

Part Thirteen A
July, 1976

Letters btwn. Monsieur Moony and Monsieur Padfoot throughout July of 1976

Dear Moony,

Hello! How are you? I hope you're having a lovely summer, the weather is very fine here and we are having fun. Not as much fun as last summer of course because we are both working which is why it's taken so long to write. James is repairing broomsticks and I am working at a Muggle pub in the village. It's great fun but Muggle drinks are wicked and I've started dressing like one of them which James thinks is hilarious. Apparently it is high fashion to wear dog collars!! Of course I have taken it up. I've met a fantastic girl too, her name is Sophie and she's visiting from France. She's gorgeous and loads of fun. You'd really like her, she reads scads of books and she's refreshing me on my French everything, ho ho.

Anyway, I hope you are having a great summer! Talk to you soon.

--Sirius

Padfoot,

Sounds like you all are having lots of fun. When is Peter coming to visit? I'm still surprised his mum is letting him go, seeing as how you and James are two of the filthiest boys on the planet. Still, it would seem he has all the luck.

I'm still trying to convince my mum and dad to let me come but the jury is still out on that one. Not so sure about the probability of a pleasant verdict, either.

Sophie sounds very nice.

M

Moony,

She is very nice.

Peter is coming around the 24th I think and probably armed with enough antibacterial charms to drop a Chimaera. I don't mind as it makes him smell always very fresh.

Tell your parents that if you don't come your friends will become illiterate, so we need your influence to avoid being expelled. Make sure you come at the same time Peter does, because then we could all knock about a bit

together since it'll probably be our last chance to have a summer free with the lot of us.

I bet you've already done your summer reading. Is it interesting or should I put it off forever as usual?

--Sirius

Padfoot,

You know very well neither of you is illiterate. You procrastinate, yes, and therein lies the secret of your eventual doom.

I liked the books. I don't think you will. One of them is very long and if you want I can give you a summary. It's about the events leading up to a war rather than the war itself so I'm nearly sure you'll fall asleep on the first page and then it will have drool on it and what a waste of a good book.

Will Sophie be around for the knocking around a bit?

I suppose this is the sort of thing that gets asked so what does she look like?

M

M,

Of course you liked them, I should think that would be obvious. The one you have described sounds horrific but I will not ask you to sacrifice your precious time summarizing it for me as probably I will just drool on your summaries anyway. What are you DOING anyway other than school reading and avoiding a visit, you depress me.

She'll definitely be around! She's that sort of girl, always up for a bit of fun and she's dead sociable so she gets on with everyone. You two would get on like a house on fire though that expression is mystifying.

She's gorgeous, honestly, like a Muggle film star, so I can't figure out why she's picked up with someone like me (other than the obvious good looks, charm, overflowing bank vault, motorbike etc.) Big dark eyes and a sweet little mouth and silky brown hair, and she's the perfect height right up to my eyes, and curvy but not, you know, too curvy, and she smells fantastic all the time. No McGoogles by a long shot but a bit of all right. Don't let me keep on I will start to sound like Prongs.

Any progress on the parental front?

--Sirius

Padfoot,

Yesterday I went to a Muggle film with my mum and the day before that we tried to make ice cream but came out with very cold milk flavored like chocolate and metal. That was a waste. We drank it anyway. I talked to mum over dinner earlier about coming to see you lot when Peter is there as well. She gave me a look that meant she'd say no again later. I'll bring it up with my father, if that's any consolation, and maybe he'll find some way to talk her into it. That is, if he's all for the idea, which I think he might be because he finds it odd I've finished my summer reading already.

Don't start agreeing; I already know you find it odd I've finished my summer reading. In any case when all you've got is pages sticky with drool I can tell you all about the ten important catalysts leading up the first battle and then I'll tell you about the battle, as well, as that's interesting, too. How does that sound?

The other books you'd like, though. One's entirely on Transfiguration and I know you'll eat it up, no drool involved. I found myself wishing while I was reading it that I was half so good as you and James and Peter at it so I could understand it all better.

Sophie still sounds nice. That is very nice.

M

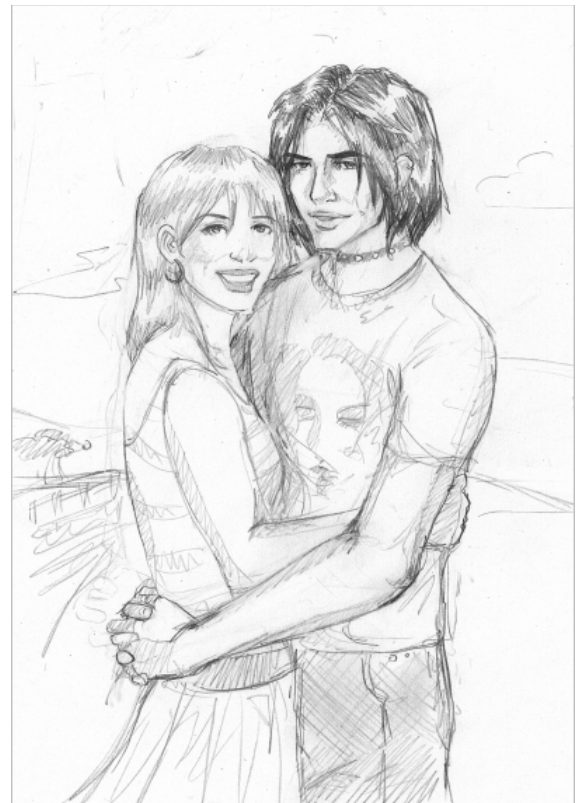
Moony,

Hurrah for your virtuous weirdness, maybe it will save us all from another Moony-less summer! If it's still a money thing James and I can sell our bodies down the pub, we have already had several offers to do an auction for charity. Oh how I wish I was joking, the offerer was a very sweet old lady in a pink cardigan.

I have been to some Muggle films as well! Soph and I went to see one about Robin Hood with James Bond in it. That was all right, she cried at the end. But then James took us to see one called The Omen and THAT was what I call a film. I did not sleep all night but took up a defensive position in the corner of my room with a beater's bat clutched in my hand. Today some little kid rolled by me on a tricycle and I shrieked like a girl. You should see it, it's ace.

She is very nice. It's nice. I have sent you some photos in which I look, as usual, frightening. Keep up the shameless begging!

--Sirius



Padfoot,



I think I will save all my screaming like a girl for the privacy of my own home, not, of course, that I do any of that ever. When I scream it is for Stella to come and get me a new shirt as I have ripped mine off in a bout of manly rage.

Now that you've choked on something laughing, I can move on. I read a review for the Omen and it seemed a bit on the silly side of moviemaking but if it comes with such high and enticing recommendation I'll see what I can do.

You look very happy in those photos. Sophie looks very nice.

I'm glad you're all having a good time. I spoke with my father this morning before he went to work and he said he'd see what he could do. On the one hand it's easier that it's just me but my mum seems to believe I will be kidnapped by doers of great evil the second I leave the house on my own and whisked away into the seedy dens of night of which, of course, Devonshire has so very many.

I believe he is on our side, however.

We shall see.

M

Moony,

You and the words "manly rage" go together like ketchup and pudding, not that I have ever tried that since it would obviously be disgusting. Clearly you need to stop going to the theatre if it puts these ridiculous ideas into your head.

It is a bit silly but it is also terrifying. If you wet yourself so over Poe I don't see how it can fail to hit the spot.

Your dad is a PEACH and you can tell him so from me.

Sorry this letter is too short, Sophie's Parents are here for the weekend and I'm to meet them and try to look presentable and not like a hooligan, in my opinion it is a lost cause.

--Me

Padfoot,

Hopefully you didn't sniff anyone's underthings or private areas or lick any parental units anywhere, much less places where there is no sun. However I have great faith in you. I am sure you did none of these things. I'm not sure why I'm sure, as past experience leads me to believe your nose was probably everywhere saying hello, but hopefully by the time this has reached you no charges have been filed against your person.

Did the meeting with her parents go well? I know how hard it is for you to look normal.

M

M--

I sniffed no one who did not want to be sniffed. Her parents were thoroughly charmed, or at least I think they were although my French is very rusty, but I'm fairly certain they were saying "We're so glad you've been so welcoming to our daughter" and not "I would like to beat you with this umbrella." Seriously though all it took was some well-placed pidgin French and they were as putty in my hands. I pretended I had learned it for Soph instead of from my Governess fourteen long long years ago. I am appalled by myself but it's not really lying if I'm not absolutely certain of what I actually said right? For all I know I could have admitted my guilt.

Sorry about the smears on this letter. James's mum has made pies as promised. Why are you and Peter not here to help us eat them? Oh well fatter and fatter I become just like at Christmas.

Seriously it is rather lonely and dejected up here. James and I work all the time because the pay is so poor so we've got to if we want to pay his dad back for the damage we did to the house. Actually the money is not so bad

for me and I do enjoy it rather, but you know me, I've always been happy in the company of the substance impaired but I miss my Jamesikins of course.

Keep poking your dad, I will keep poking you until you do.

--Sirius

Padfoot,

I don't understand. How can it be lonely when you have James and Sophie? And you go to movies and entertain foreign guests who may or may not murder you in the night with French umbrellas, not to mention. Honestly, I don't know what to say to you, or how to entertain you, or how possibly to prevent you from pondering your everlasting loneliness, as you have all the world in Devonshire with you. Not to mention tending a pub and no doubt being illegal every chance you have.

Your French is excellent. Sometimes your lies are so extraordinary I'm not sure if you actually believe your own wild delusions. I am sure they were all adequately charmed by you, *mon enfant satanique*. Just remember to return their socks to them afterwards, should they lose them in their swells of adoration.

M

PS: Oh, right, and dad said I could come.

MOONY HE DID?!

Finally!! That's great I can't wait to see you and Peter of course and have you meet Sophie and all. That's really really great. You're coming SOON right? You should come SOON. Are you taking the train?! Send us ALL DETAILS STAT THANK YOU

--Padfoot

The sun is down. Soft light from yonder window breaks. Sirius is Mercutio. Remus knows this as emphatically as he has never known anything so well before, the duality of Sirius' face and Mercutio's name. His own name is distant, somewhere beneath his fingernails, which he watches to protect the lovers' privacy. Mercutio is watching over the high wall, his eyes warm with longing.

"Look at the distance that lies between those two," he says. "Do you see? High above him she rests, and keeps he to himself, with hesitance all and silence forever."

Remus says nothing. It's not his place to watch. He feels as if he is a spy in enemy territory, the subtle indications

that he is unwelcome gnawing at his skin. He crosses one leg over the other and switches every other minute, the rustle of his hose muted from the hum of angry energy Mercutio emits.

"Do you see, Benvolio?" Mercutio repeats. "There lie our lovers."

"Are you wearing a codpiece?" Remus asks, without thinking.

"It is the very height of fashion," Mercutio says, looking hurt, "not that you would know; for thy concerns have run ever to the dry and dusty, that thou should wear a codpiece on thy brain to display thy most important organ. Wilt not look even once?"

"What passes between lovers should not concern me," Remus says, "or you for that matter, so stop it."

"But nothing passes between them!" Mercutio flashes an urgent glance at him, and then stares back over the wall. "He gazes at her, and she gazes away, and neither can speak but to himself. Look but once, and understand."

"I think I need to have a word with you about leaving people space," Remus says, regarding his cuticles intently.

"And but one word with me?" A dark grin flickers over the mercurial face. "Couple it with something, Benvolio; make it a word and a blow."

Remus blinks. "Which first, then? The blow or the word?"

"Ah," Mercutio says, "for there cannot be both at once." He pulls back from the wall, a last, lingering look cast over it, but circles Remus to his other side, and stands with his arms folded and his shoulders back against the cold stone. "Be it then that you are better at blows, by all means, may the blow be last; but if your words are sweeter than your blows, then the word should follow the blow."

"Mercutio," Remus attempts, "I'm not quite sure you're making any--"

"But let your head lead not your heart, when words and blows are better suited lower."

"This is innuendo," Remus manages to get out. "Isn't it? Look, about the kiss; I really haven't thought about it. I read in a book that things like that happen sometimes. Misplaced affections, comes of living in a dormitory with boys all year round, hormones interacting with hormones, and the pack mentality can't help either, though that isn't it any book anywhere, unfortunately, and I suppose that's for the best."

Mercutio looks bewildered. "'Tis more than but a word you share with me; yet for all their volume I wish't had been one blow!"

"I could still hit you," Remus offers.

"Aye, but for so many words? Why, needs must you'd assault me within an inch of my life." Mercutio's eyes are distant now, back over the wall. Remus' head itches to look. "Nor would such attack be unwelcome, for all the

blows in the world might be called a touch; where all the words at your command hardly graze the skin. I have come accustomed to it. Prick love for pricking, and you beat love down. So goes it with you, does it not?"

"Peace, peace," Remus digs the heel of a hand into his eyes. "Thou talk'st of nothing."

"True. I talk of dreams, which are the children of an idle brain, begot of nothing but vain fantasy."

"No," Remus says, suddenly quite bewildered by himself, "I mean you're talking nonsense."

"'Tis not my dream, nor then the nonsense mine," Mercutio points out. "Look."

Remus, without thinking, does. Juliet rests her cheek upon her bare hand, red hair pale in the moonlight. The moonlight, Remus tries to tell himself, something important about the moonlight. He can't for the life of him remember what. All the world is unfamiliar around him, as in a dream.

"You kissed me first," Remus protests.

Romeo steps out into view and lifts a hand to the vision of his love upon the balcony. It reminds Remus of people, or friends, who don't wear hose or codpieces or speak in the occasional iambs. He turns to watch Mercutio, whose anguish is stamped plainly across his features.

"Mercutio," Remus says. He rests a hand upon his shoulder. "What jealousy is this?"

"Jealousy it is not," Mercutio insists, shrugging Remus from him. "See the play carry on apace! See the lovers act their parts, pretty, petty, in the moonlight! What ho, Romeo! What ho, Juliet! What ho, Benvolio!" *He wheels upon Remus, determination unfriendly in his eyes. "Tell me, Benvolio: what is't you dream about? The capers of madmen beneath th'orb, her friendly winking counterparts alive in the heavens, and your heart fast yearning for blows?"*

"I don't," Remus begins.

"But soft," Mercutio says. "What light from yonder window breaks?"

"That's not your line," Remus protests.

But he left the curtains open; and it might as well be Sirius' line, as any.

"It's Romeo's!" Remus sits up. He's got it, now. Romeo is James; Juliet, Lily. Or is that the other way around? He isn't sure.

"That's nice, dear," his mother says. She stands at the foot of his bed, sorting laundry. "You're up early. What would you like for breakfast, mm?"

Remus and the Count are in front of the gilt mirror, and the Count is Sirius. He is in his shirt-sleeves. Downstairs the servants are making the house ready, Oriental, opulent, rich enough to belie the house's exterior, adding what they can to his already-lavish decoration. There is the acrid whiff of opium in the back of Remus' nostrils. The Count's eyes are black and heavy when they meet his in the mirror.

"Monsieur Bertuccio," he says, "my waistcoat and cravat. Where is your head?"

Remus ducks a surprised little bow of apology and reaches for the clothes. They are where he laid them on the back of the chair. The Count extends his arms and Remus pulls on the silk waistcoat, carefully, delicately. The Count has a habit of twitching at noise and ripping expensive clothing.

"They will come tonight," the Count says, with dark and heavy purpose. Remus is unsure whether he is being spoken to, or the mirror. "Danglars and Villefort, for you, and all the rest of them. And will we be ready?"

"As we can be, my lord," Remus says. "Lift your chin."

His fingers know the way. The pattern of dressing is almost comforting, and the sinew of the Count's body, coiled to snapping, reminds him of a purpose he knows too well: foreign to his own chest, but thrilling to know his blood now bears the burden of revenge. He wonders, still, at the hard edge of the Count's eyes. He thinks he knows them younger and less hateful, with laughter to each plan devised, and cunning born of delight rather than necessity.

"The plans, the plans," the Count says. He speaks to himself often, in sleep and in waking, voice echoing with his own voice through the corridors. Even in the bustle of preparation he can be heard alone or not at all. He is too well used to himself and his purpose. At times, Bertuccio is sure there can be no need of him, beyond buttoning the Count's cuffs and straightening his cravat. At times he knows there is more: a brotherhood, a bond, servant and master together, but both alike in intent.

Class distinguishes them, and will distinguish them always. But when they are wronged, they are wronged equally.

"The plans carry on," the Count whispers to himself. "The plans, the plans."

Again Remus finds his hand on this man's shoulder, though the cape there is dark, and the slash of white sleeves startles the mirror. The count covers his fingers.

"We will have it," the Count insists. "You know it well; yet at times your reflection denies it."

"Shall I speak plainly, my lord?" Remus busies his hands elsewhere, brushing out the sweep of the cloak and adjusting the heavy brooch where the Count's coiled shoulders cannot unnerve him. In the mirror he is barely present, his only manifestation the movement of the Count's clothing and the rustle of his cloak, hardly more than a ghost.

"Good Bertuccio, I would have you speak always plainly with me." The Count puts a hand on his cheek to still

him, familiar and strange, his gloved palms soft. His eyes are bright with resolve, but dulled with drug and beneath that the deeper dullness of pain.

"I wish there were no need for these plans," Remus says softly. "I remember when I thought of other things."

"I do not," Monte Cristo replies shortly. "That place stole any part of me that remembered. What can this world do to pay its debt to me? You are a better man than I, if you take no dark joy in making the world atone as it can."

"Will you be healed when they are dead?"

"When they are dead," Sirius says quietly, never taking his eyes from Remus', "and their families ruined, and their names abhorred by all men, then perhaps I will be satisfied. Who can say? It is your wrong, too, to glory in, though you will not. What will heal you, Bertuccio?"

"I am afraid when I am healed, you yet will be in need of it." Remus cannot quite meet his eyes, cufflinks cupped in his palm. "And for all that I would give you, and all that I would sacrifice, never could my hands offer what it is you seek."

"They do," Sirius says. "Already, though you do not see it."

Remus twitches awake with the touch of Sirius' fingers on his lips. In the dazed mess between sleeping and waking he fights off a sudden surge of anger. This isn't fair. He loves these books, these characters. They are sacred. Sirius has no right to infiltrate these sanctuaries and touch him everywhere.

"Bugger bugger bugger," Remus chants over the sink, scrambled by his toothbrush. "Bugger bugger bugger."

The air is filled with the uncanny sense of exclamation points!

Remus wonders why he is wearing a dress. It feels uncomfortable at the shoulders and the chest, possibly because he is broad and still growing and has, he is sure of it, absolutely no bosom. He stares down in horror at a lace frill.

The wind wuthers!

It comes to him immediately what's happening. "I'm not Cathy," he says, emphatically. "I'm not, I'm not, I'm not. This is my dream. What's wrong with me? I can't be Cathy in my own dream!"

"Cathy!" Heathcliff sighs. He manages to do so with an exclamation point! Remus ponders suicide. Above the desolate and stony moors wheels an immensely tragic gray sky.

"I won't," Remus says. "I won't, I won't, I won't."

"O! Cathy," wails Heathcliff, who looks terribly familiar, "do you remember how, lo these many years, we would sport and play along these lonely stones? How innocent, how pure, the undiscovered love of children!" He seizes Remus' hand so tightly that Remus yelps, and addresses the foreboding skies. "Yet how cruel love becomes, that MY Cathy should be the one to cause me such pain!! O, shall I never be healed, shall these sins never be cleansed, shall our love go forever unconsummated?!"

"Yes!" Remus says desperately. At least he tries to say "yes" but somehow the words that come out of his mouth are "O, Heathcliff, can you ever forgive me!" in despairing tones.

"O, Cathy," Heathcliff breathes passionately, coming in very close.

"You said that before," Remus says. At least he tries to say "you said that before" but somehow the words that come out of his mouth are "O, Heathcliff!" which he has already said, and then "The sorrow in my bosom aches for you, for you, and only and ever for you!"

The wind wuthers pityingly.

Heathcliff, who has a dark and brooding Sirius face, has eyes deep and shadowed and full of torment. Remus realizes that this is all somehow his fault -- not just the deep, not just the shadowed, not just the full of torment, but the situation itself. Sirius, wearing these clothes. Remus, with one hand of Heathcliff's clasped to his nonexistent bosom, in an uncomfortable dress. The sense of impending doom, rhythmic, like two lovers' heartbeats joined as one. The exclamation points! All of it, somehow, needs to have someone to blame, and that someone has to be himself. He wonders if those tears welling up in his long-lashed eyes are real or if they are caused by the dream or if he is crying for the lost innocence of reading, gone, gone, forever, banished by these ridiculous dreams he's never once asked to have.

"O, MY Cathy," Heathcliff murmurs. Remus can smell his breath. Breakfast. "Tell me, then, that you love me, and for one brief moment before the clouds break and the Heavens rain down their misery upon ours there shall be happiness again between us!"

"I am going to throw up on your overcoat," Remus says. At least he tries to say "I am going to throw up on your overcoat" but instead he makes a long, pained sound, almost like a duck stepped on and squawking out all the air in its body at once.

They kiss with the passion of all the stars in one convulsive burst of hypnotic light!

Oddly enough, it feels incredibly good.

Naturally, this is the point when someone outside and down the street decides to crash their car, or almost crash their car, and the world explodes in a flash of horns honking and stupid Muggles shrieking at one another and tires squealing into chaos. Remus falls off the side of his bed with a low groan and curls in on himself, realizing that something Perfectly Natural is happening between his legs.

He brushes his teeth for twenty-one minutes and eighteen seconds until it goes away, mumbling "Oh, Cathy my

rear end" all the way.

Remus sits at a desk.

This is fine. Oh, God. This is fine. He is a man, sitting at a desk, and that's terribly familiar and terribly comforting. The desk is enormous and dark, rich wood, and through the arched Gothic windows the sun filters dustily onto the wood. Remus is peeling an apple, very slowly; his hands are nicked and his left wrist has the red notch of a lifetime's archery etched across it.

Down the hall, suddenly, come echoing footsteps, heavy and jangling with metal, and an explosion of boisterous, familiar laughter amid the tumble of voices. The door of the study slams open and his brother stands before him, grinning, his dark hair wild and his face a sheen of sweat. "Brother! Have you been in here all this time?"

"I did not wish to be in the way," Remus demurs, rising.

His brother waves the comment away magnanimously. "I have been searching for you all afternoon! My men say there is no man that can take me drink for drink, and I have told them that only you can do it. They--" he throws an impatient but fond glare over his shoulder "--they do not believe me."

Remus sets the apple down on his desk, thumb along the lip of smooth wood, his fingers callused with distant memories. He sees the way the sun slants in through the high windows of the study and catches motes of dust on the air, and knows he loves it here more than anywhere else. His brother smells of sweat and drink and metal, which together mean long hours of practice and an early start to the day's end. "Does the sun set already?" he asks. "I had not meant to be so idle for so long!"

"You avoid the question, little brother." Boromir moves close behind him, quieter now in this quiet place. His men are gone, following the logic only a dream can lend, though Remus' literary core rebels against the inconsistency. "My men do not believe that Faramir, younger brother to Boromir of Gondor, can drink his elder beneath the table -- and you stand for it!" The laughter in Boromir's eyes is a fond, fraternal thing. These are and are not Boromir of Gondor's eyes. Remus reaches out, touching the young man's cheek, with two sets of remembering. "Little brother," Boromir says. "Faramir."

"I have been at study all day," Remus says. Yes, that's right, isn't it? The sweet, musty smell of old scrolls and the sprawl of scribes' writing, poetry and history and song in one upon the crackling page. Every brown, torn corner, every minute devoted to the next word and the next and always the word that follows the one before, while Boromir, outside, clashes metal against metal, in the present always. What way is this to live his own life, Remus wonders, though he loves it still.

"You have been at study all day," Boromir repeats, "yes, I see it in you. Will you always lock yourself behind the page, brother? Does no hunt excite you, no battle make your blood eager? Does no brother's love make warm the rooms you live in, warmer than this cold corner where the days waste themselves to idleness and despair?"

"That is not what this is," Remus protests.

"Come down from your tower," Boromir insists. "If you will not drink with me, then speak with me."

"Remus," Mrs. Lupin says. "Remus, yesterday you promised you'd help Mr. Tilden mow his lawn this morning, don't you remember?"

"Madness," Remus mumbles into his pillow. "Madness madness madness."

Mrs. Lupin decides she doesn't entirely understand her son.

Remus paces back and forth in his box, fumbling nervously with the buttons on his pink jacket. It's a new jacket, just finished today by some new bespoke at Saville Row, and he thought it would make him feel better, but it doesn't, and now of course because the world is a cruel and unfair place he has to pretend not to be nervous because a man he only vaguely recognizes leans in through the red door and whispers, "Mr. Wilde, the Times critic to see you,"

"Of course, of course," Remus says impatiently. "Send him in, of course."

The man nods, and a moment later the theater critic for the Times, tastemaker for the entire mass of London upper-class twits, is standing in front of him with a supercilious little smile on his face. Remus smiles charmingly at him. "Good day, Mr. Fitzherbert. Dare I say you are breathless with anticipation? Another Valentine's Day snatched from the grasps of the St. James wives, ha ha?"

"All of London delights," Fitzherbert intones smoothly, all British, as if deliberately denouncing Remus' accent. Remus spares a moment to hate him, and to observe how stodgy his waistcoat is. "Can you see how many people have fought their way through the blizzard to see your fourth? I need hardly tell you I am most excited."

Remus nods, briefly. "May I offer you some champagne, Mr. Fitzherbert?"

The critic holds up an impassive, fleshy hand. "Thank you, Mr. Wilde, I do not take drink before I review."

"You might enjoy it more," Remus offers.

"Mnnh," Fitzherbert simpers. "I might, mightn't I. Would you enjoy that? Oh, no. I shan't have my senses in any way tampered with. I want to enjoy this to its fullest."

The corner of Remus' left eye twitches. Critics. Those who can't do... Still, he finds that he's smiling at Mr. Fitzherbert, almost pitying him as he waits like death, eager for a failure, desperate for the opportunity to be scathing.

Remus likes his play. Perhaps, as the voice of doubt always tells him, it isn't as good as his others: but he likes

this play, and has full faith in it. Humor, he thinks, and hopes it isn't too sophisticated for the megalomaniac Mr. Fitzherbert to understand with one half of his brain, and, with the other, prays that it is.

"Well," he says, having nothing now that he can no longer pace, "allow me to just slip backstage for a moment and speak -- speak to my actors, mm?"

"By all means," Mr. Fitzherbert says. "Mr. Wilde -- this is, after all, your night." Remus makes a mental note of how the man looks in this one moment, fingers steepled, one leg crossed over the other, podgy but menacing nonetheless. Like a modern gargoyle, waiting to come alive and strike those who dare to be different with their intellects right in the jugular.

"Do enjoy," Remus says, and scurries out.

Backstage is a comforting, horrifying mess. A tiny, frightened-looking woman with her arms full of powderpuffs almost spills all over his jacket, but Remus whoops and trips out of her way just in time and slides round the corner into the dressing-room. Cecily is pouting into the mirror wearing nothing but a negligee and a bustle that matches her red hair; Lady Bracknell is in the corner, bellowing warm-ups against the wall. There's George, wonderful comforting George, practicing his Jack glare into the mirror as someone yanks on his untamable dark hair. And -- ah -- there, lounging against the wall, is his Algernon, all perfect grooming and lazy grace. "Oscar," he says with a brilliant smile, heaving himself upright, hands in his pockets. "Not in your box looking panicked? The world is on its head."

"You," Remus says dangerously, "had better give the best performance of your otherwise unremarkable young life."

Algernon rolls his eyes. "Honestly. Authors. Every performance I give is a masterpiece, as you know perfectly well." This time the smile is dark, sensual. Remus blinks.

The stage manager yelps out the five-minutes-to-curtain. George gets up from his chair, straightens his glasses, runs a hand rakishly through his hair and pauses to give Remus a salute and a brief grin before sauntering into the wings.

"Well?" Remus says. "Go on. Get out of my sight, you ridiculous wastrel. Don't let me be eviscerated by the London press, or I will have you hunted down."

"Mm," Algernon says darkly, "well, let's see if I remember any of my lines, shall we?"

Remus makes a strangled noise, and Algernon tips an invisible hat to him and slips by. His fingers brush against Remus' waist lightly as he goes, leaving a smear of makeup on the garish cloth, and Remus shivers and smiles idiotically after him for a moment; then shakes himself and jogs back through the corridors, up the theater stairs, to the comfort (and prodigious amounts of alcohol) that his box can provide. He looks down at the program, trying to still his shaking fingers, as the lights go down.

***The Importance of Being Serious**, it says. A New Comedy by Oscar Wilde.*

"YAUGH," Remus says, waking up. "YAUGH!" he insists, when no one answers him. "It's 'The Importance of Being Earnest' for bloody -- for Christ's -- for Merlin's -- YAUGH!"

And, he notes not moments later, he's being Perfectly Natural in his pyjama bottoms again.

This is horrendous.

Another desk. An ancient Victrola. A collection of apparatus that look almost as if they are devices for torture. A notepad, an expensive pen, a study filled with books. A large volume open on the importance of diction.

"Once again, Ms. Doolittle," Remus hears Pickering say, as if he has heard it a thousand times. He looks over his shoulder. Pickering is Peter. All right. That's new. "Please?"

"Mahbles im mah mouf," Eliza says. She looks like Sirius. In fact, upon closer, bleary inspection, she is Sirius.

Remus feels triumphant. This time, he thinks, his innermost thoughts aren't giving him frilly panties.

They're giving one of his best, male friends frilly panties.

Remus feels a little less triumphant.

"Try to make yourself heard," he says, instinctively. "As if the marbles aren't there."

"E-ee oh oo oo ay," Eliza snaps.

"There's no need for vulgarity," Remus says calmly. "I am merely attempting to teach you to speak like a person."

Eliza makes a retching motion and spits out the marbles, which skitter all over the floor, and says furiously "Wot kind of 'person' goes around with marbles in their bleedin' mouf, I'd like to know? And what's more--" She -- he -- lifts up her skirt, showing a great quantity of hairy leg, and charges over to Remus, shaking with fury, "'buy a flower off a poor girl' don't mean 'turn a poor girl into a bleedin' monkey' do it? Nor it don't mean 'stuff a poor girl's mouf wif foriegn objects,' do it? If you're a professor o' language why don't you work on your bloody comprehension skills?! Didn't arsk you to meddle with me, did I? Can't keep your nose out! Always trying to improve! I were just fine selling flowers, didn't nobody ever put things in my mouth and natter on about my grammar! And what if I don't want to be a lady?"

Given her exceedingly deep -- although curiously piercing at the same time -- tone of voice, Remus thinks rather hysterically, she may not really have the option.

"Oh my," whispers Pickering.

Remus takes off his glasses, polishes them on his sleeve, and tries not to scream. "Eliza, you must have some

patience; some reliance on the program. Don't you want chocolate every day, and fine clothes, and a Guard officer with a fine moustache?"

Eliza eyes him with deep suspicion and curls her slightly stubbly lip. "It ain't worth it; and I don't know as how I believe you. I can't do it. You don't even think I can do it. I'll be awful forever and all your improving can't fix a bloody thing."

"I must insist," Remus says, with a clinical tone that frightens even himself, "you replace those marbles, or find new ones, and continue the lesson, or else we will never know your capabilities, and shall wonder forever and always. What do you say to that?"

"I want to throttle you, that's wot I say to that!" Eliza howls. She charges Remus, and a for a moment he has the impression that this is it, the end come at last, charging him down like a yeti or some giant player of masculine but intellectually useless sports. His mind, at this moment of death, terrifies him, the slight, upper-crust balking, the shock which replaces horror, the offended sensibilities rather than anything deeper or more visceral.

"Eliza," he hears himself say, "please reconsider."

"Perhaps," Pickering attempts, "perhaps, we might postpone the marbles to another time?"

"Why don't you try talkin' with them marbles in your mouth, you'll see 'ow easy it ain't!"

"How easy it isn't," Remus says quietly.

Eliza draws a deep breath in. However smart Eliza is or isn't, however capable, seems to have no place here. Remus supposes that her sensibilities, no matter how coarse, are still feminine. Which is hard to compromise, considering the young man towering above him, red in the face and determined to have some retribution.

"Ow easy it isn't," Eliza acquiesces.

"Very good," Pickering begins.

"How," Remus insists. He holds a hand up to silence his unfortunately kind friend. Eliza grinds her teeth together.

"Ow," she whispers.

"With an h," Remus says firmly. "It's just like breathing out."

"Hhhhhh," she says, still glowering at him. "Hhhhhh..ow."

"And the whole thing," Remus prompts.

"Hhhh....ow easy it ai...sn't," Eliza mumbles. Then she looks up, and says in a voice that is shockingly like Sirius's, "why is it I always do what you want?"

"Do you?" Remus says. He is perplexed by her sudden ability to articulate herself, but is trying, just like a true English gentleman, not to let any emotion show.

"Well it's obvious, innit," Eliza says patiently. Unfortunately she is back to the nails-on-chalkboard. "Look, I'll show you: say 'jump.'"

"Jump," Remus says dubiously.

"Hhh...ow hhhh....igh?" Eliza says, and smiles.

Remus bursts awake to find that he is upside-down on his bed with his head dangling out the window and his feet on his pillow and a taste in his mouth not unlike fur. "Agh," he says miserably, to no one, and then "why me?" After a few moments' contemplation, he gets up and very carefully hobbles to the shower, where he spends the next hour.

"Don't use up all the hot water!" Mrs. Lupin yells through the door twenty minutes in.

"Not possible," Remus returns, through gritted teeth, and shivers.

The first thing Remus thinks when he sees the snow falling is that there isn't any snow in the middle of summer. He taps the glass of the window, peering down onto the winding, cobbled street. It's early morning. Somewhere, a bell jingles. The air smells of slow fires and meat roasting, and pine, and cold humidity. Though the clouds have drawn tight together in the sky he feels something come over him, ridiculous and wild and full of good cheer. Christmas, he realizes. It can be no time other than Christmastime.

His hands are warm in fingerless gloves, and a scarf has been wound tight about his neck to keep out the winter chill. Across the long, unfamiliar room a fire crackles in an austere fireplace. He tries to place himself, in time and in space, noting the lines of his coat and the odd shape of the hat on the desk before him. Horse hooves clatter over stone, fading in and out of his world.

For the first time in years, he has no urge to grunt the usual Bah! Humbug.

This, however, is more than just mere lack of open hostility: this is downright joy, the wild delirium of realizing how wonderful it is to be alive, and he runs to the window and flings it open, so that the wind rushes in at him and snow swirls around his head. There is a small, dark-haired urchin outside his house, with a hat in one hand and a mournful expression.

"Ho, boy!" Remus calls. "What's to-day?"

"Eh?" the boy returns, in some surprise.

"What's to-day, my fine fellow?" Remus yells, feeling utterly giddy. There are bells in his head,

"Today? Why, it's Christmas day!" the boy exclaims, looking up at him with no little worry. Remus has never felt so happy in all his life to hear of Christmas, and the boy with the dark hair is staring at him as if he might pull out a knife, so Remus hurls a crown at him; it is Christmas, after all, and everyone should feel as wonderful as he does. He lets out a whoop and slams the window and spins madly around the room, and then stops short, suddenly remembering something: another boy, and a Christmas that may well be quite as joyless as his always have been, as downstairs the door jingles to signal the entrance of his clerk.

"But I hate Dickens!" Remus tries to wail, and can make no noise at all.

He takes the steps down two at a time. He knows what he must do, and assumes it will end when he's done it. Even the joy that wells up in him irrepressibly cannot erase the nag of purple prose behind his eyes; the two fight for control of his emotions and leave him dizzy, as if he has been written by a man paid by the word. In a way, he supposes, it's not all that far from the truth.

First: he must tell his clerk the day is his to enjoy. Second: he must send the urchin for a turkey larger than most young boys. Third: he must wait for the culmination, whatever twist of literature and his subconscious have planned for him this night. Fourth: when he wakes up, he must consult a book to make the madness stop. It's all very simple before he leaps off the bottom step.

His nose feels pink for the first time in years. It's very distracting.

Bob Cratchit, who has a round face and unkempt hair the color of sand, is waiting for him in the office. He looks like Peter when Sirius is in a bad mood, cringing and trying to hide himself behind chairs.

"Go home," Remus says. He doesn't remember the words, not exactly, and now that thought has overridden instinct, his mind can't grasp what comes next. He struggles for something appropriate. "And, er, be with your family!" It doesn't sound Victorian. It doesn't sound like Scrooge, either.

Cratchit stares at him.

Yes, Remus wants to say, I have lost my mind.

"Go on!" he says, in a way that he hopes will be construed as "desperately merry" rather than "frightening." "Go home and be with, er, wossface, and Tiny Tim," and then there he is: at a long wooden table, surrounded by glowing candles and pine and happy, round faces and mound upon mound of Christmas puddings. There is a turkey in there, somewhere, but the puddings command attention.

"I would like to propose a toast," Cratchit says, his good-natured face quite red, raising his glass, "to Mr. Scrooge: for finally giving in to the wonderful gaiety of Christmas, as we all knew he would: and for sharing his wealth with all of us gathered here to-night."

"Hear, hear!" cry the voices from around the table, and "hooray for old Scrooge!"

"A merry Christmas to all of us!" Cratchit roars, and there is much foot-stomping and approving noise.

Remus chances a look around. Everyone he has ever met is somewhere at that table, nodding at him, knowledgeable, cheerful, happy to see him. He tries to smile.

And a thin, childish warble comes up from the chair by his: "I am glad you're at our Christmas, Mr. Scrooge!"

Remus looks down. Sirius looks up at him and grins, a shining, gap-toothed face perched on a scrawny body and immense pair of crutches. "Isn't it lovely, Christmas? I did try to tell you."

"Er," Remus says.

"God bless us," Sirius lisps adorably, "every one!"

Remus wakes up screaming.

After his mother comes running in with a plank of wood raised high to defend her son from murderers and his father spills hot tea into his pants from the racket and Remus has apologized and explained and washed his father's pants, he knows there is only one thing that can possibly help him now.

Research.

The book is called, simply, "Dream Interpretation." Remus's mother bought it some time ago, when she was having a particularly exasperating recurring nightmare about the house being overrun by fleas; since then it has lain abandoned in the Lupins' downstairs study, all 1600 pages of it growing mustier by the month. Remus has always believed Somniomancy to be somewhat wooly-headed, and it has, therefore, been one of the few books in the house that he has never touched. (The others, incidentally, are a vegetarian cookbook and a blue-bound monstrosity entitled 'Baby's First...' which he believes may contain pictures.) Now, however, he is willing to take back all the ill words he has ever said about the science if only it can make it all stop.

He flips to the index, and then to the Ls. "Literature, dreams involving" is, miraculously, an entry: it points him to page 783. Remus's heart speeds up a little, anticipating salvation.

First, there is a list of questions. Question one asks him if he has been reading too much. On a separate piece of paper, he writes *1. I don't believe in reading too much.* This means, he decides after a moment's pause, the by the book's standards he has indeed be reading too much. He makes note of it, and moves on to question two. *Is the nature of your dreams sexual?* Remus feels a flare of heat burst in his belly and burn his throat. *2. Yes* feels ridiculous, but necessary to get to the bottom of the whole mess. *If the nature of your dreams is sexual, please turn the page.* Remus turns the page. He wants an index of authors, something tangible, something reassuring.

Instead, the book says *Perhaps you should consider starting a dream diary.*

Remus stares at it.

"Is that *all* you have to offer?" he asks, after nothing happens.

The book says nothing in return, which Remus decides means Yes, as well.

"Well bugger you," he mutters. The book continues to say nothing, except *A proper dream log should be in an empty book, one which gives you Good Vibes and smells preferably of Old Leather*. Remus is half-expecting a merchandise plug. There isn't one. It's cold comfort. *Take careful note of every scenario and recurring characters, recurring themes, and recurring sexual desires*. "I don't want to relive that," Remus tells the book. The book doesn't care. *We find that, often, Illustrations Help*. "I hate your capitals," Remus says. *Illustrations are Good Way to Solve The Puzzle*. "You're doing that on purpose," Remus accuses. *Even the Smallest Illustration just might help*. "I can't draw, but I suppose that doesn't matter, either," Remus mumbles. *Perhaps, by seeing your Dreams Visualized, you will be able to spot patterns heretofore unseen by any but the Inner Eye, which will aid in recognizing the implications of your dreams*. "Thanks," grumbles Remus, "that's very helpful. No wonder mum put you away." (*See also,*) the book adds, in what Remus considers to be rather smug type, (*Sexual Dreams, pp. 32-203.*)

Remus stares at the book. It offers no insight, no truth, no revelations, no answers to all his problems. It isn't going to cure him. It isn't going to keep the deranged workings of his innermost thoughts from pasting Sirius' head onto Tiny Tim, or ruining all good books forever and ever until Remus succumbs at last to madness and padded walls.

He can only do what the book wants him to do, and pray for a miracle.

It's time to find a smelly old leather diary which gives him Good Vibes.

Whatever that means.



Romeo + Juliet



Notes:

- Sirius as Mercutio
- myself as Benvolio
- James and Lily as Romeo and Juliet, respectively
- My apologies to Shakespeare
- I cannot draw
- This is stupid.



↳ The Count of
Monte Cristo

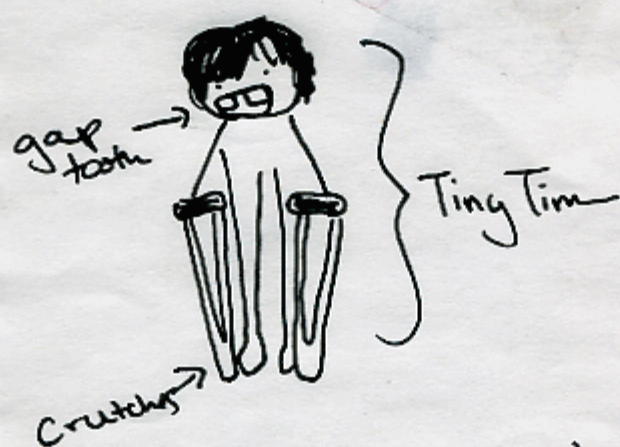
- Notes:
- Sirius as the Count (Dante)
 - myself as Bertuccio
 - at least I am still a man in this one.
 - no James, Lily or anyone else in this one → significance?
(perhaps Sirius-centric. Bugger.)



↖ Cathy (me)

Notes: (I also had a shawl.)

- Sirius as Heathcliff
- lots of wuthering wind



A Christmas Carol

Notes: I don't even like Dickens.

On reflection, Sirius thinks later, they probably should have left the house, or at least the living room.

He wasn't really thinking that far ahead, what with James and his family out visiting an aunt, work not starting until eight and him only half-dressed and Sophie wearing his favorite yellow sundress when she knocked on the door; but still, he might have at least considered the possibility that Something Too Horrible to Contemplate might happen.

But he didn't, and now it's too late.

"Er," he says, mind blank with panic.

"Er," Mr. Potter says, staring frantically at the wall. "Scuse me, terribly sorry, should have knocked--"

"No no, excuse *us*, Monsieur Potter," Sophie says apologetically, slipping out from under Sirius's arm and smoothing her dress with remarkable presence of mind. Sirius gapes at her, fishlike, feeling red heat suffuse his face right to the tips of his ears. "We did not mean to disturb you."

"No no!" Mr. Potter protests. He's a little hysterical, still trying to look anywhere but at his sofa. "Not disturbed a bit, Sophie, not at all, perfectly natural, everyone's got their pants on, ha ha, just came home a little early, going to go put my hat away," and bolts.

"Oh god," Sirius says. He buries his head in the pillows. "Oh God, oh God, oh God--"

"Oh, stop it," Sophie says. A little laugh bubbles at the edge of her sweet, dark voice. "You are like a little boy. It's only a kiss; or a few kisses." She is slipping her shoes on, entangling her fingers in his hair, and Sirius lets out a little moan, not comforted.

"He's James's *dad*! I'm living in their *house*!"

"And you are twenty-one years old," Sophie says gently. This is not strictly true, of course, but Sirius doesn't consider it a lie, exactly, since his French is terribly rusty and "vingt-et-un" *could* perfectly well mean seventeen. "He is an adult, cheri. You both are."

"Right," Sirius says. He gives her a wobbly grin. "Right! Adult! Yes! All of us! So *vingt-et-un*!" Sophie smiles at him, a little patient, a little kind, a little French and therefore a little wicked. Sirius thinks how very attractive she is, and is somewhat comforted.

Unfortunately, his reprieve is short-lived. That evening, after dinner, after Sophie has left and Sirius feels sure he's safe at last, he finds himself alone in James' room with Mr. Potter. Trapped. Lost at sea. *James*, he thinks, *ultimate betrayal, bathtime my arse, must kill him*, before Mr. Potter clears his throat awkwardly. "We thought," he begins, "we thought it would be a good idea to talk about -- certain -- to talk about -- in light of your

relationship with Sophie -- and it being our pleasure but our duty also to have you under our roof -- our roof -- and so we thought it would be best to talk about -- certain -- to talk." Mr. Potter adjusts his collar and loosens his tie. Sirius stares at him. It can't be. "Do you see," Mr. Potter perseveres bravely, "when you come to a certain age, there are certain desires that certainly come to the forefront, I'm certain, of any young man's mind."

"Urgk," Sirius says. All that comes to mind after is, "Certainly."

"I bought some -- some literature," Mr. Potter continues, shuffling through a few pamphlets in his lap. *Pamphlets*, Sirius thinks. *I will never be able to look this man in the eye again*. He isn't even able to look this man in the eye now, staring down at his shoes and wanting, more than anything else, to have the simple life of a shoelace. He'd only ever have to worry about fraying at the edges, or getting chewed on by puppies. That would be the life, even if it didn't have any pudding. "Well," Mr. Potter says, "how does this one sound? *It's Perfectly Natural*."

Sirius chokes. "What's, uhm. Sir. What's perfectly natural?"

"Well," Mr. Potter says. Sirius wonders who, of the two of them, is more uncomfortable. He imagines them, squared off in the ring, engaged in a competition of exploding heads. They'll be graded on shades, what color their faces turn, and how quickly their brains pop out their ears with embarrassment. "Well, *it* is."

"*It*," Sirius repeats. *Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God*. There is no escape. All is black. "Sir, are you...er. Oh God."

"Yes," Mr. Potter says, going greenish. He stares at the wall just behind Sirius's left ear as he charges on in a ghastly, jovial sort of way, "Yes indeed, Sirius my boy. We just thought you should know that while...*it*...is of course a beautiful and natural part of the human experience and of course, er, a wonderful expression of love between two consenting adults or, ha ha, nearly adults, there are of course certain...precautions that need to be, er, taken -- things that need to be taken into account. Er."

"Yes!" Sirius exclaims, through the haze of panic and degradation. "Yes, absolutely. Precautions. Already taken and...so on. Sophie and I, very precautions. Not that...they need to be...taken, because...not necessary! And it's all in the pamphlets!"

"Righto!" Mr. Potter says with gratitude so deep it is almost tangible. He catapults himself off Sirius's bed and claps Sirius heartily on the shoulder; so heartily, in fact, that Sirius lets out a surprised "oof!" and doubles over. "You're like a son to me, Sirius, lad."

"Thanks, Mr. Potter," Sirius mumbles, trying to breathe and weighing, in his head, all the various methods of suicide. "Really. Thanks."

"Let's keep it out of the house next time, shall we, ha ha?" Mr. Potter says, and then, "oh, don't forget, er, pamphlets." He drops them on Sirius's blanket like something dead and rotting and covered in carrion flies and then flees the room.

"I want to die," Sirius says, to no one, and, almost on reflex, opens a pamphlet.

They are all illustrated.

Sirius lets out a little noise of anguish and crawls under his bed to wait for death.

James' mother corners him on the way to the shower with a look that says *Don't Think You're Safe*. James makes a break for it, knowing that, if he times it right, he can leap out the bathroom window to his death and disfigurement just in time to avoid the inevitable. Unluckily, the inevitable has just finished washing the floors and manages to tackle him as he slips on a wet spot and falls headfirst into his own, lamentable, fate.

"Well," Mrs. Potter says, "how are you, then, son?"

"You're sitting on me," James groans. "I think you've perforated a lung."

Mrs. Potter pats him on the messy head. "I have pamphlets for you," she says. "They suggest speaking to your children about sexual intercourse--"

"AGH," James howls, trying to keep the sound of his mother saying *sexual intercourse* from reverberating endlessly through his brain, "AGH AGH AGH AGH AGH."

"--about *sexual intercourse* before they reach the age of eighteen," his mother insists, "and so here I am."

James knows now he will never, ever have sex. Some day, in the near future, once he has worn Lily down for the second time, and he finds himself locked with her in a passionate embrace, her lips sweet and her hair against his hands, he will remember suddenly and without warning this lone image of his mother, peering down at him from behind thick-rimmed spectacles, her gray hair wild from humidity and chores, saying *sexual intercourse!* triumphantly. And that will be the end of that.

"Sexual intercourse," Mrs. Potter says cheerfully, settling herself on James's stomach, "is one of the most beautiful things that two people can share, assuming that of course those two people are both willing and enthusiastic."

"La la la la!" James shrieks, slamming his hands over his ears. "*Oh to be in England, now that April's there--*"

"--and," his mother continues, unperturbed, "both are fully aware of the risks and consequences that sexual intercourse brings with it. Of course, magical medicine has made great inroads into prevention and relief for many afflicted with Sexually Transmitted Diseases--"

"--and whoever wakes in England sees some morning unaware--"

"--but pregnancy," his mother barrels on mercilessly, gently removing his fingers from his ears and holding his flailing arms in her iron grip, "lasts forever, and the emotional consequences of an unplanned or unwilling sexual encounter can be lifelong."

"Did you get this out of a *book*?!" James screeches. "I am no longer your son. Why are you *doing* this? Did you catch Sirius out with Sophie and now *I* have to suffer?"

"You need to be informed." His mother beams at him. "Now, of course, I'm sure you're very curious about all these new feelings you're having, and I want you to know that you needn't be ashamed of any of them, and I want you to ask me some of those burning questions."

James gapes at her.

"Your parents," she says, "can be a fountain of knowledge about sex in all its many forms."

James's brain shuts down completely. After a moment he manages to croak out, "Mum?"

"Yes, dear? Don't be afraid to ask the tough questions."

"I have to go take a shower." Forever, he adds silently.

"You are a little ripe," she agrees. "New glands, of course. Puberty! What a beautiful thing!"

"I can never speak to you again," James moans hollowly. "I'm going to move to Siberia and become a nun. Thank you, mum, for shaping my life this way."

"Dear, I understand you're a little hesitant," his mother says placidly, and kisses him on the forehead before helping herself up to her feet. "But please understand that we -- your father and I -- know from personal experience that sex can and should be one of the world's most beautiful things, and you should never be ashamed of yourself sexually or--"

"*HOLY GOD IN HEAVEN*," James bellows, hurling himself into the bathroom and slamming the door.

For a few moments he just sits on the toilet, trying not to weep like a child.

Then, from behind the shower curtain, someone whispers, "Prongs?"

"Pads?"

"Is your dad out there?"

"I'm never going to have sex," James says. "Life no longer has any meaning. Neither do breasts. I'm becoming a nun. Do you want to help me research nunneries?"

"I am going to become a castrato," Sirius replies in a dead voice, "and sing at the opera. Why, Prongs? Why, why, *why*?"

"It's *your* fault," James hisses, "you and your French poodle."

"I am full of misery," Sirius says. "The end is nigh."

"I blame you," James insists, without any vigor to the accusation. "You and your uncontrolled urges."

Sirius' head thunks as it hits the tiled wall. "My pamphlets are illustrated."

"My mum is a madwoman."

"Your *dad* tried to tell me about the *facts of life*."

"My mum used the phrase *sexual intercourse*."

"He said the word *certainly* at least ten times in one sentence."

"She spoke about *her* and *my dad* and -- *you* know."

"Oh God." Sirius peeks out from behind the curtain. "You win."

Remus realizes halfway through dinner that no one has spoken since they sat down to eat. A furtive glance up from his potatoes and he realizes his parents are staring at him, as if they're in the middle of the Sahara: his mum and dad two circling vultures, and himself a helpless gazelle on his last leg. He tries not to choke on his food, forcing it down his constricting throat. "Uhm," he says. "Good peas?"

"We have to talk," Mrs. Lupin says.

"What did I do?" Remus asks. "I didn't do anything."

"No, no, no, of course not," his father says kindly. "You didn't do anything at all."

"Is one of you dying?" Remus asks, fighting the urge to panic.

His mother laughs and exchanges a quick glance with his father. Remus flinches. "Of course not, darling. We just -- well, we noticed that you've borrowed my book."

"Your...book," Remus repeats. Oh God, do they know? They couldn't know. Maybe literary dreams are some kind of Lupin family thing, and when they start then you're about to be initiated into the Lupin Family Secret. "I just -- I wanted to look up some, er, dreams."

"We know," his father says. He leans across the table, putting a comforting hand on Remus' shoulder. "We just wanted you to know that these dreams happen to everyone."

Remus gapes at him, aware that his mouth is unattractively filled with half-chewed peas. "Wh -- they do?"

"Of course they do, sweetheart." His mother smiles at him, fond and understanding. The panic rises in Remus's throat. "You see, when you reach a certain age, your body starts to have...certain urges."

"No," Remus says quickly. "No urges. There are no urges."

"Of course there are," his mother presses, "and they're perfectly normal. It's hormones, you know. A function of the body. Nothing to worry about."

"No urges," Remus insists. "No urges."

"There's no need to deny it," his mother soothes. "We understand that you must be feeling -- confused, and alone, and possibly intimidated. It is, after all, a new phenomenon. You must be asking questions, like 'What's happening to me?' and 'Am I the only one?' But you aren't alone, dear."

"I went through it, myself," his father says, slicing a piece of roast.

"No urges," Remus says again. He's forgotten any other words exist.

"Now, Remus," Mrs. Lupin says patiently, "we thought that, since you enjoy reading so much, a few books on the subject would prove *very* useful."

"Am I still speaking English?" Remus babbles. "It sounds like English to me. Why aren't you listening? No urges. *No urges!*"

"Well," Mrs. Lupin attempts, "the man at the store suggested this cartoon version for young men. Do you want to take a look?"

"Not if it's about urges," Remus says, feeling hysterical.

"I get it," his father says, winking largely at him. "No urges. Right? We'll just leave these in the living room. *Just in case.*"

Remus stares down at his peas. From now on, he supposes he won't be able to eat peas. He'll forever associate them with this sick, desperate nausea, his mother's helpful expression, his father's demented, lewd wink of conspiratorial understanding. "Ack," Remus says.

"Remember: we're always here if you need us," says his mother comfortingly.

"Ack," says Remus again, and buries his face in his hands.

Peter knows he is in trouble when he hears his mother shrieking something from the living room. What he does not know is what he's in trouble for. It might be anything, except that he hasn't done anything, but that doesn't really narrow it down.

"Peter Wimsley Pettigrew, get your tail down to this room this *instant!*"

Peter scuttles downstairs, not really having any choice in the matter. His mother is glowering at him, holding up something in her hand that looks like...a sock. A very small, rubbery sock.

"Where do you suppose I found this?" she says, putting her hands on her hips.

Peter has no idea. It could be anywhere, really. He leaves socks everywhere. It might not even be his sock. It's probably one of his sister's socks.

"Er," he says. "I dunno."

His mother looks like she's going to explode. Peter imagines her exploding, and then imagines that if she did, it would probably smell like disinfectant. "In the *wash*," his mother booms. The floor beneath Peter's feet shakes. It's almost like an earthquake, only his mother might make him eat soap again, and that's far worse than the world opening up to swallow him whole. "And where do you think it *came* from?"

"I don't understand," Peter says numbly. "Socks are supposed to go in the wash. Aren't they?"

His mother's lower lip quivers. Her eyes flash with flecks of red fire, demonic and accusatory. Peter shrinks back. "Intercourse!" his mother howls. "It is a *filthy* practice, riddled with *disease!* Into the bath, young man! *Two hours!*"

Peter turns tail and runs.



"Do you have any idea?" his mother's voice follows him. "The warts -- *herpes* -- untold infections -- unsanitary -- disgusting -- *filthy* -- no son of mine--!"

Peter slams the door to the bathroom behind him and locks it.

It didn't even look like one of his socks. It was too *small* to be one of his socks. It must have been one of his sister's, got mixed up in the wrong laundry. He's not entirely sure where all this talk of intercourse comes in, and how warts got thrown in the mix, but he doesn't often listen to his mum and secretly encourages dust bunnies as pets, until she takes them away. It isn't as if he *has* to listen to her.


Oh well, Peter thinks, and runs a nice, hot bath.

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



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

 [dorkorific](#) is **Mlle. Artiste**;  [ladyjaida](#) is **Mlle. Bits-n-bats**.

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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