Summary

In a twisted turn of events, Louis finds himself posing as the brother of his fiancé, Harry, for an annual company retreat.

Did he sign up for this? No.

Is he doing it anyway? Yes.

Can they actually pull this off? Probably not.
Ok so hear me out. Who doesn’t love a good fake relationships story? Um literally no one, they feed my thirsty soul. But what about a reverse fake relationship story? Where instead of pretending to BE in a relationship how about pretending NOT to be. And even further than that pretending to be SIBLINGS! I know, I know so wild, so crazy haha! But lets see where this goes. I was randomly inspired by that one interview for Billboard when Liam calls them brothers while talking about his speech and Louis goes "brothers?”. ICONIC.

As always thank you to the ever-gorgeous and the ever-lovely K, my beautiful, amazing beta.

Let me know what you think so far and come be my friend on tumblr :)
“God, how much further is this place?” Louis questions, feeling his stomach grumbling angrily at him. All he wanted was the sweet relief of warm food in his barren stomach.

"Shouldn't be more than ten minutes from here sir, if the traffic agrees," the cab diver responds. "Are you in a bit of a rush?"

"Oh no, not really anyway." Louis chuckles. "I'm just so bloody hungry! Skipped out on lunch today and it was obviously the worst decision of my life, as now my fiancé has decided to pick a restaurant all the way in Timbuctoo."

Why did Harry pick such an obscure place to meet for dinner? The cab had already flown by dozens of suitable dining locations, but no, Harry had chosen a restaurant that was almost forty-five minutes away. He always seemed to find the most random, far out eateries in town.

“Mmm I know those days,” the driver hums in understanding. “Any special occasion? Or do you two lovebirds just like exploring the city?”

“A little of both actually. My fiancé has a thing for discovering and trying new places. It’s gradually become our ‘thing’, we try to find a new place every week. He says we have to, you know, enrich ourselves and get out of the box of comfort or something like that. I mean, I'm normally down for a good adventure, except on some rare occasions.” Louis face contorts at the sour memory.

Harry had dragged him to this god-awful sushi place in a questionable part of town. They had ordered squid against Louis’ better judgment and wound up with a horrid case of food poisoning. Louis vowed from that day forth never to return within ten blocks of that hellhole. The rest of the weekend was spent camped out near the toilet. Happy days.

Louis shakes his head trying to clear out the unpleasant memory. "Anyway, my fiancé started his new job today and I figured it’s only fair to let him pick the restaurant, despite how out of the way it might be. He is now a Creative Director at Hearst Publishing House."

“Oh, wow, you must be so proud of him.” The driver offers, casting Louis an encouraging smile through the rear view mirror.

“Yeah, you could say that.” Louis was actually bursting with pride for Harry, he couldn’t be any less proud if he tried. Harry had worked tirelessly and achieved so much at only twenty-six years of age. Hearst is one of the UK's biggest publishing houses, representing over three-hundred brands worldwide. This new job was huge for him, he was finally getting his foot in the door. Finally able to call some of the shots when for so long he had been behind the scenes, but still doing all the heavy lifting.

He had gone through so many run of the mill jobs. After university, Harry had worked for a few years as a small time editor, occasionally doing freelance photography on the side. The work was hard, the hours were demanding and the money was terrible. But Harry was passionate, working day-in and day-out, sunup to sundown.

He didn’t mind hopping between journalism and photography but his ultimate goal was to find a way to combine the two. This new job as a creative director, would finally give Harry the outlet he
needed to utilize his skillset to its full capability and see his vision come to fruition. He had an artistic
gift, an eye for beauty and it was about time he got some recognition for it.

The cab comes to a halt in front of a posh looking restaurant that appeared to be attached to an
extravagant hotel. "Alright sir, here we are, Berners Tavern. Have a lovely dinner, give your fiancé
my best."

"Thank you," Louis says with a smile as he pays the driver, "enjoy your evening."

Louis walks through the massive doors, his shoes clicking against the sparkling marble floor. The
space is impeccably decorated, large gold framed paintings adorn the high rise walls, while elegant
flowers fill the corners, leaving no wasted space. The ceiling sparkles with pristine chandeliers, the
tops of the walls outlined in cream crown molding. A picture perfect scene.

He approaches the hostess at the front desk. "Hello, I believe the reservation is under Styles."

The hostess looks down at the immaculate digital table plan spread before her. The screen illuminates
with each tap she makes in search of the correct reservation; guest names and party numbers flashing
rapidly on the display. "Ah yes, right this way sir, your party is waiting for you."

Louis follows the hostess into the vast dining area, jazz music crooning softly in the background. The
smooth music blending with the tinkling of glasses and chatter of voices. As they weave through the
organized tables and leather-upholstered booths, Louis spots a familiar figure sipping on a glass of
red wine.

Although his eyes are tired and his posture is slumped in exhaustion, Harry immediately picks up
once his gaze settles on Louis. His mouth twists into a dimpled smile as he gently sets down his
glass.

The hostess gingerly gestures to the table before them. "Here we are sir, enjoy your evening."

"Hi love," Harry stands and kisses Louis tenderly on the cheek.

"Fancy meeting you here, seeing as it’s fifty thousand kilometers away from our flat. I’m just
curious, is there a reason why you chose the furthest possible restaurant? I mean it’s lovely, don’t get
me wrong. But I didn’t think I was going to make it. There is internal warfare going on in my
stomach.” Louis clutches his stomach dramatically, emphasizing his point. “I’m honestly surprised I
haven’t passed out from extreme lack of nutrients.”

“Always dramatics with you.” Harry laughs fondly as they settle into their table. “There should be a
bread basket on its way, we could order appetizers if you really are that famished. I already took the
liberty of order us a bottle of Malbec.”

“A whole bottle? My oh my, you spoil me, love. I think I can manage for just a wee bit longer
sustained on bread and wine.” Louis states as he pours himself a generous serving of the red liquid.

He flips open the menu and begins to scan through the selections. "So what’s good here?"

“Well when I was looking into this place, the reviews said they had an absolutely to die for risotto. It
has goat cheese and crispy quail eggs in a wine reduction sauce and it’s supposedly fantastic.” Harry
explains, taking a sip from his own wine glass. “I know it sounds kind of odd, but I really want to try
it. Sometimes odd things are the best things. That’s one of the reasons we had to come here. That,
and this restaurant is really pretty.”

“Crispy quail eggs?” Louis muses, turning page after page of the menu. “That’s a first.”
A young woman, dressed in all white, appears at their table, setting down a small basket of warm bread. “Hello, I’m Rosy, I’ll be your server for this evening. I see you’ve already been served wine. Nice choice, by the way. Can I start off any appetizers for you?”

“Umm, I think we are just going to order, right babe?” Harry asks glancing over at Louis who is still deliberating over the menu.

“Look Rosy, you seem like a sensible girl so I’m just going to be frank. I’m starving and I’ve never been here before and the options are endless. I’m at a complete loss as to what to order, but I need it to be extraordinarily good. What do you recommend love?”

Rosy blushed, giggling to herself. “Well, my personal favorite is the Romnet Marsh Lamb. It’s a crispy seared lamb neck coupled with a smoked ham hock, served on a bed of English peas and baby gem lettuce. It’s fantastic, filling but not too heavy and it pairs well with the wine you ordered.”


“You know what? I think I’ll have the same. You’ve sold me too, Rosy.”

“Whoa whoa there, big boy! A few moments ago you were raving about that risotto thing with the quail and now you’ve suddenly abandoned that dream for dear Rosy’s suggestion. I don’t think so.”

“Well, she just made it sound so good!” Harry chuckles, his dimples on display.

“Very true, but besides the point. I actually wanted to try that goat cheese egg thing, you got me all excited for it, and if you order the same thing as me it’s essentially a waste.” Louis confesses, trying his best to be convincing. “Who goes to a new restaurant just to get two of the same thing?”

“Ahh, you’re right, I like the way you think babe.” Harry nods his head in agreement and looks up at Rosy. “Ok, I’ll get the Goat’s Cheese Risotto.”

“Excellent! I’ll place those orders right now for you. Wouldn’t want you to go on starving.”

“We are forever in your debt Rosy, thank you.”

“Ok, now that that’s all settled and I know sweet deliverance is near, it’s time for you to spill. Tell me, what’s it like to be the creative director? Is it everything you dreamed? Everything you hoped? Everything your heart desired?” Louis teases, sipping on his wine. “The Malbec is ace, by the way.”

“I know, right? Excellent body. Um, it was, good, yeah. Tiring, but good.” Harry answers haphazardly, his fingers twiddling with the rings on his fingers.

“Good? That’s all you have to say? Oh no, I’m going to need more than just good.” Louis presses. “I bet Niall was happy to have you around. He was basically bursting at the thought of working at the same company.”

“Yeah, he was. He treated me to lunch, actually, but he made sure to tell me not to get used to it, claiming he’s only generous to newbies.”

“Typical Niall, that man is such a mess.”

“That he is. I told him I got him next time though. I really am thankful to him for recommending me for the position. He honestly didn’t have to.”
“Of course he did, you’re the best person for the job! You worked hard for this, Harry. Niall may have recommended you, but you still earned the position. A large company like Hearst wouldn’t just hire someone based solely off a recommendation.”

“I guess.” Harry shrugs his shoulders, unconvinced.

"Seriously babe, you’re amazing, ok?" Louis reaches across the table and squeezes Harry’s hand reassuringly. "Now tell me more about your first day."

“I mean, uh...it was good, yeah...um yes.” Harry elusively responds. Louis can almost feel him biting back his words.

“Harold, I’m not dumb, I know you. What aren’t you telling me? Do you not like your job?”

“No! I do! It’s great, I promise. I mean my boss is just...a bit...I don’t know...bossy? I feel so inferior and insignificant around her. She’s so intimidating and demanding and...” Harry trails off, his gaze downcast.

“And?”

“And... I may have accidentally said I was single so she would approve of me.” Harry rushes out in a single breath.

Before Louis can even respond or clarify, Harry is rambling more nonsense at the speed of light.

“I didn’t mean it, Lou! I mean, obviously I didn’t mean it we’re engaged for Christ sake! I was just so nervous and I wanted her to approve of me and I’ve never worked at such a big company before and I just, I don’t know!”

“Harry, babe, slow down! I didn’t even know you possessed the ability to talk that fast! Just tell me what happened.”

Harry takes a deep methodical breath and runs his hand through his long hair. “Right, sorry. Ok, I was in an introductory meeting with the Executive Editorial Director, my boss. She was running through a few concepts designs and plans for the next few spreads and I don’t know how but somehow she just started to complain about her personal life. Apparently, everything in her life outside of work is shot to hell. I felt sort of bad for her, really.”

“Oh, why did she say that?” Louis asks, tearing off a piece of warm bread.

“She was going on and on about how horrible relationships are and how everyone was meant to live and die alone and not be so codependent. I guess she just got out of a bad relationship? Who knows really, she kept saying how glad she was to not be tied down. The whole time I was just mindlessly nodding along with her because, I mean, she’s my boss. I wasn’t about to question her train of thought on our first meeting.”

“Ok yeah, understandable. Go on.”

“But then she stops and looks me dead in the eye and asks me if I’m in a relationship, and I froze. She didn’t just ask me, she said it in a way where it’s almost not even a question. She said, and I quote ‘you’re not in a relationship, right?’ The only possible answer to that kind of question is no! She left no room for error and I panicked and it was silly, it just slipped out and I’m sorry.” Harry apologizes, voice dripping with anxiety and high levels of stress.

“Aww, Harry.” Louis chuckles, covering his mouth with his hand. “You’re so adorable when you
get flustered.”

“Louis, I don’t know why you’re laughing. What if she fired me? On my very first day?!”

“That is so irrational, babe. Why would she fire you on your first day, first of all, and second, who gets fired for being in a relationship? I mean, I get she did kind of trap you into that answer, but that is ridiculous, love.”

“I don’t know, Louis! I said I panicked! She is just so scary! Do you know what the people around the office call her? Medusa!” Harry states, his eyes practically bugging out of his head. “Her name is actually Melissa, but no one ever calls her that. It’s either Executive Henderson or Medusa.”

“Oh, that is too good! Sounds like something I would come up with!” Louis snickers. “Does she have snakes for hair or something?

“You know, I wouldn’t even be surprised if she was hiding serpents in there somewhere. I don’t plan on getting close enough to test it.” Harry shivers slightly as if disturbed by the whole concept. “But I’ll tell her tomorrow, I promise. I’ll face Medusa, face my fears. I’ll just say I misunderstood her question or something and tell her all about my very very hot fiancé whom I love ever so dearly and is so so so understanding and supportive.”

“Mmm go on.” Louis prompts, resting his hand under his chin.

Harry grins a sly smile. “Well, I absolutely adore him. He is the most charming and beautiful man I have ever known. I don’t know how I ever got so lucky. He is extremely smart and witty. He works as an environmental lawyer and has a huge heart and he just cares so much about literally everything. He never ceases to amaze me. And as an added bonus his ass lights up my world.”

“Ok...maybe you shouldn’t mention that last part, wouldn’t want her to get too jealous.” Louis smirks. “I’m not too fond of snakes.”

The next day Louis decides to stop by Harry’s office since he has yet to actually see it. Hearst Tower is not too far from his own firm, so Louis decides to get some fresh air and venture out on foot.

Along the way, he passes by a florist boutique and decides it never hurts to show up with flowers. Harry adores flowers, he has always been a radiant flower child. Louis lives for the look of pure joy Harry gets on his face when receiving such a simple thing as flowers. His eyes light up like the green of spring bloom, and his dimples poke at his cheeks in the most endearing way.

Louis decides on a gorgeous mixed bouquet of purple orchids and white lilies, which he requests to be tied together with a lilac ribbon. Once he has paid, he continues along the sidewalk until he reaches his destination.

Louis knew that Hearst is a pretty large publishing firm, but he had no idea that it is this large. He passes by it all the time on his way to work, but maybe he never really looked at it because it is just another tall office building in London. If you’ve seen one you’ve seen them all. But now, it’s like he’s seeing it for the first time.
It is magnificent; artfully designed and crafted of reflective windows and metal beams. Although the building can easily be described as abstract in nature, it still possesses a simple timeless elegance.

He steps in to the immaculate chrome finished foyer, white leather couches adorning the reception area. He approaches the receptionist’s desk, which is essentially a huge chrome and glass semi circle in the middle of the foyer. Three young women sit behind the vast circular desk, each with their own headset and monitor, dutiful focused and diligently at work, answering calls and typing up memos.

“Hi there, I’m here to see Harry Styles.” Louis states with an open smile, leaning against the solid frame of the desk.

“Do you have an appointment?” The first available receptionist inquires, adjusting all her attention from her monitor to Louis.

“Um no, I don’t. Did I need one? It’s more of a random surprise visit.”

“Oh, one moment, let me see if he’s available.”

“Available? He better be available, I walked all the way here and got him flowers.” Louis scuffs under his breath out of hearing range.

The receptionist picks up the desk phone and dials a number. "Good afternoon, Mr. Styles, I have a...” She pauses and looks to Louis expectantly.

“Oh right, sorry. Louis.”

"I have a 'Louis', here to see you...Right, yes of course, sir." She clicks out of the phone call with a switch of her headset. “He just got out of a meeting, but you’re all clear to go up. Mr. Styles is on the seventh floor, last door on your right. You can’t miss it.”

“Ok, thanks.” Louis replies, as he begins to make his way to the stainless steel elevators. “I better be all clear to go up, I’m his bloody fiancé.” He mutters to himself.

The receptionist had been right to say you can’t miss it; Harry’s office is basically the whole seventh floor. There are other smaller offices lining the corridor, but the main attraction is the office of the Creative Director. The outside of the office is composed of frosted glass windows, giving it an open feel, but also providing a sense of privacy.

Harry’s office door is propped open, so Louis doesn’t even bother to knock, opting instead to just waltz right in.

“Hey, babe,” Louis greets, walking up to Harry’s desk presenting the beautiful bouquet he chose, “just thought I’d stop by and bring you flowers to decorate your new posh office. And also to see if you would fancy joining your incredibly thoughtful fiancé for lunch.”

“Louis! I got so excited when I got the call that you were here. Why are you so sweet to me? These are beautiful, I love them. I love you.” Harry beams, taking the flowers and giving Louis a short peck on the lips. “I just have to finish this mockup spread really quick and then I’m all yours.”

“Alright, no rush. I’ll just sit on your expensive looking couch. Your office is massive, by the way, must have done something right. I honestly think it’s bigger than our flat. We should just move in here and save on rent.”

“I know! It’s insane, right? I’m still in shock! I had no idea I’d get an office this big. I only expected to get a cubicle in the corner.”
“You’re not a little editor anymore love, you’re a director now. The big leagues.” Louis sits on the couch and begins to flip through a magazine strewn on the adjacent coffee table. “Oh hey babe, did you tell boss lady yet?”

“Mmm?” Harry hums in question absentmindedly as he types away on his MacBook.

“That you are in fact taken? That you are spoken for? That someone has stolen your innocence and popped your cherry? That someone tends to that every night?”

Harry smirks, casting a wink in Louis’ direction. “Not yet, I actually haven’t seen her all morning so-

"Styles!"

"Speak of the devil." Harry groans, tossing his head back in exasperation. "I was so close to escaping for lunch. So long sweet freedom."

"Styyyles!” A woman hollers, stomping heavily into the office space. Louis assumes she must be the one and only Medusa.

Medusa is a tall slender woman, perfectly poised and dressed impeccably. Harry was not exaggerating about how intimidating this woman is. Her presence alone is exceedingly forceful and demanding, borderline frightening. She is stunning though, with icy blue eyes, pronounced features and raven black hair tied back into a smooth chiffon. Judging by her appearance, Louis guesses she can only be in her mid-thirties. Indicating that she must be a real hound to climb the corporate ladder that fast.

"I need that spread on my desk in twenty. Don’t disappoint me, I have way too much to do and I’d rather not have to check your report for simpleton errors. I assume that you are at least slightly competent.” She pauses, sensing another presence in the room. “Oh hello, who’s this?”

Harry looks up, eyes filled with panic, wildly bouncing between Louis and his boss. “Oh...this is...um...my brother?” Harry stammers out as if he is asking the question. "He um...brought me flowers..."

"The fuc—"

Harry hops to his feet, immediately cutting Louis off. “Yes, this is my brother, erm...Louis.”

“Mmm I sort of see the resemblance. I’m Melissa Henderson, Executive Editorial Director.” She extends one of her perfectly manicured hands in Louis direction, her other hand occupied by her phone.

Louis glares at her in response. He is so beyond offended. She can’t honestly be serious. “Um, bro, can I have a private word with you for a second?” Louis directs in Harry’s vicinity, choosing to completely ignore Medusa’s proffered hand. He glares at his fiancé with all the urgency he can possibly conjure.

“Uh yeah…sure…Excuse me one moment.” Harry responds tentatively. Executive Henderson waves her hand in acknowledgement, completely enraptured by a new message on her iPhone.
Harry follows Louis outside his office and shuts the door behind them. They stand in the open hallway, completely vacant as most of the editorial staff have already left for lunch. “What?”

“That’s all you have to say?! ‘What’!” Louis fumes, using finger quotations to demonstrate his irritation. “Harry what the actual fuck?! How did I just get demoted from fiancé to brother in 0.62 seconds flat?”

“Louis, shhh! She’ll hear you!” Harry tries to cover Louis mouth with his oversized hands, in a vain attempt to shut him up. "She has heightened senses, I swear!"

“Get your damn bear paws off me! Like I give a shit! I want her to hear me! Your brother, really? This is ridiculous Harry, even for you. And she had the nerve to say she sees the resemblance! What the fuck?”

"Lou, she scares the shit out of me, what if devil fangs come out of her mouth and she bites me and and poisons me? Or kills me? I wouldn’t put it past her. She could really be Medusa. Nicknames don’t just come out of thin air!”

“That is not fucking funny, Harry! No one is laughing!”

“I’m not joking, I’m serious!”

“Tell her now or I will kill you myself. You know I have direct access to all parts of you. You should be way more scared of me. Start sleeping with one eye open if you care about your appendages.”

“But she might fire me!”

“I don’t care if she lights you on actual fire, you will march your ass back in there and tell that she-devil that I am not your brother and I never will be! I’ve done way too much with you and for you and on you and in you and to you and all over you to be considered a friendly brother!” Louis rants, hands flailing wildly along with his words.

“Ok Louis, but-”

The door to Harry’s office flies open. “Styles! I don’t have all day!” Henderson howls, obviously no longer distracted by her phone. “Oh, that reminds me, have you checked your email?”

"Shit." Harry curses under his breath. He steps back into his office uncertainly. "Uh...well no, I was meaning to... uh... bu-”

Medusa raises a single hand to silence him, rolling her eyes. "You should have received an email for our annual company retreat. I know you’re new here, but every year we have a retreat over a long weekend at some resort. It might be a nice way for you to get to know your fellow staff members and whatnot. I believe this year it’s at The Grove? You’ll have to check.”

“As in The Grove? Like in Hertfordshire?” Harry asks in disbelief.

“Isn’t that what I just said? Keep up Styles, don’t be daft.” She throws him an exaggeratedly bored look. "As it is part of the company budget, all accommodations are taken care of, just read the itinerary attached in the email.”

Executive Henderson begins to make her way to the door. “Oh, and you’re supposed to bring someone.” She waves her hand in the air and rolls her head to the side as if it’s absolute nonsense.
“Maybe you could bring your brother since you know...you don’t have anyone else? Most people bring their significant others because there are a lot of group activities, but no one would mind if you brought a brother instead. Or you could come alone. I’ve done that before and I still dominated most of the activities.”

“No! He'll come, he'll be there.” Harry risks a glance at Louis who is positively livid. His hands bunched in tight fists along his side, eyes alarmingly wide, his whole body radiating tension and heat.

"Mm. Lovely.” Executive Henderson says promptly as she spins on her heels to make her exit. "Spreadsheet, no mistakes. Ten minutes.” She calls on her way out, the click of her heels echoing through the hallway.

The large office space is left in silence. Louis still unmoving, shooting sharp daggers out of his enraged eyes.

"Ok, I know what you're going to say, but-”

"No, no… I don’t think you know...I...You…” Louis tries, shaking his head back and forth in absolute disbelief. He just can’t even find the words; all he can see is red. “Ugh! Goddammit! I've never been good at holding my fucking tongue and you know that and I’m so fucking furious right now!”

Louis pauses and takes several deep breaths, that seem to do nothing for his temperament. “No...you know what? I’m just going to go before I say something I regret.” Louis practically says through his gritted teeth, unable to open his mouth completely for fear of what might slip out. “I’ll see you at home, enjoy the flowers, bro.”

“Wait, but...Louis...I-”

“No, Harry seriously, let me have this. Let me go, I just...I really need to cool off before we have this conversation.” Louis warns, lips still painfully tight.

“Yeah ok, you’re right. I understand.” Harry concedes, biting his lip. “Uh...have a good rest of your day.”

Louis already has his back turned, proceeding out of the office. “Mhmm.” He hums in response with a slight backwards wave of his hand.

"Shit."

Once Harry finishes up the rest of his mockup he becomes increasingly less productive. Eventually he finds himself just sitting at his desk staring at his MacBook screen, watching the number of unread emails continue to climb and climb at an alarming rate.

He should get back to work, he should finish his reviews and edit a few more mockups and respond to his ever-expanding inbox, but he can’t. All he can think about is the shitstorm he has just voluntarily caused, leaving him completely dysfunctional.

He tries texting Louis a few times, decorating the messages with heart emojis and even attaching a kissy face selfie for an added touch, but all he is met with is radio silence.
“Heyo!” A cheerful Irish voice rings through Harry’s ears. “Mate, I emailed and texted you about making good on that offer to buy me lunch, and no reply. You backing out on me or what? You know I’m not a man who messes with food.”

“Louis was here.” Harry answers simply, still staring at his computer screen. It’s become almost comforting watching his inbox grow exponentially. A mesmerizing pendulum of messages, one after the other, never ceasing.

“Ah shit! I missed Lou? Why didn’t you buzz me? We could’ve gone out for some grub together!”

“Niall, I fucked up. Seriously fucked up. I’ve only been here two days and I’m already colossally screwed.” Harry slumps against his desk, placing his elbows on the surface and cradling his head.

“That bad, huh? Alright, tell old Nialler your problems.” Niall settles into plush leather chair across from Harry’s wide desk. “Let me fix it, big guy.”

“Ok, well to put it simply, I told Executive Henderson that I was single.” Harry confesses, sitting up slightly and rubbing the back of his neck in an attempt to alleviate the stress building inside of him.

Niall looks at him with a confused frown. "But what about-"

Harry cuts him off and continues "And then Louis surprised me and came to visit and she just happened to stop by and I panicked and I said Louis was my brother so she wouldn't think I was dating anyone."

"What!? With Louis standing right there?" Niall doubles over with laughter, clutching at his sides. "This is too good! I bet Lou pissed himself when you said that. I would have paid to catch that live! Ah, priceless!"

"It gets worse.” Harry sighs, covering his face with his hands. “I also agreed to bring him to the company retreat...as my brother.”

"Ha!” Niall nearly falls out of his chair, his body convulsing in a fit of hysteria. “You’ve got to be fucking with me! Louis? Your brother? That is so sick, how could you think that was a good idea?”

“I don’t know, Niall! It just came out of my mouth before I could even realize what I agreed to. She makes me so nervous! I just...I don’t know! I couldn’t think straight!” Harry lays his head flush against the cool surface of his desk. The cold sensation having a calming effect on his nerves. “What am I going to do? Louis is so beyond pissed. When he left he couldn’t even look me in the eye. And he was making the face.”

“What face?” Niall questions wiping tears from his eyes from laughing so hard. “He has a lot of faces.”

“There’s this face he makes when something really bothers him or when he is on the verge of throwing a right fit.” Harry lifts his head and looks at Niall, “He gets really silent, and his lips get really tight, and he kind of like...squints his eyes, in a glare or something. It’s positively terrifying to be honest.”

“Ahh mate, you are so screwed.”

“Oh gee, thanks Niall. You are so helpful. What would I do without you?” Harry says sarcastically.

“Screw up apparently. I leave you alone for one second and you somehow manage to introduce your fiancé as your brother to the one person who can make or break your career.”
Harry groans audibly and hangs his head again. "I don’t know how to get out of this."

“I mean, you can’t back out now.”

“What?” Harry snaps his head up and looks to Niall questioningly. “You think we should actually go on as brothers? You think we can do it?”

“Do I think you and Louis can keep your hands off each other for a whole weekend? Ha, shit no!” Niall bursts into another round of giggles “You guys eye-fuck each other on the regular, in plain sight, I might add. No, that weekend is doomed from the start. But I can’t wait to sit back and watch the show. This is quality entertainment. You can’t find this on HBO, this shit is real!”

“I hate you.” Harry deadpans.

“You love me, almost like your own brother.”

“Get out. Get out of my office, you're the absolute worst.”

“Ok ok, I’ll go and let you return to your stupor. But honestly what choice do you really have, mate? As long as I’ve worked here, I’ve never known ole Dusa to take shit from anyone. The plain truth is, you’re new enough to still be expendable and replaceable.”

Niall stands up and stretches his arms, body responding with a small yawn. “I hate to say it mate, but you might have to just ride this one out. Fake it till you make it, as I always say.”

Niall is right. This whole ordeal may have started out as a simple excusable white lie, but now it's colliding with reality at alarming speed.

He really can’t back out now. He would instantly lose credibility and probably be sent to the slaughter or in other words the unemployment line. No, Harry can’t risk that, not this soon anyway. He has worked too hard to finally get here. To finally get his shot, to make his mark.

It’s just one weekend, they can worry about the future later, but as of now Harry is in no position to offer up the truth. His little white lie will just have to become his temporary reality. He’ll just have to somehow find a way to get Louis on board.

It’s just one weekend, one long holiday weekend. They can be platonic bro-pals for one weekend. It will all be fine, it can even end up being fun.

Honestly, what can happen in one weekend anyway?
"What says 'I’m sorry I called you my brother, but please pretend to be my brother, yours sincerely your fiancé’?” Harry ponders, swiveling around in his office chair.

Against his better judgment, he asked Niall to stick around and help him plot out his reconciliation with Louis. Basically an impossible task, but such is life.

“Mate, I promise you, there is nothing in this world that says that. I got nothing.” Niall says, his body draped lazily over Harry’s office couch. His head is thrown over the side, legs dangling off the arm rest, while his fingers casually toss a rubber band ball up and down in the air.

“Flowers?”

“Cliché.”

“Chocolate?”

“Been done before.”

“Damn it all to bloody hell! A card?”

“Harry, no one wants a card unless it’s filled with money or extremely meaningful words, both of which aren’t exactly appropriate in this situation. Isn’t Lou more of an ‘actions speak louder than words’ kind of guy?”

“Ugh!” Harry runs through his hair in exasperation. “Well, I can’t go home empty handed, Niall! That would get me absolutely nowhere!”

“You could cook for him? Good food is the key to any man’s heart, you know. That’s quality insider information.” Niall smirks and pats his belly in satisfaction.

“Yeah, but it’s already half past four. I’d have to collect groceries and get home and cook all before he gets home at six. Essentially impossible.”

“Well, that was my best. I gave you my all. You’ve wrung me dry of ideas.”

Harry throws his head back and stares at the ceiling, a stream of unintelligible sounds leaking from his lips. In all honesty, he probably sounds like he is being poisoned or stabbed, or maybe even tortured. Somehow he has crafted his own personal hell and there are no signs of escape.

“Unless!” Niall sits up from the couch overdramatically. “You’re willing to go above the bar, above and beyond all expectations! To do the unimaginable!”

“Niall, enough! I already said that I am! I’ll do anything, just tell me!” Harry pleads sitting up slightly, tone exceedingly desperate.

“Ok, picture this…the words 'brothers for life’ tattooed on your ass in Lou’s pretty little handwriting. Louis will be so mind-numbingly touched, he’ll get one to match in yours and instantly forgive you. Balance will be restored. Problem solved. You’re welcome.” Niall stands and takes an exaggerated
Harry decides to stop by Louis’ favorite tea room in London on his way home. Not the most amazing and mind-blowing peace offering, but it will have to do. He fought long and hard over what to get him, debating whether to just face him barehanded on a brave front or come crawling home with loads of gifts and tokens of apology.

Tea is probably a solid middle ground, as Louis adores his tea. They found this place together anyway, on one of their “explore the city” adventures. Louis was raving on and on about how no one understands the value of good tea anymore. ‘Tea is an art form’, as Louis always says and ‘you have to cherish it while it can still be cherished’. Harry never really understood what Louis meant by that, because when will tea ever not be around to be cherished? But he never questions him, simply nodding along in blind agreement.

Harry ends up not only buying Louis a cup of his favorite blend, chamomile mint, but also a whole bag of the loose leaf blend and a new tea press, so that he can brew it fresh at home. He even throws in a few biscuits for good measure, you can never go wrong with warm biscuits.

Feeling slightly accomplished, Harry heads home, unsure of what kind of scene awaits him. Louis could be completely over it by now for all he knows. Or he could still be blindingly furious and pissed. Harry hopes earnestly for the former or a happy medium. Angry Louis is not someone to be messed with.

Harry unlocks the door to their flat, dropping his keys in the small bowl on the stand near the door. Lazily discarding his briefcase and the box containing the tea press on the floor. He hates leaving things around, but honestly he couldn’t care less right now.

“Louis?” Harry calls as he steps further into the living room. “Lou, babe, are you home?”

When he is met with no response, he ventures further into the flat, finding no signs of life. Harry sighs audibly and continues into their shared bedroom “Louis, Louis…Louehhh?”

Lying in their bed facing the wall, wrapped in a swaddling of blankets is a small figure. Apart from his tiny outline imprinted in the sheets, the only identifiable part of him is the top of his soft brown
hair, peeping out from the duvet. Harry can’t help but feel a rush of affection for him, he just looks so little and cuddly wrapped up like a human burrito.

Harry tentatively creeps further into the room. “Louis? Are you asleep?” He whispers softly, scared that if he wakes Louis up, he will be in further shit than he already is.

The mass of deep caramel hair shakes softly, body still completely sedentary and facing away from Harry.

“Ok…Well…I brought you something. It’s…um…it’s your favorite from that tea house on 6th. Chamomile mint tea, just how you like it and a few cinnamon biscuits.”

“Mm.” Louis mumbles quietly, still unmoving.

“I…um…also got you a tea press…finally. I know you wanted one at home for a while…” Harry trails off, his efforts met with absolute silence.

Harry stands at the foot of the bed for several moments, deliberating what his next move should be. He sets the goods down on the ottoman in front of the bed. “Louis? Please just look at me. I'm sorry, I know I messed up, but…please?”

Another long span of silence passes before Louis slowly sits up, blankets pooling at waist. He looks groggy and irritated, but nowhere near as agitated as before. He meets Harry’s eyes with blank stare.

“Ok, I'm looking at you. Happy now?”

“Erm, I don’t know yet. Are you mad at me?” Harry asks shyly, biting his lower lip with his head bowed low.

“Am I mad at you? Am I mad at you!? Fuck, Harry! What do you think? I'm certainly not over the moon with you right now that's for sure! I can't believe you would willing call me your brother, and then keep going on with it!” Louis yells, his hair sticking up at all kind of directions atop his head.

“What if I went around parading you as my sister?”


“Well your hair is surely long enough.” Louis jabs.

“But, you love my hair!” Harry touches his hair self-consciously.

“Not right now I don't. Right now, I'm not too fond of you at all to be honest.”

“I guess that’s fair.” Harry hangs his head, rocking back and forth on the balls of his feet.

“I just…well…are you ashamed of me? Is that what this is?” Louis’ demeanor visually deflates, anger morphing into self doubt, his voice suddenly unsure and tiny. “I mean, I know I'm like a lawyer or whatever, but it’s environmental law, which is basically the slums of law and you’re like a big time director now and—”

“Louis, stop! No, baby, please stop! I could never be ashamed of you, ok? Never. I love you so much and I'm so proud of you. Environmental law is so important and everything you do is so important. Fuck, you're so important! It's me, ok? I'm not really a big time director Louis. I just started. This could easily end just as easily as it began. I'm scared out of my mind and overwhelmed to the point of breaking and I just want to make it so bad. I'm sorry, I’m so so sorry babe.” Harry rambles. Not his most eloquent apology, but nothing that comes out of his mouth as of late has been very eloquent.
“Ok.”

“So you forgive me then? Please say you do, because I can’t bear it when you’re mad at me. I’ve been a train wreck all day, you can even ask Niall. I spent an hour basically yodeling at the wall.” Harry half chuckles, half cringes with embarrassment.

A small laugh escapes Louis’ throat, a trace of a smile ghosts his lips. “You’re a special one, Haz.”

Silence falls over them once again, Harry staring at Louis, unsure if it is actually safe to continue.

“Ok…so now that you’ve forgiven me,” Harry pauses, biting his lip again, “I have a teeny tiiny itsy bitsy little favor to ask.”

“Ugh! God NO!” Louis groans, falling back onto the bed, shielding his whole body, from head to toe, under the protection of the duvet.

“Wait! You don’t even know what I’m going to ask!”

“Harry! What do I look like? A bloody idiot? You’re going to ask me to still pretend to be your brother for the sake of your job!”

“Ok…yes, but Lou, please! I need you.”

“Oh God why, why me? What did I do? Heavens open up and take me now, ugh!” Louis grumbles from under the covers, his voice muffled.

“Louis,” Harry crawls onto the bed and lies down next to the balled-up, duvet-covered figure, “Louehhh, pleeease.”

Harry wraps his arms around him from behind. “It’s just one weekend. It’s a four-day trip. Just do this for me. Four days, that’s it. It will be easy.”

“Easy?” Louis rolls over onto his side, peeking his head out of his cocoon. “It will not be easy, Harold! Have you lost your damn mind? We have to be extremely platonic around each other. Completely opposite of what we are! Basically cover up our natural responses to each other!”

Harry runs his hands along the curve of Louis’ spine, drawing soothing circles. “Please, please do this for me,” he begs giving his best puppy pout, “it could be fun, like a little adventure. You always say that in another life you would have loved to be an actor.”

“How is me pretending to be your brother going to be fun? In what sick and twisted dimension is that fiasco defined as fun? I can’t—”

Harry inches closer and attaches his mouth to Louis’ exposed neck, sucking gently and purposefully.

“I…uh…um…shit! You’re trying to seduce me, s-stop… this is so…u-unfair.” Louis moans out in short breaths, tilting his head to the side as Harry continues caressing him.

“Mm…you’re thinking too much.” Harry slurs, carding his fingers through the hair at the back of Louis’ head, mouth still tracing along the smooth skin of his neck.

“I’m…n-not…Harry…s-stop I’m trying…to…t-talk to you.” Louis stammers out, obviously affected by Harry’s tactics.

Harry takes it a step further and climbs on top of Louis to straddle his hips, positioning himself comfortably on Louis’ lap.
“Harry, what are you doing? Get off me! We have to talk about this.” Louis wiggles around underneath Harry’s weight trying to free himself.

Harry leans down, hovering over Louis’ face. “There’s nothing to talk about, just say yes.”

“But, Harry—”

“Please please please.” Harry chants in between peppering sweet butterfly kisses all over Louis’ face and neck. His long hair tickling Louis’ collarbones. “Say yes to me.”

“It’s not that easy!”

“Yes it is, I love you, you love me. And because you love me, you’ll do this. I would do it for you, you know I would.” Harry sits up slightly, meeting Louis’ eyes in a sincere, open stare. “I would do anything for you, if you asked me to, Lou. Anything.”

“Oh my God! You’re such a manipulator! How can I even say no now?” Louis covers his face with his hands, conceding reluctantly. “Ugh fine! Yes! I give up! Yes, I’ll be your fake brother.”

Harry bounces enthusiastically on Louis’ lap, his eyes lighting up like an expectant child on Christmas morning. He grins wildly, his dimples eating at his cheeks. “You will!” He pries Louis’ hands away from his face and returns to worshiping every exposed piece of Louis’ skin with kisses, hands roaming over his body. “I love you, I’ll always love you, thank you, thank you!”

“Yeah yeah yeah,” Louis sighs, rolling his eyes, “you better get it all in now. You won’t be having any of this during that weekend, bro.”

The week leading up to the weekend of the retreat flies by and before Louis knows it he is sitting in a car on his way to Hertfordshire. They decided to rent a car since the drive was a little more than an hour outside of London.

They are only eight minutes into the drive and Harry can not stop fidgeting. When his fingers aren’t tapping anxiously at the steering wheel, they are compulsively running through the locks of his hair. He is radiating nervous energy, completely and utterly on edge.

Honestly, Louis should be driving, Harry is obviously not fit to drive in his worrisome state. He will kill them before they even got there. Before they even have a chance to embarrass themselves. But Harry insists on driving, claiming that the trip is for his company and Louis needs to just sit back and relax. But every time Louis tries to just sit back and relax Harry finds something new to pester him about.

“Did you remember to bring the charger? I can’t remember if I grabbed it or not.”

“Yes, I brought both cell chargers, and the laptop charger. I even grabbed the charger for your camera.”

“Oh, but I feel like I forgot, my black hat. I really wanted to wear it, you know the one that has a wide brim and and the little band around it?”
“Yes, I grabbed it before we left, it’s in the trunk.”

“Ok, but did you remember to pack lotion? I mean hotel lotion is great and all, but it never smells as good. Or maybe that’s just because all the hotels we go to are shit.”

“Yes, I packed your frilly lotions and your scented soaps and your salt scrubs too.”

“What about—”

“Yes.”

“Ok, but—”

“Yes.”

“And—”

“Harry, for the love of god, will you please find your fucking chill! We didn’t forget anything important. I mean if there is anything that we need in a life or death situation we can just buy it there!”

“I’m sorry Lou, I’m just so nervous!” Harry confesses, fingers already reaching to run through his hair again for the millionth time today. “I…or I mean…we have to make a good impression. Basically all the directors will be there and even the CEOs and the big executives and the president of the company! That’s like my boss’s boss’s boss! It’s kind of a big deal, and I have all this pent up energy and I feel like I can’t breathe at the same time and I—”

“Harry, stop! You’re only working yourself up. I know it’s a big deal babe, and I know you’re nervous, that’s why I’m here. I would not be going on this wild goose chase with you if I didn’t love and support you.” Louis reaches over and squeezes Harry’s free hand. “It’ll be fine.”

“Promise?”

“I promise, love.”

They continue the drive in somewhat peaceful silence, listening to a mixtape of songs Harry personally organized the night before. Every so often, Harry still twitches slightly, his expression drenched in uneasiness. But every time Louis sees him on the verge of a panic attack, he squeezes his hand again, rubbing his thumb over the smooth skin to calm him down.

Eventually they arrive at their destination, pulling into a round-about in front of the main resort entrance.

The estate itself is absolutely stunning, a vision to behold. The Grove is the perfect fusion of modern contemporary design and old English tradition. As it is in the heart of the countryside, the grounds are bathed in greenery; flowers and plants of all sorts beautifully accenting the hotel.

A staff member, presumably a bellhop greets them at their car. “Hello, can I get your bags for you?”

“Oh right, sure.” Harry replies, popping open the trunk with the key fob. “Thank you.”

“Of course, sir. If you are ready to check in, the front desk is straight through the main doors at the end of the lobby.” The bellhop directs, already loading their luggage onto a cart.

“Alright, thanks again.” Harry replies, walking over to Louis a few paces away.
“This place is bloody huge, I’m speechless.” Louis comments, looking around and examining his surroundings in awe.

“How you came then?”

“We’ll see about that, ask me again in four days.”

Harry leads the way to the front desk, Louis trailing a few paces behind, both admiring the gorgeous setting. A few guests are mingling in the lobby, sipping coffee and reading magazines, lounging around without a care in the world.

“Good afternoon, gentlemen! Welcome to the Grove, my name is Kip! How may I assist you today?” The receptionist cheerfully inquires, beaming brightly.

“Hi, hello, um, we are here to check in. We’re here for a company retreat.”

“Oh, you must be here with the whole Hearst clan! Wonderful! The resort has so many events planned for your retreat this year!” Kip claps his hands together, clearly delighted with himself. He is almost alarmingly chipper, for a simple receptionist. “May I have your name please, sir?”

“Yes, Harry. Harry Styles.”

“Welcome again, Mr. Styles. I’ll just need to see your ID, and I’ll get your room key and everything in order. Will you be needing multiple keys this weekend?”

“Um, yes, two please.” Harry responds, offering over his license.

“Of course, sir.” Kip fiddles with the monitor in front of him, swiping cards and printing out booking receipts and documents. “Alright, here we are! I have your two keys to suite 2401 in the West Wing, an itinerary of the weekend’s festivities, and a booklet featuring all the accommodations available to you and your party during your stay here. Your bags and belongings should have already been taken to your suite by our bellhop service. I hope everything here at The Grove is to your standard, please don’t hesitate to contact me if you need assistance!”

“Thank you Kip, you’ve been lovely.”

“My pleasure sir, anytime!”

Harry and Louis turn and begin to make their way through the vast lobby.

“Well, he was mighty Kipper!” Louis jokes, imitating the bright tone of the receptionist. “Seriously though, what is that guy on? He just seems so excited about life, no wonder his name is Kip.”

“I know,” Harry laughs, grinning wildly, “he seems so sweet though, babe! I love positive people, they are such a joy to be around.”

“Harry!” Louis hisses under his breath. “You can’t call me, babe! Come on, that’s like Level One Brother No No’s!”

“Shit! Sorry, it slipped out, it’s just habit!”

“Don’t apologize to me, you’re the one that will have to explain why you call your ‘brother’ babe.” Louis shrugs with a smirk.

“Um, because you’re my baby brother? And you’re so little and petite like a babe. A small babe wrapped swaddling.” Harry makes little cooing noises and squeezes Louis cheeks.
Louis swats Harry’s hands away from his face. “I hate when you do that, I’m not even that small! I’ll have you know that I am only a few inches shorter than you and it would be less if you didn’t wear boots with goddamn skyscraper heels on them! And I’m two years older than you!”

“No one has to to know that, they only know what I choose to tell them and I’m telling them that you are my cute little baby brother. Deal with it.” Harry smirks, placing his hands on his hips in defiance.

Louis scuffs in response, turning on his heel and storming through the lobby area.

Harry easily catches up to him, his long strides carrying him farther than Louis’ little waddle.

Together they cross the remainder of the foyer and make their way to the grand elevator doors.

“Bloody hell, I forgot my phone in the car.” Louis sighs, patting down the pockets of his jeans. “Can I have the keys, I’ll just go get it and meet you in the suite. What was the room again?”

“Ok, 2401. Don’t get lost, baby brother.” Harry teases fishing out his keys to give to Louis.

“Ha ha ha, very funny.” Louis deadpans, giving Harry a pointed look as he snatches the keys from his grasp.

The elevator bell rings and Harry steps in to the enclosed metal chamber. Apart from the tinkling of piano keys conveying through the speakers, the elevator is completely silent and vacant. Harry takes a moment to inhale a few deep breathes. Now that he is actually at the resort his anxiety levels are skyrocketing. If he thought he was jittery in the car, he was surely mistaken, as now he is basically a walking time bomb triggered to implode at the slightest touch.

The elevator pings and the steel doors slide open, leading to a vast row of suite doors. Harry strides through the hall until he reaches his assigned room. Just as he is swiping the automatic key card a cheerful voice sounds in his ears.

“Hello!”

“Jesus!” Harry jumps practically falling over, clutching his chest in shock. “You scared the shit out of me!”

“Oh my! I’m so sorry! My sincerest apologies, didn’t mean to give you a right fright. I’m Liam Payne. You’re Harry, right? Harry Styles, the new guy?” Liam extends his arm out in welcome. “I don’t think we’ve ever met, I wanted to give you a proper welcome, but I never had the chance and I saw you walk in and I thought, why not now? I’m really so so incredibly sorry to have scared you though.”

“Um it’s alright, no harm done. I’m Harry, yeah. Pleasure to meet you, Liam.” Harry shakes Liam’s hand, breathing in deeply to slow his elevated heart rate.

“I’m so glad you’re here! It’s going to be such a sick weekend, it’s always a blast every year! My boyfriend, Zayn, and I absolutely smashed the scavenger hunt last year. The events get pretty competitive. Did you bring anyone with you?”

Harry blanches. His whole body going completely motionless, face white as a ghost.

“Uh, Harry, mate?” Liam waves his hand over Harry’s face, testing to see if he is still responsive. “I said, did you bring anyone here this weekend?”

“Hi, I’m Louis Tomlinson.” Louis says coming up behind a still frozen Harry, offering his hand.

“I’m Harry’s brother, lovely to meet you.” Louis glances over at Harry who looks physically relieved
to see him, color slowly returning to his face.

“Brother? Oh, how nice, haven’t had one of them in a while! Ha! Nice to meet you, Louis Tomlinson, I’m Liam Payne.” Liam grips Louis’ hand in a firm shake, giving him a once over glance. “So Tomlinson, you must be half brothers then, right? With different last names and all.”

“Different dads.”

“Different mums.”

Harry and Louis look at each other with wide eyes, caught in a lie as they said the exact opposite answers at the exact same time.

“Um...I’m confused. So you-”

“Uhh well...see...we have...like, uh different dads and the same biological mum,” Harry lies, interjecting Liam, “but...um our mum is actually bisexual...so like um...she just got married...and now...we have...um...two mums?” Harry says as if he has confused himself.

“Oh...ok, that sounds like an...interesting family dynamic.” Liam says with a deeply confused expression on his face. “But...wait-”

“Oh, you have no idea just how interesting it is.” Louis responds slowly backing away from the conversation. “But we should probably get settled in you know, long trip, busy evening ahead, kind of tired.” Louis grabs Harry by the elbow and forcibly drags him into their suite.

“Ok! Nice meeting you lads! See you at the opening dinner!” Liam calls after them.

But his farewell sentiment falls on deaf ears, as Louis is already closing the door to their suite with a quickness, desperately trying to escape that disaster of a situation.

The second the door clicks shut Louis goes off. “Oh my god, Harold! What kind of sloppy shit answer was that?! ‘Oh uh my mum got married and now we have two mums’. What the fuck?! That made literally no sense at all! Leroy or whatever the fuck his name is, looked at us like we had two heads!”

“It's Liam and no one told you to say your full name!” Harry counters. “We would have been fine if you didn’t slide that Tomlinson in there.”

“We would not have been fine! When I showed up you were standing there like a deer in the headlights! Your soul had literally left your body, I saved your frozen ass! Without me, Liam would have simply thought the new guy was a halfwit!”

“I just panicked a bit when he asked me if I brought anyone.” Harry confesses. “I thought my answer was pretty good on the spot! It was imaginative!”

“Imaginative!? You can’t be serious! We should have rehearsed this, obviously. I actually wish you would have stayed frozen a bit longer, I could have covered that so easily.” Louis rubs the bridge of his nose in exasperation. “But no! You just had to open your ‘imaginative’ mouth and speak pure foolishness! You’ve never been the best under pressure thinker. Oh my god, this was such a mistake!”

“No, it’s not a mistake, Louis! I mean yeah, that was a bit of a stretch, but it’s fine, it’s only the first day anyway.”
“Exactly! We have literally been here for only twenty minutes and we've already screwed up. This is not a good idea Harry.” Louis paces the span of their suite, striding back and forth, having moved his fingers from the bridge of his nose to the sides of his temples, massaging incessantly. “You know what, I'll just go home, you can tell all your work pals that I got sick or something. The flu? The runs, maybe? I don't know make it something really good."

“You're not going anywhere! I need you, you promised me.”

“I promised you everything will be ok. And it will be, if I leave right now, before this goes any further south!”

“No! Louis, you can’t leave now! You said you would do this for me and you’re already here! I can’t do this without you. You saw me out there! I keep fucking up at every turn. I’m so on edge and jumpy. I need you, please don’t go.” Harry pleads, worry clearly outlined in his tone.

“I agreed in a moment of weakness. You know I can't say no to you when you make that face.”

“You mean this face?” Harry amplifies his already desperate expression schooling his face into the most heart wrenching, innocently sad face. His features slightly downcast, eyes peering out through his lashes. He juts his lip out slightly and tilts his head to the side. “How could you leave me, Louis?”

“Stop. It won't work twice. I know what you're doing. I will not be manipulated by you again.” Louis backs up into the room. “You got me once, but I will no longer be subject to the desires of the flesh.”

Harry moves in closer, his voice sweetly seductive and enticing. “Louis, my love, my light, my one and only. Don't leave me, I won't make it with out you.” He pleads earnestly, moving closer to Louis.

“No stop that, I refuse to be swayed by you.”

Harry reaches out to caress Louis’ cheek, but he is met with a light slap to his wrist.

“Don’t touch me, we are related!” Louis declares, scandalized. “I will not get caught in a romantic setting with you this weekend. That is the last thing we need. You can’t just explain that away. To the eyes of the outsider, that is incest!”

“Wait, so that means you’ll stay?” Harry asks sounding hopeful.

“Yes, I’ll stay, but it’s not because I’m weak and I can’t resist you.” Louis claims defiantly. “It’s because you are a hopeless wreck and I’m a nice person. You owe me.”

“Mhmm sure.” Harry hums, wrapping his arms around Louis’ waist and leaning down to kiss him. “I know just how to make it up to you.”

“What the fuck did I just say Harry?! Don’t touch me! Don’t even think about touching me. There will be no touching!” Louis slides out of Harry’s embrace and takes an exaggerated step away from him. “I’m not taking any chances. If we do this, we are doing it the Tommo way. We are going to sit our asses down right now and get our story straight. No more of this half-assed shit. I’m not being caught off guard like that again.”

“Ok, yeah sorry. You’re right, we have to be more organized and careful to pull this off.” Harry looks down at the discarded itinerary that somehow found its way to the floor in all the chaos. He picks it up and opens to the first page, glancing it over briefly. “So we have four and a half hours
until the opening welcome dinner, is that enough time?”

“I’m waiting on you bro, let’s do this.”
Harry and Louis spend the rest of the afternoon camped out in their suite drafting their hypothetical kinship. The only way they will make it through this weekend unscathed is if they plan out their story and commit to it like it’s the gospel truth.

They order room service, having not eaten all day and spread out on one of the luxurious queen sized beds. The room they are assigned features double queens instead of one standard king. Obviously “siblings” would find no logical use in a single king size bed and would therefore theoretically want to sleep separately.

Aside from the double beds, the suite is massive, featuring a mounted plasma screen, walk-in closet, en suite bathroom, spacious living area and even a kitchenette. It could basically double as their current flat. The idea of having money and being around people with money is a fairly new concept to Harry and Louis.

For the past few years they have been working tirelessly in attempts to get ahead and make it in the world. They are in no way poor or struggling by any means, just average. They live the typical lifestyle of a twenty-something couple, reasonably comfortable. But now, Harry’s new position raises them to an entirely different income bracket. No longer little leagues, they are on their way to becoming heavy hitters. It is something they still need to get accustomed to, that is, if Harry manages to keep his job and they somehow make it successfully through this weekend.

After constant back and forth, Louis ends up going along with being the younger brother. Although he detests the idea of being referred to as ‘little’, he wouldn’t exactly mind being younger. Who wouldn’t love to pass as younger than their age? At twenty-eight, Louis can’t give up the chance to be twenty-four again.

As much as Louis hates it, most people always assume Harry is older anyway. Maybe because he is practically a giant in comparison or maybe it’s the fact that he acts like an old man with his back problems and weird rituals. Or it could even be because of his deep steady voice; how he drags out every syllable in a low drawl. Who knows the true reason, but regardless Louis decides to just roll with the punches.

Louis suggests that maybe it would help if they claimed he was dating someone else, hypothetically of course, to kind of pull the tension away from the two of them. There is bound to be loads of unintentional sexual tension between them and if there is at least the idea that Louis is in a
relationship, maybe it will serve to diffuse the flames a bit.

They fail to come up with any way out of Harry’s imaginative illustration of their family tree. There is literally no other way to explain the whole different dads and mums thing without sounding completely ridiculous. Harry essentially screwed them over on that part.

If it happens again they will just go with the different dads side of story, in hopes that Liam isn’t around to clarify or ask impossible questions. He’s the only one that actually heard the tale of their alleged family dynamic anyway, so they can only hope that no one will ask for further details in his presence.

After making the final decisions and finishing off the rest of their food, they get dressed for the opening dinner. Trying to make a good impression, Harry dresses in a fine silk button up and tight black slacks paired with black leather boats. He decides to leave his hair out, simply refreshing his curls with moisturizer and letting them tumble past his shoulders.

Louis opts for a more classical approach, choosing to dress in a simple dark suit paired with a white dress shirt accented with a black collar. He meticulously styles his hair away from his face into a poised quiff.

Once dressed and presentable they begin to make their way to the resort’s main banquet hall where the dinner is being held. Harry’s nervous twitch steadily creeps back with a vengeance, amplifying the closer they get to their destination.

Unable to stand it anymore, Louis stops in his tracks and pulls Harry aside. “Ok Harry, deep breaths. We talked about this, we went over it, there is nothing to worry about. It’ll all be fine, everyone will love you. I’m right here ok? I’m always right here.” Louis reaches over and gives Harry’s hand a quick squeeze before releasing it.

Harry nods his head, breathing deeply as Louis instructed. He closes his eyes and takes several more slow methodical breaths, calming his nerves. “Ok…ok, I think I’m ready.”

They turn the corner rounding into the banquet hall. The vast room is filled with dozens of circular tables, each beautifully decorated in a sea of blue hues. Each table is adorned by an elegant floral centerpiece illuminated by soft candles. The perimeter lighting of the space is tinted in a light teal, casting the high rise walls in cerulean shadows. At the front of the hall is a stage, ornamented with twinkling hanging lights, a podium positioned in the center.

The overall feel of the room is warm and welcoming. Guests of seemingly all ages and ranges steadily filling in, all impeccably dressed and well-mannered; some mingling about while others keeping to themselves, settling down at various tables around the hall. A live band in the corner of the room sets the mood for the evening, playing smooth soothing jazz. At the opposite end of the banquet hall, a full bar is set up offering liquid courage.

“How about we get a few drinks, and then find a table?” Louis offers, gesturing towards the bar.

They head to the open bar and after careful deliberation decide on a nice crisp white wine. As they collect their glasses, Harry sees a man waving wildly in their direction from the center table. “Oh god, it’s Liam. Should we go over there?”

“I mean, it would be rude not to, he’s already seen us. I’m sure he’s forgotten all about earlier, it should be fine. I hope.”

“Yeah, ok.” Harry replies uneasily, not completely assured.
They weave their way through the sea of tables and guests, arriving at an overly eager Liam.

“Hi boys!” Liam greets cheerfully. “Sit with us please, we’d hate to get one of those interns at our table. They never have anything interesting to say.”

“Yeah, sure alright. I mean, if you insist.”

“Yes, yes I insist! Sit!” Liam urges. “God, two years ago this poor sap named…um Bryan, I think? Yeah…Bryan, the sad intern.” Liam reminisces shuddering at the memory. “Anyway, he followed us around everywhere, like a lost puppy. It was endearing at first, but after while it was so irritating. Nice guy, just dreadfully dull and I’m not much for babysitting.”

“Poor Bryan.” Harry offers, shaking his head. “He was probably misunderstood.”

“Um, hello, I’m Zayn.” A raven-haired man seated next to Liam says pointedly, extending his hand and casting Liam an irritated look.

“Oh goodness! How rude of me, I should have introduced you, my apologies. I got so caught up in that whole intern fiasco.” Liam chuckles to himself. “Harry, Louis, this is Zayn, my amazing boyfriend I briefly mentioned earlier.”

“What did you say about me earlier?” Zayn questions looking to Liam quizzically.

“Nothing nothing Z, just how our team completely kicked ass last year in the scavenger hunt is all.”

“Oh right. That was a sick! Hopefully we get put in a good team this year. I’d hate to break the winning streak. It was a close call the year we had intern boy, he almost cost us the win.” Zayn recalls, a flash of annoyance in his eyes. He shakes his head, as if to clear his thoughts, and casts his gaze to Louis and Harry, now comfortably seated at the table. “So are you two…like a thing?”

“No! What no!” Harry jumps a little too quickly to answer. “No, we’re brothers. Yeah…brothers, totally related!”

Louis glances at Harry, his eyes conveying a look as if to say “cool it”. There is no need to spread it on too thick, they definitely get the point.

“Oh nice, nice. I’ve never thought to bring a sibling to an event like this.” Zayn ponders.

Harry opens his mouth to respond but is thankfully cut off by the arrival of an enthused blonde-headed Irishman.

“Ahoy lads! Ready to get smashed?”

“Niall, lovely for you to join us.” Liam welcomes with a genuine smile. He looks past Niall as if waiting for someone else to appear. “So who did you bring along to entertain you this year? I don’t see anyone new.”

“You know mate, I’ve decided to go stag this year.” Niall replies, sitting down in the seat next to Zayn. “I’ve been roping chicks into this thing year after year and then when all is said and done they expect more out of me. I’m still in my prime! I’m not ready to be tied down just yet, that’s what my thirties are for. So this year I’m going to appreciate the wealth already here. I mean look around! There are some prime babes just waiting to experience all of this.” He gestures to himself with pride. “I would hate for them, or myself for that matter, to go to waste.”

“Always a pleasure Niall.” Louis says rolling his eyes.
“Lou, buddy, lovely to have you here! I can’t even tell you how enthused I was when Harry said he was bringing you along!” Niall retorts with a knowing look, wiggling his eyebrows.

“Oh, you two know each other?” Liam questions looking between the two of them.

“Oh Lou and I go way way back, isn't that right, H?”

“Oh...Yeah, we had our wild nights back in uni.” Harry responds nervously, his eyes panicked, fearing every word out of Niall’s mouth.

“Wild indeed, those were the days mate. You two were something back then. Out of control really.” Niall reminisces with a smirk.

“Were you guys big partiers back then or something?” Zayn questions looking between Harry and Louis skeptically.

“Um...yeah, we had our wild nights back in uni.” Harry responds nervously, his eyes panicked, fearing every word out of Niall’s mouth.

“Wild indeed, those were the days mate. You two were something back then. Out of control really.” Niall reminisces with a smirk.

“Were you guys big partiers back then or something?” Zayn questions looking between Harry and Louis skeptically.

“Oh they kept me up many nights let me tell you. One time I caught them-”

“Please don’t, I’d like to keep what’s left of my dignity.” Louis interjects jokingly with a serious undertone. “I’m a respectable adult now, no need to rehash the mistakes of my youth.”

Harry bites his lip anxiously, silently praying that there will be no further inquiries over his past activities with Louis. They did have some especially reckless adventures and none of them would be appropriate dinner conversation.

“Ha! No sweat bro, we’ve all done some wild things back in the glory days.” Zayn snickers. “It was a simpler time, I suppose.”

“Hello gentlemen, how are we this evening?” Executive Henderson approaches the table swaying on her feet and slightly slurring her words. She holds an overfilled glass of red wine, balanced perfectly between her manicured fingers. Harry is actually slightly relieved to see her, anything to move the focus of conversation. “Lovely to see that you all made it here.” She harnesses her attention to Harry, giving him a onceover. “Styles, you look rather dashing this evening. I mean you always look presentable, I suppose, but I think I prefer your non-professional look.” She gives him a suggestive smile, placing her hand on his shoulder giving it a tender squeeze.

Harry’s face reddens as he looks up at her from his seat, “Erm...thank you. You look lovely as well tonight, Executive Henderson.”

“Oh please, call me Melissa. We’re on holiday!” She lifts her glass in the air, obnoxiously toasting herself. “No need for petty titles!”

“Um...ok? If...if you're sure...I mean you said before-”

“Forget what I said before! Live in the now Styles! In the moment!” Melissa praises, almost spilling her wine as it sloshes back and forth with her enthusiastic movements. “Oh well, I need to make some opening remarks or some such, excuse me dear.” She pats Harry lazily on the cheek and turns to make her exit.

Harry looks over his shoulder curiously as she sashays towards the stage, stumbling every so often over her stiletto heels. “Is she...um...”

“Wasted?” Liam offers. “She seems a little tipsy.”

“I’ve never seen her so relaxed…and loose.” Harry comments in disbelief. “She’s always so tense
“Yeah, she normally gets pretty drunk every year.” Niall adds. “I don’t know, it’s like she never lets loose and when she does...she really does. Last year she basically gave a strip tease after emptying out the bar. Medusa has a bangin’ body under all those scales.”

“Oh, is she your target this year, Niall?”

“Ha! Fuck no! I’m trying to keep my job, I have a mouth to feed. It takes a man’s job to eat like a man and drink like a man.” He takes a sip of his beer. “But don’t you worry your curly head H, when we get back to the office, she will be right back to her dictator self. Don’t get too used to this, it’s all temporary.”

“Mmm I’d expect nothing less.” Harry hums.

“It is a bit early though to be that drunk, we literally just got here.” Niall ponders, scratching his head. “Must have been a rough year for ole Dusa to be putting it away like that so early on.”

Executive Henderson takes the stage, as the guests take their seats, quieting down. She schools her face into a calm reserve unlike her previous free flowing demeanor.

“Good evening, for those who may not be aware, I’m Melissa Henderson, one of the Executive Directors. I’m pleased to be the first to welcome you here tonight to the opening dinner. I hope you all had a pleasant journey. To start out the night I would like you to please join me in welcoming the most important person at Hearst Publishing, the man of the hour, President Charles Richards.”

A white haired man emerges onto the stage, greeted by thunderous applause. Although he is most likely in his sixties or seventies, he has a young air about him; jovial and full of bright spirit, an upbeat spark in his eye.

“Welcome one and all to the 35th Annual Hearst Retreat. I don’t know about you, but I look forward to this event every single year. It’s the only time I get to know some of the faces at the company, the people who are the backbone and the heart of this corporation. I would like to thank all of you for coming and also for being esteemed and valued employees and colleagues. Hearst Publishing would not be where it is today without you.”

Energetic applause sounds through the banquet hall. “I would also like to formally thank The Grove Resort for housing our event this year, they have been such an accommodating host thus far. We have many exciting events planned, some old favorites and a few special new additions. I don’t want to give too much away or anything, but you all are in for a grand time. I’m so thrilled, I may even join in on the festivities!”

President Richards chuckles a hearty laugh, a knowing smile on his lips. The crowd joins in with chorus of shortles and encouraging cheers.

“Only time will tell, I’m not the young man I once was, but I’ve never been one to turn down a good time.” He smiles brightly, eyes crinkling, reflecting the blue glow of the room. “This retreat is for you, so again, welcome, I hope you all enjoy your stay here. Relax, have fun, make connections and have a damn good time!”

The audience erupts in boisterous applause, as President Richards exits the stage with a simple wave and genuine smile.

“Thank you President Richards for that warm welcome.” Melissa claps, resuming her place at the
podium. “Can we have another round of applause for the President? He has attended and even participated in every single retreat since the very beginning and Hearst Publishing would not be the same without this astounding man.”

President Richards nods in thankful acknowledgement from his seat at the front table.

“Well, the bar is open, feel free to mingle around tonight, get to know a few people. But remember we start the events at nine a.m. sharp, tomorrow morning, so don’t stay out too late. Please refer to your official itinerary for details. Thank you.”

“Nine a.m.?” Louis questions in disbelief. “On a Saturday morning? Is this work or a vacation?”

“Both apparently.” Zayn responds, shaking his head. “There is no rest for the weary. It’s all work and no play.”

“I’ll drink to that.” Louis agrees, lifting his glass.

“So Louis, what is it that you do for work anyway?” Liam questions.

“Oh, I’m an environmental lawyer, actually.”

“And a bloody brilliant one at that.” Harry adds with a soft smile.

“Save the trees, save the trees!” Niall chants, laughing to himself.

“No, it’s more than just saving the trees or even the environment for that matter.” Louis counters. “It’s about representing issues that impact the entire world, addressing change at a global level, helping people who are less understood. The environment includes everyone and as an environmental lawyer I strive to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of upcoming generations to meet their own needs in the future. It’s all about balance really.”

“Oh wow, that’s profound mate.” Zayn marvels in awe. “You know I’m all for being one with the earth. We are all just pieces to a greater puzzle. Everything has to work together in order to see the bigger picture.”

“Excuse Zayn, he gets a bit ‘zen’ after hours, especially after a few drinks.” Liam comments, observing Zayn speculatively.

“I do not Li! I believe this with the deepest parts of my being. The earth speaks and we would be wise to listen. Balance is the key to life and we can never be truly balanced if the world around us is unbalanced.”

“No, I totally agree, Zayn. It’s one of the reasons I chose my field.” Louis responds, nodding in agreement. “What is it that you do?”

“Well, Liam would like to label me as a housewife. But I’m doing freelance art and teaching some classes on the side. I just couldn’t vibe with the whole nine to five thing. I like my time to be fluid.”

“I never called you a housewife!” Liam protests. “I just said that I like that you’re home and waiting for me when I get off work is all.”

“Housewife,” Harry chuckles fondly, “I used to call Louis housewife when-” Harry’s eyes go wide, his face gradually reddening. “Um…when-”

“When I was in between jobs.” Louis finishes quickly. “My…um…partner was working and I was
on the couch playing FIFA most days. Not the best housewife, I’ll admit.”

“Oh so you’re dating someone Louis?” Zayn inquires, curiously.

“Yeah.” Louis glances briefly over at Harry. “Uh, I’ve been in a relationship for about six years now, just got engaged actually. Long story short, we met at uni, became best friends and fell in love. I haven’t looked back since.”

Harry bites back a small smile, attempting to hide his fond reaction behind his wine glass.

“Aww! How cute! Congratulations! I’m always a sucker for friends to lovers stories.” Liam swoons. “Let’s see a picture then?”

“Oh yes, Louis please! Show us all a picture.” Niall encourages, a snarky grin plastered on his face. “We are all dying to see the love of your life.”

“Oh…uh…what? Now?” Louis croaks, unprepared for this kind of intrusion.

“Yes now!” Liam urges, unwavering. “Don’t tell me you don’t have a picture of the person you’ve spent the last six years of your life committed to on your phone.”

“Well…right, of course I do. Yeah, one sec.” Louis unlocks his phone and scrolls through his camera roll frantically searching for a suitable photo. He selects one on a whim and slides his phone across the table to Zayn and Liam revealing a picture of himself posing with a platinum blonde girl with bright blue eyes similar to his own.

“Oh, she’s gorgeous, you make an adorable couple!” Liam coos. “I’m happy for you both.”

Harry chokes on his drink when he glances at the illuminated screen displaying the photo, sputtering alcohol all over the table.

“Whoa, you alright there mate?”

“Fine.” Harry coughs out, face turning scarlet red. “Excuse me one moment.” He stands quickly and begins to stumble awkwardly through the banquet hall towards the exit.

“Um…I should probably go see if he’s alright.” Louis pockets his phone and sets off to find Harry.

“Yeah alright, Lou.” Niall calls after him. “Gotta keep an eye on your brother.”

After wandering around through the halls for several minutes, he finds Harry in the restroom, leaning over the vast marble sink, dabbing his wet shirt with a damp cloth. Louis surveys the area only to find that they are completely alone.

“There you are, I’ve been looking all over. Are you alright? Do you need any help?” Louis approaches Harry near the sink.

“Oh no, yeah no. I’m totally fine, perfect actually. Just downright peachy. Splendid. Sensational!” Harry laughs almost manically. “I mean, besides the fact that my fiancé is now my brother and apparently he is engaged to his biological sister!”

“What was I supposed to do? She was the only person I was pictured with recently besides you! I’m surprised I even found that photo, your face is literally my entire camera roll! We agreed to say I was dating someone so…”

“But Lottie!? Really? Your blood related sister! You might as well have chosen your mother or my
mother or Gemma!” Harry rants, waving his hands around wildly, eyes flashing. “And she’s so young!”

“She’s twenty-two and technically I’m only twenty-four this weekend, thanks to you making me your baby brother. So it’s actually within reason.”

“She is your actual genetically related sister, you shared a womb! Aren’t you the least bit disturbed by that?!”

“Of course I’m disturbed! I haven’t stopped being disturbed since we got here!” Louis yells, exasperated. “You can’t honestly be mad at me for this! We are only here because of you to begin with. I’m sorry if I had to tarnish my family name and ethical standards for you. How was I supposed to know your coworkers were going to be so damn nosy! And Niall is no help, I swear he wants us to get caught.”

Harry sighs running his hands through his hair. “Yeah I know, I know. It’s not your fault, I’m sorry. I don’t even know who to be mad at really. Myself, I guess, it’s just frustrating how messy this is getting.”

“You’re telling me, my fiancé is my brother and my sister is my fiancé. What a wonderful life I lead.”

“Thank you. I know I said it before, but honestly, thank you Louis. I don’t know where I’d be without you.”

“You do what you must for the people you love, I suppose.” Louis sighs, shrugging his shoulders. “Even if that means parading around in a bloody hoax.”

Harry smiles softly, gazing at Louis in earnest appreciation. “Well, we should get back I guess.”

“True, it might be a bit alarming to be in the loo this long. No need to give Niall any more fuel.”

They return to the banquet hall and rejoin the conversation easily. The rest of the night is spent mingling and socializing with various guests and coworkers, schmoozing up the cooperate ladder. Ever the charmer, Harry succeeds in winning over smiles and small praises from many of his associates. After finishing off a few glasses of wine, he is as calm as ever, comfortable even. He tells stupid jokes and extremely lame drawn out stories about god knows what, but somehow manages to endear everyone he comes across.

Louis spends most of the night chatting with Zayn, both not too interested in mixing with the masses just yet. There will be plenty of time for that all weekend. Zayn dubs them ‘The Housewife Squad’, Louis being an honorary housewife as he is fully employed now. They stick to the sidelines, people watching and making jokes and remarks about unsuspecting guests, all the while sipping on wine glasses. Louis decides that if this weekend ends up being complete and utter shit at least he made a new friend in Zayn.

A few hours later, Harry rejoins Louis looking plastered and loopy as ever. They say their goodbyes and goodnights and head back to their suite. Louis unlocks the door with his key card, holding it open for Harry, as he staggers inside the room on unsteady legs.

“Louehhh!” Harry singsongs perching himself shakily on one of the beds, a dopey grin on his face. “Lou, Louuu, Louehhh!”

“You do realize I’m right here in front of you, right? There is no need to howl for me like I’m kilometers down the road. I’m literally two steps away.”
Harry ignores Louis' words completely, continuing on at the same volume. “Have I told you that you look so hot tonight? Because you dooo. So so sooo hot. I loooove when you wear suits. You should only wear suits for the rest of your life, everrr. Like ever ever everrr.” Harry gestures drunkenly, slurring his words together, eyes going in and out of focus.

Louis eyes him skeptically, choosing to observe the scene before him silently.

“And! And and anddd...you know which suit I love the absolute most!?” He pauses for dramatic effect, closing his eyes and smilingly dumbly to himself. “Your birrrthday suit!” Harry giggles, practically falling off the edge of the bed.

“You’re so drunk. Which I don’t even know how to be honest, as far as I know you only had two glasses of wine.”

“I maybe...possibly...kiiind of had a feeew shots with Liam too, buuut I’m not even thaaat drunk.”

Harry slurs, standing up and stumbling over an open suitcase. “Now back to you being incredibly hot. I mean Louuu, look at your ass! It’s insaneee. Like mind-blowingly insaneee!”

“As much as I appreciate your genuine attraction to me, I can see where this is going and it needs to stop.” Louis responds, slightly amused by the bumbling giant swaying before him.

“I looove your ass, I could liiive in your ass. Better yet, your ass is my reason to liiive.” Harry tumbles towards Louis, hands eagerly groping his body.

“Harry seriously, stop. We agreed, remember? No sex this weekend. Absolutely none. Nothing. No!” Louis escapes from Harry’s grasp causing him to loose his balance, stumbling forward even more.

“But Louuu,” Harry begs, wobbling side to side trying to regain his footing, “we are in our own suite. No one is even here with uuus. They will never ever knooow.” He drops his voice down to a whisper that ends up being just as loud. “It’ll be our little secret, shhhhh.”

“I don’t give a fuck, Harry. It’s just too risky, it’s not worth it.”

“I’m not worth it?” Harry pouts, dimples on display.

“Harry, even in your drunken state, you know that’s not what I said, don’t play games.” Louis says as he digs around in his bag in search of a phone charger. “We can do whatever you want when we are safe within the walls of our own home, but I refuse to do any sort of sexual act with you while we are here.”

“Oh really? Is that soooo? Even if I happened to…” Harry enticingly unbuttons his silk shirt, button by button. He sheds the delicate material and drops it to the floor.

“Do what you want. I’m not looking at you.” Louis replies unbothered, as he plugs his phone into the wall. He stands by the wall scrolling through missed notifications and responding to previous messages, completely ignoring Harry.

Getting absolutely nowhere, Harry stands for a moment scowling like a petulant child, completely shirtless. After several minutes of pointless staring and yearning, Harry inches closer to Louis as stealthily as he can while being completely inebriated. Taking action, Harry surges towards Louis catching him by surprise in a stolen kiss.

Louis pulls back and looks at Harry with a mix of confusion and shock. “What the fu-”
Harry attaches his lips to Louis’ once more, this time deepening the kiss, a moan escaping his mouth. He presses the weight of his bare chest flush against Louis. The force of Harry’s body catching Louis off guard forcing him back until he collides against the wall with a booming thud.

Louis breaks away from this kiss. “Fuck! Harry you’re so loud! There are guests literally next door, right against this very wall! We can’t do this.”

Harry dips his head to nibble on Louis’ earlobe. “Lou please, I’ll be quiet I promise. Just touch me.”

“Oh please, you’re never quiet! Fuck, I’m never quiet!” Louis persists, resolve slightly diminishing. “God, a few drinks in you and you’re so needy.”

“Guilty. I’m always needy for you. So needy baby, touch me. Harry moans grinding his hips against Louis. “I want you so bad, please. Touch me.”

Harry doesn’t even bother to wait for Louis’ response, instead choosing to continue his incursion, pressing Louis harder against the wall, forcing his tongue deeper into Louis’ mouth.

“Ah fuck it.” Louis growls lowly, fumbling with the buckle of Harry’s trousers, sliding his fingers beneath the waistband and tugging lightly.

Harry bends down slightly scooping Louis up off the ground, gripping under his legs. Louis wraps his thighs around Harry’s waist in response, ducking his head at the junction of Harry’s neck, sucking the beginnings of a small bruise.

Harry walks them over to the first queen bed, depositing Louis onto the soft duvet. Louis, still fully clothed, scoots backwards on the bed, Harry following suit, chasing Louis’ lips.

Harry hovers over Louis’ frame, observing him longingly. “God, you’re gorgeous.”

Louis loops his leg around Harry and flips him onto his back, straddling him on either side of his hips. Harry throws his head back, accidentally hitting the headboard against the wall with a nosy bang.

Louis traces teasing patterns from the top of Harry’s bare chest all the way to the dents of his hips, kissing down the length of his torso. Harry in his drunken form, is overly responsive to the slightest touch, eyes blown in a combination of liquor and lust. His lush lips moaning deeply, back arching reflexively to Louis’ touch.

“Shhh, love. You have to be quiet, remember?” Louis taunts as he peels Harry’s already undone trousers from his legs.

“Louis.” Harry gasps out his name like a whispered prayer, closing his eyes in bliss. “I need you to-”

A loud knock sounds from the door, interrupting Harry’s desperate plea. Immediately alarmed, Harry’s eyes fly open wild, pupils dilated.

“Fuck! Oh my god! I knew this would fucking happen!” Louis hisses, jumping off Harry’s lap in an instant. “You get it!”

“No! You get it! Look at me!” Harry whisper shouts, gesturing towards his bare body.

Louis smirks, “Well it was your idea so…”

“But you’re still fully clothed! I’m essentially naked!”
“Mmm.” Louis hums, tsking his tongue, with a shrug. “Should have thought of that before.”

Another knock echoes through the room, this one more urgent than the first.

“Coming!” Harry shouts in the direction of the door.

“Ugh, fine!” He whispers at Louis, tone panicked. “Go hide in the closet or something!”

“The closet?! You’re forcing me in the closet, what am I twelve again? Sneaking around with boys and hiding in closets. Good times.”

“Oh my god Louis, just do it!” Harry hisses, stepping into a pair of sweatpants in attempts to hide the obvious problem in his briefs, opting to leave his chest exposed for time sake.

“What has my life become?” Louis mumbles to himself, sliding into the spacious walk-in closet. 

Harry crosses the room and unlocks the door, toned skin glistening with a light sheen of sweat. He finds Liam standing in the hallway in a comfy hoody.

“Hey mate, um sorry to bother you,” Liam starts, “I was just wondering if you had a spare iPhone charger I could borrow? Somehow Zayn and I both forgot and I checked with front desk, but they seem to be out. Apparently everyone forgot their chargers this weekend. What are the odds, huh?”

“Mmm…yeah sure, one sec.” Harry turns and retreats into the suite, adjusting his sweatpants as he walks. He picks up the first charger he sees, still connected to the wall. In his anxiousness and hast to be rid of the situation, he almost hands Liam Louis’ phone along with the charger. Harry unplugs the phone, tossing it on the unmade mess of a bed and gives Liam the cord. “Here you go mate.”

“Thanks, I’ll bring it back tomorrow. I hope I’m not…uh…disturbing you or anything.” Liam’s eyes survey the state of the room. “Umm you wouldn’t happen to have anyone else here right now?”

“What?!” Harry jumps, startled. “No, why?”

“Oh umm…nothing. Zayn just swears he heard like umm…sounds…coming from your side of the wall is all and your suite is…and well you look kind of…yeah, you know never mind, it’s none of my business really.” Liam stammers out, averting his eyes.

“That’s odd,” Harry laughs nervously, scratching his head in exaggerated confusion, “I mean it’s just me in here. All me, all by myself…Just me. Yeah.”

“Oh…ok. Where's Louis?”

“He’s uhh…out. Erm yeah…just…out. Yeah.”

“Oh.” Liam says with an uneasy smile. “Alright, well I’ll leave you to it then. Uh…thanks again.”

“Yeah, no problem.”

Harry closes the suite door just as Louis tumbles out of the closet laughing hysterically. “Oh my god! He totally thinks you’re like a violent masturbator now! Your eyes are all glassy and your sweaty and your pants are bulging and he heard sounds and your ‘all alone’! Harry you should see yourself, you are the physical definition of fucked!” Louis laughs uncontrollably, rolling around on the floor, hands clutching his stomach.

“What!? He does not think that!” Harry snaps, horrified.
“Yes, he absolutely does, it was all over his tone and his face, but it’s fine. We know you have needs. Just because your ‘single’ doesn’t mean you don’t need some love every now and then. A little harmless stimulus.” Louis tries to calm his laughter but it’s just too hard, Harry has truly outdone himself this time.

“Shut up!”

“I warned you about this! You said ‘I’ll be quiet, I’ll be quiet I promise Lou, nothing will happen, touch me, touch me’.” Louis mimics Harry’s desperate tone and longing moans. “And look at you now, caught in the act! You just couldn’t control yourself.”

“Ugh!” Harry groans, rubbing his eyes with the palms of his hands “Why did you agree to me, I was drunk?!”

“Well you sure sobered up quick. And I never agreed, you basically forced yourself on me. It was a blatant assault, I was just trying to survive, that was self defense.” Louis feigns innocence. “Do you not remember? Should I remind you of how you started stripping down and forcing yourself on me?”

“God, this is so embarrassing!” Harry falls face down on the bed, burring his head under a pillow.

“There, there now.” Louis gets up and sits on the bed next to him patting his back reassuringly. “No need to cry big bro, we’ve all been there. Who hasn’t been caught wanking sometime in their lifetime?"

Harry sits up, lifting the pillow from his head and whacking Louis over the head with it. “You’re the worst, I can’t believe you!”

Louis falls over laughing uncontrollably. “Aww! I love you too! Don’t worry tomorrow is a brand new day, filled with more opportunities to embarrass yourself.”

“Kiss my ass.”

“I’d rather not right now seeing the situation we are in. Have you learned nothing, Harold?” Louis mocks, a smirk poised on his lips. “Well, if you’ve quite finished begging me for sexual favors, I’d quite like to get ready to go to sleep. You know, early morning and everything.”

Louis stands and heads to the en-suite bathroom. “I’m off for a quick shower, I assume you’ll be passed out when I get back, so goodnight brother dear.” Louis calls behind him sweetly.

Harry flops backwards onto the bed groaning. “Ugh, this is going to be such a long weekend.”
Chapter 4

Hey hey heyyy cool people :)  
So first of all your comments and messages have literally fueled me straight to Pluto.  
Thank you so much, I'm so beyond touched, I haven't stopped screaming. Knowing me I'll never stop screaming :)  
This chapter is outrageously long I'm sorryyy haha But it's my favorite one so far and it was an absolute blast to write so I hope you enjoy it! :))

Chapter 4

“Louis, babe get up.” Harry urges softly, nudging Louis’ sleeping form curled up on the bed.

“Mmm no.” Louis grumbles into his pillow, rolling over away from Harry.

Harry shakes him again gently. “It’s already a quarter past eight. You have to get up.”

“No, no I don’t, not yet…not yet.” Louis mumbles repeatedly, furrowing his head deeper into the soft linen.

“Yes yet. Don’t you want breakfast?”

“Fuck breakfast, let me sleep.” Louis declares sleepily, pulling the covers over his head in defiance.


Louis remains unresponsive, refusing to acknowledge Harry's calls.

“Don’t make me drag you out of bed. I will, I’ll do it Louis. I’ll drag your ass straight downstairs and you can go the rest of the day in the sweats you’re wearing.” Harry threatens with no real weight in his tone. “Don’t tempt me.”

Louis peeks one eye open, peering at Harry wearingly. “Oh please, you wouldn’t dare. Why are you even up, aren’t you hungover?”

“I woke up randomly about three hours ago and then I couldn’t fall back asleep, so I went down to the gym for awhile and then I found this lovely little juice bar.” Harry rambles excitedly. “I ordered their signature juice of the day, which really woke me up and cured any hangover I might have had. It had cucumber, swiss chard leaves, kale, spirulina, apple and pear. Oh! And spinach! Then I added a natural energy boost and a shot of vita-”

“Oh god, please spare me.” Louis groans, scrubbing his face with his hands. "It's too early for this.”

“It was amazing Louis, I feel so alive! I got one for you too, I don’t think you’re hungover or at least you don’t sound hungover. Your hangover voice is deeper, I think.” Harry babbles incessantly. “Anyway, a freshly pressed juice is a great way to start your day regardless and we have a really
busy day and it’s probably best if-

“Ok, ok, ok I’m up! I’m up, just stop talking. Give me the damn juice.”

Harry grins handing him a clear plastic cup filled to the brim with a think green liquid.

Louis sits up and eyes the cold drink speculatively, his face already morphing into disgust. “On second thought, I think I’ll pass.”

“Louis it’s good for you! You’ll feel refreshed and renewed after you drink it. Just try it please.”

Harry shoves the straw near Louis’ mouth.

Practically against his will, Louis sips the green juice reluctantly. “This tastes like feet! Like a sweaty fungus-infested foot. I refuse to finish that!”

“You’re so dramatic, it’s not even that bad.”

Louis side eyes him in repulsion. “I’d rather take my chances with a foot.”

“Fine, whatever. Excuse me for caring about your health. I also brought you a scone.” Harry passes Louis a brown paper bag.

Louis takes the bag, opening it up, producing a warm scone. He begins to bite into the soft pastry.

“It’s completely organic and gluten free!” Harry enthuses. “It’s made with flax seed and non-GMO ingredients.”

Louis’ eyes go wide as he spits the healthy scone out, gaging and sputtering dramatically. “Ugh! Is nothing sacred!? I at least thought the scone would be safe, how naïve of me. I should have known better. I’ll just eat later.”

“Suit yourself.” Harry shrugs, standing up and heading to the bathroom to finish getting dressed.

They get ready quickly, dressing in casual, but tasteful clothes, not really sure what events await them. Once dressed, they head to the center outdoor pavilion where the itinerary instructed them to meet, arriving with several minutes to spare.

Niall, Liam, and Zayn are congregating by what appears to be a refreshment table. Zayn and Niall slouching over in exhaustion, not yet fully awake. Liam however, seems cheerful as ever, fully erect and gesticulating animatedly, while chatting incessantly. Zayn hardly seems to be acknowledging him, his eyes half lidded, zoning out.

“Morning fellas.” Niall greets as they approach the table, yawning loudly.

“Why does it feel like it’s bloody six a.m.? I’m dead tired.” Zayn drones, fighting back a contagious yawn.

“I know, I’m barely aware of my surroundings. I feel like the walking dead.” Louis groans in agreement.

“Wake up, wake up! You all are so melodramatic! It’s nine a.m.!” Liam proclaims, bright eyed.

“Yeah on a Saturday! When last night was spent drinking into the wee hours! I should still be passed out somewhere, essentially dead to the world.” Niall whines, yawning yet again.

“Last night was such a late night.” Harry agrees.
“What did you two get up to when you left?” Niall asks glancing between Louis and Harry.

Harry blushes, remembering the events of the previous evening with embarrassment. “Uh nothing… chill…sleep…you know, nothing too exciting.”

“Right, same here.” Liam recalls. “Oh, that reminds me, I’ll bring back your charger later today Louis. I don’t know if Harry told you I came by, I think you were out or something?”

“Yeah, he might have mentioned it.” Louis grins knowingly. “I was out…um talking with my fiancé on the phone.”

“Oh, but I could almost swear your phone was in the room. It’s in a green case, right?” Liam’s face is etched in genuine confusion.

“Right…yes, so I was using Harry’s phone because mine wasn’t getting good reception. You know how temperamental phones can be these days,” Louis lies easily. He is fast realizing that Liam has an exceptional eye for detail and possesses an extremely inquisitive mind. He hasn’t stopped pestering them with intrusive questions since they got here.

“Oh, that’s beautiful, I love to see couples in honest committed relationships.” Niall chimes in. “How is Lottie doing anyway? I haven’t seen her in ages.” He asks innocently tilting his head to the side and raising his eyebrows.

“She’s great, thanks.” Louis replies curtly, eyeing Niall.

Niall smiles coyly, refusing to give up. “That’s wonderful mate, you guys are so cute. Such a power couple, I mean-”

“Um, is that coffee? Bless the high heavens.” Louis praises, ignoring Niall and shifting the focus of conversation. Louis makes a mental note to murder Niall in the future for not keeping his damn mouth shut. He may have to kill Liam too, with his interrogator ways.

Louis reaches to pour himself a cup of steaming hot coffee. “That nasty green shit did absolutely nothing for me.”

“Hey, that green shit has natural energy boosters, antioxidants, and antibiotics leading to strengthened immunity. Juicing is the wave of the future, essentially a vital part of optimal health.” Harry informs proudly.

“Harry, you juice too?” Liam inquires with excitement. “I make fresh juices every single morning! I bought a juicer a little while ago and it was honestly the best decision I ever made! Zayn flat out refuses to drink them though. He claims it’s all a hoax and we’ve all been lied to.”

“Louis is the exact same way!” Harry empathizes, smiling absentmindedly. “He never drinks anything I make for him in the morning.”

“Wait, do you live together?”

Harry looks as if he is ready to strangle himself, mentally cursing for yet another simple mishap.

“Oh we did, before the missus and I got engaged.” Louis puts in offhandedly. “He was always trying to force that super juice gunk on me. I bloody hated it. I like to start my mornings with hot tea, not some mutant green shake.”

“Ah you’re missing out mate.” Liam protests.
“I think we’ll manage.” Zayn remarks, siding with Louis.

A high pitched shriek of a crossed microphone wire breaks them from their conversation. President Richards taps on the mic a few times, testing it out. “Is this thing working or what?”

A resort staff member fiddles with a few cords, unplugging and readjusting various wires. He plugs in the last cord and gives the president a thumbs up, indicating he is clear to begin.

“All right then. Good morning lovely people! I hope you all slept well, I see many of you are looking a bit drowsy this morning.” He scans the crowd noting all the somber and dazed faces before him. “No matter, this event will surely wake you up! Albeit slightly out of order from previous years, we’ve decided our first event of the morning shall be the Annual Hearst Scavenger Hunt!”

A few cheers scatter across the gathering, many people looking completely out of it. Although it is nine a.m., a semi decent hour, most guests were up most of the night drinking and socializing and are now paying the price.

“Come on! I’m going to need more out of you than that!” President Richards encourages enthusiastically, trying desperately to liven up the crowd. “Get excited! This is the most anticipated event of the retreat! It’s tradition!”

A few more people join in cheering. Liam the loudest of them all, hooting rowdily, obviously enthused enough for the whole crowd.

“Well, maybe once we get going you’ll liven up. There have been a few changes made to this year’s hunt, so I’m going to hand over the mic to our judges so they can go over the rules and guidelines.”

President Richards steps off to the side, allowing a woman to step in his place. She balances a silver iPad in one hand and takes the microphone in the other.

“Hello everyone, I hope you’re all ready for what we have planned! In previous years, we have had a standard scavenger hunt where the participants simply collect items on a list and return back to base. But we recognize that we are now living in the digital age, so we wanted to make this year different to accommodate with the times.”

“We will be having a digital scavenger hunt in some sorts. Each team will be given a preprogramed iPad with a series of missions assigned. Each mission must be completed in order to complete the hunt. If you choose not to complete a mission, you will forfeit the points achievable for that task. Each member of the group must participate in all group related challenges and must complete at least one of the solo challenges. The same member can not complete two missions in a row unless one is a group activity.”

“The missions must be recorded and uploaded to the server using the tablet provided. The quality and performance will be reviewed upon submission and a score will be posted. The team with the most collective points after completion of the events will win the gold.”

“Now these missions come in all varieties. They will test your ability to work as a team, your capacity to think on your feet and maybe even embarrass you a little bit. But all in the name of a good time!” The judge chuckles, finding herself particularly funny.

“Unlike a typical scavenger hunt, you will not be collecting anything physically tangible, rather performing or engaging in certain activities on the grounds of the resort. You will have exactly two hours to complete all of your tasks. The team who finishes all their missions first will receive bonus points.”
“Because the missions require a level of compatible teamwork, we are allowing that you choose your own teams of five to six individuals. I know this must sound like a lot to remember, but it’s actually quite simple. Once you start, you’ll easily get the hang of it, I’m sure. May the best team win. You may now form your teams and when you are ready we will assign you an iPad.”

“What does she mean by missions?” Louis questions looking to Harry. “It’s too early for this shit.”

“I don’t know,” Harry shrugs, “it sounds kind of fun though. Keep an open mind Lou.”

Louis rolls his eyes, sipping on his coffee that obviously hasn’t kicked in yet, as he is still irritable.

“So you guys just wanna be in a group? I mean there are already five of us.” Niall asks looking amongst them.

“No objections by me.” Harry responds with a thumbs up.

“Yeah I’m down, I guess.” Louis sighs.

Zayn simply nods his head, looking completely uninterested and ready to pass out.

“Ok, but you have to know that if we are a team, we are in it to win it.” Liam informs with a serious expression. “I don’t play with events like this, I am a natural competitor!”

“Calm down Payno, you’ll have your victory! You can’t lose with Irish blood on your side.” Niall promises.

“So it’s settled then, I’ll go sign our names up.” Liam claps his hands and heads over to the judges table.

“Is he always this excited?” Louis queries toward Zayn curiously.

“He just has a thing for winning, he lives for these kind of competitions. I don’t know, I don’t ask questions.” Zayn rolls his eyes, annoyed yet fond grin on his lips.

Liam returns moments later with a sleek gold iPad in his hand. He fiddles around with the scavenger hunt app, clicking on icons and scrolling though the guidelines. “This app is pretty sick! It’s got a tracker function so we can see the other team’s progress. We can also get responses back from the judges in real time, so we can see our points and standing.” Liam’s excitement is palpable, with each passing second he becomes more and more giddy. “Oh this is going to be so fun!”

Louis slides next to Liam peeking over at the screen in his hands. “Can you see the missions on there yet?”

Liam shakes his head. “Nah mate, they’re locked until the hunt officially starts.”

“Well they thought of everything didn’t they.” Niall comments. “No way to cheat or anything.”

“Aright ladies and gentlemen, we have all the groups uploaded to the sever. There are ten groups competing in this event.” The judge announces into the microphone. “Be sure to follow the instructions as they appear on your tablets. Good luck and have fun! Your two hours starts…now!”

A loud buzzer sounds and a timer begins counting down from the judge’s table.

“Aright team, let’s do this!” Liam shouts energetically, fist pumping the air.

“What’s our strategy?” Louis asks.
“I think we should split up and get multiple things done at once.” Niall proposes. “That’ll get us the win.”

“That’s cheating.” Harry points out, unapprovingly shaking his head. “We should work as a team.”

“Fine, boy scout.” Niall retorts, rolling his eyes.

“The app won’t allow us to see the future missions anyway. You can only see one at a time. You must either complete it or forfeit and we will not be forfeiting anything. We need every single point we can possible earn!” Liam declares with full force, fire in his eyes.

“Alright, geez Payno! We get it, you need to win.” Niall quips, raising his hands in surrender. “What does the first one say?”

Liam opens the first mission, displaying it the iPad.

**Slam Dunk:** Fully clothed, jump into any of the four resort pools. 500 pts.

“What? I didn’t take the judge seriously when she said we would actually have to do things!” Niall proclaims as he reads over the first prompt. “That’s too much, I’m lazy.”

“There’s no time to be lazy, we just started!” Liam states. “Let's go to the indoor pool, it's closer and there are probably less people there right now.”

Harry agrees with a nod. “Sounds like a plan.”

They hurry through the resort, maneuvering their way along the grounds to the indoor pool. As predicted, the natatorium is almost completely vacant.

“Ok, who is going to do it?” Liam looks amongst them as they stand near the pools edge.

“I nominate Zayn.” Louis suggests.

Zayn laughs, perplexed at the notion. “Me?! Why me?”

“You’re the most appropriately dressed.” Louis gestures to Zayn’s clothes.

“He’s got a point mate, it makes sense.” Harry comments.

Zayn looks down at his attire; he is dressed in short black swim trunks, a tank top and flip flops, shades perfectly poised atop his dark hair. “I only appear to be, these are designer, I’d never actually swim in these clothes.” Zayn clarifies coolly. “To be honest, I’d never actually swim period.”

“Zayn, that’s the most ridiculous thing I’ve ever heard!” Niall declares. “You’ve got to be kidding!”

“No, seriously, this isn’t a joke! I don't do water!”

“Well, you do today!” Niall gives Zayn a forceful shove towards the water.

Zayn flails wildly, eyes wide as he falls into the pool with a mighty splash. He fully submerges under the water, losing his sunglasses and sandals on impact. His head rises from the water as he whips his soaked hair out of his face “What the actual fuck!”
Niall bursts into a fit of giggles, bending over and slapping his knees in amusement.

“How’s that water treating you, bro?” Louis teases, joining Niall in obnoxious laughter. “Bet you’re wide awake now!”

“Smile, babe!” Liam snaps a quick picture of a grumpy sodden Zayn wading in the water. He uploads it to the judge’s server instantly.

“This is designer! It's Gucci, goddammit! I fucking hate you all!” Zayn mopes as he paddles over and collects his sunken clothing items before climbing out of the pool. “And my hair is absolute shit now, so thanks.”

“You still look sexy to me, baby.” Liam comforts. “It’s a nice look on you.”

Zayn casts Liam a look of ice, completely unamused.

Harry walks over to a hutch in the corner of the natatorium and picks up a soft fluffy towel. He brings it back and hands it to Zayn. “Here you go Zayn, sorry about your hair.”

“Thanks Harry, I suppose I can still trust you.” Zayn grumbles, toweling off his dripping hair.

“I think I'm going to like this scavenger hunt after all!” Louis declares, still laughing. “What's next?”

“Umm…” Liam clicks the continue button on the app, opening up the next prompt. “It’s a riddle this time.” Liam leads them out into the hallway, they walk purposelessly through the resort while reading over the next prompt.

**Riddle Me This:** When in doubt, use me to shroud your spout. 150 pts.

“Your spout? Like a faucet? What is this about…plumbing?” Niall questions completely at a loss.

“I don’t think it’s that literal.” Harry ponders, face scrunched in concentration as he goes over the words in his head.

“God, I hate riddles, I can never get them.” Zayn complains, still attempting to dry out his hair.

“Same, I’m shit at riddles, it’s like an endless guessing game.” Liam agrees.

“Oh my god! Shroud your spout!” Louis bursts out suddenly, expression beaming as if he’s just discovered the key to life.

Harry looks over to him, eyes going wide as he suddenly seems to catch onto Louis’ train of thought.

“Condom!” Harry and Louis shout in unison, both looking overly proud of themselves.

“What? How the hell did you both get condom from that?” Niall looks at them like they’ve lost their minds.

“I mean you gotta cover your junk Niall, unless you want a few surprises down the road.” Louis concludes.

“Exactly, so when you’re in doubt about surprises, you shroud your spout to prevent them.” Harry
explains animatedly. “Or in other words…use a condom.”

“Try it, Li.” Zayn encourages. “I mean, it can’t hurt to try.”

Liam types the answer into the prompt box, and clicks submit. The screen glows with a green checkmark approving the submission. “Nice! Good thinking boys!”

Harry and Louis high-five each other, proud of their mutual accomplishment.

“Oh and it looks like there’s a sub-prompt attached to it.” Liam announces, reading over the new assignment.

Get Lucky: Without using the words condom or sex, get a stranger to give you a condom. 500 pts.

“That’s so awkward!” Niall chuckles, “I don’t think I’d be able to do it without laughing, or accidently saying the words.”

“How do you even start a conversation like that? And with a random stranger no less?” Zayn gawks, shaking his head. “I’ll pass.”

“I’ll do it I guess, I mean, I don’t mind.” Harry offers.

“Ok Harry, you’re up!” Liam encourages clapping him on the back. “We’ll record you from here.”

“Good luck, Haz.” Louis supports, giving him a thumbs up.

Harry reciprocates Louis’ gesture with a small smile as he ventures through the lobby and approaches a man rummaging through a backpack frantically.

“Um, hello there…uh…can I ask you a favor, mate? I’m in a bit of a jam.”

“Uh yeah, sure.” The man responds distractedly not even bothering to lift his head, still digging though his bag.

“Ok…um… I was wondering if…I mean…would happen to have like…um…”

“Protection? What like sunscreen? I’ve got some you can borrow I think.” He searches through his backpack producing a small white bottle. “Actually, here just keep it. I’m in kind of a rush. I’m late for my spa reservation and my wife will kill me if I’m not there on time.” The man shoves the bottle into Harry’s hands and runs off before Harry can even correct him.

Harry stares after him with the bottle of sunscreen in his hand. “Wait…no but…”

“Sunscreen!” Niall cackles, walking up to Harry. “That was horrid!”

“He didn't get what I meant!” Harry whines, hanging his head.
“Do better Styles! Come on, we don't have all day!”

“Alright, alright. I got this.” Harry shakes himself out and looks around for a new target. He spots an elderly woman flipping through a magazine on a small couch in the middle of the lobby. He squares his shoulders and begins to determinedly approach her.

“No…he's not, he can't be.” Niall shakes his head in disbelief.

“Harry, where are you going?” Louis calls after him in confusion.

Harry waves them off, unbothered and continues towards the senior woman.

“Oh my god, he's going for the granny? Why on earth would she have a condom? He is just wasting time!” Liam groans, aiming the camera at Harry reluctantly.

“Hi, this may sound kind of strange, but do you have any like…sons or grandsons?”

The elderly woman looks up from her magazine, her eyes crinkling in a smile. “Why yes I do! I love my boys to death, such great lads. Near and dear to my heart, I’d do anything for them really.”

“How lovely, I’m sure they are wonderful young men.” Harry smiles warmly. “Well I’m only asking because I’d like to request a favor of you. Frankly, you remind me of my grandmum and I feel like I can trust you.”

“Alright dear, what is it? Out with it.” She kindly encourages, still beaming at him.

Harry bites his lip timidly, fingers fiddling with his many rings. “Ok…Would you happen to have any like…protection on you…like for when you...you know…do the do…”

“Goodness me boy!” She clutches her chest. “You mean a condom?”

Harry blushes, nodding his head and casting his gaze to the floor. “Erm...yeah.”

“Well no need to be bashful young one. I'm glad you came to me, I always keep a few with me when I'm out on holiday. You never know what might happen, especially at senior bingo.” She winks boldly at him.

Harry’s eyes widen, jaw dropping as he chuckles in complete surprise. “Very understandable. I mean, a fine woman such as yourself should always be ready, you never know what suitors might await you.”

“Ever since my husband passed I’ve been on the prowl. In fact, you’re a cutie, but if you have need for one of these, you must already have someone special.” She produces a silver foil packet from her purse and hands it to him.

Harry smiles at her sincerely. “Well thank you so much, it's been absolutely lovely meeting you. Good luck at bingo. I hope you take home the gold.”

“Oh honey, I plan on it!” She wiggles her eyebrows. “Good luck to you as well, go get em!”

Harry cracks up laughing at that, completely baffled by the entire encounter. He walks over to his team waiting for him at a nearby table. Harry holds up the condom triumphantly, fist pumping the air. “Success!”

“I can't believe she had one! Grans gettin’ it in!” Niall howls.
“No shame in that! Do you what you gotta do, I’m all about the hustle!” Louis laughs. “I can appreciate a woman who gets what she wants.”

“My mind is blown. I don’t know if I should be disturbed or impressed.” Zayn marvels still in shock.

“I can’t say I didn’t doubt you mate, but I was sorely mistaken. Nice one!” Liam snaps a photo of Harry holding the condom and submits it to the judges along with the video he recorded of him obtaining it. “But how did you know she’d have one?”

“I honestly didn’t. She seriously just reminded me of my grandmum, so I took a chance. I guess I really did get lucky.” Harry responds, still bewildered by the oddity of the conversation.

“Only you could have pulled that off.” Louis remarks with an affectionate smile.

“She’s a sweet lady! I’d actually love to get to know her.” Harry says genuinely.

“Ok now that we finished that, what’s next?”

A new mission glows on the tablet screen.

**Rick Rolled:** Knock on any suite door and sing a lovely rendition of *Never Gonna Give You Up* by Rick Astley as a team. 800 pts.

“What kind of random task is this?” Liam questions.

“Nice! That song is iconic!” Harry exclaims, overjoyed at the musical selection.

Niall slowly nods his head. “Legend.”

“Which door should we pick?”

“Who cares, let’s just do this.” Liam leads the way through the lobby to the suite area, his team following closely behind. “Since we are already on the first floor, we might as well just do the first door.”

“Yeah ok, that makes sense I guess.” Louis concurs.

“Wait, shouldn’t we rehearse it or something?” Zayn questions, sounding anxious.

“Mate, we aren’t preforming at Carnegie Hall, this is an impromptu performance.” Niall states. “Do you know the words?”

“I think? I mean most likely?” Zayn says unsure of himself. “It’s a pretty well known tune, I guess.”

“Exactly, you’ve lived on the earth long enough for those words to be engrained in your mind.” Niall remarks.

“Are we doing the whole song?” Harry asks, looking to Liam. “Or what?”

“Maybe we should do a little planning, what if we loose points?” Liam frets, not willing to part with of his precious points. “We can’t give away points just for being lazy.”
“Ok, how about this, we each do a verse or so individually and then we can sing the chorus together.” Louis suggests, taking charge. “Harry you start us off, then Niall, then, I think the chorus comes, so we will sing together. After that I’ll go, then Liam, and Zayn can finish before we do the reprise of the chorus together. Sound good?”

“I suppose.” Zayn shrugs. “I hope I sound alright, I’m not much of a singer.”

“Oh please, anyone can sing this song.” Louis encourages, trying to inspire confidence. “You’ll be fine.”

“I’ll play an instrumental of the song to guide us.” Liam offers looking up the song.

“Just let me see the words really quick, as a refresher.”

Liam brings up the lyrics on the iPad. They each go over their parts briefly, committing the lines to memory.

“Ok, you guys ready?” Liam prompts, getting anxious as time goes by. “I’m expecting a top notch performance from each of you. Pull out all the stops!”

“Chill Payno chill, we’ll do our best!” Niall knocks on the door, then takes a step back, waiting for a response.

After a few moments a middle aged man wrapped in a bathrobe opens the door. His face turns from expectant to confused as he looks at the five unknown faces in front of him. “Um hello?”

“One, two, three!” Liam clicks play and the hall is filled with an upbeat eighties instrumental.

“Oooh we’re no strangers to love, you know the rules and so do I.” Harry serenades, wiggling his hips in time to the beat. “A full commitment's what I'm thinking of, you wouldn't get this from any other guy.”

The man watches them with a baffled expression. “Wait, is this-”

“I just wanna tell you how I'm feeling, gotta make you understand.” Niall sings, extending his arms out exaggeratedly.

“Never gonna give you up, never gonna let you down, never gonna run around and desert you.” All five guys sing in unison, each adding their own flare to the dynamic ballad. “Never gonna make you cry, never gonna say goodbye, never gonna tell a lie and hurt you.”

“Oh my god, I’m being Rick-Rolled!”

“We've known each other for so long your heart's been aching, but you're too shy to say it.” Louis croons, clutching his chest as he sways to the rhythm of the song.

“Inside, we both know what's been going on, we know the game and we're gonna play it.” Liam sings wholeheartedly, still recording the entire performance on the iPad.

“And if you ask me how I'm feeling, Don’t tell me you're too blind to see.” Zayn adds an extra note change to the end, enhancing his solo.

They all join together once more, pouring their whole heart and soul into the timeless chorus. Niall tossing his arms around while Harry gyrates along to the melody, Zayn being the most reserved, simply nodding his head rhythmically. “Never gonna give you up, never gonna let you down, never
“Gonna run around and desert you.” Liam does a little two step shuffle, balancing the tablet between his hands. Louis gives his best ode to eighties dance culture. “Never gonna make you cry, never gonna say goodbye, never gonna tell a lie and hurt you.”

They finish their improvised performance with a bow, linking their arms together. It may have been totally random and impromptu, but they actually didn’t sound half bad.

“So I take it you aren’t room service?”

“Nah, sorry mate. Hate to disappoint.” Niall apologizes.

“Well no matter, that was bloody brilliant! You’ve made my day gentlemen.” The man gives them a slow clap, raising his arms up. “Bravo, bravo!”

“All in a day’s work.” Louis proudly states.

“Enjoy your stay sir, hopefully we didn’t disturb you.” Harry gingerly waves goodbye to the guest.

“Not at all, you boys have a good day.” The man closes the door, as they begin to make their way back through the the hallway.

“Fellas I think we’ve struck gold! I say we quit our day jobs and start a boy band.” Niall enthuses, his face aglow.

“In your dreams Niall, we may have sounded pretty ok, but I could never do that as an actual job!” Zayn protests. “That’s too much pressure.”

“Well, we can discuss our future musical careers later, we have a game to win and we are only three tasks in.” Liam clicks a few buttons on the tablet. “According to the scoreboard we are tied as far as completed tasks go, but we are slightly behind on points.”

“We lost points?”

“What? How?”

“On Zayn’s pool dunk. We only uploaded a pic of him in the water and we actually needed a whole video of him jumping in so we lost 150 of the points.”

“Aah shit, that’s my fault lads.” Niall apologizes, placing a hand over his chest in sincerity.

“Yeah it was your fucking fault, forcing me against my will.” Zayn shouts. “I could have drowned!”

“Get over it Zayn, what’s done is done, let’s just move on already.” Niall says fed up with the guilt-tripping. “You’re mostly dry now anyway.”

Zayn shakes his head bitterly, mumbling to himself.

Liam pulls up the new assignment. “Here’s the next mission.”

**Oh My God! It's You:** Approach a stranger as if they are a long lost friend. 500 pts.

“Louis this has you written all over it.” Harry states, pointing at Louis. “You used to do that all the
time for fun when we were in school.”

“Oh yeah yeah, good times!” Louis reminisces, smiling at the memory. “That was such a great source of entertainment back then.”

“I remember that!” Niall recollects. “Man, those were the days!”

“Well I’m up for the challenge. I’m ready to revamp my legacy!” Louis cheers pompously. “Mmm… but who should my victim be?” Louis surveys the lobby area, searching for the perfect subject.

“Oh! How about her?” Zayn points to a girl stepping off the elevator. “Remember last night when we were people watching we saw her? She was ranting to the whole world about her boyfriend problems or something? Ah…what was her name?”

“Jessica! Her name was Jessica and we thought it was weird because her boyfriend’s name was Jesse and we thought that was just too much.” Louis laughs remembering their jokes from last night. “Jesse and Jessica.”

“Right, right!” Zayn remembers, chuckling. “Well, there you go bro, an easy target. A perfect stranger that you already know a little about. You got this!”

“Couldn’t ask for any better.” Louis mischievously grins. “Alright, here we go. Wish me luck.”

The team settles by a collection of decorative potted plants not too far off, Liam poised and ready to capture Louis’ shinning moment on film.

Louis tentatively walks behind the woman, cautious as not to startle her. Once he gets close enough, he taps her shoulder lightly to get her attention. She spins around expectantly.

“Jessica?” Louis inquires, beaming at her. “Jessica, is that you? Oh my god, it’s been so long! It’s so good to see you!”

Jessica’s expectant look morphs into confusion, perceptively bewildered as to who the person standing before her is.

Louis continues on, acting completely oblivious “How is the family? Oh and how’s Jesse doing? I heard you two have been having a hard time, but honestly Jess, I’ve always thought you deserved better anyway.” Louis rattles off with ease.

“Um…do I know you?” Jessica asks politely, although seriously.

“Know me? Jessica, don’t be coy!” Louis laughs placing a friendly hand on her shoulder.

“I don’t mean to be rude or anything, but who are you?”

“Jess, don’t be silly, it’s me! You always were one for jokes.” Louis shakes his head as if reminiscing the past. “Anyway, tell me, seriously, how have you been? I’m dying to catch up!”

“I’m sorry, but I seriously don’t know who you are.” She says genuinely perplexed.

“Come on, we basically grew up together, stop playing around Jessica! We go way back.”

“I mean you look vaguely familiar, I think? Remind me of your name.”

“It’s Terrence!” Louis exclaims like it’s the most obvious thing in the world.
“Terrence…Terrence…Terrence…” Jessica ponders aloud, tapping her head trying to think where she might know him from. “I don’t remember ever meeting a Terrence, at least I don’t think? Are you sure you know me?”

“Jessica, you wound me! I recognize you from across the lobby, in fact, I’d recognize you anywhere, and you don’t even remember me!” Louis states in mock disbelief. “Did I gain weight or something? Is that what it is? I’ve been meaning to hit the gym, but life has been so stressful, you know how it is.”

“No! I’m sorry, I’m sure it’s not that, it’s been a long day and I’ve had so much on my mind lately. How exactly did we meet?”

“You don’t remember!? Ah that’s one hell of a story, but I’ve actually got to run love! It’s been wonderful seeing you! Let’s get together soon! Give my best to Jesse.” Louis pulls her into a surprise hug, going above and beyond, giving her a quick kiss on the cheek.

Jessica remains unmoving in total confusion. He releases her and jogs back to his team waiting for him by the collection of potted plants.

“Louis, oh my god! You are so wild, just as bad as you were back at uni!” Harry laughs, shaking his head. “Jessica is so beyond confused!”

“Ah man, I missed that side of you Lou!” Niall ruffles Louis hair, tackling him into a lopsided hug.

“Why did you say your name was Terrence?” Zayn asks curiously.

“I like the name Terrence.” Louis shrugs, untangling himself from Niall’s embrace. “Did you get a good shot of my little performance?”

“Yep! Got it, just submitted it.” Liam confirms. “Awesome job Louis!”

Louis takes a small bow. “I do my best, hopefully it gets full point value.”

“There’s no way it won’t, that was seamless.” Liam praises, clicking around on the iPad. “Ok, here’s the next mission.”

**Potent Potency**: Head to the bar and ask one of the bartenders to mix you a cocktail of the three most potent liquors available. 500 pts.

“Oh, I got this one lads. I was born for this, it’s in my blood.” Niall claims like it’s simply a matter of fact.

“Alright Niall, let’s get you plastered!” Louis says clasping Niall on his shoulder.

They head over to The Glasshouse, one of the many bars featured at the resort. Niall approaches the bartender confidently. “Aye mate, I’ve got a little task for you. I need you to find your three most deadly drinks and mix em together and give it to me straight.”

The bartender gives Niall an amused grin. “Like with the highest alcohol percentage? Are you completely sure about that? I’ve got quite a few lethal poisons back here. I’m talking almost 100% pure alcohol and you want me to mix them? You got a death wish, bro?”
“I can take it, just make it quick, in a bit of a rush.” Niall boasts, assured in his abilities.

The bartender shakes his head, peering at Niall like he’s absolutely out of his mind. “Alright mate, your funeral.”

He sets about collecting the various alcohols, placing them on the counter. The bottles themselves look like they could bring about death on contact. He picks up Spirytus delikatesowy, a polish vodka, Bruichladdich X4, a Scottish whiskey, and imported Balkan Vodka, which appears to have a foldout label of just health hazards attached to it.

Once he finishes mixing all three liquors, he sets the glass down in front of Niall. “There you have it. Cross your heart, say a prayer, you are going to need it mate.”

“Holy hell! My eyes burn just looking at it!” Niall gasps, bring his nose down to the glass and giving it a sniff. “Lads, if I die, make sure my legacy lives on. I will die with honor, with grace, with dignity.” Niall crosses his chest, sending up a silent prayer.

“Stop being dramatic, take it like a man! An Irish man!” Louis jeers, egging him on.

“Come on Ni, don’t pretend like you haven’t done worse.” Harry comments, remembering the great adventures of Niall Horan.

Liam aims the iPad camera at Niall and begins recording.

Niall shakes himself out, taking several heavy breaths. “Cheers.” He picks up the glass, tips his head back and begins to drink the potent liquid. As soon as it hits his lips, his face scrunches to unrecognizable levels. “Oh god! I can’t feel my throat!” He coughs wildly, face turning a deep red. “Fucking hell, that might as well be gasoline!”

“Don’t be a baby! You still have some left! Drink that shit!” Zayn urges, placing a hand on Niall’s shoulder.

“Let’s go Nialler! Grow a pair!” Louis provokes.

Tears start forming at the corner of Niall’s eyes. “You’re a bunch of bastards, the lot of you. Fucking bottoms up.” He lifts the glass again, wincing as he brings it to his mouth and downs the rest of the burning liquid. He slams the glass down after finishing it off sputtering and coughing as his body scorches in response.

All four boys cheer wildly in congratulations, clapping him on the back and ruffling his hair. Liam sets about uploading the video.

“If I lose function of my body I’m coming for all of you. You’re dead. It’s fucking half past nine and here I am guzzling pure alcohol.”

“Sounds like your typical morning.” Louis smirks, raising his eyebrows.

“Watch it Tommo, don’t get me started on your typical morning.” Niall eyes Louis and looks to Harry knowingly. “Talk about loaded gun.”

Harrys face burns scarlet, while Louis’ jaw tenses. Thankfully, Zayn and Liam are too busy checking the scoreboards to hear Niall’s remark. If they had, it would only lead to a whole other interrogation and god knows they don’t have time for that right now.

Liam interrupts the conversation looking up from the tablet. “Uploaded the video, you guys ready for
“Lay it on us! I’m amped up now!” Niall declares, alcohol seemingly to already take effect.

Show Me What You Got: Teach a stranger an original dance move. 500 pts.

“Babe, you love dancing!” Zayn says, rubbing Liam’s lower back. “You dance all the time!”

“I mean yeah, but not for real! I’m not actually that coordinated.”

“Oh please, you’ve taught me a few moves here and there”. Zayn shakes his hips against Liam and wiggles his eyebrows.

“Gross. get a room.” Niall groans, covering his eyes dramatically.

“You got this Liam?” Harry questions. “You honestly can’t be any worse than me.”

“Yes, he’s got it.” Zayn decides, giving Liam a nudge.

“Ok, I guess I’m doing it.” Liam sighs, handing the tablet over to Zayn. “Here hold this. Make sure you record it.”

“Got it, Li.” Zayn winks.

Liam wanders aimlessly through the bar for a moment before approaching a pair of chatting college age girls on a whim. “Um hi. I’m not like a predator or anything I swear, I was just wondering if I could maybe teach you a dance move or two. It’ll be quick.”

The girls exchange glances and start giggling. “I don’t dance. Like at all!”

“Yeah, me neither.” The other girl pips up. “I’m a bit of a klutz to be honest.”

“I can’t believe that.” Liam says shaking his head. “Surely that can’t be true.”

“Read it and weep pal, unfortunately we both suck at dancing.”

“Well then at least let me help you improve!” Liam urges. “You’ll be fantastic I know it! You just do what I do and I’ll guide you along.”

The girls look to each other once more, silently deliberating through unspoken communication.

“Ok, fine I guess. As long as it’s easy.”

“We’ve got nothing better to do anyway. It’s nine in the morning and we are in a bar.”

“Thank you! Ok I’ll play a little music to warm you up.” Liam pulls out his phone and decides to just click shuffle.

“Justin Timberlake, nice.” One of the girls approves with a smile, instantly recognizing the first few beats of **Sexyback**. “What better way to embarrass myself then to the sweet sounds of a dance legend?”

“So appropriate, I know.” Liam jokes, laughing to himself. “Ok, so we are gong to start out slow and
I’ll break down the parts and then we will put it all together. First just step side to side.” Liam starts doing a little side step, the girls mimicking his simple movements.

“Ok good! Now keep doing that, but now add your arms. Just stick them out in front of you and pump them back and forth as you continue to step left and right.” He begins to start slowly swaying his arms to and fro against his sides as he steps to the side.

The girls pause for a moment, observing Liam’s actions before following suit. After a few beats they find a steady rhythm.

“Nice! Alright that’s the first part. Next you’re going to continue the two step shuffle, but you’re also going to alternate raising your arms over your head.” Liam continues side stepping, lifting his left arm then his right.

“This isn’t too bad so far.” She says, lifting her arm above her head.

“I told you, You’re naturals!” Liam encourages. “Ok, now add a little snap to it right as you raise your hands over your head.” The girls snap their fingers as they sway side to side.

“Yes! Ok, so those are the basics. Now we just have to put it all together, speed it up and add some personality to it. A little attitude, you know? Put your whole body into it. I’ll do it first and then when you feel comfortable you just join in.”

Liam falls into step with the beat, stepping from side to side swiftly. He begins to rock his hips, in a somewhat provocative fashion. He pumps his arms back and forth several times, then moves to raising them from side to side adding a quick snap. He repeats the cycle a few times, each time getting more and more into it, gyrating his hips and tossing his body form side to side.

The girl duo starts to follow his actions, timid at first, but soon they are dancing and bopping along to the tune, perfecting Liam’s dance.

One of the girls adds a little sass to her version of the dance, shaking her hips with added emphasis and nodding her head. Her hair bouncing along with her, tumbling at her shoulders.

Together they dance around wildly, appearing to be having the time of their lives. When the song comes to a close, they slow their movements and catch their breath.

“Wow, thank you! You both have been wonderful dance partners! I’ve had a blast! Don’t let my dance die now. Pass it on, tell your friends. Inspire the world to dance!” Liam teases lifting his arms theatrically.

“We will bring dance back!” She exclaims, mimicking Liam and raising her arms.

Liam cracks up laughing. “Alright, I’m counting on you. Take care loves.” He walks over to his team who are collectively laughing at his performance.

“Those were some interesting dance moves Liam!” Niall cackles.

Louis calms his laughter and looks to Liam. “You do realize that you basically taught those impressionable youth a glorified hip thrust, right?”

“Not true! It’s more than that!” Liam argues. “Did you not see the finger snap? Or the smooth hip rocking? Or the signature Liam Payne hand raise?”

“Yes I did, which leads me back to my first statement. You taught them how to hip thrust.”
Harry nods, agreeing with Louis. “Yeah I could see that. Especially the first part. Classic hip thrust.”


“Well, I loved it babe, you were absolutely amazing.” Zayn gushes.

“I’m glad someone enjoyed it.” Liam says, laughing at himself. “Well on to the next mission.”

**We Are Never Getting Back Together** : Stage a breakup scene in a populated area of the resort between two group members. The group members chosen must have no actual relation to each other. 800 pts.

“Oh hell, who made this mission list?” Niall sighs. “It’s only goal is embarrassment.”

“The judge did mention that in the beginning.” Harry recalls.

Liam looks among the four of them. “So who is doing this?”

The stare at each other for several moments, no one willing or wanting to be involved in this challenge.

“Zayn break up with me.” Louis finally suggests. “I’ll even let you slap me if needed.”

“What?! You think we should do it?”

“Well, I’d never date someone like Niall, in fact I’d rather become celibate and die alone.” Louis states, cringing. “Plus, you and I haven’t gone in a while, so it only makes sense.”

“Hey! For your information Louis, I’m way out of league anyway, so tough luck.” Niall scuffs, offended. “You could never handle me.”

Louis makes a disgusted face, scrunching his nose and creasing his lips.

“Well, it could be Harry and Niall? Or even you and Liam?” Zayn offers, trying to get himself out of participating.

“I just went in the last round, so I’m out.” Liam informs.

“I’m not good at breakups. I’m a bit of a crier to be honest.” Harry confesses. “I just cry until the person either leaves or feels so bad that they take me back.”

“Come on Zayn, we can do this! The Housewife Squad!” Louis cheers, placing both his hands on Zayn’s shoulders, giving him a little shake.

“Ugh fine, I’ll do it.” Zayn sighs dramatically. “Where are we doing this?”

“Umm I think there are a lot of people in the lobby?” Harry advises. “Or the pool maybe?”

“Let’s do the main pool, it’s probably fully populated.” Liam says, deciding for the group.

They dash over to the large pool area. As expected there are many guests littering the area, some lounging on the sidelines, others taking a dip in the cool water.
“Ok Harry, Niall, and I will sit on those lounge chairs and record. You guys should do your lovers quarrel over there, I think it has the best visibility, not only for recording, but you know, for onlookers.” Liam points to an area right off the pool, there are a few tables decorating the space, a steady flow of people strolling past.

“Works for me.” Louis claps his hands together, all set to go. “Ready Zayn?”

“Louis, how do we even start this? I’ve never broken up with someone publicly before. I always thought breakups should be more of a private thing.” Zayn asks worriedly.

“Leave it to me love, I’ve always had a thing for theatrics.” Louis winks, lips quirked. “Just follow my lead, you’ll be fine.”

“Alright.” Zayn agrees uneasily, slight worry etched in his brow.

They sit down at one of the small tables along the pool. Guests flowing around them, engaged in their life, enjoying their day, bathing in the sunlight. “Showtime.” Louis winks again, indicating to Zayn.

“How could you, Zayn!?” Louis declares, hopping up spontaneously from his seat, taking Zayn completely by surprise. “I loved you! I gave you my entire heart! I’ve never once wanted anyone else, only you. It’s always been you!”

Zayn looks around self consciously, still seated at the table. “I…well...”

“How could you, Zayn? All I ever did was love you! You’re my everything.”

The surrounding guests begin to take interest, pausing their activities and muting their conversations to listen in on the drama unfolding in front of them.

Zayn starts to pick up on the idea, gaining confidence, he stands up and meets Louis eyes. “This is hard for me, Louis. I’ve been feeling this way for a while, I just didn’t know how to tell you. The simple truth is…I just don’t love you anymore. I…I don’t even know if I ever loved you.” Zayn casts his head to the ground in a somber tone.

The crowd gasps in shock, hardly even pretending to be minding their business anymore.

“You never loved me? All those nights we spent together, all of those memories. What was I to you Zayn? Just a shag that went to far? Was it all just meaningless sex to you? I thought what we had was special? I thought you were the one! I thought you brought me here this weekend to ask me to marry you! And now you tell me there could be someone else! How could you cheat on me, after all we have been through?” Louis shakes his head in disbelief, his eyes appearing as if he might actually burst into tears at any moment. “Please don’t tell me it’s over.”

“It wasn’t cheating to me, it feels right with him! Every moment I’m with him feels real. In fact, if I’m being completely honest, when I’m with you I feel like I’m cheating on him. I love him, Louis.” Zayn takes a deep exaggerated breath. “I’m sorry, but I can’t do this anymore…it’s over.”

“I can’t believe this shit!” Louis yells, waving his hands wildly. “Who is it!? Who is it, Zayn? Who stole your heart and simultaneously broke mine?”

“It’s…well…it’s...”

“Fucking tell me Zayn or I swear to god, I will scream bloody murder! I need to know! You owe me
at least that! Who is it?!”

“It’s Harry! Ok…it’s Harry!”

“Harry?! My own brother!? You’re leaving me for my own flesh and blood!” Louis clutches at his heart as if he’s just been stabbed in the chest.

Again the surrounding listeners collectively gasp in disbelief. A few muttered ‘oh my gods’ and ‘the bastard’ and ‘poor guy’ can be heard whispered among the masses.

“Louis, I’m so sorry. I...um...I never meant to—”

“Save it for someone who gives a fuck!” Louis spits, venom laced in his voice.

“I really am sorry it has to be like this, Louis. I truly am. But I can’t pass up on true love. I hope you understand, it’s not personal. We had our good times but...I love Harry, and Harry loves me and we can’t ignore our feelings anymore.”

“No, fuck you, Zayn! You both deserve each other. Have a good fucking life!” Louis spins on his heel, waving both his middle fingers in the air as he storms off towards the lobby.

“Wait! Louis please! We can still be friends.” Zayn calls after him desperately, but Louis is already long gone.

Zayn pauses a moment, looking around at the disapproving faces surrounding him before following Louis’ path to the lobby. Zayn meets up with Louis by the lounge area.

“Ha! That was sick mate. I actually believed you a few times! You know if the whole save the environment thing doesn’t work out, you should go into acting. You’re fucking brilliant!” Louis laughs, taking an exaggerated bow. “You weren’t so bad yourself! See, I told you it’d be fine! That was actually so fun, I’ve always wanted to have a huge breakup, but without all the actual pain.”

Niall, Harry, and Liam catch up with them, laughing amongst themselves. “Did you see that elderly woman on the lounge chair? The first time Louis said ‘fuck ‘she nearly fell into the pool!”

“And that guy walking past with the martini, almost dropped his drink when Zayn admitted to cheating.” Harry snickers.

“Oh god and that mother who covered her child’s ears!” Niall chuckles. “That was priceless, I’m glad it’s on tape. I need a copy of that!”

“Good job, Z!” Liam congratulates. “I had no idea you could be so ruthless. Poor Louis.”

“All I ever wanted was to be loved.” Louis sniffles pathetically, pouting his lips.

“I’m kind of sad you didn’t make me your side lover though.” Liam says sounding wounded.

“Too predictable Li, gotta keep you on your toes. I just hope no one from our actual retreat saw that though. They could be confused about the dynamics of our group.” Zayn laughs, shaking his head.

“No more confused than they already are.” Louis huffs under his breath.

“Alright, well I submitted it, I’m sure we will get full points.”
“What’s up next Payno?”

Liam clicks on the screen, a new prompt appearing.

“Oh joy, another riddle.” Liam sighs.

**Riddle Me This:** *You’re all I ever wanted, all I ever needed. You’re the key to my success, a network unfolding. But how will I find you? 150 pts.*

“What? How will I find you? What is that supposed to mean?” Zayn questions, reading over the riddle.

Harry chews on his inner cheek in concentration. “Um…ok so let’s say you meet someone…”

Louis nods his head, thinking along. “Yeah, yeah and you liked them so much you wanted to contact them? Somehow?”

“Right. So you’d logically ask for a number? To find them, of course.” Harry concludes.

“Liam, try phone number.” Louis suggests.

Liam types it in to the prompt box. The iPad beeps and flashes a red X over the screen. “Nope, sorry lads it’s not phone number”

“Ok…umm…well maybe it was more than just any person…” Niall offers trying to be helpful.

Harry ponders aloud. “Key to my success…”

“…A network unfolding.” Louis continues squinting his eyes in focused deliberation as he mulls over the words. “Network…success…contact…”

“Business card!” Harry and Louis exclaim in harmony yet again.

“What are you, the Double Mint Twins?!” Niall gasps in shock. “What is with all this telepathy going on here? First condom and now business card! You guys so are freaky.”

Harry and Louis share a knowing look.

“Just a strong brotherly bond, I suppose.” Louis says sweetly looking at Niall.

Liam types in ‘business card’ and the screen glows with a green check mark. “Whoa, you’re right! How did you even get business card from that?”

“Critical thinking skills, mate. We are the products of good parenting.” Harry jokingly explains. “They instilled in us the value of sound reasoning.”

“Well, props to your parents then.” Liam laughs. “Oh! We’ve got another sub-prompt attached.”

**It’s Just Business:** *Collect 10 different business cards. Submit a picture of each individual card. 100 pts per card.*
“Can we use our own business cards?” Zayn wonders honestly. “That’s five right there. Easy.”

Harry shakes his head. “I don’t think we should risk it, we need all the points.”

“Yeah, I suppose you’re right. You’re not opposed to splitting up now right?”

“It only makes sense for this, getting ten cards as a group would take ages.” Harry states.

“Ok, let’s split and meet back here in five minutes. If we each get two in that time we’ll be set.” Liam instructs, taking complete charge of the situation as always.

“Got it!”

Louis salutes Liam dramatically. “On it, captain!”

They break off as individuals and set about collecting cards, engaging in meaningless small talk and brief conversation in order to snag a card and earn the points. Always a competitor, Louis ends up bring back three cards instead of the agreed upon two. It ends up being a needed advancement when Harry and Niall return with one of the same card.

Each team member deposits their earnings onto a table. Liam begins to snap pictures of each one, submitting it immediately to the judges. “Done, ten business cards. Good job boys, let’s keep it up.”

Liam clicks the continue button on the tablet and brings up the next mission.

**Wax On, Wax Off**: Take a rejuvenating trip to Sequoia, The Grove’s luxury spa, and get a soothing wax. You have the option of a chest wax, bikini wax, or eyebrow wax. 650 pts.

“Ah, these missions just get worse and worse!”

“Oh, that’s rough! Waxing is the pits, this assignment is ruthless!” Zayn complains.

Liam shakes his head solemnly. “This is a tough one team, who is willing to be brave today and take us to the throne of victory?”

Everyone averts their eyes, not wanting to be called upon or nominated.

“Sir Horan, I dub thee nominated for thine royal waxing.” Louis declares, adopting a regal tone.

“You shall be fit for a king! All in favor of Sir Horan, say I.”

All except one team member, raises their hand and says ‘I’. All willing to cast Niall to the wolves, to save themselves.

“All opposed?”

“All! I! I! Me! Niall! I’m opposed!” Niall points to himself, adamantly refusing.

“Niall, you probably won’t even feel it with that potent concoction still running through your veins!” Louis points out. “You should be basically numb. Take one for the team!”
“You all hate me, don’t you? First, I drink rat poison and now you want me to get waxed! No man! Fuck that!”

“Come on Niall, you need a little trim anyways.” Liam teases.

“This isn’t a little trim, this is a full-on body stripping wax! I can read you know, I’m not that out of it.”

“I know you’re a bit vain about your face, so just do your chest.” Harry suggests, smiling smugly.

“My chest?! Have you lost your fucking mind!? First of all, I slaved to grow these hairs. They are my pride and joy. Secondly, do you have any fucking idea how much that will hurt?”

“Niall, you’re doing it, suck it up and mentally prepare.” Zayn states as if it is no longer up for discussion. “This is happening.”

“Over my dead hairy body!”

“Niall, I’ll pay for your drinks for the rest of the weekend.” Louis offers generously.

“I’m not stupid Louis, that’s all covered by the company on this trip.” Niall rolls his eyes.

Louis sighs exasperatedly. “Dammit! I thought you didn’t know.”

“I don’t mess with an open bar Louis, you tried.”

“Ok, what if we each take you out when we get home?” Harry propositions. “All expenses paid, you can eat and drink and be merry.”

Niall mulls it over in his head. “Twice. I want each one of you to treat me to a wonderful dinner and endless drinks two times each. I should be eating good and free to my heart’s content eight times in the near future.”


“Yeah, I can do that.” Harry settles.

“Sure, of course Niall!” Liam agrees.

“Louis?” Niall looks to Louis expectantly.

“Ugh, I’ll actually have to spend two entire evenings with you? On my own time?” Louis groans.

Niall wiggles his eyebrows. “You’re in for a treat.”

“Ok, whatever, just do it.”

Niall claps his hands together. “Alrighty now boys, let’s do this.”

Together, they make the journey through the grounds of the resort eventually arriving at the Grove’s one and only, Sequoia Luxury Spa. The whole area smells of sweet lavender, tranquil music tinkles in the background creating an ambient aura. The spa is decorated with glowing candles, bonsai trees and soothing waterfall displays.

“Ahh, isn’t this lovely.” Louis sighs contently. “It’s just so relaxing in here. Don’t you feel relaxed, Niall?”
Niall flashes his middle finger at Louis, scowling heavily.

“It is quite nice. I'll have to come back.” Harry pauses and looks to Niall. “Um…under different circumstances, of course.”

“I agree, we should definitely book a reservation while we are here.” Zayn comments.

“You all have a special place in hell.” Niall remarks, beyond irritated.

“Oh lighten up Niall, it's not like it won’t grow back.” Liam places a reassuring hand on Niall’s shoulder, giving it a light pat.

Harry approaches the check-in desk, a perky immaculately dressed receptionist smiles brightly at him. “Hello there, this brave gentleman would like a quick chest wax this beautiful morning.” Harry pulls Niall reluctantly up to the front desk.

“Wonderful! Are you a part of the Hearst reservation?”

“We are indeed.”

“Great! We’ve been wondering when the next group would show up. The last guy actually went for the eyebrow wax. He said he couldn’t part with his chest hair.” She chuckles softly.

Niall hangs his head glumly. “A man after my own heart.”

“Yeah, poor guy was almost moved to tears. You are actually our first chest wax of the day!” The receptionist announces, sounding way too excited.

Niall groans, cradling his head in his hands.

“No need to worry sir, Carly will take excellent care of you. She’s a fantastic masseuse and she has such gentle hands.” The receptionist reassures.

A young woman with impossibly smooth olive skin, walks up to the front desk, jet black hair pulled into a slick low bun. “Hi there, I’m Carly, I’ll be your massage therapist for the day. If you would just follow me to your room sir, we can get started. This should be fairly quick.” She gestures to the remaining men. “I guess you all can come along too. You have to record, right?”

“Correct and we are also here for moral support.” Liam adds, squeezing Niall’s arm.

“We couldn't let our teammate go through this alone.” Louis says, coming up behind Niall and wrapping his arms around him.

“Assholes.” Niall grunts, breaking Louis’ embrace.

They follow the masseuse into a private room. The music of the waiting area drifting into the enclosed space, the lighting dimed and perfectly calm.

“Since I know you’re pressed for time and everything we'll just skip all the massaging and extra build up and get right to it.”

“Wow, I'm going through all this, basically sacrificing my body and I don't even get the pretty lady to rub me up with massage oils.” Niall complains. “I feel so cheated.”

“Well, you could always come back.” Carly flirtatiously grins.
“You hear that, Niall?” Louis taunts with a wink. “You can always come back.”

“I heard her, thanks.” Niall snips, aggravated. He turns to Carly and smiles sweetly at her. “If I make it through this, I promise I’ll come back, babe.”

“I’ll hold you to that.” Carly responds with a small grin. “Ok, strip off your shirt and lie on the table.”

Niall does as instructed, lying on the leather massage table staring up at the ceiling as he mentally prepares himself. Liam inches around the others and begins recording.

Carly moves to the workstation in the corner and washes her hands then begins to pull out the necessary items. Once all the materials are prepped and ready to go, she hovers over Niall’s shirtless figure. “Just breathe, ok? It’ll all be over before you know it.”

Carly takes an antiseptic wipe and quickly sanitizes Niall’s chest. Niall squirms in surprise response to the cold.

“Mate, she’s hardly touched you, calm down.”

Carly returns to the workstation and collects a basin of warm wax, a wooden applicator, and a few large size wax strips. “This might be a bit hot, ok?”

Niall nods and squeezes his eyes shut as she applies the warm wax to his sternum in a long smooth streak. She picks up a strip and presses it down over the area until it’s completely level. “Alright, on the count of three. Deep breaths. One…two…” Carly yanks the strip from Niall’s chest at full force.

Niall’s mouth flies open immediately releasing a high pitched scream loud enough to wake the dead. ‘You didn't even count to three!’ He whimpers, body thrashing uncontrollably.

Carly shrugs casually. “You’d be expecting that.”

Louis almost falls on the floor with laughter. “This is the best day of my life! I will be showing this to my future children for generations to come. Smile for your godchildren, Ni!”

“I didn’t even know any human possessed the ability to make that sound!” Liam cackles along with Louis.

“We aren’t done yet, still have both pecs to do.” Carly informs prepping the next round.

“NO! I can’t do that two more fucking times!” Niall pales, stubbornly shaking his head. “Oh my god, that’s going to be right over my poor nipples. I’m sensitive!”

“Man up bro, prepare your nips!” Zayn chuckles. “It’s about to get real.”

“Niall, are you ok? How can I help you?” Harry asks genuinely, his face frowning in worry.

“Aww yes Niall, poor baby, let Harry help you.” Louis teases, still giggling.

“I’m serious! He’s obviously in pain, I feel bad. Niall, I’ll hold your hand, ok?” Harry reaches for Niall’s hand and squeezes it reassuringly.

“Here we go, sit still.” Carly applies a thick layer of wax to the right side of Niall’s chest, quickly covering the skin with a white wax strip. Giving him no time to readjust, Carly rips the strip from Niall’s chest.

Niall shrieks, the outrageously high sound tearing through the room at deafening levels. He
reflexively crushes Harry’s hand causing Harry to scream along with him, their cries sure to be echoing through the halls of the spa.

“With no fucking warning at all this time! Carly, why!?!” Niall cries, appearing to be simultaneously writhing in scorching agony, while also howling with pained laughter. A confusing mix of reactions.

Carly smiles innocently at him. “You knew it was coming, love.”

“Man, I think I love this girl, complete badass!” Louis cheers, clapping his hands together, utterly amused. “Carly, you are welcome to hang out with us anytime this weekend. You’ve earned a special place in my heart.”

Carly laughs, preparing the last application of wax. “I may have to take you up on that.” She begins to lay a smooth layer of wax over Niall’s left pectoral.

“Are you going to give me a countdown this time?” Niall asks weakly, chest rising and falling heavily.

“Do you want a countdown?”

“Please?” Niall whines, tears prickling at his eyes. “I don’t like surprises, I can’t handle this.”

“Ok.” Carly presses the white strip over his chest once more, smoothing it out over the taunt skin. “Three!” She tugs the strip powerfully, leaving Niall’s flesh completely bare.

Again, Niall howls wildly, completely caught off guard. He squeezes Harry’s hand harder than before, Harry sinking to his knees from Niall’s bone crushing grip with a whimper. “Fuck! Carly, that wasn’t a countdown!”

“I counted mentally.” She shrugs innocuously. “But you’re all done, let me just wipe your chest down.”

“My hand!” Harry cries from the floor, his hand still firmly attached to Niall’s. “I have literally no circulation, I can’t feel my fingers!”

Niall starts to calm down, still breathing heavily but loosening his grip on Harry. “Sorry H, I didn’t mean to hurt you. I appreciate your support mate.”

Harry nods his head, cradling his bruised hand to his chest protectively.

Carly takes a soothing cloth and wipes Niall’s chest, removing all the excess residue. “Congrats you made it, you’re all set to go!”

“I’d like to say it’s been a pleasure Carly, but I can’t feel the upper half of my body.” Niall winces as he touches his sore chest timidly. He sits up and slides his shirt back on carefully.

“Niall, you did it buddy!” Liam praises. He ends the recording and sets off submitting it to the server.

“A valiant contribution bro.” Zayn applauds.

“Thank you Carly, we are forever in your debt.” Louis waves as they exit the private room.

“Maybe I’ll see you all around.” Carly winks at Niall, spinning on her heel as she goes back to work.

“She’s a feisty one.” Niall grins, following Louis through the exit. “She may have just stripped me of my dignity, but I can appreciate a woman with balls.”
Louis, feeling very much like his younger dramatic self after the day’s festivities, decides to put on an announcer voice, channeling his inner news anchor. “This just in, bachelor Niall Horan, has found his potential shag for the weekend. Sources say ‘he can appreciate a woman with balls’.”

Louis turns to Niall, holding out his fisted hand, pretending to possess a microphone. “Any comments, Niall?”

“Ah, no comment.” Niall theatrically turns from the pretend mic, shielding his eyes from the imaginary camera crew.

“You heard it here first, London. Predictions are hopeful as of now, but only time will tell.” Louis clears his throat animatedly and continues on. “In other news, a young Harold Styles has lost function of his left hand.” Louis faces Harry, shoving his clenched hand near his face. “Harold, a quick word?”

“Yes, well…I was trying to suppo-“

“Oh, heartbreaking story, Curly. But sadly, we are out of time.” Louis shakes his head and turns away from a pouting Harry. “Will he ever regain full motor function? Again, only time will tell. We go live now to Liam Payne for further news.”

Liam plays along excitedly donning his best radio announcer voice. “Thanks Louis, coming up next we have another group activity. Seems like a doozy.”

**Twista Twista:** Who needs the mat? Break out in a spontaneous game of twister in the elevator. 
*Game must last at least 5 minutes. 750 pts.*

“How is that even possible?” Niall wonders. “Twister without a mat?”

“Are we just going to call out body parts randomly?” Zayn inquires.

“I guess so?” Liam shrugs. “I don’t know, we’ll have to just roll with it, I suppose.”

They travel through the resort grounds, heading back to the lobby towards the elevator. Once arriving at the steel doors, they file into the already mostly full elevator and wait for the doors to close.

As soon as the lift begins to move Liam slams the emergency stop button and stands in front of the elevator doors. “Hello everyone, I hope you’re not in a rush. We are just going to play a short game of twister.”

The other four boys cheer as if they are so beyond excited for the game, hooting and hollering exaggeratedly.

“Twister? In an elevator?” A man dressed in swimwear asks.

A teenage boy chimes in. “You don’t even have a mat!”

“Yes, yes I can see your concerns, but it’ll be fun, ok? Just listen to my instructions.” Liam states calmly. “Loosen up people! For Christ sakes, you’re on vacation!”
“Ugh, what is it with this resort today?” A woman in the corner complains. “I just played a game of elevator twister with another group not even ten minutes ago!”

“Well, now you get to play twice, aren’t you lucky?”

“I knew I should have taken the stairs.” She groans.

“Ok, I’m starting the clock, the faster we get started the sooner you all can go about your day.” Liam starts a timer counting down from five minutes. “So um...stick your left foot out.”

The elevator passengers grudgingly obey Liam’s instruction, placing their left foot in front of them collectively.

“Ok good, now place your right hand on the floor, behind your left foot.”

“Ugh! This is so uncomfortable!” Someone groans from the back.

“You can do it! Now move your right foot, in front of your left so they are slightly crossed.” Liam instructs.

That slight action brings about a series of tangles to occur. Suddenly limbs are crisscrossed and inter-tangled in an intimate web. Personal space bubbles completely voided and rendered obsolete.

“It’s too cramped in here for this! I can feel too much in too many places.” Zayn complains, adjusting his footing.

“Alright, don’t think I’ve forgotten about that left hand!” Liam exclaims.

The crowd collectively groans in agony, ready for the game to come to an end.

“Place your left hand as far forward as your body will let you.”

“Oh god, Niall! Your ass is in my face!” Louis protests, scrunching his face in disgust.

Niall wiggles his bum in response. “You're welcome.”

“Ok, back to that left foot. I want you to move your left foot as far right as you can. Make sure your hands don’t leave the floor.”

“This is worse than yoga!” Harry wobbles on all fours, body quivering as he tries to steady himself in the compact space.

“Mate, I’m actually breaking a sweat, have mercy on us!” Nial groans, trying to maintain balance.

“Alright, alright only a minute more on the clock.” Liam announces. “So...um how about you lift your right hand in the air?”

“Liam, what the fuck!” Louis yells, outraged. “We are barely holding on as it is with all four of our limbs supporting us, and now you want us to balance on three!?”

“Ok, scratch that! Just lift your right hand from behind you and place it on the ground in front of you.”

“I’m sorry, Lou.” Zayn apologizes, the change in pose causing Zayn’s face to hover over Louis crotch.
“Zayn, you filthy minx! We broke up remember? You can’t have me anymore!” Louis teases, trembling slightly as he tries to find a semi comfortable pose.

“Everyone alright?” Liam inquires, scanning over the sea of tangled bodies. “Only thirty seconds left. Just one more move. Lift your right foot and bring it inline with your right hand.”

Unable to take anymore added strain on his limbs, Harry collapses, falling on top of Louis, who then falls on Niall causing a train reaction of tumbling to occur in the small space. Soon all the participants are on the floor twisted and tangled up in each other.

“Nice going, Harry.”

Harry huffs his long hair out of face, “Um…my bad? My hand is still cramping, it’s in a delicate state!”

“It’s all good! Times up! You made it!” Liam announces excitedly “Thank you all for cooperating, you’ve been lovely. Enjoy your weekend!”

Zayn, Niall, Louis, Harry and all the guests begin to untangle themselves from each other. Niall unhooks his leg from Harry’s ankle, while Zayn lifts his head from Louis thigh. They duck, and weave and uncross each other’s limbs until they can safely stand.

Harry rights himself and cracks his back. “I think that game is way less painful with a mat.”

“I’ve come to the conclusion that a mat is vitally necessary for a game of twister. Unless you love being in constant torment.” Louis says, agreeing with Harry.

“Never again, never again.” Zayn grumbles.

“I feel like I’ve been saying that all morning. “Niall whines. “I miss the old scavenger hunt. I never had to act so outside of my comfort zone.”

“Almost done boys, hang in there.” Liam encourages, clicking on the next assignment.

**It's your job: Impersonate a staff member at the resort. 500 pts.**

“Well this has to be Liam.” Louis claims. “Especially since he wasn’t involved in the human pretzel back there.”

“Yeah hands down. I’m retiring from this event.” Niall says, shaking his head. “In fact, I’m retiring period.”

“Ok, I’ll do this one.” Liam agrees easily. “What job should I do?”

“I mean we are already near the front desk, so that should be pretty easy right?”

“I always wanted to work at a front desk actually. It’s like the best job available!” Liam chatters. “You’re the first person anyone encounters. You basically set the mood for the rest of their experience, whether good or bad.”

“That’s a lovely sentiment Liam, but would you kindly hurry your ass up.” Louis insists, urging Liam. “We have a game to win and we are all ready to finally be free!”
“Right, of course! Good looking out, mate.” Liam shoves the golden iPad into Harry’s arms. He turns and sneaks into the service room off to the left of the lobby area. He returns minutes later dressed in a white staff uniform vest, a nametag still attached reading Kip.

“Aw nice!” Louis exclaims pointing at Liam’s new nametag. “You get to be Kip!”

“Who the hell is Kip?” Liam asks confused.

“He’s one of the receptionists at the front desk. Sweetest guy really, just extremely upbeat.” Harry explains.

“Love that guy, he’s a riot!” Niall enthuses. “How did you get his vest?”

“It was the only locker that was unlocked in the service room. He must be on break or something?”

“Are you up for being Kip? I’m going to need a lot of emotion from you. Kip is near and dear to my heart. I can’t have him misrepresented.” Niall warns, completely serious.

“Oh, I can do upbeat, watch me! I’ll do him justice, I swear it!” Liam walks over and positions himself behind the front desk, plastering a huge smile on his face. The boys huddle over on the sidelines, Harry pointing the camera in his direction.

An unsuspecting resort guest approaches the desk.

“Hello there!” Liam greets chirpily. “How can I help you today?”

“Hi, I’d like to book a dinner reservation for seven p.m. this evening.”

Liam looks at him quizzically. “Um don’t you usually do that at the actual restaurant?”

“I’ve always been able to do it here. Don’t you have access to the reservation server from your computer? I thought all reservations were placed in a central database.”

“Um right, yes of course! How silly of me!” Liam fiddles madly with computer screen, opening tabs and files trying to find the reservation server. “So which restaurant are you requesting?”

“Collete’s, it’s my girlfriend’s favorite.”

“Oh! I love that place! Have you tried the English Brown Trout? Oh god, it’s to die for!” Liam eagerly raves, eyes beaming brightly. “They serve it up with spiced pancetta and a French potato terrine! I highly recommend it!”

“Hmm I’ll have to give it try then. Thank you.”

“My pleasure sir!” Liam beams at him, overly proud to please his guest.

“So are there any available reservations or…”

“Oh, right! Yes, of course…um…” Liam wildly clicks over the screen, each access point on the computer requiring some form of passcode entry.

“Can I have your name please?” Liam asks, anxiously stalling for time.

“You can put it under Parker. James Parker.”

Unable to find the actual reservation portal, Liam resorts to typing a note under reminders.
"My sincerest apologies. Please add a dinner reservation at 7 pm for James Parker and place his tab under Liam Payne. :) so so so sorry!"

"Ok, Mr. Parker, I put it in the system!" Liam lies as he clicks save on the freshly typed reminder. "You’re all set to go! I hope you enjoy your dinner tonight!"

"Thank you, um…" Mr. Parker looks at Liam’s nametag. "…Kip. You’ve been very helpful."

“It’s been an absolute pleasure sir!” Liam nods as Mr. Parker turns and walks away from the desk towards his next destination.

“Wait, you’re not Kip!” A women dressed in an identical white vest observes. She holds a clipboard in her hand, most likely a supervisor of some sorts.

“Uh…What are you talking about?!” Liam pulls off a deeply confused expression, as if he had no idea what she could be referring to. “I’m Kip!”

Just at that moment a bright eyed, overly enthusiastic man jumps in front of the reception desk. “I’m back from my break, did you guys miss me!?” Kip pauses observing Liam speculatively. “Um…who are you? And why are you wearing my nametag?”

“Hey, sorry mate, long story! Gotta go!” Liam sheds the vest and nametag, shoving them in Kip’s arms and running off. “Check your reminders!” Liam calls behind him, jogging over to his team.

“Not bad, not bad, Payno!” Niall congratulates. “You were a pretty decent Kip, I’ll give it to you.”

“Oh my god, I felt so bad, I couldn’t get the system to cooperate.”

“Yeah, we saw you sweating over there.” Zayn comments. “What did you end up doing?”

“Babe, I just wrote an apology note and said to bill me for his dinner!” Liam laughs. “I did it all for the glory of the win.”

“Well, at least you’re paying for your mistakes.” Louis remarks. “Very noble.”

“I consider myself to be a pretty honorable guy. Most days at least.” Liam takes the iPad back from Harry and looks over the scoreboard. “Alright lads, this is our last mission! We are still slightly behind on points though.”

“Another round of applause for Niall.” Zayn deadpans bitterly. “He cost us those points on the very first mission, from square one.”

“Hey, I already apologized for that and I’ve more than made up for it now. Would you like to see my bleeding chest? Or maybe test my blood alcohol levels?”

Zayn scuffs, rolling his eyes.

Liam clicks on the last prompt, displaying it on the screen.

_On Bended Knee_: Profess your undying love to a complete stranger and ask for their hand in marriage. 500 pts.

_BONUS_: 400 additional points if you can steal a kiss.
“It’s gotta be Harry.” Niall concludes immediately after reading the prompt.


“He’s the only single one who can finesse a complete stranger to marry him.”

“But Niall, you’re single too.” Zayn states.

“Yeah, but I don’t have a way with words like this one does.” Niall points a finger at Harry. “Plus, I'm completely smoked from that death cocktail and my chest feels like there’s a gaping hole in it, I'm surprised I'm even still standing.”

“What kind of Irishman can’t hold his liquor?” Louis snipes. “You’re a disgrace.”

“Mate, I’d like to see you try that and still live to talk about it. It was basically poison!” Niall argues hotly. “And it's not just that, a piece of me was physically ripped away by force!”

“Enough, enough! We are wasting time!” Liam shouts over their bickering. “Harry, would you be willing to do it?”

Harry looks to Louis almost as if asking permission “Well, I…um…”

“Come on H, I know you have it in you, you’re a natural charmer. You were brilliant with Granny earlier. Just pick someone, anyone you like and go for it. We can’t win this without you, we need you.” Liam encourages, placing a hand on his shoulder in support.

Harry’s eyes are still locked on Louis’. Louis hardly responds, simply casting his gaze to the floor, indicating it is up to Harry to choose what he wants to do.

“Mm…alright.” Harry concedes, scratching the back of his head as if he isn’t quite sure of his decision.

“Yes! Thank you!” Liam praises. “And if you can, try to get the bonus points, we are counting on you.”

Harry nods shortly. “So I just choose anyone?”

“Yeah, mate anyone, just do it fast. We can still finish first.”

Harry surveys the lobby, observing several passerby guests. Among all the people, drifting along in their own little worlds, he spots a woman appearing to be in her mid-twenties. She is completely alone, perched on a small couch with her legs tucked beneath her body. Her brow is pinched in concentration as she reads a thick novel settled in her lap. She mindlessly toys with her long brown hair, reading glasses balanced on the bridge of her nose.

“Her, the brunette in the back, by the flowers.” Harry gestures to the unsuspecting girl.

“Nice.” Niall grins approvingly.

“Break a leg Harry, we will be recording from over here.”

Harry takes a deep breath, squares his shoulders back and begins to make his way over to the woman in question. He can feel his teammates watching him, closing in behind him to record his mission.
Harry knows exactly what he needs to say, he just hopes he remembers it. It’s been awhile since he last spoke it out loud or even read it for that matter. He breathes in another methodical breath, clearing his mind before he begins to speak. “You know what I am going to say. I love you.”

The girl tears her gaze away from her book and looks up at him alarmed.

“What other men may mean when they use that expression, I cannot tell; what I mean is, that I am under the influence of some tremendous attraction, which I have resisted in vain, and which overmasters me.”

She gazes at him completely enraptured by his words.

“You could draw me to fire, you could draw me to water, you could draw me to the gallows, you could draw me to any death, you could draw me to anything I have most avoided, you could draw me to any exposure and disgrace. This and the confusion of my thoughts, so that I am fit for nothing, is what I mean by your being the ruin of me. But if you would return a favorable answer to my offer of myself in marriage, you could draw me to any good, every good, with equal force.”

She grins widely, her expression giddy. “Charles Dickens, Our Mutual Friend. I absolutely adore that piece!”

“It’s a favorite of mine as well.” Harry confesses, smiling down at her tenderly. “And as Dickens once poured his heart out in declaration, here I am pouring my heart out to you, my love.”

“Oh my, who are you?” She blushes, covering her mouth in shock.

“It doesn’t matter who I am love, all that matters is how I feel about you.” Harry reaches for her hands and pulls her to her feet. She goes easily, leaning into his steady weight.

She inhales sharply. “How you feel about me?”

“Yes, I was drawn to you from across the room and I knew instantly. I knew with every part of my soul, with every piece of my being, with every fiber of my beating heart, that I had to make you mine.” Harry intertwines their fingers together. “I know it sounds absurd, but when is love ever not? I need you in my life forevermore, from this day until my last. Will you marry me?”

“Marry you!?" She gasps in surprise, dropping Harry’s hands. “How can I marry someone I just met-”

Harry flashes her a sinfully sweet smile, leaning in closer. “But we didn’t just meet, our bond spans through the centuries. Our love is timeless, ever-flowing, ever-passing, spilling over time and time again leading us to this very moment. Maybe this is our first encounter in this lifetime, but it’s not the first time my soul has been linked to yours.”

“But I-”

Harry reaches to caress her cheek softly, staring deeply into her eyes. She instantly goes limp at his tender touch, gazing back at him in a daze. “Shhh love.” He moves his fingers to her lips, silencing her. “If you can’t say yes to me now, just at least kiss me so that I might know what could have been, what should have been. If I were only man enough for you.”

Harry leans in slowly and kisses her softly, a light brush of closed lips. He pulls back and studies her face as if breathing her in one last time.

“If only.” He whispers, leaving her embrace. He walks away from the stunned girl, leaving her
gazing longingly after him.

Harry rejoins his group with a sheepish, bashful smile. “Did you guys get it?”

“Get it? Fuck, Harry that's was inspirational! I’ve got tears in my eyes!” Niall admires adamantly.

“Damn, Harry!” Liam catcalls. “How are you single?”

“Ok, Casanova, I'll marry you, shit! That was poetic!” Zayn ecstatically praises. “I’m glad you’re my side lover. Sorry Li.”

“I can’t even be offended! I agree, that was flawless.” Liam approves, applauding Harry. “I need to step up my poetry game, obviously I’ve been doing romance all wrong.”

Louis remains silent, glaring at Harry through squinted eyes. He crosses his arms protectively over his chest, his jaw slightly clenching, lips pressed into a hard line.

“Thanks, mates.” Harry blushes, shrugging it off as if it is no big deal. “She looked like a reader, so I thought she’d appreciate that.”

“She’s not the only one who appreciated it.” Louis insolently comments.

Liam clicks submit on their final video of the challenge. “Yes! We are officially done, good work lads! Let’s go back to the pavilion and check in.”

They start making their way back to the check-in point, Liam fiercely leading the way as usual, overly eager to claim his win.

After a few minutes of walking, Harry pulls Louis behind the rest. “I’m sorry,” Harry whispers. “I didn’t mean to um… I mean… I-”

“We can talk about it later,” Louis cuts him off, “but to be honest your proposal to me was so much better. In fact, that was basically a cheap knockoff. You’re losing your touch.”

“Losing my touch?” Harry gawks, instantly offended.

“You’re just not the man you once were, I hate to be the one to tell you.” Louis shrugs halfheartedly. “I mean, that little performance was alright, I guess, but I’ve seen better. Much better.”

“I quoted a literary masterpiece! By heart! Then I spilled my earnest soul to her! And did you see her reaction?”

“She obviously has low standards, only a desperate person would fall for that shit.”

“Louis, don’t be hateful! You’re just jealous it wasn’t you.”

“I could never be jealous of that lackluster display. I’m a man of standard and quality.”

“Aww, you’re jealous!” Harry taunts, a teasing smile growing on his face.

“I’m not fucking jealous Harry, don’t flatter yourself.” Louis huffs, defiantly.

“Lou, I’m sorry, you know it didn’t mean anything. I would nev-”

“Oi lads! Hurry up, I can taste victory!” Liam calls from the end of the hall.
“We aren’t done talking, Louis. This isn’t over.”

“I never said it was.” Louis scuffs, turning abruptly to catch up with the rest of the team, leaving Harry staring after him.
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Hey hey heyyy :)

Thank you thank you thank you times infinity for all the feedback, comments, messages, kudos ect, each one literally makes my day, I'm so beyond grateful :)
I would also like to thank some very special, exceedingly amazing people who never fail to support me and encourage me, Kylie and Jodie. i love you loadsssss, thank you so much my loves.
Welp, I hope you all enjoy this chapter :

Harry, Louis, Niall, Zayn and Liam make it back to the pavilion to check-in only moments before the next team, barely securing the bonus points for finishing first.

“We made it boys!” Liam exclaims as he high-fives each member of the team. “Ahh, sweet victory!”

Once all the teams have made it back to the check-in point, the judges begin to deliberate over the final tally, scoring the last few submissions. After several moments, they nod their heads in agreement, having made a decision. The lead judge whispers the results to President Richards, who then takes his place in the center of the pavilion, microphone in hand.

“Well friends, it was a very close call this year. I can honestly say that I have never been more entertained by watching a scavenger hunt, I’m sure the judges would agree. Who knew you all could be so creative?” President Richards laughs heartily, placing a hand on his stomach. “We only had one team that forfeited a mission, almost every team at least attempted each task. Overall, the teams were essentially neck and neck for the majority of the hunt. But nevertheless, we do have a winner. The only team that was able to successfully complete the last mission and also score the bonus, earning the most points for creativity and also finishing first overall.”

President Richards pauses for dramatic effect, attempting to build unnecessary suspense. “A round of applause for our Annual Hearst Scavenger Hunt champions, Liam Payne, Niall Horan, Harry Styles, Zayn Malik, and Louis Tomlinson.”

The gathered crowd and fellow losing teams applaud as the members of the winning team collectively join President Richards in the center of the pavilion, cheering and hooting rowdily. “And the prize is…the satisfaction of a job well done.”

The guys exchange unamused glances amongst themselves, while President Richards cheekily grins. “Ha! I’m only joking! I’m an old man, I live for a good laugh nowadays. We’ve actually secured some substantial prizes this year, no need to worry. Judges, what do you have for them?”

The head judge assumes her position next to President Richards, taking the microphone in her hand. “So for each of you, we have two all expense paid, round trip tickets for a Caribbean luxury cruise
that you are free to redeem at your own disposal.” She hands each of them a thick golden envelope. “Inside you’ll find all the details and specifics you need to redeem and plan your trip. Congratulations gentlemen.”

President Richards claims the mic once again. “Congratulations to you all, excellent work today! Thank you to everyone who participated in this event. It was a strong start to the weekend’s festivities. You are all free to go, be sure to review your itineraries as not to miss any upcoming events. Enjoy your day!”

“Sick! I always wanted to go on a cruise.” Louis enthuses, examining the exterior of the shiny envelope.

“So when are we setting sail, lads?” Niall asks, opening up his envelope curiously.

Louis gives Niall a quizzical look. “Who says I want to go on a cruise with you? I’ve had enough of you to last me for a good long while.”

“You can’t get rid of me, mate.” Niall shrugs, peering inside the envelope. “Besides, I know you love me. I would hate to deprive you of your daily dose of Horan.”

“Mmm.” Liam hums, apparently in deep thought. “I’d say summer is the best time to take a cruise, maybe late spring?”

“But that’s when everyone goes.” Zayn comments. “We should be different and go in the winter or something. You know, avoid the masses and everything.”

Louis continues his banter with Niall, arguing back and forth while Zayn and Liam deliberate over the best time of year to take a cruise. Harry stands off to the side observing them all silently.

Harry is just about to input his opinion when a strong hand rests on his shoulder. He turns around and is met with the cheerful, greeting face of President Richards.

“Harry, I don’t believe we’ve formally met.” President Richards removes his hand from Harry’s shoulder and extends his full arm out for a welcoming shake. “I’ve heard so many wonderful things about you, I’m glad you are part of the Hearst Family. I’m sure you’ll achieve great things in your career. I’m so very pleased to finally meet you.”

“Oh sir, the pleasure is all mine believe me.” Harry replies, taking his hand in a firm grasp. “I’m truly honored to be here.”

President Richards smiles warmly as they shake hands. “It’s lovely to put a name to a face. And such a young face it is. You can’t be past your twenties.”

“Twenty-six actually. I may be young, but I really do love what I do, and I’m so grateful to be an employee at Hearst. It’s been a dream of mine for the longest.”

“Young and passionate, I like it! You’ll go far my boy!” President Richards praises. “You and your erm…brother, is it? Put on quite a show today.”

“Right, yes, my brother. Uh…younger brother, Louis.”

“Theatrics must run in the family then?”

“Um…you could say that.” Harry chuckles knowingly. “Louis has always been one for the…dramatic arts.”
“Well, it was quite entertaining to say the least.” President Richards laughs, placing a friendly hand once again on Harry’s shoulder. “I’d love to stick around and chat, but you know, duty calls. Hopefully I’ll see you around, maybe we can go golfing and get to know each other.”

“Yes, of course sir, I’d love that. I’m quite a fan of golfing actually.” Harry grins, in shock that the President of Hearst Publishing actually wants to get to know him.

“Brilliant. I’d once feared the art of golf had become lost on the rising younger generations.”

Harry shakes his head. “Not I, sir. Young in body, but I’ve been told I have an old soul.”

President Richards laughs genuinely. “Well, I’ve been told I’m young at heart, but I have an old tired body, so maybe it will average out between the two of us. Lovely meeting you, Harry. I’ll be in touch.” He waves goodbye to Harry and then disappears into the throng of conversing people around them.

Hardly even seconds after his departure, Harry is rejoined by his former team. He had honestly forgotten they were still nearby due to his surprise encounter with the president.

“Harry, the guys and I have decided to head to the pool. You down?” Niall asks eagerly. “Lounge around in victory, relax and take it all in, bask in the glory. Reflect in-”

“Ok, I think he gets it. You can stop now.” Louis interrupts, rolling his eyes.

“Yeah, sure I’m down, sounds fun.” Harry replies casually. “I’m not really dressed though.”

“How about we all go change and then meet up at the main pool?” Liam suggests.

Niall nods his head. “See you in fifteen!”

They go their separate ways, Harry, Louis, Liam and Zayn actually all going the same way since their suites are neighboring each other.

Harry and Louis finish changing faster than Zayn and Liam, most likely due to the level of vanity Zayn seems to possess. They decide not to wait up for them and instead begin to make their way to the main resort pool.

Louis is dressed in black board shorts and a white t-shirt while Harry is scantily clad in short neon pink trunks. He’s shirtless with a t-shirt slung around his neck for possible later use.

As they approach the pool, they spot Niall draped over a comfy lounge chair, sunglasses framing his face. His bare chest is still swollen and pink from his wax earlier.

“Looking a little rosy there Ni, smooth as a baby’s bum.” Louis drops down on the recliner next to Niall’s, shedding his own shirt.

Harry perches on the adjacent lounger, adjusting his shades from atop his head to shield his eyes. “Does it burn still? It looks so tender and raw.”

Niall looks down at his enflamed torso. “If I don’t think about it, I’m ok. But if my chest so much as touches anything, it stings like hell.”

“So if I were to just…” Louis rapidly whips his discarded t-shirt against Niall’s smooth chest in one swift surprise motion.

Niall shrieks a piercing scream, but quickly claps his hand over his mouth. “Louis, you ass! We are
in public! I can’t be screaming like a wild banshee; I have an image to maintain! This is a fresh wound, have some decency!"

Louis snickers mischievously. “I’ll show you decency when you start extending the same courtsey!”

“Hey lads, what’s going on here?” Liam questions curiously as he approaches their lounge area with Zayn in tow.

“Oh nothing, just teaching Niall here a lesson on good manners.”

Niall touches his chest lightly and winces, he looks over to Louis and shakes his head. “I’ll remember this, Louis. Mark my words.”

Liam and Zayn claim the remaining lounge chairs, settling in to relax. Zayn sits up to apply sunscreen to his uncovered skin, but pauses glancing over at Harry and Louis, taking in their bare tattooed chests.

“You both are so tatted!” Zayn observes, looking between the tattoos littered on each of their exposed bodies. “That’s sick!”

Liam nods in agreement. “Yeah, I had no idea you guys were into tattoos like that.”

“Yep, I’m quite fond of my ink.” Harry says, looking down at his inked body.

“Same, mate. I love getting new tattoos, it’s such a high. Nothing like it really.” Zayn comments, sliding his sunglasses over his nose before continuing with his sunscreen.

“How many do you have?” Liam asks inquisitively.

“Oh, I don’t even know, I guess they just built up over the years.” Harry responds with a half shrug. “I’ve lost track of the actual number.”

“You and Louis are always going off and getting new tattoos!” Niall comments, sitting up slightly. “Basically every time I see you guys, you have a new set.”

“Oh nice! Did you get any of them together?”

“Ha! Together?” Niall barks, looking pointedly at Louis with a smirk. “Most of their tattoos are matching!”

“You have matching tattoos with your brother? Like actual bro tats?” Zayn asks in disbelief.

If looks could kill, Niall would be dead under Louis’ fiery gaze. “Like one or two, really. They have a lot of um…meaning.”

“Oh, don’t I know it! Harry, why don’t you share the story of your rose tattoo. That’s hands down my favorite. It’s such a touching story between you two, a real tear jerker.”

“Um…that’s such a long story.” Harry laughs nervously, scratching his head anxiously. “I’d hate to um…bore you.”

“Never! I love tattoo stories, it gives the art new life and perspective.” Zayn eagerly encourages. “You can learn a lot about a person from their tattoos.”

Liam’s face is etched in confusion. “Wait, so if Harry has a rose, what do you have, Louis?”
“A dagger!” Niall jumps to answer before Louis even opens his mouth. “Isn’t that just the cutest bro tat?”

Zayn and Liam share a puzzled look. “A rose and dagger as a matching brother tattoo? Isn’t that more of a…couple tattoo? Now I have to hear the story.”

Louis is literally seconds away from assaulting Niall and drowning him in the pool with his own bare hands. He is the biggest ass; Louis should have whipped his chest harder until he passed out from the pain. Niall knows perfectly well that they got the rose and dagger tattoos on the same night that they got engaged.

What kind of story could they possibly come up with that would explain why two brothers got a rose and a dagger permanently inked on their bodies? “Um...Well, to be honest, the true meaning has nothing to do with us per say.” Louis starts, formulating a bullshit story in his head.

Harry glances at him curiously, interested in where Louis is going with this.

“So...um...long story short, it’s truly about our...um...grandparents. They taught us the true meaning of love.” Louis lies, composing the fictional tale as he goes along. “Um...we came from a...broken household and we never truly understood the concept of love until our mother sent us to live with our grandparents. We spent a good amount of our childhood with them and they taught us not only about love, but about life. Besides the fact that they practically raised us, their story itself is absolutely incredible.”

Louis pauses for a moment trying to decide where he can go with this and decides with the first thing to pop in his head. “Um...our grandfather was a prisoner of war and our grandmother housed him illegally and nursed him back to health. They fell in love and despite the odds, started a life together. If they hadn’t risked everything to be together, we wouldn’t be here today.”

“So when they passed we decided we wanted to honor them in some way because of how they affected our lives.” Harry finishes, with a surprisingly convincing somber tone. “I got the rose as a representation of our grandmother and Louis got a dagger for our grandfather.”

“They truly inspired us, it pains me that they are no longer here with us. I...I miss them so much.” Louis chokes back a fake sob, adding an emotional element to the story. “But when I look down at dagger on my arm, I’m reminded not only of my granddad’s strength, but of his strong loving heart. He fought fiercely, but he also loved fiercely.”

“And the rose reminds me of my grandmum’s deep fervent passion. She was beautiful; soft and sweet like the petals of a budding rose, yet exceedingly passionate and fierce.” Harry looks down and caresses the inked rose on his forearm. “Their love for each other was truly an inspiration that will always resonate in our hearts.”

“Oh, that’s really beautiful boys, I’m dreadfully sorry about your loss.” Liam responds gravely. “Your grandparents sound like truly wonderful people. If you don’t mind me asking, how did they pass?”

Louis pours all the emotion he can possible summon into his voice, in a final attempt to completely sell the story. “They died together, only mere hours apart from each other from...natural causes.”

Harry shakes his head solemnly, eyes downcast. “They just...they...couldn’t bare to live apart from each other. Their love was strong enough to keep them together...despite death.”

Louis closes his eyes and covers his face with his hands dramatically, sniffling nosily. “I’m sorry. It
still gets to me sometimes.”

Harry reaches over and rubs Louis back reassuringly, offering comfort to his distraught brother.

“Well, how about I go get us some drinks? Maybe lighten the mood and cheer you up a bit. I love those little colored glasses with the mini umbrellas, they always make me smile.” Liam offers, standing to his feet. “Um…Zayn, come with me to help carry them.”

“Uh…right sure.” Zayn follows Liam as they set off to go secure a few much needed drinks.

Once Liam and Zayn disappear beyond the courtyard, Niall pips up, smirk poised on his face. “So… how are you liking the retreat so far? It’s wonderful isn’t it?”

“Niall, what the fuck!?” Louis yells, abandoning his previously troubled exterior and adopting wild frustration in its place.

“What?” Niall asks incredulously, eyes wide and innocent.

Louis waves his arms wildly. “Do you like throwing us under the fucking bus or do you just hate us? I always suspected you know…”

Niall laughs, squeezing his eyes together. “It’s just way too easy and Harry here, gets all flustered, it’s hilarious!”

“Hey,” Harry drawls out, “I do not! I think I did pretty ok this time, if I do say so myself.”

Louis looks over to Harry briefly and rolls his eyes before looking back to Niall. “If you don’t shut the fuck up, I will strangle you personally and make it look like an accident. No one will even know and no one will even miss you.”

“Touchy touchy!” Niall raises his hands in surrender. “I gotta say though Lou, you cover your ass pretty well, I’m impressed. I almost forget the true story; you lie so well. Maybe you two really are brothers and you’ve been fucking with me this whole time!”

“Fucking off Niall.” Louis spits, annoyed by the whole charade.

“No, honestly Louis, if you weren’t so good on your feet, you both would be shot to shit. Where did that grandparents thing come from anyway?”

“Where everything else comes from, straight out of my ass! You can’t un-romanticize something that is innately romantic, so I had no choice but to deflect the romance of a dagger and a rose to a neutral target. And what is more romantic than an elderly couple in love?”

“You know, I actually had to think about it.” Niall confesses. “Like whether you could possibly be telling the truth or not, it was that emotional, I think it was the ending.”

“If I’m being completely honest, Harry is always making me watch sappy romantic movies…they may have finally proven useful.”

“I don’t make you watch anything! You like those movies whether you admit it or not.” Harry asserts, looking at Louis. “And I thought that sounded vaguely like The Notebook, maybe with a little Pearl Harbor and something else that I just can’t put my finger on.” Harry ponders, his face crinkling in concentration as he tries to remember the film.

“I’m surprised you even caught on this time Harry, you usually just make it worse.” Niall comments.
“I do not! I try my best, I’m just not that good of a good liar, I guess. It’s harder than I thought to be brothers. I mean, we’ve been together so long that basically every aspect of our lives is intertwined.”

“Well, no one told you to be so codependent!” Niall chuckles.

“Could you at least pretend like you give a shit about us and not be such an instigator?” Louis begs, exasperated. “I mean, I tolerate you most days, and Harry actually loves you for some reason, the least you could do is try to show a little support.”

“Alright alright, I guess I can try to go easier on you guys, but no promises. Sometimes it’s too good to resist. My favorite form of entertainment, the gift that keeps giving.” Niall jokes, laughing to himself. “Well, I’m going to go check on Liam and Zayn with those drinks. Try not to get into too much trouble while I’m gone.” Niall winks at them as he leaps from his lounge chair and sets off to find Liam and Zayn.

“I hate him. He must be stopped. He must be assassinated. I will end him.” Louis threatens.

“He’s not that bad. He’s just trying to have himself a little laugh, you know how Niall is. I mean, he hasn’t done any real damage yet.”

“What? Have you not been living the same hell I have? Or maybe you’re too busy proposing to random people, another thing we also have the lovely Niall to thank for.”

“And there it is.” Harry sighs, lifting his sunglasses from his eyes. “I knew you were going to bring that back up. I was just waiting for it.”

“You’re damn right I’m going to bring it back up!”

“Ok, look Louis, I-”

Opportune as ever, Melissa saunters up to their lounge chairs, halting their conversation. As is custom for her this weekend, she holds a glass flute between her fingers, a light colored liquid sloshing around within the confines of the glass. “Styles, I’ve been looking all over for you dear!”

Harry tears his gaze from Louis and looks up at her from his lounge chair. “Me? Why?”

“I wanted to congratulate you on the win this morning. That was quite an impressive little show.” She winks at him and moves in closer.

“Oh right yeah, I had an amazing team.” Harry nods, looking over to Louis. “You remember my...brother, Louis?”

“Mhmm.” She waves him off casually with a shrug, averting her eyes and settling her attention back to Harry. She positions her body in such a way that she is essentially nudging Louis purposefully out of the conversation, standing in between their adjacent recliners.

“Bitch.” Louis scuffs under his breath, eyeing her up and down speculatively from his seat. He’s already agitated from his conversation being rudely interrupted and he hates to be blatantly ignored or excluded.

“I had no idea you were such a charmer and so well-read!” Melissa gushes exaggeratedly, obviously affected by the alcohol in her system.

“Oh…um…yeah.” Harry blushes, not used to all the attention and praise from his normally strict boss. “I love literature and poetry; I even write myself sometimes. It’s a bit of a hobby of mine.”
“You write your own poetry?” She gasps, enthusiastically.

“Here and there, nothing too serious.”

“Well aren’t you full of surprises? You know, I would *love* to hear some of your work sometime. Maybe we could get together…” Melissa hovers closely over Harry’s shirtless form on the lounge chair.

Louis’ face morphs into utter disturbance and borderline jealousy. He huffs out a loud irritated breath and claps his hands together loudly. “Alright then, I’ll just give you two some space, I hate to intrude.”

“Wait, but Lou-”

“No, seriously bro, I’m feeling a bit tired to be honest.” Louis cuts him off without a seconds thought, grabbing his keys and phone from the side table. “I think I’ll go back to our suite and maybe have a nap. Have fun with…that.” Louis gestures disgustedly towards Melissa.

Before Harry can even respond to him or stop him, Louis is on his feet and briskly walking towards the lobby.

Melissa wastes no time and swiftly lays herself down in Louis’ place, facing Harry on the lounge chair. “So about your poetry, I would really love to hear it! What inspires you to write anyway?”

“Oh…sorry…what?” Harry asks distractedly, not even paying her any attention, still looking after Louis’ quickly disappearing form.

Melissa continues on undeterred. “There must be something that inspires your creative work, like a muse or something. I’d love to just pick your brain.”

“Yeah…um, you know what? I’m kind of tired too…yeah.” Harry responds still looking absently after Louis. “So yeah…I’m just going to go. It’s been…nice…seeing you.”

“Ok, well maybe another time then.”

Harry collects his belongings, slipping his t-shirt quickly over his bare chest before dashing off after Louis. He vaguely hears his boss calling his name in his periphery, but he can’t be bothered to care. He makes a beeline towards the lobby entrance cutting through the open courtyard. Before he even makes it out of the courtyard, he bumps into Liam, Zayn, and Niall.

“Whoa whoa, why the rush big guy?” Niall questions, looking Harry up and down.

“Where are you going? We bought drinks!” Zayn cheers, holding up two glasses.

“With the little umbrellas!” Liam enthuses, pointing to the mini purple umbrella floating in his glass.

Harry gazes beyond them, eyeing the lobby doors, anxious to catch up with Louis. “Uh…yeah, sorry lads. I just um…I’m feeling a bit out of it, so I’m just going to go back to my suite.”

“Ahh no! Stay! We were going to convince Zayn to play water polo with us.”

“I told you I don’t do water. I’ve had enough of that today to last me a lifetime.” Zayn sulks, still bitter about being forced into a body of water against his will.

Niall nudges Zayn playfully. “Oh hush Zayn, you know you had fun.”
Zayn simply shrugs and rolls his eyes.

“Maybe another time boys, I’m honestly knackered.” Harry protests, hopping anxiously from foot to foot ready to bolt.

“Oh, alright then.” Liam relents. “Has Louis gone and left too?”

Harry nods his head. “Yeah, I think his coffee wore off. He’s a bit…cantankerous.”

“Well, you guys rest up then, but tonight we are going out. No excuses, you both are coming! We were thinking drinks and dancing? A little more, a little less, we’ll see.”

“Ok, yeah sure, I’ll let Louis know.” Harry says hurriedly, needing desperately to just talk to Louis already. He begins to slowly back away from the conversation, steadily picking up speed as he backpedals. “See you tonight!” Harry turns on his heel and takes off towards the doors to the lobby.

“Meet us in the lounge at nine!” Liam calls after him. “Don’t be late!”

Harry makes it to the lobby, finally, hastily crossing the foyer towards the elevators. He’s just about to hit the lift button when a woman taps his shoulder. He spins around, already annoyed that he is being stopped yet again.

“Erm…uh hi…Mr. Styles, sorry to bother you. I’m Margaret, your…um secretary.” The girl stammers out, hardly giving eye contact, staring at her feet.

Harry’s face softens as he recognizes the shy girl, face settling into a smile. “Hi Margaret, no need to introduce yourself. I know who you are. My inbox is filled with messages from you.”

“Oh um…ok right, sorry. It’s just that a lot of the directors forget my name, so I always start with that.”

“I’ll never forget Margaret, you have my word.” Harry promises, earnestly. “Is there something I can help you with? I’m sort of in a rush.”

“Oh right! Yes, sorry, I’ll be brief, I’d hate to waste your time. As you probably know, there is a date auction at the retreat and I’ve been asked by the planning committee to ask you if you would like to be part of the auction.”

“I didn’t even know there was a date auction, I’m still the new guy.” Harry laughs softly to himself. “So you want me to be a part how exactly? Like as an auctionee? Is that a word? I’ve used it during a scrabble game once, but I never actually checked to see if it was a legitimate word.”

“No,” Margaret giggles, covering her mouth, “I don’t think auctionee is an actual word. But I know you’re um…single at the moment, so you would be a fine candidate to be auctioned.”

“Oh! Um…I suppose I’m honored…I just…well…”

“I know it’s kind of nerve wracking, at least to me it is. Being paraded around on a stage and having people buy you and everything. But it’s for a good cause. All the proceeds go to charity and I’m sure with how you look, you would go for a lot!” Margaret’s face turns crimson as she slaps a hand over her mouth “Oh god! That’s so awkward, I just implied I think my boss is hot.”

Harry smiles sincerely. “I’m flattered, honestly. I just don’t know if I should…I mean…it’s complicated.”
“It’s for kids! Hearst is benefiting the Save the Children Fund this year. Imagine how many children you could help.”

“Umm…well…”

“Come on! You can’t say no to helpless children, what do you have to lose?” Margaret encourages. “I mean…I don’t want to overstep my bounds or anything, but it’s for a really good cause.”

Harry thinks it over in his head. What did he really have to lose? Louis can’t get any more upset than he already is. And it’s for charity, essentially noble work, there is no way Louis could get mad at benefiting the needs of desperate children. Plus, he probably won’t be able to escape this conversation anytime soon unless he agrees. “Uh…ok yeah, I’ll do it, sign me up.”

“Oh wonderful! The committee will be overjoyed to hear that. Thank you so much Mr. Styles!”

“But remember it’s all for the kids.” Harry teases, pointing at her with a grin. “Don’t forget that. Make sure you tell the committee; I’m only doing it for the kids.”

Margaret giggles again. “All for the kids. Got it.”

“Good.” Harry presses the button for the lift, pleased to see that the elevator is already on the main lobby floor. “Thank you for all that you do Margaret, enjoy the rest of your day.” Harry waves goodbye and rushes through the elevator doors.

Once reaching his floor, Harry basically soars to their suite, having wasted too much time already. He knows Louis has been silently seething since the scavenger hunt and he needs to diffuse the situation before it gets any worse. Harry unlocks the door with a swipe of his keycard and enters the room.

“Louis?” Harry calls quietly, unsure if maybe he actually did go to sleep. He steps further into the suite and finds Louis settled on one of the sofas arranged in the living area with a laptop settled in his lap.

Harry continues to enter the room slowly, eyeing Louis cautiously. “I thought you were tired.”

“I thought you were romancing resort guests.” Louis snaps, not looking up from his MacBook.

“Um…I think we need to talk.”

“Ok. Talk.”

Harry scrubs his hands over his face and sighs heavily. “Mm…well…first I’d like to say that I’m sorry about the whole proposal thing. But it wasn’t even real and you know that. You know I’d never say things like that to anyone but you.”

“But you did. You did and it looked pretty real to me and apparently to everyone else who had the pleasure of witnessing it.”

“Baby, it was hypothetical! I only did it for our team, so we could win! I didn’t actually mean it, obviously, and if I knew you’d be so mad about it I would have just said no.”

“Knew I’d be mad!?” Louis looks up from his laptop screen, finally meeting Harry’s eyes. “Harry, are you telling me that if I up and proposed to a random stranger and then went a step further and sealed it with a kiss, that you wouldn’t be at least a tad bit bothered? You? The master of jealousy, himself?”
“I am not the master of jealousy.” Harry scuffs, his features settling into a frown.

“Oh sure, right yeah, sure.” Louis mocks nodding his head and rolling his eyes. “Remember that time we tried out that Indian restaurant and we ran into one of my law school buddies, Chris?”

“Oh god, Louis!” Harry groans. “No stop, you always use this against me as an example!”

“And apparently I was talking to him for too long, or leaning in too close, or maybe our embrace lasted too long.” Louis continues unbothered by Harry’s protests “But you just weren’t having any of it and you ‘accidentally’ spilled a whole bowl of red curry all over him.”

Harry crosses his arms over his chest defensively. “I told you that was an accident and I stand by that.”

“An accident!? Harry, you were across the table! You basically chucked the whole bowl at his face!”

“It was just a reflex. The curry was hot so...yeah...I was taken off-guard by...how hot it was and...my hand...slipped.” Harry shrugs as if he is completely innocent and blameless. “And I apologized! I even offered to pay for his dry cleaning! I was sorry.”

“Barely. You looked pretty pleased with yourself. I’m surprised you didn’t ‘accidentally’ fling a knife at his throat instead.”

“I’m not a violent person Louis and anyway that whole situation was different. Even if I was jealous…and I’m not saying that I was, by the way…you guys had an actual history!”

“What history?! We were in the same class. He asked me out a few times. I said no each time. The end.”

“He’s an ass and I wouldn’t like him regardless of his intentions with you.”

“You only know of him from what I told you! How could you possibly know he’s an ass?”

“I had a feeling. He rubbed me the wrong way and that was more than enough.” Harry looks up at the ceiling, jutting out his chin defiantly.

“Harry, just admit that you get jealous. Admit you get jealous and I’ll leave it alone.”

“No! I do not!” Harry claims stubbornly. “Especially not of that guy!”

“Oh ok cool. I’ll just call up Chris and ask for that date now.” Louis reaches for his phone on the coffee table. “Mm...better yet why wait? I’ll just cut to the chase and ask him to marry me and I’ll read him beautiful thought-out poetry and profess my undying pure love and tell him how we are two hearts drifting in the wind or some shit and-”

“Stop.”

Louis raises his eyebrows at Harry, phone poised at his finger tips.

Harry sighs in defeat. “God fine, ok, you’re right, you made your point. I get jealous. I’d probably lose my shit if you did what I did earlier.”

“You’re telling me.” Louis scuffs, pursing his lips together.

“I know, I know. I’m sorry Lou, I just got so caught up in it. And I wanted to win for our team and make everyone proud and I took it too far, I’m sorry.”
“It’s not even just that. Your witch of a boss definitely has a thing for you.”

“What!? No she doesn’t!”

“Don’t be dumb Harry, yes she does! Her drunk ass has been all over you since we got here.”

“That’s absurd!” Harry gawks, mouth hanging open. “That’s not even possible!”

“I bet that’s why she was so adamant about you being single to begin with, it all makes sense now. She’s hunting you Harry, Medusa is hunting you.”

“Louis, you’re being dramatic.”

“No, I’m fucking not! She doesn’t treat anyone else like you and she has no regard for me whatsoever. She hardly even acknowledges my existence. But it’s all compliments and flirty smiles and lingering touches and drawn-out glances when it comes to you.”

“She’s just drunk, it’s not actually a thing!”

“Sure, sure…ok. We’ll see what happens, won’t we? She’s a hungry little cougar. It’s obviously been a very very long, dry year for her and you are prime prey.”

“What the hell does that even mean?”

Louis ponders to himself for a moment, putting pieces together in his head. “I bet she probably has a weird kink for innocent, naïve looking young men she can sink her claws into. And you definitely fit the mold with the whole doe-eyed, curly haired, dimpled thing going on.”

“Do you know how you sound?”

“I sound like someone who has just witnessed true thirst firsthand! I watched her with you Harry, she is salivating. I saw the look of pure lust in her eyes, that is the look of a woman whose well has run dry.” Louis shakes his head, tsking his tongue. “Long year, indeed.”

“So you are implying that my boss…my very uptight, strict, dictator boss, for some reason has a thing for me and is slowing trying to seduce me…for sex?”

“It’s perfect actually when you think about it, bloody brilliant. She’s your boss, you’re afraid of her. She knows how afraid of her you are and she would use that fear to manipulate you into submission. Easy.”

“I’m not afraid of her!”

“Oh really? Really Harry? So we are here pretending to be fucking siblings because of how unafraid of her you are?”

“Well…I mean…ok…she’s my boss so…”

“So?”

“So…ok, she scares me a little, but that has nothing to do with her liking me. Or wanting me or whatever! You’re being ridiculous!”

“Fine. Fine, Harry whatever.” Louis closes laptop, setting it down on the coffee table. He stands and starts to walk away from the conversation.
“Wait, where are you going? I'm not done talking to you.” Harry follows Louis through the suite.

Louis spins around to face Harry, holding his hands out questioningly. “What more do you have to say?”

“Just…uh…ok don’t get mad.”

“Well, when you start it off with ‘don’t get mad’…”

“Ok…so I sort of signed up for a date auction” Harry rushes out, gaze cast down at the floor.

Louis stares at Harry for a moment, opening his mouth to speak then closing it. He looks up at the ceiling, shaking his head as if he doesn’t even have the words or the strength, for that matter. “Harry you do realize you aren’t actually single, right? I mean, you know we aren’t actually brothers? That you are actually in some sort of committed relationship?”

“Louis, of course I know that!”

“Oh, do you? Hmm that’s news to me. I could’ve sworn you were a single man judging by the events of today.”

“Oh my god Louis stop! It's for charity! It's for little helpless children in need. I can't say no to a good cause!”

“Yes. Yes, you can!”

“Louis, what about the kids!?”

“What about them!?”

“They need help and me doing this is a way of helping them.” Harry defends. “And you letting me can be your way of helping them too. We both win.”

“You know good and well that I am all for charities and helping less fortunate kids, but this isn’t about that and you know it. If it was then we could easily make a substantial donation to the charity and call it a day. This is about you wanting to impress your little work friends and not being able to say no and set boundaries. That's fine Harry, sell your body to save the kiddies, whatever helps you sleep at night. Just make sure you sleep with one eye open.”

“I'm not selling my body, it’s a date auction!”

“I know what a date auction is. People bid money to buy you based on your looks. Basically high class prostitution.”

“Louis, what is with you today!? I think you actually need a nap.” Harry’s phone beeps in his hand. He looks down and reads over the reminder illuminated on his screen. “Oh shit, I forgot I have a staff workshop to go to this afternoon. Um…you don't have to come of course, it's for-”

“I wasn't going to. I'm taking a nap.” Louis snaps, turning defiantly and walking towards his queen bed.

“Um ok…” Harry responds, not expecting Louis’ sassy streak. “Oh and when you left, the guys said they wanted to go out tonight. Something about dancing and drinks. I said we would come.”

“Oh joy.” Louis flops on the bed.
“Yeah, it should be fun…”

Louis remains silent, curling up into a ball on top of the bed.

“So um… I’m just going to go change and head to the workshop now, ok?” Harry pauses, waiting for a response. “Louis… are we ok?”

“Perfect.”

“Um… ok.” Harry begins to move, but quickly stops himself turning back towards the bed. “Wait, but really Louis, honestly are we ok? I’m really sorry and I feel like you’re still fuming at me internally and I don’t really know what to say to fix it but-”

“We are fine, Harry. Enjoy your meeting, see you later.”

“Erm… alright.” Harry stares for a moment at Louis before setting off with an unsettling feeling in his chest that this wasn’t exactly the end of this conversation. The weekend is far from over and yet he is already running out of steam. “Only two more days, only two more days…” Harry repeats silently to himself. “Two and a half more days.”
Chapter 6

Harry’s meeting ends sooner than he thought it would or rather, sooner than he would have liked it to. It’s not that he’s avoiding Louis, he’s just…well, avoiding Louis. Their conversation from earlier resonates in Harry’s mind, as he mindless walks through the long hallway towards his suite.

Almost reaching the door, Harry pauses, halting his steps and simply staring down the extensive corridor before him. He’s not ready to talk to Louis right now, he has a million and one conflicting thoughts swarming through his head and he just wants to sort them out or at least just calm his mind a little. The past day has been borderline insane, simply one thing after the next with no time to even take it all in or process it. Harry feels like this weekend has lasted his entire lifetime, almost as if he can’t remember the life he had before all this started, yet it is only Saturday. How on earth is he going to make it through till Monday? How is Louis going to make it?

He decides to take a detour around the vast grounds of The Grove, thinking over and contemplating everything in his mind. He strolls around the beautiful estates of the resort, passing through the botanical garden, walking along the small beach on the far east side, taking in the stunning view in attempts to clear his head.

Louis does have a point, he is putting a lot of importance and priority on the opinions of other people and consequently adding a lot of unnecessary strain on his own relationship. But at the same time, he has to, right? Maybe not originally, but he has to now. One accidental, minor white lie that had slipped offhandedly out of his mouth, has now snowballed into an intricate web of lies and deceit and Harry honestly doesn’t see a safe way out.

This is his first major hitter position, his first actual successful step towards his career in photojournalism. One wrong step and he would end up back as just a freelance photographer, camped out by the phone waiting for someone, anyone to call and request his services. It would be back to graduation pictures, wedding shoots, and family portraits. There is nothing wrong with that of course, it just isn’t exactly what he wants to do for the rest of his life. He is finally making successful advances to build a solid career for himself in a field that he has a true passion for, he can’t just throw that all away.

After circling the resort grounds, time getting away from him, Harry decides he should probably head back and get ready for tonight. He isn’t exactly in the mood for dancing, drinks definitely, but not dancing. Especially not when the person he would want to dance with is posing as his brother. Louis is completely off limits for the kind of dancing he would like to do. Actually Louis is essentially just off limits, period, for everything he would like to do.
When Harry finally returns to his suite, he finds the hotel space completely vacant, Louis nowhere to be seen. All this time spent avoiding this room, spent blindly avoiding Louis and he isn’t even in here. Traces of him are scattered throughout the room. An abandoned to-go cup of lukewarm tea sits on the nightstand, clothes from earlier in the day strewn haphazardly over his bed, travel bag left open, the jumbled contents spilling out onto the floor.

As he moves in closer, Harry notices a small slip of paper positioned on the edge of the bed, a pen left next to it. He picks up the piece of hotel stationary, messy scrawl scribbled across it’s confines, appearing to have been written with extreme haste.

*Hangin w/ zayn.*

Harry reads over the short note several times and sighs audibly, running his hands through his hair. Why couldn’t Louis have just texted him that? Did he really not want to talk to Harry that badly that he would resort to scribbling out a handwritten passive aggressive note consisting of barely three words?

Harry tosses the small paper slip back on the bed, deciding he can’t be bothered to think or deal with it right now. He heads to the bathroom to take a shower and try to clear his head, for the second time in the last few hours. All that walking around the grounds to process his thoughts and empty his mind was instantly rendered void the moment he set foot back in his abandoned suite. Stress is radiating from him, all types of pressure weighing down on his shoulders with no clear cut solution.

After his shower, Harry gets dressed quickly, realizing it is already half past eight and he needs to be in the lobby at nine. Nine, sharp actually. Liam is most definitely a man of punctuality; he will never hear the end of it if he is late, even if only by a few minutes. He throws on the first shirt he sees, which happens to be a light floral piece, slides on a pair of black jeans, fluffs his hair out, grabs his keys, wallet, and phone and sets out to meet up with the rest of the group.

Harry makes his way to the lounge area of the lobby, and spots Liam sitting on a couch dressed in a deep blue, cotton button up shirt, dark denim casually tucked into the top of his caramel Timberland boots.

“8:57 Styles. Cutting it close.” Liam states, looking down at his watch as Harry walks up to him.

“Maybe,” Harry turns his head and looks around the lobby, “but I’m also the first and only one here it seems.”

“Touché.” Liam chuckles, meeting Harry’s gaze. “I don’t know about Niall, but Zayn texted and said he and Louis were on their way.”

“They’ve been together all afternoon?” Harry asks curiously.

“I guess.” Liam shrugs offhandedly. “I think they got together while we were in the workshops or something, I’m not really sure.”

Seconds later Louis and Zayn turn the corner strolling into the lounge area laughing loudly together. A soft loose jumper hangs off Louis shoulders, exposing his collarbones as he moves, tight black jeans clinging to his thighs.

“Oh my god! That’s fucking brilliant, I’ve gotta try that out!” Zayn comments placing a had on
Louis’ shoulder as they join Harry and Liam. Ever mysterious, Zayn is dressed in a head-to-toe black ensemble, matching his edgy persona.

“Yeah mate, it’s sick!” Louis chuckles in response, smiling genuinely at Zayn. “Hello boys, sorry we’re late, time got away from us.” Louis purposefully avoids acknowledging Harry directly, instead completely ignoring his gaze.

“It really did, didn’t it?” Zayn laughs as he walks over to Liam on the couch and settles on his lap. He gives him a small greeting kiss, Liam resting his hand on Zayn’s lower back. “Hi babe, missed you. How were your meetings?”

“Fine, yeah. Boring really. Just the usual leadership seminars and self improvement talks, same old, same old.” Liam states, rolling his eyes. “How about you? Have a good time with Louis?”

“The best actually, we get on really well. Right Lou?” Zayn inquires, twisting his body on Liam’s lap to face Louis.

“Yeah, brilliantly.” Louis agrees with a warm grin. “We gotta do it again sometime.”

“Totally.” Zayn smiles genuinely.

“Where is Blondie? It’s 9:04. I hate being late to things.” Liam complains, groaning.

“Let’s just leave him.” Louis suggests with a smirk, sounding completely serious. “We don’t actually require his company anyway.”

“Should I maybe give him a call?” Harry offers.

“Oh, don’t bother, there he is.” Zayn says pointing to the blonde man in light denim and white converse, stepping off the elevator across the lobby.

Niall strolls over hand in hand with Carly, the massage therapist they met earlier during the scavenger hunt. She is wrapped in a body-hugging plum dress, elegantly displaying her curves, dark hair tumbling past her shoulders.

“Oi! You’re late bub! Liam, here, is on a tight schedule!” Louis calls across the foyer, cupping his hands around his mouth.

Niall takes his sweet time walking over, whispering in Carly’s ear.

Louis throws up his hands in exasperation. “Oh, come on! Move your ass!”

“I had things to attend to…important things.” Niall responds finally, nodding to Carly and squeezing her hand as they finally reach the lounge area.

“We can see that.” Harry comments, waving at Carly. “It’s lovely to see you again Carly, I had no idea it would be so soon.”

“Yeah, I see Niall has blindly tricked you into going out with him.” Louis teases, winking at Carly.

Carly smiles a small mischievous smile looking over to Niall. “Well…what can I say? He was very persuasive.”

Niall smirks knowingly. “I have my ways. I can be a charmer when I want to be.”

“Carly, just know that I truly believe you can do better, you don’t have to settle for this sad excuse
for a man.” Louis jabs his thumb in Niall’s direction.

Carly giggles, eyes crinkling in genuine amusement. “Thank you for looking out for me, but I think I’ll take my chances.”

Louis shrugs his shoulders. “Alright suit yourself, can’t say I didn’t warn you.”

“You lot ready to go?” Liam queries, standing to his feet as Zayn slides off his lap. “I reserved a booth at The Amber. It’s on the far side of the resort, so we should probably take a shuttle bus to save time.”

They walk outside the main resort exit and approach one of the sleek resort shuttles. They slide into the rows, paired up. Harry slips in next to Louis, but Louis again, hardly even acknowledges his presence, staring straight in front of him. Harry nudges his thigh against Louis’, but Louis recoils, retreating further against the opposite end of the shuttle bus. Liam informs the driver of their destination, and the bus takes off, zooming though the grounds of the resort on a designated path.

The shuttle pulls to a stop in front of the nightclub, the music from inside the building wafting out through the crisp outside air. A few guests linger outside the doors, taking a smoke or chatting amongst themselves.

“Ready to party fellas!?” Liam calls as they exit the bus and make their way towards the tall glass doors of the club.

“Always!” Niall hoots enthusiastically, pumping his fist in the air.

They head inside the building, strobe lights flashing, colors swirling vibrant along the high rise walls. The whole space is illuminated in a warm orangey tone giving rise to the club’s appropriate name. The Amber has a posh, modern feel to it; sleek contemporary architecture with a sophisticated flare creating a very inviting, warm atmosphere.

A large dark wood dance floor lies in the center of the expansive space, an illuminated full bar positioned directly across the floor. Large circular booths and small high-top tables are littered on the outskirts of the dance floor, each illumed by small hanging spotlights.

The Amber is packed, most likely a typical occurrence for a Saturday night. Guests chat along the sidelines, others hang out near the bar area, while most let loose on the dance floor, raving and partying the night away.

Liam checks in, redeeming his reservation and a server leads them to a huge circular booth right along the main dance floor.

Niall and Carly slide in first, occupying the very middle of the booth. Zayn and Liam, Louis and Harry, respectively, flank either side of them, sliding in on the ends.

“I’ll go fetch the first round of drinks.” Liam states as everyone gets settled in, standing up and heading towards the full bar across the room. He returns moments later carrying a tray of cold beer glasses, filled to the brim. The liquid sloshes over the sides as Liam slides the glasses across the table.

“So…why aren’t we dancing yet?” Niall asks after a few minutes of casual drinking and chatting, looking around the table. “I’m ready to go!”

“I’m not really feeling it at the moment.” Louis admits with a half shrug.

“Wish your fiancé was here to dance with you, Lou?” Niall teases, winking at Louis knowingly.
Louis huffs a loud breath and sips on his cold drink, choosing not to dignify Niall with a response.

“What about you lot, what’s your excuse?” Niall inquires, looking towards Zayn and Liam.

“Well, I’m waiting on Zayn, obviously.” Liam states gazing at Zayn seated next to him.

“And I’m waiting on…well…this drink to kick in.” Zayn laughs, lifting his glass to his lips. “I’m not much of a dancer, so I need all the help I can get.”

Niall rolls his eyes, turning his attention towards Harry. “And you?”

“Uh…I’m…you know…um…”

Niall cuts Harry off before he can finish his attempt at an excuse. “You’re all a bunch of lame squares! Come on Carly, let’s show them how it’s done.” Niall links his hand with Carly’s beside him. “You see, I’m a born natural. I don’t need liquid courage to have a good time.”

Carly nods her head excitedly. “I’m game! I bet I’m a better dancer than you. Actually, I know I am.”

“See baby, this is why I like you!” Niall laughs heartily as he attempts to slip out of the booth with Carly in hand. “Scoot, scoot! My girl and I gotta dance!” Niall urges, pushing Louis and Harry out of the booth so he and Carly can escape to the dance floor. Once free from the circular table, they disappear into the mass of moving bodies.

Liam and Zayn shrug at Niall’s departure, turning to whisper in each other’s ears, caught in their own little world, leaving Louis and Harry to fend for themselves.

Harry and Louis sit in charged silence, unsaid words and silent inquiries wedging between them. The steady beat of the club music envelops around them as they remain in unmoving reserve.

“So…did you have fun with Zayn today?” Harry asks, facing his body towards Louis, finally breaking the conversational silence.

“I did.” Louis replies shortly, looking out at the dance floor, not meeting Harry’s questioning gaze.

“Good.” Harry nods.

Louis offers nothing more, hardly paying Harry any mind whatsoever. The mutual silence carries on, almost reaching uncomfortable levels.

“So…what did you guys do?”


“Things like…”

“Look,” Louis turns towards Harry, finally facing him full-on, “we didn’t do anything that would interest you. We didn’t gaze into each other's eyes or count the stars or write love songs.” Louis gestures towards Zayn and Liam across the table, clearly hopelessly infatuated with each other. “Zayn is obviously in an actual supportive, committed relationship so…”

“Oh, and you’re not?”

“Mm…I’m not so clear on that actually.” Louis sips on his drink casually. “The lines are just a bit blurred at the moment.”
"God Louis, don’t be so petty. I already apologized and we talked about this. What more do you want from me?"

Before Louis can even answer, a young woman who had been lingering near their table for a while speaks up. "Uh...hi." She greets, waving cautiously and appearing unsure of herself.

"Hello there!" Louis says cheerfully, tone drastically different from moments ago, welcoming any distraction from Harry.

"Hi...ok...I usually never do things like this, like literally never, but it’s my birthday this weekend and I’m very drunk, obviously, and my super shitty friends basically forced me over here, against my will I might add, and god, now I’m rambling...sorry."

"It’s alright. Take your time." Louis chuckles, encouraging her to continue.

She smiles weakly, looking as if she is ready to make herself disappear into thin air. “Ok, so basically I came over here in a foolish attempt to ask you to dance with me.” Her attention focuses on Louis, eyes locking with his. She inhales deeply, before continuing on. “Um...I saw you come in and I think you’re really cute and you seem really nice and...yeah...um...right so...will you...or um...would you like to dance...with me?"

“No. No he would not, he’s engaged.” Harry asserts boldly, hardly letting the poor girl finish her sentence. A disgruntled look forms on his face as he eyes the nervous young woman before them.

“Don’t speak for me Harry, I’m a grown man. I can answer myself, thanks.” Louis gives Harry a warning look before turning his attention back to the girl. “Actually love, I’d be honored. I’m sure my fiancé wouldn’t mind a dance or two.”

Her face turns beet red as she covers her mouth in embarrassment. “Oh god! You’re engaged, I’m so sorry! I’m such an idiot...of course you would have someone...it’s ok.”

“No, honestly it’s completely fine! My fiancé and I have a very...understanding relationship. We trust each other...so much...” Louis says, hints of sarcasm laced in his voice. “Besides it’s your birthday! You have to dance on your birthday, it’s basically a requirement.”

“Um...alright if you’re sure it’s ok.” She responds hesitantly.

“It’s more than ok!” Louis reassures, casting one final look towards Harry before standing to his feet. He offers his hand to her. “I’m Louis by the way.”

“Noelle.” She smiles sweetly, taking Louis’ hand.

Harry scowls bitterly, squinting his eyes in irritation, as he watches Louis squeeze Noelle’s hand and lead her off to the dance floor. Music blares loudly over the sound system, the rhythmically seductive beats of Janelle Monáe’s *Yoga* pulsating though the air.

They find a clear spot on the floor, coincidentally in perfect view of the booth Harry is still sitting at. Louis looks directly at Harry and smirks as she spins her around and places his hands on Noelle’s hips. She dances against him, her back to his front, closing her eyes as she lets Louis’s hands guide her movements along to the beat.

Harry’s entire body tenses up instantly, jealously surging over him. He clenches his jaw and retracts his bottom lip, aggressively chewing on it in envious frustration.

“Harry, bro, you good?”
Harry’s gaze darkens as he continues to stare at Louis on the dance floor, his eyes locked, assessing his every move. He could feel the steady covetous rush inside him building gradually with each passing beat of the song. He can’t seem to tear his gaze away as Louis purposefully taunts him, tormenting him with calculated movements, knowing perfectly well that Harry is watching.

“How’s it going, Styles?”

Harry’s one and only focus is on the curves of Louis’ body as he sways teasingly from side to side, his movements perfectly in time with his dance partner. Every so often a laugh escapes his lips, his eyes crinkling in a smile as he throws his head back without a care in the world. He’s obviously enjoying himself, as he rightfully should. Harry loves to see Louis happy and carefree, he’s so breathtakingly beautiful, Harry is simply in awe of him. Louis should dance and he should enjoy himself. It just shouldn’t be with some random girl from god knows where.

“Harry!”

Harry’s mind whirls with a violent sea of emotions, tossing and turning within the recesses of his slightly inebriated mind. A haze fogging his thoughts, consuming his senses. On one hand he feels aggressively possessive, seething all-consuming jealousy burning inside him, propelling his desire to march across the dance floor and claim what’s his. But overpowering the jealousy in the most compelling way, what he truly feels is remorse and all consuming guilt. After the past twenty-four hours, Harry knew he had this coming. Deep-down he knew. He knew he was wrong, he knew he pushed Louis too far and now all he can do is sit back and watch painfully as his fiancé has the time of his life pressed up against someone else.

“Styles!”

It is maddening, fucking maddening to witness. Louis wrapped up in her arms, moving together as one, proximity so close that he is completely surrounded in her presence. The thought alone is enough to inspire an envious twitch to rise in Harry’s body. He can’t stand this, he fucking can’t. It should be him. It should be Harry tossing his hands up and dancing the night away with Louis. It should be them grinding away together to the pulsing rhythm of the music encompassing them. It should be them, laughing and joking together, teasing each other about the quality of their dance moves and embarrassing themselves by attempting moves far too advanced for their limited skill level. It should be him. But it’s not and that in itself is Harry’s fault. If he wasn’t so consumed in appearances and approval, if he wasn’t such a coward, he wouldn’t be in this position at all. They would have never gotten to this point. It would be him.

Zayn balls up a wad of napkins and tosses it at Harry’s face from across the table. “Harry!”

Harry shakes his head letting the scrunched ball fall to his lap, snapping out of his trance, blinking his eyes. “Huh? Sorry…what? Did you call me?”

“Yeah…like twenty times!” Zayn shouts, the annoyance on his face turns to concern as he takes in Harry’s appearance. “Are you alright, mate? You don’t look so hot.”

Liam observes Harry’s posture speculatively. “Yeah, you look a little…tense.”

Harry looks down at his clenched fists, small crescents digging into the flesh of his palm. His knuckles are ghost white with tightened strain. “What? I’m fine…yeah…totally great.” Harry forces out a dark chuckle as he throws back his glass. Realizing it’s definitely not enough to calm his nerves, he reaches over to finish Louis’ abandoned glass, finishing it off entirely in one go. “Actually…I think I’m going to order something a little stronger.”
“Uh ok…we are probably going to go dance now anyway.” Zayn responds still eyeing Harry speculatively.

“Yeah…see you around.” Liam says, waving his hand.

Harry leaves the booth without even looking back to acknowledge Liam’s farewell statement, eagerly seeking some sort of liquid relief to drown his sorrows in.

From the dance floor, Louis watches Harry get up from the booth and disappear into the crowd of people near the bar. For a split second, he has the urge to follow him, to talk to him, to just be with him. But why? Harry would have most likely done the exact same thing if the opportunity presented itself. If it was his boss who came up to ask him to dance, he most likely wouldn’t even hesitate, eager and ready to please. Suddenly, Louis doesn’t feel so bad. Actually, at this point he couldn’t care less if he tried.

It was all in good natured fun anyway. More fun than Louis probably would have had if he had stayed with Harry. Maybe he is taking it to far, or maybe he hasn’t taken it far enough. Maybe he’s being petty, maybe they both are, but he’s had a little too much to drink to care. He turns back to Noelle, pushing Harry to the back of his mind, determined to enjoy himself tonight.

Louis and Noelle dance together for a while, bopping around to the best of dance anthems and all-time pop hits, tossing their hands in the air and letting loose. They laugh and joke as Louis attempts to showcase his self-proclaimed hidden talent of dancing. Much to his own amusement he proudly performs every corny dance he can think of including ‘The Sprinkler’, ‘The Hokey-Pokey’ and the slightly modified ‘Moonwalk’. He even does his own rendition of the 

Single Ladies dance when the song plays over the speakers, claiming his version is just as good if not better than Beyoncé’s, even though he knows that his is complete and utter shit. They dance wildly together, making a fool of themselves and earning a few laughs from surrounding club dancers.

After an hour or so Noelle drags Louis back to her table to meet all her friends who came to celebrate her birthday. They sit down and chat for a while, Louis entertaining them with far fetched stories and animated jokes as they throw back drink after drink. Noelle and her friends hang off Louis’ every word, either completely enraptured by him or completely drunk.

“I think this is the most fun I’ve ever had on my birthday.” Noelle laughs, pulling her faintly sweaty hair into a messy bun.


Noelle nods earnestly. “Yes, really! You are quite the dance partner, I must say.”

“I try my best. It’s my one true passion really.” Louis jokes with a teasing grin. “I always knew I had a calling.”

“You’re a natural!” Noelle laughs, touching her hand to his briefly. “But…um…yeah, I mean I never really do much on my birthdays, so this is probably the most memorable one.”

“You’ve never had one of those classic childhood birthdays where everyone gathers round and like…sings to you and you get loads of presents and everything is about you for one day?”

“Nope, I didn’t have much of a childhood to be honest. Kind of sad, but I’ve never really had someone acknowledge my birthday before.”

“What?” Louis asks in utter disbelief, touching a hand to his chest.
“Well, not like…publicly. I mean, people give me warm birthday wishes in passing of course, but it’s never been an actual thing.”

“You mean to tell me that no one has ever openly sung happy birthday to you?!” Louis asks in shock. “Like in your whole life? That is outrageous!”

“I told you I don’t do much for these kinds of things. I wasn’t exaggerating! Looking back, I suppose it would have been a nice childhood memory, but I’m twenty-five now so…oh well I guess.” Noelle shrugs, lifting her martini glass to her lips.

“Well we can’t have that. Not while I’m around at least.” Louis takes a final sip of his glass and begins to get up.

“Wait, where are you going?” Noelle questions, setting down her drink and grabbing his hand.

“You’ll see.” Louis winks, wiggling his fingers free from her grasp as he leaves the table.

Louis determinedly heads to the DJ’s area on the far side of the dance floor near the back of the club. He whispers to the DJ for a few minutes going back and forth in conversation, sliding him a crisp bill. They nod their heads in agreement as the DJ hands Louis a cordless mic.

Louis jogs back to their table with the mic and proceeds to stand on top of the table. “Um...is this thing on?” He taps the mic curiously, causing a loud thumping sound to echo throughout the club. The previous music fades out and the attention of everyone in The Amber is suddenly all on him.

“Right, I guess it is then.”

Noelle looks up at Louis from the table with wide eyes, tugging on his pant leg. “Louis, what the hell are you doing?!”

Louis ignores her calls completely, instead addressing the sea of people before him. “Ok, well today is a special day, it’s my new friend Noelle’s birthday and she has never been recognized for her birthday! Like ever.” Louis schools his face into an overly dramatic pout. “Isn’t that sad? Can I get a little pity for Noelle please?”

The most likely drunk onlookers dramatically make an ‘aww’ sound, offering Noelle their collective sympathies. A few people boisterously shout ‘happy birthday’ from the dance floor.

“Yes, thank you, thank you it’s all very sad, very tragic.” Louis shakes his head, looking distraught. “So I took it upon myself to end this unfortunate trend once and for all. And since it’s the very first time you’ve ever had this happen to you, it has to be special and different to make up for lost time.” Louis looks down at Noelle seated at the table. “I’m a little, you know…drunk so…excuse me. The words may be a little wrong and I may be a little pitchy but…fuck it.”

Louis nods to the DJ and the opening beats of 50 Cent’s In da Club resonate through the booming speakers. Louis shakes out his shoulders, starting to nod his head back and forth finding his rhythm. He shifts his weight from side to side as he brings the mic to his lips. “Go, go, go, go go, go, shawty it's yo’ birthday. We gon’ party like it's yo’ birthday, we gon' sip Bacardi like it's yo' birthday.” Louis raises his free arm in the air, getting into his impromptu birthday performance. “And you know we don't give a fuck cuz it's yo’ birthday.”

“It’s your fucking birthday!” Louis shouts, jumping down from the table as the song continues on, the DJ naturally transitioning the instrumental track into the actual song complete with 50 Cent’s vocals. He grabs Noelle and pulls her back onto the dance floor for a birthday dance in her honor.

Together, Louis and Noelle earn the attention of the surrounding night clubbers as they dance
around enthusiastically to the iconic rap hit. The crowd cheers them on, clapping their hands or joining in on the fun.

When the song ends, the club erupts in loud applause, guests cheering and whistling in celebration of Noelle’s birthday.

“There you go!” Louis chuckles as he leads them off the floor. “Now you can never say you’ve never had a proper birthday.”

“That was amazing Louis!” Noelle gushes, beaming brightly. “Thank you, you really didn’t have to do that.”

“I wanted to.” Louis smiles genuinely. “Always up to embarrass myself, especially for a good cause.”

“Your fiancé is lucky to have you. You’re such a sweet guy. I’ve only known you for a few hours and I’m already basically in love with you.”

Louis laughs out at that, shaking his head. “Mmm…at least someone appreciates my efforts.”

“What does that mean?” Noelle frowns as they sit down at a vacant booth.

Louis meets her eyes contemplatively as if deciding whether or not to tell the truth. “Can I tell you something?”

Noelle nods her head earnestly. “Yes, of course. Anything.”

“Ok, well…Wait, are you here for that Hearst retreat or anything like that?”

Noelle creases her brow. “Um…no, just here for my birthday. Why?”

Louis scrubs his hands over his face, sighing heavily. “So basically it is a very long confusing story and I'll spare you the gruesome details, but my fiancé, Harry, works for Hearst and he brought me here for this big retreat thing, but I'm not here as his fiancé… I'm here as his brother.”

Noelle scrunches her face in confusion. “His brother?”

“His brother. His fucking brother.”

“But…why?”


“And…so…”

“So…it's been a fucking mess since the start and I'm fucking fed up with it. I mean we aren't fighting…or not really…but I don't know exactly…so it's never been like this before. Never. Whenever we have...like an argument or something…we always talk it out…you know, together…like adults…and find a solution. But this time there really is no solution…I mean there is, but Harry refuses to acknowledge it or maybe he's too selfish to realize it.”

Louis sighs deeply, letting all the air out of his lungs. “God, he's my actual best friend, my other half. We tell each other everything. We are that annoyingly happy couple. The one everyone wants to be, that still go out on preplanned dates and spend hours just laughing and teasing each other. We aren’t stuck in a rut…in fact, we have the best sex life. Very healthy.” Louis laughs, smiling fondly before
casting his gaze down. “But now… I don't know…it's weird…”

“He was the one you were with at the table when I met you, wasn’t he?”

Louis chuckles, nodding his head. “How could you tell?”

“Bit possessive isn’t he?” Noelle smirks. “I thought it was kind of strange for him to jump in an answer for you. Now it all makes sense though.”

“To be completely fair, we both kind of have jealous tendencies.” Louis confesses reminiscently, thinking of all the times past when they were mutually desperate for each other’s full attention. “I hope you won’t be offended or anything, but initially I was using you to make him a little jealous. I know it was a petty and selfish thing to do and I’m sorry about that.”

“I can’t even be mad, I would have done the same if I were you.” Noelle giggles. “I am a firm believer in equality or in other words…payback. But how long are you going to be mad at him? You can only snub someone for so long.”

“I don't want to be mad at him. I hate when there is something between us, but at the same time, I'm mad! I'm fucking furious that we are here and I'm being paraded around as the love of my life’s brother. It's degrading and I fucking hate it. I never imagined it would go this far. Actually, I don’t even know what I imagined when I agreed in the first place.” Louis hangs his head in his hands.

“Does he know?”

“Know what?” Louis asks, looking up.

“That you hate it?”

“I don’t know. I think he knows, but at the same time he's so caught up in the prestige of his new job and impressing people. Which I understand, to a degree at least. He's worked hard for this position and he deserves to be recognized, but he's going about it the wrong way. I mean, I will always support him, of course, I love him, I love him so much.” Louis’ voice sounds weak and unsure, as he wrings his hands together. “But there has to be a line right? At some point it becomes less about being supportive and more about being taken advantage of. But I know he would never purposely take advantage of me, he just…I don’t know…”

“You should go talk to him, Louis.”

“But I don’t really want to talk to him, not now at least.” Louis confesses reluctantly, pulling at a loose thread on his jumper.

“Well, you need to. You obviously care. You wouldn’t still be here if you didn’t. I’m sure he appreciates you, sometimes people just get so far gone that they don’t even realize what they are doing or who they are hurting. I’m sure he means well.”

“Mmm.” Louis sighs, shrugging.

“Seriously, talk to him. From what I gather, what you both have in each other is extremely special and rare. You shouldn’t let something like this fester for too long or it could reach the point of regret. I don’t know Harry, but I do know that he’d be bloody crazy to mess things up with you. No one in their right mind would.” Noelle reaches over and clutches Louis’ hand reassuringly.

“Thank you.” Louis smiles softly, touched by her words of encouragement, squeezing her hand back. “Well, I should probably catch up with my group, I sort of abandoned them.”
Noelle nods understandingly. “Right yeah, of course.”

“I hope you enjoyed your birthday Noelle. It was a pleasure to have had this dance. Or dances, I might say.” Louis stands and bows before her theatrically.

Noelle stands to her feet and openly holds out her arms. “Thank you Louis, for everything. I honestly had the best time.”

Louis embraces her, wrapping his arms around her in a tight warm hug. He kisses her cheek before whispering in her ear. “So did I love, so did I. Thank you again. I needed that.” Louis releases her and smiles tenderly, waving as he turns and sets off towards his original table.

After maneuvering through the crowd, Louis makes it back to the table. “Hey lads, how’s your night going?” Louis slides into the wide circular booth on the opposite side of Zayn and Liam who are snuggled up to each other, right where Louis left them hours ago. A little way beside them in the booth, Carly and Niall are going at it, looking like a pair of horny teenagers.

“Pretty good, Li taught me a few new dance moves.” Zayn winks, sneaky grin growing on his face. His eyes are glassy and his face is flushed.

“That I did.” Liam blushes, smiling softly at Zayn with a similar expression. “I have a few more if you’re up to it.”

“Later, later.” Zayn replies, reaching over to stroke Liam’s cheek before turning his attention to Louis. “How about you? Have fun tonight?”

Louis nods his head, grinning. “Loads, yeah. I had a blast!”

“We saw your little birthday serenade. Nicely done.” Liam praises.

“Oh yeah that.” Louis chuckles, shaking his head as he still can’t believe he actually did that. “It wasn’t much of a serenade though, just me yelling really. To be honest, that’s the only part of that song I actually know. And I don’t think the song is even about birthdays.”

“It’s not.” Zayn laughs, lifting the glass in front of him to his lips.

“Figures.” Louis shrugs, chuckling to himself. “So what’s going on with these two?” He asks, pointing at Niall and Carly completely wrapped up in each other.

Liam shakes his head. “I don’t know, they’ve been sucking face since we sat back down, barely even acknowledged us really.”

Louis slides a little further into the booth, far enough to whack Niall over the head with the backside of his hand.

“Oof! What the hell?!” Niall grunts breaking away from Carly reluctantly.

“I thought it was time you came up for air. I’m fond of Carly, I’d hate to see her suffocate.” Louis jokes. “She’s too young to die. Especially not at the merciless hand of an Irishman.”

Niall sighs exasperatedly. “Can’t a guy snog a girl in peace?”

“Oh when it’s in a club! Out in the open! In front of my very tender innocent eyes!” Louis shouts in a flippant manner. “If you don’t want to be disturbed, get a room! It’s too late at night for me to see that, I’ll have nightmares.”
Niall flips Louis off and rolls his eyes. “Oh shut up, what time is it anyway?”

Liam looks down at his watch. “Shit, it’s nearly three a.m.”

Louis closes his eyes and groans. “Oh god, please tell me there is no insanely early event or ridiculous game scheduled at the crack of dawn. I don’t know if I can do that again.”

“Oh right. He seemed kind of distant, like…weird.” Zayn comments, thinking back to a few hours ago.

“Maybe he just had a long day?” Liam offers, giving him the benefit of the doubt.

“Yeah, maybe.” Zayn shrugs.

Niall leans over and whispers to Louis while Zayn and Liam chat amongst themselves. “Mate, last time I saw Harry he looked out of his fucking mind.”

“I guess I should go find him then.” Louis sighs, looking around.

“What do you mean?” Louis frowns, whispering back to Niall.

“He was properly smashed. Like I could barely understand him, he was so fucking wasted. I went to the bar to get another round for Carly and me and he was watching you the whole night. It was kind of creepy and he was rambling on about needing to talk to you and fucking up and I don’t really even know...you should probably talk to him though.”

Louis sighs. “I guess I should go find him then.”

“Looks like you won't have to.” Niall nods his head over to the tipsy figure coming towards them.

“Louuu! Loueehhh!” Harry stumbles over to their booth holding a shot glass in each hand. He downs them both one after the other dropping the empty glasses on the table as he slides in next to Louis. “I found youuu.” Harry sing-songs near Louis’ ear, speech slurred.

“God, your breath smells like straight vodka! Get back, you fucking reek!” Louis complains, completely disturbed.

“Daaance with me!” Harry begs weakly grabbing Louis’ hand and pulling him closer. “Pleaseee, I wanna daaance.”

Louis yanks his hand out of Harry’s grasp. “No, Harry you’re drunk.”

Harry just presses in closer, sliding in further next to Louis in the booth. “Remember that time we went daaancing, but theeen we just ended up…”

Louis slaps a hand over his mouth, stopping any incriminating stories from escaping his lips. Harry giggles softly, swaying back and forth in the booth, totally plastered. He kisses the palm of Louis’ hand still attached to his face, covering his lips.

Surprised, Louis immediately removes his hand looking at Harry speculatively. Harry continues giggling to himself, dimples poking at his cheeks. His eyes are glassy and unfocused, not appearing
to be aware of his surroundings.

Zayn frowns as he watches Harry. “Um…what is he even laughing at?”

“How drunk is he?” Liam questions.

Harry’s giggles turn into almost manic uncontrollable laughter. His hair is tossed wildly atop his head, fly away strands curling around his face. “It’s my fauuult…it’s my fuuucking fauultz.”

“Is he…ok?” Carly asks, her voice etched in concern as she observes Harry’s apparent hysterical breakdown.

“Oh, yeah he’s fine…totally fine. He’s just drunk and probably tired.” Louis reassures even though he is not completely sure if that is true or not. Harry sounds anything but fine.

Harry abruptly ceases his laughter, head snapping up at alarming speeds to meet Louis’ eyes. “’M nooot fine! You’re nooot fine and now we’re nooot fine and it’s all my fauuult! ‘M sooorrry!”

The stark contrast in Harry’s demeanor causes the table to fall silent as they observe Harry’s abnormally behavior.

“What is he sorry for?” Liam asks curiously.

Zayn’s expression morphs into concern. “Are you sure he’s alright?”

Louis shakes his head, trying his best to be convincing. “Yeah it’s nothing…we had a little disagreement earlier…it’s fine, I should probably just get him to bed.”

“’M sooorrry Louis, ‘m sooo sooorrry for everything. I’ll be betteerrr. I’ll be betterrr, I prooomise.” Harry slurs as he leans in closer to Louis. “Forgive me please, I’ll do anything, I swearrr.” Harry drops his head and attaches his lips to Louis’ neck, mouthing at the exposed skin near his collarbone.

Louis inhales sharply in complete shock at the unexpected feeling of Harry’s lips on his flesh. “Uh…it’s ok Harry, I know.” Louis attempts to sound unfazed and keep his voice level, while trying his best to push Harry away from him. Harry just presses harder, the heavy weight of his body overpowering Louis’ smaller frame as he lunges after Louis’ neck, seeking contact.

“Umm…it looks like there is more than just being drunk going on here.” Liam perceives, sounding slightly more alarmed than before.

Liam and Zayn exchange a look before turning back to the shit-show going down in front of their very eyes.

“But youuu left mee for herrr.” Harry pouts, lifting his head from the crook of Louis' neck briefly. “It caaan’t be ok if youuu left. Tell mee it’s ok, Louehhhh. Tell mee we’re ok.” Harry begs desperately, attempting to position himself on Louis’ lap, sliding one of his thighs over Louis’ under the table. His hands disappear under the table as well, exploring Louis’ legs and groping dangerously close to Louis’ crotch.

Niall chokes on his beer as he notices Harry’s leg and hands under the table, dribbling liquid down the sides of his mouth.

“Uh…I don’t think he’s ok.” Zayn comments anxiously.

“He’s just…um… a very touchy feely kind of guy and he gets even worse when he's drunk. Gotta
love him, right?” Louis laughs awkwardly, still attempting to move away from Harry as best as he can. This whole conversation is getting more and more incriminating as the time passes and Louis is completely powerless to stop it.

“Right.” Liam says skeptically, eyes shifty.

“Louehhh, I want yooou.” Harry slurs abandoning the idea of sitting on Louis’ lap, instead resorting to grinding his body against Louis’ side desperately.

Zayn does a double take, head snapping up. “Wait? What does he want?”

“Oh my god!” Niall laughs, covering his mouth in disbelief. “He’s so out of it.”

Louis’ eyes go wide as he realizes what exactly Harry means. He needs to get him away from people immediately before he says something even more reckless. Alcohol mixed with an apparently guilty, needy Harry don’t mix well. He is obviously so far gone, completely and utterly wasted. All of his previous defenses are down, he is a ticking time bomb set to implode. “Yeah…you want me to put you to bed, I know I know, bro. Let’s go, I know you’re tired.” Louis responds, trying for casual as he strains to push Harry out of the booth once more.

Harry shakes his head, adamantly, his eyes going in and out of focus, head rolling around as if he can’t maintain it upright. “’M nooot tiireed. I just waaant-”

“Yes, you are.” Louis interrupts quickly, knowing exactly what Harry was about to say. He wishes he knew how to forcibly make someone pass out. Everything would be so much easier if Harry was just unconscious. At this point he is basically a child with no filter, with no inhibitions. A very needy, horny, completely compromised, fully grown, five-year-old.

“Nooo! That’s nooot it!” Harry whines, still shaking his head stubbornly. “I waaant youuu to show mee that it’s ok.”

Louis is ready to slam a mug over Harry’s head to knock him out and finally get him to shut his mouth. “Harry, I-”

“Fuck me, Louuu.”

Niall’s jaw drops in shock as he looks to Louis, eyes wide. “Shit.” He breathes out.

Zayn’s brow scrunches in earnest confusion. “Did he just…”

Liam nods robotically. “I’m pretty sure he just said-”

“Oh no! I think he just meant…you know like ‘wow fuck me, I’m so smashed!’” Louis mimics animatedly, forcing out a strained, stressed laugh. “Ha ha ha Harry, you and your jokes. Let’s get you to bed. Now.” Louis pinches Harry’s side as hard as he can, forcing him to move out of the booth.

“Ow!” Harry yelps, pouting. “Louuu, that hurrrrt.”

“Let’s go!” Louis hisses, with extreme urgency.

The whole table watches them curiously, confused and disturbed expressions portrayed on their faces. They obviously don’t know what to think, what to make of what they just witnessed.

“Alright…um…so…we’re just gonna…I mean…I’m just gonna…” Louis shoves Harry with such
force that he almost falls onto the floor. Once Harry’s out Louis hops over him and grabs him by his
upper arm yanking him along with him, trying to make a much needed escape. “Yeah…ok…bye
lads…and…uh Carly.”

“See you tomorrow at brunch!” Niall calls, fighting laughter.

As Louis rushes off, he hears Liam in his periphery. “I don’t know if it’s because I’m drunk or
because it’s so late, but there is definitely something off about them…something weird…”

“Yeah…something is definitely not right about them…”

“Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck!” Louis chants to himself as he drags Harry out of the wide doors of The
Amber. “There is no fucking way they believed that!”

Louis briskly leads them outside the club, the fresh air hitting their faces. A stark contrast to the hot
warmth flowing inside the club. “Shit! Fuck me!? Fuck me! Oh my god, you might as well have
started stripping! Better yet, you could have just dropped to your knees and sucked me off right
there!”

“Louewhh wait, I’m dizzzy!” Harry whines tumbling after Louis as he is pulled rapidly by his arm.

“No, shut the fuck up! I’m so done with you, Harry. How can you be this drunk?! No more alcohol
for you! No more! Fucking none! This is second time your irresponsible drunk ass has gotten us in
trouble. You’re the horniest drunk of all time! How much did you drink!?”

Harry hiccups, giggles threatening to overtake him once again as he sways unsteadily. “I dunnooo.”

“You don’t fucking know how fucking much you fucking drank!” Louis yells, letting go of Harry’s
arm in order to wave his wildly in the air.

“Don’t yeeell at me…it huuurts my feeelings…I caaan’t remember…I just…and youuu just…”

Louis frowns at Harry, exasperated beyond belief. “I just what!?”

“Youuu just left and…youuu were…and sheee…and then I…” Harry trails off, expression confused
looking as if he doesn’t even know where he is or who is. The effects of his previous exhibitions and
alcohol themed endeavors gradually taking over his mind.

“What the fuck!”

“It’s bluuury…I felt awwwwful…I deserved it…’m sooorry…” Harry rambles, his mind a jumbled
mess of alcohol induced emotion.

“Yeah ok, I get it, you’re sorry, whatever. That doesn’t change anything. You threw yourself a pity
party for what Harry? Because I danced with some girl? Seriously? You drank yourself into the void
and now you’re so beyond hammered you can’t even keep up with the lie you started in the first
place! I can’t fucking believe this shit!” Louis glares at Harry who is once again swaying side to side,
head hanging low, looking completely and utterly out of it. His mind is god knows where at this
point. “I’m not covering for your ass tomorrow. I fucking refuse. If they ask questions, so be it. So
fucking be it…Are you even listening to me?”

Harry snaps his head up to Louis as his eyes go insanely wide, practically bugging out of his head.
He makes a queasy expression, opening his mouth to respond before emptying the contents of his
stomach on the pavement beneath Louis’ shoes.
“Oh, well that’s fucking great. That is so so fucking fantastic. Bravo Harry. Truly, you have outdone yourself.” Louis shakes his head, clapping his hands sarcastically.

Harry groans and wipes his mouth with the back of his hand. Remnants of his expulsion stuck to the stray strands of his long hair. He leans over, hands on his knees and breathes deeply, trying to steady himself as his body constantly rocks to and fro.

Louis can’t even begin to describe the agitation he feels pulsing through his veins threatening to consume his entire body in blind rage. Harry did this all by himself to his fucking self and now he just expects Louis to what? Carry his drunk ass to their suite? Clean him up and tuck him into bed and read him a fucking bedtime story? This whole weekend Harry has relied on Louis for every single thing. For every mishap, for every wrong turn, for every mess, Louis has been right there to clean it up.

Louis rubs his palms over his eyes with heavy force, willing the situation to change, willing anything to change. “You know what? No. Just no. Fuck this. Good luck finding your way back.” Louis spins on his heel and begins to determinedly walk away.

After a few steps Louis stops and looks back at Harry, his pitiful drunk fiancé hunched over and kneeling near a pile of his own spew. He looks absolutely pathetic and completely confused and Louis feels a twinge of compassion for him, a slight pang of sympathy. But not enough, not nearly enough. Harry has to learn; he needs to learn. Maybe a little tough love will wake him up and jolt him back to reality.

“Good night, Harry.”
ohhh snapppp we are more or less half way through! thats crazy haha anyway THANK YOU for all of your support through comments/kudos/bookmarks/messages/ect ect..all i can do is scream haha :) 

well if i had to title this chapter (which thankfully i don't) i would most likely dub it to be something like "circles..we're going in circles..." yeah that about sums it up sooo i hope you enjoy it! :)))

Chapter 7

Louis’ phone alarm wakes him up at a quarter till ten, the loud incessant tones sounding through the previously silent suite. He blindly stretches out his arm, reaching across his bed in an attempt to silence his ringing phone.

“God, it can’t be time already, please no.” Louis groans, eyes shut, still unable to locate his vibrating phone. “Ugh, fuck!”

When he still can’t find the source of the noisy alarm, he reluctantly rolls over, and sits up. He opens his eyes slowly, adjusting to his surroundings as he successfully locates his phone.

Louis unlocks his iPhone, silencing it completely before extending his arms out in front of him and yawning. It feels like he only slept for five minutes; his body feels heavy and lagging. Louis feels not only physically drained, but emotionally drained.

Louis forces himself out of the warm bed, standing to his feet and stretching once more, reaching his arms above his head and flexing his toes. He looks over to the adjacent bed and sees a passed out figure draped over the entire bed, face down, limbs splayed out in all directions.

“Oh look...he made it.” Louis grumbles to himself, as he observes Harry’s lifeless body. “Hooray.”

Harry is sprawled out on top of the mattress, still dressed in his clothes from last night. His floral shirt is almost completely off, almost as if he was in the process taking it off and then just passed out or gave up. His hair is a matted web, curls twisting and knotting in a disheveled halo around his head.

Louis stares at him for a moment, he would be lying if he said that he wasn’t the least bit concerned about Harry and his whereabouts of the previous night. After he left Harry in front of the club, he felt particularly uneasy. It was a brash decision to leave him there alone, one he doesn’t think he would repeat if he had to do it all over again. He had tossed and turned for most of the night until pure exhaustion kicked in, overtaking him into a deep sleep. He had almost gone out to find Harry. Almost.

After a few hours had passed and still no sign of him, he was basically hopping out of bed, throwing on his shoes, ready to report and describe a missing person. But after much internal debate, he
decided to stick to his resolve and wait it out. Luckily, Harry made it back somehow. Who knows how he would actually react if he woke up and found that Harry was still not back.

Louis heads to the bathroom and takes a long refreshing shower, scrubbing off the grime he was too tired wash to off last night. When he steps out of the bathroom about a half hour later, wrapped in a soft white towel, he finds Harry still completely knocked out, sleeping form still unmoving. Louis will have to wake him up soon, which judging by the looks of things, will not be an easy task. Harry looks like the actual dead and they have to be at brunch in less than an hour.

“He’ll probably have a headache from hell.” Louis huffs to himself, looking to Harry again and thinking about how much he probably drank the night before.

Louis sighs reluctantly, throwing on a soft grey t-shirt and black jeans and heading out the suite door. He takes the elevator down to the lobby and approaches the front desk where he is greeted by the ever cheerful, always pleasant, Kip.

“Hello sir!” Kip beams from behind the receptionist desk, bright eyed and wide awake. “What can I do for you this beautiful morning?”

“Hi Kip…um where do you think I could find some aspirin or Panadol? Just some kind of pain reliever. Extra strong.”

“Oh! I have some Panadol tablets here if you need them. How many would you like?”

“Mmm…I don’t know exactly.” Louis replies, considering the severity of Harry’s hangover. “Can I just get a whole packet?”

“Of course, sir! One moment.” Kip turns and goes to a side section of the front desk, digging through a series of cabinets. He locates the medication and returns with a whole packet of white tablets. “Here we are! Is there anything else I can help you with?”

“Thank you, Kip.” Louis takes the offered packet, shoving it in his back pocket. “Um…well...” He sighs, deliberating to himself while chewing on his bottom lip. “Do you know where I can get one of those…fruit things?”

“Fruit things, sir?” Kip asks in confusion, brow furrowed.

“You know…like the green…healthy…fruit…smoothie…shit.” Louis tries, stammering out all the words he can think of to describe it.

“Oh!” Kip jumps excitedly. “You mean like pure pressed juice? Yes! The juice bar is near the gym!”

“The gym…” Louis remembers, clapping his hands in realization. “That’s where he said he got it from, right!”

“Yeah, so if you go out the side entrance,” Kip extends his hand and points indicating the direction, “make a left and just go straight, you can’t miss it!”

“Ok, thank you Kip. Always so helpful.” Louis smiles in appreciation.

“My pleasure!” Kip nods his head in a slight bow. “I hope you have enjoyed your stay so far!”

“Oh…It’s been a one of a kind experience…that’s for sure.” Louis waves as he turns on his heel. Louis sets off towards the juice bar, following Kip’s directions until he arrives at a brightly colored
“Good morning,” the barista greets behind the long counter, “what can I make for you today?”

Louis squints at the menu written in bright bold chalk on a black board hopelessly, absolutely lost. There are produce ingredients listed that he has honestly never even heard of. What the fuck is ginseng or moringa or carambola? Are those fruits? Herbs maybe? The whole menu might as well be written in Latin, it would make the same amount of sense. “Um…I’ll get…” All the various juice recipes and combinations blend together in Louis’ mind each one of them screaming the same two things…nasty and healthy.

The barista looks to Louis expectantly, waiting for him to place his order.

“Ok…I’m sorry…I’ll just be honest…I have no idea what any of this means. I just need something that’s um…green…and has healthy things in it…like…leaves?”

The barista laughs in surprise. “That’s alright, it can take some getting used to I suppose. By leaves do you mean kale or Swiss chard or spinach?”

“All of the above?” Louis answers, unsure of what the difference actually is. “I really don’t know, it’s not for me. How about something green…that’s also good for hangovers?”

“Well this blend,” the barista points to a recipe on the chalkboard, “is really popular. It combines most of the ‘leaves’ as you put it and some essential fruits of course. I’d say it’s a pretty good hangover cure, especially with the ginger and turmeric.”

Louis looks over the juice ingredients nodding his head. “Yeah that sounds familiar enough I guess…I’ll have that.” He decides finally. “Oh can you add like…an energy boost thing to it?”

“Yep! An Acai boost?”

Louis frowns, genuinely bewildered. “Um…sure?”

“Ok I’ll have that ready for you in a few.” The barista throws a mirage of produce and ingredients into a large platinum juicer and after a few minutes produces a lidded plastic cup filled to the brim with a thick green liquid. “Here you go!”

“Oh that’s definitely it.” Louis pulls a disgusted face as he recognizes the mixture, taking the cup in his hand. “Thank you!”

Louis takes his bounty back to the suite. Upon entry into the room, he finds Harry exactly where he left him, spread out over the bed. Louis sets the juice on the bedside table and pops a few Panadol tablets to set next to it.

Brunch starts in a little less than twenty minutes, so Harry needs to get up. Who knows when he would naturally wake up. Probably never, Louis assumes.

“Harry.” Louis calls flatly, using one finger to poke Harry’s shoulder. “Get up.”

Harry’s body twitches slightly, but he doesn’t wake, his back rising and falling with deep breaths.

“Harry, come on we have to go.” Louis urges, tone sharp as he uses one full hand to shake Harry back and forth.

Harry groans, wiggling his body but still not getting up. He burrows his face further into the soft
“Harry! Get your ass up!” Louis shakes Harry’s whole body with both hands not ceasing until Harry starts to slowly respond.

At first, only unintelligible noises come out of Harry’s mouth, a low mumbling of incoherent sounds. He flips over onto his back sluggishly and props himself up by his elbows, squinting at Louis sleepily. Chunks of his hair are stuck to the side of his face, other pieces are sticking up in all directions from his head. His skin is pasty, with imprints from his pillow marring his face. Heavy bags hang darkly under his red rimmed eyes.

Louis observes his appearance, face scrunching in abhorrence. “You look like hell.”

“I feel like hell.” Harry croaks, lifting one of his hands to his matted, tangled hair. He scratches his head and yawns. “Why is my hair…damp?”

“You tell me.” Louis shrugs looking over Harry’s body. It isn’t just his hair that was wet, Louis notices now that he mentioned it. It is his whole body. Even the sheets beneath him are slightly damp, having absorbed some of the water his clothes were previously carrying.

“God, what happened last night?” Harry groans, his expression indicating that he has no recollection of his exploits of the night previous.

“You don’t remember?”

Harry squeezes his eyes tightly shut, trying to remember but actually looking more or less in pain. “Um…I remember going out…to the club…and you…dancing. And then I remember feeling like shit and drowning in shots and…that’s about it really.”

Louis stares at him for a few beats and then bursts into uncontrollable laughter. “You don’t remember! Oh this is too rich! Aren’t you in for a lovely treat!”

“What do you mean?” Harry asks in a creaky voice, rubbing his eyes.

Louis smirks, the corners of his lips twisting upwards deviously. “Let’s just say there might be a few…questions at brunch this morning.”

“Questions? What kind of questions? Like about me? Or...About us?”

“Mmm…we shall see, won’t we?” Louis states still smirking. “But I have the uttermost faith in your abilities.”

“My abilities?”

“Your abilities to cause absolute chaos and fuck everything up.” Louis responds candidly.

“Louis, just tell me what happened.”

“No, I’d rather not actually. You’ll see for yourself I’m sure.”

“See what for myself?”

“All will be revealed in due time. And when it comes back to bite you in the ass, I won’t say a word. It’s all you bro, it’s all you this time.”

“Louis, what are you talking about?” Harry sighs exasperatedly and rubs his temples to soothe the
incessant throbbing of his head. “I’m so confused and my head fucking hurts and you’re talking so loud and so fast and none of it makes sense.”

“You’re only hope is that maybe they were even half as drunk as you were and possibly won’t remember as well.” Louis continues on undeterred.

“Remember what as well!?” Harry whines, looking up at Louis from the edge of the bed like a small lost child.

“That’s for me to know and you to find out, buttercup.” Louis bops Harry lightly on the nose, smiling patronizingly.

Harry frowns petulantly and touches his nose. “Is this some sort of payback? You can’t still be mad at me.”

“Payback’s a bitch isn’t it and judging by your appearance, so are hangovers.” Louis smirks, nodding his head towards the mop of disheveled hair standing wildly on Harry’s head. “I got you a green juice thing and some tablets for your headache. Drink up, another beautiful day in hell awaits us.”

Harry glances at the bedside table and reaches over to grab the clear plastic cup. He throws back two tablets and washes them down with a long sip of his fresh juice. “Thank you.” Harry smiles weakly at Louis, the straw from the cup resting in the corner of his mouth.

“Yeah whatever, it doesn’t change anything.”

“Louis, will you please just talk to me? I don’t know what I said or what I did last night but-”

“We aren’t doing this now.” Louis interjects firmly.

“But how can you be mad at me for something I don’t remember doing?”

“Because you did it. Regardless of your memory, it still happened. And that’s not the only thing I’m upset with you for and you should definitely remember that.” Louis walks around the suite, picking up random things he needs. He grabs a jean jacket and stuffs his phone and keys into its inner pockets. “Well, I don’t want to be late, and I’m bloody hungry, so I’m going to head down. See you later, I guess.”

Louis dashes out of the suite pretending not to hear Harry calling after him. He will deal with that later, on a full stomach. He could not be more excited for brunch, anything to relieve his low blood sugar induced headache.

Louis weaves his way through the resort, nodding politely at a few familiar faces along the way. He arrives at a long window-paned corridor leading out to a gorgeous picturesque garden.

The brunch is being held outdoors on a decadent sunlit terrace alongside the beautiful botanical gardens of The Grove. White tables and chairs are arranged around a stunning marble fountain erected in the center of the terrace. The self-serve full course buffet lies around the outskirts of the open space; dishes and delicacies, pastries and treats of all sorts are elegantly presented on silver platters and sparkling salvers.

Louis is just about to step out onto the sundrenched terrace, when he hears his name being called from the long corridor behind him.

“Louis, wait up!”
Louis spins around and much to his amusement is met with Niall closing the space between them as he jogs to catch up. “Hello there, boyo!”

“Hey...hi,” Niall huffs out, trying to catch his breath, “where did you disappear to last night?”

“Um, my room...to sleep...you know, a typical thing most people do every night...” Louis answers as if it’s the most obvious thing in the world.

“Well, don’t you think you may have forgotten something?” Niall asks, falling into step with Louis as they walk outside.

Louis places a finger to his chin, looking up in exaggerated confusion. “I don’t recall...”

Niall stops in his tracks and at looks him dead in the eye. “Louis.”

“Yes, Niall?” Louis inquires sweetly, beaming at him as he also stops walking.

“Don’t ‘yes Niall’ me! You left your fucking pissed out of his mind fiancé! By himself! In the wee hours! Outside a fucking club!” Niall bellows, annoyance and irritation drenched in his tone.

“Ohh...so you’re the one who found him and brought him back. Not surprising...I knew he couldn’t have done it on his own.” Louis shrugs his shoulders and starts walking towards the serving area.

Niall doesn’t need to know that he is actually so incredibly thankful that he found him. He is in no mood to boost Niall’s ego and damage his own pride.

Niall speeds to catch up with him placing himself in front of Louis’ path. “Louis, are you serious?”

“What?” Louis asks, stepping around Niall in order to reach the first serving table. He picks up a large white ceramic plate out of the high stack at the front of the buffet line.

“Fuck Louis!” Niall yells exasperatedly. “Last night after you left, Carly and I decided to walk back to the main hotel suites instead of take the shuttles...you know because we wanted to...well...never mind...that’s not important.” Niall waves his hands madly as if to clear his thoughts. “Anyway, we apparently weren’t the only ones who decided to take the scenic route back because as we were walking past the pool area we heard these...like...odd noises that kinda sounded like...singing?”

“Singing?” Louis arranges two strips of bacon neatly on his plate and moves on to eggs. “Wait, hold that thought...Eggs Benedict or scrambled? Oh! And they have omelets! Should I go for the omelet?”

“Um...omelet I guess...I don’t know...who cares?!” Niall waves him off. “Now can I finish please? This is important!”

“Alright, alright. Geez. Continue with your story.” Louis says, picking up the serving spatula.

“God, thank you!” Niall snaps. “Ok, so... It was familiar, almost recognizable, but really muffled. So we decided to get a closer look and thank fuck we did because Harry, your fucking
fiancé, was fucking in the pool, fucking fully clothed, fucking singing to his fucking self!” Niall shouts, his movements getting so excited that he almost drops his plate.

“Would you like to say ‘fucking’ one more time for good measure? Or maybe a little louder, why don’t you? I’m sure all these lovely people would enjoy another string of profanities to go along with their Sunday brunch.” Louis gestures to the many guests lingering around them, chatting and eating contentedly.

“I couldn’t fucking care less!” Niall looks around and rolls his eyes. “Listen to me. Harry was fully clothed in a pool. Like somehow he had stumbled around the resort, found the pool and decided it would be a good idea to just jump in as is, clothes and all. Well…he did manage to somehow take off his shoes and his phone, wallet and keys were stuffed inside them. Why does he remember such random shit when he's drunk? He makes no sense. Only he would remember to do stuff like that while being completely wasted. But the point is…he was in the pool, Louis. He was in the pool, singing. By himself.”

“What was he singing?” Louis asks, eyeing a stack of savory cheese filled crêpes.

“Why are you so caught up in the fucking singing?! That's not even fucking important! I said he was in the goddamn pool! In a large body of water! Drunk and out of his fucking mind! He could have drowned, Louis! He honest to god could have giggled his way underwater and drowned!” Niall waves a silver serving spoon in the air, wagging it at Louis. “If we hadn’t gotten there when we did, who knows what we would have found! He could have been passed out dead in the water! He was up to his chest when we found him and his head was just resting on the side of the pool while he sang absolute gibberish. Any slight movement, even a hiccup, and he probably would have sunk to the bottom of the pool!”

Louis says nothing but pauses his movements, his face twisting into worry. Guilt flashes though his eyes as his mind runs rampant with the startling possibility that his fiancé could have drowned unknowingly.

“When we pulled him out he kept alternating between singing and rambling and laughing incessantly.” Niall continues, heaping a steaming pile of eggs on his plate. “The only coherent thing that came out of his mouth was when he asked where you were, which he did basically every other minute.”

Louis opens his mouth to respond but no words come out. His mind on a constant loop of the same four words. Harry could have drowned. Harry could have drowned. Harry could have drowned.

“Louis, he really could have hurt himself.” Niall scolds seriously. “If not at the pool, then somewhere else. This resort is fucking huge, it's a good thing I found him. I get that you're mad at him and I get that he's been a fucking pain, but you shouldn't have left him alone like that.”

Louis snaps out of his daze, shaking himself out mildly. “Well…he…made it out…fine.” Louis stammers out, his mouth suddenly very dry. Inside, Louis is actually on fire. What if something had actually happened to him? He knew Harry was vulnerable and a danger to himself, but he left him anyways.

“Yeah, no thanks to you.” Niall jabs, scooping messy portions of potato hash on his plate.

“I'm not his babysitter! I'm not a fucking nanny, Niall!” Louis retorts defiantly, taking a sharp dip in emotions. He knows he was wrong, but his original reason for acting out in the first place remains the same. He is supposed to be the victim in all this, not Harry. No, leaving Harry alone probably
wasn’t the best way to express his frustrations and yes, he is undoubtedly relieved that nothing horrid happened to him, of course, but that has no effect on everything else that has happened.

“Yeah but-”

Louis rudely cuts Niall off, continuing on with his rant. “Did someone make him guzzle five-hundred shots? Did anyone forcibly pour alcohol down his throat? No! He did that all by himself knowing he was already emotional and in a public place. He knew the risks and did it anyway.”

“Ok, all those things are true, but I still think you should have cut him a little slack. Or at least made sure he made it back safely. You left him completely alone.” Niall states as he drops a few pieces of bacon on his plate. “How did Harry react this morning?”

“He didn’t react. He doesn’t know…he doesn’t even remember.” Louis turns away from Niall and moves on to the next buffet table.

“Wait, what?” Niall questions, looking at Louis in shock, his hand hovering over the French toast. He drops a slice on his plate and hurries to catch up with Louis. “He doesn’t remember anything?”

“Not a thing.”

“And you didn’t tell him?” Niall presses in disbelief.

“Why the fuck would I do that?”

“Oh, I don’t know…maybe because he said he wanted to fuck you in front of a group of people who still believe you’re brothers! That’s kind of something you would want a heads-up on!”

“Well, no one told him to drink himself into the void. He always gets reckless when he drinks too much. And it’s always a million times worse if he feels guilty for something.”

“Is he guilty?”

“Apparently.” Louis half shrugs as he picks up a croissant. “I mean, you saw him last night. He kept apologizing or whatever, but I deserve more than a half-assed drunk apology. He should feel guilty…it’s is his fault…we wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for him so…”

“Ok yeah, but you did kind of provoke him with all that dancing you did with that random girl. You were with her the whole night, Lou.” Niall points out, placing a few fritters on his plate.

“Me dancing with a really sweet girl for her birthday is no where near what he has been doing.” Louis protests. “Niall come on, you’ve seen all I’ve done for him, all I keep doing for him. Enough is enough.”

“You’re not really doing much for him now. I mean, you left him, first of all, and now you’re not even going to at least tell him what he said last night so he can mentally prepare himself for the shitstorm he’s about to face. I’m pretty sure Liam and Zayn remember, so it it’s bound to come up.”

“Well, maybe it’s time he told them the truth. I mean, who the fuck cares anyway. If he’s so pressed about it he should just come clean to them at least.”

“If I were Harry, I’d much sooner tell Zayn over Liam. Liam tends to have a big mouth and he’s pretty well known in the company. Plus, he’s a bit of a suck up, so it probably wouldn’t stay a secret between us for long.”
“It doesn’t even matter, Harry would never come clean anyway. He would rather torture himself and me and continue living in a web of lies, than just own up to the simple truth. Which is so beyond me.”

“So you’re not going to help him? At all?”

“His lie, his problem.” Louis shrugs. “Harry’s a big boy, he’s got it.” Louis plops a scone on top of his overfilled plate and turns to go find a table.

“Wait, but…Louis!”

Louis disregards Niall’s calls, instead carrying his plate to the table nearest to the fountain, were he sees Liam and Zayn are already eating.

“Morning boys.” Louis greets as he approaches the large round table. Each place setting features fresh silverware along with a filled water glass and a flute filled with orange bubbling liquid, a small powdered berry poised on the brim.

“Hiya Lou!” Zayn looks up from the sausage he is cutting and smiles genuinely.

“Hey Louis, hey Niall.” Liam waves as Niall comes up behind Louis.

They take their seats at the table, setting their plates down before them on the pristine white tablecloth.

“Is Harry coming?” Liam asks looking around curiously.

“Supposedly.” Louis responds offhandedly as if completely uninterested in Harry’s whereabouts.

“He must have had a rough morning after last night…” Liam trails off, his statement open ended.

“I wouldn't know…I wasn't with him.” Louis informs, picking up his fork.

Liam frowns in bewilderment. “Oh, but you left together, didn’t you?”

“We went our separate ways, he had other plans. You'd have to ask him.” Louis answers, stabbing a chunk of potato with his fork.

Niall gives Louis a judgmental look, kicking him with his foot under the table.

“Hmm.” Liam hums returning his attention to the stack of pancakes on his plate.

“So…these fritter things are bloody amazing.” Niall says changing the subject and swirling his fork in the air. “I think the dish name card said Courgette Fritters or something like that. I have no idea what that means, but I do know that these are life changing!”

“Oh, I didn’t see those. Are they sweet?”

“It’s kinda like a baby pancake.” Niall describes, food stuffed in his mouth. “They have some that are savory and some that are sweet. This one is banana.”

“Mmm… I like the crab bruschetta and the prosciutto-wrapped breadsticks.” Zayn comments, nibbling on a breadstick. “I’m not really feeling the sweet dishes today. I’m really just want salty things.”

Niall opens his mouth most likely to make a snarky joke about Zayn’s craving for salt but Zayn cuts
him off with a sharp eye and a stern tone. “Don’t you fucking dare.”

Louis sips on his mimosa and smiles behind the glass, raising his eyebrows. “Well…maybe Liam can help you fix your…salty craving.”

Niall busts up laughing, while Liam slowly changes shades, ripening to a bright red.

“Oh, sod off Louis! I knew it was coming the moment I said it.” Zayn admits, running his hand through his dark hair. “It was a poor choice of words.”

“Ah Zayn, don’t be salty.” Louis comforts, smirking. “Cravings are natural.”

Zayn shakes his head, a small smile on his lips. “And to think I truly believed we were becoming mates…”

Louis grins, lowering his glass to the table. “We are! The best of mates! I only tease people I like, so consider yourself highly favored.”

“Lucky me then.” Zayn remarks, chuckling to himself.

They continue to eat their breakfast, silverware clinking, dishes clattering as they enjoy their food. They engage in small talk in between bites, commenting on the food and sharing random tidbits and stupid jokes.

After about a half hour passes, Harry emerges from the dead, stepping out onto the terrace, wet, freshly washed hair twisted into a messy bun. Black sunglasses rest on his nose, hiding the dark circles lining his eyes. His movements are slow and lagging, almost as if he isn’t fully awake, just dragging on, step by step. Harry completely bypasses the buffet, instead picking up a banana from the fruit basket at the end of the row and heading towards their table.

“Uh…hi.” Harry waves timidly, sitting down in the open seat between Liam and Niall.

“Good morning, Harry. Glad to see you’ve joined us.” Liam says genuinely, placing friendly hand on his shoulder. “How are you, mate?”

“I’m…alright…I guess.” Harry replies slowly.

“Is that all you want to eat?” Zayn asks, eyeing the single banana in Harry’s grasp.

“You’ve gotta have more than that! The food is fucking mind-blowing. They have four different types of eggs! And a ton of other things, of course. I’m about to go for round two, actually.” Niall enthuses, picking up a blueberry scone and biting into it.

Harry winces behind his sunglasses at the sight of so much food. “I’m not really…hungry.”

“Bad hangover?”

“Just a bit of a headache.” Harry lies knowing fully well that his whole body is burning. The only reason he made it this far is thanks to the almighty power of the fresh juice Louis brought him mixed with the sweet relief of the pain relievers. He otherwise wouldn’t even be sitting upright.

“Mate, you were so wasted last night.” Zayn laughs, biting into another breadstick.

“I was?” Harry asks curiously. He figures he must have been pretty far gone to wake up feeling this shitty.
“Yeah, I don’t think you knew where you were…or even who you were… you were all over Louis though.” Zayn states, reaching for his glass of water.

“What?” Harry squawks, his voice cracking as panic starts to rise in his tone.

“We didn’t think you were ok because you kept rambling about how sorry you were and…” Liam trails off, thinking for a moment. “Um…yeah and you wanted…Louis…for something…badly. I never seen someone so needy for their…brother…”

“Ohh…um well I…I mean we…uh…” Harry turns an alarmingly bright shade of red as he looks to Louis expectantly, eyes widening.

Louis remains completely silent, instead extremely interested in the garlic potatoes on his plate. Harry gapes at him, mouth opening and closing but no words forming, totally at a loss.

“He’s always like that!” Niall jumps to his rescue, glancing at a struggling Harry. “He’s always been the absolute worst drunk. Back at uni he was fucking wild, a complete mess really. I swear he’d get it on with a street pole if he got too wasted or even accidentally hit on his own mum. Nothing is off limits. He’s the literal definition of a blind drunk.”

Louis face goes sour at the thought, expression twisting in utter disturbance. The lengths that this whole ordeal is going to, is truly unbelievable. As if Harry allegedly hitting on his brother was not enough, Niall just threw his own innocent mum in the mix. Lovely. Such a high class family.

“Really?” Liam gasps, clutching his chest. “That’s horrifying!”

“Um…guilty?” Harry answers awkwardly, still not completely understanding what is going on. “I’m a horrible drunk…it’s embarrassing to be honest.”

“Back in his younger days, he was a real light weight. Shockingly even worse than he is now. Louis and I would spike his morning tea or coffee just to get him drunk so we could have ourselves a good laugh. It never took much and he would get so needy and desperate. It was honestly the best entertainment!” Niall laughs. “You remember that, Lou?”

Louis hardly cracks a smile, not wanting to help Harry in even the slightest way, especially not with more useless lies. “Yeah. Such fun times those were.” Louis deadpans, as he lifts his mimosa and guzzles the sparkling liquid down.

Zayn looks to Louis speculatively, taking in his closed off body language and dead tone, but remains silent.

“The best of times!” Niall exclaims, a bit too excitedly.

“Yeah.” Harry agrees, blindly going along with everything Niall says, not really having the slightest clue about what it all really means.

“Sounds dangerous mate…having no control like that.” Liam states, expression still perplexed.

“You have no idea.” Harry sighs, shaking his head.

“Well, you were definitely upset about something…that’s for sure.” Liam presses, as he looks between Louis and Harry. “Have you two worked it out?”

Louis stares blankly at Harry, waiting for him to respond.
“Um…” Harry starts.

“Honestly, Harry has such a big heart and a heavy conscience, so the smallest things bother him.” Niall explains. “He probably doesn't even know what they were fighting about because it was so minor.”

“Uh…yeah, but if there is something… I’m sure we’ll fix it… eventually.” Harry claims, meeting Louis’ eyes earnestly. They really really need to talk. It’s obviously not a minor ordeal anymore.

“Family first.” Niall adds with a wink.

“Mmm… So where’d you go last night?” Zayn inquires, peering at Harry inquisitively.

“Go?” Harry questions, not remembering going anywhere but to The Amber.

“Yeah you and Louis left, but Louis said he doesn’t know where you went after that.” Liam clarifies, lifting his water glass.

Harry looks between Louis and Niall hopelessly and then casts his gaze to the heavens for guidance. He has no idea what the fuck happened last night. “Oh… um… I went to… well I mean… I was…” Harry stammers, trying to stall for time, but not really knowing what he is stalling for. It’s not like he has an answer. Who knows where he was last night.

“He was with me.” Niall speaks up again, dedicated to keeping his friend afloat despite his lack of memory. “Uh… after I said goodnight to Carly… I met up with Harry to um… talk.”

Liam laughs openly at that. “You were actually able to talk to him like that? No offense Harry, but you were so far gone!”

Niall forces a breathy chuckle. “Shit no, he was useless. I just wanted someone to… um talk to… about uh… my feelings for Carly… so… yeah… He was a great… listener.” Niall lies, not as fast on his feet as Louis would have been, but still pulling the idea together somewhat. He can only come up with so many excuses at one time.

Harry nods his head robotically. “Yes. I’m a great drunk listener.”

“Yeah he’s great… he just listens and… nods… yeah. Always helps me work through my shit.” Niall remarks, stuffing his last piece of blueberry scone in his mouth as an excuse to stop talking.

“Well, that’s good… I suppose. We all need a listening friend.” Liam tries. “Even if that friend… is too drunk to actually do any listening… again no offense, Harry.”

“None taken.” Harry sighs.

Louis bites his tongue, stopping himself from laughing. Liam is definitely not believing this bullshit charade anymore.

“Well, I’m off to get a second plate.” Niall states, hopping out of his chair and bounding towards the buffet tables.

Just as Niall leaves, a group of people stop by Liam’s side of the table, most likely colleagues of his. Liam turns to greet them, Zayn turning as well in his seat to engage in conversation.

Louis starts to go back to working on finishing his plate when his phone buzzes in his pocket. He slides it out and sees a text message from Harry.
can we talk?

Louis rolls his eyes and silences his phone, placing it in his lap. He picks up his fork and knife, slicing through his cheesy omelet.

Harry stares at Louis from across the table expectantly before typing out another message.

louis?

Louis continues to slice his food into neat little cuts, pushing them around on his plate, taking bites every so often.

After no reply, Harry audibly grunts and bits his lip as he types out yet another message.

i can literally see you ignoring my messages…

Louis looks down in his lap at the message and sighs, rolling his eyes again. He types out a response with one hand under the table.

im eating.

Harry responds almost instantly, only a few seconds passing.

ok, after?

Louis glances over at Liam and Zayn who are still conversing with a group of elderly gentlemen, their backs turned from the table. Louis lifts his phone and thumbs out a single word to send to Harry.

why?

Harry looks up when he reads Louis message, throwing his hands in the air and casting him an obvious, incredulous look indicating that he can’t believe Louis just asked that.

lou…you know why…

Louis smirks and exaggeratedly shrugs his shoulders, tilting his head to the side as he looks at Harry. He decides to continue playing dumb, typing out a swift reply.

i don’t…

“"I don’t know how, but I somehow missed the pastry section the first time ‘round!” Niall exclaims as he settles back in his seat with a new freshly piled plate. “Look at this boysenberry cheese Danish! It’s a beaut!”

“I prefer scones to Danishes. But I do agree, it does look really good.” Louis comments, as he feels his phone vibrate in his lap again. “I should try it.”

baby please :/

Louis raises his eyebrows teasingly as he reads Harry’s newest message.

whippin out the pet names now I see…my oh my whats the occasion?

Harry sighs loudly, earning a curious glance from Niall who has been watching the exchange since he sat back down at the table. He has a Danish dangling from his teeth as his eyes jump back and
forth from Louis to Harry.

*please talk to me.*

Harry sends the message and looks at Louis through the dark tints of his glasses, attempting to bore holes in Louis skin silently until he acknowledges him.

Feeling all the extra attention in his direction, Louis looks up from the croissant he is buttering and exasperatedly frowns at Harry. He sets the croissant back on the plate, picking up his phone in his lap, tapping out a reply.

*stop staring at me.*

Harry breaks his visual assault on Louis to read the message on his screen. He doesn’t even bother with a reply, instead returning to staring at Louis incessantly.

Louis takes a bite of his croissant and instantly feels uneasy, yet again. He glances up through his eyelashes and squints at Harry. All he wants is to eat undisturbed and unbothered, but at this rate he never will with Harry and his stupid mind games.

Louis bitterly types another message to Harry.

*...still. fucking. staring.*

Harry refuses to stop, he can keep this up all day. The sunglasses giving him a much needed advantage as he continues to glare at Louis. He will stare him down until Louis finally gives up and agrees. They need to talk. Seriously talk. It is well overdue.

*fine! lets just get this over with so i can eat in peace goddammit*

Louis drops his knife onto his plate noisily along with the croissant and scoots back in his chair. “Excuse me lads, I’m just going to head to the loo.” Louis announces, standing up abruptly and turning away from the table.

Harry doesn’t miss a single beat. “I’ll join you.” Liam and Zayn turn back towards the table as Harry flies out of his seat hurriedly before any inquires can be made.

“You don’t see the weirdness in two men going to the toilets together at the exact same time? Couldn’t you come up with any other excuse? What are we, teenage girls caravanning to chat in the stalls?” Louis scoffs as Harry falls into step with him.

“Well excuse me if I’m a little slow today, I seem to have misplaced the last twelve hours of my life from memory.” Harry states sardonically.

“You only have yourself to blame for that.” Louis says as they weave through the tables.

“Harry, my good man!” President Richards materializes out of literally nowhere, jovial face glowing as usual. He extends his hand out to a caught off guard Harry for a handshake. “How are you, son?”

“I’m good…yeah good.” Harry answers, shaking President Richards’ hand.

“Marvelous! And...Louis right?” President Richards smiles warmly at Louis.

Louis plasters a pleasant smile on his face in return. “Right. Good to see you, sir.”

“You boys enjoying the brunch this morning?”
“Yes, it’s lovely.” Harry chirps, a slight sarcastic nature to his tone.

“Oh, it’s amazing! So many options and choices, I hardly know where to start.” Louis chatters easily.

“Glad to hear it!” President Richards beams elatedly. “I’m always torn by what to eat as well. Should I go salty with the baked ham or sweet with the sticky buns? Decisions decisions.”

“Both! You gotta do ‘em both. You only live once!” Louis points out enthusiastically.

“Ahh, but my wife would kill me! She worries about my health, you know. Always going on and on about blood pressure and high cholesterol. But I just want to live and enjoy life to the fullest!”

“I know that plight. Very very well in fact.” Louis empathizes, shaking his head.

“You married, Louis?”

“Umm…engaged, actually.” Louis replies as he feels Harry’s eyes on him.

“Engaged! That’s lovely, congratulations!” President Richards claps Louis on the back. “Well young one, enjoy this little break from your fiancé. I mean… I’m sure you’re very happy, but everyone needs some space now and then. And it’ll give you a chance to stuff your face full of all the wonderfully unhealthy treats around without all the nagging.” He laughs heartily to himself and lowers his voice a bit. “When you get to be my age you just have to sneak it in the middle of the night. Or better yet, hide it at the office.”

“I’ve got a whole stash in one of my filing cabinets actually. It’s got loads of sweets and chocolates and stuff. Only the best, of course.” Louis confesses with a grin.

“You do?” Harry questions, face twisting in horror as he frowns disapprovingly at Louis.

“It’s my happy place.” Louis grins, raising his eyebrows.

“A man after my own heart.” President Richards chuckles. “So Harry, I was also glad to see you agreed to be in the auction tonight. We are trying to raise one hundred thousand pounds with this event, so it’s very nice of you to lend your services.”

“Oh right! Yes, anything I can do to help. It’s a lovely cause.”

“Yes it is, this charity is near and dear to my heart actually. My wife and I have been supporters of the Save the Children Fund for years. We’ve gone on a few of the relief missions and host fundraising events every year. They truly need our support, so thank you.”

“I agree.” Harry nods his head solemnly. “Again, it’s the least I can do.”

President Richards smiles. “Well, I best be off! I need to finish my plate before I head over to start setting up for the next event. I’ll see you both this afternoon correct?”

“This afternoon?” Louis and Harry both question at the same time.

“Yes! Have you not been paying attention to the itinerary? Shame on you both! The cook-off is this afternoon! I hope you boys know your way around the kitchen!”

“I’m sorry…cook-off?” Louis clarifies again.

“Well, in all honesty it used to be more of a cooking lesson. We would hire master culinary chefs to teach brilliant dishes, but where is the fun in that? There is no competition! And I love a good
sport…don’t like to be bored, you know.” President Richard winks. “So now we hire chefs as judges and have you all compete through cooking! Fun, right?”

“Loads.” Louis grimaces.

“That sounds…brilliant.” Harry praises through a pained expression.

“Yes! And as I said before, I love good food. So I’m expecting you to bring your A-game. I want some quality dishes!”

“I only hope we don’t disappoint.” Harry states honestly.

“Oh, impossible my boy, impossible!” President Richards chuckles, shaking Harry’s shoulder slightly. “So I’ll see you there!” He floats off, hopping easily into another conversation just as he settles at his table.

“That man needs to retire…he’s just doing too much.” Louis says, once President Richards is out of earshot. “I mean, he’s an amazing man, but I thought the point of a retreat was to relax! And yet, it’s just event after event.”

“Well, you can’t say it’s been boring…”

“I still haven’t gone to the spa. I was going to go today, but now that’s shot to shit.” Louis complains. “Who knows how long this cooking extravaganza thing will last for?”

“Yeah…who knows, but that’s not exactly a priority right now. Can we get on with this please?” Harry urges.

“After you, brother dearest.” Louis gestures towards the glass door leading back indoors.

They step back inside retreating to the far corner of the long hallway, a decent distance from the doors to the terrace.

Louis looks to Harry expectantly after a few moments of silent standing pass, waiting for him to say something. “Well…”

“Well…first of all, what really happened last night? Why was I with Niall?”

Louis shrugs, avoiding meeting Harry’s eyes by casting his gaze to the floor.

“Did I say something? Or do something?” Harry questions. “I mean, obviously I did but…what exactly?”

“Oh, you did plenty of talking and doing last night…plenty…too much in fact.”

“Ok and…” Harry waits for Louis to elaborate further.

“And…you better be happy Niall came to your defense. That should have been so much worse. You deserve worse.”

“I deserve worse? What’re you talking about?”

Louis rolls his eyes and shrugs, crossing his hands over his chest, once again doing everything he can to avoid Harry’s gaze.

“Louis! Oh my god stop! You’re dragging this out! Just say it!”
“Don’t tell me to fucking stop! I’m not the one who got so drunk that I blacked out!” Louis snaps.
“You know what? No…I don’t want to talk about this right now. I’m gonna go finish my breakfast.”

“Louis please.” Harry begs, tone softening. “Please wait…I’m sorry.” Harry reaches to touch Louis' shoulder. “Whatever I said or did or I don’t even know…I’m just so sorry. I just remember that I was so mad at myself for…for everything…and I felt horrible…and I drank to forget…to forget what I’ve forced you to do this weekend…to forget how I’ve made you feel…and I guess I actually did. I didn’t mean…or I only wanted to…just please…let me explain.” Harry’s expression is earnest, his body completely open. “I hate when you’re upset with me, it’s the worst feeling in the world. I don’t want to fight anymore. Can we please just talk?”

Louis sighs, form relaxing slightly as he lowers his defenses, uncrossing his arms. If Harry is ready to sincerely apologize and talk as adults then he is all ears. “Yeah…ok you’re right, you’re right I’m sorry. I’ve just been so upset and-” Louis voice cuts off as he spots an unwanted individual approaching them. “Oh come on! You’ve got to be shitting me! Every fucking time!”

“Wait, what?” Harry asks, looking around, confused as to what Louis is referring to. He turns to his left and traces Louis’ line of sight and sees his always timely boss strutting toward them. “Ohh.” He exhales letting out a shaky pained breath. “Medusa.”

“Styles!” Melissa greets cheerfully as she reaches them. “…and company.” She glances towards Louis.

Louis looks around with a perplexed expression, placing a hand on his chest as if he has no idea who she is talking to. “Oh I’m sorry, were you referring to me? I do have a name.”

“That’s lovely dear, I’m sure it suits you.” Melissa responds condescendingly, turning her back to Louis. “Anyway Styles, I need to borrow you for a minute, it’s of the utmost importance.”

Louis glares at Harry with all the heated ferocity he can transmit with his raging eyes. Louis knows Harry can’t currently defend him as his fiancé, but he can definitely defend him as his brother or even just as a human being. Who cares if that’s his boss, she is being rude.

“Styles?”

Harry gapes at them with wide eyes, altering his focus from Louis to his boss, both looking to him expectantly. “I….uh….well… I was… kinda in the middle of an important conversation actually.”

“What who?”

Harry gestures towards Louis. “With Louis…you know…my brother.”

Melissa glances back at him over her shoulder. “Oh right. Well, I’m sure whatever it is you were talking about can wait. This will only take a moment and it’s imperative that it’s done now.” She links her arm through Harry’s and determinedly drags him in the opposite direction before he can even protest.

Harry twists his body in her grasp and faces Louis as he is being pulled backwards. “I’m sorry.” He mouths soundlessly, his face etched in remorse. Guilt is riddled over his entire expression; however, he doesn’t try to escape from the firm grasp of his boss, instead he stumble along behind her.

Louis purses his lips tightly, shaking his head as he raises his hand to flip Harry off. He honestly can’t believe Harry, one minute he is begging to talk and hopefully move past all this and the next he is putting himself into an even deeper hole. All it takes is his bitchy boss to appear to pull him right back to square one.
Louis stands in the corner a moment, suddenly no longer the slightest bit interested in eating anything else. Truth be told, Louis wasn’t even all that mad at first, of course the faux proposal and Harry’s natural flirtatious nature had annoyed him, but he probably could have gotten over it. What he is actually upset about at this point is the blatant disrespect and disregard on Harry’s part. Louis has never felt so insignificant in Harry’s life, completely on the back burner. His feelings and emotions tossed aside and looked over, all for the sake of a job.

This isn’t like Harry. Not his Harry. Not the Harry that would do anything for Louis. The Harry that hustled multiple jobs and worked himself to the bone to support them both when Louis was out of work. The Harry that would surprise Louis out of the blue and sweep him off his feet just because he missed him. The Harry that would ravish him and worship his body at all times of the night. The Harry that would travel to the ends of the earth just to make Louis smile, and make an absolute fool of himself just to make him laugh. The Harry he gave his heart to so many years ago. His best friend, his fiancée, his Harry.

His Harry isn’t like this. But this new Harry, the Harry that is essentially all consumed in his job and self absorbed in appearances and completely blinded to reality, is. This new Harry is not the Harry Louis wants to be around let alone spend the rest of his life with. This Harry’s words are meaningless. This Harry is always sorry for something, always apologizing. Sorry is slowly loosing it’s meaning, being thrown casually out of Harry’s mouth every other word. An apology without action is essentially void; more of an insult than a reassurance.

He takes several deep breaths to calm his emotions, to find his center ground. He doesn’t realize how long he has been standing there because before he knows it he hears Liam and Zayn, passing through the glass doors of the terrace into the building.

Louis starts to approach them, before he hears traces of their conversation wafting through the corridor.

“It’s weird…they’re weird, Z! I mean, they just…the way they are around each other…it’s not like…brotherly.”

Louis jumps behind a row of tall potted plants lining the corridor as he realizes the context of Liam’s statement. “Shit!” He hisses under his breath, ducking behind the large leaves.

Zayn nods his head. “I know what you mean, but then…what is it?”

“It’s more…there’s just so much more between them than just a brotherly bond. I can feel it!” Liam explains.

“What are you saying, Liam?” Zayn asks, leaning in closer.

“I don’t know what I’m saying because I don’t know what to believe! I just don’t think all is as it seems. There is something they aren’t telling us. None of it makes sense. I told you last night, alcohol only brings out the truth so…”

“So…you really do think that…that you know…they could be…ince-”

“Shh! Don’t say it out loud, babe!” Liam hisses, clapping a hand over Zayn’s mouth. “I’ve cast a blind eye to a lot but…I don’t know. I don’t like to accuse people of things but…I don’t know…I just don’t know. You and I talked about this the other night, but it was different then…I mean, it was more of a joke, but now…”

“I know.” Zayn breathes heavily. “Well, what should we do then?”
“What can we do? We don’t know anything for sure.”

“That’s true but—” Zayn pauses, ceasing the conversation. “Oh, here comes Niall, I guess we can finish this discussion later.”

“Ahh, I’m stuffed!” Niall says, rubbing his stomach as he joins Liam and Zayn. “Don’t you just love buffets? Especially brunch buffets!”

Louis decides now is as good a time as any to slide casually into the conversation. He waits until their backs are turned to him before popping out from behind the potted shrubbery. He pulls out his phone as a distraction, going for casual as he strolls up to the group as unsuspecting as he can.

Zayn spots him first, lifting his hand in a wave. “Hey Lou, you were gone so long we thought you weren’t coming back.”

“Yeah, sorry…I got caught up.” Louis gestures towards the phone in his hand, letting them assume what they will from it. “I guess I’ve sort of lost my appetite.”

“The loo will do that to you. Especially if you’re not careful.” Liam teases, chuckling at his own poorly crafted joke.

Zayn looks at him and rolls his eyes fondly. “So…you’ll be at the cook-off thing later, right?”

“Do I really have much of a choice?” Louis jokes. He doesn’t really know how to act around them now. Louis suspected that Liam and Zayn probably knew something was up but now he knows that they know. Or at least he knows that they no longer believe all the bullshit. “You guys going?”

Zayn and Liam nod their heads in unison, while Niall shakes his head.

“You’re not going, Niall?”

“It’s a partnered event, so I’m exempt seeing that I brought no partner. There can be miracles if you believe.” Niall looks up and points his hands towards the ceiling in praise. “I’m probably going to go to relax at the spa or go golfing or maybe sleep. Who knows, but I’m free! You boys have fun with that though. I heard they have some more ‘surprises’ planned.”

“Fantastic.” Louis remarks sarcastically.

“Do you cook, Louis?” Zayn asks curiously.

“Oh, you know…I dabble in the art of microwavable culinary dishes. I’m quite crafty.” Louis boasts with a grin.

“So I’ll take that as a no.” Zayn chuckles, shaking his head.

“Well, my skills are just better utilized outside of the kitchen.” Louis jokes. “However, I will say that I am a fantastic taste tester. I’ve got prime taste buds.”

Zayn cracks up laughing. “I’m not the best cook, but I have some signature dishes I can whip out on occasion. Liam is a better chef than me to be honest.”

“I like when we cook together though.” Liam smiles, wrapping his arm around Zayn’s waist. “That’s when it tastes the best.”

Zayn crinkles his nose and smiles dotingly. “That’s very very true.”
“Well, good luck with that.” Niall says, putting up a peace sign with his hand. “You won’t see me there. Who knows what kind of competitive spin they will throw on cooking!”

“I should make you take my spot.” Louis says as a joke but sounding completely serious. He is in no mood to play chef with Harry. He’d rather jump in a frying pan himself and burn than go through this. He should just not show up and go to the spa like he planned. Avoid Harry, and avoid any more unnecessary embarrassment.

“Oh no thank you, I’ll pass.” Niall states firmly, taking a few steps back. “I’m sure you and Harry got it.”

“We’ll see about that, won’t we?”
hello my loves, I’m so deeply sorry that I’m posting a little late. I’m on the cusp of finals and a mountain of projects and papers loom over my head so please forgive me. :/
anyway this chapter is pretty fun….initially at least...maybe not so much the end.... but you’ll see. i hope you enjoy it! (But i low-key know I'm about to get some interesting comments on this chapter..i can just feel it. *runs and hides in the corner* *takes shelter*)
oh! and if I happen to be late for the next chapter as well it's because I've become a slave to school and my finals have killed me haha and i don’t want to give you a half-assed chapter..you feel me? :) anywayyy thank you so much for the kudos, comments, bookmarks, tumblr messages ect each and every one warms my heart, i love you all. :))

Chapter 8

Harry slips his head through the loop of a long white apron, securing the ties behind his back into a neat bow. In the extensive industrial kitchen space, people sporting similar aprons flit back and forth around him, taking their place at various stations arranged throughout the kitchen. The cook-off is set to start in several minutes, yet Harry has yet to hear from or see Louis since brunch an hour ago. He tried texting and calling him, even resorting to blindly searching the grounds for him, but his efforts proved futile.

It turns out the task “of the utmost importance” that his demanding boss so desperately and urgently needed him for, wasn’t even that important. All she really did was go over a few details pertaining to the date auction later on in the evening. He would still have to meet at the banquet hall an hour early regardless, so it was a pointless divergence. Completely unnecessary and an utter waste of time. It honestly could have waited.

Harry stands at his designated workstation, tapping his fingers anxiously against the stainless steel surface. He slips his phone out and sighs as he is met with no missed or unread messages. He is just about to ring Louis again, when he spots the soft head of his fiancé bobbing through the double doors.

Louis stops in front of the doors and scans the vast kitchen until his eyes land on Harry. He bites his lip and takes in a visible breath of air, squaring his shoulders before crossing the space between them towards the workstation.

“Where were you?” Harry questions, eyeing Louis as he slowly walks over to the station. “I texted…and…called…”

Louis shrugs uncaringly, staring openly at Harry, daring him to say anything else. His expression is blank and unreadable.

“You’re late.”

“And…”
“And…you were supposed to be here twenty minutes ago.” Harry crosses his arms over his chest, observing Louis disapprovingly.

“Ok.” Louis responds flatly, acerbity laced in his tone. “Well…I’m here now so…”

“Whatever.” Harry outbreaths as he drops his arms and picks up a long white apron from the work station. “Here, put this on.”

Louis runs his eyes up and down the smock in Harry’s hand. “White’s not really my color.”

Harry stares at him, expression completely flat and unamused, arm still extended holding the apron.

“Look,” Louis clasps his hands together, tilting his head, “I don’t have to be here, but I am. It’s perfectly within my rights to fucking leave, especially seeing as this whole cooking event or whatever hasn’t even started yet. You could at least fix your face…and say please.”

Harry slightly adjusts his expression, marginally softening his tone. “Please put the apron on, Louis.”

Louis snatches the apron and slings it over his head haphazardly without breaking eye contact with Harry. “On.”

“Thank you. Was that so hard?”

“Extremely.”

“Good afternoon everyone!” President Richards booms from the front of the massive kitchen. “Welcome to the Hearst Cook-Off accommodated by the outstanding state of the art Grove Resort kitchen! I hope you all are pumped and ready to go!”

The scattering and rustling of awaiting participants, quiets down as everyone awaits the instructions of President Richards.

“Well, as many of you may know from previous years, this cook-off was once a simple interactive cooking lesson, conducted by the lovely chefs of the resort. But there is nothing special about that. You can take cooking lessons anywhere, anytime of the year! However, there is only one Hearst Retreat a year, so why not make it interesting, make it memorable?”

The prospective competitors respond with mixed whispers and a few unamused groans and unwilling sighs.

“Hey hey hey…none of that!” President Richards condones, shaking his head at the less than positive response. “I haven’t even gotten to the good part yet! I know many of you would rather be relaxing or indulging in the many luxuries of the resort, but this is a team building event and I think you’ll all really enjoy yourselves. So after much debate and carful consideration, I’m extremely excited to announce that this cook off will be conducted in the spirit of Chopped. If you happen to be unaware of what exactly Chopped is, it is a Food Network Original, in which contestants are given a series of mystery ingredients that they must incorporate into three courses.”

From the far end of the kitchen a woman bursts out in disbelieving laughter. “Oh, good lord!”

“Since I’m ninety percent sure that none of you are trained in the culinary arts, we will obviously be making some adjustments to the original concept.” President Richards states, mainly addressing the apprehensive woman. “For one, you will be allotted larger quantities of time for each round and the ingredients…hopefully…aren’t as challenging. But…no promises on that last part.”
“So before we get into things, let me introduce you to your judges for this event, some of which you know already. On the far left we have Australian Celebrity Chef Curtis Stone.” President Richards gestures to blonde man, seated at the end of a long table. “We are truly honored that you’re here, Chef Stone.”

“I’m happy to be here!” Curtis beams, shinning white teeth and dimples on display, as the contestants boisterously clap in appreciation. “I’ve always wanted to be a guest judge on the actual show, but this is just as exciting!”

President Richards nods towards Curtis before moving towards the man seated next to him. “Next we have The Grove’s Head Chef Russell Bateman, who recently was crowned National Chef of the Year. Chef Bateman, thank you for joining us this afternoon and also thank you for welcoming us into your kitchen.”

The slim man dawned in an official double-breasted chef’s coat baring The Grove’s insignia, nods his head in acknowledgement as the crowd claps. “My pleasure, sir.”

“We also have Executive Melissa Henderson, serving as our novice judge for the event.” President Richards motions towards Melissa who is displaying a mildly pleasant expression. “Always a pleasure Executive Henderson.”

“I’m normally one of the people competing in the event, so this should be quite fun.” Melissa smiles devilishly from her seat behind the judge’s table.

Louis boldly refuses to so much as blink as everyone around him applauds politely.

“And of course, yours truly will be serving as a makeshift host and honorary judge because I can’t come up with this whole event and not taste anything!” President Richards chuckles to himself heartily, rubbing his stomach. “I’m always game for good eating.”

“Who isn’t!?” Curtis laughs, flashing his brilliant signature smile.

“Very very true.” President Richards agrees, nodding his head. “Ok, on to the actual event. There really should be more groups, but no matter, there are ten paired groups competing in this event, which is more than the original four in the actual show. In the first round we will chop four groups, in the second we will chop three groups and in the last round, we will chop two groups leaving us with one winner.”

“It’s going to be a close competition, but we will have a champion. Who will win and who will be the chopped?” President Richards bursts into pleased laughter. “Damn, I’ve always wanted to say that!”

“I don’t get it.” Louis whispers to Harry, confusion riddling his face.

“It’s just a catchphrase from the show.” Harry informs, leaning down to answer Louis.

“The theme for this whole competition is pizza. Each round, appetizer, entrée, and dessert, will feature its own mystery basket ingredients that may be found on a pizza. Although probably a very...interesting...extravagant...outrageous...pizza.” President Richards smiles mischievously, wiggling his eyebrows. “You must use every ingredient in the basket in some way, shape or form. The stock fridge and supply pantry are freely available for you to utilize as you please.”

“After the allotted time, the judges will critique and score your dishes based on presentation, taste and creativity. And of course, if your dish doesn’t cut it you will be... chopped!” President Richards laughs openly again. “I just love saying that!”
“This man has too much time on his hands.” Louis comments under his breath.

“Chefs take your place behind your stations.” President Richards announces.

Harry and Louis’ station is adjacent to Liam and Zayn’s, who already appear to be strategizing and organizing their efforts.

Liam looks over to Harry and squints his eyes competitively. “You’re going down Styles. Mark my words, your culinary days are numbered!”

“That goes for you too, Tomlinson.” Zayn adds, peeking behind Liam’s shoulder. “Your ass is toast!”

“Oh please take us down.” Louis pleads, as he steeples his hands into a prayerful position. “Please, I beg you, set me free.”

Zayn cracks up at Louis’ plea, eyes crinkling with laughter.

“You’re on Payne.” Harry challenges, ignoring Louis’ complaints, game face poised and ready to go. “May the best chef win.”

“Chefs open your baskets.” President Richards instructs. “In this appetizer round, you will have thirty-five minutes, an extra fifteen minutes graciously given in comparison to the original show. Your appetizers must include the following ingredients: Thin Crust Pizza Dough, Shredded Chicken, Malta and Vegan Pepperoni. Thirty-five minutes on the clock starting now. Go!”

“What the fuck is vegan pepperoni?! That is blasphemy!” Louis complains as he watches Harry spread the ingredients out over the workstation. “And what kind of pizza toppings are these? Who puts this shit on a pizza?”

Harry opens the vegan pepperoni packet, taking out a slice and biting into it. “It’s not horrible. It tastes like…rubbery…but overall well seasoned. Kinda like…thinly sliced tofu with pepperoni seasonings.” He holds out the rest of his half-bitten slice to Louis. “Taste it.”

“Oh, fuck no!” Louis says, utterly repulsed. “I have self worth.”

“It’s not that bad.” Harry encourages as he wiggles the slice in front of Louis lips.

“Just let me keep what I have left of my dignity.” Louis flicks the pepperoni out of his face, letting it fall to the floor. “So…what kind of pizza are we making?”

“We aren’t making a pizza.” Harry answers simply, bending down to pick up the discarded vegan product.

“Um…I am I missing something here? Pizza ingredients,” Louis holds out one of his hands, “pizza.” He holds out his other hand, as if completing a simple equation.

Harry shakes his head. “Haven’t you ever seen the show? If the theme is pizza, we can’t make pizza as an appetizer, then as an entrée, then as a dessert! There has to be some sort of variety.”

“Harry, no one gives a fuck about variety! This basket has alleged pizza ingredients. Make a damn pizza!”

“We have to reinvent pizza, that’s the whole point!”

Louis drags his hands over his face in exasperation. “This is absolutely ridiculous!”
“We are just wasting time. Everyone else has started already.” Harry states, gesturing to the row of other workstations manned by people diligently at work.

“You're the one wasting time! I said make a pizza and call it a day, but…”

“I got it!” Harry exclaims, holding a finger up. “We’ll make a soup!”

“Excuse me…what?” Louis questions completely at a loss. “Pizza soup!?”

“No, not like that.” Harry says. “Remember when we went to that like new age fusion restaurant a few weeks ago? They had that amazing curry soup thing and you absolutely loved it. It'll be like that! We’ll make a Hot and Sour Curried Chicken Soup.”

Louis blinks at Harry several times incredulously. “Ok Harry. Let me make this perfectly clear. Just because I have eaten something sometime in my life does not mean that I instantly know how to duplicate it at the drop of a hat! Who the fuck do I look like, Gordon Ramsey!?”

Harry cuts his eyes and purses his lips, instantly annoyed. “Just do what I tell you to do.”

Louis rolls his eyes. “Ok, big brother. Whatever you say.”

“Go find a big pot and a saucepan, I'll be right back.” Harry dashes to the supply pantry and returns with an armful of seasonings and spices cradled to his chest. He dumps them on the work station then immediately retreats to the stock fridge returning with coconut milk, butter, and an array of fresh vegetables.

“Oh, so I'll work on the soup and you can knead the dough. We are making garlic knots out of it as a compliment to the soup.” Harry says proudly.

“You've completely degraded pizza. I hope you know that.”

“Just knead.”

Louis unwraps the dough from its packaging. He sprinkles some flour over the workstation and flattens the pale dough out, taking some of his frustrations of the day out on it as his fingers knead.

Harry buzzes behind him, tossing shallots, chick peas, coconut milk and a few dashes of the bubbly Malta soda into a food processor. On the stove top, the shredded chicken starts to cook mixed in companion with white onion and carrots. As the ingredients blend, he dashes curry powder, chili powder and several seasonings into the mix. “I think I’m going to blend the pepperoni too with the food processor. It should blend in well…I think. I mean the worst part about it is the texture, so if I blend it in, it should be ok.”

“If you say so.” Louis responds, sounding uninterested and distant. He looks to his right as his hands work though the dough and watches Zayn and Liam flit and float around each other, working as a seamless team. Liam sautés a mirage of vegetables and while Zayn cuts up their pizza dough into small little squares. Louis wonders what they’ll even come up with. He just hopes it’s a million times better than whatever soup they make. Maybe they’ll get lucky enough to be cut in the first round. Wouldn’t that be a miracle?

Harry sets about blending the base of the curry soup with the pepperoni slices. Once satisfied with the consistency, he pours the thick reddish curry into a pot already positioned over the stove and turns up the heat. He adds a few more dashes of coconut milk along with a few squirts of Sriracha, before transferring the sautéed vegetable and chicken mix into the pot.
“Fifteen minutes chefs!” President Richards calls from the sidelines.

Louis looks to his left and watches a married couple giggle to each other as they put the finishing touches on a simple pizza. They look completely at ease and stress free, just enjoying each other’s company.

“Look, they’re making a pizza.” Louis states bitterly, still eyeing the couple as his thumbs dig into the soft dough.

“Ok…and we aren’t.” Harry states matter-of-factly as he heats up the oven. “Are you almost done with the dough?”

“I guess?” Louis shrugs, wiping his floured hands on his apron. “I mean…what am I supposed to do with it after I knead it?”

“Break off pieces and roll them into little balls.” Harry instructs. “I melted some butter with a little garlic for you to brush over the tops.”

“Oh, how fancy.” Louis says, unable to hide the sarcasm in his tone.

“Yeah...so work on that.” Harry instructs, placing a clear bowl of steaming melted butter on the counter next to Louis. “I’m going to go get some serving bowls.”

Louis rolls the dough into little spheres, as Harry instructed and places them on a baking sheet. He picks up the basting brush and gently brushes the melted butter and garlic mixture over the dough. He pops the tray in the oven just as Harry returns with a stack of white bowls.

“Ten minutes!”

“Ok, what now?” Louis asks, turning to Harry.

“Um…well I think the soup needs a few more minutes. Then we just have to plate and we’re done.” Harry says, with a small satisfied smile. “You can help me garnish the plates.”

“Garnish?”

“Yes, garnish. It has to be pretty. You know…for presentation points.”

“Oh god.” Louis groans, throwing his head back.

“So how’s it goin' boys?” Liam asks strolling over to their station he wipes his hands on his apron, leaving colorful smudges along its previously pristine surface.

“So how’s it goin' boys?” Liam asks strolling over to their station he wipes his hands on his apron, leaving colorful smudges along its previously pristine surface.

“Oh, it’s going…” Louis sighs unenthusiastically.

“Mmm doesn’t seem like your fellow chef is too confident, Styles.” Liam provokes with a grin.

“Worry about yourself, Payne. Besides it looks like your fellow chef is having some…difficulties.” Harry nods his head towards Zayn swatting at a smoking pan.

Liam turns around in confusion and his eyes bug out in panic as he spots his boyfriend in a cloud of smoke. “Shit, babe!”

“Yeah, that’s right, take your ass back to your station, Payne!” Harry calls as Liam flies to Zayn’s rescue.
“Only five more minutes!”

“Well, I should check on our food before that happens to us. And I think the garlic knots are done.” Harry says, turning towards Louis who is still snickering at Zayn and Liam’s struggle.

“Oh, I’ll get it.” Louis responds, calming his giggles.

Harry ladles soup into four separate bowls. He artfully arranges each bowl on a saucer plate where he angles the soft warm bread.

“Final minute!”

Louis just watches from the side as Harry breaks off pieces of mint leaves and garnishes the center of the steaming curry soup, taking his sweet time as he creatively styles the presentation of the dish.

“Pop of color.” Harry smiles, obviously proud of himself.

“Mm...how lovely.” Louis deadpans as he observes the finished product.

“Time! Hands off chefs!”

A few stations down a woman groans loudly, “Dammit! We forgot to use the Malta!”

“Alright everyone, wonderful job!” President Richards encourages. “I saw a lot of valiant effort being put forth and sheer will.”

“And actual skill!” Curtis adds. “Some of you are basically pros!”

The judges go one by one through each station, each group presenting their dish, some groups prouder than others. Several of the dishes looked completely inedible, the competitors who created them clearly having no place in the kitchen, nor the desire to be in the kitchen in the first place. On the opposite end of the spectrum, other dishes looked outstanding, it’s almost unbelievable the amount of creativity some contestants seemed to possess.

When the judges finally reach Zayn and Liam, they chuckle among themselves.

“You’re the group with the smoking problem aren’t you?” Russell asks curiously.

“Right, sadly yes.” Zayn nods, casting his gaze downward. “But I think it still worked out pretty alright. It’s just got a few crispy bits now.”

“So what exactly have you made as an appetizer, chefs?” President Richards inquires.

“Well for this appetizer round we decided to go simple with a Swiss Chard Chicken Salad served with a Malta Vinaigrette.” Liam declares.

“Are you saying you managed to burn a salad?” Curtis questions, a small teasing grin growing on his face. “Oh that’s brilliant.”

“Well, not exactly.” Liam defends. “We sautéed the chicken with a few veggies and stuff like that and I dunno really...I guess it cooked faster than we thought.”

“I think maybe the flame was too high?” Zayn ponders.

“Well, in my opinion, overall it has good flavor.” Russell comments as he takes a bite of the salad. “A bit chargrilled, but still alright.”
“I like the idea of using the pizza dough as croutons.” Curtis compliments, biting into a small crouton. “Very nice.”

“I don’t like it.” Melissa states disgustedly. “My croutons are still doughy, and the Malta Vinaigrette is just way too strong, it overpowers the integrity of the salad. And then on top of of all that, the burnt taste is repulsive.”

“Funny how she has the least culinary experience out of all the judges and the most to say.” Louis whispers to Harry. “I’d like to see her whiny ass come up with a decent meal.”

Harry shrugs. “I’m not even surprised. I would expect nothing less from her.”

“Thank you Liam and Zayn.” President Richards nods politely. “Next we have Harry and Louis. What have you prepared for us?”

“Well, we prepared a Hot and Sour Chicken Curry Soup with a Garlic Knot on the side.” Harry beams, lacing his fingers together in front of his body.

“I must say, it’s a very gorgeous appetizer.” Curtis compliments. “I love the simple elegance of the whole presentation. It’s beautiful really.”

Harry looks to Louis and smirks smugly, overly proud of his arrangement. Louis simply rolls his eyes, unwilling to feed Harry’s ego.

“The flavors really compliment each other well. Nothing is too overpowering and the curry itself has such a velvety consistency. It’s delicious.” Melissa acclaims, smiling a bit to cheerfully at Harry. “I’m not such a fan of the garlic knot though, mine just had a tad too much garlic.”

“Of fucking course.” Louis grumbles under his breath. “The one part I actually did.”

“This is a brilliant reinvention of the ingredients given.” Russell praises genuinely. “I think you handled the vegan pepperoni bit the best out of all the dishes so far.”

“Thank you. I’m glad you liked it.” Harry bows his head slightly.

After the judges go through critiquing and tasting each of the appetizers prepared, they step out and deliberate. It makes more sense for them to step out, then all of the contestants seeing as there are only three of them, plus President Richards who proudly deems himself an honorary judge.

When the judges return with their decision, they chop four teams. Giving each a reason for their decision whether it be lack of using all the ingredients, poor presentation, lack of reinvention or an incomplete dish. Besides Harry and Louis, and Liam and Zayn, the other groups that made it to the next round all created dishes that went above and beyond a simple pizza. Inspired dishes that challenged the barriers of just toppings baked on dough.

“Jason and Valarie, I’m sorry but you’ve been chopped.” President Richards announces the last departing duo solemnly, lowering his head. “Thank you for joining us.”

“Woo! Yes!” Jason shouts excitedly as he claps his hands together, not the least bit upset. “I’m free! Good luck dudes! I’m hittin’ the golf course!”

“What I wouldn’t give to be that guy.” Louis sighs as he longingly watches the enthused young man basically skip out of the doors of the kitchen to freedom. “Tell me why we are taking this cooking thing seriously?”
“Because I can’t just purposely suck. I’m giving it my best.” Harry declares as if it’s the most obvious thing in the world. “Plus, we have to beat Liam.”

“We don’t have to do anything.” Louis groans. “This is all pointless.”

“All right ladies and gentlemen, only six groups left now as we move on to the entrée round.” President Richards announces. “Once again, you will be given fifteen extra minutes, giving you a total time of forty-five minutes for this round. Chefs please open your baskets. In this entrée, you will need to incorporate the following ingredients: Deep Dish Pizza Dough, Beef Escabeche, Baby Kale, and Piña Colada Flavored Yogurt. Your time starts…Now!”

“Ok, first of all, what the hell does escribble mean?” Louis asks, peering into the basket.

“Escabeche.” Harry corrects, as he looks over the ingredients. “And it’s just a different type of meat preparation. After the meat cooks completely. It’s like…soaked in acidic dressings and salts and stuff. I’ve heard it’s really good.”

“That sounds unnecessary.”

“No, it’s a delicacy.”

“These are the dumbest ingredients of all time!” Louis complains, picking up the tub of yogurt. “When in the hell has anyone ordered yogurt on a pizza?”

“I think it’s more of a twist on pineapple pizza.” Harry guesses contemplatively.

“This is bullshit.”

“You’re just a bit bitter today, aren’t you?”


“Alright.” Harry raises his hands in surrender. “Sorry.”

Louis sighs heavily. “Ok, so how are you desecrating pizza this time?”

“I was thinking we could make a Goat Cheese Beef Flatbread with a Tangy Warm Salad on top.

“Warm salad?” Louis scrunches his nose in disgust. “Like salad isn’t bad enough normally.”

“It’s not what you think. It’s just really going to add depth and more texture to the dish.”

“In my humble opinion, salad has no place on a pizza, even less so if it’s warm. But again...if you say so.”

“I do.” Harry confirms with a short nod. “So the dough is going to take a little more preparation this time.”

“More preparation?” Louis questions sounding completely over it all. “What exactly does that entail?”

“We just have to roll it through the pizza cutter attachment, to get it smooth enough to become a flatbread. It should be pretty straightforward though.”

“So…what do I do?”
“Just take out the mixer and the pizza attachment and get a large bowl, I’ll be right back.”

Louis pulls out the large KitchenAid mixer, and a long silver attachment he assumes must be the pizza cutter and places them on the workstation. He finds a silver bowl, just as Harry is returning with an armful of ingredients from the stock fridge. Harry dumps goat cheese, olive oil, arugula, fresh herb leaves, and onion onto the stainless steel surface.

“Oh good, you found the mixer.” Harry says with a small smile.

“Did you think I wouldn’t find it?” Louis frowns defensively.

“That’s not what I said. I’m just…glad…that you found it.” Harry responds slowly, sounding caught of guard. “Anyway, the attachment should fit on the front of the mixer like a nosepiece. Work on that while I start with the actual toppings.”

Harry places two skillets on the stovetop and sets about caramelizing onions in one, and throwing together a warm arugula and kale salad in the other.

“It doesn’t fit.” Louis huffs. “It just keeps falling out.”

“Ok, I’ll try it.” Harry calls over his shoulder from the stove. “One sec.”

“Here, take it from me.” Louis holds out the slim attachment.

“Take it from me.” Harry mimics slowly, with a deep set expression. He squints his eyes at the tool in Louis’ outstretched hand.

“What? No, seriously, take the attachment from me.” Louis, already irritated, shoves the pizza cutter even further in front of Harry’s face, encouraging him to take it.

“Darlin’ it’s better…down where it’s wetter…take it from me.” Harry sing-songs, absentmindedly.

“What the fuck? Just take the damn pizza cutter, Harry. I’m not in the mood for your lame riddles.”

“It’s not a riddle, it’s Under the Sea.”

“Under The Sea? Like The Little Mermaid? The Disney movie?”

“Yeah…” Harry furrows his brow in concentration. “I don’t…I just…I vaguely remember…like…singing it last night? I think?”

“Thirty minutes chefs!”

“Well, that's...weird....” Louis brushes off. “So...uhh about this flatbread thing-”

“And I was...under water? Like in a...pool?” Harry interjects as he thinks out loud, his hands blindly take the attachment from Louis and he begins to easily screw the piece into the head of the mixer. “Louis, why was I in a pool?”

“Mmm…I don’t know really.” Louis avoids casually, averting his eyes. “Anyway so, I just feed the dough through this thing or…”

“Oh my god!” Harry gasps dramatically as if he’s just had a life changing epiphany. He turns and focuses his gaze on Louis. “You left.”

“What?”
“I remember…I mean it’s fuzzy…and choppy…but…you left me.” Harry realizes as pieces begin to slide together in his brain.

“Harry I-”

“You fucking left me!” Harry bursts out, raising his voice. “In the middle of the goddamn street!”

A few curious eyes from surrounding competitors land their way, alarmed by the sudden outburst.

“Keep your voice down!” Louis hisses, reaching for the deep dish dough.

Harry looks around, realizing where they are and frowns, lowering his voice. “I can't believe you would just abandon me! Who does that?!?” Harry angrily reaches around Louis to grab the yogurt container.

“It’s not that simple Harry, we can talk about it later.” Louis responds, as he stretches the dough through the KitchenAid attachment, making four perfectly flat and long slabs of dough.

“No, we will not talk about it later!” Harry whisper shouts, trying to be simultaneously quiet, but also loud enough to get his point across. “In the street, Louis!? In the damn street!? You couldn’t even have left me somewhere safe!?”

“Harry-”

“And here I was repeatedly apologizing and begging you to forgive me when in actuality you've been hiding this from me!”

“I wasn't hiding anything.” Louis states calmly, laying the future flatbread slices out neatly. “What do I do now anyway, I finished the dough?”

“Oh, no?” Harry inquires sarcastically, tilting his head to the side. “So when we're going to tell me about how you left me? Alone? In the middle of the night? In the street?” Harry roughly shoves the bowl containing the yogurt and a few seasonings, herbs, and spices into Louis' arms. “Mix that and spread it on the dough.”

“Probably when you remembered why I left you in the first place.” Louis jabs, mixing the yogurt spread with a paddle. “You know, when you got so drunk you forgot where you were? And when your horny ass attempted to seduce me in front of a table full of curious eyes? Does that ring any bells? Or did that lovely memory slip your mind?”

Harry’s face reddens at the realization. “Erm...Kinda.”

“Oh, what a beautiful time that was, the highlight of my evening.” Louis recalls sardonically as he spreads the yogurt mix evenly over each section of dough. “So yes, I left you. I left you because you were an asshole who got stupidly drunk and reckless. I left you because you've done nothing but embarrass and humiliate me all weekend. And in all honestly, I left you because I was fucking furious at you and your level of maturity.”

“Louis, I would never even dream of leaving you anywhere….even if I was so mad at you that I wanted to murder you, I would never just leave you! How could you? Hand me that tray.” Harry demands, pointing to the the sheet with the doughy flatbreads. “How could you be so cruel?”

Louis lifts the tray and hands it to Harry. “You just…You made me so mad, I couldn’t deal with it… I wasn’t really thinking. I just needed to get away from you at the time.”
“So you just literally abandoned me!?” Harry yells as he arranges the warm salad and caramelized onion over the dough.

“Ok, I regret leaving you where I did, it was wrong of me. It was a lapse in judgment and I apologize for that, but that doesn’t excuse your downright childish behavior.”

“Childish?” Harry looks up from the flatbreads, his hand suspended over them with a handful of goat cheese.

“Yes, childish.” Louis confirms, placing his hands on his hips. “Fucking childish!”

“Um…do you guys have the paprika over here?” Liam inquires, stepping up to their workstation cautiously.

“Yeah…um…here.” Louis grabs the spice off the counter and shoves the bottle at Liam carelessly without even looking his way, immediately turning back to Harry. “You have been nothing but childish and selfish, Harry!”

“Erm…thanks…” Liam backs away slowly, eyeing Louis and Harry curiously.

“Oh…so I’m the selfish one? Really? You deemed me an inconvenience and left me to fend for myself, but I’m the selfish one? How fitting.”

“Oh my god, here we go again! Will you just shut up and stop playing the victim?! Everything can’t always be about you! You’ve had no regard for me whatsoever! Everything has been catered to your needs and what you want and I’ve been thrown by the wayside. I’m sick of it Harry, I’m sick of you!” Louis snaps resentfully. “You did this! You brought us here! Grow the fuck up, take responsibility for your actions and own up to reality! Goddammit!”

Louis’ words linger in the space between them, the rumble and clatter of pots and pans echoing in their ears. Harry stares blankly at Louis, completely caught off guard by his sudden honest outburst. He is at a total loss for words, utterly speechless.

“Fifteen minutes chefs!”

“Open the oven.” Harry says quietly after a few beats of charged silence, lifting the flatbread tray from the counter.

Louis hesitates for just a moment, blinking at Harry, before bending down to open the preheated oven. Harry slides the sheet in, closing the oven door.

They finish preparing the final components of their dish in total silence, avoiding communication at all costs. Louis mostly just stands to the side, playing with the extra pizza dough, while Harry does all the actual preparations.

After twelve minutes, Harry takes that hot flatbreads out of the oven. He plates the food, once again skillfully arranging the components beautifully on a long rectangular dish. They manage to finish the entrée with thirty seconds to spare.

“Times up! Hands off chefs!”

Exactly as before, the judges go one by one through each of the six groups, and critique their prepared dishes, making comments and compliments. Or in Executive Henderson’s case, complaints.

“Alright, Liam and Zayn what have you prepared?” President Richards asks as they move along
from the previous group.

“We’ve made a Beef and Kale Calzone served with a Island Dipping Sauce.”

“The calzone is superb.” Curtis praises, smiling around the bit he just took. “Perfectly fluffy and a little flaky on the outside. Outstanding job chefs.”

“I think it’s quite good, but the yogurt dipping sauce seems out of place to be perfectly honest.” Melissa criticizes. “It feels unnecessary and just tossed on the plate at the last minute. I don’t feel like you incorporated it well into the dish as a dipping sauce.”

“Well, I think it pairs quite nice actually.” Russell interjects, counteracting Melissa’s statement. “It adds a freshness to the whole meal.”

“Yeah, we didn’t know what to do with it to be honest.” Liam confesses. “A dipping sauce seemed like the only viable option.”

“I guess we could have baked it inside…but I dunno…it doesn’t sound like it’d taste right.” Zayn adds with a shrug of his shoulders.

“Well thank you chefs, it was an excellent dish regardless.” President Richards nods towards Zayn and Liam. “Harry and Louis, your entrée?”

“For our entrée, we made a Goat Cheese and Beef Flatbread, with a Tangy Warm Salad.” Harry introduces, voice not as proud and chipper as in the previous round.

“Your dishes are always just beautiful. I almost don’t want to disturb it.” Curtis laughs to himself as he just stares at his plate. “It’s modern art.”

“I think my flatbread should have been a little flatter, it’s kind of lumpy.” Melissa critiques with disdain. “That being said, the entrée as a whole is very good. There is a nice balance between tangy and savory. I really love the goat cheese and the use of the yogurt as a base sauce. Brilliant.” She winks unnecessarily at Harry with a playful grin.

“Love the warm salad idea. You really can never go wrong with goat cheese and arugula.” Russell praises, nibbling on a small piece of cheese. “Even though it’s a flatbread, which is typically viewed as a lighter meal, I still get that heftiness of the dish being an entrée. Well done.”

Louis and Harry both nod politely in thankful acknowledgment, as the judges finish up.

Once again the judges leave the kitchen to deliberate over the contestants and their entrées. When they return, three groups are chopped. The judges claimed that the dishes were so well prepared during this round that it was extremely difficult to decide who should be chopped. The reasons behind the demise of fallen contestants even more minor and miniscule than the last round.

The three groups that move on to the final round include a female duo, Chelsea and Grace, as well as Liam and Zayn, and Harry and Louis.

“Last round!” President Richards announces enthusiastically. “Congratulations to all of you for making it to the last round of this event. Your dishes have all been absolutely superb up to this point, so let’s see what you can come up with for dessert. Chefs open your baskets. In this final dessert round, you will need to incorporate: Mascarpone Cheese, Croissant Dough, Strawberry Preserve, and Pine Nuts. Again thirty-five minutes on the clock. You may begin!”

Harry stands unmoving for several moments, staring at the ingredients before him. Louis alters his
gaze from Harry to the random ingredients and back to Harry again.

“So…where do you want me?” Louis asks, hopping anxiously from foot to foot, not really knowing what to do with himself. The tension between them ringing thick through the air.

“I got it Louis, don’t worry about it.” Harry mutters simply as he begins opening the various ingredients, laying them out on the counter.

“Harry, just let me do something, I’m not just going to stand here.”

“Fine. Take half of this,” Harry picks up the tub of mascarpone cheese, “and mix it with chocolate hazelnut spread. And then take the other half and mix it separately with the strawberry preserve.”

Louis looks at the ingredients before him and frowns. “Where do I find the hazelnut thing?”

Harry points in the direction of the stock pantry. “Over there.”

“Oh, ok.” Louis nods as he glances towards the pantry. “And what is it exactly that we’re making?”

“Basically, I’m going to fry the dough in a flour and pine nut mix and make little doughnut holes, then roll them in powdered sugar and then we’ll drizzle the chocolate and strawberry sauces over them.” Harry illustrates, already pulling out the dough and flour.

“Ok.” Louis says as he goes in search of the hazelnut spread.

Harry sets about rolling the dough into little balls. He blends a handful of pine nuts in the food processor and proceeds to mix it with flour. After making about a dozen floured doughnut balls, he carries them over to the fryer. In the meantime, Louis mixes the two separate toppings using the handheld mixer, whisking each of them until they reach an even consistency.

“Ten minutes chefs!”

Harry returns to their station, with a bowl of powdered sugar and a sheet of freshly fried doughnut holes, still glistening with hot oil. “Roll these in powdered sugar, I’m gonna go get some plates.”

Louis nods his head and begins powdering each ball of fried dough. Harry returns with a small stack of plates and starts to use the mascarpone sauces Louis made to make intricate designs on the plate. He arranges the already powdered doughnuts on top of the deep red and chocolate brown swirls. After all the doughnuts have been plated, Harry uses the remaining sauce to gently drizzle over the small spheres decoratively.

“Alright time! Hands off chefs.”

“Oh bloody hell! It’s melting!” Chelsea complains, sulking at the state of her group’s plates. It appears that they made some sort of frozen yogurt, but it looks like a pink soupy mess.

“Well, before we begin judging, I’d like to congratulate each one of you for making it successfully through the whole competition. You’ve all done exceedingly well, I’m very impressed.” President Richards smiles addressing the six individuals standing before him. “Alright judges, we will start with Liam and Zayn. Chefs, what have you made for us?”

Liam clears his throat. “Well, we’ve prepared a Strawberry Fruit Tart with a Mascarpone Whipped Cream.”

“I like the fruit, and the whip together. It creates a very light feeling.” Curtis says, twirling a spoon in
his hand. “The crunch of the toasted pine nuts is also very pleasant.”

“I agree. It’s very tasty and not overwhelmingly sweet which is very nice.” Russell compliments. “I will say though, that the the dough of the tart is a bit undercooked in the middle, but only marginally. Lovely dish chefs.”

“Mine doesn’t have enough of the Mascarpone Whipped Cream to cover the dessert.” Melissa states, poking at her tart. “I actually wish it was a bit sweeter, but overall it’s pretty good.”

“Next, we have Chelsea and Grace, what have you both created as a dessert?” President Richards asks, moving on.

“We attempted to make a Strawberry Mascarpone Frozen Yogurt served in a Waffle Cone. But we had a few…shortfalls and it didn’t turn out exactly like we wanted.” Grace explains with a downtrodden expression.

“I really wish you were able to pull this together. I think if you had more time you would have nailed it.” Curtis sighs, obviously feeling for the group’s misfortune. “The flavor of the yogurt is delicious, perfect balance of fruit versus dairy.”

“Well, the waffle thing is completely inedible, an absolute disgrace.” Melissa complains, sounding utterly repulsed. “But the taste of the frozen yogurt is descent, even though it’s not anywhere close to frozen. It’s just yogurt at this point.”

“I really see where you were trying to go with this and it would have been brilliant if you’d been able to pull it off.” Russell says empathetically. “I agree with my fellow judge Curtis; I think there just wasn’t enough time really, but you put forth a good effort.”

“And lastly, Harry and Louis what have you prepared?” President Richards asks.

“Well, as a dessert we made Powdered Doughnut Holes drizzled with Strawberry and Chocolate Hazelnut Mascarpone Sauces.” Harry states.

“You know in your previous dishes, I never seemed to like the consistency of the dough, but this time I really like it. It’s absolutely perfect.” Melissa beams brightly at Harry. “The strawberry sauce is a bit thick though, it could have been whipped a little longer and bit more evenly.”

“Funny that.” Louis bitterly mumbles to himself. “The only time I don’t touch the dough she likes it. Interesting.”

“Doughnuts are an excellent use of the croissant dough. And they are so fluffy, basically melting in your mouth.” Russell compliments. “I also love both of the sauces, they compliment each other well. Fantastic job!”

“My god!” Curtis erupts, his plate still untouched as he just stares at it. “Ok seriously, which one of you decorates the plates each time?”

Harry raises his hand sheepishly, a blush coloring his cheeks. “Um...I do...or did?”

“You sir, have such a creative eye! Once again, you’ve managed to present a visual masterpiece. What exactly do you do at Hearst? Because I may have to steal you to work in my kitchen.” Curtis jokes, smiling widely.

Harry’s blush deepens as his dimples poke at his cheeks. “I’m a Creative Director.”
“That makes perfect sense. Perfect bloody sense!” Curtis laughs as if it’s so obvious, waving a fork madly through the air. “That’s it, let’s go, you’re hired!”

“Oh no no!” President Richard chuckles, wagging his finger at Curtis. “You can’t have him! Harry is a vital part of Hearst now. You’re too late.”

Harry laughs, cheeks still red. “I’m sorry, mate. I guess my talents are better suited where I am.”

“We’ll talk later.” Curtis winks exaggeratedly, still chuckling to himself. “I know you can’t say much in front of your bosses here.”

“Chef Stone, you have overstayed your welcome.” President Richards jokingly teases, plastering an overdramatic frown on his face. “Stop trying to swindle my employees.”

“Alright alright, I’m done.” Curtis raises his hands exaggeratedly in surrender, displaying a wide dimpled smile. “Let’s go make this decision, so I can flee the country.”

The judges step out and take a moment to deliberate the winner, basing their decision not only on the dessert round, but on the whole competition in its entirety. They revisit all the dishes previously made, evaluating past mistakes versus overall success.

“Well, here we are down to the final three teams. It was a hard decision to make, but ultimately the judges feel confident in their decision. Before I announce the champion though, I would like to once again thank our judges for their time, expertise, and commentary.” President Richards turns to face the judges table. “Chef Stone, Chef Bateman, and Executive Henderson, thank you ever so much.”

The judges each respectfully bow their head appreciatively towards President Richards, as the three remaining groups applaud in appreciation.

“Ok, now for the moment truth. The big and final reveal! The winner and first ever Hearst Chopped Champions are,” President Richards pauses for dramatic effect, dragging the suspense out as long as he possibly can, “Harry and Louis! Congratulations chefs!”

Harry and Louis turn towards each other, hesitating slightly before settling with a simple high-five.

“Oh, come on!” Liam groans, pouting at the loss. “What did they do better?”

“Well it was pretty close. Almost a tie really, but it came down to the singed toppings in the appetizer round, that ultimately lost you some quality points. However, your beef calzone in the entrée round was spectacular!”

“Harry and Louis, congratulations!” Curtis exclaims as he walks over and shakes each of their hands. “You both were bloody brilliant today! The prizes for this event come from a favor I put in with an old friend of mine. A private, all expense paid, six course meal at Alain Ducasse’s exclusive restaurant in London. You’ll dine at Table Lumière, the most coveted table in the house as it’s completely surrounded by shimmering fiber optics. It’s really spectacular actually, such an experience.”

“Wow, that sounds amazing!” Louis enthuses. “I hear that place is literally out of this world, but is virtually impossible to get a reservation. It seems like it’s booked for years on end.”

“That’s incredible!” Harry beams excitedly. “Must be nice having friends in high places.”

“It has its perks. Food wise, I can’t complain.” Curtis smiles brightly. “And it could all be yours Harry, leave Hearst and become my protégée. We could rule the world!” Curtis jokes, lifting his fists
dramatically in the air.

Harry cracks up laughing at the notion, raising his hand to his mouth to hide his dimpled giggles.

“No, but in all seriousness kid, you really do have a creative eye. I can see why you are as highly esteemed as you are at such a young age. You’ll go far, I’m sure.”

“Thank you, Chef Stone.” Harry nods his head with a smile. “That’s very kind of you to say.”

“Oh please, call me Curtis, only my employees call me Chef Stone, and even then it’s pretty rare.” Curtis chuckles softly. “Well, congratulations again to you both. I wish you all the best in your endeavors. Maybe I’ll see you around sometime.” Curtis smiles brightly, waving goodbye as he begins to make his exit.

“It seems you’ve beat us far and square.” Liam sighs, walking up to Harry with a defeated expression. “Who knew you were such a culinary wizard, Harry?”

Harry shrugs, brushing it off. “One of my hidden talents, I suppose.”

“Hmm, well I-”

Melissa rudely walks in between the conversation space, interrupting Liam. “Styles, I need you at the main banquet hall in fifteen minutes to finish getting ready for the auction. Don’t be late, I don’t want to have to look for you.”

“Yeah alright.” Harry says, as he watches her sashay herself out of the front kitchen doors, following behind President Richards and the other judges.

Liam rolls his eyes and turns back to Harry after being so rudely cut off. “You put up a good fight, but I believe we would have easily won if Zayn didn’t light our whole stove on fire and burn half of our dish”

“I said I was sorry about that!” Zayn says, sliding up next to Liam. “It was an accident!”

“I know, I know, Z. I’m only teasing.” Liam comforts, raising his hand to rub Zayn’s lower back reassuringly.

“Better luck next year lads.” Louis says, rejoining the conversation.

“Next year your ass is mine. I’m coming for blood.” Liam tries his best to keep a menacing expression, eyeing Louis and Harry.

“I’m counting on it.” Harry responds, glaring right back.

“Good. I will bring the Payne.” Liam chuckles at his pun, eyes crinkling. “Well, we’re gonna go freshen up and whatnot before the date auction. You’re in that, right Harry?”

“Uh…yeah…kinda a last minute sorta thing” Harry shrugs, scratching at his neck.

Louis rolls eyes and wrings his hands together.

“Mm…that should be interesting.” Liam comments.


“Yeah…you know I’ve been informed that apparently that’s an actual requirement.” Harry informs.
“What seriously? Who said that?” Louis asks appalled, turning toward Harry.

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“I honestly don’t know.” Harry sighs. “I didn’t ask questions.”

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“Good luck, mate. Knock ‘em dead, strut your stuff and all that.” Liam teases, with a little demonstrative shoulder shimmy. “You ready, babe?” He asks looking to Zayn and turning to leave.

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Harry turns to leave as well, but Louis reaches out to stop him, lightly grazing his side with his fingertips. “Wait Harry, before you go…can we just or can I…I don’t know…explain myself…you know from what I said…before?”

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“I think you were more than clear. I’m selfish and childish. Everything is my fault and you’re sick of me.” Harry recites like a series of items on a list. “Got it, thanks. I’d rather not hear that again to be honest.”

“I think you were more than clear. I’m selfish and childish. Everything is my fault and you’re sick of me.” Harry recites like a series of items on a list. “Got it, thanks. I’d rather not hear that again to be honest.”

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have burst out so harshly like that.” Louis apologizes earnestly. “I’ve just been holding it in…and it sorta just came out all at once, like word vomit. I’m sorry.”

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Harry stays silent for a moment, playing with the rings decorating his long fingers. “So that’s really how you feel? Are you sick of me?”

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“It’s not that easy…it’s not that I’m sick of you, really…it’s just…I keep thinking of…” Louis’s voice trails off as he casts his gaze to the ground.

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“I keep thinking of what happens next.” Louis utters quietly, slowly meeting Harry’s eyes.

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“What do you mean by that?” Harry inquires in genuine confusion, frown lines creasing over his brow.

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“What happens after this, Harry? What happens when this weekend is over and we go home?” Louis questions, sounding unsure and defeated. “What happens?”

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Harry’s frown deepens, hard lines setting in over his usually smooth face. “Nothing happens. Everything will stay the same and it’ll all go back to normal.”

Harry’s frown deepens, hard lines setting in over his usually smooth face. “Nothing happens. Everything will stay the same and it’ll all go back to normal.”

“That can’t be true. How can anything stay the same after all of this?” Louis protests, tone starting to rise. “This isn’t superficial, Harry. Maybe it was at one point, but it’s so much more now. There are bigger issues here. Real issues.”

“That can’t be true. How can anything stay the same after all of this?” Louis protests, tone starting to rise. “This isn’t superficial, Harry. Maybe it was at one point, but it’s so much more now. There are bigger issues here. Real issues.”
“What issues? Louis, I-”

“Are you always going to choose your job over me?” Louis blurts out, cutting Harry off. “Will I always have to compete for your attention? What about in the future? What about-”

“Wait, what?” Harry interjects, returning the favor and cutting Louis off. “Now you’re accusing me of putting my job before you!?”

“I’m not accusing you of anything Harry, I’m just stating facts. You would choose your job over me. You are choosing your job over me.”

“Louis, that’s ridiculous! No, I’m not!”

“Yes you are, Harry! Maybe you just don’t realize it, but you have been putting everything above me since you got this position.” Louis argues adamantly, his body tensing. “And maybe that’s partially my fault for not being completely honest about how I felt from the beginning. But nothing can stay the same if I’m not first for you, if you never choose me.”

Harry scrubs his hands over his face. “Where is this even coming from?”

Louis stills, his eyes searching Harry’s imploringly. “Do you want to marry me, Harry? Do you really?”

“What?! Louis, of course I do! How could you even ask me that?” Harry asks in disbelief, throwing his hands up in the air. “Is this because we lengthened our engagement? Because that was only because you said you wanted a really nice wedding and you wanted to buy a house to start our married life together in and-”

“No, stop!” Louis yells, putting his hands up in front of him. “This isn’t about that at all! You’re completely missing the point!”

“Then what is it? Tell me what it’s about, baby.” Harry reaches to caress Louis’ cheek. “All I’ve ever wanted is to finally marry you. You’re my everything, I do it all for you.”

“I’ve been telling you and you’re not listening to me!” Louis bellows exasperated, moving away from Harry’s touch. “This isn’t about the length of our engagement or when or where we get married or where we live because all that shit is fleeting if we don’t fix the real problem! This is about us respecting each other and treating each other as equals. This is about you loving your job more than you love me!”

Harry takes a step back in shock. “No, Louis never! That's not true!”

“It is Harry! Right now, it is!” Louis shouts, arms flailing wildly along with his words. “And I don't want to wake up one day, years down the line, and regret marrying you!”

Harry takes in a sharp inhale of breath. “You regret me?” His voice almost breaks, as the words slip past his lips. “Regret us?”

“I didn’t say that. I don’t regret us. I don’t.” Louis’ tone softens as he shakes his head and takes a small step closer to Harry. “It’s just that...this isn’t us. This isn’t us, Harry. I don’t remember the last time I went to bed legitimately angry at you. I can’t even think of a time were I’ve ever questioned your commitment to me. Or even considered being anything less than happy when I think of my future life with you. I don’t want this to be us.”

“We are still us, Lou.” Harry slowly moves in closer, his voice impossibly small. “That’s not us.”
“But what if this becomes us? What if ten years from now you’ve worked your way to the top and you’re massively successful? But with great success comes more responsibility and even more pressure. What if all pressure becomes too much for you? Or for us?” Louis questions, his voice betraying him.

“If nothing changes, and we continue on like this, I see myself eventually being lonely. I see myself constantly begging you for time or attention and at first you’ll try to appease me and promise to be home early or to be better. But after awhile, the pressures will just increase and I’ll no longer be a priority for you. You won’t have time for me anymore and you’ll just wave me off like I’m a chore or a nuisance. I see myself taking care of all our future kids and having to explain to them why one of their daddies is always gone at work and never home; why he’s never there for them. I see myself in a one sided relationship with my husband and I don’t want that Harry. I don’t want to be with you but not actually have you. I don’t want pieces of you. I want you. All of you. Maybe that makes me selfish but so be it. I don’t want to start our life together with the unsettling feeling that one day I may resent you.”

“Louis…I could never…I could never be that man.” Harry stammers out, at a loss for words. “You’re my only priority. I’d always be there for you and make time for you…Always.”

“But babe, you’re slowly becoming that man and it scares me because I know you’re better than that.” Louis’ eyes are cloudy, storming with emotion as he gazes at Harry’s broken expression. “I know you. I know you better than I know myself sometimes. I know how much you care and I know that you love me but…”

“Well, if you know that…if you know me…then how could you think I’d ever become a person who would disregard you like that? Or disregard our future family?” Harry’s eyes are earnest, filled with feeling and unshed tears, his voice weak. “Our kids?”

“Because even though I know you, I also know that you’re changing. You’re priorities have changed and I don’t like where I fall in them. I supported you from day one. I’ve always been in your corner, pushing you on and I’ll always be your number one fan.” Louis pauses and looks up at the ceiling, collecting himself. He looks back to Harry with watery eyes and a sad reminiscent smile. “God, I’m so proud of you baby, I really am. So fucking proud. You made it. You really made it. After everything, you worked so hard and you’re achieving your dreams and I know that and I get it. I’d never want to take any of that away from you. Never. But now that you’ve made it, now that you’ve made this huge step towards finally establishing yourself and reaching your goal…I just don’t know where I fit in anymore.” Louis confesses, sounding small and unsure. “I don’t know if I fit the mold for the path your life is taking.”

Harry’s voice is at a soft whisper as if he’s afraid to speak. “What are you saying, Louis?”

“I’m saying that…I mean that…that I…” Louis sighs and runs his hands aggressively through his hair, water leaks quietly from his eyes. “Fuck! I love you, Harry! I fucking love you so much! I’m so gone for you, I’m fucking whipped, always have been really.” A fond watery laugh escapes Louis’ lips. “We’ve been together so long; I almost don’t know who I am without you. You’re a part of me. It seems like it has always been you and me. You’re the man that I love. You truly are my everything. You’re it. I would do anything for you, but I’m tired, baby. I’m tired and I’m scared and you’re asking too much from me and I want us to be ok, I want everything to just be ok. But right now it isn’t. And I don’t know what to do.”

Harry shakes his head slowly, his eyes pleading as they softly leak saltwater down his face. “Don’t…”

“I’m saying that I need something something to change. I need it to change, I need you to fix it and if
you don’t…” Louis pauses, taking a deep breath, appearing to be internally fighting with himself. “If you don't...I...I don’t think…shit! I can’t do it anymore.”

Harry immediately crowds Louis’ space taking both his hands in his and linking their fingers together. “Louis, baby, no. You don’t mean that. You don’t. You can’t.” The new wave of freshly formed tears brimming under Harry’s eyes starts to spill over, trickling down his cheeks.

“Styles!”

Harry visibly deflates at the sound of his name being called in that shrill urgent voice, carrying through the sound barrier of the walls. He closes his eyes, causing more tears to stream across his face and shakes his head several times. When his eyes open, Harry focuses his attention on his fiancé standing before him. He leans down and presses his forehead against Louis’. “I love you. I love you and only you. You know that. Baby, tell me you know how much I truly love you, how much I truly need you. It’ll be ok, we’ll be ok, I promise. It’s you and me, Lou. It’s always been you and me.”

“You’re being summoned.” Louis whispers as he unlinks one of their hands and wipes a stray tear away on Harry’s cheek with his free thumb.

The tender action only seems to upset Harry further, his expression pained. “No! Louis listen...fuck! I’m sorry! I’ll fix it! I’ll be-”

“Styyyles!”

“I think you have to be somewhere important.” Louis unlinks his other hand and takes a step away from Harry, using both his hands to scrub over his face.

“Styyyleess!”

Realizing that his boss’s voice is growing exceedingly in volume the closer she gets to the kitchen, Harry panics as his mind starts to scramble. “Don't give up on me Louis, please don't…I...I know… I’ve been shit...and I…you should be upset…I mean…fuck…I realize that I…” Harry rambles rapidly, trying to reason with Louis and express his feelings but not actually communicating coherently. “I just… I get it…but please don’t…I’m so sorry…I really...I mean…you can’t…we still need to talk about this…and I...Fuck! Just please…don't leave.”

“STYLES!” Melissa’s voice booms loudly through the kitchen as she materializes though the front double swing doors. “I’ve been calling you and calling you! I even called your phone! What are you doing? You’re supposed to be at the banquet hall already! Let’s go! Time is of the essence!”

Harry hardly acknowledges her presence, instead roughly swiping under his wet eyes and staring openly at Louis. His emotive green eyes attempting to convey everything he feels, everything he still wants to say, everything he still needs to say, but can’t. “Please.” He whispers hopelessly, sounding completely defeated.

“You should go.” Louis whispers, tearing his gaze from Harry and increasing the space between them by taking several steps back.

“Come on, you can chitchat later!” Melissa urges, clutching Harry’s upper arm. “There is a lot to do and we only have an hour before the auction!”

“Oh.” Harry grits bitterly through his teeth, his eyes raging, as he yanks his arm away from her grasp. “I’m coming.”

Melissa raises her eyebrows at him, opening her mouth to most likely make a comment on his less...
then pleasant response, but ultimately lets it go as Harry slowly turns toward her. He follows behind her soundlessly, exiting the kitchen through the front swing doors, leaving Louis standing alone in the deserted space.

Louis leans against one of the workstations and slowly slides down the side of it until he is sitting on the floor with his back against the cool surface. He pulls his knees up to his chest, places his hands over his legs and buries his head in his hands. Louis takes several deep breaths, while racking his hands through his hair, trying desperately to calm the accelerated beating of his heart.

“So…you probably should have had that conversation in a more…private place.”

Shocked by the sound of another voice, Louis’ head snaps up, eyes wide and instantly alarmed, as he is met with Zayn slinking out of the shadows near the rear door.

“Well…fuck.”
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

hiiiii beautiful people! ok so this chapter is obviously very very lateeee (RIP finals claimed my ass and my first born children too RIP RIP RIP) and I deeply apologize for that, thank you all ever so much for being patient with me especially after leaving it sorta hangin on a cliff haha. but on the bright side, this one is absolutely massssssive. the events of this chapter were originally outlined to be split into two chapters but I sat down to write it and I just...???? idk idk idk The pieces just flowed into each other so I decided what the hell...happy holidays :) so here i humbly offer you a nearly 18k chapter filled with many many up and downs (don't kill me :)) enjoy my loves.

Chapter 9

“How long have you been standing there?” Louis rubs angrily under his eyes, trying to rid the excess water that seems to never stop pouring.

“Umm…long enough…” Zayn scratches the back of his neck as he carefully steps closer to Louis’ seated figure on the floor.

“Well…cheers, mate.” Louis sighs heavily, lifting the hem of his shirt to wipe his eyes.

“It wasn’t on purpose or anything. I wasn’t like…trying to spy on you.” Zayn states, defending himself. “I came back because I left my phone at my workstation and then when I got here, I heard yelling so I just sorta hid behind the pantry. Then I recognized the voices as you and Harry and I kinda just…froze. I walked in around the part where you asked Harry if he still wanted to marry you.”

Louis looks up at Zayn with dead tired eyes, his knees drawn up to his chest. “So…basically, what you’re saying is that you heard it all, yeah?”

Zayn shrugs, haphazardly nodding his head side to side. “More or less.”

“Shiiit.” Louis drags out, racking his fingers over his scalp. “Shitty shit shit.”

They remain silent for a moment before Zayn speaks up again. “So I may be taking a stab in the dark here, but I’m assuming you and Harry aren’t actually brothers then…”

“What gave it away?” Louis chuckles ironically, tilting his head to the side and peering up at Zayn.

“Mmm…I dunno really.” Zayn teases with a small smile. “The topic of marriage kinda threw up some red flags for me.”

“Oh yeah, that’ll definitely do it, alright.” Louis laughs loudly, suddenly finding the whole situation oddly funny. “No, we aren’t actually related.”

“Ohh thank fuck!” Zayn exhales, relief flooding his features. “There was a good period when I thought you could be in a serious incestuous relationship.”
Louis barks out a laugh. “Ha! God no! Harry is one hundred percent not blood related to me. We share no genetic heritage. He’s my fiancé.”

“Everything makes so much more sense now!” Zayn sighs, a hand clutching his chest.

“I’d imagine it’d be a pretty confusing conversation to walk in on with no context.” Louis agrees.

“I’ll say.” Zayn crosses the distance between them and slides down against the station to sit next to Louis on the floor. “So...you’re not brothers, but you’re engaged and pretending to be brothers...how exactly does that work? Or maybe I should just ask...why? Why are you pretending?”

Louis rolls his head towards Zayn slowly, resting it on the side of the station wall. “You want the long or short version?”

“I don’t think we have time for the long one, so give it to me quick, I guess.”

“Right, so to be brief, Harry started his job at Hearst not too long ago. He has the bitchiest and most demanding boss to ever walk the face of the earth. Harry doesn’t always handle pressure well, especially if he’s nervous. He accidentally claimed to be single, and went further to claim me as his brother in front of his boss blah blah blah and now here we are.”

“So...you’ve been parading around as your fiancé’s brother all weekend to save his ass?”

“Yeah pretty much.” Louis nods his head in agreement. “That sums it up quite well actually.”

“That’s love.” Zayn says boldly, drawing up his knees.

Louis chuckles, peering at Zayn. “Is it?”

“Oh yeah, bro. Definitely.” Zayn confirms without a doubt. “I don’t know what Liam would have to do to get me to do what you’ve been doing. I mean, damn...now that I think about the weekend as a whole...Yeah...nope, I think I would have told Liam to fuck off by now. Or I’d probably rat him out. Whether on accident or on purpose, it would have happened. We wouldn’t have made it nearly as far.”

“But you love Liam, yeah? You really wouldn’t do it for him? Come on...even if he begged?” Louis pouts dramatically, squinting his eyes.

Zayn sighs, blowing air out of his nose. “Alright alright. I would. Of course, I would. I just probably would never admit to it.”

Louis laughs, nodding his head. “Understandable...I wasn’t going to do it at first.”

“So why did you?”

“He begged. And I’m a sucker for good heartfelt begging.” Louis shrugs with a light chuckle. “No, but in all honesty, joking aside...I’d do basically anything for Harry. He was so stressed about his new job and everything and I felt for him? you know? I wanted to help him in any way I could. Even if the only way to help him was the most ridiculous thing in the world. I’d embarrass myself and be a fool for him any day.” Louis admits honestly. “Plus, it was kinda nice to be needed.”

“What do you mean needed?”

“Maybe not needed...I don’t know. Of course, Harry needs me, he loves me. We love and need
each other, we’re a team.” Louis says, trying to explain himself. “But he doesn’t... need me anymore. When we were younger and first starting out together, Harry was so so young. He is actually two years younger than me and back then we were almost at different stages of life. He needed someone to protect him and to provide for him and take care of him. He needed that stability. And I was all that for him.”

Zayn nods his head waiting for Louis to continue.

“Now it’s kinda like it’s been reversed in a way. Harry is mature and stable on his own, he’s a grown man now, he doesn’t exactly need me to take care of him like that anymore. In fact, if I’m completely honest, he takes care of us now really. Which is...you know...fine and great and all that. We’ve adjusted and grown in our relationship and...it works.”

Zayn frowns. “But?”

“But...I don’t know...it’s weird. Like before he got this job I always knew where we were, where we stood with each other. It was me and him and we had a plan and a vision for our lives that we were going to reach together. We had the same end goals, the same mindset, basically. Us against the world and all that.” Louis explains, gaze trained on his shoes. “But it doesn’t feel like that anymore. This job...and then being here this weekend...I don’t know...I’m seeing a different side of Harry. A side of him that not only no longer needs me, but has replaced me with need for a career. Almost as if he’s outgrown me? Maybe...I don’t know.”

Zayn listens quietly, letting Louis vent his frustrations and process his thoughts out loud.

“And I am in no way, by any means, a person who feels that insecure in himself to have to always be needed by someone or anything like that.” Louis clarifies. “But no one likes the feeling of being completely unneeded or disregarded, especially by the person you care about the most, you know?”

Zayn nods his head soundlessly as Louis continues.

“Harry and I always made each other our number one priority. Since the very beginning, we put each other first. Always.” Louis smiles softly. “But now Harry’s number one priority is his career. It’s above me...or at least that’s how it feels. And I know that sacrifices have to be made sometimes for the overall greater good or whatever...I get that, really I do, but...I just feel like he has repeatedly sacrificed me for the sake of his job. And it’s all so bloody terrifying because he’s never done that before and I don’t really know what I can do...or what happens next. It’s just...so much...all at once.”

Zayn remains quiet, taking in Louis' words as he lends a listening ear.

“Zayn, can I ask you a personal question?” Louis adjust his gaze from the floor towards Zayn.

“Go for it.” Zayn encourages openly. “It’s only fair, really.”

“True.” Louis nods his head before continuing with his question. “Why aren’t you and Liam...”

“Engaged?” Zayn finishes after Louis’ voice drops off. “Married?”

“Yeah...you guys just seem so in love.” Louis comments. “Why haven’t you taken that next step?”

“We are in love, but it took us a while to get it right. To realize what we wanted and how to actually make it work.”

“Really? I would have never guessed that. You’re so...I don’t know...domestic.” Louis grins.
Zayn laughs, his eyes creasing at the corners. “We’re getting there. But we took a break. A long break.” Zayn divulges, expression suddenly contemplative. “And I don’t know… It’s not that I regret the break exactly, because it caused us to realize how stupid we were being…but at the same time I regret it, because we wasted so much time. The time we spent apart was the worst time of my life. And when we came back we didn’t just jump back to how it was. We had to rebuild it. All of it. From the ground up. Of course, we knew we loved each other, but we had to readjust; address things we used to avoid before. And make sacrifices that we should have made the first time around.”

“What kind of things or I mean…what happened?” Louis asks. “If you don’t mind me asking.”

“I don’t mind.” Zayn says shrugging. “Um… kinda similar to you I guess. I felt like Liam wasn’t making time for me. It was back when his job required him to travel all the time. And it seemed like he was never home and I was always so lonely. I never told him though. Whenever he got home I’d just instantly be so happy to have him back that I’d ignore everything else. I’d ignore the fact that with each passing day of him being gone, I was growing to resent him more and more for not being there. I suppressed it all while he was home and I got so caught up in the moment.”

Now it’s Louis’ turn to nod his head quietly as Zayn continues on.

“Until he had to leave again and all those feelings came crashing back. I tried everything to distract myself, to be more independent, but it just made me resent him even more until finally I snapped. He came back one night from a really long trip and I just lost it. We had a huge fight and we both said things we regret now and…we broke up.”

Louis blows out a stream of air from his nostrils. “Zayn…I… that’s… how did you fix it?”

“It was hard. It was so very hard, and I never want to go back to that place.” Zayn discloses in a somber tone. “But what I learned through it all is that, Liam wasn’t the only one at fault. Yes, his career was the major issue and he was being insensitive by leaving me and not recognizing how unbalanced our relationship was and on and on it goes. But sometimes you gotta look within yourself and think about what part you played in your situation you know? Like for me, personally, I let it be ok. I let things pass that I shouldn’t have and let it go on for far too long without actually talking to him about it. How could I truly expect Liam to know how I was feeling if I didn’t express it to him? If I kept hiding my feelings from him? Even if only minor, that makes me partially at fault. To make it work, he had to learn how to balance his career life with our home life and I had to learn how to better communicate and express myself in our relationship.”

Louis listens contemplatively to Zayn as he speaks.

“And it was a daily struggle, especially at first when we got back together initially, but we made it work because we love each other and it was harder apart than it was together.” Zayn expresses. “And of course, like any couple, we still have rough days. Some days I know that he gets so upset that he wants to murder me and some days I want to murder him too.” Zayn laughs, smiling to himself. “But on those days is when I look back and think about how far we’ve come. Not only together, but individually. I have my flaws and he has his, but we accept them and we help each work through them. We helped each other grow as individuals, so that we could work together as one.”

“Shit, Zayn.” Louis exhales, rubbing his hand over his face. “You’re getting all deep on me. Damn.”

“I apparently do that from time to time.” Zayn chuckles.

“So…do you think that there is something I can do? Or should do?”
“Well, I think that everyone in general should always be striving to grow and mature, personal growth is always key.” Zayn starts, facing Louis on the floor. “When it comes to you specifically though, I think you are so much stronger than I was, Louis. You’re already ten steps ahead. You are bravely facing the issues in your relationship head on and you’ve started to tell Harry how you feel, something not many people have the strength to do and something I really wish I would have done earlier.” Zayn confesses.

“Yeah, I guess, but…” Louis trails off, shrugging his shoulders.

“I don’t fully know the whole story, and I’ve only really just met you and Harry, but from what I just saw, I think it’s obvious that you both love each other. You wouldn’t be so emotional and conflicted if you didn’t.”

“I do love him Zayn and he does love me, I know he does, but what if we can’t make it work?” Louis asks openly, his eyes expressive. “What if it’s not enough?”

“It is enough if you make it enough. If you’re putting forth enough effort. If you both are on the same page, growing together with each step.” Zayn reassures. “Yeah, the real problems that you and Harry have go outside of this weekend, but he loves you. And if he loves you as much as he says he does and you love him equally in return, then it’s worth fighting for, Louis. Don’t give up too soon, allow Harry some time to sort his mind out. If this is the first time he’s ever heard you say all of this, you’ve gotta give him some time to process it and figure out what he can do to change it.”

“Ugh, but I don’t want to be here anymore.” Louis groans, running his hands through his hair exasperatedly. “I’m ready to go home.”

“Well, you can’t leave now.” Zayn states seriously.

“Why not?”

“No, you can’t just leave, that’d just be stupid!” Zayn declares boldly. “Tomorrow is the last day anyway. You’re almost done. That wouldn’t make any sense at all.”

“But I can’t do it, Zayn.” Louis sighs deeply, sounding hopelessly torn. “I’m not giving up on my relationship…I just can’t be here. The longer I’m here, the worse it gets.”

“Harry needs you, Louis. I know it’s hard for you, but I imagine it has to be hard for him too. Maybe not in the same way, but it can’t be easy on him. Harry brought you here in the first place because he needs you, because he relies on you for support, that much hasn’t changed.” Zayn says “Louis…he needs you.”

Louis remains quiet, hugging his knees to his chest as he stares at the floor.

“And if in the next twenty-four hours something else happens and you need someone to talk to or even someone to scream at, come find me. I’m here for you.” Zayn puts a reassuring arm around Louis’ slouched shoulder, pulling him close. “You’ll be ok, Lou.”

Louis nods his head slowly against his propped up knees while Zayn holds him close.

After a few moments of Louis sitting wrapped up in Zayn’s arms silently, Zayn peers down at him. “You good? Or at least good enough for now?”

“Yeah…I think so.” Louis responds quietly.

Zayn stands to his feet and offers his hand to help drag Louis up from the floor. Once grounded, they
begin to make their way out of the rear kitchen exit.

“Wait, wait.” Zayn pauses his steps, expression mildly confused. “I just thought of something.”

“What?” Louis asks, stopping behind Zayn.

“If Harry is your actual fiancé, then who is your fake fiancé? The one in the picture?”

“Oh god.” Louis chuckles lightly. “That’s my younger sister Lottie, actually. I know, I know. It’s a fucking mess.”

Zayn’s eyes grow wide as he begins to laugh loudly. “That’s absolutely brilliant, mate!”

“Desperate times.” Louis shrugs, laughing along with Zayn.

“Wait…so Niall?”

“Niall is a little shit.”

“He knew the whole time!?” Zayn gawks, mouth hanging open. “Oh my god!”

“Irish bastard.” Louis grumbles, shaking his head. “He made it all so much harder than necessary.”

“Damn right, he did.” Zayn laughs. “He encouraged all of Liam’s overly invasive questions.”

“Ugh god…I know. Do you know how hard it is to make up intricate stories like that on the spot?” Louis inquires seriously. “Luckily, I’ve been blessed with a silver tongue.”

Zayn doubles over in laughter, finding the whole thing hilarious.

“Speaking of Liam though, is it wrong of me to ask you not to tell him? I mean, I know he suspects…something, but could you not tell him? Not quite yet at least. I personally don’t really care at this point, but for Harry’s sake.”

Zayn calms his laughter, demeanor suddenly serious as he nods his head. “I won’t tell him.”

“Are you sure?” Louis asks, expression hesitant. “Because I don’t want to be the reason you keep things from each other. And I don’t want to cause problems in your relationship with your boyfriend.”

“Your secret is safe with me, Lou. I promise”

“Thank you Zayn, really.” Louis says earnestly, voice soft, not knowing exactly how to express his appreciation for Zayn. “Just…yeah…thanks.”

“Of course, bro.” Zayn doesn’t even hesitate to pull Louis into his arms once again in a warm embrace, his hands tracing soothing circles over Louis’ back. “Housewife squad for life.”

Louis encircles his arms around Zayn, clinging to him tightly, nuzzling his head in the crook of Zayn’s neck and holding onto him for dear life. Zayn finding out was unfortunate at first, but altogether exactly what he needed. He needed to vent, to talk to someone unbiased. He needed to be encouraged and he really really needed to just be held tightly and comforted.

“Alright, come on.” Zayn pulls back, letting go of Louis. “We have a date auction to get to. And Liam’s probably wondering where I am. You know how he is about time.”
“Yes, I know.” Louis grins. “How could I ever forget?”

Louis and Zayn leave the kitchen and return to their adjacent suites, each changing swiftly into more appropriate attire for the evening. Once dressed they walk to the banquet hall, where the auction is being held.

Completely transformed from the last time they had been in the vast space, the room is now basked in a reddish glow, giving the hall a deeply romantic feel. The mass array of tables still remain littered across the room, but are now adorned with fresh scarlet roses, illuminated by soft square candles.

The stage appears to have tripled in size, consuming the whole far side of the wall. A heavy crimson velvet curtain hangs from the beams positioned above the stage. The curtain is currently drawn closed, hiding whatever lies behind it. At each corner of the stage lies a huge screen displaying a goal meter, the indicator presently measured at zero, at the bottom of the meter.

Louis and Zayn stroll to a table a few rows back from the stage, already seated by Liam.

“Hi babe.” Liam greets warmly. “Find your phone? I was worried about you.”

“Yeah sorry, I…um…ran into Louis and we uh…I meant to text you.” Zayn tries, avoiding the truth of what actually happened.

“I’m a terrible influence it seems.” Louis adds with a small smile.

Liam laughs, adjusting his gaze to Louis. “Nice to see you again, Louis. Last I saw you, mere moments ago, you stole my title as cooking champion and things can never be the same between us.” He jokes, squinting his eyes humorously.

“Liam, I would have gladly given it to you.” Louis admits. “I still have no place in the kitchen.”

“You looked like you knew what you were doing to me.” Liam presses.

“Looks can be very deceiving.” Louis brushes off with a shrug.

“Mmm…I’m sure.” Liam teases, with an undertone of seriousness in his statement, eyes still squinted.

“Good evening all!” President Richards booms from the massive stage, microphone in hand. “It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Hearst Charity Date Auction!”

The audience, seated in the vast swarm of tables, erupts in excited applause, select individuals sounding way more exited than others.

“I know that many of you look forward to this event above all others each year, as it is a prime opportunity to kick start a possible new romance and maybe even find true love.” President Richards wiggles his eyebrows suggestively. “And although it is a lively and entertaining event, let us not forget the true purpose behind why we host the auction each year, to raise money for those less fortunate.”

“This year all the proceeds will be charitably donated to the Save the Children Fund in attempts to boast their overall mission for this year and save the lives of hundreds of children in need. Our goal is to reach one hundred thousand pounds by the end of the night.”

“Some may say this is a steep goal to strive for in one night, but I believe we truly can achieve if all goes according to plan. So please, please be generous. You know…if there is even the slightest
feeling, even the slightest marginal attraction to any of the potential dates we have in store, don’t even hesitate to place a bid. You never know where it may lead.” President Richards winks at the crowd, causing a few people to chuckle lightheartedly. “There actually have been a few long-term success stories from previous years, so you really never know. That’s why you shouldn’t dawdle in placing a bid. It could really be true love!”

The audience once again applauds, cheerful, amused laughter chiming in across the banquet hall.

“All of our most eligible bachelors and bachelorettes at Hearst have so graciously agreed to be a part of this auction. I think you all will be extremely pleased with the selection of individuals. I have the utmost faith that this auction will be a great success! With your help of course.”

“And, in case you were wondering, we take all forms of payment. Cash, cheque, money order and of course all major credit cards.” President Richards teases, always a jokester. “Maybe even minor credit cards, I don’t like to discriminate.”

The crowd laughs heartily as President Richards amuses himself with his own joke.

“So let’s get on with it!” President Richards cheers, raising the hand holding the slim iPad in the air.

“Alright alright, let me see here.” President Richards adjusts his glasses as he peers down at the screen in his hands. “Ok. Our first bachelorette originally hails from the beautiful city of Edinburgh. She has recently become fluent in French and also has taken up a knack for yoga. A date with this lovely lady will include an exciting day out on the horse range for a romantic horseback riding adventure.”

“Hmm…that sounds quite fun actually. I don’t remember the last time I rode a horse.” President Richards comments randomly, interrupting his own date introduction. He returns his attention back to the iPad in his grasp. “Sorry, anyway…Please welcome Hayley Carter!”

The curtains are instantly drawn back and a pretty blonde woman in a slim short cranberry dress sashays out onto the stage. She struts around the stage, hair bouncing along with her as hearty catcalls and piercing whistles echo through the banquet hall.

“Well, Ms. Carter, it appears you’ve made quite the first impression.” President Richards comments after Hayley has modeled across the entire stage. “We will start the auction off at five hundred pounds.”

The bidding goes back and forth jumping from bidder to bidder across the room, as the price continues to escalate. Hayley, much to President Richards amusement, ends up starting the night off strong, going for a solid six thousand pounds.

The final bid trend rises and falls as the night pushes on. Some dates selling for high amounts of money, while some not exactly hitting the mark. The actual dates arranged with each auctioned individual range from glamorous five-star dinners to daring hiking trips to adventurous white water rapid expeditions to simple trips to the skate rink. Bachelors and bachelorettes are bargained and argued over, the bids oscillating anywhere between two thousand pounds and eight thousand pounds. Each sum adding to the final goal displayed on the screen, the indicator bar continuing to climb higher and higher towards the end goal as the auction continues.

“Great news! First off, we may have just witnessed the beginnings of the next great love story. I really felt the connection between the last two! Didn’t you?” President Richards asks the audience excitedly, his eyes sparkling. “I think they make the cutest couple! I really hope it all works out for them.”
The audience collectively makes an ‘awww’ sound, apparently agreeing with the sentiments of President Richards.

President Richards looks at the digital indicator rising steadily on the screen. “Second, we have just reached seventy-five thousand pounds! And we still have so many more amazing people to go! At this rate we might surpass our final goal! How exciting is that?!?” He claps his hands together in absolute delight, almost dropping the tablet out of his hand in all his excitement.

“Ok…our next bachelor is a native of the gorgeous country of Ireland. He believes in living life to the fullest and he never turns down great food or a strong drink. He’s a fun loving guy who lives for a good laugh and a good time. He also has many hidden talents, but you have to get to know him to find them out.”

“I’m actually really curious about these alleged hidden talents.” President Richards ponders aloud as he peers down at the screen before him. “I’ll have to ask him later...Oh! Right, excuse me. Back to the auction. An enjoyable date with this gentleman will entail a fun trip to the London Zoo.” He chuckles lightly to himself. “That’s sure to be entertaining, to say the least! Please join me in welcoming Niall Horan!”

Niall bursts out of the velvety curtain, dressed in a slim fitted navy suit with a crisp partially buttoned white shirt revealing his freshly waxed, still slightly rubicund chest. Dapper as ever, his blond hair is parted to the side and smoothly slicked back, giving off an old timey classy feel. To top off his vintage look, he sports a pair of simple glasses, balanced on the bridge of his nose.

The crowd absolutely goes wild at the sheer sight of him. Niall eats it up as he teasingly parades around the stage, unbuttoning his suit jacket and doing a little spin. He strides to the edge of the stage and blows a kiss to a table filled with young women, all of them swooning.

“Ok ok, calm down! All can be yours, just pull out those chequebooks.” President Richards jokes, but is most likely dead serious. “We will start the bidding off as usual at five hundred pounds.”

“Six hundred pounds!” A curly haired redhead exclaims instantly, obviously having no time to waste.

From the center aisle a dark haired woman hollers. “One thousand!”

“One thousand five hundred pounds!” The same red-haired woman yells.

“Two thousand!” A deeper male voice sounds from the far corner of the banquet hall.

Niall raises a single eyebrow, surprised at the variety of bidders he is attracting, but still extremely amused.

The redhead girl hops to her feet and shouts loudly. “Five thousand pounds!”

“Whoa, that’s a quite a jump!” President Richards states in surprise, while Niall begins to lose composure, his face splitting with an entertained laugh.

“Five thousand five hundred!” Pipes a blonde woman near the front.

“Six thousand!” The ginger girl declares, moving closer to the stage.

President Richards hardly has to do much as the prices continue to elevate on their own. Niall smiles brightly from the stage as his head bobs from bid to bid trying to keep track of the most current offering.
“Ten thousand pounds!” The redheaded girl screams like her life depends on it. It was clear from the beginning that she was never going to lose this auction. She saw, she plotted and she conquered.

Niall starts laughing in pleased shock, his cheeks blossoming cherry red.

“Do I hear any higher bidders?” President Richards encourages, looking around the room. “Going once…going twice…sold for ten thousand pounds!”

The audience explodes with ample applause, Niall clapping right along with them as he continues to laugh with pure delight, his cheeks still flushed.

“Well, Mr. Horan, what do you think about that? A massive ten thousand pounds all to spend a day with you!” President Richards sounds overjoyed. “You are now the most sought after man of the night.”

“I can’t believe it!” Niall beams, still giggling. “That is insane! I’m so beyond honored.”

“Let’s just hope you’re worth all the money.”

“Oh most definitely!” Niall turns and winks at the ginger woman, who blushes crimson, and giggles into the hand covering her mouth. “I aim to please.”

“Well, I do hope so for her sake, she worked pretty hard to buy you. Either way, there will be no refunds, so you’re stuck with him!” President Richards teases gazing down at the woman. “Good luck, lovebirds!”

“Alright folks, let’s keep it moving.” President Richards continues on with the auction as Niall steps off the stage, descending the stairs on the far side.

Niall circles around the side of the banquet hall as the auction continues on, weaving through the vast sea of tables until he reaches the table Louis, Liam and Zayn are seated at.

“Well, look who it is.” Louis opens his arms in welcome at Niall’s arrival. “The sexiest man alive himself. What are you doing sitting with us lowly commoners?”

“Ha ha ha very funny.” Niall deadpans as he takes the empty seat next to Louis at the table. “Despite my newfound fame, I’ll always come back to my day ones. My humble subjects, my adoring fans.”

“Ha ha ha very funny.” Niall deadpans as he takes the empty seat next to Louis at the table. “Despite my newfound fame, I’ll always come back to my day ones. My humble subjects, my adoring fans.”

“I gotta admit that was quite a back and forth, Ni.” Liam laughs, eyes crinkled in a genuine smile. “I don’t think it’s ever been that upbeat during an auction. It escalated so quickly and it was still the highest bid of the night! That’s amazing!”

“Well, what can I say…everyone wants a piece of this.” Niall gestures to himself proudly, a smirk poised on his lips. “You gotta get it while you can. After all, I am a trademarked limited edition collector’s item.”

Louis glances over at Niall and rolls his eyes. “I’m suddenly so nauseous.”

“Ten thousand is a lot for anybody really.” Zayn comments. “I can’t believe you went for that much. Congratulations, bro!”

“All in a day’s work…I mean look at me, I’m obviously worth the money.” Niall laughs energetically, knowing how foolish he sounds.

Louis feigns gagging, covering his mouth exaggeratedly as he pretends to hurl.
“What’s with the glasses though?” Liam asks curiously.

“Well clearly, I’m pretty sexy au naturel.” Niall begins, taking a sip of the water glass in front of him. “I mean…I can’t really get much more attractive than this, but I can look more intellectual while also still being hot, instantly upping the wow factor. So hence,” he gestures to his face with one of his hands, “the spectacles.”

“You are the most ridiculous person I know.” Louis declares, reaching over to shove Niall’s glasses further up the bridge of his nose. “And I don’t say that lightly.”

“Glad to here it!” Niall accepts proudly. “Someone’s gotta spice up your life.”

“I need no more spice in my life at the moment.” Louis says seriously. “Thank you very much.”

“Wait, but what about Carly?” Liam inquires.

“What about her?” Niall counters, sipping at his water glass.

“Are you still interested in her?” Zayn asks as a continuation of Liam’s question. “Or…”

“She's great. I’ve only gone out on one official date with her, but yeah…I mean I like to keep my options open. I’m not a man who closes doors. Or opportunities. Or anything really.”

“You’re out of control.” Louis states flatly.

“I can’t be tamed.” Niall grins, shimmying his shoulders towards Louis.

“Please stop.” Louis groans.

Niall smirks, wagging his eyebrows from behind his glasses.

“Wonderful, wonderful!” President Richards exclaims, clapping his hands together as he watches the indicator on the screen rise to the green goal mark. “We have officially reached our goal of one hundred thousand pounds! Thank you to all of our extraordinary bachelors and bachelorettes, as well as the planning committee and of course, our lovely audience and generous bidders. Thanks to the generosity of you lovely people, we will able to make a huge impact in the lives of so many children.”

“Does that mean Harry doesn’t have to go?” Louis whispers to Niall, curiously. “I mean they made their goal, it’s kinda pointless now, right?”

“But…the night is not yet over, we still have one more eligible bachelor!” President Richards announces proudly.

“I see I spoke too soon.” Louis mumbles to himself with a sigh.

“Our final bachelor is originally from Holmes Chapel and is our newest edition to the Hearst Director Circle. He dabbles in the art of poetry and he aspires to become a master in the sport of badminton.” President Richards pauses and looks up from the screen. “Although it’s not written on here, I’ve recently learned that he is also quite talented in the kitchen. So that’s an obvious plus and he has a lot of spirit and a good sound heart.”

“A date with this delightful fellow involves an enlightening visit to London’s Royal Opera House to enjoy a world-class opera performance. Mmm…how stimulating, I wonder which show it’ll be.” President Richards once again adds his own commentary to the simple introduction. “No matter,
ladies and gentlemen, our final bachelor, Harry Styles!"

Harry steps out from behind the curtain slowly, his expression stoic and blank, almost as if he is wearing a mask concealing his true emotions and the only expression he can manage without losing it is a completely blank one.

His hair is flowing long and luscious, curls cascading to his shoulders. He wears a black sheer top, only buttoning a few buttons near the bottom, his body taunt and tone under the thin material of his blouse. His overly tight trousers cling to every crevice of his lower half, almost becoming one with the skin of his legs. Harry doesn’t even really need to do much, every single movement of his figure is explicitly displayed, clearly outlined and exaggerated by the spotlight shining on him. His muscles ripple as he moves further across the stage, he looks almost unreal. His striking appearance is duly noted by the audience as they take in his arrival.

“What the actual fuck.” Louis blurts loudly, more as a statement then a question as his jaw goes slack.

Liam peers at Louis from across the table with concern. “Are you alright, Louis?”

Louis shakes his head, clearing his thoughts. “Oh…yeah, yeah. Fine, totally great, yeah. Thanks.” Louis forces a tight closed lip smile, his cheeks straining until it physically starts to hurt.

“Sure you’re alright, mate?” Niall whispers, leaning in closer to Louis as Liam and Zayn return their attention to the stage.

Louis alternates between nodding and shaking his head, unsure of what his true reaction is. “Uh yeah…I mean…no. Wait, yes, of course…it’s just…actually no, I’m not. No.”

“What can I-”

“Did he really have to wear that shirt.” Louis interrupts disapprovingly. “Of all the fancy shirts and flowery button-ups and frilly blouses he owns, and of all the many outfits he packed and brought here…he’s wearing that.” Louis rants, clearly on a roll, building momentum. “And as if it’s somehow not enough that the shirt is completely transparent, he also doesn’t even have it buttoned up. Just casually got his titties out on display. He might as well have just shown up naked. Trousers tight as hell, basically painted on; shirt all see through and shit, essentially serving no purpose whatsoever. Why even bother to button one measly button on that shirt, better yet, why even wear it in the first place? It’s bloody useless! Nothing is left to the imagination! Just…what the fuck.”

“Ok…” Niall whispers. "Chill out Lou, you’re so on edge. Did something happen today?”

“No, I will not chill out!” Louis whisper shouts, ignoring Niall’s latter question. “Who the fuck dressed him like that?!“

“I thought you’re supposed to dress up. It’s a date auction.” Niall states as if it’s obvious.

“Yeah ok, but not like that. Look at you…then look at Harry.” Louis looks Niall’s seated form up and down. “Your little outfit is dignified and classy. You’re dressed in a three-piece suit for fuck’s sake!”

“Aww Lou is that a compliment?” Niall beams proudly.

“No, it’s fucking not a compliment! The point is that you fit the requirements while actually wearing garments that serve a purpose in clothing you. We aren’t even that close to the stage and yet I can clearly see all four of his nipples, every twitch of his muscles and literally everything going on in his
pants. Everything.” Louis points out bitterly. “I mean, if I hadn’t already seen it in living color, I’ve most definitely seen it all now. And so has everyone in this room.”

“I mean…he looks good.” Niall tries, trying to be positive. “He looks great, actually.”

“Of course, he fucking looks good! That’s the point! He is being paraded around like a piece of meat served on a silver platter.” Louis grumbles, biting on his lower lip in frustration. “She did this.”

“She who?” Niall creases his brow, absolutely lost. “Louis, you really don’t sound like you’re all the way there today. Seriously, what happened?”

“The she-devil.” Louis whispers simply as if the short statement says it all.

“Oh Medusa…You really think? But…why?” Niall questions seriously. “If she did…she probably didn’t realize what she was doing. She’s totally smashed, can’t really hold her actions against her; she’s been hitting the alcohol hard all weekend. I don’t think she’s been sober once in the last three days.”

“Oh please, she knows what she’s doing.” Louis confirms, his brow set into a hard line across his forehead. “And I don’t care if she’s been poisoned, there is no excuse for that amount of unprofessionalism and inappropriate behavior. First, no exec should ever be that boozed up all the time whether on a retreat or not. Second, she shouldn’t be manipulating the employees beneath her. It’s sexual harassment. I should represent everyone who she has ever wrongfully abused and sue her drunk ass.”

“I don’t think harassment falls under your jurisdiction.” Niall comments. “You’re an environmental lawyer.”

“And she is tainting the environment.” Louis objects. “I can literally feel the lust in the room and it’s choking me. I hate this. I fucking hate everything.”

“Louis, what happened today? Don’t you think you’re being a bit dramatic? It is a date auction and all. He is supposed to be found attractive, it’s a good thing.”

“Niall, I beseech thee, please kindly shut the fuck up. You’re not helping.” Louis states, losing more self-control over his tongue with each passing moment. “I’ve had the most shit day and I’m not here for your useless statements and pointless opinions.”

Harry finishes strutting around the stage as President Richards begins talking again. “Alright settle down, settle down. Man the chequebooks, Visas at the ready. We will, as usual, start the bidding off at five hundred pounds.”

“One thousand pounds!” Melissa shouts, of course as the very first eager bidder.

“No. Just no! Who the fuck does she think she is?” Louis pipes up again in an angry whisper. He honestly wants to scream at the top of his lungs and march across the room slap that woman clear across her snooty face. “First, she dresses, or should I say undresses, Harry in the single most revealing ensemble he owns. And now she has the audacity to fucking buy him too! Are there no rules to this auction!? This is fucking outrageous!”

“One thousand five hundred pounds!” An older woman in the corner shouts, lifting her hand lightly.

“Two thousand!” Melissa counters easily, almost sounding bored.

“Oh, no no no.” Louis shakes his head adamantly. “I will be damned if I let that thirsty cow win my
Harry. At least let him go to someone innocent or maybe a nice sweet old lady. I can deal with old ladies, but not her. Ugh, god please…not her.”

“You do realize someone will have to buy him right?” Niall asks uselessly. “It’s an auction, that’s like…the point.”

“Oh, gee…I had no idea. That’s news to me. Thank you for that insider information, mate. Where would I be without you?” Louis whispers to Niall, tone dripping with sarcasm. “Of course, I fucking know that, Niall! I’ve come to terms with that unfortunate fact already.”

“Ok, then what-”

“I would rather guzzle gallons of petrol and physically light myself on fire and consequently burn to blackened ash, than let that conniving witch buy a date with my Harry. It can be anyone, literally anyone, but…her.” Louis states fiercely as he looks to Niall, with flaming eyes.

“Louis, have you lost it? Do you know how you sound?” Niall observes Louis’ manic state with concern. “Insane. You sound insane.”

Louis ignores Niall’s statement, his eyes growing wide as if he’s just had a brilliant idea, he twists in his seat rapidly, facing Niall. “Niall, buy Harry!”

“Oh...so now you want my help?” Niall huffs, rolling his eyes.

“Niall please.” Louis begs earnestly, furthering his seated body towards Niall. “Just buy him. I’m sorry for snapping at you, really I am, it’s been a very long shitty day. But it’s important to me. Just bid on Harry.”

“No, what? Are you serious?” Niall questions, eyes growing increasingly alarmed behind the lenses of his glasses. “You can’t be serious right now!”

“Yes, I’m dead serious! Just do it Niall, buy him. I’ll be forever in your debt and eternally grateful and all that shit.” Louis requests, a level of desperation evident in his voice. “And not just for me. Do it for Harry.”

“No, I was literally just auctioned!” Niall protests stubbornly. “How does that even look? I was just bought on a date and now I’m buying another date?”

“Niall, I'll pay for it! Please.”

“Five thousand pounds!” Zayn calls out, winking across the table at Louis, obviously trying to make an effort in the whole situation, sensing Louis in distress.

Liam turns to Zayn with an incredulous expression, raising one eyebrow. “Babe?”

“What?” Zayn shrugs casually. “I think we should make a donation, it’s a good cause. And…I mean…he’s hot…just look at him.”

Louis mouths a silent “Thank you” towards Zayn with a small appreciative smile.

“Z, we don’t have to buy a date to write a cheque to the charity. You do know that, right? We can just donate.”

“Yeah ok, but Harry and I are secret lovers, remember?” Zayn bites back a playful smile. “I gotta support my side hoe.”
“That was a game, Zayn. A game.” Liam responds, not amused in the slightest.

“Oh Li, don’t be like that, babe. You’re still my number one hoe.” Zayn leans over and peppers Liam’s face with soft kisses until his expression cracks into a pleased bubbling smile, giggles escaping his lips.

“See, that’s a real friend.” Louis whispers, jabbing Niall roughly in his side with his index finger.

“Ow!” Niall jumps as he slaps Louis’ hand away under the table. “I am a real friend!!”

“Oh? I couldn’t tell seeing as through you’ve abandoned me in my time of dire need. That trifling home-wrecker is singlehandedly ruining my relationship and you are just sitting idly by. And you have the nerve to continue to call yourself a ‘friend’.” Louis degradingly adds finger quotations to the word ‘friend’ while shaking his head. “You should be ashamed of yourself.”

“Louis, I really don’t think it’s all that serious and I also don’t think you’re in your right mind.” Niall murmurs, his brow scrunched. “And how does Zayn know anyway? What the fuck happened today? Did I miss something? I mean, I obviously did...you’re exceptionally wound up and nothing out of your mouth makes any fucking sense.”

“One thing. I asked you to do one simple thing for me.” Louis rambles on ignoring Niall’s questions purposefully, not really wanting to relive the events of earlier all over again. He wishes he could make it all just go away. This is without a doubt the longest weekend of his life. “You know, I knew something like this would happen. I told Harry his boss has a thing for him and he was like ‘oh no no, that’s ridiculous Louis, don’t be absurd’.” Louis lowers his voice imitating Harry. “Well, how ridiculous is it now, Harry? How fucking ridiculous is it now?”

“Seven thousand pounds!” Melissa’s shrill voice pipes up again as she raises her hand from her seat.

“Oh fuck this.” Louis gripes, under his breath, standing to his feet and turning away from the table. “Excuse me.”

Niall grabs Louis’ hand as he stands, looking up to him. “Louis wait, where are you going?”

Louis frees his hand and starts moving away from the table. “To take care of a few things… personally."

“Alright, do I hear seven thousand five hundred?” President Richards encourages, while Harry looks like he is trying his best to not appear absolutely horrified. He clasps his hands behind his back and presses his lips tightly together, worry lines beginning to wrinkle his features.

“Eight thousand!” Melissa unsurprisingly offers, always going a tad higher than necessary.

Louis curves around the large room to a completely random table. He ducks down to his knees behind the head of a plump bald man. He clears his throat softly, and cups his hands around his mouth. "Eight thousand five hundred!” He screams in high mock feminine voice.

“Nine thousand!” Melissa unsurprisingly offers, always going a tad higher than necessary.

Louis circles around the large room to a completely random table. He ducks down to his knees behind the head of a plump bald man. He clears his throat softly, and cups his hands around his mouth. “Eight thousand five hundred!” He shouts boldly, lowering his tone several octaves to sound believable. The man looks around in confusion, but Louis has already slipped away, moving on to a new table.

“Nine thousand!” Melissa bids effortlessly, never taking her eyes off Harry on the stage.

“Not today bitch, not fucking today.” Louis mutters under his breath as he slides behind a table full of middle aged women. Most of them are ogling Harry anyway so he might as well give them the nudge they need. Once again he clears his throat and draws his hands up to his mouth. “Nine thousand five hundred pounds!” He screams in high mock feminine voice.
“Joyce, was that you? I thought we agreed we weren’t going to be cougars this year?” One of the women at the table questions disgruntledly. “That boy is a baby! He’s probably half your age!”

“I know, I would never! I swear that wasn’t me!” Joyce defends, holding her hands up in surrender.

Louis snickers to himself as he slinks off towards the back of the banquet hall.

“Ten thousand pounds!” Melissa bids after only a brief pause.

“Dammit, come on! When will she fucking stop!?” Louis crosses the hall and crouches down at another unsuspecting table completely occupied by men of different age groups.

“Ten five!” Louis grunts boisterously, in a voice much huskier than his own. He quickly dodges out of the way as the men all glance around curiously at each other in confusion, completely unsure of where the bid originated from or who it was placed by.

“Twenty thousand pounds!” Melissa stands to her feet and boldly declares, her voice resonating through the banquet hall. No one could ever say that she wasn’t determined, that’s for sure.

The audience collectively gasps in disbelief at the obscene amount of money being offered. If it wasn’t enough that Melissa just doubled her previous offer, she also just placed the highest final bid of the night, doubling the previous record earned earlier by Niall.

“Motherfucker!” Louis hisses angrily to himself, “Who the fuck has that kind of money to spend on a date!? A fucking date! She can’t be that desperate! What the fuck?!”

Harry’s jaw drops open in pure shock, his eyes dilating wide in absolute horror. He looks like he is on the verge of passing out, his complexion ghostly pale and severely discolored.

“Twenty thousand pounds! Did you hear that, Harry?” President Richards exclaims, overly thrilled at the donation. “Well, I don’t think anyone will match that, but for good measure…Going once…Going twice…Sold!”

Harry winces as if he’s just been brutally slapped across the face, his eyes falling closed slowly. He’s just been sold to his boss. Of all the people in this room, it just had to be her. An evening alone with her sounds worse than eating shards of broken glass.

“I just cannot believe!” President Richards exclaims. “Executive Henderson that is such a hefty and generous donation, we’ve never had such a large amount offered at one time as you must know from your involvement in previous years. We are truly grateful.”

“Well...it’s for such a noble cause! I’m happy to help.” Melissa says towards the stage, still eyeing Harry. “And I’m sure we will have a smashing time on our date. I’m just so excited.” Melissa winks at Harry seductively for emphasis.

“What do you think about that, Mr. Styles? It’ll be quite a date, I’m sure!” President Richards extends the mic out towards Harry. “Can you handle that?”

“God, help me.” Harry says weakly into the mic as a completely serious cry for help, but the audience takes it as a simple joke, laughing wholeheartedly.

“Oh young Harry, you’re a riot!” President Richards clasps Harry on the back with an amused chuckle.

Harry tries to smile, but it portrays more as a grimace. He looks nauseous, his face shifting from
abnormally pallid to a ghastly green.

“Well, this event was an outstanding success! Thanks again to everyone who contributed in any way to make it all happen and run smoothly. On behalf of The Save the Children Fund, I honestly cannot begin to thank you enough. Truly, from the bottom of my heart to yours, thank you.” President Richards bows his white haired head in earnest sincerity.

The whole room bursts in energetic applause, everyone touched by his genuine thank you. President Richards is a brilliant leader that seems to be universally loved and adored across all accounts. Through the years he has collectively earned the respect of the entire publishing house. The adoration is extremely well deserved, as he is a truly incredible man.

“The next time that I will formally see you all is tomorrow at our last event, the closing dinner. It has been a brilliant weekend and I hope each and every one of you enjoy the rest of your stay here at The Grove. Try the spa or go golfing or tour the gardens or…I don’t know! Just have a good time!” President Richards raises his hand in a closing wave. “Good night everyone.”

As soon as President Richards is done speaking, Harry spots Melissa ascending the stairs to the stage towards him. He wastes no time and swiftly turns on his heel in the opposite direction, fleeing to the staircase on the other end of the stage. He has to find Louis and he will not be roped into another one of her schemes. He’ll just deal with her later. Or never.

Harry searches the whole banquet hall, avoiding conversation at all costs. Several coworkers attempt to talk to him and he really hates to be rude, but small talk is just not a priority right now. Harry sees Liam, Zayn, and Niall chatting on the far side of the room, but as soon as he realizes that Louis is not among them he swerves in the opposite direction. He knows that if he goes over there, he’ll get stuck and end up wasting even more time.

Once Harry has explored the entirety of the large room and confirmed the fact that Louis is no longer here, he decides he might as well go back to their suite. There is a possibility that he just went back there. But there is also a slight possibility that he left, actually left. But Harry refuses to think like that. No need to jump to conclusions, just yet.

Harry treks through the resort as quickly as his two feet will carry him and makes it back to his suite in record time. Reaching the door, he’s almost scared to go inside, afraid of what he will find inside. Or won’t find.

Unsurprisingly, Louis is once again nowhere to be found. Harry hopelessly scours the suite for him, looking for clues or indicators as to his possible whereabouts.

“Dammit, where is he?” Harry asks himself, discouraged, feeling himself starting to panic.

Harry feels unnervingly restless and exceedingly powerless, torn as to what exactly he should do next. Go out and ransack the resort all in the name of finding Louis or just wait it out until he possibly comes back, both options raising his anxiety levels to unheard of heights.

Ten seconds from his inevitable emotional breakdown, Harry hears the suite door click open. Louis steps in the room slowly with his head bowed, he lifts his head and pauses as he sees Harry staring at him like his life just flashed before his eyes.

“You’re still here.” Harry exhales, sagging with relief and letting out a breath he didn’t even realize he was holding.

“I’d at least tell you if I was going to leave.” Louis answers quietly, a slight frown to his brow. “I
wouldn’t just up and go without letting you know.”

“I thought that…especially after…” Harry trails off, sounding overwhelmed, casting his gaze to the floor.

“That wasn’t completely your fault, Harry.” Louis sighs. “Being in the auction in general was unquestionably your fault, but you couldn’t really control who actually bought you. Even though I knew-”

“Please…don’t even say it, I already know.” Harry interrupts, shaking his head solemnly, gaze still downcast. “You were right. My boss may have a thing for me.”

“May?”

“Has a thing.” Harry corrects, lifting his head. “Definitely has a thing.”

“Mmm.” Louis hums, lifting a single finger towards Harry. “So she dressed you like that I assume…”

Harry looks down at his body self-consciously. “Um…well yes. I mean they are my clothes…obviously, but she picked it out and put it all together.” Harry admits, head downcast. “I definitely wouldn’t have worn this to a date auction…especially not when…you…um…yeah…I would have ideally worn something way less…revealing.”

“Mmm.”

“And I swear I had no idea she was gonna do any of that…buy me, I mean.” Harry clarifies, twisting his rings anxiously around his fingers. “And not for that amount of money. I mean…it’s actually ridiculous.”

“Mmm.”

“Why aren’t you more upset?” Harry’s tone is soft as he frowns deeply, looking concernedly at a blank faced Louis. “You have every right to be. I know for a fact that I would be livid if I were you right now.”

“Oh…I was extremely upset…I still am. I’m just…” Louis shrugs looking absolutely defeated, his voice lacking in any inflection or conviction. “I’m too tired to be really upset anymore. I don’t really have it in me right now to be honest. I feel numb to it all and I feel like I’ve said all I have to say today. There isn’t much more for me to do or say right now.”

“You said a lot today…or earlier…”

“I did.”

A deep silence encompasses them, neither of them really wanting to go into what was said earlier. It’s all too heavy and too much and too unfamiliar.

“Louis, we-”

“Oh, Zayn knows by the way.” Louis interrupts randomly off the top of his head, like it’s no big deal.

Harry’s eyes grow wide with genuine surprise. “Wait, what!??”

Louis yawns, rubbing his eyes. “Yeah, he accidentally walked in on our conversation, so that’s that I
“Shit.” Harry exhales, running his hands through his hair anxiously. “Um...will he or did he…”

“He hasn’t told Liam, if that what you’re worried about.” Louis answers flatly, before Harry even finishes forming the question. “But he suspects something anyway so…”

“He does?” Harry breathes deeply, his brow creasing.

“I mean, come on Harry, it’s really not the hardest puzzle to solve.” Louis states obviously. “He’s a bright man, he’s bound to figure it out. Give him at least a little credit.”

Harry nods his head and sighs. “Yeah…”

“And I actually feel quite bad because it’s really not Zayn’s problem at all and he shouldn’t have to lie to his boyfriend for you. He’s doing it for me because I asked him to, for god knows what reason. But you need to sort your shit out, Harry. And sort it quick.”

“I know, I know, you’re right.” Harry agrees, nodding his head repeatedly. “I will Louis…I promise…I’m sorry.”

Louis stares at him blankly for several moments, frustrated at the amount of times he has repetitively heard the word ‘sorry’ tumble out of Harry’s mouth, almost as if it is some sort of reflex statement. A purposeless apology can only carry so much weight at this point, and the threshold has long been reached.

Louis blows a steady stream air out of his mouth. “Well…I’m knackered, I reek of pizza dough and I’m pretty sure I have flour and all sorts of other baking shit in my hair. So I’m gonna have a nice, long shower and go to sleep.” Louis turns his body and sets about crossing the suite towards the bedroom door.

“Ok.” Harry says, still unmoving, feet grounded firmly as he watches his fiancé. “Louis?”

Louis pauses his movements at the sound of his name being called and waits silently near the doorframe for Harry to continue.

“Um…I know you’re upset and angry with me and I know we aren’t ok right now and I take full responsibility for that but...thank you...for not leaving.” Harry says softly in earnest appreciation, his expression open and sincere.

Louis turns around slowly, meeting Harry’s eyes. He remains soundless, but nods his head marginally, the acknowledgment so slight, Harry almost thinks he imagined it. They share a small moment, gazing at each other before a loud knock sounds from the door, bursting their little bubble of rare peace.


“Harryyy!”

Louis blinks several times, recognizing the shrill voice. “Please...tell me that’s not who I think it is.”

“Harry Harry Harryyy!”

Harry rolls his head back and lets out a long annoyed exhale. “But...that’s weird...She never calls me by my first name. It’s always ‘Styles’.”
“Make it go away.” Louis grumbles, as he vacates the common area of the suite. “I’m going to take that shower now.”

“Yeah…ok.” Harry groans again as he strides towards the door tentatively. The unceasing banging becoming more and more persistent the longer he takes.

“Harry! I know you’re in there! Open the door! Harryyy!”

Harry unlocks the suite door and opens it slowly. Standing before him in the hallway is none other than the Melissa Henderson, in all her glory, dressed in nothing more than a thin silk robe. Having most likely forsaken her usual glass altogether, she holds a whole bottle of what appears to be vodka in her grasp. Or what once was vodka, as the bottle is nearly empty.

Harry takes in her appearance with a confused expression. “Um… Executive Henderson, what a surprise.” He deadpans, pursing his lips. “What are you doing here? It’s kinda late. It’s very late actually. Too late for you to be here…now.”

Melissa reaches up to squeeze his cheeks. “Oh Harry Harry Harryyy.” She coos, her breath fetid with the smell of pure alcohol. “I told you, call me Melissa, dear.”

Harry cringes at her touch, absolutely repulsed by the twinge of foul air eluding her mouth. “Erm. ok…Melissa…what are doing here…in my suite...at such a late time?”

“Harry, don’t be coy.” She wags the vodka bottle carelessly at him, swinging it around in her arms almost hitting Harry smack in the face.

“Ok ok…I’ll take that. You have clearly had more than enough.” Harry states, forcefully prying the bottle from her vice grip. “Let go of it.”

“Fiiine.” Melissa huffs out in a whiny tone, letting go of the bottle begrudgingly. “It’s not why I’m here anyway.”

Harry takes the bottle and sets it down safely on the dark wood table near the suite door. “Ok, so again…why are you here?”

“Oh, Harry love, you must know.” Melissa says teasingly stepping further into the suite and closer to Harry.

“Um…I’m sorry. Maybe I’m missing something. Know what?” Harry asks, unsettled by the proximity of his boss, stepping backwards with each step she takes towards him.

“That I want you.” Melissa declares boldly, continuing to close the distance between them.

“You…wait…what!?” Harry gawks stumbling over his words in shock.

“Yes, I wouldn’t pay that amount of money for just anybody. You’re special. Very speeeecial.” Melissa slurs, with an alluring grin.

“Uh Exec- I mean…Melissa…I think you’re drunk. Obviously. You should probably just go back to your suite and we can just forget about this.” Harry begins to lead Melissa to the door, attempting to guide her with a firm hand on her shoulder. “You can just leave now. It never happened. No harm done.”

“Nooo, I’m not leaving! I’m staying right heeere!” She places a suggestive hand on his exposed chest.
Harry recoils instantly to her touch, jumping back. “Ok no. Nope…no, you’re definitely out of it. Come on, I’ll even walk you back to your suite if you want.” Harry tries to lead by example and walks towards the suite door.

Melissa traces his steps quickly, catching him completely off guard in an ambush and forcing Harry back until he is pressed up against the steady door. “I thought we could start our little date early.”

“What?!” Harry squeaks, his eye panicked and wide. He tries desperately to do all he can to become one with the solid door, propping himself firmly against it in a feeble attempt to get as far away from her as possible.

“Mhmm.” Melissa continues to crowd Harry’s space, her face inching dangerously close to his. She pushes against him while her hands toy with the remaining buttons on his sheer shirt.

Harry attempts to wiggle his way free from against the door, but Melissa has him pinned down, her body pressing flush against his. “Ahhh! You’re literally my boss! That's definitely not appropriate!”

“Who caaaaares? No one has to knooow. No one will ever knooow. It'll be our little secret.” Melissa takes that moment to surge forward, closing the gap between their faces. Her lips press firmly against his, as her tongue fights to make its way past the gates of Harry's unwilling mouth.

A strangled yelp escapes Harry’s throat as he slides his body down against the door and ducks free underneath her arm, escaping her grasp. “Ack gah agh ugh!” He gags loudly, wiping his mouth with a beyond revolted expression. Harry stumbles backwards to a safer area of the suite as his sheer shirt hangs open at his sides.

“Oooh you’re a feisty one!” Melissa wiggles her eyebrows at him as she sashays her hips in his direction. “I love that you’re playing hard to get. I’m always up for a challenge.”

“I’m not playing hard to get! There is nothing to get! There will be no getting! I can’t be gotten! No…get got…get…no…shit!” Harry stutters, completely flustered and losing the ability to form coherent sentences. He continues to back away from her, nearly bumping into a lampstand. “I don’t want…this! Or that! Or you! No!”

“Yes, you do I know you dooo.” Melissa forces Harry back into the far corner of the suite.

“No no no I really really don’t. No!” Harry curls his body into the corner, eyes darting back and forth, seeking an escape route.

Once again Melissa rushes towards him, but Harry feels it coming this time and slides away just in the nick time.

“Ahhhh!” Harry squeals as he escapes the corner and flees to the bedroom, his completely unbuttoned shirt, sliding down over his shoulders.

Melissa follows him into the room, a playful drunken smile on her lips. “Oh! Are we playing a gaaaame?”

“No!” Harry stubbornly protests, waving his hands wildly around him. “No, we aren’t playing any games! We aren’t doing anything! Nothing is happening! No! No!”

“I like gaaames.” Melissa grins mischievously, tracing his steps. “I'm very good at them. Verrry verrry good.”

Harry scuttles to the other end of the room. There are only so many places to run and he doesn’t
want to physically hurt her or anything. But she needs to stop. Now.

“My um fia...I mean my...erm fuck!” Harry sputters flustered, as Melissa once again invades his personal space. “My...Louis...is like...right in the-”

“I don’t caaare.” Melissa places a single finger over his mouth, silencing him. She leans up on the tips of her toes and whispers near his ear. “I want you.”

Harry slaps her hand away from his lips and jumps back at the uncomfortable feeling of her words being whispered against his ear. “Ok...I get that you have some sort of twisted attraction to me and I guess that's... flattering and all...kind of...I don’t know...but you’re my boss and I'd rather-”

Melissa raises one eyebrow seductively and in one swift motion tugs on the tie of her silk robe causing it to fall open revealing smooth tone skin skimpily adorned by a black lacey bra and matching lace panties.

“Oh my god!” Harry gasps, taken completely by surprise. He staggers backwards and trips over one of Louis’ discarded shoes, falling over ceremoniously on his ass. “What the fuck are you doing!?”

He yells from the floor, scooting backwards against the carpet.

“Getting what I want.” Melissa lunges towards him on the floor, but Harry hops up on his feet at alarming speed before she is able to pounce on him. He marginally misses her attack, but in his haste ends up tripping clumsily over his own two feet, landing right back on the floor, limbs flailing.

“This can’t be happening to me. This can not be happening to me.” Harry repeats under his breath like a prayer as he crawls on all fours across the carpet, trying to map out a solid escape. “This. Can. Not. Be. Happening.” Maybe if he says it enough times, everything will just go away. Maybe she'll go away. “Oh, I’m so dead. There is no way I can survive this. He’s actually gonna kill me.”

Harry attempts to squeeze under the first queen bed, inching his body as quickly as he can through the tight space between the bedframe and the floor. By using his elbows in an army crawl, he gets the upper half of his body to safety under the bed until he feels a firm grasp wrap around his still booted ankle.

“Fuck.” Harry whimpers, fighting desperately to continue forward as his leg is pulled in to the opposite direction.

“Who is ‘he’?” Melissa demands as she forcefully yanks Harry out from under the bed by his heels. With nothing to really hold onto his body goes easily. “Is there someone else? Are you cheating on me?”

“Am I...what!?” Harry squeaks, flipping over on his back, with his foot still held in captivity. “We aren’t...you and I aren’t...what!?”

“Oooh...but we can bee.” Melissa says, seductively which actually comes off more as frightening than anything else.

“This is insane!” Harry screams, prying his foot free from his boot as he scrambles to get away. “You're insane!”

Melissa watches Harry clamber inelegantly to his feet, his black boot still left in her hand. “Come on Harryyy!”

Harry unwaveringly shakes his head without ceasing, as he continues to back away from her. “No, no I really can't. I won't! No!”
“Yes, yes you can Harry. Have me.” Melissa states shamelessly, taking her already open robe completely off, letting it fall softly to the floor. She is left standing in only skimpy lingerie that is not doing the best job in concealing her nearly nude body.

“Ahhh! No! God no! Put that back on! Fuck!” Harry slaps a hand over his face, to shield his eyes. He cracks his fingers open just enough to see partially in front of him as he bends down blindly and picks up the robe off the floor and throws it at her.

She shakes her head as the thin silky material returns back to the floor and strides closer to him

“Oh my god! Why me, why me!” Harry stumbles back until his leg hits the edge of the second queen bedframe. Before he can move away from the bed, Melissa pounces, pushing him down onto the mattress. Although much smaller than Harry in stature, Melissa is surprisingly strong and even more determined. She pins Harry’s floundering arms down near his head as she straddles his hips.

“We could be great together. Sooo sooo great.” Melissa encourages from her comfortable seated potion on Harry’s lap.

“What in the whole hell are you talking about?!” Harry shouts, still squirming, his legs kicking up on top of the mattress as his body twists around. “There is no we! There has never been a we! Just you as my boss and me as your subordinate!”

“Same thing.” Melissa shrugs as she leans down over his torso.

“No! No, not the same thing!” Harry twists and thrashes underneath the weight of her body pressing down against him. “Not the same thing at all!”

“Sounds the same to me.” Melissa lets go of Harry’s arms above his head, and occupies her hands with Harry’s belt instead.

“No!” Harry quickly slaps her hands away from his belt buckle, their hands fighting against each other. “Get off me! I’m not going to sleep with you! I refuse!” Harry squirms as her bare thighs tighten over his hips.

“Why nooot?” Melissa pouts, jutting her bottom lip out.

“What!? Isn’t it obvious?! I just told you tha-"”

“Do you not think I'm attractive?” She interjects, tone questioning and doubtful.

“Um…it’s not that…it’s um…you're...great...” Harry tries, taken slightly aback by her sudden shift in tone and change in demeanor. “You’re…yeah...great?”

“It is that isn’t it.” Melissa frowns self consciously, as she lets go of Harry’s belt in surrender. “It has to be that.”

“Uh…no? It's...”

Melissa sits up on his lap, her expression contemplative as she gazes down at him in a fleeting moment of clarity. “My last boyfriend said I wasn't good enough or pretty enough. He didn’t want me anymore and he broke up with me this year. Well…it was hardly a breakup actually. He screamed at me and said I wasn’t worth it and then he called me a heartless bitch and left me for someone else.”

“Um…I’m…sorry?” Harry offers, confused as to why exactly she is telling him all this. Right now
especially. Seated on his lap in lacey panties, in the middle of the night. He has a strong urge to just throw her against the wall and flee to safety.

“And…I…it’s been absolutely horrible. I’m having the worst year of my life and I’m so lonely. I have no life at all. All I really do is work now and I’ve worked so hard and I…I have everything but at the same time…nothing.”

Harry stays completely still, panicked wide eyes staring at her. At this point her defenses are completely down, he could easily just flip her over on the floor and make a run for it. But he doesn’t want to end up hurting her. Especially not physically. And she looks emotionally damaged enough already.

“Do you think that’s true? Is he right?” Melissa asks earnestly, soundly uncharacteristically unsure and small. “Am I heartless?”

“Uh…well…”

All of a sudden Melissa bursts into tears, heavy drunken sobs racking her bare body. “I thought he really loved me, I thought I meant something to him. I loved him so much and I tried so hard to be good enough for him. But he didn’t want me and you don’t want me and I just feel like I’ll always be alone and no one will ever want me!” She cries, her broken voice high pitched and whiny. “And I can’t stop drinking. I was never an alcoholic but now…I just…I can’t stop…it keeps me numb to everything. It helps me forget. If I stop drinking, then…then I’ll really have to face the truth. I’ll have to deal with…everything. And I can’t do that…I don’t…I don’t want to face myself.”

“It’s ok…” Harry tries weakly, not really sure how to be comforting towards her.

“It’s not ok! I am a heartless bitch and I’m unlovable. I’ll never have someone who actually cares about me. I’ll never find love or have a family. I’ll never be happy!” Her body collapses on top of him as she bawls into the crook of his neck.

“It’s…ok…” Harry repeats the only thing he can think to say at this point, patting her back awkwardly.

Melissa continues to sob loudly against his chest, ugly tears streaking her face and smearing her makeup all over Harry’s torso.

Harry stares stunned at her breakdown, not once did he ever think he would be here in this moment watching his boss sob onto his chest. Not once. He never signed up for this. It was definitely not in the job description when he signed his contract to Hearst. He definitely would have remembered seeing a ‘Psycho Ass Boss’ clause.

Melissa is utterly wasted, so much so that her insecurities are being completely unmasked. Truth be told, she is a beautiful woman, physically striking in fact. Harry has never seen her so unsure of herself. She would never even think to speak of any of this in a sober state. She’d probably want no one to know and probably die of mortification if anyone knew the insecurities and doubts she carried. After all, she has an image to maintain and a presence to uphold. Harry feels slightly bad for her, but not nearly bad enough.

All of a sudden, her incessant crying ceases, her body stills and her breathing becomes shallow. A stark and unsettling contrast to her demeanor only moments ago.

Harry peers down at the resting silent figure toppled on his chest. He pokes at her cheek curiously. “Psst. Are you ok?” He shakes her body lightly, but is met with no response, just deadweight lying
on top of him.

Harry lets out a long breath and lies utterly dumbfounded. One minute his boss is trying to have her way with him and get him to sleep with her, then she’s crying uncontrollably about her life problems and now she is completely passed out, dead drunk, lying almost naked, curled against his exposed upper body.

Harry looks up from Melissa’s unmoving hardly clothed figure, sprawled out on top of his body, and sees Louis glaring unblinkingly at them from the bathroom door. His hair is dripping wet, with a towel slung over his shoulders. He stands in an unzipped black hoodie, revealing his naked, still damp chest, his legs clothed in soft grey sweatpants. “Louis, I-”

“Harry, get her the fuck out of here.” Louis’ voice is eerily calm, but laced with venom, cutting through the stillness of the room. His whole body is rigid, teeth gritted tightly together, fists clenched. “Or I swear to god, I will fucking murder her.”

“Ok…but Louis, really, I-”

“Harry, stop. Just stop. Listen to me. If you don’t get her bitch ass out of here right now, so help me there will be a homicide.” Louis warns slowly, tone a startling mix of fire and ice all at once, a terrifying combination. “I promise you, I have never been so onboard with the act of murder until this very moment. I have had more than enough of this shit.”

“I can't just throw her outside! She’s unconscious!”

“Toss her in the fucking hallway Harry, I don’t give a single fuck.” Louis voice remains completely level, as he stares with unblinking eyes. Although his words are quiet, it’s apparent that he is seething internally. “Get. Her. Out.”

“But Louis that's so mean! Something could happen to her, I can’t be cruel.”

“Harry.” Louis pauses, closing his eyes slowly, his mouth pressed into a firm strict line, holding back. “Get rid of her.”

“But how?”

“Don’t ask me how. Just do it. Call room service or better yet, call animal control or call the exterminator.” Louis instructs firmly. “But don’t ask me how or I swear, you will be calling the police.”

“Ok.” Harry props himself up slightly on his elbows, Melissa sliding lower over his bare torso.

“Harry, I’m so beyond serious. Get her out of our suite. I don't care how you do it or where she goes or what happens to her, but I want her gone by the time I get back.” Louis removes the towel from his neck and drops it carelessly to the floor.

“Get back?” Harry scrunches his brow in confusion. He almost wishes Louis would just yell at him, at least he would know what’s going on in Louis’ mind. This silent cold version of Louis is so so much worse; getting stabbed in the neck repeatedly would be less painful than this. “Where are you going?”

“Out.”

Louis zips his hoodie up all the way to his neck and lifts the hood over his freshly shampooed hair. He silently stuffs his sockless feet into a pair of sneakers, grabs his keycard and leaves the suite.
without another word, slamming the door behind him.

“Damn it all to fucking hell! Shit! Fucking dammit!” Harry curses incessantly, overly frustrated. He tosses his head back against the pillows behind him and groans. “He is so fucking pissed! I’ll never get him to forgive me at this rate. And I… he almost… we… dammit!”

Harry attempts shaking Melissa again, jostling her body firmly. But she remains unresponsive and unmoving.

Harry tries once more to wake her, shaking her as hard as he can, but maybe a tad too hard because she slides off his body, rolls off the bed and hits the ground facedown with a loud thud.

“Oh shit!” Harry curses, getting off the bed to examine her. He finds that she is still completely unconscious, none the wiser. “Damn. How much did you drink? You really are knocked out. And I thought I was a bad drunk…”

Harry rights himself and slides his already almost completely off blouse from his body, replacing it with a basic black t-shirt. He stuffs his foot into the lone boot he sacrificed earlier and fixes his undone belt buckle as he crosses the span of the room to pick up Melissa’s discarded silk robe.

Harry crouches down next to her on the floor. Hesitantly, he lifts her up under her arms like a child and props her body up against the side of the bed. Without touching too much, he carefully slides the robe onto her body, pulling the two lapels of her open robe together. He fastens the robe, tying the sash into a neat bow.

Harry reaches into the front pocket of the robe for a room key and finds nothing. He tries the adjacent pocket and finds nothing but a tube of lipstick. “Of course you don’t have your keycard with you. Of fucking course. Because this day just couldn’t get any better.”

Harry sighs deeply while carding his fingers through his hair. He slides a hair tie from his wrist and styles his wild hair into a quick messy bun, missing a few stands and letting several hairs fly loose.

He bends over, leaning down to scoop her up into his arms, bridal style. Her head dangles and bobbles lifelessly, causing her to appear dead. If it wasn’t for the shallow breaths escaping her nostrils from time to time, Harry would simply assume she must have died.

While holding Melissa in his arms, Harry strains to grab his keycard, phone and wallet, stuffing them into the pockets of his tight trousers.

He carries her out of the room, kicking the door closed with his booted foot. As he begins to walk down the hallway he notices Liam stepping off the elevator into the hallway. “Shit shit shit.” Harry curses under his breath as he begins backpedaling.

“Oh hey Harry, I…” Liam’s voice drops off as he gets closer, taking in the comatose robed woman draped in Harry’s arms, his expression puzzled. Liam lifts his hand and gestures toward Melissa curiously. “Is that… are you two?”

“Oh no!” Harry blurs quickly, shaking his head adamantly with wide eyes. “No no no!”

“I mean… it’d be understandable really.” Liam offers. “She paid twenty thousand pounds for you. You gotta get something outta all that right?”

“No! No, definitely not. Nothing is coming out of any of that. No!” Harry adjusts Melissa in his arms triggering her silky robe to fall slightly open, revealing her smooth bare skin and the top of her lacy bra. “Ugh! Come on! Goddammit!”
Liam raises his eyebrows, blinking several times. “Um…It’s alright, I won’t tell anyone. I promise. No judgment.”

“No, Liam seriously, I know how it looks, but we aren’t a thing. Really! She’s my boss!”

“People sleep with their bosses all the time…it’s not even a big deal anymore. It makes sense though now that I think about it. She does seem quite drawn to you I suppose.”

“I’m not sleeping with her! I’ve never slept with her and I never will! I swear! It’s not like that at all!” Harry defends, attempting to close Melissa’s robe, while still balancing her in his arms.

“Ok…if you say so.” Liam shrugs, sounding unconvinced as he continues eyeing Melissa and her scantily clad body.

“I would never sleep with my superior, for any reason. That’s completely unprofessional.” Harry states clearly as an absolute. “She was in my room…and…she…well she…um…just passed out…so I was trying to get her back to her room.”

“Wait, why was she in your room?” Liam questions.

“Oh god.” Harry groans, looking up towards the ceiling, wondering why everything is against him today. He feels like curling up in a ball and dying. Just dying. Just surrendering over to death and…dying.

Liam presses further, not letting the inquiry slip away unanswered. “If you aren’t sleeping with her…”

Harry shakes his head at a loss for words, eyes still locked on the ceiling. “I um…”

“I can’t think of any other logical explanation for her to be, one, in your room at this time of night and two, dressed…like that.” Liam’s glance dips down to Melissa’s robe once more.

“Look, you know what Liam?” Harry questions, his tone riddled with agitation, as he adjusts his gaze from the ceiling to Liam. “I don’t even have an answer for you! I don’t know why she came to my room and I don’t know why anything is the way it is right now! I don’t know anything! I’m tired and stressed and irritated beyond fucking belief and I have a million other more pressing things on my mind and I don’t have time for questions I can’t even begin to answer! The bottom line is I’m not having sex with, screwing or fucking my boss in any way, shape or form. It’s all just an extremely unfortunate misunderstanding and I have to go. Now.”

Liam frowns deeply at Harry’s unexpected outburst. “Um…ok?”

“Goodnight, Liam.” Harry’s nods curtly, stepping around him.

“Night.” Liam waves mildly, still grounded in the same exact spot as he watches Harry hoist Melissa higher in his arms and walk towards the elevators.

Harry rides the elevator, completely on edge, stress practically dripping visibly from his shoulders. When the bell rings for the first floor he steps out and marches through the lobby towards the front desk with Melissa in tow.

“Good evening, sir!” Kip beams, suspiciously chipper and upbeat for the late hour.

Harry frowns as he reaches wide desk, hard deep set lines etched on his face. “Kip, are you ever not working?”
Kip laughs cheerfully, not offended in the slightest at Harry’s somewhat rude inquiry. “I mainly just work weekends. I’m not here as much during the week. But I do love my job, it’s never a bore to be honest.” Just as Liam did earlier in the hallway, Kip eyes the unconscious woman in Harry’s arms. “What can I do for you this evening?”

Harry readjusts Melissa in his arms, shifting her weight. “Mm...ok so it’s a very long, not really explainable story, but basically, I need Melissa Henderson’s room key...because as you can see she’s not really at liberty to take care of herself. And somehow I got stuck with her. Like out of all the places she could have been or people she could have been with or tortured…she chose me. Isn’t that considerate? Hands down, best night of my life! I mean, who doesn’t want to be harassed by their boss in the middle of the night and then have them pass out on them? Literally on top of them… but as I said…long story…not important.” Harry rants wildly, swaying back and forth with Melissa in his arms. “Anyway, if you could just pull up her room information that would be great.”

Kip observes Harry from behind the front desk with obvious concern. “Well, it's not really resort policy to give out room keys or guest information…”

Harry closes his eyes weakly and sighs heavily, his body sagging. He is so close to falling on the floor and just giving up. On everything.

“But seeing as though you have the actual guest in question with you,” Kip looks to Melissa again. “I think I can overlook it.”

“Oh my god.” Harry exhales deeply, visibly deflating with relief. “Thank you so much, I really appreciate it.”

“Plus, you look like you really need to catch a break.” Kip adds, offering a comforting genuine smile.

“You have no idea.” Harry sighs faintly, shaking his head.

“Rough night?”

“Oh...mate...that is truly the understatement of the year.”

“Well, is there anything I can do?” Kip asks, brow etched in concern.

“You are already doing more than enough.” Harry smiles feebly.

Kip hands over the slim keycard. “She’s on the very top floor, room 6566. And if there is anything you need...anything at all, don’t hesitate to call down or come back.”

Harry nods almost pathetically. “Thank you Kip, really, thanks.”

“My pleasure sir. I hope tomorrow is a better day for you.”

“Hopefully.” Harry turns and struggles back towards the elevator, dragging his feet. He steps onto the lift, riding it all the way to the highest floor.

“Goddamn, you’re getting heavy.” Harry complains, pausing to adjust her in his arms yet again. “Ugh...whatever fuck it.” He huffs as he slings her body over his shoulder. Melissa’s head dangles behind Harry’s back, causing her hair to sway to and fro as he continues down the long hallway.

When he reaches her suite door, he fumbles with the key card, trying it several times in the card reader before it clicks and glows green, granting him access into the suite.
Harry steps into the extensive suite, nearly double the size of the already large suite he is staying in downstairs. It is utterly massive, complete with a full-sized kitchen even having multiple bedrooms. Basically a modern house.

Harry carries Melissa through the hallway to what he assumes is the master bedroom. He stumbles towards the king size bed and drops Melissa’s unassuming body onto the perfectly made bedspread like deadweight. Melissa lands on her back, her robe coming undone yet again as her limbs splay out in random directions.

“God, I can’t stand you.” Harry mutters through his teeth, looking down on her unconscious body with loathing. “I don’t like saying that I hate people, but I’m pretty close to saying I hate you. I actually think that I might want to physically strangle you.”

The longer he stares at her, the angrier he feels inside. Hot flashes of resentment, surge through his exhausted body. Harry dwells on everything that led to this moment, that led to this feeling of hopelessness. He feels as if he is about to self destruct or explode at any moment. Blind seething rage bubbles up in his throat as he clenches his fists tightly.

“Fuck you, Melissa! Fuck you, Executive Henderson! Fuck you, Executive Director Melissa Henderson! Fuck you!” Harry angrily screams at her oblivious body. “Fuck you and your bitchiness! Fuck you and your demands! Fuck you fuck you fuck you! You’ve ruined my life! You’ve ruined everything! This is all your fault! You just make everything worse for me! And now the one person that actually matters is fucking furious at me and it’s all your fault! Fuck!”

Harry collapses into the lounge chair directly facing the bed, he places his elbows on his knees and buries his head in his hands. He feels like he is having some sort of panic attack as he takes in choked erratic breaths. His shoulders shudder uncontrollably as he breathes through his breakdown, trying desperately to calm down and regain control. When he finally looks up his eyes are red, his demeanor broken and shattered.

Harry swipes under his red rimmed watery eyes and stares at Melissa’s completely unmoving figure. “It wasn’t supposed to be like this.” He utters, voice shaky and hauntingly quiet. “I never thought…I never imagined it would go this far. I actually didn’t even realize it had gotten to this point. I’ve been so caught up in doing everything you said and getting your approval and pleasing you. But right now I couldn’t give two fucks about you.”

“I’ve run out of fucks to give.” Harry chuckles darkly, slightly on the manic side, pulling out his disheveled bun causing his hair to stick out in all directions from atop his head. He probably looks like he has completely lost his mind and maybe he has.

Harry keeps laughing, his cackles bellowing through the still, silent room, echoing against the walls. He laughs at everything and at nothing all at once. He laughs until the pain of his laughter matches the pain in his heart. He laughs until he can’t tell if he’s laughing or crying, his eyes leaking ugly saltwater tears regardless.

After awhile his body settles as he takes in several more, deep calming breaths, his demeanor sobering up to reality. Harry closes his eyes for a moment, the steady thumping of his racing pulse ringing in his ears.

“I hurt Louis.” Harry breathes out somberly, as if it’s all hitting him again in a whole new wave of raw emotion. “My Louis, the only person that even truly matters. My love. He’s so hurt and upset. And I did that.”

“I pushed him too far…I broke him. He’s the strongest person I know, he’s my rock and I…I broke
him. I’ve never hurt him like this. I’ve never seen him so…disappointed…in me.” Harry shakes his
head in disbelief, his voice pained and breaking. “He cried. Louis fucking cried today and I don’t…I
can’t…I can’t deal with it. It feels like I’m being physically torn apart. Louis hardly ever cries. Ever.”

Harry scrubs his hands over his wet face, swiping at tears that just keep falling.

“He did cry when I proposed to him though. But those were happy tears, very happy tears. We both
cried actually.” A soft fond laugh escapes Harry’s throat, a reminiscent expression overtaking his
features. “He was so caught off guard, taken completely by surprise. Oh, it was the most amazing
thing, I’ll never forget it.”

“I took him to the place where he first told me he loved me, or where we first told each other more
like.” Harry leans back in the plush lounge chair and looks up as if he’s reliving the memory. “It was
at my old darkroom studio, I used to practically live in it back during uni days. We had so many
amazing memories there, it became like our little secret spot after awhile. Louis would always meet
me there after classes, while I worked on developing pictures and films for school. Sometimes I’d
just bring him there to fool around, even if I didn’t have any work to do.” Harry blushes soft pink, a
small grin poised on his lips. “Actually, Louis and I had more than one first in that old studio.”

“So with all the memories surrounding that studio, I decided it was the perfect place to finally
propose. I went there early and hung tons of twinkling lights and dozens of pictures of us and mainly
of him throughout the years. They were all arranged in a circle around the room like a timeline of our
life together.”

“I’ve taken so many pictures of Louis, snapshots of different events in our life. Some minor, some
major, but all equally special to me in some way. I collected tons of them, but he had never seen most
of them. I had never shown him them, I guess I was saving them for a special occasion.”

Harry twists the rings adorning his fingers absentmindedly as he talks, twirling them slowly around
in a methodical motion.

“Oh my god…his face when he saw it all was…unforgettable.” Harry recalls in awe, eyes shinning.
“Louis was glowing; he was actually ethereal. His eyes were so so bright, and his expression was…I
can’t even describe it really. I wouldn’t do it justice. He looked like a dream. My beautiful dream. I
took a picture of it actually, to remember it by. It’s absolutely breathtaking, probably my best work of
all. I haven’t shown him it yet though. I think I want to give it to him as a wedding gift, but who
knows.”

“Louis went through each and every photograph that I put up one by one and laughed or added his
own little commentary or backstory to whatever was being portrayed in the image. He was totally
blown away by how many there were and how far back they went. He went through the whole
circle of prints and once he got to the last photograph, he completely broke down and that’s when the
tears came. It was an old picture I found of us from when we first met, that I knew he had never
seen. I don’t even remember who actually snapped the photo, but it has to be one of my all-time
favorites of us because it’s so simple yet it just conveys so much. It’s us…just us.”

“In the picture, Louis is…like…telling a story I think, really animatedly and extremely dramatic…
typical Louis at that age, really. And he’s smiling really really wide at me, with the corners of his
eyes crinkling. And I’m smiling right back with the most incriminating grin on my face. I was totally
enraptured by him. I found him so…mesmerizing.” Harry smiles introspectively. “I think I loved him
even then. I had literally just met him, I barely even knew him, but yet…I knew. I knew he was it. I
knew I was completely and utterly gone for Louis Tomlinson.”

“So under the picture I wrote ‘From our first day until our last day, and every day in between, I will
always be yours. Louis, will you marry me?’ And I remember he turned around so quick, with tears in his eyes and his hand over his mouth. I got down on one knee and poured my whole entire heart out to him and I asked him to spend the rest of his days with me and finally marry me.”

“And you know what the first thing he said was!?” Harry squawks, laughing to himself. “It was something like ‘You bastard! You knew I wanted to be the one to propose!’”

“I still find that so incredibly funny because…it’s so…Louis. Always a natural competitor.” Harry caresses the rose tattooed on his forearm and sighs contently. “But, of course he said yes. And he insisted that he have a part in our engagement so he suggested we get new tattoos to commemorate the day. He picked a rose and a dagger duo as a symbol of new beginnings, a beautiful love and timeless strength.”

“That was such an amazing day. One of my best memories with Louis. Maybe even, the best so far. He was so happy…we were so happy. It was so…unreal.”

Harry sits up and leans forward in the chair, once again placing his elbows on his knees.

“How did we go from that to this all in a matter of days?” Harry runs his hands roughly through his messy hair. “Or maybe he’s been feeling like this? Maybe Louis had his doubts before we got here and I somehow made it worse. I validated his doubts and pushed him over the edge. How could I be so blind?”

“This was supposed to be a good thing. A great thing even.” Harry says looking down at his booted feet. “When I got this job, I was so excited. Not just because I love photography or publishing or photojournalism or anything, I mean I do, don’t get me wrong, but I was most excited about finally being able to provide for us and secure a stable future with Louis. To be able to give him the life he deserves.”

“The plan was we were both gonna work really hard and save up for a bit to afford everything. God, Louis always says the silliest things when it comes to our wedding. ‘Baby, I’d marry you any time, any place. I’d marry you in a dumpster. We’d save a lot of money, yeah? Just you and me and all the filth of London. Happy days.’”

Harry cracks up laughing as he recalls Louis’ words, his dimples denting his cheeks.

“But really Louis loves weddings, especially big weddings. He won’t always admit to it, but he does, I know he does. He’s a secret romantic, but I’m on to him.” Harry smiles warmly. “We decided we want a winter wedding because spring weddings are overdone and cliché.”

“’What’s so special about spring anyway? It’s all pollen and allergies really. I say since we are both products of the winter months we should have a winter wedding and change up the game’. ” Harry mimics Louis’ voice with a giggle. “I imagine it like a winter wonderland, not really Christmassy or anything just like…magical. With lights and whimsical decorations and gorgeous white flower arrangements with little crystals. Oh! And an ice sculpture. There has to be an ice sculpture.”

“Then we decided that after our wedding, we’d ironically ditch the whole winter theme and go to Hawaii for our tropical warm honeymoon. Especially since Louis can only deal with so much cold at one time. We planned it all out.” Harry explains, playing with his rings again. “Well, not all of it but you know…the big parts.”

“Sometimes we just sit in our crappy flat, wrapped up in a blanket, with our limbs twisted together and plan out our lives. We want to to get a really big house just outside of the city. Close enough that we can get to work and whatnot, but far enough away that it’s not so busy and bustling. One with a
really nice kitchen and an office for Louis and a studio for me with tons and tons of bedrooms and a huge backyard for our kids. Five kids. Well,” Harry corrects, tilting his head, “six, if Louis has his way. He thinks we have to have an even number or else one will always be left out and get lonely. He’s a firm believer in the buddy system. He always says ‘What’s one more? Let’s just start our own footie team!’”

Harry chuckles fondly at the recollection, shaking his head. “I never really argue with him about it. I’d have a dozen kids with Louis if he asked. I just want to start a family with him and be able to provide for him. I just want to make him happy. He makes me so incredibly happy and I want to give him all he deserves and so much more.”

“Everything I do is for him. Always for him. He’s my reason. And I lost sight of it. Somewhere along the line, I lost sight of why I took this job in the first place. It was for him. For Louis.”

Harry pauses, his gaze refocusing on Melissa’s still, comatose figure, laid out over the duvet.

“The funny thing is that Louis is right. He’s right about everything. He’s always right. I mean…look at me. I’m talking to you like you can hear me. I’m spilling my sorrows to my passed out boss and basically telling my whole life story.” Harry states as if he can’t quite believe it himself. “I yelled at you and cursed your name, when in reality, I can’t even do it to your face. Louis is right, I’m scared of you. I’m afraid of doing the wrong thing and taking the wrong step, but somehow I’ve ended up taking the worst step of them all.”

“God, what if I really messed it all up? What if I can’t fix it and we can’t move past this? What if he doesn’t forgive me? Or even worse what if he does and I really do become that person? That man who is absent and never there and constantly preoccupied with everything but what really matters and he resents me in the future? I could end up seriously hurting him if nothing changes.”

“I never thought I’d be that person. It never even crossed my mind. Not once.” Harry claims. “But I also never thought I’d hurt Louis and I did. I never thought I could ever make him feel like that or doubt me or doubt himself and I did. So what if…what if…my priorities really have changed and I continue to lose touch with what matters most?”

“I can’t let that happen.” Harry shakes his head strongly. “I don’t want that to happen. I don’t want to lose him. I can’t lose him. I need him. I need Louis so much, as much as I need air to breathe, I need him. I don’t even know what I would do if I lost him. Probably lose my shit like I am right now. Except a million times worse.”

“I’m a mess!” Harry laughs frantically, his eyes outlined in an even angrier red than before. “A complete fucking mess!”

Harry runs his hands over his face, pulling at the soft skin under his eyes in frustration. He looks down at the watch on his wrist. “Shit…it’s three a.m.”

He stands to his feet, stretching his arms out and looks over Melissa’s sleeping figure, sighing resentfully. Harry reaches down to roll Melissa over, just enough to slip the duvet out from under her deadweight. Once free, he tucks her lifeless body under the fluffy comforter; an action that truly wasn’t necessary, but he feels slightly rude for not putting her to bed properly earlier. His ingrained polite mannerisms momentarily overpowering his despise for her.

He leans closer to her tucked in figure and whispers softly. “You may have had a rough year or whatever the fuck, but you have completely screwed me over and for that I hope you wake up with a hangover straight from the pits of hell. A hell matching the one I’m currently living.”
In some ways Harry feels a lot lighter, not so much clearer, but lighter. All that pent up frustration and tension that has been building up inside, finally given the chance to be vented out of him. Even though it all fell on deaf ears, he still feels better about getting it all out and having some sort of relief. The act of thinking out loud helped him process everything and also put matters into perspective.

Harry has absolutely no idea what he is going to do, but he knows that he can’t lose Louis. He has to get Louis to forgive him and not just that, he has to show that he won’t continue to neglect him, prove to him somehow that the trend stops here.

In a sense, Harry knows what he has to do, he just doesn’t know exactly how to do it. But he refuses to let his job or his manipulative boss come before Louis anymore. He downright refuses; enough is enough.

Harry crosses the expanse of the master bedroom, pausing at the doorway and turning around once more before he leaves in a final goodbye.

“Goodnight.”
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

hey hey heyyy :) i hope you all have had a beautiful and lovely holiday! you know...in my head i wanted to post this sooner and i feel like the new norm for me is late haha but you're all peaches for being patient with me. thank you thank you thank you for all of the nice messages and kudos and bookmarks and comments and yes and yes...i really do take them all to heart so thank you dearly :))
in my outline i deadass named this chapter "The Hallelujah...Suck Ittttttt chapter" *insert praise hands and middle finger emojis* haha anywayyyy enjoy my loves!

Chapter 10

Right, two, three, four...

Left, two, three, four...

Harry slides the ring gracing his middle finger methodically, in a trancelike state. Twisting it right, then twirling it left, then back again to the same systematically soothing rhythm, his finger flourishing pink with irritation.

Harry pauses for a moment, glancing down at his watch for the millionth time in the past hour. He slides his iPhone out of his pocket to check for any new or missed messages, knowing fully well that the message he so desperately sought after would not be found. As he checks his phone, he notices an unread missed message from Niall, received three and a half hours ago.

where are u mate. just saw a storm cloud resembling your fiancé blow past me in the lobby.

Harry sighs heavily, completely unsurprised by Niall’s experience. Louis was most likely on a warpath somewhere, anyone standing in his way was bound to be on the receiving end of his sharp loose tongue. Harry types out a simple message accurately depicting his current location.

in purgatory…

Harry doesn’t expect a reply from Niall and is rather surprised when two minutes later his phone buzzes against his thigh with a response. He doesn’t even pretend to know what Niall does or why. It’s nearly six a.m. and for some odd reason, this man is awake.

no seriously harry where are u

That’s actually a very good question now that he thinks about it. Where even is he? One minute he remembers being one place, the next minute he is unknowingly somewhere completely different, as if his cognizance is oscillating in and out of steady consciousness. He’s been drudging aimlessly throughout the resort, walking in blind circles as his mind wanders off on its own.

He was going to try and go to sleep, but when he went back to their suite, the room was so unnervingly silent that it felt blisteringly loud and he just could not stay in there. The deafening silence and the roaring of his thoughts combined with anxiety stricken anticipation of waiting for his
fiancé to cross the threshold and come back to him was messing with Harry’s morale. He couldn’t escape his thoughts, but he could at least escape the uncomfortable, unsettling aura of the room; driving him sightlessly to his current whereabouts.

Harry looks around and realizes he’s surrounded by a scenic throng of beautifully sweet flowers. Lavender tulips, bright orange marigolds, plum petunias and dozens of gorgeous varying herbaceous plants engulf Harry’s surroundings and suddenly enrich his senses. As striking as they all are, somehow he hadn’t even noticed them, his whole body essentially operating on autopilot. How did he even get here? How long has he been here? Harry feels like he has been sitting on the cold stone bench beneath him for centuries, yet at the same time he doesn’t remember sitting down on it at all.

in a garden, i think. probably. idk

After what Harry assumes to be several minutes, he hears heavy footsteps traipsing through the narrow cobblestone path of the gardens. The footsteps draw exceedingly near, but soon cease their movements. Harry doesn’t even bother to look up, he already knows who the hefty footsteps belong to and who it is that is looming over him.

“Hey buddy.” Niall crouches down and sits next to Harry on the icy marble bench, mirroring his position of crossed legs.

“Hi.” Harry responds despondently, staring forward at the bleak sunrise peaking in the distance.

“How long have you been sitting here?”

Harry shrugs, continuing to gaze straight ahead.

“You look like…shit. Actual shit.” Niall announces, taking in Harry’s defeated downcast appearance.

“Good.”

“So…I take it you’ve been up all night?” Niall asks curiously.

“Yes.”

“Mmm…Wanna talk about it?” Niall offers, leaning in a little closer towards Harry.

“No.”

Niall sits back, giving Harry a bit more space. “Ok.”

Niall stares silently at Harry for a moment, watching as he continues to anxiously toy with the same ring on his middle finger, deep set lines hardening his tired face.

“Why did the boy throw a bucket out the window?” Niall ponders randomly, still looking towards Harry.

Harry turns his head towards Niall slightly, brow furrowed, looking completely lost. “What?”

“Because he wanted to see the waterfall.” Niall grins, biting his bottom lip.

Harry blinks at Niall several times in absolute confusion.

“And why did the boy throw butter out the window?”
“Um…I dunno. Why?”

Niall’s grin grows as he bites back contagious giggles. “Because he wanted to see the butterfly.”

Harry barks out a surprised laugh, slapping a hand over his mouth. It’s really not even that funny, but at the same time it just is.

“Oh and why did the boy throw his watch out the window?” Niall asks, excitement hinting in his voice.

Harry settles his laughter and smiles contemplatively. “Mmm…is it because he wanted to see time fly or something like that?”

“Yes!” Niall exclaims, clapping his hands together, overly enthused. “You got it! I knew you’d get it!”

Harry giggles openly, eyes squeezed shut. “But…why are you telling me riddles?”

“It got you to smile so…I’d say, mission accomplished.” Niall pumps his fist in triumph. “I keep a few god-awful jokes in my back pocket for a rainy day. And this definitely classifies as a rainy day.”

Harry continues to snicker, Niall joining in with amused spouts of gratified laughter, both of them chuckling together until they are gasping for breath and clutching their sides.

Eventually Harry stills, blowing a steady stream of air out of his mouth as he slowly leans down and rests his head comfortably on Niall’s shoulder. He takes several deep inhalations, sucking in a lungful of fresh oxygen as Niall adjusts his arm around him and rubs his back reassuringly.

“Niall, I messed up.” Harry whispers softly, almost unheard.

“It’s alright bud, it’s ok.” Niall encourages, continuing with the mollifying patterns along Harry’s spine.

“No, it’s not.” Harry shakes his head defiantly against Niall. “By messed up, I mean that I royally fucked up…and it’s all a mess and I’m a mess and I don’t know where Louis is…he left his phone in our suite… and he’s upset and he should be…I would be…and I’m worried about him and-”

“Harry, Harry shh.” Niall shushes consolingly. “It’s ok. You guys will be fine, I know it.”

“I haven’t even told you anything, you can’t know that.”

“Well…are you going to tell me?”

Harry stays silent for a moment, before lifting his head and turning his face towards Niall. “Louis thinks I’m putting my career before him.”

“Are you?”

“No? I mean yes…but it wasn’t intentional.” Harry sighs heavily. “I only realized it was true after he told me…and then once he said it and told me how shitty I’ve been acting, I couldn’t even really react to it or deal with it because all hell broke loose and everything keeps getting worse and worse and…I don’t know…now I just can’t stop thinking about it.”

“Thinking about what exactly?”

“All of it. Everything. All that I did and all that I didn’t do. None of this would have happened if I
was honest in the beginning. If I set boundaries. If I hadn’t been so afraid. If I handled things differently. If my priorities were straight from the start.” Harry pauses, breathing deeply. “If I put Louis first.” He sighs overwhelmed. “I just keep thinking of everything I could have done. Or should have done.”

“Mmm.” Niall hums, nodding his head. He sucks in a heavy breath and slaps his hands down hard against his knees. “Come on, let’s go golfing.”

“What? No!” Harry refuses, his features scowling. “Are you even listening to me?”

“Yes, I am…that’s why I think we should go golfing. It’ll be fun and it’ll help you get your mind off things and clear your head. You need this. Come on.” Niall grabs Harry’s hand and begins to stand to his feet.

“I don’t feel like golfing, Niall!” Harry yells, yanking his hand away exasperatedly. “Now is not the time! Louis is missing! He is out there somewhere and he is fucking pissed and I have to find him!”

“And do what!? Tell him what!?!” Niall yells right back, standing over Harry. “What are you going to do, Harry? Find him and tell him that…what? You’re sorry? You honestly think that will work? That’s fucking pointless! If he’s as pissed as I think he is, then ‘I’m sorry’ is just not going to cut it. Louis is hurt, he’s upset, and judging by the looks of things with him having left his phone, he doesn’t want to talk to you. He wants space.”

“Fine…then I just want to sit here.” Harry declares stubbornly, glowering at Niall. “Or maybe find a strong drink. Or actually…no, I’ll just sit right here. Here is good. I can’t fuck up anymore if I just stay right here.”

Niall scowls, looking Harry up and down disapprovingly. “Why the fuck-”

“Because you’re right Niall!” Harry shouts, rudely interjecting Niall, seeming to already know what he was about to say. “You are right! I don’t know what to tell Louis and I don’t know what to do anymore! Not that I ever really did know anyway. Every single thing I have done has damned me straight to fucking hell! I haven’t done anything right! Not one fucking thing! And maybe I never will! It’s all too fucking hard!” Harry rants sounding on the verge of giving up. “So if it’s useless to look for him, then yes…I’m just going to sit here. Indefinitely.”

“No!” Harry shouts indignantly. “You can’t know that! You can’t just say that it’ll all work out because not everything does!”

“Yeah, I can say that and I am saying that!” Niall insists, grabbing hold of Harry’s hand for the second time. “Get your pale ass up Harry!”

“How?” Harry questions bitterly, features hard. “How can you possibly know that it’ll all work out?”

“Because I know you! I know you and I know Louis! I’ve known you both since the very start, I
watched it all!” Niall affirms, waving his arms wildly. “I've been the awkward third wheel many a time. I watched you become inseparable best friends then I watched you fall deeply in love and I watched you grow together and I watched you face and overcome hard times together and I know you will be fine. You'll work it out. It's what you guys do, you’re never mad at each other for long.” Niall lowers his voice and looks to Harry earnestly. “And… I learned what it really means to love someone from watching you and Louis.”

“Niall, you never told me that.” Harry utters softly, voice quiet as he gazes up at Niall.

“I didn’t think I needed to.” Niall confesses. “I know I tease you both a lot, but I really do love you and I believe in you guys.”

“I love you too. I can’t speak for Louis though.” Harry jokes with a small smile.

Niall grins widely. “Louis loves me the most, even more than you do.”

“I think you’re right.” Harry agrees, chuckling lightly before his expression returns to solemn. “But who is to say that I won’t fix everything only to make the same mistakes again? I could just keep on fucking up.”

“Harry, everyone makes mistakes, it’s what you do after that’s even worth a damn…what you do to make it better.” Niall explains. “You can’t stay stuck in the ‘what ifs’ and the ‘should haves’. It’s all in the past now, it happened, you are obviously painfully aware of it…now just fix it. You love him, he loves you, so do what you have to do to make it work.”

Harry looks up and searches Niall’s eyes. “It’s not that easy.”

“Oh, but it really is…”

Harry remains silent and lowers his head, staring at the little pebbles and rocks along the cobblestone path beneath him.

“I know that you know what you need to do, Harry.” Niall continues. “And maybe you need a little time to build yourself up to actually do it, but until then we are going golfing. You have no choice. Get the fuck up…let’s go.”

Harry spends the entire day with Niall. Together they putt through The Grove’s entire eighteen-hole golf course. Surprisingly, it actually does serve to clear Harry’s head, the combination of cool refreshing air hitting his face coalesced with the mindless action of swinging golf clubs around does wonders for his spirits.

As the day progresses, Niall continues to tell Harry more lame jokes and random riddles. Every so often when he feels Harry fall too deep into his thoughts, he slides up next to him and gives him little hugs.

Niall doesn’t push any more. He doesn’t ask Harry what he wants to do next after they finish the golf course. He doesn’t pester him about what’s on his mind when Harry trails off during lunch. He doesn’t press him about Louis or suggest what he thinks he should do. Instead he keeps the day light, offering meaningless conversation and dumb stories and much needed companionship. Niall already said his piece; he said everything he has to say and now it’s up to Harry to act on it. Harry has always loved Niall for that. He always says exactly what needs to be said and jolts him awake, but he never pushes.

Throughout the course of the day, behind every backswing, and every strategic foot placement on the green, Harry’s mind soars. He weighs the pros and cons of his options, he deliberates through
possibility after possibility and he internally battles with himself at every turn. He knows that on some level he’s avoiding Louis, but Niall is right. If he finds Louis, something has to have changed. And he knows exactly what that something is. It’s the doing it that’s giving him the most grief. The manning up and just facing his fears head on and doing it.

The day flies by and soon it’s time for the closing dinner, signifying the end of the retreat. After showering off the strong smell of grass and sweat, Harry and Niall slide into the banquet hall a little late, opting to just sit at one of the deserted, far back tables instead of looking for Liam and Zayn among the throng of people. President Richards is already on the stage, having probably already made opening remarks.

The closing dinner is everything one would expect at any concluding ceremony. Favorite highlights are rehashed and timeless moments are celebrated. A best moments reel plays on the screen recapping all the most memorable highpoints of the retreat. The crowd laughs along as various pieces are replayed from the events. People around the hall openly hoot or shriek embarrassedly at the sight of themselves on the massive screen. Niall even laughs at himself on display as he watches the moment he screamed out in pain from his chest wax. The video not only covers the brilliant times the scavenger hunt brought, but also the joys of the cooking event, along with some behind the scenes footage from the date auction. Interspersed are short one on one interview clips with an assortment of employees, enjoying themselves along the sidelines of the pool, or chilling in a golf cart, or just lounging leisurely in the lobby. The mini movie as a whole has a way of bringing about a feeling of strong reminiscence and warmth among the crowd.

After the film, President Richards makes acknowledgements, thanking critical individuals for their involvement and support throughout the weekend. He calls different people up to the stage and presents them with flowers or simple tokens of appreciation, asking each of them to say a few words or give a small speech.

Harry feels like everything is droning on and on, various people going to and from the stage for who knows what reason, the audience cheering off and on in between, and so it goes. Over and over and over again. All of it sounding exactly the same to Harry’s weary ears. He shouldn’t even be here in all honesty; he hasn’t seen or heard from Louis in almost eighteen hours now and he isn’t taking it well. He was never taking it well in the first place, but now it’s just all too much. He feels like he can’t breathe, like all the oxygen has been sucked out of the room and he is gradually choking, steadily falling to his timely demise.

“I can’t sit here anymore.” Harry admits to Niall in a pained whisper. “I’m losing my mind. I just…I know that nothing has changed…and I haven’t done anything to fix the situation, but…I need to find Louis.”

“What are you going to say to him?” Niall wonders, leaning in towards Harry.

“I don’t know. I just…I need to see him…and I can’t stop thinking about him or how he is or where he is.” Harry confesses. “I’ve avoided it all day and it’s got me nowhere…so I think I’m just gonna go.”

“Are you sure?” Niall asks concerned. “I think this whole thing is almost over anyway.”

“Yeah, I’m sure. I really can’t even think straight.” Harry stands to his feet and starts to turn away from the round table. “I’ll see you later, Niall. Thanks for today, I really needed that.”

“And our final and most noteworthy award, Choice Hearst Personality, goes to Harry Styles!” President Richards announces, his voice booming though the banquet hall.
“Wait, what?” Harry squeaks at the mention of his own name being called, a spotlight suddenly aimed directly at him. He stands like a deer caught in the headlights, blinking in confusion, body poised to make an escape.

“Harry! Come on up here, son!” President Richards encourages from the stage, gesturing his hand towards Harry at the back of the room.

Harry remains frozen in shock, still standing near the table, feet aimed toward the door he was about to escape from.

“Psst! Harry!” Niall whisper shouts from his seated position at the table. “Go, that’s you!”

“Come on Harry, don’t be shy.” President Richards reassures as the audience cheers him on with thundering applause.

Harry feels his legs begin to carry him towards the stage, the crowd continuing to wildly clap for him. He doesn’t even know what this award is for, he’d been zoning out for the past hour. He knows his face must look outrageously perplexed and he tries to school his expression towards a more neutral pose, but nothing seems to be working.

Harry ascends the vast stage and strides towards President Richards to shake his hand in a robotic like trance.

“On behalf of Hearst Publishing House, I present to you, this award for Choice Personality of the Annual Hearst Retreat.” President Richards beams, holding a glistening gold trophy.

The audience explodes in applause again and Harry has had enough. What is the meaning of this? He doesn’t feel like he has done anything worthy of being awarded with choice person or whatever the fuck. Sure, he knows people seem to like him and yeah he won most of the events this weekend, but for Harry, the highlight of his weekend was realizing how wrong he has been treating the person he loves. Everything else beyond that has faded away in his mind.

“Go ahead, say a few words.” President Richards encourages, leaving Harry the podium at the center of the stage.

Harry stands at the mic at a complete and utter loss for words. Is he supposed to make a grand speech about how grateful he is for this award and how fantastic this retreat has been or some shit like that? “I um…I…”

His mind races as he battles with what to say. All day he thought about finally telling the truth and he knew he was going to have to do it. But not on such a grand level, in front of hundreds of people he works with, people who cheered him up onto the stage, people who are are looking to him right at this very moment in anticipation. But why not? Why the hell shouldn’t he just get it all out right now, just one and done. Rip off the Band-Aid and rid himself of this lie flat-out. He owes it to Louis. After the way he has been treating him, he owes Louis this and more.

Harry takes a deep calming breath and shakes his head, clearing his thoughts. “Um ok…You know what? No... I can’t do this. I just can’t anymore. It’s hurting me, and more importantly the person I love. I… I have to say something. I’ve been holding it in for a while and…it’s about time I told the truth.” Harry pauses for a long moment, mustering up the courage to say what needs to be said. “I don’t have a brother.”

The audience resonates with whispered confusion, hushed tones echoing bewilderment across the hall.
“Um...I do have a sister though.” Harry rambles pointlessly, beating around the bush. “But not a… um…brother.”

“What? So Louis is your sister?” President Richards asks, sounding confounded. The crowd mirroring his considerations, growing increasingly puzzled.

“What!? No!” Harry shakes his head, not expecting that question at all. “Louis and I share no blood relation at all.”

President Richards frowns, thinking way to hard about this. “So he’s adopted then? Or you’re adopted? Or—”

“No no!” Harry lifts his hands, sighing with defeat. “Look, I lied. Louis isn’t my brother. He is nothing even remotely close. He’s something completely different to me. He’s the love of my life.”

“I knew it!” A voice, strongly resembling Liam’s, bursts boldly from the audience.

“He’s my fiancé.” Harry continues slowly. “Louis is my fiancé.”

The audience gasps collectively, sharp inhales of breath resounding across the hall.

“He’s more than that really. He’s everything I have. He’s…my life.” Harry admits, gaining steam, over the initial hump and shock of it all. “Louis came here with me…or actually I forced him here with me…and he has paraded around and pretended to be my brother because I was too much of a fucking...oops, sorry…excuse me.” Harry apologizes for the profane word usage, placing a hand over his mouth. “Too much of a coward to admit the truth.”

The silenced whispers and hushed murmurs continue as Harry braves on with his impromptu confession.

“I embarrassed him and disgraced him and degraded him and a ton of other horrible things…all because…I…I was scared for my job.” Harry confesses soberly. “It all started with a small white lie and it somehow snowballed into all this. And I put a blind eye to it all…I figured it would all be ok in the end, but it’s not, of course it’s not. How could it be, when all I’ve been is blindly selfish and self-centered?”

“Truly, I would not be where I am today without Louis by my side…in fact, I wouldn’t even be the same person. I love him with everything I have left in me and I owe it all to him.”

A few ‘awws’ echo across the room, several people sounding touched by Harry’s sincere sentiment.

“So even as honored as I am, I don’t think I really deserve this award or any sort of recognition whatsoever.” Harry admits, hanging his head solemnly. “I’m deeply sorry to everyone that I have lied to or mislead throughout the span of this weekend. I was wrong, and I sincerely apologize.”

“Well, that was…unexpected.” President Richards states slowly after a few moments of stunned silence, expression still baffled.

“Yeah…I know…I’m sorry.” Harry apologizes again, turning away from the podium to exit the stage.

“But you know what Harry?” President Richards asks, halting Harry in his tracks. “It really does take a lot to do what you just did. To openly admit the truth, and not only that, to do it bravely in front of all your esteemed colleagues. You know…Bruce Lee once said, ‘Mistakes are always forgivable, if one has the courage to admit them’.” President Richards quotes knowledgably off the
top of his head. “Although your actions were wrong initially, you made an admirable effort to make them right and for that I think this award still belongs to you.”

Harry’s mouth falls open in surprise as the awaiting audience once again erupts in boisterous applause seeming to agree wholeheartedly. President Richards holds the gold trophy out to Harry, with a genuine smile on his face.

“The Choice Personality award is meant to go to someone who shows strong character and great promise and I truly believe you possess those things.” President Richards continues, over the applause. “And if nothing else, I’m sure the majority of us would all agree that you’ve been an entertaining delight all weekend. It’s been an absolute pleasure having you here for your first Hearst Retreat, and I look forward to future years.”

Harry takes the award in one hand weakly, mind still so beyond blown. President Richards takes Harry’s other hand in a warm congratulatory grasp.

As President Richards firmly shakes Harry’s hand he leans in close, speaking in hushed tones. “Next time, bring Louis as your husband.” He winks mischievously as he releases Harry’s hand.

A shocked laugh escapes Harry’s mouth and he nearly drops the trophy in surprise, barely holding on to it. “Will do sir.”

President Richards grins kindly before turning towards the podium again to make his closing remarks for the evening. Harry descends the platform, exciting the banquet hall from a side door near the stage and entering one of the long corridors of the resort.

Harry’s heart is racing a mile a minute. He feels a surge of adrenaline coursing through his veins, the realization of finally ridding himself of the stupid lie he chained himself to is beyond exhilarating. Who knew telling the truth could be so freeing?

“Styles!”

“Ugh, god…what now?” Harry sighs under his breath as he turns to face his dictator of a boss. Maybe he isn’t as free as he thought, still another chain tying him down, needing so urgently to finally be broken.

“What the hell was that?” Melissa demands, emerging from the same side door he just escaped from and taking her signature power stance in front of Harry, staring him down.

“Um…the truth.” Harry states blankly, shrugging his shoulders. He is so over all of this and he has way more important and pressing things to do, like find his still M.I.A. fiancé.

“I could fire you. I could end your whole career right now, before it really even has a chance to start.”

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“I could fire you. I could end your whole career right now, before it really even has a chance to start.”

“Then do it.” Harry dares, looking her straight in the eye, unfazed.

Melissa looks slightly taken aback, her stone face flickering with perplexity. “You don’t care if you lose your job? If I fire you? Because I could, I could do it right now.”

“Yeah…I mean you could, but…you won’t.” Harry states brazenly.

“What makes you so sure?” Melissa inches closer to him, her gaze becoming even more intimidatingly stern and unwavering than before as she stares him down. “I could destroy you.”
Harry falters marginally as she steps closer to him, his demeanor faintly abating in strength. He takes a deep breath, reminding himself that nothing she can say or do is worse than the possibility of losing Louis. He has been dwelling on the idea of this all day. While golfing through those eighteen holes, he planned out exactly what he needed to say to this woman when the time was finally right. He replayed it all over and over in his head and thought out every possibility of how this could end until he felt somewhat prepared for all outcomes.

Internally, he will admit that he is scared shitless. For some reason confronting his boss face to face is a million times harder than confessing to a room full of people. Maybe that’s because she’s the only one that matters, the one he’s been hiding from since the start. This whole charade all started with her, so really it is only fitting that it must end with her. This is something he has to do, not only for his relationship with Louis, but for himself. Once again Harry mentally prepares himself, taking several deep breaths and calming the last of his cowardly thoughts. “Well…because…my outside personal relationship has literally nothing to do with my career or my performance in the workplace.” Harry starts, slowly. “I don’t even know what I was so afraid of in the first place. Just…you really. But…why? I work really hard and I’m damn good at what I do and I earned it. I earned this position and despite the countless ways you have manipulated and intimidated me that fact remains the same.” Harry squares his shoulders, standing up a little straighter and squinting his eyes in challenge. “And…fire me and I will drag you down right with me.”

Melissa raises her eyebrows in disbelief, caught completely off guard by Harry’s uncharacteristically bold statement. “Excuse me?”

“You heard me.” Harry leans forward, using his height to an advantage as he peers down on her small stature. “You know…it would really be a shame.” He shakes his head gravely.

“What would be a shame?” Melissa inquires, waving one of her manicured hands in his face, sounding increasingly irritated.

“It’d be a downright shame if Human Resources happened to…I don’t know…find out about some inappropriate sexual misconduct within the upper levels of the company…”

“What?” Melissa’s eyebrows skyrocket to indescribable levels.

Harry scrunches his brow in mock consideration, placing a contemplative finger under his chin. “I seem to recall being blatantly harassed and sexually attacked last night. To the point where I physically felt defenseless and maybe even…dare I say...threatened…”

“I…I didn’t…I mean…I don’t even remember…and um…I was drunk and-“

“Ehh, wow…that’s another thing. I just don’t know if someone with such an addiction to alcohol is truly fit to run a whole division of the company…it’s all just such a shame.” Harry overstates, tsking his tongue while shaking his head disapprovingly. “Gosh…and HR is only a nice short stroll from my office or even a simple ring away…hmmm…”

“Are you blackmailing me?” Melissa questions nervously, the pitch of her voice escalating in frequency.

“Oh me?” Harry feigns innocent, allowing his eyes to grow shocked, touching a scandalized hand to his chest. “What? No, I would never. It would just…you know...be an absolute shame…”

“You wouldn’t dare.” Melissa says through her teeth, trying to keep her tenacity intact.
“Oh, gee.” Harry sighs dramatically, shaking his head, with a sympathetic pout. “All that hard work...just instantly lost. What will people even say? An alcoholic sexual predator right under our very noses. Oh my god, the scandal of it all!” Harry exaggerates, covering his mouth as if he is so deeply appalled. “No more credibility...wow that would be just...horrible.” Harry smiles sickeningly sweet, his dimples cratering his cheeks. “Don’t you think?”

Melissa hardens her gaze, squinting her eyes in question. “Styles, what are you saying?”

“Mmm...what am I saying? Oh...I just don’t know...hmmm.” Harry ponders innocently, a sarcastic undertone to his words, before his face becomes startlingly serious, the humor in his eyes rapidly diminishing, replaced with ice. “I’m saying that I am not your bitch boy and I am not your slave. I am a Creative Director and you will treat me as such. I will dutifully fulfill all the requirements of my job in a timely and organized manner, but I will not be manipulated and deliberately disrespected by you anymore.” Harry starts to gain momentum, his voice strong and his tone alarmingly terse. He’s been aching to tell this woman off since his very first day of work and he finally found the courage to do it.

Melissa gapes openly, at an utter loss for words at the staggering change in Harry’s demeanor and tone.

“To be completely frank, I’ve tolerated far too much of your controlling bullshit and I refuse to stand for it anymore. The version of me that endured that shit is long past dead. From now on I will only interact with you on a professional level and nothing more.” Harry’s eyes flash darkly as he looms in closer and lowers his voice. “If you touch me again, or so much as breathe in my direction in a way that I deem unprofessional, I swear to god, I will personally drag you to hell and back. You’ve disrespected me, but disrespect Louis one more time and I will expose you within every inch of your life. Are we clear?”

Melissa nods her head slowly in startled shock, her jaw slack and her eyes exceedingly wide.

“Fantastic!” Harry beams, clapping his hands together, suddenly extremely bright spirited and overly cheerful. “Well, I will see you back at work! Have a safe trip home Executive Henderson. Ciao!”

Harry makes a peace sign with his fingers and spins on his heel, with his trophy in hand, leaving his boss gaping after him. He struts confidently down the hall, feeling undefinably invincible and on top of the world. He can hear the glorious tinkling of chains falling, and feel the freedom of his shackles loosening.

He finally stood up for himself and set tangible boundaries, boundaries that should have been in place ages ago, but better late than never. “Wow, that felt really good. Oh my god, Louis would be sooo proud!” Harry laughs to himself, basking in the feeling of accomplishment, before his eyes grow exceedingly wide. “Shit! Louis!” In all his exhilaration and triumph, he almost forgot that he still has to find Louis, wherever he is. Find him and then somehow, hopefully, get him to listen. But where to start? With a resort of this size, where should he even begin? He just needs some sort of guidance or a clue or actually just...help.

Harry turns the corner of the long hallway with hast, not paying the slightest bit of attention to where he is going, simultaneously entering the lobby area and colliding head on with Liam.

“Whoa, there Harry, wh-”

“Liam!” Harry drops his trophy to the floor and embraces Liam in a full on body hug before he even finishes speaking. “Liam! I’m so sorry!”
“H-Har-rry...I can’t b-breathe.” Liam sputters as Harry squeezes him tightly.

“Oh right, sorry…um…my bad.” Harry releases Liam from his vice grip, cheeks blossoming pink with embarrassment as he takes an appropriate step back. “But…um about last night…I’m really sorry for snapping at you, mate. I didn’t mean to be so rude. It was a very stressful day. Actually, just a very stressful weekend.”

“Well, it all makes bloody sense now, doesn’t it?” Liam mutters, straightening out his now rumpled shirt with the firm press of his hands.

“Yeah…but really, I’m honestly so so sorry.” Harry adamantly apologizes. “For everything. For all the lies and the confusion and just…everything.”

“I mean, I figured something was off.” Liam admits, with a half-hearted shrug. “Especially…after you…erm had that little drunk episode on Saturday night.”

“Ugh, god.” Harry winces, running his hand through his hair. “Don’t remind me.”

Liam chuckles lightly, shaking his head. “Saying ‘fuck me’ while mouthing at someone’s neck is just a bit…incriminating. Brother or not.”

“I actually wish I never remembered that, it’s better left forgotten.” Harry cringes at the memory. “I feel like I’ll never live that down.”

“Probably not.” Liam laughs. “But I’m still a bit confused about this whole thing, it doesn’t seem to add up. How did all this even come about? Or why?”

Harry takes in a deep breath, before blowing it all out in a steady stream of air. “Um…it’s quite a long story to be honest.”

“I’ll fill you in later, babe.” Zayn slides into the conversation, taking his usual position at Liam’s side.

“What?!” Liam gasps, looking curiously towards his boyfriend. “Zayn, you knew!?”

“I only found out yesterday, I swear!” Zayn defends. “And I promised Louis and-”

“You’ve known for a whole day!?” Liam interjects, expression laden with betrayal.

“It’s not Zayn’s fault!” Harry tries. “He did it for Louis, who, of course, did it for me. It’s no one’s fault but mine.”

“Is that why you wanted to buy Harry last night at the auction?” Liam inquires still looking to Zayn.

“No, I actually wanted him for myself. I’m madly in love with Harry. He’s my soulmate.” Zayn jokes sarcastically slinging an arm around Harry.

Liam scowls, adopting a childlike pout and crossing his arms over his chest.

“Yes, yes! Li, of course that’s why! I’m only joking.” Zayn says, slowly removing his arm from Harry’s waist. “Bad joke, bad joke I get it, sorry.”

“A tired joke more like.” Liam grumbles. “Maybe it was funny at one point, but it has definitely lost its appeal.”

“Yeah…ok. You’re right, I’ll let it die.” Zayn encircles his arms around Liam from behind and rests his head on his shoulder. “It’s dead, I promise. I’m sorry.”
“Mhmm.” Liam hums, rolling his eyes as Zayn nibbles on his ear.

“Truly though Liam, please forgive me. I hope that we can continue to become friends. You know, despite…uh…everything, I really did enjoy getting to know you. And you as well, Zayn. You’re both amazing and it’s been an absolute privilege spending the retreat together.”

“We did have a lot of fun, didn’t we?” Liam grins, a small smile on his lips. “Probably more fun than we usually have at these things.”

“Oh, definitely.” Zayn agrees, releasing his hold around Liam. “I was so beyond ready to go home last year.”

“God, I know…especially with that annoying intern boy tracing our every move.” Liam complains, reminiscing on the past. “You’ve made this year so much more interesting that’s for sure.”

“Never a dull moment…especially not with Louis around.” Harry grins shyly. “It’s just unfortunate that your first impressions of us were rooted in a stupid lie.”

“No harm done, Harry. I know you probably meant well.” Liam states. “You’re a good guy, so is Louis. And there will be plenty of time to get to know each other.” Liam outstretches his hand towards Harry. “Apology accepted.”

Harry shakes Liam’s warm hand, smiling sincerely at him.

“Um…where is Louis anyway?” Liam asks suddenly, seeming to realize he isn’t around. “I don’t think I’ve seen him all day, come to think of it.”

“Ugh, I don’t know.” Harry groans, feeling the weight of his situation all over again. “Zayn, do you have any idea as to where he might be?”

“Wait, you mean that even you still haven’t seen him?” Zayn questions, sounding extremely baffled, his expression deeply worried. “After all this time?”

“No!” Harry declares, shaking his head. “Not since last night when-”

“Yeah…he told me.” Zayn interrupts in understanding.

“So…you saw him then?” Harry’s eyes grow hopeful, his tone borderline optimistic. “What did he say? How was he? Was he really upset? Of course he was. But how upset? Like on a scale of one to ten?”

Zayn scratches the back of his neck, not sure how to answer all of Harry’s questions. “Uhh…I don’t really know the exact levels of Louis’ rage, but I’d say…not good. Um…if I had to put an exact number on it, I guess I’d probably say…um…no less than a seven? Maybe…I dunno. I really thought you would have found him by now.”

“Shit.” Harry curses, anxiously scraping both his hands against his scalp. “Was he really loud and yelling a lot? Cuz that’s probably a solid eight on the Louis scale.”

“Uhh…yes?” Zayn answers, more as an uncertain question. “And…no?”

“So…he was quiet and closed off?” Harry wonders, his appearance becoming less and less composed. “Bloody hell, silent Louis is the worst, it’s basically a death sentence.”

“Well…yeah…I guess? Maybe? But at the same time, not really.”
“Dammit Zayn!” Harry exclaims, completely exasperated. “Which was it?! What happened?!”

“Ok ok!” Zayn raises his hands in defeat. “Um…he came to my room late last night and said he needed to talk. I think he came to me first after he left you, because his hair was still wet from a shower.” Zayn recalls, scratching his neck again. “Anyway, I had just got out of a shower myself, so I told him that I needed to put clothes on and then we could meet in the lobby because Liam was on his way back to our room.”

“I was wondering where you really went last night.” Liam thinks out loud. “You said you couldn’t sleep.”

“I mean…that’s partially true. I couldn’t sleep because I was with Louis so…”

“Yeah, but-”

“Alright,” Harry interrupts brusquely, “not to be rude or anything but…um…can we…get back to…”

“Oh right right, sorry mate.” Zayn apologizes, catching Harry’s drift and refocusing on the issue at hand. “Ok…so I met Louis in the lobby and he was kinda cold and distant and yeah…I guess you could say he was closed off. He was reluctant to respond to anything, but…I dunno…he looked like he was about to physically burst or something.” Zayn recollects. “So I suggested we go outside for a walk. You know fresh air and all that…it’s good for the mind. Did you know that the brain utilizes twenty percent of our oxygen intake and increased oxygen leads to-”

“Zayn please!” Harry is so close to yanking out his own hair in frustration, he could not care less about random oxygen facts right now. All he knows is that his delirious brain is getting a lower and lower percentage and becoming increasingly deoxygenated the longer it takes to find his fiancé. Time is just passing by and he still hasn’t made any progress in finding Louis.

“Fresh air brings clarity which is the key to a sound mind and also leads to a sound body.” Zayn explains anyway, irritating Harry beyond belief. “But…ok sorry…uhh so thirty minutes of mostly silent walking around the resort and then out of nowhere he just…went off. Like he ranted. Ranted ranted.” Zayn stresses seriously. “Never in all of my life have a witnessed a rant like that.”

“What did he say? Was it really really bad?” Harry worries, a million questions popping into his head at once. “Shit, it was wasn’t it? How long did he rant for? What did he say?”

“Uhh…it’s probably best if I didn’t repeat it…just um…a lot of profanity…and um…strong words…uhh…loud noises…yelling…uhh…yeah, it wasn’t the prettiest. He went on like that for a good solid hour…uninterrupted. I kinda just followed behind him to make sure he didn’t run into a tree or get hit by a shuttle bus or something. He wasn’t really watching where he was going. Just screaming and yelling and of course…cursing.”

“Fuck.” Harry exhales, scrubbing his hands harshly across his face. He should have gone after him earlier, but would it even have made a difference? He’ll never know, all he can do now is focus all of his efforts on finding him.

“Exactly.” Zayn nods his head.

“Then what happened?” Harry asks, unsure. It’s like he wants to know, but then at the same time he doesn’t.

“It was really weird. He just…stopped? Like stopped yelling, stopped walking, stopped moving, just stopped.” Zayn says, sounding still confused by it all. “I dunno…he seemed eerily at peace all of a
“That’s a good thing, right?” Harry guesses. “Like…maybe he got it all out?”

“I mean…that’s what I had assumed. I thought maybe he felt better after all that shouting and ranting and was going to go find you or something. But he obviously didn’t or you wouldn’t be here now.”

“Do you think, maybe…he went home?” Liam wonders, eyebrows knitted tightly together. “Just left early or summat?”

“He would have told me…I think.” Harry ponders worriedly. “Actually no, he definitely would have told me…yeah. And he said he was coming back when he left our suite last night.”

“Hmm…and you’ve already tried giving him a ring?” Liam asks trying to be helpful.

“He left his phone in our room, most likely on purpose.” Harry sighs, weaving his fingers through his hair again. “I don’t have any way of reaching him.”

“Hmm.” Liam hums to himself. “And Louis didn’t say anything else, Zayn? Nothing at all?”

“Umm…” Zayn casts his gaze to the floor as he thinks. “He mumbled something about needing to enjoy himself or some shit…I dunno it was all so strange.”

“Ugh…that could mean anything!” Harry groans, throwing his hands up in vexation. “He could be anywhere! This damn resort is fucking massive!”

“Wait, you’re going to help me find him?” Harry asks, surprised, eyebrows shooting up.

“Of course Harry, we’re proper mates now.” Liam smiles genuinely, placing a warm reassuring hand on Harry’s shoulder. “And besides…you can’t look everywhere alone. You’ll never find him that way, especially not if he doesn’t want to be found.”

Harry nods his head. He really would never find Louis alone. It’d be almost a lost cause.

“Did Niall leave already?” Zayn asks.

“I’m not sure, I don’t think so.” Harry assumes. “I doubt it though; he’s probably trying to get as much free food as he can in his system before he actually leaves.”

“Then let’s get his Irish ass to help, he’s not doing anything of value anyway.” Liam suggests.

“Very true.” Harry chuckles softly.

“It’s like another scavenger hunt!” Zayn exclaims. “But…with no clues. And bit more important…and probably a lot harder. On the bright side, it’ll be way less embarrassing I’m sure.”

“I’ll start a group message, so we can constantly update each other as we...you know…scavenge.” Liam pulls out his phone and starts a group message including Harry, Zayn, and Niall and proceeds to title it *Operation: Find Louis*. “Don’t worry Harry, we’ll find him.”

To be honest, Harry isn’t as worried about finding Louis anymore, however he is increasingly worried about what awaits him once he does finally find him. From what Zayn recalls, Louis seems to be all over the place, not only physically, but emotionally. And that was hours ago, who knows
what kind of state he’ll be in now. He’s a wild card. He could be up or he could be down or he could be indifferent or difficult or a combination of all the above. Louis may not even want to listen to Harry at all.

The reality fills Harry with the sinking feeling of dread and unease. He just wants to go home, put everything behind him and move forward. Today was a progressive day, a valiant step in the right direction. Although unwilling at first, Harry fought many battles, he faced fears and prioritized what was important and won the battle against himself. Now, even though he just wants to collapse on the floor, he has just one more battle left to fight.

Getting Louis to hear him out could possibly prove to be the hardest battle of them all, but also the most important. Louis will listen though right? It will probably be an uphill struggle, but of course he will…maybe? Probably? Hopefully? Harry just needs a serious chance to explain everything and properly apologize and prove to Louis that he is all he really cares about. That Louis is his everything.
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

helloooo its meeee :) 
thank you as usual to all of you beautiful people and your lovely messages and comments and kudos, you're all amazing and i appreciate you :))
ok so this chapter starts off kinda different lol its a little group message initially haha so um the bolded initial indicates whose text is... fun fun funn sooooo i hope you enjoy it loves

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 11

Operation: Find Louis

N: um...what is this, why am i in this group message??

Z: we are looking for louis...get off your ass

N: harry you still haven’t found him??? dammmn son

H: no :((

L: niall where are you?

N: i was about to catch the end of this sick buffet :D

H: called it.

L: so youre on the north side?

N: yepyep

L: good stay over there and cover the north side of the resort. ive got the south wing, harry has west, and zayn has east

N: okeydokey. you just want me to look around here for him?

H: search don’t look. seeeaaarrrrccch

L: scavenge!

N: scavenge?? as in scavenger hunt????

L: bingo! ;)

N: oh god liam pls no more...i have scars...
Z: haha having war flashbacks are we?
N: no one is laughing zayn...no one...
N: um...this restaurant is louis free btdubs
Z: im laughing and that's all that matters. ;) nothing poolside
H: hes not in the main suites building...all the hallways are clear on each floor and so are the stairwells
N: why would he even be in a stairwell??
H: i. don't. know. leave me alone...
N: ??????
Z: uh...ok anyway louis is not at the indoor pool either
L: the gyms all clear! no signs of louis in the gym itself or in the sauna or the locker room
L: oh and hes also not at the juice bar...which i don't think is too surprising lol
N: hes not at the actual bar either...which i for one think is surprising...that's where id be. day and night, rain or shine lmao
Z: ha good to know.
L: which bar did you check ni
N: the glasshouse
H: im gonna check the amber
Z: east pavilion is a no go and the botanical garden is empty
L: nothing at the golf club lounge...he wouldn't be out on the green right? i mean i can check
N: no don't bother. h and i were there all day...plus louis doesn't golf
H: yeah he doesn't think its a real sport...nothing at the amber btw
L: alright moving on then
Z: the gardens are so peaceful...it has a pacifying effect
H: i kno, i was there at sunrise, its lovely
L: youre still there babe?
Z: yeah sorry i got distracted, its almost hypnotizing. im leaving now tho ha
N: lads i stopped by the spa and saw carly.
H: ok?? and this is relevant why???

N: calm your tits harry...she saw lou earlier today

H: WHAT??!! she did?!??!

L: how long ago was that

N: uh something like 5 hours maybe a little more

Z: did she say where he might have gone or....

N: supposedly the front desk?

Z: im near the lobby already. ill ask around

H: ask kip!

Z: true

L: well...not that i really thought he would be there but the main kitchen is clear

N: way to be thorough payno

L: it never hurts to try

H: i appreciate it liam :)

Z: kip saw him!

N: niceeee

H: WHAT DID HE SAY?!

Z: he said they had a good chat about life and then kip said that he told him about all his fav unappreciated parts of the resort that no one ever goes to

H: oh well that’s just great...

N: so hes basically in the ass crack of this place

Z: yeah pretty much

H: did he give you any kind of direction?

Z: he said the best things are on the far south side or something. li i think your closest

L: k im on it

L: wait...where exactly am i going?

Z: um kip is talking to another guest now but he said something about going beyond the golf lounge place and then um...theres a path? i think?
L: a path?

H: you think?

Z: yes??

N: you'll be fine liam... just follow the yellow brick road and click ur ruby red shoes...you got it mate

H: why don't you just ask him for a map of the resort and send a picture of it?

N: smartass...

H: oh so im the smartass? you're the one who sent that fucking lame wizard of oz joke...that btw was completely unasked for and unappreciated

N: liam please find louis so he can take the stick out of harry's asshole...it's stressing me the fuck out.

Z: ok boys stop bickering. here's a pic of the map...i circled the part kip was talking about.

L: thanks z :)

N: sooooo since liam has a lead now can i just stay put? or go back to my previously scheduled program? cuz...

H: no.

N: may i ask why the hell not??

H: cuz...

H: i.

H: fucking.

H: said.

H: so.

N: liam pls...help™

H: you better be searching horan or your ass is mine

N: liam...you're our only hope...harry has fallen to the dark side...im afraid there is no light left in him

H: ni all where are you? what are you doing? if the answer is not on your hands and knees motherfucking searching for louis...then consider yourself dead

N: okk i get that liam is out scavenging or whatever but...zayn? have you left me in this group message alone to burn? to die? zayn? pls?

H: answer me horan.

N: come out come out wherever you are @zayn @liam and most of all @LOUIS
Z: haha ;)

N: ZAYN dont leave me ever again...im scared

Z: sry ni...im looking for lou so harry doesnt slay my ass

H: real fucking friend. @@ @@ @@ @@ @@ niall take note

N: is that your version of shade??

N: and why is my friendship being constantly compared to zayns. i feel so attacked. im so tired...i need to lay down...i need a nap

L: I FOUND LOUIS I FOUND HIM THE EAGLE HAS BEEN SPOTTED!!!!

N: fucking finally! shit...harry has lost his goddamn mind!!!!

H: WHERE ?????????????

L: its like a cute little ice cream bar?

N: the fuck? theres an ice cream bar?!?! how did i not kno this?!?

Z: its official...louis wins at hide and go seek...

H: OMG IS HE OK??????

L: um he hasn’t seen me...but he looks fine? i think? at least from where i am…

H: ! iM o nm ay !W !

N: wtf?? are you running and typing or something?? what is that shit supposed to mean????

Z: probably ‘im on my way’ haha XD

N: ooooo if i squint my eyes and tilt my phone i can kinda see it. maybe

L: ill wait up for you mate.

Z: good luck harry! go get ya man

N: YASS PLEASE go get him so he can fix you and i can finally be at peace again fuck

After running for what feels like an eternity, Harry finally makes it across the resort to Liam. He feels like he just had the ultimate grand tour of The Grove. Niall was not exaggerating; this ice cream bar really is located in the ass crack of the resort. Who would ever think to look for this place? But, maybe that’s the point.

“Hey mate.” Liam greets as Harry reaches him, slowing drown his sprint. “Did you run all the way here? You could have taken a shuttle at least half way.”

“Can’t miss a day of cardio, Liam.” Harry hunches over, putting his hands on his knees as he catches his breath. “And it was crowded with people checking out or something…I don’t even
know...I hardly stopped to investigate.”

“I see, I see.” Liam chuckles. “Guess all that cardio came in handy today.”

“We’ll see, won’t we?” Harry outbreaths, breathing pattern starting to return to a normal range. “Where is he?”

“He’s right in there.” Liam states, pointing at the quaint little ice cream shop.

“Did you talk to him?” Harry asks, standing up straight and doing a mini stretch.

“No, I figured you probably should first.” Liam responds honestly. “I’ve just been watching to make sure he doesn’t leave or anything. But he seems pretty...content.”

“What does that mean?”

“Well, he doesn’t look upset so...I’d hope it’s a good thing?”

“Yeah, hopefully.” Harry blows a gust of air out of his mouth. “Thank you Liam.”

“Good luck, mate.” Liam gives Harry a brief hug, patting his back. “You got this.”

“Thanks...I’m sure I’ll need all the luck I can get.” Harry smiles weakly and squares his shoulders, turning away from Liam. He pushes through the swing doors of the small isolated building, his senses immediately assaulted by the sugary sweet smell of dairy and freshly made waffle cones. The interior of the shop is vibrant and colorful, bubbly upbeat music plays in the background creating a positive vibe throughout the shop.

Aside from Louis and a few staff, the ice cream bar is essentially deserted, probably due to the fact that it is nearly eleven p.m. on a Monday night. The rush and buzz of the long weekend quickly fading.

“Well love, what is your favorite? I’ve tried nearly half the menu now.” Louis asks a middle aged woman in a white apron, standing over him. He sits at a large booth wearing the same black hoodie from the day before, his hair un-styled, simply falling softly like a halo around his head. The surface of the table is scattered with dishes, surrounding Louis in a swarm of bowls, each at a different level of consumption, none of them actually finished.

“Oh hun, that’s such a hard choice. I fancy all of them really.” The woman leans over Louis and points to something on the menu in Louis’ hand. “Maybe this one, the Cookie Lover’s Sundae? And then we could add some caramel on top? That’s what I always do, it has to be one of my all-time favorites. Do you like caramel?”

“Come on darling, of course I do.” Louis responds with a kind smile. “Sooo many choices. I probably can only stomach one more to be honest and I want it to be really really good. On one hand, I think the cookie thing that’s your favorite sounds absolutely amazing, but then on the other hand so do all of these! God, why is this sooo hard!”

“Louis!” Harry exclaims from the doorway.

Louis hardly acknowledges Harry’s presence, simply cocking one eyebrow over his menu.

“I’ve been looking everywhere for you!” Harry outbursts, rushing over to the table Louis is sitting at. “Not just me, Liam and Zayn and Niall helped too. We looked everywhere!”
“Mmm...how lovely.” Louis answers absently, eyes poised on the menu in his hands. “Weeell…you found me...”

“Yes and I have to-”

“Nuh uh uuuuuh nooo stop. Stop talking…you’re clouding my thoughts.” Louis places a hand up halting Harry from saying anything further, still not looking up. “I’m trying to make a decision and it’s very important. Obviously. And I can’t have you blabbering on in my ear while I think. So shut it.”

“What? Louis-”

“Nooo! What did I just say!? Quiet! Shhh! Shhh! Shhh!” Louis shushes excessively, still deliberating over the menu. He lifts his head up, turning his attention to the woman standing next to him. “Alright Suzy love, I think…yeah…I think I’m gonna go with your favorite but…I wanna add cookie dough to it. Why does something called cookie lovers or whatever not include cookie dough? That’s just wrong on soooo many levels. You can't truly love a cookie, without loving the dough it was birthed from. Such a travesty.”

“I agree, babes.” Suzy nods her head, the curls of her hair bouncing along with her movements. “So that’s what you want then? Cookie Lover’s Sundae, add caramel and cookie dough.”

“Perfect!” Louis beams brightly.

Suzy grins down on him. “Extra whip like last time, Lou?”

Harry slides silently into the booth, sitting across from Louis and watching his odd behavior closely.

“I don’t think it’d be right without it. Extra whip is essential.” Louis answers easily. He glances over at Harry, choosing to finally address him. “This is Suzy, by the way. She is the beeest and I love her dearly. She’s actually my favorite person right now.”

“Hi honey, you must be Harry.” Suzy smiles warmly at him, her eyes creasing naturally at the corners. “I’ve heard…so much.”

“Um…yeah I’m sure you have. But it’s nice to meet you…um…Suzy.” Harry smiles as pleasantly as he can manage. He is so beyond confused. What the hell is going on here?

“Dooo you waaant one?” Louis asks suddenly, randomly elongating and slurring his words. “They have this caramel one with little chocolate bits in it that's sooo amazing and earlier I had a fruity swirl thingy which at first I was strongly against, but then it kinda grew on me.” He rambles on animatedly, demonstrating an alarming amount of conviction over a few bowls of ice cream. “And…oh my god! They do this thing with any type of cereal sooo like the milk is ice cream and theeeen they mix the cereal in it! It's beyond brilliant! It blew my mind. You know I don’t mess with cereal.” His tone gets drastically serious all of a sudden. “Cereal is never a game.”

“Yes.” Harry answers slowly, perplexed. “I know…”

“So anything for you, dear?” Suzy asks looking to Harry questioningly.

“Um…” Harry looks from Louis, up to Suzy with a bewildered expression. “I think…I’m good…thanks.”

“See Suzy...I told you.” Louis rolls his eyes and sighs. “He’s laaame.”
“I’m not lame, I’m just…um…confused…”

“You’re a lame square.” Louis says as a matter of simple fact. “The lamest of all the lame squares to ever lame.”

“What are you talking about? I’m so…lost.”

“Alright well, I’ll go put that in for you Louis.” Suzy waves sweetly and leaves the table.

“Thanks love!” Louis exclaims appreciatively.

Harry observes Louis closely, not sure how to approach him. “Lou, are you…alright?”

“You know…I was feeling a bit queasy earlier and I thought…shiiit I’m gonna fucking puke. Great.” Louis says, once again randomly dragging out his words. “But theeeen…like all things really…it passed and I got my second wind or…tenth wind? I dunno…fuck it. I’m still going sooo… cheers!”

Harry frowns, leaning in closer over the table. “Um…are you drunk?”

“Nope nope nopee!” Louis singsongs, with a spoon dangling from his mouth. “I’m completely sober, maybeee…just maybeee, I’m on a little sugar high if anything. Apparently they don’t serve alcohol here because it’s a place for kids or some dumb shit like that. Ridiculous, right? That’s like saying adults don’t want ice cream…like what the fuck?” Louis waves his spoon around wildly as he talks rapidly. “In my opinion, it would only make sense to serve alcohol with ice cream because they go together soooo well. Come ooon people! It’s common sense.” He rants arbitrarily, sounding very convicted. “Suzy agrees with me though, she said ice cream and alcohol are a match made in heaven. She just may be my kindred spirit.”

Harry doesn’t even know how to respond to that. More like he doesn’t know how to respond to Louis right now. “Is this where you hid all day?”

“Oh no no noooo. Half the day maybeee…I dunno…I quite like it in here though. It’s nice isn’t it? Quiet. I don’t think many people know it exists, thankfully.”

“What about the rest of the day?”

“Umm…I was with Zayn originally. Loooads of fun times there. So much fun in fact, that I lost my voice for awhile, aah memories.” Louis explains, sounding extremely cheerful but sarcastic at the same time. “And then I went to the spa! God, fucking finally, bloody hell! That was my one and only goal for the entire weekend and I finally went.”

“Um…a-”

“And was it everything I hoped for, you ask?” Louis talks over Harry. “Oh…well you know, it was alright, yeah? I had a really good deep tissue massage. Apparently, I had a lot of hard knots to work out in my back…which, coincidentally is an indicator of stress.” Louis throws his hands up sardonically, as if he has no idea what that could mean. “Hmm…oh how I wonder what that might be about?”

“Louis, I know and I-”

“Oh! And I saw Carly!” Louis exclaims enthusiastically, talking over Harry yet again. “Chatted with her for a bit.”
“Yes…I heard…”

“I really like her, she’s quite feisty and sooo spirited. We had a good laugh.” Louis continues. “You know…Niall should really capitalize on that before she realizes what a sad sack he really is. She could do a million times better, but I think she actually likes him. God only knows why.”

Harry decides it’s probably just easier to go along with Louis’ ramblings, no use trying to fight it at this point. “I guess you should tell him then? He listens to you.”

“Oh, believe me, I will.” Louis states seriously. “Mmm ok…so after Zayn was…the spa and theeen…what did I do after that?” He ponders, retracing his steps out loud. “Oh, right right yes! Then I plotted murder…it was quite therapeutic actually. I came up with a bullet proof strategy and everything. It’s ridiculously solid.” Louis smiles proudly, a mischievous glint in his eye.

“What? You plotted murder?” Harry asks in horror. “Seriously?”

“Yeppp!” Louis enthuses, popping the ‘p’ sound. “Kip helped me! Imagine that. He’s so cheerful and innocent on the outside right? But really he has a dark side. And he is sooo brilliant, like an evil genius! He’s actually studying criminal law!” Louis explains energetically. “But I seriously think that his mind actually works more like a criminal than a lawyer, sooo he is a vital asset to the master plan.”

“What is the master plan?” Harry questions, partially afraid to find out.

“Well, I can't bloody well tell you! Then I'd have to kill you too.” Louis says obviously, rolling his eyes. “Actually in the original murder outline you were gonna die anyway, but then I decided to spare you because Anne would be so sad and I really do love Anne.”

“Well, thank you for at least remembering my mother.” Harry responds considerately. “That’s very thoughtful of you.”

“Mmm I try. She’s like a second mum to me…despite the unfortunate child she raised.” Louis looks Harry up and down, shaking his head disapprovingly. “Gemma came out alright though. You just can’t win ‘em all can you? One out of two, not too bad, I suppose.”

Harry purses his lips, but says nothing about Louis’ notion. “Sounds like you had quite the adventure today.”

“I did...yeah. Good times.”

“Were you ever going to come back and find me?”

“Uhhh nooo.” Louis laughs loudly, eyes crinkled. “Why the fuck would I do that?”

“So what where you going to do?”

“Well well well…I’m glad you asked. I was going to take these keys,” Louis gestures to the car keys for their rental car on table in between the empty and half eaten bowls, “put my ass in a vehicle and hightail it the fuck out of here.”

“And leave?”

“Isn’t that what ‘hightail it the fuck out of here’ means?” Louis retorts, scrunching his face. “Come on, Harry...think.”
“But you…” Harry starts. “You were really going to leave me here?”

“Honestly, it was either leave you or kill you and I swear to you…I battled with both.”

“So why haven’t you?”

“Left? I dunno really.” Louis shrugs halfheartedly. “For one this ice cream is fucking fantastic and-” Louis pauses, suddenly tuning his attention to the music playing in the background, catching the middle of Natalie Cole’s timeless hit, *This Will Be (An Everlasting Love)*. “Oohhh…I love this song!”

“Yeah, it’s a great song.” Harry agrees easily. “But I really need to talk to you.”

Louis begins humming mindlessly to the song, blatantly tuning Harry out.

“Louis, it’s important.” Harry urges.

*This will be, you and me.* Louis starts singing softly along to the upbeat tune. “Yes sir-ee.”

“And now you’re singing?”

*Hugging and squeezing and kissing and pleasing*…

“Um-”

“…together forever through ever whatever.” Louis sings in one single breath.

“Are you done?”

“Yeah yeah yeah whooooaaah!”

“I.”

“Love!”

“Um-”

“Love!”

“Louis!”

“Love!”

“Seriously?”

“Love!” With each repetitive ‘love’, Louis gets a little louder, until he is practically shouting, his voice carrying over louder than the original track. “Love!”

“Oh my god!” Harry exclaims, throwing his hands up.

“Love!” Louis bops his head side to side, closing his eyes as he sing-shouts along, purposefully ignoring Harry. “Love! Love! Love! Love love love!”

“Louis!”

“Love!”
“This is ridiculous.” Harry sighs, scrubbing his hands against his tired eyes.

“Love!”

“How many times does she sing the word love?” Harry questions hopelessly.

“Eighteen.” Louis answers quickly before he goes back to singing. “Love love love!”

“Oh, so you can answer that question but-”

“Love!” Louis sings, back to ignoring Harry. “From now ooon!”

“Have you quite finished?” Harry asks flatly.

“No, I have not quite fucking finished, don't be rude!” Louis states, annoyed. “This is a classic Harry, educate yourself. It basically ends every slightly romantic movie in existence, sooo you and your romcom loving ass should know this. It's even in the damn Parent Trap!”

“Yeah, I know that, but-”

“Then I don't see the problem.” Louis shrugs as he continues humming along to the ending notes of the song.

Harry sighs again, heavily. “The problem is that you won't-”

“Look, is there a reason why you’re here?” Louis interrupts sounding even more irritated. “Or did you just come to shit on my parade? Because I am perfectly fine. I've been fine all day, I've actually had a great time without you, so unless you have something of value to say…you can go.”

“You're not fine. You’re just acting fine. Actually you're not even acting fine, you’re acting… weird.”

“Don't tell me how I feel. I’m telling you that I'm fucking fine and I fucking mean it.”

“I’m not trying to tell you how you feel, Louis…it’s just that-”

“Do you have a problem with me having fun? Is it such a crime for me to actually have a semi-decent time on this godforsaken retreat from fucking hell?”

“No, Louis. Of course not. I just need to-”

“Then leave me be.” Louis declares simply.

“Here you are Louis love, a Cookie Lover's Sundae with caramel and cookie dough and of course, extra whip.” Suzy sets the large dish in front of Louis, the sides overflowing with tracks of caramel, fudge, and whipped cream.

“Siiick!” Louis enthuses, looking up at Suzy. “Thank you love, it looks amazing!”

“Enjoy hun.” Suzy says, patting Louis’ head tenderly before leaving them alone once more.

Harry observes Louis with deep concern as he begins to taste his prized sundae. “So…um…Louis can we please talk?”

“Oh my god” Louis exclaims. “This is sooo good!”
“I’m sure it is and I’m glad you like it…but-”

“Mmm I dunno, I think it may be my new favorite?” Louis deliberates, sucking on his spoon. “Suzy is definitely a frozen dairy mastermind.”

“Louis?”

“She is sooo right! This dessert would be absolutely lost without the caramel.”

“Seriously, I-”

“But the cookie dough really pulls it all together to be honest.” Louis continues, unbothered. “Sooo good on me, I suppose.”

“Louis, baby will you please listen to me?” Harry begs earnestly, sounding more desperate.

“Try it.” Louis scoops some onto the spoon, holding it out to Harry expectantly.

“No really, I’m good, thanks.” Harry declines, utterly exasperated. “Just let me-”

Louis forcefully jams the loaded spoon into Harry’s mouth shutting him up.

Harry stares flatly at Louis with spoon hanging from his mouth for several moments, his expression completely unamused.

“It’s really fucking good right?” Louis beams at Harry. “Like…out of this world good!”

“Yesh…it’s guh.” Harry garbles almost unintelligibly around the spoon between his lips.

Louis frowns, looking down at the dish before him. “I need my spoon back.” He grumbles, reaching across the table to rudely yank the silver spoon from Harry’s mouth causing ice cream to dribble messily down his chin.

Harry grabs several napkins from the middle of the table to wipe the sweet melting substance from his face. “Ok, I tried it. Can I talk to you now?”

“You know what I could really go for?” Louis questions offhandedly, waving the spoon around with his words.

“Oh my god, Louis why?” Harry groans, laying his head down on the table.

“A fresh basket of chips.” Louis thinks aloud, ignoring Harry yet again. “Yes! That’s definitely it.”

“Louis please.” Harry pleads pathetically, cheek pressed against the cool surface of the table.

“That whole sweet and salty thing sounds sooo perfect, right?”

“Why? Whyyyy?” Harry whines, knowing fully well that everything he says is being purposefully ignored.

“Too perfect to ignore in fact.”

“Ughhh.” Harry groans against the table.

“Mmm I wonder if Suzy knows where-”

“Dammit Louis, enough already!” Harry sits up abruptly waving his hands in the air. “I told the
“Truth!” Louis slurs, spoon lodged in his cheeks as he gazes at Harry curiously.

“At the closing dinner...I told everyone the truth about who you really are.” Harry admits finally.

“Like everyone? Everyone, everyone?” Louis asks, pulling the utensil out of his mouth with a popping sound.

“The whole damn publishing house.”

“Well finally…fuck.” Louis exhales, putting another spoonful of his sundae in his mouth.

“Yes I know, I know.” Harry lowers his gaze to his lap. “So I got some random award for I don’t even know what…but that’s not really important.” He explains, lifting his head up. “Anyway, I went up there, on stage, to accept it or whatever, but then it just felt so wrong and I ended up telling the truth about everything, which was...interesting.”

“Mmm.” Louis sucks the last traces of ice cream off his spoon. “And what about your shit boss?”

“I told her off.”

Louis bursts out laughing at that, accidentally dropping his spoon into his lap. “Okaayy suuure.”

“I did! Really!” Harry tries seriously as Louis continues to laugh uncontrollably.

“Mmm that just seems a bit...far fetched. I guess I believe that you finally told the truth...I mean, seriously...that was long overdue.” Louis comments, settling his laughter and wiping off his spoon with a napkin. “But telling off that she-devil? Not so much. Aren’t you’re terrified of her?”

“Louis, I did, I swear.” Harry asserts. “I stood up to her. I wouldn’t lie about that.”

“Did you record it?” Louis asks, dipping his freshly wiped spoon in his ice cream bowl.

“Um no?” Harry responds with a puzzled expression. “Why would I do that?”

“So I can see it and my soul can be blessed...duh.” Louis responds as if it’s so obvious. “Think, Harry think. God, where is your brain today?”

Harry sighs for the millionth time in the past hour. “But...I did it.”

“Allegedly.” Louis states, pointing his spoon at Harry. “I don’t know that for certain.”

“Baby, I did it for you.” Harry declares earnestly.

“What does that even mean to me if I wasn’t there?”

“You really don’t believe me?”

“Redo it.”

Harry scrunches his brow in confusion. “What?”

“Recreate the conversation or it didn’t happen.” Louis shrugs simply, casting his head down to the bowl in front of him, stirring the spoon around in his sundae.

“Louis, you can’t honestly be serious right now.”
“Oh, but…I am.” Louis lifts his head, looking Harry straight in the eye. “Dead serious. I’ll be her and you be…you…obviously.” He shakes out his shoulders dramatically and clears his throat.

“But-”

“Stylesss!” Louis shrieks abruptly in a scarily reminiscent shrill voice, pitch spot on.

Louis looks to Harry, raising his eyebrows expectantly as he waits for him to respond.

Harry stares at Louis, a surprised quirk to his lips. “Seriously? You really aren’t joking?”

“Um? I’m sorry, do I look like I’m joking? Why would I not be serious?” Louis questions, back to his usual voice. “Let’s go, Styles. Come on, get your ass in gear. I want to really feel the emotion. Your absolute best. No shit acting. And it shouldn’t be that hard…you’re only playing yourself.”

“Uh…ok…I’ll give it my best, I guess.” Harry exhales.

Louis nods and clears his throat again, getting back into character. “Styles! Whine whine whine, irritating screaming, white noise…blah blah blah…I’m the bitchiest bitch in this bitch and most importantly you’re my bitch!”

Harry bites his lip to keep from laughing at Louis’ impression of his boss. “I’m not your bitch!”

“Yes you are! I own you, bitch! So listen to me!” Louis yells in the same piercing tone. “Ahhh! Demands demands demands, more useless high-pitched noise!”

“No! I won’t! You don’t own me, I’m done!”

“Yes yes yes! Insert petty comments and snide disrespect blah blah blah! Do everything I say because I said so! Or else!”

“Or else what!?” Harry yells, trying to keep his expression stern. “I don’t care! I refuse to be treated like this!”

“Or else I’ll kick your ass, Styles! I will make you suffer!”

“Then do it.” Harry tries again for the seriousness he had earlier, but it’s a little hard with Louis imitating his boss with shockingly amusing accuracy.

“I will! Don’t test me, Styles! I will manhandle you however I want because I own you, bitch!” Louis mocks, holding his head up unnecessarily high. “Did I mention that besides being a bitchy bitch, I’m also a thirsty hoe? Because I am. The thirst is so very real in me and only you can quench it.”

“Fuck off! I don’t want you!”

Louis inhales sharply and closes his eyes slowly. “Oh god, that’s sooo hot.” He moans, lulling his head back. “Ugh…fuck me, Harry.”

“Wait, is that you talking or her? Because-”

Louis lets out ear-splitting banshee scream that if given the chance could most likely wake the entire underworld. “Fuck me, bitch!”

“Nope…right ok…you’re still her…got it.” Harry nods to himself, sighing heavily before going back to this ridiculous charade. “No! I won’t! And for the love of god, I’m not your bitch!” Good thing
this little ice cream bar is essentially deserted; it could be a traumatic scene for a child to witness. Or anyone really. From behind the counter Suzy watches them with obvious concern. Harry smiles weakly at her, attempting to signal to her that everything is fine. Or somewhat fine. It’s probably not his most convincing smile, but oh well.

“How dare you deny me!” Louis leans across the table and slaps Harry clear across his face, instantly bringing his attention back to the matter at hand.

Harry’s jaw drops as he blinks several times in shock. “Ok…she didn’t slap me, Louis.”

Louis frowns, his face morphing into contemplative confusion. “Who the fuck is Louis? Mmm that name doesn’t ring any bells. Unless…I don’t know?” He ponders exaggeratedly, scratching his head and looks up at the ceiling. “Could it possibly be the same Louis that you introduced me to three hundred million fucking times? Or maybe the Louis that I choose to ignore deliberately? Mmm it can’t be. As far as I’m concerned I’ve never met anyone named Louis and he doesn’t exist.”

“Louis is the most inspiring person I know.” Harry answers genuinely, not missing a single beat. “He is kind and goodhearted and he cares way too much. He is thoughtful and impossibly sweet. He’s outrageously funny and witty. He’s absolutely brilliant. And it is more than an honor to be able to experience how staggeringly beautiful he truly is everyday.” Harry continues honestly. “Louis is everything. He is literally everything to me. He never ceases to take the breath out of my lungs and the words right out of my mouth. I love him with every part of me. He’s all I’ll ever need. And not you, or this job or anything else, will ever change that.”

“You really did it, didn’t you?” Louis questions quietly in his normal voice. “Tell her off…I mean.”

“I did.” Harry answers, nodding his head. “And I would do it every single day for the rest of my life, if that's what it takes for you to forgive me.”

“You're not afraid that she'll fire you?” Louis asks seriously.

“No.” Harry responds simply. “I honestly don't care about this job or anything at all really, if it means losing you. None of this would have any meaning…not the money or the prestige or anything, it's all fleeting. I only took this position for you, so that…I could take care of you.”

Louis stays silent, lowering his eyes from meeting Harry’s gaze and wringing his hands together in his lap.

“And I know you don't exactly need me to take care of you…but I just...I want to give you everything, because you deserve everything and...you're everything to me. I just want to make you happy. I want to marry you and give you the big beautiful wedding you always wanted and I want to buy you your dream house and raise our army of kids in it. I want you to never have to worry about finances or stress over bills or have a single care in the world. I want to give you everything you ever wanted out of life. But I don’t want to give you everything, if it means losing everything in return. If it means...losing us…or losing you. Because I can’t…I won’t…lose you.”

Louis keeps his head hung low, his hair falling over his face, covering his expression.

“I know that you're worried about what the future holds for us and all that it entails, but I promise you I'm not going anywhere. You don’t have to worry about being lonely or ignored or overlooked because you will never be alone. I'll always be there for you when you need me and I’ll always put you first. I'll never let anything come between us again.” Harry promises, his voice passionate yet soft. “Nothing is more important to me than you. I promised you that I’d try to fix it... and this is me trying. This is me trying to change. It doesn’t automatically make everything right and I know that,
but I’ll never stop trying for you. I will do better, Louis. I will be a better man for you.”

Louis finally lifts his head and meets Harry’s unwavering gaze slowly.

“I choose you, Louis. Every time, no matter what…I choose you.” Harry declares openly. “And I'm sorry. I'm so so sorry, baby. For all the shit I put you through. For how stupid I’ve been acting. For all the many times I fucked up in such a short span of time.” His voice drops off and becomes extremely soft-spoken. “For hurting you.”

“I asked too much of you. Way too much…and that was so wrong and selfish of me to do. I should’ve never asked you to do any of this. I should’ve never disrespected you like that. I should’ve paraded you around as the love of my life all weekend, not hid you as my brother.” Harry continues, eyes still locked with Louis’. And you love me so much that you went along with it anyway, until it physically broke you and…I let you do it. I went along with it…and I told myself that you were fine and that we were fine, but…that only just proves how self-absorbed I was acting.” Harry admits, breaking his gaze momentarily. “You weren’t fine, you were hurting…and it took me too long to realize it.”

“I need you too, Harry.” Louis whispers softly after a few moments of silence.

“I love you, Lou…and there are no amount of apologies or ways that I can make it up to you. And I…I don’t even know what else to say to you except to just express how truly sorry I am.”

Louis sighs. “Haz, but…I…I’m sorry too…”

Harry frowns and shakes his head. “Louis, you have nothing to be sorry for. It’s on me, I did this.”

“I just…I…you…goddammit! You made me furious! I was so…angry and…upset and…pissed the fuck off and…I let it get the best of me at times.” Louis admits, running his fingers through his fringe. “You really fucked up, that’s undeniably true…but some of the ways I dealt with it weren’t right…and I’m not proud of it.”

“No…it’s ok, you were just upset. I deserved it.”

“I left you blind drunk and alone on a sidewalk, Harry.” Louis points out, tone flat.

“That is very true, but I was being a dick.”

“‘Yes, you really were, but you still could’ve gotten hurt. Anything could have happened to you…and I…I’m sorry.” Louis apologizes. “And part of me also wants to apologize for slapping you, but I don’t think it’ll be genuine. I’m gonna just go ahead and be honest and admit that I’ve been thinking about slapping your face all day.”

Harry lets out a small laugh. “Well, I can’t fault you for being honest.”

“Yeah…I don’t think I truthfully regret that at all.” Louis admits with a budding smile. “I guess…maybe…I’m sorry for plotting to kill you though. Maybe.”

“Oh please, you could never kill me anyway.” Harry shrugs easily, the corners of his lips quirking upwards.
“Hmm…and why is that?” Louis asks curiously. “And if you dare say something about how I couldn’t kill you because I’m smaller than you or some disrespectful shit like that, I will murder your ass just to prove a fucking point.”

“It’s only logistics really…”

“Don’t fucking say it Harry…if you value your life you won’t finish that statement.”

“You’re just tiny…and small.” Harry continues regardless of Louis’ threats. “It’s not personal…it’s just a fact. You’re petite.”

Louis scoops up large spoonful of ice cream from the bowl in front of him and flings it at Harry, the cold substance landing smack on his nose.

“Louis!” Harry shouts in surprise, his mouth falling open.

Louis smirks and saucily quirks one eyebrow. “How do you like the logistics of that? Kiss my petite ass!” He starts laughing uncontrollably, closing his eyes and clutching his sides, but abruptly stops when he feels a lump of cold ice cream hit his cheek. Louis’ eyes fly open, his hand reaching to his face.

“Oh, so it’s like that, is it?”

Louis shrugs his shoulders. “You brought this upon yourself. Your statement was unnecessary and uncalled for.”

“What statement?”

“Don’t play this game Harry, you will lose.” Louis squints his eyes, glaring at Harry across the table. “You know what you said…”

“Hmm…was it…no…it couldn’t have been the word…small?” Harry questions innocently.

Louis blinks several times, his face flat and unamused.

“Small.” Harry taunts again, smiling wide. “Small small smaaalll. My small small little Lou.”

“Eat shit!” Louis launches an older already completely melted bowl of ice cream at Harry, splashing all over his face.

Harry grabs the dish closest to him on the table and attempts to scoop it up at Louis, but Louis ducks out of the way before it can make contact. Ice cream flies back and forth across the table, Louis managing to stay mostly clean, while Harry having no such luck.

Given no other choice, Harry retreats under the table after missing Louis several times, most of his attempts backfiring as Louis seems to never miss his target.

“Where do you think you’re going? Can’t take losing?” Louis slides down the booth after Harry, catching him off guard by dumping the remaining contents of an ice cream bowl all over Harry’s chest.
“Ah! Louis that’s so cold!” Harry yelps, jumping up and hitting his head on the underside of the table. “Ow! Shit!”

“Advantages of being so-called ‘small’, I like to call it, petite perks…or karma.” Louis laughs contentedly. “It’s perfectly cozy under here for me.”

“That actually hurt.” Harry laughs, sounding pained through his laughter.

“Aw poor baby.” Louis mock empathizes, jutting out his lip. “Want me to kiss it better?”

“Yes.” Harry pouts rubbing the top of his head.

“Ha! You thought, suck it!” Louis cackles teasingly. “Serves you right, maybe you’ll think twice next time. Victory is mine!”

“Fine, fine you win. Here, let me give you a congratulatory hug.” Harry leans over and forces his body over Louis’, engulfing him in his arms. Louis tries to retreat backwards, but just ends up being pressed down on the floor.

“No! You’re just trying to get that shit all over me!” Louis struggles underneath Harry, really only making it worse as the globs of ice cream from Harry’s shirt makes its way onto his hoodie. “I was once so clean and victorious!”

“I’m simply spreading the love.” Harry clings to Louis tightly, wiggling his body, smearing more creamy ice cream onto Louis’ clothes.

“Oh god, it is cold.” Louis laughs, squirming underneath Harry as the cold dairy begins to permeate through the material of his thin jacket.

“Now we match!” Harry giggles.

“Well, I guess it’s true that a couple that wears matching flavors of ice cream together…stays together.” Louis jokes. “But since we are matching, the real question is…who wore it better?”

“Hmm…I think this specific shade of fudge really brings out your eyes.” Harry grins. “This is definitely within your complimentary color wheel.”

“I know, right?” Louis flutters his eyelashes. “I was basically born to be bathed in chocolate. But on the other hand, that caramel streak is giving your hair a natural highlight. You’re practically glowing.”

“Maybe I’m born with it.” Harry lifts off Louis slightly and flips his sticky, clumped hair over his shoulder. “Maybe it’s caramelline.”

“Oh my god, Harry!” Louis gasps theatrically. “This might just be your best look! Ever!”

“Clearly, I’ve out done myself.” Harry declares, sounding extra ridiculous. “Changing the fashion industry one topping at a time.”

“Ironic.” Louis agrees, laughter in his voice.

They lay wrapped up with each other, Harry on top of Louis under the table, their entangled limbs sticking out into the open, too long to fit under the surface. It probably looks absolutely ridiculous, an eyesore of a spectacle to witness. Here they are, a couple, hopelessly covered in swirls of caramel and fudge, painted in melting dairy and whipped cream, laughing wildly together under a table at an
ice cream bar at midnight.

Harry leans down and sucks the syrupy chocolate off Louis' face, trailing his lips down the sugary path until he meets Louis' lips. "You're so much sweeter than I remember."

Louis giggles, scrunching his nose and crinkling his eyes. "Than you remember? It's only been since Friday when you last kissed me."

"That was a lifetime ago. I’ve aged ten million times over since then." Harry says, attaching his lips to Louis’ left cheekbone. "And I missed the taste of your sinfully sweet mouth."

"Me tasting allegedly sweeter may or may not have something to do with the sugary gunk I’m covered in…but that’s just a thought…I may be wrong…who knows, really?"

"No, it’s you.” Harry declares, nibbling softly on Louis’ bottom lip. “Definitely just you.”

“Mmm.” Louis hums, closing his eyes. “Just sinfully sweet, chocolate bathed, petite ole me.”

“Yes…you.” Harry mumbles against Louis’ mouth. “I love you.”

“Ditto.” Louis giggles, pulling back and gazing up at Harry lovingly.

Harry laughs happily, looking down at Louis and softly brushing his hair away from his face.

"Can we go home now?” Louis whispers, his hand caressing Harry’s sticky face looming over him.

Harry nods his head, smiling wide before kissing Louis’ forehead. "Yes, baby...let’s go home."

"Margaret, how are you love? I’ve yet to call you today, surprisingly, and I miss the sound of your lovely voice.” Harry sits at his desk, talking to the intercom. He holds a silver stylus in one hand, a tablet in the other, a ball-point pen balancing behind his ear, tangled in his hair. The surface of his workspace is covered in an assortment of documents and drafts, old spreadsheets and stray prints littering the entire desk.

“I’m very well thanks.” Margaret’s voice echoes through the speaker. “What can I do for you, Mr. Styles? I know you didn’t ring me just to hear me talk.”

“I get lonely sometimes.” Harry states, swiping pictures around on his tablet. “I can’t just call my secretary for a nice chat?"

Margaret’s cheerful giggle resonates through the intercom. “You could, of course, but something is telling me it’s a bit more than that this time.”

“Mmm. You’re a smart one, very perceptive. I think I’ll keep you.” Harry answers teasingly.

“Alright, a couple things. First, could you try to schedule a meeting with Mr. Williams for late next week sometime? We were supposed to meet last week and then we tried for yesterday, but it just keeps falling through. Anyway, long story short, he emailed me about rescheduling or something… I’ll forward you his message.”

“Ok sure, I’ll get on that.” Margaret answers easily.
“Ok and then I think I’m supposed to meet with our newest client tomorrow, but it conflicts with the last minute meeting we’re having about the Jacobsen piece, so if you could just—”

“I’ll call them and fix that straight away.”

“Great! Oh and speaking of the Jacobsen piece, I can’t seem to find the final written outline. I know I did it, but I need to make a few changes to match the rest of the spread and I can’t find it anywhere.”

“Oh! You sent me a copy this morning. Remember?” Margaret prompts.

“I did…didn’t I? That’s right. Could you just—”

“Already sent.” Margaret states before Harry finishes his question.

Harry frees one of his hands by sticking the stylus between his teeth, using his now free hand to wake his desktop computer. He squints at the screen, opening up his inbox. “Umm…Oh! Got it! Thanks!” Harry responds, taking the digital writing instrument out of his mouth.

“No problem, Mr. Styles. I’ll work on setting up those appointments for you.”

“Thank you, Margaret. You’re an absolute gem. I will follow up with you later.”

“Right. Bye—Oh!” Margaret exclaims, randomly interrupting herself. “Mr. Styles do you have lunch plans today?”

“Um…no.” Harry mumbles distractedly, reading over the newly received email attachment. “Erm…why?”

“Because Lo—um…actually never mind. Talk with you later.”

“Mhmm mk.” Harry hums absentmindedly as the intercom call ends, stylus back between his teeth as he types rapidly on the keyboard, tablet abandoned in his lap.

“Psst!”

Harry’s head snaps up, caught off guard, the stylus falling from his mouth to his lap.

“Hi babe!” Louis greets chirpily, strolling into Harry’s large office.

“Louis!” Harry greets, surprised. “What are you…I just talked with Margaret…she didn’t even tell me you were here.”

Louis laughs, hopping eagerly from one foot to the other. “Yeah, I told her not to bother telling you because—”

“Shit.” Harry curses suddenly. “Did we plan for lunch today? God, did I forget? I just…shit, I’ve had such a busy morning and—”

“No, no we didn’t! It’s a bit of an impromptu visit. You’re fine, love…I promise.” Louis reassures. “But I have something to tell you and it just couldn’t wait!”

“You do? About you?”

“Yes!” Louis rapidly nods his head completely ecstatic, still lightly bouncing on his toes. Whenever he gets excited he is reminiscent of a little boy, a bright young light to his eye. “Well, more than just me, really! It affects us both in the grand scheme of things; the overall greater good, if you will.
But…oh my god, Harry! I just have to tell you!"

“Wow, you’re really excited!” Harry laughs elatedly at the sight of his beaming boy.

“I am! I am! Yes! Harry  I felt like I was literally going to combust if I didn’t tell you! But it had to be in person! So here I am!”

Harry adjusts his gaze from an over-enthused Louis to the swarm of papers surrounding him and back to Louis again. He nods his head once, as if making a decision. “Alright then, let’s get lunch anyway and you can tell me all about it.”

“Wait, what?” Louis questions, sounding surprised. “Right now?”

“Yeah babe, come on…let’s go.” Harry ceremoniously drops the tablet and stylus on top of his mess of a desk and stands to his feet. “What are you in the mood for?”

“You don’t have to finish that?” Louis points to the mound of spreadsheets and colorful prints decorating Harry’s desk. “You look like you’re really busy and I know you have a really big deadline coming up…so um…I can just tell you really quickly and then you can get back to it. We don’t have to do lunch…really, it’s ok.”

“Nope, not happening. Louis we are doing lunch. Whatever you have to say is obviously very important to you so it’s important to me.” Harry slides on his suit jacket.” I want to hear the news that you rushed over here to tell me. Besides I’m fucking starving and you’re saving me from a sad lonely meal of leftover bagels in the conference room.”

Louis looks back at the collage of papers and photographs “But…it looks like so much. I don’t want to throw you off track or anything.”

“Baby, it’s fine.” Harry assures with a warm smile. “It’ll still be here when I get back and I’m almost done anyway.”

Louis smiles at that as he stands near the doorway watching Harry walk over to him. “You’re sure?”

“Positive.” Harry kisses both of Louis’ cheeks reassuringly.

“Ok.” Louis smiles softly as he reaches up and plucks the abandoned pen from behind Harry’s ear. “Forgot this, I think.” He holds the pen out to Harry, using his other hand to fix Harry’s curls.

“Oh right.” Harry laughs taking the pen from Louis and sticking it in the breast pocket of his shirt. “I was looking everywhere for this earlier! I ended up using one of those crappy pens that barely even work.”

Louis grins fondly as he finishes toying with Harry’s hair. “You’re a mess without me.”

“I am. I truly am. I need you around.” Harry smiles, taking Louis’ hand in his to lead him out of the vast office space. “Specifically to find all my long lost favorite pens.”

“One of my many talents, pen finding. It’s a rare gift you know…a craft not many men possess.”

“Well, I—”

“Styles!” Melissa calls vociferously, heels clicking swiftly across the long hallway. “I need to— wait…where are you going?”

“I have a lunch date.” Harry responds proudly, hardly paying her any mind, looking to Louis beside
him, their hands interlaced.

Melissa adjusts her gaze and acknowledges Louis, seeming to notice his presence for the very first time since invading their conversation. “Erm…hello.” She greets standoffishly.

Louis offers nothing more than a tight close-lipped smile and a short head nod in return. He will never like this woman. Never.

“Anyway,” Melissa continues, turning back to Harry, “I need to discuss the arrangement for the Jacobsen piece with you. The final presentation is due next week, as you know.”

“I’m aware. Yes.” Harry answers concisely, annoyance building in his voice. Can’t he just get lunch with his good news bearing fiancé in peace?

Louis slides his hand out of Harry’s grasp, taking a few steps away. “Um…I can just…”

“No, Louis stop. It’s fine.” Harry insists, taking Louis’ hand again, stopping him from moving any further. He gives Louis an assuring look before hardening his gaze towards his boss. “What specifically do you need, Executive Henderson?”

“Well for one, I need you to finish the spread but with a few alterations, I have the adjustments from the previous drafts right here.” She holds out a thick manila envelope out to him. “And then I need you to edit and compile these mockups with the ones I gave you earlier.” Melissa holds out a second envelope, just as thick as the first.

“Ok, just leave it on my desk.” Harry answers concisely, already turning on his heel to leave, pulling Louis closely along with him.

“Wait. Styles, seriously, I need it done straightaway.”

“Um ok…is it an emergency?” Harry questions, turning around to face her again, agitation present in his tone. “Is it so imperatively urgent that I do it right at this very moment? Is it so life-threateningly important that I need to drop everything, skip lunch and do it right now?”

“Uh…well…no. Not exactly, but—”

“Then you can leave it on my desk.” Harry snaps firmly, pointing through his open office door towards his desk. “I’ll look over it when I get back.”

“This is a high profile client, Styles. It can’t be late. I need to review your work before we make the final copy. So the entire thing needs to be done by the end of the day.”

“And it will be.” Harry guarantees. “I never miss deadlines. I’ll have the whole Jacobsen spread completed and sent to you no later than five this evening. You have my word.”

Melissa snaps her mouth shut, pursing her lips, having nothing more to say on the matter.

“Now if you’ll excuse me, my fiancé is waiting for me.” Harry turns away again, giving Louis’ hand a quick squeeze. “Ready, babe?”

“Yes.” Louis answers softly with a small proud smile, looking up at Harry affectionately.

Harry leads them through the publishing house, through the halls and down the elevator and across the lobby, not stopping until they are safely outside the large building.

“Ok, what is the news that couldn’t wait?” Harry asks, facing Louis as the fresh air hits their faces.
“Ah! Ok! So it was so unexpected! I still can’t really believe it if I’m being honest.” Louis’ smile almost consumes his entire face, expanding exceedingly wide as he talks.

Harry’s smile grows wide slowly as he observes Louis’ contagious excitement. “Ok…”

“Alright…are you ready?” Louis stills momentarily, eyeing Harry.

“Yes, yes! I’ve been ready!” Harry enthuses genuinely. “Tell me!”

“I made it, Harry!” Louis beams, as if that simple statement says it all.

“Made what!?” Harry’s eyes light up with secondhand excitement, not really even sure what he is really excited about. All he knows is that if Louis is excited, then naturally he is also excited.

“Or I mean… I will make it, but still I basically made it!” Louis rambles, distracting himself as he talks uselessly.

“Louis?!”

“Ok, ok sorry, I’m just so excited!” Louis laughs, covering his mouth. “You know when you’re so excited and you built it up so much that you don’t even know how to start? Or where to start? It’s kinda like that but—”

“Out with it Tomlinson, damn!”

“My law firm is considering me for their next junior partner! Louis announces. “I made partner!”

“Oh my god!” Harry gasps, jaw falling open. “What!? No way! What!?"

Louis bits his lower lip and nods his head repeatedly bouncing on the tips of his toes, his eyes dancing along with his feet.

“Louis! Shit! You always wanted to become a partner!” Harry draws Louis close, consuming him completely into his warm embrace. “Oh my god, this is huge! How do you feel?”

Louis laughs happily as he wraps his arms around Harry’s waist. “I don’t know! Excited! Obviously. And…fucking buzzed! And shocked!”

“Well, I’m not shocked.” Harry lets go of Louis, looking at him sincerely. “You deserve it! You’re a brilliant lawyer. The best!”

Louis smiles thoughtfully. “I don’t know about being the best but—”

“Oh shut up.” Harry states, interrupting Louis. “You’re the absolute best of the best! If I took all the best lawyers and put them in a room—”

“Wait…why?” Louis asks, confused. “Why would you put them in a room? What purpose does that serve?”

“Can I finish please? Shut that unfairly pretty trap of yours.” Harry says, squinting his eyes at Louis.

“Well damn, excuse me. Please, by all means, continue.” Louis raises his hands in surrender, allowing Harry to continue on with his sentiment.

“So anyway, back to what I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted…if I put all the best lawyers in a room, like the best of the best and then ranked them, you wouldn’t even have a rank
because you’re that much better. You’re rankless. Is rankless a word?” Harry chatters on aimlessly. “I should look that up... I don’t think it is, actually. But whatever... you are without rank, because you’re simply the best. There is no standard to compare you to because you surpassed all standards. Making you the-”

“Best. I get it.” Louis laughs fondly. “You’re so dramatic... and weird.”

“Baby, I’m just so proud of you!” Harry exclaims, embracing Louis again, squeezing him tightly. “So fucking proud.”

Louis squeezes Harry back, just as tight, if not tighter, nuzzling his head against the crook of Harry’s neck.

“We have to celebrate.” Harry murmurs into Louis’ hair.

“We can celebrate by you finally marrying me.” Louis mutters into Harry’s shoulder.

“What?” Harry chuckles softly, kissing the top of Louis’ head. “I already am going to marry you.”

“I don’t wanna wait anymore, Haz.” Louis whispers seriously, leaning back to meet Harry’s eyes.

“You don’t?” Harry questions, surprised, eyes widening.

Louis shakes his head slowly. “I don’t.”

Harry opens and closes his mouth several times, not really know what to say. “So... you... y-you...”

“I want to start planning our wedding.” Louis smiles, eyes lighting up at the thought. “I don’t want to put our life on hold anymore and-”

“And with my job and you becoming a partner...” Harry continues Louis’ train of thought.

“We could do it in a year or so.” Louis finishes, excitement building in his voice. “The wedding we always wanted. We’ve already saved a lot and that was before and now-”

“Now we can... start...” Harry picks up Louis’ sentence only to trail off again as the realization hits him.

Louis nods his head, smiling brightly at Harry, bouncing enthusiastically on his feet yet again.

“Lou, are we finally getting married?” Harry asks in an excited whisper.

“Baby, we are finally getting fucking married.” Louis confirms, wrapping his arms around Harry’s neck and sealing their lips together.

Harry giggles against Louis lips happily. “Let’s start planning our wedding.”

Chapter End Notes
hellooo from the other side haha ok so for the next chapter (the final chapter
*teardrop*) i may take a little longer than usual because it will probably be the longest
chapter yet and i want to make sure i do it right lol sooo just wanted to give you a little
heads up so it doesn’t look like I’ve abandoned it or anything haha. but I’m really really
reallyyyyy excited about it! so yeah! until then loves :))
soooo when I said it would probably be a little long i had no idea it would be THIS long. umm its somehow become its own little ficlet at 32k?? idk idk idk. I apparently have more feelings about this than I thought soooo yeah...there's that...

a few side notes:
so I also embedded tracks for certain parts of it because my sister claims it's an absolute must to get the entire essence haha. I never did that in previous chapters for songs but I went back and did it just to be consistent. I'm not gonna force to use/watch/listen to them but it would probably make more sense all together if you did so I recommend it lol

Also, for reference, it's depicted as a countdown, placed in the not too distant future from the ending of the last chapter, almost like an epilogue.

Welppp, I've been told the chapter as a whole is a doozy but who knows haha....all I know is that it's v v v long and i hope you enjoy it my loves :)

*****UPDATE 2.9.17
so the party no longer ends here friends, if you liked this story and wished it went on just a bit more, there is now a sequel just for you :) yaaayyy. so if you want you should check that out after this epilogue, it's linked in the series :))

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 12

“What are we doing here, Harry?” Louis asks impatiently, sitting up in his seat and looking out of the car window. “Where are we going?”

Harry places a warm hand on Louis’ thigh, giving it a light squeeze. “Calm down, you’ll see.”

“I am calm… I’m just curious.” Louis confesses, turning his face towards Harry. “We’ve been in this cab for ages.”

“It’s been twenty minutes.” Harry reminds, chuckling under his breath.

“Exactly. Ages.” Louis asserts. “It’s been so long that I have to piss.”

“I think you’ll make it. We are almost there.”

“Almost where?” Louis tries again, probing for answers.
“You’ll see! I told you!” Harry laces his hand with Louis’, drawing their intertwined fingers up to his lips and giving Louis’ knuckles a brief kiss.

Louis sighs exaggeratedly, huffing out his breath and sinking back against the stiff leather of the cab. “Fine…I guess.”

The cab pulls to a slow stop in front of a beautiful multi-story brick house, accented by a charming blue door. Broad white-paned windows decorate the face of the home, a wide paved driveway leads past the encompassing gate, lined with groomed shrubberies and pristine bushes.

“Are we here? Is this it? What is it?” Louis shoots out a series of rapid fire questions before Harry can even think to respond. “Where are we?”

Harry thanks the driver kindly and pulls Louis out of the cab by his hand, leading him up to the gate of the large house without uttering a single word.

“Harry, seriously, where are we?” Louis questions again. “Whose house is this? I wasn’t prepared to visit someone today.”

Harry turns around slowly to face Louis, a knowing quirk to his lips. He releases Louis’ hand and reaches into his pocket to reveal a set of tinkling keys. “Yours.”

Louis’ expression contorts as he looks questioningly from the keys dangling between Harry’s fingers, to the picturesque house before them and then back to Harry’s awaiting face. “What? You…”

Harry’s grin slowly spreads across his face as he happily nods his head, answering Louis’ unfinished question. “Welcome home, baby.” He whispers dropping the keys into Louis’ hand and kissing his cheek affectionately.

Louis gazes down at the pair of silver keys in his hand in absolute shock. “You…bought me…a…house?” He questions softly, eyes looking up and searching Harry’s. Louis covers his ajar mouth with his free hand, shaking his head in disbelief.

“Yes and I know I didn’t consult you on it before I bought it…but…um a couple of months ago it came on the market out of the blue and it’s exactly like what we wanted and I didn’t want to wait…so I thought I’d surprise you.” Harry explains anxiously, not sure how to gage Louis’ reaction as he remains silently staring at the keys in his hand.

“And…uh…I really hope you like it.” Harry continues, twisting the rings on his fingers, filling the silence. “Oh! And we will have to buy a car, obviously, because of the distance and everything…and the realtor said we can probably move in within a few months or so…once all the paperwork is finalized. But…um…I’m sorry for keeping it from you and I hope you’re not mad—”

“Mad?” Louis asks, halting Harry’s nervous ramblings and meeting his eyes again. “Harry, oh my god! You bought us a house!” Louis enthuses, taking a few steps back then walking around in small circles, not knowing exactly what to do with himself.

“I bought us a house.” Harry laughs, biting his lip as he watches Louis’ excited reaction.

“A house!” Louis bursts out, eyes shining brightly.

“Yes!”

Louis stares at the gorgeous house in front of him for a few moments before spinning around and beaming at Harry. “Our house!”
“Mhmm.” Harry hums happily. “All ours.”

“Fuck, Harry!” Louis runs over and jumps into Harry’s arms, locking his legs around his waist. Harry, caught off guard, takes a few steps back, steadying himself as he snakes his arms around Louis’ body, holding him up.

Louis leans back slightly and cups his hands around both of Harry’s dimpled cheeks, before crashing their lips together repeatedly. It’s an uncoordinated and sloppy series of kisses, but it’s meaningful nonetheless, filled with uncontrollable giddiness and genuine adoration. “I love you, I love you, I love you!”

Harry smiles against the brush of Louis’ lips, giggling as his fiancé showers him in little burst of love. “I love you too, Lou.”

Harry spins Louis around in his arms before setting him down on the ground. He threads their hands together once more. “Wanna see the inside of our house?”

Louis nods excitedly, bounding up and down on the tips of his toes, body thrumming with excitement.

Harry gives Louis the ultimate tour of their new house, going through each and every room and giving Louis a possible vision as to the memories they could have in each space. Louis chimes in easily, adding little ideas here and there as they blissful imagine their future life.

They go from bedroom to bedroom, exploring the expanse of the kitchen, circling through the den, admiring the wood-floored living room, laughing and smiling happily, hand in hand. Eventually, after walking through the entirety of the large house, they make it outside to the rear of the building.

Harry and Louis stand on the extensive wood deck, which wraps around the inferior portion of the house, and look out onto the scenic horizon. The sun is slowly setting, bathing them in a glow of warm tawny hues and golden rays. They stand in peaceful silence, fingers intertwined together, contemplating the thrilling events of the day as the serene air covers them in a calming stillness.

“Harry.” Louis whispers at last, after moments of uninterrupted gazing. He shifts his footing to face Harry fully, eyes searching and deeply overwhelmed. “I…I don’t even know what to say…I just…it’s so beautiful…it’s…everything…more than everything, really. I just…thank you.”

A small smile ghosts over Harry’s features. “You really like it?”

“Baby…I love it.” Louis answers softly, voice wavering with unconcealed emotion. “So much.”

“Yeah?”

Louis nods his head quietly, not trusting his emotional voice, burrowing his head against the warmth of Harry’s chest. Harry pulls him impossibly close, stroking his back gently as he nuzzles his head against Louis’ hair.

From the start, they always had a home in each other, but now they have the chance to make a physical place home. To take this large empty house, void of mistakes, lacking in memories, barren of emotions, and fill it with home. Fill it with the home they already have in each other. A home full of warm comfort and hearty laughs and fond recollections and good times. A home filled with love. In time, they will make this place their home.

“Told you I’d buy you a house someday, Lou.”
“Louis!” Harry exclaims, sitting up abruptly from his previously comfy position draped over Louis’ legs, hidden under the duvet. He drops the iPad he was using and props up on his knees. “I think we should take dance lessons!”

Louis looks up from his laptop and peers at Harry above the frames of his glasses, which are balancing perfectly on the bridge of his nose. “Absolutely not.”

“Yes!” Harry bounces on the bed excitedly. “We should totally take lessons for our wedding!”

“Nope.” Louis says, popping the ‘p’ as he continues typing on his computer. “Not happening.”

“Why not?” Harry sits back on his heels and frowns petulantly.

Louis raises his head again, looking above the rims of his frames. “I hate to be the one to break this to you but…there is no hope for you when it comes to the art of dance.”

“Which is why I want lessons, Lou!”

“Where is the random idea coming from? You were so content only moments ago.”

“Ok…here me out.” Harry claps his hands excitedly and sits up high on his knees again, towing over Louis.

“Alright…I’m listening.” Louis mumbles, not looking up at Harry, but still typing away on the keyboard.

“No, wait…close that.” Harry gestures to the MacBook consuming Louis’ attention.

“Hmm?”

Harry leans down and closes the laptop, then also plucks Louis’ glasses from his face and places both items on the bedside table.

“Harry!” Louis slaps his hands down on the bedspread. “I was emailing our wedding planner about that caterer we met with yesterday.” He explains, smoothing his hands over the duvet. “You didn’t like them, right? It’s like all they can do is seafood options.”

“Eh…whatever, emailing Rachel can wait. Sorry, not sorry.” Harry bends down and kisses the tip of Louis’ nose. “And no, I didn’t like them either. It wasn’t even good seafood. But we can discuss that later. Right now we are talking about dance!”

Louis grins and pulls his knees up to his chin, scooting back on the bed and getting comfortable.

“Ok, ok. I’m all yours. Let’s talk dance.”

Harry beams brightly, picking up the tablet he previously discarded on the side of the bed. “Ok, so I’ve been watching YouTube videos and—”
“Ooh no.” Louis groans, throwing his head back against the headboard. “Who gave you access to the internet? This can’t end well.”

“Ha ha very funny.” Harry rolls his eyes and purses his lips together. “Anyway…I was on YouTube, just you know…perusing and—”

“Perusing?” Louis teases. “No, I don’t know. Tell me Harold, how do you peruse the ole YouTube?”

“I don’t appreciate you mocking me. I was perusing or browsing or surfing or searching or whatever makes you more comfortable.”

“No, please…peruse away.” Louis urges with a smirk, offering an encouraging hand. “Don’t let me stop you.”

Harry narrows his eyes before continuing. “Anyway, I was watching wedding videos online and there are some really really really amazing first dances! So I think we should have an original first dance!”

“When you say ‘original’,” Louis fingerquotes, “what exactly are you imagining?”

“Something unique! And different!” Harry enthuses, bouncing on his knees again. “Like…we should do the dance from Dirty Dancing!”

“What!?” Louis barks out a laugh, dropping his head to his knees as his body shakes with amusement.

“Nobody puts baby in a corner.” Harry recites, wiggling his eyebrows.

“Please stop, I’m two seconds from falling off this bed!” Louis laughs loudly into his knees. “I really don’t think you’re coordinated enough for that.”

“Or we could do Footloose! Or we could even do a swing dance!”

“Or why not The Dance of the Sugarplum Fairy!” Louis pops his head up with a teasing grin. “Love that one! Personal fav of mine, if I’m being one hundred percent honest.”

Harry purses his lips, crossing his arms over his chest. “Ok…You’re being sarcastic and this is a serious matter.”

“I thought I was being realistic, but…ok.” Louis surrenders with a smirk. “How about you take up pole dancing or lap dancing? I’m sure there are a few insightful YouTube videos on that.”

“Louis, how is that appropriate for the first dance at our wedding?”

“I dunno. I’d get a kick out of it though…so I think it’s worth considering.”

“We can put a pole in our new house.” Harry winks seductively, plopping down in front of Louis’ drawn up knees. “Dead center in our bedroom.”

“Hmm.” Louis hums, reaching over and carding his finger’s through Harry’s curls, luring him closer.

“And I could dance for you…” Harry whispers, breath lingering on Louis’ neck. “Every…single…night.”

“Ooh every night?” Louis dips his head to the side, giving Harry full access to his neck.
“Mhmm.” Harry nips at the divot of Louis’ sternum at the base of his neck. “A full, private show just for you.”

“Oh wait.” Louis pauses, untangling his hand from Harry’s hair, and righting his head. “Actually no, this can’t happen. You’ll probably kill yourself. I’ll just let it continue to be a personal fantasy of mine in my head for your safety.”

Harry sits up and scowls, pouting his lips. “Where is your faith in me?”

“Babe, I have so much faith in you. And I love you way too much to see you die stripped down on a pole. That’s no way to die.” Louis smiles innocently at Harry, eyes honest.

“I don’t know what to do with you sometimes.” Harry laughs fondly, patting Louis’ cheek. “Well, back to these dances, I think—"

“Oh god, there is more?!"

“We haven’t decided on anything, so of course there is more!” Harry says obviously. “So…we could learn belly dancing?”

“Again, are you sure you possess the skills for that? Seriously?”

“Um, Louis, of course I do. Look.” Harry lifts the hem of his shirt, proudly baring his toned tummy, shaking it as best he can. “Or how about Merengue? Or Bachata? Samba? Rumba? Cha-cha?” In between throwing out random dance styles, Harry continues his feeble attempts at belly dancing.

Louis bites back a laugh, teeth sinking down on his bottom lip. “I’m just gonna ask one more time, just for my own clarification. Um…are you aware of the body you were given? I mean it’s a beautiful body…I love your body…it just tends to be not as…uh…what is the word I’m looking for? Um…I’m gonna go with graceful? Agile, maybe?” Louis ponders. “Just not as smooth as…other people…”

“Oh please Louis, I’m not that bad!” Harry huffs, pouting as he drops his t-shirt.

“Not that bad.” Louis cackles hysterically, echoing Harry’s words as he laughs into his knees again.

Harry whacks Louis repeatedly over the head with a pillow. “Disrespectful!”

“Hey! Haz, babe please!” Louis laughs, shielding his head from the blows of the pillow. “I love you and your gorgeous, uncoordinated body!”

Harry drops the pillow and sits up on his heels again. “Remember like…six or so years ago, when we did that talent show thing together?”

“The Salt-n-Pepa thing?”

“Yeah that!” Harry jumps, smiling wide and clapping his hands excitedly. “And Niall was DJ Spinderella!”

“Yes! Oh my god, that was so long ago!” Louis laughs, remembering their rehearsed dance routine. “That took fucking forever to teach you, though.”

When they had first started dating, they signed up for a slot at their university talent show as a joke, but somehow it caught on and soon was received as a serious thing. They ended up learning the entire dance routine for *Push It*, practicing day in and day out. The three of them did so well that they
surprisingly won first place. After that, Louis referred to Harry as ‘Baby Salt’ for weeks and Harry started calling Louis ‘Big Daddy Pepa.’

“But I killed it! In a good way, of course.” Harry clarifies.

“You did kill it.” Louis agrees. “After centuries upon centuries of practice. We watched the video of Salt-n-Pepa doing that dance at least two hundred times, just so you could get it right.”

“The point is…I owned that dance. I can dance, Lou. That whole performance proves that.” Harry claims assuredly. “I was a good Salt.”

“You were quite an unforgettable Salt, actually. Especially with those hip rolls of yours.” Louis comments, thinking back to that time, so many years ago. “And thrusts.”

Harry rolls his hips slowly. “You mean this.” He continues to repeatedly revolve his hips around in practiced motions, followed by a quick thrust.

“Yes that.” Louis nods, biting on his forefinger.

“Still got it.” Harry winks flirtatiously, rolling his hips one more time. “Hips don’t lie.”

Louis smiles affectionately, reaching up and pulling Harry down to him. “How about we don't choreograph our first dance?”

Harry settles comfortably in between Louis legs, gazing up at him curiously. “And do what?”

“We just dance.” Louis replies simply.

“You mean wing it?”

“I'll pick the perfect song and it'll just be our little moment. Just us.” Louis traces his fingers tenderly over Harry’s cheek. “Just you and me.”

“A surprise first dance?”

“Not a surprise for me, but yes.” Louis leans down and presses his lips against Harry’s. “It’ll be special, I promise.”

Harry rests his head against Louis’ chest contently as Louis runs his hands through his hair, kissing the crown of his head. “Ok Lou, I trust you.”

{214 days}

“Guess who’s back?!”

Louis glances up from the case notes in his hands. “Slim Shady?”

“Nope! Just your friendly neighborhood fiancé, dropping by.” Harry snickers, strolling into Louis’
office and plopping down in his usual routine spot in the left chair across from Louis’ desk. “Nice Eminem reference, though.”

“I try, I try.” Louis leans back in his plush chair, crossing his arms behind his head. “Visiting me in my office just like the olden days, what a lovely surprise.”

“Yep yep. I miss your office.” Harry comments, looking around the quaint space. He used to visit so much in the past that it might as well have been his office too. He was well acquainted with all of Louis’ coworkers and associates and tended to just hang out and edit pictures in Louis’ office while he worked. “It’s always so peaceful in here.”

“I know, it is quite calm here.” Louis agrees, surveying the room. “That’s probably because I have a strict ‘No Bitching and No Bitches’ policy.”

“Is that so?”

“It is. An environmental law firm must have a stable, calm work environment.” Louis continues. “Did you not see the sign? It’s out there clear as day. You can’t miss it.”

“I’ll have to look out for it.” Harry laughs, shrugging out of his blazer and making himself comfortable.

“Yes, I’ll have to take it with me when I finally move to my new office next week.”

“You’re finally getting your new office?” Harry questions curiously.

“Yeah they told me today! About damn time. Even though I’ve officially been acting as a partner for months, I had to wait for the old fart upstairs to truly retire, so I could get my new partner office.”

“A new office that we will need to christen.” Harry implies suggestively, wicked grin growing on his face.

“Exactly. Hopefully my new desk is as sturdy as this one.” Louis strokes his desk reminiscently. “I think it served us well in the past.”

Harry smiles devilishly, gazing at the dark wood desk before him. “That it did.”

“So to what do I owe the beautiful pleasure of your company today?”

“Well, my day ended surprisingly early. I had some cancelations and stuff. So I thought I’d come hang out with my favorite law partner.” Harry leans over and steeples his hands over Louis desk. “Oh and I also wanted to run something by you.”

Louis smiles, wagging a pen between his fingers. “Alright, what is it?”

“Um…ok. So long, although entertaining, story short…President Richards wants to officiate our wedding.”


“Yeah!” Harry laughs. “That was my reaction too.”

“Like, no shit?” Louis asks again. “He seriously wants to marry us?”

“Yes, no shit! Apparently, he has a license and everything.” Harry picks up the mini squishy football on the desk and rolls it between his fingers. “He was telling me that he officiated his daughter’s
wedding a few years ago and I said that we hadn’t picked an officiant yet and he just insisted. Repeatedly. I told him that I’d have to ask you first, obviously.”

“Of course this man has a wedding officiant’s license.” Louis laughs, shaking his head. “I’m not even surprised. That sounds like something he’d do.”

“I know! He is definitely a man of many talents.” Harry tosses the mini football up and down over his head. “So what do you think?”

“I’m totally cool with that. He’s such a fun loving guy.” Louis agrees easily. “Are you fine with it?”

“Yeah, of course, he’s great! He’ll be so thrilled. He was ecstatic over just the thought of it.” Harry stops throwing the ball and faces Louis again. “He also suggested that we look into getting married at The Grove and if we’re interested he’d get us a discount.”

“Really? You think we should? It is really gorgeous there.”

“Yeah and it’s not too far.” Harry agrees. “You know…for our guests who might have to travel or something.”

“True.” Louis nods, considering. “How much of a discount are we talking anyway?”

“Like half off.”

“Oh shit.” Louis gasps tossing his pen down on his desk. “Why are we even discussing this? That’s a no brainer.”

“You think so?”

“Um…yes, Harry. It’s a fucking huge resort, that’s insanely beautiful and we can do everything in one location, like the actual wedding and the reception and housing for the wedding party and a ton of other things…all for half the price.” Louis expounds further. “How could we possible say no to that?”

“Alright then, that’s that.” Harry claps once, smiling wide at Louis.

“That’s that.” Louis smiles back slowly, an excited buzz in the air.

“Look at us making real progress on our wedding.”

“I know, I know. How very adult of us.” Louis giggles, rubbing his chin. “All we’ve done thus far is…I don’t even know…hire a wedding planner, try out random caterers and run around telling people in vain.”

Harry holds up a single finger to make a point. “We also discussed our first dance, so that’s something.”

“Oh right, how could I neglect that?”

Harry chuckles softly. “So I’ll contact Rachel and tell her we want to book a date at The Grove for…sometime…”

“It has to be in winter babe, remember?” Louis prompts, sitting up in his chair.

“I could never forget.” Harry smiles warmly, giving Louis a knowing look. “No spring clichés.”
“Precisely.”

“I can’t believe we waited so long to finally come here.”

Louis slides out of his chair, standing to his feet. “I know; it’s been what? Like nine months?”

“Yeah, wow…it really has been a while.” Harry breathes out, lacing his fingers with Louis’ to lead them out of the restaurant. “It was worth the wait though, I think.”

“Very, very true. It’s definitely worthy of all the hype. That was the best veal dish I’ve ever had. And that hanging lights…fiber optics thing…is pretty sick, I have to admit.” Louis pauses for a moment, thinking. “What do they call it again?”

“Table Lumière.” Harry recites in his best and most exaggerated French accent.

“Right, right.” Louis affirms, nodding his head. “I knew it was Frenchy.”

Harry waves goodbye to the hostess near the door, before guiding Louis out of the exit. “We should come back sometime.”

“We should. We’ll have to pay for it ourselves next time, but oh well.”

“Harry? Louis?”

Harry and Louis break hands to concurrently turn around, responding to the unexpected sound of their own names being called.

“Chef Stone?” Harry asks first, surprised.

“Curtis! Please call me Curtis…but hey!” Curtis gives them each a brief greeting hug.

“We had no idea you’d be here.” Louis states, stuffing his hands in his pockets.

“I could say the same for you. What a nice surprise!” Curtis beams warmly. “How are the lovely brothers this evening?”

“Oooh.” Harry sighs, dragging out his vowels in a long breath. “This is awkward…”

Louis barks out a laugh, leaning into Harry’s shoulder, eyes squeezed shut with amusement.

Curtis scrunches his brow in confusion. “What? What did I say?”

“I guess he really wouldn't know; he was only there for that one day.” Harry realizes, thinking out loud.

“Know what?” Curtis asks again, expression still perplexed.
“Guess not.” Louis shrugs, standing up straight and calming his laughter. “You got it, bro.”

“Um…right…ok.” Harry starts slowly. “Well…funny story, Louis isn't my brother...he's actually my fiancé.”

“We're getting married in six months.” Louis adds, taking Harry's hand once more and raising it cheerfully. “Yay!”

Curtis' face contorts in shock, jaw falling open slightly, before he quickly recovers. “Oh wow, ok. So I guess…congratulations are in order then! You know, come to think of it, you were acting very weird during the whole cook-off. I usually don’t make assumptions, but there was so much…raw tension between you.”

“Yeah…that wasn't the best day for us.” Harry admits, casting his head to the ground.

“No, I don’t miss that day at all.” Louis agrees.

“Well, you won the cook-off at least.” Curtis reminds “And you got to come here. I’m sure it was much more enjoyable as a romantic date than a platonic brothers outing.”

Louis and Harry laugh in harmony, glancing at each other. “Definitely.”

“So how did you like the place? Did you enjoy yourselves?”

“Oh it's beautiful, yeah.” Louis enthuses, glancing back at the restaurant they just exited. “And the food was truly phenomenal!”

“Absolutely amazing!” Harry impassions, gesturing his delight with his fingers. “I loved it.”

“Yeah, I quite like it myself. I’m just passing through really. I’ve been in London for a few weeks to film a cooking special.” Curtis explains. “But anyway, congrats to you both again on your wedding! That’s awesome!”

Harry smile spreads slowly across his face. “Yeah, we’re very excited about it. It’s been a long time coming.”

“Do you have a caterer?” Curtis questions curiously.

“Actually…no we don’t.” Harry confesses, glancing at Louis. “We tried out a few things, but so far nothing solid.”

“I’m sorry, but…um…are you…offering?” Louis inquires tentatively, expression baffled.

“As a matter of fact, yes!” Curtis exclaims. "I would absolutely love to do your wedding!"


“Yeah sure, why not? If you’ll have me, that is. I love weddings! I haven’t gotten to cater a wedding in years, this will be so fun!” Curtis digs in his back pocket and pulls out his wallet, fishing out a white business card and handing it to Louis. “Here's my card, it's got my cell on it. Just give me a ring and we can talk entrées.”

“Yes…um…of course, yeah.” Louis stammers out as he takes the card from Curtis.

Harry just nods his head blankly, startled by the series of events unfolding before him. What are the odds that a celebrity chef would offer to cater their wedding?
“Alright boys! Lovely to see you again!” Curtis reaches over and shakes each of their hands, dimpled bright smile on display. “Harry, I’m just gonna casually throw it out there again that I still want you to come work with me but…you know…no pressure.” He grins genuinely, before looking down at his watch. “Well, I really gotta run. Chat with you soon mates!”

“Oh my god!” Louis jumps, facing Harry excitedly once Curtis is gone. “The Curtis Stone just gave me his cell phone number! Hashtag winning.”

“Um correction…gave us his number, not you, for our wedding.”

“Mmm…but he handed me the card though…so yikes, looks like I got his number.”

“He is married.” Harry informs dryly.

“Ok? And I’m holding his card so…”

Harry scuffs, crossing his arms over his chest. “Well, he still likes me better so…”

“Oh yeah, of course. That’s why you’re holding his card right?” Louis clarifies mockingly. “Mhmm, thought so.”

Harry squints his eyes. “You were closer to him at the moment, it only makes logistical sense that he would hand it to you. He wants me to work for him, so I’m pretty sure he likes me better than you.”

“Whatever makes you feel better, babe.” Louis dramatically waves the white rectangle around, blatantly teasing Harry with it. “It’s not that deep.”

“You’re so annoying.” Harry sighs, turning to wave down a cab off the bustling street.

“I’ll just put Curt’s beautifully embossed business card away so it doesn’t get lost or bent or anything unsavory like that.” Louis tucks the card away into his breast pocket, giving it a gentle pat against his chest.

“Curt? You jumped to nicknames now?”

“Well…you know…when there’s chemistry like ours these things just happen naturally.” Louis grins, amusement bouncing in his eyes.

“You’re so ridiculous.” Harry sulks, rolling his eyes.

Louis blows Harry an over-the-top kiss. “I’ll put in a good word for you, love.”

{142 days}

“So…about our wedding party…” Louis starts, sitting on the kitchen countertop, legs swinging against the cabinet beneath him.
“What about it?” Harry prompts after Louis doesn’t continue, turning from the stove in front of him.

“Mmm.” Louis hums, nibbling on a baguette. “I think…I’m gonna ask Zayn to be my best man.”

“Really? I thought you were gonna have Stan?”

“I was…but…I don’t know?” Louis scrunches up his nose, looking up at the kitchen ceiling, deliberating with himself. “I’m always with Zayn now and even though we haven’t been friends for ages upon ages…I think he knows the current me better. I haven’t talked seriously with Stan in basically forever. I’ll still have him as a groomsman though, of course…but, yeah.”

“Makes sense. You’ll want someone there who can actually calm you down when you flip out hours before.” Harry teases, reaching in the cupboard and grabbing dried oregano.

“What!?” Louis bursts, sounding offended. “I’m not going to flip out!”

“Ok sure…whatever you say, babe.” Harry grins knowingly.

“If anyone is flipping the fuck out on our wedding day, it’s you.” Louis argues, waving the long stick of bread at Harry. “You cry at the wind.”

Harry nods his head unashamedly, agreeing with Louis. “I never said I wasn’t, but I guarantee you will too.”

“Wanna bet?”

“Actually…yes.” Harry nods his head again, grinning wide. “Yes I do. I bet that you will lose your shit before our wedding. Whether it’s the week before, or the day before or an hour before…you will lose your shit.”

Louis holds his chin high as if Harry’s words are blasphemous. “My shit is staying together, where it belongs.”

“You sure about that?”

“What are we wagering?”

“So in the highly probable likelihood, that you will lose your fucking shit before our wedding…I would like to wager the simplicity of a thong.” Harry proposes, attempting sound official and profound.

Louis creases his brow, confused but slightly amused. “A thong?”

“A thong.” Harry restates simply. “A thong that shall be worn everywhere by the loser…ahem you…for the first twenty-four hours of our honeymoon.”

“And what if said loser is…ahem ahem ahem…you?” Louis mocks, looking to Harry pointedly.

“Then I’ll wear it of course…it comes to that. Which…it won’t.” Harry answers certainly, not sounding the slightest bit worried.

“Everywhere?” Louis raises a curious eyebrow.

“Everywhere, everywhere. In our villa. Thong. We go to the beach. Thong. Every and anywhere that we go. Thong, thong, thong.” Harry singsongs cheerfully. “I guess if we go to like dinner or somewhere really public, you can put something on over it. But the thong remains regardless.”
“That’s a bit bold isn’t it? Like twenty-four hours of streaking, basically.”

“Maybe. It won’t be me so…I’m chillin’.” Harry shrugs easily, sprinkling seasonings into the pot of minestrone soup before him. “Our villa is on a semi private beach, so you may be lucky, or you may not…only time will tell.”

“You’re on, Styles.” Louis squints his eyes in challenge. “Even if I did lose, which I won’t, you couldn’t handle a whole day of my ass parading around in a thong. You would implode.”

“Oh, I’ll take my chances.” Harry taunts, stirring the pot with a large spoon.

“Ok, suit yourself.” Louis shrugs, taking another small bite out of the large breadstick in his hand. “We’ll see then, won’t we?”

“Yes, we shall see indeed.” Harry smirks, placing the lid over the pot before crossing the kitchen to join Louis on top of the counter. “So you’re good with the rest of our wedding party, then?”

“Yeah I think so.” Louis nods, offering Harry the bread in his grasp. “I mean, between the two of us we’ve got a pretty good mix of family, childhood friends, and uni friends as groomsmen.”

“And Liam.” Harry adds, tearing a piece off of the baguette in Louis’ grasp.

“And Liam, of course.” Louis amends, “Then we’ve got Ernie as the ring bearer and Doris and Nettie are flower girls.”

Gemma named her now four-year-old daughter Anntoinette after her own mother, Anne, and her husband’s mother, Bernadette. A lovely gesture, but Harry insisted that although the name is beautiful, it is far too long to call a child, so he nicknamed her Nettie and it somehow stuck.


“He’d be absolutely livid if he wasn’t one of our best men.” Harry laughs, swinging his feet. “He told me it was his birthright. Especially for all his troubles.”

“What troubles?”

“He’s seen too much apparently. He said his eyes have been scorn and he can never look at the world the same way again. We ruined him.”

“That man needs actual help.” Louis laughs shaking his head. “Anyway, yeah, so I think we’re good, wedding party wise at least”

Harry hooks his socked foot with Louis’ as their legs hang from the countertop. “Brilliant.”

“Can you just give us one moment?” Louis asks a woman in a white coat hovering over him.
“Yes, of course.” She nods kindly, before quietly leaving the room.

“Ok baby, talk to me.” Louis urges softly, gazing at Harry.

Harry sighs, running his hands through his hair. “I just…I don’t know.”

“Tell me about it, love.” Louis encourages, grabbing Harry’s hand and tracing his thumb in soothing patterns. “What’s going on in your head?”

“It’s just…it’s so much pressure…so much rides on this…it’s…everything.”

“Mhmm.” Louis hums, nodding his head in agreement.

“It’s just such an important decision…I don’t know.” Harry tries, biting his lip. “What if we don’t make the right choice? What if we screw this up?”

“God, I know…it’s all too much.” Louis lets go of Harry’s hand and begins to rub his back in exchange.

“I can’t deal with this, Louis.” Harry turns to face Louis openly. “You have to do it.”

“Me?” Louis questions. “Oh, Harry…I don’t…I just…I can’t. I don’t know either, baby.”

“This is way too hard. I don’t know what to think anymore…I’m so confused.”

Harry and Louis sit and agonize over cake flavors as if their life desperately depends on it. The table in front of them is littered with a variety of cake slices each one seeming to scream out at them in its own way. They’ve been at this bakery for two whole hours, far exceeding the average lunch break.

“I mean…what if today I like the strawberry but…tomorrow I may lean towards chocolate or lemon or maybe even raspberry with the dark chocolate swirl thing?” Harry ponders, taking another stressed bite out the double fudge cake in front of him. “But then on our wedding day I might really crave red velvet or orange cream or just regular vanilla or marble or…or…”

“Or Dulce de Leche!” Louis adds, twirling a fork in his hand.

“Oh my god, Dulce!” Harry gasps, throwing down his fork on the plate. “Fuck this. No. I can’t. I’m too attached to them all!”

“But Haz, we have to choose. The fate of our wedding depends on it.” Louis emphasizes, stabbing his fork into a slice of red velvet.

“I know, I know!” Harry groans, throwing his head back. “The stress of it all!”

“We could have the most amazing wedding of all time and then have a shit cake and that’s all anyone will ever remember.”

“Dammit no! I’m out.” Harry stands to his feet. “I’m so done.”

“You can’t just leave me here!”

“Louis, I trust you. You’re stronger than me, baby. Make me proud. Choose wisely, my love.”

“Harry no! Don’t leave me!”

“Go on without me Lou, I’m too weak. Save our wedding.”
“No, baby please!” Louis begs theatrically. “I can’t!”

“Ok, but seriously…I have a client meeting in fifteen minutes and I’m definitely gonna be late, so I actually do have to go.” Harry kisses Louis forehead, before moving towards the door. “I love you…no pressure. Anything you choose will be perfect, ok? I’ll text you, babe.”

“What if I don’t pick the right one?”

“You will. Of course you will. I believe in your sweet tooth.” Harry scuttles back across the room and kisses Louis one more time. “Bye, love you.”

“I love you too.” Louis laughs tenderly as Harry slips out the door.

The baker returns moments later with a few order forms. “Alright, how’s it going? Have we come to a decision?” She scans the room quickly and frowns in confusion. “Oh, where is your fiancé?”

“He’s in a better place now. He asked me to go on without him.” Louis explains, traces of hilarity in his voice. “The stress was killing him…I have to be man enough for us both now.”

The baker laughs, shaking her head. “You two are too much.”

"{93 days}"

“There.” Louis steps back and admires the wall in front of him. “All of our family are accounted for.”

Harry starts a slow clap as he looks over the massive mural on their wall. “On to everyone else then.”

Pinned to the wall is a huge floor plan of their wedding reception, little color coordinated sticky notes with names on them litter the surface, indicating the various seating arrangements.

“Ok, I’m gonna go ahead and designate these three empty tables for all our uni friends.” Louis points to a group of tables in the middle of the floor plan. “So if you pull any of those names out of the basket just stick ’em somewhere in there.”

“Cool.” Harry bends down to the seemingly never-ending name bucket on the floor, and pulls out a few cards. “So Will and Tracy broke up.” He holds up two name cards of their old university friends.

“Really? I thought they were in it for the long haul.”

“I knew they wouldn’t make it.” Harry admits. “You can’t just take a random world civilization class with someone and up and marry them the next day.”

“I mean, I took multiple classes with you and we're getting married.” Louis reminds, tilting his head.

“Yes…but look how long we've been together since then.” Harry counters. “They met, hooked up, and got married in two seconds flat.”
“When you know, you know, I guess.”

“Turns out they actually didn't know.” Harry states, waving the two separate name cards. “But anyway, we can’t sit them at the same table because it didn’t end well and they aren’t on speaking terms. But then Tracy doesn’t like the people we put at this table because apparently they sided with Will in the divorce and then Will isn’t friends with so—”

“What the fuck is this? A soap opera?” Louis raises his hands, interjecting Harry’s gossip story. “I don't care about these people's ridiculous deep rooted uni drama! They will sit their asses wherever we put them and they will like it, otherwise they can leave. I don't give a single fuck.”

“We don't want to make them purposely uncomfortable.”

“That is not our problem. They need to get over themselves. This is about us, not them. They should be happy to even have a damn seat to sit their whiny ass in.” Louis plucks the name cards from Harry’s hands and sticks them randomly at two separate tables without a care. “Simple as that.”

Harry laughs, shrugging his shoulders. “Well, I hope it works out, for their sake.”

“You can’t please everyone, love.” Louis bends down and picks up the next name card, gagging dramatically. “Medusa Bitcherson.”

“Is that what the name card actually says?” Harry laughs at the revision of his boss’s name.

“It might as well.” Louis scuffs, holding the card as if it’s diseased.

“Louis, I told you we can disinvite her.”

“You can’t just disinvite your boss from your wedding, that's so unspeakably rude. We have some class, Harold.”

“I only invited her to not be rude in the first place, but if you want her gone, she's gone.” Louis wags the small slip between his fingers, scrunching his nose up as he glares at it with distaste.

“Babe, seriously, if you don't want her there, I will march into her office and tell her to rip that invitation in half.” Harry states boldly. “Better yet, I’ll rip it for her.”

“It's fine.” Louis answers finally.

“Are you sure? It's our wedding day, I don't want you to be uncomfortable or anything. I have no problem telling her to get lost, whether that be against etiquette rules or not.”

“Thank you Harry, but really it's ok. It's all in the past now, I’m a big boy.” Louis assures with a small grin. “But if she pulls anything…one single thing…I swear, I'll slit her throat with a cake knife.”

“Sounds fair.” Harry nods, grinning.

“I’m gonna seat her at the garbage table, along with all the other people I hope don’t show up, but have some kind of unfortunate obligation to invite them. I’ll put her right next to my annoying dickhead law school ‘friend’ Herman.”

“Why is he even invited?”

“I invited all of my old law friends to be fair, but I don’t know how I was ever friends with that dude
in the first place.” Louis admits, thinking back. “Actually, I don’t think we were really ever friends at all, just in similar circles.”

“Mmm maybe they’ll hit off.”

“Who knows? They seem equally yoked to me. Bitchy and Dicky. How quaint.”

Harry snickers as Louis pins her name to the board at the table in the far, far back of the reception hall. “Wait!” Louis spins around, confusion written all over his face.

“What?”

“What ever happened to your date with bitchface to the opera?”

“Oh that.” Harry chuckles, picking up another name card from the basket. “I didn’t tell you?”

“No? And I completely forgot about it…I actively choose to believe she doesn’t exist.”

“I mean…we didn’t go, obviously.” Harry says, placing the newest name on the board.

“Well duh…I would know if you did.” Louis states, rolling his eyes impatiently. “So what happened?”

“Alright…so she came to my office one day, unannounced as usual and was like ‘ooh I can’t go’.” Harry mimics her voice, and puts his hands on his hips sassily. “And I was like ‘I wasn’t going anyway bitch, you tried’ and then she was like ‘you can have the tickets, if you want’ or some pathetic shit like that. And I was like ‘hell no hoe, I’ll pass, get the fuck out.’ The end.” Harry bows jokingly, pleased smile etched on his face.

“Oh really?” Louis asks sarcastically, tilting his head. “Is that what you said? The dialogue is just brilliant. Bravo.”

Harry laughs, grinning wide. “Maybe not in those exact words.”

“I had my suspicions.” Louis laughs, entertained.

“No, ok. I was civil and I politely declined like an adult.” Harry confesses truthfully. “But the gist is, there is no way in hell I am taking those tickets.”

“But why? You love opera. We could go. You could have taken the tickets for us. You still can, I don’t think they have an expiration date.”

“But Louis…it’s like…blood tickets…bought with blood money. It just feels dirty.” Harry cringes, scrunching up his face. “I don’t know, it just feels uncomfortable and wrong. Like accepting a gift from the devil. There are strings attached.”

“And then you might owe the devil in the future.” Louis adds, holding a knowing finger to Harry.

“Yes, exactly and I’m not having Satan herself coming by my office with more slave chains to shackle me with.”

“Chains don’t excite you?” Louis teases, wiggling his eyebrows.

“Not those kind.” Harry shivers uncomfortably again.

Louis chuckles lightly. “Good to know.”
“What do you think of this?” Harry holds an intricately designed glass vase, accented with gold patterns.

“Um…it’s nice, I guess. Useless, but nice.” Louis shrugs, glancing up from the blender he just scanned, adding it to their wedding gift registry.

“Not useless, it appeals to the eye and stimulates the senses.” Harry stares at the vase as if it is speaking volumes to him. “It has unlimited means of purpose. Its exquisite beauty cannot be contained. It’s graceful, yet modern; sophisticated, yet understated. This vase has a unique attraction; its immeasurable splendor beacons the soul.”

Louis blinks at Harry several times, expression flat. “So in short summary of that…its purpose is to look pretty.”

“In layman’s terms.” Harry mutters, eyes still inspecting every detail of the vase in his hands.

“Oh right, yeah great...we will just have a really pretty, but impractical house for awhile, that’s cool.” Louis nods sarcastically. “Don't ask to sit down, we have no furniture. Don't ask to stay over, we have no linens. Don't ask to take a shower, we have no towels. Don't ask to eat, we have no plates. Oh! But have you seen our seven-thousand-pound vase? It serves literally no purpose except to sooth your soul with its beauty. We would be absolutely lost without its aesthetical appeal in our midst.”

“Ok, ok I won't get the vase. Geez.” Harry scuffs, tearing his eyes from the expensive vessel.

“No, babe, if you like it, then we’ll get the vase.” Louis offers.

“I think it’s very lovely, but I also see your point. We don’t have to get it.”

“I mean, you already scanned the vase and it really can’t hurt to put it on our gift registry. I'm just saying that maybe you shouldn’t scan any more overpriced vases and maybe go for something more practical like…I don't know...shower curtains?”

“Shower curtains?”

Louis nods affirmatively. “Yes, shower curtains or other practical things we need in our house.”

“Mmm.” Harry hums contemplatively before leaning over and angling the scanner at Louis’ bum.

*Beep*

Louis jumps, spinning around in surprise. “Did you just scan my ass?”

“It's a practical thing I need in our house.” Harry responds innocently, biting his lip.

*Beep*
“And you scanned it again…”

Harry grins cheekily. “I wanna make sure I get it. You know how it is. You never can be too forward with these things.”

“It’s a limited edition so…I don’t know if you can have it.” Louis shrugs his shoulders halfheartedly.

“Can I at least take out for a test drive?” Harry tries, lips quirked.

“I’ll see what I can do. But I can’t make any promises. It’s a hot commodity right now.”

“Oh I’m sure it is.” Harry agrees easily.

“Maybe if you put a down payment on it.” Louis suggests flirtatiously, fingers grazing across Harry’s belt.

“A down payment?” Harry echoes, tipping his head to the side.

“Mmm.” Louis hums, inching nearer to Harry, hooking his fingers in Harry’s belt loop, abruptly yanking him closer.

Harry yelps in surprise as his body presses against Louis’. “What kind of down payment?”

“If you have to ask, then you must not be the right buyer.” Louis unhooks his fingers disappointedly and takes a small step back.

Harry exhales deeply, using Louis’ forearm to pull Louis back against him. “You drive a hard bargain.”

Louis smirks haughtily. “You gotta with premium merchandise. It’s do or die in this business.”

“Hmm I see, I see.” Harry drones, ghosting his lips in front of Louis’. “I think that can be arranged.”

“Well, my good man, you might just be the proud owner of this quality work of handcrafted art.” Louis grabs his own ass smugly, raising a suggestive eyebrow.

“Score!” Harry fists pumps, raising the scanner triumphantly in his hand, his voice echoing through the store. “Your ass is mine.”

“Might.” Louis emphasizes again, reaching up to pull Harry’s extended arm down. “I said might, I still have to consider other substantial offers.”

“You’ll forget there ever were any other offers after I give you my down payment.” Harry gropes Louis’ ass confidently, biting his lip.

“Harry, I am scandalized.” Louis inhales sharply, touching an appalled hand to his own chest. “What kind of boy do you think I am?”

Harry smiles, full of content as he leans in to kiss Louis’ nose gently. “My boy.”
Louis opens the door to their flat, covered only by a blanket wrapped round his waist, his chest bare and exposed. “Niaaalll!”

“Hey Lou.” Niall frowns, looking Louis up and down. “What’s with the blanket?”

Louis looks down at the afghan he’s holding close to his body. “It’s covering my juuunk duuuh. Caaan I help yooou?”

“You invited me over.” Niall responds simply.


“Yes, you did.”

“Diiid nooot.”

“Did!”

“Diiid nooot.” Louis sings, wobbling on his feet, almost losing his grip on the blanket swaddled around his body.

“Oh my god…you’re drunk.” Niall sighs, throwing his head back.

“Yeees veeery. Buuut…why are you heeere?”

“I told you, I was invited over by you idiots.”

“Ummm ooone sec.”

“Louis, wait just-”

Louis slams the door shut in Niall’s face, cutting him off.

“Harrehhh!” Louis drunkenly shouts, echoing through the flat.

“Louehhh!” Harry answers, popping out from a giant cardboard box with a bottle of wine in his hand.

“Diiid yooou invite Niaaalll over?”

“Uuhhh…what daaat is it?” Harry slurs, leaning on the side of the cardboard box located in the middle of their living room.

“Tuesdaaay, babe!” Louis yells, blending sounds together. “It’s Tuesdaaay!”

“Right, Tuesdaaay! Ummm wait! It’s Tuesdaaay already!?!”

“Yeeesss, it’s Tuesdaaay!” Louis giggles. “Aaand theeeere is a leprechaun at our dooor!”

“I’m right here.” Niall grunts through the door. “Can you let me in like civilized people?”

“Ooooh, then yeees! Harry exclaims, jumping in the box, sloshing wine over himself. “Oops…I spiiilled.” Harry hiccups, tripping over himself.
“You invited hiiimm?” Louis groans in agony. “Noo Harrehhh, nooo!”


“Yooou couldn’t have remembered thaaat befooore…”

“I remember vaguely teeelling yooou but yooou were like leeets get drunk and I waaas like oook baaaby boooy, whatever yooou saaaay.” Harry recounts the events of early that evening dopily.


“Maybee he’ll go awaaay.” Harry whispers noisily, holding a finger to his mouth.

“Still here. I can literally hear everything you say through these walls, this shit flat is paper thin.” Niall says, irritated. “Are you going to let me in now?”

“Niaaalll, go awaaay!” Louis shouts through the door.

“I came to help you!”

“That was befooore!” Louis yells, leaning against the closed door.

“Before what?”

“Befooore Harrehhh got druuunk and naaaked in a box and I joined hiiim.” Louis shouts. “Weee have tooo finish what weee started!”

“Oh god.” Niall groans exasperatedly.

Louis opens the door again with a mischievous smile plastered over his face. “Waaanna seee?”

“No! God, fuck no! Please I’ve already heard enough!” Niall growls, expression disgusted. “I’m just gonna take a quick stroll and call Liam and Zayn to tell them to be late…and when I get back you both better be clothed. No one wants to see that!”

Louis pouts, furrowing his eyebrows together. “Niaaalll, I’m sooo offended.”

“What? Why are you offended?”

“Harrehhh!” Louis hollers, turning his head back towards the inside of the flat. “Niaaalll said thaat he thinks yooou have a terrible booody!”

“I didn’t say that.” Niall deadpans. “I just don’t want to see it.”

“Jealouuss!” Harry calls back from his hideout in the box. “I’m in myyy penthouse half-naaaked”

“I cooked this meal for yooou naaaked.” Louis yells back.

“Soop where the hell yooou at?” Harry howls from the living room.

“Isn’t that Beyoncé?” Niall asks uselessly as Harry and Louis continue to drunkenly sing their version of *Jealous*.

Harry takes another swig out of his wine bottle “*Just oone shooot left of this driiink, in this glaaass. Don’t make mee break iiit.*”
I wish that you were me. So you could feel this feeling. "Louis sings, completely smashed. "I never broke one promise, and I know when you're not honest."

"Please stop." Niall begs.

"Now you got me yelling, that's because I'm jealous!" Harry shouts, sloshing wine everywhere. "Or actually... that's because you're jealous!"

"I'm not jealous! I'd just rather not see all of that or any of that!" Niall gestures halfheartedly to the blanket still draped around Louis' waist.

"Harrehhh!" Louis screams at the top of his lungs. "Now he says I have a shitty body too!"

"Nooo, fuck that! Nooo we know he's lying! He has witnessed your ass in living colors! Fuck youou, Niaaalll!" Harry starts attempting to get out of the box. "Nooo! Let me talk to him."

"No! I'm leaving! I'm going to get a few pizzas around the corner." Niall backs away from the open door. "I'll be back and there should be clothes. Clothes everywhere."

When Niall gets back after thirty minutes, along with Liam and Zayn, Harry and Louis are dressed in sweats, but still camped out together in the huge cardboard box, cradling wine bottles.

"You both are fucking useless." Niall complains, after packing a few boxes with only the real help of Liam and Zayn.

"Not truuue!" Louis argues, features frowning. "Harrehhh is helping!"

"Yees I am! I'm paaacking Louehhh because I have to take him with mee to our new hooouse."

"Yeaaah! I have to be wrapped carefully because I'm veeery delicate." Louis explains, as Harry slowly encases his arm with cellophane wrap. "That's what Harrehhh said."


"You're children. You are fucking children right now."

"They kinda do look like five-year-olds playing in a box." Liam laughs as he watches Harry stick a red fragile sticker on Louis' forehead. "Isn't it kinda cramped in there though?"

"They don't believe in personal space." Niall gripes, scowling.

"I think it's cute." Zayn argues. "Leave them alone, they're happy."

"I would gladly leave them alone if I didn't need to know what they want me to do with their shit." Niall holds up a lovely decorative bowl. "Ok, Harry, wrap or box or trash?"

"Traaash!" Louis shouts.

Harry shakes his head repeatedly. "Nooow wraaat it!"

"Booox it!" Louis yells.

"Wraaat box!" Harry exclaims.
“Booox wrap!” Louis says back, giggling to himself.

“Oh my god.” Liam laughs as Harry and Louis go back and forth using only those three words.

“Ahhhh!” Harry exclaims jumping up suddenly. “A booox that wraaaaps itself and theeeen beat-boxes a raaap about wraaapping…aaall while in the traaash!”

Niall’s face contorts in disturbance. “What the fuck?”

“A wraaap raaap.” Harry sings proudly, smiling wide.

“My baaaby is briiilliant.” Louis smiles fondly, kissing Harry’s cheek.

“How much did you drink to revert yourself to wasted toddlers?” Niall questions, utterly bothered.

“Uhhh…Harrehhhh do you knooow? I don’t knooow?” Louis closes his eyes as if he is trying really hard to remember. “It’s all bluuurry nooow.”

“Umm I think I knooow…it waaaas…umm…two whooooleee motherfucking booottles!” Harry singsongs boisterously, lifting one of the bottles in his hand.

“That’s riaight!” Louis claps enthusiastically. “One for mee and one for my baaaby!”

Zayn bends over laughing, Liam joining him, giggling into Zayn’s hunched over shoulder.

“It's Tuesday.” Niall says flatly. “Just Tuesday.”

“Weeell it's tipsy Tuesdaaay in this hoousehold biiitch!” Louis throws up random gang signs from in the box, the movement nearly causing him to fall over. He steadies himself by leaning on the side of the massive box.

“Tipsy Tuesdaaay!” Harry sings, half on top of Louis’ back, waving the bottle around in the air.

“Is that a real thing?” Zayn asks curiously.

“Weee made it a thiiing so deal with it mofooos!” Harry yells, holding up his wine bottle again and taking a swig.

“And what exactly does it entail?” Liam inquires.

“Liaaam!” Louis gasps loudly, jumping up and jostling Harry, still draped over him. “That is veeery personal aaand private! How bloody dare youuuuu!”

“Since when are you two private?” Zayn chuckles at the notion. “And it’s just us, we are no strangers to the life you lead.”

Harry giggles happily against Louis’ back. “Do yooou really want to knooow?”

“Babe nooo! Shhh!” Louis smacks his hand over Harry's face and drags him back under the cover of the enormous box, their heads no longer visible. “Dooon’t expose us. Sooome things are better leeeft unsaid.”

“No, no, no.” Niall shakes his head as he folds up a box. “Forget they even asked.”

“But, I actually want to know now.” Zayn admits.
“I know, me too.” Liam agrees, nodding his head.

“No you don’t, ok? Look me in my eyes.” Niall says seriously, looking up. “No. You. Don’t.”

Zayn frowns at Niall. “But…”

“Listen, I lived with these people for far too long and I have seen too much. My innocence was taken from me. They do weird fucking shit. Look at them.” Niall points to the box with a deeply disturbed expression. “They are camped out in a cardboard box, drinking wine out of the bottle like it’s a sippy cup. And before I got here they were doing the same thing only without clothes. This is actually mild for them, believe me.”

“Ummm heeellooo?” Louis calls out randomly from the box, still not visible. “Heeellooo?”

“Heeellooo?” Harry answers Louis in question, sounding confused.

“Nooo, shhh Harrehhh, I’m talking to Niaaalll now.” Louis whispers extremely loud.

“Hellooo? Niaaallll?” Louis tries again. “We can hear yooou, ooook? And we dooon’t appreciate your judgment sooo…yeaahh.”

“Dooon’t appreciate it!” Harry echoes, mimicking Louis drunkenly.

Niall sighs, rolling his eyes. “Anyway, could you pass me the tape, Liam?”

“Yeah, here you go, mate.” Liam offers Niall a roll of duck tape, eyes still looking curiously towards the inhabited box.

“Thanks Liam.” Niall responds, taking the roll and beginning to tape up a medium sized box.

Zayn busies himself with wrapping picture frames. “Oh look it’s me and Lou from our cruise. Ew, god, I hate my hair in this picture.”

“Why Z?” Liam asks as he glances down at the framed photo in Zayn’s hand. “I liked your hair long. It looked good on you.”

“You really think so, babe?”

“Without a single doubt.” Liam confirms instantly. “Actually anything you do with your hair is sexy.”

“Aww thank you, Li.” Zayn beams appreciatively, closing the gap between them to wrap his arms around Liam. “I just wanted to hear you say it.”

Behind them, the large box rumbles and shakes a few times before tipping over completely. Harry and Louis tumbling out of the box together giggling wildly. Louis is somehow squeezed into the oversized jumper Harry is still wearing, the top of his hair peeking out by Harry’s neck, but his face still covered by the soft material.

“Louehhh! That tiickles!” Harry giggles, squirming around on the floor, with Louis on top of him inside his sweater.

“Booo!” Louis pops his head out of the opening suddenly, peppering Harry’s neck with feather light kisses.

“I’m so beyond done with both of you.” Niall grumbles, giving up. “This is such a waste of time.”
“Maybe we should just go?” Liam suggests. “Come back another time when they’re…sober?”

Zayn nods hurriedly, agreeing with Liam. “Yeah, they’re so wasted and they look pretty content with that box so…”

Niall squints his eyes at Liam and Zayn suspiciously. “You guys just want to go home and get in your own drunk box.”

Zayn and Liam share a long lingering and meaningful look, before abruptly spinning on their heels and heading towards the door. “Well…see you, Ni.” Liam waves in farewell, slinking his free arm around Zayn’s waist.

“Give H and L our best.” Zayn says as Liam leads him swiftly out the front door.

Niall sighs heavily, watching Liam and Zayn sneak off, whispering sweetly in each other’s ears. He turns back to Louis and Harry, who are now messily making out on the floor, their bodies fooling around with uncoordinated drunken movements. “Ugh, I need to expand my friend circle.”

||

(29 days)

“I’m walking first.”

“No, you’re not.”

“Yes.” Louis sits up in their bed, linens pooling at his waist. “Stop playing games, Harry.”

“I’m not playing any games.” Harry answers, following suit and sitting up in the darkness of the room. “You are not walking first.”

“Yes I am, Harold.” Louis argues adamantly, flicking on the lamp positioned on his bedside table, illuminating the bedroom.

“Nope.” Harry shakes his head repeatedly. “Not happening, Louis.”

“Yes, I’m older! It just makes more sense.”

“No, age has nothing to do with this at all.”

“Age has everything to do with it!” Louis disputes, lifting his arms up.

“Louis, you are walking in last so that I can see you walk down the aisle, in all your glory, to me.” Harry explains as if there should be no debate.

“No! I will not! No!” Louis protests. “Instead, I’m gonna watch your tight ass march down to me!”

“No! No! No!”

Louis groans, rubbing his eyes. “Why would you bring this up right as we were about to fall asleep
anyway?”

“I dunno.” Harry shrugs. “I guess, I was just thinking about it…so yeah. I didn’t think much of it at the time.”

“You dropped a bomb like that and thought nothing of it?” Louis questions. “Nothing at all?”

Harry frowns, shaking his head. “No, because in my head you were always walking last.”

“Well, fuck that.” Louis crosses his chest defiantly.

“How about we do something different then?” Harry suggests. “Like something untraditional?”

“Well, Rachel said that some couples have done a nontraditional arrangement before and put the chairs in a semi-circle or something so that both grooms can walk in at the same time. But then it limits what you can do with decorations and the photographer and shit.” Louis explains, leaning back on his elbows. “And you want that ice sculpture thing so badly, so…”

“No, we can’t get rid of that, it adds depth and character to our wedding. It’s staying.”

“Why are you so attached to an ice sculpture?”

“Because…I am.” Harry states, unwilling to budge. “It’s a must. And photography is really important too. We can’t have shit wedding pictures. Pictures last forever.”

“I know, exactly.” Louis concurs. “So how do we solve this?”

Harry holds out both his hands. “Rock Paper Scissors.”

“What are we? Seven?” Louis scuffs, slapping Harry’s hands down.

“Maybe.” Harry smirks.

Louis rolls his eyes, pursing his lips together. “Any more smart ideas?”

“Hand to hand combat. Fight to the death.”

“Right.” Louis nods sarcastically. “So whoever wins will just marry himself. Sure thing.”

“Yep.” Harry adopts a serious expression, linking his own hands together as if holding someone else’s hand. “I, Harry, take you, Harry, to be my lawfully wedded husband, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for bet—”

“Why Harry?” Louis sighs, interrupting Harry’s recitation of his own personal vows. “Just…why?”

Harry giggles, obviously entertaining himself. “You didn’t even let me get to the part where I kiss myself. It’ll bring tears to your eyes, I swear.”

“Please, enough.” Louis holds his hands up in pleading. “I’m more disturbed than anything else. Let’s just come back to this later. Or tomorrow…or something.”

“Ok, fine.” Harry begins to start laying back down, but stops halfway, abruptly righting himself. “Wait! But we never talked about our names!”

“Our names?” Louis questions.
“Yeah, our married names.” Harry clarifies. “The possibilities are endless.”

Louis lifts his brow. “Are they?”

“Yes, Louis they actually are.” Harry states seriously. “I could be Harry Styles or Harry Tomlinson or Harry Tomlinson-Styles or Harry Styles-Tomlinson or you could be Louis Tomlinson or Louis Styles or-”

“Ok, ok I get it. Tons of combinations.” Louis raises his hands in understanding. “Is this really the best time to discuss this?”

“Yes, babe. Why put off for tomorrow, what we can do today?” Harry reminds eagerly.

“Technically, it is tomorrow, it’s past midnight so…”

“Exactly, so we are already behind.”

“Or maybe we’re actually ahead?” Louis alters with a contemplative expression. “Cue the creepy music.”

“Ooh that’s trippy.” Harry gasps dramatically. “Time is so weird.”

“Very.” Louis agrees, sighing. “But since we are wasting time being awake anyway, we might as well figure this shit out.”

“Right right right.” Harry nods his head, sitting up further and facing Louis fully. “Ok so…I don’t know if it’s fair for you to take my name and I not take yours or vice versa, especially, you know…as equals. Even though, if I’m being completely honest, I’ve always wanted to be a Tomlinson.”

“Is that a kink of yours?” Louis teases.

“Mmm yes, always.” Harry purrs. “My strongest kink, actually.”

“Well, I always wanted to be a Styles.” Louis counters, raising a single eyebrow.

“Is that right?”

“Yep, one hundred percent factual.” Louis states. “I think Louis Styles has a very nice ring to it. I’m already getting attached to it.”

“It does, but…so does Harry Tomlinson.” Harry argues. “It just flows. It’s effortless and natural.”

“We are getting absolutely nowhere with this.” Louis sighs, falling backwards onto the bed, placing his arm over his face. “We’re going in circles.”

Harry pauses for a moment, looking down and biting his lip. “I’ll take your name.”

“What?” Louis peeks his eye out from under the cover of his arm.

“I’ll take your name Louis, seriously.” Harry says again without a trace of uncertainty.

“What?” Louis sits up again, with a confused expression. “No…but…Harry you can’t just…”

“Yeah, I can Lou, and I want to.” Harry answers softly, meeting Louis’ questioning eyes.

“We can just hyphenate and—”
“No, really baby, I want to.” Harry assures as he gently takes Louis’ hand in his. “I thought about it a lot, not just right now, but before and…I decided that I’m going to take your name. And it just makes more sense legally, especially with kids and everything. Hyphens can get so messy. I want to be a Tomlinson…and we can raise a house full of little Tomlinson babies.”

“Harry, that’s…huge.” Louis breathes heavily, eyes growing wide as he grips Harry’s hand. “Are you sure? Like really really sure? Because I don’t want you to feel pressured to do that…especially if you aren’t sure about it. I would take your surname in a heartbeat, I swear.”

“I know you would Lou, but I don’t want you to because I’m taking yours.” Harry kisses the corner of Louis’ mouth tenderly. “I wanna be yours in every single way. Always.”

“Harry…” Louis shakes his head breathlessly, no words forming. “I…I don’t…I…”

“Don’t kink shame me.” Harry grins against Louis' cheek.

“Never.” Louis whispers, sliding his arms around Harry’s middle, drawing him close.

Harry pulls back after a few moments, searching Louis’ eyes. “But…I have an exception.”

“Anything, love.”

Harry’s small smile grows into a full on shitfaced grin. “I get to pick the order of how we walk in for our wedding.”

“Dammit, I should have known.”

Harry beams proudly. “I’m walking in first, and you, my sweet beautiful boy, are walking down the aisle to me as I watch your every…single…move.”

Louis huffs out a breath. “Fine, fine. That is way more than fair.”

“Or.” Harry starts, raising a single finger indicating that he just had a brilliant idea. “Or. Or. Or!”

“Or what?” Louis laughs, pressing his lips against Harry’s upright finger.

“I could meet you halfway.” Harry smiles, cupping his hand around Louis’ cheek.

“How would that work?” Louis questions, gazing at Harry.

“I’ll just wait for you midway and we can walk the rest of the way together.” Harry explains easily. “But, I still get to watch you walk in and partially down the aisle.”

“That’s all you really want, isn’t it?” Louis smiles fondly, turning to switch off the lamp.

“Mhmm.” Harry hums contently, laying back against the pillows. “I’m very easy to please.”

Louis positions himself comfortably on top of Harry, resting his head on his chest. “I don’t know about all that, but I love you regardless.”
“Oi Kip!” Louis calls from across the lobby, cupping his hands around his mouth. Harry follows closely behind as they walk through the front doors of the resort.

“Louis! Harry!” Kip exclaims from the receptionist desk once he spots them making their way across the lobby floor. “You made it!” He leaves his desk and meets up with them, throwing his arms around their necks in a welcoming group hug.

“The party can’t start without us.” Harry chuckles, as Kip squeezes them tightly.

“We are the fucking party!” Louis adds, lifting his free hand enthusiastically. “Even though, honestly I just want to check in and go take a nap.”

“Ooh, a nap sounds sooo amazing right now.” Harry agrees.

“Right?! That’s all I’m saying.” The three-man powwow breaks up, Kip releasing Harry and Louis from his hold. “So Kip, you got keys for us or what bro?”

“Yes! Wait, wait! Let me do my job properly!” Kip laughs excitedly, scurrying back behind the desk, adopting a cheerful, but business appropriate smile. “Welcome to The Grove, checking in, sir?”

“Yes, indeed we are.” Harry grins, playing along. “Checking in for the Styles-Tomlinson wedding.”

“Wonderful, wonderful! Would you mind providing a form of identification please?” Kip continues, looking to Harry. “Just kidding, I know who you are!” He laughs to himself, pulling up their reservation on the monitor.

“It’s like déjà vu.” Louis laughs, thinking back to their first check-in experience at the resort.

“It really is!” Kip beams happily, as he types on the computer in front of him. “Although, your wedding is going to be the last event I’ll be present for at The Grove.”


“I passed the bar!” Kip announces enthusiastically, eyes lighting up. “I passed and I got a job at a small law firm! It’s not glamorous or anything, but it’s a start!”

“Kip, that’s fantastic I’m so proud of you!” Louis congratulates earnestly.

“It’s partially due to you, Louis, thanks for all the tips!”

“Of course mate, glad I could help.” Louis nods, giving Kip a thumbs up. “The bar is a bloody pain in the ass. Congrats!”

“No, congratulations to you! To you both actually!” Kip looks between Harry and Louis, joyfully, always radiating positive energy. “You’re getting married!”

Harry smiles warmly, all the enthusiasm is almost contagious. “Thank you very much, Kip!”

“How does it feel?” Kips asks as he prints out a few final documents. “Are you nervous?”
Louis glances at Harry thoughtfully. “Um I dunno really, it hasn’t hit me yet…I don’t think.”
“Yeah, same.” Harry agrees contemplatively. “It doesn’t feel real, honestly. It really just feels like I’m back here on holiday. Except…you know…not with my fraud brother.”

“I’ll drink to that.” Louis jokes, leaning against the counter of the desk.

“Well, I’ve got your room keys!” Kip presents them with two key cards, sliding them across the desk. “And a printed schedule of events for your wedding! Even though I’m sure your well aware of it already. But you know, just incase you need a map of where everything is and whatnot.”

“Oh…I think I remember it pretty well.” Harry laughs, taking the keys and itinerary packet from Kip. “Kinda hard to forget.”

“I’ll say.” Louis sneers.

“Congratulations again, you two!” Kip smiles wide, beaming from ear to ear. “I’m so happy for you! Enjoy yourselves!”

“You’ll be there on Sunday, right?” Louis asks as they start backing away from the check-in desk.

“Yes, of course, I wouldn’t miss it!”

“Good, good.” Louis nods, pleased.

“Seeya Kip, always a pleasure!” Harry salutes, before taking Louis’ free hand and crossing the lobby.

“I miss that dude.” Louis laughs under his breath, shaking his head. “He’s a riot.”

“He is definitely one of a kind, that’s for sure.”

{24 hours}

“So Harry you’ll walk to this point. Then you’ll stand here until...”

Harry, utterly preoccupied by the silent amusing expressions Louis is sending him from a few meters away, fails to acknowledge his name being called. His dimpled grin consuming his face as he giggles affectionately.

“Ok, Harry?” Rachel clarifies, looking to Harry expectantly.

Harry continues doting on Louis fondly, rocking rhythmically on the balls of his feet, not paying the slightest bit of attention to the instructions of his wedding planner.

“Harry?”

“Hmm?” Harry snaps out of it, tearing his gaze away from Louis and refocusing on the sound of his name being called. “Right. Got it yeah, thanks. Sorry I was…um…just…”

Harry blushes, smiling bashfully at the ground as he walks to his indicated position down the aisle.

Rachel looks down at her clipboard. “Alright then, so Louis you’ll be last to come in.”

“Do I get a veil? I kinda want a veil now.” Louis jokes, laughing to himself as Rachel guides him to his starting position. “I think it’d accentuate my figure.”

Niall’s signature laugh echoes from the front of the huge ceremony hall near the alter where he stands lined up with the rest of their wedding party. All of Louis and Harry’s immediate family are either arranged orderly in the front, or hanging out in the first row of seats as the wedding rehearsal carries on. “Yes! Please wear a veil, I will pay you!”

“I think we should make you wear the veil.” Gemma suggests with a smirk, her daughter perched on her lap playing contently with an empty flower basket. “Or maybe a muzzle.”

“I always loved you, Gemma!” Louis shouts from the far end of the aisle, throwing a thumbs up in her direction. She returns his gesture with double peace signs, sticking her tongue out good-humoredly.

“Ok, so Louis, easy enough, you just basically walk to Harry from here.” Rachel treads Louis’ future path to demonstrate. “Oh! But don’t walk too fast. A lot of people get really nervous and then they walk way too fast for the music and to be honest it looks kind of awkward. So take your time.”

“Oh, we can’t have that.” Louis shakes out his shoulders, easing his mild anxiety. “Why does this have to be so stressful?”

“Don’t mess it up, Lou!” Lottie teases, lounging on a chair near the front, surrounded by her sisters, Fizzy, Daisy and Phoebe.

“You’ll do great, baby.” Harry encourages from midway down the aisle.

“Yes, of course you will, no sweat.” Rachel takes Louis' hand and walks him to Harry at a leisurely pace, replacing her hand with his. “Then you both walk the rest of the way, up to this point.” She pushes them down the long aisle until they reach the front.

Rachel moves Harry and Louis around like dolls, getting them in place, while also jotting down a few notes and reviewing several plans.

While Rachel is flitting around checking things off on her clipboard, Louis resumes making silly faces at Harry, their interlocked hands swinging between them. Nothing could diminish their bright giddy smiles as they gaze at each other, both of them completely zoning out to whatever their wedding planner is saying to them. They’ll just find out when the time comes.

“Then after he finishes talking, he’ll prompt you each to say your vows and exchange rings” Rachel goes on, speaking rapidly. “Niall and Zayn you’ll have the rings, so you come forward, here.” She rushes over and moves Zayn and Niall, guiding them to where they need to be.

“Would you kill us if we lost your rings?” Niall asks curiously as he steps closer on Harry’s side.

“What do you mean ’us’?” Zayn inquires, sounding offended. “There is no we or us. I would never lose them, speak for yourself.”
“I trust Ernie, a seven-year-old, to carry them on a pillow more than I trust you to simply hand them to me, Niall.”

“Ouch.” Harry laughs. “Well, I trust you Niall.”

Rachel pipes up again, lifting her head from her notes. “So you’ll exchange rings and so forth and there will be a pronouncement of marriage then you’ll kiss and—”

“Wait,” Louis interrupts, a grin growing on his face. “We should practice that part for real, I think.”

“Mhmm.” Harry purrs leaning in close. “Wouldn’t want it too look awkward or anything.”

“Right. Very smart.” Louis agrees meeting Harry’s lips, their impassioned kiss lasting far longer than necessary.

“Geez, save it for the wedding!” Niall shouts.

“Night.” Zayn adds with a smirk, wiggling his eyebrows.

Louis breaks away from Harry, grinning widely, and winks at Zayn knowingly.

“Then it’s closing remarks and the recessional where you all follow after Harry and Louis in the pairs I assigned you earlier.” Rachel instructs, pointing down the walkway.

“And then happily ever after!” Liam claps excitedly, face beaming with joy.

“Yes! Exactly!” Rachel agrees cheerfully. “Any questions? Everyone ok with that?”

The wedding party all nod their heads and hum their understandings, collectively.

“Great!” Rachel claps her hands together, tucking her clipboard under her arm. “Well family and friends, I think we’re done. Just remember your cues and everything should be perfect!”

“Yes!” Niall enthuses brightly. “Now can we eat! This is called a rehearsal dinner, but yet thus far there has been no dinner.”

“Have some couth Niall, damn!” Louis responds, demeanor suddenly feisty. “I seem to recall that the word ‘rehearsal’ is also found in the term ‘rehearsal dinner’.”

“Tell him Lou, tell him!” Harry encourages, slouching down to rest his chin on Louis’ shoulder.

“Oh, I’ll tell him, baby. I got this.” Louis sasses, head tilted to the side, holding a finger up. “We can’t have this all play and no work thing going on at our wedding. Not when it’s coming out of our wallet. Not when our hard earned money is going to feed your ass. Oh, no no no, you tried.”

“Run and tell it!” Harry shakes his head while clapping his hands as extra as possible. “Put him in his place!”

“Why must you both be so goddamn annoying?” Niall sighs as Harry and Louis crack up laughing to themselves.
“Remind me why we are doing this again?” Louis asks, looking up at Harry as they stand in an open deserted hallway, their rehearsal dinner having just concluded.

“For the build up.” Harry says simply, rubbing Louis’ shoulders up and down. “For the grand unveiling.”

“We can just cut this part out. It’s not necessary.”

“Or is it?” Harry raises an inquisitive eyebrow.

“It’s not.”

“Ehh…I think it is.” Harry scrunches his nose before pressing his forehead to Louis’.

“But…not sleeping next to you is gonna feel so weird and lonely.” Louis complains, sulking.

“You'll miss me so much.”

“I miss you already.” Louis confesses openly.

“I know.” Harry agrees, stroking Louis’ hair. “Nothing will feel the same and I’ll probably never get any rest without you.”

“What if my feet get cold?” Louis mopes, protruding his bottom lip. “You always warm me up in the middle of the night.”

“Or who is going to pet my hair and spoon me till I fall asleep?” Harry pouts, matching Louis’ expression exactly, a mirror image. “This was a terrible idea.”

“It was your idea!” Louis reminds, throwing his hands up.

“Well, it seemed like a novel idea originally, before we actually had to go through with it.” Harry confesses. “You know…absence makes the heart grow fonder and all that.”

“Let’s just forget we ever agreed on this. It was a shit idea.” Louis suggests. “You can just follow me back to my suite and we can just pretend like this never happened.”

“Don’t tempt me, it’s not fair.” Harry sulks, still pouting his lips. “Plus, I already told our parents we were doing this.”

“Why would you do that?” Louis groans, casting his head back. “Why, why, why?”

“To enforce it, if need be I guess.” Harry admits. “Incase we weren’t strong enough to separate ourselves.”

“God, I can’t do this.” Louis sighs heavily. “I won’t see you for almost twenty hours.”

“It’ll be worth it. I promise.” Harry assures, thumbling Louis’ cheeks affectionately. “When we see each other for the first time tomorrow, it’ll all be worth it.”

“I feel like a teenager saying goodbye after a first date.” Louis giggles. “All I need now is my mum to—”
“Louis, come on, love.” Jay calls from down the hall.

“Welp…there we go.” Louis shrugs, laughing to himself. “Wow, I thought we were passed that age.”

Harry grins, glancing briefly at Jay coming down the corridor behind Louis. “Suppose not. Well, at least my mum hasn’t—“

“Harry!” Anne calls, turning the corner of the far hallway behind Harry.

“Never mind.” Harry laughs, hearing the sound of his mother’s voice.

“Teenage memory official complete.” Louis concludes, chuckling along with Harry. “Now say something ridiculously corny.”

“Like what?” Harry giggles in question.

“I dunno. Something really sappy and dramatic that star-crossed teens say at goodbyes.”

“Hmm…ok, I got this.” Harry takes a deep exaggerated breath, shaking out his shoulders and grabbing both of Louis’ hands, meeting his eyes earnestly. “I’ll never let go, Louis. I’ll never let go.”

Louis erupts with laughter, eyes squeezed shut. “Is that The Titanic?”

“I’ll never let go!” Harry shouts, holding their intertwined hands up and shaking them for emphasis. He kisses each one of Louis’ knuckles before dramatically letting his hand go. “I’ll never let go. Promise.”

“Oh, that’s fucking priceless.” Louis giggles, pressing his temple to Harry’s chest as he laughs.

“I think that’s as dramatic as I can be.” Harry chuckles into Louis’ hair, kissing his head lightly.

“Louis!” Jay calls again, walking closer to them.

“Alright mum! Just one sec, I’m coming.” Louis lifts his head, turning to answer his mum before facing Harry again. “Damn, we really are adolescents again. This is all your fault.”

“Too bad we weren’t dating at the age of fifteen.”

“Such a shame, then I would have loved you for almost half my life.”

“Might as well have been my whole life.” Harry asserts truthfully. “Everything before you was pointless.”

“Basically.” Louis agrees, playing with a strand of Harry’s curls. “I really am going to miss you though; I wasn’t joking about my feet getting cold. It’s a real problem. You’re like a natural heater.”

“You and your ice toes.” Harry smiles fondly. “We can get you a heating blanket, you’ll never know I’m gone.”

“It’s not the same.” Louis pouts, one finger completely coiled with a lock of Harry’s hair.

“Harry dear, let’s go!” Anne tries again, her voice getting closer.

“Ok, I’m coming.” Harry responds, without breaking his gaze with Louis. “Next time I see you, we will be getting married. Like really getting married. Like fuck me, no shit, dead ass...married.”
“That’s so weird.” Louis awes in wonderment. “Good weird though, but still so…weird.”

Harry bites his lower lip, thrumming with anticipation. “I can’t wait.”

“Me neither.” Louis beams, swinging their joined hands between their bodies.

Harry unlaces their hands, instead using them to pull Louis in, pressing his lips softly near his ear. “Meet me at the aisle and don’t be late.”

“How could I be late?” Louis whispers back, chuckling softly.

Harry runs both his hands slowly up and down the length of Louis’ spin, holding his body close. “Don’t lose your shit.”

“I haven’t lost it yet, have I?”

“There is still plenty of time.” Harry mumbles, brushing his lips against the exposed skin of Louis’ neck. “Shit only takes a single second to get lost.”

Louis bursts into another fit of giggles, burring his head against Harry and tightening his hold around him.

“Louis, don’t make me drag you.” Jay threatens, only a few paces behind them. “I will do it, if need be.”

“Harry, babe, let him go! You'll have plenty of time for that tomorrow!” Anne chuckles, from the opposite side. “Tell Louis goodbye.”

“Anne, can you believe this?” Jay calls, gesturing towards the inseparable pair with her hand on her hip.

“Our boys.” Anne laughs, fondly shaking her head. “What are we going to do with them, Jay?”

“Bye, baby.” Harry murmurs in Louis’ ear, still not letting go, in fact, holding on even tighter.

“Bye, Haz.” Louis answers, arms clinging securely to Harry, seeming to have no plans of letting go anytime soon.

“Harry!” Anne calls again. “Release Louis now!”

“Ok, bye for real this time…I guess.” Harry kisses Louis softly, before releasing him and taking a tentative step back.

Harry doesn’t get very far before Louis surges forward and closes the small gap, locking their lips together once more and encircling his arms around his midriff. “Bye, love.”


Slowly, Louis and Harry reluctantly untangle their bodies and back away from each other, inching down the hallway in opposite directions, yet still facing each other. “I love you.” Harry declares breathlessly.

“I love you.” Louis returns just as breathless, feet retreating further across the hall with small baby steps.

“I love you more!” Harry shouts, voice echoing against the walls as his mum takes his hand and
guides him backwards.

“I lov—fucking hell mum!” Louis yelps as his mother grabs his forearm and pulls him the rest of the way. “I’m a grown man!”

“Yes, a grown man who would stay in this hallway all night shouting ‘I love you’ till he is blue in the face.” Jay counters, dragging a resistant Louis along. “And watch your language.”

Louis grins and looks back over his shoulder at Harry being hauled away by his mum. Harry twists around too and gives Louis a small wave, blowing him a kiss. Louis mouths ‘I love you’ in return, before turning the hall, led by his determined mum.

Louis stops struggling and links arms comfortably with his mother, pressing a tender kiss to her temple. “I love you too, mum.”


“Louis, Louis!” Zayn places both his hands on Louis' shoulders comfortingly. “Just breathe, ok? It’s fine…everything is fine. I’ll tie your bowtie for you and you’re going to be alright.”

Louis tries to calm his erratic breathing, holding his head up as Zayn secures his tie into a perfect bow.

“All done.” Zayn smiles encouragingly and brings Louis in for a warm hug. “It’s ok to be nervous. It’s natural even. It’s a big day for you, I know. But, you’re going to be fine…just breathe. Keep breathing.”

Louis nods silently against Zayn’s shoulder, back heaving as he takes in several more deep breaths.

“I've got something for you.” Zayn whispers, stroking Louis’ back in small patterns.

“What?” Louis pulls back slightly, meeting Zayn’s eyes.

“Yeah, I've been instructed as your best man to give you this.” Zayn releases Louis and walks over to the door, picking up a package that he brought when he came in. “Here.”

“What is it?” Louis questions, taking the large box from Zayn.

Zayn shrugs. “I guess you’ll have to open it to find out.”

Louis stares down at the immaculately wrapped box in his hands, curious as to what it could be.

“So I'll just give you a moment alone, ok?” Zayn says, quietly exiting the room.

Louis shuffles to his bed, sitting down with the gift in his lap. Carefully, he unties the silver bow securing the box and unwraps the elegant wrapping paper. He removes the lid of the box and takes out an envelop resting on the very top, his name scrawled over the outside in Harry’s neat handwriting. Louis opens the envelope and takes out a letter.

My dearest love, Louis,

Seven years ago, I was struck with an indescribable feeling. A feeling so powerful and complex, far exceeding any measure of dimension, not a feeling that can be quantified or calculated. It’s not a feeling that I can describe really. It’s not one that can be duplicated or forced. Not a feeling of butterflies or stomach knots or goose bumps. It’s a deeper feeling that flows in me and consumes my very essence. A feeling that blurs self in exchange for the entanglement with another soul. A feeling I don’t ever question or doubt; I just follow blindly, hopelessly, wherever it may lead.

Seven years ago, when time stopped, when everything else faded away, when my eyes met yours and I felt that indescribable, all-consuming feeling, I fell for you and I've been falling ever since.

Louis swipes at his eyes and places a shaky hand over his mouth as he continues to read silently, taking in each and every word as if his life depends on it.

I fell in love with your adventurous spirit and courageous heart. I fell in love with the simple kindness in your smile. I fell in love with the softness of your lingering touch. I fell in love with the way your eyes light up with true passion for the things you care for most. I fell in love with the humor and wittiness that keeps you young. I fell in love with the determination and tenacity that courses through your very core. I fell in love with your selflessness, a kindness like no other.
I fell in love with you. I fell in love with every fragment, every quirk, every piece that makes you who you are. And it is the single best thing that has ever happened to me. I’ll never let go of that feeling. I’ll never let go of you.

You always tease me about being a hopeless wreck when I’m nervous, but I know you get just as riled up when you’re nervous. And I know you’re probably a beautiful mess right now. I can just picture it, your voice gets higher and you fidget with your hair and you ramble and get so flustered and it’s just so adorable. But don’t freak out, baby. It’s just you and me. It’s always been just you and me, Lou. And today, when we’re up there, it’ll just be you and me again. Today nothing else matters. Today is the day that we become one, Louis, and I’ve waited so long for this day.

Inside this box is my wedding gift to you. I wish I could see your face when you open it, but we have these stupid no contact rules that may or may not be my fault. Remind me why you let me go along with this again?

Anyway, I’ve held on to it for a while and when I look at it I see my whole life. I see a vision untold. I see everything that matters to me. You are my vision, Louis. I love you more than anything.

Patiently awaiting our date at the alter. xxx

yours always and forevermore,

Mr. Harry *almost* Tomlinson .xxxxx

“Oh Harry.” Louis gasps breathlessly, clutching the letter to his chest. He closes his eyes causing the brimming unshed tears to fall softly down his cheeks.

Slowly, Louis sets aside the letter in his lap and begins to further open the box, removing the excess tissue paper.

“Oh my god.” Louis blows out quivering breath, pulling out an exquisitely framed picture of himself. It is astonishing, a brilliant masterpiece, telling a beautiful story of love. Somehow the angle and the lighting and the very nature of the image captured perfectly portrays all of the weight and magnitude of that unforgettable day.

Louis remembers that day perfectly, every single detail of it in full-fledged blinding color. Seeing it all over again, seeing the look on his face, seeing the pure unadulterated love in his own eyes, brings a startling rush of emotion over him. On that day, nearly three years ago, he said yes to Harry, he said yes to the rest of their days, he said yes to forever. And today is the day he’ll be saying I do, the day he will marry the love of his life.

Suddenly there is not enough oxygen in the room and Louis is overcome by a floodgate of unstoppable tears, flowing mercilessly down his face. His lungs expanding and collapsing rapidly, hyperventilating, leaving him desperately gasping for breath.

“Louis?” Zayn peeks into the room again gradually. “Are you…ok?”

“No.” Louis whimpers, shaking his head with both of his hands covering his tearstained face, chest rising and falling heavily.

“I need to see him.” Louis breathes deeply, wiping under his eyes as he sits up straight. “Fuck, I have to see Harry.”
“But, Lou, you can’t see Harry yet.” Zayn says softly, approaching Louis carefully.
Louis stands to his feet, still sniffling, nose red. “How about I just call him? It'll be short I promise.”
Zayn shakes his head. “Nope, I’m pretty sure that is also not allowed.”
“Really really really really quick!” Louis begs, pulling out his phone. “Please Zayn!”
“No, Louis!” Zayn warns, stepping closer to him. “Stop!”
“A text?” Louis unlocks his iPhone and clicks the green message icon. “I will settle for a simple text!”
“Louis, I will confiscate your phone.” Zayn threatens, reaching for Louis’ phone.
“No! No! Please!” Louis dashes away from Zayn, running across the suite, holding on to his phone for dear life as he attempts to type out a message to Harry. “He has to know…he has to know that…that I…”
Zayn catches him easily, Louis’ distressed state paralyzing him from moving at his usual quickness. He pries the phone from Louis’ weak, trembling hands, stuffing it in his back pocket. “He knows, Louis. He knows.”
“But…I…please! I miss him so much and I have to talk to him! I have to hear his voice!” Louis cries, swiping at his wet cheeks. “His gift…and his letter…I just…fuck!”
“I didn't make the rules…you both did.” Zayn reminds, smoothing his hands over Louis’ shoulders.
“Shit!” Louis yells, breaking away from Zayn to anxiously pace the expanse of the room. “Why did we do this! This has to be the dumbest fucking thing we could have thought of!”
“Absence makes the heart grow fonder, I suppose.”
“No, shut the fuck up, Zayn! I don’t fucking care!” Louis shrieks, throwing his hands up in emotive exasperation. “I don’t want to hear that shit again! I just want to see my Harry! I need him! I need Harry now!”
“Well, I’m sorry, bro. You can’t see him for another hour.”
“What am I supposed to do with myself for another hour!?” Louis wails hopelessly, sinking back on the bed and resting his head in his hands.
“Um…we could play Fifa!” Zayn tries, sitting down on the bed next to Louis. “I'll even let you win.”
“I always win.” Louis mumbles into the cover of his hands, hiding his face.
“Yeah, but this time I'll let you.”
“Zayn! What!?” Louis pops his head up, cheeks ruddy, body tense. “That doesn’t make any fucking sense!”
“Harry, he's gone!” Niall bursts into Harry's room wildly. “Louis is gone!”

“What?!” Harry questions, expression utterly horrified.

Niall cracks up laughing, leaning over on his knees. “Just kidding mate. Oh my god, your face!”

“Niall, you're supposed to be my best man.” Harry grunts, completely unamused by Niall’s antics. “That’s not even close to being the slightest bit funny.”

“We all know Lou would never leave you, chill the fuck out.” Niall responds easily. “And I am your best man. I’m the best, best man. I’m just providing much needed comedic relief.”

“Mhmm sure.”

“Damn bro, what’s wrong with your eyes? They’re all red.” Niall observes as he inches closer to Harry. “Have you been crying? Nothing has even happened yet!”

“Listen Niall, I went to sleep crying, I woke up crying, I'll be crying all day.” Harry explains, rubbing his eyes. “And it's my wedding day, I'll fucking cry if I want to.”

“Doesn’t look like you have much of a choice to me. Death by your own tears.”

“Ni! Louis and I are getting married!” Harry enthusiasmcly embraces Niall with full force, bouncing up and down. “I’m marrying Lou today!”

“I know, I know! Fucking finally!” Niall laughs, clapping Harry on the back. “Congratulations buddy! I’m very happy for you guys.”

Harry chuckles happily as Niall attempts to lift him off the ground.

“Oh! I almost forgot.” Niall sets Harry down and lets him go. “I actually came here to give something.”

“From Louis?”

“Well, it's certainly not from me.”

Harry giggles as he takes the small box from Niall. “You know what's funny?”

“What’s that?”

“We both swore up and down that we weren't doing this.” Harry laughs, running his hand through his curls. “Like the whole wedding gifts thing. And yet, we both did it. Isn’t that funny?”

“You guys are so gross. I'm leaving.” Niall huffs, heading towards the suite door. “Enjoy your gift. I’ll be back later.”

Harry opens the box and takes out a repeatedly folded square of paper. He unfolds it to its full size,
revealing line after line of Louis’ script.

Hi love :)

Who knew that innocent little curly haired boy with two left feet and a dimpled smile that could light up a room, would grow to be the beautiful man that I adore. From the very first moment I saw you, I desperately wanted to meet you. From the very moment I finally met you, I wanted nothing more than to simply know you. And from the moment I knew you, I knew that I also loved you. That I will always love you Harry, with my whole heart.

I thought really hard about what to get you, and nothing seemed meaningful enough. I wanted my wedding gift to you to be something you could always hold close to you and remember us by. Remember how much I love you and how much you mean to me.

So, without delving into my internal battle and uphill struggle over this gift, I’ll just come right out and say that I’ve made you a playlist and if you listen to it in order, I think it sounds like our love story. It sounds like you and me falling in love with each other. It sounds like us.

Baby, you’re so good at capturing everything in pictures and depicting our story in little snapshots of time. So I thought I’d make a soundtrack to our lives, something you can listen to and go back and relive it all. It’s us. Just us. Our story, our love. All the laughs, all the memories, all the late nights, all the touches, all the glances, all the feelings, all the ups and downs. All the love. All of us.

All of you really. Because Harry, you’re my all. You’re my confidante, to share my deepest fears. My joy, to laugh and joke with. My comfort, in the hardest of times. My lover, who knows me best. My peace, when I’m tormented. My friend, to simply talk to. My companion, when I feel alone. My faith, when I don’t believe. My hope, when I’ve given up and all is lost. My inspiration, when I need a muse. My love, who I hold dear. And soon you’ll be my husband, to share the rest of my life with.

Harry can’t seem to stop the tears flowing endlessly from his eyes. He pauses for a moment to wipe his eyes, the saltwater running so heavily down his face, that it almost hinders him from even continuing.

I give you all of me as if I wasn’t already yours. I was yours long before this day, and I’ll be yours long after. My heart is yours, for it only beats to the sound of your voice. My soul is yours, for it is tied to you for eternity. My body is yours for it only responds to the touch and attention you give it. I am yours, I give my whole self to you, for you are my every and only reason. Without you I would be lost, for you are the very best parts of me.

Harry, we’ve already had so many beautiful moments together, moments I wouldn’t trade for the world. And I’m so ready to share many more moments with you as we move on to the next phase in our married life. For all the moments to come, you have my utter devotion. I love and adore you.

Always.

Your lifelong partner in crime and future husband, Louis :) xxx

p.s. You can’t listen to it yet because it has songs I chose for our reception later and our first dance has to be a surprise! And there’s another surprise song on there but you’ll see :) But I wanted you to be able to remember every part of this day so I put it on there.

p.p.s. Don’t do it, Harold. Don’t you dare listen to it. I’ll know if you did it. I. WILL. KNOW. Watch yourself..xx
p.p.p.s. Stop crying, love. I know you’re crying, but baby if you cry, then I’ll cry and we’ll be an ugly sobbing mess and I think we should strive to look marginally decent on our wedding day. Don’t you think? Or is that just a lost cause? :)

p.p.p.s. I love you, Haz :)))

“Louis.” Harry chokes on a sob in his throat, air passages closing up as he gasps for a much needed breath. His hands shake as he digs further into the box, pulling out a silver touchscreen iPod. Harry flips over the device to the back side and reads the inscription.

you are the beat of my heart,

you are the rhythm of my soul,

you are my song, you are my love.

L+H

Harry unlocks the screen displaying a picture of himself curled up on Louis’ lap, completely and utterly knocked out. It’s a photo obviously self taken by Louis as he tenderly kisses Harry’s temple, his free hand splayed out over his chest, holding Harry close to his own body.

Harry remembers around when it was taken. He had had a horrendous, long day at work and went home feeling like complete shit. But when he got home, Louis took one look at him and just pulled him into his lap, asking not a single question. Louis held him close as he lovingly braided his hair and whispered in his ear until Harry peacefully fell asleep. Louis took care of him, he always takes care of him. He always does exactly what Harry needs. Because in the end, he is what Harry needs. At any given time, at any given moment, all he needs is his Louis.

Harry had no idea Louis took a picture of them that day, but he’s glad that he did because he can see it. He can truly see it, without a shadow of a doubt, he can see how much Louis loves him. Not that he didn’t know that already, or didn’t believe it to be true because he does, of course he does. But to see it, to see it so blatantly spelled out for him, to see it blaring brightly at him with all the force of the shining sun, is more than his soul can endure, causing his heart to burst, warming his spirit, taking an emotional toll on his body.

“You're crying even harder now than when I left.” Niall appears in front of Harry, yet Harry didn’t even register him coming in.

Harry looks up at Niall with wet expressive eyes, lips quivering “I…I can't…I…just…”

“Harry, you look like shit.” Niall observes, taking in Harry’s red eyes and runny nose. “And you can't look like shit on your wedding day. We have to fix this.”

“I just...he just...he…Louis...” Harry stammers emotionally, too overcome to express himself properly.

“He what?”
“He just...god!” Harry cries, overwhelmed. “He made me a soundtrack to our life, Niall!”

“He wh—”

“And look!” Harry wails, shoving the iPod in Niall’s face, displaying the lockscreen picture. “It’s us! It’s...me and...it’s Louis and it’s everything!”

“Well...have you listened to it?” Niall asks, frowning at the mp3 player being forced into his personal space.

“No!” Harry sobs uncontrollably, hot tears streaking his face.

“So...let me get this straight, you’re this emotional about an iPod with a playlist on it that you haven’t even heard?”

“Yes!” Harry bawls, voice cracking as he drops his head into his lap, body heaving with unstoppable emotion.

“Why don't you just listen to it?”

“No, I can't. Louis said not to.” Harry sniffles, lifting his head up, trying to recompose himself but failing miserably.

“Only Louis would give you a gift you can't even use right away.”

“I love it. I love it so much.” Harry looks down at the slim iPod in his hand as if it is the most precious and valuable thing in the world. “It's the best gift he’s ever given me.”

“You should listen to it.”

“No! He'll know.”

“Nah, he'll never know.”

“Niall!” Harry shrieks raucously. “He will know! Louis will know!”

“Mmm, you’re probably right. You're a shit liar. He’ll see right through you.”

Harry nods his head staring once again at his wedding gift, with tears in his eyes.

“Well, stop crying long enough so that we can make you look decent. It's like you’ve been injected with hormones or something. Come on.” Niall takes Harry’s hand and guides him up.

“I'll try...” Harry sniffles, wiping his nose. “Wait! Oh my god! I bet he put the song we danced to on our very first anniversary or the song that we...that...I...that...or...” Harry breaks down again before he finishes his sentiment, merciless tears pouring out of his eyes in fresh new waves.

“Aww bud, you’re alright. I know, you’re overwhelmed, it’s ok.” Niall wraps his arms around Harry’s body, drawing him close. “Come on, Harry. It’s ok.”
Time slows to a halt. Voices reduce to simple silence. The world stills, rendered motionless. Everything fades away, pushed off into the far unneeded distance. Nothing is as momentous as this very instant, not a single tangible thing. It's raw and it's real, coming into full unrestrained focus at lightning speed. Nothing feels as magical as this moment.

Magical may not even begin to describe it. The scene before them is absolutely breathtaking. More breathtaking than they ever even envisioned it to be, captivating the senses and holding them prisoner. The entire space is cloaked in pure white, evoking the feel of a wintery cascade. Snow white roses whimsically litter every available surface, erupting the entire venue in a fresh enticing scent. Soft twinkling lights hang beautifully, draped throughout the massive room, embedded with shinning crystals and silver accents. Row, upon row, upon row of seated awaiting guests line the long aisle, each chair tied with silky ivory sashes.

Every eye is on them, but their eyes are only on each other. Can only gaze and focus on one another. For as soon as their eyes lock, and they see each other for the first time in what feels like years, what feels like eons, what feels like an eternity, any doubt or uncertainty is all washed away. The moment their eyes meet and they take each other in, consume each other’s presence, a stillness falls over them like no other.

It’s just them. Although in reality, time is still moving, voices are still being heard, the world is continually turning and eyes are eagerly watching. But in that one look, in that one unbreakable gaze, it’s just them, just as it always was and will be. Nothing else matters.

As the music begins to tinkle in around them, Louis takes his first steps down the aisle, guided by the light in Harry’s eyes.

The emotion and the severe weight of it all waves over Harry first, the stunning vision of Louis rendering him speechless. A rich, deep blue velvet suit jacket graces Louis’ form, his hair immaculately crafted off his face into an elegant swirled quiff.

Halfway down the aisle as promised, Harry stands looking like the essence of a tragically poetic dream. Clothed in a fitted white tuxedo, accented with delicate floral patterns matching the rich sapphire of Louis’ velvety suit. His long curls tumbling gloriously down to his shoulders.

They gaze at each other like there simply is no more beautiful thing in the universe, they gaze at each other as if they truly cannot believe how lucky they are. To be here in this moment, to be as loved as they are, and to be marrying each other on this day.

With each step Louis takes towards Harry, he feels weightless. Like coming home. The passion and the fire that has been built up for years, that slow burning passion, is now roaring like an all consuming fire. Needing to stay alive, to stay burning.

And the closer Louis gets to Harry, the faster his heart races. The steady thrumming of his pulse pounding out of his chest to a mighty beat. Both hearts beating out, calling for each other.

But when the two hearts meet and Louis finally reaches Harry, the incessant beating and thrumming of their bodies mutes to insignificant background noise, as did everything else. The distress signal of their hearts and steadfast yearning of their core ceases, for at last they are now home.
“You're already crying.” Louis whispers softly, as he laces his fingers with Harry’s.

“So are you.”

Louis sniffles, squeezing Harry’s hand. “Damn allergies.”

“It’s January.” Harry lets out a watery giggle, as they walk in concordance down the aisle.

“Exactly.”

They continue down the length of the runner, hand in hand, smiling at recognizable faces in the audience along the way. Once Harry and Louis reach the end of the walkway, their already emotional mums each embrace them fully, kissing both of their cheeks before taking their seats in the front row.

Harry and Louis stand, backs turned from the audience, facing a suited and pristine President Richards at the alter.

“Dearly beloved, we are gathered here on this beautiful day, in wondrous celebration. Not a celebration to mark the start of a relationship, but one to recognize and affirm a bond that already exists, a love that reigns unstoppable.” President Richards addresses the multitude of people before him. “Each of you are present today because you, in one way or another, have played a part in the lives of Harry or Louis or maybe even both. On behalf of our lovely grooms, I would like to extend a sincere heartfelt welcome.”

Harry and Louis, standing side by side, glance at each other, sharing a small private smile.

“Today, we witness a marriage that began seven years with two young boys.” President Richards continues in his booming voice. “Two young boys who became best friends, who then became lovers, who eventually became each other’s everything, as their love grew exponentially and reached towards infinite. Innumerable factors have brought them together, adding to both of their lives to create something greater, something even more beautiful than that which existed before. And now, today, Harry and Louis become a unified set that is nothing but natural, sometimes complex, occasionally irrational, but always, always real.”

“Real love is the greatest gift of all, freely given between two persons of sound heart and willing body.” President Richards, smiles warmly at the couple before him, tone earnest. “Harry and Louis, as I’ve come to know you, I, as well as everyone gathered before us, can attest to the fact that the love you possess for each other is oh, so real. It is pure and rare that two people could love as unconditionally, as passionately, as you both do.”

Their guests hum their agreement, several individuals already shedding soft tears as they watch the wedding proceed.

“From that first moment of ‘yes’ when you decided to marry, to this moment of ‘yes’ as you pronounce your vows, you promised yourselves to each other. Before this moment you have been many things to one another, growing as one, both learning and teaching.” President Richards smiles happily as he continues on with his speech. “Now you will say a few words that will take you across a threshold of life, linking prior moments to this one, causing things to never quite be the same between you. For after these vows, for after this moment, you will brave the world as spouses, as forever partners in the journey of life.”

President Richards looks to Harry first, nodding his head towards him. “Harry, you may proceed with your vows to Louis.”
Harry and Louis turn to face each other; Harry unlinks one of their hands to pull a small slip of paper from the inner breast of his suit jacket, hand trembling slightly.

Eyes wet, Harry meets Louis’ warm, grounding gaze, taking in a deep calming breath and clearing his throat before beginning with his vows. “Louis, there are so many things I wish to vow and promise you today, but I don’t know where to start.”

“I can’t promise that you’ll never be afraid, but I can promise that I’ll never let anything hurt you. I can’t promise that there will never be hard times, but I can promise I’ll fight through it with you. I can’t promise that every day will be as happy as this one, but I can promise that I will stop at nothing to see you smile.” Harry looks up from his vows, a slight quirk to the corners of his lips as his dimples poke at his cheeks. “And... I can’t promise that I won’t ever get on your nerves and I also can’t promise that I won’t unashamedly laugh when I do.”

Louis giggles fondly, smiling through his emotional crying eyes as he squeezes Harry’s fingers.

“But I can promise you this…” Harry recites earnestly, meeting Louis’ eyes again. “I promise to love and care for you, and I promise that I will try in every way, with all that is in me, to be worthy of your love.”

“I see these vows, not as promises really, but as privileges. I’m lucky enough to be able to laugh happily with you and cry with you. To care for you as best I can and share with you all the wonders of life. To comfort you with my body and mirror you with my soul. To dream with you and build a family with you and live with you. To love you.” Harry’s voice almost falls to a whisper, emotions reigning heavily over his features. “And I promise, no matter how old we get, I will never stop loving you.”

Louis sucks on his bottom lip as saltwater tracks down his cheeks steadily, taking in all of Harry’s words.

“I want to not only grow old with you, but to grow with you. Despite what challenges may carry us apart, I know we will always find our way right back to each other.” Harry continues, sniffing. He takes a moment to compose himself before continuing. “And when we are old and we have stockpiles of memories hidden behind our wrinkles, I will take the time to trace every creased line on your still gorgeous face, so that I can relive all the memories we’ve shared today, until forever.”

Harry gazes, unabashedly heartfelt, into Louis’ eyes, voice utterly shattered with the severity of his feelings. “I promise that I did, I do and I always will choose you, my Lou.”

Louis releases a heavy quivering breath, using his free hand to gently stroke the tears from Harry’s face. “God, Harry.”

Harry sniffles while he tucks his vows back into his pocket, then brings his hand to Louis’, still rested on his cheek. They gaze at each other openly, hearts heavy and weighted, filled with an indescribable amount of intense love.

“Louis, you may proceed with your vows to Harry.” President Richards instructs softly, dabbing his eyes with a handkerchief from his breast pocket.

Louis removes his hand from Harry’s face, other hand still linked as he retrieves his vows from his back pocket. “Harry,” Louis starts, but is immediately overwhelmed, voice getting caught in his chest. He shakes out his shoulders and looks up, attempting to stop the water from flowing from his eyes as he laughs nervously, trying to calm himself. “Uh... sorry, ok, hold on... I'll get it... I’ll get there.”
The audience all chuckles lightly along with him understandingly, using this time to dry their own misty eyes.

Harry offers Louis a watery affectionate smile, stroking his thumb reassuringly over Louis’ hand, reminding him wordlessly that he’s right there and it’s just the two of them. Louis nods, sniffing one last time before starting again, looking towards the vows in his hand. “Harry, I love you with all my life. But to tell you that I’ll love you for my entire lifetime doesn’t seem fair, because it’s not nearly close to enough.”

Louis looks up, staring deeply into Harry’s eyes with all the sentiment he can muster. “Our love is a once in a lifetime love and I vow to never forget that. I vow to cherish the unbreakable bond we share, to hold dear all the times that have brought us together, whether good or bad. I vow to have the patience that love demands, to speak when words are needed, and to hold my tongue and share the silence when they are not.”

“I vow to stand by your side and support you as you’ve always supported me.” Louis clutches tighter to Harry’s hand as he continues, voice wavering every so often. “I vow to always come back to where it all began and live in the warmth of your heart and eternally call it home.”

Harry gasps for breath, pressing his free hand to his chest, more tears falling from the corners of his eyes as his features beautifully break.

“I vow to never stop getting to know you as you evolve and grow more beautiful with each passing day, to love you in all your many forms, now and forever.” Louis promises, wholehearted and sincere. “I believe in you, the person you will grow to be, the person you have helped me become, and the couple we will be together.”

“This is my earnest vow to you, my equal in all things, in every thing. My one true counterpart.” Louis pauses for a moment, inhaling deeply.

“You’re forever my Haz, my heart.” Louis’ voice breaks, as the words fall from his lips, gaze locked on Harry. “You make loving easy and without hesitation or a single moment of doubt, I take you, all of you, in everyway imaginable.”

“Baby…” Harry exhales shakily, expression choked up on a sob.

“Sorry…ok, wow…sorry, was not expecting…um…right.” President Richards blubbers under his breath, gaze cast down, wiping at his eyes repeatedly, before lifting his head again to continue. “The wedding ring serves as an outward and visible sign of a long lasting life and unbroken love. It symbolizes your life together, for it is never ending and always beginning, a bond which unifies two souls, two hearts, together in love. It is an unbreakable seal of the vows you, Harry and Louis, have made to each other.”

President Richards gestures for the rings which Niall and Zayn each promptly supply Harry and Louis, respectively. The matching platinum, wide band rings are inscribed interiorly with the short phrase ‘all of our days’, paying homage to the sentiment of their engagement.

“May these rings always call to mind the power of your love.” President Richards declares as he turns to Harry.

“Harry Edward Styles, do you take Louis William Tomlinson as your husband, in happiness and with patience and understanding, through conflict and tranquility, acknowledging and accepting his strengths as well as his faults, loving fiercely and faithfully as long as you both shall live?”
“I do.” Harry smiles tearfully, sliding the platinum ring onto Louis’ finger with all the care and
tenderness in the world.

“Louis William Tomlinson, do you take Harry Edward Styles as your husband, in happiness and
with patience and understanding, through conflict and tranquility, acknowledging and accepting his
strengths as well as his faults, loving fiercely and faithfully as long as you both shall live?”

“I do.” Louis affirms, nodding his head as he slips the metal band over Harry’s ring finger, looking
upon it devotedly.

President Richards, victim to the all the emotion in front of him, wipes his eyes again before
continuing forth. “May you always draw in strength from the vows you have promised.
Understanding, even in moments of great despair, the home you always have in each other. Solace
under fire, shelter under rain, sharing and embracing one another’s joy and pain. Growing wise
instead of old, welcoming the very mysteries of life through the optimism of your steadfast love.”

“Because, Harry and Louis, you have showered our hearts with expressions of your deep love, and
promised each other the bliss of all your days, before the company of your family and friends, it
gives me great honor and pleasure to pronounce you partners in life, bound together by the union of
marriage. You may now seal your promise with a kiss.”

Harry and Louis smile widely at each other before melting their lips together in a fervent kiss. Their
arms encircle one another as they hold each other amorously through their first blissful married
caress. They can’t stop grinning against each other’s mouths, pure joy radiating from their
expressions.

“I love you.” Harry pours into Louis’ mouth fervidly.

“And I love you.” Louis returns the sentiment with worshiped love, repeatedly sealing his lips
against Harry’s.

Guests stand and applaud happily, affirming the new marriage as Harry and Louis turn to face them,
hands linked. They set about down the aisle once more, showered by an outpouring of falling rose
petals, encasing them from every angle. Smiling, they stride with swinging tight grips, making their
way out of the building.

“I lost my shit.” Louis confesses outright.

“What?” Harry laughs, not expecting those to be the first words Louis says to him once they are out
of the ceremony hall.

“Before the wedding I mean.” Louis clarifies, as they step off to the side. “I fucking lost my shit.
You were right.”

“Called it. I know you so well.” Harry smiles tenderly, squeezing Louis’ hand. “Good news though,
I’ve got a blue sparkly thong with your name on it. It even matches your eyes.”

Louis eyes crinkle as he laughs. “Perfect.”

“Don’t worry, we don’t have to go anywhere. I won’t embarrass you. You just have to wear it for
me.”

“Oh no…I will wear the fuck out of that thong wherever we go, clothed or unclothed, and I’ll watch
as you flip shit over it. I’m not ashamed of the ass I was given.” Louis smirks teasingly. “Good luck
keeping yourself together.”
“Rude.”

“If I lose, I like to lose with grace.” Louis explains, beaming happily at Harry. “It’s almost like I’m winning anyway.”

Harry giggles looking at Louis fondly. “I missed you.”

“I missed you too.” Louis confesses, stroking Harry’s face. “Last night was the absolute worst. I hardly slept.”

“Same. I missed you so much and then I was too excited about today and then I got thinking of you in a suit, but the suit I imagined you in did not even do you justice.” Harry says, eyeing Louis’ body appreciatively. “But really all I did was toss and turn all night. And cry. Lots of crying…it was…ugly, so so ugly…you wouldn’t want to see that, I promise.”

“See, I could have fixed that.” Louis claims, pressing his lips to the corner of Harry’s mouth. “I had half a mind to sneak into your room in the middle of the night anyway.”

“And I would have kicked your disobedient, mischievous ass out in the hallway.”

“No, you wouldn’t. You would have accepted me with open arms in your tearful moment of weakness.”

“You know…there was a point in the night when I probably would have, actually.” Harry admits with a small smile. “But it was worth it seeing you for the first time in almost twenty hours. You took my breath away.”

“You’re still taking my breath away, love.” Louis admires Harry’s striking form. “Can’t we just…like…slide into a stall real quick?”

“A stall!?” Harry asks utterly appalled, face contorting in disgust. “As in the toilets?”

“Yes! Exactly!” Louis nods his head mischievously. “Come on! No one will know.”

Harry scuffs as if Louis has lost his damn mind. “Louis, I don’t care if people know, I will not have our first married sexual encounter be anything less than romantic and absolutely perfect. Have some self control.”

“Oh please, we have done sooo much worse.” Louis reminds, tilting his head to the side. “So much worse in fact, that this wouldn’t even register on the grand scale of naughty acts.”

“Yeah ok, but we weren’t married then.” Harry points out. “Those times were just about lust and desperation and want. This actually matters, it has meaning. We aren’t going to have a cheap and dirty fuck in a stall.”

“But Harry please, I’m dying! I want cheap and dirty!” Louis begs desperately. “I turned myself on thinking about you…and my thong…and you and my thong…and you again…and…now I can’t go on. You wouldn’t want me to die on our wedding day when you could have saved me.”

“All in good time.” Harry smiles cheerily, sliding his hand into Louis’ once more. “You’ll survive.”

Louis lets out a long disgruntled groan, throwing his head back and walking blindly, only led by Harry’s hand guiding him in the right direction.

Harry brings Louis’ hand to his lips as Louis continues grumbling unintelligible sounds of distress.
and frustration. “Come on, we have to go take pictures before our reception.”

Harry drags Louis to their designated spot for their wedding pictures, where they meet their family and the rest of their wedding party along with the photographer. The photo-shoot runs smoothly and swiftly, getting all the shots they wanted almost effortlessly and before they know it, it’s time for their reception to commence.

Louis shivers, blowing warm air into his cupped gloved hands. “Outdoor pictures will look nice and everything, but I am slowly turning into a human ice sculpture.”

“Damn, we could have saved a bit of money and replaced one of the ice sculptures with you.” Harry teases, covering his hands over Louis’ to help warm them up.

“I think we should rub up against each other to keep warm.” Louis suggests with a flirty grin.

“I'm a married man.”

“Yes, married to me!” Louis reminds jumping up and down. “You just promised me your mind, body, and soul. Emphasis on body.”

Harry chuckles, watching Louis closely. “You keep trying it, don't you?”

“Um, yes?” Louis answers as if it's a ridiculous question, wrinkling his face. “And I will continue to try it until you stop being a prude. What’s mine is yours and what’s yours is mine. So give it to me!”

“Patience, patience.”

“Harry, I've had sooo much patience. You've starved me for two weeks. Two weeks Harold. We haven’t had sex for two whole bloody weeks!” Louis emphasizes, growing in volume. “All in the name fucking romance or whatever the fuck. How you have such restraint all of a sudden is beyond me. You're normally the insatiably horny one.”

“Well, I doubled my kickboxing routine, you know to let out some frustration...but on the bright side I can kinda see it on my abs.” Harry pats his taut stomach with a pleased expression. “So that’s pretty cool, I think.”

“Oh really?” Louis questions sarcastically. “Wow, well I wouldn't know...I don't know what your body looks like anymore! It's been years. We are basically an Amish couple now.”

Harry giggles, pressing his lips to Louis’ pink nose. “Sexually frustrated you is so adorably cute.”

Louis squints his eyes and scowls. “I think I’m passed sexually frustrated. What’s the next level after that? Sexually combustible? Sexually on fire maybe? And soon I’ll be sexually dead.”

“Absence makes the-”

“No! Nope! No, stop! Fucking stop that shit right now!” Louis interjects, waving his hands around. “I never want to here that bullshit hallmark quote ever again! Shove that absence-fonding up my ass!”

“Touchy, touchy.” Harry consoles, rubbing Louis' shoulders.

“Harry, I swear, if you were to just look at me long enough or even breathe on me in just the right angle, I’d have an orgasmic experience right here on the spot. It's that real right now.”

“Sounds like you have a very serious problem.” Harry lowers his voice and leans in close, dipping
his head and blowing a soft stream of warm air in Louis’ ear. “I guess, I could...maybe...”

“God, yes. Finally.” Louis moans, rolling his head back. He slides hands slowly under Harry’s jacket, dipping further south.

“Help...you...out...” Harry continues slowly in between soft nibbles to Louis’ earlobe. He flattens his hands out over Louis’ ass, pressing Louis firmly against him.

“Please, baby.” Louis begs, eyelashes fluttering closed, fingers roaming desperately across Harry’s lower back.

“Tonight.” Harry steps back abruptly with a teasing grin, removing his hands completely from Louis' body.

“Ugh, you're the worst! Fuck!” Louis grunts in agony. “I give you a ring and you lock everything up! I think we should get a divorce to save our sex life. It’s our only hope.”

“We have to go to our reception. I think we are already late.”

“Fuck the reception and fuck me!” Louis demands, groaning out in severe frustration.

“How do we even get back from here?” Harry questions, blatantly ignoring Louis.

“Harry Harry Harry!” Louis whines, full of need, snaking his arms around Harry’s waist from behind. “Harrehhh! Don’t do this to me!”

Harry takes a few steps forward, Louis dragging along, clutching tightly to his middle and mouthing at the back of his neck. “Where did our family go?”

“Wait, they left us?” Louis questions, stopping his needy whining to look around, arms still wrapped around Harry’s midriff. “How do you leave the grooms behind? I mean...it's for us?”

“Maybe they were giving us space?” Harry guesses, shrugging halfheartedly.

“Wasted space...seeing as though I'm still untouched and horny as hell.” Louis grumbles bitterly, releasing Harry. “And...if that wasn’t enough, it’s fucking freezing out here.”

“It is pretty cold.” Harry agrees, body shivering slightly.

Louis looks around again, scanning the surrounding area before turning back to Harry. “Do you trust me?”

“Uh...yes?”

“I don’t like the uncertainty in your tone, Harold. You either trust me or you don’t.”

“Of course, I trust you, babe, but why do you sound so...mischievous?” Harry investigates, eyeing Louis. “Like you’re about to commit a crime or something.”

“Because I have an idea, but it may or may not involve petty theft.” Louis admits, sounding like the epitome trouble.

“You made an honest man out of me today and yet now you want to make me into a thief.” Harry shakes his head disapprovingly. “Louis, I am appalled. I have standards.”

“You want to steal a golf cart?”

“Yeah, so we can get to our reception.” Louis points to a currently abandoned golf cart a few meters away. “Come on, it’s all for the greater good.”

Harry’s line of sight follows Louis’ pointed finger to the golf cart, unsure. “But…”

“I’m cold, you’re cold, we’re late, let’s go.” Louis grabs Harry’s hand and pulls him to the cart. They climb inside the cab of the cart, Louis taking the wheel and guiding it onto the path. “Much faster than walking.” Louis says proudly, eyes locked on Harry as opposed to the road.

“Louis, curb!” Harry motions frantically at their undesired trajectory towards the edge of the path.

“Oh shit!” Louis curses, swerving out of the way just in the last moment, nearly missing a strolling elderly couple. “Oops! Sorry loves!” In a bit of a rush!” He shouts, waving at the couple apologetically.

Harry turns around, leaning out of the golf cart enthusiastically. “We just got married!”

“Congratulations!” The couple calls as the cart zooms rapidly by, knocking Harry and Louis up and down in their seats.

“Oh my god, Louis, slow down!” Harry yells as he slips and slides on the bench of the golf cart, hair tumbling everywhere. “I almost fell out of my damn seat!”

“Hold on, my love.” Louis leans over and kisses Harry’s temple. “Hands and feet inside the cart at all times please. Safety first.”

“Do you even know where you’re going?”

“Westside, right?” Louis grins taking one hand off the wheel to throw up a twisted ‘W’ with his fingers.

“No!” Harry declares, trying to sit up properly. “The banquet hall is on the eastside, near the pavilion!”

“I know, I know.” Louis assures, holding an poised hand up. “Chill.”

Harry gives Louis a pointed look. “Did you say west just so that you could make that hand signal?”

“I'll never tell.” Louis smiles knowingly at Harry taking his eyes off the path before him.

“Tree!”

“Oh, bloody hell!” Louis deviates from the route at last second, the cart shifting drastically to the left, jostling them up and down. Harry flies up, bumping his head lightly on the hood of the cart.

“You know what? I'll walk, it's all good.” Harry decides, rubbing the top of his head. “Just let me out here.”

“Harold, calm yourself, we are almost there…I think.”

“You think!” Harry blurts, hand still on his head.

“Know!” Louis corrects, turning his head towards Harry and off the road again. “I know.”
“Louis!” Harry shrieks, pointing to a giant sign they are on target to collide with.

“I see it! I see it!” Louis steers the cart to the right, barely missing the large sign. “Damn! Have you no faith in me?”

“I have the utmost faith that...um...you wouldn't do it on purpose.”

Louis frowns, creasing his brow. “I'm a good driver Harry. I'm just trying to get us there faster.”

“Mhmm ok.” Harry replies sarcastically.

“I'm a better driver than you, that's for sure.” Louis states boldly, scuffing under his breath.

“Oh please.” Harry rolls his eyes, laughter on his lips.

“I only speak truths.” Louis holds his head up, jutting out his chin.

“Well, if that was true we wouldn’t be about to run off the road. Again!” Harry points out, screeching.

“Fuck!” Louis veers the golf cart, narrowly avoiding crashing into a huge fountain. “Well, maybe I’d be a better driver right now if I wasn’t so tense!”

“Aww, babe, why are you tense?” Harry asks, tone mockingly sweet. “Is it the cold?”

“Don’t ask these dumb, disrespectful questions.” Louis deadpans, expression not amused in the slightest. “You know why and it’s your fault.”

“Mmm I don’t recall.”

“Come on baby, ease my tension. I know you want to.” Louis puts a hand on Harry’s inner thigh giving it a seductive squeeze.

“Louis, look out!”

“Goddammit!” Louis turns the golf cart, scarcely missing a wide bicycle rack, the sudden motion causing the cart to spin out of control, twisting and turning wildly before finally pulling to a stop right in front of the reception hall. “Well, look at that we made it.”

Harry’s hands are tightly clutching the edge of his seat, eyes wide and alarmed. “Oh my god! Who knew that the day I married you would be the day you tried to kill me?”

“Hey hey hey now, did I get us here or not?”

“Barely.” Harry attempts to smooth out his windblown, flyaway hair with his hands, stepping out of the golf cart. “I lost a few precious years of life, that I will never get back. I may never live to see our grandchildren now.”

“Oh hush. Don’t be so melodramatic.” Louis says as they walk indoors to the foyer area outside of the actual banquet room where their reception is being held.

“Where were you guys?” Lottie asks as soon as they near the door to the reception, a cute sign near the door happily welcoming all their guests.

“Um? Where were we?” Louis questions back, accusing. “Where were you? You all left us.”
“Shame, shame, shame.” Harry shakes his head, swinging an arm around Lottie’s shoulders. “Our own family abandoned us in the cold.”

“We really thought you were following behind!” Lottie defends, looking up at Harry. “And then when you weren’t we thought you wanted space or something.” She pauses briefly, grin growing. “So…did you…you know…do it?”

“Lottie!” Harry gasps horrified, unhooking his arm from her shoulder and touching a scandalized hand to his own chest.

“No Lots, we did not have sex, if that’s what you're asking.” Louis answers, completely unabashed. “In fact, Harry and I aren't even a sexually active couple so…”

“Wait, what?” Lottie asks, confused.

“Celibate.” Louis shrugs, sighing. “It’s quite an unfortunate situation to be honest.”

“He’s being overdramatic.” Harry claims, rolling his eyes towards Louis. “We aren't celibate; we’re just waiting until tonight. Because I think it should be romantic and special.”

“Aww that's so cute!” Lottie gushes. “That’s a nice idea, Harry.”

“No, no! It's not cute at all!” Louis argues, shaking his head adamantly. “Don’t let this imposter wannabe-cupid fool you! It’s purgatory. I’m on fire. Physical fire.”

“I know, right?!” Harry beams, answering Lottie while ignoring Louis. “Thank you! I thought it was a nice idea as well. But apparently my efforts aren’t appreciated.”

“We could have done it ten times, ten different fucking ways by now.” Louis grumbles.

“Ten times? Really, babe? That’s a little fast isn't it? It’s barely been two hours.” Harry chuckles, questioning Louis. “You must have it really really bad.”


Harry's eyes widen in genuine curiosity. “But...how?”

“Ooh.” Louis grins wickedly, biting on his lip and staring at Harry lustfully. “So first I would-”

“Alright…well, now you're talking about things I’ve never wanted to hear in my life.” Lottie interrupts, walking towards the door to their reception. “So while you two sort that out, I'm gonna go tell them that you're here, so they can officially announce you and all that.”

“Oh! Make sure they play our song!” Louis jumps suddenly. “Niall knows, but just remind him.”

“Got it, Lou!” Lottie throws Louis a thumbs up before disappearing through the door.

“Wait…our song?” Harry inquires, sounding puzzled.

“Yeah! Our song...well...one of them. I put it on the playlist.” Louis spins around abruptly, eyeing Harry skeptically. “Which you didn't listen to, right?”

“No I-”

“Look me in the eye.” Louis places both hands on the sides of Harry’s face, dragging his head down to watch him closely.
“Louis, I didn’t listen to it, I swear!” Harry giggles, opening his eyes as wide as possible for Louis. “You can even ask Niall!”

“Mmm ok. You’re not lying.” Louis decides after searching Harry’s eyes for a moment. He presses his lips to Harry’s briefly before releasing his face. “But yes! It’s our song and when it plays and we walk in to it…you better do the thing!”

“The thing?” Harry’s expression has nothing written on it except honest confusion. “What? How can I do ‘the thing’ if I don’t know what ‘the thing’ is? I don’t even know what song it is?”

“Ooh you know…you know…” Louis stresses slowly as if Harry is just supposed to magically understand. “Here put this on.” Louis randomly hands Harry a simple pair of black sunglasses.

“What? Where did you get sunglasses from?” Harry asks, staring at the pair of shades in his hand.

“Around…it doesn’t matter! Just put them on!”

As if on cue, easily recognizable nineties beats echo through the walls, the initial notes of *Push It* sounding around them in the hallway.

“Oh…my…god!” Harry gasps, jaw dropping as he recognizes the song. “You did not!”

“Yes! Yes! Yes!” Louis bounces excitedly, extremely pleased with himself. “I did! I did!”

“You can’t be serious.” Harry shakes his head in disbelief, mouth still agape.

“I’m so serious, Baby Salt.” Louis giggles happily, sliding his sunglasses onto his face.

“It’s been six years, Louis! How? Or…why? Or…” Harry stutters, without words. “Oh…help me. The mistakes of my youth are catching up to me.”

“Ooh baby baby.” Louis sings softly in Harry’s ear, rolling his hips slowly. “Ba-baby baby.”

“No! Stop, no! I refuse!” Harry asserts, stepping back several times.

“Get up on this!” Louis bellows, shimmying his shoulders playfully towards Harry, tongue hanging out of his mouth.

“I can’t believe you would bring this back! I’m not embarrassing myself on our wedding day!”

“We have to make a statement Harry because it’s our wedding day!” Louis argues, doing a little dance on his toes. “And it’ll be fun, like it was the first time! And technically you brought it back when you reminded me of it months ago.”

“I didn’t sign up for this.”

“You signed up when you said ‘I do’.” Louis grabs Harry’s hand and starts dragging him back towards the entrance. “So come on hubby, let’s bounce!”

“I’m not drunk enough for this.”

“You were perfectly sober the last time.”

“Yeah…ok…but-”

“Ah push it!” Louis shouts, interrupting Harry’s excuses.
“Fuck me.” Harry sighs heavily, casting his head back as he follows behind Louis.

The large doors open to the banquet hall, the steady beat pulsing louder than before. The air surrounding them is flooded with color, the room is aglow with tinges of hushed blues and precious whites. The wintery theme of their wedding carrying through to the decor of their reception.

“Salt and Pepa’s here!” Niall booms energetically from the DJ booth, hands cupped around a microphone. “For the very first time, I present to you Mr.’s. Harry and Louis Tomlinson!”

Louis raises their joined hands above their heads proudly as their guests hoot and cheer, some even standing to their feet with cameras pointed and ready.

“Oh my god. My mum’s gonna film it!” Harry hisses as they make their way to the large dance floor set up in the middle of the reception hall.

“Well better make it a good show then right? Our kids will probably see it one day.” Louis smiles happily. “Wouldn’t want to traumatize them.”

“Too late.”

Ah, push it!

As the heavy breathing sounds of the track resonate around them, Louis begins to do the dance they memorized so many years ago. Gazing at Harry, Louis holds his hands out in front of him, then quickly brings them back in, rolling his hips once, doing the first cycle of the dance, urging Harry to join him with the wagging of his eyebrows.

Ah, push it!

Harry watches Louis for a moment before sighing and swinging his hips along with him to the beat. They lift their arms slowly above their heads, bring them down rhythmically to every rehearsed swivel and shake.

Ah, push it! Get up on this!

Together they find a distantly familiar groove, mirroring each other’s body movements with happy, laughing smiles. Before they know it, they’re dancing out recklessly together as if no time has passed at all.

Ah push it, push it real good!

“Now, wait a minute, y’all, this dance ain’t for everybody! Only the sexy people! So all you fly mothers, get on out there and dance!” Niall echoes the words off the original song into the mic, prompting guests to actually join in on the dance from their tables as Harry and Louis continue out on the dance floor. “Dance, I said!”

Salt and Pepa’s here, and we’re in effect, want you to push it, babe...

Louis jumps up, as if on cue, twisting towards Harry and spreading his legs as Harry drops to the floor and slides swiftly through the opening of his legs.

Coolin’ by day, then at night working up a sweat...

Harry and Louis both thrust their hips in unison, popping their backs to and fro. They bounce over to one of the front family tables, seated by all their sisters. They pull each of them up to their feet, Fizzy
and Daisy covering their faces with embarrassment, while the rest just burst with shocked, but impressed laughter.

Come on girls, let’s go show the guys that we know how to become number one in a hot party show…

They step back on to the floor, twirling around simultaneously, crisscrossing their legs as they jump and spin back and forth with practiced eased.

Now push it! Push it good, p-push it real good!

Louis and Harry walk back and forth rhythmically, shimmying their shoulders and gyrating their bodies around each other, trying not to get too distracted by their own uncontrollable laughter.

Ooh baby baby, ba-baby baby

In concordance, Harry and Louis place their hands behind their heads, lulling their heads back as they roll their hips slowly and in time to every exaggerated ‘baby’.

Ooh baby baby, ba-baby baby

Harry struts over to the DJ booth and leans closely into the microphone in Niall’s hand “Yo, yo, yo, yo baby-pop!” Harry sings to Niall, just as he did in their original routine.

Niall exaggeratedly makes a ‘who me?’ face, gesturing a single hand to his chest in question.

“Yeah you, come here, gimme a kiss.” Harry responds in time to the verse, wiggling a finger flirtatiously, as Niall theatrically kisses his cheek.

“Better make it fast or else I’m gonna get pissed!” Louis snatches the mic away and says his part of the whole exchange. “Can’t you hear the music’s pumpin’ hard like I wish you would?”

“Now push it!” Niall yells into the mic, pumping his free hand in the air.

“P-push it real good!” Harry and Louis shout together chuckling to themselves. The song continues on as Louis giggles into Harry’s shoulder, wrapping his arms around him and swaying slowly.

“Boy, you really got me going.” Louis sings softly and privately in Harry’s ear along to the tune.

“You got me so…I don’t know what I’m doing.” Harry answers back quietly, finishing the line and cupping his hands gently around Louis’ face.

Louis smiles brightly at Harry, before Harry leans in and presses their lips together happily, both of them can’t help but smile against each other through the kiss. Even after all these years and how much they’ve grown and changed and matured, they will still always be those silly, young boys who fell in love. Despite time and age, they are still just as in love as they were then.

“I can't believe I still remember that whole thing...that was years ago!” Harry awes in amused surprise, removing the sunglasses from his face. “Salt and Pepa at it again.”

“God, we were so young!” Louis laughs, covering his mouth, also removing his shades.

“I totally thought that was never, ever coming back.”

“Hence, why I resurrected it today.” Louis grins, petting Harry’s cheek. “Just for you.”
“You love to embarrass me, don’t you?”

“Oh, I live for it.” Louis smirks cheekily. “But I think you did pretty well, Baby Salt, a little rusty, but still alright.”


Louis inhales sharply at the sound of his old nickname, eyes dilating. “Don’t talk dirty to me, you know I’m already weak.”

“Oh my god, it still works!” Harry laughs uncontrollably, leaning over with his eyes squeezed shut. “It always turned you on when I called you that and it looks like it still does!”

“Stop this. Don’t be rude.”

“Big Daddy Pepa.” Harry moans exaggeratedly, causing Louis to suck in his bottom lip as his head tips to the side. Harry smirks at Louis reaction, utterly pleased with himself. “Mmm you did used to love that. Ooh, we’re sooo bringing it back.”

“Fuck, Harry! I just said I’m a weak man! You can’t just call me that and do the dance and not expect me to react to it. I’m holding on by a thread.”

“Daddy Pepa.” Harry looms in close, whispering temptingly and rubbing himself against Louis teasingly. “Get up on this.”

“Harry, please.” Louis whines desperately, breath hitching.

Harry kisses the side of Louis’ jaw before taking a step back, catching Louis’ roaming hands from groping his backside, as they are still basically in plain sight. “Honestly, you’re really the one who brought it back, so you can only blame yourself, Pep.”

“I’m definitely not going to make it.” Louis groans, shifting on his legs. “Especially not with you toying with me like this.”

“Angsty, angsty.” Harry rubs Louis’ lower back, being mockingly comforting.

Niall leaps out of nowhere, laughing loudly as he throws his arms around Louis and Harry. “I can’t fucking breathe! It was funny six years ago and it’s a fucking riot now because you’re grown ass men! I can’t believe I’m blessed enough to have witnessed that twice in one lifetime! The luck of the Irish, I tell ya.”

“You’re still the best DJ Spinderella.” Harry comments as Niall releases them. “Salt-n-Pepa is nothing without their brilliant DJ.”

“Harry, I can’t believe you remember the cues. I had no faith in you mate.” Niall admits, still laughing. “But Louis was so sure that you’d remember. You still need to work on your pop and lock though.”

“Lou, you had faith in my dance skills?” Harry beams, eyes lighting up.

“Yeah baby, I backed you up. I took a chance on you.” Louis nods proudly.

“The best reception entrance of all time!” Niall enthuses, clapping his hands together as he cackles. “We should have brought back the matching outfits!”
“Oh my god, what happened to those?” Harry wonders, eyes bugging out as the memories come back.

“I doubt Harry’s still fits.” Louis points out, eyeing Harry’s body up and down.

“I’m sure yours does though.” Harry smirks jeeringly. “Still the same size.”

“Hey hey now. None of that.” Louis narrows his eyes towards Harry. “Plus, I think I should be praised, not mocked, for maintaining my figure.”

“It’s your stature, not your figure, that I was referring to.” Harry corrects, taking his hand and leading him towards their table. “Come on, Daddy Pepa, let’s sit down.”

Harry and Louis take their seats at the front of the hall, seated at the center amongst their close family and friends. As the reception dinner is served and enjoyed, many toasts are made in celebration and honor of Louis and Harry. Their parents each give moving speeches about how much they have grown and how happy they are for them moving into the next phase of their life. Anne burst into tears halfway, causing Harry to, of course, cry along with her.

As best men, Niall and Zayn each give a speech, Niall basically just using his time to roast and expose Harry and Louis, as expected, causing all of their guests to laugh merrily along. Liam raises his glass for a toast as one of the groomsmen, giving a very well thought out and sentimental speech. Harry and Louis’ sisters also offer a small word in congratulations as well as several of their close friends and groomsmen.

While most people finish off their plates, Curtis approaches Louis and Harry, appropriately dressed in a white chef’s uniform. “So, newlyweds, how was the food? Did it all turn out how you wanted it?”

“You’re absolutely brilliant!” Louis compliments, smiling wide.

“From what I had of it, it was amazing!” Harry agrees honestly. “But every time I start to eat again, someone says something that brings me to tears. I’ve spent the majority of my time sitting here crying, as opposed to actually eating.”

“Oh mate, I feel you. Your vows brought me to tears. Like real man tears!” Curtis confesses, chuckling to himself. “I was sitting there like…Shit! I need to call my wife and make sure she knows I love her right now!”

Louis nods his head, grinning. “Do it, mate!”

“Oh, believe me, I did.” Curtis nods, dimpled smile widening on his face. “If she didn't know before, she sure as hell knows now.”

“I'm sure she knew before.” Harry comments. “How could she not?”

“Yeah, but it never hurts to say it again.” Curtis adds, turning to leave. “Well, I'm gonna go back to the kitchen. If I don't see you again, congratulations on your marriage! I wish you all the best in life. You're such an adorable couple!”

“Thank you, Curtis.” Harry smiles genuinely.

“Yeah mate, thanks so much!” Louis calls, as Curtis retreats towards the side exit, waving in goodbye. “Always love talking to C-Stone.”
“C-Stone?” Harry giggles, amused. “Another nickname?”

“We’re proper mates now, babe. I told you he liked me better.” Louis says obviously. “Our meeting was no chance occurrence, as some would like to believe.”

“What are you talking about, Louis?” Harry laughs, always entertained by Louis’ dumb antics.

“Don’t beat yourself up about it, love. I’m sure he thinks you’re quite alright.”

“Quite alright?”

“Mhmm.” Louis pecks’ Harry’s lips, reaching for one of his hands. “Come on it's time for our first dance!”

Harry frowns as Louis pulls him to his feet. “Wait…we have an actual first dance?”

“Duh Harry. What kind of wedding do you think this is?”

“I mean…I thought our little Salt-n-Pepa thing was the first dance.”

“Oh please. That was our entrance.” Louis scuffs as if Harry is being absurd. “It just so happened to also be a dance.”

Harry laughs, shaking his head fondly. “Well, you can see how I was a bit confused.”

“I guess.” Louis nods his head to the side, considering Harry’s point. “That would be cheating though because it wouldn’t be the first time that we danced that dance.”

“Very true.”

Louis snakes his arms around Harry from behind and gently pushes him towards the dance floor. “And I promised that it would be special.”

“Also very true.” Harry nods as he is propelled forward by Louis guiding behind him.

“And that it would be just us.” Louis whispers against the back of Harry’s neck, lips ghosting over his hair. “You and I.”

They stop in the center of the glass dance floor, their initials projected on its smooth reflective surface. The lights across the reception hall dim, except for the warm glow casted down on the dance floor, enveloping Harry and Louis, making it truly feel like it is just them in the entire room. Ever so softly, the twinkling of piano keys flows around them, the beautifully moving first notes of Michael Bublé’s *You and I* floating through the air enchantingly.

Louis steps around Harry to face him, an affectionate smile on his lips as he holds out his hand to Harry. Harry grins bashfully as he laces his fingers with Louis’ and takes a step closer.

> Here we are, on earth together. It's you and I, god has made us fall in love, it's true. I've really found someone like you...

Hands locked together, eyes gazing lovely at each other as a deep passion ignites within them. They twirl whimsically and wondrously, completely caught up in their own little bubble.

> Will it stay? The love you have for me. Will you say? That you'll be by my side, to see me through. Until my life is through...
The slow, romantic rhythm of the song, carries them across the floor, whisking them off to a far off place. A place where nothing else matters, nothing but the two of them.

*I'm glad, at least in my life, I've found someone. That may not be here forever, to see me through. But I found my strength in you…*

Louis unlinks his hands from Harry’s in order to encompass his arms around him, drawing him near as they rock slowly back and forth. Harry rests his head against Louis’ hair, hands steady on his lower back.

*Cause in my mind, you will stay here, always, in love. You and I, you and I, you and I…*

They hold each other close, hopelessly lost in the closeness and feel of their bodies swaying together as one. Suspended in time, floating together in perfect unison, one soul, one mind, one heart.

*In my mind, we can conquer the world, in love. You and I, you and I, you and I…*

Louis pulls back marginally to lean up and brush away the tears on Harry’s cheek with his lips, the water from his own eyes trickling down the sides of his face.

*You and I…*

“I love you, Harry.” Louis whispers against Harry’s wet cheeks. “I love you so much and I picked this song because it’s always you and I, through everything, through anything…”

Harry breathes heavily and clutches Louis tighter, closing his teary eyes and nuzzling his face against Louis, trying to be as close to him as humanly and physically possible.

“Just you and me baby. Always.”

“I love you.” Harry breathes out emotionally, not even a whisper for his voice is so small, so reverent.

When the song comes to a close, Harry cups his hands around Louis’ face, kissing him passionately. The on-looking guests of their reception applauding and awing, as their eyes gaze upon the hopelessly in love couple.

Harry and Louis take a few moments to recover and collect themselves before traipsing off, hand in hand, to greet and chat with their countless guests. They float around the room mingling with old friends, socializing with family, greeting and thanking everyone for spending the day with them, and enjoying themselves for every single minute of it.

“So how’s married sex?” Zayn asks instantly in greeting as Harry and Louis approach Liam, Niall and Zayn at the open bar.

“That’s a very good question…I wouldn’t know.” Louis grumbles, not even slightly surprised by Zayn’s question.

“What?” Liam frowns, setting down his drink. “Are you not married?”

“Oh, I’m definitely married, just not sexed.” Louis looks to Harry pointedly, pursing his lips.

Niall’s face twists with puzzlement. “Wait...so where were you before the reception, like after the pictures?”

“Yeah...you were late so we just assumed...” Zayn trails off, looking between Harry and Louis
peculiarly.

“No, we spent that time in a golf cart.” Harry clarifies easily, unbothered by Louis’ comments. “We almost died.”

“We did not almost die.” Louis rolls his eyes, huffing out an annoyed breath. “Frankly, I personally spent that time begging Harry to fucking touch me and it was all in vain.”

Harry squeezes Louis’ hand, leaning in to kiss the corner of his mouth tenderly. “I love you too.”

“So, you’re telling me that you’ve been married…for what? Five or six hours now? And you haven’t had any kind of sex? None whatsoever?” Niall simplifies, slamming his glass down. “Bull-fucking-shit!”

“Unfortunately, the rumors are true.” Louis sighs, voice pained. “There is no sex involved after marriage so…save yourselves.”

“Guess we can’t get married, babe.” Zayn turns to Liam jokingly. “That’s the best part of our relationship.”

“You only love me for sex, I knew it.” Liam pouts, frowning at Zayn.

“Nah, I love you for you and all that is you.” Zayn nibbles on Liam’s earlobe dotingly.

“So, when are you guys gonna tie the knot?” Harry asks, still holding Louis’ hand and twisting the platinum ring decorating his finger.

“Oh well, we didn’t want to take away from your day or anything but…”

“We’re engaged!” Zayn announces excitedly, finishing Liam’s sentence, eyes twinkling.

“No way!” Louis releases Harry’s hand to embrace Zayn. “Fuck, bro!”

“Congratulations boys!” Harry enthuses cheerfully. “That’s wonderful!”

“Ayyye!” Niall lifts his drink again joyfully.

“Yeeah!” Zayn beams, smiling wide. “I’m fucking stoked!”

“When? Or how, did this happen?” Louis inquires.

“About a week ago…it’s a pretty long story to be honest, so we’ll tell you later when you have more time.” Liam smiles, rubbing Zayn’s lower back.

“Well, we are so happy for you guys!” Harry congratulates again.

“Thank you, thank you.” Liam says appreciatively, nodding his head before turning towards Niall. “You’re next, Niall.”

“Hey…don’t rush me please.” Niall holds his hands up in defense. “Carly and I are good where we are for now.”

“Aww, how is she?” Louis questions., sounding genuinely interested. “I do love that girl.”

“Yeah…I love her too.”
“Wait, like love her or love her?” Liam asks Niall, purposely stressing the latter.

“I love love her.” Niall admits with a small smile.

“Did you tell her that?” Zayn interrogates, raising an eyebrow.

“Um…yeah, last night actually.” Niall answers sheepishly, casting his gaze to his shined shoes.

“And?” Harry probes, all four of them looking to Niall expectantly, crowding in close with their eyes wide.

“And…” Niall drags out slowly. “She loves me back!”

“Oh my god! Niall! You got a girl to love you! This is momentous!” Louis jumps excitedly, slinging his arm around Zayn. “Zayn! She loves him! Did you hear that?! Carly loves Niall!”

“I heard, I heard!” Zayn laughs happily, smiling at Louis, before turning to Niall. “Nice one, bro!”

Liam ruffles Niall’s hair, drawing him close. “Mate, good work! That’s so great!”

“Niall, that’s huge!” Harry pulls Niall away from Liam for a hug, squeezing him tightly.

“My little Irish beansprout is all grown up.” Louis pushes Harry aside to dramatically kiss both of Niall’s cheeks, wrapping his arms around his neck and crushing him. “I’m so fucking proud!”

“Get off me, Lou!” Niall laughs, squirming around under Louis’ chokehold.

“Where is Carly?” Louis asks, somewhat releasing Niall, to look around the huge room. “I need to make sure she wasn’t delirious when she said that.”

“She’s around here somewhere.” Niall answers, ducking his head out of Louis’ arms.

Louis looks around again before abruptly walking away without another word, most likely to go find Carly.

“Louis?” Harry calls after him. “Babe?”

Louis waves behind him offhandedly as he continues walking through a throng of people, before disappearing completely.

“Guess he really wants to talk to her.” Zayn chuckles, shrugging his shoulders.

“He has always been extremely protective over Niall.” Harry laughs fondly, shaking his head. “He loves him.”

“Yup.” Niall beams proudly. “He can talk all the shit he wants, but at the end of the day, he loves me. I know it, he knows it, and he can only deny it in his dreams.”

“What’s not to love?” Liam smiles.

“Exactly Li, exactly.” Niall agrees, slinging an arm over Liam’s shoulder and leaning on him.

“Well gents, as lovely as it’s been to catch up on your love lives, I’m going to go find my husband.” Harry announces, backing away from the group.

“Ok, but really quick!” Liam stops Harry with a light touch. “How good does it feel to finally get to
call him that?”

A bright, dimpled smile spreads slowly across Harry’s proud face. “Sooo fucking good.”

Harry shuffles through the reception hall, following the path he thinks Louis might have taken, until he feels a small tap to his shoulder.

“Harry?”

Harry turns around, slowing his steps to meet his always timely boss, his face remains neutral at he blinks at her several times in question.

“Um…you’re wedding service was really lovely.” Melissa compliments slowly, shifting her eyes nervously. “I just…I want you to know that um…I’m genuinely happy for you both.”

“Thanks.” Harry answers concisely, starting to take a few steps back.

Suddenly, Melissa throws her arms around him, closing the space between them and pulling him in for a friendly hug. Harry remains completely still, hands at his sides not hugging her back.

“I wish you all the best truly. And…um…I’m sorry.” She admits quietly against him, not one for apologies of any kind. “For um…yeah…I’m sorry.”

After a few moments of silence, Harry cautiously lifts his arms and hugs her back briefly. “Thank you for coming, Melissa.” He answers kindly before pulling back. He nods at her once in acknowledgment of her apology and proceeds to turn around and walk away.

Harry walks around aimlessly, greeting a few other guests along the way as she searches for Louis.

“Uncle Harry!” A blur of dark brown curls comes crashing into his leg, holding onto his lower limbs for dear life.

“Nettie!” Harry crouches down to greet her, drawing her in for a hug. “How’s my favorite niece?”

“I’m your only niece, silly!” Nettie giggles, pinching Harry’s cheeks with her small hands.

“Yes, but that doesn’t mean you’re not my favorite little munchkin!” Harry tickles her affectionately, Nettie squirming and screeching in his arms.

“Ok ok! I’m your favorite!” Nettie laughs as Harry continues tickling her tummy. Ever since she was born they’ve had a tightknit bond. Often referred to as his ‘mini-me’, Nettie mirrors Harry’s personality to almost alarming levels, even possessing the curls and dimples to match. Although her eyes are a pale bluish grey instead of green. One day, when he actually has other nieces and nephews, deep down, she will still always be his favorite girl.

“Uncle Harry, look!” Nettie bounces, clapping her hands against her beautiful ivory dress. “I’m a princess today! Look at my dress!”

“You’re the prettiest princess in all the land!” Harry awes dramatically, admiring her gown. “I love your pigtails! And you have a pink bow! Ah-mazing.”

“I had a flower crown. But I took it off cuz it made my head all scratchy.” Nettie pats her head and pokes out her lip.

“Well, that’s no good.” Harry shakes his head, reaching for her hair. “Can I borrow one of your bows?”
Nettie touches the bow on her head protectively, frowning cutely. “But…why?”

“Because I want to look as pretty as you! It’s my wedding day and you look better than me! How about that?”

“Oh no Uncle Harry, that’s impopsicle!”

“I think you mean impossible, love.” Harry corrects, grinning.

“That’s what I said, impopsicle!” Nettie jumps, throwing her hands up.

“Alright you.” Harry laughs, poking her tummy.

“Where’s Uncle Lou?” Nettie looks around, confused.

“I don’t know! I’ve lost him somehow. You wanna help me find your Uncle Lou? I miss him so much that I might fall over and die!” Harry pretends to start collapsing, closing his eyes and clutching at his heart as if he is on the verge of death.

“Don’t die, Uncle Harry!” Nettie screams, attempting to push his head back up. “I’ll die if you die! And then Mummy will die! And Nana will die! We gotta find Uncle Lou!”

Harry peaks one eye open at her. “Alright, I’ll hoist you up onto my shoulders so you can look for him, ok?” He stands to his feet, looking down on her.

“Ok!” Nettle makes grabby hands, reaching up to Harry. “Up! Up! Up!”

Harry lifts her up and perches her over his shoulders, holding onto her legs as they search for Louis.

“Uncle Lou! Uncle Louuu, where are you?” Nettie shouts in her small voice from Harry’s shoulders. Uncl—Oh! I see him! Go that way!”

“This way?” Harry purposely goes in the opposite direction, turning them around to the way they came from.

“No! Uncle Harry! No!” Nettie laughs, tugging softly at Harry’s hair and pointing towards Louis a few meters away. “That way!”

“Ooh ok!” Harry sighs dumbly. “Silly me!”

They approach Louis finally, and Harry sets Nettie back down on the floor. Louis must hear her little shouts and squeals because he spins around and drops down to his heels with his arms wide and ready for her, smiling happily.

“Uncle Lou!” Nettie shouts with glee, running and throwing her small arms around his neck. “We found you!”

“Nettie, my little lovebug!” Louis wraps his arms around her warmly. “How are you, darling?”

“Good now. Uncle Harry was very very scared.”

“Was he?” Louis peeps up at Harry from his crouched position, who is grinning down at him.

“Yes, very very very. He said if we didn’t find you he’d die!” Nettie throws her hands down, and makes her eyes as wide as they can go.
Louis gasps in dramatic shock. “Well, we can't have that, can we? Thank you for your help little missy, you’re my hero!” Louis kisses Nettie on the cheek then stands to kiss Harry in greeting.

“Eww! Yucky!” Nettie slaps a hand over her eyes.

“Nettie, your dress! It’s beautiful! Do a little spin for me, love.” Louis encourages, making a spinning motion with his hand.

“I’m a princess!” Nettie sings, spinning around in small circles.

“And I heard that you did such a good job today as flower girl!”

“I was very very scared cuz there were so many strange people.” Nettie frowns, rocking adorably on her heels. “But Dory made me feel better.”

“There you are, Nettie.” Gemma approaches them with her hands outspread. “I’ve looked everywhere for you, gumdrop. I see you’ve found your Uncles.”

“Hi Mummy. Yes, I have and I'm not leaving them!” Nettie grabs both of their hands and holds them tightly, one clutched in each of her small fists.

“Well, I think they have other people they have to see. It is their wedding, plus, you need to change your dress before you dirty it up with cake.”

“No, I'm a princess!” Nettie asserts defiantly, holding a handful of the skirt of her dress in her teeny hands.

“Well, if you're a princess, then I'm a queen, and the queen says the dress has to come off.” Gemma says, placing her hands on her hips.

Nettie pouts, gazing up at Harry. “Then what does that make Uncle Harry?”


“Heeey.” Harry whines slowly, scrunching his face.

Nettie frowns, turning her head to look up at Louis next. “What about Uncle Lou?”

“The poor fool who fell for the jester’s lame jokes.” Gemma replies easily, still grinning.

Louis shrugs nodding his head agreeably. “They are pretty bad.”

“No, no, no, no, no! Uncle Harry is a king and so is Uncle Lou, no!” Nettie disagrees, repeatedly shaking her head, and waving her arms.

“Allright, then they are both kings, but not in our castle.” Gemma amends. “In our castle I’m the queen and your father is a king and you little princess will take off that dress.”

“No Mummy! Not my princess dress! No!” Nettie cries, hiding behind Harry’s legs.

“Gems, not the princess dress!” Harry pouts, batting his eyelashes. “Pleeease.”

“Yeah, let the poor girl wear her dress.” Louis pleads, joining in with Harry and jutting his lip out. “Look at her, she’s gorgeous.”

“See! I’m gorgy-us!” Nettie adorably tries.
Gemma narrows her eyes at Louis and Harry. “You two need to stay out of this.”

“Mummy please!” Nettie cries again as Gemma reaches to take her hand.

“Nettie, you'll get cake all over it!”

“I won't! I won't!” Nettie shakes her head. “I'll be extra carey!”

“Careful.” Harry corrects with a giggle.

“Yes, that.” Nettie agrees, bounding on her toes.

“Anntoinette, it has to come off!” Gemma asserts, in a warning motherly tone.

“No! Then I won’t be a princess anymore!”

Harry bends down to her level, placing his hands affectionately on her small waist. “Darling, do you trust me as king?”

Nettie nods, gaze cast to her toes, sucking on her lip.

“Well, as king, I say that you should listen to your mum.” Harry suggests softly. “But...I also think you should be able to at least dance once more in your pretty dress.”

Nettie nods again, slowly lifting her head.

Harry extends one hand to her. “Can I have this dance, Princess Nettie?”

Nettie grins, taking his large hand in hers as best she can. “Why yes, my King Uncle Harry.”

Harry laughs, kissing her cheek. “Ok, but promise me after our dance you’ll listen to the queen.”

Nettie looks down at the floor and pouts again, rocking back and forth and running her tiny hands affectionately over her dress. She lifts one hand and wiggles her finger at Harry, gesturing for him to come closer. Nettie leans over and whispers in Harry’s ear.

When she’s done, Harry pulls back and nods at Nettie before standing to his feet.

“So she’ll take off the dress…but she not only wants to dance with me, she also wants to dance with both of us.” He nods to Louis, next to him. “Together.”

“I want both of my kings to dance with me while I’m still a princess.” Nettie explains, placing her hands on her hips.

“You’ll always be a princess, baby girl.” Louis smiles down affectionately at her. “But alright, whatever the gorgeous princess wants. I’ll wait right here till your ready for me.”

Harry and Nettie smile cheerfully with nearly the same expression on their faces. They turn around together and Harry guides Nettie onto the illuminated floor to dance.

“He's so good with her, you both are, really.” Gemma smiles as she watches them begin to dance out on the floor. “You’ll make such wonderful fathers one day.”

Louis leans on Gemma, resting an arm on her casually. “You think so?”

“Yeah, one hundred percent. I’m honestly already jealous of your kids.” Gemma admits, shifting her
gaze to Louis. “They’ll have two of the most loving dads anyone could ask for.”

“Thanks, Gem.” Louis smiles appreciatively. “And I’ve told you a million times, but you truly are an astounding mother. I don’t even know how you do it.”

“Well...I’ve got my hands full with that little rascal already and…” Gemma pauses midsentence. “Want to know a secret?”

“Oh, I love secrets, you know that.”

Gemma laughs, nodding her head. “Well...I’ve got my hands full with that little rascal already and…” Gemma pauses midsentence. “Want to know a secret?”

“Yeah! Really!” Gemma smiles, placing her hands on her stomach. “Try not to tell Harry though, at least not yet. He’ll start treating me weird again and I’d like to avoid that as long as possible. I learned my lesson last time.”

“Understandable.” Louis nods chuckling. “He can be a bit…”

“It’s ok...I won’t make you speak ill of your new husband.” Gemma smiles, patting Louis’ shoulder. “But my brother can be overbearing as fuck sometimes.”

Louis barks out a surprised laugh. “You said it. Not me.”

“Gotta love him though.”

“Always.” Louis grins, watching Harry do a weird chicken dance with Nettie on the dance floor, which should be horribly embarrassing, but is somehow endearing. “He only means well.”

“Looks like they’re ready for you.” Gemma points to the dancing duo out on the floor. Harry, although a full grown man, bounds up and down enthusiastically, calling for Louis, bearing no real difference from the four-year-old bouncing next to him. He is essentially one in the same with his little giddy niece.

"Guess it's my time to shine." Louis laughs, making his way out on the floor, surrounded by other dancing guests, friends and family alike.

The three of them dance happily, Harry and Louis swinging a giggling Nettie around between their bodies. Once they've had their fun, Nettie goes back to her mother, as promised, and the newlywed couple retreat towards the front of the room where their exquisite six-tier wedding cake sits.

Since they were so terribly conflicted over cake flavors, each tier of their wedding cake is made up of a completely different flavor. The baker said that since no one can tell from the outside, it wouldn’t be much of a problem to make each layer different, basically giving them an ever so lovely, six-tier, incognito, rainbow cake.

“Ehh...so what are you feeling? I don’t know where we should we cut first. I think the order is red velvet, orange cream, lemon, Dulce de leche, chocolate, and lastly vanilla.” Harry recites as they stare at the tall cake before them. “So which one? It’s like we just prolonged the problem.”

“Mmm.” Louis hums contemplatively, sucking on his teeth as he eyes the cake.

“They all still sound so good!” Harry confesses, sighing. “I think I truly understand the meaning behind wanting to have your cake and eat it too.”
Louis giggles, slipping his hand around Harry’s middle and smiling up at him knowingly. “How about I help you out?”

“Aww, you’ll pick for me?” Harry swoons, kissing Louis’ forehead. “Thanks, babe.”

“I’ll do you one better. What if I said that I ordered six mini cakes to bring on our honeymoon?”

“Oh, you didn't!?” Harry gasps, grin spreading across his face slowly.

“I did!” Louis nods, beaming proudly. “I figured that we deserve to have our cake and eat it too. I mean…what is life if we don’t? And I’m sure we'll have plenty of fun with them.” He wiggles his eyebrows suggestively, giving Harry’s bum a quick pat.

“Oh, how I love you.” Harry sighs contently. “You know how I feel about you and chocolate. Or you bathed in chocolate, specifically.”

“Oh I think I do know a little bit about that.” Louis nods knowingly, leaning closer to Harry, mouth hovering ever so close to Harry’s as he presses their bodies firmly together. “I particularly wish I knew more about it right at this very moment.”

“Mmm I’m sure you do.” Harry gives Louis’ bum a quick teasing squeeze before turning towards the cake and picking up the silver cake knife. “But we have a cake to cut.”

“Will my torment never cease?” Louis groans, adjusting himself slightly.

Harry smirks. “So bottom tier of the cake then? Since it doesn’t really matter anymore and all.”

“Bottoms good.” Louis sighs heavily. “At least some bottom can finally be happy and at peace, knowing that it’s actually been enjoyed and cherished.”

Harry bursts with laughter at Louis’ simple sexual innuendo, eyes creased with amusement.

“Unlike yours…or mine.” Louis continues dryly, reaching for the knife held weakly in Harry’s grasp.

They slice through the cake together, hand over hand, cutting a perfect slice of the bottom tier vanilla cake. Harry and Louis sit back at their table and lovingly feed each other cake. Harry eating his purposely in a seductive manner, only serving to taunt and frustrate Louis further. Louis tries desperately to grope Harry under the table a few times, but Harry swats Louis’ grabby hands away and laughs teasingly.

“You’re a menace to society.” Louis grumbles, giving up on his efforts to get in Harry’s pants.

Harry grins around the fork in his mouth, sucking it back and forth in his mouth rhythmically while staring at Louis, a moan escapes from his as he tips his head.

“Nope. This is actually fucking disrespectful.” Louis drops his fork and stands from the table, holding a champagne glass. “I’ll be back.”

“Alright Lou.” Harry waves his fork at Louis innocently, as he crosses the room towards a seemingly specific table.

Harry continues to suck on the cake loaded utensil in his hand, watching as Louis embraces and then proceeds to chat spiritedly with a woman across the hall. His body moves fluidly as he talks, bouncing and turning in simple yet astonishing and profound ways, captivating the very core of
Harry’s mind. From the sinful curves of his waist, to the wondrous arch of his toned back, to the mesmerizing dip just north of his bum, Harry’s imagination runs wild with a sudden and earnest lust, body burning with uncontrollable desire.

All ideas of self control, all notions of restraint and practiced reserve are instantly thrown to the wind, banished by the wayside. Before he even realizes it, Harry is striding purposefully over to where Louis is standing.

Once Harry reaches Louis, he slinks his arms around his midriff from behind. "Um…can I borrow him for a moment?" He asks an older woman sweetly, that he only now recognizes to be Suzy from the quaint little ice cream shop he found Louis in oh, so long ago.

Louis cranes his neck, leaning back against Harry’s weight. He places one of his arms over both of Harry’s and smiles contently as he sips his champagne.

“By all means hun.” Suzy smiles cheerfully, eyeing the two of them warmly. “He's all yours.”

“So nice to see you, Suzy love. It's been far too long.” Louis breaks away from Harry momentarily to embrace her, kissing her cheek. “Thank you so much for coming.”

“Of course, my dear. Anything for you.” Suzy nods, squeezing Louis hand once before shooing them off. “Now off you go!”

Harry waves kindly at her before grabbing Louis’ hand, yanking him rapidly to the far corner of the reception hall behind an illuminated decorative tree.

“Harry, what?!” Louis laughs, sloshing his champagne everywhere as he teeters behind Harry. “What is it? Where are we going?”

“I can't anymore.”

“Can't what?”

“I can't wait!” Harry exclaims, jumping up as if he’s on fire.

“Oh, look who can't keep it together now, Mr. Romance himself.” Louis grins, chuckling under his breath.

“Yes, hello it’s me, it’s me.” Harry nods repeatedly, waving his hand in mocking introductory hello. “I’m horny and semi-hard and I can’t wait anymore.”

“What?” Louis asks, holding a taunting hand to his ear. “What was that? I just didn’t quite hear you over the sound of my own anguish. One more time for me, love.”

“I can’t wait anymore!” Harry shouts again.

“I find that very interesting.” Louis strokes his chin contemplatively. “Very, very interesting.”

“Hmm…a man who thought he was wise once told me…and I quote: ‘absence…makes…the…heart…grow…fonder.’” Louis drags out every single word mockingly, as if he is deeply moved by these words, still holding his hand to his chin. “Mm mm mm doesn’t that quote just give you chills?”

“Stop.”
“I didn’t do a damn thing. You brought this upon yourself. I’m just an innocent victim in your cruel games.”

“Louehhh.” Harry throws his head back and sighs, dragging out Louis’ name in need as he rocks back and forth.

“Yes, love?” Louis asks, abominably sweet, voice soft. “What do you want?”

“Everything!” Harry cries, lifting his head up, hands dragging down his face in suffering.

“Aw, I know, I know, poor poor baby.” Louis pouts, patting Harry’s cheek mockingly. “Tell me about it.”

“Oh god, baby please!” Harry whines, shoulders sagging as he closes his eyes and reaches out blindly and desperately for Louis. “It’s you! I need you now! And fuck! You’re ass in…that…fucking…suit…we have to GO!”

“My ass does look pretty good in it right?” Louis does a little teasing shake, lifting the hem of his suit jacket to proudly display his bum. He raises an eyebrow and purposely drops his champagne glass to the ground. “Oops, how clumsy of me.” Louis makes an unnecessary spectacle of bending down in front of Harry, ass manipulatively rubbing up against his crotch, creating a steady friction.

“Shit!” Harry hisses, pupils beginning to dilate. “Louis stop! Fuck! I’m actually burning! Let’s fucking go!”

“Oh, you’re burning?” Louis scuffs dramatically, standing up straight. “Please, you don’t even know the meaning of the word. I’ve been talking about being bathed in the flames of a thousand suns for hours and you just taunted me like the tease you are. My oh my…how the tables have turned.”

“Baby, that’s was earlier...this is now! I’ve run out of strength. I can’t wait anymore! I want you.” Harry begs earnestly. “I want you so bad, it physically hurts.”

“And people in hell want ice water…but…”

“Then be my ice water! I’m in hell!” Harry whimpers, scrubbing his hands over his face again.

Louis juts his hip out, placing a hand on his waist, considering Harry. “Just admit this whole absence makes the heart fonder shit was a mistake and we can go.”

Harry tosses his head back again and groans heavily, running his hands through his hair in exasperation. “Ok...I’m sorry for teasing you. I’ll admit it wasn’t a very nice thing to do. Especially not for so long.”

“And?” Louis raises an eyebrow, waiting for Harry to continue.

“And...absence is dumb and we should never partake in it again. I’m sorry for making you wait, I learned my lesson.” Harry admits, talking faster than Louis ever remembers him talking in the past seven years. “Can we go and fucking consummate our marriage now? PLEASE!”

“Alright alright, someone’s thirsty, damn.” Louis raises his hands in surrender. “To be honest, you had me at ‘I can’t wait’.”

“I want you...in this ring...and...only this ring.” Harry grasps Louis’ ring finger and sucks it slowly into his mouth. “NOW.”
“Fuck yes, Harry, finally.” Louis sighs, with urgent want. “But where? I mean I’m open to anything really at this point but—”

Harry reaches into his back pocket and pulls out a key card, pleased grin consuming his face.

Louis gasps, snatching the card from Harry’s hand. “You got another room for tonight? But I thought we were gonna go home first and catch our flight tomorrow morning?”

“Well… I thought ahead and I figured we wouldn’t make it home anyway. It’s hours away. That was never happening. We would never ever make it.” Harry laughs as if that is the biggest joke of all time. “So I brought all our luggage here, so that we can just go straight to the airport in the morning.”

“God, I fucking love you.” Louis kisses Harry deeply, tongues seeking wildly, almost losing themselves in just a kiss. “I’ve never been more in love. I was ready to take you down on the dance floor at the expense of our guests.”

“Wow, that could be… a bit much.” Harry chuckles, breathless.

“Sometimes you just gotta let the exhibitionist in you shine bright.” Louis laughs, actually sounding serious. “Desperate times call for desperate measures. But, oh well. I guess we won’t need to resort to that this time. Let’s go.”

“Wait… but… won’t we be missed?”

“Do I look like a man who cares?” Louis frowns, taking Harry’s hand. “Let’s get the fuck out of here.”

“Once I get you, I’m not coming back out here.” Harry asserts as they start walking. “It’s over. So over.”

“Even better.” Louis grins, tugging Harry along towards the exit.

Abruptly, Harry stops in his tracks, biting his lip anxiously. “But we can’t just leave our own wedding.”

“Oh, but we can and we will.” Louis assures, attempting to drag an un-budging Harry. “Everyone knows the reception is just for the guests anyway. We did our part, we paid our dues, we are free in my book.”

Harry keeps his feet planted on the ground as Louis pulls on him tirelessly. “Louis, we have to at least say goodbye.”

“Ugh! God! Fine!” Louis grunts, releasing Harry and tossing his own hands up. “We’ll make our final rounds, then we are peacin’ the fuck out of here. Got it?”

“Got it.” Harry nods curtly. “So how should we do this?”

“Alright, here’s the plan.” Louis claps his hands together and leans close to Harry as if it’s top secret. “We’ve already acknowledged all the major people, so it’s really just the randies left… you know… coworkers and distant family, acquaintances, who I’m still not quite sure how they got here or why we are paying for them to eat… but whatever.”

Harry laughs in agreement. “Ok, yeah… that’s true.”

“Ok, so we are going to split up and knock this shit out. I’ll take this half and you take that half.”
Louis points to two separate sides of the large reception hall. “Rendezvous in precisely thirty minutes at the ice sculpture. Deal?”

“Deal.” Harry leans over and plants a heated kiss on Louis lips, searing their mouths together. “I love when you make plans. It’s so fucking hot.”

“This is a matter of life and death, babe.” Louis states gravely. “It’s no longer a game.”

“Agreed.” Harry nods, pecking Louis lips once more.

“Thirty minutes. No more, hopefully less.” Louis reminds. “Just say thank for coming, yada yada yada, hello, goodbye blah blah blah, hit them with that one, two, three, gone and move your ass on out.”

“Ok, I get it.” Harry laughs as they start to back away from each other. “Thirty minutes.”

Harry and Louis split up and zoom through their reception, hugging guests and paying their dues, trying their best not to get looped into any long conversations or persistent dance propositions. After a little more than thirty minutes, they make it safely to the ice sculpture, feeling accomplished.

“Done!” Harry exclaims excitedly as he meets up with Louis at the sculpture

“Done!” Louis high fives Harry triumphantly. “Let’s blow this popsicle stand!”

“So we can blow each other!” Harry jumps, clapping his hands happily.

“That part was already understood. You didn’t have to say it out loud Harold, damn!” Louis condemns teasingly. “Have some fucking class! There are children around. Fuck.”

“Oh shut up.” Harry giggles. “You know good and well those were next words coming out of your mouth.”

“You can prove nothing.” Louis shrugs, grinning naughtily. “I’m dignified and tasteful so...”

“Or tasty.”

“Will you never learn?”

“Mmm…Teach me, baby. Teach me.” Harry moans huskily, closing his eyes and rubbing hands over his own body.

“Oh my god, let’s go!” Louis grabs Harry hand and drags him briskly out of the side exit of the reception hall.

What starts out as a fast paced walk, turns into a run as they sprint madly across the resort, hand in hand, laughing breathlessly and happily until they make it to the elevators of the lobby.

“You’re too fast with those long legs.” Louis gestures to Harry’s lower half as they step into the elevator.

“Well…I could carry you.” Harry suggests, pressing the button for their floor.

“Oh no, no.” Louis shakes his head, leaning against the wall of the elevator. “I’m good, thanks.”

“Oh yes, yes.” Harry mimics Louis in opposite. “I'm carrying you over the threshold anyway.”
“Like hell you are!”

“Oh, but I am, little Lou.” Harry says, as the elevator pings, stopping at their floor.

“Fine, if it'll make you happy...” Louis sighs, holding up his hands like a child. “Sike! You thought!” He sprints out of the elevator doors, taking off swiftly down the hallway.

“Louis!” Harry calls fondly, before running after him through the halls, following the echo of Louis’ incessant cackling.

Louis unlocks the door to their suite, running inside quickly as Harry rushes in behind him, chasing him into the master bedroom.

“You know what I wanna do?” Louis questions, facing Harry and toeing off his shoes.

“Get naked.” Harry answers instantly without a doubt, following suit and slipping out of his shoes as well.

“Yes that, of course that. But first...” Louis jumps on bed, grabbing a pillow before standing up straight, cocking one eyebrow in challenge.

“Pillow fight.” Harry grins, amused. “Fight to the death.”

“You always skip so many levels!” Louis laughs, eyes crinkled with amusement. “It’s always straight to ‘fight to death’ with you!”

“It’s either live or die.” Harry grabs a pillow and joins Louis atop the bed. “There are no in-betweens in war.” He smacks Louis with his pillow first, taking him unfairly by surprise.

“Dimpled bastard.” Louis retaliates, hitting Harry square in the face with his pillow.

They jump up and down on the king size mattress, each holding a fluffy pillow in their grasp and whacking each other playfully with it, giggling manically and having the time of their life.

Eventually, they collapse down on the bed, Harry falling down on top of Louis as they continue to laugh gleefully.

Harry’s laughter dies down as a grin grows widely across his dimpled face. His hair dangles down around him as he stares at Louis, eyes full of adoration. “Baby, we’re married.” He whispers in the silence, tracing the sides of Louis’ face softly.

Louis gazes up in pure awe of the man before him, biting his lip as it curves into a smile. “Proper husbands.”

“Ooh say it again.” Harry requests, eyelids fluttering closed at the always welcome sound of Louis’ voice.

“Husband.” Louis repeats slowly, leaning up to suck the underside of Harry’s jaw. “My husband. My beautiful, sexy husband, whom I love ever so.”

“I don’t think I’ll ever get tired of hearing you say that.”

Louis cradles Harry’s face in his hands, searching his eyes openly. “Then I’ll never stop saying it.”

Harry turns his head and kisses the palms of Louis’ hands rested against his cheeks. “Took us seven years, but we made it, Lou.”
“Yeah love, we did make it.”

“Finally.”

|||||

Chapter End Notes

....perhaps if I was going for unabashedly cheesy (which maybe I am)...I could say that they..maybe...Faked It Until They Made It hehe :))

and to think this whole thing was birthed from a simple interview. I think it turned out to be a pretty alright decent story in the end. I can't believe it's over though *sheds tear*
I've had the best time writing this and I'm so thankful for all of you who read it and especially to all the people who were basically there since it started. I’ve loved all your feedback and messages and support and I’m gonna miss it all so much!

come be my friend on tumblr @avocadolouie
or don't if you don't want to of course, no pressure...or maybe you already have enough friends or whatever... either way, I respect it, way to keep it real fam :)

****update 8.25.16
so thanks to all the lovely, beautiful, inquiring messages from all of you gorgeous people, I've finally decided to write a little follow up to this fic. I'm not sure how long it'll be or when it'll be done but I'm gonna do it :) and I just want to say that I'm so incredibly honored and touched by all of the comments and messages encouraging me to add to this random little story of mine. I love you all :))

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!