

Part Eleven
May, 1976



James is awakened at seven twenty-two A.M. precisely on the morning of May 12th by Sirius Black leaping onto his head like a monkey.

"Mnghh!" he shrieks, and throws himself upright, which slams his skull into the bedpost and entangles him thoroughly in the sheets. Something is on his head. Something is *on his head* and he *cannot breathe* and he has a dim memory that Rumpelstilzkin is trying to teach him how to make bread pudding, and *oh God I'm drowning!* He flails wildly and then, suddenly, is released with a great whoosh of air into the early summer Friday light.

Sirius' face, upside-down, manic, and rather too close, pops into view.

"Help!" James squeaks in terror.

"Good *morning*, birthday boy," Sirius coos, and kisses him soundly and very sloppily on the mouth. "Who's my all-grown-up little cabbage? Whosee den?"

"I am no one's cabbage before ten in the morning," James says, trying to decipher through the haze of sleep which way is up and which way is escape. "Get off my legs! Aghhh you weigh a ton."

"You are so ungrateful," Sirius pouts, sitting up and thereby putting all his weight on James's knees. "I got you a present!"

"Is it a kiss?" James asks warily.

"Do you want it to be?" Sirius flutters his eyelashes.

"How about we up the ante to a blowjob," James suggests, giving up, "as is actually customary? Have you already eaten breakfast? There's jam on your nose."

"Oh sweetheart, you always notice the little things about me," Sirius says. He runs his fingers over James's chest in a way that might be called seductive if it weren't so sticky. "That must be why this marriage has lasted so long. Six bloody years; kill me. Anyway, no, it isn't sexual favors. I'm not in the mood, with the new baby and all. It's this." He shoves a very messily wrapped parcel at James, then sits back on his heels -- his extremely grubby boots still tangled in James's sheets -- and regards him with those expectant, eager puppy-eyes: *open it open it open it*.

And it must be admitted that Sirius does always give the best presents.

"So *what do you say*," Sirius beams. "Who's your Keeper? Eh? *Eh?*" James begins to grin, pushing his hair out of his eyes and groping with his free hand for his glasses. "Are you speechless? You'd better be speechless. Give daddy a good fish-mouth -- that's a good birthday boy."

"Gillyweed," James says. "Sirius. *Where* did you get *this much Gillyweed?*"

Sirius shrugs. "Grew it myself." He wiggles his fingers before him. "Green fingers, all of them. Not just the thumbs. Don't look so horrified." He brings his forehead to James', eyes dark and cheerful and oddly ominous. "You will never know my secrets, Mr. Potter. Simply rejoice in their results."

"No rejoicing until *after classes*," James insists, but his heart isn't in it. "This must've cost a fortune!"

"Sixteenth birthdays only happen once." Sirius flings himself back against the bed. Even his eyes are grinning ear to ear which, James thinks, as he shoves his glasses onto his nose, is hard as hell to accomplish. "Celebrations are an important time in a young man's life that he will *never remember ever* the morning after." James stares down at the Gillyweed and the thin rolling paper on his lap and says nothing. "Oh, come *on*," Sirius groans. "Don't tell me all you wanted for Christmas was your two front teeth?"

"Lily," James sighs.

"Well I couldn't very well wrap *her* up and have you smoke her," Sirius mutters. "You're just going to have to make do with Gillyweed and Gillyweed-induced mistakes whether you like it or not. You will have fun." Sirius pulls himself upright to jab one pointy, meaningful finger into James' chest. "Whether you like or not. But," he adds, cheerful again, "you *will* like it. Trust me."

"That," says James, "is the most ridiculous demand you have ever made of me."

"You're going to have a fantastic birthday," and that wicked, shit-eating grin spreads all the way up to Sirius's sparkling eyes, and James doesn't know whether to be terrified or very, very excited.



"Pass me my lighter, will you, Pettigrew?" mutters Sirius around the little white cylinder resting between his teeth. It looks so harmless, Remus muses; like the little bits of paper that Sirius sometimes gnaws on when his nails are too short or too dirty to bite. But Remus has actually listened in Herbology, and he's pretty sure that harmless is the last word for it.

Without looking away, Peter does. The lighter is a big, clunky, shiny Muggle monstrosity with a golden lion on it, which Sirius insists he got at a Muggle club from a pretty girl with pink hair but Remus thinks he had it custom-made, back when he had the money to make anything he wanted. "Where did you even get that much weed? Doesn't it cost a fortune?" Peter is wide-eyed, but leaning back against the crenellations of the Astronomy Tower with great, forced nonchalance.

"Bought it off my mum." Sirius looks up, eyes dark with amusement. "How do you think the Blacks got their money? Toujours Pur -- you're bloody right. As the driven snow. And never laced with anything."

Peter gapes at him.

Sirius rolls his eyes. "I'm joking, you stupid tit." He flicks the lighter open, so that the flame flares orange over his face and the shadows of his cheekbones. The tip catches; Sirius closes his eyes, hollows his cheeks, and inhales. He holds it a moment, keeping the joint lazily between two fingers, and then exhales slowly with every evidence of satisfaction, ending in a small, surprised laugh. "Whoof! I've missed that."

"I should have gotten first hit," James sulks. "It's *my* birthday."

"And so you shall," Sirius says placidly. "I was only testing it for poisons and/or jinxes. God." He hiccups out a breathy laugh, a slow, small grin on his face. "I'm out of practice. Here." He transfers the joint neatly into James's waiting fingers, his other hand already busy with the packet, "This one's all yours. I'll roll another for the rest of us, but seeing as how it's your birthday and all, you ought to have your own. Hey." He laughs again, as if the sound is spilling out of him, slow and heavy as the smoke trickling now from James's mouth. "Do you remember that time the summer after fourth, when we smoked up for the first time and you kept saying it wasn't doing anything, it wasn't doing anything and then you ate that *entire cake* and then your mum -- hahaha--"

James cackles, blowing out a quick plume of smoke over the edge of the tower. "Ah, Jesus, yeah-- she was just *lost*, and Sirius goes--"

"--'He's just had a growth spurt!' Genius--"

"--and we both thought it was just the funniest thing in the entire world, so there we are, reeking, and I've got cake in my hair, and we're just hysterical, on the floor, fourteen years old, and my mum goes -- hahaha -- she goes, 'Well, you ought to have more *vegetables* then, I'm growing fresh *plants* in the garden but I don't know if you can find them under all those *weeds*--'"

"--I thought I was going to choke. I've never laughed so hard. Here, Moony, you go first, I've been."

Here they are, Remus thinks, the Prefect in him slightly hysterical: four juvenile delinquents smoking something horribly illegal in what is officially a class space. He is a dead man.

In for a penny, he thinks, and reaches out to pluck the joint from Sirius's hand.

He's done this before when he wasn't a prefect, and learned he was the only person probably on the planet who could actually be more uptight with a roll of Gillyweed between his lips than not. The lazy and somewhat boneless relaxation of his friends, Peter like a sock full of suet and Sirius like a dog gotten at spilt firewhiskey and James reminiscent of a giant, beached fish, is something Remus supposes his metabolism doesn't allow or the basic, conflicting mechanisms of his mind simply can't comprehend. He always puts the joint between his lips anyway, and impressed Sirius the first time because he didn't even cough, just looked cross-eyed down at the joint between his lips at one end and his thumb and forefinger at the other and wondered why nothing at all was happening. Frankly, deep down, he *is* happy: happy to stay in control, happy to hide the sudden rigid lines of his backbone as the effect worked only backwards on him, and happy to look after his confused and babbling friends as the great profundities of the modern age are lost completely on him because he can't translate Gilly-head. The squat round table they circle with their legs crossed is anathema to the prefect inside him, but to the boy, it's simply confusing.

"Pass it here," Peter says. He nudges an elbow into Remus' side.

"Think about Gillyweed less," Sirius adds. "Smoke Gillyweed *more*."

Remus takes two long drags in and watches with new, jittery contemplation as the light at the far end flares with the intake of breath. He breathes out two even lines of smoke through his nose, and passes the joint to Peter.

Perhaps it's a new sort of ritual, Remus thinks as he sits back, something that boys are actually supposed to do. Being hidden and secret is part of its charm, which means it's yet another one of those things Remus will never understand.

"You're still thinking," Sirius says. He wags a finger under Remus' nose, admonishing. "Stop that. Here, have another."

"Er," Remus says. He gets the feeling Gillyweed etiquette is also lost on him, forever and ever and apace.

"Thanks." Sirius rolls his eyes. James has started to laugh on Remus' right and Peter, on Remus' left, has a wide-eyed, glassy look of intense godliness. Across the table, Sirius has rolled a fourth and final joint. One for each of them, and Gillyweed to spare for the birthday boy, if he'll have another. Sirius blows smoke in a long stream across the table into Remus' eyes.

"That's right," Sirius says. He points at Remus with a lazy finger, direction cock-eyed. "*You*."

It's going to be a long night.



"Have you ever thought...like, if you looked really close up at someone's skin, you could, like, *see* their *molecules*? Buzzing around, you know? Cos there's...there's all that empty space, but it's not like you can see that. You'd have to be way close up, like. Can someone put that record on?"

"What record? Sirius, that makes no sense."

"The...muggle one, y'know. The...Bob wossface. Dickens. Scrooge. Marley. It's right there -- just -- oof. Hahaha. I can't reach it. No, man, you're not listening -- I don't mean, like, their *literal molecules*. I mean, the things that, like, make you up. D'you see it? It's by your foot."

"Moony's literal molecules are by his foot?"

"I don't think he was saying that, Peter."

"No, no, I get it. I *get* it. I see your molecules, Sirius. You have a *lot* of molecules, mate. Whoa."

"Ta, Pete. See, the man knows what he's talking about. Look, if you can't find it just put on *another* one, I'm not

that picky right now. There's that Indian bloke, and the four nancies Evans likes. What's the matter, birthday boy, *you're* awfully quiet. Do you need another?"

"I just keep thinking about her *hair*."

"You *said* you wanted 'the Bob wossface,' so I'm trying to find you the Bob wossface. Besides, I like the Beatles."

"Lily liked the Beatles. Said I looked like that -- that Paul one. Funny hair, they had. I just keep thinking about her *hair*."

"It's just *hair*, mate. Look on the bright side. See how many stars there are? Go on. Look up."

"... Yeah. Oh. You're right."

"There's *loads*."

"It makes you feel a bit like...like your problems aren't that important, really? Compared to, like, a star's problems?"

"Got it in one. That's my boy."

"It's just that Lily...she's like...she's like a *star*, Sirius, all, twinkly, and--"

"Stars don't throw grapefruit juice in your face, Prongsie. Even metaphorically. Look up again. There. That's beauty, man."

"Well, they're pretty stars."

"Ahahaha. Ha. Ha. What? Oh, nothing, I just thought of a joke."

"I just keep thinking about her *hair*. Stars aren't all soft and orange and tickly when you touch 'em."

"How do you know?"

"Actually, they're burning balls of gas, so I doubt they'd be tickly--"

"Stars can be *anything you want 'em to be, mate*. They're like -- they're *yours*. All yours. If you just *look* at 'em long enough."

"No they can't, Sirius, they're always going to be hydrogen...oh, never mind."

"It's metaphorical. You have no soul. Poetry or whatever. Prongs -- ahaha--"

"Wha--"

"Your face, mate...your face...I just...I..."

"Stop laughing, you immature little tosser, it's...that's the *pangs* of...oh God. I can't believe myself. It is pretty funny, isn't...oh..."

"Stoppit -- I can't breathe -- oh Jesus, hahahaha--"

"What's so funny?"

"I don't know, it's -- well, they're laughing. Ahahaha. Ha. There's that *joke* again."

"*I just keep thinking about her hair.* I mean. Do you -- ahaha -- do you listen to what you're -- ow! That hurt."

"My love for her--"

"Is it like stars?"

"Is your love a burning ball of hydra -- hydro--"

"Hydrogen."

"Hydrogen? Is your love gassy?"

"Is anything about James *not* gassy? -- Ow. Fuck you."

"You know what I like about smoking, is how you feel all floaty, and like you're going up. Like...close your eyes. I feel like I'm going...up!"

"Pete."

"What?"

"Look. Just. Don't tell everyone how high you are. It's stupid."

"Because nothing *else* about this conversation has been stupid. Thank god you're here to keep our standards up."

"Oh God, listen to the Prefect. Why don't you go tell on us if you're just going to lord your metabolism over everyone? Shit, that's the funniest word. Metabolism. Metaaaaaabolism. Metab. Olizmay."

"You know what I really liked about her, she had the cutest little bones under her wrists. Like little...very small bones."

"Did you like that more than -- oh, wait, it's coming to me -- right, there we go, got it -- say -- her *breasts*?"

"That's -- well -- *Sirius*--"

"Her nipples? Nipples. Haha! Nipples."

"I was talking about her wrists -- she had such lovely little wrists, and *fingers*--"

"My God, man, you never saw her tits."

"That isn't--"

"You never *touched* 'em, did you. Ha! Haha!"

"My metabolism isn't something I can *control*, you know."

"Shut up about your metaboliz-iz-izm, we're talking about Evans' breasts. Did you ever see them? Were they wrong? Were they pointy? Did they have delicate bones?"

"Breasts don't have--"

"Were they like two twin stars winking at you from the great beyond?"

"What kind of fucked-up breasts have *you* been looking at?"

"I was being poetic."

"Wormtail's seen *loads* of tits. Not all at once, obviously."

"Oh, come on. We've all seen 'em. Who here has actually touched anyone's breasts?"

"I know all about *Sirius*'--"

"Sirius, have you got breasts?"

"No! Haha, sod off. No. He knows about every girl who I've been out with is what he means. He keeps track. Because he's jealous. Aren't you?"

"No, I know about them all because he tells me every bloody *day* like I haven't heard about him and Alice Prewett in the broom shed seven million bloody times."

"She's got *huge* ones."

"Is that your type, Petey?"

"You know what's funny about breasts? You get two kinds: water breasts and pudding breasts."

"Oh, Christ."

"Shh, Moony! Let the rat speak."

"No, I mean it! It makes sense. Like, tits basically feel like they've got water in, or like they've got pudding. I don't care how big they are, but I think pudding is better."

"That's...I don't even know what to say."

"So which was Evans, eh, Jamesie? Water or pudding?"

"Pudding made with water?"

"Shut up, all of you. We're not having this conversation. I didn't like her for her breasts. I mean, I liked them. Very much. But--"

"But you went and you had *feelings* for her, didn't you. Her and her wristbones and her hair you can't stop thinking about. What about her molecules? Did you ever get so close to her skin you could see her molecules?"

"She had *lovely* molecules."

"Sure she did. Nice shape, from what I've seen beyond those jumpers, and just a *little* excited to see me--"

"That's uncalled for."

"She wasn't your girlfriend, was she? Did you want her to be?"

"She kissed him! She kissed him! Underneath the mistletoe that time, just this Christmas. Ahahaha -- listen, mates -- you have to listen to this joke, it's brilliant."

"Pete. Your molecules are moving."

"They are? Where?"

"If you just concentrate hard enough they'll stop."

"Oh God. My molecules. Oh God. They're *moving*. Remus. Remus, help me."

"Sorry, Peter. I think you can handle that on your own. It was the *mistletoe*, for Merlin's sake, are you ever going to let me live that down?"

"Well? What do you think about *her* molecules, Remus?"

"Are molecules being used here for some sort of oblique reference to Lily's--"

"Her tits, man. What do you think of them? Ow! Stop hitting me, have another hit yourself."

"I've never looked at them."

"Good man."

"*Prefect.*"

"She used to play with my hair. I fucking love it when girls play with my hair. Get her nails right into my scalp."

"Why, does it save you the effort of playing with it yourself? Haha."

"I'll play with your hair if you like."

"Thanks, Pettigrew, I'll pass."

"Oho! You see, the mistletoe never lies. Remus, look, True Romance blooming right under our very noses. Two Marauders, kept apart by the forces of...force. What was I talking about?"

"James and Peter and their doomed love affair."

"You're both getting such a thumping once I remember how to move my arms. You know what, I'm just glad I got to kiss her."

"That's practically Tennyson, you know. Tis better to have loved and lost, and all that."

"I fucking love this song. Everyone shut up, listen to this song. *Is this love is this love is this love is this love that I'm feeling?*"

"No, I think that's Gillyweed, actually."

"I'll feel *you*."

"All right, who *said* that?"





Peter's brow furrows in concentration, following the shadows over the ceiling. Sometime earlier James decided he hated the stars but liked, very much, the ceiling, and flung himself onto his back. Peter, who understood that James was talented and had a nice head of a hair and was really funny and had good cheekbones and was the perfect role model, did the same.

"The ceiling," James sighs. "I like the ceiling. It doesn't *twinkle*. It's not *beautiful* or *far away*. It's not going to up and dump you one day because it thinks you pulled a prank on Severus Bloody Snape. Don't you like the ceiling, Pete? The ceiling is so lovely."

"Er," Peter says. "Wait, you're not talking about the sky anymore. Are you?"

"I hate this birthday," James confides. I love Gillyweed. I *hate* this birthday."

"You're sixteen," Peter says. "That's exciting, isn't it?"

"You've been sixteen for ages and you're not that exciting," James points out. Peter has to admit that this is true. "It's not that. It's -- everyone's trying so hard. Sirius is trying but he's a total blot. He's my best friend but he's a blot, and he's never been in love with anything other than his own face in the mirror and my mum's cheesecake. And Remus -- well, you know. Is *Remus*. D'you know what he did after Lily broke up with me?"

"No," Peter says loyally, even though he does, because he was *there*.

"He gave me a book," says James, and shakes his head. "A *book*. He didn't even *give* it to me, he lent it to me, and he said--" James adopts a near pitch-perfect imitation of Remus' careful, soft, posh tenor-- "he said, '*Ahhh*, James, look, if you can avoid getting *treacle* on the pages I'd rather like to, errr, *lend* this to you, it's really very helpful sometimes to find solace in, errrr, literature.' Bollocks!"

"Have you tried reading it?"

James makes a disparaging noise. "Please, Wormtail. You know perfectly well I'm illiterate."

"You are not," Peter scoffs. "You're more literate than anyone I know! Well, that doesn't count Remus. Well, Remus doesn't count. Well, you know what I mean. Remus is a library with a head and two legs."

"And no one notices the head and two legs," James agrees. "I know. I mean, I suppose he was trying, what with giving me a book being like giving me a baby and lending me a book being like lending me a baby, in his world anyway, and even I wouldn't trust me with a baby."

"And you do like your treacle," Peter adds.

"I do, that." James sighs, flinging both arms up into the air. "It's just it seems so *stupid*, it must, to all of you, that I won't stop going *on* and *on*--"

"And *on* and *on*," Peter helps.

"--right, that, *on* and *on* about her. It's just that I fancy her, I *really* fancy her, not her *molecules* or anything silly like that. The whole of her. She's *wicked*. I mean, she's absolutely wicked. I don't think you know what it's like, to talk to a girl who's willing to kiss you afterward, who's just *wicked* when you're talking to her, like -- like a *friend*."

"Girls can be friends?" Peter blinks.

"So it's like losing a friend, too. Over something *so incredibly stupid* -- it makes me want to tear my hair out."

"You'll get a bald spot," Peter says. "That wouldn't be very attractive."

"No." James gnaws his bottom lip. "I don't want to get a bald spot, my hair's weird enough as it is. Though it looks like she *likes* the bald, what with Kingsley's great big shiny head letting her check her teeth after every meal. Bloody great bald shiny wanker."

"I thought you liked Kingsley."

"*Liked*. Past tense. *Now I don't*. *Now I want to turn him into noodles*."

"Good luck," Peter says. "He probably bites. Through *bone*. Anyway, she's not even dating him."

"They've kissed," James says colorlessly. "I've seen it. I saw it today, actually. Which is a major part of why this, through no fault of anyone's but my own, is the most terrible birthday ever. And I can't even be angry about it because I can't feel my *legs*. Where the hell is Sirius? He should be hearing about this."

"He didn't want to leave the stars," Peter says. "You remember, he got very forceful."

"Right," James breathes. For a moment he just lies there, one brown arm thrown over his chest looking limp and helpless. As Peter stares at him he gets the strange, almost protective urge to put his head on James's stomach. And so he does. Because he's very high.

"Oof," James groans. "Pete, Christ. Your head's like a lead weight. That can't possibly be the brains. What're you wearing in your hair?"

"I used, uh, some of your Sleekeasy. Why? I mean it was just lying around and I wanted to see what I'd look like. But -- wait a minute. It's the brains, too!"

"Oof," James repeats. "You're high. That's why you're doing this. Yes?"

"Your stomach is soft like a pillow is soft," Peter sighs.

"Good man, Pete," James says, and pats his head. "Good, heavy-headed man."





"Have you ever thought...like, if you looked really close up at the sky, you could, like, *see* the stars' *molecules*? Buzzing around, you know? Cos there's...there's all that empty space, but it's not like you can see that. You'd have to stare for a really long time. And maybe you'd have to fly up there to get closer."

"You said that already," Remus says. "Only it was about skin and molecules, not stars. But I appreciate that you're still trying to converse."

"The Gillyweed is gone," Sirius moans. "Gone, gone, goooooone."

"It's better that way," says Remus. "You'd kill off what few brain cells you have left."

Sirius eyes him. "S...you've...got a metabolism," he says, very astutely. "Dangerous. Unfair. Processes chemicals."

"I should hope so," Remus says. "Who would take care of you lot if I weren't around, being -- being metabolistic? Oh God, look, you've got me talking like you."

"You," Sirius says, fixing him with a very serious look and a finger pointed decisively just beyond his right ear, "you are. You. You take care of people too much. No fun."

"I can't help it, it's a werewolf thing," Remus explains. "I mean, not the taking care of people bit, because that's really not a werewolf thing, if we're talking evolution and so on, but the -- not being fun. Chemically, anyway."

"You coming," Sirius says vaguely, "to come see me over the summer? What record is this?"

"Beatles," Remus says. He doesn't look up. "Those nancies Evans likes? Those nancies I like, apparently. Well, mostly their later work."

"La la la la la meaningless," Sirius hums under his breath. "Re-e-mus. Are you going to come? Peter might, and I'll be with James the whole time. You can teach me about grammar and metabolism instead of writing to me about it. What d'you say? Come on."

"I don't know," Remus answers finally. "I don't know, that's -- it's hard to say, right now."

"You haven't even asked your parents." Sirius looks darkly at Remus from beneath mussed hair, brow knit in hurt confusion. "We don't just sit around and smoke Gillyweed all day, you know. James' mum is like -- well, she makes incredible pies but she doesn't stand for messing about. And James' dad, you remember, with the records! I'd let you talk to him *some* of the time, anyway. Maybe for an hour every two days so we could all be spared the flailing about and the spit when you get excited and things. And I know you, I *know you*, you like pies. Right? She makes all these chocolate cakes. At least, she *will* because I'll give her recipes."

"Sirius," Remus says, "it's not that I don't want to go. I always want to go."

"La la la la la meaningless," Sirius mutters again, half-tuneless. "I hate not liking the summer. It's the bloody summer. There's no work to do and no classes to be on time for and no Snivellus lurking around every corner -- putting *silver* in your *jam*, I might add, and it's hard looking out for you all the time because he's sort of slimy and wriggly, like a snake -- and I *hate* not liking it! It's not fair."

"Snakes aren't slimy," Remus says.

"And stars are balls of burning gas and werewolves have metabolisms that work so fast you're still always the smart one while the rest of us are drooling about molecules," Sirius snaps. "Fine. Fine. *Don't* come visit us."

"It's just that I might not be able to," Remus attempts. "It's not that I don't want to *try*."

"If you wanted to, you'd come."

"*You're* not being fair."

"I am always fair. I am justice itself. Scales and well-draped sheet and blindfold and everything."

"Sirius, I told you, I *want* to come--"

"Didn't think you would anyway." Sirius huffs breath out through his nose. "You have a three-month date with a dark room and a small lamp and all your summer books. I understand. I give you full permission. Wank all you like to proper grammar and iambs. Very sexy, iambs. I can understand where you're coming from. Ha! Get it? *Coming* from?"

"I don't have the *bloody* money," Remus hisses. "Would you *shut up* about it?"

"I'll give you the money," Sirius says, with elephantine gracelessness. "Don't be such an arse about it."

"I'm sorry," Remus mutters. "I didn't mean to be short. It's just -- I'm not going to take your money. Anyway, even if I was, you don't have any. You're the dethroned heir. It's all very romantic, really."

"I won seven sickles," Sirius says dreamily, "from James, over the Hufflepuff match."

"I can't get to Devonshire on seven sickles," Remus says. "But I'm deeply touched. A sweeping gesture of generosity which, unfortunately--"

"Don't be like that." Sirius wriggles his shoulder-blades into the stones. "Mmf. Summer nights, you know, when it's warm but it's kind of cool so it's like there's no temperature at all? *That's* what I like."

"Be like what? What am I being like?"

"Like you get, right now, and when people do nice things for you, or say anything, you get all -- well -- you know." Sirius makes a vague, whispery hand gesture, so his arm winds up into the air and then collapses onto the stone. "Ow. All snarky and -- smart. Which you are. Smart. Big words. But, d'you know, I don't think we've ever had a real conversation?"

"Sirius, you are so high you couldn't tell a conversation from a giraffe," Remus says. "Come on. I think you should go to bed."

"This is it, see." Sirius throws his arm backwards as if to point an accusing finger but it wobbles to Remus's left for a while and then collapses. "There we have it. Give the man a trophy. It's all witticisms until someone loses an eye."

"You are incoherent," Remus says sharply.

"*You* are like a cabbage," Sirius says. Remus gapes at him. "Like a cabbage, with...leaves on top of more leaves. Except you're like an endlessly regenerating cabbage. Every time someone eats a leaf you get another one. If you

ever want to have a conversation with someone, they can't be cabbagey about it. Do you think if someone farted enough they could make their own *star*? It's all gasses, innit?"

"We've had conversations," Remus insists into his chest. "We've had many conversations."

"Name one you didn't correct my use of who and whom in." Remus winces. "Or one that didn't involve you piping up with a fact or a quote or a denial of your participation or any number of your *library* of admon-- ammo-- *admonishments*, it's bloody hard to talk with this much Gillyweed in you, but you wouldn't know that. You always know your admo from your ammo and you always will."

"We've had conversations," Remus repeats, "that haven't involved--"

"Two," Sirius says. "I counted. I count. Two. In first year. They went like this. 'Hallo, Remus, will you pass the bread.' 'Yes, Sirius, and would you like some milk?' 'Yes, thank you, I would.' That one's my favorite. The other one is a little more confusing because I think -- I *think* -- I was drunk. End of March. Went like this. 'Hallo, Sirius, are you drunk?' 'Why yes, Monsieur, I do believe I am.' 'Here, have some hot chocolate.' 'Fnrfhgh.'"

"I remember that second one," Remus says. "The 'Fnrfhgh' was where you collapsed in my lap."

"Your lap is soft like a pillow is soft," Sirius points out. "But let's not talk about that right now. We're talking about your inability to communicate."

"My inability to communicate?" Remus splutters. "My inability? Sirius, you're the one theorizing on the possibility of *farting a star into existence*!"

"Because I was thinking about the possibility of farting a star into existence." Sirius fixes Remus with a reasonable, if not somewhat dilated, look. "And I decided to share my thoughts with you. That's communication."

"That's babbling," Remus says, "actually."

"Nooooo," Sirius protests, "you *think* it's babbling, because you think thoughts are for *thinking*."

"Of course," Remus says. "Thoughts are *not* for thinking. My God, your insight is blinding."

"You think," Sirius struggles on, arching his back to stretch, "you think thoughts are for just *your* thinking. Very selfish really." Swimming into visibility somewhere around his pupils is Remus, but Remus keeps sort of drifting away every time he tries to focus in on him, and everything seems sort of soft and distant, and Sirius absently scratches the inside of his thigh and watches the stars whirl in circles overhead because it is much easier than watching Remus drift off.

"I don't feel the need to share every inane little detail that drifts into my fevered brain, if that's what you mean," Remus says eventually. Sirius rolls over to look at him. It is difficult to quite get him to stay in a reliable field of view so Sirius leans in to see better. His sweater is very green and Sirius tells him so.

"Thank you," Remus says. "Why is your nose in my stomach?"

"I like it. Your sweater, not your stomach. Green is my favorite color. Look, I'm cuddly. You've got your metabolism and I've got my need to be petted, we've all got our -- friends should -- scratch my back, I'll scratch yours, sort of thing."

"You called me a cabbage."

"In French that's a very common endearment," Sirius says knowledgeably. "*Mon p'tit chou* and all that."

"Did your governess call you a cabbage? Is this a sort of childhood trauma thing?"

"No, my governess called me *son enfant satanique*. It could have been a cabbagey kind of *satanique*, I suppose. Do you speak French?"

"Not very well." That short, self-deprecating laugh. "I tried to, so I could read Voltaire and that, but it got all mixed up with the German in my head and then I got..." Sirius has already forgotten what they were talking about and considers the thing closest to his eye: rocks. People build things out of rocks. Towers and that sort of thing. But a rock never says, 'I should like to be part of a tower,' does it? No. It's just a rock. Rocks can't talk. How many rocks would have liked to be something else, like a huge statue of Buddha, or a little...something else made of rock? Or nothing at all, maybe just a rock on a riverbank or something, gathering mud. Maybe it's no better than *slavery*.

He does not realize that he has said any of this aloud until Remus says, "Er. Maybe?"

"That might have been babbling," Sirius admits. "But it was also charming and endearing and you liked it."

"But I could never do it," Remus says. "That's not what I do."

"So." Sirius rolls against Remus' legs, shifting to peer up at him. "Were there any grammatical errors in my thoughts on rocks?"

"I wasn't paying attention to the grammar; I was too busy being horrified, in general, at the basic premise." Remus smiles fondly. "It was a very philosophical moment for you, Sirius. It's too bad you won't remember any of it."

"I'm trying to talk to you," Sirius insists.

"I could have sworn you were trying to chew my sweater." Remus pats his head. "Do you like behind your ears? Scratching? Or just sort of -- you know. Slow motions."

"This is my happy place," Sirius sighs. Remus runs his fingers over his scalp, idle motions, feeling stupid and un-boy's-club inside. He's always felt stupid and un-boy's-club, especially in the face of Sirius Black, who might as well be a founding father of The Boy's Club dynamic, and James Potter, who might as well be the very first vice-president, and Peter Pettigrew, who might as well wear a Boy's Club sign around his Boy's Club neck. Remus doesn't always mean to correct Sirius' grammar -- it's a losing battle, in any case -- but sometimes it just comes out. Like frogs or pearls from a fairytale. Remus shakes his head. "You should think out loud," Sirius suggests.

"Do you know that? Then maybe one day your brain won't explode, and I think you'd like that. Not making a mess for the house elves to clean up. Not getting your knickers dirty. Not getting any brain on your hair."

"I don't always *mean* to correct your grammar," Remus says, sheepishly. "Your grammar is actually very good. Better than you allow it to be, often, and so I'm always trying to bring out the little Lord Fauntleroy in you. It's silly, really."

Sirius looks serious for a moment. "Well, all right. That makes sense. But what are your thoughts on rocks?"

"They're rocks," Remus replies. "They don't feel anything. They are perhaps the most inert things on the planet. They don't care."

Sirius pets a rock next to his head. "It's all right, baby. He doesn't mean it. He's just got a Remembrall up his arse."

"I *do not*!" Remus protests.

"I'm sorry," Sirius says. "He hasn't. I didn't mean a word. Don't stop. My ears get lonely." He grabs Remus's wrist and tugs it back to his head, staring at Remus -- or, at least, sort of at Remus -- with huge, reproachful eyes. "You can't start and then stop. Do right at the back of my neck."

"Here?" Remus attempts, rather awkwardly skritchng just at the place where Sirius's spine ends, just under the loose collar of his shirt. Sirius makes a low, pleased noise deep down in his throat and rolls his head back on his shoulders, digging his skin against Remus's fingers.

"Mmf. Yeah. It's not as good as a girl, because you haven't got nails, but just...put your back into it. Right...oh."

"This is alarming," Remus says, because it is. Sirius's eyes are lidded and dark, a little half-smile on his face and his body heavy with narcotic-induced relaxation. "I know you too well. We'll have tonight, and then you'll never Floo me."

"Just don't stop," Sirius moans in exasperation, and butts his head into Remus's diaphragm. "Look, just do it like giving someone a shampoo."

"I've never shampooed anyone," Remus mumbles, but gamely tries anyway. Sirius fairly melts.

"Oh God. You have the most enormous hands. Freakishly enormous. Does that ever...mm, yeah. You are a god, Moony, a god among men. Oh, I love drugs; I want to live in an opium den. An opium den with scalp massages. Mmm. Ohh, right there. Yes."

"I feel I ought to be wearing gloves," Remus says. "Who knows what other unprofessional skritchngs you've gotten your head rubs from?"

"Nobody ever rubs my head," Sirius sighs. "Well, not this hea--"

"That's enough." Remus runs his thumb underneath the back of Sirius' ear. "Opium dens don't have scalp massages."

"I'll invent the one that does," Sirius groans. "Necessity being the father of head rubs."

"You were so close," Remus says. "*So* close."

"Is that what you're thinking right now? 'Oh, look at silly Schmirius Schmack, had too much Gillyweed and now all he wants in his schmilly little schmife is a head rub and he's happy?' Were you thinking it in that voice, too, because I thought that was a *stunning* imitation of your dulcet reprobation." Sirius makes a grumbly sound deep in his throat. "Well you can think it all you like -- just don't stop."

"I'm not stopping. I'm not thinking that and I don't *sound* like that and don't mock the hand that skritchies you. You *are* out of it."

"Stop looking so fond of me, then, I'll get the wrong idea." Sirius presses into Remus' leg, nosing his hip. "This is good. Oh, yes. This is *very* good."

"It's positively pornographic," Remus mumbles, "that's what it is."

"You're such a prude," Sirius murmurs. "We're both fully clothed and no one is going to wake up with a bun in the oven. Unless there are buns at breakfast in which case, the house elves will deal with it, not you."

"Don't think I won't eat the buns," Remus says. "Don't think I won't eat *your* buns, for this."

"Naughty," Sirius growls. "And God, your fingers. Do you have any idea how -- how *long* your fingers are? And *agile*? The rocks forgive you. I forgive you. What are you thinking now?"

"Your hair feels nicer than it looks," Remus says.

"It's not the only part that does," Sirius leers, and then reconsiders. "Actually, I think I mostly look pretty nice, too. What do you mean, nicer than it looks? Does it look bad?"

"I refuse to discuss this with you," Remus says.

"No, we're practicing. You're saying what you think, as you think it. It's practice. So go on. To the left -- oh. Yes."

"Do you mean," Remus starts, adjusting his fingers, "do you mean that you want me to go on one of those insane stream-of-consciousness monologues, like you do, where you completely refuse to filter out things that don't make sense, or are completely unrelated, or are deeply, deeply wrong--"

"Yes," Sirius says serenely. "That's exactly what I mean. So...*go*."

"I can't just...*go*."

"Why not? You're having thoughts, aren't you?" Sirius reaches up to curl Remus's tie around his fingers and tug absently on it. Remus makes a strangled noise and yanks it away.

"All right. I'm thinking...why did I leave my tie on, when a) it's very hot and very late, so it's either too late or too early to be dressed and b) I know Sirius Black cannot keep his hands off of brightly colored objects when he becomes affected by substances in any way, because he has no attention span and the self-control of a mad toddler?"

"...it's because you're a prefect, I suspect. Propriety at all times. Ties."

"And -- all right. I'm thinking...I'm thinking about -- I'm thinking about *how stupid this is*, Sirius, I'm sorry, I can't help it, it can't be done. I did try."

Sirius shrugs, so the points on his shoulderblades dig rather painfully into Remus's thigh. "You made an effort. It's no good. You're cabbage through and through."

Remus considers this. He considers Sirius, sprawled boneless across his lap, with his heather-wild hair tangled in Remus's fingers and that look of dopey contentment on his face; he considers Sirius' very poor analogies and his random grammar and his chronic verbal diarrhea and his tendency to trample mindlessly on delicate situations.

"I'm thinking about records," he says at length. Sirius stills for a moment under his fingers, and then relaxes again, arching like a cat into Remus's touch. "I'm thinking about...this song." The record, thoughtfully, has changed itself and is spinning back out the second disc: *Listen to the pretty sound of music as she flies*. "My dad got me this album for my...tenth, I guess. Sixty-eight, it came out? And it was used when he got it. It wasn't really for me. He knows all the lyrics. And it was the same year they got me the Victrola, so I'd already got my big present."

For Sirius's tenth birthday he got a purebred black Arabian and a three hundred-year-old sword with burning rubies set into the hilt; the fencing tutor was considered an accessory. He remembers these things -- the horse was called Altair until Regulus rode it into madness and it had to be put down. He remembers his mother calling him in to breakfast on this day, and his governess buttoning him into his new suit. He remembers sitting at the head of the table for the first time as the Heir, kicking his too-short legs against the chair, and the cold press of his father's lips on his forehead.

"You got a record for your tenth birthday?" Sirius says. He hopes he hasn't said everything he was thinking out loud this time, as well, but Remus' tight-browed look, foreign and far-off, suggests he hasn't. Either that or he did, but Remus wasn't listening.

"Two records. The White Album -- it's two records. In one. More expensive. I was glad, because dad loved it and mum thought it was all right, and it wasn't swing but it worked for all of us. It was useful. It was practical. It was put to good use. If you sat between the two speakers in the living room during Back in the USSR, it sounded like the airplane at the beginning was flying right over you, which is a sort of Muggle magic. What did you get for your tenth birthday, a house?"

"That's not fair again."

"I'm sorry. A third world country?"

"That was mum's first idea," Sirius mutters. "But then they decided on a sword which I *really liked* but I don't have it anymore because I went off to, you know, Hogwarts and got sorted into Gryffindor and ruined all their lives and oh, by the by, I hate them, pureblooded nutters."

"Sirius," Remus says. "*You're* a pureblooded nutter."

"But not by choice," Sirius replies. "They're pureblooded nutters by choice; I'm pureblooded nutter by accident. There's a great big difference."

"Have you ever sat between the speakers and listened to the plane fly overhead?" Remus asks, sensing the delicacy of the topic and knowing from the storm clouds in Sirius' eyes he's gone too far. "It's really nice. Especially if you're alone, and the record is just *slightly* scratchy from use. It sounds real, but then again it doesn't. But it does go overhead."

"I love Gillyweed," Sirius says. "I think your werewolf metabolism isn't all you promised me it would be, pudding."

"I'm not talking about farting out stars or rocks having feelings," Remus protests. "I'm talking about experiences in my life that meant something."

"That's what you think about?" Sirius reaches behind his head, picks Remus' hand up, and moves it to a lonelier spot. "That -- that right there -- *perfect*. Mmng. What were you saying? Oh right. Moments. Life. Meaning. Most people don't think about that stuff, Remus."

"No, they don't. It's why I keep my mouth shut most of the time. That, and I enjoy your monologues on the cabbage, and your tangents about molecules, and your ability to speak for twelve minutes without pause about the virtues of a really good banana." Remus scrunches the hair beneath his fingers and smooths it out, glad his nails are blunt and his fingers graceful under pressure.

"Do you play the piano?" Sirius asks. "The saxophone? The tuba? These are a musician's hands, my friend. You have *magic fingers*."

"I didn't mean to joke," Remus says. "About what you got, for your birthday. You got a pony though, didn't you."

"Regulus killed Altair," Sirius sniffs. "And this is why I *don't* relive my moments, life, meaning constantly. Because then I would kill my brother."

"Was it a nice pony?" Remus inquires, trying to be helpful. "Was it fluffy?"

"He was black." Sirius yawns hugely and nestles himself a little deeper against Remus's body. "He bit people. He was my best friend, which is depressing. When I first got him I tried to feed him an apple and he went for the jugular."

"He didn't like apples?"

"He liked *meat*," Sirius says, with some distant pride. "You should take up the tuba, is what you should do, if you don't play it now. Or the accordion. You can't spend your whole life making moments and saving them up for later, can you? You'd go mad. You have to just be in the moment and not be thinking about it. The cabbage, or the banana, that's the moment as it's going on. Meaningful experiences with record players and socioeconomic discrepancy -- well, that's incipient madness. How many big words did I just use?"

"Do you count 'meaningful?'"

"Socioeconomic. Incipient. I can't use words like that when I'm *sober*." Sirius coughs. His voice sounds scratchy and dark and he's pretty sure that when he wakes up his throat will be in terrible pain. "Which is your favorite song?"

"I can't pick one," Remus says.

"Cabbagey answer," Sirius says. "Disqualified! Look, do I have to glue your hands to my head, or what? Can you make circles, like, with your thumbs? Right -- sweet God. Right like that..."

"I can't pick one. Look, you go on about me trying to make moments, right? Well, I don't even like moments. I like the...thing as a whole, I suppose. I like these two records together. The songs are all right, all of them, by themselves. But I like the two records. I like playing them from both sides in my yard while my father sings 'Sexy Sadie' to my mum very off-key and there's an airplane overhead. That isn't a moment, that's...what it's like. The whole picture. If I picked one song I'd have to break it down, and then I'd miss the whole point." Sirius, for once, says nothing. "I played the violin for three years, if you want to know. Very poorly." There is a peaceful, though bizarre, silence from his lap. "Sirius?" Remus looks down in surprise, and Sirius lets out an enormous snore and flops onto his stomach, nuzzling his face into Remus' leg as he does so.

"Hrooooghnh," Sirius snores.

"I like to remember everything," Remus says, very quietly, so as not to wake him. "As it was. Because moments by themselves aren't enough; they're just -- they're like photographs. They move a little, they wave, but they aren't everything. You can look back on a moment and say 'In that moment I was happy' or, more often than not, 'In that moment I was uncomfortable' or 'In that moment I was sad' or 'In that moment we were all berks' but you can look back on *everything* and you think, 'That was good.' Because when all the moments come together, when all the songs meet up with one another, you get something whole and complete and wonderful, people you loved and people you hated and a fondness for them you may not be able to recapture but everything you remember about them being somehow more than they really were, because that's what remembering everything does. When I'm old, I think, I'll look back on this and I won't remember 'That time Sirius thought, if he lit a fart on fire, he could make a star come out of his arse' but I'll probably remember the stars themselves. I won't think 'He nearly choked me when he grabbed onto my tie' but I will think about the stupid doggy noises you're making, even right now, even while you're sleeping. It probably means remembering *everything* and not jumping from moment to moment like life is a game of leap-frog and should be taken experience to experience like lily-pads is foolish, because I won't remember you're often a berk and James is often a berk and Peter can be impressively inane and I am such a wet-blanket with such a large nose it's a miracle you don't hate me. I'll just remember that I talked for five minutes

to a friend who was already sleeping and I was happy anyway." Remus pauses, sighs, and thumbs the side of Sirius' jaw, not noticing the path of his fingers. "You're not going to remember any of this. Which is probably good since this, my friend, is definitely babble. I hate Gillyweed. It makes you think everything is profound when, in reality, you're talking to yourself and no one else can translate the language that is You."

"Huuuurooooooghnh," Sirius agrees.

"And you can fall asleep *anywhere*," Remus huffs. "That's *infuriating*."

A long, heavy-breathed, almost-silence.

"Goodnight," Remus says, and closes his eyes. The stars twinkle out -- or, at least, out of the moment.

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



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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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