

## The Cowboy In Us All

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# The Cowboy In Us All

by [taggiecb](#)

## Summary

Louis and Harry are used to living their lives under the glare of the spotlight. But when the real pain of trouble in their relationship gets to be too much they turn to the one thing that they can control; the messages in the songs they sing onstage.

## Notes

Happy Birthday my friend. So much love to you. xoxoxo

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

One of the first things that Louis had realised when he started becoming more popular and started hearing his songs on the radio more frequently was how much pure trash people could make up about him in the media. He has learned to ignore the lies and tabloid fodder a long time ago. But as he scrolls through his phone right now, barely stopping on the blurry pap pictures, he wishes that they were lying.

“I wish you wouldn’t look at those,” Niall, Louis’ lead guitar player pleads as he makes himself comfortable on the hotel room bed. “You know it’s all bullshit.”

“Is it?” Louis snorts. “It all looks pretty accurate to me.”

Louis starts to scroll again, this time with purpose. He tries to ignore the jolt of pain in his chest when the picture loads and focuses on the headline. “Country Singer Harry Styles splits from boyfriend and fellow singer Louis Tomlinson.”

He glances up at Niall who is frowning, face scrunched up in sympathy. “Harry Styles kicks off a new tour! Is a new relationship around the corner as well?”

He keeps going, almost addicted to the pain. “And this one’s my favourite, “Harry Styles finally comes to his senses and dumps B list singer.”

“Now that one is pure bullshit,” Niall says with such conviction that Louis wants to believe it.

“Maybe it is but...” Louis’ heart aches like it’s being strangled. “Look at him. He looks happy.”

The last word catches in his throat.

Niall looks over his shoulder and scoffs. “He’s faking it.”

“Faking?”

“You know Harry, Lou. Better than anyone. This is all a game to him. He’s trying to hurt you because you hurt him.”

“What did I do?” Louis squeaks. He’s the one who was left, in the middle of the night no less. Not even a goodbye, not a call. Not an apology.

“Ok, he’s hurting and doesn’t want to do it alone.” Niall amends. “The bastard should be hurting.”

“He tries. Well, he tried.”

“You’re not done with him.” Niall doesn’t form it as a question. They both know the truth. It kills Louis to see the hurt in Niall’s eyes.

“You know how hard this has been for him. The fame and his past, and he really does try. Sometimes it just gets too much for him.” Louis hates the words even as they are coming out of his own mouth. He has heard friends defend their partners in just this manner and he has told them all to love themselves more and get out. But he can’t. Not with Harry. Not yet.

“So what are you going to do?”

“Tonight, I’m going to sing.” Louis stands up, grabbing a brown leather jacket from the back of the chair.

The adrenaline of the arena lifts Louis up above the pain and anxiety for a good while. He sings his songs, pouring every ounce of emotion into the performance. And it’s great...for a while. Somewhere near the end of his set the giddiness turns into exhaustion. Letting his emotions flow allows them to stay just at the surface of his skin. He feels everything, and he’s having a hard time holding back the floodgates of everything that he has been trying to keep together for the past twenty-four hours. The sea of faces that were cheering him almost seem to be mocking him. He wants to scream.

That's when he sees the sign. Lots of people have them, most of them supportive. Signs of love and happiness. Some funny even. This one was simple, on yellow poster board.

WHERE’S HARRY

He feels something break inside him. The world stops for a second. Thousands of people staring at him as he holds his mic in his hands and looks at the expectant faces of his band. Niall moves closer to him, covering the mic with his hand.

“You alright, Lou?” He asks, the dance still in his eyes for the sake of the crowd.

“Can we do that new one? Do you think we’re ready for it?” Louis asks, surprising himself with the calm of his voice.

“You sure?”

“Yeah.”

Niall just nods and takes his place again. He must signal to the rest of the band to back off because when he starts picking cords, he’s alone. *Acoustic version, okay*, Louis thinks.

“This is a new song Niall and I have been working on,” Louis says to the audience as Niall slowly makes his way through a makeshift melodic intro. “I hope you like it...I hope it helps” He adds the last bit hoping that it helps one person in particular.

*If I had just one tear running down your cheek*

*Maybe I could cope maybe I'd get some sleep*

*If I had just one moment at your expense*

*Maybe all my misery would be well spent*

The crowd quiets a little. Louis doesn't know if it's because they can't sing along yet or because they want to hear the song, but it makes him feel more alone than he had sitting in the hotel room staring at those pictures.

*Could you cry a little? Lie just a little?*

*Pretend that you're feeling a little more pain?*

*I gave, now I'm wanting something in return*

*So cry just a little for me*

The crowd picks up after the chorus. They know what the song is about. These are his fans. His people. He guesses if there was any doubt about what was happening in his all too public relationship, this would put an end to that.

But he knows as well as Niall does, it's not his fans who he's singing this for. It's Harry. He wants Harry to see how much he's hurting. He wants Harry to see what he has done. He wants him to hurt.

The tempo of the song just gets higher and more demanding from start to end, and the entire place feels like the roof will be blown off just from the energy that he's emitting alone, until the end when he brings it back to practically a whisper. A plea. He's begging, and he doesn't even care anymore.

*Give it up baby*

*I hear you're doing fine*

*Nothing's gonna save me*

*I can see it in your eyes*

*Some kind of heartache*

*Honey, give it a try*

*I don't want pity*

*I just want what is mine*

He has to keep himself from collapsing on the floor of the stage when the last note is played. His fans are losing their minds cheering, and he bows slightly and blows kisses before he walks into the darkness of backstage with Niall holding him up.

“That’ll teach him,” Niall says into Louis’ ear making them both laugh through the tears that are now spilling freely down Louis’ face.

“I outta slap you,” Liam says to Harry in his deep Louisiana accent. Harry just nods and replays the song from Louis’ concert from the night before. It’s a bad quality video from a fan that couldn’t stop moving and shaking long enough to get a good image, but Harry can’t stop even long enough to try to find a better one. “You told me you two broke up, you didn’t tell me that you just left him in the night like a fucking coward.”

Liam is still shaking his head. Harry wants to kick him out. Not because he’s wrong but because he wants to hear the song. Again.

“Did you listen to this?” Harry asks, holding up his phone and letting it play from the start again.

“I have, and the rest of the country, too, I expect,” Liam replies with a disapproving look on his face. “How could you do that, Harry? You’re better than that.”

Harry could try to explain why. He could try to reason with Liam, make him understand. And Liam probably would, too, try at least. But he won’t. What’s the point? Louis knows and isn’t that all that matters?

Except Louis apparently doesn’t know. They’ve always had an understanding. Sometimes Harry needs to be alone. He needs to get away. Sometimes staying in one place for too long makes him feel as though he’s suffocating. Louis has always understood. He’s always been there with open arms when Harry came back. Because he always comes back.

“I gotta make this right.” Harry stands up as though he could just go right now and see Louis. He can’t; they’re on opposite ends of the country. He could call, but he’s going on stage in less than an hour. He pulls his phone out and stares at it for a second before Liam snatches it out of his hand.

“Don’t you dare text him right now.” Liam places it a good distance from Harry’s reach and looks at it in disgust. “I have seen the tabloids, Harry. This isn’t going to be fixed with one of your half word, half emoji nonsense messages.”

“We both know that those tabloids are bullshit.” Harry rolls his eyes. He doesn’t even look at them anymore.

“Apparently a lot of things that you think you know, you don’t know at all.” Liam points at the phone that’s still playing Louis’ song. He’s caught up in the words again, feeling the pure anguish in his voice like it’s a sharp knife to his gut.

“Shit.” Harry puts his head in his hands. He wants to throw something, break something. But he feels like he’s broken everything already.

“Come on, H. We have to go play some music.” Liam pulls him to his feet. Harry goes, switching on the part of himself that loves the stage. It’s all he has the energy for at this point.

Everything goes smoothly. His energy is up, and the songs are great. He loves the beginning of a tour when everything feels new and shiny. He loves that even a tip of his wide brimmed black Stetson elicits screams from his fans. He loves that a smile can make someone swoon. It’s a powerful feeling.

But tonight, all he can think about is what isn’t there. Who isn’t there. What he’s losing.

“Everyone having a good night?” He asks into his mic, picking a little on his guitar. The crowd screams again.

“I’m glad, I’m glad,” he says, hiding a little under the brim of his hat. “I’m not having the greatest night.”

The crowd moans in sympathy for him. They all know. Hard not to. “Don’t feel too sorry for me, I did something stupid and hurt someone I love.”

The crowd gets quieter now. He doesn’t know if it’s because they don’t know how to react or because they want to hear what he has to say.

“He’s not here tonight. So I was wondering if y’all can do me a favour?” They scream again, loud and bright and flashes them a smile. “Can you take out your phones and maybe record this song for me? So that he can see it?”

He knows that they’re mostly all doing this anyway, but he wants to be sure.

“Ok? Do you have my good side? How’s my light?” He teases before he lets his face fall and settle into the expression that he’s been feeling on the inside all night. He picks on his guitar more meaningfully now and looks out into the crowd.

*I don't know why I act the way I do*

*Like I ain't got a single thing to lose*

*Sometimes I'm my own worst enemy*

*I guess that's just the cowboy in me*

A flash of hundred of little lights start to shine on him and he pushes down the lump that's forming in his throat.

*I got a life that most would love to have*

*But sometimes I still wake up fightin' mad*

*At where this road I'm heading down might lead*

*I guess that's just the cowboy in me*

He picks up the pace at the chorus. An explanation for his actions? No, just a confession of his sins. Setting the world right. Letting Louis know that he sees what he's done.

"Lou," he says in a low voice throwing the audience into near hysterics.

*I know there's times you must have thought*

*There ain't a line you've drawn I haven't crossed*

*But you set your mind to see this love on through*

*I guess that's just the cowboy in you*

God, he hopes. He takes his hands off the guitar and opens them wide. Encompassing the entire arena.

*We ride and never worry about the fall*

*I guess that's just the cowboy in us all*

The lights go out and the sounds of cheers are deafening. He walks off stage feeling drained, empty.

Louis can't say that he is sleeping well. That performance that Harry had pulled the night before is definitely not helping though. Louis was in tears almost from the first note, heart breaking and hopeful as much as he doesn't want to be. But when he tried to call, he was directed straight to voicemail. All texts were also left unanswered. So what was it all for if not to apologise to Louis? What was the point?

He sighs and rolls over again, forcing his eyes to stay closed, praying for sleep to overcome. It's not for lack of sheer exhaustion, that's for sure. A soft but distinctive knock on his door makes his already plucked nerves dance. It must be a mistake. Wrong room or something. He ignores it, eyes almost squinting in the effort to keep them closed. Another knock. No one would dare try to get him out of bed right now. An emergency would have only been through the phone. Another knock. This time a little louder, a little more insistent.

Fucking Niall he thinks. He's the only one who would even dare try to disturb him after the last couple of days. He better hope that it's worth it because he's in for the tuning of a lifetime. He swings the door open with more force than at all necessary, face set and mouth open.

"What do you want?" He yells before the words die abruptly, and his mouth hangs frozen.

"You," Harry says.

"What the hell are you doing here?" Louis asks, practically dragging Harry into the room. A quick assessment shows Louis part of what he wants to know. Harry is a bit of a mess. His hair is swirling around his head in all directions, his well worn hat moving in his fidgeting hands. There are dark shadows under his eyes, and his clothes are wrinkled and saggy. But dammit, he still looks beautiful.

They're standing, staring at one another as if in a standoff, waiting for one of them to reach for their weapon. Harry looks like he's about to jump out of his skin.

"Harry," Louis says a little softer this time. He wants to touch him, comfort him somehow.

"I heard your song," Harry says. Louis can see something break in him just a little as he says it.

"I heard yours too." Over and over again he thinks, but doesn't say out loud.

Harry just nods, scratching the back of his neck. A habit that is both heartbreaking and endearing. "It wasn't -- I wasn't trying to make excuses."

A flare of hurt and anger suddenly shoots through Louis' chest. Of course, he didn't mean it. He never means it. "Then what were you trying to do?"

Harry just looks at him, silently pleading. But he isn't getting off easily this time. Not this time. "I love you so much," Harry says with such an earnest tone that it feels as if they cut

right through Louis chest. "I don't know if I'm good enough for your love. I don't know if I deserve it."

Louis wants to protest. Harry has struggled since Louis has known him, and likely long before that, with the idea of his own worth. But in the end, all he can do is shake his head and clench his jaw to try to keep the tears from welling into his eyes.

"But God help me do I want it." Harry lets what little he had left of his guard down and opens his palms toward Louis. "I will do everything in my power to never hurt you again."

Instead of jumping into Harry's open arms like he wants, like Harry likely expects him to, Louis turns toward the window. He feels like it's a full time job just to keep his heart beating "Do you know what you did to hurt me?" He asks, not looking at Harry but hearing him shuffle uncomfortably behind him.

"I left. I was a dick," Harry says.

"That didn't feel great, no. But you needing to take a step back isn't a bad thing, Harry. It's not what hurt the most." He looks back. Harry looks like he's being scolded and that makes him even more frustrated. He doesn't want to lecture the man he loves. He doesn't want to parent him. "You lied to me."

Harry's mouth opens and then closes again. There's no denying this fact. Louis wonders if Harry is trying to figure out which lie Louis is calling him out on.

"You told me that you were okay. You told me that you were happy," Louis practically whispers.

Right before his eyes he sees the moment that Harry breaks. His body crumples before him and instead of trying to hold himself together for whatever storm he had expected Louis to throw at him he goes to the bed and sits on the edge, curling in on himself.

Louis does go to him now. He wraps his arms around Harry's shoulders and breaths in the sharp, spicy scent that is just Harry. His belly warms at the feel of Harry melting into him.

"It kills me, Harry." He tries and fails to keep the raw emotion from his voice. "To see the mask you put on for the world. But it breaks my heart to see you do it for me."

"I'm sorry," Harry says, forcing out a wet breath. "I just don't want to lose you, too."

"Harry, you walked out of my house in the middle of the night and then acted to the world like you were having the time of your life." He can feel Harry flinch at the words. "And I'm still here."

Harry pulls away and looks him in the eye. They're both openly crying at this point, but Louis thinks that maybe that's not a bad thing.

"Are you?" He asks, sounding small and timid. Not the brazen and bold man that the world fell in love with.

“Yeah, I am.” He stops, wondering if he should say out loud what he’s thinking.

“But...” Harry supplies, clearly seeing the hesitation.

“We can’t do this again. You can lie to the world, you can lie to your fans, your friends, even your family if you want to. But no more lying to me. Your bad days are my bad days. We have to do this together. I can’t be left behind, and I can’t wake up to an empty bed wondering what had happened to you.” Louis’ chest tightens because for a second he wonders if Harry will reject this ultimatum. They both stay silent for a second, just watching one another.

“Louis, you’re the most important person in the whole wide world to me.”

“Same,” Louis says, finally finally letting himself take Harry’s mouth with his own.

“I’ll do anything to make you happy. I love you so much.”

“Same.”

“I’m going to marry you someday,” Harry says, pulling Louis closer. Louis suspects that maybe he will.

“Same,” he says with a giggle before Harry can deepen the kiss and throw them both into distracted longing.

End Notes

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