

**even in my worst lies (you saw the truth in me)**

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# even in my worst lies (you saw the truth in me)

by [twoheadlights](#) ([fizzfic](#))

## Summary

au where dan and phil are actors pretending to be boyfriends for pr

(title from dress by taylor swift) (obviously)

## Notes

she's baaaaaaaaaaaaack for realz!

this has been in the works for literally 2016 how tragic is that

but i dusted off some off my old stuff and this one just called to me so i guess we're going with it. i'll add more tags to it as the story progresses and i'll be (hopefully) posting twice a week - tuesdays and saturdays.

thank you so so much to [charlotte](#) and [sara](#) for helping me out, i am forever indebted to you<3333

this is a work of fiction obvs, i don't own dan and phil, don't let them see this yall know how it goes THANKS

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

# one

It happens during Nick Grimshaw's show.

When Dan says the words, ‘oh I went out with this guy’, it isn’t made a big deal of. He freezes for a millisecond, looks at Nick, clearly panicking but his friend nods encouragingly at him. So he takes in a deep breath and continues talking about his terrible date with an anonymous man who spilled rosé on Dan’s trousers. He fidgets with the wire of his headphones and spinning on his chair. He finishes his entire bottle of water. No one comments on the story other than politely laughing at the situation. The show ends with Nick’s favourite song of the week, Dan doesn’t pay attention. As he stands up and hugs Nick, shakes hands of other radio people, he feels like he’s floating because *he did that*. And nothing blew up.

Outside, however...

“Do you even know what you’ve just done?” Francis exclaims. His face is red and Dan’s afraid his head might pop at any moment. “You could’ve given us some kind of warning, Daniel, honestly.” He pinches the bridge of his nose with one hand and squeezes Dan’s shoulder with the other.

“Don’t ‘Daniel’ me,” Dan retorts, shaking his hand away. “I just...wasn’t thinking, okay?”

“Yeah, obviously.” His manager rolls his eyes. “C’mon Dan, think of how this has made you look.”

“How this has made—what?”

“Your past relationships have all been with women. There’s going to be questions about that.”

“*Most* of those weren’t real.” Dan argues, gritting his teeth. “It was to hide...all this. But now I don’t have to hide anymore. I can be myself.” He tries for a smile he thinks is hopeful but it probably looks like a grimace. He sighs. “I can, y’know, go out with guys and not have them sign things to keep quiet or cover it up by saying it was a night out for beers or whatever. Because it’s more than that. I—I’d like for it to be.” He doesn’t usually speak his mind but now all his thoughts are pouring out like someone tipped his head over to the side.

Francis nods but he’s looking at his phone, typing away. He puts it to his ear and says, “Get yourself in the car. I’m going to try and calm the entire world down.”

“Not like you haven’t before.” Dan murmurs but he complies and goes to his car.

Really, it’s just another typical day in the life of Dan Howell. But something tells him it’s going to be his last one of those for a long, *long* time.

His best friend in the industry, Niomi finds it a bit funny. She's proud of him and tells him as soon as he enters her salon. And then she asks him if he wanted any numbers of her cute male friends, which Dan glares at her for.

He slumps on an empty salon chair and rubs his eyes. "I dunno, should I have not?" He asks.

"I think you should come out when you think you're ready." Niomi answers. "Maybe you thought you were ready. I mean, you can't do anything about it now."

"I know."

"You've sent the media into Apocalypse mode."

"Ah, what else is new?"

Niomi laughs and shakes her head, making her blonde fringe fall onto her eyes. "I'm going to attend to clients now, are you staying? We could do dinner."

Dan nods. "*Please*."

She leaves him alone to think. *It wasn't supposed to be like this*, is his first thought. It really wasn't. When Dan *did* think about coming out, he knew he didn't want to make a big deal out of it. He'd wanted to do it slowly, gradually – normalise it a bit for him to say that he's been out with boys and done things with them. He wonders what exactly everyone's saying. He usually likes to lurk on social media but this time...he realises he's scared. There's always been theories about his 'relationships' with all his female co-stars being strictly for PR. Will this prove anything? Maybe they'll think he has a preference for women? Which would be wrong, because he *so* does not. Can bisexual people even have preferences when they're supposed to be attracted to two or more genders? It seemed like an open game to him when he first started discovering himself. What are the rules here?

Maybe coming out when he's still having an identity crisis wasn't the best idea. Oh, well. Too late now, sonny. You've done it, haven't you? Now deal with the mess you've created.

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Dan knows a lot of people. But only a few know him well enough to know that after a Big Day of Coming Out, he needed a Big Night Out.

Or not.

"Good morning, sunshine."

Someone rips the curtains apart, letting glaring sunlight into the room. Dan groans and buries his head in his pillow.

"Dan, c'mon. You've got an important lunch booked."

"Wha'?" He mumbles. Only then does it register to him that his manager is in the room. He sits up and stretches. "What lunch?" He asks, yawning.

Francis spares him an exasperated glance before going through his wardrobe, presumably looking for what Dan would be wearing for this mysterious lunch.

“A director. Or well, I think it’s a manager of an actor.”

“Make up your mind.”

“They were being vague on the phone. Anyway, take a shower and wear this.” He throws Dan’s red Givenchy jumper and black jeans at him. “I’m giving you fifteen minutes and then taking you away.”

“It takes fifteen minutes for me to straighten my hair.” Dan argues. “I can’t go out with *shower hair*.”

Francis rolls his eyes. “Why not? You’ve been embracing other non-straight aspects of your life, why not your hair?”

Dan makes a face at him. “That’s cold. Get out of my room.”

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Once Dan is dressed (he’s unable to straighten his hair because Francis hid his straighteners while he changed his clothes) and fed a granola bar for energy, he allows himself to be taken into his car, making sure the hidden paparazzi that are sometimes out and about to take candid shots get some good shots of him *walking* (about ninety percent of the reasons why Dan never leaves the house is people, to be honest. It’s a bit much).

“So what is this lunch about again?” Dan repeats. “You didn’t elaborate and I like to know details.”

“Well,” Francis starts, “we’re meeting a filmmaker.”

“*Ooh* .” Dan widens his eyes in mock wonderment. “I know this already, Francis.”

“He’s new, or well, new to the big screen hopefully if you like the script and you better because I had to *dig* for this, Daniel --” He catches himself before Dan could interrupt him to stop his ramble. “Anyway, it’s a good movie. A little lowkey for someone with your history \_\_\_”

“I don’t mind lowkey.” Dan says quickly, suddenly more interested. He wonders how low is lowkey because he’s only ever worked with big names before.

“Right, well, when I called him, he was *obviously* thrilled and said he’d love to meet and show you the script. I thought it’d be quite a special one for you.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Dan asks, raising an eyebrow.

“You’ll see,” Francis says, smirking.

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“Daniel, meet Mr. Pj Liguori.”

“Please, call me Pj or Peej, if you like.” The curly haired guy in front of Dan says, grinning. His green eyes are wild, and he’s taller than Dan by at least two inches. He doesn’t look like a filmmaker - at least none of the ones Dan has met. They usually wear dress shirts for meetings. Pj has on similar skinny jeans to him and is wearing a grey jumper that had a black patch on one of the shoulders that looked like it might’ve been stitched on by Pj himself. He’s also really young; probably Dan’s age or a year older. Dan wonders how much experience with film he has.

They sit in their reserved booth and look at the menus in front of them.

“Dan, I’m a huge fan.” Pj starts earnestly and Dan smiles at him. “I loved you in *Where I Go*. Your lines in that reduced me to tears and I’m not easily moved.”

Dan wonders if that’s true or if he’s just saying that. Pj doesn’t *look* like someone who’s easily moved. It’s hard to tell who tells him the truth so he just goes along with it and says thanks. “Well, the writers write. I just do my best to do the script justice.”

He notices that Pj has a bag with him in which he assumes is a script of some sort and points at it. “Anything in there for me?” He asks.

“What? Oh.” Pj turns a light pink and nods before pushing his hand into the bag and pulling out a thick folder of sorts. “This is what we’ll hopefully be working on together.” He slides it towards Dan and intertwines his fingers together.

“I call it *monsters*. No capital letters.”

Dan smiles as he skims through the pages. “Is that your thing?”

“Something like that. Anyway, the story is a bit overdone but uh, *you’ve* never done anything like it and y’know, considering recent events—”

“Recent events?” Dan asks, looking up.

“You coming out,” Pj replies quickly. “Congratulations, by the way. The news made me and my friends really happy.”

“Thank you,” Dan says, smiling. “What does this have anything to do with—”

“You’ll be opposite a guy.”

Dan’s jaw almost hits the floor. “Like, romantically?” He asks, eyes wide.

Pj nods. He leans forward and says, eagerly, “You’ve never done a full romance film, I know, it’s always been a side plot thing for you. You like the action and the sci-fi and the thrillers but this will be so good, trust me, like, I know we don’t know each other at all but you *can*. Trust me, that is. My friend Phil? He says I have that face, y’know, the kind mums like and -  
-”

“Pj, stop.” Dan interrupts, but he’s grinning. He can’t actually believe it. And *Francis* is smirking at him. “You did this?” Dan asks him.

Francis shrugs. “Least I could do. Also, you’re free now, thought I’d make you busy.” He sips his strawberry water. “Anyway, Mr. Liguori and I need to have a chat about this movie and its promotion since *you’re* not an indie actor, are you? It’ll get more attention than Pj here is used to and he needs a proper PR team working with him.”

Dan sees Pj’s eyes widen even more and notices how *green* they are and how they’re brought out more by what he’s wearing. He probably doesn’t have a personal stylist, but Pj definitely knows how to make himself presentable, a feat Dan has yet to master.

“A PR team? I mean, what my team usually does is send out the final copies to lots of festivals, see which ones pick us and attend. It usually works.” Pj turns a light shade of pink because Francis is looking at him like he’d just spoken in Italian. “I don’t *need* a PR team.” He says decidedly, even nodding like he’s sure of himself and what he’s said. Dan admires that. He himself has only ever defied Francis a handful of times and gotten away with it.

Francis however, raises an eyebrow, looking unimpressed. “Mr. Liguori, can I speak to you outside?” His voice is dangerously calm, but Dan knows he’s really alright. He’s just going to be more firm, maybe give Pj an empty threat or two. He smiles at the director reassuringly as he and Francis leave the booth to talk.

“Let’s lookey here,” Dan says to himself, pulling Pj’s folder towards him. It has the movie’s name on the front, Pj’s name along with others – Sophie Dunn, Louis Lawson , Ciaran Malone – names he’s never heard. He opens it, and is greeted with a handwritten list of names this time. There’s a bolded **CAST** heading which catches his eye. Almost every name has an actor next to it – again, none he can recognise – except one where Pj has written, ‘*Dan Howell????*’ at which he smiles. The character’s name is Adam. The name itself feels foreign but that’ll last until he’s finished reading the script in about half an hour.

Under his character is Orion, played by one Phil Lester. Pj’s added next to it a cheeky, ‘*playing himself in his true form of an alien*’. Dan laughs to himself and wonders about this Phil Lester that Pj had also mentioned earlier, how they both had been very happy about him coming out. He definitely likes Pj and likes the script more and more as he goes through it, noting little doodles and notes in the margins, some by Pj, others by who Dan assumes are the people mentioned on the cover page.

All he knows he *definitely* wants to work on this project, no matter what.

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Phil’s day really couldn’t have started worse, to be honest.

First, he wakes up too late to be on time to get to work, his shower is unnecessarily cold and you would think eating a bowl of Lucky Charms would turn this around but *no* . Wrong. He pours too much of it into his bowl and then he’s almost out of milk so it ruins the cereal to milk ratio. He sighs because really, there’s nothing he could do now. Before he can pick it up and eat though, he gets a text.

It's from Pj. *need to see you asap. see you at the usual place?* Phil frowns and leans on the kitchen counter.

Bad idea.

The bowl of too much cereal and too little milk is pushed off the edge of the counter and smashes on the floor, pieces of glass flying absolutely *everywhere* \, milk splattered on the cabinets, Phil's pyjama bottoms, dripping down the counter. It looked like a cow was just split open in some horrible murder scene (a cow murder. He makes a mental note to tell Pj about that, see if they can turn it into a short movie somehow).

The milk ruined the t-shirt he was wearing slightly so he runs back to his room to put on his gray jumper with foxes on to cover it up. It's a chilly...afternoon anyway.

The usual place is a cafe a small distance away from Phil's apartment so he walks there and sees Pj bouncing on his heels outside the cafe.

"Hey!" He calls out. Pj's face lights up when he sees Phil which is worrying because that means he's going to tell him to do something no one else wants to do.

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"I got Dan Howell." Pj says solemnly and takes a small sip of his tea. He's not a coffee drinker which is strange since he's been friends with Phil for about nine years. He's got a small smile on his face but he doesn't look like someone who *has* got Dan Howell.

"But?" Phil prompts. There has to be a but; it'd be dumb to not assume that because this is a big time actor with an agent and probably a personal stylist who would *not* agree to an independent film by someone no one respectable has heard of. Yet.

"It's ridiculous." Pj says, teeth gritted. "But they...Dan's manager has this elaborate plan, okay? And I would've said no straight away if this wasn't *Dan Howell*, you know? And I met him and he's so genuine and nice and *he* really liked the script and wants to be in the movie—"

"Peej, you're drifting." Phil interrupts. "What do they want?"

Pj takes a deep breath in. "You both to be in a relationship."

Phil frowns. "We are. In the movie. It's a tragic relationship but nonetheless—"

"In real life, Phil."

Well, he'd figured that out – he was just hoping he was wrong. He gulps. "Why?" He asks. "I mean, I thought the whole fake, PR relationship thing was when he was pretending to be straight. What's this—"

"It's for a cover up." Pj explains. "Apparently the coming out wasn't planned, and Dan was in huge trouble with people, but they've come up with this fake boyfriend that he's been hiding and now they don't want to anymore. I know, I know," he lifts his hands up because



Phil's raising his eyebrow, ready to scorn big Hollywood people, "but that's the condition. And to be honest, Dan didn't seem that reluctant."

"Wow, he really wants to do this movie." Phil murmurs. A little louder, he says, "Weren't they going to ask *me* about it first? You know, the super secret fake boyfriend?"

"They do want to speak with you, but only after you've agreed to do it."

Phil snorts. "Fat chance." But then he sees how Pj's face falls for a second but then it's back up in a supportive smile and guilt traps him. It would go against so many of his morals to do this, but then again, having someone like Dan Howell in his movie would bring Pj's name up in the industry so much. "I...Let me think about it?"

"*Really?*" Pj asks, leaning forward, his eyes wide. "Hey, this is totally your decision, okay, I don't want you to do it because you feel—"

"I've thought about it. Boyfriend me up." Phil says, smiling at his best friend, feeling queasy inside but he'll die before he disappoints Pj in any way. Dan Howell better be as nice as he's heard. And a good kisser.

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"So who is this guy?" Niomi asks, leaning forward curiously.

Dan shrugs. "His name's Phil. I'm meeting him tomorrow on set. And then it begins."

"Ah, you're going for a love-at-first-sight story. Always fails, that one." She rolls her eyes and Dan smiles sheepishly at her.

They're at a club, in a private booth and there's noise in the background that isn't quite reaching their ears. Dan's thinking about Phil Lester, and the alien movie, and working on an independent film with Pj, who he's met once but already likes more than every other director he's ever worked with on anything. The thing he's most excited about is getting to *kiss* a boy on camera. He's had that experience off before, but only with strangers, no one he knows. There was that Chip Gellar back in secondary school but he was seventeen and they called it 'experimenting'. Now he's twenty five and he's (almost) sure that he's attracted to men and he has a good life. More than good.

He smiles. "It's not. Love at first sight, I mean. Apparently we've been hiding our relationship for a while now."

"Oh really?"

"Mhm. And the reason I came out was because I'd had enough of hiding."

Niomi looks at him intently. He never knows what she's thinking, even after years of being friends. Before she can say anything though, Dan's phone rings. It's Francis, and he considers hanging up but decides against it and picks up.

"Hey, what's up?"

"Daniel, I know this is unexpected," Francis says, skipping out on greetings. Always business. "But I've called Pj and told him to get his filming team and also Phil to the club you're at right now."

Dan sits up straight, eyes wide. Niomi tilts her head at him questioningly. He shakes his head and says, "Wait, what? Here? *Now*?"

"Yes, yes. It's been days since you've come out, and filming starts tomorrow. The press will get a look at you both and wonder who he is, and what you're up to. It'll be good promotion for the movie too."

"The movie."

"Of course."

Dan sighs. "The press will get a look at me and the guy tomorrow too, they've never stayed away from sets. Besides, I don't even know anything about him, how're we supposed to—?"

"It'll give you some time to get to know each other then!" Francis interrupts. "Keep to yourselves for a bit, talk to him, ask him questions. Honestly Dan, you'd think this was your first time doing this."

That stings. It *isn't* the first time Dan has done 'this', is the thing. But it's the first time it'll be with another man and he doesn't know the first thing about him. At least with the actresses before he had a little background information, time to watch their movies. Does Phil Lester even like his movies that much?

He hangs up, probably when Francis was mid-sentence. Well, fuck him. He lets out a frustrated sigh and leans back on his seat.

"What's wrong?" Niomi asks.

"My *boyfriend* is coming here." Dan answers, smiling tightly. "Along with the director of the movie and a bunch of their buddies. We're having a group bonding session."

"But this is *our* bonding session." She complains.

Dan sits up and shrugs. "Can't do anything about it now. They're on their way here." He's still angry, mostly at Francis and he gulps down his glass of vodka, feeling the alcohol burn his throat on its way down.

Niomi opens her mouth to reply but sees something behind Dan that makes her stop. "Is that them?"

Dan turns around and sees Pj Liguori followed by a few other people. He can't see all their faces clearly, but he stands up and waves in their direction, trying to get their attention unsuccessfully. He calls a waiter over and tells him to get them to the booth before they get lost.

He looks at Niomi, feeling a sudden panic within him. He is *not* prepared. His best friend imitates taking a deep breath and he follows her.

"Sir?" The waiter has returned and behind him - there they are. There's one girl, who's holding Pj's hand. She smiles at Dan. He breaks eye contact with her and looks at the three other men with them. One of them looks at him with no expression at all and the other two look around at the club and people.

Show time.

"Pj!" Dan exclaims, wrapping his arms around his shoulders. "Thank you so much for getting my boyfriend out of the house!" He leans in close to Pj's ear and whispers, "Which one is he?"

They break apart and Pj lets out an exaggerated laugh. "Oh, well, he never could say no to me." He replies, and pats the shoulder of the guy who was looking at Dan before. Oh.

Phil Lester looks nothing like Dan expected. If he didn't know he liked men already, he'd definitely start wondering after looking at this one. He's *tall*. But that's not the best part. He's wearing a well-fitting red shirt with white hearts all over it, buttoned up all the way. It doesn't look like an expensive shirt, probably from Topman. He's wearing black rimmed glasses but Dan can see blue eyes and he's always been a sucker for them. His hands are balled into fists and though he doesn't seem to be nervous, he's now avoiding looking at Dan at all.

The waiter is still standing close by so Dan smiles at Phil in what he hopes is a fond manner. He leans forward and kisses him on the cheek, making him jump slightly. He pulls away and says, "It's good to have you tonight. Nice to have a bit of a party to celebrate the movie!" He glances at the waiter and thanks him, signalling him to leave. The latter does so, but his step has a bit of a hop in it. Like he's just got some inside scoop. Wonder what that's about.

"Sit!" Dan says to everyone. "There's vodka, champagne, something else that made me dizzier than I expected." He laughs, and they join in but they seem to be scared. Oh well. "And meet my best friend, this is Niomi. She makes me look prettier."

"It's hard work," Niomi says, smirking, sliding a bit to the side so Pj and his apparent girlfriend could squeeze next to her.

Pj introduces everyone, except Phil. Louis, Jamie and Sophie. Apparently they're his team on all his movies. A consistent group. That must be nice. Phil is sat next to him, closer than strangers normally would be sat, but they're *not* strangers, are they?

God, it's going to be a long evening.

At the first chance he gets - when everyone is chatting amongst themselves and Niomi has found a new friend in Jamie - Dan leans in closer to Phil and whispers, "Do you wanna get out of here?"

"Excuse me?"

"Or to a dark corner here," Dan continues, smirking. "You know, to talk and get to know each other."

Phil's eyes widen and Dan notices that they're a strange shade of blue. *Very* blue, but flecks of other colours in there, which he can't see because it's too dark and his glasses reflect Dan's face back at him. "T-talk?"

"Just talk." Dan says reassuringly. In his haze, he can see Phil's nervous but he wants to make sure there's no reason to be. He gestures to the railing that's looking down at the club where all the people are unaware of them being there.

He gets up and walks, feeling Phil follow him slowly, nervously. He leans over the railing, looking down at everyone seemingly having the time of their life; skin against skin, laughing, drinking, kissing, loving, living. He smiles at them, feeling a little bitter inside because of what he's doing when he should be feeling free.

"So, you actually like guys?" He asks when he feels Phil stood next to him.

"Oh yeah." Phil replies. "I love boys. All kinds."

"Do you like girls?"

"Did. Lost interest." He chuckles. "I don't think I've spoken to a girl who isn't Sophie or Louise regularly in *years*. Bryony doesn't count, she's like...my mum or something, honestly."

He's rambling. Dan turns to him, his face now lit up by the lights. He's *pale*. Almost translucent. He doesn't look anything like an alien, except maybe the shape of his head. Dan wonders why it's like that. He's really pretty though. Smart-looking.

"So you're my boyfriend." He states, smiling at him.

Phil shrugs and purses his lips. "I guess."

"I have good taste."

He blushes. Dan likes him already. But he's really not good with conversation. He suddenly doesn't know what to say. The glass in his hand is almost empty. He says, "I'm gonna go get some more—" the same time Phil says, "So what's your fav—" before he stops. His cheeks get redder and he shakes his head. "Sure, go ahead." He says quickly. "I'll be here."

Dan gulps and walks away, feeling *beyond* embarrassed. "Fuck, fuck, *fuck* —" He mutters under his breath and walks to where Niomi is stood with a couple of other girls. "Niomi!" He calls. "I need to die, like, right now."

She smiles bemusedly at him. “What embarrassing thing did you do now?” She asks. “Do I need to take you to the back to leave?”

“Maybe.” Dan answers, sounding hysterical to himself. In the back of his mind, he *knows* he’s making this a much bigger deal than he’s making it out to be, but this is who he is as a person.

Niomi tilts her head to a side and pouts sympathetically. “Look,” she says, patting his shoulder with her free hand. “You can’t run away from this. Think of how it’d look to your new friends.”

Dan mumbles incoherently. He didn’t *ask* for them to be there. He’s not prepared for this situation.

Niomi tells him to go back to his *boyfriend* and stay until she gives him the signal that it’s acceptable to ditch them.

Dan goes back to Phil, a full glass in hand. “Hey, sorry for disappearing,” he says sincerely, because he can tell Phil feels out of place. He’s fidgeting with the hem of his shirt with one hand and pushing his one strand of hair falling on his forehead back (it relentlessly falls back down – Dan doesn’t hate it all that much).

“It’s totally cool!” Phil replies, voice a little high. “This just, uh, isn’t my scene.”

“I understand. What *is* your scene?”

“Ha, well, it’s probably a tie - either fire up the Xbox or microwave popcorn with one of your movies on BluRay.” His eyes widen. “That makes me sound like a weird obsessive fan. I’m really not, I mean, there’s loads of other actors whose movies I have on BluRay, you’re not like, first choice or anything—”

Dan laughs lightly. “No, Phil, it’s alright. I’m really flattered.”

Phil turns a light shade of pink which is so noticeable over his really pale face. Dan sips on his drink some more, his brain trying to come up with more conversation topics. He’s done this multiple times (he hates himself for just thinking that).

“So, how long have you and Pj known each other?” He asks.

Phil’s eyes widen a little, but his shoulders relax, as if Dan had just asked a question on a test and it was from a chapter he was well-versed in. “Uh, about ten years or so? We met in university, in the same course. Did a couple of group projects together. Peej was really into telling stories – I think that comes across as obvious though.” Dan nods and even from the corner of his eye, he can spot Pj in the group they’d been part of previously where he’s gesticulating wildly as he tells them some anecdote or the other. “And I liked acting and editing. We uploaded some stuff online, that got attention and we made some really cool friends around the country and that’s been our crew until now.” His eyes go a little glassy as he speaks, like he can see a supercut of the things he’s describing.

Dan swallows. “Well, that sounds amazing. You *have* to show me some of your old stuff. And I can’t wait to see you all in action tomorrow.” He really can’t. The more he talks to Phil, the more he thinks about the script, Dan feels his insides squirm with excitement and nervousness.

Just then, Sophie walks up to them and waves to catch their attention. “Uh, Phil?”

Phil looks at her questioningly. “Yeah, what’s up?”

“It’s late. We have to be early tomorrow.”

Dan picks up a flicker of disappointment on Phil’s face but it’s so minuscule that maybe he imagined it. Because *he’s* definitely feeling disappointed at the interruption. They had just gotten comfortable. But Phil nods at Sophie, and says, “Yeah, okay. We’ll leave in a bit. Let me just say goodbye.”

Sophie glances at Dan and gives him a small nod before going back to Pj, Jamie and Louis. Phil now turns to Dan and smiles. “It was really nice meeting you. Wish I could stay longer.”

*Then stay*, is what Dan wants to say. But instead, he says with a strained smile, “I understand. Call-times are important. We’re all serious artists. I’m probably going to leave soon too. No point in staying if my boyfriend’s not with me.”

Phil laughs. “I guess.”

Dan walks them to the door, keeping close to Phil, a hand on the small of his back. When they’re out, the rest of the group not paying much attention, Phil looks at Dan and smiles at him. “See you tomorrow. Goodnight.”

Before he can walk away, Dan leans forward and kisses Phil on the cheek. “Night, Phil.” He whispers in his ear. Phil shivers, possibly from the cold of the air, or maybe just because of Dan.

He gulps, nods and follows his friends into the London night. Dan watches his hunched back until the group turn a corner.

-

The thing is, Dan knew someone would’ve seen that kiss. Taken a picture. They weren’t at the secret exit that celebrities take to avoid paps, and that wasn’t an accident. Just because they weren’t in Dan and Phil’s faces, doesn’t mean they weren’t watching. People saw. And people clicked. And now Dan Howell is officially seeing Mysterious Black Haired Mystery Boy. Nothing new.

“Let’s do shots.” He says gruffly, sitting next to Niomi.

“Are...you okay, hun?” She asks, raising an eyebrow at her friend.

Dan nods furiously. “Need to chill. Last night before work, work, work.”

And so shots.

## two

### Chapter Notes

thank u so much for leaving kudos and comments and sending me nice messages about the first chapter<333

next update on tuesday!

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

Dan wakes up to the sound of his alarm, except it sounds like it's ringing from another room, not right next to his ear.

"Mmph." He buries his face into the pillow, but his left hand goes to his phone on the nightstand. The screen lights up. *9:15AM*.

Wait.

No.

Fuck, fuck, *fuck*. He was supposed to be on set fifteen minutes ago.

^

The air on the first day of filming is filled with a special kind of excitement. Phil and Pj are always the first ones on set, and they start setting up the main equipment before the rest of the crew show up. The cast for this movie isn't even that many people - there's the usual people like Sophie and Jamie and Louis. And Ciaran as DoP of course. Today's scenes involve mostly Dan and Phil though, because Pj wanted them to get comfortable with each other on-screen quickly.

"The lighting is going to be so perfect today," Pj says, grinning up at the sky, hands on his hips.

"You always set your films to be gloomy so the weather is always fitting," Phil replies, rolling his eyes.

They're putting up marks for the characters to stand on and Phil runs his lines in his head. Since he'd contributed to the script, he's pretty confident but this is just how he's always



worked as an actor. Always memorising dialogue, learning mannerisms of his characters, almost method-acting but not really.

*Orion. Friend.* He thinks. Those are his first words in the film. And he doesn't really say them. Spoilers.

"Hey, what's the time?" He asks out loud.

"Uhhh, 9:30."

Phil frowns. "Dan's not here yet. Is he?" As if to look, he turns around, peers into the distance. They're at Pj and Sophie's house, in their backyard specifically, which will be Dan's character's house in the film. He was given the location, and so was Francis and so was whoever was driving him to set. He can't help but feel a little annoyed. Surely Dan Howell isn't the stereotypical diva actor who doesn't show up on time, unprepared, maybe even unbothered by it. Then again, Phil hadn't expected Dan to go along with the fake relationship schtick after coming out. What does he know about Dan anyway?

^

Dan takes out an earbud. "What?"

The driver doesn't look back when he replies, "We're here. I'm supposed to leave you here and come back when you're done."

"Right, okay. See you then."

"See you, sir."

Dan used to tell him not to call him that, or even 'Mister Howell', but it never stuck and now he doesn't bother. He gets out of the car, a backpack on his shoulder, and walks to the house. He chews on his lower lip, feeling nervous because he knows he's late. And after that whole speech he'd given Phil the previous night about how serious making it to set on time was! Fuck.

The door opens and it's Louis.

"D-Dan! Hi! We were wondering where you were!" Every sentence Louis says is extra cheerful and Dan hates it. He should be getting yelled at. He's rarely ever late for things, but when he is, producers lecture him about 'time is money' and how his 'stardom doesn't matter to them' and every time Dan feels bad.

"I'm sorry I'm late," he mutters as he follows Louis into the house and out the back.

"Overslept."

"It's cool, mate. Just don't do it again, we need to stick to the schedule."

Dan nods. He looks around the set and it's already set up, of course. He missed it all. Pj sees him and waves. "Dan, hey! Come on, let me show you your wardrobe and stuff."

"I brought the bomber jacket," Dan says, following Pj into a shed.

Inside, it looks nothing like it. The space is huge, first of all. There are mirrors and tables for makeup and clothing rails with costumes on them.

His eyes fall on the only occupied chair in the room. Phil's reflection looks at Dan's - slightly glaring and Dan immediately feels like a deer in the headlights. He's about to open his mouth to say something, apologise *again* for being late, but then –

"Okay, Dan, take a seat!" Pj says, leading him to the chair next to Phil. Dan sits, careful to not meet eyes with Phil again. "Louise will get to you in a sec." He leaves them to it.

Louise is wonderful. She talks a lot, which means Dan has someone to direct his attention to, and he answers all her questions as best as he can, clearing any queries she has about his skin and allergies and how he wants his brows done and what shade of foundation he goes for. She's no Niomi - no one is, it would seem - but it doesn't matter. He doesn't know if Phil is still shooting him death glares but the coldness is apparent. Louise doesn't try to get him to talk to them, so Dan assumes that she can feel it too.

"Alright, you're all done, lovey," she says, giving Dan's hair a final fluff with her fingers.

"Thanks, Louise." Dan gets off the chair and grins at the makeup artist.

Phil also gets off his chair now, and nods at both of them and leaves the shed. Dan and Louise exchange glances. "Don't mind him," Louise says gently. "He's just very particular about time. But things always happen, it's not a film set if there isn't a little chaos."

Dan nods but internally the guilt is eating him alive.

^

Yes, Phil is mad. But even he has grudging admiration for Dan's acting skills. He can't stop being a fan, can he?

The first scene filming goes smoothly, which never happens because someone always screws up. But Dan says his lines perfectly, or gets them by the third take at least. He even improvises So yeah, Phil is impressed, and maybe even a little excited to see one of his favourite people do their job in such close proximity but it means *nothing*. He's expecting Dan to be a complete diva any second now, and make this whole fake relationship thing a lot harder. But he doesn't. Dan is just fantastic. And the crew loves him. They're obviously being extra nice because he's a famous award-winning, beautiful man who's starred in their favourite films, but he hardly notices the starry eyes.

They film for about four hours, just like the schedule says. Phil has only two scenes for now, his introduction and his first meeting with Adam, Dan's character. Pj tells him that they work great together; Phil retorts that they've said like five sentences to each other.

He's in the shed, wiping off his makeup when he hears the door open and shut. Dan walks up to him, and gives him a small smile that Phil doesn't return. But this time, he feels a pang of guilt for it.

"Hey." Dan says. The first thing he's said to Phil the entire day. "So, today was good, right? I'm having so much fun already."

Phil nods. "Yeah. Was great. It'll probably get more hectic as we go on. It's important that we do everything right and on time so that we can do post-production stuff well before the submission happens." He knows he's being an asshole, guilt-tripping Dan like this, but he can't help it. But it works.

Dan sighs. "Phil, I'm really sorry I was late today. I slept through like, five alarms. I had the worst hangover."

Phil snorts. "This is supposed to be helping your cause how exactly?"

"There's a reason I got so fucked last night," Dan persists. He's twisted his body on his seat to face Phil. He's wringing his hands too, like he really wants Phil to listen. So he turns himself, to do just that. "I got a call from Francis telling me you were coming," Dan continues, "and he said something that really stung, okay? And when I kissed you, that was me checking things off a list, making sure I was doing the right thing for the public. It fucking *sucks*." He looks down at his hands now, like he can't look at Phil, like it's shameful what he's doing. "I came out because I wanted to be done with all this bullshit and yet, here I am, and dragging *you* into it. You don't deserve it."

Oh. Okay. "I..." Phil doesn't know what to say. He appreciates the honesty? His hand goes up to touch Dan's shoulder, and he squeezes, hoping Dan feels some kind of reassurance. Of what, Phil isn't sure, but he understands Dan Howell a little bit more. For one thing, he *isn't* that okay with the fake relationship, so his moral compass seems to be in the right place - for now.

Dan smiles at him again, and his stomach flips, which he tries to ignore (unsuccessfully).

"HOW'RE THE LOVEBIRDS DOING?" comes a booming voice. Dan and Phil turn around to find that the source of that voice is an important looking man in a linen suit (*why?*), his hair perfectly done and a bluetooth headset in his ear. From Dan's furrowed brow, Phil can tell that he knows this man.

His strides are long and so he's in front of them in about two seconds. "Phil! I don't believe we've met, have we?"

Phil shakes his head and also Dan's manager's hand. There are veins popping out of the man's neck and temple. He supposes that's what it's like working for one of Hollywood's bigger names. "Uh, nice to meet you, sir."

“Likewise, likewise! Call me Francis, by the way, we’re all friends here.” He looks at Dan now, who’s sitting up and looking at his manager expectantly. “Daniel! How was your first day working with a new crew?”

“Great. Everyone’s been so cool,” he replies, but the way he says it is so monotone and Phil immediately notices things he didn’t before - Dan’s shoulders are tense. His eye contact with Francis doesn’t falter once. It’s like he’s trying to look bigger than him, like he’s not afraid of him.

Francis nods, apparently unfazed. “May I speak to you outside?”

“Do I have a choice?”

He gets off his chair, smiles at Phil one last time and leaves the shed with Francis.

^

It’s amazing how Dan’s mood can go from 100 to 0 with just his manager making an appearance.

“What is it?” He asks, as soon as they’re out of the shed, wanting to cut to the chase. Francis would’ve come before if it was just to check on things. He would’ve been directing him and Phil both on how to act on set so that everyone would be fooled and think they were actually together. Dan’s surprised he didn’t do that this time.

Maybe Francis notes the hostility in Dan’s tone because he doesn’t say anything about it. “So, I’ve been taking some calls all day today. People want a piece of you. They want to know more about this secret you’ve been harbouring for God knows how many years and they want. To. Know. *Now*. You’ve become an icon. A *bicon*, if you will.” He allows himself a chuckle for thinking he’s being clever, but Dan’s seen his fans call him that on Twitter for days now. “Anyway, you have a few interviews tomorrow and the day after, nothing too big, no talk shows, just a couple of radio things in London. I thought it’d be a good idea, you can share your story, and also talk about Phil! Which so nicely segues into the movie. Tease it a little, talk about working with your partner.”

Dan raises an eyebrow. “I don’t know...” He really doesn’t. He’s not ready, it’s not like he can say a lot about any of those things yet. But he *has* been reading things that the fans have said and Francis isn’t wrong when he said people want to know. It would be for a greater cause. There’s a lot he’s unsure of but Dan knows he wants to use his platform for good. So really, there’s no harm in answering a few questions, right? But there’s one problem. “What about filming?” He asks. The schedule. He promised he would stick to it.

“I’m sure they can do a few scenes without you and Phil.”

“Phil?”

“Of course! He has to come with you as support! Also, pictures of his face can be released officially. All everyone has right now is a blurry side profile from when you kissed him last night. Nice work, by the way.”

“Thanks,” Dan mutters. He knows too well that if the interviews are fixed, then everything Francis is saying will be non-negotiable. Phil would have to join him in London, and filming would have to be delayed because of it. Because of him *again*.

He feels miserable. So much for making up for today.

Another thought comes to him just then. “Wait...London. Where’re we going to stay? My flat’s off-limits, it’s being renovated.” He says.

“A hotel, then.” Francis replies. He immediately whips out his phone, no doubt to book a room.

“A hotel. With a room. With...two beds?”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Daniel. Could you imagine if the hotel leaked that Dan Howell and his Boyfriend checked into a room with separate beds? You’ll have one bed.”

Fuck.

## Chapter End Notes

say hi on twitter or [tumblr](#)! :D

# three

## Chapter Notes

hiiiiiiiiii :D

really dialogue-heavy chapter today lmao i hope y'all don't mind, THEY JUST HAVE A LOT TO TALK ABOUT

i had a lot of fun writing this chapter bc i got to write my FAVOURITE part of fake dating AUs (see tags) and i hope you too have a lot of fun reading it!

thank u so much for the comments as always<33

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

Turns out there was nothing to worry about with the schedule. Pj told everyone he had to leave town for a couple of days to visit his parents unexpectedly so filming *had* to be halted. Dan thinks it's a little too convenient and he tells Phil about his concern when he hears about it.

**Phil:** Nah if you've known peej as long as i have this is just expected

**Phil:** His parents call him for the smallest things

**Dan:** wow goals

**Phil:** lkr

The whole crew had exchanged numbers so that they could make a group chat, which is where Peej broke the news. Dan decided to text Phil separately and they'd been talking pretty much the whole evening. In between, Dan packing a small suitcase for London. He normally wouldn't bother with night clothes because he sleeps in his boxers, but he can't do that if he's going to be sharing a bed with Phil. It was awkward enough telling him about it.

*Ping!* He unlocks his phone again and sees that Phil sent him a picture: it's a selfie, and he looks like he's lying down on a bed next to piles of clothes and one hand covering half of his face. His visible eye is rolled up like he's exhausted and he's pouting. His hair is flopped down, covering his forehead, making him look a lot younger.

He looks adorable.

**Phil:** What exactly does the bf of a famous actor wear?

Dan smiles and taps on his screen to start typing.

**Dan:** cutie

**Dan:** wear whatever you want it doesnt matter

**Dan:** looks a lot more colourful than my situation over here

He considers for a second taking a similar selfie but catches his reflection in the mirror on the opposite side of his room - he's in his long night shirt with space cats and his hair is a mess of curls, his skin red and splotchy. Definitely *not* adorable. So instead, he takes a picture of his neatly folded clothes, all black or having black somewhere or the other. Even his socks are black.

**Phil:** Omg. i mean i know you're known for wearing monochrome all the time but i think you have a PROBLEM

**Dan:** just call me dannyedgelord666

**Phil:** Changed your contact name lol

**Phil:** Hey can i bring my switch? I figure if we'll be on a train for a while we could play some mario kart or something

**Dan:** LSKFHDSKFDS YES

**Phil:** keyboard smash.....definitely not straight

**Dan:** i'm breaking up with you after i beat your ass at mk8

Phil's not a messy person. He's not. But sometimes he leaves socks on the coffee table ("I'll put them back on in the evening!"), and sometimes there will be visible dust on his figurines and shelves. And sure, he doesn't put his clothes back in his wardrobe until he intends to go out and bring back a potential one night stand home, and *sure*, that doesn't happen often, but he's not messy.

Still, he cleans like a robot that's been built to clean and that's his sole purpose. Dan is on his way to pick him up in a car, and then they'll take a train to London from Manchester. He's not nervous, because from their texts, Phil is confident there won't be a shortage of conversation. Also, he has his Switch in case things do get awkward. If they get bored, there's always I Spy. Phil is prepared for any situation. What he's not prepared for is London itself. He's been a few times to see friends, and to attend gatherings, and even go to concerts. But Dan had warned him about paparazzi that Francis would've called and informed, who would know what hotel they're staying at, because they always somehow find out. He was also told about the sleeping situation.

One bed. That's fine.

Again, sharing a bed with another person, even if he wasn't romantically involved with them – not a novel experience for Phil. He cuddles his friends all the time, especially at house parties when he's drunk. But sleeping next to Dan Howell, someone he admires professionally (and also...personally) (he's *cute*), spending two nights with him, completely sober; yeah, that he's a little less than ready for. Even the actual *being a couple* thing. He's had boyfriends (maybe? What counts as a boyfriend? Do they have to meet your parents? Because if so, then his number goes down significantly). Hold hands, kiss (*oh god*)...what else? He thinks about how Dan will probably know since it's not his first time, but that thought is immediately extinguished.

*But it's true.*

The doorbell rings, interrupting his train of thought. "Coming!" He calls out, rushing to the door, and opening it.

Dan looks *very* cosy. He's wearing a grey hoodie, but it's the weirdest hoodie Phil has ever seen - it's too big for Dan first off, and it has like, a wrap over design that he could probably fit a two-month old baby in.

"Morning!" Dan says in an overly cheery tone. His eyes are wide and he's much more awake than Phil feels right now. Behind him is a big, burly man in a three-piece suit, sunglasses on even though it isn't nearly sunny enough for them. Obviously a bodyguard.

"You're really happy for five AM," Phil comments, letting Dan and his security guy in. "I am *so* full of coffee," Dan says as a way of explaining.

"Ah. Well, let me get my bags, you and uh..."

"Thomas." Dan supplies, waving at the bodyguard.



“Right, Thomas. You can wait in the lounge.” Phil leads them there, and lets them get comfortable while he gets his things from his room. He grabs his own York university hoodie, a bright green colour which make it easy to lose and goes back to find Dan scanning his DVD shelf with his hands behind his back.

“Okay, I’m ready!” Phil announces, making Dan turn around.

“You have such a great place,” he says, gesturing around at Phil’s lounge full of trinkets and pictures and whatnot.

“T-Thanks,” he replies. “You’ve only seen one room though.”

“It’s a good lounge though! Great DVD collection. Two *Buffy* boxsets...seems a bit obsessive.”

“One’s signed by Joss Whedon,” Phil says defensively, crossing his arms in front of him and frowning.

Dan holds his hands up in defeat. “And that’s valid.”

Thomas speaks for the first time since they arrived. “We have to go, or we’ll miss the train, Mister Howell.”

Dan nods and looks at Phil. “Are you ready?”

^

It’s a two-hour long train ride to London from Manchester. They’re in first class, which Dan realises Phil isn’t used to because he spends the first ten minutes just feeling the seat he’s on. “It’s so *soft*,” he gasps, running his hands over the leather. Dan just smiles at him fondly. There’s not a lot of people with them, just a few businesspeople who don’t care that they’re in a coach with Dan Howell (he’s thankful for that though). And then they’re off.

Dan beats Phil at Mario Kart exactly four times before the latter pouts and says the train is throwing him off his game (“*Ohhh*, blame the train, *okay*.” “Shut up!”). After that comes I Spy. There is only one round of that because Dan hates playing it and Phil keeps ‘spying’ tiny things on Thomas’ person; the bodyguard is completely unaware of this, or he’s pretending, but Dan doesn’t want to find out so it’s all he can do to not laugh hysterically when Phil says, “I spy with my little eye...something *big*,” while pointedly looking at Thomas’ forehead.

Dan pulls out his phone and opens up Instagram to take a boomerang. They’re passing by trees and they’ve always been his favourite part of the journey.

“What’re you doing?” Phil asks, leaning towards him to look at his screen.

Dan captions the post, ‘off to london!’ says, “Just updating the fans. They get worried when I’m too silent.”

“Oh, is that why you sometimes emo-tweet at three in the morning?”

Dan blushes, but he manages to retort, “Oh, do you keep tabs on me too, Phil?”

Phil stutters, “N-No! But I follow you, you know, as a *fan*, and your tweets are in that catch up tab the app has. Don’t be so full of yourself, Howell.”

Dan laughs. This is why he likes Phil. So far he hasn’t hidden the fact that he’s a fan, but it hasn’t stopped him from keeping Dan in his place.

“Aren’t you scared of stalkers?” Phil asks after a beat of silence. “Like, you posting that and they just show up and mob you or something?”

“Nah,” Dan replies. “Not in London. Or anywhere at home, really. People are used to it. There might be a few, but it’s not like I resent it, you know?”

“You don’t?”

Dan shakes his head. He can feel Phil’s eyes on him, curious. He continues, not looking back at him, “I don’t want to get all cheesy, but the fans are important and so, so dedicated. I *can’t* resent that aspect of fame. The lack of privacy, I signed up for that shit when all this started. So whatever. I’ll sign a few pieces of paper, I’ll take a picture.”

Phil doesn’t say anything. It’s not that Dan hadn’t talked about this to anyone before, but it’s something he strongly believes in. He’s grateful for what he has, he knows how lucky he is and it *kills* him because there’ll be times that he can’t help but wonder if he deserves it. But he also knows he needs to get over it and appreciate everything he has. His fans have always been supportive of him, and he’s tried to be as close to them as possible, meet with them, go to conventions, listen to their stories. He says yes to every Make-A-Wish, ComicCon, movie premiere, ad campaign he can just so he can meet them and tell them that they’re as important to him as he is to them.

“That’s why I came out, you know.” He now says aloud. “I felt like I was lying to the only people who seemed to give a fuck about me. And before you say it, *yes*, people in my life care about me. I was lying to them too.” He looks down at his hands now, not sure if he should say what he’s thinking next. “I’m still lying.”

Suddenly, a pale hand reaches over and grabs one of Dan’s. He looks up at Phil, who smiles warmly at him. He squeezes Dan’s hand and says nothing. But he doesn’t need to.

-

Phil stays holding Dan’s hand when they get off the train, walking to the car waiting for them, as some people with cameras take pictures of them, they weren’t particularly rude and he loops his arm around Dan’s as they checked into the hotel they’re staying at.

“Hey, you’re really good at this,” Dan says softly when they’re in the lift and Phil rolls his eyes.

They’re on the tenth floor, and their suite isn’t anything fancy. Dan immediately goes straight for the minibar and pulls out a Dairy Milk and scarfs down two bits before Phil can even take

his hoodie off.

“God,” he moans. “I love you.”

Phil raises an eyebrow at him, clearing judging. Dan just licks some melted chocolate off his thumb. “You're disgusting,” Phil comments.

Dan shrugs. “I asked them to put some Bounty in there for you too, since you mentioned liking coconut. But maybe you don't want them?”

Phil's expression is hard to read – it's between confusion and happiness. He slowly walks to the minibar where Dan is still stood munching his chocolate and peeks into the fridge. “Oh,” he says casually. He takes out the bar of chocolate and says thanks. “It's so fun having a fake boyfriend who'll spend his money on unnecessary shit like this.”

Dan grins. “I know right?”

“Mhm. We're like friends with benefits, but the benefit is the perks that come with your fame.”

“Wow. Where's *my* benefit?”

Phil smiles with his teeth – there's bits of chocolate in between them. “You get to hang with me, of course.”

“*Of course.*”

-

Dan's body doesn't tire that easily but he did wake up at fuck o' clock that morning, so when it's officially dark outside and him and Phil had finished their room service dinner and watched *Speed* (“young Keanu Reeves could get it.” “*Current* Keanu Reeves could get it.”), it's difficult for him to stifle a yawn.

“Go to bed, old man,” Phil says, nudging his shoulder playfully.

“M fine,” Dan protests, but he lets himself curl up on the couch.

“Um, excuse me, I know I look really hench, but I can't carry your ass to the bed so you better walk yourself there and sleep.”

That wakes Dan up. The bed. Right. He stretches and groans. “You can sleep there,” he says. “I'll take the sofa.”

He'd thought about it and really, there is no reason for them to sleep in the same bed. It's only for a couple of nights. His back can take it, he's sure.

Phil snorts. “Nice joke, Howell. C'mon, it's late, I'm tired too. I'll drag you to bed.”

Dan narrows his eyes. “You sure? This isn't uncomfortable?”

“Mate, you drooled on my shoulder on the train for half an hour. We’re way past uncomfortable.”

Dan clears his throat awkwardly. He’d immediately made it a point to forget the nap he took on the train and his head just fell on Phil’s shoulder. “O-Okay, I just thought, you know...you just wouldn’t want to. There’s no real point it, right?”

Phil purses his lips and furrows his brow. “Well...there is, uh...it might help us get more comfortable as a couple? Hear me out,” he says quickly, because Dan’s eyebrows are so high up his forehead they’re going into his hairline. “We’re going to be a couple on-screen too, we’re going to have to make it look like we’re intimate with each other and what’s more intimate than the bed?”

There’s a second of silence while Dan deliberates. Phil starts to look worried, which makes him laugh. “Oh, Philip,” he says, throwing a hand over his shoulder and leading him to the bedroom, “if you really want to cuddle, all you had to was *say* .”

Phil pushes Dan away. “*No*, ugh, fuck you Dan.” He complains. “You know what, I *was* going to cuddle you, like a bro, but now that you’ve said that you can say goodbye to these arms.” He spreads them and falls back onto the bed, starfish-style.

Dan doubles over laughing, and it’s been a while he’s done that. He shakes his head, smiling at Phil getting under the duvet on the left side. He does the same now and he lies on his side, facing Phil, who’s lying on his back.

“Hey,” Dan says softly. “Phil, hey.”

“Yeah?”

“I want to thank you for doing this.” He bites his lower lip. “I don’t think I did before. But I didn’t think you would say yes.”

Phil sighs. “Truth be told, I wasn’t going to. *But* this project is really important to me and Peej. And when your people came to us asking if we would cast you in the role, it became all we wanted. I think Peej would have agreed to being in the relationship if I was more adamant about not doing it.” He chuckles softly and now turns to look at Dan. His eyes *aren’t* just blue. There’s some green in there too and flecks of gold. Dan genuinely thinks he could probably drown in them.

“I also realised that maybe this movie is important to you too,” Phil continues. “Y’know, it’s pretty clear because after your coming out your agent or manager or whoever would want you to do a role like the one in *monsters*.”

Dan nods. “That is what Francis told me. And I *really, really* wanted to do this movie. The script is...unbelievable. You and Pj are really good storytellers.”

Phil smiles. “Well, thanks. Anyway, when I realised *that*, I couldn’t find it in me to say no. This is so much bigger than you just doing any other movie. It’s the first one where you’re

kind of just playing yourself. So, whatever. If I have to play your boyfriend in real life for you to have that, then I'll do it."

He's echoing Dan's words from the train. He opens his mouth to say something, but all that comes out is a loud yawn. Phil giggles and twists his arm to switch the light off.

"Goodnight, Dan."

"Night."

Dan buries his head into the duvet so only his hair is visible and he scoots closer to Phil to feel warmer. And if his hand ends up on Phil's waist then it's none of anyone's business, is it?

## Chapter End Notes

say hi on [tumblr](#) and [twitter](#)!

## four

### Chapter Notes

hey!! so so sorry for the delay on this chapter, i just wasn't feeling it but i hope this makes up for it. we'll be back to our regular schedule next chapter onwards! thank you for being patient :D

Phil has a hard time waking up on the best of days. And somewhere in his sleepy subconscious, he knows he's supposed to wake up. It's an important day. But the fog in his head is preventing him from remembering what exactly makes the day so important. Well, that and the warmth pressed up against him.

He opens one of his eyes and the world is blurry. Darn. He has a hard time turning around to get his glasses. He grunts and opens both his eyes. It takes a second to adjust but he can see the source of warmth on his body.

*Dan.* It's all Phil can do to not detach himself and fall off the bed onto his back. Okay. Dan Howell has just wrapped himself around Phil. Or well, just his arm around his waist. Phil's breathing gets very heavy, and this is ridiculous. He has slept with a lot of people (does that sound like a brag?), and has definitely woken up with them tangled up with him. Every time that has happened, his first instinct is to get out. He'd carefully untangle himself, not wake the other person up, pick up his clothes that are most likely strewn across the room and tip-toe out of the room and their flat. He's never heavy-breathed before. Besides, they didn't even *sleep* together.

Phil lets himself sink a little lower, shifting Dan's hand, making him stir. "Mmphf," Dan mumbles, and his grip tightens.

Phil sighs. "Dan," he whispers. "Hey. Wake up." He pokes Dan on the cheek. "*Daniel.*"

"Don't call me that," Dan mutters, still not moving.

Phil rolls his eyes. "Dan, get off me, I need to pee."

That makes his eyes fly open and he sits up immediately. "S-Sorry," he says, stretching. Phil pointedly looks away when he does, because the action causes his shirt to ride up. "Go ahead. I'll freshen up after you."

"Mhm."

He gets off the bed having been released from the prison of Dan's arms, and goes to the ensuite bathroom. He takes a shower too, if only because he wanted to wrap himself up in one of the robes provided to them. While he enjoys the feeling of hot water cascading down his

body, he wonders about what today will be like. They're supposed to go somewhere together, be photographed loads, and he would have to watch Dan spin some tale about how they met and fell in love.

*C'mon, Phil, make yourself useful*, he thinks. *How do people fall in love?*

He thinks back to when he first saw Dan. It was in his debut, *Warmer*. He wasn't the lead or anything, but he was on the poster, and Phil had been intrigued ever since. The movie wasn't...great, but Dan himself was excellent and really became the character. After watching it, Phil spent the night watching interviews of the cast - mostly ones of Dan alone - and listened to him talk about getting the opportunity to work with such talented people and how he got into character himself and Phil knew that he was going to be big soon.

And he was right. Dan landed himself a lead role in the next three movies he did. Phil had the biggest crush on him, and always thought it was such a shame he was apparently the biggest heterosexual player in the industry.

When he comes back out, Dan's out of bed, and on the phone, pacing.

"Okay, mhm, alright," he's saying, running his hands through his hair. "You should come here, and then we can go to the studios together. *Please*, Niomi. Fine, I'll get you an Uber. Love you."

"Who was that?" Phil asks, rubbing his towel against his hair to dry it.

"Niomi, she'll be dressing us up and doing our hair. So keep it as it is." Dan looks up at him from his phone. "Oh. Hello. Robe. Nice." He clears his throat and purses his lips.

Phil's arm instinctively goes across his middle and he fidgets with his wet hair. "Thanks?" He says, not quite sure what the correct reaction is. "Um, you can take your shower too now." Dan nods, and walks past him into the en suite, leaving Phil to continue drying himself off and waiting for the mysterious Niomi.

^

Dan and Niomi met on the set of *Where I Go*. She'd been listening to the new FKA twigs EP at the time in the background while she did his makeup, and Dan, being a huge fan asked her about it. As it turned out, the two had a lot more favourite artists in common, amongst other things. She became Dan's number one confidant in the industry and the only person he trusted with his appearance. She understood him like no one else did.

"I'm sorry I didn't speak to her much the day we met," Phil says after Dan gives him the 411 on his best friend.

They're both sat in their robes, having showered and eaten pancakes for breakfast. Now Dan is just on his phone, checking his messages. He never looks at his social media, unless he

himself wants to tweet something or post a picture on Instagram. He knew the pictures from King's Cross were probably out. He doesn't know what people are saying. What the fans are saying. He really hasn't been paying attention since he came out and part of him is really scared to. He sighs loudly as his finger hovers over the Twitter app icon.

"What's up?" Phil asks, looking at him curiously.

Dan shakes his head, making his damp curls fall onto his forehead. *Note to self, get haircut*, he thinks. "Nothing," he replies. "It's just. I haven't checked my mentions in like, a week."

Phil looks like he's about to make some kind of snarky remark, but his the realisation hits him and he says, "Oh. Since..."

"Yeah."

"That's valid. I think you should, though."

Dan tilts his head to the side in question. "Why?"

"Just do it." Phil says encouragingly. "Trust me, people are a lot nicer than you might think. I remember being *so* happy when I listened to you talking about that date with the guy. Also, just think about how this is huge for your fans who identify as queer, how *big* this is for them, that someone as successful as you is out and proud." He smiles at Dan and there's a look of pride, almost, on his face. He reaches across the table to hold Dan's hands and squeezes them.

Dan swallows and nods. He opens up his Twitter app and refreshes the screen. He'd switched off push notifications way before any of this, when verified "news" accounts started posting absolute garbage about him that he didn't want to see.

But when he checks his mentions now, it's just a flood of tweets from his fans telling him how proud they are of him. He sees some pictures too, of him and Phil walking out of King's Cross and getting into their car. Seeing those makes Dan's stomach flip. The captions of those pictures say things like, 'i'm so happy that dan can openly go out with his bf now!!' and 'THE BOYFRIEND IS CUTE'. He chuckles softly.

The verified tab in his mentions is littered with articles about him and Phil, but he scrolls past them to look for some positivity. He finds it in tweets from his actor friends, from people he didn't know personally, but who wanted to express their feelings. There's also a couple of tweets from other LGBTQ+ celebrities that Dan recognised - Olly Alexander from Years & Years, Troye Sivan, there's Kehlani too, which he wasn't expecting. He can't believe it, really. It's not that he expected anything *bad*. But he's overwhelmed. He's already sitting, but he needs to sit down. A tear falls on his phone screen.

"Are you *crying*?"

Dan looks up and blinks back his tears. "No," he says, sniffing. "I'm just, so happy, you know?"



Phil nods and he's smiling at Dan so warmly that if his heart hadn't melted before, it is now. "I told you. The people who love you and support you, they're the ones you should be focusing on. When this ends, you can live your truth for good."

Dan tries not to focus on the first half of that sentence too much and goes back to reading messages and tweets.

-

Niomi brings a rack of clothes with her for both him and Phil.

"Phil, sweetie, I know you're going to be backstage, but you need to look presentable and uh," she squints at nothing in particular, trying to find the right words, "like you're dating one of the most famous actors in Hollywood?"

"Niomi!" Dan exclaims, offended on Phil's behalf.

His best friend shrugs. "I'm sorry, babe, but your pictures from the station yesterday? I felt *so* bad."

Dan looks at Phil apologetically, but he seems unbothered. Currently, he's having his hair gelled up by one of Niomi's assistants who came with her. He looks like he's having the time of his life, his eyes closed, a serene smile on his face.

He walks to the rack now, and opens up the bag labelled 'Dan'. When he takes it out, he recognises the top immediately. It's Alexander McQueen - obviously, it's eighty percent of his wardrobe anyway, as a brand ambassador for them - a white jumper that has the phrase 'hissing at the sun' on the sleeve and also on the front. Niomi also brought him black ripped skinny jeans, which he's new to, but absolutely chuffed about wearing.

When he comes out in his outfit, he sees that Phil's hair is done and *oh boy*. Phil's hair, which he usually straightens and flattens against his forehead, is now up and defying gravity. His pale forehead's out, and he looks...older? Weird how just a change in hairstyle can do that. He'd changed too, while Dan was gone and his outfit isn't anything Dan could imagine Phil wearing on a regular day - he's got on a black and white striped t-shirt and an acid wash denim jacket over it, and he'd replaced his usual black skinny jeans with light grey straight trousers that Niomi had probably cuffed up for him.

Needless to say, Dan is speechless.

Phil is examining himself in the mirror. "I mean, this is Topman," he says. "I always wear Topman, so I don't know why you were complaining about my choices."

Dan snorts as he settles into his chair, ready to have his hair straightened. "You look nice," he tells Phil. "Also, I'm ready."

The assistant doesn't move, but she glances at Niomi, who in turn shakes her head. "Nope. No more straightening for you."

Dan's jaw drops practically to the floor. "Excuse me? But I always do that, it's my *one* go-to hairstyle, why aren't we doing it?"

Niomi shrugs, and doesn't say anything.

"You look like a hobbit," Phil comments, "but like, in a good way. Hobbits are cute. Like, Elijah Wood? I had *so many* dreams about him, let me tell you --" He stops himself, realising what he's about to say. He coughs and continues, "Uh, try new things?"

There's a knock on the door just then. Dan stands up and goes to open it and it's Francis.

"Oh good, you're ready," he says, as soon as he sees Dan. He walks in, and looks around. "Oh, wonderful! Phil, you look amazing, Niomi darling, hello, splendid job, really, this is why we like having you around..."

Dan rolls his eyes at Phil behind his manager's back. "So, remind me what's happening exactly today."

Francis turns around and blinks at Dan. "Right. You're being interviewed by Nick again, it won't be long this time, maybe ten minutes? But there's going to be paparazzi outside the studios, they're going to ask questions too, don't just ignore them, smile a little, appear cosy and just do the usual 'yes, i'm fine, we're doing great, thanks, how are you?' nonsense." He looks at Phil, who looks confused beyond belief. "Phil, you follow Dan's lead, you'll get used to it."

Phil starts to look nervous and Dan instinctively just walks to him and squeezes his arm reassuringly.

Francis then announces that they have to leave or else they'll be late and leads the way out of the hotel room. Dan and Phil walk close together, until Niomi tugs on Dan's arm so they both fall behind the group.

"What?" Dan asks.

"What was that, before?" Niomi asks back. "With the arm grab? You both seem awfully comfortable for people who met a few days ago and done like, maybe two scenes together."

Dan doesn't know what to say to that. He's aware of the fact that him and Phil aren't exactly awkward with each other, save him waking up in Phil's arms that morning. "Isn't that ideal though?" He says. "We should be comfortable, so everyone thinks that we're in love or whatever."

Niomi hums. "I guess. Anyway, this felt different, like even the way you both talk to each other and also like, I caught him looking at you. *Looking*." She raises her eyebrows suggestively, but Dan waves it off. Doesn't mean anything. Don't overthink it.

It's nothing.

Dan and Phil sit next to each other in the car with Niomi and Francis sitting opposite them.

“My god, why do you both look like you hate each other?” Francis says, his forehead creasing. “Move closer together, hold hands, I don’t know. Be a couple.”

“That’s specific,” Niomi says, rolling her eyes. “More importantly though, you guys have a story, right?”

*Oh, shit.* Phil looks confused. “What do you mean?” He asks.

Francis glares at Dan. “Really? You had all of yesterday and you couldn’t come up with a story of how you met?”

“We were busy,” Dan replies, defensively. “We were...practising being a couple, you know, cuddling and stuff.” He feels himself get hot as he says it, and even Phil shifts uncomfortably. That’s a lie, they did not cuddle even once, at least not awake, and they’d just been having too much fun binging movies and playing video games.

Francis raises an eyebrow, and Niomi has a satisfied smirk on her face. Dan ignores both and looks at Phil, who he’s most concerned about. “I’ll probably wing it,” Dan tells him. “Met at a party, instant connection, something like that.”

“Okay, but how did I, Phil Lester, unknown actor, end up at the same party as you?” Phil asks, and Dan’s stumped, because that’s valid.

“Uhh...” He frowns. “Well, you and Peej are already kinda filmmakers with an audience. That’s what you said, right? At the club?”

Phil nods.

“So you’d have contacts. Someone who could get you into a party. And it doesn’t have to be an exclusive thing, I mean, those aren’t the only parties I go to.”

“*Wow*, you saying my contacts aren’t good enough for your exclusive parties, Howell?” He’s struggling to keep his offended expression though and they both burst out laughing. Phil’s laughing so hard, he’s almost silent, his eyes are shut and his hand falls on Dan’s thigh, and rests there. He doesn’t move it when he stops laughing, and Dan doesn’t do anything to move it either. In fact, he places his own hand over it, and bites his lip to hide the smile creeping up on his face as he catches the looks of surprise Francis and Niomi exchange.

The car stops - they’ve reached the BBC.

“Okay, everyone, big smiles,” Francis instructs.

Dan looks at Phil and grins at him. Phil swallows and nods, so he opens the door and gets out. He turns to help Phil out, and he can hear the photographers. They both tilt their heads down as they walk to the entrance. There is security around them, but the paps know to keep their distance. And then the questions hit.

“Dan, Dan, how are you both?”

“Fine.”

“Dan, what’re you going to discuss today?”

“Just catching up with a mate.”

“Phil, is it love?”

Dan glances at Phil, curious to see how he’ll react, but also wanting to help him avoid that preposterous question. *Is it love?* Ridiculous.

Phil looks at the photographer, and smiles. He lets go of Dan’s hand and wraps it around his waist and winks - *winks* - at the photographer, before leading the way into the building himself.

And that’s the second time Phil has left Dan speechless that day.

^

Phil feels like he’s on auto-pilot from the moment he leaves the car. They’re greeted by some of the radio people and then Nick Grimshaw himself. He’s really nice and seems like he’s a good friend of Dan’s but he obviously isn’t aware of the actual situation here, or he does, and he’s doing a good job of hiding it.

“Dan, you’ve got quite the cutie with you,” Nick says, nodding at Phil, making him feel self conscious. He never quiffs his hair up, nor does he wear denim jackets. He tries for a warm smile directed at Dan, which to be honest, is coming to him easier than he’d thought.

It’s hard to not look at Dan fondly as he steers his way through all the people, shaking hands, hugging, introducing Phil. He’s effortlessly charming. There are a few seconds Phil’s lost in it, forgets what’s happening but then he’s brought back on earth whenever he catches Dan’s manager scrutinising their every move.

When they’re finally in the studio, Dan knows where to go. He sits on Nick’s opposite, puts on his headphones and flashes him a thumbs up. Phil stands next to Niomi, and keeps his eyes on Dan.

And it begins.

^

“That was Paramore with *Still into You!*” Nick starts, as the song fades out. “Still such a jam. Ah, well, as promised, we have today’s guest here. He was on a while ago and he caused quite a stir. Hi Dan Howell!”

“Hello Nick Grimshaw,” Dan replies, grinning.

“So I know I’ve said it already, but congratulations on coming out. That’s a really big thing you did, I’m so proud of you. What’s it been like?”

Dan’s eyes light up as he talks about the response, and how his parents already knew but they were happy for him, and he’s enjoying not needing to hide that side of him anymore.

“When did you know?” Nick asks, genuinely curious.

“Uhh, when I was eighteen, I think? Or nineteen. Basically, I watched *Obsessed*, have you heard of it? Terrible movie. But Beyonce’s in it. And Idris Elba. I *mean*, can you imagine? So one minute I’m admiring Bey, and the next I can’t keep my eyes off of Idris.”

Phil laughs softly, and Dan catches his eye and smirks at him. “I had high school crushes, I brushed them off. Went to an all-boys school, thought I was losing my mind with no girls around,” he continues. “Oh, there was this *one* school trip that ended with me and this boy kissing -- it was *nothing*, there was no tongue!” He adds, laughing at the shocked expressions of everyone in the studio. “But yeah.”

“*Wow*. Okay so, the people listening can’t see this obviously, but everyone is just...shook, is the word, I think. Even a certain someone, who’s really close to you, isn’t he?”

Dan feels the heat rush up to his face and he can’t help but smile. “Uh, I *guess*?” His voice goes up really high, the way it does when he’s trying to get out of answering things.

“Tell us about Phil, Daniel.” Nick says, leaning back in his chair.

Dan shakes his head while also smirking at Nick, and he looks at Phil behind him too, who’s raising his eyebrow at him, waiting.

“Um, he’s great.” He starts. “Yeah, uh, actually he’s a big reason, you know, as to why I wanted to come out in the first place. We’ve been together for a while and I didn’t want to hide that anymore. Yeah.”

Nick nods in understanding. “So how’d you two meet?”

Dan laughs airily, and it sounds so fake to him. “*Well*, it’s not that wild of a story. It was at a party, and he was there as a guest of a mutual friend of ours...” and he tells the entire story about how he and Phil were introduced to each other, and immediately hit it off, spent most of the night near the snacks, flirted a little, and exchanged numbers. “I had to chase him,” Dan says, smiling, as though remembering what that was like, except all he’s thinking about is their train trip to London. “We went out a couple of times and like, I knew, somehow that he was special. He is. He’s one of the best people I know.”

He's not even lying. That's the first thing he's said about this whole thing that he's not lied about.

-

Francis tells them the interview was a 'success', whatever that means, but Phil uses it as an excuse to make Dan order one of everything from the menu at their hotel for dinner. By the end of the night, they're both lying on the sofas, not talking, just making sounds of distress.

"We're like whales," Dan says, but the words are hard to form in his mouth.

"Mm."

"*Beached* whales."

"Mm."

Dan looks over at Phil, and he's *gone*. They're both definitely drunk; they had a lot of wine. He knows Phil can't sleep with his contacts on, so he nudges him with his toe that's close to Phil's head. "*Phiiil*, getup."

"Don'twanna."

"Your contacts."

Phil groans and shifts a little, now lying on his side. "I'm dead. Pick me up."

Dan wants to laugh, but he just...doesn't have the brain power to. But he still sits up, struggling to carry his own weight, and gets off the sofa, feeling a little dizzy as he does. Then he walks to Phil, grabs his arm and pulls him up. "C'mon, big guy," he huffs, holding him by the waist and practically dragging him to the room. He feels an odd sense of *deja-vu*.

Once they're in the bathroom, Dan opens the tap and splashes some water on Phil's face in an attempt to wake him up a little - and it works.

"Get your lenses out," Dan says, "and come to bed."

Phil nods and yawns. His hair is still up, with just a strand falling on his forehead. He looks cute, Dan thinks. But he's thought that since they met, so it's not a big deal. He should just never voice that. He goes back into the room and takes his jumper off, throws it across the room, then his jeans, which he has a little problem with, but finally he's in his boxers and he lets himself fall face first onto the bed, burying himself in sheets and pillows.

There's a sound of a door shutting and shuffling. A couple of thuds and something falls onto the floor (Dan hopes it hasn't broken, whatever it is, or Francis would be mad). He feels the bed dip next to him and he opens an eye to see that Phil is in bed with him. But Phil is also shirtless. He has his back turned to him, but Dan, even in his drunken and sleepy state, notices that it is a *very nice* back. There is a mole just under his neck. Dan wants to reach out and touch, but before he can, Phil turns around, groaning as he does.

“Come here,” Dan whispers, reaching out, and Phil does. He feels the warmth of Phil’s body on his own, and then his eyes shut and the world goes black.

# five

## Chapter Notes

cough

i have no explanation

BUT WE'RE BACK BAABBYYYYY

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

“Cut, cut, cut!” Pj yells. Dan can tell he’s trying not to lose his shit, which is very nice of him, but also Dan wishes he just would.

Phil, stood opposite him, pouts. He looks ridiculous, of course, in his latex bodysuit and face paint, and Dan’s mostly used to it, but still finds him cute in that moment. “What did we do wrong now?” He asks, arms crossed comically. “C’mon Peej, I’m sweating, we’ve been doing this one scene for half an hour, it’s not supposed to take this long.”

“Exactly!” Pj replies, running his hand through his hair. He slumps back in his director’s chair and joins his hands as if praying. Dan raises his hand slightly, like he’s in class.

“Uh, if I may?” He says meekly, making everyone in the room turn to look at him. “I think the problem is that we’re too awkward. Me and Phil, that is. And that was fine when we did the first meeting scene but by now we’re supposed to be like, bestest buddies or whatever, right?” He swallows. “But me and Phil haven’t done anything that would help us get closer in real life so...”

Pj claps and his eyes widen. “You’re right! Well, maybe. You guys *are* stood really far apart right now...” He looks at the stark distance between Dan and Phil, who look embarrassed.

Dan suddenly feels the frustration Pj was. It’s been two weeks, they’re supposed to be more comfortable with each other. But they never really hang out outside of set, and sometimes Dan picks Phil up at his flat to go to set. They don’t particularly mind it – Dan comes to learn that Phil is a focused artist and when he’s working on the film, that’s where his priorities are. They’re both the only people who don’t go out for drinks or dinners with the crew (that may also be because of how exhausted they get and Dan not wanting the crew to experience mobs of photographers wherever they go).

Phil frowns and says, “We could, I dunno, go out?” He looks at Dan, as if asking for permission.

“Yeah!” Dan says, nodding. “Just the two of us...hanging out.” He almost said ‘on a date’, but there’s no need to pretend with everyone being aware of the situation.



Pj thinks about this. “Hmm. Right. Okay.” He claps his hands once. “You both can leave now, and do whatever. We can continue on with scenes you’re not in.” His forehead creases because there aren’t that many scenes without the *two leads*.

Phil sighs in relief and walks away and Dan follows, waving at the crew.

In the shed/dressing room, Phil doesn’t even wait for Dan to look away, he just starts removing his bodysuit. “Ugh, I hate this thing.” He complains.

“You look cute in it,” Dan comments, turning away slightly to look at himself in the mirror. He doesn’t really need to change, seeing as he plays an ordinary human being. He’d been in his fair share of latex suits though so he understands Phil’s pain. “Anyway, I think I have an idea of what we can do.”

“Oh, really?” Phil gets out makeup wipes from his backpack and sits at his dressing table, getting to work on his face. “What do you have in mind?”

“You’ll see.”

^

Phil fell asleep. And when he wakes, they’re still on the road.

“Wh-We’ve been driving for a million years,” he says. “Dan, what the fuck?”

Dan only smiles serenely whilst looking out the window. His dimple pops out, and Phil has to resist the urge to poke it. He’s put on an extra layer, an oversized red hoodie. It’s a colour Phil has never seen him in and it looks good. But Dan just always looks good. He could probably pull off wearing a trash bag. Or Phil’s alien bodysuit.

“We’ve only been driving for an hour,” Dan informs him. “Almost there anyway. Look out.”

Phil does. They’re definitely not still in Manchester. “Dan, seriously.”

Dan laughs. “Welcome to Southport.”

“I’ve never been here,” Phil says, staring out the window at the town. It’s not different to other seaside towns he’s been too though, although it’s not crowded they way most of them are, crawling with tourists and residents alike. “It’s so pretty.”

Dan nods. “Yeah,” he says. “Not a lot of people actually know that I come here. Not even Niomi.”

“Wow, I feel special.”

“You are.”

Phil feels himself blush. Dan makes that happen so easily. He's not shy at all, dropping compliments like it's nothing, touching Phil like it's not making electricity shoot through his veins, like it's not making his head spin. Phil had always been somewhat of a fanboy, but it's different since London. He knows the reason the scenes weren't working – it's because Phil has a hard time looking at Dan in the eye. How could you, after you've spent the night in someone's arms and not acknowledged it the next morning? Or the day after. Or the week after.

He feels his heart flip every time Dan so much as says his name. He's glad they haven't been asked to be couple-y in public anymore (other than holding hands when going to set) or else he'd actually lose it. He now knows that paps only show up when you call them, so there's no pressure to act like a boyfriend but now as he looks at Dan from the corner of his eye, he wonders if there's any way he could get him to give Phil his hoodie.

(He's only human.)

Thomas parks the car in a lot and they get out. It's windier here than it is in Manchester, what with being near the sea and all but Phil's never been that affected by the cold, crediting it him being born during a snowstorm and therefore immune to freezing temperatures. He feels his fringe get slightly swept up.

"Ugh," he groans, trying to plaster it back down on his forehead.

Dan looks at him, hearing the noise and frowns. "Let it be," he says. "Your forehead needs to breathe after today."

And Phil does.

Thomas and Dan exchange nods and the bodyguard walks off. Phil looks at Dan quizzically. "Is he scouting for paps or something?" He asks.

"Nah. Just going to do his own thing. No one has ever found me here."

"Oh. So, what now?"

He feels nervous. It was Dan's idea that they go out. He tried not to read into that too much, reasoning that Dan does want to fool everyone into thinking they're together. He also thinks it's why they're being awkward on-screen. So it's not because of...no.

Dan extends his hand, and Phil takes it, feeling quite incredulous. "Come on, I'll take you to my favourite place."

-

It's an ice cream parlour.

"It's November." Phil says, squinting at Dan, who shrugs.

"Ice cream's good in any climate, if you ask me. And it's not that cold." He has a glint in his eye and he enters the parlour and what's Phil going to do? Not follow?

The owner, upon seeing her arrived customers, gasps and exclaims, “Daniel! It’s been too long!”

She leaves her post at the counter, calling out one of her workers to take her place and runs to Dan, wrapping her arms around his waist. She’s short and old and Phil internally groans because *of course* Dan is close to a sweet looking old lady who works in a fucking ice cream parlour. This couldn’t be more like a romantic comedy.

“Hellooo,” Dan says, his eyes shut as he hugs her. “I *know* Judith, I’ve just been busy, but you know I’d never forget you. Or your rhubarb ice cream.” His eyes widen and in that moment, six-foot-two giant Dan Howell has never looked tinier.

Judith the ice cream parlour lady gives Dan a knowing look before turning to Phil. “Ah, you must be Daniel’s friend!”

Dan slaps his forehead. “Oh, right! Phil, this is Judith, she’s easily one of the top five best people on Earth.” He has his arm around her, and she smacks his chest lightly, laughing. Phil could cry, honestly.

“And Judith, this is my...um, Phil.”

“*Your* Phil?” Judith repeats, a playful smile on her lips.

Dan’s very clearly blushing, which makes Phil blush and not want to look anyone in the eye, but he laughs nervously and extends his hand to shake Judith’s anyway. She takes it and pulls him close, hugging him. It’s a lot like hugging his mum to be honest, which is why he melts into her.

“It is nice to meet you, Phil.” She says. “Come sit at the counter, I’ll get you both something to cool you off.”

They do exactly that and Phil looks at the blackboard with all the flavours on it. There’s a rainbow flavour that he’s attracted to and he tells Judith that he wants that.

“Typical,” Dan comments. Phil sticks his tongue out at him.

-

They leave the parlour with their cones in hand.

“Let’s go,” Dan says. He grabs Phil’s hand (cue heart flip) and leads him around town. “I used to come here a few times with my mum. Judith reminds me a lot of my grandma. Which I know is *such* a cheesy and obvious thing to say, haha all nice old ladies remind me of Gran but it’s *true*.”

They walk around supposedly mindlessly, but Dan is leading him somewhere for sure. He looks around and points at stores and tells stories of times when he’d been here before.

Phil takes out his phone to take a picture of his cone. Dan looks at him with an unreadable expression - somewhere between amusement and exasperation.

“This is such basic behaviour,” he says.

Phil sticks his tongue out at him, and continues captioning the picture he’d taken. “Life is too short, Dan. Plus, I like taking pictures. It’s a reminder that something happened, that it’s real.”

He realises what he’d said and his eyes widen. He looks at Dan and stutters, “I - I mean, look, this ice cream looks like it’s from a dream, y’know, so -”

Dan laughs, shaking his head. “I got you.” He says, chucking still. “I like photographs too. I take ‘em all the time.”

“What do you usually take pictures of?”

“Food,” Dan admits, making Phil roll his eyes, but he feels that fondness in his heart, like he can’t believe Dan is real. “And receipts. I used to take pictures of our family dog all the time, tracking his growth until he died. Anything that could get lost. So yeah. Receipts, pets, food. People. You could lose people too.”

Phil swallows, not *quite* sure how to react. So he just licks his ice cream some more.

They walk in silence until they reach where Dan supposedly wanted to go - the beach. “Better photo op,” Dan says, smirking at Phil and he takes a selfie of him licking his ice cream, his back against the sea. Phil, yet again, ignores the fluttery feeling in his chest.

^

Dan regrets telling Phil about taking pictures of things he fears losing. It’s one of those things that doesn’t sound vulnerable but it is. But Dan can’t help it - being vulnerable around Phil, leaving his heart on his sleeve when it’s usually caged deep inside. He knows he can trust Phil though.

They stay on the beach for a long time, long after they’re done with their ice-cream and play question games to get to know each other and talk about the movie and how much they’ve gone through and before they know it, they’ll be done and it’ll go to post.

“Wow,” Dan breathes.

“What’s wrong?” Phil asks.

“I didn’t realise how much we’ve filmed. It feels like time just *flew*.”

Phil doesn’t respond, just hums. Dan feels an emotion he wasn’t feeling until now: sadness. He finds his heart sinking at the idea of not going to set anymore, of going back to his London flat, waiting for the next thing, for a hopeful premiere and to see Phil again. That’s what it is. He just wants to see Phil again. Fuck.

*Click.*

“What the-?” He blinks at Phil now, who has his phone pointed at Dan, giggling at the screen.  
“What are you even *doing*?”

Phil shows him the picture. It’s not bad, if Dan’s being honest. Except it’s of his side profile, his ‘bad side’ but it doesn’t even look that bad so he’s confused. “Y’know, the whole loss thing. Didn’t want to lose, uh, this moment.” He flushes pink, which is always evident because of how pale Phil is. His blushes are never subtle, but Dan doesn’t mind. He feels heat rise up to his own cheeks, and has to bite down a smile forming on his lips.

Dan lets him post the picture on his story too, knowing it’ll be screenshotted thousands of times and tweeted at him.

He doesn’t mind, no.

-

**niomi:** so you’re having fun i see

**dan:** what do you mean

**niomi:** dan pls your instagram story is just you and phil being cute  
you’ve never done this much for anyone else

**dan:** uh

**niomi:** do you LIKE phil

oh my god

dan

DAN COME BACK HERE

**dan:** sorry phil was ranting to me about people who get everything in their popcorn in the cinema and he demanded my full attention

oh

NO I DONT

**niomi:** .....i believe you

^

**martyn:** you're in such deep shit

**phil:** what did i do

**martyn:** ????

you're kidding right

did you start dating dan howell and just FORGET to tell us

mum is so mad

**phil:** ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh

**martyn:** its finally my time to be favourite child

**phil:** you always were

**martyn:** was not

**phil:** were too

what should i do

**martyn:** was not

i mean

consider...introducing him to the parents? i know you havent been in very many relationships

**phil:** HEY

**martyn:** christmas hols are next week right

come home, bring him along

**phil:** hmmm

Chapter End Notes

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## six

Rossendale is like a snow town. Dan immediately loves it.

Phil drives them there, and Dan envisions the next day's headlines about a tragic car crash that killed both him and Phil because the latter consistently forgot to use his blinkers and went over the speed limit where he wasn't supposed to at all.

"Do you always drive like you're in a car chase in a movie?" Dan asks when they finally stop in front of a house.

"That's mean. I'm not driving you back."

"*Good.*"

"Hey!" He shoves Dan lightly as they lug their bags out of the trunk and walk to Phil's parents' house. It's big, two-storeyed and very old-looking. The door has a huge knocker on it under which is a wreath, and Dan inhales the sweet smell of pine. Phil knocks once, twice and they step back a little. There's some scuffling sounds from inside. Now that Dan focuses, he can hear faint music playing too. Probably Christmas songs. A small smile creeps up on his face.

The door opens and Phil's mum is grinning at them. She's a whole head shorter than Phil and her laugh lines are really prominent but the resemblance is uncanny. They have the same bird-beak-like nose and twinkle in their eyes.

"Child!" She exclaims, coming out of the house to embrace her son. "Glad you remembered where we live, it's been so long."

Phil groans. "Mum, we literally saw each other a month ago."

"Exactly! It's been too long."

"You're silly." Phil rolls his eyes at Dan, who shakes his head in mock disappointment.

Mrs. Lester now looks at Dan and her smile falters. He gulps, but manages to say, "Hi, you have a lovely home," to her, rushed and punctuates it with a laugh, on the verge of nervous but hopefully in a good way.

"You haven't seen it yet, silly," Mrs. Lester says, finding her smile again and it makes the heat rush to Dan's cheeks. It's occurring to him that he doesn't know *how to do this*. His other relationships, real or otherwise, never got to this stage. He's never met the parents. Nothing has gotten to this stage. He finds himself straightening his posture.

They follow her inside, leaving their shoes on the rack and Dan feels Phil immediately grab his hand. He looks at their intertwined fingers and then at Phil, questioningly.

“You look scared,” Phil explains quietly, so that his mother doesn't hear. “You shouldn't be. I'm here.” He smiles at Dan warmly and he feels it right down to his toes, making them curl.

Phil's parents are – well, they're *nice* and it's not like Dan didn't expect that, considering what Phil is like. But he'd never met people who looked and acted so much like a family. And they *weren't* pretending. The sun hasn't even set and Kath has fed them mince pies, and given them milk with cookies (this is when Dan finds out Phil is lactose intolerant and also very... *opinionated* about non-dairy alternatives. Apparently nothing beats almond milk and soy milk is the drink of the devil. Dan is endeared, to say the least).

He sits in between Phil and his mum on the squishiest sofa ever as she brings out the photo albums.

“Oh, this will be good,” he says, grinning mischievously at Phil, who groans.

“Just remember that all your childhood pictures are online and I can easily use them as blackmail.”

“Did it not occur to you that either most of those pictures were put online with my permission or have been on the internet for so long, I'm immune to the embarrassment that comes with it?”

He smirks as Phil rolls his eyes and opens his mouth in a defeated ‘o’.

It's a fun time, looking at Phil's childhood - it seems like they documented *a lot* of it. He learns that there's also home videos of him speaking his first word, and taking his first steps, eating his first piece of solid food and Dan's heart breaks a little as the camera follows a tiny, chubby Phil waddling into someone's arms with his own fists in the air, squeaking, “eddymaaaaan!!” at them.

“I don't know either,” Phil whispers when Dan looks at him confused.

Hot chocolate and the sound of the whole family's chatter and laughter warms him up right down to his socked toes.

^

It's not like Dan and Phil hadn't shared a bed a couple of times. But it's different because this is Phil's childhood bed. And it's almost the right size for two six-feet tall men in their twenties.

“I can take the guest room,” Dan says, eyeing the bed.

Phil shakes his head. “No, I actually suggested that to Mum. Not because I don't want you to sleep here,” he adds hastily, “you know. Boundaries. But she got all squinty-eyed, and I knew she was going to give me unwarranted advice just in *case* we were fighting, which we're not so I...” He doesn't know how to finish that sentence. He let his mum think they were a-okay? A happy couple with zero problems? Maybe they should've pretended to be fighting so they could sleep separately. “I just went with it.”



But the thing is, and Phil would never admit this aloud, but he *likes* sleeping with Dan next to him. He likes the feeling of him being close by, he likes how peaceful he looks when he's not awake and worrying about a million different things and when he's memorising lines so much because he wants to give Peej the vision he deserves to see onscreen (his words, not Phil's) (although Phil is pretty much the same).

Just then, someone claps Phil on the back.

"Ah!" Martyn says loudly and Phil internally groans. He didn't realise his brother was coming home on the same day as them. "I see you're showing Dan Howell where the magic happens. Or, happened." He turns to Dan now, holding out a hand to shake. Dan takes it and looks at Phil behind Martyn's back, eyebrow cocked. "I'm Martyn, his older brother, spent most of Philip's school years lying for him because he was never good at sneaking people out of the house."

"Most of his school years?"

"That's not true!" Phil protests.

"Which part?"

Phil grimaces, but doesn't answer, and Dan grins.

His room is...well, it's been modified into a guest room, which is slightly disappointing. But Phil thinks he does a well good job of explaining what it *used* to look like it.

"There were movie posters plastered everywhere, like not just the walls, but on the *ceiling*. Tom Cruise watched me sleep at night. And I thought it would be quirky to bring down some old toys from my childhood and keep them in the background of my videos, you know, to add a bit of personality, let the internet know what kind of person I was. And you can still see on this patch of carpet where I'd left my straighteners on accidentally and it's burnt, yeah, Mum's put a vase there to conceal it but I'll always know..." He looks at Dan as he walks around and touches things and picks up picture frames with more young Phil and Martyn pictures. He smiles at them. Phil feels a little self-conscious. This room had never seen anyone explore it with the same eye that Dan was. Usually it was straight to the bed or to a wall (to the window?) and sometimes after they'd fooled around the person would look around and laugh at Phil's silly possessions, or point out props from old videos but they wouldn't *stay*.

No one has ever stayed.

"I'm going to take a shower before bed," Dan says, jerking his thumb towards the door and leaves, towel and his toiletries bag in hand. Phil mouths an 'oh' and falls back on his bed, bounding once, and groans, hands covering his face.

It's going to be such a long night.

^

Dan falls in love like this:

He's at the supermarket with Phil and his brother, following from behind a trolley, a quiet observer. He chuckles at their bickering over everything they buy – the size of the jam jar, how many apples are *too* many apples, “you can get shaving cream in London!” “not before I have a full-on Wolverine mane!” (Dan secretly wants to see that and contemplates hiding the shaving cream now in the trolley)

It's when they're in the car, him in the passenger seat, and his hand goes to hold Phil's over the gear lever automatically, and Phil doesn't react, but there's a small smile on his face as he tries not to run someone over as he backs out of the parking and get on the road. Dan feels heat rise up to his cheeks, warming him up more than the car's heater could. Martyn talks for the whole ride home, asks Dan about behind the scene stories on his previous sets and it's so *easy* to slip into this, to think that this is the first of many trips they'll be making, that he's starting to see the Lesters as family.

There are more moments where he catches himself looking at Phil for a second too long, his gaze lingering as he watches him in his natural state, around his parents. He smiles at Phil's accent changing significantly around them, voice deeper, words slurring slightly.

-

Dan goes back to Reading on Christmas Eve. Phil drives him to the station, avoids getting them killed but only after almost running a red.

“Mum told me to give you this.” Phil says, pulling out a tupperware, which definitely has cakes that Dan would kill for. “For the ride, or your brother, or whatever.”

They're stood on the platform and the train leaves in thirty minutes. They hadn't spoken much on the drive there and still aren't, which isn't unusual for them. Dan's started to love the comfortable silence between them along with the noise they create talking over each other and when Phil excitedly tells him stories from his childhood about filming in abandoned hospitals and first kisses behind trees.

“Thank her for me,” Dan replies. “Oh, I actually have your present.” It was something he'd found at a store when Phil had left him alone in a store and it *screamed* Phil's entire personality to him. He pulls it out of his pocket and hands it to a shocked Phil.

“Wh—I didn't get you anything though, I didn't even *know* —”

“It's fine,” Dan interrupts, but his cheeks are aflame. How embarrassing.

Phil holds up the plastic thing – it's a walrus in the shape of a milk carton, the size of Phil's palm.

“You put it in your fridge,” Dan explains. “I didn't know they sell these here. I have a golden pig I got in Japan.”

“Aw,” Phil says, grinning cheekily making Dan even more flustered. “So we're kind of matching, huh?”

“Uh.” There's an announcement about his train's departure from the station and Dan thanks every holy deity in existence for the timing. “Oh, I have to...”

Phil's expression changes and it's the same one that's so hard to read. He coughs, nods, and steps back a bit. “Yeah, yeah, you have to...Go on then. I'll make sure to tweet something emo as fuck about missing you.”

Dan laughs but that makes his heartstrings pull a little. It's like with that one sentence Phil burst the bubble they'd been in for those few days.

He watches from the large window when he's inside, waves at Phil, but Phil doesn't look at him. He's looking at the fridge walrus like it's treasure that he's found on a deserted island.

Dan looks away and stares at the empty seat opposite him, not at all looking forward to spending Christmas without Phil.

## End Notes

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