

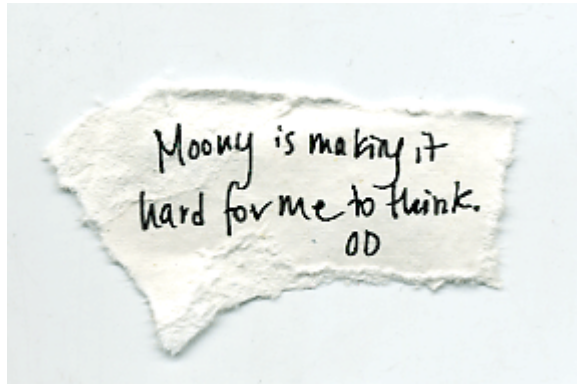
Marauder's Map : version number one.
(explodes on contact.)

A. Dumbledore

!!

Mr. Worms

Bugger all, I can't
draw footprints!
Here, Noony, let the
professionals
handle it!



Except for the occasional sneeze -- while the rare histories section is optimal for total privacy, it is also unfortunately optimal for total dust -- the library is quiet. The only light flickers from the tip of James' wand, held trembling with excitement over the folds of old parchment. The Map, forever associated with capital letters, does nothing. The four boys crowded around it hold their breath until Remus feels dizzy and Sirius sneezes for the fifth time. At last, a blotch of ink takes form in the area labeled, in impeccable script, LIBRARY. Hours of research, practice, trial, error, refinement, and countless failed attempts and wasted paper, draw together in precise concentration and form four pairs of footprints, eight little shod feet in total, mounded together in what Remus realizes is the rare histories section. The names bloom like a stain, two on each side. JAMES POTTER and SIRIUS BLACK; REMUS LUPIN and PETER PETTIGREW. James makes a noise like he's just had the best wank of his life. Sirius sneezes a sixth time. Peter's mouth is hanging open like he's a fish and Remus thinks dizzily that they are geniuses, that they should be endowed with magical research grants, and it's a bloody shame no one can ever know about Their Map because One, it is A Secret, and Two, it's against so many Hogwarts rules and regulations that the very prospect of it had at the onset made Remus' head hurt for days. No one will ever know the tale of their creativity, their inspiration, their dedication to the cause. It seems a pity, really, Remus thinks, that so much hard work should be known only amongst the four of them. Then again, that's his Boys' Club Wet Blanket spirit talking. He keeps the regret to himself.

"We did it," James whispers. His wand shakes erratically. "Look at us. There we are. Right there. *Right there*. It's fantastic. We're brilliant. We are the best pranksters ever. Future generations will sing our names to the heavens. *Look at us*. We did it!"

"Well," Remus cautions. "We've only got us to work. And we still have half the map to finish."

"Be quiet, Moony," Sirius cautions. "Let Prongsie have his moment. They're so rare for him; he deserves his happiness."

"They are not rare," James protests, "I have moments all the time. Loads of them. Moments all over the shop. It's just -- it's just that this one is -- Moony, be quiet for a moment and just think about what we *did*!"

"I *am* thinking," Remus objects. "I am. It's wonderful. It's just there's so much more we could *do*. I'm just thinking ahead!"

"How's it doing it?" Peter whispers. With the tip of his wand, he prods gingerly at the banner bearing his name.

Sirius gives him a withering look. "Have you been paying any attention for the last *year*, Wormtail? Honestly?"

"It's just -- I think it's -- well, it always surprises me when it works," Peter mutters, and coughs into his sleeve. Sirius rolls his eyes exaggeratedly and buries his face in the map again. Remus eyes them. "Anyway," Peter says, with unexpected clarity, "I don't like this. I mean -- it's that -- there are *rules* now."

"And these *rules*, as you call them," Sirius drawls, "they apply to us since...when?"

"He has a point," Remus says carefully. Sirius has been strange lately -- well, *not* strange, actually, Remus thinks ruefully. Strange might be preferable. What Sirius has been is painfully familiar: dark and mercurial, unpredictably and stunningly cruel between moments of intense affection and generosity. It's first year all over again, and Remus doesn't know if it's the flat or the family or the increasingly divided

attention of James Potter, but he does know that he doesn't like it. "There are different rules."

"Prongs," Peter appeals, "*you* know. The rules. They can find out about stuff like this now. You've been dragging people into Dumbledore's office for them since first term! Rosier got *expelled* for less. I mean, he had a tattoo! And that's nothing like this."

"Oh," James says distantly, "did he? That's nice. Padfoot, we're going to have to do something about this, look, see how it sort of smears when I move?" He kicks a foot back and forth to demonstrate. "Messy."

"I like the smeariness," Sirius protests. "It makes it all livelier."

Remus looks helplessly between them, James and Sirius, dark heads buried in the crinkling swaths of paper and Peter, looking rounder and fairer and more trembly than ever, doing his slouching best to mount a protest. He's gotten three increasingly frantic Howlers over the past month from his mother, screaming at him about running with a dangerous crowd and how he'd better be prepared to be yanked off home at any moment. There's something gray in his face, something wary and terrified in the slope of his spine, and Remus wants to help him. Carefully he says, "There is more monitoring now. It's all this business with -- what Peter's saying, that is -- what *I'm* saying, as well -- I just think we ought to be, you know, discreet."

"Silence, jellyfish-men," Sirius commands, fixing them with a regal stare and pushing his hair out of his eyes. "Honestly! Both of you! This is not a time for monkeying around and talk of discreetness and tattoos."

"I thought we agreed that it is always time for talk of tattoos," James says in some surprise.

"Well," Sirius amends, "yes. But *can* we focus please? This is one of the greatest magical tools ever constructed by man or beast," with a wicked glance at Remus, which Remus cannot wholly appreciate, "and it needs to be completed. Which means we need to focus. But first, we need to drink this peach concoction that Prongsie found in the Potions closet--" James gives a grand, if distracted, bow-- "and do some sort of pastoral dance. Who knows a hornpipe?" He drops the sticky, ancient-looking bottle into Remus's lap and returns his attention once more to the Holy Boy's Club Grail: the map. Remus stares down at the bottle, which may contain some kind of schnapps concoction. Or some kind of rat poison. Whatever it is, it smells like rotten fruit and vomit. Remus prods it warily.

"Dances," James says absently, "always your lookout, Pads. What's missing, d'you think? From the tracker? It can get us, and who's that off in the corner -- all blurry -- is that your brother?" Sirius bends in close, narrow, sharp, and nods curtly. "Well, that's rum, isn't it? Do you think it's a sort of -- I don't know, a family thing?"

"Can't be," Sirius replies shortly, "we're not in the same family, are we?"

"A scent sort of, thing, I mean, maybe," James says. His knee is pressed up against Sirius's leg, arm casually over Sirius's shoulder, their knuckles grazing with the boyish closeness of twelve-year-olds, not seventh-years engaged in unbelievably illegal activity. Remus bites down the urge to tsk. "Like -- all right, dogs can smell if something's a bird, you know, or if it's a...stoat. You know what I mean? D'you think it's doing something like that? Might be how we could get everyone on there."

"Mm," Sirius murmurs. His eyes scan the page, dark and quick with thought. "Like a -- *oh*. You mean..."

"Yeah! You know."

"--but if that's it, then couldn't we--"

"Right, with..."

"But would it work, you know, because--"

"I don't know, that's the thing, isn't it? It's--" James makes an indecipherable, though clearly deeply meaningful, gesture. It's as if they're speaking another language, one that requires no verbiage at all. "--*You* know. We can't do that. I've got three essays due, for one thing."

"What are you talking about?" Peter says loudly. His face is very pink.

"Fixing it," James answers. "Pads, do you think we--"

"No, it's much...we'd have to, and all that, and that's impossible--"

"I don't see what you're talking about!" Peter yells, suddenly leaping to his feet. "I don't! I don't see what you're talking about and I don't see how this works on its own like that! We're going to be in so much trouble. I want to go down to breakfast and forget this whole stupid thing! What's the point anyway? We'll only be here five more months and then what? It'll just be lying around? I don't like it! I want to leave!"

Remus thinks he has never seen anything so brave in his entire life.

Or anything so quivery.

"All right," James says impatiently, giving Peter a severe look over his glasses, "keep your shirt on, Pettigrew." Sirius doesn't even glance up. "Look," James continues, "it's for posterity, and all that. We've been over it a thousand times before, what's died in *your* pants this morning?"

"Besides the ob-vi-ous," Sirius sing-songs."

Peter draws in a deep breath, and then deflates. The voice of James Potter, while not the voice of reason, has always held this power over him. James' convictions are Peter's convictions; it's a joke amongst the other Gryffindor boys and it's a weapon amongst the Slytherins and it's something of a cause for consternation amongst their professors, but there it is. There it always has been. Peter just sags like a balloon lost all its air, darting narrow looks to either side, and then shrugging.

"That's it." James pats him on the shoulder. "There's the spirit."

"Reasons," Sirius mutters, and shoots Peter a scornful look. "Don't know what you're on about, Pete. S'like he's talking Egyptian."

"Er," Remus begins.

"*Idea!*" James exclaims suddenly, so loudly that Peter jumps and Sirius whips around and Remus almost chokes on the three vital organs that attempt to abandon ship by leaping out through his throat. James gives little time for recovery, but beckons all three of them close. "You see," he explains, "what we're missing -- what we've been missing this whole time -- *is*--" He gestures wildly, feverishly, to the map before him. The mass of feet and names wobble as all four of them lean close. In the hallway just outside Filch's feet stalk back and forth and back again, with lurching footprints. James points frantically at them, their names, mouth working with little sounds like "Bibble!" and "Werghk!" but incapable of forming words in English.

"*Brilliant!*" Sirius replies suddenly, as if somehow the inspiration has undergone some osmosis through James' skin to his own. "James, mate, *James*, you are the most *brilliant* wizard in the *world* -- except for me, of course -- but that's to be expected, everyone falls short eventually -- *God*, how'd you think of it?"

"What are they talking about?" Peter hisses violently.

"I'm not," Remus replies, "well, I don't -- well, *they* know what they're doing. I think."

"We haven't put any of *us* in it," James explains. The unspoken finish -- *obviously* -- lingers in the air between them.

"Yes we *have*," Peter replies, sounding exasperated. "Look, we're right there. Everyone's there. Our feet, see, and Sirius' are the ones that are sort of bleeding ink at the ends, like they've been shot."

"No," Remus whispers, understanding. "No -- no -- *of course*, that's it, it's the simplest *bloody* trick in the book!"

"Exactly," James says.

"Exactly," Sirius echoes.

"Huh?" Peter demands.

"We haven't put any of ourselves in," Remus repeats. "Not replications. *Us*."

"It hasn't got the Marauder Mentality," James finally bursts out. "It doesn't know what to look for -- it doesn't know what a Marauder

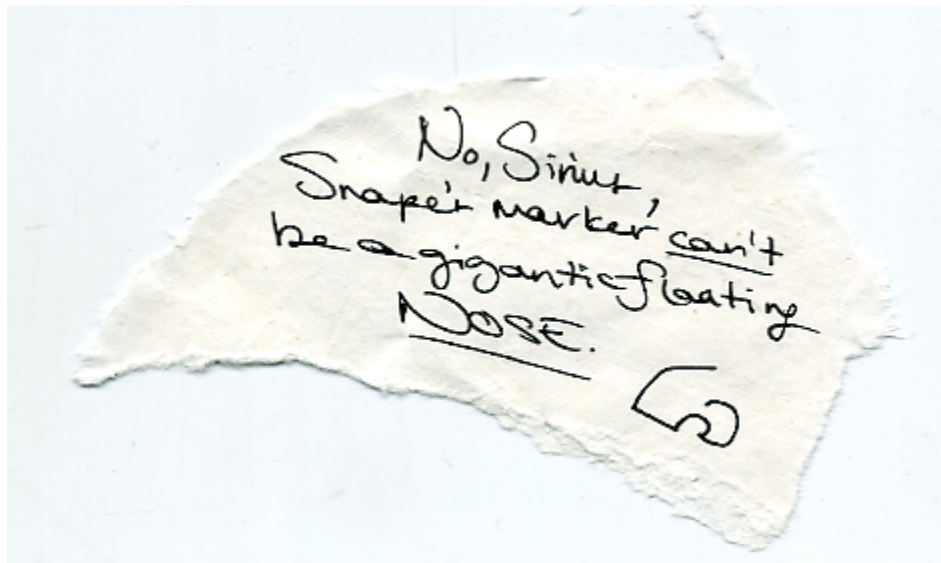
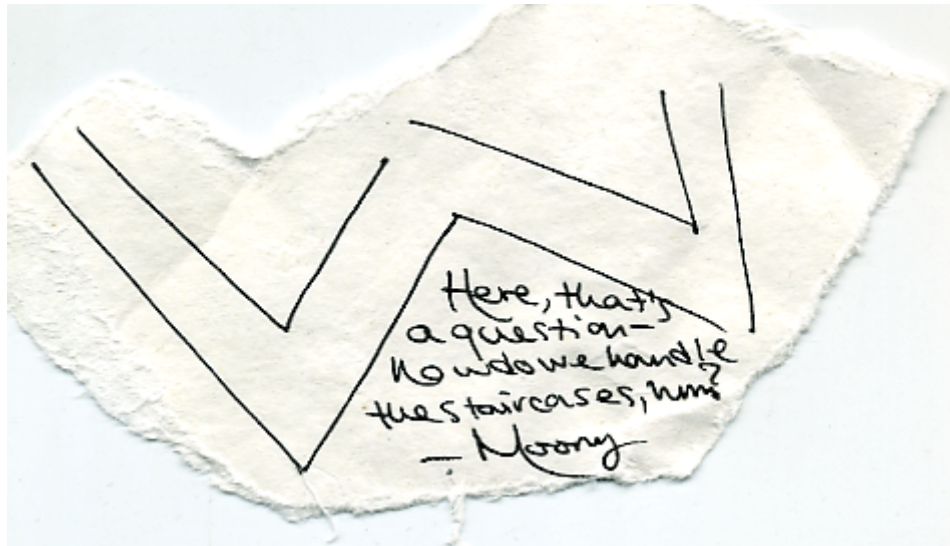
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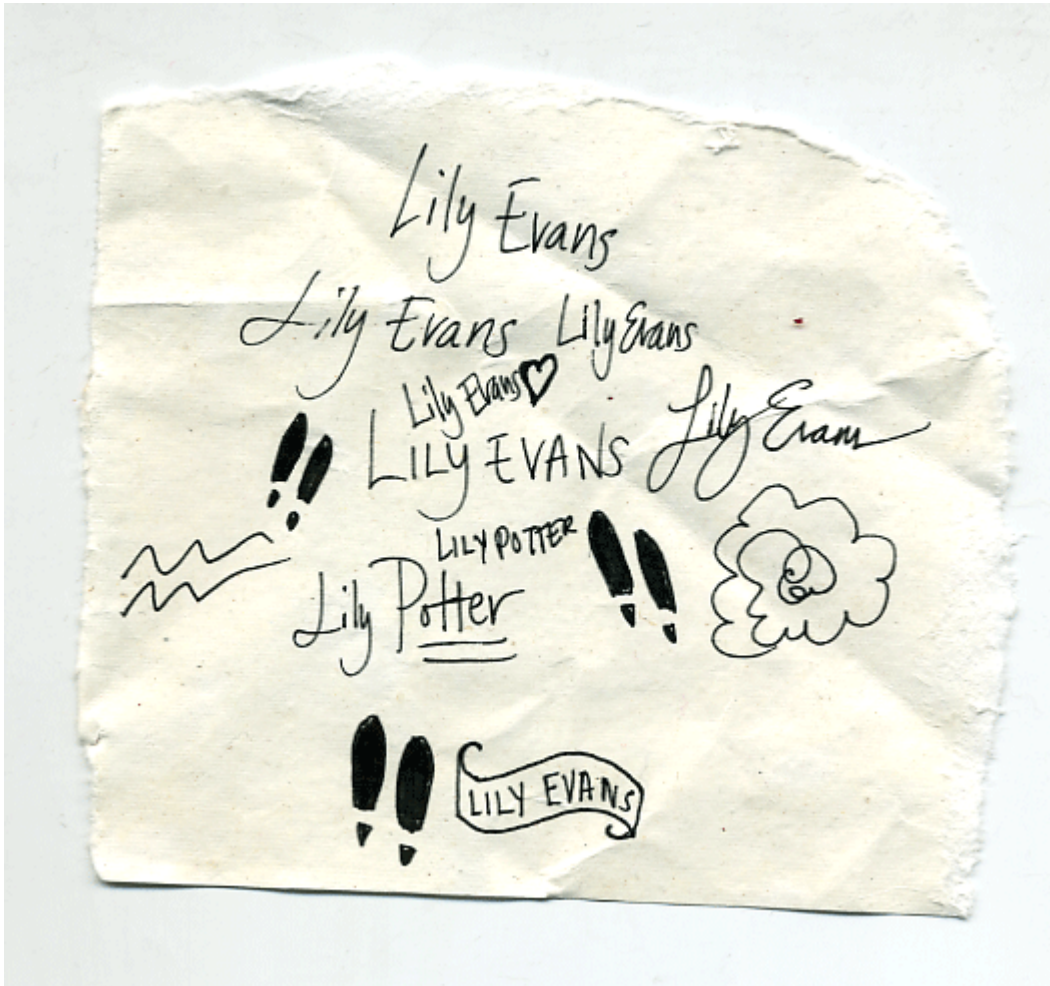
"And how can it be a Marauder's Map," Sirius finishes, "without a Marauder's wit -- humor -- cleverness!"

Remus refrains from making any comments.

"Does this mean Wormtail is going to have to go inside the walls again?" Peter moans.

"Good man, Pete," Sirius says, clapping him on the shoulder. "He is ready for anything, should it come in the line of duty!"





They are beneath the floorboards when they hear the ominous creak. "It's here," Sirius is insisting, "this is where I found the tunnel, d'you see, and *no* I am *very* sure, so you *don't* have to look so dubious."

Remus doesn't ask how it is Sirius knows how he looks at the moment at all -- it's very dark, and for all Sirius knows Remus could look sympathetic, or deranged, or like he's just suffered a stroke. Dubious is hardly high up there on the list; deranged is well near the top, though, and stroke is gradually gaining steam. "I didn't say it's not here," Remus tries to say patiently. "All I said was there's a spider in my trousers."

"I think there is always a spider in your trousers," Sirius replies.

Remus is just about to ask him to explain himself when they hear the creak.

It goes: *creeeaaaak*. Remus forgets the spider and peers up through the slats, watching the light shift in a terrible, dreadful, foreboding way. He nudges Sirius in the side. "Someone's up there," he hisses, feeling loud and echoing through every swelling, hollow space inside him.

"Well, yes, I know," Sirius whispers back. "I bet it's James, having us on."

"It's not James having you on," a female voice booms from above. "But it is someone with incredibly good hearing, so you'd best come on up from there."

"Women have magic powers unbeknownst to man," Sirius hisses.

"I have noticed," Remus replies.

"Do please consider complying now," the female voice booms again. "I have magic powers all over the place that I'm sure you've never dreamed of."

"Shows what she knows," Sirius says, almost wickedly. "Well," he adds, louder, "we're on our way up. With our hands in the air, shall we, or can we count on your magic powers to chance keeping our hands hidden?" The floorboards shift again. *Creeeeek, creeeeaaaaaaaaaaaaaak*. Remus wriggles. The spider wriggles.

"Do as you please, Black," the voice booms.

"Hello," Sirius says. "Death knows my name."

"Just let's do as she says," Remus whispers. "Here -- the game's up."

"Oh, Moony," Sirius mourns, "the game is never up. I, however, am up." He reaches up, grabs the loose plank, and shoves. Not more than a minute later he's already kicked Remus in the nose twice, given himself three splinters, and fallen backwards onto Remus' head. Remus makes a mental note for posterity: nothing good will ever come of exploring the castle with Sirius Black.

"Well." A face appears, and a lit wand. "It would seem you *are* incapable."

"Sorry, do I know you?" Sirius says airily, shaking sawdust and what may very well be several immense termites out of his hair.

"Black, don't dissemble with me." The woman crosses one skinny, striped leg over the other and peers forward at them, folding her jangling arms over her knee. Remus helplessly attempts to extract himself from Sirius's armpit. "I practically taught you to dress, you little wart. Aren't those boots mine?"

Sirius's mouth falls open. A termite may or may not have fallen into it. Remus doesn't really want to think about it. "McKinnon?"

"In the flesh. Never thought you'd see me again, did you? Never thought I'd visit vengeance upon your head for all those dungbombs you kept exploding in the changing-room? *As if I didn't know*. Oh." Her green eyes slant sideways for a moment, coolly disinterested. "And that's Lupin, I suppose."

"Er," Remus says. "Yes?" And now that he's heard the name, he does remember Marlene McKinnon -- surely she was about seven feet tall, before, all pink hair and immense lungpower and an air of intolerance for all things stammering and named Remus Lupin? He shrinks back a little into the hole. He longs, idly, for Sirius' armpit, despite the smell.

"He looks exactly the same," Marlene says to Sirius, thankfully ignoring him again. "Do you still knock about with James Potter, I suppose?"

"Do we knock about," Sirius says. "Do we knock? Do we ever. And about." He grins. It's remarkable how he is so capable of making the most incomprehensible collection of sentences seem valid with such a grin. Well, what you lose in coherency you make up for with charm. Or else you're that unfortunate Hufflepuff boy. What's his name -- something Doogle. "What, Remus? Remus doesn't change. He just sort of gets bigger when no one's looking."

Remus stares at his feet. He can feel McKinnon's eyes on him, the intense gaze boring into the very depths of his soul. That wouldn't be so bad, but he can almost smell her disapproval. She's not just looking into the very depths of his soul -- oh, no. That would be preferable. Rather, she's looking into the very depths of his soul and failing them. She is calling them a wading pool of mediocrity, a watering hole for the unworthy. The toes of Remus' shoes point together. He feels eleven years old.

"Hm," Marlene says. "No, I suppose not. What have you been knocking about, then?"

"Can't tell you," Sirius replies cheerfully. "We'd have to kill you if we did."

"I'd like to see you try." Marlene buffs her black nails on her shirt and regards them idly. "I scratch like a tiger."

Sirius winks roguishly at her. "I always thought you were a tiger."

"Eurgh," Marlene says, wincing. "You know you were *eleven* once. Don't start with me."

"Well, what are *you* knocking about for then, if not for the chance of seeing how your little protégé has grown into handsome and virile manhood?" Sirius hoists himself neatly out of the floorboards and is just absently sticking a hand back for Remus when Marlene quirks her very red lips up to the side and makes a noise

"He's not an idiot, Black," she says impatiently. "Let him climb out himself."

Sirius blinks. Remus blinks. Marlene doesn't.

"All right then," Sirius says casually, and shoves his hand into his pocket. "You're avoiding the question."

"I didn't feel like answering it," Marlene shrugs. "Got a smoke?"

Remus sets determinedly about for a boost. There don't seem to be any. It was fine for Sirius, who could pretty much claw his way out using Remus as a sort of human stepladder. For those who have not had the breadth of experience that Remus has in serving as a human stepladder for Sirius Black, the smell of his foot as it is coming down over Remus' nose -- the particular, disturbing, grip-like action -- it is a combination of sensations which haunt him on dark and stormy nights. Remus sneezes, and inhales a good deal of antique dust, and gets a splinter in underneath the soft flesh of his palm that feels a little bit like medieval torture. By the time he's gotten a good grip and hoisted himself up and out, panting, and with more bugs crawling in his hair than are left gnawing away at the floor, Sirius and Marlene are smoking a particularly pungent wizarding grass that serves also as cinnamon in some seedier bakeries in Hogsmeade. Remus coughs -- he can't help it, there's something alive in his throat -- but tries to do so quietly, so as not to disturb them. At least it smells nice, now. Less like foot, and more like a hot bun. A hot bun held tenderly between the toes of a foot.

"Oh, don't," Marlene mutters irritably. "You with your coughing. It's ridiculous, you realize. We see you. We *see* you," she repeats, and snorts in the back of her throat. "No need to have it be a production number."

"Er," Remus says. He thinks: *But I have bugs in my esophagus*. "Sorry," he finishes.

"Here," says Marlene, and stands up with a great deal of noise -- all boots and chains and rustling. Sirius' eyes follow the back of her head. She sticks out one hand and makes a dismissive little motion with her chin. "Come on. Have a boost-up."

Remus takes her hand gingerly. Marlene yanks upward, simultaneously dislocating his arm and flinging him out of the pit. It is a very similar sensation, Remus thinks dazedly, to being a boulder in some sort of medieval catapult. Sirius cackles unhelpfully as he lands.

Oof.

"Gnaa," Remus says in a small voice.

"Next time," Marlene whispers, crouching next to him, "don't let other people get you into any holes you can't climb out of on your own."

"Aiee," Remus agrees.

"Now where were we," Marlene continues. She turns back to Sirius, wiping her hands -- the implications of which are not lost on Remus. He rolls his shoulder about in its socket, listening to it go pop. "Ah yes. I was going to explain to you that it's absolutely none of my business and here's the bargain: if you don't tell anyone you saw me about, I won't tell anyone that you're the little gophers digging holes around here. How's that sound?"

"McKinnon," Sirius says, "you are a man among women."

"And don't you forget it," Marlene finishes. "Remember, Black: always have a bargaining piece."

Remus' shoulder snaps back into its proper place.

"And you, too, I suppose," Marlene adds, jerking her head back at him. "Though what you'll do with it, I don't know."

"He's not very good at bargaining," Sirius says. "Which is funny, because you'd think he would be -- he's a cheap little bastard."

"They all are," Marelene murmurs. "They *all* are."

Who? Remus thinks. *People whose shoulders you've broken?*

"So how about it, gophers? Do we have a deal?"

While it has never been a question he directly asked himself, Remus has always liked to believe that he has enough pride not to make any deals with anyone who called him "gopher" and rampantly, openly disliked him.

"Of course," he says, a little breathlessly, mourning the loss of what little dignity he ever had.

"We'll see," Sirius says. "Seems to me you've got more to lose. How about another smoke and then we'll talk?"

"How about I don't prevent you from having grandchildren?" Marlene suggests.

"Ooghk," Remus says, which means, *you are singularly convincing*





"She's something else, isn't she?" Sirius whistles, that long, drawn-out note of admiration and awe that serves as his universal judgment call, and Remus says, before he can stop himself,

"She doesn't like me!" It's horrible -- pleading and whiny and wet-blankety and all the things Remus struggles so hard not to be, and has made great strides against, but is, deep down, at the core, something sopping and needy and strong enough in its own way to be one half of his equation. And he can't help it; it's as if someone else is operating his mouth and he's just vomiting out these vile little helpless burps. "I just--"

"She likes you all right," Sirius says, a little bewildered. "It's just -- I mean, you were never close, right?"

Neither were you! Remus wants to shriek. *Why doesn't she like me? How can I fix it? What did I do?* "I don't," he begins. "Do you think I should get her flowers?"

"Not really a flower kind of girl, McKinnon," Sirius says, full of awe. "No -- no, definitely not."

"Should I write her a card? An apology? Send her one of those plants they've bred to bite people like pitbulls and hang on like lampreys?"

"Does it have flowers?" Sirius asks. Remus nods. "Not quite up her alley. You're awful with gifts. She wouldn't like books, either, so don't ask her."

"Boots?" Remus asks. "With spikes on the toes for, I don't know, ripping lads' souls out and stacking them, like soul-skewers?"

Sirius ponders that. "No," he says, "but you're getting warmer. It's got to have teeth."

It's no good, Remus realizes. *No matter what I do, she isn't going to like me*. And it's not that she doesn't like him -- well, all right, that *is* a necessary part of it -- that really gets him, that really makes him feel sick. It's that there's no reason -- the decision is so arbitrary -- there's nothing he can *do* about it -- he's so futile, so helpless, against this great injustice. He *is* likeable. He tries so *hard* to be. Perhaps he isn't charming like Sirius or confident like James or even blithely unaware like Peter, but he does have his certain appeal. *You grovel*, a tiny voice in the back of his head says. *You bow, you scrape, you plead, and when all else fails, you beg. You beg emotionally. You emotional beggar*. "Shut up," Remus says irritably.

"I didn't say anything," Sirius replies, blinking. "Unless the voices are back. They're not telling you to burn anything?"

"No," Remus says. "You're the only one who ever tells me to burn things."

"Why do you even care if she likes you?" Sirius asks, fairly reasonably. "Do I even need to point out that she's insane? Spiffing lass, but completely mental. Say, I'm hungry. Have you, I don't know, an apple or something?"

The worst thing, Remus thinks furiously, is that he actually pats around his midriff before he can think about it. Of course he knows there's nothing there -- Sirius is the one who can produce food magically from any wrinkle in his clothing, no matter how small -- it's just so he can look as if he's looking. "I don't. Never mind. I'm -- bother. It's nothing. We should go back. We flagged this floor, can we move on?"

"To food?" Sirius suggests hopefully. "I think to food. How about that?"

"You are boring," Remus says. "Boring and predictable." He hopes that he is talking to Sirius, except Sirius isn't listening, distracted by the possibilities of crumbs and cheerful digestion.

This is the problem with being a bloke, James thinks: constant distraction. If it isn't one thing, it's another. Lately, it's been one thing -- one really big category thing, he should say -- which gives way to a lot of other littler category things. And this, James adds, is why he is not a poet, a writer, or a reader, but rather someone whose sparkling brilliance lies within action!

Or something like that.

"Concentrate, James, my man," he mutters to himself. He screws up his brow, tries to imagine sticking his attention to the map before him with tape or glue or other fun sticky things. No luck. It's very clear that what he's supposed to do, what he's trying to do, has no relevance to what his mind wants to be doing.

Example: right now, he's working on the map. He's adding bits and bats of Marauder memorabilia, the very first balloon that ever made Snape fart, the very first insult Remus ever dared to use ("You're -- you're being -- you're being *typically unreasonable!*"), the very first banana peel Peter accidentally left on the floor in first year that sent Lucius Malfoy flying out the window -- and so on and so forth. However, halfway between adding fake moustache to parchment paper his brain has decided that a much better use of its time would be: recalling the words to every advertisement jingle from every radio program he listened to as a child.

*Zonko's has your favorite toys
Loads of fun for girls and boys
Zonko's is a magic place
Wait until you see Mum's face!
Memories she can't erase...*

"Oh Zonkooo's," James mutters tunelessly, "*is a maaa-giiiiic place*. Bugger this!" He throws the map down. "I *am* useless!"

"You are useless," Lily says, appearing behind him. James makes a strangled noise, all high-pitched and unbecoming. "Oh, there there." Lily sits and pats him on the ruffled head. "Your mind was elsewhere. I won't tell anyone. It is impressive, though, the tone that you get." James looks at her sheepishly, and folds the map neatly into his lap. "Why, Mr. Potter," Lily tsks. "Secrets, is it?"

"Not secrets," James blurts out. "A map." *Double your leisure, double your fun with Dolly Drooble's cloning gum!*

"Well, I saw that," Lily sighs. "Unless your lap is having a camping trip I doubt it needs a tent."

"Er," James says.

"Let's forget I said that," Lily mutters. "You know, I -- I meant the map."

"Oh!" James laughs nervously, loudly. It is almost impossible to concentrate over the noise of his brain, which is shrieking *Chocolate Frogs! You'll hop till you drop with Chocolate Frogs!* at about a million silent decibels. "Oh, yes, the map. Quite. Right. The map. Not the -- but the map. Ha, ha! Ha -- hold on a minute -- how'd you know it was a map?"

Lily stares at him. "You just told me yourself."

"Bugger," James says. "It's supposed to be a secret."

"We're going about in circles," Lily says. "You do realize that?"

James looks at her. All fifty-seven inches of her. All fifty-seven red-head inches of her. Little sparks want to shoot out from his fingertips. To his credit, he doesn't make the pained, wounded noise he wants to. "Lily Evans," he says, "you and I, we are always going about in circles." Lily coughs into her palm. "But that's not what you meant, either."

"No," Lily agrees, "I rather meant the conversation."

That's the problem with being a bloke, James thinks: constant distraction. *Gringotts, good as goooooold*. He folds the map into less of a tent and more of a pamphlet in his lap and then sets it on the table.

"You were working," Lily says. "I've distracted you."

"That's all right," James says. "I've been working for a while and I'm not, er, getting anywhere."

"More circles?"

If your tile needs a shower, call on Mrs. Skower! "Constant. Can we have supper."

Lily considers it. *Shut up*, James commands his brain. *You have to shut up now*.

"You don't have to look so thoughtful," James mumbles. "It's not like I've asked you to have all my Potter babies."

"All right," Lily says, and takes his arms. "Yes. Let's."

James really, *really* hopes she isn't talking about the babies.

Collected Data: What Lurks Behind the Walls. What Pops up When You Pull the Witch's Nose and/or Push her Wart, &c. &c. &c. As Photographed in Great Style by One Mssr. Remus Lupin, a.k.a. Mssr. Moony, in the January of '77.



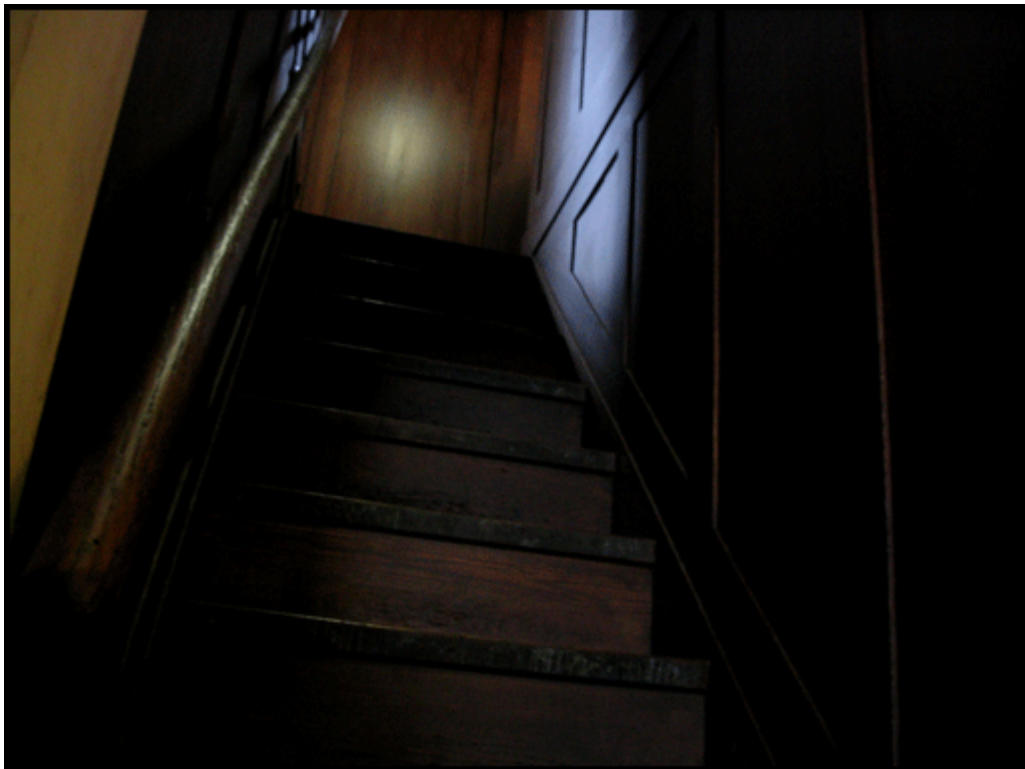
Hidden Staircase. Exhibit One.



Hidden Staircase. Exhibit Two.



Hidden Staircase. Exhibit Seven Hundred and Seventy Seven, or So It Feels Like.



Hidden Staircase. Exhibit Are We Done Yet?



*Hidden Staircase. Exhibit Down Which Mssr. Padfoot **Will Indeed** Push You Given the Chance If You Are Documenting Most Seriously.*



Hidden Staircase. Exhibit Apparently Used For Certain After-Dark Activities And Therefore Very Much Not Useful To Our Endeavours.



Secret Hole What We Fell Through. Twice. BEWARE THE TERMITES. They Are Dedicated Little Buggers.

When making a map with your three best friends, it's easiest not to be the rat of the group. Small, silent and useful, that's what Wormtail is. With a twitch of his whiskers and a vehement shake of one small pink paw, he disappears behind a statue, and into the network of hollow walls and secret, miniature passageways, ready as he ever is for sudden death. He'd like to feel invaluable. Mostly, he just feels terrified.

"That's the good thing about *our* brand of modern magic," Sirius says, munching on something crunchy and sweet-smelling. "It doesn't have anything to do with eye of newt and toe of snail. Snails don't even *have* toes -- do you know, I think our books are making it all up. A network of lies, that's what it is -- mass-production of fake snail toes, sold for ten times the cost to make them, and the rich get richer while the gullible poor make snail toe potions. Give me a good charm any day, a good old swish and flick; now that's what magic is all about." He stops for a minute to chew and swallow. Remus nods.

"Keep talking," he encourages, as the pause draws out into a veritable silence. "Give us some more of that Marauder mentality."

"And it's not to say I'm not good at Potions," Sirius continues, around another mouthful. "D'you remember that time -- of course you do. Ah, the golden years. Well, year. How many socks turned purple? How many good Slytherin lads had whiskers everywhere the eye could see?" Sirius sighs, and flutters his lashes. "Truly one of my better moments. Not even a Potter Plan, but one hundred per cent Black. Pure. Undiluted. They'll be singing about that one for years. Where was I?"

"I'm not sure," Remus admits. "I think it had something to do with eye of newt, toe of snail, and your uncharted prowess in everything from javelin throwing to professional bum scratching."

"Don't flatter me, Lupin, I've never so much as touched a javelin." Sirius wiggles a dangerous brow. "I was talking about Potions. I would never dismiss the honorable profession if it were honorable but I, a miserable failure. It's just that it isn't honorable, you see. Where's the spontaneity? Where's the vision? Where's the tried and true history of it all -- I ask you, where *are* the explosions?"

"Potions go 'poof' sometimes," Remus says helpfully.

"Isn't that like *you*," Sirius says. "There's no boom. I like boom."

The paper in front of Remus gives a little fizz, the sound parchment makes just as it's being tossed onto a fire, and a little puff of dark smoke billows up and out from its center.

"Oh!" Remus says, startling backwards.

"What did you do?" Sirius yelps, hurling himself forward.

"I think your enormous ego broke it," Remus murmurs. He pokes at his handwriting with the tip of his quill. "I really do think you've overloaded something. You wanted booming!"

"You're not one to talk," Sirius replies, easing himself back into his chair. "Everything started smelling like chocolate and then the paper almost melted. I blame *you*."

"That is a new and exciting development," Remus sniffs. "Anyway, at least it didn't smell like squirrel. *Yours* smelled like squirrel."

"I would have said singed dog, actually," Sirius says, with some dignity. "Do you think that did it? Now all we need is Peter's -- I think Mrs. Norris ate him, actually, that's going to be a bit of a problem -- and James. James, James, oh, our dear fallen comrade -- did you see him at dinner? It's a tragedy, you know, to love a woman."

"I'll keep that in mind," Remus replies dryly.

"It's all right for *you*," Sirius continues, "you've a heart like iron. Like stone. All crumple, like a sweet wrapper."

"A crumple iron stone wrapper?" Remus attempts.

"But with chocolate inside," Sirius clarifies. "Where most men have blood you've got cocoa -- but for those of us who feel the pangs of first love--"

"Come now, that's indigestion, I told you that much mustard would only bring heartache."

"--it is a tragedy indeed." Sirius snags the roll of parchment from Remus and sniffs it. "Why is it that yours smells like chocolates and mine smells like a singed dog? Or possibly squirrel?"

"I think it's telling," Remus says. "Don't crumple it. It's essence of Padfoot. It's vital."

"Let me tell you something, Moony, my crumple wrapper chum," Sirius explains, "I have seen the essence of Padfoot, and it has nothing to do with parchment."

"Erhgm," Remus says.

"Oh," Sirius tuts, "you and your Victorian constitution. I would say it is endearing but unfortunately it is *highly disturbing* and James and I make fun of it behind your back. And I won't lie to you: there it stands. You are what they call a freak. I figured I should be the one to tell you. It might hurt less. Seek help! Steal a *Busty & Bewitched* from under James' pillow! It's going to be all right in the end, I think, only you've got to *work with us* or else we can't win." Sirius tosses himself backward into the armchair next to Remus'. It lets out a gasping groan. "That's the sound of a well-fed man breaking furniture," Sirius concludes. "What's next on the agenda for to-night?"

"That's all we can do, until James comes back with the map." Remus pushes his hair out of his eyes and yawns. It's been a long day and an even longer evening. They had run into Marlene McKinnon once more, right before dinner, and she gave him the sort of look one person gives another when they are determined no hair should grow in a certain spot on their body *ever again*. It was all right that time, because she was looking at Remus' nose, and the last thing Remus' nose needs is any hair, so perhaps she was, however inadvertently, doing him a favor. But his luck might not hold out, next time. There's no question that, for the next few days, she's going to haunt Remus' dreams, stomping, disapproving, judgmental.

"You're thinking about McKinnon," Sirius says unexpectedly, grinning lewdly. "If I didn't know you better I'd say there's a bit of chocolate left in the old crumply wrapper yet."

"Sirius," Remus retorts, feeling agitated, "that's ridiculous."

"You're girly enough for her," Sirius points out. "Marlene and Moony, sitting in a tree-eee--"

"All right then," Remus says, "I think the ink's dried."

"One day you are going to explode," Sirius says. "It's all just going to build up inside you. You won't be able to help it. You'll go mad, your brain will blow, you'll just make this satisfying *pop* sound, *pop*," he demonstrates with his hands, "and then we'll mourn old Moony's passing, but secretly, we'll have seen it coming all along." Remus gives him a look. "*Pop*," he repeats. "Trust me. You'll see. Pop goes the we -- the -- well, you know."

"If I do I will secure for you ringside seats." Remus busies himself with looking busy. "Perhaps your future lies in the fine art of divination."

"Now that," Sirius says, "is a flat-out ridiculous waste of time."

"You're only saying that," Remus replies vaguely, "because you only ever see drapery in your crystal ball."

"The professor says they're *veils*," Sirius mutters. "There's no need to bring that rubbish up again, now *is* there."

"Your future in bridal couture is not really the issue at hand," Remus agrees. "What should be the issue at hand is that your soul seems to smell like burnt puppy."

"Endearing," Sirius says. "Lovably flawed. Enthusiastic. Now knows better, needless to say. I think it fits."

"I think you are entirely too proud of yourself." Remus busies himself with tidying his rolled-up parchment, pushing it against the table so its edges align. If you don't do that, sometimes one layer will get all crumply, and the consequences of crumpliness under these circumstances are -- well, they are not to be pondered.

"I deserve it," Sirius protests. "Come on, man. Objectively. As a scientist. Don't you think I deserve it?"

As a scientist, Remus rather thinks they all deserve statues made. As a person, he thinks their heads are already dangerously close to inflating and floating away, with their little bodies dangling below. "No."

"Where's Jaaaaames?" Sirius moans, heaving an enormous sigh and collapsing even deeper into the furniture. "The charms of Lily Evans -- pfah! is what I say to that. We have work to get done. It's not your fault she doesn't like you, you know."

"Lily likes me," Remus says with rare certainty. "You should say as much."

"I'm not talking about *her*," Sirius says, rolling his eyes, "as you know perfectly well. I'm talking about, you know. Dagger-eyes. Mad stockings. You can't win 'em all, Moony. Sometimes you just don't like people. No fault of their own. Look at Midge Madsen."

"You don't like her because she's got spots," Remus mutters. "I don't want to talk about this."

"Wrong! I notice her spots because I don't like her. They're not spots, anyway, they're craters. What has she ever done to me, though? Not a thing. I just can't stand the way she chews. It makes me all squirmy."

"Pfah," Remus quotes, waving the bit of parchment in warning. "Drapery and spots. Your head is entirely too puffy."

"Veils," Sirius insists, and gives Remus dark looks only for the rest of the night.

"Well, I don't know," James says. He looks dubiously at the aged parchment before him, but Remus can almost hear his quickened heartbeat. It does look rather uninspiring -- blank and bare, folded up like someone's old homework they forgot even to start. Yet the

four of them are gathered about it as if it is the Holy Grail of boyhood. It very well may be. Remus doesn't even dare touch it, James looking unusually flushed, Sirius nearly vibrating beside him, and Peter gnawing his lip with a mousy twitchiness. "I mean what if it doesn't -- but then what if it does--" James breaks off, shakes his head and touches the parchment reverently. This is it. This is the moment of reckoning. They've always been very good at making these things up, the four of them, almost prodigal. There are hitches here and there, now and then, but that's to be expected. The idea that they might not succeed is always lurking, waiting, but they've always beaten it. Most of the time they just don't acknowledge it's there. But this is the ultimate test. Remus doesn't like to think about it, but it is -- it really is -- their last huzzah.

Huzzah, Remus mouths to himself.

"We should," Sirius says.

"I know," James agrees.

"Savor the moment," Peter whispers.

"We ought to have music," Sirius points out. "Moony -- a record. Something -- dramatic."

"No, no," James says, "no, we must have silence." He licks his lips. "This, men, is the day we have prepared for since the very beginning. We are on the verge of greatness."

"Even though no one can ever know," Sirius adds.

"Even though no one can *ever* know," James repeats.

"Well, maybe we can hide it. Make another map. Buried map treasure. Only the worthy shall pass, et cetera et cetera," Sirius murmurs, as an afterthought. "That ought to be fun, too. I mean, the year isn't even over. We still have time to--"

"The suspense is driving me mad," Remus says dryly. "Music, no music, Sirius is bouncing and Peter is twitching and James looks like he's about to have an aneurysm so *can we--*"

"Shh," James says, clapping a hand over Remus' mouth. "You are ruining the moment for everybody."

All eyes turn once more to the map on the table in front of them. It is the sixth map; the first was to test the mechanism, the second to improve the mechanism, the third to refine the mechanism, the fourth to develop the map itself, the fifth to add all possible players. It is the sixth map, and it has a little something extra in it. Mischief, perhaps. Passwords. A sense of humor. It has notes and plans and secret passageways, favorite foods and four distinct personalities. According to James, it enjoys insulting Remus' nose second only to insulting Snape's. It is, Remus must admit, the perfect specimen (if not a bit moody). All they have left to do is decide on a password, the key, the finalization. But greatness is so close Remus can almost feel it.

Or perhaps that's Peter, twitching.

But even more omnipresent than the rhythm of Sirius' jiggling thigh is the knowledge that they are bound to each other in creation. Without even one of the four of them, maps and animagi and legacies disappear. It's the four of them, Remus thinks, the four of them together. It is at once a delight and a sobering thought. It is a wonderful thing to be a part of something larger than oneself, and a terrible thing to be inadequate in the face of it.

"You heard what Prongs said. Enjoy the moment," Sirius hisses in Remus' ear. "Stop thinking deep thoughts."

"Well now I can't," Remus replies. "You've spat on them."

James brings a finger to his lips and whispers, *shhh*. They draw in a deep breath all at once.

James taps the parchment with his wand.

"I do solemnly swear," he breathes, a tremble on his lips, "that I am up to no good."

The map unfurls.

"Oh, beautiful," Sirius murmurs.

"Oh, *yes*," James breathes.

Remus has to admit, it is pretty spectacular. He feels like a proud father, absolutely insane and somewhat giddy in the center of himself. There's a little glow of golden light before them, and painstakingly drawn footprints wind their separate ways down two-dimensional corridors, a microcosm of reality. James' meticulous scrollwork spells out the names.

"We're brilliant," Sirius says.

"I did that," Peter points, delighted. "And that, as well. You lot were too big."


"We are *brilliant*," Sirius says again.

"All right, men," James says. He steels himself. "Here in the year one-thousand-nine-hundred-seventy-six of our lord, anno domini, we are witness to the very first -- the very first --"

"All purpose tool and guide to ultimate mischief," Remus supplies.

"Right," Sirius agrees. "The Marauder's Map."

"Well," Remus says, into the faint glow and the dry ink and the wrinkly fruit of over a year's hard labor. "I'd say it's mischief managed, eh?"


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Cowritten by  [dorkorific](#) and  [ladyjaida](#).



 [dorkorific](#) specializes in **Sirius**;  [ladyjaida](#) specializes in **Remus**.

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The handwriting of Remus J. Lupin, Severus Snape and James Potter is done by  [ladyjaida](#).

The handwriting of Sirius Black, Peter Pettigrew and Lily Evans is done by  [dorkorific](#).

Don't worry; Peter won't be stupidified. **Trust us** on that one.

We would like to take a moment to thank  [windjinn](#) for leaping down the stairs with  [ladyjaida](#)'s bra on his head.

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