

Supernova

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Supernova

by [SiriuslyASorceress](#)

Summary

From the outside, it may look like James Potter has everything one needs to be happy. An abundance of talent, a prestigious job, a beautiful wife, an adorable child. So why can't he let go of the past? Why does he still see silver eyes and a crooked smile when he dreams at night?

It's been six years. Six years since Sirius Black left England. He practically ran away from the country and hasn't stopped running since. When he has to return to parts of his old life, he tries his best not to dwell on the past.

What luck then, that the past is one of the first people he runs into.

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"What, so the French sent a cursed Curse-breaker?"

There is humour in James' voice, signalling that this isn't meant to insult, merely falling into the way they always used to talk to each other. It's almost too easy reciprocate, to answer with banter that still feels too familiar and pulls at Sirius to be released. He bites his tongue.

"I can assure you, cursed or not, I am still excellent at my job, Auror Potter," he says pointedly.

Notes

Well, here we go again, another multi-chapter fic! - Happy to see you here!

I hope you enjoy reading as much as I enjoyed writing it.

Before jumping in, I'd love to give the biggest of all thanks to my amazing beta reader:
LovelyMasks

The story would not have been what it is now without your support, encouragements and advice and it was such a pleasure working with you. - Go check out her amazing fics people, you will love them!

There will be 13 Chapters in total. It's fully written so updates will be regularly.

Chapter 1: Sirius

Chapter Notes

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

Sirius

After: 1984

Somehow, he had imagined his return to England to be a grand affair, cheered on by people keen to see him, and happy to have him back. They would go to a trendy wizarding pub and share old and new stories alike, fuelled by pints of butterbeer and a few stronger drinks worthy for a celebration.

Instead, when he turns the key and the roaring of his motorcycle abruptly ends, he is met with a deafening silence. It is his own fault; he is well aware of that. Not staying in contact with most of his friends from Hogwarts wouldn't exactly make for a warm welcome. He doubts anyone would have even bothered to turn up if he had told them - not after leaving without a trace and a goodbye. His mood doesn't improve when the quick *tempus* shows it is well into night-time, but that's what he gets, deciding to travel all the way by bike instead of portkey.

With a heavy sigh, he swings one leg over the machine and firmly plants both feet on British soil for the first time in six years. Not quite soil though, most of Wizarding London is paved with cobbled stone, and Horizont Alley in front of the Happy Hippogriff is no exception. Looking up the tall building, he notices that it still looks just as he remembers it, rather run down and shabby, but the laughter coming from inside inviting enough to lure people in regardless. He had been inside before, almost in another lifetime, and yet the streets are still haunted with the silhouette of a boy with unruly jet-black hair.

He shakes his head to clear it and moves inside, his legs feeling stiff and his steps wobbly as he makes his way through the crowd to the reception.

“Hi, I believe you have received a booking from the French Curse-breaker guild, for Sirius Black,” he says nonchalantly and keeps his face neutral even when recognition flickers through the receptionist's eyes. She looks only a bit younger than Sirius himself, meaning they likely went to Hogwarts together, not that Sirius remembers her - his attention had been entirely elsewhere at the time.

“Ah, Mister Black. Terribly sorry, we weren't expecting you so late. You see, with Curse-breakers we are aware that itineraries change so quickly. We thought you no longer would be staying with us. I'm afraid check-in has ended two hours ago and we have since given away your room.”

“Right, then just give me another room?” he tries, though the apologetic look on the receptionist's face tells him that they don't have any available before she even says the words. She suggests he could try the Leaky Cauldron or other pubs down the street, but it is late and Sirius is not in the mood for the hassle.

Lucky for him, there is one person he reluctantly stayed in contact with, the question is just if he will be at home already or still in the office he never seems to leave. Not particularly keen on going to the Ministry, he decides to try his home address first, taking a moment to set up the navigation charm on his bike before setting off with a loud roar from the machine. It is, thankfully, only a short drive before Sirius comes to a halt in front of a row of nice-looking flats near Whitehall, there are even balconies with plants on them and he snorts at the sight.

He makes his way over to the door, grateful for the meticulous way with which his brother always adds even the flat number to his sender's address, even though the owl would probably find the place blind by now. Through the tiredness, there is also a rising of excitement mixing into his feelings. He hasn't seen him in years, and while they had been estranged during their time in Hogwarts, Regulus had been incredibly persistent when Sirius left England, and the only person who knew enough about the intricate connections the Blacks had in France to track him down there. While reluctant at first, Sirius had soon leaned into the exchange of letters and its small lifeline to England, getting to know his brother anew in the process.

He gives the door a hearty knock, a small grin spreading over his face at the prospect of seeing Regulus, and most likely even managing to piss him off by showing up unannounced at his doorstep at almost midnight. Annoying his little brother is one of the things that will bring him joy until the day he dies.

A faint sounding tap-tap-tap and a muffled swear word is all the warning he gets before the door is practically ripped open.

"What the—," he stops, dumbfounded, "Sirius?!"

"Regulus."

They stare at each other grimly for a moment longer before the façades break, leaving behind two young men grinning widely at each other before pulling each other into a hug.

"What on earth are you doing here? I didn't expect you before next week, and certainly not at that hour," Regulus asks while pulling him into the flat.

Sirius takes a first glance around, surprised by how well lived-in the space seems. The hallway is full of coats and shoes and when Regulus takes him to the living room, it looks homely and warm. Not untidy, but also not at all the notoriously clean way his room at Grimmauld Place used to look. There is a large wooden desk in front of a window, the view of the stacked papers on it obstructed by the greenery of plants that are artfully placed around it.

The status of the flat seems to be reflected on his brother as well; even without the noticeable growth spurt he went through, Regulus looks different than Sirius remembers. The Slytherin had always taken great pride in their heritage, looking expensive and pristine and noble in a way that would make every single ancestor of the House of Black proud and resulted in Sirius trying to hex his robes any chance he got. Somehow, he had expected that his brother would still look like that, wearing expensive robes no matter if at work at the Ministry or at home. Instead, Sirius dares to think that Regulus looks comfortable, his hair slightly unkempt

and wearing a red jumper that looks like it had its best years well behind it but is too cosy to throw out.

“Well, the Hippogriff gave away my booking so I was hoping you have a couch I could crash on for the night? The Ministry wanted me to start early for a few cases so there’s been a few last-minute changes.”

Regulus rolls his eyes at him again but with his brother, he sees it as a gesture of fondness, not annoyance. “Couch,” he mutters displeased, “I’m not a troll, Sirius. If you behave, you can even have the second bedroom. For as long as you need.”

“You sure?”

“Of course,” Regulus nods at him, though a flicker of uncertainty crosses his features, the palm of his hand rubbing against the back of his neck in a rare display of insecurity. “Though if you are staying, it would probably be prudent to make you aware of a certain development I have not yet told you about. You see, I met someone who—”

“Love, have you seen my jumper?” calls a voice from the neighbouring room, a voice that sounds incredibly familiar, but his brain refuses to dig up the memories that belong to the person behind the voice, their existence too entwined with another person he has been trying his hardest to forget. There is an awkward look on his brother’s face as he tentatively looks at Sirius. It doesn’t stop the footsteps from growing louder though.

“Did you steal it again? I literally just took it off, I swear you are half Niffler, the way you—”, the voice stops abruptly. In the doorway stands Remus Lupin, clearly coming from a shower and missing a jumper, instead wearing a towel around his shoulders.

Sirius’ brain needs a moment to compute, eyes darting between Regulus whose face matches the colour of the stolen knitwear, and an incredibly surprised looking Remus.

“How?!” Is the only thing that comes to his mind, and to be fair, it is a rather good question considering his historically pure-blood fanatic little brother, renamed heir of the House of Black, is involved with Sirius’ werewolf half-blood Gryffindor friend. Apparently, Regulus really was not exaggerating when he wrote that he outgrew his beliefs on blood purity and felt stupid about not doing so earlier.

“Well, hello to you too, Padfoot,” Remus snorts, as he takes a t-shirt from a pile of neatly folded laundry and puts it on.

The old nickname hits him with a wave of unwelcomed nostalgia, but the excitement of seeing his friend outweighs anything else. Especially because Remus doesn’t seem phased in the slightest that he hadn’t heard from Sirius in years, widely grinning at him instead.

“Damn, it’s good to see you, Moony!” he laughs, and crosses the distance between them to pull Remus into a one-armed hug.

“Oh great, we are doing the nickname thing again,” Regulus remarks drily while making his way to the kitchen to put the kettle on, leaving the two reunited friends some privacy.

Sirius is grateful for it, because he still feels like he owes Remus an apology, and that's something he prefers not to do in front of an audience. If it was up to his family, Blacks wouldn't apologise at all, and while he tried to ignore every lesson they ever taught him in that blasted house, some things had been harder to shake than others.

Steeling himself for the inevitable, he looks at his friend. It looks like the past years have been kinder to Remus, Sirius notices relieved. There are perhaps a few more grey streaks in his sand-brown hair, but there are no additional heavy scars he can see, and the shadows under his eyes look less pronounced. The way Sirius remembers it, no matter how happy Remus had been, he always had a slightly haunted look in his eyes. The transformations taking a toll on him, but more so the anxiety of an uncertain future looming in the back of his mind. Somehow, his eyes don't have this look anymore, instead looking content and optimistic, and Sirius wonders if it's perhaps an effect of this new potion, designed to hold the wolf at bay even during full moons.

He takes a long breath, before speaking. "I'm sorry, Moony. I know I should have written you. I meant to, but... every time I took that feather in my hand, I just... it reminded me of- I couldn't-"

It's a shabby start to an even shabbier apology that he didn't think he would have to make today, and it doesn't convey what he wants to say. He frowns in frustration, looking to the side in an attempt to hide his annoyance with himself and gather his thoughts. Trying to push away the intruding face with the hazel eyes that plops into his mind, just like he had done countless times before. Remus must take some pity on him because he feels his hand clasping his shoulders and is forced to look back.

"Pads, I know, alright? I saw you on that last night, remember? You said you had to leave and... well the way you looked, I knew I wouldn't see you for a while. I don't blame you for that, ok?" Remus squeezes his shoulder before letting go, still with that familiar gentle smile on his face.

It feels like a weight is being lifted off his shoulders, something he had become so used to carrying that only its absence revealed the true heaviness of it. It makes his smile come easier and he freely gives it to Remus, nodding in thanks. He doesn't want to remain in the memory that Remus brought up, so he focuses his attention on the burning questions on his mind.

"So... you and my brother dearest. How on earth did that happen?"

"That story is too long for the time of day," Regulus drawls, re-appearing in the living room with a tray of tea and biscuits floating in front of him. They float to the table and Regulus takes Remus' hand to pull him onto the sofa, an arm lazily hung over the back rest and pulling his legs up to cross them.

As Sirius watches the two of them from his own, single armchair, there is a slight tuck in his heart, a longing for even a smidge of how besotted they appear to be with each other. He has had that once, and with all the passing time, he would have thought the loss would become easier, but that never happened. Instead it had doomed every other relationship he had from the start. He takes a long sip of his tea, willing himself not to dwell on the thoughts that are so much more prevalent here in England, fuelled by seeing the people of his past.

He wills his attention back to the couple in front of him, both expectedly looking at him.

“Sorry, what?” he asks when it becomes clear he had missed a question.

“I was just wondering what brought you back to England?” Remus repeats, amused look on his face.

“Well, to keep it short, I work for the French Curse-Breaker Association. It’s a bit different to the British one, in the sense that it works more on a freelance basis with jobs usually being proposed by the Association and then they are up for grabs by anyone interested. For this one though, they specifically approached me because it’s a job for the British Ministry. Officially, it’s because they want to make sure there is no issue with communication and all that, but unofficially I think they just want to rub in that I’m working for the French instead of the English.”

A snort escapes Regulus, accompanied by an eyeroll that very much suggest he is right. The animosity between the English and the French wizarding communities is still as strong as ever.

“It’s hilarious really. They properly jumped at the chance when I said I needed to register being an Animagus. Barely any questions asked. I just told them all Blacks are taught but I couldn’t register before I moved to France, and suddenly they were all too happy to have it on the official registry that I registered there instead of England.”

“Right, so all Blacks are Animagi now?” Regulus lets out a laugh, “what am I then?”

Sirius puts on his best impression of a tragically sad face while he is desperately trying not to burst into laughter.

“Oh yes, the tragic case of Regulus Black the dung-beetle Animagus is now a very popular story in the French wizarding society,” he says with a straight face which works fine until Remus starts hysterically cackling and Regulus shouts a loud “Oh for fucks sake, Sirius!”

“Oh, don’t worry, I blamed it on all the inbreeding,” Sirius says casually, causing Regulus to flip two fingers at him.

It’s far past midnight when they finally say goodnight, and Sirius retreats into the spare bedroom. On the way he passes the large desk again, stacked with papers and a typewriter on it. He had assumed Regulus just brought work home with him, but on closer inspection, he would have noticed the parchment, feather, and coffee mug on the right side of the table, while Regulus is left-handed just like Sirius himself. A small smile steals over his lips, as he learned that Remus managed to follow his dreams and make a name for himself as a writer. Somehow that makes him feel closer to his old life than he had in a long while.

He didn’t expect this thought to catch up with him so quickly the next day.

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It is the scent that hits him first, his canine senses picking it up in a heartbeat. That distinctive fragrance of cedarwood, mint and a whisper of gooseberry. The scent of every Amortentia he ever smelled. A scent that feels like home, a return after a long journey. For a brief moment, he feels his heart soften, the warm feeling of fond familiarity washing over him, and the tender excitement of meeting a loved one after too long apart.

Then, realisation rushes in, as he looks into the stunned face of the person that had been all of those things to him, and yet had become a stranger in the six years that passed since.

The hint of fragrance is washed from his mind, together with every thought he has had before entering this office, leaving nothing but blanks behind where there should've been words.

He's had so many words, had imagined this situation in his head over and over. Casual, nonchalant, accusing, angry, tearful. Likely, Sirius had thought of every single way this conversation could go, the tone and outcome more often than not tied to the level of alcohol in his blood, when the intrusive thoughts of the person in front of him would no longer stay banned in the back of his mind.

And yet, when he looks into the familiar and yet so foreign face of James Potter, his mind is silent.

The remnants of soft boyishness have entirely left James' face, replaced with a stronger, squared jawline which looks tightly clenched at the moment even under the short beard hiding it. He looks taller and yet somehow his posture had lost the prancing way with which he used to carry himself. The black uniform he is wearing, embellished with two red, diagonal stripes, suggests the rank of Senior Auror of the serious crime division - remarkable, considering the comparably short time period to achieve such a promotion. But James Potter had always been remarkable, and as he stands there, in his dragon leather boots and long, dark coat, emblazoned with the golden DMLE crest on his chest, it is the only word Sirius deems fitting.

For all the changes, there is one thing that remains exactly as Sirius remembers it. The jet-black hair looks just as untameable as it has always been. It falls uncontrollably around his face, some bits poking up in the back, and Sirius remembers how soft it used to feel against his fingertips.

So far, he hasn't dared look at his eyes, well aware of the power they have always held over him. They had been his undoing for most of their school years and haunted his dreams ever since. Those hazel orbs framed by a slight greenish tint at the corners, always glinting golden with mischief and life itself.

When he feels like he can no longer avoid it, he finally drags his eyes towards the inevitable and is immediately pinned into place by the stare he receives. His glasses are different, Sirius notices in an afterthought, instead of the familiar squared ones he wore at school, those ones are rounder and suit him terribly well. Behind the glasses, though, Sirius finds the biggest change, and the most unexpected.

No longer do his eyes look like they are filled with mischief, instead, they look distant and sad.

Sirius squares his shoulders and lifts his chin. No, that just won't do. He will not be at the receiving end of this particular look. There is nothing that would justify James Potter looking at him with betrayal in his eyes, no matter how well he tries to hide it behind a façade of neutrality.

Sirius clenches his fist, still hidden in the pocket of his leather jacket, as a wave of anger rushes through him. How dare *he* look betrayed, when – there is a splintering noise as the pot on James' windowsill breaks apart and covers the floor beneath it in porcelain shards, soil, and remnants of a flower. Lilies, Sirius notices and tries not to flinch at the irony, but letting a flowerpot explode in James' office had not been one of the scenarios he imagined upon their reunion.

“What the–,” James starts, releasing his gaze from Sirius as he flips his head to the source of the noise and eyes the destroyed parts of his greenery with confusion.

Clearing his throat, Sirius puts on his best nonchalant face, not willing to let a single bit of the embarrassment show that has taken hold of him inside.

“Apologies, that would be my fault. Curse damage. My magic is sometimes acting out at random. Should be fixed soon,” he says stiffly but the lie comes easily enough, helped by the fact that there is no way in hell he would admit that his magic is actually acting out in situations of emotional distress and the healers wouldn't commit to promises of it being temporary, instead sending him back to England in an attempt to rehabilitate his magical core in the country where it stabilised in the first place.

“You have been hit by curse? How?!” James asks, voice sounding a bit shrill.

“Not quite hit. More like –,” he pauses, realising he is falling right back into the old habit of carelessly sharing every thought with the man in front of him, “ah, the technicalities don't really matter. Comes with the job description.”

“What job description?”

So he doesn't know, Sirius realises. They are both mutually unprepared to meet again on this random Wednesday morning in the middle of March. Neither had imagined it like this, though who knows if James had imagined it at all. Perhaps it is just Sirius who could still not let go after all this time apart. More likely, he had become nothing but an afterthought, perhaps a side character in stories James would tell his child about his time at school. That's what it came down to anyway, and it would be a lie to say that it doesn't still sting, the hurt barely blunted by the passing of time. Perhaps time doesn't heal all wounds after all, and facing the person who dealt those wounds does nothing but sharpen the blade.

His fingernails dig into the palm of his hand, it is all he can do as an outlet, a way to retain composure on the outside while his mind is gathering a storm. He is used to the feeling, has spent his whole childhood like it, but he didn't think the seething anger would ever be directed at James.

The years of taught politeness and practiced indifference blend into his behaviour in a way that would make even his damned parents proud, managing to give a reply that is devoid of

any true emotion, instead relying on the haughty, neutral way the Blacks have always used to communicate, and Sirius has always hated.

It is far removed from the way he spoke to James at Hogwarts. It is, however, fitting for an unwelcomed conversation with strangers. "I'm the Curse-breaker the French sent over."

"What, so the French sent a cursed Curse-breaker?"

There is humour in James' voice, signalling that this isn't meant to insult, merely falling into the way they always used to talk to each other. It's almost too easy reciprocate, to answer with banter that still feels too familiar and pulls at Sirius to be released. He bites his tongue.

"I can assure you, cursed or not, I am still excellent at my job, Auror Potter," he says pointedly while waving casually at the flowerpot, repairing it wandlessly as a demonstration of his words more than a desire to see the plant restored again.

James' face falls, very much the effect Sirius sought, but it doesn't come with any satisfaction.

"Oh fuck off, I didn't mean it like that, you know that!" he protests, his Surrey accent getting stronger as his frustration grows. It is something Sirius had made fun of plenty of times at school, though he got as good as he gave, considering how he was mocked by his dorm mates whenever he apparently spoke too posh or tried not to sound posh at all. The reminder of countless nights sprawled on their beds while clutching their stomachs from laughter pushes through his mind and he stifles the thought, locking it back with all the other things he forbids himself to think about.

He doesn't want to acknowledge what James said, and in a split second he decides that he doesn't have to indulge James in anything, doesn't owe him that. So instead of answering, he lets his gaze wander over the office with its boring white walls and magic windows that show a sunny scenery instead of the grey London sky and misty rain he just escaped from. He tries not to dwell on the pictures standing on James' desk, turned so it is impossible to see the motives from where Sirius is standing. It doesn't take much imagination though; the frames will be filled with his beautiful wife and young child. The picture-perfect family. His gaze turns to the empty desk in the room.

"I assume this is my desk then? That's what the lady at the reception said, but I could go somewhere--"

"No," James interrupts quickly, "I mean, yes, this is your desk. 'Cause you will be working on some of my cases, so I guess they thought it made sense, and- "

Sirius just nods and moves to the desk, not wanting to listen to the rambling that he once thought was incredibly endearing.

He fishes his bag out of his pocket and enlarges it with a flick of his wand. Being well aware of the pair of eyes that are still watching him, he pays James no attention, instead taking his time to unpack a few books and utensils, content to ignore the Erumpent in the room for as long as possible.

“So... How come you are with the French Curse-Breakers?” James asks after a while, clearly no longer able to hold back on the questions burning in his mind.

“I live there,” Sirius replies coolly, not looking up from his desk, instead pretending to casually flick through one of his books. He doesn’t know which one he picked up, nor can he make out the words written on the page.

“France,” he murmurs like it is a revelation, “so this is where you have been.”

“Yup.”

Something changes in the air, Sirius can feel the frustration roll off James, leaving the crackling feeling of James’ magic on his skin. It is quickly replaced by the man himself, suddenly standing very close, the opened book in Sirius’ hands the only thing creating a distance between them.

Up this close, the changes in him are even more pronounced. His body had been as familiar to Sirius as his own, now though, the proportions he remembers no longer apply. Where his shoulders used to end, they now go on, broader than before and ending in muscled arms that hadn’t been as pronounced at school. James had always been strikingly fit with all his quidditch, a lean muscular build from all that tossing around of quaffles, but adult James is a completely different level. The Curse-Breaker training he built for himself is rigorous enough, after all, he need to be quick on his feet and strong enough to withstand whatever might be thrown at him, but Auror training must be tough as hell if James’ body is anything to go by.

It makes Sirius even more angry, that James has the audacity to look like that.

“Can I help you?” he says, praying his voice sounds unaffected while he is anything but, his heart hammering in his chest.

“Can you- ,” James takes a deep breath, looking incredibly frustrated, “Can you fucking help me? Oh, I don’t know Sirius, maybe you could tell me why the hell you left without a word? Nothing! For six years! Yeah, I think I really need help to understand how you thought that was an alright thing to do?!”

Sirius snorts humourlessly. There is no other way to even react to this, apart from anger at James’ misplaced, self-righteous outburst. “Oh, I said words. Not my problem you were too drunk to remember them,” he snarls, not keen on the reminder of the night that ended with getting his heart ripped out of his chest by the man in front of him.

James looks furious, and Sirius has the odd urge to tickle the sleeping dragon, see how far he can take it, hurt or be hurt, anything better than this stage in-between, but he is beaten to the chase.

“You just disappeared for years! Not sending word even once! I was worried sick, my parents were too. You were a Potter in everything but name!”

Because you gave that name to someone else, Sirius shouts in his head. The thought alone ignites so much hurt he is worried what else his unstable magic might do if he doesn't put distance between them right away. But he won't go like this, not with James' accusation hanging over him, making him the victim of this. If anything, his upbringing provided him with all the necessary tools to be vicious and ruthless, practically breeding into him how to destroy people with nothing but a few well-placed words. It was a well-known fact in Hogwarts, his sharp tongue feared as much as the end of his wand, but back then he wouldn't have dreamt of using it against James. Now though, he won't hold back, not anymore.

"Oh, I did stay in contact with your parents. How do you think they found their summer home in France where they are currently staying? I just asked them not to tell you because I had no interest in staying in contact with you," he spits out.

He pushes past James, out of the room before his magic gets a chance to wreak havoc in the office. Though, he doesn't miss the moment when all anger leaves James' face, being replaced by a look of utter devastation that would have him regret his words if he wasn't so occupied with keeping it together to break down somewhere in private.

He remembers the way to Regulus' office only because they arrived at the ministry together, and he prays to all deities that his brother is away from it at the moment. When he swings open the door, he is instead met with three startled faces.

"Out," Regulus bellows at his visitors after a look at Sirius. There is a rustling of paper and they are gone in a heartbeat. With a practiced flick of his wand, wards glimmer around the office while a few of his belongings carefully fly into chests which look even more guarded.

He fixes Sirius with a considerate stare while a *protego* flickers around him. "Alright then, out with it," he commands, and Sirius wants to fire back a flippant remark, but the tether of control he has been able to uphold for so long, finally snaps. Magic is pushing through him with enough force that he stumbles forward. Through the blood rushing in his ears, he can still hear the crackling and splintering where his magic breaches his brother's wards, crashing into them with enough force to wreck the decorations behind them and leaving cracks on the walls itself.

The release stops so abrupt that the following silence feels loud, only interrupted by Sirius' heavy panting.

"Salazar, are you alright? That was quite the surge," Regulus sounds worried as he makes his way around the table to get to Sirius.

With this much magic suddenly leaving his system, Sirius feels his knees go soft from exhaustion. The chairs in Regulus' office look very comfortable, but he doesn't trust his legs to carry him there, instead sits down on the ground, leaning against the wall.

Regulus takes a potion from his cabinet and hands it to him without comment, quietly sitting down next to him.

"It's not usually that bad," he murmurs after a while.

“What made it worse this time then?”

Sirius swallows, breathing in audibly as the past hour runs through his head again. “I didn’t tell you I would be working with the Aurors, did I?”

Regulus’ eyes widen, making the connection instantly, then they grow soft with concern. “You met James.”

The name makes Sirius flinch, like the memories of him had done countless times before, but worse, because this is reality, a reality that still burns as much as it did six years ago.

“I thought he worked in Quidditch. I didn’t expect to meet him at the Department of Magical Law Enforcement of all places,” Sirius admits resigned.

“I would ask how you are feeling about it, but that would make me sound like that mind healer Remus makes me see, and by the state of my office, it is also rather obvious.”

They take a moment to both look around the rather chaotic state of the once neat office and Sirius snorts, a laugh escaping him that Regulus can’t hold back either. There isn’t really anything to laugh about - his magic is going haywire, his brother is the worst emotional support anyone would want to talk to, and he has to work with the person that caused his hasty departure from England while pretending to himself and him that he doesn’t still harbour feelings for him buried deep down somewhere – which makes the giggles break out of him to a point of tears. If anyone would enter the office right now, they would be treated to the view of two Blacks hysterically laughing in a destroyed office, and it would be enough to confirm all the rumours about the unhinged streak running through the ancient family. The thought makes him laugh even more.

“Way to go for a first day, huh?” Sirius snickers when they finally calm down a bit, strangely, he does feel better. The tight coil of emotions seeming looser. Perhaps Regulus isn’t the worst emotional support after all.

“I’ve seen worse,” Regulus shrugs.

Sirius nudges him and looks around the office, starting to cast *reparos* to the broken objects. “Quite the fancy office you have here, Reggie. What is it you do again?”

Regulus snorts at the question and the fond eye roll tells Sirius he failed at tricking his brother into giving away his occupation. For some reason, Regulus isn’t allowed to tell, and that makes it even more of a challenge to get it out of him. Perhaps he is an Unspeakable, or working in Intelligence. In any case, likely he made a vow and physically can’t tell, but that doesn’t mean it’s not fun to try.

“So you are seeing a mind healer?” Sirius probes, wanting to move away from the topic of James and stalling his return to the Auror department.

Regulus hums in confirmation. “Yeah, according to Remus I have a ‘self-destructive need to prove myself, stemming from the shit show of our upbringing and the instilled constant feeling of never being good enough to deserve affection’,” Regulus says lightly, making air

quotes with his finger, as if he didn't just perfectly describe what being raised in the House of Black did to their heads. Until now, Sirius didn't even know Regulus felt like this, after all he had always been the perfect son, the perfect Slytherin. But growing up as they did would leave marks on everyone, and being second born into their family came with as many challenges as being born heir. Their lives always seemed miles apart, but it left the same scars, regardless.

“So, is it helping?”

“It is, actually. And also brings me to something I wanted to ask you,” he looks tentatively at Sirius, as if he isn't sure how to approach the topic. “We don't have to talk about it right now, but-”

He gestures for Regulus to continue.

“It's about the house.”

Not a topic he is overly happy to talk about, but it will take his mind off other things well enough.

“Are you still struggling to remove mother dearest portrait?”

A long sigh is answer enough. The whole house is a bloody nightmare and apparently continues to be so even after their parents' demise.

“Why bother with it at all?” Sirius asks.

“Because its magic is too strong. It would never rot. It would just stand there, a signal for everyone that the ancient House of Black still stands, unchanged and with all its bigotry and hatred untouched. It's unacceptable. The house simply **MUST** be reformed. Remus couldn't even get through the front door without being hurt! It has to change.”

Sirius nods thoughtfully, surprised by the intensity with which Regulus speaks. Apparently, a few years without being under the wand of Orion and Walburga Black does wonders to a person, Sirius thinks grimly.

Regulus' idea to turn around the house would send a message that is impossible to ignore. While nothing on earth would ever get him back into that house if he can help it, the ancestral home of the House of Black is quite interesting from a magical point of view. With generations of magic flowing through it, it has developed a strong sentience, adjusting itself fully to its owner's wishes. That is, if you are a welcomed inhabitant. As his own relationship with his parents deteriorated, he could swear he would trip seemingly over thin air, bumping into sharp edges that hadn't been there before and catching his little toe in the door frame more than once.

He wonders how the house behaves now that it belongs to Regulus.

“Hope you plan on also redecorating then? The house elf heads are really not up to the latest standards of interior design.”

They both snicker at that.

“It is an awful lot of work and I plan to start properly in the summer, but I require some help from... say a Curse-Breaker who is familiar with the Black family magic and experienced enough to attempt it?” Regulus says, casually looking at Sirius but the hopeful look in his eyes doesn't fool anyone.

“Ah, here we are again, being used by Slytherins,” he says jokingly.

Regulus mouth twitches, “You should be proud, being used by a Slytherin means you are actually of use.”

Sirius rolls his eyes elaborately, “You better be paying really fucking well.”

When he leaves the office, Sirius is wondering when exactly his brother had become the reasonable one between the two of them, working on his world view, seeing a mind healer, embracing his life. It's like he has come out of his shell in the past years, growing into himself, while Sirius feels like he is still the same person he has been six years ago, still running - away from things and towards things; just running, with no destination in sight.

...

Before: 1976

It had started like so many things between them - with a dare. This time though, the dare wasn't uttered from one to the other, not the typical ‘I dare you to try and get a leaf from the venomous tentacula without it biting you’ or ‘I bet you won't manage to sneak a shrivelfig into Snivellus' potion without anyone noticing’. No, this time, it was a dare uttered by a completely different person, and yet impacting the two of them more than any other dare ever before.

‘I dare you to tell us the name of the most attractive person in the room, and as a reward you even get to kiss them, properly though, not that closed lipped shite we have seen here before!’ Mary MacDonald coos at James, and Sirius snorts into his drink at her clever way of turning a dare into a truth on this weird ‘spin the bottle’ game that Lily introduced them to. It's a muggle game, but they wouldn't be wizards if they didn't get to spice it up a little bit. Breaking into Slughorn's potion supplies and nicking a bit of Veritaserum to mix with the fire whiskey had all of the Gryffindor fifth years intrigued enough to join in. They will all be incredibly hungover on the train ride home tomorrow, but at the moment, the return to Grimmauld Place is far from Sirius' mind, cushioned by the pleasant feeling of drink in his system.

“Well, that's hardly fair, innit! Everyone knows Sirius is the most attractive person in any room!” James blurts out after a sip of the diluted Veritaserum. The room erupts into shouts and laughter, some murmured confirmations, and James throws his hands into the air helplessly. Sirius tries not to let it go to his head, shooting a crooked grin at no one in particular, though he had expected it would be Lily Evans who James would name, the way he was always talking about her.

“Sorry mate, you could always send a howler to my parents to complain about it,” he suggests with a smirk, trying to hide the nervousness that is creeping up on him at the prospect of kissing someone. But then, James and Sirius always do everything together, so it really could be a lot worse than having his first kiss with James. In fact, the thought of kissing James doesn’t sound bad at all, his drink-hazy mind decides, confirming a suspicion about his preferences that is slowly getting too loud to be ignored.

“Maybe I will,” James jokes back, a slight flush on his cheek that could be as easily from the fire whiskey as it could be from the prospect of kissing.

Sirius nudges his side, “Least you can do if you get to snog me, actually.”

James snorts in response before his face turns sober, a concentrating expression on it. “Right, no time like the present. Let’s do this then,” he proclaims, slightly leaning in while the other Gryffindors are cheering in response.

It doesn’t take much. They are already sitting shoulder to shoulder, Sirius just has to move his head a bit, lean into the warmth of James’ body. Their lips meet tentatively at first, Sirius sees how James closes his eyes before he closes his own, determined to do nothing but feel the new sensation that leaves his lips tingling. He chases the feeling and James’ lips with it. They were dared to kiss properly after all, and Gryffindors never back away from a challenge.

He leans into the pleasant feeling more, puts a hand on the back of James’ neck to draw him closer, feeling his soft hair, slightly damp with sweat from sitting with their backs to the fire. There is a light touch of fingertips on his skin where James tucks a strand of his hair behind his ear and Sirius shivers at the gentle touch.

They break apart when the cheering of their housemates becomes too loud to ignore. Sirius slowly opens his eyes, still feeling rather dazed. Who knew kissing would feel so good? James has a similar look on his face and there is an amused twinkle in his eyes that makes Sirius snort in response. They chuckle as they nudge each other with their elbows, as easily as breathing returning to their usual behaviour. Mary gives them an approving nod, a sign for James to flick his wand at the bottle next.

Chapter End Notes

Sirius needs a hug! We will see how James is dealing in the next chapter :)

If you liked the chapter, I would love to read your thoughts in the comments!

Chapter 2: James

Chapter Notes

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

James

Before: 1976

“You wanna talk about it?” James asks a few days after Sirius unexpectedly landed on his doorstep, looking exhausted, hurt and shaken in a way James had never seen before.

It had been late evening when a tentative knock interrupted his reading, alerting the Potters to a guest at this late of an hour, apparently getting straight through to the front door without triggering the wards around the manor. That fragment of a thought was everything James needed, making it abundantly clear who would be on the other side of it, and he dashes to the front door, not heeding his parents’ warnings to be careful.

Sirius practically falls into his arms, heavily panting and cold through to the bones, broom still in hand.

“Pads, Merlin, what happened? Did you fly all the way over here?” Sirius doesn’t answer, but he doesn’t have to, James can read it all from the look on his face, the hurt and anger brewing in his grey eyes, and the flinch on his body when James shifts his grip to hold onto him better.

His parents are there in an instant, ushering him inside and wanting him to sit down, but Sirius doesn’t let go of him so James holds on with dear life in return. He feels so cold, shivering violently in James’ arms, and he knows there are charms for that, but they would hurt if applied on a body as cold as Sirius’ and nothing that hurts Sirius would ever be acceptable.

“It’s alright, you made it. You are safe,” he whispers over and over while his body’s warmth gets exchanged for the ice in Sirius’, trying to calm down the boy in his arms as much as himself.

James isn’t really expecting an answer to his question, knowing how good Sirius is at pushing away things he doesn’t want to deal with. Banishing them away into a corner of his mind that he keeps tightly locked, key thrown away. It makes him worry that at some point, that wall will come crashing down, leaving him with too much to deal with all at once, and what if James isn’t there when it happens? That’s one of the reasons he is trying so hard to talk about it now, get some of it out. But pushing Sirius on the relationship with his family is

an incredibly delicate act and more often than not results in him pulling away even further into himself.

There is a long silence where they do nothing but listen to the owls hoot in the distance. James is sitting with his legs crossed, arms resting on the ground behind him as he follows Sirius' gaze, looking up at the stars above. It gets uncomfortable, craning his neck like this, so he copies Sirius' pose instead, lying in the grass with his legs bent, one ankle resting on the knee of the other.

He steals the cigarette straight from his friend's lips, ignoring the protesting huff he gets in response. Sirius takes a long sip from the goblin wine they nicked from the wine cellar instead.

"I always thought, in their own way, they loved me. That between all the shouting and anger, they would still remember the times when I was younger, when mother taught me how to play the piano and father took me to Diagon Alley to buy my first broom. I didn't think they would just forget so utterly that I am still their son, you know?"

He pauses, for a brief moment, a frown creasing his eyebrows.

"Or maybe they did remember it, but rather started to see me as a failed first attempt, no longer needed when I wouldn't perform according to their wishes. What's a few curses then to bring their points across, when they have a perfect second born to take the spot if the broken first born doesn't live up to their expectations." Sirius is still fixing the sky, his voice sounding sober and detached, not giving away how deep those thoughts cut into him.

James releases a breath he didn't realise he was holding. His heart hurts for his friend, for everything he had to go through at the hand of the people who were supposed to love him unconditionally. Who again and again did nothing but belittle him when they should have celebrated him instead, worshipped the ground he walked on just as James does, bathing in his brilliance. And yet, for years, Sirius had endured it, perhaps hoping things would change again, trying to reconcile his position in his family in the past with his present.

Sirius had been the prodigy, the apple of Walburga's eye as he was formed into the perfect heir to the Noble and most ancient House of Black. Powerful, intelligent, charismatic, ruthless. Possessing all the qualities the Blacks like to portray to the outside world. A born king to a family that sees itself as royalty. Before Hogwarts, his relationship with his parents may have been similar to James' own, he was raised loved, praised for his talents and tutored to nurture them further.

Then, he had been sorted into Gryffindor, and things kept slowly spiralling out of control ever since. Because this is the other side of the Blacks, the one talked about only in hushed whispers. The rage fits and outbursts of anger, the unHINGE-ness paired with their standing higher above the law than others with nothing to touch them. The only way the Blacks would fall is by ripping themselves apart. Something they excel at as much as everything else.

By pure instinct, he takes Sirius' hand, entwining their fingers, lightly squeezing them.

“They don’t deserve you. Never did. You aren’t broken, Si. You are better than all of them, and you got there all by yourself, despite everything they threw at you. Because you shine so much brighter than the rest of them,” James hears the light huff from Sirius’ lips, the corner of his mouth slightly twitching in hidden amusement, and James realises he accidentally just made a comparison to the star Sirius is named after and it does sound a bit corny to think about it like that. Not less true though, which he is keen to make Sirius understand.

“Don’t huff at me, it’s true. You are a bloody supernova. You light the path for others, even if you have to blast your way through. You are never satisfied with going the easy way, not when you believe it isn’t the right path to follow. And that takes so much more courage than anyone in your family has ever shown. If they don’t see you for the brilliant person that you are, then it is entirely their loss, cause you are cut out for more, Sirius Black, and I, for what it’s worth, am glad to be right by your side for it.”

Sirius finally turns his head away from the stars, his eyes having lost the sharp edge of hurt prevalent in the last days. “That’s worth quite a lot, actually,” he says, a slight twitch on the corner of his mouth again, turning into a small smile the longer James just smiles back at him. A warm feeling of accomplishment rushes all the way through him all the way to his toes, just from seeing him smile again.

They fall silent again, falling back into the comfortable peace between them that makes it so easy to let the mind wander. Sometimes in this state, James finds strings of thoughts seemingly out of nowhere, and the one that has made its way into his mind now is sure to bring back a proper smile onto Sirius’ face.

“So, can I send them that howler now?” James asks, and Sirius catches on immediately, barking out a surprised laugh.

“Actually, why not. As long as you don’t forget to mention how pretty I am.”

James snorts, nudging him in the ribs with his elbow, but being more than just a little relieved at having managed to coax Sirius out of his own mind. “Oh shut it, you arrogant arse, or I will send you a howler as well.”

Sirius elbows him right back, grinning widely. “You could make it into a poem. I do like to be wooed a bit before being kissed.”

“Oh do you now? And when exactly did you find that out, between the one kiss that you have had in your life?”

“Well, I’ve always been a quick learner. Didn’t take much more to perfect the best wooing techniques and become an expert in kissing.”

Perhaps it is a mad thought, induced by wine and the euphoria of having Sirius safely at his home and joking with him again, that make him say the next words, seeing the mischievous glint of his eyes reflected in Sirius own.

“Prove it, then. I dare you.”

It doesn't feel like a mad thought when Sirius' lips gently land on his own again, it feels just right.

...

After: 1984

It can barely even be considered morning when James drags himself out of bed, unable to lie still for a moment longer. He had spent the whole night tossing and turning, falling into a light slumber only to jerk awake again when his thoughts blend into dreams and bring back the devastation that is Sirius' face.

He quietly makes his way downstairs, almost mechanically preparing coffee in the muggle machine Lily insisted on, while his mind is still roaring about their short encounter yesterday, reeling it over and over. James is rather surprised he hadn't just died on the spot from seeing him again, his heart racing his mind. An involuntary shiver runs through him at the thought and he puts his head in his hands, rubbing his eyes with the palms of them.

Behind his closed eyes, the moment becomes even clearer again, Sirius opening the door with his haughty looks and crooked smirk, unbeknown who would be on the other side. It felt like James had been frozen in time, staring at the man who had still been a boy when he last saw him. His raven hair looked longer, falling onto his shoulder in roguish waves, the fringe slightly obstructing the piercing silver eyes. Sirius had always known how to carry himself, an imposing posture that had been bred into him from the moment he was able to walk, and yet, somehow he looked even more confident than at Hogwarts, reassured of his brilliance and filled with power.

At the same time, he had radiated the familiar careless arrogance, if not by his posture than by the clothes that he wore. Walking into a traditional magical institution such as the Auror office in muggle clothes and still looking like he owned the place. If anything, the look suggested that he should own the place, with the black combat boots and ripped trousers. The trousers had hugged his long legs just right, and yet, it had been the jacket that caught most of James' attention. He knew this leather jacket. He still remembers the covert trip to Muggle London to surprise him with it. James still remembers the spark in his eyes when he tried it on, could almost still taste the sweetness of the kiss he received in thanks. There are a few more scuff marks on it now, some bits even look like they got singed by spells James doesn't even want to think about, and Sirius must have tailored it to still fit, but it is the same jacket. Sirius had kept it, even when he left.

James had spent all night thinking about it and yet is no closer to making peace with the look Sirius had given him. The light smirk freezing on his face when he recognised James, dropping into a careful mask of nothing, marking James the same.

It's not like he doesn't understand, but six years without even a word have made him bitter and hurt as well. Six years without even knowing if Sirius was still alive, is that really what he deserved? Perhaps it is. Perhaps he deserves Sirius' contempt on top of his own, he is the

one who had fucked it up so badly after all. But seeing it played out so plainly in front of him still ripped up the old wounds that never had a chance to heal.

What is he even supposed to do now? Go into his office and work with Sirius on his cases, pretending that it doesn't sting every time Sirius pulls those walls up, leaving James outside like a starved animal, looking for any tiny bread crumb of his true thoughts and feelings?

While James can admit he grew up endlessly spoiled, he was also taught to deal with the consequences of his actions. But between all the sacrifices he has made in the past years, letting Sirius treat him with nothing but professional curtesy would be the most wretched challenge yet. Not even giving up his promising quidditch career for a more stable career as Auror after Harry's birth would come close to the feeling of Sirius treating him like a stranger, no matter how unhappy his job makes him.

Dawn is barely breaking when he gets dressed for his morning run. Standing still has never been good for him, offering his thoughts too much space to run around in his head, getting intertwined and tangled. With any luck, a long run would loosen the threads tightening around his mind, or at least help to shake the tiredness away for a few hours.

His usual running path takes him through a large park and for a moment the urge to turn into Prongs becomes almost unmanageable, the thoughts of his animagus always so much easier to bear, but Prongs had become rather big and he doesn't particularly fancy ending up in the muggle newspapers again.

Sirius would have found that incredibly funny though, the thought shoots through his head and he groans in frustration. It's all such a mess, James doesn't even know where to start with all his feelings. There is just too much of it all. He wants nothing more than to have *his* Sirius back, longs for the connection that had always felt larger than both of them and as easy as breathing. When Sirius had left, he had taken that with him, and breathing hasn't been effortless since.

A part of him still holds onto the anger he had felt, the helplessness he was submitted to when Sirius left without a single word. For months, he searched for him, tore apart every wizarding city and village. Then, three months after his disappearance, on a day too sunny to receive such news, his parents sat him down and told him that Sirius had been in touch, and that he is well but doesn't want to come home. James can still feel the same desperation burn through him, when no amount of pleading had moved his parents to tell him more. Instead, they told him to focus on the family he was building, and once Harry was born, James had to admit defeat.

Then, he is ashamed that he even has the audacity to feel angry. Sirius left everything he ever knew behind, just to get away from him. It had taken James years to push through his own feelings of betrayal, and once he managed, he was left with the crippling realisation that there is no one to blame but himself, that it was him who pushed Sirius to disappear, hurt him so much that he saw no other way than to run. The realisation had left James floored for days and he only managed to pull himself out of it because of Harry.

Heavily panting, he continues his run, faster and further than his usual routine, until he feels nothing but the burn of his muscles and his lungs, deafening his screaming mind.

“Hey, morning Lilyflower,” he says softly, when he enters the bedroom after his shower and hears Lily’s wand alarm going off. He turns it off and presses a small kiss against her hair, “Don’t worry about getting up just yet, I will get Harry to school.”

“You sure?” she mumbles, face still half-hidden under the covers, clearly not ready for the day after the late shifts she’s pulled at St. Mungos in the past days.

“Very much, sleep,” he confirms as he gets dressed and she hums contently as her breathing evens out again.

There is an uncomfortable tuck in his stomach, making him glad Lily won’t be joining them for breakfast. His thoughts are still occupied, and his wife is way too perceptive to not notice James’ behaviour is off, no matter how little they actually see each other these days with both their busy schedules. Another thing to add to the endless list of things he feels bad about.

There is one thing he could never feel bad about though, and his day is in dire need of brightening up. As he opens the door to Harry’s room and walks over to sit on his bed, a smile spreads over his face at the obnoxiously fake sleeping noises his son is making, trying to avoid having to get up. That is, until he hears James’ whisper his name conspiratorial.

Harry’s eyes snap open immediately, looking at James excitedly. “Daddy! Are you taking me to school today?”

James laughs at the obvious excitement in Harry’s voice and softly ruffles through his wild hair, so much like his own.

“I am. And we might even get to look at the beasts today, that is, if we make it out of the house in time.”

The five-year old immediately jumps out of bed, no sign of the tantrum he easily gets into at the prospect of having to go to school. Lily thinks going to see the magical beasts before school would spoil him too much and getting out of bed without the prospect of a treat should be the norm, and while James would usually agree, he also sees no harm in walking through the Department of Magical Creatures for ten minutes with Harry in the morning if it brightens up his day so much. Newt is always keen to talk about magizoology, and Harry is the best audience he could ask for.

After helping Harry with the clothes he picked for the day, they make their way downstairs. Harry is clutching Snakey, the plush snake that Regulus was all too keen to buy for him in an opportune moment at the muggle zoo. James came back from the toilet to this green monstrosity in his son’s arms and a very smug looking Regulus. Remus was almost bending over with laughter at James’ reaction, but Harry loves the damn snake so much that nothing would coerce him into, say, a lion plush animal.

It makes him wonder if Reg knows yet that Sirius is back. No - this has to stop. No more thoughts of Sirius.

“Right, breakfast! Can you sing the hippogriff song that we practiced for me while I’m cooking, Haz?”

He can barely hide his grin when Harry cheerily sings his song about hippogriffs and hinkypunks, while James fries the eggs for their breakfast.

After he drops Harry off at school, the world becomes a bit less colourful again and without the energetic child pulling at his arm to demand detail about every magical beast they encounter, he feels the tiredness creep back into his bones.

Instead of going directly to the office, he takes a detour to the coffeeshop close-by for a much needed top up. The queue is long enough that his eyes roam over the familiar selection of beverages written on the signs. It lures his mind to wander, travel back in time.

He even remembers Sirius’ coffee order. How he always pretended to like his coffee black, no milk no sugar. Most people believed it because it fit the person they believed Sirius to be and because he had so much control over his facial features that it wouldn’t give anything away unless he wanted to. For most people, that is. Because James was not most people and noticed the small downturn of Sirius’ lips as he drunk the dark liquid, clearly less than thrilled with the choice of drink.

Quite the difference to the look he had given him when they went to Hogsmeade and James ordered the most outrageous sugary drink, with pumpkin spice flavoured syrup and chocolate dust on top. When they had gotten their drinks, he wordlessly swapped them, taking the black coffee Sirius ordered for himself instead. He stifled Sirius protests with an exasperated look and a ‘don’t be a prat and just drink it’. In the end, Sirius relented, and the way his eyes went wide after the first touch of liquid on his lips was a revelation on its own. James had made a point out of covertly slipping some coffee syrup into Sirius’ morning coffee in Hogwarts as much as he could, quickly getting addicted to the small smile playing on Sirius’ lips as he took his first sip, his eyes always effortlessly finding James’ for a quick thank you.

For a brief moment, he considers ordering a coffee for him as well, but would Sirius even accept it? Or just bin it, probably right in front of his eyes, just to make a point?

“Are you just having the usual, James?”

He blinks, violently coming back into his own body after his thoughts had drifted away so thoroughly.

“Uhm, yeah, cheers,” he says in the end, leaving the coffee shop with only his own coffee cup.

Any attempt to bring Sirius a coffee would have been in vain; the office shows no trace of him when James enters. Instead, a parchment lies on his desk and he would recognise that handwriting anywhere.

James touches the letters, feeling the parchment underneath. For years he had waited for a letter in this handwriting, now that he has one, written all formal and addressed to 'Auror Potter' and signed with 'Curse-breaker Black', it feels like a slap in his face. He tries not to think about the hidden box of unsent letters shoved into the back of his closet, addressed to 'My dearest Supernova'.

The lines of text are entirely professional, informing James that his case files have been reviewed and offering insights into the nature of the curses and dark magic likely related to the objects he is dealing with, and the level of danger and resources required to attempt a cleansing. The methodical approach reminds him of their work on the map, where Sirius had been the one to solve most of the magical problems they encountered by writing the full magical composition out in an order that had Remus and Peter scratch their heads but James struck with awe.

It all made sense, if you had an innate understanding of magic in the way that Sirius always had, seeing the full picture all at once and drilling into the different levels underlying in the incantations, connecting and reconnecting them until they fit together in every possible way. James had always envisioned it like weaving a net, connecting each and every single piece with each other, instead of the chronological order connecting a piece only with the one before and after. It's this deep understanding of magic that is felt rather than learned, that makes Sirius so well suited for this job. He had always enjoyed the theory behind complicated magic, treating it like a riddle to be solved. James is glad that at least one of them is working in a job that fulfils them.

There is also a small slither of hope, that Sirius had chosen to present his thoughts on the cases like this, trusting James would be able to follow them just as he was able to in Hogwarts.

But how did he manage to pull all of this together in such a short span of time? Why would he think he needed to do all of this in one day, likely night? Unless... unless he was leaving again? Decided this wasn't working for him but not wanting to leave empty handed?

The thought makes James' heart speed up, blood rushing through his ears. He can't leave, not again. Not like this. This can't be all James will have of him before he disappears into thin air, not leaving a single trace, just like before.

He is pacing through his office, unable to calm himself. In his training he has learned plenty of tricks to stay level-headed, but the thought of losing Sirius again is too much to bear, makes his heart feel tight and breathing almost impossible.

Usually, in situations of crisis, James remains on top of the chaos, because his mind is chaos all the time and he is more than used to it. Where Sirius sees the full picture and calmly dives into the well of connections that create it, James' focus is on the individual pieces itself, instinctively knowing where to centre his attention in an ocean of floating thoughts. It is what made him so good at quidditch, and what earned him such a quick promotion to Senior Auror, the innate feeling that never betrays him, has kept him and his colleagues safe on more than one occasion because his focus wouldn't allow him to panic, wouldn't make him miss important details that might turn out dangerous.

Usually, that is.

Because nothing could prepare him for the utter despair and panic that settles in his bones at the thought that Sirius might be gone again.

His body is acting on instinct alone, throwing floo powder into the fireplace before his mind has a chance to catch up on anything.

He stumbles into Remus' flat, glad the floo isn't blocked, meaning Remus must be at home. It is the first place he could think of, desperately needing to talk to someone who would understand. Perhaps he even knows where Sirius might be, perhaps he had been in touch with Regulus.

"Moony?" he shouts, more running than walking into the living room where Remus usually writes around this time of day. His voice sounds strange to his own ears, high-pitched and desperate. There must be visible relief on his face as he spots his friend, wide-eyed looking at him from his desk, fingers still lingering on the muggle typewriter he insists on using.

Remus jumps from his chair, walking over to him with a concerned look on his face.

"Prongs? What's going on? Is something wrong with Harry?"

"What? No. Harry is fine," James frowns, confused why Remus would jump to that conclusion, but the fact that he barged into his flat looking as distraught as he feels may be a valid reason for concern. He doesn't linger on the thought though, needs to get Remus up to speed so they can come up with a plan to track Sirius down.

He starts pacing through the room, hands flying through his hair, desperately trying not to drown in his racing mind.

"Sirius is back, Moony. He is the Curse-breaker who is supposed to help with my case. I saw him in my office yesterday and he fucking hates me. And now he is gone again and he's read all the files and made a report on all of them already, and what if he decided that this is all he is going to do, and he is leaving again?" His voice is trembling, barely able to voice his thoughts, because what if it's true? If Remus is responding to him, he can't hear it over the sound of his pounding heart and the ringing in his ears.

He continues to pace, his eyes unfocused as the room begins to spin in front of his eyes. "I can't—Moony he can't be gone again. I didn't even get a chance to—" his voice sounds pleading, willing Remus to do anything to fix this, even when it is all James' mess to begin with. He can't be gone again, not before James even had a chance to do anything.

He can't be gone, it's not fair, not like this, not again.

James only realises that he has been saying it out loud over and over again when Remus violently shakes him, and his mind snaps back into place mid-sentence.

Remus gives him a relieved and exasperated look when he sees James' eyes focusing again. "Dammit Prongs," he sighs and wordlessly points to the sofa.

It's only Remus' hands still on his shoulders that are holding him upright, without them, he would be sagging to the floor with relief. A large black dog is jumping from the sofa, taking a few steps towards him before stopping, the imposing figure staring up at him, teeth bared and body tense, ready to pounce.

Sirius isn't gone. He is still there. Hasn't left.

"Padfoot," he whispers, as much awe as surprise in his voice. Apparently, it was the wrong thing to say, because the large dog is snarling at him before he launches. If James wanted to, he might have managed to throw up a wandless shield. Instead, his hands remain tightly on his sides. No, if this was Padfoot's way of dealing with him, he would take it.

They crash to the ground, and James sends a short prayer to the inventor of carpets, even though it does very little to cushion his fall backwards. He groans out in pain, the air being pushed out of his lungs as Padfoot's mighty paws are resting on his chest, holding him down while the growling dog's teeth are mere centimetres away from his face.

James can't remember the last time he has seen something so beautiful.

The familiar silver eyes meet his own and James is done trying to hide any of the feelings that Sirius' return have revived in him. He heard it all anyway. Heard the utter despair his disappearance caused him. Heard his racing heart, could probably smell the panic on him.

So he lets go. Let's go of the loneliness of the past years, how his life was so clearly defined in with Sirius and without Sirius, before and after, how desperately he had tried to fit into a life without him and how badly he had failed, never truly letting go of all the could-have-beens between them, the regret he never truly allowed himself to feel about the choices he had made. It is flickering through his eyes, and he knows that if any person could read even half of it, it would be Sirius. It would always be Sirius, the missing piece to his heart and soul.

Padfoot still fixes him with a stare, soaking up every piece of him. James would give him all he is if it meant being able to look into his eyes for just a few moments longer. The steel in them is slowly melting, giving way to liquid mercury instead. His teeth are still bared, but there is no bite in it any longer.

"Padfoot," he whispers again in awe, not able to stop his hand from reaching out, slowly finding its way into the soft fur on the dog's head.

Padfoot's jaw clenches shut and he leans into the touch, eyes closed and bowing his head lightly to give James' better access.

"Padfoot," James murmurs over and over like a prayer while his fingers gently trace through the soft black fur, remembering all the good spots like it was yesterday. Wishing so badly it had really only been yesterday. It is so easy to pretend like this, falling back into actions so familiar his fingers will always remember them.

A soft cough snaps both of them back into reality and James doesn't know if it's been minutes or seconds, only that it hasn't been enough time and he wants to shout in protest

when he sees the walls of steel come back into Sirius' eyes. The too heavy and yet just right pressure on his chest is suddenly gone, leaving him aching for the touch as he watches the dog leave. There is a soft sound of claws scratching against the door handle, and a clicking of a door falling shut.

He rubs his hands over his face, trying to clear his hazy mind.

A subconscious tingle tells him Remus is still looking at him. "Don't look at me like that," he protests, not taking the hands from his face. He is well aware of the look on Remus' face, the judging in it.

His friend lets out a soft, defeated sigh, "I don't even know where to begin, Prongs."

James doesn't know either. He is a husband and a father. He has a family that loves him and deserve to be loved back the same way. And yet, he desperately wants to run after Sirius, correct all the mistakes from the past, following the exact opposite of the path he had been on for years. The path that leads him to the life he is living know. But then, he could never imagine a life without his son. How does any of this fit together? Where is he even supposed to begin untangling this mess?

In the years that had followed Sirius' disappearance, a slow realisation had crept up on him. He had tried his hardest to block it out, tried everything he could to not allow even the thought of it, but the truth remained, unhindered by his attempts to prove himself otherwise. James Potter had only ever truly loved one person in his life. In a fairytale, this person would have been the person he married, and they would have lived happily ever after. But this wasn't a fairytale, and the person he married wasn't the love of his life.

He is ashamed to even think about it like that, but if he is brutally honest with himself, in the dead of night when darkness brings thoughts never to be thought of in daylight, he acknowledges that love wasn't the reason he married his wife. At the time, he could still convince himself that he could love her as she deserved. She had given him Harry after all, the joy of both their lives - but it is undeniably the child that is glueing their marriage together. It isn't like it is a bad life, the family life of the past years still feels nice, Lily is beautiful beyond measure and a better person than he deserves. But he can't help but find their marriage lacking, especially as routine creeps back more and more into their lives the older Harry gets and the way they barely see each other with their different work schedules, but at the same time neither of them doing much to change that.

He can't help but feel trapped by the life he is living and the interactions they are having. It is nice, stable, and they are a great team, but it lacks excitement, feels colourless and stuck. Lately, whenever he says 'I love you' to her, it feels like he is speaking with glass in his mouth. He does love her, she is an amazing person by herself and an even more fantastic mother to their son, but this kind of love feels different, could never compare to the person he let go.

With Sirius, the world had felt brimmed with colour, the possibilities felt endless, James basked in the light that shone so bright from him, never imagining he would have to find his way without it lighting the path ahead for him.

And then he had let it all go to shit.

Chapter End Notes

Sooo, James is really not having a good time, not at all being able to keep a certain someone out of his thoughts! Can't blame him, I'd be pining after Sirius too.

Next chapter will have them both interact more again, so thats something to look forward to! :)

Always happy to read about your thoughts in the comments <3

Chapter 3: Sirius

Chapter Notes

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

Sirius

Before: 1976-1977

This first summer spent at the Potter's will forever be etched into his memory as a summer of so many firsts.

The first time he feels truly free, allowed to live day by day in a way the holidays should be enjoyed, not the continuance of studying throughout the summer with private tutors, all in the name of preparing him for a future as heir to the house of Black.

The first time he experiences true, unconditional parental attention he hasn't felt in years, if at all. The Potters had always been more than welcoming to him, but now that he is staying, the care they provide him with is more than anything he could have imagined. Euphemia and Fleamont treat him just like a second son, as if he had always been part of their family and just moved back home after some time away. Grimmauld Place hadn't felt like a home in years, but Potter Manor quickly becomes just that. A safe haven, where he is allowed to just be, where he is accepted and supported. They even support his decision to take on a summer job at the village after seeing how much it meant to him to not be dependent on anyone, desperate not to be a burden even when they reassured him that he wouldn't be. James is harder to convince, telling him off for being stubborn and proud, but in the end, he relents to Sirius' determination.

It is also the first time he truly acknowledges that he is in love with James. They share many firsts this summer, both growing more and more bold, small touches and chaste pecks turning into lingering fingers, exploring hands and heated kisses. Somehow, this night under the stars had unlocked something else entirely, igniting a desire between them that couldn't be satisfied unless acted on. Hands wander under shirts and into waistbands, mouths follow. It is sometime there, where the lines between their friendship and more have become so blurred, that Sirius realises that it has never just been friendship between them. At least not for him. There has always been something more, something unnamed, but stronger than any other feeling.

There is no need to name it, it is plain obvious in any case when his fingertips stroke through James' unruly hair, his head resting in Sirius' lap as they are lying at the lake not far from the Potter property, lazing the day away between swimming and kissing. Or when they both catch each other's eyes, wide grins following, purely because they are looking at each other. Or at night, when Sirius slips into James' room, tormented by self-doubt so deeply instilled into him that it takes James hours to sooth him, needing his solid comfort to fall asleep when his mind won't leave him to rest.

Sirius is in love with James, and he likely will be until the day he dies. If it were anyone else, that might have been a scary thought, but it's James, so the thought brings only comfort. They will never stop being. No matter what shape and form their relationship might take in the future, they share a bond deeper than anything, and he doesn't think anything could ever change that.

They were inseparable even before this new part of their relationship developed, so no one seems to notice a difference in their behaviour when they return to Hogwarts for sixth year. Granted, they save the kissing for private moments, not needing to announce this new development of their relationship and cheapen it through Hogwarts' gossip. Yet, even when they share a sofa in the common room, Sirius' back pressed against James' chest, his chin resting on Sirius' shoulder and fingers tracing circles on Sirius' hip while they are reading a book together, no one even bats an eyelash. It's making Sirius wonder how long those touches have existed between them purely platonically that it doesn't give a single raise from their housemates.

There is a thrill in keeping their activities a secret, disappearing under the invisibility cloak together to make out in the most obvious of places. Pushing James against the wall in a deserted corridor on the way to class and snogging him senseless, leaving his hair in a delicious mess, even more so than before. Lingering in the changing room after quidditch practice, getting up to a lot more than just showering.

In all of sixth year, only one person catches them. Being used to Sirius sleeping in James' bed from years of sharing a dorm together, Remus doesn't think twice as he throws back the curtains to wake them, unassuming of the unholy morning activity they are currently very much engaged in. Thankfully, the bedcovers hide just enough, but there isn't really any excuse to finding Sirius sprawled out on the sheets, James thrusting into him, both heavily panting with pleasure. James' sudden stillness entices a needy whine from Sirius as he moves his head to look at James in protest, only to find an embarrassed Remus looking at them. He is far too gone to care.

"Would you mind, mate?" he says casually, pointing to the curtains.

"Uh yeah, of course. Sorry," Remus stutters, hastily drawing the curtains shut again.

James looks at Sirius entirely gobsmacked, before he bursts out laughing, Sirius following suit.

They later tell Moony a bit more about it all, but he seems rather happy to not revisit this moment and just tells them to set a tempus in the future because he won't try and wake them when they are late for breakfast again.

On James' seventeenth birthday in March they finally visit the tattoo shop in Hogsmeade. The idea to get a tattoo had long been on Sirius' mind, but he couldn't quite settle on a motif. That is, until his own seventeenth birthday five months prior.

He hadn't expected to get anything from his parents, and that expectation turned out to be true. Surprisingly, it had stung more than he expected. Not because he wanted a gift from them, but because it made him realise that no one would be giving him a watch, the coming

of age gift every witch and wizard received from their family upon reaching maturity, symbolising the time spent together in the past and time spent in the future, together. Who would want that with him anyway? It made him realise that he truly had nothing left of the family he shares a name with. No one would be gifting him a watch.

Or so he thought.

Because he would never have expected the Potters' owl that day, or the satisfied expression on James' face.

"Ah, just in time. Come on, let's go." James exclaims with an amused smirk on his face, as he takes the parcel in one hand and Sirius' hand in the other, and drags him out of the Great Hall, breakfast entirely forgotten.

Sirius protests all the way to the deserted room James leads him to, making it very clear he had very much intended to eat the bacon that had still been on his plate. James just snorts and shuts him up with a kiss, successfully muffling Sirius' protest.

His eyes are glinting with excitement as he slowly pulls away and pushes the parcel into Sirius' hands.

"Just thought you would appreciate some privacy with this, but if you would rather return to your bacon..."

"Oh shut it, Potter," Sirius grins, because James knows all too well that Sirius would never leave a mystery unsolved. When he opens the parcel, there is an envelope inside, and a little box, covered almost completely by Sirius favourite sweets. The letter inside, addressed to him, isn't written in James' handwriting, though. It's Fleamont's, he had come to realise. His head snaps up to James, who just grins widely at him, gesturing for him to continue. His eyes drop back to the letter, but nothing could ever have prepared him for its contents. His eyes fill up with tears as he reads through the lines, Euphemia and Fleamont declaring him their son, telling him he would always have a home with them. He violently blinks the tears away, too distracted to even notice James had taken the box and opened it for him.

"Hey Pads, happy birthday," he says gently, holding his parents' gift out for Sirius to see. A silver pocket watch on a silver chain, the carved in Potter crest boldly visible in ruby red. A Potter heirloom, James tells him later.

He throws himself into James' arms, needing his grounding touch more than anything as he buries his face into the crook of his neck, holding tight.

This is how they end up in the tattoo shop, finally able to settle on a motif. James gets the Potter crest on his biceps, bold and proudly presenting his heritage. Sirius planned to get it in the same spot but changes his mind in the last moment. Instead, he gets it on the inside of his left forearm, just below his wrist, wanting the reminder of the family that had chosen him easily accessible and visible to him at all times. Like this, he can see it any time he moves his arm, any time he casts a spell. A constant reminder of the people he loves. He doesn't even

need to explain it to James, the softness in his eyes as the needles ink Sirius' skin clearly showing his understanding.

"I've been thinking, I want to get something else," James declares when they are done, and Sirius raises an eyebrow in question. Not entirely surprising though, he had the same thought, something about the process of getting a tattoo, the pain and rewarding image, feels addicting, even when they are fully healed already thanks to magic.

"Oh yeah, what's that going to be?"

James gives him a challenging look full of anticipation. "You will have to wait and see," he declares before he pushes Sirius out of the shop and tells him to meet him at the Three Broomsticks later.

It isn't much later when James joins them in the pub, but enough time has passed to let Sirius' fantasy go wild. There are so many options, things that James might have inked on his skin, and he is dying to find out what it is. James Potter is an enigma that keeps changing, a puzzle Sirius is never fully able to solve. It is exciting and frustrating at the same time.

"So what did you get?" Sirius blurts out before James even has a chance to sit down. James just grins at him teasingly and shrugs. "Well, quite indecent to undress in public, innit? Afraid you will have to wait till later."

Sirius growls at him and makes sure they leave the pub after only one drink, dragging James back to the castle and up the stairs all the way to the dorm in a hurry, ignoring the Gryffindor's chuckles at his impatience.

In the end, nothing could have prepared him for the image. James takes his time, making sure they are in bed, Sirius straddling his hips on top of him, before he finally relents and removes his shirt. There it is, on his left ribcage. The canis major constellation.

"Oh fuck," Sirius groans, the sight of his constellation inked into James' skin proving more than he can handle.

James watches him closely, tracing his hands over Sirius' sides. "You like it?"

Sirius hums in agreement, words fleeing him as his fingers stretch out to touch the dark ink. The stars are connected through a thin line, one star outshining them all, pulsating in a way that is impressive even for a magical tattoo. Sirius slowly leans down, tracing his lips over his mark on James' skin, can't get enough of it, of him.

...

After: 1984

The whole purpose of working through the night was to keep James busy enough with the preparations for the cases that Sirius wouldn't have to see him. Hell, he had even thrown in some odd ingredients and objects that had absolutely no relevance to the curses he is working

on, solely adding them because they require higher security clearance to get, meaning James would have to procure them himself.

The plan had been fool-proof in his head, working through his insomnia, with the case files offering a welcome distraction. Bonus points for not having to see James for the day. He had even managed to fall asleep in the early morning, Padfoot's simpler mind luring him into some much-needed rest, helped by the soft, rhythmic clicking of Remus' typewriter.

There is only one small detail he had missed. Making plans where it concerns James Potter never works out. Ever since Hogwarts, James defied almost every plan ever set. Usually, Sirius was right there with him, but apparently that does not mean he is immune to the *confringo* that is the Potter heir.

Explosion is perhaps the right word to describe the state James had been in when he entered Moony's flat. He had looked so distraught, Sirius was halfway through the mental process of transforming back into himself, ready to jump into whatever danger would be awaiting them. But then James started speaking.

No danger then, or perhaps the most dangerous thing of them all.

Suddenly, staying as Padfoot had been the wiser choice, not trusting his own mind or magic while he witnessed James' frantic reveal of how much it had affected him when Sirius left. It came as a surprise, considering that he left James with everything he ever wanted. What was Sirius, when James could have a wife and child, the family he always longed for?

Even as Padfoot, his mind wouldn't stop racing, jumping too quickly through emotions to properly process them. So he latched onto the one most familiar, anger. Burning hot through him when James used his old nickname, the nickname *he* had chosen for Sirius. It brought back too much of the barely blunted pain and before he knew what happened, James was tackled on the ground below him, looking up not with anger or fear, but pure awe.

In the end, it was the familiarity in those hazel eyes, the truths they presented to him, like falling through an endless sea of soft feathers. They were falling together, neither of them knowing even the direction they were falling into.

Sirius still doesn't know. It has taken him all the drive from London to the outskirts of the city to feel fully human again, clutching onto Padfoot's mind in an attempt to reduce the variety of emotions rushing in. The sharp anger he felt before had been blunted by James' silent story, but the walls he built around himself remained very much unbreeched. Letting James in through the front gates again would be fatal, no matter how much his heart may yearn for the touch he just got a taste of, or the quiet understanding that had always made words redundant between them...

Until in the most crucial moments, it hadn't. Sirius would do well to remember that.

He would prefer to keep driving, putting as much distance as possible between them, hoping it could be enough to make him forget those hazel eyes. But it isn't, nothing is. No distance had worked in the past six years to make him forget them, so a drive away from London won't do the trick now. Besides, he has a job to do, one that he actually enjoys and is good at.

But also one that will take him right back to the Auror office and in very close proximity to the person he wants to avoid and see more than anyone else, all at the same time.

Unfortunately, there is no way to push back his return to the office, the potion he started yesterday is very much awaiting his return. It is for the most intriguing case of James' files, the unsolved disappearance of a young man three years ago and the possible involvement of the Blishen family, an influential Eastern European pureblood family with strong ties to potion making and dark magic.

Usually, in cases of disappearances there comes a point where the victim is declared dead, and three years without a trace would certainly qualify for just that, had the Aurors in one of James' recent raids not found evidence that Lucien Caillat must be very much alive. It had been a raid to dismember a smuggling ring where they found a metal chest, ornated with intricate flowers.

The chest oozed dark magic and was put immediately under a stasis charm for transport to the Department of Magical Investigations. But while working their way through the parchments full of recipes and orders, one thing had stood out to James. It was only an ingredient, but that was more than enough to kick his detail-oriented mind into action, remembering a single clue from years ago. It caused the breakthrough in this case. Sirius had always marvelled at James' memory, the detail that he focuses on, connecting it to something that seems unrelated until someone bothers to connect the dots. James had done just that, breathing new life into the cold case.

The found recipe was incredibly thorough in that it specifically required the hair of a male half-veela, an incredibly rare find and most certainly way too expensive for the underground potioneers to obtain legally. A thought that must have also occurred to James, as he interrogated one of them and confirmed the half-Veela's identity to be that of the missing person. Not dead then, but captured.

Lucien's whereabouts are still as unknown as they had been before, so naturally Sirius made it a priority, but so far, the riddle of the chest remained unsolved. He had spent a good portion of last night removing the protective layers of dark magic woven around the chest like a blanket. It reminded him unpleasantly of the dark objects causally displayed by his grandfather Arcturus at Black Manor, increasing his suspicion of the involvement of the Blishens. At least, it meant he was well equipped in reversing the spells though, leaving the chest free to be touched, but no closer to being opened. Somehow the box exhausted all his vast knowledge of unlocking spells.

Hence, the need for a potion. It made sense, considering the Blishens have always prided themselves with their proneness to potions, and considering where the chest was found. In the end, the chest itself had given him a valuable hint. One of the revealment spells he had run resulted in elegant golden letters darting over the front.

Ad mortem purus.

He had settled on brewing the Draught of the Living Death. Starting the brew had been a lengthy process, taking him until the early hours of the morning to get it to the required simmer. He would rather not go through that pain staking experience again, no matter how much he trusts in his own abilities. Better to get it over with and return to the office.

With a bit of luck, James won't be in.

Sirius allows himself a quick detour to Diagon Alley, buying the rest of the required ingredients, just in case James hadn't made it a priority to work through his list. To avoid his return for just a few more minutes, he pushes his bike through the streets to the Ministry instead of driving. He stops as he passes Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlour. It's too cold for ice cream but Sirius remembers the coffee used to be excellent in their Hogsmeade shop - the special coffee, not the usual bitter dishwater most people like to drink. He can't stop his feet from leading him into the shop, the interior just the same as it is in Hogsmeade. Before a wave of nostalgia can hit him, the barista looks at him expectantly, enough to prevent any unsolicited memories from surfacing.

"A hazelnut latte with pumpkin spice syrup and cream on top, please," he rattles his usual order, and is promptly met with a confused look. Apparently, that coffee order still doesn't go well with his general looks - leather jacket, bike parked outside and all. It reminds him that he is not anonymous here. This isn't a random muggle coffee shop in Paris where the barista would sneer at his order, but anonymity would ensure his reputation stays intact. This is Diagon Alley, a place where gossip travels fast and where the sudden reappearance of the disowned Black heir into the English wizarding community puts him under extra scrutiny as it is. It is incredibly silly, it's just a coffee order, but suddenly he feels like he is seventeen again, clutching onto the persona he had built and only let one person truly look behind. "And a coffee, black," he adds, making it sound like the first order wasn't his at all.

He can always bin the black dishwater on the way to the office.

It doesn't take long for the beverages to float in his direction and he keeps them floating in front of him, as he pushes his bike forward to the Ministry. He stops at a bin, ready to dump the black coffee and be done with it, but then he hesitates. Perhaps... James had looked rather tired. And it would be an unnecessary waste to just bin it. It doesn't mean anything, just that he is not a wasteful person. Likely James isn't even in, so he could always give the coffee to someone else.

Of course, Sirius is entirely out of luck. James is in, his head snapping up immediately as Sirius opens the door to his, now their, office.

"Hey," he says in greeting, his voice sounding small.

Sirius doesn't look at him, only lets his eyes dart over him for the slightest of moments before he walks to his desk and lets the coffee float over to him with a flick of his wand. "They gave me one extra," he explains, needing to clarify that he didn't specifically buy James a coffee.

"Right. Thanks," James replies surprised as he snatches the coffee cup and brings it to his lips, a small smile hidden almost fully by the cup. Not that Sirius is looking.

He is pointedly not looking. Instead, his eyes wander to his desk, where ingredients are neatly lying in the order Sirius had written on his list. James had made it a priority then. It's only

been a few hours since he had written this list, and between then and the breakdown James had at Moony's... Well, apparently, he is still nothing if not efficient.

"Cheers for the ingredients," he says, because it seems fair to thank him for it, and professional.

"No worries. Figured it might be important, considering the half-finished Draught of the Living Death you are brewing?"

James sounds curious while he is pointing to the cauldron on the potions station. Well, they will have to work on those cases together, so he might as well share his thought process. They have always worked best when sharing ideas, and there is a person's life at stake after all. He points to the chest on his desk, the engraving still visible.

"*Ad mortem purus*. Pure until death," James translates effortlessly, a frown on his face, "Catchy. Would've made a fantastic Yule gift for Walburga."

A snort leaves Sirius' before he has a chance to hold it back, he stifles it quickly, but the damage is done, James' eyes glinting as he grins back. Sirius continues with his explanation before he can get too distracted by it. "Well, after my repertoire of unlocking spells proved fruitless, I moved on to potions. The potion is incredibly difficult to brew and requires a range of rare and difficult-to-obtain ingredients that have historical connotations of being available only to the upper class. The Blishens are heavily involved in potioneering after all, and with that engraving on the rather ancient chest, it seemed worth a try."

"That's brilliant," James exclaims, still with those sinful lips drawn into a smile.

Sirius tries very hard not to be affected by the comment, to wave it off, but he can feel the heat rising in his cheeks. In an attempt not to fully embarrass himself, he turns to his potion, ready to add the final ingredients.

He clears his throat. "Hmm, we will see about that," he mutters, attention snapping to the demanding potion in front of him as he adds the sprinkled moonstone and stirs three times anti-clockwise in a slow motion. The potion turns to its silvery finish and Sirius lets out the breath he was holding. He takes James' dragonhide gloves from the potions station and puts them on. Then, he carefully fills the potion into two phials.

"Well, no time like the present, innit?"

James looks expectantly between him and the chest before he moves his wand in a quick motion. Sirius can feel protective spells fitting around him like a second skin. It's the step he usually forgets, too absorbed in solving the riddle to care about such mundane things as safety. He doesn't want to think about what it means that James did. Doesn't want to think about the feeling of James' magic against his skin.

Carefully he lets the potion drip, feeling his own anticipation as well as James' as they both wait for something to happen.

Which it doesn't.

“Shit,” they mutter at the same time after giving up their attempt to will the chest into doing anything at all.

Sirius lets out a frustrated huff. “So much for brilliance,” he grumbles as he sits down on his desk, eyeing the chest disdainfully as he sips on his blissfully delicious latte.

“Still was a good idea,” James insists as he moves back to his side of the room, where he has notes and pictures and thread floating around, connecting some invisible dots that probably only make sense in James’ mind at the moment. He pushes up the sleeves of his dark red shirt and Sirius nearly spits out his drink when all his brain supplies is *forearms*. It also isn’t helping that he has a front row show to the broad shoulders and muscular back that the shirt does nothing to hide. Dammit, last time he checked, Auror uniforms weren’t looking like this. They always used to be impressive and functional, making a quick switch to active operations possible, but they never had athletic long-sleeved shirts look like that, clinging to the skin just right. Or perhaps Sirius never bothered to look closely before.

Well, it is incredibly hard not to look at James. It always had been, but Sirius is more than a little annoyed that it still is. He doesn’t want to look at James. His anger might not be burning through him like molten lava after seeing him so devastated this morning, but that only means that if he isn’t careful, he will be swept right up into James’ orbit again, unable to prevent the crash that would inevitably follow. It would be impossible to pull away again, it had nearly ended him last time and he is under no illusion that he would be equipped any better for the fallout this time around.

He wills his eyes away from the Merlin-forsaken back and it lands on the damn flowerpot again. To be fair, Sirius is holding up considerably well under the circumstances. Even his magic is behaving today. He takes wins where he gets them.

It is quiet in the office for a while, James working on connecting his invisible details and Sirius trying to stare down the chest into offering up its secrets. Damn purebloods and their damn need for secrecy. He bets someone felt oh so superior, creating this chest and the locking mechanism, feeling like it is all thanks to their blood and lineage that they could come up with it in the first place.

His eyes grow wide with realisation.

It couldn’t be, could it?

“Oh, you absolute gremlin-shit pureblood bastards,” he mutters to himself as he jumps from the desk, the exclamation and movement catching James’ attention as well.

Sirius doesn’t waste any time, taking his wand and slicing his right palm open with a *diffindo* as he grimaces at the sting.

“Whoa, hold on, what the-,” James protests the action, but Sirius is already squeezing his palm over the chest, the blood seemingly igniting the metal. He adds the second phial of the potion next, entirely focused by how the silver mixes with the red and fills in the flowery ornaments, the whole chest pulsating with a glow.

There is a faint clicking sound at the same time as Sirius is thrown off his feet.

For a split second, he thinks the chest has thrown him off, another undetected defence mechanism. But as he crashes to the floor with his back first, something heavy lands on top of him. His head should hit the floor next, but the blow never comes. Something is cushioning the back of his head. That something is an arm. Which means that the heavy something on top of him is the person that is attached to said arm.

“Ugh, what the fuck, Potter?!” he groans, the pain in his back distracting him momentarily from the fact that James is sprawled on top of him, apparently throwing them both to the floor as the chest opened. Is this payback for earlier? Eye for an eye, sore back for a sore back?

James is heavily panting as he looks down at Sirius. “Oh, don’t you what the fuck me. Do you even have the slightest regard for your safety?! This chest could have been filled with all sorts of vile things! You didn’t even bother to put on a protection charm!”

His words somewhat sound reasonable, but it’s very hard to focus on them when James is still so close, they are touching in so many places where they haven’t touched in years, his face is flushed and his hair dishevelled, and his eyes look wide with adrenalin, the golden speckles in them all too visible. Sirius can even feel James’ breath lightly tickling his cheek.

The silence stretches between them, the pause for Sirius’ reply too long, making James aware of their current position as well, the switch from protective Auror mode to something else all too clear in the way his body tenses. Sirius can feel it all too well against his own.

They are too quiet, too unmoving, captured in each other with no escape. They have never been so still in each other’s arms, usually always moving, always doing something, fingers gliding over skin. Sirius’ heart is hammering in his chest and the urge to move forwards, drawing James in, pressing their lips together is becoming more and more difficult to withstand, damn the consequences, damn everything.

Why does he still feel like this? After everything that happened between them, why is it that he is so drawn in? Why is it so difficult to fight this? Shouldn’t it be easier? Isn’t that why he left - so it would become easier? How can it feel just as hard as it had before? Why can’t he let go?

There is a cracking sound as the damn flowerpot once again falls to pieces, breaking the loaded silence between them and startling James into action, jumping to his feet, most likely thinking the chest had caused something instead of Sirius’ unstable magical core destroying his greenery again.

Sirius is slowly rising after him, stretching out his battered back as James’ accusation comes back to him.

“The jacket has protection spells, by the way.”

“Huh, what?” James looks at him confused before he connects back to the conversation, “Oh, right. Well, I didn’t know that, did I? Last time I saw it, it didn’t.”

Sirius raises an eyebrow, not giving in because now that he thinks about it with a clearer head, James' actions weren't safe either. "So you thought it would be a good idea to tackle me? To what, take the damage yourself? What happened to that nifty little protection spell from earlier, that felt solid enough."

"I left my wand on the table. And my clothes also have protection spells, so without knowing your jacket had some, I did believe it was a good idea to tackle you and take the damage, yes. Especially when you do something so reckless as slice your palm open and drip it over some dark object like that! What was that about anyway?"

James still sounds exasperated, but it is the soft, familiar kind of bickering they somewhat slipped into. It isn't the first time Sirius had a rather lax attitude towards his safety, so this isn't a new argument for either of them. For the sake of finally finding out what is in the chest, Sirius decides to not comment any further on it, bringing the attention back to the dark object in question.

"Well, it all comes down to lineage and blood with purebloods, doesn't it? So the lineage works through the potions, somewhat confirming our hunch that the Blishens are involved. For the blood I just assumed that it would either work because I'm a pureblood or because it is very likely that one of my ancestors at some point shagged a Blishen, so in any case it was worth a try."

There is that look on James' face again, the same one he received while they became Animagi or when Sirius solved a particular tricky bit on the map. It had always filled Sirius with so much pride, being recognised for his intelligence instead of his looks, especially by someone so brilliant, so equal to him as James. He tries very hard not to think about it now.

"Let's take a look at the chest? I assume you are done with throwing me to the ground for the day?"

James rolls his eyes at him but there is curl in his lip that speaks of a smirk as he comments a dry, "Very funny," and moves to the chest.

With a swish of his wand, the chest carefully opens, and though he is occluding his mind, Sirius wishes he had also held his breath. The smell is distinctive, just as it always has been. The first thing he smells is the comforting scent of motor oil, exactly the brand that runs through his own machine. Then, there is the smell of fresh cut grass and pine needles, reminding him of the Potter's garden and countless times lying in the grass in the summer, pine trees swaying lightly in the wind. The last thing he smells has always been the most damning, overpowering everything else. The mix of cedarwood, mint and gooseberry prevalent only in James' perfume. An expert blend that Fleamont is making with ingredients found on the Potter estate, it's divine. No wonder James never deviated away from it.

"Goddamn Amortentia," he curses, not needing a reminder that the smell had never wavered for him, no matter how much he had wished it did over the years. He points his wand at his mouth, forming a bubble of fresh air around his nose and mouth. He takes a deep breath, trying to clear his head from the mindfog the Amortentia creates. That's when he notices that James hasn't answered him yet.

He turns to face him and is met with big, clouded hazel eyes staring at him, a strange expression on his face. He must have taken quite a deep whiff, then, probably emerging into some lovely feelings for Lily and not willing or unable to pull away from the lulling haze created by the potion. He points to James' lips and repeats the spell under clenched teeth. James' eyes become clearer immediately, blinking rapidly as the effect of the scent lessens. A few deep breaths later and his hand flies through his hair, a slight flush on his cheeks.

"Thanks. Dammit, that's some strong stuff," he huffs out, sounding annoyed with himself, "how did you manage to get through the fog so quickly? Every time I made some headway it pulled me right under again."

"I just knew it wasn't real," Sirius answers, trying to keep the bitterness out of his voice. It wasn't the first time in the past years that some maleficent being had tried to use James against him, creating the perfect fantasy that would never be true. That is what had always pulled him back, the innate knowledge that this would never be true again. It left him grateful in the moment where escaping the mental clutches was imperative, but in shambles once the dust had settled, overcome with grief for losing a reality that was never his to begin with. "I was already occluding as well, so I suppose I had some head start," he finishes his explanation and James looks at him still with that strange expression on his face.

To avoid further questions, Sirius points to the chest.

"Shall we?"

They both peer into the opened chest from a safe distance, identifying the source of the smell from a phial which looks like it had been left unclosed, free for the smell to collect in the hollow chest. Brilliant, Sirius has to admit. A last line of defence, making the potential thief so overcome with desire that they rather get to the person of their affection than focusing on the insides of the chest.

"Veela hair," James points out, already looking at the reason for the defences in the first place.

"Lucien's?"

"Hopefully. That way perhaps he could be traced," James says thoughtfully and performs a series of complicated stasis charms that transport the items to forensics in prime condition, just as they found it.

Once done, visible relief is written on his face.

"This is fantastic news. We might actually get somewhere with this case now!" he says excitedly, then looks at the empty space where the chest had sat mere seconds ago. "Not gonna lie, I'm glad to see this blasted chest go, it had my skin crawling every time I looked at it. Is it like that every time you work on a case?" he asks, obviously trying to continue with the string of conversation they established while working. But that was work, when Sirius tried his best to be professional and had something else to occupy his mind. But work had just quite literally vanished, so he doesn't feel like indulging any further into this

conversation. Truth to be told, he is still feeling too rattled from the Amortentia and every interaction he has had with James today already.

“Had a lifetime to get used to it,” he says non-committedly, turning away to get his bag.

“Right, of course. I-” Whatever James wants to say gets muddled in a loud, excited shout.

“DADDYYYYY!”

In the next moment, a miniature version of James is running into the room, not letting himself get stopped by Remus coming after him from in the hallway. Sirius’ eyes flicker to James, his whole face entirely transformed by utter fondness as he moves down to hug the child, picking him up with ease to spin him around.

“Well hello, little wizard. What did we say about running into my office without warning?” He asks despite the wide grin on his face.

The child is turned away from Sirius, but just watching James in this moment could have made him happy for a lifetime, if the circumstances had been different.

“We said I should knock before I go in. But I shouted, that counts,” he says determined.

James snorts in response, ruffling the child’s wild hair. “Right, we will have to practice that again. What are you doing here anyway?”

“Uncle Moony picked me up from school today. So we wanted to say hello,” the child says excitedly as Remus enters the office, slightly out of breath.

“Sorry Prongs, Harry is honestly getting way too fast, and too good at dodging!” His eyes travel through the room, surprise clear on his face when he spots Sirius, “Oh, hello Padfoot.”

Sirius’ response is drowned out by a loud gasp, the child – Harry – snapping around, fixing Sirius with a curious stare. From afar, he really looked like James, with wild black hair and rounded glasses sitting on top of a straight nose. Close up, Lily’s influence is hard to miss in the almond shaped, piercing green eyes and light freckles across his face.

“Padfoot, like the dog?” Harry says, eyes still wide, his face brimming with excitement.

“Uhm...,” Sirius looks at James for any kind of clue on what is going on, but James is decidedly unhelpful, face as crimson as the shirt he is wearing and looking anywhere but at Sirius. Fine, have it that way then. “Yeah, like the dog.”

It was apparently the correct answer, as Harry is letting go of James’ hand and makes some curious steps towards Sirius.

“Oh, that’s so cool! The stories of Padfoot the Dog are my favourites! Was it your parents’ too? Is that why they named you Padfoot?” Harry says, getting a bit sloppy with his words as he is speaking too fast for his mouth to form the words properly.

Sirius can't help but laugh at his excitement and crouches down to have a proper conversation eye to eye about this mysterious dog.

“Something like that. They actually named me Sirius.”

“Hmm, you don't look serious. I prefer Padfoot.”

Sirius snorts at his directness, the apple did not fall far from the tree, that much is clear already. “I will tell you a secret,” Sirius leans in conspiratorial, “me too!”

Harry giggles at him and moves his hand to a high-five, Sirius obliges of course.

“So, what's your favourite story of Padfoot the Dog?” he asks, very interested in seeing if he has read the situation correctly. If, for some reason, James had been telling his son stories of Sirius, well Padfoot.

“Ohhhh, there are so many! Hmm, the one with the ice? Where Padfoot finds the ice puddle and tries to carry the icy bits? And then they go on the adventure to rescue the snowman.”

“Oh yes, I remember that one. Quite the story, really.” Sirius does his very best to sound excited with Harry, hiding the exasperated expression reserved for James. He does indeed remember the story with the ice, not so much rescuing any snowmen though. It had been the winter of sixth year, where Sirius was strolling around as Padfoot, only to get distracted by a frozen-over puddle. For Padfoot's easier mind, the puddle had been the perfect toy, rolling around on the slippery surface and picking up broken bits from it, trying to carry the ice around only for it to slip out of his mouth over and over. He had been going at it for a good long while under the amused looks of Remus and James. When they finally got him to leave the puddle alone and turn back into his human form, he had been punished with sore teeth and a stiff jaw for days. James had been terribly entertained by it.

Harry still looks at him with a wide grin, and Sirius can't help but be glad for it. His own experience taught him not to punish a child for their parents' mistakes, and Sirius sees so much of James in him already that it is impossible not to like the child. It is an almost automatic gesture, to tap his wand against Harry's glasses and clean them – they are just as dirty as James' have always been.

“You wanna see something cool?” he grins, and Remus gives him a stern look, clearly expecting what's to come. Harry nods, eyes wide and awaiting. James eyes dart between Sirius and his son, his face still as red as a fire crab.

On Harry's nod, he turns into a Padfoot.

There is a gasp coming from both Potters. Harry's is excited and squeaky, James' is horrified.

“Dammit Pads, turn back before someone sees you! We are literally in the Ministry, you can't just-”

“He registered in France, Prongs. I guess, he can.” Remus interrupts, still not sounding happy about it, but Padfoot barks happily at them.

“Oh, right,” James mutters, hand ruffling through his hair. He moves forward to take Harry’s hand as it stretches out to touch Padfoot. “What do we do when we see an animal we want to pet?”

“We ask if we can pet it?” Harry looks up to father before looking to Padfoot again. “Can I pet you, Padfoot?”

“Well, technically you ask the owners, but, well I guess in this case...,” James rumbled response is somewhat drowned out by the excited bark Padfoot lets out, and the havoc Harry makes about petting him.

Before long they are chasing each other through the office, and Padfoot has to admit that Moony is right, Harry is incredibly fast and dodgy – for a 5-year-old.

But as all 5 year-olds that had a day of school and a wild chase with a dog, it soon becomes high time for a nap, and Harry yawns loudly before settling down on the sofa with his face pressed into the soft thick of Padfoot’s fur.

“Oh no buddy, Padfoot is not a pillow. That will give him back pain, you wouldn’t want that, right? Let’s get you to bed.” James’ voice sounds soft and a few more sentences in that tone would lull Padfoot right to sleep with Harry.

“Mhhh, ‘kay,” Harry mumbles with his eyes closed while Remus picks him up and arranges with James to take him back to the Potter’s.

“Bye, Pa’foo”, he waves weakly at the dog and Sirius lets out an amused bark in goodbye before they disappear through the door.

Sirius transforms back, stretching his long legs out on the sofa. His mood has considerably improved after the playing session, a light smile hanging loosely on his lips. “He’s a great kid,” he says, when he notices James’ eyes on him. It is a look that Sirius can’t quite place.

“He is. And I think you really made his day, possibly week, by turning into Padfoot. Thank you for that.”

“Well, apparently Padfoot is quite the popular character,” Sirius retorts, probing into why on earth James would tell Harry those stories, apparently making Padfoot such an important character in his son’s life.

“Hmm, and definitely thriving under all the praise, very susceptible to flattery,” James says instead of giving an explanation, voice sounding light in an attempt to keep the conversation so. Sirius only hums in response, not sure what there is left to say while they are tiptoeing around the Erumpent in the room. The Erumpent he doesn’t even want to address, does he? It would just open up barely healed wounds again, without the prospect of mending them.

He swings his legs off the sofa and stands up. “Right, I will be off, then. Got some stuff to prepare for the other cases.”

“Right, yeah of course. I will just finish this report and leave as well. Don’t work too long, we made some great progress today,” James says too quickly, sounding flustered.

Sirius just nods in response as he takes his bag. He makes his way over to the door in silence, but when he reaches the threshold, he lingers. After James’ outburst this morning, he thought he saw something in James’ eyes – but all the truths laid bare in that moment pale compared to the joy he’d shown just now with Harry, likely has with his family every day. Sirius is nothing but a remnant of his past, and a regrettable one at that.

There is something that needs to be said, a truth that will burn but makes it across his lips anyway.

“I’m glad you are happy, James.”

Chapter End Notes

Well well well, here we are again, with some Prongsfoot interactions! Mix in some Harry and you have the perfect recipe for confusion and feelings!

Hope you enjoyed this chapter, I'd love to hear your thoughts in the comments :)

Chapter 4: James

Chapter Notes

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

James

Before: 1977

As they are lying on the wooden footbridge behind the boat house, inhaling a puffapod stem, and the soft spring sun warming them, James doesn't think life could get much better than this. His back is leaning against the building, giving him a perfect view of the boy resting with his head in his lap. His high cheekbones are framed by dark hair, growing longer than he was ever allowed to when he was still the heir of the House of Black. Since then, it had grown down to his cheeks, and it is clear how much Sirius loves the new look, feeling more and more like the person he wants to be, free from the obligations of his heritage. James loves it as well, loves the feeling of gently pushing it behind his ears - careful to avoid the still healing piercings adorning his ears now-, loves the silky strands in his hands as he braids them, loves the little gasps Sirius lets out when he tugs on it. While the fingers of his unoccupied hand gently glide through Sirius' hair, his eyes are glued on the way Sirius' lips are drawn into a smile, getting wider every time he inhales the puffapod smoke.

Merlin, he is beautiful.

Even with his eyes closed and the fully relaxed look on his face, James can still feel the whirlwind of his magic, the supernova brightness of it that makes people recoil in fear of getting burned, while James wants nothing more than to bask in the warmth of it. He radiates like the star he was named after.

In moments like this, he allows his mind to run free, allows himself to dwell in the fantasy that this is more than two best mates looking to each other for pleasure. That this is an actual relationship, with all it entails. He knows that this isn't what Sirius wants from this, but sometimes, it is nice to just imagine it anyway.

James draws another deep breath from the puffapod, letting his mind drift further and further into the fantasy.

"Life can't get much better than this," he drawls, more to himself than anything else, but Sirius still opens his eyes to look up to him before letting his gaze wander over the black lake and up to the castle.

"I guess you have a point. Let's enjoy it while it lasts, alright?"

"You make it sound like it isn't going to?" James huffs, rolling his eyes at Sirius' impermanence, always expecting things to change, nothing lasting forever, especially not good things. James has made it his mission to prove him otherwise.

“Well, life is inherently unpredictable, isn’t it? The fact of the matter is, we will never be here again, in this moment, feeling as good as we feel right now.”

“Maybe, but there will be other moments, feeling just as good, or even better,” James says, interrupting his own optimistic speech to lightly slap Sirius for the side eye he is receiving in response.

“Oh don’t look at me like that, you twat! The future is going to be great; we will make sure of it. You will be the best Curse-breaker to ever walk this earth while I will be the best chaser to ever fly the skies. At some point, there will be a big family, enough to make an own quidditch team. And maybe one day we will come back here, think back to this moment, and you will have to admit that I was right all along.”

Sirius looks at him, slightly shaking his head in fond disbelief, still a smile hanging off his lips, but James thinks it seems sadder somehow. “If you say so, Prongs.”

“I do. You will see.”

...

“I can’t believe the old hoot made you head boy!” Sirius cackles, still bent over the letter that had arrived via owl directly into the Potter’s kitchen this morning, in the middle of their summer break from Hogwarts. It will be their last year, and James can’t wait to return with the new shiny badge on his uniform.

James snorts, “Probably because I don’t call him an old hoot.”

“Pff, you have called him worse!”

“I have not!”

“Aww, look at you, already fully in responsible head boy attitude.”

“I swear by Godric, Pads! One more word!”

“Oh, I’ve got two for you: Head Boy!”

Sirius starts running while he still speaks, clearly working quick to get some distance between them. James is chasing after him with roaring laughter. He catches up with him in Sirius’ room, tackling him in a move that has both of them falling onto the bed, pillows flying all around them. They are still laughing, Sirius’ voice muffled in the crook of James’ neck.

James pushes his face up, not wanting to miss the wild joy on Sirius’ face, his grin revealing the slightly too-sharp canines. He gives himself a moment to take it all in, the raw, devastating beauty. Then, Sirius pulls him down, their lips clashing together in something that resembles their chase. It’s messy, and there is too much teeth through all their grinning, and it is all consuming. It’s perfect.

...

“Sirius,” James exhales exasperated, struggling to hide the fondness at the sight in front of him, “your bed is so full of pillows, I can’t even see the mattress anymore! Where did you even get all those pillows? I’ve never seen that many pillows in the house, let alone those pillow covers!”

“You can’t see the blanket cause you are blinder than a bat,” Sirius shoots back, “this is a perfectly fine amount of pillows. And if you must know, I just got them from the village after work.”

A wave of fondness crushes into James as he imagines Sirius picking up all those different sized pillows, taking the time to select the matching pillowcases, a whole rainbow of colours taking over the bed. He had also already tested them out before James walked into his room in Potter Manor, going by the imprint on the pillows where they have formed around a human-shaped form.

A wide grin is spreading over his lips at the thought what it reminded him of.

Sirius eyes narrow. “What?”

“Well, you made yourself a dog bed, didn’t you?” James explains with a giggle, “Look at it, all nicely shaped to keep you all lovely hugged and snuggled.”

“I certainly did not,” Sirius shouts, and he sounds so posh, and the tips of his ears turn so red, James’ heart feels like he might burst.

He draws him in, ignoring the little protesting huffs he gets in response.

“Shame, it looks incredibly comfortable,” he says, and it earns him another huff, softer this time, just like Sirius turns soft in James’ embrace. “Would be a shame not to try it out properly,” he continues, enough mischief in his voice that Sirius’ eyes flick to him in warning, but he is too late to react to James pushing both of them forward, letting them fall into the pillows.

“Hmmm perfect,” James announces, ignoring Sirius’ unpleased groan as James’ weight pushes down on him and James nestles his head into the other boy’s neck, leaving soft kisses on the way.

The way Sirius’ arms sling closely around him, accompanied by a content sigh as he shuffles more and more into the pillows, tells James he was entirely right. Sirius did built himself an incredibly comfortable dog bed, and James has no intention to ever leave it.

...

James walks into the dorm with a wide grin on his face. It is quite hilarious, and he can’t wait to tell Sirius about it. The irony of it! The irony of Lily Evans asking him out, not even a month into the new school year. Him. Not the other way round like it was during fifth year, where he had made a total fool of himself. Sirius’ reactions back then had been between pity

and exasperation. He is going to have field day with this. He is going to tease James again about how being head boy obviously tamed him enough for even Evans to find him interesting. Then James is going to demonstrate to him how this is very much not the case.

In any case, it is awfully flattering, and he is not above admitting that it has pushed his ego quite a bit. Lily is a gorgeous witch after all.

“You won’t believe what just happened!” He exclaims with a wide grin as he spots Sirius on his bed, long legs crossed and back propped up against the headboard.

Sirius’ head snaps up from his book and immediately returns the grin, “Well, out with it then, Jamesie.”

“Right, get this. Lily Evans just asked me out!” He can’t keep the giggle out of his voice at the absurdity of the situation.

Something in Sirius’ face shifts, James can’t put his finger on it. He is still grinning back at James, there isn’t really anything different in it, but somehow there is. James isn’t really given any chance to dwell on it though, because the next bit that leaves Sirius’ mouth, somehow pulls the broom from under him.

“Well, about time. Good job, mate. Looks like you improved enough from your pathetic attempts from fifth year.”

Sirius’ voice sounds cheery, and James hates that it does. He hadn’t told Sirius to ask for permission to pursue anything. It was meant as a bit of a laugh. He can feel how the grin goes numb on his face, he isn’t even sure if he is still smiling or grimacing instead.

It was only meant as a laugh, and what he had gotten instead, is the confirmation that Sirius had no issue with him dating other people. That this thing between them is truly nothing but two mates helping each other out while waiting for the real deal. It stings more than it should, more than he wants to admit to himself.

“You think I should go for it?” James asks, needing the confirmation.

Sirius just shrugs, looking entirely unaffected. “Sure, been a long time coming, hasn’t it?”

“Right, cheers.”

It didn’t feel that way to James, nothing had been a long time coming. He had been perfectly happy with their arrangement, perhaps a bit too happy. But apparently, he was alone in that. It’s his own fault, reading into things and letting his delusions run so ridiculously wild. He feels incredibly stupid all of a sudden.

And just like that, whatever delicate thing had been growing between them, withers to nothing.

...

After: 1984

"I'm glad you are happy, James."

The words still ring in James' ears, even days later. So does his response.

"I-, I'm trying. I should be happier. I'm not."

It doesn't matter what he would have settled on, because Sirius is gone before he can come up with a response. And perhaps that is the problem - that the words "I'm happy" have become too difficult to say, even before Sirius made a reappearance in his life.

He had been happy for a while, had forced himself to move on and live his life to the fullest of his abilities, dancing in the rain with Lily and making up bedtime stories for Harry. When had it shifted again? When did happiness become such a fleeting feeling, a fickle little thing constantly snuffed out by a sense of duty and responsibility instead? When was the last time he had truly laughed with Lily, or even spent time with her without one of them having to rush out of the door for some appointment or emergency?

"So, how has the past week been?" Remus snaps him out of his thoughts, eyeing him over the teacup in his hands. They both know Remus doesn't give a shit about the mundane things he's been up to, so James cuts straight to the chase.

"He isn't really speaking to me unless it's relating to a case. There are sometimes those moments when it feels just like before, where we fall right back into our own way. But whenever he recognises it, he pulls back so sharply it's honestly giving me whiplash. I just want to talk to him, Moony," he hates how desperate his voice sounds, but he continues anyway.

"We haven't addressed anything from before, absolutely nothing. And that's driving me mad because I want to talk about it. I want to know what he has been doing in the past years, all of it. But there is just never an opening, he doesn't allow for one at all."

James rubs his face in his hands, exhausted by the week he has had, constantly on edge at work to not miss anything Sirius might be saying or doing. He is yearning to see just a smile.

When he looks up from his hands, Remus gives him a disapproving look, the corner of his lips curled downwards, brows furrowed. "You are obsessing over him, Prongs. How do you see this ending? Cause I don't have to remind you that you have a wife and child at home. Lily is my friend as well, and I know you are going through a rough patch, but I don't want to see her get hurt."

"Do you think I want that?!" he snaps, unable to hold back on the frustration any longer. "Dammit I never want to see her unhappy. I've done all I can to ensure she is happy. I've given up Quidditch, haven't I? Taken on a job I can stand less and less each passing year for no other reason than that the hours are flexible enough to work around her schedule at Mungo's. I've tried so hard to be a good husband to her, be worthy of the person she is. How is that not enough?!"

“Because you are doing it out of duty, not love. I’m not saying you don’t love her, but I am wondering if you love her enough to make it through the rest of your life like that and not resent your choices at some point.”

Remus’ voice is gentle, not rising to the heat in James’ own and the words hit so deeply they deflate all his anger and leave only devastation behind. James looks down to his tea, blinking harshly. His voice sounds hoarsely as he asks, “Why are you saying this, Remus?”

“I saw the look on your face while you watched Harry and Sirius in your office. I had forgotten you could look so besotted, but that is because I haven’t seen that expression on you for years. Since Sirius left, to be precisely.”

There is a long, painful sigh coming from James as he lets his head fall onto the sofa’s backrest, staring at the ceiling in the hopes for a revelation. All he sees instead, is the moment Sirius and Harry got to know each other, how Sirius so instinctively knew how to speak to Harry. How Harry had been so curious to get to know him, usually being rather reserved around strangers. He can’t help imagining his life looking like that, with Sirius by his side like this.

“So, I’m just asking to understand if you have an idea of what you want to do next?” Remus probes.

But what is there to do? His life would be in shambles if he finally gets the courage to speak to Lily about their relationship. Even if she doesn’t hate him for wasting years of her life, Harry would still grow up so differently than James had wanted him to. And Sirius still hates his guts. He would be all alone. And after Sirius left, he realised he doesn’t cope well with being alone.

“I have absolutely no clue, Moons.”

The conversation is still brewing in his head even days later. He looks down at the report he should be finishing and doesn’t remember when he stopped actually reading it. This time, he doesn’t get much of a chance to ponder over it, interrupted by Benjy Fenwick’s thundering voice in front of his door.

“Sirius, mate! So you are actually back in the country then? And not a single owl! I should be offended, but you can make it up to me over a drink at the Leaky after work?”

James’ head snaps up to the door, wishing it wasn’t closed, and Sirius’ silky voice wasn’t getting swallowed by the wood between them. He grinds his teeth together, suffering through endless minutes of small talk of which he is only privy to a very one-sided point of view. Did Sirius accept his invitation for drinks? Oh, Benjy must have a field day with this, getting to parade Sirius around the pub just as he had during their fling at Hogwarts. James grinds his teeth.

As the door opens, he has only mere seconds to school his features into something that doesn’t look like something worthy of incinerating the door. The laugh on Sirius’ lips dies

when he spots James on his desk, going back to the mask of indifference that is all he gets to see of Sirius these days. Couldn't he at least have the decency to put this face on before he opens the door? Must he really just start looking like this when he sees James? As if he is some kind of dementor that sucks any joy out of him at the mere reminder of James' existence? As if this wasn't his office and he was entirely expected to be here?

"Morning," Sirius says, neutrally, professionally. Because that is all he gets these days. Laughs are apparently reserved for Benjy fucking Fenwick.

He can feel his temper rising even more.

"Didn't know it is 'bring your cat to work' - day," James remarks at the orange Kneazle that waits patiently by his feet.

"That's a Kneazle," Sirius says dryly, as if he truly believes James doesn't know the difference. Of course, he is aware that James knows what a Kneazle looks like, which makes this even more annoying. But two can play this game, and at this stage, James is willing to do anything to get a reaction out of Sirius.

"Sure looks like a cat to me."

"It is clearly a Kneazle, no cat would get that big."

"You sure? Could just be a very overfed cat, if you ask me. They might have tricked you to make a quick sickle."

"What kind of cat would have that kind of tail? It's literally textbook lion tail!"

"Pff, as if they couldn't just charm a cat's tail. In fact, you probably wouldn't even need a spell, just take a fluffy cat and shave the tail like that."

Sirius lets out an annoyed huff of air. "I swear to Merlin, James, if you say the word cat one more time, you will regret it."

James can't help it, the thrill he feels as Sirius fixes him with a stare, unable to hide the glint in his eyes. He needs this as much as James does. A way to release this pent-up tension between them that is building and building and building.

He puts on his most smug smirk and looks Sirius dead in the face, "Well, that would be catastrophic, wouldn't it?"

The Kneazle hisses and Sirius curls his lips, flashing his canines in a move that could be grin or a snarl, James would take either. "Meet me in the duelling room."

Sirius motions for the Kneazle to walk into the office and turns on his heel into the direction of the training room, James can't hide the grin on his face as he watches his back.

He looks down to the Kneazle, which is still eyeing him with disdain.

“Oh don’t look at me like that. I’m well aware that I’m pathetic, alright? Just go and have a nap.”

While the Kneazle jumps onto the sofa, James brims with anticipation as he makes his way over to the duelling room.

Sirius is already in position, ridding himself of his leather jacket and revealing a short-sleeved shirt and a left arm full of tattoos. Intricate runes following in swirling patters around the muscles, moving in front of James’ eyes as Sirius flexes said muscles, crossing his arms. James can feel the heat rise in his cheek when he realises how obvious Sirius just caught him staring. He can hardly be blamed though. Not when this tattoo would warrant a much more thorough investigation, not when he can still see the Potter crest inked into his arm as well, not when the v-neck reveals his collarbone and the hint of more ink.

“First blood,” Sirius declares dryly, and James’ feels the hitch of excitement pass through him, filling him with adrenaline. It’s an outdated duelling technique, and they don’t even do it much at auror training, but of course, Sirius would understand the thrill of it, understands the desire for crackling magic, buzzing with power, being let loose without restrictions.

James nods, a loose smile hanging off his lips. With a swish of his wand, the empty duelling space changes, turns into a setting that is very close to their old DADA classroom. There are blackboards with enchantments and sigils on the side, and tables and chairs orderly arranged. James made sure to also conjure up a very specific one. One that carries the initials SB & JP carved into the wood. The one they had so thoroughly, blissfully defiled that one evening. Sirius’ eyes flicker with recognition. Yes, James hadn’t chosen this setting by chance. If Sirius wasn’t going to acknowledge their past, James would nudge him towards it anyway, and he isn’t one for subtlety. He is done with all the unspoken tension between them.

“Let’s make it even more exciting, shall we? If I win, we will talk.”

Sirius huffs out air. “If I win, we won’t.”

The confidence that Sirius has, while going up against a duel-proven auror, pushes a thrill through James’ veins, and he forcefully wills his thoughts to return to the duel. The stakes are higher than ever, and he would not make the mistake of underestimating Sirius. He licks his lips in anticipation.

Once they have moved through the traditional opening of a duel, the first thing that come hurling at him is the desk with their initials. He throws up a shield just in time, surprised by Sirius’ first move. It isn’t his usual style; Sirius is too good with offensive spells to rely on his surroundings so early on in a duel. James tries not to take it personal as the desk splinters into pieces from the force of his shield.

James fires a quick salvo of stunners in his direction, but they are counted as quickly as he shoots them out. To break through Sirius defences, he moves around the room until he stands in a straight line with the old globe in the corner of the room, Sirius the only thing between them. As he casts more spells with his wand to keep Sirius at bay, he covertly moves his left

hand to move the globe in with a wandless *Accio*. He is quite proud of his wandless magic and not beneath using it to get an advantage. Letting Sirius get hit with the globe should break his concentration, however before the globe can hit him, the runes on Sirius left arm light up blood-red and he throws himself out of the way in the last second. James blinks in surprise and almost gets hit by the globe that is flying at him with considerable speed. It distracts him long enough for Sirius to take cover behind a flipped desk, and when James tries to move it, he finds it locked in place.

So instead, he moves closer, trying to get sight on Sirius again. With the barricade Sirius had built, he won't be able to approach without losing his own cover. He needs a way to get behind Sirius quickly enough to dodge his attacks.

He can feel his sore muscles aching as he gets into the position to sprint, but it's a welcoming burn as he sprints forwards. As he runs, he casts a *Glacius* strong enough to freeze the ground in front of his feet, the force of his movement enough to glide over the ice. It gives him a few valuable seconds to get behind Sirius, change their position and get out of the deadlock they are in. It only gets more heated from there. They exchange a series of spells, neither holding back on the nasty stuff. There is a silent understanding between them that it would be insulting not to give this their best. Exchanges of rapid-fire curses and spells fly around them, some dodged, some blocked, neither of them gaining any ground.

There is something captivating about the way Sirius throws curses at him. His magic, like a tempest that surrounds him, a constant vibrant display of power that makes people tremble in his presence. Sirius is devastating in every sense of the word. He throws out curses in different languages unfaltering, adjusting his wand movements seamlessly. It's not particularly clean, there are rugged edges, but it is elegant nonetheless in a dangerous, predatory way. Sirius handles his wand in a duel like he handles everything in life, with little regard to people who can't catch up with him.

James can though. He always could. James' magic moves against him in chaos to Sirius' order. Their magic crashes against each other, tugging and pulling, never falling entirely apart, instead pushing each other higher and higher, colliding together in a way that brims with power. It makes the hair on James' arms rise with goosebumps.

His undoing in the end, doesn't come in the shape of a spell, at least not at first. It comes in the shape of Sirius' tight black jeans, sitting low on his hips. In itself, it would be slightly distracting, however not fatally so. That is, until Sirius lifts his arms while casting. As his shirt rides upwards to accommodate the movement, it gives James an unobstructed view of the perfect alabaster skin, and fatally, the dark ink in shape of two antlers, red roses blooming on them and some petals falling to the ground in a soft motion. It is a forbidden sight, one with so many obscene memories that James' brain turns entirely to mush. Sirius is still wearing James' mark on his skin, just as James is still carrying the canis major constellation. He is so mesmerised by the stretch of Sirius' skin and the falling petals that he doesn't see the spell coming.

It hits him straight in the chest, too quick for him to counter, and sends him flying, toppling him over in the process. He lands face first on the ground, and the pain shooting through his nose, accompanied by the cracking sound, does not sound promising.

When he gets onto his knees with a heavy groan, he can feel the blood gushing freely from his nose. The classroom looks unrecognisable, broken wood lies splattered around the room, a puddle in the middle of it where James' ice has melted away. His eyes lock onto Sirius, walking towards him with perfect swagger and a smirk on his lips. Only the rapid movement of his chest shows he is panting just as heavily as James himself.

He comes to a stop in front of James, wand drawn and pointed at his face. James isn't sure if he is going to get hexed further, and honestly, he feels so humiliated and embarrassed, he would probably prefer to pass out anyway. But then, he hears the soft "*Episkey*" and feels his nose slot back into place with a sharp snap. He wipes the blood away with the sleeve of his shirt and nods in thanks. Then, he lets himself fall backwards onto the ground again, wiping the sweat from his face with his hands while he gets his breathing under control.

From the back of his eye, he watches Sirius move towards the door, and a pang of regret rushes through him. What a damn rookie mistake to get distracted like that, it's embarrassing.

Sirius doesn't leave though.

James curiously pushes himself to his elbows, watching intently as Sirius fishes a small paper package from his jacket and then walks back towards him. Towards *him*, not the door!

Sirius sits down next to him, legs crossed. His gaze is purely fixed on the pack of cigarettes, as his long, bejewelled fingers are moving to retrieve one. He slips it between his lips and James can't help but stare at it, almost missing the moment when Sirius wordlessly offers him the pack.

"I stopped smoking," James says as he grabs one of the cigarettes and draws it out.

"Sure, me too." Sirius replies without missing a beat, as he lights his own.

Finally, their eyes find each other and after a moment of utter silence, there is finally a humorous crinkle in Sirius' eyes and they both snort.

It is enough to break through the ice, such as the duel apparently was enough to release some of that tension, making them talk even when James lost their bet. He avoids the questions that are actually burning through him. It is nice enough to have Sirius in a talkative mood at all, and he would rather bite off his own tongue than disrupting it.

"So... why exactly did you bring a Kneazle into the office?" he asks between the draws of the cigarette.

"What Kneazle? That's a cat."

"Oh fuck off."

Sirius snorts. "Fine. That's Phoebos. My Kneazle, and a fantastic colleague, actually. Sharp at noticing dark magic and with a wicked instinct for danger. He stayed in France while I settled in, but Henry, my former mentor, sent him through earlier today. I didn't just want to leave him in the flat."

James' lips draw into a smile at the name. He hadn't forgotten Sirius' interest in mythology, of course he would name his pet after Apollo, the Greek god known to ward off evil spirits and curses.

"I always thought it was a bit ironic that cats like you so much." It reminds him of Hogwarts, how he had to compete with the cats of the Gryffindor common room to get his head in Sirius' lap before one of the furry little beasts claimed the spot.

"Well, obviously they are very intelligent animals."

A chuckle escapes James at that, glad to hear that Sirius jokes just as arrogantly as he used to.

"You said you had a mentor? Is that normal for Curse-breaker training?"

Sirius is quiet for a moment, looking contemplative, and James holds his breath, hoping he did not push too much. It still seems like a safe question, and James is dying to hear about anything Sirius is willing to offer about his life in the past years.

Before he can worry too much about Sirius withdrawing again, he starts speaking. "Not quite. There isn't really a training programme like you have for aurors. It's more like, you get an induction, and then most of the actual learning happens on the road as they give you the assignments. After a few years, or whenever they deem you fit, you get invited into the Curse-breaker guild, where they actually share the trade secrets with you. But to be fair, at that point, you have probably figured most of it out already or died trying."

James opens his mouth, quite shocked how casual Sirius is talking about the potential death threat of his work. But then, the more he thinks about it, this way of learning sounds perfect for him. Sirius has never been one to sit idle through lessons, rather wanting to read a book and teach himself without supervision, never too phased with the danger this approach may entail. It allows him the freedom to use his instincts, tailor his own learning to what he deems important. James' heart tightens at the thought that Sirius is doing exactly what he always wanted to – at least one of them managed to. This is how he had always been thriving, engulfing himself in research in the library for their most complicated inventions at school, and discussing them afterwards with a person he trusts to be able to follow him. This person used to be James. Is it now this mentor Sirius told him about?

"So, when did this mentor come in then?"

"Oh, I met Henry on a job in Iran, when my head was almost between the teeth of a Manticore."

"What?" James shouts, gaping at Sirius who had just casually told him that he had not only seen one of the rarest and most violent magical beasts but also apparently almost got eaten by it?

"Did you know Iran has something similar to the pyramids?" he asks, before he takes a breath from his cigarette. "Turns out Manticores love them for their lairs. I was still in my first-year assignments and entirely ignorant to different cultures, thinking magic is the same everywhere and I know it all." Sirius rolls his eyes at himself, a small smile on his lips.

“Well, Henry found me just in time, saved me, gave me the bollocking of my life, and then agreed to mentor me. Something along the lines of me being ‘a ridiculous danger to myself if left unsupervised, but too talented to let the potential go to waste.’”

The laugh escapes James before he can stop it. That does sound so familiar he is entirely sure if he ever met this Henry, they would get along splendidly. He can already imagine the wise, old wizard behind the name and hopes he gets a chance to thank him for saving Sirius’ life if they ever meet.

Before he can ask more questions, hear more about the life Sirius has built for himself, the door swings open. He is about to shout at the person who dares to interrupt their talk, when he sees the serious expression on Benjy’s face.

“Forensics had a breakthrough. We can track Lucien if we act fast. Meeting in the Operations room asap.”

Both scramble to their feet, not wasting a second. Technically, James should tell Sirius to stay put, that this is solely Auror business. But they don’t know what they will be facing, and James would feel considerably better having him around.

Chapter End Notes

Did somebody say tension???

Hope you enjoyed the chapter, let me know your thoughts in the comments!

Chapter 5: Sirius

Chapter Notes

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

Sirius

Before: 1977-1978

Sirius thought he had been prepared for it. After all, good things don't last. It's the rule of his world, the rule of his universe. He had long made peace with the fact. And yet, when James told him, grinning from one ear to the other, that Evans had asked him out, it had come entirely unexpected, catching him like a bludger to the gut. Somehow, he naively thought that they would have more time. That he could have James for just a bit longer. That the end of them wouldn't be so abrupt, leaving him feeling like someone severed a limb from him.

It had always been inevitable; James' clear picture of his future entirely clashing with everything that Sirius is. A family, kids. Nothing that Sirius could ever give him.

Sirius is no stranger to pain, his family made sure of that from a young age. He is good at bearing it and even better at hiding it, locking away all feeling behind a mask of arrogance and false laughter. But this, this cuts through skin, flesh, and bones, and twists his heart more than any vicious curse ever had before. And still, he would put on the familiar mask and bear it, because having James as his best friend was still so much better than not having him at all. If that's all he could have, he would take it, and be grateful for it.

It had always been inevitable, and yet, when James leaves the dorm shortly after his announcement, something in Sirius breaks. Breaks so badly that it knocks the breath out of him, and he slings his arms around himself in a desperate attempt to hold himself together.

Blacks don't cry, he hears his mother's voice shout in his head as the letters from his book become all blurry. He throws it against the wall. *Blacks don't cry*, he hears his father command as he wipes furiously at the hot liquid that won't stop running down his cheeks. He lets cold water wash away any trace of it. *Blacks don't cry*, he hears his grandfather scold as he feels the punch land on his face, feels his lip split open.

It's not enough.

He clenches his fist and punches back, landing it straight on Mulciber's nose. It is pure luck that he is the first Slytherin Sirius run into, because Mulciber knows how to throw a punch and is quick to anger into a proper fight. He is built like a bull and Sirius doesn't stand the slightest of chances against him without his wand. A few more taunts and he is lifted up by the collar of his shirt, more punches batter on his face.

Sirius grins, maniacal and bloody, because finally, finally he is getting somewhere with this. Then he spits the blood right into Mulciber's face and waits for the next punches to land.

Fists rain in on him and there comes a blissful moment where the pain in his body numbs everything else, where his vision gets fuzzy around the edges and he is so close to not having to feel anything at all. Then, Mulciber's weight on him is suddenly gone, and Sirius' mourns the loss as reality comes back into focus. He turns his head, and his eyes fall onto a familiar, carefully polished pair of black oxfords.

"You are ruining the fun," he chokes out, slowly pushing himself up on his hands and knees, spitting out the blood in his mouth.

Careful hands are helping him up, dragging him into the potions classroom nearby while buckling under his dead weight. "Gryffindors have a strange way of having fun," Regulus presses out through his teeth as he heaves Sirius into a chair.

"Oh shut it, Reggie. You have barely spoken to me all year, you don't get to lecture me now," Sirius spits out, feeling his temper on the rise again already.

Regulus gives him a long look, trying to read Sirius as much as Sirius is trying to read him, but they have both become too good at masking.

"Fine, I will get Potter."

"No!" Sirius almost shouts it out, a flicker of emotion crossing over his face, too strong to hide. It likely does more in stalling his brother than his shout does. Regulus looks at him again, frown on his face as he is assessing the situation, always playing scenarios out in his head.

"Alright then," he mutters finally, turning away from Sirius to rummage through Slughorn's potion supplies. A potion is pointedly put in front of him, not leaving Sirius with a choice to decline. He needs to heal anyway, James can't know what he had been up to.

"What were you doing in the corridor?" Sirius asks as he waits for the potion to work.

"It's in the dungeons. It's you who is out of place here," Regulus replies sharply but then he takes a breath, composing himself, "I heard you run into Mulciber."

"Ah, so you came to enjoy the show? Watching the disgraced heir take a beating? Been a while since you last saw that, huh? Missed me much?" Sirius knows that this is not what Regulus is doing there, the fact that he is sitting in a classroom feeling his injuries heal is more than enough proof. But as the pain fades away more and more, he already feels like picking a fight again.

Regulus gives him an unimpressed look. "Well, you might be burned off the tapestry, but you still carry my last name. It reflects poorly on me now when you let yourself get beaten up like a squib by the likes of Mulciber."

The counter is as much thin air as Sirius' original taunt, and neither of them can hold back an amused snort. He didn't think he would get to speak like this with Regulus again after his run from Grimmauld Place, they had barely talked at all in the past year, neither of them knowing where they stand. Sirius had missed him more than he wanted to admit to himself.

Regulus shifts, putting his weight from one foot to the other as the silence draws on. "I'm sorry I didn't do more to stop them."

Sirius shakes his head. "I'm glad you didn't. They would have done the same to you. I'm sorry I couldn't take you with me."

"I wouldn't have come."

A long sigh escapes him, because he knows this, but it still hurts to have Regulus say it. That he would stay in this hell hole instead of going with Sirius, likely for reasons only Slytherins could understand. "I know."

There is only a small nod coming from his brother, but his eyes are fixed on Sirius with a worrying expression. "Will you let me help next time?"

Next time, because Regulus has already deduced that there will be a next time, and he knows Sirius well enough to be right. For how good they have become at bearing pain, neither of them had ever learned how to deal with it without turning it into an inferno. "Probably not."

A nod, because Regulus hadn't expected any other answer. "I will be there anyway."

"I know."

The next time Regulus finds him is after he sees James and Lily kiss for the first time. James' hands are on her hips to draw her in closer, Lily's fingers fly through his hair. Both have a familiar little smile on their lips, indicating that this isn't the first kiss they share. Sirius feels like throwing up. Instead, he goes to find some Slytherins to rile up, and Regulus finds him after, already equipped with potions. The image still won't leave his mind, he gets a first-row seat to it every time he closes his eyes. The collection grows and grows, until he avoids the common room altogether and usually excuses himself the moment Evans makes her way over to them. He can feel James' frown on his back when he does, but it only lasts as long as Evans needs to reach him.

When it is no longer enough to pile one pain over another, he tries to numb it instead. His monthly puffapod stem stash is gone in less than two weeks, but at least in those two weeks he can fall asleep and doesn't wake up in the middle of the night to empty sheets where there used to be a warm body.

"So you what, just decided to smoke MY puffapod stems without me even being present?!" James says exasperated one evening when he notices his own missing stash.

Sirius just shrugs unapologetic as he stretches out his legs in his bed, too high to care. It's a glorious feeling after caring all too much. "Looked like you were busy."

"What, for all 10 of my puffs?"

"You are busy a lot these days, Prongs." It's meant to sound nonchalant, like Sirius doesn't care at all, instead his voice sounds bitter even to his own clouded ears.

James huffs out an annoyed breath before he walks over to Sirius. "Budge," he commands and shoves on him until he manages to squeeze in on his bed. Sirius feels bratty enough to not give him even an inch more, so their shoulders are pressed tightly together as James stubbornly tries to get comfortable. He takes the puffapod stem from Sirius' lips with a defiant glint in his eyes. Sirius lets him. Of course he does.

When his usual - and only - supplier suddenly refuses to sell to him, Sirius very much suspects James behind it. He wants to be angry about it, but he knows James has a point, especially when he started turning up high to McGonagall's classes and it was only thanks to him that Sirius got away with it. It is NEWT year after all, and he is acutely aware he doesn't have a fortune or name to fall back on anymore once they leave Hogwarts in mere months. His grades can't be slipping if he wants to go into Curse-breaking.

Instead, he starts spending more time as Padfoot. It is what he should have done from the start, working better than pain and drugs combined. With his thick fur coat, the slowly warming weather is perfect for prolonged time spent napping at the edge of the forest, where a large black dog doesn't seem out of the ordinary. Padfoot's way of thinking is blissfully simple, when he sees James, there is only happiness, excitement, and a strong sense of loyalty, not leaving room for any other feeling. Of course, it's also helping that James always carries around some bacon for him, still warm from the stasis charm it is under. James had turned vegetarian shortly after their transformation, losing all appetite for meat, while Sirius' own had only increased. Padfoot is very pleased with the knowledge that James' carries around a treat specifically for him.

As the year passes by, it becomes harder and harder to avoid Evans. She seamlessly blends into their little group, joining them whenever she can, and Sirius wants nothing more than to hide James away for himself in those moment. Instead, he is perfectly pleasant to her, because it is important to James - even when he repeatedly claims it's still casual between them -, and because it is hard not to be. Objectively, if she hadn't been stealing James from him, he is sure he would have liked her. He can see exactly why James does. Besides from the actual beautiful face, she is sharp witted and funny, passionate about her interests and outspoken about the things she believes in. She is also excellent in explaining the muggle world to him.

More so, she is kind. And James deserves this kindness, it's so much more than Sirius has to offer. Where Sirius is a burning inferno, she is a cooling pool of calmness. Where he is acting first, thinking second, she is considerate in her actions and the people it impacts. Where people retreat from his raw energy, watching him worriedly like he is going to explode at any

moment, they greet her with a smile and a kind word. Where he has always been too much, too intense, she is just right. James calls him Supernova, he is calling her Lilyflower.

Because Lily Evans is worthy of James, more worthy than he could ever be, he tries his best to like her.

“You know, it seems a bit silly even to admit it now, but I was always a bit scared of you!” Lily giggles into her cup, cheeks flushed from the drinks they have had all night. They are sitting in front of the fireplace in the common room and Sirius made a point of squeezing into the love seat next to James, not giving Evans the chance to claim the spot first. They may not be shagging anymore, but Sirius would be damned before he gives up the casual closeness and touches they returned to. James’ fingers are in his hair, alternating between massaging his scalp and braiding little braids into his hair. It’s something he does sometimes when he feels unsettled and needs his hands to do something. They stop at her words.

Evans’ confession takes him out of his peaceful little place and he opens his eyes to look at her. “Most people are,” he shrugs.

“Not James though,” she remarks, because everyone knows that Sirius and James have been like broomstick and snitch from day one. And it is true, everyone else had kept their distance from him in the beginning, even Remus and Peter had been James’ friends first and took their time to warm up to Sirius. Not James though, James had matched him from the start, not even the slightest bit intimidated by the raw edges that made others wary. In the end, he did become friends with the Gryffindors, he can be fun and charismatic after all, and his looks certainly helped as well. It had just taken more time and it never felt as carelessly easy as it felt for people talking to James.

“That’s because James is scarier than me, Evans” he says lightly. James may be the sweetest person as he is sipping on his butter beer and braiding Sirius’ hair, but there is not a single doubt in his mind that James would burn the world down for the people he loved.

Lily looks doubtfully at him, but James lets out an amused little snort, not negating the statement as his fingers again gently brush some hair from Sirius’ face to pull it into the braid. Sirius leans into the touch as the knuckles accidentally glide over his cheekbone. James’ eyes snap from his own fingers to Sirius’ eyes instead.

Sometimes, when Sirius sees James looking at Lily, he wants to scream – don’t look at her, look at me. And every time James does, Sirius finds it hard to fully grasp the intensity of it. There is a difference there, to the looks Lily receives from him. With Lily, it’s an easy smile on his lips and fondness in his eyes, but it doesn’t match the burning look Sirius receives when James’ eyes are fixed on his lips for too long. Or on the slither of skin when Sirius’ shirt rises up just enough to reveal this very specific tattoo, the one he got in retaliation for the canis major constellation on James’ skin.

Sirius notices those looks, and he isn’t a stranger to them. If it was anyone else, he would know exactly what they mean, but with James it is a mystery all over. Because James has had

him, but still decided to go for Evans instead. It is all incredibly confusing, and it would be so easy to delude himself into hoping.

Instead, he tries to move on, leans into all the easy flirtations that come his way, adamant to prove to himself that he has a chance at happiness even without James at his side in that way.

...

After: 1984

“It’s Auror business, James,” one of James’ colleagues insists, and Sirius is tempted to roll his eyes if it wouldn’t risk further antagonising him. He has a point, it is Auror business, Sirius is a civilian and technically has no bearing in an Auror operation. But he *wants* to be there. He wants to see this through as much as the Aurors on the case.

“I can vouch for Sirius’ duelling skills and given the case so far, it is likely that his vast experience with curse breaking will be necessary.”

“If this was my case-”

“It’s not,” James says, voice sounding icy, “and we are wasting time discussing this. Move out team.”

It puts the group into action, following James through the door he had just left.

“Fine but then you are teaming with him,” Jackson mumbles under his breath.

Sirius can’t help the snort that escapes him. “Obviously,” he replies patronising. As if he would ever team up with anybody but James. His feelings may be all over the place, contradicting himself at any turn, but one thing is as certain as it has always been: If James walks into a dangerous situation, Sirius will be right there with him.

He sneaks a small look to James in his Auror mode, walking intently and confident, just like he had walked onto the field on every quidditch match. There is a rarely seen stern impression on his face, brows furrowed and eyes bright with anticipation and adrenaline. His mouth is tight, but Sirius could swear he saw the corners of his lips twitch at his comment.

The portkey takes them to the edge of a forest, hidden from the view of the adjacent castle. It looks old, something not quite ready to be called a ruin, but also far away from the imposing look it must once have been. The air smells boggy and wet to his fine canine senses, confirming they have travelled to the Cairngorms in the Scottish Highlands.

“Surveillance reports some visible activity from the walls and windows, so we will use disillusionment charms to move closer. Once inside, as discussed. Jackson’s team go right,

Fenwick's cover the left wing, Sirius and I will take the cellars." James is fully in his operation mode, and while Sirius usually doesn't follow any orders but his own, he would always make this one exemption.

All nod in agreement and Benjy winks at him with a grin on his face, making Sirius snort. James looks ready to smite Benjy on the spot, which is enough to fully sober Sirius as well. They get into position and Sirius doesn't want to think of James' presence next to him as comforting, but he can't help himself.

What's new, when it comes to James, he thinks grimly and clenches his teeth together, collecting his mind for the task ahead.

"Ready?" James says calmly and they move into action. Glamoured and in the cover of the trees, they carefully make their way to the walls, scanning for traps and other nasty surprises on the way. Watching the quick work with which the aurors carefully re-wire the protective barrier surrounding the castle to create a free passage, Sirius is quite impressed by the efficiency with which James' team moves. The serious crime division clearly is top notch under James' leadership.

Once inside, a few quick hand signals and they split up. According to the Surveillance team, most activity in the castle has been detected in the upper levels, they suspect the main operations of the potions ring to work from there. It will be up to James' team to clear the upper levels of the building, raiding the potioneers and everyone else they can apprehend. Sirius and James will be looking specifically for Lucien. They already know he is in the building, just not exactly where. In the end, they settled on the cellars as the most likely spot because the hair they found looked frail, not at all the glossy thickness Veela hair is known for, likely caused by a lack of sun- and moonlight.

The entrance hall of the Blishen residence somehow reminds him of Black Manor, with the large staircase leading to the upper levels where all the important rooms are situated. There are also doors to the left and right on the ground level, but they look considerably less opulent than the inviting staircase. The ground floor is for the unimportant rooms, reserved for house elf lodgings, the kitchens and other things that wizards like to keep beneath them – quite literally, in old houses such as this.

Sirius moves towards a dark painted door next to the staircase. This must be the entrance to the cellar, he is sure of it. But a warm hand on his shoulder stops him before he can move forward. James lightly shakes his head, making a circling motion with his finger which likely means he wants to take a look around first. Sirius frowns, the door is right there, what's there to look for?

A quick flow of hand signals, then he's pointing to the door. It isn't difficult to read the signs, James had signalled them to him in almost every quidditch match they played, whenever he wanted Sirius to create a diversion. That's what he thinks this is then, a diversion, with the actual entrance to Lucien's holding place hidden somewhere else. Clever. Sirius nods and they carefully move to the left door instead.

It must have been house elf ledgings once upon a time, but the small beds are all deserted now, with no remnants of the lives who once occupied this room. They move forward, as

expected it takes them into the kitchen - a large space, with three fully equipped workstations and an assortment of pans and pots hanging on the walls. His eyes glide through the room, but nothing of worth stands out so he is intent to move on until a soft nudge to his side stops him.

James points towards a spot in the corner of the room, a spot his eyes glance over, once, twice, not able to hold the attention fixed to it. A notice-me-not spell, he realises, as he pushes through the defences and finally manages to focus on the unassuming door. Of course, James had seen right through it. James, who always manages to take in all the details he is confronted with. It is nothing short of brilliant to set such a wide and yet deep reaching focus, and Sirius tries not to look too impressed as they walk towards the door.

Their diagnostic spells flare up with a number of barriers and seals that are cast to keep intruders out. They look at each other, James has an excited flare in his eyes now that catches Sirius by surprise and makes a smirk escape him.

This is a serious operation, an important mission with someone's life at stake, and yet, he can't help the giddy feeling that pushes to the surface. It feels like they are back at Hogwarts, sneaking around to discover the castle and find all the places where they really are not allowed to be. The feelings grows even stronger when James motions for him to guard while he is working on dismembering the net of protections spells.

Sirius has a hard time focusing on keeping watch, his eyes keep drifting back to James, who kneels down as he works so intricately through the barriers, concentrated calm look on his face which somehow is a stark contrast to the wild black hair that is covering some of his face. It has always been a marvel to see James do complicated magic, and Sirius shifts from one leg to the other, trying his hardest not to get distracted by it.

A faint click announces his success and Sirius lets out a relieved breath as he turns towards the door. He points at his nose and his mind, silently telling James to occlude and hold his breath. After all, they really wouldn't want a repetition of the amortentia incident.

Both of them are tensely waiting for something to happen as the door is pushed open, but – nothing. The door reveals nothing but a narrow spiral staircase, going downwards. Wound in a clockwise way while descending, the stairs were designed to put the descender at a disadvantage, their right wand arm being tight against the narrowest part of the stair, close to the central pole and as such restricting movement. A grin escapes Sirius as he looks down onto the wand in his left hand. Ha, take that, ancient architects. As if reading his thoughts, James lets out a humoured breath, switching his own wand into his left hand. Of course, he would have learned to cast with both hands, he already worked on it at school. It is unfortunate that Sirius had always been drawn to this kind of casual competence and power James radiates, and he turns away before the thought can take root.

The staircase ends in a narrow pathway, looking more and more like a dark cave carved into the stone. Lighting the way with a *lumos* would be too dangerous, they would rather not announce their presence, so instead, they walk towards the ever-growing darkness. It gets so dark that Sirius barely can make out the tip of his own wand, and he feels a warm hand on his shoulder as James is latching onto him in an attempt to stay close. It's right at the curve of his neck, not restricting his shoulder or wand movement at all, but it is worse this way, because

James' soft fingers brush against the skin on his neck, unhindered by fabric. His mind is running high on adrenaline, but without any apparent danger distracting him, it is all he can think about.

The passage twists and turns as they make it past yet another corner, a faint blue light becoming visible. They slowly make their way towards it, while scanning the floor in front of them for traps. If this really should lead to the cell of Lucien, clearly his captors thought themselves save enough not to bother with protection spells past the cellar door. As they get closer, a rounded, larger cave becomes visible. Sirius blinks against the sudden blue brightness that tints the room.

The fingers brushing against his neck linger even when their field of vision vastly improves. Sirius should shake them off, most likely James had just forgotten about it, but he finds himself too weak, not wanting to break the connection just yet.

In itself, the room looks entirely unassuming, nothing more than an empty stone cave - if it wasn't for the silver tray with remnants of food on the ground. It's lying in front of one of the walls, and there are light scuff marks on the stony ground, as if the tray had been pushed over it repeatedly.

"Illusion?" Sirius whispers, and James nods before he springs into action, the warmth on his neck suddenly gone, leaving the cold of the cave to creep back in. The illusion is strong, holding up under the pressure James submits it to, so Sirius joins in. It feels obscenely close, having their magic merge together with a shared purpose. While their earlier duel had it pulling and pushing against each other like a raging storm, this time, it feels like a light breeze on a summer day, welcoming and familiar. The little gasp that escapes James tells Sirius that he isn't the only one feeling this. It would be all too easy to let himself be swept up in the sensation.

He bites down hard on his own lip, pulling himself out of this haze just in time to see the illusion come crumbling down. Instead of the stone wall, a cell becomes visible, and with it a frail young man who is clutching the steel bars and rattling them in an attempt to get their attention. He stares at them, face contorted in a silent shout, but as Sirius' and James' gaze meet his, he closes his mouth in startled surprise.

Sirius lifts the silencing spell on the cell.

"You can see me," the man whispers hoarsely with a heavy French accent.

"Lucien?" James asks, though it is obvious. He looks thinner than in the pictures, but no less beautiful. His hair is completely white, reaching down to his elbows and matching his too-pale skin tone. No wonder. The cells have windows that imitate the passing days, but they are nothing more but an illusion, a mockery more than anything else. Apart from the windows, there is only a small bed and a stack of books on the floor, all looking more than well read.

The piercing blue eyes flicker between Sirius and James, a small "Oui?" confirming it.

"We will get you out of here," Sirius says, then repeats it in French, just to make sure.

Lucien sags with relief, only his tight grip on the bars preventing him from falling over. He looks to Sirius, "Merc-" he starts saying, but the words get stuck in his throat as his eyes suddenly grow wide and he recoils further into his cell.

Sirius doesn't have to turn around to understand they have been busted, the anguish on Lucien's face is enough to confirm it.

"I think not," drawls an unfamiliar voice and Sirius whips around just as James does. Alexei Blishen stands in front of them, wide grin on his face as his wand and those of his three goons are pointed at them. "I think you will leave my pretty little pet exactly where he is supposed to be."

Sirius curls his lips in disgust.

The odds may not be in their favour, but Sirius would be damned if he let some potion arseholes best him. He can sense that James shares the sentiment. They move into action so in sync that it feels like no time has passed at all, like they are still what they were in Hogwarts, still able to read each other's minds and work as one unit rather than two separate people.

Sirius starts throwing curses while James shields them both, deflecting curses left and right as they batter onto them simultaneously. They end up back-to-back, each fighting two of the attackers and while they are fighting separately, their magic still moves as one. The essence of their magic entwining with each other, braiding a bond that strengthens them both, the pieces all falling together seamlessly. Sirius can feel James' impact in his protection spells, like an extra layer weaving into his own magic. His offensive spells also come quicker, his wand feels eager to react, feels almost fuelled with determination.

He barely feels the spells that make it through his barriers, none of them strong enough to cut through the adrenalin that flows through. When one of his nasty curses lands true, one of his attackers doesn't get up again. From the corner of his eyes, he can see James is the same position, only fighting Alexei Blishen now.

They are no match for an Auror and a Curse-Breaker, and Alexei seems to realise the same. When James throws up a new shield, he acts quickly. Instead of continuing his attack on James, he points his wand to the door of the cell. Before either of them can react, an explosion crashes against the cell door, ricocheting at the wards. The blast is enough to throw them all off their feet.

Sirius crashes against the stone wall and his vision goes dark for a moment. He can feel blood gushing from his temple, but when he moves to stand up, Alexei already speaks up.

"Oh, I wouldn't do that," he drawls, sounding so self-assured, Sirius' head snaps up. Alexei has used the distraction well, he has James, using him as a shield, wand against his temple.

Sirius feels the blood in his veins run scorching hot.

"Wand please," Alexei demands.

James looks at him pleadingly, but he isn't pleading for Sirius to throw his wand, it's the opposite. He wants him to keep it, his chance to defend himself, no matter what that would mean for himself. How dare he? How dare he, think that Sirius would let anyone threaten him? How dare he, think that Sirius would prefer his own safety over James'?

Sirius throws it over to Alexei carelessly; he won't need it for what comes next.

He stands up, fuelled more and more by rage as he sees James tense against his restraints. His glasses are cracked, but apart from some scuff marks, he looks unhurt. Alexei presses the wand further into his temple.

That will be his last mistake, Sirius decides.

Threatening James Potter will be the last mistake anyone would ever make in his presence. He can feel the turmoil of his unstable magical core now more than ever. It is tearing through his insides, raging through his veins, hot wrath building and building, seeking release to obliterate anyone who would dare to hurt the person his magic only ever wants to gently caress, never see in distress.

Sirius gives Alexei a small, devious smile, then, he unleashes hell.

Sirius only opens his eyes because something is heavily shaking him and he is ready to tell this person to fuck off and let him go back to sleep. The words get stuck in his throat as he comes face to face with James.

"Oh thank Merlin," James exclaims, breathing out relieved, "what on earth were you thinking?"

Sirius snorts at the sound of James' chiding, fighting off the remnants of dizziness. He feels entirely tapped out, like even a *lumos* would tip him over the edge again.

"Not really my choice, accidental magic and all," he says as he slowly sits up, James' hands on his shoulders holding him upright.

"Accidental, my arse," James mutters while he takes a potion from his holster and shoves it into Sirius hands.

"What happened to Alexei and the likes?"

There is a dangerous glint in James eyes. "Well, I guess you just incinerated them on the spot," he says casually.

"Oh, whoopsie?"

James snorts, then full on starts laughing, Sirius can't help but chuckle along. No one would ever expect it, but the always smiling, doe-eyed Potter heir had a cruel streak similar to Sirius' own. Protecting his people at all costs, no matter the repercussions. Casually laughing at murder fits the bill just right in this case, even if no-one would believe it by looking at him.

“Very accidental indeed,” he says as he helps Sirius to his feet. “How are you feeling?”

“Remember that time when I crashed into the Hufflepuff quidditch stand full speed? Pretty much like that, plus how tapped out we felt after our first transformation.”

James pulls a face. “Nasty. Drink the potion and rest up while I’m working to remove the barrier to Lucien’s cell, alright?”

Sirius nods and leans against the wall, watching James work on the remaining barrier, battered already by Alexei’s explosion and Sirius’ eruption of magic. Lucien watches him wide eyed, like he still can’t believe the reality of his rescue. It must have been terrible, being held captive in this room for years, held like nothing more than an ingredient to harvest. Sirius starts talking to him in French, a language his captors likely didn’t bother using, so hopefully it will bring some solace to the young man, some assurance that he is alright, that he is getting rescued, regardless of how unhinged the duelling scene might have looked to him. Slowly, Lucien starts to talk back, tentative at first, but then with more spirit.

When James announces he is done and puts an arm through the vanished barrier to test it, Lucien steps out of his cell for the first time in years, tears streaming down his face.

“Before we go out, we need to check the castle is clear,” James seems to consider this for a moment, unconsciously putting a hand through his hair. “Uhm, how are you with a patronus these days?” he asks, hesitantly.

“Same as always,” there is a hopeful expression on James’ face, before Sirius finishes his sentence, “but too tapped out at the moment.”

His face falls.

“Right, of course,” the hand flies through his hair again while he is biting on his bottom lip. “Guess I will just- uhm, yeah,” he stumbles, looking around the cave aimlessly for an invisible solution to his inner turmoil. Sirius isn’t sure what his problem is, James’ patronus had always been strong, radiating and standing proud just as Prongs himself.

James clears his throat and points his wand, “Expecto Patronum,” he murmurs, and it sounds so falteringly that Sirius isn’t surprised that nothing is happening at all.

He frowns, opens his mouth to ask what the issue is, when James tightens the grip on his wand and takes a deep breath.

“Expecto Patronum.”

This time, the white mist starts forming immediately into the shape of Prongs. Or so it seems. But what forms in front of his eyes isn’t the Patronus he had seen James cast multiple time at school. Instead, it is his own. It’s Padfoot.

James visibly flinches at the sight, then pulls himself together. “Status report Potter. Target acquired, requesting clearance to move.”

In a blink of an eye, Padfoot is gone, Sirius stares unblinkingly after the glowing form. He must have imagined it. Perhaps he is concussed after all.

James is looking anywhere but him, shifting his weight from one leg to the other. The tension between them feels so thick, it could be cut with a *diffindo*.

When a glowing form comes running towards them, for a moment he hopes it's really Padfoot, needs to see it again, just to make sure his battered brain didn't make it all up. But it isn't Padfoot, it's a small bear instead. "Status report Fenwick, all targets apprehended. All clear to move out."

They start moving without another word. James is walking ahead, illuminating the dark passage and leading them through the tunnel while Sirius quietly resumes his conversation with Lucien, mind still racing to process what he had seen. Perhaps he had made it all up, he just get his head checked out. Or, well, it's not that he didn't expect his leaving to have an impact on James. That's likely all this is, and he refuses to talk to James about these things, there is no point in reliving a past that tore him to shreds, no matter how James seems to disagree.

They follow the cheery voices to the entrance hall, being met by the remaining part of James' team. A few people are missing, and with them the people they apprehended.

"Any injuries?" James scrutinises each of them, but while they all look a bit roughed up, they shake their heads. "Good job, everyone. Let's get forensics over here and pack up. We will take Lucien directly to the Infirmary, and I want each of you to also get checked out today."

As they walk towards the portkey, Benjy keeps up the good mood. "You forgot to mention the most important bit, James. Celebratory drinks later in the Leaky." James opens his mouth, but Benjy is already stopping the protest, "Nope, you are not getting out of this one. We know your schedule is free tonight."

James agrees exasperated and Benjy looks at him next and winks, before he announces, "Sirius, you are coming too."

Everyone is looking at him expectantly, everyone but James, who is still very much avoiding even his general direction. It makes him defiant enough to agree.

Chapter End Notes

I'm really sorry for flashback Prongsfoot, but hey, at least they are still ready to commit murder for each other even now?

Would love your views on this chapter, thank you for reading! <3

Chapter 6: James

Chapter Notes

Here we go again!

There is a bit of German in this, it is translated in the notes below, but if you don't understand it, it's fine too. James doesn't either, and it is by no means plot relevant.

Enjoy <3

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

James

Before: 1978

“Big nap?” James greets the large black dog that lounges in a sunny spot near the Black Lake, watching the gentle lap of water hitting the shoreline. He barely has enough time to get the wrapped piece of bacon from his pocket before Padfoot stands up, stretches out leisurely and looks at him with big grey eyes. Well, how could he ever say no to that?

“Yes yes, there you go. Bloody impatient, mate,” he chuckles while Padfoot snacks on the bacon.

Once finished, he runs off, and James is ready to shout in complaint about not being a bloody bacon delivery owl when Padfoot comes back into view, running towards him with a large stick in his mouth and tail wagging excitedly. Sirius is going to complain about all the wood stuck in his teeth later, but to be fair, that makes it even more funny.

James uses the time to practice a few Chaser throws, Padfoot barking approvingly every time he gets a complicated one right as he chases it through the air. When they are both too exhausted to go on, he charms the ground under him dry and warm before he sits down.

“Cuddles?” he asks, opening his arms for the large dog to step into. Padfoot approvingly lies down on top of him, eagerly awaiting his favourite ear scratches. James chuckles as Padfoot’s tongue swipes over his cheek before he settles on James’ chest. Padfoot seems a lot happier than Sirius these days, and James wishes all problems could be fixed with a couple of well positioned ear scratches. But Sirius isn’t ready to talk about it yet, James tried and failed more than once, crashing against the mountain-high walls he erects around himself sometimes. They are too high to climb in one go, even to James, so if he can at least make sure to keep Padfoot happy, he counts it as a win. If he closes his eyes, he could almost pretend it was Sirius’ weight on top of him instead of Padfoot’s. It’s difficult to admit to himself how much he misses the way Sirius always draped himself on top of him, how his

usually poised and tense body went soft and pliant under his massaging fingers, so similar to Padfoot's now.

"What on earth is that thing on you?!" Lily's voice snaps him out of his forbidden daydream. He reluctantly opens his eyes to see her approach suspiciously.

"A dog?" he says calmly, not wanting to startle a relaxed Padfoot.

"That's not a dog! It's huge! And it looks like the Grim! What kind of creature is that? Where did you even get it?"

"Uhm, the forbidden forest I guess? It's technically not really my dog..." he lies casually, but immediately regrets his choice of words as Lily's eyes widen.

"You are just randomly petting a creature from the forest?! Are you crazy?! There is a reason it's called the forbidden forest!" she shout-whispers at him.

He snorts.

"Don't worry, Professor Evans, he is very friendly."

Lily carefully comes closer, muttering something about befriending the Grim being a bad idea as she moves to sit next to James.

Padfoot chooses exactly this moment to disprove James' words, eyes snapping open and a low growl pressing through his sharp teeth. With a yelp, Lily pushes to her feet again to put some distance between them.

"Merlin, Snuffles," James reprimands. "Friendly, but territorial," he adds for Lily's sake while his hand flies back to give ear rubs to the dog. Padfoot just gives him an eyeroll before closing them again, evidently deciding that ear rubs are more important than the silent argument they could be having about his attitude.

Lily shifts from one leg to another, looking around unsurely.

"Well, I'm gonna head back to the castle, are you coming with?"

Looking down to Padfoot, he has no interest in leaving the moment just yet. "I will find you later, alright love?"

He could swear Padfoot lets out a satisfied little huff when Lily leaves, and well, isn't that interesting? Sirius is always impeccably nice to Lily, but Padfoot is showing something that Sirius is way too good to hide.

"So, Padfoot doesn't seem to like Lily very much," he probes when they are back in the dorm.

“Padfoot doesn’t like having his nap time interrupted,” Sirius retorts with a toothpick in his hand, “and Sirius really doesn’t like to pick wooden bits out of his teeth. I swear by Merlin, Prongs, I will use some nasty hex next time if you play fetch again.”

James has a hard time holding back a grin at that. “Pff, you are not the one having to say no to Padfoot! It’s impossible! If you don’t want Pads to play fetch with a stick, then get your inner animal under control.”

“Oh that’s rich coming from you!” Sirius points a finger at him, “You have eaten yourself through half a ton of Hagrid’s pumpkins before I got you to even consider moving.”

“Well, at least pumpkin is actually good for deer!” James says exasperated, “Need I remind you of the time you thought you would die because Padfoot ate some chocolate?” To be fair, once they had established that Sirius was indeed not in any danger of dying, it had been a rather hilarious.

“Godric, I will never live this down. It smelled really nice, alright?” There is a light dimple on Sirius’ cheek, showing that he is working very hard not to burst out into a grin first. James loses that fight, like he does every time when he gets Sirius riled up and ready to burst into laughter.

Only when he is lying in bed does he realise that he hadn’t really gotten an answer to his question. Not one that he believes anyway. Adding this to Sirius’ recent rather erratic behaviour paints a picture that he is only now beginning to unravel, slotting the small details together that he had collected over the past months. Sirius had always been too good at hiding things, he had managed to hide for years how bad Grimmauld Place really was, deflecting attention away by doing something else that would occupy everyone’s mind.

But when did it start, and why? Sirius had always liked to spend time as Padfoot, if he stays around the forbidden forest, he blends in well enough to not draw attention to himself. So that wasn’t necessarily out of the ordinary, though James had been thinking that he is seeing rather a lot of the black dog lately. The most dominant tell that something is off had been Sirius’ increased smoking habits, but he didn’t even complain when James took care of his supply line. He just stopped. Or had he? Wasn’t that when he first started to see more and more of Padfoot? So if those two are connected, if Sirius traded smoking for staying as Pads, what was the cause? The smoking had started seemingly out of nowhere, or he is still missing a vital piece.

James sighs in frustration, feeling like he had thoroughly exhausted the pieces he is able to link together, but without the picture getting any clearer.

...

“Hey Sirius, tomorrow around two? At the great stairs?”

James’ head snaps up from his bag to watch the dark-haired Ravenclaw chaser approach Sirius, a self-assured grin on his face.

Sirius draws up one of his elegant eyebrows, eyeing him with a small smirk without saying anything at all. It's usually enough to deter anyone trying to ask him out, even though they never cease trying. Fenwick doesn't falter under the look until Sirius' lips split into a grin. "Alright then Fenwick, two works."

"Will you start calling me Benjy then?"

Sirius huffs out a light laugh, "If you play your cards right, I might."

"Oh, you can bet on it," Fenwick says with a wink before he walks off.

James watches the whole conversation entirely gobsmacked, blinking a few times to fight the confusion.

"What was that about?" he asks, putting an arm around Sirius' shoulder.

"Oh come on, James. You can't be that oblivious! Benjy was asking Sirius out to Hogsmeade tomorrow," Lily chips in, widely grinning at Sirius.

That can't be. Sirius doesn't have dates. He's never expressed any interest in dating. Or Benjy Fenwick of all people. Surely, he would have told him if that was the case. And in any case, how did Fenwick even get the idea to ask Sirius out in the first place? He had kept his preferences to himself so much that James himself only knows, because – well, because they discovered it together.

And now, he just openly goes on a date with Benjy Fenwick of all people? When he'd never done anything of that sort with James?

He has a hard time keeping the smile plastered on his face.

Sirius snorts in response, that little grin still on his face. "You got it, Evans."

He puts his bag over his shoulder, pushing off James' arm in the process. James feels left entirely off centre as he takes Lily's hand and follows her to their next class.

The feeling remains, especially when Sirius comes back from Hogsmeade, wearing a smug grin and flushed cheeks.

"Well, you've been gone a good while," Remus remarks teasingly as Sirius drops down on the armchair, draping his long legs over the armrest. He is wearing the leather jacket James gifted to him last year, combined with some muggle jeans that are tight enough to leave little to imagination.

"Yeah, we went to the pub for a while," Sirius says, grinning back at him.

James frowns, because they had been to the pub as well, and James would have noticed Sirius' presence, he always does. "Oh? Didn't see you there."

An elegant hand flies through Sirius' hair, he is well aware that he is holding the attention of everyone in their little circle of friends right now. Lily, Mary and Marlene are basically on the edge of their seats, waiting for Sirius to drop the news. "Didn't stay there for long. We decided to go somewhere quieter."

They are cooing and cheering for him and James has a hard time not rolling his eyes at the reaction. He can feel the tension in his jaw as he clenches down on his teeth.

"Well done, Black. Benjy is a good one, and definitely easy on the eyes," Mary grins, giving him a high five.

Marlene hums in approval, "Hmmm, yes, all those nice quidditch muscles. I should look into getting a Chaser as well before all the good ones are gone. I mean, barely any good ones left, now that both James and Benjy are off the market. Dorcas is pretty fit though, definitely wicked on the field."

"Benjy is hardly a good Chaser," James mutters, more to himself than anyone else. His comment is drowned out by Lily arguing about objectifying Quidditch players on his behalf. He doesn't really care, rather enjoying the attention most of the time, but he still puts an arm around her in support.

His eyes snap to Sirius though. It looks like he is following the conversation, but his eyes are fixed on James with an unreadable expression.

...

"You have been on the broom for too long," Sirius chides as James walks into the changing room after his shower. He is wearing his boxers already, because Sirius is not entirely wrong, the insides of his legs feel sore and chaffed and the thought of them rubbing against each other without fabric in-between makes him grimace.

"No such thing," he says lightly, because he would go back onto that broom in a heartbeat if someone asked him, all pain forgotten.

It earns him an all-suffering eyeroll in response.

"Oh yeah," Sirius says, challenge in his words and his eyes, his hand stretching out to lightly trace his fingers along the inner side of James' thigh. A sharp hiss escapes him, it burns, but oh Merlin does it feel good to feel Sirius' fingers like that. He bites down the inside of his cheek hard.

Sirius eyes him for a moment, elegant eyebrow raised in assessment.

"Sit down, captain," he then says softly, eyes locked onto the red of his thighs. James feels like he is ready to die as he drops onto the bench, legs having gone too soft to support him.

Sirius kneels down in front of him. The pose is so familiar it shoots warmth into James' face, and he forces himself to think about a plethora of unpleasant things to keep calm. It would be

wrong to show that kind of reaction, they don't do this anymore and it feels unfair to Lily. He is grateful Sirius' attention is fixed on the bag next to him, fishing out a tub of healing balm.

His movements are slow and deliberate as he opens the tub and sinks his fingers into it. James is so transfixed by the view, the glint of the silver rings, he can barely hold back a whimper. Then, Sirius' steely eyes find his own before the fall onto his legs and he starts carefully rubbing circles into James' aching thighs. This time, the dreaded groan escapes him and he hopes Sirius takes it as a sign of pain and nothing else, because this part of their story is done, even when James so much wishes it weren't so. He closes his eyes in a sorry attempt to regain his composure.

They don't stay closed for long, because he is weak, and he can't miss the view Sirius is presenting, the rare submissiveness in his posture, his eyes following the movement of his hands as they rub in the cooling balm that is providing James with so much relief and pleasure.

The desire to have Sirius' eyes meet his own again is bigger than the voice of reason in his head. "Supernova," he breathes out, because he just can't help himself. The reaction to the name is immediate, Sirius' head snaps up, pupils wide enough to hide almost all silver, and James only now see the red tint on his cheeks, previously hidden by his hair. His eyes travel to Sirius' lips, those sinful, kissable lips. They are parted already, so ready to be kissed silly.

James' fingers move on their own accord, colliding gently with Sirius' chin, meaning to guide him closer, all consequences be damned. Sirius moves toward him, the familiar line of his neck stretching to meet him.

"Oi, is that you Potter?!" a familiar voice shouts from outside the changing room and Sirius jumps to his feet quicker than James' eyes can follow. James wants to shout in frustration when he sees the guarded expression re-entering his face. He doesn't have time to say anything before Benjy fucking Fenwick continues, "For Merlin's sake, the Gryffindor training ended half an hour ago, you can't overrun into the Ravenclaw training all the time. I'm opening the door and I don't give a fuck if you are starkers."

He follows suit to his threat and charms the door open. James crosses his arms, staring daggers at the Ravenclaw. "Honestly Potter, you-," he notices Sirius then, and his annoyed face morphs into a grin.

"Oh, not you too, Sirius! Not even your pretty face can stop my training session." he laughs before pulling Sirius into a kiss. The kiss that was supposed to be James'.

...

Benjy Fenwick soon becomes the bane of James' existence. Generally, he's never had a problem with the Ravenclaw, except for some good natured Quidditch rivalry, but that doesn't mean he has to like the way he is worming his way into their friend group.

Whenever he can, he joins them during the day, arm casually slung over Sirius' shoulder, and everyone seems to think he is a delight to have around. James doesn't quite share the sentiment. Something in the way Sirius reacts to him seems off, it's hard to put a finger on it. But other times, Sirius seems entirely content with whatever his relationship with Benjy is

morphing into. James doesn't ask how serious things are between them, part of him is fearing the answer more than he would like to admit.

The moments when Sirius isn't there are even worse, because it's giving his mind cause to run wild with imagination of how he would be spending this time away. It's occupying his mind so much that even Lily noticed, sitting him down and telling him that it is fine to be worried about their upcoming NEWTs and that, if he feels distracted or worried by any of the subjects, she's happy to talk about it and help him through it. It's an incredibly sweet offer, and James feels entirely shabby when he realises that his source of distraction stems from Sirius' absence alone, not any NEWT related crisis. He doubles his efforts to be a good boyfriend after that, because Lily doesn't deserve this half-baked version, now that they have made things more official, but his thoughts still linger on Sirius more than seems acceptable, even to himself.

...

The missing pieces come together all at once, building a cohesive picture that is impossible to ignore.

It starts with a throwaway taunt from Mulciber as they are walking through the dungeons in the evening. James had asked Sirius to patrol with him, not wanting to put it on Remus who was still recovering from the full moon. Sirius isn't a prefect, but James would rather have a capable person with him when patrolling Slytherin territory. So close to NEWTs, everyone feels high pressured and perhaps eager to release some tension. Plus, he wanted some time for just the two of them anyway. No Benjy in sight.

"Finally back for more, Black? Been a while since your blood stained the corridor," Mulciber's taunt interrupts his thoughts.

James' wand is pointed directly to Mulciber's face in a heartbeat. "What did you just say?!" he grinds through his teeth. He is ready to hex the bastard into next week for threatening Sirius, but Sirius is just standing there, hands in his pockets and looking entirely unconcerned, if it wasn't for the twitch in his tightly clenched jaw.

It is unsettling him enough to use a sensible approach instead. "Do you want detention or are you going to piss off to whatever hole you crawled out of?" James snaps back and Mulciber leaves with an unconcerned laugh that has James' hand twitch with the need to fire a stinging curse after him.

"What was that?" he demands from Sirius once Mulciber is gone.

"What was what?" comes the still unconcerned reply and it does nothing to dispel how pissed off James is feeling.

He lets out a long breath, and his voice sounds pointed when he speaks next. "What was he referring to?"

"It's Slytherins," Sirius shrugs, already starting to move again, "he just wanted to get a rise out of us."

James wills his legs to follow Sirius, but his mind can't let it go, not when Sirius reacted so different than he usually does when taunted by Slytherins. Not when his shoulders still seem too tense while he moves.

More details slot into place, like that one time when Regulus hurriedly came over to him, demanding he kept Sirius away from the dungeons. He had snapped back at him in response, thinking that Sirius had tried to contact him, and the younger Black snubbed him. But what if that hadn't been the cause of his demand? There had been rumours at the time, light whispers of someone seeing Sirius beaten up and bloody, but Sirius had seemed uninjured and unbothered by it, so James had disregarded it as stupid gossip.

What if it wasn't though? What if Sirius had been beaten up by Mulciber or some other Slytherins? Why wouldn't he say anything? When even did that happen?

He stops in his tracks, so abrupt and quietly that Sirius doesn't even notice. James stares at his back. He remembers distinctly when those rumours had been floating around, because it was the time when he started seeing Lily and things took a moment before they slotted back into place between the two of them.

There it was, the missing detail that put everything into place. All of Sirius' behaviour throughout the year explained by one thing that brought it all into motion. James started seeing Lily.

It was Sirius who even brought it up, suggested it to him. And yet, letting himself get beaten up, getting high, staying as Padfoot, dating Benjy, it was nothing but a reaction.

He doesn't know what pisses him off more, Sirius acting like he doesn't give a shit when he first brought up Lily, or how incredibly blind James had been for not noticing it earlier. He had been lulled into this nice cosy place with Lily that he didn't even stop to consider that it was him who Sirius reacted to. How Sirius always layers one pain over another. It had taken him days before Sirius allowed anyone to heal his wounds when he first came to Potter Manor, needing the physical to work through the mental. This is the exact same thing. How on earth did James miss this?!

"You coming?" Sirius ask hesitantly, walking a few steps back towards him. "Everything alright?"

"Hm?" James' head snaps up as the world comes back into focus. "Oh yeah, right. Sorry." He hurriedly walks to catch up with him.

"Daydream on your own time, will you?" Sirius teases and gives him a light nudge with his elbow. "I have evening plans to get back to."

James clenches his teeth. Does that mean Sirius would rather spend his evening with Benjy? The thought is adding hot anger to the frustration he is feeling already.

He crosses his arms in front of him, "Well, as long as you remember where your loyalties lie for the final game."

“What’s that supposed to mean?!”

“Just saying,” he shrugs, “Benjy is a pretty shitty Chaser, but-”

Sirius erupts on him, interrupting him before he can really get it going. “Oh come off it, you arrogant tosser,” he snaps. “He is not shitty, and I’ve had enough of you badmouthing him every chance you get. We get it, James, for some reason you don’t like him. Well, get the fuck over it.”

He narrows his eyes. They are going to hash this out here and now. “So what does Benjy order for you then, on those nice little dates you go on, when you are at Florean? A black coffee, is it?” James drawls, aware he is edging dangerously close to really pissing Sirius off, but unable to stop himself. Benjy knows fuck all about him. James would do so much better on those dates.

Sirius snarls at him in response, looking like an animal ready to pounce. “How is that any of your fucking business?”

“Cause he is absolute rubbish, you can do better than him.”

A bitter laugh. “Oh yeah, can I now? And who would that be, hm?”

James hadn’t meant to say the next words, but they feel right even as they leave his mouth. “Perhaps the person you are trying to get over. Benjy is nothing but a distraction, you don’t actually like him.”

“Fuck you, James,” he spits venomously and if James had been anyone else, he would have run from the pure Black ice-storm of anger that is settling on Sirius’ features. Not James though, to James he looks beautiful, like a celestial creature of wrath coming down to tear apart anything in its way. James’ supernova. “It doesn’t fucking matter how much I like Benjy or not. It’s getting me in the right direction.”

“No it doesn’t. Not if that direction is away from me. I don’t want you to get over me.”

Sirius looks startled, like he hadn’t expected those words at all. “Oh, you have some fucking nerve!”

James is unsure who started it, if his hands had been buried in Sirius’ collar first, or if it was Sirius pushing him against the wall. The result stays the same as their lips find each other, hard and heavy, too much pent-up emotion between them being released all at once. It’s messy and blissful, ecstatic and utterly delightful as he finally gets to draw Sirius close again, feel his toned body press against his own.

“If this is some sick joke to you, Potter-,” Sirius murmurs breathlessly against his lips, eyes heavy lidded as they find James’.

“It’s not,” James is quick to interrupt him, because now that he has Sirius again, he realises more than ever that he never wanted anything else.

Sirius lounges in again, taking from James all he wants while keeping him pinned against the wall. He kisses like he has been starved, tongue flicking over his lips, rediscovering James' mouth. His teeth scrape from his lips to his jaw, leaving a pleasant burn behind that is soothed with kisses immediately after. The path of havoc continues to his neck, and James buckles against him, eagerly giving him everything, body going soft with want under his touch.

“Room of requirements?” he breathes out heavily. Sirius hums in approval, eyes dark and wanting as they roam over James' dishevelled state.

They take their time devouring each other, both so starved of each other's touch. And how much he had missed Sirius' body under his. How he could spend hours just worshipping him, letting his tongue trail over the hot, pale skin, making sure to pay extra attention to the dark ink on his hips, shaped in the form of antlers that grow flowers depending on the seasons. James can barely think straight any time he sees it, overflowed with a possessiveness at seeing his mark on Sirius' body.

They come down together, fully spent from their earlier activities and Sirius is fully draped over him, body soft under the little circles James is drawing onto his back.

“I love it when you lie on top of me like this,” he admits, because he had always wanted to say it and it seems like the earlier barrier preventing him from saying it has lifted. Sirius weight had always been like a comfortable blanket, calming the nervous energy in his limbs with a mere touch.

“Yeah, me too.”

They fall asleep like that, and James sleeps better than he had in ages.

Waking up next to Sirius again feels like the biggest treasure imaginable.

“What now?” Sirius murmurs, withdrawing from the good morning kiss while James is chasing after his lips. When he opens his eyes, the look on Sirius face is wistful, almost sad. Like he expects this to be a dream and nothing else, like James is going to disappear into thin air. It speaks to how early in the morning it is, a bit more awake and Sirius would have tried to hide it.

“I want to be with you.”

“What about Lily?” he asks, never one to shy from unpleasant truths, even if they hurt him.

“I don't want Lily as much as I want you,” James admits, no longer denying himself the truth of it, even though it is a shitty thing to say about her. He'd tried, tried so hard to do what people expect of him, to find as much joy in dating her as he did with Sirius. It never felt right.

Sirius eyes widen in surprise, a small frown of disbelief on his face. “Why date her then? Why didn’t you say something earlier?”

“I could ask you the same question.”

A small smirk plays on Sirius’ lips, James wants to kiss it off his face, because he already knows what he will say next.

“What, why I dated Lily?”

“Stop being an arse,” James chuckles, before turning more serious again. “Why didn’t you say something? In fact, you told me to go after her, if I remember right.”

“Because you looked so damn happy when you told me she asked you out. I didn’t want to stand in the way of that.”

James lets out a long sigh, because Sirius sacrificing his own happiness is a pattern he is all too familiar with. “I just thought it was really funny. I wanted to tell you about it and bask in the ego boost. I didn’t actually think of accepting until you told me to. And then I just went along with it, I thought if I tried long enough, it would start feeling right.”

“Oh.”

The sheepish impression on Sirius is enough to make James grin.

“We are utter muppets, aren’t we?”

“Sums it up.” Sirius snorts, displaying a grin of his own before he leans in and steals a kiss from James. “Let’s do better, yeah? Let’s actually communicate, like we always have before?”

It is the easiest thing James has ever agreed to, feeling giddy with excitement at talking to Sirius like this, like they are at the start of something great, a relationship that is all James ever wanted. Sirius is lightly biting his lip, a considerate look on his face that tells James to be quiet and let him think, because whatever Sirius is about to tell him, is important.

“I guess I was worried about telling you the truth. You are the most important person in my life, and I am scared I could do something that would damage us.”

James takes in those beautiful silver eyes, so full of warmth and fear of rejection. He will work his whole life to make Sirius understand how precious he is, how he doesn’t have to be afraid of James’ rejection because that would never happen. “Nothing you do could ever damage what we have. You are a part of my soul.”

There is a flicker in Sirius’ eyes. His breath hitches, and for once, he is not hiding away any of the emotions he is feeling, and he is all the more beautiful for it. There is a small, hopeful smile on his face that James wants to turn into an overly happy grin through kissing alone.

“So... if I told you I’m in love with you?” Sirius says quietly, almost like a whisper.

James' heart is either bursting or stopping, he isn't entirely sure. The only thing that he is sure about, is that he has never felt this strongly before in his life. His body tingles, a wide grin spreading over his face that is impossible to hold back. He must look so ridiculous, Sirius gives him an indulging smirk.

"I'd tell you I love you too."

They still grin into the kisses they share, it's more teeth clashing than lips, but James thinks it's the most perfect thing in the universe.

Only when they can no longer ignore the grumbling of their stomachs do they come back to reality. It reminds him that he will have to face Lily, and that he cheated on her without even feeling overly bad about it. Not when it brought him back into Sirius' arms.

Still, it will be a shitty thing to break up with her, she is an amazing person and deserves better, and James loves her enough to not want to see her hurt. But his words are true, he wants Sirius more than anything. Loving Lily feels like a light breeze, easy and calm. But loving Sirius is like a storming inferno, the heat wrapping comfortably around him instead of biting.

Sirius gives him a long look, searching for answers he can easily read off James' face. He presses their lips together next, drawing James into a soft kiss.

Then, he takes a deep breath, his face scrunching at an unpleasant thought. "You can't break up with her so close to NEWTs."

James frowns at him in surprise so Sirius continues, "She is already worried about her standing in the wizarding community. And she doesn't have anything to fall back on. Good marks are her only chance. We can't ruin that for her."

"Merlin, you actually do like her."

"Unfortunately, she proved very difficult to hate." Sirius admits, not sounding happy about it at all.

"So you want me to what, stay with her until after exams?"

An uncomfortable shuffle. "No, I don't want you to, but I think anything else would be a pretty shitty move."

James gives him a long sigh.

"You are right. Exams must be on her mind, she already seems incredibly stressed at the moment."

"Hmmm," the noise can only be interpreted as reluctant agreement.

"And you are sure that you are ok with this?"

"It's not for long, is it?"

He is quick to nod, to reassure Sirius. "I won't sleep with her or any of that. But I think if I stopped touching or kissing her, she would notice something is wrong."

"It's the least we can do, right? She is a friend after all."

"I will try to keep it to a minimum," he murmurs, burying his neck in Sirius' shoulder, breathing in his comforting scent while his lips follow the curve of his neck all the way to the delicate spot behind his ear.

It will be a difficult two and a half weeks, but they will figure it out. After all, they are finally doing it together again, and that has always been how they are at their best.

...

After: 1984

As they wait in front of the pub for the rest of the team to arrive, James still feels utter mortification about revealing his patronus to Sirius. It feels like a betrayal, to be so embarrassed of his patronus. For years it was the only piece of Sirius remaining with him, the only companionable comfort he could give to himself when it felt like he was missing him so much his soul was tearing itself apart. But Sirius was never meant to see it. And when he did, well, he didn't exactly look thrilled.

His thoughts are interrupted by a thundering noise, echoing unhindered through a narrow side street. James sends prayers to every deity he can think of, hoping it's not what he thinks it is. None of the gods are on his side as it seems, as a man on a motorcycle becomes visible, parking the bike to the side of the pub. The motorcycle is all chrome and black, looking very much like the one in the muggle magazines Sirius had shown him throughout the years, insisting he will one day own one of those and make it fly. James had never understood his obsession with them, after all brooms exist. But looking at him now, he gets it.

Both of his feet are planted on the ground, his legs straightened out in ripped black jeans. Under the familiar leather jacket, James can make out a Gryffindor red shirt. It makes James feel awfully inadequate, getting ready for the pub at work with a wrinkled set of back-up clothing he keeps in his locker. A plain pair of washed-out grey trousers and an old white shirt with the puddlemere logo that started feeling uncomfortably tight around his arms ages ago.

His own inadequacy only becomes more apparent as he watches Sirius take off the black helmet, shaking his head to sort his hair out in the process.

"Merlin, he is so hot."

For a moment James is mortified that he had accidentally said it out loud, but then he remembers that his voice luckily doesn't sound so distinctively female and like his colleague

Allie's.

A wistful sigh comes in response from Benjy. "Oh yes, it's only gotten worse since our fling at Hogwarts. Shame he is taken."

James tries very hard to ignore the pit that just dropped in his stomach. He has no right to feel so disappointed by this revelation. None, at all. Sirius would probably hex him to the moon if he knew, and rightly so. After all James had put him through, he is the last person to deny Sirius this happiness. He presses his lips together in a thin line, gaze not wavering away from Sirius, who swings his long legs over the machine. The scene is imprinting itself into James' memory and he doesn't know if he should be happy or distraught by it.

"He is? Dammit, of course he is."

"Well, he's been talking about this guy, apparently they live together in Paris."

So they even live together, meaning it must be quite serious. James doesn't allow himself to think back to a time where they had plans to live together, where the thought of not doing so seemed impossible.

A sigh. "Clever man. Would be incredibly stupid to let this one go."

James winces at the comment. It catches Benjy's attention.

"Hey James, surely you know better than us. Would I still have a chance if I gave it a shot?"

"No," he growls, unable to hide the disdain from his voice.

He is in desperate need to either disappear or get a lot of strong drinks in very quick succession. The need only grows stronger as Sirius comes walking towards them, crooked grin on his face, looking sheepishly.

"Hey, sorry I'm late. Hope you didn't have to wait long?"

"Ah, don't worry about it, Sirius, it was worth it. Sweet ride you got there," Benjy grins at him, and puts his hand on a laughing Sirius' back as he leads him into the pub. James follows, with his teeth clenched too tight and his throat dry.

To make matters worse, he ends up sitting next to him. And when seven grown men and women have to squeeze into a booth that is constructed for a maximum of five, they inevitably end up touching. James is ready to die on the spot when he gets squished closer and closer into Sirius, their arms and legs touching, sending heat through his whole body, a light breeze of Sirius' magic tingling against his skin.

"So, Sirius, that Veela boy seemed quite taken to you. Sure you aren't a bit Veela yourself?" Benjy shamelessly tries and Sirius indulges him with a wink.

"Wouldn't put it past my ancestors, honestly, but they would have taken that secret to the grave."

“Well, I think it’s pretty obvi-”

“Don’t be crude, Fenwick. We all learned in fourth year that Veela are attracted to beautiful people,” James interrupts, voice way too sharp in interrupting their banter. His outburst only gives him satisfaction for about two seconds, then, he notices the stares of everyone on him and realises what he just said. He clears his throat, “You are up for the first round anyway.”

Benjy gets the first round, per usual they start off light, with only a beer where James would have preferred something well stronger. His body feels on fire everywhere he is touching Sirius. Sirius, who is occupied by a conversation with Benjy, and not at all concerned with their closeness.

Why would he, James thinks bitterly.

Likely, James is nothing but a disappointing remnant of his past, an unpleasant shadow in the otherwise brightness of his life. The life he has built after James, when he apparently travelled the world, found love in the city so known for it, and settled into a life far from the disappointment that is James.

Sirius’ life sounds like he is flying all the way to the sun, collecting brightness from all the things he wanted to do on the way, until one day, he will inevitably be able to rival it. James however, shamefully has to admit to himself that he had already peaked at Hogwarts.

Since then, he has settled into a life he never planned on living and tried to find happiness in it anyway. Harry made it easier, it was the simplest thing in the world to focus on his son and grant him the best possible childhood. Lily made it easy as well, being the fantastic mother and person that she is. And yet, James is thoroughly aware how his own life feels like a thread that had been loosened and pulling more and more into the fabric until there is nothing of it left, and he dreads the day he will take Harry to the Hogwarts Express for the first time.

His thoughts are interrupted by Benjy’s bellowing voice, “Honestly, I’ve never seen a person be so good at a job they dislike with such a passion.”

The eyes of the group are on him. He is unsure how the conversation lead to this, but this isn’t a secret, so his casual shrug only induces more laughter from this colleagues. He feels Sirius’ gaze on him, but there are no words between them. And why would he care anyway.

The drinks get heavier as the evening goes on, correlating almost entirely with the heated discussion on the latest quidditch regulation they got into. James is a passionate believer that it is entirely bollocks, and he is not afraid to make that observation clear to anyone on the table, repeatedly.

He can almost imagine the discussion that went down in the Puddlemere locker-room when the change was announced, and he realised how much he still misses those discussions from the year he was actively playing. He had merely gotten more than a taste of it, but in an ideal world, he would have had it all.

“I didn’t keep up with quidditch much in the past years,” Sirius’ calm response to a question James didn’t hear being asked, and it draws a collective gasp from the group.

“How did you get away with that as James’ best friend? We can’t even escape the quidditch talk at work!” Benjy teases, and James’ body grows tense as he realises that no one knows they didn’t stay in contact after Hogwarts. No one would have believed it anyway.

“Leaving the country helped, if you need inspiration,” Sirius says casually, tight smirk on his face.

The group erupts into laughter, any attention diverted away from him, and he gratefully leans back against the backrest and takes a big sip from his fire whisky.

“So, you don’t like being an auror?” Sirius asks quietly, as the rest of the group are either in their own conversations or at the bar.

He dares a tentative glance at Sirius, just to confirm the question was really directed at him. He is met with curious looking grey eyes. They reflect the fire light in a way that makes James think of molten silver. He almost regrets looking.

“I guess it’s just different than I expected,” he finally manages, not quite satisfied with this answer either.

“Too many rules and no room for creativity to enhance the results?”

“Exactly!” James exclaims excitedly, because finally someone gets how restrictive the job really is, “and don’t get me started on the bloody paperwork!”

There is the smallest twitch at the corner of his lips, and James relishes in it.

“Why do it then? What was wrong with quidditch?” he probes.

James can’t help the wistful smile spreading over his lips at the reminder of his too short quidditch career. How exhilarating it had felt to play in front of thousands of people.

“Nothing was wrong with quidditch. It was bloody fantastic, everything I thought it would be.”

An elegantly raised eyebrow is directed at him. “But?”

“But it was too much travel. Not really family friendly when you got a small child at home,” he shrugs with a sigh.

“Right,” Sirius says pointedly.

They both stare into their drinks, clearly edging too close to a conversation Sirius doesn’t want to have. James scrambles his brain for a way to continue this conversation, find a safe topic, anything to keep Sirius talking, learn more about what he has been up to.

“Auror doesn’t sound family friendly either though,” Sirius remarks before he can decide on a topic.

“It was a compromise. The hours are better manageable than quidditch and it sounded exciting enough on paper; and with Lily working at Mungo’s, we are able to coordinate our shifts to make it work.”

“But you don’t like it, why stay?” Sirius probes further. James had forgotten how deep Sirius digs, how he leaves no stone unturned.

James is quiet for longer than he intends to, trying to come up with a reason. “Well... it’s technically a decent job, I guess. Harry should have good role models and being an auror does fit the bill.”

He shifts uncomfortably under Sirius’ doubtful look.

“Why not go back to quidditch now? Harry is older and they introduced ways to make it more family friendly, didn’t they?”

James is ready to sink into his chair, be eaten by it, just disappear. Instead, he starts tearing at the bright label of his empty beer bottle. The brewing witch on the cover starts complaining immediately, and he mumbles an apology before he realises with heated cheeks that he just apologised to nothing more than a moving imprint of magic.

“I’m too old for quidditch now, without proper training for years. I simply lack the skill so that broom has flown away,” he eventually says, a realisation that stings, and he never admitted to anyone else.

Sirius makes an unbelieving noise, but thankfully lets it go.

“Fine, no quidditch then. What about broom building, you seemed to love that just as much as the game itself at school.”

James feels like a broken record when he admits he doesn’t have the skill or knowledge for that either.

Sirius snorts, “Oh yeah, you tell me you don’t have an elaborate opinion on the latest Comet? Or ideas how you would have built it instead to improve airflow and responsiveness of the right flank, or whatever else you always came up with for the Gryffindor team?”

James opens his mouth to protest. But then, he did think of those things. The new Comet is incredibly unbalanced for a quidditch approved racing broom. It’s an embarrassment they have released it at all. “I would have to get a proper education, basically starting at zero as an apprentice to even get started. It would take years,” he says instead.

“So? The years will pass anyway,” Sirius shrugs nonchalantly. “Just an idea, Pro- James. I assume doing something that actually makes you happy would also count as being a good role model to Harry.”

With that, he shuffles off the booth to go to the bar, leaving James behind with an idea blooming in his mind. And had Sirius really accidentally almost called him Prongs? It takes a

long time for his heart rate to stabilise. He will have to consider the rest of what Sirius said without alcohol in his blood.

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A few days later sees James at the exact same coffee shop dilemma as before. Again, the barista asks a casual “the usual, James?” while already moving to prepare his black coffee.

“Actually...,” the barista stops in his track to look at him, it’s too late to back out now, so he might as well commit to it. “Could I also get a hazelnut latte with pumpkin spice syrup and cream on top, please?”

His mind rattles down the order by itself as if no time had passed at all. This used to be Sirius favourite coffee order. As he holds both cups in his hands, he can only hope it still is and he isn’t about to make an absolute tit of himself.

The plan is to just casually stride into the office, coffees floating in front of him as if it’s the most normal thing in the world. Still, James feels nervous as he opens the door to his office, worried Sirius will be back to the mono-syllabic self he had presented in the past weeks, closing the small gap in his defences James had been trying to open. In the last possible second, James aborts the plan, instead taking the coffees into his hands.

“Morning,” he says perhaps a bit too cheerful, visibly startling Sirius, who drops the bit of chalk he is using to write on the black board with a muttered swear.

James faintly recognises some of the runes from his arithmancy course, others look entirely unfamiliar to him. It isn’t enough to deduce what he is working on, so he moves closer instead, coming to a stop next to him. When he dares a glance, Sirius looks unusually dishevelled, with his hair in a messy bun and white chalk imprints on his trousers and torso, like he had carelessly wiped his hands on them. There is even a dust of white in his hair, and James’ heart squeezes at the sight.

“You look like you could use this,” he says, holding the cup towards him and trying to sound casual.

“Hmm? Oh, cheers,” he mutters, not taking his eyes from the black board as he grabs for the coffee. Their hands slightly touch, and it almost makes up for the anticlimactic thanks and Sirius not even looking at him.

Sirius holds the cup, but makes no move to drink from it yet, instead scribbling more runes that become more and more foreign to James. Still, he doesn’t move away, too curious to see what had Sirius so enthralled so early in the morning. He must have been at it for some hours at least.

It is almost enough to make him miss the moment Sirius takes a sip from his drink, but James sees from the corner of his eyes how his face stills and his eyes widen before he takes another sip, eyelids fluttering in the process. Just like he did at Hogwarts.

“I drink my coffee black,” he murmurs afterwards. There is a slight uplift in the corner of his lips, enough to tell James that he is messing around.

“Sure you do,” he snorts, “you wanna tell me why you look like you have been here all night, writing over my carefully curated quidditch scores?”

“Oh, that’s what this was supposed to be? Sorry, it looked so ineligible, I thought it was just Harry scribbling something out of boredom,” Sirius says all too innocently, turning towards him with a light smirk.

James doesn’t buy it for a second, Sirius had years of practice reading his handwriting. “You know exactly what it was. I can’t believe you just deleted it for... well, for what exactly?” he inquires, unable to hide the humour from his own voice.

“Ah, don’t get your wand in a twist, Prongs, your precious quidditch tracking is on the other side of the blackboard. You do realise a blackboard has two sides, right?”

James feels like he is ready to cry, and it has nothing to do with any quidditch trackings. Sirius clearly hadn’t realised, but his old nickname falling from Sirius’ lips is like music in his ears.

There is something clever he wants to retort, something to keep this banter going, but before he can open his mouth, he is interrupted by someone clearing their throat. The voice belongs to a guy around their own age, with blond hair, a loose grin on his face and clothes that would likely be considered fashionable anywhere else but look too forward to be UK wizarding fashion.

“Henry!” Sirius shouts excitedly and bolts past him, straight into the arms of the stranger. The stranger who turned out to be Sirius’ mentor, who is not at all the old, grandfatherly type James had imagined him to be.

“What on earth are you doing here?” Sirius continues, arm hung around the man. James had never seen him so tactile with anyone but himself, not even during his fling with Benjy, and he finds he doesn’t like it at all.

“Just here to visit my beautiful darling, love of my life, most dashing of them all,” Henry says in a sing-song voice that makes Sirius laugh and James wanting to rip his ears off, “but coffee isn’t a bad idea either,” he announces as he takes Sirius’ cup from his hands. There is a slight French accent and a hint of something that James can’t quite place in his voice.

After a quick sip, the cup is shoved back into Sirius’ hands again, with an exasperating comment about Sirius and his terrible coffee syrups that are apparently also cluttering up their flat. Their flat. Because they live together. Because they are together just as Benjy said. James is acutely aware of all the muscles currently working hard to put a neutral look on his face and he has to concentrate on keeping it exactly like that.

His careful work is threatened when Sirius points towards him, “Sorry, I should introduce you,” he says, looking at James, “James, this is Henry, Henry, this is James.”

James is mentally preparing himself for the expected dance of pleasantries. All the ‘nice to meet you’s, the ‘how are you doing’s, and the ‘are you enjoying your time in London, looks like the weather is getting better’ lying ready on his tongue.

He doesn’t get to use it though. Instead of moving towards him to start this charade, Henry’s eyes snap back to Sirius.

“Dein Ernst?” he says flatly, and James guesses the hint of an accent must have been German, even though he can’t make out the words.

“Ne, mein James,” Sirius replies with a sheepish expression on his face, that has Henry’s scolding look melt into a snort. James once again curses Walburga Black for insisting that Sirius not only learned Latin and French from a young age, but also German, claiming it as part of her own ancestry.

“Das habe ich jetzt nicht wirklich gemeint, als ich dir gesagt habe, du solltest deine Vergangenheit aufarbeiten. Geht’s dir gut?”

“Geht schon. Sei einfach nett, ok?”

A long inhale, then Henry’s eyes fall on James.

“Sorry James, all with you now. It’s nice to meet you,” he says with a smile, and James soldiers through rounds of small talk until Sirius drags Henry away by the sleeve of his shirt to get him a coffee from the kitchen.

James sinks into his chair, staring at the paperwork in front of him. There isn’t much that could make his day worse, but karma delivers reliably as ever when he hears Benjy’s voice from the kitchen.

“Engaged? Well, congratulations! An autumn wedding sounds great.”

He has no right to feel so entirely deflated by those news. Shame simmers hotly through him, how can he even have the audacity to be disappointed. How can it feel like he is letting Sirius slide through his fingers all over again, disappearing like fine sand on the beach.

When his fingers rub over his face, his eyes get caught on his golden wedding band, not failing to make him feel a million time worse.

He comes home later than he had planned, having taken Darrow’s patrol just to get out of the office and away from Sirius’ haunting presence. There is faint music playing in the house, and the smell of spices from a home cooked meal makes him pause. It’s only then that he remembers he was meant to cook with Lily tonight, their version of a date night, of spending time together while cooking in the muggle way.

Somehow, he almost expects a sign to pop up over his head, just like in a museum. It would say ‘worst husband in existence’ and summarise his long list of failures, ending with details on how he is late for a date with his wife because his thoughts are entirely consumed by his

childhood love who literally ran off to a different country to get away from him. Shining endorsement. It would finish with an exposition on delusion and lying to oneself in an attempt to fix all the things unfixable.

His bag drops to the ground with enough noise to startle him out of his little daydream. Shame, standing stuffed in a museum is likely preferable to his actual life at this point.

With a few long breaths, he enters the door to the kitchen. Lily turns towards him, mid stirring.

“I’m sorry, Lils. Patrol run over,” he says weakly.

She shrugs with a small smile. “Its fine. Will you set the table?”

It is really not fine. It shouldn’t be fine. But Lily is accepting his lame excuse anyway, perhaps because he is looking guilty enough as it is. Or because she had long given up on having expectations.

He dutifully sets the table, regretting not even making it in time to say good night to Harry.

When Lily joins him, she starts to tell him about her day at work and he is grateful for the distraction, tries to actively listen and show his interest, even when his heart isn’t fully in it.

“I saw Sirius today as well,” she announces, and this has his attention right away.

“Oh?” he tries to keep his voice neutral. He had told her weeks ago that Sirius is back, and that they are working together on some cases. She had accepted it with very little comment, very different to the way she had pestered him about his disappearance years ago, even though James obviously was never able to tell her the reason for his disappearance, no matter how much she asked. Why would she see Sirius, where would they even meet? He has a hard time controlling his body, remaining carelessly in his seat.

Lily takes a sip from her wine and it feels like ages pass before she starts explaining that she had seen Sirius at Mungo’s. That he was there with a blond man, and that he was referred to healers at the magical core department.

“Oh yeah, he mentioned he had some issue with stabilising his magic sometimes, resulting from a curse.” He tries to say casually, not wanting to dwell on the fact that Henry was at his side for this, not James himself.

“Oh I see, hope he gets it sorted. How was your day then?” she asks, and James takes a big gulp of his wine.

“Long,” he shrugs, “Lot’s of paperwork and the patrol ended with me having to listen to Mrs Billery -you know, the crazy plant lady with the herbology shop- accusing her neighbour of stealing her Kneazle and him vehemently denying it. Well, turned out Mrs Billery’s own Venomous Tentacula ate the Kneazle and that her licence for dangerous plant had been withdrawn months ago. So I ended up wrestling with the damn thing to confiscate it because

the herbology department had already left for the day. And I get to do to the lovely report for that tomorrow.”

Lily looks at him unblinkingly, then she lets out a poorly concealed laugh. It makes James feel a million times better to see her laugh.

“I can’t believe you are laughing at my misery like this,” he teases and she wordlessly refills his glass of wine, still giggling lightly.

They both end up a lot more drunk than is reasonable for a weekday, but for once they are talking and laughing together and James doesn’t want to stop. They had moved to the sofa two glasses ago and James knocks over their latest refill as he leans over to kiss her. Lily lets it disappear with a flick of her wand as she kisses him back, flinging her arms around his neck.

It starts so well, when he carries his beautiful wife to their bed, still kissing her all the way up the stairs and they both are eager to get out of their clothing. James isn’t sure when it changes, when Lily’s moans turn into something so untrue that he can’t ignore it, and his own arousal is sabotaged by pictures of Sirius and Henry dancing through his mind. They call it a night there and then, both reassuring each other that it is the wine, and the late hour, and the early morning they will both have, unwilling to get to the actual issue at hand as they turn away from each other and fall asleep.

Chapter End Notes

Sooo, some Prongsfoot bonding, and then the next bomb dropped... sorry James!

Ah, German speaking Sirius, my beloved.

The region in Germany I am from actually does a celebration of Hexennacht ('Witches' Night') – also called Walpurgisnacht. It’s a night where witches are said to hold a large celebration on the Brocken (a mountain in north-central Germany) and await the arrival of spring.

So for that reason, the name Walburga always connected with Germany in my mind, and I was happy to bring that into this story as well.

Now, for the translation:

It’s basically a German version of the “Are you serious joke.” Ernst is a German name that also translates into “serious”. (yes, I know... I just couldn't help myself..)

“Dein Ernst?” - “Are you serious?” → but in this case, Sirius wants to make a joke out of it, so he uses the second meaning of it; translating it as “Your Ernst/(Sirius)?”

“Ne, mein James,” - „No, my James.”

“Das habe ich jetzt nicht wirklich gemeint, als ich dir gesagt habe, du solltest deine Vergangenheit aufarbeiten. Geht’s dir gut?” – „That’s not quite what I meant when I said you should work on reconciling with your past. Are you alright?”

“Geht schon. Sei einfach nett, ok?” - „It’s fine. Just be nice, ok?”

Hope you enjoyed this chapter, I'm always looking forward to reading your thoughts <3

Chapter 7: Sirius

Chapter Notes

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

sirius

Before: 1978

The party in the Gryffindor common room is still raging, even after hours of drinks and about fifty heartfelt goodbyes and plannings of reunions. Through the blasting music, it is the quiet goodbyes that Sirius is craving above all, the silent thank you to the castle that had been his first proper home, had shaped his life and gave him James. For the last time, he is making his way through the dark, deserted corridors, the winding, narrow passages and the astronomy tower, standing high above it all. The castle had always felt its most magical at night.

It feels strange, feeling so wistful for a past that hasn't even fully left yet, and at the same time feeling the inevitable optimistic hoping for the future to come. A small smile steals itself on his lips at the thought of the future. The future he has planned with James, the flat they will start looking for soon. Just the two of them, in their own little space. Lazy mornings turning into lazy afternoons without either of them needing to leave their tender embrace. No longer interrupted by James' obligation towards Lily. It has only been two and a half weeks since their talk, but Sirius yearns for nothing more than to finally announce James as his.

He looks up into the familiar night sky, almost the same as it was when he first came to Hogwarts, when the stars shone so vastly they illuminated the Black lake with their light. Sailing through the stars made him feel like everything was possible, and his sorting into Gryffindor proved him right. He wants to feel the same tonight.

Familiar footsteps draw closer, and the smile on Sirius' lips widens into a grin.

"I thought I would find you here," James lightly slurs as he walks up the final stairs, one hand still on the railing to stabilise himself.

Stretching out his hand, he invites him to come closer.

"I will miss this view," Sirius admits. James moves in behind him, hugging him from behind and burying his face in the crook of Sirius' neck. The sudden warmth and James' breath tickling the back of his neck sends a pleasant shiver through Sirius, he leans into the touch.

"Me too. It feels like the end of an era."

"We've left our mark though, don't you think? With the map and all," Sirius pauses for a moment, still mourning the loss of the parchment they poured so much of their magic into. But it will live on, as part of Hogwarts and their legacy. "How did you find me so quickly without it anyway?" he adds.