Uncharted Territory

by Thealmosthertoricalquestion

Summary

Teddy was made for winter. He was made for cold weather and thick, horribly-patterned sweaters with the cuffs pulled down over his fingers. He was made for ice on the pavement and snow in the sky and hot breath curling in the air. He was made for hot chocolate and crackling fires and things that made you feel warm inside when it was freezing out.

He was not made for heatwaves, but James Sirius Potter was, and that was all the more infuriating.

Notes

Thank you to the lovely L, for the beta!

“I got the most pretentious-sounding hotel I could, just for you, Alby.”

Albus grunted from the back seat. When Teddy glanced in the mirror, he could see that Albus was half-asleep, his face buried in the pillow shoved between his neck and the bite of the seatbelt. His shoes were off and his glasses were folded up in his lap, and he was very clearly not listening to a word James was saying, trying to reach a higher plane of existence where he was an only child.
Scorpius sat beside him, legs curled up underneath his parka, frowning down at a Muggle games console. Teddy could hear jaunty music whistling out of the speakers, and the little beeps that indicated text was appearing on the screen. He wasn’t sure how it was working around magic, but Scorpius was clever like that. He always had a few tricks up his sleeve, and he had a mind that rivalled Hermione’s, not to mention that the two could often be found whispering together, discussing Muggle culture and the flaws of the Wizarding World.

“It’s called Artits Harbour,” James continued, oblivious to his lack of audience. “I guess it’s not really a hotel. It’s one of those luxury cottage things, so there’s a guarantee that nobody’s pissed in the bed and we don’t have to share with anyone. I figured that would cheer you up, Albert, not having to interact with other humans.”

Teddy snorted into his coffee. It was half past six on a Friday morning, and he’d been woken up by James repeatedly blasting the horn of his brand new van, which hadn’t been outside the flat they shared when Teddy went to bed last night. Albus and Scorpius were already bundled into the back seat, one boy pissed off and the other one confused. James hadn’t stopped pressing the horn until Teddy got downstairs and chucked their pre-packed bags in James’s face, but he had stopped to get Teddy a coffee, Scorpius a gluten-free muffin, and Albus a takeaway cup of tea.

“How much did this luxury cottage cost?” Teddy asked, frowning over at James, who grinned back at him.

“I am now bankrupt,” James said with good cheer, turning right onto the motorway.

The van they were in was a clunky old monstrosity that rattled and groaned like the ghoul in the Burrow’s attic. It smelled faintly like cigarettes, and mostly like Febreeze. Teddy thought he could see a bottle tucked in the driver’s door, and he shook his head fondly, sipping his drink, which was lukewarm by now. The van felt like a death-trap on wheels, but Teddy had no doubt in mind that James had equipped it with every safety spell he knew, although he would deny such a thing if Albus asked.

Scorpius put his game down and picked at his muffin with pink-painted nails. He was the only thing in the world brighter than Teddy’s violet hair; his soft jumper was a shade of salmon that could be seen from miles away, and his shorts were bright blue. Sat next to Albus, who was still wearing his black pyjama bottoms and an old band t-shirt, he looked more than a little obnoxious.

Then again, Teddy thought, as he craned his neck to read the faded Toxic Time-Turners lyrics on Albus’s t-shirt, they were both obnoxious. Just in very different ways.

“Is all of this really just to celebrate you getting your driver’s license?” Scorpius asked. He brushed a strand of immaculate blonde hair out of his eyes and Albus grunted again. His mouth fell open and he started to snore lightly, so Scorpius reached out casually and gently pushed Albus’s mouth shut, cutting off the noise in a practiced move. It was kind of impossible to believe that the two of them weren’t together, in Teddy’s opinion, but that was the truth of it.

“Do we need another reason?” James asked, shrugging. He reached over to turn the radio up, only for the sound of the weather-man’s dulcet, cheerful tones to fill the van. Teddy flicked it off before James could attempt some sort of writhing, interpretive dance to the man’s words and crash them into the nearest Civic.

“No,” Teddy said flatly, before James could protest. “Just watch the road.”

“Grumpy,” James complained, but, miraculously, he did as he was told.
By the fifth hour, Albus looked ready to kill someone, Scorpius had fallen asleep with his Muggle console jammed between his thighs and his muffin smeared on the floor, and Teddy had read a quarter of a book and missed several crucial plot moments, due to the way James kept catapulting the van over the bumps in the road.

James was, as ever, annoyingly upbeat.

He didn’t seem to care that they had been crammed in an ugly van for the past five hours, and that the air freshener had lost its charm at hour three, or that his supply of fizzy drinks was running low. He kept singing Muggle pop songs as they drew closer to their destination, making up words when he didn't know the verses, and he joined in loudly with the strange quiz games that people played on the radio. He made Teddy feed him potato sticks from a red bag he had shoved inside the glovebox, and he didn’t notice when Teddy swapped one out for a Bertie Bott’s Every Flavour Bean until it was too late. The feel of James’s lips brushing against Teddy’s fingertips more than made up for the Bean that was spat in his lap, which only served to convince Teddy that he was a love-sick lost cause.

“Please, for the love of fuck, tell me we’re nearly there,” Albus groaned, as one song died and a new one began.

“Don't fudging swear around the baby,” James said, jerking his thumb meaningfully at Scorpius, who scowled at him sleepily. Teddy grabbed James’s hand out of mid-air and put it firmly back on the wheel. Skin was warm and soft beneath the pads of his fingers, and he loitered for a moment on the bumps of James’s knuckles. The lingering touch made them both pause, until Teddy looked away. James cleared his throat and nodded out of the window.

“And yeah, we’re nearly there,” James said. “Look.”

They looked. Their surroundings, which had gotten considerably greener the further they drove, were now a bright blue. Teddy had seen the sea before, and paddled in it when he was younger, but not on such a pretty summer day, not with kites in the sky and the sunlight bouncing off the slow waves.

“It’s a beach cottage?” Albus said, wrinkling his brow in surprise.

“Yep,” James said. “Baby’s first trip to the sea.”

Scorpius flipped him off lazily.

“I’m going to take that as excitement,” James decided.

“How was I supposed to know there were only two beds?” James demanded, trying very hard to look innocent and mostly failing.

“I mean, technically there are four,” Scorpius pointed out, peering cautiously up the small white steps that lead to the hallway, “but two are bunk beds.”

“Thank you, Captain Obvious,” James said, with a teasing wink that made Scorpius blush, just as Albus stormed back down the hallway. He was barefoot and angry, which was par for course, and the sight of Scorpius blushing because of his brother only made him angrier. Teddy propped an elbow up on the kitchen table, which was prettily decorated to look like a proper English breakfast
set-up, complete with miniature fresh jam jars and dainty spoons. He swung the keys to the van around his index finger and found his eyes, as always, drawn to James.

“I despise you,” Albus said glumly, staring at James. “You woke me up at arse o’clock for a surprise holiday, and now I have to either share a bed or sleep in a bunk. I haven’t slept in a bunk since we went on that family camping trip and Hugo wet the bed in the bunk above me.”

James snickered into his palm. Albus shot him a glare so full of loathing that Teddy was surprised James didn’t just keel over.

“Next you’re going to tell me that this isn’t a relaxing, do-as-you-like holiday, and that you’ve planned group activities, or something,” Albus said.

A remarkably guilty silence wasn’t what Teddy wanted to hear in response to that, but it was what he got.

“For fuck’s sake, James,” Albus groaned, and then he scooped up his bag, grabbed Scorpius’s sleeve, and started yanking him towards one of the bedrooms. Scorpius gave an apologetic little wave as they disappeared, and Teddy listened to Albus curse and complain all the way along the hall, before the door to the bedroom snapped shut.

James shot him a winning smile in the resounding silence, but Teddy wasn’t fooled.

“You want to tell me what’s going on?” Teddy asked. He got up and strolled towards James, eyebrows raised as James leaned back against the breakfast bar and shrugged.

“I have no idea what you mean,” he said. “I’m just celebrating, that’s all.”

Teddy knew James well enough by now to know when he was lying. He did this thing where he scuffed the toe of his shoes along the ground, and Teddy could feel it happening, pressed right up against his own boot. He raised an eyebrow at James, who raised one back.

“Fine,” Teddy said eventually, mostly amused. “You keep your secrets. At least tell me that you really didn’t know about the beds.”

He wasn’t angry, and James could tell, could always tell.

“I had no idea,” James said, snickering. “Hilarious, though, right?”

“I’m not sure Albus agrees,” Teddy said, but he found himself grinning down at James fondly anyway. He could never get enough of the way James laughed, the way it brightened his whole face, made him look young and vibrant, like he could light up the night. Teddy was pretty sure his affection showed in his eyes, but luckily James never seemed to notice. If he did, he kept quiet about it, which meant that he really hadn’t noticed, because there were few things that James could keep quiet about. Teddy having feelings for him probably wouldn’t make the list.

James rolled his eyes. “Him and Scorpius share a bed all the time, I’ve seen them snuggled up together when Mum’s made me go and get them for breakfast. He’s probably just mad because now he can’t wank off to the image of Scorpius in tiny blue shorts without him knowing about it.”

Teddy made a shushing sound, glancing at the hallway, but Albus didn’t make a righteous, explosive appearance, and there was no mortified puddle on the floor to indicate that Scorpius had heard. He sighed as James started laughing again, but he couldn’t hide his fondness.

Teddy had been hiding his deeper feelings for James for a while now. It had been four years since
James left Hogwarts, and one year since he’d moved in with Teddy and turned his whole life upside down. Teddy wasn’t one to faff about when it came to feelings of the heart, but he was a private person. James very much wasn’t.

Truthfully, although he knew he liked James, probably even loved him, he was still working through some things, and it all came down to the fact that he desperately didn’t want to mess this up. He thought, sometimes, that James might like him back, but there was always a chance that he wouldn’t, and Teddy refused to lose him, not because of something like this.

“You realise this means we’ll have to share a bed, don't you?” Teddy asked.

Sometimes James fell into his bed and refused to budge, snoring away into Teddy’s pillows and then vehemently denying said snoring the next morning, when he woke up all sleepy-eyed and rumpled. Sometimes he passed out on the floor of Teddy’s room, devising Quidditch Plays or reading Muggle fiction that he liked to pretend he didn’t own, or drinking, sometimes, when the mood took him, and Teddy would lay awake, trying not to stare at the way James sprawled so languidly on the carpet. And sometimes they both fell asleep on the sofa, inches from each other, in each other’s space because they didn’t know how else to exist, but this was different. This was purposeful, determined, a choice.

James opened his mouth, shut it again with a small click, and then shrugged. The tops of his cheeks were a little pink. Probably from the slow-growing warmth bleeding in through the glass windows, Teddy thought firmly, refusing to let his mind get carried away. He could never quite settle on his favourite things about James, because they were numerous and dizzying, but the way he blushed for Teddy was high up on the list.

“There are worse things in the world,” James said breezily.

Teddy wasn’t so sure about that.

“You’re both disgusting,” Albus said, stomping down the stairs. Teddy wasn’t sure why he was being targeted, but he figured he’d let it slide because Albus was a cranky child at heart. It had been a long day, after all, and it was only lunchtime.

Albus had the same shirt on, but his pyjama bottoms had been swapped out for skinny jeans. It was too warm for anything longer than shorts, and getting gradually warmer, but Albus was stubborn to a fault.

Scorpius trailed behind him, rummaging through a wallet full of Muggle money excitedly. He was always charmed by anything Muggle, and despite having lived in Muggle London for at least a year, he still got overly pleased when he got to use pounds and notes rather than galleons and sickles.

“Love you too, little brother,” James said. Albus swore at him viciously. Teddy winced, although he had to give Albus credit for the creativity.

“Mum would threaten to wash your mouth out,” James told him. He pretended to wipe a tear from his eye. “I’m so proud. I’ve raised you well.”

“We’re going to find food for lunch,” Scorpius announced, snagging Albus’s sleeve before a proper argument could break out, and then there was a clatter as they both disappeared down the stairs. Teddy watched them go before joining James in a perusal of their new, shared bedroom, since he wasn’t going to be cramming himself into a bunk bed for however many nights. He could probably shrink down to fit inside, but Teddy’s mind seemed to remember how tall he naturally was, even if his body wasn’t technically tall at the time.
He had no idea what James was really planning beneath all of this, but he didn’t mind waiting to find out. Teddy was good at waiting.

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Teddy was made for winter. He was made for cold weather and thick, horribly-patterned sweaters with the cuffs pulled down over his fingers. He was made for ice on the pavement and snow in the sky and hot breath curling in the air. He was made for hot chocolate and crackling fires and things that made you feel warm inside when it was freezing out.

He was not made for fucking heatwaves, but James Sirius Potter was, and that was all the more infuriating.

“How are you not boiling?” Teddy asked, poking Albus in the shoulder. Albus was lying stiffly on a towel on the baking hot beach, in a large, baggy hoodie and black skinny jeans. Further down the beach, James was trying to dunk Scorpius under the waves, to no avail. “You’re wearing all black.”

The heatwave had hit about an hour ago, submerging all of England in a sticky, sweaty haze of heat and ushering them to the beach only a little while after lunch, which consisted of beans on toast and a box of sweets each - little colourful, sour lumps called Nerds that made them all wince. James had been appropriately delighted by the turn of events and promptly started pulling off his clothes, leaving him shirtless and revealing a lot of tanned skin, dotted with hundreds of brown freckles that drew Teddy’s eye like a moth to a flame. Teddy had averted his gaze, wheezing silently, in time to catch Albus smirking at him.

“The breeze gets in through the rips,” Albus muttered, tucking a hand pointedly in the hole at his knee.

“There is no breeze,” Teddy said, throwing an exasperated look around the crowded, sweltering beach.

Albus opened one eye and glared at him. “Also, I’m fucking exhausted and I could barely sleep in the car. Van. Whatever the hell that thing is pretending to be.”

“Scorpius keep you up with that game?” Teddy asked, grinning as he reached for the suncream. He was neatly sequestered under a large umbrella, on top of a beach towel, sweating his arse off, but somehow the sun was still insistently staining his bare arms. James was one of those people who just had to look at the sun to get gloriously tanned and freckled, but Teddy burned if he wasn’t too careful. Grandma said his mum was the same, that her skin was always sensitive, and that it probably had something to do with their abilities.

“He’s obsessed with it,” Albus groaned, throwing his head back dramatically. “It’s Lily’s fault for showing it to him. You barely even do anything, you just walk around and catch fish and bugs, and then you sell them for bells so you can buy things for your house and make your town all pretty. That’s literally it. That’s all you do, so why the fuck does he spend nineteen hours a day playing it?”

There was a familiar yelp from down by the sea, and Teddy looked up in time to see James pop back up out of the water, spluttering and soaked, hair plastered to his forehead. Scorpius was laughing so hard that he could barely breathe, so he didn’t see the moment when James launched himself at him with a battle-cry. They went down in a fit of laughter and sea-spray, and Teddy shook his head, grinning.

When he glanced over, he found Albus propped up on his elbows, a small smile on his face as he watched Scorpius fling water in James’s face.
“Looks good on you,” Teddy teased.

“What?” Al asked absently.

“Happiness. Cheer, joy, glee, whatever you want to call it. Smiling.”

Albus spared him a glance. “I smile. Just not when I’m on a beach.”

Albus was spared more teasing by the arrival of Scorpius, who vaulted over their cooler box full of butterbeer and landed on Albus. Teddy leaned out of the way of their flailing limbs, wincing at Albus’s shrill shout and Scorpius’s squeal, and turned to find James running up the beach towards him. He was wet from the sea, tanned skin glistening in the sunlight, and his hair stuck up messily from the play-fighting. Teddy wanted to mess it up even more.

James gave him a grin as he grew near. His swimming trunks lay low on his hips, and he kicked up sand as he ran, scattering it in the air and making families glare at him. He also didn’t appear to be slowing down.

Teddy threw the suncream bottle aside and braced himself for impact.

James collided with him, just as Scorpius had collided with Albus, and Teddy reared back as they hit the towel. His head clonked against the stem of the umbrella, which wobbled precariously despite the charm keeping it aloft.

“Merlin, you’re bony,” Teddy groaned, rearranging them so he didn’t have an elbow in his gut.

“I reckon there’s an ancient erotic text with that line in it,” Albus said, from somewhere under Scorpius. “Oh Merlin, you’re bony. Come hither and lay thou’s sultry beard upon my ample - ow, fuck.”

Scorpius rolled off a mercifully-silent Albus and splayed on the sand, tucking his feet under Albus’s legs. James was still completely collapsed on top of Teddy, who couldn’t say he minded having James in his arms, although his shirt was soaked now and James was pressing against his bladder.

“I don’t want to know what you spend your time reading at night, Albatross,” James said, voice muffled by Teddy’s shirt. He popped his head up and squinted at Teddy, who was pretty sure he must have an attractive triple-chin from James’s point of view.

“Come with me to get an ice cream,” James demanded, levering himself up and shaking his hair like a dog. “They have ice cream vans up by the car park.”

Teddy didn’t think he would survive if he had to come out from under his umbrella. There was at least a portion of shade here, but out there, there was nothing but stinging sand and laughing people and bright, hot sunlight. And James. James was out there now, swanning along and expecting Teddy to follow, and the kicker was that Teddy was already getting to his feet, suncream half-smeared on his arms as he stuffed his feet into his shoes.

“Whipped,” Albus mouthed, lying back down with a smirk.

“Albus, will you put suncream on my back please?” Scorpius asked, reaching for the bottle.

Albus sat up so quickly he was almost a blur. Teddy smirked at him, ignoring his glower as he trotted off after James, who was halfway up the beach by now.

“Nice of you to join me,” James said, with a cheeky grin as Teddy drew near. “Was worried you
were getting sucked up into that umbrella. It’s supposed to be a beach holiday, Teds, which kind of implies that there’s sun and sea involved.”

“Yeah, well, not all of us can be so...” he trailed off, waving a hand vaguely at James’s body. James’s expression turned blank with shock for a moment, before it flickered and he grinned wickedly.

“Be so what, Teddy?”

Teddy elbowed him, and James ducked away, still grinning, and raced up the steps towards the car park. Teddy shook his head and followed, running after him with his own grin in place, a grin that only grew wider when he heard James whoop from the top of the steps at the sight of the ice cream van.

The world shimmered at the edges. Parked cars gleamed and heat came off the scorching metal in waves. Pavements melted beneath flip-flops and ugly sandals. Teddy would have gone barefoot, except he wanted to be able to walk, and third degree burns on his heels weren’t conducive to that.

“I want a proper ice cream, the kind you see in Muggle pictures,” James said, bouncing on his heels as they joined the queue. “You know the ones with the curly ice cream and the chocolate thing?”

“The flake? You know you could have just gone to Fortescue’s, if you wanted an ice cream that much,” Teddy teased. “You didn’t have to come all the way down to the countryside.”

Fortescue’s was an ice cream parlour in the middle of Diagon Alley. It had been boarded up for as long as Teddy could remember, but it had been re-opened a few months ago by the old owner’s second-cousin, something that had delighted Harry to no end. They sold the strangest, weirdest, most wonderful ice creams, but there was something idyllically charming about the sight of a vanilla cone with a flake poking out of the top of it.

“Aw, look, they even have ones for kids,” James said, pointing at the glossy sign pinned to the outside of the van. He aimed a brilliant smile at Teddy. “Let’s get one for Scorpius.”

Teddy sighed, but couldn’t disguise his grin. He pushed a handful of Muggle coins onto the tray and smiled at the server, who looked hot and grumpy. “Two ninety-nine cones, a calippo, and one mini-milk, please.”

James elbowed him sharply.

“With flakes, please,” Teddy added, grunting as he shifted away.

They gathered up their treasures eagerly and began the walk back along the beach. Teddy cast a subtle cooling charm on the ice creams to keep them from melting too fast, but that didn’t matter with James. He ate it messily, with no grace, following sticky trails of cream down his fingers and wrists with his tongue and lapping at the cone. Teddy was half-horrified and half-aroused just watching him, which sort of summed up how most people felt when they looked at James.

“We got you something,” James shouted, as they neared their spot on the sand. Albus didn’t look up, face-down on the towel, but Scorpius perked up as they grew closer. Teddy felt mildly guilty for the mini-milk now, but he handed it over anyway, still working on his own cone.

Scorpius scowled at the little cartoon cow on the cover, but he unwrapped it all the same.

“Don’t forget Al’s,” Teddy said, as he dropped down under the umbrella again.
James grinned slowly. “As if I would ever forget my darling baby brother.”

Teddy watched, faintly aware that some sort of war was about to break out, as James tiptoed over to Albus, lifted the back of his shirt, and dropped the ice-cold calippo on his bare back.

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Sharing a bed with James might have been fine if it weren’t nine hundred degrees outside. Teddy stripped off his shirt and flung it away from him, before collapsing back against the bed. The sheets were sticky with sweat again, so Teddy cast another Scourgify, and then a Cooling charm, but it didn’t seem to do much.

“This is unbelievable,” he said, flopping back against the pillows. James grunted sleepily beside Teddy, facing the other way. He was shirtless too, something Teddy was doing his hardest to ignore, but he always slept facing the same way that James was facing, so eventually he was going to end up looking. Probably staring.

“Stop squirming,” James murmured, pressing his face into the pillow, his voice muffled. It was a bit rich, coming from someone who spent his entire life moving and felt no shame about it, even in situations where you were supposed to be still and quiet. Like funerals, Teddy remembered, with a wince.

“I’m hot,” Teddy complained.

“Yeah, you are,” James said, with a little dreamy giggle, and then he promptly started snoring. Teddy rolled to the side and stared at the back of James’s neck, brow furrowed. He had no idea what that meant. He knew what he wanted it to mean, but he was at a loss for words, and James was asleep anyway. Teddy had no doubt that he’d get a knee to the groin if he tried to wake James up now, just to ask him if he really thought Teddy was hot.

The thing was, James was pretty vocal about his attraction to people. He didn’t sleep around, but he’d wax poetic about almost any celebrity, so long as someone was there to roll their eyes at him. And he was always winking at Teddy and talking about his arms, but Teddy had no idea if that was real, or just James being James.

Kicking the covers off his feet, Teddy decided to forget about it. He studied James’s back instead, feeling a little guilty for the heat that pooled inside him as his eyes flicked from freckle to freckle. They were dotted everywhere, huddled around his shoulder-blades and dipping down to the base of his spine in little bunches, where his back dimpled. Teddy wanted to press his tongue to each one, map the spaces in between with his mouth.

The thought made him a little wild, and he turned over again, facing the other way. It took him a while to drop off to sleep, and it had nothing to do with the heat.

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“I’m not getting in that,” Albus said, staring at the kayak in horror. “I want my death to be something dignified, thanks, something that’ll impress people at my funeral. I don’t want someone to say, ‘He died doing what he absolutely fucking hated, drowning under a gigantic plastic pea-pod, and it was all his brother’s fault.’ I want it to be more heroic than that.”

Teddy privately agreed, but James looked so excited, standing next to his own kayak and holding out an oar, that he begrudgingly slipped on a life jacket with minimal complaint. They could technically just cast Buoyancy charms, or swim, since Teddy doubted they’d be going too far, but James was going all out, and anything that gave him a little extra edge in the safety department was fine with
Teddy.

Scorpius was already in his kayak, fastening his life jacket and looking unhealthily happy about the whole thing. He was nowhere near the water, so Teddy had no idea where exactly he planned on rowing to, but he seemed to be having fun.

“That’s a spoilsport,” James said, reaching over and poking Albus in the stomach with the oar. “All you’ve done so far on this trip is moan.”

“I’m waiting by the towels,” Albus said, grunting as he dodged another poke. He strode off, arms crossed over his chest.

Scorpius watched him go before clambering out of the kayak. Teddy stifled a laugh at Scorpius’s beige Chino shorts, but James had no such compunctions, cracking up as he had been intermittently since they left the cottage.

Scorpius, in a rare show of rebellion, flipped them both off. And then shot a furtive, guilty look at Teddy.

“Sorry, mate, but you look like a right twat,” James said. Scorpius pulled off the life jacket and flung it at James, blushing, and Teddy sighed at them both.

“Scorpius, are you sure you don’t want to go kayaking now?” Teddy asked.

“I’ll make Al go in the two-person one when you two come back,” Scorpius explained, with a slightly mischievous grin that reminded Teddy not to underestimate him. He jogged off to sit with Albus. Teddy watched him go with envy, until he received his own jab in the stomach with an oar. He batted James away and pointed a finger in his face, which James pretended to bite.

“If I drown, I’m blaming you,” Teddy said. He headed for the Kayak that Scorpius had abandoned, but James stopped him.

“We’re going in the two-person one,” James decided. “Grab the drinks.”

“I’m not letting you be responsible for my safety.”

James gave a loud, theatrical sigh, flailing the oar about. “C’mon, Teddy. You trust me, don’t you?”

Teddy narrowed his eyes. He did trust James, of course he did, but that was a dirty, cheap trick, and James knew it.

“Fine,” Teddy said, leaning down to grab two bottles of butterbeer out of the cooler. “But we’re not going out in the deep water.”

James grinned. “Just get in the kayak, Teddy.”

He got in the kayak.

They weren’t quite coves, but the rocks that poked up out of the shallow water created little pathways for them to bump their way through. The water was more green than blue here, and cold enough that Teddy stuck his hands in every time he got too hot, the water cooling his wrists. A few people wandered around on the rocks, laughing every time they slipped. It was easy to tell who was local from the way they bounced and slithered easily over rock-pools, bare-foot.

James was in his element. He kept pointing out different types of coral and shellfish that Teddy
didn’t recognise, words tripping off his tongue that Teddy didn’t know. Teddy took the oar for a bit and pushed them through the little pathways, letting James lean over in excitement to try and spot fish below.

“It’s pretty awesome down here for magical wild-life too,” James said. He looked lazy and carefree, trailing his fingers through the glittering water as he leaned back, but Teddy could see the excitement in his face, the passion in his eyes. He was confident in what he knew.

“I always forget you like this kind of thing,” Teddy said, as they bumped gently off a rock. A cave loomed above them, dark and shining with water, an enormous hollow of rock that they floated through aimlessly. It was darker in here, and a little cooler too, although the rock, when Teddy brushed his fingers over the surface, was warm and wet.

“Most people forget,” James said lightly. “I don’t exactly shout about it, and I’ve got the Quidditch thing going, haven’t I?”

Teddy frowned at him. James shone in the broken light that bounced all around them, his hair pleasantly mussed, his mouth turned down a little. Teddy didn’t like that; James had a mouth made for smiling.

“Hey,” he said, letting the oar dip up so that they drifted. “What’s wrong?”

James bit his lip, an action that usually stirred something inside Teddy, made him want to lean in and bite and take. Coupled with James’s unusual expression, though, it made his heart sink instead.

“You know there’s a couple of Quidditch Teams down here that I was looking at? Well I found out that they have wizarding marine schools down here too,” James said, almost like it was nothing. Teddy knew it wasn’t nothing. “They’re working on conservation for magical beasts below the water. They schools are pretty new, still in their first few months, really, but it’s still cool.”

“Cool,” repeated Teddy flatly. He was a little concerned by James’s uncharacteristic hesitance. Usually he got straight to the point, blunt as anything, and charmed everyone into seeing why his point actually made the most sense, and why they should agree, why they should follow him to the ends of the world. He wasn’t manipulative, just charismatic, bright. All it took for most people was a spark of a smile, and Teddy was no different.

James winced imperceptibly. He never winced, not really, just took everything in his stride and strolled along, arm-in-arm with whatever was supposed to have taken him by surprise.

“I was thinking—”

A great shout interrupted them, and they both whipped round to see Scorpius and Albus teetering on a Transfigured two-person kayak, coming down one of the narrow paths towards them. Albus had jammed his oar into a bit of rock to keep them from going over, and Scorpius was clinging wildly to the side, giggling nervously.

“Fucking hell, Scorpius!” Albus shouted, an edge of something hysterical in his voice. “This isn’t the time to sing rock your damn boat. You did that on purpose, you prick!”

Scorpius giggled again, and then he snorted, and then he started laughing properly, bent double as his cackles echoed around the cave. Teddy felt the weight in his stomach dissolve as James laughed too, a sound that was almost relieved, and that didn't make sense either.

Teddy started steering them forward again, out of the cave and down the next sun-lit path. Fish flitted about beneath them, narrow, darting here and there among the disorderly currents. Albus shot them a
murderous look as they went past on the other side of the rocks, but his mouth was twitching as he watched Scorpius laugh and wobble. A cheerful wave was James’s only response as he lounged back like some sort of leisurely King, not a care in the world.

“Are you going to let me do all of the work or are you going to give me a hand?” Teddy asked, quirking one blue eyebrow.

James leered at him, gaze flicking all the way down Teddy’s chest, which was mostly obscured by the fluorescent life-jacket, so it had to be for show.

“But you look so good like that,” James said. The earlier tension had passed, and Teddy pushed back any lingering curiosity over the lost moment, refusing to think about it in case the answer was something he didn’t want to hear. Not the best strategy, he admitted, but his only one so far when it came to James. Thinking about James lead to wanting to do something about James, which was dangerous, uncharted territory.

They could hear more shouting behind them, and Scorpius’s laughter, amplified by the cave, but for the most part it was quiet as they wound through the rocks.

“Alright, Princess, time for you to put those muscles of yours to use,” Teddy said, lobbing the oar at James. James caught it with both hands above his head, and lowered it into the water with a long-suffering sigh.

“I resent the fact that you seem to think Princesses are lazy, by the way. You’ve seen all the Barbie films. Those Princesses are wicked.”

Teddy snorted, reaching for the bottle of butterbeer by his feet. “I’ve only seen all the Barbie films because you made me, and I might have a healthy respect for her, but I don’t have any for you.”

James made an indignant, wounded noise, and he splashed Teddy with the oar. “I’ve never been so insulted. You wound me, Teddy.”

“You’ll live, sweetheart. While you’re in a helping mood, fancy cooling this for me?” Teddy asked, wiggling the butterbeer under James’s pink nose. He wasn’t sunburned, just blushing, which was odd. Teddy reached for his own wand anyway, knowing James would refuse, but James stopped rowing and snatched the bottle from him.

“We’re doing this the proper way,” James said, grinning as he fumbled about at the bottom of the kayak for the other bottle. When he had both, he conjured a long green net, and then he put both bottles inside the net and let it sink in the water. Seaweed drifted past them, undulating lazily in the cavernous blue-green. The bottles looked out of place, alien.

“I’m sorry I asked,” Teddy said, amused, as the bottles bobbed along beside them, clinking together gently. “You didn’t have to drown them. I’m sure their crimes were only minor.”

“You’re such a dork, I always forget,” James said, delighted and fond. He leaned back, one hand wrapped around the net. “This’ll make them colder.”

“So would a cooling charm,” Teddy pointed out, but he wasn’t complaining. James looked happy again, and when he got the bottle back a few minutes later and put it to his mouth, James’s eyes tracking his every movement, it was cool to the touch.

*

The beach wasn’t James’s only plan. It was too hot to do anything too adventurous, but after they
dried off and returned the kayaks, James jammed them all into his awful van and drove them miles, blasting music, until they reached a building at the end of a dirt road. Teddy had given in and bought a pair of sunglasses and a shorter pair of shorts, and he caught James staring at his legs more than once as they strolled through the car park, gravel crunching beneath their sandals. He stared at Teddy’s arms, too, when Teddy pulled off his over-shirt, leaving him in just a tank top.

“Enjoying the view?” Teddy asked, smirking.

James purposely surveyed the farm with a big sweeping motion of his arms. “It’s stunning. Lovely and green. One might even say verdant.”

Teddy snorted and shook his head fondly, bumping their hips together as they walked. He didn’t know how James couldn’t see that Teddy stared at him just as often.

“What is this place?” Albus said, yawning as he tripped past Scorpius, who was fiddling with his game again. His chino shorts had been exchanged for even tinier shorts, and Albus seemed to be having trouble keeping his gaze up.

“Something Farm,” James said, digging a pamphlet out of his jeans pocket. “Trevaskis. We’re doing the Pick Your Own thing.”

“Pick Your Own thing,” Albus repeated warily, redirecting Scorpius as he started to drift sideways, eyes glued to his screen.

“It’s strawberries, Albany, not homicide,” James said. He slung an arm over Albus’s shoulder and tugged him across the car park. Albus grumbled, but leaned into him, the way he always did when he was tired. “No need to sound so dire.”

Teddy reached over and plucked the game from Scorpius’s hands. Teddy didn’t know how he could play and walk at the same time. He expected a protest, maybe a squabble, but he forgot that Scorpius wasn’t James or Al, and instead he got a sheepish look.

“Sorry,” Scorpius offered quietly, shifting on his feet. “It’s just fascinating.”

Teddy grinned at him fondly, and waited for Scorpius to put the game in his bag before he dragged him close and ruffled his hair.

“What is this Pick Your Own thing?” Scorpius asked, from underneath Teddy’s arm.

“Jamie said something about strawberries, lunch, and pigs.” Teddy shrugged. “So, basically, I have no idea, but at least we’ll be full.”

Scorpius wrinkled his nose, and Teddy chuckled when he said, “I hope he doesn’t mean pigs for lunch.”

Trevaskis was a working farm, with a little restaurant at the front and fields and fields full of trees and berry bushes. Paddocks lined one side of the farm, full of different animals, and the air smelled of summer, earthy and rich.

Teddy leaned against the railing and watched several pigs roll around in the mud. A piglet had climbed on top of it’s snoozing mum and was proudly surveying it’s conquered kingdom. Scorpius and Albus were further down the path, comparing several of their friends to the donkeys and cows, and James was flitting between everything with a wide grin on his face, zooming around like a hyperactive child until Teddy grabbed him and pulled him to his side.
“I know you’re not actually a three-year-old,” Teddy said, rolling his eyes. “So maybe stop sprinting around like one. You’re not gonna be able to enjoy anything if it’s all just a blur to you.”

His hand was resting on the small of James’s back, warm and steady, but he felt anything but balanced. James had a way of sweeping his feet out from underneath him just by being near.

“It’s called being excited, Teddy, you may want to try it sometime,” James teased, nudging him, but not pushing him away. If anything, he shifted closer, and Teddy wrapped his arm more firmly around James’s waist, unable to resist.

The sharp intake of breath made his heart shake, but James cleared his throat and leaned against the railing with him, watching the pigs. One of them was eyeing him curiously, and the rest were running around, oblivious to the heat, their curled tails and floppy ears bouncing as they moved.

“Trust me,” Teddy said, keeping his voice purposefully light as he leaned closer to breathe the words near James’s ear, “I can get pretty excited. Just takes the right kind of persuasion.”

James did a strange sort of double-take, glancing up at Teddy with wide eyes. He seemed torn between laughing and blushing.

James was always flirting. As far as Teddy knew, he didn't sleep around, but he liked to flirt. The back and forth was fun for him, Teddy could tell, and James was just an appreciative person. He liked people, the way they looked, the way everyone was different, the way they all had something charming about them, he had told Teddy once.

He flirted with Teddy often, and Teddy had tried time and time again to convince himself that it was because he was there, because he was convenient, because James simply liked to flirt. It meant nothing, he told himself firmly, and so Teddy rarely returned the favour, his feelings too far on lockdown to even consider it.

He couldn’t deny that it was gratifying, though, to see how flustered James got just because of a few suggestive comments.

He’d have to keep that in mind.

“How dare you to steal a feather from the floor in front of that goose,” Albus said, as he strolled past. James straightened up immediately, eyes zeroing in on the goose in a paddock in the distance, pecking at the ground. White feathers littered the ground, but only right by his feet.

“You’re on,” James said. “If I do it, you have to pick up a spider in the polytunnels.”

Albus grimaced. “There’s spiders in the polytunnels?”

One look at James’s smug grin had Albus steeling his spine. “Deal. Go on, then. No magic.”

James did not back down. Teddy watched with a resigned air as both boys started marching towards the paddock, occasionally shoving each other. Scorpius joined him after a moment, and then sighed.

“I’m going to go and pick some strawberries. I’ll meet you at the car once they’ve been kicked out.”

James was nearing his mark, and Albus was beginning to falter now. Teddy had a feeling that nothing was going to stop this train-wreck, so he nodded to Scorpius.

“Get me an extra punnet, and I’ll give you the money when we get back. If we all get back.”
Scorpius saluted him, and then glanced around before disappearing with a crack. Teddy looked up in
time to see James hop over the fence, and Albus leg it in the opposite direction.

“Bloody hell,” Teddy said, and summoned the first aid kit from the car. Just in case.

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“Today is a day that will be remembered throughout all of history,” James began, arms spread wide
as he perched on a rock, head tipped up towards the sun, his adoring audience gathered below him.
“Today is a day that will be burned into the minds of those who doubted us. This battle will rage
across the beaches of this earth. Children will sing songs about this day. Our names will be written in
the stars for all to see. My adoring audience, our time is now.”

“James,” Teddy said, with infinite patience. “Your adoring audience is getting antsy.”

James shot him a wink, and then put on a grave expression, continuing. “Gentlemen, please, select
your weapons.”

Teddy sighed, staring down at the bundle of spades and buckets on the floor. James watched them
from on high as they skirted around the pile, and crowed loudly and triumphantly when Albus was
the first to pick something up.

“I will put this through your eye if you don’t get down from there and stop being a twat,” Albus said,
voice flat as he brandished a green plastic spade. Scorpius hooked a bucket over his arm and
elbowed Albus, presumably trying to keep the violence to a minimum. They had already almost been
mauled by an enraged goose and a farmer today, and only a handful of spells and Teddy’s best
Auror voice had gotten them out of there.

There had been no feather to show for it, but there had also been no picking up spiders, so both
James and Albus had considered it a rousing success, and Scorpius had eaten half a punnet of
strawberries by the time they returned, so he seemed pretty pleased too.

“You can only do that if Teddy agrees to nurse me back to health,” James said, hopping down from
the rock and shoving his hands in the pockets of his shorts. He was shirtless again, miles of tanned,
freckled skin on show. Teddy was glad they’d placed a Notice-Me-Not on this portion of the beach:
he didn’t want to have to see the way other people would undoubtedly stare at James.

“Since St Mungo’s wouldn’t take you unless we blackmailed them, I guess he’s your only option,”
Albus said, although he begrudgingly lowered his weapon at Scorpius’s insistence. He cast a sly
look in Teddy’s direction and said, “Not that he’d mind. Pretty sure that you’d be getting more
sponge-baths than you actually needed.”

James glanced at Teddy to gage his reaction, sunny smile still in place and a slight strain around his
eyes. Teddy hummed as he picked his own spade up off the sand and tapped it against his thigh.

“If you’re lucky, I might even wear the uniform,” Teddy said. “Just for you.”

James cleared his throat, but his voice still cracked a little, and Teddy counted it as a victory. “This
has gone wildly off course. C’mon, we’re supposed to be building sandcastles, not torturing me with
images I will sadly never see.”

Teddy’s mouth twitched. James sounded genuinely distraught.

“Oh, is that what we’re doing?” Scorpius asked mildly, examining his bucket studiously. “Your
speech made it sound like we were taking on the forces of evil with just a handful of plastic.”
“Don’t forget my daring nerve and chivalry,” James added.

Scorpius smiled sweetly. “As if anyone could ever forget that.”

Albus coughed a laugh into his hand and proceeded to tug Scorpius away, presumably to start building their sandcastle while James affected a look of outrage.

“Oh, I don’t think so,” James said, pointing a finger at them. “Albus, you’re with me. I think Mini-Malfoy needs to be taught a lesson about who to sass.”

“I sass you all the time,” Albus said, scowling as Scorpius willingly changed course and headed for Teddy. Teddy offered him a subtle high-five and bumped their hips together. “Why aren’t you sending me off?”

“Your sass is like being put down by a toddler.”

“Toddlers are ruthless, and you’re a dick,” Albus grumbled, proving James somewhat right, but he nevertheless moved to stand beside his smug brother.

“Guess we’re on opposite teams, then?” Teddy said, raising an eyebrow at James. Scorpius was already digging in the sand, furtively twitching his wand at Albus’s spade. Albus frowned down at it as it shrunk a little in his hand.

“Guess we are.” James smirked. “Sure you can handle being away from me for that long?”

“Reckon I’ll manage,” Teddy said. “I’ve got a pretty good view from over here anyway.”

He gave James a blatant once-over, ignoring the overly dramatic sound of disgust from Albus in favour of watching James’s back straighten and his eyes darken. He seemed restless, all of a sudden.

“Besides, this’ll be over quickly,” Teddy said, as a tower of sand began to rise and form the foundations of a castle behind him, courtesy of his teammate. “There’s absolutely no way you’re going to beat us.”

“You’re going down, Lupin,” James promised him, narrowing his eyes.

“Oh, Jamie,” Teddy said, leaning closer and lowering his voice, a smirk on his lips that made James falter. “That’s one of my favourite things to do.”

In retrospect, it probably wasn’t the smartest choice of words. Not only did it cause Albus permanent, everlasting pain and anguish, but it also surprised James into stepping backward. And backward happened to be in the path of a bucket, which promptly rolled under James’s foot and deposited him with a crash in a lump on the ground. Silence fell across their secluded bit of beach, and then Albus cracked up.

“Ow,” James said faintly, blinking up at the sky.

“You alright there, Jamie? Comfortable?” Teddy grinned down at him.

“Oh, it’s a grand old time down here. Haven’t been penetrated this deeply since the winter of ‘21,” James said, dislodging a spade from under his arse. He sighed wistfully, like he was remembering something sweet. “Now that was a good year.”

“Not a good enough reason to use the word penetrated,” Albus complained, through snorts of laughter.
“Did this competition have a time-limit by the way?” Scorpius asked, sounding pleased, from somewhere behind Teddy. “Because regardless of the answer, I think I’ve won.”

Teddy turned, and his mouth dropped open. He’d seen pretty much every form of magic before, both in school and in Auror Training, but there was no denying that this was something spectacular. A small Hogwarts towered over Scorpius, who was eyeing the swooping sand-owls warily.

“Malfoy’s really don’t know how to not be dramatic bastards, do they?” James asked, after a moment of awed silence. Albus abandoned his half-full bucket and rapidly-disappearing spade to stand beside a blushing Scorpius, who began to point out the greenhouses and the intricate little details visible through the sea-glass windows. A flying lesson was taking place in the grounds, sand figures struggling to mount their spindly, shifting brooms.

“You’re one to talk,” Teddy said. Instead of helping James up, he dropped down beside him instead, and leaned back on his elbows. Soft, hot sand felt as smooth as silk against his bare legs, and his cooling charms were finally working, keeping the sweat away from his shirt. The heat rolled over him, and he let it, tipping his head back as the sun beat down on him. He heard an appreciative, throaty sound from James, and resisted the urge to look over.

Albus was peering in the library window now, quiet compliments falling from his lips, while Scorpius gently directed the owls away from their heads, blushing. James rolled twice across the sand so he was lying pressed up against Teddy, beaming up at him.

“Look at the young ones, falling even more in love,” James said, cooing. “It’s almost worth losing the competition.”

Teddy could feel the warmth of James so close to him, where his bare skin had caught and held the sunlight. Sand stuck to James’s stomach, firm and lightly dusted with hair, and no doubt his back was coated in sand. Teddy could almost taste the shape of James under his hands, he was so close. Then his words cut through the hazy fog of desire. “Almost?”

James’s teeth shone, cat-like. “Oh, we’re having a rematch in a minute. No doubt about it. I don’t lose to anyone, Teddy. You should know that by now.”

“You tried to fight a goose,” Teddy said drily, his heart racing at the look on James’s face. “I think the whole world knows that by now.”

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Teddy heard a noise from the adjoining bathroom and glanced up, concerned. He was already in bed, half-tucked under the covers, a book propped up on his lap. He had discarded his jeans and thrown on a loose cotton t-shirt, one of his that smelled a little like James, inexplicably. Not that he minded. He wondered if James had been wearing it, and the thought sent a shiver through him.

“What am I seeing?” James demanded, mouth hanging open. He stood in the doorway of the bathroom, a towel wrapped around his waist and his wand tucked behind his ear. His skin was still wet from his shower. There was a smear of toothpaste near his mouth that Teddy wouldn’t mind kissing away, regardless of the sharp taste.

“A hallucination, judging by your reaction,” Teddy said, hair growing orange with confusion. He marked the page of his book with his thumb while he leaned up in bed. “What’s wrong with you?”

James waved a hand at Teddy and then made a mad grab for his towel when it slipped, revealing sharp hip-bones that glistened where the water had collected in the hollows. Teddy had to count to
ten and shift the covers a little to hide his reaction. Boxers weren’t much in the way of armour.

“Those,” James said, almost choking on the word. “On your face.”

Teddy frowned, lifting a hand until his fingers found the edge of his glasses. He didn’t wear them often, but gritty sand and contacts didn’t mix well, and his head was already pounding from all the hot sun. It was still hot now, despite being late at night, but Teddy wanted to read at least another chapter before he tried to sleep, and the glasses helped.

“My glasses?” Teddy tapped the lens lightly, cleaning a smudge away wandlessly. “What about them?”

“I didn’t even know you had glasses,” James said. Whined, really.

Teddy shifted them down his nose and frowned at James over the tops, and James’s eyes went strangely wide, bugging out of his head.

“You think I’d give you even more incentive to call me an old man?” Teddy asked drily. He pulled his book closer and opened it, patting the space beside him on the bed absently with his free hand. “Are you coming to bed or not?”

A strangled noise was his only answer, and then the soft tread of footsteps filled the room as James slunk towards the bed. He threw himself onto the covers and lay there for a minute, muttering inaudibly to himself, presumably cursing Teddy’s existence, although Teddy didn’t know why.

“You’re not wearing pants,” Teddy reminded him, after the third minute of James muttering passed. A soft thwip of magic signalled the summoning of James’s boxers, and Teddy was very careful not to look as James wriggled out of his towel and into them. His towel hit the floor, and he rolled onto his side, head pillowed on his arms, and watched Teddy.

Another five minutes passed in comfortable silence before Teddy closed his book, sighed, and shifted to face James. It was still light, the warm lamps turning everything golden. James’s eyes were contemplative, and fixed on him, and it set something in Teddy alight. Rarely was James still and thoughtful like this.

Teddy planned to ask what was wrong. He planned to finally ask what was going on with James this weekend, why they had come here, what was making him act so strangely, and he planned on getting a straight answer.

He took off his glasses, folding them with nimble fingers and resting them on the pillow. He opened his mouth, and then James opened his mouth, and as usual, all of Teddy’s plans went out the window.

“I’m moving down here.”

Teddy felt the world slow down. Stillness filled him, filled the room, to the point where only the soft sound of waves lapping against the sand outside could convince him that he was still here, in this moment.

“You want to repeat that?” Teddy asked, after a long moment.

James sighed, sitting up. He ran a hand through his hair, but for once, the motion didn't distract Teddy from the conversation.

“Falmouth Falcons have an opening on their team, and they asked for me. I’ve been stuck as a
Reserve for so long now, and it doesn’t seem like that’s changing anytime soon. This, though - well, it’s got loads of coaching opportunities attached to it, and I get to fly properly, in front of people. I get to actually do what I love doing.”

“That’s great, Jamie,” Teddy said softly. He found one of James’s hands and squeezed it gently.

James grimaced. “Yeah, I figured you might say that. This would be a lot easier if you were a mean old bastard rather than nice and supportive like I knew you’d be.”

Teddy snorted, and James managed a grin.

“It makes more sense to be down here, close by, than all the way up in London,” he explained reluctantly. “I can’t get a Floo Network for something that isn’t Ministry affiliated without throwing my dad’s name around, and I’d rather do this on my own, you know? Because I’m me, not because I’m a Potter. So I’d have to move.”

Teddy blinked rapidly. Albus was often the one who felt the pressure of their family name keenly, who had all the expectations piled on top of him. But maybe James was just a little better at hiding it all. James twisted the covers in his hands, the only sign that he was nervous.

“There’s also the magical marine schools I was talking about,” James added, a hint of shyness in his voice. Teddy knew that James didn’t often talk much about the other things he enjoyed. He did brilliantly at school, but it was sort of a given that James was going to leave, and keep being brilliant at Quidditch for the rest of his life.

And Teddy knew he’d do that, because James loved Quidditch with everything in him. But he also loved other things.

“There’s a couple of openings, and you have to do some tests and stuff to get in, and money might be a bit tight for a while,” James said, shrugging. “But I asked about it, and the schools said as long as I know my stuff, they don’t see why I can’t do side-courses alongside the Quidditch practice, if I want.”

“And you do want,” Teddy said, venturing a guess.

“Yeah,” James said. He puffed up his cheeks and blew out a breath, a small frown taking root in his mouth. “I do. But I want a lot of things, Teddy. That’s kind of what this whole weekend’s been about. I wanted to see if you’d like it down here before I asked you.”

Teddy felt a new kind of tension fill the room as he puzzled over that. He was still reeling from James’s declaration. He couldn’t imagine not living with James, not now that he’d had him there, in the mornings and evenings and lunchtimes, filling up the empty spaces with laughter and chatter and soft smiles that made Teddy ache. They fit together, Teddy felt, and he had never been happier than when James moved in and they both realised that this worked. That was partly why Teddy was so afraid to say anything to him about how he felt, until he was sure: he didn’t want to lose this, or ruin what they had.

It would be bad enough if James just moved a few miles away, maybe to a different part of London, but to move all the way down to the bottom of the country? The thought made him feel sick.

And now James was going to ask him something. He seemed to be waiting, so Teddy braced himself, flicking James gently on the hand to get him to loosen up a little, even though all he felt was tension in every cog and gear that filled his bones.

“Ask me what?”
“Move with me,” James said boldly.

Whatever Teddy had been expecting, it hadn’t been that. But maybe he should have. He sucked in a breath and stared at James, startled.

“What?”

James continued on bravely. “Look, I know it sounds mad, but if you think about it, it makes sense? You can get a Floo Network put in to connect you to your office. They’ll do that for you, since you work in the Ministry, and you’re good at your job, so they won’t want to lose you. You just have to Floo to your office in the morning, and ta-da! You’re at work! We already live together, so we already know we won’t hate it once we move here. We can help each other out, and… for fuck’s sake, I don’t want to move without you.”

Teddy felt winded. He’d expected practical reasons, like sharing the rent, but this was James. James, who wore his heart on his sleeve and brandished it like a weapon, who lead with what he felt, rather than what he thought, but who thought great things all the same. He was driven and passionate and full of light, dynamic, and he belonged here, on beaches and in the sea, sunlight on his freckled skin, sand between his toes, his smile a fixed point.

He belonged here, and he wanted Teddy to belong here with him. It floored him, made his voice stick in his throat.

“Never thought I’d see the day you’d do a big, heartfelt speech to keep me around,” Teddy joked, but his voice was too breathless and shocked for it to sound funny.

James scoffed, a slightly nervous grin in place. “Have you met me?”

Teddy had. And he knew James better than anyone. He knew that even if this seemed impulsive, it wasn’t. James would have thought this out, carefully, and come to conclusions and put it all together. The silence stretched as Teddy thought.

“So, I hate to pressure you, but I’m not actually hearing an answer here,” James said, his voice full of false joviality. “Usually I’d wait and give you loads of time to think about it, being the generous, thoughtful person that I am, but we have to lie next to each other all night, and that’s going to be bloody awkward if we don’t at least talk--”

Teddy had never been impulsive. He had always been smart and thoughtful, but he wasn’t a Saint, wasn’t the kind of person that a lot of people thought he was. He’d had a scowling, angry phase that sometimes didn’t feel like a phase. He’d been a little shit in school. His teachers trusted him because he knew how to grin and charm people, and his friends knew he was an arse and loved him for it. People thought he was aloof, sometimes, too cool for anyone else, and sometimes Teddy felt it, felt like he was out of reach of everyone, a boy out of place and without a family, without something that made him belong.

He was thoughtful and smart and kind and lost, and James made him feel found, but he didn’t make him feel impulsive until now.

James’s voice crashed to a stop as Teddy kissed him. The words faltered against his lips, and the heat of James’s skin under Teddy’s hands was almost too much. He knelt up, leaning down to press closer, to kiss James and come to the slow, foggy realisation that this was happening, that James was kissing back, panting against his mouth, hands gripping his shoulders like a lifeline.

This, Teddy thought, as he drew back slowly, didn’t feel impulsive. This felt like an inevitability,
something they had been hurtling towards for years.

“What,” James said, still stumbling over his own breaths, “the hell?”

His warm, brown eyes were wide and stunned, nose nudged against Teddy’s as they breathed together. He was breathing hard, nails digging into Teddy’s shoulders, Teddy’s own hands fastened tightly around his waist.

“What?” Teddy asked, voice low and shaken. “Never had a kiss before?”

“Not like that,” James muttered, a little dazed. Then he cringed a little and scowled at Teddy. “Don’t let that go to your head, Teddy, or you’ll never fit back in my van.”

Teddy smirked. He couldn’t stop smirking until he realised that he’d just kissed James, and James had kissed him back, and nothing had imploded or exploded and nothing had died a fiery death as a result. The world was still spinning, perhaps a little too fast. And then the smirk softened into a smile, something awed as he moved one hand to cradle James’s face, thumbing at his lower lip, where his mouth had just been.

“So are we going to talk about that, or are we just going to kiss some more?” James asked. “Not that I’m complaining. If more kisses are in the future, I’m definitely down for that.”

“If you want them,” Teddy said. He felt a little guilty, all of a sudden. “I didn’t ask if that was what you wanted, before I kissed you. I’m sorry, I just…”

James thumped him lightly on the shoulder. “I’ve been trying to get you to do something for the past year. I wanted it. You didn’t have to ask. You must have been able to see.”

“Doesn’t mean I shouldn’t have asked,” Teddy said, shrugging, before he admitted, “but yeah, I did see. Denied it, usually, but I saw. I was just trying to make sure that this wouldn’t ruin anything, I think.”

James laughed, a little crazed, and fell back against the bed with a sigh. Teddy stayed where he was, kneeling by James’s thigh, until James furrowed his brow and made an impatient motion with his hands.

“The fuck are you still doing up there? Get down here.”

“It’s too hot to sleep like that,” Teddy said, but he didn’t actually object, curling up beside James and tugging him into his arms. His glasses slipped off the pillow, but he didn’t care. His heart was still pounding with the risk he had taken, with the memory of how James tasted, how they fit together now.

“I will physically fight the sun if it stops you from holding me in the night,” James proclaimed, shameless. Teddy tucked a laugh into the space between James’s shoulder-blades. He was going to need to cast a dozen cooling charms in the night, but it was worth it, he thought, if he got to have this. He twitched his hand, and the lights in the room went out, leaving them in darkness. Waves kissed the shore, and Teddy kissed James again, slowly this time, softer.

“I’m guessing the big dramatic kiss was because you like me and want to have my babies,” James said.

“Something along those lines.”

James snickered slightly. “Glad we’re on the same page, then.”
Teddy kissed him again to shut him up, hands skimming gently over James’s ribs, pulling shivers from him.

“You didn’t actually answer my question,” James said, after a few stolen moments of quiet. “About moving.”

“What part of that kiss sounded like a no to you?” Teddy asked, nosing at James’s neck. “I’m with you, Jamie, wherever you go. You never have to ask.”

The next morning dawned with another wave of heat. Teddy lounged at the breakfast table, his toast buttering itself as he plucked the third strawberry from the punnet and held it out to James. James grinned wickedly at him as he bit into it, and juice ran down Teddy’s fingers.

“Want me to get that for you?” James asked, jerking a head at the mess on Teddy’s hand. Teddy’s hair turned a deep, happy purple.

“That’d be a nice way to start the morning.”

“What, my morning wake-up blow-job wasn’t good enough for you?” James demanded, as he leaned in to lick up the strawberry juice.

“Oh, bloody hell, no,” Albus said, standing in the doorway with an expression of dawning horror on his slack face. Both of them jumped. Teddy spilled his coffee all over his toast and cursed under his breath. James hastily wiped his mouth, but he was obviously trying hard not to laugh.


James leaned back in his seat, an unapologetic grin on his face. “Morning, Albirmingham. Sleep well?”

“Yeah,” Albus said, pulling a face. “Kind of glad about that now, since I won’t be sleeping ever again.”

Teddy rolled his eyes, mouth twitching as he cleaned up the mess of coffee and soggy toast. The newspaper had miraculously survived.

“This isn’t as bad as the time I caught you with that photograph last year,” James pointed out, and Albus started hissing like a slug exposed to salt, waving his arms around maniacally as Scorpius trudged into the room, yawning. His hair stuck up like a pygmy puff, and he blinked at the quiet chaos before grunting and heading for the coffee.

Albus sighed and moved to sit beside Teddy, snatching a bit of un-soggy toast and biting into it. He didn’t look at them as he chewed, and then he mumbled something before clearing his throat.

“I’m happy for you, or whatever,” Albus said, cheeks red. “It’s nice, and it’s been a long time coming. I’m glad. Just don’t blow each other while I’m in the next room anymore, okay? That’s a new rule.”

There was a splutter from the counter as Scorpius fumbled his cup, and Teddy chuckled. James, on the other hand, beamed like Albus had given him a Vintage Firebolt for Christmas.

“Aww, baby brother, that’s the nicest approval in the world. I’m going to ignore that last bit, but I appreciate it.” He launched himself over the table to ruffle Albus’s hair, ignoring the way Albus
practically vaulted off his chair to avoid him.

“What are we supposed to do today?” Scorpius asked around a yawn, clutching his mug desperately as he approached the table, skirting the battle taking place over the jam. He caught Teddy’s eye and offered him a small smile, murmuring, “Congratulations, by the way. Just don’t almost crash the van on the way back this time because your hands touched.”

Albus cackled from the floor when Teddy went a little red. James jumped up, looking distinctly rumpled, and pulled out a crumpled, stained list from the pocket of his flannel pants. He stared at the itinerary before grinning.

“Hiking, and then cliff-diving,” James said cheerfully. “That’s what we’re supposed to do today.”

“As fun as that sounds,” Teddy said, dust-dry, “I think I’d rather stay in the cottage.”

James frowned at him.

“When the beds are.”

James perked up, putting the list down with purpose.

“And I think these two would definitely rather not stay in the cottage,” Teddy added, with a small smirk. “Especially if we don’t want to break Albus’s rule only five minutes after he’s made it.”

“I think that’s our cue,” Scorpius stage-whispered, and he hastily summoned a basket from the cupboard, piled it full of leftover breakfast foods, before he dragged a grumbling Albus away from the table.

“I’m not even dressed yet,” Albus complained.

“I think you look handsome like this,” Scorpius replied, and Albus abruptly shut up. The front door snapped shut behind them.

“So,” James said, clapping his hands together in the ensuing silence. “Was that all a ruse to get out of hiking or did you really want to spend the day with me?”

Teddy softened, standing up to move towards James, bracketing him against the counter like he’d done on the first day, only this time he leaned down to kiss him soundly, as though he’d done it every day and would do it every day still. With any luck, he would.

“I always want to spend the day with you, Jamie,” Teddy said, catching James’s happy sigh against his mouth. “I meant every word.”

“Oh good,” James said, grinning widely. He started tugging Teddy towards the bedroom eagerly, snagging the strawberries that Scorpius had thoughtfully left behind. Teddy paused to grab the newspaper off the table and let James lead him away. “I had some ideas about where we could start, if we want to make Albus make as many rules as possible.”

Teddy laughed loudly as they stumbled into the bedroom. The strawberries went down on the bedside table, beside Teddy’s rescued glasses - and those gave him some ideas for later, as he remembered James’s breathlessness, but for now, he had his own thoughts about where they could start.

“Actually, I thought we could start with something else, first.”
“I’m all ears,” James said, falling back onto the bed and grinning up at Teddy. “Lay it on me, Lupin. What’ve you got in mind?”

Teddy ducked down to kiss him softly, and then leaned back, grinning as he held up the newspaper.

“How about we start with house-listings?”

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