Unbelievers

by isthatyoularry

Summary

It’s Louis’ senior year, and he’s dead set on doing it right. However, along with his pair of cleats, a healthy dose of sarcasm and his ridiculous best friend, he’s also got a complicated family, a terrifyingly uncertain future, and a mortal enemy making his life just that much worse. Mortal enemies “with benefits” was not exactly the plan.

Or: The one where Louis and Harry definitely aren’t friends, and football is everything.

Notes
I'm so happy to finally share this! I haven't posted anything in almost nine months, which feels so strange, but I'm finally back! I've been working on this for a few months, leaving it and coming back, but now it's finally (almost) finished. Hopefully you will enjoy it :)

Huge thanks to Vicky who makes sure my spelling and grammar stays in lane. Thank you, I love you.

--> WATCH TRAILER

The title is from the song Unbelievers by Vampire Weekend, and if you want, here are a few songs you can listen to to get into the mood:
I Slept With Someone In Fall Out Boy And All I got Was This Stupid Song Written About Me - Fall Out Boy
Gives You Hell - The All-American Rejects
Dirty Little Secret - The All-American Rejects
New Perspective - Panic! At The Disco
Unbelievers - Vampire Weekend
As usual you can find me here:
Twitter: isthatyoularry
Tumblr: isthatyoularry

**Added notes:** I've chosen to adapt the American school system to this fic for different reasons. High School has four years and Louis is in his last (senior year). However he will be going to University (as in the British system) after High School. Lottie is in the year before starting the first year of HS. Just wanted to point this out for easier reading.

**Disclaimer:** None of this is real. Nothing in this is meant to imply anything, nor does this reflect my personal beliefs about anything or anyone. This is fiction.

**Translations:**
[Italian](#)

**AS OF JUNE 2016 NO NEW TRANSLATIONS ARE PERMITTED!**

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)
"Fuck, you're tight," Louis groans.

"Oh, really? I thought this would be easy considering I've never done this before," Harry breathily shoots back. "Fucking moron."

"Are you going to shut up and let me fuck you?" Louis snaps. The floor is cold, but Harry's body is radiating heat from everywhere, and it's making Louis even more frustrated.

"Please, do go on." Harry rolls his eyes, but his scowl forms into a wince and the annoyed quirk of in his mouth disappears as it shapes into a small 'o' when Louis hardens his grip on his hips, and pushes into his body. "Shit," he winces, and his hand goes to clutch at Louis' bicep, and Louis has to go down to rest on his elbow at his side.

"Don't tell me it hurts, love," Louis says. "You're the one who insisted not to be on your knees."

"Oh, excuse me if I – uhh." Harry's nails sink into Louis' skin as he bottoms out.

"Son of a bitch," Louis swears, immediately slapping his hand off.

"You're one to talk," Harry hisses, his lower leg wrapping over Louis' calf. "Anyway – " He gasps as Louis pulls out and then slowly thrusts into him again. Harry's so unbearably tight, and the heat all around him almost makes Louis dizzy. He leans on his elbow and breathes heavily, fingers clutching around Harry's hip.

"You could've at least warned me, you asshole," Harry exhales.

"Sorry," Louis grits out, concentrating on slowly work in and out. "Now, what were you saying?" he asks, as snarky as he can manage.

"Yes, um." He bites down on his lip hard, and Louis can't help but feel quite satisfied. He's rented his mortal enemy speechless. "I was saying that excuse me if I'd like to see the face of the person who’s the first to fuck me."

"Yeah," Louis breathes, rolling his eyes as much as he can while, you know, fucking somebody. "Because you're so bloody in love with me."

Harry actually laughs, and it causes a ripple in their bodies, a trickle of something (not sparks) to shoot up Louis' spine. He gasps against Harry's neck.

"Stop laughing," he orders him.

"Why? It was the funniest joke I've ever heard."

"Are you going to shut the fuck up while I fuck you?" Louis complains, thrusting into him harshly. He does it roughly on purpose, and Harry's body slides up a few inches on the floor. He gasps, hissing against Louis' neck.

"Thanks." Sarcasm.

"Welcome."
He thrusts into him, and he can feel Harry's body going less stiff and more responsive and willing as the time passes by.

"Is it good yet?" Louis asks, voice softer, because he's not a total monster.

"Mm-hmm," is all he says, but he's locking his legs behind Louis' thighs, so Louis supposes that’s answer enough.

He doesn't say anything else, and Louis picks up his pace in satisfaction. His fingers clutch at Harry's thigh, his other arm feeling a bit numb, as he's been leaning on it. Harry clenches around him, making Louis gasp and lose his grip, and his chest knocks into Harry's. He moans into his neck, feeling his sweaty skin against his cheek.

Harry's chuckle is not nice. "You know," he gets out between breaths. "If you come first, then I'm the one who fucked you."

Louis almost growls. Would he just be silent for once? He grips Harry's hips harshly and with his chest against Harry’s, he fucks him hard. It's deep, harsh and the only things coming out of Harry's mouth now are moans, hisses and heavy exhales. It's relentless, warm and sweaty. Harry's body gets more and more responsive underneath Louis’, squirming at every thrust, and when Louis changes his aim, his whole body jerks.

"Found it?" Louis smirks.

"Found it," Harry groans.

Louis chuckles and then they're back into it. Louis keeps aiming for it, not always getting it, but judging by Harry's creased forehead and open mouth he assumes he does more often than not. Harry's brows are furrowed like he's concentrating, and Louis can feel the pool of heat build in his gut.

He groans, cheek accidentally clashing into Harry's. The boy under him doesn't say anything though, and Louis realizes it's because he's biting his lip so hard it's white. "Harry, come on." He can't come first. It'd be too degrading. "Harry," he urges. "Come."

He doesn't, and Louis feels like slapping him a bit, but then again, when has Harry ever listened to a word Louis has said?

Louis takes matters into his own hands – literally – and he slips his hand down Harry's chest to his stomach. He can feel his muscles ripple and ribcage expand quickly under his hand. He finally reaches his cock, and with two sharp tugs, he's got Harry coming all over himself on the dirty floor of the locker room. Harry clenches around him so abruptly, that Louis can't keep quiet as he comes, too, inside of the other boy.

After that it's silent, only their rapid breaths echoing loudly in the room. Louis' on top of Harry, face buried in his neck, heaving out breaths against the crook of his shoulder. They lay there for a minute. It takes almost sixty seconds for their heart rates to slow, and come down from their orgasms.

Then Harry pushes Louis off. "Stop breathing on my neck. Ugh."

Louis rolls his eyes, sitting up and chucking the condom at the bin. It goes in, naturally.

Harry's already wiping himself off, and Louis hits him not too lightly in the arm. "My jersey. Really?"
Harry scoffs, throwing it at him and gets up from the floor. He stands there, looking obnoxious and full of unjustified pride.

Louis glares. "You were gonna shower anyway. Arse."

"I thought you liked my arse," Harry smirks. Louis balls up his dirty football jersey and throws it after him. He misses; Harry's already turned around and headed for the showers. The only thing satisfying about it is Harry's waddle.

" Fucking dick," Louis mutters.

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Louis doesn't even know how it happened. They were arguing on the football pitch, Coach yelling at them to stay after practice and talk it out, tired of their constant fighting. They did, and as expected it led nowhere.

They've always hated each other, is the thing. The first clash they had was when both of them wanted the same number on their jersey. Even though Louis had claim, Harry got it for some unbelievable reason. Louis had to watch his number, 17, get printed underneath a filthy "Styles" and he had to live by with the mortal and mere number 28.

Then there's the matter that Louis is the prime midfielder. He's the playmaker, ball distributer, and honestly the puppet master of the pitch. He runs the whole game, both defending and scoring, and without him his team would be nothing. He's practically the next Xavi Hernandez. It doesn't help, though, that Harry Styles is a striker – the best striker on the team, and Coach wants Louis to rather pass him the ball than score himself, and if Louis gets yelled at when he rather dribbles through the defenders himself than to do so, then that's something he’s willing to take because no way in hell is Harry going to take the crown from Louis and win the scoring league.

It didn't get better when the seniors graduated, including the team captain, and Coach named Harry and Louis co-captains for their senior year. Louis was in rage. Dammit, he’d worked his arse off to be captain. All those nights at the pitch after school, all the hard training and morning runs – his coach should see that he’s giving his all into this, considering if it doesn't involve a ball Louis despises working out.

It's early September now, and not even a month has passed since school started and Louis’ been co-captain with Harry. It's unbearable is what it is. Harry's got the worst fucking ideas (starting up yoga with the team on Saturday mornings, really?) and the fact that he's the most pretentious jerk to roam this planet does not help. Stupid long legs, disproportionately broad shoulders, and how does one manage to have a six-pack while sporting love handles? Christ’s sake! It's the granola, Louis swears on it.

Today, it was one of the usual fights.

"Why can't you get your head out of your fucking arse and pass me the ball for once, huh?" Harry growled, pushing through some of the teammates standing in the way.

"Oh, so you can miss the entire goal again? Like you did the last game?" Louis spat. It had been the last match of the previous season and they were down by one, in the final three minutes, and the bastard fucking missed the shot.

"Fuck you, Tomlinson. I was fucking tackled and you know it!"

"Stop blaming anything but yourself. You're just a pussy, aren't you?"
After that it escalated quite quickly. Now that he thinks about it, he's pretty glad Liam was there to rip Harry off his body before he punched him in the jaw. It's not fair to hit someone who's smaller and has a much prettier face, really.

Coach tried to speak with them, he really did, but after three years of hatred, verbal and physical combat, it's not that easy to just bury the hatchet. So when the boys were allowed to go back to take their showers, the rest of the team were already done and gone. Louis was fuming, throwing off his jersey on the floor in pure frustration. Harry wasn't better. The insults were showering down over both of them, and then Harry was gripping Louis' hips and they were getting off against each other on the floor. It was Harry's idea that Louis should fuck him. Louis' not really one to deny a free fuck, so.

Right now though, he's not sure why he would ever even consider doing something like that with Harry, the pretentious hipster moron that he is. Louis' not even gay to be honest. The only positivity he can think of right now is that they didn't kiss, so he didn't get any hipster bugs in his mouth at least.

Louis slams his locker shut, and then jumps back in horror when there's a face hiding behind it. He sighs when his heart rate has slowed down – it's Niall. Of course it is.

"What do you want?"

The blond arches a brow. "Really? Is that how you greet your best friend?"

Louis rolls his eyes, and starts strolling down the hallway. He hears Niall's footsteps behind him, his never ceasing rambling just floating past his ears. Honestly, the kid has a lot to say for someone with such a small set of opinions. Niall's smart, casual and likable; he's easygoing is the thing. And he won't ever stop talking.

"So, how did it go with the coach after practice?" Niall asks, as they reach the parking lot. It's not a surprise that he already knows. It's a small town, which equals a small high school, which in turn translates into 'news travel fast'. "I heard you and Styles got into it again."

"Ah," Louis hesitates. On one hand he got to fuck someone, but on the other he hates that person, so, "Fairly okay. Nothing new." Well.

"So you punched him in the face?"

Louis lets out a loud cackle as he unlocks the doors to his car and pulls the key out of the keyhole. "Nah. That happened just once."

"Twice."

"Whatever."

He opens his door to the driver's side, and is about to say goodbye to Niall when he sees the boy jumping into the passenger seat without hesitation. Louis gets in, arching a brow once he's inside.

"What are you doing?"

"You're driving me home." The 'duh' goes unsaid. "Well? What are you waiting for? Chop-chop."

Louis just shakes his head and starts the car with a hair-rising screech.

When they get home, Lottie's in the kitchen. She's pouring herself a glass of juice and Louis easily sneaks it from her and empties it before she's turned around again. She notices the empty glass and
just sends him an annoyed stare before pouring herself up some more.

Niall's by the door taking off his shoes, having decided in the very last minute (when Louis' car was right outside his house, *for God's sake*) that he was coming over to Louis' instead. He comes into the kitchen, immediately greeting Lottie with exaggerated hugs and kisses to her forehead.

She rolls her eyes, holding her glass far away from him not to spill. "Hi, Niall. Bye, Niall," she mutters and then trudges upstairs to her room. Niall laughs and opens the fridge, looking for something to eat.

"Niall, make me food," Louis pleads, flopping down on a chair by the dinner table and resting his feet on the one next to it.

"There's nothing in your fridge."


"When's your mum home?"

"She's not. Her shift's already started," he says. His mother works nights at the hospital, so it's usually up to Louis to make dinner for him and Lottie when she's not there. The twins live at Mark's most of the time, and only spend a couple a days at a time at home. It has its good parts; he doesn't have as much responsibility when his mother is working, but also the bad parts; he misses them.

Today it's better they're at Mark's, though. If there's no food then that means Louis has to go shopping or buy take out. Children should eat good food, and when Louis is in charge that's not going to happen. It's half past five, and Louis currently does not have the energy to go grocery shopping.

"Let's get pizza," Niall suggests. It's like one mind, really.

"You're driving."

"Fine."

Of course Lottie wants to come, because she doesn't trust Louis with something even as simple as buying pizzas. You'd think the fact that Niall's coming would be enough, considering he'd never hurt a crumb.

They take the car, Niall driving and Louis half sleeping in the passenger seat while Lottie's in the back. Niall decides the music even if it's only a five-minute drive and it's Louis' family's car, because apparently since he's "just as much part of the Tomlinsons as Louis" as he puts it, those facts are insignificant.

They pull up outside the parlor, walking inside discussing the toppings of which are edible with pineapple. It's highly irrelevant seeing as none of them would ever dream of getting pineapple on something as sacred as a pizza (Hello? Have some dignity). They're leaning against the counter as they wait, Louis resting on his elbows. He's tired, hasn't done his homework yet and he also has to go for a run tonight. He leans his face in the crook of his elbow.

On the other hand, he might skip that run. Too fucking tired.

They wait a few more minutes, Louis not picking up his head and just listening to Lottie and Niall bicker about something without relevance in their lives whatsoever. He hears when the door
chirms, new customers walking into the parlor. By the sound of it, it's a woman and a man, and they're talking in frustrated tones, their bickering seeming like it hasn't stopped for fifteen years. Louis is about to snap his head up and tell them to shut up because their fighting is giving him a headache, when the door chirms again and the next voice is the one that haunts his dreams. Well, okay, not really, but it's Harry.

"Have you ordered yet?" Harry's voice asks, and Louis frowns. He looks up, finding Harry talking to the bickering couple. Obviously, they're his parents. No wonder the boy's so uptight.

"No, sweetheart. What do you want?" The woman's voice softens considerably.

"I'll have the veggie one," Harry mutters. Typical, Louis thinks, rolling his eyes.

The boy is in a hoodie, just like Louis, and his eyes look tired and his hair’s disheveled. He's still waddling a little, and Louis smirks as he leans back against the counter, watching Harry walk out of the parlor again.

"Wasn't that Harry Styles?" Lottie asks. She's in eighth grade and doesn't even go to the town's high school yet, and still she knows who he is. It could have something to do with Louis always complaining about the boy and coming to her to tell her all about their fights, but most likely that's not the only reason.

"Yeah," Louis mutters.

"Hm, he's fit."

"Shut up, Lots."

"I mean he is," Niall says, objectively, and Louis scoffs. "I hear he's the favorite on the team."

"Yeah, alright," Louis laughs and rolls his eyes. Please. "When you're done talking shit, come out with the pizzas." He hands Lottie a few bills and trudges out the door, heading for the car. Naturally, he finds Harry leaning against his own. It's a shiny, black Range Rover, and probably cost more than Louis' entire house. Another reason not to like him; he's spoiled.

Harry's fiddling with his own fingers, looking nothing like when he's fuming, and trying to wrestle Louis to the ground. Louis goes to lean against the brick wall, exactly on the opposite side of the sidewalk, right in front of Harry.

"How's that waddle?" he asks, putting up a smirk on his face.

Harry's head snaps up in surprise, and his stance immediately shifts as he sees him. His face turns grimmer and he picks his head up, confidence suddenly littering his demeanor. "Why? Didn't know you cared so much about me."

"I thought you were the one who cared about me. You practically begged me to fuck you."

"I didn't beg," Harry says through his teeth. "And it was hardly any good either."

"Please," Louis scoffs, pushing off the wall and walking up to the other boy. He leans forward, holding up his chin just inches away from Harry's. "I fucked you into oblivion."

Now Harry is the one to scoff. "Don't flatter yourself." His hands go to Louis' shoulders, shoving him a few paces back. It's not that hard, and it only makes Louis roll his eyes.

"As if you wouldn't do it again," he grins. He arches a brow as Harry opens his mouth, but just as
he's about to say something the door to the pizza parlor opens, and Niall and Lottie come trudging out with two pizza cartons each in their arms.

Louis takes several steps back, and joins them as they walk by. He sends Harry a dark look that is reciprocated without hesitation, before he turns around and ignores Harry's presence completely.

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Louis doesn't really understand it, the Harry thing. He hates Harry, and Harry hates him. One moment Harry was spitting at Louis, and the next he was spitting on his fingers, opening himself up on the floor beneath him with lube he got from God knows where. Louis doesn't regret it per se, but he doesn't understand it. He wouldn't do it again.

Strangely, it doesn't seem to have affected their relationship at all. They still hate each other – that much was obvious last night outside the pizza place. Which is a good thing. Louis can't imagine life not hating Harry. No sneering in the hallway, no nasty comments in class, no threats during warm up, and no fights at half time. It's unimaginable.

Louis rolls over in bed Tuesday morning, the day after what will from now on be referred to as “the incident”. He groans into his pillow, the noise turning into a half scream before he remembers that his mother is sleeping. The scream turns back into a muffled moan, and he scrunches his eyes up for a second. Fucking school.

He rolls over again, sitting up, hair disheveled and eyes grim. He throws the duvet off and gets up. He stares at himself for a second through the mirror on the opposite wall, squinting his eyes at his tired profile for a moment. If he were a vampire, maybe he wouldn’t look like a fluffy pigeon each morning he woke up. He turns on his heel, and heads into the bathroom, leaving his beloved bed unoccupied.

His bed. Ah, his perfect bed. He doesn't have his own car like most of his classmates, he doesn't have a tv in his room, or a brand new computer, but he has his warm, big bed. They’re practically married the two of them.

He takes a shower, shaves, puts on his clothes, and packs his footy practice gear. He goes down to the kitchen, briefly greeting Lottie who's already sipping on her tea at the table. Louis makes himself some and puts it in a to-go cup, one from the large supply he and Niall stole from Costa a long time ago when they were bored. They're far from criminals, but Louis admits, it was rather exciting.

It's not really weird that they hate each other, he thinks as he sips, Harry and he. Literally everything is different about them. Louis' loud and says things without thinking, burning in the moment of heat. Harry is mostly quiet and reserved, gazing, and his words are biting like frost. Louis' smaller, shorter, and Harry’s shoulders are broad and he's tall. His eyes are deep green while Louis' are blue, his lips thin and Harry's mouth big and full. They should be living on different planets, honestly. God knows Louis’ life would be easier if they did.

He takes the car to school, dropping Lottie off first and then parking in his usual spot in the school lot. He wonders if there will be any noticeable changes as he walks into homeroom, but the lovely glare from the other side of the room when he walks in reassures him there aren’t. Ah, sweet sense of normalcy. And nobody seems to know he’s had sex with a boy.

He’s had sex with a boy.

If Harry even counts, which he doesn’t. Harry’s not even a boy. He looks like some kind of grown up man with a baby head. Kind of. In fact, Louis is forgetting it ever happened. Please, as
if he ever laid a hand on him.

“Lou,” Niall calls from the back of the room, and Louis saunters down the aisle to take the seat next to his. He leans back in his chair, crossing his arms as the teacher starts moaning about being on time, and for Niall not to act as if Louis actually was and stop disrupting class.

“When’s the English assignment due again?” Louis asks quietly, pursing his lips.

Harry’s chewing gum. It’s quite annoying. Frankly, it’s something that has disturbed Louis for the longest of time. He’s obnoxious even in the way he chews. Long stretches of his jaw, won’t keep his mouth shut and also talks like he’s the most important person in the world. As if people are supposed to have time to listen to his slow, stupid drawl.

“Next week,” Niall tells him. Louis’ eyes send daggers at the side of Harry’s head.

They go separate ways after first class, Tuesday being one of the few days Louis doesn’t have to endure Harry’s presence until football practice at the end of the day. The hours go by fine. Louis has lunch with Niall, Stan and a few guys from the team, and determinedly does not think about the fact that he’s fucked a boy – more precisely, the boy who’s sitting at the table with some of the school’s hipster types and another party of the team.

It’s weird, but only because Louis doesn’t feel weird. He should be fidgeting in his seat, contemplating his every move and crying on his bed, wondering why he can get it up when it’s a bloke grinding on him. He doesn’t, though, because he’s not pathetic. He just doesn’t feel weird. Nothing’s changed, nobody knows, and he and Harry still hate each other. It’s not like they’re going to do it again. Life can go on.

“We should buy like fifty bars of KitKat and a ton of popcorn and just die on Sunday,” Niall says. “It’ll be expensive, but worth it.”

“Can’t. The twins are coming over for the day.” Two months ago Louis would have said yes and brought the milk with a season of Breaking Bad, but not anymore. “And also, diet.”

“Ugh,” Niall complains. “This is why I’m not on the footy team. I couldn’t hold a diet for even two hours.”

Louis scoffs. “You could, you just don’t want to.”

Niall shrugs. “True.”

Before football practice, Louis usually gets going by running two laps around the pitch. It gets his blood pumping, brings him into focus, and he takes the time to contemplate what he needs to think about and concentrate on during the next practice session. It’s a strategy he’s been working with since the start of season. He uses the time to contemplate what skills he needs to improve, what techniques he needs to work on, what drills they should run during practice, and mostly also what the most efficient way to shut down Harry’s stupid fucking suggestions is.

Louis’ still jogging around the pitch when a few of the other lads from the team start trickling onto the pitch, kicking around a ball before practice starts. Louis’ just passing the bleachers and comes to a stop by the gang, picking up his water bottle from the case on the bench, and he spots Harry. He’s on his way from the locker rooms, bag thrown over his shoulder, trudging slowly like he’s got all of the time in the world. He should be first on the field like Louis – he’s co-captain, isn’t he? Jesus, show some respect and responsibility!

Harry’s nearly on the field soon enough, and Louis is about to say something when he hears someone call him from behind. He turns, frowning, vaguely recognizing the girl who’s waving at
him from the bleachers.

“Hi, Louis!” she calls, smiling and waving before she turns to her girlfriends and giggles, sitting down next to them. It’s not unusual that people watch the team practice. People – mostly girls – sit on the bleachers studying or chatting in the sun as the lads work out, and it’s definitely not uncommon that people say hi to him or wish him good luck before games. This girl though, he doesn’t quite understand why she’s talking to him, specifically.

He wrinkles his nose slightly, waving back stiffly. Her name is Natalie, or Nicole, or something in the likes. She’s one of the people who tend to follow Harry’s squad around. Why would somebody genuinely want to be around him? Louis shudders. Who would want to listen to his words? Who’d want to date him? Who would even want to touch him – okay. Yes. Well.

Louis turns around again, facing the pitch, and immediately he’s locking eyes with the aforementioned moron. Louis arches his brows in annoyance. “What are you looking at, Styles?” he snaps.

Harry only glares and turns away.

Louis ignores him for the rest of practice. They do it like they always do. Louis runs practice Mondays and Tuesdays, Harry Wednesdays and Thursdays. On Fridays they usually have matches, so Coach runs a lighter session with them in the morning before school starts. Today’s Louis’ day though, and even if Harry struts around giving pointers and encouragements, he’s in charge. They’d been meant to run all practices together, but Coach let them split it up when he realized they couldn’t agree on anything, ever.

Louis decides they all should run the drills the last fifteen minutes, and all of the boys groan.

“Come on,” Harry says, jogging up to him. He’s in the red training jersey with black shorts just like the rest of the team, and he’s towering over Louis slightly. “You made them run ten laps yesterday. Give them a break.”

Louis absolutely despises feeling small, and so he nails his eyes on Harry, glowering with his jaw clenched. “How do you expect the boys to play ninety minutes when they’re in bad shape?” He turns to the other lads. “You, go run. Now!”

“The season’s just started,” Harry says once the boys have run off. “You can’t go all in from the start! You need to build it up, the body –“

“Shut the fuck up, Styles. I don’t need your biology lessons. They should be in shape, and they should keep their fitness up outside of practice on their own. If we want to fucking win this season every single person needs to be in shape.” Louis spits out the words angrily. They have to win. They have to. There’s no other way.

Harry opens his mouth, but Louis cuts him off. “You can do your freaking yoga and granola stretches or whatever asparagus shit you like on Wednesdays, but today I run practice and you better start the drills before I snap your neck.”

Louis exhales heavily in frustration, kicking off to join the team and leaving Harry behind.

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“Does it mean you have a disorder if your fingernails don’t grow?”

“What the fuck, Niall.”
“Serious question.”

“No.”

“Is that an answer to my question, or you being your natural, rude self?”

“Fuck you.”

“They haven’t grown at all since I last cut them. Like, yesterday.”

“Shut the fuck up.”

“I feel like you’re in a bad mood today. Do I not offer you enough comfort in life anymore? I realize I’m lacking a bit of satire for your taste these days, but as I said, I might have a disorder and until I’m cured you’ll just have to deal. How’s the football going? And also, should I go to the school nurse? Hmm, I think I might.”

Louis turns to glare at Niall, where he’s sitting on the other side of the table. They’re in the school library the next day, where it’s meant to be quiet. “The school nurse? I swear to God, Niall.”

“What? It could be a lethal problem. I need my nails for… stuff.”

“Like getting food out of your teeth?”

Niall looks at him. “Do I have chocolate between my teeth?”

“Fuck off.” Louis sighs, turning back to his algebra. He’s trying to study, and Niall is attempting to annoy him to death. It doesn’t help that the first football match of the season is coming up, and his nerves are a ticking time bomb.

“And it’s not even like I’m playing it up.” Niall leans over the table, pushing his hand in Louis’ face. “Do you see this? It’s –“

“I get it, Niall. The new school nurse is hot!” Louis exclaims.

“Mr. Tomlinson! We keep quiet in the library!” the lady at the front desk hisses at him, earning him several looks from lingering students.

Louis sends a homicidal glare Niall’s way, and the other boy at least has the decency to muster up a sheepish smile. Louis rolls his eyes, turning back to his homework, and thankfully his friend keeps quiet after that, even if Louis can see him biting at his nails.

It’s so typical that just when Niall finally shuts up, Louis can’t concentrate anyway. The upcoming game is at the front of his mind at all times, and his stomach feels funny and uncomfortable every time he thinks of it. It’s just that everything is hanging on a thread, and if they don’t get a good kick off for the season, it’s going to be a lot harder pulling that string up.

And it doesn’t help that Harry’s training strategies suck. His yoga inspired warm-ups are worthless – everybody knows that football players are stiff as sticks – and his knowledge and understanding of the football game might be decent, but the way he happens to enforce this into actual practice is more or less hopeless.

The stress is nibbling at his insides, and at this rate he’s going to combust. There’s tons of other shit he has to worry about, the jackass on his team shouldn’t even have to be on the list. The game isn’t even until next week, and the stress isn’t good for him. Shit, he’s going to have to ask Lottie to make him one of those facial cleanses tonight.
His phone buzzes on the table next to him, and after a glance at the name on the display he quickly picks it up, angling his face away from Niall and answering.

“Hi, Mum,” he murmurs.

“Hey, honey,” she says softly, and Louis already hears the guilty note in her voice. “You in school?”

“Yes, is everything alright?” he wonders, glancing around the library, his fingers subconsciously finding their way to his mouth.

“Yes, baby. I just needed to tell you I’m picking up an extra shift today. I won’t be home until lunch tomorrow. I’m really sorry, love, but can you make dinner and—”

“Of course, Mum,” Louis reassures her solemnly. “Don’t even worry about it. I’ll see you tomorrow, yeah? And then family dinner on Friday? You, me and Lots?”

“Yes,” she says, and Louis can tell she’s smiling. He bites his cheek to keep his own expression intact, and nods to himself.

“Good. Love you, Mum.”

“Love you too, Boo.”

They hang up and Louis sighs, running a hand over his face. Shit, okay. Enough is enough.

He starts stashing up his books and pushes his stuff into his bag, pocketing his phone. Niall looks up at him in question, and Louis throws his bag over his shoulder.

“Niall. Sorry, mate, I have to go.”

“What about last period?” he asks.

“I can’t, I—” He looks at Niall pleadingly. “I have to go. I’ll call you later, yeah?”

Niall shrugs, glancing down at his phone. “Sure.”

Louis nods and then half jogs out of school towards his car. He gets in and throws his bag onto the worn passenger seat, leaning over and opening the glove box, pulling out a stash of papers he’s had in there for way too long. He places them in his lap, sliding a thumb along the edges.

He’s been putting this off for so long, but lately it just seems inevitable. He thought he could work it out somehow, but everything just seems to be going downhill, Harry being co-captain and ruining the team’s chances at the league title being very much part of it.

He groans, leaning back in the seat and hiding his face behind his hands, taking a few moments to collect himself. He suddenly feels disgusted with himself for acting like such a brat right now. He’s not a brat. He’s a hardworking lad who gives his all to achieve what he wants – this is only embarrassing. But he can deal with that.

Louis shakes his head at himself. He has to be quick and be back for footy practice at four-thirty. He’s already dreading it, Harry’s polka warm ups and exercises, and he does not have any urging desire whatsoever to spend an hour listening to him droning on and on about technical shit he’s known since he was five.

He gets himself together and starts the car, swerving out of the parking lot and speeding into town.
Louis is as dead as a zombie. Whatever that might mean. He doesn’t feel very alive is the thing, but he still has to drag himself out of bed and to school. He slips into a pair of skinny jeans, throwing on an oversized, simple black shirt and slipping into his checkered vans. Since they don’t have a match tonight (which they usually do on Fridays) the practice is scheduled after last period instead of before first, and Louis can spend the entire day not being pestered with Harry’s presence.

His mother’s still not home from work, but they’ll have a family dinner for once tonight, and Louis’ quite looking forward to it. He’d rather hit the gym than go to first period, but having a stellar attendance record can’t hurt his future, which is looking rather uncertain as of this moment.

He goes to make sure Lottie has woken up and finds her at her mirror in her room, and so he goes down to the kitchen to put the kettle on. He makes two jelly peanut butter sandwiches and brings a cuppa each up to Lottie’s room. He places hers on the desk she’s sitting at, and then proceeds to flop down on her bed.

“Did you—”

“Text her? Yeah, she’s not coming,” Lottie interrupts grimly, frowning at the mirror in front of her.

Louis sighs, even though he knew what the answer was going to be all along. He scratches at his scalp in annoyance, and shakes his head. “She makes me so frustrated, you know.”

“Me too,” Lottie mutters.

“How long’s it been?” he asks, taking a bite of his sandwich, chewing loudly. “A month?”

“Try two.” She puts her curling iron down, turning around in her chair and crossing her legs. “I don’t want to nag her. It’s up to her, Lou.”

“Yeah,” Louis agrees, but insists on rolling his eyes. “I haven’t seen her in forever. Not like, for real.”

“Maybe next week, okay?” Lottie says, pulling a tight smile. Louis nods, but he doesn’t have much hope.

Finishing their breakfast and brushing their teeth, they pack up their schoolbags and then get into the car. Louis drives by Niall’s house, because apparently his best friend doesn’t feel like driving today, and when they pick him up he spreads out on the backseat, filling the car with good-natured chatter that lightens Louis’ mood immensely. He drops his sister off at her school, and Niall climbs into the front seat. He’s finally starting to think the day’s not going to be as bad as he thought this morning, when all of that is shattered in the timespan of five seconds.

Louis is about to turn into his usual parking spot when suddenly he’s cut off by another car, seemingly appearing out of thin air. He is forced into an abrupt stop, slamming the brakes and having him and Niall shot forward in their seats.

“Ooof!” Niall lets out a rough breath, the seatbelt cutting into his chest. “What the fuck!”

Louis narrows his eyes in incredulousness, realizing who the fucker who just stole his parking spot is. A black Range Rover. Fantastic.

Harry gets out of the car as soon as he’s parked, throwing a winning smile Louis’ way
accompanied by a casual wave and a wink. Louis rolls his window down, yelling “Motherfucker!” at him. With an angry growl he starts the car again, parking on the other side of the lot.

“I fucking hate him, Niall,” Louis swears. “Do you understand how much of a prick he is?”

“I know. I’ve witnessed stuff.”

“And I have to deal with that for a fucking hour every day!”

“Maybe we should do something about it?” Niall says, pursing his lips.

Louis turns towards him in his seat, interested. “However do you mean?”

“Maybe we should teach him a lesson.”

“Have him beat up?”

“No! Christ Tommo.” Niall shakes his head. “I meant, like, a prank. Make him suffer a bit, but not in a ‘rough him up’ kind of way. Who do you think we are? The mob? Mate, we watched Disney movies last weekend.”

Louis rolls his eyes. Niall’s right of course, but it’s not like Louis would mind seeing Harry with a few tame bruises. Okay, he’s not a sadist, but it would be nice to get back at him a bit. A prank does sound tempting.

“I like where your mind’s at, Watson,” he says after a moment of pondering, and begins to climb out of the car.

“Why am I always Watson? Louis, it’s literally the other way around. I’m Sherlock, you twat.”

**

Louis hates Harry an extensive amount.

Yes, he realizes he spends an awful lot of his time thinking about how much he despises him, but he’s just such a bother. He’s currently shooting penalties at the keeper, and is netting them neatly in the corners every single time. Louis is standing on the other side of the pitch, shaking his head. They’re not even supposed to be shooting penalties. Coach specifically told them to practice their technique on something they feel like they need to improve, and with the way Harry keeps casually scoring, Louis doubts he needs to practice shooting from the spot kick, eleven meters from the goal. Like, seriously? Fucking show-off.

Louis hates him.

He squares his shoulders after few minutes of scowling and juggling with a ball of his own, and saunters confidently over to where Harry’s shooting at the goal.

“If you’d practice something you don’t already know how to do, maybe we’ll win a game or two,” he says, crossing his arms with the football at his feet.

Harry’s back stiffens, and he slowly turns around to arch a brow at him. “And what have you been practicing?”

“Things that will improve my game,” he says, shooting out his jaw. “Penalties occur in three out of fifteen games, statistically. I doubt you’ll need much more training. Why don’t you go dribble
some cones or something?”

“Are you really telling me what to do?” Harry asks, jaw clenching.

“No. Just giving you advice,” he smirks. “You’ll be needing it…” He gives Harry a meaningful onceover and a pointed look, turning around and strolling casually towards the bleachers.

And in one…two…

“What the fuck was that supposed to mean?” Harry growls, hand locking on Louis’ shoulder just as Coach calls out, ending practice.

Louis turns around, firmly pulling Harry’s hand off him. “I just meant that if you keep up with your rabbit exercises and only shooting penalties at Liam, then you might not spot on the team anymore,” he shrugs.

“I’m the best player on the team. Stop talking a bunch of crap,” Harry hisses. His wild, dark curls are pulled back in a pink little headband that looks ridiculous, and how he even expects Louis to take him seriously is beyond belief. Never mind the fact that he’s right out lying to Louis’ face.

“You’re not the best player or the team,” Louis spits. “You’re the seventh. Might pass for sixth.” He’s a close second. Whatever.

“Why am I even having this conversation with you?” Harry says, shaking his head disbelievingly. He starts pacing towards the bleachers, and Louis strolls besides him, enjoying how annoyed he looks.

“Because you just can’t stay away from me. I thought we established this, you’re in love with me.”

“You’re so full of yourself, you know that? Shut the fuck up and leave me alone, will you?” Harry picks up his bag and throws it over his shoulder. Louis reaches for his as well, smirking as he follows Harry to the locker rooms.

“And how the fuck have you come to that conclusion?” Harry asks, shaking his head. “You’re such a tit, you think everyone likes you. Open your fucking eyes.”

Please. Louis knows everyone doesn’t like him. That’s what jealousy means. Duh.

“Open my eyes? If anyone should it’s you. From this morning I’d think you’re fucking blind,” he sneers.

“Is that what this is about?” Harry says, rolling his eyes as he opens the door to the locker room. A few of the lads from the team slip out in the go, and Louis glares as he waits to get inside. “Me taking a parking spot I got to before you? You’re going to annoy me into suicide because I took the spot you wanted?”

“That’s my spot!” Louis yells as Harry struts inside. “You and your obnoxious car has never parked there, why the fuck would you now? Everybody knows that’s my spot!”

“Everything isn’t about you, Louis,” Harry scoffs, setting his bag on one of the benches.
Louis glares and starts unpacking his own, noting how empty the locker room suddenly feels. He’s about to explain to Harry very clearly exactly how much everything actually is about him, when Harry’s phone starts ringing. He watches him answering it, seeing him turn his back towards Louis and mumbling into the phone.

Louis’ plan isn’t working. Not that it was very well elaborated, but Harry’s not even breaking a sweat getting pissed at him. Louis hoped he’d maybe push him a bit, subsequently get suspended from the team for attacking a teammate. Louis realizes he’s not on his best game. He’s going to have to do better.

Harry’s putting his phone away again, his tall back turned toward Louis. The red jersey stretches over his broad shoulders when he leans down, and Louis squares his own shoulders, crossing his arms.

“Was that your mum? Are you guys gonna’ fight over pizza tonight, too?”

“Why don’t you just mind your own fucking business?” Harry spits, spinning around vehemently, anger suddenly seeming to ignite him in a way it didn’t before.

Louis holds his hands up. “Oops! Sorry. Sensitive much?” He smirks, and puts his bag on the bench and starting to riff around for his stuff. It’s working.

“Why do you always feel the need to be such a snarky little brat? Honest question.” Harry scowls angrily, and Louis can tell he’s getting worked up. Still, it suddenly doesn’t feel as good as he thought it would.

“Why are you so bloody pretentious and condescending?” he shoots back, turning to glare back at him.

“I’m not condescending. It’s not my fault you feel inferior by nature.”

“I don’t feel inferior,” Louis growls, his blood suddenly stirring furiously. He flexes subconsciously, trying to make himself seem bigger than he is. He’s always used his voice to appear bigger and stronger and take up the most space in a room, and he carries himself in a way that people don’t usually notice that he’s actually quite petite. It’s only with Harry that Louis’ reminded that he’s smaller, and he absolutely loathes it.

“Sure, you don’t. You feel so strong and powerful all the time. It’s why you feel the need to push everybody else down and make people feel bad, so that you’ll feel even bigger and better. You’re so confident, love being yourself that you have to fight so hard to –“

“Shut the fuck up,” Louis growls, lunging for him. Their chests connect harshly, knocking the air out of both of them, and Harry falls back against the locker, Louis tumbling with him. They scramble, pawing and pushing at each other to get out of the unintentional embrace.

Louis felt the need to punch him, now he doesn’t want to be near him. His words sent a wave of unease through him, and he feels like drinking bleach to get rid of it.

Harry grips his shirt then, and hauls him up and pushes him roughly, sending him backwards. Their eyes lock in a heavy gaze. Louis’ chest is heaving, and Harry’s still sweaty from practice, hair mussed and body warm. Louis can still feel his hands tingling from the contact of Harry’s skin as Harry stares at him, teeth sunk into his bottom lip. There’s this thing in Louis’ stomach that clenches like a fist, like it’s drawing in this need by the fingers. Harry’s emerald eyes seem to catch the change in his demeanor and how he looks at him, because then he’s close again, but for another reason.
Their chests press close together and Louis’ hands land on Harry’s shoulders. Harry pushes him back until he hits the lockers behind him, and he doesn’t know how wrestling turned into this.

Harry’s in his face, and they’re breathing rapidly. Louis’ eyes trail to his lips and he isn’t sure how they got here, just like it happened last time, but they’re so close, torsos crushed against one another, Harry’s knee pushed in between Louis’ thighs somehow. Harry’s hands tangle into Louis’ hair, holding his head back. He sinks his teeth into Louis’ shoulder, and Louis gasps. It’s odd. Louis doesn’t know if he’s biting him or just seeking some sort of leverage, because not a second later Harry rolls his hips, moving into him.

Louis’ nails dig into his back, clawing at him, and his other hand grips a tight hold of the hair at the nape of Harry’s neck, pulling him back. Harry ruts against him again, and Louis mustn’t be thinking because this is Harry fucking Styles, who he hates.

Louis bucks up, meeting the roll of his hips and the feeling is like nothing he’s felt before. Sex was great, but the way he can feel Harry’s hardness – proof of how turned on he is because of him – against his own makes something inside him twist, and it feels incredible.

Harry’s face is in his neck, and Louis’ head is against the locker, bumping into it with every thrust they share together. He’s already fully hard, and the material of their footy shorts is thin, and Louis can feel everything. He’s wet he realizes, pre-cum smearing his boxers, as Harry’s chest moves quickly against his own. He’s almost completely enveloped by him, and his chin is just barely over Harry’s shoulder. Harry breathes against his ear, Louis suddenly having the urge to push Harry’s shorts down to slide their naked cocks together. He moves his hands to his hips, sliding them under the waistband of his shorts like he wanted, and he feels how Harry’s thrusting gets more fervent, erratic as Louis meets him halfway.

Louis clutches at his skin, gripping Harry’s small, albeit perky, bum in his hands, groaning as he feels his muscles tighten with every thrust. Louis isn’t thinking. He isn’t thinking because obviously if he were then this wouldn’t be happening. This is Harry. But Harry’s arse is also currently naked and in Louis’ hands. He palms at him, and Harry’s breaths are warm at his neck, body getting more and more rigid against him, and Louis knows what’s happening.

“Fuck,” Harry gasps when Louis runs hand over the cleft of his cheeks.

“Shut up,” Louis groans. He’s in the zone here, thank you. He’s so painfully hard, and as Harry whines in his ear he’s getting closer and closer, rapidly. His fingers dig into Harry’s skin, and he knows he’s not lasting much longer.

Abruptly the door to the locker room is slammed open, and Louis pushes Harry off of him with a force he didn’t know he possessed. Harry stumbles away, eyes ringing with alarm. They’re hidden behind a wall of lockers, thankfully.

“Lewis!” It’s Niall. Fucking Niall. “Where are you? Are you conditioning your hair?”

“Niall! I’ll be out in a second,” Louis says, hoping his best friend can’t detect the panic in his voice.

“Jesus Christ, man, you’re slow. Everyone’s gone.”

“Niall! Leave,” he orders. “I’ll be out. Just wait by the car.”

“I have actually seen you naked before,” comes the answer from the other side of the lockers.

“Jesus, Niall. Just fucking leave. Please!”

“Motherfucker,” he swears. He quickly starts pushing his clothes back in his bag, cleats going in even though they usually stay in the locker. He doesn’t think he’s ever been this fast packing before, but he can feel Harry’s eyes on him, and suddenly he feels a lot more uncomfortable with being near him. He stuffs his bag, throwing on his shoes and a hoodie over his head without looking at him. He stomps out the door, jogging away after Niall.

Shit. It happened again.
“Five quid you’re gonna burn those,” Lottie says, as she leans on the counter next to the stove later that night.

Louis opens his eyes, throwing a glance at the frying pan. And, ah, crap. She’s right. He hurriedly pulls the pan off the stove plate with a grimace, eyeing the burgers he attempted to make.

“Shit.”

Lottie ticks her head to the side, glancing at the burned meat. “So, what’s on your mind then?”

Nothing. A lot. Everything?

“Don’t lie, I know when you lie.”

“Just worried about… stuff, you know?” They don’t talk about what “stuff” implies. They don’t have to.

Lottie smiles sadly at him, and then nods at the kitchen drawer where the takeout menus are located. “Should we order in?”

Louis rolls his eyes, but agrees. “That’s probably for the best.”

He plucks his phone out of his pocket, feeling another anxious contraction in his chest when he sees the display is still empty.

Lottie takes hold of his arm after turning off the stove, and pulls him gently towards the living room. They end up ordering Chinese, and they chat lowly as they watch a movie that’s running on the TV. Louis tries to stay away from the rice when they finally eat, knowing he hasn’t gone for his daily run yet, but it looks too appetizing and there’s so much on his mind other than the diet he’s been keeping the last two months.

He tries not to think and just concentrate on the movie, but these nagging thoughts are constantly at the back of his head. He doesn’t even know if he’s going to make it to next the week at this rate.

He’s not even meant to be thinking about the Harry thing. Look, it’s not even like Louis got mad about what Harry was talking about. It wasn’t even true, like, Harry is full of bullshit. Louis was just annoyed with him for being such an idiot and thinking he knows everything. What he said
had no impact on him whatsoever, and even if it did, it’s not as if Louis would let it show. That thing that happened afterwards just kind of… happened, and there’s nothing else to it. Harry’s just got this weird thing about him, and that’s – Yes, this is all Harry’s fault. Established. Done with. Stashed away and never thought of again. Great.

“Do you think you could teach me how to drive, maybe?” Lottie asks, looking at him from her side of the worn leather couch.

“You?” He raises a brow, brought out of his trance. “Are you even old enough?”

“Yes,” she says, rolling her eyes, but then bites her lip. “I just thought,” she tucks a strand of hair behind her ear, “since Mum and Dad aren’t around much, and like, I know you’re busy, but perhaps you could teach me?”

Louis thinks his heart is squeezing a bit. “Of course I’ll teach you, sis.”

**

There are many things Louis has thought about these past days. This was not one of them.

After an hour of football practice the following Monday (a half hour of running drills, and a half hour of playing mini-games that Louis rewarded the boys with, but they didn’t seem to particularly enjoy since their legs were too tired, including murderous stares from Harry), Louis finds himself in the locker room. All the lads are undressing, getting ready to shower, and Louis can feel Harry’s angry gaze from across the room.

So, like, Louis is not awkward because there are a bunch of naked dudes surrounding him. That’s a regular weekday afternoon. It’s just that, Harry’s looking at him, and Liam is leaning against the locker they almost got each other off against. And that’s weird. It’s really weird. He and Harry have gotten off against each other. That’s… just. Louis doesn’t know what to think when he thinks about that. It’s strange and a bit creepy, and somehow it’s all he can think about.

Harry’s currently only partly undressed, standing by his bench in shorts, frequently sending small glares Louis’ way. The rest of the boys are either in the showers or getting into fresh clothes. Louis has barely gotten his own kit off. He realizes this with a start and quickly rips off his jersey, kicking off his socks.

He cannot end up alone with Harry in the locker room again. That stuff can never happen again. Because it’s gross. And that’s not a gay thing – it’s a Harry thing. Also, Louis does not need this in his life. Harry means trouble, and Louis can’t have more trouble in his life than he already has. This, whatever it is that’s happened twice now, cannot happen again, which means that Louis can’t end up alone with Harry. Ever.

He quickly pulls on his old jersey again, figuring he better not test things and get in the showers, risking being caught alone with Harry afterwards. He stuffs his things in his bag again, ignoring Harry’s eyes on him and stalks back to the football pitch. He didn’t go for a run last night. He should jog some extra laps.

Louis avoids Harry like the plague for the rest of the week. He doesn’t even sneer at him in the hallways the next day or spare him a glance at practice on Wednesday. He doesn’t let himself get agitated at his stupid exercises at practice, only clenches his jaw and does whatever Harry orders, and he thinks Harry notices it. He doesn’t stick around in the locker room and he doesn’t shower with the team. It’s kind of gross riding in his car all sweaty he soon realizes, so he usually stays and runs laps around the field until the showers have cleared out. Yes, he knows he’s being a bit ridiculous, but he doesn’t want to take any chances.
It’s Thursday morning, six o’clock, when Louis picks Niall up before school. Niall looks half-asleep when he trudges out of his house, his school bag and a duffel bag thrown over a shoulder each. He’s in track bottoms just like Louis, a t-shirt on his chest, and for some apparent reason he’s put his fringe into a tiny ponytail that stands proudly upright on his forehead.

“You look like a unicorn,” is the first thing Louis says to him. “Is that a tiny prick?”

“Fuck you. I cannot believe I’m doing this. You should be so glad I’m your best friend.”

“I love you,” Louis grins, poking him in the cheek. Niall only grunts and ties his shoelaces.

When they arrive at school the lot is empty, the brisk morning air fresh against their cheeks. They dump their bags by the bleachers, and Louis makes Niall pull on a thin, long-sleeved shirt over his t-shirt before they kick off on the track encircling the grass pitch. The grass looks a bit dewy, a sign the autumn is slowly nearing, and the fresh air does well for Louis’ lungs.

Niall is panting slightly heavier beside him, but he’s keeping up well. They chat a bit as they run and Louis stretches his legs out, feeling a slight ache. Harry made them do some really fucking strange exercise the other day that felt more like bending over and spreading your legs than anything else, and it’s left some traces in his muscles.

“I don’t get how you do this every day,” Niall breathes after five laps, sweat glazing his forehead, cheeks flushed.

“I don’t do this everyday.”

“Maybe not at six am, but you run the blocks and the park all the time.”

Louis shrugs the best he can while running and kicks up his speed, leaving a yard of space between them.

“Shit,” Niall breathes heavily once he’s caught up. “Calm down a bit, won’t you? We’ve run five laps at a decent pace. You’re going to ruin your legs, mate.”

Louis makes a non-committed grunt, keeping up his pace.

After seven laps Niall throws himself on the grass beside the track and announces his capitulation, chest heaving and face flushed in red where he wrenches a bit too exaggeratedly on the ground. Louis rolls his eyes and runs two more laps, walking one last to calm his nerves and blood flow.

They shower in the locker room that’s specifically distributed to the football team. Usually it’s off limits for anyone not on the team, but since classes haven’t started yet Louis figures it won’t matter if Niall spends fifteen minutes in there. They get dressed, Louis using up ten minutes in front of the mirror trying to tame his hair, while Niall imitates a dog getting out of a bath. Louis pushes his sweaty clothes into his duffel, slinging it over his shoulder as they walk back to the parking lot.

It’s almost warm when they step outside, and the morning dew is completely gone. The parking lot has started filling up with cars, and Louis waves at few of the lads from the team standing by the small fountain in front of the big entrance. The school may be small, but the board sure seems to invest a lot of money into making it look fancy.

They dump their duffels in the backseat of Louis’ car and fetch their school bags, trudging back towards the main building. Louis’ first class is French, while Niall has Geography in the second building.

“See you on the other side, mate,” Niall says, saluting him and starting to back away.
“Tell Mr. Warner a big fuck you from me!” Louis calls after him, and Niall’s laugh seems to echo against the sky.

Louis grins, and turns to face the main entrance. Of course, that’s when he sees Harry.

He’s leaning against his pretty car, shining like a toy in the morning sun, and he’s with that artsy guy. He’s in Louis’ drama class but doesn’t say much. They both look stupid where they stand, all sharp jaws, lean bodies and eyes brimming with disinterest. Harry’s in black, skinny jeans as usual, a moss-green plaid shirt hanging loosely from his shoulders, and he’s got his Ray Bans on like the pretentious bastard he is. If he’s trying to look cool and authentic he isn’t succeeding. Louis almost snorts. His friend is doing a way better job of it; dark, almost raven hair that’s getting a bit long and is pushed to the side, everlasting pout on his lips, and a smoke between his fingers.

Louis glances down at his phone when it buzzes in his hand, disappointment sinking his chest once again. He bites his cheek and sends another glance towards Harry. A second later Harry’s face turns Louis’ way, and Louis determinedly twists his chin away, walking straight into the building without another look.

**

“Lads!” Coach exclaims, gathering them all around him during half time. Louis’ blood is pumping, his knees are grassy and his forehead’s sweaty, the adrenaline shooting through his body like a rocket. “You’ve got this, yeah? We’re down by one, but if you keep this up we’ll catch up in no time. Liam, try to get the ball out as fast as you can, and Jonah we’re going to move you up the field. Prioritize the offense, yeah?”

The rain is pouring down, drenching them, and Louis is furious. The opposing team is shit and yet they’ve succeeded a goal to them. It wasn’t even a pretty goal, and if Stan hadn’t fouled their midfielder they wouldn’t have gotten that free kick. It was a cheap one as well, and Louis was opening his mouth at the referee in 0,1 seconds.

This isn’t a good start of the season. The referee has kept a close eye on Louis after that, and he even threatened to give him a yellow card if he didn’t keep his mouth closed for the rest of the game. Louis can’t even give a friendly elbow in the ribs to one of the opposing players, and the frustration is making him sweat even worse. Coach is constantly yelling at him to go wider, to open spaces for the rest of his teammates, even though Louis knows if they’d all just keep their positions for once he would easily be able to dribble through the opposing team’s defense.

“You’ve got this, Tommo!” Stan says fiercely, clapping him supportively on the shoulder, before Liam grips his neck and tells him to keep open so that he can get him the ball immediately from goal kick.

They get back out on the field soon after that, and Harry grabs Louis’ shoulder harshly. “Pass me the fucking ball, fuckhead,” he growls, and then jogs off to his spot for kickoff.

Louis fights off the urge to flip him one, and then the match is on in full force again. It’s sweaty, rough and frustrating, and Louis uses his muscles to tackle anyone he can get close to. He’s too heated and Harry keeps waving at him to pass, but he’s in a bad position and Louis’ head is spinning.

The second half is coming to a close what feels like forty minutes too soon, the desperation among the team almost tangible on the field. The blood is burning in Louis’ veins.

“Wider, Louis!” the coach yells.
“Louis, over here!” Connor is screaming, and all Louis can think is “four minutes” and that there are two players in front of him that he needs to get past.

The ball is light and moves quickly at his feet due to the wet grass, and he moves with the speed and technique only someone with years of training could. He doesn’t even think. Harry is waving at his right, vein almost popping in his neck, and Louis fakes left, going right. He passes his first opponent, his teammates calling for him in his periphery. The second player isn’t attacking him like the first one. He’s pensive and calculates Louis’ moves, not blindly attacking. Louis’ blood is stirring as his muscles work without thought. He does a quick step over, then fakes left, goes right, and then stops, bringing the player out of balance for a fraction of a second, just enough to be able to pass him on the left side.

The maneuver is impressive, but Louis barely hears the crowd cheering. He can tell Coach is screaming at him, pointing in a direction Louis doesn’t have time to waste looking in, and he sees Harry waving his arm above his head. Louis doesn’t pass him, though. He charges forward, voice in his head frantically yelling that they can’t lose. He can see the other team’s keeper readying himself to protect his goal, and he can Harry’s looking absolutely livid in the corner of his eye.

Louis continues forward, ready to shoot, and then suddenly he’s tackled.

He looses the ball.

It’s a fair tackle. Louis is on his bum on the wet grass, and the referee doesn’t even bat an eye. He feels his stomach sink, and he knows he’s screwed up. It’s just simply in the air that his teammates’ insides are bubbling with annoyance and disappointment at his actions.

He looks up, immediately seeing the grim stare Harry’s nailing him with. He shakes his head slowly and Louis feels like he’s imploding. He gets back up on his feet, and his throat is thick and there’s a lump in it, but he tries to breathe normally. It’s not working, his chest feeling tight and heavy as it heaves in ragged movements. There’s nothing but disappointment within him. He knows it’s his fault, and the rest of the team know it too. He’s just cost them the first win.

There’s only a minute left of the game and Louis knows they’re going to lose. The crowd seems to know it too, their cheers having died down and their posters lowered.

But then Louis sees it happen. Freddie steals the ball from the guy on the other team. It happens in a matter of seconds. The player succeeds the ball to Freddie, who sends it through the air, landing at Stan’s feet. A quick maneuver, another pass, and then the ball is figuratively in Harry’s hands. Harry shoots forward, rounding his defender and sends the ball shooting like lightning into the far end of the goal, into the net.

It’s a tie. 1-1.

The game is over subsequently and Harry’s in the bottom of a pile of muddy Donny players, and Louis’ left staring.

They didn’t lose, is the first thing he thinks.

Second, Harry made sure of that.

Third, Louis screwed up. He fucked up bad.

The crowd is cheering, Harry’s being praised, the coach is shaking his head at Louis and it feels like something is burning a hole through his body, burning his flesh from the inside and rotting every piece of him.
The disappointment turns into anger.

He doesn’t speak to anyone after the game. Niall gives him a sympathetic smile that he ignores.
His sister and mother tell him a “good game” each from where they are standing, closely huddled
under a yellow umbrella, which he completely neglects. He’s soaking wet, hair plastered to his
forehead. He should feel cold, but he’s so heated inside he could ignite.

None of the boys speak to him in the locker room. Only Liam claps him on the back, making
Louis shrug the hand off without a word. The lads get into the showers, and Louis sits on the
bench, staring at the muddy floor for minutes.

He can hear the boys singing in the showers, Harry’s name being praised over and over again, and
Louis’ never felt quite like this before.

He’s never been this disappointed in himself. Maybe it’s how enormous the buildup for the game
was, how high his expectations of himself were, that made everything feel so colossally disastrous
now, but he knows there’s so much more. Everything is riding on this. He doesn’t have anything
else. He doesn’t know what he’s going to do if this doesn’t go his way – and that is terrifying.

Tears prickle in his eyes and he suddenly can’t stand it anymore. He gets up from the bench,
wiping at his eyes, pulling on his jacket and throwing his bag over his shoulder. He storms
through the rain to the car his family’s waiting in.

Lottie and Louis’ mother are out getting dinner. Louis didn’t want to come. It’s been an hour since
he left the school after the game and the anger has subdued a bit. The rain is still pouring, and he’s
sitting on the small stone porch outside the front door, staring as the tiny grass lawn turns muddier
by the minute. He’s got Harry’s car keys in his hands, fiddling slightly with them in his lap. He
don’t even know what he’s supposed to do with them. Just put them back in his locker at
practice on Monday? Harry’s surely not even suffering, probably caught a ride with his parents
back home after the game.

Fuck.

Louis doesn’t know what he’s doing. He had it figured out. He was going to win every footie
game this season and prove that he’s good enough, but now everything seems so hopeless. First
game and he screwed up. He sighs, groaning in annoyance and looks up.

“What the fuck,” he says loudly. What the hell?!

There’s a soaked, dripping and completely sodden Harry Styles walking by on the sidewalk past
Louis’ house.

“What the fuck are you doing?” he calls, watching as Harry’s head snaps up, finding Louis staring
at him in confusion. Harry looks up, glancing at the house for a second. He’s only got a hoodie on
and a pair of tracks, his bag hanging over his shoulder, the strap across his chest. His hair is wet
against his forehead, and he looks like baby Tarzan more than anything else. Well, he also looks
like a beaten puppy.

Harry stares at Louis for a moment, standing still on the pavement, before he finally says, “The question is, what are you doing? Why are you sitting on a porch, looking sufficiently suicidal?”

“I’m not suicidal! I’m just… it – I thought it was appropriate to my mood,” Louis huffs.

“So fucking dramatic, I swear to God…” Harry sighs and shakes his head, rolling his eyes tiredly.

Louis copies the gesture lamely, crossing his arms where he’s sitting under the yellow porch light. Harry’s still standing in the rain, not that that matters to Louis. “If anyone’s suicidal, it’s you. What are you even doing walking in this weather?”

“I think I lost my keys,” he mumbles, frowning.

“How unfortunate,” Louis deadpans, hand automatically squeezing around the set of keys in his hand. It’s Harry’s fault he didn’t hitch a ride with his parents anyway. No need looking like a puppy like that, hands stuffed in his pockets and shoulders up.

Harry just squints and pulls an insincere smile at him that lasts for about a second.

“Well, have fun walking in the rain.” Louis stands up, turning towards the house. “Oh, and heads up!” He throws the set of keys at him. Harry looks up just in time, catching them at his chest. He frowns, and then the realization sets in.

“What the fuck?” he exclaims. “You stole my keys?!”

“Who said I didn’t just find them?” Louis counters, glaring.

“Where? In the pocket of my jeans?!”

Louis sighs, but Harry’s stalking forward, shoes wetly scraping against the small stone path up to the porch. “You’re so sensitive,” Louis says, giving a little shake of his head. “What’s a walk in the park?”

“I’m going to be sick now!” Harry yells, exasperatedly throwing his arms out. “What if I miss football practice?”

Wow. This might actually be one of Louis’ best schemes yet, elaboration and intent irrelevant.

“Oh, calm down, captain.” Louis rolls his eyes. “What’s a little cold? A fever isn’t that bad.” Harry looks ready to burst and Louis’ mood rises by the second. “Oh, don’t look at me like that. I’m not some sadist.”

“Fucking sinister is what you are!” Harry yells. His big eyes are green and enraged, and he’s shaking his head. “What is the matter with you? Why – Why would you take – no, steal my car keys! Who does that? Why would you…?” He stops his strange pacing and looks up at Louis, suddenly shaking his head again and squinting in incredulousness. “Is this about the game? Wow! You are so incredibly selfish.”

“Hey!” Louis finally cuts in. “I’m not selfish! I gave the keys back, didn’t I?”

Harry laughs coldly. “Yeah, okay, yeah. It’s fine now!” He makes a disgusted noise. “Ugh, Louis! You’re so bitter! I don’t understand you. You’re so fucked up.”

Louis charges forward. “I’m not fucked up. You’re fucked up!” His hands collide with Harry’s
shoulders.

“What a comeback,” Harry sneers, pushing him back.

“Why are you always such a jerk?” Louis pushes him back again, putting them on the muddy lawn.

“I’m a jerk? You have a twisted fucking perception of reality,” Harry huffs, pushing back.

“You know what?” Louis suddenly says, throwing his hands out. “I’m not going to do this with you. Goodbye! You can leave.” He turns his back on him, stalking towards the house.

“We’re not finished yet!” Harry growls, and Louis hears him walking after him.

Louis spins around, and almost gets a whiplash when he snaps his head up, finding Harry right behind him. Their chests are flush and Harry’s a few inches taller, staring down at him while he tries to control his breathing. They glare at each other, and Louis is reminded of how their last fight turned out. Harry’s nose is flared, eyes fierce, and Louis swallows.

It’s going to happen. He can tell. Harry’s going to grab him and roll his hips against him like last time, and Louis’ not going to be able to stop it from happening. He doesn’t know what he’s going to do when it does.

Harry looks down at him, biting his lip in that way. “Fuck me,” is what he eventually says, bluntly and breathlessly.

That was not exactly how Louis expected it to happen, but… “Yeah, okay,” is his response.

Somehow Louis ends up dragging Harry into the house, pressing him down on the floor in the hall. “My mum and sister will be home soon,” he rushes, ripping off his sweater and pushing his track bottoms off.

Harry shakes head, turning over on the floor. “Just take me from behind,” he breathes, and… yeah, that’s, that’s. Okay.

Harry’s just seems to know what to do, and boldly pulls down his trackies and pants to his ankles, easily getting on his knees while Louis struggles with breathing correctly. Harry also apparently just so happens to have a bottle of lube and condoms in his bag as well, and Louis isn’t even surprised because Harry is probably some sort of sex freak with an exhibitionist kink among many others. Louis wouldn’t be shocked, honestly.

Harry lets Louis finger him open. It’s probably the strangest thing he’s ever done, but certainly also the hottest. Harry’s walls are hot and thick, and Louis’ fingers are slick. He can’t help but moan at the sensation, while his other hand is squeezing around his hip harshly. Harry isn’t quiet either and after only two fingers he claims he’s ready, practically pushing his arse against Louis’ groin.

Louis fumbles with the condom, Harry groaning impatiently in front of him. When he finally pushes into his heat, his entire body feels on fire. It’s hot and it’s sweaty. Louis’ knees hurt against the floor, but he assumes Harry’s worse off and he isn’t complaining. He’s leaning on his elbows, head hung and body jerking with every one of Louis’ thrusts. He’s so warm around him, Louis’ fingers digging into his sides, hips snapping, and the sound of hot skin slapping is all Louis can hear apart from Harry’s moaning.

“Harder,” Harry groans, face buried in the crook of his arm. “Please,” he moans.
Louis won’t deny it. He likes hearing Harry beg.

They don’t last long. Harry jerks himself off with pants and moans, and Louis comes with stuttering thrusts and nails digging into Harry’s hips.

“Shit,” Harry breathes once Louis’ pulled out of him. Louis runs a hand through his sweaty hair and throws him a glance. He’s still on his stomach, trousers at his ankles, and the skin by his hips is red. “You know,” he says, “before the first time we fucked, I honestly didn’t expect you to have as big of a cock as you do.”

Louis rolls his eyes. “And now you just can’t seem to get enough of it?”

“Your self-righteousness is gross.”

“And your ‘holier-than-thou’ attitude is appalling.”

“Who knew you had such a vocabulary?”

Louis glares at him, but is interrupted just as he opens his mouth. The headlights from a car shine in through the windows in the kitchen, and Louis grabs Harry’s arm roughly.

“Get up! Now!” He hurriedly gets his own trousers on, fetching Harry’s bag from where it’s lying by the door.

“Fuck,” Harry swears, immediately getting on his feet and pulling his pants up from his ankles. “Where’s my shirt?”

Louis hurriedly looks around for it, catching eye of a wet hoodie by a chair. He throws it at him, picking up the shoes that must be his as well, and pushes him towards the back door in the kitchen. He hears the car doors slamming shut from outside and in hysterics opens the door, and literally shoves Harry barefoot out in the rain.

“Hey!” Harry exclaims, but ducks with wide eyes when Louis throws his shoes at him. “Ow!”

“It’s a pair of shoes! You’re so fucking weak.”

“Fucking sinister!” Harry exclaims, as he stumbles to put them on.

Louis flips him off and closes the door in his face, turning to face the room just as his mother comes into the kitchen.

“Hi, honey. Feeling better? We bought frozen lasagna. Let’s snuggle up in front of the TV, yeah?”

“Brilliant,” Louis smiles, kicking a sock that doesn’t belong to him behind him.

**

“You stole his keys?” Niall asks in incredulousness. “You – You stole his… keys.”

Louis glares at the ceiling above his bed.

“You actually, literally stole his car keys. Like, the keys to his car. From his bag.” There’s a moment of silence. “His keys?!”

“Yes, Niall!” Louis exclaims. “His keys! I stole his keys!”
“God, Louis… Just checking.”

“Why are you laughing?” Louis can literally hear his attempts at keeping quiet through the phone. The next second Niall is bursting into actual laughter. It’s Saturday afternoon, and Louis doesn’t need this. “Stop laughing!” Niall cackles for a minute straight, his literal ha-ha-ha’s vibrant even through a phone. Louis rolls over on his bed and hangs up on him.

A moment later Niall calls him up, still laughing into the phone. Louis hangs up again.

He crawls underneath the covers of his bed, mourning every piece of dignity he used to have. Louis’ mother found a grey, soaked shirt under a radiator in the hall yesterday and Louis had to pretend it was Liam’s from the team, and he’d put it there to dry. His mother had given him a funny a look before picking it up and throwing it in the wash, and Lottie had laughed at him from her spot at the kitchen table. The shirt is now lying neatly on Louis’ dresser, freshly washed and folded, together with the pair of socks Harry had left behind.

Louis’ phone buzzes beside him again. He rolls his eyes, pressing the green button on the screen. “Have you stopped being a dick yet?”

“Sorry, mate,” Niall snickers, and Louis sighs. “No, don’t hang up! I’m nice again. Please, do go on and tell me what happened next. I’m all ears.” Louis doesn’t think that’s very believable, considering most of the time Niall’s only mouth and no ears.

“Right,” he says, and tells a brief summary of what occurred, conveniently forgetting to add the “oh, and we fucked” part. Louis doesn’t even know how he would tell anybody that. How do you just tell somebody that you’ve done it up the arse with someone you hate? Niall’s life would be a lie, honestly.

His phone buzzes once more while he’s speaking to Niall, and he quickly pulls away to glance at the screen. He frowns when he sees it’s only a random text, and he realizes he can’t just sit and wait anymore. He tells Niall he’s got to go, and hangs up.

It’s been almost two weeks now and nobody’s called or sent him a message. He went all over town, leaving resumes and begging people to take him on, and he hasn’t gotten a single response. He realizes getting a job isn’t that easy, and it’s not as if Louis’ resume is very impressive, but he really, really needs this.

He gets out of bed, righting his shirt and changes his tracksuit pants for a pair of proper jeans. He fixes his hair a bit and makes sure he looks presentable, before trudging downstairs. Lottie’s with her friends and his mother’s working, but what’s new. Jay takes the bus to work so that Louis and Lottie will have the car available, and spending a lot of money on petrol isn’t something they’re very keen on. Louis tries not to use it too much, but he gets lazy sometimes, and today is one of those days.

It’s a weekend so there are more people in town than usual, but Louis tells himself to just suck it up. He needs this, and he wants to make it easier for his mother as well. He goes into the café at the end of Cavanaugh St. but no success there. The manager apparently hasn’t even looked over his resume, and Louis turns and leaves with a roll of his eyes. At the next place, the cinema, they say they aren’t hiring at the moment, but Louis tries to persuade them into changing their minds. It doesn’t go very well, but at least the owner of the salon says he’ll get a free popcorn next time he visits.

Three additional stops and no luck later, he finds himself at the little fro-yo shop on Will Abby. He’s getting a bit desperate, and by the time he walks in the sun’s starting to set. There are a couple of people sitting around in the shop, but none of whom Louis recognizes, so he walks
straight up to the till. A tall guy is standing behind the cashier, and he’s wearing a black t-shirt with a pink little fro-yo cup over the heart. He looks fairly young, and his nametag says “Greg”.

Before Louis gets a word out though, the lad is looking up, and pulls a smirk. “Louis, innit?” he says, grinning slightly, giving him a slow onceover.

“What?” Louis says dumbly, taken aback.

Greg smiles, giving him a nod. “Your resume. I read it over yesterday.”

“Oh.” Alright. Okay. “So…” he says, warily stepping forward and leaning his arms on the counter. He finds himself looking up at the guy, who feels like a good ten inches taller than him. “What do you say?”

“Straight forward aren’t you?”

“Well, there isn’t much else to talk about is there?”

Greg gives him a small smile. He copies Louis, leaning on the counter. “Look, Louis. Do you have any experience at all? As in working in a shop with costumers?”

“It’s putting cold stuff in a pot. How hard can it be?” Louis says, shrugging.

“So, no,” Greg smiles, and he might look a bit endeared with Louis’ attitude. “No experience?”

“I’m pretty?” Louis tries. “I’ll bring all the girls in town to the shop?” Even if that’s the exact opposite of what he would like to happen. Ideally, nobody in the world would know he needs a job to help his family’s economy.

Greg laughs, lips quirking up around a white smile, and he straightens up, hands on the edge of the counter. “True,” he grins. “You are pretty.”

Louis smiles. “So? Me, fro-yo, work here thing?” He doesn’t care if Greg only gives him the job on the grounds of the “bringing girls” concept – he just needs the damn job.

He purses his lips, looking down at Louis. “I’ll give you a call once I’ve worked out some schedules. I need to teach you a thing or two as well.”

The sense of relief is almost making Louis hug the guy, but he settles for a smile and a handshake, and leaves with the feeling of a tiny bit of the anxiety in his belly being smothered.

**

Louis was seriously anxious about what people would say at school about the game. He was prepared for looks, people rolling their eyes and sighing in his presence, and even his teammates ignoring him. It’s safe to say he was a bit worried, but as the school day on Monday passes by, it seems to have been for nothing. Nobody seems to hold even the slightest grudge against him, and his teammates seem all too wrapped up in talking about how fantastic the ending of the match was, and how Harry saved the game. To be honest, Louis greatly prefers that even if it isn’t completely ideal.

And Louis has more to worry about, namely how the hell he’s going to return Harry’s clothes that are currently lying tucked into his bag. He’s contemplated just putting them in his locker while the boys shower after footie practice, but it feels a bit perilous, and he doesn’t really want to risk getting caught, because how would he ever manage to explain that?
He can’t make up his mind, and that’s why after second last period he’s still got Harry’s clothes in his bag, and is considering just throwing his shirt away or just put them on top of his other locker in hope he’ll find them later. And that’s what he doesn’t understand either; why he so badly has to make sure Harry gets his shirt back. It’s a bloody piece of fabric. And socks. Who the fuck cares?

That’s how he decides. Who the fuck cares, it’s a damn shirt. He’s just going to walk straight up to Harry’s locker and leave it there. He purposefully strides down the corridor, and steers into the hallway he knows Harry’s locker is located in. Thankfully, the hall is relatively empty, most people on their way to classes, and Louis quickly follows the lane of red painted lockers until he reaches the one he knows belongs to Harry.

(Long story short: in freshman year Louis and Harry had a slight tendency of sending little death threats and hate notes to each other by sticking them in the other’s locker.)

He can see a few girls down the hall making their way towards him, and he quickly digs through his bag, getting the shirt out and trying to find the damn socks as well. It takes a moment or two, and then someone is clearing their throat behind him just as his hand closes around the pair.

He slowly turns around, and of course. Of fucking course.

Harry is standing there. He’s in this stupid, patterned button down, which is not even buttoned. Like barely. His hair is getting a bit long lately, and it’s curling around his ears, and he’s got this deep parting going on. His arms are crossed, one of his eyebrows arched upwards. He’s staring at him expectantly, and he looks so damn stupid and posh that Louis merely even acknowledges Harry’s friend – the artsy guy – that’s standing next him.

Louis straightens up, and with vast dignity and head held up with pride places the pair of socks on top of Harry’s shirt, and takes the two steps up to him. He keeps his chin up, pointedly not looking at him when he neatly presents the articles to him, holding them out. Louis can see Harry slowly reach out in his periphery, and the second he takes the clothes, Louis ready to stride away, intent on showing how unbothered, indifferent, and completely blasé he is about all of this.

His phone just happens to start ringing and he reacts in a fraction of a second, seeing as it’s Greg from the fro-yo shop. He has to take this call immediately, his plan be damned.

“Shit,” he accidentally says, earning a glance from Harry as he’s struggling with his bag and getting the phone to his ear. “Fuck.”

“Hi, Louis! You look great today!” a girl’s voice says from beside him and he vaguely recognizes it, but is too preoccupied trying to accept Greg’s call to look up.

“Hi, thanks,” he says in a haste, finally tapping the green button. “Greg!”

“Louis! Mate! How are you? I’ve got the schedules worked out. How about you come over at four on Wednesday and I’ll teach you everything I know.”

Louis can almost see Greg’s smirk in his head. “Sorry, man. I can’t do afternoons. Weekends and nights only.”

“Well, shit,” Greg says. “You could have told me that.”

“Sorry for ruining all your work. I hope you can still put up with me. I’m a handful, should have told you.” He smirks, and it might be a bit inappropriate, but by the way their first conversation went he’s got the feeling it’s okay.

Greg laughs easily, which confirms that, and Louis grins. “Fine, Thursday night then. I’ll have
Louis breaks out into an even bigger smile, because shit, that’s a load off his shoulders. “Great. See you then! Wednesday night. I’ll be ready.”

“Well.”

He finally raises his head after ending the call, and finds Harry and his friend staring at him. Harry looks like he doesn’t know whether he should punch him or pat him for whatever reason, and his mate is only gravelly gazing. Louis’ smile disappears the moment he meets Harry’s eyes, and pointedly twists his jaw away. He gets back to plan A, and strides away with pride and dignity (and a little bit of happiness in his gut).

**

The very next day, the first thing he’s met by when he walks into homeroom is a hot scowl from the back of the classroom. It’s Harry, who else, and he looks proper pissed off. Louis isn’t exactly fazed, but he can’t help but wonder what it is now. He isn’t surprised, but he’s fairly certain he hasn’t done anything. He goes through his memory in class, but he can’t seem to remember a moment where he’s supposed to have angered him. Football practice went fine, they didn’t even bicker since Harry was pleasingly ignoring him, and he can’t be reminded of any other time where they could have clashed.

He doesn’t really care, though. Harry’s an unreasonable twat anyway. Louis has things to do, like, not worry about any Harry related thing whatsoever.

Niall complains about his nail condition during lunch, which means he’s still hung up on the school nurse. Louis doesn’t really see it, but supposedly she’s hot.

“But have you seen her legs, mate?” he says, when Louis tells him to get a grip. “She’s like made of gold. Her skin is shining, and her eyes are the deepest of the deepest seas. I’d get down on my knees for her anytime and anywhere. I bet she tastes like glitter, if you know what I mean.”

“You need a fucking filter.”

He doesn’t have the time for this.

Thursday is coming up, and he actually finds himself getting a little nervous. He’s not usually the type to get nervous, and Greg seems great, but Louis has this feeling that if he doesn’t do this properly he will be getting sacked stat, and that is just isn’t something he can afford.

When the day finally rolls around, and Louis has suffered yet another day with Harry staring at him like a creep the entire school day, he is at the frozen yoghurt shop and Greg is showing him the ropes.

He’s in his normal black jeans, but he’s wearing a black t-shirt with the logo on, just like the one Greg had on a couple of days ago. It all seems pretty easy, only the fro-yo machine is a little complicated to refill, and the cashier takes him about fifteen minutes to work, and Greg laughs at him the entire night. He has to wear a stupid tag as well that says ‘NEW AT WORK’ and while it’s embarrassing, it helps him not to look like a complete idiot in front of customers.

Actually, this whole job thing isn’t as bad as he’d thought. He thought he’d feel ashamed standing behind the counter, but it makes him feel better. He’s making a difference, helping himself get somewhere and he feels less uneasy knowing he’s at least trying.

He feels his phone buzzing in his pocket, and a wave of unease falls over him at once. He lied to
Niall about what he was doing tonight. He never lies to Niall. He hasn’t lied to him in years (and withholding certain information does not count), and he seriously doesn’t have a good reason why he’s done it now. It’s just… embarrassing, but he knows that if Niall found out he’s gotten a job, he would passively aggressively guilt trip Louis into bringing his family to dinner at his house, and then make his own parents invite them to lunch both two days of the weekend for the rest of the year. That’s not something Louis wants. They’re fine.

He ignores his phone, looking up when he sees his new boss approaching.

“Do you think you could handle a customer by yourself?” Greg asks, nodding encouragingly at the glass door. Louis looks over, and he spots somebody coming towards the shop.

“Yes,” he nods, feeling kind of okay behind the till. “You better not leave though,” he adds. Greg cackles, but stays.

When the door opens, Louis regrets his decision instantly. It’s a woman and a man walking into the shop, and his stomach sinks. This is so not what he needs right now.

“I’m just saying, Des,” the woman says, hand gesturing vividly. “I don’t think it’s a good idea –“

“Anne, we’ve talked –“

“Don’t interrupt me, please.” They stop in front of desk, eyeing the toppings while they continue bickering.

Louis’ never felt more uncomfortable. He glances back at Greg helplessly, but the bloke only snickers, gesturing for him to go on. Louis really doesn’t want to interrupt – he doesn’t want to be a part of this at all.

“Are you ready to order…?” he asks carefully after another minute of listening to the couple snip at each other.

The woman looks up at him, and Louis meets her eyes. She looks strikingly much like Harry. The same big mouth, the jawline familiar and her hair the same dark color as his. Her hair is wavy, not as curly as Harry’s, but it’s easy to tell from whom he inherited his looks. Mrs. Styles’ eyes are lined with wrinkles, but it’s hard to tell if they’re from age or exhaustion. Something tells him it’s the latter.

Louis fully expects her to recognize him, considering he plays on her son’s football team. Yet he earnestly hopes Harry’s parents are too wrapped up in their fighting to realize who he is, because if they do they might tell Harry he works here, which is definitely not something he wishes. He can’t believe it’s only been a few hours and it’s already gone to hell.

Somehow Harry’s mother doesn’t twist a muscle, doesn’t actually seem to recognize him in the slightest. She orders a small pot with cut strawberries and coconut shavings, and Harry’s father one with Oreo chunks. Louis nervously taps the screen to the computerized cashier as the couple start bickering again. It makes him even more nervous, because their fighting is incessant and he barely knows how to work the machine as it is.

“Is something wrong?” Harry’s mum asks, and Louis instantly flushes.

“I’m sorry,” he says. “I’m new.”

“It’s okay, sweetheart.” She pauses. “Des, I’m going to my lawyer on Monday if you don’t change your mind.”
“Anne!”

“I’m done!” Louis announces much louder than intended, and hands the credit card back over to Harry’s mum forcefully. Take it and leave, for the love of God.

“Thanks, love.” She takes the card, and picks up her fro-yo. They leave and Louis almost feels like he’s supposed to wipe sweat off his brow. He watches the door to the shop close, uneasiness bubbling in his stomach.

Greg hangs his arm over his shoulders. “That went well. Depressing couple as hell, but that went pretty good I think.”

“Yeah,” Louis swallows, tearing his eyes from the windows.

**

The next day, Louis can feel Harry’s eyes on him from the moment he steps out of his car in the parking lot at school. He doesn’t know if he’s imagining it because he still feels so uncomfortable with what happened at the shop last night – or what he heard, rather – but he feels awkward the entire day.

When he glanced around the lot he wasn’t able to spot Harry, but considering the boy was still staring at him the day before he is pretty sure it isn’t just in his head. It’s confirmed when he attends the classes they share. Harry’s eyes are surely locked on him the entire lectures. The few times Louis dares to meet his eyes, he’s just staring back, eyes dark and teeth sunk into his bottom lip. His gaze on him makes him squirm, mainly because he doesn’t know what it is he wants.

It continues the whole day. When Louis sees him in the corridor between classes his eyes are always set on him, and he isn’t even glaring, he’s just looking and it’s creepy and weird. For a moment he thinks that Harry’s parents might have recognized him after all, but it doesn’t feel like it’s that. They didn’t even spare him an extra glance the night before.

During lunch Harry’s sitting at a table inconveniently situated across from Louis, and his stares have turned from weird to something terrifyingly on a level with stalker-ish, and Louis almost wants to cry because he doesn’t know if Harry wants to kidnap and murder him, or grab him by the collar and fuck him against the nearest wall.

Before football practice Louis tries to raise a brow at him, silently asking him “what?!” while they’re on opposite sides of the locker room, but Harry only keeps looking. He stares at him, and then slowly, slowly his tongue peaks out and licks his bottom lip. Louis’ immediately freaked out and is certain Harry is doing this exclusively for the purpose of just that. He gets his cleats and runs out of the changing room, escaping towards the pitch as fast as he can manage.

Luckily, Harry’s the one in charge of practice today, and he has to keep his attention on the team, rather than on Louis. It’s a relief, but Louis’ still wondering if he’s just taunting him, has some hidden motive, or simply is just crazy. After practice he goes strictly home without showering, avoiding Harry at all costs.

The following day isn’t nearly as nerve-wracking, but Louis still feels strange and Harry gives him a few lingering glances during homeroom.

At lunch Louis is at a table by the west end, eating together with a few lads on the team. Niall’s somewhere on his left, being loud and laughing obnoxiously. Any other day Louis would have been acting the same, but he is currently being stared at by Jack the Ripper (also commonly
referred to as Harry).

Louis wrinkles his nose, chewing slowly on his bagel. Harry is in some kind of white blouse, and there’s an earring dangling from his ear. He looks like some kind of pirate with a thing for women’s clothes. Louis silently bets the earring is fake.

“What has he done now?” Liam says on his right, startling him slightly.

“Hmm?” he says, swallowing.

“Styles. What has he done now? You’re glaring.”

“Well, he glared at me first,” Louis mutters.

Liam chuckles. “What did you do then?”

Louis turns to look at him contemplatively. Liam is a nice kid. He’s been the team keeper for years, and he’s one of those guys people just like, even though he doesn’t even try. It’s the brown, puppy eyes, Louis figures. Or the fact that he’s got biceps like no other, and could probably bench-press Louis himself.

“I don’t know, Liam,” he says slowly, licking his lip and taking another bite of his bagel. He glances at Harry’s table, and he finds him still gazing. “I don’t know.”

During fourth period it’s announced through the speakers that footie practice has been canceled, and Louis is about to go to Coach’s office to complain after class when he’s interrupted by a text message from an unknown number.

My house after school. Bring lube.

It can only be from one person (and he swears to god he doesn’t even want to know how in the world Harry’s got his number) and Louis is wholeheartedly wondering why Harry’s such a bloody creep. And he’s absolutely ridiculous, too, expecting Louis to just show up because he says so. Louis doesn’t even own lube. Like, why would he have lube?! Also, they’re planning ‘dates’ now? What even? And – ah, fuck. Louis is going to have to buy lube, because, well, of course he’s going to Harry’s.

After ten excruciating minutes at the pharmacy, Louis is pulling up at Harry’s house. He has decided he is never, ever, ever going to buy lube by himself again, especially one that says ‘for anal use’. The woman at the desk probably knew who he was and thought he was going to go home and shove a cucumber up his arse. Fucking Styles. Louis cannot believe he just did that.

He locks the car and fervently begs to the lord Harry’s parents aren’t home. He does not particularly want to be in an environment where people threat their spouses with getting divorces when they don’t get their way, particularly when he’s holding a bottle of lube in his hand. And also, Harry’s parents could recognize him, which could have severe consequences.

He’s fairly sure they aren’t home, however. Otherwise Harry hopefully wouldn’t have “invited” him over, unless his parents are okay with their son having sex with boys while they’re at home. Which wouldn’t actually surprise him since they’re related to Harry, who Louis is becoming more and more certain is a total freak.

Anyways. Louis is getting sidetracked here.

He knocks on the door. Several times. Harry doesn’t open, but when Louis tries the doorknob it’s unlocked, so he carefully walks in. The first thing he thinks when he steps inside is that the Styles
family probably keeps three maids in a cellar somewhere that are forced to keep the house unnaturally clean. Secondly, it doesn’t look like Harry belongs to this house in the slightest. Harry is all kitsch and knickknack, and this house is very… neat. Polished.

This is so uncomfortable.

Louis finds a wide staircase, and figures Harry’s room is upstairs. On the wall on the way up, several framed family photographs are set up. It’s Harry and his parents, including a girl who must be Harry’s older sister. Louis wouldn’t be surprised if the girl is halfway across the country. Louis would be if he had to live with such parents they have. For a moment he feels sort of queasy as he lurks his way to Harry’s room upstairs. He doesn’t understand how Harry stands these people.

All feelings of pity dissipate the moment he finds Harry, though. He’s leaning back on his bed in his room, casually texting on his phone, shirtless.

“What are you such a fucking creep?” Louis says, throwing the lube at him, hitting him in the stomach.

Harry merely catches it before it rolls down, eyeing it appreciatively. “Oh, the expensive one. Nice.”

“What the hell is wrong with you?” Louis asks exasperatedly, not even bothering to wonder how Harry even knows that. Louis was the first boy who fucked him. Like, hello, Harry shouldn’t know that stuff, unless he’s been doing some extensive experiencing by himself. Which. Possibly. Louis feels like a bloody virgin in comparison. Which, until recently he was. Let’s not talk about that, though. Let’s not.

“What?” Harry says.

“You’ve been a complete stalker for days. What the hell did I do to you? Stop staring at me, for fuck’s sake.”

“You’re insulting me. I feel hurt.”

He looks like a fucking frog. “You look like fucking frog.”

“Hey.”

“Jesus Christ.” Louis groans, falling back onto Harry’s bed, arms spread, body shaped like a T. He feels Harry moving beside him, and he opens one eye to find him lying on his side, head propped on his elbow. He’s smiling down at him, and he’s lying a bit too close in Louis’ opinion.

“Aw, baby,” Harry murmurs, sarcasm heavy on his tongue. “Been having a rough week, huh?”

Actually, yes.

“I don’t know, maybe I’d feel a lot better if some creep didn’t look at me like he wants to assault me in class. You know, a pupil is supposed to feel safe in school?” He closes his eyes again.

Harry’s bed is pretty soft.

He feels Harry’s hand on his stomach, way too big, fingers long and spindly, splaying over him obnoxiously. “Poor baby,” he says, rubbing his skin under his shirt softly.

Louis squints, glancing from the touch at his belly and up at Harry’s smirking face. “I’m much better now. Thank you for caressing me,” he deadpans.
“Very welcome, honey.” Harry smiles sweetly. “Now would you please stop fucking whining and do what you came here for.”

Louis rolls his eyes, but nonetheless reaches for the lube.
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Hiii, here's the third chapter! Hope you will enjoy.

For update questions: I will upload a new chapter once a week, at the end of each week. You can expect an update around Thursday/Friday/Saturday or something like that, but there will be a chapter out each week!

I also added some notes on the first chapter that you can check out [here](#).

As usual, thanks [Vicky](#) for being the quickest and bestest beta ;)

Happy reading!

So. Look.

Louis didn’t plan this. He didn’t, it just happened.

After he and Harry finished back at his place last Friday, Harry may have kicked him out and thrown the lube bottle at him as his revenge for Louis pinching his hips a bit too hard. He said he was sure he’d bruise, and Louis thought that was a bit unfair because Harry had actually enjoyed it at the time. Nonetheless, Harry was throwing him out and Louis was standing there with a bottle of lube, so he took it with him home.

What happens thereafter he can’t be blamed for.

He may or may not have an obsessive compulsion to be better than Harry at absolutely everything, and that isn’t his fault. But, as it is, everything means *everything*. So that’s why he’s here in this moment, half lying in the dark on his bed a Sunday night with the computer on his lap, staring at the homepage of a porn site.

This is entirely Harry’s fault. Louis isn’t even that much of a porn guy, really, but when he came home from Harry’s a couple of days ago he was itching. Harry seemed like he knew stuff and Louis refuses to have lesser knowledge. Imagine being worse than Harry in bed. Jesus.

He went home that day, muttering about how Harry knew which lube were the good ones. He is still determined to surpass Harry in knowledge and experience. So here he finally is, having mustered up some courage and waited until everyone in the house is asleep.

To be completely honest, most of what he’s seeing is scaring the fuck out of him. All he can see in the video descriptions are “Boy pussy gets bred by daddy” and there are pictures of people holding their partners upside down, using big ass (definitely no pun intended) dildos and spanking each other. Louis feels almost like he’s cringing at the screen, blinking rapidly against the light.

He briefly thanks God (which he realizes could be somewhat inappropriate) Harry hasn’t expressed any sort of interested in those things as of yet. Mostly it’s freaking Louis out because he didn’t know this is actual stuff that people do, and he has no experience in it at all. Does Harry expect him to hold him down and blindfold him? That doesn’t actually seem that unappealing, but
he’s glad he was Harry’s first. He can’t be that experienced, come on now. It’s only been a few weeks since that first time.

He exits the page, determined to find another. There has got to be home videos somewhere with people who look normal and not like famous, waxed porn stars hooked on muscle relaxers who belt fake, cringe-worthy moans.

He finally finds an amateur video of what appears to be a couple, seemingly not much older than himself, which he finds quite comforting. The light in the room of the video is dim, but the people are visible enough. The person who seems to be the top has got light blond hair and is lying down on the bed, getting snogged by the other lad, who’s straddling his hips, knees bent at the top’s ribs. The blond one underneath is groping the other’s bum, which isn’t that bad. Not that big, a little perky. It reminds him of Harry’s.

The couple rolls over, and before Louis knows what’s going on, the lad who’s been underneath up until now is turning the other one over and is spreading his bum cheeks. Louis figures he’ll get the lube, and for the first time he feels a real tingling sensation low in his belly. He’s fingered Harry twice now, and it’s something he’s definitely enjoyed. Harry just… squirms and moans, helpless to the touch.

At first he doesn’t understand what they’re doing on the screen, but the blond one isn’t getting the lube. Instead he’s leaning down and plants a kiss against the bottom’s hole.

So.

Louis did not know that’s a thing.

He continues watching, pupils round as he stares at the guy licking and kissing the other man’s arse. Part of him wonders what the hell he is doing watching something like this, but the rest of him feels flushed and warm.

It looks… quite pleasant. The moans escaping the bottom’s lips don’t sound faked in the slightest, and Louis suddenly wonders what Harry would sound like if Louis did that to him. Would he be into this?

He watches, feeling himself slowly go hard, mouth ajar and his breath getting more and more labored. He eventually pushes down his boxers, letting his cock breathe. He realizes he’s never been this hard, like ever, and Jesus Christ, there has got to be more videos like this, right?

He gets off, replaying the shot where the blond dips his tongue into the other’s arse, making him spill over his entire chest.

So.

Louis is into that, it seems.

**

The lads on the team are having a bit of banter when Louis comes into the locker room on Monday. Apparently Liam has a new girlfriend, and Jonny and Stan caught them kissing behind the old gym before lunch. Louis manages to catch up on the conversation quickly, interested in the gossip like everyone else.

"She’s pretty, though," Lee says kindly, giving Liam a thumbs up.

"I know," he answers bashfully, a little blush starting at his throat.
"Careful, Li," Louis teases with a grin as he's pulling his shirt over his head. "You already seem whipped. If you don't watch out she'll have you on a leash," he jokes.

The lads laugh, and Liam rolls his eyes lightly. "Don't really care to be honest."

Louis quirks a brow, breaking into a smile while Stan laughs loudly. "She’s that good in bed, yeah?"

Liam flips him off, and Louis frowns, about to open his mouth and tell Stan to stop being a dick when Harry interjects. "Hey. That's rude."

Louis looks his way, a little stunned. He didn't expect Harry to be that guy. He hasn't seen him all day either because he didn't show at homeroom this morning, but he’s here now, sitting on the bench and pulling his sock over his shin guard, shirtless. For a moment Louis is reminded of the video he saw the previous night, and he bites his lip. He shakes his head at himself, but can’t help but look at him. He eyes him quickly in his periphery, allowing himself to take in his toned upper body. He doesn’t see any bruises on his hips, though. Told you, jackass.

For some reason the boys on the team seem to find Harry’s words funny, though, and the room is filled with cackles.

"He says because he hasn't gotten a good lay in months," Stan laughs, and Jonny sits down on the bench next to Harry, dunking him on the back.

"Tell us Harry, when was the last time you pulled?"

Louis' heart beats just that much faster. Meanwhile, Harry shakes his head in annoyance, hair shadowing his eyes.

"That’s none of your business," he says, throwing his jersey over his head. Normally, Louis would have rolled his eyes and called Harry a pussy or proclaimed him a virgin for being so uptight about it, but now that actually he is the subject of Harry's sexual activities, he can't be anything other than thankful for his standards.

"Please. It's just us lads," Jonny grins, and Louis bites his cheek not to tell him off.

"I said it's none of you're business," Harry grits out, shrugging off Jonny's arm.

"Don't be such a puss, Harry."

Stan is one of the closest mates Louis' got on the team, but right now he needs to shut the fuck up. Louis bites his cheeks, keeping his eyes strictly on the shoe he's tying.

"Come on," the lads chant and Louis wants to smack them all with the fire extinguisher that's attached to the corner of the wall.

"Fine!" Harry suddenly exclaims and Louis stills. "Last week. And a fucking good shag as well."

And. Okay.

Louis looks up. His heart is racing, but he’s immediately met with Harry's green eyes, and for a moment he feels completely lost. Harry's face looks grim, but his eyes are searching and not as hard as his face. Louis' mouth is just the slightest bit of ajar, and all he really wants to do is to grab his bag and run. He's never been good with handling problems. He's good with running, though. That he can do.
"Get your arses to practice," Louis yells suddenly, no idea where the words are coming from. He stands, grabbing a stray football from where it's resting on the floor. "We've got drills to run, lads!"

The team collectively roll their eyes and groan, but nonetheless gather their stuff and begin trudging out the door, knowing that Coach will check their attendance in a few minutes. Louis ends up last with Harry. It definitely wasn't his intention, but maybe it was Harry's because he strolls slowly next to him, not saying a word while the other lads are within earshot.

"You're not a good lay," Harry finally declares next to him as they’re trailing behind the rest of the team.

Louis almost laughs. "Yeah. Thanks."

"Not at all."

"Glad you think so." Louis rolls his eyes. "Tell me that the next time you attack me."


Louis’ mouth falls open. That was not what Louis meant. Before he gets a word out, Harry is jogging up the field, barking out an order to get the lads warmed up.

And no, Louis thinks, as they’re jogging around the pitch. This isn’t going to do. Harry can’t just tell him when they’re going to meet up and “do it”. What does he think this is? Some sort of insane soap opera? Mortal enemies with benefits? What the hell even is that? Louis shakes his head, running a hand over his face.

Nope, he thinks, when they’re running drills. This is definitely not going to do. They’re going to have to talk about this. They have to. Louis is not going to go on this crazy cruise of Harry’s decisions. This is not going to be a thing. Harry is his arch nemesis. They absolutely loathe each other. The fact that they’re having sex is some supernatural occurrence that Louis doesn’t even think of as real.

He feels slightly on the verge of insane here.

After practice, Louis goes straight to the parking lot. Ten minutes later he is still waiting by Harry’s car. Well, hiding. He’s crouched behind his antagonist’s Rover, feeling like an assassin on a mission. His fingers are drumming impatiently against the blindingly shiny bumper, and he can’t hold back the roll of his eyes. Harry manages to bother him without even being present.

He finally hears footsteps nearing the car, so he sneaks a peak around the edge. Harry is approaching, hair newly wet from the shower, his bag thrown over his shoulder. He has time to unlock the car and open the door to the backseat, before Louis is jumping out and into his space.

"Jesus fuck, Louis," he groans, clutching his chest.

“You,” Louis says through his teeth, grabbing his shirt and pulling him roughly with him around the car where they’re hidden. “Talk. Now.”

“What are you doing?” Harry complains, righting his shirt.

Louis grabs him by the ear and pulls him down to earth, or at least to match his own height.

"This thing going on between us," he gestures wildly with his other hand between them, "is not going to be a thing. I don't even know what it is we're doing here. One day you're all up on me"
and the next those green little eyes of yours are sending daggers into my skull," he says dramatically, and Harry sighs. Louis stomps his foot, making him gasp and crouch slightly. "This is weird – no, this is wrong, and we need to talk about it."

Harry arches a condescending eyebrow, still biting his cheek in pain. "Gay is wrong?"

"No!" Louis hisses. "You are wrong. This thing that is not a thing between us is wrong. It's insane is what it is! Somewhere there are dead kittens going batsh! crazy in their graves – this is absurd and needs to be talked about –"

Harry is grabbing his bum. His huge paws are on Louis' arse, pressing their crotches together, completely contradicting and undermining everything Louis just said. And he's smirking.

Louis glares, intending to push him off when he puts his hands against his chest. Except Harry uses that moment of movement to his advantage, rolling his hips into Louis' and making him gasp involuntarily.

"Styles," he warns angrily, still in Harry's grip. He's certain Harry's not listened to a word he's said.

"Tomlinson." Harry whispers, and squeezes his arse, digging his fingers into his thin footie shorts.

Fuck.

"This is not a thing," Louis repeats, slightly breathless.

"Yeah, yeah, Miss Principles. Now get in the car so I can blow you, yeah?"

Dammit.

Louis sighs, nails digging into Harry's bicep.

Harry opens the car door, lifts him up by the hips and lays him down on the beige, filthily expensive leather of the backseat, pulling down Louis' pants while Louis vows to aim at Harry's grossly rich interior design.

**

The next two months pass by in a blur, generally in the same manner. Louis hooks up with Harry on a pretty regular basis, most often when Harry corners him in the empty locker room and invites himself over to Louis' house the nights when his mum's working the shift, or when she isn’t home during free periods, or twice, the back of his car. If they want to go all the way though, Louis’ house is a prime choice.

Louis' got a packet of lube and condoms in his wallet everywhere he goes, because he’s learned that Harry indeed is some kind of insatiable monster. Not that Louis isn’t using the opportunity, because he is, but he used to be a bit classier about it… in the beginning at least.

**October 27th**
Louis: hi
Harry: what
Louis: do you want to meet up?
Harry: is this your polite way of inviting me to a sex orgy
Louis: no.
Harry: are you sure
Louis: yes
Harry: why are you texting then
Harry: ??
Harry: weak. Just ask me if you want to do it
Louis: Okay?
Harry: so….?
Louis: so?
Harry: Jesus fuck should I bring a bottle of lube after footie practice or not
Louis: oh my god
Louis: yes

**November 9th**
Louis: do you want to meet me
Harry: why
Louis: because...?
Harry: because ?
Louis: you know
Harry: I don’t
Louis: quit it
Harry: you’re such a baby
Harry: your house 9:30pm

**November 21st**
Louis: wanna fuck?
Harry: damn way to be classy…
Louis: you’re such a dickhead
Harry: but you like me ☺
Louis: my house during lunch period. No bs.
Harry: can’t wait sweetheart
Louis: fuck off

**November 22nd**
Harry: fuck?
Louis: I fucked you yesterday where is the patience why do you love me so much
Harry: ????
Louis: see you in 10

**November 30th**
Louis: ?
Harry: !

There are only about a handful of times Louis has instigated a meet-up, but he thinks that might only be since Harry is constantly keeping him on his toes, knowing that the boy is some sort of wild animal that can come at him at any time of day, whenever, and wherever. Apart from in public, that is. Louis is actually the only one of them being civil here. Harry can randomly grab him and pull him into a closet when he least expects it. At least Louis asks permission if he’s going to give Harry a handjob.

In conclusion, Louis’ pretty well fucked these days. And he’s, like, good at it. Harry tends to come first, and both of their stamina has definitely improved, so he counts that as a success. He thinks his abs have gotten a bit more prominent these days too. He’ll ask Lottie about it.

Ever since the porn incident, that video’s been a thought hiding in the back of his head every time he hooks up with Harry. He’s watched those videos a lot by himself, and it’s probably the hottest thing he’s seen. Girl porn is okay, but… those videos are something else.
Anyways.

Football is going extremely well. They haven’t lost a single game this season, which is unheard of in the school team’s history. Harry is still a pretentious asshole that Louis regularly wants to kick in the head. He still has the most awful ideas for the team and Louis still has to go out of his way to shut him down. Other than that, things are going kind of great. Louis is working his arse off to make this the best year the team has had so far, and thankfully Harry is putting in lot of effort as well. The lads on the team are very sharp this year, except from when they’re dicking around in the locker room, while Louis is deeply focusing on not staring at Harry changing.

That’s another thing. He might – *might* – have come to terms with finding Harry a little bit attractive. It’s not like it’s a big deal – he could have Harry on his knees for him with the snap of his fingers if he wanted. So.

It’s only a month left until Christmas break and the schoolwork is piling up. Louis is constantly busy, having football practice, matches, homework, a job, and also a Harry to keep content. He’s actually found that the more often they fuck, the easier it is to manipulate Harry into going with his decisions about the football team. His mood is usually that much better when he isn’t “suffering from sexual frustration” as he’s put it when he’s texted Louis a few times.

“Why are you plotting Harry’s death?” Niall asks him at lunch. It’s Friday.

“What?” Louis scoffs.

“You’re glaring. Not that that’s unusual,” Niall adds under his breath, and Louis sends him an indignant look. “You’re hating him through your eyes. What did he do?”

“Nothing. I don’t need a reason,” Louis hisses, crossing his arms. Harry’s currently standing on top of his lunch table, reenacting that time he was a total idiot.

“Is it because he scored two goals at the last away game and you only scored one?”

“No,” Louis scoffs. Please. Louis doesn’t get hung up on those things. Silly.

“Is it because he’s dancing to Grease right now?”

“Grease is *my* favorite movie!” He exclaims, throwing his hands out. “He’s making fun of it!”

“I doubt he remembers that you played Danny Zuko in eighth grade,” Niall says lamely, chewing on his chips.

“Oh, please,” Louis sneers, standing from the table. He hangs his bag over his shoulder, stalking away towards the exit. He walks by Harry’s table, sending him a glare in passing. He’s currently doing the hand jive.

“Hey!” Harry calls behind him, and Louis spins around.

“Please don’t speak to me, you’re disrespecting the entire Grease community with your dancing, and I am repulsed.”

Harry chuckles. “Grease community,” he says under his breath, and jumps down from the table. He puts his hands on his hips, starting to make the moves to ‘You’re the one that I want’ towards him.

“I’m going to gag,” Louis says. Why is he doing *that*. “Please stop, you’re embarrassing the entire school.”
“Why don’t you show me how to do it then?” Harry asks cheekily, and Louis can see a few lads from the team and a couple of Harry’s friends laugh. Harry leans in, whispering, “I know you can roll your hips…”

Louis gives him an affronted look, pulling back. “And if you don’t stop, you won’t know what that feels like anymore.” He backs away, heading for the exit.

Niall catches up with him in the hallway. “I don’t really understand what your deal is, but the two of you really seem to love hating each other.”

“The only thing I love about Harry is that I don’t have to be in his presence again until the match tonight.”

**

The locker room is crowded, filled to the max. It’s the last home game of the first part of the season before the winter break, and the cheerleaders are making a ruckus in the changing room, singing chants and painting the players’ cheeks with war stripes, hugging them all good luck. It’s actually fun and Louis and Stan are standing on one of the benches, belting “Meat, sauce, sausage roll, come on Donny give us goal!” along with the cheering squad.

“Right, lads!” Coach yells from the doorway. “Out with ye on the field! Warm up, let’s go!”

“Yes, sir!” Louis yells back, jumping down on the floor, before he jogs to the corner behind a wall of lockers to check himself in the mirror one last time.

The room is crowded as people push towards the exit and Harry walks just past him. His shoulder brushes against Louis’ chest where he’s standing in the corner, and the moment is too good not to take advantage of.

His small hand snatches out, grabbing Harry’s waist and pulling him back against himself. Harry goes pliant instantly, and Louis’ tummy swirls a bit.

“How’s that rug burn?” he whispers against his neck, a memory from the other day at the back of his head; he asked the same thing then, Harry flipping him off and grabbing his shirt off the floor, slamming the door.

“How’s that rug burn?” Harry hisses back, but doesn’t move away.

Louis squeezes his hip, and a thought hits him. He rolls his hips obscenely against Harry’s arse, and murmurs, “Still want me to teach you…?”

He can see him swallow over his shoulder, and Louis’ tummy swirls a bit.

“Stop it, or I’ll elbow you,” Harry hisses, bringing him back to reality. Louis squeezes his hip one last time, and it’s equally funny and hot how strong Harry’s sexual submissive streak is. He seems to get lost in every touch, despite what comes out of his mouth. Louis lets him go, and Harry swiftly moves away as if their encounter never occurred.

The match goes splendidly. It’s another win for Doncaster: Louis scores two goals, both assists coming from Lee. Louis kisses his cheek passionately after the game, laughingly giving him a piggyback ride off the pitch. The coach nods at him approvingly when they pass him, Louis
grinning widely, saluting him.

“Hey,” Lee says at the side of his head. “Isn’t that your mum?” Louis looks up, finding his family waiting by the end of the pitch.

“I’ll see you later, ‘kay?” he says, dropping his teammate off on the ground. He jogs up to them, breaking into a bigger smile as he sees the two little girls by his mother.

“Babies!” he yells, throwing his arms around his little sisters.

“Louis!” they shriek in response, clutching around his waist as Louis hugs them to him. Fuck, he’s missed them. He hooks them under his arms, spinning them in a circle until they beg him to stop.

“Louis,” Daisy says, poking his nose.

“Daisy,” he smiles. “Phoebe,” he nods to his other sister, who looks exactly the same as Daisy, only in a different jacket.

“Aren’t you going to greet me too, loser?”

Louis looks up at Niall who’s standing next to Lottie, both of their arms crossed. He finds Niall’s parents close by as well, and he grins and waves at them. They come over, congratulating him on the game. Niall’s mother hugs him despite his sweaty attire.

“Put on a jacket, dear,” Maura says, rubbing his arm. “Aren’t you cold?”

“I’m off to the locker room, actually.” He looks to his own mother. “Wait for me in the car, yeah?” His mum nods, and he bites his lip to hold back his smile, hugging his little sisters one last time before jogging back to the building.

**

Aside from Harry’s little Grease stunt, the entire day is a faultless success. The game went great, the Friday night is spent with his family around the kitchen table having dinner and watching movies in front of the tv.

Louis’ got Daisy on his hip, the five-year-old drawing on his cheek with a purple crayon as she giggles, while Louis helps his mother cook dinner. Lottie and Phoebe are drawing at the kitchen table, quietly giggling and chatting.

He’s cut the onions, now letting them fry with the champignons in the frying pan on the stove. They’re making Spaghetti Bolognese because that’s what the girls requested. His mother is by his side, bringing out the pasta and pouring up water in the stew pan. His mum’s taken the entire weekend off to spend it with the family. Louis it hasn’t felt this bubbly in a while.

He’s crooning along to the stereo, some happy song by Natasha Bedingfield, and blows a raspberry against his sister’s cheek, belting the “I love you, I love you, I love you” part into her ear and making her scream at him, smile hiding in her eyes. That’s when his mother comes up on his other side, the money box her hand, face in a frown.

“Why is there extra money in the box, Lou?” she murmurs, fingers touching the extra couple of pounds.

“Oh,” Louis says, casually. “We didn’t go shopping yesterday.” He clears his throat, acting busy with the food on the stove. “We just ate sandwiches last night.”
“Why?”

“Sorry, we were just tired,” he says, looking up to meet her eyes. She shakes her head, sighing.

“Darling. You need to eat properly. I give you money to cook real dinner. There’ve been too many takeout and sandwich dinners in this house.” She chuckles, but Louis knows she’s serious.

“Yeah, sorry, mum. Sorry.”

She gives him a smile, stroking his back warmly before she starts bringing out plates and cutlery from the cupboards. Louis sets Daisy down and walks over to Lottie, sitting down next to her at the table. He taps her thigh lightly while looking at her. She turns, frowning.

“What?” she murmurs, leaning into his side.

“If Mum asks, we ate sandwiches last night, okay?”

“We ate tomato soup last night.”

He gives her an exasperated look.

“Fine, but you owe me,” she says, serious. He rolls his eyes, but he can tell she’s wondering why he’s having her lie about some dinner.

See, he hasn’t told anyone he works at the fro-yo shop yet (which is going great. Greg is ace and Harry’s parents haven’t come around again, thank god), not even Lottie knows, and he normally tells her everything. Thing is, he doesn’t want his family to know he’s got a job to help make the household go around.

First of all, if Lottie would get a job, Louis would be angry and pissed because a teenager shouldn’t have to get a job, even if it’s necessary, and he reckons she’d feel exactly the same about him. Second, he just wants to help, make everything just a bit easier on his mother. He hates that she has to work long nights and shifts, and he barely gets to see her during the week. She looks tired and stressed most of the time, and if he can help her by bringing in some extra money maybe she wouldn’t have to work so damn hard all the time. Thirdly, his mother would probably hit him. Alright, not really, but she would be angry and then she’d be sad. Louis can’t have that. It would bring on the realization that their situation is much shitter than they’re pretending.

All money they’re bringing in is currently going to bills, food, car petrol, and Lottie and Louis’ university funds. Louis sneaks his money into the food and petrol box, and if there’s any left, the jar under his bed. Slightly old fashioned, but it works.

They have dinner and move on to the couch once they’re finished, where they put on a Disney movie for Daisy and Phoebe. Or maybe it’s for all of them, because the Tomlinsons are all saps and Disney lovers deep down.

The little girls start to drift off to sleep sometime around ten-thirty, and Louis gets up from the couch, starting to put the empty bowls that held some snacks and fruits away in the kitchen. Lottie comes in after him, carrying two glasses. They walk back to the living room, but Louis stops in the doorway. His mother is sitting back on the couch, the twins lying on her legs, fast asleep. Jay strokes their cheeks, smiling down at her daughters.

Louis stares, unable to look away. He feels Lottie grabbing his arm, fingers tightly clutching around his elbow.

“I wish she was here,” Lottie whispers, and Louis can’t look down because he can already tell by
her voice that there are tears in her eyes.

“Me too, Lots.” He swallows. “Me too.”

They stand there quietly for a few minutes. Louis breathes slowly, feeling like Lottie’s hand on his arm is the only thing keeping him sane.

“Let’s go to bed, yeah?” she says, pulling him towards the stairs. “Let’s leave them alone.”

He nods, following her upstairs and crawls in under his duvet in his room.

**

Louis is in the yard playing with the girls when his phone buzzes in his pocket. For some reason he always forgets to put the sound on after muting it, and he nearly constantly ends up keeping it off. He’s not sure who it could be, though. Niall knows he’s busy with the girls the whole weekend and the rest of his friends are more texting types. He brings his phone out, raising a surprised brow at the caller ID.

“Why didn’t you call me yesterday?” Harry’s voice says as soon as Louis’ tapped the green button on the screen.

“Why are you calling me now, is the question,” he replies in confusion. “Why would I call you?”

“Are you serious? So you were just going to rile me up before the match and then just not fuck me?” Harry says, completely incredulous.

Louis is lost. Harry was riled up? He expected Louis to fuck him yesterday? Like, Harry has expectations on their sex life now? “I wasn’t aware we had rules. Were you waiting up for a booty call all night, or?” He can’t help but let out a cackle.

“Yes?” Harry says, as if it’s something so obvious that Louis should have known. “You text me once your sister’s asleep, that’s what you do. How’ve you not caught on yet? Christ, I knew you were slow, but…”

“Right,” Louis says, still not quite following Harry’s logic.

“So?”

“So…?”

“Are you going to come over then?” he sighs, making it sound like Louis is a million years behind in his calculations.

“I can’t this weekend.”

There’s a moment of silence. “What.”

“Can’t.”

“What do you mean ‘can’t’?”

“As in cannot. Don’t have time. Am busy.”

There’s another beat of silence. “Are you serious?!” Harry hisses.

“Yes,” Louis says, rolling his eyes at Harry’s dramatics. “I can’t this weekend. Stop being a drama
queen and suck your own cock.”

Harry must be the best person in the world at giving silences that scream a million words at once.

“Fine.” He’s pissed. “If you don’t have time, why should I give you time ever again?”

He ends the call with a click, and Louis feels slightly shocked at his behavior, but also not very surprised. Harry has complained about immense sexual frustration before, Louis just wasn’t aware it made him this pissy. He’s been annoyed at Louis before for not complying with his plans, but it’s never been quite like this. Louis rolls his eyes, part of him already dreading Monday and facing Harry’s wrath.

He can’t help but snort at that.

The rest of the weekend goes well. They take the girls to the park for the afternoon, and he and Lottie play with them on the playground while their mother sets up the picnic they brought. The weather is chilly, but he twins are full of energy and Louis finds he can barely keep up. He’s been so tired lately, always so much he needs to do and he doesn’t get nearly enough sleep.

Louis’ got a football to juggle with while the twins continue on the swings with Lottie. He’s at seventy-one bounces on his feet when the late lunch is ready, and they all fall down in a heap on the blanket Jay’s laid out.

They take the stroll through town on their way back. Phoebe and Daisy take turns getting a piggyback ride, and they casually discuss dinner options as they walk. Lottie is going through a risotto recipe from her memory when Louis’ eyes catch on a shiny car at the end of the street. It’s in silver, sleek, and a woman is standing by the hood, arms crossed. Her hair is dark and she’s in a long wool coat. Though she’s far away, Louis can see the tension in her posture. It’s Harry’s mum, of course.

“Err, why don’t we go this way?” he says, heading to cross the street. “We can walk past the store and buy some ingredients, yeah?”

He feels awkward, because the woman down the street doesn’t have a clue to who he is and yet he’s avoiding her like the plague. He once again wonders how Harry stands his parents. They do seem okay separately, but together they make Louis’ head ache and that’s only after two short-lived encounters. The ambience in his house must be toxic. Louis doesn’t even want to imagine Sunday night supper in their fancy dining room.

Louis’ family doesn’t seem to mind, though, and he steers them to the other side of the road.

**

Harry keeps his promise. He doesn’t text or call Louis again during the weekend, and not for days into the next week either. He seems proper pissed and Louis is concurrently as amused as he is annoyed. Harry is being stubborn and silly, and Louis would very much like to tell him so. If it weren’t for the fact that Harry keeps a two-yard distance between them at all times he’d have done that by now.

Louis tries to approach him during football practice on Wednesday. They’re on a two-minute water break, so Louis walks up to him, bottle in hand and ball by his feet.

“Are you done being silly anytime soon?” he asks, brow arched. Harry is at the moment fixing his little headband that’s supposed to keep his unruly curls out of his eyes, and he only sends Louis a hard look in response, not answering. He looks more or less like a disgruntled kitten. Louis sighs, crossing his arms. “Stop being a spoiled brat. You can come over during my free period on
Friday, alright?"

Harry doesn’t even throw him a glance before he takes the football from Louis’ feet and walks away, completely ignoring his request. Louis should not have the patience for this.

For the rest of practice Louis makes a point to stare at Harry at any given moment. Harry’s done it to him before, and he’s learned it has a very trying effect. He wants to see if it’ll give any results. However, it doesn’t seem to help much. The only outcome is the football Harry sends flying over the pitch, whacking him in the shoulder. He sighs and gives up for the day. He’s not completely sure why he even cares.

At the end of the hour and when the rest of the team is starting to pack up and head for the showers, Louis is stood at the corner of the pitch, chatting with Liam, Lee and Matthew. There are a few people who’ve challenged the cold to watch the team, even though it’s December. Louis and the boys have learned to handle the brisk air and chilly temperature, even if it’s dull during mornings and when the wind is being particularly uproarious.

Louis says goodbye to the lads and heads over to the bench to fetch the water bottle case. He pulls off his thin, cotton gloves, hearing when a few people leave the bleachers, walking by him.

“Good practice, Louis,” someone says, and he glances up. It’s that girl again (Louis still can’t recall her name, but he’s pretty sure it starts with an N?) and she smiles at him, stopping a yard or so away for a moment.

“Thanks,” he says, taking a sip from his water.

The girl has one of those puffy jackets on, fake fur attached on the hood. She smiles at him, giving him a short onceover. “So, do you think you’re going win the scoring league next term?”

“Hopefully,” he says, mentally counting the scores he made last game, coming to the conclusion that he’s one up from Harry in total.

“Well, don’t let anyone beat you,” she grins, and leaning towards the exit area.

“Not a chance,” he smirks, picking up a forgotten jacket from the bench.

“I’ll see you around then,” she nods and leaves to catch up with her friends.

He waves, shaking his head a little. He’s not sure what her deal is, but she seems nice at least. Though, he can’t for the sake of him remember what her damn name is –

“Woah,” he huffs, air escaping his lungs as he’s pulled back. He feels a strong hand against his collarbone, fingers ice cold against his skin. An arm is hooked over his shoulder, keeping him locked to the chest behind him. He feels the brush of lips against his ear, and he squirms, the arm around him straining and uncomfortable.

“If you ever wanted to see me again, you’ve definitely fucked it up now.” Harry’s hiss is sharp and Louis struggles to get out of his hold. Luckily, Harry releases him, and Louis turns, finding him fuming and eyes dark. He’s about to yell at him for nearly keeping him in chokehold, when Harry rips the jacket he’s holding out of his hands. “That’s mine.”

Then he’s stalking away and Louis is left staring, shocked and confused.

**

The entire week after that is strange. Harry still doesn’t speak a word in Louis’ direction, and
Louis doesn’t try to approach him either. There’s this weird tension whenever they’re close though, and Louis doesn’t even know where to begin to try to sort this out in his head. He doesn’t know what he did to trigger such an outburst from Harry on the football pitch and neither can he come up with a rational explanation. He has long before they started hooking up thought Harry was an unreasonable twat, but apparently he needs anger management classes as well.

Louis stays out of his lane for the remainder of the week.

It’s Sunday when Louis is in the kitchen, drinking tea with Lottie. For the record, he hasn’t had sex with Harry for more than a week and a half. It must be the longest they’ve gone so far and as it looks right now, it’s not going to happen again. He never really imagined how their “thing” would come to an end, but at least this way it wasn’t because they got caught. He’s never really imagined getting caught either. He’s not too sure what would happen… he muses silently, taking a sip from his cup.

Lottie’s phone buzzes on the table, and he’s brought out of his ponderings. Lottie eyes her phone for a second before she answers the call, the tiniest of frowns set on her face.

“Hi, Dad,” she says and Louis right away awkwardly clears his throat and gets up from the table. He does actually have some homework for English class he has to finish, and he leaves to fetch his books in his room, hoping Lottie’s call will have ended by the time he gets back. Upstairs he stalls, pretending to look in drawers he knows his books aren’t going to be in, and takes two extra moments to fix his fringe in the mirror.

Unluckily, the phone call hasn’t ended once he finally comes back into the kitchen, and he internally groans, sitting down to finish his cup of tea.

Lottie looks up at him, and then hesitantly says, “I’m not sure if he’s home, Dad. I can check… Hold on.” She covers the phone with her hand, holding it down. “He wants to talk, Lou. He says you’ve been ignoring his calls.”

Louis doesn’t look at her, keeps his eyes on his English assignment on the table. “Tell him I’m out on a run.” He was going to go for one later anyway. Mark can surely wait.

Lottie purses her lips, but nonetheless does as told. “I’m sorry, Dad. He’s probably out on a run or at the football pitch, or something. I’ll tell him to call you back, okay? … Yes, I’ll pass on the message … Love you, too … Bye.”

She puts the phone down and Louis keeps his eyes on the words in front of him. He’s supposed to be writing an encapsulation of this text his teacher gave him –

“Why do you ignore Dad’s calls, Louis?” Lottie asks him bluntly. Even if she covers for him, he knows she hates it.

“He’s not my dad,” he whispers.

“You’re ridiculous,” she says harshly. Louis knows she’s angry. He doesn’t look up. “Don’t you realize that the two of you are doing the exact same thing? If you and her would–”

He clenches his teeth together. “It’s not the same, Charlotte.”

“Don’t Charlotte me,” she snaps. She stands from her seat, shaking her head in frustration. “I’m going to Alice’s house. You can eat dinner by yourself tonight,” she mutters, and leaves the room.

Louis can hear her putting on her jacket and shoes while leaning on his arms on the table. He closes his eyes and when the door slams he doesn’t even flinch, only sighs. He lies there for what
feels like an hour, not returning to his homework. He’s too tired, emotionally. His head feels like mess, and he’d really love it somebody would come and help him tidy up some time.

That’s looking at you, God. He hasn’t exactly been present in his life so far, he thinks, if only a bit passively aggressively. If he were present in a supportive manner, Louis’ life surely wouldn’t be this. He probably doesn’t have the right to ask anything from God, though. He’s never really believed in him anyway.

There’s a quick rap at the front door that interrupts his thoughts, and he looks up in confusion. He wasn’t expecting anyone and anybody who’d show up unannounced would also just walk straight in without knocking.

Louis frowns, standing up and heading for the door. He briefly thinks that maybe it’s his savior that God has finally sent him. He’s supposed to love everyone and all that, even the lost ones. It’s probably not an angel landing on his doorstep, though. He opens the door, and no. It’s definitely not an angel, nor the person who’s going to be his savior.

Harry is standing in front of him. He’s in a coat, hair loose and curls tousled by the wind. His skin looks beaten by the cold, face pale, but the apples of his cheeks pink. There’s something awkward about his stance, and when he looks up Louis has to swallow because the emerald in his eyes is more prominent than ever – it’s accentuated by the tears in his eyes.

“Hi,” he says, his voice subdued and low. He bites his lip, swallowing.

“Hey,” Louis says, absolutely nonplussed. He doesn’t know what to say. And he doesn’t think that this is quite appropriate. Well, it shouldn’t be. Harry’s crying and he’s come to Louis, his mortal enemy. “What… err, what are you doing here?”

Harry wipes a hand over his face and he clears his throat. “Can I stay here for a while?”

“What?” Louis asks, incredulous. Harry wants to stay here? This doesn’t make sense, especially not after they’ve parted ways, which was Harry’s idea. Louis still doesn’t know why.

“I know,” Harry says. His nose sounds a bit stuffy, and his breathing is rather ragged. “I know it’s weird and awkward, and I really wouldn’t do this if I didn’t have any other option, trust me, but… I need somewhere to stay. Only for a couple of hours.”

Louis doesn’t quite know how to… function. What is this? Is God playing a joke on him?

Harry makes a frustrated sound, and Louis can hear the desperation in it. “Louis,” he says, staring him straight in the eye, brow furrowed and mouth quirked downwards. “Please,” he whispers.

Louis stares for several seconds. Either he sends him away, or he lets him in. He really doesn’t feel like fighting with Harry, and he’d rather do without him today to completely honest.

But the “please” is entirely up to Louis’ interpretability, and to him it’s as clear as water on a sunny day. He bites his cheek, and in the world he’s letting himself do this, and nods his head back. “Get in.”

Harry nods fervently, and Louis steps aside.

They have sex, because honestly Louis doesn’t know how to do anything else with Harry. They’re in Louis’ bed, under the covers, Louis’ hands clutched at Harry’s shoulder blades and the other boy’s chin is on his shoulder, legs wrapped around him. They’re unusually quiet, only the occasional moan escaping their lips, Harry’s fingers grasping Louis’ hair. Louis fucks him slow and deep, and everything feels different. He could tell something wasn’t entirely right, maybe
simply because Harry doesn’t just show up to Louis’ house in the afternoon (who is he kidding, Harry was crying). He hasn’t said a word since they stood in the doorway either, just quietly fingered himself open with Louis’ hands hovering closely.

He groans brokenly into Louis’ neck when he hits his spot, and Louis squeezes his body close. He doesn’t know what Harry’s thinking or why he’s so pliant and soft in this moment. Louis doesn’t feel comfortable with it because he’s never ever seen Harry so vulnerable. He hears his sob against the side of his face and for a moment his thrusts falter and he pulls back, hands on Harry’s sides softening.

"Hey," he says, and he feels Harry’s thighs tightening around his waist. "Do you want to stop?"

"No." He shakes head determinedly, but his voice is small. "No, keep going."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. Please. Just fuck me."

Louis swallows and nods, and Harry’s nails dig into Louis’ back when he pushes deeply into him. His heels bury into Louis’ calves as Louis breathes heavily, and a wince mixes with a moan when Harry pulls sharply at his hair. Harry feels it and his hands soften, fingertips lightly feeling over his scalp instead. The sensation is almost scary and Louis doesn’t understand how Harry is doing this.

Fuck.

He doesn’t get it. How does Harry manage to build this bubble of senses inside Louis that feels like sparks that will ignite his whole body? He’s just… this hasn’t happened before. The sex has never felt quite like this, maybe because it’s slow and Harry is softer than normal and he’s fingers against Louis’ skin are so soft. Louis is going to combust. And he’s going to come first. He knows it.

He does. He picks up his pace and groans into Harry’s neck as he spills inside the other boy. He feels like his body will crack open at the seams. He doesn’t get it. How?

He pulls out, chucking the condom at the bin in the corner of his room. Harry’s still breathing heavily, eyes half lidded and he’s looking up at Louis like he doesn’t know what they’re doing anymore. Once again Louis is on the edge of asking if he wants to stop, but he realizes it’s not what Harry’s wants. There’s something on the other boy’s mind, and he needs a distraction.

Normally, Louis would have gotten off the bed and scoffed, saying that Harry could finish off himself, it being his own fault he didn’t come before Louis was done, but not now.

Harry at first doesn’t understand what Louis is doing. He’s lying back against the mattress, lips plump and red from biting them, breathing heavily. What Louis does is that he leans over him, hands gripping his hips firmly. He kisses him from his chest down. He plants sucking, wet kisses that trail down the middle of his stomach. It’s new and it feels a little weird because this is Harry.

Louis glances up as he works his stomach and he sees Harry’s furrowed brow. For a moment he thinks he’s going to push him away, but he doesn’t. He leans his head back and closes his eyes.

So Louis continues. He kisses down Harry’s milky skin, tongue sliding down his abs, feeling his muscles work underneath him. He trails his hands along his sides, running them over his smooth and soft body. He slides lower down on the bed, and his tongue dips into Harry’s belly button. Harry’s hips jerk at the touch and his hard dick bumps into Louis’ chin.

And, that’s. Uh.
Louis hasn’t even thought about what he’s doing or where it’s going. And, well. It’s there, in front of his face. He hesitantly glances up at Harry, but his eyes are still closed.

Louis swallows because… well.

Harry’s mouth is open and his hands are trembling at his sides, and that settles it. Louis’ hand takes a hold of his cock, the other clutching around his thigh. Slowly he jerks him off, heart beating rapidly as he works up the courage. He can tell Harry’s getting more flustered though, so he licks his hips and just does it. He takes him in his mouth, just the head. It’s a weird sensation, but strangely it’s kind of… okay.

Louis does what he personally thinks is nice. He’s not sure how many blow jobs Harry’s received, but he hopes he’s not landing at the bottom of the list. He gradually takes him down more and more, the best he can (he hasn’t really done a blow job before, but whatever. He’s doing this to be nice and Harry can take it how it’s handed to him). Harry’s responsive underneath him, hips jerking and moans leaving his throat. Louis mentally gives himself a pat on the back.

He gets sort of lost in it. Eventually he doesn’t think and just does. He sucks him off, firm hands holding his hips and takes him down. He hollows his cheeks and hides his teeth, just focusing on one thing; getting the boy off. Harry’s fingers find his hair at one point, and he tugs. Louis moans around his cock, and Harry completely stills.

Louis opens his eyes, realizing Harry might come soon.

And, ah… Um. He hasn’t thought that far.

Tentatively he moans around him again and Harry’s blunt nails digging harshly into his arm is warning enough. Harry comes in his mouth. He coughs, spluttering a little. It’s not the sweetest taste, and it’s kind of warm and slimy, but he makes a face and swallows nonetheless.

There’s an awkward silence where Louis shuffles up on the bed, lying down on his back by Harry’s side. Harry’s gaping, eyes on the ceiling, just inhaling and exhaling loudly. Louis waits, interlocking his fingers on his chest as he does.

Three minutes go by.

Louis purses his lips.

Another two pass.

Louis looks at him at the corner of his eye, starting to worry again. “Um, are you okay?” he asks, suspiciously.

Harry gives him a long, incredulous, sidelong glance. “You were fucking obscene.”

He should have expected that. Louis rolls his eyes with an exasperate sigh. Harry’s absolutely fine. “Shut your mouth, Styles.”

"You were!"

"Shut the hell up and be glad I sucked you off." Louis hits him on the chest.

"Aw, don’t be embarrassed, Lou." Harry pinches his cheek and Louis immediately slaps at his hand.

Louis leans away, squinting at him. Smug piece of shit. He should be nice. Louis fucking let
Harry make him fuck him. He should be thankful. He frowns, eyes softening from their annoyed stare. “Are you okay, though?”

Harry opens his mouth, and then closes it again. “Yeah,” he says offhandedly and looks away. “Why wouldn’t I be?”

Well, okay. If he’s going to act like that, sure. Louis doesn’t have time for his problems anyway.

He rips the covers from the bed, wrapping it around his waist as he stands, leaving Harry naked and alone on the bed.

"Fine, be in denial. I’m taking a shower. Be gone when I’m done." Louis walks towards the bathroom, slipping out of the blanket just outside the door. He faintly hears Harry’s low whistle and rolls his eyes.

He steps in under the running hot water and leans his forehead against the cold tiles of the wall. He really has to contemplate what he’s doing with this Harry thing soon. God, today he sucked his cock. No, never mind that. Today he sucked a cock. He’s not even gay! Okay. Well, he knows that’s not entirely true, but no. He’s not even camp – despite what Niall says sometimes. And hey, it was a pity fuck, alright? Harry was freaking messed up, or something. Louis fixed it, he’s not crying anymore, is he. It’s charity. Yes, exactly. Charity.

"What are you doing?"

Oh god.

Louis straightens up from his position against the wall and turns to glare at Harry, who’s standing completely naked and holding up the shower curtain.

"No. What are you doing?"

Without warning, Harry’s climbing into the shower.

"But – No – Harry!" Louis tries to keep him out. Doesn’t work.

So, Harry’s in the shower now, smiling happily down at him like a fucking frog.

"Why are you still here?" Louis asks, crossing his arms.

"Aw, you’re really cute when your hairs all wet and plastered to your face. You look like a little boy."

Louis grits his teeth. “Anything else, baby Tarzan?” he says, drily.

"Nope." Then he goes in front of Louis and starts to rifle through the shampoos and conditioners on the stand. Louis just leans back against the wall in exasperation. "Is it your strawberry shampoo?" Harry asks, smirking as he turns around.

"I have four sisters, idiot."

"Hm. Why are they in your bathroom then?" He arches a brow, as if he’s onto something.

"If you didn’t notice, there are two doors in here." And as if Louis’ family could afford a bathroom each. Harry might be slimy rich, but Louis most certainly is not.

“Oh.”
"I bet you use it anyway," Harry grins. "Did you have time to use it before I got in? I think I gave you plenty of time."

"I’m getting out now," Louis announces.

"So you did use it. Come here, I want to smell it. Does it smell good?"

"What are you – Harry!"

Before Louis knows what he’s doing, Harry’s grabbing his tiny waist and is pulling him back against himself. Louis loudly complains and protests, but Harry’s just holds him back. His hands, slick with soap, roam over Louis’ skin. Up to his pecs, low on his belly, thumbs digging into the jut of his hipbones.

"Harry, honestly, if you’re going to start getting off against me, I’m leaving." Louis tries to break out of his hold (maybe he’s not using his full strength, but whatever), but Harry doesn’t let him. He holds him close, chest snugly fitting into Louis’ smaller body.

He feels the first kiss on his left shoulder blade, then another at the nape of his neck. They make a slow trail along his shoulders, Harry’s arms wrapped around him in a hug. His wet lips meet his skin as the water rains down on them, and it’s quiet and Louis can’t really think. He feels Harry’s lips press against the curve where his shoulder meets neck, and before he knows it he has subconsciously leaned further into the touch. It’s when the kisses turn into more that he frowns. Harry’s kissing him deeply and wetly at his neck, tongue playing over his skin, lips sucking wetly and teeth occasionally dragging over the already sensitive skin.

"Harry," he wonders, suspiciously. "What are you doing?"

"What you did to me before," he murmurs, lips brushing at his neck.

"But you were sad, I –"

"And now I want to do this."

So. Kissing is a thing now then.

Well. It’s charity. It really is.

So Harry kisses him. He licks along his neck and kisses his shoulders, sucking and even biting. The teeth drag like electric sparks and it gets harder and harder to breathe correctly. Harry’s hands slide over his skin, nose mushing against the nape of his neck and Louis almost sags against him. He doesn’t even know. How does Harry manage to make him like this? Louis despises Harry. He’s an idiot. And still he’s got Louis weak in the knees.

He gasps when he feels Harry’s hand wrap around his cock. His other clasps at his hip, firmly holding him still and breathing kisses into paths across his shoulder blade. Louis groans, giving small thrusts into his hand, and Harry lets him. He caresses his hip with his thumb, lips never stopping to move against him. His nose is in Louis’ hair and Louis moans again as he squeezes around his shaft lightly.

"Fuck," he breathes, arching back into Harry’s torso, feeling him rub himself against Louis’ bum. And, that position is new, although it’s certainly not unpleasant, he thinks. And oh god. He really does have to deal with this whole Harry crisis soon.
He ignores it for now though, breath rapid and he’s thrusting into Harry’s hand as he jerks him off. He feels him breathe into his neck, planting kisses every so often, and rubbing himself off between the top of Louis’ bum cheeks. He hears Harry’s moan, low and deep, and his hand slips up and tangles his fingers in his wet hair. The other that’s already clenching Harry’s left hip (he can’t stop it, it’s not his fault, it’s simply biology) sneaks back and clutches around Harry’s bum, pressing him closer. Harry groans, and Louis’ practically melting. With a twist of Harry’s wrist he’s coming all over his stomach, and not a moment later he can feel as Harry splatters over the small of his back.

Without so much as a word, Harry turns Louis around in his arms, gets on his knees and licks Louis’ cum off his stomach. Louis feels like he’s going to sink through the floor. Then the boy is standing up and plants a last small kiss at Louis’ collarbone. Then he’s gone.

Louis leans back against the wall again, the water having run cold long ago.
“Motherfucker!” Louis yells, eyes popping in front of his mirror the morning after Harry’s Sunday visit. “Fuck,” he hisses, leaning in and examining his neck that’s littered with purplish bruises. It looks like he’s been fucking assaulted, beaten up with a baseball bat by someone who kept aiming specifically for his neck.

Louis growls while stomping towards his dresser and starting to vehemently dig through his drawers.

Fucking Harry. The bastard. That motherfucking bastard! This was so his intention. He is a monster. Fucking rude. And evil. He’s an evil monster who snuck his way into Louis’ shower and probably used the moment to avenge whatever it was that made him mad at Louis in the first place last week. Louis cannot believe he fucking swallowed for him.

Motherfucker.

He finds the shirt he’s looking for, holding it up before him in front of the mirror. He doesn’t even know why he owns the shirt. He shakes his head grimly, mentally sending daggers across the block. He is going to murder Harry at practice.

**

“Why do you look like a complete twat?”

Louis whips around in a full-body movement where he’s just sat down next to Niall in the library. “What?” he hisses. “It’s a turtleneck. Have you never seen one before?”

“Yeah… just not on you.” He eyes Louis up and down.

“Well, it’s cold, okay?”

“It’s not that cold.”

Louis glances up, giving him a silencing look. Would he just let it slide, alright? Louis is not doing this by free will. Harry’s stupid fucking love bites are covering his entire neck. This is his fault. Louis doesn’t care about the reason why he came to his house yesterday in the first place – which was very, very strange and Louis shall ignore it forever, along with the fact that Harry licked Louis’ cum off his fucking stomach – the only thing he cares about is planning out in perfect detail how he’s going to kick his ass.
“Stop watching me,” Louis says, feeling Niall’s eyes on him.

“I just can’t really… comprehend this.”

“It’s cold. Okay? Let it go.”

Niall sighs next to him. “Fine. You still look like a twat, though.” There’s a shutter sound coming from his right. “And this will also not be forgotten, ever.”

Louis is going to kill Harry.

They try to study after that. Louis still hasn’t finished his English assignment and he’s already gotten two new projects to start on today in other classes. He really should try to get more revising into his schedule, which is rather full. He needs to return his maths homework tomorrow and he hasn’t even started yet. He’s also got the late shift at the fro-yo shop, and that’s not helping him in the slightest. He needs to get this finished.

“Hey,” Niall says after a couple of minutes of silence. “We haven’t hung out in a while. Like, outside of school, properly.”

That’s another thing. Niall has somehow become subordinate to everything else, and Louis feels terrible. There’s just so much stuff he’s got to do and neglecting his best friend is the last thing Louis wanted, but it has just happened to turn out that way.

“I’m really sorry, mate,” Louis says sincerely. “I’ve been so busy lately.” He’s got no good excuse.

“I know,” Niall says easily. He slaps a hand on his upper arm, squeezing. “It's okay. I just miss you, Lou.”

“Aw, Niall,” Louis jokes, but says earnestly, “I miss you too, mate.”

“Good,” his friend grins. “Then how about Friday, I come over and we’ll have pizza with Lottie and watch movies like we used to, yeah?” He smirks. “And then I’ll talk to my contact and set us up with the nice little lady Mary.”

Louis shakes his head, smiling fondly. “I don’t smoke pot, Niall. You know that.”

He rolls his eyes. “Right, Tommo.”

“That was before the season started. I can’t do drugs. I need to keep in shape in every way.” He taps his temple lightly.

“And now the footy season has ended,” Niall replies with a sweeping gesture of his hand. “Come on, it’s nearly holidays soon and matches don’t start up until, like, March again. You deserve a break.” Louis looks at him for a second. Niall bumps his shoulder with his. “I can get your favorite brand of gin too…”

Louis breaks into a smile. “Fine, you dick. Just not in the house. My mother has a nose like a hound. She could tell if we’d smoked a normal cig hours earlier.”

“I know. That’s why we’ll do it in my car.” He winks exaggeratedly, and Louis shakes his head fondly, resuming his studying.

**
Come football practice, Louis has had enough. The collar is chafing, he has to use full-body movements so the bloody hickeys won’t sneak into view, and he looks absolutely ridiculous. He pulled his hair upwards into a quiff this morning, and he feels too proper, like some rich Ralph Lauren type who wipes off his Ray Bans with fifty-pound notes.

He stalks into the locker room, just having realized that he’ll have to keep the polo shirt on beneath his training jacket because it doesn’t cover enough of his neck. He’s one of the first people in the locker room and he quickly changes into his football kit, jogging out onto the pitch, leaving his bag on the damp grass and begins to run laps around the field.

The shirt absolutely sucks to work out in. It keeps hitching up his hips so he has to frequently pull it down, and it itches terribly against his warm skin. There’s a thought, he’s going to skin Harry alive!

Finally, when Harry and the rest of the boys reach the pitch, Louis stalks over, demanding a captains-only meeting. Harry rolls his eyes as Louis sends the other boys to warm up before he grabs Harry by his jacket and pulls him to the corner of the pitch.

“What now?” Harry sighs.

“What do you mean ‘what’?” Louis hisses, aiming a punch at his the chest. Harry recoils, just barely avoiding the hit and he makes an indignant noise. Louis scowls, zipping down his jacket and grabbing his collar to pull it down.

Harry’s eyes lock on his throat and the expression on his face instantly turns smug. He reaches his hand out to Louis’ neck, fingertips light against the purplish bruises. He’s admiring his work Louis realizes, and he slaps his hand off.

“You’re such a dick. Do you understand what a burden this has been all day? See, this is why we don’t do that.”

“Do what?”

“Kiss and… stuff! You can’t be trusted! I should’ve realized the moment you started with that in the shower that you were going to do something stupid. What if somebody sees it?”

“Oh, okay! Hmm, I feel like I want to run you over with a car… so, should I just get on with it then? Huh?” Louis shakes his head in exasperation. “I was nice to you yesterday, and yet you avenged me by printing your fucking teeth into my skin. You ungrateful fuck, I swallowed for you!”

“I know,” Harry says, eyes sparkling. “It was ridiculously hot.” His hand comes up, reaching out to touch Louis’ throat once again. Louis takes a step back, giving him a warning look.

“You’re unbelievable.”

“What is unbelievable is how many times you’ve pulled me aside at footie to chew me out.”

“Maybe I wanted to mark you up?” Harry says calmly.

“You’re such a dick. Do you understand what a burden this has been all day? See, this is why we don’t do that.”

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“You’re unbelievable.”

“What is unbelievable is how many times you’ve pulled me aside at footie to chew me out.”

Louis squints. “If you didn’t constantly make me want to kill you, I wouldn’t have to.”

“I think you like it.” He smirks, eyes blinking innocently at him.

Louis is going to burst. “I do not– What the fuck are you doing?!”
Harry’s hand has slipped onto his lower back, and he’s stepped up to stand flush against Louis – in public. He’s looking down at him, biting his bottom lip, and no, no, no. Louis pushes him off, horrified.

“Harry!” he hisses angrily, and with a smacking sound he slaps Harry’s arm down that’s extracted towards his chest.

“You look so hot in that polo. Your cheekbones… When you speak it almost looks like when you sucked me off.” He’s coming up close again and Louis puts a hard hand against his chest, keeping him away.

“Do you want to get caught or something? Do you have a death wish? Because if you expose us I will make sure you’re in your grave before you’re nineteen.”

“How many times have you promised to be the one to end my days? I think I’d rather die in –“

“Hi, Louis!”

Harry stops in the middle of his sentence, eyes flashing as he looks up. Louis turns around, noticing the girl who has a tendency to randomly greet him behind them.

“Oh, Harry,” she says. “I didn’t you know you two were friends…” She ticks her head to the side.

Louis drops his hand from Harry’s chest immediately, taking a step back. “We’re not.”

“Why don’t you fuck off, Jasmine.” Harry’s voice is cold and his face is harder than Louis’ ever seen it. Not even when he punched Louis square in the face that time before summer quite measures up.

“Wow, friendly,” she says, raising her brows. She crosses her arms, and Louis frowns. And wait, her name is Jasmine? Wow, Louis was way off on that one.

“You don’t deserve friendly. You’re horrible person.”

“Harry!” Louis gasps, shocked. Harry usually seems so nice to people, Louis himself excluded. He’s always been unusually respectful towards women; this is definitely out of character. Jasmine has been nothing but friendly to Louis and she doesn’t deserve such words from Harry, who is being an idiot.

However, nobody says anything, tension thick.

“Anyway,” Louis tries, attempting to divert the awkward tension that’s more than confusing. “What are you doing here?” he asks the girl amicably.

“I saw you over here, so I thought I’d stop by and say hi,” she smiles.

“Oh.” Louis smiles back.

“Well, he doesn’t have time to talk,” Harry interjects sharply, grabbing Louis’ jacket. “We’ve got practice.”

Louis pushes Harry’s hand off. “Rude.”

“She doesn’t deserve more than.”

“You shouldn’t talk to me that way,” she says, eyes hard, while Louis feels completely out of element. “You should know better, Harry.”
“You’re literally the scum of earth,” Harry retorts, shaking his head, turning and walking away.

Louis cannot believe this. He sees how Jasmine bites her lip, and this time he’s the one to grab Harry’s jacket, pulling him backwards. Before he can say a word, though, Harry’s hands are connecting with his chest and he’s sent tumbling back onto the grass. Furious, Louis rips off the ground, apologizing to Jasmine in a haste before stalking after Harry, who is clearly absolutely insane.

“What is your problem?!” he exclaims.

The only answer he gets is a V from Harry’s fingers, and then he’s disappeared towards the locker rooms.

Louis gives up. He has no idea why, but Harry is an unstable wreck. He doesn’t understand where these violent outbursts come from. All he can think is that Harry just abandoned practice and is seriously bipolar, and he clearly has some problem with Jasmine.

Louis doesn’t know what the fuck is going on, but he is sure as hell not going to pretend to be some shrink and figure it out. He’s got enough trouble on his shoulders as it is, he doesn’t need any more. Harry can figure out his mess by himself.

Louis goes back to practice and the lads who’ve finished their warm ups, and luckily Louis’ already run a few laps around the pitch. He begins practice, starting with a few defense exercises. He can’t help it, though, if the picture of Harry’s wet eyes from the day before pops into his head more than once.

**

It’s morning, but it might as well be night. It’s dark outside, most houses are unlit, and the ground is somewhat frozen. It has yet to actually snow this winter, although it never really does. When Louis was a kid, all he ever wished for on Christmas and his birthday was real, proper snow. He got it one year too, of course that was also the week his grandmother passed away, so it kind of put a damper on the whole snow thing. He wonders if there will be any this year.

It’s early Tuesday morning, and Louis is out on his morning run. He hasn’t been doing it for a while since his sleeping schedule hasn’t been stellar lately and he’s too tired to get up early enough in the morning. It’s quite windy, and his old windbreaker doesn’t help much. He’s jogging the track through the park, planning on taking the circuit around the blocks on his way back instead of crossing the dewy grass behind the oak trees like he usually does.

He’s listening to music, but the pumping bass has been pushed to the back of his head by wandering thoughts. Usually running keeps him in check, helps him think about everything else than stuff, but today it’s not working.

Christmas is coming up soon. Louis has his eye on a few gifts for his family, now that he has a little more money to spend. That’s probably the only good thing about Christmas this year. The celebration won’t be the same. It was the first thing he thought about when he learned about the divorce. What is going to happen at Christmas? His birthday? He knows Mum and Mark have made up plans for this year, but there’s this thing wrenching in his gut. It’s not fine.

He jogs onto the sidewalk, glancing at the clock on his wrist. He’s been out a bit too long he realizes – the way through the blocks taking a bit longer than the normal circuit – and he figures he’ll take a shortcut, turning right and onto a familiar street. He’s a little more than a mile from his house, but if he pushes he could probably make it back in less than five minutes.
He picks up his pace and a hundred yards onto the street he realizes that, yep, this is definitely Harry’s street, and he’ll pass his house in a minute or so. He mentally sighs, forcing himself to keep running. He shuts out his thoughts, focusing on the music in his headphones. He can’t help but notice Harry’s car in the driveway though, or that the lamp in his room is lit. He’s probably just waking up, getting himself ready for school...

Louis shakes his head. Keep running, Tommo.

By the time he makes it home he’s sweating, forehead hot beneath his fringe. It hasn’t gotten any lighter outside than when he left, although it is December, and it feels like it’s getting darker and darker each morning.

He takes a two-minute breather and unties his beaten jogging shoes before he goes inside. He wipes his brow on his sleeve, throwing his shoes to the side just inside by the door, closing it behind him. He pulls off his jacket, about to run up the stairs to take a shower, when he hears his mother’s voice in the kitchen. She didn’t have a shift last night so it shouldn’t be weird, but Lottie isn’t up yet and the tone of her voice rains over him like a bucket of ice water.

“Mark,” she sighs. “Please.”

Louis holds his breath where he stands by the stairs, gripping the hand railing tightly.

“Will she talk to me at least? … Ask her again. It’s… It’s been four weeks, Mark.” Her voice is low, ending in a whisper. Louis’ chest is heaving again, and he shuts his eyes, inhaling through his nose.

“Just… Okay … Tell her I love her?”

Louis can’t stand it.

“I miss her.”

He darts up the stairs and slams the door to his room, jumping into the shower without turning on the heat.

He gets ready quicker than normal, rushing through his usual morning rituals, not bothering to get his hair done. He just wants to get out of the house. He throws on a pair is skinny, black jeans, a soft grey/black jumper with a few white splatters on, and leaving his room and goes to knock obnoxiously on Lottie’s door. She opens it, eyebrows arched.

Thankfully, she is finished so he grabs her arm, rushing them down the stairs. She complains about his hurry, groaning that she hasn’t even brushed her teeth yet. While she does that, Louis sneaks into the hall, internally begging his mother won’t hear him. He slips his shoes on and grabs the car keys from the little blue bowl, walking quickly towards the front door.

“Oh, honey! You’re leaving already?”

Fuck. He turns around, smiling weakly.

“Don’t you want any breakfast?”

“No, I’m good. I’ll just grab something from the cafeteria. Lunch’s third period already, so,” he assures her quickly, praying she won’t bring it up.

“Ohay.” She gives him a small smile, reaching out to stroke his cheek. She looks hesitant then and Louis knows it’s coming. “I spoke to Mark on the phone this morning. He wondered —“
Louis steps back, her hand falling towards the floor. “It’s not the same, Mum. It’s not the same.”
He backs away, swinging his bag over his shoulder. “Lottie! We’re leaving!”

“Howdy!” Jay says, lips tilting down. “You and Fizzy –“

He gives her a hard stare, silencing her. “It’s not the same,” he forces out, words firm. In fact, there’s a huge, flaming difference that makes him so nauseas at the bare thought of it that he feels like he’s going to be sick. He turns on his heel just as Lottie comes out of the bathroom.

He rushes out the door and to the car. He gets in, putting the key into the ignition, shutting his eyes for just a second. When Lottie finally opens the passenger door, she gets in silently, placing her bag in her lap.

“Don’t say anything,” Louis whispers.

“I won’t.”

They drive to school in complete silence. After Louis’ dropped his sister off he makes a U-turn, driving into the city instead of toward the direction of the school. He opens his phone, texting Harry.

_Congratulations sweetcheeks. You get practice all to yourself today_

He arrives at the fro-yo shop just past eight. Greg is there, just having opened up the place it seems.

“Hey, man,” he greets, and Louis nods while walking in behind the counter. “What are you doing here?”

“Skipping. Please, let me do something. I’m –“

“Bad day? Already?”

“Yeah,” he nods, hoping Greg won’t ask. Thankfully, he doesn’t.

“Well, you can start by refilling the soft ice cream machine. It ran out last night, didn’t it?”


The older man squeezes his arm, smiling warmly. “No worries, love. Anything for you.” He winks, and Louis rolls his eyes, cracking a smile despite his efforts.

“Told you,” Greg singsongs. “Can’t resist the GJ charm!”

**

By the time Louis makes it home, he’s got several missed calls and texts on his phone. He’s had it shut off for the entire day, not wanting to hear from anyone. Greg was amazing all day, distracting him with lame dance moves and singing in a weird falsetto, and he didn’t ask once about Louis’ bad mood. Louis spent the day goofing around, letting himself forget about the troubles just for once. He does feel a bit anxious about skipping practice and Coach will most certainly have a talk with him tomorrow, but he’ll make it up to the team somehow.

The first text message is from Harry, only displaying several question marks. It’s quite on point, considering Louis’ not missed a practice session all season. There are a few from Niall and one from Liam, too. The next one is from his mum, asking if he’s okay and telling him that she’s sorry.
He knows she’s at the hospital right now, but he sends her a thumbs-up emoji anyways, knowing she’ll check her phone as soon as she’s on break. He absolutely despises fighting with her, and he doesn’t want her to think he’s pissed at her. He’s not, but it’s just – never mind.

He takes off his shoes, leaving them by the door and goes to his room, preparing to go to bed and hide underneath the covers and pretend to be asleep so that Lottie won’t interrogate him. He’s not in the mood in the slightest.

He opens the door and instantly wishes he didn’t come home at all. On his bed is not only his sister, but also his best friend, both of them blinking innocently back at him. If it weren’t for the multiple pizza boxes placed between them, Louis would have thought they were staging an intervention.

“Hey,” Lottie says, smiling.

“Hello,” he answers warily, eyeing the two of them suspiciously.

“Hey, mate,” Niall greets. “Heard you had a bad day, so we moved pizza night up a date.” He grins and holds up one of the boxes.

“That’s… that’s actually really nice,” Louis sighs, even if his room is going to smell like food for the next three days. Niall loves garlic sauce on his kebab pizza.

He flops down on the bed, stretching. His back cracks pleasingly and he closes his eyes, inhaling. The only thing he’s eaten today is oreo toppings and half a sandwich that Greg offered him.

“Where were you all day anyway?” Niall asks once Louis’ got half a pizza slice into his stomach.

“Just…out.”

“Okay…”

“I don’t know,” Louis shrugs. “Didn’t want to be home. Spent a few hours in the park playing footie…” Fantastic lie.

“You could have called me,” Niall says, eyeing him slightly from his side of the bed. “You could’ve stayed at my place if you didn’t want to be home with Jay. My parents work till six, you know that.”

“Yeah, sorry,” Louis mumbles. “Didn’t want to bother you.” He grabs another slice of pizza, chewing slowly so that he won’t have to answer any more questions. He feels Niall’s eyes on him a bit longer, but his friend seems to let it be for now.

“Won’t Coach Abrahams be angry you missed practice?” Lottie wonders, though.

He shrugs. “Haven’t missed a day all season. I think it’ll be okay.”

“Styles must be thrilled.” Lottie grins, ribbing him with her elbow.

Louis scoffs. “I wonder if he can handle even a day by himself.” He’s pretty sure he can, but he doesn’t correct himself. Lottie’s got garlic sauce on her upper lip and Louis teases her about it, changing the subject.

“Do you know what the main topic was all day at school?” Lottie says when the empty cartons of pizza have been relocated to the floor and all three of them are spread out on the bed, stomachs aching and Niall’s burping is a mildly disturbing background noise.
“What?” Louis asks. Her tone is quite disbelieving and even though she’s only in eighth grade he’s a little bit intrigued.

“You.”

On the other hand, he might not be.

Niall’s laugh is a loud cackle. “Why the hell would he be interesting enough to talk about? He does nothing but play footie all day.”

Lottie shakes her head. “Trust me. I wish I understood the appeal, but – no, no I don’t.”

Louis rolls his eyes. “Sorry, sis. I’m the most attractive Tommo around.”

“Actually, they were saying that you’re the last one on the footie team they’d date.”

“What?” he scoffs, eyes closed and hands locked on top of his chest.

“Yeah, like Niall said, they think you’re too into football. Wouldn’t be attentive enough.”

“Hey! I would so be a good boyfriend! And – no, ew! You’re all eighth graders. Aren’t you all, like, fourteen? Why were you even talking about this?” He scrunches his nose in distaste.

Lottie shrugs. “Well, don’t ask me. I’m not the one discussing your bum.”

“What?” Louis opens his eyes. The only one who’s ever dared mentioning his bum to his face is Harry, and he’s only allowed (not that Louis doesn’t slap him at least once when he does) because Louis is shagging him.

“Never mind,” Lottie deflects. “Anyways, one of the girls’ sisters goes in your year and apparently she dated Styles. She said that from what she’s heard he’s not such a good choice of boyfriend either. Her sister –“

“Woah, woah,” Louis says, holding up a finger in the air above them. “Hold on. Say that again.”

“Her sister dated Harry Styles in sophomore year…?”

“No, yeah. I got that. Who is this person? Who dated him?”

“Why are you so interested?” Niall grins, and Louis elbows him in the gut, turning over on his side towards Lottie, efficiently blocking Niall from the conversation.

“This Jasmine girl. Jasmine Parks.” She arches a brow at Louis’ face.

What.


He rolls over, kneeling Lottie in her thigh in the go. “You knew about this?” he asks Niall vehemently.

“Well, yeah?” he shrugs. “Everybody knows. They were like a thing two years ago. Don’t know why you didn’t. Wasn’t that the year you constantly had sharpened pencils in your pocket so you could stab him if he came too close?”

“Not relevant,” Louis says curtly. “Wait. That girl keeps talking to me about stuff. Like, at practice.”
“You’re gonna shag Harry’s ex?” Niall raises an impressed brow. “That’d be the ultimate, bro.” Then he makes a face. “I think he’d definitely break your face, though.”

Louis makes an indignant grimace at him, lying back down again.

And, no, he’s not going to shag her. He hadn’t even thought about her that way. She just seemed to pop up everywhere, especially at practice. And Harry used to date her? That’s gross. Ew, the both of them have had sex with the same person. He’s never shared anyone like that before. Although, he hasn’t actually slept with anyone but Harry so… but let’s reiterate that we shouldn’t talk about that.

Wait. Hold on. Those times Harry was angry with him? Both times at the pitch when he literally attacked him, was that Harry being on his merry way to destroy his face? Because he was talking to a girl he used to date? On the other hand, Harry did not seem especially fond of her.

Louis groans, hands covering over his face.

“What are you doing?” Niall asks.

“Nothing,” Louis answers, sighing. “Let’s just sleep for half an hour okay? I’m too full of pizza to think.” The only answers he gets are content hums, and he closes his eyes.

**

Louis is at the football pitch. It’s Friday night, but the bleachers are empty and the spotlights are off. The air is cold and the grass frosty. Today was the last day of school before Christmas break. It’s nice. He’s got some maths to study during break, but other than that the schoolwork is pretty much finished for this term. Football season doesn’t start up again until March either, although the team will have practice as usual once school starts again.

He hasn’t spoken to Harry since the fight with Jasmine last Wednesday. Louis feels faintly creeped out when he thinks about them being together. He’s had about twenty hours to process it, but the whole thing isn’t making more sense to him now than before. One thing he’s come to, though, is that somehow he can’t really imagine Harry dating a girl. It’s strange, but he just can’t see it.

Louis would refuse to say it out loud, but let’s face it, the image of Harry fucking Jasmine has popped up in his head more than once. It feels quite gross, and disturbing, but mostly terribly awkward. He can’t really see Harry touching her like that and especially not being the one actually doing the fucking part. Louis’ always figured he enjoys taking it way more than giving. Not that he’s asked, but he’s pretty certain that if he gets kicked in the shin for joking that ‘maybe Harry should do the work instead’, it means that no, Harry is not interested in doing the work. He’s probably not a topping kind of person. Unless she used to ride him, which, yeah, is an offer Louis wouldn’t decline if somebody asked either.

He’s figured that someday he’s going to fuck somebody else, but the idea of it seems quite far off. He’s only ever slept with Harry, but he knows eventually he is going to do it with someone else. This thing with him can’t go on forever. How many months has it been now since the first time? Three? Despite their constant feuds he can’t truthfully say that he wants it to end. It’s quite… not nice, exactly, but… yeah okay, it’s nice. Harry’s not nice, except for maybe when he moans in that way when Louis pulls his hair.

“What are you doing?” someone asks Louis when he’s juggling a ball, just ten bounces away from his record. He flinches, which makes him drop it. With a heavy sigh he turns around, staring grimly at the person approaching him.
“What does it look like, Harold.”

The boy is in black skinnies, a grey hoodie over his head and a jacket thrown on top. A few of his tangled curls poke out from underneath he hood. He looks tall, if a bit gangly, hands stuffed into his jacket pockets like this. Louis himself is in tracks and has a thick jumper on over a long-sleeved shirt. His blue beanie and cotton gloves are on; despite the cold he’s trying to practice.

“I don’t know,” Harry says as he comes closer. “You look rather lonely, though.”

“And that comes from the bloke strolling about the school on a Friday night.”

Harry shrugs. “I was on a walk. Clearing my head.”

“Didn’t know you had much in there,” Louis mutters.

“You really can’t keep a conversation up for even one minute without insulting people, can you?”

Harry rolls the football back with the sole of his shoe, hiking it up with his toes. He starts to bounce the football on his feet, gracefully getting to seven bounces before Louis speaks.

“It’s hard,” he says, chin up, “to be nice to you, when the only things you’ve done recently is ignore me and attack me out of nowhere.”

Harry certainly knows what Louis is referring to – Louis can see how his shoulders stiffen slightly, faltering just the tiniest bit in his juggling, but managing to keep the ball in the air. In a sudden heat of frustration, Louis braces himself and then lands a hard shot to the ball when it’s in the air above Harry’s feet. Harry jerks back, the ball flying across the pitch into the dark somewhere.

“You almost strangled me last week because I talked to that girl!”

“I didn’t strangle you,” Harry scowls, although he looks a bit ashamed of his actions. Like he should. “I didn’t attack you on Wednesday. I was pissed off. Don’t you get that she’s only around when I am? She says hi to you when I’m there, she spoke to you on Wednesday because I was there.”

“Wait, when did she say hi to me? What the hell are you on about?”

“In the hallway? You were on the phone? Being all squirmy and flirty talking to that guy, after you returned the shirt to me.”

“I was not flirting.”

“I don’t care,” Harry says, but swallows. “Listen. She’s only doing it because she has an agenda. She’s not nice to you, she’s trying to get to me.”

Hold on.

“Are you jealous?”

Woah. Woah, woah, woah. That makes no fucking sense. Harry’s violent reactions have been from jealousy? Although, Louis has heard of possessive bastards who think they own everybody and won’t let people shag their exes, even if they don’t do it themselves. Like, a hardcore version of stealth dating. Maybe that’s a bit farfetched, though. Louis knows he says it a lot, but he doesn’t actually think Harry’s a psycho. He’s sure he has his… err, weird, freaky reasons for what he does sometimes.
Harry stares at him, eyes earnest. “No, I’m not.” His voice is firm. “Believe it or not, I’m actually looking out for you.”

Louis arches a brow. “What?”

“She’s… Jasmine’s not nice, okay?”

Louis, dubious, scratches at the back of his neck. “I don’t know what happened between you two, but she’s seems pretty nice to me.”

Harry’s face hardens again, and Louis resists the urge to raise his hands in a placating manner.

“She’s not, Louis. I’m telling you. You may hate me, but I’ve never lied to you. If it wasn’t a prank, or to humiliate you,” he adds. Louis narrows his eyes. “But I’m telling you the truth, Louis. Don’t befriend her. She’s a disgusting human being. I’m not going to tell you why, because we’re not mates and I don’t owe you anything, but don’t trust her.” Harry’s hands land on Louis’ shoulders, as if his words will sink into his head that much faster by physical contact.

“This is so weird.” Louis shakes his head, leaning away. He sighs, suddenly filled with so much confusion and exasperation. He throws his hands out, spinning around. Nothing makes sense! “You are so fucking complicated, you know that? You’re fucking weird, and secretive, and you have anger issues, and you’re so terribly annoying—”

“Are you going somewhere with this?”

“– and you make me crazy on a daily basis, and I don’t get why I’m listening to you right now.” Louis spins back around, finding Harry a few steps closer than before. He’s looking at him evenly and Louis feels slightly cautious. “Why should I trust you? Didn’t you date her, or something?”

Harry presses his lips together, before nailing his eyes to Louis’. “That’s exactly why you should.”

Louis shakes his head again, running his hands over his face. “This is ridiculous.” He slumps down on the cold grass, falling back onto the ground. He covers his face with his arms, shutting his eyes for a moment.

This is all too much.

He hears when Harry settles down on the ground next to him and he uncovers his face, finding him leaning down on the grass not too far away. They sit there, faces only a bit grim, and eyes fastened in front of them. The silence isn’t awkward, just silent.

“You’d think I’d be dead by now, counting how many times you’ve threatened to murder me,” Harry says randomly, musing. “I don’t think I’ve threatened to do that to you. Yet.”

“You might.”

“Maybe.”

“I should probably just kill you first, shouldn’t I, before you bury me somewhere.” Louis makes a face. “Could probably run you over with the car, or stab you in the back when you’re not looking. Or shoot you.”

“Where would you get the gun, though?” Harry wonders.

“Good point, Styles. What should I do then?”
“Push me in front of a train?”

“Hmm, no. You’d probably just survive it,” Louis mutters darkly. “Resurrect again, right, like an annoying fucking ghost, haunting me forever. You’d pull a Charlie Sheen, wouldn’t you?”

“Anger Management?” Harry raises a brow.

“Is what you need.” Louis looks straight ahead. “You’ve seriously got some issues, mate. You attacked me twice this last week.”

He sees how Harry’s jaw clenches, but he doesn’t say anything.

“Fine,” Louis sighs, thinking he’s probably crazy for saying this. “You win. I won’t befriend her, but if you ever push me again because you think I’m getting it on with your ex I will mutilate you, you weirdo.” Harry snorts, and there’s a small grin on his face as he watches his own feet in front of him. “Two and a half limbs would be what was left of you.” Louis adds with a roll of his eyes, and he’s surprised when he hears the cackle of laughter that escapes Harry’s lips. He gives him a glance, watching him carefully where he splays on the ground, leaning back on his elbows and head thrown back from his laugh.

“Okay,” Harry says when he’s stopped giggling, a sound that felt eerily strange to Louis’ ears, and made his tummy feel a little weird. “As long as you promise not engage with her.”

“Fine. Whatever.”

This feels slightly weird, and yet it’s a kind of satisfying exchange of words. All they ever do is fuck and fight, thus it feels strange having a normal conversation with him, but also somehow pleasing. He doesn’t really know Harry as a person.

But, yuck. He doesn’t even know where his thoughts are heading. He shakes his head at himself, patting his trouser pocket for the little pack. He might have bought some cigarettes on his way back from the fro-yo shop yesterday. He’s not eighteen, but everybody knows Lenny in the small shop beside Tesco sells them anyway. He takes the pack out, finding the lighter stuffed next to the cigarettes that are left.

Harry looks up, making a double take when he sees Louis light up. “What – ugh! What are you doing?” he whines.

“What does it look like?” Louis mumbles, cigarette in the corner of his mouth as he stuffs the pack into his jacket again.

“Smoking? Really?”

“I don’t do it all the time, okay.” Only sometimes, when it’s necessary.

“That’s a foul habit.”

“What do you care?”

That makes him quiet and Louis smiles a little as he exhales toward the sky. There aren’t any stars out, or at least the clouds are covering them. He knows they’re there, though. It’s funny, because he remembers at least five times in freshman year when he sat on his porch, praying for Harry to catch a disease that would prevent him from being on the football team. He chuckles, recalling their ridiculous hate notes and death threats. Not that they’ve changed much, but they’ve grown up a bit at least. His past self would probably hate him if he knew what they’ve done together.
Harry looks up at him, eyeing him slightly. Louis takes another drag, blowing smoke in his face.

“Ugh,” he moans, tilting his head away and waving his hand in front of him. “Dick.” Louis grins, stubbing the last of the cigarette. “As if I’d kiss you now,” Harry mutters under his breath.

Louis stops, looking up. Their eyes lock for a moment and Louis slowly arches a brow at him. It takes Harry two seconds, and then he’s realized what the mischievous spark in Louis’ eye means.

“No, no, no,” he begins, starting to get up from the grass. Louis is quicker, already halfway up and gracefully slings his leg over Harry’s waist, easily straddling him and pushing his arms down to the ground. He grins down at him, hands strong and keeping Harry’s arms from moving where they’re locked on either side of his head. Harry scowls. Louis smirks. He leans down.

“Don’t do it,” Harry says, inching his head away as much as he can. Louis snickers, knees pressing into Harry’s sides to keep him from squirming. He feels him twist underneath him, and he hovers, the other boy’s face only inches away. “Louis –“

“What are you going to do about it?” he teases, unable to keep laughter out of his voice.

“This is rape!”

He scoffs. “It’s not. Don’t you want to feel my smoky lips against yours? Taste my mouth?” Their noses brush together and Harry groans, arching his head away, legs kicking as he tries to get as much space between their lips as possible. “Haven’t you ever wondered what it’s like to kiss me, sugar?”

“Ugh, sleazy.” Harry glares at him from the corner of his eye, his cheek pressed against the grass. “And if I have, it’s because I seriously wondered if you took people’s souls with them when your mouth left theirs.”

Louis leans down again, sliding his nose lightly against Harry’s jawline, down his neck. “You want to try the death kiss?” he murmurs into his skin.

“Dementor’s kiss. You’re a dementor,” Harry huffs.

“Harry Potter fan?” Louis scrapes his teeth against his neck. Trust Harry to be a know-it-all even when he’s trying to wriggle Louis off him.

“Who isn’t?”

“I’ve not read the books.” Louis leans away, smiling innocently down at him. He has actually read a few of them, but.

Harry turns to face Louis. Then he blows air into his face.

“Ew,” Louis says, but doesn’t recoil.

“Let me go,” Harry says evenly, arms then jerking upwards. Louis pushes them down.

“No.”

“Don’t kiss me. Louis.” Harry tries to catch his eyes. “I’m serious.”

Louis leans in. Harry kicks his legs. “Would you be still?”

“No –“
Louis grabs his chin in his fingers, holding his head in place. His lips are somewhat pushed together by his hold and they’re a little chapped, yet they’re plush and in the sweetest color of pink Louis’ seen in a while. For a second, he actually contemplates kissing him. He wasn’t planning on it, just wanted to mess with the other boy, but it would be hilarious to see his face afterwards, and his lips do look rather soft…

Harry lands a hand in his side, sending him tumbling off him.

“Jesus,” he huffs, rolling over on his back and rubs at his ribs, chest heaving.

Harry’s also on his back next to him, and he gives him a sidelong glance. “Were you really going to kiss me?”

“No. I’ve told you. There are reasons we don’t do that, moron.”

“You’ve never told me any reasons why.”

Louis makes an indignant noise. He pulls his jumper down, showing off the still prominent love bites. “This is proof enough. You can’t be trusted.”

Harry’s mouth turns into a small smirk, and like last Wednesday, he reaches out, fingertips lightly brushing against Louis’ collarbones.

“Uh-uh,” Louis says, affronted, leaning back. “What makes you think you get to touch?”

“They’re mine,” Harry says distractedly, eyes locked on the bruises. “I made them,” he murmurs.

“What do you mean ‘yours’? You’re ridiculous.” Louis shakes his head, standing up from the cold grass and zips his jacket up again. Harry gets up, following his lead. “Now, if you don’t terribly mind, Styles, I’m going home.” Louis turns around, but when he hears Harry’s steps behind him, he’s reminded of something else. “Hold on,” he says, crossing his arms. “What do you think you’re doing?”

Harry shrugs, smiling slightly. “Walking home.”

“No, you’re not.” He shakes his head. “Fetch my ball.”

Harry arches a brow, looking behind him into the dark. He turns back to Louis. “There is no way I’ll find it, and also, you’re the one who kicked it away.”

“I think you’ll find it,” Louis says, thought crossing his mind.

“What do you mean ‘yours’? You’re ridiculous.” Louis shakes his head, standing up from the cold grass and zips his jacket up again. Harry gets up, following his lead. “Now, if you don’t terribly mind, Styles, I’m going home.” Louis turns around, but when he hears Harry’s steps behind him, he’s reminded of something else. “Hold on,” he says, crossing his arms. “What do you think you’re doing?”

Harry stares at him for a few moments, eyes fixed on Louis’ covered throat. His lips are pursed, and it seems like he’s honestly considering it.

“And why is that?” Harry challenges. There’s a small curl touching his eyebrow, and it kind of ruins the stern façade he’s trying to pull off.

“Because if you do, and manage to catch up to me before our paths home go separate ways, I’ll let you suck another love bite into my neck.” He’s seen Harry’s entranced looks and definitely noticed how he licks his lips at the sight of Louis’ abused neck. But mostly, he really just wants to see if he can make Harry do it.

Harry stares at him for a few moments, eyes fixed on Louis’ covered throat. His lips are pursed, and it seems like he’s honestly considering it.

“Fine,” he says, and Louis smirks. “But,” he holds up a finger and Louis’ eyes harden, “if I do, I get ten minutes to do what I want to your neck.”
“Ew,” Louis whines. “You’re such a pervert.”

“Ten minutes.”

Louis squints. “Two.”

“Seven.”

“Five.”

“Deal,” Harry grins, reaching his hand out. Louis warily meets him halfway and Harry’s big paw covers his for a moment. They stare at each other competitively, slowly backing away towards their respective sides of the pitch.

“Better start,” Louis smirks, before taking off in a run.

The wind is fresh and strong against his face as he spurts. Truthfully, he doesn’t give a shit if Harry finds his ball or not, but it’s somehow amazingly exhilarating running like this, wondering if Harry will catch up to him or not.

He crosses the school parking lot in full speed, rounding the corner and heading strictly down the road towards the village. He can’t help but grin, feeling the adrenaline spread in his body as he runs. He can’t fucking wait to see Harry’s face the next time they meet, knowing he probably spent a good ten minutes looking for Louis’ stupid football in the cold before he gave in. Louis can’t honestly believe Harry agreed to it, only for the sake of drooling over Louis’ neck. His stomach flutters strangely at that and he frowns, pushing forward. That’s silly. It’s not actually going to happen.

For the next five minutes he runs focused, eyes locked on the lights coming from the houses up the road. The streetlights do little to light up the sidewalk, but he’s jogged this path so many times he could do it asleep.

He finally reaches the street where he can see the small piece of eminence in the ground by the sidewalk, just where the road parts in two. He smirks, knowing for sure that Harry won’t catch up with him. So long, moron, he thinks, and glances behind him, expecting to see nothing but darkness.

“What the fuck,” he breathes.

Only about thirty yards away, Harry is spurting like a fucking monster, ball safely tucked under his arm. His curls are wild and Louis’ eyes widen in horror.

“Shit,” he gasps. No, no, no. This was not supposed to happen. Shit.

He panics, feet stumbling on the ground, trying to pick up his pace. Harry is just coming closer and closer and Louis pushes himself to his limit, forcing his feet to move faster.

Dammit, Louis is quicker than Harry. He’s always been. He doesn’t know how the fuck Harry is catching up with him, but it can’t have taken him more than two minutes to find that stupid fucking football.

He glances behind again, which is definitely a mistake, and he loses half a yard. Fucking fuck, Harry’s only ten yards away.

“Stop!” he yells, as if Harry will listen.
“Are you scared?” Harry yells back, and Louis can literally hear his footsteps behind him.

Fuck, fuck, fuck, he thinks. He’s twenty yards away from the crossroad. Fuck. He can do this. Just a few yards more. He feels the sweat against his forehead, and the strain in his calves, his heart erratically pumping blood and oxygen to his muscles.

Only a few yards… He finally reaches the marked point, only a yard away. Fuck, yes!

He’s about to look behind him again, when Harry suddenly collides into his back, knocking breath and sense out of him. They tumble to the ground, landing on the grass of someone’s yard.

Louis can’t breathe. All air has escaped his lungs, and he dry heaves, feeling Harry’s strong arms locked around his chest. He slaps his hands off, scrambling out of the other boy’s grip.

He hears his faint laugh, vibrant in the cold air. “I fucking did it – Oh, shit.”

Louis feels pale and he blinks, suddenly feeling Harry’s hands holding his arms up above his head.

“Breathe. Slowly.” His hands are firm, but soft around his wrists. Louis eventually feels his heart rate slow, lungs finally filling with fresh air. He opens his eyes, seeing Harry right in front of him. He looks concerned and his eyes search Louis’ for a moment, before Louis closes them again.

“You okay?” Harry wonders.

“You fucking dick,” Louis murmurs, focusing on inhaling in slow breaths.

Harry chuckles, figuring Louis is just fine. “I won,” he says, and Louis finds him smirking when he opens his eyes again.

“You’re insane.” He pulls his arms down again, Harry releasing his wrists. The football is lying abandoned against the grass next to them and he breathily picks it up, throwing it at Harry’s chest. Harry catches it, making his attempt seem lame.

“I still won.”

“I am smaller than you. Do you have no sense? I could have died.”

“You’re just fine.”

Louis growls, getting on his feet. Harry imitates him, smirking as they’re standing face to face. Louis bites his cheek, scowling back at the other lad. He did not plan on this happening. This was so not what was supposed to happen.

“I won,” Harry says again, licking his lips.

“Fine,” Louis sneers. “So what, are you just going to get off against me now, or?”

Harry ticks his head to the side, contemplating. “Hmm, I might save it.”

“What? You can’t save it. You get now, or never.”

“Those weren’t the rules. You said five minutes, but not where or when.”

“You think I’m just going to let you molest my neck anywhere you want? Do you have surprise kink, too?”

“Too?” Harry frowns.
“Well, obviously you have some sort of thing for my neck, otherwise we wouldn’t be here.” Louis scoffs, shaking his head in exasperation.

Harry smirks, taking a few steps closer. Louis holds his ground, leaning up not to let Harry tower over him. The other lad places his hand on Louis’ waist, thumbing his jumper where the fabric’s slightly bunched together. Louis raises his chin, looking up at him. Harry’s only got eyes for his neck though, and Louis feels a bit like he’s a vampire, or something equally creepy.

“I have tons of kinks you know nothing about,” Harry murmurs, bringing him closer with his hand on his waist.

Louis arches a brow, mildly disgusted. “Please don’t share.” Though, he does kind of want to know now.

Harry only keeps smirking, eyes nailed on Louis’ neck, and he mentally prepares himself for feeling his lips on his skin as the other boy zips his jacket down, pushing the collar away to expose his throat. He seems to take an eternity to get to it, eyes contemplative, as if he’s wondering where to begin, hand softly brushing against his skin. Louis stomps his foot, heel clashing down on his toes. Harry winces, but doesn’t say anything, only retaliates by pushing Louis’ body flush against his. Louis leans back slight, making it clear that he is not into this by any means (his heart beating just a tad quicker and cheeks feeling slightly warmer is irrelevant).

Harry lowers his head, nose brushing against Louis’ jawline. It’s like he’s taking in the moment, enjoying it for as long as he can.

“Time’s ticking,” Louis says.

“It starts when my lips touch your neck,” Harry murmurs back. Louis is ever grateful most houses are blacked out, because if anyone finds them like this he does not know how to explain that he’s letting a freak get high on smelling his skin.

“Get to it now, or I’m leaving.”

“If you do I’ll follow you back… Let me.”

Louis rolls his eyes, but decides to let Harry have at it. Besides… last time wasn’t that unpleasant. Truth be told, it was actually rather hot. And Harry does have a thing for it… Maybe he could use this against him somehow.

He feels his lips hover, and the tiniest of contact makes him inhale through his nose. Suddenly, he can’t help but think about what Harry said.

“Do you really think I steal people’s souls with kisses?” he whispers.

“No. You’re just an idiot,” he says back, and Louis can see the small grin on his lips when he glances down. Then, without another word, Harry proceeds to press his lips into Louis’ skin.

His mouth is hot and his kisses languid. Louis counts to four whole seconds before he’s lost, and all he can feel is Harry’s strong hands cradling his neck, while he drags his teeth along Louis’ skin. He bites, tongue smoothing over in a way that makes the mild pain almost enjoyable. He doesn’t have a pain kink like Harry (Louis has come to this conclusion after three months of doing him, and he’s pretty certain these days), but somehow he can finally see the appeal. There’s something exciting about it, adrenaline tickling his nerves, making him feel hot. He feels too dazed all of a sudden and he doesn’t even have a single inkling to how long Harry has been devouring him. Knowing him, he’s probably taken advantage of Louis’ state.
Harry’s lips suck against him, altering between almost making Louis hiss and nipping lightly on his thin skin. His mouth is wet, and warm, and Louis doesn’t even realize he’s closed his eyes, body having fallen pliantly into Harry’s.

Finally, Harry lets him go. He takes a step back, eyes hooded and Louis can’t even reprimand him for admiring his work. His skin feels a bit achy and sensitive, and he can tell Harry really put an effort in.

“Right,” he says, trying to awaken. He shakes his head, focusing on Harry’s smug face. “We’re done.” He takes a step back, turning toward the street that leads to his house, facing Harry. “So, Harold,” he says stiffly. “This night has been terribly unpleasant. I shall wish you a shitty Christmas and a boring New Years Eve.”

“Thank you, Lewis.” He looks like he can tell how unsettled Louis feels, and Louis doesn’t like that at all. “Did you like the kiss?” He definitely looks like he knows.

“No. And, you’re welcome.” Louis squares his shoulders. “I’ll see you after the holidays.”

“Well, I’m going to lie awake at night, shivering with anxiety.”

“You better.” Louis gives him a stiff nod, picking the football up from the ground, then to back away. Harry keeps their eyes locked for a moment longer, gaze contemplative, until Louis finally turns around, starting down the street.

“Louis,” he hears him say behind him only seconds later and he sighs, turning around.

Before he sees it coming, Harry’s hand is on his shoulders, and their chests are flush against one another once again. Louis’ breath catches, dropping the damn football, and then Harry grabs him by the back of his neck and presses his lips against his.

His mind goes blank. He can’t think. It’s… Harry’s lips are soft and his hands are so soft, just hovering at his neck and cheek as he presses his kisses to his lips. He can barely breathe, and the shock and feeling of Harry so close makes him incompetent with movements. His kisses are just lips sucking on Louis’, his nose brushing against his cheek as he tilts his head to the side. It’s so much stronger of a feeling than when he kissed his neck. It’s like that shot of adrenaline, but multiplied into fifty times stronger. He feels unstable, but it’s making him fall into it.

Slowly his posture loosens, and his fingers grip Harry’s forearms. He still can’t organize his thoughts, but he can feel Harry’s hands against his face and his lips are warm. Several moments have passed, and yet he doesn’t react. Harry tongue licks along his bottom lip, and all he can do is open his mouth, allowing him closer.

His grip on Harry’s arms hardens when he feels his tongue slide against his. His mouth is wet and sweet, his hands holding Louis in place as he licks into his mouth. Louis’ eyes must have closed sometime, because he all he can see is darkness, and all he can feel is the strange buzzing inside him and the hot wetness of Harry’s saliva.

Harry then releases him after what feels like minutes of being lost in vacuum – no thoughts, no sounds, no nothing, except for bubbles and Harry. Instantly the connection is lost and it feels like getting hit by a truck. Louis blinks, unable to comprehend.
“Right,” he says, clearing his throat. He can barely feel how cold it is outside.

“Right,” Harry agrees.

Louis backs away awkwardly, giving a slight wave, before turning around.

Walking home is like being in a room full of people, but you can’t hear a word of what they’re saying because in your head your are somewhere completely different. Louis can’t think, can’t comprehend, and doesn’t understand what is going on in front of him. His head feels flimsy, as if he still hasn’t exited the state where he couldn’t breathe after Harry knocked him to the ground.

He can’t really feel the pavement under his feet as he walks, but somehow he makes it home, noticing the light in the kitchen through the window. It’s not until his phone shrills in his pocket that he seems to wake up, standing on the porch outside the door. He picks it up, without looking at the caller-ID.

“Hello,” he says, numbly.

“Hi,” the person on the other line says, and it’s like the daze surrounding him shatters. It’s almost like the drop of a glass vase, or if a bullet shot straight through a window. “Louis, hey.”

He can’t think, but he wants to, and his mind draws a blank as he fervently tries to function. It seems the attempts are futile.

“Louis, I can’t believe you picked up.”

“I –” he stutters.

“I’ve missed you so much, son.”

No, he thinks. No, he’s not his son. He can’t really hear what the man on the line is saying. His head feels too foggy. He tries to breathe correctly, but his head is swimming and his chest feels like it’s tied up in knots. He tries to tune in, but it’s like the voice is half a mile away from his ears. He shakes his head, slaps his cheek, and when he finally understands what the man on the other side of the line is saying, it seems like he’s halfway through a long rant already.

“… and I know our relationship hasn’t been the best since the divorce, but I’d really love it if we didn’t become like strangers, you know? I feel like we’re heading that way, and I can’t even begin to say how sorry I am for how this has turned out. Louis, please … Louis? … Are you there?”


He shuts off the phone, opening the door and walking inside. He’s biting his cheek so hard it could bleed, and he pushes off his shoes with his feet, stopping in the doorway to the kitchen when he sees his mother sitting there, cup of tea and a book in front of her.

She must’ve heard him come in, because she looks up. Her mouths falls slightly open when she sees his wet eyes, hands putting the book down.

“I’m not going there,” he whispers.

“What?” she says, not understanding what he’s talking about.

“To Mark’s. I’m not spending Christmas there.”

His mother sighs, standing up from her chair at the table. “Honey,” she says. “We made those
plans ages ago. You can’t back out now, your father expects you to come.”

“Mum,” he says, voice hard and teeth clenching. “I’m not going.”

“Louis. Listen, we’ve talked about this several times. You haven’t mentioned this in weeks, I thought you changed your mind.”

“Well, I haven’t, and I’m not going to stay with him. You and him just selfishly made up plans without asking me.” He feels warm, skin burning up. All those feelings from kissing Harry have morphed into something else. Something angry.

Her face goes stern, and she swallows. “That is not up to you, Louis.”

“It’s my birthday. And Christmas. I do not, not even for a million pound want to spend those days with him.” He takes a heated breath. “Not a fucking chance.”

“Louis, don’t say that. He’s –“

“I can’t believe you. You’re taking his side? You’re my mum, you’re the only one I’ve got. Why don’t have my back? Or can’t you understand what I’m saying?!“ He walks into the kitchen, pacing.

“Louis, stop. Right now.” Her lips are pushed together, but Louis can see the little flicker of uncertainty. He doesn’t know what’s with him, but he pushes it.

“Don’t you fucking understand? Are you incapable of some compassion or empathy? I’m your son, why are you doing this?”

“Louis,” she says lowly, arms crossed. “I’m sorry, but it’s going to happen.”

He doesn’t get it. Does she not… He knows it can’t be that, but his brain can’t help but come to too fast conclusions. He loses it.

“No fucking wonder why Fizzy doesn’t want to live here! We’ve got nothing! Literally, nothing! The floors don’t have proper heating, the car is fifteen fucking years old, the shower is cold after ten minutes, I can’t fucking go a day without worrying about my future and the football university, and on top of that, we’ve got a mother that doesn’t support us. Why the fuck would she?! Unlike me she’s got a fucking Dad. Who the fuck would want to stay here of all places, and especially with you?”

He regrets them the second the words leave his mouth, probably already halfway through the first sentence. Even when he sees the expression on her face change he doesn’t stop, and he can’t take them back. His mother is staring at him, as if she can’t believe he just did what he did. To be honest, he can’t believe it either.

He doesn’t feel straight. He feels terribly off, hot and dizzy. It seems like he’s always doing it wrong. He’s been feeling it for a while, but it’s finally boiling. It feels like all he can ever do is fight, fight and fight, and if it’s not verbal, it’s physical that he takes out on Harry when he gets too out of line. He almost understands Harry then. Maybe he’s like Louis, if only a bit.

It’s been too much today. Everything has come crashing down at once and he feels so completely and utterly lost. Everything is confusing. He doesn’t know what he’s doing anymore. His face crumbles in time with his mum’s, and he sinks to the floor, face buried in his hands.

The first sob feels like it’s ripping up flesh in his chest, up his throat. He hasn’t cried in months, hasn’t let himself. The hot drops of tears flood down his cheeks now and he can’t breathe properly
without hitching and gasping. After only a few seconds he feels his mother’s arms around him, holding him to her chest.

He cries, snot and tears mixing, and his mum rocks him, but he knows she’s crying, too.

“I’m sorry,” he cries, face pressing into her collarbones. “I’m sorry, Mum. I’m sorry.” He can’t do this; he can’t fight with his fucking mum. She is all he’s got. She’s his constant, his rock. She’s been here for every moment of his life, supported him through everything. “I didn’t mean it,” he sobs.

“No, baby,” she whispers, and he feels her hiccup. “I know, I know. But,” she says, voice teary. “I know it’s shit, too. It sucks. I’m sorry, it’s utter shit, and I wish so bad it was different, but I can’t change it. I’m trying to make it better, and I wish it were, but… I’m trying, baby.” She kisses his head. “I’m so sorry.”

“I’m trying, too, Mum,” he promises, as she rocks him. “I’ve been working at the fro-yo shop in town, I’m trying to help. I swear.”

“You got a job?” she whispers.

“Yes,” he whispers back.

“Oh god, baby,” she sniffs, and then she hugs him harder. He wraps his arms around her middle, and they sit there, crying and rocking on the kitchen floor. It sucks, and it is goddamned shit, is what it is. But what is, it is.

“God, we’re so pathetic, Mum,” he whispers when the room has started to feel cold. Her chuckle is clear, even if it only lasts for a second.

“I know, sweetie. But it’s okay to be sad sometimes.”

“No.”

“It is, Louis.”

Fuck. He tries so fucking hard to not let it all crush him like this. He can’t fucking be this way.

“Louis?”

“Mm,” he murmurs.

“Do you want some tea?”

“Yeah,” he whispers. “Yeah, Mum.”
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

This chapter is a bit shorter than the last one, but hopefully it won't be disappointing content-wise :) Thanks to Vicky as usual, my beta, and also thank you guys so much for your lovely comments and kudos, it means very much a lot to me. xx

Find me here:
Twitter: isthatyoularry
Tumblr: isthatyoularry

The party is already in full speed when Louis and Niall arrive. It’s just ten o’clock, but they’ve been at Niall’s place, having dinner. Usually on New Year’s Eve Louis’ family go over to Niall’s, but the table felt horribly empty this year and Louis could stand it only for so long.

The party they’re at is only a few blocks away and they walked over there, sipping from a flask with gin in an attempt to catch up on the drunken buzz. They didn’t want to drink at their parents despite being of age, but they’re ready to get plastered as soon as they get inside.

The hostess of the party is this girl Kelly. She’s on the cheering squad and Louis knows her well enough. Her house is gigantic, which is probably for the best, because according to the event on Facebook almost the entire senior class is attending tonight. Louis knows at the back of his head that Harry probably will be here tonight, but he doesn’t want to think about that. He’s done pretty well not thinking about him for the entire break. More or less.

Louis and Harry almost never attend the same parties, because they never tend to hang out in the same crowds. If the football team ever gathers it’s mostly for a few beers for an hour before everyone leaves to do their own thing. It’s probably Louis and Harry’s fault that the team isn’t very close knit. Louis hasn’t been feeling parties much lately either, only went to a few last term, and he doesn’t even know if Harry has been around the people he usually hangs with. Tonight, though, Louis is ready to get pissed and not think about anything at all.

He and Niall greet their mates as they get into the house that’s rather full. The kitchen is crammed, and they right away press through toward the kitchen table where people have dared to leave their alcohol. Niall snatches a bottle of vodka, finding plastic shot glasses somewhere and pours them one each.

“Happy New Year, Lou,” he grins, raising his glass. Louis smirks, tipping the drink back. It’s some Russian shit and it burns, the two of them making faces at each other.

“Another?”

“Another,” Louis agrees.

They finally make their way into the living room after two more shots, and Louis spots Stan and Oli on the couch. They’re smoking and Louis makes room for himself between them, joining their loud chatter. The music is blasting loudly through the room, furniture having been ruthlessly pushed to the walls to make room for dancing, and Louis can spot several pairs getting slightly indecent. He’s pretty sure Niall is part of one of the couples. He’s already pulling, and Louis can
hardly deny that his best mate’s got game.

“Liam!” Louis yells when he sees the lad coming into the room. He’s looking good in a white, tight t-shirt that does well to his broad shoulders and chest, and his light jeans make his waist look incredible. It’s strange, because Louis hasn’t ever found him very attractive. Maybe he’s a little drunk, though.

Liam comes over, bumping Louis’ outstretched fist before giving him a hug. Louis whines until he does a shot with him, and in the Louis winds up sitting on his lap for whatever reason. It’s nothing but friendly, but it’s nice somehow. Louis loves being affectionate, especially when drunk. It was such a long time ago he got this inebriated, and the feeling is heady and pleasant. He’s almost forgotten how great a good buzz can be. He’s been too busy with football to let loose lately, and he tells Liam as much.

“I usually throw parties, mate,” he answers. “Come to mine. Ed and Zayn usually come, too.” Louis doesn’t know who Zayn is, but Liam knows the good kind of people, he’s sure.

“Wanna smoke?” Louis asks.

“Sure.” He wraps his arm around Louis’ waist, keeping him on his lap as he raises his bum to get his pack of cigarettes out of his front pocket. He keeps his arm there, lighting his cig and then leans in to let Louis light his off of it.

It’s past eleven when Sophia, a pretty brunette, stumbles into the room, squealing when she sees Liam and sits down on his other side. Liam must look like a proper pimp like this, sitting in a big armchair, Louis on his left leg and his girlfriend on the armrest, legs draped over his right. Louis is way to hazy to be bothered when they make out for a bit. Sophia’s clutching Liam’s face, leaning into his side. Louis is way too hazy to be bothered when they make out for a bit. Sophia’s clutching Liam’s face, leaning into his side. Louis doesn’t care; she doesn’t bump him out of the way and she lets him sit on Liam’s lap, head resting back against his shoulder. Stan may have offered a drag of his spliff and Louis might not have said no.

Liam’s hand is warm on his waist and Louis’ head starts feeling a little hot. Sophia is still sitting down on Liam’s other side, smiling at him. Louis gives her a lazy wink, and she giggles.

“He’s a bit out of it?” he hears her say to Liam, and he feels him shrug beneath him.

“It’s fine,” he says, and then Sophia gives Louis a kiss on his cheek. He turns to face her and she smiles, eyes crinkling a little. Louis kind of thinks she smells a bit like summer. Maybe he should get a girlfriend, he thinks. Someone who smiles like blue skies and pretty springs. And has soft hands.

“Hi,” he says to her after a while, knowing he’s probably greeted her before. Liam chuckles.

“Your girlfriend is nice, Liams.”

“Thank you, Lou.”

Louis averts his eyes, looking around the coffee table in front of them. Some of the people surrounding it have been exchanged for new faces, but the ambience feels the same. People are smoking, drinking, just hanging back. Louis realizes he’s probably among the lazy drunks. The energetic ones usually crowd the dance floor, and the rest mingle about, being a bit of everywhere. He wonders where Niall is.

“What’s Niall?” he asks out loud to no one in particular.

“Mate,” someone says, who’s sitting on the other side of the coffee table, smiling and waving. “I’m here.”
“Niall!” he exclaims. “Bathroom, Niall!” He needs the bathroom.

“In the hallway, lad. Should I walk you?”

“Mm-hmm,” he nods, uncoordinatedly getting up from Liam’s lap. He thinks he feels a hand or two helping him keep steady. He feels Niall grab his arm, leading him to the bathroom through the half empty hallway. Most people are probably outside or upstairs, he figures.

Niall helps him into the bathroom, telling him he’ll go back to the living room. Louis locks the door and then spends fifteen minutes sitting on top of the toilet seat, staring at his legs as he rhythmically bumps his heel into the fluffy mat. It’d be a shame to get sick it, since it’s very pretty and fluffy, so he stands and goes to the sink, washing his face with cold water. Hands gripping either side of the sink, he finds himself staring at his own reflection.

He’s been feeling very confused lately. Everything is very confusing. A lot confusing. Confusion. Exhaustion. Many things and strange feelings.

Somebody bangs on the door a few times he thinks, before they give up. Louis isn’t sure what time it is, or how long ago somebody knocked on the door last, but he figures he should probably go out to the party again. He does, but heads upstairs after he peaks into the living room. Most people seem to have gone outside, but it’s cold out and he isn’t really feeling it. He finds a second bathroom in a corridor on the second floor, and climbs into the bathtub, leaning back. He has Liam’s pack of cigarettes in his pocket he realizes a few minutes later, and he lights one, letting the pink shower curtain hide him.

He knows he probably shouldn’t be alone on New Year’s, especially not when he’s actually at a party, so he brings his phone up. *Hide and seek Niall*, he texts, grinning a little to himself. He’ll never find him here.

Louis must have fallen asleep, because the next thing he knows someone is opening the bathroom door, locking it behind them. It’s a guy, Louis finds when he peeks out behind the shower curtain.

“What are you doing?” he asks, voice tired, but a little less drunk. He feels more awake now than he has the entire party.

The lad almost screams, crowding into the opposite wall. Louis laughs, giggling. The other guy looks scared, but calms when he finally spots Louis in the tub.

“What you doing, mate?” he asks. “Scared the fuck out of meh.”

“Sorry,” Louis smiles. The lad’s pretty skinny, but has nice eyes, he decides. He looks nice. “Hey, you’re the artsy guy!”

“What?”

“Curly’s friend.”

“I’m Zayn.”


“Yeah.”

“I’ll close my ears.”
Zayn chuckles, shaking his head, but nonetheless zips down his jeans. Louis closes his eyes, cheek mushing against the cold edge of the tub. When the guy is done, he flushes and washes his hands.

“Hey, do you know where Niall Horan is?”

“My Niall? You know my chipmunk?”

“… I guess.”

“Somewhere. Down.”

“Helpful,” Zayn nods. Louis is not certain if he’s sarcastic or not. “Right. It’s midnight soon, mate, just letting you know.”

“Yeah... Send someone to carry me downstairs? Preferably Lima.”

“Who?”

“Liiima. Liams.”

“Payne?”

“Mm-hm.”

The door closes a few seconds after that. Louis supposes he’s alone again. He could probably get up himself, but he’s tired and somebody should help him. Louis is on the way to bring the school’s footie team to the championship game, it would be not only be polite, but an honor to help the team captain.

The door opens a couple of minutes into Louis’ ponderings and he’s decided he’s going to ask Liam to carry him bridal style down the stairs to make his return extra extravagant. He bets everyone has missed him.

“You’re not Lima,” he says, frowning once he looks up. That’s definitely not him.

“No.”

“What are you doing here?” he wonders, swallowing.

“Zayn told me you were here.”

“Why?”

“’Cause he’s my friend.”

“Did you want to see me?” Louis asks, eyeing the other lad as he puts a leg over the edge, climbing into the tub. He doesn’t answer, only settles back, knees pulled up on either side of Louis’ legs.

Louis inhales quietly, suddenly feeling rather uncertain. Harry’s sitting in the tub with him and they’re simply looking at each other. It feels quite tentative. Their last encounter seems like ages ago, but he’s not going to lie and say he hasn’t been thinking about it, even if he’s tried not to. The picture’s been ingrained in the back of his head for the last week, and he doesn’t know what do with it.

“So,” Harry finally says, voice low. He looks as unsure as Louis’ feeling.
“So,” he says back. “How was… how’s your break?”

“Okay.” He nods once, pursing his lips.

“Cool.”

“Yours?”

Christmas did actually go by rather calmly. He and Mum celebrated by themselves, grandma and grandpa coming over on the 25th. It was a calm, cozy and pleasant, if slightly strange, affair. Lottie’s still quite mad at him for skipping Christmas at Mark’s, but she told him she’d talked to Fizzy (although with a hard look and a meaningfully arched brow), who’d apparently said she’d think about coming home sometime. He also had a long conversation with Jay about their fight, including the job thing. She’d been upset, but let him keep it. They promised from now on there’d be no more lies.

“Okay, I guess,” he answers, eyes locking on Harry’s fingers scratching his bent knee.

“Are you drunk?” Harry asks, voice low, eyes not looking up.

“A little. You?”

He shrugs. Louis watches him and he thinks he looks quite… not fine. He suddenly wonders if it’s just the party not hitting him up right, or if it’s something else. Like, something with his parents. He has no right to ask, so he doesn’t, even if the image of Harry standing outside his door, crying, is pounding his mind.

“Time’s it?” he murmurs.

“Eleven fifty-six.”

“Happy New Year,” he says lamely, rolling his eyes.

Harry scoffs, throwing his head back. He accidentally clashes into the wall behind him and Louis bursts out into a cackle, slapping his hand over his mouth. Harry winces, whining as he rubs the back of his head. Louis smiles, bumping his inner thigh with the toe of his shoe.

“What are you doing here?” he asks, not unkindly. “Really?”

Harry looks up at him, shaking his head a just fraction where he’s finally leaned it back against the wall. “I have no fucking idea.”

And somehow that makes absolute sense.

“Who’re you going to kiss at midnight then?”

“Do you want me to kiss you?” Harry asks, looking right at him.

Louis shrugs. He doesn’t want him to kiss him, he just… doesn’t want to not be kissed.

“Time’s it?” he asks.

“Eleven fifty-nine.”

They’re quiet for a moment, and then Harry finally sighs. It’s a low, perhaps even haunting, sound of longsuffering exhaustion. Louis can see him through the gap of his legs, staring at the ceiling.
“I don’t want to be alone.”

And. Yeah. Louis knows what that feels like.

“Yeah,” he whispers back.

It feels completely right when he scrambles, after some awkward shifting crawling in between the space of Harry’s legs, elbows landing on either of Harry’s warm shoulders. He gazes down at him, Harry’s eyes blinking back. Louis pushes his soft hair back, hands cradling his face. Harry blinks back and there’s an understanding between them.

“Time is it?”

He glances at the small clock on the table in the corner of the bathroom. Before he can answer there’s a loud cheer from outside, the rest of the guests of the party yelling their New Year wishes.

“Twelve,” Harry whispers.

“Happy New Year, Harold,” Louis says back, and leans down and kisses him.

It only last for a couple of seconds, but it’s warm and sweet. It’s not heading anywhere, but Louis closes his eyes anyway, feeling Harry’s soft lips kiss him back. It doesn’t mean anything, but it comforts them both in their own ways.

They part with a little breath each, and Louis leans back, sitting on Harry’s thighs where he’s straddling him. He reaches out, strokes a bit of saliva off Harry’s lower lip with his thumb before he gets up and out of the tub, unsteady on his feet as he leaves the bathroom.

**

Louis doesn’t hear from Harry for the rest of the break after New Years Eve. He left the party a couple of hours later, Niall finding him somewhere in the living room. He didn’t see Harry for the rest of the party either, figuring the other boy stayed upstairs or went back to wherever he was before he appeared in the bathroom.

Louis spends the last week off mostly resting up, playing FIFA at Niall’s and seeing Liam a couple of times. He goes on a few jogs, but tries not to think too much about his usual work out schedule. He also actually starts teaching Lottie how to drive. The first two lessons they do nothing but sit in an abandoned parking lot, trying to get Lottie to actually get the car moving. It happens, if quite jerkily, but results in an engine breakdown when she loses the clutch. It’s kind of hilarious and they end up laughing more than anything, even if Lottie finds it frustrating.

Niall comes along a few times and he’s actually quite helpful as Lottie carefully swerves around the parking lot.

“I think we should try driving down the small road by the woods,” he suggests. “You’re ready, Lots.”

“Really?” she says. “Louis hasn’t let me do anything else than this for days.”

Well, Louis is pretty sure that he is not even allowed to be teaching somebody how to drive. Getting caught, or you know, dying, isn’t exactly ideal.

“Yeah, come on. Nobody ever drives there. It'll be fine. Louis?”

“Fine,” he sighs. “But I’m driving over there. Switch.”
Lottie rolls her eyes, but nevertheless complies.

It ends up being fine. Louis is still worried the owner of the small road will pop up, which wouldn’t be pleasant, it being private property and all. However, they’re alone, and Lottie drives up and down the dirt road, practicing stopping and starting over and over again.

“Lots,” Louis says after several painfully abrupt stops. “If you let up on the brake just a little bit after you’ve pressed down, the stop isn’t going to be nearly as close to breaking my neck.”

“Sorry,” she laughs. She starts the car again, drives onwards a few yards and then slows. “Like this?”

“Better,” Louis nods, only rubbing his chest from where the seatbelt has been cutting into it a little bit. “Maybe we should actually start checking up the rules for practice driving.”

“Nobody’s gonna see us, Lou. Chill out a bit, it’s fine.”

Louis sends Niall a glare over his shoulder, in the process noticing the phone in his hands. “Is that my phone?”

“No –“

“Give it!” Shit.

“It’s not your phone, it’s –“

Louis rips it out of his hands, heart pumping quickly. He turns it over in his hand, realizing that no, it is not in fact his phone. Relief instantly fills him, and he lets out the big breath he held.

“What’s wrong with you?” Niall asks, matter-of-factly.

“Nothing. Oof!” He rubs his chest, eyes glancing at Lottie who’s looking focused on the road in front of her. He gives Niall a sheepish look. “Sorry,” he mumbles.

“What did you think I was doing? Looking through your texts? Since when do you even write anything interesting anyway? The last thing I’d want to read is your football schedules that you send everyone on the team. Yes, I know about those. The lads on the team hate them, did you know that?” Niall rolls his eyes. “And since when do we have secrets – Ooof! Lottie!”

“Sorry!”

Louis swallows, guiltily turning the phone over in his hand. “Sorry. I don’t know what came over me,” he says abashedly. “Wait. What were you doing then? This is Lottie’s phone.”

“What?!“

“Eyes on the road.”

Niall smirks. “Reading texts.”

“Niall!”

“Road. Eyes. Road.”

“Louis! He’s reading my texts!”

“No one! You’re such a shit, Niall –“

“Stop the car.”

“– and I’m going to kill you!”

“Stop the car!”

“He seems nice, though. But, I do wonder –“

“I swear to god, if you don’t stop the car we’re going to die.” Louis grips the seat in painful grasps.

“Nothing happened.”

“Are you sure? I wasn’t even going to say anything if Louis hadn’t found me out, but now that you’re being all defensive I’m curious.”

“Niall, you’re an arse!”

“Stop the car!” Louis yells, and then finally, finally, Lottie stomps on the break.

“Woah!”

”Ugh!”

Louis leans over, turning the car off completely. “If you two fight in the car one more time I’m not going to drive with you, Lottie, ever again. I’m not willing to risk my life.”

“I was driving in thirty, Louis, chill.”

“That’s ten too fast.”

Lottie ignores him, turning back to Niall. “Where did you even get my phone?”

“I’ve got contacts.”

Lottie turns to scowl at Louis.

“Hey! I didn’t do anything.”

“Yeah, you saw how he freaked when he thought it was his.” Niall sends Louis look that feels genuinely annoyed and perhaps a tad cold, and Louis shrinks a little.

“Don’t do that again.”

“Can’t promise anything, sis,” Niall shrugs. “So, are you dating?”

Louis’ sister turns beat red and Louis’ eyes narrow. “You’ve got a boyfriend?”

“No!” she exclaims. “Not yet,” she adds.

“You’re fifteen!”

“And you’re eighteen? Just because you were a nerd in Junior High doesn’t mean I can’t date.”
Louis crosses his arms. They’ve all already undone their seatbelts and they’re sitting in a triangle, looking sufficiently pissed at each other. Louis’ mad at Lottie, Niall’s mad at Louis, and Lottie is mad at Niall.

“When did this start?” Louis asks sternly.

“It hasn’t been going on long, Louis. Just since New Year’s.”

“Did you kiss him at midnight?” Niall asks.

Silence.

Louis gasps. “You kissed him?!”

Lottie glares. “So what?! Everyone kisses people at midnight! Niall kissed Melissa!”

“How’d you know?” Louis and Niall say synchronously, faces littered with confusion.

“Please, everybody knows. And Louis, just because you were baked as fuck and has sworn to celibacy doesn’t mean the rest of us are the same way.”

“Wha – I wasn’t – I didn’t get stoned,” he stutters.

Lottie rolls her eyes. “Louis, I saw pictures on Facebook of you in someone’s lap, staring like a freak at your own hand. You were wrecked.”


“Why do you all act as if I’ve never done stuff with anyone?” This so not what they should be talking about, especially not with Lottie. Or with Niall. They shouldn’t be talking about this at all. For the record, he wants to say, he’s done things that neither of them could ever dream of.

“You’ve never had a girlfriend,” Lottie says.

“You don’t have to have a girlfriend to do stuff.”

“Please, you’re hardly the sleep around type, Lou.” Niall shrugs. “You get attached.”

“This is absurd.” He’s done perfectly fine with Harry, thank you very much.

“So, you did kiss someone at midnight then?” Lottie arches a brow. The way her expression looks is way too similar to how Louis would look, and he feels annoyance bubble in him. Also, how did he manage to get here?

“I didn’t… I didn’t say that.” Louis presses his lips together, trying to look composed.

They can’t find out, like, they can’t. He can’t even fathom what would happen if they did. Louis is having sex with Harry. With a boy. He’s not ashamed about the last bit, quite, but he is certain he’s not ready to tell anyone about it. Christ, he doesn’t even know what he’d say. Are you gay they’d all ask, and Louis wouldn’t even know what the hell to answer. He doesn’t know! Okay! He doesn’t even know himself. He feels his expression crumble slightly and he bites his cheek, settling determination on his face. He will not be found out.

Lottie laughs, shaking her head. “Bet you’re wearing a chastity belt, Louis. Saving yourself for marriage?”

“Nothing wrong with that,” Louis mutters, turning back in his seat. Niall doesn’t say anything, but
Louis can feel his eyes on his neck. He can feel it. Niall knows something’s up, even if he doesn’t know what. He won’t say anything, Louis’ pretty sure of that, but he feels awfully guilty, ashamed that he’s keeping something from his best fucking friend.

“Let’s just get home now, okay? I promised Dad to help him cook dinner,” Niall says, leaning back in his seat.

“Switch,” Louis mutters.

**

There’s only one day left of break. Louis hasn’t hung out with Niall since the incident with Lottie, who for the record is constantly texting Martin. Her face lights up every time her phone chirps, and Louis finds himself glancing at his own phone that stays perfectly silent.

He’s not going to lie, Niall and Lottie’s constant reminders that he doesn’t do anything other than play football makes him feel slightly depressed. He knows they don’t know the complete truth, like his job and Harry, but it still makes him feel a bit miserable. He doesn’t have much to do the last days of break, since he doesn’t have any shifts at the shop and Niall seems distant, though Louis can’t blame him.

It hits him that lately the highlights of his life this last year have involved Harry. Nothing has made him feel as much as Harry, no matter what kind of feelings. His situation at home brings him complete misery, but lately Louis has no idea what kind of feelings Harry will extort from him. It’s strangely exhilarating and he doesn’t know if he likes it or not.

His eyes flicker to his phone again. He could text him… But no. No, he can’t.

They wouldn’t have anywhere to be anyway. Louis’ mum is home for the day, reading in the kitchen, and Lottie is in the living room with Louis, texting. He wouldn’t be able to sneak him in, much less sleep with him unnoticed. They can be a bit loud… Plus he’s not even that horny, despite it being weeks since he slept with Harry last.

He sighs, rolls over on the couch and closes his eyes. He could use some sleep, he supposes. Staying up and watching porn all night isn’t good for his sleeping schedule. It wasn’t even for getting off purposes, he was just… curious to what he could do to Harry to have him an undone mess beneath him. And maybe, he wants to do something that’ll impress him. Maybe.

He wonders what the kiss thing means. That time after the football pitch was unexpected and if he’s honest, really good. He can still remember Harry’s soft hands on his neck and cheek, holding him still while he kissed into his mouth. Then there’s the kiss on New Year’s Eve. It was short, but soft too, and the agreement between them evident.

It was a moment of strange, but mutual affinity. It wasn’t sympathy, just… Louis isn’t sure what it was. But it mattered somehow.

*I don’t want to be alone.*

Yeah.

Louis ends up going to bed early, stomach feeling slightly anxious. He doesn’t know why, but going to bed feels like a solution to escape his silly thoughts and the unease in his chest. It’s only seven pm, but he wishes his mum goodnight and says he’ll see her when she gets home tomorrow afternoon. Lottie teases him, calling him “grandpa”, but he only flips her off, not completely annoyed.
He brushes his teeth, crawling in beneath his covers with a pair of tartan pajama bottoms and a black long sleeved shirt. He feels a bit cold, and he faintly wonders if he’s starting to get a fever. He puts music in his ears, pulling the covers up past his head.

Louis wakes up just past one in the morning. *Panic! At The Disco* is no longer playing from his headphones, but it’s only because it’s replaced by the shrill sound of his ringtone in his headphones. He groans, pulling his duvet off him. The air that hits him is slightly cool, and he realizes he’s been sleeping in his cocoon for several hours.

“What?” he groans into the phone, cheek mushed against his pillow, too tired to even contemplate who could be calling him this late.

“What?”

It’s Harry. His voice is almost urgent, a little hoarse, and the first image that pops into Louis’ head is the picture of Harry, standing outside Louis’ door. He can’t do anything but murmur, “Fine,” and he tries not to comprehend it, even though his stomach swirls a bit, perhaps.

He sits up, running a hand through his ruffled hair. It’s standing in every direction it seems, but he’s too tired to bother doing anything about it. He doesn’t even know what Harry wants.

The text comes only ten minutes later. He trips quietly down the stairs, checking that Lottie’s door is safely closed. He glances out the window, unable to spot Harry’s car. Maybe he walked.

He opens the front door, squinting at Harry. His curls are somewhat disheveled as well, his long legs in track bottoms and a green hoodie, jacket on top. He looks tired, but he isn’t crying, so Louis takes that as a good sign.

“Hi,” he says.

“Hey,” Harry answers, hands stuffed in the pocket of his sweater. It almost feels exactly like last time. It feels like such a long time ago now.

“Why are you up at one am? It’s school tomorrow,” Louis says, voice grave from sleep.

“Couldn’t sleep.”

Louis steps aside, letting him inside and closes the door behind him. The boy steps out of his shoes, picking them up. His eyes slide over Louis slightly, and yeah, Louis supposes his attire isn’t exactly flattering; the pajamas are making his limps look less firm, as if he’s still a gangly teenager. He’s never been very gangly, though, more compact and small than anything else. Harry’s eyes linger on his waist. Louis tries not to think much of it.

Louis turns around, slowly leading the way upstairs. He hears Harry following him and they quietly trudge into Louis’ room. As soon as they’re inside, Louis closes the door and crawls in under the duvet. He hears Harry shrug out of his jacket, placing his shoes on the floor. It takes a few moments, and then he feels the bed dip next him.

He turns over, cheek mushed against the pillow, face only a couple of inches from Harry’s. Louis’ toes are freezing.

“You look like a baby hedgehog,” Harry murmurs, sleepiness prominent in his voice, too.

Louis digs his chilly toes in between Harry’s calves, making him wince. He puts a hand over Harry’s eyes. “Sleep.”
When he removes his hand, Harry keeps his eyes closed.

Louis watches him for a moment. *I don’t want to be alone.*

“Yeah,” he murmurs, voice so soft he’s sure Harry didn’t hear.

**

When Louis walks into homeroom the morning after, Harry catches his eyes instantly.

They woke up in the morning just past seven by Louis’ alarm. Harry looked rumpled by sleep, voice hoarse and somehow soft despite the rasp. Louis had to restrain himself from running a hand through his hair.

“Will you give me a ride to school?” Harry asked, blinking innocently.

“Not a chance,” Louis answered, pushing him away from him on the bed. Harry grabbed the duvet, rolling himself into a burrito. “I have to drive Lottie, so you need to leave before she wakes up.”

“I don’t want to,” Harry huffed. “I have to walk home and get my car.”

“You need a change of clothes, too.”

“Can I borrow yours?”

“They wouldn’t even fit,” Louis scoffed. “You’d stretch them.”

“I wouldn’t,” Harry huffed indignantly, unwrapping himself from the duvet. He got up, giving Louis an eyeful of his bare legs and chest. He was only in his boxers, and Louis narrowed his eyes as his gaze followed Harry to the drawers. The boy started riffling through his clothes, making a mess, and Louis groaned loudly.

“Stop ruining my drawers!”

“Stop whining. Hey, this one will fit.” He held up Louis’ blue button down, one Louis only uses when he has too look relatively proper. It was slightly too big for him, so he supposed Harry could take it.

“Fine, but wash it after.”

“Yeah, yeah, Mum.” Harry treded his arms into the sleeves, and Louis’ eyes caught the way the end of the sleeves were twisted incorrectly. His fingers twitched, urging to fix it. “I need pants.”

“You’re not allowed to borrow my trousers.”

“I think these’ll fit.”

“Those are mine!” Louis ripped the black jeggings from his hands, holding them as he pushed his own pajama bottoms down. “Stop looking.”

“You’re getting all naked in front of me. It’s unfair to tell me I can’t look.”

“My body, my rules.”

Harry shrugged, hands digging around in Louis’ drawer still. “Fine. I’ll just close my eyes and picture you naked instead.”
“You need therapy.”

“You need to tame your hair.”

Damn.

Louis eyed himself in the mirror. He really did need to fix it. He went to fetch a brush from the bathroom and sent a dark look at Harry on the way over. It took less than a minute though, and then Harry was walking into the bathroom, crowding Louis in by the sink. He noticed he was wearing a pair of Louis’ black jeans; too short, unfairly tight.

But he was smirking, rifting through the cupboard while Louis’ huffed in annoyance, Harry’s chest draped over his back. “Is this toothbrush yours?”

“Yes, why – No!”

Harry fit a strong arm around his waist, keeping him tightly back against Harry’s hip. He batted Louis’ hands away, placing the toothbrush down on the edge of the sink to put on some toothpaste.

“Gross,” Louis whined, when Harry brought it to his mouth.

“Can’t do anything about it now,” Harry grinned, voice muffled.

“Like, hell I can,” Louis growled, and started twisting in Harry’s grip, writhing and digging his nails into Harry’s arm.

Harry tried not to budge, but Louis is a “squirmy little thing” as he put it. Eventually they ended up crawling on the floor, both of Harry’s big hands locking Louis down.

“Why,” was what Harry said, when they were breathing heavily, lying on the floor.

“I don’t know,” Louis said. He actually had no idea why they were wrestling over a toothbrush, but “I want my toothbrush.”

“You can have it when I’m done.” There was toothpaste dripping down his chin.

Louis leaned in, biting the end of the toothbrush between his teeth and sufficiently removing it from Harry’s mouth.

Harry was looking incredulously at him, and Louis internally wondered why he was so acting like a fucking weirdo. What is he doing, honestly? He spat the brush from his mouth, and heard it land somewhere to his left.

“What was that?” Harry asked.

“I honestly don’t know.”

Harry met his eyes, and for a moment they almost looked a bit… fond. “Do you want some toothpaste with that?”

“What?”

Harry kissed him. Toothpaste. It was disgusting.

Louis brings himself back to reality, Niall tugging on his arm toward their seats farther back in the
classroom. He can’t help but keep his eyes on Harry as they walk down the row, though. He’s in Louis’ clothes, hair soft and tucked behind his ear. He’s also meeting Louis’ gaze brightly, only blinking back innocently.

Normally, Louis would assume something was up, that Harry was planning something, but now… he’s not sure. Something happened here, he thinks.

**

Something did happen, he supposes. After Harry’s surprise sleepover he seems to come around more often, especially late in the evenings. At first, Louis is annoyed, more often than not waking up with Harry beside him in the morning hogging the duvet when they’ve had a quick, late shag. Eventually it becomes more of a habit. When he stays, Harry sneaks out in the morning, meeting Louis’ eyes in homeroom later. Louis has even started bringing breakfast up to him in the morning. It’s a foul, foul habit, but he figures the kid’s got to eat.

And kissing. That’s a thing.

After beating the shit out of Harry as quietly as possible for kissing toothpaste into his mouth, it becomes a thing. They kiss, and it’s not bad at all. It somehow makes the sex better, less of a physical thing and more…intimate, perhaps some would say.

It doesn’t matter, really. It’s just something they do.

Louis sets up some rules though. For example, number 13: Harry has to keep his bites below the collarbones. Which is something Harry often grumbles and complains about, but Louis will not endure another turtleneck day.

Football practice starts up again. The hours aren’t as draining right now, since the season doesn’t start until a little less than two months. It’s going quite good, and Louis is sufficiently pleased. He thinks the boys can tell, because everyone seems to have a lot more fun at practice, and the team feels almost close knit for once.

Even the coach is unusually happy and seems to actually agree with Louis’ decisions more and more. Harry doesn’t seem to mind either, actually on board, too.

“Good session, Louis!” Coach Abrahams says on a Tuesday, the end of January only days away. He claps him on the back and Louis hides away a grin, bubble of joy expanding in his chest. “And good on ye and Harreh. Haven’t seen ye fight in ages! Proper mates, yeah?” He winks, knowing himself that’s quite farfetched. “Good, good,” he hums, walking away to end today’s practice, all the while Louis’ stomach sinks.

He’s right. They haven’t had a public fight in ages. Not since before the break anyway. Now that he thinks about it, they haven’t properly fought in weeks. Nothing other than playful wrestles in Louis’ bed or a bit of banter has been going on between them, and he suddenly realizes this with a start.

What exactly is happening here?

His thoughts head a terrifying direction, and he wants beat at them, destroy them. He and Harry are not friends.

His eyes darken as he sees Harry a few yards away, he and Lee playing around with a ball. No, he thinks, fetching a ball himself. They’re definitely not friends. He drops the ball, letting it bounce once before kicking it in Harry’s direction. It knocks him in the shoulder blade, making him clutch his back.
“What the fuck?” he calls.

Louis flips him off, stalking away.

He and Harry aren’t friends. He should have known, though. This thing with him is going to end badly. If even Coach has noticed, then everyone must know. His pulse is ticking, and he feels itchy all over. No one can know. Nobody.

Louis is on his way to his car in the parking lot, when he hears the crunching footsteps against the pavement behind him.

“What did you shoot at me?” Harry asks, clearly annoyed.

“Felt like it,” Louis mutters. Shit, people are going to know. They’re gonna fucking know.

“Idiot.” Harry glares as he catches up to him, walking a few paces to his left.

“Fuck you,” Louis replies grimly.

“What’s wrong with you?” Harry asks, but he doesn’t look surprised.

“Fuck you, that’s all.”


Louis stops in his tracks, and the anger seems to suddenly run off him as he blinks, turning to look at the other boy. “Who the fuck says ‘ditto’?” he asks, almost baffled. What the fuck even is this boy?

Harry scoffs at him and turns onto the path leading down the street toward town. He’s got his bag slung over his shoulder, strap across his chest, and he’s stuffed his hands into the pocket of his hoodie. The image is strikingly familiar.

“Wait,” Louis says, confused. “Are you walking?” He shakes his head in bewilderment. He didn’t sleep at Louis’ last night.

“Yes,” Harry says over his shoulder, continuing to walk.

“What the fuck. Why?”

“I like walking!” His tone is dismissive, defensive, but Louis knows it isn’t the truth. He squints after him. He doesn’t know quite what it is, but Harry’s very… secretive sometimes. Not that he expects his mortal enemy to share his deepest, darkest secrets, or whatever, with him, but it’s kind of annoying knowing that there is something. Sometimes, he wonders if he already knows what that something is. He sighs.

“Do you need a ride?” he finds himself asking, and after a wary look in response and having to promise not to talk too much, he’s got Harry in the passenger seat of his car and they’re on the way home.

It’s getting a bit dark, the sun still not staying up for longer than after practice ends. The street lamps along the road are, together with the lights from the houses, the only things lighting up the town. They don’t say anything, partly because Louis gets the feeling Harry really isn’t in the mood, and partly because he doesn’t know what to say. He reaches Harry’s street and he frowns, seeing Harry’s car in the driveway and two other sleek ones parked at the curb and in front of the
“So your parents are home,” he comments.

Harry snaps his head to look at him for a second, and then turns to scowl slightly at the window of his house that’s facing the street. A lamp is lit and Louis thinks someone is moving in there. He doesn’t quite understand why Harry would insist on walking when he’s got parents to pick him up, or why the hell he didn’t even drive his own fancy fucking car this morning when he’s got one.

Louis watches him, eyebrow raised questioningly. Harry looks back at him indifferently for a short moment, green eyes seeming just a bit contemplative. Then he’s jumping out of the car without a word and Louis watches him wordlessly walk around the vehicle and rip Louis’ door open.

“Ditto,” he says, once he’s got Louis outside with his back against the car in front of him.

“Ditto?”

“I say ditto.”

Louis squints. “Don’t say ditto.”

“Ditto.”

“Stop.”

“It sounds like dildo.”

“No.”

“Ditto.”

“Harry – “

“Ditto.”

“Don’t fucking say ditto.”

“Ditto.”

“You just said – Oh my god, this conversation doesn’t make any sense!” Louis exclaims exasperatedly. He runs a hand through his hair, shaking his head. A movement in the window of Harry’s house catches his eye in the motion, though. He recognizes Harry’s mother and the woman is smiling tentatively, giving a small wave. Harry sees how Louis’ gaze locks for a second and he turns, looking at his mother for a moment.

Harry doesn’t wave back or smile like Louis expected, instead he grabs Louis by the neck and presses a warm kiss to his lips.

Louis can’t really contemplate the action in the moment; all he can feel is Harry’s hand around his neck, hot lips wetly melting into his own. Harry presses him softly into the car behind him, thigh pressing snugly against his. He can feel Harry’s bag on the ground against the side of his leg, but most of all he feels the way Harry’s curls tickle at his forehead and how soft his lips are.

“What are you doing,” he murmurs nervously. “Your mum…” Somehow the fear of getting found out is subdued by the way Harry hands touch his jaw.
“Don’t worry,” Harry says lowly against his lips. Louis somehow trusts that, and then Harry plants a kiss on his jaw, hands squeezing his waist. It’s so warm, and hot, but not in a way that Louis wants to rip his clothes off, but it’s having him wish for this kiss to last a bit longer.

Harry kisses him against the car for what feels like hours, hands softly roaming his upper body, altering between licking into his mouth and pressing small kisses against his plump lips. It feels so…teenager-y. Or like a movie where they make out for hours simply because they can’t get enough. It’s not like that, but feels like it. In the moment. Not like, in real life. Or.

Whatever.

When Louis finally opens his eyes, Harry kisses him firmly on the lips once, then traps his chin between his thumb and index finger. Louis just looks back into his eyes, and a moment later Harry flicks his nose with his finger, giving a small smirk. Louis rolls his eyes before Harry’s grabbing his bag off the ground and struts into his house, his mother no longer visible in the window.

Louis frowns as he drives home, still able to feel the touch of Harry’s lips against his mouth and the feel of his hands on his waist and neck. He can’t help but admit to it; he really, really likes the way Harry’s hands feel.

They don’t kiss like that, though, is the thing. They don’t kiss just to kiss. They kiss when they have sex, or when they want to annoy each other, or mock one another with “endearing” nicknames. They don’t spend fifteen minutes making out against cars like some pretty rom-com.

Louis isn’t sure this was what it was, though. He’s fairly sure this wasn’t kissing for the sake of kissing. Harry’s mum saw, and Louis is sure Harry knows that, too. He wanted her to, Louis realizes.

He trusts that Harry knows she won’t say anything, but the idea that Harry only kissed Louis because she was watching, to prove a point, makes him feel eerily unsettled. Mostly, maybe, because Louis liked it.

He decides to ignore that for now.

**

It’s raining and Louis can hear the drops of water smattering against the window. It’s Friday, early, and he doesn’t want to ever leave his bed. He also hasn’t asked Harry about the kiss even though it’s been days, but he feels warm and cozy wrapped in a duvet, Harry’s next to him practically radiating heat.

Louis rolls over towards him, poking him lightly in the side.

“What,” he huffs, turning his head and burying his face into the pillow.

Louis eyes him for a moment. There’s a sense of comfort around him that Louis hasn’t seen before. He looks content, sleepy and soft. Louis has somehow along the way realized that Harry might like sleeping at his house, here, in his bed.

“Wake up,” he says, poking him in the side again. “School.”

“I don’t want to go,” Harry mumbles and bats Louis’ hand away. Louis tries to poke him again and their hands get into a bit of a struggle, Harry groaning in annoyance into his pillow as Louis tries to pinch him awake. Eventually Harry just grabs his arm and pushes him down on the mattress, flopping down on top of him. Louis’ breath escapes him and he groans, Harry heavy and
sprawling on top of him, chest against chest.

“We have to go to school,” Louis says.

“No, we don’t. I’m on you. You can’t move.” There’s a roughness in his voice mixed with drowsiness, and the result is kind of endearing.

“We have to go to school,” Louis repeats.

“No. Coach is going to cancel practice ‘cause it’s raining. And there’s no game tonight.” His breath tickles at Louis’ collarbone and his leg feels hot between his.

“Classes.”

“Not important. Let’s stay in,” he murmurs, lips puckering as he raises his head. “Have sex all day.” It’s extremely tempting, is what it is. “Your mum works the day shift today, right, Lou,” he whispers. “Your sister will be in school, you’ll be naked, I’ll be naked… Special day…”

“Harry…”

“Fuck me.” His lips are brushing against Louis’ jaw, slightly wet and there’s warmth radiating from his body. His hands are sliding up Louis’ shoulders and gripping his neck, thumbs pressing up his jaw.

“Harry.”

He leans up and kisses him, lips all wet, and Louis can’t believe they’re doing this when his sister’s probably awake in the next room. He mostly can’t believe he’s kissing Harry when the boy’s got morning breath and a pillow mark on his cheek.

Harry gets into it quickly, pushing Louis’ ruffled hair back between his fingers, sliding up and kneeling over him. His knee is between Louis’ thighs, and Louis feels slightly dizzy as Harry sucks on his bottom lip.

Harry’s got a t-shirt on and Louis lets his hands squeeze his hips before feeling his way up under his shirt. His hands skim over his back, humming a little as Harry arches into him submissively. Harry sucks on his jaw and when he bites a little, Louis locks his hands around his wrists, rolling them over and pushing him into the mattress.

“You like to get bity, yeah?” he murmurs, Harry’s hands locked above his head.

Harry doesn’t answer, only juts his hips up with his eyes half-lidded, and Louis doesn’t wait for more. He’s got his leg snugly between Harry’s, their hips pressed together. He pushes Harry’s shirt up to his armpits, and resumes to drag his teeth down his chest.

“Oh my god.”

Louis rips his head up vehemently, hands on Harry’s naked chest.

“Louis, Christ. I didn’t know you were into football players.” It’s Lottie. She’s standing in the doorway, eyes wide and looking shell-shocked.

Oh.
“How long have you been standing there?” Louis asks breathlessly, nothing else in his mind at that moment. Harry is still under him, eyes just as wide as Louis’ and they’re still locked in the same position.

“Long enough,” Lottie says, looking a bit scarred. “Oh well, have fun... I’ll just… get myself to school.” Her voice sounds numb as she turns to leave the room, and Louis finally wakes up, springing into action. He pushes Harry roughly off of him, scrambling off the bed and runs after her.

“To... Lottie,” he calls, half falling on his way through the door, slipping on the threshold. “Lottie.” He finally catches her arm by the stairs just outside his room, heart beating in panic in his chest. She spins around, eyebrows raised. “Lottie, listen. You cannot tell –“

“Was that really Harry Styles?” she hisses.

“Yes, but –“

“Do you top or bottom?”

“Lottie, Jesus!” he hisses frantically. “Keep your voice down!” Lottie rolls her eyes, but Louis tightens his grip on her arm. “Listen, you cannot tell anybody. Not a word, okay?” he pleads.

She grabs his hand and firmly removes it from her wrist, crossing her arms solidly.

“Lottie, please!” He’s begging here. The significance of what just occurred is starting to sink in and he isn’t sure what the fuck he’s going to do if she doesn’t keep quiet. Fuck, this thing isn’t supposed to be real. It’s a tiny little nothing that happens sometimes that no one is supposed to know about. Christ, it doesn’t even mean anything! Shit, if his sister doesn’t keep her mouth shut then people will know he’s sleeping with Harry, which is just as insane as it sounds.

Lottie is staring at him with narrowed eyes and Louis is almost ready to pray on his knees.

“I cannot believe this, Louis,” she says. “In our house? While I was home?! Did he sleep here? Oh my god, Harry Styles?!”

“Lottie!” Louis hushes, unable to stand how fucking weird it sounds saying it out loud, hearing it from someone else. “I know, okay? But you can’t tell anybody. I swear to god, if you do, I –“

Christ, he doesn’t even know what would happen if she did. He feels cold even though his heart is
beating like a drum, making his blood stir.

His sister stares at him, arms crossed and she’s definitely angry.

“Fine,” she finally sighs, her hands falling to her sides, and Louis releases a breath of hefty relief. “But,” she holds up a finger, “I’ll be waiting downstairs for you to drive me to school in ten minutes and to tell me every fucking little thing about this. Tick tock.” With that she stomps down the stairs and Louis is left feeling like someone took a giant spoon and is mixing relief and anxiety into a big soup in his stomach.

He slowly goes back into the bedroom where Harry is sitting on the edge of the bed, half dressed and hair disheveled. Louis flops down on his stomach on the bed, processing. What the hell just happened?

A few silent moments go by, neither of them saying a word. A minute ticks by before Louis opens an eye when Harry clears his throat.

“So… school then?” Harry asks, casually.

Louis abruptly sits up and throws a pillow at him, hitting him directly in the face. “Why the fuck are you not freaking out?” he exclaims.

“Ow.” Harry rubs at his nose.


“Louis, stop!”

“Shut up!” He hits him in the back.

“Stop making a fuzz! Stop abusing me! It’s not a big deal. She’s your, “ he ducks from a shot towards his head, “sister. She’s not gonna –“ Harry suddenly gets off the bed, then proceeds to engulf Louis in a locking embrace on it, keeping him from attacking him any further. “Damnit, she’s not going to say anything. Stop being overly dramatic.” He lets out a breath, air brushing against Louis' cheek.

Louis’ hair is standing on end, his chest is heaving and he can’t move. Harry’s arms are around him, the pillow locked to his chest under his arms. “I’m not overly dramatic,” he huffs. “I happen to be just the right amount of dramatic for someone in my situation.” He takes a short, restrained breath. “I’m not even gay, Harry. People can’t know about this!”

Harry’s laugh is right by his ear, and it’s condescending and amused all at once. “You’ve fucked me multiple times and you love my arse. Sure, you’re not gay.”

“I do not love your arse.”

“Yes, you do,” Harry smiles cheekily, and then pecks the top of Louis’ head because he knows it’ll make him mad. Louis determinedly leans away from the touch as much as he can for a lad in his position and Harry snickers, but finally releases him. “Now, I’m gonna take a shower, use up all your strawberry shampoo and girly conditioner, put on my clothes, and go to school.”

“Sod off.”

Ten minutes later Louis is climbing into the driver’s seat of the car, Lottie getting in from the other
He turns on the ignition and leaves the curb. He can’t really think of what’s worse – that his sister obviously thinks he’s gay, or that she’s seen him being all up on a guy, or that said guy is his mortal enemy.

“You’re really making your boyfriend walk to school?” is the first thing she asks, arching an unimpressed brow. “It’s raining.”

So, it’s even worse than that. She thinks they’re dating.

Louis glares at her. “Yes? And he’s not my boyfriend. We’re not friends.”

“You looked awfully chummy to me.”

“Shut up, Lottie,” he says, unable to help the defensive side of him overpowering everything else in his head.

“Whatever, Lou,” she mutters, turning to stare out the window, and they fall into an uneasy silence. Louis’ stomach still feels queasy, like someone’s still stirring it. After a few moments more, Lottie sighs as they reach a stoplight, looking at him hesitantly. “Since when do you even like boys, though, Lou?”

He shrugs, biting his cheek.

“Since when do you like Harry Styles of all people?” He can feel her eyeing him, noting her careful tone.

“I don’t know, Lottie, okay? I don’t know, and I don’t like-like Harry. This is just a– some thing we have. It just happened, alright?”

“Louis, I believe you. Just, it’s a bit weird, yeah? You’ve hated him for ages.”

“Well, he used to be really annoying and then we became co-captains and…”

“Wait. How long has this been going on?” Lottie asks, brows shooting up.

“A couple of… months?” he replies, sheepishly.

“Jesus Christ, Louis.” She shakes her head, taking off her seatbelt as Louis stops at the curb outside her school. She turns to look at him for a moment and he meets her stare for as long as he can bear. “Just don’t, I don’t know, do anything stupid.”

The defensive snip is at the tip of his tongue, but he withholds, sinking his teeth into his cheek once again. He nods and she reaches out, slapping him on the thigh.

“I bet you let him dom you, Lou.”

She’s out of the car before Louis can word vomit all over her.

**

Louis contemplates not going to school. He doesn’t think he’ll make it to the end of the day, the big knot of angst in his stomach making him unable to think. He briefly considers waiting in the car all day outside Lottie’s school, just to make sure she doesn’t go anywhere after classes so he can get a hold of her first. Even though she promised not to tell, he hasn’t told her that nobody
knows about this, and that means Niall too. Louis wouldn’t put it past his sister to text him, asking why the hell she’s the last to know.

Fuck, Louis feels horrible. Keeping this from Niall in particular makes him feel almost nauseas. Despite how much he’s tried to pretend that this isn’t a big thing, it’s starting to settle in just how fucking big it actually is. He’s pretended this Harry thing is just make believe, and as long as nobody knew, even when Harry’s mum knew, it didn’t feel important. But it is. He face plants into the steering wheel, trying to breathe in a normal pace. Doesn’t work.

He almost drives to the fro-yo shop instead, but he receives a text just before he starts the car.

*Where the hell are you dickface,* it reads. It’s from Niall of course. *Homeroom started five minutes ago*

Shit, fuck, ugh. He’s been submitting to the crisis for way too long. Sit up, he orders himself. Start the car and drive to school.

He does as he tells himself and when he finally arrives at the school, he’s come to the decision to ignore everything inconvenient and pretend nothing ever happened. He’s a good actor; he can put up a façade. If Niall has found out then it’s just a matter of time before he kicks his arse, so it doesn’t really matter how long Louis prolongs meeting him.

He makes it to school just as the homeroom period ends, students filling the big hallway on the way to their lockers. Louis follows the stream, walking to his locker to leave his bag and fetch books for sociology class. He realizes that Harry’s in that class and even though he knows deep down that Niall wouldn’t tell anyone what he knew if he found out, he’s still terribly paranoid. He doesn’t really want to be near Harry, considering even the football coach could tell their relationship is different.

He takes a seat next to Stan in the back, positioning himself as far away from Harry as possible. Several people are crowding around Harry at the moment, mostly girls but a few of his friends for some reason, too, and Louis once again has to quell the paranoia sizzling in his chest. If people knew they would be crowding around him, too. Harry probably just said something “funny” (a lame joke that’s really just pretentious, or so bad people felt like they needed to humor him) before Louis walked in.

The teacher starts the lecture and Louis focuses so hard on what she’s saying that he doesn’t hear Stan talking to him until he pokes him in the ribs harshly.

“What? I’m taking notes,” he says in annoyance.

“So, what are you planning for today?” There’s a glint in his eye, and Louis feels like he’s missing out on something. He’s too uptight to indulge though, so he fixes his eyes on the powerpoint Ms. Marin is using.

“I don’t know, nothing,” he mutters, shrugging. He senses the awkward look Stan gives him, but he doesn’t give a shit right now.

When class finally ends, he takes his time packing up, letting Stan leave first. He stuffs his books in his bag before putting it on, double strapping. He feels a hand on his shoulder when the room is empty, save the teacher. He looks up, almost starting when he sees that it’s Harry. Jesus, he thinks. He’s a nervous wreck.

“No trouble, gentlemen,” the teacher says, holding up a finger when she sees it’s only Styles and Tomlinson left in the room. Louis rolls his eyes and Harry makes an indignant face at her turned
Harry turns to Louis. “So?”

“She said she wouldn’t say anything,” Louis says, crossing his arms.


“Of course I am,” Louis hisses. “She might tell Niall, and I don’t even know what to do if she does —“

“Niall? As in your best mate? He doesn’t know?” Harry frowns.

Louis’ eyes widen. “No! Why would you think that?” He gasps. “Have you told people?!”

“Of course not…”

Louis gapes. “Are you kidding me? Are you fucking joking, Styles?!”

Harry sighs again, his large hand landing on Louis’ waist. “Don’t freak, but Zayn knows. He found your football at my house.”

“Are you fucking kidding me?!”

“Mr. Tomlinson!” the teacher reprimands. “Language. You two have got two minutes, then I have to lock up the classroom.”

“Sorry,” he mutters, turning to nail his eyes on Harry again. “Are you for real? Why didn’t you just tell him you stole it to mess with me or something?”

“Well, he saw your pants, too…”

“You could have told him they were yours!” Harry is so fucking incompetent. How hard is it to spit out a little lie? Like, how stupid can you be? Christ, three people already know about this. Who knows, maybe in a week the entire town will know that the footie captains are fucking.

Harry’s eyes harden. “It was a little hard when they had your initials and jersey number printed on them.”

Shit. Dammit. Those boxers were a gift from the team for his birthday last year. He sighs, running a hand over his face.

“That’s it, right? Nobody else knows, yeah?”

“No.” Harry shakes his head.

“Thank fuck,” Louis sighs. “Cannot believe three people know I’m sleeping with you, you fucking train wreck,” he mutters. He feels Harry’s hand leave his waist. He looks up, ready to leave him with a last comment to keep his mouth shut, but Harry’s facial expression cuts the words right off his tongue.

His arms are wrapped around his belly, and his eyes are staring down at Louis. He looks surprised, but most of all he looks disheartened, almost… hurt.

Louis opens his mouth a second time, but nothing comes out.
“Train wreck,” Harry repeats as he slings his bag up on his shoulder, teeth gritting together. “Well, I guess you know me best to know that, don’t you?” He walks away, jaw set and arms crossed. Louis already feels bad.

The rest of the classes are horrible. Not only is the stress eating him up, but he can’t fucking believe he told Harry he’s a fucking train wreck. He didn’t even mean it; it slipped out. If anybody is, it’s Louis. Jesus Christ, it’s not as if he hasn’t noticed that Harry sometimes seems beaten down, and Louis is not a bully. It’s just Harry he fights with and they’ve always been like this. Maybe he went too far this time. He fucking knows Harry’s exterior has been less hard lately, that he’s been more vulnerable. He’s not fucking blind, Christ sake.

*What a fucking dick you are, Louis.*

If his best friend had found Harry’s clothes in his room, he’d probably cave, too. Fucking shit.

Louis continues the day in misery.

“What’s wrong with you?” Niall asks after next period, and Louis can’t even muster up the façade he promised himself in the car. At least Niall doesn’t know about Harry.

“Just, I don’t know. Bad day.”

Niall makes a sympathetic face. “Sucks. Maybe we can make it better somehow.”

“How?” Louis whines. He doubts Niall can get rid of the proverbial gloomy cloud above his head pissing all over him.

“Weed. Tonight. My car. My contact just set me up with a nice stash.”

“How do you even afford shit like that anymore?” Louis long ago stopped asking who his contact is.

Niall shrugs as they get in line in the cafeteria. “Still have money from Nan left.” Niall’s grandmother passed away last year, leaving him with rather hefty inheritance.

“Sure you don’t want to save that for Uni?”

“There’s more than enough for that.”

Louis hums, deciding on a sandwich and a juice box, even though he can feel he won’t be able to swallow anything down. Quenching the unsettling turmoil in his stomach is not going well.

They sit down at a round table by the south wall, and Louis doesn’t touch his food until Niall’s already halfway finished with his. Liam, Stan and Lee stumble down at their table, followed by Ed and Jonny. Almost the entire football team and a bunch of hipster types that Harry hangs out with come into the cafeteria not long after. They’re pushing Harry with them, even though Louis can see that he seems quite subdued. Louis pushes his food away, taking a moment to hide his face behind his hands.

“So, what’s the plan?” Lee asks brightly, and the rest of the boys seem to lean in slightly around the table. When Louis opens his eyes, he sees them all looking at him expectantly.

Louis frowns, confused, eyes falling on Stan. “Plan?”

“Told you,” Stan mutters under his breath.
“Did you forget?” Lee asks, incredulous. “It’s February first! You always have a plan, Louis! Last year you orchestrated a weeklong mission!”

Louis feels cold, and just as he’s about to open his mouth to ask if it’s really the day, almost half the cafeteria starts singing.

“Happy birthday to you!”

No.

“Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday dear Harry…! Happy birthday to you!”

The cafeteria erupts in applause, someone whistling loudly, and when Louis glances over to Harry’s table there’s a fucking cake presented in front of him. Harry blows out the candles, small smile on his lips, even though it doesn’t quite reach his eyes.

“It’s his birthday?” Louis whispers.

“Mm-hmm,” Liam nods. “Did you honestly forget?” His eyes are curious, but kind.

Louis is going to throw up. “Yeah.”

“I mean, it’s okay. Everybody knows you lads haven’t been throwing much tantrum about each other lately. People will understand.”

Louis making a spectacle on Harry’s birthday has been thing since they started High School. It’s not like he hurts him or turns his day into an irreparable mess; it’s mostly just pranks that end up okay. Most of the football team is usually in on it, too. Last year he gave Harry a cake after spending an entire week abusing him with practical jokes and misery, saying “Happy birthday! You’re a cunt,” and then pushed his face into it. Harry took it with grace, he reckons, save the fact that he picked up the cake and held Louis down, crushing it against his face and stuffed it up his shirt.

This year, Louis called him a train wreck, and made him think he meant it.

“Jesus Christ.” He stands from the table abruptly, scurrying out of the diner hall hastily. He’s got to fix this.

**

It’s four PM. Louis cannot believe he’s doing this.

The essentials were easy to find at the shop, and the key to Harry’s backdoor under the empty pot, too. His parents weren’t home yet, thank god, and Louis snuck into Harry’s room, bag full of decorations and shit he did not know were that fucking expensive.

He shoves it all onto the bed, flailing somewhat. Even if he’s been at Harry’s house a few times, it never stops bothering him how prominent the uncomfortable ambience in this house is. It’s too clean, too stiff – all wrong. Harry’s room is so impersonal and it doesn’t fit him. Louis dislikes this house a great amount and he thinks he gets why Harry likes to be around his more, even though this bed is pretty great.

He made up some lie to Niall that he didn’t feel well enough for getting high in his car, to which his friend answered that that was the actual point of why they were going to get stoned in the first place. Louis didn’t answer that text. He hasn’t spoken to Lottie either, or his mum who was going to make dinner tonight. Somehow this is really fucking important and the rest has to be
subordinate right now, because Louis will actually admit it: Harry actually means a tiny little bit to him. He wouldn’t be here right now if he didn’t. Louis isn’t fucking slow.

He starts by changing Harry’s sheets. He bought ones in golden glitter when he skipped the rest of the classes for the day. He quickly strips Harry’s bed of the old ones, stuffing them underneath the bed because he doesn’t quite know what to do with them. It takes him several minutes to get the new ones on, and maybe he falls once while he’s working on the duvet, but otherwise there are no major problems.

Next, he rolls Harry’s navy colored blinds down, making the room darker. He stands on a chair, tangling a cheap strand of light bulbs into the curtain rod above his windows behind his bed that makes up the outer wall. He turns them on and then proceeds to tangle gold glittery garlands into the strand. He’s not exactly efficient and it doesn’t turn out completely like he had in mind, but he’s nonetheless pleased with the result. It looks nice, homey, like someone actually lives here. Someone who really likes glitter.

After that he blows up the balloons. They’re in some kind of rainbow color, resembling petrol on asphalt mostly, and he ties them to various obstacles in the room with silver strings usually meant for wrapping gifts, that were fifty percent off price at the store. The balloons shine a little in the light from the lamp on Harry’s desk. Louis thinks this might actually work out.

He adds the last touches quickly, realizing it’s almost five. Harry could be home any minute. He pulls down the big, framed poster of Ronaldo off Harry’s wall, replacing the picture with another one he stole from the footie team’s locker room, having added a few things on it with a black marker. He unceremoniously throws the Ronaldo poster under Harry’s bed (please, Messi is the only one, thank you very much), and then he brings out the other stuff.

He strips, gingerly pulling on the briefs he found back home. They’re black and way too tight, making Louis uncomfortably walk around the room, stretching them out with his hands. He tries to get a look at his bum from behind in Harry’s mirror, and is satisfied with the result of that at least. The glitter spray is a lot harder to handle, though. It flies a little bit of everywhere, but fastens to his oiled skin at least. He’s careful not to let it get on his neck, though, because he knows that’s probably for the best, unless Harry likes the taste of body oil and glitter.

The last touch is the party hat that he fastens on his head, a little bit askew. He fixes his fringe, making it look a little disheveled, and then he stares at himself through the mirror. Skin golden, oily, and sparkling with golden glitter. He can literally see his own cock through the thin material of these too small briefs, and he looks more or less like a stripper at a New Year’s Eve party.

There’s a hundred percent chance he’s going to humiliate himself. He can live with it. Maybe. If it works.

He suddenly hears the sound of a car engine and he scurries over to the window, peeking out from the side of the blinds. It’s Harry’s car and he catches him jumping out of the vehicle, heading for the front door.

Louis hurries to Harry’s speaker by his bed, connecting his phone to the AUX cord. His heart pounds like a fucking hammer and he’s already blushing. Fuck, he doesn’t even know if it’ll turn Harry on – which isn’t even the main priority here, but will hopefully be a side effect.

He listens sharply by the door as he hears Harry’s low, muffled steps up the stairs down the hall. Fuck, he’s coming this way.

Louis is regretting it already, but it’s not like he can abort the mission now. He quickly presses play on his phone, places the glitter spray by the bed and turns the light off again, except for the
light bulbs hanging with the garlands. The music is loud, bass slow, and 50 Cent’s “
mm-hmm yeah” is filling the room. Louis scrambles on top of the bed, positioning himself facing the door.

The door swings open, just as the song goes “So seductive,” and Harry walks in.

“I take you to the candy shop,” 50 Cent sings, and Louis leans up on the bed, locking his eyes on Harry’s shocked expression. He tries to look as seductive as possible, exposing his body to Harry. The boy is gaping, eyebrows shot up to his hairline and he blinks as if he can’t comprehend what is going on. Louis can’t either, to be completely honest.

He puts up a smirk and gets up on the bed. His hands run down his stomach slowly, holding Harry’s gaze, and he rolls his hips. Harry’s hand is locked on the doorknob, not moving an inch. Louis grabs his crotch, eyes locked on him, moving to the beat of the music.

It’s filthy, dirty and ridiculous, just like it’s supposed to be. Harry’s blinking rapidly, mouth still open at the sight in front of him. The glitter is evident in the light, the room shining in golden, Candy Shop blasting on top volume. Louis moves to the bass, touching his chest, hips, nipples, sliding his hands to his own bum, thrusting slowly into the air.

“What the fuck is this,” Harry breathes as Louis sucks obnoxiously on his fingers, sliding them into his briefs for quick moment.

This is so not what Louis thought he’d be doing this morning.

He meets Harry’s eyes and the boy is still gaping, mouth slightly less open, but eyes fastened on Louis’ hands near his crotch. They slide over him and Louis bends down, picking the glitter spray up and pressing the button. Glitter rains down over him, 50 Cent sings, ”Give it to me baby, nice and slow. Climb on top, ride me like you in a rodeo,” and Louis licks his lips, dancing ridiculously, even gives a try at twerking. Harry bursts out laughing in disbelief and Louis grins, shimmying as he climbs down the bed. He dances in front of Harry, hands on his hips as he rolls them. He grabs Harry arm, pulling him into the dim room, closing the door with his foot.

“I’ll take you to the candy shop. Boy, one taste of what I got… I’ll have you spending all you got, keeping going till you hit the spot,” Louis mimes, pushing Harry back towards the bed. Harry’s eyes are on him, bright, smile almost breaking out, but his cheeks are flushed and Louis bends down in front of him, looking back over his shoulder. Harry seems to be somewhere in the state between death and life, but Louis can’t tell if it’s from laughter or from being turned on.

Louis winks exaggeratedly over his shoulder, pushing Harry into another laugh, before he sits on his lap, rubbing his bum against his crotch as the song ends. He feels Harry’s labored breath against his back, and he presses his arse onto his dick, leaning back into his chest so they both fall back on the bed.

“Oh my god,” Harry gasps. “What the hell was that?” He laughs, and Louis can’t help but chuckle either. Did he really just do that?

“Well,” Louis starts. “It’s your birthday and I was a fucking arse this morning.” Harry’s lips press together for a short moment, as if he’d momentarily forgotten. Louis swallows. “I thought I’d make a fool of myself to apologize, and at the same time give you a little gift.”

Harry takes the room in for a moment, eyes looking up at the garlands and light bulbs, then the balloons and the sheets. His arm is curled under Louis’ back, thumb touching the jut of his hip.

“Well, you’re a fucking arse for sure…” he mumbles, “but I like the room.”

Harry smiles, big and close-lipped, looking up slightly while he pretends to ponder. “That was definitely unexpected. Ridiculous, and the striptease was definitely a hundred percent on point…” Louis slaps him lightly in the stomach, eliciting another laugh. The sound makes him kind of warm and he realizes he’s heard it much more often lately.

“I’m sorry, though. Harry, for real.” He glances up at him, quite ashamed. He’s never really apologized to Harry for anything before, he realizes. “It was uncalled for.”

Harry glances down and Louis thinks he’s biting his cheek. Louis tries to get him to meet his eyes, fingers sliding to his chin to make him face him. Harry averts his gaze still.

“Harry, I’m sorry. And I did try to make up for it.”

“Sometimes, you’re a fucking dick, Louis, for no reason at all.” His face his grim, and this was not how Louis meant for his birthday striptease to go. He’s still in the fucking hat and he looks ridiculous. He suddenly feels too exposed, too far out on the limb.

“I know,” he murmurs, and he releases Harry’s chin. He sits up, crossing his arms over his stomach, wondering how his self-esteem could go from ten to zero so fast. He faces away from Harry when he stands, looking around for where he threw his fucking clothes. “Maybe, I should go.”

Harry doesn’t say anything and Louis swallows. He thought he’d feel okay with being humiliated, but like this… He quickly stands from the bed, walking around it in search for his jeans. Not there. Harry sits up and Louis can feel his eyes on him as he peeks under the desk on the other side of the room, unable to find them.

“What are you doing?” Harry murmurs.

“Leaving. This was a bad idea,” he mutters. Shit, fuck. He knew this wasn’t going to go his way. Damnit.

He can hear Harry getting off the bed as he opens Harry’s closet door, wondering if he stuffed his clothes in there in lack of other places to put them. If he could just find his clothes that would be nice, because he’s beginning to feel a lot more of the humiliation prickling at his skin.

“Louis…” Harry’s hand lands on his waist. “Why are you leaving?” Louis turns around, trying to cover most of himself with his arms. Harry’s looking down at him, but Louis can’t tell much from the expression on his face. He shrugs. “Didn’t you get me a birthday present?”

Louis snorts. “Greedy,” he lets out with a breath.

“Hey, you got me one, yeah?”

“Kind of.”

“Well?” He arches a brow, bumping Louis’ hip with his own.

“You look like a frog like that.”

“Now you’re rude again.”

“Sorry.” Louis runs a hand over his face.

“Apology accepted.”
“I was gonna, you know, offer you three wishes and grant them,” Louis mumbles, words barely audible, hand sweeping towards the bed.

“Really?” Harry’s expression is surprised, but he certainly looks pleased.

“Yes, and don’t look at me like that. The mood has been sufficiently ruined.”

“Wait,” Harry says then. “How did you even get into my house?”

“Not important, Harold. Anyways, I should probably –“

Suddenly the door is swinging open and Louis is throwing himself behind Harry, using him as a human shield. The bathroom is all the way on the other side and there’s nowhere else to hide. Louis winces, closing his eyes, face against Harry’s back.

“Darling, we’re going to start setting up for – Oh. Oh, wow!” It’s Harry’s mum. Louis doesn’t dare to open his eyes. He’s clutching Harry’s upper arms so hard they’ll probably bruise. Harry holds his arms back in return, keeping Louis to his back, covering most of him. “Wow, darling. Who did this? It’s amazing!” Louis hears her take a few steps into the room, and then the sound abruptly stops and Harry’s hands tighten against Louis’ sides. Louis can’t open his eyes.

Harry clears his throat awkwardly.

“Oh god,” Mrs. Styles says, and Louis realizes he’s still wearing the fucking party hat. “I didn’t realize, I’m sorry.”

“Mum, could you give us a moment. “

“Certainly, dear,” she answers quickly. “I’ll let your, err, friend – boyfriend, I mean, err, him get dressed. I’ll see you two downstairs, or, I – I’ll make sure to set an extra plate.” She sounds halfway to hysterical as she lastly whispers “Oh god,” under her breath. She leaves the room admirably fast and Louis stays stiff behind Harry, breathing hot air between his shoulder blades into his shirt.

“Oh my god,” he whispers. Harry’s body is stiff, back moving in time with his long breaths against Louis’ face. “Did you know they were going to be home?”

“I forgot.”

“Shit. I need to leave.” He doesn’t move an inch, still shocked. They stay locked in the same position for another minute, and Louis realizes Harry might just be as fazed as him. Despite how indifferent he seemed towards his mother that time he kissed him when she was looking from the window, he feels unsettled. It kind of sippers from his body.

“What are we going to do?” Louis’ fingers run to Harry’s back, clutching his shirt.

“I – I think, I think she thinks you’re staying for dinner.”

“What?”

“Birthday dinner. My relatives are coming.” His voice sounds far away, uncertain.

“I’m not.” Louis says. “I’m not. Right?”

“I don’t know.”

“Harry.”
“I think you should get dressed.”

“Harry.”

“Please. Do me a favor.” His hands squeeze Louis hips, leaning back against him slightly.

“Harold!” Louis hisses.

“Harry!” There’s another woman’s voice outside the door. “Why is Mum a nervous wreck? What did you do?” Louis leaps across the bed, almost falling, and Harry slaps a hand over his mouth, but can’t stop himself from laughing. Louis reaches the bathroom door, throwing himself inside before another person can see him. He can hear Harry cackling outside the door, sounding like some kind of manic hyena.

Louis decides to ignore that sound and groans, burying his face in his hands. He doesn’t even know how he got here. Dinner. With Harry’s family. Dear God. He cannot do that. But Harry asked him to… This was so not what Louis meant to be doing tonight.

He can hear muffled voices from Harry’s room, and Louis figures he might as well get rid of the glitter and oil covering his entire body at least. And the fucking party hat. Jesus Christ.

He strips, getting into Harry’s shower. It takes him a few minutes to figure out how to work it, but once he gets it going he can’t help but compare it to his own, the water raining down almost magically in comparison. It takes him twice as long to get rid of the glitter and oil than he thought, and not even then is his skin completely shimmer-free.

By the time he gets out of the shower, he has grown a huge ball of NO in his stomach. No way in fucking hell is he going to have dinner with Harry’s family, especially when his mother just saw him in a party hat, almost naked and hiding behind her son. This is awful. This is a catastrophe.

And he doesn’t have any clothes. Well, clothes that are appropriate for dinner with your nemesis’ parents. And for the record, he still doesn’t know what the hell happened to his normal clothes.

He hesitantly opens the door, towel around his waist, looking into Harry’s room. “Is it safe?” he asks, and Harry turns around, nodding to him. Louis sighs and walks into the room, flopping down on the bed. Harry watches him, eyes lingering just a moment on his upper chest. “What’s the plan then?” Louis says. He looks down, finding there’s still a little gold shimmering there.

“Plan?”

“Do you sneak me out the back? Tie up some sheets so I can climb out the window?”

“You’re staying,” Harry says determinedly, shaking his head.

“What?!” What the hell. “Harry, why?!”

“Because…” He seems to fumble for words, sighing exasperatedly. “Please do. Just, my parents they – Look, if you do, nobody has to know. And I’ll owe you.”

Why is he looking like that? All puppy and tentative?

“Owe me how?” Louis might be contemplating it. Stupid puppy face.

“I don’t know, anything.”
Louis eyes him were he’s sitting on the edge of the bed, eyes pleading and slightly hopeful. He’s so damn secretive and it’s annoying the fuck out of him. Louis inwardly sighs. He shouldn’t care, but it still bothers him.

“If you still want, you can grant me my wishes after....”

Louis rolls his eyes, shaking his head. “You’re such a dirty player. Fine.”

Harry grins, standing up from the bed with a bounce. “Good. Let me get you some clothes. Oh, and I found your things stuffed into my nightstand drawer?”

While Louis dries off with the towel and blow-dries his hair, Harry searches for a shirt for him to borrow. Louis feels a bit weird, because this is so off from what they usually do. They don’t do things with other people. It’s as if God thought to himself, “Oh, look it’s February. Maybe I should finally start meddling in Louis’ life. Not to make it better, of course. Just meddle a bit. Be a bitch.”

“Here,” Harry says, coming up behind him as Louis is focused on trying style his fringe into something relatively cute. He throws a glance over his shoulder, spotting the blue shirt Harry’s holding. “I think this will fit.”

Louis takes it, holding it up between them. It’s light blue, a button down. His eyes pass from the shirt and Harry’s upper body, arching a brow. “Did you wear this in junior year?”

“Sophomore,” Harry smirks.

“Fucking arse.” Louis whacks him in the shoulder, but nevertheless takes the shirt. Harry laughs and grabs Louis, who’s turned around, with his arm over his chest and presses his mouth to the nape of his neck. “Get off, you vampire,” he mutters, heart pumping warmly.

Walking down the stairs when the clock hits ten past six is one of the strangest experiences of his life. He heard the cars pull up outside the house and he’s slowly been growing more nervous, all the while Harry’s looked more determined.

He hears people chatting downstairs and he grabs Harry’s arm, stopping him for a second at the top of the stairs. “Harry –“

“Louis,” Harry sighs. “It’s cool. Just act like you’re my boyfriend and pretend we’ve been dating for ages.”

“But we haven’t been dating for ages. Doesn’t anybody know that?”

“My Mum has seen us kiss once, and this was the second time she’s seen anything. I haven’t told her shit. Nobody knows anything.”

Louis’ eyes widen. “Are you saying we’re about to give your entire family heart attacks?!” he hisses.

“Just be cool, Louis.” Harry reaches out and fixes Louis’ shirt, touching the collar lightly. The shirt fits, but it actually might be tiny bit big. Harry laughed for two full minutes when Louis realized. Harry himself is in a navy blue shirt, a button down as well, but he’s actually done it up all the way for once, instead of showing his tits like he normally does.

“I hate you so much,” Louis whines. What the hell has Harry dragged him into?
Harry grabs his arm and pulls him down the stairs. The voices get louder and louder as they come closer to rounding the corner to the living room. Thankfully, it’ll only be Harry’s family and grandparents, not too many people, but still Louis’ pulse would get a fucking speeding ticking if it were a car. And that is the strangest metaphor he’s ever thought of. This is all clearly driving him nuts. *Holy shit.*

Harry and Louis walk into the living room. Louis instantly spots Anne, Harry’s mum, and also his dad and the girl who looks like a female Harry, who is his sister. Louis recognizes her from pictures on the wall up the stairs. There are also three older men and two ladies; both sets of grandparents, probably. And an uncle, or something.

“Harry!” One of them exclaims, raising his arms. He’s rather tall, but sturdy and could probably break Louis’ arm without effort.

“Grandpa,” Harry grins, gripping Louis’ elbow and forcing him with him into the room, as if he knew Louis was planning to bolt within the minute. Harry doesn’t let his arm go while he hugs his grandfather, who claps him heartily on the back. Louis thinks he sees slight similarities between him and Harry’s dad. Grandpa Styles, maybe. He seems to be in his sixties, looking fresh despite his grey hair.

Harry makes the rounds quickly, hugging each member of his family apart from his sister and parents, all the while Louis fiddles with his sleeve, feeling the curious eyes on him.

Harry introduces his grandparents warmly. Louis was right; the first person he hugged was Harry’s dad’s father, Gus Styles. Then there’s Grandpa and Grandma Selley, Anne’s parents. They both seem kind and humble, both smiling at Louis. Lastly there’s Grandma Styles and Barney. Actually Grandma Styles is Harries now, remarried to Barney Harries. There doesn’t seem to be any tension there, though, which Louis takes as a good sign.

“Who’s this then?” Grandpa Styles asks. “Zayn? Harry’s best mate, yes?”

“No,” Harry interrupts before Louis can say anything. “This is Louis.” His voice is warm and soft, and Louis almost glares at him. Fucking hell, Harry is going to play this hard. The grandparents’ eyes flicker to Louis, who swallows thickly. He can see the questions in their eyes as Harry’s hand goes to Louis’ neck, nails scratching the hair at his nape softly.

Louis sees how the similar look fills all of their eyes. They all just took the first hint. No one says a word.

“Hi,” Louis breathes, a slight tremor in his voice. He’s going to absolutely murder Harry after this.

His eyes slide to Anne, who swallows thickly once, eyes flicking nervously between the guests. She claps her hands together, as if to gain some composure. “So, dinner! Dinner’s ready! Let’s eat. Sit at the table!”

The guests turn into life again, starting to move along towards the dining hall. Louis turns to Harry. “You’re an asshole.”

“It’s going to be absolutely fine, boo,” Harry coos, squeezing his waist. Louis narrows his eyes, but throws a glance over his shoulder. Grandpa Styles looks away impressively smoothly, but Louis did catch the suspicious look in his eye. While the other people seem to have let Harry’s hint go, the older man seems to have not.

Harry grabs Louis’ arm, pulling him to his side and they follow the stream into the dining room. By the time they get there, Harry’s laced his arm around his waist, hand curled around his side,
fingers scratching lightly against his ribs.

Harry’s dad has already taken a seat at the head of the table, an empty chair by his side. Harry’s grandparents are settled down in the rest of the chairs. There are two left at the end of the table. Harry sits down next to Grandpa Selley, leaving Louis next to Gemma, Harry’s sister. He feels her eyes on him as he sits and he wonders if Harry’s not even told her about what’s really going on. It wouldn’t surprise him, though, if he hasn’t. Not even Louis knows what’s really going on.

Anne sits down next to Harry’s dad and exhales nervously. “Right. Dig in!”

Food is passed around and quite honestly Louis doesn’t feel that hungry, but Harry happily loads his plate with tons of things, barely letting Louis touch the platters himself.

“Harry, relax,” Gemma finally says, arching a brow, making Grandma Styles, Jackie, chuckle.

“Darling,” Jackie says, “we’re having dessert, too.”

Harry rolls his eyes and sends the platter on to Gemma, instead grasping the bowl of salad. “Salad, love?” he asks Louis, who’s internally getting quite… disturbed by his behavior.

“Yes, dear. Please.”

Harry beams at him, shuffling salad onto his plate, all the while Louis inwardly rolls his eyes. Harry is way too good at pretending.

When they’ve all started eating, the conversation seems to finally flow easily. The grandparents ask about Harry’s schoolwork, what music he listens to lately, what gifts he’s received so far (at which Harry squeezes Louis’ thigh under the table and Louis almost chokes on his cherry tomato).

“Well, we’ve not had time to give Harry his gifts yet. We’re doing it at dessert,” Harry’s father says, and several eyes go to Harry. Gemma arches another brow.

“Don’t you always wake up to cake and Mum singing ‘Happy Birthday’ like a champ?” There’s a slight chuckle in her words and everyone seems a little befuddled, eyes questioning. Louis can’t help but see the downward twist in Anne’s mouth.

“Well,” she says. “Harry wasn’t home this morning.”

“Oh?” Grandpa Selley asks.

“He was at Louis’.” Her eyes stick to her plate, and Louis feels terribly guilty all of a sudden.

“What?” Harry’s dad frowns. “I thought you were at Zayn’s, Harry. Didn’t you say –“

“No now, Des,” Anne says lowly, placing a hand on his arm.

Louis shifts awkwardly in his seat, faltering under everybody’s eyes. Harry, however, is keeping himself composed. He pops a piece of cucumber into his mouth, chewing, completely unbothered.

“Well, did Louis celebrate you properly then?” Barney asks, smiling encouragingly at Louis and Harry. Louis almost doesn’t keep himself together, but Harry settles a warm hand on his shoulder.

“Well, he pretended he didn’t remember my birthday when we woke up,” Harry smiles. “And then he surprised me after school.” His hand once again slides into Louis’ hair, and Louis’s head feels hot. His cheeks are burning, because Anne is looking positively like she’s going to choke and all he can think of is the boxer briefs, glitter and the party hat. Harry’s hand softly caressing
him isn’t helping, especially not when he’s turned to face him completely, the other hand sliding up his thigh.

“Yes,” Louis choking out. “I redecorated his room a bit. Thought it needed a makeover.” He forces a smile. He can feel Gemma’s eyes on him and he’s sure she’s realized something isn’t right. Not just that the present wasn’t just a makeover, but that the whole Harry and Louis thing is off.

Jackie smiles, delighted. “Oh, how lovely! We must go look after dinner! Right, Evie?”

Harry’s other grandmother nods, eyes kind as she smiles at Louis. He smiles back hesitantly and Harry squeezes his thigh. Harry’s father, however, looks utterly confused, Grandpa Styles seems suspicious just as Gemma, and the rest don’t show anything but indifference to what the others are suspecting, or they choose to overlook it.

“Oh, yes, definitely. I was so surprised. It’s so lovely. He put up a light bulb strand, got me balloons, and changed the sheets…”

Louis snaps his head Harry’s way, eyes ringing with alarm.

Motherfucker, how blatant does he actually need to be? Louis is five hundred percent certain somebody is finally going to snap and ask what the hell is going on. Louis was expecting maybe a few affectionate touches, not implies that he was planning to fuck Harry on his bed tonight.

“Welcome, love.” Louis says tightly and pulls a smile. He touches Harry’s chin lightly and quickly looks down at his food again. He’s waiting for it, almost wincing already. He doesn’t even know what to tell people when it does.

“So… how did you meet then, Louis?” Jackie asks, a subject Louis did not expect.

Louis looks up, a little surprised. “We’re co-captains of the school’s football team. Harry and I run the football practices together. We’re starting the play offs for the championship in March…” He trails off, wondering why nobody looks like they have any idea of this.

“You’re co-captain, Harry?” Des asks and Louis’ jaw almost drops. Harry’s father is looking at him, shocked. Harry’s gone completely stiff, hand falling off Louis.

Anne is gaping. “You never told us that, Harry!”

Everyone is looking awkwardly between parents and son, and Louis wants to sink through the floor.

“How would I tell you? You don’t care about football. You want me to go to business school, anyway,” Harry says.

The tension is thick. The silence is eating all of them alive, and Louis feels anger bubble inside him. How did his parents not know about this?!

“Well,” he says, voice biting. “Harry is one of the best players on the team. He deserves to be captain. He’s done a lot for the team, and I really think he could get somewhere, playing football.”

The tension doesn’t waver.

“Well… that’s great, Harry,” Barney says, obviously just trying to deflect the tension. Louis wonders if there’s actually anybody who knows or cares about how much Harry loves football.

“It is,” Louis agrees, voice way too determined and clear.
“Let’s move over to the living room, okay?” Anne says, and Harry is up from the table first, the others following hesitantly. Louis stands and Harry instantly winds his arm around his waist. Everyone clearly sees it, but no one seems to have the energy to say something.

Harry walks Louis out to the living room, falling onto the couch. His hand covers his eyes and Louis tentatively sits down next to him.

“Are you okay?” he asks, even though he knows he’s probably not.

“Yes,” Harry says anyway. “Whatever.” He removes his hand and Louis presses his lips together, not liking how Harry actually looks like he’s used to this.

Louis doesn’t know if he should say anything, but if he thought he should, he doesn’t know what he would say.

Barney walks into the room, followed by Grandma Styles. “Well, that was weird, huh?” Barney says, sitting down in the armchair next to the sofa. Jackie stands by him, hand on his shoulder.

Louis accidentally chuckles, surprised at the blatant confrontation of what just went on. Harry lips pull a little, and Louis settles into a small smile.

“Here’s to hoping dessert will be better.”

“Do you know what you’ll wish for, before blowing out the candles, dear?” Jackie asks.

Louis turns to look at him as well. For a moment he thinks Harry’s going to say something honest, but then he turns to Louis, biting his lip as he pulls him to his side. “Don’t know what I’d wish for, Grandma. Got all I need already.”

His voice is sugar sweet. Louis almost hits him. On another thought, he actually can’t keep from doing so. Louis hits him in the chest, sighing. “You’re so gross,” he mutters, shaking his head.

“You love it,” Harry grins.

Louis rolls his eyes, looking away, but he can’t help the smile tugging on his lip. Dammit, Styles.

“You two are so cute,” Jackie smiles and Harry looks up at her for a moment. For a second he seems unsure of something before he pulls a small smile, but it doesn’t really reach his eyes. Maybe this wasn’t the reaction Harry wanted pretending to have a boyfriend. Louis frowns, remembering how determined Harry had looked when he kissed Louis outside his house with Anne watching. It’s like he wanted chaos tonight.

Louis tries not to mull over what Harry’s grandma said either, but he knows for a fact that he and Harry definitely aren’t cute. They hate each other. They’re not cute.

The rest of the family comes into the room, filling up the chairs, and Harry’s dad sits down in the spot next to Louis. He feels Harry’s arm tighten around his shoulders, pressing him closer to his side.

“So, do you think you’ll get what you wished for then, Harry?” Grandpa Styles says as he settles down in another armchair. He’s followed by the Selleys who gather around the low table, taking place quietly.

“I don’t know,” Harry shrugs. “I’ve only seen envelopes this far.”

They chuckle and Louis bites his cheek. “What did you wish for?” he murmurs, only Harry able
“I didn’t,” he answers.

“No?”

“I don’t know what I’d wish for,” he shrugs, but there’s a tightness in his shoulders. There’s a part of Louis that wants to be pissed, say something snarky about how yeah, Harry already has everything anyone could ever want – a car, a big house, a college tuition he’s able to afford – so, yeah, what would he wish for? But it doesn’t feel right. It doesn’t feel like Harry meant that at all.

“Hold on!” Des suddenly interrupts. “I finally know where I recognize you from, Louis! You work at the frozen yoghurt shop!”

Oh.

Oh, fuck.

Louis can feel Harry’s body still, and he can tell that if Harry could without revealing that they’re not actually dating then he’d question Louis right here and right now. Louis’ glad that he doesn’t ask though, because he can feel the embarrassment warm his blood instantly, and his cheeks turn pink. It’s not the embarrassment that simply makes you blush, though, it’s the one where you feel so terribly humiliated it churns in your stomach.

“Yes,” he chokes out.

“Why didn’t you say so? Anne and I have been there loads of times!”

“I –” Louis whispers, then clears his throat and tries again. “I didn’t think you’d remember me.”

He didn’t want them to remember him. He didn’t want them to know, didn’t want anyone to know. Especially not Harry. Harry’s seen how different Louis’ house is to his own and he doesn’t want him to have another reason to believe how much less Louis has. Is.

“But that’s great, Louis. Gathering experience is important for the future. What are you planning to study and work with?”

Jesus Christ. Louis doesn’t even know. Football, football, football. Fuck, he doesn’t know what the fuck there is for him except football. God, this is too much at a time.

“What is this? Some kind of interrogation?” Harry interjects, surely able to feel Louis’ labored breath against him.

“Sorry,” Des says, raising a brow at his son over Louis’ head. “Is it wrong to ask that? I was interested!” Harry’s answering look must be telling him it’s not and Louis feels somewhat grateful. He just wants to move on with the conversation. He needs this night to be over already. “Well, at least you seem to have a lot going for you. Do you have a girlfriend, too?”

Oh my god.

Everyone stills, silence cutting through the room as if someone turned off a boom box.

“Dad,” Harry hisses, giving him a shocked glare. Louis hates him so much. He’s faking it so well and all Louis can do is pray he doesn’t look like he wants to die. Which he does.

Harry’s father looks terribly confused, looking around the room, lost. “What? Did I say something
wrong again?”

“Oh my god! Dad!” Harry exclaims loudly, and Louis is so done with him. Great. He got his perfect moment to be dramatic. “Are you kidding?”

Harry’s dad looks so confused, so oblivious to everything. Louis almost feels bad for him. He looks positively lost, looking around helplessly. “What did I do now?”

“Des, darling,” Jackie tries. “Harry and Louis are not just friends.”

“What do you mean?”

“Dad, are you that slow?” Harry asks. He’s sitting on the edge of the sofa, and now he actually looks so genuinely pissed off.

“Hey! Don’t talk to me that way, son,” he reprimands. “I’m sorry, but…”

Louis is still leaning back against the couch, hoping to disappear as Des and Harry lean forward, the rest of the guests awkwardly sitting around the table. It’s clear now that everybody has understood apart from Harry’s dad.

“Dad,” Harry says, eyes hard. “Do you genuinely not get it?”

“No, clearly not!”

“I’m dating Louis!”

The tension is so thick it’s tangible. Louis wishes he were on Mars right now. At least the conversation about his job is forgotten.

“Dating?” Des asks blankly. The entire room seems to sigh in exasperation. It’s almost as if they were in a classroom, somebody having just said the dumbest thing the whole class had ever heard.

“As in kissing, Dad,” Harry says harshly. “Having sex.”

Just then Anne comes into the room, carrying a huge birthday cake. It’s a wonder she doesn’t drop it, honestly, because her face contorts into something unexplainable, stopping dead in her tracks just by the table.

“Oh god,” she says. Her eyes flicker to Louis instantly.

“Oh my god,” Louis whispers, covering his face in his hands. His face is burning and Harry is a fucking arsehole. This is the most embarrassing night ever, and this isn’t even his family.

Harry just bloody, fucking came out. Just like that.

“What.” Des says, incredulous, staring at his son.

“Oh dear,” Anne says, shakily putting the cake down. “Harry and Louis are together, Des. Let it go. Who wants to sing for Harry? Come on, let’s –”

“You knew?!” Harry’s father gasps, eyes flicking to Anne in surprise. “You didn’t tell me? You don’t tell me anything!”

“Dad, please. I didn’t tell anyone!” Harry says, getting up from his seat.

Louis is trying to keep his calm. He’s leaning his elbows on his thighs, looking out on the scene
playing out in front of him.

“So, so – you’re gay?”

“For god’s sake!” Harry exclaims and then he’s grabbing Louis’ head between his hands and plants a hot kiss on his lips, startling him. He lets him go quickly and stares pointedly at his father. “Yes!”

Des blinks rapidly, eyes locked in place. “Jesus,” he says then, shaking his head, falling back against the couch in exhaustion.

“Cake?” Anne tries weakly.

**

Louis is pissed.

Harry is an arsehole. A complete twat.

Sure, Louis knew Harry wanted him to pretend to be his boyfriend tonight, but he did not know that Harry was going to throw a fit, out himself in the process, and now several people know Louis is not straight. For fuck sake, Louis doesn’t know what he is and Harry should have fucking checked with him first if it was okay to spill everything to his entire frickin’ family!

What if Anne sees Louis’ mum at shop and decides to have a chat? They’re not even dating. Louis hasn’t even told anybody he’s doing a guy, and no, no, no. Everything is just a big, fat motherfucking no.

Harry is driving him home since Louis didn’t come with a car. Louis isn’t speaking to him, is glaring out the window, but Harry’s seems strangely elated, humming along to the radio. Fucking dementor.

When they stop outside Louis’ house, he turns to Louis. “Are you still mad, baby?”

Louis snaps his head towards him, scowling. “Don’t call me that.”

Harry rolls his eyes. “Louis.”

“I hate you.”

“Louis, I didn’t plan for the whole thing to happen.”

“I know you wanted the chaos, Harry. Just like I know you kissed me that time outside your house because you wanted your mum to see. You have an agenda with everything.”

“I don’t.”

“So what I said wasn’t true?” Louis arches a brow, staring at him, eyes hard.

“Fine,” Harry sighs. “I knew she was looking.”

“I don’t get you!” Louis exclaims, exhausted. “This is a secret, Harry! We don’t like each other! We have sex, and nobody is supposed to know that! And then you kiss me in front of your mum and make a scene in front of your family on your birthday, and it’s like you’re begging for attention! I just want to take you and shake you, and explain to your thick head that that is not how you keep a fucking secret!”
Louis breathes heavily, staring at Harry, jaw set. Harry looks back at him, one hand on the steering wheel, back slightly slumped. He’s still in the blue button up, curls brushing his neck as he looks back on Louis.

“Sorry,” he says tightly, meeting his eyes. The look they share is hard, long and unflattering. It’s Harry who finally gives in though, eyes flicking to watch the street through the windshield. “You forgot my birthday,” he says.

Louis snorts. Unbelievable. “Sorry, sweetheart. It’s not as if we’re dating or anything,” he answers, words reeking with sarcasm.

“You usually remember anyway.”

“What are you mad because of that now?” Louis sighs, shaking his head as he crosses his arms, staring out the window at his house. He should just jump out of the car and leave. He doesn’t get why he’s still sitting here. “I gave you a present at least, you didn’t get me one.”

“We were on break.”

“It was still my birthday, wasn’t it?” Jesus, who even cares?

“I haven’t gotten my gift, though.”

“Well, you’re not getting it either. I’m still mad at you for this stupid birthday party.”

They’re silent again, the heating from the seats in the car having slowly faded. Stupid, shiny car. Stupid Harry. Stupid everything.

Harry’s thumb picks slightly at the leather of the steering wheel, eyes locked on the movement. “If I apologize, will you let me sleep at your house?” he asks, almost a whisper.

Louis totally wants to punish him. He wants to scoff and snort, and say bitch please, no fucking way in hell, go back to your house and enjoy the misery. But he can’t.

“Don’t touch me and don’t say a word,” he says instead, grabbing his bag with the stupid glitter and party hat and shit off the floor of the car, and jumps out. Harry cuts the engine quickly and Louis hears as he locks the car, quickly following Louis up the small stone path to the house.

It’s not until Louis reaches the door that he realizes that his mum and Lottie’s probably home, and that she knows too.

He stops, sighing heavily. This morning feels like ages ago and this day has been way too much. He doesn’t need this. Doesn’t want this. It’s so much. Too much.

“What?” Harry asks, behind him.

“I haven’t talked to Lottie all day. Not since this morning.”

“You don’t think she’s told anyone, do you?”

“No?”

Harry’s hand settles over his chest despite what Louis said in the car. He’s standing behind him, pushing him back to his chest soothingly. “It’s okay. She wouldn’t say anything. I’m sure.”

“You have way too much faith in people.”
“And you trust no one.”

“I am being realistic.”

“Cynical.”

“Same shit.”

Louis unlocks the door, still feeling Harry hovering behind him. He kicks off his shoes, Harry doing the same before Louis locks the door from inside and they trudge upstairs quietly. The house is quiet and the lamps are off. The door to Lottie’s room is closed, so Louis is guessing she’s either watching a movie or having gone to bed. He’s glad he doesn’t have to speak to her yet.

He drops the bag on the floor and strips, not bothering to care that Harry’s still hovering behind him. He unbuttons his shirt – Harry’s shirt – and drops his trousers to the floor, kicking them off. As soon as he does though, he feels Harry’s soft fingers run down his sides.

“Harry…”

“Can we?” he whispers, and his voice is asking, wanting.

God. His skin is warm against Louis’ back, making him shiver. His nose brushes the back of Louis’ neck, hands still lingering on his waist. His touch is light and soft, waiting for permission.

“You have some nerve,” Louis breathes, but Harry’s right hand flattens against his stomach, pulling him closer.

“Want you to fuck me, Lou,” he whispers. “Haven’t fucked me proper in weeks.”

Not quite the truth, but close enough, because Louis is growing hard already.

“Want you to,” Harry breathes, “Want you to hold me down, tear me apart and fuck me so hard I can’t walk for days.”

Fucking, dammit. Louis wants to scream.

He turns around vehemently, grabbing Harry by the arms and pushes him down on the bed beneath himself. Harry’s already pliantly submissive, mouth ajar and eyes asking, asking, and asking for Louis take him apart.

“Want me to wreck you then?” Louis wonders, hands locking around Harry’s wrist, if a bit too hard for him.

Harry’s eyes are already half lidded. Lately it’s as if as soon as they’re in the moment of having sex, they lose their normal personas, letting go completely of what they really are to each other.

Harry nods, mouth open, and Louis digs his nails into his wrists, not too sharply, and drags his teeth against the skin under Harry’s jaw. Moaning, Harry arches up, trying to get some friction between them. Louis doesn’t let him, only avoids his searching hips and leans away.

“Can we get the glitter?” Harry suddenly asks, words hurried as they come with an exhale of air. His eyes have brightened impossibly. “Please?”

“Are you for real?”

“Yeah,” he nods, eagerly at that.
“O-okay,” Louis stutters, getting off the bed. “Get your clothes off,” he adds before he unzips his bag, trying to find the spray can of golden glitter. He finds it after a few moments and stands, finding Harry in nothing but his boxers, spread out on the bed. “How do you want it?” he asks, unable to tear his eyes off the big bulge in Harry’s pants.

“Oh. Your chest,” Harry breathes.

“Fuck, alright.”

He hesitantly presses down on the button and instantly golden shimmer attaches to his skin, making him glitter in the dark room. It’s a little cold like before, but he can’t bring himself to care about that or how strange this is, because Harry’s looking like he might come from the sight.

“Get over here,” he groans. “Now.”

Louis disposes of the can, throwing it somewhere where it won’t thud against the floor and crawls up on the bed between Harry’s open legs. He feels him lock them around his waist immediately, fingers running to Louis’ jaw.

“I’m granting you three wishes, birthday boy,” Louis murmurs – yes, he’s giving it up – and teasingly squeezes Harry bum. Fuck, he loves Harry’s bum.

“Are you a genie?” Harry giggles.

“Well, if you rub me right…” Louis laughs, and Harry almost guffaws. He’s breathy from the anticipation though, and Louis feels it when he reaches his hand between their bodies, feather-lightly feeling over Louis’ semi.

“What can I choose then?” Harry asks, meeting Louis halfway in a painfully slow roll of his hips.

“Anything you want.” Louis feels exhilarated just by the thought of what Harry could pick.

“I want…” Harry hums, running a hand down Louis’ tummy. “Fuck, I love the glitter,” he sidetracks and Louis takes his hand, rubbing it against his skin and the excess glitter rains down onto Harry’s naked torso. Harry grins and his hand sifts through Louis’ hair, grasping it at the nape of his neck, no doubt leaving traces of gold there.

“I want your neck,” Harry says slowly and he sucks a single wet, slow kiss into the skin under his jaw. “And then I want your fingers… deep. And then,” he stops to exhale, air hotly hitting Louis’ skin, “you choose.”

“I choose?”


“Fuck. Okay. What first?”

“Fingers. God, I want your fingers.”

Shit. Louis can give him fingers. He can give him whatever he wants.

What.

Fuck, brain. Not now.

“Turn over, Harry,” he orders, and the other boy groans, doing as told. Louis shuffles up between
his legs, lying down on his stomach. He runs his hands down his sides. Suddenly he’s beat with the images of those videos.

Jesus, fuck, *the videos.*

Louis groans out loud, feeling Harry squirm in his hands. He wants to do that. He wants to know if Harry would like it, if he’d moan like those boys in the videos, if he’d come from being opened up by Louis’ mouth.

“You’re clean, right?”

“Yeah, yeah,” Harry moans. The sound is muffled, and Louis glances over to see that the boy has pulled in a pillow to press the side of his face into.

Louis almost shivers, his hands gripping either of Harry’s hips, thumbs pressing into his bum cheeks. He could do it.

He slides his left hand down and pushes Harry’s legs farther apart. Harry moans and it gives Louis the courage he needs. He spreads Harry’s cheeks apart, putting his tight little hole in complete view for him.

“Can I go first?”

“Huh?”

“My wish first.” He can’t tear his eyes from Harry’s hole. His cock is so hard and he just wants to put his mouth on him. Fuck, he can’t wait for Harry’s answer.

Louis presses a hot kiss to Harry’s left cheek and Harry jerks beneath him. Louis holds him still, thumbs spreading him apart. He remembers how they did it in the videos. He tries to do the same, trailing kisses closer and closer to the crack of his bum, tongue playfully peeking out now and then. Harry lungs are working, labored, and his hands are clutching the pillow. Harry’s hair is spilling all over the pillow, curly locks hiding most of his face.

“This okay?” he whispers into the very low of Harry’s spine, feeling his warm, warm, milky skin like silk under him.

The reaction he gets almost shocks Louis, making his heart beat so fast it feels like it’s on the way out. Harry almost *sobs* his answer out. “Yes,” he whines. “Yes, yes, god.”

Louis breathes hotly, barely keeping control of himself as he plants a wet, lingering kiss at the top of his crack. He continues down, leaving a path of hot and wet saliva. Harry squirms beneath him, but it’s so very obvious he wants to keep still, wants it so bad.

Louis wants it bad too.

Tentatively, he presses his lips softly to Harry’s hole. It’s barely a kiss, just light touch, but Louis can literally feel how Harry’s entire body tenses up, back arching deliciously and Louis wants to take him and do everything to him. He’s so bloody pliant, and he *always* wants it.

Louis gives another kiss to his hole, keeping his cheeks apart. Harry’s legs move slightly together on the bed, so Louis grabs a steady hold of his thigh, keeping his legs surely apart. He swallows, and licks a wet stripe over his entire hole, and he can feel how Harry’s muscles tighten forcibly.

“Louis,” he whines, and the emphasize on the s doesn’t even seem be a conscious thing.
“You okay?” he asks breathily, but all he gets is a low groan and Harry pushing back against him. He wonders how hard Harry is, if he’s straining against the bed, all trapped and hot. The only reason Louis thinks he himself hasn’t come yet is because he’s been so engrossed in the work. He wants to dive into it again, make Harry come and from this only.

He leans down again and flicks his tongue over his hole, wetly dribbling a bit of saliva like he’s seen some do. He lets his lower lip slide over it and teasingly flicks his tongue against his skin outside his puckered opening. Harry almost mewls, and he’s warm and there’s a slight sheen of sweat over his shoulder blades. Louis licks against his skin, keeping his hand firm on Harry’s thigh and forcing himself to keep from touching his own cock.

Harry doesn’t seem to be able to though, because his right hand leaves the pillow he’s been clutching and reaches down to squeeze around his cock.

“No,” Louis breathes, sending a gush of air against Harry and making him squirm. “Don’t touch, Harry.”

“I can’t,” he whines.

“You can,” Louis pleads, having no idea if it’s actually true or not. But he doesn’t want it to be over and he wants give Harry all of it before it is.

Harry removes his hand, but grips Louis’ wrist before he can pull it away completely. “Please,” he exhales, linking their fingers. His hand is sweaty and warm, and Louis feels a bit of stickiness on one of his fingers, most likely pre come from his cock. It’s fucking hot, though.

“Keep you legs apart then,” he murmurs, and as answer Harry spreads his thighs farther apart, hand almost crushing Louis’ in his.

Yoga. Gotta be the fucking yoga.

“Jesus,” Louis moans. Harry’s hole is wet and puckered, and Louis presses his nose into the patch of skin above it, letting his tongue rest against the little hole, just above the surface. Harry’s grip on his hand is hard, but he can barely feel it, head already swimming at the thought of what he’s about to do.

Slowly, he presses his tongue into him. His walls are hot and he’s tight, the feeling strange and foreign, but not bad.

Harry clenches almost instantly, making Louis pull away, but only slightly. He strokes his left bum cheek with his free hand, trying to make him relax. The sounds escaping the very low of Harry’s throat make Louis’ belly tighten, and he wants to open Harry up completely and fuck him onto cloud nine.

He dips his tongue in once again and this time Harry only shifts beneath him, strangled moans muffled by the pillow. He arches again, unable to keep from, apparently. This time Louis doesn’t stop what he’s doing, only squeezes Harry’s hand back and presses into him further. His left hand grips his hip, the other boy pushing back as he flicks his tongue inside him as good as he can.


“You ready?”

“Yes, fuckhead. Just, fuck. I want –”
Harry’s so wet already, but Louis gathers some more saliva on his tongue, and kisses the spit into him. He feels him shudder, and Louis pulls down their linked hands to be able to reach better. Harry won’t let go of his hand and Louis fingers might be on the way to fall asleep, but it doesn’t matter. His other hand comes up to clutch around his cheek as Louis lets the tip of his tongue linger just down the edge of Harry’s hole.

Slowly, he lets his thumb press in next to his tongue, and the other boy squirms away. Louis wonders if it’s too much, but Harry only shakes his head and squeezes his hand. Louis sucks his pinky into his mouth instead, wetting it before he sinks it alone into Harry. He’s warm inside, not too tight at all for Louis’ finger, and he works it in and out slowly, kissing around Harry’s rim softly.

He fetches the lube with his free hand when Harry starts getting too loud, and with one hand he carefully tries to dribble some into his hand. He lets his fingers sink into Harry one by one, adding only when Harry begs him to.

“Cock,” Harry says, finally. “I want your cock, Louis. I need it. Now,” he begs. The sound of his voice when it gets so desperate usually has Louis fumbling to do as told, and now is no different.

He reaches for the condom – a bit of a stretch since Harry’s still clutching is other hand – but he manages to get it and rips it open with his teeth. He wishes Harry would have seen it because that was definitely porno adequate.

His left hand finds the bottle again and he quickly lubes himself up. He lines up after dripping a few drops over Harry’s hole, dipping his two fingers in just once to make sure it wets him up enough.

“Louis,” Harry hisses, fingers curling around Louis’ hand.

“Sorry,” he apologizes. He rubs his length over Harry’s crack just once before the tip presses against his rim. He pushes in slowly, gasping at the hotness. Fuck, Harry’s so fucking good. So, so good.

He bottoms out, balls touching Harry’s arse, the other boys biting his lower lip harshly.

“Move,” he orders.

Louis does as told.

He works in and out, picking up a fast pace, skin slapping in the dark room. The glitter seems to fall off Louis’ chest as he gets sweaty, the golden shimmer snowing down onto the small of Harry’s back. He kind of wishes Harry could see it, because he’s sure he’d love it.

It only takes a few thrusts more before Harry cries out, coming, and collapses on the bed. His hair is sweaty and his skin is warm, legs practically shaking. His grip on Louis’ hand is deadly, and Louis is still inside him. God, it’s heavenly, and it’s hell.

“Go on,” Harry says, still coming down, words slow. “Finish.”

Louis almost faints. “You serious?” he asks, voice hoarse.

“Yeah.” He nods weakly against the pillows, but the signal from his hand is clear.

Louis might die a happy man.

He thrusts into Harry again, heat pooling in his gut almost instantly. Harry winces, but he’s pliant,
letting Louis choose his pace. It doesn’t take much for Louis to spill into the condom, though, and he falls down, flush against Harry’s back, nose in his sweaty neck.

“Oh my god,” Harry whispers.

“Mmf,” Louis agrees. He heavily moves off of Harry after a moment of silence, pulling out with a wince as Harry simultaneously releases a hiss.

“I’m going to sleep for fifteen hours,” Harry says zombie-ly, but rolls over onto his back at least. His tummy is covered in come, looking like it’s been rubbed against the sheets. Louis wants touch it. Kind of. That’s how he realizes he’s still holding Harry’s hand.

He lets him go, prying his fingers out of his stony hold. His fingers ache as he stretches them, frowning a little at them.

“Sorry,” Harry mumbles, eyes half-lidded.

Louis grunts, and he ties up the condom, tossing it towards the bin and falls back on the bed again. Harry’s pulling the duvet up over himself, not minding the come that’s going stale on his stomach.

“Should we save the last thing? The wishes?” Louis asks sleepily, crawling in underneath the cover Harry’s holding up.

“Save it,” Harry mumbles, dropping the edge once Louis’ curled in beside him.

“Saving it,” Louis promises and closes his eyes, falling asleep feeling Harry curls brush against cheek.
Hello! Hope you're all doing good with everything that's going on. Just wanted to make sure everybody knows that this fic is in no way affected by the real events of the boys and that everything written in this fic was planned long ago and written a little less than long ago ;) Stay hydrated, because this is a long one :)

Thank you Vicky for being an angel with endless patience with my darn commas ;D

Find me here:
Twitter: isthatyoularry
Tumblr: isthatyoularry

There’s a voicemail on Louis’ phone when he wakes up. Harry is still fast asleep by his side as Louis brings the phone to his ear to listen to it, eyes still droopy and body heavy with sleep.

“Yooo!” the voice says. It turns out it’s from Niall. It’s from last night. “You, Louis, you ditched me today. Right from school, ye fucking ditched without a word.” He sounds slightly far away, not drunk, but probably on something. “You didn’t tell anyone, but you could’ve told me. And then you ditch me again with a fucking text? You’re a prick! I love you, but you’re a dick. And a prick. You’re so bloody fucking distant lately, and I’m getting high by me self in me car, and you’re a dick, being a dick somewhere else! Not even yer sister knows where ye at!”

Louis swallows when there’s a bit of a pause. Louis can hear faint music in the background, maybe a voice or two as well. But Niall did say he was alone, so.

“This is our senior year, mate.” His voice is softer, but still irate. “And yer being all weird and keeping away from everybody. I’m not cool with that, lad. I’m mad at you! I let shit fly with you because I know you hate talking ‘bout shit, but don’t think you don’t owe me explanations! I’ll always be here for ye, mate, but don’t make me feel like you don’t appreciate it, mate. Uncool.”

The line goes dead after that. The first thought Louis has is that Niall’s Irish accent seems to get enhanced whenever he drinks or gets high. The second is that Louis is a terrible, terrible friend. He’s a dick and a prick, like Niall said.

Something pokes him in the cheek.

“Angry. Hedgehog,” Harry mumbles. Louis looks to his right, finding Harry squinting up at him, eyes half lidded and there’s a pillow mark just to the left of his mouth.

Louis scoffs and rolls over, not in the mood to handle Harry right now. He picks up his phone, opening a new text message, trying to figure out what to write Niall. He shouldn’t even be texting, should he? Calling wouldn’t even suffice. He should go over and hug the shit out of him, apologize and make sure to change his stupid behavior. Why does that seem so bloody hard, though?!

He feels the bed dip, Harry sidling up behind him, hand sneaking around his waist to flatten out over his tummy.
“Seriously, Harry.” Louis’ tone is sharp, cutting.

“Wow.” Louis can practically hear how he arches a brow. “Pissed off much?”

Louis huffs, pushing Harry’s hand off his stomach and scoots away. “Fuck off.”

His tone is ice cold; anyone else would have recoiled, but Harry never seems to take any shit from Louis. He moves closer to him again, fitting perfectly into the curve of his legs. His hand once again makes it onto his stomach.

“Are you angry?”

Louis grunts.

“Angry, or sad-angry?”

Grunt.

“What’s wrong?” Harry murmurs, not removing his big hand.

Louis kind of wants to kick him a bit, but he also likes the way Harry’s hand feels against his skin. It shouldn’t be this soothing.

“Niall’s angry with me,” he mutters, fiddling with a loose string in the pillowcase. His lower lip is popping just a bit while he focuses his glare on the stupid fucking string in the stupid pillow.

“Why?” Harry inquires.

Louis shouldn’t be telling Harry anything, but the words are already on the way out of his mouth.

“I’m neglecting him,” he whispers. His voice feels too thick, throat clogging up. And no. He never cries. Stop it. He swallows, ridding his voice of the rasp. “I haven’t told him about… you know. So he thinks I’m being weird, keeping stuff from him.”

“You kind of are.”

“Thank you, Harry. Seriously.”

“I mean, why don’t you just tell him…?”

“Oh, please!” He raises his hand dramatically, still feeling Harry’s soft breath against the back of his neck. His arm is still tightly wound around his waist, following his every breath. “I’m sorry, Harold, but not all of us are fucking blessed enough to be able to blabber to everyone who will listen about our sex lives with boys!”

“…Niall’s homophobic?”

“No!” Louis hisses. “Jesus. But that doesn’t mean I want to tell people! Not yet. Not… ever? I don’t know! Maybe I have a little self-preservation? Or want to think things through before I fucking yell at my parents that I’m having sex with a boy.”

“So, you’re still mad about that?” Harry asks, voice annoyingly calm.

“Yes!” Louis answers, glancing over his shoulder. “Don’t think what,” he gestures vividly with his hand, “happened last night changes that.”
Fuck, he ate Harry out last night. Rimjob.

What an adult thing to do. Right now he just feels like a child.

“Louis,” Harry says warily behind him. “You don’t trust people enough. Like, isn’t Niall your best friend?”

“Yes.”

“Why don’t you trust him?”

“I, I do,” he stutters. His words are followed by silence – all kinds of wrong silence. A silence that contradicts what Louis just said. “I trust him with my life,” he adds, because he does. Somehow this isn’t about that, though, and fucking Harry seems to understand that, too.

Why does Harry have to do this? This is the closest conversation Louis has had with anyone about this stuff, and he really, really doesn’t want to talk about it ever again. Stupid Harry.

“I could think of some words to tell you, but I think you’d hit me,” he murmurs.

“Save them.”

“Okay,” Harry whispers.

**

Louis spends most of the remaining day with Harry, which is something he really shouldn’t because what he should be doing is apologizing to Niall and making sure they’re okay.

Instead he takes a long shower with Harry, grants his last wish, and they fall back in bed to sleep an extra hour. Harry doesn’t say anything about Niall again, which Louis is immensely grateful for. Jay is working during the day, but Louis can hear Lottie downstairs when he wakes up from their nap. He doesn’t want to talk to her right now though, would rather stay sleeping and ignore all his problems forever.

Harry is in some kind of place between sleep and consciousness, eyelids fluttering softly now and then, naked shoulders heaving against the mattress and cheek pushed against the pillow as Louis watches on, frowning, disgruntled.

He doesn’t know what he’s supposed to do. There’s a little voice in the back of his head yelling ‘no, no, no’ every time he even thinks about driving over Niall’s. There’s another voice begging him to just ‘stay, stay, stay’ in bed all day with Harry. He doesn’t have to work today, but he knows eventually he’ll have to get up and get his shit together. Talk to Lottie, talk to Niall, kick Harry out of bed because this habit of him making a home out of Louis’ bed is getting out of hand… Communication sucks.

There’s a knock on the door.

“No,” Louis groans to himself, squeezing his eyes shut for a second. He can feel Harry shifting next to him. Louis reaches a hand out and places it on his bicep. Don’t move, don’t say anything, just be still. Stay. Or something.

There’s another knock.

“What?” Louis calls, keeping his hand on Harry.
“Louis, we’ve got to go shopping. There’s no food!” Lottie’s voice sounds normal. Louis doesn’t feel normal. Everything is twisted and wrong.

“Are you sure?” he asks, voice muffled against the pillow.

“Yes, idiot. Get out of bed and out here. Leaving in ten, come on.”

He can hear her faint footsteps retreating from the door, and he sinks back into the sheets.

Twisted. Wrong. Stupid.


“Why do you think so much?”

Louis opens his eyes, finding Harry staring at him with his green, crystal clear, big eyes. Some fucking fairytale, isn’t he? Louis almost scoffs out loud.

“My life isn’t exactly easy, is it?”

“You’re making it much more complicated than it has to be.”

“Just… just go back to sleep, Harry. “

Surprisingly, Harry does as told.

**

“So, you’re gay then,” Lottie states, nodding as she pushes the shopping cart down the aisle.

Louis, who’s walking (sulking) next to her, hands stuffed into the pockets of his black track bottoms, scoffs. “I’m not gay,” he says.

Lottie side-eyes him.


“So, you’re like? Gay…curious?”

He sighs. “Don’t label me, Lots. You’re not a fucking… label maker. I’m me, okay?” His voice is rather soft; he knows Lottie means nothing by it, but he still doesn’t want people putting tags on him.

“I know,” Lottie retorts, sighing as well. “I don’t give a fuck, Lou. If you’re, like, queer, then it’s whatever. Cool.”

Queer, he thinks. He’s never believed in labels or categories, really. He’s always thought sexuality is very unrestricted thing. Like, it’s just nature, he supposes. Just people doing stuff, something fun, something they enjoy. Homo sapiens doing the do. Homo sapiens homo-ing. Or something.

Queer, though. Queer sounds rather nice.

“You do dress rather gay, though,” Lottie laughs. “And don’t think there’s not a reason Niall calls you princess sometimes, alright?”

“Wha– !” Louis makes an indignant huff, stopping in the middle of the aisle, looking down at
himself. He’s in track bottoms, a simple white t-shirt and a waist cut jean jacket. “What’s gay about this?! And what do you mean? I’m not a princess.”

She shrugs. “Wrist, hair flick thing… I don’t know.”

Louis glares, affronted. “You’re all stereotypes, Lots. Get away from me, please.”

“That! The annoyed flick!”

“I hate you. That’s homophobic.”

“What? It’s just you, Lou. Right?” The glint in her eye is as annoying as it is similar to something Louis usually has in his own. “It’s in your blood.”

He rolls his eyes, heading down the aisle again. “So, you’re homophobic and racist. Good to know.”

“Oh, come off it,” Lottie scoffs, rolling her eyes as she sidles up next him, even though she knows Louis’ just being bitchy. “My boyfriend’s black, I don’t think so.”

“Your what?” Louis stops again, and he can tell by his younger sister’s face that she totally had not meant to share this with him. “Boyfriend? You sneaky little minx.”

She gives him a slow once over, ignoring his narrowed eyes before she puts on an even face. “This was about you, brother. So, ignoring what I said, and speaking of, how’s Harry?”

“What do you mean ’speaking of’? Harry’s not my boyfriend.” They start strolling again, heading into another aisle.

“Oh, please. He practically lives in your bed. I’ve heard you two go at it at least twice. You’re so lucky Mum hasn’t caught you yet.” Lottie reaches up to bring down two jars of peanut butter into the cart.

“First,” Louis says, picking up the two jars from the cart again. “Gross. Second, just because he sleeps over it doesn’t mean we do anything but fuck and sleep.” He puts them back on the shelf, steering Lottie away from the sweets.

“You do more than that. You guys were on a date yesterday, weren’t you?”

“We were not! Where the fuck do you get your information from?” Jesus Christ.

“You were out with him all night!”

“Doesn’t mean anything,” Louis argues indignantly. “Just because we do stuff it doesn’t mean we’re a couple.”

“Doesn’t matter if you’re not labeling yourselves.” Lottie smirks, taking the butter Louis hands her to put in the cart. “You’re still doing stuff.”

She’s wrong. They don’t do shit together.

Louis stares at her, impassive expression on his face. “If you don’t shut your mouth, sis, I will–“

“No!"

No. Oh no.
“What?” Lottie says, looking behind her, just as Louis sees Anne, Harry’s mum, rolling her shopping cart towards them.

“Lots?” he says, smiling, voice strained. “Fetch some apples, will you?” He gives her a push in the right direction, sending her half tumbling away.

Anne stops her cart a moment later, smiling at him. “Hello, darling.”

“Hey,” he says, smiling back tightly. Why, why, why.

“I’m glad to run into you, actually,” Anne says tentatively, looking a little uncertain. “I wanted to apologize for last night.”

“Oh.” Louis wraps his arms over his stomach, swallowing as he meets her eyes.

“It was an utter mess,” she sighs, shaking her head. “I am so sorry for letting you get in the middle like that. I’m sure it was very uncomfortable for you,” (a bit, thank you, Louis thinks), “and I’m sure that wasn’t how you wanted your first meeting with your boyfriend’s parents playing out.”

“Err, yeah,” he says, scratching his arm. “Yeah, I guess.”

“Also, darling,” she says, looking at him in a different way, frowning slightly. “About your job at the frozen yoghurt shop…”

“Yeah?” he whispers, scared that she’ll mention what he thinks she will.

“Why didn’t you say anything?” she asks.

“Err.” He tries to gather words on his tongue, say something that makes sense. “Harry and I, we aren’t exactly official yet, kind of.”

“Well,” Anne says slowly, pursing her lips for a moment. “I know you’ve seen me and my husband not on our best behavior—“

“Anne,” Louis interrupts instantly. “I don’t know anything, honestly.”

She shakes her head. “It’s fine if you do, Louis. For the record, I love Harry with all my heart. He’s my first priority, and I don’t want you to think he’s not. I’m assuming it’s you he’s been staying with as of late, but I can’t have you thinking that he’s not cared for at home—“

“No,” she stops herself. “I don’t know anything, honestly.”

She shakes her head. “It’s fine if you do, Louis. For the record, I love Harry with all my heart. He’s my first priority, and I don’t want you to think he’s not. I’m assuming it’s you he’s been staying with as of late, but I can’t have you thinking that he’s not cared for at home—“

“Anne, I– I can’t…”

“No,” she stops herself. “I know. I’m sorry, I just… He’s fragile, Louis. And I miss him.” Harry’s mum sighs again, and for a moment she looks rather resigned. “I don’t want to put you in a weird position, Louis, I don’t, but I feel like I’m losing him sometimes, and… Take care of him, you know? Don’t let him get into his own head, and he likes pancakes with bacon in the morning, since he sleeps at yours a lot, and he…” She stops, closing her mouth. “I’m sorry, Louis,” she says, voice evening out. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s…” It’s not… He’s not sure.

“I’ll see you around, darling.” She smiles sadly, before pushing her cart away.

A few things (it feels like a hundred at once) hit Louis.

First of all, Harry’s mother just stood there in front of him, making sure Louis knew Harry wasn’t neglected at home. She should be telling Harry that, making sure he knows. Yes, she looked
pretty down and torn up, but Louis is sure that there is something that they’re doing wrong in that
home because Harry looks like he’d rather bathe in boiling water than go home when Louis tells
him to. He doesn’t know how Anne and Des can’t realize that Harry is miserable at home. For a
moment Louis can’t see why he is, either. Anne truly just looked like she was devastated about the
situation, too. She’s been nothing but lovely to Louis.

But then, he can. All kids have different relationships with their parents, for reasons that no one
else might understand. Louis would know.

Anne and Des didn’t know Harry was footie captain. They haven’t seen a match the entire season,
probably not ever because then they’d know that Harry and Louis don’t actually go well together. 
Fuck, Anne doesn’t even know that Harry and Louis aren’t friends, that they’ve hated each other
for years. It’s painfully obvious that Harry and his parents don’t talk. They don’t share things or
communicate at all it seems. It’s awful. Really, fucking awful.

And where the hell has Harry been staying? What does he do when he’s not at Louis’? Does
Anne think Harry spends twenty-four hours a day with him? Well, he is over at Louis’ a lot and
sleeps at his place, but it’s surely not that much.

If this is fate, that Louis was supposed to get mixed up in something like this, then he and “God”
are truly finished. Obviously, God was done with him long ago.

“Was that Harry’s mum?” he hears Lottie ask behind him. He turns around, giving her a look
where she’s standing with a bag of green apples. He doesn’t answer, only takes the bag and puts it
in the shopping cart, pushing it towards the check out.

“So, you’re not a couple then?” Lottie smirks anyway. “Just chatting with the mum-in-law and
stuff??

Louis keeps his mouth shut.

Once they’re in the car again, having stuffed the groceries in the trunk, Lottie asks if they can go
practice her driving for a bit. Louis is not quite in the mood, but he doesn’t know if he’s ready to
face Harry yet, not after that completely awkward conversation with Anne. He should probably
just tell him what happened, but everything is always so bloody complicated. He doesn’t want to
deal with it right now. He just wants to lie in bed, wrapped in a thick duvet, possibly with Harry
next to him. For reasons. Whatever.

Won’t be home until later. You should probably leave by four if I haven’t gotten home yet, he texts
Harry.

Will you give me a back rub if I wait until you get back here…?

No

Pretty please lou :( my shoulder hurts

From when?

Yesterday

You’re so full of shit. Fine.

:)
On Monday, Louis jogs before school. Football is going to kick up again soon and they have their qualifying match the first week of March already. The championship is looking rather bright as it is right now. The team is sharp, Louis and Harry leading the scoring league between all northern school teams at the moment. Louis is already preparing with the rest of the team. Coach Abrahams is taking a bigger role at practice nowadays, but incredibly he trusts the two of them as captains more than Louis would have thought at the start of the season.

Partly, he suspects it’s because of their decrease in fighting. Louis can’t deny it; they’re unbelievably good together on the team lately. Sure, Louis rather dribbles than passes to the other boy, but it’s gotten “better” as Coach puts it. Harry is still doing his yoga stuff, which… erm. Louis didn’t know he could become this bendy. It’s improved his ability accelerate faster and switch directions quicker. Harry’s knee exercises have helped him an extensive amount.

Stupid Harry.

Harry who is currently sleeping in his own house. Apparently his father had requested his presence at Sunday supper, and he told Louis he’d stay the night. Louis still feels terribly awkward about his conversation with Anne, and as the time passes by he only gets angrier with Harry’s parents. And with parents at in general.

Some are absolutely amazing, but others… Look, parents are supposed to make sure their kids feel safe and are healthy in all ways, both physically and emotionally. Parents are supposed to stand by their children, give their all to them. Parents don’t fucking leave their children when everything hits rock bottom. Stupid, fucking parents. Some people don’t even deserve their children anymore. Harry deserves better, and fucking damnit, but Louis deserves better too–

Louis contains himself. His thoughts have wandered away in a direction they weren’t supposed to. This was meant to be about Harry. It was, but… He sighs, letting out a hefty breath. Enough.

He’s reaching the street he was heading for – the red brick house down the road his goal. He can see Maura Horan’s car still in the driveway as he comes closer, slowing down into a walk. The ground is still frosty, the morning quite grey so far. He can see the light in the kitchen from the window as he crosses the yard, heading for the front door.

It opens before he reaches the porch, Niall’s father walking outside. “Ah, Louis!” Bobby says with a big smile. “Haven’t seen you around much, son. How are you? Out for a morning run?”

“Yeah,” Louis nods, smiling back. He’s even missed Niall’s parents, he realizes.

“Niall’s inside, eating breakfast. Have a good day! Good luck on the qualifier!” He claps Louis on the shoulder as he walks past, heading for Niall’s mum’s car.

Tentatively Louis steps up the small porch. Bobby left the door open, so he walks inside without knocking. He feels strangely awkward. He knows Niall’s angry with him and he hasn’t felt this out of place in Niall’s home since the first time he visited. He can barely remember that day now; all he recalls is playing footie in Niall’s yard and being terrified of his older brother, Greg.

He toes off his shoes, wiping sweat off his forehead with the sleeve of his jumper. He pokes his head into the kitchen, finding his best friend chewing on a piece of toast, a glass of orange juice by his side. Maura is nowhere in sight. Louis swallows, carefully clearing his throat.

Niall looks up and Louis smiles, close-lipped and sheepishly. His eyes are apologetic already and Niall instantly rolls his eyes at the puppy face Louis knows he’s probably pulling already.

“Sit, dickface,” Niall says, kicking the chair on the other side of table in front of him.
Louis does as told. He awkwardly watches as Niall spreads butter onto another piece of toasted bread. There’s a crunching sound when he takes a bite, and Louis finally opens his mouth.

“I’ve been shit, Niall. I know.” He should tell him everything, lay it all on the table.

“No shit, honey,” Niall says, rolling his eyes. Louis doesn’t say it, but snarky doesn’t suit his otherwise so amicable friend. He knows he deserves it, though. “You know,” Niall continues, not looking at him, instead stares at the toast he’s munching on, taking occasional sips of his juice. “I don’t even know what you do when you’re not in school, or who you’re with when you cancel on me.”

“Niall…”

“You’re shit.”

“I know,” Louis says, looking up to meet his eyes. “But I’m here now and I’m trying.” He should just blurt it out. He’s fucking Harry. Frequently. And he… sort of enjoys Harry’s company. Maybe. Sometimes. How the fuck does he tell Niall that?!

He doesn’t get an answer because God hates him, and Niall doesn’t say anything either. He finishes his bread and sets down his empty glass on the table.

“Niall, I’m sorry.”

“School starts in forty minutes, Louis. You better get home and shower if you’re going to make it.”

Louis’ chest tightens. He doesn’t know what he really expected, though. Clearly apologizing isn’t enough. Niall is his best friend. It shouldn’t be this hard.

“Please…” Louis says, rubbing his fist into his eye. “Just. From now on it’s going to be different, Ni. I promise. I won’t be weird anymore.”

Niall eyes him, face still hard. Louis knows he should be telling Niall what he’s been hiding, because he knows Niall knows there’s something.

“Do you want a ride to school?” Louis eventually asks, sighing.

“Fine.”

Louis looks up, surprised. “Okay,” he says, smile growing on his lips. “I’ll pick you up.”

“Well, duh,” Niall says as he stands from the table, heading out of the kitchen. Louis can see the small twitch of his lip though, and his own smile broadens. “Now get out of here. I’ve got to shower and you stink.”

Louis laughs, relief blooming in his chest. Niall leaves the room without another word and Louis lets himself out of the house, jogging home. A little more weight is off his shoulders, once again.

When he gets home he quickly showers and changes into fresh clothes. He’s halfway into his black jeggings, a grey jumper with an American flag on hanging loosely off his shoulders, when he’s standing in the kitchen. Lottie’s at the table, sipping from a teacup with her perfectly groomed eyebrow arched.

“Hurry,” he tells her. “We’re picking Niall up on the way.”
“Oh, good,” she says, taking her feet off the chair she had them propped up on. “You made up. I’ve missed his face.”

“Me too.” He smiles, grinning up at her, unable to help himself.

She shakes her head at him. “Sappy, loser. Though, I bet Harry loves how gooey you get.”

“What does Harry have to do with anything?” he frowns in annoyance.

“He’s your boyfriend, in’he?”

“He’s not, I’ve told you a thousand times. And I don’t get gooey around him, or ever. I’m not a sap, like other individuals in this family.” That’s at you, mother.

“I’m sure you do. You’re, like, crushing on him. Deeply.”

“What are you talking about?” Is she out of her mind?

“Yeah, you are. You get that,” she waves her hand around, “look when people talk about him.” Louis certainly does not. “Have you genuinely lost it, sister?” He pulls his jeans up the last bit, eyeing her in displeasure.

She rolls her eyes. “I have a boyfriend, I know this shit. I know what heart eyes look like better than anyone. Martin is like… it’s a bit strange sometimes, yeah? But you’re possibly worse.”

Louis stares at her, nose scrunched in disgust. “This conversation is over. Now get up, we have to leave.”

The drive over to Niall’s is quick. Louis feels slightly jumpy, belly filled with a strange sensation. Okay, so, he might be a little bit nervous and excited. Niall hasn’t completely forgiven him, or at all, but maybe they can get past it. In no time they’ll be friends again. Louis has just got to stop being an idiot, put Niall before Harry at all times, generally being a normal friend. He’s not been a normal friend lately, because friends don’t ignore and lie to each other.

Niall trudges out of his house as Louis pulls into a stop by the curb, bag hanging off his shoulder. He opens the door in the front (Louis forced Lottie to sit in the back) and jumps in. He looks somewhat stiff and Louis feels overeager in comparison. Maybe Niall just needs to warm up to him a bit?

“Hey,” he greets him, trying to catch his eye.

“Hey, Nialler,” Lottie says.

“’Sup, Lots.”

“Glad you guys are friends again.”

“Hmm.”

Louis swallows.

Niall looks at him. “Are you going to drive, or what?”

“Right.” Louis coughs awkwardly, restarting the car.

The first few minutes are silent, Louis nervously drumming his fingers against the worn leather of
the steering wheel. He bites his lip, daring a glance at Niall at his side. His friend is staring out the window, wringing his hands in his lap. Lottie doesn’t say anything, but when Louis throws a glance in the rearview mirror he can see her covering her mouth as she gazes out the window, eyes crinkled. She’s such a shit.

They eventually reach her school. She jumps out of the car, but not before she grabs both of their shoulders, squeezing once. “Just kiss and make up, boys. You know you’re in deep, deep love with each other. Come on.” She grins and then shuffles out of the vehicle, slamming the door shut.

Niall shakes his head, snorting. Louis gives an awkward laugh, restarting the car and leaving the curb. They both stare out the front window. Louis almost wishes the radio were on. Maybe then the silence between them wouldn’t make everything so fucking stiff.

“Oh, fucking Christ,” Niall finally groans when they’re halfway to school. Louis’ shoulders jump in horror at the surprising outburst. Their eyes meet and then Niall is cracking up, loudly cackling. “You looked like a scared squirrel, Louis,” he gets out between his hitching breaths, and Louis breaks at that.

They laugh and it feels so fucking good. He was so scared Niall was going to tell him he didn’t want to do this anymore, that he wanted to stop being friends. It feels so bloody good to know that they can still laugh like this. They’re puzzle pieces, salt and pepper. They will come together even through the worst of fights.

They giggle until they can’t anymore, Louis grinning happily as they near school. “How’s footie then?” Niall asks as he turns into the parking lot. “Still bothering everyone with your crazy training schedules? Is Styles still a brainless vegetable?”

Louis starts laughing again and Niall joins him. He can’t actually believe he used to say those things about Harry. It’s funny now though, because it seems so ridiculous. They both giggle, Niall clutching his stomach and Louis covering his mouth with his hand. He turns the car off, letting a last cackle out. His phone chirps in that moment and Louis’ belly swoops. His hand is quick as a snake when it snatches out and grabs the phone from the cup holder.

The moment after he does it though, he realizes. He slowly looks up at Niall, fear turning his blood cold. But his friend’s eyes have already turned so dark it almost scares him. No. No, no, no. He didn’t mean–

Niall is out of the car in the blink of an eye. Louis is behind him a second later, grabbing his shoulder to stop him just in front of the car. There are people around, but Louis can’t focus on them right now.

“No,” Niall exclaims as Louis’ hand reaches him, voice extremely hard. Louis’ hand drops from his shoulder. “You know what, Louis? Fuck you.” His voice is firm and it’s like everything he says is non-negotiable. They’re frostbiting. “I don’t know what I’ve done for you to act like I can’t be trusted, but until you get your shit together, consider this,” he flicks his hand between their chests, “you and I, over. We are not friends.”

He turns around swiftly, heading toward the school in a pace Louis would have to run to catch up with. And Louis is speechless. Lost.

People are around them are staring, eyes flicking between Niall’s retreating back and Louis’ shell-shocked posture. Louis only stares, unable to move.

He didn’t even mean to do what he did. He didn’t reach for his phone to hide it from Niall. He
wasn’t trying to hide anything – he wasn’t even thinking about that in that moment. He felt bubbly
and happy that he and Niall were on the way to good terms again, and when his phone made that
sound his belly fluttered and…

He was excited. He was excited to see Harry’s text.

It’s unfair, but at first Louis almost blames him. If it weren’t for Harry then Louis and Niall would
still be best friends. Everything would be normal. But then… everything else would be different
too. Maybe the football team wouldn’t be as good, Louis would not know that he likes boys yet,
and Harry wouldn’t have anywhere to go when being at home got too much.

Goddammit. Everything always comes back to Harry. Louis goes back to close the car doors,
grabbing his school bag from the backseat. He swallows, head swimming with thoughts.

What if… What if Lottie was right? Could she be…? Could Louis actually like Harry a little bit,
as in like that?

No. The answer to that is not a chance. That’s impossible.

Yet that’s not even what’s important right now. Louis wants to kick himself. What’s important is
that Niall just seemed to drop kick Louis as a friend. Louis’ head is all fucked up, filled with
nothing but Harry. He can’t even keep his mind clear of him when his lifelong best friend just
fucking broke up with him. What the hell just happened?

What the flying fuck just happened. It was so bloody quick and it’s so fucking dumb. All of it.
Everything. Everything all the time.

**

Literal weeks pass. Louis is not sure if he’s ever felt this strange. He senses that he might be
mildly depressed. He voices as much to Lottie and Harry, who both are worthless and tell him to
just spit it out let Niall in on the secret. They don’t understand, obviously.

It’s not that Niall would hate him or drop him as a friend for being in sexual agreements with a
boy. He’s not homophobic and neither does he think poorly of non-romantic, sexually beneficial
relationships. However, Louis has been lying to him for months. He knows Niall feels like Louis
doesn’t trust him, understandably, but it’s not that Louis doesn’t.

He’s never told anyone he likes boys before. Lottie stumbled upon it and he didn’t have come out
to Harry’s family. That’s the thing. Louis doesn’t know how to do that “coming out” thing. He
doesn’t even know what he’ll come out as. Jesus, it’s only been a few months and it’s not like
he’s had romantic feelings towards a lad anyway. That option with Harry has been sufficiently
shut down. It’s sexual, and everyone knows that lots of things can be physically pleasing. He’s not
ready.

In the meanwhile, Niall doesn’t contact Louis and he avoids him like the plague in classes. Every
time Louis tries to reach out he recoils like a turtle to its shell. In classes he makes sure to sit next
to occupied seats and at lunch he eats with a couple of mates Louis doesn’t know and doesn’t
think is particularly fond of him either. They’re more of the Harry type of people. While Louis
feels hurt by Niall’s complete dismissal of him, he supposes it’s fair somehow. He can’t help but
feel disheartened that Niall chooses to be with people who openly dislike him, though.

Everyone notices as well and some talk as been going around since the incident in the parking lot.
Although, nobody seems as surprised as Louis would have thought. When he tells Liam and some
of the lads on the team during lunch that they’ve had a fall out, they don’t seem surprised.
“Hmm, well,” Stan says. “You’ve been drifting apart for a while I guess.”

The other lads only shrug, humming in agreement. Louis is almost shocked, but he keeps it in. He feels like he’s just been on a rollercoaster ride, nauseated. Has it really been this obvious? Has Louis been that horrible as a friend? The answer is self-evident. Apparently he has.

“Maybe it was both of you, you know?” Harry says, when he’s standing with his knees on the floor at the end of Louis’ bed. Louis is lying back on it, feet on the ground and Harry between them. “He didn’t make an effort the last week before your fight either…” He trails off and his argument sounds weak even to Louis’ ears. Harry plants a kiss by the jut of Louis’ hipbone, nose sliding down towards his cock. Louis knows he’s just trying to make him feel better, but not even he can do that right now. Louis knows what’s wrong. He’s just not ready to do what it takes to fix it.

Harry wraps his hand around Louis cock and pumps him slowly. Louis lets out a breath, toes curling against the floor. Harry’s other hand is stroking his left calf slowly, simultaneously soothing and using it to hold him in place.

“Can we just fast forward to when you go down on me, please?” Louis sighs, and Harry gives him a small sigh of his own in response before subsequently taking him in his mouth.

Harry has been unexpectedly nice about the situation. He doesn’t pester Louis about it, only sighs and gives him sympathetic blowjobs. Not only the Niall and Harry situations have changed, but also his family situation as well he finds out one night, late February. He catches his mother on the phone, laughing as she sits on the sofa, phone tucked between her ear and shoulder. She’s smiling, a pen in her hand scribbling things on a piece of paper.

Once she hangs up, Louis fixes her with a raised brow.

“Oh, that was Fizzy,” his mother says calmly. Louis’ eyes almost pops out of his head. “Didn’t you know?” Jay says, eyebrows up. “We’ve been speaking for a while, Lou. How could you have missed that? Lottie’s met with her a couple of times as well.”

He feels… betrayed, almost. Not by Lottie and his mum, but by Fizzy. Of course, he’s glad his family is healing, but… he’s not. He’s not healing, he doesn’t feel better and he hasn’t caved. If Fizzy isn’t ignoring their mum anymore, then Louis is the only one left. But it’s not same. Mark is not Louis’ father, he’s his stepdad. Not related.

Louis feels lost, unstable even. He doesn’t know how to act.

“Anyway, we might go away together. Just for a weekend or something, Lottie, Fiz, and I.”

How lovely. The family’s gathered once again.

Louis leaves the room, thinking he might throw up.

He calls Harry later that night, having tossed and turned in bed for hours, unable to fall asleep. His skin feels like it’s crawling, the feeling even worse than it’s been for the last weeks. Only football and Harry ever seem to take his mind off things, but not even they work sometimes.

“Why are you up five in the morning?” Harry whispers, concerned, as he silently follows Louis up the stairs into his room, closing the door behind them.

“Why are you?” Louis responds, turning around. He swiftly grabs hold of Harry’s neck, jumping into his arms, legs wrapping around his waist. Harry clumsily catches him, clutching his thighs and perching him on his hips.
“Fair,” he mutters, then flops down on the bed, taking Louis with him.

He kisses him softly, crawls up on the bed and straddles him, fingers in his hair. Louis sighs, hands squeezing around Harry’s hips, feeling him press closer to his chest. Harry plants another kiss to his throat, nose burrowing there. His breath is soft, air brushing warmly against Louis’ skin, and for a moment all he can feel is Harry’s delicate touches, skin silkily smooth against his own. Lately, everything positive seems to come from him. Louis’ breath hitches. Harry’s next kiss touches the underside of Louis’ jaw, lips caressing the softness there.

“Maybe you should just talk to him,” Harry whispers. Louis stiffens, but doesn’t push him away. “I know you don’t want to, Lou, but you’re miserable. You’re so sad-angry all the time, babe.”

Babe.

“He doesn’t answer my calls, Harry,” Louis says, ignoring the pet name despite the chill that runs down his back. “And I’m not sad-angry. I’m just annoyed, is all.”

“Lou,” Harry sighs, fingers brushing through the hair at the nape of his neck. “It’s okay to be sad sometimes.”

Louis looks up at him, eyes piercing his and Harry leans back, hands landing on Louis’ chest. “Are we going to start a shrink session now? Do you want me to braid your hair?”

Harry face falls. “I’m trying to help you, Lou,” he says, and he sounds frustrated.

“I don’t want your help. I don’t need you to console me.” Louis can’t help how snippy he gets. Feelings are not his forte. He doesn’t know why he does this, pushes everyone away.

Harry shrugs and scrambles off Louis’ lap. He’s mad, Louis can tell. “Fine. Whatever. I’ll just go home then.”

“Harry, it’s half six.”

“Well, you don’t need me here, so.”

Jesus.

“Stop being a drama queen and come to bed, for God’s sake.”

Harry’s brows are furrowed and he looks disgruntled, annoyed. “I’m not having sex with you now.”

“Yeah, yeah, whatever,” Louis sighs, pushing the duvet to the side and crawling in underneath. “Just… stay, for the love of God,” he mutters.

He rolls over, listening to the silence in the room that keeps growing for a long moment. Finally, he hears the sound of Harry taking his clothes off, the rustle from Louis’ drawers as the other boy finds himself a shirt to sleep in. When Harry eventually crawls in under the covers, he lies with his back towards Louis, who rolls back over, staring at the back of his head.

“I’m not some charity case, Harry.”

“Good,” he mutters. “Neither am I.”

Harry slowly turns around, eying him. “Just don’t cry when we sleep together, alright?”

Louis snorts, cracking up. He lets out a small laugh and rolls his eyes. “You’re the only one who’s done that, loser.”

“Don’t know what you’re talking about.” Harry turns over again, letting his back face Louis, who’s snickering lowly. “It’s not funny,” Harry sighs after a longer moment. Louis slides closer behind him, nose touching the back of his head. His hair smells slightly like strawberry.

“You’re the only one who’s done that, loser.”

Louis snorts, cracking up. He lets out a small laugh and rolls his eyes. “You’re the only one who’s done that, loser.”

“Do you want me to cuddle you?”

“I thought we decided we weren’t going to do that? We’re not charity cases.”

“As if you don’t end up wrapped around me like a bloody octopus in the morning anyway.”

“That happened once, Louis. I’ll punch you in the face if you mention it one more time.”

Louis doesn’t answer, only squeezes him closer to his chest, able to feel his warm skin even through the ugly, yellow shirt he must have found in the bottom of Louis’ drawer. Harry doesn’t say anything else, only sighs into his pillow, leaning back into Louis’ touch.

**

“I’m not saying that he doesn’t know what he’s doing,” Sophia, Liam’s girlfriend, says. The three of them are strolling back from the bleachers, having just had lunch outside in the spring sun. It’s still cold, but the light of the sun is making Louis feel a little less depressed. “I just think that a fair warning would have been nice. It’s a huge assignment and we’ve all already got exams to cram for, and you boys have got the championship ahead. Announcing the project now is a bit late in my opinion. If he’d done it earlier it could’ve been slightly more doable, since we’d have more time to plan.”

She’s talking about a new Social Studies assignment that their teacher shocked them all with this morning. Louis’ schedule is feeling rather tight these days and his motivation for anything but football is turning rather feeble.

“Maybe we can talk him into postponing the due date at least?” Liam suggests, taking her hand as their arms swing between them. Louis isn’t very hopeful Mr. Warner will listen, but if Liam is going to open the discussion he might as well support that.

“Thanks, babe, but I hardly think he’ll budge,” Sophia sighs, thoughts on the same wavelength as Louis’.

Liam leans in and kisses her cheek just as they reach the main building. The two of them are very sweet with each other, the kind of high school sweethearts you would expect from an American cliché. Louis has been spending most of his time in school with them lately and they’re great company, honestly. They’re much calmer, less of a ruckus than the boys on the team, not as inquisitive or curious as Stan and Oli. They’re good at giving Louis space when he needs it. What he really wants, though, is to be back with Niall.

Louis is walking on Sophia’s other side, somehow ending up in his own little world, which isn’t very unusual these days. He’s been a little wrapped up his head lately, or at least Lottie tells him so, but he can’t help it. In this second, however, it’s like someone takes a vase of glass and smashes it against concrete, forcing him abruptly awake.

By the end of the parking lot, the last row closest to the main entrance, Niall is standing. He isn’t alone, because he’s leaning against a shiny Range Rover, one that Louis knows all too well. Louis
feels cold. Niall’s got black Ray Bans on and he’s smoking, talking to Harry’s friend, Zayn.

Louis’ steps must have faltered, because Sophia and Liam stop by his side, looking at him worriedly.

“What’s going on?” Liam asks, but he follows Louis’ gaze and seems to understand only a moment later. “Oh.”

Niall doesn’t smoke. He does pot, but not normal cigarettes. He doesn’t hang out with Zayn either and he sure as hell does not lean against Harry’s posh car. Louis feels almost sick. Not because there’s something wrong with Zayn, but the fact that Niall is friends with him...

“Oh,” Sophia says slowly, but Louis can’t stay here. He squeezes his eyes shut, hurrying into the building.

Everything is wrong. Everything is twisted. This year has been so fucking weird and Louis doesn’t like it. It’s all heading towards a crash, a catastrophe. This summer, before school started, Louis had it all figured out. After two months of crying and worrying so much he didn’t eat and hardly slept, he thought he’d figured it out. It’s obvious now that none if it is going to play out like he wanted. Day one at football practice when Coach named Louis and Harry co-captains, everything was screwed, destined to burn up.

Louis pushes the door to the loo open, finding the stalls seemingly empty inside. He leans with his hands on the edge of one of the sinks, eyes burning and belly twisting in knots.

The questions are too many. When did Niall befriend Zayn, or that type of people in general? Is he doing it because he knows it will upset Louis? That can’t be right. His friend can get angry, but he never used to hold grudges or be intentionally mean. Maybe he’s just changed? All the lads say Louis and Niall grew apart. What if they have? What if Niall prefers the company of those guys, the people who clearly don’t come to the football matches to cheer for Louis?

Another thing hits him and he swallows, hand coming up to cover his mouth. Does Harry know about this? Niall was leaning against his car after all. What if he’s known this whole time that Niall has jumped boarders? Maybe Louis is seeing this in black and white, but it’s always been that way; Harry or Louis, and Niall always had Louis’ back.

Fuck, Louis has to know.

*Did you know?? about niall did you know ??*

He leaves his phone in front of him on the counter next to the sink, staring down at it like it’s a time bomb while his hands grip the edges harshly. His knuckles are whitening and his eyes feel wet as gazes at the phone conversation, the blue bubble still only saying ‘delivered’. Harry hasn’t seen it yet.

He almost jumps out of his skin when one of the toilette stalls open and flinches, hiding his face behind a hand, scratching at his hairline.

“Louis?” The female voice is familiar and Louis damns the school’s gender-neutral bathrooms for the moment. The brunette walks up to the sink, washing her hands.

“Oh. Hey, Jas, hey,” he says, coughing awkwardly and wipes his eyes as inconspicuously as he can manage. She notices it though, because she eyes him carefully through the mirror, frowning.

“Oh, Lou. Are you okay?” she says once she realizes he’s almost crying.
“Yeah, fine.” His voice is thick, though, nose stuffy.

She looks at him with concern. “No, you’re not… Louis, is everything okay?”

“Yes, Jasmine. I’m good, alright.”

“Louis,” she sighs, and takes a few steps closer. She leans on the counter next to him, arm brushing his as she meets his gaze through the mirror. “Is there anything I can do?”

No, there certainly is not. There’s nobody who can fix this. Louis angles his face away from hers, not wanting her to see how broken he feels.

“Hey,” she murmurs, voice warm and kind. “Louis, you can trust me. I just want to help.”

“I just… I’m.” He rubs a hand over his face. He’s just so tired of everything. He needs a fucking break, but there’s no time for that. There’s no fucking break from life.

Louis’ phone buzzes on the counter.

*Know what?? Lou is everything ok*

Louis just wants to go home.

He feels light fingers brush over his hand and he looks up at the mirror again. Jasmine’s hand is covering his softly, but her eyes are trained on the screen of Louis’ phone. Louis quickly snatches his hand away, picking up the device from the counter in an instant.

He feels relieved. Harry doesn’t know. Surely that’s not how you answer a text message you understand? Harry’s not a good liar, even through texts he somehow manages to remain unconvincing. Louis would like to think Harry wouldn’t do that to him anyway. In the slightest chance that Louis does have… you know, he would like to think that he hasn’t got it for someone who would do something like this to him. Even if it’s Harry Styles. But Louis doesn’t. So, it’s whatever.

“I’ll just…” He coughs. “I’ll see you later, Jas.”

He quickly walks out of the loo, pushing the door open and leaving Jasmine in front of the sinks. He almost flinches when there’s someone just about to open the door on the other side. Louis wants to sink through the floor. Zayn is in front of him.

They don’t say anything. The look, however, that Louis sends the other lad is enough. He knows his face is flushed, eyes red-rimmed and eyelashes wet, but he scowls. His eyes are filled with blatant hatred. It’s not Zayn’s fault, but Louis’ frustration is unrestrained.

He pushes past him, shoulders colliding painfully. It should happen in slow motion, like it would in a film. It doesn’t though – it’s just hard and terrible. Zayn doesn’t say anything, but Louis might as well have.

**

He’s off the entire football practice. He thinks the entire team can see it and feel it on the pitch as well. Harry takes command as captain despite it being Louis’ day, but it feels natural. A couple of months ago something like that would be unimaginable – now Louis is just grateful.

Harry goes easy during practice, letting them all have a rather relaxed match at the end of the hour. Louis isn’t focused, misses several passes, generally not playing well. Eventually the boys stop
passing him and leave him be. Harry’s on the opposing team, and when he jogs past Louis he
gives him a concerned look. Louis can’t talk right now, though, and Harry can’t do anything
either in front of the team. All Louis wants is to go home and curl up in bed. His eyes are bleary,
his throat feeling clogged once again when Harry meets his eyes, a few yards between them on
the pitch. Harry’s eyes are questioning, worried even. His mouth opens just a little in a silent
question.

Louis just shakes his head a fraction, biting his lip. Harry frowns and Louis smoothens his features
with a hand over his face. Harry’s frown deepens and it almost churns in Louis how much Harry
seems to care. Despite their history and strange arrangement, Harry’s concerned about him and
that’s more than he can say about anybody else. Harry might be the only one except his family to
have an inkling to that his problems run deeper than just Niall, but it matters all the same.

Louis realizes that he didn’t want Jasmine’s concern, not because Harry asked him not to befriend
her, but because her worry is insignificant as opposed to the people’s in his life who matter. He
doesn’t just want someone to care, or just someone when he feels alone. He wants the people he
cares about. And lately Harry is one of them.

Louis admits to it, as mind-boggling as it feels. He didn’t need Jasmine to cry to, because, fuck it,
he only wants Harry right now.

“Louis,” Coach says, pulling him aside after practice. Louis can feel Harry’s eyes on him,
watching. Louis swallows and follows the older man to the bleachers where they sit down. Coach
folds his hands together, looking at him evenly. “How’s it feeling, lad?”

“Sorry,” Louis apologizes instantly, sighing. “I was shit today.”

Coach Abrahams nods slowly as his olive skin glistens softly in the light from the sun that’s about
to set. He brushes his short, dark beard between a finger and thumb. “You know, the first
championship match is next Friday.”

God knows that Louis knows this. They’ve been practicing for weeks and the stress has been
nibbling at the insides of his gut for days. They won their qualifying match a couple of weeks ago,
but this is the real deal. This is the quarterfinal. The team is completely wrapped up in the
anticipation and preparations. They really should have had a harder practice today, but Harry
obviously could read the team well, knowing that a softer session would be a better fit. He’s good
at that, reading people. Harry’s got a good feel.


Abrahams claps his back once, but doesn’t say anything for a while. They both lean their elbows
on their thighs, watching the pitch empty, the lads trickling away toward the locker room. Harry’s
still by the bench though, putting footballs back into a net.

“You’re a great player, Louis,” the other man says. “You’ve got it in you. Not just the raw talent,
but that spark. You just have to show people that and you have to bring it when it matters. You’ve
developed massively as a team player this year.”

“Crediting yourself, are you?” Louis says with a quirk of his brow and Coach chuckles. Louis
grins, stomach warm with the praise from the coach. It means a lot.

“Don’t think you wouldn’t have been the player you are without me, Tommo,” he says, clapping
his thigh. “These four years have done well to your brains as well as your feet.” There’s a smile
on his lips, and Louis’ genuine grin remains. “What I wanted to tell you, though, Louis, is that
Manchester University is asking for my opinion.”
Manchester University, with a direct link to Manchester United’s youth team. Last year they chose two players from Donny. Doncaster has continuously produced and developed excellent players, and Louis’ dream university has kept their eye on Louis’ school for the last two years. Two players is an incredible amount, and Coach knows that Louis is desperate to be one of the few from the district they choose this year.

“What have you told them?” Louis almost whispers.

“Nothing,” Louis looks up. It feels like his heart is in his stomach, pounds hard and sending waves through his entire body. “I haven’t given my proposal yet, but I will in a few weeks. You know that you’re one of the best players on the team, Louis, you and I both. Your skill on the pitch is unheard of in our school’s history. The thing is, they’re looking for a keeper at the moment and their focus isn’t on midfielders. You’re also not the only player on the team looking to get into Manchester.”

Louis can’t really think. He doesn’t know where Coach is going with this. “So?” he whispers.

“But,” they might be interested. Last year we talked about you, but they didn’t think you were ready, yet. They’re not looking for players to fill the position you play right now, but if you show them what you’ve got I really do think they’d want you.”

Louis feels almost breathless, despite sitting down. Manchester doesn’t need him, but Coach says they could want him. If he shows them how good he can be. “How?” he asks shakily. “How do I show them?”

“A scout is coming to watch one of the championship games. I don’t know which one yet, but I will inform you, Louis, and then I need you to bring it. That doesn’t mean you should score a goal,” he adds, giving him a pointed look. “That means being a team player and owning the pitch as a responsible team captain.”

“Don’t be a diva, right?” Louis’ head has completely shifted in thought direction. Everything seems to drift away – everything but this.

“Exactly. Play like the player you are now, not the one who started the first game of the season.”

Louis nods and follows his coach when he stands from the bleachers. “Right,” the older man says. “Now there’s a bottle of whiskey at home with my name on it, to celebrate what a bloody good team we’ve got this year.”

Louis smiles and Coach trudges off toward the building where his office is located. Louis watches him go, lips pursed, feeling a massive sense of love and gratefulness for that man. Any other coach and Louis wouldn’t be anywhere. And Harry. Thank fucking god for Harry. Thank god for him asking Louis to fuck him that day in September, because if that hadn’t happened then Coach would never even consider talking to Manchester about Louis.

He grabs his bag off the ground and jogs towards the parking lot. There’s an elated feeling in his chest despite the fact that Coach never promised him anything and that Manchester’s opinions about him are diffuse and unclear. His belly is light, momentarily having forgotten Niall and everything else. He feels fluttery and filled with hope.

The lot is almost completely empty, but Louis catches movements by the building, Harry just having placed his bag in the backseat of his car. Louis jogs over, hurrying to catch him before he leaves.

“Hey,” he breathes, stopping
“Oh, hey,” Harry says. “I saw you were speaking to Coach, so I thought I’d talk to you later. Are you okay? You looked so down before, I thought– Your text…”

Louis shakes his head, for the moment not wanting to get into that, adrenaline pumping in his veins. “Yeah, yeah, I’m good.”

“What’s going on?” Harry gives him a once over where Louis is practically bouncing. Harry’s in his regular track bottoms, the team windbreaker zipped open, revealing his chest covered in a white t-shirt.

Louis drops his bag to the ground and grips Harry’s neck, pushing their lips together. Harry is caught by surprise and stumbles on his feet a little, hands steadying himself on Louis’ waist. Louis’ kiss is enthusiastic, and he’s glad the lot is empty because he couldn’t have waited until they got home to do this. Harry’s lips move with his, meeting his kiss softly. Louis squeezes his shoulders before breaking the kiss, keeping his fingers wound around the material of his jacket.

“What was that for?” Harry asks, breathless and cheeks almost looking pink.

Louis shrugs. “Can’t explain it.” He grins, tummy fluttering. As he stands on his toes to cup Harry’s cheeks, the surprise in his eyes is utterly adorable. “Thank you,” Louis says earnestly and places one more ardent and purposeful, close-lipped kiss to his lips. He releases him with a sweet sound, stepping back. Harry still looks taken aback, taking a step backwards to keep steady on his feet.

“Come over at nine, yeah?” Louis says, backing away.

“O-okay,” Harry answers, voice still tinted with bewilderment.

“See you,” Louis grins and jogs away towards his car on the other side of the lot.

Harry, Harry, Harry.

**

"Stop!" Louis suddenly yells, face twisting in pain. "Ow! Ow, ow, ow!" Harry stops moving in confusion, hands resting on Louis’ chest.

Holy shit.

"Cramp! Hip! Cramp, cramp," Louis whines, his hip twisting in a certain way that’s making his entire leg feel like it’s going to rip off the joint.

Harry's currently straddling him – sitting on his dick more precisely – and he raises himself again.

"Don't!" Louis exclaims, gripping his thigh. "Don't move." His face is contorted in pain and he bites his lip, just waiting to let the cramps cease.

They’re on Louis' bed, completely naked, obviously having sex. Harry wanted to ride him, which Louis agreed to and now regrets deeply. Harry’s just so tight this way and Louis can feel him so deeply, and maybe he got a bit too into it.

Harry's sweaty and warm above him. He was moving so good. His hands were clasping Louis' arms and feeling over his chest and fuck, the moans that Louis extracted from him... Fuck.

Finally Louis' leg seems to chill the fuck out and he relaxes, head falling back against the pillow, letting out a long exhale. A moment later Harry pinches his side and Louis finds him staring
expectantly, eyebrow arched. Louis' still inside him, and Harry's cock is hard and nearly leaking against his stomach. Louis licks his lips, meeting his eyes.

"You good?" Harry asks, eyes flicking from his face and sweaty chest in a rapid motion.


He rolls them over, and Harry's legs fall open, knees up. Louis wraps his arms around his waist and thrusts, promptly feeling the gust of air from Harry's gasp at the side of his face.

Louis fucks into him, and he feels his hands clasp helplessly at his back. Harry's breath is hot in his neck and Louis can feel that his lips are wet. He leans back only to dive in, pressing their lips together for a quick kiss.

They part with a slick sound, and Louis presses another to his mouth, getting lost in all of the senses that Harry is enrapturing him in. He doesn't know how it's possible, but the sex just seems to get better and better.

"Ah," Harry moans, arm reaching back and hand grabbing the headboard above him, the other locked tightly in Louis' hair, pulling at every thrust. Louis winces; Harry can be quite rough when he doesn't know what he's doing, too lost in reaching his own climax.

Louis buries his face against Harry's throat, warm breath hitting his collarbones and nose brushing against his Adam's apple as Harry lifts his leg, hooking it around Louis' hip. They're lying slightly on their sides, Harry is moaning, and Louis thinks he's going to cramp again if they don't come soon. He's close though, and Harry's nails dig into his nape. Louis retaliates, reaching up and grabbing a handful of Harry's curls, yanking his head back.

"Aah," Harry groans. "God!" Louis is pretty sure his skin his bleeding from how hard Harry is digging his nails in. "Again," he demands. "Do it again, Lou."

Louis does, timing it with a deep thrust. Harry comes with a loud shout, head falling back, his mouth open as he breathes heavily. His eyes are round as he continues to come over his stomach, and Louis squeezes his waist to tell him he's going to pull out. Harry nods, pressing his eyes shut as Louis moves out of him. He throws away the condom and wanks himself off, leaning on his elbow and hovering above Harry's worn out body.

"Can I come on you?" he asks, squeezing around his cock.

Harry nods, eyes still closed as he slides down on the bed beneath Louis. God, Harry is so attractive like this. He's so flushed, tired and still so submissive. He's elated, green eyes ever so lovely, and the pink shade of his cheeks is utterly beautiful.

Louis comes over Harry's chest and collarbones, Harry staring up at him, mouth open and breathing as his glassy eyes blink dazedly at him. Louis falls down on the bed beside him, completely worn out, but he can't help but press a hot kiss against Harry's plush and bitten lips.

"That was..." Harry mumbles, hand splaying over Louis' chest. "That was good." He chuckles breathily and Louis joins in, closing his eyes contentedly.

"You've got to ride me more often."

"My pleasure," Harry says dorkily and Louis rolls his eyes, sliding his leg over Harry's and scrappes his teeth over the boy's nearest nipple. Harry immediately shivers, squirming away with a hitch in his breath.
"Sensitive?" Louis murmurs, arching a brow.

Harry nods and Louis mentally adds 'research nipple play' onto his to-do list.

Harry's chest is blank with sweat and he looks too appealing, honestly. He leans down, sucking Harry's nipple into his mouth.

"Jesus Christ," Harry groans, fist closing around the hair at Louis' neck, but he doesn't push him away. Louis teasingly swirls his tongue around it, his other hand reaching for the second nipple.

Before he can close his fingers around the bud and twist, there's a sharp knock on the door. Louis stops and Harry's hot breath against the top of his head disappears.

Lottie pokes her head into the room. "So, are you two all finished up now?"

"Lottie, Jesus! Boundaries!" Louis yells, pulling the duvet up to cover them. She pays them no mind though, walking into the room with no shame. He watches as his sister sits down on the chair at his desk. "I didn't even know you were home, Christ," he huffs. Louis stares palely at her, trying to cover Harry's come covered chest with the blanket without getting it all gross. It's not working in his favor.

"What is it?" He asks, pushing his sweaty fringe off his forehead. "Why can't you wait until later? This is so inappropriate."

"If I wait it'll be night before you two have left bed. Don't say anything, trust me, you two can go on for a while."

Louis makes a displeased noise, covering his eyes with his hand. "Ew! Lottie! The hell!"

"What, it's true!" she defends, crossing her arms. "Anyway, you promised to practice driving with me today. You've been holed up in your room with Harry all afternoon, but you promised."

"I thought you went out." Louis makes a face, glancing over at Harry. He doesn't seem very bothered by Lottie's presence, however. He is leaning back, arms behind his head, looking content and at ease. There are love bites that are reddish and prominent by his collarbone, and there's a drop of come just beneath his left one.

Louis wipes it off with his finger and then elbows him in the ribs. He looked far too pleased. All orgasm-hazy still.

"I came back, though. So, are we going, or what?" Lottie says in his periphery.

Harry sends him a scolding look before his eyes relocate to Louis' sister again. Louis twists his head her way, rolling his eyes before flopping down on the bed. He closes his eyes, inhaling deeply once before he abruptly sits up again.

"Fine," he sighs loudly, beginning to get up from the bed when Lottie starts to head out the room. He's stopped by a tentative hand on his bicep. Harry is looking at him apprehensively, biting his lower lip.

"Can I stay here for a while?" he murmurs, eyes flickering. "I mean, I-- I can just stay in your room and I'll lock the front door from inside and sneak out the back door later." He swallows. "I won't snoop. Promise."

Louis frowns. He's totally forgotten about Harry’s problems in the midst of his own.
Harry's eyes turn pleading. "Louis," he murmurs. "Please."

Louis hates this. "Yeah, 'course," he murmurs back. He despises how much Harry hates being in his own home.

"Or you can just come with us?"

"Why are you still here, Lottie?" Louis asks, snapping his head up.

She shrugs, other than that ignoring him. "You could, and then I'll have two teachers, not just one, and we can drop you off later so you don't have to worry about sneaking out."

Harry looks at Louis, and their eyes meet for a second.

"Sure," Louis sighs. "Whatever. If you want to."

"Okay," Harry nods, and Louis realizes his warm hand is still wrapped around his arm. He glances down at it, subsequently looking up, meeting Harry's eyes again.

"Right. Lottie get out so we can shower first."

He's not sure if she's gone or not before Harry's hand on him has tightened, and he is tucking Harry's hair away behind his ear, diving into kiss him again.

It's a day after Louis' talk with the football coach. The pain from yesterday, seeing Niall and Zayn together has dulled partly. Right now, he's more confused and hurt. He hasn't heard any rumors about him weeping in a bathroom either, so it seems Jasmine has kept his secret. He still doesn't know why Harry can't stand the thought of Louis befriending her, because she still hasn't done a thing for Louis to form a bad opinion of her.

Harry came over last night just like Louis requested. He was inquisitive, asking about his text earlier, still seeming completely bewildered with Louis' behavior. Louis shrugged it off, just wanting to touch him, be close. Once Harry gave in, letting it go, Louis fucked him slowly on his bed, sucking a fat bruise into his ribs.

Right now, Harry's lips are terribly distracting, but Louis forces himself to release his grip of his curls and get up. After they've finally finished kissing, they take a quick shower and get dressed. Harry pulls on one of Louis' bigger jumpers and his own jeans, throwing a black hoodie at Louis who's too busy blow-drying his hair. Harry comes up behind him, hooking a finger in his pants and lets the elastic slap against his skin. Louis hits him in the arm, sending him a glare, but Harry only grins, shying away.

They trudge downstairs, grabbing a piece of toast each, before Lottie comes downstairs and demands they be in the car within a minute.

"You're so bloody demanding, " Louis sighs, and Lottie makes a face at him.

"I wonder who she got that from," Harry says idly, too casual. Louis turns to him, narrowing his eyes while Lottie grins winningly. "Can't say it isn't true, Lou," Harry shrugs, grinning as he jumps into the back of the car.

"So rude," Louis mutters, climbing into the passenger seat in the front as his sister takes the wheel.

"You love me, love," Harry says cheekily. Louis glances back at him, eyeing the other boy. His curls are still damp, his smile easy. Louis squints a bit, eyeing the strand of hair that is lying in the wrong direction at the deep parting of his hair. Louis kind of wants to fix it, so he reaches over
and does it.

“I don’t,” he mutters stubbornly as he pushes the little curl to the side, putting it gently in lane with the rest of his soft hair. Harry watches the movement, but doesn’t say anything. He can see some of the same bewilderment in his eyes that lingered there yesterday outside his car, yet he stays still and lets Louis fix the strand back into its place. Louis’ hand falls away. “Wasn’t sure about your fringe,” he mutters, leaning back into his seat.

He can feel Lottie’s eyes on him and he sends her a glare. “Are we going, or what?”

“Sure,” Lottie shrugs, smirking to herself while she starts the car. Harry doesn’t say anything either, but Louis is fairly sure the boy is smiling. He allows himself a quick glance back and sure enough Harry is grinning way too widely, looking far too pleased. Louis inwardly rolls his eyes.

They head out on the road, Louis directing Lottie onto a usually pretty abandoned country road. They’re mostly silent as they drive, but it isn’t uncomfortable. Louis might be in a little bit of an orgasm-haze still, and Lottie’s driving as become exceptionally better. He could maybe fall asleep to the sound (an actually rather annoying noise, but you get used to it) of the engine.

Louis is a serious driving teacher though, so he keeps instructing Lottie as she drives. They eventually get to the country road Louis had in mind. His sister has been getting good lately, so he thought he’d allow her to drive a proper road in proper speed.

“Foot on the brake when the road curves, Lots,” he warns. “Even if it’s just a bit, you need to slow down.”

“Look far ahead, too,” Harry adds. “It’s easier to keep the car steady.”

Lottie nods seriously as she accelerates, and Louis glances at Harry where the other boy has leaned forward. He’s sitting in the seat in the middle now, elbows resting on his knees to be able to participate in her so-called lecture better. It’s funny how invested he seems. Niall used to think this was fun too, but he was never this involved, as if he was actually enjoying it like Harry. Louis looks down at him softly.

“Don’t run over any bunnies,” he says and Harry chuckles. He looks up, meeting his eyes. They’re warm and so bloody green. It’s like there’s a bloody forest in there, or maybe a football pitch. See, Louis can be romantic if he wants to. Not that – well, fuck. Never mind.

“I don’t think there are many bunnies here, Louis,” Lottie says.

“I was making a joke.” Louis sends her a look.

“Wasn’t funny.”

“Harry laughed.”

“But his humor sucks.”

“Hey.”

“Why are you insulting us?” Louis says. “Also, eyes on the road. You’re going five too fast as well.”

Lottie amazingly slows down. Wow. Louis seems to have some domination left in this family after all.
“I’m just telling the truth.”

“You’re unbelievable,” Louis huffs.

It’s quiet for a moment, all three of them only watching the scenery as they drive along the deserted road.

“It’s funny how you both act like the other is horrible, but your personalities are so in line with each other.” Harry’s voice is low, but contemplative. Louis looks back at him, seeing his small smile.

“What are you implying?” He narrows his eyes, mostly joking.

Lottie groans. “He’s implying we’re like each other.”

Louis groans in response as well.

“Aw, Lou.” Harry laughs, wrapping his arms over Louis’ chair and around his chest. He squeezes him, cheek mushing against the top of Louis’ head. “It was a compliment.”

“Get off me, you octopus.” Louis groans, pushing at his warm hands. His belly flutters while Harry only grins, kissing his cheek obnoxiously before letting him go.

“No smooching in my car,” Lottie orders.

“No smooching,” Harry holds up his hands, dimples deep in his cheeks. “Sorry, Lots.”

“It’s cool, Harold. As long as you keep your hands where I see them.”

Louis frowns at the two of them. “When did you start bonding?”

“Oh, we’re best buds, Lou,” Lottie says easily. “Harry makes a mean cup of tea in the mornings.”

Louis stares at them incredulously, as they act overly casual. He huffs in annoyance, indignantly shaking his head at their ridiculousness. He silently wonders how the hell they got here.

When it’s starting to go dark outside they head back home. There aren’t many cars out, but then again there almost never are if it’s not morning or five o’clock. Lottie parks the car, something she’s getting surprisingly good at.

“So, should we order some Chinese, or something?” Louis suggest once she’s turned off the engine, opening her phone. “It’s six. Mum seems to have already left.”

The house is dark indeed. Their mum must have only been home briefly between shifts. “Sure,” he sighs, undoing his seatbelt.

“Didn’t you tell me you had work tonight?” Harry asks confusedly from the back.

The car is silent.

Fuck.

Motherfucky –

“Work?” Lottie asks, turning to look at them.

Louis’ heart beats like a drum and all the while he feels cold. The tension soon turns thick in the
car, as neither Louis nor Harry say a word. Harry’s closed his fist in front of his mouth, holding his breath as he realizes what he just did.

It’s not Harry’s fault. It’s not his fault. Louis repeats this in his head. It’s own fault. Louis closes his eyes, thumb and index resting against the bridge of his nose for a moment.

“Louis?” Lottie’s voice is sharper. “What does he mean by ‘work’?”

Louis inhales, turning to face his sister. He feels pale, almost fears how angry he knows she’ll be once she finds out. “I work at Frozen Goods in town, nights and weekends.” He says the words lowly, but they’re clear, voice even and eyes meeting hers.

She closes hers for just a second. When she looks up again they’re hard, just like her voice. “What.”

“I’m sorry for keeping this from you–“

“How long?” she interrupts him.

“Since September last year,” he whispers.

Her lips press together firmly, jaw clenching. “That’s almost half a fucking year, Louis. What the fuck.”

“I’m sorry! I didn’t know how–“

“How long?” she interrupts him.

“Since September last year,” he whispers.

Her lips press together firmly, jaw clenching. “That’s almost half a fucking year, Louis. What the fuck.”

“I’m sorry! I didn’t know how–“

“Do you want me to give you a minute?” Harry whispers from the back of the car. Louis stomach
sinks even further, because he completely forgot that Harry’s here. He’s heard everything.

“No,” Louis says lowly, managing to keep the waver out of his voice. “We’re done. I’m leaving for work.” He opens the car door, starting to climb outside.

“Maybe if you made up with Dad, then Fizzy would finally completely make up with Mum.” Lottie’s voice is cold where she sits in the driver’s seat, keeping her eyes locked ahead of her.

Deep down, Louis knows that Lottie doesn’t mean what her words imply, but it hurts all the same. He turns slowly, face expressionless.

“I didn’t do this. I’m not the one who ruined our family, Lottie, so don’t you dare blame me.”

He slams the door, without a word stalking up to the front porch, unlocking the front door. He stumps up to his room, ripping out his work uniform out of a drawer. Meanwhile he keeps his teeth sunken into his cheeks, blinking, fighting the hot tears in his eyes. He quickly stumbles down the stairs again, but Harry’s standing on the last step, looking at him with a sad frown.

Louis comes to a stop, arms wrapping protectively around his ribcage. “What?” he sighs, tears almost spilling over. He’s so fucking exhausted.

“Nothing,” Harry murmurs, but then he’s lacing his long, warm arms around him. He cocoons Louis in, keeping him captured against his long torso. Louis’ face buries almost automatically in his neck, letting himself just for one moment breathe. Just one minute of feeling Harry’s soft hands rub against his back, holding him enraptured in him for only a bit.

Louis forces himself to break the hug. Harry’s so much, too much. He’s so… It just hurts.

Louis’ eyes are wet, and he blows out his cheeks as they part. “See you around,” he mumbles, unable to meet Harry’s eyes as he pulls away.

He leaves the house, throat thick. The car is empty when he passes it, but he knows Lottie didn’t go inside the house. Maybe she went to a friend’s. She’s probably at Alice’s. He wipes a hand over his face, and starts to jog. He’s late for work.

**

It’s Friday. Match night.

The lads are sitting on the benches in the locker room in what resembles a circle, all eyes focused and jaws clenched, fists locked. Louis’ eyes are trained on the laces of Jonah’s shoes in front of him. Tonight they’re all the same. They’re all dressed in the same black socks with the red stripe, the same dark shorts, the same red and white striped jersey covering their chests. They’re all determined, focused, sharp.

“Lads,” Coach Abrahams begins just like he always does. Louis closes his eyes. “Tonight is it – our first real championship match. We all know what to do, and we all know how what it will feel like being out there. We’ve been here before. It’s hard, it’s rough, and it’s a bloody competition. This year, though, we’re stronger. We’ve got a keeper with the highest saves percentage in the district, two players consecutively leading the scoring league, another player that tackles so cleanly yet so hard it almost bring a tear to my eye to watch.”

Someone snorts, a few chuckle. Louis just breathes.

“Those things we have aren’t what going to give us a win tonight. It’s the fact that we’re a team. Every single player, no matter if first string or second, no matter how many goals scored, how
many saves made, no matter how many cards received, are equally important tonight. As a
collective, we're indestructible.”

The locker room is silent for a moment.

“That was so cheesy, Coach,” Lee snorts and the rest of the troop lets out gentle laughs,
atmosphere finally turning relaxed. Louis exhales, grinning a little.

“Donny,” someone says, thrusting a fist into the hole of space in the middle of the circle.

“Donny!” Stan yells, and the room fills with warrior shouts.

The team forms a huddle, hands in the middle and eyes meeting one another evenly. They’re
going to win. They’re going to fucking win.

They all eventually get out of the locker room, as a team making their way towards the pitch. The
sun is on the way down, sky a mixture of orange and pink. The opposing team is already on their
half of the pitch, warming up, and the bleachers are filled to the limit, people even standing on the
ground in front of and to the sides, wherever there’s room. Almost the entire school is here tonight
and probably half of the town. Louis’ blood is pumping.

He makes the mistake to throw a glance towards the parking lot. He shouldn’t have, because he
doesn’t need this right now.

Niall is standing close to Zayn by a car, both of them mumbling, looking over their shoulders.
Louis frowns, steps slowing down. They’re exchanging something, but Louis can’t see what. He
almost comes into a complete stop, making Liam walk into him from behind.

“Sorry,” he mumbles, shaking his a head a little.

Liam simply claps him on the back, walking past him and continuing with the team. Zayn seems
to look past Niall’s shoulder in the same instant, and he nods toward where Louis’ standing. Niall
turns slightly, eyes catching on Louis who doesn’t know what he’s supposed to do. All he feels is
confusion.

Niall turns on his heels, starting to pace purposefully towards him. Louis’ suddenly unsure of his
intentions, but he keeps put. They haven’t stood face to face in weeks.

Just when Niall reaches him he raises his arms and Louis is fairly certain he is going to punch him.
In reality he throws his arms around him, crushing him in a tight hug.

Louis’s shocked. The impact against his chest almost makes him stumble, but he catches himself,
hands gripping Niall’s grey hoodie at his back. His heart beats like a drum, but Niall’s familiar
scent is almost making him cry with relief. Louis misses him so much it hurts.

Niall still holds him, but his words are clear by Louis’ ear. “I’m only here because I know how
much this game means to you. Don’t think this changes anything.” Niall ends the hug with that,
and starts backing away.

Oh.

“Good luck, Lou. You suck.” Niall grins. Then he’s turning around and rejoining Zayn by the car.

Right. Louis clears his throat even though he’s just standing there by himself, looking like an idiot.
He shakes his head, wondering what he expected. As always, he knows it’s his own fault why
things are the way they are. Isn’t it so with everything? All that is wrong in his life is his fault?
Maybe Lottie was right.

No. He shakes his head. That isn’t rational and he knows it isn’t true. His sister isn’t here though, watching the game. She made it very clear this morning that she would in no way be sitting on the bleachers with their Mum and the twins to cheer him on. She didn’t even text good luck.

Louis turns around, starting to head towards the pitch. His team needs him.

He never seems to catch a break though, because before he’s even taken a step, someone taps his shoulder. Louis looks up, finding Harry behind him. He’s a little out of breath, holding his pink little headband in his hand.

Louis inhales, shuddering slightly. “Hi,” he murmurs. He knows there are people around but he can’t help instantly going soft, thumb finding its way to the end of Harry’s jersey. He’s just so tired. “What are you doing?” he asks, lowly.

“Forgot this in the locker room,” Harry explains easily, holding the headband higher to show him.

“Oh.” Louis fiddles a little with the end seam of Harry’s shirt, staring at the fabric, eyebrows knit.

“Hey,” Harry says, voice sounding too elated. “Did you and Niall finally make up?”

“No.” Louis presses his lips together, finally looking up.

“What?” Harry shakes his head. “I saw you hug just now. Did you tell him?”

Louis releases Harry’s shirt, taking a step back. “No, I didn’t.”

Harry sighs and the sound cuts through Louis’ system like an axe. It feels like it cleaves him in half. “Louis…”

He stares up at him. He thought – he actually thought Harry might understand. Nobody has been on his side except for Harry. “Are you serious?” Louis asks, mouth open.

Harry stares back, crossing his arms. “Louis, I just… You keep so many lies from so many people!” He sounds so exasperated it makes Louis’ tummy clench unpleasantly.

Louis’ heart sinks, defensiveness taking over entirely. “That is none of your business.”

“Louis, we both know that it’s true.”

“When will you get it through your head that it doesn’t matter?! You still don’t get a say.”

“Lou!” Harry exclaims, hand landing flat over Louis’ chest. His eyes are pleading, his frown deep. “I’m just trying to help.”

Louis looks back at him, meeting his eyes impassively. “Why?”

Silence.

“That’s what I thought,” Louis whispers. He pushes Harry’s hand off his chest where it was hovering over his heart. Harry’s mouth remains in a straight line, eyes almost passive if it weren’t for the small glint of disappointment.

Louis walks away, cleats finally sinking into the grass pitch. Right. Football.

***
They win.

Louis only feels hollow.
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

This is a fucking monster, haha I'm sorry :) Also, apologies for the delay as well, but it's here now :)

Thank you Vicky, you're the best!

Find me:
Twitter: isthatyoularry
Tumblr: isthatyoularry

Louis’ phone is buzzing incessantly next him on his bed. It’s been doing that for the last two days, namely since Friday. Louis is currently spread out like a starfish on his bed, drooling into the pillowcase his nose is flattened against. It hurts a bit, but not as much as his heart.

Wow, he’s such a sad fucker. He mentally congratulates himself on simultaneously being a fucking idiot and a heartfelt poet.

The buzzing dies out, but Louis knows it will start again in an hour or so. He is not going to answer, however. He’s promised himself that he won’t.

Harry’s been calling endlessly since after the match. He called until it was twelve, then he called once every hour yesterday, and today he’s gotten seven phone calls in and it’s only two o’clock. Louis glumly sits up, staring out the window. His eyes are half-lidded, hair rumpled. It’s pissing down rain outside, it’s almost dark and it honestly looks like the world is ending out there.

Maybe it is. Louis wouldn’t mind, because who has he got? Niall’s ended their friendship, Lottie is giving him the silent treatment, his mum is barely home, Mark is not his Dad anymore, and Harry’s… yeah, Harry’s complicated.

Louis face-plants back onto the bed. His phone starts buzzing again and he squeezes his eyes shut, moaning into the suffocating pillow.

Don’t do it, Louis.

It keeps buzzing.

Don’t.

Buzz.

Love yourself.

“Mrkfg,” Louis groans, and reaches out to grab his phone.

He wasn’t supposed to do this. When he got home from the match last Friday, he just felt so utterly pathetic and lost, all of it crashing down on him when not even Harry wanted to put up with him anymore – Harry who has kind of been his rock these last months. He started thinking. The conclusion that he came to involved feelings.
Lottie might be right; there might be a teeny, tiny chance that she could be.

There has to be a reason he didn’t feel completely fucked up until Harry wasn’t behind him anymore, hasn’t it? There has to be a reason as to why he’s felt this miserable since their fight.

But, on the off chance that he does have those kinds of feelings (strange, senseless feelings) for Harry, then those are not be encouraged. Bad, bad feelings. Now that they’ve been gently acknowledged, they can go back to wherever they came from (hell).

“Mrgff.”

“Lou…?” Harry’s voice is soft, and perhaps a bit surprised that Louis answered his phone call. His voice is warmer than Louis expected. He thought Harry was calling to fight.

He huffs in answer, the only thing he can manage. It’s getting somewhat hard to breathe against the pillow now, but Louis refuses to pick his head up. He turns slightly instead, just a fraction to the side to let in some air. “Talk,” he instructs quietly. If Harry’s going to yell, then he should get it over with quickly.

Harry inhales on the other side of the line. It’s strange how just the sound of it makes Louis’ belly knot up. “I want to apologize, Lou,” he starts. “Like, for several stuff.”

That was literally not what Louis expected. It feels like he stops breathing, everything inside him stopping for a just a second, completely taken aback.

Harry pauses, perhaps to see if Louis is going to say anything. When he realizes that Louis isn’t going to, he once again takes a deep breath. “It wasn’t fair of me to do what I did before the match. First of all, it wasn’t my place to tell you when or how you tell your best friend that you’re gay.”

“Queer,” Louis mutters. Harry’s voice is so bloody dark and soft. It could honest to God lull Louis back to sleep, but as it is his heart is pumping in full speed.

“Queer, then,” Harry says, and Louis thinks maybe there’s a smile on his lips? Is it simply wishful thinking, though? “But, yeah, it wasn’t my place. Even though I respectfully think it would be better for you if you did, that is something that is up to you. Like you said, I don’t get a say in that.” He takes a small break.

Louis doesn’t think this is quite real. How in the world have they gotten here? Harry is giving him a genuine, long bloody apology.

“Secondly,” he continues. “To bring it up like that before the most important match of the year so far was seriously so fucking idiotic. You didn’t need that right then, because the game was what was supposed to be the only thing on our minds, you know? Luckily our team slayed, but still… Also, thirdly,” he stops, clearing his throat awkwardly.

It’s quiet on the line. Louis frowns, despite the smile that was starting to grow on lips. He knows the little feelings are rejoicing, but they can go fuck themselves. Shoo.

“Harry?” Louis finally asks.

“Okay, shit.” He sounds so awkward and a just a little bit pathetic. “This is going to sound fucking strange and don’t think this means anything, but um. I’ve…”

“You’ve…?”
“Err–”

“For fuck’s sake, spit it out.” Louis rolls his eyes.

Harry inhales an amount of air that probably could fill an entire balloon. “I’ve got your back.”

Oh.

Louis rolls over, leaving the phone resting beside him on the bed. Inhale, exhale. No, this is so not good. Not good at all. Louis was so supposed to keep composed so the annoying butterflies in his stomach would starve to death in lack of Harry related things to feed on. It’s been two days and Louis’ already handed them a silver plate of what they want.

Using the words of Blair Waldorf: Louis loves God’s all creatures (kind of), but these butterflies need to be murdered. There is no such place for them here. Do they not understand that they’re unwanted? Undesired. Detested. Go away.

Although, Louis can’t exactly blame them despite his animosity towards them; after all, here he is, putting the phone to his ear once again.

“Erm,” Louis says. He coughs. Harry’s quiet on the other side of the line, but Louis can hear him breathing. He can almost picture him covering his face in embarrassment. “So… I’m going to hang up now? And then you’ll call again and we’ll pretend it never happened.”

“Okay, good.”

They’re quiet for another moment. “But I’ll know, okay,” Louis can’t help but add before he quickly terminates the call.

Dear goodness.

He calls Harry up again. “So, do you want a blowjob or something? Because I’m kind of bored.”

Because I miss you.

Once their second phone call has ended, Louis crawls off the bed. He eyes himself in the mirror, and just like a couple of months ago he thinks he resembles a fluffy pigeon a little too much. His hair is ruffled and standing on end, his eyes puffy. He looks almost the same as he did then, though maybe his cheekbones are a little more prominent, the angles of his face sharper. He’s older.

You can’t really see it, but he’s also queer and probably not-so-much-hates Harry Styles. Strange things.

Walking downstairs he’s shirtless, only in a pair of sweats and sports socks, figuring Harry’s going to undress him later anyway. He rubs his neck, feeling a slight ache as he’s been sleeping strangely these last nights.

“Oh,” he says when he comes into the living room, having heard voices from there. Lottie and Jay are sitting on the couch, snuggled up in blankets. They’re watching Ice Age and if it weren’t for the fact that Lottie hates him and Harry’s coming over, Louis probably would have joined them. “You’re home?” he asks his mum.

Jay smiles up at him, for once looking well rested. “Yes,” she says. “Did you forget, honey?”

“Yeah, I guess.” He sinks his hands into the pockets of his sweats, pursing his lips. Sid on the TV
screen just realized everyone has left without him, and Louis watches him converse with the huge mammal as his eyebrows knit. Harry will be coming over and Louis didn’t think his mum would be home today. There’s no way he can just sneak him upstairs without her noticing, and unlike Harry’s parents Jay actually knows that he and Harry aren’t very friendly. Weren’t. Anyway.

“What’re you frowning for?” Jay asks.

“Oh, nothing. Just tired, I think.” He can feel Lottie watching him, but she looks away when he meets her eyes.

“Well, you’ve had the entire day to wake up, darling. Grab some breakfast, will you?”

He mumbles an answer, heading to the kitchen. It’s still pouring outside, raindrops smattering against the windows. There’s still hot tea water in the pot so Louis makes himself some, strategically choosing a larger cup because he knows from experience that Harry will drain half of it before Louis gets a chance to let it cool.

He spreads some butter on a piece of toast, but opts for some ham on top because Harry isn’t that fond of meat. Louis won’t succumb to him more than he already has, because just the fact that he knows that isn’t ideal. Sometimes it feels like he knows Harry too well, yet other times not quite at all.

The knock on the door comes soon enough – Louis hadn’t even given cancelling their plans a single thought – and he leaves his tea and toast on the worktop. He trudges into the hall, opening the front door to a dripping Harry.

He’s in a coat, navy hoodie sticking up around the collar. His curls are a little damp, but the dimples in his cheeks are prominent as he steps inside, shrugging off his jacket. He smiles down at Louis who keeps himself composed, trying not to smile back too widely.

“Hey,” he says timidly, and the way his hands reach for the fabric of Harry’s hoodie almost seems automatic. He fists the sides of his shirt, bringing him closer. Harry drops his jacket onto a nearby chair and steps out of his wet shoes, proceeding to wind his arms around Louis’ neck.

The hug is tentative, but warm. Louis all of a sudden wants to apologize too, but his eloquence with words is lacking deeply. He hopes he can put across some of it in actions. He doesn’t want Harry to be upset with him either.

“Have you forgiven me?” Harry murmurs into his hair, just behind his ear.

Louis humbly nods, forehead pressed against his shoulder. He shouldn’t have been that angry in the first place. Harry was probably right about him being able to make his life easier, but either way Harry can’t tell him when to share something this personal. Louis has a bit of a blockage when it comes to deep things. They’re so far down on the list of things he can cooperate with.

Harry’s fingers are soft when they brush through the hair at Louis’ nape. His hands are always so bloody gentle. His arms leave Louis’ shoulders and his warm hands smoothly slide over his skin, gripping his waist. The touch is gentle, yet firm and possessive, almost. Not in a showy way, but the grip is natural and firm, like it’s supposed to be that way. Louis ignores that last thought solely for the sake of his own sanity.

Harry squeezes his waist, bringing their lower bellies together. His lips feather-lightly brush along his jaw and Louis almost closes his eyes. He could get lost in this. He could quite literally let Harry take him right here. He can imagine him taking him apart. They’ve never even done that and he’s fairly certain Harry doesn’t like doing that sort of thing. Maybe someday, though.
“Mum’s home,” he finally manages to get out. Harry instantly leans away, leaving several inches of space between them. Louis is as relieved as he is disappointed. He keeps his fingers clutched around the excess material of Harry’s shirt, not letting him get too far away. “Sorry, I forgot.”

“It’s okay. Should I go?”

“No,” Louis says, just as his mother calls from the living room.

“Honey, who’s here?”

“Err, fuck. C’mon.” He gently grabs Harry’s shirtsleeve, pulling him with him toward the living room. Harry’s footsteps are slow, perhaps he’s a bit nervous, but he comes with, staying close to Louis’ side when he stops at the entrance of the room.

“Oh, hello.” Jay greets, surprise evident on her face.

Louis bites his cheek, refusing to give in to the hotness building up the back of his neck. “Mum, this is Harry.”

“Hello, Mrs. Tomlinson,” Harry greets politely, waving awkwardly where he’s standing. Jay looks at Louis at first just for a moment, obviously confused. Of course, she knows his and Harry’s relationship has changed a lot this year – just from watching the footie matches anyone could tell, but it’s not like Louis has been completely honest.

It feels so incredibly strange introducing Harry to his mother. Harry’s been here countless times while she was sleeping, and he’s sucked Louis off and given him handjobs in the middle of the night. It’s been months.

Jay starts to get up, untangling herself from Lottie and the blankets, but Harry interrupts. “No, no, it’s fine. Don’t get up. It’s okay, we don’t want to bother you. We were just going to say hi.”


“Oh, we’re headed upstairs,” he says, clearing his throat.

Lottie scoffs conspicuously loudly, and Louis’ eyes flicker to her in alarm. She isn’t looking at him though, only keeps on an indignant frown, eyes on her nails. Harry’s hand is hovering over the small of Louis’ back, keeping him settled.

Louis’ mum nods, giving them a small smile. Louis in relief realizes she might accept Louis’ simple introduction, however, he’s quite certain there will be interrogating questions later.

“See you later,” Louis says, grabbing Harry’s sleeve again. He remembers his breakfast just on the way up, and drags Harry along, back into the kitchen.

“Does she hate me?” Harry asks, grimacing a little.

Why do you care? The question is automatic in his head, but it doesn't feel right. It's strange, but the question isn’t warranted anymore. Not at all.

“No,” Louis says instead, leaning against the counter. “She’s probably just confused.”

“Yeah,” Harry nods, taking Louis’ teacup out of his hands, gulping down at least a third. Louis bats at his tummy.

“Mine,” he sighs, but doesn’t take it back. He takes a bite of his toast instead, looking up at where
Harry’s nose is buried in the big cup. “How come your parents weren’t surprised?”

It’s a bold question, really bold, and he can see Harry tense up instantly. Why don’t your parents know me as your mortal enemy? Why don’t they come to your football games? Why didn’t they know you’re captain?

They never talked about this. Louis ate Harry out instead. Clearly they’re good at avoiding heavy subjects. But Louis is asking now, and meanwhile he waits for an answer Harry takes another gulp of the hot tea, shoulders stiff.

He finally looks up. “Football… is like.” He purses his lips, eyes locked on the teacup. His voice is strange when he continues. “It isn’t important.”

“But you love football,” Louis murmurs, brows knitting together.

“But it’s not important enough.”

Louis is about to disagree; football is the most important thing on the planet, Louis’ life relies on it for Christ sake. He’s also pretty certain that it’s one of the few things Harry genuinely loves, but Harry hands Louis back the cup after that and turns around, efficiently putting an end to the subject.

Louis can tell, though. He can tell those words aren’t Harry’s. Louis boxes this away, because it’s obvious that Harry doesn’t want to talk about it. Louis isn’t up for a fight; he just wants a calm day in bed to be entirely honest.

He picks up his toast, and pushes at the small of Harry’s back to direct him towards the stairs. His shoulder blades seem tense, posture a little stiff as he walks. Louis’ hand instinctively softens, simply resting there comfortably.

As they get out in the hallway, Louis’ hand has slipped in under his shirt, fingertips light at the bottom of Harry’s spine. They’re just about to head up when Jay calls from the living room. Louis sighs, peeking into the room, Harry still at his side.

“Before you go and disappear upstairs, I was going to tell you today,” she sends a small look Harry’s way, but continues. “In two weeks the girls and I are going away for the weekend. Just Lots, Fizzy and I. We’re heading to a spa, get some relaxing and bonding time in, you know? Just us girls.”


“Honey?” Jay asks, but Louis only walks upstairs, Harry not far behind him.

Louis dumps the teacup and half-eaten toast on the nightstand, before he digs his hands under a pillow and flattens out on the bed. He hides his face in the soft pillow, breathing slowly. He feels when the bed dips, Harry crawling up on the bed. He sneaks a glance; Harry’s curled his knees to his chest, back resting against the headboard.

“Tired?” Harry asks.

“Hmm.”

“Have you slept all day?”

“Hmm.”
Harry’s voice is low and gravelly, and it sounds as if he’s been in bed all day too. Louis feels him shuffle a little – then his light fingertip is tapping on his back. The touch is simple, just a small brush of skin against his, a little contact, completely delicate. It starts as almost just a little scratch, but goose bumps pop up Louis’ back when Harry’s finger slides upward, continuing to move in tiny circles.

It’s a little wonderful.

“You’ve got a birthmark under your shoulder blade.”

“I know.”

“Haven’t seen it before,” he murmurs. His fingers trace down Louis’ spine, the sensation calming yet making his pulse tick faster. Stupid feelings. Die. Harry’s fingers still for a moment, Louis closes his eyes.

“Don’t stop.”

His fingers gently start moving again, making up random patterns as they go. They stray to Louis’ side once, making his belly jump.

“Ticklish?” Harry wonders, and Louis thinks there might be a smile on his lips.

“Little,” he murmurs back. He lets out a long sigh, squeezing the pillow closer to his chest.

“You okay?”

“Mm-hmm.”

“Do you want to watch a movie?” Harry wonders, hand flattening out over Louis’ spine.

Before Louis can answer there’s a knock on the door. “What?” he calls, rolling over on his side.

Surprisingly it turns out it isn’t his Mum bothering him, but Lottie. He sits up quickly when she walks in, Harry’s hand falling away. “What are you doing here?” he asks. She hasn’t spoken to him in what feels like ages (it’s a couple of days, but whatever).

Lottie crosses her arms, hip popped as she speaks. “I want to go for a drive. Can we go?”

Louis hesitates. This is completely unexpected and coming out of nowhere. She hasn’t shown a sign wanting to patch things up with him. Both of them are quite good at holding grudges – they’re Tomlinsons after all – but hey, they’ve also never been good at not being friends. On one hand, he’s extremely tired and a day in bed watching movies with Harry would have been perfect, but on the other, he doesn’t want to skip an opportunity to make up with Lottie. She’s his sister after all, even if she said some horrible things to him.

“So,” Lottie says when he hasn’t answered in a moment. “Do you want to go or not?”

“Okay,” he nods. “Harry, get me the shirt over there, thanks.”

“See you downstairs,” Lottie mutters and leaves the room.

“Can I come?” Harry asks, reaching towards the floor, fetching the simple, grey shirt Louis discarded last night. “This smells a bit,” he remarks.

“Well, you’re not going to be smelling me are you?”
“Just get another.”

“Fine, pick one then.”

Harry stands from the bed, yawning as he walks over to the dresser. He starts riffling through the top drawer. “Can I come then?”

“Oh,” Louis says, cheeks suddenly burning. “Sorry, I didn’t ask. I thought you wanted to since, you know, last time was… fun.” Fuck, it’s warm in here. Harry doesn’t seem to notice anything though, still looking through the drawer. Louis looks away, awkwardly patting the duvet below him.

“Right,” Harry finally says, walking back over and holding up a black t-shirt with a white Adidas print. “Here, stand.” He holds up the shirt.

“Are you dressing me?” Louis asks.

“Just slip your arms in, will you? You’re so bloody slow.”

Louis grumbles, but nevertheless reaches up and lets Harry slip the shirt down over his body. He pats his shoulders gently, before he grabs his forearms and drags him up from the bed. Louis sighs, following easily. He stumbles into him when he stands and it almost scares him how easily Harry fits him into his side, keeping him upright.

Louis coughs awkwardly, but lets Harry’s arm rest around his waist as they walk downstairs. It’s nothing. It’s nothing. It’s nothing.

They meet Lottie downstairs, and Louis completely ignores how she looks at Harry’s arm fitted around him. He knows what she’s thinking, and yeah, he’s thinking it too. However, it’s nothing.

They get on the road. It’s tentative and somewhat stiff. The rain is pissing down, smattering against the windows, clouding Louis’ sight. He mumbles instructions and Lottie grumbles answers, while Harry sits silently in the back. Louis wonders why he even wanted to come. Being in an environment filled with palpable tension isn’t exactly how Louis would want to spend his Sunday.

It’s not until Lottie starts to wholeheartedly ignore what Louis’ saying that the suffering silence breaks. When he clearly orders her to turn left, she stomps the gas and continues strictly forward.

“What are you doing, Lottie?” he asks sternly. She doesn’t answer, and Louis starts to worry. He glances back at Harry, who seems a little uncertain as well. “Right, just take the next left then and we’ll go back.”

When they reach the next crossroad, Lottie turns right. She hits the gas, and Louis grips the edges of his seat, eyes wide. “Lottie! What are you doing?”

She doesn’t answer, and neither does she slow down. She keeps her eyes on the road, hands tight on the wheel. She is driving way too fast, and Louis doesn’t trust her to take them wherever they’re going safely.

“How?! Where the hell are we going?” he demands, cringing as the scenery flashes by. “Lottie! Stop the car.”

“No,” she says evenly.

“Charlotte! I have a responsibility of what we’re doing here. You need to listen to me, if you don’t
this could end seriously badly. This isn’t okay!”

It’s dead quiet in the car, not a sound coming from the back either.

“Pull the fuck over.”

“Nope.”

Louis looks up, wincing as he spots an approaching car farther down the road. “You better stop this car right now,” he growls. They’re most definitely going to die. Lottie isn’t that bad of a driver, but she lacks of experience and he doesn’t trust her at all. “I’m never driving with you again.”

Lottie slows down a little as they pass the other car, Louis’ heart rate already running too fast. He looks over his shoulder, catching the look of Harry leaning back in his seat, looking white and nervous. Christ. Louis is about to yell when he suddenly sees the sign with the street name on. Water flies up by the curb when Lottie runs through a puddle.

“No fucking way,” he says, voice tight. “I cannot believe you.”

“I’m not sorry, Lou.”

“Fucking traitor,” he hisses. This isn’t okay – this isn’t fine. Especially not in front of Harry. Louis would never in a million years thought that Lottie would do something like this to him. Fuck, he should have known. Of course Lottie suddenly hadn’t forgiven him and decided she wanted them to be friends again. It should have been obvious that something wasn’t right, but then how was he supposed to know she’d do something like this? He closes his eyes as Lottie slows down, turning into a smaller street. “Stop the car,” he says, voice low this time, hand covering his eyes.

“No.”

“Charlotte—“

“I don’t care what you say.”

Louis raises his voice. “It doesn’t matter what you do, okay? This isn’t going to happen. It’s not up to you, do you not understand that? Everything isn’t going to be fine if you lock us in a room for a few minutes. It doesn’t work that way.”

His sister doesn’t answer, so Louis stares palely out the window. This isn’t fine.

Eventually the car comes to a jerky stop down the street. The house where they’ve stopped is in red bricks, the windowpanes white and it looks too proper, too fresh and new. Lottie shuts off the engine, taking the key out and stuffing it into her pocket.

“Louis,” she says seriously. “Dad’s in there, Fizzy too. I’m going inside. I highly suggest you do, too. Harry, you can come as well.”

Louis doesn’t answer, only stares straight out the window in front of him. The raindrops are gathering in heavy lumps against it, the sound making Louis’ head spin instead of making him feel calm like it usually would. The car is too quiet, tension so heavy it’s palpable. Somebody cut could it with a knife, or stick a needle through it and something would explode.

“So,” Lottie murmurs after a few minutes, voice a tad softer. She reaches out and touches his arm. “Are you coming?”
He turns to face her, looking her dead in the eye. “Not a fucking chance in hell.”

He doesn’t flinch when her face falls, teeth sinking into her bottom lip. She looks down, her hair covering her face as she undoes her seatbelt, opening the car door. “Screw you, Lou,” she whispers, before getting out and slamming the door in his face.

God.

Louis leans back in the seat, closing his eyes. He doesn’t want to watch Lottie knock on the front door and walk inside, knowing that Mark is in there. Louis doesn’t want to be here. The air feels suffocating, like someone’s draining the vehicle of all air.

“Can’t fucking breathe in here,” he swears after a long moment, thick with tension. He rips the seatbelt off and jumps out of the car. The rain wets his face instantly, and he pulls the hoodie over his head. The pavement outside the brick house’s yard is gravelly and the puddles are growing. Louis’ sneakers get sodden quickly as he walks around the car, leaning against the side.

Fucking God.

He closes his eyes, squeezing them shut tightly. His hands are locked in fists in the pocket of his hoodie. Fuck. He can’t do this. He’s right in there. His dad – no, stepdad, who isn’t even his fucking stepdad anymore. Just Mark. Who isn’t anything anymore. Not in relation to Louis anyway.

He hears the car door open, but he doesn't want to look up. By now Mark surely knows he's out here, perhaps he's already gazing out the window at him.

Louis couldn't turn around, he could never bear to face him. What would he say? What would he do? There's no possibility of a good outcome. The only plausible outcome is Louis being left feeling like something equivalent to being run over by a truck.

His hoodie is cold and wet all the way through. Why does everything have to be so fucking hard?

He groans, leaning back and facing the sky. Cold droplets land on his skin as he hears the sound of Harry's footsteps stopping next to him. His arm brushes against his, leaning back against the car by his side.

Louis wonders if he's going to say anything, if he's going to ask what the hell is going on. Louis wouldn't know what to answer.

"I knew that your parents had split," Harry says lowly, voice almost vulnerable for whatever reason. "I didn't know it was this complicated."

"Yeah, well," Louis mutters, surprising himself with how even his voice is. "It is." He glances to his right. Harry's eyebrows are knit, mouth pressed together in a line, corners of his mouth pointing down. His shoulders are too stiff. He's blinking too fast.

"Is it, like, how--" He cuts himself off, shaking his head and his voice has gone rough. "I don't--"

Louis tries not to think, just say the words calmly. Explain it. "He's not my dad. Not really. When I was little my mum remarried and Lottie was born. They got divorced before last summer started."

It's been almost a year, he realizes. It feels like a lifetime. They used to be family, proper and all.

"He's, um. I used to call him 'Dad', but he's not. He didn't want me." He clears his throat. "Well, it
took him six months to realize he might after all. So…” Louis kicks off the car, jumping up and
down once, trying to gather some warmth. His eyes are not wet. It's rain.

Harry looks up finally, meeting his eyes. "Did you know before?" he whispers. "Could you feel it
before they told you?"

He knows why Harry is asking, how can he not? There's a reason Louis can't stand being around
Harry's parents – it reminds him of how his own home used to be like before it happened. Harry
knows it's coming, he must.

Louis takes a careful step forward. "Of course I did."

Harry presses his lips together once again, inhaling deeply. His cheeks are bitten by the hard-
hitting wind, the apples pink, and eyes shiny.

Louis speaks slowly. "Even though we're opposites, we're not that different, Styles."

Harry nods. Reality check; they've both got dysfunctional families. In Harry's case it just isn't
official yet.

It's all too similar. Louis' dad hasn't been to a single one of Louis' footie matches this season. He
used to be at every one of them, cheering him on and giving him pep talks and discussed the
match with him afterwards. Not anymore.

"Does it still hurt?"

"All the time."

Harry nods. Then he shakes his head. "Why is everything shit?"

"Yep. It always is, isn't it?" He shakes his head as well, chuckling. "It's even fucking raining."

"Bloody perfect."

"Your hair is wet."

"Well, you look like a drenched puppy, babe."

Babe. Again. He's said it before. "Drenched puppy?"

"Yes."

"Does that mean you find me cute then?" He arches a brow and takes the remaining steps
forward, leaning against Harry. His jeans are wet, and their thighs flush against one another feels
cool.

Harry purses his lips. "Do you know what people do in the rain?"

"Yeah?" He winds his arms around Harry's neck, trying to accommodate to his attempt at a
distraction. They tend to be very good at those, the distractions, so when Harry's hands go to
Louis' hips it's to have him arch into him. Louis comes easily, warmth swimming through his
body despite the horrible weather as he puts his chest against Harry's. "What do they do then?"

"I'll give you a guess," Harry murmurs, eyes locked on Louis' lips.

Louis smiles, standing on his toes, making their chins bump. He purses his lips once, just a little
but it's enough to let their lips touch. “I don’t know, tell me.”
Harry’s nose slots against his, cheek pressed against cheek. “Show you,” he murmurs softly, pushing their lips together.

If Louis could describe how it feels getting kissed by Harry like this he’d probably have better English grades. As it is, his grade is pretty low so there will be no extravagant descriptions. He can feel it in his toes though. Harry sends a wave of hotness through his body by his plush lips alone. Louis could do this for hours; Harry’s tongue warm in his mouth, simply sliding with his, licking the roof of his mouth, his lips sucking Louis’ swollen. It’s a good distraction, it really is. Louis’ breath is heavy within moments, and Harry’s hands tighten on his back.

“You’re so wet,” Harry murmurs, fists clenching around Louis’ hoodie.

Louis snorts a laugh, throwing his head back, cackling. “You did not just say that, love.”

Harry eyes him for a moment, leaning in so their lips are still touching. Then he gets it, and groans. “I meant your jumper,” he moans, hugging him close and kissing his jaw.

“I know,” Louis grins, leaning up to put his mouth on Harry’s again.

They kiss until Louis is fairly certain they’ll both get hypothermia. Harry’s cheeks are too cold against his and it’s starting to feel like he’s holding on to Louis’ body for warmth rather than sexual interests.

"Are you okay?" Louis giggles, thumbs stroking Harry's neck on either side.

"Let's get inside the car, yeah?" Harry says, shivering almost violently.

"Okay," Louis has time to say before Harry tightens his arms around his waist and lifts him up, walking around the car without much effort. "Oh my god," Louis laughs, face pressed to his neck. He smells so perfect. Fuck everything, he could just stay hidden there for the rest of the day.

Harry steps onto the sidewalk, still carrying him and opens the door to the backseat. Then he has to actually let Louis go, but they crawl in, shivering in their wet clothes. Harry's curls are sticking to his temples and cheeks, his lips the only things about him still looking warm. Harry's hands are pale and shaking, and he blows hot air onto them. Louis leans to his side, trying to steal some worth.

"This wasn't good," he says.

"Excuse you, my kisses are excellent."

Louis bats at him. "I meant the standing in the rain part. Imagine if both of the team's captains are sick for the semi-final game."

Harry watches him for a moment. "Are you nervous?"

"Yeah," Louis admits quietly. Harry is on his right, closest to the sidewalk, but Louis stares out the window, at the house on Harry's side. Harry follows his gaze, the car quiet and a little cold.

"Me too," he says slowly.

They fall into a comfortable silence, both of them simply staring at Louis' former stepfather's house. Louis has no idea after how long it happens, but eventually Harry takes Louis’ hand where it's resting on top of his thigh. They don't say anything, Louis doesn't protest and neither does he feel the need to. When they're alone everything is fine.
They stay there, fingers linked on top of Louis' leg for the rest of the time they wait. Eventually Harry closes his eyes, head leaning back against the seat. He looks like he could fall asleep any moment, but Louis can't tear his own eyes from the house.

His dad is in there, his sisters as well, and he can't help but wonder if he shouldn't be in there too.

When Lottie finally stomps back to the car, Harry has fallen asleep and their hands are warm. Louis squeezes Harry's once before finally letting go. They drive home in complete silence.

**

When Louis walks into the diner he’s met with the sight of a herd rowdy boys gathered around two booths, most of them members of the footie team. He isn't sure what he expected when he received a text message from Liam at work after school, but he wasn't really prepared for this. Greg smiled at him kindly when Louis told him he hadn't hung out with the boys in ages, and let him leave early.

It's a few days after Lottie's impromptu father visit.

He walks up to the nearest booth the lads are crowded around by the window. It's seven-thirty-ish, but it's April and the sun is still up and the unusually busy street is visible from the inside.

"'Sup, lads," he says, putting up a little smirk on his face as he leans against the side of the booth. It's been too long since he hung out with them all like this.

“Hey!” Lee says, looking up from under his dark brown fringe. “Yo, you showed!”

“Louis!” Liam grins, holding three chips between his fingers.

“You ordered already?” Louis arches a brow.

“Um,” Liam says, looking sheepish. “Sorry, we didn’t think you’d show up. You never do, really.” He coughs awkwardly, and the rest of the boys seem to shift uncomfortably or cast their eyes down.

Louis wonders when he stopped being reliable, stopped being a constant in the group. It hits him how strangely mutual it feels. He doesn't feel very much part of the gang anymore. He and Harry seem to have holed themselves away.

"It's fine," he says easily. "As long as you make room for me in the middle. Move over, Oli."

Oli rolls his eyes, but complies, everyone around the table grinning with ease again as Louis shuffles in to sit between Liam and Oli. Lee, Stan, and Ed are on the other side, the table between them all filled with napkins, drinks, dippers, chips and burgers. It's greasy and Louis should probably be yelling at them for pigging out like this before the upcoming semi-final game, but he doesn't. The boys deserve a break, it's a week and a half left until the match, and besides, Harry and Greg always tell him to relax a bit. Maybe he should listen.

"Chips, Lewis?" Lee offers.

He shakes his head. "No, thanks." The boys roll their eyes. "Oi, you can stuff yourselves with carbs, you filthy animals. I'm not stopping you, but I'm not gonna."

Mostly he's just tired of being the one always controlling everything and making sure everything's on point. He just wants to be able to relax for once. Sadly, with some things it seems like he can't – at least not when it comes to himself.
"Even Harry is less strict than you," Ed says.

"And Harry eats carrots and cauliflower for breakfast," Oli snorts, making the other boys laugh.

"Harry doesn't like cauliflower," Louis mutters before he even realizes what he's saying. He doesn't even know how he knew that.

His voice is overshadowed by the boys' laughter, but Liam seems to have caught his words. Louis feels his eyes on him, all the while his neck starts feeling hot.

"Is this diet?" he asks Liam, pointing at his cup of coke.

"Ye—"

"Cool." He grabs the drink, sipping tensely from the straw, shoulders tight.

"Speaking of Mr. Yoga," Stan chuckles. "Harry had a love bite the size of Mars on his ribs a couple of weeks ago."

Louis nearly chokes. His heel accidentally clashes into Liam's shin, making him audibly gasp and wince.

"Sorry," Louis says, eyes fastened on Stan in front of him.

"Yes!" Lee says, banging his hand against the table, making Ed jump and nearly drop his dippers in the process. "I knew I wasn't the only one who saw it!"

"He has them all the time, too," Oli chips in.

"It was huge, like definitely a ten minute project," Lee continues. His enthusiasm reminds Louis terribly of Niall, and he's hit by a heavy feeling in his gut. At this point he only feels dull thinking of his best friend. "It has got to be at least a little bit painful."

"Yep. Remember when he pretended he didn't know what I was talking about when I asked who he was shagging?" Stan laughs. "As if they haven't been showing up in different spots all year. He's definitely got a regular fuck."

Okay. Louis has missed out on a lot of things here. Is this a topic of discussion among the team these days? Harry is not being careful enough. Louis should also stop leaving love bites over his entire body. His nice little body. Christ. Relax Louis. Fucking butterflies.

"You sure seem invested," he snaps.

"It's hard not to notice! How did he expect to keep it a secret? We all shower together."

"Lads, you can all relax, I asked him about it," Ed says calmly.

He did what.

"What did he say?" Louis is the quickest to ask, unable to help himself. His leg restlessly jumps under the table. He needs to know. He has got to know.

"You know, you two have been unusually impassive toward each other. Why are you interested?" Stan arches a brow back at him, but Louis senses he's only retaliating for Louis' little snip earlier. He shrugs. "Missed his birthday, didn't I? Need to gather some intel. Come on now, lad, tell me something valuable."
Ed shrugs, flicking some of his ginger hair off his forehead. He's been talking about cutting it lately. "He said it's good sex."

Louis stares at the boy. Is that all? You're not going to go into explicit detail? Not explain if he said it tenderly? If he seemed indifferent? Was he honest, does he genuinely like the person who leaves marks on his skin? Did it seem like he had freakishly annoying fucking things in his stomach when he talked? For god's sake.

"Is that all?" he deadpans.

The rest of the boys turn to Ed, eyebrows arched. "More information, please," Lee says.

Louis carefully brings the cup to his mouth. He casually taps his finger against it, hand is clenched around it tensely. He sips, sips, sips.

"That's all."

Come on.

"What is this?" Louis shakes his head, starting to stand. "You're all a bunch of gossips, yet you can't tell me something worthy of my attention?" He sighs, crawling out of the booth, elbowing Liam in the go. When he finally gets out, he sighs and mutters, "I need some fucking water. This dry taste of fucking conversation is parching."

He walks up to the cashier where a younger woman and a man are standing behind the counter, grimly watching Louis' mates make a mess in the corner of the diner. Working in the fro-yo shop, Louis knows what an inconvenience it is when people are loud and cause trouble. He hopes they don't hate them.

"Can I have a water, please?" he requests.

"Bottled or tap?"

"Tap's fine."

"It's free."

“Cool.”

He waits while the girl finds him a glass and fills it. She hands it over, but he stays by the till, giving himself a moment before he has to go back to the table. He loves his mates, they’re good fun, but talking about Harry is stressing him out. Thinking about Harry he could do for ages when he’s alone (there are loads of things; curls, legs, bum, hip rolling technique, lip plumpness, cock, smile, his laugh) but talking about it like this only makes him think about the worrying stuff (feelings, hand-holding, coming out?, flappy insects in the stomach area).

He shakes his head, taking a large sip of the water. He brings his phone up and taps into his messages, thumb hovering over his conversation with Harry. His name in Louis’ phone book is simply his name, but Louis has recently had the urge to make it something more personal. He tends to use emojis for his friends’ names, or make jokes out of them. Take Oli, who is simply an olive emoji. Harry is one of the most important people in his life right now. He should have an emoji.

The door to the diner opens several times, the bell chiming loudly and interrupting Louis’ trail of thoughts. He presses the home button and exits his messages, pushing his phone into his pocket. He can talk to Harry later. He’s supposed to be socializing.
He looks up, internally sagging as soon as he sees who’s arrived. Girls. Jasmine and her pals, to be more exact. He has been avoiding her like the plague since the bathroom incident. He walks back over to his own table. It’s darker outside now, the sun having almost set as he sits down next to Liam at the end of the booth.

“Wey, you’re back,” Stan grins. “Look.” He points at where Jasmine and her friends are sitting down at one of the tables on the other side of the room. “Girls!”

“I have eyes, thanks,” Louis says haughtily.

Stan snorts. “You’re so bloody uptight. When was the last time you hooked up with anyone anyway? Did you even get a New Year’s kiss? Are girls even on your radar?”

The fuck does he know. The fuck does Louis know. Does he like girls at all anymore? Currently what’s on his radar is football and Harry, and there isn’t much space for anything else. How is he supposed to even figure that out if all he can see when he thinks of love and sex is Harry’s fucking dimples and his greeny, green eyes?

“The summer party at Jonny’s!” Lee remembers. “You and Hannah by the pool!”

“Don’t remind me,” Louis mutters.

“That is so not the spirit,” Stan says, sighing. “Come on, you gotta live a little. We’ll invite the girls over and you can get with the brunette. She’s been pining for you all year.”

“You are so annoying.” Louis shakes his head, staring at Stan. The other boy stares back, and it turns to a bit of a competition of who can gaze the longest without blinking or faltering. They end up laughing.

Louis shakes his head, chuckling. “Mate, go ahead and go for her, I’m not interested.”

"As if that matters, she's only into you,” he retorts exasperatedly. "What's holding you back?” He stares at Louis expectantly, who feels the rest of the boys’ eyes on him as well.

"She's not my... type."

The boys collectively sigh and Louis grimaces indignantly. Seriously. He rolls his eyes, leaning back and crossing his arms.

“Actually,” Liam says, “I think Louis is right. If he’s not into her then it’s just mean to lead her on for a shag.”

“Thank you.”

Stan groans. “I hate you lads, you’re so lame. Yo!” he then calls. “Claire!” A blonde girl at Jasmine’s table looks up, then waves enthusiastically. “Yes, Claire! Babe, get your party over here, we’ll make room.”

Louis rolls his eyes, mentally sending daggers at his mate that’s usually not this bloody persistent. It’s probably because he has a thing for the Claire girl, Louis thinks in displeasure.

Soon the girls have brought their stuff over, and Oli and Ed move a table to fit it next to their booth, not even noticing the glare the man behind the counter sends them. They chatter happily and Louis gives a quick smile at their greetings. Jasmine pops down in the chair next to Louis closest to the booth. He can’t help but think that Harry wouldn’t be a fan of it.
"Hey! Louis!" Jasmine says lightly, smiling happily. "How are you?"

"Fine, you?"

"Brilliant," she grins. She’s in a black polo, her long hair shiny where it falls over her shoulder. Her lips are painted in dark red, mouth full and teeth white. Objectively Louis could easily say that she’s beautiful.

He nods slowly, the silence between them feeling rather palpable suddenly. "Right," he says, hand landing on his thigh loudly, turning everyone’s attention on him. "I'm gonna go. Got a paper due in two weeks.” He gives a quick, rather insincere smile before he waves and stands, turning to head out.

The boys roll their eyes, but Louis can’t be bothered. He gets out into the fresh air, feeling a little less suffocated. However, the door doesn’t close when he expects it too.

"Hey, Lou! Louis."

Louis turns, shoulders tight. It’s Jasmine. She catches up with him just outside, hand catching his arm. She leaves it there.

"Hi?" His brows rise as if he's confused to what she could want, but he's not stupid. If Stan is right then she's into him, or she – according to Harry – it’s Harry she wants to get to. Lately though, that possibility seems less and less plausible. Would she really continue all year? Harry hasn't even been in near distance all these last times Louis' encountered her. Maybe she just has a misplaced, unrequited crush? Or perhaps, she's just simply being friendly.

Honestly, Louis can't tell. If he could he obviously wouldn't be fussing this much about what Harry’s real feelings are.

Jasmine meets his eyes, seeming sincere. "How are you, really?"

His brows knit. "What do you mean?"

She sighs, ticking her head to the side. Her eyes are uncomfortably sympathetic. "I know you were crying that day, Lou."

Louis rolls his eyes, running a hand over his face. In what world does she believe he would ever want to talk to her about this? Everybody who knows him knows that he hates talking about his feelings, and worse, he loathes crying. Literally, why would he want to have this conversation outside a diner?

"Jas, I'm fine. We're not talking about this." He turns to leave, but her hand is persistent around his arm.

"Louis, you can talk to me." She tucks a strand of long, brown hair behind her ear, her matching eyes blinking nervously. "I know it's a little forward, but I really think you could use talking to someone. Losing your best friend is hard, I would know." Her mouth tilts down, but her thumb strokes Louis' arm warmly.

Louis dubiously takes a step back. He doesn't know how to react to this, honestly. "Jas, babe. I'm sorry if you’ve lost a friend or something, but I haven't. Niall's still my best mate, that hasn’t changed. Thanks for your concern, really, but I'm good. I'll see you, around."

He squeezes her hand once, and then lets her drop it when he turns to leave. He takes in the expression on her face, her mouth pulled into a small 'O'. Rejection. He feels bad, he's truly sorry,
but he can't act the way she wants. They just couldn't be friends.

God, this is not a problem he wanted to deal with.

He leaves her standing outside the diner, swiftly hurrying to his car. He should go home, do some homework, or something. Maybe try to share a sentence or two with Lottie. Perhaps.

Before Louis opens the car door, someone taps his shoulder. He turns around, scared it's Jasmine who hasn't had enough yet. It's not her though, and he wonders why he even thought it would be. She's just a girl, why would she seek out another opportunity to be turned down?

In the end, it turns out it's Liam. He looks like he's jogged, probably to catch Louis before he leaves. "Hey, man."

"What's up?" Louis asks, raising a brow.

"Just wanted to tell you," Liam says, smiling crookedly. "I know Harry's best friend pretty well. He told me Harry's said his person is – Harry's words – a pretty fucking good person. He said they're cute when they sing in the shower when they think no one can hear, and his eyes are very lovely." Liam grins, before he slaps Louis on the shoulder and jogs off toward his own car.

Louis is left gaping, entirely breathless. Liam said “his”. The butterflies are thriving.

**

So, Liam knows.

Louis contemplates this while he cleans off the counter at the shop the next day, brows furrowed. He supposes he should be angry, knowing that Harry’s friends are leaving loose ends all over the place. Surprisingly, most of all to himself, he's not. He doesn't quite know how, but he's not worried. Maybe it's because of how nice Liam sounded, or how sweet he looked when he smiled a little impishly as he called Harry’s fuck his person. Louis quite likes that word. Maybe Harry has become Louis’ person, too, in some ways.

He doesn't know how Liam figured it out, but it's oddly comforting that he did. Louis trusts him.

Who else knows? Harry’s family, Lottie, and Zayn. Maybe even Sophia. Couples tell each other everything, right?

Speaking of Zayn. Niall.

The two of them are evidently friends these days. Maybe Niall even knows. What if he does? Would Louis be able to skip the whole coming out chapter? In a way he really wishes that’d be the case, but at the same time not. He doesn’t want it coming from anyone other than himself. He still doesn’t know how, though, but he wants to. Suddenly for the first time there’s actual longing to just spit it out. He wants to tell his best friend. He wants to be free of it.

He needs to take a breather after he realizes that, because wow if that doesn’t feel heavenly to finally come to. He wants to tell. He just has got to find the right moment.

“What are you smiling about?” Greg says, and Louis finds him grinning down at him, hip against the counter. Louis lifts a brow in return, smirking back.

“Nothing. I’m just in a good mood.”

“That’s nice. How come?”
“I don’t know.” he shrugs. Maybe it’s because he feels like he's got people to catch him now, just in case. His smile broadens.

“Sure, you do! What is this?” Greg laughs. "You’re all sunny." He eyes Louis, lingering on his face for a moment. His voice is soft. "It suits you."

Louis simply grins, incapable of doing anything else at the moment, and tosses the wet towel at Greg’s chest. It leaves a wet patch on his black t-shirt, and the older boy arches a brow.

“Really?”

“What are you going to do about it?” Louis says playfully. He’s in such a good mood. It’s completely liberating.

“Do you really want to know?”

“What is that supposed to mean?” He cautiously watches as Greg raises his hand, holding the towel up. Greg takes a few steps back, turning on the sink. “Don’t you dare,” Louis warns.

Greg only smirks, wetting the towel entirely under the water. He slowly shuts it off, while Louis steps back warily. His eyes flick between Greg and the dripping dish towel, knowing that it’s only a matter of time before he attacks. Louis searches for some kind of weapon, but the only thing he sees are tiny, colourful plastic spoons. He grabs them.

Then Greg advances and Louis yelps, running away as Greg chases him. He doesn’t get far, Greg catching his waist and rubbing his face into the towel. It’s so gross.

He manages to fight him off, and then throws his spoons in his direction. He misses spectacularly, a rainbow of spoons loudly landing, completely spread out on the floor behind him as he dashes out from behind the counter. He feels when the towel splashes against his back, wetly soaking his shirt.

Louis groans and balls it up, throwing it back at Greg who’s crouching behind the till. He hits him in the neck.

“Ow!” Greg laughs, and Louis cackles victoriously.

The fight continues. Louis builds an empire behind a table and two chairs while Greg throws more plastic spoons. In return Louis sends balled up napkins at him. When Louis finally runs out, his hair is dishevelled, his shirt has several wet spots, and the shop looks like mess. Thankfully it’s a slow day.

“Leave me alone! Surrender!” Louis calls from behind his table.

“Never!”

“You’re fucking tall! And older! Huge! Surrender to me, I’m tiny in comparison, and I deserve it!” It’s unfair, really.

“You’re tiny in comparison to everyone! It doesn’t count! By now you should be used to it, you tackle down footie players way bigger than you on a regular day!”

“I’m 5’9”! But you’re still bigger!”

"Well, you have other traits that make up for it!"
Louis peeks over the edge of his table. "Like what?" he wonders, interested.

“Surrender and I’ll tell you.”

“Promise you won’t attack me?”

“I promise!” he calls. Louis can see his hands shooting up from behind the counter.

He slowly stands, Greg doing the same. He looks almost as rumpled and disarrayed as Louis, light hair standing a little on end.

The door chimes then and someone walks into the shop. Louis tears his eyes from Greg's, alarmed because of the state of the shop. It’s really a mess.

And, oh. No bother, it’s Harry.

Harry. Oh shit, it’s Harry.

Louis instantly goes lukewarm, his body feeling milky as his eyes lock on him. Harry’s hair is newly washed and the curls are lovely and soft-looking. There’s a pair of Ray Bans covering his eyes, his legs are in a pair of sinful blue jeans and torso covered in a simple white shirt. He looks wonderful.

Louis evidently looks like shit.

Harry’s here, though, as in at Louis’ work. He saw him a couple of hours ago at footie practice, sure, but he’s clearly been home for a few hours in between. Practice was easy. Liam acted normal and Harry laughed at something Louis said during water break, which went to sit on the shelf next to “good person” and “cute”. God, Harry really said those things?!

Harry takes off his shades, hanging them at the front of his shirt. His eyes fall on Louis, who awkwardly pats down his hair, fixing his shirt. They regard each other for a moment, simply looking.

“So, this is where you work?” Harry then grins, checking out the shop. Louis nods, feeling a little coy all of a sudden. Harry nods, eyes locking on the spoons littered on the floor. “Nice,” he says, smiling.

Louis rolls his eyes. “It’s a slow day so we were just having fun, throwing some stuff. I won.”

“Sure, you did,” Harry says easily.

“He didn’t,” Greg interrupts from behind the till. “A minute ago he just surrendered.”

Louis quirks a brow. “And you were just about to tell me my beautiful traits.” He walks up to the counter, hopping up to sit next to the till, facing Harry. He sees his gaze follow him, standing a little closer. Louis looks back at Greg. “And those were?”

He smiles softly. “I was going to say that you’re adorable and attractive.”

He’s a little surprised, but damn right. Louis is adorable and attractive.

He’s about to declare as much, but then suddenly Harry’s scoffs. Louis’ eyes flicker to him, finding him with his arms crossed, standing even closer now. Harry’s eyes are narrowed, evidently displeased. "Adorable and attractive?" he huffs. "Rugged and handsome, more likely."

Louis’ mouth opens, surprised. "Rugged and handsome?" he asks.
Louis' mouth opens, surprised. "Rugged and handsome?" he asks.

Harry's face is set determinedly, staring grimly in Greg's direction out of the corner of his eye. "Yes."

"Thanks," Louis chuckles, feeling like his stomach is doing somersaults. He watches as Harry shuffles on his feet, coming even closer. Eventually he leans on the glass container that's keeping the toppings for the frozen yoghurt. His arm is only inches away from Louis' shoulder, and if he wanted Louis could easily splay his hand on his tummy.

Harry looks down at him and Louis meets his gaze. Harry's just watching though, so he raises his brows. Harry doesn't seem to notice, but his thumb grazes Louis' knee. He's wearing jeans, but that doesn't seem to matter because goose bumps spread over his skin anyway. For some reason the image of them having sex pops up in his brain. What can he say? He's a teenager and Harry's fucking gorgeous. His eyes stay locked on Harry's, tongue licking over his lower lip. That Harry seems to notice, and he seems to realize what Louis' thinking about.

He smiles, small and genuine, finger pressing down on Louis' thigh. Can Louis take him and fuck right now, please?

"What was your order again?" Greg suddenly pipes up. Louis is almost startled. It feels like they've been staring at each other for days. Louis could keep going.

"He didn't order," Louis says, reluctantly averting his gaze from Harry. "Do you want anything?" he asks softly, eyes quickly back on him again. He's got a tiny braid in his hair.

"No." Harry shakes his head, curls softly bouncing. "I came to tell you, I'm planning a jog for the team."

"A jog?"

"Yes," he nods. "Team building, jogging a few miles in the woods and stuff. Could be good for us before the away game, I think."

"That sounds actually good," Louis says. Harry rolls his eyes. "No, really!" he chuckles. "When?"

"Saturday afternoon, next week."

"The day before the game then. Sounds nice." He squeezes Harry's forearm.

"Right," Greg says impatiently next to him. "We need to get back to work."

"There are no customers."

"Well, the sorbet needs to be refilled and this place looks horrible."

Louis sighs, but in his periphery he notices Harry giving Greg a look. Louis knows that look, and his belly suddenly feels floppy, exhilarated. "Fine," he says, leans closer to him, murmuring. "Are you coming over later?"

He's not flirting. Alright, he might be.

"If you want?" Harry murmurs back. He shrugs and stuffs his hands into the pockets of his trousers. Standing like that his shoulders seem broader, torso leaner in a delicious way. Louis wants to lick his stomach.

He tears his eyes away from Harry's t-shirt covered tummy, looking up to meet his eyes,
swallowing. "Yeah." He blinks slowly. "You could stay over...?"

"I'll see what I can do." They both know he will. "Bye, Lou."

Louis lets a small breath escape his lips. "Bye."

Harry winks as he backs away, fitting his shades back on his nose. He leaves the shop, Louis exhaling where he’s sitting.

Harry is so bloody perfect and Louis is so fucking screwed.

**

*Are you coming to the away game next Sunday? It's the semi-final :) we could talk after?*

Louis sent the text message over an hour ago. Niall hasn't answered. It's probably the twelfth time he's checked his phone by now. He's on the couch at home, lounging with his feet propped up on the armrest and a cushion under his head. There's a rerun of a week old Premier League match playing on the TV, but he isn't paying much attention. He's a little sore from practice, but he should be revising, truthfully. The last exams of the year are coming up.

"Love," his mother calls from the kitchen.

"Yeah." He hears her chair scrape against the floor and her steps coming closer to the living room. He keeps his eyes shut.

She chuckles when she sees how he's spread out on the sofa. "Are you comfortable enough, sweetheart?"

"I could use someone to fan me, I think."

"It's not quite warm enough for that yet." He opens one eye. She's leaning in the arch of the doorway, hand resting comfortably on her hip. She looks nice.

"You're all dressed up?" She's even got lipstick, he notices.

"Yeah, I'm going out with a few people from work tonight."

"Oh." That's nice. It was a long time ago she did that. "Have fun, Mum. Be careful, don't drink too much," he smirks.

She rolls her eyes, but smiles. "I was actually going to talk to you about next weekend. The girls and I are going away as you know."

"Wait," he frowns. "Next weekend? My match is next weekend. Aren't you coming?"

"Hush, silly. We'll be back by then!"

Oh. His heart rate slows significantly. "Good."

"What I wanted to say is that you're allowed to have a few friends over if you want, but no big parties."

"I'm not going to throw a party the week of the most important match ever." Come on.

"I know, but I wanted to be a proper mummy and say it anyway," she winks.
Louis rolls his eyes, smiling. "You are a proper mum."

"Alright, love." She purses her lips. "Can I ask about Harry?"

He cautiously meets her eyes. "What do you mean?"

"We've never talked about it, darling, but I didn't know you were so close all of a sudden?"

He shrugs, looking at the TV. "I don't know. We're just friends now, I guess."

"That's nice. About time you grew up at least. He seems like a nice boy."

"Mum."

"Yes, yes. I'll go." She grins. "I'll be home later."

"Curfew at ten!" He calls after her, and he hears her laugh down the hall.

His phone chirps and he almost falls off the couch. It takes him a second to realize that it's not Niall though, because it was Harry's ringtone.

_Come over please xxxxxxx_

He frowns. Harry _has_ been spending a little more time at home lately, but the situation with his parents hasn't seemed to have changed significantly. Also, x's?

_Is something wrong_, he asks.

_No just come please !!!_

_Ok_

He gets up from the couch, yawning and stretching his arms above his head. He contemplates if he should go fetch lube and condoms from his drawer upstairs, but he figures Harry would have said so if he wanted him to bring something. Lately it hasn't been entirely certain that they will be having sex of any sort when they hang out. Louis doesn't exactly mind, because Harry gave him a handjob yesterday afternoon in Louis' shower.

He slips into his shoes by the door, grabbing his jacket.

"Where are you going?"

He turns, finding Lottie standing by the entrance to the kitchen.

"Harry's," he says hesitantly. She hasn't been speaking with him much lately.

She nods slowly. "Figured. Mum found a random button down in the wash, just so you know. How many shirts is it now? Four? You should be more careful."

It's a little strange that she's looking out for him, but he hopes she's missing their friendship as much as he's been missing it. It's not easy being without Niall and her.

"Thanks, Lots."

"Can you give me a ride to my boyfriend's house?"

He grins. "So, that's what you really wanted?"
"Whatever, Lewis."

He chuckles, and they both file into the car soon enough. He drops her off a couple of blocks away, giving her a hug. It takes her a moment to squeeze him back, but eventually she locks her arms around his waist and presses her face to his neck. It's lovely. Louis has missed her.

"Still angry with you," she mutters before she closes the door.

Louis figures that's as good as he gets right now. It's cool.

He arrives at Harry's house a few minutes later, noting one of the sleek cars parked in the driveway. He presses his lips together, feeling a little reluctant in case Harry's parents are home.

He slowly strolls up to the porch, feeling wary as he presses down the door handle. He's learned that Harry never opens the door if you knock, and apparently the Styles family don't see the point of locking doors. He walks in, carefully avoiding making any noise. He feels silly, kind of, but having a conversation with Anne alone or even with Harry's father is something that sits very low on his list of things he'd find enjoyable.

He quietly makes his way to the stairs, finding the living room empty when he peeks his head inside. Feeling a little safer he trudges upstairs, heading for Harry's room. It's simply down the hall, and Louis feels rather calm when there are only a few yards left. Something brushes his calf.

He almost jumps out of his skin, leaping away and whacking his shoulder in the wall.

There's a cat.

It meows casually as it continues to saunter in no hurry down the hall, while Louis' hand's covering his chest completely in horror. What the hell.

"You never told me you have a fucking cat, you know?" Louis tells Harry once he opens his door, heart still pumping in his throat.

Harry's on his bed, sitting, like Louis usually finds him, leaning against the headboard. He looks a little tired, curls loose and soft around his face. Louis flops down on the bed, looking up at him.

"That's Dusty," Harry says lamely, eyes trained on his knees. They're pulled up close to his chest, lips pursed.

"What's going on?" Louis asks.

"I don't know." He shrugs.

"You sounded urgent."

He shrugs again.

"Hey," Louis says, sitting down on the edge of the bed. "Are you okay?" Harry doesn't answer. Louis watches him in silence for a long moment. "Want me to suck you off...?" he asks slowly, raising a brow.

Harry smiles a little, at least the corner of his mouth seems to quirk upwards as if he’s holding in a little chuckle. “Yeah,” he says.

Louis rolls his eyes, but crawls up on the bed as Harry makes himself comfortable, lying down on the bed with his head resting on a pillow. Louis pushes Harry’s shirt up to his armpits, giving a
tiny lick to his flat stomach. Harry squirms, laughing, and Louis smiles back. He plants a small kiss on the spot.

He quickly unbuttons Harry's trousers and slides his hands under the small of his back to pull them down. Harry pliantly lies still on the bed, letting Louis manhandle him until his pants are halfway down his thighs.

He's not even got a semi on, but Louis sinks his teeth into his skin at the jut of his hip. Harry hisses, but soon relaxes as Louis licks over the bite. He continues to trail kisses over his lower stomach and groin, feeling his thighs tremble slightly under himself. He sucks a mark under Harry's navel, giving it a little peck before he looks up at him.

He grips his cock with his left hand, giving him small tugs as he watches his face contort with pleasure. Louis can feel himself growing hard simply at the sight of his face, mouth ajar and brows knitted.

"Louis," he says then. He's a little breathless, but other than that he speaks almost conversationally, slight strain in his voice. "Do you think you could go down on me now?" he exhales, chest falling.

Louis almost laughs. He's fucking adorable. There's no way around it. "Yes, H."

"Thanks, baby." He clears his throat, making another heavy exhale.

Louis takes a steady hold at the base of his length and licks his lip. He opens his mouth and slowly takes him down. Harry reacts instantly. It's obvious he really tries to stop himself, but it's pointless because his hips buck up on their own accord anyway. Louis supposes it was a while he ago he sucked him off; he's mostly been giving him handjobs.

He sucks him deeper until his nose barely touches Harry's stomach (which is a feat, because hello, Harry's huge – a fight they've had plenty of times. Harry claims he's better at giving blowjobs because he can deepthroat better, but in Louis' defence Harry's mouth is fucking gigantic and Louis' cook has more girth than length), and stays there for as long as he can. His eyes water and he breathes harshly through his nose, but he soon has to pull away to breathe properly. Harry's hips follow, but Louis takes a steady hold on him to keep him in place.

"H," he reminds, pressing a thumb into his thigh.

"Uh-huh," he breathes, hand tangling in Louis' hair.

He takes him down again, this time bobs his head up and down, the slide easy. Harry tastes a little salty from pre-come, but he's rather sweet (another argument – "you should eat more fruit, Lewis") but it's not as if Louis has anyone to compare him with.

Harry's breathing gets more and more laboured soon enough, hips getting jerky. He pulls at Louis' hair – not too harsh, just a warning – and Louis hums around his cock, making Harry moan out loud.

"Lou," he groans. "Lou, I'm gonna – Uh."

Louis squeezes his hip soothingly and it's not long before Harry finishes, warm spurts of come filling Louis' mouth. He sucks it up (pun intended) and swallows, taking it all so they won't have to get a towel to clean him up. Harry moans through it, fingers scratching Louis' scalp.

When he's done, Louis tucks Harry back into his pants and leans back to give him room to pull his trousers up. Harry's forehead is a little warm, as is the small of his back. Louis' still half-hard in his
jeans and the feeling of Harry's skin against his fingers isn't making it better.

He crawls up to the headboard, tucking a pillow behind his back. Harry sits beside him, slightly farther down so his head is in line with Louis' left shoulder when he leans back.

"Thanks," he says, exhaling.

Louis nods. "S'fine."

Harry looks up at him. "Want me to get you off?" He nods down at Louis' crotch. His curls are askew and his eyes are a little droopy.


Harry hums, head drooping to Louis' shoulder. Louis can feel the scent of his shampoo, green apple this time, his hair only inches from his nose. Louis wraps his closest arm around Harry's neck, fingers sinking into his hair. He brushes it off his forehead, carding it back delicately. It's soft. Silky.

"Mum and the girls are going away the weekend of the match," Louis says idly.

"But they always watch –"

"They'll be back on time."

"Oh."

"Yeah," Louis hums.

"They're always there," Harry says quietly.

"I was thinking you could stay over, like, the whole weekend if you wanted...?" It could be nice. The whole weekend to themselves, just relaxing. Maybe it's silly.

“Sounds brilliant,” Harry hums.

Louis tries to bite down his smile. He brushes Harry’s forehead lightly with his thumb. “Cool.”

They’re silent for a while. Louis finds Harry’s closed his eyes when he glances down. He wonders if he’s fallen asleep, but after a moment more he feels him shift a little closer.

“If I ask my parents to come watch the game, do you think they’d come?” Harry murmurs.

Thing is, Louis can’t answer that. He has no idea. He’s fairly certain that Anne and Des absolutely love Harry, but he wouldn’t put it past them overlook it, prioritize it away. He wants to tell him that if they love him then they’ll be there, but it isn’t true. If they don’t show, it would be a hard blow. Louis knows what that kind of disappointment feels like.

“I don’t know,” he whispers in lieu of answering. “But I think you should definitely ask, though. Even if they don’t care about football, they care about you. Asking them might help.”

“Your’re wise when you want to be.”

“It’s just this particular subject,” Louis says lowly. “I’ve got A’s in dysfunctional families.”

The joke that wasn’t really a joke falls flat, and they’re quiet again. They’re just breathing slowly, Louis stroking Harry’s hair. It’s quite lovely, despite the heavy subject.
"Do you think we're going to win?" Louis wonders, honestly.

Harry’s answer comes easily, yet it’s earnest. "Yeah."

In this moment it would be so easy to ask Harry if he feels something for Louis too. It feels so normal, sitting here with him, just talking. He couldn’t be sure, but it feels like there’s something there and it’s mutual.

Before Louis can think any further, Harry’s hand reaches his. He looks down, finding he’s reached over Louis’ lap. He grips Louis’ hand, linking their fingers just like in the car a few weeks ago. Louis lets him knit them together, continuing to softly card through his hair with his other hand.

He could lean down and kiss his forehead. It would be appropriate, he thinks. Harry’s so tired and soft. Maybe that sort of thing requires having talked about where you stand relationship-wise, though.

There’s a knock on the door, and Anne pokes her head into the room. Louis’ hard-on has gone down by now, but he wonders if he should let go of Harry. The boy doesn’t move, however, so Louis remains how he is. Harry’s mum’s eyes widen when she spots them on the bed, but she doesn’t seem fazed. Just like Louis’ mother, Anne surprisingly seems less stressed. There aren’t as many wrinkles creasing her eyes or mouth. She looks peaceful, to a degree.

“Oh, hi,” she says, voice lowered. “Didn’t know you had come over, Louis. I was just going to tell Harry that dinner’s ready. Louis, would you like to join us?”

Err. Rather not.

“Oh, I’ve got to get home. Was just stopping by, really.”

Harry leaves his head against Louis’ shoulder, continuing to feel heavy by his side. “I’ll be down, Mum,” he says, sighing. It doesn’t even feel like Harry remembers that he’s still holding Louis’ hand. Louis remembers, of course he does. The touch is like an electric cord, sending hotness up his entire arm, making his head swirl. It scares him a little that Harry might not feel the same, that it’s a big deal. What if he’s the only one with butterflies? It’s a scary thought, that Harry still considers him his nemesis. He can’t, can he?

“Alright,” Anne says. “I’ll see you around, Louis.”

“Bye.” He waves, giving her a quick smile before she closes the door.

Harry sits up, shoulders slouched and eyes tired. He sits farther down on the bed, staring at the door, but keeps his hand in Louis’, arm stretched back. “Do you want to know something?” He doesn’t look back.

“What?”

“They haven’t said a word. About me, being gay.”

“Oh,” Louis breathes. “You’d never told them before, yeah?”

Harry shakes his head, swallowing. “Not a word. It was like it’d never happened when I got home from yours the day after the dinner party. It’s not like they treat me differently or think less of me, but just the fact that they completely ignore it is worse. I know they don’t care if I marry a boy, but. Just, like,” he clears his throat, but Louis can hear how clogged he sounds, “maybe they could
tell me they love me anyway, you know?"

It hits a little close to home. Wishing someone would tell you they love you is painful, especially because there’s no way to ask for it. Especially when it’s your parents, the ones you shouldn’t have to ask.

It’s impossible that Harry thinks of Louis as his enemy. They’re not enemies – they’re friends.

“Just so you know,” he says quietly, staring at Harry’s shoulder in front of him. His hand is almost crushing Harry’s in his. “I think you’re very brave for coming out to your entire family. I also think you deserve a lot of happy things.” He swallows. “I’ve got your back.”

The minute he’s said it the room feels several times quieter.

Harry turns around, eyes big and mouth open. Then he lets Louis’ hand go, but only to cup Louis cheeks and kiss him.

**

"Did you know that dolphins are the only animals that have sex for pleasure?" Harry asks.

Louis stares back at him impassively.

"Like, except for humans." His voice is slow, drawling, and he's looking down at Louis through half lidded eyes.

"How did you learn that?"

"Facts about dolphins dot com."

"Did you search that up yourself?"

"Was just browsing, you know."

"Cool."

Harry is peculiar, to say the least. He's also funny, intelligent and likes fluffy animals. He also calls Louis 'babe' and 'baby'.

Louis adds these to the list of things he'll use when he's going to tell Niall that he's got butterflies for Harry. He's going to need heavy loads of reasons as to why he's actually likeable, because after spending three years complaining to Niall about him, he's got to have good reasons as to why he's suddenly changed his mind. Obviously, Louis likes to be prepared.

At the moment, Harry is leaning back against his locker in the changing room. They're the first there, early even, and having changed into their footie kits they're currently taking advantage of a moment alone. Apparently Anne has become more and more insistent that Harry sleeps and eats at home, so their time together to make out has been reduced by at least 25 percent. Louis knows because his lips are less dry than they usually are.

He's laced his arms around Harry's waist, the other boy keeping his wound around Louis' shoulders, head leaning back against the locker. Louis watches him from beneath, pursing his lips so they brush against his chin.

"Do you often google animal facts?"

"Sometimes. Couldn't sleep last night."
He looks it, and acts it too. He blinks slowly, drawls when he speaks and his body is incredibly soft.

"Why?" Louis inquires with a hum.

Harry shrugs, having shut his eyes completely. "Lots of yelling. Fighting."

It absolutely tears Louis inside hearing how hopeless he sounds. Louis knows exactly what it's like, and seeing Harry go through that now, almost exactly a year since Louis did, makes the wound twitch. He wishes he could change it somehow, but he supposes all he can do is offer some support.

"I'm sorry, H." It's all he can say for now, but it doesn't feel like nearly as much.

"It's not your fault, babe."

"You know," Louis says, pressing his forehead to Harry's chest, literally speaking to his torso. "I think it's really good you'll be staying at mine this weekend. 'Cause then you'll get proper sleep and rest up."

"Are you just saying that because you want to fuck me?" Harry asks.

"You hurt me, Harry," Louis says. "As if I'd keep you from being able to perform at your peak on the most important match of our lives." As if he were that heartless. As if he didn't care about him.

"I’m kidding," Harry says, but Louis feels uncertain.

"You don’t actually believe that right?" he wonders, almost a whisper.

Slowly, Harry shakes his head. "No," he says, arms tightening around his shoulders. "I don’t believe that. We’re, you know, keeping each other… distracted. You’re in my corner?"

Louis’ heart pumps, making it feel like his whole body is flooded with heavy waves in tune with his heartbeat. It sounds like Harry doesn’t know how to explain, but he anxiously wants to know if he’s unsure or if he simply doesn’t know what Louis feels and doesn’t want to put himself out there yet. Or perhaps that’s just Louis.

"I’m in your corner yeah," he affirms. "I am." He reaches up on his toes to press a little kiss to his chin. Meanwhile, his pulse is still ticking. He wants know; if he’d press his cheek to Harry’s chest, would he be able to feel his heart drum like Louis’?

The door to the locker room flies open, and Louis can hear when a few of the boys from the team bundle inside. Louis and Harry that are hidden behind the wall of lockers pull apart, Harry pressing a last kiss to Louis’ forehead. Louis walks around the lockers, revealing himself to the lads on the other side, thankful Harry can’t see how red his cheeks are burning.

You don’t kiss someone on the forehead if you don’t have genuine feelings for them, right?

The boys greet him happily, cheering. Louis can tell they're hyped for today's practice, the last one before the big match on Sunday. He's excited too, but it's more of a jumpy, jittery feeling. He sits down on one of the benches, just as Harry comes out to join them. The boys look up, greeting him in surprise.

"Are there more of us hiding behind there?" Jonah asks, chuckling when Lee jokingly goes to
“Just captain to captain conversations,” Harry says pleasantly, sitting down on the bench next to Louis. He feels his thigh graze his, skin brushing against skin. Harry doesn’t remove his leg and neither does Louis. He keeps his eyes strictly away from the touch.

Practice is fun. Coach Abrahams comes up with a few exercises that require lots of teamwork. It’s amazing what a change has gone through the team. Everyone is brighter, more eager to work, and everyone seems to have a really good time. Louis thinks it’s really fucking cool to watch something like that happen to a team. It feels pretty awesome.

At the end they compete within the team. In pairs they have to run across half the pitch, one giving the other a piggyback ride. Louis instantly jumps onto Stan’s back, and they end up beating Harry and Ed by a yard. Naturally that means they’re obnoxious about it.

“Harry is taller and has more muscles, yet I run the fastest with Louis on my back!” Stan yells, the team’s attention already on him.

Harry scoffs, laughing. “Louis literally weighs nothing!”

“I could do it with Ed on my back as well,” Stan challenges.

“Oh, really?” Harry says. He arches a brow, and, from where Louis is watching with the rest of the lads, he looks genuinely up for the challenge.

“Yes, really,” Stan nods. Louis doesn’t think he’s really thought this through, because Louis is rather certain that Harry’s by far stronger and faster than him with these circumstances.


“How am I involved?”

“We’re switching. Ed, get on my back.” Stan walks to up to Harry, both of them facing the white paint that outlines where the pitch is divided in half.

Harry waves Louis over, holding out his arms to let him jump onto his back. It’s a little strange, but mostly exciting, because they haven’t been this close in front of the team before. Even sitting next to each other on the bench in the locker room today felt intense. Louis jumps onto his back, legs wrapping around his waist securely. He locks his arms around his shoulders, fingers digging into his shirt.

Harry carries him easily, positioning himself next to Stan who’s carrying Ed. Louis feels Harry’s bun brush against his nose, so he presses his cheek to the side of his head to avoid it. Harry’s ear is just inches from Louis’ mouth. He can feel Harry’s hands holding his thighs firmly, keeping him solidly in place.

“If you win, I’ll give you a congratulatory blowjob tonight,” Louis whispers, smiling.

Harry’s laugh is bright, making Ed turn and look at them. Louis arches a brow at him, but his smile remains. He’s been a little excited to have Harry over. Perhaps, maybe, they could talk. Like, really talk. Ed simply gives him a competitive narrowing of his eyes.

“Blow the whistle, Coach!” Harry calls.

He does and they’re off. It’s bumpy, but not as bumpy as when he was on Stan’s back. To be fair,
Stan is keeping incredibly well, only half a yard behind. They reach half of the distance quickly, Harry and Louis in the lead. Louis clings on for all his might, legs starting to slip.

Suddenly, Stan is running awfully close to them, Ed poking out a leg to push Harry sideways.

“Oi!” Louis yells. “Cheating!”

“Keep straight, Styles!” Coach calls over, making the rest of the team cackle.

“I’ve tried but I can’t!” Harry yells back. Louis bursts out laughing, the innuendo and the reality behind his worse too clear.

They manage to catch up to Stan and Ed, Louis reaching out to pull on Ed’s jersey to keep them back. There’s lots of yelling after that. Soon, they’re about to cross the line and Ed manages to knock Louis in the side, which makes Harry slip and then all four of them are falling into a heap.

Louis lands on his side, Harry onto his chest, elbowing him harshly in the rib. He feels someone’s cleats pressing into his calf. It faintly reminds him of the night of his and Harry’s first kiss. They’d been running, competing and Harry ended up knocking the breath out of him.

Harry rolls off and over on his side, facing Louis. “Are you okay, Lou?” he asks, eyes filled with worry.

“Nobody better have broken a leg because we need to fucking murder on Sunday!” Lee calls from where the team is sprawling on the ground.

“We won!” Louis insists from the ground, holding his arm up in victory. He feels Harry move by his side, chuckling.

“You’re fine then?” he asks, smiling.

“Very fine,” Louis agrees, sitting up.

“You did not win!”

Harry pulls Louis to his feet and the fight continues all the way to the showers.

They all get changed in no hurry. There’s lots of cursing, teasing, inspiring monologues about the upcoming game, and singing. When Louis finally gets dressed, it’s almost six o’clock. Jay and Lottie have already left for their weekend with Fizzy by now, and Harry is supposed to drive over right away. Louis’ got pizza, beer and movies planned.

He leaves the locker room and heads to the parking lot. His car is parked in its usual spot near the building, but before he gets there he sees Zayn. He’s leaning against Harry’s car, smoking. Louis slows down, looking around the empty lot for a moment. Zayn hasn’t seen him yet, and Louis feels slightly strange as he chooses a new direction, heading towards him.

“Hey,” he says once he approaches him, voice not unkind.

Zayn looks up, clearly surprised. “Hello,” he greets, gaze following Louis as he comes to a stop in front of him.

Louis awkwardly shuffles on his feet, adjusting the strap of his training bag over his shoulder. He looks down for second, inhaling to gain some composure. He looks up, finding the other boy frowning at him.

“I, err,” Louis starts. He feels fucking silly, but meeting Zayn’s brown eyes, watching him lean...
against Harry’s shiny Rover in his moss green jacket and tousled quiff, makes him nervous. “These, um. These last weeks have been really hard for me, for all kinds of reasons.” He shakes his head, exhaling. “I’m not here to defend myself, I just want to apologize.”

Zayn squints at him. “For what?”

Louis stares back. “For being a dick? For knocking into you, and taking my frustration about Niall out on you?”

He watches him purse his lips, nodding. He drops his smoke, dragging the sole of his shoe over it where it still burns. “It’s fine,” he shrugs.

“Is it?” Louis asks in confusion.

“I think you should talk to Niall instead, mate.”

Louis nods. “I know. I will. I’ve tried, too, but he doesn’t answer my texts or calls.”

“Do you really think texting is enough?” He looks up at him, eyebrows quirked, making his forehead crease. He looks like some smouldering model, sounds like a sage teacher.

“Course not,” Louis mumbles.

“Then try again.” His voice is light, making the matter seem so simple. Easy.

Slowly, Louis nods. He should get going. “Sorry. Again,” he mutters, then turns and trudges back toward his car.

“Hey!” Zayn calls, before he’s gotten far. Louis stops, spinning around. “You’re proper in love with him, aren’t you?”

His mouth opens, eyes meeting Zayn’s earnest ones. Louis can’t read him. “How do you know?” he calls back, not letting his voice tell anything.

“Because you’re wondering how he feels about you. If you weren’t, you wouldn’t care.”

Louis frowns. “How do you— Liam,” he realizes, lips pressing together solemnly. “Do the two of you observe, report back to each other and discuss?” he asks.


Louis snorts, rolling his eyes as he turns towards his car. “See you around,” he says, shaking his head.

“Bye, Lou,” Zayn calls, and Louis is a hundred percent sure he’s still smirking.

**

"Louis!" Harry yells from the car.

"I’m coming. Relax, H."

"We’re late!"

"We’re captains! The others will just have to fucking wait."

"We’re supposed to be there first!"
"Chill out! I'm coming now." Louis finishes locking the door, hoists his bag up on the shoulder and jogs up to Harry's car. He quickly jumps inside, pushing his bag into the backseat as Harry leaves the curb. "It's not my fucking fault we had to clean up the entire fucking kitchen before the mix got stuck."

"If somebody hadn't decided to make pancakes an hour before we had to leave, which is pretty idiotic in the first place since running with those carbs in your stomach is a fucking hell, we wouldn't have had that problem!"

Louis vehemently turns to face him. "I was making us breakfast, you ingratitude! You're the one who spilled the entire mixture over the counter and the floor."

Harry can't say anything to that, so he grits his teeth and scowls out the windshield. "Why were you even making breakfast, anyway?" he grumbles.

They both know Louis is the bowl of cereal breakfast type. But as it was, Louis woke up this morning with Harry plastered to himself. His thigh was tucked in between his, arm wrapped over his torso and nose in his neck. Louis was warm, Harry's hair was disgustingly close to his mouth (not that it didn't smell very nice), and he couldn't really move. So, he sucked a bruise into the junction of Harry's shoulder to wake him up, and then when Harry moaned and rolled over, Louis could escape.

After taking a much-needed shower, he went downstairs. Also, since it's the day before the match, he thought they should be eating properly. Harry likes pancakes. Louis just happened to not realize how late he woke up, and when Harry bundled down the stairs it got quite stressful.

"Was hungry," he shrugs.

The rest of the ride is spent in silence. Louis sighs and leans his forehead against the window.

The previous night after Louis' talk with Zayn, he drove back home, Harry arriving at his house not much later. Louis texted Niall again, requesting they'd meet up after the semi-final, or whenever he has time afterwards. He didn't answer.

They ordered pizzas, watched an old animated movie and Louis contemplated asking Harry to talk. He never got the opportunity to. This morning was a mess and now they're bickering.

It's a fifteen minute ride to the woods they are meant to meet at. They're supposed to be there at one, but by the looks of things they're at least ten minutes late.

They eventually turn onto the dirt road leading up to the meeting point where all the tracks through the woods begin. Louis can see the small meadow, which is more a of a grass lawn with a few benches and a barbecue site than anything else. Harry turns into one of the few parking spots that are left, stopping the car.

They jump out of the vehicle, making their way to the table the rest of the lads have gathered around.

“You can all relax, your beloved captain is here,” Louis announces, holding his hands out in a placating manner. The boys weren't even doing anything but talking lowly in groups. They look up, about to greet their powerful leader when Harry brushes past Louis, putting him in the shadow himself.

“Thanks for the introduction, Louis,” he says briefly, and then proceeds to climb up on the table that the boys were circled around. Louis squints. “Right, we're all here, yes?”
“Yes, we know how to show up in time for things,” Liam says.

Louis swears that if Harry could, he’d totally blame his late arrival on Louis. As it is he can’t, and Louis meets Harry's eyes with a smirk. “Snarky doesn’t suit you, Lime,” he says, and then shuffles onto the table to stand next to Harry.

"Were you riding together?” Lee asks.

"Yes,” Louis says curtly. "For captain reasons."

Harry looks down at him, arching a brow. “Any reason you’re joining me on the table, dear?”

“For captain reasons…?” Truthfully, he doesn’t know. Harry was on the table, so it only felt appropriate that he should to be standing there, too. Otherwise he would be the less powerful and dominant captain.

Harry smiles at him expectantly. “Go on then.”

“Right.” He clears his throat, clapping his hands together as the team watches on, probably knowing very well that Louis is going to go on a long improvised rant about something random. "Kids, when I was your age, I was—"

“Alright, nicely put, Lou,” Harry interrupts, hands clasped behind his back. The team laughs. Louis glares. “What I was going to say was that when you’ve all run five miles, there will be a surprise waiting for you back here with me and Lucifer."

Louis blinks.

"Surprise?” Liam asks.

"You're not going to run?"

"Lucifer?"

"No, but seriously, are you not going to run with us?"

Louis smiles down at Stan haughtily. "For captain reasons. And Lucifer, H, really?"

Harry grips his neck. "No, we're going to be running the three mile track, then prepare the surprise."


Louis turns to Harry, looking up at him. "We have presents?” he hisses. Never mind that, he didn't even know they had a surprise to begin with.

Harry ignores him, which makes Louis throw his hands out in exasperation. "Who's ready to run, boys?"

"Yes, let's go!" Oli jumps once, pulling at random limps around him. Louis should promote him to something.

Louis helps him shoo people toward the start of the five mile track, and the boys start jogging down the path. Before Louis can join them, though, Harry stops him.

“You want to talk?” Louis says. “Don’t you remember you called me the name of some dude
Harry cups his face and smiles down at him warmly. “Let’s not fight,” he says. His nose grazes Louis’. “We’ll fix the rest of the mess at home later, alright? And then we cheat and get us ice cream, yes?” His voice is soft. Louis doesn’t want to keep bickering either, so he nods quietly.

“Okay,” he tries to say, but it comes out slightly muffled since Harry is somewhat pushing in his cheeks. Harry grins and then leaves him to catch up with the team. Louis follows quickly, soon enough reaching Liam and joins him.

They jog in a comfortable pace, Louis and Liam eventually falling behind Harry, Ed and Jonah. Strangely, Louis doesn’t find it weird talking to him now that he knows that he knows about him and Harry. Neither of them mention it, only chat about the game and trivial things. Louis wouldn’t mind if he said anything, but he doesn’t want to be the one to bring it up either.

He watches Harry’s back while they jog. Liam talks about the new Marvel movie coming up, and Louis’ eyes trail from Harry’s shoulder, to the skin of his neck visible above his jacket, to his hidden waist and down his legs. He can still feel Harry’s nose brushing against him. If it weren’t for their no-proper-sex-before-the-big-match rule, Louis would want him now. Like, right now.

He realizes how much their relationship has changed these last weeks. So quickly after Louis and Niall’s fallout Harry showed him support, and they grew tight so fast. Is all this just down of the agreement they’ve formed? They can’t possibly be this close just because they’ve clinched a deal to be on each other’s side? Or?

Harry wraps his arm around Louis’ waist, hoisting him to the side and making him squawk. The rest of the boys slow down. “This way, Lewis.”

“Thanks, H, I can walk.” Louis splutters, stomach swooping even as Harry sets him down. “And a warning would have been nice.”

“This is where we part ways, minions,” Harry announces to the rest, Louis noting where the path splits in two. “See you back at the meadow.”

“You’ve started talking like Louis.” Stan arches a brow.

“Stop copying me, dick,” Louis says, joking but mostly to blot out Stan’s words.

Harry doesn’t answer, simply salutes and starts down the three mile track. Louis nods at the lads and bounds after him, disappearing into the trees.

It takes him a moment to realize that Harry is actually running rather fast, his training jacket in red blurry by the trees farther down the path. Louis kicks up his speed, trying to catch up. The path is tricky, zigzagging between firs and oak trees. He doesn’t quite trust the groundwork and eventually he ends up losing sight of Harry completely.

He’s starting to sweat pretty heavily after running so fast — which is something they shouldn’t be doing because, fuck, this was supposed to be a jog — when the trees start to thin out.

Harry jumps out from a bush in front of him.

Louis screams.

His heart is in his throat and he stumbles backwards, almost falling over a root in the ground. He recognizes Harry’s face only half a second later, exhaling in relief. “What the hell are you doing?” he complains, meanwhile Harry cackles like a fucking idiot.
“Your, face,” he gasps, clutching his stomach.

“Is this why you were running so bloody fast? This was supposed to be a relaxing jog, you dick.”

Harry shakes his head, mouth forming into a solid smile. “No, we had to hurry because the surprise needs to get ready.”

Louis makes a face, leaning back against the oak behind him. “What even is the surprise?”

“Got a water hose in the car we can hook to the tap at the side of the little shed back at the site.”

Louis lifts his brows, surprised by Harry’s mischief. “Ooh, they’re not going to be pleased about this.” He grins, impressed.

Harry walks up to him, leaving only a foot of distance between their chests. He’s still smiling, clearly smug and proud of his plan. He licks his lip, arm coming to rest against the tree trunk above Louis’ head. Louis meets his eyes in inquiry, keeping their eyes at level. Harry’s just gazing back, the jade in them glistening almost like in a book. He’s gorgeous.

Harry leans in lips ghosting over his jawline, nose just barely brushing his cheek. Louis wants him to kiss him, tongue, saliva, teeth clashing — all of it.

Harry hums as Louis holds his breath, feeling Harry move his lips closer. He closes his eyes.

"Was this your plan?" he breathes.

"Yeah. I came up with the surprise as an excuse so I could have you all to myself." Louis snorts. Kiss me.

He can feel Harry inhale against himself. Here it comes.

He doesn't kiss him. He ducks away, leaving Louis to open his eyes in disappointment. He winks, and then jogs out into the meadow towards his car. Louis wants to groan aloud, sink down to the ground against the tree, and cover his eyes.

He’s a hundred percent sure that he's so incredibly, miserably fucked.

**

Back in Harry’s car on the way home, they’re both soaking wet in freezing water, clothes sodden. It’s safe to say the lads on the team weren’t happy, but Harry and Louis were truly fucked once they realized that there were fourteen boys against the two of them. Louis is shuddering and shaking like a tiny fucking Chihuahua in the winter, planning on a long bath in the tub filled with, preferably, steaming, boiling water.

Harry’s curls are plastered to his neck and he's shivering, his shoulders hunched. As they arrive at the house, his phone starts buzzing where it sits in the cup holder. He picks it up once he’s shut off the engine, bringing it to his ear.

"Hey, Mum," he says, and Louis is relieved to hear he doesn't sound irritable or hostile. Louis points towards the house, signing he's going inside while he talks. "Oh, really," Harry says into the phone as Louis grabs his bag and gets out of the car.

It's just past four, the sun is still out, but Louis is having a hard time enjoying the warm weather as his hair is still dripping, clothes soaked to his pants.
He's surprised when Harry closes the door to the car quite loudly, having ended the conversation much sooner than expected. Louis waits by the porch, watching the other boy stalk up to him in a quick pace.

Harry comes to stand in front of him, crossing his arms firmly, voice hard. "How about we talk about the times my mother has had private conversations with you."

Louis’ mouth shapes into an 'O'. His heart starts to pound.

“Apparently,” Harry says tightly, “she’s talked to you about me, and fought with Dad in front of you at your job.”

Louis swallows. "Did she say all that now?" He's scared to speak too loud.

"Were you seriously never going to tell me?" Harry asks, completely exasperated. Louis hopes Harry's hard exterior will dissipate, but he prevails. “How could you not?” His brows are lifted as he stares back at Louis.

“I–” Louis stutters. “I didn’t want to worry you.”

“What do you mean?”

Louis inhales. “Last autumn she, erm.” He scratches his arm, looking down at his feet.

“Spit it out.” His jaw is clenched, teeth gritted.

“She threatened to go to her lawyer?”

Louis wishes he’d lied something up, because the look on Harry’s face as it crumbles is nothing he ever wanted to see. It’s like something ghosts through his body, tearing him up inside. He sits down on the porch, pulling his knees up to his chest, burying his face in the crooks of him arms.

Louis aches for him.

Slowly, he sits down next to Harry, both of them facing the street, the front door of the house behind them, and their knees almost brushing. Louis’ hand comes up. He wants to touch Harry’s neck, turn him to himself and let Harry rest against him, letting him know there’s a place where he can feel protected. Harry moves an inch; Louis’ hand drops.

“When was this?” His words are muffled and hard to hear, but Louis can make it out.

“September. I think,” he murmurs, frowning at his feet.

Harry sighs, and when he looks up to meet Louis’ eyes, they’re red and shiny. “Is it fucked up that I’m not surprised?” His question is earnest, face expressionless apart from his eyes. “But it still hurts?”

“No,” Louis whispers. “It’s not fucked up.”

“I feel fucked up. A lot.”

“Me too.” He’s not alone.

“You should.”

Louis looks up, but when he meets Harry’s gaze once more there’s a small glint in his eye. Louis
shakes his head, and Harry smiles. It’s tiny, but it’s there. Little dimple.

Louis hooks his arm around his neck and pulls him in. Harry cuddles into his side, exhaling softly. His head rests against Louis’ collarbone, Louis’ arm around his shoulders. He holds him, keeping him close and embraced.

“Don’t,” he murmurs, almost so softly that he isn’t sure if Harry hears it or not. “Don’t feel fucked up.”

In either case, Harry doesn’t respond, only stays against Louis’ chest. His curls have started to dry a little, but their clothes are still wet. They should get out of them.

“What did she say to you about me? At the store?” Harry suddenly wonders, whispering. He sounds too vulnerable.

Louis stares at the yard in front of them. “She apologized for your birthday party.” He starts slowly, going easy. “She told me to take care of you. That I shouldn’t let you get into your own head, and that you like pancakes for breakfast. She loves you.”

It takes a moment before Harry answers, still buried in Louis. “Is that why you made pancakes this morning...?”

Louis can’t answer out loud, but it’s blatantly obvious what the answer is.

They stay quiet.

A car pulls up in front of the house. Louis hears the engine, but he doesn’t want to open his eyes. There’s a car door shutting, and then eventually Harry is freeing himself from Louis, sitting up.

“Lou,” he says quietly, making him sigh. He keeps his arm around Harry’s shoulders as he opens his eyes.

There’s a man walking towards him. He’s in his forties, a little older than Louis’ mum. His hair is just a year or so away from greying, his face seeming older than when Louis last saw him. His heart pounds, but strangely his throat doesn’t clog up and he doesn’t run away. He remains sitting.

“Hello, Louis,” the man says as he stops in front of him. He looks calm, casual.

“Hi.”

“How are you?”

“Fine.” The man nods. “You?” Louis asks. He doesn’t know what is causing him to feel this settled, this placated.

“I’m alright,” he nods. “I’m alright.”

Harry is still by Louis’ side, silently watching Louis converse with his former stepfather.

“What are you doing here?” Maybe he’s nervous after all. His pulse is ticking, head feeling a little dizzy for just a second, like when you aren’t a regular smoker and it’s the same feeling you get when you haven’t had a cigarette in ages and you take a few drags, feeling the nicotine go to your head.

Mark shrugs, light-hearted. “I came to see if you wanted to hang out.”

Louis feels the expression on his face grow dubious. He feels Harry move under his arm,
remembering that he’s still very much pressed to his side. “Me not answering your calls wasn’t an inclination to what the answer might be?”

“I found it an incentive to try a little harder.”

Louis’ stomach knots up. He swallows, looking down. He feels Harry’s fingers clutch his hand then, spreading his fingers and slotting them with his own where it rests below his shoulder. It’s comforting.

Mark doesn’t look shocked, and neither does he seem displeased. He looks… interested. “Is this a new thing?” he asks.

Louis shrugs. “I’m queer.” Fuck, did someone rupture a balloon inside him?

Mark nods. “I saw you two. When Lottie visited and you stayed outside?”

“Oh,” he breathes.

“Does Mum know?”

He says it like he would when they were a family. Like, how for the benefit of your kids you call your wife “Mum”. Can I go to the party tonight? Ask Mum, yeah?, or alternately, Can I have a fiver? Ask Dad, love.

“No,” Louis whispers.

Mark nods, as though he understands. It should annoy Louis. It doesn’t. He’s slightly surprised, but then again he wouldn’t know what to expect.

“You’ve changed a lot,” Mark notes.

Louis’ shoulders are tense as he shrugs.

“I thought,” Mark begins, “that you and I could have a lads night? Since the girls are off with Jay, us boys could do something similar? Or brunch perhaps, if you’re busy tonight?” He nods at Harry, who’s staying quiet by Louis’ side.

“I…” Louis says slowly. He looks up, meeting Mark’s eyes evenly. “I think I’ll pass.”

He watches him purse his lips. He doesn’t look surprised, but actually disappointed. Louis looks away.

“Maybe another time then,” he nods. Not very likely.

Louis can see how he nods again in his periphery, mostly to himself, accepting. When he gets no other reaction from Louis, he starts walking away. He feels Harry twitch beside him. His hand in Louis’ is heavy and his fingers lax; he isn’t holding on anymore.

Mark reaches his car, and then Louis shakes his head, teeth sinking into his bottom lip. He drops Harry’s hand, standing up and running after his Dad. Stepdad. Former.

“Why did you stop coming to my games?” he asks, almost desperately. Mark turns around, and there’s only two feet separating them.

Mark stares back at him as if it’s obvious. “I didn’t want to ruin it for you.”

“Ruin it?” Louis asks, mouth falling open. “It was our thing!”
“Louis,” Mark says, inhaling in bewilderment. “Footie is your everything! After the divorce you refused to talk to me! The last match I went to you looked heartbroken when I was there. I thought you didn’t want me to come anymore. I would never want to ruin a game you love so much.”

Louis shakes his head. “It was our thing.” He feels dizzy.

Mark looks at him, trying to understand. “Do you want me come?”

“I’ve a match tomorrow.”

“I know. A school two hours from here.”

“You know?”

“Of course, I do.” Mark ticks his head to the side. “It’s our thing, yeah? I always hope you do well.”

Louis doesn’t know how to comprehend this. It feels completely mad. How…?

“So,” he says, arms wrapping around his own stomach. His clothes are still cold.

“I’ll be there if you want.” He looks earnest.

“I’m not sure I’ll want to talk after,” he whispers.

“That’s okay.”

Louis nods.

Mark leaves with another small smile. Louis walks back to the house, finally unlocking the door. He senses Harry around him, but his head is unfocused from his presence. He’s astonished, shocked. Is this all a huge, fucking misunderstanding?

He walks upstairs, immediately heading for the bathroom where he turns on the tap and fills the tub with hot water. He barely feels cold anymore, but he doesn’t feel warm either. He strips, sinking into the half-full tub.

He wraps his arms around his knees, head leaning back against the edge. It can’t be a coincidence, though. Fact is fact. Facts don’t change. Previous events don’t change over time.

He doesn’t know how long it takes, but after a while the door to the bathroom opens and Harry steps inside without a word. He rids himself of all clothes and turns the tap off, unceremoniously plumping down in the tub opposite of Louis, water splashing over the edge.

Louis opens his eyes. Harry stares back at him expressionlessly.

They look at each other. Harry’s eyes are green, almost jade. It feels like it takes at least five minutes before Harry opens his mouth.

“I would give anything for my parents to do what he did.”

Louis knows he would. He can also tell that explaining to Harry that it isn’t the same situation wouldn’t make him understand.

“Harry,” he murmurs, but the other boy is having none of it. He reaches for Louis’ legs, drawing them from his chest. His hands close around his ankles, pulling at him until Louis is forced to be
close to him. Louis sits up, knees on either side of Harry’s thighs, straddling him.

Harry grasps his wrists, chest brushing Louis’ elbows where they’re locked between them. Their faces are only inches apart, Louis standing on his knees and Harry gazing up at him. Louis can’t look away.

“You don’t listen when I explain,” Louis whispers after what feels like a lifetime. “You don’t want to understand.”

Harry’s gaze remains resolute. “You don’t even bother explaining. You don’t tell me properly. I can’t read your mind to get the seventy-five percent of the thoughts in your head that you keep to yourself.”

“Our families are similar, but if I tell you our situations aren’t the same, will you accept that?”

“Yes.” The conversation is tense, solemn and serious. Harry’s hands still don’t release Louis’ wrists, keeping him locked in the same position. “But I won’t accept how you’re dealing with yours.”

“Why?”

“Because you could have the things you want, and you don’t understand that.”

“You don’t know what I want.”

“Yes, I do.” His voice is clear, pupils focused on Louis’. “A whole family. A scholarship. To get out of the mess that’s your life.”

“You don’t know anything,” Louis whispers.

“You don’t listen to me,” Harry says.

“Why would I?”

“I know you.”

“I know you, too.”

Harry drops Louis’ wrists, making him gasp when he wraps his arms around Louis’ torso instead, elbows digging into his back and hands flat against his skin higher up. Louis is pressed against Harry, tummy flush against Harry’s chest. His chin is against the hollow part between the halves of Louis’ ribcage.

“You should listen to me.”

“Why?” Louis inquires, their voices just as grave, controlled and moderate as before. A business meeting, almost.

“Because I know better this time,” Harry says. “And I need you to trust me.”

“And if I do?”

“Then you won’t regret it.” His words end in a whisper.

Louis stares down at Harry. The water around his upper thighs is still warm, but inside he feels even hotter. His lower lip has parted just a tiny bit from the other, his breathing deep. Their shared gaze is too intense. It’s so thick, it feels like the molecules of the air are vibrating between them.
Louis’ fingers are light on each of Harry’s shoulders. Harry’s hands sink down his back excruciatingly slowly, fingertips barely touching his shivering skin. Harry’s gauging Louis’ reaction as his fingertips go lower and lower. They’re still only staring at each other as his hands touch Louis’ arse. Louis gasps audibly. It doesn’t break the tension, but Harry’s eyes widen, chest falling as he exhales heavily.

He looks enlightened, like he might’ve realized something. Louis presses his lips together. Harry’s eyes suddenly flickering over his face. His hands tighten on him, fingers digging into his skin as he sits up straighter, and all of a sudden Louis’ crotch is pressed to Harry’s torso.

Harry knows how hard he is, just like Louis can feel Harry’s length grazing his thigh. Louis stays locked in Harry’s eyes, heart pounding in slow, heavy beats.

He finally stands after minutes, freeing himself from Harry and leaving the tub. His knees are wobbly, practically shaking as he walks out of the bathroom and to his room. He’s still dripping when he comes back, bottle of lubricant in his hand.

Harry’s gaze follows him as he comes back, closing the bathroom door behind him. Louis swallows, placing the bottle of lube on the edge of the tub next to the wall. He gets back into the tub, knees shaking. Harry’s hands hurry to his waist, gripping him almost too tightly as he straddles him once more. The grip is nice. It feels settling, and Louis feels secure.

“I thought you didn’t want.” Harry words are barely audible, but they’re unwavering and his eyes aren’t leaving Louis’.

Louis shakes his head. He didn’t think Harry wanted.

He leans forward, stomach meeting Harry’s chest again and Harry’s hands instantly tighten around his lower body. His hands are huge, powerful. Louis wants him.

Harry leans forward, forehead landing solidly against Louis’ chest, the bridge of his nose pressing into his skin. Louis squeezes his eyes shut, fingers knotting in Harry’s hair, fisting his curls in painful grips. Harry exhales hotly against Louis’ stomach, pressing a fiery kiss there.

Louis doesn’t moan, but his breath is rapid and shallow. He feels it when one of his hands leaves his body, the sound of opening the lube bottle making his tummy flutter. It’s happening.

Feeling Harry’s finger brush against his hole is something else to what he’s ever felt entirely. He’s never touched himself like that, never dared to, but he wants it from Harry. His whole body is stiff, but it’s from longing and anticipation.

“Breathe,” Harry says, and so Louis does as soon as he feels Harry’s lips sucking into his skin again. It’s slightly painful, teeth nipping in the same spot at his sensitive skin, but it keeps him distracted from his nerves.

He keeps his eyes shut, but his mouth opens in a silent gasp as the tip of Harry's index finger presses inside him. The sensation is foreign and a little bit scary, but Harry's other palm pressing against the small of his back is keeping him steady. His long finger pushes in further, feeling thick inside him. But it's wet from lubrication, and he feels so fucking close to the other boy it makes his insides warm. He feels like liquid, body in Harry’s complete control.

Harry rubs his finger in and out, the slide getting more and more comfortable for the longer he does. Louis knows that by this time Harry would want more, but Harry's experienced and Louis isn't used to this. Harry knows too, and he takes his time, making sure he's thorough and Louis has time to enjoy the feeling. He does.
Eventually, he tugs on Harry's hair, gasping immediately after as his finger slowly pulls out. He feels strangely empty for a moment, but it's not long before two of Harry’s fingers hover over his hole, only the tips pressing inside. He's wet enough that it doesn't hurt, but it stretches. Harry's other hand pats his back reassuringly, reminding him to breathe. All the while, Louis' hands continue to stay locked in the other boy's curls, feeling his hot breath against his torso. He doesn’t know how to breathe without stuttering, but Harry’s fingers are sure and it makes him feel calmer.

Louis doesn't know how long it takes, but it seems like hours. They work up to three fingers, and it's excruciating in many ways. Harry’s fingers are so long and slender, and it hurts at first, but it also makes him feel so fucking close to him. It all makes his body feel simultaneously boneless and tense.

Finally, Louis thinks he's ready and Harry must feel it from how he shifts, Louis surprising even himself by how he pushes back against Harry’s fingers. It’s something Harry usually does, but it seems so incredible that this time their positions are changed.

Harry crooks his fingers. Louis almost comes on the spot.

“Mother fucker!”

Harry’s laugh is just as sudden. His cackle is quick and over soon, seriousness taking over again, but it still makes Louis' chest warm. Harry is dimpling. He can tell. Louis presses his thumbs into his craters, fingers light and eyes still closed. However, his knees are hurting from being pressed to the floor of the tub, and the water, he realizes, is nearly cool.

“Harry,” he breathes, word merely a whisper.

Harry wraps his entire right arm around Louis' waist, holding onto him as he hoists himself up with the other hand clutching the edge of the tub. For a second Louis thinks they’re going to fall and kill themselves, but Harry’s arm tightens around him, helping him out of the tub. He's able to lean on the other boy, Harry carrying most of his weight.

There's a rug on the bathroom floor. Its colour is dark, purple edging towards black. His Mum bought it only last week. It's fluffy, entirely soft against Louis' back as Harry places him on it, carefully laying him down on the floor. Louis instinctively spreads his legs, Harry fitting himself perfectly between them, pressing another kiss to the raw spot on Louis' chest.

Louis' heart is a hammer slamming against his ribcage. Harry's thighs rubbing against his own is making his nerves spark once again, but he's already wet and open from Harry's fingers and he really, really wants this.

He wonders how Harry felt the first time Louis buried himself deep inside him. Was he nervous like Louis? It must have been so different, because back then they weren't even friends. They didn't trust each other, weren't even kind to one another. He wonders if Harry felt safe with him. Louis feels safe right now.

Harry leans down over him, elbows resting on the rug by his head. He's looming over him, but it isn't intimidating, only intimate. He lines himself up, if perhaps a bit hesitant at first. Louis' hands slide onto his shoulders, palms flatly stroking over his shoulder blades, and then after a moment his boy visibly relaxes.

The moment the head of Harry's cock pushes past Louis' rim, everything seems to turn into slow motion. Louis can feel Harry’s ragged breathing against his neck, chest expanding against his, and his soft curls tickling his throat and cheek. He also feels Harry's knuckles at the inside of his thigh as the other boy eases himself inside.
Harry feels like everything at once. Imagine it raining for the first time after the longest of droughts. Imagine the sun poking out for the first time after a dark winter. Envision inhaling after being trapped under water. It also feels like being torn in two, but at the same time being put together. It's the best feeling.

Louis knew Harry was big, but it's so different actually knowing it like this. He presses inside Louis in a slow, long movement, making him squeeze his shut, biting his cheeks terribly hard.

He lets out a broken sob once Harry bottoms out, breath feeling knocked out of him. It takes him a moment to get used to the size of him, taking deep breaths, head heavy against the floor. With his eyes closed, all he can see is darkness, thus every other sense feels enhanced. All he can feel is Harry. Everything is just him. His hands, the tickling of his hair, his smell.

Harry starts moving when Louis signals it's okay, and the movement is fucking incredible. There's a spot inside him. He knows exactly where Harry's is and how he reacts when Louis rubs against it, but when he finds out for himself what it actually feels like, he's completely speechless. He can't describe it, and he can't convey to Harry how he feels either. It's unexplainable. The other boy usually swears or groans, even complains in a terrible no-actually-means-yes language, but Louis can't do that.

His eyes feel wet.

He suddenly gasps, whining at Harry’s strength on him as he continues to push into him, abruptly moving in a much faster pace. His hold is firm on his body. He keeps him in place, in a way that he’s restrained, but it’s not forceful or suffocating; it’s anchoring.

The position is so unusual, but it feels good. Harry is moving firmly inside him, making him wince and inhale in pleasure at the same time. The sensations of his hips and thighs moving against his own, skin sliding against skin, is overwhelming. He feels entirely encompassed by Harry’s bigger body, back arching as he thrusts into him.

When Louis comes, his legs are shaking. Harry's thrusts against his prostate are relentless, and Louis gives in much too soon. Their sex usually lasts for so much longer, but this isn't like normal. His come splatters on his stomach, another thing that he's not used to.

But then when Harry comes only seconds later, he realizes that they never used a condom. Harry releases deep, deep inside him, wetness filling him up. It's not the most pleasurable thing, but Harry's heavy body on top of him makes it feel so incredibly worth it. It makes it better somehow.

It takes them ages to come down. Their breaths are heavy and rapid, Harry's forehead sweaty on Louis' neck, and his nails are still dug into Harry's back in return.

Every nerve in his legs seems to be strained, but at the same time his limbs are lax, spread wide under Harry. Eventually he has to pull out of him, and it’s fucked up how much Louis misses having him inside him already. Afterwards Harry grabs a towel that he soaks under warm water, cleaning them both off. He keeps his arm around Louis as they silently tip the bedroom, creeping in under the duvet.

Harry sidles up with him, arm wrapping over his stomach and where Louis is lying on his back, exhausted.

"I'm still shaking," Louis whispers, looking down at his thighs in bewilderment, even though he can't see them in the dark.

"You're wonderful," Harry whispers back, looking precisely as astonished. Louis closes his eyes,
but Harry places a plump, wet kiss onto his lips from the side. Then another, and another. Five. Louis doesn't have the energy to kiss back much, entirely content.

"This wasn't good," Harry murmurs against his lips, fatigue evident in his voice. His breath brushes over his face.

"Why?" Louis asks, almost drifting already.

"Footie."

"Forgot," Louis murmurs. He can't bring himself to care.

“Was it okay?” Harry whispers. Louis silently nods, nose bumping Harry's. “You’re better at it than me.”

It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter if Harry isn't used to topping because to Louis he was amazing. That's all that matters.

“I loved it.” It’s almost too close to those other words.

Louis could do it. He could actually tell Harry about the butterflies in his stomach. But he doesn't.

Harry turns over, and Louis moves up to fit into his body from behind, squeezing him close. He still smells like sweat and sex, curls damp. It's pretty fucking scary how much he means to Louis.

**

Warm up is hectic. Much like the previous match, the anticipation and excitement is swimming in Louis' veins, the rest of the boys pumped and ready next to him on the pitch.

Louis can still feel last night in his bones.

He went out like a light as soon as he closed his eyes, falling asleep instantly. When he woke up little past ten in the morning, Harry was already downstairs, making “proper” breakfast, as he called it. That meant pancakes with bacon, egg on toast, and tea.

They didn't mention the previous night. Neither did they have to, but Louis felt as though Harry was keeping himself distracted from the subject. The moment Louis strolled into the kitchen, hair ruffled and face still scrunched from sleep, Harry was moaning on and on about the game, the opposing team, the talent scouts, Liam's goal kick technique — anything, honestly. After a while Louis figured he was just nervous about the match.

They ate a sizeable brunch, packed their bags and rode over to the school where the bus was waiting to take the team to the town where the semi-final game is being held. He received a text just before arriving from Niall.

Can't make it to the match. Believe in you. We will talk.

It left Louis feeling fairly reassured they could repair their friendship somehow. It's okay, he supposes, that Niall isn't there to watch him for once, because he's already spotted his mum, Lottie and the twins in the stands. He hasn't seen Mark yet, though.

The team huddle up before kick-off, wrapping their arms around each other and hyping themselves up. Harry's arm is solid on top of Louis', Liam standing between them unbeknownst to the way Harry's fingers are pressing into his arm.

The game starts in only a few minutes. After their huddle they go to the bench for a last drink. As Louis chugs down at least a third of his bottle, he notices Coach Abrahams pulling Harry aside. They talk lowly, carefully. Louis' eyes flick to the crowd, instinctively searching for Jay and the
girls. He always finds reassurance in knowing they’re there. He finds them, but he's completely stunned when there's a fourth girl standing with them.

Fizzy.

Her hair is long and dark, looking like an exact copy of their mum. She’s beautiful. Louis’ missed her. He can’t believe - And oh. There's Mark as well. All of them. Watching his game.

Louis quickly averts his eyes, feeling so astounded and fucking... fucking... He doesn’t know. It's heart-warming.

He walks out to take his spot on the pitch for kick-off, opponents and teammates doing the same. Louis is about to walk up to the referee to flip the coin, but suddenly Harry's there.

"They're not here," he says. A pang of sorrow and distress hits Louis at first, then comes the anger. Harry's parents didn't come. It's so fucking unfair, because not only did Louis’ dad come like he promised, but there are six people cheering him on. Harry’s got none. Before Louis can say anything, Harry continues in a quick pace. "The scouts are not here."

Louis' stomach drops. Oh.

"What?" he whispers.

Harry’s eyes are clear and his voice is filled with purpose. "The scouts from Manchester aren't coming tonight. They're only going to watch the Championship final. Coach didn't want me to tell you because he thought it would only stress you out, but... We have to win, Louis. They're never going to watch us play if we don't get to the final."

Louis' heart is almost beating harder than last night when they had sex. They're not here.

Slowly, he nods.

Talking to the referees and the captain of the other team goes by in a blur, Louis unable to even remember what the other captain looked like.

Once the match’s begun, everything turns into a haze of tackles, free kicks, dribbles and passes. None of the teams score. Liam saves, and their keeper saves, Harry hits the goalpost and they hit the crossbar.

By the time the match is coming to an end, everybody is exhausted. It's even. The crowd is on their toes, the coaches are yelling, and the match feels far too familiar to the first one of the season. Louis' skin is prickling, Harry's words echoing through his head. His entire family is watching him play.

There's only a few minutes left. Louis makes it past one of the other team's half backs, ball close to his feet. He sprints, the ball safely following his movements. Harry's running on the other side. There are two players defending in front of them.

"Hey!" It's Stan, suddenly calling from his left, having spurted to catch up. They’re three against two.

Louis quickly passes him the ball, running toward the middle of the penalty box. Harry's in there with him, and two defenders in blue jerseys as well as their keeper. Stan makes the cross.

The ball flies high above their heads, Harry jumping up to head it into the goal. He misses. It lands against Louis' chest and he brings it down, kicking with all of his might, making it fly straight up
in the roof of the net, the keeper nowhere near able to reach it.

It's a goal.

Louis is tackled down by Harry, not much later by Stan and the rest of the boys. The pile is huge and somebody grabs Louis' head, smacking his lips to his forehead, subsequently yelling in his ear. The boys are heavy on him, but all Louis can feel is relief. Happiness, too.

They won. They fucking won.

They all start to roll off, a few more minutes remaining of the game. It's a mess. Louis' not sure who's who, and he can't see much other than striped jerseys. But then. Harry's eyes. He's smiling at him in pure awe and adoration from where he's lying between cleats, mud, and limbs belonging to Donny lads.

In the midst of it all, Louis kisses Harry.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

So many thank you's to Vicky for pulling through as my beta despite suffering through flooding and being without wifi and electricity this week. Love you for helping me out with this, I couldn't do it without you. xx

Also the epilogue will be with you shortly! And there will be some notes added after the epilogue about the characters, so please read that if you like :)

Twitter: isthatyoularry
Tumblr: isthatyoularry

Louis is drunk, and heavily so. He’s got a feeling that he passed his consuming limit a while ago, stomach queasy and head almost spinning. He closes a hand over his mouth, breathing hot air into it to try to stifle himself.

The music is pounding, Jasmine’s house full of people. He shouldn’t have come, honestly. People are looking at him, certainly knowing he’s far gone where he sits in the corner of the living room on the second floor. He’s on a couch, eyelids drooping. He’s fairly certain the people he was talking to—surely some time ago now—have left their spots next to him. He guesses he was too drunk to keep the conversation flowing.

He can’t lean back on the couch because then his stomach would to convulse, his head already swimming. He keeps resting on his hand, his elbows digging into his own thighs as he watches the scene play out before him.

Harry is playing beer pong. He’s smiling, shirt lifted to show off his stomach, the hem tucked into the neckline and shaping his shirt into some sort of bra. The hickey Louis sucked below his bellybutton is gone, and neither are there any other marks visible on him, showcasing that Louis has touched him, felt him, had him buried inside himself.

They haven’t talked since the game, properly. Or at all. Louis can still see the look of utter shock on Harry’s face as Louis leaned in and pressed their lips together, if only chastely.

Louis played it off. It was just an impulse of a victorious moment. All the lads were hugging and kissing each other—perhaps not on the mouth, but nobody really caught on anyway. Only, Harry looked like his life was flashing before his eyes, and Louis thought he was going to puke at the sudden realization of Harry’s rejection.

Just thinking of it now makes another wave of nausea wash over him. He squeezes his eyes shut, only for a second. He should find his way to a bathroom, and sooner rather than later.

There’s a loud laugh—Harry. Louis instantly opens his eyes, succumbing to how deeply his body is aching for him. Harry just won the BP round together with Ed it seems, and they’re triumphantly cheering. Louis doesn’t even know if Harry knows he’s here, watching him. There are loads of people in the room, and Louis is keeping a fair distance, but not too far.

He misses him. It’s been almost a week. The match was on Sunday, and this is the fifth day since.
Louis hasn’t dared to call or text, and Harry hasn’t made a move to contact him either. In the
locker room at practice they’re tense, dancing around each other, scared of making eye contact. It
only feels worse each day.

Louis is fairly certain. Harry has understood that Louis has feelings for him, and now he’s
awkward. He doesn’t feel the same. It’s evident. Louis remembers how awkwardly they parted,
brushing off their kits before jogging to take their positions to play off the last bit of the match.
Louis could barely celebrate the victory afterwards, anxiety taking over entirely.

In a way he supposes this moment was inevitable. In some way, eventually they would have had
to figure out what they’re doing together. Now, Louis knows that it isn’t a romantic thing. He’s
just glad he never sat down and told the other boy how far fucking gone he is for him.

Louis sits up a little straighter as Harry walks over to group of lads, now standing closer to Louis
than before. He’s still exposing his lovely belly, his beautiful little love-handles on display for
Louis as his back faces him. The dimples there are prominent, and Louis can still perfectly picture
how he looked when golden glitter was snowing down across the small of his back.

Louis wants to hold him. He wants to touch, kiss him, feel him and especially his soft, soft skin
against his fingertips.

Over by the other wall, Harry’s hand settles on someone’s waist. Louis accidentally kicks a beer
bottle, and it falls over on the floor. The touch is innocent, only lasts for a second, but for that
moment Louis only sees green.

“Louis!” someone calls then, voice loud through the crowd of people. It’s Stan, towing a group of
people with him, Oli the only one Louis can make out in the moment.

Louis doesn’t react, but suddenly Harry turns around, eyes skimming the crowd and then they’re
locked on him. Their gazes meet. Confusion tumbles over Louis, because Harry looks so unsure
where he’s standing. His eyes flicker, filled with uncertainty and apprehension. He looks
awkward, shuffling on his feet, perhaps even shy. Louis can’t look away.

Harry does, tearing his eyes from Louis quickly and turning back to his friends. His shoulders are
still stiff, Louis can tell.

Stan and the rest settle down around him on the couch, Louis looking up to find Jasmine by his
side. She smiles, and Louis tries not to display how uncomfortable he is.

“No need to look like you want to run away. I know you’re not into me. I’m over it.”

Louis swallows, trying to force away the inebriation from his bones. “Really?”

“Yes, silly. I know where I’m not wanted.” She giggles prettily—maybe she’s somewhat affected
by the alcohol, too. Louis’ eyes stay locked on her mouth, her lipstick color the only thing he can
focus on now that Harry’s not facing him anymore. The color is dark purple, matches her dark eye
shadow and black blouse. She notices his gaze. “Are you okay, sweetie? Have you been drinking
much?”

“Yes,” he says, but he isn’t sure to what he’s answering. Her hand sifts into his hair, the touch
oddly comforting as he tries to fight the alcohol in his system.

“Louis, honestly,” Stan says, cooing, only partly sarcastic. “You’re an adorable drunk.” The boys
laugh, and Louis would roll his eyes if he didn’t currently lack of eye-coordination. If that’s a
thing.
“Somebody get him a kiss. He deserves one,” someone else says. “He scored the goal and he looks so bloody miserable. Someone cheer him up.” It’s possibly Oli. Or Lee. Or anyone.

“I don’t need one,” Louis says, still trying to focus on the color of Jas’ lipstick. He doesn’t want to pass out.

“Everybody needs a kiss!” Stan proclaims. “Claire? Where’s Claire? There you are! Kiss, please?”

Louis didn’t know there was a Claire around. But, diner. He thinks of the diner.

Stan gets a kiss. The girl is seems rather adoring of him. Louis has a weak thought that he would applaud if he had the energy.

“Louis, now you go!”

“He’s drunk, you fucking idiot,” Jasmine chastises Stan, who isn’t very sober either.

“On the cheek then.”

Louis glances over at Harry’s group. He wishes he would come and get him. He quietly hopes Harry will see how out of place he feels, walk over and rescue him. Harry probably wouldn’t even do that if Louis hadn’t kissed him. He would steer clear of Jasmine.

Louis continues to look at the other boy. As if by some miracle, Harry turns around and stares back at him. Once again their gazes meet, but this time Harry’s eyes darken almost instantly. It confuses Louis at first, but then he feels the press of lips against his cheek. He’s fairly sure it’s Jasmine.

Louis wants to say something. He wants to stand, walk over to him and tell him he’s the only one. One and only. For the moment he doesn’t care that Harry didn’t like that he kissed him on the footie pitch; he just wants to Harry to know he doesn’t care about Jasmine. But Harry has turned around, and he’s swiftly pacing away. He disappears down the stairs, Louis still able to see the way his eyes burned.

Maybe he’s just drunk, but he suddenly doesn’t understand. Why does Harry care that she kissed his cheek? He doesn’t love Louis. He’s not in love with him, he doesn’t want Louis the way Louis wants him.

But then, of course he’s angry. He hates Jasmine. Perhaps Harry doesn’t love him, but that does not mean he doesn’t (didn’t?) consider Louis his friend. Because they were friends, weren’t they? They talked. They took care of each other. Louis loves Harry. Louis loves Harry so much he feels like he’s going to rip apart—hence the miserable, drunken pining.

“I need to go,” Louis mumbles to his friends.

“Somebody take him to the bathroom,” Lee says, frowning. “He doesn’t look good.”

Louis is grateful when he feels a pair of hands hoisting him up, securely keeping him upright. The person leads him through the room, someone else directing them to a bedroom down the hall, the opposite direction of the stairs. Louis wants to tell them to help him to Harry, but he can’t. Harry is probably gone anyway.

“This way.” The door to the room opens with a key, the hands firmly helping him inside.

“Bathroom is over there.”

The lights in the bathroom are too bright, making him squint and blink rapidly. He’s set down in
front of the toilet, a soft hand brushing his fringe from his eyes. “It’s okay.”

“Lime?” Louis asks.

“Yes, Lou. You’ll feel better once you’ve gotten that shit out of your stomach.”

“Don’t wanna.” He hates puking. “Can’t.”

“Yes, you do. I promise it’ll be fine.”

“Help.”

Liam, lovely and fucking gross Liam, grips Louis’ neck presses two fingers into his mouth. Louis doesn’t need more than the brush against the roof of his mouth, before his stomach starts heaving. It’s horrible and he hates it, spluttering, unable to breathe for long moments. It feels as though it goes on for ages, until finally he only can dry-heave poignantly.

He feels gross. Pathetic.

“Can’t believe you stuck your fingers down my throat,” Louis rasps, coughing, still spluttering. The corners of his eyes are watery, and he feels practically boneless.

“Love you, mate,” Liam chuckles, probably already having washed his hands thoroughly.

“Love you,” Louis replies, tired and hopeless.

“Let’s wash you off.” Liam gets a soaked towel and starts cleaning his face, softly brushing it around his mouth and cheeks. Louis lets him manhandle him out of his shirt, helping him into the bedroom again.

“Hey.”

“Hi. He’s alright. Just tired, I think? Can we put him here?”

“Of course.”

Lipstick. Jasmine.

Louis has never been so grateful for a bed. Liam tucks him in, putting his head against the pillow and pulls the covers over his shoulders. Louis could sleep for a year.

Liam leaves soon, giving him a wave and tells him to try to remember to call him in the morning. Louis’ not sure if he will, but nods tiredly against the pillow. He’s about to close his eyes when he feels the bed shift. Jasmine’s still sitting at the end, legs crossed and arms wrapped around her stomach. She is starting to get up, but abruptly, Louis can’t let her.

“Jas,” he says, voice throaty and sore. She stops from getting off the bed, sitting back down and meeting his eyes, her own looking possibly exhausted. “Why does Harry hate you?”

He can’t help it. He has to ask.

He’s surprised when she looks down, shoulders suddenly hunching in obvious distress. For a moment it seems like she isn’t going to answer, but then she sighs, a sound that makes Louis’ chest feel tight. Her voice is low, almost a whisper, but not quite. “I did something.”

Louis blinks. “What did you do?” he asks, voice barely a sound due to the hoarseness.
She turns to look at him, regarding him carefully for a moment despite how vulnerable she looks. “You've got a thing don’t you?” she asks, voice soft.

Louis’ mouth opens, but nothing comes out. Jasmine doesn’t wait for an answer, already knowing it. She looks away, eyes on the door leading out of the room. “We used to be friends, you know,” she says instead, voice vapid. “Like, proper. Then in sophomore year we started dating.”

Internally, Louis winces. It feels kind of sick, thinking the two of them have been with the same boy. That Harry has been with anyone else but him at all, really. It’s fucked up, but in his head, Harry is his. Nobody knows him like Louis, and nobody knows Louis like Harry does. They’re each other’s person. Harry is Louis’ boy, the only one who seems to be able to repair all the shatters in his head.

“Well,” she continues, stuttering uncomfortably. “We broke up pretty soon. You can relax, Lou. Nothing... happened between us.” She bites her lip. “‘Cause... erm. He—couldn’t, you know.”

Oh.

Oh.

“It was a pretty hard blow, you know? And just the fact that it wasn’t me, but that he’s... gay. Imagine dating someone and realizing they weren’t really themselves with you?” She shakes her head, pursing her lips.

Louis doesn’t know what to say.

“I guess I was stupidly in love and heartbroken,” she whispers. “And then I... told him I’d tell everyone.” Her voice turns into a whimper as she speaks, sounding utterly miserable.

Louis looks up at her where she’s sitting by his side. Her hair is falling over her shoulder, hiding her face as she stares at her hands in her lap.

“I’m not proud, not at all. Sophomore year me didn’t have fucking clue to anything.” She chuckles, but it sounds sad. “I was a bitch. What I did was really hurtful, especially since we were friends. I was supposed to, you know, help him through it. Not even sure he understood why he couldn’t do it when it happened.” Her lips press down into a firm line, before she says, “He hates me now. To this day won't forgive me.”

It's a lot to take in.

“He told me you went after me to get to him.”

“At first, maybe. The first time I said hi to you, he and I had had a fight. It was a new year, new times, you know? I wanted him to forgive me, but of course he wouldn’t. So, I guess I tried to befriend you to irk him, because he used to hate you.” She looks at Louis, meeting his eyes seriously. “I changed my mind. You’re all... no offense, but you’ve got a load of shit surrounding you it seems, so I didn’t want to make things worse for you.” Her lip twitches, smiling just a little. “Also, I kind of like you, as a friend, perhaps. But you like Harry, and he hates me.”

“So we can’t be friends,” Louis murmurs, and she nods. Louis’ entire face feels heavy to uphold. “Harry’s mad at me, too.”

“Why?”

“Kissed him. He doesn’t feel the same. We just...” He lifts his hand, then lets it land heavily on the bed again.
She’s quiet for a moment. “Are you sure about that?”

Louis doesn’t answer, only lays his head back on the pillow. He feels her hand patting his back softly.

“I’ve been mean to you. Mostly because of Harry.”

“I don’t care. Clean slate?”

“Yeah,” he whispers.

She nods, giving his back a last stroke. She stands from the bed, sighs, heading for the door.

Louis’ chest suddenly tightens, a miserable feeling grabbing hold inside him. “Can you stay?”

“What?” She stops by the door, hand on the knob.

“I hate sleeping alone now when... you know.”

She smiles, properly this time, eyes crinkling. “You’re sweet, Louis, but Harry wouldn’t like it one bit.”

No, he would not.

“You sleep here. I’ll let you stay until tomorrow, even have some breakfast before you leave.”

“Thanks.”

He closes his eyes as she quietly closes the door, and he thinks he can hear her locking it from the outside so that no drunkies will stumble inside.

Louis lies down.

What she did was bad. Pretty fucking mean, frankly. Louis understands why Harry’s hurt and angry. On the other hand, it was two years ago, and as far as he knows she hasn’t told a soul.

It’s their shit, he decides. Louis can’t deal with more. But, he won’t be friends with her if Harry wants him, perhaps even if he doesn’t. Fuck, Louis would do anything for him. Anything at all. If only the other boy would talk to him.

He doesn’t understand. He thought they were on the same level. The shocked expression on his face when Louis kissed him shouldn’t have been there. Hell, only seconds before Harry was looking at him like he hung the moon. (If he wanted, Louis would bring him a fucking star. Or maybe just buy him one. He’s heard you can do that.)

He’s fucking hurt. And confused. Harry reacting like that was completely off the charts. What did he do wrong? Nobody even saw it.

Louis falls asleep, chest churning with worry.

**

In the morning, Louis wakes up with a head pounding like a fucking bongo drum. It’s annoying, is what it is. Somebody might as well pick up a loudhailer and breathe through it into his ear incessantly for two hours straight. He’s going to punch the first person he sees today.
As it is, the first person he sees is Jasmine. His head is throbbing as he makes his way downstairs. He wasn’t able to find the shirt he wore the night before, feeling awkward as he sneaks towards the front door in only his jeans. He smells disgusting, too.

There are remnants of the house party everywhere; plastic cups in every corner and on every table, empty packs of cigarettes, furniture disarrayed. When he passes the kitchen—which is placed similarly to Louis’ house by the front door—he’s stopped by the sound of the tap running in the sink.

“What are you standing there for?” Jasmine asks, and Louis turns around, finding her with a bowl of waffle mixture. Her dark hair is in a bun, Abercrombie & Fitch sweats and an old grey t-shirt on. She looks somewhat like a female version of Harry, and Louis thinks if he were into girls (which doesn’t seem to be the case) he’d be attracted to her.

“Was going to sneak out,” he says truthfully.

“Hmm, too bad. I was making waffles.”

Louis is ravenous, stomach completely empty and growlingly craving substance. He doesn’t want to linger here, though. He wants to go home and fill his veins with Advil.

He doesn’t know what to say. He clears his throat. “Can’t find my shirt.”

“I’ll find it and put it in the wash,” she shrugs. “You'll get it back.”


He nods to himself before he leaves, opening the front door to be met by a tepid morning breeze. It’s already warm, despite only being the end of April. His nipples harden against the breeze, but other than that he’s fine as he leaves the house, traipsing down the stone path. He isn’t entirely sure where he parked his car the previous night, but it can’t be far away. He starts looking, heading down the street.

His phone starts buzzing after ten minutes, which is also when he realizes that he didn’t even drive to the party last night. He caught a ride with Oli. Christ. He turns around, realizing he’s going to have to hike home. Might as well start walking then.

“Hullo,” he answers his phone, shoes scraping against the asphalt.

“Are you still drunk, mate?”

“Oh, hey.” Louis clears his throat, shaking his head to try to shake himself awake. The sun still feels too bright for his eyes. “Were you there last night, Ni?” he wonders in confusion.

“Nah, although Zayn told me you were pretty messed up.”

“Right. Zayn,” Louis mumbles. He didn’t know he was there either.

“Yes.”

They’re silent for a moment. “Can I ask you something?” Louis asks as he treks. He feels a bit strange strolling about the area, half naked on a Saturday morning.

“Sure.” Niall’s voice is easy, just like it used to be when they were close friends. Maybe they still are.
“Why did you become friends with him?” The question should be loaded, should bring on an awkward silence filled with tension. It doesn’t. When Niall answers he seems composed.

“Louis,” he says calmly. “I have to admit something to you.”

“Okay?” Louis frowns.

“I’ve known Zayn for a while.”

“A while?”

“Like, since sophomore year.”

Louis literally stops walking. “You’ve what?”

“You know how Liam always has friends around on the weekends because his parents always go to their country house?”

Louis swallows. “Yes.” There’s a fat rock resting by the sidewalk, a big abandoned grass lawn splaying out before it where the houses thin out. He sits down on top of it, knees feeling a little weak. It’s not from fatigue, but sometimes he need things to settle him.

“You never wanted to come because you didn’t like Harry’s friends, but well. Zayn was always there, since apparently he and Liam went to kindergarten together and stuff. So, like, he used to bring stuff to the parties you know, and then when he didn’t show up sometimes, people wanted the stuff. So, it all began with us asking if we could buy from him. After that it all just became the way it is now.”

“Zayn is your dealer?” Louis summarizes incredulously.

“And close friend.”

If it had been September, months ago, Louis would have been angry. He can’t be angry now though, and he doesn’t blame his friend. Maybe he should be little itched that he’s been keeping this from him all along, but hypocrisy is neither attractive nor is it one none of Louis’ traits.

He sighs, closing his eyes for a brief moment. His voice is slow, and it takes a bit of strength pushing the words out. “Do you think we could somehow put everything behind us?

“No judgment, no grudges, and no more lies?”

“Yeah,” he whispers.

“Yes,” Niall says. He sounds serious, yet bright. “But first we have to talk about you.”

Louis nods, and keeps nodding. “That is something I’d like to do in person,” he murmurs quietly.

“No?”

“No?”

“No,” Niall affirms.

“Right,” Louis coughs. “I’m on a street somewhere near Jasmine Parks’ house? Maybe you could bring a shirt and pick me up? Perhaps some deodorant.”

Niall laughs, and Louis is rather certain he keeps laughing after they’ve hung up.
Looking back at these last months, Louis feels like a completely different person. If someone would have told his junior year self that his senior year was going to be the ride of his life, he wouldn’t have believed them, at least not to this extent. Guess what, Louis? You’re going to lose half your family for a year, your best friend for a few months, but also realize you’re in love with your idiot nemesis, who’s actually one of the most perfect human beings you’ll ever meet, and become a better football player at eighteen than you ever thought possible.

His phone buzzes again. Want to come over and hang out? The house is empty, just us lads :)

It’s Mark. His Dad. Is it silly if Louis wants to go? Is it silly if he really, really wants to see him? He’s itching for normalcy. He’s itching for things to be less problematic. He’s also, erm, he’s willing to talk.

The thing is, last week they were all there. The entire family was watching him play his match, even Fizzy, his sister who he hasn’t seen since before Christmas. It’s fucking April and he’s tired of missing her. Everyone else is making an effort, and maybe like Lottie said once, if he tried like everybody else, things would fall into place. Maybe the pieces won’t form together instantly, but those things will come with time.

Louis smiles a little to himself. He’s wise, eh? Old and sage now, isn’t he? Lottie would say that.

Niall’s car turns up down the road only a few minutes later, stopping by the sidewalk. He pushes the nearest car door open, smiling at him. “Oi, oi!”

“Oi,” Louis grins, getting off the rock. He climbs into the passenger seat, easily taking the t-shirt and hoodie Niall is holding out for him. His blond friend is snickering a little at him, but Louis only shoves him in the arm, before treading the navy jumper on top of the simple white tee. It feels like they’re good again. Somehow they’re good. Maybe they’re both just as tired of not being friends.

“I honestly never thought we could go this long without being friends,” Louis murmurs as Niall maneuvers the car back down the street. He leans back in the seat, snuggling into the sweatshirt, sleeves covering his hands and hoodie hiding half his face. “Thought we’d crumble too soon.”

“I always thought we were the physically fighting types?” Niall says, which has Louis arching his brows. “Silent treatment was never our thing. Like, I thought we’d go from cuddling to tearing each other’s hair out. Biting, that kind of stuff.”

“Biting? You’d bite me?”

“I’ll bite you right now.”

Louis cackles. The boy is completely serious. “I’ll bite you, too.”

Niall grins, but keeps his eyes on the road. “Missed you.”

“Missed you, too, pumpkin.”

“New nickname? I like it. You can be my cauliflower.”

“Can I just be your flower instead?”

Niall shrugs. “Of course, my sweet lily.”

They fall into a soft silence, comfortably watching the scenery flash by at the sides of the road.
Sitting here with Niall, no tension clinging at their bones, feels so fucking good. It’s like inhaling fresh air for the first time in weeks. Louis feels lighter, even though there are still monsters gnawing at his feet.

When the houses start forming blocks once again, Louis remembers.

“Niall,” he says, looking at his friend hesitantly.

“Yes, flower?”

“Dad texted me.”

He turns to face him slowly. He knows how hard the divorce has been for Louis’ entire family, and he knows how much Louis’ relationship with his father means. “Oh?”

“He wants me to come over, like, now.” He hopes Niall understands that it doesn’t mean he’s ditching him.

“Do you want to go?”

Louis looks down at his hands, brows knitted. “I think so.”

Niall’s voice is soft when he speaks, and Louis looks up. “Should I drop you off?”

Their eyes meet for just a moment. “I’d like that.”

“It’s okay, mate,” Niall says reassuringly, because he simply knows Louis. He knows what makes his brow furrow and he knows why. “Good even. I’ll just wait in the car, and if you want to run out I’ll whisk you away.”

He loves his best mate to the moon and back. He wish he could convey it a better way.

Louis directs Niall the rest of the way to his father’s new house. Well. He’s been living there a little less than a year now, so. His dad’s house.

It’s not until they’ve parked just outside that his pulse starts to pick up pace, finally beginning to bother him.

“It’s alright. Just take a moment to brace yourself, mate.”

“I know, I know,” Louis answers, but his leg is still jumping up and down restlessly.

“What do you want me to do something? Like, an encouraging speech?”

Louis doesn’t know if it would help, because he wants to do this, he’s just scared of what might happen once he walks inside. He nods.

“All right,” Niall hums, obviously thinking up something. Louis almost rolls his eyes. “Oh! Yeah! Okay.” He clears his throat. “One time when I was little, before we met, I went away for a weekend and Greg was supposed to take care of the hamster we shared while I was gone.”

Louis watches him dubiously.

“It gets good!” Niall complains indignanty. “So—if you let me finish—when I came back, it had died of age, right? But I thought he’d killed it. So, I cried for literal days, but when I finally told Greg why I was sad, I found out that that wasn’t what happened at all.”
“What kind of bullshit story is that?”

“I don’t know. It was the only thing I could think of!”

They stare at each other in annoyance for a few moments, before Louis gives in, sighing.

“What was the hamster’s name, Ni?”

“John.”

“Right. I think I’ll just go inside then,” he leers. Niall shoves him in the shoulder.

“Just fucking go inside, Louis.” He gives him an encouraging smile, and Louis rolls his eyes, but swallows and opens the car door before he can change his mind.

The stone path up to the house is familiar to his own house’s. Although all houses in town are rather similar, this yard is different, because this is the only place Louis has ever genuinely feared.

The small steps up the porch and to the front door make his knees wobbly, and it reminds him of stepping into the bathtub a week ago. It’s different now, because then he was sure that Harry would make him feel alright. He doesn’t know what to expect on the other side of this door.

Somehow he always expected it to be Harry to hold his hand through this moment, maybe perhaps only because he has been here since Mark actively started to seek contact in person. But Harry is avoiding Louis, and Louis is avoiding Harry. The situation is just strange, awkward and uncomfortable. Louis wishes they would talk, if only to know where they stand. It’s terrible not knowing.

He inhales deeply, squaring his shoulders, ringing the bell.

The moment Mark opens the door, Louis feels fucking silly. His father is smiling, his eyes wide and soon crinkling in the corners.

“Louis,” he says warmly, and it’s obvious he didn’t think he’d show up.

“Hi,” Louis mumbles self-consciously, looking up.

He doesn’t try to hug him, and he’s grateful for that, because he doesn’t think he would have been able to survive an awkward moment like that. Louis hesitantly steps out of his shoes by the door once inside, following Mark into the kitchen.

“I’m so happy you’re here, son,” he says, grinning. “Missed you.”

He nods. “Yeah.” He can’t say it back. Not yet.

Louis hesitantly sits down in one of the kitchen chairs as Mark starts looking through the walnut colored cupboards. He still remembers the first time he and the girls saw the new house. Louis hated it. He hated the smell of new furniture, he hated the new clock on the kitchen wall, he hated how the couch in the living room wasn’t in worn leather, and he absolutely detested the fact that all of it was real.

“Should we make some lunch? Get that hangover out of you?” He grins knowingly, nodding at him.

Louis’ cheeks warm. Just thinking of the miserable previous night makes him feel the heat of mild humiliation. He can’t believe that he basically told Jasmine that he’s head over heels for Harry,
when the only thing connecting him to said boy this past week is the angry glare he was given. Louis misses him so much it feels like an iron fist is clenching down on his insides each time he thinks of him. The fact that Harry has pretty much dumped him is both embarrassing as it is heartbreaking. Although, he can’t exactly feel like he’s going to cry yet, because he hasn’t been explicitly told the truth yet. Perhaps he’s protecting himself a bit, imagining that if Harry hasn’t officially told him that he’s pathetically and unrequitedly in love, it isn’t real yet.

The house isn’t that intimidating anymore. The house doesn’t matter.

“I can’t do this without talking,” Louis whispers, shaking his head clear of Harry’s face. “I need to know first.”

Mark nods, understanding that the conversation needs to be held, but there’s a confused wrinkle in his forehead. “Know what, Lou?” He walks back to the table slowly, sitting down on the opposite side of the table.

“Why you didn’t want me?” It feels like his voice is one word from trembling. He hates sounding this insecure.

Mark opens his mouth. “Why I didn’t want you? What do you mean?”

“The divorce?” Louis says, voice getting a fraction louder as he starts to feel upset. “When you were talking custody over the girls you didn’t even mention me.” He still remembers feeling like he wasn’t there. In house filled with seven people, he felt like he was invisible.

Mark looks completely nonplussed. “Louis, sweetheart—”

“Why?” He shakes his head. “I wasn’t even asked what I wanted. Just tell me why.”

“Louis, biologically you’re not mine,” he starts, looking at him with warm eyes. It doesn’t make sense. “There wasn’t a chance in a million years that would I have gotten custody over you if there would have been a fight. My lawyer told me not to get into it. You were going to be eighteen in just a few months, and your mother and I were certain that you’d want to live with us both anyway. We thought that we’d come to an agreement by ourselves.”

It’s fucked up hearing it like this. It sounds like a simple version of what was Louis’ personal hellhole for months. His throat is thick, a lump forming. He hates the feeling. It always makes him feel so powerless, all of his feelings out on display.

Mark’s voice is softer. “But then you refused to speak to me after the divorce was finalized and —”

“Maybe I wanted you to fight for me,” Louis whispers. He can’t look up to meet his eyes. It’s too hard. He has to fight every word out of his mouth. “You made me feel like I wasn’t important. You and Mum were having constant arguments over the girls.” Mark opens his mouth, but Louis has to continue. “Do you realize how insignificant that made me feel?” he asks, finally looking up. Mark is staring back at him in distress. “I thought you didn’t want to be my dad anymore.”

The tears spill over, just a few, falling down his cheeks. He brushes them away swiftly, angrily. He sniffs, shoulders shaking with his uneven breaths.

Mark gets up from his chair, walking around the table quickly. He sinks down on the floor to Louis’ level, taking his wrists softly. He stares up at him, and even though Louis wants to, it’s hard to pick his head up and look at him without the safety of space.
“Louis,” Mark says slowly, entirely serious, yet mild and reassuring. “I love you so much. I don’t want to ever not be your dad.” He watches Louis for a moment, squeezing his arms. “Do you remember when Lottie was born? You held her little hand in the hospital, looked up at me with your blue round eyes,” he chuckles, “and then you asked me if this meant that I was your dad too, and—”

“And you said yes,” Louis interjects, voice hoarse and his mouth is pulling down with emotion.

Mark nods. “And I said yes. Exactly.” He squeezes his wrists again, making Louis meet his eyes. “Listen to me, Lou. You’ve always been my son, and you still are now. I’ll still be your dad when you’re thirty and have five kids of your own, yeah? Always.”

“Okay,” Louis whispers. He nods, and then nods again. “Yeah.”

“Good,” Mark smiles, and pulls him into a hard embrace.

Louis clings to him. It’s hard to comprehend how idiotic these months have been. All he can think of is how good it feels to be wrapped in his dad’s arms, how long it has been since he’s felt his scent, how he’s missed him. He doesn’t know for how long they hug, but when they let go it feels like a balloon has burst around them, and for the first time the room is entirely free from tension.

“Want some lunch then?” Mark asks, standing up, smiling down.

“Actually,” Louis says, looking up sheepishly, “Niall is waiting in the car. We were gonna hang out. Haven’t in a while.”

“Oh, well. Next time then,” he shrugs.

Next time.

“Alright,” Louis says, smile tugging at his lips. “Next time.”

He leaves only a few minutes later, Mark repeating how much he loves him and waving at Niall from the porch before going inside. Louis slides into the car, chest warm, slumping against the seat.


Louis nods.

“Hug?”

“Yes, please.”

He leans over, and then Niall encompasses him entirely in his arms. Louis feels the tears start to prickle in his eyes once more, but this time they’re coming faster, heavier, more. His chest starts to heave rapidly. He can feel Niall patting his back, trying to placate him, but it only makes him shake more. He presses his eyes closed, but it doesn’t keep the tears from coming. He’s bawling his eyes out, sniffling disgustingly into Niall’s neck.

“What is it, flower?” Niall murmurs. “Thought it went fine?”

Louis shakes his head, exhaling raggedly, sniffling. He’s ugly crying, unable to stop, everything coming over him. He doesn’t even know why.

“Louis?” Niall asks, voice serious now. He keeps his arms just as hard around him, not letting him
out of the cocoon.

“I’m in love with him,” he cries.

Niall stills. “Mark?”

“No!” Louis shakes his head, snot running down his chin. He can’t help the twitch of his mouth, but the sadness crashes over him instantly. “Harry. I’m in love with Harry.”

Niall stiffens, seeming to suddenly realize what he said. He’s in love with him. He’s in love with Harry.

Louis cries more. His friend doesn’t say anything, but he still keeps his hold around him. He’s stiff, and Louis wails like a child.

“What?” Niall asks, voice leveled but shocked.

“We’ve been having sex,” Louis coughs up. “I love him.”

It’s a rather succinct summarization. It does the job, though.

Niall leans back, staring at Louis with wide eyes. He’s gripping his upper arms, but keeps a distance. Perhaps because Louis is crying up a flood, hiccupping and shaking almost violently.

They sit in silence, contemplating what Louis just said.

“Shit,” Niall whispers. “Right, we gotta talk!” He sounds strange, and Louis coughs disgustingly, wiping his face with the end of his shirt. Niall’s nose wrinkles. “Okay, Jesus. Breathe.”

Louis can’t talk. He’s just crying, shaking and snotting, and he can’t do anything about it. God, he just—Harry. He loves Harry and suddenly that makes everything about Louis and his life even more pathetic.

“Louis.” Niall’s voice softens. “Is this what everything has been about? You and Harry?”

He nods, and just keeps nodding, wiping at his eyes.

“Louis, you have to talk. You have to tell me.”

He’s not exactly eloquent. He jumps in timeline, interrupts himself in the middle of sentences to cry and splutter and show texts on his phone. It’s a little messed up, but Niall understands in the end. The tears won’t stop falling, but his shaking ceases eventually.

“So,” Niall says, scratching his hair as he frowns. “Like, I can understand why you didn’t say anything about the job thing. I get it, it’s embarrassing—”

“Thanks, Ni.” Louis leers just a little, wiping his chin.

“But the Harry thing? Like? What even?” He shakes his head. “Like, that’s huge. That’s bigger than huge, it’s... What’s bigger than huge?”

“This?” Louis sniffs.

“Yeah! That’s a huge part of your life, and it’s Harry. Did you think I’d be mad or something?” he sighs. “Cause this beef with him has always been yours, not mine. I don’t care that it’s him, but just the fact that you thought you had to hide it? I honestly can’t believe you didn’t tell me the moment it happened. You know I don’t give a fuck about the gay—”
“Queer.”

“—thing. I support you no matter what, because I am your best friend!” He stops for a moment, looking down at his own hands. “I just... I’m a little disappointed. A lot hurt.”

Louis’ lip wobbles “I’m so sorry.”

“No more lies,” Niall says firmly, looking up to meet his eyes.

“Technically—”

“—or withholding of information.”

“Yeah,” Louis says. “Promise.”

“Okay,” Niall nods. He smiles. “Let’s hug it out and go home, yeah?”

Hugging him feels like a year of exhaustion and anxiety being released from his gut. Everything is out in the open. He doesn’t have to hide from Niall anymore, he’s got him back on his side, and he didn’t lose him. He’s on the way to being on good terms with Mark as well. Some things are falling into place.

“We’ll figure this out, yeah? It’s not entirely fucked up with Harry. We’ll fix this.”

Louis doesn’t know if he believes him, but he feels infinitely better after hearing him say it.

They drive home in comfortable silence, fatigue starting to cling at Louis’ limbs. He can see where Niall’s t-shirt is ruined from his crying, but his friend doesn’t seem to mind. Louis loves him so much, and at the moment he can’t quite believe Niall is real, that he’s a person that Louis gets to have in his life.

Niall parks the car outside Louis’ house, sighing heavily. “Let’s just order pizza and watch movies with Lottie? I’ve missed her, too.”

Louis nods, opening the car door and trudging towards the house, Niall not far behind. He reaches him before they walk inside, gripping his arm.

“Hey,” he says, meeting his eyes. “Not to be cheesy, but I love you.”

“We’ve always been cheesy, Ni,” Louis smiles. “Love you, too.”

Louis opens the door and they take off their shoes, heading into the kitchen to find the takeout menus. Niall comes up behind him, and they end up discussing pizza toppings. Louis can’t stop smiling.

“Hey!”

Louis and Niall turn around, finding Lottie standing there with an open mouth. “Hello,” Niall grins right back.

“Where the fuck have you been!” Lottie exclaims loudly, and runs over to embrace Louis’ friend. Niall meets her halfway, swinging her around. It’s slightly movie-esque, and Louis finds it a little strange, but his smile almost hurts.

“And you!” Lottie says once Niall’s let her go, pointing at Louis now. She walks up to him. “You text when you stay out the entire night! Where the fuck have you been today?!”
Louis clears his throat awkwardly, smiling down at his feet. He looks up, unable to keep a straight face. “I was at Dad’s.”

Lottie’s face shapes into the embodiment of a surprised emoji—which is a quite hilarious way to put it, Louis might add—and then suddenly it crumbles. She takes the small step and her body collides with Louis’ solidly. He wraps his arms around her, keeping her tucked safe against himself.

“Thank you,” she whispers, and he realizes just how much he’s been hurting her by being stubborn and scared this whole time. She’s just a little girl, and he’s her big brother, supposed to protect her. He thinks the family can finally start to heal properly.

“Love you.” There have been too many heartfelt moments in one day, but Louis has to say it. His gates have opened it seems. He almost rolls his eyes at himself, but that’s what it feels like.

“Love you, too.”

“Should we form a group hug?”

“Shut up, Niall,” Lottie says, squeezing Louis closer.

**

One would think that after such a groundbreaking weekend that Louis has had, things would start changing for the better. Personally, Louis considers himself having had quite the crappy year, so if God would stop being a little bitch and send Harry on his merry way to talk to him, then he’d be grateful.

Yes, he’s angry. And God never listens, as usual.

Neither does Harry.

Louis tried to talk to talk to him during practice. It was embarrassing. He wanted to cry.

It wasn’t even about them, it was about footie. Like, the team that they’re both captain of. It’s been another week of sneaking around each other, Friday already having come back around. He thinks it’s rather absurd how slow the days pass without Harry. Suddenly he has all this free time, and nothing to do. He’s got Niall, but he doesn’t take up all the time Harry did, because Harry was constantly by his side. Louis is so bored, wanking isn’t even making him feel good.

He walked up to Harry today during morning practice on the pitch, where he was sipping from his bottle of water. Louis said hello, like the polite mannered person he is. Harry stared at him awkwardly for three whole seconds before he walked away without a word.

Louis should feel rejected, but he’s in the next stage: annoyance. (He’s still very much heartbroken and confused, but that’s not to be mentioned.)

There’s been an obvious change of dynamic, and everyone has noticed. Two weeks ago they were closer than ever, and now they can barely look one another in the eye. It’s fucking annoying is what it is. None of the lads on the team say anything, but Louis is quite sure they’re worried about the upcoming game, afraid whatever is going on between Harry and Louis will shake how good things have been going. Louis isn’t worried, but he’s a little bit worried.

They’re on the way to the pizza parlor, about to get pizzas before heading over to Liam’s house. Louis is being social, because Niall is actually bringing out his social butterfly (which is still also
They order six pizzas, and end up waiting by the counter.

“Seeing Harry now is kind of fucked up,” Niall says conversationally. Louis turns to look at him. He doesn’t know why, because Harry hasn’t been there for him in weeks, but mentioning Harry in a negative manner irks him. He needn’t worry though, because apparently Niall didn’t mean that. “Like, knowing that you and him get off together. Can’t even picture it. Imagine you and him snogging…”

Oh god. Louis should definitely not tell him about the time he ate Harry out.

“You’re weak.”

“I can see the chemistry, though. Hate sex. Nice.”

“It was only hate sex in the beginning. They weren’t even the best times,” Louis mutters.

“Which was the best time then?” The blond wiggles his brows.

“Not telling you, I don't even know.” Definitely when he rimmed Harry and they held hands, or their last time.

“Okay, but tell me what he’s like then, when you’re not fighting.” Louis squints at him. “Come on, I want to know. Lottie has told me, but I want to hear it from you.”

Louis rolls his eyes. “Fine, he’s lovely. Can we not talk about him, please?”

Niall suddenly frowns, clearing his throat. He inches his head to the side, obviously having spotted something. “Err, okay. But, um, he’s here.”

“What do you mean ‘here’?”

“As in here,” Niall hisses.

Louis swiftly turns, eyes widening as he sees Harry walking inside the parlor with his mum and dad. This is all too familiar. Louis can’t deal with this.

“I’ll be back,” he hisses to Niall, then scurries away towards the bathroom. He hurries inside, throwing the door shut behind him.

Jesus. He is such a pussy. No matter how annoyed Harry makes him, he still has him running and hiding. How the fuck did this happen? (He also can’t believe how many times he has asked himself this very same question.) He is standing in a fucking bathroom, hiding like a scared freshman on the first day of High School.

In four years his relationship with Harry has brought out a lot in him. Hate, annoyance, indignation, anger, but also love, worry, and adoration. However, never has he been scared. Louis has had some pretty low moments this year, but he thinks he detests this one the most.

Maybe mostly because he knows Harry isn’t scary, never mean, wouldn’t hurt a fly. So, that would mean he’d be entirely honest telling Louis how he really feels if it came to it. Louis doesn’t think he wants to know the answer anymore.

The bathroom door opens. Louis turns around, giving his back to the entrance, hiding his face.

“Oh.”
It’s unfair how Louis can recognize his voice by such a small sound. He winces, turning around.

“Hello.” He keeps his eyes down, shuffling on his feet. Part of him wonders if Harry is even going to answer, or just turn around and flee.

“Hello.” It surprises him how nervous Harry sounds. He realizes then, as he watches Harry fiddle with his fingers, that he is just as awkward and unsure as him. He doesn’t understand why. He doesn’t understand anything when it comes to Harry these last two weeks.

They stand there, partly looking at the floor, partly glancing up to each other.

Harry is finally the one to take the step. “I’ve seen you’re friends with Niall again. He knows?”

Louis purses his lips, nodding. “Yep.” He can’t look up completely. Harry has watched him? Maybe that’s exaggerating. Of course, he’s noticed.

“Good,” Harry whispers, barely making a sound.

More than two minutes must pass by, both of them uncomfortably silent, not knowing how to act. Louis hates this. He needs to know what happened. He needs to know why the kiss on the pitch ruined everything.

Harry carefully walks towards the sink, stepping around Louis, whose gaze follows his every movement. He washes his hands, slowly and thoroughly, as if he wants to drag it out. Is Louis being self-righteous? Thinking that Harry actually wants to be in here with him? Or is he just optimistic? Maybe Harry always takes five minutes to wash his hands.

Jesus Christ. Shut up.

“What’s your problem?” he asks then, voice clear. He sees Harry still, swallowing. He straightens up stiffly, stuffing his hands into the pocket of his navy hoodie. He looks tired, Louis notices. He’s in black Adidas track pants, a pair Louis usually would borrow, hair loose. “What happened?” Louis asks again. “I don’t understand what happened.”

Harry doesn’t say anything, just frowns at his own feet.

“Harry.”

“Harry.”

For the love of God.

“Harry, for fuck’s sake—“

Harry reaches out and winds his hands around Louis’ neck, bringing their mouths together.

“Mmpf.” Louis’ hands fumble, clasping at Harry’s hoodie as he pushes Louis back against the sink, lips hot on his. It doesn’t take long until his tongue is in Louis’ mouth, and he whines, arching into Louis’ body as he grips Harry’s waist.

It feels too good. All too good.

It’s all so natural, every movement coming so easily. Louis pushes at the small of Harry’s back, making him press closer to him. Harry follows Louis’ direction without thought. His tongue in his mouth is the best taste in the world, both of them moaning as the kiss deepens.
Harry exhales, whining when Louis breaks apart from the kiss. The sound is so delicious, and Louis has missed it so much it drives him crazy.

“I can’t stay away from you.” Harry shakes his head, drawing Louis in once more by his neck. Their lips mesh together so well, fitting perfectly. God, he can’t believe they’re doing this, not when—

Louis suddenly falters, leaning back slightly. Harry follows, but Louis sets a hand against his chest, keeping him from re-connecting their lips.

“What do you mean?”

“I—”

“You’ve been purposely keeping away from me. Why?”

Harry leans back slightly, eyes flickering. “I didn’t mean—”

“Yeah, you did.” He stares at the other boy. “I don’t get this,” he nods down, gesturing at how they’re curled around each other. “I don’t understand what happened between the footie match and right now.”

Harry blinks rapidly, lip wobbling just a fraction. Louis sees it, but he doesn’t understand it. Harry opens his mouth to say something, but nothing comes out. His eyes are so clear and green, pleading. He doesn’t know what to say, that much is obvious. Harry starts to say something again, but then the door to the bathroom opens, ruining everything.

Louis steps back, leaving at least two feet between them.

“Oh, Louis! Haven’t seen you in a while!” It’s Des, Harry’s father.

“Hey,” Louis mumbles, crossing his arms with a sigh.

Des strolls over, reaching out to shake Louis’ hand. “Glad to see you! And nice to see you both together for once. Harry’s been miserable lately, missing you. Where have you been?” He chuckles, clapping Harry’s back warmly.

Both of them stare at the older man, Harry’s cheeks hot.


“I gotta go,” Louis whispers, and ducks away. He leaves the room, finding Niall leaning against the counter outside, pizza cartons under his arm. “Niall, we’re leaving,” he says, stalking towards the exit.

“Whoa, wait, what happened?” Niall follows him outside and to the car, jumping into the passenger seat, pizza cartons on his lap. “I saw Harry go inside, what’s going on?”

“I don’t get him.” Louis shakes his head vigorously. “I don’t understand what is going on in his fucking head.”

“Well, ask him?”

“I did, but his freaking dad walked in!” He sighs, but it turns into a groan. “I don’t know how to explain. With us you never get the whole thing. We just understand each other, but I feel like I am at a point where he needs to just hand it over, because I don’t get it anymore.”
He’s been keeping away from him, but now he just grabbed him and kissed him? It doesn’t make sense. Does that mean he doesn’t want to stop being whatever it is that they are? Louis doesn’t want to lose Harry, but he thought kissing him on the footie pitch would mean something on a bigger level. Is that why Harry kept away, because he knows Louis has feelings for him? He tried to keep away so he wouldn’t end up hurting Louis’ feelings, but in the end the temptation kicked his knees in?

Fuck. The fuck does Louis know. He doesn’t understand shit.

Niall nods, frowning. “Let’s just drive over to Liam’s.”

Niall says it as if to dismiss the situation, that Louis should think about something else for the moment. Well, easier said than done. Louis frowns, confused anger painting his face somber. He suddenly feels more hurt than he has this entire week, simply because he doesn’t understand. What did he do? Did the kiss really ruin everything? He thought all those kisses they’ve shared meant the same thing. He thought when he trusted Harry with himself that that meant exactly the same thing.

“Don’t cry, Louis,” Niall says. Louis turns to look at him. “You’re more than him. Even if it might feel like he’s a big part of you, he’s not all. You’re you, and if he’s done something that isn’t cool, then you can’t let him drag down all of you.”

“Thanks, Ni,” Louis whispers, but it only helps a little. Niall hasn’t known for long about them, and he doesn’t get the whole Harry and Louis concept quite yet. It’s not that Harry done something, it’s what he isn’t doing. Louis needs him to do something.

They arrive at Liam’s house just past eight, walking inside without knocking. It’s been a while since Louis’ been at his house, but the interior and the colors of the walls are familiar. The house always seems to have a distinctive smell of home cooked meals, and Louis has always had a habit of feeling at home here. Not that he’s been over that much, but it happens now and then. Liam’s mum adores him, he’s pretty sure.

Liam and a few people are already in the living room, slouching on the couches. There are a few opened beer cans and crisp packets on the table, the TV playing music off someone’s Spotify account. Louis recognizes Sophia, Liam and Ed, then notices Zayn sitting in one of the armchairs. Louis nods in greetings, reciprocation coming in the form of a smirk and a military salute. Louis is fairly certain that Zayn finds Louis’ relationship with Harry hilarious for some reason, or maybe he just enjoys Louis’ struggle. Maybe he likes watching people struggle in general.

Louis shakes his head. The only one he’s ever known to be described as sinister is himself, and that’s not even by someone who dislikes him. His mum actually loves him very dearly.

He takes a seat in Liam’s lap (because where else?) and gives Sophia an exaggerated smile. She rolls her eyes, but he knows she’s only endeared. He once again wonders if she knows about Harry. Probably.

Niall dumps the pizzas on the table, sits down on the couch and instantly steals an unopened beer from the bunch. Ed punches him in the arm subsequently, so the owner of the beer is found quickly. Louis watches in amusement as they bicker, leaning back against Liam’s shoulder.

“Are you okay?” Liam asks in his ear, arm wrapped securely around his stomach.

Louis keeps his eyes on the boys. “Yes.”

“Louis.”
“Harry.”

“I’ve noticed.” Liam’s voice is just a murmur, but he’s serious and warm at the same time. Louis can smell on his breath that he’s had at least one cigarette and a drink of something harder. He’s not drunk, though. “Wanna tell me?”

Louis bites the inside of his cheeks. “I don’t know where we stand.”

“Ask him.”

“It’s a little hard when he’s all ‘kiss and go’.”

“He’s doing that?” Liam frowns.

“Not really. Just today.”

“When?” Louis can feel Liam’s stubble against his jaw.

“You’ve got a beard.”

“I’m gonna be nineteen soon, I’m allowed.”

“Harry’s nineteen.” Ah, logic.

“You need to stop thinking about him all the time.”

“I know.”

“Want to smoke pot?”

Louis shakes his head. “Not in the mood.”

Liam looks at him. “What exactly happened between you?”

Louis sighs, looking away and shaking his head. “Nothing,” he mutters, slumping back against Liam so they’re resting back against the chair. Liam lets it go, because he’s nice like that. Sophia arches a brow at Louis’ disgruntled face and his grumpily crossed arms. “What, Mummy?”

“You’re adorable when you’re sulking,” she laughs.

Louis rolls his eyes, and eventually everyone falls into another conversation, suddenly discussing Stan and the Claire girl for some reason. Apparently something went down on Thursday. Louis couldn’t care less. He’s feeling a rather annoyed with the boy for the moment. He very much dislikes the way he keeps pushing Jas in his face. Pretty uncool, especially when he was that drunk last weekend.

“He’s coming round later,” Ed says. “He’s at hers at the moment, I think.”

“He’s getting round,” Zayn says offhandedly.

“What do you mean?” Liam squints.

Zayn shrugs. “He was with Hannah the other day.”

Louis snorts. “Hannah Walker?” That’s the last girl Louis snogged before Harry. He rolls his eyes. For some reason it sounds pretty silly. Hannah’s lovely, but come on.
“Yeah.” Zayn shrugs again, reaching to pop a crisp into his mouth.

“And you think that’s cool?” Liam asks.

“I don’t consent to cheating if that’s what you’re implying,” Zayn says in annoyance, leering at Liam, but then for some reason his eyes flicker to Louis. Louis arches his brows, completely nonplussed. What the hell is that supposed to mean? “I don’t consent to it, but that’s his business, I suppose.”

Louis frowns in indignation, once again crossing his arms. What the fuck was that supposed to mean?!

The front door to the house opens, and not long thereafter someone pokes their head into the living room, holding up a case of beer. “Brought some—oh.”

Fantastic. Louis is thrilled.

He’s in the same clothes as before, and Louis wonders if the other boy thinks it’s appropriate to show up to a binge in a hoodie and track pants. The fact that he pulls it off is irrelevant. And Louis hates that as soon as he sees how sad Harry looks, Louis’ insides turn to goo and he can’t be even be the slightest bit annoyed anymore.

He meets his eyes, and Harry swallows when he sees Louis’ sour face. The other boys greet him, but he looks uneasy as he sits down on the couch on the opposite side of Louis and Liam. The conversations keep going, but Louis is unable to join in. He finds himself staring at the table in the middle of the circle, gaze unwavering, because he doesn’t want to have to look up and meet Harry’s eyes.

Sometime in middle of someone’s sentence, Louis gives in, looking up for the first time since meeting Harry’s eyes when he stood in the doorway. Instantly his eyes flit to Harry (because they’re treacherous) and he finds Harry isn’t looking at him—he’s staring at his stomach, more precisely at Liam’s arm wrapped around him.

Fuck. No. Louis can’t deal with this. For the first time he realizes that sitting on someone else’s lap with his… whatever Harry is, in front of him is a really stupid idea. The longer Harry keeps his eyes downcast, but surely looked on the touch, Louis feels more and more jittery.

He can’t be sitting here in Liam’s lap when Harry is right in front of him. It’s wrong, especially when the only one’s lap he’d rather sit on is Harry’s. Or better, Harry should be sitting on Louis’ lap. He should have him tucked against him, be able to feel his curls tickling his temple and cheek, drowned in his boyish scent, and feel his soft, pliant body against his chest as he breathes. That’s what should be happening.

“Going to the bathroom,” Harry mumbles then, dolefully standing and heading out of the room.

Louis starts to stand immediately, taking the chance relocating from Liam’s lap to Harry’s spot on the couch, but he feels Liam’s arm tighten on him, Niall shaking his head just a fraction. Louis stills in confusion, wondering what he means, and why both of them are acting the same way. Is there some sick telepathy thing going on?

“Stay put,” Liam says. “Don’t move because of him.”

“Can you read my mind or something?” Louis asks.

“No, but you got all tense when you saw him watching you. Louis, stay relaxed.”
“I can’t relax!” he exclaims. Before he knows it he slaps a hand over his mouth, wondering what the hell has gotten into him. “Shit,” he whispers, realizing everyone’s looking at him. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine,” Liam says, nonplussed.

Louis looks up, and great. Harry is standing in the doorway, looking at him.

Louis just walks away. He disentangles himself from Liam’s arms, grabs one of the beer bottles on the table, ignoring everyone’s looks and brushes past Harry. He shakes his head, exhausted. He heads up the stairs, shoulders slumping and shaking his head at himself. He finds Liam’s room upstairs, closes the door behind him and falls back on the bed, covering his face with the nearest pillow.

He screams, kicking his legs dramatically. He’s fucking tired. He’s acting like a child, but he doesn’t know how else to let out his frustration. Usually going to the pitch and kick a ball around helps, but he can’t do that right now.

It doesn’t take long before he hears the door into the room open and soon closing again, steps reaching the bed. The bed sinks next to him, but he doesn’t want to look up. He knows it’s him. How could it not be?

He feels his hand on his knee. It’s just there, resting, fingertips a tiny weight on his jeans. Nothing happens. Louis breathes hotly against the pillow, arms squeezing it tightly, muscles tense. Harry’s hand moves an inch to start with, then he strokes his knee, palm flatly patting his leg. Louis doesn’t know what he’s doing, but he’s not sure that Harry would know either if he asked.

Louis thrusts the pillow away, sitting up, hair disarrayed. Harry’s hand remains where it is on his thigh. Louis stares down at it, sitting still.

“What are you doing?” he asks carefully. He doesn’t know what he means. What are you doing with your hand? What are you doing with me?

Harry keeps his eyes downcast, brows knitted and his shoulders tight. “Want you,” he whispers.

Louis doesn’t know how to translate that. He needs to know what it means. “Harry, what’s going on?” he asks, filled with fatigue.

Harry looks at him, swallowing, eyes flickering down to his lips. “I want you.”

He reaches out once again and clutches Louis’ jaw, holding him in place as he plants a kiss to his lips. Louis doesn’t know whether to give in or stop it. He opens his mouth out of habit, because Harry kissing him always makes him want more. This time Harry kisses him earnestly, then with urgency. There’s something not right about it. He seems almost desperate. He’s not himself right now. Louis can feel it. It’s a distraction.

He breaks apart, pushing Harry back forcefully. “What are you doing?” he asks, and this time there’s anger behind it.

Harry’s face crumbles. He inhales shakily, squeezing his eyes shut. “I’m so sorry,” he whispers. “I’m so sorry.”

“What do you mean?” Louis asks, cautious now.

“I can’t tell you,” Harry whispers. “I don’t want to hurt you.”

No.
It hurts more. It hurts more this way.

“You hurt me more by not telling me the truth,” Louis begs, eyes starting to itch. If it is what Louis thinks it is, then just do it. Be done with it. Be done with him. He doesn’t have to drag it out, just end it.

“Fuck, Harry. Just fucking say it.” Harry’s tears roll over the edge, flooding down his cheeks, leaving tracks. It makes him angry, voice sharp. “What the fuck happened? On the pitch? What the fuck made you look like I’d just destroyed everything?”

Harry inhales, crying as he speaks. “That’s not what I was talking—“

“Harry.”

Harry shakes his head, giving in, but now his posture is different, like they’re talking about something else entirely. He looks up, but as soon as he meets Louis’ eyes he averts his, entirely hapless once more.

It takes another few moments, then he whispers, “At the match you looked at me like...” He stops. He fumbles for words, opening and closing his mouth, but can’t seem to come to anything.

“Harry,” Louis says, urging him. Harry looks up, meeting his eyes for real this time. The anger suddenly passes within him, because Harry is fucking miserable, and he looks at Louis like he is everything to him. Louis doesn’t dare to hope, but...

“It’s silly,” Harry says in despair, hiding behind his hands.

Louis catches them, keeping them safe in his between them on his lap. “It’s not silly,” he whispers.

He keeps pushing him to say what it is he wants, because he can feel that it’s big. He can feel that it’s something involving what Louis is feeling inside. His butterflies are going crazy, flapping their wings and making his entire chest flower with anticipation. His pulse is ticking wild, no speeding limit. Couldn’t catch him if you tried.

Harry shakes his head, exhaling. He’s halfway to tears again, and Louis so desperately wants to know what it is that’s making Harry feel like this.

Before he says it, the room feels more silent than ever.

“You looked at me like it meant something,” Harry whispers, eyes shining with tears as he looks up.

Louis’ heart pounds so hard he can feel it in his throat. He can feel a lump forming, thickening his airways. The muscles in the corners of his mouth forcefully pull down.

But Harry continues.

“And I’m scared that it means what I think it does, because...” He inhales shakily, gasping for air between his hiccups. “I don’t know if I’m right, Louis, I don’t. I’m so sorry—”

Louis leans in and kisses him, softly, reassuringly. He needs to convey that it did mean something. Harry hiccups against his mouth, and it’s a little weird, but Louis stays, fingers slipping into the hair at his neck, thumbs stroking his jaw. He looks him in the eye, lips soft against his.

Harry understands. He stares back at him. His shoulders move up and down, chest heaving.
There’s something that’s wrong, though. He doesn’t seem placated, nor does he seem relieved.

Louis feels like he’s been running hot and cold interchangeably. One moment he thinks Harry’s going to break his heart and the next it seems like he loves him back.

“I got into Manchester University, Louis,” Harry whispers. “I’m so sorry.”

Have you ever felt like you’re suddenly trapped in vacuum? It’s just silence, you and your thoughts. It feels quite like that, the few seconds after Harry stops speaking. They stare at each other, blinking, entirely still as if one movement would shatter them both like glass.

Louis finally leans back. His mouth is ajar, shock flooding through his entire system. His hands drop from Harry, the room feeling like crystal, fragile.

“I found out this morning,” Harry says then, crying, words desperate. “I’m so sorry! You can still get in, Louis! But I, I have to accept, because I— There’s nothing here for me, and my parents won’t pay for anything other than business school, but I got a full scholarship. I can’t not take it, Louis. I’m so sorry. Please forgive me.” His words end in a whisper, shoulders shaking with tears.

*You’re also not the only player on the team looking to get into Manchester.*

Louis remembers when Coach told him. Back then he didn’t even consider who it could be. He should have realized sooner, because it makes sense.

“Oh my god,” he whispers to himself.


It’s not realistic, though. It’s not realistic at all.

The shitty part is that he gets why they’ve called Harry already, not even having seen the last game of the season. Harry’s brilliant. He’s got the leadership, the team play, coveted skills, and he’s dedicated and resolute. Most of all he’s consistent. Louis would be a risk. He’s got ups and downs, too fiery and sparking. Untrustworthy.

Louis presses his lips together, shaking his head. It won’t happen. He untwines his hands from Harry’s.

The door opens then, Stan barging in, finally having arrived it seems. Zayn and Niall are hot on his heels, looking like they were trying to stop him from walking inside. Louis wishes they would have. He doesn’t have the patience for him at all.

“Yo, there you are!” He grins at Louis, throwing a shirt onto his lap. “Jas asked me to pass it on. Nice one. About time you got laid!” He laughs and leaves the room again, whistling as he strolls away through the hall, having no idea what he just walked into.

Louis looks down at his lap, stuffed up t-shirt, newly washed but wrinkled, causing a form of silence that makes the room quiver like a chandelier during an earthquake. He can still feel Harry’s thigh against his, feel him shake from tears by his side.

Louis stares out into the room. He looks around like it’s holding some kind of curse.

Harry blinks, looking down at the shirt and up at Louis. “It’s yours,” he whispers, voice barely a sound, but the shock is evident, as if he didn’t think it actually was.

“Harry, it’s not what you think.” Niall’s voice is firm.
“What is it supposed to mean?” he sniffls, wiping at his eyes. They’re so clear and green, and it hurts Louis to the bone.

The icicles in the room melt, disappearing as wild, hot fire flowers up instead.

“This is fucked up. This whole situation is fucked up,” Louis declares loudly, angrily. He stands, ripping up from the bed and leaves. Niall follows him, leaving Zayn, Harry and the shirt behind.

**

Louis doesn’t know what he’s doing. There’s a week left until the championship match and here he is, skipping practice. The Manchester scouts will be there. Three weeks ago Louis wouldn’t have been able to even comprehend a single person on the team skipping two minutes of practice the week leading up to the match. He’d skin that person alive, quite literally.

He didn’t feel good, he told Coach this morning. He’s sick, unable to attend. Can’t have that, no. Don’t want it getting worse before the match.

Louis receives texts from eleven people on the team, asking if he’s alright. He feels sick with himself for not pulling through for them. He’s their bloody captain. He should be there through thick and thin. He should be strong.

Truth is, he’s faltering. He doesn’t feel well. Worry eats at him, anxiety rolls over in his stomach, and his heart feels like it’s wrenching apart. He put on his jogging shoes this morning and it felt so wrong he had to go take them off. Not moving felt much better.

Existential crises seem to be handed to him on the regular, even though he doesn’t deal with them well. Maybe God wants him to learn. By the way, he’s done with God. He’s done with believing in things. If you do, then you hurt. Fact.

“How’s footie going?” Mark asks him over the phone while he’s at home during the afternoon.

“Can’t wait to watch the match. It will be a close one, eh?”

Of course he hasn’t told anyone that there’s a zero percent chance of him getting into Manchester. They rarely accept more than one player from one school, and the exception is too unusual. It’s also Monday and Harry was called on Friday. If they were calling all their choices the previous week, then it’s done. Louis isn’t getting into Uni and I won’t be going anywhere in life. Fact.

“Fine,” he answers. Everything is so bloody fine.

“Are you going to be captain? Or Harry?”

Louis wishes he wouldn’t mention him, but it’s inevitable. “Harry. I was last game. We take turns, so.” It’s Harry’s moment to shine. The people he will be playing for at university will be watching him for the first time in a while, so it fits, Louis supposes.

They talk a bit more about the upcoming game. Louis feels stupid, because it doesn’t excite him like it would have a few weeks ago. They end the chat after another ten minutes of talking, Louis stumbling downstairs in sweats and ski socks (because they’re comfortable, alright) to bring up some tea to grumble into in his bed.

He stops dead in the entrance to the kitchen, his mother calmly sipping on a cuppa herself.

“You’re home,” Louis observes, awkwardly still.

“Yes, I am,” she says calmly. “You didn’t notice me when you walked in an hour earlier than you
should from school.” She arches a pointed brow. “I also found these this morning.” She nods at the table in front of her, specifically at the small packets placed there.

Louis turns beat red. “It—”

"Has something to do with all the strange pieces of clothing I’ve been finding? That don’t belong to you?” Louis swallows, no fucking idea of what to say. His mother picks up one of the small packets, clearing her throat, before reading what it says. “Durex. One latex condom. Rainbow colors.”

Leave it to his mum to be the most awkward person in the entire world.

“It was a joke,” he says weakly. Harry had said something about popsicles…

She looks at him meaningfully, before she waves him forward, holding out her arms. “Want to tell me, darling?”

He nods slowly, and fits himself into her lap, feeling like a five-year-old as he snuggles into her chest. “There’s a boy,” he mumbles.

“A special boy?” she murmurs back, her cheek pressed to the top of his head.

He nods silently, pressing closer to her, wanting her to wrap him up and hide him.

“Are you skipping practice because of him?” she wonders, and he knows that she knows it’s Harry.

It’s hard to answer, because it isn’t solely because of him. It’s a mix of things, but mostly it’s football. Football feels symbolic for a lot of disappointing things at the moment.

He shrugs, blinking slowly. “Very tired today.” He doesn’t have to say more. His mum understands. She sways them back and forth for a moment, keeping her arms around him tightly.

“Mark says you’ve been talking things out.”

Louis nods. “Yeah. We talked.”

“He told me how you felt.” She pauses for a moment, her swaying stilling. “I didn’t know you felt that way.” He can’t answer, because he doesn’t know what to say. “Sweetie,” she sighs. “We should have talked about it. We should have explained what was going on. Things were so complicated back then, and must’ve been much more confusing for you and the girls. I’m so sorry we never talked.”

He nods, unable to do much else.

She kisses his cheek, keeping her face snuggled to the side of his. “Do you want a party for your graduation?” she asks.

He squeezes his eyes shut. “No, please,” he whispers. “No party.” She just nods and starts rocking them side to side again, humming some old lullaby she used to sing when he was a kid. It should be silly, but it’s not.

He receives a text from Harry before he goes to bed later that night.

*Louis please come to training, don’t think the match doesn’t matter it matters very much a lot*

His stupid way of talking shines through his texts so clearly, and it pricks at Louis how much he’s
going to miss him when he leaves. He already misses him.

**

He goes to training on Tuesday. He owes the boys that much. It’s the last footie match in High School, the last one with this team, with his boys. Even if he isn’t getting into his university, he still owes the lads to play his best. Winning the championship might mean a little something to him anyway, even if it won’t lead him to something bigger.

Little things. Just because some things go to hell, it doesn’t mean other lose meaning. It’s not because of Harry that he’s here. It’s just… he’s got nowhere else to go, so. Or that’s what he tells himself.

It’s obvious why Harry looks sad and awkward each time their eyes meet now. Louis still doesn’t know why he kept away from him before he got accepted to Manchester, but every time Louis catches him staring at him now he looks miserable and apologetic.

Louis knows Harry didn’t take his spot. He almost rolls his eyes at how silly thinking that would be, but he knows that Harry’s scared that’s what Louis thinks. He doesn’t. This is all just... unfortunate.

He knows Harry wants to walk over and talk, apologize and apologize again, because he can see the way he looks at him. Louis can’t take that. He can’t take Harry being sorry for getting what Louis wanted. It only makes him feel worse.

“I miss Harry,” Lottie says pointedly that afternoon, after practice. The three of them are slouching in the living room, Niall scratching at her scalp where she’s fitted her head onto his lap.

“Well, suck it up.”

“What he means to say is, he’s waiting for Harry to woman up and tell him if he loves him back or not,” Niall says, and receives an approving arched brow from Lottie.

Harry’s afraid that Louis hates him because of football. Thing is, Louis could tell him that he isn’t, fuck, he should tell him that, but. He can’t talk to him, and especially not about where they stand anymore. How many times do you have to ask somebody to be clear with you and they never give you an answer, until you realize that they don’t want to tell you? Obviously, the answer you want is not one that they can give.

There’s the other thing. Harry is leaving. He doesn’t know when, but some time before September he’ll be gone. Louis doesn’t know where he himself will be, but he knows where he won’t. It’s unfortunate.

“I’m getting another glass of water,” he says, getting up from his chair, walking out into the kitchen.

He lets the tap run for a few seconds, waiting for the water to turn cold. He sips down the entire glass, refilling twice before he walks back to the living room.

“Did he ever tell you anything?” Niall’s voice is low, murmuring. Louis stops in the hall, frowning.

“Not really. It was just small talk about random things. When Louis slept in late he’d come down and have breakfast with me, or just make me tea and we’d sit at the table for a bit.”

Louis didn’t know this. Harry was always by his side when he woke up. He was always there,
nose pressed to his throat. Does that mean he always went back up, slid in under the covers and fitted himself back into Louis' side?

“That’s so strange,” Niall mumbles, sounding like it seems a bit unbelievable to him. Louis stays silent, listening intently. “Do you think he loves him back? You know, like Louis loves him, I mean? I’ve understood that they’re friends too, but are they romantic?”

“Never really saw them acting like a couple, but they were affectionate. They saved private things for themselves, I guess. But...” her voice ceases for a moment. Louis listens harder, brows knit. “I really think that they can be good together.”

She’s wrong. They can’t be good together. There are too many outer factors fucking everything up. It’s fucked up, realizing that however Harry actually feels for him, it won’t matter. In three months Harry will be gone anyway.

Honestly, Manchester can go fuck themselves. Not because they didn’t pick him, but because they chose Harry and only him, whisking him away from Louis.

Louis is going to play for Liverpool solely in spite.

He walks back into the living room, making every sound conspicuous. Stop talking. Stop talking. Stop talking.

**

Wednesday.

The silence, the awkward skipping around each other, the shy apologetic looks during classes, they all stop on Wednesday at practice.

The lads on the team are gathered in the locker room, sitting on the benches in a circle. Louis is placed on one of the short ends, between Ed and Liam. Harry is on the opposite side, directly in front of him. Louis is fumbling with the laces to his shoes, trying not to look at the boy. He doesn’t know why it matters if they work things out or not anymore.

Louis finishes his left shoe, looking up at where the lads beside Harry are laughing about something. Stan has got his phone up, pointing at the screen while Oli is cackling beside him. They’re scrolling past pictures from some party it seems. Louis’ annoyance with Stan is over the top. He scowls down at his shoes, continuing with his second cleat.

He once again hears his cackle after a couple of moments, and he snaps his head up, barely keeping himself from saying something nasty. He bites his tongue in the last moment, closing his mouth. Fighting within the team before the match is not good for their team mentality.

Instead his eyes wander to Harry, who’s glancing down at Stan’s screen as the other boy scrolls. His face is impassive, tired blues under his eyes prominent. Louis wants to smooth them out, kiss them away. Can’t do that, no.

Louis doesn’t know what it is that happens, but suddenly the boys quiet down, Harry’s entire posture turning stiff as they all stare at the screen.

Stan and the boys burst out laughing after a second, but Harry doesn’t laugh. His entire face displays clear shock, mouth open just a little. Then he shuts lips together, suddenly turning to face Louis. His eyes are cold, but Louis can read the hurt in there like an open book.

The whole team goes silent as Harry abruptly stands up in a scarily fierce movement, disrupting
the chatter. He stands in the middle of the circle, eyes piercing Louis’, whose heart is beating so hard it feels like he’s going to crack a rib. Harry’s never looked at him like this. He’s just standing there, eyes filled with anger and hurt, staring at Louis like he’s broken him in two.

“Did you fuck her good then?”

Louis’ mouth falls open.

Harry’s voice is void of any emotion, yet his eyes disclose everything at once.


“Jasmine! That’s who!” His voice is one word from breaking. He points back at the phone Stan is holding. Stan is just sitting there, startled just like the rest of the boys.

“I didn’t,” Louis whispers.

“Zayn saw you! You were in the bathroom with her. The fucking shirt!”

Bathroom? What—fuck, that’s over a month ago.

Liam’s voice is like the calm spot within a hurricane. “Harry, he didn’t sleep with her. She washed the shirt because it was gross after the party.”

Harry swallows, arms wrapping around himself self-consciously. He blinks quickly, like he’s fighting off tears.

“You don’t trust me,” Louis realizes.

Louis stares at Harry. He realizes that it does matter if they talk or not. The point is that he’s head over heels in love with Harry, and Harry may or may not feel the same. It fucking matters.

Harry gives up any pretense of seeming composed. “I do, Lou,” he whispers. “But it’s scary, because you don’t trust me back.”

It’s not fair. At the match, that wasn’t supposed to happen. Harry shouldn’t have looked at him in that way, and then left without explanation. Every other reaction would have been fine. Louis trusted Harry. After their night together he trusted him completely, but after his reaction he’s been faltering, not knowing where they stand anymore. He still doesn’t.


The room is eerily silent, Louis vaguely aware of the other lads sitting around them.

He knows that it is beyond Harry’s control if he’ll hurt him. Louis will end up hurt however this all plays out, because in the end Harry will go.

“Pitch, boys,” he orders, gaze locked in Harry’s. Nobody moves an inch. “I said, go to the pitch!”

After an awkward moment, there’s rustling of clothes and scrapes of studs against the floor. The boys file out of the room, Harry and Louis remaining put until every last person has left, the silence the only thing left in the room.

Louis stares at him, voice hard. “Don’t think for a second that I would hurt you like that. You and Jasmine need to sort your fucking shit out. Leave me out of it, because I’ve been nothing but loyal to you.”
He turns around leaves the room, the door loudly clashing closed behind him even though he didn’t mean to slam it. He doesn’t ever want to see the way Harry’s eyes looked when he spoke again. He doesn’t think they’ll sort this out. He just doesn’t see it happening.

He walks out onto the pitch, seeing how his teammates murmur among themselves. Louis doesn’t say anything, and Harry doesn’t come back for the rest of practice.

**

The next couple of days before the championship final are weird. Louis knows there are talks going around school about him and Harry. Nobody seems to actually know what it is they’re talking about, but the fact that there’s something going on between Harry Styles and Louis Tomlinson is evidently out there. It’s not the usual talks either. It’s not “Harry pushed Louis over at practice” or “Louis yelled at Harry for not doing his drills and called him a miserable twat”. It’s very hush-hush, A-list gossip.

Maybe the talks seem different because Louis and Harry aren’t going back to normal like they usually would after a fight. Through Louis’ vision Harry doesn’t exist, and Louis isn’t even on Harry’s radar. They don’t talk, they don’t look at each other, and they don’t even see each other. As far as anyone would know they don’t think the other even exists.

Only Harry’s always there. He’s in Louis’ periphery, jogging across the pitch, sitting at his desk in class, and leans against his car next to Zayn in the parking lot.

Louis wonders if this is it, if it’s over now. It feels like a book with an enormous lead up, the anticipation over the top, having your skin prickling, and then when you’re done and close the book you feel unfinished, because the ending wasn’t even that great. Louis wonders if their story is one of those, completely and utterly disappointing.

Luckily there are only two days left of school until the weekend and the big match, and pretending he doesn’t see Harry only lasts for two entire days. It feels like a lifetime. At least when they were only avoiding each other they acknowledged one another through lingering looks. Now they don’t even pretend the other is there.

Dramatics have always been Louis’ strong suit, so obviously he feels strongly that his life is pretty much over. He’s not filled with excitement and anticipation for the upcoming game, but he itches in a different way. He feels almost disappointed, because he always imagined the last game of the season to be something happy, something everyone would enjoy. The team should be in a state where the aura is comfortable, much like it was just before the semi-final. Now everything is awkward and wrong.

He doesn’t understand the point of the scouts even coming to the game anymore either. It’s unfair how he thought he’d be given a chance to as least prove himself before they decided if he was worth a shot or not. He resents them already.

Saturday night before the game he’s at the football pitch, letting his frustration buzz around him like a field of snapping electricity. He lines up ball of after ball in front of the goal, kicking and kicking, chest burning and sweat wetting his hair. He shoots until he has to fetch all of them again and start over, and then again and again, over and over. The balls fly into the net, they clash with the posts and crossbar, they rustle the fence behind the pitch, but he never feels relieved.

Nights like this, when he feels like nothing is okay, footie always finds a way to relieve his system. Running up and down a pitch used to clear his brain of the cluster, but it isn’t helping tonight. Nothing is helping.
He lands another hard shot into the very low of the left goal post. It hits the inside of the post, but it’s too hard and bounces off diagonally, out into the dark on Louis’ right.

Louis sighs and starts lining up the footballs once again. There’s still this unpleasant energy lingering inside his veins that won’t dissipate. He needs to get rid of it, but it doesn’t go away.

“Of course you’re here!”

Louis stops in the middle of landing another shot to one of the balls. He closes his eyes in frustration.

“Of bloody course you’re here…!” He’s singing. Louis turns around, watching Harry half walk-half dance towards him from the side of the pitch. “You’re always here.”

“Jesus Christ, have you been drinking?”

“Just a little,” Harry says indignantly. He stops a few yards away, clasping his hands behind his back and manages to look almost entirely sober.

“Fuck, Harry, we have a game tomorrow.” Louis turns in aggravation, blowing another shot to the nearest lined up ball, sending it straight into the crossbar, making the entire goal shake slightly with the impact.

“It’s just a few beers, and I don’t get hung over.”

Louis snorts. “As if. Didn’t you spend an entire morning in my bathroom after we drank too many shooters?” He kicks another ball into the net.

“I don’t get hung over on beer,” Harry corrects himself in annoyance.

“Why do you always show up when I’m here?” Another kick.

“It’s not your pitch.”

“Why are you here?” Another kick.

“Okay,” Harry says, holding up his hands. “Will you just chill with the shooting for a bit? Relax… God.”

Something flares within him.

“No, I will not!” He yells, vehemently turning around and stalking up to him, literally screaming in his face. “How the fuck am I supposed to relax?! Do you have any idea what it feels like losing the only thing that’s going to fucking save you from this fucking hellhole?!”

Their faces are inches apart, Harry gazing down at him. In a way he’s unwavering, but he looks the furthest thing away from cold. “You haven’t lost, Louis,” he says, taking a small step back, swallowing. “They can still call.”

“Don’t be so fucking naive, Harry.” His voice is filled with venom.

“Louis, the game hasn’t even occurred yet! Stop thinking that everything is over when you’re not even close to the finish line!”

“But it is over!” he yells. He kicks another ball, this one flying far above the goal, rustling the fence behind the pitch.
Harry’s voice when he yells back is something Louis has never heard before. The raw emotion in there is staggering, and his heart pounds like a hammer.

“You act as if you have nowhere to go when you do! It drives me crazy!” He gestures vividly with his hands, as if he wishes he could rip a limb from his body in pure frustration. “You’ve got one thing in your head! You don’t see anything clearly! Even if Manchester doesn’t pick you, you’ve got fucking options! Your grades are good, Louis. Your football is far above mediocre, and there are other programs! You’ve got job experience, the teachers love you, and Coach respects you so much. You have people falling in love with you from left and right, and you don’t even notice any of it!”

Louis blinks. “Who’s in love with me?”

Harry wavers. He swallows and shrugs. “I don’t know, girls? Greg?”

Ouch.

Fucking asshole. He can’t even say it, can he? Can’t fucking tell him that he doesn't feel the same.

Louis wants to force it out of him. So you’re not? You’re not in love with me then?

“Greg has a girlfriend, you fucking piece of shit,” he whispers instead.

He turns back to his footballs, sending one of them flying into left top corner of the net. It rustles, but it isn’t satisfying him.

Harry’s voice is lower, but he’s still talking like he’s begging Louis to listen. “Don’t stop until it’s actually over.”

“Harry, for fuck sake—”

"It’s not over!”

"I don’t believe you!”

"Trust me, goddammit, Louis!” Harry exclaims in anger.

He stalks over, suddenly gripping Louis’ arm and hauling him back. Louis stumbles, but quickly straightens up, ripping his arms away from Harry’s touch.

I trusted you and look where it got me. He’s got him heartbrokenly in love without a chance at a happy ending. He wants to say it.

“Louis,” Harry says, sighing in a hopeless kind of way. “It’s been months, babe, just trust me on this.”

“Don’t call me that! And I don’t trust people. I trust myself.” Sometimes it feels like he can’t even do that. “I trusted you, Harry, and look where it’s gotten me.”

Harry’s face turns hard, but at the same time it doesn’t look like he believes the words he’s letting out of his mouth. “It’s not my fault that—”

“I’m not talking about the fucking scholarship.” I’m in love with you, you fucking idiot.

He goes back to the footballs once again, but instead of kicking he picks one up with his hands and throws it across the pitch instead. It disappears into the darkness.
“Louis!” Harry says then. His voice is serious and honest, tone scarcely earnest. “You’ve got everything on a leash. You’ve been killing yourself doing what you’re doing. You have a job, school, footie, all this shit with your family and—me. You’re going to hit a wall if you don’t stop. It drives me insane watching you.” He pauses, but only for a second. “You’re never completely at ease. You worry so much, and I can’t think of one moment where you’ve just let everything be.”

Louis stares up at him, unable to speak.

“Sometimes it’s better to let go.”

They look at each other, and Louis thinks they both know how what he just said could be interpreted. The double meaning is clear.

“Do you want me to let go?” Louis asks, arms crossed over his chest, raising one of his brows. His voice is even, but inside he’s gathering up a storm.

Harry’s eyes don’t tell what he’s thinking for once. At least, Louis can’t read him.

Louis should. He should let him go because after all he’s going anyway. Maybe not now, but he’ll be gone. Trying to keep him will only make them both suffer.

Harry still doesn’t say anything.

“I don’t know what you want from me.” Louis shakes his head, taking several steps backwards.

“I want you.” The words stumble out of Harry’s mouth in a rush, as he takes a step forward.

“See, you say that,” Louis says. It’s the only thing Harry has told him each time Louis’ asked for the real thing. “But it’s not enough. And it won’t make any part of us okay.”

He backs away.

“See you.”

**

Louis has all of his things packed. His cleats, towel, fresh clothes, and shin-guards (which are newly washed, because they smelled terrible so Louis decided to throw them in the washing machine, and it worked) are all stuffed neatly into his training bag, waiting by the door.

The game is in two and a half hours, and Mark is supposed to come by and pick him up soon. He isn’t nervous, but his stomach feels strange. This is the game the entire senior year has been leading up to, and now he doesn’t know how to feel about it.

It’s strange to think that the semi-final was almost a month ago. Everything is so different now, it feels like the last time he slept with Harry didn’t even happen. It’s fucked up, but then again, everything is always a little fucked up. He should be used to it.

“Louis!” Lottie calls from the kitchen. “Dad’s here!”

“Wait! Wait, wait, wait!” His mother comes running from the living room, stopping him from picking his bag up. She grabs his head between her hands and plants a loud kiss on each of his cheeks. “Good luck! You’ll do great! And we’ll be watching all together. If you want to find us, look for the pink, sparkly sign with your jersey number.”

Louis grimaces as she lets his head go. “You made a sign?”
The twins did it. Mark sent me a picture.”

Louis shakes his head, hiding his smile as he bends down to strap his bag over his shoulder. “I’ll just go now.”

“Hold on!” Lottie comes out into the hall and wraps her arms around him in a brief hug before he goes. “Good luck, bro. Don’t suck.”

“You make me feel so loved.” Louis smiles, then turns around and strolls out the door, waving a hand behind him. He pulls his hoodie over his head, quickly traipsing down the stone path to the dark blue Volvo waiting at the curb. He jumps into the passenger seat, closing the door and putting on his seatbelt as Mark turns on the ignition.

“Hi,” Louis greets after a moment.

“You don’t sound nervous at all. What’s wrong?” Mark asks instantly.

“What do you mean?”

“Your foot isn’t tapping and your posture isn’t tense. Come on, what’s going on?” He gives him a frown, reminding him that he knows him so well.

Louis looks at his father. “You can’t tell anyone if I tell you.”

He’s still frowning, but nods nonetheless. “What is it?”

“D’you promise?”

“You have my word.”

Louis sighs. “I didn’t get into Manchester. This match doesn’t matter.” He turns back to staring out the window. Mark is quiet for a few moments, but he can’t do anything but simply open his mouth before Louis interrupts him. “I know.”

He doesn’t have to say more and his dad’s hand reaches out and squeezes his shoulder.

“I’m so sorry,” he murmurs. Louis can’t see his face because he refuses to face him. “It’s going to be fine,” Mark says then, voice calming, and there isn’t a note of worry in his voice. It frustrates Louis immensely. “I know it will. Football doesn’t necessarily have to be everything, Louis, but there are other schools, love. We don’t have to talk about it now, but we can fix this, yeah?”

Louis doesn’t answer, but he knows he’s wrong. Footie is everything.

After a couple of minutes they reach the school. Mark drives him all the way to the building, stopping at the end of the parking lot.

“Louis,” he says, as Louis is about to close the door behind him. “Don’t give up just yet. After all, this is just one match. You and your boys just want to win the championship, yeah?”

Louis closes the door, Mark’s words poking something in him.

His boys. The lads. His team.

Of course they all want to win the championship. The boys are relying on him to do his best and lead the team as a captain should. They’re a team for Christ sake. Shit.

Mark’s car speeds away. He’s on his way to pick up Fizzy and the twins before heading over to
Mum’s house. Apparently they’ve decided to try to spend some time together as a whole. His parents are not getting back together, Louis isn’t that dumb or naïve. But it’s nice. They’re making an effort. Louis’ team will be making an effort tonight, so fuck everything else, because so should Louis.

He starts walking towards the locker rooms, bag heavy on his shoulder. The booths for checking the tickets are already up, the bleachers decorated with the school colors, arrows put up pointing the opposing players in the right way of their given locker room. From a perspective it looks festive and fun, but really it’s far from.

Most of the lads are there when Louis walks into the room, grabbing a seat at the end of one of the benches. The atmosphere isn’t as sparked as before the semi-final, but Louis didn’t truly expect it to be. However, the lads are obviously nervous, walking around, bouncing on their feet, pulling up their socks with far too much concentration than needed. Louis feels traitorous, seeing as for once he doesn’t share the exact same feelings as the rest of the team.

Everyone gets dressed at their own rate, and it takes Louis fifteen minutes to even get his shorts on. As he’s just pulled off his shirt, the door opens and Harry steps inside along with Coach Abrahams. Harry’s eyes fleet Louis’ way, and Louis looks away promptly, focusing on treading his shirt over his head.

He keeps his body facing the wall of lockers, leaving his back to the empty circle in the middle of the room. He tries to psyche himself up, jumps a little to get his adrenaline running. He’s never felt this detached, so indifferent prior to a match. It feels entirely wrong.

“Louis.”

He turns around, finding Harry standing behind him. He’s fully dressed, jersey hanging low over his crotch, slightly loose from his shoulders. He’s timidly looking down at him, tummy leaning forward slightly as he fiddles with something in his hands. It’s the captain armband, red and white with black, thick script.

“Here,” he says, biting his lip like a toddler, handing it out.

“It’s not mine. I was last game, Harry,” Louis says, brows knit.

“Want you to have it.”

“Harry…”

“Please.” His eyes are deeply earnest. “I talked to the lads, we all agree,” he says quietly. “You should be captain on the last game of the season. You’ve made us a better team this year, and you’ve been entirely devoted to us. You deserve it.”

Louis regards him in total silence for a moment, swallowing as Harry pushes the band into his hands. He grips it when Harry lets go, watching him give a tight nods at it, before turning around and walking back to his spot by one of the other benches.

Louis doesn’t know if it’s true that he deserves it. Maybe any other game this year, but tonight… Though… He could earn it. The match hasn’t even started yet, and already he’s disappointed with himself. It doesn’t need to be that way. He can still turn it around.

He bounces up on his toes, hands squeezing around the armband forcefully before he finally decides that, fuck, okay. He can do this. He reaches up and fastens it around his left upper arm, feeling the tight material press around his bicep. It feels good. It feels like it belongs there.
Coach talks to them before the match, just like last time. Louis doesn’t listen too closely, too busy feeling his pulse tick rapidly in his veins. He can do this. Right. Of course he can.

Harry meets his eyes sometime during the speech. He nods at the band around Louis’ arm, giving a tiny smile. Louis forces himself to look away.

Coach sends them out of the locker room soon enough, blowing his whistle for symbolic reasons, giving them all high fives and claps on their backs. As they step out of the locker room, Louis amongst the last group of boys leaving, someone calls from their right. Most of the team continues towards the pitch, but Louis stops, the few lads behind him.

“Oi! Tomlinson!”

Louis turns to see a group of guys from the opposing team, five of them ganging up just a yard away. They’re clad in green attire, arms crossed as they size up Louis’ team, the one in the middle twitching a brow.

“Y’Alright, mate?” Louis says, arching a brow right back at him. He crosses his arms as well, biceps tense, captains armband not needed for a second to show who’s in charge on this turf.

The one in the middle, dark hair, a few inches taller than Louis, smirks and takes another step forward. Louis instantly feels the boys behind him close in. He isn’t completely sure (yes he is, he’s a thousand percent certain) but he thinks Harry’s immediately to his right, flanking him not an inch from his arm.

“You’re up by three in the scoring league.”

“Damn right I am.”

He snorts. “Shouldn’t be so confident, since I’ll be taking that spot after tonight.”

Louis snorts, laughing, then turns completely serious. “Your self-righteousness is disgusting.”

“And your holier-than-thou attitude is appalling,” Harry adds. Louis almost rolls his eyes.

He continues. “Maybe if you practiced your free kicks a little more you wouldn’t have ruined your chances at getting through to the final match properly, instead of playing bingo with penalties.” He sees how the lad’s eyes darken. Yes, Louis has been reading up. “Maybe you wouldn’t need to walk over here to rile people up if your footie was actually above mediocre.”

He scowls, tone dark. “You can talk, Tommo, but it won’t earn you a golden trophy.”

“That’s exactly what I said, you incompetent moron.”

His eyes narrow, anger obvious on his face. It looks like he’s going to argue further, but instead he turns to leave, ending with a last sentence. “Nice braid, princess,” he snorts, nodding at Harry.

Louis isn’t having that. The whole team isn’t having that.

Almost as if practiced, every single one of them takes a step forward, jaws and fists clenched. Louis’ voice is ice cold. “Why don’t you take the homophobic piece of shit language you just threw at my boy and shove it up your fucking arse, before I punch you in the fucking throat.”

Maybe it’s the fact that Louis’ eyes are burning that makes him walk away, but it’s probably just because Coach Abrahams is walking up to the huddle. The lads scatter, heading towards the pitch instantly.
“Oi, lads! What are you doing? Get to warm up. Now, let’s go!”

Louis sighs, grumbling as he watches the opposing team’s leader go. He hopes to break one of his ribs with a lovely, subtle elbow before halftime. He turns around and starts to follow the boys to the pitch, but Harry stops him with a hand on his shoulder.

“What?”

“You called me your boy.” His voice is soft, eyes looking up at him with a glint. Hopefulness.

Louis bites his cheek, crossing his arms once again. “Don’t let it get to your head,” he sighs, before he hurries to get away.

Warm up seems to flash by in two minutes. Before Louis knows it it’s time to take positions and greet the referees and shake hands with the other team. The boys get ready by the bench, taking a last sip of water and stretch some more. Louis has spotted the pink sign in the crowd, at the right corner by the ground. He didn’t wave or try to gain their attention, knowing they’re there is enough.

“Louis.” Coach taps his shoulder. Louis turns and faces him, finding the older man nodding him to the side. He follows, stopping a few feet away from the team. Coach nods at his arm, brow rising.

Strangely, Louis feels like blushing, his neck warming. “Harry gave it to me.”

“I see.” He clasps his hands in front of his stomach, staring at him seriously. “I want you to know that it’s okay to be nervous. The scouts are here to watch you, specifically. I didn’t want to tell you like this, but I’ve seen how unfocused and far away you’ve seemed this entire week, never mind not showing up at one of the sessions. It’s going to be fine, Louis. Don’t let your nerves affect you. If you just play like you normally do, it will be okay.”

Louis pales, swallowing thickly. “Are lying to me?” he whispers.

He snorts. “Why would I ever lie to you?”

That’s a good question. A really good one. Coach Abrahams claps him on the shoulder encouragingly, giving him a tightlipped smile before strolling off towards the bench.

The crowd is already loud on the bleachers, waving signs and scarfs around, cheering for their respective teams. The referees have taken place at the centre of the pitch, hands clasped behind their backs, shoulders squared.

Holy fuck, they’re here.

Louis turns around, eyes scanning the crowd. He can’t spot the scouts, or anyone who could potentially be one of them. His chest feels tight, throat thick.

He’s evidently pale as he walks up to join the lads by the middle circle, taking place at the front of the line. He feels Liam’s gloved hands pat him on the back in reassurance, but everything around him seems blurred.

The coin flipping is fast, Louis winning, choosing to pick side instead of starting with the ball. He’s always had this thing, wishing to start with the ball in the second half, just in case they’re down. It’s not much, but it always makes him feel more optimistic. It hasn’t been needed in a while though, because they haven’t been down by a goal in ages.
When the game starts, it feels like someone is blowing a horn into his ears, whitening out every sound. The ball is illuminated to him, tunnel vision. The match is intense from the start, everybody suddenly on their toes and splitting at the seams with energy. Louis doesn’t know how, but somehow they’ve all gone from circling around each other in a strange atmosphere, into playing like a team. Maybe it’s because if their hard practice, because no matter what is going on within in the group, they come together, playing like a team because it’s the only way they know how to do it.

Louis swipes the ball from the opposing team’s captain twenty minutes in, flitting down the field through a piece of open space. He’s nearing the penalty box, sensing the other boy closing in on him from behind. He passes Jonah on his left, ready to take a new position, but as soon as he’s passed the ball on to his teammate, he feels his knees fold he’s tripped somewhere in the middle in front of the penalty area. He lands harshly on his left side, the whistle from the referee loud and clear over the pitch. The crowd’s furious, booing.

“Oi!” Louis yells, scowling up at the lad in the green jersey and red armband. “Keep your fucking feet aimed at the fucking ball, will you?!”

The ref comes up, holding out a hand to warn Louis from keeping such language. He then turns to the other lad, face grim. He holds up a yellow card, making the entire green clad team groan in frustration.

Louis smirks, lifting his brows once, then grabs the hand Stan is holding out for him to help him up. However, he manages to catch the dark look in the boy’s eyes before he turns away, and he knows this is far from over.

Everyone starts taking place for the free kick, three defenders staying behind, the rest gathering in the penalty box. Louis, Harry and Lee are left by the ball, staring at it in contemplation.

“Louis takes it,” Lee says, taking a step back.

“Should I?

He quirks a brow. “When have you ever asked?”

That’s true. Louis used to simply walk up and line the ball up like it belonged to him. He frowns, nodding.

“I’ll line you up,” Harry says, nodding right back at him. Louis doesn’t need to answer, because Harry simply knows.

Louis takes a couple of steps back, taking in the position of the wall the defending players have formed in front of the goal. The keeper is standing just a foot too much to the left. It’s a tiny technicality that would go unnoticed, but Louis is good at punishing where the mistake has been made.

The adrenaline is pumping in Louis’ ears, and he feels his heart pound against his chest in hard motions. The referee blows his whistle, and Harry nods, poking the ball just a little forward, before Louis takes three quick steps forward and kicks it straight over the wall.

The keeper is five inches short as he throws himself, hands not able to reach far enough as he reaches toward the right upper corner of the goal. The ball goes in, top corner, rustling the net satisfyingly.

It’s strange, because the joy doesn’t come instantly like it normally would, and for a second Louis feels weirdly numb. He feels the boys hug him and kiss his head, clapping him on his shoulders.
and back. He sees Coach throw a fist in the air, yelling in praise, but he feels detached from it for so long that it takes Ed’s loud voice in his ear to wake up.

“Two of the most important goals! You’re fucking insane! Not a chance you’re not winding up on a wall of fame somewhere!” He cackles, the sound sharp in Louis’ ear.

He scored.

But as things go, they don’t hold the lead for long. Only five minutes later one of the defenders makes a tiny mistake, letting one of the green players slip past. They succeed a goal, and suddenly it's tied once more.

After that the match turns into something else entirely. The frustration is evident, the tackles harder and the foul elbows and pinches worse than ever. Louis knocks a midfielder over with a hard shoulder in the back just a few minutes before halftime. It’s too shady for the referee to make out what happened, but it was definitely not clean play, and everybody knows it. Coach warns him to cool it, but it isn’t easy. The more Louis’ team gives, the more they get back. The entire pitch feels like a minefield. One wrong step and it’s going to turn ugly.

Louis swipes his sweaty fringe off his forehead during halftime, only to pour water over his entire face, wiping it off with the end of his jersey. He feels like a soaked fucking otter, his muscles are sore and his calves are burning.

If he thought first half was rough, then he doesn’t know what the second part of the match is. Three more yellow cards have been distributed and Louis can’t even remember how many completely unnecessary free kicks. When the opposing team scores thirty minutes in, everything goes dark for Louis. He can feel his boys fuming, Liam spitting at his gloves in frustration. It feels like they should have burst ages ago, and it’s long overdue.

Louis knocks over another player only a few minutes later. It’s foul and his sportsmanship isn’t exactly thriving. He’s late into the situation, tackling down one of the guys that stood by their captain as he spat homophobia over Harry. Not to be cold, but Louis thinks he deserves it and lot more.

The referee instantly whistles, stalking forward. He stares at Louis grimly as he raises the yellow card, making Louis roll his eyes. It’s not that he didn’t see it coming, it’s that he did it and he didn’t care about the consequences.

“One more thing and you’re off the pitch,” the ref warns, and Louis knows how serious he is. He can tell he’s pissed that he missed Louis’ last foul (Louis could gladly let him know that he’s missed a couple more, but he isn’t asking. He is fairly certain that the entire opposing team hate his guts) and he would send him off the pitch if he could.

Someone pulls at his arm, dragging him away from the huddle of players that’s formed where the pathetic idiot is still sitting on the ground.

“Focus,” Stan says, grabbing his head in his hands, holding him still and stares into his eyes. “Relax. Focus. Screw that guy, don’t make this personal, Louis. Who gives a shit what they said about Harry? They’re homophobic piece of shits who can shove a dildo down their throats, but we’re not going to let that affect us, alright?”

Louis rips apart from him in frustration, but he stays put, staring back at Stan. He’s right. He knows that.

He’s playing the strangest game of his life. He doesn’t know what he’s playing for. Is he playing
for the scouts that are sitting on the bleachers? Is he playing for his mates, or for the trophy, or for Harry who wants to prove himself to the people having taken him on, or is he playing because he has to? He’s never felt like this about football. He always used to play for himself.

He slaps himself on the cheek. It burns, but he feels better. Focus. It doesn’t matter what he’s playing for. Whatever it is, winning is the sole goal in either case.

He takes place with the rest of the lads in the penalty area, leaving Jonah and two other boys in the blocking wall. The guy who’s going to take the free kick lines up, and the others bounce in their spots, positioning themselves.

The lad takes the shot. It flies directly into the left goal post, flying right out in front of the goal. Louis can hear the gasp of the crowd, the green players moaning in frustration. But the ball is still free in the area. Quick like nobody else, Liam scoops it up and flings it to the left side of the pitch, creating a fast turnover as it lands by Lee’s feet.

Everyone is in action once more. Lee flits down the field, Louis heading up in front of him to give him an alternative. There are only two defending players in front of them, and Lee passes Louis the ball.

It feels like going back eight months. It’s the exact same situation, Louis alone with two defenders in front of him. He dribbles past the first one, the step-over coming naturally before he fakes left and goes right. Only one player ahead, and then the keeper.

“Hey!”

Harry is on the far right, because bloody hell, of course he is. Where else would he be?

Louis nears his player, who is torn between attacking him and making sure he can’t pass Harry. The moments flash by, and the inevitable decision to stop Louis first takes only a nanosecond.

It’s silly how big it feels, but, fuck it. Louis trusts Harry. He passes him the ball. Harry is left with the keeper, and there’s no doubt about what happens next. Harry scores.

Louis almost laughs as he hears Coach Abrahams yelling voice over the crowd, and he looks over to see him throw his large notebook to the ground in pure elation. Louis chuckles, and with a grin hugs his boys back. It’s once again a draw.

The intensity of the game continues through to the last minute. When the referee ends the second half, it’s still a draw. Just the thought of playing overtime is draining, but there’s not much to do about it.

Louis’ calves are aching, his heart is beating rapidly with fatigue from running up and down the pitch for almost two hours soon. The first half of the overtime period resolved to nothing, and the second part feels more or less hopeless. Each time there’s a goal chance for either team, there’s some misfortune. A goal post, someone saving their team in last moment, losing the ball out of exhaustion, or like when Harry tries to round his defender he’s pulled back by his shirt, obviously because the defender is too tired to keep up, which is naturally how games turn fouler.

When the ref blows off the game, Louis feels almost relieved for a second, until he realizes what it means.

“Oi, Tommo,” the other team’s captain says, smirking. He’s muddy and his face is red from running, but his haughty smile seems to have prevailed throughout the match. “Take a deep breath, lad. Luckily for us, we’ve got penalties in our favor already.” He grins wickedly, then turns around to join his team.
Louis would punch him. Any other day and he’d break his nose to match the rest of his ugly face. But he doesn’t say a word, only turns around to face his boys. They’ve all gathered in a circle around their coach, nerves trickling in their veins, chests still heaving heavily from exhaustion.

There are five shots to be taken per team. Coach looks resolute as he declares each name. “In order,” he says, watching them all listening intently. “Lee. Harry. Jonah.” He gives each player a nod. “Stan… Louis.”

The last shot.

Coach must see the panic in his eyes because he steps forward, hands gripping his shoulders. “Louis. It’s just a silly footie game.”

“It’s not silly. It’s my life,” he breathes.

“Is it going to kill you, taking the penalty?” he asks.

“No—”

“Then it’s not your life.” He lets him go, shrugging.

“You can do it,” Liam says next to him. “You’ve taken a penalty against me hundreds of times. I may know your corners and sneaky tricks, but they don’t. Use that.”

Liam is going to be faced with five penalties, and yet he’s calmly trying to cool Louis down. Thing is, Liam works well under pressure. Louis never has.

Soon enough they have to gather at one of the goals. The tension is peaking as Liam and the other keeper flip for who begins. Liam loses. Louis watches with his heart beating in his throat as he walks over to the goal, positioning himself in the middle. As the player who is the first to shoot walks up to the penalty spot, Louis grips the nearest person, clinging to his side, finger digging into his arm. He feels the reciprocating squeeze around his wrist.

The whistle goes off, and it takes two seconds before the green clad player sinks his left foot into the ground next to the ball, the other kicking a confident shot at the goal. The ball goes left, Liam goes right.

0-1.

Lee leaves his place among the lads, walking up to the spot with an unflinching expression on his face. Louis wishes he could pull that off, but he knows he won’t. Louis doesn’t dare blinking as he watches him shoot. A gigantic breath of relief escapes his lungs as Lee nets. His body looked entirely confident as he landed the shot, but when he turns back around, Louis can see exactly how pale he is as he exhales shakily. They’re all just as nervous.

The next shot is for the opposing team. By some miracle Liam manages to reach the ball just as it’s about to go in on his left bottom corner, and knocks it out. The boys and the crowd burst into a loud scream, fists in the air. Louis is certain that tonight is going to be the end of him.

Next, Harry breaks away from the team, somewhere on Louis’ left. He walks up to the penalty box slowly, every step tense and uncomfortable. He leans down and positions the ball the way he likes it with his hands, carefully placing it on the grass in an almost sacred manner. No one within the ten mile radius would blame him.

The ref blows the whistle. One deep breath.
Harry scores, because of course he does. Louis still remembers how angry he was when Harry wouldn’t do nothing but shoot penalties during Coach’s practice. “Penalties occur in three of fifteen games,” he said to him, silly and indignant. It seems the championship final is one of those three.

Harry comes back to them, exhaling like he’s just run a mile. The boys reach out and pat him wherever they can reach as he walks by, but in the end he comes to stand on Ed’s other side, nervousness suddenly evident on his entire face. Louis reaches out behind Ed’s back and grips the back of Harry’s jersey, just holding on, something to ground him. He doesn’t know if he means himself or Harry.

But it’s going to be fine. It’s going to be fine. It’s going to be fine.

The opposing team scores. Jonah misses. 2-2 with two penalties left each.

Then the other team scores again, and Stan nets his shot. The other team scores once more, and suddenly it’s Louis’ turn. It’s currently 3-4. If Louis scores they go to another round of penalties. If he doesn’t, they lose.

He doesn’t meet anybody’s eyes before he walks up to the spot. His ears are pounding with his heartbeat, the feeling of pressure from not only the entire school and half the town, but from his boys, Coach, and not least of all himself hanging over him. His skin already itches, feeling cold even though he’s still sweating from running himself drained for two hours.

It’s not your life, he thinks. It’s not your life. It’s not your life.

The thoughts don’t work, because how is it not?

He adjusts the ball on the ground, but he can’t bring himself to take his time like Harry or Lee did. He needs to get it done. Thinking too much will only make it worse.

He takes a couple of steps backwards, refusing to meet the keeper’s eyes. Louis knows he’s smirking, trying to psyche him out just like any goalie would in this situation. Louis stares above his head, waiting for the sound that tells him to shoot. It comes a moment later, and Louis takes three determined steps forward and shoots.

He knows the second he touches the ball that something is going to go wrong. He feels almost nauseas, a sick trickle of something crawling through his stomach and up his chest, as he watches as the ball flies towards the goal.

The shot is too hard. The ball flashes like lightning, flying straight into the underside of the crossbar. Louis watches in complete horror, and the whole place feels eerie with silence, as the ball bounces directly down to the ground, just beneath the bar. It’s like watching in slow motion, gaze following every step of the movement.

Is it going to bounce into the goal or out? The keeper has already thrown himself in the wrong direction, and can do nothing but watch as the ball touches the ground.

It goes out.

He stands there, completely still, mouth open. He missed.

He feels paralyzed with the shock that he didn’t see coming, even though he knew this was a very plausible scenario. No goal.

The tears flood to his eyes in an instant. He can’t hear what the people around him are saying,
neither can he hear the crowd, and it’s good. He doesn’t want to hear a word.

He turns around and walks away. He doesn’t run, but his muscles ache with how badly he just wants to disappear. He knows the other team is yelling in joy and that his own is standing still, having nothing to say.

Maybe if it was a different time, he thinks. If he hadn’t kissed Harry at the last game, if Manchester had waited to call Harry until this game was over, then maybe he would have scored. Then perhaps everything wouldn’t be what it currently is.

Reality check: you can’t change the past.

Coach Abrahams grabs him by the shoulder when he’s halfway off the pitch, before he can run away from everyone. “Louis.”

“No,” he cries, shrugging out of his hold.

“It’s—“

“No, it’s not okay!” he yells back, backing away from him. This time he’s actually running as he hurries to get away from this place.

He knew it. He knew it wasn’t going to happen. Jesus, he fucking knew, so why does it come crashing down as fucking hard as it does? Having had his hopes murdered a week ago already, he wasn’t supposed to feel like this. He was prepared. But as it is, that doesn’t matter for a fucking second. It hurts just as much.

He can’t be here. He can’t meet anyone’s eyes. He doesn’t want to see any one of these people again. Can’t face them.

Louis missed. He told Harry he didn’t trust other people, that he trusts himself, but it seems like he can’t even do that. Fuck he—he knew. It wasn’t going to happen, it never was.

There are people everywhere, some celebrating and some with their heads hung in disappointment. Louis runs until he reaches the parking lot, heading towards the street that leads him home where he can hide.

“Louis!” Harry catches Louis’ hand just at the corner of the parking lot. Louis shouldn’t be surprised, really.

He pulls Louis to his chest almost strenuously, and before Louis knows it he’s wrapped up solely in Harry. His arms are tight, his lock firm, making sure Louis can’t get anywhere. He knows that Louis was running away to hide, and he isn’t having it.

Louis’ shoulders are shaking with tears, but for a moment everything just seems to dissipate and all he can feel is Harry encompassing all of him. He cries, body quivering and convulsing. He coughs, sniffles, and his eyes itch horribly as he snivels, his hands gripping Harry’s shirt in painful clutches.

Harry’s breath is warm over his ear, his arms are protecting and Louis feels himself almost disappearing into him. He wishes he could. He smells like mud and grass, sweat and salt. For a second he wishes that this were the place he could hide.

“It was only a few inches, baby,” Harry whispers into his hair. His hands on Louis’ back are squeezing him so tightly it hurts. Not only physically. Louis can feel his rising chest expanding against his own, loose strands of his hair brushing his bare neck. He wishes he could stay here, but
he knows he won’t be able to.

“Close, but no fucking cigar, innit?” he whispers, tearing himself away from him and hurrying away.

**

One day. Two days. Three days. Four.

Thursday. Louis is sitting on his porch. He hasn’t heard a word from Uni.

It’s inevitable that it happens, because it has to, hasn’t it? The talk.

His entire family is inside the house, spending time together as a whole for the first time in literally a year. They ate Spaghetti Bolognese, and now they’re all inside making dessert. Team effort. It was nice for a while, when he could forget everything else. He can’t do that for long.

It’s warm out even though it’s dusk. It’s May, and May means there’s roughly a month left of school. Roughly a month until Harry is out of Louis’ life for good.

Louis could try to make him stay. He isn’t going to. Harry deserves going to uni and he deserves to go play at one of the best schools Louis can think of. He’s not angry that he’s going, he’s just sad.

So, the inevitable happens. He’s sitting on the porch, hands in his own hair, knees pulled up to his chest.

“Hi.”

He looks up.

Harry is standing on the sidewalk, just where the stone path down to the porch starts. He’s in his navy hoodie, his usual track pants on. He looks so normal, yet everything feels different from any other time he’s showed up out of the blue.

Louis hasn’t spoken to him since the match. Hasn’t been to school much. The exams are finished, practice doesn’t hold any significance anymore, and facing people in school seems like a much too hard task.

“Gotta admit my timing is good,” Harry says. His voice is airy, but it’s like he’s trying too hard to seem casual. It’s silly, because they both know what he’s here for.

Louis gets what he means. Harry’s timing is good because Louis is already sitting on the porch, almost like he was expecting him.

“Not really.” Good timing would entail not leaving the moment they seem to both know where they stand.

“Maybe not then.” He shrugs, lips pressed down not too hard, cheeks just a little puffy. They’re rosy too, as if he’s already embarrassed. He’s nervous, Louis realizes. He musters up a small smile, trying to seem unintimidating, but just turns out tired and hopeless.

Harry inhales, fingers trembling just a little. “Remember how you said that you trusted yourself with me?” he starts, voice uneven. He swallows, and as much as Louis wishes that he could walk up to him, take his hands, look into his eyes and calm him down, he knows he can’t. “I know that you’ve been trying to talk to me about… us?” He inhales, muscles tense. “I’m sorry that I haven’t
been very… erm, accommodating. Just… sorry.”

Louis watches him, lump already starting to thicken in his throat.

He shuffles awkwardly, looking down at his own feet, curls covering half of his face. Louis can see his mouth moving, lips delicately pink in the slowly darkening evening. “Well, you said that you trusted yourself with me, and it sounded like you couldn’t anymore? And I guess, what I’m trying to say is…” He looks up, eyes impossibly green as they meet Louis’. “You can?”

It comes out like a question, but Louis knows it’s a statement. He squeezes his eyes shut for only a moment, trying to muster up some strength to get through this.


Harry bites his lip, eyes knitting. He’s quiet when he speaks. “Because you looked at me like that, and I was scared that you didn’t mean it afterwards. You acted so strange and I was scared to take the first step. I was surprised, I mean, wouldn’t you be? If I kissed you in front of everyone?”

“Nobody saw.”

“Ed saw.”

“Oh,” Louis breathes.

Harry fiddles with his hands where he’s standing in front of Louis, continuing. “I waited for you to make the first move and then you didn’t, so I thought you regretted it. And then I couldn’t make the first move and the longer you stayed away the less courage I had to go back to you.”

Louis swallows, trying to force away the heaviness pulling at the corners at his mouth. His bottom lip wobbles anyway.

“I thought you didn’t feel the same.”

Harry’s quiet for just a moment, bracing himself. “I do,” he whispers, barely audible.

Louis feels the tears fill his eyes before he’s even said it. “You’re leaving.” He closes a hand over his mouth, biting his cheeks, just trying to keep everything inside, even though he knows his barriers won’t hold.

The other boy takes a small step forward, voice small. “We can work it through, yeah?” He sounds like he’s scared of hurting Louis, knowing that it’s a sensitive subject. He takes another step forward, but abruptly stops when Louis shakes his head, hand still covering his mouth. “What?”

“Can’t,” Louis forces out.

“What?” Louis wants to die as he sees the utter confusion on Harry’s face.

“I’m sorry,” he whispers weakly. “It won’t work.”

“Louis, please,” Harry says, face torn with distress. “Trust me, trust that this can work.”

“It’s not about us, it’s about the fact that you’ll be gone.”

“But—“
“Harry!”

Harry’s gaze is suddenly hard, but the frowning expression on his face is tinted with anguish. “Take off your fucking seatbelt for once, Louis.”

Louis looks back, teeth gritted harshly, heart pounding in hard strikes. Their gazes turn into scowls as they glare at each other, Louis’ jaw locked tight and Harry’s hands balled up in fists. The look is unfaltering, and just for the moment it feels like neither of them is ever going to give in. But Louis is the first one to do so. His entire chest is knotting up with anxiety, making it hard to breathe correctly.

He closes his eyes, and sighs. Elbows resting on his thighs, he covers his face with his hands, taking a moment to inhale and exhale. “I can’t,” he whispers. Watching Harry go will be too hard. He opens his mouth to say it again, but Harry won’t let him.

“Louis, you can’t give up now!”

“You’re leaving!” Louis says loudly, looking up at him through the tears. “For three years, Harry!”

“So what?” Harry takes a step closer, but it’s like he doesn’t dare to touch. “We feel the same!”

“But you’ll be gone! I’ll be here. We won’t work.”

“You won’t know, Louis, if you don’t fucking try!” he exclaims angrily. He’s standing almost just a foot away from him now. Louis is still sitting down, shoulders hung and nose stuffy.

It’s like a pathetic, miserable fucking movie.

But he can’t do it. It will be too hard.

“It doesn’t matter, Harry,” Louis says slowly, shivering. “It won’t matter in the end, because you’ll still be breaking my heart every moment you’re away.”

Silence. Then Harry whispers something through his tears, but it’s too low for Louis to hear.

“What?” he asks, wiping at his red eyes in frustration.

“I love you.”

Hearing him say it feels like flowers green inside him, a balloon of fresh air filling him up. Yet it breaks heart. It rips it to shreds, just tears and tears and tears. The hurt just doesn’t stop. It just throbs even more because he knows there won’t be a happy ending at the horizon.

Louis squeezes his eyes shut, but it doesn’t keep the tears in. It pains him to say it. His voice is colored by the uncontrollable teardrops rolling down his cheekbones. “Harry, it won’t work,” he whispers, voice broken. “Not because I’m being cynical, but because you’re the only one I’ve ever loved like this and I can’t stand the thought of missing you every single day.”

The silence between them that seems to come in frequent waves is heavy over their heads. Louis leans on his thighs, hands lined up and covering his nose and mouth. His eyes itch from the unstopping flow of tears, heart throbbing with heavy aches.

Eventually someone has to say something.

“Is that your answer then?” Harry’s voice is uneven, strained.
Louis presses his lips together, unable to meet his eyes.

Harry doesn’t say anything, and when Louis finally looks up, Harry’s face is blank, deprived of any feelings. Only his green eyes are staring at Louis, and they’re shiny. When he opens his mouth it’s barely a whisper. “I would rather fight with you, than love anybody else.”

The silence is eerie this time. Louis’ skin prickles, shivers jolting down his spine. It feels like the silence before the end, when everything just stops being. Louis covers his eyes with his hands.

Harry says something then, his voice clear and his words scarily sobering.

“So what would you have done then? If you got into Manchester and I didn’t? Would you still give up on me then, or are you just bitter?”

His question shoots a hole in his gut. Suddenly there’s a huge part of empty space, leaving him with the feeling of free falling. Breathless.

He never thought of that.

He opens his mouth, but nothing comes out. The cold chill down his back makes his every hair on his body stand on end.

Harry waits.

Nothing comes out.

Harry walks away.

**

“I’m fine.”

Louis is more tired of that phrase than anyone will ever know.

“No, you’re not. You’re miserable.”

Louis closes his eyes in frustration. There’s no need to tell him that. It’s as obvious as the hickey Niall is sporting on his collarbone, red and glaring. Louis doesn’t say anything about it, because they both know exactly how obvious it is.

People have been asking him if he’s fine at least three times an hour. When he walked inside the house after Harry left last Thursday, he stopped by the kitchen, for a second watching his family. Lottie, Daisy and Phoebe were crowded around Mark, laughing as they tried to pull him down to the floor. Jay and Fizzy were dotting whipped cream in one another’s faces. Picturesque.

Mark and the girls stopped as they saw him standing there. “Hey,” his dad said, his broad smile falling as he saw Louis’ red-rimmed eyes. “What’s up, kid?”

“Harry and I broke up,” he said, before he rushed away. Lottie and Fizzy came knocking on his door a few minutes later, hugging him until the tears eventually dried away. He didn’t feel any better then, and he isn’t expecting to in the foreseeable future either.

So people ask him if he’s fine, because he’s obviously not. Louis grumbles in answer, scowling away their concerned second question. It’s been eating at him for days. It’s Monday, first day back in school since the talk (he didn’t go on Friday).
He and Niall are strolling behind the school building, heading towards a small lawn hidden behind the gym. They used to go there a lot in junior year, just being together, Louis fiddling with a football, Niall rambling about something without meaning, smoking just to smoke, talking just to talk. It feels weird going back now that it’s been so long since the last time.

They settle down on the grass, the sun streaming in behind a couple of trees. Louis leans his head back against the ground, Niall’s hand patting him twice on the stomach, before he starts whistling good-naturedly. Louis’ mood can’t be swayed, and he should be annoyed, but he’s not. The melody is just there. It’s summer soon, so it’s only appropriate.

“Can you believe senior year is over?” Niall says. “It’s flashed by so fast.”

“Yeah.”

“If anyone told me we stopped being friends for a few months I’d never believe them.”

“Me neither,” Louis murmurs. He’s put his shades on, hiding his eyes from sunlight and the scrutiny of other’s gazes.

“I wouldn’t believe them either if they told me that all of that happened just for you to throw the reason away later.” He side-eyes him meaningfully, brow arched.

Louis looks away. As if he hasn’t thought about that. As if it hasn’t been gnawing at his bones how useless and meaningless it seems now. But at the same time it’s not, because now he knows himself a little better. He’s conflicted.

“Can we not talk about it?”

“No?” Niall says, the sound soft, but he’s looking at him seriously. “You can’t keep shelving things up inside of you. You’ll just keep being miserable. I think you should just admit to yourself that you made the wrong choice. We both know you did. You’re still in love with the kid, and that won’t change even if you’re apart.”

Louis swallows, blinking behind his sunglasses. Harry going away will hurt him more than anything, but the words he spoke before he left him on the porch are burning in his head. Would you still give up on me then? Or are you just bitter?

They walk back to the main school building in silence.

There are only five days of school left, graduation holding place on Friday. He expected it to feel huge, but it’s been overshadowed by everything else. They have their last footie practice today as well. They won’t be doing anything serious, just mess around, talk about the season that just passed. Louis is going to miss playing footie with these boys, and he’s going to miss Coach Abrahams. He’s always been good to him.

Sitting down in the locker room, surrounded by the lads for the last time is depressing. They are all smiling knowingly at each other, bittersweet looks in their eyes. Louis can’t really taste the sweetness. He loves them so much. The first practice he came after the championship final they all gathered up in a big group-hug, squeezing him half to death. He’ll miss them immensely.

People soon start to trickle out of the locker room, but Harry is standing by one of the benches, footie kit on, curls out and free, one strand tucked behind his ear. He’s pretty. His lips are full and pink, eyes a lovely color of jade, hair dark and skin milky. Louis loves everything about him.

Harry smiles at something Stan is saying to him, and it aches in Louis how admirable he is. He’s just dazzling, so firm yet so neat. He’s the most delicate flower of the bunch, entirely enthralling.
That’s why he has to let him go, Louis thinks. Because he deserves happy things. He deserves proper love, attentiveness, care. Being apart, Louis won’t be able to give him those things. It will only hurt.

“Congratulations mate,” Stan says to Harry when Louis tunes in, watching him slap him lightly on the shoulder.

Harry’s smile is bashful, sweet, yet obviously he isn’t entirely happy. Louis swallows thickly. “Thank you.”

“Don’t forget us, babe,” Stan grins, patting him on the chest before winking. Harry chuckles, and the sound is soft. His eyes slide to Louis, eyes turning sad almost instantly. He looks down. Something is scratching through Louis’ chest.

“I’ll try not to,” he murmurs, following Stan outside.

The room is empty.

So, Louis thinks to himself. If this is the end of their story then that’s fine, because everything isn’t always like the books, or the movies. Everything doesn’t have a happy ending. Louis’ life is reality. Harry will go on to do great things, surely. Louis will try to take courses at the local university, and figure something out. They’ll live their separate lives and eventually everything will be okay.

Louis groans loudly, tearing at his own hair.

Who the fuck is he kidding? All of that is bullshit. Fuck, all of that is utter, pathetic, crap. It suddenly angers him that he’s even trying to pretend that it’s going to be okay, because it won’t. Lying to himself only resolves in catastrophes, he should know that by now. Niall just fucking told him, too.

He sits on the bench in the locker room, hands covering his mouth and nose, breathing in and out. The door opens, just for a bit. “Louis, are you coming?” someone calls.

“I’ll be right out!”

The door falls shut a couple of seconds later, leaving him alone in the quiet room.

Shit.

He knows.

He is bitter. And it’s not fair. It’s not fair at all. He loves him, and Harry loves him back—and Jesus Christ. Harry doesn’t want him to let him go, and isn’t that a better solution to his happiness? Harry wants him and Louis wants him back. He wants to fucking try. He has got to try. He didn’t spend a month and a half scared shitless that Harry didn’t love him back just to shove back in his face the moment he told him what he wanted to hear.

Fuck that.

Fuck Manchester and their fucking program, because they are not keeping Louis away from Harry any more than they already have. No fucking way. The program made Harry scared to tell Louis he loved him in the first place because he was afraid that Louis would hate him for getting accepted. It drove them apart.
Footie is not everything. Despite what Louis may have believed through his four years of high school, football is not the key to life. It might be part of you, like a huge, enormous, gigantic part of you, but it does not control you. There’s not a way in hell that a fucking sport is keeping Louis from Harry.

He storms out of the locker room, half walking-half running towards the pitch where the lads are lazily stretching and warming their sore muscles in a circle.

“Styles,” he calls, voice hard as he steps onto the grass, making a beeline for the boy.

Harry looks up, eyes filled with confusion, the rest of the boys stilling in alarm. This is exactly how Louis would approach Harry when they’d have a fight when they hated each other. He would have stalked up to him, fists balled and eyes burning, shouting at him.

Right now he is burning, but it’s not anger. The lads must see something in him, though, because they part ways for him like scared mice. Harry stays put where he is, standing still, waiting for Louis to come at him.

Louis comes at him.

He takes three quick steps just in front of him, hands gripping his shoulders and hauls himself up, legs wrapping around Harry’s waist without effort. The boy stumbles back from the impact and in surprise, but his hands go his hips automatically not to let him fall.

Louis stares at him, hands sliding into his hair, carding his long curls firmly away from his eyes. Harry looks back at him in confusion, mouth a little open from shock. He manages to keep them upright, leaning back slightly as he exhales nervously.

Louis continues to stare.

“Don’t think for a second you’re ever getting rid of me, you dick.”

Harry’s eyes widen for just a split second before Louis leans in and presses their lips together. He can hear the surprised sound he makes, along with the shocked gasps from his teammates. He doesn’t listen anymore after that. He keeps his hands wound in Harry’s locks, insides fluttering with the feel of Harry’s lips against his. He feels like he can breathe again.

He notices how paralyzed the rest of Harry’s body is, and he tugs softly at one of his curls. He leans back just an inch, mouth still brushing Harry’s as he whispers. “Don’t forget me, please.”

Harry shakes his head, swallowing. “Could never.” He looks dazed, eyes still wide. They glance down at Louis’ lips, and with a swooping sensation in his belly Louis leans down and kisses him once more.

He could get used to this feeling. Kissing Harry like this without worry is the best feeling in the world. Louis loves him, Harry loves him back. They can do this.

The kiss turns urgent soon, Louis pressing his tummy against Harry’s chest, making him shuffle unsteadily on his feet.

“Louis Tomlinson,” It's Coach Abrahams. For a second there, Louis forgot other people exist. He
doesn’t think making out with one of the co-captains is a very proper thing for a co-captain of the school’s footie team to do.

“Yes,” he says, giving him a sheepish smile. He’s not ashamed, but he just realized he just snogged Harry boneless on the footie pitch in front of everyone. And he is still in said boy’s arm, who is stumbling weakly. He unlatches his legs from Harry’s waist and slides down, landing with wobbly knees on the ground. He manages to catch the look of Harry’s beaming face, before he turns around and clasps his hands behind his back, smiling, widely and guiltily. “Did I do something?” he asks.

Coach shakes his head, rolling his eyes. “No, you just gave everyone a show of that,” he waves his hand around in the direction of Harry, “but that’s not what I was going to talk to you about.”

“Oh.”

He can feel Harry’s chest pressing against his back, his nose just inches from the back of his head. Louis’ body is still weak from their kiss, heart still beating hard. He feels Harry’s soft fingers stroke one of his own behind his back. He thinks his butterflies have gone into cardiac arrest.

Louis swallows. “What did you want to talk to me about?”

Coach comes to stand proudly in front of him, shoulders squared and hands clasped behind his back just like Louis. He blinks, staying comfortably calm as he watches Louis’ confused eyes for a moment.

“I received a call from Gary Cooper up at Manchester.” Louis’ mouth opens in bewilderment, but Coach goes on. “They finished their discussions this morning, and they thought you’d like to know that you’re going to be offered a place at their football program.”

Louis’ knees feel weak. He feels how Harry’s hands grip his waist, literally keeping him upright.

Coach smirks. “They said something about winning a scoring league and coming second in the championship is rather impressive.”

It’s like a reward. After daring to take the big step, God gifts him with the only thing he’s ever wanted—apart from Harry.

Louis is so done with God.

He breaks into a big smile. “Are lying to me, Abe?”

“Why would I lie to you?”

“Oh my god.” He blinks back the tears, but they’re coming in masses. It’s impossible, and soon they’re flooding down his cheeks. “I got in?” he whispers.

He nods, smile big and genuine. “You got in.”

“I got in.”

And then Harry’s arms are wrapping around him from behind, face burying into his neck, nearly choking him to death. Louis can’t even think, but everything inside him has turned into greenery and pink flowers and blue skies for some unfathomable reason. His pulse just flew past seven stationed police cars, and he can feel Harry placing kiss after kiss to his jaw and cheek, squeezing him mercilessly.
There are teammates patting him where they can reach and telling him congratulations, but his eyes are closed and Harry’s face his clouding half of his vision anyway.

“I love you so much.”


Harry hugs him so hard he can barely breathe, hands gripping his jersey tightly. “Can’t believe this is real. I thought you didn’t want.”

“I want. I want, I promise.”

Harry exhales into his neck, pressing a kiss to his pulse point. Louis turns around in his arms—somewhat hard due to Harry’s grip on him—and winds his fingers tightly around the hem of his shirt.

“I’m sorry for—”

“It’s fine.”

“It’s not fine,” Louis insists. “I was bitter and I wasn’t thinking clearly. I know I want this, even if I hadn’t just found out that…” He closes his mouth, unable to say it out loud. He can’t believe it’s true. “We’re going to uni together. Can you believe that?” he whispers, looking up at him, disbelief coloring his words. It’s still so incomprehensible. Harry’s face is almost breaking with his smile.

“You came to your senses,” he grins, voice soft. “Finally.” There’s a glint in his eyes when he laughs, and Louis grins, leaning in and burying his nose in his chest, fingers gripping his jersey.

“Let’s be clear here, Styles”, he murmurs, but he can’t keep his grin off his face. “I still hate you and you’re still my antagonist.”

“That’s okay, as long as you love me too.”

“What a fantastic book,” Louis murmurs, reaching up on his toes, faces only an inch apart. “You’ll be glad to hear I love you very dearly.”

“Aren’t you the next Oscar Wilde.” He arches a brow, then purses his lips, asking for a kiss.

“I cannot believe you ruined that moment for me.”

They watch one another for a sweet moment. Harry’s words are low and warm. “Are we really going to fight?”

Louis purses his lips. “I suppose we’ve fought enough for now.”

Harry grins down at him, dimples forming gigantic craters in his cheeks. He wraps his arms around Louis’ shoulders, crushing him against himself, swaying them. “So, you have a crush on me, huh?”

Oh my god. He’s in love with a complete dork.

Louis is weak.

“You had a crush on me first.” He arches a brow. “Or did you not?”

“You will never know, baby.”
He leans down and kisses him.
The Epilogue

Chapter Notes

So, sadly this is it for Unbelievers! It's been so much fun writing this story, which has been in the works for nearly a year now, to and from. It started off as me writing down this scene of Harry and Louis fucking on the floor of a locker room on my phone while I was out walking, and it just evolved into this huge thing. Wow. So many thank you's to Vicky, and also everyone who's written me such nice messages that honestly keep me going so much. Thanks a million.

I've added notes at the bottom if you want to read those. :)

As usual
Twitter: isthatyoularry
Tumblr: isthatyoularry

Unbelievers: The Epilogue.

Harry Styles.

“You know that this is pretty much criminal, right?” Harry tells his best friend as the lad jumps back into the car after dropping weed off at Niall’s house.

Zayn leers at him, adjusting his seat belt in the driver’s seat. “Just because I’m nice and sometimes give you some for free, doesn’t make what you’re doing anymore legal, you know.”

Harry watches him for a second as he starts the car, contemplating. “Can I have two joints?” he asks.

“Why?”

“Louis?” Duh. “Have you seen happy Louis? Happy Louis on drugs is the best thing this world has ever seen. He is like a chipmunk singing carols in a tree in glittery attire. Do I need more of a reason?”

“You’re the worst boyfriend ever.” Zayn shakes his head, pursing his lips as he navigates out on the road, heading towards Harry’s house. “How is it going with that, anyway?” he asks. “How many times have you broken up again?”

Harry scoffs. “Please… They’re not breakups. If they were breakups, Louis broke up with me twice just last night. Fights are not breakups. Fights are fights, until Louis’ thick head remembers he’s in love with me and that we’re going to be living together at uni. Then he goes all puppy again.”

“Why do you even fight?” Zayn mutters. He has a way of seeming very uninterested, when in all actuality Zayn’s interested-face is his face that looks uninterested. If that makes sense. It took Harry two months before he understood that Zayn was his friend.
“Because Louis says I’m high-maintenance, when he doesn’t actually think so, and I’m not.”

“You talk way too fast.”

“And did you know that Louis thinks he’s smart when he tries to hide things from me? As if I wouldn’t know the second he starts cooking something up! I know every single one of his facial expressions, and while saying ‘No, I did not take your navy hoodie’ his eyebrows did not rise that tiny fraction they would have if he were speaking the truth. He is the worst. Honestly, I should break up with him solely because of this.” He blinks for a moment. “No, I shouldn’t.”

“Right...” his friend says. “How’s his sister then?” he sighs, obviously trying to change the subject. Harry has a way of talking for too long when it comes to Louis. “She and her boyfriend broke up?”

“She broke up with him, yeah. She’s fine. We’ve beat Louis at night time FIFA three times consecutively. He’s very annoyed. He mostly grumbles and goes to bed without kissing me. He’s a sour loser. Little grape…” he hums. “Did you know—”

“No, please. Harry.”

“Did you know that during summer he trains double the amount he normally does?” Harry frowns. “Maybe he’s afraid he won’t be fit enough when we start at Manchester… Shit. I should talk to him about this. We should talk more—”

“Okay, Harry,” Zayn finally says loudly, cutting him off. “I’m not buying this shit. What is going on? Really?”

Harry shuts up, giving in. He sure talks a lot about Louis, but he isn’t a fast speaker. He stares at Zayn’s annoyingly deep brown eyes for another moment, until he turns to look out the window instead. “Mum is finishing moving out today,” he mutters, head falling back against the seat.

When he was told that she was moving to Cheshire the night before he found out he was accepted at Manchester, it literally felt like the world was crashing down on him. Spending two years with his parents’ constant fights, bickering and passive aggressiveness, he somehow still wished that they would stay together. For a while it calmed down, they seemed much less stressed than tense, and at the time he actually thought they had worked things out. Naively, of course. He later found out that that’s when they decided to finalize the divorce. Brilliant. Then he had to tell Louis he got accepted to Manchester University Youth Football Program.

It’s probably one of the hardest things he’s done in his life. Being unequivocally, heedlessly and steadfastly in love with him, it hurt more than anyone will ever know having to tell him that he got accepted to the school that only takes on fifteen players to the program a year, and it would ultimately mean that his dream was shattered to pieces.

Obviously Harry knows that it wasn’t his fault, but that doesn’t mean it hurt any less. Even though Harry knows his parents, as much as they love him, would never agree to pay thousands of pounds to let him run around after a muddy ball on a “lawn” instead of studying something “proper”, he thought for just a second that he didn’t deserve it as much as Louis. But he needs the scholarship, even if it at times felt like Louis needed it more, because sure, Harry can study whatever he wants apart from footie because he’s got the money, but Louis can’t. It’s unfair, but sadly that’s how it is.

Nothing to dwell on, however. Somehow it worked out. By some fucking miracle it did.

Harry has a boyfriend now, and a pretty damn good one at that. Though Louis claims Harry is
high-maintenance, Harry knows he secretly loves every second of their time together. Kisses on doorsteps, hand-holding, snogging sessions during lunch period while school lasted, and a dick up Harry’s arse, are things Louis is rather accommodating with. All of this, and they have yet to have had a proper date.

“How do you feel?” Zayn wonders.

Harry shrugs, pouting down at his fingers. “Good? Bad? How am I supposed to feel?”

“I don’t know, mate.”

A good thing amongst the bad, is that Louis knows exactly how Harry feels. He’s been through what Harry is going through, and while Harry can’t share the experience with anyone, as his sister isn’t here to do it with him, Louis has been a solid rock.

He still remembers showing up on Louis’ porch that Sunday afternoon, tears in his eyes. Zayn was away for the weekend to visit his cousins, and truth be told, Harry doesn’t have that many friends. Sure, there’s Ed, but he can’t really talk to him like with Zayn. Louis was his last—honest to God his absolute last—choice of person to go to, but Harry needed a distraction and Louis is good at those.

No wonder, Harry thinks now, because Louis is a champ at avoiding problems for as long as he possibly can.

But Harry had just been sat at home, stuck the entire Sunday trying to revise for a stupid quiz he had the next day, with his parents yelling able to be heard through the entire house. He had gone down to try to ask them to quiet down for just a moment, but it only escalated and ended with Anne grabbing Harry’s hand and telling his father that they were leaving right then. Instead, Harry was the one leaving, jogging down the sidewalk away from his own home. It was fucked up. In hindsight, he’s more angry at the situation than he was then. Then he was just sad.

Louis’ house always felt so foreign to him in the beginning. There were traces of multiple people everywhere, stuff on the floor, beds unmade, the staircase creaked, and there were so many toothbrushes in the bathroom Harry always seemed to find more each time he counted. At times it felt like it was the only place he could relax. No parents hanging over his head wondering if he’d done his homework yet, or if he wanted to check out some business universities during the weekend. There was no fighting or yelling.

As much as Harry loves his own sister, they were never that close. Seeing Louis and Lottie bounce off each other, hug and kiss one another, made him feel like there was a bond between them. He hasn’t felt like there’s a bond between him and his sister in a long, long time.

All in all, Louis’ home felt warm. And he let him stick around. When he had work and Lottie was out he let him stay in his room, read books, do homework, or sleep. He wanked once. It was strange. He doesn’t think he should tell Louis about it.

Around the time that Louis and Niall’s friendship was at its worst, Harry thinks his and Louis’ friendship really started evolving. Louis needed someone, and they were both already practically living in each other’s pockets. As much as Louis doesn’t see it, Harry was there all the time. He told his mum Zayn needed help with homework at nights, that he went for early runs in the morning, or that he was staying late at a friend’s so he just decided to crash there. Eventually he straight up told her he was sleeping at his boyfriend’s.

It came to a point where he was sitting at the kitchen table in Louis’ house one morning, alone with a cup of tea and wearing nothing but sweats, when Lottie came down and decided to have a
talk with him.

“Do you believe you live here, or something?” she asked, squinting in a way that almost shouted ‘Louis’.

Harry swallowed down the tea that really was too hot, a little taken aback. “No?” He’d never really had a private conversation with her, as Louis had always been around when she was.

“You’ve been drinking my favorite tea.” She sat down on the chair at the opposite side of the table, eyes accusing.

“Oh.” Harry’s mouth turned round as his eyes flickered between her and the cup right in front of him.

“Why?” she asked, eyes still narrowed.

“Because it’s the best tea?” he said apprehensively.

She regarded him for a moment more, leaning back in her chair. “You’re not all bad, Styles.”

After that, morning tea with Lottie became a bit of a thing. Then when she had to get ready he’d go back upstairs and sleep for fifteen more minutes, until Louis would wake up and panic because he only had twenty minutes to shower and get to school. It was a pretty routine, for a while there.

Now, morning tea usually comes with Louis’ sister and his mum, ever since she got a promotion at her job and is at home a lot more. At first Louis was apprehensive about the whole ordeal. A morning only a week or so after graduation, Louis came down to the kitchen, finding the three of them in stitches, and instantly went into defense mode. He squinted suspiciously, like he always does in that displeased manner with his arms crossed, and asked if they were making up conspiracies. It took him a week until he accepted that that was how it was going to be from then on. He grumbled. Now that Harry thinks about it, Louis has a way of seeming very displeased in general, even though he secretly is very, very pleased.

Well, until this summer. Harry has never seen Louis like this. He’s happy. He’s like a completely new person—relatively—and for the first time he seems genuinely free. Watching him smile makes Harry’s entire belly flutter, because his smile is unstrained, nothing weighing him down. The change is so prominent, and Harry couldn’t be happier for him.

Zayn stops the car outside Harry’s house. There’s a moving truck just outside, three shirtless men loading boxes into it. If it weren’t for the fact they were representing the end of Harry’s family as a complete concept, he would have spent a moment praising God for what a pleasant sight. As it is, it’s not pleasant at all.

“Call me later, mate. If you can tear yourself from quiffy quifferson for just a moment to hang with me.”

Harry frowns at him. “You’re no fun.”

Zayn looks at him. “You’re no fun.”

Harry snorts, sighing as he opens the passenger door. “See you.”

Zayn salutes him before he closes the door, and Harry starts strolling up to the house, hanging his duffel bag over his shoulder. He walks inside, maneuvering through the sea of cardboard boxes filling up the entire entrance. He knows his dad isn’t home. He’s at Harry’s grandma’s for the weekend, as he didn’t want to be here when Mum left. Harry knows they’ve already said their
goodbyes—they even hugged and shared a last peck, wow—so it won’t be that unsettling when he comes back and the house is half empty.

Harry knows his mum is somewhere in the house, but he doesn’t feel like talking. He heads upstairs to return some of his clothes, because as it appears more and more of his stuff seem to end up in Louis’ room. He is going to spend the weekend here, since he doesn’t want his dad to be alone when he comes back from Gran’s.

When Harry walks inside his room, he stops in the doorway. “So, you’re here,” he notes, arching a surprised, albeit pleased, brow.

Louis is sprawled on his stomach on the bed, facing the windows, only in jeans, no shirt. His skin is smooth and golden, shoulders buffer than they were a few months ago. This sight is so much better than the three men outside. Harry—insert loud groan—loves Louis’ back.

“Oh, hello,” his boyfriend says casually, throwing a look behind him before returning to his book.

Harry opens his mouth. “Is that a face mask?”

“It’s against pores.”

From what Harry managed to see, there is a thick layer of green goo across his nose. He drops the bag on the floor before walking over and spreading out on the bed. He crawls up to Louis, burying his nose into the small of his back. His skin smells like vanilla and honey, and just a little bit salty from the summer warmth. He could eat him up. (Words like that go in the category of things he doesn’t say when Louis can hear.)

“And you decided to do that here?” Harry murmurs against him, lips brushing his skin and making him shiver. He’s soft and firm at the same time, shifting slightly under Harry’s weight. He reaches a hand back, scratching Harry’s scalp for a short moment in greetings.

“Lottie gave it to me and I was bored, so I came here. Your mum made me cookies.” His voice is slow, as he’s probably reading as he speaks.

Harry turns his face, leaving his cheek pressed against Louis’ back. “She made you cookies? How does she even have time for that?”

“Think she wants me to like her more.”

Probably a lost cause. Well, Harry knows Louis doesn’t hate her, but he also knows he isn’t too fond of her either. They’re okay, though.

“So,” Louis says then.

“What?”

“So do you think I’m pansexual or not?”

Harry frowns in confusion, hand cupping Louis’ side over his ribs. “Why?” he asks tentatively, placing his chin against his back.

He doesn’t need to imagine how Louis rolls his eyes, because it’s simply in the way he talks. “Because I’m asking? Does that make sense to you, sweetheart?”

This is the first time Louis has mention anything of the sort, but truthfully Harry isn’t surprised because Louis always does this—acts as if he’s had an entire conversation with Harry about the
matter when in reality that conversation most likely happened in his head.

Harry purses his lips. “Why do you think you’re pan?” he wonders.

“But I was watching those guys out there and I didn’t feel a thing.”

“You watched them?” Harry presses his chin harder into his back, making him shift in discomfort. “You have a boyfriend, Lewis,” he murmurs.

Naturally, Louis continues on like nothing happened, head still in his book. “And then I remembered watching girl porn and I didn’t feel anything either. So then gay porn came to mind, and I thought that was pretty cool if I was imagining—” He rolls over, making Harry slide off him. “Because… Then I look at you and…”

He trails off, eyes lingering on Harry’s face before slowly taking in the rest of his body where he’s splayed out on the bed by his side. His mouth is just a little bit open, eyes soft with adoration.

Harry should not be this endeared by him when he’s got green cream over his face, but his stomach still flutters and his heart feels too big for his chest. He remembers seeing Louis watch him like this before they were officially together. It made his entire stomach swoop, and made it hard for him to breathe, because he just looks so sincere and completely head over heels. It scared him in the beginning, because Louis’ actions felt so far from what his eyes were conveying. Right now it only makes his heart beat faster and makes him want to scream ‘I love you’ at the top of his lungs.

“Harry-sexual sound pretty good to me,” he breathes, voice tight as his eyes linger on Louis’ bare stomach, the small happy trail leading into his jeans…

“You’re so full of yourself,” Louis snorts.

Harry swallows and bites his lip, yearning starting to build in his lower regions. “I could be full of you.”

Louis guffaws. “Where is your shame!”

“Haven’t got any.”

“As if I didn’t already know.”

Harry reaches out with grabby hands until Louis succumbs. He sits up and scoots forward on the bed, until Harry can cup his face and kiss him. Harry likes doing that, because then he can keep Louis close for as long as he likes.

Louis deepens the kiss, tongue gently nudging Harry’s bottom lip. His lips feel like they always do; soft, thin, and delicious. Harry instantly accommodates—like always—and opens his mouth, simultaneously trying to pull Louis on top of him. Louis does that thing where he pretends Harry is annoying and sighs, but it only takes him a second to follow.

Harry spreads his legs, Louis easily fitting himself in between. Harry loves this feeling, Louis pressing against his crotch, hands squeezing his arse or pressing his thumbs to his nipples, his movements deliberate and sure.

His nose nudges Harry’s jaw, and he promptly exposes his neck to let Louis suck a hard kiss just below his jawline. He fits his arm around his waist, pushing at the small of Harry’s back to have him arch up. Harry inhales, lifting his hips as Louis rolls his down.
They both exhale, sounds of pleasure escaping them. “Lou,” Harry breathes, fingers sinking into his hair at the back of his head. “I want,” he mumbles, and Louis instantly keens, a sound of agony mixed with desire slipping past his lips.

The phrase has become a bit sentimental to them. The words mean Louis burying his face in Harry’s neck, pressing a tiny kiss to his pulse point, or Harry squeezing Louis half to death, or gentle kisses before going to sleep. Or like this, moaning lowly and holding on, close, close.

Louis pants softly in his neck, placing another kiss there. Harry arches up again, stomach jumping with the chill when Louis’ hand sinks into the back of his jeans. Harry closes his eyes, anticipation warm in his tummy as he waits for his hand to sink lower. Louis stops.

“I’ve just realized something,” he says.

Harry opens his mouth to complain, but then... “You’re still wearing the face mask.”

Louis nods.

“Do I have green stuff all over my neck?”

“Yes.”

He makes a displeased noise, body going slack under Louis’, head falling back against the bed. “Yeah, no. We’re not having sex now.”

Louis rolls off, stretching his arms above his head, yawning. “Wasn’t aware we were having sex?”

“You don’t catch up on anything, do you?”

Louis snickers. “I thought I was making you come in your pants, but...” He shrugs, eyes twinkling.

Harry reaches out where he lies on the bed, hand cupping the side of Louis’ neck, index finger touching his jawline. He brings him in close, lips just an inch apart. “You’re taking me out on a date tonight,” he murmurs. “And afterwards you’re going to fuck me.”

He grins as Louis visibly swallows, eyes instantly sliding down to Harry’s lips, nudging them together, just brushing.

“Wait,” Louis says lowly, frowning. “When you say ‘afterwards’ you mean...? I thought our dates meant fucking already.”

“That’s why you’re taking me out on a real one. A date.”

“Your mum leaves at six.”

“I know, but after. The only date we’ve had was on my birthday, Lou, and it barely counts.” Louis’ face instantly turns apologetic. “No,” Harry says, pushing a finger to his lips, shushing him before he’s even said a word.

He knows Louis still feels bad, but Harry doesn’t blame him anymore. Louis has apologized too many times to be counted, and they were both dickheads back then. Louis made up for it later that night anyway, and to be fair, Harry wasn’t entirely innocent that day either.

Harry leans in and kisses him on the tip of his nose. He knows he hates it when he does that.
“Don’t say anything, baby. Just take me out on a date.”

“Okay,” Louis mutters, giving in.

“And look nice. Proper.”

“Are you saying I don’t look nice?”

“Why do you pick fights about everything?”

Louis rolls his eyes. “Harry, it’s called banter—”

“I know, I was keeping it going,” Harry sneers back at him, and their eyes lock in a tense gaze. Louis’ eyes are the first to break out of the hold as always, sliding down to Harry’s chest.

“Can we—”

“In the shower,” Harry agrees, quickly standing from the bed and pulling Louis with him into the bathroom.

**

Can we talk? I know you hate me, Harry, but it’s been two years. I’m sorry that I tried to get a rise out of you with Louis. I’ve made mistakes, but I just want us to talk so I can move on. You refusing to even speak to me hurts, I just want us to be free of this. I don’t expect us to go back to being friends or you to like me again or whatever, but don’t lie and say you wouldn’t feel better about our situation if we talked... Pls H . Xx

Harry stares at the message. It’s not the first one of the kind he’s received, but this is the first time he’s ever felt remotely like replying.

He knows Jas and Louis are friendly, not entirely friends, but something of the sort. Watching them together, especially when he and Louis weren’t talking, was trying.

The thing is, he saw it from the start. After the fight he and Jas had in September, she went directly to Louis. It was a sore spot. Like Louis felt when Niall went to Zayn, Harry felt battered, even confusedly disturbed. Despite not having been close for a year more or less, it irked him, made his chest flare with almost repugnance at times.

And then, he didn’t want her to touch upon things that didn’t belong to her. Or rather, he didn’t want to touch things that were in some respects his. At the time he still felt horribly hurt and angry, and just the thought of her meddling so close to another one of his secrets made him feel sick.

Even though Harry now knows that she would never tell people the truth about his sexuality, and he hated Louis, back then he didn’t want to allow her the chance to do the same to Louis. Of course he had no idea what sexuality Louis aligned himself with—obviously Louis still doesn’t—but he didn’t want her to acquire the ability to put Louis in the same seat Harry was in. His intentions of protecting Louis were severely more selfish in the beginning, as a possible outing of Louis could ultimately mean Harry himself obtained a risk of being exposed. However, as he gradually grew closer to Louis, his reasons to keep Jasmine and Louis apart became more pure, but as he realized with a start one day, also flecked with very evident green.

He knows now that Louis never had a single intention of being intimate with her, but it was still a fear close to his heart. Seeing her near him, kissing his cheek in front of everyone, made his chest sting horribly, and not only because it was her. The thought of Louis with anyone else makes his skin crawl.
The kiss, and then only a week later, the shirt. It didn’t click immediately. The few days that passed, his head was filled with disoriented thoughts and his chest was constricting with anxiety, the fear that Louis actually did something convulsing inside him. He remembered how Zayn had told him he walked into the school bathroom, finding Jasmine in there after bumping into Louis. He’d proper told her off for going after Louis, but the fact that Harry knew now that Louis and Jasmine were talking, only added to his doubts. Maybe Louis didn’t have feelings for him after all? But the same day he came running towards Harry, looking so fucking free and happy, kissing him in the parking lot. Harry had never seen him like that.

Louis was confusing, to say the least.

After the semifinal, he couldn’t believe that he’d let them go from being so, so close to this, something non-speaking, so awkward and tension-filled. The confusing part is, he didn’t mean for it to happen like that. Louis kissed him, and he looked so freaking earnest and like he was throwing all of the things inside him at Harry. Harry was shocked. Louis never spoke about his feelings willingly, and it startled him. He was surprised.

It wasn’t logical, but it scared him. And the second their lips met, Harry realized that everyone were surrounding them. Maybe Louis didn’t realize? When they parted, Harry looked over and saw Ed staring at the both of them. Harry didn’t know what to do. And then Louis hurried away so fast, Harry couldn’t even think.

Louis didn’t call him like he was supposed to after the semifinal. Harry waited, but he didn’t call. He waited for it all night as his parents were too busy dividing furniture to ask him how the match went, and he waited the whole day afterwards, even as Louis didn’t show up to school. He knows now that he should have just called, because Louis was just as confused as him. It was a grand misunderstanding, to say the least.

At first he didn’t know if he should approach him or not, he didn’t know if it was okay to talk. It was so awkward, because none of them knew what was going on. Watching Louis and Jasmine at the party, for a moment he thought that maybe the good times were just a spell. Maybe Louis was just an unbearable prick like he used to think.

But that was not true, because the moments they’ve had, fuck, the last night they had before the semifinal… All of those things were real. Louis trusted Harry and together they did something new. It was big, scary and simultaneously absolutely blissful. Harry never knew he even wanted it like that, but with Louis everything is good. So, so good.

He tried to stay away from him after the party, because he knew things between them were so complicated. Louis made everything inside him feel like a hurricane. He didn’t know what he was doing with Jasmine, he didn’t know what he was thinking, he didn’t know anything about anything. Louis tried to talk to him, but Harry just… It’s hard to explain how incredibly disoriented he felt. Zayn was saying he heard rumors about Louis and Jas, Louis wouldn’t meet his eyes for longer than a second, and then when he came up to Harry, he just couldn’t do it. Not right then, because he was pretty sure he would have crumbled.

In the bathroom at the pizza place, it just snapped inside him how much he wanted Louis. Before he had to tell him that he got a spot at Manchester, he just wanted to be able to kiss him like nothing was wrong. He wanted push all the problems away for just one day, so maybe he and Louis could feel fine once again. It doesn’t work like that, though. He realizes he was hurting Louis by not talking to him, but at the time he was not thinking clearly. All he wanted was for Louis not to hate him.

Present day, it still tears at him thinking of Louis and Jas as friends. However, he does want to put
it behind them. Louis keeps saying it’s their shit, that he isn’t going to be in the middle of it, that he doesn’t care if Harry chooses to make friends with her or not. He says it’s up to Harry, but Harry knows deep down that Louis and Jasmine could make pretty good friends, and even though it’s been years, Harry still misses her friendship. Perhaps, putting it behind him is a good idea.

*We can talk, but not for long. Gotta be home before six,* he texts back.

*Our spot?*

It’s not their spot anymore, but he agrees and tells her to meet him there in half an hour.

He drops his phone back on the bed, rolling over on his stomach.

“Are you leaving me?” Louis murmurs behind him on the bed, the arm that was tucked around Harry’s waist following his move, hand ending up flat against Harry’s naked spine. His voice is husky from the afternoon nap, hair still damp from the shower.

“Was gonna talk to Jasmine, actually,” Harry whispers, turning to face him. He looks sweet where he’s still partly locked in sleep, cheek pressed to the pillow. He looks good like this, soft features, bare shoulders and hair flat against his forehead. He’s been wearing a quiff lately, says he is trying it out. He only used to do his hair up on occasion before, but lately he’s been wearing it like that pretty regularly. He looks beautiful either way, in Harry’s probably biased opinion.

“Yeah?” Louis murmurs back, only opening one of his eyes. Harry tiredly leans over and kisses his eyebrow, then fits himself into Louis’ outstretched arms, with a small hum burying his nose in his neck. Louis holds him to himself, fingers light on his back.

“Mm-hmm.” Harry nuzzles closer, wanting to be as near as possible. Sometimes simply the feeling of Louis breathing against him makes him feel at ease, everything else melting away. Like scary icicles turning to easy water as they’re hit with the warmth of the sun. Louis has been feeling like Harry’s personal sun for a while now.

“Want me to come? It’d be awkward, but…”

“No.” Harry shakes his head, nudging his lips to the curve of his neck, just to let them rest there. He smells good. Soapy.

Louis understands. All he does is squeeze his arms tighter around Harry’s torso, the air almost wheezing out of him as he clings to Louis. He feels a little helpless all of a sudden, as if the only thing making him feel good being Louis. It used to be like that for a while, often when everything felt particularly shitty.

“I love you,” he whispers, voice tight.


“I know,” Harry says, shaking his head, but his eyes itch.

Louis says it anyway. “It’s okay if you’re sad about your mum leaving.”

He shakes his head, holding on tight around Louis’ naked torso. “I’m glad she’s going,” he whispers. The words are low and meant for Louis only. “Even though we’re leaving soon, I’m glad she’s going now because I couldn’t watch them trying to fake it for much longer. She wants to go, so then she should go.” His voice is raw, husky. Louis fingers card through his hair, the touch reassuring and soothing at the same time. “She wants me to visit her in Cheshire, but… I just don’t know.”
“You don’t have to decide that now, love,” Louis murmurs. “You can wait. The entire summer is left.”

Harry sighs. “You always know what to say.”

“Well, God knows I’ve learned some things this past year,” he mutters. He plants a small kiss on Harry’s shoulder, hand patting his hair one more time.

“I need to get dressed,” Harry mumbles. “Can you drive me? You can keep the car so you can pick me up before our date.”

“Fine,” Louis mutters. His family’s car is beginning to face its last days of its long, long life, and Louis is rather unwilling to admit it. Lottie, however, is pretty pleased about the fact that Harry lends his car to them whenever they need it.

They reluctantly crawl out of bed, slipping into new clothes. Louis pulls on a pair of track pants and a jumper despite the warm weather, both of which belong to Harry. He looks perfect, eyes still tinged with sleep under his fringe.

“Can I have this?” he asks, picking a dark blue beanie out of one Harry’s drawers. Harry isn’t sure if Louis means ‘borrow’ or ‘keep forever’, but either way he shrugs and agrees.

They trudge downstairs, Louis’ hand softly clenched around Harry’s t-shirt. He’s adorably sleepy after he naps, following Harry like a child. As they reach the last step on the stairs, Harry’s mum comes into the room, a big cardboard box in her arms.

Harry’s chest contorts just a little. Her long, dark hair is twisted into a knot, and she looks tired, but in a ‘I’ve been carrying boxes the entire day’-way. She sets the box down on the floor when she spots them, smiling as she lets out a breath. “Hi, boys,” she says, hands settling on her hips. “Are you leaving?”

“Yeah,” Harry mumbles.

“Oh,” his mum says. “Well, I suppose I won’t be seeing you in while, Louis.” She steps forward, arms out. Louis steps into her embrace without hesitation, staying in her warm hug for a moment. Surprisingly, it isn’t awkward. Louis pats Anne gently on the back, murmuring something in her ear. She says something back, and to be entirely honest, Harry doesn’t care what it is.

Louis steps back, a small, kind smile on his lips. Harry reaches out and links their fingers, pulling him towards the front door.

“You’ll be back before six, yeah?” he hears his mother call behind him, and he nods, waving a hand above his head, making an agreeing noise.

He knows he’s being rather insensitive at the moment, but he knows himself. There will be enough emotion when he has to say goodbye. He doesn’t want to spend more time than necessary being sad.

Louis swings their hands between them as they stroll towards the car. He looks exceptionally adorable, the grey jumper sleeves hanging low over his hands. It’s pretty amazing how their relationship has grown to something so comfortable, and most of all so normal, in such a short time despite the history they have.

The first couple of days were tentative when it came to acting like a couple. It was a strange concept that they could now hold hands, peck and touch each other, and basically do anything
they wanted in public.

What Harry actually took for granted, Louis said in a weird voice as he took Harry’s hand tentatively. “You’re, erm, I love you? Be my, erm, uh…” (seven years later) “…boyfriend?” It was very sweet (Harry laughed at his indignant frown when he told him so). Boyfriends, though. It was a nice confirmation.

After spending the entire last football practice sitting on the pitch with the lads, kissing each other softly as often as possible, they drove over to Louis’ house, Louis walked backwards, holding both of Harry’s hands as he led him up the porch and into the house, kicking off his shoes without releasing him. He looked so bright, eyes so blue, and lips pulled up in a small smile as he murmured words Harry was too dazzled to remember.

Lottie spotted them as they walked past the kitchen, grinning brightly as she noticed Harry. Louis rolled his eyes when she came to hug him, breaking their hold of each other’s hands. “I’m so glad you’re back together, I can’t believe you even thought you’d be able to be apart for real,” she said, shaking her head and giving Harry a kiss on the cheek.

Louis simply linked their fingers again, pulling Harry upstairs. For some reason, all of his condoms were confiscated, but not the lube, so Louis ended up fingering Harry until he came. He wanked Louis off afterwards, sucking a hard love bite into his neck.

It all has seemed to fall into place pretty seamlessly. Sure, they have their fights and bicker pretty regularly, but it’s all good. Harry smiles over the hood of the car at Louis as they’re about to get into the vehicle. It’s very good.

Louis turns on his favorite radio station, adjusting the driver’s seat to his satisfaction, before he navigates out on the road. Harry directs him towards a small playground behind one of the older blocks in the town. Louis drives leaning back in his seat, one hand on the wheel and the other scratching the nape of Harry’s neck.

“Second,” he murmurs as he slows down, about to turn onto the street leading up to the playground.

Harry switches gear with ease for him, before turns his head and kisses the inside of Louis’ small wrist. “Thank you,” he murmurs as the car comes to a stop.

“D’you want me to pick you up?”

“Nah, I’ll walk. Just pick me up at seven and wear something nice.”

“You’ve said that ten times. I’ll dress up, I promise,” Louis sighs, but leans over the console to kiss him goodbye. Harry tries to contain himself—a constant battle—and keeps the kiss relatively short.

“See you,” he murmurs, giving him a last peck before he jumps out of the Rover.

He closes the car door and trudges off between the trees, taking a shortcut rather than walking all the way over to the path that leads to the round sandbox, swings and slides. The trees are green like the grass and moss, the summer truly having flowered now. It’s been so long since he’s been here, probably a year or so. He’s going to miss Donny when they’ve left for Manchester. It’s not that far, but still. Doncaster has been his home for eighteen years.

The trees thin out, shaping a meadow not far from the playground. There’s a small shed, painted red with a dark, worn roof. It’s old, the paint flaking. The bench beneath a pair of trees is there though, just like it’s always been. It almost melts into the scenery, flowers growing on the ground
and around its legs, a bush curling behind the back.

Jasmine’s already there. She’s in a flowery skirt with black boots, a thin knitted jumper on top. She smiles as she looks up, eyes crinkling in that familiar way. The fact that they’ve been close friends feels strange because it’s been so long, yet it seems like yesterday.

“Hello,” she murmurs in that pleasant, soft voice. Her hair is newly washed, eyes free from makeup.

“Hey,” he says, sounding rather curt without meaning to. He sits down on the bench next to her, leaning back and crossing his ankles. She’s tucked her knees to her chest, facing him.

“Glad you came,” she says.

He clears his throat a little. “We can skip the pleasantries,” he says quietly, drawing his shoulders up a little.

“It was the truth, H,” she says softly, but nonetheless nods, seeming to brace herself for the conversation that’s coming. She shakes her head. “To be honest, I don’t know how to say what I’ve said already so many times in a different way. You must know by now that I am sorry about what happened back then.”

Harry nods, then shakes his head, hand running through his hair. “It’s just taken me some time to forgive you,” he smurms lowly. “Still haven’t entirely.”

“I just don’t want you to hate me, Harry,” she whispers.

“I don’t—I don’t hate you, Jas. I’m just hurt. You hurt me pretty badly.”

“Yeah,” she nods. She looks at him seriously, eyes filled with sincerity. “I just don’t want to leave this place knowing that you’re still hurting.”

“I’m not hurting,” he says softly. Truthfully he hasn’t been sad in a while, mostly he’s just been missing her friendship. “I’m just disappointed and… I don’t like what you did.”

She nods, lips pressed together. “You know why I did, though, yeah? I can’t defend it and I won’t, but it wasn’t just a heartless act.” She sounds vulnerable, yet strong, in a way.

“No, I know. And I—I’m not innocent,” he whispers, looking up at her. “I’m sorry to tell you this, but… I should never have pursued something romantic between us.” He sheepishly looks down at his own knees. He’s ashamed, honestly. Hiding the stuff he’s been guilty for behind his anger about the things Jas has done wrong has been too easy, and also unfair. “I knew I probably liked boys, but I. You were one of my best friends. I loved you, but I was confused on what level.”

“Because I loved you more?” Jas asks, arching a brow.

He swallows. “Yeah,” he murmurs. It’s strange saying these things out loud, but it feels good. This is the only thing they’ve never truly talked about.

“I’m not in love with you anymore, Harry,” she says calmly.

“I know.”

“And I’m sorry about Louis.”

“I know.”
They don’t have much to say to each other about those other things, because it feels like they’re both pretty over fighting about it, over rehashing everything. Harry has heard what she’s told Louis, and he doesn’t need her to say it all again.

“Can we just decide we’re done with this shit?” he says, voice loud, exhaling heavily.

“Sure.” She nods, hair swaying over her shoulders. “Yes. Sounds good!” Her hands slap against her knees, like the decision has been made.

“Alright,” Harry sighs.

He looks over at her, and her smile is there, but mostly she just looks relieved. Harry feels a little relieved too. He knows all the feelings suddenly just won’t pass, but just the fact that they talked without fighting, no matter how short the conversation was, is a step in the right direction.

He doesn’t know if they’ll be friends again, but this is enough for now.

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“Alright,” his mum says after putting the last suitcase of clothes into the back of her car. “I’m all packed up and set now.”

Harry nods where he’s standing on the sidewalk in front of the house, fiddling with his hands. “Right,” he gets out.

His mother sighs, leaning against the side of the car. She looks up at the house, shaking her head in small movements. “I’m going to miss the house.”

Obviously, Harry thinks, but doesn’t say it. She’s lived there for a long time now. It feels a little sick, but somehow he’s come to terms with this happening. His eyes aren’t prickling like he thought they would, he mostly feels a little bitter and sad.

“Yeah,” he hums. Gonna miss having you here. Gonna miss watching you cook dinner in the kitchen, read on the couch, work in the office. Gonna miss you being here.

She looks at him. “I really want you to come stay a few days with me Cheshire, Harry. You can bring Louis if you want.”

“Maybe,” he shrugs. “We’ll see.” He’s not ready to say all those things yet, and maybe yes, he resents her a little for leaving. They’ll be fine, though. Someday, everything will be okay. Louis has helped him believe that.

Anne straightens up, smiling sadly at him. “I love you so much, baby,” she whispers. He can see how honest she is, brows knitted sadly. “I wish some things didn’t go down the way they have, and I wish I could fix them, but I can’t. I just need you to know that I love you and I’m always here for you. I’m really proud of you for… you know, being you.”

Why did she have to wait until this moment? All the shit that has gone down within the family, and she chooses this moment to say it. There’s been a whole lot of crap, including Harry feeling like he had to start a fucking fire for them to notice him. He wishes she could have done this sooner.

He steps into her hug, feeling her latch her arms around his waist. He hasn’t hugged her in a long, long time. He’s much taller than her now, but she smells just the same. His heart hurts.

“Love you, Mum,” he whispers, because of course he does. Despite everything, he loves her so
“Me too, sweetheart,” she says. When they finally part, she gives him a close-lipped smile, tucking one of his stray curls away behind his ear. “I’ll call you tomorrow, love.” She softly taps his nose.

“Okay.” Harry wraps his arms around himself as he watches her climb into her car, biting his bottom lip. She waves and he waves back, before starting the car and leaving the curb.

He watches her go, inhaling tiredly. The goodbye felt succinct, but enough somehow. He can settle for that.

He knows he’s settled a lot when it comes to his parents, but it’s very hard to change how things are within a family, especially as a kid. It’s fine though, because sometimes things suck, but you learn to handle it. He’s not going dwell on it anymore. He’s done that far too much.

He goes inside, heading up to take a shower and get ready for his and Louis’ date. It’s a good distraction, because he’s been rather excited about this.

He steps into the shower, rubbing himself with the honey soap because he knows Louis likes the smell. He washes his hair, and trims his pubes just a bit because he kind of likes how neat it looks, before rinsing off and getting out.

He lets his hair dry by itself, curls becoming bouncy due to the rather expensive conditioner he splurged on last week. He picks a pair of black jeans, and then a red flowy shirt. It’s a little blouse-ish, has ruffles on the sleeves and the neckline is V-shaped. It’s a nice one, and he thinks Louis will like it.

He fetches two small packets of lube from his drawer, placing them in his pocket. Just in case.

The clock is just hitting seven when he hears the car pulling up at the curb. He grins, slipping into a pair of brown boots before hurrying downstairs. He throws a last look in the mirror before heading to the door. When he opens it, he finds Louis standing on the lowest step, looking entirely amazing. There’s a swooping sensation in his stomach, and he actually licks his lips. He can’t help it. Louis makes him feel all kinds of things.

“Oh my god,” Louis murmurs, eyes raking over Harry’s body.

Harry smiles bashfully, cheeks heating up. He’s not usually this shy about compliments, but Louis looks so bloody sincere and honest, genuinely taken aback as he looks at him.

“You look good too, babe,” he says lowly. Louis’ hair is pulled upwards and to the side, and he’s wearing black trousers and a dark button up, fastened even at the top. He’s holding a jacket that he probably didn’t even plan on wearing, feet in vans, because Harry knows he doesn’t own shoes that are the right kind of semi-casual. He’s lovely.

Harry locks the door quickly, then turns around to face Louis, who reaches out for his hand instantly. “Is this some fancy brand?” he hums as he thumbs the ruffles at the end of Harry’s sleeve. He links their fingers, leading Harry off the porch.

“Yeah,” Harry hums, following him towards the car. Louis simply nods, but then stops, and pulls Harry closer until his tummy is pressed to Louis’. He places his other hand against the small of Harry’s back, making him arch slightly. He’s looking at his lips.

“You’re being indecent, Louis,” Harry says. “You’re supposed wait until after the date.”

“My boyfriend is looking amazing right now, so I’m sorry, love, but I’m too tempted.” He grins,
Harry holds up a finger between their faces. “One,” he allows, but giggles when he feels Louis’ hand sneakily sinking lower on his back.

“Only one,” Louis promises with a cheeky grin, and leans forward and captures his lips with his own. It’s slow and languid, perfect. Harry bites softly at Louis’ bottom lip, glancing down at it, entirely pleased.

“Naughty,” Louis murmurs, pinching his side.

Harry lets him go, planting a kiss on his puffy lips. “Let’s go.” He steps out of Louis’ arms, happily making his way towards the car.

“Tease,” Louis says behind him, but Harry can hear the affection in his voice.

Harry doesn’t know where they are going, but Louis assures him it’s somewhere nice. He drives them into town, where he parks the car outside an Italian restaurant. He looks pleased with Harry’s reaction as he opens the car door, ceremoniously helping him out. It’s silly, but it’s also fun and makes them both laugh.

The restaurant is cozily lit, red and brown interior giving it a romantic atmosphere. Louis has made reservations for a small table in a secluded area where the hostess leads them. There’s a lit candle, and Harry excitedly points at the small rose petals on the table.

“They’re real!” he exclaims once they’ve sat down, having thoroughly examined them. Louis smiles at him, and Harry knows he gets excited over small things, but Louis only looks endeared.

They look at each other for a moment, smiling at one another for some reason. It feels a little weird, doing this, to be entirely honest.

“Is it just me or...”

“This is weird?” Louis says, looking around the room. “I mean, not weird, but I never pictured us doing this sort of thing.”

Harry purses his lips. Well, he did picture it, but now that they’re here it feels very foreign. They’ve gone from hating each other to deciding to live together when they go to Manchester in nine months. It’s so strange, looking back at it like that. He’s not sure if they’re the fancy date types.

The waiter comes over with the menus, kindly greeting them and taking their drink orders. Harry can’t help but snicker as they peruse the menus in silence.

“What?” Louis asks.

“This is weird,” he hisses over the table. “We should be eating fries and watching movies in your bed right now.”

“You’re the one who wanted the bloody date,” Louis says indignanty. “Come on. Now we’re doing this. Be proper. Ask me what I do and how I grew up.”

Harry grins, pressing his leg to Louis’ under the table. “I know those things about you already. Tell me what you did this afternoon, before you came over instead. Did you wank? You obviously shaved.”
Instead of grinning and telling Harry an explicit story about what he did in the shower, his face turns grim. “Actually, I, err, was looking at the footie program’s website,” he says tightly, brows knitting angrily. He looks down at his menu, but Harry can see that he isn’t reading.

“What happened?” he asks carefully.

“You remember that prick? Aaron something? Who called you princess?” His mouth twists down in displeasure.

Harry frowns. The captain of the team they lost to at the championship final. “What about him?” he asks apprehensively.

“He got in,” Louis says, and when he looks up he looks sufficiently pissed off.

“Oh.” That means they’ll be playing on the same team as him. “Fuck.” He rubs a hand over his eyes, holding in a groan.

“It’s bullshit!” Louis exclaims, Harry’s eyes widening in surprise. Louis’ eyes are stormy and jaw clenched. “I don’t want to play on that prick’s team. I swear to God, if he even speaks in your direction again—”

“Woah,” Harry interrupts, raising a hand to shush him. “Babe, no need getting homicidal. He’s just a dick. It’s crap, but… can’t do anything about it.”

“He’s a pathetic loser. He deserves broken kneecaps, not a place at Manchester.”

“Lou!”

“Why are you defending him?” Louis says in annoyance. “He was completely homophobic, don’t you just want to break his nose?”

“Louis,” Harry murmurs, reaching over and patting his clenched hand. “Of course I don’t like him, but I’m not going to waste my time letting him bother me.”

“He’s a dick.”

“We’ll deal with him if necessary when we get there, but right now we shouldn’t dwell on it. Baby, I don’t want you worrying about him.” He knows Louis going to walk around drowning in his own thoughts if nobody stops him. “And between you and me,” he smiles. “I think you and I will be fine.”

Louis regards him for a moment, still looking sour, but not as angry. He agrees with Harry, but doesn’t quite want to. “Do you think so? That we’ll be fine?” he asks instead.

Harry swallows. “I mean, yeah? We’re good at footie, we’ve got each other’s back, and… we’re in a good place, yeah?” Louis gives a small smile, glancing down at his menu. Harry presses his leg closer to his, aiming for a reassuring gesture. “Let’s not talk about him, yeah? This is supposed to be a good night, right?”

Louis sighs. “Yes, I know. Sorry.”

Harry gives him a small smile that he returns, nudging his leg back under the table.

It’s sucky news of course, but it won’t kill them. Harry is pretty confident that Louis would kill the thing attacking them first, before letting anything hurt them. It feels pretty amazing, knowing that Louis would do anything for him. When he stood up for him before the big match, Harry’s heart
was beating so fast and he felt so utterly cared for, despite them not being on the best terms at the moment. Nobody has really been there for him like Louis has.

The waiter comes up and they give their orders, Louis some chicken dish and Harry pasta. They manage to leave the footie talk behind, focusing on rubbing their legs against one another and trying to get the other turned on solely through that. Harry loses, not because he pops a boner, but because he doesn’t want Louis’ vans rubbing on his jeans. Louis calls him a pretentious twat. Harry flips him off.

The pasta is delicious. It came with a shrimp sauce and cherry tomatoes, making Harry moan the second he tastes it on his tongue. Louis squints at him, and he moans just a little louder for effect. Louis shakes his head, and chews his mozzarella chicken in silence while Harry smirks.

For dessert they order cheesecake to share, which Harry knows Louis knows Harry will eat the most of. He’s used to it though, so he’ll live. Harry licks his spoon while Louis talks about something Liam said the day before, admiring the way his mouth moves as he enunciates as clearly as he does. He could watch his lips forever, honestly. He could read the dictionary and Harry would listen to all of it twice. Maybe.

Thinking back on their first kiss, he doesn’t even know what he was thinking when it happened. Louis looked so disoriented and maybe Harry felt a little too confident. It was pretty hilarious how dizzy he looked after Harry sucked another bruise into his neck, and he wanted to affect him even more. He’s not going to lie and say he’d never imagined kissing Louis before. When you have sex with someone, that thought does occur to you, yeah? But when he looked at Louis, suddenly there was a huge ball of desire in him, urging him to take hold of his shoulders and do it. It felt right.

“I wish this was a booth so I could palm you under the table right now,” Harry says conversationally. Louis splutters on his water, setting the glass down instantly.

“Christ, Harry!” he hisses.

“What? It’s true,” he grins cheekily. Louis leans in, shushing him. Their faces are only inches apart over the table, and Harry smiles innocently. “I’m not wearing any pants.”

It’s quite hilarious, the way Louis stills completely for three entire seconds, before his eyes narrow. “I swear to God, if you’re making this up…”

Harry giggles. “I’m not.”

“We’re getting out of here, Haz, right now.” He’s totally serious, is the thing, which both makes Harry laugh more and the desire in him start to rumble.

Louis calls for the check, and the waiter comes over. Louis pays with urgency, before quickly grabbing Harry’s and hand guiding him towards the exit, meanwhile Harry stays close to his side, whispering all kinds of things he can come up with.

When they reach the car, Harry climbs into the backseat as Louis takes the wheel, quickly driving towards Harry’s house. Harry spreads his knees, letting his hand trail up between his legs, cupping himself. He watches Louis drive, palming himself through his jeans as he lets the anticipation of Louis fucking him spread through him. He moans just a little, thinking of Louis’ cock grazing his prostate.

“What are you doing, Harry?” Louis says, and throws a look in the rearview mirror. His eyes widen comically, mouth opening. “Holy shit, Harry. Stop that!” he hisses, but he can’t seem to tear his eyes away quick enough.
Harry moans a little, squeezing himself. Louis watching him get off is making him feel loads of things. He’d fuck himself with his fingers for hours as Louis watched him. He’ll put that idea forward some day.

Right now, though, he wants Louis to fuck him as soon as possible. Luckily they’ve got lube, and condoms aren’t really necessary. Harry can wash the interior design if needed.

Thinking back on the first time they fucked, he’s extremely happy the entire day played out like it did. If it hadn’t, then maybe they wouldn’t be here right now.

The first time they had sex, Harry had been to the drugstore the same day, stocking up on some lube. It’s not like he wasn’t a virgin before Louis, because he was, but he’d been curious. He’d been at the drugstore a few months earlier, and he’d seen the bottles of lube. Thinking back at the massive amounts of porn he’d watched, he wanted to try it out. He’d never really dared to do it before, but at the same time he was curious, and he had a feeling it would be good. Buying lube without condoms just seemed sad, though, like he was going to go home and just fuck himself with his fingers (which was admittedly the truth, but he didn’t want the clerk to know that) so he grabbed a pack on the way to the check out.

So he’d just been stocking up on lube during the lunch break, because he didn’t have anything to do since Zayn was off somewhere else, maybe with Liam or something. He’d stuffed it in his training bag where it could be easily hidden, and when he and Louis fought the same day, the thought of the lube in his bag just emerged in his head. Louis was looking at him, licking his lips, and Harry could feel that he wanted it. It just happened.

Louis parks the car suddenly, and Harry looks up, finding they’ve stopped by an abandoned piece of meadowland along the road.

“What?” Harry asks, but when Louis starts climbing into the backseat he instantly understands. He moans at the simple thought of it, moving so Louis can sit down on the middle seat. He quickly straddles him, picking the lube packets out of his pocket, putting them on the seat next to them.

Louis grabs his waist, and leans in and kisses him with gusto, all tongue and urgency. Harry arches into him immediately, feeling his hands slip in under his shirt, rubbing his back and pressing him closer. Harry moves his crotch down against Louis’, the feeling all too good.

Louis’ lips relocate from his mouth to his neck, and Harry grips his short hair as Louis’ hands push at his jeans. He moans, Louis’ lips at the curve of his shoulder sucking hard kisses. He feels Louis’ hands tugging his pants down on his hips, and he rises on his knees, helping him shove them down his thighs. Louis groans when he finds out Harry was telling the truth, revealing his naked cock beneath his trousers.

He runs his hands along Harry’s thighs and hips, sending shivers up Harry’s sides and back. His hands leave him for just a moment, and he hears Louis rip one of the lube packets open, coating his fingers until they’re slicked up. Harry leans forward, latching his arms around Louis’, the feeling all too good.

Louis starts moving his middle finger slowly over his hole, the tip pressing in and making Harry rut back for more. He always wants too much too fast, but Louis always reminds him to take it easy. Louis’ finger sinks into him, Harry keening instantly. His fingers are sure, and he knows what he’s doing as he moves, arching it slightly.

Harry’s a little tight, Louis not having fucked him properly in a few days. Louis moans a little as
Harry clenches around his finger, cock rubbing against Louis’ stomach since they’re pressed so close. He works up to two fingers soon, and Harry is fully hard, precome already gathering at the slit. Louis is completely hard too, his dick straining in his jeans. Harry pops off the button, zipping his pants down and freeing his cock. He almost groans at the sight, and he instantly begs Louis to hurry up.

“Relax, H,” Louis hums, his third finger pressing inside along with his other two, stretching him thoroughly. Harry gasps, rising a little on his knees at the feeling. “Soon,” Louis promises, and Harry nods, forehead pressing to his neck.

“Now,” Harry moans after just another minute, rocking back onto his fingers. They’re brushing slightly against his prostate, but not enough. He knows Louis is keeping them away with intention, but Harry wants it.

“Okay,” Louis finally says, and plants a soft kiss to Harry’s shoulder. His fingers slip out of him, and he wipes them on his own shirt (which is a shame because it’s a nice shirt). He raises his bum, pulling his jeans down to his knees as best as he can with Harry straddling him. Harry clumsily rides himself of his own completely, Louis helping him so he doesn’t lose balance.

When his lower half is entirely naked, he straddles Louis again, making himself comfortable. Louis is meeting his eyes, chest heaving slightly, and Harry leans down and attaches their lips, at the same time reaching back and gripping Louis’ cock to guide him.

The head of his cock sinks in past his rim, and it stretches, but at the same time it’s good. Harry likes when it hurts just a tiny bit, but Louis knows that too, which is why always makes sure it won’t hurt at all. It’s a little annoying, but he supposes Louis is just being a proper boyfriend.

Louis isn’t too big, but he’s got girth. Harry’s mouth stays silently open as he sinks down, letting Louis’ cock fill him up. Harry doesn’t know if it works like that, but he thinks Louis’ dick is definitely made for his hole. Probably doesn’t work that way, but if it did then that would be the case.

Louis groans into his ear, Harry adjusting on his lap. His hands hover over his arse as Harry slowly rises, making sure they don’t detach. Harry sinks down again, feeling Louis’ cock deeply filling him.

“Are you good?” he asks, gasping as he feels Louis shift beneath him. Louis nods, hands tightening on his sides. He pushes Harry down a little more, making him open his mouth in a silent gasp. His entire length is inside him, and it feels so, so good.

Eyes locked, Louis guides him up, and then down again. Harry rises on his knees, and sinks down once more, breathing through his mouth and keeping his gaze steady on Louis. The slide is easy as he moves, Louis’ hand helping him keep in motion.

“Mmpf.” Harry leans down and pushes their mouths together for a quick kiss. He moves faster, hands locked in Louis’ hair, foreheads pressed close. He can feel him exhale against his lips, his hips moving upwards, meeting Harry halfway.

Harry’s breath is loud and fast, thighs starting to burn. His cock rubs against Louis’ shirt, precome staining it. He reaches down and strokes himself, groaning softly against Louis’ mouth. He’s starting to sweat, neck warm and legs getting tired. Louis understands, and he tightens his arm around his waist and holds him still, thrusting up.

“Oh,” Harry breathes, Louis panting just as bad. Louis’ hairline is damp, breath ragged as he fucks Harry in fast movements. Harry can feel his muscles tensing as he holds on to his shoulders,
his stomach curling in pleasure. “Fuck, I’m close,” he whines.

“Me too,” Louis gasps as Harry goes down, meeting him halfway.

They hold on tightly as they work their way to the edge, Harry moaning as Louis’ thrusts get more and more fervent. He strokes himself faster, arm sore but it’s so fucking good. The air around them is hot, but Louis smells amazing, and the way his body is moving against his is fucking bliss.

“I’m gonna,” Harry breathes, and not long thereafter he feels Louis muscles tighten, coming inside him. After Harry fucked Louis without a condom, and he described the feeling, Harry was very eager to feel it. After they tried that for the first time, he decided it’s very much one of the best feelings ever. He comes instantly.

He moans quietly, rolling his hips in Louis’ lap in slow motions, stroking his cock until he stops coming. Louis wraps his arms around his waist, drawing him in close. Harry exhales, heavily leaning against Louis’ worn body. He rests his head on his shoulder, hand on the other, patting his shirt.

“Do you still think you’re Harry-sexual?” he whispers, tired smile tugging at his lip.

Louis rolls his eyes, letting out another long breath. “If you want me to tell you you’re my only one, then yeah. I am Harry-sexual, baby.”

Harry chuckles lowly, pressing a kiss to Louis’ cheek, before nuzzling into his neck. “Really, though? Do you think you’re pan?”

Louis shrugs, closing his eyes. “I don’t know. I think I’m a little leafy. Gonna drift for a while, I think.”

“You do that. I can anchor you, though, if you’d like,” he smiles affectionately.

“I can anchor myself,” Louis says stubbornly. “But you get to hold my hand if you want.”

“Sounds like a good deal,” Harry hums, pleased.

“Should we shake on it?”

“Pinky promise?”

Louis snorts. “If you want to be like that.”

Harry whines. “Like what?”

He arches a brow. “Cheesy?”

“Just admit you’d like it.”

“I hate you so much, Harry.” Harry throws his head back, cackling when Louis thrusts his pinky out to bump Harry’s hand. He quickly links their fingers, keeping them tucked together. He looks down at them, smiling happily.

Telling Louis he loved him was very hard. See, Louis thinks that he’s as clear as an open book, but really it takes a magnifying glass to understand what it is that is actually going on in his head. While he thought he was handing everything to Harry on a silver plate, Harry actually had no idea where they stood. Every time he tells him now, he’s reminded of the relief he felt after telling Louis the first time.
“I love you a lot, and I promise to love you a lot for some time now,” he says quietly, nudging Louis’ jaw with his nose. Louis can’t hold it in, smiling despite himself.

“Same.”

Harry makes a displeased noise. “Say something sincere!”

“Alright, relax,” Louis shakes his head. “I love you. I promise to take care of you, and you’re very gorgeous all the time.”

Harry looks up at him, feeling his other hand softly squeezing his waist under his shirt. Their linked pinkies rest on Harry’s naked thigh, Louis watching them softly. “Good one,” Harry hums.

Louis keeps him tucked to his side for a couple more minutes, kissing his cheek lovingly. Harry thinks they’re going to be very fine.

**

“Four,” Sophia says, lifting one of her brows competitively.

Harry smirks back. “Five.”

She squints. “Weekends included?” Harry nods. She smirks. “Six.”

Harry frowns, but before he can say anything, Louis interjects. “Are we talking intercourse or everything included?”

“Everything,” Sophia says, while Harry says, “Intercourse.”

They look at each other, Harry smiling triumphantly. “I suppose I won. I get more dick than you. Hand it over.”

Sophia rolls her eyes, shooting the strawberry sundae over on the table. She leans back in the booth, Liam’s arms draped over her shoulder. “You’re a sex maniac, Harry,” she tells him sourly, meanwhile he just smirks and pops a spoonful of ice cream into his mouth.

“You don’t know half of it,” Louis mutters.

“Are y’all really having that conversation?” Niall asks, looking a little pained from Louis’ other side.

“Yes.” Harry slouches back, tucking himself to Louis’ side. He pulls his knee up, foot on the edge of his seat as he slides his hand onto Louis’ thigh comfortably. Louis’ arm is resting around his waist, thumb on his hipbone, softly stroking his skin beneath his t-shirt.

“Do we have to?” Ed asks from where he’s sitting next to Liam on the other side of the table.

The six of them are at the diner, eating fries and burgers. Louis’ half-eaten meal is left on the table, and Harry pops two of his fries into his mouth, chewing quickly, before stealing another. He knows Louis sees it, but he lets it slide like always. Harry purses his lips at him, requesting a kiss that Louis gives with a soft sound.

“Are you all set for London?” Louis asks Sophia afterwards, who nods.

“Yep, all packed.” She’s leaving tomorrow already for a summer internship. It had something to do with fashion, Harry is pretty sure. He watches her smile quietly at Liam, who smiles back
softly. She’ll be away two months, while Liam will be here. They’ve been together for several months now, and Harry is rather certain that their relationship is going to last for a while.

“Nice,” Louis hums, but doesn’t say more. His hand squeezes Harry closer to his side.

Harry watches him for a small moment, eyes lingering on his eyelashes. He leans in, whispering in his ear. “I’m happy we’re not gonna be apart.”

Louis smiles down at his hand on his thigh. He doesn’t say anything, but he doesn’t need to. What he’s feeling is clear.

They make it out of the diner an hour or so later, Niall leaving with Liam and Soph, Ed by himself, and Louis and Harry stuff into the Rover. It’s dusk, the sun starting to go down. Louis is wearing Harry’s Ray Bans, and he looks exceptionally good in the evening sunlight. Harry feels pretty lucky.

They drive over to Harry’s where they can have the house to themselves. It’s pretty empty nowadays, his dad mostly working and isn’t home a lot. He should feel lonely, but it’s not often he has time to do that. He’s got Louis and his family, Zayn, and Louis’ friends have been very accepting of him. Summer has been kind this far.

They go upstairs to get ready for bed, Louis stripping himself of his shirt and trousers as soon as they reach the bedroom. He makes a pleased noise when his eyes reach the bed, grinning. “Oh, the golden sheets!”

Harry grins. “Yeah. I like them.”


“My favorite.”

“I want to suck you off,” Louis says then, turning to him. He looks completely serious. “Get on the bed.”

Harry isn’t slow to comply, so he sits on the bed and scoots up to the middle, lying down on his back. He exhales, grinning as he feels the bed shift, Louis positioning himself between his legs. He quickly makes work of Harry’s trousers, pulling them and his pants down his thighs. He’s not hard yet, but Louis is fast when it comes to taking care of that problem.

“This never gets old,” Harry says a couple of minutes later, Louis’ mouth around his cock. He’s resting back with his arms behind his head, smirking in pleasure as Louis sucks him down. Louis’ mouth is sinful, honest to God. His cheekbones are fucking heaven. Louis lips leave Harry’s cock with a slick sound, and he gives Harry a look. “What? It doesn’t. Your blowjobs are great. You do all the work while I just lie back and steadily reach my org—”

“Harold.” Louis squeezes around his cock.

“Ah, Christ!”

Louis smiles haughtily, something that used to annoy Harry until he realized Louis isn’t serious half the time he speaks. He’s endearing. “If you want to reach you orgasm then I’d prefer it if you shut up.”

“Is that a challenge?” Harry asks, lungs labored as Louis continues to stroke him steadily.

“No, silly,” he chuckles. “That’s an order.”
Harry groans loudly at that, head falling back against the mattress. It makes Louis grin, and Harry knows how much he loves it when Harry falls for his stupid tricks. Basically, the only thing he needs to do is make his voice a little more dominant and Harry is gone. Louis chuckles, but proceeds to take him into his mouth.

Harry’s eyes flicker around the room for a moment, Louis’ wet mouth too much. He needs to find something to anchor him, and that thing can’t be Louis. His eyes trail to the wall, and suddenly he stills.

“What the hell?” he says, squinting. He leans up on his elbows, mouth open. “Is that—oh my god, is that a picture of you framed on my wall?!”

Louis releases him, eyes going to the wall next to the bathroom. Harry moves closer on the bed, regarding the picture in shock. The picture is of Louis in his footie kit, everything on except for the shirt. The number 28 is written on his stomach with a black marker, and there's a big heart drawn around him. He’s written ‘I love you, Louis’ below and there are tiny scribbles of ‘Harry Tomlinson’ in the corners.

“What the hell,” he says in disbelief. “You’re such a shit. Where’s my Ronaldo poster?”

Louis snorts, snickering. “It’s been months and you haven’t noticed.” He throws his head back, cackling. “How many friends have you had over who didn’t say a word when they noticed it?” He gives Harry’s cock a stroke, making him jerk, having forgotten about the blowjob entirely.

Well, honestly. None. But just the fact that people could have seen this is horrible. Louis is a fucking dick.

“When did you do this?”

“Your birthday,” he shrugs easily.

Jesus. His boyfriend is a menace.

“I love you, but I hate you so much,” Harry says, shaking his head. Louis only grins mischievously, before attacking Harry on the bed, pressing him down on the mattress. Harry laughs despite himself, wrapping his legs around him. Louis gives him small kisses on his face, until he sighs, giving way to Harry’s protesting hands.

Alright, I’ll finish your blowjob now,” he says, smiling as he slides down on the bed. Harry hums, but he isn’t entirely satisfied. He yanks at Louis’ hair, making him pull up, wincing in pain. “What are you doing?” he complains.

Harry stares at him seriously, keeping their eyes locked in a heavy gaze. “I want you to go down on me for so long that you develop gills,” he says.

Louis stares back at him, looking a little taken aback by Harry’s curtness. “Alright,” he says hesitantly, eyes wide.

“Good,” Harry breathes, nodding.

Louis nods back, before he crawls down on the bed, placing a small kiss on Harry’s thigh. “But you totally stole that line from ‘My mad fat diary’,” he mutters.

“Just go with it, for God’s sake, Louis.”
So first of all thank you again for reading and supporting this story! You don't know how much your kind messages mean to me. But I'd like to explain some things about Louis and Harry as characters, most of all Louis.

See, the thing is, he's very complicated. He's very much in his own head all the time, doesn't really let his feelings out a lot, which obviously means he shelves up a lot of things inside him, just sitting in there dusting up. He's got a lot of trouble on his shoulders, and things in his past make it hard for him to be his best self. It's not easy trying to be perfect, or make the right decisions, especially when you're a kid with a lot of problems. Suffering from mild depression can make it hard to make the best decisions even though you know deep down what's right, and also make it difficult to see the good stuff surrounding you. Louis tries very hard not to let things push him down, but he handles a lot of things wrong. He learns to talk more about his feelings eventually, but the feelings stuck inside him obviously affect the way he handles things.

Harry sees those things in Louis, he understands him, but it frustrates him too because he can see that Louis has tons of brightness around him. But, he also knows that there are reasons why he doesn't see it. He’s very perceptive, and the two of them are very compatible. Of course eventually in the story Harry get frustrated with him, but it only means he's human.

Louis is human too, and he's not perfect, definitely not. But they both try their best, even if things go misunderstood and they make poor decisions. But in the end lots of things solve themselves, which makes it easier for them both to see things more clearly. That's pretty much all I wanted to say: that Louis and Harry are human, and that both of them do things and create problems that aren't necessary without meaning to. But they've learned and gonna learn some more :)

**Added note:** Also I wanted to say that I know this story has some very cliche 1d traits, Louis being poor and has daddy issues, and Harry being rich etc, but as I've stated this is complete fiction. I don't necessarily believe in those cliches (neither do I like to speculate) and we straight up know some of those aren't true. Basically I'm saying that this is complete fiction, once again. :)

Thank you a million again!

Listen to the song the name Unbelievers was taken from [HERE] :D
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!