

Mature

Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

M/M

Harry Potter - J. K. Rowling

Sirius Black/James Potter  
Euphemia Potter/Fleamont Potter  
Regulus Black/Remus Lupin

Sirius Black  
James Potter  
Harry Potter  
Remus Lupin  
Euphemia Potter  
Fleamont Potter  
Peter Pettigrew  
Lily Evans Potter  
Regulus Black  
Bellatrix Black Lestrage  
Marlene McKinnon  
Pandora Lovegood  
Xenophilius Lovegood  
Walburga Black  
Orion Black  
Benjy Fenwick  
Minerva McGonagall

Mutual Pining  
Emotional Sex  
Not Actually Unrequited Love  
Friends to Lovers  
Pining James Potter  
Pining Sirius Black  
Protective James Potter  
Protective Sirius Black  
Hurt Sirius Black  
Sirius Black Needs a Hug  
James Potter Needs a Hug  
Eventual Smut  
Gay Sirius Black  
Bisexual James Potter  
Angst with a Happy Ending

Hurt/Comfort  
Temporary Amnesia  
Temporary Character Death  
Artist Sirius Black  
Quidditch Player James Potter  
Past James Potter/Lily Evans Potter  
Period-Typical Homophobia  
Internalized Homophobia  
Good Parent James Potter  
Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence  
First Wizarding War with Voldemort (Harry Potter)  
Marauders Era (Harry Potter)  
prongsfoot - Freeform  
Morally Grey Regulus Black  
Past Child Abuse  
Good Friend Remus Lupin  
Angst and Fluff and Smut  
James Potter Loves Sirius Black  
Sirius Black Loves James Potter  
Love Confessions  
Idiots in Love  
Sharing a Bed  
First Kiss  
Minor Regulus Black/Remus Lupin  
First Time  
Romantic Fluff  
Found Family  
Hurt James Potter  
Slow Burn  
Emotional Hurt/Comfort  
Regulus Black and Sirius Black Angst  
Sirius Black Gets a Hug  
Jealous James Potter  
Blood and Violence  
James Potter and Lily Evans Potter Raise Harry Potter  
References to Depression  
Child Harry Potter  
No Prophecy | Sybill Trelawney Does Not Make A Prophecy About Harry Potter and Voldemort  
Past Sirius Black/Benjy Fenwick

English

## **Shooting stars, falling objects**

**Nyx\_21**

**Summary:**

Remus shook his head slowly. "Peter was there. And I saw the body."

James' stomach dropped. *The body*. As if Sirius were no more than a discarded shell.

"Well, I didn't," James said flatly, crossing his arms. "If I had, I'd have known it wasn't him."

"You were a teenager, James," Remus said gently. "You panicked. You couldn't have known what would happen that night. When are you going to forgive yourself?"

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In 1978, just three weeks before graduation, Sirius Black died a hero, protecting Peter Pettigrew from a Death Eater ambush. Five years later, James Potter is the only one who believes he survived.

Until Sirius comes back.

A post-Hogwarts Marauder Era AU about missing memories, love that defies death and the dangerous secrets of the Great and Noble House of Black.

## Notes:

Originally, I was planning this to be a 10 chapter memory loss fic set during the Hogwarts years. Instead, it became the longest and most heartfelt story I've ever written.

Sirius and James insisted on taking it in directions I didn't expect. There's mystery and mythology, magic and mayhem. But at its heart it is a story about love. It's about two people who would love each other in any universe. It's about losing everything and fighting for the people you love.

I hope it makes you feel something.

A warning: this one is going to hurt in parts, but I can guarantee a happily ever after for my favourite boys. Keep an eye on the TWs, though.

## **Chapter 1** (<http://archiveofourown.org/works/61656694/chapters/157615285>): **Because of you**

## Summary:

"I thought we were going together," Sirius said, his voice low, almost steady, but not quite.

The air between them shifted. A crack in the earth, a faltering heartbeat.

"We were," James said, quieter now. "Only Lily - "

"I'm not talking about Lily." Sirius' head snapped up, his voice cutting through the night like a blade. "I'm talking about us."

James froze.

## Notes:

This first chapter is a bit of a prologue set five years earlier than the actions of the story. We'll keep having flashbacks throughout. I'll aim to post once a week if possible.

**TW:** This chapter hints at internalised homophobia, although it manifests more as raw panic in the moment.

**Soundtrack:** I love to listen to a song on loop while I write. For this chapter I had "[White Lie](#)"

<https://open.spotify.com/track/6dsaGgxTbGI93Avwih65x5?si=7aa6891b3b3e4d69>) by The Lumineers on repeat.

(See the end of the chapter for [more notes \(#chapter\\_1\\_endnotes\)](#).)

*"I have forgotten your love, yet I seem to  
Glimpse you in every window.*

*Because of you, the heady perfumes of  
Summer pain me; because of you, I again  
Seek out the signs that precipitate desires:  
Shooting stars, falling objects."*

- Pablo Neruda, "Love"

## Hogwarts School, Scotland – June 1978

James Potter woke up in his four-poster bed in the Gryffindor dormitories to the sensation of something cold pressing against his forearm. He opened his eyes to find Sirius Black bent over him, drawing on his exposed skin.

For a moment, James simply watched him. Sirius lay on his stomach, propped on his elbows, his grey eyes narrowed in concentration. His hair, loose and unruly, brushed his shoulders. It struck James, as it always did, how utterly consumed Sirius was. Whether he was sketching, pranking, or spinning stories in class, every ounce of him was absorbed in whatever he was doing. All those sharp angles focused on the task at hand.

"What time is it?" James asked, voice thick with sleep. He stifled a yawn with his free hand – the other pinned by Sirius. With the bed curtains drawn it was impossible to know the exact time.

They had stayed up late into the night, talking and laughing together. In three short weeks they would leave Hogwarts forever. All their exams were finished, the Quidditch Cup sitting in pride of place on the windowsill. James had even sent off his application to join the Auror program.

There was nothing left to do but dream about their coming freedom. Their conversations felt far too vivid, too urgent to end with the night. These days, Sirius slept almost every night in James' bed.

Sirius did not look up. "Hold still. I'm nearly done."

James grinned, his chest warming. "Is this what Paris is going to be like? You holding me hostage while you draw on me?"

Sirius paused, one eyebrow arching in mock consideration. "Any objections?"

"Depends," James replied, tilting his head. "Will there be croissants?"

Sirius' mouth curved into a half-smile, his attention already back on the drawing. "Obviously. I can't let you starve."

"Of course not," James replied lightly. "Then you'd have to draw on paper like a normal person."

Sirius scoffed. "Normal people are boring."

James chuckled, reaching for his glasses on the bedside table. Sliding them on, he looked down at his arm. Sirius was drawing a bee near his elbow, its wings so intricately detailed they looked ready to take flight.

"That's incredible, Pads," James said with unguarded admiration.

Sirius glanced up at him, a faint flush colouring his cheeks before he turned his gaze back to the drawing. "It's nothing."

"It's not nothing," James said, nudging him lightly with his foot. "You're going to blow them away in Paris."

Sirius shifted uncomfortably, brushing off the compliment. "It's just a class," he muttered. "Not a big

deal.”

James huffed a small laugh, shaking his head. How could Sirius not see it? He was brilliant at everything he touched, and yet he refused to acknowledge genuine compliments. It was frustrating, endearing, and so very Sirius. There was a seed of doubt beneath his confidence. A side he only showed James.

Nonetheless, James knew that Sirius was excited about the course – delivered by the most prestigious Muggle art school in Paris – and the fact that James was coming with him. It would be the first stop in their round-the-world adventure to celebrate their graduation.

James’ gaze drifted back to the bee, his chest tightening with something he could not quite name. Without thinking, he reached out and wrapped his arms around Sirius, pulling him down until he was sprawled over his chest, right over the Puddlemere United logo on his t-shirt. Sirius protested weakly but gave in almost immediately, resting his head on James’ shoulder.

“You smudged it,” Sirius said, his voice muffled against James.

James lifted his forearm to examine the drawing. The slightly smudged wing made the bee look in motion. He let his arm fall once more, tightening his grip around Sirius.

“I like it better that way,” James replied.

Sirius sighed. “At least it’ll be hidden under your dress robes tonight.”

The reminder of the Leavers’ Ball thrilled through James. He and Sirius had decided to go together, without dates. A wave of anticipation spread through James whenever he contemplated it. Just him and his best friend - his favourite person - celebrating a final hurrah before they left Hogwarts. Ready to start their adult lives the way they had done everything else since they met on the train to Hogwarts in First Year: together.

But there was unfinished business to consider before they left the castle gates. For weeks, concern had lingered at the back of James’ mind. His hand drifted to Sirius’ forearm, brushing over the sleeve that concealed the raised, circular scar beneath. The Black family seal. It was in the exact same spot on Sirius that the bee now occupied on James.

“Are you going to talk to Regulus today?” James asked quietly.

Sirius tensed, and James smoothed his hand down the length of his back, hoping to soothe him. No one else knew about the sigil, which had appeared the same day Sirius’ estranged father, Orion Black, had unexpectedly dropped dead. Foolishly, both Sirius and James had assumed Sirius’ ties to his family were severed, that he was done with them two years ago when he had fled Grimmauld Place and sought sanctuary in Potter Manor. The appearance of the sigil was a disturbing development. Sworn to secrecy, James had not breathed a word of it to anyone, not even the other Marauders.

“Do I have to?” Sirius groaned, burying his face against James’ neck. “Can’t we just pretend it doesn’t exist?”

James hesitated, his fingers tracing slow, comforting patterns between Sirius’ shoulder blades. “I just want to make it’s not dangerous.”

Sirius lifted his head to look at him, his grey eyes shadowed. “Everything to do with my family is dangerous.”

James frowned, the weight of Sirius’ words settling uncomfortably in his chest. James could not let anything happen to Sirius.

“Even more reason to talk to your brother,” James said, his voice firmer this time.

Sirius sighed, his resistance wavering. He always caved when James asked for something. James clung to that knowledge now. Reaching up, he toyed absently with one of Sirius’ earrings before tucking a loose curl behind his ear. Everyone said Sirius looked like his mother, but James thought the resemblance ended with his perfect features. His spirit, his loyalty, his charisma, his talent – those were the characteristics that defined him.

Sirius opened his mouth as if to respond, but before he could, the bed curtains were thrown open. James startled at the sudden exposure, keenly aware of the way Sirius was draped across his chest.

“Unbelievable,” came the dry voice of Remus Lupin. He stood at the foot of the bed, arms crossed,

eyebrows raised in mock disapproval. “Here Wormtail and I are preparing for one of our last ever pranks and you’re lying around cuddling.”

“We’re not cuddling,” James replied, releasing his grip on Sirius who immediately sat up to glare at Moony.

“You’re the one who gets pissy before the full moon and yells at us for talking in the dorm,” Sirius complained.

Remus rolled his eyes. “Whatever. You realise this entire prank was your idea, Prongs? You gave us one of your famous speeches about ‘legacy’ and everything.”

James laughed. “Alright, alright. I’m coming.”

Reluctantly, he climbed out of bed, stretching as the dormitory revealed itself to be a hive of morning activity. Remus had spread the Marauder’s Map across his duvet, scraps of parchment scattered like fallen leaves as they marked the locations of every suit of armour in the castle. Peter stood before the mirror, his brow furrowed in concentration as he practised the wand movement for the enchantment, his gestures jagged and hesitant, like someone trying to mimic a dance they had not quite mastered.

Peter had always struggled with Transfiguration and Charms, his talents lying instead in the logic of Arithmancy and the patient mapping of stars for Astronomy. All week, he had been rambling on about the comet due to streak across the night sky during the Leavers’ Ball, his excitement as infectious as it was unrelenting.

“You’re overthinking it,” James said, crossing the room to stand beside him. He adjusted Peter’s stance with practised ease. “They’ll know what to do once you cast the charm. Trust me.”

After hurried showers and haphazard attempts at tidying themselves up for the school day, they gathered around Remus’ bed, gazing down at the plan spread out over the duvet like a battlefield strategy. Sirius was nearly vibrating with anticipation, his energy lighting up the room as James ran through their assignments.

When they left the dormitory, they marched as a unit, their steps in near-perfect sync. The Gryffindor common room was hushed in the golden morning light, younger students hunched over last-minute exam preparations. Tall, arched windows cast shifting patterns of sunlight across the floor, warming the stone and promising summer’s arrival, even in the chilly highlands of Scotland.

Marlene McKinnon was sprawled across the couch, a Muggle fashion magazine balanced on her knees. She glanced up as they passed, snorting at the sight of their purposeful expressions.

“Should I come downstairs for the show?” she asked, raising an eyebrow.

“I’ve no idea what you’re talking about,” James replied smoothly, his grin effortlessly charming.

“Right,” she drawled, settling deeper into the cushions. “Well, Lily’s on patrol, so don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

James could feel his friends’ glances at the mention of her name. His relentless pursuit of Lily Evans had taken on an almost legendary status. No matter how often he insisted he was over it they still looked at him whenever she came up. Even Sirius, which bothered him for reasons he did not like to examine too closely. The truth was he had given his pursuit all the way back in Sixth Year.

“I almost feel like I should let her put me in detention,” Sirius mused, breaking the awkward silence. “For old times’ sake.”

Peter gasped, scandalised. “But then you’ll miss the comet, Padfoot! It’s a once-in-a-lifetime –”

“Yes, yes,” Sirius interrupted, waving him off with an exaggerated sigh. “We know. It’s the single most important event in the history of the galaxy.”

“Just because you have no appreciation for Astronomy...” Peter huffed, crossing his arms.

James slung an arm around Sirius’ shoulders, grinning. “Don’t worry about Pads. He’s not going to get caught, are you? Not when we’ve got big plans for tonight.”

“Oh, do we now?” Sirius asked, an answering smile spreading across his face.

James leaned conspiratorially towards Marlene, his arm still draped carelessly over Sirius. “We’re going to get drunk,” he stage-whispered.

Marlene gasped theatrically, letting the magazine slide onto her chest. “How completely out of

character.”

“What can I say?” Sirius replied, looping an arm around James’ waist in return. “James is a terrible influence.”

Even as they joked, James became acutely aware of Sirius’ hand resting on his waist, the faint movement of his fingers tracing the line of his hip. It was such a subtle gesture, and yet it sent every thought in James’ head screeching to a halt.

Sirius was watching him, measuring his reaction. Without thinking, James’ own fingers began a light, unconscious mimicry, brushing the edge of Sirius’ shoulder in the same rhythmic motion. James could not bring himself to regret it when Sirius pulled closer. They fit together like puzzle pieces.

He wondered whether anyone else noticed these quiet, unacknowledged touches that had become increasingly frequent. It had always been hard to know exactly where the boundary should lie with Sirius. James would never touch Remus or Peter this way. But everything was different with Sirius – blurred and intense. James could not stand next to him without feeling a pull.

James pushed the thought away, as had become his habit. When they were travelling, far from the weight of expectations that defined their schooling, there would be time to make proper sense of it. All these moments between them over the years. This feeling that something was gathering speed. For now, he just needed to get through the final weeks of term.

“Prongs,” Remus prompted, breaking the spell. “Don’t we need to get going? For that very legitimate school-related activity?”

“Subtle,” Marlene quipped, picking up her magazine with a smirk.

James released Sirius and stepped away hastily, suddenly realising he had lost himself in the moment. “Right. Let’s go.”

They filed out of the common room, splitting off at the corridor outside the portrait hole. Sirius lingered for a moment, catching James’ eye with a questioning glance. James offered him a reassuring smile.

“Save me a spot downstairs, Pads.”

Sirius’ grin lit his face. “See you there.”

James watched him retreat before turning towards his own assignment. The torches flickered as he jogged down the hallway, their light throwing long, shifting shadows on the stone walls.

His mind wandered, unbidden, back to Sirius. Specifically, what he might wear to the ball. He always looked effortlessly handsome, no matter how little he seemed to try. James had decided to wear his family robes: Gryffindor red with a gold sash. Sirius had always liked him in them.

Not that James was dressing for Sirius. Not exactly. He just did not want to let him down by looking like a slouch.

Lost in thought, James nearly collided with Lily Evans. She caught herself against the wall, her Head Girl badge gleaming proudly on her chest, her green eyes sharp and discerning.

“James,” she said, straightening her pristine uniform.

“Sorry, Lily,” he said hastily, reaching out reflexively to help her balance.

She waved him off. Calling each other by their first names was a new development, probably a result of their long hours spent together fulfilling their respective duties as Head Boy and Girl. The strain in their relationship had eased when James had stopped asking her out whenever he saw her.

Lily’s gaze narrowed, flicking over his crooked tie and unbuttoned cuffs with a practised eye.

“What are you plotting?” she asked, crossing her arms.

James offered his most innocent smile, as though she had just accused him of a crime he had never heard of. “Just trying to figure out how to ask you to the dance,” he said, improvising.

Her expression softened, a smirk tugging at her lips. “Go on, then.”

“What?” He blinked, caught off guard.

“Ask me.”

He chuckled nervously. “I’m starting to think you just enjoy rejecting me.”

“Maybe I won’t reject you this time,” she replied, a flicker of amusement in her voice.

James hesitated. It had been a long time since he had even thought about asking her out. His days had been consumed with planning for the future and his travel plans with Sirius. And yet, here she was, waiting. Looking at him so expectantly. He searched his mind for an excuse but came up short.

“Uh...do you want to go to the Ball with me?” James asked, his voice uncertain.

“Yeah,” she said with a casual shrug. “Okay.”

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Sirius could never quite decide how he wanted to draw James. Sometimes he focused on his size - the strong, broad shoulders and the way he seemed to fill a space so effortlessly. Although James was not that much taller than Sirius, there was a striking solidity to him, a strength that grounded everything around him. In these sketches, he resembled a statue, all power and masculine grace.

But then there were his eyes, warm hazel framed by lashes so long they seemed almost cartoonish, yet perfectly suited to the openness of his face. That warm expression had a way of catching Sirius off guard, making his chest ache. There was the freckle, too, just at the corner of his mouth, like the finishing touch of an artist placed to make his features even more maddeningly appealing.

Though Sirius would never admit it aloud, he adored James' hair. That unruly mop was completely untameable, a perfect reflection of James himself. It was Sirius' solemn duty as his best friend to mock it at every opportunity, even as he seized every opportunity to run his fingers through it, to muss it further just to see what it might do.

Then there were his hands. Sirius could not overlook them, with their blunt fingernails, perpetually ink-stained knuckles from his quill. James was far more committed to his studies than he liked to claim. Perhaps he left things to the last minute, but his assignments were always brilliant and well-reasoned. Sirius had no doubt the Auror program would throw open its doors to him. They would be mad not to.

Sirius even loved the rough callouses on his palms from endless hours on his broom. He had tried to capture the way James moved on a broom – the astonishing speed – but no sketch, no amount of charcoal or paint, could ever do it justice. It was something that had to be seen, experienced, to be truly believed. Sirius loved game days, loved smacking bludgers at anyone who dared to even look at James, clearing a path for him to do what he did best.

His sketchbook was filled with pictures of James. Just like every one before. It was one of the many reasons he kept his sketchbooks locked in his trunk, even in the dormitory. For years, the thought of James discovering those pages had filled Sirius with dread. But lately, something had shifted. For the first time, Sirius found himself daring to imagine that James might not recoil if he ever saw the sketches. That he might even understand them.

Something had changed between them. Sirius could not pinpoint exactly when it had happened, but for more than a year now, he had noticed James looking at him – not trying to catch his eye, but simply looking. Watching him with a quiet intensity that sent shivers down Sirius' spine. On the rare occasions they were apart in the common room, Sirius would glance up and find those hazel eyes already on him, soft and full of something Sirius did not yet have the courage to name.

James had not gone out of his way to mention Lily Evans since Sixth Year. He had not asked any of the girls who fawned over him in his Quidditch uniform to the Leavers' Ball. He was going with Sirius. Every time they walked together down the narrow corridors of the castle, their hands brushed. Every shared smile seemed tinged with a nervous, trembling anticipation. They whispered plans for the future, lying next to each other in bed.

In those moments, Sirius' foolish, hopeful heart dared to believe that perhaps - just perhaps - his feelings were not as unrequited as he had always feared. Perhaps one day, he would reach for James without James pulling away. Perhaps one day, Sirius would be able to sketch every inch of James from memory.

Enchanting the suits of armour assigned to him did not take long. Sirius had always excelled at enchantments. It drove Professor McGonagall to despair that he lacked any ambition for a respectable

career. Despite his excellent grades, Sirius could not imagine himself cooped up in an airless Ministry office, taking orders from some grey-faced bureaucrat. There was so much life out there waiting to be lived, and he wanted to seize it all with James by his side.

With time to spare, Sirius reluctantly recalled his promise to James. His steps carried him down to the dungeons, where he knew Regulus would be cloistered, preparing for his final Potions exam. Keeping an eye on his younger brother had become a habit, even when that very brother usually refused to speak to him.

As Sirius descended, the air grew cooler and damp, clinging to his skin. The torches burned brighter against the gloom, their flickering light casting long, eerie shadows. The Potions dungeon, with its low ceiling and perpetual dampness, was a dank and oppressive space. Professor Slughorn, of course, preferred far more luxurious quarters on the fourth floor, with views of the Herbology greenhouses.

Sirius found Regulus seated at a workstation, steam rising in thick billows from his cauldron. The humidity had brought out the curl in his dark hair, and his sleeves were rolled to his elbows, revealing pale forearms. The dungeon was deserted apart from his brother.

Sirius leaned over the cauldron, peering into the bubbling green liquid. "That looks disgusting."

Regulus did not even glance up. "What do you want, Sirius?"

The voice was strange after so long, detached and clipped. It had been a long time since they had exchanged even the briefest of words. Sirius had not intended his escape from Grimmauld Place in Fifth Year to sever the bond with his brother, but he should have known better. Every action had consequences, rippling endlessly outward.

Sirius swallowed hard, tasting the damp, metallic air of the dungeons. "I need to talk to you."

Regulus' stirring did not falter. "So, talk." The words were flat, disinterested, like the snap of a closing book.

Sirius inhaled sharply, forcing himself to hold back the surge of frustration rising in his chest. Without a word, he tugged up his sleeve and held out his arm.

The sigil stood stark against his pale skin, the raised white scar of the family crest gleaming in the low, flickering light: the inverted pentagram bisected by a sword.

Regulus' gaze finally lifted, sharp and assessing. For a moment, his face betrayed nothing, but then his lips curved into a faint, mocking smirk.

"*Toujours pur*," he said softly, reciting the family motto like a taunt - *Always Pure*.

"*Toujours* not interested in anything to do with our family," Sirius snapped, lowering his arm but not his guard.

Regulus shrugged with studied indifference, returning to his potion. "You're still the heir."

"Walburga blasted me off the family tapestry," Sirius shot back, his sleeve falling down to hide the mark again.

Regulus' hands moved deftly, his focus fixed on the bubbling liquid. "Being heir isn't about a bit of embroidery. It's about blood. You know that."

Sirius set his jaw. "I'm not the heir. And I'm definitely not the Lord of the House of Black."

"The sigil says otherwise," Regulus replied, his tone arch and faintly amused. He gave a pointed glance at Sirius' covered arm. "Unless you're suggesting I kill you and claim the mantle for myself?"

Sirius scoffed. "Like I'd give you the satisfaction. Besides you're not even eighteen yet."

"So, what then? It's hardly a surprise. Or are just afraid your little friends will notice the mark and start doubting your loyalties?"

"None of them are going to find out about it," Sirius said confidently. James did not count; he was different.

Regulus' gaze flicked upward again, this time lingering. His eyes swept over Sirius, sharp and appraising. "Why do you look like that?"

"Like what?" Sirius asked, straightening, his hand instinctively brushing back his hair.

Regulus tilted his head slightly, narrowing his eyes. "You look...happy."

Sirius barked a laugh, short and defensive. "No, I don't." He glanced away, suddenly unable to meet

his brother's piercing gaze.

"You do," Regulus said, as if the fact was distasteful.

"I'm just looking forward to getting out of here, so I don't have to see you all the time," Sirius said, his voice sharpening like a blade.

Regulus leaned back slightly, studying him with unsettling clarity. A flicker of something like understanding crossed his face. "This is about Potter, isn't it? And your little plan to run off to Paris together."

Heat surged to Sirius' cheeks, a bright and treacherous flush. "We're not running off together. We're going travelling."

"A Grand Tour through Europe," Regulus said scornfully. "How very Muggle of you."

Sirius tapped the edge of the cauldron, the clang of metal surprisingly loud in the quiet space. "Look, I just want to make sure I'm not going to get possessed or anything."

"Father had the sigil for decades," Regulus replied. "Did he strike you as someone who was not in control of his faculties?"

Sirius raised an eyebrow. "Do you really want me to answer that?"

Regulus scowled at him. It was a low blow, Sirius knew, to speak ill of the dead. But it was difficult to tell whether Regulus looked offended out of affection for Orion or because he perceived a slight against their family name. His prickly brother had always been so difficult to read. There was no doubt Regulus had admired their father. It was simply not clear whether he had liked him.

Sirius could tell he would get nothing further out of his brother. The dungeon air was oppressive, and he was itching to leave - eager to claim a good spot in the Great Hall, to see James again, to firm up their plans for the evening. He was even looking forward to seeing the stupid comet that Peter would not shut up about.

"Good luck on the exam, Reg," Sirius said, attempting to leave the room on a positive note.

"Good luck with shirking your responsibilities to our bloodline."

So much for that plan. Sirius offered him a sunny, sarcastic smile before hurrying out of the dungeon, back up to the Great Hall.

The space was filled with students chatting over breakfast, the air alive with talk of holiday plans. Overhead, the enchanted ceiling forecasted clear skies, the soft blue streaked with warm light.

Sirius spotted Moony standing near a statue in the corner of the room, half-observed in shadow. He pulled up alongside him.

"So, this is how you blend in?" Sirius asked, a crooked smile tugging at his lips. "Standing awkwardly in the corner of the room?"

Remus shrugged good-naturedly. "Some of us are natural wallflowers."

"Said the werewolf," Sirius replied, his voice low.

"On the topic of your natural lack of subtlety," Remus said, a sly smile spreading across his face. "When should I expect a happy announcement from you and Prongs?"

Sirius whipped his head around, eyes narrowing. "What are you talking about?"

"Come on," Remus scoffed, rolling his eyes. "I'm not blind. Even by your standards, you're in each other's pockets. And beds. I can tell something's going on."

The words hit Sirius like a burst of cold air. He felt suddenly, terribly exposed. Both Regulus and Remus had seemed to notice something off today, as if his carefully constructed armour had cracked. A thread of unease tightened in his stomach, cold and coiling. Was he being too obvious? Was he going to scare James away?

It was important to tread carefully. Not to push him. To carefully navigate the rules – those rules that decided who should be loved. And how. And how much.<sup>[1]</sup> Sirius had always hated rules, even before he understood his own preferences.

"Relax, Padfoot," Remus said, his teasing tone softening when he caught the flicker of unease in Sirius' eyes. "No need to clam up. I'm just winding you up."

Sirius forced himself to exhale slowly, biting back the urge to lash out, to deny, to deflect. This was Moony. He had no reason to doubt him, no reason to retreat behind sharp words and sharper silences.

“Leave the jokes to the experts, Moony,” Sirius said wisely, his voice lighter now as he gave Remus’ shoulder a firm pat.

Remus chuckled, his amber eyes crinkling with amusement. “Right you are.”

At that moment, James appeared at the entrance to the Great Hall, and Sirius’ heart clenched like a string pulled taut. James looked oddly out of sorts, his gaze sweeping the room with an unfocused, almost hesitant quality. There was something disarming about the way he moved - unusually slow.

Every fibre of Sirius’ being urged him to close the distance, to hurry to James and pull him aside, to find out what was wrong and fix it. Instead, he rooted himself in place.

James weaved his way through the bustling hall, his hair as chaotic as ever but his usual swagger dimmed, almost tentative. Sirius’ breath hitched as James stopped beside him, taking up his familiar place as though by some unspoken law of the universe.

At the High Table, McGonagall cast a pointed look in their direction, her sharp instincts clearly catching the scent of mischief. Sirius met her gaze with his trademark grin, one that teetered just on the edge of insolence, but his attention was already elsewhere. He shifted closer to James, his knuckles brushing lightly against the back of James’ hand, the touch so subtle it could have been accidental.

“Everything okay?” Sirius asked, his voice low enough to be swallowed by the hum of the hall.

“Uh, yeah,” James said, but there was an uncharacteristic uncertainty in his tone. He reached up to rub the back of his neck, his fingers dragging through the mess of dark hair. “But, there’s been a slight change of plans for tonight.”

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The Great Hall flowed seamlessly into the grounds beyond, its enchanted doors thrown wide open to let the cool evening air mingle with the warmth of the celebration. Inside, floating candles and delicate glass lanterns hung suspended, casting soft, golden light across the polished floor. Bright garlands looped along the walls, and charmed ivy trailed lazily over the archways, glowing faintly as if infused with moonlight.

It should have been a perfect evening; it was everything James had ever imagined in the early years of school. Lily was radiant in a forest-green dress, her fiery hair tumbling in soft curls down her back. She had smiled brightly when she saw him waiting in his family’s dress robes at the bottom of the stairs to the girls’ dormitories. He had complimented her, offered his arm, and done everything Euphemia Potter had instructed him to do when escorting a young lady to a ball.

But Sirius lingered in his thoughts, tugging at his focus with a quiet persistence. James kept seeing Sirius’ expression when James had told him about Lily. The way his face had fallen, his emotions slipping through cracks in his usual façade. Sirius rarely let anything show if he did not want it seen, and the memory struck James like an off-key note in the otherwise jubilant symphony of the evening.

He could not shake it, nor the guilt that had come after. Sirius had stared at him in the Great Hall, oblivious to the commotion of enchanted suits of armour bursting into life around them. They had marched jauntily, trumpets blaring the Gryffindor fight song, while confetti and fireworks exploded in showers of light overhead. Yet Sirius had not even flinched.

James had pressed a hand to the back of his neck, unsettled, searching for the right words to say. “Listen, Pads, I - ”

“Congrats,” Sirius interrupted, his voice flat and distant. “I can’t believe Evans finally gave in.” And then he had turned on his heel, stalking towards the Great Hall’s entrance.

“Where are you going?” James had called after him, alarmed by the abruptness.

“To find a date,” Sirius had replied without looking back.

Remus had said nothing until Sirius vanished. Then, with a sigh, he had muttered, “I say this from a place of love, but you really are an idiot sometimes, James.”

James could not remember ever feeling worse. Now, as he stood beside Lily at a table near the Hall's entrance, he tried to push the moment from his mind. He was supposed to be enjoying this final celebration of school, yet his gaze kept drifting to the door, searching for Sirius. He was failing miserably as a date, and Lily had clearly noticed.

"Are you alright?" she asked, studying him.

James forced a smile. "Of course."

"You seem distracted," she said, biting her lip with a note of irritation in her voice.

He hesitated. "Sirius and I are fighting. I was hoping to talk to him tonight."

Lily smiled knowingly, irritation transforming into understanding. "I was wondering where your other half was. I thought I'd have to compete with him for your attention all evening."

James' chest tightened painfully at the joke, guilt gnawing at the edges of his thoughts. It was just for one night. Surely Sirius would forgive him for the change. In the meantime, he needed to keep it together. Lily deserved better than this. After all, it was her night as well.

"You've never had trouble keeping my attention," he said honestly, and she blushed faintly, adjusting the strap of her dress.

"I thought you might have lost interest," she admitted softly. "When you stopped asking me out."

Before James could answer, Sirius strode into the Hall with Marlene McKinnon on his arm. They were a striking pair – Marlene in a lavender gown, Sirius in deep purple robes that accentuated his regal bearing. Her long silver nails curled possessively against his sleeve. They looked like talons.

Sirius' brooding expression betrayed no pleasure in her company, even though they were friends and had always gotten on well. His sharp grey eyes flicked towards James and Lily, pausing just long enough for James to feel a jolt of something fierce and unnameable in his chest. He had not had the heart to scrub away the picture of the bee. Under Sirius' glare it burned.

Then Sirius turned away, leading Marlene into the crowd without a word.

"Did you know they were going together?" Lily asked, curious.

"No," James said flatly, trying to mask his irritation. He offered Lily what he hoped was a reasonable attempt at a smile. "Do you want to dance?"

As they swayed to the music, James caught only glimpses of Sirius through the crowd, each one unsettling in its pull. Despite his efforts to be present with Lily, his thoughts strayed, his focus fractured. He was relieved when they joined a larger group, eager to camouflage himself in the nostalgic conversation.

When Marlene joined their group, barefoot and clutching her strappy shoes, James seized the opportunity.

"Where's Sirius?" he asked quickly.

"Probably outside," Marlene replied, rolling her eyes. "Smoking or brooding. Why are the pretty ones always so moody?"

James did not bother with a response. Making his excuses to Lily, he slipped out into the gardens.

The grounds had been transformed into a romantic wonderland, the soft glow of lanterns lighting pathways that wound between secluded alcoves. The air was cool and fragrant with spring blooms, the rustling leaves blending with distant laughter and music from the Hall. Above, the sky was a canvas of stars.

James threaded through the crowd, his instincts guiding him towards the quieter edge of the grounds. Sirius did not like being around people when he was upset. He always retreated to his designated spots. James knew exactly where to look.

The night was darker and quieter away from the lights of the party. Sirius stood alone at the water's edge, his silhouette sharp against the silvered ripples. The still lake was a spectacular sight, reflecting the shimmering stars.

Sirius was not smoking, just staring at the surface of the lake, motionless but for the slight shift of his shoulders as he breathed.

James stopped a few paces away, hesitant. "You're avoiding me."

Sirius stiffened but did not turn. "I'm paying attention to my date."

James snorted softly. "Right. Is that why you're out here alone?"

Sirius finally turned, stepping just out of the shadows. The faint glow from the lanterns reached him like a painter's hesitant brushstroke, illuminating the tension in his sharp jaw, the storm in his eyes.

"Just go back to the party, James." His voice was low, rough.

"No," James said, stubborn. "Not without you."

Sirius stared at him, his expression unreadable. Something raw flickered in his gaze before he looked away, his thumb worrying at the cuff of his sleeve.

"Why are you so angry with me?" James asked, his voice quiet but unsteady. It was a foolish question. The moment he said the words he wanted to take them back. Now was not the time. This conversation could wait until Paris.

Sirius' hand stilled. For a long moment, he did not answer, his eyes fixed on the ground. Then, in a voice barely above a whisper, he said, "I thought..." He trailed off, shaking his head as if to banish the words.

James leaned forward, just enough to hear. "What did you think?"

"I thought we were going together," Sirius said, his voice low, almost steady, but not quite.

The air between them shifted. A crack in the earth, a faltering heartbeat. A long delayed moment suddenly upon them.

"We were," James said, quieter now. "Only Lily - "

"I'm not talking about Lily." Sirius' head snapped up, his voice cutting through the night like a blade. "I'm talking about us."

James froze.

Sirius should warn people before he looked at them like that. It was too much. Not just the rawness but the certainty in it, the refusal to look away. Like his hand was pressed to a live flame but he refused to move it.

James shifted his weight, trying to dispel the tension rising between them. He wanted to say something light, to break the moment before it broke him. But he could not bring himself to make light of the situation, not when Sirius looked so upset.

"I couldn't back out when she said yes," James said. "I was the one who asked her."

Sirius folded his arms across his chest, like he was fortifying himself. "Did you want to back out?"

*Yes.*

James almost said it. It pressed against his throat, a truth he had buried, along with all those other feelings that he tried to deny. All night, James had been aware of Sirius at the edge of the party. His silhouette cutting through the crowd, dark and restless.

All night, James had wished it was Sirius beside him. He wished they were in Paris, far away from their schoolmates. In a new place where no one knew them. He wished he was watching Sirius bringing beauty to life on a blank canvas. It was the most wonderful sight in the world.

But James could not say any of that. He crossed his arms, mirroring his friend.

"I don't know," James said.

Sirius stared at him, his expression unreadable, his eyes storm grey. The moment their eyes met, James felt that strange alchemy within that only Sirius could inspire. Everything inside him turned molten and golden. Overhead, the stars seemed to draw closer, shivering in the stillness.

Before James could respond, the comet appeared, a flash of fire, brilliant and fleeting, streaking across the dark expanse of sky. Despite the tension between them, James watched it in awe, its reflection rippling over the lake.

"Pads," James said urgently, pointing to the sky. "You're going to miss it."

But Sirius did not turn. His eyes stayed on James, unwavering. Suddenly, the spectacular display overhead was irrelevant. All that mattered was Sirius.

"I don't care about the comet," Sirius said.

And then he was moving, all cat-like grace and focused intent. He closed the distance between them.

James dropped his hands to his side, breathless and rooted to the spot.

Sirius came close and did not stop. He was no more than a breath away. James could smell his familiar scent – cedar and smoke. Sirius put his hands to his face, gentler than James had imagined. Because James *had* imagined it, although it was something he could scarcely admit to himself. He had imagined closing the distance between them. He even dreamed of it. A part of him had always known that the longing he had to be alone in the world with Sirius was not just friendship.

“Don’t hate me,” Sirius whispered.

James felt his words, felt the warmth of his breath. Sirius traced his jaw and James forgot how to speak, how to breathe, how to move.

And then Sirius kissed him.

Everything inside James lit up. Sirius settled his hands on his hips, and they felt like branding irons. He would have handprints on his skin by morning. When Sirius pulled back, James was trembling. The space between them was unbearable. For a moment, they lingered, their foreheads almost touching.

“James,” Sirius said, so quiet it could have been a breath.

Hearing Sirius say his name was electrifying. Suddenly it was James closing the distance, tangling his hand in that soft hair, kissing him like his life depended on it. His body pressed closer, seeking something he could not name. Their hips slotted together, and Sirius groaned. James felt the sound down to the soles of his feet.

James was just like the comet, burning up as it hurtled across the night sky. The warmth of Sirius’ palm at the back of his neck grounded him even as everything inside him burned.

A sudden cheer rang out from the direction of the castle, distant but jarring. James broke away, breathless and disoriented. He almost expected a crowd of people to be gathered, watching them. Although it was clear they were still alone, panic shot through James like an arrow. He backed up, creating more distance between them.

“They’re just excited about the comet,” Sirius said, something vulnerable in his voice.

James could not look at him, not yet. He already knew that Sirius would look devastating – well-kissed and dishevelled, more beautiful than anything the night sky could offer. James turned towards the lake, his chest heaving, his mind a blur. When he reluctantly looked back, Sirius was watching him, his face soft and open in a way that made James’ heart ache even through his fear.

“Say something,” Sirius pleaded.


James opened his mouth, but nothing came. His throat was tight, his mind empty. He took a step back, then another. Sirius’ expression shifted, the openness closing like a door.

“James - ”

But James had already turned, fleeing towards the castle, towards Lily, towards safety.

By the time he looked back, Sirius was gone. It was not until later that James discovered exactly how gone he was.

## Notes:

Thank you so much for reading, commenting and leaving kudos 

### Notes:

[1] A quote from Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*: “Only that once again they broke the Love Laws. That lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much.”

Close (#)