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Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Choose Not To Use Archive Warnings , No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	One Direction (Band)
Relationship:	Harry Styles/Louis Tomlinson , Zayn Malik/Liam Payne , (slight) , Josh Devine/Niall Horan
Stats:	Published: 2013-08-04 Words: 33724

and i owe it all to you

by [justaboat](#)

Summary

louis is a dancer and harry serves to be a rather big distraction.

Notes

essentially this entire fic is for dom. i love you a lot i hope you enjoy it.

betsy, cat, and agnes for being darlings and encouraging and wonderful. you're the best and i love you a lot.

if you read this, thank you you're wonderful.

“so you remember that friend of zayn’s i was telling you about?”

louis bends, touching his toes as he exhales.

“yes.” he doesn’t expand. he knows liam will do that without louis’ prompting him.

“right, well. he’s coming to a party this saturday that zayn and i are going to and i thought that you’d want to come. since you agreed to meet him and all,” liam replies.

louis inhales, stretching down to touch his toes once more as he exhales, letting his limbs go limp for a few moments. there’s a few other people scattered throughout the room as he stands up straight, beginning another set of stretches for his arms.

“i don’t know if i can, li. i’m really busy right now,” louis says after a moment.

liam snorts. “of course you are. you’re always busy. with dance or practicing and homework and babysitting your sisters we never see you anymore. besides,” he trails off, looking pointedly at louis, “you *promised*.”

louis chews his lower lip, briefly considering his options. he could simply refuse liam and he’d huff off in frustration and come back and apologize tomorrow morning before class. or, he could say yes and actually have a night off for the first time in months.

“a friend of zayn’s?” louis asks. liam looks hopeful.

“yeah, yeah he’s brilliant. one of his best friends since they were kids, apparently. zayn says he’s a dancer as well which could, i dunno, help you two out a bit.” liam’s talking fast, the way he does when he’s excited about something and louis has to focus really hard to keep up with him.

“a dancer?” louis echoes.

“that’s what zayn said anyway,” liam says, leaning against the wall as louis braces himself against the barre, “besides. you haven’t even met zayn yet.”

louis blinks. they’ve only been dating what, a month and a half? two months? christ, he can’t even remember. all he knows is that liam won’t shut up about zayn and his tattoos and his brown eyes and his drawings and, well. louis reckons he knows more about zayn than he does himself at this rate.

“right, no, you’re right. i haven’t been around much,” louis says apologetically. “it’ll be good,” he reassures liam.

louis grips the barre, cold against his hand, just enough to make goosebumps come across his arms as he starts his next set of stretches: bending his knees before straightening out, repeating the same motion over and over as he winces at the pain in his knee as he does so.

“that’s perfect. i’ll tell zayn, and niall, since he’s going because he knows the person who’s throwing the party, or something, i’m not quite sure to be honest,” liam admits as louis laughs.

“of course he does,” louis says, unsurprised, before giving liam a small smile. “i’ll see you tomorrow then? biology?”

liam nods. “we can plan more for saturday while dissecting our frog. or whatever the hell it is.”

“pig,” louis corrects as he makes a face of disgust, “and don’t remind me.”

he leaves with a wave, out the door as louis takes in a deep breath. there’s no getting out of it now, unless he comes down with a miraculous case of the chicken pox. but he’d gotten those when he was nine and liam had been the one who had come over and kept him company by playing video games while he had been quarantined to the house.

louis grips the barre a little more tightly, closing his eyes for a few moments. he needs to stop thinking about liam and saturday and zayn’s apparent friend and focus on his routine. he goes through it in his head, plugging in his ipod before walking onto the middle of the floor. the wood creaks beneath his weight as he takes in a deep breath, centering himself.

one two three, one two three, one two three, one two three

the notes begin for the familiar song as louis takes his first stance. from there he lets his body

move, arms outstretched and ankles turning beneath him as he spins in the air, soon coming back to the ground as his feet make contact.

he almost tumbles when his feet get tangled but somehow louis maintains his balance, straightening out before continuing to the next set of positions. he's not focused. he's not breathing properly. his heart is pounding in his chest and it's distracting him, is the issue.

there's a while where he's able to clear his mind and move his body easily, almost without a care in the world. and for a while it's like anything he's ever worried about fades and he's left with an empty room and a song playing in the background.

however the moment passes and sure enough louis topples to the ground, losing focus as he lets out a string of curse words. his knee is throbbing where he'd fallen but he ignores it, pushing himself up off the ground.

there's a fan in the room that's broken, one of the blades loose and making a ridiculous rattling sound that's annoying him. maybe that's why he can't do this fucking routine, because one of the ceiling fans in the practice rooms is broken and driving him slowly insane.

no, louis thinks as he goes into his first stance. it's him. he keeps fucking up this routine and he can't figure out why that is. the music begins again as louis starts from the beginning. he has to get this, he can't keep messing it up when his auditions are coming closer and closer.

and everything is fine until that one part, that one part he can't seem to get no matter how he tries. his feet get tangled and he always ends up on the ground in some sort of defeated position with his knee beginning to swell. but he ignores the pain in his knee as he stands once more, fighting the urge to punch the wall as he balls his hands into fists.

he can't get it.

he tries for the next hour and a half; no matter how much he pushes himself, nothing changes.

there's no point in staying in this stuffy room. the walls are beginning to feel like they're closing in on him and he can't dance when he feels this restless. so he takes a sip from his water bottle, wiping a bit of sweat from his forehead as he puts his bag over his shoulder, unplugging his ipod as he puts it into his pocket. he closes the door with a final click before walking down the hallway, which is now long empty.

there are a few teachers in their classrooms, some of their lights still on as louis makes his way into the parking lot. he's frustrated and irritated, throwing his bag into the backseat as he climbs into the drivers seat.

on the way home he stops off at a gas station, filling up and buying a few packs of gum and crisps as the sales clerk hands him his change. louis thanks him, taking the plastic bag as he heads back into his car.

there's a text from his mom telling him she'll be home a little after eleven, louis tapping out a reply, telling her to have a good time as he turns onto his road. it's dark, the curtains drawn and the lights shut off as he pulls into the driveway, closing the door of his car as he pulls out his keys, unlocking the front door.

"mum?" he calls out, letting the door fall shut behind him as he sets his bag of crisps onto the front bench.

she's gone. he'd thought she might still be here when he'd gotten home since she has a tendency to run late, though apparently that's not the case today. when he goes into the kitchen there's a

plate with a bit of tin foil wrapped over top of it a note attached reading: *Some leftovers for you! Just throw them in the microwave. Hope practice went well, love you! xoxo.* he puts the note on the counter, taking off the tin foil as he puts the plate into the microwave.

his sisters are all gone for the next week, at his dad's. louis had opted not to go, would much rather stay here and not have to deal with him. just the idea of spending an entire week at his house is an exhausting one.

he puts on a kettle for tea when his phone buzzes from his counter. there's only one person that calls him besides his mother at almost nine o'clock at night.

"hello?" louis answers.

"tell me the imagery in to kill a mockingbird or i'll chop off your legs while you sleep."

"jesus, niall."

"i know where you live, louis."

louis snorts. "did you actually read the book?" he asks.

"i'm halfway through the movie, but it's black and white. giving me a headache," niall whines from the other line.

"y'know it might help if you actually read it," louis lectures.

"you're my least favourite person right now. and that's saying alot, since liam lost my copy of the new justin bieber album."

"are you even paying attention to the movie?" louis asks, taking a bite of his dinner. it's only half warm, he realizes with a frown.

"fuck off, it's so *boring*. how was practicing? liam said he'd finally got you agree to saturday."

"fucking sucked, thanks for asking. i'm never dancing again." it's niall's turn to laugh now, "i'm serious, niall."

"sure ya are, lou. i'm sure you were fine. you're just being hard on yourself as always," niall says, "so you're for sure coming saturday? not going to flake out on us?"

"you never know. i could come down with a severe case of the chicken pox before then," louis replies as he puts his plate back into microwave. half cold potatoes are never good to eat.

"chicken pox or not you're coming. liam wants you to hang out with zayn, he's been whining about it for weeks and this will finally shut him up," niall says.

louis sighs, mostly in defeat. "i know. i'm going, alright? anyway, i should go. work on my paper for english."

"stop bragging. you actually read the fucking book," niall says, clearly annoyed as louis smirks.

"love you," louis tells him.

"fuck you."

there's a click as niall hangs up, leaving louis in his kitchen as he pulls his books out of his bags and pulls up a stool to the small island in their kitchen. he's restless, hands shaking as he goes

through his essay outline.

it's going to be a long night, louis thinks as he blinks tiredly.

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"what are you going to wear on saturday?"

louis pauses. presently he's kneading the heart of a pig fetus as he looks up at liam with a sort of look of disbelief.

"i'm a little busy at the moment, liam."

liam rolls his eyes. "this is important, louis."

"it's wednesday. why do i need to plan what i'm wearing for *saturday*?" louis asks, feeling a little nauseous as he does so.

"well, i mean, you're meeting zayn and zayn's friend. i just want to be prepared," liam says, pointing to the kidney.

louis groans. it smells unfortunately like formaldehyde and death mixed in with the regret of his ever walking into this godforsaken classroom. the frustration from yesterday's practicing is still sitting inside of him, spreading through his body and lingering in his touch.

"i was going to wear that shirt i wore to niall's party," louis finally says, moving onto the kidney. he wants to die.

"the white one? button up?" liam presses, writing down some notes as louis pulls out the small intestines next. or what he assumes are small intestines, anyway. he's isn't sure. and quite frankly he doesn't *care*, he just wants to get his hand out of this fucking dead pig.

"yeah, that one. is that alright with you?" louis asks, though he's teasing.

even when faced with a dead pig he's still got his wit.

"i liked that one. that sounds good," liam encourages as louis rolls his eyes, laughing quietly.

"glad you approve. do you want me to text you pictures before you come pick me up to see if you approve of my hair as well?" louis says sarcastically.

"i mean. zayn and i will be driving, but i can check and see on the way," liam replies.

"oh my *god*, liam, i was kidding," louis tells him before laughing, a little more loudly as liam's cheeks flush.

"shut up," he snaps, "find the liver."

louis glares at him briefly before continuing to rifle around in the open pig. how the hell is he supposed to find a liver when he'd already mistaken the lung for the heart just a few minutes ago.

he finally finds the liver, liam writing down a few more notes as louis swallows. he feels light headed, but that could just be from the stench. and the organs. or both.

"so niall was telling me he talked to perrie this morning," liam begins after a moment as louis immediately stiffens. this can't be good.

“did he?” louis says, not looking up as he now looks for the large intestines. one would figure they would be near the small intestines, though apparently that’s not the case.

“said she told him she saw aiden the other day,” liam continues and louis feels his neck getting warm. “apparently he mentioned he’d been talking with you again?”

it’s phrased like a question, and liam’s intonation makes it sound like a question, but it’s not a question. it’s a statement. because liam already knows the answer.

“found the large intestine,” louis informs him, holding it up. liam’s no longer taking notes.

“louis.” his voice is firm.

he doesn’t say anything for a moment, and liam doesn’t push him to. instead he lays out the organs onto the tray next to them, ignoring the sick feeling in his stomach as he does so. the name repeats in his head, aiden aiden aiden aiden. it’s been so long since he’s heard that name.

his hands are trembling, louis realizes as he takes in a deep breath. he’s slowly coming undone, starting from somewhere in his chest. he’s not sure he can breathe.

“he um,” louis says slowly, swallowing. “he texted me the other night.”

he hears liam sigh, though louis can’t tell what sort of tone is meant to go with it. he’s mostly focusing on the way his hands are trembling as he tries to steady them, needing to break the pig’s jaw without having a complete breakdown.

“what did he say?” liam’s voice is softer now, gentle. coaxing the words out of louis.

louis doesn’t want to talk about this. he wants to keep dissecting this god awful pig and forget this conversation ever happened.

“just asked me how i was doing. said he missed me.”

he remembers it so clearly. it had been a few nights ago when he’d been holed up in his room, working on a revision for their biology midterm when his phone had gone off. he’d half expected it to be niall begging him to bring him food but what he found was quite the opposite.

hey. wondering how ur doing. miss u. maybe we can hangout sometime soon.

he’d stared at his screen for quite a while, reading and rereading until his eyes got sore from staring at his screen for so long. the number itself was deleted ages ago from his phone, but louis knew who it was. he would know that number anywhere. it’s engraved in his mind.

but he hadn’t replied. instead he’d turned off his phone and tried to forget about it and work on his review. because louis knows where it would have gone if he’d replied. it would have gone where it always does. where it’s been going for almost a year and a half.

louis would have said something about doing homework, and aiden would have asked if he’s busy for the rest of the night. louis would have said no. aiden would have invited him over. and at two am louis would have gotten into his mother’s car and driven for forty-five minutes and parked in front of a house he barely knows.

the cobblestone path would lead him to a bright red front door, which would open and aiden would be there. his hair would be a mess and for a moment louis lets himself remember what it feels like to run his hands through it, how soft and pliable it was to his touch. they wouldn’t say much, aiden most likely kissing him before he could get a word out anyway.

he'd follow him up the stairs, voices hushed in the early hours of the morning as they'd go into his room. third door on the left, the rest of his family asleep as he'd usher louis inside.

they'd kiss and touch and it would be near perfect in the moonlight, aiden barely illuminated in it. he'd still be beautiful, breathtakingly so. enough to make louis' heart pound and his head feel slightly dizzy, aiden's lips moving across his jaw line in the stillness of the room.

they wouldn't talk. and that would always bother louis, sit somewhere uncomfortably in his chest. but he wouldn't say anything about it. instead, he'd kiss aiden and try to forget it.

but louis hadn't replied. the text is still in his inbox, still a temptation. but he can't reply. it would just make everything that much worse, louis had realized while sitting on his bed.

"what did you say?" liam asks, pulling louis from his thoughts.

he stares at the tray in front of him, briefly forgetting that he's staring at pig guts.

"i didn't say anything. i didn't reply." louis says finally, voice low.

liam nods, putting a brief hand on louis' shoulder. and it's comforting, having liam close and not lecturing him. not say anything. he's just there. and for a moment, louis doesn't feel so alone.

he forces a small smile. "it's fine. the past, all that. we shouldn't be talking about it anyway, it doesn't matter," louis says, briefly glancing to their notes, "what do i need to find next?"

"louis -"

"the palate, ah, of course," louis interrupts him. any fond look has been erased from liam's face, he now looks more irritated.

"*louis.*"

louis shakes his head. "it's fine, liam. i promise. i don't want to talk about it anymore is all."

he doesn't say anything for a moment, watching louis as he tries to break the pig's jaw. louis does it, a snapping sound coming as both he and liam wince, louis making a retching sound as he shakes his head.

"you don't have to come saturday. i don't want to like, force you, or whatever," liam says.

louis pauses, looking to liam as he jots down a few more notes. "no, liam, it's fine, i promise. aiden was a while ago. i'm okay with going out, honestly."

it's been almost three months said he's said name aloud. it sort of hangs off his tongue, a weird bitter taste coming to his mouth when he does so.

"alright. if you say so," liam finally says after a moment before turning back to their paper. "so next we need to try and find the spleen, wherever that is..."

louis smiles, faintly as he nods, the two of them beginning to search with ten minutes in the class period to go. and a part of him wants to tell liam that sometimes, it still hurts. that a large part of him still misses aiden and that part of him, he suspects, is a massively big part of why he can't seem to dance anymore.

but he doesn't. because liam's happy and giddy, talking about zayn as they fill out their pig diagram. not even a deceased fetal pig can ruin liam's happiness about zayn and, well, that's

saying something.

besides, if louis tells him about the whole aiden ordeal, it'll give him more cause to worry. because liam's constantly in a state of worry, as niall always says. louis agrees. it's a wonder he doesn't have a head full of grey hair.

the period ends as they hand in their packet to their teacher, mr. stevens, making their way out the door as louis runs a hand through his hair. he's got to go to english, then has study period, then he's got to practice, and make it home to make dinner for his mom and sisters who are coming home later today.

"hey, lou?" liam says as louis stops in front of his locker, opening the door.

"yeah?" he asks, unpacking his biology books as he fishes around for his english binder.

"i'm, um, i'm proud of you."

louis smirks. "for not fainting an entire class period while sticking my hands inside a dead pig? me too, actually."

liam's face softens, though still slightly serious. "no, not that, though i agree," he says as louis pauses, looking at him. "i'm proud of you for not replying."

a silence passes between them as louis nods, slowly. "thanks, li."

liam says nothing, instead gripping his shoulder briefly before walking off down the hallway as louis takes in a deep breath. for a moment he leans his forehead against the cool metal of the locker, the change in temperature welcomed against his slightly warm skin.

yeah, louis thinks as he stuffs his books into his bag, he supposes that's something to be proud of as well.

--

aiden used to watch him dance.

he'd sit quietly in the corner while louis spun around the room, putting together his routine. louis could always see him from the corner of his eyes in the mirrors, aiden's hands always folded in his lap the same way, the same unreadable expression on his face.

it was back when louis would actually let people see him dance. sometimes liam and niall would join him, all sitting in silence as the music played throughout the room. other times it would just be the two of them, alone, louis always feeling slightly vulnerable at having that pair of eyes constantly following him, watching him.

"i don't understand why you love it so much," aiden used to say time and time again, "though you're pretty brilliant at it."

louis had always doubted his sincerity when he'd said it, hands in his pockets and grinning at him with his usual crooked smile. louis misses that grin. misses a lot of him, actually.

presently he's on the floor of the practice rooms, frustrated and hungry and having given up for the evening. it's almost six, which means he's got to get himself home so he can make dinner. yet no part of him wants to move from this floor. his head is pounding and his chest is moving, uneven, as louis closes his eyes for a moment.

another two hours wasted because he still can't fucking get it. louis wants to scream. wants to rip out all his hair and kick at the floor until he breaks something.

he's so fucking restless. no part of him can sit still, always on edge, always trying to think of a way to fix this routine and get it perfect. he mostly hates himself, how he doesn't have the motivation to pick himself up off the floor and try one last time before he has to go.

he's sweating and he's tired and he wants to crawl into bed and never leave. but it's friday, which means he's got to get home, make dinner, work on his paper and get ready for the party tomorrow. louis groans. he'd nearly forgotten about that. save for the fact that liam had spent every waking moment reminding him and niall about it throughout the day.

so, he hadn't actually forgotten about it. he's just *trying* to forget about it. but he'd promised. and he can't back out now. it would crush liam completely. plus, judging by the pictures of zayn he's seen from when he and niall went through his facebook pictures, zayn could totally crush him. squish him like a tiny grape in his fingertips.

louis is too young to die at the hand of someone who looks like they've been sculpted by the gods. of course liam would fall for someone who looks like they could be the son of fucking zeus himself.

he moves, finally, forcing himself up off the floor. louis takes his ipod, shoving it into his pocket dejectedly as he makes his way toward the door. once he opens it however he pauses, blinking as he looks at the scene before him. there's a boy he's never seen before, sweeping, looking oddly guilty as louis' brows furrow.

he doesn't say anything to them, face hidden by the curls covering their eyes as he brushes past them.

"i watched you dance."

louis freezes. he turns, blinking, as he looks to the brown haired boy. "excuse me?" louis snaps, irritated.

"you're good," they add.

"do i know you?" louis finally asks, feeling oddly uncomfortable as he shifts his bag on his shoulder.

the boy stops sweeping, looking toward him and christ. louis' breath catches in his throat as the bit of hair moves from their face because they're fucking gorgeous, is the thing. green eyes and a jawline louis might possibly die for.

"no," they say, voice low, "does that matter?"

louis would still be annoyed if it weren't the way they lick their lips, slow and careful as he takes in a sharp breath.

"i suppose not," louis tells them, straightening out his shirt as he tugs at it lightly. "i, um, i should go."

they nod, almost as if expecting it, and louis doesn't say anything else. instead he commits to memory their dark hair, long legs, and low voice as he shuffles off down the hallway.

that was, new. his hands are shaking as he opens his car door, shoving his bag in without a second thought as he slips into the drivers seat once more. he's never seen that boy before. he's not even

sure they go to his school. and yet there they had been, broom at hand and curly hair. pink lips, louis thinks to himself as he leans his forehead against the steering wheel. stunningly pink lips.

they'd seen him dancing. he supposes that's why his hands are shaking and his mind is racing as he starts his car.

louis isn't certain but a part of him thinks he sees a now familiar head of brown hair watching him through the second story window as he drives out of the parking lot.

--

saturday evening comes a little too fast for louis' liking.

he's staring at a large pile of clothing on his floor, huge and ridiculous as he puts his hands on his hips. he'd decided his outfit on wednesday with liam while dissecting a pig but somehow when he'd tried it on just a few hours ago, it didn't seem right.

louis is being slightly insane, he realizes that, laying out a few more items onto his bed to get a better look at them. they're just clothes, for christ's sake. and it's just zayn. and zayn's friend. who, according to niall, is a strapping young fellow. so sue him if he wants to look good.

his phone buzzes. it's a text from liam. *Heyyyyyy Niall will be thereeee in 20 minutess ! :)*

louis groans, tossing his phone onto his bed in a mini fit of rage. he'd gotten one from niall almost twenty minutes ago telling him to stop fretting over an outfit and just wear something. louis had then suggested he'd go naked. niall had said if that's the case he refuses to pick him up.

what if I just wear a loincloth ? louis had asked.

What No niall had responded, before sending another text seconds later. *Stop texting me Im driving!!* he'd sent a few moments later as louis had laughed quietly.

he's not even sure why he's nervous. this is stupid. he's being stupid. finally fed up with himself louis changes into a pair of slightly tighter jeans, the joy division t shirt niall had given him last year and a denim jacket. and if liam doesn't like it he can suck it, quite honestly.

less than five minutes pass before there's a knock at the door, louis rushing out of his room in an attempt to beat his sisters to answer it. there's no such luck. when he rounds the corner they're already there, giggling as niall tries to push past them.

"ready to go?" he asks, louis nods.

"i'm leaving mum!" louis calls, pocketing his phone as he hears movement from the kitchen.

"you're staying over at niall's?" she asks, looking between the both of them.

"yeah. i'll have my phone with me," louis reminds her, tapping his pocket briefly as if to reaffirm his point.

"be safe, please. and have fun. but not too much," she tells him firmly.

"i'll make sure he doesn't get into too much trouble," niall says after a moment.

she smiles, sweetly. "you've always been my favourite, niall," she tells him with a wink before giving one last final wave to the two of them as he pushes open the door.

"how the fuck did you manage to become her favourite," louis mumbles as niall laughs, loudly.

“with my charm and good looks, obviously,” niall informs him as louis flips him off. “oi, i’m your ride here, asshole,” niall reminds him.

louis doesn’t comment, instead getting into the front seat as he scrunches his nose. there’s empty take away boxes and an assortment of sports equipment littered throughout the vehicle as niall starts the car, clearly oblivious to the stench.

“this is disgusting, niall. do you ever clean your car?”

niall pauses, looking around for a moment before backing out of louis’ driveway. “do you wanna walk or not?” he asks.

louis rolls his eyes, deciding against adding anything else as he crosses his arms over his chest. his leg is moving up and down in an attempt to calm himself, because apparently he’s still nervous as niall drives down the road. there’s music coming through the speakers, the eagles, louis recognizes. he only knows that because it’s the only fucking thing niall ever plays in his car. his driving music, apparently.

“you’re fidgeting.” niall comments after a moment, flipping on his turn signal.

“i’m not,” louis argues.

“you’re doing that thing with your leg,” niall says, turning onto an unfamiliar road.

“i’m *not*.”

“why are you nervous then?” niall asks after a moment as louis scoffs.

“i’m not nervous, jesus,” louis lies. he’s nervous. so much so he’s fearful he might be sick in niall’s car. not that it would make much of a difference, considering the state it’s currently in.

“is it because i told you zayn’s friend was hot? it’s like i said. hot people hang out with other hot people. it’s the circle of life, or whatever,” niall tells him, as if he’s some sort of expert on the subject.

“which doesn’t explain why i hang out with you,” louis replies.

“fuck off,” niall spits.

“you’re the one refusing to tell me anything about him. fucking traitor, you are,” louis informs him.

according to the directions niall printed off it’s a thirty minute drive to this kid’s house. if they’re even the right directions, louis thinks as he reads them over. he hasn’t a clue where they’re even going.

“i’m letting you have the element of surprise.” niall says simply.

“what if he’s everything i dislike and it ends awkward horrible?” louis asks, glaring at niall as he does so.

“don’t think so,” he replies, turning onto another road. “is this queenston road? these signs are so fucking small i can’t even read them, christ.”

louis looks out the window. “no, it’s lavender drive,” he says after reading the sign. “who names

their street lavender, anyway. that's absurd."

"dunno. it's a little weird," niall agrees, "and you're not gonna hate him."

he looks to niall, brows furrowing. "how do you know that?" he asks, suddenly rather curious.

"because i know *you*, lou. and i know your type."

"i don't have a type," louis argues stubbornly. "this next street is queenston," he adds.

niall makes a sharp turn, nearly missing it altogether as louis hits his door abruptly as he winces. he should've driven with liam. less bruises that way.

"yes, you do have a type. and ha - he, fits it perfectly."

louis narrows his eyes. "ha. that's his name? ha?"

niall shakes his head. "shut up. i've said too much already."

"what kind of a name is ha? he sounds like a serial killer."

"oh my god, shut up or i'm going to shove this fucking cleat into your mouth," niall threatens as louis sighs loudly.

for the rest of the way niall forces louis to explain the imagery in to kill a mockingbird, though louis barely gets through any of it because niall argues and asks far too many questions as they pull up to the house.

except the house is already rather full. packed, actually. the driveway is completely full and there's no possible way niall can park there. so they continue down the street, near the end of it when he finally finds a bit of space to park.

"jesus, what kind of party is this?" louis asks, getting out of the car as niall shrugs.

"dunno. last time i saw the kid who's throwing it i was in like, year five," niall says.

"that's promising," louis comments sarcastically.

they walk along the sidewalk, louis' hands in his pocket as they start up the driveway. there are people littered throughout the lawn, stumbling about, and the music is loud coming from the house as they slip inside.

it's not a big house, louis thinks as he follows niall through the doorway, yet it feels as if almost all of doncaster has been shoved into it. there's no way they're going to find liam.

immediately someone calls niall's name through the large crowd and of course, louis thinks with a small smile. niall begins talking to them, turning to louis as he tugs him toward the two of them.

"louis, this is one of my old friends from mullingar, sean. sean, this is louis, he goes to school with me," niall introduces.

louis extends a hand, shaking it as sean laughs. "ditching us for doncaster. what were you thinking?" sean asks as louis forces a small sort of laugh.

"s'not all bad," niall defends. louis is tempted to kiss his cheek, but refrains.

he glances around the unfamiliar kitchen, bottles of assorted types of alcohol spread across

countertops, people talking loudly above the music. his head's already pounding, which is a bad sign as he taps a nervous finger on his thigh.

if he'd had time to practice today he probably wouldn't be so on edge. instead he'd been too busy working on his midterm review and paper and picking out a stupid outfit that he hadn't any time to dance before niall had gotten there. which leaves him stressed and filled with a handful of pent up emotions, all moving inside of him as louis takes in a deep breath.

he needs to find liam and get this whole 'meeting zayn and zayn's friend' ordeal over with. so he excuses himself from his conversation with niall, beginning to push through the crowd and looking for that familiar head of short dark hair.

his search begins in the kitchen, but there's no liam. he makes a mental note to try and keep an eye out for niall as well should he be stranded alone in this house. from there he goes into the living room where there's some sort of makeshift dance floor, some people on it as louis holds back his laugh.

somewhere between the living room and the back deck he hears his name being called above the massive amounts of people.

"louis! louis, over here!"

it's liam, he realizes as he turns, suddenly remembering how nervous he was in the first place. his fingertips continue to tap a familiar rhythm against his thigh as he pushes toward liam and who he assumes is zayn. he recognizes him from the facebook profile pictures.

"thank god we found you. niall said you'd wandered off somewhere," liam says, breathless. "anyway, you guys find the house okay?"

louis nods. he glances briefly to the dark haired boy behind liam. "it was easy. just had to find the smallest house with the most amount of people crammed into it," louis explains.

liam grins. "when niall suggested this party i didn't know there'd be this many people," he says, turning so now louis is facing the dark haired boy. "anyway, louis, this is zayn. zayn, this is louis."

he immediately extends a hand as zayn shakes it, grip firm before releasing it. "nice to meet you, louis. liam's been wanting us to meet for a while, apparently."

louis nods. "yes, he's been plotting this for quite some time," he agrees, watching a small smile settle on zayn's lips when he does. "i'm afraid i might be a bit of a disappointment after all the hype, i'm sorry to say."

zayn shakes his head. "i've basically heard your life story so, i don't think that's possible. i would've refused to meet you otherwise," he assures louis.

"right, well, that's good then," louis says, his own smile widening as liam is practically beaming now.

"i'll get us some drinks," he offers and before louis can say he'll tag along liam's gone and he's left with zayn.

"so. zayn." louis begins, "do you have any hobbies?"

there's a small weird sort of pause before zayn laughs, putting a hand on his stomach as louis laughs a few moments later. it sort of eases the tension between them, the awkward first forced meeting as he shakes his head.

“i don’t do a whole lot besides sleeping and drawing,” zayn admits. louis snorts. “apparently you’re the one with the talent.”

“if by talent you mean the ability to make sure my younger sisters don’t all murder one another when they’re all in the same room then yes, that’s a talent.” louis says.

“so you’re not a dancer then?” he asks.

louis chuckles, somewhat nervously. “oh, right, that. i suppose so. i dabble, really.”

“liam says you’ve been doing it since you were three. doesn’t sound like dabbling to me,” zayn responds.

louis opens his mouth to say something but liam’s already back, shoving a beer bottle into both their hands and beginning to chat loudly about niall playing a round of beer pong in the kitchen. louis isn’t surprised.

and he likes zayn. he’s even tempered, soft spoken, but he’s also rather funny, making comments and sarcastic remarks in the conversation. not too mention his tattoos are rather interesting. louis has already been staring for a while, half the time not even realizing it until he gets an elbow in the side from liam.

“louis? are you listening?” he asks as louis’ head snaps up.

“sorry,” louis replies, “what was that?”

“i said, harry’s here. do you wanna meet him now?” he asks.

louis feels his chest tighten, gripping a little tighter at the neck of his beer. zayn’s made his way across the room, head bent and talking to someone louis can’t make out the face of. briefly, louis thinks he’d much rather be pulling out the insides of a fetal pig than standing and waiting to meet this friend of zayn’s. harry, apparently, as liam’s just informed him.

“hi.”

he looks up from his beer bottle, pausing as louis stares at the boy in front of him. dark curly hair, those green eyes and oh, jesus.

louis goes to say something, extending a hand but instead finds himself jostling his beer bottle and getting liquid all over harry’s shirt. “oops,” louis says quickly, cheeks flushing as he shakes his head, “oh my god, i’m so sorry here - ”

he turns, but there’s no paper towel or napkins or anything to help with the spill. and harry’s still there with beer on his shirt and oh christ, he’s making a wonderful first impression, isn’t he?

harry’s got the same look on his face louis thinks must be similar to his own, if he’s remembering louis correctly from just yesterday when he’d been leaving the school. but it’s the same guy, louis is sure of it as he looks to him apologetically.

“let’s um, let’s find some paper towels, or something,” louis tells him, beginning into the kitchen, “we’ll be right back,” he assures liam before slipping into the crowded room.

harry’s right behind him, warm against his back as louis inhales. “you don’t need to keep apologizing,” harry says, breath warm on his neck and fuck.

louis shakes his head. “course i need to apologize. i just ruined your shirt with beer,” he argues.

“they can be washed, y’know,” harry reminds him.

he takes a roll of paper towels from the countertop, handing harry a stack of paper towels. louis leans against the counter, looking to the beer stain on harry’s rather nice button up shirt. from now on in the life of harry he’ll be known as that idiot that spilt beer on him at a party. what a way to be remembered, louis thinks as harry accepts his obnoxiously large stack of paper towels.

“i’m so sorry,” louis apologizes again as he watches harry press them to his shirt. it’s not helping. he’s gone and completely ruined a perfectly good shirt.

“didn’t i see you the other day? at the school?” apparently harry’s not the type to beat around the bush.

louis coughs, quietly, for a moment as he runs a hand through his hair. “i think so? i was leaving the practice rooms. you had a broom, if i do recall.”

harry smiles and louis feels his heart stutter in his chest. “yes, a broom. and wearing that ridiculous janitor’s shirt.”

“funny,” louis says, smiling now himself, “i don’t recall a janitor t shirt. was too distracted by your brooming abilities.”

harry laughs and louis fears he might pass out at the mere sound of it. “brooming abilities. that’s a new one,” he says with a wink and okay. louis is calm. just no longer breathing.

it takes a moment but louis soon remembers that harry had seen him dancing, the idea making him oddly uncomfortable as he tugs at the sleeve of his jacket. it’s fucking hot in the kitchen but he can’t take it off for fear it might get lost. or stolen. or possibly burned in a sad attempt at fire wood, or something.

“what were you doing there?” louis finally asks.

harry’s getting nowhere with the pieces of paper towel, still dabbing them against his shirt as louis takes a few more pieces from the roll, dampening them underneath the tap for a few moments before handing it to harry.

he accepts them, looking to louis. “i work there after school three days a week. money, all that,” harry explains, beginning to work on the stain. the wet paper towels are helping, if only slightly.

“ah, of course,” louis replies.

and it’s funny, because louis is fairly certain harry’s the most beautiful boy he’s ever seen. with his long fingers and still slightly pink lips, floppy hair and dimples that louis wants to get lost in permanently.

“you go to school there? with liam?” harry finally asks, snapping louis out of his intense gazing at harry’s lips. he wonders if harry noticed, praying to god that he didn’t.

“yeah, known him since we were little,” louis replies, “childhood friends, all that.”

from somewhere else in the kitchen he can hear niall cheering loudly. most likely won another round of beer pong.

“zayn mentioned that,” harry comments. “how long have you been dancing for?”

louis looks at him briefly, running his fingertips along a piece of paper towel as he shrugs. “for a

while. i guess.” harry looks at him. “since i was three.”

his eyes widen, almost in disbelief. “jesus, since you were *three*?” he repeats.

louis nods. “the only way my mom could get me to stop was when she put me in dance class, apparently.”

harry’s smile widens as he laughs quietly. the stain is a little less worse than before, louis notes as he rinses another few pieces of paper towel under the tap.

“i’ve never had lessons,” harry finally says after a moment.

“really?” louis presses.

he takes the pile of paper towels, tossing them into the trash as harry keeps the wet stack pressed to his shirt.

“i’m not like, professional, or anything. just do it for fun, mostly. zayn and i do,” he explains.

“what type of dancing?” louis asks and harry looks almost embarrassed when he does.

“um. mostly modern stuff, i dunno. hard to explain.”

louis blinks, smiling faintly as he watches a small blush begin to colour harry’s cheeks. he doesn’t comment on it, instead looking to see liam in the doorway of the kitchen, looking anxious as zayn tugs on his hand but liam doesn’t move, obviously looking for the two of them.

“we should get back, i think liam might have a heart attack if we don’t,” louis says as harry turns, catching sight of liam as he nods in agreement.

“jesus, he’s pale,” harry comments as they wade through the crowd.

“i’d like to see you dance sometime,” louis finally says.

harry looks at him, briefly, his arm brushing against louis’ own. “i’m sure we can arrange something,” harry tells him.

and for the rest of the evening, it’s nice. the group of them, niall joining them later after his beer pong tournament, cheeks flushed and voice loud as they all attempt to fit on a couch. harry sits next to louis, pressed right up against him and it’s distracting, to say the least.

but it’s the five of them, on that couch, for the rest of the evening and louis wouldn’t have it any other way.

--

louis doesn’t see harry again until monday.

he’s practicing, music playing in the room as he goes through his routine for the second time in the past twenty minutes. but it’s no use, louis thinks as he pulls his knees up to his chest, sitting in the middle of the floor. he’s going to keep fucking it up.

so instead of staying on the floor and wallowing for the rest of the evening louis stands, taking his empty water bottle as he pushes open the door. when he does he stops, seeing a familiar figure down the hallway as he takes a few steps toward the fountain.

“were you watching me, then?” louis asks, unscrewing the lid.

harry pauses his brooming, clearing his throat as he looks at louis now, sheepishly. “maybe. for a few minutes,” he admits.

louis holds the button for the fountain, letting water pour into the bottle as he watches harry for a few moments. a part of him, though a small part, still doesn’t like the idea of someone watching him. especially when that someone is harry.

but another part him, the larger part he assumes, wouldn’t mind having some company. with the same room and the same music day after day it tends to get a little lonely.

“do you wanna come in?” louis offers.

harry doesn’t reply right away and louis wonders if he’s crossed some sort of line. but then harry sets his broom against some lockers, walking down the hallway toward him as louis puts the lid back onto his water bottle.

“you’re right,” louis says as he opens the door, letting harry in first, “that uniform shirt is atrocious.”

harry rolls his eyes, though doesn’t say anything as they step inside. he pauses for a moment, louis watching as he takes the whole room in. with the high ceilings and the wood floors, it’s a little bit large. and for a moment, harry almost looks small against it all.

“you’re normally alone in here?” harry asks.

“usually. unless there’s people in here doing other things. but mostly it’s just me,” louis says.

harry doesn’t say anything, and louis is oddly alright with that. instead he goes to the centre of the room once more, pressing play on his ipod. the music begins as louis stretches his arms out, starting to move and trying not to focus on harry watching him the entire time he does so.

he stands with his arms crossed, leaning against the door. even without talking he’s a force in the room, somehow invading all of louis’ thoughts as he moves to the music.

and for a while, it's alright. louis keeps moving as harry stands quietly, his presence surprisingly comforting. he stays in routine, in form, moving across the floor until he reaches that one part. the part he can’t seem to get, no matter how much he rehearses. the part that always ends up with him on the floor cursing and swearing and his knee in a state of agony. this is no exception, not even with harry here apparently because sure enough louis finds himself back on the floor, wincing at his knee.

he looks up and finds harry laughing. or trying to hide his laugh, holding a hand to his mouth and failing miserably.

“are you laughing at me?” louis questions.

harry shakes his head. “no, no, i wouldn’t even dream of laughing,” he says, trying to be as serious as he possibly can. it’s not working. he’s grinning. louis can see his dimples.

“oh my god. you’re laughing at me,” louis says, incredulous.

harry walks across the floor, taking only a few steps until he’s in front of louis, extending a hand. louis pouts, crossing his arms over his chest. “i’m never letting you watch me dance again.”

“i’m sorry, i’m sorry,” harry says apologetically as louis takes his hand begrudgingly. louis makes

his way toward his bag, pulling out an ice pack as he places it on his knee. it's now beginning to swell. "it's just. you have to admit it was kind of funny."

louis scrunches his face, glaring at harry from a few feet away. "it stops being funny when you keep messing it up repeatedly for months."

harry's face softens as he nods, almost knowingly. "no, i suppose not then," he says empathetically. louis doesn't need his pity, he thinks as he watches harry pick up his ipod. "what's this routine for?" he finally asks.

the million dollar question, louis thinks as he almost laughs at himself. "it's stupid, really."

he keeps pressing the ice to his knee, ignoring the throbbing as harry looks up at him, an eyebrow raised as he does so. "can't be that stupid if you're spending this much time on it."

and, well. harry has a point.

"i have an audition for juilliard at the end of the term," louis says finally.

and for a moment, harry's expression is unreadable. something between regret and sadness, a few lines appearing on his forehead as he continues to scroll through louis' ipod.

"that's amazing," he says sincerely, "those are hard to get, aren't they?" harry finally asks after a moment.

"yeah, i suppose. it's not a big thing." louis isn't sure why he said that, because it *is* a big thing. it's fucking huge. perhaps he'd said it mostly because harry looks similar to a kicked puppy, eyes downcast in the soft light of the room.

"it's huge, louis. this could change your entire life."

louis blinks. "well, yes. when you put it that way that doesn't make it any less stressful. thank you."

harry laughs quietly once more, smiling faintly. "i didn't mean it that way."

"i know."

a silence settles between them, louis with his ice to his knee and harry inspecting his ipod. honestly, what is there to do besides look through his music? he doesn't even have much on there to look at.

"did you finally find my nudes on there?" louis asks as harry chokes, coughing abruptly. "i'm kidding, jesus. i wouldn't put those on my ipod, i share it with my sister."

harry looks at him, cheeks flushed as louis grins. he likes harry's cheeks that colour. he likes a lot about harry actually, if he's being honest with himself.

"let me help you, then."

louis is already packing up his things when harry makes the suggestion. "what do you mean?" louis asks. but he knows what harry means. he just wants to hear him say it.

"i mean with your routine. let me help you with it."

he looks so sincere, standing there that louis isn't sure he can say no. "i have to see you dance first."

harry seems taken aback for a brief moment, looking at louis. “what do you mean?”

“i mean i want to see you dance. then maybe i’ll let you help me,” louis explains.

“alright.”

louis puts his bag over his shoulder. “alright?” he echos.

“alright, i’ll let you see me dance sometime.”

“luckily enough we’re in an empty practice room so, the floor’s yours,” louis suggests as harry snorts.

“jesus, no, not here. i didn’t agree to when, if you recall,” harry informs him, crossing his arms over his chest. his broad chest, louis thinks before snapping back into reality.

“fine then. i’ll just wait to see it, i guess,” louis says, looking pointedly at harry. “i’ll have you know i’m not a very patient person.”

harry smirks. “i had a feeling you wouldn’t be.”

“what’s *that* supposed to mean?” louis asks, but harry’s already halfway out the door.

“i’ll see you later, louis,” harry tells him with a wink and he’s gone.

bastard, louis thinks as he glares at the door, almost as if somehow trying to will harry back through it. but he doesn’t come. instead him and his broom are long gone from the hallway by the time louis emerges. and fine. louis can wait.

he isn’t sure how long but he can wait.

but if it means he gets to see what’s underneath that horrible janitor shirt then louis is willing to find out.

--

“do you have his number yet?”

niall’s talking through a mouthful of chips and salsa, a bit of cheese hanging from his bottom lip as liam bursts out laughing. louis glares up at him, throwing a crumpled napkin in his direction. it lands in the salsa instead.

“i don’t know what you’re talking about,” louis says simply.

“oh *please*,” niall continues, “i’m not an idiot, louis. we all know you want harry.”

“again, i haven’t a clue what you’re talking about,” louis replies, taking a chip as he takes a small bite out of the corner.

“zayn told me he’s single,” liam adds as louis rolls his eyes.

“he has nice hair.” louis finally admits.

“and...” niall trails off.

“and. and he’s got. nice legs,” louis mutters, staring at the countertop.

niall and liam look at him. “and a nice voice. he’s got a nice voice.” still no response, “and nice tattoos and fucking *christ* what do you want from me?”

“tell us the truth, louis. that’s all we want.” niall says simply.

“i barely know him, alright? *if*,” louis makes a point of enunciating the *if* clearly so niall hears it properly, “something were to happen between us, hypothetically, it wouldn’t for a while.”

“so you haven’t thought about his dick?” niall asks. both liam and louis choke on the chips they’re eating.

“*niall*,” liam reprimands, smacking him lightly on the shoulder.

“ow! jesus, i’m just asking, liam,” niall snaps.

louis leans his head against the counter. he should’ve seen this coming, honestly. you help one attractive curly haired boy get beer off his shirt and suddenly you want his dick. not that louis wouldn’t say no to harry styles’ dick if offered, but still. he doesn’t even know harry’s last name.

“styles.”

niall’s at liam’s laptop later that night after watching a movie (the amazing spider-man, as per louis’ turn to pick the movie this week for their once a month movie night sleepover), wearing a pair of ridiculously large slippers as liam and louis look at an old yearbook currently open on liam’s bed.

“what are you on about?” louis asks, shifting slightly on the bed.

“harry styles. that’s his name,” niall says impatiently. “keep up, lou.”

“i could’ve told you that,” liam says as niall rolls his eyes.

louis scoffs, turning the page. “are you facebook stalking him now? i think we should be asking niall how he feels about harry’s dick...” louis says as niall doesn’t move from his chair.

“he wears headbands a lot,” niall says after a moment. clearly he’s moved onto profile pictures.

louis doesn’t comment. instead, he glances to liam, who’s texting. most likely zayn. who’s most likely with harry. how wonderful. he’ll never escape harry styles so long as he lives.

“he wears really tight jeans. but he’s got the legs for it, so i guess it’s okay.”

louis is ignoring niall now. he’s decided. hopefully niall gets the message with his lack of response.

“his favourite movies are love actually and grease.”

lord above, harry styles is an absolute dream boat.

“he loves his sister a lot.”

louis slams the yearbook shut, tempted to see how much damage he could cause if he threw it at niall right now.

“i don’t want to hear this,” louis informs him as niall continues scrolling, apparently ignoring his pleas.

“for someone who doesn’t care you seem oddly upset by all this newfound information,” niall says knowingly, leaning against the chair as louis groans.

he takes one of liam’s pillows, pressing it to his face as he stays there for a few moments. so what if harry styles likes his sister and wears really tight jeans that accentuate his lovely long legs. so what. louis doesn’t care. louis wants to asphyxiate himself with this pillow. that’s all he wants. it’s a simple dream. he’s a simple boy.

“i just feel like a stalker, is all,” louis tells niall from underneath the pillow.

“i’m sorry i couldn’t quite hear that...” niall says. louis kicks in the direction he hears the voice coming from. he hits nothing but air. a failed attempt in his plot to end niall horan.

“lou, stop trying to suffocate yourself,” liam says from the end of the bed.

“i’m fine.” louis isn’t convincing anyone. not even himself.

“louis.” niall says, “louis louis louis louis louis louis louis.”

still nothing. he could possibly die here, on liam’s bed, thinking about harry styles in a headband. and possibly his dick. no, he’s definitely thinking about harry’s dick. he’s going to die thinking about harry styles’ dick. brilliant.

there’s a dip in the bed, to the side, and before louis can look up to see what’s going on niall is suddenly tickling his sides as louis bursts out laughing. he immediately moves, trying to wriggle from his grasp but it’s no use, niall having a firm grip as louis lets out a small shriek.

soon liam is there as well and it’s a surprise attack, louis realizes as he breathlessly tries to get them to stop. it takes a minute but finally they let him go as he tries to catch his breath, knee beginning to throb from the sudden movement. “you’re - both -” louis huffs, standing as he makes his way toward the door, “assholes.”

niall’s behind him now, smacking a kiss to louis’ cheek loudly as he turns the door handle. “it’s all out of love, you know that,” he tells him as louis waves him off.

he makes his way downstairs to get a makeshift package of ice, putting some in a bag before closing it, pressing it to his knee. he’s getting distracted. with harry, with school, with family, with everything. he’s distracted from the one thing he needs to be focusing on.

which is the routine. he needs to focus on the routine, louis reminds himself as he winces when the ice touches his skin.

when he finally gets back upstairs they all pile into liam’s bed, falling asleep somewhere around two am with niall snoring loudly beside him.

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louis’ biology midterm is on monday. it’s saturday. so he shouldn’t be worrying about his midterm right now because he’s drunk. or tipsy, at least. he’s somewhere in between, possibly. the hazy sort of middle ground, he thinks, taking another sip of his drink. he likes it. his heart is pounding in his ears and he’s got this weird sort of warm feeling throughout his body, like he’s been sitting in front of a fire for ages and it’s a wonderful, wonderful feeling.

they’re at a party, another friend of niall’s who he can’t seem to remember the name of. either way he’s sitting with liam and zayn on a couch, discussing the politics of chewing gum during an exam. louis is anti gum chewing, saying it distracts those around the person with their incessant

noises while liam is pro gum chewing, claiming it helps calm the test writer and therefore making it easier for them to answer the questions.

zayn doesn't take a side. but louis knows if he would, he'd taken liam's.

"harry should be here soon," zayn comments. louis says nothing, instead picking off the label on his beer bottle.

louis turns to see both liam and zayn looking at him. "what?"

"i *said*," zayn repeats impatiently, "harry should be here soon."

louis scoffs. "dunno why that would matter to me."

zayn gives him a knowing look, raising his eyebrows as louis says nothing. instead he continues to pick off the label on his beer, liam saying something about getting more drinks but louis isn't focusing on his words. instead he's thinking about harry, what he's doing, what he's wearing.

niall's helping with the music, large headphones over his ears as he begins fiddling around with the soundboard in front of him. he's standing next to someone who louis recognizes from his english class, though he can't put a name to them. john? jordan? josh? josh. that's it. josh. josh devine. or, alternatively, josh *define* as he and liam had nicknamed him in the seventh year with their ever present wit, apparently. niall's had a not-so-subtle crush on him since year four when josh offered him a juice box. apparently the crush is still alive and well to this day, louis observes as he watches niall laugh at something josh's told him, pressed close to his side.

louis takes another sip of his drink when he pauses because, well. there's harry. it's almost like his heart forgets to beat for a moment before picking up again, fast now in his chest as he leans back against the couch.

"you alright?" liam asks. louis nods.

"completely fine," louis lies.

harry's wearing plaid, and those tight jeans, and he's smiling and lord, this isn't fair. a few of his shirts buttons are undone and louis is suddenly very aware of how much skin is exposed. his cheeks feel hot, and not because of the amount of beer he's consumed.

"sorry i'm late," he begins apologetically, sitting down beside louis at the end of the couch. zayn had made room for him but apparently harry had decided sitting down on the small space beside louis had been a good idea. not that louis is complaining, with the way he smells. no, he's not complaining at all. "my sister needed a ride to her boyfriend's."

liam shakes his head. "we weren't doing much anyway, louis was discussing the merits of gum chewing during exams," he says as louis swats at his arm. he looks up at liam, who's now mouthing something like 'tipsy' and 'drunk' to harry and motioning toward him.

"hey!" louis cries, pouting. "i'm fuzzy, is all. just a little fuzzy."

"course you are, lou," liam tells him with a small smile.

"do you want another one then?" harry offers and louis realizes how close harry is to him, his breath warm on louis' cheek.

"i'm, um," louis says, not turning to look at harry for fear of how he'll react. he figures it would be something akin to a bird in heat, squawking about and trying to kiss harry's face. instead louis

looks at his bottle. half empty. he's still got a way to go. "i'm alright, actually. thank you though."

harry nods. "save my seat for me, yeah?" he asks.

"dunno. people have been lining up to sit with me all night..." louis trails off as harry laughs quietly before stalking off into the kitchen, louis possibly watching him the entire time he does.

"what's that about you not caring if harry's here or not?" zayn asks.

louis glares at him. "fuck off," he says as both liam and zayn snort, amused.

liam looks like he's about to say something when harry returns with an open bottle, sitting back down beside louis on the couch. zayn starts talking about something, harry joining in as louis listens quietly. their words float around him, voices soft in his ear, which he finds oddly comforting with all the chaos around him.

but louis can't really focus with harry so close to him. everytime he talks his voice is low, coming from his chest with a sort of rumbling. he talks with his hands, louis realizes after a few moments. flailing his fingers around in an attempt to try and get his point across at whatever he's trying to explain. and his *dimples*, louis thinks, his dimples that he adores so much. louis blames the beer he's had for his inability to stop staring at harry styles. then again, he supposes he's using the beer as an excuse to stare incessantly at harry styles. his head is spinning. louis likes it. he also likes harry. he likes harry a lot.

somewhere in their discussion of karaoke harry does something louis hadn't been quite expecting. he'd been sitting there, slouched on the couch, listening to liam describe his thirteenth birthday party (first ever boy/girl party in their class. it had all been a rather large ordeal, actually) when they'd sung grease lightning together when louis interjects.

"you *refused* to sing, if i do recall, mr. liam payne. i had to practically drag you up there with me because you were too afraid to embarrass yourself in front of danielle," he says, zayn laughing loudly from his end of the couch.

"i didn't know the words!" liam defends.

"you're a terrible liar. they're on the *screen* for you to read along," louis tells him, poking at his cheek. he does once, twice, three times before liam gives him an irritated look.

"harry and i did a cover of a whole new world once," zayn pipes in. louis is still poking liam's cheek.

"oh god, don't bring that up," harry says slowly, reaching out his hand and, well.

he takes the finger louis has assigned to poking liam's cheek, holding it loosely in his hand as louis doesn't move for a few moments, trying to figure out if this actually happening or not. but harry doesn't let go of his finger. in fact, he begins to run his thumb along the back of louis' hand in such a way that he's finding it hard to concentrate on a whole lot of anything right now.

"are there videos?" louis asks. he curls his finger around harry's hand awkwardly.

"yes. but i've made sure zayn doesn't release them to the public," harry replies.

"zayn?" louis asks, looking toward him.

"there are videos..." zayn begins. harry's doing this thing now, with louis' hand, where he's intertwining their fingers and louis is having trouble focusing again. "but unfortunately i'm sworn

to secrecy.”

“even for me?” louis pouts.

“even for you, i’m afraid. harry can be quite terrifying sometimes,” zayn replies as louis looks up toward harry now.

“impossible. he’s a kitten.” louis says.

harry gasps in an attempt to look offended, eyes widening. “i am *not* a kitten,” he argues, but louis shakes his head.

“even when you’re mad you’re still a kitten,” louis says. he giggles.

liam and zayn are in some sort of discussion as louis turns his face slightly, harry still looking at him as he laughs quietly. “have you ever heard of buttons, styles?” louis teases.

harry frowns. “i was warm,” he protests.

“warm,” louis repeats, feeling the pad of harry’s thumb drag across the back of his hand in a slow, circular motion.

“louis?” harry finally asks.

“hm?” he hums in response.

harry doesn’t say anything for a moment, louis too wrapped in their hands to notice anyway. it’s just that his hand is so small compared to harry’s, he thinks after a moment. completely encompasses his own. louis likes it. feels more at home, having his hand nestled against harry’s.

“i think i can show you now.”

louis’ brows furrow. “show me what? your kitten impression?”

“that’s for another time i’m afraid,” harry says softly, lips ghosting along louis’ ear and *fuck*. “i meant i can show my dancing now, if you’d like.”

briefly, louis looks out onto the dancefloor. there’s quite a number of people there already, he notes, turning back to look at harry.

and he wants to see harry dance, he does. but he also likes harry being this close, having his hand in louis’ own. he doesn’t want to give that up so easily.

“if you must leave me,” louis says dramatically as harry laughs.

“i’ll be back before you know it,” harry reassures him gently.

he carefully pulls himself away from louis and off the couch, though keeps their hands together as he slowly pulls louis to his feet. “i need you to get a good seat,” harry explains, grinning wickedly at him and *oh*.

but before louis has a chance to react harry’s shuffling off, leaving louis standing on the edge of the dancefloor as he crosses his arms over his chest. he follows harry as he makes his way toward niall, whispering something to him as louis blinks. somewhere to his left he can hear zayn and liam whispering quietly to one another but he doesn’t look at them. instead he stays focused on harry.

the song changes to something louis doesn't know, something fast and upbeat that makes the floor shake just slightly. but harry stays firm, body not swaying as louis takes in a deep breath. it's rap music. music he isn't used to. which is fine just something different, he supposes.

then, suddenly, harry's moving. and louis is sure he hasn't seen anything more captivating.

whenever louis had imagined harry dancing up until this point he had never been sure what to expect. with his long limbs louis assumed he'd be all over the place, no control, no way of keeping himself from toppling over. but it's quite the opposite, actually. harry's got a sense of control louis is almost envious of how he moves so carefully, so precise.

it's not what louis is used to. he's used to choreographed movements, of the same positions and the same routines all put formally together. but harry? harry's different. he moves his hips, he shuffles along the floor, he's all over the place. and yet on the other hand he's composed and careful and it's making louis' head spin. sort of a controlled chaos.

he's beautiful, is the thing. there's a bit of sweat on his forehead but louis can't take his eyes off of him.

other people have begun to take notice as well, apparently, taking a step back and watching him as louis smiles to himself. harry certainly knows how to put on a show, louis thinks as he chews on the inside of his cheek.

he's good. more than good, actually. he's fucking brilliant. the song begins to fade as harry finishes with some ridiculous pose, waving his hands about over his head as louis laughs, shaking his head.

"so?" harry approaches him now, not even bothering to try and hide the ridiculously proud grin on his face.

"so." louis repeats, trying to hide his own obnoxious grin on his face.

"so. tell me what you think," harry presses as he stands in front of louis now, hands gently on either side of his waist.

"well," louis begins, taking in a deep breath. harry's clouding his thoughts again, making his world spin just a little more. "it was impressive."

harry raises an eyebrow. "and?"

"and. it was unlike anything i've seen before," louis adds. harry frowns.

"that doesn't sound good," harry says after a moment.

"no no no," louis says finally, trying to put his thoughts together. it's difficult. harry makes doing normal, everyday things difficult. "i mean, you have good form. and you need a bit of work in a few areas but you're really good, harry. you're brilliant."

harry's frown soon fades as he nods and louis now realizes that he's no longer standing in the middle of the dance floor, now instead backed up against a wall as he pauses. he doesn't remember that. he doesn't remember moving.

"good enough to help you?" harry asks, licking his lips. christ.

"possibly," louis responds, smirking as he watches harry's face drop, slightly. "i'm kidding, i'm kidding, of course you can."

but louis doesn't want to talk about this anymore. he wants to talk about how close harry is to him, crowding his space and hovering just over his lips. neither of them say anything, standing in one another's space and everything else seems to fade around them. all he sees is harry.

"can i kiss you now?" harry asks, voice low.

"why are you even asking, for christ's sake," louis responds quickly.

harry grins and louis is about to lecture him on the ethics of teasing someone when they're half drunk but he's already leaning in and the words seem to escape him. instead harry press his lips against louis' in a gentle, quick motion.

and it's perfect.

perhaps not the sort of kiss from those films he'd watch with his sisters when they were younger; with the fireworks and raising one's foot to signify how beautiful of a kiss it is. but louis doesn't need fireworks to know how good of a kisser harry is.

he kisses slow, lazy, like he knows how long louis has been wanting to kiss him for. then he ever so gently begins sucking on louis' lower lip and louis let out a small moan, unable to stop himself. he pauses, cheeks flushing as he pulls back, laughing quietly.

harry's hands are still on his waist, gentle, his fingertips somehow underneath his shirt and pressing lightly against his skin. louis likes it. "like that?" harry teases, taking a bit of louis' lower lip between his teeth.

"a little," louis says simply, though he knows for a fact his smile is giving him away.

they're kissing again, harry apparently impatient to put his lips back on louis' own as he begins to lick into his mouth, careful with each movement he makes. harry's hands are beginning to explore, just slightly, and it makes louis' breath hitch in his throat each time his fingers make contact with his skin.

"do you," louis begins as harry starts kissing along his neck, his thumb gently running along louis' jawline, "like movies?"

"i like movies." harry answers between peppering kisses along his collarbone.

"do you like dinner?"

he can feel harry smile against his skin. "i like dinner. and i like movies."

"how do you like dinner and a movie and my company for an entire evening?" louis suggests, feeling oddly nervous as he does so. though he isn't sure why when harry's presently sucking on the skin just below his ear.

"i think i'd like that very much."

"so when are you free, styles?" louis asks, trying to sound suave and cool. mostly he sounds out of breath, panting at the way harry's licking around the shell of his ear.

"how does next friday sound? say... seven?"

"six thirty," louis says firmly.

harry pauses, looking at him as if unsure at how serious he's being. louis giggles into harry's

shoulder, burying his face somewhere in harry's neck. "so seven doesn't work?" harry asks.

"no, seven's fine. i'm just being an asshole," louis says, voice muffled by harry's shirt.

"of course," harry says, almost knowingly, as he nips at the edge of louis' ear.

and just like that, he's going on a date. with harry styles.

--

"liar."

louis looks up from his english notes, to find niall glaring at him from across the library study table he's presently situated at.

"you told me you didn't even like harry," niall says, sitting in a chair as louis watches him silently.

"i never said that. i said i liked his tight jeans," louis replies, "now can i get back to studying?"

niall shakes his head. "i just found you've got a date with him. you wanna know how i found out?"

"i don't, actually. you can tell me when i'm done with my midterm review for english," louis says.

"i was in line for my lunch in the cafeteria," niall begins. clearly louis isn't going to get any studying done for at least the next twenty minutes so he should just give up. "and josh comes up to me in line -"

louis snorts. "josh? josh *define*?" he asks.

"oh my god, stop using that nickname for christ's sake. one day he's actually going to hear you say it and never speak to me again," niall says as louis smirks. "anyway. as i was saying. i was waiting to get my lunch when josh comes up to me and says if i've heard the news about you. i ask if it's about the audition you got at juilliard. he says no. and when i was getting my chips he tells me -"

"is this going to be a play by play or can you just get to the fucking point?" louis interrupts as niall flips him off.

"he tells me if i've heard about you and that curly haired kid. which i'm assuming is harry, though in his case it'd be more poofy than curly, i think. anyway. i ask him if this about you and him making out against a wall for almost two hours -"

"it wasn't *two hours*, jesus, niall," louis says as niall folds his hands on the table impatiently. "sorry, sorry, continue."

"as i was saying. he told me that you're apparently going on a date with this bloke on friday. i laughed because you would've told me first if you were going on a date with him, right?" niall's not really asking. he's more so accusing.

louis sighs, leaning his head back for a few moments as he pinches the bridge of his nose. niall has a point. the only reason liam knows is because of zayn who had first heard from harry. it's all one big horrific circle, really.

"we might. possibly. be going on a date." louis says finally through his hands.

"and you didn't think to tell me?" niall's raising his voice in the middle of the library. louis stands,

closing his book as he ushers the both of them out before they get kicked out.

“i thought i’d told you. i’d been a bit drunk that night,” louis explains once they’re out the doors. though he’s not sure it’s mattered since essentially the entire library heard all that niall had to say.

“all you really told me was something about harry having a good kitten impression,” niall says as louis blinks.

“christ.” louis breathes. he doesn’t remember that. he vaguely remembers briefly discussing kittens and harry, but he remembers no impressions.

“well?” niall’s got his arms crossed over his chest, looking at louis as he feels a pang of guilt run through him.

“okay, yes, we’re going on a date. on friday. and i should’ve told you. i’ve just been studying and haven’t had a chance to do much of anything,” louis explains, and it’s true. for the past two days he’s only ever been in the library, practice rooms, or curled up on his bed reading.

niall narrows his eyes, looking at louis for a few moments. “alright. fine. whatever. you’ve been busy,” he says with a wave of his hand.

“are you sure?”

“course i’m sure, lou. m’too lazy to hold a grudge anyway,” niall says sincerely.

“right, of course,” louis says with a small laugh, “i have to go practice anyway so i’ll see you later, yeah?”

niall nods. “when you come to liam’s on saturday after your date and tell us all about it.” he demands.

“even details on how he kisses? cause he’s a good kisser, niall, let me tell yo-”

but niall’s not listening anymore, hands over his ears as he whistles an obnoxiously loud tune. “bye, lou!” he calls before walking off down the hallway.

louis smirks, watching niall go for a few moments, wiggling his bum in this ridiculous way the entire time. he makes a mental note to text liam about saturday as he begins to pack up his things from the library, closing his bag as he makes his way toward the practice rooms. school’s over in five minutes anyway so it’s not like he’s going to miss anything. he makes a quick stop in the bathrooms, changing into his practice clothes before making his way down the hallway once more.

the practice room is empty as he pushes open the door, making his way toward his usual corner. the fan is still making that terrible noise, louis notes as he opens his bag. with the sunlight pouring through the windows he sets his ipod and speakers in their usual spot before gripping the barre, breathing steadily.

he begins his stretches, trying to clear his head in the quiet of the room. it’s just him. briefly he looks toward the small window in the door, finding nothing before looking straight ahead once more. focus. he needs to focus.

once finished his stretches he goes to the familiar song, pressing play as he takes his first position.

*all the right friends in all the wrong places,
so yeah, we’re going down*

the music begins and he starts, breathing steadily. his knee is aching but louis doesn't pay attention to it, doesn't let his mind settle too long on the pain. instead he turns his ankles, counting in his head.

*just paint a picture, of a perfect place,
they got it better than what anyone's told you*

the room itself is a little too warm, having forgotten to open a window. the music is loud and the floor is steady beneath his feet.

for a moment, a picture of aiden passes through his mind as louis' eyes trail to the corner of the room. then too hazy, how just last week he'd been standing there. but this isn't about them, louis tells himself. this is about his routine and his audition.

*they'll be the king of hearts, and you're the queen of spades,
then we'll fight for you like we were your soldiers*

maybe he puts too much pressure on himself. maybe niall's right. maybe the only reason he ever wanted to dance in the first place was to get noticed. with all his sisters and the divorce between his parents maybe he'd just wanted to be seen.

then again, perhaps it was because he'd had all this emotion inside of him and nowhere to put it.

he moves his feet, extending his arms as the music continues to play on. he's doing good, he's still upright. that's all that matters.

*do you think i'm special?
do you think i'm nice?
am i bright enough to shine in your spaces?*

harry's not there. louis had half expected to see his green eyes peering through the window, but there's nothing. there's no one. which is fine. perfect, even.

he shouldn't have expected to see harry anyway. he's working. that's why he's here, anyway. to work. not to watch him dance.

louis takes in a deep breath, a shoot pain coming up from his knee but it's fine. he pushes forward, moving moving moving until -

he's on the floor once again. louis swallows, wincing as he sits up slowly. he wants to laugh. wants to laugh and laugh until his sides hurt because it's better than the alternative of curling up into a ball and crying. wants to laugh at himself and he wants to laugh at the fact that he thought he could actually follow through with this audition.

"you know, louis," his first ever dance teacher, ms. rink had once told him, "i think you're a very talented dancer."

he'd only been six, looking up at her after having a particularly embarrassing fall in front of the entire class. "i fell. everyone saw it," he'd said after a moment, picking at the bottom of his shoes to try and hold back his fresh tears.

she'd gently put a fingertip under his chin, tilting his head up to look at her. he still remembers the colour of her eyes; a blue and green mixture, gentle and kind along with the tone of her voice. almost like honey.

"just because you fell doesn't mean you're not good," she'd told him, voice serious.

louis had wiped at his cheeks, some tears still on his cheeks as they'd wet the back of his hand.

"promise me you'll keep dancing, okay, louis? can you do that?"

he hadn't understood the question, a part of him still doesn't understand how she'd believed him when he'd been so young. seeing something in him when he was six years old, something he still can't see now, sitting on the floor of the practice rooms at eighteen years old.

"i'm not going to get any better," he'd replied stubbornly.

"you will. i promise."

he doesn't remember much else from that class, really, apart from that moment. he wonders what she's doing now, if she's still teaching, if she'd even remember him. he can recall the dance studio she'd owned downtown, the faded yellow walls, his mom always standing at the door and watching him with tears in her eyes. louis had never understood why, but every time he'd danced she'd cry.

"why are you crying, mummy?" he'd asked her, taking off his shoes after his lesson one week.

"nothing, baby." she'd replied, voice shaking as she'd smoothed out his hair. "one day you'll see."

maybe that's why he's having so much trouble. because ms. rink and his mother, because all these people believe in him so much it's beginning to weigh on him, sink into his shoulders, a constant stress on him.

he's supposed to be dancing for *himself* but somehow it feels like he's made it more so about the people around him.

and for a moment he allows him to look once more to the window in the door. harry's still not there.

--

"i'm backing out."

"he's going to be there in ten minutes. you can't back out now, you asshat."

"put liam on the phone again at least he was *considerate*," louis snaps.

"you'll be fine, lou. you look great and -"

"you don't know what i'm wearing niall. what if i'm wearing a loincloth?" louis interrupts him.

"you're not. or you fucking better not be, louis tomlinson. you're going to be *fine*. now hang up and get your shit together." niall lectures him.

"i'm going to die."

"you're being dramatic. i'm hanging up on you now."

"niall."

there's a pause. for a moment louis can hear what he assumes is liam and zayn in the background, no doubt yelling over fifa. louis wants to be playing fifa, not standing in his room in his boxers feeling ill at the fact that harry will be at his door in approximately nine minutes.

“listen to me. don’t overthink it. you’ll just freak yourself out. it’s going to be great, louis. i promise.” niall’s voice is softer now, encouraging.

louis smiles faintly, closing his eyes for a moment. “alright. alright i’m going to get my things.”

“good. text me later alright? but not during your date for christ’s sake,” niall says as louis laughs.

“i won’t. promise.”

“love you, louis.”

“love you too, niall.”

he hangs up, ignoring the sick feeling circling in his stomach as he looks in the mirror. his outfit is good. his hair is good. he’s good. he just needs to fucking breathe.

opening his door he makes his way into the kitchen, his mother and sister lottie at the table as he looks between them. “what?” he asks, smoothing out his shirt.

“where did you meet this boy again?” his mother asks, stirring her spoon around in her tea mug.

“through liam’s boyfriend, zayn,” louis replies. “why?”

“nothing. just wondering. you look nice though,” she encourages, lottie giggling as louis scrunches his nose toward the two of them.

“so you like him then? harry?” lottie asks as louis blinks.

“well i, um, i don’t know. he’s fine,” louis stutters.

“just fine?” his mother presses.

“is there a reason i’m getting interrogated right now?” louis asks as both lottie and his mother exchange looks.

they’re about to add something else when there’s a knock at the door. it’s six fifty-five. he’s early. immediately lottie pushes herself off her stool, racing toward the door as louis groans. there’s no stopping her, he realizes with defeat as he hears the door open.

“who are you then?” lottie asks. louis briefly considers ramming his head into the corner of the counter.

“i’m harry. i’m, um, here to pick up louis?”

“coming!” louis calls out, turning down onto the hallway as his stomach does that weird little flip again.

lottie turns, eyebrows raised as louis hears his mother’s footsteps behind him. jesus. harry’s been here all of two seconds and louis wouldn’t blame him if he wanted to back out already.

“hey.” harry says, smiling.

“hi.” louis replies, feeling his cheeks blush as his mother clears his throat from behind him. “mum, lottie, this is harry. harry this is my nosey mother and my especially nosey sister, lottie. be lucky the rest of them aren’t home or you’d be trampled by now.” he introduces, mostly begrudgingly.

harry grins, shaking both their hands and as louis looks back at his mother he's dumbfounded because somehow, he's already charmed them. his sister looks positively love struck and his mother is smiling like a schoolgirl.

they need to go.

"lovely to meet you both. i'll have him back before midnight, promise," harry informs his mother, flashing another smile and louis is almost certain she swooned when he had.

"have a good time you two. though maybe you want some aspirin? louis has a habit of talking a lot..." his mother teases.

"oh my god," louis mutters, looking to harry as with a silent plea of 'let's go before i stab myself'.

harry gets the message, putting a gentle hand on the small of louis' back as he leads him out the door. "i'll have to pass. but thank you!" he tells them with a wave as he walks louis out toward his car.

it's small, and brown, but yet somehow suits harry just perfectly. "sorry about them," he says apologetically.

"i like 'em. remind me of you," harry replies as louis looks at him.

"what's that supposed to mean?" louis asks.

he's about to open the door when harry comes beside him abruptly, pulling on the handle as he opens it, motioning for louis to step inside. "what sort of date do you think i am?" harry asks, trying to sound appalled.

louis smirks. "right. sorry."

he carefully climbs into the car, ignoring the way his heart feels like it's somehow found it's way into his throat. it's clean, he notices, first off. and smells like pine trees, which he finds endearing and also slightly amusing.

there's a band playing louis doesn't recognize, a change from niall's incessant eagles blaring in his car.

"are you hungry?" harry asks.

louis turns, looking at him as they don't say anything for a moment until finally they burst into laughter. "jesus, harry. what a way to break the silence," louis teases as harry keeps his eyes on the road, waving a hand in his direction.

"what?! it's a question!" harry defends.

"i could eat, yes. i thought that was the point of this date. dinner and a movie." louis says.

harry sticks out his tongue, louis smiling as he leans his head back against his seat. he takes the familiar street into downtown, talking about the band playing as louis listens quietly. he likes listening to harry. even if it's about some obscure band from colorado he's never heard of.

the discussion carries until harry pulls into a small restaurant, a diner near the water as louis unbuckles himself. he goes to open the door until harry shakes his head.

"no, wait -"

and just like that he's out the driver's door, opening it as louis steps out. harry doesn't let go of his hand, leading him inside as louis follows beside him.

dinner's nice. it's filled with conversation and harry telling him about his life, where he grew up, things louis hadn't previously known about. louis tells him a bit about his family, picking at his salad as their waitress brings them more drinks. outside there are a few ships sailing by and harry's smiling and it's lovely.

harry grew up in cheshire, with his mom and sister gemma. he doesn't mention his father, and louis doesn't push him to. him and his sister used to have tea parties and singing competitions with the occasional dance competition. harry assumes that's where he'd first started dancing. when it occurred to him that it's something he could do.

money was tight so he got a job at a bakery while in school where he'd met zayn. the two of them had bonded immediately and they'd never looked back.

"so you and zayn are pretty close then?" louis asks.

"yeah. he's my rock, i think. solid. steady."

it had taken a while for zayn to get into the whole 'dancing' thing. and even sometimes he'll refuse to do it when harry asks him, apparently. but he's good, harry had reassured him. very good.

according to harry they'd learned from a few kids at school, and on weekends would go out and attend parties or sneak into clubs. no formal training, simply picking up dance from those around them. which, louis still can't seem to wrap his head around.

"so you've never had a dance lesson in your life?"

"never. though i used to sometimes watch them, outside a dance studio near my mom's hair salon," harry recalls.

"christ. i can't even imagine. i wouldn't know where i'd begin," louis tells him truthfully.

"we don't have the same style, so i suppose your lessons make sense," harry says.

louis nods. he picks a little more at his food, telling harry about his own lessons and how he'd been offered the audition for juilliard when his teacher at the time, mr. scott had recommended him.

"i don't have a back up plan. i don't have anything else lined up if i don't get in," louis admits after a moment.

harry's quiet, fingertips brushing against louis' wrist. "you'll get in." he finally says.

louis looks at him, watching the serious expression on his face. and the crazy, insane thing is, louis almost believes him.

"we're going to be late, aren't we?" louis says after a moment as harry seems to snap back into reality, nodding.

"right, yeah, shit," he replies, pulling out his wallet as louis makes a noise of protest. "no. this is a *date*, louis."

he doesn't argue. doesn't see the point, really. harry pays the bill and they go back to the car,

following the familiar road to the movie theatre.

it's strange, being with harry in all the places he knows the best in this town. because when he's with harry, it's like he's experiencing it all for the first time. somehow, like coming home.

harry pays for the ticket and insists on getting popcorn, the largest bag, with extra butter as per louis' request.

"i'm surprised it's not dripping everywhere," harry comments as louis holds the bag.

"that's the art of butter with popcorn, young harold. a miracle to mankind," louis replies knowingly.

"miracle might be a bit of a stretch..." harry begins as louis gives him a look.

"popcorn and butter are my thing, harry. my saviour. the one thing in this world i turn to in times of trouble, my confidant, the thing i hold dearest in this world." louis informs him.

harry puts a light hand around louis' waist, pulling him close as he laughs quietly into his hair. "so i'm competing with popcorn and butter?" he asks after a moment.

louis nods. "fraid so."

harry nods, as if accepting the challenge as they enter the theatre. and to fill every first date clichè they make their way to the back row, sitting in the farthest left corner as louis eats a few pieces of popcorn.

apparently they're seeing the new brad pitt flick, harry tells him.

"so you've got it bad for brad, eh?" louis asks, leaning back in his seat.

"i never said that."

"i mean, i don't blame you. but i'm more of a george clooney man myself," louis says as harry looks at him now in disbelief.

"you can't be *serious*."

louis snorts. "is this going to come between us? cause this is your chance to back out now, styles."

harry shakes his head. "i'll change your mind." he says simply.

he takes a piece of popcorn from the bag, nose scrunching as he eats it. louis laughs, putting a few more pieces in his mouth. "how do you like it, love?" he teases.

"you're going to eat that whole bag yourself, i hope you know," harry tells him.

louis grins, nodding. "that was my plan."

harry doesn't comment as the lights dim, louis shifting in his chair as the previews begin to play. he wonders what type of movie watcher harry is on dates. if he's the type to actually listen, or, alternatively, if he's the type to try and see if it's possible to make out for the entirety of the film. though truthfully, louis can't figure it out.

because harry's knee is touching louis' own, his hand is inching near louis' thigh but his eyes are focused on the screen. mixed signals, louis thinks as he scrunches his nose.

so louis decides on a new course of action. he takes his hand out of the popcorn bag and slowly, carefully, begins to suck the butter off of each finger. from beside him harry coughs, quietly, clearing his throat as louis starts on the next finger.

if harry was paying attention to the movie he isn't anymore. he clears his throat for a second time, running his hands along his thighs.

"i got you napkins," he says, voice hushed.

"don't need them. like putting my mouth to use," louis informs him. harry coughs again.

"jesus," harry breathes finally as he turns, facing louis now.

they're not even five minutes into the film when harry kisses him roughly, demanding his full attention as louis holds back a whimper. he somehow manages to get the bag of popcorn onto the floor, abandoning it completely.

it's a bit awkward, trying to get comfortable with an obnoxious armrest between them. but louis tries to ignore it, instead focusing on kissing harry back.

there's still a sense of urgency, louis notes as harry gently holds onto his elbows, tugging him closer as louis tries to take him all in, tries to remember how it feels with harry's lips pressed against his own. in the dim light of the movie theatre everything seems to move more slowly, each movement more noticeable.

"you taste like butter," harry says against his lips, still smiling.

"good or bad?" louis whispers back as harry nips at his lower lip.

"good. definitely good," he reassures him.

harry begins to run his tongue along louis' lower lip and louis is having issues holding back the noises that just might escape his mouth if harry keeps going that. so he shifts, moving as close as he can with that fucking armrest in the way.

"oh, fuck it," louis finally mutters.

trying to be as careful and quiet as he can possibly manage he slowly slips from his chair, bringing himself onto harry's lap. harry's breathing heavily, louis bringing his knees to either side of his waist in an attempt to keep himself steady.

"hi," louis says softly, lips hovering just above harry's.

"hi," harry pants, his hands resting on louis' hips.

"good thing i'm so flexible, innit?" louis asks as harry nearly whimpers at that.

but he holds back, biting down on his lower lip as louis smiles, proudly. the air between them is charged, alight with something as louis tries to breathe, to calm the pounding in his chest. it's different with harry, louis thinks briefly, different than with aiden. cause a part of him, since meeting harry, somehow always craves his touch. to be close to him. to feel him near. he's not sure he's ever had that with anyone else.

and that scares him. terrifies him, actually.

"louis," harry says quietly, barely audible above the movie.

“hm?”

he’s carefully undoing a button on harry’s shirt, rather preoccupied with sucking on a bit of skin just underneath his ear.

“*louis*,” harry’s voice is urgent now, almost pleading.

it doesn’t take long for louis to realize just why harry’s so desperate for his attention, feeling his already hard cock press up against his thigh.

“your car?” louis asks. it’s the only place he can think of right now in the haze he’s currently in.

harry nods. louis carefully slides off of him, trying to be as discreet as possible. though he supposes their cover was already blown long ago when they’d started kissing in the back of a movie theatre in the first place.

they walk down the stairs of the theatre, louis catching glimpse of something he assumes is a zombie, blood and gore flying everywhere as he nearly laughs. instead he grips harry’s hand, feeling him directly behind him as they walk through the movie theatre.

harry can’t stop touching him, kissing the back of his neck briefly as they walk through the lobby and christ, how far is his car?

apparently it’s near the back of the lot, louis realizes as harry unlocks the back doors. this is going to take some getting used to, louis thinks as he watches harry climb into the back seat. he’s already painfully hard himself, following suit as harry lays across the seat, feet nearly out the door.

louis crawls between his legs, trying to find a comfortable position on the seat as he closes the door behind him, positioning himself on his stomach, still between harry’s legs. harry’s back is to the door as he sits up, making more space for louis, watching louis as he moves.

“lou -”

louis kisses him, licking into his mouth immediately as harry makes a whining sort of sound. a hand comes to rest at the back of louis’ neck as he presses his palm to harry’s dick, massaging it through the fabric of his jeans as he hears harry inhale sharply.

“don’t. tease,” harry says finally as louis grins.

he begins work on the button of harry’s jeans. “how do you get these on? they’re so tight...” louis trails off, lifting up a bit of harry’s shirt to press a kiss to his stomach, perhaps enjoying a bit too much the way his muscles clench when he does.

“are you seriously talking about this right now?” harry asks, laughing breathlessly.

“just curious,” louis says innocently, running his tongue along harry’s skin.

it takes a bit of work, harry shimmying from his pants as louis, his briefs coming off next. helps pulling them down. next comes his briefs, which are a bit easier, louis pulling them down and freeing harry’s cock as it slaps against his stomach. louis can feel harry’s hand in his hair, gently tugging as louis briefly presses a kiss to the tip of harry’s cock.

he’s already so hard, louis notes as he feels his heart continually pounding in his chest. “are you - alright?” harry asks after a moment as louis nods.

“course i am, love,” louis reassures him gently.

and with a street light illuminating the car, the way harry's cheeks flush when louis puts his mouth on his cock as he moves his mouth down, carefully, taking more of him in as he does so. louis gently grips at harry's thighs, trying to steady himself from being moved around too much in the small, cramped space of the backseat.

harry grips a little tighter at his hair as louis continues, precome leaking into his mouth as he licks along harry's shaft.

it takes a few minutes to work himself up to putting the whole of harry in his mouth, getting used to the the feeling of him in the back of louis' throat. harry's breathing heavily, chest rising and falling rapidly as he calls out a continued mantra of his name *louis louis louis louis*, head tilted against the glass.

he pulls off of harry, pressing a gentle kiss to the inside of his thigh, feeling them tremble slightly under his touch.

"i'm gonna -" harry breathes, eyes moving to look at louis.

he's just so beautiful. he's stunning. louis wants to tell him that every day he possibly can, remind him of it when they're doing nothing except sitting in his car and driving down unfamiliar roads, when he wakes up in the morning with sleep still in his eyes, louis wants to tell him.

louis nods, taking harry in his mouth as he gasps, quietly, the sound loud in the near silence of his car. his stomach is sore and his head is pounding but then suddenly harry's coming as louis feels it hit the back of his throat, swallowing as he pulls off, perhaps a bit too soon as a small bit of come slides down harry's stomach.

he gently moves a bit of hair from harry's forehead, pressing a kiss to his temple as he then moves to lick along his stomach briefly, harry watching him silently with a loose, blissful smile on his face.

"salty. like butter," louis teases as harry laughs, voice hushed as louis sits himself up to kiss him.

they stay there for a while, louis taking a few kleenex from the front seat of harry's car as he cleans him up the best he can. from there louis tries to get himself off a few minutes later as harry wets his hand, spitting on it as he pumps louis' cock once, twice, three times before he himself comes in the back of his car.

louis curls up to his chest, running his fingertip along the small mark he'd left underneath harry's ear as he listens to the beat of his heart, steady in his chest as louis closes his eyes for a few moments. with aiden it was all touches and no words, but with harry? with harry he's all tender touches and kisses and telling louis just how lovely he is.

the drive home is silent, almost serene as harry holds his hand. and as tired as louis is he doesn't particularly want this night to end. he wants to stay in harry's car and go for a drive, an adventure, go anywhere his heart desires because right now, louis feels like he can conquer the world. it's at his fingertips, the world and all his dreams, with harry by his side. perhaps, louis dares himself to think for a moment, perhaps this is why love is so dangerous and so beautiful all at once. fills you with the idea that you can take the world with that person by your side when in reality you're sitting next to them, in their car, feeling your heart flutter in your chest.

if this even is love, louis thinks for a moment.

harry pulls into the driveway, stopping in front of the closed garage door as louis pouts.

“don’t wanna go in,” he says after a moment.

“don’t want you to go in,” harry replies.

louis is tracing lazy shapes along harry’s palm, reminding himself to breathe.

“thank you for tonight,” louis says sincerely.

“thank you for coming with me,” harry tells him gently.

he doesn’t want to say anything else, for fear it might ruin the moment. instead he kisses harry, chaste and brief before pulling away, opening the car door as he closes it.

“goodnight, harry.”

“goodnight, louis.”

he stands in the middle of the driveway, hugging his sweater to his chest as he watches harry back out then down the road again, his lights illuminating his path as he goes.

--

“what movie did you see again?”

louis pauses, blinking as he puts a piece of ham onto his sandwich. “the one with brad pitt?” he replies pathetically.

“did it not have a title?” niall presses, pouring a rather disturbing amount of mustard onto his bread.

“something with a z?” louis offers. it’s all he’s got to go on, really.

“world war z?” liam asks from across the counter, zayn pressed to his side.

“yes, that one,” louis says as zayn smirks.

“how was it? the movie?” he asks as louis narrows his eyes at him.

louis doesn’t respond for a moment, instead taking a moment to lay some lettuce and tomato onto his bread as he begins slicing some cheese. liam coughs, loudly, though louis still doesn’t look up.

“i hear it’s really good,” liam adds.

“though i think in order to see a movie you have to actually stay in the theatre...” zayn comments as niall snorts, amused.

“oh my god.” louis says after a moment, “how did harry even tell you? isn’t he away for the rest of the weekend?”

zayn raises an eyebrow. “we have phones, louis.”

louis groans, cutting his sandwich in half. he feels mildly uncomfortable, mildly being a rather large understatement as niall passes him a cup of water.

“the movie was boring anyway...” louis trails off before taking a bite of his food.

“really? cause i heard it was really good. like a cool zombie thriller,” zayn pipes up as louis glares

at him.

“you talk a lot,” louis comments, though he’s smiling.

zayn’s grinning himself, pressing a kiss to the top of liam’s head before whispering something to him, liam laughing quietly as louis decides to take a sip of his water instead. fifa’s still paused in niall’s living room, controllers spread across the floor haphazardly.

“so. how was he?” niall finally asks, breaking the silence.

and before louis can answer zayn bursts out laughing, loudly, louis doing the same as he nearly falls off his chair. liam yells a ‘niall!’ before throwing a slice of tomato at him, louis still unable to control himself as he keeps on laughing.

his sides are hurt as niall yelps, peeling the tomato off his arm as he looks between zayn and louis, who look as though they might topple over at any second from their laughter.

“i’m just asking, jesus!” niall almost yells above the noise.

the four of them continuing laughing, tears in louis’ eyes as he grips the counter. from somewhere on the counter zayn’s phone vibrates as louis stops mid bite into his sandwich.

“don’t -” louis begins because he knows who’s calling.

zayn grins, trying to calm himself down as he picks up his phone. “hellllllllo harry! we were just talking about you!”

louis moves quickly along the floor to the other side of the counter as he makes a reach to take zayn’s phone.

“what were we saying? oh, nothing much. louis was just telling us about the movie you two saw last night...” zayn continues, waving louis’ hand away as niall laughs loudly.

he almost gets his phone, a mere seconds away before niall pulls louis’ arm back, holding it firmly as zayn leans against the fridge.

“oh, that new brad pitt film? niall said it looks really good,” zayn says, picking at his nails as louis groans.

“yeah, dunno what kind of person would prefer george to brad either. must be lunatic...” zayn winks at louis. “i should go though, we’re in the middle of an intense fifa game and louis is telling us about your little make out session in your car.”

“oh my *god*,” louis says, loudly.

zayn pays no attention. “i’ll tell him. bye!” he hangs up, putting his phone onto the counter as louis is almost certain he’s going to die from mortification, niall releasing his arm. “harry wants you to text him. and to stop telling people you made out in his car.” zayn’s grinning as louis swats at his arm.

“i hate you,” louis says firmly.

“now now,” liam reprimands, “let’s get back to playing and stop ganging up on louis.”

louis nods to liam, taking his plate as they make their way into the living room once more. call it fate or call it karma but louis wins both games, dancing around the living room in defeat as zayn

tosses a controller in his direction.

--

harry's gone a little more into next week. he's with his dad apparently, spending some time with him and his sister before she goes off to school.

and while louis shouldn't miss him, he does. misses his dark hair, misses seeing him in the hallway.

he'd gotten an eighty-five on his biology midterm, which he supposes is good enough. he'd also gotten an A on his english paper, which he'd been rather proud of. though niall had gotten an A+, which louis had found hard to believe since he hadn't read the book *or* watched the movie.

"luck of the irish," niall had told him with a grin.

apart from that most of his time is spent dancing. he'll go into the practice rooms a little after school's out and won't leave until the sun's completely set and it's well into the evening.

he's stressed. on edge. can't seem to move properly or get his emotions just right. he thinks part of it might be because harry's gone, but the largest part of it is that his audition is in a little more than three weeks. the thought makes his stomach clench in an uncomfortable sort of way.

so he practices. and practices. and practices some more. does it any moment where he's not doing homework or sleeping. he repeats the routine through class in his head, when he's walking down the hallway, any second he can spare is dedicated and devoted to nothing else.

harry's been texting him on and off, though mostly he's with his family so he doesn't respond all that often. which louis understands, he just misses him, is all.

it's wednesday nearing six in the evening and louis has claimed defeat. defeat with his routine, defeat with his audition, defeat with doing anything in his life.

"you alright?"

louis turns, relief flooding through him at the familiar voice. harry's there, in the doorway, watching louis quietly with a look concern and amusement on his features. it's here louis realizes how ridiculous he looks, in the middle of the practice rooms with a look of defeat on his face.

it's the first time he's seen harry since their date. since the back of harry's car. since, well, since everything, he supposes.

"i'm um. i'm fine." louis stammers finally.

"you don't look fine," harry argues, taking a few cautious steps into the room.

"i'm stretching."

harry shakes his head. he stops in front of louis now, bending down so he's sitting on the floor in front of him. louis is near tears, the stress and frustration continually building inside of him as he looks at harry silently.

"i've got some time. why don't we work through it together?" harry offers, voice gentle in the chaos presently in louis' mind.

he leans over, slowly, pressing his lips to louis' for a few brief moments. it reminds louis just how

much he's *missed* harry. but he soon pulls away, resting his forehead against louis' own as he runs his thumb briefly along louis' cheek saying, *missed you*.

"it's just this one. part. i can't seem to get it," louis begins when harry pulls away from him finally, helping him up as harry nods.

"how's it supposed to go?"

louis shows him, running through each step slowly so as to not fall again. harry watches, quiet, not saying anything. his expression is unreadable, which makes louis a little uncomfortable.

when he's finally done he looks to harry, sighing loudly. "i can't get it."

harry's chewing his lower lip, brows furrowing as he runs a hand through his hair. "what if you tried something like this -" he trails off.

and he shows louis. does a small step as louis watches him for a few moments. harry turns his ankle just slightly, pulling an entirely different position than what louis had originally planned for his routine.

"but then how would i get to the next stance..." louis then says, showing harry as he pauses.

this goes on for a while. each of them interjecting and trying to figure out a way for louis to finally get this. harry's different than louis has ever seen him before. he's focused, driven, his voice is firm and low when he talks, each movement he makes controlled and centered.

they have different styles and yet somehow as louis follows harry's feet, it makes sense.

harry's just so sure of himself. has this air of confidence louis adores so much, most likely because it's something he's been lacking so much lately in himself.

so they piece it together bit by bit until harry turns on the music and motions for louis to dance. and he does. harry's got his arms crossed over his chest as louis plays the mantra in his head *one two three, one two three, one two three*, repeating the motions they'd just put together moments ago.

and he gets it.

he actually gets it. louis pauses, mostly in disbelief as he blinks. but before harry can say anything he rewinds the song, crouching over on his ipod until he reaches the part he needs. he stands up straight, repeating the movements again.

he gets it a second time.

louis feels a sense of bliss come over him, laughing loudly so as to make sure that this is actually, truly, happening. he's grinning, covering his mouth as he looks toward harry. he's got the same big smile, but he's nodding. almost as if he knew louis was going to do just fine. almost as if he'd known it all the long.

he's a few feet away when louis nearly sprints toward him, feet carrying him as harry's arms find his waist, louis wrapping his legs around harry's middle firmly. he's breathing heavily, running the pad of his fingertip along harry's features.

harry doesn't say anything. doesn't need too. louis can clearly see the adoration shining in his eyes, his green eyes in the soft lighting of the room.

and there, in the quiet and softness of the room, louis kisses him.

he responds immediately, arms tightening around louis as a bit of harry's curls tickle his forehead. it's slow, gentle, filled with something louis can't quite decipher. perhaps want, need, he thinks as harry gently licks into his mouth.

"missed you," harry breathes, voice hushed against his lips.

"missed you," louis responds after a moment. his heart is pounding so loudly within his chest he's afraid it might be loud enough for harry to hear.

but if harry does hear it, he doesn't comment on it. instead he carefully makes his way to the only chair in the room, sitting down carefully as louis shifts slightly, so he's now in harry's lap. he hasn't been gone long, yet somehow it's felt like years, louis thinks as he feels harry's soft skin underneath his fingers. like he's got to relearn harry, piece by piece.

from outside there's the sound of steady traffic, cars moving past them as louis begins to suck lightly on harry's lower lip. harry tilts his head back, just slightly as louis pulls back, pressing gentle kisses along his neck.

harry gently noses along louis' jawline, distracting louis from the mark he'd been working on just below harry's collarbone. he can feel harry's hands along his back, moving slightly to cup louis' ass gently as he inhales sharply.

"jesus, harry," louis says softly, kissing the corner of his mouth.

"i said i missed you," harry defends as louis smiles against his chin.

"hm, i suppose so," is all he says with a small laugh.

the air between them is heated, louis breathing heavily as he feels his world beginning to spin around him, uncontrollable. harry somehow makes him unable to control anything, his entire world feeling like it's slowly moving from his fingertips, away from his grasp. but louis doesn't mind, doesn't hardly seem to notice.

"i -" harry begins, momentarily distracted when louis nips along his jawline, "wanna -"

"wanna what, babe?" louis presses, harry's breath warm on his cheek.

"wanna fuck you. on the floor," harry breathes, though at this rate he's more so panting.

louis blinks and he's about to laugh when he looks to harry. his eyes are dark, voice low and serious and ok. he wasn't kidding. louis isn't even sure why he'd think harry would be joking about something like this anyway.

"yeah. yeah, yeah okay," louis says gently, kissing harry's lips messily before slowly sliding off of him.

harry makes a small moan and louis can already see the outline of his dick through his impossibly tight jeans and jesus. "i just need to find -" louis cuts himself off, harry nodding knowingly.

he rummages through his bag, hands trembling and fuck, he needs to focus. louis finally finds what he's looking for in his front pocket, lube along with a package of condoms, having originally bought them for niall, forgetting to give them to him. thank god for niall sometimes, honestly.

by the time louis gets it out harry's crowding his space as he kisses behind louis' ear, tugging at

the hem of his shirt. they're both on their knees, louis' back to harry in the stillness of the room.

he hasn't been with anyone since aiden. and louis is sure that thought should terrify him but it's just that it's harry, *his* harry, and that's all that matters. though louis' hands are still trembling and he's sure that harry can notice the way they shake against his skin, harry's fingers curling around louis' hand gently, as if reassuring him.

louis had been waiting for harry to rip off his clothes, to make quick work but it's the opposite, actually. his touch is gentle and patient, his lips smooth against louis' skin as he carefully takes off his shirt.

it's almost like he's learning louis. trying to memorize him, louis thinks as he feels harry's lips along the small of his back.

"you know what i thought when i first saw you?" harry asks finally, lips moving along louis' shoulder.

louis shakes his head. he's sure if he tries to talk right now his voice will break in an embarrassing way so he opts out of saying anything, instead humming for him to continue as harry gently bites down against his skin briefly.

"i thought i'd never seen anyone so beautiful," harry finishes after a moment and louis believes him.

he swallows as harry tugs on the hem of louis' pants, his practice pants, which are easily removed along with his boxers a few moments later. harry's fingertips dance along his waist, lips travelling anywhere they can touch, really.

"you okay?" harry finally asks after a moment.

"m'okay," louis manages in response.

he's completely exposed, laid bare for harry who's somehow discarded his shirt somewhere as louis turns, just slightly to press his lips to harry's. he responds almost immediately, pressing back as louis sighs against them quietly.

it calms him down, eases his nerves slightly.

from behind him harry's beginning to put lube on his fingers as louis take in a slow breath, bracing himself against the floor, both his hands splayed against the hardwood. "louis," harry says softly, one of his hands pressing small circles into louis' back, "you gotta relax, babe."

louis nods. he feels harry's lips briefly press to his back as he slides his first finger in. louis inhales sharply, fingers curling on the floor as harry's hand gently grips his thigh, steadying him. it's been so long, so so long but harry's so close and the desire for him is beginning to pool in his stomach, making his head spin.

harry's got his third finger in now as louis leans his forehead against the floor, rolling it to one side as he tries to breathe. and for a few moments harry pulls out of him as louis lets of a small whining sound, harry kissing the back of his thigh, reassuring him he's still here. harry goes to put on the condom and louis feels his chest tighten when he isn't there, isn't touching him, and he wonders when that happened. when he got so attached.

by the time harry pushes into him louis closes his eyes, nails digging into the floor as he takes in a deep breath. he puts a hand on his cock, pumping to help relieve some of the pressure for a few moments.

“harry - you need to - move -” louis manages, voice breaking.

harry presses gentle fingertips into the back of louis’ thigh apologetically before beginning to move as louis lets out a sound, low and from his chest. because he has harry, in this moment. harry’s his and even now louis can’t get enough of him.

he keeps saying words like *beautiful* and *lovely* among a few others louis can’t make out with the heat pooling in his stomach. louis continues to stroke his cock, breathing heavily with harry still pressing into him and it’s slightly sore now, definitely going to be sore tomorrow, but it’s *harry* and louis can’t seem to get enough of it. one of harry’s large hands is on his back, his sides, gentle and careful with each movement across his skin and god, louis loves him.

“gonna come -” harry begins before pulling out, cheeks flushed with that same loose, blissful smile on his face reminiscent of the one louis had seen in his car just a few weeks ago.

louis comes a few minutes later with a small noise in the high ceilinged room, with only harry to hear him as he leans his back against the floor, laughing quietly when harry’s at his side a moment later. he kisses louis’ chest, his neck, his arms, everywhere louis will allow.

fingertips begin to explore as louis kisses his lips, one hand pulling on the back of harry’s neck, tugging him closer closer closer. they’ve got to clean up but louis can’t think of anything else right now except how harry’s lips feel against his own, his feet get tangled with louis’ against the floor.

louis doesn’t say it. doesn’t say the three words repeating through his head as harry intertwines their fingers some time later, still not having moved from the floor. but he supposes they don’t have to say it.

so instead louis begins to carefully trace the words along harry’s palm, unsure if he’s half asleep or half awake when he does.

i
love
you

harry smiles, faintly, leaning up to press a kiss to the underside of louis’ chin. message received.

--

they’re not together, per say.

“what do you mean you’re not together?” niall asks louis a few days later.

presently they’re working on a project for geography, which isn’t going well. along with niall, who also isn’t taking this news so well.

“i dunno. we haven’t talked about it,” louis says quickly, gluing a summary of their project to the bristol board in a haste to ignore niall’s stare.

“yet you blew each other in the back of his car just fine.”

louis glares up toward him, rolling his eyes before cutting out another section of paper. niall’s breathing through his nose, loud and forced which means he’s angry. though louis hasn’t a clue why that would be.

“we’re gonna figure it out. eventually. after my audition,” louis explains.

“did you tell him that?” niall questions.

he hadn't. in fact, he and harry mostly dance and kiss these days. because louis is stressed and because harry's lips are so goddamn kissable he can't seem to help himself. not that harry seems to mind, which louis takes a good sign.

“why are you so mad about this?” louis snaps, putting down the pair of scissors.

niall pauses. he looks at louis, closing his laptop on the kitchen table. “because i don't want you to get hurt, lou.”

louis chews his lower lip. he supposes niall has a point. niall always has a point.

“i'm not going to. not this time.” louis reassures him.

“so just talk to him.”

niall's leaning against the table as louis feels his chest tighten at the suggestion. he has absolutely no reason to doubt harry has feelings for him, and yet.

“fine. i'll talk to him.”

“tomorrow?” niall presses.

“i'll talk to him on saturday. at the party.”

niall snorts. “good idea, louis. talk to him when there's loud music and beer. that'll end well.”

louis scowls, tossing a bit of excess paper across the table toward him.

“it'll be fine,” he says finally.

niall says nothing, instead continuing to cut at a stack of papers as louis takes in a deep breath. he'll talk to harry on saturday, things will be fine.

which doesn't explain why he's so fucking nervous.

--

by the time saturday comes louis is almost certain he's going to be sick. liam, niall, and zayn had reassured him that he'd be fine, that it'll go over fine, considering that louis has no reason to think that harry doesn't feel the same way.

regardless, he has a few beers anyway. to take the edge off. because apparently harry's going to be late, as he'd texted louis a few moments ago explaining he's got to take his sister to her boyfriend's once again.

it's fine. louis is just trying not to think anything of it. instead he sits with liam and zayn on a couch, the two curled up against one another and niall once again hitting on josh at the dj booth. honestly, he's so painfully obvious it's a little ridiculous those two haven't made out yet, louis thinks as he sips at his beer.

“i'm going to get another drink,” louis announces as he stands, liam blinking as he looks toward him now.

“louis -”

“i’m fine. i can handle another one, liam.”

zayn looks like he wants to say something but doesn’t as louis stands. he makes his way into the kitchen, finding an unopen bottle in a cooler as he opens it with a bit of help from the kitchen counter. he’s fine. completely fucking fine. he’s just going to tell harry he might be in love with him so yeah, he’s fine.

except he’s not fine at all, really.

because his audition is soon and he should be practicing right now but instead he’s drinking beer and planning how he’s going to tell harry styles he’s in love with him. it’s ridiculous. he’s ridiculous.

around him people are yelling, loudly, and it makes everything hard to focus on. so louis grips the edge of the counter, lightly, trying to centre himself again.

one two three one two three one two three

“louis?”

it’s not harry’s voice, louis knows that he as he turns. in fact, it’s someone who’s voice he hasn’t heard in months. one that makes his stomach clench in a way that makes louis feel as though he’s about to be sick.

fuck.

it’s aiden. it’s aiden with his old jean jacket louis loved to steal that smelled like smoke and a bit of vanilla, aiden with his ruffled hair and it’s aiden. aiden aiden aiden. for a moment louis thinks of stumbling back to liam and zayn, asking them to get him the hell out of here. but instead he stays planted where he is, standing as he watches aiden take a step toward him.

“what are you doing here? i didn’t know you knew sean...” aiden asks, watching him carefully, as if fearful louis might run away.

he should. he should run away. he should run far away because harry is on his way. harry. lovely harry. wonderful harry. harry.

“i’m um - yeah, we met him through niall,” louis explains, trying to breathe.

and the thing is, despite all the shit aiden put him through, louis still wants him. possibly might even still love him, just a little bit.

“do you wanna take a walk?” aiden suggests.

he should say no. “yes.”

aiden smiles. louis has missed his smile. he’s missed a lot about aiden.

but harry. instead louis continues to walk alongside aiden, a part of him yelling to leave while the other half can’t seem to help itself.

“it’s been a while,” aiden comments finally, leading him through the crowd. louis wonders if liam and zayn have spotted him, if they’ll come to rescue him. rescue him from aiden, but mostly from himself.

“yeah. sorry about that,” louis replies after a moment, voice slow.

“how have you been, louis?” aiden finally asks.

and it’s weird, because aiden never asks about louis. in fact, he supposes this is the longest conversation they’ve ever had in the span of the two years they’d previously known each other. louis looks at him, briefly, running a hand through his hair.

“good,” louis says simply, “practicing. school.”

aiden nods. louis swallows, tugging on the ends of his sleeves. he’s trapped. he can’t move. can’t step away from him. though he knows he should, knows that harry could be here any second.

“when’s your audition?”

he’d almost forgotten he’d told aiden about his audition. in fact, he’d been the first person louis had told. it had been late at night, in aiden’s room, when louis had whispered it to him. but aiden hadn’t responded and louis had always assumed he hadn’t heard him.

apparently that wasn’t the case.

“next week,” louis says.

aiden presses a hand to the small of louis’ back and it doesn’t feel right. that’s where harry’s hand goes, louis thinks as he leads them into an empty bedroom.

“you’re gonna do great, lou,” aiden tells him sincerely. louis doesn’t say anything in response.

he removes his hand from louis’ back, with a small bit of relief as the door closes behind them. that’s not a good sign. louis should leave. he should wait for harry outside, greet him the moment he gets here. but he still doesn’t move. and louis hates himself a little bit more for it.

“what do you want?” louis finally asks.

he doesn’t respond for a moment. instead, he takes a few steps toward louis and louis hates him, he really does. but a part of him doesn’t, isn’t even close to hating him. it’s a gross battle inside of him, neither side winning because louis isn’t sure what side of him he wants to win.

“i miss you,” aiden admits finally.

the wallpaper is peeling from the walls, bits and pieces coming off around the corners, louis observes as he shakes his head.

“i thought i loved you, did you know that?” louis tells him, voice hushed.

aiden runs his fingertips along the back of louis’ hands as louis feels his jaw tighten.

“i was an idiot,” aiden says.

louis looks to him, nodding. “yeah, you were.”

he doesn’t move his hands. he also doesn’t take a step back when aiden leans in closer, closer and closer until he’s kissing him.

and for a moment, that part of louis that held out, held out so long for aiden fills his chest as his eyes flutter closed, responding as he presses back. but the moment passes when he remembers all the empty nights, laying beside him the darkness of his room.

aiden doesn’t love him. louis can feel it on his lips, in the way he presses up against him. harry

loves him with his smiles against louis' skin and gentle touches, but aiden doesn't. just as the realization hits him the door opens as louis moves away from aiden, hands shaking as he takes in a deep breath.

it's harry. he's not saying anything, instead looking between them with look of hurt and disbelief.

"who the fuck are you?" harry demands. his voice is angry, something louis hasn't yet heard with his gentle, generally carefree disposition.

"aiden. who the fuck are *you*?" aiden responds.

"harry. and i was here to find louis, though apparently he wasn't trying to find me," harry spits, slamming the door as louis clutches his stomach.

"louis, what the hell -"

but louis doesn't let aiden finish. doesn't want to listen as he opens the door, catching sight of harry as he rounds the corner at the end of the hallway. he pushes through the large amount of people crowded into the small space, pushing around the corner as he watches harry walk out the front door.

no. no no no no he's not going to lose harry. not when he had him so close.

"harry!" louis calls, walking across the grass. he doesn't respond, instead keeps walking. "harry! harry you need to listen to me!"

he stops, but he doesn't turn. louis is nearing a sprint as he catches up to him, facing harry as he holds onto his elbows gently.

"i think i've heard enough, thanks," harry says angrily.

louis shakes his head. "no, harry that was - that was aiden. and we had a thing, you know? we had this weird complicated thing and i hadn't seen him in months and suddenly he was here and -"

"and you just ended up kissing him? that's it?" harry interrupts.

"i don't know, i don't - one second we were in the kitchen and the next we were kissing and that's when i realized, you know? that he doesn't love me. he never loved me. and then you were there and now we're here," louis explains, out of breath and head spinning.

"do you know why i came here?" louis shakes his head. harry continues, "i came here to tell you i loved you."

loved. loved. the word repeats through his head, over and over again.

"it meant nothing, harry. i promise."

"is that what i was to you? just another kiss? another date? another nobody, louis? someone without a face that could help you forget that asshole back there?" harry's raising his voice again as louis winces, taking a step back from him.

"that's not it. you *know* that's not it," louis argues.

"really? how am i supposed to know that?" harry asks, tone cold and words sharp.

"i let you watch me dance."

harry pauses, expression unreadable as louis feels his entire body begin to tremble. “did you let aiden watch you dance?”

the question stays in the air. louis can’t lie to him.

“yes.”

“i’m not here to compete for you, louis. i want you. i just want you.”

louis swallows, tears beginning to hit his eyes. “harry -”

“goodbye, louis.”

but it’s too late. harry’s walking off again, down the sidewalk. louis wraps his arms around his waist tightly, watching him as he goes. he doesn’t call his name, doesn’t move. just watches as harry disappears down the street, zayn running off after him as liam stops behind him, a hand on louis’ shoulder.

“he’s gone, li,” louis says quietly, voice trembling. “he’s gone.”

he cries into liam’s shoulder, his tears dampening the fabric of liam’s sweater as the music plays loudly behind them.

--

louis mopes. he mopes and he eats a terrible amount of ice cream and he doesn’t leave his house. doesn’t leave when liam invites him out, doesn’t leave when niall invites him over to play fifa. and rightfully so, because he’s an idiot. he’s an idiot who’s lost harry styles.

until wednesday. because on wednesday, something inside of him snaps. something inside of him changes as he’s sitting in his living room, watching notting hill for what feels like the millionth time this week.

and so he gets off the couch. he gets changed, and he gets into his car, and he drives. he drives until he reaches a familiar building, staring at it from across the road.

‘Dance Studio On Fifth Street’ it reads in bold yellow lettering as a sense of nostalgia comes over him. he can remember how heavy the door felt to his younger self, pushing it open before his lessons. from inside there’s a group of people, dancers, louis observes as he grips his steering wheel. he doesn’t know why he’s here.

but he gets out of the car. he opens the door, the familiar bell going off as he steps inside.

“now remember to bring snacks for next week’s last class!” ms. rink is speaking, smile wide as louis leans against the wall.

they all begin to pack up, parents helping their children as louis crosses his arms over his chest. he feels oddly out of place, standing silently as he takes in a deep breath. she might not even remember him. in fact, he’s mostly betting on the fact that she doesn’t and he drove all this way to make a completely fool of himself.

“ms. rink?” he finally asks, approaching her as she’s sorting through a stack of papers.

she looks up at him, her face still soft and gentle in the bright lights of the studio. she’s gotten more wrinkles, louis notes, though they only make her face glow more as she smiles.

“louis tomlinson.”

so she does remember him, louis thinks with slight relief. “i didn’t think you’d remember me,” he admits, rubbing a hand on the back of his neck.

she laughs, quietly, waving goodbye to a few students before turning back to him. “of course i remember you. you’d think i’d forget my most promising student?”

louis smiles. “i suppose not. i didn’t even know if you’d be here, truthfully. thought you might’ve moved on.”

ms. rink nods slowly, setting the papers down onto the table as she looks toward him once more. ““fraid not. my husband always used to tell me he’d suspect i’d die here one day,” she reminisces, her fingers moving her ring around her finger a slow, constant motion. “but anyway. what brings you here, louis?”

he shifts his weight, clearing his throat.

“i don’t know, really,” he says after a moment, “i have this audition next week and i’m sort of freaking out and -”

“audition for what?” she interjects.

“for juilliard,” he tells her, “though i don’t know why i’m following through with it. every time i think about it i feel more sick than excited. i shouldn’t even be auditioning.”

she pauses, not saying anything for a moment. louis instead watches as she makes her way across the floor, opening a desk drawer as she begins to shuffle through some papers. it takes a moment but she finally takes out an envelope, making her way back toward him, her heels clacking with each step she takes.

when she finally reaches him she hands the envelope to him, louis accepting it wordlessly. “open it,” she encourages.

and louis does as she says. he carefully rips open the top as his brows furrow. there’s a bit of laminated paper, bright blue with a lion on it, a speech bubble saying **‘CONGRATULATIONS! YOU’RE DANCER OF THE WEEK!’**, followed by a small, plastic metal on a bright yellow lanyard. louis runs his fingertips over the words, shaking his head as he smiles, faintly.

“this is mine?” he asks, mostly in disbelief when he sees his name written on the bottom of it. he remembers her giving them out, vaguely, one to each student after every week of dance lessons. to whoever danced their hardest that week, or something. he doesn’t quite remember.

“you don’t remember winning it?” louis shakes his head. “such a shame. you’d danced your heart out for it.”

“i wish i still felt about dance like i did then, you know? with no auditions and no competitions, just dancing,” louis says after a moment.

“you still can, you know,” ms. rink says finally.

and he wants to believe her, truly. because somehow after all these years she still owns her dance studio, still teaches day after day, still loves to dance. but louis? louis isn’t even twenty and can’t hold onto his dream.

“thank you,” he breaks the silence.

“for what?”

louis smiles, briefly, amazed that she still has no idea. “for believing in me.”

there’s tears in her eyes now as she grips his hand, briefly, before releasing it. “you should get practicing then,” she tells him with a wink.

he goes to hand her back her envelope but she shakes her head, lightly pushing it back toward him. “keep it. it can be a sort of, inspiration.”

he grips the envelope a little tighter, making his way toward the door as he gives her one last wave. the bell dings as he opens it, stepping outside, taking one last look before going into his car.

it’s not until he’s home and has the envelope on his desk does he see it, a small note, written in her same familiar handwriting.

I’m proud of you, Louis. You know what I used to tell you? That cheesy saying? ‘Dance like no one’s watching’. Do that. Dance your heart out.

--

harry doesn’t reply to his texts. or his phone calls. or his facebook messages. he doesn’t respond to anything.

and louis shouldn’t care. he should be focusing on his audition, not constantly checking his phone in hopes that harry’s replied to him. but every time he checks there’s nothing, and every time he goes to practice he’s closer and closer to ripping his hair out.

“give him time,” niall had told him one night. they’d been studying, pulling louis close on the couch as he’d shaken his head.

“he’s not coming back,” louis had said. niall hadn’t argued with him.

so now all he’s got is his routine. he’d tried to get liam and niall to watch him, but it hadn’t helped. they weren’t harry. as much as louis loves them dearly, they weren’t him.

his focus is all off, he can’t control himself, keep himself steady. he’s a mess.

the hallways are quiet after school. there’s someone else who brooms them now, a girl with a high ponytail and has a terrible habit of blowing loud bubbles with her gum. she wears that ridiculous janitor’s shirt and it makes louis’ heart ache a little bit when he remembers how good harry looked in it.

“how’s he been?” louis asked liam one night over the phone.

liam hadn’t said anything for a moment on the other line, over at zayn’s watching a movie. “he’s been alright,” he’d finally answered.

and as much as louis had wanted to push, he hadn’t. instead he’d listen to liam tell him about him and zayn’s cooking expedition, which had apparently ended with zayn nearly burning down the entire house when he’d left the chicken for too long in the oven. louis had laughed quietly, holding his phone close to his ear.

“he misses you,” liam had said after a moment.

“yeah,” louis said gently, “i miss him too.”

he supposes he could get in his car and drive to harry's house or pick up his phone and dial his number, though louis knows he couldn't take that rejection from harry. couldn't face him saying no again through a phone or to his face.

presently he's at his kitchen table, working on school work having just gotten home from practicing as his mother puts a mug of tea before him. his eyes are puffy from lack of sleep and his throat is sore, the lemon tea helpful with the pain.

"are you okay, louis?" his mother asks.

"m'fine. just stressed," louis says.

she watches him for a moment, silently, from across the table as he rubs his eyes. he should sleep.

"you should get some sleep. your audition's tomorrow," she reminds him.

louis nods. he finishes his tea, closing his notes as his mother takes his now empty mug. she kisses the top of his head, wishing him luck as he pads off toward his room.

there's still a few marks left along his skin, marks harry had made not too long ago. he trails a fingertip along his arm, tracing a faint bruise as he takes in a deep breath. he shouldn't be depending on harry so much with this audition, he knows that.

he slowly sinks into his mattress, taking his phone from his bedside table as he reads a text from liam and niall, wishing him luck tomorrow.

instead of replying he goes to a familiar name, tapping out a message as he leans his head back into his pillows. *Auditions tomorrow . They said i could have one person watch , so i gave them your name* he sends it off without a second thought, pulling his blankets closer and drifting off into sleep, somehow hearing a car faintly drive off in the distance.

--

louis doesn't sleep well. in fact, he sleeps rather terribly, tossing and turning in his bed until his alarm goes off far too soon for his liking. he checks his phone. no texts.

it's saturday, which means he's got no classes to worry about. just his audition. this fucking audition that he just wants to get over with. perhaps a part of him, he suspects, has already given up and realized he won't get in.

"louis? are you awake?" his mother's gentle voice comes, followed by a tap on his door.

"i'm up," louis replies, surprised when the door opens.

"i'm making you some breakfast but i um -" she pauses, stepping inside as louis watches her silently. "this was outside the door when i went to get the paper this morning."

it's a rose, a single rose in her hand as louis blinks. he knows who it's from, who left it there somewhere late into the night. "is there a note?" he asks.

she shakes her head. "nothing with it," she replies, gently handing it to him. "get ready and i'll say goodbye to you when you go, alright?"

with that she closes the door, leaving louis standing alone in his room with a single rose and wondering what the hell harry styles is playing at. it's red, he notes as he gently pokes at one of the thorns. he winces, briefly, setting it onto his bed as he changes into his clothes. and instead of

thinking too much and getting himself sick he repeats the routine in his head, over and over, trying to remember each movement as he puts his bag of his shoulder.

he hardly touches his breakfast, finally eating a piece of rye toast with jam to please his mother.

“you’re gonna do great, baby. are you sure you still don’t want me to come with you?” she asks as he takes his car keys from a small bowl near the front door.

“i’ll be okay,” louis reassures her with a kiss to her cheek. “i’ll be home a little after one.”

there’s tears in her eyes as she closes the door behind him, waving as he pulls out of the driveway. if he makes it to the school without being sick that will be a miracle in itself, he thinks as he turns on the radio, trying to give himself something to take his mind off if it.

however there’s another surprise as he approaches the vehicle, pausing as he stares at it for another moment. there’s a rose underneath the windshield wiper, a single rose, much similar to the one he’s presently holding in his hand. louis takes it, trying not to give it a second thought as he gets into his car, setting them both onto the front seat beside him.

the weather’s getting warmer, meaning summer’s coming. he’s only got two exams before he’s finally done for good, graduation a few weeks afterward. god, he’s graduating. the thought sits heavy on his chest as he grips the steering wheel a little tighter.

he’s graduating and the only school he has any hopes of getting into is juilliard. he’s a fucking idiot, is what he is.

when he pulls into the parking lot there’s a few cars spaced throughout it, the idea that more than one person coming to audition makes his stomach turn uncomfortable. but louis ignores it, getting out of the car as he closes the door.

the halls are oddly quietly as he makes his way toward the practice rooms, looping his hand through the handle as he pulls but, it doesn’t open. it’s locked. louis exhales, leaning his forehead against the wood as he tries to calm himself down. it’s fine. he practiced mostly all last night and he knows it’s probably for the best because if he were to practice now too much it would throw him off completely.

though he supposes a part of himself mostly wanted to see if by some miracle harry would be here. louis pauses, looking down toward the roses in his hand as he takes in a deep breath.

he soon finds that the auditorium is also locked as he makes his way toward the backstage area. there are a few people scattered throughout the room, mumbling to themselves and rehearsing their steps as he sets down his bag slowly onto a chair with his name taped to the back of it haphazardly.

he’s got about ten minutes till his audition, according to his clock as he begins a few stretches. deep breaths. in and out, in and out, trying to calm the storm in his chest.

“louis tomlinson?”

a voice breaks him from his routine, about halfway through as he looks to see a woman standing before him with a clipboard. her hair is in a tight bun, lips in a thin line.

“yes?”

“you’re on next,” she informs him before walking off.

louis is going to be sick. his hands are beginning to tremble and he now so more wants harry's hands more than anything to steady them. but he's alone, rubbing his hands together as he makes his way toward the small opening in the curtain. he'd gotten through his routine only once this morning but. that should be enough. or he's praying it's enough.

he distantly recognizes the girl who's dancing now, though he can't recall her name. all he can see is a faint light in the auditorium seats, a few people sitting there as he swallows.

her song ends as she bows, saying her goodbyes and suddenly it's his turn.

"louis tomlinson?" it's the second time he's heard his name read aloud. it's also the second time he's heard his name read aloud wrong.

but he doesn't correct them. instead he steps out, the lights bright as he looks out into the audience. there's a woman and two men watching him with clipboards.

"i'm louis," he introduces, silently kicking himself as he does so.

"you've been recommended by your instructor mr. scott, is that correct?" the lady asks after a moment.

louis nods. "yes, he taught me for nearly four years," he explains.

she says nothing in response. he isn't sure if it's good or bad. they're a bit like rocks sitting there. emotionless, unreadable. "what will you be dancing for us today louis? is it your own piece?" one of the man asks.

he can already feel the nerves beginning to settle. "i composed it myself, with the help of a friend of mine," louis says.

"a mr. harry styles?" the other man asks now, reading off the sheet in front of him.

louis nods, feeling his throat tighten at the name. he misses harry. he misses him so goddamn much it's a miracle he hasn't burst into tears on this stage.

"alright. the music will start playing in a few moments, then you can begin."

begin. the word repeats in the room, echos, as louis goes into his first position. that's when he sees him.

he's barely noticeable in the darkness of the auditorium, leaning against the door in the familiar stance louis knows too well. harry's here. harry's watching him.

but suddenly the music begins and he's got to dance, even while his thoughts are a bit scrambled. mostly they're *harry's here harry's here* as he moves, keeping himself controlled despite the way his mind is racing. he doesn't look out into the audience, he stays focused.

harry's presence is still surrounding him, comforting him, as if willing him to keep going.

and louis does.

he reaches that spot, the one place he fears most when he follows harry's steps, his encouraging words in louis' mind as he moves his ankle, just like harry had told him to do. and he gets it. louis likes to think that if he looked at harry right now, he'd be smiling with his shoulder pressed against the auditorium door.

when the song ends louis is left on the stage, in his final position, slightly delirious because he'd done it. he'd actually fucking done it.

"thank you, louis. we'll get back to you by the end of the week," one of the men tells him, and if louis were to allow himself to he'd think that they're smiling from their seats, watching him as he takes a bow.

"thank you. i look forward to it," louis tells them before making his way off stage.

he's happy, so deliriously happy when he pushes back the curtain and finds harry standing there. right as he's about to say something he notices harry's got something in his hands. it's a bouquet of roses.

it was him. "harry -"

but he doesn't get another word before harry is kissing him, rough and messy, hand on the back of his neck as louis immediately responds, licking into his mouth and not thinking about the three or four other people currently with them waiting for their auditions. their teeth knock against one another painfully, the roses being pressed against his chest as louis tries to get closer, closer, impossibly closer.

louis grips at his waist, trying to hold onto him. it doesn't work because before long harry's pulling away, breathing heavily and handing the roses over to him, making his way out the door without another word. and he's gone, leaving louis with a bunch of roses, the relief of his audition and an ache in his chest that tells him this was possibly the last time he'll ever see harry styles.

--

"you're limping."

louis scowls, glancing to niall as he shakes his head. "am not," he argues.

"why don't you just go to the doctor if your knee hurts that much?" niall whispers from behind him.

"because i don't *need* to go to the doctor's. i'm fine," louis responds quickly, seeing niall shake his head from the corner of his eye as he approaches the older lady in front of him.

"name?" she asks.

"uh - tomlinson, louis," he says as she nods.

"your robe is in the third rack. if it doesn't fit you report to mrs. taylor and tell her. if it does fit then you can hang it back onto the shelf," she tells him, rather curtly.

he makes no remark, instead walking down the rows and rows of gowns quietly. there's a sense of excitement in the room, people talking in loud tones, telling of their plans for next year. louis tries to ignore them, looking for his tag somewhere in this long line of black graduation gowns. he supposes this setup could have been better, finally finding the one marked with his name a few moments later.

louis tries it on to find it fits, rather comfortably. or as comfortable as a stuffy gown can get. satisfied, he hangs it up, spotting niall's blonde hair a few rows over.

"fucking hell," niall mutters.

“what’s wrong?” louis asks as he approaches him, though when he gets a good look at niall he can see the problem quite clearly.

it appears niall’s gotten the wrong size, swimming in a robe that’s far too large for him, judging by the way the sleeves fall far past his hands. it’s almost like he’s wearing a bed sheet, wrapped around him as louis tries not to laugh.

“you could make it work,” louis tells him, laughing quietly as niall glares up toward him.

“fuck you. i said a small and what do i get? a fucking extra large. god.”

louis helps unzips the robe for him though he supposes niall could have gotten out of it with no problems in the slightest. he waits as niall goes to hand in his robe to mrs. taylor, who accepts it as she hands him a small slip of paper.

“and?” louis asks as niall approaches him.

“gotta go back next week. see if the one they get me fits,” niall replies, shoving the slip into his pocket.

louis nods, following him out the door and toward their lockers. exams are done and all he needs to worry about his getting through graduation. then he’s done. finally, done.

“have you heard from them?” niall asks after a moment.

“who, julliard?” louis asks. niall nods, “not yet. they said they’d call this week. so far nothing.”

“ah, don’t say that. i’m sure they’ll call with good news,” niall reassures him as louis forces a small smile.

the halls are quiet as they walk up to louis’ locker, niall going to his own as louis spots liam in front of his locker.

“can i help you?” louis asks, motioning to liam standing directly in front of his locker.

“are you coming this weekend?” liam asks, voice firm.

louis blinks. “i don’t know what you’re -”

“to prom, louis. are you coming or are you going to mope around about julliard not calling you back?”

he finally steps out of the way as louis takes the last few books out of his locker as he sighs, loudly. truthfully, he hadn’t even thought about prom. mostly because he’d wanted to ask harry the last time he’d seen him and, well. clearly that’s not happening anytime soon. louis takes out a few binders, study notes as he puts them into his bag.

“i don’t want to go.” louis says finally.

liam rolls his eyes, as if he’d somehow knew that’s what his exact words would be. “c’mon, lou. it’ll be and you and zayn and niall and josh. you’ll have fun, i promise,” he reassures louis.

louis snorts. “right. a fifth wheel. sounds like loads of fun, li,” he responds sarcastically, closing the locker door perhaps a bit louder than he should. it’s the last day to empty their lockers, louis already taking most of his things home early on in the week.

“please, louis? i really want you there,” liam presses and god, that’s not fair. he can’t just pull out

the puppy eyes on him, it's just rude.

louis looks at him, every part of him wanting to say no. "fine," he agrees, concluding temporary insanity as he closes his backpack.

liam grins. "perfect. i already got you your ticket, and i'll see you tomorrow a little after six, okay?"

he thrusts the ticket into louis' hand without another word, stalking off down the hallway and leaving him with a single, solitary ticket in his hand.

there's no way he's getting out of it, louis realizes as he shakes his head, putting his bag over his shoulder and making his way out toward his car.

--

true to his word, liam and zayn are there to pick him up a little after six. louis had been ready for a little over an hour, bored and without anything to do when his sisters had insisted he started getting ready now. so he'd put on his suit, allowing lottie to help him with his hair. from this mother had requested to take some pictures, which louis had thought to be ridiculous, but had agreed anyway.

mostly they're him standing awkwardly in their front garden and he can't help but wonder if it would have been better with someone else standing by his side. louis supposes he'd have been all smiles and dimples, most likely his hand on louis' waist.

louis misses him. misses his dimples, the way he'd tug louis closer to his side.

"my my, you look handsome!" liam calls as he gets out of the car, zayn not far behind him as louis feels his chest tighten. he hasn't seen zayn since the party last week, suddenly feeling out of place as he forces a small smile.

"thanks," louis replies, rubbing the back of his neck, "you two look great," he adds.

liam laughs, zayn smiling faintly, which louis takes as a good sign. of course his mother allots for more pictures of the three of them in the garden, liam all bright smiles as louis holds back a groan.

"this is going to be great," liam says as both zayn and louis get into the car.

and he's right. mostly.

prom itself was slightly boring, louis had thought while sitting at their table, though the food hadn't been all bad. niall and josh had chatted happily the entire evening, louis noticing their hardly subtle hand holding underneath the table as he'd smiled, faintly. he'd decided that they're sickeningly adorable, the sort of couple that you hate to watch but you find yourself watching them anyway despite how near nauseating they might be.

as for liam and zayn, things went better than expected. zayn was talkative, not making a point of ignoring louis, which he supposed was a good thing.

then had come dancing. which had been fine. louis had been asked by perrie, a girl from his biology class and dan from his first period english class in ninth year. all in all it hadn't been terrible, which louis supposes he should be thankful for.

presently he's at josh's house for an after prom party, which he hadn't known about till liam had informed him they were attending when they got into his car. and despite his not having a change

of clothes, louis had obliged to go. mostly because he'd had no other choice, really.

there's people littered throughout the living room, making it warm and the music even louder, pounding with each beat as he grips the neck of his beer bottle. he can see liam and zayn talking in one corner, laughing and giggling with niall and josh, as always, putting on music as louis takes a sip of his drink.

he's about to try and find another drink when louis pauses, seeing someone walk into the house as his heart nearly stops.

harry.

harry looking impossibly tall, harry wearing a beanie with his curls tucked underneath it, harry. louis immediately feels his stomach twist uncomfortably, standing rather quickly. but it's no use, because apparently harry's already seen him. of course harry's going to see him, louis thinks, suddenly getting defensive. this is *his* prom after party.

though he supposes his annoyance doesn't outweigh his missing harry, the ache painfully large in his chest as louis shakes his head, wordlessly crossing the room and slipping out the patio doors into the back yard.

the air is warmer than inside, sticky, clinging to his skin as louis braces himself against the wooden railing. he's got his sleeves rolled up, suit jacket abandoned in liam's car along with his tie and yet it still feels like he can't breathe.

why is he here? he made it pretty clear he didn't want any contact with louis. louis swallows, gripping the edge tighter and tighter until his knuckles are almost white.

he's about to try and find some escape to liam's car when the back patio door opens. silently he prays it's liam, niall, or even josh coming to see if he's alright.

but it's not. it's harry.

louis turns, slowly, looking at harry as he steps out onto the deck. his hands are in his pockets, shoulders hunched as louis takes in a deep breath.

"what do you want?" louis' voice is sharp.

harry looks as though he's about to laugh. he doesn't look at louis, instead mirroring louis' previous positions of bracing the wooden railing.

"have you heard back from them?" harry finally asks, not responding to louis' question.

"no. and even if i did, would you even want to know?" louis asks.

he looks at louis then, brows furrowing in the pale moonlight. he laughs quietly, though louis hasn't a clue what's so funny.

"if i didn't care would i have shown up to your audition?" harry questions, crossing his arms over his chest.

louis opts to staring straight ahead at the door, pressing his lips together into a thin line.

"i texted you."

harry nods. "i know."

“why are you here?” louis repeats his question.

“why are you mad?” harry finally asks, voice softer than louis had been expecting.

“am i not allowed to be?” louis snaps.

harry’s quiet for a moment, not saying anything as he looks out across the backyard. there’s a pool, a few leaves floating around in it as louis watches him trace little designs against the wood railing.

“did you love him?”

he’s talking about aiden. he runs a hand through his hair. he doesn’t answer right away, looking away from harry. from inside the music is still playing, loud and obnoxious despite being outside. a sort of muffled loudness, louis thinks.

“i thought i did. i suppose i just wanted him to love me, even if i knew he didn’t,” louis admits after a moment.

harry doesn’t say anything. louis isn’t sure if he’s going to laugh or cry. all he knows is harry’s hand is impossibly close to his own on the railing, and it takes all of louis’ energy to stop himself from running his thumb along the back of it. just to feel harry close, feel the touch of his skin underneath the pad of his thumb.

“zayn said liam told him you didn’t want him to kiss you.” harry’s picking at the hem of his shirt.

“not really, no. i was sort of ambushed on that one,” louis replies.

he turns toward harry, finding harry’s already looking at him when he does.

“still mad at you, you know,” harry tells him.

“i know. i’m still mad at myself, so you’re not alone.”

harry takes a step toward him. louis doesn’t move. even when his hands come to rest on his waist, fingertips pressing into their familiar spot. he leans his forehead against louis’ own, tentatively, as if he’s still figuring out if this is what he should be doing.

louis thinks harry might kiss him, standing in josh’s backyard. but he doesn’t. instead he brings his thumb to run along louis’ jawline, his cheek, lips parted in a way that louis feels his heart beating faster in his chest.

but then he takes a step back, louis watching as he does so. “you should get that checked out.”

“what?” louis asks, watching harry as he opens the door.

“your knee. you should get it looked at,” harry tells him before leaving louis alone on the back deck once more before he goes, closing the door behind him.

--

when louis finally goes to the doctor, it’s mostly against his will.

niall and liam wake him up on monday morning, his only day off that week before shoving him into niall’s car.

"i'm - fine!" louis cried as niall pulls out of the driveway.

"you're not," liam argues. louis pouts. "we're going to a walk in clinic. that's that."

so niall drives, louis glaring at both him and liam from the back seat. they pay no attention to him, instead turning up the radio and singing obnoxiously loud. but he's fine. he doesn't need to go to the doctor.

what if he gets bad news? what if he's not allowed to dance anymore? there's reasons why he hasn't gone, despite everyone urging him to go.

when liam parks louis gets out, begrudgingly, slamming the door loudly as liam scowls at him.

"louis tomlinson?"

they've been in the waiting room ten minutes, niall skimming through magazines while liam attempts to reassure louis that he's going to be fine. it's not helping. now he's stressed and staring at pictures of justin bieber plastered across the article niall's reading.

"what?" niall asks, "he's a legend. leave me alone."

when the nurse calls his name louis' head snaps up, nodding. "that's me," he says as she nods, smiling.

"follow me," she instructs, starting off down an unfamiliar hallway.

louis follows, giving a final wave to liam and niall as he does so. he tries not to think of all the terrible news that potentially awaits him.

"what seems to be the trouble, louis?" an older man, dr. bracket apparently, asks.

"s'just my knee. hurts sometimes when i dance, is all," louis explains.

dr. bracket's brows furrow. "which knee?" he asks. louis points to the left one. "how long have you been dancing?"

"since i was three," louis answers.

he soon looks at louis' knee, silently, which makes the worry build inside him ever more. he asks louis to bend it a few times, asks where the pain is, things like that.

"it seems you might have a sprained ligament," he says finally, "which should be fixed and managed so long as you wear a knee brace when the pain becomes more than a five or so out of ten, does that make sense?"

louis nods.

"you're gonna go to for some x-rays but i think they'll merely show what i suspect is there." he's writing down on a pad of paper as louis chews his lower lip.

"so i can still dance?" louis asks, tentatively.

dr. bracket nods. "you can still dance, louis. so long as you follow my instructions."

he walks out with a slip of paper telling him when his x-ray is along with a prescription for a knee brace. on the way out he makes a point of hitting both niall and liam in the arm.

there, louis can almost hear harry say as they get back into niall's car, that wasn't so bad was it?

god.

--

it's seven in the morning when his phone goes off.

he's been in and out of sleep, restless and uncomfortable in his bed when his ringtone goes off beside him. louis groans, half expecting it to be niall as he hits the answer button.

"hello?" he answers, voice groggy and slow.

"mr. tomlinson? my name is julia temple, i'm calling on behalf of the juilliard recruitment committee following up an audition you did about a week ago?"

immediately louis sits up, regretting it as his heads begins to pound painfully. he winces, pressing his phone closer to his ear. he's going to be sick. he's actually, truly going to be sick.

"right, yes, this is he," louis says quickly, bringing a hand to rest on his forehead.

"sorry to be calling so early," she tells him apologetically and briefly louis wonders how much this phone call is going to cost him. he bets more than he's got right now, which is less than five dollars. "but i wanted to tell you the decision on your audition."

louis grips his comforter, the fabric between his fingers as he closes his eyes. "it's fine i was awake anyway," louis lies, waiting for her to continue.

"and on behalf of the juilliard school of dance, we'd like to extend you an invitation to join us for this upcoming semester, beginning in september. a package will be mailed to you in the next few weeks where you can give us your acceptance letter, should you chose to take your spot. we're rather excited to see what your decision will be."

this can't be real. this can't be happening. "i - thank you. thank you, thank you i will be mailing my acceptance letter as soon as i can," louis says, gripping his phone tighter.

"that's wonderful to hear. we look forward to hearing from you, louis."

"thank you. thank you so much," louis tells her, unsure of what else to say because at the moment he's presently run out of words to say.

she hangs up and louis is left on his bed, dropping his phone somewhere on the comforter as he tries to process what just happened. because he's not certain, but he's pretty sure he'd just gotten a call from juilliard telling him he'd been accepted.

he should tell his mom. he should go into the kitchen and tell her the news but instead louis finds himself in his car, first sending off a slightly incoherent text to both liam and niall before getting into the car, driving to the school and parking in the nearly empty parking lot. apparently there's some sort of basketball camp today, the doors open as louis makes his way down the familiar hallway.

the practice room is empty as louis takes a step inside. and another. and another until he's standing in the middle of it, looking ahead into the mirror.

he got in.

the weight of the news is still sitting on him, mostly because he's still in a state of disbelief. he got in. he *got in*.

he's not sure what to do next. if he should yell, scream, kick at the floor or simply stand there in silence.

when he finally turns there's a familiar figure in the doorway as louis stares.

"thought i'd find you here."

"how did you -"

"liam said you texted him. told us the big news," harry explains, not taking a step into the room.

louis smiles. he can't help it. he feels like he might burst at any second as he takes a moment to move toward him, across the old wooden floors.

"hi," louis breathes, fingertips ghosting along harry's arm.

"hey," harry replies, his smile widening. there's dimples. "what's that?" he motions to louis' knee.

"oh," louis says, glancing to the brace he'd put on last night, somehow forgetting to take it off in the commotion of this morning. "it's um. a knee brace." he explains, dumbly.

"are you okay?" harry asks.

"m'okay. it's just for when the pain starts," louis explains as harry smiles faintly. louis likes that. likes harry's smile. god, when did he become such a sap?

but that's when it hits him. he's going to be moving to new york. far, far away from harry, far away from doncaster, far away from all of this, louis realizes in that moment.

"congratulations, louis," harry breaks his thoughts.

louis swallows. "thank you."

it's oddly cordial, louis thinks as he stares up at harry. he's got a bit of stubble on his chin, he notes, though unsure how he feels about it. he likes it, he thinks. possibly. louis isn't sure. he's got too much to process in his mind right now than deciding if he likes the idea of harry styles having facial hair.

"i'm, um, i'm sorry? i fucked up, you know? things were going so well with us. and i was an idiot. i kissed aiden. and that was bad. very bad. and you have every right to be mad. i suppose i'm mad at myself, too, so that makes two us and -"

"louis -"

"no. no, let me finish because this is important, you know? it's important because if you want to make this. us, work. and if you want to make us work we have to talk about this stuff. talk about how much of an idiot i am because i love you, you know that? god. i love you and i went off and kissed my ex. what sort of person does that?" louis is rambling now, talking quickly and god, he almost sounds like liam. he's been spending too much time with liam.

"*louis*," harry repeats.

louis pauses. "yes?"

“you think too much. do you know that?”

“i’ve been told. once or twice.”

harry’s taking a step toward him, bringing both his hands to cup louis’ cheeks. he’s smiling again, leaning down and hovering his lips over louis’ own.

“you’re still thinking,” harry says after a moment, eyes narrowing.

louis scrunches his nose. “that’s what people do, harold. they think. it’s human nature, you can’t accuse me of thinking when you yourself are doing it right now,” he huffs.

harry rolls his eyes before pressing a faint kiss to the corner of louis’ mouth. “you got in.”

louis smiles, nodding slowly, feeling harry’s hands still gently cupping his cheeks. “i owe it all to you, i think.”

“don’t think so. you were the one up there on that stage, not me,” harry argues.

“god, you’re stubborn,” louis replies. harry grins. cheeky.

but before louis can argue anything else harry is kissing him. properly kissing him. wrapping his arms around louis’ waist and pulling his feet off the ground kissing him. so much so louis soon finds himself breathless and giggling into harry’s neck as he spins him around and around, their laughter mixing together under the bright lights of the practice room.

--

him and harry have a long, extended talk. it’s over dinner one night as louis tells him about aiden and harry listens in silence. he doesn’t say anything as louis recalls the entire long, complicated affair, stealing a few of harry’s fries in between as he does so.

and after that they talk. and talk some more. they talk about each other and where they see this going and all the while louis feels harry’s foot against his leg, rubbing along it and making it terribly hard to focus.

but it’s good. better than good, actually, since louis considers himself properly in love with harry styles.

“so we’re okay?” louis had asked as they’d left the restaurant, harry’s arm around him.

“yeah,” harry replied, kissing the top of his head, “we’re okay.”

as for the summer, it’s perhaps the best one louis has ever had. it’s filled with the five of them, occasionally six with josh, doing ridiculous things and not generally having a care in the world, for the most part.

one weekend they’d decided to take an impromptu road trip which had ended with liam trying to fold a map and yelling something at niall who apparently had ‘messed it up beyond repair’. zayn, harry, and louis had all watched this take place from the back seat, trying not to laugh when niall had punched a hole straight through the piece of paper and informing liam that “it’s just a fucking map anyway you asshat.”

liam’s just very fond of maps, apparently. who would have known.

needless to say they’d made it out of the road trip in one piece, though they’d all made an

agreement to never go on one again should they rip off each other's heads in the process.

in the last week before louis' leaving for new york they have a bonfire at niall's. they're all in chairs around the fire, the smell of smoke and beer thick in the air as louis curls closer to harry's chest, comfortably on his lap.

"so louis is leaving," niall says after a moment.

"don't," harry warns, "i don't want to talk about it."

niall tosses a stick into the fire. it crackles.

"we're all leaving, niall. louis is just going a bit farther than all of us," liam says in reply, his hand intertwined with zayn's over the armrest of his chair.

"a *bit* farther," harry repeats, somewhat sadly. louis presses a kiss to his temple.

presently niall's making s'mores. or attempting to, anyway. he burns the marshmallows too much for louis' liking. but louis doesn't complain, instead accepting it as he lets harry have the first bite.

"besides. you'll be stuck with three of us anyway," zayn says, "since we're all going to the same bloody school and all. you'd think we'd all be sick of each other by now."

louis laughs. harry's got a bit of chocolate on the edge of his mouth, he observes, kissing it away as niall makes a retching noise from across the fire.

"want me to clean you up next?" louis asks, loudly, as niall flips him off.

"no thanks," niall says, tossing an untoasted marshmallow toward him.

"bit weird, innit? thinking about that," liam finally says.

"thinking about what?" louis presses.

there's crickets in the distance, loud and present in the background as louis licks the remaining marshmallow bits from the pads of his fingertips, the glow of the fire barely illuminating their faces.

"about - this, i dunno. about the fact that we graduated and we're going to school in the fall."

"yeah, and louis didn't even trip on the stage when getting his diploma," niall jokes as louis takes his turn to flip him off now.

"niall's idiocy aside," louis begins, ignoring niall's squawk of protest, "i guess you're right, li. but we'll be back. s'not like we'll all be gone forever."

the air between them all is heavier now, harry's arms keeping him steady as louis watches a frown appear on liam's face in the orange glow.

"feels like we just found each other and now we're all leaving," he says slowly.

the rest of them nod, silently, in agreement.

"we all kinda feel more like brothers than anything," niall says.

harry's quiet. his thumb is tracing gentle circles into louis' side, underneath all the layers of blankets and sweaters he's presently wearing. they all knew he'd be leaving eventually. louis

supposes that they hadn't thought it would come so soon.

"we'll always be brothers," louis tells them after a moment.

"we're the five best friends that anyone could have..." niall begins singing as louis scrunches his nose, laughing fondly as niall now waves his hands above his head in a ridiculous motion.

it's zayn's turn to do something unexpected then, standing and tackling niall, peppering his face with kisses as the rest of them burst into laughter, niall letting out strangled noises as liam soon joins in. without a second thought louis is standing, harry not too far behind him as they're all tackling niall now, one big pile rolling around in the grass of niall's backyard.

"you're - all - fucking - *idiots*," niall grumbles from underneath the group of them, zayn pressing another kiss to the top of his head with a loud smacking sound.

"hm. don't think i'd have us any other way," louis hums, somewhat proudly.

they fall asleep sometime later in a similar pile in niall's living room, saying their goodbye's tangled up in one another.

--

louis' final, full day in doncaster is spent entirely with harry.

he arrives at his house a little after nine am, despite protests of it being too early as he gets out of the car. his eyes are a bit puffy from sleep as he approaches the door, knocking on it before it opens.

"can i help you?" there's a woman before him. gemma, louis assumes.

"i'm looking for harry?" louis asks, feeling slightly out of place. he could have possibly gone to the wrong address, being now played by some practical joke of harry's. it's too early for this.

"i'll get him. c'mon in," gemma offers, opening the door a bit wider as louis takes a step inside.

after their past few months together this is, oddly enough, louis' first time in harry's home. it's neater than he thought it would be. pristine, almost. so much unlike his own home. from upstairs he can hear hushed voices, assuming they belong to both gemma and harry as louis takes in a deep breath.

he's looking at a picture of what he assumes is harry as a younger child, bright eyes and even brighter smile as he hears footsteps descending the stairs. it's harry, lovely harry in his jeans and an old t shirt with holes in it, making a face when he sees what louis is looking at. "ignore those..." harry says gently, "do you want some tea?"

"i'd love some."

harry ushers him carefully into the kitchen, which is even more so lovely than the foyer, louis observes as he tries to take it all in. harry pads across the floor, turning on the kettle as louis goes to sit on a stool.

"harry -" louis begins.

"i don't want to talk about it. not yet," harry says quickly.

louis nods as harry kisses his cheek briefly before taking two mugs from the cupboard above him

as louis watches quietly.

back home he's got boxes and boxes scattered around his house, last minute things to send to new york. he's still got so many things to do but all he can focus on is harry. the morning light is still coming through the window, dark clouds beginning rolling in and muting some of the orange and yellow hues colouring the back of his shirt.

they don't say anything until the kettle finishes boiling, louis pushing off his stool to stand beside harry at the counter. their fingertips brush occasionally, each getting their tea ready as louis rests his head carefully harry's shoulder.

"you had a really nice haircut as a kid. suits you," louis says after a moment.

harry makes a face. "stop."

"i'm serious. you could make it look good now too, i think. bring it back, you know?" louis continues as harry groans.

"you're not funny."

"we could do it now, even, if you wanted. get a bowl and some scissors. i've cut my sister's hair loads of times. this should be a piece of cake," louis says.

"oh my god," harry mutters, putting the milk away into the fridge.

"i mean. i personally wasn't a fan of the bowl cut when i was younger but i think with your curls it could look really good, accent your jawline and -"

harry's kissing him suddenly, pressing louis' back against the edge of the counter and it's uncomfortable except that harry's doing that *thing* with his tongue that has louis nearly going weak at the knees.

"found a way to shut you up," harry teases, winking at him as louis swats at his arm, lightly.

"don't tell niall or he'll make a habit of it," louis responds as harry rolls his eyes, kissing him instead of saying something.

the rest of their day louis wants to somehow re live for the rest of his life.

there's kissing. and movies. and kissing. and baking (though harry did most of it. louis instead was perched on the counter, swinging his legs while watching harry whisk. "you're a marvelous whisker," louis had told him. harry had scowled, somehow fondly), harry takes a few instagrams of louis trying to whisk despite his protests. they have dinner. there's more kissing. then touching. perhaps a blowjob or two before harry has to get their cookies from the oven.

"too salty," louis comments from the counter.

harry laughs, taking a bite as he shakes his head. "just salty enough, thank you very much," he responds. louis smiles.

by the time harry walks him out to his car it's almost midnight, which would technically be tomorrow, which would, technically, be the day louis leaves.

"don't wanna go," louis says, quietly, as harry opens his car door for him.

louis turns, facing him in the opening as harry takes a step toward him. there's a sad sort of smile

on his face as he doesn't say anything for a few moments. instead they stay there, harry's forehead against his own and the wind blowing around them.

"christmas," harry reminds him.

"it's so far away," louis whines, shaking his head.

he wonders, briefly, if he didn't get on his plane tomorrow. if instead he took a semester off and worked at some coffee shop or whatever place would hire him and went to doncaster to study instead. so he didn't have to go.

"i'll see you at christmas."

harry kisses him, brief and chaste in the warm summer air.

"love you," louis says softly, feeling harry's hands against his cheeks.

"love you too," harry replies.

louis turns his head, just slightly, pressing a faint kiss to one of harry's palms before finally getting into his car. he backs out of the driveway slowly, harry only illuminated by the small garage light behind him. the visual is clear, something to remember in louis' mind until he reaches the end, turning as harry becomes blurred, the tears threatening to fall as he turns off onto the road and back toward his home.

--

Louis Tomlinson - Nutcracker Prince

it's still a bit... unbelievable, louis thinks as he rereads it. even though he's already done three shows, the fourth and last one about to happen in less than ten minutes. he still can't quite fully grasp the idea that he'd gotten a lead in the christmas production.

"louis? you ready to go in five?" greg, the assistant stage manager asks.

"yeah, yeah i'm good," louis tells him, forcing a grin.

"you'll be fine. it's the last show. piece of cake, i promise," greg reassures him.

"right. cake. got it."

he gives louis one final wave before allowing the curtain to fall shut once more, the faint preshow music playing quietly in the auditorium. greg's right. it's the last show. he'll be fine. more than fine, actually. once he's done he'll be getting on a plane and returning home and everything will be fine.

"you're worrying too much, lou," liam had told him a few nights ago over a video call in his dorm room.

"am i? because harry's not responding to my texts? at all? i know he's read them. he keeps his read messages on. or whatever it is," louis snaps in reply, rubbing his temples in irritation.

and it's true. over the past few weeks his contact with harry has lessened significantly. which wouldn't be so worrisome if it weren't for the fact that it's harry and he's always looking for an excuse to text louis. not that louis minds, reading them between classes or practices because they're mostly little things harry will tell him throughout the day. it makes him feel oddly closer,

which doesn't make any sense.

"he's just busy. he's a student too, you know," zayn pipes in from beside liam now.

"does the rest of the university of doncaster have anything to add?"

"stop being an asshole and worrying. harry's not going to break up with you," niall says as louis rubs his face with his hands.

"you guys don't - understand. we email, we text, we video call. it's like there's not an hour that goes without us talking," louis defends.

"what about when you're sleeping?" niall argues. louis flips him off.

"just stop worrying," zayn tells him, serious.

"ugh. you lot are no help whatsoever," louis grumbles.

"love you! get some rest before your show!" liam says, waving obnoxiously as louis had ended the call with a faint "love you!" from niall and zayn.

so now he's standing in the dressing room with a few texts from his mother and liam wishing him luck tonight, but none from harry. even with being distant he'll at least reply to one or two of louis' texts randomly throughout the day. but today? nothing. not even an 'i love you' text to wake up to in the morning.

naturally it's going to stress him out. naturally it's going to get him worried. because louis can only think of one reason why harry would pull away like this. because the distance was too much, because he possibly found someone new, the list is endless, really, once louis had started considering all the options.

from underneath his costume louis checks his brace is set, which it is, making sure it won't randomly snap off his knee halfway through the show. beside him he can hear movement, people preparing themselves before the curtain call.

he's nervous.

he's so fucking nervous, oh god. it's a sold out show. it's the last show. he can't fuck this up. in a last desperate attempt he checks his phone but, nothing. just a text from niall of some new socks he'd purchased, apparently. christ.

greg ushers them out into their positions, counting down and the show begins.

when the auditions had first been announced louis had thought he'd try out just, you know, for fun. what would be the harm? if he didn't get in he could do something like a background dancer, or costumes, or anything, really.

and somehow he'd managed a lead role. almost unheard of in first years at juilliard, but somehow he'd done it. it's still a mystery even to himself to this day, but he's grateful for it nonetheless. apart from the practices and juggling school and a part time job in the cafeteria, he'd done it.

there's a certain thrill he gets from being on stage. he'd learned that about himself when he'd been six at his first dance recital, and that fact is still true as he stands on the stage performing to a large amount of faces he doesn't recognize.

there's a moment in the first act where he thinks, for but a moment, that he might be here. they're

in the back, dark hair and broad shoulders and louis thinks that maybe, just maybe he's here but then -

no. he pulls himself back into reality, focusing on the movement of his arms, stretching them out because that's ridiculous. harry's not here. he's back home, in doncaster, on his way to his parents' house for christmas dinner.

louis doesn't look in that part of the audience for the rest of the show.

"good job everyone!"

"we smashed it!"

"louis! you did amazing!"

spirits are high when the show is over, having done their final bows and now trying to all fit backstage. louis talks with a few of the cast members, telling them his apologies about not being able to make the cast party because he's got to catch a flight home and all.

he changes into a different set of clothes, wiping off what best he can of his stage makeup. there's a few farewells until he makes his way to his make up table to collect his bag and things. though when he approaches it, he pauses.

there's a single rose tucked into the mirror as louis blinks in disbelief. it can't be. his fingertip brushes along the petal, slowly, as if still trying to figure out if it's real or not.

"hi."

louis turns and there's his boy. he's wearing a suit and his hair is done just the way louis likes it and he's *here*.

"hey."

he's laughing, his smile large across his face as harry takes a step toward him and jesus fuck, he's actually here. he's really here.

louis reaches out his hand, catching one of harry's fingers between his own as he grips it rather tightly. "you're, um. you're here." louis says after a moment.

"had to come see your show after reading all the great reviews," harry says with a shrug of his shoulders.

"and? what did you think?" louis asks, straightening out harry's tie.

"i think you definitely have the best ass out of everyone in that ballet," harry tells him, voice low and serious.

"i suppose i can live with that..." louis replies with a wink.

they stand there for a moment, louis still in slight disbelief as harry presses a kiss to his cheek. he smells like aftershave and mint and louis wouldn't have him any other way.

"so this is why you weren't replying to me?" louis asks.

harry's kissing his forehead now, lips curving into a smile against his skin. "something like that. trips like this take a while to plan, you know," harry tells him.

louis hums, tugging the lapels of his suit and pulling him closer. he stands on his toes, just slightly, kissing him briefly.

“i missed you,” louis says.

“missed you too,” harry says, “but don’t you have a flight to catch?”

louis pulls away slightly, looking up at harry as he blinks. “yes, however i don’t think i’ve been properly acquainted with your lips yet -”

“wouldn’t want us to miss our flights, now would we?” harry’s pulling on his hand lightly, louis taking his bag and rose from the mirror as he follows behind him. “c’mon. we gotta get you home.”

he puts an arm around louis’ shoulders, pulling him close as they walk off down the hallway. though louis suspects he’s already found a home, tucked away somewhere under harry’s arm and close to his heart.

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