Like a Lighthouse On The Coast (I Need You)

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/19184275) at http://archiveofourown.org/works/19184275.

Rating:	[Not Rated](#)
Archive Warning:	[No Archive Warnings Apply](#)
Category:	[M/M](#)
Fandom:	[One Direction (Band)](#)
Relationship:	[Harry Styles/Louis Tomlinson](#)
Characters:	[Harry Styles](#), [Louis Tomlinson](#), [Nick Grimshaw](#), [Niall Horan](#), [Mitch Rowland](#)
Additional Tags:	[Alternate Universe](#), [famous/non-famous](#), [Singer Louis](#), [Songwriter Louis](#), [Singer Harry Styles](#), [Songwriter Harry Styles](#), [why the last names for harry's but not louis'](#), [American Harry Styles](#), [American Louis Tomlinson](#), [everyone's american](#), [Idaho](#), [omg that's a tag lmao](#), [Meet-Cute](#), [Friends to Lovers](#), [Kinda](#), [Pining](#), [Mutual Pining](#), [Songwriting](#), [Singing](#), [urm](#), [No Smut](#), [Travel](#)
Language:	English
Collections:	[Week Fifty-Six](#)
Stats:	Published: 2019-06-12 Words: 19,362 Chapters: 1/1

Like a Lighthouse On The Coast (I Need You)

by [lululawrence](#)

Summary

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Oh God no. If Louis had known there was going to be live music, he would have chosen somewhere else. Why did they have to ruin what was truly the perfect ambiance for Louis with some sub-par wannabe singer-songwriter?

"Hello, I'm going to sing some songs for you tonight. I hope you like them."

The voice was deep and smooth, slower than Louis had expected. It made him want to look up at the singer rather than cower into the corner of his booth.

So he did. The man didn't look nervous at all, but he didn't look like the cocky asshole Louis had been expecting either. Louis continued to brace himself as he took in the simple Ramones shirt and jeans the man was wearing, when something Louis hadn't been expecting happened.

The man began to play his guitar, and he was good.

And then, the man began to sing.

Or the one where Louis has all the pressure of his sophomore album and none of the inspiration, but maybe all he needs is someone like Harry Styles to turn all that around.

Notes

Once upon a time, there was a girl named Sus. She would watch tv with her parents, even if she didn't much care for the shows. In March of this year, she was watching The Voice with her parents, and a guy came on whose story inspired her in multiple ways for many different reasons. She then started this fic. She knew she couldn't finish it then, she had many deadlines to meet, so she put it to the side for months. When the time came for her to finish it, she thought she was burnt out. She thought maybe this was finally the end of her writing.

But it wasn't. She finished it and she loves this silly thing very much, so she wanted to share it with all of you. The end.

lol so yeah, basically that's how this came about. Thank you to EVERYONE I sent snippets to that got excited with me over this or helped me remember why I was writing it to begin

with lol Massive thanks also go to my dear betas [Lynda](#) and [Molly](#). Even with their amazing help, mistakes probably remain, and those are solely my own.

I also don't actually know anything about songwriting or recording or the music industry and while I have spent much time in Idaho, it was on the other side of the state in or near Idaho Falls, so I also know little to nothing about Coeur D'Alene and honestly misspelled it so many times it's embarrassing (did I misspell it now? possibly...), so please don't take this as fact. I literally based it all off of the package they did about the kid on The Voice and googling.

This fic was written as part of an ongoing challenge using the book 1000 Feelings For Which There Are No Names for our prompts. To read the other fics written in this challenge, [click here](#). You can find more information on the challenge here and to reblog the masterpost on tumblr, you can [click here](#).

My Prompt was 50: the warm feeling when your friends throw you an unexpected farewell party before your trip.

The title of this fic comes from I Need You by Tim McGraw and Faith Hill, which I shamelessly used in this fic. I do not own any of the characters in this, it is a work of fiction, do not share this with anyone associated with anyone mentioned in the fic, do not translate this work without my express permission, do not repost this fic elsewhere, etc etc etc. Sigh. This section keeps getting longer and I'm tired so I'm leaving it at that.

I hope you like this fic! Thank you for taking this fun little ride with me :D

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Growing up in a town like Coeur D'Alene, Harry thought he would live there for the rest of his life. It was small and tucked away in the mountains of western Idaho with literally anything a young boy could ever desire for a day filled with outdoor adventure. He'd travelled the country and seen photos of where his friends went when they travelled the world, but in his mind, nothing could ever compare to Coeur D'Alene.

In a lot of ways, none of that had changed. Even now, Harry was sat at his favorite spot in the world, overlooking the lake closest to his house from an overhang on a nearby hiking trail. He tugged his beanie down further when he felt the wind pick up. Coeur D'Alene was still the most beautiful place he had seen. He just didn't feel like he belonged there anymore.

The town had slowly grown larger and become more of a resort town that attracted the rich and the famous. Instead of being a quiet place that focused on the beauty of nature, it grew into a town that relied on the money of those who visited and the ever revolving door of fads and requirements to keep the city attractive to them.

Slowly, the ski slopes Harry and his friends had basically thought belonged to them became the premier resort in town that they could no longer afford to visit. The lake they used to swim in was now guarded with restricted swimming sections to keep them safe from boating activity, and so on and so on.

Harry took it rough, until he found music. From the moment Harry picked up a guitar, everything changed for him. It was like the vast unknown that had been life after high school had finally gotten a light turned on above it and the room could be seen. The room that Harry would step into once he was eighteen and graduated was filled with music that he himself created.

Or so he thought. He was now twenty-two and had yet to catch his break.

He couldn't give up on his dream, though. There was a flame burning within him that told him music was his destiny. So, until he got to where he knew he was meant to be, Harry continued working. He had gigs almost every night at various establishments throughout town, and most of them even paid him. Not enough to live off of, but he would take what he could get. He loved performing, even if he knew no one was listening to him. It still filled him with peace that he couldn't attain any other way. Not even at his favorite spot overlooking the lake.

An annoying tone rang out and Harry knew it was his alarm telling him he better book it back down the mountain or he'd miss his serving shift at Coeur D'Alene Cellars, the fancy winery in town. He hated how strict the dress code was and the stuffy atmosphere of the place, but the food was delicious and the wine even better, and thanks to the high ratings they had, his tips were always decent as well.

Harry turned off his alarm and finally stood up. His special spot hadn't lead him astray. After spending only twenty minutes there, he had an idea for a new rendition of an older song. If he could get the idea ironed out after his serving shift, maybe he could even try it out tonight.

*~~***~~*

Louis had to admit the town was beautiful, just like Niall and Liam had promised. It just wasn't what Louis needed. He had never been too fond of the outdoors, there were too many bugs. What was he supposed to do in a place whose entire appeal was based on the one thing Louis couldn't find a way to enjoy?

He supposed he wasn't really there to be out in nature. He was just there to get away. Escape from life and stress for awhile.

Even so. There was still the pressure. His first album since the band had broken up had skyrocketed and done far better than he had ever imagined. Naturally, the record label wanted to be sure the second was just as successful, if not more so. If Louis' writer's block continued, though, there wouldn't even be a second album.

Louis hit a few keys on the piano he was sitting in front of and it was just noise. It felt like ages since he'd even had inspiration for a line, much less a chorus. How had music and writing turned so far against him that he couldn't even hear the beauty in the tone anymore?

"Fuck," Louis muttered before standing up and scrubbing at his eyes. It was only then he looked out the windows and realized how dark it had gotten. He hadn't eaten in hours, he'd just wasted away in front of the piano with his phone, computer, and loads of blank paper.

Okay, food. He needed to eat and then come up with a plan of sorts. Mainly, he needed to figure out how long he was going to force himself to languish alone in the middle of nowhere Idaho before giving up and going back to LA. Or New York. Hell, maybe he'd hop on a plane to some secluded island in the Pacific instead. Then again. That was essentially what he'd already done, just with colder weather and much less sand.

Rolling his eyes at himself, Louis looked down and deemed his jeans and hoodie to be low key enough to not garner him too much attention. He grabbed his phone and his keys, and headed out.

The house he'd rented had left a nice and thorough list of places to get food nearby, and he was pleased. There were several options of all different styles, but Louis just wanted a burger. The place closest to him boasted "farm fresh organic beef", as if Louis cared about any of that, but it also seemed like a place where he could go and hide away without worry of anyone approaching him.

As soon as Louis walked in, he knew he'd found his favorite spot. It was only the second restaurant he'd tried since he arrived in Coeur D'Alene, but he could feel it.

The hostess led him to a booth in the corner, and he happily opened the menu before looking around.

The lighting was low, as most restaurants seemed to prefer once it got dark outside, but it still felt lively. It wasn't overwhelming, thankfully, just lighthearted. As if those who were there, staff and customers alike, were truly happy to be right where they were right at that moment.

It had been awhile since Louis had felt that way. Hopefully he could soak up some of it up and use it for his songwriting.

He'd just placed his order with the server and was about to type up some possible lyrics he'd already been inspired by when he heard the music being piped in go silent and a throat was cleared into a mic.

Oh God no. Anything but this. If Louis had known there was going to be live music, he would have chosen somewhere else. Why did they have to ruin what was truly the perfect ambiance for Louis with some sub-par wannabe singer-songwriter?

Louis steeled himself for the man's voice.

"Hello, I'm going to sing some songs for you tonight. I hope you like them."

The voice was deep and smooth, slower than Louis had expected. It made him want to look up at the singer rather than cower into the corner of his booth.

So he did. The man was standing in front of a microphone on a tiny raised platform in perfect eyesight of Louis. He didn't look nervous at all, but he didn't look like the cocky asshole Louis had been expecting either. Louis continued to brace himself for what was sure to accost his ears as he took in the simple Ramones shirt and jeans the man was wearing, when something Louis hadn't been expecting happened.

The man began to play his guitar, and he was *good*. It was a tune Louis found almost familiar, but not quite, and the way he plucked at the strings almost gave Louis flashbacks to the Beatles or even John Denver.

And then, the man began to sing. His voice had a power lacing it that gripped Louis and held him captive, ignoring even the food when it was placed on the table. He couldn't let a single moment of this man's performance go unobserved, and yet everyone else in the restaurant seemed to have no idea what they were witnessing: pure art.

Whoever this man was, he took songs that were popular to the point of being overplayed and reworked them entirely, making the lyrics hold new meaning for Louis. He sang songs that were epic classics and somehow did them *better*. It had only been twenty-five minutes, and Louis felt like a changed man.

"This is the last song for now," the man said. "I'll be back for more in about fifteen minutes, but you probably won't be here anymore, so thank you for joining me. I hope you like this last song, it's a favorite of mine and I just finished the arrangement tonight, so I hope it isn't too rough."

Louis was so wrapped up in the man's performance, it took him two lines to even realize the man was singing *Louis' own song.*

The way it was being sung, though. Louis closed his eyes and let the music sink into him, because he'd never been so touched by his own words before. This complete stranger had taken a song that held so much of Louis inside of it and made it his own so entirely that Louis didn't feel worthy of keeping his name attached to it anymore.

The song ended far too soon, and there was scattered applause throughout the room. Louis felt he deserved much more, but one set of fervent clapping only went so far.

"Thank you again for joining me tonight. My name is Harry Styles and I'm here every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from nine until eleven and I'd love to see you all again. Have a great night."

The man - *Harry* - smiled at someone behind the bar and turned off the microphone before leaving his guitar on a stand Louis had previously missed and walked to the bar.

Should Louis go up to him and compliment him? Should he talk about how incredible Harry was with the way he owned the room and the music? Tell him to pay no mind to the fact no one seemed to realize they were in the presence of greatness? Should he buy him a drink and explain how Louis considered more than once what the sweat on his neck might taste like?

What Louis should do is pull his head out of his ass and eat his now cold burger. He should leave the man alone to keep living his probably wonderful life, and go back to his temporary home and write.

So that's what Louis did. He ate his burger, which was still delicious despite Louis ignoring it for almost half an hour, left a good tip, and walked out just as Harry was getting back on stage to sing for a new set of patrons.

*~~***~~*

Louis couldn't remember the last time he had written so many songs in such a short amount of time. Niall was right, the fresh mountain air was good for the soul and the creative juices.

If Louis was being honest, though, it wasn't the air that had made the difference.

Harry's voice stayed with him and woke something within Louis that he hadn't even realized had gone to sleep. Louis had so many ideas flowing through him on the short drive back to his rental that he almost forgot to lock the car before rushing into the house to start getting them down.

The next time he looked at the clock, his back aching from bending over the piano with his phone recording everything he was singing and writing and musing about, it was almost three in the morning. It was fruitful, though, because he already had the basis for at least three different songs and a good start on the chorus for two of those.

He went to bed around five, but even once he had gotten tucked in, he still was getting ideas and humming potential melodies into his voice memos on his phone.

Louis finally woke up past noon and felt an itching beneath his skin that he had missed so much it could almost be called a longing. When he used to write songs for the band and especially when he was writing for his solo album, Louis had felt an anxiety within himself if he wasn't actively making music. He still didn't fully understand it, but he knew that it was his body's way of telling him he left something incomplete. He knew that once he started a project, he would feel this way until it was done. It drove his friends and family insane, because he would ghost them completely for weeks at a time as he fell into a hole of songwriting and sleeping, only taking breaks long enough to eat and shower, but when he emerged he always felt on top of the world.

Hopefully this would end similarly.

It seemed like it would. He ordered pizza in while he cleaned himself up and ate as he worked on tweaking his ideas on the laptop. It was such a difference from the night before, where he spent hours hardly touching the piano keys and the paper at most had a doodle of a dumb smiley face on it. Now he had three paper notebooks sitting in front of him with his phone on one app and at least three going on the laptop as he tried to take what was in his brain and lay it out in a way that others could understand and hear what he was going for.

It was wonderful and it was like a full sensory experience for him until he got stuck. Again.

The fizzing beneath his skin was still present, but it was like his brain had shut down. He got up to get a drink of water and realized it was the same time he'd been pulled out of his stupor the night before, which meant that if he headed down to the same burger joint he had the night before, he could hear Harry sing again and maybe that would unlock him once more.

Louis didn't even have to make a conscious decision, his body was already acting on it and taking him towards the door.

<p style="text-align:center">*~~***~~*</p>

"Thank you for joining me tonight! I love performing for everyone here. My name is Harry Styles, I'm here every Tuesday through Thursday, so have a great weekend and I'll see you next week."

Harry smiled and waved and he heard once more a loud, fervent applause from one person while the rest of the people in the restaurant didn't seem like they could care less that Harry was up there.

He was used to people not really paying attention to him. That's basically what he was paid for and why he didn't really interact with people unless they looked really into it. He was meant to set an ambiance and he liked to think he did it well.

This week had been strange, though. All three nights he'd played at Steve's, there had been someone clapping with much more enthusiasm than he was used to. It was only one person and it was every night, so he was *hoping* they were there for him, but the idea seemed a little far fetched. Maybe they were here for the week and really liked Steve's burgers.

Harry set his guitar on the stand and walked to the bar where Mitch had his beer waiting.

"Oh, Mitch! Buying me a beer? You shouldn't have," Harry teased, pretending to act coy. "After all, what would Sarah say?"

"Fuck off, Harry," Mitch said, but he wasn't hiding his smile very well. Harry knew he said otherwise, but underneath it all, Mitch really did love him.

Harry laughed and took a sip. He loved the seasonal lagers they served at Steve's and a new one had just come out last week. Harry sighed happily as he sat down at the stool in front of Mitch.

"So, what did you think?" Harry asked as he set his cup down on the bar. "Is there a certain set you think works better than the other? I liked my new song from Tuesday, but I'm not sure. I feel like people might have preferred my original song from tonight better."

"I liked your original, myself, but redoing one of Louis Tomlinson's songs the way you did was ballsy."

Harry turned, surprised by the voice he heard close to his shoulder. Upon seeing who it was, Harry was even more glad he'd set his glass down before so he couldn't drop it on the floor when he realized Louis fucking Tomlinson himself was complimenting Harry's music.

"Holy shit," Harry said quietly, eyes wide. He blinked a few times, but Louis continued to stand there. "You're…" Swallowing, Harry did his best to pull himself together and say a full sentence. "Hi, I love your music and I don't think I've played your song yet tonight."

"You haven't," Louis said, smile wide and eyes sparkling. God, he was somehow even more beautiful in person. "But I've come every night to hear you sing. You're really talented."

Harry looked back to Mitch to see if he was hearing the same thing Harry was. He must have fallen and hit his head or something, because this absolutely wasn't real. There was no way *the* Louis Tomlinson had listened to him for three nights and liked what he heard.

"What are you looking at me for?" Mitch asked, flicking Harry with his wet rag as he moved further down to clean the bar where a party had just left. "The pop star is talking to you, not me."

Turning back to Louis and feeling a bit sheepish over the fact he's behaving like some socially-challenged elementary school child, Harry rubbed the back of his neck and smiled as best he could. "Thank you," he finally managed.

"You're welcome," Louis said, bowing his head a little as he gestured to the stool beside Harry. "Is this taken?"

Harry shook his head as quickly as he could. "Nope. Definitely free."

Smiling even wider, Louis sat down and smiled at Mitch. After ordering a beer on tap, Louis turned to Harry. "So, do you write your original stuff by yourself or do you have a writing partner?"

"Oh, uh," Harry couldn't really believe he was being asked about his writing process by someone as famous as Louis. What had this night become? "Well I usually write it by myself, but sometimes if I'm stuck on a part or something, Mitch here is really great with a guitar and writing some things himself."

"He's full of shit, don't believe a word he says," Mitch warned Louis as he handed him his beer then walked away.

Louis started cackling before turning his bright smile Harry's way. "God, he's already one of my favorite people in this town."

Harry tried not to let a swirl of jealousy grow within his belly. "He's pretty great, yeah," Harry forced out with what was hopefully a genuine smile before taking a sip of his beer. He didn't have much time left before he needed to start his next set, and besides, he really did love Mitch.

"Does he help you with the arrangements for your covers as well?" Louis asked before taking a sip of his own and humming happily at his choice. "I'm being serious when I tell you I've never heard someone take a hugely popular song and make it entirely their own like you do. It's incredible."

"Thank you," Harry said, still feeling like this conversation was somehow not really happening. "Those are all my own, though."

Louis tilted his head and smiled at Harry. "Your YouTube videos are pretty impressive as well, you know."

Harry choked on his beer in surprise and winced at the burning sensation it caused inside his nose. Thankfully none actually came out, but it was a near thing and that feeling was going to bother him the rest of the night.

"You looked me up on YouTube?" This conversation somehow continued to shock him and he wasn't sure he'd be able to handle too much more. Louis was going to send his blood pressure so high he was going to pass out.

Smirking, Louis said, "I've done my research on you best I could, yeah."

Shaking his head, Harry finally had to ask the question that had been running through his head from the moment Louis turned this into a full fledged conversation. "Why?"

"Why what?" Louis asked, chuckling. "You're good, Harry. I already told you that."

"Yeah, but," Harry ran his hand nervously through his hair. "I'm not *that* good. I mean, I like to think I'm pretty good, but I've been called mediocre enough times to know that my

chances of getting out of this town thanks to music are slim."

Louis narrowed his eyes. "Anyone who calls you mediocre obviously has no idea what the fuck they're talking about."

Harry snorted. "Yeah, well some of them were pretty high up in various record labels, so excuse me for disagreeing."

"You got in for auditions at labels?" Louis asked, eyebrows high. Harry was at least somewhat glad he was able to turn the tables for at least a little bit.

Shrugging, Harry said, "A couple."

"Five," Mitch yelled from where he was mixing drinks a few feet over. "He's gone to LA for five different labels."

Turning back to Harry, Louis said, "They're fucking idiots."

"Said I wasn't what they were looking for," Harry said. "Or that I was too mediocre to gain a true following or something like that."

Louis leaned forward and said, "Well, I'm telling you they are wrong and I'd like to prove to you how much I believe that."

One last swig to drain the cup, Harry stood up and asked, "Oh yeah? And how'd you like to do that?"

"Write with me."

"Yeah right," Harry said turning around to walk back to his makeshift stage. This had to be a prank someone was pulling on him. Hell, Grimmy knew exactly how much he loved Louis and his music. He'd probably run into him and asked him to pull Harry's leg or something.

"I'm serious," Louis called after him.

"Okay," Harry said with a laugh before he picked up his guitar. "I'll dedicate this next set to you and if you're still here afterwards, we can exchange numbers."

"You've got yourself a deal, Curly."

*~~***~~*

Harry stood on the front step of a house he didn't even know was tucked away where it was. It was in a perfect little nook of thick trees, which hid it from most vantage points in town. The house was also huge, just as he had expected for a pop star like Louis Tomlinson, but he wasn't really prepared for the nerves that accompanied walking up to it.

It took about fifteen minutes, but he finally rang the doorbell. He'd wanted to knock, but was certain it wouldn't be heard in a house as large as this one was.

He could hear steps coming down the hall and Louis opened the door, a wide grin on his face. "Hey, come on in. Thanks again for coming."

"I still don't know why you're thanking me," Harry said as he took off his shoes in the entryway. "I really should be the one thanking you pretty much nonstop for this opportunity."

"I really don't think you understand how much you've helped unblock me," Louis said as he started leading the way into the house. It was so spacious, Harry could hardly take it all in. "I was at a complete standstill until I heard you on Tuesday."

Harry shook his head and hurried to catch up. "Well. Glad I could help. Hopefully I don't disappoint tonight."

"I'm sure you won't," Louis said, smiling over his shoulder.

When Harry turned into the large room Louis had set up with a piano, a couple of guitars, his laptop, and loads of paper, Harry smiled. This was the perfect setting. The room was small, comfortable, and looked similar to his own process at times.

"So do you have a specific song in mind you want my help with, or do you want to start something completely new?"

Louis started shuffling through papers as he spoke. "Well, kind of both. See, I had an idea for a song after your set on Wednesday and it's only a vague idea lyrically. I was thinking you might be able to help me fill in some holes and maybe have some ideas for the music itself."

Harry looked over to the piece of paper Louis finally pulled out of a bunch and was holding toward him. Taking it into his hand, Harry nodded and read over what was there.

"Okay, so do you have an idea of the sound you want for this one?"

As soon as Louis had expressed his idea for general vibe, it was like they had tapped into a water line and they couldn't stop the flow of music and lyrics. They wrote and rewrote, strumming guitars and even coming up with some ideas for harmonies.

They'd also come up with a few other ideas while they were working on this song, so Harry was happy Louis was recording all of this. It was such a new way of songwriting for him, he hadn't thought about the possibility of losing ideas if they didn't record their sessions.

There was a lot Harry was learning, actually. How various mediums helped and hurt his songwriting depending on what he was trying to figure out at the time. How Louis rubbed the back of his head up through to the front so his hair was ridiculously tousled after only five or ten minutes of the inspiration striking.

That spending time with Louis hadn't made Harry like him any less. He'd always been so sure that Louis was one of those celebrities who seemed too perfect to exist because he *was*.

Harry had spent hours with him in a small room songwriting, though, and he had yet to even find a single flaw.

Blinking and rubbing his eyes, Harry looked up and saw the time.

"Holy shit," he muttered, looking at his phone to make sure the clock was right. Unfortunately it was. "It's almost two and I've got a morning shift at the cellar tomorrow. I'm sorry, but I've got to go."

"I'm sorry to have kept you so long," Louis apologized before standing. He groaned as he stretched out, and Harry did the best he could not to linger on the strip of skin that was exposed just above his waistband when Louis did so. "I really did only mean for you to help for a couple of hours. I didn't mean to take over your entire night."

"It's fine," Harry said, smiling as he put his guitar back into its case. "I really enjoyed it and hope it was helpful for you."

"Of course it was," Louis said, scoffing. "I could co-write the entire album with you, if you weren't against it."

Harry snorted as he zipped the case and stood up. It was only then he saw how serious Louis was. "Fuck, that wasn't a joke."

Louis chuckled and shook his head. "It wasn't. You're incredibly talented. And, if you co-wrote with me, it would not only help me out, but it could definitely get your foot in the door with the industry guys."

Eyes wide, Harry took a deep breath. "Wait, seriously? Like, you'd seriously help me like this?"

"Yes, Harry. I would."

"But… why?"

Louis folded his arms and smiled. "I don't like to brag, but I do have a bit of an eye for new acts, you know. I love finding people that might have been overlooked and helping them find their footing. People who are actually talented and such."

Harry nodded. "Yes, I've noticed that. Plus your twitter is often alerting people to lesser known singers."

Closing his eyes, Harry realized he'd just admitted at least partially how big a fan he was of Louis. He'd already known Harry was a fan, he made that ridiculously obvious the first time they ever spoke, but he felt like following Louis on social media or something was a different level and he'd just given himself away. So much for seeming chill.

"Okay then," Louis said, smile evident in his voice. "Well I've heard something in your voice and I recognize the magic you've created reworking other people's songs. Your own original music is just as inspiring, and I'd like to use it for my own benefit on this upcoming album while also helping you get your foot in the door at the same time, if that works for you."

Harry finally opened his eyes and bit his lip. "You really think you could get someone to sign me?"

Louis shrugged. "Depends on what kind of deal you're looking for and what your goals are. But yes, I think I could absolutely get you connected with people who can get things kick-started for you."

Harry studied Louis. "And my name is actually going to be listed as songwriter for the songs that get published or recorded in any way?"

"Yes, Harry," Louis said, smiling. "I'll even have my assistant send over paperwork for you to sign saying exactly that. I'll make sure it's all legal and binding and I'll even get you registered with the songwriting agencies we go through so it's all above board. Alright?"

Harry studied Louis' face before slowly nodding. "My friend just graduated law school. He works real estate law around here, but I'll see if he can look them over for me before I sign them, if that's okay."

Smiling widely, Louis nodded and rocked on his feet a bit. "You're already getting the hang of this, Styles."

They quickly agreed on another time to work on some more songwriting, and as Harry walked back to his car, he couldn't help but wonder if this was finally what he'd been waiting for. Maybe it was finally the time for him to make a name for himself and leave the town that had outgrown him in so many ways.

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"Haz, I'm still confused why you're bringing these to me. You know I don't specialize in anything even close to the industry," Nick said, settling down in his chair.

Nick and Harry had been close friends ever since Harry had followed him around for an entire summer. Harry had been eight, Nick seventeen, and Nick thought it was adorable until he realized Harry was never going to leave him alone. He'd adopted him as a sort of younger brother, which worked well for them, and when he'd returned after college to join his dad's law firm, Harry had never thought he'd need his expertise for anything.

"I know, but I don't speak the type of English that's used in these papers," Harry said. "I read them to the best of my ability, but I want to be sure I'm not signing away my rights or anything."

Sighing, Nick rolled his eyes and pulled the papers towards himself. "I'm just telling you, this is not professional advice. Alright? All I'm going to do is let you know if I think this is a good deal or not and why, and then you go on your way."

"Yes, I get it," Harry said, nodding quickly.

Nick wasn't far into the first document when he started looking confused. The further he went, the more nervous Harry got. Nick wasn't quiet often, especially when he was confused, and he worried it didn't bode well.

Would he need to stop what he'd been working on with Louis? Was the deal actually a big mess? Was Harry going to get screwed over if he signed these papers? He wanted so badly to work with Louis on his album, it was more than a dream come true, it was so perfect he hadn't even dared to imagine it could possibly happen. He didn't want it ripped away from him now.

"Harry," Nick said slowly before looking up at him. "These are forms to get you registered as both a songwriter and a performing artist with legitimate recording and production companies associated with a major label. You know that, right?"

Nibbling on the side of his index finger, Harry nodded. "Yeah, that's what I told you, isn't it?"

"No, actually, it's not," Nick said, falling back into his chair and laughing a little as he scrubbed at his face. "Do you have a record deal I'm not aware of? A manager out there making connections for you other than just Adam helping get you gigs?"

"No," Harry said. "I'm confused. What does any of that have to do with this?"

"Then what the hell kind of project is this?"

"Exactly what I told you before," Harry said, frustrated that Nick was making such a stupid big deal of this. He knew it was important and not likely that someone like him would be able to do something like this, but he'd already told Nick all of this so he wasn't sure why Nick was questioning it all like he was. "I'm helping Louis Tomlinson write his next album."

"The Louis you said you were writing songs with is Louis *Tomlinson?"* Nick practically screeched.

"Yes," Harry said, once again. "I told you that this morning."

"No no," Nick said looking back at the papers. "You never once mentioned his last name. I thought it was some songwriter who had come here on vacation and had roped you in out of desperation to give his music some new life or something. I didn't realize you were working with one of the biggest names in music right now."

"Oh." Harry rewound their conversations and realized he might not have ever mentioned a last name. Oops. "Sorry?"

"Yes, well," Nick sighed and leaned forward once again picking up one or two of the documents. "Two of these are simply applications with the usual fine print. Nothing out of the ordinary and absolutely fine. These other two, though, actually give you a lot of leeway and rights. It's pretty ironclad, but in your favor. I'm impressed, actually. They're very generous and not at all what I was expecting considering the examples we'd read while I was in school."

"Oh," Harry said, blinking and finally allowing himself to feel excited. To think this could actually be happening for him. "So, you're saying it would be alright if I signed these?"

Nick gave him a suspicious eye and restacked the papers together. "I will not give you outright advice like that. All I will say is these seem like good options overall and nothing set off my suspicions while reading them."

Harry jumped up, pulling Nick into an awkward hug over his desk. "Thanks, Grimmy! You're the best!"

"Yeah, you're only saying that 'cause I just gave you free legal advice. Don't let my dad get wind of this."

Harry laughed as he gathered the papers up. "I won't. Promise."

Taking a deep breath, Harry walked out into the sunshine and shivered a little, checked the time, and hurried home. He should have plenty of time to fill these out, get them to Louis, and still get to work on time.

For the first time since he'd first talked with Louis, Harry allowed himself to actually hope. Hope that he and Louis would continue working together well. Hope that they would write songs that Louis wanted to record and songs his label would like. Hope that this could be the break he had been waiting for.

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"So did you listen to what I sent you?" Louis asked as soon as Niall picked up the phone.

"I did, and so did Zayn."

Louis bit his lip and continued pacing his music room. "And?" he prompted when Niall didn't say anything else. "I trust you guys. I want to know what you think."

"Well I'd hope so since we're producing your fucking album again," Niall retorted back.

"Niiiiiii," Louis whined. "Put me out of my misery, okay? The label is breathing down my neck. They want a hint of how things are going, and I'm still afraid to tell them anything because I can't tell if this stuff is as good as I think it is or if it's just because I've been here alone for long enough that I've lost all perspective."

Niall sighed over the line, and Louis dropped himself onto the couch. He hated talking on the phone with him. He was so expressive with his face but gave nothing away when they were on the phone together. Louis hated it.

"You're working with someone I'm not familiar with," Niall finally said in a way that meant he was obviously digging for information. "Did the label send you someone? Did you call in

a favor?”

“No,” Louis said, messing with his fringe in a way that he knew would make it look all limp and oily in no time. He'd need to push it back into a headband by the time he and Harry met up that afternoon.

“Then who's the other voice we heard?”

Clearing his throat, Louis said, “He's a singer-songwriter I discovered here. I've had him sign some paperwork and shit to get him registered because I want to do the whole album with him.” When Niall remained quiet for a few moments, Louis belatedly tacked on, “As long as you don't think what we have come up with so far is shit.”

“It's not shit, Lou. You've gotta trust yourself.” Niall said something to the side again before there was some movement on the line and a door closed. “It's different from your previous stuff, but also like…”

“Like I've finally found the sound that I was on the edge of but couldn't quite tap into before?” Louis filled in.

“Yes, exactly,” Niall said in such a way Louis felt like Niall would be pointing at him if they were in the same room just to add emphasis to it. “That's exactly it. I don't know if it's Coeur D'Alene or this singer-songwriter dude, but whatever it is, keep it going.”

Louis closed his eyes and allowed his body to fully relax in a way he hadn't been able to since coming up to Idaho. “Okay. Awesome. He's coming over to work on some more stuff this afternoon.”

“I want your daily tapes of the sessions you two are recording while you work as well,” Niall said over the ruckus of whatever was happening on his end of the line. “I might have to snatch this guy up when you're done and see if I can put him to work.”

“He doesn't just want to be a songwriter, you know,” Louis said, feeling protective of Harry for some reason. He knew Niall wouldn't feed him to the wolves or anything, but the industry wasn't an easy place to be and he worried.

Which was ridiculous. Harry was a grown ass man who could very well take care of himself. Louis didn't know why he was acting like this.

“Of course he doesn't,” Niall said with a loud laugh. “No one ever does.”

Louis hummed in agreement.

“Shit, fucking fuck,” Niall practically yelled into the phone. “Lou, I've gotta go. Send me those recordings!”

And then the line went dead. Louis chuckled and looked around the messy room. Yeah, he'd send him their session recordings.

For now, though, Louis had a few hours before Harry was done with his serving job. He might as well try to get some more written before Harry was able to join him again.

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"Okay, but what if we dropped it here. We get a lot of your upper register in this song, so I feel like it would give a drop back down into your chest voice that much more power if we were to switch it up for this repeat near the end," Harry said, circling some lyrics and singing an example of what he was thinking.

"Yeah, yeah," Louis said, before repeating what Harry had just sung.

He tried to ignore the chills Louis' voice gave him when he dropped it down, his rasp so close and unfiltered. He had hoped that after hearing Louis sing for the past several days as they continued writing, that he'd be more used to it. That he'd build a tolerance of sorts.

That wasn't happening.

"How should we end it, though?" Louis bit his lip and messed with the guitar recording they'd done a little earlier for this song. "I feel like going back up could have some good punch, but we could also scratch that last repeat of the bridge and instead have me stay low and sing the first line again."

"Why didn't I think of that?" Harry asked, strumming on his guitar again and singing what he thought Louis was imagining.

"Exactly! Perfect!" Louis said with a clap before scratching out what they'd written on both their lyrics sheet as well as the bar-staff paper. He typed in some more notes as Harry absently strummed on the guitar before he was interrupted by his stomach growling.

"Shit," Harry said, glancing at the time. "We really should get something to eat. And probably take a break. It's almost dinnertime and we never had lunch."

Wincing, Louis looked at Harry. "Sorry, I get like this. I get so wrapped up in it, I'll forget to eat if something doesn't remind me."

"Obviously I get just as caught up, so you're fine," Harry said, smiling before he stood and twisted around in an attempt to get his back to loosen up. He hadn't moved enough and the position he kept while playing guitar always messed with his back.

"You okay?" Louis asked, looking at Harry with concern.

"Yeah," he said, rolling his eyes before setting down his guitar. "I just need to remember to move around and stretch more often. I've got a bad back, so it hurts sometimes."

"Okay, let's go out and get some food, then. Let's get out of here and move around a little more. You don't work tonight, do you?"

Harry smiled and shook his head. "Nah, it's the monthly open mic night, so my set was cancelled."

"Perfect," Louis said. "Let's go get something to eat, and then you can take me to see some of the sights in your town. I haven't seen much outside of the house and Steve's."

Harry froze and turned to Louis, his eyes wide. "Wait, seriously? How long have you been here?"

Louis shrugged and threw a glance at Harry before leaving the music room. "A couple weeks I think? Not too long, but long enough I should definitely see more than I have."

"Uh, yeah," Harry said, rushing to catch up with Louis. "I know just the place."

They grabbed sandwiches to go from Harry's favorite mom and pop shop down the road and then, after making sure Louis was wearing good shoes, he led them into the woods.

"I forget how cold it gets in the shade after being so warm in the sunshine," Louis muttered, shivering a little. "The trees are so thick right here."

"Yeah, don't worry though. The path picks up soon, so you'll be sweating despite the chill soon enough."

Harry did his best to keep his pace a little slower since he wasn't sure what kind of hiking Louis was used to. He kept up well enough and didn't seem to be struggling too badly, but Harry wanted him to enjoy it and not regret it.

"So where exactly are we going?" Louis asked.

"It's my favorite place in all of Coeur D'Alene. Just wait until you see the view."

Louis made occasional sounds as he kept walking, and Harry couldn't help but smile. There was a lot about the town that felt like it didn't suit him anymore and a lot of things had changed to make him sad, but this was one thing that he didn't think would ever change for him. The beauty of nature in this area was something he would never find anywhere else.

"Okay, are you ready?" Harry asked, pausing before they turned to the overhang. They were just out of view, where the trees were still thick, and Louis had his hands on his hips as he breathed a little harder than usual.

"Yes, Harold. Show me this most amazing of all places."

He tried to hold back his smile, but it wasn't working very well. He hadn't shown his place to anyone new since he'd brought Nick up here several years ago. He was excited to see Louis' face when he looked out over the lake and surrounding mountains and trees.

"Okay. Watch your step, alright? It's not exactly the safest and I don't want to be responsible for the death of pop music."

Harry held his hand out and waited. Louis looked at him warily, but took his outstretched hand. He didn't want to think about why the feel of Louis' calloused fingertips made him want to kiss them, made him want to see where else might feel rough on Louis' skin. He was lucky enough to call Louis a friend and be working with him. Anything more would be ridiculous, even if his admiration of Louis as a person had only grown since they'd spent time together.

As they carefully made their way onto the rock, Louis was looking down and watching his step, which was probably smart. He squeaked a little when he saw how far up they were, and Harry chuckled a little.

"Oh come on, Harold, you shouldn't laugh at an old… man…"

Harry knew exactly when Louis had stopped looking at Harry and instead took in their surroundings, not only because he stopped talking, but also because his grip on Harry's hand got suddenly tighter.

"Oh my God," Louis said, sounding like he could barely breathe.

Harry studied Louis' face and was glad to see he was just as awestruck as Harry probably had been the first time he'd found it.

"I had no idea we were this close to the lake," Louis said quietly. "It's so still out there, reflecting everything back to us. It's like a postcard."

"Smells better than a postcard," Harry said happily before he dropped down to sit near the middle of the rocky overhang. Louis let go of his hand, but before Harry could miss his touch, Louis plopped right beside him, their knees overlapping in his attempt to stay as close to Harry as possible.

"Hope you don't mind my staying in your space," Louis said as he continued looking around. "I'm honestly quite scared of heights, so even though I am loving this, my heart is trying to escape my chest and it feels safer near you."

Harry shrugged and wrapped his arm around Louis' waist, pulling him closer. "Nothing wrong with a good cuddle."

Louis hummed and continued studying everything they could see. "How did you find this?"

"Got mad at my mom in middle school and ran off from our picnic on the lake. It was public space back then, like the whole lake was, and I just started hiking." Looking around, Harry remembered the feelings of anger he'd experienced that day, but also his guilt when he'd returned. "I knew she'd be worried, but that was half of the reason why I did it, you know? So I just started walking. The thing is, there are loads of trails around here and people could never explore all of them. It would take a lifetime. I started following what was probably a deer trail at one point, and it led me here."

"How'd you ever find your way back?" Louis asked.

Harry could feel Louis' eyes on him, but he ignored it. "It took me a long time to get home that night," he admitted, laughing a little. "My mom was *livid* when I returned. It took a lot of exploring to make my way back here, but I figured it out and came prepared. I brought bright cloth strips to mark the trees. It's obviously a more popular trail now, but yeah."

He felt Louis shaking his head. "You are a troublemaker, Styles. I can tell."

"Yeah, I maybe gave my mom a few heart attacks growing up."

They enjoyed the quiet of the surroundings a little longer, before Harry took note of the sky.

"Alright, the sun is going to start setting in a bit, so we should make our way back down before it starts getting dark."

Harry noticed Louis glancing back several times before they turned back onto the path fully to make their way back.

"So, ready for some more songwriting?" Louis asked, rubbing his hands together. "I think we can probably finish up the song we were working on before we really got going this morning."

"Let's do it."

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Louis was in trouble. He was in a lot of trouble.

The thing was, Harry was incredible. He was *more* than incredible. If God had decided to make a man that lived up to every dream Louis had ever had of his perfect partner, he was pretty sure it would be Harry. He suited every preference Louis had physically, he wasn't afraid to fight Louis or call him out when he was wrong, he had the most incredible voice and an incredible sense of music. His intuition was somehow perfectly honed when it came to what was missing from a song. Not to mention he'd talked about how he loved to cook earlier.

Basically, Louis felt like it was only a matter of time before he was head over heels in love with the man he was currently writing his second album with. And now, they were writing a love song together.

So yeah. Louis was in trouble.

"Something just isn't working here," Harry said, leaning back in his seat. "I feel like we need to do something to switch up the second verse. I also think we need to separate the first and second verse. It will make the beginning a little too short, so maybe we can add something to

help draw it out a little and not feel like it's rushing into the bridge, but it's not working as it is."

Louis had to agree. He pulled his head out of his thoughts about how plush Harry's lips looked, and tried to focus on the song.

"That might help, but I feel like we need something else. What if instead of being from the perspective of the singer, like first person, what if we made it third person? Do you think that would help?"

Harry scrunched his nose as they both looked at what they'd gotten down so far.

"No, I feel like that takes away some of the power of the emotions described here." Suddenly, Harry sat up straighter as he stared into space a little and covered his mouth with his hand. "Fuck, wait. Oh my God, I think I've got it."

He jumped up and grabbed Louis' iPad they'd left at the piano earlier.

"Yes yes yes," Harry was changing as he moved things around and worked in a way that Louis couldn't see. He waited until Harry was done and ready to show him. "Yeah, I think I figured out why this wasn't working and this is perfect. If you like it, I mean."

"Okay, spit it out, Harold," Louis said, fondly.

Harry turned to Louis and scooted close to him. "It's gotta be a duet," Harry said. "The first verse is you talking about how you want that drink, you want the cigarette, all that. You go through singing about how much you need the person. Like a lighthouse and the rain and all that. And *then* the second person comes in."

"Oh my God, that's why their need feels different. Their desires come from a different place, but they still need the same thing," Louis said, feeling like a light just came on and showed him the rest of the song. "Fuck, you're right. Let's get this second verse fixed and then we can figure out some harmonies, oh my God, you're right."

They fervently got to it, and it was like the song flowed from them lyrically. It felt *right* in a way it hadn't before. Louis was also having an incredibly hard time not imagining Harry as the other voice in the song. Sure, Harry was singing it, but Louis wanted to insert Harry into this imaginary character who was longing for Louis as much as Louis was longing for him.

So, he did the best he could to take those projections and reel them in as they got back to work.

Musically, it was coming together just as well as it had lyrically, but two hours later, they were stuck again.

"I'm not sold on the two voices coming together in the second chorus though," Louis said, running his hands through his hair. It felt greasy and limp after working on this song for the past several hours. It was well past midnight at this point, but he and Harry both knew they were going to keep working until the song was finished. "I know this is going to technically

be a feature for someone, but I do like duets to be more balanced, and I feel like it will give the other voice more power if they get a chance to sing the chorus after their verse too."

Nodding, Harry said, "Okay, fair. What if there was some alternating after that second chorus then? Then they can come together and sing some harmonies on the last chorus and finally have some overlap like that?"

Louis sighed. "I don't know. It feels like it maybe isn't a song that's going to have them singing it together at all."

"What do you mean?" Harry asked, scrunching his nose up. "This is perfect for some harmonizing."

"I know, but like. It's about need and longing, right?"

Louis stood up and tried to find a way to put his feelings into words. He was trying really hard to not make it about himself and how he was writing about what he felt like his longing for Harry could grow into if given a chance. He didn't want to scare him off before he'd even had a chance to try to woo him. See if it was possibly mutual. But he had to figure out if he could explain how this song was playing out in his mind. He was a lyricist and a songwriter, but he was finding it hard to lay out everything he was imagining to Harry right now.

"It's not really a song about how well they work together. It's about how they both want it so bad they *need* it. They don't really get it, right? That's not what the song is about. Shouldn't that be reflected in their not really singing together? It almost makes it stand out even more that way."

"Fuck," Harry said, staring at Louis. "That's really beautiful."

Louis blushed and whispered, "Thanks."

"We should try singing it like that." Harry nodded beside him. "It'll help with ironing out the end of this."

Nodding, Louis walked back over to the sofa. He got to singing his part, and then Harry picked up for the second. Louis tried not to stare. He did. It just didn't work very well. Harry was one of those people who sang and you didn't want to take your eyes off of him. He had something incredible about him, and Louis couldn't believe others hadn't seen it.

Louis almost missed his cue to come back in after Harry's part, but he got it. The ending was still incredibly rough, but after messing around a little, they simplified it and finally got it all worked out. As they sang their repeated theme of *I need you* at the end, Louis couldn't help but feel that maybe it was true. Maybe he *did* need Harry. And the way Harry was looking back at him as he sang his own just made Louis feel like maybe it was the same for him.

"Okay," Louis said with a smile. "I think that was it."

"Yeah, I think so too," Harry said quietly, suddenly looking nervous and checking his phone. 3:30 a.m. lit up and Louis' jaw dropped.

"Shit, I'm sorry it's so late."

Harry smiled at Louis and shook his head. "It's fine. Really."

Louis hummed, and they went quiet again, just staring at each other. There had been something soft, tentative as they wrote the duet tonight. Louis had done his best to ignore it as he felt like he was putting his feelings out there for Harry to see, but he couldn't do that anymore. Did Harry feel the same as he did? Was that part of why they worked so well together? Why they somehow knew what the other was saying sometimes before it was even said? Louis had never felt that with anyone before, but he and Harry had found that connection within an hour or two of writing together. It had to mean something, right?

Just as Louis was about to invite Harry to stay in the guest room, Harry stood up and cleared his throat.

"I should get going. I open tomorrow. Or, well, today I guess."

"Sorry," Louis apologized again.

"No, it's okay, Lou," Harry said, reaching out and gently squeezing Louis' forearm. Just a few inches lower, and he would have taken Louis' hand. It was ridiculous how much he wanted that. He had ever since Harry had offered his hand during their hike a few days ago. "But I really should go."

"Okay," Louis whispered. "I'll be there to watch your set tomorrow night."

Harry nodded as he focused on zipping up his guitar case. "Alright. I'll see you then."

Louis walked him to the door, and before Harry could walk out, he turned and wrapped Louis into a hug. Louis didn't hesitate to wrap his own arms around Harry's waist and tuck his face into Harry's neck.

"Thank you for letting me work with you on this, Lou," Harry said quietly. "I don't think you understand how much it means to me."

"Of course," Louis said. "I think we're almost done writing for the first part. Should probably talk to Niall about scheduling studio time."

Louis felt Harry stiffen in his arms.

"Oh, right. Yeah. Course."

Louis pulled back and looked at him, but his face was like a mask. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, everything's fine," Harry said, before giving a tight smile and walking out the door. "Night, Louis."

"Night, Harry," Louis said, suddenly even more confused than he already was.

Harry felt like an idiot. He'd somehow lost track of the fact that Louis would be leaving, but of course he was. He never meant to stay here long term. It had felt like a bucket of ice water had been thrown over him though when, after feeling like maybe they had a connection between them that was worth exploring, Louis talked about going to LA to record.

He quickly fixed his bun and made sure that he didn't smell like the seafood special from the winery before grabbing his guitar and heading over to Steve's. He needed to not let it affect his set. After all, it didn't matter how much he brought in with the songwriting, he was definitely going to need the money from gigs to keep going. Who knew how much he'd end up actually making off the songs anyway.

When he walked in, Louis was already settled into his usual booth and Harry wished he wasn't. He didn't need to look at him as he sang to remember how humiliated he felt for actually forgetting this wasn't Louis' life. Thinking maybe he could have a part in it.

"Hey, did you get my texts this afternoon?" Louis asked as Harry set up.

Harry had gotten those texts. He hadn't opened them on purpose, though.

"Sorry, I haven't really had a chance to check my phone with everything today," he said, not looking at Louis as he made sure the cord was plugged into the sound system correctly.

"Well, Niall said that he was able to get us time in the studio as early as next weekend, but I wasn't sure if that was going to be enough time to get shifts covered and what it would mean for your regular gigs." Harry froze. Did that mean he thought Harry was going with him? To LA? "I don't know how long exactly we'll be down there or if we would want to keep writing while we're down there instead of coming back up here or what, so I just wanted to see if that was a possibility or not before I had Niall book the time."

Finally turning and looking at Louis, Harry asked, "I'm coming with you?"

Louis laughed before saying, "Yeah, of course you are." When Harry didn't immediately respond, Louis' eyes went wide. "Fuck, did I not make that clear? Yeah, I want you in the studio with me to make sure we're getting everything the way we imagined. Sometimes I lose sight of that during the production part, and if you're there I feel like it'll be easier to stay with the original intent for the songs."

Harry tried to keep his smile in check, but his relief was flooding him to the extent he knew he wasn't doing a good job of it. He could tell simply by the way Louis' eyes dipped down to his cheek that his dimples were coming out.

"Yeah, I'm sure I can make that work," Harry said, basically giving up on pretending to play it cool. His smile was so wide, he knew it was pointless. "You're sure, though? Like, I didn't realize I was going to be such a big part of the entire process. I've never done anything like this before."

"Harold, I want you there," Louis said, eyes sparkling. "Let me know if I can do anything to help you get ready for it, okay? We can talk details tomorrow and I'll have my assistant get us flights then."

"Wait, they'd book my flight, too?" Harry asked, suddenly feeling overwhelmed. "No, Louis, that's too much-"

"No, it's not," Louis said, rolling his eyes. "It's a trip for work. You're not paying for it."

Harry found himself, for the second time in twenty-four hours, lunging forward and pulling Louis into a hug. There was just something about Louis that always made Harry want him closer.

"Thank you," Harry said into Louis' neck. "I really do appreciate all of this so much."

"Well, I appreciate you working with me and sharing your talent," Louis said, pulling back. "Now, get yourself ready and put on a good show, yeah?"

Rolling his eyes, Harry took a breath and got back to work. He'd have to talk to Steve during his break about his gigs. Then he'd also have to reach out to the winery and…

He could take care of that tomorrow. He couldn't believe he was going to be working in a studio and with Louis Tomlinson and Niall Horan.

His excitement infused itself into his set, and he could tell by Louis' wide smile that he sounded even better tonight than he usually did. It was like the more time Harry spent with Louis and in his presence, the more confidence he had in himself.

He hoped that meant good things for this trip. That maybe it would turn out better than the other times he'd gone down. He somehow knew that if Louis was with him, it would be. He just had to wait and see.

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"Zayn keeps sending me names, but none of them feel right for this duet," Louis lamented to Niall. "Don't get me wrong, I appreciate the help, but I think he has a different idea in mind for this song than I do."

"He does, he has a heterosexual idea. It's gotta be Harry, Lou."

Louis froze in the middle of his packing. "Wait, what?"

"You heard me, you idiot," Niall practically yelled into the phone. He never did know how to regulate his voice when he got excited. "You two sounded perfectly suited when I listened to the tapes! It's got to be the two of you."

"There's no way the label will ever let us release that," Louis said, falling onto the bed. "There's a reason Zayn was sending me female artists, Niall. It's not because he has an agenda to further or whatever you were joking about before, it's because he's realistic, as am I."

"Oh, just feed them some shit about how you're both just pining after the same girl or something. Everyone loves a good love triangle."

"That's not the song, though," Louis argued, scrubbing his face. "Can you just imagined the way they'd try to market that? It's not like I imagine it being a single or anything, but I'm out. If people heard me singing a love song with another man, especially if that man is Harry, they'd start making entirely correct assumptions and I think the label damn well knows that."

"Lou," Niall said, sounding more serious than he had during the rest of this conversation. "Just record it with him. The worst they can say after we've got it sent over to them is no. But don't you want that chance?"

Sighing, Louis stood up again. "Yeah. I do."

"That's what I thought," Niall said, sounding entirely too pleased with himself. "What's going on with this guy? I could practically hear the sexual tension in the recordings."

"You have no idea," Louis groaned. "He's so gorgeous, Ni. And you can hear how amazing his voice is, and he's so kind and generous and just. He's amazing. And I have no idea if I should actually try for anything with him or not."

"Why not?" Niall asked. "I mean, honestly, what do you have to lose?"

"A friend? A songwriting partner? The potential love of my life?"

"You're fucking lost, man." Niall laughed. "Just ask him out."

"I thought I might tonight," Louis said, scrunching his nose with nerves as he tossed in another shirt. "See if he'd let me take him out when we get to LA tomorrow."

"Go for it," Niall said. "I really don't see him saying no."

"You know nothing about him," Louis said with a laugh.

"You learn a lot about someone listening to them songwrite, Lou," Niall pointed out. He wasn't wrong. "Now, back to business. We'll definitely get Harry in backing vocals for some of these other ones if he's up for it. It can't hurt to get his voice out there that way as well, and if he can feature in a duet with you, that's even better. There's something special about the way your voices blend together that is really rare, so we need to harness that."

"Yeah, absolutely."

"If he's good with working with me on his own while he's here, that would be great, too. You still haven't given me his contact information, but I get you wanna keep him for yourself right now, you jealous fucker."

Louis was about to fight the fact he was jealous when he heard Harry shouting for him downstairs.

"Lou! Louis? Are you here? If you're not, you really shouldn't leave the door open."

"I'm up here," Louis shouted down to him. "Come on up!" Lowering his voice again, Louis talked into the phone again. "I'm not jealous, but I've got to go anyway. Alright? I'll talk to you tomorrow."

"Lou, I can't believe it!" Harry was panting a little and he rushed in for another hug.

Ever since the night they wrote the duet, he'd been even more effusive with his hugs than he had been before. Louis couldn't find it in him to complain.

"I got a call from RCA, they want me to come in and see them!"

Louis pulled back from Harry, smiling in surprise. "Really? When?"

"Next week! I told them I'd already be down there, so I might as well, right?" Harry spun around. "I mean, it could be just as shit as it was when I went down there for the other labels, so I'm not getting my hopes up too high, but they said that they heard some of my stuff on YouTube and had to get in touch. Isn't that insane?"

"Insanely awesome," Louis said, pulling Harry in for another hug. "That's so great. I'm excited for you."

"Thanks," Harry said, smile wide. "So, you about ready to go? My friends said I wasn't allowed to come to the bonfire if I didn't bring you along."

"I very much doubt that they actually meant that, Harry," Louis said with a chuckle. "But yes, I'm about ready. Let's go."

"You don't know Nick," Harry said with a little grimace.

Laughing, Louis nodded and said, "Yeah, well, I'll meet him tonight and judge for myself."

"Yes you will."

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Harry knew it was stupid, but he was nervous for Louis to meet his friends. He'd already technically met Mitch, but he had no idea how he'd handle Nick especially. Nick was a disaster on the best of days - no matter the professional mask he put on for work - so with alcohol and a large fire, Harry really wasn't sure what to expect.

As they walked up to where he thought the bonfire was supposed to be, it certainly hadn't been tiki torches and a large banner reading, "Good Luck, Harry!"

Warmth filled his chest as he walked up and saw that most of the town was there.

"What the hell?" Harry asked before turning to Louis. "I'm so sorry, I had no idea it was going to be like this, I really did think it was just going to be a few of us."

"Harry!"

Harry turned and saw Nick skipping, actually fucking *skipping,* towards him with a beer in hand and sunglasses still on despite the fact it was nearly dark out.

"Grim, what have you done?" Harry said with a laugh, wrapping him in a hug.

"It was mostly your mom, actually, but I did extend most of the invites and book the music."

Shaking his head, Harry pulled back and said, "Grim, this is Louis. Louis, this is Nick Grimshaw."

"Oh, your lawyer friend?" Louis asked, with a smile as he extended his hand. "Nice to meet you."

Scoffing, Nick rolled his eyes. "Is that how he introduced me? What a lazy fuck. I practically raised him."

"He is absolutely lying," Harry said with a laugh. "This gorgeous woman here was the one who raised me."

"Hi, darling," Anne said, coming over and pulling Harry into a tight hug. She smelled strongly of fire, and he knew she'd been there helping set everything up for hours now. "Were you surprised? We weren't sure if Grimmy would actually keep the secret or not."

"I can't believe you two are just out here making me look like shit in front of our celebrity guest," Nick said, popping a hip and shaking his head. "They love me, they just pretend they don't."

"Oh, I'm sure," Louis said, smile wide. "Very nice to meet you, Ms. Styles."

"It's Twist, actually, but you can call me Anne."

Louis' eyes went wide and he grimaced. "I'm so sorry, I shouldn't have made that assumption."

"Oh you're fine," she said, wrapping him into a hug as well. Harry loved his mom and how welcoming she was. "It's a fair assumption. Now, can I show you around and introduce you to a few people while Harry gets his congratulations from everyone since it's technically his party?"

Louis looked at Harry, and he once again felt warmth flood him, but it was a much different kind from what he felt when he realized his friends were throwing him a going away party. This one made energy fizz beneath his skin and butterflies kick up in his stomach.

"Sounds great. Lead the way," Louis said, holding out his arm for her. Anne laughed, waved at Harry, and took Louis' arm as she guided him towards a small gathering near the food table.

"Now, you're mine," Nick said with a wide smile. "Come on, the crew is over here, though I suppose you should greet the rest of your public as well."

The entire night, Louis and Harry spent maybe fifteen minutes in each other's company, but it felt like so much more because every time Harry would look across the gathering, it felt like Louis' eyes were already on him. He would have been embarrassed, but Louis didn't seem to be, and what exactly did that mean?

"Oh my God, just get out of here, you two are disgusting."

"What?" Harry squawked, looking at Adam where he was standing with his wife, Emi.

"You're practically eye fucking and have been all night." Harry's jaw dropped at Adam being as blunt as he was. "Just do us a favor and get a room."

"He's right," Emi said, smirking.

"It's not like that," Harry argued weakly. He wished it was. Maybe it could be? But it wasn't like that. Not yet.

"Sure it is. He wants it to be, if it isn't," Emi said before leaving Adam's side and wrapping Harry in another hug. "For real, though, good luck, babe. This will be your time, I know it will."

Blowing out his cheeks, Harry turned to look back at Louis, who glanced his way again too. Harry nodded towards where he parked and Louis nodded.

"Alright, well. We're going to head out either way. Thanks for coming, guys."

Harry hugged everyone he passed as he walked towards where Louis was, still with his mom.

"Sorry I basically abandoned you the whole night," Harry apologized.

Smirking, Louis shook his head. "Don't be, your mom is great."

"I've decided I'm adopting him, by the way," Anne said, wrapping her arm around Louis' waist. "Hope you don't mind having another mom. You've got one, whether you want me or not."

"Oh, you know what, I can basically guarantee you'd *love* my mom, so I don't think there will be complaints from anyone about that," Louis said as he turned in for a hug. "Thanks for introducing me to everyone so Harry could enjoy the party."

Anne kissed Louis' cheek and said, "Of course, love. Take care of my boy, alright?"

"I will. Promise," Louis said.

Harry's heart skipped a little when he heard Louis promise that, and his mind began to whirl to possibilities that he knew weren't at all what Louis meant. All the many, varied ways Louis could take care of him.

"Come on, Harold. We want you to have some sleep before we've got to leave for the airport tomorrow."

Nodding and hugging his mom himself, the two of them waved on their way out and were soon in the car.

"Thanks for coming, even if I barely saw you," Harry said, starting the car up.

"Sure," Louis said, before going quiet again.

The air was thick in the car, and Harry was about to say something, *anything,* when Louis spoke up again.

"Hey, Harry?"

"Yeah?" Harry glanced at Louis before focusing on the road again.

"You can say no, right? Like, I don't want you to feel pressured or anything, but…" Louis took a deep breath, and Harry tried to figure out what the hell was going on. Louis never tripped over words like this. "Do you think you'd let me take you out tomorrow night?"

Harry pulled to a stop at a light and looked at Louis. His heart was racing, but he was scared to hope. Louis could mean the invitation as something entirely different from what Harry was wanting it to be.

Clearing his throat, he asked, "Like, as a date?"

"Yeah, if that's alright." Louis gave a tight smile, and Harry could see how nervous he really was. Why was he nervous about *Harry?* "I'd really like to take you on a date."

A honk sounded behind them, and Harry realized the light had turned green. He got moving again, but once he'd pulled himself together again, he said, "Yes. Yes, I would really like to go on a date with you."

"Really?" Louis sounded surprised.

"Louis, I am not sure why you're so nervous, but yes. If you want to take me on a date, I one hundred percent want to go on a date. Lots of dates, actually."

"Thank fuck," Louis whispered with a chuckle.

Harry chuckled as well, and it was like the tension was broken.

Well. Mostly.

When Harry pulled up to Louis' house, he looked over at Louis and, once again, found Louis looking at him.

"Hey," Harry said, quietly.

"Hey," Louis repeated, smiling.

"Can I kiss you?" Harry asked. He had no idea what came over him, but he did know that Louis was interested in at least *something* and Harry didn't want to have to wait longer than he had to before he felt Louis' lips on his.

"Fuck, please," Louis said.

They both unbucked their seatbelts and turned towards each other. Louis reached out and placed his hand gently on Harry's cheek, both of them slowly leaning into each other. When their lips finally met, it was tentative, a little awkward, and their lips were dry from being out in the cool night air, but he didn't care. It made his heart pound and his toes tingle at the possibilities that could come from whatever it was between them.

Pulling back after just a short time, Louis stayed close as he whispered, "Goodnight, Harry. Thanks for bringing me tonight."

"Thanks for coming," Harry said, matching Louis' quiet tone. "Sleep well."

Louis opened the door and climbed out, but he ducked down to look inside before closing it behind him. "Pick you up at nine, yeah?"

Nodding, Harry smiled back. "Yeah. I sent you my address, right?"

"Sure did, curly. Goodnight, and I'll see you then." Sending Harry a wink, Louis shut the car door and walked up to the house. Waving once more, he let himself in and that was that.

Harry had a date tomorrow with the guy he had been falling for over the course of at least the past week or two. Then, the next day, he would have his first day in the studio followed by a meeting with a label that was interested in signing him. It felt like everything was on fast forward now and all his dreams were on a fast track to becoming actual possibilities.

He had to keep his expectations in check, but he couldn't help it. It felt like everything was finally coming together after years of trying. He just hoped it wasn't too good to be true.

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"You're sure it's okay that I'm staying at your house?" Harry asked for probably the millionth time since Louis picked him up that morning.

Louis shook his head as the cars ahead of them on the freeway finally moved enough for them to access the exit that would lead them to Louis' house. He wanted to make a face or something at him, but Harry was too busy looking out the window at the palm trees or some other equally exciting and exotic California sight.

"Harry, I promise. There's room. Are you still comfortable with the arrangement like you were when we were setting all of this up?"

Harry was looking at him now and biting his lip, but he nodded his head slowly.

"Okay, great. Then so am I. But if you change your mind, we can absolutely book you somewhere else. You were essentially staying at my place during songwriting sessions in Coeur D'Alene, so I'm fine with it if you are."

Giving a nervous smile, Harry wrinkled his nose before looking out the window again. "I just don't want to get in the way."

"You won't get in the way," Louis said, reassuringly.

The rest of the drive was quiet as they fought with yet more traffic until they were finally in Louis' neighborhood.

"Fuck," Harry murmured, face practically plastered to the window. "I know you've got money, but I always forget what that means until I'm forced to remember. Like hearing your song on the radio or something."

Louis rolled his eyes. "First thing I did when I got a decent amount of money was buy a car for myself. I'd never had my own growing up, and it felt like freedom. Second was buy my mom a house for her and my sisters. Then I went out and bought an obnoxiously massive house for myself. I grew fond of it, though, so even though it's way too big for me, I haven't been able to get rid of it and now, here we are."

Right then, the car pulled up into Louis' driveway, the driver pulling up so Louis could reach out the window to punch in the code. As the gate lifted, Louis watched Harry's face.

The house really was insanely huge. He couldn't imagine ever putting all of the rooms to use unless he had his family staying with him for long periods of time, but it was nice to have a place that could hold his friends and family for bigger events. He was always a bit nervous bringing someone new there, though. Would they judge him for it? A lone bachelor, living in what was essentially a mansion, just outside LA?

While Harry's jaw dropped a little in surprise, he didn't look like he was judging at all.

"Yeah, I guess you really do have the room," Harry said, voice squeaking a little.

They made quick work of getting their luggage out and soon enough they were inside the entrance to the house.

"This is different from what I expected," Harry said, looking around them as Louis tossed his keys in the bowl near the front door. "Should I take my shoes off?"

Shrugging, Louis kept walking towards the living room. He wanted to open all the drapes to let in the light. That was what he loved most about the house and California in general: all the natural light.

"You can keep them on if you want or leave them at the door. Whatever you're most comfortable with."

Pulling the curtains to the side, Louis smiled at the back yard. This was his favorite room in the whole house.

"Seriously, this is gorgeous," Harry said. "And it's obviously a nice house, but it feels comfortable. I was kinda expecting it to be like a museum or something where I was afraid to touch anything."

Snorting, Louis turned to look at Harry. "Yeah, I wanted to be sure it was homey. I chose an older house because it felt more personable. It was almost like it has a history that filled the house and made it seem less lonely."

Pursing his lips, Harry nodded. "Or it's just filled with ghosts."

Louis laughed loudly, and soon Harry joined in with some soft chuckles.

"Here, let me show you to the guest rooms so you can choose which one you'd like to be in."

The rooms that were mostly prepared for guests were the ones his sisters and mom used whenever they visit from back east, so Louis led them upstairs and down the hall closest to his own bedroom.

"These first two probably aren't to your liking. I have them fitted with two beds each so both sets of twins have their own space. I'd imagine you'll like one of these here, though."

Louis walked in to open the curtains in each room that Lottie, Fizzy, and Jay usually stayed in, allowing Harry time to explore and choose for himself.

"I'll be right back."

Leaving Harry to look around, Louis picked up his own bags and took them to his bedroom, throwing open the blinds there as well. He could see that Ana had been by, because despite the fact he told her she could take the days off and he'd still be paying her, he noticed she'd picked up the little bit of mess he'd left behind. She really did do too much for him, sometimes. He was spoiled.

"Hey, if it's alright, I think I'll take the one across the way," Harry said from Louis' doorway.

Louis startled around, and smiled at him. "Perfect. That's where my sister Lottie usually stays. She says it's the room with the best view."

Smiling, Harry nodded. "It really is." After a short pause, Harry's eyes went wide and he held out a hand towards Louis as he rushed out, "Not that yours isn't also nice!"

"Oh my God, don't make this awkward now," Louis said, laughing. "I mostly chose this one because of the en suite and the fact it's got a larger closet to handle my ridiculous shopping habits."

They stood and stared at each other a little, and Louis was starting to hate himself a little bit. Everything had been fine up until now. They'd both seemed a little giddy and nervous, but were still able to hold a good conversation. How were they supposed to last until the reservations Louis made for dinner? They didn't have to leave for another three hours yet.

"So, when-"

Louis' question was cut off by the doorbell ringing. He took a few steps towards Harry and looked down the hall as if that would give him any insight as to who was at the door.

"Sorry, I wasn't expecting anyone, so I should probably see who it is?" Louis pointed towards the stairs as he started walking again. "Not many people have the code to my gate, but I really don't know who it could be."

Harry shrugged and followed suit. Louis was almost to the door when the person waiting started banging on it and yelling.

"Come on, you lazy fuck. I know you can move faster than that, your house isn't *that* big."

Louis pulled the door open and put his hands on his hips. "Excuse you, you're being incredibly rude considering you didn't warn me you were coming."

Niall smiled wide and pulled off his sunglasses. "You should always know I'm coming over. It's been ages, Tommo!"

Louis rolled his eyes as Niall pulled him into a tight hug, laughing loudly in his ear.

"It was only a few weeks. You've definitely gone longer."

"Whatever," Niall said, clapping Louis pretty hard on the back as he pulled away. "So this is Harry, right? Harry, you're amazing, I want you on a record."

Louis heard Harry make a choking sound before coughing a little. Turning in concern, he found Harry with his mouth opening and closing a bit before he wheezed out, "Wait, really? What?"

"Of course. I'm Niall, by the way."

That made Harry's eyes go even wider than they had been before, and Louis was a little worried he was going to lose them at this rate.

"Niall, like Niall Horan? That Louis was sending all our writing tapes to?"

Louis sighed. "I told you to ease him into this, Ni. God. Now close the door and come inside. Let's get us all a drink."

"Yeah, that's me," Niall said from behind Louis. "I love your tone and think that little bit of a rasp with the clear voice and range is exactly what I need for my next project. It's gonna be a little gritty, kind of classic rock inspired, melody infused magic and I want you to be the voice for part of it."

"I have no idea what to say," Harry said before coming into the kitchen and looking at Louis like a scared child.

"How about we start with getting him used to the recording process in general," Louis suggested, holding a beer out for Niall before getting the water Harry had softly asked for.

"Yeah, I'm already feeling a little overwhelmed doing the backing vocals and duet with Louis, but I am potentially interested in your song," Harry said, taking the glass of water with a smile. "I just want to do this one step at a time since it already feels like it's going so fast."

"Sure, sure," Niall said with a nod. "I just wanted you to know I'm more than interested, yeah?"

Niall stayed for another half an hour or so, playing some chords on the piano as he explained some of the other songs he was working on before leaving as quickly as he came.

"Is he always like that?" Harry asked from where he was laying on the couch behind Louis. He had his hand in Louis' hair, and Louis could very nearly fall to sleep sitting there on the floor if Harry kept it up.

"Yeah, pretty much," Louis said, chuckling. "You get used to him."

"Hey, Lou? Think we have time for a little nap before our date? I'm really tired."

Checking the time, Louis nodded. "Yeah, sure."

They both slowly stood up and made their way to their rooms. Louis had been tempted to almost reach for Harry's hand or give him a little kiss, but decided against it. He'd wait until their date for that.

Harry didn't seem to have the same qualms, though. He turned to go into Lottie's room before he came back to Louis and gave him a quick but firm kiss.

"See you in a bit," Harry said with a smile.

Louis wished he could say he had a good comeback - or any comeback at all, really - but instead he just stood there dumbly as Harry closed the door behind himself and left Louis in the hall.

Louis was already in so far over his head, and he had zero issues with it.

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Harry had been so nervous leading up to the date, and now they were having dessert and he didn't even know why. Everything with Louis went exactly as it usually did. Things were relaxed and comfortable and their conversation never lagged. It was everything a first date should be. Not to mention that every time Louis' foot brushed up against his or Louis placed his hand on Harry's back to guide him into the restaurant or literally *any kind of physical touch,* Harry felt like his entire body was lighting up and able to be seen from space.

As they were leaving, though, Harry realized that he wasn't sure what Louis was expecting now. They were already staying at Louis' house and Harry had chosen the room right across from Louis'. Would they kiss? Awkward hand jobs and a cuddle? Harry didn't mind a little messing around after a first date, but he felt rusty. He'd been so busy with his music that when combined with the rather small dating pool he had available to him back home, it had been quite a while since he'd had a date. He wasn't sure he was ready to jump into bed, even with someone as amazing as Louis.

Actually, now that he thought about it, maybe he was especially scared because it *was* Louis.

There was something about Louis that made Harry feel alive in ways he didn't even know were possible, but that was only part of it. Louis felt… important. Harry couldn't describe it, how could he when he still didn't fully understand it, but Louis felt like the opposite of just some fling. Some guy that would play a role in Harry's life for a time before leaving again.

Maybe that was it. Louis felt permanent. And that made everything with him feel that much more important to get right. Until Harry was ready, he didn't want to rush anything, because he wanted to be sure everything went exactly as he wanted.

Louis reached out and grabbed Harry's hand in his once he eased the car onto the road. Harry allowed their fingers to lace together, and when he looked down at them, the lights by the road lighting them as they drove past, just one more thing felt like it was as it should be.

"You've been quiet since we left the restaurant," Louis said, barely loud enough to be heard over the music playing in the background. "What's going on in your head?"

Harry looked up from their hands and found Louis glancing at him before turning his attention back to the road.

Taking a deep breath, Harry said, "Dunno. A bunch of stuff, really."

Louis hummed and stayed quiet. Harry took it as an invitation to keep going if he wanted, and he tried to weigh out how to say what he'd been thinking without scaring Louis too much.

"I was just thinking about how you feel like so much more than just a first date," he finally said slowly, watching Louis' face for any change.

If possible, Louis' face relaxed even further into the smile he was already wearing.

"Oh, yeah?"

Nodding, Harry said, "Yeah."

Louis lifted Harry's hand to his mouth and kissed his knuckles. "Good. Because I want us to be so much more than just a first date. If you do, I mean."

Tingles started down where their hands were connected and caused chills to course over Harry's body at the same time nerves settled in his belly.

"Yeah, I do," Harry agreed. "But, I also want to make sure we take it slow. I want to be sure we really get to know each other before we jump into anything, you know? I want to make sure we do this right. For us."

Pulling up to a stop sign, Louis looked at Harry and smiled wide enough crinkles showed up by his eyes. Harry loved that smile. It felt somehow more real than any other smile Louis had.

Squeezing Harry's hand, Louis said, "Yeah. Let's do this right."

Nerves settled for the time being, Harry leaned back and happily allowed himself to watch Louis drive as they both hummed along to the music the rest of the ride back to Louis' house.

"To work around your meeting with RCA tomorrow afternoon, Niall wants to get us into the studio pretty early. He wants to start on a few of the earlier songs you helped with before jumping into the duet later, so we should probably get to bed," Louis said as they both kicked off their shoes and removed their jackets.

"How early is early?" Harry asked before heading upstairs. He wanted to double check that his outfit was ready for tomorrow and rehearse a few things with his guitar before bed.

"Should probably leave here about six to try and beat the traffic," Louis said, face scrunching up a little. "I know, it's early, but I swear the studio will make it worth it. There's nothing like recording in a space where you know others have started and made their dreams a reality."

Stopping outside his room, Harry turned to Louis and smiled. "I can make do with that, then."

Louis stood in front of him, head tilted to the side. After a few moments of uninterrupted eye contact, Louis stepped up closer to Harry, took his hand, and pulled him even closer.

"Does taking it slow mean I can still give you a kiss goodnight?" Louis asked, with an innocent smile. "Because that's all I've been thinking of since last night. I'm already finding you to be quite addictive, Harry Styles."

Harry's heart was racing and he studied Louis' face. His reddish whiskers were shining in the hall light, making his lips look even more smooth than they usually do. How did he do that? Harry felt like his were always in a perpetual state of being chapped, but Louis' always looked so soft.

"Is that a silent yes? Or a silent no?" Louis whispered, finally getting Harry to look back at his eyes.

"Definitely a yes," Harry said, smirking as best he could to try to play off the fact he got distracted by Louis. Again.

Louis reached up and cupped Harry's cheek, drawing him into him for a soft, gentle kiss.

The angle was perfect, so much better than the awkward positioning over the middle console in the car the night before. Louis was just an inch or two smaller than Harry, but that was enough to allow them to pull each other closer and - with a gentle tilt of their heads - their bodies and mouths slotted together like they were made for each other.

Harry had thought their first kiss was amazing, but it was nothing compared to this one. They were able to take their time now. Harry was able to wrap his arms around Louis' midsection, only letting go of his hand so he could get both hands on the sliver of skin that showed when his shirt rode up.

Louis' skin was burning, just as hot as the burning Harry felt on his lips. It was like something ignited between them when they touched, and when it was as intimate as this simple kiss, he felt like he could easily burn to his core. At this point, that's all he wanted. To have Louis' touch cause him to become a giant ember, basking in the effects of being connected to him in such an profound way.

They finally broke the kiss, but Louis didn't let Harry move far. He tilted his head to rest his forehead against Harry's, and it was only then that Harry realized Louis had run his fingers into his hair. As they stood close, catching their breath, Louis' hands continued gently combing through the hair at the nape of Harry's neck. Harry couldn't hold back the shivers it caused, feeling so good.

"Sorry," Louis whispered, the smile growing on his face.

Harry only chuckled. "Please don't apologize," he said, leaning forward for another short kiss. "That was amazing."

"Mm, it was." Louis pulled back enough so he could look Harry in the eyes, and gave him a small smile. "Goodnight, Harry."

"Goodnight, Louis."

He regretfully allowed Louis to pull away from him, then they both turned towards their respective rooms. Harry closed the door slowly and quietly behind him, then tried to lean his head silently against the door so Louis wouldn't know what state he'd left him in.

Well. Harry glanced down at the front of his pants and gave a small snort. Louis probably well knew, considering how close they'd been only moments before.

That couldn't be what Harry dwelt on, though. If he wanted to get any sleep tonight, he had to hurry and prepare for tomorrow.

Even after ensuring he was as prepared as he could be, Harry couldn't help but touch his lips as he laid in bed trying to find sleep. They still burned, and Harry knew he would happily chase that feeling every day he possibly could.

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"I'm gonna kill you if you don't stop tapping your foot. The least you could do is keep it in time with the song we're working on at the moment."

Louis winced and looked over at Niall. "Sorry, sorry. I'm just. Nervous for him."

Niall rolled his eyes before looking at Louis. "Honestly. I know. I get it. But I need you to either focus or get out of here until he's arrived because we're getting nowhere with your vocals."

Louis pushed back from the desk and stood abruptly. Walking to the door for the recording area, he said, "Record this or don't, I don't even care at this point. I just need to do something more than sit or sing."

Once he stepped back into the space where his acoustic guitar and the piano were sitting, he felt something unwind in his chest. Usually singing did that for him, but for whatever reason, nothing had been coming out right since Harry hit the three hour mark of being gone. Louis thought he'd have heard from him by now, but since he hadn't, his mind was going through all the worst case scenarios and it made his voice come out pitchy. Tense. Not what Louis needed at the moment.

The piano was drawing him in this time. The idea he had running through his mind was meant for the guitar, but he was more confident singing while playing on the piano. He could try out the basic idea that would bridge the last chorus with the repeats at the end on the piano and if he felt like it worked, he could go further with the guitar then.

For the first time today, Louis got lost in the music. It felt right, like it was flowing from him, and the chord progressions were nothing more than an extension of himself and his emotions.

It didn't stop when he switched to the guitar, and Louis had barely finished what he thought might be the perfect run-through of an unplugged version of the song when Niall's voice piped into the booth, making Louis jump.

"I got all of that and I think we'll use that last one." Louis looked at his best friend through the window and Niall was busy with the desk in front of him. Without glancing at Louis, he continued. "This is a song that I want to have more of a stripped sound for anyway, so let's go with this for now. We can tweak later. Let's start laying down the vocals since I've finally got you sounding how I want you."

Nodding, Louis put the guitar back down and picked up the headphones by the vocal microphone.

Louis was finishing the chorus - closing his eyes to sing the lines about how much he needed this phantom person in the same way his uncle needed the rain for his crops, like a lighthouse on the coast, like the holy trinity needs the Holy Ghost - when he opened his eyes and sang the last, "I need you," as he made eye contact with Harry.

Of course the song wasn't for some phantom person. It was for Harry. But it had only been a few weeks and Louis wasn't sure he was prepared to really admit that to himself, much less to anyone else. But right now, looking into Harry's eyes, Louis *felt* like maybe Harry felt the same way.

Taking a deep breath, Niall forced him to finally break the gaze and focus on the music again.

"That's exactly what I need from you, Lou. I want to hear the first few lines again, because you were a little shaky still getting into it. Then we can skip to the end when you'd be singing again, alright?"

Louis nodded and glanced at Harry again while Niall cued the music to start where he wanted it. He was so torn. He wanted to sing every last syllable of the lines he'd written with the gorgeous, incredible man in front of him *to* him, but he also was going to die a slow and painful death if Niall forced him to keep recording without eventually figuring out how his meeting with RCA went.

Harry's eyes never left Louis and something about their weight gave him the ability to sing everything Niall wanted him to before he flew from the booth, almost forgetting to take off the chorded headphones before he did.

"So, how'd it go?" Louis was so nervous that after everything, Harry had only been given another rejection. He might be even more scared though that they offered him a deal and Harry had signed the first one he'd been offered out of elation that someone wanted him.

Louis knew from experience that didn't often end well.

Harry squished up his nose, and Louis' stomach fell. "They offered me a three record deal," he said with a shrug. "It sounded pretty good from what I could tell, actually. But I said no."

Shaking his head and covering his eyes with his hand, Louis tried to keep up with all of the emotions that were pulling him one way to the other.

"You what?"

Smirking a little at Louis, Harry's entire face was soft as he reached out for Louis' wrist to pull his hand away from his face completely. "I said no, and then came right back here."

"Why?" Louis asked, feeling breathless. "That's everything you wanted."

"I didn't have a good feeling about it," Harry said softly. "Plus, Nick had been doing his homework on entertainment deals so he could better advise me, and he gave me a few things

to look out for. Things that had really screwed artists in the past. This had all of them. Between it not feeling right and that, I wasn't going to sign with them and since I'm not really anyone as far as they know, I didn't have anything to bargain with. So they let me walk out again and I came back here."

"I'm sorry," Louis said. He couldn't see any remorse or sadness on Harry's face, but he did still feel bad. "That's all pretty shitty, but I'm glad you said no if you didn't think it was right."

"Me too," Harry said with a smile.

After they stood in silence, staring at each other, Louis realized Niall was being uncharacteristically quiet. He turned to look at his friend, only to find he and Harry were alone.

"When did he leave?" Louis asked, surprised. Niall wasn't exactly known for being quiet or sneaky, so he was kind of impressed he hadn't noticed him leaving.

"Pretty much when you walked out of the booth," Harry said with a chuckle.

Rolling his eyes, Louis walked closer and pulled Harry into a hug. "So what do you plan to do now?"

"Well," Harry said, drawing out the word before ending it by planting a kiss on Louis' neck. It caused shivers to erupt even as Harry continued speaking and Louis had a hard time focusing. "I plan to record some backing vocals for you and do a fucking great job on our duet, then just kind of go from there."

Louis pulled back and looked at Harry. "I meant for *your* career."

Shaking his head, Harry said, "Don't you think this is going to help my career? I'm going to get writing and singing credits on songs for *the* Louis Tomlinson. That's a pretty great bonus for my career in my book."

Louis stared at Harry with a knowing look for a moment until Harry huffed a sigh.

"Okay, fine. A part of me is scared to death that's the only offer I'll ever get or it's the best I'll ever be offered. But for now I'm trying not to focus on that, okay? Is that what you wanted to hear?"

Louis leaned forward and pecked a quick kiss on Harry's lips. "Not really, but thank you for telling me anyway. I swear, you'll be rolling in offers as soon as more people hear about you, alright?"

"Are you love birds done being disgusting yet?" Niall stuck his head in through the door, despite having his eyes closed like he could potentially see something that would scar him forever. He was ridiculous. "This studio is booked in a couple hours, so we've gotta finish up here soon."

"Yeah, we're done," Harry said, laughing and pulling away from Louis. "You ready for me?"

"Of course," Niall said cheerfully as he dropped back down into his chair and immediately began working to adjust the levels for Harry.

Harry had just turned and started walking into the booth when Louis reached out and grabbed Harry's hand. It felt fast, it felt stupid and reckless, but he had to ask now that the thought had just crossed his mind.

Louis licked his lips as Harry looked at him question clear in his eyes. "Boyfriends?" Louis asked softly, brows high and feeling the most vulnerable he had possibly ever.

Harry's entire face melted and he surged forward to give Louis a firm kiss. "Yeah, boyfriends."

"Get in there, you lovesick fool!" Niall cried, using his hands to try to shoo Harry from where he was sitting in front of the computer. "God, you two are awful."

Harry just kept beaming at Louis, even as he walked into the frame of the door Louis was holding open for him.

So much was still unknown. He had no idea if this different feel for his album would do anything close to as well as his first album had. He didn't know if the label would like it. He had no idea if Harry would actually benefit from having his name attached to this project or not.

But as Harry sang his own verse about how much he also needed Louis, staring into his eyes, Louis felt like maybe Harry wasn't an unknown. Maybe he was one of the few things Louis could rely on.

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Harry still wasn't used to it. Of course he wasn't. It had only been about a week since a video had surfaced that thrust Harry into the limelight, thanks to Louis' fame. All the same, he didn't know how Louis handled this all the time.

"Video drops in about ten minutes, you ready, babe?"

Harry looked up from where he was curled up on Louis' couch and smiled when Louis settled beside him.

Through the recording process, he and Louis had gotten more comfortable in each other's space and taken to making out anywhere they possibly could. They *thought* they'd been careful, but apparently some fans were having a tour of the studio when Louis and Harry had gone in to clean up a few vocals on the last song for Louis' album. They'd gotten a video of the two of them wrapped up in each other in the smoking courtyard when they had thought they were alone, and it went viral.

Louis had been out for years, so thankfully that wasn't an issue, but suddenly Harry became this *mystery man* who wasn't much of a mystery for long. Especially since people quickly learned that he had helped with the writing and vocals and was actually the other voice in the duet Louis was releasing as his first single off the album.

It had brought a lot of hype, which was great in some ways, but it had changed everything for Harry even sooner than he'd anticipated. Luckily, for the most part, the reactions had been positive. The song had dropped within hours of the fan video getting spread, which was lucky timing for them. Louis had thought at first it was the label being shady, but his lawyer confirmed they legitimately had nothing to do with the video.

Now, everyone was finally going to get their first good, up-close look at Harry with the music video. Harry felt like he'd handled it all as well as possible, but he was more than a little scared of how everyone would react with this overtly *not straight* music video coming out featuring them both as boyfriends. Lovers.

"Your phone is going crazy, are you going to check it?"

Harry glanced at his phone, which kept lighting up with texts from his family and emails coming in from his brand new manager, Greg.

"I really should turn off my email notifications, but I think Grim and Greg might kill me if I do that."

"I turned mine off ages ago. They'll get used to it," Louis said, winking at Harry. "You doing alright?"

Harry leaned into Louis and breathed deeply. "Yeah. Greg keeps telling me about the deal war that is going on with the labels now. I had no idea it could even be like this for someone like me."

Louis placed a kiss on Harry's head. "Yes, well. I'm not surprised at all. You're amazing."

Snorting, Harry turned his head to place a kiss on Louis' shoulder. "Whatever."

"Isn't Grimmy supposed to be here soon?" Louis asked, glancing at his phone. "I thought he said he'd be here for the release so he could distract you with paperwork while we wait for initial reactions to come in."

The doorbell rang right as Louis finished talking and Harry forced himself to stand up. He'd convinced Nick to move at least part-time down to LA to help Harry with all of his legal needs, since apparently there would be plenty as he was finding out very quickly. Nick had grumbled and still seemed a bit out of water, but Harry knew he'd pick up on things soon enough.

Besides, it wasn't often he met a lawyer he felt he could trust.

"Open the door, bitches! I'm here for the stars of this show!" Nick yelled as he rapped at the door.

Harry whipped it open so fast, Nick almost lost his balance, but he flashed Harry a wide smile before he smacked his shoulder.

"You've been ignoring my emails. Don't lie, I know it's true. You go and become a star with a famous boyfriend and you can't even answer me in a decent time frame anymore."

"Fuck off, you love me," Harry said, pulling Nick inside before slamming the door shut.

"Hazza! It's up! Come watch it with me!"

Harry wiped his sweaty hands on his sweatpants and was incredibly glad Louis had turned down the label's offer to have a party celebrating the successful release of the single as well as the video going live. They'd wanted a big event with a screening of the video and everything. He couldn't imagine watching himself with Louis for the first time surrounded by people who would all be looking at him like a piece of merchandise. It was best to be with one of his best friends and his boyfriend for the first time.

Nick wrapped his arm around Harry's shoulders and guided him back into Louis' living room.

"I wanna see what you two look like on screen. It can't possibly be as disgusting as you are in real life."

Harry hip bumped Nick and made him run into the wall before he dashed off to join Louis on the couch. Louis was practically buzzing with excitement, and Harry had to admit he kind of was too.

Once the three of them were settled, Louis hit play and the video started on the Louis' massive TV.

Harry's phone continued to light up with ignored messages, Nick never stopped his slew of comments, and Harry's brain practically refused to do anything but frantically buzz with concerns over how this all could play out for him, but none of that mattered.

He couldn't think of a better way to start things off for himself. A new chapter for Louis, a new *everything* for Harry, and it started together with the support of everyone important to them. For the first time since he'd discovered music in high school, Harry felt like everything was *right*. Just as it should be.

He did his best to bask in that and enjoy the ride, however long it lasted.

End Notes

Thank you for readinggggg! I hope you enjoyed it. If you did, please leave a nice comment and a kudos. I also have a fic post if you'd be so kind as to give it a reblog so others might know this fic exists too :D

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!