# Return the Favour

by wotcherpotter

Summary

James learns he has one month until he becomes infertile. At 23 years of age, the concept of children had never even crossed his mind — but now that the option is being taken away from him it's all he can think about.

Notes

This work is based on an Australian movie called Not Suitable For Children. It's decent as far as Australian movies go, stars Ryan Kwanten (True Blood). Anyway I tweaked it to suit James and Lily etc, etc.

Sarah (GhostofBambi, as if you didn't know) requested a Jily oneshot dedicated wholly to her for her birthday so - Happy Early Birthday!!! I hope you enjoy it.

The tap from the sink was digging into the small of his back where he was leaning on the countertop, but it paled in comparison to the feeling of lips around his dick. His head was leaning back against the mirror, afraid if he watched the moment might be over too fast. Music pulsed through the speakers in the backyard outside, though was muffled through the closed window. The lips were replaced by a hand, a thumb flicking over the head.

‘I — fuck.’

His breathing grew ragged. The mouth was back, sucking on the tip while the hand worked the rest.
‘Sammy I’m —’

His hips jerked involuntarily before freezing in his moment of bliss. His body sagged with relief, the tap digging into his back once again. He pulled up his jeans sluggishly, as though he didn’t have full control of his arms yet. With his belt buckled he opened the bathroom door and was about to walk back downstairs to join the party.

‘James.’

His guilt at having forgotten her was immediate. He turned around without having an idea of what to say or do. The result was an awkward kiss on the cheek followed by, ‘Er, thanks.’

‘James wait. There was a lump on your balls I think — I think you should get it checked out.’

He only half heard her as he ran down the stairs two at a time. He detoured through the kitchen to grab himself another can of Jim Beam and Coke before joining everyone outside.

‘James, I’ve been looking for you all over,’ Sirius yelled over the music.

He pushed his way through the people separating them to where James had stopped just outside the back door.

‘You can’t have looked that hard.’

The back door opened behind him to reveal Sammy. James avoided making eye contact by taking a long sip from his can as she got lost in the crowd.

‘You really should stop asking her to suck you off at parties, it’s quite unbecoming.’

‘And you’re a picture of dignity, are you?’

Sirius shoved him enough that he stumbled to his left, spilling his drink on the sleeve of his shirt.

‘Fuck off,’ James said. He stepped off the back porch and made his way through the crowd to the DJ they had hired for the night.

‘Hey mate, can we make requests?’

‘If you’re going to request ‘Gasolina’ your mate already has, five times. I’ve been trying to work it into the set so it still flows.’

‘Cheers lad,’ James said, patting the guy on the back.

James tipped the dregs of his drink down his throat before walking over to the cooler box and grabbing himself another. He stood by, surveying the crowd as he took his first sip. He found Sammy again chatting to another girl he vaguely recognised. The memory of what she had said to him up in the bathroom came back to him, though it was fuzzy. Something about a lump…

Before he could finish the thought, he was joined by his other housemate.

‘Heard you were up in the bathroom with Sammy again.’

‘God, you and Sirius love to gossip.’

There was a beat before she responded to him. ‘Well don’t give us so much to gossip about.’
James snorted. ‘Not your best rebuttal, Evans.’

Lily rolled her eyes at him, which was as much as she would ever admit defeat.

‘What’re you doing down here then? Thought you’d be over and out if you were getting your dick wet.’

‘A bit crass, aren’t you?’

‘Didn’t have the same posh upbringing as you and Black, did I?’ James tipped his drink in acknowledgement. ‘Anyway, I’ve had at least five tequila slammers and who knows how many of your Jim Beams, so you ought to be thankful that I’m even speaking and not passed out in a ditch’

‘Oi.’

‘Snooze you lose, Potter.’

With that she was off, mingling amongst the sweaty bodies on the makeshift dance floor. He had expected somewhat of a lecture from her about treating women with a bit more respect, though maybe that was coming in the morning. There wasn’t long to dwell on it; the opening shouts of ‘Gasolina’ began to play over the speakers. All other thoughts abandoned as he raced to find Sirius.

His mouth tasted like a dog had rubbed it’s ass all over it. He could feel his brain attempting to break free of his skull through his eyes. He cracked open one eye, hissing as the light burned, his brain screaming. He kept his eyes closed and felt around him to ascertain his surroundings. The bed was empty aside from himself, and he was fully clothed — including his shoes. His feet were hanging off the side of the mattress, just waiting for a demon to drag him away. He swung them the rest of the way until they were flat on the ground and his upper body still resting on the mattress. He needed to prepare himself.

He hauled himself up, pushing through the pain that threatened to tear his skull apart. He felt his way — eyes still closed — to the bathroom, where he turned the water to scalding in the shower. He stood under the water fully dressed, letting the water seep into his shirt and sear his skin underneath. He stripped his shirt off, jumping at the splat that echoed off the bathroom walls when it landed on the floor. After the effort freeing himself from the rest of his clothes, all he could manage was sitting on the shower floor. The water soothed his stomach and aching head enough that he could attempt to wash away the dirt from the night before. It was then he remembered what Sammy had said.

‘It’s just as I suspected, James. You’ve got testicular cancer.’

‘Fuck.’

James’s mind was racing with a million different thoughts. He was too young to die. How was he going to tell Sirius? He needed his Mum and Dad. He didn’t have any of his affairs in order. Did he even have affairs?

‘James. James, listen to me. You’re not going to die.’

‘Why did you let me suffer like that, you prick.’

Frank was smiling at him, not in a mischievous way — though there was a slight glint in his eye that gave him away.
‘So if I’m not dying then…’

‘It’s not aggressive, so I’d suggest tackling it head on and cutting it out.’

‘Right, yeah. And everything… would be fine?’

‘You mean, can you still have sex? Most people find it a bit tender immediately after the operation. But you will have full function of everything, yes.’

James sighed heavily with relief.

‘But James — keep in mind that you won’t be able to conceive naturally. There are ways around that of course. I doubt you’ve even thought about having children, but just something to keep in mind.’

At the look of panic on James’s face Frank chuckled.

‘Your bedside manner is appalling and I will be leaving a complaint with your supervisor.’

‘James, how many times are you going to come see and make the same joke? I own this practice. There is no one higher up than me.’

‘Maybe you should see someone about your lack of a sense of humour.’

‘It’s not me who’s lacking.’

‘Thanks, Frank,’ James said in earnest. ‘For not making me go down to the hospital and letting a stranger fondle my balls. Honest.’

‘I’m also glad we shared this moment,’ Frank said, patting him on the back.

Frank stood to look at a calendar behind his desk. ‘I can schedule you in for surgery about a month from today, on the 15th of August. That suit you?’

‘How long will I be out of action?’

‘What, have you got a hot date planned on the 16th?’

‘No, I just meant with uni going back a couple of weeks later. It’s my last year, I can’t afford to miss anything.’

‘Oh.’ Frank had the audacity to look slightly embarrassed at his earlier question. ‘Yes of course, you should be fine after a couple of days rest.’

James nodded his head a couple of times to give him a few seconds to accept all the information he’d been told that morning. He had cancer — but he was going to be fine. And he’d have to use science to have a kid. It actually didn’t seem that gloomy of an outlook.

‘Okay. Let’s do this,’ he said, determined.

‘Brilliant, I’ll get the paperwork sorted and mailed through. There’s some bits and bobs you’ll need to sign.’ Frank sat in his computer chair and spun to face James again, a small cup in his hand. ‘Now, take this and go to the room next door. We can use one specimen for several IVF attempts, so don’t worry about how much — just make sure you get it in the cup.’

Frank pushed the cup into James’s hands before standing and opening the door to his office. James
knew he was only doing his job, but the knowledge that Frank knew exactly what he’d be doing in the room next door was not what he would call arousing.

‘Just give it to Alice at the front desk when you’re done, and I’ll make sure it goes where it needs to be.’

And now his wife would know he’d been jerking off as well. This day was not going as he had hoped.

‘Fuck off, you haven’t got cancer,’ Sirius said.

James sighed. He’d been trying to tell Sirius for the last 10 minutes, with little success. He stirred the pasta sauce he was making over the stove before turning back to face Sirius where he was sat at the breakfast bar.

‘I wouldn’t lie about something like this. Or play a prank. This is real, you can call Frank if you don’t believe me.’

‘So Frank’s fondled your balls.’

‘Frank’s fondled your balls?’ Lily said, walking through the front door.

‘For fuck sake.’ James turned back to the stove.

‘Hallo, Lily dear.’ Sirius greeted her with a kiss to her cheek.

Lily set her bag on the countertop and sat next to Sirius at the breakfast bar. She picked up an apple from the fruit bowl and took a crunchy bite. James turned to face her with a scandalous look on his face.

‘Dinner’s almost ready, you’ll spoil your stomach.’

‘A bit teste, are we?’ Sirius said. The sly wink at Lily was not missed by James, who threw the tea towel hanging on his shoulder in Sirius’s direction.

Lily continued to crunch away on her apple, despite James’s earlier admonishment. ‘Is someone going to explain the ball fondling?’

James began to pull bowls from the cupboard, choosing to ignore them both.

‘James says he has testicular cancer.’

‘Cancer — Sirius, this isn’t something to joke about.’ Lily rose from her stool, moving around the breakfast bar to stand beside James at the stove. ‘Are you okay?’

He was slightly shocked how earnest she sounded. He had known Lily for several years, but they had never really been that close. Inviting her to live with him in the house his parents had left him had been more Sirius’s suggestion, since they had the closer friendship.

‘Er, Frank said I’ll be fine. I’ll have an operation in a month to take out the tumour and that’s it really.’

‘Still. Are you okay — I don’t know — mentally, or emotionally or whatever? That’s some heavy shit.’
She surprised him by pulling him into a tight hug. Her arms were wrapped around his waist for a moment before he remembered to reciprocate. The last person he hugged had probably been his Mum; the thought made his heart hurt remembering she wasn’t there to talk to. Though the hug Lily was giving him felt like a close second.

‘I, er—’ his voice broke, and he stopped to clear his throat. ‘Yeah, Lil, I’m fine.’

She looked up at him with an eyebrow slightly raised, but squeezed him encouragingly before joining Sirius again.

‘Who’s hungry then?’

He was a nervous fidgeter; he always had been, however there were few times in his life that he had ever been nervous. There was a magazine in his lap that he couldn’t read, his leg was bouncing so violently the words had become a blur. He found a pen in one of his pockets and began to click it up and down, much to the chagrin of the other people in the waiting room.

‘James Potter? Dr. Longbottom will see you now.’

He took a deep breath before walking down the corridor to Frank’s office.

‘Hi mate, sorry to call you in again. Hope I didn’t scare you,’ said Frank, shutting the door behind James. ‘Have a seat.’

James sat in the same seat as before, his leg resuming its jiggling immediately.

‘It’s nothing to do with the cancer, James. Well, sort of.’

‘Er…’

‘It’s the sperm, actually.’

‘Hang on — what?’

‘So what happens is, when we take a sample we freeze it cryogenically. What that does is keep it at the exact age it is when frozen, ready for use at a later date.’

‘Right yeah, I’ve seen a movie or two Frank.’

‘Of course, of course. Well, when we tried to freeze yours it died.’

‘That’s… bad?’

‘It means the only way you’ll be able to have children, is if you get someone pregnant before we go through with the surgery next month.’

At 23 years old, James was far from wanting his own children. The only time he had ever thought about children previously was when he himself was a child. Up until five minutes ago, he had thought he was still a child. There was something about having the option taken away from you, that made you want it more — like when you were told you couldn’t laugh at something, and it made you want to laugh at least five times louder.

‘Well, can’t you try it again?’

‘It doesn’t really work like that, James. If it doesn’t freeze the first time, it’s highly likely it’s not
going to freeze the second time.’

‘Can’t you just try, Frank. For me?’

‘James, it’s not the end of the world. Science is evolving everyday, maybe when you’re ready to have a kid there’ll be new ways to make that happen. But for now, I’m sorry James.’

‘Is that all then?’

‘That’s all. I thought it better to talk about it in person with you.’

‘Brilliant. Thanks Frank. Best be heading off, busy day and all. Nice seeing you.’

He knew he was reacting to the news like a toddler, and maybe that was even more of an argument that he shouldn’t have a child right now. As he walked down the street towards the nearest tube stop, it was all he could think about. As fate would have it, a mother walked a stroller down the street towards him. Sat facing him was a talkative toddler, babbling absolute nonsense which to James sounded more like, ‘you need me, James, neeeeeeed me.’

He blinked a couple of times, dumbfounded and staring at the child. The mother noticed his stare and hastened her pace past him.

‘I’m not creepy, honest! I just — oh, bollocks.’ He kicked a pebble off the pathway in frustration.

As he continued, it occurred to him that the baby — or his delusions — were right. After Frank’s news, he was almost desperate for a child of his own. It couldn’t be that hard to get someone pregnant, he reasoned with himself. A month seemed ample amount of time to get the job done. His only problem was finding someone who would have a baby — and have it with him.

James flopped back onto his bed, exhausted from the day and fit to burst after dinner. The problem of who he could have a baby with still plagued his mind. He hadn’t told Lily or even Sirius about it when he arrived home — he wasn’t sure how to put it in a way that didn’t make him sound deranged. He was quiet over dinner, which they had overcompensated for by being obnoxious. He knew it was for his benefit, that they were only trying to cheer him up but it only made him angry. They were so carefree, they had all the time in the world to get their lives together and get themselves organised before thinking about children.

He scrolled through his phone mindlessly in an attempt to take his mind off it. In his lack of attention he pressed a link accidentally and was bombarded with ads. There was one that stood out to him, though it made him feel slightly uneasy that it had appeared. It was for an adoption agency, an option that he’d forgotten until that moment. With increased fervour he began his research.

He was quick to find out that due to his medical history — or rather, present — he wouldn’t be eligible for adoption, and was back at square one. Soft bickering from outside his door pulled him out of his thoughts.

‘You knock.’

‘No you.’

‘You wanted to come check—’

‘— But you know him better!’
‘I can hear you both,’ James said by way of interruption.

‘James,’ he heard Lily say, ‘We just wanted to check you’re okay, you seemed a bit down at tea.’

He didn’t respond but his bedroom door was pushed open anyway — as he knew it would be. Sirius barged into his room with Lily close behind. Sirius splayed on the bed next to him, where Lily sat at his desk chair.

‘I’m fine.’

‘You can’t expect either of us to believe you,’ Sirius said.

‘Fine. Frank told me this morning that freezing my sperm didn’t work, so now I have a month to get someone pregnant or I’ll never have kids at all.’

‘How does it just — just not work?’

‘I don’t know, Sirius. I’m not the doctor,’ James said, and rolled over so that his face was pressed into a pillow.

‘There has to be more options. What about adoption? Have you even thought about that?’ Lily said.

‘I won’t be able to adopt because I’ve got cancer, there’s a medical clearance or something stupid.’

‘So that’s it then. No kids.’

James rolled back over to face them. ‘Oh, I’ll be having a kid.’

‘But you —’

‘I’ll get someone pregnant in the next month or I’ll die trying.’

‘Jesus Christ. James, you can’t just — just go around ejaculating everywhere.’

‘Oh my God, Lily I won’t be walking down the street with my hands in my pants, that’s disgusting.’

‘So what’s the plan then, genius?’

‘Why do you care anyway?’ James said, trying to stall.

‘Yeah, what’s that about, Lils?’ Sirius said, sitting up and resting on his elbows.

‘Fine. I won’t help and you can come up with a shitty plan for the rest of your life. Goodnight.’ She stormed out of James’s room and down the hall to her own. Silence rang throughout the house after she slammed her door.

‘You’d think she was the one missing out on having a kid,’ James said in a whisper.

Lily’s departure had meant the end of the conversation. Which was why it was three days later, and James was still wallowing in self pity in his bedroom. He was staring at the ceiling counting sheep in the hopes of boring himself to sleep. His phone vibrated on the nightstand beside him and he welcomed the distraction.
11:23pm Sammie: You up?

James sighed before realisation hits him.

11:24pm James: Be there in 10

James’s body moved on autopilot on the walk to Sammie’s house, while his brain whirred to life with a thousand thoughts. A plan was setting itself in motion; a weak plan — but it was better than no plan. When he rounded the corner onto her street he could see her waiting for him on the bench outside her building. There was little in the way of greeting, just a polite kiss on the cheek. Sammie grabbed his hand and lead him upstairs to her apartment. Upon the closing of her door James pushed her against it, his lips catching her gasp. She recovered quickly, and her answering kiss was full of heat. Her hands undid the button on his jeans fluidly before dipping past the waistband of his underwear.

James groaned with pleasure when she released his cock and started tugging. He was leaning on the door for support while his other hand found its way under her shirt. She moaned her approval, but as he felt all the blood rushing down he remembered his half-baked plan.

‘Sammie,’ he said between kisses. ‘Sammie.’

‘Right, sorry,’ she said, pulling her top over her head and throwing it on the floor next to them.

‘No, Sammie. I didn’t mean — do you want to have a baby with me?’

‘What?’ She looked at him as if he’d gone mad. He couldn’t blame her. ‘What the fuck, James?’

Admittedly he could have delivered the proposal better. Sammie untangled herself from James and sat on the arm of her lounge behind him, her arms now folded to cover her chest. James was leaning against the door to face her.

‘Are you going to explain, or is that all I get?’

James tipped his head back against the door and ran a hand through the hair sticking to his forehead. He was uncomfortably aware that his dick was still hanging out of his pants — now limp — and hastily put it away.

‘I’m — God, I don’t know.’

‘Losing your mind?’

James rolled his eyes. ‘Yeah, that’s probably a contributing factor. The truth is — is that I won’t be able to have kids after next month and I just thought, maybe, that you might want to help me. Have a child.’

‘Don’t you think that’s a little… Serious, for our kind of relationship?’

‘Er, I didn’t think we had a relationship.’

‘That’s my point.’

‘Oh. Right. So that’s a no?’

‘I thought you were smart,’ she said, picking up her own shirt and throwing it at him.

‘Okay, okay. I get it, I’ll go.’
James let himself out, jogging down the stairs to try and shake the feeling of rejection washing over him. It was stupid of him; of course she wouldn’t want to mother his child. But the rejection still stung, and pushed him to jog the entire trip home.

It was past midnight when he walked back through the front door. He moved quietly through the house — unsure if anyone else was awake — and into the kitchen. The light in the extractor hood dimly lit the kitchen just enough for him to see where he was going. He opened the fridge, bent over to pull out a beer.

‘James?’

James hit his head on the freezer in his shock. He rubbed the slowly-forming egg on his head, turning to see Sirius sat at the breakfast bar with a bowl of cereal.

‘What are you doing down here?’

‘What are you doing down here?’ Sirius said, raising an eyebrow.

‘I was at Sammie’s.’

‘Ah, I see. In times of trouble, I too like to get my dick wet for clarity.’

‘I asked her if she wanted to have a baby with me.’

Sirius choked on a cornflake. ‘What did she say?’

‘No, obviously, or I wouldn’t be trying to drown my sorrows in alcohol.’

James turned back to the still-open fridge, and pulled out the bottle he had reached for earlier. It was quiet as he twisted the top off and took a long sip, the only other sound coming from Sirius’ chewing.

‘Are you okay?’

James hesitated. ‘Yeah.’

Sirius pushed his stool back and walked around the counter to where James stood. He wrapped both arms around James’s shoulders, taking him by surprise. James hadn’t realised how much he needed it until the warmth of the first tears ran down his cheek.

A moment of weakness had struck James in the wake of his meltdown in Sirius’s arms, in which he messaged several past girlfriends. It wasn’t his finest hour, though his bruised ego wasn’t complaining. First, because majority of them had replied; second, because he had ended up with a date.

He’d decided on the way to the cafe that he would try his luck again with the baby talk. He told himself he had nothing to lose. His leg bouncing under the table said otherwise. His hand was wrapped around a large mug of Earl Grey. His eyes were so focused on the door that he didn’t notice the tea burning his tongue as he drank.

The bell rang for the seventh time since he’d arrived. He stood abruptly, knocking the table and spilling his tea in his haste to pull the chair across from him out for his date.

‘Wotcher James,’ she said with a smile.
‘Carissa, how are you? It’s been so long.’

‘Alright, you? I’ll just order a cuppa and be back.’

James raised the corner of his mouth just enough to be considered a smile and nodded his acknowledgement. He wished in that moment he’d ordered an iced tea, a juice — something cold to soothe the sweating. A bead of sweat tickled his calf as it ran down his leg. He knew it was the nerves — there was no way London could be that hot in late July — but he couldn’t understand how the situation would bother him so much.

‘You off with the fairies?’

Carissa pulled him from his thoughts as she sat across from him, an identical steaming mug in her hands.

‘Just a lot on my mind, s’all.’

‘Oh James, I’m so sorry.’ Her hand reached out to cover his own on the table and squeezed.

James looked up at her bewildered, until he realised she was talking about his parents. He felt as though he’d taken a punch to the stomach, a familiar sensation at the mention of his parents that he wasn’t sure would ever go away. A prickling in the corner of his eye preceded the single tear that fell, which he hastily wiped away.

‘Sorry,’ he said gruffly.

‘You don’t have to be sorry.’

‘It’s just, that’s not even close to why I asked you here. It was just a shock.’

‘Er…’

‘I’ve bollocksed this up, haven’t I?’

‘James, what’s going on?’

James pushed his glasses up so they were resting in the tangled mess on top of his head. His hands rubbed at his eyes, eliciting a groan as he argued with himself about whether to bomb this date or not.

‘Do you want to have a baby?’ he said, muffled through his hands.

‘You ill, or something? I’ve heard of a summer flu but I didn’t think it made you lose your mind.’

‘I mean it, Riss.’ He looked up and caught her eye. All he saw was pity. ‘Forget it, it’s stupid.’

James stood from his chair, the grating of which along the floor caused all eyes in the cafe to turn on him. She caught his wrist before he could get too far.

‘Do you want to talk about what’s wrong?’

He forced a small smile onto his face and shook his head. ‘It’s nothing. Just a bad day.’

The next date was better than the first, though still ended up with a no. The third, the fourth, the fifth and even the sixth all had the same result. When he let himself think about it, he supposed he
should have seen it coming. He’d never given any hints of wanting a baby in the past, and half of these girls he hadn’t spoken to in months, almost years. It was the seventh date that he was made aware of a difference.

He walked through the front door after a seventh decline of his proposal. Sirius was sat in the lounge with a large bowl of popcorn. James heard the familiar sounds of *Mamma Mia!* playing from the TV. Lily was curled up next to him, humming along to Super Trooper when James flopped onto the armchair beside them.

‘Sirius, just the man I wanted to see.’

Sirius didn’t even look in his direction before saying, ‘You’ve given up on women, then?’

‘Even if that was the case, you’d be the last resort.’

Sirius splayed a hand on his heart, turning to face James with a look of mock offence. James gave him the finger.

‘Kate says she got a message from you last night.’

The only give away that Sirius knew what was coming was the slight flare of his nostrils.

‘Oh? I don’t recall.’

‘Let me refresh your memory, then.’ James pulled his phone from the back pocket of his jeans, tapping on the screen until he found what he was looking for. He began reading off the screen, ‘Hi Kate. Long time no chat. I hear you’re going for lunch with James tomorrow, absolutely brilliant. Just something to keep in mind when you’re there, James will probably ask you to have a baby with him. Yes, he’s crazy. Say no, I beg of you. Ta, Sirius.’

‘That doesn’t sound like me.’

Lily snorted beside him, poorly covering it with a cough. James glared at her before turning back to Sirius. Sirius laughed, seemingly at the TV — but James knew there was nothing funny happening at that moment from the countless times he had seen the film.

‘Sirius.’

‘Fine. Yes, it was me. Can I get back to Meryl Streep? She needs me.’

‘No, you can’t,’ James exclaimed. ‘You need to give me an explanation for ruining my chance at having a child.’

Sirius gave James a deadpan look before pausing the movie and turning to face him. ‘First of all, she was never going to say yes — you haven’t spoken to her in three years.’

Awkward silence filled the room while James waited for Sirius to add to his argument. James gave Sirius a skeptical look, urging him to continue.

‘Er… I didn’t really have another point.’ Lily elbowed him in the ribs. ‘Ow, what the — oh yeah, we think you’re going about this the wrong way.’

‘You’ve been chatting about this a lot then, have you?’ James folded his arms across his chest, looking determinedly out the window and trying to avoid whatever lecture he was about to get.

‘Yeah. We care about you, James.’
James eyed Sirius in his peripheral, trying desperately not to show he was listening.

‘If you really want a kid, asking your old girlfriends isn’t going to get you one.’

‘I don’t see you coming up with anything better,’ James said, growing increasingly angry.

‘Not me, no. But Lily had a good idea.’

That took James by surprise. His eyebrows rose into the mess of his hair, his eyes grew wider than the lenses of his glasses. Even in the dim lighting from the TV he could see the pink rising on Lily’s fair skin in response to his reaction.

‘I just thought — well there’s this woman at work that I know wants to have a child. It could be more like… a business partnership, than a relationship. I could set up a meeting for you.’

‘You — and they — but what if — do I have to go alone?’

‘I can come with you, if you’d like,’ Lily said.

After lunch the next day, James found himself sat next to Lily at a table for four in an unfamiliar cafe near her office in the city. He was too tall for the small table, amplified by the jiggling of his leg underneath its shaking the the top. Lily hadn’t been able to put down her tea since it was ordered.

‘James.’

‘Mm?’ He looked up from the spot on the tablecloth he had been staring at.

Lily pointed her head in the direction of the door where a couple were now walking in.

‘That’s her? Is she a—’

Lily stood from her chair — effectively cutting him off — and smiled, inviting the women over to their table. ‘Emmeline, Andrea, Hi. I ordered a tea, I hope you don’t mind.’

James stood jerkily from his seat. All three of the women at the table visibly cringed at the sound it made scraping along the floor.

‘I’m James.’ He held his hand across the table to shake. ‘Thanks for coming.’

Lily looked at him and he could tell she was trying to have a conversation with her eyes but he didn’t know her well enough to decode it. She changed tactics. Covered behind a cough, she said ‘Sit. Down.’

‘So. Lily tells me you’re in need of a surrogate, James.’ The one Lily referred to as Emmeline spoke first.

James gave Lily a confused look at which she kicked him under the table. A strangled yelp escaped his mouth as he bent to rub his shin. He didn’t miss the look of worry between the couple.

‘I, er — yeah I guess.’

‘You guess?’

‘What he’s trying to say is he’s looking for a partnership.’ James nodded in agreement.
Andrea spoke then. ‘So you would want to raise this child together?’

‘Yes?’ James looked to Lily for assurance. ‘Yes.’

‘We’d have to get to know each other a bit first, of course.’

‘Er, okay. Do you… like tea?’

Andrea and Emmeline both laughed at him as Lily hit him over the back of the head.

‘Ow,’ James whined.

‘I was thinking more along the lines of medical history,’ Emmeline said.

‘Right, yeah, me too. But I also thought it might be easier if we felt a bit more comfortable with each other? Unless you’re planning on drinking. I know that loosens me up a fair bit,’ James said. He was smiling at his own joke, but a look around the table showed that it wasn't well received.

‘I’m sorry?’

‘You know, for when we…’

‘James!’ Lily’s cheeks we a fiery red.

‘Oh my god.’ Andrea was looking at him in disgust.

‘What? What did I say?’

‘I’m sorry, I’m so sorry. We’ll get going.’ Lily dragged James from his chair, outside the cafe and down the street, not letting go of him until they were almost back to the office building where Lily worked.

‘Are you going to tell me what’s going on?’

‘You thought you were going to have sex with her?’

It was James’s turn to blush. ‘Well I — I don’t know.’

‘I try to help you and you think I’m getting you laid. This is great. How am I supposed to show my face at work anymore?’ Lily sat on a nearby bench with her elbows leaning on her knees and digging her palms into her eyes. James sat down beside her, unsure of what he was supposed to do. He put his arm around her shoulders gingerly.

‘I’m sorry, Lily.’

‘You’re sorry. That’s great, James. That’ll fix it.’

Fury boiled in James’s chest. He pulled his arm away from Lily as if he had been burned. ‘You know, it’s my life I fucked up too. It’s not you who lost a chance at having a kid.’

His eyes were stinging with the tears he refused to let spill over. Lily turned her head so that it was resting on her palm and looked back at James as the first tear slid down his cheek.

‘James, I—’

‘Forget it. I don’t want your pity.’
He stormed off, ignoring Lily’s calls after him. This idea was fucked. Trying to have a kid was fucked. Him having cancer was fucked. And his parents not being here was the most fucked up part of it all.

He was laying face down on his bed, headphones blaring the songs from his angry playlist when Lily came home. He couldn’t hear her knocking, or her yelling through the door. His only indication that he wasn’t alone anymore was the subtle dip of the bed where she sat. He pulled out his headphones as he turned his head. Without his glasses it was hard to tell, but he the fire of her hair was impossible to mistake. He turned his face back into the pillow.

‘James, please.’

He pretended not to hear her again.

‘James. I can fix this.’

‘How Lily? You can’t magically make the cancer go away.’

‘No, I can’t.’ A shiver went up his body from the spot where she touched his leg, so tenderly that he was convinced to roll over. ‘But I can give you a child.’

His eyes widened. ‘You’re going to steal a child?’

‘Has anyone ever told you you’re a fucking bellend?’

‘You’re not the first, no.’ He leaned for his glasses before sitting up and facing her properly. ‘I doubt you’ll be the last.’

‘I meant we’ll get me pregnant with your baby.’

‘You — wait a minute. I’m the bellend?’

‘I knew you’d think it was stupid, never mind, I was just trying to make up for getting angry at you this afternoon I’ll just go.’ She was almost at the door before James was able to get his mouth to function.

‘No, Lily wait. I didn’t mean that. I didn’t think you even wanted kids.’

‘Well of course I did, I mean, I never thought I’d have any at 23 but I’m not exactly opposed to it.’

‘Not opposed — Lily have you thought this through? Having a kid isn’t like deciding where you want to go for a drink on a Friday night.’

She rolled her eyes. ‘Yes, James, I’ve thought it through. You don’t need to patronise me.’

‘I didn’t mean it like that, you know I didn’t.’

A beat of silence passed between them. James didn’t know what to say, or if there was even something he should say. Should he thank her? He had so many questions, but it didn’t feel right for him to ask any of them. His bed dipped again as Lily sat on the edge, closer than she had before.

‘Is Sirius home?’

The question was loaded with tension that he wasn’t sure he was imagining. His mouth was dry.
He shook his head. Lily tugged on his hand and he jumped as if electrocuted. He turned his hand over but there was no mark.

‘James?’ Her cheeks were flushed. ‘We need to go to Tesco.’

‘Wait, what? What are we going to do there?’

‘We need a turkey baster.’ She lead the way out of his room and down the stairs. She grabbed a jacket from the back of a chair, and threw James’s own at him. She threw his wallet from the kitchen bench.

The room was small, most of it taken up by the bed in the middle. The bag with the turkey baster was dumped on the nightstand on Lily’s side of the bed. James was still wasn’t sure what any of it was for, or why they were in a hotel.

‘We need to set some rules,’ Lily said. She sat on the bed facing him where he leaned on the window sill. ‘I don’t want Sirius to know.’

‘He’s going to find out eventually.’

“Yes, but he doesn’t need to find out just yet. Only if this works.’

‘If this works?’

‘It’s not guaranteed that I’ll get pregnant, James.’ She said it gently, like she was trying to sweeten the poison of the truth.

‘Right. And what is the turkey baster for?’

It was her turn to look at him in confusion. ‘To inseminate me…”

‘What the fuck?’

‘You thought we were going to have sex?’

‘Why else are we in a hotel room?’

‘Oh my god.’ Lily tried to stifle it but her laughter seeped through the cracks. James folded his arms across his chest in a last ditch attempt to save his bruised ego. She pulled the turkey baster from the bag and took a glass with her to the small bathroom. She returned to her spot on the bed with the glass full of water, and handed both items to James.

‘What am I supposed to do?’

‘We’re practising. Here,’ she squeezed the turkey baster and sucked up water from the glass. ‘See?’

James did the exact same thing, except managed to squirt water into Lily’s eye. ‘Oh my God.’

Lily was squealing as she ran into the bathroom. ‘I’m sorry!’

James moved the glass to the nightstand and flopped back against the pillows, rubbing his temples. The bed dipped. He could feel the heat radiating off Lily in waves from how close she was. The electricity he’d felt in his bedroom found itself in his throat.

‘Maybe we should… try it the normal way.’ Her voice sounded confident, but she was avoiding his eyes.
‘You don’t have to do this.’

She squeezed his hand. ‘We should set some rules though, so it’s not weird.’

James nodded. ‘No kissing. And maybe… no unnecessary touching?’

‘What do you deem unnecessary?’

‘Well I don’t know, I’ve never done something like this before.’ Her cheeks were burning.

‘Hey, neither have I. We’ll go slow. Let’s just get under the sheet and see how it goes?’

It was a suggestion, but he waited for her to nod her permission before acting on it. She gave him the tiniest of nods before pulling the sheets over herself. Within seconds the pants she was wearing were thrown out from underneath, as well as her underwear. James sprung into action, removing his own pants before joining her and throwing his own briefs on the floor.

His hand wrapped around his cock, though it didn’t need much coaxing. He turned to Lily to see if she was ready, and saw her staring up at the ceiling with a concentrated look.

‘Lily?’ She looked at him like she’d been brought back down to Earth. ‘Are you okay?’

She smiled at him, small but genuine, before lifting her bra out from under covers. ‘Super.’ She tossed it on the floor with the rest of her clothes.

James rolled onto his side, leaning his head on his elbow. ‘Ready?’

Lily’s response was a quick kiss to his cheek before pulling him towards her. James was hovering above her, his full weight on his elbows either side of her head. His cock was close enough that he could feel the warmth emanating from her, eliciting a groan. Her thighs were hitched around his waist with subtle encouragement. He wrapped his hand around his cock once more, guiding it into position before sliding in.

‘Fuck.’

‘Lily?’

‘Maybe kissing… wouldn’t be so bad.’

‘And unnecessary touching?’ James said with a smirk.

Lily pulled his face down to her own; he had a second to glance at her lips before they were covering his own in a hungry kiss. Her tongue darted across his lips imploringly and he obliged, moaning when their tongues met. His thrusts were languid, giving himself time to relish the kiss. She was warm and sweet, like butterscotch sauce, and it wasn’t long before his pace quickened.

He moved his mouth along her jawline, pressing soft kisses into a sweet spot behind her ear. She was moaning delicately into his ear, each one making his cock twitch inside her. Every sound she made was sweeter than the last. When she said his name, that was his undoing.

‘Lily, I—’ She cut him off with her lips on his again, swallowing his words and the groan that followed as he came.

His breathing was ragged, his body covered in a light sheen of sweat. He rolled onto his side, propped up by his elbow again.
'Did you even come?' he said, still panting.

'I mean, that’s not why we’re here, so…'

James cringed. ‘That’s a hit to the ego.’

‘It wasn’t the worst sex.’

‘Wasn’t the worst? That’s not the review I was going for.’

‘Review? This isn’t Yelp.’

James had to laugh at that. Lily’s laugh mingled with his own, reminding him of butterscotch again. He watched as the dim lighting danced on her skin, the pink in her cheeks just visible. She noticed him watching her; when they locked eyes James could feel the electricity charging between them again. He tucked a loose curl behind her ear, using it as an excuse to lean closer to her. He was so close, when he opened his mouth to speak again his lips grazed against hers.

‘Let me return the favour.’

Over the near two decades James had known Sirius, he had not once been able to keep a secret from him. This wasn’t form a lack of trying; on the contrary, there had been several surprise birthdays that were ruined by Sirius’s cunning. Which is why returning to the house he shared with Sirius and Lily after their sex-capade — knowing that Lily didn’t want Sirius to have even a hunch — he knew was attempting to accomplish the impossible. As luck would have it, Sirius was in the middle of his beauty sleep when James creaked the old front door open.

He had left before Lily, at her insistence that it would be less suspicious if they arrived home at different times. He sent her a quick text to let her know Sirius was still asleep before running up the stairs two at a time up to his room. He fell back on his bed and allowed himself to reminisce on the previous evening’s events for a couple of seconds. He could still smell the sweetness of Lily’s perfume on his shirt. But he could feel himself hardening at the memory of her in only his shirt, a sign that he needed to jump into the shower.

After tugging one out in the shower (he couldn’t just leave himself hanging), he wrapped a towel around his waist and made his way down to the kitchen for breakfast — only to be met by Sirius and Lily sat at the breakfast bar. He froze in the entrance, eyes locked on Lily’s like she was the headlights and he was the deer. Warmth spread across his cheeks as though he’d been caught in the act.

‘Morning,’ Sirius said, seemingly unaware of the exchange and pulling James out of his reverie.

‘Is that the time?’ Lily said. Sirius raised an eyebrow in concern. ‘I’d love to stay and chat with you boys but I’m running late. See you for dinner tonight!’

James watched her run from the room transfixed.

‘Does she know it’s Saturday?’ Sirius said, pulling James from his thoughts for the second time in a matter of minutes.

‘Saturday, you say? That reminds me I have to… er, buy some — some curtains for my cupboard.’

James ran back upstairs to his room. He dropped his towel on the floor and pulled on the first clothes he could find, hoping like hell he had read the situation correctly. He dug around his
dresser to find his wallet and phone he’d discarded earlier, stuffing them both in the back pocket of his jeans. He jumped down the stairs and was back out the front door within an hour of walking through it that morning. The hotel they’d stayed in the night before was only a couple of blocks away from the house, but after running the whole way James was struggling to catch his breath by the time he walked back into the lobby.

She was sat in an armchair facing the door when he saw her, typing furiously away on her phone. His own buzzed in his back pocket when she was finished. He didn’t need to look to see it was what she was furiously working on moments earlier. He had the worst eyesight of the two, but she was the one who only saw him when he was sat in the armchair across from him.

‘How did you get here so fast? I know you’re fit, but that fit?’

‘You underestimate my abilities.’

‘Someone has to or your head will grow far too big. And I’m quite fond of its current size.’

‘Is that a compliment?’

‘Shut up, before I take it back.’ She stood from her chair and walked across the lobby to the elevator. ‘Are you coming?’

He nearly tripped over his shoelace in his haste. From the smirk she was trying to hide James could tell Lily hadn’t missed it. The elevator dinged its arrival before either of them could say anything about it, and all thoughts of it disappeared as soon as they stepped inside. The tension between them was palpable. James couldn’t take it any longer. He intertwined his fingers with Lily’s and pulled her towards him, so that there was nothing between them except the thin cotton of their clothes. He dipped his head, eager to taste the sweetness of her mouth again. She was just as eager, her mouth already open and waiting.

His hands explored her body, keen to hear her moaning his name again. His right hand found its way to the hem of shirt and he teased her, tracing languid circles into her skin. He knew he was affecting her from the not-so-gentle nibble of his lip. He smiled with satisfaction as the elevator dinged again and they sprung apart. Lily interlaced their fingers again and lead him to the same room as the night before. She fiddled with the card, her hands shaking from the adrenaline. When she finally opened the door James picked her up bridal style, carrying her into the room and kicking the door closed.

He laid her on the bed, pressing a single kiss to her lips before moving to the edge of the bed where he’d left her feet dangling. She kicked her flats off; her impatience made him grin. She huffed her frustration.

‘Quit being an arse, and get on with it.’

James’s grin turned to laughter. The sound relieved some of the tension that hung between them. He toed off his sneakers hastily, not wanting to waste anymore time. He tugged on the hem of Lily’s skirt, struggling to pull it down any further. Lily lifted her bum off the sheets to undo the zip at her back. James tugged again, this time successful in freeing her lower half. The lacy red knickers she wore underneath made his cock twitch on sight. His knees dipped into the edge of the bed. Lily parted her legs for him, allowing him to see the wet patch already soaking into the front of her underwear.

‘Jesus Christ.’ He managed to pull his eyes back up to her face and saw her cheeks were flushed, whether from heat or self consciousness he couldn’t be sure. He took her hand in his own just to be
sure, and squeezed his reassurance.

He lay on his front facing her, and was about to pull down her underwear when a hand stopped him. It took all his strength not to whine.

‘I can’t be the only one with no clothes on.’ James rolled his eyes, but pulled his shirt over his head without protest. ‘It’s called equality.’

‘You’re so full of shit.’ He undid the button on his jeans and stripped them off as well before joining Lily on the bed again.

Too impatient to care, he pulled her knickers off unceremoniously and flung them over his shoulder. He swiped tentatively across her clit with his tongue, watching her reaction. She moaned without hesitation, her back arching up from the bed. That was all the encouragement he needed.

His mouth was on her then, sucking on her clit and tongue swiping up her folds. Her hands tugged on his hair, pulling him closer. He wound his arms under and around her thighs, pulling her closer to him still. He concentrated on her clit, swirling his tongue back and forth. He slid a finger inside her, to Lily’s loud appreciation. His cock grew fatter against his stomach, but he was determined to make sure she came before him.

With the addition of a second finger Lily began to grind back. He looked up at where her head lay on the pillows, fiery curls sticking to her head and mouth open in a small ‘o’ releasing her sounds of pleasure. It was the most beautiful James had ever remembered seeing her. He felt something other than lust in the pit of his stomach, but there wasn’t time to dwell on that now. With renewed vigor, he slid a third finger in and curled all three inside her.

‘Holy — James. Right there, right there.’ She trailed off into unintelligible moaning.

It wasn’t long after she was crying out with her orgasm. James lapped languidly as she rode the waves of aftershocks. When her breathing had slowed, James pulled his fingers out gently and made a show of sucking them clean. She pulled his hand towards her before he could get to the third finger and sucked it off herself. He nearly came right there in his briefs.

‘Lily, you can’t just — if you keep doing that, all I’ll ever do is embarrass myself in bed with you.’

‘You’re so dramatic,’ she said, though she was smiling.

She tugged on the hand she still held and he scrambled up beside her onto the bed. She straddled his lap and he welcomed the friction it brought. Her hands caressed his cheeks and brought his attention back to her. She was kissing him, lips parted and tongue meeting his own. She pulled back slightly, catching her breath as she leant her forehead against his.

‘I never thought you’d be self conscious. You shouldn’t be.’

She continued the kissing down his neck, leaving a trail of them down his torso. Her hand dipped beneath the waistband of his briefs, freeing his cock and letting it fall heavily against his stomach. Lily’s trail of kisses continued to the head of his cock, at which point she swirled the shaft around her mouth. James sucked in a sharp breath, using all his strength not to fuck her throat.

‘Lily…’

He thought she might have ignored him with the way she began to take more of him in; but she repositioned herself and was sinking down on him before long. He watched her at first, grinding up and down on him. She undid the buttons of her shirt, slowly revealing the matching bra hiding
underneath. James reached up to massage both her tits and rub her nipples between his thumbs. Her accompanying moan was the last straw for James, and he couldn’t wait any longer for his release. His hands held her waist in position as he thrust up into her, almost growling his pleasure.

Lily cried out for the second time that morning; as she pulsed around him the knot in his stomach began to tighten until it was all too much and he was joining her. When he could no longer support her she collapsed beside him in the bed, curling around him. He wrapped his arm around her shoulders and pulled her closer still, so there were no parts of his skin that weren’t touching hers.

‘I’m not usually one to avoid saying I told you so,’ Lily said, pausing for breath, ‘but I’m worried I’ll give you a fat head if I do.’

‘You don’t even have to say it, I already know — I am the best lay you’ve ever had.’

The carpet was not as soft as it looked when he landed on it face first.

If you asked James to tell you what he’d been doing on his summer break before becoming infatuated with Lily Evans, he couldn’t tell you. Hell, if you asked him what he was doing with his whole life up until that point, he still wouldn’t have an answer. There was no specific moment where the sun shone down and angels sang from above that made him realise; it was more like he was eating his cornflakes and dropped his spoon in the milk. (It was exactly like he was eating his cornflakes and dropped his spoon in the milk.) Sirius was less than enthused about the milk splattering over the counter.

‘Where’s Lily?’

Sirius looked up from where he was mopping up James’s mess to eye him curiously. ‘It’s 10 on a Tuesday, so she’ll be at work.’

‘Oh right, yeah.’ James went back to eating his cornflakes.

‘Everything good between you two?’

James began to choke, spraying milk over the counter again — this time a few stray cornflakes joining. Sirius grumbled to himself as he continued to wipe it up.

‘Why would you say that? We’re fine.’

Sirius raised an eyebrow.

‘I just got the sense things were a bit funny around here lately.’

James dropped his spoon for the second time in the span of five minutes. ‘Er, I don’t know what you mean.’

‘Mate, you can tell me the truth. It’s your place, and I love living with you but I know you didn’t really know Lily before I dragged her here with me. If you aren’t getting on — I can find us another place.’

Sirius was focused on the dish cloth in his hands, wringing out the mopped—up milk and avoiding James’s eyes. James was touched that he would even offer such a thing, what with the ordeal he’d gone through with his parents as they grew up. They were practically brothers — Sirius has his own room in his parents house for god sake — and this place was as much his as it was his own. He couldn’t kick him out of his home; not again.
‘Sirius,’ James started; but he wasn’t sure how to finish the sentence. Instead, it was his turn to wrap Sirius in a bone-crushing hug.

‘James, what—’

‘You’ll have to try a bit harder if you want to get rid of me.’

‘Honestly, you’re so dramatic.’

James could hear the eye roll in the tone of his voice. A smile played at the corner of his mouth in response. He pulled back and gave Sirius a swift kiss on the cheek before picking his phone up from the counter on his way to leave.

‘So you’re just leaving this for me to clean up?’

‘Now you know the real reason you live here,’ James called over his shoulder as he walked out the front door.

He didn’t have a plan when he walked out the door; he only knew that he needed to see Lily. He walked down the street towards the tube station by their house, hoping inspiration would strike.

The echoes of a whistle were heard at the entrance to the station causing James to run downstairs to the platform. A quick glance told him it was headed towards the city — all he needed to know to jump onboard. His was unable to sit still for the entire hour it took to arrive into the city. He was pacing the train up and down with no one in his way at such a late hour of the morning. He jumped off at Whitechapel, satisfied that he was close enough to the city and simultaneously itching to get some fresh air on his face. By the time he was back on the street it was half eleven.

The sun was peeking through the clouds as he turned onto High Street. The unfamiliar warmth on his skin made his grin wider; he felt giddy. He walked between throngs of people towards the unfamiliar building Lily worked in. He had only been here twice before, both times accompanying Sirius. A sudden pang of jealousy hit James at how familiar Sirius was with everything to do with Lily — before he remembered Sirius had no idea about James and Lily. He let himself feel a little smug at that thought.

He crossed the street, growing more familiar with his surroundings with each step. He recognised the cafe where he’d met Emmeline and Andrea. The memory felt like months instead of the week and a half it had been. He turned to his left, finally noticing Lily’s office building a few buildings further down.

He walked through the spinning door to the lobby, where he ran into his second problem: he had no idea what floor she was on, or how to find out. There were turnstiles across the floor blocking him from reaching the elevators. A reception desk stood to the right, though surely he wouldn’t just be given information on her. He stood in the middle of the room pondering his next move when the elevator sounded its arrival, several people stepping out. Among them he spotted her immediately, her cherry—red hair vibrant against the grey backdrop of the building. Her face lit up the moment she saw him, the sight spreading a warm tingle throughout his body.

‘James?’

‘Are you busy?’

‘I was just going on my lunch break.’

‘Brilliant. I know the perfect place.’ He laced his fingers through hers and lead her down the street.
She leaned her head against him as they were walking down the street. ‘Where are you taking me?’

‘Er…’

‘You didn’t have anywhere in mind, did you?’

James shook his head with a sheepish look on his face. ‘I just wanted to see you again.’

‘You saw me last night,’ Lily said, fighting a smile.

‘I can go home, if you’ve had enough of me.’ James made to pull away, but Lily was pulling him back towards her before he could even take one step.

‘I guess you can stay.’

He laughed, full bellied and warm, pulling her closer to him. He pressed a soft kiss to her temple before she was leaning on his shoulder again, and let her lead the way down the street.

The house was quiet, aside from the low murmur of the television as the credits for Bridget Jones rolled up the screen. Sirius was ‘out’ — no further details were given, except that he wouldn’t home until the next morning. James had taken the opportunity to set up a night in for himself and Lily.

There were candles set up on several surfaces, he cooked dinner and dessert, and had time to duck down to Tesco and buy a nice bottle of wine. When Lily walked through the door at quarter to six, James was just uncorking the bottle.

He’d fallen asleep somewhere between dessert and the end of the movie; happily waking up with his head in Lily’s lap and her hands running through his hair.

‘You missed the best bit; Colin Firth kicked Hugh Grant’s arse.’ She was smiling down at him.

‘I’ve seen it before.’ His voice was hoarse from sleep. He smiled back up at her.

‘I forgot to tell you — with the surprise and all.’ She untangled her legs where they were perched underneath his head, padding over to the kitchen counter where she had left her bags. She fished out a paper bag, producing from it a long thin boxed.

‘I bought a pregnancy test on the way home.’

‘You can tell already?’ James moved to stand beside her at the counter. She was studying the back of the box, reading the fine print.

‘I think so. I’ll be right back.’ She took the box with her down the hall, where James heard the downstairs toilet door click shut.

Never had a longer bathroom break been taken than the one Lily took in that moment. He cleaned up the living room while he was waiting, trying to keep his mind off what the little stick would say. There was a flush and the sound of the faucet, after which she joined him back in the kitchen.

‘What did it say?’ He couldn’t help himself; the words tumbled out before he could stop them.

‘It doesn’t say yet, it takes a couple of minutes.’

She stood beside him at the counter again, placing the test face up on the bench. He wrapped an
around her shoulders, more for himself than her benefit. She wrapped her arm around his waist and began rubbing smooth circles into his hip. He stared at the tiny oval.

‘There — there’s a line. That’s a line, right? What does one line mean?’ He was excited, he was anxious, he was scared; but Lily was frozen. ‘Lily?’

‘It’s — it’s not… James, I — fuck, I’m sorry, I’m so sorry, I didn’t—’

She was crying, fat wet tears bubbling down her cheeks. James pulled her into his chest, and even though he felt like he might throw up he ran his fingers through her hair and let her cry all over his shirt.

‘It’s not your fault, Lil. It’s okay, it’ll be okay.’

‘I just wanted to — to — oh, James.’ Each word was punctuated with a sob.

James guided her back to the lounge, where it was her turn to curl up in his lap. He couldn’t remember a time when she had ever been so upset, not in the years he had known her. He hadn’t realised how much her getting pregnant would mean to her, though he supposed he should have; she wouldn’t have offered to if it meant nothing to her.

Lily’s sobbing ceased shortly after they sat down, and they passed the time together in silence again. He wasn’t sure how long they sat there together, but he began to doze off again. His glasses sliding down his nose woke him up with a jolt, reminding him of the evening’s events. Gently, he shook Lily’s shoulder.

‘Lily. Lil,’ he said, and she stirred in his lap. He face was still blotchy from earlier, and she looked as if she might start crying again at any minute. ‘Let’s go to bed.’

He made sure she was following him as they walked upstairs. He pushed open the door to his own bedroom, but Lily kept walking past him.

‘Where are you going?’ he said, causing her to stop and face him with her brow furrowed. ‘I thought — I need you to — can you stay with me tonight?’ He was standing in the doorway to his bedroom staring at his feet, so he didn’t see the tear that slid down her cheek again; or how quickly she wiped it away before wrapping herself around him. It was his turn to let it out.

Tears were falling on his glasses so that he couldn’t see. He took them off and tried to wipe them clean on his shirt, but that only made them blurry. He gave up, discarding them on his nightstand and fell back on his mattress. Delicately — so much so that he almost didn’t notice — Lily unbuttoned and pulled off his shorts, dropping them on the floor. She dug around in his dresser, swapping her stiff business wear for a soft cotton shirt. Tears were still rolling down his cheeks as she climbed into bed beside him, where they now began to gather in the crook of her neck. She was smoothing his hair off his face, soothing him, when he finally fell asleep.

Hospital gowns had to be made of the itchiest material known to man. James promised to himself as he was getting changed into his, once he was finished his law degree he’d use it to do something useful — like campaigning for comfier hospital gowns. He kept his mind busy coming up with the early stages of his campaign. There was a knock on the door.

‘James?’

‘I’m decent.’ Sirius walked in with Lily following. The sight of them both had a soothing effect, even if it only lasted for a moment.
‘How are you feeling?’ Sirius said.

‘Starving.’ It was technically the truth, he hadn’t been able to eat in preparation for the surgery; but all three of them knew that was barely scratching the surface of his emotions.

Lily’s fingers wound their way through his own, instantly relieving him of some of his tension. It was a gesture that Sirius didn’t miss, looking at them both with bewilderment.

‘This is an interesting development.’

‘Fuck off, Sirius.’

Both James and Sirius turned to face Lily in shock at her outburst; James looking slightly smug, Sirius a touch proud. A second knock at the door.

‘Morning James. Sirius, Lily,’ Frank walked in, cheerful as ever. ‘Ready to go?’

Lily gave his fingers a squeeze and a swift kiss to his cheek, before letting Sirius crush him in a hug. He stepped towards Frank, following him from the room.

His glasses were squeezing his head so hard he thought it might explode from the pressure. He took them off and dropped them on the desk in front of him, rubbing his eyes to ease the tension. It had little effect, except that he now saw faint stars when he opened his eyes again. Seeing the textbooks piled on his desk in his peripheral brought back the popping feeling from before. His final year was proving to be the most gruelling yet.

James had been back at university for two weeks, and already overcome with case studies and chapters to read. His operation and recovery had both gone smoothly, a fact he deeply regretted now that he was buried under the textbooks on his desk. He needed a break.

He walked down the hall to the bathroom, where he began drawing a bath. He knew it was more than just the workload that was affecting him; the past couple of years had been piling up and weighing him down. He’d barely dealt with his grief for his parents passing, and lesser still about losing his chance to have children. He poured copious amounts of apple-citrus scented soap in before undressing solemnly and stepping in.

He had a moment to himself to relax before someone was knocking.

‘Occupied,’ James said.

‘It’s me,’ came Lily’s voice form the other side. She didn’t wait for a response before letting herself in and plopping down on the toilet.

‘Come in,’ said James.

Lily rolled her eyes but he could see her smile. She began to undress, starting with her shoes and continuing until she was standing in front of him in only her underwear. James was incredibly thankful he thought to fill the bath with bubbles aplenty. She removed the last of her clothing and climbed in, her chest flush to his back. He closed his eyes, savouring the way she eased the tension from his body completely just by being near.

‘Rough day, huh?’

‘You could say that.’
Her arms wrapped around his middle, her chin leaning on his shoulder. She pressed a soft kiss just below his ear.

‘I think I know something that will make it better.’

‘In here? Won’t that be kind of… slippery? I don’t want to break something, Lily.’

The shaky laugh she let out sent shivers down his spine. ‘I didn’t mean that, James. But, I suppose we could, in celebration…’

‘ Celebration?’ James paused. ‘What are we celebrating?’

He tilted his head, trying to find clues in Lily’s face. She was smiling, so wide and bright he thought her face my split in half. Her eyes were glassy, which was worrying before he remembered people cry happy tears sometimes too.

‘I’m pregnant.’

This was one of those times.

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