oh thou, my lovely boy

by kindlynow

Summary

Sirius begins a new year at Newton Academy with a mysterious new roommate and an invitation to an underground book club for banned homoerotic books.

Notes

hello! this is my entry for the 2019 wolfstar big bang, inspired by an amazing artwork done by annabel_eyre (tumblr)!!

title is from shakespeare's sonnet 126

some disclaimers before we begin:

i know there is another boarding school fic out there by the incredible picascribit, however, i have not read past the first chapter of it because i read the warnings and decided it was not for me. so, if there are any major similarities between that story and this one, i do apologise, but it was also neither intentional nor subconscious (apart from the new roommate thing, but I attribute that to Dead Poets Society.)

some of this is possibly anachronistic in that certain readings of texts are too modern for when this is set, but that is something i was not very concerned about getting period accurate. what i was concerned about was that contacts were invented in 1887, then updated in 1938, and finally perfected in 1950 and therefore it is entirely plausible james wore them while playing sports.
in the spirit of Hogwarts, this school that i have created is non-denominational (yes, i know how unrealistic that is for a posh english boarding school) and therefore they do not attend chapel or say grace before meals, because i Could Not Be Bothered to write all of that in.

‘tis also a very vague british boarding school experience, because the eton college wikipedia page was a novel in itself, and there was no way i could fit an entire boarding school culture into a fic this short. I’ve also never been to boarding school, so i apologise if you did and struggle reading through the inaccuracies. I have also never read the picture of dorian gray, so.. good luck wrt that.

See the end of the work for more notes

To most, the first day of a new school year marked a loss of freedom. Once again were children aged 5-18 saddled with homework, insufferable teachers, obnoxious peers. Summer was over, the sun locked away for another nine months, plants and animals soon following suit.

Sirius, however, an all-round abnormal child, had always loved the first day of the new year. Seeing his friends, returning to the warm, inviting dorm room claimed as his since first year, how another year older meant another year further up the pecking order. Even the drive to his boarding school was beautiful, the way the dark sandstone of building looked against the bright yellow and orange leaves of early autumn; the fancy, chauffeured car, how it would pull in smoothly amidst all of the other sleek cars lined out the front of the main entrance, delivering Sirius to his bigger, better home, even if it meant being trapped in close quarters with his parents and little brother for the duration of the trip.

A new year meant new opportunity. New chances to learn, yes, but better yet to make memories, to create hijinks and run around the winding halls or sneak across the grounds after hours. His classmates seemed to feel the same as well, bustling all around him with great suitcases, trailed by equally enthused parents, all in furs and pearls and dark suits as if this were the social event of the year. It may as well have been, with the way his mother spoke of impressing them all for most of the summer.

Because the truth was, Newton Academy was the sort of institution that placed a great value on impressing the right sort of people. Untouched by the destruction of either of the World Wars in the sprawling foothills and farmlands of the English lowlands, a few hours North of the heart of London, lay an institution of incredible academic and social notoriety. Newton boasted, for a hefty sum, the opportunity to turn only the most worthy of boys into up and coming young men of modern British society. Graduating students were bound for Oxford and Cambridge, and the list of notable alumni was miles long, including but not limited to, Prime Ministers, top Bankers, and half of the Royal Family.

Newton had also recently celebrated its 400th birthday, and appeared to have not changed a thing since then. The aged sandstone, pointed turrets, hand-wound clock tower, low hanging willows, and creepy half angel half gargoyle lawn ornaments still remained since the day they were all erected. The only modern feature seemed to be the addition of electrical lighting, but even then, the lightbulbs were a sort of yellowed parchment shade and therefore only really enhanced the feeling of age.

The staircases and foyers were never so full as on moving in day, compounded by the new first years who would stop and stare in the middle of walkways every few moments to appreciate the grandeur of their new home, and Sirius took the opportunity upon walking through the ornate front doors, to
properly observe his classmates in their natural states. Uniforms were not mandatory on the first day, being as it was a Sunday, but were absolutely expected for the welcome assembly that night, so the walk to his dorm room was filled with all sorts of colour and texture that would soon be hidden away for a good 5/7ths of the next year.

Sirius himself had come dressed all black, which would have delighted his parents greatly if his jacket had not been made of leather and his pants not as tight as he could possibly procure, and felt rather cool with the way he stood out wending his way through the throngs of people, headed towards his room without a second glance back to his family. By the time he climbed the stairs and turned down the final corridor that would lead him to his dorm, two tall, red-headed figures had appeared on his either side, also carrying their own trunks and dressed in matching sweaters.

“D’you heard about Anderson?” The voice to his left said, and it took Sirius a moment to recognise that it belonged to Gideon, rather than Fabian.

“No, I didn’t. What happened?” Sirius was kept rather out of the loop with matters of school over the summer, splitting his time between his house in London and James’ home in Croydon and not really socialising with anyone else besides Peter.

“I heard he and his family went on holiday to America and couldn’t get back in the country. Something to do with his father not being who he said he was. Quite a scandal and all that. Won’t be coming back this year, anyhow,” Fabian replied, all seriousness.

“Where’d you hear that from?” Sirius asked, looking up for the first time since they had appeared. Fabian was taller, with slightly shaggier hair since the last time Sirius had seen him. He didn’t need to look to his other side to know Gideon looked just the same.

“Him,” he pointed a thumb to his brother. Sirius rolled his eyes.

The three of them arrived at the door like they had many times before, but suddenly, this time, there was a trickle of dread down Sirius’ spine that halted him from turning the knob and entering. He had been no more close with Anderson than he was with his other roommates Gideon or Fabian or Frank, not like he was with James and Peter, but the removal of one of the core puzzle pieces that made up his everyday at Newton was not how he wanted to start his second to last year. Sirius wanted very much for everything to be exactly where it left off at the end of last year, unchanged by time and variables out of his control.

“Does that mean we’ll be having a new roommate? Or have they just taken out the bed?” Sirius asked, hand poised on the knob, other hand adjusting his sweaty grip on the handle of his trunk.

“Guess we’re about to find out,” Fabian smiled from a few steps behind him.

Sirius took in a breath and twisted the knob, and was immediately engulfed in the familiar sounds and smells of his home. James and Peter had already arrived, were all unpacked and loudly discussing their respective summers over the round, wooden table in the middle of the room, and Sirius immediately tossed his trunk onto his bed so he could greet them.

“Welcome back lads!” He called, clapping them both on a shoulder and pushing himself into the conversation, interrupting it without much care.

“Welcome back indeed. You look very dashing,” James said, putting on a posh sort of accent.

“Why, thank you,” Sirius replied, attempting to do the same, but, as it was already so posh, sounded just the same as he usually did. “Just wait until I get an actual bike to go with it.”
He did not spend very much time speculating about or planning out what his future would look like, but if there was one thing solid in Sirius’ mind, was that it would involve the fastest, sleekest, coolest motorbike he could get his hands on. It wasn’t really possible whilst he was still living under his parents’ roof and also off of their money, because they would immediately take it from him and also enact some harsh punishment, or while he was still at Newton and would not be allowed to have it with him, but that didn’t stop Sirius from dreaming about it constantly, or preemptively dressing the part.

“I don’t think chauffeurs will drive bikes, too,” Peter said, so earnestly that it made James crack up so hard he nearly fell right out of the chair.

“Yeah mate, you know you actually have to drive those things yourself, don’t you?” James managed to get out around his laughter.

Sirius scowled at the two of them, tossing his hair back with both hands in affronted annoyance. He had grown it out over the summer, allowed by his parents under the guise that it was looked more aristocratic that way, and now it nearly brushed his shoulders. Sirius just liked the way it curled more the longer it got, and didn’t really care for aristocracy much anyway. More tittering laughter came from across the room and he looked up to see that Gideon and Fabian had paused in their unpacking and were laughing at him too. Sirius resisted the urge to stomp his foot.

“Don’t act like any of you have ever driven anywhere in your lives,” Sirius huffed, but eventually he too had to admit it was rather true and cracked a smile. He would get his license some day, and then he would be the one laughing.

The brother went back to their unpacking, as James and Peter resumed their recounting, and Sirius was left to survey the room. Frank’s bed was still empty, having either not yet arrived or gotten caught up in the crowds on his way up, but the one next to his, formerly Anderson’s, had an old, battered trunk at the end of it, with various books and pens spread across it’s allotted desk, and a fresh uniform spread out on the otherwise undisturbed comforter. None of it was familiar, which meant only one thing. New roommate, indeed.

“You missed him,” James said, presumably catching him staring and successfully breaking Sirius out of his reverie. “He was in here earlier unpacking all that. Don’t know where he’s got to now, he didn’t say much.”

Sirius looked back down at his friend, confused at how he could be so casual about a stranger invading their home. Peter looked just as disinterested, and Sirius had to cross the room and busy himself with unpacking his own things so that he didn’t explode at the both of them for being such traitors.

“What was he like?” Sirius asked, bending down to put his white, uniform dress shirts in the bottom drawer of his allotted chest, one of three pieces each of them got.

It went desk, bed, drawers, repeated seven times around the edge of the room, with enough space in between to give each of them some semblance of privacy. James, Peter and he were on one side, with Gideon, Fabian and this new boy on the other, Frank the mediary between the two, himself sandwiched on each side by a window. A large, round table with seven chairs sat in the centre of it all to encourage rousing intellectual discussions between them all, preparing them for parliament or the workplace, or academia. Mostly, they used it as a place to play cards and cheat each other out of whatever snacks the others had hidden away somewhere.

“Tall, sort of skinny. He had these scars across his face too, faded mostly but quite a few of them. Dunno what they could be from,” James explained.
That’s not what Sirius meant, he didn’t care for James opinions on his appearance, he wanted something of substance, a look at who he was as a person, inside. A first impression. Important things.

“Did you get his name at least?”

“Oh yeah, some Roman or Greek thing, what was is Pete?”

“Remus,” Peter, who had always been much better at things like history and classics, replied.

“That’s it, Remus Lupin. Cracking name, he seemed a bit boring, though,” James said.

“Great,” Sirius groaned in return.

Sirius had unpacking down to a science by this point. Arguably the most boring part of coming back, often he would just survive by living out of his trunk until he had worn everything once. His two grey uniform sweaters were stuffed in the bottom drawer next to his shirts, the five identical pairs of black uniform trousers in the drawer above that, next to all of his socks and underwear and ties, and then finally, all of his weekend clothes; t-shirts, trousers, sweaters, and so on, shoved roughly in the top drawer, and then he was finished.

After pushing his trunk underneath his wire bed frame where it would live for the next few months, Sirius once again joined his friends at the table, lounging back in the chair so that he could lift his feet onto the table, and cross his leather boot covered ankles together. He pulled his half empty packet of fags out of the pocket of his leather jacket, and a box of matches out of the other one. The regular stash of unopened boxes had been mixed in with his socks and underwear when he’d unpacked earlier, but James and Peter didn’t need to know that. Thieving bastards.

Sirius stuck one between his lips, pocketing the packet again before others were begged off him, and lit the end with a match on the first strike despite the fact that they were very much prohibited in dorm rooms.

“ Couldn’t wait til we’d even started classes to stink up the room?” Fabian said as he and Gideon were on their way back out into the hordes of people.

“Thought you might have missed the smell of me,” Sirius replied, blowing a cloud pointedly in their direction.

“Nah mate, that we haven’t missed.”

“James, crack that window would you,” Gideon called on his way out after his brother, making a show of wafting the door open and closed a few times to disperse the smell.

Sirius flipped him off, only receiving a laugh echoed down the corridor in reply, but he wasn’t mad. Next time the two of them had a drink in them they’d be round begging for one off him, and then who’d be the one laughing. Them still probably, because he caved every time, but that didn’t matter.

“I’m not his servant,” James grumbled, but got up to open the window to the right side of Frank’s bed anyway.

“Cars still there?” Peter asked.

The front facade of the main building of Newton, which contained everything except for the sporting facilities, was in a wide U shape, centred around a courtyard of stone benches and perfectly manicured hedges, as well as the curved strip of road that allowed cars to pull right up to the
cascading stone steps that lead to the front doors. The dorms were all housed in the left hand wing, when you were facing it from the courtyard, and the room the boys had been assigned faced inwards to all of this, directly across from the wing which contained most of their classrooms.

“Yeah, some still. Not as many as earlier, took dad ages to find a park when we arrived.”

James stayed at the window for a few moments longer, upper body shoved out like Juliet in her tower. No one had fallen out thus far, fortunate, as they were on the fifth floor, but Sirius had become a master at scaling the side to sneak out by year four. With one of the windows open and the door still ajar, the cloud that normally followed Sirius whenever he was not in class dispersed rather quickly, but it also meant that anyone walking the hall would stride past and catch him in the act.

Which is exactly what happened. Out of the corner of his eye, Sirius could see that a figure had appeared to the right of him, hovering somewhat awkwardly between the open doorway and where he still sat, reclined in his chair. The figure cleared its throat pointedly a few times, until Sirius lazily dragged his gaze from the back of James’ head to face it.

“Alright Reg?” He drawled with a lazy smile.

“Mum and dad have left,” Regulus said shortly.

“Don’t see how that’s any of my business,” Sirius told him, putting on an air of calm disinterest.

“Mum said to tell you not to get in any more trouble this year because it makes us all look bad,” he continued.

Sirius knew this, because she’d said it enough times over the summer. He suspected Regulus just wanted the perverse joy from telling him this in front of his mates.

“It’s not me who makes them look bad, they do a good enough job of that in their own. Now go away. I’m an upperclassman now, you have to do what I say,” Sirius said, waving the hand clutching his cigarette in the air between them.

“No, I don’t. And don’t bother me and my friends again this year, we aren’t children anymore and it’s not funny,” Regulus said diplomatically.

“My friends and I, you mean. Parents pay enough for this place, you think you’d actually be learning,” Sirius said serenely, and stuck the fag back between his lips in a way that signalled he was done with the conversation.

Regulus looked for a moment like he wanted to stomp his foot and storm out, a familiar sight to Sirius, especially considering he had learned the routine from him, but he quickly schooled his face back into the calm facade of someone who was merely there to deliver a message, and turned on his heel and left much in the way he had come. Silently, like some sort of spy.

Sirius did not watch him leave, for he had spent the last three months with his brother and was now quite happy to spend as much time as far away from him as possible.

“He’s getting big,” James said, plonking himself back into his chair at the table. “Looks rather a bit like you now.”

That caught Sirius’ attention immediately. He looked sharply at James, who was wearing one of the most shit-eating grins Sirius had ever seen, overjoyed to have known exactly how to push Sirius’ buttons. Sirius plucked the shrunken end of his cigarette from between his lips and flicked it at James, making him squawk and lunge sideways lest it land in his great mass of hair and leave a
lingering smell.

He straightened up and glared good naturedly at Sirius, and the two boys grinned at each other for a small moment, happy to be back home and back to their old antics. They were soon interrupted by the familiar banging noises of someone entering the room and accidentally smacking their trunk against the door frame as they did so.

“Frankie! I was beginning to think you’d forgotten which room was ours,” James crowed, rising from his chair and crossing the room to shake Frank’s hand.

“Glad to see you haven’t changed over the summer,” Frank sighed, pushing past him to reclaim his usual bed.

“You know me. Nothing if not consistent,” James grinned.

Sirius smiled at Peter, who smiled back in a way that suggested he didn’t quite know what he was supposed to be smiling for but was happy to have been included all the same. It didn’t matter, Sirius knew. And as he looked around the room at the small messes that had already been made, the open window through which he could see a glimpse of cloudy blue sky, the smiling faces of his two best mates, and Frank’s hideous, knitted sweater vest, Sirius very much appreciated that he could, indeed, count on James to be exactly who he was, and he could count on Newton to be exactly what it was as well; home.

“That’ll be me next year, just you wait and see,” James said, elbowing Sirius in his side enthusiastically and nodding to the front of the hall.

Sirius looked up from where he had been staring, zoned out, at the boy sitting in front of him, to see Evan Rosier, seventh year, on stage with Professor McGonagall and Madame Hooch, the both of them beaming with pride and satisfaction as they pinned the golden Rugby Captain badge to the lapel of his uniform blazer. The seated boys whooped and hollered once the two women stepped back, and he waved and bowed as if he had just been awarded some sort of medal, before taking his seat once again to the side of the stage by the new Prefects. Sirius rolled his eyes.

“I sincerely hope not, or I’ll be in the market for a new best mate.”

“I don’t see what it is you’ve got against Rosier, he’s a great Rugby player, reckon we’ll be doing a lot more winning this year with him in charge,” James scoffed.

There wasn’t anything explicitly wrong with Rosier, despite generally being a smarmy prick, but there was something about the way he looked down his nose at Sirius whenever they happened to be in the same place that rubbed him the wrong way, and Sirius was yet to get over it.

A sharp shush came from the row behind them, an upperclassmen presumably, as they were seated ascendant in year groups, but it only made the two of them laugh. They did pause in their commentary however, because Headmaster Dumbledore was once again rising to give another address. The Welcome Assemblies progressed in much the same way every year. Everyone was welcomed back with an inspiring speech about learning and greatness and honour, the new Head Boy and Prefects were announced, updates to the schools donors and subsequent amenities were revealed, and most important of all, the new Literature teacher was introduced.
Newton Academy had an unfortunately long line of Literature teachers in it’s equally long run. None of them managed to stay much longer than a year, two if they were lucky. Sirius thought it had something to do with the fact that the ones they kept hiring were all at least 90 years old, and convincing two hundred teenage boys that Shakespeare and Homer and Milton were not the most boring people in the entire world would certainly have taken a toll on anyone of that age. It was also rather jarring to have to get to know a new person each year, and as such it was also widely known as the worst subject at Newton. James, Sirius and Peter, however, did not see it as such a death sentence, and preferred to think of the class as the prime opportunity to see how much they could get away with.

The Headmaster stood to a pregnant hush, taking his due time to gather himself as everyone waited with bated breath to meet the new Literature professor. Sirius could see him sitting by Binns, the History professor, and had already confirmed that once again he was old and white and on the brink of death, and did not know what any of the fuss was about. Nevertheless, he watched as Dumbledore lent forward on his podium and addressed the hall filled with eager boys.

“One last thing before you all go to dinner, we have a new faculty member with us this year,” he spoke, as if this fact was a surprise, and not a regular feature of the Academy. “Professor Warburton will be henceforth taking all Literature lessons, and I expect you will afford him the respect and enthusiasm that he is due.”

Some years, the Literature professor would stand and give their own address. Some boring rambling about how they have heard great things about Newton boys and expect the best of the students, or worse, that they attended themselves eons ago and plan to carry on the traditional education afforded to them. Warburton, however, remained seated, clutching his cane between widespread legs, glaring out at the students without so much as a nod of acknowledgment. Sirius had a bad feeling about this one, and one glance to James and Peter let him know that he was not alone in that.

“When you return to your rooms this evening you will find your class schedules have been pinned to your doors. Read them carefully, there will be no excuse accepted for tardiness or mistaken classrooms, I expect the highest at Newton this year, as I do every year. Dinner tonight is Shepards pie, if I am not mistaken. That is all.”

Four hundred starving boys then erupted into a great mass of pushing and shoving, as they all attempted to be the first our of the door and into the food hall. The upperclassmen, closest to the door and generally the largest, pushed their way through as rightful first priority, allowing James, Sirius and Peter the space to stand on their bench chair and step of the back of it onto the row behind, again and again until they too reached the door. James and Sirius had to wait for a moment around the corner for Peter to catch up, out of breath and a little wobbly, but once he had they were off to tea with the rest of them.

The dining hall was bigger than the assembly hall, with four long tables running the length of it, each sandwiched on both sides by a series of hardwood benches, deep chestnut and glossy to match the tables themselves. Food was always already set out for them by the time they arrived, no matter the meal, presumably by the people who also prepared the meals that Sirius had yet to even glimpse in his six years eating there everyday, and Headmaster Dumbledore had been correct in that it was indeed Shepards pie.

There was no allocated seating in the dining hall, first come first serve, but there was still an unspoken sort of seating arrangement, and Sirius could see a group of upperclassmen shooing off a group of first years who did not know that the end of table by the west wall were in fact their seats, and had been for a long time. The three of them were not so inflexible, and usually sat wherever there was a spot, or wherever they could make one next to boys they knew. The seating plan tended
to pale in comparison to a warm, hearty meal.

That night, when they returned from dinner, their class schedules were on the door, and Remus was back in the room. Sirius tried not to look at him, intent on treating him as if he had always been there, unwilling to feel like the one who should introduce himself in his own home. He got on with undressing from his uniform, hanging his jacket from the hook on the side of his dresser as he would need it tomorrow, but dumping his trousers and dress shirt on the floor to be collected by the matrons while the seven of them were out in classes the next day.

Undressing and being undressed in front of was nothing to Sirius now. It had been, certainly, back when he was first stuck with a group of boys his age and also when half of those boys had joined the rugby team and then also when all of them had begun puberty together in an awkward, sweaty mess. But they were like brothers now, and even the idea of imagining any of them in any sort of sexual situation was borderline repulsive.

Which brought him back to Remus. Not the imagining part, but the brother thing. Sirius was once again on guard, self conscious in a place where he had no business being self conscious, but he pulled on his worn flannel trousers and t-shirt that served as pyjamas, and bounced onto his bed looking for all the world like he was entirely unconcerned by a new, possibly hostile presence. All thoughts of bitterness and unfairness were halted however as Sirius looked up and across the room at his new roommate properly for the first time, and realised that James had left out some very important details earlier.

Namely, that Remus was incredibly fit. He was still in his uniform, minus the blazer, as he lounged back against the wall above his bed, so Sirius could not see him properly, but from what he could see, Remus was indeed tall, and skinny in a way that managed to be elegant rather than lanky. His head was tilted down into the book he was reading, full head of golden curls on perfect display, but Sirius could still see the curve of his long nose, thin angled lips pursed in concentration. His heart felt like it was wedged in his throat.

He realised he had been staring, and quickly looked around to check if he’d been caught. The rest of them were in similar states, pyjama clad and gathering their bits a pieces to head to the shared bathroom to brush their teeth before bed. Sirius glanced up at him again. Remus flipped a page in his novel, and Sirius caught a glimpse of his long, purposeful fingers. He shot up off the bed, gathered his toothbrush, toothpaste and hairbrush from the top of his dresser and left the room as quick as he could without making a scene.

The bathroom was at the beginning of the hall, right next to the staircase that led either one more floor up or all the way down to the ground floor, which then connected to the rest of the school. All the dorms on this floor, of which there were four, shared the bathroom, which meant that it was rather uncommon to not be sharing the space with at least one other person at any given time. There were four when Sirius arrived, two in the showers and two in the sink, but Sirius paid them no mind as he dumped his things on the counter and collected his thoughts.

The white tiles and scents of soap and cleaner did their part to clear his brain, and he started with his teeth. He had for all the world expected to dislike this new roommate, coming in there right as Sirius was happy and comfortable with the routine of it all, replacing one of his good friends. But then he’d seen him. Did it make him shallow that just because Remus was good looking, Sirius was prepared to do a complete turnabout on the way he felt about him, despite not having spoken to him once? Yes, probably, but he was willing to live with that if it meant he could keep looking at Remus in all his beauty.

He spat in the sink and rinsed his brush. It was of course not ideal to be living with someone you
found mindblowingly attractive, especially if you did not know whether it was possible they would ever reciprocate such feelings, but, like most of his other experiences at Newton, Sirius was willing to make the best of it. He began to brush his hair at the sink too, watching in the mirror the satisfying way the bristles untangled all the knots and returned it to its flowing, cascading glory.

When he returned to the room, now in much higher spirits than when he’d left, having decided that a fit roommate was not exactly the end of the world, as he was free to gaze upon him all he liked provided that he not get caught, Remus was on his way out. He had, what Sirius assumed to be, his sleepwear bundled underneath one arm, and was carrying his toothbrush and toothpaste in the other. Sirius tried to catch his eye as they passed each other by the doorway, to give him a nod of greeting or maybe leave an impression of cool indifference, but Remus just kept looking past him to the door, face set in disinterest, and disappeared into the hallway.

Sirius looked to James, who shrugged and looked equally as confused as Sirius felt. Neither of them said anything however, as Gideon, Fabian and Frank were still in the room, but also because turning around and gossiping about someone as soon as they’d left the room, no matter how much you initially disliked them, was not something they did. Instead, Sirius tucked himself in bed, as did James and Peter, and switched off the lamp by his bedside, getting what would most likely be his only early night of the next year.

Lights out was officially at 10pm every night, but was seldom followed in their dorm room. Usually to the detriment of being exhausted the next morning, even when the only reason they stayed up was because they could not bare to end their conversation, as opposed to because they had been sneaking around setting up some sort of prank or exploring an off limits part of the school, as they often also did.

The four of them absolutely had no intention of retiring any of their schemes, apparently the rest of the dorm had a different idea, and for the first time in newton history, the light in their room was switched off at ten o’clock. By Frank, sure, but the shock of it nearly had Sirius’ head spinning. He lay there in the dark for a while, listening to the rest of them snore and shuffle around, and realised for the first time really how old he had gotten. He didn’t hear Remus return, but of course, by then, he had much bigger things to worry about, and had decided to sleep instead of considering any of them.

The next morning, when Sirius awoke to dull light pouring in on the far wall, internal body clock permanently set to rise with the sun, ingrained in him from so many years of early morning classes, Sirius found that he was not the first to wake as he usually was, because Remus’ bed was empty. His blazer was missing from the hook, so Sirius, in his just-woken-up stupor, simply assumed he was similarly an early riser and had woken early and dressed and gone down for breakfast already.

He threw back the covers and got out of bed, then moved to James’ and Peter’s beds and shook them until they woke, and their moaning and groaning then woke the other three in a nice domino effect that meant they rarely had to use an alarm clock.

Sirius didn’t realise until he arrived and found that he was not there, that he had been hoping to run into Remus in the bathroom, or maybe half way down the hall so he could introduce himself properly. In the clear light of a new day he realised that he may have been being slightly dramatic with the whole ‘intruder’ thing, but what was life without a little drama, really? But now that distaste was turning into disappointment at the fact that he hadn’t even gotten the chance to make a first
impression. Or, possibly, that he had made it unknowingly and Remus was now avoiding him specifically because of it.

Sirius made it through three classes and lunch before he spotted Remus, just as he was beginning to think that he was not even enrolled, but merely heard of a spare bed and turned up every night to sleep in it. It had been in their Literature lesson, a class that contained all seven of them and also the rest of the boys in their year, as it was mandatory and there were just enough students enrolled to fill a classroom.

James, Peter and he had waltzed in as they usually did, loudly and animatedly continuing their conversation from lunch. They took three adjacent seats in the middle of the room, far enough from the front to not be called on, but not too far back to be accused of trying to slack off, and after settling in and pulling out his Lit workbook and a pen from his front pocket, Sirius had looked up and seen that Remus had claimed the seat a few rows in front of him, diagonal to his right, and was now sitting in perfect eyesight.

It wasn’t quite fair to say that Sirius had been looking out for him. He was a good student, payed attention in class, did all his work and was only disruptive when the class was too boring, but, well, he could also multitask. Sirius was observant by nature, and what he observed was Remus, in three quarter profile, long nose and high cheekbones, both hatched randomly with fine, shiny scars, skin pale as the chalk dust desperately clinging to the blackboard. Truth was, he was beautiful, and it thrilled Sirius to think that no one else in the room knew what an adonis they had in their midst; that he was the only one with any real taste.

A loud and sudden bang came from the doorway, making everyone jolt and halting all conversation as all attention was simultaneously drawn to the old man limping through it and over to the blackboard. The class remained silent as he scrawled his name at the top of the board, not because any of them might have forgotten it since the previous afternoons assembly, but in a way that made it seem as though he was marking his territory.

“I do believe that there is an understanding of what the curriculum this year entails,” he began, leaning heavily onto his long, wooden desk, leering above them rather menacingly. “And I do, like any good man, see the value in tradition, especially when it comes to learning the writings of old that shaped this great country, and the rest of the developed world. However, I have reviewed the list of texts given to me to be studied this year, and I have made some changes.”

A concerned murmur ran through the boys for a moment, until a great bang came once again, as Professor Warburton slammed his walking cane down onto the desk, successfully reclaiming everyone’s attention and creating a tense silence that rang out in the air.

“Quiet. I will not tolerate disorder in my classroom. That is your final warning. Now, I have been a teacher of Literature in the finest schools across the country since before you were all a twinkle in your father’s eye. I know what is good and to be valued, and what is scum that should be eradicated from schools and libraries alike. What has history, is what is good, and what has stood the test of time, reflects the values of a good and proper society.

“Instead, I will be teaching you only the finest of British literature, written by men who represent the finest of British culture. Orwell, Hardy, and of course, Shakespeare - arguably the greatest of them all. We will be beginning with King Lear, one of his tragedies. You, boy, hand out that pile,” he pointed to a boy sitting in the front row, and then to a stack of old books at the end of his desk.

The boy stood obediently, and wordlessly collected them, distributing them quickly out to each desktop. Soon, all of the boys had a dusty, worn copy of King Lear, pulled from the depths of the schools book storage, likely not seen the sun for a good 40 years. Sirius flipped open the first page to
see if anyone had written a name in it. No such luck. He didn’t blame them, he wasn’t exactly thrilled by the idea of announcing that he had the book in his possession either.

Everyone seemed to be more or less resigned to their new fate, adjusting quickly to a change of a schedule they were not particularly married to in the first place. But Sirius saw it for what it was. He knew the curriculum, not perfectly, but enough to understand the situation; he had seen sixth year boys walking around with their assigned texts, reading them on the lawn or quickly over lunch before a lesson. Bronte, Woolf, Wilde, Austen.

It made Sirius’ blood boil, and it took all his self control to not jump out of his seat and cry injustice. But he knew from years of experience that making a fuss like that, especially when he was the only one making it, though no doubt James and Peter would follow him even with no clue as to why he had gotten up, only led to egregious detentions. Instead he sat and seethed silently, only half paying attention as the Professor began to read aloud the first page and would occasionally scrawl something abstractly related on the blackboard for them to copy to their notebooks.

He stared down at his book for the rest of the class, so fired up that the adrenaline began to make the words on the pages swim around. As soon as they were dismissed by the hand wrung dinging of the bell in the courtyard, Sirius clamped one hand firmly around the wrists of Peter and James, and pulled them all the way to the food hall, so determined to be out of there that he only realised once they stopped, that it might have been the first time he would have been able to talk to Remus alone, and that he had just basically run in the opposite direction.

“The bloody nerve of him,” Sirius said, angrily piling food onto his plate.

He may have been caught up in various daydreams about the many ways he might devise a plan to get him fired, but plotting required energy, and tonight was a roast.

“The worst part is, half these blokes would be thrilled if they worked out why he’s done it. Wouldn’t be surprised if it was my own bloody parents who complained and had him appointed.”

“It’s right awful mate,” Peter said through a mouthful of potatoes, but Sirius could tell he was being earnest.

“You think Dumbledore knows about it? Maybe he’s trying to do it all on the sly. You could go ask him if it’s legitimate,” James said.

“What, like a child crying to dad ‘cause they aren’t getting their way? Nah, whatever the solution is, it’s up to me,” Sirius said.

“Us, you mean. We want in on whatever retribution you got planned, don’t we Pete?”

“Oh, yeah. What’s the plan exactly?”

“Well, I haven’t gotten that far. But I will. I’m not just gonna take this shite lying down. It’s repugnant,” Sirius groaned

“Big word, maybe you don’t even need any more Lit lessons,” James grinned, and then caught sight of Sirius’ serious face. “Only joking, mate.”
They finished their meal in a tense, loud sort of silence. Sirius was still fuming, which meant by association the other two caught it as well like some sort of disease. After not too long, shorter than it would normally take them to eat, were they having with with it in the slightest, they got up to leave, for lack of anything better to do. It wasn’t that Sirius wanted to be in their room, either, he would only continue to seethe there, but the sooner he was out from under Warburton’s watchful eye, seated at the head of the hall at the teachers’ tables, the better.

The three of them had only managed to reached the large doorway when an enthused voice called out to Sirius from the end of one of the tables. He turned immediately at the sound of his name and saw Benjy Fenwick, seventh year and Prefect, wiping his mouth with a white cloth napkin and rising gracefully from his place amongst his friends, who remained caught up in their rowdy conversation and payed neither of them any mind. Sirius turned to Peter and James, who had also paused in the threshold and were looking between the two of them with a mixture of confusion and schoolyard intrigue.

“You both go on, I’ll catch up with you later,” Sirius nodded to them, leading them to nod back and retreat down the corridor.

Sirius took a breath to centre himself for a moment. It had been a while since he had last spoken to Benjy, although, they did not spend a whole lot of time talking whenever they were together so that was not really saying much.

But it was one thing to rendezvous in an empty classroom or out in the tucked away areas of the school gourmets, and an entirely different on to speak openly in the dining hall in front of everyone.

“ Been a minute since I’ve seen you, how have you been?”

“Oh, yes, indeed,” Sirius replied, then cursed himself internally at how wobbly his voice had gone. “I’ve been fine.”

Benjy smiled at him, a perfectly straight row of blinding white against his brown skin. It was enough to make Sirius weak at the knees. Sirius liked to think of himself as someone who was smooth; he had charisma, could flirt the pants off just about anyone if he so wanted, and confidence poured uncontrollably out of every orifice, but up against Benjy’s natural good boy charm, he was rather useless.

“I don’t want to keep you too long, so I’ll cut to it. I assume Warburton gave your year the same talk as well, and I know you’re smart enough to see right through it for what it was really all about,” he said in a low voice, leaning in so that the conversation was a bit more private. Sirius had grown over the summer to the point where Benjy no longer towered over him, and they were nearly the same height, if it weren’t for his perfectly sculpted hair adding a few inches.

The image of Warburton, in front of a mirror, practicing that speech to deliver to all seven years of the student body flashed momentarily through Sirius’ mind and he had to bite his cheeks to stop from smiling.

“Yeah, of course,” Sirius sighed frustratedly. He was frankly growing tired of the whole situation.

“Exactly,” Benjy said sympathetically. “I also know you well enough to know that you’d like to do something about it.”

Sirius wondered briefly where exactly Benjy had learned all this about him, considering he had been distinctly absent from Sirius’ daily life for a good six months, but as his assessment was more or less correct, he didn't say anything. Benjy held out a small square of paper, folded a few times on itself,
for him to take.

“We’ve started a club. Caradoc and I, to look at all the texts he’s barred. And then some. The address is on there, so is the time. I don’t need to tell you not to share that around, do I?” He smiled.

“I’ll burn after reading,” Sirius said, then took it from him in a way that allowed their hands brush together for a long moment, and slipped the paper quickly in his jacket pocket without a second look at it.

“Just don’t burn down the school. You’ve managed not to this long, I’d hate to be the final catalyst,” he winked, and disappeared back to his mates so seamlessly it was like he’d never even been gone.

Sirius took his time going back to their room after that. Though some book club run by two overachieving upperclassmen was not the same as proper Lit classes, it was better than nothing, and if Sirius had to wait out Warburton for the rest of the year, he could do that if it meant things would go back to normal the next.

The corridors between the food hall and the dorm wing were relatively empty, with everyone either back in the hall staying out as late as possible to continue their reverie, or having left early like James and Peter to do it in the privacy of their own rooms and the comfort of their pyjamas. Uniforms were required for all weekday meals, including dinner.

The note felt heavy in his pocket, and although Sirius took his time meandering through the school, the prospect that he would soon be opening it never left the forefront of his mind. A club. He didn’t know what to expect. Would it be like the school sanctioned ones? Chess or debating or rowing or rugby, filled with enthusiastic and boisterous boys, or something more refined, a group of upperclassmen playing at a gentlemen’s club. Who else would be there? No doubt Benjy had collected others as he had Sirius, was this some sort of perverse reunion, or way to make them all vie for his sole attention?

Sirius wanted no part of that, if it were the case. he’d only wanted to get his rocks off, and it had been great at the time, but he was well over Benjy now. There was a certain thrill that ran through him at the prospect of being face to face with the occupants of Newton’s closet; he’d always secretly loved peeking into other people’s business.

It was not until he had reached his own dorm hall that Sirius contemplated opening it, however. He was serious when he said that he’d burn it after reading it, not just because he liked to burn things, but because he understood the gravity of their situation. Not only would it be a group of them out of bed, after hours, somewhere they were presumably not supposed to be, but with all of them queens too, reading banned books? It would not go down well.

He breathed a sigh of relief when, upon turning from the staircase to face the corridor, Sirius found that all of the doors to the three rooms were firmly shut, and he could walk the length of it to sit at the bay window at the end, without anyone seeing him stride past their doorway. So, he did, and only when he was situated comfortably, leaning back against the wooden frame with his legs tucked up so that his knees were at his chin, did he pull out the letter.

It was nice paper, expensive, not just a ruled notebook page ripped from a workbook, but Newton was the kind of place where expensive paper was not only common, but a necessity. The message was short, in neat, black ink. Sirius read it carefully, then again, and again until he had it memorised.

_Thursday night - 11:00pm. Room 221. Come alone._

There was no closing, no name to be traced back to. Smart. Sirius pulled his ever present box of
matches from the inside of his blazer pocket and struck one, then burned the letter until all of the writing had disappeared, before blowing it out and opening the window enough to slide the remaining singed, plain piece of paper through the gap to the ground below. He then stood, brushed the ashes from his uniform, and returned to his dorm.

Upon opening the door, he was met with the sight of James, Peter, Gideon and Fabian all sitting around the table in their pyjamas, which for some inexplicable reason only consisted of boxers and a white singlet for Gideon despite the gradually lowering temperatures, playing a round of cards. Frank and Remus were on their respective beds, noses in books like a couple of nerds, also in their pyjamas. Which, for Remus, seemed to consist of a large, dark green cotton jumper.

None of them looked up at his entrance, and judging by their intense concentration and the occasional smacks that Sirius could hear as he retreated to his bed, it was no more adventurous than a game of snap. He pulled off his blazer, hung it on the hook, threw off his trousers and shirt, leaving them once again on the floor in the spot that the previous days ones had disappeared from, and, not bothering to put on his pyjamas seeing as though he would have to take them right back off again for a shower, gathered his toiletries off of his dresser.

A particularly loud smack came from the table, followed by a chorus of disgruntled grumbling over a clearly delighted whooping, grabbing Sirius’ attention. When he turned around, however, now in nothing but a pair of pants, he managed to catch Remus’ eye, presumably also startled by the noise, and for a brief moment they stared wide-eyed at one another, transfixed like strangers meeting over a crowd, drawn inexplicably towards one another, and then the moment was broken by Remus once again looking down at his book.

It was enough to bring a blush to Sirius’ cheeks, and he made a beeline for the bathroom, chased from his room for the second night in a row by the beautiful sight of the mysterious Remus Lupin. It was getting ridiculous, really. Since when had Sirius run from anything in his life? He was normally the one charging head first into things, unafraid of taking what he wanted from the world. But this was different, this was delicate, this was… a crush?

Sirius thumped his forehead onto the tiles, sticking his face under the spray of the shower head. Shit. This was a crush. How was it possible, when the two of them had never talked? Never mind that he looked like some sort of greek god, lovingly crafted by Caravaggio himself, Sirius new nothing about him. But wasn’t that the ticket. He knew nothing about Remus, and somehow that made it all the more fun. He wanted to know him, wanted to get to know him, but not to ask him about himself, for there was no satisfaction in knowing someone because they told you about themself in words that could be misconstrued or concocted, but instead Sirius craved the puzzle of discovering another person in a way he never had before, authentically and piece by piece.

James and he had met on the very first day, and then the two of them had met Peter. They knew each other inside and out, every quirk, every habit, everything. But they had grown up together, they were who they were because of the other two; inextricable and forever bonded by a shared history. And that was wonderful and brilliant and Sirius would not trade his best mates for the world, but there was something about getting to know someone after they had become themselves that seemed to mean a great deal more. Like two whole parts combining to create something bigger.

He shut off the water and wrapped himself in one of the fluffy, white towels provided by the school that seemed to never be in short supply. Around him boys were dressed similarly, all sense of modesty long gone by that point in their academic careers, and Sirius had no qualms about returning to their dorm still dripping wet, with nothing but a towel around his waist, leaving a trail of water down the corridor behind him. He had grown comfortable in this home of his, and it was not uncommon for he, or any of the other boys for that matter, to walk around in all sort of states of
undress, and his strange crush on Remus was not going to change that. Besides, if this was a crush, then it seemed almost economic to at least show off what he had to offer, so to speak.

He returned to find the room almost exactly the same as he’d left it, so Sirius dumped his towel on the floor with his uniform, pulled on his grey sweatpants, grabbed his hairbrush (he had brushed his teeth in the shower to maximise his time) and sat down in one of the empty chairs around the table; shirtless, because Sirius hated the way his hair would drip onto the collar of it and make it stick to his skin.

A final slam of hands came from the circle and James leapt out of his seat in raucous victory. Sirius could see him clutching the entire stack of frayed cards as he danced about and stuck the other hand, fingers formed into a V, in the rest of their faces. Sirius laughed at his antics, happy for him only because he had not been playing against him, and could therefore not be bitter over his own loss.

“Real sore winner, you are,” Fabian laughed, pushing James’ hand away.

James stuck out his tongue, but neither of them were serious. They all acted the same way; only a bit of schoolboy fun. Sirius threw his hairbrush at him all the same.

“Oi! Quit it. Are you dealing me in or what?” Sirius called, using his fingers to finish the job of his hair now that he was without.

“More snap?” James said, beginning to shuffle the deck.

“I was thinking something a little more high stakes,” Sirius smirked.

“Indeed. Shall I deal you lads in too?” James said, suddenly turning to address the rest of the room. “Frank? Remus?”

Sirius’ heart stuttered for a moment, and he looked up, startled even by the mere sound of Remus’ name, to James, and when he found James looking serenely across the room, followed his line of sight right to Remus’ face. Remus shook his head silently, only flicking his eye up at James for a fraction of a second. It felt like an eternity to Sirius.

“Not me, but thanks mate,” Frank said, and then everything was back to normal.

Well, normal for Sirius. He was sure that he was the only one that had a mild conniption every time Remus was in eyeshot, and to them this was a normal night with a normal progression of events. He hoped dearly that none of them noticed anything wrong with him. But, despite his penchant for the dramatic, Sirius was very good at keeping things under wraps. He kept a fairly large fact about himself from most of the school, even James didn’t fully know how truly awful it was to live at Grimmauld Place and be an outcasted member of the Black family. He could put his regular facade over this too, and no one had to see any of his inner workings played out unfortunately on his face.

So he played Rummy and did his best to forget that Remus was only a mere few metres away, alive and real, reminding himself all the while that the burning gaze he would imagine on the side of his face that made his tanned chest and neck bloom embarrassingly pink was all in his mind, and Remus did not watch him in the way Sirius would watch Remus when he thought he wasn’t looking.

Thursday came around with blissful haste. The week had progressed rather the same, and also in a
way Sirius assumed it would for more or less the rest of the year. He woke early, woke his mates, Remus was rarely there, and when he was he was fast asleep and remained so until Sirius left for breakfast and therefore did not speak to him. He went to classes and meals and seethed during agonising Lit lessons over his copy of King Lear. He debated inciting some drama himself, just for something interesting to do.

Remus was, expectedly, not there on Thursday morning either, and as Sirius did not have Lit on Thursdays, he found himself having not even glimpsed Remus for an entire day. It wasn’t that he thought Remus was avoiding him, if anything, Remus was avoiding everyone. Even then that was a stretch, because Sirius did not detect any malicious intent from him. He did not flee or seem standoffish when any of them would ask him something, he would just shake or nod his head, or on rare occasions, answer flatly with polite disinterest.

Sirius had almost been beginning to think he was a foreign student, not uncommon at Newton, and could not speak English or something, but the first time he had opened his mouth and declined an invitation to go and sneak down to the kitchens with the five of them, Frank staying in, again, because he was painfully boring, Sirius had been shocked to find that he spoke English perfectly well, with a perfectly regular London accent, no hint of his poshness or James’ south city accent or Peter’s northern twang. It was also deeper than he had been expecting, and he found that it was a great unfairness that he never ran into Remus in the mornings, because he imagined it to be the type of voice that leant itself very well to an early-morning-gravel.

But Sirius also understood his isolation, to some extent, and so did the rest of the boys in the room, never nagging him or pushing him too far with invites, but similarly not quite prepared to leave him out altogether. It must have been hard to come into a place like this once everyone knew each other and had formed brotherhoods already. Sirius almost felt guilty for initially accusing him of trying to push his way in. He looked happy enough, no cries of homesickness came from his bed, and he would occasionally smile or let out a small laugh while reading one of his books.

Remus was just.. reserved. And that was fine. Well, it would have been if Sirius didn’t day dream for most of his waking day of waltzing up to Remus and saying the perfect thing that would crack his exterior and get him to laugh, the beginning of another life-long friendship if nothing else more. Because Sirius would take what he could get with Remus, even if what he got was nothing more than the chance to stare at him in profile during Literature, and occasionally being in the same room with him before lights out.

So when Thursday night came around and Remus was still not in the room, Sirius was not surprised. He had stopped expecting him to be there, even though it had realistically only been five days of knowing him. Remus just seemed like someone who was a creature of habit. What he did not expect, however, was that Remus did not return before lights out. Sirius himself had gotten ready for bed as normal, but as soon as the rest of them crawled under their bed covers and switched out the lamps, he had waited a good half hour, before slipping back out again.

The only light in the dorm at night came from the moon filtering through two medium sized windows either side of Frank’s bed, on the wall perpendicular to his own. It was not enough to clearly see everything, but it was just enough for him to be able to see the clothes he was pulling from his dresser. For the first time that year, Sirius was able to put on his regular clothes, and, having already decided upon an outfit in the minutes he spent laying still and waiting for his roommates to go to sleep, pulled out a pair of slim black trousers, a tight white t-shirt, and the leather jacket that lived permanently on the end of his bed frame, hooked on one of the low wire posts. If Sirius knew Benjy and Caradoc, this was them living out their post-academic book club fantasy, and would most likely turn up in some sort of suit. So, Sirius thought it fitting to wear his own version of a suit.
He tried to be as quiet as possible while changing, and carried his boots to the hall before putting them on so they wouldn’t make a noise against the floor. It would not be the end of the world were he to get caught sneaking out past curfew by one of them, certainly nothing out of the ordinary, but it was just all around easier if he could do it all while keeping a sense of privacy. Of course, he’d spill the whole thing to James and Peter over breakfast the next morning anyway, but there was a thrill in doing it all first on his own. Like this was his, something made for him, that he perfectly qualified for in a way that he hadn’t for anything before.

His boots also made a sound on the hardwood floor of the hall, and Sirius quickly realised that if he was going to make it all the way across the school without attracting the attention of anyone, he would need to make the journey in his socks. So, that’s what he did, ducking occasionally around corners if he thought he heard Filch, the janitor appointed to night watch duty, and making it to the second level of the classrooms a few minutes before 11, if his wristwatch held up to a moonlit window was correct.

It was also not until he had climbed the staircase and paused to put his boots on, now in the clear as the classrooms were entirely derelict past curfew, and checked around the corner down the hall that lead to the infirmary, that Sirius realised for the first time the possibility that Remus’ unexplained absences may have just been because he had some sort of illness that flared up regularly and meant that he had to spend all manner of hours in the infirmary.

Of course, it was equally possible that Remus was a bit more rebellious than Sirius initially assumed, and the continued mystery of it all did nothing to wipe the excited smile from his lips or calm the adrenaline fueled pounding of his heart in his chest.

Sirius had never had a class in room 221, he didn’t even know they went up that high, but there it was at the end of the row of second floor classrooms, tucked in a dark corner and looking like it hadn’t been opened in years. It only occurred to him once he’d reached for the knob that this could have been some kind of setup. Anything from a convoluted way for Benjy to once again get him alone, which, honestly, he wouldn’t much mind after going to all the effort of sneaking out there, to something downright malicious, though he didn’t know why anyone would target him. Payback maybe? The three of them had done a lot of pranks over the years.

Whatever it was, Sirius was already there, and his curiosity was far too powerful to let him turn back now, anyhow. The door stuck for a moment when he pushed it open, then gave and opened suddenly all the way in, making him stumble a little as he was all but launched into the room.

“Sorry I’m late!” He grinned.

He was late by all of a few seconds, but in a circle of old chairs and couches sat Benjy, Caradoc, and two of their seventh year friends whose names Sirius knew once but had elected to forget as it was not pertinent information, as well as three younger boys he had not seen before but judging by their choice to willingly wear ascots they were definitely of the gay variety, and…Remus. Remus Lupin. Remus who was not in their dorm room, who was sitting, one leg crossed over the other, dressed in brown corduroys and that dark green jumper, on the end of the couch with an elbow propped on the arm and his chin in his hand, surveying Sirius with wide eyes that held no sign of shock or fear, but a noticeable spark of excitement. Sirius nearly jumped him on the spot.

“Yes, well, have a seat, anywhere you like,” Caradoc told him, in a strong commanding Prefect voice, perched atop a tall stool like he was the one running the whole thing.

“Right,” Sirius breathed, then shut the door again solidly behind him, and moved for the only open seat, the other end of the couch next to Remus.
It was apparent immediately exactly why Sirius had never had a class in the room before, the place was a dump. Broken desks and chair were piled against the walls, with books and papers stacked randomly on any flat surface, all covered in a thick layer of dust and cobwebs like once upon a time the faculty had used it as some sort of makeshift storage room and then promptly forgot about it entirely. Only one of the overhead light bulbs seemed to be working, casting a dim glow over the group of them that made the whole thing feel strangely intimate, like they were all about to horribly start sharing deep and personal stories or something.

“As I was saying, no one can know about this. There’s no telling your friends in confidence, no inviting a friend a long because they’re curious about life on the other side of the fence. No one, and I’m dead serious about that,” Caradoc explained, sounding exactly that.

The three younger boys stared in mild horror, and nodded their assent quickly. For all that he was a poof, Caradoc was quite regular. Blonde, handsome, on the rugby and rowing teams and built perfectly for both, arms almost as thick as Sirius was around the middle. Not to mention all the connections he had via his parentage, one of them some relative or close friend of the current Prime Minister. He was, logically, not someone you would want to mess with, and seemed to like playing directly into it. Sirius rolled his eyes.

“That goes for you too, Sirius,” Benjy chided.

“What? Me? I’m great at secrets,” Sirius smirked. Benjy just shook his head fondly in reply. They both knew James and Peter would know everything in a matter of hours.

It carried on a bit as Sirius was expecting it to, and even though Caradoc had not turned up in a suit, Benjy and the two others had. They all lit up thin, fancy cigarettes and waved them about as they debated various poets and authors and playwrights like a game of verbal tennis that had the three younger boys swivelling their heads back and forth with every new argument or theory brought up. Sirius never learned their names, or the names of the other two upperclassmen. They seemed to think it was more clandestine that way.

Sirius didn’t pay much attention, however, as his own head was entirely filled by swirling thoughts that converged on one major point: Remus was gay. Or, at least, into boys enough to turn up to a bloody glorified gay book club. He chanced a glance out of the corner of his eyes at Remus’ crossed legs. His trousers weren’t even flared. He really was gay. Sirius wondered briefly how on earth Remus had come to know about this having not even been at the school for a whole week, but he was careful not to question too hard. He didn’t want to seem ungrateful.

It almost seemed too good to be true, like he’d fallen asleep last period in McGonagall’s Mathematics lesson and was about to be woken by a text book to the head. For all that Sirius had imagined a magical and sudden affair with Remus, he hadn’t really thought it to be actually possible. He’d almost not wanted to tease himself with the possibility of it all, had kept a distance and not bothered to pry Remus’ shell open in case he did not like what he discovered. But now, now he knew, whatever Remus had hiding under that green jumper and that air of grim solitude, Sirius wanted to discover it all.

The rest of them were still going on, pausing now and then to explain to the younger boys the intricacies of Dickens’ choice to characterise particular characters in the homoerotic way that he had, as they kept rapt attention and tried as best they could to stifle their yawning. Neither Sirius or Remus joined in, Remus having barely moved since Sirius had come in, but Sirius could barely stop himself from leaning towards him and saying in a low voice, “is it just me, or are they a little too good at all this?”

Remus didn’t reply, but he tilted ever so slightly towards Sirius, as if he had gone to turn towards
him but stopped himself. Sirius’ heart bloomed in his chest, and he knew in that moment, he would say anything to get Remus to properly look at him.

“I bet they don’t even care about literature, they just want a bunch of people to boss around,” he continued. “Probably aren’t even gay, just act the way they do because they’re posh and got confused.”

And then, it happened, The greatest moment in Sirius Black’s life, admittedly short as it had been at the time. Remus dropped his arm to his lap, and turned to look at Sirius with a bemused expression.

“Is that what happened to you?” He said sweetly.

Sirius’ heart pounded, and he was powerless to stop the bright grin that spread across his face.

“Not me. I know what I am,” Sirius smirked back, holding Remus’ eyes until he too gave a small smile.

“Dearborn, the time!” A shrill, posh voice had suddenly yelled.

Both Sirius and Remus whipped around to see where it had come from, spell thoroughly broken between the two of them. Once if the other upperclassmen had checked his watch, and in a fit of drama, stood suddenly from his chair for emphasis.

“Blimey, nearly 12 already. Well, let’s close up shall we, lads. What do you all say we all get a little Wilde, hm?” Caradoc grinned.

“That was rotten,” Benjy said, but he was laughing.

“I know, I know, I do apologise.” Caradoc laughed, then stood from his stool and crossed the room to gather up a stack of books that Sirius had previously assumed were part of the decor. “Why don’t you all take one of these, read it over the week, and next week we’ll reconvene and have a chat about our thoughts.”

“The Picture of Dorian Gray?” One of the three boys, the blonde one, where the others were brunette, said.

“Yes, do you know it?” Caradoc asked him. The boy shook his head.

“Ah, well I won’t spoil it for you, it’s quite the read. Though I will say the author, Oscar Wilde, was a homosexual himself, and despite being published in 1890, the main character also indulges in his fair share, if you look close enough. It’s not a happy tale, rather dark in fact, but a good lesson nevertheless.”

“Not to mention the rather erotic implications near the middle,” one of his friends added, making the four of them laugh properly like it was some sort of inside joke.

“Yes, well, don’t say I never did anything for you boys. Anyway, we will chat more about this all next week, goodbye for now. Also, do manage not to get caught on your way back to bed, and if you do, carry this night to your grave. I will not have any of you dobbing on the rest of us for failing to walk silently.”

Sirius took his copy when it was handed to him, but he did not flip through it or read the blurb, instead, shoved it into the pocket of his jacket and took his leave. He was too wrapped up in the revelation of Remus being bent to bother chasing Benjy down. Besides, now that he’d seen him in his natural aristocratic habitat, Benjy had been stripped of most of his sex appeal.
He hesitated in the hallway in case he could catch Remus on the way out and walk back with him, but when Sirius turned to see if he was on his way, he spotted he and Caradoc in what seemed to be an intense conversation. Well, that explained the mystery of how Remus had gotten involved.

So Sirius walked back to bed alone, striding out in front of the other nervous curfew-breakers with the confidence of someone who had done it many times before. The rest of them were still asleep when he cracked the door and silently climbed into pyjamas. He’d tell James in the morning, but right now, Sirius was going to sleep.

The early morning fog hung low and thick across the grounds behind the school, making everything seem a little colder than it probably was, a reminder of the snow that was to come in only a few short months. Weekends were not a chance for a lie in for Sirius in the way that they were for the rest of the students and faculty, his body seeing no difference in the days and waking him with the first rays of sun like normal.

Sirius was not the only one sullied to this fate however, as Saturday mornings were reserved for Rugby practice, out on the large pitch past the lake, one of many the sprawling grounds had. Which meant that James was out there with him, although he had the luxury of running around to warm up, while Sirius had to freeze. He didn’t have to freeze of course, seeing as he was not a team member and did not have to watch Rugby practices every week as he did, but as he was a supportive friend, he did. Besides, the Rugby uniform consisted of a jumper and short, black shorts, and there were quite a few fit blokes on the team, but James didn’t have to know that.

Lean figures raced around the pitch, smooth grey in their sports jumpers, all with black N’s sewn on the front, the colours of their team, and Sirius watched with only mild interest. Madame Hooch called out various instructions or plays or whatever they were called, but Sirius paid it no mind. He had floated through Friday, though Remus had gone right back to his evasive ways. Even that couldn’t dampen his spirit or make him forget the way Remus had smiled at him, or the sound of his smooth voice, which held the promise of mischievousness just underneath his carefully picked words. He felt like one of the romantics they’d studied the year before, Keats, or maybe Byron, consumed by his feelings, the world a little brighter for Remus being in it.

And it was a nice day, birds were already awake and singing in their trees, the grass glistened white with its layer of dew, crunching a little underfoot in the cool morning, sunlight broke through the clouds in patches and shone splintered rays against the pale horizon. Sirius sat on one of the spectator’s benches, wrapped in a cream knitted sweater and his leather jacket, the copy of Dorian Gray on his lap, and could almost not bare to look away from it all to open it and begin reading.

Sirius knew Wilde, he’d read some of his poems the summer after he’d learned he was gay, both himself and Wilde that is, but they didn’t much make sense at the time because he was too young. As such, he didn’t really know what to expect, but by the time James was running up to him, sweaty and a little mud-covered at the end of his practice, Sirius found that he was nearly a quarter way through it and absolutely hooked.

“At the sex part yet?” James said, nudging his muddy Converse against Sirius’ boot. The man in the shop had called them ‘Beatle boots’ and Sirius had bought them immediately.

“Not yet, but you can borrow it after me if you’re that curious about it.” Sirius folded the corner down to mark his page, then managed to fit the whole thing in his jacket pocket and stood.
They began to meander back towards the main building together so that James could shower and change before breakfast, as well as take out his contacts and put his glasses back on. He only wore them for practice and games, and even after all these years Sirius was not completely used to him with a bare face.

“No thanks, the assigned stuff is enough for me. I still don’t get why you’re actually choosing to read more than you have to, you’ll turn into Frank and then be too busy to come pull pranks with me and Pete,” James said, bumping his shoulder with Sirius casually as they went.

“Maybe I actually like to read, you know, to build character and all that. I can be both things at once,” he retorted.

“Or maybe you just wanna go back and talk to Remus again next week,” James accused.

Sirius grinned and felt himself blush a little, not at the mention of Remus, but at his best mate knowing him so exactly. It was true; Sirius was a fast reader, and enjoyed it at that, but the whole midnight rendezvous palaver was a bit much, even for him, who thrives off of underground protest movements and such. It was the thought of seeing Remus again, under those dim lights, engaged in a way he never was in class, that drew Sirius back in.

“Tell me again why you two can’t just talk normally? Why does it have to be in that club in the middle of the night? It’s not like he doesn’t wanna be seen with you, you live together.”

“Honestly, I don’t know. I wasn’t exactly imagining we’d run off into the sunset together or anything like that, but I did think afterwards we’d at least be conversational, only he’s still disappearing off at all hours.”

“You said he was talking to Caradoc after, maybe that’s where he goes,” James shrugged, as if he hadn’t just caused Sirius to feel like someone had poured ice water down his back.

Only, that couldn’t be it. Yeah, they were chatting, and they clearly knew each other, and he couldn’t blame Caradoc if he had taken one look at Remus on the first day and already gotten with him. But they had been standing so far apart, and Remus hadn’t had that look of excitement like he’d had when Sirius had been the one talking to him.

“You’re the one on the team with him, does Caradoc seem like he’s gotten with Remus already?” Sirius said, trying his absolute hardest to keep his voice casual.

“Just because I’m on the team with him, does not mean we are close mates. But it’s Caradoc, you’d be hard pressed to find a bloke he hasn’t gotten with,” James replied just as they reached the small courtyard that led them back inside.

“Know from experience do you?” Sirius grinned, and pushed his way inside to head for the dorms.

“Oh, fuck off,” James rolled his eyes.

Unbeknownst to him, of course, McGonagall had unwittingly picked that moment to take a stroll through the same corridor. At this point, Sirius would not have been shocked to find out she had placed some sort of monitoring charm on the both of them.

“Potter! Language!” She called.

“Sorry, Professor!” James called back, and ran after Sirius, who saw him coming and did the same.

“No running!” She yelled again.
“Sorry!” They yelled back in unison, and ran even harder.

School picked up the next week. The Professors seemed to think one week was enough time for them all to settle in satisfactorily and began doling out essays and assignments on top of regular bookwork, double the amount of the previous year since they were now upperclassmen and thus had College in their immediate sights.

Sirius didn’t much care for going to College, and at that point was of the opinion that he’d get away with living off his inheritance for as long as possible, maybe get his own place in London and feel like a regular member of society instead of some ponce stuck in an ivory tower. He did care for staying out of detention if possible, however, mostly to keep his time free, and therefore did all of the work he was assigned, usually the day it was given, because he’d done the last minute thing before and it had not worked out in his favour.

Which meant that the lot of them had been rather locked in their room all week. Remus had been there for some of it, silent at his own desk working away fervently in the same way the rest of them were, but mostly he had been off elsewhere, probably in the library as Peter had reported spotting him there when he’d gone to borrow a book for his own History essay.

It was nice to know he wasn’t off with Caradoc all the time, more for Sirius’ own self-esteem than that he felt he had any sort of claim over Remus. He wasn’t a creep. And on more than one occasion Sirius had contemplated slipping out to the annex at the back of the main building that housed the school’s sprawling library, but quickly decided that it would be akin to stalking and stayed put in his room.

Despite having written hundreds of essays over his time there, Sirius had not frequented the Newton library as much as the rest of the student body presumably had. It was beautiful. Dark wood everywhere, dim ceiling lights and table lamps that created an atmosphere of focus and studiousness, rows and rows of old books on any topic you could ever want, within age-appropriate reason of course, and even thin wrought iron balconies that ran the circumference of the room high up on the wall for the books that were not allowed to leave the library. It seemed the sort of place that Remus would enjoy, nice and quiet and everyone concerned with only their own business.

Which is why Sirius did not often find himself there. He was loud and brash and chatty, and the librarian, Madam Pince, had thrown him out for being disruptive or disrespectful more times than he could count. It was almost like a game now, could he duck in and get whatever books he needed without her spotting him. This was fine with him of course, as he liked to spend time with his mates in their room, able to talk when he liked and be as disruptive as he wanted before they yelled at him to shut up.

But Sirius could also only take so much of being in his own room as well, and, upon finishing his essay for Warburton and realising he still had another two to go, had decided to go for a walk and clear his head before tackling any more, or his brain was going to explode. Still in his uniform, as he would need to be in it for dinner that evening, minus the tie he’d ripped it off as soon as he’d gotten back at the end of last period, Sirius headed for the main part of the building, past all of the study rooms and professor’s offices, directly to the outdoor courtyard, with all of its stone pillar archways and quiet places to take a breath.
He didn’t get a chance to sit and relax however, because as soon as he’d gotten there and taken one look out at the grounds past the courtyard, he’d seen a lone figure by the canal, seated on one of the low, wide railings at the foot of the old wooden bridge that crossed over it. It was Remus, reclined and perfectly balanced, also in his uniform but with a grey woollen coat on top, reading a book. Sirius felt the wind go from his lungs at the sight. No matter anything else, it would always be true that Remus was the most beautiful boy he’d ever seen at Newton, and he spent a lot of time looking out for beautiful boys.

As if drawn by a magnet, Sirius began walking towards him without really realising he was doing it, and soon he had reached the grassy bank by the bridge. Remus didn’t look up, so Sirius crept further, until he stood before him so that he was looking slightly down at him. He could see then that the novel Remus was clutching was the exact same one that was tucked under his own pillow back in the dorm.

“Good book?” Sirius said.

Remus didn’t start or seem surprised at his presence, and must have heard him approaching and decided that continuing to read had taken precedence. Instead, he lazily lifted his head to look up at Sirius, squinting a little with the sun now in his eyes.

“I’m not sure. I don’t yet know how it ends,” he replied.

“Well then, I eagerly await your thoughts this Thursday night,”

The far off sounds of rhythmic yelling and grunting grew gradually louder and louder, and both boys paused for a minute as the rowing team made their way further and further down the canal to where they both stood at the bridge. The team members were all in striped black and bronze jerseys, the other of Newton’s school colours, the same shade as was striped on each student’s tie, thin lines of silver and bronze, interspaced with thick black, perfectly matching the crests and banners dotted throughout the buildings.

Water splitting seamlessly around the pointed hull, they glided across the surface, oars in perfect unison as they leant back and forth to row backwards, paying the both of them no mind, all focus and complete trust in the captain looking forward and guiding them with his large speaker cone. Both boys watched, transfixed for a moment at the elegant precision of it, then, once they were far enough down the canal that the noises were once again nothing more than dull echoes in the background, turned to one another to continue.

“Is this where you always run off to?” Sirius asked, the hint of a smirk creeping to his lips and a lightness in his voice.

“Not always,” Remus replied cryptically. He seemed to also be enjoying teasing Sirius with the roundabout sort of way they conducted conversations.

“But sometimes,” Sirius prodded.

“Only when the rowing team has practice,” Remus said, for the first time breaking his cool exterior with a handsome smirk.

Sirius grinned back, thrilled to finally have someone to whom he could relate with things like that. James and Peter were always good sports, but there was certainly a large difference between patiently listening to them fawn about girls, and hearing the object of your desire talk about how much he liked looking at men in the same way you did. He hadn’t noticed Caradoc on the boat, but then, he hadn’t really been looking for him.
Remus closed his book and leaned forward to jump back down to the ground. When he stood at full height, his face barely inches away from Sirius’ own, Sirius realised that it was the first time they had been so close together since they had met, and that Remus was a good few inches taller than he was. It took everything within him not to reach out and touch Remus, somewhere, anywhere he could get his fingertips on; the mousy brown hair that curled over the shell of his ear, the peak of his high cheekbone, the faded groove of the scar that ran across the bridge of his nose.

But it was Remus who gave in first. He dropped the novel into the pocket of his coat and with both hands now free, smoothed them across Sirius’ uniform lapel, straightening it and flattening it down, never breaking their eye contact. Once he appeared to be satisfied, instead of taking back his hands, Remus slid one of them up until he reached the top of Sirius’ shoulder and could reach the black locks of curled hair that rested there, twisting his fingers through the ends. Sirius could barely breathe.

“You know, with your long hair and this almost-suit, you would make a good Dorian,” Remus said with a barely held smile. Sirius wasn’t sure whether that could really be considered a compliment or not, but as Remus was still standing in front of him, and had not run off in fear or disgust, he decided to take it as one.

“I’m not supposed to be porcelain pale? I think I’m a few shades off.” Sirius had what he liked to call a year-round tan. It was of mysterious origins, passed down from his father’s side, possibly from somewhere in the Middle East if the rest of his features were anything to go by.

“Not necessarily.” Remus said, as if they were discussing any other topic they might have learned about in class. “Just described as good looking.”

Sirius grabbed the hand still brushing through his hair by the wrist, and brought it between them. Remus didn’t try and break out of his firm grip, just moved it back and forth, twisting his fingers upward in much the same way he had just been doing to Sirius’ hair. In the sunlight, he looked nearly transparent, the bright blue-green of his veins stark just under the skin, criss crossing over tendons which stretched and moved as his fingers danced through the air. He was the colour of cold marble, all the way up to his fingertips, where the skin under the nail and the pads of each finger glowed a soft red, like the end of a nose in winter.

“Same thing,” Sirius said, and grinned when Remus blushed, his cheeks a beautiful warm to match his fingers.

Remus did take his hand back then, but not forcefully, and Sirius let his coat sleeve slip from his grasp, then watched as Remus took a step backward. He hadn’t realised just how close they had been standing. Sirius wanted to say something more, anything, just to keep Remus talking to him forever, but before he could, Remus had smirked and turned on the spot and was striding purposefully away, back up to the school building. He didn’t look back, no suggestive glance over his shoulder that beckoned Sirius to follow after him.

Sirius slumped against the railing, all of the excited tension vacating his body at once, leaving him feeling slightly drained. Was that what it was like to be in love? It was exhausting. In the distance, he could see that the rowing team had turned around and were headed once again back towards the boat shed. Sirius turned too, and headed back inside.
It soon became clear to Sirius that he had begun marking his time by proximity to Thursday evenings, though he was not sure exactly when that had started. Where the other boys waited for Friday nights where they could finally begin the weekend and stay up as late as they wanted without fear of sleeping in the next morning, or maybe the weekend itself, where they were free to leave campus and go down into London for a night on the town or meet up with the girls from the nearby state school, Sirius craved the dank, dusty smell of that room, the dim lighting and the thrilling secrecy of it all. When he thought about it, it was very much like being in an actual closet, and the irony of it only served to thrill him more.

But their club was still a heavily guarded secret, which meant that when the other boys in their dorm decided to stay up chatting and playing cards late into the night, it was not as simple as slipping out unnoticed, at least not for Sirius, as Remus had managed it sometime around 10:50 without anyone batting an eye. So, Sirius had to wait. He folded early in an attempt to halt their game, but it just made the other five, Frank inexplicably joining in this time and no doubt adding to the motivation to continue the revelry, more motivated to keep going as their own win was in sights.

Sirius contemplated telling them he was off for a solo mission to the kitchens, or even that he needed the loo and that it would just take an exorbitantly long time, but by some stroke of miracle, or maybe because he was a little more observant than people gave him credit for, James had announced he was tired, and soon they were all turning in for the night, crawling into their respective beds and switching out their lamps in unison. Sirius wasted no time getting out of there. He hadn’t changed out of his uniform dress shirt and trousers after dinner, so he resigned himself to appearing in that, adding the leather jacket on top in a way that just made him seem confused, rather than rebellious.

Again he made the trip in socks, gathering up dirt and dust on the soles in a way that had made even someone as messy as Peter balk the week before, and nearly a full half hour late, he appeared once again in front of that tucked-away classroom door.

He opened the door, smoother this time having remembered that it would stick, and without preamble addressed the assembled group. “This time, I really am sorry I’m late.”

All heads turned towards him, and if there had been a conversation going it was halted. There was a new boy in attendance as well, another sort of familiar face from the seventh year, only not one of Caradoc and Benjy’s usual cohort. Looking at him, Sirius would not have picked he was bent; he looked as nauseatingly charming as the rest of the student body, with neatly cut dark hair combed to one side, a collared shirt and smart trousers. He was also in Sirius’ seat on the couch next to Remus, who had been once gain following Sirius’ every movement with his chin in his hands, so Sirius took the rickety wooden chair between Benjy and one of the younger boys.

“Not to worry,” Benjy said in a way that suggested there had been quite a bit of worry. “We were just discussing what we thought of the novel.”

“Did you read it?” Caradoc added, sounding like he though Sirius actually reading a book was the most unlikely thing in the world.

Sirius grinned, wide and cheeky. “Sure did.”

“You-You didn’t like it?” Benjy asked, wearing a smile that was clearly an effort to hide his surprise.

“It was a fine novel. Well written with a good moral and all that, but I don't understand why, if the author was gay himself, he would choose to make Dorian bent when he was supposed to be an evil person.”

“Well, it’s about hedonistic vices being one’s downfall,” one of the other upperclassmen said, as if
he were explaining something simple to a child.

“I got that,” Sirius rolled his eyes. “But the implication that men being together is the same as murder and envy and all those sins. *That* I didn’t get. From what I’ve read about Wilde he thought being gay was grand, why wouldn’t he make Lord Henry or even Vane the one who was bent, instead of the evil one?”

A silent pause rang out in the dim room for a moment while everyone thought it over, and then a creaking sound came from the end of the couch as the newcomer leaned forward.

“You do understand it was illegal at the time, and the only way he could have gotten any explicitly homoerotic content past the sensors was to attribute it to this evil character, as you say,” he remarked.

“Then why write it at all? All it does is reinforce the idea that being bent makes you somehow inhuman and gives everyone else more ammunition.”

“Yes, but that is only true if one already believes that way. You and I who read this and know that being gay is not all of those things, understand that Gray is simply living without societal constraints and his expression of sexuality is a symptom, not of his evil nature, but his disregard for people’s opinions, and thus can be seen as a byproduct of his not being proper, rather than the cause of it.

“And isn’t it true that in the end he sees the error of his own ways, and cannot be entirely evil if he has a conscience?” He finished with a smile, as if he had won some sort of argument. Sirius wasn’t going to let him off that easy.

“But if the ending implies he has seen the error of his ways and all of the previous events were like a sort of teenage rebellion, then isn’t it also true that him being with men is part of that, and included in all of the things he must repent for?”

“I don’t think he was trying to imply that having those attractions is a morally negative thing. I just think he wanted to slip it in wherever he could and this was the only place people would let him, so that years later, men like us could gather around and read a book about someone like us.” Benjy interjected, in an attempt to get the discussion back on track and bring it back to the group. The rest of them hummed thoughtfully, like Benjy had just declared the true purpose of it all, and he preened a little at the praise.

Sirius didn’t care either way. He liked the novel fine, it was just fun to get a rise out of them all. He looked to Remus, just to watch him or maybe see if he was paying attention to the whole charade, and found him already staring back, wide eyed, lips parted just slightly. His head was cocked subtly to one side like he was focussing on figuring something out, and he held eye contact as if he was trying to look right into Sirius’ brain.

It was a lot, having Remus look so openly upon him like that, and almost without thinking, as if in reflex, Sirius winked at him. Remus jolted slightly, snapping out of whatever thoughts had been going through his mind, and the same red blush rose on his scarred cheeks as had on that afternoon by the canal.

“I’m glad you all enjoyed it, that is what this is here for. Introducing the youth of tomorrow to the literature truly worth reading.

“Shakespeare? But we do that with Warburton in Literature,” a younger boy said, holding the novel out in front of him delicately like it might have been poisonous.
Once again, Sirius took his copy once Caradoc reached him, and this time deigned to read the cover. It was an old edition, the browned paper crumbling in places and the printed script looped and fancy. The cover merely said Sonnets, William Shakespeare and Sirius did not put it in his pocket for fear it would tear.

“Yes, Warburton does love good old Shakespeare. But I do wonder what he would think were he to find out that our boy Will is on record as being in love with a young man,”

“What?” One of the upperclassmen said, at the same time the other one said, “You are lying.”

“Would I lie to you?” Caradoc replied, and for the first time Sirius saw a glimpse of what lay just under the surface. That spark of flamboyance, a penchant for showmanship, kept tightly guarded and completely covered around everyone but them. “It is a hundred percent true lads. Sonnets 1 through 154, known as the Fair Youth Sequence, dedicated to an as yet unknown chap.”

A pleased hum ran through the assembled group. Even Sirius was intrigued, now.

“Well, I for one am rather excited to find out what exactly these love letters contain,” an upperclassman said.

Caradoc smiled, clearly satisfied. “And I am excited to hear all of your thoughts next week. See you lads then.”

Which meant the meeting was over for another week, painfully short, but certainly worth it. For all that the group of them had their share of upper class habits, Sirius was certainly used to that from the rest of the student body, himself included, he was well trained in looking past that to be able to enjoy the actual point of the meetings: a bunch of benders reading books.

They all rose in accidental unison, and Sirius readied himself to intercept Remus on the way out. In the middle of the crowd would have been too awkward, and so would stopping him at the door, especially if people were still trying to leave through it. In fact, Sirius decided eventually, that it would be best to stop him en route, and then walk the rest of the way together, to try and finish the plan that had been interrupted the week prior. Only, it appeared that someone else had a similar idea, and this time, it was focussed towards Sirius.

A figure appeared in Sirius’ field of vision, blocking Remus out entirely. “I don’t believe we’ve met. Edgar Bones. You know, I don’t necessarily believe your reading is incorrect. I do agree that associating being gay with hedonism doesn’t do anyone much good, but I do love a good discussion. You should consider joining the debating team, I have a feeling you would be a good fit.”

Sirius gave him the most polite once over he could muster, which, all things considered, did end up being rather polite. He knew this kid, well, this type of kid. The chummy overachiever, straddling the line between oppressor and oppressed, rich in a way that made being gay just downright unfair, desperate for any way to rid himself of the chip on his shoulder, yet so attached he would not know where to begin without it. There was only enough space in Sirius’ life for one chip, and it firmly rested upon his own leather-clad shoulder, thank you very much.

“I appreciate it, mate. But I’m looking for something a bit more low-maintenance at the minute,” he replied, and high-tailed it out of there.
It turned out that Sirius did not have to wait very long, much less another whole week, before being able to talk to Remus properly. The next morning in fact, instead of the usual routine of waking at dawn, observing whether or not Remus was present, waking his roommates, washing and dressing with them and all going down together for breakfast, Sirius had for some odd reason awoken before sunrise. Not entirely unheard of, but certainly not very common.

He checked his watch on the nightstand and, finding it to be too late to bother going back to sleep as he would be awoken in barely half an hour anyway, decided to get up. Everyone else was sound asleep in their beds still, so Sirius gathered his uniform and took it to the bathroom to change into there, where he was free to make as much noise as he liked.

Sirius showered in the evenings, it was just not possible to have his hair dry before he got to class, something which would absolutely have afforded him a detention, so his time in the empty bathroom was quick. He mucked about for a bit, going through all the shampoos and personal items that other boys kept in the showers and by the sink, until the first rays of the morning broke through the tiny window at the top of the bathroom wall, and then returned to perform his daily duties of making sure his mates didn’t get their arses kicked for being tardy.

A few boys passed him in the corridor on his way back, among them Remus, also carrying his uniform with his toiletries, and it made Sirius happy to think that Remus also thought to be so courteous. He didn’t smile at Sirius, but he didn’t duck his head and ignore him either like he might have a few weeks ago, so Sirius counted it as a win.

The boys all woke as normal, rather like a group of zombies crawling out of their graves, moaning and groaning included, but eventually they too were up. Remus appeared again briefly to deposit his sleepwear and collect his stack of books for the day, but slipped out as quickly and silently as he’d come. James had initially looked perplexed at Sirius’ state of dress, once he’d put his glasses on of course, but hadn’t mentioned it, most likely because he knew that his curly hair was always quite a mess in the mornings and therefore did not have room to comment of the state of anyone else’s appearance, and would be told as much.

Sirius lasted all of about 5 minutes sitting and watching and waiting for the rest of them to get dressed and ready without anything for himself to do. It seemed impossible that they all took this long every morning.

“Right, I’m going for breakfast. I’ll meet you lot down there,” he said once he had grown sufficiently restless, then grabbed his books from his desk, and left.

“Awright mate,” Peter replied through the wool of his uniform sweater, where it was stuck over his head.

Sirius felt a bit weird going for breakfast on his own. It was almost always something they did together, barr sick days and all that, like soldiers sharing a meal in camaraderie before facing the enemy as one. The enemy in their case being either their stuffy professors, or, more accurately, the institution of education itself. Either way it was a tall order, and so they placed a great significance on the most important meal of the day.

One might have been expected to feel a little self conscious or possibly slightly lost upon entering a space in which they normally had a group of friends to back them up, but Sirius did not obey the regular laws of human confidence levels. Every part of the school was his as much as his own room was, and no rich, white, straight boy was ever going to be able to intimidate Sirius Black into anything that resembled shyness, no matter how many of them there were grouped together.

The hall was only about a third of the way filled at that early a time, meaning that Sirius was spoiled
for choice in terms of seating, so he stood just inside the entrance for a moment and scanned the room, debating his options. He didn’t get very far, however, because there Remus sat, alone underneath the large, ornate cathedral style window, lit from behind, the closest thing to an angel the halls of Newton had ever seen, being as it was non-denominational. The early morning sun filtered through the frosted glass in a perfect square around Remus, who once again had his face in a book and had either finished his breakfast already or was too distracted to have begun in the first place.

Sirius wondered momentarily why exactly he had been running into Remus more and more often; was it that he was constantly drawn to him, pulled closer by some sort of cosmic force, or had he become so used to the sight of Remus’ face that it was now second nature to pick him out of a crowd? Or, maybe, Remus was simply letting himself be more easily found. Either way, Sirius was not going to pass up an opportunity so perfectly presented to him.

He strode purposefully down the gap between the long table and the far wall of windows and met Remus about a third of the way. The seat next to him was free, as were all of the other seats around them, so he took it casually, as if he were any other student just there to eat and get on with his day. Once the light engulfed Sirius too, it felt like entering into another world. The silverware and serving trays glinted around them, and the sun was warm on his back like a thick blanket, turning Remus himself a shade of gold that rivalled even Sirius.

It was beautiful; like nothing else existed. No school, no classmates, no Warburton. Just Remus and his ever present book and his red fingertips and his casual disregard for Sirius even though he absolutely heard him sit down. It was thrilling and constantly made Sirius want to do more, be more, more impressive or smooth or quick witted. He’d do anything for Remus to look at him like he did the night before, like Sirius was the most amazing creature that ever lived.

Remus turned a page and Sirius was shaken out of his thoughts. He looked down to see the patchy, faded words of Shakespeare staring back up at him and smiled.

“Pretty brave of you to be reading that so out in the open,” Sirius grinned, and put an elbow on the table and his head in his hand to lean sideways towards Remus.

“What do you mean? Warburton said Shakespeare is a perfect example of British excellence. There’s nothing uncouth about any of his works, why should I worry about getting caught with this?” Came the casual reply.

“I almost want to tell him old Bill was a bender just to see the look on his face, but then you’d lose your book, and I’d never do that to you,” Sirius said.

Remus rolled his eyes, but Sirius could tell he was trying his hardest not to smile. “How kind of you.”

“You know, I never realised how bloody confusing Shakespeare is when you haven’t got someone standing up the front of a class explaining it line by line.”

“You just have to pay close attention,” Remus sighed.

Sirius smiled. “Okay. Read me one. I promise I’ll pay attention.”

“Right, er. Well,” Remus stuttered for a moment. He seemed caught off guard, like he hadn’t expected Sirius to say something like that, and it made Sirius grin to know he still had cards in his hand to play. Remus blushed a little, then cleared his throat elegantly and began to read the sonnet that was open on the next page. “Is it thy will thy image should keep open my heavy eyelids to the weary night? Dost thou desire my slumbers should be broken, while shadows like to thee do mock...
my sight? Is it thy spirit that thou send’st from thee so far from home into my deeds to pry, to find out
shames and idle hours in me, the scope and tenor of thy jealousy? O, no! thy love, though much, is
not so great: it is my love that keeps mine eye awake; mine own true love that doth my rest defeat, to
play the watchman ever for thy sake: for thee watch I whilst thou dost wake elsewhere, from me far
off, with others all too near.”

They stared at each other for a moment, breathing deeply and unable to look away. The moment felt
like it went forever, as if they had missed the morning bell and were now late for their first class, but
Sirius couldn’t bring himself to care. Remus’ strong, melodic voice floated around his head in
swirling patterns, hypnotising him further and further into infatuation. His heart pounded where it
was lodged up in his throat, and he wondered absently whether Caradoc would mind Sirius handing
back his own copy with a page missing. What he didn’t know wouldn’t hurt him.

“Nope. No clue. Something about sleeping, but that’s all I’ve got,” Sirius said.

“Really?” Remus seemed genuinely shocked, the coy facade dropped entirely and replaced by
honest confusion.

It was incredibly endearing, and the first time Sirius had been granted a glimpse behind the cheeky,
witty exterior Remus always presented to him. Apparently unable to stay serious for very long
around him however, a wide grin began to form on Sirius’ face, to which Remus rolled his eyes and
closed his book to shove Sirius’ shoulder

They ate in silence for a while. Well, Sirius ate, and Remus continued to read, but it was comfortable
all the same, like they did it every morning, effortless and perfectly content in each others presence.
There was even a point where Sirius had been searching for the salt shaker, and without looking up,
as if he knew exactly what Sirius was thinking, Remus had handed it to him, and the two of them
continued on like it was perfectly normal.

Without the presence of Peter and James creating constant conversation, Sirius took the opportunity
to watch the other students in the hall. The contrast was clear between those who were morning
people and those who were not, and Sirius found it rather entertaining to pick out those bleary eyed
and messy haired boys from the crowd like a sort of game. His other roommates had still not
appeared, but there was still a good 15 minutes until the morning bell, so that was not unusual, as the
group of them had long perfected the art of eating breakfast with seconds to go so there was no
telling when they would eventually surface.

Inevitably, Sirius’ stroll through the faces of Newton landed him on the familiar yet jarring sight of
his little brother. James had been right, they did rather look a lot like each other, to the point where
they were called the opposites names so often that their professors resolved to only referring to the
both of them as Mr. Black. For all that they did go to the same school, they had almost nothing to do
with each other during the term. It was not just because they had enough during the breaks, or
because they would get told off for bickering in the halls, no, the problem Sirius had with Regulus
was not really with him at all, but the group of boys currently surrounding him.

Somehow in his four years at Newton, Regulus had managed to make friends with the richest,
slimest, nastiest lot of them all. And that was saying something, because a lot of corrupt bigwigs
were honoured alumni. Sirius didn’t blame him, not entirely; he was young, and they exuded
influence and status. To be their fresh ingenue must have seemed a big honour if you ran in those
sort of circles. But Sirius very much did not, and instead watched those circles from the outside, and
saw that they were a bunch of bigots in three piece suits, parading around with their parent’s money
and last names.

So, Sirius tried his best to stay out of it all. His mother and father were thrilled that Regulus had made
such important friends, and he was not about to cause a scene and burst his little brother’s bubble anytime soon. A standpoint which was, of course, tested greatly at times like these, when Malfoy, seventh year and unofficial leader, who was seated next to Regulus, leaned in solemnly with a hand on his shoulder to tell him something, and Regulus nodded his head emphatically, lapping up every word like a little kid. It was hard watching his own brother be corrupted before his eyes.

Sirius must have made an unhappy sound or tensed up or something, because a warm hand came to rest on his shoulder, and Remus’ concerned face came into his peripheral.

“Are you okay?” He asked. Not patronisingly, but with just the perfect amount of care.

“Always,” Sirius grinned widely, and turned to look at Remus. Over his shoulder, however, he spotted the exhausted faces of his friends, rubbernecking around the hall, presumably looking for him. “Lazy sods are finally up.”

Remus smiled back, reassured or maybe amused, and also turned to look at the group of them coming in. Sirius felt his stomach fall a little. Would Remus take off like he usually did from social situations? Or would Sirius have to decline breakfast with his mates? He wouldn’t leave Remus to his lonesome again, not just because he didn’t want to, but because that would be incredibly rude, not to mention imply that Remus was the next best thing when he couldn’t get his first choice of dining partners. James and Peter were still looking around, ambling slowly about, now just trying to find an empty spot big enough for all of them since the hall had filled up so much.

“Wave them over here,” Remus said calmly, shocking Sirius back to reality.

“Pardon?” The hall was loud, but Sirius had heard him fine. He was just surprised at what he had heard.

“There’s plenty of room,” Remus gestured to the empty seats opposite them, where the sunlight had receded slightly so that it reached only to their side of the table.

Sirius stared at Remus for a moment, trying to determine whether the smile on his lips was covering up any awkwardness or secret displeasure. Remus seemed like the self-suffering type. But he could not find any hint of hidden emotion, just pleasant crinkles by his eyes that Sirius had not noticed before.

“Okay,” Sirius breathed, then stood tall above the seated boys like a beacon, and waved a hand when he caught James’ eye.

He sat a little further down the bench, slightly more away from Remus as they had, at some point, moved quite close to one another. Soon, four boisterous boys joined them at the table, Frank having been scooped up by his group of mates from other years, James across from Sirius with Peter to his side, and Fabian across from Remus, with Gideon to his. They did not make a show of seeing Remus outside of the dorm room, just dug into breakfast with all the gusto of growing teenage boys, and similarly Remus did not seem intimidated by their presence, serenely putting away his book and making himself a plate.

“Bloody hell, I’m starving. Why am I so starving? I ate all that dinner last night,” James said through a mouthful of toast.

“It’s cuz we don’t do those midnight trips to the kitchens anymore,” Peter replied, doing rather the same.

“You’re right Pete, why did we stop doing those?”

“Because last year Filch saw us and said if he caught us again he’d drag us to Dumbledore, remember?” Fabian added.

“But that was last year, it doesn’t count, we’ve got a new slate now.”

“Why didn’t he drag you to Dumbledore that time?” Remus interjected.

They all laughed together; not meanly, like Remus was stupid for asking, but fondly, happy to be recalling old memories. Sirius’ heart throbbed inside his chest.

“Cuz James threatened to use his connections to get him fired,” Gideon said with a smirk.

“That is not what happened! You’re remembering it wrong,” James squawked, affronted, once again perfectly taking the bait that Gideon had dangled in front of him many times before by that point.

“Oh, right, because ‘you’d be making a big mistake, I would think twice about dobbing us in if I were you’ is so easy to misconstrue,” Sirius said.

“I meant morally! Not that I’d do something to him! I just wanted him to think twice about whether ruining our fun was really what he wanted to do with his life! He’s just doing his job, it’s not his fault we’re all brats,” he finished, and the rest of them laughed again.

“Speak for yourself, mate,” Sirius said, and ducked expertly to the side when James catapulted a baked bean at him with his spoon.

He wished this meal would go on forever. Screw Mathematics, screw Chemistry, and most of all, screw Literature.

Things were different from then on. Not entirely, Remus still disappeared sometimes, though Sirius now knew it was to the library to catch up on homework, and he preferred to sit and read his books than to join in on their loud card games in the evenings, but . They would eat together, go to class together, chat in the mornings and while lounging around the dorm. Sirius hadn’t managed to get him alone again however, not even on the next Thursday night, as Edgar had accosted him once again to see if he had reconsidered the debating offer.

He felt like he was going to explode, the anticipation and desire to just talk to Remus one on one was building everyday, and Sirius almost wanted to go back to the evasion if it meant that they could continue their half fliting half antagonising thing they had been doing for a while.

Not that it wasn’t nice to be able to talk to Remus whenever he wanted, even if other people were in the conversation as well. He was learning a lot about Remus, such as the fact that he was on a scholarship, the reason behind his transfer at such an odd time, he loved Astronomy but was pants at Chemistry, and that he was almost better that Sirius at sneaking food back up from dinner.

It all served to make his crush worsen, however. Sirius spent almost as much time listening as he did staring at Remus in Literature, although anything was preferable to listening to Warburtons’s drivel. In fact, if it weren’t for Remus and Sirius’ perfect view of him, he might not even show up to the class at all. But as it was, he was hopeless, something James liked to remind him on the daily, and still showed, if only to make the difference between the class and their meetings more pronounced.
Meals on weekends were treated differently than meals on weekdays. During the week, there was more of a production. A routine. They were to show up on time and sit together like men at some sort of fancy event, in the suit-like uniforms with napkins and polite conversation, three meals a day, always at the same time. Weekends were a lot less formal. They were not mandatory, and, if old enough, boys were permitted to make the walk into the nearest town to eat there if they preferred. Uniforms were not required, though proper dress, and absolutely no pyjamas, were expected, and meals were more menial, mostly just variations of bread and cheese.

Sirius made the trek to the hall, in proper clothes, slim grey trousers and his cream jumper, a little after lunch began. The times were also looser of weekends, and food tended to stay out until it had all gone or until the table was needed for the next meal.

That morning, Remus had woken up at the same time as the rest of them, but had still been in bed when they were leaving for breakfast. Sirius initially assumed that he was waiting for the rest of them to vacate the bathroom, but it had been a good while and still he had not shown for breakfast. Which meant that there was a possibility that he was still in the room. Which meant that if Sirius went back up, he might possibly be able to catch Remus alone. Any possibility was reason enough for Sirius.

He stood suddenly, drawing attention from both James and Peter as well as some other boys around them. “Er, I’ve just remembered, I have to go see Binns about that essay on Dunkirk.”

“Now? On a Saturday?” James asked.

“We don’t have class til Tuesday, and that’s when it’s due, so I have to go now.”

“Alright. See you back at the room later?”

“Yeah, sure,” Sirius said, and left so fast he was sure he had accidentally upended a table or two on his way out.

When he opened the door, Remus was inside, and he was alone, perched on the sill of the open window closest to his bed in the corner spot, a cigarette clutched delicately between two fingers. Sirius vowed to never ignore his gut ever again. Ever. Sirius watched for a moment as he put it to his lips, still staring out at the courtyard below, ignoring Sirius’ entrance as he always did. His cheeks hollowed out as he inhaled, Sirius’ sweaty palm slipped off the door knob, he exhaled a cloud into the outside air, Sirius’ thundering heart pumped adrenaline around his body until his limbs went numb. It was as if time stopped, everything leading up to this one moment that held the promise of something great.

“Thinking of jumping?” Sirius said, voice echoing around the room, breaking the soft silence.

The barest of smiles graced Remus’ face, and he stubbed the butt out on the stone exterior of the building, reaching down so far Sirius was afraid he might topple over, then dropped it into the bushes below. He didn’t climb back inside, just twisted enough to face Sirius, and leant his head back onto the frame so that he was looking down his nose at him, eyes half lidded.

“Just figuring out the most efficient way to toss you out when you’ll least be expecting it,” he said slowly, sedately, like he wanted to stretch out the conversation for as long as possible.

Sirius swallowed, then stepped further into the room, knocking the door with an elbow so it swung
shut behind him, sealing them both in their own world.

“Daydreaming about me, I get it,” Sirius replied sweetly. Remus rolled his eyes.

He waited for Remus to reply with something witty like he always would, a crack about how full of himself Sirius was, but nothing came, he just stayed bent up on the windowsill, watching Sirius with hooded eyes as he walked to Remus’ desk and began to move the papers and books around casually. There wasn’t anything particularly interesting on any of them, just homework and half completed essays, and Sirius did it mostly to get a rise out of him anyway, but still Remus stayed put.

Underneath it all was the glossy copy of *The Charioteer* by Mary Renault, the book they had all been given at the end of the last club meeting. Sirius ran his fingers lightly over the cover and then down the side where a paper bookmark stuck out a few pages from the end. It felt almost intimate, touching Remus’ things like that, when before then he had never even crossed into his designated corner of the room. Like Remus was trusting him, letting him in the only way that teenage boys know how, through leaving uncurated parts of themselves out to be viewed, silently and under the guise of curiosity.

Once the tension in the room had built to a near palpable level, Sirius left the papers be and turned to lean against the desk, legs and arms crossed. His fingertips tingled against his palms, so he squeezed them tighter to himself. The change of location meant that he was no longer in Remus’ eye range and Sirius took the opportunity to take a breath out.

“You don’t have to skip meals you know, the lads and I always have a space for you with us,” he smirked.

Remus stared at the wall for a moment, and then, without any hint of gratefulness, said, “thanks for your concern, but my prospective loneliness is not the thing that keeps me locked in here.”

“Oh?”

Sirius adjusted himself against the hard edge of the desk in an attempt at getting comfortable. This was Remus throwing him a bone, giving him an insight into how he felt, what he did with his time, and Sirius wanted nothing more than to hear it all spill out. Sirius could see now that his uncharacteristic silence had been thoughtfulness, and was eager to hear what those thoughts might be.

Remus slid down from the windowsill then, one arm braced on the raised windowpane so that the short sleeve of his loose t-shirt slipped down enough for Sirius to see his bicep and the tips of the golden hairs that curled from his armpit. It was too cold to be dressed like that, Sirius himself in wool trousers and a knitted sweater, but Remus didn’t seem to mind. With both bare feet on the wooden floor, he leaned to rest against the window in a mirror of Sirius, hands resting either side of him, red fingers curled around painted wood.

He sighed, and it seemed to deflate him a little, shoulders slumping, almost imperceptible if Sirius hadn’t been trained to notice every detail of him.

“It’s a hard school, you know. They really weren’t kidding about the whole ‘we provide rigorous education to produce only the highest achieving members of British high society’ thing,” he said, presumably quoting some sort of pamphlet that Sirius had never bothered to read.

“Sounds like someone’s been falling for their propaganda,” Sirius smiled.

Remus stood suddenly and strode the few paces towards him, the shock of it making Sirius stand
also, until he was right in Sirius’ face, eyes wide and sparkling. He seemed possessed, suddenly
overcome by a force outside himself,

“S’not the only thing I’ve been falling for.”

Then he leaned forward, and Sirius barely had enough time to realise what was happening before
soft lips were pressing against his own, tentative, like he might have read things wrong, until Sirius
raised both hands to cradle the back of Remus’ head, fingers threaded in his soft hair, and kissed him
back hard. He tasted like the cigarette he’d just smoked, his tongue a little dry but his lips every bit as
soft as Sirius always dreamed they would be.

Sirius could barely think, the feeling of Remus under his hands was so overwhelming, the warmth of
him pressed against his chest, how his nose rested against Sirius’ cheek. He never wanted the
moment to end, but it had to, not just because he was beginning to run out of air, but because the
others would be coming back soon, and as badly as Sirius wanted to go further with Remus at that
moment, he’d also never been walked in on before, and wanted to keep it that way.

Eventually they pulled away from each other, chests heaving with their harsh breathing, but only far
enough to be able to rest their foreheads together. Sirius still had his hands cradled around the back
of Remus head, and Remus’ own were fisted desperately in the collar of his jumper. A laugh
bubbled up out of Sirius’ chest unprovoked, and he couldn’t stop it from spilling out of his lips onto
Remus’. Sirius could feel Remus’ chest moving, and he realised he had begun to laugh too, deep
from inside of him and in a way that sounded almost relieved.

He placed a softer kiss on Sirius’ lips, gentle and delicate in stark contrast to the desperate way
Remus had kissed him at first, but it set Sirius’ insides on fire just the same. He could feel Remus’
breath on his lips with how they were still pinned together. Sirius pulled back to look at him, and
found his lips red and swollen, his eyes fluttering open, and his hair more of a mess than it usually
was. Only, it was a deliberate mess this time, and the knowledge that he had been the one to mess it
up made him break out in a face splitting grin.

Sirius felt incredible. It was every night they ran around the school after curfew, every early morning
watching James in the cold that seeped into his bones, every evening spent laughing and yelling in
their dorm, happy and carefree and weightless in his body. He wanted to climb on top of the roof, or
go screaming down the halls over how happy he was. Instead, he let go of Remus and took a few
steps back, until the back of his knees hit the edge of his bed, and he sat down on the mattress,
staring up at Remus.

Remus seemed perplexed, but only for a second, and then he too broke out into a grin, and moved
over to join Sirius. He assumed Remus would take the spot he’d left next to him, hopefully so they
could snog some more, but instead, Remus climbed all the way onto the bed and leant against the
headboard and put his feet in Sirius’ lap, one eyebrow raised like he was daring Sirius to say
something about it.

Sirius wanted to say something, but for the first time in his life did not know what that something
should be. It seemed as though one wrong word, one misplaced question would bring the whole
thing crumbling down around him. He wanted to know if Remus felt the same about him, did he lay
in that bed and imagine all the other ways this could have happened like Sirius did, would Remus
have left his mates in the dining hall just to come up and see if he was alright, had he also memorised
that sonnet he’d read out and did it run through his head all day?

But all that could come later, so Sirius let Remus’ feet fall from his lap as he pulled himself up on the
bed also to sit by his hip, Remus’ gaze once again never leaving him, clearly unable to switch off his
observant nature. His t shirt had rucked up slightly from the way he was leaning with an arm behind
his head for support, and Sirius reached out a hand without thinking to run his fingers over the pale skin that showed.

The tips of angry scars poked out from soft cotton, and Sirius pushed Remus’ shirt further up his stomach to unveil the rest of them, like a secret pathway on a map leading to gold. Remus sucked in a breath and Sirius could feel like stomach flutter under his touch. Each one was a clean, straight line, spanning the width of his torso in parallel to the others, slightly raised and more red than the ones on his face. Sirius had noticed them before, absently as Remus had changed or times like this when his shirt had lifted, but had never really stared like he had the chance to then.

“You want to know what they’re from,” Remus said flatly, a statement rather than a question.

Sirius didn’t pause in his exploration, and instead ran a finger all the way across one that spread over Remus’ ribs, smiling to himself when it made Remus shiver.

“Not really, I’m enjoying the story I’ve created in my head of you fighting off a pack of wolves,” he said casually. Remus didn’t reply, but his stomach had jumped slightly, so Sirius looked up to his face and found him staring incredulously. “What?”

Remus shook his head, snapping himself out of whatever stupor he was in. A surprised smile stretched out on his lips. “That’s what I always tell people. That I fought off a wolf.”

“Do you tell them you won?” Sirius grinned.

“Of course, what would be the point in making myself the loser?”

Sirius let the shirt fall back down again and removed his hand, using it instead to push himself up onto his knees so he could move closer to Remus’ face. One hand braced on the headboard, he leaned down, his dark hair creating a soft curtain around the two of them.

“And do they believe you?” He whispered.

“I suppose no one has cared enough before to bother wondering if I might be lying,” Remus whispered in return, and leaned the rest of the way up to once again meet Sirius’ lips.

Loud, boisterous footsteps thundered down the corridor, audible even through the thick walls and shut door. Sirius sprang back, alarmed. He could hear voices, loudly discussing something he couldn’t quite make out, and without thinking much about it, rolled himself off of Remus’ bed, and by extension Remus, darted across the room and leapt into one of the chairs around their table. The deck of cards had been left in a neat pile and Sirius picked them up and started shuffling them, intending it look like he’d either just finished a game of solitaire or was about to begin another.

As he did, the door knob began to turn, and in busted the disgruntled figures of his two best mates.

“How-” James began, but Sirius cut him off.

“Bloody hell, you two took your time, I think I’ve started to go grey,” he said, and laid the cards out on the table in ascending piles for a new round.

James rolled his eyes and jumped onto his own bed. Peter did the same, only, there wasn’t much of a jump involved. Sirius watched him dig out both a textbook and workbook from the mound of junk on his desk, and pull them in front of himself on top of the duvet, spread out like he honestly intended to get some work done. Sirius wasn’t so confident in his skills of conviction.

“Have either of you done the work for McGonagall yet? I’m stuck on question 17,” Peter said to the
“17? It only goes up to 15. Which chapter?” James replied.

“8, like she gave us.”

“Mate, she gave us 9. Said to skip 8 altogether.”

Peter squawked. “You’re joking! So I did all those questions for nothing?”

“Looks like it, sorry mate,” James shrugged.

Sirius tuned them out. He needed to get onto that homework too, but he’d started a game now and wasn’t going to stop until he’d won it. Instead, he looked up at Remus, now seated at his desk like he’d never been anywhere else. He was facing the wall, back hunched slightly over his book, but Sirius could still see the faint pink blush under his collar. A lingering secret, just for him.

______________________________

The next meeting had been quite the ordeal. The last thing either of them wanted was to walk in there with this new development written all across their faces, but the prospect of another week of only making eyes at each other similarly felt like torture. So, they both walked there together, finally, and got all of the flirty conversation out of their systems before hand. Sirius also blinked pointedly at the lowerclassmen who had taken one end of the couch. But that was more due to him being an upperclassman and also a little shit, than any sort of personal interest. Mostly. They did, however, laugh a little too loudly at some of the things Caradoc and his band of upperclassmen said. Really, they couldn’t help it. Sirius was fluent in pretentiousness, but at some point it just became too much.

One of these occasions, Benjy had also apparently had enough. He’d snapped the book in his hand shut and said, “you may find Baldwin’s tale of repressed homosexuality amusing, but some of us are trying to learn for the betterment of ourselves.”

Remus had nodded his head apologetically, perfectly innocent in the whole thing, of course. Sirius just grinned and replied in much the same tone, “what do you have to learn about? Thought you had repressed homosexuality down pat.”

“Little shit,” Benjy had said, and continued on with the meeting.

______________________________

“So, you do this every Saturday?”

Remus seemed dismayed at this prospect, but nevertheless there he sat, right next to Sirius on the bench at the edge of the field. Sirius nodded enthusiastically, if only to jostle Remus a little.

“It’s in the job description for best mate. I legally have to,” he replied.

Remus nodded sagely and then yawned spectacularly. His eyes were still puffy with sleep, and the two of them were wrapped in the knitted blanket Remus had brought with him at the start of the year. It was almost too cold to be enjoyable to watch James practice now, but it wasn’t like Sirius had
anywhere more important to be. Not when the rest of their dorm mates were still asleep, and so, logistically, this was in fact the only place he could really be alone with Remus anyway.

Besides, Remus was tucked into Sirius’ side, and had his head resting on Sirius’ shoulder. He would sit through a blizzard if he had to. Remus yawned again, and snuggled impossibly closer, and this time Sirius had to laugh.

“I thought you were a morning person,” Sirius said.

Remus lifted his head to level Sirius with a confused look, as if his current presence should have been enough to dissuade him from the assumption. He was right, it did, but it still didn’t really make sense.

“But you’re always up before the rest of us,” he continued.

It was Remus’ turn to laugh. “I don’t get up because I want to,” he said. “I get up because I have to go to the library and study my arse off. I wasn’t just giving you a line when I said it was a hard school.”

Once again, Sirius was speechless, possibly only the second time in his life that he ever had been. It was like Remus had some sort of magical power over him. All this time, Sirius had been thinking about him, wondering what sort of mysterious, intriguing shenanigans Remus got up to, and he had been in the library the whole time. Sirius had fallen for a swot. Dammit But when he saw the way Remus was looking at him, it didn’t matter. His eyes were bright and his nose was pink and he was out in the early morning fog because of Sirius, because he wanted to spend time with him. Warmth flooded his body, a soft glowing sort of feeling, and he wrapped Remus up tighter in his arms, if that was even possible.

Unfortunately, Rosier picked that moment to run past the both of them, still a ways out on the field, but certainly close enough to be able to make out that it was Remus with the Sirius’ regular figure. He gave them a look, not directly antagonistic, but not pleasant either. Sirius sneered back, but the big, blonde, hulking mass that was Caradoc was already running over to Rosier. He said something that Sirius couldn’t hear, and it made Rosier turn away, with a great deal of visible reluctance, and rejoin the rest of the team in the middle of the field. Caradoc turned to them and winked, unabashedly directed at Remus and Remus only, before doing the same as Rosier, disappearing unfortunately not for good. Sirius heart sank. Not just because of the whole handsome, masculine, clearly willing to woo Remus out from under him thing, but to be ‘rescued’ by Caradoc of all people? It was just pure embarrassing.

“He reckons he’s everyone’s knight in shining armour,” Remus scoffed.

It took Sirius by such a surprise his head nearly separate entirely from his neck with how fast he turned it. “What?”

“Caradoc,” Remus said, with a nod of his chin to the retreating figure on the field. “Someone's got to tell him not everyone needs to be saved.”

Sirius could have cried in relief. Finally, here was what had been missing all along. Someone who got him, and got the world, and got the microcosm of their school and saw it all for what it really was. Here was someone he wanted to spend every second of every day with. And he wanted to start right then, with that second.

“Come on,” Sirius said, and stood, pulling Remus and the blanket around them with him.
“What? Where are we going?” Remus asked.

“We are going back to the room, and you are going back to sleep. And then later, after you’ve rested properly, I’ll kick the rest of them out and we can do whatever we like.”

Remus just stared at him for a moment, not quick in shock, but deep in something else. Then he nodded, and said, “sounds perfect.”

And it was. Perfect, that is. It was perfect.

End Notes

let me know if there are any major errors/inconsistencies (i am bad at reading back my own work and may have missed things)

thank you for reading!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!