just a memory (and all that we could've been)

by trustingno1

Summary

"I think - there's something wrong. With Harry's memory," Louis says, and someone mutes the TV.

(or: Harry wakes up in a reality in which he and Louis are very much together. Which is pretty awesome. Or - it would be. If Harry could remember any of it).

Notes

I am 99% sure that this is a result of watching *The Wizard of Oz* as a child.

Toronto, Canada.

"Fuck," is the first thing Harry hears when he comes to, "fuck, fuck, fuck." Niall, he's pretty sure. He doesn't open his eyes just yet. His head hurts.

"God, you're useless in an emergency." Louis now, Harry's certain, but he's all terse.

"What's your great idea?" Zayn asks, just as snippy.
"We should get Paul," Liam suggests. "We need to get him to a hospital."

Harry manages to crack an eye open, at that. "Bloody hell. Calm down," he says, slowly, looking up at the circle of faces hovering above the couch.

"Oh, thank god," Niall mutters, looking ridiculously relieved, and Harry squints at him for a moment.

"Hey, look. You didn't kill him," Zayn says, mock-encouraging, slapping Niall on the back.

"We're going to be in so much trouble," Liam says.

"We?" Louis repeats, "I didn't brain him with the controller." He runs his hand through Harry's hair, almost absently, in a way he hasn't for months, now, and Harry presses into the touch, instinctively.

"I didn't realise he was behind me!" Niall protests. Then, to Harry, "Mate, I'm really sorry."

Harry licks his lips before replying. "FIFA?"

"I beat Liam 7-2," Niall says, proudly, and Harry gives him a weak thumbs up, closing his eyes again.

"Oh, no, don't do that," Liam says, urgently. "I read once that you're meant to keep people with concussions awake." There's a long pause (and Harry doesn't have to open his eyes to see the sceptical looks from the other guys), then a slightly defensive, "Or maybe I saw it on TV."

"I thought that was a myth," Louis says, almost thoughtfully.

"I don't have a concussion," Harry says, without opening his eyes.

"Are you a doctor?" Zayn asks, which, Harry feels, is a little uncalled for.

"I'll get Paul," Liam decides, and Harry groans.

Louis crouches next to the couch. "We probably should get you checked out," he allows, touching Harry's cheek lightly with the back of his fingers.

Harry opens his eyes and smiles slightly. "OK." Then, because he's honestly curious, "How long was I out?"

Louis tweaks his nose before answering, and they're both smiling, now. "Only a couple of seconds."

Liam returns with Paul in tow, and when Paul sees them all surrounding Harry, he gets that look on his face, like he can't quite remember why he took this job.

"I'll bring the car around," he says, as Louis and Niall help Harry sit up, before doubling back and dropping a heavy hand on Harry's shoulder. "You feeling alright?" Paul asks, genuinely.

"Never better," Harry says, mildly. Niall nudges him with his elbow, still apologetic and Harry drops his head onto Niall's shoulder for a moment in reply.

"I'll go with them," Louis says, lacing up his shoes, which is - Harry was expecting Liam. Or Zayn. But this is good. He's not complaining.
(In the back seat of the car, Harry closes his eyes against downtown Toronto flying past and - yeah. He's definitely felt better. Louis' hand lands on his, giving it a comforting squeeze, and when Louis doesn't let go, Harry lets himself smile again, just a little).

* * *

"What's the verdict?" Liam asks, head whipping around, when they return.

"Is he going to make it?" Zayn asks, melodramatic and wide-eyed, and he almost manages to keep a straight face.

"I'm fine," Harry says.

"We should've asked to see his credentials," Louis muses, "I'm not certain he was a real doctor."

Harry laughs, tiredly. "He was nice."

"He gave you Panadol," Louis says.

"Because I'm fine," Harry says, again.

"We just need to keep an eye on him for the next couple of days," Louis says, to the others, "And he's meant to ice his head if it hurts." He snorts, quietly, almost contemptuously. "Ridiculous."

"I'm really glad you're OK, Harry," Niall says, and he still looks a little guilty, so Harry waves at him, dismissively, before he can apologise again.

"I," Harry says, "am going to go lie down for a bit."

"Good idea," Louis says, solemnly, still hovering at his side.

He strips down to his boxers, tossing his shirt in the direction of his bunk (and Liam doesn't even chide him about any of it, bloody hell, the perks of mild concussions) and goes to brush his teeth - and, of course, Louis follows him into the bathroom.

"You right?" he kids, like this band hasn't already broken down every barrier possible, broken them down and broken them apart, like they still have privacy and secrets, like Harry doesn't know these four guys better than he's ever known anyone.

Louis smiles. "Quite."

Harry shrugs. "Carry on," he says, grabbing his toothbrush.

"Seriously, though," Louis says, closing the door behind him, and Harry's eyebrows are rising, "Don't do that again." He wraps an arm around Harry's waist and pulls him into a hug.

"Thanks, Lou," Harry says, pressing his temple to Louis', briefly, because he's been fluent in the lines between what Louis' not saying for years, now. Louis pulls back a little and kisses him, soft and fast. "What are you doing?" Harry whispers, and Louis snickers, pressing a quick kiss to Harry's chin.
"Cute." He kisses Harry again, slower, dirtier, and Harry pulls away, licking his lips, once, out of habit.

"Lou - what about Eleanor?" he asks, helplessly, and Louis' face creases in confusion as he pulls back too.

"When did you talk to El?" he asks, and Harry's just as confused as him. Possibly more.

"I ... didn't?" he says, slowly.

"OK," Louis says. "Um. Good? Why are we even talk-" he reaches out and touches Harry's waist again, lightly; Harry flinches away, and Louis looks hurt.

"I'm not going to - not while you have a girlfriend," and his stomach's twisting unhappily. He's missed this - missed Louis, so much - but he can't. Not like this.

"A girlfriend," Louis repeats, face now carefully blank, hand falling back to his side.

Harry shrugs. "Yeah."

"As in, Eleanor."

A beat. "Yeah." And seriously. How is he the one with the head injury?

"Harry, come on." And that sounds like maybe they - but, no, he'd know if they'd, if Louis was - he'd just know, OK?

"You texted her this morning about meeting us in LA," Harry reminds him, toothbrush still dangling from his hand.

"OK," Louis finally says, brow creased again. "Yeah, OK." He touches the small of Harry's bare back before slipping out of the bathroom.

* * *

He avoids Louis' thoughtful gaze when he leaves the bathroom, but Louis follows him to his bunk, poking his head around the curtain before Harry's even lying down.

"About ... before," Louis says, hesitantly, and Harry shakes his head, slightly.

"'s OK."

"Yeah?" It's an expression of Louis' Harry can't quite read. "Well. Night, Curly," Louis says, fond and quiet, smoothing the hair off Harry's forehead.

Harry grins, and rubs his eyes, exhaustion creeping over him. "Night," he mumbles, as Louis pulls the curtain closed behind him.

"Code red," he hears Louis snap, "Band emergency."

Harry opens his eyes.

"Code red?" Zayn asks, lazily, amused. "The fuck?"

Niall's laughing, Harry can tell.
"Isn't 'code red' fire?" Liam asks.

"I think it is," Zayn plays along.

Liam sounds mock-resigned. "Louis, did you start a fire?"

"I think - there's something wrong. With Harry's memory," Louis says, ignoring them, and someone mutes the TV.

"I thought - the doctor checked him out, yeah?" Zayn again, suddenly serious.

"Yeah. But he thinks I'm still with Eleanor," Louis says, flatly.

"Jesus fuck," Niall breathes.

"Lou," is all Liam says.

"Don't," Louis says, all brusque and clipped.

"You sure he's not just fucking with you?" Zayn asks.

"He wouldn't," Louis' reply is quick, sure. "Not - not about this."

Someone murmurs their agreement, low and gentle. Niall, maybe.

"He knows - who he is. Where he is. He knows us. I just - I don't know. I'll call Anne in the morning," Louis says. "See what she thinks."

"He might sleep it off," Liam says, just as softly. "You never know."

"Yeah," Louis says, unconvincingly. "Maybe."

There's a long pause. "Jesus," Niall says, again, finally.

* * *

Harry stirs when Louis pulls back the curtain again, freezing when Harry meets his gaze.

"Hey," he whispers.

"Hey," Harry says, rolling over to make room for him, and, yeah, he's smiling a little, because Louis hasn't crawled into his bunk for the better part of two years.

"I was just checking on you," Louis says, settling in beside him. "Didn't mean to wake you."

"Couldn't sleep," Harry admits.

"Yeah?" Louis asks, rolling his head towards Harry's on the pillow, and he's close, so close.

"You think there's something wrong with my memory," Harry echoes him from before, quietly, and a corner of Louis' mouth curls up, as his hand creeps under the blanket.

"I think," he says, as his hand rubs lazy circles on Harry's bare stomach, "you've had a really
fucked-up day."

"That's true," Harry says, seriously, and Louis smiles, again (smiles so much, so easily today, head knocks and all).

* * *

He wakes up alone the next morning, and wanders into the kitchenette, looking for the others - finds only Liam.

"Morning," he mumbles, scratching, absently, at his chest.

"Coffee?" Liam offers, and Harry grunts his agreement before his eyes focus on Liam properly. He didn't notice yesterday (which, yeah, is fair enough. He had other things on his mind. Mostly Louis. Louis and his stupid face and stupid hands and stupid mouth), but-

"What happened to your hair?" he says, cocking his head to the side.

Liam touches his head. "What?" he asks, concerned, and god, he's as bad as Zayn, sometimes.

"It looks ... different." Harry's not an expert. But Liam seems to have grown his buzz cut out, um, overnight. Liam's giving him a look, now, thoughtful and wary, like Louis, so Harry reaches out to take his coffee. "Ta," he adds and -

something else he didn't notice in the dark of last night. He puts the mug down slowly - refuses to check Liam's face now - and traces the inside of his elbow, lightly, curiously. Where Things I can should be- nothing.

What the fuck?

* * *

When they arrive at the next hotel, Harry takes an extra-long shower, standing under the hot water until he's pink and pruning. He wipes clear a bit of the mirror and turns to the side, a little hesitantly, and touches his fingertips to his tattoos, lightly, one by one.

Most of them are there. Which is sort of reassuring. The iced gem. The masks. 17 Black. The padlock. Hi. (He smiles and prods that one again, just because. He likes it a lot). The star. The hanger.

There's one he doesn't recognise, and he pulls the skin around it taut as he studies it. It's a tiny soccer ball. It's kind of cool, but he doesn't know why or where he got it, doesn't know the story, and that, that bothers him.

He's not surprised that Louis' hanging out on his couch when he opens the bathroom door, towel low around his waist.

"Hey," he says.
Louis looks up from his phone. "Hey," he says, eyes bright.

"I'm just gonna -" Harry gestures at his suitcase, "put some ... pants on."


"Where are the others?" Harry asks, pulling on a pair of black cotton boxers.

"Shopping," Louis says, sounding as confused as he looks. "Urgent errand, or something?"

The corners of Harry's mouth curl up a little. "Right."

Louis pauses. "How's your head today?"

Harry touches his forehead, instinctively. "Not bad. Niall's been working out," he deadpans, before lightly pressing the egg on the back of his head. "Hurts more where I hit the floor."

Louis' lips twitch. "Understandable, I guess."

"Yeah." Harry perches on the end of the bed.

"How's-" Louis gestures at him.

"I don't understand what's happening," Harry admits, aloud, for the first time.

"I told you that guy wasn't a real doctor," Louis mutters, and Harry ignores him.

"Liam's hair-" and Louis makes such a confused face that Harry'd laugh if this wasn't so serious, "and my tattoos and-" this is the big one, the one he needs, "last night. You said that I thought you were still with Eleanor." Louis jerks his chin in a half-nod. "Is that ... are you-" and Louis leans forward and braces his elbows on his thighs.

"El and I dated for a few months. But that was ages ago."

"No," Harry says, automatically, because, yeah, there's a part of him that wants to hear that they broke up - and no, he's not proud - but that's wrong. "You've been together for like ... a year and a half?"

"No," Louis echoes, frustration creeping into his voice. "You and I-" and he doesn't know how, but in that moment, Harry knows what he's going to say.

"This isn't funny, Lou," he cuts him off. Harry likes pranks. Pranks are funny. But this is cruel, and it's a shitty, shitty thing for Louis to do (Louis who knows, who must know, that Harry loves him, still loves him, never stopped loving him), even as a tiny part of him wonders how Louis could change his tattoos, how Louis could grow out Liam's hair, wonders what the payoff for a prank like this could even be.

"Haz," Louis says, helplessly, and Harry crosses his arms over his chest, shoulders hunched forward. "I wouldn't - joke. About this." And Harry wants, so badly, to believe that.

"You and I were - whatever. During X-Factor and after," Harry says, almost indifferently, like he hasn't thought about it since. He shrugs. "Then ..." and he won't finish that out loud, because it was awful enough the first time around. Then they acknowledged that the band might actually be going places. Then Harry knew that he loved Louis more than Louis loved him. Then they realized that they might be in a little over their heads. Then Louis called it all off. Take your pick.

"We agreed, Haz," and Louis slows his words here, exact and deliberate in a way he isn't
"When we got back together, we agreed that you wouldn't hold that against me."

"You're so full of shit," Harry mumbles.

"Hell, it'll be online. Or ask them," Louis says, waving an arm at where the others would usually be. "Any of them. They'll tell you."

And he almost does. Because Liam, who tries so hard to be the sensible one, won't lie. And Zayn, who - even if gave a shit about Louis' pranks this early in the morning - has become so quietly, fiercely protective of him lately. And Niall, Niall who probably knew Harry loved Louis before Harry did, Niall would never joke about this. But he doesn't want to wait and he knows someone who will tell him, and according to his phone it's only the middle of the afternoon back home-

he calls Nick, from the side of the bed, back to Louis, gives himself at least the illusion of privacy.

"You can't possibly have another song to promote," Nick greets him, and Harry grins.

"Maybe I just wanted to hear your voice," Harry teases, as a warm familiarity, equilibrium, settles over him.

"If only there was a way for me. To broadcast my undeniably sexy voice. To anywhere in the world."

"Shut up," Harry says, amicably.

"What are you up to, rock star?"

"Oh, you know. Just got out of the shower," Harry says, mock flirtatiously, and Nick snorts.

"Don't let your boyfriend hear," he warns, lightly, and Harry chokes on nothing in particular. "Oh, are we still - don't let your entirely-platonic-better-half hear," Nick amends, and Harry needs to know.

"We're friends, yeah? Louis and me?" He knows that Louis can hear him; finds he doesn't really care.

Nick laughs. "Sure. Friends with cock-sucking benefits. I have a few of those." And the earth tilts under Harry's feet again -

and strangely, it's that that convinces Harry. Nick, who wouldn't give a stupid prank of Louis' the time of day, who knows that Harry's still all kinds of fucked up and hung up on Louis, but who took him under his wing and never made him talk about it.

Bloody hell.

He hangs up (after a mumbled "Gotta go," and Nick's "Oh, the life of the rich and famous.") and stares at his phone for a long moment, before joining Louis on the couch. He sits sideways, up against the couch arm, knees up and toes just shy of Louis' thigh. He googles Eleanor, and Louis pretends not to know what he's doing.

The first link is old - over a year old, from January 2012 - but he opens it, anyway.

There are pictures of them - Louis and him - walking down a London street together a good foot between them, him carrying some groceries; it's nothing scandalous, by far, but everyone's having a field day:
**Harry Styles Gives Louis Tomlinson a Helping Hand**

We have to wonder - is Larry Stylinson back on? Days after Louis Tomlinson confirmed he and student Eleanor Calder have parted ways, the One Direction cutie was spotted out and about with charming beanie-clad band-mate Harry Styles.

The cute twosome - who haven't been seen together for a few months - picked up some groceries before heading back to their flat for a quiet night in. With the band's tour starting next week, it might be their last for a while!

The adorable domesticity in these pics is enough to make us weep! Sound off in the comments below - is Larry Stylinson back on? Was it ever off? Or do you prefer some other combination of the One Direction boys? Whose shoulder would you cry on to get you through a breakup?

Sugarscape, of course. Of course. He's about to back-button out of there like he's on fire when another headline catches his eye (and he shouldn't, he knows, shouldn't look, shouldn't trust Sugarscape, but)-

**HARRY STYLES COMES OUT?!**

Our favorite One Direction mop-top often wears his heart on his sleeve. Literally. (Check out our album of Harry's best shirts below!). His latest choice has everyone talking.

Harry was seen out in a Queer Republic "Hi. I'm a top" shirt earlier today. When asked about it, he grinned and pointed to the cartoon spinning top, saying only, "It's cute!"

So coy, Harry.

What do you think? Was it all for publicity? Is it just a cute shirt? Or is Harry trying to tell us something?

And, OK. He's seen a lot of weird, photoshopped shit in the last few years. But - this. He taps the photo and zooms in a bit, then holds his phone out to Louis.

"Did I ... is this real?" he asks, because he's never seen that shirt before in his life (although, he has to admit, the spinning top is cute), and the hair on the back of his neck's standing up.

Louis glances down, cursorily, and nods. "Oh, yeah."

Harry looks at the picture again. "I don't ... I don't remember," he admits, fear prickling down his back, and Louis wraps his hand around Harry's ankle, lightly, a little hesitantly, before squeezing it, reassuringly. "How much trouble was I in?" he asks, because there's no way he got away with that.

Louis grins, and it's cheeky and young, and Harry can't help but grin back. "I'm pretty someone from Modest was actually yelling about the morality clause in your contract, at one point," and Harry laughs.

"Sounds about right," he says, softly, giving the picture one long, last look, before putting his phone down. "Why'd you break up?" he asks, knowing that Louis'll follow him, that Louis'll follow him anywhere.

Louis smiles, at that, fast and genuine, as he thinks. "Uh," he scratches at the back of his neck. Harry waits, and Louis laughs a little, at a memory Harry can't touch.

"Tell me," Harry says, instead, because it must've been him, "Tell me what I said."
Louis turns to face him on the couch, back against the other arm, legs crossed - can only hold his gaze for a moment. "You said," he begins, "that it wasn't fair that I had to hide who I was. But that more importantly, it wasn't fair to Eleanor. Or you." He chances another glance up and Harry nods.

"I can be pretty reasonable like that," he agrees, solemnly.

"You said that I was your best mate," Louis continues, slowly, "and that no-one meets the love of their life at sixteen, but that you loved me. You said," he breaks off and shakes his head slightly, "that we'd always regret it if we never gave it a proper shot." He's smiling a little again, at the memory, "So charming."

Harry's throat is tight. "Wow," is all he manages to get out.

"I can bunk with one of the other lads tonight, if you like," Louis offers, in the silence. "If this just got too weird."

"Oh," Harry says, before he can catch himself. "Do we normally-"

"Yeah," Louis says. "This tour, we've been sharing." He meets Harry's gaze, briefly, before glancing down again

(and this can't be real, it can't be, because it's too stupidly perfect, but he wants it to be real, wants it so much he aches with it).

Before he can say anything, though, the door to his room bursts open.

"We got you a present," Niall announces, triumphantly, holding out a pink helmet adorned with a jaunty gold ribbon, Liam and Zayn following him in, Liam pocketing the room key.

"Please, come in," Louis says, dryly.

"Thanks," Harry says, reaching for the helmet, trying for sarcastic, but he knows his cheeks are dimpling, because he loves these idiots. "I need a picture of this," he says, lifting up his phone and sticking out his tongue, straps of the helmet dangling around his chin.

"Looking good," Zayn says, jerking his chin in a mock-sleazy once over, and Harry flips him off.

He opens Twitter on his phone and stills, immediately. He hasn't seen it trend for months, but there, right there:

#LarryStylinson

and he tilts his phone towards his chest, automatically, like it'll stop Louis from seeing it, even as he tries to think, tries to remember anything they could've done to get LarryStylinson trending again.

His thumb hovers over the screen for a second, before he checks Louis' twitter, then his, and oh. Oh.

A pair of matching tweets, made within minutes of each other, from two nights ago, generic enough that they could try to deny it, if they wanted to -

@Harry_Styles: night babe
@Louis_Tomlinson: night, love
They go to some Korean barbecue place Niall's dying to try, for lunch, and Harry's not trying to be rude, but he just needs a minute, so he sandwiches himself between Zayn and Niall when they get there.

Louis doesn't seem too disappointed though. He bends his head, deep in conversation with Liam, both frowning a little, and Harry knows, with all certainty, what - who - they're talking about.

They all follow Harry back into his hotel room, which is probably the most normal thing that's happened all day.

"Harry," Liam says, aiming for casual, looking up from his phone, "My parents want to send your mum a card or something, you know, congratulate her on the Believe in Magic benefit? Where should they send it?"

As far as ruses go, it's a pretty weak one. Their parents exchange holiday cards every year. Harry holds his gaze for a long moment as Niall sprawls next to him on the bed. "Address hasn't changed."

Liam shrugs. "Lost it, I guess." Zayn, lying on the couch, his feet in Liam's lap, snorts into his book.

Harry holds out his hand, "I'll type it in," he offers, and Liam's grip on his phone tightens, almost imperceptibly.

"That's OK."

Harry rolls his eyes, but there's no real irritation behind it. "Stop testing me, Li."

Zayn sits up, swinging his feet down to the ground as he tosses his book aside. "Fine. What's your name?"

"Louis Tomlinson," Harry says.

"What's the band's name?" Zayn presses on, suspiciously.

"The Wanted," Harry says, a little testily, and Louis snorts his laughter from the single armchair. "I'm fine," Harry says.

"You're really not, mate," Niall says.

"Traitor," Harry mumbles.

"What do you remember?" Liam asks.

"We met on X-Factor," Harry recites, because he knows this, because this will always be true. "I met you in the bathroom," he amends, glancing over at Louis, then, "We didn't get through as solo acts, so they made us into a group. I remember," he insists, "I remember the show and the bungalow and Simon's house and Louis getting stung and singing Torn and we came third, yeah?"
"Who won?" Zayn challenges him.

"Matt Cardle," Harry says, without missing a beat, then, a little sheepishly, "and all of his ... cats," and Niall laughs.

There's a bit of cautious hope on Liam's face.

"So that bit's OK," Louis says, a little thoughtfully.

"What next?" Zayn prompts.

"Uhhh," Harry scrubs his face and tries to put it all in order, tries to condense the last few years into a few sentences. "Simon signed us. We toured. We made an album. *Up All Night,*" he adds, pointedly, "We toured again. We won Brit awards and VMAs and we made another album and we toured again."

"What else?" Liam asks.

Harry picks at a loose thread on his blazer. "I fucked up my solo. In our first performance of *What Makes You Beautiful,*" he says.

"It wasn't *that* bad," Niall mutters, and Harry can't help his smile, because these guys have always had his back (always will).

"Danielle," Liam says, expression now unreadable. "What do you remember about her?"

It's the first thing to trip him. "Um," Harry says, "You - you broke up last year," Liam nods slightly in confirmation. "You were really cut. You ... you shaved your head and we thought you were having some sort of breakdown-" Niall's trying to muffle his laughter, now, Harry can tell, "and never really grew it back. Except..." he trails off, because obviously Liam has grown his hair out, or never cut it off in the first place-

and apparently, here, in this reality or whatever it is, they were better friends to Liam.

"What'd you do for Christmas?" Zayn asks, suddenly, and Louis glances up from his lap.

Harry shrugs. "Went back home for a few days," he says - it was boring and low-key and so completely normal that it was awesome and he wasn't *Harry from One Direction* for a week, just Harry, and he helped his mum with the dishes and slept in late and teased Gem and watched Christmas movies. But Louis' mouth twists a little, probably not intentionally, and Harry knows, somehow, that was the wrong answer.

Louis tosses Harry his phone, probably a little harder than necessary, and Harry looks from it to Louis before, slowly, waking the phone up. Louis' background lights up - the two of them, stupid Santa hats on, and he stares at it for a long moment, feels not even faint recognition (just fear, again, twisting in his stomach).

He taps in Louis passcode - 2412, his birthday, still - and opens up his picture album. He scrolls up until he finds the Christmas pictures; there's a bunch of them, Santa hats and Christmas trees and a slightly off-kilter picture of Louis kissing his cheek, and his face is scrunched up in laughter and mock disgust.

"We did the week up to Christmas Eve with my family," Louis tells him, and Harry shakes his head slightly, automatically, "and Christmas Day and after with your family."
"We only had a couple of days off," Harry protests.

"We had a couple of weeks," Liam says, slowly, and he's frowning again, "so Niall could have his surgery."

Harry glances quickly at Niall, who, dutifully, shows him the scar on his knee.

"It's like," Zayn pauses, looking at Harry in something approaching wonder, "it's like you have this whole alternate reality."

"Maybe I switched with another Harry," he suggests, half-kidding.

"Maybe we need to take you back to the hospital," Liam corrects, and Louis snorts his agreement.

(They end up voting on it, and Harry loses, 3-1, because Niall abstains, and he pats Niall's leg, in thanks. "I'll remember this," he promises, before he realizes what he's saying, and Niall's grinning, wide and brace-y. So Liam gets Paul, again, and Louis looks for his shoes, again, and it's a different hospital, a different doctor and a different, awkward conversation).

* * *

He calls his mother as they leave the hospital; "What does the doctor think?" she asks, and - for a moment - he feels like the kid he still very much is.

"That no two head injuries are the same," Harry parrots, and his mum laughs.

"Are you OK?" she asks, "Do you - I can be on a flight tonight, if you want," she offers, and his mum is all kinds of awesome, "There's no shame in needing your mum," she adds.

"It's OK. The guys are taking good care of me," Harry says, "Thanks, though."

She doesn't try to hold back her laughter. "I'm not sure that puts me at ease," she's just teasing him, he knows, and he loves her all the more for it. "Call me whenever," she tells him, "It doesn't matter what time."

"Yeah," Harry says, throat inexplicably tight.

"Love you," she says, and Harry presses the phone harder to his ear.

"Love you too," he says, and it's part that it's his mum and part that she's a constant, no different here than in his memory.

* * *

Louis' been texting the other guys, Harry knows, so no-one's waiting for them when they return.

"Just one day without a trip to the hospital," Paul begs, walking them to their room, and Louis salutes him.

"We'll do our best," he promises, and Paul sighs (but Harry knows he'll stay there for an extra
beat, until the door locks behind them).

"Night!" Harry says, brightly, over his shoulder.

"Did you want me to - I can bunk with one of the other lads, if you like," Louis offers again, as he closes the door, and Harry shakes his head.

"It's fine," he says, pulling off his shirt, and Louis glances away.

* * *

He can't sleep.

They have a concert tomorrow; they have sound check and interviews and a concert, and he needs to get some sleep, but he can't stop thinking (about Eleanor, about Louis, about the real world, his world, about whether he can trust any of his memories).

"I've kind of lost the last two years of my life," Harry mumbles, and he can sense Louis turning in his bed to face him.

"Kind of," he agrees, softly, and his voice isn't sleep-scratchy, yet, so he's having trouble sleeping, too.

"Did you love her?" Harry asks, after a pause, "Eleanor?" and it's the one thing he's been wondering all afternoon, and he's not sure he wants to know.

Louis' silent for a moment. "I think I could have, one day." Then - like an admission, so quietly, "I wanted to."

"I know," Harry says, and for a moment, he aches for all of them, for him, and Louis, and Eleanor.

* * *

"We can cancel these shows," Liam says, over breakfast, not for the first time, and Harry ignores him. "Or post-pone them," he amends.

"People would understand," Zayn agrees, and they've clearly talked about this without him.

"Nope," Harry says, in-between bites of scrambled egg. Which - OK. Might not be the most sensible approach, but cancelling would disappoint people, and rescheduling would be a nightmare, because they'd either have to bump other dates or eat into their holidays or double back to Canada after New Zealand and none of that sounds appealing, honestly. He's not going to be that guy. He can still sing. Bags under his eyes and all.

Louis looks at rough as Harry feels, poking at his hot breakfast a bit listlessly.

"You going to finish that?" Niall asks, hopefully, and Louis pushes his plate towards him.

* * *

He knows Liam and Zayn are watching him closely at sound check, and he ignores them, until
Zayn slings a companionable arm around Harry's neck and pulls him in close. "Hey," he mumbles, into Harry's ear, "Just so you know. In Nobody Compares?" he waits for Harry's nod, "You've been changing "girl" to "babe" lately." And Harry actually raises his eyebrows at that, because the thought of him getting away with that - fuck. It's something he's never brought up, or fought, or even mentioned, back in his world, but he has a lot of lady-specific lines on Take Me Home. Which is - whatever. It's fine. It is what it is. (Except here, apparently, it's not fine, and maybe this Harry is a little bit badass). "Just - do whatever you want," Zayn says, not unkindly, patting Harry on the back as he pulls away.

"Thanks," Harry calls after him, and Zayn turns, suddenly.

"Also," he says, holding up a finger, "No matter what Louis says, we haven't changed "rock me" to "fuck me"."

Harry laughs at that. He would. "Noted."

"Zayn!" Louis protests, outraged, craning around from where he's sitting at the front of the stage, legs dangling off the edge. "It would've been hilarious!"

* * *

They have only one interview this afternoon, for local radio, and Liam frowns as they're driven over to the station.

"Do you feel up to it, Harry?" he asks, and Zayn pulls his earbuds out and even Louis and Niall stop wrestling for a moment.

"Course," Harry says

"Li," Louis says, leaning forward, "if he says anything obviously wrong, we'll just play it off as a joke, yeah?"

"We'll have time to cut him off," Zayn points out, and his eyes are kind, even as he imitates Harry, "Uh, well, this one time, we - uh," and Harry stretches out to kick him.

It's the same questions - same answers - as back in his world (We didn't get through as solo artists; No, you never get used to it; The VMAs last year was definitely a highlight; We're proud of this album; We truly have the best fans in the world) until -

"So which of you are currently single?" and he's been asked this question what feels like daily for years, so Harry doesn't react, doesn't look at Louis, but he's not sure how this Harry answers this question, and before he can really fuck things up, Liam (and bless him, sometimes, honestly) opens his mouth to give an answer Harry can tell he's given before.

"Actually, none of us have girlfriends right now," he says, with a grin, and it's so clever in its simplicity that Harry can't help his smile. Louis' smirking a little, he can tell.

"What's the main thing you look for in a girl?" the interviewer asks.

"Someone fun," Liam says. "I'm quite boring, so I want someone who can bring me out of my shell a bit."
"It's true," Harry says, solemnly, relaxing a little, "He's so boring."

"A dreadful bore," Louis agrees, nodding.

"Uh - a good sense of humour," Harry says, at the interviewer's prompt, because he's pretty sure this answer hasn't changed.


"Confidence," Niall finally says. "You know? A girl who can carry a conversation."

"Someone who knows how to cheer me up when I'm taking life too seriously," Zayn says, pretty openly, and Harry glances at him, feeling like a shitty mate, as it registers that apparently, in this world (or whatever it is), Zayn and Perrie broke up too.

"You know how you can tell that some people are just genuinely good people?" Louis asks, rhetorically, and he looks over and meets Harry's gaze for a moment, "That's what I look for."

* * *

He pulls on jeans and a flannel shirt he remembers with hands that shake, just a little, the nerves in his stomach worse than he can remember (right up there with Simon's house and the first live show and Red or Black).

*He can do this. (He knows he can, and maybe that's the difference).*

Someone - Zayn, he thinks - puts that LMFAO song on, and it's almost comforting that their pre-show ritual hasn't changed much; the guys are dancing around, pumping themselves up, and Louis' pretending to fan Liam, and Zayn's walking on the spot, and Niall's just jumping in a circle, so Harry grabs his forearms and joins in, until they're all breathless and laughing.

Louis waves everyone over. "Bring it in," he says, holding his hand out, and they reach into the tight circle, palms down, something they haven't done for years, not since the early days of X-Factor, as Louis cries, "Wiggle wiggle wiggle!" Zayn shoves him, and Liam rolls his eyes, and Louis catches Harry's gaze, still grinning, and it's somehow so much better than anything meaningful or deep.

* * *

It doesn't go that badly. Definitely better than the others are expecting, the way they keep looking over at him, like he's about to implode.

There are things that are so, so familiar; he could do the choreography to What Makes You Beautiful in his sleep, knows his cue in Torn like he knows his name, and he's settling, settling into it when -

*Little Things. Little Things* gets him.

Like he remembers, they all grab a wooden stool and make a wide v, Liam and Zayn at the front, and Niall at the back, guitar resting on his thigh. Liam and Zayn trade off the first verse. Louis starts singing about tea and everything's normal and fine until -
Louis stands up, and the screaming intensifies, and Harry knows - he knows - this is a Thing. Something happens, now, something the audience is expecting, and somehow, somehow, he knows exactly what it is, like it's in this-Harry's muscle memory.

Harry stands too, and Louis' smiling, and it's all happening so quickly, but he starts his part, and moves towards Louis, unhurried and faux-casual, and they meet in the middle of the v, halfway between their stools, and Louis touches his cheek with the hand holding his mic and Harry ducks his head and smiles, and they continue over to each other's seats, and all they've done is swap stools, really, but it's a giant Fuck You to someone, he knows.

And then, the song's nearly over, when Louis glances across the stage again and sings, "It's you," to him, with none of the theatrics Harry's expecting, just simple and quiet, and Harry holds his gaze and sings it back, before turning back to the audience.

***

After the first costume change, Louis wraps an arm around Harry's waist, low and underneath his blazer, easy and un-self-conscious in a way they haven't been on stage for so long and he's missed this so much.

"How's everybody doing tonight?" Liam yells, over the screaming.

***

During Up All Night, Louis grabs his hand and lifts it and nods at him, encouragingly, eyebrows raised expectantly and - it can't be. His Louis would never (maybe once, a long time ago, but not now, and not on stage) -

but this Louis' smile is growing, and Harry ducks and spins under their joined hands until he's dizzy and grinning, and Louis grabs him from behind, squeezing his biceps, laughing into his neck.

***

He sings 'babe' in Nobody Compares, because he might never get this chance again, and when Louis sings something about Paris and kissing, he pokes Harry's chest as he walks past, and Harry clutches at his shirt exaggeratedly, knees buckling, staring after Louis, and it's stupid and fun and so, so easy.

***

He takes his final bow sandwiched between Louis and Liam, sweaty and warm and buzzing, and he can't stop smiling.

They drop their arms and pull apart and Louis flings himself into Harry, and Harry wraps his arms around him, straightening up and leaning back until Louis' feet leave the ground, and Louis' surprised laugh is warm in his ear. It's adrenaline and relief and joy and he knows - and he knows Louis knows - that people are recording this, but he doesn't care, and Louis doesn't seem to, and his stupid cheeks hurt from all of this smiling.
Everyone's quiet on the drive back to the hotel, and it's a good, comfortable silence. Louis shifts in
the seat beside him, knee pressing against Harry's, briefly, before he pulls away, but Harry follows
him and presses their knees together again, and Louis looks from their legs to Harry, like he's not
quite sure what's happening, and Harry gives him a tiny smile, and looks back out the window.

In the lift up to their floor, the back of Louis' hand brushes against his, lightly, and he bites his lip
and tries not to smile.

Niall glances between them, back and forth, eyes narrowing slightly, before his face splits into a
wide grin. Liam, noticing, follows his gaze and grins, too, until Zayn looks up and asks,
suspiciously, "What's so funny?"

"Nothing," Harry says, immediately.

"I'll tell you later," Liam mutters.

"Oi!" Louis protests, and there's a beat, then-

"Oh," and Zayn knows, too, Harry's guessing, because he's fighting a grin, too.

"Keep it down, though, yeah?" Niall says, and Louis' muttering something about filthy minds, and
Harry shrugs.

"Can't promise anything," he says, mock-regretfully, and Louis' smirk is getting out of control,
when the lift doors open.

"Come on," Louis says, linking his arm through Harry's, and walking ahead of the others. He
chances a glance over his shoulder as he unlocks their door - and even Liam's joined in the hip-
thrusting Niall and Zayn have got going. "Animals," he pretends to snap, and Harry curls into
him, laughing against his temple.

Louis manages to open the door, and Harry's kissing him before he's kicked it shut behind them.
It's warm and familiar, and so much better than the tour bus (there's no guilt eating him up, no
unhappiness hanging over him); Louis opens his mouth to him, immediately, and his hands span
Louis' cheeks in a way they didn't three years ago.

Louis hooks his fingers through the belt loops of Harry's jeans. "C'mere," he says, tugging him
back towards the nearest bed, and Harry follows, easily, kissing Louis' mouth, his cheek, his chin.
They fall onto the bed in a tangle of limbs and laughter and Louis rucks Harry's shirt up a bit and
touches his stomach, smiling at the way his muscles twitch in response.

Louis doesn't break his gaze, smile fading a little, as he spreads his legs, and Harry settles onto,
into him, kissing him, again, and again (he's allowed to; he's allowed to and he hasn't, for so long,
in his world), rubbing against him through too many clothes.

Louis pulls back, a bit reluctantly. "Are you sure?" he asks, forcing the words out through almost-
gritted teeth. "I don't want to - you know. Take advantage."

"Are you honestly worried about my virtue?" Harry asks, amused, squeezing Louis through his
pants, and he's as hard as Harry. "I'm pretty sure that went the way of your dignity-" Louis nips
his neck in silent reproach, "the first time you blew me in a bathroom stall."
"Fuck off," Louis says, laughing into Harry's neck. And yeah, OK, so that definitely happened in this world, too.

"We're all class," Harry says, a little absently, glancing at the table between their beds.

"Top drawer," Louis says, without embarrassment, and Harry kisses him, again, as he leans over and grabs the lube.

"Do you have a-

"We don't usually-" their voices overlapping, because Louis knows what he's asking. "But I think I have one in my wallet? If you - if that-" and Harry cuts him off with a hard kiss. "Or not?" Louis says, a little breathlessly, and Harry grins, as he shrugs out of his shirt. He braces himself on one arm as he undoes his jeans, and Louis helps him wriggle out of them. He rolls off Louis and tugs on his shirt, pointedly, until Louis lifts up and lets him pull it off.

He unzips Louis' pants, slowly, his hands shaking a little (not for the first time, tonight, he knows), and when they're both naked, he kneels between Louis open legs, hand circling him, stroking him lightly. Louis laughs, a little self-conscious at Harry's scrutiny, and Harry commits him to memory, leaning forward to kiss him again.

Louis grunts as Harry's leg rubs against him, and he pushes up into the touch, rutting against Harry, as Harry grinds down against his hip.

"I've missed you," he says, so quietly (and it's mostly to a Louis who's not here), and Louis grabs his hip to still him.

"I'm good," he says, with a nod, and Harry lifts up a little to grab the lube. He drizzles some over his fingers and reaches out, touches Louis between his legs, gently, almost reverently (and he remembers this, he does, from when he was sixteen and stupidly in love, from when they had no idea what they were doing. He's nineteen, now, and he likes to think he's grown up a bit, but - if he's honest - he's still so, stupidly in love).

He pushes one finger into Louis, hot and tight, and Louis draws up his knees a little.

"Yeah," Louis says, breathily, "Yeah, OK." Harry moves his finger back and forth a little, and Louis arches his neck. "I'm - I'm ready," he says, after a moment, and Harry's torn (because, yeah, his dick's ready too, but he doesn't want to hurt Louis, and he likes this, likes watching Louis fall apart as he fingers him, and apparently he doesn't do as good a job at keeping his face blank as he thinks, because Louis kind of smirks a little, and says, softly, "Next time, you can just-", makes an obscene gesture with his hand, and Harry didn't think it was possible to get any harder, but there you go).

He grabs the lube again and slicks himself up and Louis smiles at him as he lines himself up.

"OK," he says, a little idiotically, but this is happening, and when he presses in a bit, Louis grunts again and fuck, he's tight, and Harry's not going to last long. "Jesus," he breathes, pushing in a bit more, and Louis kicks at him with his heels until he pushes all the way in, and he pauses there, and they catch their breath for moment. "You good?" Harry asks, against Louis' lips, and Louis nods, smiling - again? still? Harry doesn't know.

He pulls back a bit, takes a couple of thrusts to get in a rhythm, and Louis rocks his hips against him, chest heaving, and when Harry lifts up a bit more, changing the angle a little, Louis arches against him.

"There?" Harry checks, and yeah, he's being a bit cheeky, he knows, but Louis doesn't seem to
"Yeah," is all he says, raspy, and Harry picks up the pace a bit, until Louis' crying out every time he slams into him. "Close," he warns, and Harry reaches down between them, and he has to slow down a little to coordinate it all, but he manages to stroke Louis semi-in-time, stroke him through it, as his legs tighten around Harry, toes curling as he comes over his own stomach.

"Fuck," Harry mutters, licking a bit of Louis' come off his hand, and Louis' eyes are dark, so dark, as he wraps his legs higher around Harry.

"Come on, Haz," he murmurs, and that - that - does it; something inside him breaks, and he's pounding into Louis harder than before, and they're creeping up towards the headboard a bit. "Love you," Louis adds, and Harry's coming, hard and sudden, as Louis squeezes tighter around him.

He collapses onto Louis for a long moment, cheek to cheek. "Love you too," he murmurs, eyes shut, and he can say that again, here, and it's almost too much.

"I know," Louis says, and it's not sad or sorry, like he remembers. It just is. He kisses Harry's cheek. "But you weigh a tonne," he adds, and Harry huffs a laugh. He pulls out, carefully, and Louis hisses through his teeth. Harry flops down onto the bed next to him.

"Should go clean up," Harry says, not moving, and Louis leans over a bit to kiss him, all lazy-lipped.

"Mmmn," he agrees, sleepily. "In a minute."

(They don't.

When Harry awakens, the next morning, Louis' still stretched out next to him, and he tugs Louis into the shower, Louis' eyes barely open, and after cleaning up a bit, Louis slumps against the cool wall tiles, as Harry slowly jerks him off).

* * *

They have one extra day in Toronto before packing up and heading for - Detroit, apparently, according to their schedule - so Paul blocks off the hotel's pool for them.

"You, sir, are a gentleman and a scholar," Zayn says, grandly.


"I was just going to say thanks," Liam deadpans.

"Yeah, ta, Paul," Niall says, and Harry laughs.

Niall cannonballs into the pool, and Liam reminds the rest of them not to run, so Louis wraps his arms around Liam's waist and topples them both into the deep end, and when Liam resurfaces, he splashes Louis in the face.

Zayn's still pretty shit at swimming, so through unspoken agreement, they're mostly horsing around in the shallow end. Louis shoves Liam underwater and manages to climb onto his shoulders.
"Come on!" Niall says, pressing down on Harry's shoulders, and Harry ducks under and lifts Niall up.

"What are the rules?" Liam asks Zayn.

"Keep it above the belt," he says, with a wave of his arm that Harry assumes begins the fight, so he lurches towards Liam and Louis, and Niall puts his fists up like they're going to box.

"We got this," Louis says, to Liam, as he and Niall start to grapple. (Niall's knee is near Harry's face, and the scar's fading, he can tell, but it's still there. He wonders how Niall got his surgery so early, wonders if maybe, in this reality, they banded together a bit more, stood up for each other - themselves - more often).

"Niall's scrappy, though," Zayn says, almost thoughtfully.

"He is," Liam agrees, grabbing Louis' legs to keep him upright.

Harry reaches out, slowly, while the others are distracted, and when he tickles the bottom of Louis' foot, Louis kicks at him and Liam yells something about a yellow card, so Harry does it again, and Louis dives off Liam's shoulders to tackle him.

Niall falls out of the way, floating away on his back, laughing, and Louis corners Harry on one of the steps.

"You think you're clever?" he demands, mock-tough, and Harry grins.

"Little bit," he admits, pulling Louis closer, and they're both wet and slippery and he's not sure who moves first, but they're kissing, lips chlorine-y and wrinkly, and Louis' chest slides against his nicely.

"Red card!" Niall says to Zayn, "Louis' ... interfering ... with Harry," and Louis' laughing against Harry's mouth, now, but they're kissing, still kissing, even when Liam splashes at them, half-heartedly (but there's something nice about it, about not having to hide, because Harry knows, even in this world, the number of people they can be themselves around is suffocatingly small. These boys, though, like in his world, will protect this secret - not for the sake of the band, Harry knows, but for him, and for Louis).

* * *

They play a bit of FIFA on the way to Michigan.

"I call Harry," Louis says, quickly, loyally, and Harry high fives him, as Zayn jokingly reaches for the helmet.

(As always, they win, because, Harry allows, they really are better together).

* * *

Another interview when they arrive; more of the same questions, except word's gotten out about Harry's hospital visit.

"Small head knock," Louis explains, "during what can only be described as an all-out-brawl over
the straightener. Honestly. It's like living with children, sometimes,” and he sounds so indignant that even Liam laughs.

That somehow segues into, "Who worries about their appearance the most?" and the question's barely out of her mouth before they're all tripping over each other to name Zayn, who scoffs in mock outrage.

"Harry carries around chapstick!" he says, and as far as deflections go, it's pretty good.

"My lips get dry," Harry says, mildly.


"That's not what Vaseline's-" Liam breaks off, pretends to catch himself in time, and it's part that it's Liam, part that they're actually having a good time, that they're laughing so stupidly hard.

(They laugh more, Harry can tell. The band. They laugh, and they don't have to pointedly not-choose sides, and they can sit wherever they like in interviews, and there aren't any weird, tense undercurrents, and it's all quite brilliant).

* * *

Another night, another concert.

Louis pulls him aside, early on, and points out a poster with - he can't make it out, exactly, but it's his face and Louis' face and a big heart, and one of Louis' hands is still gripping the inside of his elbow, so he gives a big thumbs up in the general direction of the poster and Louis squeezes his arm, laughing.

* * *

He sings 'babe' in Nobody Compares, again, and he's pretty quietly chuffed - twice; he's done it twice, now, come on - but then Louis sings "chapstick", instead of "lipstick", with a grin over his shoulder, and Niall throws his head back and laughs, and this'll be all over the internet by the time the show's over, and Harry almost misses his cue, he's smiling so hard.

* * *

Louis does a few bars of Hey There Delilah, tonight, and Harry can almost see the Louis he was, fringe and rolled-up pants, and he smiles into his lap at the memory.

Harry does a bit of The Fray's Heartbeat, and he gets into it, stomping his way through the chorus, to memories of him and Louis sharing an iPod and a bed in the X-Factor house, one earbud each, listening to The Fray and The Script, squashed into the same bunk, Louis' foot nudging his when he really liked a line or chord or solo (and they listened to How to Save a Life over and over, he remember, with almost startling clarity, Louis' fingers playing an invisible piano on Harry's thigh).

* * *

(Louis keeps his promise and lets Harry finger him until he's breathless and broken, hips rocking against Harry's hand frantically, and Harry kisses his knee before reaching out and wrapping a
slick palm around Louis' cock, stroking him with a sure grip, and when Louis comes, he comes hard, sweat matting his hair to his forehead.

When he catches his breath, he pushes Harry onto his back and blows him, head bobbing between Harry's thighs, and Louis still makes that same, wet noise as he does in Harry's memory, and it's too much and he comes before he can warn Louis, who flattens his tongue and swallows what he can).

* * *

"Your Harry," Harry mumbles into his pillow, as he tries to think it through, "I wonder if he took my place."

Louis humours him, tonight. "Maybe he did, Haz."

Harry frowns. "He'll be sad," he says. "He'll be really lonely."

Louis props himself up on his side. "Were you?" he asks, curiously (and Harry can't bring himself to answer, because what sort of wanker complains about the life he had?)

"He'll be so mad at my Louis," he says, instead. "Or - no. Disappointed."

Louis pretends to pout a little. "Why?"

Harry thinks about it for a moment, before shrugging. "Because my Louis' a bit of a coward." And maybe that's not fair or true, but it is to him. "My Louis chose Eleanor." His throat's all tight now, what the fuck?, and this Louis' watching him, eyes soft and sad, and he reaches out, fingertips mapping the dips in Harry's spine.

"Give him time," he says, softly. "He's probably fucking terrified." Then, to lighten the mood a little, "He'll pull his head out of his ass eventually."

Harry smiles, very slightly, and mulls it over. "You think so?"

"I know so," Louis says, confidently, "I know how his mind works," and Harry finally laughs a little.

There's silence for a while, after that, until-

Harry flips onto his back and sighs, loudly.

"Go to sleep," Louis groans, shoving at his shoulder. "We're up early tomorrow."

"We're up early every day," Harry points out, quite reasonably.

"All the more reason to get some sleep now," Louis mutters.

Harry bites his lip. "What if ... what if I wake up back in my - my real life?" he asks, putting words to his biggest fear. "I like it here." His smile's goofy, he knows, but he's fucking happy.

With surprising speed, for someone so exhausted, Louis flings himself on top of Harry.

"Babe," Louis murmurs, pinning him to the mattress, lips brushing Harry's, and they're both smiling, "this is real."
"Yeah?" Harry asks, as Louis nudges him with his nose.

"I'll prove it," Louis says, reaching down between them to cup Harry.

"So cheesy," and Harry's laugh turns into a sharp gasp, and Louis' kiss is warm and familiar and so, sweetly affectionate.

* * *

"Fuck," Harry hears, before he opens his eyes. "Fuck, fuck, fuck."

He's not in a hotel room with Louis, he knows, and the disappointment's almost suffocating.

He sits up a little. "FIFA, yeah?" he doesn't really ask. Can't look at Louis.

Louis squeezes his shoulder briefly, and his hand doesn't linger. "Maybe don't get up just yet," he says.

"I'm fine," he says.

"I'm so sorry," Niall offers.

"What day is it? Where are we?" Liam asks, watching him carefully. Liam. With his stupid, short hair.

"Christ, ask him something he'll know," Zayn says.

"We're in Toronto," Harry says, slowly. "Right?" he finally looks up at Louis, who grins back at him.

"See? He's fine."

"I still think he should see a doctor," Liam says.

Harry pushes his sleeve up and traces the tattoo in the crook of his elbow. Things I can.

Just - one more thing. And he knows, knows what the answer'll be before he even opens his mouth.

"Perrie and Eleanor are still meeting us in LA, yeah?" Harry half-asks, and Louis narrows his eyes in confusion, maybe slight irritation, the same look he always gets when Harry talks about Eleanor.

"Yeah?"

And, OK. He's really back.

"I had the weirdest dream," he says, "while I was asleep."

"Dude, you were out for, like, ten seconds. Max," Zayn teases him, reaching for his cigarettes, and Liam shushes him.

Louis' texting. Probably Eleanor.
"Tell us about it," Liam says, perching next to him on the couch.

"Were we in it?" Niall asks, squashing into Harry's other side.

Harry smiles, very slightly. "Yeah. All of you."

"Was it a sexy dream?" Liam asks, mock-solemnly.

"Not if it involved Niall," Zayn kids, and Niall kicks Zayn's knee until he collapses half on top of him, laughing.

Louis' the only one still standing.

"What are you waiting for?" Liam asks, and Louis chucks his phone onto the table beside them before diving onto the pile, stretching out over all four of them.

"Hi," Harry says, looking down at him.

"Hi, love," Louis says, probably out of habit, more than anything, and his expression shutters, immediately, and Harry gives a tiny shake of his head, like, it's OK; we're OK, but Louis still looks troubled.

"I missed you," Harry says, to Louis, and Liam stills beside him, like he's not quite sure what's happening, "while I was out," he clarifies, and Louis' smiling, all helplessly fond.

"Missed you too, Hazza," Louis says, and he's clearly just playing along, but it's a nickname he so rarely uses, these days, and Harry's not smiling, because it's not a joke, to him, and Louis' smile slowly fades.

"Your arse is really bony," Niall says to Louis, oblivious, and Louis shifts a bit in their laps.

"Budge up," Louis says, to Liam, as he crams himself between Harry and Liam.

"This is ridiculous," Zayn says, from the other end of the couch, Niall's legs hooked over his.

"'Tis, rather," Liam deadpans, leaning back to catch Zayn's glance.

"Good lad," Louis says, brightly, throwing an arm around Harry's shoulders. "Now, young Harold here-"

"That's not my name," Harry stage-whispers.

"Doesn't matter," Louis says, without missing a beat, "is going to tell us a story."

"After we take him to the hospital," Liam says.

"You're a bit of a wet blanket, Li," Louis frowns, and, slowly, Harry reaches up and laces their fingers together (knows that Louis won't throw him off or anything, but he'll casually disentangle himself in a second, and maybe, maybe this is enough).

"Is that a sex thing?" Niall asks, "Because it sounds disgusting."

Louis hasn't pulled away, yet; he bounces their joined hands off Harry's chest, lightly, in a mindless rhythm, instead.
"Come on, Harry," Liam says, getting to his feet. "I'll get Paul to drive us."

Louis' phone buzzes on the table next to them, and Louis turns to look at it, stilling their hands, and Harry loosens his grip a bit so Louis can grab his phone. It's fine. It's - whatever.

"I'll go with him," Louis offers, and Harry glances at him, quickly, but Louis' craning his neck to look at Liam, almost upside down.

"OK," Liam says, slowly.

"Fetch Paul, then, man! What are you waiting for?" Louis yells, suddenly, twisting until he's right way up again, and Niall starts and laughs, hard, beside Harry. "Honestly," Louis sniffs, so much like he was when he was eighteen and doing video diaries on the stairs that Harry can't help but laugh, too.

Louis stands, pulling Harry up with him before dropping his hand (and it doesn't hurt as much as Harry thought it would). Louis grabs his shoes, pockets his phone without reading the message and bumps Harry with his shoulder, all quietly playful.

Liam returns with Paul, who sighs, "I'll bring the car around," even as Louis beams at him.

"You're a doll," he calls, to Paul's back, and Zayn snorts in laughter. Harry laughs a little, too, even as his head starts to really throb, and Louis' grin is a bit smug, like maybe that's all he was after in the first place.

"Idiot," Niall says, from the couch, and Louis ignores him.

"You and me, Haz," he says, linking their arms, "Just like old times."

Even Zayn glances up at that, at them, then Liam, who still looks a bit concerned.

Harry smiles slowly, helplessly, at Louis, who smiles back, soft and fond and everything Harry misses so much. "Just like old times," Harry repeats (and it's not, not really, because there's a phone burning a hole in Louis' back pocket, and it's everything and nothing like it was, or could've been, but Louis' smiling at him, tucked into his side and - today? That's enough).

Please [drop by the archive and comment](http://example.com) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!