



n 1: a young mind not yet affected by experience (according to John Locke) 2: an opportunity to start over without prejudice

Chapter 1

Lily Evans slammed her bag down to the ground, flopping into her seat in an angry huff. How ever in the world James Potter had been made head boy was beyond her, but she hated the idea, especially since she knew it would mean his spending more time alone with her.

The only comfort was Mary MacDonald, who was a prefect, and her best friend (they had become quite close after her falling out with Snape) and Remus Lupin, also a prefect, who could at least attempt to keep James away from her, before she could inflict bodily harm on him.

Not wanting to inflict said bodily harm, Lily had not spoken one word to him, biting her tongue the entire prefects meeting, then rushing out with Mary.

“Almost there Lily. Can you believe it? Only one more year till freedom!” Mary said excitedly.

“Only one more year, and I’ll never see Potter again.” Lily added vehemently.

Mary smiled at her wickedly, “You mean, you aren’t planning on marrying him?”

The glare Lily sent her would have made any one else wither, Mary only smiled wider.

“You know Mary, I never tease you, and there are boys I could tease about.”

It wasn’t any secret that Mary MacDonald had been around. She wasn’t a whore, nor anything close, only she chose to get around with the sort of guys who liked the sort of girls that really got around. That, and compared to her friends, such as Lily, who was so much of a prude she out to have the word virgin stamped on her forehead, she was loose.

“Lily, you know half those rumors about me aren’t true.” she defended.

“But the half that are mar you bad enough.”

“I may have had a few boys, but at least I, unlike some girls I know, specifically one particular red-head, am not a tease.” Mary proclaimed, a mocking glint in her eye.

“A tease? I thought I was a prude, have I been upgraded over the summer, or are you sticking to the notion I need to get laid?” Lily said, a smile forming on her lips. Her and Mary could be such opposites sometimes, she knew Mary was not really as coy as she pretended to be, and Mary, well Mary knew she was a prude.

“And what is a tease, but a prude who makes boys want her? And you, my darling, make boys want you.”

Lily rolled her eyes at the comment. The only boy who wanted her was one James Potter, who had a better chance of seeing the Chudley Cannons actually win a game than go on a date with her.

“James Potter is not a boy, he’s cousin to the giant squid.”

“And his friends aren’t much better.”

—

James peered around Peter’s shoulder, trying to see where Lily was sitting. They were in the Great Hall, and he had been hoping to sit next to her. Or, near her, as next to her was not an area she would ever allow. Maybe on the same row as him, with Remus between as a buffer.

“Where is she?”

“Who?” Peter asked, prodding James in the side, as he was leaning over him, causing him to have to lean to the side, into the third year beside him.

“Evans, who else?” James grumbled disagreeably.

Sirius rolled his eyes at the remark. Remus shook his head as is to say ‘theres no point in arguing with him’

Lily, along with her friend, who, in spite of his affections for Lily, James had never really cared for, strolled by.

“Hey, Evans, theres room over here, I saved you a seat!”

Lily completely ignored him, flipping her hair over her shoulder, whispering something to Mary as they walked past. Mary sent a rather tempestuous look over her shoulder at Sirius, before turning back, and whispering furiously to Lily.

“Why does she hate me?” Sirius asked blankly, looking over at the two.

Remus and James exchanged looks.

“Ah, thats Mary MacDonald.”

“I don’t know any Mary MacDonalds.” Sirius replied, looking over in the direction of the two again, Lily spotting him and rolling her eyes, saying something to Mary.

“Thats the problem. You see you do know her. As in you knew her, and called her the wrong name whilst knowing.” James explained.

“I slept with her? Think I would remember that, she’s good looking, nice legs. Not the normal reaction I get from girls I’ve been with...”

“Did you mess the part where I mentioned you called her the wrong name?” James intruded.

“Oh, well, that could cause some resentment.” Sirius said, shrugging it off.

“You two amaze me.” Remus said in scorn, but it was an affectionate sort of scorning.

“I amaze myself sometimes.” Sirius joked, earning a jab in the ribs from Remus, who was seated next to him.

“How?” James asked in curiosity.

“You spend all your time pinning after the one girl who won’t have you,” Remus said, looking at James, “and you,” he said, turning to Sirius, “spend all your time chasing any girl who will have you.”

“Not any girl, I do have standards.”

“I’ve seen his standards, they’re a mere step above troll.” James informed.

“It’s whats on the inside that matters.” Peter spoke up.

“Wormtail, thats something your mom tells you when she thinks you’re ugly.” James replied.

“James, that isn’t true.” Remus said disapprovingly.

“His mum must have gave him that speech.” Sirius said to James.

“I don’t know, he isn’t that ugly.”

Peter looked happy to have the attention drawn from him. Remus, who was used to such things by now, only ignored their antics.

Sirius glanced back over toward where Lily and Mary were sitting, focusing on the brunette. She was pretty, in a way different than Lily, with her hair falling slightly past her shoulders, her clear blue eyes angry slits as she caught him looking at her.

He quickly turned away. “You know, I think I’m going to go talk to her. See if I can’t get her name right the second go round.”

James looked at him in disbelief. “The second go round? Have you lost it? You called the girl the wrong name, you’d be lucky to have a civil conversation.”

“For once, Prongs is right. I would leave her alone.”

“Right, what Remus said, hey, what do you mean for once?”

—

“If he looks over here one more time...” Mary said in a low voice.

“He won’t. He’s probably just figuring out who you were, and why you attempted to murder him with your eyes.” Lily said soothingly.

“He’s a prick. A stupid tactless prat, a selfish git, an unbearable ass.”

“I agree one hundred percent. Which is why I still do not understand why you slept with him.”

Mary sighed, letting her head hit the table. "I was bored, and he was easy."

"Easy does not even begin to describe it. He came out of the womb trying to score." Lily said, with a glare in the boys direction.

"But he is attractive, right? I mean, you think he's good looking, don't you?" Mary asked.

Lily cast a look in the boys direction again. "I suppose so, but the fact that he's the devils right hand man sort of ruins the effect for me."

"The devil being James Potter, I assume."

"Who else?"

Mary went white, and was suddenly gripping the edge of the table hard. Lily looked across from her to see why, Sirius Black was standing right behind Mary.

"MacDonald."

"Black. Nice to see you remember my name." she said tightly. Lily noticed her fingers twitching, as if itching to grab her wand.

"About that, I can make it up to you, I was thinking-"

"No." Mary said quickly.

"But-"

"No."

"Just-"

"No."

"Even if-"

"No."

"Are you su-"

"Yes!"

"Okay then." he said defeated. "Evans." he said, giving a wave to Lily. Lily smiled back at him, a strangely hateful smile, and waved.

"Bloody idiot." Mary grumbled, fingering her wand.

"He isn't worth it, put the wand away." Lily ordered.

Mary obeyed, but not before sending one last murderous glare at Sirius.

—

James was smiling when Sirius returned. "That went well."

Sirius slid into his seat. "She wants me. She's only very skilled at hiding it."

James, Peter, and Remus laughed, causing Sirius to look slightly offended.

"Sorry mate, but I have a better chance of finally getting a date with Evans than you do with her."

"Care to make a wager on that?" Sirius challenged.

"What sort of wager?"

Remus spoke before either of the other two could. "Do you think it's a good idea, to wager over who can get one of the girls first? Lily would not be happy to hear."

"She's never happy to hear anything. It's a wonder why I like her. And it isn't like I won't be trying to win her anyway, only now, I can win her, and whatever it is Padfoot is wagering." James waved off.

"I think you underestimate how much Evans loathes you." Sirius commented.

"I think you overestimate your charm."

Peter, sensing things could turn ugly, said quickly, "What will you two be wagering?"

"Loser has to play the last Quidditch game of the season naked." Sirius suggested.

"You do know you'll be thrown off the field." Remus cut in.

"I love it. So what if we're thrown off the field?" James replied.

"But, won't that cost us the game?" Peter pipped up.

James and Sirius's faces fell. "How about streaking through the field, sort of a victory lap, after the game, while everyone is still cheering?" James quickly thought up.

"Perfect. I'll have to take pictures to show your kids one day, but then again, I don't really want to see that..." Sirius said.

"I'll be the one taking pictures, after I win." James replied confidently.

"You two are digging your graves." Remus stated.

"We need a day, a marking point to end the bet." James said suddenly.

"We can think of it later, you have to lead off those scared looking first years." Sirius said.

James and Remus got up from their spots, breaking away with nervous first years following them.

Lily cast a glance over James, who had, as of yet, only went as far as to try to get her to sit beside him during the meal. Usually he'd have asked her out at least twice by this point. Not that it was anything she missed.

"Stupid git." she mumbled.

"Conceited toad." Mary added.

"Arrogant jerk."

"Hopeless moron."

"I really cannot stand Potter." Lily fumed.

"Potter? I meant Black."

"Oh." Lily said shrugging. "Him too."

Chapter 2

Classes did not start until the next day, so Lily and Mary were sitting in the common room, chatting. Or, trying to, as they were distracted by two certain boys who kept glancing their way. Lily refused to give James the pleasure of acknowledgment. Mary didn't have her restraint, and was looking over often, to see if the boys were looking at them. Sirius caught her looking and gave her a wink and a wave. She responded with a falsely sweet smile, and rude finger gesture.

Lily took the as the cue to go, and pulled Mary after her by the wrist up into their room.

James watched their exit, sighing. "Evans is ignoring me."

"It's better than her old tactics, of yelling at you every time she saw you." Remus said brightly.

"At least you aren't being flipped off." Sirius complained, glaring at the spot the girls had once been seated.

"We still need to decide a day to end this bet." James reminded.

Sirius shrugged, not caring. He seemed to be taking Mary's rejection personally.

"Would you stop pouting and pay attention? Jeesh, you'd think it was the first time a girl turned you down." James snapped.

"It is the first time." Sirius said moodily.

Remus arched an eyebrow. "You're kidding?"

"The first verbal rejection, I have had a few roll their eyes and walk away. But this is different. Wouldn't even hear me out-" Sirius started.

"Welcome to my world." James said dryly.

"Speaking of Lily, aren't you patrolling with her? I'm with Mary-no Sirius I will not out in a good word for you." he said quickly, seeing Sirius about to say something.

"Why not?"

"Because I'm not taking sides on this wager of your's and James's."

"I'm not taking sides either." Peter said.

"You don't know either of them." Sirius pointed out.

"I do. I sat next to Mary in Muggle Studies last year."

"So, you could-"

"No."

Sirius sank back in his chair defeated. "I'm hearing that word a lot today."

"I have to go. Evans will never let me hear the end of it if I'm late." James said, rising. Remus followed suit.

They were met by Lily and Mary outside in the hall only a moment later. The pairs set off in opposite directions, Mary mouthing 'good luck' to Lily over her shoulder.

"So Evans-"

"No, before you even say anything, no, I will not go out with you, and no I will not let you finish the question, and yes I really mean it." Lily said swiftly.

"I'm hurt Evans." James kidded.

"The only thing I've hurt is your ego. And theres plenty left."

"Ouch. Not if you keep saying things like that. How bout you make it up to me and go out with me this weekend?"

Lily curled her hands into fists, ready to start screaming.

"You know, you really do look lovely that shade of red." James commented, a grin on his face at observing her red cheeks.

"Potter, for the one thousandth time, leave me alone." she said through clinched teeth, striding down the hall to avoid him.

James ran to catch up, falling into step beside her. "Evans, if I did that, who else would you have to release all your aggression on? You'd miss having me around."

"I'd miss you? I think it's finally happened Potter, you really have lost your mind." Lily spat, trying to stay ahead of him, but he was able to keep up.

"You running away from me Evans?"

"I'm not running."

"But you are trying to get away from me."

"I think that would be beneficial to your health." Lily said, turning a corner sharply. The dim lite hallway made it hard to see, but Lily yelled at two students in a dark corner, sending them back to their rooms.

"That could have been us, Evans." James said, watching the forth years scurry away, red-faced.

"You are the last person on the planet I would kiss in an abandoned hallway." she huffed.

"What about an not abandoned hallway?"

"I wouldn't kiss you anywhere, let alone touch you or even speak to you if I didn't have to." Lily snapped.

"Why not?"

"Because I don't like you!" Lily shouted.

"Really? You should have said something." James said casually, watching her face turn red and her close her eyes, and appear to be counting.

"Come on Evans, breathe, in and out, in and out-"

"Argh!" Lily let out a strangled noise of frustration, turning around and sweeping past him.

"I'm trading Mary with who to patrol with. Let her have you, at least I can tolerate Remus."

James turned and followed her. "Mary doesn't like me."

"I don't like you." Lily reminded.

"But you do, you just have a hard time seeing it." James argued.

Lily stopped in her tracks. "A hard time seeing it? Potter, I despise you."

"So, we have a love hate relationship, that works for me."

"The only sort of relationship we have, is the one you have fabricated in that deluded little mind of yours." Lily said slowly, as if speaking to a small child.

"But we could have one, if you gave me a chance."

"Theres a better chance of hell freezing over-oh wait never mind, you're here, this must be hell."

"One date Evans."

"No!" Lily screamed.

"Better me than that greasy Slytherin git-"

"You mean Severus? We were just friends, and we aren't even that anymore if you haven't noticed, which I'm sure you have because you stalk me." Lily defended.

"Friends? Ha, I saw the way he looked at you."

"Better him than you."

"Evans, you do not mean that." James said gravely.

"No, I think not, you're both at the bottom of my list, neither possessing any of the qualities I look for in a man. Granted, you still are a silly boy, so I wouldn't much expect you to."

James ignored the silly boy comment, he could prove to her he was man later, when he was snogging her senseless. "So, what qualities do you look for?"

"Wit, charm, good looks, manners, in short, all qualities which you do not posses." Lily sniped.

"Hey, I've been told I was good looking."

Lily sighed, rolling her eyes dramatically at his words. "Of all the things to defend, you chose the one that matters the least."

"You said manners last, so I would assume they matter the least."

"I was naming them in order of things which you lack the most."

James considered this. "Ah, so you do think I'm good looking."

Lily spun around to face him. "Potter, you know you aren't ugly, and you have enough girls after you to show for it, so stop trying to read more into this than what it is."

"You think I'm pretty." James said, batting his eyes in an overly exaggerated feminine expression.

Lily almost cracked a smile on that one. "Lightening is pretty, but I wouldn't touch it."

"Is that the best you can come up with?" James challenged.

"I am going back to my room now Potter, and pretending you do not exist."
"Goodnight Evans, dream about me!" James called to her retreating back.

—
"Really, I do not know how you hang around those idiots." Mary ranted.

Remus had been listening to her rant the last five minutes, about James and Sirius. Most of the ranting about James had been for Lily's sake, quickly followed by ranting about Sirius, which was more a string of endless profanities, with his name attached to the end.

She paused to suck in more air, and Remus took the chance to cut in. "You know, they aren't really that bad. James really does like Lily, he just doesn't go about showing it well. And Sirius, he feels bad about what he did, calling you the wrong name."

"And how does he feel, exactly?" Mary challenged.

"Guilty."

"Really?" she said mockingly, knowing it wasn't true.

"It's not a deep sense of guilt, you know, something he likes to keep to his self."

"Ah-ha! I knew you were lying." Mary said victoriously.

"Not lying, so much as wishful thinking." Remus said, taking a step back from her in case she decided to release her wrath on him.

"You're an okay guy Lupin, but you think you could influence your friends a bit more."

"I try. I fail." Remus said simply, causing Mary to laugh.

"At least you try."

—
"You two should just give up." Remus announced, walking into the common room, seeing James and Sirius. Sirius was holding a glass of water under Peter's fingers, as he had fallen asleep on the couch. Remus waved his wand, and the glass flew toward him.

"Hey, I wanted to see if the warm water trick really worked." Sirius complained.

"Do you want to clean up the mess if it does?" Remus shot back.

"Moony makes a good point. Wormtail probably wouldn't like it either."

Remus dropped into a seat next to James.

"What did you mean we should give up?" Sirius asked, prodding the sleeping Peter.

"I had a talk with Mary, and from what I gather, Lily won't be coming around anytime soon, and Sirius, you don't have a chance in hell. She called you things I've never even heard of."

"Looks like I'll be winning." James gloated.

"We'll see about that."

—
The next morning, Lily darted away from the common room as soon as possible, in hopes to avoid James. She explained it all to Mary, who had groggily gotten out of bed, and followed her.

They managed to avoid James, until the first class, (which happened to be a double potions, what a way to start the morning) when he and Sirius slid into the desk behind them. Lily immediately cast her eyes about the room, for another empty desk, but found none. They were stuck.

"Morning Evans. How was your night?"

"Excellent, seeing as you weren't involved."

Mary and Sirius watched the little exchange in interest, James was asking about her dreams of him, she was saying she dreamed he was dead, then woke up crying realizing it wasn't true, until Slughorn went to the front of the class, and started talking.

Lily was so focused on what he was saying, it was easy to ignore James. Mary was not so lucky, finding him boring her enough to feel drowsy. She closed her eyes, only to rest them a moment, when she felt breath tickling her ear.

"Wake up MacDonald."

"Don't touch me." Mary said sharply, starting a little.

"I'm not touching you." he whispered, his mouth a mere fraction from her ear, causing the hairs on the back of her neck to rise. She had slept with him, after all, and her body seemed to fully remember it, while her mind was trying to forget.

Lily, who had been watching them with annoyance (while James was greatly amused), lifted her book and whacked Sirius with it.

"Ow, Evans that hurt."

"Next time I'll hit harder, stay away from her." Lily said furiously, drawing the attention of a few students.

"I'd listen if I was you." James warned, smiling at Lily. She sent him a withering look before turning back around.

As soon as class ended, Lily and Mary rushed out the door, away from James and Sirius.

"I don't know why he's bothering me, he already got in my knickers, no point in trying for leftovers, when there's plenty of fresh meat around." Mary whined.

"It isn't so bad. I'm going to go talk to the headmaster about what we discussed." Lily said, patting her on the shoulder comfortingly.

"Right. I'll run to the library and get those books we'll need for Slughorn's homework. Maybe if I'm lucky, she'll let me leave with them."

—
Mary balanced the load of books in her arms. She hadn't been really paying attention during class, paranoid that Sirius might invade her personal space again, so she didn't know exactly what books they needed, or even exactly what the assignment was.

It was difficult to see with all those books, and she found herself colliding with what felt like a brick wall. Her books went everywhere, and she instinctively grabbed on to the shoulders of whoever it was she had ran into to keep from falling, while that person wrapped an arm around her waist.

"You should watch where you're going MacDonald."

Of course, of all the people she could have ran into, it had to be Sirius Black. She opened her eyes, seeing she was nose to nose with him, her body practically molded against his.

"You should stay out of my way Black." she said harshly, shoving herself away from him and back a few feet, feeling heat rush to her face. The last time they were so close...it wasn't something she wanted to think about.

Instead of letting him see her blush, she turned and went to picking up her books.

"Need some help with those?"

"No." she rejected quickly, his offer likely had some double motive.

The sad truth was, she did need help, as was obvious, after three tries at standing up while holding all the books, only to have half of them fall again. Sirius watched with amusement until finally she conceded, "Okay, I may need some help."

He took half the books from her, walking beside her in silence, not saying anything, a mockingly expression on his face.

"I could have done it alone. I only thought this would be easier."

"I could see that."

"Shut up."

The pair walked without speaking, into the common room, where they ungraciously dumped all the books unto the floor.

Mary sat down in a chair, and much to her irritation, Sirius sat across from her.

"Is there something you want?" she said pointedly.

"A thank you would be nice."

"Thank you for helping me carry my books. It was first gentlemanly thing I've ever seen you do."

"I'm a perfect gentleman." Sirius defended.

"Define gentleman."

He flashed a smile, one that, had she not expected it, would have made her go weak in the knees. He really was just too good looking, it was a terrible distraction to her disliking him.

"A gentleman is someone who treats a lady exactly how she would like to be treated." he said, his eyes roaming her suggestively.

Mary felt a blush creeping up her cheeks. The look reminded her of things she would rather forget, things that had been going quite well, until he called her the wrong name. She could have forgiven him, if it was something like Marly, or Maria, or Marsha, or something that could vaguely resemble Mary, but he was way off. It didn't even start with the same letter.

"Then trust me, that's not you."

"You're going to hold one little slip up over my head? It was months ago."

Mary glared at him, but said nothing. If he was going to beg for forgiveness, it could prove to be entertaining. But, it seemed he wouldn't beg, because he didn't say anything else.

"One 'little' slip up? You called me Stacy, my names Mary, they aren't even remotely alike!" she shrieked.

"Oh, yeah, I had been talking to this girl named Stacy, but she had a bloke, and I must have got mixed up."

He realized this was the wrong thing to say upon seeing the stony expression on her face.

"What I meant was—" he stopped speaking as a group of fifth years walked by, one sending a flirtatious smile over her shoulder toward him. Forgetting he was with Mary he smiled back, watching them walk away.

"That is so typical of you." Mary snapped standing up.

"What?" Sirius asked innocently.

"Enjoying the view there? Well, I hope you enjoy the view of me walking away, because it's the last you'll be seeing of me." she said, storming out.

"What did I do?"

—

"Go away Potter." Lily snapped without looking back, recognizing the footsteps falling into place behind her.

"How'd you know it was me?"

"Because you're my only stalker." Lily said, but without the usual venom in her voice.

"Why are you in such a good mood?" he asked curiously.

"I just talked to the headmaster." she replied cheerfully. James was sure to savor the moment, he, Lily Evans, and cheerful hardly ever went together.

"And that puts you in a good mood? Usually it just puts me in detention."

"I wasn't in trouble. Unlike some people, I do have some regards for the rules."

Hearing the shift in tone and not liking where it was headed, James quickly intruded "Why were you seeing him?"

"This idea me and Mary had. We wanted to throw a party, or, gathering, for the seventh years."

"Lily Evans? A party? Am I hearing correctly?"

Lily flushed. "It's a dance, actually. And it will be chaperoned. It isn't to celebrate so much, but to distract people. A lot of people in our year have lost family members to Death Eaters, and they deserve something happy, and even if it won't make them happy, planning it will at least distract them from their thoughts awhile."

James looked at her red face. A dance seemed a silly solution, but what she said was true, it was a distraction at least.

"Anyway, it isn't anything you'd be interested in, so—"

"I want to help." he cut in.

"You do?" she said in disbelief.

"Unless you'd rather me not..." he trailed off.

"No, a pair of hands is a pair of hands. Thank you Potter." she said, a genuine smile on his face.

"What day is this dance going to be?" he asked, an idea clicking in his head.

"Halloween."

"That's perfect. I gotta run, we'll talk more about this tonight."

He ran off and Lily watched him go, bemused.

—

James burst into the common room, seeing Sirius spread out in a chair.

"Padfoot, I think we have our day to end the deal."

Chapter 3

"And then he tries to play it off all innocent, like he isn't a piece of womanizing scum." Mary finished, tossing her book into her bag aggressively.

Lily nodded her head sympathetically. She wasn't daring to say anything. When Mary ranted, it was best to sit back and only supply the occasional nod or grunt of agreement.

"I really do hate him. If only he wasn't so damn shaggable."

Lily nearly swallowed the piece of gum she had been chewing. Womanizing scum to damn shaggable was a big jump.

"Who's shaggable?" a voice asked.

Lily looked up to see James, occupied by none other than Sirius, Remus, and Peter, "The seeker for the Chudley Cannons."

"So, why does she hate him?" Peter asked.

"She likes another team." Lily said, making it appear this should be obvious.

"I didn't think you liked Quidditch." Sirius spoke.

"I love those Quidditch players. Nothing sexier than a guy on a broom." she said quickly, mentally cursing herself, because she remembered he was on the Quidditch team. From the grin on his face, she was sure he was thinking the same thing.

"What about you Evans, guys on brooms do anything for you?"

"Of course, but me and Mary here only like Seekers, which you aren't."

"We love Seekers." Mary added. "It's so hot the way they...seek."

Lily shot her a look that clearly said "do you know what the hell you're talking about?"

James smiled at the comment. "Your knowledge of Quidditch astounds me."

"Speaking of Quidditch, shouldn't you all be off somewhere, talking about it or whatever it is people who have been hit in the head with bludgers a few too many times talk about." Lily said, trying to spare Mary, who was resembling a deer caught in head lights.

Since you two know about it, we could talk to you. What team do you like, MacDonald?" James teased.

"I think Lily was trying to hint she wants us to leave." Remus said helpfully, glancing down at Lily and Mary.

James sent him an irritated look, but decided he was right. "See you around Evans."

Lily and Mary waited until they were out of sight, before Mary buried her face in her hands. "He so knew I was talking about him, I'll never live this down."

"I wouldn't worry about it. He isn't exactly the sharpest knife in the set, if you know what I mean."

—

"I told you I would win. Evans still hates you, but MacDonald thinks I'm shaggable."

Remus shook his head at his friends remark, choosing to keep his silence and let James and Sirius argue about it. However, James didn't have a chance to respond, as Peter spoke up first.

"I thought she was talking about the Seeker for that Quidditch team."

"That was only to cover up that she was talking about me, and how shaggable I am." Sirius said, stating the obvious.

"Is shaggable even a word?"

"Not one you would find in the dictionary." Remus answered.

"Oh." Peter said.

Sirius sighed at Peters ignorance. "Shaggable, as in able to shag."

"Oh, but isn't everyone able to shag?"

James grinned, he was sure Peter was just going on to be annoying now, but it seemed Sirius had not caught it.

"Yes, but calling some one shaggable is appreciating that they are able to shag."

"Didn't she already shag you once? I think that shows enough appreciation, so it isn't really a compliment."

Sirius frowned. "Shut up Wormtail."

James and Remus exchanged smiles.

"Like I said, I'm winning."

—

James fell into step behind Lily as she shuffled into the classroom.

"Prefects meeting tonight Potter, don't be late."

"That was almost a civilized conversation, I think we're bonding Evans."

"You're head boy, I'm head girl, we have to be civil." Lily said, sliding into her seat. As was expected, James and Sirius sat behind her and Mary. That was the way things were, once you chose a seat the first day, you were pretty much stuck with it the rest of the year.

"Moony and Wormtail are lucky, they don't have Potions till the end of the day, by then Slughorns already tipsy." James complained. A loud 'shush' sent by Lily caused him to pause his speech.

"Anyway."

"Shush."

"Alright Evans, put a sock in it, I'll be quiet."

Sirius smiled and whispered, "She has you whipped, and you aren't even dating her."

"She does not. Respecting her obscure desire to pay attention in class is all. She sits with her papers in plain sight, that'll be helpful on test day."

At that comment, Lily shifted, pushing her papers out of view.

"Or, maybe not."

Sirius looked bored, and turned to James. "I think I'll harass MacDonald a bit."

"Have fun with that, avoid those text books, Evans has a good hitting arm."

Mary actually was paying attention in class, so she did not feel Sirius, once again, invade her air space.

"MacDonald, can I borrow yesterdays notes?"

His lips had grazed her ear when he spoke, causing her to bolt up in her seat. Covering the gesture, she rapidly grabbed for one of the papers in front of her, hitting it back to him.

"These are Evans notes."

"Thats okay, they're better than mine."

Lily looked over at her darkly. Mary mouthed sorry.

"Thanks MacDonald." he said, dangerously close to her again. Mary nodded, focusing on Slughorn, ignoring how close he was, how there were goose bumps breaking over her arms...

Sirius slid back, smiling at James. James took a look at Mary and smiled back. "Poor girl, she almost jumped into the floor."

"I told you she wants me."

—

"Evans."

Lily slowly turned to face the voice saying her name.

"Potter? Was there something you wanted?"

James eyed her. "Several things, actually, but none you would be willing to give..."

Lily glared at him, her hand traveling to her pocket, where he knew she kept her wand.

"But, I'm here to give you something."

"Whatever it is, I'm sure I don't want it." Lily said primly, turning back around.

"It's your notes. Mary let Sirius borrow them."

"So why isn't he returning them?" she snapped, snatching them away from him.

"Thought we would appreciate the alone time."

"He was wrong."

"But, Evans, I thought we could use this time to discuss plans for your dance." James said, knowing he had struck gold.

"We'll discuss it at the prefects meeting tonight. We have to raise the money yourselves, Dumbledore's idea."

"We have to raise the money? What if we don't raise enough?"

"If we don't have enough, whatever we raised is going to St. Mungo's, as charity, or if we have to much, whatever is left over is going there." Lily explained.

"You have any big ideas on how to raise this money?"

"We'll talk about it at the meeting tonight, so everyone can hear." Lily replied.

Once again, her tone was lacking it's usual venom. James found it a blessing, if all it took was being involved in a few plans for a dance, he was going to start a fucking committee.

"I have to go. I have class starting soon." Lily said, with none of her usual hostility.

"See you later Evans."

Later Potter.”

Mary rushed down the stairs, she was going to be late for class, she couldn't afford to be late, she was a prefect. In her haste, she stumbled over her own feet, spiraling down the last of the steps, until she felt two arms surrounding her.

If she opened her eyes, she was sure she would see who she thought it was, and since he was the last person she wanted to see, she kept her eyes closed.

“Am I alive?” she said, eyes closed tight.

“You have got to be the clumsiest girl I know MacDonald.”

Mary opened one eye, seeing Sirius Black. She held back the groan waiting to escape her lips.

“Gravity and me are currently at war. It has something personal against me. It keeps sending me crashing into your arms every chance it gets.” she said, glaring at the air around her, as if it could be blamed.

Sirius bit back a laugh at her expression. “I don't mind your crashing into my arms. I like you here.”

Mary glared at him, pushing away. Unfortunately, there were stairs behind her, so instead of backing up, her foot hit the top of one and slid, causing her to again fall, and Sirius to again catch her.

“Looks like you like it here to, you've been visiting it so often.”

Mary didn't say anything. She couldn't find any words to dignify herself. After allowing him to step back, still holding her, and place her on the ground, she spoke.

“How'd you know I was here?”

“I didn't, it isn't like I plan on seeing you. Fate intervening, maybe?” he suggested, lying because he had been looking for her, using the Marauders map to find her.

“Fate? A funny thing for you to mention, considering you failed Divination.”

“It was a boring class, I only took it because there were two girls to every bloke.”

Then he remembered that he was supposed to be wooing her, and that comment would not have much helped. “Then, I realized these sort of things don't matter, and I dropped it.”

“Hmm, and I heard you were kicked out.”

“Dropped, kicked out, same difference.”

Mary walked away, hearing him rush to catch up.

“I'm trying to go to class Black.”

“I know. I'm being a gentleman and walking you.”

Mary sighed. “I thought your definition of a gentleman was someone who treated a lady the way she wanted to be treated.”

“I've updated my definition. A gentleman is someone who gives a lady exactly what she wants.”

“That's assuming you know what we want, which in most cases, you don't.” Mary pointed out.

“Knowing what a girl wants is easy. They don't try to hard to hide it. It's the things they're too embarrassed to ask for that a real gentleman gives them.”

Mary felt the color rushing to her face again. Why did he have such an effect on her?

“Is sex all you ever think about?”

“Who said anything about sex? You really are a dirty girl MacDonald, not that I mind.” he said, giving her a winning smile. Mary tried her best to ignore how it made her tingle.

“What I meant was walking you to class, but if sex is what you really want-”

“Sirius Black if you touch me I will hex you!” she said in a panic, rushing a few steps ahead of him.

She looked back to see his amused smile, and groaned. Of course, he was only gouging her reaction, and she had given him exactly what he wanted.

“I'm leaving now, before I say something else and make an bigger ass of myself.” she said calmly turning and walking away, a haughty expression on her face. She pretended not to hear him laughing at her.

The prefects meeting drug on and on, Lily explaining things she had already explained to him earlier. Remus kept nudging him to pay attention, as Lily was glaring at him frequently.

“So, any of you interested can stay and help think of ideas, everyone else can go patrol. If your normal partner stays, just grab someone else.”

A few of the prefects looked excited at this idea, and two hoped up, nearly skipping out the door. They were sixth years, and dating, the reason they weren't allowed to partner up to start with. Another pair left, everyone else remaining.

“Okay, we'll split into groups, you over there”, she said pointing, “and you two over there. And last will be me, Mary, Remus, and Potter.”

At James name, Mary arched an eyebrow, looking between Lily and James questioningly.

“Some one has to keep an eye on him.” Lily supplied.

The smile forming on James face quickly disappeared. If that was what she wanted, to keep an eye on him...Though he wouldn't mind keeping an eye on her, a hand too, but that could cause some trouble...

“Potter are you paying attention?”

James snapped out of his thoughts. “No, sorry, thinking about something.”

Remus was giving him a disapproving look, that was mirrored by Mary. Lily was looking at him as if he had killed her cat.

“What were you thinking about that was so important?”

James thought it prudent not to mention he was thinking about his hands and her body, so he quickly said, “Nothing, trying to think up ideas.”

Her face softened a little. “Think of anything?”

“I was thinking we could have a...bake sale.” he said quickly, saying the first thing that popped into his head.

“We have elves that will cook for free. I don't think it will work.” Lily mused, then added thoughtfully, “But it was a nice idea.”

James nearly fell out of his seat. Lily Evans had said something nice, to him.

“Potter, what's the matter with you? You better not be sick, because I'm not dragging you to the hospital wing.”

There was the Lily he knew.

“Nothings wrong Evans. Nearly blown away by your beauty, thats all.”

Lily glared at him darkly, and Mary snorted. Even Remus had a shadow of a smile etched across his face.

“I have to say, that line was particularity bad.”

“Yeah yeah, like you could do better.”

“So, how are things with you and Potter?” Mary asked, smiling at Lily.

“Why would you ask how things are? What things are you referring to?”

“You did put him in our group...”

Only to keep an eye on him." Lily defended.

"Couldn't Lupin do that?"

"Lupin doesn't want to be too harsh, in regards to their friendship, I have no such concerns."

Mary didn't say anything back, a knowing smile on her face.

"What?" Lily said, caving in to the silent mockery.

"Nothing." Mary said, twirling her hair.

"Mary..." Lily said, voice low.

"You like him." Mary cooed.

Lily threw her pillow at Mary. "I do not!"

"You don't hate him quite as much."

"That's because I know after we leave here, I'll never have to see him again."

Mary stopped twirling her hair. "That is true. That means I won't be seeing Black either."

"What did he do now?"

"Following me around like some sort of freak. Making illicit offers." Mary grumbled.

"Think of it positively. It's like having a lost little puppy." Lily said cheerfully, glad for the change of subject, away from her and James.

"Lost puppy? More like a dog in heat."

"You always did want a pet Mary, and you tell me boys make the best ones." Lily teased.

"If he were my pet, I'd neuter him."

"Ouch."

"Yep, one little snipeity snipe and all my problems would go away. I'd be saving thousands of ovaries. It would be a public service, really." Mary continued.

"Uh-hunnh. Public service. More like a safety net, so you won't fall pray to his shaggableness."

Mary turned a shade of red Lily didn't know was possible. "I did not mean that. I was only mad, and ranting, and you know how I am when I rant, remember that time I told Pomfrey she was nutters?"

"That had a lot to do with the two bottles of firewhiskey you drunk."

"I vaguely remember deciding it would be a good idea to skinny dip in January. It didn't work so well." Mary recalled.

"Right. The much better time to skinny dip would be August, everyone knows that." Lily said seriously, causing Mary to smile.

"Want to give it a try, unleash your inner bad girl?"

"My bad girl is fine where she is, on the inside. I like her there." Lily responded.

"Really? I think James Potter wants to cause you to unleash it. In a fit of passion most likely, while you two shag in some broom closet." she was cut off, giggling madly, as Lily started throwing objects at her.

"Why such a strong reaction Lily, unless you want it to happen..." Mary said, dodging the brush hurled her way.

"Another word and I will kill you, best friend or not." Lily threatened.

"That sounds like denial to me Lily, I think I should go get Potter, you two can-ahh!, Lily I was only kidding!" she shrieked, as Lily hit her repeatedly with the pillow.

"Take it back!" Lily ordered.

"Okay, okay, you don't like Potter."

Lily ceased her hitting, a calm expression on her face, one that seemed blissfully unaware of it's previous insanity.

"That's right, and the sooner he realizes it, the better."

Chapter 4

"Evans."

Lily nearly cringed at the sound of her name, she had been trying to avoid James all morning, the conversation with Mary had her thinking, and she was not liking her thoughts, as it seemed she really did not hate him as much.

"Evans, just so you know, when I catch up with you, I'm going to ask you out."

Lily stopped, an exasperated smile on her lips. "Then please do proceed, so I can turn you down."

"See, I was thinking Evans, since you turn me down every time, you could shock and amaze me, and say yes once."

"Or you could shock and amaze me, and stop asking."

James smirked at her, standing closer than she believed was necessary. "But Evans, you did tell me to proceed asking, which is giving me permission to ask, and that's only a step away from accepting."

"It amazes me how you twist things around like that, with only two brain cells to rub together."

"And now you are admitting I have a brain, last year you called me a brainless moron. I'm getting closer to your heart each day."

Lily gave up, seeing as he was obviously winning, and there was no way for her to come out on top. She would accept defeat gracefully, for this particular verbal spar, and be ready for the next one later.

"I have to find Mary, leave me alone Potter."

"I'll see you in Potions."

"Don't remind me."

—

"MacDonald."

Mary sighed. So much for her 'avoid Black at all costs or die a horrible humiliating death' plan.

"I'm sort of busy Black, can this wait?"

"Busy with what?"

Mary pushed her things behind the couch, it wasn't something she wanted him to see. Her and Lily had came for an idea to raise money, a kissing booth, and then they had decided to barter dates to the highest bidder. Which reminded her, Lily thought he would fetch an high price, and she was supposed to ask him.

"Nothing. Shouldn't we be off to class?"

To make sure he wouldn't get curious, she poured her books into his arms. "Here, I'm giving you the honor of carrying my books for me."

—

Lily was surprised to see Mary walking through the door with Sirius. Not as surprised as James beating her to class, but shocked.

"Switch seats with me." Mary demanded. Lily didn't question it, just did like Mary asked.

"Look, they've switched on us." Sirius observed.

"Way to state the obvious Padfoot. Probably tired of you harassing her."

"Class is going to be far to boring with no one to bother. Mind if I have a go at Evans?"

James smiled at the thought, he was pretty sure Lily would hit with the book again. "It could be entertaining."

“Evans.”
Lily ignored him, much the same way she would have ignored James.
“Evans.”
James saw Mary say something to Lily, and though he didn't hear it, he thought it was 'See what I deal with?'
“Evans.”
Lily spun around. “What?”
“Nothing.”
Lily turned back around, whispering something to Mary.
“Evans.”
Lily turned back around, this time with her book in hand.
“Never mind.”
James slide a look toward his friend. “At least she didn't hit you. She would have hit me.”
“I'll hit you both next time.” Lily said, without moving. Mary looked around at them, Sirius said hello and she turned around, rolling her eyes.
“Are you sure she wants you? Seems like she hates you to me.” James said.
“Not as much as Evans hates you.”
“She doesn't hate me. She loves me, it's just taken her awhile to catch on.”
“Keep dreaming Potter.”

—
“MacDonald, are you avoiding me?”
“No, this is how I treat all boys.” she said dryly, hoping he would take the hint and leave. Lily had managed to avoid James, so why couldn't she avoid Sirius?
“I don't believe you. We both know how this is going to end, so playing hard to get is pointless.”
Mary nearly saw red at his words. Could he be any more full of his self?
“Playing? I'm not playing at anything, I'm serious. I think you're a lecherous, disgusting, self-serving piece of dung, and I wouldn't spend five minutes alone with you if you were only boy on Earth.” she said furiously, sweeping past him.
Then she remembered she was supposed to ask him to be auctioned off like a piece of meat, and that she had likely ruined her chances. Too bad, she never wanted to see him again.
“Thats what you say, but it isn't what you feel.”
“Black, if you do not stop bothering me, I'll—” she didn't know how to finish. There were no words to describe the awful things she wanted to befall him.
“You'll do what?” he challenged, falling back into step beside her, walking so close their arms brushed.
Mary ignored the contact. There was no way she was at all happy to have any part of Sirius Black touching her. “Theres this thing, called personal space Black, maybe you've heard of it.”
“Come on MacDonald, I've been closer.”
Mary gaped, not knowing what to say to that. She was sure she looked like an idiot, gaping at him, trying to find the words to say. Finally she just said,
“That was a mistake.”
“And it's human nature to repeat our mistakes.” Sirius replied, moving as if to touch her, until the look she sent him made him drop his hand.
“I learn from my mistakes.” she said stiffly.
“How many mistakes have you had?, you are a prefect.”
“Not nearly as many as you.” she said, giving him a sideways glance.
“You need to live a little.”
“You need to die a little.” she responded.
“You can't die only a little.”
She tilted her head, smiling at him. “Hmm, you're right. Guess that means you just need to die.”
“MacDonald, you break my heart.”
“As if you had one.”
He smiled at her, and she was itching to smile back, but she held the urge inside. “As much as I'm enjoying this attempt at witty banter, I have to go, I have things to do.” she said, rushing ahead.
“You can't run forever MacDonald.” he called.
“You'll get bored of chasing me.” she called back.
“You'll miss me when I do.”
“I'm not justifying that with a response.”
“Wasn't that a response?”
“Shut up Black.”

—
Lily groaned at the line of boys before her. The kissing booth idea was good in theory, sure to raise money, but the sad part was she actually had to kiss some of the boys. And none of the girls besides her and Mary were willing to help. At least she wasn't having Mary's luck, she had caught the line of Slythrins.
“How much longer till you take over?” Lily asked.
“In like two minutes.” Mary replied unhappily. “Oh no, please tell me that isn't Black in the line.”
Lily peered out, and saw it was him, hidden behind the big guy in front of him.
“Don't worry, we'll tell him you're done for the day, no way he'll kiss me.”
Mary slumped down hiding her face in her arms. “I wouldn't be so sure. He'd kiss anything.”
The line progressed, Lily having to hit one of the boys for trying to kiss her a moment to long.
“This is so degrading, why did I think of it?” she said, for what was the tenth time in that hour, as Sirius came up and dropped his money in the jar.
“We have the right to refuse customer service.” Lily said quickly.
“Oh, it isn't for me. I'm waiting in line for James. He thought you would be less likely to run away that way.”
James stepped from the back of the line, walking to the front. A few people got mad, but none said anything to his face.
Lily glanced at him, and at Mary. “Sorry, the kiss has to go to who paid for it. Too bad.”
“That works for me.” Sirius said, stepping toward her, before James yanked him back. “He'll just take his money back.”
“Or, he could leave it, and call it charity, which would just really make me and Lily so happy.” Mary suggested.
“Or, I could just kiss you MacDonald.”
Mary looked over at Lily in horror. “Sorry Mary, you know I'd take an crucio for you, but I'm not kissing Black.”

Hey, are you comparing kissing me to torture?"

Both girls said yes simultaneously. "I'm hurt."

"You'll recover." Mary said. Then sighing she added, "Let's get this over with already, I have twenty other losers to kiss."

If he was bothered by being called a loser, he didn't show it. Mary closed her eyes, waiting for the kiss she knew was coming, hoping maybe he would change his mind...

She felt his lips against hers, the lightest of touches, an electric thrill shooting down her spine, but as soon as it had begun, it was over.

Her eyes flew open in disbelief. "That's it?"

"Disappointed?" he teased.

She flushed, tilting her head defiantly. "Hardly. It's only you're the first guy who didn't try push things a bit to far, and you're the one I would think would."

"I'll prove you right later."

Lily turned her attention from Mary and Sirius, to James. "Back of the line Potter."

"Speaking of that." James said, putting his hand into his pocket, and pulling out a handful of galleons.

"That should be about what you were hoping to make, so-" he turned to the line "They're closed, you can all leave."

Lily looked at the line, and at him, not sure whether to be grateful or angry. She decided angry, since it was the emotion that best fit her and James.

"Potter what do you think you're doing?"

"Saving you."

"I do not need to be saved, Mary and I were fine before you came along."

James shrugged, turning back to the line. "You can all still snog MacDonald, Evans is out."

"What?!" Mary shrieked.

Lily did not have a chance to respond, as James grabbed her wrist leading her away.

"Potter, let me go, you have no right-"

"I don't want you kissing all those guys."

Lily yanked her wrist away. "It doesn't matter what you want."

"You didn't want to kiss them either."

"I do not need you to rescue me, I don't want you to rescue me. And it isn't even about that, don't try to make yourself sound all noble when really all it is is that you don't want me kissing anyone else, because you're a jealous git." she raged, closing the space between them until she was directly in front of him, her breaths coming out ragged with fury.

"So, I was jealous, you're going to get mad about it?" he said, noticing how close they were, nearly touching, he could bend down and his lips would reach hers...

"Potter, you better not be thinking what I think you're thinking." she snapped.

"That now would be a perfect time to kiss you senseless?" he said, subconsciously raising his hand to touch her face.

Lily pushed the hand away. "I cannot believe you." she cried, incredulously.

"Come on Evans, one kiss."

"If you so much as think of kissing me, I will murder you. Understood?"

"Understood, but if you change your mind..."

Lily didn't let him finish the sentence before she marched away. He was the last person she would ever want to kiss.

So, why was she wondering what it would be like?

Chapter 5

"Lily."

It was three in the morning. Not midnight, when they had crawled into bed. Not one, when Lily had woken up and had to pee. Not even two, when she had not yet drifted back into deep sleep.

It was three o'fucking clock in the morning.

Mary was going to die.

"What!"

The yell came out muffled, (as do must things when one's mouth is pressed into a pillow, along with the rest of their face) and Mary didn't hear the anger.

"I've figured why Black kissed me like he did."

"Because it would be indecent to kiss you any other way." Lily grumbled.

"Ha, as if he cares about being indecent. He lives to be indecent. He revels in it. He-"

"Is there a point to you waking me up, or should I just kill you now?" Lily snapped.

"Right. Black kissing me. He was trying to provoke me, thinking that he could get me thinking about really kissing him, which I would so never do." Mary said, propping up on her elbows, quite unaware of her roommates longing for sleep.

"Obviously." Lily replied. Mary didn't note the sarcasm.

"He's trying to play tricks with my mind." Mary added.

"And succeeding, apparently."

"Lily!"

"Sorry, you are in clearly in complete control of the situation."

Mary beamed. "That's right."

Lily didn't point out she was being sarcastic. That would lead to more talking and less sleep.

"Lily."

"If you say one more thing about Sirius Black, I will throttle you."

"Somebody's cranky."

"You woke me up at three in the morning, to talk about Black of all people." Lily said, frustrated.

"Okay, go back to sleep. Gosh, next time I'll wait until morning." Mary whined, looking over at Lily.

After a few seconds, she pipped, "Lily?"

"I. Need. Sleep."

"But-"

"SLEEP."

—

It was morning, James just having rolled out of bed. He had big plans for Lily Evans that day, he had seen the look in her eyes, (it was hidden behind anger and annoyance, but it was there) she had wanted to kiss him. And it was the day he finally would.

Explaining this notion to Remus, however, seemed to be a mistake.

"She isn't going to kiss you."

"She will, you'll see."

Remus didn't answer, only gave a disbelieving look. Peter didn't want to agree with Remus, and say Lily wouldn't kiss James, so he wisely said nothing. "What do you think Wormtail?"

Peter glanced at James, before saying quickly, "What do I think? I try not to."

"And you succeed most of the time." Sirius said, rising out of his bed.

"How come no one woke me up?" he said, seeing all his friends dressed.

"We wanted to see how long you would stay there. James was going for lunch, but I was only saying till after breakfast." Remus said cheerfully.

"Moony, let me miss class, a prefect? What would your mother think." he joked.

"His mother is a nice lady, feel bad for her, her son such a delinquent." James added.

"Moving past my mother-Sirius don't say anything, that wasn't an opportunity for a inappropriate remark about my Mum-we need to get to class."

"Right, Potions with Evans." James said, smiling dreamily.

"And MacDonald. She's about to cave, I can tell."

"You two are hopeless." Remus said.

"And thats why you love us." Sirius replied.

"And why Evans will love me."

—

Potions was a nightmare. Slughorn had decided to mix things up, and make everyone switch partners. Lily had no choice but to work with James, as he had yelled "Evans is mine!" before anyone else had a chance to grab her.

Mary had tried to find a partner, but Sirius, unlike James, had decided verbally claiming his partner wasn't enough, and caught her by the waist, pulling her into the chair beside him.

Lily refused to speak to James at first, silently fuming, Until he spoke up. "I only chose you because you're best in the class."

She shifted her gaze to him, her eyes narrow. "You did not. It's bad enough you had the nerve to think of kissing me—"

"And you have the nerve to bring it up, meaning you must be thinking about it." James added, loving the way Lily's face was suddenly the same color as her hair.

"I would never think of kissing you, I detest you, I despise you, I loathe you, I abhor you, I hate you in every way possible." Lily ranted.

"Theres a fine line between love and hate." James replied, his usual smile still on his face. It was unnerving, if she had told any other boy that she hated him, he would have left her alone, he would be hurt, but James Potter? He just smiled like it was nothing.

"I believe we are standing on opposite sides of that line." Lily said back.

"Not for long."

She had really hated his persistence fifth year, when their so thought mutual hate turned into his infatuation with her. Which, all things considered, the mutual hate wasn't ever so mutual, he was always teasing her, the way little boys everywhere showed their interest in the opposite gender. Though, she would have thought he would out grow it eventually.

She hadn't been shocked when Severus told her James liked her. She had suspected as much. The way they reacted to each other had changed. His mocking had become lighter, her responses harsher. The more he seemed to like her, the more she disliked him.

Then he had asked her out. While he had her best friend dangling in the air, certainly not the best time to ask. Of course she had said no. Then her friendship with Snape ended, and she grew closer to Mary. Since then, things had changed. She wasn't sure how, but they had, in a way that is she was still friends with Snape, they never would.

She couldn't define the change, she didn't want to.

"Evans, you alive over there?" James said, waving his hand in front of her face.

"Remove your filthy hands from my proximity Potter." she snapped.

"You were zoned out. Thinking about me?" he said hopefully.

"Sort of." she admitted, then realizing she did, covered her mouth.

He was grinning at her, a smug look on his face. Lily sent him a withering look, that only served to make him smile brighter.

"I was thinking of all the reasons I dislike you. I was on reason two hundred and seventy four when you interrupted."

"Two hundred and seventy four? Evans, I don't think you could name ten."

Lily whirled around in her seat, facing him, an intense look on her face.

"One: you are an arrogant git. Two: you are immature. Three: you're mean to my once best friend."

"Hey, you aren't friends anymore." James cut in.

"It doesn't matter. The damage is done. You can undo what it did. You were mean to a friend, and even if they aren't my friend anymore, you still were an ass when they were. That can never be forgiven. It's a girl thing, get used to it."

James rolled his eyes. If Lily was saying she would never like him, because of some greasy Slytherin, he was going to stab his self in the eye. "You have six more reasons to name."

"Seven, you idiot."

"Fine then, seven, stop stalling Evans."

"Four: you're dense."

"I'm not dense."

"You can't even count to seven."

James didn't argue the point, a simple mistake, anyone could have done it. His math skills had nothing to do with anything.

"Five: your best mate is also an arrogant, immature, dense git who was mean to my once best friend."

"What does Sirius have to do with anything?"

"People are judged by the company they keep." Lily replied.

"I didn't judge you when you hung around Snivellous."

Lily pretended not to hear his remark, and went on. "Six: you are annoying. Seven: you won't take no for an answer. Eight: I cannot stand the way you ruffle your damn hair. Nine: you have no regard for the rules. Ten: you're irresponsible."

"That was ten, but you know, eight really shouldn't count, you can't hate someone because of their hair, that isn't fair." James argued.

"Life isn't fair Potter. Get over it."

"Such hostility. I think you are hiding your true feelings Evans."

"And what feelings would these be?" Lily said, knowing where it was going, it had gone there several times before, and it never failed to be entertaining to cut him down.

"The feelings that make you want to pull me into some dark corridor and do unspeakable things to me."

Lily smiled, that one was too easy. "You're right, I do wanna pull you in some dark corridor and do unspeakable things to you."

"You do?" he said warily.

I do, but we're using different definitions of unspeakable. I'm talking about things like torture, killing, throttling, strangling, ripping your eyes out of their sockets and making you swallow them." she said cheerfully.

Sometimes it frightened him how she could say things like that in that tone.

"Let's just do this potion."

Behind them, Mary and Sirius were not faring much better. Mary was working on the potion, while Sirius was working on Mary.

"The Hogsmeade trip is coming up soon."

"Uh-hunh." she agreed, not really paying attention.

"Got a date yet?"

"Nope." she answered, observing the potion. It probably shouldn't be bright pink.

"Wanna go with me?"

Mary was too distracted to really be paying attention, but glanced over to him at that. "What?"

"Wanna go with me?"

Mary looked at him in disbelief. "You're asking me on a date?"

"Trying to."

Mary looked at him blankly. "Are you stupid?"

"So, that's a no?"

"That's a hell no." she said, turning back to the potion. It would be going along better if he was helping.

"Why, it isn't like you have someone else to go with."

Mary mentally cursed herself. She should have said yes when he asked about it. "Maybe I'm waiting for someone to ask."

"You aren't." her replied confidently.

"And how would you know?" Mary snapped.

He shrugged. "I just know."

Mary turned away from him. "It doesn't matter. What matters is we're going to fail this potion, because you wouldn't do anything but sit there and hit on me."

"It was more entertaining to watch you ruin it."

It took all of her willpower not to pick up the cauldron and dump the potion over his head.

"Don't you care about failing?"

"Let me see." he said, rising, placing his hand on her waist, guiding her out of his way. Mary tried not to notice that he touched her.

"I think it's right now." he said, breaking her from her thoughts.

Mary looked into the cauldron, and gasped. "But, you're supposed to be bad at Potions."

"It isn't my best subject."

Mary observed him a moment then grinned. "Oh my gosh, you're aren't a idiot, you're smart."

"What are you talking about MacDonald?"

He sounded wary, which made her believe it was true.

"How are your grades?"

"Horrible, everyone knows that."

"Let me see your last test."

"No."

Mary flicked her wand, casting a summoning charm. She had only just mastered non-verbally using one.

"Don't look at that." he said, reaching for the paper.

"Wow, you actually have high marks. You did better than me."

He snatched the paper back, not meeting her gaze. "Don't tell anyone."

"What? That you aren't a complete moron?" she said, then smiled. "Oh, I get it, it'll ruin your image."

"It isn't like I care about my grades or anything. I just do the work when I feel like it, and when I do get high marks."

"And all these years I thought you were cheating of Lupin."

"I have been cheating of Remus. I never do my work. I don't know the assignment most of the time."

"So, you're a brilliant slacker."

"You aren't ever going to let this go are you?"

"No way, wait until I tell everyone you're really a nerd."

The look of horror on his face made her laugh. "Just joking." then an idea formed in her head.

"But, you know, there is something you can do for me..."

—

Lily was going crazy. Auctioning off men was not the world's best idea. Maybe it was revenge, for having to kiss losers at a kissing booth, but it was not working so good. Asking them questions was worse. As if any of the girls would care for the answers, they just wanted the best looking one.

"So, Remus, you ready for your three questions?"

"Is one of them how did I get talked into this?"

"No, Mary informed me Sirius was forcing you and James. Something about if he had to so did you."

"He didn't force Peter."

"Peter wouldn't fetch a high price." Lily replied, then realizing how rude that was, flew a hand across her mouth.

Remus was fighting back a smile. "Let's just do those questions."

"Okay. What's your idea of a perfect date?"

"There's no such thing as a perfect date."

"Whatever, next question. Do you believe in true love?"

"I suppose so."

Lily hated that question. No one ever shouted yes or anything, and more than a few said no.

"Okay last question, this one is randomly selected by my group of girls back there." she said pointing, to the group of silliest girls Remus had ever seen.

One of the girls came up, and whispered something in Lily's ear.

"They want to know if you're gay."

"No, I'm not gay, why?"

"Calm down, I know you're straight." Lily said. "You can go, I still have the other two idiots left."

Sirius slid into the chair across from her. "Evans."

"Black. Let's get this over with."

"Fine with me. I just hope I don't get stuck with a troll."

Lily didn't comment. Though, she personally hoped he did, he and James both.

"Whats your idea of a perfect date?"

"One where my dates opts to take her clothes off."

"Ugh, next question. Do you believe in true love?"

"Define true love."

"Never mind. Last question." the same girl came up, and whispered something in her ear.

"I'm not asking him that!"

The girl shrugged and walked away. Lily sighed, and proceeded to ask.

"Boxers or briefs?"

"Commando."

"That is disgusting, forget this, tell Potter to come on."

James sat down smiling at her, waving at the group of girls.

Lily didn't waste time with the formalities. "Whats your idea of a perfect date?"

"Any date with you."

"Do you believe in true love?"

"You make me believe."

Lily wished it was over. She knew he would try to say things like that. The girl came back, whispering the last question in Lily's ear.

"How do you know it's love?"

"Because it's you." he replied, his tone light, but his eyes serious. Lily stood up, suddenly unable to bear being so close to him.

"I have to go. See you later Potter."

—

The auction had been going surprisingly well. It was earning a bit more money than they had expected. Remus had got stuck with a unattractive girl, but he wasn't getting upset about it. Sirius had gotten a rather pretty blonde, whom Mary had told to tell him her name twice. Lily did have to send off a herd of third year girls, who wanted dibs on some of the men, finally placing a sign that said 'only forth years and up.'

James was the last to go, and his being quite popular, Lily was sure they would get a lot of galleons for him. Not that she could see why he would be worth it.

The bids started pretty low, and Lily found herself yelling along with some of the girls. She was only trying to get more money, so when she yelled fifty galleons, and there wasn't an immediate cry of fifty five after, she began to worry.

"Aren't any of you going to bid higher?"

No one said anything and Lily buried her face in her hands, knowing this was not going to end well.

Mary looked around at the girls and at Lily. "Fifty galleons, going once, going twice, and, I cannot believe I'm saying this, but sold, to Lily Evans."

James had the smug look she hated on his face, and Lily thought she would die. So, instead of speaking to him, she got up and walked away, him following.

"Evans, where are we going for our date? You paid fifty galleons for it, you know, and you could have had it free."

Lily marched on, ignoring him, hoping he would go away. She had no such luck, him following her along to the edge of the lake.

"Potter, we are not going on a date, I do not even have fifty galleons, I was only trying to earn money for the dance."

"But you paid for a date, so we're going on a date."

Lily spun around, walking closer to him, a deadly look in her eyes. James would have liked to back away, but if he did, it would mean backing into the lake.

"We are not going anywhere. I'll find the money, and pay it, and skip the date. Theres no way i would ever go out with you."

James smiled at her. If that was true, she wouldn't have let herself buy a date with him. "If you say so Evans, but you have to get something for your money."

She was thrown off at the remark, until she felt his hand on her wrist, pulling her against him, pressing his lips to hers. Immediately, she brought her hands to his chest, meaning to push him off, then he ran his tongue along her bottom lip, causing her to gasp in shock, allowing him to take advantage of the situation, and deepen the kiss.

His tongue touched hers, and the hands on his chest that were meant to push him away gripped the fabric of his shirt. His hand sneaked up her sides, one finding its way into her hair, pulling her closer still, the other around her waist.

Lily was dimly aware that what she was doing was wrong, but her mind was too foggy to care. She allowed him to kiss her harder, responding with fever. It was only when he pulled away, that the part of her mind that had been screaming it was wrong seemed to function again, and she opened her eyes ready to say something to say anything, but was unable to, as his lips found his way back to hers.

James couldn't help but kiss her again. For starters, it would shut her up, stop the screaming he was sure was to come. That, and she the way she looked standing there, lips swollen, hair in disarray, eyes glazed. She just looked so indecent he had to kiss her again.

The rational part of Lily's mind was still telling her to push him off. Other parts of her anatomy were telling her rational mind to shut the fuck up.

James pulled away again, loving the sound of Lily's slight moan of disappointment. He swept back down, placing a series of light, teasing kisses upon her lips, before she groaned, subconsciously pulling him back toward her. Then he was kissing her like she had never been kissed, throwing all restraint out the window. Suddenly, Lily felt weak in the knees, slumping, so that he had to wrap his arm around her tighter, lifting her up onto her tiptoes, continuing to kiss her wildly.

It was he that ended the kiss, only when the thought of Lily's virtue struck him, and it was against all propriety that he should continue kissing her in such a wanton manner, in a place anyone could walk by and see. Lily almost whimpered at the loss, before she realized exactly who and where she was kissing.

She looked into his eyes, unable to think of a word to say to explain how she wanted to murder him in so many ways. Whatever he saw there, she was aware it was working, as he let her go. Then, a wicked idea filled her head.

She placed her hands back on his chest, bringing her lips near his. James was unsure whether to trust this gesture or not, and decided in either case, she would be the one to kiss him if it were to happen again. Not that the thought served to make her any less distracting.

"Potter." she practically cooed his name, and he felt as if he was floating, Lily, the girl of his dreams, cooing his name, allowing him to kiss her. There was something very wrong with the image, but when her lips were so close, he found it hard to think.

Then she gave him a hard push backwards, sending him falling into the lake.

"Never touch me again!"

With that she spun around, and marched off, leaving James dripping wet, and utterly confused.

Chapter 6

"Go away Black, I have to rescue Lily." Mary called over her shoulder, following the head boy and head girl toward the lake. They were already far ahead of her, the bright glare of the sun making it hard to see, their figures silhouettes in front of the sparkling water.

"Rescue her? She just paid for my best mate."

Mary sent a look over her shoulder at him. "Thats why I need to rescue her. Potter will never let her live it down."

Under other situations, Sirius would have wanted James and Lily alone, for James to get her, but there was a bet involved, and he didn't want to lose. Not

that he at all minded being seen naked, half the female population already had, and he wouldn't mind letting the other half. It was the principle of the thing. "If you're rescuing Evans, than I'll have to rescue James."

"From who?"

"From Evans. That girl is violent. And from his self. He does tend to make an ass of his self around her." Sirius admitted.

"You've noticed that too?"

The pair reached closer to Lily and James, so they were in clear sight. Mary skidded to a stop suddenly, causing Sirius to run into her.

"Could you test your brakes some other time MacDonald." he stopped, following her gaze seeing what she was looking at.

"Black, do you see what I'm seeing?"

"Looks like Evans is snogging my best mate."

Both looked out at the intertwined figures, barely believing what they were seeing. Then Lily and James broke apart, and Lily pushed James into the lake. Mary let out a string of giggles, while Sirius laughed behind her.

"-shouldn't be laughing-your best mate-in the lake." Mary said between fits of laughter.

Sirius stopped laughing, covering her mouth with his hand from behind her. "They'll hear us."

Mary nodded against his hand, for once not panicking at the contact. After composing herself, she slid away from him. "I have to go mercilessly tease Lily now."

"I have to go mercilessly tease James."

Sirius strode over to the lake, trying to keep a smile off his face. "Having a swim?" he said down cheerfully.

James gave him a look that clearly told him to not push the matter. However, Sirius never was one for leaving things alone, and prompted, "I saw Evans push you in. What did you do to her?"

James felt at this point in his life, while he was sitting on his arse in murky water (it was so much dirtier up close) his glasses lopsided on his face, with what he was sure was seaweed in his hair, it would be best not to answer.

"I didn't do anything, she's just bloody insane."

Sirius held down a hand to pull him up, figuring there would be plenty of time to tease him later. Though, he couldn't help one little jab. "Well, whatever you did, you must have done a very poor job of it."

If he had took into consideration that James was holding onto his arm, as he had offered it to pull him up, he would have kept it to his self. But, he did not consider this, and James pulled back on the arm hard, sending him falling into the water.

James looked down at his best friend, picking the sea weed out of his hair, adjusting his glasses. "How much did you see?"

"You pulled me into the lake!"

"And Evans pushed me into to it, and yet I survived, ergo so will you."

"Did you just use the word ergo?" Sirius said, momentarily distracted from his anger.

"Heard Remus use it once. Sounds smart doesn't it?"

"Much smarter than you are." Sirius assured, rising out of the water.

"You know, I don't think I've ever swam in there with clothes on." he said thoughtfully.

"Or without the presence of a female." James added.

"You'll pay for pulling me in the lake, I know where you sleep at night."

James rolled his eyes, looking at his wet friend. "With your attention span, you'll forget about payback by tonight."

"What?" Sirius said, hopping on one foot, pouring water out of his shoe.

"I rest my case." James said, getting out his wand, and casting a drying spell on his self and Sirius.

"You never answered me about how much you saw." he reminded.

"I saw you kissing Evans. I've gotta say Prongs, I've never had a girl so disappointed at my kissing abilities to push me in a lake."

"I'll be sure to pass that on to MacDonald, she'd love to be the first."

"Speaking of MacDonald, I wasn't the only one who saw you pushed in the lake..."

—

Lily was seated on the edge of her bed, her arms crossed tightly, her foot tapping erratically. Her school tie was loosened around her neck, her eyes unfocused, chewing her bottom lip in thought.

"Lily?"

Lily jumped at Mary's voice, uncrossing her arms and attempting to smile. It didn't quite work.

"You kissed Potter."

"How do you know?!" Lily cried. It was embarrassing enough she did it, she didn't want anyone knowing about it.

"I went after you, to save you from Potter. Guess I didn't make it. But pushing him in the lake was nice."

Lily flung herself backward on the bed, it creaking from the force, her hair flying out around her. She blew a stray piece out of her face.

"He kissed me. I didn't kiss him. So I pushed him in the lake. That's all, nothing more."

Mary grinned, seating herself on her bed. "So, was he a good kisser?"

Lily gave her a horrified look. "I pushed him into the lake, doesn't that sort of answer the question?"

"Not really. It is Potter after all. And you did kiss him back, so I wanna know what it was like." Mary argued.

"No comment."

"Come on, was he a good kisser?"

"Was Black good in the sack?"

Mary pouted, that wasn't fair. "Fine, point taken, I won't mention Potter if you don't mention Black."

"We have a deal."

—

"So, she pushes him in the lake."

James felt like killing Sirius. It was bad enough when he told Peter, who had laughed, but now he was telling Remus, who would laugh, and say 'I told you so.'

"Not trying to rub it in James but-"

"I know, you told me. And you are trying to rub it in."

Remus and Sirius exchanged looks, and Remus went on, "Maybe you rushed things a bit."

"Rushed things? I've been asking her out since fifth year, if we took things any slower we'd go back in time." James complained.

"You have to remember, she's a girl. Girl's like to take things slow. It's all about control. They know they have what we want, and the longer they make us wait for it, the more we'll be willing to do to get it." Sirius explained.

"You're referring to sex, I'm guessing." James said.

"What else?"

There are such things as meaningful relationships." Remus spoke.

"Moony, meaningful relationships are for people who are too boring to get attention from more than one person at a time."

"It's a wonder women like you at all Padfoot."

Sirius shrugged. "Women love blokes like me, they would like to pretend they could be the one to fix me."

"I wasn't aware you were broken." James replied.

"I was disowned by my family, I've broken the record for detentions, I disappear every month on the full moon with you three, I spend more time on a broom than in the classroom."

"We don't have enough time to hear everything that's wrong with you." Peter spoke up.

"That disappearing on the full moon never worked for me." Remus added.

"That's because you have a secret. Adds a bit of mystery, but women only stick around to they figure it out, then they get bored. Since it isn't my secret, it works for me."

"Glad to know you're using my lycanthropey to score."

Sirius didn't have a chance to answer, as James said suddenly, "Do you think Evans would like me more if I was broken?"

"What?"

"What?"

"What?"

James didn't expect them all to look at him like he was mentally challenged. "She might like me more, you know, if she thought I was, I don't know, Padfoot is the one who said girls like to fix things."

"Yes, but not Evans, she isn't normal. And besides, I'm not broken, I'm cracked. Big difference."

"He cracked all right." Remus said.

"Insanity is a state of mind." Sirius replied.

"What the hell does that even mean?" Remus asked.

"I don't know. I read it on a bumper sticker."

"Since when do you see muggle cars?" James asked. Sirius suddenly became very interested in studying his nails.

"Hey, that wasn't you this summer—"

"If you are refereeing to that time your aunts car went missing, I have no clue what you are talking about."

James let it drop, he wasn't sure he wanted to know. "How do I make Evans like me?"

"You could start by calling her Lily." Remus suggested.

"You think that would work?"

"It's worth a try."

—

If great minds think alike, than Mary was sure unbalanced one did as well, and since James Potter and Sirius Black were both pretty unbalanced, in her opinion, if James thought it would be a good idea to kiss Lily, Sirius might think it was a good idea to kiss her. So, she was hiding in the one place she thought she would not see him, the library.

She wished she had thought to drag a friend along, the reason she left the room was Lily was being sulky, but the library was just so boring. After a few minutes, she decided to do her homework. In need of books, she reached up, trying to get one from the highest shelf. A summoning charm would have been easier, but she didn't think of it. Jumping up to grab the book, she locked her hand around it, and hit the ground at an odd angle, sliding, closing her eyes and waiting for the collision that never came.

What did happen was an arm around her waist. She groaned, refusing to open her eyes. "Please don't be Sirius Black."

"Close, but not quite."

She opened her eyes, finding her self looking into a familiar pair of gray ones. "Oh, you're the other one."

Upon seeing the look on his face, she quickly added, "I meant the younger one, the better one."

All things considered, she didn't know him, but he wasn't trying to get in her pants, so he was already far ahead of his brother. Her words seemed to make him happy, and he put her back on her feet, stepping away.

"Mary MacDonald." she said, sticking out a hand.

"Regulus." he said back, instead of shaking the hand, using it to lead her to where he was seated.

"Why did you think I was Sirius?"

Mary looked at him blankly, then remembered her words. "Oh, gravity keeps forcing us together. I fall and he catches me."

"Do you fall that often?"

Mary blushed. "Only when he's around apparently. If he fell down in front of me, I would laugh. Stupid git."

Regulus arched an eyebrow. "That's not the usual reaction he gets from girls."

Mary smiled. "I know, usually, it's more like—well, I would show you, but I'd have to take off my clothes."

"Can I ask what he has done that is so offensive?"

"You can, but I won't answer." she replied.

Then she tilted her head, looking at him. "I thought you two hated each other."

Regulus looked away from her. "It's complicated."

Mary leaned forward, whispering, "Is it true his name was blasted off the family tree?"

Regulus met her gaze again. He shouldn't be talking to her, she was muggle born. A mudblood. Just looking at her, you wouldn't be able to tell. Her blue eyes piercing into him had the same emotions any other witch would have.

Mary didn't know what was going through his mind, as she waited silently. He looked so much like his brother, not nearly as good looking, slighter, shorter, but still... Even some of the gestures were the same, he was moving in his seat, Sirius always moved around when he was sitting, as if unable to keep still. She could have kept looking, but she didn't really want to admit all the things she had noticed about Sirius Black to herself.

After a moment, Regulus finally answered the question. "Yes, it's true."

"By who?"

"My Mum." he answered, then seeing the stricken look on her face, added, "I thought it was a bit harsh, personally, but you don't argue with my Mum. She can be..." he trailed off, not sure how to finish.

She shouldn't be talking to him, he was friends with Slytherins, some of the same Slytherins who had did some dark magic on her in fifth year. But all she felt was pity.

"So, was Black-Sirius that is, guess you're Black too, was he always a git, or was there ever a time he wasn't a complete toad?"

She saw the corners of his mouth almost twitch into a smile. Maybe he wasn't so bad.

"No, he was always a git. But you really can't blame him. Comes with being a Black."

Mary smiled at him. Maybe he wasn't so bad. "But his name was blasted off the tree."

"I know, you think I would have left you alone to improve."

Then Regulus grew somber. "If I had ran away, I would have went to Andromeda's. She was the other Black blasted off the tree. She married a mud- muggle born."

Mary ignored that he had almost used that vile word. Some things like that ran deep. If your dad, and his dad, and his dad before him all said it, you would too.

"I think I remember a rumor about her. Is that what your family does to everyone, blast them off the tree, if they do something you disapprove of?"

"Pretty much."

Mary swung her feet in front of her, unable to imagine her family ever doing such a thing. What was life like for Sirius, growing up in such a place?

"Why did you say if you ran away? Would you?"

"No point running. You can't escape who you are, what you're part of. One day you'll wake up and realize that you've been seeing the world through someone else's eyes, and it'll be too late to change it."

The tone in his voice frightened her. It was too dark, too bitter. "It's never too late, if it's what you want."

He looked up, his eyes meeting her briefly. "Sometimes it is."

"Not if you fight for it. You have to fight to change things, sometimes, harder than you think you can."

Who was she to say such things? She didn't believe in war. She was a lover not a fighter. There was a war happening, and she wanted no part of it. She just wanted it to go away. Or, if she had to do anything, be a healer, that way, she could still help, but not have to fight.

There was an oddly pained look on his face, and he quickly looked away, changing the subject. "How's Sirius?" Then, he quickly added, "Not that I care."

Mary thought the kind thing to do, would be to not point out that she thought this was a lie, and simply answer. "He's fine. He's good. You know, same prat he always is."

Regulus stood, Mary watching him rise. "Are you leaving?"

"I shouldn't be talking to you. People like us, we don't usually chat with."

Mary didn't have to hear the end, she knew it. It was society. It was life. Frankly, she was used to it.

"Is it hard, living your life based on what you think you should do, as opposed to doing what you want, what you think you should, not what someone else has fed you?"

She was getting angry, she had expected an angry remark. What she got surprised her.

"More than you would know."

He walked a few steps away, then stopped. "Don't tell Sirius about this conversation."

"If it's what you want," she replied, pondering. Perhaps there was more to Sirius Black than she thought.

—

The view outside her window was getting boring. The sun had been shining brightly, but it had moved behind a cloud, the only cloud in the sky, and she could no longer stare at it. It wasn't normal behavior, to stare at the sun, nor good for one's vision, but Lily felt as though she was proving something to herself. The longer she could let it burn, the stronger she was.

She needed all her strength. James Potter would require it. Lately, she had been losing more and more battles with him. She was at her wits' end. The verbal spars seemed more and more silly. He didn't ask her out as much. She didn't miss it, but still...

Things had changed. Something was changing still, and it was beyond her control. And that little kiss by the lake hadn't helped things, and no matter what she wanted to believe, pushing him in the lake didn't exactly even out the odds.

The common room was a better place to be. People to distract her from her thoughts. She walked down the steps, curling into a chair. It was oddly quiet. There was no fire, almost no light. Some one had been playing with things from Zonko's again. She should find them and confiscate it, but it seemed to much effort.

The sound of footsteps could be heard, and she registered that they sounded like James Potters. Sadly enough, she could recognize his footsteps, she had heard them trailing behind her so often.

"Ev-I mean, Lily."

Lily was a little thrown off to hear him use her first name. It was something he never did. The best tactic, she decided was to ignore it. "Potter."

"That has a nice ring to it, doesn't it, Lily Potter."

That was a blatant attempt to provoke her, and she was not giving him the pleasure. He had already gotten far too much out of her for one day. "What do you want Potter?"

"I need to talk to you Lily."

She turned her head, looking him over. The shadows were playing across his face, making him seem translucent. The only thing she could see clearly were his eyes, and they had the same serious look as before, the one that caused her to have to leave.

"Whatever you have to say Potter, you can take it and shove it where the sun doesn't shine. I don't want to hear it."

This didn't discourage him, she hadn't really expected it too. It was just their way. If she had said 'okay, sure' then things would be off balance. The universe out of line. The planets out of whack. They would cease to be Evans and Potter, and would have to be Lily and James.

"I'm sorry."

She swung around in her seat, eying him. That was not what she had been waiting for. Where was the smart ass remark? The tease of how she did, in fact, kiss him back?

"Am I hearing correctly, or have you finally driven me mad?"

"You are hearing correctly, and in either case, it isn't a far dive." Seeing the look on her face at the last remark, he went on, "I'm sorry I kissed you. I shouldn't have. It was bad timing."

"Did you realize this before or after I pushed you in the lake?" she sniped.

"After. And may I add, you didn't know if I could swim, and if I had drowned you would have felt extremely guilty."

Lily rolled her eyes, then remembered the dark, and that he likely couldn't see. "It was shallow water. It takes a special kind of stupid to drown in that, that even you do not possess."

Instead of responding, he walked closer to her, stopping behind her chair, folding his arms across the top. The back of her head was just barely touching them, but it seemed too much. However to move would seem too obvious. Instead, she turned her head slightly, looking up at him.

It was her ear brushing his arm then, and she found herself unable to look at his face. She focused on his robes. They were worn around the sleeves, more wrinkled than hers. The same ones she had pushed him in the lake in.

"I would have thought you'd change."

"I would have thought you would too." he replied, the meaning in his words different than hers. Why did a kiss change things? It was physical, it meant nothing.

"Kissing you isn't a life changing event." she responded, meeting his gaze at last.

"It could be."

Before she could spit out the insult she had coming, he added, "Not like that. Listen, okay?"

Lily complied, for reasons she didn't understand, expect that he sounded different. He had a lot in the last few weeks.

"I meant, it could be a turning point for us. I did something stupid, you pushed me in a lake. We're even. We could start over. A fresh plate. Forget the past."

"Forget the past? After all the things you've did?" she scorned.

"I'm not that person. Not so much. I just want you to see that."

The trouble was, she had seen it. It wasn't as dramatic as she liked, but he was changing, he was growing up. And the adult thing to do would be to acknowledge that. She always pegged herself as mature, it was time to show it.

"I see parts of it. I do. But it isn't enough to change anything."

James sighed, shifting so that his arms were stretched to their length, one resting on either side of Lily's head. "I'm not asking for it to change things now.

I'm just asking you for the chance to allow things to change, whether they do or not."

His gaze was drawing her in, making her want to run again, it was too intense. She was unprepared. She could handle the usual non serious, joking him.

This she wasn't so sure.

"I guess that sounds fair."

James smiled, and she was lead to thoughts of other things he could do with his mouth, before she quickly vanished them. Those thoughts were not allowed.

"One more thing, Lily. Could you call me James. We are head boy and girl, we should be on a first name basis."

Lily wasn't sure what to say. If he was going to call her Lily, she would have to call him James.

"That makes sense on a strictly professional level. So, okay. But don't think it means anything."

James smirked. Lily's insides melted a little. "Wouldn't dream of it."

Chapter 7

Sleepless nights. They were brutal. Lily was learning that. All she could think of all night was James Potter and the intense look in his eyes. Finally, she had just gotten up, looking out the window, watching the sunrise.

She had never noticed how pretty it was before. All the colors, violet, red, orange, yellow, swirling together, thoughts of James Potter swirling together, a big mess of colors and emotions. Red like his quidditch robes, yellow like the tiny flickers of light in his eyes when he looked at her, violet like-

"Lily, are you staring at the sun again? You're going to scar your retinas." Mary cried, sending Lily out of her thoughts, jumping turning to face her friend.

"I was watching the sun rise."

"The sun rose an hour ago."

"Guess I was just thinking."

"Well, get out of la la land, we have to get to class." Mary said, looking at Lily's disheveled appearance. Her hair was unbrushed, her face pale, her eyes blood shot. "Maybe we can be a few minutes late. Slughorn likes you."

Lily stood, running a hand through her tangled hair. "Yeah, maybe."

"I snuck you some food up." Mary said, looking at Lily concerned. "Did you sleep last night?"

"Not so much."

"You can make it up in class."

—

From the looks of Lily, James was guessing Lily hadn't had a good night. As soon as she slid into the seat in front of him, he leaned forward. "You okay Lily, you look like shit."

Lily turned, sending him a half hearted annoyed glare. "You really know how to flatter a girl, James."

"That's not what I meant. You're still beautiful as always." he said flashing her a grin. "But, today, its a more...rugged sort of beauty."

"Right..."

"Good job there Prongs."

James ignored Sirius, focusing on Lily. "Hey, Lily will you—"

"No." she answered quickly.

"You didn't let me finish the question!"

"No, I won't go to Hogsmeade with you." she said.

"I wasn't going to ask about Hogsmeade. I already have a date."

Lily felt an oddly flat feeling at his words, brushing it aside. She should be happy. He wouldn't bother her. "Anyone I know?"

"Oh, its just Sirius and his ego. After MacDonald turned him down again, he realized he's never been turned down twice by the same girl. It could take some hard work, but I think he'll survive."

"Hey, I can hear you, you know."

"Shut up Sirius." James replied, turning back to Lily. "So, you see, I cannot go with you, but thanks for asking, maybe next time."

Lily glared at him. "I was not asking. And what was it you wanted?"

"Oh, that. Can we switch patrol partners tonight? You and MacDonald, me and Remus?"

His giving up time with her made no sense. It was not something James Potter would do. But, if it was what he wanted, she wasn't about to argue. "Sure."

"Thanks Lily."

Lily turned back around in her seat.

"Lily."

"James, could you let me do the assignment?" she snapped, but with not even half her usual frustration. She almost sounded amused.

"Why did you have to say that about me?" Sirius said lowly, so the girls wouldn't hear.

"I want her to think I'm a good friend, girls love that stuff."

"And you had to use me?"

"MacDonald heard, maybe she'll give you a sympathy hook up."

"You think so?"

"No."

—

Mary was extremely happy. She had managed to get all through Potions without having spoken one word to Sirius Black. It was enough to make her hope he really had gotten bored of chasing her.

"MacDonald." No such luck.

And it would have to be an empty corridor he found her. No windows. Just dark enough to sneak in a snog without anyone seeing, if you lurked into a corner.

"Until now, I was having a good day."

He fell into step beside her, grinning. She hated the way he smiled. It was so...It made her want to do naughty things to him, things which she had no

business doing. Not that it was limited to how she smiled, but how she talked, and walked, and breathed...

She never was one for denying herself her most carnal desires. Especially pleasures of the flesh. Men, chocolate, firewhiskey, if she wanted it, she usually got it, no matter how bad it was for her.

"Your words, they sting."

"If only they could kill."

"That is the second time you've mentioned wanting me dead, a few more times and I may believe you love."

"Don't call me love."

"Sorry love."

She gave him the dirtiest look she could muster. He was utterly unfazed.

"So, you, me, Hogsmeade?"

"Haven't I already told you no?"

"Giving you the opportunity to change your mind," he replied, smiling brightly.

"I'm giving you the opportunity to walk away before I hurt you."

He sighed, a bit dramatically in her opinion, and moved in front of her, walking backward as she walked forward. "You know, I'm beginning to feel as if you dislike me."

"No, Black, I love you," she said sardonically.

"I knew it all along. So this weekend, at Hogsmeade, would you rather go to the Three Broomsticks, or the Hog's Head?"

Mary lifted her hands as if to wring his neck, then walked around him. She wasn't listening to anymore.

"So, I guess that means you're letting me chose?"

Mary stopped, striding back over to Sirius, and angry expression on her face. When there was but six inches between them, she stopped, pointing a finger angrily. "We are not going anywhere together, unless it's the hospital wing after I hex you."

After thinking long and hard over what she thought of Sirius, she had decided that feeling sorry for him because his family was bonkers was not enough to actually force herself to be nice to him.

"You know, you look like someones Mum like that," he said, nodding toward the finger. She followed his gaze, and suddenly realized how close they were.

Well, she couldn't back away. That would be letting him know she was affected by the proximity, and he would never let it go.

She searched her mind for an excuse to leave, any excuse she could think of, but none came to mind. This was not good...

"You okay MacDonald, you're looking pretty nervous down there?"

"Nervous? Why would I be nervous?" she said, with more bravado than she felt. She wondered if he knew it was an act.

"I don't know, why would you be?" he said, taking a step forward.

She longed to take a step back, but there was a wall only three feet away, and she was not being trapped between him and a wall. Bad things happened against walls. Once, she had done it with a guy her fifth year against a wall. That wall was inside a broom closet, but still, that sort of pinning, that sort of entrapment was dangerous.

When he reached out a hand to touch her, she lost her resolve, backtracking as far as she could, until she felt the wall behind her, her back hitting it with more force than she would like.

He followed her, leaving her no personal space. "If you aren't nervous, why are you running?"

She looked up and locked eyes with him. "Maybe I like to be chased."

It was all she could think of to say, and it wasn't exactly the most discouraging thing. He lifted a hand, idly playing with a bit of her hair. She closed her eyes, trying not to shudder. She could feel his body brushing against hers they were so close, too close...

Before she could think that closing her eyes likely sent the wrong signal, she felt him leaning toward her, his lips near hers. She had to think of something to say. Anything to say.

"I may like to be chased, but I never let myself get caught," she whispered, her lips only a fraction from his, if she leaned forward even the tiniest bit...

She could slide away, leave it at that. Let him think she was just being coy. If only her damn feet would move.

"I have you pinned to a wall MacDonald, I think that defines caught."

"Yes, but you aren't the sort of guy who do anything to a girl she wasn't willing to do," she said back, trying (and failing) to keep her eyes from falling to his lips.

"You seem pretty willing to me."

"I think you may be projecting."

Neither said anything for a second, waiting for the other to make the next move. Finally Mary spoke, "Are you going to let me go some time this year?"

"Are you going to go to Hogsmeade with me?" he asked.

"No!"

"Then I'm afraid I don't have any choice," he murmured, bringing his lips to hers. She tried to move back, but there was the wall, and she couldn't think, and it was only a kiss, that wasn't so bad, just to let herself sink into it, this one time...

Her arms snaked there way around his neck, much of their own accord. She knew the last thing she should do was to kiss him back, but her common sense was having little say in the matter. She felt herself rising to her tiptoes, kissing him back in a way she knew she shouldn't, it could lead to very bad things... Why was a broom closet never around when you needed it?

He tilted her head, kissing her harder, with a urgency she didn't quite understand. Her knees felt like jello, she had forgotten what a good kisser he was. She slumped back against the wall again, taking him with her, causing them to pressed much closer together, and his hand was sliding from its spot on her waist, and hell, was he unbuttoning her jacket? It was only a jacket she was feeling a bit hot anyway...

She shrugged it off, tossing it to the ground, intertwining one of her legs around his, and then he was lifting her off the ground, slamming her bodily into the wall again. The force knocked her back to reality, and she wrenched herself away, gasping for air. Looking down, she saw they were still locked together, and untangled herself, pushing him back.

"Satisfied?" she said coldly, hoping he would think she was as mad as she sounded.

"Not nearly," he answered, bringing his lips near hers again, her closing her eyes expectantly.

"See you around MacDonald," he said, and she could hear the smirk in his voice. Her eyes flew open, watching him walk away.

"Fucking tease."

—

In light of the fact that she had lost her mind, Mary decided to go to Lily, her best friend. What she saw was her and James huddled together over something in the common room.

"Really? Are you sure it's like that?"

"Po-James, I'm better at you in Potions, trust me."

"Am I interrupting something?" Mary asked, Lily jumping at her words.

"No, I was just helping James. You know, can't have the head boy failing."

Mary nodded, looking between the two suspiciously. Lily noticed the look and sighed, rolling her eyes. "For goodness sake Mary, I didn't snog him again." "Snog him? Who said anything about snogging? I never mentioned snogging. I haven't even thought of snogging. I am completely snog free." Mary rambled.

Lily and James both eyed her like she was crazy.

"I'm going upstairs now. You two have fun." she said, turning and walking away.

James looked at Lily. "You know, I think she may have snogged someone."

"I think you may be right. Goody for her."

"If you're feeling jealous..." James said, sliding closer to her.

"Don't touch me."

Chapter 8

Lily followed Mary shortly after she had strolled off, ready to avoid James. He had been sitting close to her, his arm brushing hers, his breath tickling her ear when he bent his head close to see...

Mary would be much easier to deal with. And she wanted to hear about the snogging.

"I don't wanna talk about it." Mary said, as soon as the door swung open. Lily found her lying flat on her face on her bed, shoes kicked off.

"Who was it?"

Mary groaned, but didn't answer. Lily went and sat at the edge of her bed, waiting. Mary would talk, she always did. And, sure enough, it wasn't two full minutes before Mary started wailing.

"It was stupid Sirius Black. Stupid, stupid, stupid. Why am I so dumb? I cannot believe I kissed him!"

It was rather amusing, how Mary was reacting, but Lily was to kind to be entertained. Or, to show that she was entertained. Though, she had thought Mary hated Sirius.

"Why did you kiss him? I thought you hated him."

"I do! But... YOU kissed Potter and you hate him, so why can't I kiss Black?"

Lily blinked. Mary had finally lost what little sanity there was left. "I never said you couldn't. You can kiss whoever you like. Personally, Black wouldn't be my first choice, but if he's what makes you happy..."

"He doesn't! I didn't want to kiss him, he made me!"

Lily sat up straighter. "He didn't force you did he?"

"Force me? No. He tricked me."

"He tricked you into kissing him?"

"Yes."

Lily stood, pacing around, sending wary glances at Mary occasionally. "And how did he do that, exactly?"

"If I knew Lily, then he wouldn't have tricked me."

"I'm beginning to wish I had stayed with Pot-James. You're making him seem normal."

"Oh, we all know you fancy him." Mary snapped.

"I do not fancy him." Lily spat furiously.

"You did kiss him."

"You kissed Black!"

"Okay, maybe you don't fancy him."

—

"What did you do to MacDonald?" James asked, entering the room he Sirius, Remus, and Peter shared.

"Who me?" Sirius asked innocently, looking up from his spot on his bed.

"It had to be you. Or else you're in trouble, because your girl is snogging other guys."

"She isn't his girl." Remus spoke, turning a page in his book.

"His girl for the wager. Makes it easier for me though." James replied.

"Don't get your hopes up, it was me."

Remus looked up from his book for that. "You kissed her?"

"Why do make it sound like that's so hard to believe?"

James thought it best not to interrupt. It would be much more fun to watch Remus and Sirius argue.

"Because she hates you, and because you waging to see if she will go out with you."

Sirius sighed. "But that's why I kissed her, now that I've kissed her, she will have to say yes."

"You do realize that, that is a horrible idea. You're playing with an innocent girl's emotions." Remus scolded. The book was put down, and he was turned to face his friends.

That meant a lecture for sure. Especially if he put down his book (which James suspected had one of Peter's dirty magazines inside) then he was serious.

"A snog is a snog. No emotions involved."

"For you Sirius, not for Mary. I know her. I patrol with her every night. You can't just kiss her, ask her out, and dump her for the sake of a bet. She would kiss you if she didn't like you, but she'll never agree to a date unless she had feelings for you. You'll break her heart."

James and Sirius glanced at each other. They had never thought of that. But it was too late. Neither would be the first to pull out.

"Break her heart? MacDonald hates me. If she goes out with me, it'll be to get me off her back, or in her bed. Either way, she isn't looking for a relationship. So if she agrees to go on a date with me, we'll go, she realize she hates me, and we'll never speak again." Sirius argued.

"Do you really believe that?" Remus said in a strained voice.

"I don't know. Maybe we'll have another shag, then she'll never speak to me again."

"That's unlikely." James muttered.

"Hey, she shagged me before."

"James, have you stopped to think what Lily would think of this?" Remus diverted.

"No, but she knows I'd be asking her out anyway, so she won't care too much."

"You're forgetting Mary is her best friend. She would not be happy knowing you pulled her best friend into some ridiculous wager."

James turned to Sirius. "He may have a point."

"Then we'll have to make sure they don't find out."

Remus sighed, picking up his book again. "Padfoot, at least promise me you will keep your hands off her. At least that way she can walk away with some of her dignity."

"Keep my hands off her? That takes all the fun out of it."

Remus sent him a look that reminded him of the way McGonagall had looked at him when she caught him in the middle of a snog session his third year. It was highly unpleasant.

“Okay, okay, I’ll keep my hands off her.” he said moodily.

“You aren’t expecting me not to touch Lily, are you?” James asked, that was not a promise he would be making anytime soon.

“No, you truly care for Lily, so I say by all means go for it. Just avoid large bodies of water.”

“Hey!, why are you on his side? You said you were staying neutral.” Sirius demanded.

“I’m as neutral as Switzerland.”

Upon the bemused expression on his friends faces, Remus quickly said: “Never mind.”

“I’m only supporting that he should win Lily, not that he should win the bet. He’s been chasing her two years. He does not only want her because a bet.” Remus finished.

“Lily is the love of my life.”

“We all know Prongs, heard it a thousand times. And I do not only want her because a bet. MacDonalds grew on me.”

Remus and James started at him in wonder. James turned to Remus, his tone serious.

“Did you hear that? Our Sirius actually likes a girl. He grew up so fast.”

“Yes I know, I never thought the day would come.” Remus added.

“We raised him well.” James replied.

“I never said that I liked her. I just said she grew on me. You know, like I can tolerate her. Thats all.”

“I think I hear wedding bells in the future.” James teased.

“Mary Black does sound nice. Not to mention the loads of kids they’ll have.” Remus said.

“Two of which he’ll name after us.”

“Don’t forget Peter.” Remus reminded.

“They’ll name their twelfth son Peter. He can name his first son James, and it can marry my first daughter Lily. It’ll be just like me and Lily all over.”

“I do not like MacDonald and I am not marrying her or having her kids.” Sirius snapped.

“Technically, she will have your kids. And she may have your kids, if you plan on shagging her. In which you will have to marry her, or her family will kill you.” Remus said.

“You make shagging sound awful. I think I’ll give it up for life. Just the thought of little Sirius’ running around..” Sirius said, shuddering a little at the thought.

“You? Give up shagging?” James asked.

“Thats one of the funniest things I heard all week.” Remus said.

“I don’t know if I should feel insulted or complimented.”

“Insulted.” James clarified.

“Don’t you have red heads to annoy somewhere else?”

—

The light was catching Lily’s hair just right, making it match the color of the gentle flames that were licking in the fire place. She was bent over something, a book, James noticed, the edges of it were frayed, and she was reading intently. The common room was deserted, except for him and her (there was some sort of disturbance in the hall, that he was pretending he did not know was caused by Sirius and Peter.)

She was too absorbed in what she was doing to notice him, and he took a moment to drink her in, before approaching her. Her eyes were dark, a shade of green he recognized as the one they had after he kissed her.

He crept closer to her, quietly. He was soon directly behind her, and she hadn’t noticed. He peered over her shoulder, looking at what she was reading.

“What are you reading?”

Lily jumped, turning her upper body around so fast her hair whipped him in the nose. He reached out and tucked a lock behind her ear, earning him the glare she was sending him to intensify.

“What do you want Potter?”

“James.” he reminded, grinning at her.

“What do you want James?”

He shrugged nonchalantly. “What are you reading?”

Lily snapped the book shut, turning in the seat so her arms were rested on the top of it, facing him.

“Pride and Prejudice. It’s a muggle book, you wouldn’t have heard of it.”

“I’ve heard of it.” he said quickly. Actually, he had not, but he thought he would score some points if he had.

Lily arched an eyebrow at him. “Really?”

“It was mentioned once, in muggle studies.” he invented wildly. Lily seemed to believe him, but also seemed disappointed that she had lost an opportunity to scold him.

“What’s it about?”

“It’s a love story. A woman meets a man, and dislikes him almost immediately. But, her sister likes his friends, so by a string of events they meet again, and he becomes infatuated by her, while she continues to hate him. As she should, because he is a bit of a toe rag, really.” Lily explained.

James smiled at the toe rag remark, he had been called that by her before. “And how does the rest of it go?”

“He proposes to her, and she turns him down. But he is unchanging in his feelings to her, and eventually wins her over with his persistence, and the making of grand gestures. Then they get married, and live happily ever after.” she finished, rising from her spot, strolling away from him.

“You know, this story has a familiar ring to it.” James teased, following behind her.

She spun around to face him so fast, that for the second time, her hair whipped him across the face. It smelt like vanilla, and he was tempted to lean in and inhale the fragrance.

“If you mean the girl hating a boy, who is obsessed with her, than yes, it is familiar. However, do not expect a similar ending.”

The haughty expression on her face changed, as she realized how very close she had brought them, in her spinning to face him. Their bodies were almost grazing, would graze, if either took in any deep breaths. A sudden nervousness filled her, making her long to back away. But she would not give him that little pleasure, to let him know he had an affect on her.

“Lily, what are you thinking about?” he asked lightly, smiling at the blush rising in her cheeks. Her eyes were dark again, and she was for once, in all the time he had knew her, rendered speechless.

“I wasn’t thinking anything.” she finally said. Though the way her eyes kept darting to anything else but him told James differently.

“Really?, because I’m thinking of several things.” James started, bringing a hand up, and tracing a finger along her jaw. “One in particular.”

“If you think about trying to kiss me, I will butcher you.” Lily said sharply. She was trying, and doing a poor job, of stopping the sensation where his fingers had touched her.

“I guarantee you I won’t think about it.” James murmured, bringing his lips down close to hers.

He replaced his fingers previous location with his lips, causing Lily to inhale sharply, a her eyes to flutter closed. The movement caused her body to just barely touch his. She shivered, sending electric volts through his veins.

He moved on, to kiss the very corner of her mouth, about to kiss her, when she dropped her book, it hitting the ground with a loud thump. The noise

brought Lily back to her senses, and she looked up at him with hazy eyes, stepping back quickly. As soon as she stepped back, she quickly crossed from a dazed sort of confusion, to raw anger. She rose a hand, ready to slap him for daring to attempt to kiss her. He caught it by the wrist mid swing. In her fury, she rose the other, James grabbing it by the wrist, and spinning her so she slammed back into the wall, him against her.

She struggled vainly to get her wrists out of his grip, to no avail. She stopped trying, giving him a murderous glare. James rose her arms above her head, sliding his hands up her wrist, interlocking his fingers with hers. He met her even gaze, no longer moving. It seemed to be a silent war, she would not speak to him, nor would she look away.

"Lily, as much as I care for you, I will not tolerate your hitting me. I think letting you push me in a lake is enough." he said, in a low voice, lowering his gaze from her eyes down to her lips. He leaned in closer to her, Lily lowered her lashes, following his cue.

"So, I'll be safe if I let you go?" he said, his lips nearly touching hers. She nodded mutely, the motion causing her lips to touch his briefly. She closed her eyes expectantly.

"Okay." James replied, his lips brushing hers as he spoke, before releasing her, and stepping back.

Lily's eye flew open, and she stared at him. She opened her mouth to speak, then closed it, deciding anything she said she would likely regret later.

"You dropped your book." James said, crossing the distance to it, and lifting it, pushing it against her chest.

Lily tried to think of anything besides the fact that his fingers were touching her chest, as she reached her own fingers up to lock around the book. He rose his hand, and she waited for him to finally kiss her, gripping the book harder. She was greatly disappointed when all he did was tuck a strand of hair behind her ear.

The smug smile on his face would have infuriated her at any other time, but her mind was not functioning properly.

"I'll see you tonight-no, I'm patrolling with Remus; so I'll see you tomorrow."

"See you tomorrow." she said robotically, her mind far away from her words.

She watched him leave in silence, wondering what was wrong with her. She had wanted him to kiss her. She was losing her mind.

Absolutely losing her mind.

Chapter 9

"Oh, you're back. Is Black anywhere down there? I want to avoid him, but I have to get out of this room-Lily what's wrong?"

Lily had sat on the edge of the bed, her eyes unfocused, staring out into space. She was twisting her hands nervously in her lap.

"Lily?"

Lily turned to face Mary, and said softly, "James almost kissed me."

"He almost kissed you? Meaning he didn't, so you have nothing to worry about." Mary chirped, smiling brightly at her. Her attempt at lightening Lily's mood failed, as Lily would not smile back, and in fact looked away.

"But there is...because...I wanted him to."

Mary's eyes widened, and she gaped at Lily speechless. Finally, she found what she hoped were comforting words.

"That doesn't mean anything. It doesn't mean you like him. It just means that you find him attractive, as do most girls here, and that you know he's a good kisser. Wanting to kiss a boy is a physical longing much different than any sort of emotional attachment."

"But, he's James. He's Potter. And I wanted to..." Lily protested weakly.

"The first step to recovery is acceptance. You've accepted it, and now you can move on."

Lily furrowed her brow in confusion. "You speaking like its some sort of drug problem, or addiction."

Mary sighed, and sat beside her. "How can I explain? Okay, I'll put it like this: I kissed Black. I hate him, but I kissed him. Why? Because I know from experience that he's pretty good at it. And once you know something makes you feel good, you're bound to do it again, even if you know it's bad for you."

"So, I wanted to kiss James, because I already have, and I wanted to try it again? Even though I hate him."

"That about sums it up. Men can be dangerous addictions. You get so lost in the high, you forget all the lows. And thats when you get in trouble, because that's when crazy things happen, like falling in love." Mary replied.

"I don't think I'll fall in love with James." Lily said back, smiling a little.

"What I'm saying is, if you want to song him, snog him. Just don't forget you hate him, because if you do, you're leaving your heart exposed. And if you do that, it's eventually going to get broken." Mary finished.

"Well, I am not going to snog him. I would never kiss some one I do not care for. Okay, that once, but-" she stopped, thinking about the time by the lake, how his lips had felt against hers, heat coiling inside her at the thought.

"Once is a accident. Twice is a mistake. More than that becomes a pattern." Mary said.

"Don't worry Mary, I'm not making James my bad habit." Lily said, smiling fondly at her. Some of the things Mary said were a bit odd, but she always did find a way to make her feel better.

Mary gave a dejected sigh."That's great. Because I think I'm making his best friend mine."

-

The time for patrols came, and Lily found herself strangely wishing for James presence. Though that could have something to do with Mary, who she was patrolling with. They had spent most of the day together, Mary making Lily peer into every hallway, or room they entered, to make sure she could avoid Sirius at all costs.

"Why do you think James wanted to patrol with Remus?" she asked conversationally.

"Don't know. Maybe their having a clandestine love affair." Mary quipped.

"Do you even know what clandestine means?" Lily teased lightly.

"Okay fine, maybe they're having a torrid love affair."

"Ah, that theory would be excellent, but you are forgetting they are both straight, and James is obsessed with me." Lily concluded.

"True, true. But, really, why do you think they would want to patrol together?" Mary asked.

"I don't know, anything special about today?" Lily replied.

"Um, lets see, its Alice's owls birthday, its the anniversary of my parents first date, its a full moon-"

Mary stopped when she heard Lily scoff at the last part. "What?"

"Nothing, just that the full moon remark reminded me of something. Back when I hung around Snape, he was convinced Remus was a werewolf."

"What? That's crazy. Remus a werewolf?" Mary said, laughing at the idea. "I mean, he's far too...gentle. And he's ill quite a bit."

"But he is always ill around-no, thats just coincidence." Lily said, shaking her head.

Mary looked over at her, pondering. "You don't think...I mean...you aren't actually considering?"

"What? No, of course not. Silly of me to even think it. Remus is the most ordinary boy I know." Lily answered.

"Very ordinary. Not at all the type to have skeletons in his closet, or dark secrets."

"Exactly."

-

It was late(or, early) when the boys decided to trek back into Hogwarts. The sun was just barely up, and as soon as they made it into their room, Remus

and Peter collapsed on to the beds. James and Sirius, who were used to keeping such hours, with or without Remus' 'fury little problem', decided that instead of sleeping (which would be hard to obtain, with Peter's snores) they would take a walk.

There was a light sheen of mist clinging to the ground, the sky a stormy gray; a sure boding for nasty weather later in the day. They walked in silence a bit, staring out into the overcast sky, before Sirius broke it.

"He's getting worse, you know."

James nodded. "Not so much during. But like this, on days after. He'll probably miss his morning classes."

"Not that he would tell us." Sirius added.

"You reckon that's why Peter stayed behind?"

Sirius shrugged. "I think he just wanted the sleep. Takes a bit more effort for a rat to keep up with a werewolf, a stag, and a dog."

Remus' condition had always been a pressing concern, one most difficult, as there was nothing they could do about it.

"I think people are starting to suspect, especially the Slytherins."

"Probably due to Snivellous. Wish you had never saved him."

"Sirius!"

Sirius grinned over at him, it was a rare occasion when James would be the one to scold anyone.

"Just joking. He isn't worth Azkaban."

Turning the topic away, James said: "Did I tell you about Lily?"

"What?"

"She wants me." James answered simply.

"She wants you dead."

James shot his friend a dirty look, before continuing. "I almost kissed her."

"Only almost?"

"I could have kissed her, but I didn't." James replied.

"Why not? If I had a chance like that to—" he stopped seeing the look James was giving him, and reworded. "If I was you, and I had a chance like that, I would take it."

"I couldn't. I had to get inside her head, make her think. If I had kissed her, she would have been mad. But, because I didn't kiss her, she will spend all her time wondering why, thinking about it, and she will have to admit to herself that she wanted me to kiss her. And then, she will realize she loves me, and we'll—"

"Please don't go into the Lily Evans speech again. You should have snogged her. Who cares about getting inside her head? You kiss her, she kisses you back, that proves she wanted it, you win." Sirius interrupted.

"I'm trying to make her realize she loves me, not seduce her. I could get any girl in some dark corner and have her knickers around her ankles. But this isn't any girl, this is Lily Evans. She has to be handled with care." James explained.

"Doesn't sound like much handling is going on."

James threw his hands up in the air in defeat. "Why do I try to explain anything to you?"

—

After (another) mostly sleepless night, Lily and Mary trudged down to breakfast, Lily looking worse for the wear.

"Lily, you have to start sleeping. You should brew some calming draught, or dreamless sleep." Mary suggested.

"Why would I brew it, when if I asked Slughorn would give me some of his?"

"Then you should ask. Though I am sure James Potter would love to know he kept you up all night. Not exactly the way he would have pictured it, I'm sure, but still—"

"Shut up Mary."

The girls slid into their seats, noticing at once that the boys were not there. "Where's the object of our frustration this morning?" Mary voiced.

"Where are the objects of our frustration this morning?" Lily corrected.

"No, its singular. That's how much time those four spend together. They form one functioning person together." Mary explained.

"Remus must be the brain." Lily stated.

"Of course. Oh, wait there they are, minus their brain." Mary said, pointing.

The marauders, minus Remus, saw the girls and waved. Mary refused to wave back. Lily gave a wave as if nothing had transpired. This apparently, was not a good idea.

"Good morning Lily." James said, smiling, dropping into the seat next to her.

"Why are you sitting there?"

"I thought that wave was an invitation."

"It was being polite." Lily said back, in a clipped tone.

"So, you weren't waving us over?"

"No!" she snapped, longing to knock the smirk off his face. "Wait, did you say us?"

She looked behind Mary, and saw Sirius and Peter, who had just arrived. Peter waved at both of them, Lily gave him a tolerant smile, and was ready to turn back to James, and tell him to leave, when Mary caught her attention.

"Morning MacDonald."

Firstly, Mary's loud clattering of her fork hitting her plate caught Lily's attention. Though she couldn't blame her, as close as Sirius was standing. Keeping appropriate distances were not his and James' strong points.

"I gotta pee." Mary broadcasted, jumping up and scurrying away.

James exchanged a look with Lily, who shrugged. If that was Mary's escape tactic, she wasn't going to knock it. "You know, I better go to. Girls always go to the bathroom together. It's embedded in our nervous system. You wouldn't understand."

With that she rose, following Mary. Sirius turned to James. "You know, I think we're being ignored."

"You know, I think you're right."

—

"Really, Mary. 'I gotta pee.' Is that the best you could do?" Lily asked, as they walked toward Potions.

"It was lame, I know. But I'm better. I'm so ready to deal with it." Mary defended. It was true, she was not going to be nervous, jumpy Mary, who was still hung over on kisses, she was going to be tough, bad ass Mary, who eats boys like Sirius Black for breakfast, and spit them back out.

The only problem, was she wasn't sure she could pull it off.

It was no surprise when James and Sirius walked in late. It was not an uncommon experience.

"Look at them, just strolling in like they own the place." Lily huffed. Though, Slughorns taking five points from their house, each, was enough to make the rest of the class share the sentiment.

James and Sirius slid into their seats, James leaning forward to talk to Lily. "I heard that comment love, we had a good reason."

Oh, and what should be?" she challenged.

"Maybe they were having a morning shag...with each other." Mary suggested.

"We were with Remus, he's sick." James said, before Sirius could comment on the gay jab. Though he had to admit, Sirius and Remus made pretty attractive girls, after a few bottles of firewhiskey.

"What? Is he okay?" Lily asked, concerned. She and Remus had both been prefects, she thought he was alright compared to the others.

"Poor thing. We should go cheer him up. I can bring cookies." Mary offered.

"He isn't dying you two." James said pointedly.

"Yes, but I do rounds with him every night. We're friends." Mary defended.

Sirius sent a look towards James then looked back at Mary. "Close friends, would you say?"

Lily sent a bemused look the boys way, he had to be crazy. Remus was not a romantic attachment, he was their information source, the consultant between the groups, the peace maker. Mary, however, took it as a golden opportunity.

"We're close. I mean-" she stopped, putting on a coy smile, "we're such good friends. I just adore him, really."

Before anyone could respond, Slughorn scolded them for talking in class. After that, they were mostly quiet, but Lily noticed Sirius kept sending angry looks at the back of Mary's head. She flicked her wand, words appearing on Mary's paper.

"That really was very cruel, what you did to Black, making him think you like Remus."

Mary smiled, and shrugged, flicking her own wand. "He deserves it."

"Miss Evans, Miss MacDonald, is my lecture so dull you're more interested in passing notes than paying attention?"

Lily smiled at him, Slughorn loved her, she could get away with murder in his class. "Do you really want an honest answer?"

"One of these days I will take points away for cheek, but with your talent I see how you would be bored."

"Nothing to do with you sir." Lily said sweetly.

"Life or death situation you know." Mary added.

"What was so important, may I ask?"

James leaned forward, between the two girls. "They were acquiring about the health of a class mate. Very noble cause sir."

Slughorn never had really liked James or Sirius, and both knew it. So, when he walked away, other than continue the conversation with one of them, no one was shocked.

"You know, I wonder about you Evans. Don't know how Slughorn likes you so much, unless you're working for 'extra credit' if you know what I mean." Sirius said. Lily was not sure if he was joking.

"I know that your mind is a very sick, twisted, perverted place, where a great number of wondering is possible." Lily responded.

Slughorn was sending them all dirty looks, so the four remained quiet, separating once class was over. James made to follow Lily, but Sirius grabbed him, hauling him into an empty corridor.

"You know, I had planned on being alone with Lily, in this same corridor."

"You had a chance." Sirius said dismissively. "This is more important than you and Evans."

James sighed, leaning against the stone wall. "What's it about?"

"Me."

"I thought you said it was more important-"

"Me and MacDonald. And Moony." Sirius interrupted.

"I'm not following."

"He told me to keep my hands off her. She prattles on about what good friends they are." Sirius answered, as if it would explain everything.

"So he had a reason for saying it. They're friends. What are you getting at?"

"They like each other."

James stared at him blankly. Remus wouldn't do that to them. But then again, he had spent a lot of time alone with Mary, and he could have developed feelings for her. And, Remus being Remus, would not tell, but suffer in silence.

"I don't think so, but if he does, what are you going to do?"

Sirius started pacing the floor, then stopped after a few moments of thought. "If he likes her, we'll have to call off the bet. I can't be trying to charm the girl Moony's fell for."

"So you wouldn't mind his being with her?"

"Why would I? Only a bet, not like I care or anything. Let him have her. Probably couldn't handle her anyway."

James noted Sirius had taken up his pacing, making him doubt the sincerity of his words. He hoped, for both their sakes, that Sirius and Remus did not fancy the same girl. Those sort of things never ended well.

Lily would know the truth, he would ask her.

—

Lunch was not pleasant. First James had came over, telling Lily he needed to speak to her, and it was 'really important.' Lily had told him she would talk to him later. If it was important, she would listen, if not, then she could always walk away.

The unpleasantness was only increased, when Sirius had the girl who had bought a date with him seated at his side at lunch. And Mary was sending dirty looks at said girl every few minutes.

"Look at her. I'm loads prettier, don't you think?" Mary said.

"Loads." Lily agreed loyally.

"Not that it matters. I hope they're very happy together. I hope they're the happiest couple in school. Just because he kissed me in a hallway yesterday doesn't mean anything. He can prefer her. I hope he prefers her." Mary raved, stabbing at a potato viciously.

"Poor potato. It never hurt anyone." Lily said in mock sadness.

"It deserved it. Stupid jerk." Mary grumbled.

"Did that potato happen to be named Sirius, by any chance?" Lily asked.

"Actually, yes it did, not that has anything to do with anything." Mary answered. "Hey, lets go say hi to Remus."

Lily stood, following her friend, rolling her eyes. It was not going to be fun, that was for sure. She was only glad she was above playing games, unlike Mary.

Mary slid next to Remus, who was directly across from Sirius, while Lily slid into the spot beside James, in between him and the other side of Remus.

"Mary wanted to drop by and say hi." she clarified. James was ready to say something he hoped would be both charming and witty, when he noticed the way Sirius was glaring at Mary and Remus, deciding it would be better to work on damage control.

Mary leaned over toward Remus, cupping her hand around his ear, whispering into it. "Act like I'm telling you something very interesting and naughty, I'm trying to make Black mad."

Remus said nothing back, but she could tell he was smiling. Probably planned on telling Sirius everything later, she thought. "Don't you dare tell." she ordered, kissing his ear. Then she frowned.

"He was supposed to see that, but I forgot to move my hand."

This time the smile as real, as she was likely trying not to laugh at her. "I'll talk to you tonight Mary." Lily had decided the same things as James, and was busy looking back and forth between Sirius and Remus, waiting for something bad to happen. "Lily, when can we have that talk, I think you know what I wanna talk about..."

Lily nodded mutely. "We can meet outside. In about an hour." then she couldn't help but add, "We can meet where I pushed you in the lake." Mary hopped up, calling bye to everybody by name, sending a false smile to Sirius, who looked on the verge of throwing a tantrum. All Blacks threw very good tantrums, and no one wanted to witness one. Lily followed behind her, waving goodbye.

—

The rain was falling down a lot harder than she hoped, and the wind was strong. Lily supposed common sense would have told her not to venture out into the rain, but she was sure James would be there waiting, and she would have to fetch him, before he caught his death. Not that she cared or anything, but she had wanted to meet outside, and she thought he just might be daft enough to think she would still be there in the rain. So, she would go out, get him, and go back inside. Only because the weather looked ugly, and she didn't want him caught out in the storm. Not that she cared or anything again, just human decency.

Lily stood by the lake, shivering. It was windy, she was soaked to the bone, and James wasn't there. So, apparently, he wasn't as daft as she thought. It was too much, suddenly, and Lily sank down to the soft, wet grass. Its blades stuck to the exposed part of her legs, the wind lifting the bits of her hair not weighted down with water, blowing them around her face. She had wanted him to kiss her. Regardless of what Mary said, that meant something. The question was what.

She didn't want to know what. Things were not supposed to be this way. Lily lifted her knees, hugging them to her chest. She needed to think, and no one would bother her where she was. A drop of rain hit her face, sliding down her nose, falling unto her lip. She lifted a hand to wipe it away, pausing, remembering how James lips had felt on hers.

Why hadn't he kissed her? He had the perfect chance.

"Lily?"

It was James voice calling out. Maybe he was that daft. Or maybe he thought she was. Either way she didn't turn around.

"I've been looking for you everywhere, why are you here in the rain?" he said, dropping down to kneel in front of her, removing his own cloak and wrapping it around her.

"Because I thought you would be." she answered numbly.

"Lily—"he started, letting it hang, unsure of what to say. The silence was awkward, engulfing, until finally Lily had to break it.

"Your glasses are wet." she stated, reaching up and removing them, wiping them on her robes. "All of me is wet too, so I guess that didn't help." she added, looking up at him. He had nice eyes, he looked better without the glasses.

"You look different, like a whole other person."

"I can't see you to tell you how you look." James replied, a smile on his face. Lily held up the glasses, and he put them back on. "You look the same. Only wetter. Not that I mind, your robes are clinging to you nicely."

Lily folded her arms in front of her, glaring at him. "You're disgusting."

"And you're a pain in the ass, but I still fancy you."

Lily felt her face turning red, how could he call her a pain in the ass, when he was the one who did everything? "If I'm such a pain, why do you fancy me?"

"I have no choice. I am captivated, entranced, infatuated, fascinated, mesmerized, bewitched, by you." he answered, his gaze falling to her lips.

She noticed his direction, and quickly interjected, "So why didn't you kiss me last night?"

"I have no idea. Temporary insanity." he murmured, reaching out a hand, drawing her closer to him.

"Don't." she ordered sharply, pulling away, wrapping his cloak around her tighter, covering herself to the chin.

"Why?" he asked, sitting beside her, so close he was touching, his thigh against hers. She unfolded her legs, it only made it worse, every part of her leg was then touching him, her calves against his, her thighs against his, shoulders brushing.

The rain continued to pour. It no longer mattered, it was second to what was happening between them.

"Because it'll change everything. And I don't want that to happen." Lily cried, desperately wanting to put space between them, but not wanting to leave his warmth.

"You said you would allow things to change." James reminded, his eyes meeting hers. Lily tried to think of anything else, she hated the way he could look at her, that intensity made her want to squirm.

"I didn't want them to change this fast." she protested weakly.

Thunder crashed, and Lily winced, pulling his cloak tighter around her shoulders, lowering it a few inches. It smelt like him, she vaguely realized, like something clean and woodsy, pine she decided.

"Lily, I'm going to kiss you." James said solemnly.

"No you're not." she said back quickly. Her tone was not very convincing.

"Yes I am. Unless you stop me." he answered, leaning in toward her, running his hands through her wet hair. "Did I ever tell you, you smell like vanilla?" he asked, kissing the strand of hair in his hands. Lily shook her head, gazing at him in a mixture of longing and horror.

He leaned forward his lips a fraction from hers, his finger tracing along her jaw. "Not going to stop me?" Lily wanted to say stop, but the words had died in her throat. She couldn't speak.

His lips meet hers, a soft, slow, lingering kiss. She parted her lips beneath his, but he pulled away. Lily wanted to scream, that was it? That was all?

"You taste like rain." he said, his thumb tracing her lower lip.

"You do too." she replied, reaching up to move his hand.

Before she could, he was using to pull her back to him, kissing her hungrily. It was in no way gentle, she could feel his teeth scarping her lips, his hands had found there way into her hair, tilting her head. She parted her lips under his, his tongue touched hers, and she felt as if she had died.

Her arms went around his neck, while he slid on around her waist, pulling her onto him. Her nails dug into the flesh of his neck, her body pressed into his. He let out a feral growl, in the back of his throat, adjusting them so she was lying on the wet grass, him on top of her.

Lily felt her back hit the cold ground, and pulled away from his embrace, gasping. "James, I—" She stopped, seeing his lust darkened eyes, her gaze falling back down to his lips, before he reattached them. Lily writhed beneath him, moaning into his mouth.

James pulled away from her mouth, causing her to whimper with disappointment. Her whimpers were quickly replaced by mewling sounds of pleasure, as he lined kisses, down her jaw, her neck, her ear, pulling his cloak of her, yanking her robes, kissing her collarbone as his hand traveled up her leg.

She wound her arms under his, nails biting into his shoulders, arching against him. James returned his lips to hers, kissing her savagely. Thunder crashed, and Lily started, yelping in surprise.

"Fuck." James said, remembering where they were, raising a hand to his mouth, wiping away a bit of blood.

"You're bleeding." Lily stated, sitting up, dazed.

"You bit my tongue when you jumped."

"Oh, sorry." she answered, not paying attention. She was still unfocused, lost in a haze of lingering sensation.

"Come on Lily, lets get inside." James said, holding down a hand. Lily did nothing.

Lily.”

His voice brought her out of her daze, and she reached up to take his hand. Instead of letting it go, he used it to pull her along behind him. Lily followed without arguing.

What had she done?

Chapter 10

The glass on the window was foggy, and the concerned girl looking out was ready to go and find her friend her self. She turned, casting her eyes to the boy who had just entered.

“I’m about to go after her.”

Remus sighed, sinking down into the armchair near the fireplace. “James went to find her, she’ll be fine.”

Mary turned back to the window, frowning. “I don’t trust him alone with her.”

Remus sent her a sideways glance, and replied: “Lily will be fine. She can control herself, even if our James can’t.”

Mary blushed, walking and seating herself across from him. Self control was something she lacked.

“Remus, this morning, you said you wanted to talk...”

“Whats going on with you and Sirius?” he asked bluntly. Mary was shocked, he normally was not so straight forward.

“I just wanted to make him mad, thats all. You know, get him to back off.”

“And you used me?”

“I saw an opportunity and I took it. And you have to admit, you work much better than Peter.”

He smiled at that, it was true. “Mary.”

“Remus.” she mimicked.

“You have to stop this.”

Mary crossed her arms, glaring at him defiantly. “Why?”

“Because I do not want to see either of you hurt. Especially by the other.”

Mary looked away, back to the window. When it rained it poured...

“To be hurt would mean we would have to care, and I assure you, I do not care for him, and he doesn’t care for me. He only likes the challenge.”

Remus refused to meet her gaze, an almost guilty expression on his face. Mary found that a bit odd, but pushed it aside.

“I mean, why else would he want me? He already got me once, and he isn’t exactly the kinda guy who likes to stick around. I actually think if I said yes, he would find me unbearably boring, and move on to the next girl.” she added, then tilted her head to the side, thinking.

“You know that may not be a bad idea. Because then he would leave me alone, which is what I want. And I couldn’t care less that he couldn’t care less. Really.”

“Except that you do.” Remus said quietly, causing Mary to meet his eyes. She sighed and looked away.

“He’s sort of...I don’t know. I don’t care, not really. I mean, we’re talking about a guy who couldn’t even remember my name a few lousy hours. Why would I care? How could I be that incredibly stupid?” she said, with a dry laugh.

The knowing look Remus was giving her made her want to crawl into herself and cry. On some level, she might have started to wonder what it would be like if he really did care, if he really did like her. And, on some deeper level, the thought made her insides feel warm and fuzzy. All those things she hated with a guy.

All the things that led to bawling your eyes out in a bathroom stall, praying that no one came in and saw you. All the things that made you hurt.

“He never means to hurt anyone Mary, I don’t think he realizes he does. He is who he is, and you can’t hate him for it.”

Mary laughed again. “Can’t I? He’s your friend, you get all the good bits.”

“And a great deal more of the bad than you would imagine. Just do me a favor Mary.” Remus said, suddenly more serious than before. He had even reached out and clasped her hand.

“What?”

“Don’t go out with him unless you’re sure of his feelings for you.”

“Um...okay. I wasn’t planning on saying yes anyway, but sure.” she said, a bit confused. “Why do you care anyway? Shouldn’t you be on his side?”

“I care because I’d like to think you and I are friends. And I am on his side, I would like to think of it as saving him from his self.”

“You do that quite a bit, I assume.” Mary replied.

“Not nearly enough. But, don’t use me as your pawn next time. He might actually believe you, and I wouldn’t want to have a row with him.”

Mary gasped, realizing the damage she could cause. She wouldn’t want Remus to suffer for her. “Oh, I didn’t think about that, not really. I guess I’ll have to tell him the truth,... or some clever version of it.”

“That would be nice.”

If it were someone else, besides Remus, they would be mad. But he wasn’t, and Mary felt a friendly rush of affection for him.

“You’re sweet. You should find yourself a girl. You’d be much better at it than your friends.” she said, leaning forward, still holding his hand, and kissing him on the cheek.

It was a great misfortune that Sirius had chose to walk in at that time. “You two look cozy.”

“This isn’t what it looks like.” “I can explain.” Two voices rushed at the same time. Sirius was not interested in listening, walking out looking angrier than Mary had ever seen him.

“Remus, I’m so sorry, I didn’t-”

“I know. Give him time to cool off. He won’t listen to anything you say until then.”

Mary sighed dramatically. She would explain for Remus’ sake. That was the only reason.

Really.

—

As he pulled her into the safety of the school, through the door, into the instant coolness that had her shivering, the wet and the temperature change making her want to curl closer to him. Then the thought left her head, replaced by the thought that she had finally lost her sanity.

What had she been thinking? She had been kissing-no, not kissing, making out- with James Potter. In the rain. In plain sight of anyone.

Or, anyone else crazy enough to wander out into a storm.

She quickly changed to other thoughts. How was it so cool inside a place that had no AC? Probably some complicated bit of magic. And why had she never noticed just how huge her feet were? Marly too. Or maybe she was only trying to distract herself. Her feet were the only thing she could see, as she had her head down. Down, not looking at James.

“Lily.”

“Do you think I have ugly feet?” she burst.

“What?”

“My feet. Do you think they’re ugly?”

James had the look of someone who would love to strangle something. Preferably her. Likely due to her desperate attempts to avoid what had happened.

"I don't know, take off your shoes and I'll tell you."

Lily stupidly found herself considering doing this. So she could hit him with said shoes, but the thought made her realize how undressed she was. Her robes hung open, exposing a wide expanse of creamy flesh, including her entire right shoulder, and tiniest bit of her bra. Which happened to be bright pink, and clashed with her hair horribly.

"Oh, what did I do?" she moaned.

"If you want a reminder..."

That was all he said, before yanking her toward him, with the hand she had never taken back, and pull her against him, crashing his lips to hers. She broke away, trying her best to look properly mad...but she feared it just came out looking incredibly turned on.

He slammed her back into the wall, kissing her ardently. Unable to resist this time, Lily kissed him back, feeling him lifting her by the waist, her wrapping both her arms and legs around him, pressing her body against his. With both being so wet, she could feel every muscle in his body pressed against hers, as if they were both wearing nothing at all.

An image of James Potter wearing nothing but a smile, pressed against her wet body filled her mind, causing her to tighten her hold on him, sliding her arms from around his neck, slipping her hands into his hair, kissing him like she had never kissed a boy before.

What little control he had been desperately grasping at slipped away, his hands (which he had kept on her waist until this point) slid up, pulling the rest of her robes down, exposing her pink bra. An awful color in his opinion. Lace, not cotton as he would of expected from her.

The heat radiating from his hand made it hard for Lily to think, that and he was still kissing her, making it harder to think (she suspected there were a few things getting harder for him, but she didn't to linger on the thought), and everything he touched was burning. And everything he didn't was burning to be touched. But she did not want to round second base with a man-or boy, she hated. Especially in a place anyone could walk by and see.

She yanked away from his kiss, looking pointedly at his hand, until he removed it, placing it on the wall beside her shoulder, repeating the action with his other hand, after he pulled her robes back in an almost decent position.

"I can't do this."

"I know, this is a bad place. Should have found somewhere more private." he replied. His voice sounded strained, and he looked strained. Though, that might have to do with the fact she was wrapped around him, her breasts against his chest, her hips against his, her...but that line of thinking could get her in trouble.

She found herself lowering her gaze back to his lips, then quickly looked back up. He was actually gripping the wall. At least he was attempting self control, something she had lost around the second time he had kissed her.

"No, I mean I can't do this at all." her voice sounded hysterical. Not at all sexy. Not at all like a girl who was dying to be ravished. Which, she was not, she firmly told her self.

"Why? If you haven't noticed Lily, you already have."

Why was he so infuriating? And so damn tempting? It should be illegal for a man (boy, she reminded herself) to be able to kiss like that.

"Because..." she honestly could not think of a good answer, other than her tried and true 'i hate you' routine, that he would no doubt mock, seeing as it wasn't common practice to wish to be ravished by persons whom you hated.

She said the first thing that popped to mind, no matter how ridiculous or absurd it sounded. "Because I'm a virgin."

"I'm not trying to get in your pants Lily. Everyone knows you're a virgin. I wouldn't make you one of those girls who shags a guy before even going on a date."

Lily almost opened her mouth to defend Mary, who was one of those girls, at least once in her life, but quickly closed it. If she defended those sort of actions, he might think she would support them, and she wasn't sure she could say no, if it came down to it.

That was the harsh truth of reality. She didn't like it, but she wasn't going to deny it. Not to herself. To him was a different story.

"You know a great many of them sort of girls I'm sure." she said primly, shifting a little under him, noticing the pained expression on his face as she did. She could move, it would be kinder to him, as she was obviously having quite an affect on him, but she did not feel that generous. Not to mention, she was comfy where she was, or deliciously uncomfortable. A bit hot. A bit bothered. Not an entirely unpleasant feeling.

"Is that jealously I hear?"

Lily blushed slightly, because for a moment it was. But, that was an affect of kissing. Hopefully, not a lasting one.

"No it is not. I hardly care how many notches you have on your bed post, I'm just reminding you that some of us still have their virtue."

It was amazing how prim and proper and snotty she could sound, while still having her legs wrapped around him. To laugh would earn him a hit, or if she was feeling torturous, a bit more shifting and sliding under him.

"Lily, can I tell you something, something you'll promise not to tell anyone else?"

Lily glanced at him questionably, shifting again (he really wished she would stop) to better look down at him. "Although I'm sure I would love an opportunity to blackmail you, I won't tell anyone. You have my word."

"Sealed with a kiss?" The dirty look she gave him told him no.

"Okay, the thing is, there may not be quite as many notches on my bed post as I let people think."

He said with a good bit of nervousness, and Lily felt curiosity, and much to her dismay relief, at the words. "And by not so many, you mean..."

"Very few." he replied, but he was not looking at her. Lily had a sudden thought, and she was sure she was not right, not James-I'm-so-bloody-awesome-Potter, but she had to prove it to herself.

"How few?"

"Ah, you see, I..never mind, I shouldn't have tried to tell you."

"How few?" Lily demanded, her voice fierce.

"None."

She blinked. Then she gaped. None? "Are you telling me you're a virgin?"

He placed a hand to her mouth, looking around. "Shh, don't say it so loud."

"Oh Merlin, you are serious. I don't believe you. Is this an elaborate scheme to get in my pants, because if it is I am not falling for it."

"It isn't a scheme. I started liking you in fifth year, I was crazy about you, and that was about the time that the girls I dated started to be willing to-" he paused, saying put out seemed offensive.

"Yes, yes, I know what they were willing to do, continue." Lily snapped.

"But you see, all I could think about was you. And how I would rather it be you." seeing the explosive look on her face, he added, "Because I was head over heels for you."

That calmed her down a bit, and he went on. "So, it didn't seem fair, to be with one of them, and want someone else. I guess I was hoping you would come around, and my first time would be with you. When you were ready."

Lily looked down at him, then said: "That is the stupidest thing I have ever heard. You will never be with me. But if I've spared other girls some grief, by all means continue on with this little fantasy."

"Never? You seemed ready to go a minute ago."

Lily's entire body surged with anger, and she moved her hands balling them into fists, hitting him on his shoulders repeatedly. "You big-headed, conceited,

arrogant jerk! I hate you, you're a complete ass, you stupid douche bag!" James caught her fists, pinning them above her head. She would have to learn to control her temper. Or he would need to buy a better life insurance plan. "And you're a nutcase, but you don't see me hitting you."

Lily glared at him. "Let me go."

"No."

She tried to move her leg, to kick him, but instead she only slid down him a few inches, and deciding it would hurt to lower her legs, as he had lifted her up a few inches higher than she could reach, remained in place. Though she did get a small thrill at his reaction to her body sliding against his.

"Let me go, James you're hurting me."

For a second she thought that might work, but she never had been a good liar. And he could always read her well.

"Has anyone ever told you, you're a horrible liar?"

Lily was tired of his teasing her, and she wrenched her arms from his grasp, writhing to remove her self from near him. He took a step back, and she landed on the ground in a most unladylike heap.

"I cannot believe you let me fall!" she cried, attempting to stand. The look of amusement on his face as she fell while trying to do so made her want to kill him. Slowly and painfully. "Oh, I hate you!"

Other times, she would have been ashamed of how childish she sounded, as she was sounding a bit like a whiny kid, throwing a fit. But she didn't care, she was tired, she was wet, she was horny, and she could blame all these (especially the last) on James.

He crossed the distance between them in one angry stride, and yanked her up to her feet. Then he proceeded to fiddle with her robes, causing Lily to shriek.

"What are you doing?!"

The annoyed glance he shot her made her close her mouth. He was closing her robes, not removing them.

"I don't want everyone staring at my girl."

The anger flared again, this time stronger than ever. "Your girl?! I am not your girl, do not treat me like I'm some sort of possession!"

His hands stopped, his eyes flicking up to hers, then back down. "I'm not trying to possess you...unless you want me to." he said, his eyes roaming her body. She felt naked under his gaze, a fresh flood of desire washing over her. "James..."

Whatever was in her voice, it had the desired effect, as it caused him to kiss her again. Barely. He was giving her a string of light, teasing kisses, his hand inside her robes again, driving her crazy with almost touches, his fingertips just barely brushing against her.

Lily let out an frustrated growl, lurching forward, kissing him hard. She could feel him smirking against her mouth, and she pulled back a little causing him to groan, and yank her back. He spun her, her back hitting the wall, as their lips fought for control. Lily let him have it, letting him take the lead was much easier.

One of his legs was between both of hers, and when he moved she gasped, drenching herself away from his kiss. He didn't seem to mind, as he started kissing every bit of exposed skin in her body. Which wasn't much with her robes back intact.

And he still wasn't touching her, only with the lightest skims. Lily had decided his plan must be to tease her unto oblivion, some sort of awful punishment for making him mad. "Would you just get on with it." she moaned, arching against him as he nipped at her neck.

He pulled her into a heady kiss, and Lily felt as if she was floating, flying, sinking, drowning, and she didn't care, couldn't care until-

"Oh, sorry, I ah-I'll just go another way."

Some first year, a puny little thing, had walked around the corner and saw them. Lily had never been so embarrassed her entire life.

"I cannot believe what I'm doing. Was doing. I have to go." she said quickly, walking away from him, feeling on the verge of tears.

"Lily, wait." he called, catching up to her, grabbing her arm to stop her.

"Don't touch me!" she cried. She kissed him, had wanted to do a lot more than kiss him, and in a public hallway. It had her feeling the worst sort of guilt, that she should do that with anybody, but him? And getting caught, by a first year.

"Don't you think we should talk about this."

"I don't think talking is what you have in mind." she said curtly, walking forward.

"Where are we going?"

"I'm going to my room. You can go to Alaska for all I care."

"Where?" he asked.

"It's a state in Am-never mind. Leave me alone."

The conversation followed much like this all the way to the common room, and when they stepped inside, they were shocked to see what looked like a book fly but inches past their head. Taking in the scene, they saw Mary, who was yelling and throwing any near object, and Sirius, who was avoiding said objects, which were aimed at him.

"This isn't good." James said from behind her.

"Not good at all."

Chapter 11

Everything had been fine until she walked into the common room. She had thought it over, decided Remus was right, and gave Sirius time to cool down. During this time she had done a lot of thinking, and that to tell him what had happened was important, but that was in the back of her mind, what was in the front was something else.

That maybe, just maybe, he really did like her. Why else would he get so mad? So jealous? The warm sliding feeling in her stomach agreed. As much as she tried to push it back, it made her feel a sense of victory. Sirius Black never went for seconds, he took what he wanted and he left. But she, just your normal girl, nothing special, had him wanting her.

It was silly, vain even, but every girl felt a little rush at having one of the most popular, sought after boys at school like her. Though, behind that sense of victory was something else, something much closer to her heart.

That was until she saw him in the common room, and all thoughts of forgiveness or second chances left her mind.

He was on the couch, with the same girl she had seen him with earlier, the one Lily had told her she was loads prettier than. The very same girl she had said she hoped he would be happy with. Well, they certainly looked happy. He was kissing her, and not only was he kissing her, he was really kissing her. A black rage filled her, and before the part of her mind that kept these sort of things under control could speak up, she was yelling, and drawing quite a crowd.

"You double- faced, two- timing, bastard!"

At this time, Sirius was finding a bit hypocritical that she should be mentioning two timing, after what he had walked in on. Seeing the look on her face, he thought it would be best not to bring it up at the moment.

"How could you kiss me then kiss her! It was like only yesterday!"

"Actually it was the day before-"

He was cut off by the girl beside him. "What's she talking about?"

Mary shifted her fury toward the girl. "You stay out of it or I'll rip your blonde hair out by its brown roots."

The girl looked highly affronted, then dropped down into the seat behind her and Sirius. Sirius glanced back at her, as if expecting her to side with Mary on her tirade. Deciding she wouldn't, he turned his gaze back to Mary.

"Don't talk to her like that. At least she isn't one of your best mates."

A fresh wave of anger rolled over her, stronger than ever. "What's that supposed to mean?!"

"Like you haven't done the same thing with Remus!"

The accusation only made her madder(though, it was what she hoped he would think, but in her rage that hardly mattered) and she practically snarled at him.

"We're just friends, I only pretended to like him to piss you off. Unlike you, he doesn't find it necessary to fornicate with everything that breathes!"

The knowledge that she was only trying to piss him off(and succeeded quite nicely) should have made him mad, but it only made him aware of how much trouble he was in. Mary would never forgive him, and he could kiss his chances of winning the wager goodbye. So, he might as well duke it out with her, he surely wasn't about to get put down without a fight, not with people watching.

"You didn't seem to mind last year when it was you I was forni-"

He didn't get to finish the sentence, as Mary threw the first thing she saw at him. Which happened to be a pillow, so it was harmless. The next item was a shoe, after that a bottle of ink, then the book. That was when Lily and James walked in, neither noticing.

Sirius had to admit, her aim was pretty good. The old saying hell hath no fury like a woman scorned popped in his head, and he had never agreed with it more. Mary had lost her fucking mind, she was crazy, she wasn't out to only humiliate, she was out for blood.

The book was followed by a another pillow, which was handed to her by Frank Longbottom. He wasn't sure if it was to aid his cause or to hurt it, but he liked to think Frank had handed it to her to keep her from throwing something harder.

"MacDonald, calm down!"

This only earned him a agitated shriek, and a empty butterbeer bottle tossed at him. That meant it was probably time to switch tactics. "I didn't even kiss her, she kissed me."

The girl, who had been watching the display with growing interest, snapped "I didn't know you had a girlfriend."

"She isn't my girlfriend."

"I'm not his girlfriend."

Both things were spoken at once, and before Sirius could say anything else to save his self Mary was back at him. "You kissed her back, and thats the same thing!"

"No it's not, its human nature. Someone kisses you, you kiss them back. It doesn't mean anything."

"Oh, so now I don't mean anything?" the girl behind him challenged.

The plan to calm Mary down had backfired, now instead of just one angry woman he had two angry women to deal with. Not good.

"Thats not what I meant."

"Oh, so what did you mean?" Mary said, her voice no longer sounding full of unrestrained rage, but a deadly calm, as she advanced nearer to him. The girl behind him rose, looking as angry as Mary suddenly did calm.

"Hi, I'm Stacy, you want his front, I'll get his back."

Mary laughed at the irony of it. It did seem only fitting. "Really, he loves girls named Stacy. Sounds good to me, be sure to kill him slowly."

Around this time, most of the students in hearing distance had gathered around, including Remus and Peter. Lily and James had stayed out of it, Lily saying to let them 'work it out'. James took that to mean: "I think its really fun to watch your best friend about to be murdered."

"I think we may need to step in now."

Lily nodded striding forward, James behind her. Remus and Peter were approaching also, from the opposite direction.

"Mary" he hoped the use of her first name would help, but she only seemed madder. "You shouldn't be so mad it's not like I promised you anything."

That was the wrong thing to say. "You didn't promise me anything?! I cannot believe you, all men are the same! I hate you!"

He was expecting her to lunge at him, she had the look in her eyes, like someone about to attack. It reminded him painfully of Bellatrix, who was the real nutter of the family. Just then, Lily and Remus appeared at her side, leading her away. James put an arm around the waist of Stacy, flashing a smile at her, and walking her away, chatting amiably. Peter stood at Sirius' side.

"People are staring."

"Yes, Wormtail, I can see that."

"I think we should go upstairs."

"Good idea."

-

Lily took over guiding Mary, as they reached the stairs to the girls dorms. Remus let them go, saying he was going to go have a talk with Sirius. Neither Lily nor Mary spoke until they were inside the privacy of their room, where their other two roommates (Alice and Dorcas) were not in.

"What happened?"

"He was-I saw him..then I." Mary started, then fell back on to the bed, ready to scream.

"Care to elaborate?"

"He was kissing her. And I, sort of lost it, I guess."

Lily nodded, observing Mary nervously. She had gathered that much already, what she wanted was to hear Mary's side of it. Without it being yelled for the entire population of Europe to hear.

"I don't know what happened, I saw him, and I couldn't control myself. Lily, I was wanted to hurt him."

Sadly, it was true. She had wanted to hurt him, and for more than the raw fury. Because he had hurt her. She had let her self get so angry, simply because it saved feeling so hurt.

"I know, I understand. Mary, it's going to be okay." Lily said assuringly. Whether this was true or not had no meaning, it was what you were supposed to say at such times. Though, Mary had never cared for what one was supposed to do.

"No it's not. Lily, I was so mad. But more than that, I was...I wanted to cry. It mattered, and I don't know why, because it isn't supposed to matter, why should I care who he kisses, or where?"

Know she really felt as if she was fighting back tears, and crying was not something Mary MacDonald did. She hadn't cried since her forth year, she took things in stride. If it hurt, don't let it show, don't let the weakness show. She did not bend, she did not break.

Maybe she was already broken.

"I think I may have went and lost my mind." Mary decided, causing Lily to smile.

"If it helps any, know you aren't alone."

Mary arched an eyebrow. That sounded interesting, and a much more welcome train of thought than Sirius Black's lasted conquest. No, not conquest, she had interrupted that, but she was sure that was where it would have lead, she knew from experience.

"James?"

Lily sat beside her, sighing. "James."

What happened?"

Lily groaned, not wanting to relive the events (wanting to relive them again and again), wishing they had never happened (glad they had happened), not knowing what she felt (being scared of what she felt.)

"It's all very confusing," she stated, knowing Mary would want more. And she would give it, if she had walked in and saw James in a snog fest with some random girl, she would crave a distraction.

"I went to find him in the rain. But he found me. And he told me he was going to kiss me, and he did."

That was simplifying things, but she knew Mary well enough to pause for questions.

"He kissed you? And you let him? What was it like? Better or worse than last time?"

Lily almost laughed at the eagerness in Mary's voice. "Better. But what was best was when we got inside."

Mary turned on her side eagerly, ready to bust with a thousand questions. Lily waited for her to ask, and seeing she was ready to listen, continued.

"So, we sort of made out. Against a wall. And he may have seen my in my bra. Things got a little...heated. But then, we were caught by a first year."

Mary gaped at her. "Things got heated? How heated?"

"More than I would like to admit."

Mary smiled at her. "Did he hit a home run?"

"No!" Lily cried, blushing furiously.

"Did he come close?"

"He barely rounded second." Lily said stiffly, glad that most of the witches around would not understand the muggle terminology.

"Ah, so he did round second. Lily, I...wow."

"Yeah, wow."

The pair sat in silence, until Mary spoke. "You going to be okay with this?"

"With wanting to shag Potter? No. You going to be okay with Black kissing blonde?"

Mary did not say anything about Lily's wanting to shag James comment. That would be cruel and unusual, to make her discuss it. The things you wanted were sometimes the last thing you needed, and there wasn't much you could do about it.

"Maybe. But we'll both be okay, eventually."

Lily lay down beside her, closing her eyes. "Yeah, I think so."

"Don't worry Lily, I'm here for you, I won't let you not be okay."

"Same here."

—

"I can't blame you. I would have kissed her too." Peter spoke up. He and Sirius were alone in their room, as James and Remus had not come up.

"I know you would have kissed her, you would kiss anything."

"I was just trying to help." Peter defended, feeling slightly offended. Sirius had the unfortunate habit of taking out his bad mood on anyone near.

"yeah, yeah."

Peter decided this comment passed for an apology, and went on, "Why was she so mad? I thought she said no when you asked her out."

"She did say no." Sirius answered, letting the book he was levitating in the air drop. "So it's her fault, really."

"Nice logic there Padfoot."

Sirius and Peter turned toward the door, seeing James and Remus enter. Sirius pretended not to have heard James' remark, and returned to levitating his book, bobbing it up and down, up and down.

"You've finally done something that proves you are an even bigger idiot than I thought." James said, grinning. Then, for safety precautions, he grabbed the book from mid air.

"I can snog whoever—"

"Getting caught?" James broke in.

Sirius shrugged. "Yes, that wasn't smart. But I stick to the defense that she kissed me."

"And that makes you completely guilt free." James added.

"It does." Sirius defended.

"I thought you were the one who was good with women."

"I am good with women. MacDonald is not a woman, but a vicious, life sucking harpy."

Remus sent him a dirty look, taking over the conversation. He had hoped James would handle it, as Sirius was more apt to listen to him, but it appeared to be a false hope.

"A life sucking harpy?"

"You aren't going to defend her are you? She pretended to fancy you, to get to me."

"And you thought the worst of it, and you know that I would never do anything—" Remus started.

"I know you wouldn't! I thought...I wasn't thinking. But she still shouldn't have done it. Serves her right I kissed someone else. Not that I can't kiss who ever I want. She can't tell me what to do."

James and Remus exchanged looks. It seemed something had hit a nerve.

"Can she kiss whoever she wants?" Remus asked.

"Yes...no. Maybe. No."

"That made sense." James said brightly.

"So, you can but she can't?" Remus asked.

"That sounds right."

"Do you realize how unfair that is?" Remus scorned.

"Life's unfair." Sirius said dejectedly.

"Excellent defense there." James complimented sarcastically.

"I'm sure Mary will love it. You can give her that explanation when she confronts you again."

"Shut up Remus."

"I think she'll forgive you." Peter pipped.

"Course she will, I just need to figure out how to go about persuading her."

"Um, how about you apologize?" James suggested.

"Apologize? Never."

Remus only shook his head in frustration. If Sirius and Mary were going to be fighting, he would be dragged in the middle, and that was one war he did not want to be involved in.

—

It was a full two days before either girl would talk to the boys. When they did talk, it was James to Lily, asking her why she avoided him. The hallways were

clear, no one in sight, light streaming in the window, her seated at the edge, lost in thought.

"Lily."

"What do you want Potter?" she snapped, more angry at being pulled from her thoughts than at him. But he didn't need to know that.

"We're back to that?" he asked, fully aware of the use of his surname. He refused to go backwards. He had been chasing Lily Evans for years, and he would have her if he died in the process.

"Guess so."

James took a step toward her and she hopped off the ledge she was perched on, walking away. He caught up with her easily.

"Go away Potter."

"Sorry, but I can't do that dear."

"Potter." Lily said through gritted teeth. Dear was what her mum called her dad. James Potter could not call her dear. It was all to couple-ish.

"Yes, sweet pea?"

"Okay, fine, I'll call you James." she gave in. Being called sweat pea was just intolerable.

"Thank you Lily."

Lily had never so badly wanted to wipe the smirk off his face. Not to mention, she didn't exactly want to see him. After what happened, she needed air, she needed to think.

"What do you want with me?" she said irritably. The quicker they went through their normal routine, the quicker she could be rid of him.

"To stripe you naked and cover you in whip cream, but thats hardly what I'm here for."

Lily spun around and gaped at him. Deciding there were no words to reply to that, she spun back around a haughty expression on her face. Not that the thought didn't have its appeal.

"You know, you remind me of someone when you do that, I can't think of who...I got it. Sirius' cousin. Narcissa. She always had that look on her face. A real shame too, she would have been pretty without it."

"Then why don't you go after her?" Lily suggested speeding up.

"Because she is married and horrid. Besides, the only girl for me is you." he replied, catching back up with her again.

"You know that I'm siding with Mary right? So, we could never be together. I hate your best friend. That would cause severe problems in our relationship."

Lily hoped that might make him leave her alone, but no.

"So you're admitting we have a relationship." James said, smiling.

"No, I..."

"But, thats okay. I've figured it all out. Since you hate my best friend, and I think yours is psycho, we can both just deal with the other for the sake of our love."

"Mary is not psycho!" Lily defended.

"She threw a book at my best friend."

"Yes, well, he deserves it." Lily said conclusively, not really sure herself, but Mary was her best friend, and had stuck with her through thick and thin.

And of course, she hated James Potter, which made Mary staying away from Sirius all the more convenient.

"I'm not going to argue about this with you." James replied.

"Why not?" Lily challenged. She would love to argue with him, it could help her remember that kissing him in hallways was not something to be desired.

"Because, you'll make it into something worse than it is and refuse to speak to me for two weeks."

Lily found this to be an uncomfortable truth, and even more uncomfortable that he should realize it. "I refuse to speak to you in most cases anyway."

James continued as if he had not heard her, much to Lily's irritation. "Plus, if we get in a fight, you will be more likely to say no when I ask you out."

Lily froze, her mind not quite able to wrap around the words. Ask her out? After he had finally managed to go more than a day at a time without it?

"So we're back to that again?" she spat, walking forward briskly. James did not follow, but stopped and leaned against the wall. For some reason, Lily found herself slowing down, and turning back to look at him.

"Guess so."

The two said nothing, and for a moment, Lily felt as if the world had stopped spinning. She hated the way he could look at her, that searing intensity, the sort that made her want to crawl inside herself and pick her insides clean of him. That look seeped him into every pore, into the air she breathed, making her want to burst.

It was emotional overload, and she didn't like it. She had the strangest urge to bury herself into his arms, and hold on until the world was normal again. Which, would contradict every aspect of normal she had ever knew to do so.

Finally, he shifted his gaze away, and she could breathe. Lily was sure he knew of his affect on her, it was why he did it so often. Walking away would seem wrong, anti-climatic almost. Though, the thought that her and James could have a climax sent shivers down her spine.

After the longest moment in the history of the world(at least, in Lily's world) he looked back at her, the intensity gone, his normal smile on his face. "So, what do you say?"

"Say to what?" Lily asked dumbly. Somehow, the way he looked at her was the same as if he had kissed her. Maybe more so, because this was an emotional sort of drowning, and kissing him was just...kissing him.

"Go out with me?"

Lily opened her mouth, then closed it. The answer was obvious, but the hesitation was unheard of. She should have shouted no, shouted it for the world to hear. Instead, she shook her head, not a negative answer, but to clear her mind.

"No."

With her answer uttered, she turned sharply, walking in the opposite direction. It no longer mattered where she go, as long as she was away from him.

"No? Lily, didn't what happened mean anything to you?"

He sounded, dare she think it, almost hurt. No, not almost, he did sound hurt. And it crushed up some part of her inside some part that had no business caring at all what happened to James Potter.

"Nothing at all." she said, in a tone much colder than she thought she could muster.

She didn't look back to see his expression, or listen to hear his voice. She didn't want to know she hurt him. If she didn't know it, she couldn't regret it.

She had a feeling she would regret it anyway, everything with James was one big regret. The question was, did she regret what she did, or not doing it before?

Chapter 12

If James could bring his self to hate Lily, he thought he would, but being unable, he felt a deep set anger, covered in self pity.

"I can't believe she said no to me." he said, entering into his room.

"Isn't that what she always says?" a voice asked from his bed. From his bed, the bed of James Potter that had been neatly made earlier that morning.

"Why are you in my bed?" James addressed Sirius, who was stretched out across his bed, flipping through one of Remus magazines.

"Its cleaner than mine." Sirius replied, looking over at his own bed, with most of the sheets in the floor, and a sandwich that appeared to be collecting mold.

"How did that happen, we have house elves that clean up." James said, lifting the sandwich and cringing at the smell.

"I once told them to never touch my things, and they took it to heart."

"How do you sleep on this thing?" James said, then paused, "How do you entertain women on this thing?"

"Oh, last time I 'entertained' a woman, I used Remus' bed."

James made a mental note to never sit on his bed without first casting a disinfecting charm. "Does he know about that?"

"No, if he knew he'd kill me." Sirius replied, then adding for his defense "I cleaned his sheets after."

"Right. Moving on from that subject...Lily said no when I asked her out."

"Do you want me to pretend to be shocked?" Sirius asked flipping a page idly.

"No, but with what happened...Hey is that the swimsuit addition?"

"Why else would I be looking at it? And what happened? You finally snog her again?"

James sat on Peters bed, twirling his wand absently. "Yep."

Sirius seemed more interested, and tossed the magazine aside. "Give me details."

"Details?" James repeated, then replied "She has a pink bra."

"Did you shag?" Sirius asked.

"No, we did not shag. Lily isn't that sort of girl."

"That's unfortunate. So why'd she say no?"

James stopped twirling his wand, staring at some fixed point in the wall. "She said it didn't mean anything."

"Sometimes people say things they don't mean." Sirius remarked, worried for his friend. He had never seen James look so low.

"She'll come around."

"You think so?" James asked.

"I'm sure of it." Sirius answered. Maybe he should go and have a talk with Lily.

—

A girl can only miss so many days of Potions in a row before she is lost, so Mary regrettably knew that her second day would be her last. However, avoiding Sirius had been well worth it.

A small part of her wanted to give him the chance to explain. A very small part. The rest of her wanted to push him off the astronomy tower. In her efforts to not cave in to this murderous desire, she had thrown herself into raising money for the dance. She had harassed every student she had seen, until they made a charitable donation. Which, had raised 75 galleons, in only two days.

"We'll have to raise some more money, but we're almost there. We need another meeting to discuss it. I've been putting it off. I wish I could kick James off the team."

Lily had been in one of her moods all morning. She was stressing over everything, and talking about everything, making plans. Mary knew it had something to do with James(it almost always did these days).

"We need him on the team. He's the most popular boy in school. If he helps us, all the mindless clones will too." Mary said dryly, letting her arm drop from her bed and slump to the floor.

"Right. People are sheep." Lily agreed, though Mary could hear her grumbling under her breath, about James Potter not being so great.

"Lily, lets do something. I'm bored. Lets skip out and go somewhere."

Lily looked at Mary as if she lost her mind. "Why? I'm head girl, I can't skip out. And you are a prefect."

"So? I'm bored."

"You aren't bored. You're feeling sorry for yourself about Black." Lily replied.

"Ouch. Are you trying tough love on me Lily?"

"Is it working?"

"No, I feel like slitting my wrist now." Mary joked.

"Then do it in the bathroom, I don't want stains on the floor."

Mary smiled, and sat up. "You know, I really hate you sometimes."

"Love you too. Lets go downstairs, maybe we'll run into Alice or Dorcas." Lily suggested. Their other roommates weren't around much, as Alice was always with Frank, and Dorcas was always in detention.

"Sure. You go ahead, I'll be down in a minute, I have to find my shoes."

Lily left Mary on her knees looking under the bed, heading downstairs. As soon as she reached the common room, she started to go back up. Seated by the fire were Sirius and Peter, and she had no intentions of letting Mary run into them.

"Evans!"

Lily froze. The last person she wanted to speak to was Sirius Black(besides James, of course) but Mary would be down any minute, and she didn't want her to have to see him.

"What do you want Black?"

Sirius jumped up from his spot, and walked over to her, taking her elbow in his hand directing her toward the seat he was just in. "We need to talk."

"Lets go out in the hall." Lily suggested, pulling her arm away from him, sending him a dirty glare for daring to touch her. She didn't give him time to protest, but walked out, causing him to have to follow.

"Whats this all about?" Lily demanded, glancing over to the portrait hole, seeing if Mary would be stepping out.

"You and James."

Lily rolled her eyes, and sat down. She gestured to the spot on the floor beside her, and he dropped down. "What does he want? I have to say, I didn't think he'd chose you to play messenger, all things considered."

"I'm not playing messenger." Sirius informed.

"Really? Then what do you want?" Lily asked, genuinely shocked. She had expected James to relentlessly hound her.

"Why'd you say no?"

Lily looked at him for a second, wondering what he was referring to, then replied, "Oh, that. I didn't want to, thats why. What other reason is there?"

Sirius looked at her, she seemed guarded, defensive. Which, in sake of his chances at winning, that could be in his benefit. But James was his best friend, and he would rather have him happy, and lose, than see him suffer. If that meant lending a helping hand and kicking his own self in the ass, he would still do it.

"Were you telling him the truth when you said it meant nothing?"

Lily gasped. "He told you!? That asshole—"

"Didn't you tell Mary?" Sirius cut in.

"Yes, but its different, I was telling her because she's my best friend, I wasn't bragging."

"I never said he was bragging. He was telling me the same reason you told her."

Lily glared at him, then turned, facing away. "You know, this isn't any of your business."

It is when I see my best mate without me screwing with you. You didn't see him. What you said to him...I didn't think you were that sort of person."

"That sort of person? What you did to Mary was worse, so don't tell me what sort of person I am!" Lily accused, hands clinched at sides.

She held his gaze for a moment, before looking away. "Maybe we're both horrible people." she whispered, drawing her knees up, resting her chin on them.

"You aren't horrible. James wouldn't want you if you were. Difficult, maybe, but not horrible." Sirius assured. Lily glanced over to him, to find he was almost smiling at her. She felt herself almost smiling back.

"Maybe, but, I had to say no. And then he brought it up, and I didn't know what else to say. I'm not ready to go out with him." Lily stated, feeling like a fool, explaining herself to Sirius Black of all people, the cause of her best friends misery.

Sirius slid closer to her, considering what to say. "But yet, you keep kissing him." The dirty look she sent him let him know that it was the wrong way to approach the subject.

"Listen, I'm not saying go out with him. If you're not ready, you shouldn't, because it would only mess with his head, and really, he's confused enough most of the time." he paused to see Lily smile at the last remark, then continued. "What I'm saying, is find nicer ways to reject him, if that's what you feel you have to do. A positive answer is preferable, but since that isn't happening, you could be a little kinder."

"Oh, so what do you suggest?" Lily asked wanly.

"Apologizing for what you said, for starters."

Lily sighed, leaning back against the wall. "Is he really all that upset?"

"Would we be having this conversation otherwise?"

"Fine, I'll think about it, okay."

—

Mary held back a groan. Peter Pettigrew was engaging her in the world's most boring conversation. She had the funny feeling he was trying to distract her. Finally, after a long speech about the differences between rats and mice, she intruded.

"Why are you trying to keep me here?"

Peter turned red, and looked away. "What are you talking about?"

"You know what I'm talking about, you sat next to me in class all year in muggle studies, and we only had, like three conversations. Now, you want to have a chat, out of nowhere?"

"Just wanted to catch up, see how you were—"

"Peter." Mary said sharply, crossing her arms.

"I was trying to keep you inside because Sirius wants to talk to you and I'll be back in here soon." Peter said quickly.

"What?"

"I said, I'm trying to keep you here, because Sirius wants to talk to you, and he'll be back in here soon."

Mary looked at him darkly. "You can tell him that I'm not interested in anything he has to say, and that he can kindly go fuck his self."

Peter looked shocked to hear the word fuck leave Mary's lips, and nodded. Seeing he wasn't going to further bother her, Mary trotted back upstairs.

Lily and Sirius entered, just as Mary had walked upstairs. Lily immediately took off back up the stairs as well, and Sirius resumed his place across from Peter.

"Have you seen her?"

"I tried to keep her down here, but she left." Peter answered.

"Did she say anything? Is she still mad?"

"She told me to tell you to fuck yourself, so yeah, she's still kinda mad."

Sirius sighed. This was going to be harder than he thought.

—

Lily had made a completely new patrol schedule, it would have people rotating partners. This was, of course, to distance herself from James. However, it was the night of her patrol with him, and she had to face him eventually.

For the first time, he did not greet her, barely seemed to notice her as she walked beside him. Lily felt a surge of guilt, and knew she would have to say something. She couldn't let things remain the way they were.

"James, can we talk?"

His eyes flicked over to her, and he shrugged. "Let's sit down." Lily suggested, sinking down to the ground letting the shadows swallow her. James sat beside her, and she took a breath.

"What I said before, it's not that I meant that it means nothing...it's just that I don't know what it means. I mean, we haven't even had one serious conversation, we don't even know each other."

James looked over at her. "Lily, we've went to school together seven years, I think we know each other."

"Maybe, but we haven't really taken any time to get to know each other. What do you know about me? Could you tell me my favorite color? My favorite song? Do you know that I'm addicted to muggle soup operas? Or that I still have my baby blanket at home, just in case? You couldn't tell me anything of any value about myself, and I couldn't about you. But yet, we can make out in a hallway? Can't you see how backwards that is?"

"I've never thought of it that way." James replied.

"I know. But this is, this is weird. You and I, I mean, this wasn't supposed to happen." Lily said.

"Are you and I happening?" James asked, meeting her eyes.

"I don't know, I mean, we don't like each other, it's always been that way, then, suddenly you do. And two years later, here we are. I don't know anything anymore. Maybe we should talk, maybe we could be, not friends exactly, I'm not sure if I even want that, but I do want to figure this out." Lily explained.

"Tomorrow, have lunch with me. We can talk, and we can figure this out." James suggested, grabbing her hand.

"Okay." Lily agreed, much more easily than she would have imagined. "Tomorrow at lunch, we'll talk."

"It's a date."

Lily rolled her eyes, smiling a little. "No, it's not."

"Can't blame a guy for trying."

Chapter 13

Once again, Lily found herself being woken up at three in the morning. However, this time, it was due to the door being opened, and someone attempting to creep inside. Though, they were a bit noisy, for creeping.

"Who's there?" Lily said groggily, trying to remember where she put her wand. Death Eaters could have invaded the school, and killed them all, and she didn't know where her wand was to fight.

"It's me." a voice called.

Lily squinted through the shadows, and saw Alice, who had likely just sneaked in from a snog session with Frank. "Alice, you shouldn't let the head girl catch you. I'm going to pretend I thought you were in the bathroom. G'night."

"Thanks Lily, you're awesome." Alice said, flashing her a peace sign.

Lily rolled her eyes at the gesture, Alice was a flower child, who hadn't realized the 60's had ended. Though, muggle and wizarding worlds had different cultures. And though Alice was all about peace and love (specifically make love not war) she was willing to fight in the war, for future peace. And love.

Lily turned back to her side, also pretending not to notice Dorcas was also missing. She did a lot of pretending for their sake. Closing her eyes, she was almost asleep, when Mary whispered her name.

"Em?"

Mary took that to mean 'what' and whispered quietly, "Alice woke me up and I can't get back to sleep, I'm going downstairs, to sit awhile."

Lily mumbled something else Mary could not understand, and Mary quietly exited the room.

—

"Why are you dragging me along on this adventure?" Remus asked, as he followed Sirius out of the room, stopping to remove James glasses from the floor. Both boys jumped as Peter yelled something in his sleep.

"Should have took Peter, sounds like he'd rather be awake."

"Yes, but Mary likes you, so if you tell her not to kill me, she'll listen."

Remus sighed, this was the stupidest idea Sirius had ever had, and there was a long list of stupid to out do. "Who says I'll try to stop her?"

"You'll save me Moony, what would you be without me? I know how much you love me." Sirius joked.

If he only knew how much Remus did not love him at the moment, he wouldn't be joking around. He did not like to be woke up at night, and especially did not like being made to get out of his nice, warm bed.

"How do you plan to sneak into the girls dorms? If you knew how, you would have done it ages ago."

Sirius waved off this remark. "I'll go in Anigmas form. I'm unregistered, so it shouldn't stop me."

Remus had never considered this, well, he had never considered that Sirius or James would consider it, it had become apparent to him around the middle of fifth year. He chose not to share this with the others, as a precaution for the female population.

"Have you considered the roommates? Lily will not be thrilled, nor Alice or Dorcas."

"Lily could be a problem, but a sleeping spell should solve that. And Alice is off somewhere shagging Frank, as I saw him sneaking off earlier. Dorcas won't be a problem."

"You can't cast a sleeping spell on Lily, James would—"

"Never have to know." Sirius finished. "But, I won't do anything to Evans."

"Because you know she could kick your ass." Remus muttered.

"Every man knows his limitations, and Evans is one scary lady when she's mad."

"You know, you're admitting you could get beat. By a girl." Remus taunted.

"You know, you're rather unpleasant this time of the night." Sirius shot back.

"Because I'm supposed to be asleep this time of night."

The two had just stepped inside the common room, when they saw someone dart out.

"Who was that?" Remus said quickly. With the war, everyone was a little on edge.

"I don't know, take the cloak and follow them, I'll go up to the girls room and see if theres anyone else."

"You have the cloak? Did you ask—never mind. I'll go after him, you should get a teacher."

Sirius was about to reply, when a small scream was heard from the direction of the girls staircase.

"You take care of that, I'll go after the other one." Remus stated.

Once outside the door, Remus saw a figure in a heavy cloak, and raised his wand, removing the invisibility cloak. "Who are you?"

The figure threw back the black cloak, reveling blonde hair, with a bright pink streak, and an unlit cigarette hanging from her mouth. Brown eyes shone at him, clearly amused.

"Chill, its just me."

Remus lowered his wand. "Dorcas?"

Dorcas smiled, shrugging. She was wearing a mens flannel shirt under the cloak, and not much else, Remus noticed. She lifted her hand to the cigarette in her mouth. "Got a light? Left my wand upstairs."

Remus did a bit of magic, lighting her up. He personally thought it was dangerous to be out alone at night without a wand, with everything going on, but to lecture her would be pointless, and a waste of time.

"Want a drag?" Dorcas offered.

"No thanks. Sorry about before I didn't recognize you."

"Its the hair. Last week it was green, this week, its pink." Dorcas replied, twirling the streak of pink hair around her finger.

"Listen, me and Sirius heard a scream, it might not be safe. You don't have a wand, so stay behind me. Put that cloak back on, it'll help hide you."

Dorcas nodded, instantly serious. She moved behind Remus, and Remus, struck by an idea, pulled her to his side, draping James cloak around them.

"Be quiet, we don't want them to hear us." Remus warned.

"I know, do you think Sirius..."

"He's fine."

—

The scream, Sirius realized had came from Mary, who had fallen on the stairs. Not being able to help her, he waited at the bottom, until she reached close enough for him to aid her, cursing under her breath all the while.

"Mary, what happened?"

"I tripped going down the damn stairs. I think I twisted my ankle." Her pain had temporarily caused her to forget her anger, which she remembered, as soon as he held out a hand to help her.

Mary swatted it away. "I don't need any help from you."

Instead of arguing, Sirius decided to save time, by simply sweeping her up, and carrying her to the nearest arm chair. The couch would have been better, but he was afraid she would wiggle out of his arms and further hurt herself by the time he reached it.

"Put me down! Black put me down right now!"

Ignoring that he was already lowering her into the chair as she said this, Sirius placed her in it, legs dangling over the arm rest, back resting against the other. Then he took a seat facing the entrance, and her, so he could watch both.

Mary was about to question this, when Sirius spoke up. "We saw someone going outside. They looked suspicious. Remus went after him."

Mary glanced over at the entrance, then toward Sirius. "Don't just sit there, go help him."

"And leave you like this? With a twisted ankle and wandless? If he isn't back soon, I'll go after him, but until then I'm not leaving you."

Mary glared at him, unsure of whether to feel angry. "I don't need you to be my hero. I'll be fine. He's your friend."

Sirius shifted his gaze to her. "And he's yours, and he would want me to stay with you."

That was unarguable, so Mary remained silent. There was nothing to say to Sirius, only she really hoped that Remus would be alright, and that could go unspoken. After a few seconds, she yawned, stretching, and feeling herself start to drift off into sleepiness, even her brain was on to high of alert to let her

fall asleep.

The noise caused Sirius to shift his attention to her, and he found his self momentarily distracted. The tight white tank top and shorts pajamas she had been wearing had failed to capture his interest before, because he was much more focused on her well being. Though every time she moved, the shorts slid a little further up, reveling more of her legs. And all the stretching was showing a bit of mid drift, while causing her strap to fall off her shoulder.

"Would you stop that, its distracting." he hissed.

Mary, thinking he meant the yawning nodded, and closed her eyes. Suddenly the portrait hole swung open, for apparently no reason. Mary was ready to scream, when a hand reached up, and pulled off the cloak-apparently an invisibility one-and Remus and Dorcas were revealed.

"Where were you? It was only Dorcas?" Sirius shot.

"Sorry to worry you. The fat lady didn't want to let us in." Remus explained.

"The stupid old cow." Dorcas added, then seeing Mary. "What happened? Is she okay?"

"She fell. That was the scream we heard. Its only a twisted ankle. Nothing Pomfrey can't fix." Sirius explained. Taking a look at Dorcas, he smiled, "Nice outfit."

"You like? I wore it just for you." Dorcas said back, grinning.

"You wore it just for me? Would you take it off just for me?"

Dorcas put a hand to her mouth, pretending to be shocked. "Mr. Black, that was a very naughty thing to say." She flipped her hair over her shoulder, flashing him a cheeky smile, "But not nearly naughty enough."

Mary felt a familiar feeling rising in th pit of her stomach, one which she knew was unhealthy and pointless. First, she was too angry to be jealous, and second, it was Dorcas. Dorcas was an outrageous flirt, but it only showed they were friends, if she liked a boy, she was far too much of a nervous mess to flirt with him at all.

"Hey, girl with sprained ankle here." Mary snapped crossly.

"Sorry, lets get you to the dragon lady."

Mary buried her face in her hands. "That woman hates me."

"Yes, but its her job not to show that." Dorcas reminded.

"Can you walk? Do you need help getting there?" Remus asked.

"Did I tell you Mary, Remus is my new knight in shining armor, he was willing to protect me from Death Eaters, my wandless little self. And he pulled me under the invisibility cloak, without touching my ass." Dorcas said, sending an amused glance toward Sirius.

"That was completely accidental."

"Sure it was."

"It was your idea to skip detention." Sirius reminded.

"Considering that I hate Black and don't want his hands anywhere near my ass, then yes Remus, I may need some help." Mary said, attempting to stand.

"I'll go with. Lily will be mad we didn't wake her, but that girl is brutal without her sleep." Dorcas said, walking over to Mary, and supporting her other side.

Sirius looked at Mary like he would like to help, then decided against it. Remus and Dorcas had it covered, and Mary was still pretty mad at him.

"Now would be a great time to talk to you, without you being able to run away. Or kick me." Sirius prompted.

Mary turned her head to Dorcas. "Dorcas, kick him for me."

"Never mind." Sirius replied, walking along as Dorcas and Remus helped Mary limp to the hospital wing.

"Why is he still here?"

"Because I'm concerned about you." Sirius replied. He was concerned, but stressing it might make her more likely to forgive him.

"Really? Where did this concern come from, you didn't have it when you were kissing that girl, you didn't have it when you forgot my name." Mary accused.

If she did not someone on either side of her, she would limp over to him and shove her good foot up his ass. It might be anatomically impossible, but the effort would be amusing.

"Whats in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." Dorcas replied. The others looked at her weirdly. "It's Shakespeare. Romeo and Juliet." They still looked at her weirdly, and she continued. "What I'm saying is, who cares what a guy calls you, as long as he gets you off."

She frowned a second, then added. "As long as it isn't something weird like mommy, or a family members name. His family that is."

"You must know my family." Sirius joked.

"Don't you guys, like marry your cousins?"

"Distant cousins. Most pure bloods are related somewhere down the line. Which is why they're all crazy." Sirius explained.

"So thats whats wrong with you." Mary said snarkly.

"MacDonald, you can't stay mad forever."

"Only digging the hole deeper, love." Dorcas advised.

The rest of the walk was in silence, Mary not speaking to Sirius, and Sirius not wanting to make things worse with Mary; Remus and Dorcas not wanting to be in the middle. This being so, none of them had created a story for why Mary would be out of bed so late at night to twist her ankle, or why she had three people carrying her.

Which was, of course, the first thing Pomfrey asked. In most cases, Pomfrey didn't ask questions, but Mary was a special case, as Pomfrey was rather unfond of her.

Being taking by surprise, Remus and Sirius were unable to think of a good cover story. Mary had never been good at telling lies. So, it was Dorcas who improvised.

"You see, Mary got up to go to the bathroom, and since its dark, she wanted me to go with her. We always try to stick together at night, with the Death Eater attacks and all, you can never be too safe."

Pomfrey seemed to accept this, maybe even approve of it. "What about them?"

Pomfrey liked Remus, as she had always felt a little sorry for him, with this situation, and proud of the way he handled it. Sirius, on the other hand, visited her far to often, and had stopped giving excuses ages ago.

"Oh, them. Well, Mary fell, going down the steps, and I needed some help to get her here."

"Why not ask Miss Evans to help? I do believe she is your roommate, and head girl, and would be happy to aid you."

Dorcas looked over at them quickly, then answered. "Because, he's her boyfriend, and I thought he would want to know."

The look Mary gave her made Dorcas very glad her ankle was sprained. That way she couldn't catch her.

"That doesn't explain why Mr. Black is here."

Sirius looked outraged at the idea that Pomfrey thought Remus was Marys boyfriend, Remus looked amused, while Mary looked delighted.

"He's my boyfriend. Wanted to help." Dorcas said quickly, shooting a look Sirius' way. He seemed to be trying not to laugh.

"I tried to warn her." Mary said gravely, enjoying trying to make Sirius squirm.

"She did, but I didn't listen. But not all of us can be the perfect couple. Like Mary and Remus." Dorcas said, catching on. Mary was her friend, and Sirius was...sort of her friend too, but Mary was injured, and there was no point kicking a man while he's down. Or she was down, in such a case.

Mary and Sirius were looking at each other, locked in a silent war, as Pomfrey was preparing to fix her ankle. Then Sirius slid an arm around Dorcas, causing Mary to glare at him.

"I think were the perfect couple. Don't you Dorcas?"

Dorcas looked between the two of them, and back to Remus for help. He shrugged, as if to say 'I'm as lost as you are.'

"Perfect? When you kiss other girls?" Mary snapped.

"It's an open relationship." Dorcas supplied, as Pomfrey was glancing between Mary and Sirius, as if on the verge of throwing one out at the next sign of upcoming hostility.

"So open it almost doesn't exist." Sirius added, sending Mary an equally vicious glare.

"And it never will." Mary snarled back, and it was clear they were no longer talking about his pretend relationship with Dorcas. Dorcas looked as if she wanted to pull away, but Sirius had tightened his grip on her, likely because he was mad.

"Maybe I don't want it to." Sirius snapped back.

"Then maybe you shouldn't make it seem like you do!"

By this time, Pomfrey was getting tired of them, and turned to face Dorcas, Sirius, and Remus. "You three out!" she shouted, and they scurried off, into the hall.

"What the hell was that all about?" Remus attacked, as soon as they were out the door.

"She was the one who started it!"

"Both of you shut up!" Dorcas intruded.

The two looked at her a moment, then turned back to each other. "I'll stay to talk to her, you two go ahead."

Remus was on the verge of disagreeing, when Dorcas sent him a look that reminded him strongly of McGonagall.

"We'll see you later Sirius. By the way, I am so dumping you." Dorcas teased.

"I suspected as much. You know what they say, if you love them let them go. And I do hate to see you go, but I do love to watch you leave." Sirius replied.

"Don't even think of checking out my ass Black. You on the other hand, Remus darling can enjoy the view."

Remus rolled his eyes at the remark, falling into step beside Dorcas, hoping his wasn't leaving Sirius to his death.

—

Mary was taking a long time to come out. The last he checked, it had been four and a half minutes since Remus and Dorcas left. A simple sprain shouldn't take so long to fix. He had the feeling she was avoiding him.

The door swung open, and Mary stepped out. "You're still here? Where are Dorcas and Remus?"

"They left, so I could talk to you."

Something much like fear shifted into Mary's eyes, and was then quickly replaced with anger as she marched onward, brushing past him. "I have nothing to say to you."

"Too bad, because I'm not leaving."

Mary turned down the first corridor she saw, then kept walking. If she got lost, she didn't care, she only wanted to avoid him.

"Why are you so damned mad?"

Mary stopped and spun around, unable to believe his gall. Why was she mad? As if the answer wasn't obvious.

"Because you are a slut."

"Oh, like you aren't." he shot back.

"What?! I can count the number of guys I've been with on one hand." This was a true statement, she had only been with a few men, she simply chose to frequent them more often than some other girls would deem acceptable.

"Are you counting by fives?"

Mary gasped. "If you're implying that I'm a—"

"I'm not implying, I'm saying it."

"Oh, and isn't that the preacher, preaching to the choir. As if you're so innocent." she raged, hands clinched into tight fists at her sides.

"No, but I'm not a girl."

"You are such a sexist." Mary spat, feeling the urge to hit him. She was so angry she could feel every nerve in her body standing on end.

"I'm not a sexist, I'm a realist, we live in a society full of double standards."

"I never realized you were such a conformist." Mary said, walking away again. That was the best thing to do, before either of them could get hurt.

"Stop walking away."

"Stop following me." Mary countered.

"Why won't you just forgive me?" Sirius demanded.

"Forgive you? You haven't even apologized!" Mary scorned.

Sirius said nothing, and Mary turned back to look at him. In the dark, he looked different, more serious somehow. And his hesitation, along with the look in his eyes was all she needed to see the truth.

"You aren't sorry. Only sorry you got caught. And you expect me to forgive that?" her voice was soft, her anger disappearing, along with the small bit of hope she had that he might do something to deem his self worthy of her forgiveness.

With that being said, she turned and walked away, head down. Just before she could leave the corridor, Sirius grabbed her arm, causing her to turn and face him. Her eyes locked on his, and a sudden tightness formed in her chest.

"I am sorry that it hurt you."

He was, she could see that. Sorry that he hurt her, but not that he had did it. And all things considered, it just wasn't enough.

"That isn't good enough." she said back, pulling her arm away.

"MacDonald...Mary, L"

Mary stopped, the use of her first name slightly catching her off guard. She hated herself for feeling hopeful, for wanting him to find the right things to say, but she knew he wouldn't.

"I never meant for any of this to happen."

Mary smiled a small, sad smile, peering over her shoulder at him. "No one ever does."

Chapter 14

"What do you mean she sprained her ankle? Why didn't you get me?"

Dorcas flopped back on to her bed. Lily really was brutal once she was awoken, and she had to tell her the truth. "I told you, Sirius and Remus were there. And you don't like to be woken up. She's fine."

"Where is she?" Lily asked, expecting to see Mary strolling in any minute.

"With Sirius. It looked like they needed to discuss some things, so I left them alone."

Lily blinked. "You what?"

"Lily, she has to face him. She can't run away from every guy she feels something for, just because what some creep did to her back in forth year."

"It's Sirius Black, do you think he really cares about her?"

"He isn't a bad guy Lily. I mean, I've had a few detentions with him."

Lily snorted, clearly meaning that she did warrant the time spent in detention as time to prove someone was a good person. Not that Lily Evans had never had a detention herself, she was only phenomenally good at talking her way out of them.

"Sure he's sort of a...libertine, but he wouldn't hurt her own purpose."

"I know he wouldn't do it on purpose, and he may be an okay guy, outside the range of romance. He came to me about James, he was the reason I talked to James yesterday. But he isn't what Mary needs." Lily argued.

"Lily, don't you think Mary can decide what she needs? Not us, not you."

Lily was about to answer, when Mary walked in. Her words quickly changed. "Are you okay? What did he say?"

"It's fine. I'm so over it, I'm so over him. I'm going to bed."

Regardless of what Mary said, Lily was quite sure, it was not fine.

--

James could hardly wait to get out of bed. It was the day he would finally win Lily's heart, he just knew it. The fact that he had several of these days was rather irrelevant, because it was finally going to be the day.

"Today, Lily will finally realize she loves me."

No one said anything, Remus was still sleeping, Peter chose not to disagree, and Sirius was in a mood. James personally thought he had no right to be, as he had woken him coming back in, and told him nothing expect the words 'Mary...ankle...hates me...Moony...'

"Could you pretend to be happy for me?"

"I'm ecstatic." Sirius said numbly.

"I'm happy for you." Peter pipped.

"You know, I think I'm making Peter my new best mate. He's much more agreeable."

When this did not warrant a response, James walked out, calling over his shoulder for Sirius to wake Remus.

"So, you really think you'll get Lily to go out with you?" Peter asked, once they were in the hall.

"Today is the day, I have a feeling."

"Didn't you say that the time she--"

"Shut up Peter."

--

The Great Hall was crowded, the normal breakfast routine in full swing, when Dumbledore made an announcement. James was hardly paying attention, but caught the last bit, "and here is Miss Evans to give you a bit of oral stimulation."

Across from him, Sirius nearly choked on what he was eating. "Did he just saying Evans was--"

"He means she's giving a speech." James answered.

"About the dance." Remus supplied.

"Oh, is Mary looking this way?"

Remus sent him an annoyed look, before glancing over in the girls direction, she was seated next to Dorcas, across from Alice and Frank, who were more interested in eating each others faces than breakfast. Dorcas saw him looking and waved at him, he waved back. She blew him an exaggerated kiss, before turning back to Lily.

"No, she isn't looking."

"Lily really is not very good at these things, no one is listening to her. Especially the Slytherins." James noted.

"Oh, are you listening to that?" Sirius asked, glancing Lily's way with disinterest.

"No, we'll hear the same thing tonight at the prefects meeting." James answered, waving at Lily. She ignored him. He continued trying to catch her attention,

"Potter, stop making suggestive hand gestures at me. Now, like I was saying--"

The entire Great Hall was looking at him. He grinned broadly, glad he was not easily embarrassed.

"She isn't mad, thats a shocker." Sirius said, looking at Lily smiling. "Maybe today will be your day."

"Thanks for the support. Sorry Peter, he's my best mate again."

Peter pretended to be shocked. "Are you dumping me?"

"Yes, these last twenty minutes have been beautiful, but I can't deny how I really feel."

Sirius looked at the two of them. "It takes a very secure man to joke about being gay."

"Yes it does." James added.

"I think you pull it off a little to well."

James was about to respond, when Sirius said "Is she looking yet?"

Remus glanced over, Dorcas waved again, and he turned back to Sirius. "No, she isn't looking."

"Why don't you look yourself?" Peter said.

"Because, then she'll know I'm looking and she won't look because she doesn't want me to see her looking." Sirius explained. Then, "How about now?"

Remus looked over, and said no again. A moment later, Dorcas had walked over, shoving herself between Peter and Remus.

"Mary requests that you stop raping her with your eyes."

"I'm not looking at her!" Sirius defended, looking toward James for assistance. James picked up his fork putting a big bite in his mouth. "Can't help, bad manners to talk with food."

"You aren't, but Remus is. And we know he isn't looking at Mary for his own sake."

"I don't think I like you anymore." Sirius addressed Dorcas.

Dorcas put a hand to her chest, "My heart, it breaks at your words." She turned her attention to Remus, "Don't fall to his bad influence, Mary is counting on you to be the decent one."

She paused, then added. "I, of course, would much prefer you indecent, and badly behaved."

"You're flirting with him now? I thought I was the one you flirted with." Sirius said, in mock sadness.

"You know you're always in my heart, love."

"I was aiming to get in a lower part of your anatomy, but your heart will do."

"You can't shag every girl in school rotten. Far too many names to remember." Dorcas teased.

"Ha ha."

"Speaking of shagging," She said, pointing at James, "you need to shag Evans. Girls way to tense, needs to relieve some stress. Never saw someone who needed a good lay as bad."

"I'll try my best." James said, smiling.

"Oh, while I'm here, Remus, I need a favor."

Feeling tense, need to relieve some stress?" he joked.

"For sure, but that's not what I mean. See, this bloke, MacMillan I think he was, has somehow got the idea that I fancy him."

"Don't know how a bloke could think that." Sirius said sarcastically. Dorcas smiled at him, going on.

"Anyway, he keeps trying to hit on me, and I don't want to break his heart, sooooo, I need you to be his partner." she finished.

"I'm Peter's partner."

"I know, but for a few days, and you're good at...everything, and he's good at Potions, so you'll be evenly matched. I can work with Peter."

Peter was shaking his head no, he remembered an incident in third year, where she had somehow caught her own hair on fire.

"How about you work with Remus, and I'll take MacMillan. Then we can switch back in a few days, after he...I don't know, moves on or something." Peter suggested.

"Works for me." she said, shrugging.

"I'd be a horrible knight in shining armor if I didn't help." Remus replied.

"I knew you would save me. I'll be sure to repay you in a very raunchy and extremely immoral way."

"I can hardly wait."

"Who says you have to? I am an exhibitionist you know." she teased. He rolled his eyes, and she waved goodbye, walking back over to Mary.

"I think I like her." James declared.

"You just like her because she said you should shag Evans." Sirius said.

"Isn't that reason enough?"

—

Potions was apt to be very stressful, which is why Mary was considering skipping it. However, she was not the only one, as the first empty corridor she rounded had Sirius in it.

"Life is so unfair." she moaned, as he appeared at her side.

"That is is. How did you like this morning's speech? In need of anymore oral stimulation?, because I know that I am." he said, eyes raking over her.

She glared at him, refusing to respond.

"I'll take that as a no." he said, waiting for her to answer. When she did not, he sighed. He had been up all night, staring at the ceiling, thinking about her, and what she had said. Her anger he could well handle (maybe even a small part of him realized he deserved it), but that sort of sadness, that was something else.

"Mary, about last night."

"It's fine. Things happen. I'm over it." she said dully, brushing past him. "We have to get to class."

Sirius watched her walk away, feeling an odd sense of regret. What sort of attitude was that to have? He caught up to her, catching her arm, spinning her to face him.

"What do you mean it's fine? It isn't fine for me to kiss you then kiss someone else, it isn't one of those things that just happen."

He paused, seeing the smile on her face. "That didn't come out right."

"I think it came out perfectly." she said, yanking her arm away.

"What I mean to say, is, I've thought about it, and I may be, not saying that I am, not really good at these sort of things..."

She arched an eyebrow at his incoherent speech. "Spit it out already Black."

"Sorry."

She crossed her arms, looking at him. "All things considered, that was sort of anti-climatic."

"So, I'm forgiven?" he said hopefully.

"I'll think about it."

—

Lily couldn't help but to feel buzzing with excitement. And nervousness. Her and James had a lot of things between them, as many bad as good. She was starting to think that using the Great Hall to talk would not be the best idea, maybe they could skip lunch and go somewhere else.

"Lily?"

She turned at the sound of his voice. "James."

Why the nervousness? Maybe she knew things would change, maybe she was afraid. She put on a small smile. He ran his hands through his hair.

"Stop that, I hate when you do that." she said catching the hand, then blushing furiously. Touching him would not be a good idea, not after what happened last time.

"Sorry. You wanna go somewhere?"

"We can stay in here." Lily said, glancing around the common room.

"We can go upstairs." James suggested. "No one is in my room."

Lily gave him a look and he quickly added, "I promise to be good."

"Okay."

The pair walked up in silence, James ushering her to sit on his bed, while he stood. She looked up at him, unsure of what to say, settling for "You can sit down, it's your room."

He sat beside her, both quiet for a moment. Then, he spoke. "You think I don't know you, but I do. I know that you drink your coffee black, with two sugars, and that you count to ten when you're mad. I know you have this thing with your sister, that it isn't good. I know your favorite color is gold, that you love Quidditch more than you'll admit, that you like that muggle rock band the running stones—"

Lily laughed, correcting him. "The Rolling Stones."

"Right, well, muggle music...Anyway, I know you. I do. I see you."

Lily smiled a little, he was mostly right, he did know those things. Perhaps he had been paying a bit too much attention to her, over the years. "Okay, let me guess about you. See what I know."

She paused, thinking, then said, "I know that you spy on me in the morning, while I drink my coffee, I do now anyway... I know that your favorite color is red, that you always start Quidditch practices weeks before the other teams, and that yours last the longest. I know that you care about your friends more than anything else."

She stopped, thinking again. What else was there to say? There were not many positives about him, the negatives outweighed them by far, but hadn't he changed, could she not forgive him his past? But he was such an arrogant toe rag, really, as if

A thought hit her, and she spoke it. "I know that you like to act like you think you're the greatest thing to walk the planet, but I think really, it's to cover your own insecurities. To hide who you are, with who you want to be."

His eyes probed hers a second, then he flashed her a grin. "Half right. I do act like a git, rather than be seen as weak, but for the most part, I'm just a conceited prat."

She smiled, in spite of her best efforts not to. "Yes, well, at least you're honest."

"Honesty is the best policy." he replied.

It is the most important thing in any relationship. You have to be able to trust one another, to know that the person is there for you. Things have to be solid, open. Not covered with jealousy, misunderstanding, hate because you're different." Lily said, speaking as if he could not hear.

"The sister?" he asked.

"Petunia. How did you know about her?" Lily asked, green eyes rising to meet his.

The light flickered in them, making her seem young, childlike. He could easily imagine her with that questioning look on her face, when she had received her letter to Hogwarts.

"Remus. Once, in third year, before I liked you, or knew I liked you that is, you talked to him about it, and he told me to let up on you, because you were having a hard time."

"She wanted to go too. To Hogwarts. She wanted to be special. I tried so hard, to make her see, but..." Lily trailed off sadly.

"What was it like, when you first got your letter? When you found out you were a witch?" James asked, sensing her need to change the subject. Slowly, as if not realizing she has done it, she pulled her legs up, wrapping her arms around her knees. The gesture makes her look more like a child, scared and alone, and he wants to touch her, to hold her, but he waits.

"I knew before the letter." there was a pause in her speech, then she continued, her voice flat. "Snape told me."

"The day on the train-" he started.

"Yes, that day, we were friends, and you were cruel to him, and I hated you, from that moment." she said gravely.

"I was eleven, you can't-"

"I don't." she cut in, eyes staring out, unfocused. "That's why you don't know me. You see, he was my friend. My best friend. And then there was the day that changed it all, the day he said that awful word, but I had been making excuses, it would have happened anyway, eventually."

James did not speak, knowing that this was not something to intrude on, as he was unsure she would ever leave herself so open or vulnerable to him again.

"After, I was so mad. I knew I would never forgive him, but, Petunia, things were getting worse with her, and I suppose I clung to him, he was like a brother to me-"

James had to fight from laughing at that remark, Lily with all her innocence could call it that, but he knew what sort of love it was, from the other side, and she was not viewed as a sister, and if so, it was one very, very messed up family. He knew how it was to love her, really love her, and to see the same thing coming from someone else, well, it was obvious, to say the least.

"I blamed you. I know it was silly, but I thought, if you had never teased him, and it never had happened, I could go on pretending. I wouldn't have to admit we would end up on other sides of the war, I could pretend there was no war. I could pretend I could save him, you know." her speech stopped, and James observed her, had he ever seen her in such a state? No matter how bad someone was, if you knew them long enough, you pretended it wasn't so. He knew that much having Sirius as a best friend. And Lily had known Snape since she was a child, she wouldn't see, until she was forced to...

To think if he had been a bit nicer to him, Lily would have seen him in a different light, ages ago.

"I guess the real reason I was mad, isn't that I knew I couldn't save him, but that he couldn't save me. There's this thing, this tight, hard ball, of anger inside me, making me want to say things, to do things I never would. I hate dark magic, and I hate people using it, but once.." she flushed, to ashamed to go on.

"You can tell me. I won't care Lily. Look at some of the things I've done."

She nodded, then continued. "It was third year. That was the year things with me and Petunia got really bad. Some Slytherins had been picking on me, calling me that word. I remember being angry, and telling Sev-Snape. So, he told me this spell, told me to use it if they bothered me again. It was dark magic, I knew it, but I didn't want a fight, so I said okay, not ever planning on using it. Then, they ganged up on me, and I was alone, and I couldn't think of what to do, so I did it. I used dark magic. And it worked. I hurt this boy, I hurt him bad. I never got in trouble, because he was too embarrassed to tell anyone that a mudblood had beaten him."

James rested a hand on her shoulder, feeling her flinch. "Lily, it's okay, you were defending yourself, it's not like you did it for pleasure-"

"I liked it." she broke in. "It felt good when I did it. There was this rush, this feeling of power. I know why people turn to the dark arts, it makes you feel like-"

Lily stopped speaking, looking over at James. Gouging his reaction. He didn't seem disgusted, like she thought he would. "That's the way it's supposed to feel. You were thirteen, and if it was Snivi-ah, I mean Snape, that taught you, then it was probably advanced. You couldn't help but feel that way. You never used it again, and that's what matters. You chose the right path, you're a good person."

There were tears brimming her eyes. "No, I'm not, because I've wanted to do it again. The day Mulciber cursed Mary, I almost went to find him, to do something as bad back, but I couldn't face the idea of being like him."

James stood, hands on knees, gazing down into her eyes. She refused to meet his gaze. "Lily, look at me." She acquiesced, bringing her eyes to his.

"That's what makes you a good person, that you didn't do it, that you didn't want to be like him. We've all been tempted, one time or another, but you stayed true to who you were."

Still, with her eyes on his, she spoke. "I hated you more after that day, because it was easier than hating myself for being blind. I hated you, and him, and me, and everything. Then there were times, when I would think of the war, and I can see it, all of us fighting, me with the good side, you'll be there too, I suppose."

"Course I will." he cut in.

"And I can see Snape, fighting on the other, and if it came down to it, me and him, dueling to the death, fighting each other on opposite sides if the war, I don't know if either of us would have the nerve..."

She didn't need to finish the sentence, he knew what she meant. "You aren't capable of killing Lily. It isn't in you."

"If I had to, if it was to protect my friends, my family, even you, I would." she responded.

James felt something warm explode in his heart at her words, she had included him, as if she actually cared, as if admitting she thought him worth it. He was not sure she noticed, but it only made him more aware she meant it.

"That's part of me, that still hopes that all of us can stop this, that there won't be a need for war, that they'll all just admit they were wrong, and we can forgive them, and move on." she said softly.

"Could you really forgive?" he asked, thinking of the death, the fear, of all the wrong that had occurred.

"Some things, but in the end, I think...no, it's too late, for any of us."

He said nothing for a moment, then rested his forehead against hers, finally saying, "You were wrong."

"About what?" she mumbled, eyes closed, breathing gently. There breaths were coming out in sync, and she could hear the faint beating of his heart, it was so still.

"Wanting to be saved. You never needed to be saved, you could always save yourself." He stopped, before adding quietly, "You saved me."

She smiled softly, the sadness of the moment slipping away, "Anytime Potter."

Chapter 15

"Since Evans is gone, I knew how lonely you would be, and decided to grace you with my company." Sirius said, dropping into the empty spot next to Mary. She gave him an annoyed look, before turning back to her food. "Very lonely, as I'm only sitting with Dorcas, Alice, and Frank."

Sirius glanced at Alice and Frank, who were in the middle of another very public display of affection, wrinkling his nose, looking back at Mary. "Those two don't count."

The conversation was a bit dull, and it does nauseate you a bit..." Mary trailed off. Alice and Frank broke apart.

"Hi Sirius, I didn't see you there." Alice said, smiling brightly.

Sirius refrained from letting loose a witty comeback, as Mary pinched him on the leg none to gently.

"You and her are friends again?" Frank asked.

"Yes."

"No."

Both looked at each other, Sirius pleading, Mary amused. "Right. As long as theres no flying objects." Frank said, turning back to Alice, continuing their expression of love.

Sirius made the gagging gesture, and Dorcas laughed. Mary rolled her eyes. "So, Mary, I thought you said-"

"I said I'd think about it." she reminded.

"Dorcas, help me out."

Dorcas removed her hand from the chocolate pudding she had been trying to steal from Mary's plate. "Me? Mary, you simply must forgive him. If not, I'm afraid he may not make it. His big head will finally deflate, and since its full of only hot air, he'll die."

Sirius was glaring at her, as she smiled at him. "That was very helpful Meadows, thanks."

"Why would that cause him to die?" Mary asked.

"Because Mary, you can't live with a deflated head. Gee, thought everyone knew that. It would look funny too."

"Right..." Mary replied, casting a look toward Sirius. Why was he there? She needed time to think, to not simply forgive him because it was what she wanted, because she couldn't unwrap her mind from around one bloody snog (and one bloody shag).

"Mary I need to talk to you." Sirius said, rising from his spot beside her.

"So talk."

"In private." he added, casting a glance toward Dorcas.

"Oh no. I know what you do to girls in private, and it isn't talking." Mary said, shaking her head.

"Thats not what I want—not now anyway, but later..."

The look Mary gave him made him stop speaking. "Okay, we can go and talk."

That, in his most humble opinion, was far to easy. But, he was not one to complain about good luck. He lead her out into he hall, finding someplace dark and secluded. She was glancing around it warily.

"Are you still mad?"

She didn't look at him, but at her feet, as she sat down, back resting against the wall. "I don't know. You said you were sorry, but its not like you were real enthusiastic about it."

He sat beside her, idly playing with the hem of her skirt, thinking. "I wouldn't have done it, if I didn't think you liked Remus. I didn't kiss her, but yeah, I kissed her back, and maybe I was giving her the wrong idea, but I figured you deserved it, if you were doing it to me. And you weren't."

"I wasn't. I guess we were both wrong, But I didn't kiss anybody." she said, shifting away from his hand. He barely noticed. She supposed she was nervous, and trying to find something to occupy him self with.

"Most of the time, if I kiss a girl, she knows it doesn't mean anything, and she knows not to think she's the only one I'm kissing. That was how it was, and now you're here, and I guess things have to be different, and I don't know how to do that." he answered.

"It's not like I've agreed to go out with you or anything." she reminded.

"Then its not like you have the right to get jealous." he shot back.

Mary looked away from him, crossing her arms. "Okay, you may have a point, but that doesn't mean I'm letting you off easy."

"So, you are forgiving me then?"

"Yes, Black, I'm forgiving you." she said crossly. It was stupid really, being a damn idiot. Should have never spoke to him again.

"You could try to sound a bit happier about it."

She cracked a smile, standing to her feet. "My common sense is disagreeing with the rest of me at the moment."

Sirius thought about standing, but he decided he much preferred the view from the floor. "Ignore it, eventually, it'll just disappear one day."

"I think I would like to keep mine, seeing as you've lost yours."

"Are you so sure its kept? Seems not, standing there, those are nice knickers by the way, love the hearts."

Mary gasped, kicking him in the leg.

"Why are all the women I know so abusive?"

"Because you're like a child who needs the occasional spanking to stay in line."

"You wanna spank me?"

Mary realized how suggestive that sounded, and turned red. "No, I do not."

"So you like to be spanked instead? You know, our initials are S and M."

Mary crossed her arms, glaring down at him. "Yes, and yours are SOB so I wouldn't use that as a defense."

"If you met my mother, you would see that I really am a SOB."

A little small guilty feeling nagged at her, and she dropped beside him. "I'm sorry, I wasn't thinking, I shouldn't have mentioned-"

He cut her off laughing. "I'm not going to burst into tears MacDonald, you can mention them all you want."

"I think I'd rather not. Not a happy subject I would assume." she replied, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear.

"No, not a happy subject."

He rose, holding down a hand. "Lets go."

"Go where?" she asked, taking his hand, bemused.

"To my room."

She let his hand go instantly, re seating herself on the ground. He rolled his eyes in exasperation.

"Not for that."

"Then why?"

"We can't skip out of class down here." he answered, pulling her resisting form up.

"And why would I want to skip my next class with you?" she challenged, a smile forming on her face.

"Because you want me. Now get up."

Mary stood, narrowing her eyes at him. "If I skip, I am not spending the time in your room. People would think the worst, and people already think the worst about me anyway."

"We aren't skipping in there, we're getting something, then we're skipping."

"The map?"

"What map?" he said, feigning innocence.

"The one you used to escape detention with with Dorcas."

Oh, that map. Yes, that's the one we're getting." he said, casting a questioning glance at her.

"My prefects badge is in my chest in my room." she assured. "And really, I am skipping class, so why would I get you in trouble if I'm going to be with you?"

"Right. Lets go."

—

"I thought you were through calling me Potter." he said softly, twirling a strand of her hair around his finger, head still rested against hers.

"Only to annoy you." she murmured.

He leaned away from her, then lifted her hand, linking his fingers through hers. "Go out with me?"

"I'm not sure if I'm ready." she said nervously, biting her lip.

"Anything I can do to convince you?"

"Maybe." she said, humming as he lifted the hand he was holding up to his lips, kissing the inside of her hand.

James released the hand, leaning forward, lips almost touching hers...When the door flew open, and Lily jumped in surprise, causing her forehead to crash into his.

"OW!"

"Whoops, talk about bad timing." Sirius said from the door. From behind him, Mary glanced around, seeing the two others. "Oh my gosh, were you going to shag?"

Lily did not answer, but turned a very deep shade of red. James sent a very frightening look toward Sirius, that let him know that he was going to be sorry for interrupting him and his lady love. Especially if shagging was on the menu.

"Evans, going to shag? Throw her virginity out the window? Sacrificing her purity?" Sirius said, in mock horror, only causing Lily to turn redder.

"Don't tease her." Mary scorned from behind him.

"I was not going to shag him." Lily defended.

"Not with them ruining my chances." James muttered under his breath.

"What was that?" Lily snapped.

"Nothing." he said quickly, turning away from her withering glare.

"James."

"Really, nothing. Just thinking out loud. You know I'd never do anything you didn't want to. I respect you." he said, hoping to erase the frown on her face.

"It's true. He's very respectful. Never once opened the door and caught him shagging someone. He can't say the same about me..." Sirius added.

"Not helping." James shot, casting a worried look at Lily. She shook her head, in silent assurance that she would not tell of his virginity. As if it was a crime.

"I wasn't going to shag him. I don't believe in premarital sex." she burst.

"You still believe that?" Mary questioned. It had been a shared belief by them, and Alice, and Dorcas, back in there early years of Hogwarts. All of which, most certainly changed their mind.

"You don't believe in...but marriage is forever... that means you'll only shag one person your whole life." Sirius said, as if the idea were extremely frightening.

"That is sort of the point."

"I think its sweet." Mary said, sending a furtive glance towards Sirius.

"Yeah, sweet." James said, forcing a smile. "I would wait for you. For as long as you want."

"Must be love." Sirius muttered.

"You know, I think its a good idea." Mary stated.

"You do?" Sirius asked, turning to look at her.

"I do. I think I'm going to go with it. No sex until marriage. None at all, until I'm wed. No shagging, screwing, boffing, banging, fucking, fornicating..." she said, a big smile on her face.

Sirius looked crestfallen, and James seemed to very much appreciate it. After all, had he not walked in, he would be doing things much more pleasurable than discussing absence with Lily.

"I think me and Lily should go now. See you later." Mary said, taking Lily's hand and walking out the door. They made it down the hall far enough to not be heard, when they burst into laughter.

"That was so funny, did you see the look on their faces." Mary asked.

"I know, I thought Black would cry."

They stopped laughing, Mary looking at Lily. "You don't really not believe in premarital sex?"

"I don't believe in sex before love." she replied.

"So, that's a no?"

"I'm all for the premarital sex, as long as you're in love with the person. You weren't serious were you?" Lily replied.

"Hell no. Me? No I love it way too much to wait for it." Mary answered. "By the way, were you going to shag him?"

"No! I mean, I don't think so." Lily answered.

"Oh, so you considered it?" Mary said, smiling devilishly.

"As if you were heading up there with Black to have a friendly chat." she defended. No, she had not considered it, but she was not very good at saying no, so it seemed.

"I was not there to get horizontal, we were going to skip class together. But it seemed better to leave him with that."

"I thought you were mad?"

"He apologized, and I've forgiven him."

Lily nodded. If she could almost not say no to James, anything was possible. "He asked me out again. I said maybe."

"I knew you two would end up together one day." Mary said, grinning.

"You did not." Lily protested.

"Okay, maybe not, but I started to suspect." Mary replied.

"Yeah, so did I."

—

"Are you sure this is right?" Dorcas asked, peering down into the simmering cauldron.

"Yes, its what the book said to do." Remus answered from behind her, retrieving some extra ingredients from the boy behind him.

"So why is it bubbling?" she called. He stepped behind her, looking over her shoulder. "I don't know, hold on." he said, reaching around her, dropping something else into the potion, holding onto the desk to push himself up and see farther over her shoulder.

"Ah, I knew you would find a way to get me in your arms." she teased, looking at the space he had unknowingly trapped her in.

"How did you know?"

"It was all clever rouse, my destroying the potion." she chimed.

He blew a bit of her hair out of his face. "Hey, could you do me a favor and pull that into an elastic for me? My hands are covered in potion gunk." she said,

gesturing to the elastic laying on her open book. He looped it loosely around her hair, fingering the pink streak as he did. "The hair really does suit you." "Really? I was about to change it to electric blue, but if you like it." she said, grinning.

"My opinion is held in that high of regard?"

"I know you have a massive crush on me, so.." she started, causing him to roll his eyes, and her to send him a wink.

"I can barely contain it."

"Why contain it? Knock off the cauldron and toss me on the table and ravish me."

"I would, but this is a grade, so I can't. Maybe next time."

She sighed. "I suppose I'll have to wait, but I'm holding you to it."

Before he could respond, the door opened, and James strode in, saying something to Slughorn.

"Mr. Lupin, please accompany Mr. Potter."

Remus stood, shrugging at Dorcas's bemused expression, and followed James out into the hall, where he saw Lily and Mary standing, faces drained of color.

"What's happened?"

"Emergency prefects meeting." James supplied, rigid, on edge.

"Theres a girl missing. Captured by Death Eaters is what they think." Lily said, voice flat.

"We'll have to tighten things up, no more people patrolling alone, one set patrol partner, punish anyone out after curfew." James said. Mary was still pale, not looking at anyone, only the ground.

"She was taken sometime last night. She wasn't in her room. She disappeared during the time we do patrols. There was a Death Eater in the school, and we didn't even notice." Lily said.

Remus had a sneaking suspicion, one he did not want to be the one to voice, sliding around inside of him. It was Lily who spoke it.

"It may have been an inside job. They think some of the students are Death Eaters."

None of them spoke for a moment, then Remus broke the silence. "Do they have any suspects, anyone they can prove?"

"Nothing that they can prove, but plenty we all know." James said, voice full of scorn.

"If they won't do anything, we'll have to keep an eye on them. We know who to look at, half the Slytherins are looking to join." Remus said back, Lily nodding.

"Anyone we know for sure?" Remus asked.

"Mulciber, Avery, and Snape." Lily said quickly, eyes to the ground. James instinctively wrapped his hand around hers, and she held tightly.

"Anyone else?" James said, sparing a glance toward Lily.

Mary sucked in a breath, and at her words, the reason for quietness was clear. "Regulus Black."

All three eyes turned to her. "Sirius' brother, Regulus, I think he's a Death Eater."

Chapter 16

The emergency meeting had every prefect in school present, and a few teachers, who were available to leave their classes. The meeting was held in the Great Hall, everyone piled together at the Gryffindor table. At the head, stood Lily and James, addressing them together, telling them the same story. However, they did not mention the possibility of Death Eaters in the school. It was likely that a few of the Slytherin prefects were Death Eaters themselves. If anyone noticed that their heads were holding hands, they did not mention it. What was asked, was who the girl was. When Lily, along with help from James, explained that her name was Kayla Dearborn, she was a second year Gryffindor, muggleborn, several visibly winced. She was young, not taught well enough yet to defend herself against full grown wizards and witches. Added to that she was muggle born, and Gryffindor, her fate was obvious. After an hour of setting up an schedule, assigning partners(Lily had James, Remus had Mary), creating safety questions(in case of someone was acting under a curse), and then going back, and making sure that the younger students were patrolling close to older ones, the meeting finally ended.

"We need to do something." Lily said, as they all walked down the hall, back toward the common room.

"But what? Go and hex all the people we think are Death Eaters, I can see that going over well." Mary said back, twisting her hands nervously.

"No, that would only get us all expelled." Remus answered, before Lily could say something back.

"Are you going to tell him?" James asked abruptly.

Mary slowed her pace for a second, then continued on. "No, I can't prove it can I? So why would I tell him?"

"How do you know?" Remus asked.

"We talked one day in the library. I got the feeling he was involved."

"Why didn't you say something?" James snapped.

"I wanted to assume the best thing." she cried.

"It doesn't matter. What matters is we need to make sure something like this doesn't happen again." Lily intruded. Then she looked toward the others. "We need to prepare ourselves. Be ready for a fight. It may take more than just prefects."

"What are you suggesting?" Mary asked, looking at her quizzically.

"More people to help. More people to fight. If the schools attacked, we can't have only the teachers to protect us." James said, catching on to Lily's idea.

"You aren't saying we should teach them how to fight?" Remus spoke.

"No, not them. We're hardly qualified. Ourselves, we teach ourselves, so that when the time comes, if it comes, we can protect them." Lily explained.

"I can't fight. I'm awful." Mary said, "I can cast any healing spell, charm anything, but I'm awful at defense."

"See, thats the problem. We're the ones out here at night. We're the ones that would be spotted first. We have to know how to defend ourselves." Lily pointed out.

"Not to mention, we need people to keep an eye on the Slytherins." James added.

"So, what are we going to do? Find a group, spy on Slytherins, and report it all back to the headmaster?" Remus asked reproachfully.

"Yes." Lily answered without hesitation.

"He wouldn't believe us." Mary said quickly.

"He would believe her. She's head girl. Teachers love her. She's one the best witches of the year." James argued.

"Thank you James. But that doesn't matter. What matters is, if we tell him, he'll keep a closer eye on them." Lily replied.

"Lets do it." Remus said.

"Yeah, I'm in." Mary said, feeling a bit uncertain.

"You can't pretend the war will go away, it won't." Lily said firmly.

"I know."

James looked between the two, he had never really liked Mary, but he admired her for joining, when war was the last thing she wanted.

"Now that we've decided to do it, we have to figure out who to trust. If they are Death Eaters, they won't hesitate to attack us." Remus said.

"Us four, naturally." James started, "And Sirius and Peter."

"And Dorcas." Mary spoke.

And Frank." Lily added.

"Alice comes along with Frank, I assume." Remus inquired.

"Yeah, but she's really good. She doesn't want there to be a war, but she can hex like any Auror I've seen." Mary replied.

"So can Frank." Lily added.

"What about Dorcas?" James brought up.

"She's good. I know you wouldn't think it, with her attitude, but she's one of the best in our year in defense against the dark arts."

"Anyone else?" James prompted.

"No, we should keep it inside our house, with people we can trust." Lily replied, the four reaching the common room. At the door, they were surprised to see an anxious Dorcas and Sirius waiting, behind them, Peter and Macmillan.

"Whats going on? As soon as class ended I made Peter come and wait with me." Dorcas said, "And then he wanted to come, so we let him in with us." she said, with a dirty look toward Macmillan. "Then I made Peter get Sirius, and we've been here."

Lily took a look at the group, then cast a furtive glance toward James. "Macmillan, out."

The Hufflepuff looked as if he would question this, but then he saw the serious look on the head boy's face, and turned, walking out.

"Finally, it was awful being alone with him. He kept trying to ask me to the dance." Dorcas breathed with relief. Sirius shot her an annoyed look at the remark, then turned to James.

"What happened?"

"Kayla Dearborn has been kidnapped by Death Eaters." Mary supplied, before James could speak. James turned to look at her, and something passed between them, and she looked away, leaving Peter, Dorcas, and Sirius to ponder what is as about.

"What did you say?"

All turned to the direction of the stairwell, where Alice stood. "What was her name?" she demanded, walking in.

Dorcas looked at her in confusion, then gasped, "Dearborn, why didn't I think?"

"Um, am I the only one who's lost?" Peter asked.

"Kayla Dearborn is Caradoc Dearborn's little sister. He's a friend of Franks." Alice supplied, her face pale.

"Is he in our year?" Remus asked.

"Yeah. I have to go tell Frank. He'll need to keep an eye on Caradoc, make sure he doesn't do something stupid." Alice said, running toward the boys dorms.

"We know him?" Sirius asked.

"No, we don't really know Frank's friends. We wouldn't know him if it weren't for Alice." Lily answered.

No one spoke for a moment, then Lily cleared her throat, and launched into explaining what the others had her and James, Remus, and Mary had been talking about in the hall. No one spoke until she was finished.

"Yeah, I'm in." Sirius spoke first.

"Same here." Dorcas quickly followed.

Peter was the last to answer. "Yeah, me too."

"Alice and Frank, we were going to ask-" Mary started, looking at the ground.

"Whats wrong with her?" Sirius whispered to Lily. She cast a sideways glance at James, who shook his head slightly.

"She's upset thats all. It just hit her a bit harder than the rest of us."

Sirius nodded, looking toward Mary, who evasively avoided his eyes.

"I'll tell them." Dorcas assured.

That seemed to conclude things, and Mary turned, walking out. Sirius made to follow her, but James went after her first.

"Is she going to be alright?"

"Let James handle it, he calmed her down before." Remus lied. Lily was a bit surprised at how easily he did it.

As soon as James caught up to Mary, he grabbed her arm. "Owl!"

He let her go. "Sorry, I didn't mean to grab you so hard. Still tense I guess."

"What do you want?" she asked bluntly.

"Are you going to tell him or not?"

She sighed, looking away. "Thats where I'm going now. To find him, and see if its true. And if it is-" she sucked in a breath. "Then I'm going to tell him, and pray he doesn't shoot the messenger." she said, laughing dryly.

"I can tell him. He's my best mate. If you don't want-"

"No. It has to be me. I'm the one who suspects." she cut in. James looked down at her, then in a movement he would never have thought his self doing with Mary MacDonald, of all people, he hugged her to him, letting her dig her nails into his shoulders, like a parent would hold their crying child.

"I'm so scared. This war, everything. It scares me so bad that sometimes...I'm not as brave as Lily, or as strong. I can't handle this." she said, a note of hysteria in her voice. Then, she peered up at him. "Why are you being nice to me?"

"Because you're Lily's friend."

"That didn't always matter." she said softly. James thought back to his younger years, particularly one memory of his fifth year.

"Maybe I grew up."

"I guess we don't have a choice about that." she said, trying to smile. It came out awful and forced.

"I thought you were crying." James said, looking down at her.

"I haven't cried in three years." Mary said, breathing in a gasping breath of air.

"Thats not healthy MacDonald."

"When was the last time you cried?" she countered.

"Thats different. Girls cry more."

She narrowed her eyes.

"Not saying anything, just you can get away with it. Men can't." he defended.

She wanted to step back, but she wasn't sure she wanted to, that would mean going to do what she had to do, and it wasn't something she looked forward to.

"You and Sirius should start a club. Shovenistic pigs."

He laughed. "You know you called him Sirius."

She groaned. "Great."

"I promise I won't tell."

Mary backed away, and smiled, this time it was a little less forced. "Thanks. I better go."

"Where are you going to look?"

"Library. Don't worry, I won't wander into Slytherin territory. Imagine Lily's reaction. 'You let her go there? You didn't stop her?' She would kill you." Mary

replied.

"Be careful." he advised.

"Yeah, yeah, you sound like my mom." she said, rolling her eyes, walking away.

She didn't look back, not even once, until she reached the library. Her eyes swept over the room. She hadn't really expected him to be there, but there he was, seated in a corner, in the shadows, only a bit of light hitting his face.

Her heart clenched at the sight, he had never looked so similar, or so different than Sirius. And yet, even if she knew in her heart, that the truth would be an unpleasant one, she could not think that anything so like Sirius could be so lost.

Lost. Not evil. That she was sure. Afraid. Alone. But not entirely bad.

As if any of those things would matter, if what she thought were true. Either he would follow his path, or he would be killed.

"Black?" she said tentatively, slowly walking closer.

He looked up in surprise, then seemed almost pleased to see her. "Mary?"

She glanced around, making sure no one could see them, then sat beside him on the ground. "Yeah, its me."

"What is it?" he looked at her face, where her unease was painfully obvious. "Is it Sirius, has something happened?"

"No, no, not that." she assured quickly. "He's fine. He's always fine." then she paused, "I'll make sure of it, okay."

He studied her, before looking away. "So, I take it your opinion of him has changed."

She smiled wryly. "You could say that."

He looked at her for a second, before returning to his blank staring off. "You're in love with him."

She drew in a sharp breath of air, eyes wide looking at him. "What?"

"Girls always fall in love with him." he looked at her, then added. "He stole my girlfriend once."

"What?" she asked, scolding herself for letting the conversation head in that direction, instead of what she came for.

"This girl, she was French, came down to visit friends, over the summer. A pure blood of course. It was the year before he started Hogwarts. She was my age, and liked me better. Then he stole her from me."

She looked at him oddly. "You were nine. What'd he do? Hold her hand before you did?"

He gave her a hateful look, and she sighed, looking away. "I'm sure he feels awful about it."

Regulus smiled. "No he doesn't. She came back a few years later. I was fourteen. Our parents had a party, and she was invited. I decided to sneak away for awhile, and went into what I thought was an empty room. And what did I see? Them two going at it like wild animals."

"That sounds...mildly traumatic." Mary replied.

"Mildly, yes."he answered.

Mary bit back a laugh, then smiled broadly. "But you have to admit, it is kind of funny."

"I suppose."

Mary's smile faded, as she remembered why she was there. "I have to ask you something. And it isn't because I want to know, because I don't. But I have to."

"What?"

"Are you a Death Eater?" it was simple, quick. To the point. She had thought she would stutter on the words.

"What?" his voice reigned shock, but his face went pale, and his eyes nervous.

"You are." she said quietly, afraid to speak the words above a mere whisper.

"You don't know what you're talking about." he snapped.

"Show me your arm." she ordered. Sighing, he held out his right arm. "The other arm."

"No."

Mary looked away, then suddenly leaned toward him, yanking back his robes. She backed away instantly. "No, I wanted...Why?"

He glared at her. "You wouldn't understand. You don't know what its like. You don't live with those people, I had no choice."

"You had a choice, you could have said no, you could have left." she quickly countered.

"And go where? All my friends are as bad as them. What would I do? Live in the streets, and for what, so people like you could be happy?"

"People like me? Go ahead and say it, call me a mudblood, I know its what you think!" she cried.

He cast his eyes around, making sure no one heard. "Shut up."

"That wasn't what I meant." he added.

"Then what did you mean? How could you do this? How am I going to tell-" she stopped, thinking.

He grabbed her arms, causing her to shriek. "Don't tell Sirius."

She meet his gaze, turning his words in her mind. It was not even a possibility, but he sounded so serious, so grave. "Why?"

"He'll hate me."

"He already does." she said back, eyes never leaving his.

He released her. "He hates me? He's the one who left me with them, with no one to be on my side, with no one else for them to scorn."

She took a breath, closing her eyes, to avoid the intensity of his. "It isn't too late. Talk to him, he can help you. We can all go to the headmaster, tell him, make him hide you."

He laughed, it was almost frightening, the contempt in it. "The days where Sirius would save me have long since passed. I won't hide like a scared dog. I've made my choice, and I will not turn my back on the people I love."

Was that loyalty, she wondered, or just a blow toward his brother? But why would he leave his family? He played along perfectly, they loved him. In his own way, he chose the higher path, he chose to stick by those he cared for, regardless of what they were.

Could someone ever really look at someone they loved, and see them for a monster?

But, then again, Sirius had, Lily had, even she had, so long ago.

"Then I guess we have nothing left to say to one another." she spoke softly, rising. He followed suit.

"Will you tell?"

"Only him. I won't turn you over, if thats what you're wondering."

As she said it, she turned away, walking toward the door. He caught her wrist, making her look over her shoulder at him.

"Why?" he asked, voice laced with bewilderment.

"Because, you're his brother." she said, pulling her arm away. Then she added, "And I'm not in love with him."

She didn't hear his response, she was already running walking away. Then, she looked back over her shoulder, "The missing girl, did you-"

His eyes widened. "No, I didn't know. I would never...not here. I wouldn't ever. Not while theres still people I care about here."

Mary felt dangerously close to tears.

--

Lily lay on her bed, waiting for Mary to come back. She had been waiting with Remus, Peter and James, but she needed time to think. And in efforts to avoid talking about the missing girl, the war, they had started discussing Quidditch.

The door opened and from the slouched, defeated posture, Lily didn't have to ask. "Have you told anyone?"

"No." Mary answered, leaning against the wall, closing her eyes, exhaling.

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"No. Distract me. Prattle on about anything. Just don't make me think about having to deliver that bit of bad news."

Lily closed her own eyes, letting her worry subside. When she was ready, she would talk. Probably around three in the morning.

"Did you see James today? The way he handled things? He was so mature, so serious. I never see that side of him. I was...impressed."

"I know. He was great. You both were. I almost cried all over him, by the way."

Lily opened her eyes. "What?"

"In the hall. He was nice to me. It was weird. I always thought he found me annoying." Mary replied.

"He does find you annoying. I find you annoying, and I'm your best friend."

Both were silent a minute. Then Mary spoke. "I'm going to wait until morning to tell him."

Lily knew as well as Mary that this was an escape strategy, but she would not mention it. She could pretend it was for more time to think of what to say.

"Wanna go down? Plan the meeting tonight." Lily asked.

"Yeah, okay."

—

The scene downstairs was chaos. Apparently, Frank had not managed to calm Caradoc Dearborn down.

"No, you won't stop me, I'm not going home, I'm going to find her!"

Lily and Mary took in the scene, wearing matching shocked expressions. Alice and Dorcas were standing close to Caradoc, while Frank held him.

Caradoc struggled against him, his auburn hair falling into his face, bright blue eyes blood shot. It looked as if he had been crying.

And why wouldn't he, with what he had been through? Something had to be done. Lily stepped forward, when she noticed James and Remus standing

farther back. Remus held a cup in his hand, and approached the crazed Caradoc.

"Here, drink this. It's only water. It will make you feel better. Drink it, and come sit down." Remus coaxed, the boy hesitantly accepting.

As soon as he sit down, he calmed, staring blankly. Remus came behind Lily, whispering into her ear, "Laced with calming drought."

She nodded, Mary looking at Caradoc sympathetically. After a minute of watching, Dorcas moved from her spot, and sat beside Caradoc, intertwining her hand in his. She did not look at him, as the silent tears streaked his face. Quietly, Alice went and sat on his other side, taking his free hand.

"I was supposed to protect her. Mom and Dad were shocked, to find we both could do magic. They didn't know anything about it here. I told them I would take care of her. They came for me, to tell me to pack up, to go home, that my parents were waiting. I couldn't face them, I can't see them, not when she's...I promised to protect her, and she's gone. She's gone."

Tears were streaking Lily's face now to, and James walked over to her, wordlessly sliding an arm around her. She leaned into him. Mary glanced over at them, then looked away. Lily was right, James was impressive. He was handling things perfectly.

Two people walked back into the common room suddenly. Mary and Remus swung around to see who. Standing there were Sirius and Peter.

"We told them it was taking awhile. That he would be down in a few minutes." Sirius said.

Peter looked at Lily, still in James arms, and Mary, motionless beside Remus. "We went to tell them to wait for him."

Neither spoke, Mary catching Sirius eyes across the distance. What to say? And when to say it. But she could not look away. He swept across the room, stopping in front of her.

"It'll be okay."

Mary tore her eyes away. "No it won't."

—

The plan for the group they stared was to meet everyday after class ended, before curfew ended. Then, at night, after patrols, they would split into groups, and take turns observing the Slytherins. It was all set in stone, who would be with who, who would go where, when Caradoc Dearborn, (who had caused quite a scene, refusing to leave school, and his parents couldn't force him, as he was already of age) intruded.

"I want to help."

His voice rang out through the groups whispers, where they sat huddled in the common room. Frank cast an apologetic look toward the rest. "I told him. I had to. It was his sister."

"I think we should let him in." Alice added.

"It was his sister." Mary agreed. Remus looked toward James, then said, "I agree. It means we can keep an eye on him. The last thing we need is someone chasing Death Eaters, trying to play hero."

"Moony makes a point." Sirius replied. Peter nodded. James looked at Lily, who sighed, then nodded as well.

"Okay, Caradoc, you can help. Come on, you can be with Alice, Frank, and Dorcas."

"The first ones to spy on Slytherin are James, Peter and I." Lily supplied.

"Tomorrow its Mary, Sirius and I." Remus added.

"Then its us, and the order repeats." Dorcas said, her tone dead serious for one of the few times in her life.

"Okay, anything else?" Lily said, ending the meeting, looking at Caradoc.

"No. Frank told me everything."

Mary twisted her hands in her lap, before speaking. "Sirius," he seemed shocked by the use of his first name, eyes flicking up to her. "I need to talk to you... tonight."

—

James was glad for the time alone with Lily, knowing that Peter would be a third wheel soon. It was no coincidence that he was with them, they sorted by strength, he and Mary were the weak links, and would need to be with someone more talented.

Lily had hardly looked at him, she seemed lost in thought. There was no one in the dark hallways, the missing girl had gave everyone a scare, most were too afraid to leave there rooms after curfew.

"Lily, whats wrong?"

She started, looking at him, then away. "Nothing, its just...You really did change. You aren't the boy I hated."

"Hated? As in, past tense? As in, presently, you don't?" he asked, voice hopeful.

"That sounds about right." she answered, smiling a timid smile. Where had all her bravery gone? If she hated him, she could have said anything, done anything. She felt like a first year, with a crush on someone far out of her league.

Which was ridiculous. Everyone knew James liked her. She forced herself to relax.

"So, you're finally admitting you are undeniably, uncontrollably, unbelievably, head over heels in love with me?" he said, grinning cheekily.

She laughed. "No, I wouldn't go that far. Maybe I barely tolerate you."

"Barely tolerate me?" he repeated, stepping closer to her side. She took a step back, leaning against the wall, grinning back in the same manner.

"Maybe I barely like you."

He stepped closer, looking down into her eyes, nearly touching her. "Just barely?"

Just barely." she said back, her gaze traveling down to his lips.

"Go out with me?"

She looked away, then back into his eyes. "Ask me later. Not tonight. Its been such a sad day. I don't want to look back, and remember the day I said yes like this. I want it to be happy."

"But when I ask, you will say yes?" he said, his heart racing unexpectedly. She may not have said yes, but she came close. And she would, she would soon.

"I'll say yes."

In a moment of elated happiness, he lifted her by the waist hugging her, spinning them in a small circle, before placing her on her feet, Lily still laughing at his behavior, and kissing her ardently. She wrapped her arms around his neck, kissing him back with fever.

She was definitely saying yes.

Chapter 17

"I'm going to tell him tonight." Mary said, addressing Remus. She had to, the silence was swallowing them. He was waiting for her to speak.

"So, he is then." he stated, as if he had already knew. She supposed they all had.

"I'm afraid. You'll let me pull him off somewhere to tell him; I mean, you don't mind being alone? Just stay close, it'll be safer. And, I'll feel better, if I can't think of how to handle it." she said, hating how weak she sounded, it wasn't her. She was strong, she was tough.

She wasn't supposed to want to dammit cry.

"I'll stay close if you need me."

She smiled, folding her arms across her chest, looking at the ground. "You know, it's funny. A few weeks ago, hell, even a few days ago, I would have been afraid to be alone with him for entirely different reasons. And now, its for the worst possible one."

"You would have been safe. I made him promise to keep his hands off you. But that was then, and this is now, and I can't blame you for being nervous."

Mary stopped walking, looking at him with wide eyes. "You made him promise to keep his hands off me?"

"I didn't want you getting hurt. And I know him." he answered.

"You mean you know me, and my lack of restraint. After tonight, that won't be a problem, he'll hate me." Mary said, a note of bitterness in her voice.

Remus rested his hand on her shoulder, meeting her eyes. "He won't hate you."

Mary sighed. "We'll see."

—

It was hard not to smile, with the euphoria of perfect kisses still lingering, but the time for such things was past. Lily and James, along with Peter, had work to do. Once they had reached closer to the Slytherin common room, (Lily knew where it was, thanks to her past friendship with Snape) they split up in three different directions.

James, wishing he had the map, but he had left it with Sirius, forgetting to get it back for the task at hand, found nothing. He tracked back, meeting up with Lily, who also found nothing.

"All clear. You?" he addressed.

"Same. Where's Peter?"

Both were silent a moment, realizing the err of their decision. He could have been ambushed. Both turned simultaneously, heading in the direction Peter took. He came around a corner, nearly running into them.

"Wormtail, what happened?" James asked, steadying the shorter boy.

"I ran into Mulciber and Avery. They were planning something, whispering. I couldn't hear what." he said, breathlessly.

Lily mumbled something under her breath, that James thought sounded like Muffalto, or Mufulto, of somewhere in that area. "What?"

"Its a lovely little spell Snape taught them. Keeps everyone else from hearing the conversation, makes it sound like humming, or mumbling, or something." she paused, then added. "We used it to get away with talking in class."

"So, we won't ever get to hear what they're saying?" James said, in exasperation. Then he turned his attention back to Peter. "Did they see you?"

Peter looked away, before answering with a shaky voice. "Yes, they saw me."

"What happened? Did they hurt you?" Lily said, walking closer to him, eying him head to toe.

"No, they...they admitted what they were. They tried to get me to join."

"What?!" James cried, his voice outraged.

"They told me I wouldn't have to live in my friends shadow anymore, that I could have glory, that I could be somebody. They said the dark lord rewards his followers."

Lily's face twisted with anger at his words, James with disgust. "What did you say?"

"I told them I would never betray my friends."

Before James could say anything back, probably something along the lines of what he would have said, including several profanities, Lily intruded.

"I cannot believe them. It's just like them, preying on the weak—"

"On the weak? Is that what you think, that I'm weak?" Peter snapped, eyes filled with some unfathomable expression.

"No, Peter, I didn't mean it like that, I—"

"I know what you meant. I'm going back to the room, it isn't like you two will need me." he cut in, turning, going in the opposite direction. James sent Lily a dark look, before following after him.

"James, wait, I—" she stopped, not knowing what to say.

"Lily." he called her name gruffly, more worried about her being there alone than angry. But still, he sounded plenty angry. Lily caught up with them, all walking in a stormy silence.

They parted ways without saying goodbye.

—

Mary had waited as long as she could, avoiding telling him at all costs, even sparking a conversation about Quidditch, just to buy time to think of how to break it. Asking men to explain Quidditch always ensured at least a ten to twenty minute block of time to think.

It was only when Remus started looking at her pointedly, that she cut in on the speech Sirius was giving, about how Keepers were once allowed to score points.

"Sirius, I need to talk to you."

He stopped speaking, seeing the grave expression on her face, and wordlessly followed behind her. Once they reached a dark corner, Mary sat, leaning against the walls, breathing in ragged gasps.

"What is it? Are you alright? Mary?" her erratic breathing was bothering him, and he called out for Remus.

"No! It's fine, Remus, stay there."

She ignored him eying her oddly, and took another breath. "How's your relationship with your brother?"

He seemed stunned by the question, then answered, "We don't have a relationship. Not anymore."

"So, you didn't stay in touch, after you left him?" she prodded.

After I left him? I wasn't him? I left, it was my parents. He chose to side with them." Sirius defended, an edge to his voice.

"Did you ever think maybe he doesn't see it that way?" she asked, voice low.

"What are you getting at? I left because I had to. I walked away because I couldn't stay. Not there, not with them." he snapped.

Mary squeezed her eyes shut. "I don't think that's how he took it."

"What are you trying to say?"

She hated the angry tone, the rawness in his voice. She was hitting a nerve, and she wanted to stop. But she couldn't. "That maybe there's a difference between walking away, and walking out."

"You don't know anything, you-"

"He's a Death Eater!" she cried, tears leaking from her eyes, for the first time in a long time.

His face went pale, the words he was planning to say dying in his throat. "What?"

"I saw the dark mark on him. He doesn't want it. He thinks he had no choice." Mary said, this time softer, barely above a whisper.

"I shouldn't be surprised, I knew, eventually...he's only sixteen. I thought..." his voice trailed off.

Mary didn't know what to say, holding a hand over her mouth to hold back a sob.

"If I had stayed...I could have...maybe he wouldn't..." he sounded more unsure than she had ever heard him, more broken, and it was obvious to her, that maybe he had never really been fine, that in spite of his behavior, he was fucked up, anyone in his situation would be, and she had made it so much worse.

"You don't know that." she said, the sob slipping out, and then she was crying, like she hadn't ever thought she would cry again, deep, sobbing, weeping.

"I'm sorry, I'm so s-sorry. I know that you didn't want to know, that you wouldn't want to hear, and I know that you'll h-hate me."

She put a hand on his arm, and he shoved her away roughly, as if her touch burned him. "I don't hate you. It isn't your fault." he said sharply, sliding farther away from her.

Mary shook, crying harder, while Sirius sat, stiff, rigid, staring blankly ahead. She stood, swaying a little from her shaking. He needed to be alone. He didn't want her there to help.

He didn't want her.

Remus, who had heard the crying, came around the corner, catching the crying Mary, who had nearly fallen, wrapping a supportive arm around her. "Come on let's give him some time alone." he said, casting a worried look at the unmoving Sirius, before leading Mary away.

It was close to morning before Sirius left.

--

It was October 16th. It had been two days since Mary had broke the news, two days since she had spoken to him. He had skipped all his classes. James was there with him. There was not much to say, so James simply stayed with him, unspeaking, silently assuring that if he needed to talk, that he would be there to listen.

He however, was not talking to Lily. The incident with Peter, along with trying to show his general 'thereness' to Sirius, he hadn't really wanted to talk to her. It wasn't a happy time for him. And, he was slightly angry about what she said to Peter. Of course, he still loved her, but under the circumstances, he felt he was more likely to bite her head off than express that, so he thought it best to stay away from her.

This sentiment did not sit well with Lily, who he had not bothered to express it to. Lily thought he was still angry over the comment she had made to Peter, which she had not meant to be offensive. Even James knew he was weaker than the rest.

However, she would not waste time thinking of him, she had other things to worry about. Such as Mary, who was taking Sirius's behavior a bit hard. She seemed to feel it was all her fault, and she should not have told him. Not to mention, she had a dance to plan.

The unpleasantness seemed as if it would stretch on forever, until finally, that morning at breakfast, James spoke to Lily.

"Lily."

She looked up at him, eyes dangerously narrowed. "James." she replied back stiffly, looking down at her plate as if he was not there.

"You aren't mad are you?" he asked, sitting across from her.

"No, not at all. You only kiss me then ignore for two days. Why ever would I be mad?"

"Cut the sarcasm."

She glowered at him, until he sighed, looking away for a moment. When his eyes returned to her, she seemed to be waiting.

"I was sort of busy, you know, with the best mate who found out his brothers a Death Eater. So, sorry, if I thought making sure he didn't do something rash like pitch himself off the astronomy tower came first."

Lily found it hard to keep glowering, when he put it like that. However, that was a little extreme, talk off suicide. "I hardly think Black would go so far. After all, they aren't all that close, are they?"

There was a genuine concern in her voice, but her lack of understanding irritated him. "No, but that only makes it worse. What would think if it were your sister?"

Lily looked down, not wanting to meet his gaze. There was a different intensity there now, one she did not like. "I get it. I do, it's just...I don't know what to do. How is he?"

She surprised herself with her concern, although she was warming up to James, the idea of also warming up toward Sirius had never crossed her mind. It seemed that one went along with the other however.

"He won't talk about it."

Lily nodded, thinking of Mary, of how she had laid staring at the ceiling, looking so hollow, saying she didn't know what to do. That sort of sadness and pain did not fit people like Sirius and Mary, they were eternal rays of sunshine, existing in a carefree sort of happiness, only changing to the occasional fiery burst of anger. Sadness should not be included.

"I thought you were ignoring me because of Peter. I thought you were mad." she admitted.

"I was mad. I'm still mad."

"Mad? All I said was the truth. You know he isn't as strong as us. I didn't mean to hurt his feelings." she paused, then added, "Besides, I wasn't the one who asked what he said to the offer, so if anyone should feel bad, it's you."

She wished she could take the words back, seeing his expression. But, she couldn't, and she was not going to try, when doing so would only cause more damage.

"I wasn't asking because I didn't trust him. I only wanted to know what he said. I know none of my friends would ever do anything like that. I trust all of them with my life."

His voice was strangely controlled, meaning he must be very angry. Lily understood this, but she thought his unshakable trust a little naive. It was part of life, that friends changed, that people grew apart, that sometimes, it was the ones you loved, who hurt you the most.

"You shouldn't be so trusting, even friends can be the ones who stab you in the back." Actually, to her it made more sense. Enemies, at least would stab you in the front, friends in the back. Or maybe it was friends in the front, straight through the heart.

"I have better choice in friends than you do." he said back, his voice that same deadly calm.

Lily gasped, flinching as if he had hit her. Without speaking, she turned her back on him, walking away. It was with a odd sense of remorse, that James

watched her go, wishing to call her back, but finding himself unable.

Lily was the first to arrive for class. Potions was usually a subject she enjoyed, as Slughorn had a special fondness for her, and she was especially good at it. Knowing James would be there sort of ruined it. She hoped with all her heart, he would skip out again.

Her hopes were diminished, as he walked in with Sirius. Both took their place wordlessly. Feeling it would be proper to turn, and at least address Sirius, with what he was going through, she shifted in her seat, sure to avoid looking at James.

"How are you doing?" she said, the politeness in her voice driving her mad. It seemed too forced. The look he shot her made her think he believed so as well, but she could not be sure. He looked like hell, as if he hadn't slept in days. She supposed he hadn't.

"You look aw- as if you haven't slept. If theres anything I can do..."

"Don't crowd him Lily." James said, looking her over. Lily turned away from his gaze, eyes on the door waiting for Mary. It was only seconds later she walked in, bumping into the door on her way, a low string of profanities muttered under her breath. Lily had to smile at that, if Mary was back to cursing, it meant she was back to normal.

Or, she was, until she saw Sirius.

"How is he?" she whispered to Lily, seating herself next to her, casting a glance over her shoulder.

"He can hear you. And he doesn't appreciate you discussing him as if he isn't here."

Even James seemed shocked by his friends speaking, he had endured two days of silence. Once, he would have thought that a blessing, but not anymore.

"Does he always refer to his self in the third person?" Mary asked, in an attempt to capture the usual lightness.

"He doesn't." Sirius answered, an attempt of a smile on his face. A part of him felt bad about Mary, she had cried, and thought he would hate her. He was doing a good job of letting her think so.

"Wanna partner with today?" he asked, unaware of the disagreement between James and Lily. He was not aware of much that had happened the last two days.

"Of course. James, move." Mary said quickly, sliding out of her seat. James was giving her an annoyed look, but stood, holding out his chair for her. She rolled her eyes at the gesture, but sat. She had thought Sirius would say something, but he did not.

The instructions were given, and the two groups worked silently. Finally James slid closer to Lily, whispering so not to get in trouble. "I'm sorry about earlier."

"It's fine." she said, in a clipped voice that let him know it was not fine.

"Really, what I said was out of line. I've been sort of stressed out. I didn't mean it."

Lily did not look at him, but her shoulders slumped a little, and she sighed. "Yeah, we all have been. I shouldn't have said what I said either."

James stopped a minute, looking at her. "You know I love you, right?"

Again, she sighed. Once it would have bothered her, but she did not mind now. It wasn't as if he was professing his undying affections for her, it was more of a profession of love in general, much the same sort of love she might profess to feel toward Remus, or Frank, or Dorcas, or Alice.

"Yes, James, I know."

"I mean besides being in love with you, I really do love you. Even if you never loved me back, if you never returned those feelings of love in that way, I'd still want you as a friend."

She closed her eyes, then said evenly, "I know. I suppose, in that sense of the word, that I may love you a little too."

He smiled. "And in the other sense of the word?"

"Don't push your luck."

He grinned at her response, it was typically Lily that he had to. "But when I ask, you will still say-"

"Yes. When you ask. But it better not be now, because I'm trying to do our assignment, and you are not helping, therefore, I am not feeling very generous."

James looked down, and realized Lily had nearly finished the potion herself. "Sorry. You can be very distracting."

"Stop trying to flatter me, and get to work."

Behind them, Mary and Sirius were not fairing so well in the conversation department. Occasionally, Sirius would read her an instruction, or tell her to change the way she was doing something, but other than that, they were not speaking.

"Sirius, could you say something, anything, you're freaking me out." Mary finally said, eyes desperate.

Sirius looked up at her, and then spoke. "Okay. You want a piece of chocolate? I stole it from Remus." Then, with a smile, that was a weaker version of his typical one, he added "He has a problem."

Mary took a glance at her dirty hands, and held them up to him. "Can't."

"Here." he said, reaching in his pocket, and holding it up to her mouth. She opened her mouth, letting him slip it inside, trying not to shudder, as his thumb traced her lower lip. The look on his face was very typical, and exactly what it would have been before.

Hormones, she decided, were a very distracting thing.

"I want to talk to you later." he said, behind her now, looking over her shoulder at the potion, very nearly touching her. His hand slid down her arm, taking the stirrer from her hand, doing it instead his self. Her arms dropped numbly to her sides.

"Yeah. Okay. Later, to talk." She was sure to stress the word talk.

He grinned behind her. "Lunch good for you?"

Mary thought of the table, holding several other people, and a teachers nearby. "Sounds good."

"We can go to the common room. It should be empty."

Mary groaned.

--Caradoc Dearborn had taken a permanent spot next Frank during meals. This resulted in Frank and Alice(who sat on his other side) actually eating more meals. This also resulted in Dorcas, who usually was the third wheel, as Alice's best friend, getting more conversation time. Which was nice, because her general happiness was contagious, and Caradoc smiled more and more often in her presence.

Also, through some unspoken sort of pact, all the people in who were part of the secret group, had started taking meals together. Except, of course, James and Sirius, who had not been around the last two days. They were still missing two, only this time, it was Mary, not James.

Everyone burst into laughter, at some joke Dorcas had been telling, except Lily who had not been paying attention. She was focused on the short, blonde boy beside James. "Peter."

Peter turned to her, his smile dying. "Yeah?"

"I'm sorry. About before." she said, hoping it would be enough.

"It's okay."

And all was forgiven. James was beaming at her, happy to have her and Peter back on good terms. If James trusted him, then so did she. She could ignore all the qualities that she saw that would make him want to turn to the dark side. After all, not everyone gave in to their darker nature.

All the people around her she could trust with her life. She was sure of it.

--

The common room was empty, just as Sirius had predicted. That was no comfort to Mary.

"So, what was it you wanted to talk about?" she said, voice cheerful as she could muster, sitting down on the couch. He sat far to close beside her.

"I wanted you to know I don't hate you."

Mary blinked. "Oh." Well, that wasn't what she expected. "Thank you."

He laughed. "What?" she said indigently.

"You just thanked me for not hating you."

Mary thought about it, then smiled. "Yeah, that is a bit odd."

The mood changed, as suddenly, Sirius said, "Why did you cry?"

"Because, I thought that I hurt you, and that...it made me want to cry." she said softly.

"Oh."

They sat in unspeaking for a moment, then Sirius said, "I didn't take you as the sort of girl who cries."

"I'm not. That was the first time I've cried in years."

The surprise on his face made her want to laugh. "Is that really so weird?"

"It isn't normal."

She sighed. "Maybe I cried all my tears then."

Sirius looked at her scrutinizingly. "It was a bloke."

Mary laughed. "Really? You think?"

"That explains you wanting to make me a one night stand."

Mary rolled her eyes. "I wasn't going to make you a one night stand. I was telling the truth about being able to count the guys I've been with on one hand. I just visit them when the urge calls." she paused, shrugging her shoulders. "If you hadn't been such a dumb ass, and called me the wrong name, we would be shagging. Shagging occasionally, anyway."

There was an awkward pause, then Sirius proclaimed, "Wow, I am a dumb ass."

"Yep. But you're pretty good-looking, so you can get away with it."

This time, the smiling was easier, and normal. It was like things had not changed.

"Tell me about him."

Or, maybe they had.

Mary looked at her feet, wiggling her toes idly, thinking. Was it so bad? Maybe it would help him understand, in any case.

"It was my forth year. I had never had a real boyfriend, you know, a few dates here and there, but that was it. Then he came along. He was a seventh year, in Slytherin. I guess that should have told me something there. Anyway, he asked me out. I was young and stupid, and I thought it was cool, that a seventh year liked me. I mean, who was I? So, I said yes."

She stopped, folding her legs up, sitting pretzel style, hands digging into her knees. "It didn't take long for him to seduce me, I thought I loved him, who am I kidding, I did love him, and he had me convinced he loved me. I gave him my virginity, I mean...I gave him my heart. Of course, he told me the relationship had to be secret, he was in Slytherin, me Gryffindor, he was a pure blood, me a muggleborn, he was older...a thousand excuses, and I bought every one."

"What happened?" Sirius asked, noticing how her nails were digging in deeper into her skin, she was going to leave marks.

"I found out it was all a game. Him and all his stupid friends, they were having this-competition." she spat, "to see who could get the most mudbloods" her voice cringed on the word, "to take their innocence, to play with them, to use us like toys. Thats all we were to them. The one who had the most points, you got more points for more girls, and more if you could get them to trust you."

Her nails were leaving marks in her flesh now, and Sirius wanted to grab her arms, and pull them away. He didn't move, if he did, he was afraid he would lose her. It was obvious it was not something she discussed much.

"The winner got some big pile of money. Just a game, never anything else. In the end, it was his guilt that made him confess, though I already heard, from one of the other girls, she was in Hufflepuff. I don't think she'd want me telling people she fell for it too, so I can't tell you who."

"I understand. Mary, I"

She cut him off, by continuing to talk. "They thought it was funny, to break our hearts. All because we didn't have the right bloodline. But, the funny thing is, he told me he really had started to care for me, that he wanted me to forgive him, and to let things keep going on, they way they were."

She let out an ironic laugh. "I told him to kindly go fuck himself, and if he ever spoke to me again, I'd castrate him."

Sirius did not respond.

"So, you see, I have a few issues with men. Thats why I'm never in relationships. I have issues, with trust. So, I made friends, guys I could use for a good time, but nothing more. I had a different boy from every house, not planned, just the one's who caught my attention. The one in our house graduated last year, the one in Ravenclaw has a girlfriend, who is a whore, and cheating on him by the way, with his cousin, of all people. Not that it matters, as he isn't exactly faithful. The one in Hufflepuff suddenly matured, and wants a meaningful relationship, thats what he told me over summer. He lives a few blocks from me, muggleborn too. So, I needed someone, and you were there, and everyone knows Sirius Black is always up for a shag."

"Did you think about the guys feelings in all this, that maybe-"

"They always knew what it was. It was a physical thing, no strings attached. I wasn't allowed to get emotional involved. My heart was already broken, and nobody deserves someone who is broken. So, I don't really do the whole couple thing."

Something very frightening was curling up inside Sirius at her words. He pushed it down, reaching out a hand, touching her face, making her meet his eyes. "Mary, you know, I would never do something like that to you."

Guilt reared up, because wasn't it what he was doing? In a way it was the same, on a less sadistic level. He was only trying to get her because a bet. But not really a bet, but he had to cling to that, because he didn't have emotional attachments, they never lasted, James, Remus, and Peter were all the attachments he needed, they were his family, there was no room for anyone else.

He moved his hand away, and she looked away, not saying anything back.

"Some people just aren't relationship people, and I think me and you are some of those people." he said, trying to fight back the feelings of guilt.

"Yeah, I think so." she replied, untwisting her legs, swinging them in front of her. "What about love? What do you think of that?"

"It's out there, for the people who want to find it. It exists, if you want it to. Its one of those things you have to believe in, for it to be real." he answered.

"Does it exist for you?" she asked.

He shrugged. "Not interested."

"Me either. Except..." she started.

"Except what?"

"Except, every girl wants the fairy tale, the happily ever after. Sometimes, I want someone to make me believe." she said softly, not meeting his eyes.

There was such a melancholy tone to her voice, such a defeated posture, she looked so fragile, that Sirius felt he had to do something. "Do you trust me?"

She was thrown off by the question, but it did not take her long to answer. "Yes."

In a swift movement, he had her pulled closer to him, his lips hovering near hers. "Don't." she ordered, her voice sounding very tiny.

"Why?" he asked, eyes flicking up to meet hers.

Emotionally involved."

He backed away from her, thinking. "By involved, you mean?"

"That I care about you. I guess we were even friends."

He sat back, folding his arms. "This complicates things."

Of course, she had no idea what he was talking about, but she had enough things going on inside her own mind to agree. "Tell me about it."

Her choice of words made him want to laugh, telling her about was the last thing he could do.

—

"Lily?"

The voice that was calling her name had been the one she was waiting for, and she spun around, hopeful. The smile on her face had him wondering what she expected. Well, she made him wait years for a chance, she could wait another few hours.

"Do you want to come play Quidditch with me and Sirius?"

Her face fell, and he had to fight to keep from laughing. "Play Quidditch. With you and Sirius." she repeated.

"Yep. You can bring along Mary, we can play two a side."

"I really hope this is not your idea of asking me out."

He grinned. "Nope, not it. Though, I do have plenty of ideas. I'm waiting until you least expect it. When would you least expect it?"

"I don't know, while I'm in bed, in the shower."

"Perfect, I'd love to be in bed, and in the shower with you, I'll ask you then."

"Ha ha."

James reached down and caught her face in his hands. "You really are too sarcastic sometimes. It makes you seem very unpleasant."

Before she could respond, he bent down, kissing her lightly. She automatically lifted herself up on tiptoes, to kiss him deeper, when he pulled away. She frowned in disappointment, and he tried not to smile at her response.

"So, are you coming?"

"Yeah. Okay." she said, not thinking. She was still thinking of the kiss, that would have been much more lovely, if James was not determined to drive her insane.

James extended his hand, and she took it without complaint. They walked that way until they reached the Quidditch field, where they saw Mary and Sirius already were, along with Dorcas and Remus. Apparently, Sirius was teaching Dorcas how to ride a broom, to the amusement of Mary and Remus.

"Am I straddling it right, I'm very good at straddling things, you know."

"Yes Dorcas, you are straddling it right, but it has to be in the air to fly." Sirius said, with an edge of impatience.

"You are not a good teacher. Remus, come be my teacher, you aren't so impatient." Dorcas called.

"I'm not going anywhere near you and a broom combined."

She sighed dramatically. "I thought you loved me."

"I did."

She smiled wickedly. "You mean when you loved me last night?"

"No, I was referring to this morning."

Mary was rolling her eyes at the two, and Sirius was glancing between them, trying to decide if it was real flirting, or just normal Dorcas flirting.

"Ah, that reminds me, you owe me a shag."

"And you owe me one." Remus reminded.

It was then that Mary noticed Lily and James, and waved at them. Remus decided that the 'couples' needed some alone time, and called to Dorcas,

"Wanna walk with me?"

She opened her arms, nearly falling off the hovering broom, all two feet off the ground. "Take me, I'm yours."

"I'll take in the common room."

"Will you really?" she asked, with pretend eagerness.

"No."

"Such a tease."

Lily and James watched them go, bantering playfully. "You know, I think it would be fun to flirt so often, and never mean a word of it." Lily mused aloud.

"Don't. You'll encourage people." James said immediately.

"Why would I encourage them when she doesn't?"

"Because you're beautiful, and boys will want to believe you." James supplied.

"I don't know. Dorcas is pretty attractive. A little lacking in the chest department, but attractive." Sirius replied, earning him a slap in the arm from Mary.

"What?"

"You cannot judge a girl's attractiveness by her boobs."

"I don't. Every girl has something to make her attractive, you have nice legs. Very nice legs." he said, stopping to look at said legs, while she blushed. "Lily has a nice pair of eyes." he quickly finished, seeing the look James was giving him. "Dorcas has her assets, especially the ass part of assets."

This earned him another slap. "What? That was a compliment."

"Ass compliments are not compliments." Mary snapped.

"Nope. Ass compliments are verbal sexual harassments." Lily informed.

"Away from the subject of ass's, who wants to play Quidditch?" James intruded.

"Play with Evans." Sirius grumbled. Lily cast a questioning look at James. "I've been letting him win. Thought it would help." he whispered into her ear.

"If you do that, you shouldn't make it obvious." she suggested.

"Are you going to play or not?" he asked, summoning his broom. It whipped past Lily's head, landing in his hand.

"I don't have a broom." she pointed out, glaring at him.

"Oh, right. Sirius, give Lily your broom."

Sirius tossed it over, without arguing, much to Lily's surprise. She caught it, and mounted it, hovering in the air. "James, if I die, I'm coming back to haunt you."

"It isn't that bad Lily. Once you get in the air, you'll love it. Flying is great."

"If we were meant to fly, we'd be born with wings." she muttered.

The pair shot up in the air, Lily did know how to ride a broom, she thought it would be nice to learn, since it may be the safest form of transport, with the war and all. This however, did not mean she rode well.

"You can ride...kind of." James said, surprised. "I didn't know that."

"I'm a woman of mystery." she replied, trying to not fall off the broom. She was having difficulty making it go forward.

"Wanna play a game? I'll go easy on you."

Lily huffed, flipping her hair over her shoulder. "I do not need you to go easy on me. Play me like you would anyone else."

James shrugged. "If that's what you want, but I am on the team, and you can barely fly."

"Just tell me the rules to this stupid game."

Under other circumstances, James would have been horrified to hear Quidditch called stupid, it was his great love after Lily, but he would forgive her, as she was very high in the air, for someone who did not like brooms.

"No rules, just score anyway you can."

"Well, that sounds easy enough."

Lily's words proved untrue, as Mary and Sirius sent them up the proper equipment, and Lily was fairing horribly. Below, Mary was cheering for her, and Sirius for James. Lily did manage to score twice, where James scored seven, and one of those he let her have, the other because she nearly fell off her broom, and that was of greater concern that stopping her from scoring.

After that, James thought it was time to go down, Lily arguing all the while. "I could have caught up, I only needed more time."

"Right." James agreed.

"I mean, I wasn't that bad." she added.

"I've seen worse." he replied, not bothering to tell her that they were mostly second years.

"Okay, I really was dreadful, but-ahhh!"

"Lily!"

Lily found herself somehow hanging upside down from her broom. She had never really mastered the finer technics of riding, such as landing, and breaking. Though, that might be because she considered herself learned enough after two lessons. Luckily, she was only about four feet from the ground.

Mary was laughing at her, along with Sirius, who stopped, walking over to her. "Let go." he ordered, preparing to catch her.

"If you drop me..." she threatened, letting go.

When she opened her eyes, she found herself safely in his arms, until James landed beside them. "I think this is yours." Sirius said, passing her to James.

"I am not his." she protested. James rolled his eyes, placing her on her feet.

"You know, that was sort of fun. I want to learn how to play." she announced, exhilarated. "Will you teach me?"

"I really hope this is not your idea of asking me out." James replied.

"No, you're asking me in the shower, remember?" she said back, grinning.

Mary and Sirius exchanged looks. "I'm not touching that." Mary said.

"Me either."

Lily turned her attention from James, facing Sirius. "Thank you for letting me ride your broom."

"You can ride my broom any time you want." he said, eying her suggestively. He frowned when James failed to respond, that was really the only fun part of flirting with Lily.

Lily wrinkled her nose and the thought, and behind her Mary quipped, "Don't worry Lily, its a relatively short ride."

"I resent that comment."

Mary flashed a smile at Sirius. "Are we going to play or what?"

"If I was as nice as James, I would offer to go easy on you, but I'm not, so if you really want to play..."

"And you claim to be a gentleman." Mary teased, "It doesn't matter, I'll still kick your ass."

"I'll believe it when I see it."

"I want one of those hitty-things." Mary said.

"We aren't using the 'hitty-things', not with only two people." Sirius said.

"But isn't that what you are, the person who uses the them?"

"They're called Beaters." Sirius informed.

"I'm sure you're very good at beating things." Mary said, "Isn't it going to be hard for you to play something else?"

"I can try something new."

"Switching hands?" she said cheerfully.

"Okay, theres no way I'm going easy on you now."

As it turned out, Mary was actually quite good. For all her clumsiness on her feet, she had a odd sort of grace on a broom. Or, just luck, because the way she rode, she should have fell off at least ten times, but didn't. Her and Sirius were playing a close game, he only in the lead by one more score.

"She's a natural on a broom. She should have tried out for the team." James observed, Lily at his side.

"She's never rode before. I mean, except first year, when we all had to try it." Lily replied.

"You mean she hasn't been on a broom in six years, and she rides like that?" James asked, amazed.

Lily shrugged. "Guess so."

"They're tied again." James said, going over to the equipment.

"What are you doing?" Lily said curiously.

"I'm going to see if she can use the 'hitty-thing' as she calls it."

"James." Lily said.

"In a minute, I can't find-"

"James."

"Hold on."

"James!"

"What?" he said, turning to face her. Lily pointed to a spot over his shoulder, where the Snitch was hovering.

"You should probably catch that."

James reached for it, and it flew away. "That's the snitch we use for practice." he said, then cupped his hands around his mouth. "Sirius! Get the Snitch!"

The Snitch flew past him, as he tried to catch it, closer to Mary, who reached for it, missing by a mere inch, before taking off after it. It went down dangerously low, close to a nearby tree.

"Mary, watch out!" Lily cried from the ground.

Mary did a turn, spinning her broom so that it was no longer horizontal, but vertical, spinning it in a circle, stretching and catching the Snitch, nearly hitting the ground, before looping back up, flying in a circle, and landing on the ground.

She got off the broom with wobbly legs, and held out the Snitch to James. "Here."

James took it, looking at her wide eyed. Sirius landed next to him, wearing a matching expression.

"What?" Mary said.

"I have never seen someone fly like that, not someone who's never ridden a broom." James said.

"That was amazing." Sirius added. Then he frowned, "You could have fell off, what the hell were you thinking?"

"It wasn't like you were catching the damn thing." Mary shot back.

"She makes a point." James said.

"I agree with Sirius."
"I'm fine Lily. It was sort of awesome. I think I like Quidditch." Mary stated, handing James his broom.
James took his broom with one hand, Lily's with the other. "Hey Lily, lets go somewhere, I want to talk to you."
Lily brightened a little. "Okay. Don't die while I'm gone." she called back to Mary.
Mary waited for them to leave, before looking at Sirius. "Sirius?"
"Yeah?"
"I can't feel my legs."
"That's normal. It happens the first few time after flying. You'll get used to it." he assured.
"Good. I still haven't kicked your ass yet you know."
"I'll get you a one of the schools brooms."
It was nearly dark by the time they came inside.

Chapter 18

"What did you want to talk about?" Lily asked, as soon as they had stepped back inside the school.
"I was going to ask you." James stopped. "But, I want it to be perfect. Romantic."
"We smell like a Quidditch field, my hair is a pile of knots, and my legs hurt. Romantic isn't going to happen."
"Good point. Maybe a bath would help."
Lily frowned. "Fine. I need to fix my hair anyway. I would think after two years of waiting, you would be a bit impatient to get this over with."
"Maybe." he said, coming up behind her, wrapping an arm around her waist. "But maybe its more fun to torture you."
"I really do hate you sometimes." she said, pulling away from him. He reached out and pulled her back. "I am going to ask, I just want it to be perfect for you."
She turned in his arms, eyes serious. "I think, as long as it's you, it will be perfect for me, no matter what."
That was as close to a confession as he was going to get at that point he supposed, and coming from Lily, that was a pretty good one.
"No matter what?"
"No matter what."
She seemed so sincere in her feelings, that James could not help but to lean down and kiss her. Realizing he had yet to ask her out, he pulled away.
Lily groaned. "You have got to stop doing that. I'm going to die if you don't kiss me properly."
"If its a matter of life and death." James said, returning his lips to hers. He opened his mouth over hers, kissing her slowly, deeply, not in the sort of wild, frenzied passion she wanted, not yet. It was a slow burn, building up, until something exploded inside Lily, and she kissed him wildly. He lifted her off her feet, arms around her waist, her clinging to him, kissing him like she never had. She was throwing more than her body into it, this time, it was with her heart.
So engrossed in each other they were that they did not hear the running footsteps. Just as they pulled away, and James was about to ask the question he had been dying to hear yes to, a voice called to them.
"Lily! James!"
Both turned their heads in the direction, seeing Alice, face colorless, panting from her run. James immediately put Lily back on her feet. Before he or she could ask what happened, Alice told.
"It's Kayla Dearborn. They found her. She's dead."
—
"So, this is your room." Dorcas said, eyes sweeping across, smiling at the mess. She flopped down on the neatest one.
"I knew one day you would end up in my bed."
"Is that Remus flirting, without me starting it? I am very proud."
"Proud?"
"Of myself." she said, gesturing him over. "I am a wonderful seductress."
Remus sat next to her. "It was my idea to come to the room, so that makes me the seducer, don't you think?"
"Ah, yes, but I seduced you into seducing me." she said, grinning.
"Dorcas?"
"Remus." she mimicked.
"I never know if I should take you seriously."
The smile on her face faded. "Oh."
He rolled his eyes next to her, and took her hand. "Sorry."
She shifted her eyes to his, then looked down at their joined hands. It wasn't like she hadn't held his hand. She had taken on the walk, joking around. But if it was serious...
"Sorry?" she repeated.
"For making you think that I thought that you—"
"I-uh, um." she cut in. A blush crept up her cheeks. "I...never mind."
Before Remus could say anything back about her odd behavior, she spoke.
"You wanna go to that dance with me?" she asked, her normal grin on her face.
"Seriously?"
"Seriously." she answered.
"Like a date?"
She rolled her eyes. "What else? You're being a bit slow today love."
"I don't know what to say." he replied.
"Generally its a yes or no. I promise I won't cry if its no. My heart will go on."
"I wasn't going to say no. I was just wondering why you were asking me." he said back, looking up into her face.
"Because you didn't seem the type to make the first move." she said, lowering her lips to his.
Neither heard the knocking on the door. "Remus? Are you in there?"
"Its my room Lily, we don't have to knock." James said, pushing the door open.
"Dorcas?"
"Well, this is a bit embarrassing." Dorcas said, removing herself from Remus, and standing up.
James glanced between them, sad for the loss of the chance to tease them horribly. It could wait until later. "We have a situation."
"What?" Dorcas asked.
"Has something happened?" Remus added.
"They found Kayla Dearborn's body." Lily said, her voice again being oddly flat. She had expected it, but still, it was a shock. They were trying to gather all

the members of their little group, to look after Staradoc.

"Her body? As in, she's dead?" Dorcas said, horrified.

"Yes, as in she's dead." James answered.

"Caradoc has he-" Remus started.

"They're talking to him now. Filling him in on the details." James answered.

"We should get down. We have to change the password, we have to set up more precautions." Lily said.

"Are all the others down there already?" Dorcas said, voice barely above a whisper.

"Mary and Sirius are still in the Quidditch field. They should be back soon." Lily answered, turning and heading back. James fell in step behind her, Dorcas and Remus following. When they reached downstairs, they were greeted by Alice and Frank, both pacing nervously. Peter was there also, slumped against the wall.

"Caradoc has been gone a long time." Frank announced, still pacing.

"His parents will be on their way, he might not come back. He may go straight home to his family." Alice said, stopping and sitting down on the couch, burying her face in her hand. "I feel so bad for him."

"His parents may let him stay. It's safer here, than it is with muggles." Frank remarked.

"But, his family will want him with them." Dorcas said, seating herself beside Alice. After a moment, Frank dropped on the other side of her.

"We need to think of what to do. McGonagal will be here to meet with me and James any minute. We'll need to think of a new password. We'll have to make sure everyone stays inside. I think the game should probably be canceled." Lily said, pacing quickly in the spot Alice had stood, biting her nails.

"Cancel the game?" James repeated.

"Yes, if a girl is missing, and we think she was taken from the school, than it isn't illogical to think we could expect an attack, and a Quidditch game is the perfect opportunity, all those people in one place." she explained. Alice and Peter cringed at the thought.

James sank into a chair, not speaking for a second. "You're right. I'll run it by the team. It was only Hufflepuff anyway, and they're team had to put in two third years for beaters, the others didn't come back to school this year. It would be an easy win anyway."

"The teachers will probably cancel the rest of the season." Remus said. It was not unlikely, if Lily had thought of the possibility of an attack, than so would the teachers.

"They can't cancel the season! We have a good chance of coming in first this year!"

"James, calm down." Lily ordered. "You can argue with them to change their minds, if they decide to do it."

"Right. Lily, stop pacing."

She stopped, sitting on the arm of his chair. "We should go, McGonagal will be wanting to see us soon. Remus, make sure all the students stay inside. I don't want anyone wondering around the grounds."

James and Lily walked out, leaving the other five. The meeting with her took longer than they thought, and with the news somehow spreading, there was chaos. Remus, Dorcas, Peter, Alice and Frank were so busy trying to stop the panicking students (several friends of Kayla Dearborn), that they did not think of finding Mary and Sirius to tell them of what happened.

--

"I told you I would kick your ass." Mary gloated.

"I let you win."

"What? Just admit, you lost. To a girl." Mary taunted, as the pair strolled back into the castle.

"I lost by one, and that last play was dirty."

"You never said we had to play fair."

They reached entrance, only to find the password had changed. After a few minutes of yelling to see if someone would answer on the other side, and Sirius getting in a argument with the fat lady, causing her to leave her picture and go visit her friend, they concluded they were not getting in.

"We'll have to go find McGonagal. She'll give us the password." Mary decided.

"Along with a lecture for not knowing it already." Sirius muttered.

"I'm a prefect, she likes me, remember?"

They walked along, arguing over whether Mary's last score should have counted, when she finally caved in. "Fine, it's a tie. I don't care. I want to get the password. I need a shower, clean clothes and a bed." she groaned, when much to her astonishment, a door appeared on the wall.

"Theres a door. A door that wasn't there before." she said, looking to Sirius to see if he was as shocked as she was. He seemed disinterested. "Lets see where it goes." she said, opening it up.

"It's nothing, only-" Sirius started, when Mary's shriek cut him off.

"Look, theres a bed, and a bathroom, and look its my clothes."

What she said was true, in the middle of the room was a massive king sized bed, adorned with gold and red silk sheets, a fresh set of clothes lying on the edge. Off to the side was a door, leading to a bathroom.

"Thats what this room does, you've been here seven years and never used it?"

Mary frowned. "No. Guess I never needed to." She stopped speaking, smiling brightly. "I'm going to take a shower."

"What about getting the password?"

"We can get it later. I have to share the other showers, and the Ravensclaws always hog the prefects bathroom." she said, waving her hand dismissively.

"I'll just wait here."

Several long minutes later, Mary emerged, wearing the fresh clothes, smiling happily. "You wanna use it? You kinda smell."

"Thanks MacDonald."

"Sorry. Just go, and then we can go get the password. I'm using the bed while you do. If I'm asleep, wake me up when you get out."

Instead of sleep, she thought of the conversation they had before. She had not told many people that story, Lily, Dorcas, and Alice. It stung less than it had before. Before she knew it, she had closed her eyes, and was lost in thought.

"Mary."

She nearly jumped, at the voice so close to her ear. "Do you have to lean over me that way?" she hissed.

"You said to wake you up."

"I wasn't asleep." she snapped, then sighed, sitting up. "I've been thinking."

At her words, he sat beside her on the bed. "About what?"

"I was thinking about what we were talking about earlier. I think, that maybe, its time for me to get over it, to be a normal functioning human."

"A normal functioning human?" he repeated, amused.

"Yes, but the thing is, that I don't want to try to be normal alone." she said, glancing at him furtively.

"You want me to try to be normal with you?" he asked, smiling.

"Only if you want to."

"Okay."

"Okay? That easy?" she said, confused.

"Why not?"

She looked away, stifling a yawn into her hand. "I don't know how you do it. Quidditch is tiring. I feel like I'm about to fall asleep. And everything hurts. Places I didn't know I had feel sore. Even my bloody hands hurt from holding the bloody broom so bloody long."

Sirius tried not to laugh at her outburst. Instead he held out his hand. "Give me your hand."

She did as he said, sending him a bewildered look. He took the hand between his, threading the muscles.

"That actually does feel good." she admitted, closing her eyes, holding out her other hand. He took it, instead of doing as before, kissing the inside of her hand.

"No, thats bad, really bad." she said, jerking her hand away.

Sirius rolled his eyes. "You're overreacting."

"Okay, yeah, I'll give you that."

He slid behind her, placing a soft kiss at the nape of her neck. "What else will you give me?"

Mary tensed. "You aren't supposed to touch me. You promised Remus to keep your hands off me."

"He told you about that?"

"Yes, and I think I should remind you."

"This isn't touching you. You said you felt bad, and I'm helping you feel better."

This time, Mary rolled her eyes. "Shagging always makes me feel better, so I won't be asking for your help."

Something changed in the way he was looking at her and she flopped back unto her back, muttering 'WWLD.'

"Isn't the saying WWJD?" Sirius asked, lying beside her on his stomach, propped up on one arm, the other hand tracing idle circles on her stomach.

"No, I'm trying to think like a prude, so its what would Lily do." she informed.

"I imagine she would push you in a lake for a comment like that."

"No, lakes are her and James thing."

He smirked at her. "And what is our thing?"

"Beds, apparently." she said dryly, glaring at the offensive hand. "Hands off me, remember."

"You know, I only promised my hands, that leaves open a whole variety of other parts of the anatomy." he replied, replacing his hands with his lips, then rising, lips hovering over hers.

"I can't. Emotionally involved, remember?"

"Normal functioning humans can be emotionally involved."

She glanced up into his eyes, then moaned. "I can't kiss you. If I kiss you, I'll end up shagging you."

"That isn't much incentive for me not to kiss you."

She did not respond, and he lied down beside her, both staring up at the ceiling. "You know, I have a thought." Mary voiced.

"What thought is that?" he inquired, not much listening. He was thinking it was the highest form of cruelty, to bring up the possibility of shagging, then not shagging. Talking about shagging and not shagging was like drinking a beer with no alcohol, or eating chocolate with no sugar, or soda with no caffeine. It was simply wrong.

"We're friends right? And friends help each other out, right?" she continued.

"Right. Where is this heading?"

"Say then, that if I was in need of a shag, and you were in need of a shag, that it may, in fact, be our duty, as friends, to shag each other." she concluded.

"My lady makes a valid point. I think we should proceed with the shagging." he agreed. It was unexpected, but he would roll with it.

"Right. Because theres nothing wrong with a friendly shag. A roll in the sack between friends."

"Nothing wrong with that. Much better than relationships." he agreed.

"Loads better. All sex and no commitment, and we can have..err, lovely conversation." she justified.

"Mary?"

"Yes?"

"Can we stop with the lovely conversation, and move on to the friendly roll in the sack?"

"Okay."

—

Lily and James arrived back in the room, to see five people whizzing around, in a panic.

"How could you just let him—" Alice said.

"I didn't know, he told me he was going for a walk, that he wanted to be alone." Frank defended.

"We have to do something, to stop him." Dorcas added.

"He's already gone, how can we stop him?" Peter argued.

"Everyone calm down, or we won't be able to do anything." Remus said, trying to calm them down. He was ignored.

"What is going on here?" Lily demanded. "And where is Mary? Or Black?"

"Caradoc is gone. He went to Hogsmeade, to try to find the Death Eaters that killed Kayla." Frank supplied.

"He what?" Lily said, voice shrill with disbelief.

"We don't know what to do." Peter added.

"If we tell, he'll get expelled." Dorcas said quickly.

"And if we don't he could die." Remus argued.

"Everybody, shut up!" James snapped, turning to Frank. "How did you find out?"

"He left a note, in our room. His parents, they didn't make it here. Their flight was delayed a few hours. They were traveling the muggle way." Frank stopped speaking, looking down in shame. "He kept talking about how he couldn't stand to face them, how he couldn't look them in the eyes. How she was dead, and he didn't do anything...I should have known, I should have guessed that he would—"

"You can't beat yourself up about this, there was nothing you could do." Alice cut in.

"That wasn't what you were saying a minute ago." he snapped.

"Stop it, we can't attack each other. We need to figure out what to do." James intruded.

"What do you think we should do?" Peter piped.

They were all looking at him, all waiting for his answer, even Lily. It was uncomfortable, being forced to be the leader, but he supposed someone had to do it. "I don't know. We could tell, but he'll be expelled. We could go get him ourselves, but that puts all our lives at risk. We have to decide now, because we don't have the time to waste."

James stopped speaking, and turned to Lily, who had her eyes cast to the ground. "What do you think Lily?"

Without looking up, she answered, shocking them all. "We should go after him."

"You want us to go after him?" Remus said, voicing everyones surprise.

to late. He's our friend, and we have to help him."

No one spoke at her words, each thinking, until Frank broke the silence. "He's one of my best mates, I'll go."

"If we go we all go." James said. "We'll need the numbers. We should find Sirius and Mary."

"Someone will need to tell the teachers...in case we don't come back." Dorcas said, voice wavering.

"You stay, tell them after we leave, get them to contact the ministry." Remus spoke.

"No, I'm going." she protested.

"You should stay, one of us has to and you brought it up."

Dorcas stamped her foot. "I am not staying! Just because we snogged does not mean you get to tell me what to do!"

"You two snogged?" Alice said, glancing between them.

"Can we focus on what's important?" James said, before anyone else could speak. "I'm using the two way mirror to find Sirius. He and Mary should have come back by now."

"You don't think, you don't think that anything happened, that Caradoc may have convinced them-" Alice said, leaving the question hanging.

"Sirius isn't that stupid." James replied. Remus and Peter exchanged looks. "Okay, Mary isn't that stupid."

No one said anything back, as James seemed to be angry with the mirror. After a moment he spoke to it, "Get to the common room, it's an emergency. Bring Mary."

—

Mary propped up on one elbow, watching Sirius hopping on one foot, trying to pull on his shoe. "You know, most blokes at least wait until I'm asleep before leaving."

"I have to go. We have to go. James said there's an emergency."

"What emergency?" she asked, wrapping the sheet around herself, standing up, searching the room with her eyes. Where were her clothes?

"Didn't say. I think he may have saw you."

"Saw me? I'm naked under this!" Mary hissed, pulling the sheet tighter.

"Right, you are aren't you?" he said, stepping closer to her, hooking his thumb in the sheet and peering down.

She swatted his hand away. "It hasn't changed any from ten minutes ago."

With that, she started searching for her clothes, finding them (her knickers had somehow ended up in the bathroom) and pulling them on quickly. "We should go."

"You're mad at me." he stated, not bothering to make it a question. Why was she mad? She surely wasn't mad before. Unless she had been faking it. But that was impossible. Or so he would like to think.

"I'm not mad." she said stiffly, walking toward the door.

"Yes you are." he argued. "If you're mad about the shagging, you know, I was tired because of Quidditch that's all really."

"What?" she intruded, then laughed. "No it isn't that. I'm not mad because it was awful, I'm mad because it wasn't. I wanted it to be awful."

"You wanted awful sex? You'll have to elaborate on that one."

She sighed, leaning against the wall. "To prove a point to myself."

"And what point was that?"

"That I didn't like you."

Neither spoke for a minute. "I shouldn't have said anything." she finally said.

"No,—"

"Just forget I said it, okay." she cut in.

"That's not what I meant. I meant no, as in no, it's okay that you said it."

"It is?" she said, surprised.

"Go out with me."

"What?" she said, blinking in surprise. "You mean like a date?"

"Like a lot of dates."

"Like a relationship?" she asked.

"No, not exactly. You don't like relationships. What I meant is..." he paused, trying to think of what to say.

"You look nervous." she said, grinning.

"I do not get nervous, especially about asking out a girl." he denied.

"Oh, because I thought it was kind of...hot." she replied, smiling.

"Right. Really nervous, never done this before."

She laughed. "Done what?"

"Ask you to be...not exactly my girlfriend but something like that..." he started.

"Like your non-girlfriend." she suggested.

"My non-girlfriend?"

"Yes, and you could be my non-boyfriend."

"And what is that exactly?" he inquired.

"Almost the same as going out, but not." Mary answered.

"Sounds good to me."

"You know, I haven't said yes." she reminded.

"Oh yeah."

"You look so nervous, it's so cute." she said, smiling.

"You are a cruel girl MacDonald."

She laughed. "Yes."

"Yes you're cruel?"

"No you idiot, yes to the question. Really you can be so thick sometimes."

—

The group sat anxiously, waiting for Mary and Sirius to arrive. It had been decided that one of the younger students would carry a letter, which James wrote, to McGonagall after they left, explaining things. The first year who had agreed to it was too terrified of the older students to even think of reading it.

Not knowing what could happen, and it probably would be nothing, because James could not think of any Death Eaters stupid enough to gather in Hogsmeade, unless of course, they were planning on attacking the school, in which they would all likely die anyway, he thought it would be best to say to Lily all the things that needed to be said, before he was unable to say them. Taking her by the arm, he pulled her aside, near the fire.

"Lily." he said, gazing down into her face. The light from the fire was making her eyes seem to glow, or perhaps it was the layer of unshed tears, and

though it was silly, at that moment, with her hair, usually vibrant, hanging lankly around her shoulders, face pale, on the verge of tears, she had never looked more beautiful to him. Maybe because he was already thinking of it as the last look he may have.

"What is it?"

"I know you wanted it to be happy, but I don't know if we'll have time for it to be happy, I don't know how much time we have left, and if anything happens, I don't want to go, not ever having heard you say yes."

She nodded. She understood. It could be nothing, but, it could be worse. They could all be hurt. They could all die.

"Will you go out with me?"

"Yes." she answered, without hesitation. Then, "Where?"

"Anywhere. To the dance." he said.

"Okay."

James looked down at her, it was now or never, and he didn't think she would say no. "Lily, I know that you agreed to go out with me, but I don't need to go out on dates with you, I don't need the 'getting to know each other' stage, I know how I feel about you, I've known for a long time. Be my girlfriend?"

So, the speech in his head was much more romantic, not so something a seventeen year old would have said. But, all things considered, under the circumstances, he was sure she wouldn't mind the lack of flowery words, or romantic notions, and sweet endearments.

Lily opened her mouth then closed it. She wasn't expecting it. "Okay. I know that's not the best answer, it isn't very sweet or romantic, but-"

"It's the perfect answer." he cut her off.

Before either could say anything else, they heard a great amount of banging, and yelling. With a laugh, (though a weak one) Dorcas hopped up and let them in.

"Why did you have to change the bloody password?" Sirius complained, walking in, Mary behind him. Dorcas looked at Mary, an amused expression on her face.

"What?"

"You're a button off." Dorcas replied, pointing to Mary's shirt, with buttons in the wrong holes. Mary went red, and Dorcas swiped her wand, fixing the error for her.

"Well, I suppose we know where they were." Alice pipped, smiling.

"We'll be expecting the details later." Dorcas whispered, slinking back to her seat.

"So, what happened?" Mary asked, looking around the room, trying to ignore the disapproving look Lily was shooting her, along with the one that promised a very interesting conversation later with Dorcas.

"Kayla Dearborn is dead. Caradoc is going to Hogsmeade hunting Death Eaters. We're going to bring him back." James said simply. There was no time to go into details, a quick summary would have to do. It was already dark out.

"How are we going to get there?" Sirius asked, not bothering with more questions.

"We fly. It's the safest way." Frank spoke.

"Right. Let's meet at the Quidditch field, everyone get a broom, and they're wands, and anything you may think of we need." James instructed.

Less than five minutes later, they all were at the field. In the front, stood James, looking at them all, Lily beside him.

"Alright, who can fly? I know I can, along with Sirius, and Mary." Beside him, Lily made a soft scoffing sound. "She's a natural, and I'll be in the lead." This seemed to ease Lily's worry a little.

"I can fly." Frank spoke first, "And so can Alice, I taught her."

James looked over to the others. He knew Remus was not very good on a broom, though he could fly if he had to, much better than Lily in any case, Peter was hopeless. As he swept his eyes to Dorcas, he was strangely glad to see they all had a broom, willing to fly even if they didn't know how, to help a friend.

"Dorcas, can you fly?"

"No." Sirius said, before she could answer.

"Some of us will have to double." James said. "I'll take Lily."

"I can-" Lily started.

"You can, but I'd rather you be near me."

"Because I really need you to protect me." she said, rolling her eyes.

"How do you know I don't want you to protect me?" This earned another eye roll, but she dropped her broom.

"I'll take Dorcas." Frank offered. James could understand that, Dorcas was Alice's best friend, and he would want her to be okay.

"Remus, ride with Mary." James said, in a tone that he hoped suggested he was really worried about her flying capabilities. Better not to hurt any feelings.

"Peter can fly with me." Alice suggested.

"And I'll pick up Caradoc-or what's left of him." Sirius added. Alice and Dorcas both cringed at his words.

"Could you be less tactful?" Mary scolded.

"It's okay, Caradoc will be okay. I know it." Alice intervened.

Wanting to hold on to that hope, no one spoke, getting on their brooms. Dorcas was holding on to Frank tightly, James was sure Lily was trying to crack a rib. Peter had his hands on Alice's shoulders, glancing at Frank.

"Grab her by the waist, and hold on tight. The tighter the better. Trust me, you've never seen her fly." Frank advised. Peter followed his advice.

"Okay, I know the way by broom, so follow behind me." James called.

The ride was unbelievably fast, for almost everyone to be carrying another person. There was no sign of the dark mark in the sky, making them hopeful, but their joy was short lived, as they flew lower, approaching Hogsmeade, and a bright green light shot inches past Mary's head.

"It's not the Order, it's a bunch of kids!" a voice cried, clearly angry.

"Kill em anyway."

The group of Death Eaters below had near them to shapes, shapes that looked suspiciously like bodies, and from farther away, from the air, it was easy to see Caradoc's hiding form. He was nearly at the Death Eaters, and looked ready to attack.

Fortunately for him, the Death Eaters were too busy shooting various curses at the others to notice him.

As the curses flew, they all shoot out of the way. Dorcas managed to shoot a hex back at a Death Eater who had nearly hit her. There was no way to tell who it was, they all were wearing masks. Mary nearly bucked Remus off their broom, trying to avoid being hit. Sirius managed to send a hex back toward a Death Eater, at Lily's yelled warning.

Seeing that they weren't going to be able to fight off the Death Eaters, not with half of them too busy concentrating on flying to fight back, and the other half nearly falling off the broom, landing not being a possibility, James flew up higher in the air.

"Separate!" he bellowed, each shooting off in different directions, Sirius calling that he would get Caradoc. This situation, at the very least, caused the Death Eaters to have to split up, to go after them.

James and Lily landed behind the Hogs Head, the two Death Eaters that had chased them out of sight. Much to their horror, when they peered around the corner, they saw this was not the case, as they, along with two other Death Eaters, were engaged in a fight with Dorcas and Frank. Dorcas and Frank

stood back to back, shooting off curses, and defensive spells. Frank barely avoided being hit with a Cruciatious, dunked down, yanking Dorcas down with him. He jumped back up, ready to attack, when all four turned to Dorcas, who had landed at an odd angle, and was still pushing herself up. One kicked her down, while another turned to Frank, who was ready to face them.

Lily and James moved forward, James casting a stupefy and the Death Eater above Dorcas fell, and she hopped up, casting another stupefy on one of the other Death Eaters. Frank continued to duel the other one, while the one left went to dueling James, Dorcas and Lily.

After a cry from Frank, James turned to help him, leaving Lily and Dorcas to face the Death Eater. They faired well, until he kicked Dorcas's legs out from under her, sending a killing curse toward Lily. Dorcas yanked her by the leg, sending her flat on her back. The Death Eater pointed his wand down at them, while Dorcas was reaching for the wand she had dropped.

"Avada-"

"Sectumsempra" Lily shot quickly, going ridged at the pool of blood soaking the man's robes. His scream made James turn in her direction, as Frank took down the other Death Eater. All three eyes were on her, widened in horror.

"No, please don't be dead." Lily gasped, tears forming in her eyes.

"He was going to kill you, he was going to kill us." Dorcas said, voice fierce. "You did what you had to do."

"Lily, what the hell was that?" James asked, he and Frank walking toward the girls.

"I don't know, something I saw once, in a book." she answered, failing to mention which book and who it belonged to. That would not likely sit too well with him.

"And you used it? Lily, do you know how dangerous-" James started, as at the same time Frank was saying "You used a spell you didn't know?"

"It said it was for enemies, I didn't know it would be that bad." she cut in.

James looked down at the Death Eater. "He isn't dead. And he'll make it, once all the others round him up. We have to find everyone else. Then we head to the Shrieking Shack."

"The Shrieking Shack?" Dorcas repeated, voice laced with confusion.

"It leads back to-" James started.

"Hogwarts." Lily finished.

"Right. Lets go."

--

Somewhere inside the Hogs Head, Aberforth peered out the window, and sighed. It was time to contact his brother.

--

After Mary and Remus crash landed, into a bit of trees, they had done nothing but try to stay out of sight. The rough landing had not been kind to them, Mary's wand arm had what she was sure was a cracked wrist(from catching herself in the landing) along with a black eye(when the end of the broom had hit her), and Remus had a large gash to his head, that though she had healed, as soon as she saw, and was limping, having twisted his left knee. Not knowing exactly how to handle it, Mary left it, rather than try to help, and make it worse.

Walking along, with arms around the others waist, to keep from falling, they trekked on. Suddenly, Remus stopped. "We need to head to the Shrieking Shack. Theres a passage that leads back to the school. We need to get help."

"Surely someone in town, by now would have-"

"Think, if Death Eaters are here, everyone has already been threatened, or are to afraid to do anything. No one is going to take the risk, and put their lives at stake."

Mary nodded, pulling away from him, fishing around her pocket pulling out her wand with her left hand, and attempted to fix her wrist. "Episky." Much to her surprise, it worked, and she rotated her wrist, testing it. "Want me to try it on you?"

"Will it work?"

"Only one way to find out."

After a second of thought, Remus nodded. Mary closed her eyes, and cast the spell. When she opened them, she was surprised to see it had worked.

"Thanks Mary."

"Right. We have to get the others. I won't leave without them." she said, face set in a determined glare.

"We need someone to go back for help, lets find some of the others, then we can decide who." Remus said diplomatically, which Mary understood to mean 'lets find the others and send you back.'

"I'm beginning to like Alice's theory, make love not war. Its a lot safer, thats for sure. A much better way to pass the time." Mary grumbled, stepping over a pile of brush.

"Speaking of passing time, what were you and-"

While Dorcas would jump to the worst (or best, depending on how one approached it) idea, Remus did not, leaving room for doubt.

"Lets just say I've had my share of love and war today."

Before he could respond, a shrill scream stopped them both. Their eyes met in frenzied look of terror. Mary knew that scream, it was coming from Alice.

"It's Alice, we have to hurry."

"I think it came from this way, come on."

--

Franks warning of holding on tightly, may have been what saved Peter's life. As Alice and he avoided a curse, another hit from behind, lighting their broom on fire. Desperate to find something to break their fall, Alice crashed them into a tree.

They hit, and Alice had caught a branch, while Peter had his grip on her, hanging on to her waist, until he could swing over, and land on another branch. There they tried to climb down, but mostly wound up falling, hitting branch after branch, catching one to break their fall occasionally, until they reached nearer the bottom.

The lowest branch was a good five feet from the ground, and Alice fell, landing flat on her back, while Peter tried to climb down after. He was hanging from the branch, when the Death Eaters approached circling in on Alice. Five in two were not very good odds. One, with an almost lazy air, disarmed Peter, who grabbed at his wand, causing him to lose his grip and fall to the ground.

Alice was also disarmed, and one of the bigger Death Eaters yanked her to him, wand pressed into her cheek. "We could use another hostage. I don't think one was enough."

"N-no, p-p-please, let-let us go." Peter said from the ground.

"Listen to how scared he is. Maybe we should take him too, he'd be fun to play with, to hear him scream-" another Death Eater spoke.

"Kill him, he's pathetic. We only need one."

"Don't kill me. Please. Let her go. We won't tell anyone about you. We won't if you let us go." Peter pleaded, now crying. Alice looked very angry with him. Blubbering wouldn't solve anything.

"Listen to that. He thinks he can negotiate with us." one laughed, a mocking edge to his voice.

"They could be useful, we need to kill them all. Let them draw their friends to us." the Death Eater holding Alice suggested. The other four agreed. "We

need a scream, little girl.”
Alice clamped her mouth shut, shaking her head. “Come on, and scream pretty, you don’t want me to have to make you.”
His breath was hot on her throat, his wand feeling very there and ready against her cheek. But doing what he asked would send them over, and she would have them die for her. Not Frank and Dorcas, and Mary and Lily, not her friends, not the love of her life. She would die first.
“Not going to scream? Then I’m afraid I have no choice.” the man said, pushing her down hard on the ground. “Crucio.”
Alice thrashed on the ground, trying to hold in the scream rising in her throat. Peter watched in horror, fighting not to faint himself, just from seeing the curse. “Stop, please stop, don’t hurt her. You’re killing her, please.”
“Shut up, or we’ll do the same to you.”
Peter stopped speaking, sobbing silently. They were both going to die, and there was nothing he could do to stop it. If he were talented like James, he could have kept his wand, and fought them off, if he was brave like Sirius, he could have tried it without a wand, if he was smart like Remus, he could have figured out a way out. But he wasn’t, he was only Peter, and he had depended on his friends his whole life to look out for him, and they weren’t there, and he didn’t know what to do.
He let out one more plea, to let her go. He was answered with another Death Eater casting a crucio on Alice. This was all she could take, before wailing out from the pain. Alice’s shrill scream rang through the night.
Help was coming soon, it had to.

Again, Alice screamed.

Chapter 19

“Would you get on the damned broom?” Sirius snarled, again grabbing Caradoc by his robes, hauling him back.
“They killed my sister!”
“And we’ve just knocked out two of them, get on the broom so we can get to the Shrieking Shack.”
“I won’t stop till I get them all.” Caradoc argued, usually bright blue eyes darkened with determination.
“Look, I understand, it was your sister, but if we don’t go, your parents will be burying two kids, instead of one.” Sirius argued. Though Caradoc had done quite well in fighting the two Death Eaters that had approached them, Sirius was unsure whether he could handle anymore.
“It was my sister, my family, what would you do if they attacked your family? Could you just leave?”
The pained look on his face almost Sirius pick up his wand and agree, go on a wild Death Eater attacking frenzy, but the thoughts of who could be behind one of those masks stopped him cold.
“You’re asking the wrong person. I don’t have a family.” Sirius replied, yanking him by the robes again, before he run off. He had once heard the insane were physically stronger than the sane, and he believed it must be true, as Caradoc was proving hard to hold.
“Yes you do, what if was James, or Remus, or Peter they killed? Wouldn’t you want to do something, could you live with yourself if you didn’t?”
Sighing, Sirius let him go. “As long as we don’t kill anyone.”
A loud scream stopped both in their tracks. “That was Alice.” Caradoc said in a whisper.
“Come on, we have to hurry.”

—
Why was no one coming? The entire town had to hear that scream. Frank, Dorcas, Lily and James had, the first two taking off at a run with no thoughts of things like safety, or that they would be stronger together.

“James, wait!” Lily cried, stopping.

“What?”

“Dumbledore, he has a brother, he lives in Hogsmeade. We can go to him for help.” she said, panting.

“Go find him. I’ll catch up with Dorcas and Frank.”

—
Remus and Mary were the first to arrive, seeing Peter unconscious (they had grew tired of his pleading), and Alice on the ground shaking, no longer screaming.

“Look, we’ve got company.” a voice drawled.

“Let our friends go.” Remus demanded. He sounded far braver than he felt, and Mary was quite sure that she would not be able to even fake bravery at this point. Alice eyes were too unfocused, too blank, to still, she was too pale. She could not look at her like that.

Instead she turned toward Peter, casting an epsikey to revive him. “Get them out of here.” Remus whispered to her.

“And leave you? No!” she hissed back.

Peter blinked, looking over at them. “Alice, is she—”

“I don’t think so.” Remus called back. He and Mary had their wands out, but the Death Eaters were not attacking.

“Peter, where’s your wand?” Mary called.

“Gone.”

“They think they can beat us, its almost funny.” one of the Death Eaters said to the others.

“Accio Peter’s wand.” Mary said, tossing it to him. She was not sure that he would be much help, but then again, she wasn’t sure she would be either.

“You little—”

“Don’t hurt this one.” another Death Eater called, walking closer to her. Her wand shook in her hand, she knew that voice.

“Stay away from her.” Remus ordered, switching his wand in the direction of the Death Eater.

“Try anything, and we’ll kill your friend.” he threatened. Looking back at the Death Eaters surrounding Alice, none of them doubted it was true.

“Mary you have grew up, the years have been good to you. You always were pretty—for a mudblood.” he said, circling her.

Mary’s breathes came out in rasping gasps. It couldn’t be, not after all the years, not when she was finally okay...

“Wilkes.” she said, voice tight.

“I think we’re on a first name basis, don’t you Mary?” he teased, stopping behind her. “Drop your wand.”

“No.”

“Now.” he hissed.

Alice laying cold and broken on the ground. Peter’s expression of horror. Remus’s being hurt. Caradoc could be dead. All of her friends could be dead. Kayla Dearborn killed. It was all to much. She shouldn’t be there, not her, she wasn’t built for war.

The wand slid from her hand.

“Good girl.” his voice said, very close to her ear. His hand was on her shoulder, his wand pointed near her heart. “Now you can watch while your friends die. We’ll be taking you with us. I think a hostage may lead to some...helpful, negotiations.”

“Take me if you want, but please, let them go.”

He laughed at her words. “Why would we do that?”

“You said you need a hostage. They can tell that you’ve taken me. Hearing their side of it, of what happened, it can make your negotiations go faster. If you leave them alive, our side will feel some gratitude, if you kill them, the won’t listen.” she said rapidly.

During her speech, Peter had crawled closer to Alice, her head in his lap. She looked dead. Remus had his eyes on hers, glancing down at her wand. She nodded her head slightly.

After a mental countdown in her head, she lunged forward, surprising him into letting her go, grabbing for her wand. The second she was clear, Remus fired a stunning spell at Wilkes, who was to preoccupied with trying to grab Mary to pay attention to him.

The other Death Eaters turned their attention toward him, and from behind, Peter stunned one of them. That evened the odds, making it three on three. At that time, Dorcas and Frank came sprinting toward them, each flying a curse of their own, hitting one of the Death Eaters, knocking him down. James followed closely behind.

Frank and Dorcas saw Alice, Frank running toward her, Peter jumping up, and joining Remus in a duel against one of the other Death Eaters, while James fought the other. Mary stood watching a second, before shouting, "Dorcas, help James, I'll help Frank with her!"

Dorcas leapt up as her words, they were not she knew, because Mary was afraid, but because she would be better able to help Alice, and she better to help James.

Still, the Death Eaters were more skilled, and Alice, in spite of all Mary and Frank's best efforts, was not waking up.

—

"You don't think I've already told him girl? My brother knows what's going on. If he could better control his students—" Aberforth stopped, glaring at Lily.

"We had to come, to help a friend. If they're on their way, I have to go, they need me." she said quickly, speeding back toward his door.

"Go? You should stay here where it's safe, not go out there challenging Death Eaters, you'll be killed."

"My friends are out there, I'm not staying safe while they're risking their lives!" she cried, outraged.

"You'd rather die with them then? Then by all means, go ahead, it's your funeral. You just tell me what I'm supposed to tell my brother when he asks me why his head girl died."

"Tell him I wouldn't listen to you. I have to go." she said, once again heading toward the door. There was no time to ponder how he knew she was head girl, word traveled she guessed.

"Wait!"

Lily stopped, glancing back at him.

"Take this." he said, handing her a bottle.

"What is it?" she asked, eyeing the small, round bottle with curiosity.

"Phoenix Tears."

"Thank you." she said, sliding the bottle into her pocket.

"Don't stand there wasting time, if you're going, go."

Lily ran out the door.

—

Sirius and Caradoc came around, just as Dorcas let out a shrill scream toward Mary.

"Mary, watch out!"

The curse, aimed for James, which he had sidestepped, hit her squarely in the back. The second Dorcas took to look Mary's way, to see if she was alright, the Death Eater fired a curse toward her. Caradoc, moving faster than any of them would have thought, lunged in front of her.

The curse knocked him out cold, Dorcas catching him mid fall. There was a split second to decide what to do for Sirius, either jump in and help James, or go to Mary's side. He jumped into the fight.

"Dorcas, get Mary!"

Her comply could not be heard over the screams of curses being thrown. Remus and Peter had almost taken down their Death Eater. James and Sirius together were fairer even better.

"Stop playing around and kill them!" one yelled to the other.

"Leave Black, my wife will want the honor."

"It's the Lestranger brothers. That means Bella's near by." Sirius hissed toward James.

That was not good. James remembered her from the few times he had seen her. She was crazy.

Before he could answer, Lily came hurrying toward them. Instead of joining the fight, it looked as if they had it covered anyway—she ran toward Frank.

"How is she?" she asked, looking down at Alice's still form.

"She won't open her eyes. She won't come back." he answered, tears openly streaming down his face.

"I have something that can help, we have to get her out of here."

Frank nodded, lifting her up in his arms, as if she were nothing more than a rag doll. A limp, unmoving doll...

"Mary, is she—"

"Just knocked out. I can't wake her up." Dorcas informed.

"We have to get them out. Is Caradoc alright?"

"Fine. Same as Mary."

Lily looked at all of them, then toward James and Sirius, and Remus and Peter. "Follow me, we can get them out, then come back and help the others. I don't know if Alice has much time."

"I'll get Caradoc, you get Mary." Dorcas said, lifting Caradoc. Lily slung an arm around Mary, pulling her along. After this was all over, she was going to suggest her losing a few pounds.

"Where are we going?" Dorcas called, struggling with Caradoc. Frank was nearly running, having to stop and wait for Lily and Dorcas.

"Aberforth's."

By the time they made it to his door, they could hear a very feminine shriek, and more sounds of dueling behind them. Some of the other Death Eaters would be waking back up soon.

Lily's shout barely left her throat, when the door was opened, and Aberforth ushered them inside.

"Did you give it to her?" he said, looking at Alice, who Frank had laid down on his table.

"No, it wasn't safe there." Lily answered, pulling out the bottle. She handed it to Aberforth, who was at Alice's side in seconds, attempting to help her.

"If that doesn't help her she's better off dead."

"Alice, wake up, please, open your eyes."

Frank's voice nearly broke Lily's heart, he sounded like a child. She wanted to take care of Alice, but there was also Mary, and Caradoc. "Can it help them?" she asked.

"It's worth a try." Aberforth answered.

Mary and Caradoc lie on the floor side by side, Lily at Mary's side, Dorcas at Caradoc's. It only took a moment for them to wake.

"Dorcas—" Caradoc croaked, seeing the girl hovering above him.

"You okay? You took a curse for me. You're a real idiot, you know." Dorcas said, smiling at him. Lily noticed it was not her normal smile, softer somehow, more serious.

"I already lost one sister, I won't lose another."

Before either her or Lily could say anything, Mary woke. "Lily?" Her eyes shot about the room. "Where are we? Where's Remus and Peter? And Alice? They were there, and Wilkes.."

"Wilkes? You saw him?" Dorcas said sharply.

"It doesn't matter." Lily intruded. "Frank, is Alice?"

"Not yet-" his sentence was cut short, as Alice's eyelids fluttered open. "Alice?"

"Frank-" her voice broke. "It hurts."

Dorcas was up, flying over to them, Lily, close behind. "I know, I know. I thought I had lost you." Frank said. Dorcas took one of her hands, Lily the other.

"No way. We're dying old, in our sleep together, remember?" her voice was still small, but there was an attempt of a smile on her face.

"I love you." Frank answered.

"Me too."

"Me too."

Lily and Dorcas said simultaneously.

"I love you more. And you both." Alice replied, eyes drifting closed again.

"Don't close your eyes, Alice, look at me."

"It's alright. She needs the rest." Aberforth said, from his spot standing near Mary and Caradoc.

"We have to go back. Sirius is out there." Mary said, rising.

"You aren't going anywhere." Aberforth said. "Stay here, help is on the way." From the noise outside, it seemed it had arrived. A voice that sounded distinctly like McGonagal was shouting in the distance.

"So we just wait?" Dorcas demanded.

"You'd only be in the way. Let them handle it, they'll return your friends to you."

The next few minutes were the longest of Lily's life. Caradoc joining Frank by Alice, his whispered apology, Mary and Dorcas seating themselves beside her on the ground, it all passed in a blur. After a few, long, gut-wrenching moments, the door swung open.

"Remus!" Dorcas was up and across the room so fast it was almost impossible to believe. The force of which she flung her arms around him nearly knocked him off his feet. Lily and Mary stood, each wearing expressions of horror.

"Behind me." Remus assured, untangling Dorcas from him.

James and Sirius came in next, Peter between them, they supporting him on each side. As soon as they had passed him off to Remus and Dorcas, Lily followed Dorcas's suit, running across the room, flinging herself at James.

"James, I was so scared, but I had to go, I had to help Alice-"

"It's okay. I'm fine. You're fine. We're all okay." James answered, holding her tightly. She buried her head in his chest, silent tears falling. She wasn't sure if they were tears of relief, or just because she couldn't hold it anymore.

Mary did not move, her and Sirius looking at each other across the space between them. "Are you-"

"I'm fine."

She strode over to him, stopping directly in front of him. He smiled at her. It seemed horribly forced.

Not that it mattered. They were all okay, or, they would be. Peter may have broken a leg, Alice may need a few days in St. Mungo's, but they were all going to be okay.

The door flung open, and McGonagal, along with a handful of Aurors, stormed in. None of them had ever seen her so angry. "Tell me, just what were you thinking?"

Lily removed herself from James and gulped. Maybe they still were in trouble.

Chapter 20

The Death Eaters had all disappeared. Still, the Aurors accompanied them back to Hogwarts for safety. McGonagal did not yell anymore until they reached the safety of Dumbledore's office. Lily was sure this was to build up tension, before she exploded.

As soon as they were in the office, she exploded. "What gave you the idea to sneak off and face Death Eaters?!"

Caradoc should have felt very lucky that he, Peter, and Alice had been sent to Pomfrey. Dorcas, had, by some miracle, been the one to allowed to help the limping Peter walk there, so she got out of hearing anything.

No one spoke to defend themselves. They knew that would only make it worse. "And you, my head girl, I would expect this sort of behavior from you two-" she paused, sending a look toward Sirius and James, who quickly became fascinated with the carpet, not once looking up from it, until her eyes passed on. "not at all the behavior my heads should be displaying, I should take remove your badges!"

Lily gasped. "No, it wasn't her fault, it was my idea, I made her go along with it." James said quickly.

"I doubt that is true Mr. Potter, and even it were, Miss Evans had every opportunity to walk away." Before he could respond, Minerva turned sharply to Remus and Mary. "And you two, prefects!"

"And you Mr. Longbottom, I will be writing your mother, you can count on that."

Frank spoke as if to defend himself, then stopped. "Yes ma'am, but, could I go, to see Alice, I'll take whatever punishment you give me, but I have to see her-"

"Go, I'll speak to you later, take Miss MacDonald with you, I don't like the looks of that wrist, a sloppy job on healing it."

The two scurried off, not wanting to stay longer than necessary. Lily felt horribly out of place, usually when there were four people gathered with McGonagal yelling, they were the other three present plus Peter.

"The headmaster wants to see you his self. I do not know what punishment he'll be giving you, but you'll all be in detention with me every Saturday until you graduate. I trust you can deliver that message to the rest of your friends. They will be serving them with you, along with any days to make up what they will miss for their injuries."

Lily let out a breath of relief. She was sure she would lose her position, along with James. Remus, she heard, gave a similar breath.

"I have in my mind to call off this dance you are planning-"

"No, you can't, everyone is so excited, if you have to, don't let us go, but don't ruin it for everyone else because of us!" Lily cried.

"That decision I will leave to Dumbledore."

As she said it, Dumbledore swept in. "I've just came back from Madame Pomfrey, you'll be glad to hear, she says all your friends will make a full recovery."

"I'll take it from here Minerva, there are parents to be contacted."

She turned leaving them. James thought, for the first time in his life, he would rather have her stay and yell at him some more.

"What you all did was very dangerous, you could have all been killed. Though, you did it to save a friend, which is what any true Gryffindor would do."

James and Sirius exchanged looks. They were getting off that easy?

"However, it was not the most well thought out of moves. But I do believe Minerva's punishment will suffice. In such a case, seeing ones friend so near death is punishment enough."

Their was a collective sigh as they all realized they were off the hook.

Now, on to other matters. You'll all be graduating soon, so have any of you given thought to what you want to do?"

It was an odd question, for such a time, but Lily, who was built with the impulse to answer all questions correctly, spoke hesitantly, "Um, I was thinking of being an Unspeakable, sir."

"You'd be well suited for it. What about you, what are your plans?"

"Auror." James answered.

"Auror." Sirius repeated.

"I haven't decided. It could be a bit difficult." Remus said.

Lily thought that an odd answer, but didn't say anything, Dumbledore seemed to know what he was referring to.

"I have a proposition for you, after you all graduate. Tell me, have you ever heard of the Order of the Phoenix?"

—

All of them were to meet with Dumbledore the following week. That would allow time for the others to be out of the hospital. Though, there was hardly time to explain all this, as the next few hours were spent by friends bedside.

James and Remus and Sirius told Peter, who was not in bad condition, after being healed. Pomfrey even opted to let him out, after only a few hours rest. Caradoc was forced to stay, for what Pomfrey called 'psychological reasons', apparently she found him to be harmful to himself.

Alice would be staying over night, a healer from St. Mungo's coming over to check if her injuries were serious enough to deem her a stay there. In such hard times, no one wanted a student taken out of Hogwarts, not when it was the safest place one could be.

After they had lingered an hour or so, Pomfrey kicked them out, to let them rest. Mary, had been asleep all the while, after a calming draught was issued. Pomfrey had inquired about what happened, and she did not respond well.

Frank and Dorcas were sat at the door, waiting for the next possible moment to see Alice. Remus had went and sat with Dorcas, Peter beside him. Peter had already tried to apologize to Frank, for not being able to protect Alice. Frank had not been angry, he understood the odds.

That left Sirius, Lily, and James alone. Sirius, strangely, had not spoken at all about anything, not even attempting to talk with Mary, asleep or not. After a few minutes a silence, while they took a walk, to clear their heads, Sirius said he was going to the kitchens, to bring up food.

Leaving Lily and James alone. "Whats wrong with him?"

"Bellatrix showed up. She's his cousin. Tried to kill him. Almost did, missed by an inch."

Lily was horrified. However, with such a day, it didn't mean as much. One inch had saved a life, and that was all that mattered. "Thank you, for sticking up for me. You didn't have to lie."

"Head boy doesn't mean anything to me. Head girl means everything to you." he answered simply.

She sent him a smile. "Not everything."

He smiled back. "She would have died without you, you know that right?"

"She would have died without Aberforth. All I did was get her away long enough to save her."

"If you hadn't thought to go to him for help-" James argued.

"Stop making me a hero. I used dark magic, I used magic I saw in-nevermind."

"Saw in where?"

Lily didn't answer. After a moment, she smiled over at him. "I don't want to talk about it."

"Okay."

The pair stood in silence, staring out the window. "The suns rising." Lily said quietly.

"Yeah, its morning."

"Does that mean this god awful day is finally over?" she said, a humorless laugh in her voice.

"Yep. It's officially tomorrow."

She didn't say anything for a moment. "I'm glad I'm starting my tomorrow with you. I thought, for a second, when you didn't walk in that door, and it was only Remus-"

In a swift second, he was in front of her, holding her face in his hands. "I'll be here for all your tomorrows, I promise."

Her felt as if it had stopped in her chest. It was the most imperfect moment to realize it, but there it was, so clear in her mind. If he hadn't walked through that door...

"I love you." she said, voice breathless.

James let her go. "Did you just say what I think you said?"

"Yes."

"Tell me again."

"I love you."

His lips crashed into hers, kissing her fiercely. She clung on to him, a tangle of limbs, slamming into the wall, before she suddenly pulled away. "You didn't say it back." she accused.

"I love you, I love you, I love you. More than anything."

A broad smile broke over her face. "I never thought I'd like hearing that."

"I never thought I'd hear you say it back." he replied.

"Yes did, you egomaniac." she teased.

"Yeah, but-"

"Shut up and kiss me."

—

After finally being allowed back in, Pomfrey only gave them a few moments. Visiting hours were long over. Frank wanted to stay by Alice's side, and after several minutes of arguing, Pomfrey agreed to let him visit outside of hours, but only if he would not miss any classes. During the day, most which they all slept, Mary awoke to the sound of arguing.

"Mr. Black, she is asleep, and it is no time-"

"Let him in." Mary called. She desperately wanted to see Sirius. Thoughts of Wilkes had filled her head, her nightmares. She had dropped her wand, she had been ready to let him win, and why, all because once upon a time she was a girl and he was a boy, and she had loved him.

Well, she didn't anymore. And she was prepared to tell him this whole story, because he would want to know, as her non-boyfriend. Only, it was the wrong Black coming to see her.

"Mary, are you alright?"

"What do you care? It was your friends that did this to me, to Alice."

He winced. "I had no idea, I swear."

"And if you had, what, you would have saved me? What would you have done?"

Casting his eyes around for Pomfrey, he knelt by the bed. "If they were in Hogsmeade, it means they were planning on attacking the school."

Mary felt as if the world had stopped spinning.

They won't, not now, after a bunch of students beat them. The Aurors didn't catch anyone. I heard, that Bella, that she almost-" there was no point in hiding anything, everyone knew, or suspected his cousin as a Death Eater.

"Who? I don't remember a girl being there."

"Never mind. Listen to me, you've got to be careful. Warn Sirius, Bella is out for blood. No, don't do that, just make sure he's careful. If they decide they want revenge, I can talk to Wilkes, he seems fond of you, we can get them to leave you alone."

Mary looked at him stunned. "I don't want that bastard's help, I can handle myself. And for another thing, I do not need you to protect me. And, I am not your brothers keeper, talk to him yourself."

"I can't."

"You mean you won't." she argued.

"I won't. But I will make sure you're not harmed. I can give him that."

Mary looked at him indigently. "I am not some sort of consultation prize, you can't substitute me for him."

His eyes met hers and he looked quickly away. "I know that."

After a seconds hesitation, she placed a hand on his shoulder. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to snap."

"I'm sorry too." he said, removing her hand. "Is she okay?" he asked, looking toward Alice.

"She will be." Mary answered. He stood, pacing.

"I wasn't prepared for this. For death, and murder. They made it all sound so heroic. Theres nothing heroic about it. There's no glory, there's just...nothing."

"Then don't do it. Leave them, Sirius, he would be thrilled, I know it."

He turned, face set in a painful expression. "They'll kill me, don't you understand that? And they won't stop with me, they'll destroy everything I care about. That includes Sirius. So you shouldn't be so eager, because in the end, you will find it wasn't worth it."

His hands were gripping into her arms, and again, she felt very much like crying. "He didn't speak, for days, after I told him. He didn't even ask how I know. He hasn't talked about it since."

Regulus released her, dropping onto the foot of her bed. "He always knew it would happen." he said darkly.

"You're his brother." she hissed.

"It doesn't mean anything to him, why should it to me?"

"Talk to him, please." she pleaded, ignoring his words.

"If he wants to talk, he can talk to me. I won't be the first to make amends."

"Why are men so stubborn?!" Mary cried, pounding into the bed with a fist.

"Shh! Do you want her in here?" Regulus hissed, eyes searching for Pomfrey.

"Scared she'll see your tattoo?" Mary bit.

"I came to see if you were okay, if you're going to be like this, I'm leaving." he said stiffly, moving to walk away.

"Regulus, wait."

He stopped, then turned, re seating himself at the end of her bed. "What?"

"I don't know. Just...be careful, okay. There's a war, and you'll be fighting in it, and I don't want anything to happen to you."

He laughed, and flashed a crooked smile, "I still have a year left of school, maybe I'll get lucky, and the war will end before then."

"Maybe." she replied, trying her best to sound as if she believed it. "Who do you want to win, really?"

He didn't answer for a moment, rising again, and looking away from her. "I don't care who wins, I just want it to be over."

A sharp cry stole Mary's attention, before she could reply to Regulus.

"Mr. Black, she is not to have visitors, I've already let one back there-"

"Sirius. Hide." Mary hissed.

"Where?"

"The bed next to me is empty, get in and pull the curtains." she instructed. He did as she said, and she flopped back on the bed, smiling sweetly as Sirius sat on the edge, near her feet.

"Hey you."

"Mary."

He glanced over her. "You look a bit flushed, should I call for-"

"No, no. I'm just...excited to see you." she said quickly.

An idea had struck her, and she planned to use it. If Sirius and Regulus were too stubborn to speak to each other, then she would have to speak for them, and hope Regulus was not above eavesdropping.

"It must have been hard for you, to not know if he was there, fighting anyway."

Sirius looked at her oddly. "He wasn't."

"But if he was, and the Aurors came, what would you have done?"

"I would have told him to have a nice life in Azkaban."

"You would let him go to prison?" Mary cried.

"Better than to let him die. There he would be alive and out of the way."

So, her plan was not going well, time to change tactics, and forget the whole thing. "Sorry, forget I said anything."

Something was wrong, he was barely looking at her. He hadn't came to see her earlier, not that she could remember. "What's wrong with you? Why won't you look at me?"

"When I saw you get hit, it was-all I could think was that something could happen to you, that you could be dead. But, I didn't go to you, I went to fight. I just left you there."

Mary nodded solemnly, listening to him. "Frank was there, beside me. I think he covered it."

"I told Dorcas to take care of you."

"See? So it's okay." Mary replied. He was behaving oddly.

"You could have died. You shouldn't have been out there. You aren't good in those situations, I knew that, but I let you go-"

"Let me? You didn't let me do anything. I would have went no matter what you said, he's my friend too." Mary cut in, anger flaring inside her.

"You could have died. You have been gone. Remus told me what happened, when that guy grabbed you. You didn't fight, you just let go."

A sharp pang of betrayal ripped inside her, Remus would be getting it later, that was for sure, but she had Sirius to worry about.

"Maybe I did, but I'm still here, aren't I? I made a mistake, people make mistakes." she defended.

"You could have gotten yourself killed."

"He would have killed Alice!" Mary shouted back.

"They would have killed her anyway." he argued.

"Why are you getting so angry about this? What's really bothering you?" Mary demanded.

"I watched you get cursed, and I couldn't do anything, I couldn't go near you, I couldn't stand to see you, to see you like that. All I could think, was that you

could die, that I could lose you and-" he stopped speaking abruptly.

"And what?" Mary said softly.

"Nothing."

"Sirius..."

"I should go. You need your rest, Pomfrey was hammering on about it earlier." he said, standing.

"Sirius Black, don't you dare walk away from me." she ordered harshly. She was sure that he caught the double meaning in her words.

"I'll come see you later." he said, bending over silencing her words with a kiss. Sufficiently flustered, by the time she formed a response, he was already dashing out the door. Only a moment later, Regulus was back at her bed. "I'll be going. Don't tell him I was here."

Mary sighed. "Of course not."

--

"We have to talk."

James rose a brow at his best friends pacing. Ordinarily, those four words bode trouble, but he had a feeling that in this case, the would not be quite so bad.

"Is it about the bet? Because I already asked Lily out. And she said yes."

Sirius halted in his pacing. "When?" then he added, "Finally."

"I know, took her long enough. It was before you and Mary came in." James answered.

"I have you beat. You say us in the mirror."

"Good thing you did. Do you know the hell Lily would give me if you hurt her? I don't want to have to play sides between you." James replied.

"About that. We should call this whole thing off. No more bet." Sirius announced.

"Sounds good to me. I lost. Wait, if I lost, why are you calling it off?"

Sirius took a second to think about it, then launched into the story Mary had told him. James ran a hand through his hair. "If she finds out, you're screwed."

"Which is why she can't find out."

"We have to tell them."

Sirius looked at James as if he grew a third head. "Are you crazy? Why would we tell them?"

"Honesty. We owe them that."

"No we don't. We can't tell them. If we tell them, they'll hate us." Sirius argued.

"If we keep from them, and they find out, they'll hate us."

"How would they find out? The only other people who know are Wormtail and Moony." Sirius pointed out.

"Moony, may be tempted to be...more honest than we would like. He and Dorcas-" James started.

"He wouldn't tell. Especially if we tell him we called it off."

"You're right, he'd never give us up. Neither would Peter. But we still have to tell them, they would be hurt, if they heard from anyone else. We can spare ourselves by being honest now." James said.

"We could, but we shouldn't. Like you said, they would be hurt. So, if we don't tell, they won't be hurt. And we won't be in trouble. Everyone wins." Sirius said back.

James realized this was self-justifying logic, but he much preferred it to losing Lily, after he had just won her, because of something so stupid. "You're right. It would only hurt them."

"Right. So, they'll just never find out. Ever."

Somehow, they both doubted it was true.

Chapter 21

The only person still held in the hospital was Alice. Caradoc had been let out, (though it was not without the smooth talking of Dorcas and Remus) and all were prepared to hear about the meeting. Frank was going to tell Alice about it later.

"So, what is the Order of the Phoenix anyway?" Mary quipped.

"I've heard of it before. It hasn't been around that long. I heard two teachers talking about it. They got really quiet when they saw me." Dorcas supplied.

"So, is it something we want to do?" Lily said, from her spot on the floor, head rested on James shoulder. He was idly playing with her hair. "James, stop that, its distracting."

"Yeah we should do it. I mean, if the meeting goes okay. Dumbledore will explain everything. If it sounds cool, we can do it." Dorcas said, temporarily lifting her head from Remus's legs. "Remus, how are you supposed to be my pillow if you keep moving?"

"I didn't know I had volunteered to be your pillow." he replied. She grinned up at him. "I volunteered you. Because there's no other bloke whose bony knees I'd rather feel denting the back of my head."

"Ignore her Remus, I think your knees are quite nice." Mary pipped.

"Lovely, really." Lily added.

"Moving away from Remus's knees..." Sirius started. He was sitting next to Mary, close but not touching. This was odd for him, because he never had been goo with understanding personal space. Mary was finding his behavior a bit strange.

"This meeting, we'll all be going then?" James asked. Everyone agreed.

"And, we'll still keep patrolling the halls at night. Just in case."

"Oh, it won't be a problem, I think. No way they would come now." Mary replied to Lily's statement.

"Why?" Peter asked.

"They got their asses kicked by a bunch of students."

"Good point."

After that, they all fell silent. It was still hard to believe that had taken out of group of Death Eaters.

"You know, we're kinda awesome." Dorcas stated.

They all agreed. It was easier than to think of how they had made it out mostly on sheer luck.

--

The notion that once a couple was together, or a noncouple was together, that everything was happy, that it was the end of the story was one Mary considered especially stupid. There were so many things she wanted to talk about with Lily, to hear about. It was clear that everyone was coupled up, Lily and James, and Dorcas and Remus, her and Sirius, obviously Alice and Frank. The only ones not with someone were Caradoc and Peter, and she supposed that they had good excuses, Caradoc had lost a sister, Peter was...well he was Peter.

It was a time that a girl desperately needed her friends. Which was why all of them were gathered in their room.

"Sirius is driving me crazy. It's like he's suffocating me, and pushing me away all at the same time. I mean he's there, he hovers, but he doesn't say anything."

"Maybe he's in shock. His family was out there you know. His own cousin. Then you were in the hurt, no one wants to see their girlfriend like that." Lily replied.

"Non girlfriend." Mary clarified.

"What's a non girlfriend? Or non boyfriend?" Dorcas pipped.

"Its what commitment phobes call each other." Lily spoke.

"I'm not afraid of commitment. I've committed myself to him, just not in traditional terms. And he better be committed to me, or I will so kick his ass."

"Maybe thats why he isn't talking. He's afraid to say the wrong thing and get his ass kicked." Dorcas chimed.

"What about you? How's it going with James, the boy you swore to never ever ever in a hundred million years like?" Mary prompted to Lily.

"It's great. He's great." she said, grinning, as only those in love could grin.

"He is not great. He walked in on me and Remus, remember?"

"I was there." Lily reminded.

"Yeah, but there was another time. Earlier today. I mean, I was going to get laid."

"I was going to get laid', how romantic." Mary said, giggling.

"What's it like? The first time I mean?" Lily said hesitantly. Both other girls started at her.

"Are you thinking about..." Mary started.

"About time." Dorcas added.

"I'm serious. I was wondering. I mean, not now, but eventually, I think maybe it would be..." she sighed. "I love him."

"I knew it." Mary said, smiling.

"I knew it first." Dorcas said, also smiling.

"Yes, you knew it, he knew it, everyone knew before I knew it. Just answer the question." Lily replied.

"Hurts like hell." Mary answered. "But then, you know, it gets better. With practice. Then it can be really good."

"Unless he's a virgin too—not likely," Dorcas started, "then neither of you not what you're doing, and its a confusing mess. That was how it was for me. But, I've only been with two guys, so what do I know?"

Lily didn't say anything. So what if it would be awkward, it wasn't like she was even sure she wanted to, not yet. She just wanted to be prepared.

"That's only three less than me." Mary stated.

"Yes, but I only slept with them while we were dating. Except that one time, and that other time, and then that last time."

"A girl has needs."

"Which reminds me, how was it shagging Black, does he live up to his reputation?" Dorcas asked.

"One word: awesome." Mary answered.

"So, sex is really like, all its cracked up to be?" Lily asked.

Dorcas and Mary exchanged looks. "Yeah, but only if its what you want."

Lily sighed, flinging herself back unto her pillows. "I'll just let nature take its course. If it does it does and if it doesn't it doesn't."

Which, Dorcas and Mary informed her, always means it does.

—

Words like love came easier. There was always the thought of danger lingering. Of the meeting. But, love was there, and it was dominant.

"James?"

The sun was sinking into the sky, and light spilling into the window, reddish orange, illuminating Lily's frame. She turned away from it, seating herself on the edge of his bed.

"Yeah?"

"Does this ever like, scare you? Me and you? I mean, being together?"

"Being in love is hard. But, its worth it. You're worth it."

He was sweet, and good, and caring. The kind of person she would have never expected him to be, much less the kind of boyfriend. But, she didn't know if she was the kind of person who could be loved. She had resisted for so long. She wasn't sure how they were supposed to be.

"I don't know how to do this. I've never been in love."

"There isn't a way to do it. You just do it." he answered.

"Okay, so lets just do it." she went red, realizing how the words sounded.

"Sounds good to me." he joked.

"That isn't what I meant." she said. "Do you want to do it with me?" she asked bluntly.

"Err—sure, if you're offering."

"No, I am not offering. I was asking to see if thats something you would want to happen." she said, frowning.

"I want whatever you want." he said simply.

It was such a sweet answer, that she couldn't resist kissing him for it. Soon, what had turned out as something light, and perfectly innocent, was turning into something else. His hands were in her hair, and she was in his lap, then her shoes were off, followed by his.

She wasn't sure how it happened, only that she was hot, and tingly, and every part of her was burning, and there were his hands, and her hands, and they were lying in his bed, he on top of her, her shirt unbuttoned, his shirt off, and she was letting nature take its course.

And then, he stopped touching her, stopped kissing her.

"I can't do this."

Lily's eyes flew open. "You can't?" it was hard to believe. But, things were hard to grasp, with the hazy fog her mind was wrapped in.

"I want to, really, but I can't." he replied. All he could think was of her telling him she loved him, of her telling him who she thought honesty was important.

She had been lied to before. She had heard Mary's story.

He had to tell her.

On the other hand, Sirius would kill him.

Then again, she deserved to know.

Then again, she was half naked in his bed. In his bed.

"Why?" she said confused. She was fine with it, but if he wanted to, then what was stopping him? Thinking of her? Was he unsure what she wanted?

"I have to tell you something. Something that will make you..."

"Make me what?" Lily asked. He was acting strangely.

James took a breath, ready to answer...And the door flew open. Lily shrieked, which caused him to shriek, and the sight of them caused the person at the door to shriek.

"Sirius have you ever heard of knocking?!"

"It's my room too, how would I know you were nailing Evans?" he said, attempting to walk out of the room, but finding it difficult, as he had his eyes closed tightly. Lily was buttoning her shirt with hast, before remembering she could use magic.

Sirius bumped into the door frame. "Damn wall, when did it move?"

James walked over, and very ungraciously pushed him through the door.

"You know, I think I'll go." Lily said.

"Really?"

"Yeah, to clear my head. And make sure you didn't push Sirius down and give him a head trauma. Though if you did, he could develop amnesia and forget seeing me like this."

"Right. We need to knock first. Walking in on this sort of thing happens a lot lately."

"Dorcas told me. Anyway, I better go. We can talk later."

She was gone, and Sirius came back in. "I didn't know she was here, and I saw nothing, I swear."

James cast him a disbelieving look. "What kind of bra was she wearing?"

"Black lace." he answered automatically. "Just a guess, I mean."

"Yeah. Learn to knock." James said, pulling back on his shirt.

"I was in a hurry." Sirius answered, lying on his bed.

"Why? Shouldn't you be with Mary? You've been permanently attached."

"I'm detaching. It was her I was trying to avoid." he replied.

"You're trying to avoid her?" James asked.

"I can't-she...I don't want to talk about it."

"You know, I think you have avoidance issues." James said back, pulling on his shoes, and spotting Lily's. He'd have to bring them back to her later.

"I do not."

"Yes you do. I mean, you found out your brother was a Death Eater, and you haven't spoke one word about it. Mary told you, and you didn't even ask how she knew."

"I don't want to."

"You don't want to talk about it. You want to pretend it never happened but it did."

There were certain things James knew not to mention, and that this was one of them. But, the way Sirius was behaving was not normal. He was angry, of that he was sure, but more so, he knew somewhere he was scared. He knew from experience Sirius did stupid things when he was scared.

There was fifth year. The incident with Snape. It was all Sirius's fault. Asking why, why in the hell did he almost murder someone. There was a time when the others wouldn't speak to him, not he or Remus. Peter stuck by him, much because no one else would, until the anger blew over, and they could all forgive.

"I'm not pretending it didn't happen. What the hell am I supposed to do? I can't do anything. I can't do anything."

James had not time to come up with the right words to say-any words to say- when Sirius turned and walked out, slamming the door behind him.

—

Maybe it was true that he couldn't do anything. But, maybe, it was still his job to try.

Mary would be happy, she wanted him to do something. He would have to tell her later. At the moment, he was still trying to figure out why he was headed to the library, in search of the brother he thought he would never be speaking to again.

There was a group of Slytherins gathered around, seated at a table. He dully noted that among them were Mulciber and Avery. Well, he was hardly about to approach the lot of them, which meant he could get by with not trying to do anything.

Or, not, as Regulus glanced up and noticed him, saying some excuse to his friends, and walked between to bookshelves, out of view. Sirius went around the opposite way, meeting him in the middle.

"We need to talk."

Regulus sent a glance over his shoulder, then looked back at Sirius. "Later. I'll send someone to get you."

"How do I know they won't try to kill me?" Sirius asked. He wouldn't put it past Death Eaters to do something of the sort, he was a blood traitor, and they were as bad as muggles in their eyes.

"Trust me."

"It's hard to trust a Death Eater."

"It's easy to trust your brother." he shot back.

The two stared at each other a moment, before Sirius finally answered. "I'll see you later."

Both knew that it was all that needed to be said. Everything else would be said later.

—

Mary sat on Sirius's bed, swinging her legs in a furious motion, while drumming her fingers against the mattress. She was being avoided. She was a lot of things, but Mary MacDonald would not be ignored.

He wasn't there. Even when he hovered and he was there, he wasn't there. But, this was worse. Sure it had only been a few hours, but she had the feeling unless she did something, it could become permanent.

The door swung open.

"Where have you been?"

Sirius glanced over at her, and felt his energy drain. He had been wandering, trying not to think, and thinking anyway. "I went to find Regulus. I'm going to talk to him later."

Mary's swinging ceased, her fingers going still. "Okay."

"That's it, okay?" he said unbelievably.

"Do you want to talk about it more?" she asked.

"No."

"Then okay." she replied.

He let out a breath of relief. "Sorry about avoiding you."

"I'll forgive you this time." she said back, her legs swinging again. "You know, if you want to talk, or anything, I'll be here. No matter what happens with him. I'll be here if you need me."

"I know." he answered, looking at her. It was strange, but it was as if something was choking him, some new thing strangling him when he looked at her. She was going to be there. She was there, and he couldn't imagine her not being there.

The idea of it was terrifying. The thought of losing her scared him to the core. Somewhere, along the way, without his realizing it, she had become essential to him.

He loved her. It was the last thing he wanted, but he did just the same.

If he had time to think about it, to panic over this fact, he would have, but he was saved, as at that moment, there was a knock on the door. Mary glanced at the door questioningly.

"We have a new knocking policy." Sirius explained, before walking over, and flinging open the door. He had been expecting James, or Remus, or Peter. Even Lily, or Dorcas. He did not expect the fidgeting blond standing in front of him.

"Um, Sirius?" she said biting her lip nervously. He recognized her from somewhere. She was very pretty, blond, blue eyes, perfect lips. He tried to rack

through his brain just like he had seen it. Had he 'dated' her? He hoped not, not with Mary in the room. No, that wasn't it. He thought on it some more, then it came to him. Charms. She was in his Charms class one year.

"Emmeline Vance?" he blurted.

"Ah, yes. Regulus sent me to get you."

From his bed, Mary sat a little straighter, listening with curiosity.

"He sent you? But, you're in Gry-"

"Yeah, I know. Being in Slytherin doesn't make you a bad person. Our houses can be friends." she defended.

"Whatever you say."

"Follow me, I'll take you to him."

He followed behind her through the corridors, watching her ponytail bounce up and down as she walked. How would she know Regulus?

She turned into an empty classroom, that he knew to be Slughorn's. He followed behind her, and saw Regulus seated on a desk, legs just not reaching the floor. Emmeline walked over to him, and stood beside him.

"I brought him. Do you want me to stay, or to go..." she said, voice trailing off.

"You can go. I'll catch up with you later." he said dismissively. She frowned at his tone, and turned to walk away, before he caught her arm, pulling her down and whispering something in her ear. Sirius couldn't hear what he said, but whatever it was made her smile, and she walked out the door wearing the same smile.

"So, you're boffing a mudblood. Mother would be proud." he stated.

Regulus glanced up from where he was seated. "So are you."

"But Mum can't really do anything to me."

"It was my act of rebellion. I wanted to do something to make them angry, after they...after what happened with you."

Sirius was a bit surprised by how easy it was for them to be speaking, it was strained, yes, but he had expected it to be hard to speak at all. Without thinking, he went and sat beside Regulus. Unlike him, his feet could touch the floor.

"So, it's true then." he started.

"You wanna see the mark?"

"I'll pass."

The pair sat in silence, something dark and tangible hovering in the air around them. "I don't want it. But you can't take it back. Not if you want to stay alive."

"You could turn yourself in." Sirius said, looking down at the ground. He pushed himself back farther, so that his feet didn't touch the ground. Without realizing it, they began swinging their legs in perfect rhythm.

"And go to Azkaban? With the dementors? No, I'll chose life."

"Even if its at the cost of others?" Sirius said, an edge in his voice.

"I haven't killed anyone yet." Regulus defended.

"Yet."

Regulus did not say anything for a moment, then said "You have to forgive Bella. She didn't mean-"

"I was there. She meant it." Sirius intruded.

"She's our cousin." Regulus reminded.

"Tell her that, I wasn't trying to kill her."

"She's still family. Family is supposed to forgive each other." Regulus said.

"What family were you growing up with?" Sirius asked, shooting him a look.

"Even we can forgive. Its harder but...if you came back right now, if you came back, and said you were sorry, they'd let you stay." Regulus said quickly, not looking at his brother.

"At what price? Me and you having matching tattoos? I don't think so."

"Thats what I thought." Regulus said, almost smiling.

"What about you? You want to leave, to come with me?"

"We both know its too late for that." Regulus answered.

"Thats what I thought."

Neither spoke for what felt like several long, drawn out years. It was Regulus who broke the silence.

"Things will never be the same, will they?"

"Things stopped being the same a long time ago Reggie. Its too late to change them back."

"Reggie? I haven't heard that in years."

Maybe it was that a part of him knew it was their last conversation, the last one they could have, without being on opposite sides of a war, without trying to kill each other. But, Sirius wanted for a moment, for both of them to be children again, and there biggest worry was who would get to play with Andy, and who would get stuck with Cissy in a game of two-side Quidditch.

"Maybe I'm feeling nostalgic." Sirius replied.

"Maybe you're becoming sentimental."

Sirius shrugged, both stopped swinging their legs at the same time. "That girl, does she know you're a Death Eater?"

"No." Regulus answered.

"How do you hide it?"

"I bandage it and tell her its for a Quidditch injury."

"That has to be getting old." Sirius replied.

"She'll be moving on soon enough."

That was life. Everyone moved on. It was crazy, and it didn't make sense. A lot of things didn't make sense, a Death Eater screwing a muggleborn, two brothers on two different sides of a war, death, love, hate, loving someone and hating them all at once.

"I should go." Sirius said, standing.

"Yeah, you probably should, before someone hears us. Em's probably standing around waiting, make sure she goes back."

"I'll take care of her." Sirius answered, walking toward the door.

"Sirius."

Sirius stopped, leaning against the door, back to his brother.

"I'm sorry if I disappointed you."

"I'm sorry too. When I left...I should have took you with me. I should have asked you to come." he said back.

"I would have said no. You knew it, thats why you didn't ask." Regulus answered.

"Yeah, but I still should have tried."

"Yeah, you should." Regulus agreed.

Sirius knew that walking out the door would change everything, that it was the point of no return. If he left, things never would be the same (as if they ever would anyway), and there would be no chance to fix them (like there ever was a chance). Walking out was giving up.

Sometimes, you had to admit defeat. There was a point when it was easier to let go than hold on. Hell, there were a lot of points like that, but the one they reached was the worst, when it hurt less to let go, than to hold on to something that could never be.

"Goodbye Regulus."

"Goodbye Sirius."

Sometimes, goodbyes were forever.

--

"So what are you being for the dance?" James prompted.

"Mary and I are being the devil and the angel on your shoulder. She's the devil." Lily answered, from her spot in the common room floor, where her, Remus, Peter, and James were sitting. Caradoc, Dorcas and Frank were off somewhere together, and Mary was 'waiting for Sirius.'

"What about you, what are you going as?" Lily asked.

"Don't know." James answered.

"Don't know either." Peter answered.

"Me and Dorcas are dressing from some muggle fairy tale. She's being little red riding hood."

"What does she want you to be?" James asked.

"The big bad wolf." Remus said grimly.

James and Peter both bit back laughter, that Lily did not really understand.

"What is so funny?"

At that time, Sirius swept past them, without speaking.

"Whats wrong with him?" Peter asked.

"Mary's upstairs, she'll take care of it." Lily said, her tone concerned.

"Right. Then we'll let her take care of it." Remus said. Everyone else could only agree.

--

Mary yelped, jumping up a foot when Sirius came in, slamming the door behind him. There was so many things she could ask, how it went, what he said, but from looking at him, she knew he wouldn't want to answer any of those things.

"Sirius..." she said, placing a hand on his shoulder. He grabbed the hand, and used it to pull her to him, attacking her mouth with his. His hands dug into her hair, holding her close, and she gripped onto him. There was something different, desperate, savage even, about the way he was kissing her. She wrenched herself away.

"What are you doing?" she asked, blinking to see past the stars in her eyes.

"Trying not to think." he answered.

Mary glanced up at him, he looked like he needed not to think, all the color was drained from his face. He looked like hell, and it stabbed her somewhere in her heart. Without speaking, she brought her lips back to his.

She ignored that he was holding her to tightly, squeezing her to hard. Some sorts of pain needed to be shared.

--

"Alice!" four voices all cried at once, as Alice came in the common room, Frank, Dorcas and Caradoc all behind her.

"They let her out." Frank announced, as Alice did a little twirl.

"I'm good as new."

"We thought they wouldn't let her go, but Dorcas went down there and made it happen." Caradoc said, smiling at her.

"It wasn't all me. Mostly me. But not all me." she replied, smiling back.

"Her and Caradoc were brilliant. Those two scare me together." Frank said, wrapping an arm around Alice.

"Next on the menu is world domination. But we're still working out the finer details, right Caradoc?"

"And I always thought it would be Alice who you conquered the world with." he said back.

"It was supposed to be, but she needs a vacation. We'll be the Queens, and you can be our king."

"Where does that leave me and Remus?" Franks joked.

"We'll make sure you get put on all the job parts of slave labor."

Both boys rolled their eyes. Alice looked at all of them, all her friends, minus Mary and Sirius. It seemed like ages ago since they could joke and laugh.

"Its good to be back."

--

Sirius glanced down at the sleeping girl beside him. There was a bruise on her arm, and he was sure if he lifted the sheet and looked down, there would be more along her body.

A sense of guilt washed over him. He had used her, in the most primal of ways, and though she had been more than willing, he felt bad. He had reduced her down to nothing more than a physical object that he could use to erase his thoughts.

She stirred beside him. "Was I asleep?" she said, stifling a yawn.

"Yeah, for a few minutes. Mary, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to-"

"Its okay. I've had it rougher. Are you okay?" she asked, placing a smile on her face.

"Define okay."

She sighed, and twined her hand around his. "What was it like?"

"It was better than I expected. Not good. But, we didn't try to kill each other."

"Thats good."

"He's screwing Emmeline Vance."

Mary's eyes went wide. "But she's muggleborn. I had Transfiguration with her last year."

"He said it was his act of rebellion."

"Maybe it was all he could think of." Mary said.

"Maybe. But she doesn't know what he is. I have to get her away from him. It isn't safe for her. His friends won't exactly approve."

"Maybe, but she doesn't seem like the sort who needs a knight in shining armor."

He winced at her words. "What?" she questioned.

"You deserve more than this." he said quietly.

"More than what?" she said, confused.

"More than me."

She blinked. "Okay...I think talking to your brother has left you with a few issues to work out, so I'll assume that remark is a part of one of them."

"You said it yourself, every girl wants the fairy tale. I can't give you that. I would if I could, but I can't. You deserve someone who can give all the things I can't."

She sat up, wrapping the sheet tightly around her. "I don't want a fairy tale. And I'm not asking you for anything."

"But you should be. You should be asking me for more. And you can't with me. You deserve something better than this."

Mary laid back down, pulling herself closer to him. "It isn't about what I deserve, it's about what I want, and what I want is you."

He closed his eyes, listening to her breathe. "Mary..."

The words hung in his throat, unable to come out. Love was big and scary, and not something he wanted to deal with on top of everything else. Saying the words would change things, and he couldn't deal with many more changes.

"I know. Me too." she said softly, closing her eyes.

He didn't have to say. She knew.

—

Emmeline Vance had become a problem. Sirius had filled the others in on her, and from the looks of it, she needed a friend. She always sat alone. Alice explained that she had always hung around two other girls, but their parents pulled them out of school.

She was a girl utterly friendless, and involved with a Death Eater. Or, at least she previously had been. Whether she still was was up for debate.

"We have to do something. Look at that poor girl. We should invite her to sit with us." Lily said, glancing sympathetically.

"We don't really know her." Peter stated.

"So, she can't be that bad." Alice piped.

"If she isn't that bad, why doesn't she have any friends?" Peter countered.

"He makes a good point." Dorcas stated. "Not that I agree or anything."

"We should be nice to her." Mary said.

"I agree. Someone go invite her." Caradoc said.

Lily nudged James in the side. "James, go get her."

"Me? You go, if I go, she'll think I'm some bloke putting moves on her."

"She wouldn't think that. But she probably would say no. James isn't very tactful." Remus said.

"I'll go." Sirius said suddenly. All eyes turned to him.

"You'll go? She will think it's some bloke putting the moves on her." Frank said.

"She will not. I'll go." he said standing.

"Good luck." Dorcas called.

"Emmeline?"

The girl peered up at him, bright blue eyes (they reminded him of Mary's eyes) wide. "Sirius?"

"Do you want to come sit with us, me and my friends?"

She didn't answer, staring at him in disbelief.

"You know some of them I think, Lily Evans, she's head girl, Mary MacDonald, you had a class with her last year, Dorcas Meadows, you probably shared a detention with her sometime. And then there's Caradoc Dearborn, Frank Longbottom, and his girlfriend Alice, Remus Lupin, Peter Pettigrew, and James."

"I think I know Caradoc. He once dated my friend Lisa's cousin. But, she's gone now. Her parents made her move. Lisa that is, the cousin is still here." she said. There was almost something timid in her voice.

"Well, then you'll have something to talk about. Caradoc was going to leave, but his parents thought he should stay, be near his friends to help with the grieving process or something."

"I heard about his sister. How is he?" she inquired.

"Better. Do you want to come?"

"Why are you asking me?"

"Because you're alone, and no one should be alone." he answered.

"I don't need your charity."

"It isn't charity." he argued.

"Hanging out with you would make Regulus mad. And that would be great." she said, almost to herself.

He arched a brow at her.

"Oh, he dumped me. Not that you can dump someone you aren't really dating."

"Be glad. He wasn't what you thought."

"What does that mean?" she asked.

"He's a Death Eater." the words spilled from his mouth far too easily. It wasn't as if he wanted the world to know, only, he thought she deserved as much.

"He's...oh my god." she said, slumping in her seat.

"Are you going to tell anyone?"

"No, I wouldn't. He's only sixteen. I didn't think they wanted."

"They want whatever they can get." Sirius interrupted.

"I think I'll come and sit with you." she said softly, rising, looking like one who was in a daze, as if the world around her was not real.

When she sat, everyone was kind to her. Kindness was needed in such times.

—

The day for meeting Dumbledore was upon them. All were nervous about what would be said. All of them knew it could change their lives forever. They all went, plus one. Lily had already asked about Emmeline, who was phenomenal at healing, and excellent in Charms. Dumbledore had given his consent, saying that he trusted in her judgment.

They listened breathlessly, as he told them what the Order was, and what it did. After, he paused waiting for the questions. None of them asked any. When it came time to decide what to do, Caradoc was the first to agree to join, followed by Lily and James, then Alice and Frank. Remus said yes next, then Emmeline agreed. Dorcas was next, then finally Sirius, followed by Peter. The only one left was Mary.

"I can't do this. I'm not good enough. I'm not talented, in anything. I don't know."

"You don't have to decide now. Think about it, and come see me."

Mary was shocked at Dumbledore's reaction. She would have thought he would be angry, or disappointed. "Yes sir."

They all pilled out. No one mentioned what Mary had said.

—

The dance had finally come. Remus had somehow convinced Dorcas to let him be something else, and she had told him he could be "that dude who hacks the granny out of the wolves stomach."

Lily and Mary had their costumes, and to James, Lily actually did appear like an angel. Mary loved her devil outfit. Alice and Frank were Inferi, which seemed to be a popular costume. Emmeline, who had attended with Peter, as friends, as neither had a date, was dressed in a hot pink body suit. When

asked what she was, she explained she was the color pink. Peter was not in a costume.

James, Sirius, and Caradoc were dressed as a popular wizarding band, composed of three wizards. People seemed to like their costumes, and Lily informed them they may win the costume contest.

The night was going perfectly. Everyone was enjoying their date, or dates, as Dorcas was being both Remus and Caradoc's date, since Caradoc could not find one, no one wanted to approach the boy whose sister had been murdered. Remus hadn't minded.

The Marauders were all seated together, watching as Frank and Alice attempted to dance. The sight was amusing, but not as amusing as Emmeline and Peter, who were setting a record for squashed toes. Dorcas was jumping around with Caradoc, who seemed genuinely happy, for the first time in a long time.

Mary and Lily were off getting drinks, and hearing compliments on how well they had planned it all out. After long moments, Lily made her way back to James and the others. "Everyone wants to talk to us. I'm glad we decided to let all the forth years and up come, they seem really happy."

She plopped down beside him. "Mary got stopped by some guy in a mask. I don't know who he was. But they're out there dancing. She said she knew him."

Sirius glanced toward the dance floor, not spotting Mary. He shrugged, he trusted her, dancing was nothing to be concerned with, and took another drink from the bottle in his hand.

"Sirius Balck is that firewhiskey?" Lily asked, in mock anger.

Sirius took a long moment, before carefull replying, "No."

"You liar."

"Yes, I'm awful. Drinking at a party, who would have thought?" he said, rolling his eyes. "I'm bored. Lets dance. James, I'm stealing your girl."

"Watch out Lily, he's a bit crazy with the firewhiskey." James warned.

"Remember that time in the tower?" Remus prompted.

"When he leaned out the window and declared himself a sex god." James said.

"Hey, those three girls agreed with me." Sirius defended. "And they were hot. Triplets I think."

"Um, Sirius, there was only one girl, and she was ugly." James reminded.

"Guess I was drunk enough to see triple. Most people only see double, see Evans, I'm an overachiever."

"Just lead me to the dance floor." Lily said, shaking her head at his comment.

After a second, a sweat Dorcas slid into the seat beside Remus. "I'm so thirsty." she said, taking a gulp of his punch. "Where's the booze? I know Sirius snuck some in."

"As a prefect, I am not allowed to tell you that its under his chair, so you'll have to find it yourself."

"Thanks Remus."

Dorcas took a long drink from the bottle. "Hey, I saw Mary go out in the hall with some guy. Any of you know who?"

"No. Wonder what she's doing." James said, bored. He wanted Lily to return.

"She'll be back soon. Come dance with me Remus." Dorcas said, dragging him out to the floor, where Caradoc had taken Emmeline from Peter's hands.

Tonight was the night, he had to tell Lily the truth. Only, he had to get Sirius to agree to it first.

—

Mary was surprised when Regulus asked her to dance, but there were not many Slytherins at the party. According to him, they were having their own party, in their common room. Still, he had lead her into the hall.

"You know I talked to him."

"Yeah, he told me."

The hall was dark, compared to the brightly lit great hall. The song changed to one slower, and he took her wrist, swaying them along. She supposed if anyone came out, they would get the wrong idea, but she knew it was only a distraction.

"I don't think we'll be talking anymore." he said.

"I'll take care of him. Don't worry." she replied.

"Thanks."

"So, you were doing it with a muggleborn. That's surprising."

"I wanted to do something, something that they wouldn't approve of. I was sick of being their puppet. It was the easiest thing. She knew that it would never lead anywhere."

"It still hurts. I think her pride is damaged. She knows what you are, you know." Mary told him. Their swaying slowed down for a second.

"She won't do anything."

"No, she won't."

The song ended, but they kept swaying. Human contact was healing. "I can see why he loves you." Regulus said, causing her to look up at him.

"You see people. Good or bad. Well, besides Wilkes." She cringed at his name, and he went on. "You get people. You're like this sense of calm. And you don't take his bullshit, which is important. He needs someone like you."

"He doesn't need me. He just wants me there. And thats enough for me."

"You don't want to be needed?"

She looked up, meeting his eyes. "Love isn't about needing. Its about wanting. Dependency is about need. Love makes you strong, you don't need anyone to survive, you just wouldn't want to survive without them."

"Right."

"He'll be fine. And you will be too. No matter what you are, you aren't a bad person. You're just in a bad place, and one day, you'll find a way out."

"You believe that?" he asked.

"I do."

"Then so do I." and he did, at least for a moment.

She backed away from him. "I better go. He'll be wondering where I am."

—

Lily came back over to James an exhilarated smile on her face. "I've figured it out. The more he drinks, the better he dances."

"Then we'll be sure to get him punch drunk on our wedding day." James replied.

"Our wedding day? So we're getting married some day?" she said, bending down to kiss him.

"One day." he replied, pulling her back down, kissing her again.

"I can hardly wait." she said.

"I'm serious." he said back.

"Where's Mary?" Sirius asked, popping up behind Lily, causing her to jump.

"I don't know. Lets go in the hall and look for her." James suggested.

As soon as they were out of ear shot, James whispered, "We have to talk about the bet."

"What about it?"

"About telling them."

Sirius muttered something under his breath that James was grateful he couldn't hear.

—

"Hey Mary, James and Sirius just went looking for you." Lily said, as Mary bounded back over to them. All of them, besides Alice and Frank, and James and Sirius were back at the table. Mary did not have a chance to respond, as a loud squeal caught their attention, and they looked over and saw Alice jump up and hug Frank. She quickly ran over to the group, pulling him behind her.

"Dorcas, Lily, Mary!"

"What is it?" Dorcas asked.

Alice held out her left hand, where a ring was on her finger. It was large, and square cut. "Me and Frank are engaged!"

All three girls mouths dropped open, before they all started squealing in excitement.

"Congrats." Caradoc said to a blushing Frank. "I told you the day met her you'd marry her."

"Om my gosh, he really did." Alice said, smiling, and hugging Caradoc, then Remus, then the girls again.

"Congratulations." Remus said.

"You have to tell James and Sirius." Lily said.

"We'll go get them." Mary said, her and Lily rushing out to find them. What they found was not what they wanted.

"We have to tell them. If we explain, they'll understand. We'll all have a laugh about it one day." James said.

"Oh yeah, 'We made a bet to see which one of us could get you to go out with us first, with no regard to your feelings, but its okay, because we'll all have a laugh over it one day' because they'll really react well to that."

Mary gasped, and Lily gaped. Both boys turned around to see them standing there.

"Lily, it isn't as bad as you think." "Mary, I can explain." both said at once.

"Not as bad as I think?!" Lily cried.

"Save your breath. How can you explain this? What happened to 'I'd never do something like that to you'?" Mary snapped, a note of hysteria in her voice.

Sirius strode over to her. "It isn't what you think, really. If you let me—"

He was cut off by her hand across his face, a loud, ricketing slap that could be heard through the entire hallway. "You're an ass. We're over. Never speak to me again."

Lily glared at James. "What she said."

The noise had drawn the others out, all their friends in the hall. "What happened?" Dorcas asked, glancing at them. Alice and Frank who had been wearing smiles went sober. Caradoc and Emmeline looked on with interest. Remus and Peter looked nervous.

"A bet. James and Sirius had a bet over us." Mary said, voice nearly shaking.

"What?!" Alice cried.

"I told you it was a bad idea, that you never should have—" Remus started.

"Wait, you knew?" Dorcas said, eyes flashing over to him.

"Yes, but they're my friends—"

"And Lily and Mary are my friends." she cut in. "Whatever. Forget this." she said, walking away from him, to Mary's side. Lily walked over too, and they all started back to their room. Alice and Frank along with Caradoc followed behind them.

Remus and Peter stayed with James and Sirius. Emmeline seemed unsure of where to go, then turned and followed the others.

"We really fucked up, didn't we?" Sirius said, running a hand through his hair.

"Fucked up is an understatement."

Chapter 22

Believing the girls needed space, (and not being allowed in the girls dorms) Caradoc and Frank left them to return to their own room. Emmeline had went with them, not knowing how to help. As soon as the girls made it in the room, Mary collapsed. She fell to the floor, hugging her knees to her chest, tight, and sobbing. Dorcas knelt in front of her, and hugged her, telling her that everything would be okay.

Lily was too angry to cry. She knew Mary was likely crying from anger, and she felt that they should let her. "Dorcas, let her breathe. She needs to let it out."

"Its okay, go ahead and cry babe." Alice said, stroking her hair.

Lily sat next to her, and Mary's head fell onto her shoulder. "We'll be fine Mary, we'll get through this."

In spite of her being too angry for tears, she felt them starting to some anyway. "Lets get out of here. We can't be sad, Alice just got engaged. We should be happy for her."

Mary nodded, wiping the tears from her eyes, letting Dorcas and Lily pull her up.

"So, what should we do?" Alice said, gazing at her friends. It was horrible what had happened, and if she had to push back celebrating her engagement, she could.

"We should drink." Dorcas said, rummaging through her basket. Little red riding hood had to have a basket. It seemed years ago that Remus had teased her for having smokes inside it. Though, it had only been minutes. But, there was no point lingering on those sort of thoughts.

After a moment, she pulled out a bottle. It was Sirius's, that she had hidden there, after a teacher had walked by.

"Thats the best idea I've heard all night." Mary said, wiping away more tears.

Normally, Lily would disapprove, but the circumstances called for something extreme. "Lets party."

"Wow, two words I'd never thought I'd hear Lily say." Alice teased.

"Just hand me the damn bottle."

—

"I told you two it was a bad idea, but like always, you didn't listen. And now, along with you two ruining the best things that ever happened to you, you've ruined me and Dorcas." Remus ranted.

"We're sorry. They weren't supposed to find out this way." James said.

"Dorcas will come around. Mary and Lily will never speak to us again, but she'll come around." Sirius assured.

"They have to speak to us again. They can't just ignore us." James inserted.

"Yes they can. And they will. That, or homicide." Sirius concluded.

"It'll all be alright in the end." Peter said, in what he hoped was a helpful, optimistic voice.

He didn't quite pull it off, and none of them quite believed him.

—

"I can't get no satisfaction, I can't get no satisfaction. 'Cause I try and I try and I try and I try. I can't get no, I can't get no!" four voices wailed, stumbling through the hallways. The bottle of firewhiskey had long since been emptied, upon which, the girls discovered, it had a refilling charm placed on it.

This being said, they had all gotten quite lost, and ended up near Slytherin territory. It was a wonder that they had not been caught, as it was getting late, and they were wondering the halls. However, most of the teachers were in the Great Hall, chaperoning the dance, while the younger students were in their

rooms.

"When I'm watchin' my TV and a man comes on to tell me how white my shirts can be. Well he can't be a man 'cause he doesn't smoke the same cigarettes as me." Dorcas continued.

"I can't get no, oh no no no. Hey hey hey that's what I say!!" Alice finished, along with Mary.

"Does anybody know where we are?" Alice asked, swaying and bumping into the wall.

"Who cares?" Dorcas said, while she what one could assume was dancing. It wasn't very graceful, but Alice joined her nonetheless.

"I think I know where we are." Lily broad casted, and they all turned to look at her. She made her face deadly serious. "We're near the Slytherin common room." The severity of her words was ruined, due to the fact that she giggled directly after saying them, nearly falling over.

"Hey, be careful, you'll drop the..." Mary started, then forgot where she was going.

"Booze." Alice supplied.

"Yeah, that stuff." Mary agreed, snatching the bottle from Lily.

"They're having a party." Mary stated.

"Then lets party with them." Lily said boldly. The other three girls could hardly believe it, when she walked over to the Slytherin common room entrance, and proceeded to figure out the pass word. After naming off several different things, she was finally allowed inside, the others scurrying after her.

Once inside, there were a few audible gasps, over the very loud music playing. People had just barely began to remark about their unexpected guests, when someone brushed over to them. Two someones, actually.

"What are you doing here?" Regulus hissed, gripping Mary firmly by the wrist.

"We wanted to come to the party." she said, words slightly slurred.

"Are you drunk?" he asked, incredulously.

"Completely sloshed." she answered.

So apt on Mary and Regulus, the others did not notice who Lily was speaking to.

"Why are you here? Do you want to be killed?"

"Aw, Sev, I haven't talked to you in ages. But you know, you were right, about Ja-Potter. You were wrong about a lot of things, but you were so right about him."

There was no response from Snape, other than to look at her with disdain, and grip her arm suddenly before she fell. He and Regulus met eyes, and both thought the same thought.

"Lets get them out of here." Regulus said, pulling Mary behind him. Mary reached out, and grabbed Dorcas's hand, pulling her along. Snape yanked Lily behind him, and she yanked herself away.

"Don't touch me! Don't you dare touch me!" she shrieked, tears now in her eyes. By now, there were several people looking their way.

A pained expression came over his face, before he answered. "Yes, right. Black get her out of here."

There was a moment where no one spoke, the silence engulfing, unspoken things strangling. "I can walk myself." she finally said, turning walking away. She had had her heart broken enough for one night. She didn't want to face her former best friend, the one who had taught her about heartbreak in the first place.

All men were douche bags. It was as simple as that. Maybe she would join a coven, become a nun. After all, she still had her virginity intact.

Regulus pushed all four of them out. When they were far enough away, he leaned against the wall, giving them space, contemplating whether he should go find someone to lead them back to their own common room. He decided not to. They would be fine on their own, and no one would really feel like going after them. Not when he had been the one to lead them out. The Blacks were Slytherin royalty.

Lily lay on the cool floor, tears streaming. It seemed anger only could last so long until someone broke. Mary lay down next to her, reaching across the distance to grip her hand. "You really loved him, didn't you?" she said softly.

"Which one?" Lily said back, closing her eyes.

"Good question."

Alice, always the first to spring back from these sort of things, spoke. "Maybe we should get her out of here." Dorcas agreed, and Lily rose, the three heading back toward their room. Mary did not rise.

"I think I wanna stay here awhile, and think. I'll catch up."

When they were out of sight, she pulled the bottle back out, taking another long drink. All she needed was a box of chocolates, and a boy and she could forget her problems. The booze wasn't helping her escape. She wanted to feel something else, anything else. Maybe the guy from Ravenclaw wouldn't be opposed to one more roll in the sack.

"Mary?"

She smirked at the sound of the voice. It seemed the answer to her problem, and a perfect way of revenge had just came around the corner. "Regulus, what are you doing here?"

"I thought you may have all passed out. I was about to go find Sirius to take you to bed."

She scoffed, laughing. "Trust me, Sirius will not be anywhere near my bed ever again."

"I take it thats the reason for that." he replied, gesturing to the bottle in her hand.

"Exactly the reason. It isn't really helping anymore." she said, rising to her feet, swaying a little. She felt unbalanced, in more ways than one. And angry, so very angry, that she found herself like this again.

It was worse than with Wilkes. At least, with him, all she did was ball her eyes out, alone in bathrooms. She kept her pain to the confines of her closest friends. Not the source of pains younger brother.

"I think you've had enough."

She wobbled over to him, grinning. "I think you're right. Terribly unsafe to drink alone. It makes one feel so lonely." she said, sliding closer to him.

He lifted a brow at her expression. If she thought that he was going to be some sort of pawn in whatever deluded plan she had, she was crazy. He would not be used only to hurt his brother. "Mary, I'm taking you back."

He was cut off, as her lips crashed into his, and he gripped her arms, trying to wrench her away. When that proved unsuccessful, he wound his hands in her hair, yanking her back.

Both stood staring at each other, breathing hard. For him, she was sure it was more that she had caught him off guard, and kissed him hard enough to steal his breath, because he most assuredly was not kissing her back. For her, it was effort to not throw a rage.

"I am not going to be used. Whatever he did to you, I won't be your payback. As much as I hate him sometimes, I am not fucking his girl, only so that you can piss him off, to obtain whatever sort of justice you consider necessary."

His voice was cold and hard, and if it had been anyone else, someone she actually desired, the rejection would have been like a slap to the face. Instead it was a mild annoyance to her plan. "Fine. But you don't know what you're missing."

"And I have no desire to find out."

She sighed in aggravation. "If you won't fall prey to my fabulous seduction attempts, then you should at least have a drink with me. Unsafe to drink alone right?" she said, holding the bottle between them. "So, what do you say, wanna party?"

He looked at the bottle then her, and considered. "Why the hell not?"

The next morning, when she woke up, she was very surprised to see that she was not in her own bed, and that she was not alone. Regulus Black was beside her, still sleeping.

What had she done?

Chapter 23

The pounding in her head was making it hard to think, but she was sure that that actually was Regulus Black laying in bed beside her. She was almost afraid to look, but she lifted the cover, and saw...

That they were both fully clothed, down to her shoes. Well, she had lost her horns somewhere the night before. She felt like she needed them, whatever had happened, she was not behaving like a good girl, that was for sure.

"Where are we?" she asked, shaking the boy beside her awake.

"The room of requirement." he answered, pushing her hand away. "I took you here after you passed out." He buried his face back into the pillow, and groaned.

"Hey, don't go back to sleep. Open your eyes." she said, shaking him again.

"Could you stop that, the world is already spinning." he moaned.

"Sorry. So, what did I do last night?" she asked, glancing around. The sheets on the bed were now green and silver, trimmed with black. Very Slytherin-ish.

"If you're worried about this-" he said, gesturing to the sleeping arrangement, "don't. I turned you down the first time, and the two times after that. I just wasn't enough of a gentleman to sleep on the floor."

The first time, and the two after that? Well, that was embarrassing. "It's a big bed." she said, attempting to smile. "Look, last night, I was mad, and I guess I thought you-"

"Would be a nice slap to the face?" he finished. "What did he do?"

"I would rather not talk about it." she answered, turning to face the other way.

"If you say so. There's a shower in here, and I'm using it. You want to go first?"

She turned to peer at him. "Why are you offering?" From the way it sounded, she had been miserable company.

"Because... you smell."

She groaned. Of course she did. She had probably threw up somewhere along the line. "I can't. It took Lily and Dorcas to get this costume on. It's skin tight. And even if I do manage to get it off, I have nothing to where back to my room."

He looked at her a second, then motioned her off the bed, sliding off himself, and picking up the green sheet. After a few complicated gestures, it transformed into a dress. He handed it to her. "I saw Emmeline in one like it. Hers was blue, but I'm not good with colors. Or material. So, you're stuck with green silk."

"Very Slytherin." she commented, stepping toward the bathroom. Suddenly she stopped. "I think I'm going to puke."

Regulus took a careful step back from her. "I would run to the bathroom."

Mary barely made it. "Just kill me now."

There was an uncomfortable silence, as both thought that people like him did kill people like her. Mary waved her hand dismissively. "Forget that. Just come hold back my hair."

--

"Lily, Lily wake up." a voice hissed, close to her ear. She turned away from the voice, and screamed, as she fell over what felt like a cliff, and landed on something warm and soft. And currently saying "ow."

She looked down below her, and saw a mop of auburn hair. "Caradoc?" she said, confused. His eyes opened, their normal blue lined with bloodshot red. Apparently, he hadn't slept well.

"Could you get off me. Heavier than you look." he said. Lily scrambled off, then looked over to her cliff. It happened to be his bed, where Dorcas was occupying the other side.

"I let you two have it. I slept on the floor. Alice is with Frank."

Lily looked over to Franks bed, where Alice lied curled beside him. She would probably be fine. Alice never had a hang over. Lucky her. "I can't feel my toes." Lily declared. Caradoc smiled, and loped an arm around her waist. "Dorcas thought you may be dead."

"That's because I feel dead, and I'm an accomplished drinker. Or at least, better at it than you. So I know you feel bad." Dorcas said.

"I think I'm going to pass out." Lily answered, stepping away from Caradoc's supporting arm. She swayed, and he stepped forward, letting her wrap her arms around his neck. "Walking isn't a good idea." she summarized.

Caradoc, who was trying his best not to laugh at her, swung her up, catching her with an arm at her waist and one under her knees.

"Please do not do that. Hurts." she winced.

"I'm taking you to Pomfrey." he said.

"Will she make it go away?" Lily asked, hiding her eyes from the light, burying her face in his shoulder.

"Yeah. Probably." Dorcas answered, rising from the bed. "Maybe I'll go to."

before either could answer, Alice yawned, stretching, and jumping up from bed. "Good morning."

Dorcas looked at her in disbelief. "How can someone who consumed that sheer volume of alcohol be pleasant in the morning?"

Alice shrugged. "I'm going to go check on Mary. She's probably alone in the room. I'm not sure how we ended up here."

"Can we just be sure to avoid James?" Lily whispered, eyes drifting closed.

Caradoc looked down at her. "Yeah, I'll make sure we don't run into him."

--

"I miss Lily." James said, staring up at the ceiling.

"I miss Mary." Sirius echoed.

"I miss Dorcas." Remus added.

"I miss Emmeline." Peter added as well. Three pair of eyes all turned to him. "I just thought I should add something too. She's the first girl that came to mind."

"Lily was the love of my life. I have to win her back." James said.

"We should go down to breakfast she'll be there." Peter suggested, then to get them moving, "They're having pudding this morning."

"I like pudding. Vanilla is my favorite. Lily smells like vanilla." James sighed.

"Mary smelled like strawberries. I like strawberries. Especially covered in chocolate. I would have liked her covered in chocolate..."

"I'm not touching that comment." Remus answered, the first to get out of bed. "Peter, do you want to go to breakfast? We can leave these two to mope."

"Sounds good to me."

--

"Mary?" Alice called, stepping into the room.

The blond on the floor startled, turning to face Alice. "Alice?"

Emmeline?" Alice asked. "What are you doing here?"

"I came to see if you all were doing okay." Emmeline answered, standing up.

"We're fine. Caradoc is running Lily to Pomfrey. Dorcas is still with Frank. He's asleep. Have you seen Mary?"

"Um, no. Wasn't she with you?"

"No, she wanted to be alone for awhile. I thought she came back here." Alice said, starting to grow concerned.

"Where were you last night?" Emmeline asked.

"You won't believe it, but Lily actually made us go into the Slytherin common room. But then we saw Snape and Re- and we saw Snape, and he led us out." Alice said, smiling, hoping Emmeline didn't catch her slip.

Emmeline smiled tightly. "Right. Snape. Well, at least Lily saw an old friend. That must have been nice. Catching up."

"Not exactly." Alice said, carrying on before Emmeline could continue. "I'm going to go look for her. Can you help me find her?"

"Of course. We'll meet up in the Great Hall in a few minutes."

Emmeline waited until Alice left the room, to follow behind. She had a feeling she knew exactly where Mary was.

—

Mary smiled at her reflection. After she had slipped on the dress, she had decided to go all out in looking good. It took a few tries to charm away her bloodshot eyes, but she had managed. Next, she had curled her hair in gentle waves, and put extra care into her makeup. The halter style dress, which was just short enough to be sexy, and just modest enough to leave things to the imagination, she thought was the best part.

She would have to borrow the real one from Emmeline sometime. Which made her think, she should borrow Alice's silver hoops. And Dorcas's black choker. And the boots Lily had gotten for Christmas last year, that she never wore. Leather knee highs would match the leather choker she wanted to borrow.

After all, she had to look good. Not only good, but hot. Smoking hot. She wanted Sirius Black to live in regret every moment of every day. And, she wanted to find a new boy. Rebounding always felt good. Not to mention make her ex horribly jealous.

"Mary!" the voice intruded her thoughts, and she turned, seeing Emmeline behind her, farther down the hall. "Emmeline, hey."

"Where were you last night? Alice is out looking for you." Emmeline demanded.

"Oh, I ah...there was this guy, who let me stay with him. Not stay with like you know, sex or anything. Just a bed to crash in." she babbled. How could she tell Emmeline where she was?

Emmeline eyes her. "You know, I have a dress just like that. In blue. And not silk."

"Really? Must be in style." Mary replied, walking on. "I'm heading back to the room. Wanna come up?"

"Were you with Regulus?"

Mary froze. "Why would you think that?"

"Alice slipped and almost said his name. I was there when he met up with Sirius. I know you were with the Slytherins. He knows about you and Sirius. If he saw you, then he'd try to do something." Emmeline said.

"I passed out. He was just being nice, trying to help out his brother's lady love. Or, ex lady love. Whatever. But it was all innocent. I camped out in the room of requirements with him. It was nothing." Mary explained.

Emmeline walked closer to her, her eyes dark, her face stony. "Mary, listen to me, I'm warning you, as your friend, stay away from Regulus Black. He isn't what you think. Don't be fooled by the knight in shining armor stint he pulled last night; he's only saving you because he can't save himself."

"Maybe he has some kind of inferiority complex, that he wants to break or something, but he isn't all bad. I believe people can change." Mary answered.

"So did I." Emmeline reminded. "But look what he was hiding from me. I was so gullible, so naive. He's a liar Mary. He can pretend to be whatever you want. You don't know him like I do."

"You mean in the biblical sense?" Mary joked. Emmeline's expression did not change. "Okay, not funny. But, really, I think I see some other side if him. It's not like we're friends. I just don't want to hate him. Which only puts him on the same standing as any other stranger."

"You don't spend the night with a stranger." Emmeline pointed.

"That really depends on what kinda girl you are." Mary replied.

"I just don't want to see you pulled into the middle of whatever is going on with Sirius." Emmeline said, gripping her wrist.

"Don't worry. I want nothing to do with Sirius. I can handle myself Em. But thanks for being a friend. It means a lot, that you were concerned for me."

Emmeline let her go. "I don't have a reason to be, do I?"

"No. I'm through with the Blacks. I can't see one without thinking of the other, and I just...don't want to think about it." Mary answered, smiling.

"That's good. But one thing, what are you and Lily going to do when you have to see them in detention?"

Mary's smile faltered. That was not something she had thought of.

Chapter 24

Lily walked languidly toward the Great Hall. She had just went back upstairs, to dress for the day, after returning from Pomfrey's. Caradoc had offered to wait for her, and walk with her. The fact that she was so transparent in her fear of seeing James made her say no. She would have to face him eventually. Not that she was planning on putting as much care in as Mary. Mary, she saw, had been in the room, and was borrowing things, getting ready. Lily had barely pulled on her wrinkled uniform, and tossed her hair up in a messy ponytail. At least her lack of interest would make Mary look better. She would pale in comparison sitting next to her.

The thought of skipping breakfast altogether was a tempting one, but then James would know he was the reason, and she didn't want him to think she was off somewhere, miserable because of him. So lost in her thoughts she was, she didn't see the person coming directly around the corner.

Books scattered everywhere, and Lily rushed into an apology. "I'm so sorry, I didn't see you there. Here let me help." she said rapidly, picking up the books, placing them back in his arms. She had barely glanced at his face.

"Thanks Lily. Its okay, happens all the time. I'm nearly invisible."

He knew her name. Well, she was head girl, and she had been dating the captain of the Quidditch team. Meaning, she supposed, she was popular enough to have strangers know her name. She peered up at him, he was starting to rise to his feet. He seemed familiar.

The boy shifted the books all to one arm, extending the other to help her up. "Thank you." she said, gazing at him. He was not very tall, only about an inch above her, slight in build, not attractive, but not exactly ugly either. His eyes were dark, his skin pale, his hair in need of a cut, the black strands falling into his face.

"Bertram Aubrey?" she asked, it finally clicking. James and Sirius had once made his head grow to twice its normal size—the offense being that he was Slytherin. He was a fifth year, and had no reason to be in that part of the school.

"Yeah. Your boyfriend once almost blew up my head."

"Not my boyfriend. We broke up." she stated. "I'm really sorry for what he did, by the way. I know it was a long time ago, but—"

"Not your fault. You weren't there to keep him in line." he cut in, smiling softly.

"I think you give me too much credit." she said, smiling back. It was refreshing, to have a normal conversation. And the fact that it happened to be about James, and coming from someone who disliked him as much as she did, had absolutely nothing to do with it.

"No, I think a girl like you could keep a guy in line."

Lily felt a blush rising in her cheeks. Was he flirting with her?
"No, no, I didn't mean to offend you. It's just, you seem so nice. I've seen you around, you're always trying to help. You seem like a good person is all I'm saying," he said, seeing her face, going red himself.
"Oh, erm, thank you." she stammered. "Can I ask why you're here?" she said, blushing again. She hoped it didn't seem to rude.
"Yeah, it isn't normally where you would find a Slytherin. I have a cousin, he's a Gryffindor. I was heading to the library, when I remembered he had one of my books I need to return."
"Oh, well, I think you may be to late. The common room is cleared. No one to let you in." she answered, then continued, "But, really, a cousin in our house? I thought it was only in rare cases families were separated."
"That's mostly siblings. My parents, my mum, she was a pure blood Slytherin, my dad was a muggleborn Gryffindor. Her family was mad at her, nearly disowned her, but then, her sister, my aunt that is, she met my dad's best mate, who was also a Gryffindor-" he started.
"And she fell in love. And so, you ended up in the same house as your mum, and your cousin the same as his dad." Lily finished.
"Yep. But my uncle was a half-blood, not a muggleborn, so my grandparents like my aunt best. They were kinda big on bloodlines, but they were willing to accept their daughters choices."
Lily found it was strange, she had one conversation with this boy, and she knew all about his family, where she had dated James, and they had barely discussed his. Of course, the topic of family was mostly avoided, with Sirius and Caradoc's feelings to consider.
"Do you need help carrying those, they look sort of heavy." Lily offered.
"I wouldn't want to take your time-"
"No, really, I'm avoiding someone. And like you said, I like to help." she said, taking a little less than half of the stack. She would let him have the bigger stack, in case he had the classic male ego problems.
"Thanks Lily."
Lily had a feeling she was going to like Bertram.

--
Mary walked into the Great Hall, well aware of the looks that were being shot her way. She looked damn good, and she knew it. All she needed to complete her ensemble was a good piece of arm candy. Scanning her eyes around, she decided she would try Hufflepuff. Ravenclaws were to intellectual, she didn't want someone she would have to have long conversations with. Slytherins were out of the question, she was muggleborn. And one of her own house would be around to often.
Her eyes skimmed, and she saw a good looking sixth year get out of his seat. She strolled over to him easily. "Hi, I'm Mary."
The boy glanced over at her, sweeping his eyes across her. "I'm Gilderoy. Gilderoy Lockhart."
Mary glanced quickly over toward where she knew Sirius would be sitting. As she thought, he was watching her. "You want to go for a walk?" she asked, putting on her best flirty smile.
"Sure. I know this great spot I can show you. One time when I was there..."
Mary let his words drone on, and linked her arm through his, not really listening.
--
"Look at her. Walking away with that wanker. She probably thinks that it will make me jealous. Like I'd ever be jealous. I wonder who he is. Ugly isn't he?" Sirius ranted.
"Sirius, we do not know if he is a wanker. We've never met him." James said, fighting not to laugh.
"That was an interesting choice of clothing. I wonder if she'll be in trouble for not wearing her school robes." Remus speculated.
"I think she looked pretty." Peter answered, then glancing Sirius's way, quickly added, "But I think that was what she was trying to do. Make you feel bad."
"I know that." Sirius snapped. "Did you see how tight she was holding his arm?"
Remus and James exchanged looks. "Sirius do you think that you may be overreacting, just a bit-" Remus started.
"You two laugh, but if it were Lily or Dorcas-"
"Speaking of Lily, where is she this morning?" Remus cut in. Dorcas he could see, she was seated across from Alice, beside Caradoc, Emmeline on her other side. She was laughing at something Alice had said, leaning to the side into Caradoc who was laughing as well. The view was perfect, as Emmeline had bent over, burying her face in her hands, laughing, leaving nothing to block his view of her.
"Earth to Remus." James said, waving a hand in front of his face.
"What?" Remus said, jerking his eyes away.
"I was just asking if you think we could get Emmeline to talk to them for us. She's still our friend, at least, I think so." James said.
"One way to find out." Sirius replied, waving at Emmeline across the distance. She caught sight of him, and waved back, her expression bewildered. He motioned her over. She turned, and said something to Dorcas, who glanced their way, fixing him with a frosty stare, before turning around.
"That look was extremely hostile. I think it just got a lot colder in here." James said, looking at Remus sympathetically.
"It's for the best. I couldn't have kept her. What kind of relationship could we maintain, with my condition?" he answered, gazing over at her. It would be enough to know she was happy. And, it was not as if he were like James, who was losing the love of his life. She had merely been a crush, an infatuation. Not that telling himself that made it any better.
Emmeline slid into the seat beside Sirius. "What is it?"
"We're still friends right? I mean, you aren't taking sides?" James asked. Emmeline glanced at all of them, and sighed. "No, I'm not. What you did was wrong, but you know that. I'm not saying I condone it, or even understand it, but I won't stop being friends with you for it." she stopped, then continued. "I was alone, and all of you kind of took me in, made me feel welcome."
"Does that mean you'll help us win back Mary and Lily and Dorcas?" Sirius asked hopefully.
"Not a chance." Emmeline answered, then she paused. "Sirius, I don't think Mary will forgive you. Lily, she may come around, eventually, at least enough to one day be friends again, but Mary..."
"Just friends?" James echoed.
"Not ever?" Sirius asked.
"What about Dorcas?" Remus questioned.
"Oh, Dorcas, she'll be the easiest. I mean, I wouldn't go expecting to get back together or anything, but I think she won't mind being friends. She'll see you did what you thought was right, not stabbing your friends in the back. Lily and Mary will probably forgive you too. And you Peter."
Remus carried his gaze over to Dorcas, her and the other were getting up, ready to walk out. Alice and Frank were hand in hand, oblivious to the world. Caradoc had dropped a friendly arm around her shoulder, and she was still smiling.
"She seems happy." Remus concluded.
"She is happy. Mostly. She has her friends, and Caradoc's doing a good job of distracting her. I guess he's gotten good, at finding ways to block unhappy thoughts." Emmeline replied, following his gaze.
"I'm going to go find Lily. See if I can talk to her." James declared.
"I don't think that would be such a good idea. You need to give her time to cool down." Emmeline advised.

I know. But you know, I need to see how she acts. See how far I have to go.” he replied, hoping up, walking away. Emmeline thought it was incredibly stupid, having her be their look into the female psyche, then ignoring her.

“His life is in serious danger, isn't it?” Sirius asked.

“It's Lily, what do you think?”

No one had to comment on that. They would all have to hope for the best.

Lily was unaware of how much time had passed, sitting there in the library. She had already missed her chance to grab breakfast. Bertram was remarkably easy to talk to, a great listener. And, he was pretty interesting himself. She had found out he was an artist, and that he once had a crush on Alice, back in his first year, (he had seen her from afar, and fallen in love, so he said) and that he had an irrational fear of squirrels, (the result of an incident when he was five, that he didn't want to talk about) and, most importantly, that he had nothing in common with James.

Which, was enough to make him a winner in her books. She found him sweet, and awkwardly charming.

“Bertram, look at the time. I have to run. This was nice. Maybe we'll see each other around.”

“Yeah, that would be cool. My cousin, the one I was telling you about, were hanging out this Saturday, want to come?” he asked.

“Um, I can't. I have detention Saturday. And every Saturday the rest of the year.” she said, wincing as she said it. All that lost time, all that time forced to be with James.

She had expected him to question it, but he didn't. “That's harsh. Maybe some other time.”

“Yeah, I'd love to.”

The thought hit that, “yeah, I'd love to.” was the sort of answer one would give to someone asking for a date, and that was not what she had in mind. But he was asking her to go, to hang out with him and his cousin, so it could not be like that. Could it?

“This isn't...I mean, it isn't ah, like a um-” she started, unsure of how to go about it tactfully.

“A date?” he finished, grinning. He seemed amused by her nervousness.

“Yeah. That.”

“Only if you want it to be.” he answered.

“You seem like a nice guy. A really nice guy. But, I just came out of a relationship, and it didn't end pretty. I've only been single a day. I wouldn't want to rebound, that only hurts everyone involved.” she explained.

“I can understand that. But you can never have to many friends right?”

“Right. I think we'll make good friends Bertram.”

They both stood at the same time. “You want me to walk you back?” he offered.

“No, its out of your way.”

“Thought you might want to not be alone. In case the ex ambushes you.” he replied.

“I can handle him.” she said, an edge to her voice, angry just thinking of it.

“I know. That's what worries me.”

She laughed at his words. The laughter quickly died, as she saw James entering the library. “Oh no.”

“Want me to punch him?” Bertram offered.

“No, I'll do it myself.” she said back.

“Lily!”

Lily folded her arms, waiting for James to approach. “Anything you have to say, I don't want to hear.”

“Lily, I'm sorry, for everything, you have to believe that. It was only a joke, then things got out of hand-”

“Oh, so I was only a joke?” she snapped.

“No. Of course not. I loved you. Love you. If you would let me explain-” he tried again.

“Explain what? That you lied to me? That you did something you knew could hurt me and my best friend, even though you claim to love me? You weren't there, you didn't see Mary last night. I can see you making some stupid bet over me, half the school was betting on whether we would end up together. But you pulled her into this, and that's something I will never forgive.”

James seemed to realize they had an audience, noticing Bertram. “Whose he?”

“You mean you don't recognize him?” Lily scorned.

“Oh, you're that guy who me and Sirius...sorry about that. It was all for a laugh.” James said, ready to turn his attention back to Lily.

“Really funny.” Bertram replied dryly.

James looked between them, hoping that what he was seeing was not the start of a romance. Not someone else with his Lily.

“Lily, we need to talk.”

“No James, we don't.” she answered, turning to walk away. “Bertram, you still want to give me that walk?”

“Sure Lily.”

The glare James was giving Bertram would have killed, if looks could kill. Lily reached out, and grabbed him by the hand, pulling him along. It was more of a “hurry the hell up and lets get out of here” gesture, than a romantic one, but James did not see it that way.

For the first time in his life, he was looking forward to detention.

Chapter 25

Avoidance.

There were five definitions for it in the dictionary, including becoming vacant, the act of dismissal or withdraw, and the act of shunning.

Exactly which of these Lily and Mary were doing, they were unclear, but one thing was for sure, they were definitely avoiding James and Sirius.

However, like most things, this had to come to an end. Saturday came, and detention, which started at the same time class would have started, and lasted the entire length of a school day, rolled around. But, if there was to be war, they would not go unprepared.

“So, I have mine and Gil's relationship cemented. He adores me. Well, he adores himself, and I pretend to listen when he talks, which is all he requires. And all I require is that he is hot enough to annoy he-who-shall-not-be-named. It's a beautiful relationship really, we're both only using each other. He wants to look good, and have someone to nod and smile. I want to make he-who-shall-not-be-named cry.” Mary said, applying the final touches to her make-up.

Lily wasn't sure who actually wore make-up to detention, much less the short shorts Mary was wearing, but if that was what she wanted. “How do I look?”

“Simply stunning. Can you speed up?” Lily grumbled. Alice and Dorcas had already left, off to wake up Frank and Caradoc.

“I hinted a touch of sarcasm there. Are you really wearing that?” Mary asked, turning to wrinkle her nose at Lily's outfit. She was in sweats and a tank top. It was her sleeping time, so she was wearing clothes that she could be sleeping in.

“Whats wrong with it?”

“Well, at least he won't think you're trying. That's good. And I think I like your plan better. Bertram looks like he could be an actual boyfriend. I should have went with an average joe.” Mary said, finally ready to leave.

“It isn't a plan. We're just friends.” Lily defended.

“Right. If you say so.” Mary answered grinning.

Mary, I think the whole get back to Sirius thing is affecting you. You've lost the ability to turn off your inner bitch that you usually save for him." Lily replied, walking out the door.

"Someone needs their coffee." Mary chirped. She had endured years of morning verbal abuse, and Lily actually had a point for once.

"Do you think they'll be there yet?" Dorcas asked, surprising Lily by hoping out from around the corner.

"Dorcas!"

"Sorry," she quipped. "Alice and Frank are on their way. Caradoc may take longer. I flung back his covers to wake him up. Did you know he sleeps in his boxers? Boxers that have little teddy bears on them. Cute, really. And utterly embarrassing."

Lily shook her head, that was not the image she wanted in her mind that early in the morning. Or, any time at all.

"So, what did he say? Did he scream at you seeing him? Was it funny?" Mary pressed.

"No, he just looked at me, groaned, and asked for five more minutes. Thats when I started teasing him about the teddys." Dorcas answered.

Lily let the conversation fade out. She had to think of happier things. Like when it would all be over.

—

The hallway was not really a dirty hallway. It was just one that had not been cleaned in awhile. Likely due to that it liked to relocate itself occasionally. And that it happened to have some very deep set in stains in the floor.

None of which, should have been a problem, except the were told they were cleaning it all the muggle way. Which ensured that it would take all day.

Minerva had left them alone, having other things to do. Apparently, there had been some big fight, which involved a Slytherin boy defiling a Gryffindor boys Hufflepuff sister. In any case, the said Slytherin had a broken nose, the other boy a broken wrist, and the sister a late period.

Nothing to stir up the gossip like a possible pregnancy.

They had divided naturally. James, Sirius, Peter and Remus had taken one side, Lily, Mary, Dorcas and Alice the other. Caradoc and Frank were in the middle, acting as a human blockade of sorts. No one spoke for awhile, waiting for their teacher to return.

When it was clear she would not, the invisible line they had drew, which Frank and Caradoc were straddling disappeared. Frank and Caradoc had went farther down, Alice and Dorcas following. Peter and Remus had kept their careful distance, but of course, for the other two it was impossible.

"Mary."

Mary ignored the boy behind her, returning her sponge to the bucket, continuing to scrub at a difficult spot. "Mary, I really am sorry about what happened. It was never meant to go so far. Have you say yes, make sure you wouldn't feel bad about not seeing me again after the one date. Not a problem considering you hated me, and we would have went on with life."

Mary flinched, biting back the urge to slap him again. "Get away from me now."

"Mary—"

She threw down the sponge, water sloshing over the side of the bucket. "I don't want to hear your excuses. You lied to me. I was nothing more than some object to you."

"You weren't an object. I cared about you." he argued.

"Right, you cared. But, before you started caring, I was nothing. And if you hadn't started caring, I would still be nothing to you. You used me, for some stupid wager you and Potter thought would be amusing." she snarled, turning back, scrubbing at the floor viciously.

"Mary, come on, you can't stay mad forever." he pleaded, gripping her wrist to stop her furious movements.

Mary glared at his hand, appalled. She couldn't stay mad? Well, she would shoe him mad. He had just better be glad they had had their wands taken. She yanked her arm away, then took the sponge and threw it at him. The proximity assured she wouldn't miss.

"Throwing a sponge at me? If thats what makes you feel better, throw every damn sponge in the room at me. I don't care."

Mary smiled at him. "I was just getting it out of the way."

"Out of the way for what?" he asked, confused. There was something scary about that smile..

"For this." she answered brightly, rising to her feet and dumping her bucket of soapy water over his head.

She turned her back on him, walking away, when she felt something hit between her shoulder blades. Something soft and wet.

She spun around. "I cannot believe you threw a sponge at me!"

"You poured a bucket of water on me!"

"This shirt is white, if it gets wet, its see-through!"

Both glared at each other. Why he had to go and fall for the most annoying, mentally unstable girl in the entire school, he was unsure of, but she was driving him mad.

"Why won't you just listen to me?" he tried.

"Because theres nothing you can say that would change the way I feel." she said back, crossing her arms.

By now, the others, minus Lily and James, who were off having their own arguments, were watching.

"I'm not asking you to forgive me, I'm only asking you not to hate me."

That was unnerving. She hadn't expected him to say something like that. It wasn't fair. "It's too late for that." she said coldly, turning her back to him.

"You can't just walk away from me." he cried.

"Watch me." she called back.

"Mary, you know what you mean to me, it isn't just every girl I let get away with dumping dirty water on me."

"And it isn't every guy who drives me to dump buckets of water on him." she retorted.

"Just give up. She isn't going to change her mind." Dorcas called.

"Leave her alone." Alice added.

"Really, I would let her be. And I'm not just saying that because Alice wants me to." Frank spoke.

"Hey, where did Lily and James get to?" Caradoc said, stopping everyone else from continuing the conversation. For which, Sirius was very grateful. He felt like he was being ganged up on. Not that his dear friends Moony and Wormtail had bothered to defend him, they would be hearing about that later...

"I think Lily and James walked off around the corner to talk. At least, thats what James had in mind. Lily didn't seem to happy, but she walked with him." Remus said.

"At least she didn't bring a bucket." Peter replied. Sirius glared at him.

"We should go and get her, before he does something stupid." Mary said.

"No, we should let them work it out. They'll have to eventually, they are they heads. They have to talk to each other." Frank suggested.

"Five minutes, then I'm going to get her." Mary said, frowning.

The next five minutes were the longest of her life.

—

"What was it you wanted?" Lily snapped, as soon as she and James were around the corner. She had only walked away with him to get it over with. She knew it would have to happen sooner or later.

"Whats going on with you and Bertram?" he demanded.

"Thats all?!" she cried in disbelief. "You led me back here to talk about that?"

"Are you going out with him?"

She rolled her eyes. "No, I am not going out with him. We're hanging out tomorrow, as friends."

"Right. As friends. A greasy little Slytherin who you saw is your friend, who obviously fancies you. Sorry, but I've already seen how this story ends." she snapped.

"Don't you dare compare Bertram to him. It's different. We are just friends, and he does not fancy me, and if he does, I'd rather it be him than you. Just because he's Slytherin doesn't make him bad." she argued. It was low of him, to use that against her anyway.

"What about our meetings, will we still be having those? Or will you be too busy with your new 'friend' to make it?"

"What you stop being a jealous pig?" Lily snapped. "Yes, we'll still have our meetings, because being able to protect ourselves from Death Eaters is more important than avoiding you. Not that we've had that many anyway."

"Then when is our next one, since you've all been avoiding us like the plague?" James asked.

"We can start having them on Sundays. That means tomorrow. We can meet in the common room, let's say at seven."

"Okay."

"Okay," she repeated.

"Fine," he said.

"Fine."

"Okay."

Lily wrung her hands in her hair and moaned. "We are not having one of those arguments. I will not stand here and say fine and okay for the next ten minutes. So let's just get the required fuck you and fuck you too out of the way."

"I wouldn't talk to you like that Lily."

"Yes you would. But it doesn't matter, because I am leaving. I am going back to do what we are supposed to do. You can do whatever you want, just stay away from me."

He sighed. So it was back to the raw hatred again. It was like starting everything all over. He hated it.

"Lily wait, I don't want us to be like this." She stopped, turning to look at him.

"That's too bad James, because that's the way we are, and the way we'll stay. It was your choice to be like this." she said, turning back around.

"Do you think I wanted this? I didn't choose this."

"Your actions have consequences, maybe it's time you learned that." she replied, her tone clipped. He caught up to her, catching her by the wrist.

"Lily, I wanted to tell you, I did."

"But you didn't," she hissed, yanking her wrist away.

"I know, and I'm sorry. Really sorry. I never meant to hurt you, or anyone. I love you, I've always loved you. I wasn't thinking," he pleaded. He almost wanted to throw out that it was not his idea, it was Sirius's for the stupid bet in the first place, but that would be a betrayal, even though he was sure she knew that much already. And, she would only see it as a childish attempt to shift the blame.

"Leave me alone," she snapped, spinning around again. She wanted things to be different, she did. But they couldn't be. They never would be. And she couldn't go back in time, and undo things. And neither could he.

"Emmeline, she said that maybe one day, you would forgive me enough to be friends."

Lily felt a shift of anger in her from James to Emmeline. She would have to talk to her later, she knew she was only trying to help, but still. "We can't be friends. You're in love with me. And I'll never be with you. Friendships like that don't work."

"But you're still in love with me too. You're just too mad to see that," he argued, causing her to turn and face him again. There was a good five feet between them, and from across the distance he could see that her eyes were glassy, she looked almost as if she would cry.

She looked tired, and worn. Her sparkle was gone, and she no longer looked like his Lily. He had never wanted to comfort her so bad, but he was the one who hurt her.

"It doesn't matter," she said softly.

"It doesn't matter? You're admitting that you are, and that it doesn't matter? It's the only thing that matters," he argued, crossing the distance to her stopping directly in front of her, gripping her arms as she tried to turn around again, preventing her from turning her back to him.

"A lot of people I love have left me down. Why should you be any different?" she said, and suddenly, she was like that day in his room, she wasn't hugging her knees, but she might as well have been curled in the same ball. And what was worse was that it was all his fault, he was just like every other person she loved that had hurt her.

"Lily, I will not give up on you. I will find a way to get you back, even if it is only as my friend. I can't see my life without you in."

Her eyes changed, and she looked scared, not sad. "I can't be near you," she whispered.

"Why not?"

"Because..." she trailed, unsure how to answer without letting him know just how much he still affected her, how much she still cared for him.

He couldn't look at her, not with that pain in her eyes. He let her arms go, his hands reaching to her face, resting his forehead against hers. "Always Lily, remember that. I'll be here waiting. I'll never stop loving you."

Chapter 26

She was running. Running through a dark corridor, and she did not know where she was, until suddenly, the scene around her changed, and she was near the tree, the one that led to the Shrieking Shack, the one where that near fatal event had occurred.

There was James, and also Sirius, with Mary standing nearby, frozen in front of it, as a snarling beast was coming out. Stranger still, there was Snape, and Bertram, Bertram near Mary, trying to pull her away, calling her name. Which, Lily found odd, as he had never met Mary, save for passing her once in the halls.

Snape was near the beast, the werewolf, and he was about to be attacked. But she had heard how this ended, hadn't she? James had saved him.

"James, do something!" she shouted, to far away to be of help. But he did not move, he did nothing. "Snape, get out of the way, run!" she screamed.

"I don't need help from a mudblood."

"See Lily, I told you all Slytherins are bad." James said, an eerie smile on his face. Sirius pushed Snape into the werewolf, who went to attack, and Lily could not bear to see, and turned to face Bertram, to beg him to help, but saw he was wearing the same smile as James, and pushed Mary forward as well. "Mary!"

"Oh, don't worry, you'll be with her soon Lily. All mudbloods have to die. You all have to pay." a voice behind her whispered, and she turned, seeing Regulus Black, a shrill scream escaping her throat as she turned and ran.

Then, she was a ten year old girl again, running home, to see Snape and Petunia arguing. Of course, Petunia was the one who was being mean, she always was, but Lily had to defend her.

"Leave her alone!"

"Avada Kervada!"

And Petunia was on the ground dead, and she was screaming, running to her body, sobbing her name. Petunia's hands reached up and gripped her

neck, choking her, and Lily broke free running, only to exit and see a dark mark in the sky. She was seventeen again, and there was a battle raging, and they were loosing and there was James, covered in blood, and broken, walking near her. "Lily."

He was dead. Dead dead dead. And he was reaching for her, twining there hands, pulling her to him in an inescapable embrace. Then there was pain, a deep pain in her chest, and she looked down to see her heart, still beating, dripping blood in his hand.

He ripped it in half. He ripped her heart in half. Lily screamed.

Lily shot up in bed, screaming. Only seconds later, three girls were at her bedside.

"Lily are you alright?" Mary asked. "Whats wrong?" Alice said. "What happened?" Dorcas demanded.

"Nothing just a nightmare." Lily said, breathing hard. She hoped she didn't dream anymore.

—

They thought she was back asleep again, but she wasn't. Lily could hear every word they were saying.

"I haven't seen her like this since fifth year." Mary spoke, her tone hushed.

"The Snape incident?" Dorcas questioned.

"What else?" Alice replied. "Never liked him you know."

"Me either, but this is worse than that. I heard her last night, she was crying in her sleep." Mary said.

"I don't know what to do. I'm scared she's going to become withdrawn, fade out." Alice said, barely above a whisper.

"I know. This is bad. She became a shell, after everything. First Snape, then her sister. She was...broken. I'm afraid she's going to become that again. I remember, she didn't eat, she didn't sleep, she was so vacant." Mary spoke, and the worry in her voice did something to calm Lily's anger that they were talking about her.

"Lily's too strong to break down." Dorcas assured.

"She is strong, but she-I mean she woke up screaming, thats a sign that whatever is going on inside her head is not good." Mary argued.

"Maybe she should talk to someone." Alice suggested.

"But who? Not one of us, or she already would. Maybe this Bertram guy will be good for her." Dorcas said.

"Maybe. But what about you two? How are you handling this, with Sirius and Remus?" Alice asked.

"Anger is my friend now. Its easier. But, obviously, I am not handling it." Mary said, forcing a laugh.

"He betrayed us. I mean, sure, I liked him, but it isn't like I was planning on riding off into the sunset with him or anything. I'm fine. He's fine. We're both fine." Dorcas answered.

"Dorcas..."

"Really Alice, I'm cool." Dorcas said, hearing Alice's tone.

"Dorcas, if you want to forgive him, we'll understand. I'm sure in his mind he was only doing what was right." Mary said.

"Yeah well, it wouldn't have worked anyway. Its like he was always keeping some big secret from me. I mean, I guess he was, with what happened with Sirius and James, but if he's capable of that kind of deceit, how can I ever trust him?"

That Lily thought, was a very good question. How could any of them ever trust again?

—

It was stupid really. Like she needed a babysitter. Of course, since she was meeting Bertram in the library, and Dorcas was headed to the library, it was only natural that she walk along. Nothing really.

Except, Dorcas didn't really need the library, she always waited until the last minute to do her work. And, Lily did not need a chaperon. Which was apparent, by the way she walked into the library, not looking back, letting the door fall shut behind her.

Dorcas rolled her eyes, walking in, mostly for show, and grabbed a few books. Her Care of Magical Creatures class had a project to do, researching any magical creature they chose. Of course, most of the good ones, or easy ones got snatched up first, so she was left with slim pickings.

There weren't many books on her topic, but she found a few, and scurried out the door, after glancing over to see for sure that Lily was in Bertram's care. She found Mary's worries to be a bit extreme, and the sudden maternal like need to shelter Lily more a way to avoid her own problems than anything.

But, she had never denied her friends were crazy.

Someone else whirling around the corner bumped into her, making her drop her books, which were all carried in the bumped arm. "Hey, watch where you're going." she snapped. She couldn't fathom why anyone would want to run to the library, of all places. All the good stuff was restricted.

"Dorcas?"

She froze. "Remus?"

He walked over to her, picking up one of her books that skidded farther away, glancing at the cover.

"Why are you researching werewolves?"

"Care of Magical Creatures. We have a project. I wanted vampires, but they were taken." she answered, taking the book back.

"So..." there was an awkward pause, as he thought of what to say. "How have you been?" he finally settled for.

His nervousness made her want to giggle, because it was so Remus. But, they were past that point, and she had always bounced back from break-ups fairly quickly. No point crying over spilled milk.

"I've been good. How 'bout you?"

"I've been better." he said honestly, smiling at her. Her lips twitched up a little in a smile back. "But, I want to take this chance to apologize. I was stuck between two places, telling you, which would have been right, or protecting my friends, which also was right."

"I don't think there was anything right about it. The entire situation was wrong." Dorcas said.

"I know, but, in their way, they do care. And, you know Sirius, he never means to hurt anyone." Remus defended weakly.

"Yet he so often does. And James, I know he loves her, or whatever, but she doesn't need him. She wants to be happy, and she can't with him getting in the way." Dorcas replied thoughtfully.

"Or, she could simply forgive him, and things could return to normal."

"That isn't an option." she said back, then smiled. "Besides, when were things ever normal with any of us?"

"Good point." he replied softly.

Both fell into step, walking along in uncharacteristic silence, surprisingly content. Until Remus felt he had to speak. "Dorcas?"

"Yeah?"

"Are you- What I mean is, will you ever forgive me? I would understand if you chose not to, but I do miss having you as a friend."

They stopped walking, Dorcas (out of a force of habit) starting twirling the streak of pink hair around her finger. "Undecided." she answered after a moment, turning and walking away. He watched her walk away, when after she reached a good distance, turned back, and waved.

While he still had a way to go, it was a start.

—

Lily bent over the book with Bertram, the light starting to fade behind them. Their spot by the lake was peaceful, and they were not disturbed for most of the day.

Bertram, really, this is amazing.”

“It isn't the good.” he said back modestly.

Lily's eyes roamed the picture of her, that he had idly started sketching earlier. It was now complete. “You made me far to pretty.” she said back.

“Don't be silly, you're beautiful. You keep it, as a gift. It would have been better in color, pencil can't really capture your eyes.”

Lily glanced over at him, very close together in the fading light. There was a blush on her cheeks that she was sure he could not see. “Thank you.”

“I think you're my new muse. You inspire me.” he said simply. And for him, that did not have to mean anything more than it meant, it could have romantic implications, but she was not sure. Her experience was limited. (Oddly, when a girl has a best friend of the opposite gender the first five years of school, it tended to scare boys away, and when the Quidditch captain showed interest, all hope was lost for the other contenders.)

Still, she was unsure of whether Bertram did or did not have feelings for her, and she did not want to lead him on. But, she did not want to hurt his feelings either.

“Is that a good thing?” she asked hesitantly.

“Of course it is. The best thing. I've never had a girl be my muse. Well, not one who actually talks to me. Usually if it's a girl, it's one I've never spoken to.”

That had her shifting uncomfortably. “Why am I your muse?”

“Because art is about expression, emotion; and you're like a rainbow of emotions. You're face, the way you tilt your head, or smile, your eyes.” he answered.

“If that's all it takes I'll be sure to find you a line of damaged girls. Maybe you could draw me and Mary together, and add Emmeline for effect.” she responded.

“I didn't mean to-”

“You didn't. It's just...hard you know. Have you ever been in love?” she asked, not liking how close they were, because it would be so easy to misuse her affection for him, to transfer her feelings for James over, and pretend he could be the same for her, out of nothing more than general fondness and amiable companionship.

She lay flat on her stomach instead, not to have to lean so close, to have her face so close to his. It only served to remind that while she could certainly care for someone else, her heart would always be the one place she didn't want it.

With James.

Bertram adjusted, laying beside her, his arm brushing against hers. Lily thought that was okay, because it reminded her of times long ago, of her and her sister, lying out in the sun. She had always burnt, while Petunia would tan. But it also reminded her of lying in the shade talking about her future with a boy who would never be part of it.

“I think so. Once. I mean, I don't know. They didn't love me back.”

Lily tilted her head, looking at him inquiringly. She would have to remember, he was two years below her, and his romances were just beginning.

“There was this girl. The most beautiful girl in the world. I saw her, while on vacation. She had blond hair, and green eyes—nothing like your eyes, hers were more of this light color, the sort that reminded you of summer. Her nose was a bit too short for her face. She was flawed, but she was the prettiest girl I had ever seen. She was with a group of kids, it was at the fair, she was laughing with them, and gave one a toy she had won. Her laugh sounded like bells.” he stopped, blushing, seeing Lily gazing at him intensely.

“Go on.” she urged.

“She was in white, white shorts and shirt, and sandals. She turned, and the sun hit her, and she smiled at me, and waved. I loved her that moment, I never would have had to know her. I talked to her, about stupid things, small talk, but she made everything so interesting. I never caught her name. I never forgot her.” he finished.

Lily was smiling at him. “Bertram Aubrey, who would have known, a hopeless romantic.”

“I'm just hopeless.”

“No you aren't, you'll find the right girl, I promise.” she assured.

“You think so?” he asked.

“I do.”

“Lily, didn't you have some sort of meeting to get to? It's seven thirty.” Bertram announced, having seen the time on his watch.

“Oh no! I'll be late. I have to go.” she said, jumping up.

“Lily wait, I'll walk you. It isn't safe for you to walk around alone, not with the Death Eaters and all.” he said, falling into step beside her.

She let him walk her, because it would be simpler than arguing. Once they reached near the common room, unaware that James had just stepped out, ready to go find her, worried something had happened, Lily on impulse leaned over and placed a kiss on Bertram's cheek.

“Thanks for putting up with a crazy girl like me. It takes something to hear a girl go on about her ex. You've been really great.”

James had already stepped back inside by the time she had turned around, and she could not understand just why he was so furious when she walked in.

Chapter 27

“Where have you been?”

Lily glanced over toward James, who seemed extremely angry for some reason. Maybe she was late, but punctuality had never been his friend either.

“Sorry. It isn't like you're known for being on time either.”

“I need to talk to you.” he hissed, taking her by the arm, a bit roughly, and leading her out in the hall.

“What?” she snapped jerking her arm away. She had seen Mary rise to follow them, along with Alice. Maybe they would come and this conversation could be avoided.

“What were you doing all this time?” he demanded.

“I was with Bertram, we lost track of time. What is the matter with you?” she answered crossly.

“You were off with Bertram, doing who knows what, and we were all sitting here, worried something had happened.” he snapped.

“I didn't mean to worry anyone, I'll apologize to them all when we get back inside. Can we go now?” she bit back angrily.

“What were you and him doing anyway, that made you lose track of time?” he asked. Lily was appalled at the accusation in his voice.

“We were talking. That's all.” she said. As if she needed to defend herself to him.

“I saw you in the hallway.”

Lily blinked, wondering what he was talking about. She had said goodbye to him, was he going on due to one kiss? A kiss given more in a sisterly fashion at that.

“What you saw was perfectly innocent, not that you have any right to be mad if it were not. I can treat my friends in any way I choose.”

With that, she turned ready to head back inside. How she could deal with him the rest of the year she wouldn't know. She would lose her mind. He drove her stark raving mad.

His hand on her shoulder stopped her, and he spun her around, facing him. The proximity was uncomfortable, too familiar, too close. Lily took a step back, her back brushing the wall, he taking another step forward, sufficiently trapping her.

Her heart pitched, beating faster in her chest, her breaths coming uneven. Being so close to him sent a pull of warmth through her, causing her body to tingle. It took all her will and strength to remain impassive, as if her hormones were not raging inside her, as if her lips were not tingling in anticipation.

neither spoke for a minute, only looking at the other. Wordlessly, he lifted a hand, and traced a finger along her jaw. Just the lightest touch sent sensations rolling through her, shivers tumbling down her spin.

"Perfectly innocent?" he repeated. He had to be sure. Lily had no reason to lie to him. She wouldn't have anyway. It would have made more sense to lie and say they were something, than to lie and say they were not. But, Lily was not a liar, and she would never hurt anyone, even him, after the way he had hurt her.

"Perfectly," she answered, beginning to regain some coherent thoughts. She had to move away from him. She had to cool down. It was essential that she should be far away, somewhere where her body could not override her mind.

She started to slide past him, her body brushing his, again sending tingles she wished she did not have, when he caught her arm. She stopped moving, looking up at him. He released his grip on her arm, sliding his fingers down her skin, until he had her hand in his.

She glanced down at their twined fingers, and back at him, tugging them free. The urge to touch him was so overpowering, she placed her hands at her sides, flat on the wall, leaning the top half of her body against it, her legs slightly in front of her.

It was to make space between them, but she saw the err of her plans only seconds later, when his hands found her hips, stepping forward, so that the lower part of her was flush against him. He tugged her forward, her hands never leaving the wall, his lips near hers.

Lily found her eyes fluttering closed, much against her will, but she didn't care so much anymore. Desire was fluid, running inside her, hot and spreading. But she could not yield to the temptation. She would not. Her hands tightened their grip on the wall.

She would not kiss him, but she could hardly stop him from kissing her. That was what she had decided. If he kissed her, then she would, if only for a second, kiss him back. Then she would pull away, say something cruel and callous, and go inside.

He murmured her name, his lips almost on hers, when someone calling her name broke them apart. Or, precisely, caused her to slid away from him, and lean on the opposite wall, just as the person calling looked over at them.

"Frank?" she asked, trying to smile. Frank glanced between them, and said nothing. One thing he had learned over the years, was not to get involved in these manners. Both were his friends, and though he had chosen Lily's side, he could still feel sympathy for James. It was at Alice's request that he was currently anti-James, as well as anti-Sirius.

But, he knew love was a complicated thing, and that people often hurt one another. However, he thought it had to survive, and to forgive, if it was true. Besides himself and Alice, he did not think he had ever seen two people who belonged together so much. So, James was a bit of a dunderhead. Men often were in dealing with the fairer sex, as he knew from his own experience.

"We were wondering what was taking so long. Are you coming?"

"Yes, we were just about to go back in." Lily answered, shooting James a furtive glance.

"Right. Lets go, can't keep them waiting." James responded, walking behind Lily and Frank.

Mary's eyes were on him in a second, giving him a look of pure loathing. James felt very accomplished, that was the sort of look he thought only Sirius capable of earning from her. It seemed he had been rewarded with all of Lily's friends hating him.

Which was evident by the obvious split in the room, with he and his friends on side, Lily, Mary, Alice and Dorcas on another, and Frank, Emmeline, and Caradoc in the middle.

"Lets get to the Great Hall already." James snapped. That was where they had agreed to go, the Room of Requirements was always up for debate, but they didn't want to scare anyone, if it was seen they were missing. They wouldn't be able to be found there.

Everyone filed out behind him, until they reached their destination. Lily, he noted, stayed as far from him as possible.

"So, what are we doing tonight?" Emmeline asked. She had not been coming along to these as often as the others, being relatively new to the group.

"We're dueling." Sirius filled in. He had not been talking much, only saying a few things earlier to Remus, who had made him aware of just what Dorcas was researching. Other than assuring that she would not figure out his secret, he had not spoken a word, only sitting in a moody silence.

Mary had been doing much the same.

"It's an odd number of people, so you can go against whoever wins when me and Dorcas duel." Lily offered.

First up was Alice and Frank, who almost always dueled each other, and since they knew each other perfectly, and could anticipate the others actions, it was always fun to watch. Alice won, which she credited to Frank's being gentle on her since her ordeal with the Death Eaters.

"Shouldn't we practice avoiding dark magic, since that is what we'll be facing?" Emmeline asked. She made a point, the others had to admit, but none of them were willing to be the ones who tried it. They could save that for later.

Lily and Dorcas were the next to go. Unlike Alice and Frank, their moves were wild and unpredictable, and the others were glad that the Great Hall offered plenty of room, with the tables moved out of the way. The Silencing Charm was much needed as well.

"I'm putting money on Evans." Sirius said, between James and Remus, who were watching in fascination.

"Me too." James answered.

"I think Dorcas can handle her." Remus argued.

"Thats because you fancy her. Evans is more skilled." Sirius said.

"Skill doesn't always matter. Dorcas is flexible. Quick on her feet." Remus argued.

"I'm with Remus on this one. Dorcas for sure." Caradoc said, coming up behind them.

"I'm sort of stuck." Frank said.

"Do you all have to sit there and argue about it. Just watch and see who wins." Mary snipped, from father back, where she was seated with the other girls. Her words lost their meaning, when she yelled out a cheer for Lily, who had successfully disarmed Dorcas.

The two girls came back, both pink in the face. Dorcas wasn't upset at losing. "I should have saw that coming from a mile away. Good fight Lily."

"You almost had me for awhile." Lily replied.

"I was rooting for you." Remus said to Dorcas.

"I can't promise I'll do the same." she said back, a grin on her face.

"So you'll be rooting for me?" Caradoc asked.

"Your own personal cheer squad." she quipped.

"Somehow I feel this is more about being against him than for me." Caradoc said, in a mock display of disappointment.

"Aw, you know I love you." she responded, stepping to his side and placing a sloppy kiss on his cheek. "There a kiss for luck. Win for me."

"Ew, Dorcas was that really necessary?" Caradoc said, wiping traces and her lip gloss of his cheek.

Suddenly, Remus had never felt more ready for a duel in his life. It was silly, to be mad about her kissing Caradoc of all people. Caradoc, who she had taken a shine to, and become over protective of. Caradoc who he had shared her with as a date to the dance. Caradoc who had lost his sister, and who Dorcas had pitied. Caradoc, who probably had by some means of transference, tried to use her to fill his loss.

"Aw, you're blushing. Thats so cute." she teased.

"Lets go." Remus said impatiently.

"I'll be sure to win for you." Caradoc called over his shoulder, to which Dorcas responded by blowing him an exaggerated kiss. Remus told himself it meant nothing, after all, hadn't she flirted with Sirius, and hadn't he ended up dating one of her closest friends?

Jealousy wasn't an emotion he felt much, despair, self-pity, lonely, every range of those sorts were close friends to him, but he usually would avoid things

as petty as envy. And envy meant hand with anger, and that was a deadly combination. The duel had barely started, and he was fighting harder than he ever had. Much of it was due to Dorcas's occasional yelled cheer for Caradoc; though part of him knew she was only doing that to see how far she could push him. If she had not been mad, she would have cheered for neither, caring for them both in equal (though he hoped opposite) ways. She would have merely congratulated the winner, and consoled the loser. It was over quickly, his sending a nonverbal spell, sending Caradoc flying backwards, and slamming into the wall. That was not exactly what he intended, he only wanted to cause him to fly off his feet, not actually slam into anything. "Ow." Caradoc moaned, holding his hand to the back of his head. His head had hit the wall, and hit it a bit hard. The hand he drew back had blood on it. "I'm bleeding."

There was a gasp, and both Mary and Emmeline were on their feet, being the best at healing. However, Dorcas had already rushed over to him, bent over, examining him closely. "Are you alright? Do you feel dizzy? Does it hurt?" she fired rapidly. "Not so much." he answered, betraying himself by wincing when she placed a hand on his injury. "Remus what the hell were you thinking? You could have really hurt him!" Dorcas scorned, sending him such an reproachful look, he had to look away, staring down at his feet. "Let one of us try." Mary called, glancing between her and Remus. Her and Emmeline seemed to sense it could be a war zone any time soon. "I think we should take him to Pomfrey, just to be sure. We can lie and say he fell." Dorcas said, eyes already averted back to the boy she was kneeling in front of. "Dorcas, I'm fine. Really. Just a cut." Caradoc argued. "It's bleeding too much to be just a cut." she argued back. "Now get up, I'll take you there." "Do I have a choice in the matter?" he asked. "Nope."

The pair headed off, Dorcas sending Remus a cold look of indignation as she passed. He called out an apology to Caradoc, who merely shrugged it off. "These things happen."

If only Dorcas would be so understanding. Not like he did it on purpose. "I think we should all go now. The part where some one needs medical attention is usually hand in hand with the time to say goodbye." Lily suggested. "We have to do rounds." James reminded Lily. "Oh, right." "Another night of uncomfortable silence, I'm guessing." he said, to which she sighed, but spoke no more. "I think its safe to say we can all be a few minutes late." Mary said. Remus nodded in agreement, then blurted, "Do you think he'll be alright?" "He'll be fine." Peter injected. "But I'd avoid Dorcas, she looked a bit upset there mate." Sirius suggested. "Oh, you're one to give romantic advice." Mary scorned. "Coming from the girl who dated a Death Eater." he shot back. "Better to date one than to be raised by them." she snapped back. "You two, enough." James broke in. At least he felt he was getting somewhere with Lily, He was afraid to leave those two alone together. One of them may not make it out alive, and he had a feeling it wouldn't be Sirius. "Can we please not discuss Death Eaters and dating or Sirius family. They're all kind of tied together for me." Emmeline said, wincing. The others all shifted their eyes. "Right, so lets go do those rounds." Alice interjected brightly, hoping to lighten the mood. "Alice, you aren't a prefect." "You're right Lily. So, all of us non prefects will head up to bed." she answered, taking Frank by the hand. Emmeline followed behind them. Hanging out in Franks room sounded better than another sleepless night. "I'm going to go see if Caradoc is alright." Remus announced. "I'll go to." Lily offered, turning back to James. "You don't mind starting without me? I'll catch up." "Go ahead." he answered, waving her off. He extended a hand to Mary. "Want to be my new partner." She shot him a dirty look. "I'll wait for Remus." "Thought so."

James walked off, leaving Mary alone with Sirius, a situation she had not thought of when she rejected James's offer. "Sorry, about what I said. You know, the whole dating a Death Eater." he said quickly. "Sorry about the remark about your family." she said back, not looking at him. She didn't want to stoop low enough to attack that. It was wrong. Awkward silence followed. "So, whose that guy I see you with?" Sirius asked, bringing Mary out of lala land. She was trying to pretend she was alone. "Gil? Oh, he's my boyfriend." she said simply. "I thought you didn't like boyfriends." "Maybe I just hadn't meet the right guy." she said back. Another silence followed. "This is stupid." Sirius spoke. Mary rolled her eyes, walking over to the fire place. She idly grabbed a poker, and shifted the mess inside. A few sparks flew, hitting her arm. "Son-of-bitch." she cursed lowly. "Did I ever tell you how cute you are when you swear?" he asked, gliding over to her, taking her arm and looking it over. "Did I ever tell you you're an ass?" "More than once." he replied, unaffected. "Why won't you go away?" she asked, frustrated. "I was hoping persistence would win you over." he said, no longer feeling moody. He liked Mary when she was like this. She was challenging. "It won't." she said sharply. Before he could answer, she added, "Remember, I'm holding a poker. That can be a deadly weapon." He rolled his eyes, and in one swift movement, had the poker from her hands and tossed over his shoulder, landing half way across the room. Mary narrowed her eyes at him. "Do you feel better now, or would you like to throw something else?" "If I remember, you're pretty fond of throwing thing yourself." he jibbed. "You deserved it." she defended. The distance between them was gradually closing. "Maybe." "Go away." "No."

They were face to face, Mary ready for a verbal war. At least, until she met his eyes. He was aware of the closeness, and he was looking at her in the way that always made her think of things hot and steamy, and R rated.

"Don't touch me." she said automatically, to which he smirked.

"I wasn't going to. Scared?" he replied.

"Disgusted." she shot back.

"I think you want me to touch you."

"I think your ego is sucking all the air from the room."

How had she gotten herself into this mess? Of course, telling a boy not to touch you made him realize you thought about his touching you, which made him realize you wanted him to. Or wanted him to, but didn't want to want it.

"I hate you." she said suddenly. But her voice didn't sound as strong as she hoped, and it seemed the time had come to stop hiding behind her anger, and face the music.

"Hmm, maybe." he said, stepping closer, forcing her to have to take a step back, or be ran into. She pressed herself into the wall. Why was it men always backed women into walls? She had always liked walls. They were nice to lean on, good to kick when one was mad.

Her opinion was starting to change.

"I do. I really do." she argued. The timing for her mental safety wall to collapse could not have been worse. She hated how weak she sounded.

His eyes were skinning over her, making her wish he would leave, just leave before she did something she would regret. She never had been good at saying no, and she had a particular weakness for him.

"I know." he answered, lifting a hand, running his fingers up her arm.

"I said not to touch me." she snapped.

"You didn't sound very convincing."

Their eyes locked, and suddenly her anger was back, stronger than ever, but with it was something else.

"You can keep saying you hate me as much as you want, but we both know theres more to it than that. You're going to have to deal with that sooner or later." he said.

"Whatever else there is could never measure up to the way I despise you." she said back, her voice hard. And she did hate him, she did, she was furious, but beneath it all there was a craving, just as strong, something raw and primitive.

Whatever it was, he saw it in her eyes. He raised both hands, resting one on either side of her, boxing her in, lowering his face near hers.

"Even so, theres something about anger-" he started.

"That makes you turned on." she finished. "The sex is always better if you want to kill each other."

That was bad Mary talking. The bad Mary that she really should keep locked away. Bad Mary was the Mary that had wanted to hop into Sirius bed in the first place. Because he was there.

His lips touched hers, and she drew back. "I have a boyfriend."

"I don't care." he murmured, bringing his lips back to hers, ravishing her mouth. Her resistance went out the window, and she kissed him back, her hands folded into his shirt, pulling them as close together as possible, her body grinding into his.

He let out an illicit moan, moving his mouth from hers, kissing his way from her neck up to her ear.

"I don't think...this is...such a good idea." Mary managed to get out.

"You think too much." he said, his breath warm on her ear.

"I still...hate...you." she breathed, moaning as he nipped at her flesh.

"I hate myself for hurting you." he answered, nearly making Mary loose her focus on not focusingBut, then his lips were back on hers, and whatever thought she had was lost, washed away in a tide of ecstasy.

It was hard and brutal, almost cruel. Whatever feelings she was acting on were black and ugly, anger and lust. She was sure she would have bruises. There was a coppery taste in her mouth that let her know one of them was bleeding, but she couldn't be sure who.

And she didn't care. She hoped it was him. She wanted to hurt him, like he had hurt her.

"Mary, are you ready to-" the question died on Remus's lips, as he walked in and saw his friends locked in an embrace.

They broke apart quickly, breathing ragged breaths, Mary red in the face. She looked humiliated, sad, angry, and scared all at the same time.

"Mary-"

Whatever Sirius had planned to say was lost, as she rushed past him and out into the hall. Remus sent him a look, and said quickly, "I'll go talk to her. Make sure she's alright. Stay here and don't do anything stupid."

Sirius let him go, falling back into a chair, glaring at long thrown aside poker. Couldn't he do anything right?

Chapter 28

"Mary, wait."

Mary stopped running, glancing over her shoulder at the boy following her. "Remus, don't. I don't need you to come help me, I don't need you to save me for him. We were friends, but you chose him, and I may be able to overlook that, for Dorcas's sake, but that doesn't mean we're friends again."

Remus chose not to comment on the part about Dorcas. Whatever could have been, it had been ruined earlier. And Dorcas deserved someone normal. He had to remember that.

"This isn't about that. Are you okay?"

She turned, and he could see that she was crying. "Does it look like I'm okay? I never used to be one of those girls who cried. Look at me now, I can cry at the drop of a hat. Everything is so messed up."

Remus cautiously walked closer to her. "I know. But things will get better."

"How do you know that?" she said, a laugh, or maybe it was a sob, caught in her voice. The hallway had never seemed quite so wide or empty. The floor below her feet had never seemed so unstable. She felt as if she were standing on a swaying bridge.

"Can you imagine them worse."

"Yeah, actually, I can." she answered. There were worse things than teenage heartbreak after all.

"What happened in there?"

"I don't know. I'm so stupid. I shouldn't have—it only makes it harder—to let him go."

Her tears had not stopped, and she added reproachfully, "But, you warned me didn't you? I should have never gotten involved."

"I did try to warn you, but that was because I knew. But I know him, and he does care for you. He is sorry, you have to believe that." Remus said gently.

"I know he's sorry. Being sorry isn't good enough. It doesn't change what happened." she cried, then added, in a hollow whisper, "I think I love him."

Then her tears were no longer silent, but loud and gushing and she found herself with her head on his shoulder sobbing. He was saying comforting things to her, that she couldn't hear over her own tears, and that she didn't want to hear.

"Why couldn't I have just fell for someone like you? Someone good, and nice, and normal." she asked, pulling away from him, trying to smile. He was being kind to her, and she could forgive him for his part in it all for that. He was only someone stuck in the middle.

He stiffened at the words normal. "You're better off. Guys like me make horrible boyfriends. Ask Dorcas."

"She is okay, you know. You know she broke your heart. Dorcas is strong, she doesn't break that easy." Mary assured him.

"She is, isn't she? But, you're strong too."

Mary shook her head. "No I'm not. I'm just good at bullshitting people into thinking so."

"How's Caradoc, by the way? You and Lily went to see him."

"Pomfrey is keeping him over night, just to be safe. I think because all that's happened in his family, she wants to take extra precautions with him." Remus explained. He didn't mention that Dorcas had barely looked at him as she explained this, and that her voice had been frosty enough to start the next ice age.

"I should stop by, and see for myself. Make them feel better."

"Them?" Remus questioned.

"Do you think Dorcas is going to leave his side? Remember when Alice was there? She only left to give her and Frank time alone, so I'm guessing she'll be right there until Pomfrey kicks her out."

"You should go ahead then. I can do the rounds alone."

"Are you sure? You shouldn't-" Mary started.

"I'll catch up with James. Then I won't be alone." he answered, before she could finish her concern.

"Okay. I'll see you later." Mary said, heading off for the hospital. For some reason, she didn't feel like going at all. That room brought back too many memories. But, she would get over it. Something told her, no matter where she went, there would always be something to make her remember.

-

Emmeline had planned on going to bed. But, then she had walked downstairs, and she had seen Sirius, looking so forlorn, sitting there, that she had to speak to him.

"Sirius?" she called hesitantly. He may not want to talk about it. She hadn't wanted to talk about her problems. She would rather bottle them up, and pretend on day that the bottle wouldn't overflow.

He barely glanced her way, but she could assume that meant he was giving her permission to intrude on his misery. "Are you alright?"

"No, probably not." he answered, smiling her way. It was a good attempt at a fake smile, she may have bought it, if she didn't have so much experience in faking them herself.

"I'm serious." she said, sitting next to him.

"No, I am."

Emmeline rolled her eyes.

"Yeah, that joke stopped being funny third year." he admitted.

"It stopped being funny before then I'm sure." she said archly.

"And she shows some spirit. That doesn't happen much. I was beginning to think you were a living dead girl."

"Don't try to avert the attention to me. It won't work."

He sighed, looking away from her, his eyes focused on the dancing fire. She didn't speak for a minute, then said, "You looked like you needed someone to talk to."

"So do you." he answered.

She tucked a piece of hair behind her ear, following his gaze to the fire. She remembered once, when she was young, she had caught a piece of paper on fire, just to watch it burn. Her mother had come in, and yelled at her to drop it.

She thought, in a lot of ways, she was still the same. She still liked to watch things burn, just because for a few moments it was pretty, for a few moments, it looked bright, and alive, with vivid color.

"Yeah, but you probably aren't the best person. Besides, I don't like talking about it. You go."

There was a pregnant pause, then he finally spoke, "It's Mary."

"What happened?" Emmeline asked.

"I kissed her."

"Oh." she said, understanding.

"Usually the next question is somewhere along the lines of 'did she kiss you back?'" Sirius said.

"Usually. But she did. And I know that already. That's what makes it worse, knowing that they still care, but that it doesn't matter anyway, because it changes nothing. It hurts more that way." she explained, then she added, ignoring the look he was giving her, "And, right now, she hates you. And I may not know a lot about love, but I do know about hate, and needs something to live off, as much as love."

She drew her legs up under her, not looking his way, staring at the fire again. "Hates the same as love, when you really get down to it, it's just the chosen path of survival, when love stops working."

Sirius had no idea what to say to that. He felt like they were on the same page somehow, but he didn't know how to comfort her, and he had never been good at those things anyway.

"I don't know what to say, to you."

"So, don't say anything." Emmeline said back softly. She realized, vaguely, that the remark could be taken out of context, but she knew that he wouldn't. He wanted Mary, and she wanted something that had never existed. He was the winner of the group, at least he hadn't fallen for an illusion.

"I stopped you from going up to bed." he said, changing the subject.

"I don't sleep anymore." she answered flatly.

He looked her way again, then said, "Yeah, me either."

"I think I'll just sit awhile, if that's okay with you." she responded, her voice still flat, and void of any real emotion.

"Stay. I want you to. I could use the company."

Both sat for the longest time, neither speaking, until finally they each drifted off into sleep.

-

The trip to see Caradoc had been wasted. He was already asleep, and Dorcas was nearly asleep as well, refusing to abandon her post by his side. Pomfrey did tell her to leave, and Mary told her that she thought she should leave as well. Dorcas reluctantly left, and Mary and her set off down the hall together.

"You should talk to Remus." Mary said, breaking the uncommon silence.

"After what he did to Caradoc?"

"Dorcas, it was an accident. You know that. Besides, when did Caradoc become such a touchy subject?, I know you've kind of tried to look out for him, with everything in his family, but he doesn't need you hovering over his shoulder all the time."

"It isn't a touchy subject. It's just...he pushed me out of the way that day. He took that curse for me, and I can't help but to think...that it had more to do with his not caring if he dies, than wanting to protect me." Dorcas explained.

That was a idea Mary had never considered. But, weren't they all a little jaded, a little unstable? "None of us want to die. Sometimes, the idea of living is hard, but I think that all of us, we really want to go on, to be okay. We just need those few minutes, of feeling weak, because if we can't sometimes let

those things out, they all come out the wrong time. Do you get what I'm saying?, I don't think I'm making sense."

Dorcas smiled over at her. "It makes sense. I get it."

"I still think you should talk to him. He was there for me earlier tonight, when I needed a friend. And maybe thats something we all need, to be there for each other. He's still there for you Dorcas."

"Maybe he is. But...I feel like something has changed. With us. More than that. There's like...theres parts of himself that he hides away, and I never bother him about it, because I think he just wants to show me his best, but if a guy can't be his whole self in front of his girlfriend, than who can he?" Dorcas explained.

Mary speculated what to say, and decided the best thing to do would be to let Dorcas figure it out herself. She sure as hell didn't have the answers. "I kissed Sirius."

"Really?" Dorcas asked, her attention shifted.

"Or, he kissed me. But I kissed him back. And Remus kind of walked in on it. Which, I'm glad for, because who knows what I would have done? And then, I left, and I cried. Again."

"It's okay to cry." Dorcas said.

"You never do." Mary pointed out.

"No, I just chain smoke until I feel better. You should cry, its better for you." Dorcas said, grinning.

"Chain smoking would make me cry. My eyes water just seeing the smoke."

"I'd stay away from the drinking. You wake up in bed with strange men that way." Dorcas suggested helpfully.

Mary smiled wryly. "Ha ha."

"You should talk to Sirius. If you're kissing him, then obviously there is something that needs to be said."

"I'm not ready for that." Mary said.

"No one is ever ready for anything. Thats life, you gotta roll with with it."

Mary thought they may work for Dorcas, but for her, some things were not so simple.

—

Lily had not went on rounds with James. She had ran into he and Remus, and pulled Remus aside, asking would he mind going for her, because her and James had a 'weird moment' out in the hall earlier. He had agreed, which he figured probably was enough to earn her forgiveness.

However, Lily could not avoid him forever, as much as she was hoping to do so. She was procrastinating purposely, stopping by to see Caradoc, who she knew was about to be released. With her went Mary, Dorcas and Emmeline.

She had seen Emmeline the night before, asleep beside Sirius on the couch. While she had not wanted to bother waking Sirius, she had shaken Emmeline, and told her it was late. She supposed Emmeline had taken care of Sirius.

But, none of that mattered, as she was too busy trying to distract herself from knowing she would see James in mere moments. Which was why her and Dorcas and Emmeline were having their conversation about throwing Alice an engagement party. Sometime over Christmas break was what they were hoping for.

Mary was busy with Caradoc, who was still lying in bed. "She said she would let me out, but she hasn't yet. I think she thinks that I did it to myself or something."

"She's a nutter, thats why. I told her that once, and she's hated me every since. That, and I may have said some other things. Alcohol is liberating that way."

Mary replied.

"Maybe. But it isn't such a good break-up cure." he said, sending back memories into Mary's head.

"I wanted to make what I felt go away." she said simply.

"Is that why you're with that guy from Hufflepuff? I don't like him. You could have found a better one."

"Yeah well, love makes us do irrational and stupid things. I wish I had never fallen for him in the first place. It would have saved me a lot of trouble." she said, glancing over at the other girls. She wondered if Lily felt the same.

"You shouldn't say that. If you love someone, you should never regret it, even it ends badly, even if you know it will never work, if it can never be. Loving them can sometimes be enough. And I think that, that love means more than the end. Love makes you do irrational things because it is irrational. It doesn't care about circumstance, it has to run its course, regardless." Caradoc said, following her eyes.

Mary turned back to look at him. "Wow. And who is it you're in love with?" she asked, smiling.

"No one."

"Is it Emmeline? You've been hanging out with her a lot lately. I could so fix you up. It would be great, she needs someone good in her life." Mary asked, growing excited.

"She needs friends. Not romance. And besides, it isn't her. I'm not interested in anyone." Caradoc said.

"Ah, you said it isn't her. That means there is someone." Mary accused brightly.

"You aren't going to let this go are you?" he asked.

"No way. You just wait until I involve Lily, Dorcas, and Alice." she said, smiling at him. The idea excited her. Love could still exit for someone else out there. And, Dorcas's words still hung in her mind. If what she said was true, Emmeline wasn't the only one who needed someone good in their life.

Chapter 29

Lily had left toward Potions with a lethargic air. She did not want to be there, or to see James. However, from what she could gather from Dorcas, Mary was even more eager to avoid Sirius. Which was why Lily was pretending to believe that Mary really did feel sick, like she said, and was going back to let Pomfrey have a look at her.

That was what she pretended to believe. She was sure somewhere along campus, she was with Caradoc and Dorcas (who never missed a chance to ditch class) and possibly Emmeline, and they were all having a great time.

All of them abandoning her to be stuck with James. And, to be stuck with Sirius, who she was dreading would be playing the tell her I said this game. Well, she was not being messenger, everyone knew what happened to them.

"G' morning Lily."

Lily slid into her seat trying to ignore that James was behind her. "Usually, one would say some form of greeting back. Thats how civilized society works." he prompted.

"Hello James." she said, an edge to her voice.

She had expected an immediate comeback, but there was none. He was being quiet, which was strange. In fact, it could almost add to the moody, sulky silence Sirius was expressing.

"Is he sick?" she asked, gesturing to Sirius. He didn't look well, and Mary had said she felt bad, and if he was ill, then she may have really been sick. Which would make Lily feel very guilty for mentally deranging her.

"Mentally or physically?" James replied. Sirius made no answer.

"No, Mary said she felt bad, and I know something happened with them last night. If he's sick she may have caught it from him." Lily answered, leaning across her seat and placing a hand on Sirius's forehead. He swatted her off.

"I'm not sick. I'm not sick. She's avoiding me."

"What did you do to her?" Lily demanded.

"Lily, calm down." James intervened.

"Shut up James." Lily snapped. "What did you do to her? I swear I will hex you into next year if you said anything to hurt her." she threatened.

"I kissed her." Sirius snapped, sending James a sideways glance. Obviously duking it out with Lily in front of him was highly undesirable, but it looked as if it may happen anyway.

"Oh." Lily said, her cheeks tinged with color. "Yes, that would explain it." she finished, turning back around. All she could think was how she had almost kissed James. Well, looks like Mary had similar problems, only she didn't have Frank to rescue her.

"Lily, about last night."

"What about it? Nothing happened, nothing was going to happen." she said quickly.

"Are you really using that as your defense?" he asked, unbelieving.

"It isn't a defense. Nothing happened. I have no reason to defend myself. I wasn't aware we were in some kind of battle."

"Love is war." he commented dryly.

"Yes, but only one side can win a war, so if you win, that means you'll see me lose, and if you really love me, you wouldn't want that." she answered.

"Would you two just make up already?" Sirius intruded.

"Stop being so selfish Sirius." Lily scorned.

"Selfish?" he repeated.

"Oh, like you don't see that having your best friend and Mary's best friend back on good terms could help you." Lily sniped.

"You are one deluded bird. I'm glad its James that found you. Not sure a sane person could handle you." Sirius replied.

"Lily, Sirius, stop. Lily, don't attack him because you want to attack me. Sirius don't attack her because you're feeling masochistic, Mary will give you hell later." James said, waving a hand between the two.

"You're right. I'm sorry I'm taking it out on you Sirius." Lily said stiffly. "But I still think you're an ass, and if you go near Mary-

"Okay, point made. Lets all listen to Slughorn shall we." James cut in.

The rest of Potions, they spent in complete silence.

-

"I've never cut class before without a reason." Emmeline said, following Dorcas and Caradoc, beside Mary.

"Yeah, well I wanted to avoid Sirius, and Caradoc here has suffered a traumatic injury, and needs his rest. Dorcas...just look at her record, this isn't anything new for her." Mary explained. Walking along side the Forbidden Forest was not something she did often, but, they needed to be far enough away to not be caught.

"Right. Aren't you going to ask about last night? I knew Lily told you she found me with him on the couch." Emmeline asked, trudging through a thick patch of mud. Her foot got stuck, and she attempted to pull it out.

"Actually, she didn't. But, I don't really need to ask. I trust you Em. But, if you want me to ask, here goes: Did you sleep with him?" Mary said, glancing over her shoulder.

"No, I mean, we fell asleep, but it wasn't like that." Emmeline said hastily.

"Good. Are you stuck? Caradoc, come pull her out."

"It isn't her." Caradoc said, walking over, and giving Emmeline a yank.

"So, where are we headed?" Emmeline ventured to ask.

"The Forbidden Forest. I've always wondered what it was like inside." Dorcas said, her voice perfectly calm, as if she was speaking of trying a new restaurant.

"Are you insane?" Mary hissed, at the same time as Emmeline's saying "No way."

"I think it could be fun." Caradoc agreed.

"Don't encourage her." Mary warned.

"Hey, isn't that someone there?" Emmeline said suddenly, pointing toward farther down, where someone was emerging from the woods.

Mary squinted her eyes, and looked to where Emmeline was pointing. "Yeah it is. I know him. Stay here, I'll be back."

No one had a chance to answer, before she was off, catching up with the figure. "Why are you in the forest?" she demanded.

He started, unaware of her being so near, so fast.

"Regulus."

He glanced over at her, then sighed. "I needed something. Ingredients, for a potion."

"What sort of potion?" Mary asked, her tone suspicious.

"It isn't for him, if thats what you're thinking. Its for myself. Something to help me...to help me not care, when the time comes that I have to...you know, for him."

Mary swallowed the question rising in her throat, and nodded. She would not ask. "Like I said, I know you aren't a bad person, and one day, you'll figure out a way out."

He didn't look at her, then in a hurried attempt to change the subject, he asked, "How's Sirius?"

Mary smiled wryly. "You should have told me he would break my heart."

"You wouldn't have listened." he answered. "How's Em?"

"She isn't telling your secret, if thats what you mean." Mary said.

"No, that isn't what I mean." he said, his voice so low she almost didn't hear him.

"She's fine. We're all taking care of her."

He nodded, then turned toward her, catching her by the shoulders, speaking quickly, "Be careful. Wilkes had a vendetta against you, and he's asked Muliber to take care of it for him, since he can't be here personally."

Mary went pale, gripping onto his arms. "What do you mean, a vendetta?"

"You're a mudblood—sorry for the term, but thats what you are to him, and he was once involved with you. He cared about you." he had to pause, as Mary let out a scoff at his words. "And after he saw you again, he got angry, he doesn't want to feel any sort of sympathy for a mudblood, so he wants you out of the picture."

"You mean, he wants to kill me?"

Regulus's eyes widened. "No!, Mulciber would never agree to that, not for Wilkes. For someone like Bella maybe, but not him. He wants you out of school, out of the wizarding world. An attack would be enough to have your parents bring you home. He doesn't want to kill you, but he does want to send a message."

"What message?" Mary said, voice hoarse. Her heart was beating rapidly in her chest, and she had never felt more afraid.

"That mudbloods shouldn't stick around where they don't belong. That they should stay away." he paused, then took a breath, and continued, "I'm worried, if they find out about Emmeline, and me, they may do something to hurt her too. Mary, I don't want anything to happen to you two."

Regulus released her, stepping back. "I shouldn't be telling you this. It could have me killed."

Mary took in a ragged breath, then answered steadily, "Not if it never happened."

"What?"

"If you can't remember it, then they won't be able to see." she explained.

"Do it." he ordered.

"Obliviate."

—

Caradoc and Dorcas had become disenchanted with the idea of the Forbidden Forest, and were more interested in who Mary could be talking too. Emmeline was no fool, and she was not blind. She had seen the look on Mary's face, and she could have recognized the familiar walk of the figure anywhere.

She was going to have a talk with Regulus, and tell him to stay away from her friends. He only would bring her trouble.

She would talk to him, and it would be soon.

—

"A potion that lowers inhibitions?" Lily asked, listening to Bertram explain his project to her.

"Its something for Slughorn. We have to create our own version of Veritaserum. Something that will make people tell the truth." he explained.

"We already have a dis inhibitor that makes you tell the truth. Its called alcohol." Lily joked, then added more seriously, "Thats a complicated potion, for a fifth year. Why is he making you do it?"

"A few people, they're worried about OWLS, and he says that if they can do this, and make it work, that as long as they make an S, they can go on next year. Usually, he would say an exceeds expectations."

"Thats funny, he didn't do that for us." Lily remarked.

"My class has a lot of his favorites. I think you're in his little club."

"Sort of." Lily admitted. The pair had just entered the Great Hall, and Lily stopped moving. There was a girl sitting beside James, in the spot that was usually occupied by Sirius. And she was leaning toward him, laughing, her hand rested on his arm.

Bertram followed her gaze, and arched an eyebrow. "What's Betty doing over there?"

Lily didn't answer, trying to fight down the sick feeling rising in her. The girl only looked about fourteen, there was no way she could be involved with James. But, she did look like the sort of girl who would be.

She wasn't exactly very pretty, she was cute, sexy even, in a dirty librarian sort of way. Her black hair was chopped off to chin length, and she was wearing stylish glasses. Her clothes were tight, and it appeared she had hemmed her school skirt up a few inches.

In short, she was competition, (not that she was still competing) and Lily hated her.

"Who?" she asked, fixing the girl with a glare.

"Betty Braithwaite. She's in my house, a year below me. She's horrible. Pushy, rude, fake. A vicious bitch, in other words." Bertram explained.

Lily blinked, then glanced over at him. She had never heard him talk like that before. "Bertram, is there some sort of...bad history between you two?"

"You could call it that. Last year, she started flirting with me, made me think she really liked me, but all she wanted was a copy of Slughorn's final. He gives the same one every year, and since I'm a year ahead, I already took it. She was failing." he answered.

"Did you give it to her?" Lily asked.

"No, I told her it was wrong, and that I couldn't do it. I offered to help her study, but she wasn't interested. After that, she stopped talking to me. I saw her the next day, cozying up with some other guy my year."

Lily patted his arm sympathetically. "That doesn't explain why she would be with James. He would never date a Slytherin."

"Maybe you should ask him. I don't like the guy, but he doesn't deserve to be used. You should warn him."

Lily considered his words for a second, then took off. She may not be able to prevent James from seeing other girls (not that she cared if he did), but she would not let him be betrayed. Even if she did think he deserved it, she couldn't let someone be hurt, not if she could stop it. Even the person who hurt her.

Vaguely, she wondered where Sirius was, it was lunch time, and the avoidance game should have ended. But, that was not the thought that concerned her. Remus said hello to her, which she replied without thinking back, her words hollow.

Betty looked up at her, from deep in a conversation with Peter, who was too busy with her to notice Lily's presence. James looked up at the same time, and Lily met his eyes. "I need to talk to you."

"Okay, sure."

"Alone." she added, shooting a look toward Betty. He glanced over at the girl beside him, and rose, following Lily into the hall.

"Lily, whats wrong?"

"Betty is bad news. Bertram told me. Don't get involved with her James." Lily said quickly.

James looked at her a second then smiled. "Thats what this is about? Betty? Are you jealous, Lily?"

Lily went red, and turned around, stalking away. "I knew this was a bad idea. Have a nice life James."

James bit back a laugh, realizing she was serious, and caught up with her. "Lily, wait. It isn't what you think."

"I don't care. You can date whoever you want."

James did laugh this time, making Lily very confused. "Whats so funny?"

"You are. Betty isn't there for me, she's with Peter."

Lily felt her mouth go dry, as at the same time, a warm feeling of relief washed over her. "But, she was sitting beside you."

"In the seat across from Peter." James corrected.

"Oh, yeah, I didn't notice that, I thought..." Lily let the sentence trail off, unsure of what to say.

"Lily, you're the only girl for me." he said, taking her face in his hands.

"I'm not your girl anymore." she reminded.

He sighed, releasing her. "I know."

Lily did not know what to say, the silence was eating away at her. Somehow, everything felt wrong. And, it was all messed up, and she couldn't fix it. "I think I should go."

He nodded. "Maybe yeah. I know that you're mad, and you need space, but, I'll be here Lily. I'll wait as long as it takes. So, when you're ready..."

She crossed her arms, looking at the ground. "And what if I'm never ready?"

"Then I'll keep hoping."

She looked up and met his eyes. He was looking at her in his intense way again, in the way that made her want to run to him, and hold on to him and never let go, but she knew she couldn't do that.

"I'll never give you up Lily."

"Forever is a long time to wait." she said softly.

"Not for you."

—

Mary had come to the conclusion it was time to end things with Gilderoy. Or, Gil, as she called him. It wasn't fair to him, to stick around, when she really did not care. Or, when she was off kissing other boys. That was a low she had never reached, and she would not be an unfaithful whore. A whore she may well be, according to some people's standards, but she would not be an unfaithful one.

"Mary, there you are, I've been waiting. You'll never believe what happened to me this morning, it's the strangest thing, I woke up and—"

"Gil, stop. Please. For once, can we let me talk?" she said, sitting down. Him following cue. The lake looked beautiful in the light, the water shimmering, a breeze blowing. The serenity of it all did not fit into what she was about to say.

"Of course love," he replied, leaning over to her and kissing her briefly. Mary tried to put as little enthusiasm as possible in it.

"Gil, this is hard to say. I care about you, really I do, but I've been doing some thinking, and I just don't think we're right for each other."

There it was. As simple as that. She didn't have to tell him anything else, why hurt him when she need not to? It was easier on everyone that way.

"Why? Mary, I thought we had something good. I mean, you were the perfect girlfriend—"

Mary cut in, placing a hand on his arm. "That's the thing Gil, I'm not. I pretended to be something I'm not. The girl you fell for...she's just an illusion. She isn't me. She's no where near perfect. And you deserve better than her."

Whether this was true, Mary was not sure, but she thought it was the best thing to say. And, it would make it easier on him.

"So, this is really it then?" he asked, and for a moment, she felt real pity for him. He had never asked for any of it, she had only been using him. It didn't seem as important that he was using her too, she had known that, but he had been oblivious.

"Yeah Gil, it's really it," Mary answered, offering him a weak smile.

"Is one last kiss goodbye too much to ask for?"

Mary shook her head, "No, I don't think so."

—

Sirius had spent the last few minutes searching the campus for Mary. He hadn't been able to see her inside, so he was thinking maybe she was outside, likely avoiding him.

He had just spotted her, by the lake, there with her so called boyfriend. Probably confessing to him what happened. He didn't think she would hide that from him. Mary wasn't that sort of girl.

At least, he thought so, until he saw her lean forward, and start kissing him with an intensity he had never witnessed in her, save for him.

He stormed back inside the building. He needed to hit something, to find a vent for his anger. Or at least, that was what he was thinking, before a girl hurtling around the corner ran straight into him, but instead of letting go, clung on to him, burying her face into his shoulder, crying.

"Emmeline, what happened? What's wrong?"

She lifted her head, looking up at him. "I talked to your brother."

"What did he do to you?" Sirius asked, looking her over.

"Nothing. I just—I shouldn't have went," she said, tears staining her face.

"So why did you?"

She looked away. "No reason." She couldn't tell him about Mary. Not that. He was already mad enough at his brother. He didn't need to hear that Mary was in some sort of twisted friendship with him.

"Emmeline."

"Because I'm a stupid girl okay, that's why," she snapped.

He looked down at her, then placed an arm around her. "Are you going to be okay?"

"Probably not," she said, returning her head to its previous location. He pushed her back a little and looked down at her.

"I saw Mary, with that guy. She was kissing him."

"He is her boyfriend," Emmeline reminded.

"I know, but—"

"I understand," she cut in, taking his hand in hers. He met her eyes, her eyes that reminded him so much of Mary's.

Before he knew it, he was lowering his face to hers, and she was closing her eyes, and they were only a fraction apart. "This is wrong," he said, stopping himself from moving on.

"I know," she whispered back.

"We can't."

"We shouldn't," she echoed.

"So why are we still standing here?" he asked.

"Because your arm has me pinned."

He let her go instantly, and she took a giant step back.

"Emmeline..."

"You don't have to apologize. We both know it wasn't me you were thinking of."

"I don't even want to know who you were thinking of," he commented back.

She smiled at him, stepping back forward, and placing a hand on his arm. "You're twice the person he'll ever be. You can't even compare."

If only Mary felt the same about her new boyfriend, his world would be a much happier place.

—

They had all invited Emmeline to spend the night. She had looked awful when Mary had run into her. Mary had explained to her that she had dumped Gil, a fact she wanted Emmeline not to report to Sirius. Emmeline had agreed not to, because Mary had asked.

As for Lily, she was still shaken by her conversation with James. She only hoped he warned Peter about Betty.

"I've officially decided love sucks," Dorcas declared, looking at the sorry state of her friends. The only one happy was Alice, but Alice had a predisposition to be happy regardless. She would have been happy with or without love.

"You've never been in love Dorcas. You wouldn't understand," Alice spoke, from her spot on her bed, where she was lying flat on her stomach, head buried in her arms.

"But I was almost in love with Remus," she defended. She hadn't quite reached the more than a crush stage, but she did really care for him. He was her friend, which she was sure was a good foundation for something more.

"Almost doesn't count," Emmeline said from below her on the ground.

"She's speaking from personal experience," Mary replied. "But, I agree. Almost does not count. And, I'm with Dorcas, love sucks. I've been in love twice, and both ended with me going through a box of tissues."

"Love is beautiful. Sometimes it hurts, but in the end, all the pain is worth it," Alice defended.

"What if it isn't?" Lily spoke. She didn't want to imagine that, that it wasn't. She liked to believe someday she would find someone to love again. But had she? No, she had met a boy, a perfectly nice one, who she was sure would date her, if she asked him to.

But was she the slightest bit interested? No, all she wanted was for whatever was going on inside her to stop. Though she was pretty sure it never would. James was there inside her, in her blood, permanently running through her veins.

At Lily's sad expression, Mary felt she had to say something, anything, to distract her. "I kissed Sirius."

"I know. He told me."

"He told you?" Mary repeated, disbelief in her voice. Why would he tell her, it was not as if he and Lily had a lot of pleasant chats lately.

"Yes, he did. I told him to stay away from you."

"Good job." Mary said approvingly. She needed him to stay away, she knew she couldn't much longer.

"Stop trying to distract me. I don't need to forget him, I need to get over him." Lily said snarkly.

"You need to get under him already." Dorcas mumbled.

"What was that?" Lily asked.

"Nothing." Dorcas replied smiling sweetly. She still held the notion Lily needed to get laid. And clearly, she was not getting over James, leaving the option of forgiving him, and moving on. Regardless, she would support any decision. She had been rooting for Bertram, but upon closer inspection, she wasn't sure he could handle Lily.

"Caradoc says, that if you love someone, you should never regret it, regardless of how it ends. That loving them is enough. That the love means more than the end." Mary said, looking over at Lily.

"Since we do we take romantic advice from Caradoc?" Dorcas said with a laugh. "The boy is chronically single."

"That's because he's secretly in love. I'm going to set him up. Once I figure out who the girl is." Mary replied.

"If there was a girl, Frank would know, thereby I would know, so trust me, there isn't a girl Mary." Alice responded.

"What if it's you?" Mary said with a gasp.

"In love with his best friends girl? Please, that has romantic cliché written all over it. Maybe it's you he loves." Dorcas said to Mary.

"Or, maybe he's in love and doesn't realize it." Emmeline said softly.

"How can you not realize you're in love?" Dorcas asked.

"Because it's easier that way." Emmeline answered.

"Denial has a lot to do with it." Lily added.

"Yeah, well, love still blows. Three out of five girls in here have ended up miserable. And only one got the fairy tale love. Then there's Dorcas, whose never been in love, so can't really count. The stats are not looking good." Mary stated.

"What if Caradoc was right? What if it is just the love that matters, not the end?" Lily said, sitting up quickly.

"If he was right we'll have to celebrate, it would definitely be a first time occurrence." Dorcas replied.

"If he was right, it means we shouldn't be so angry. That we should just be happy that we had the time we did, while the times were good." Emmeline said, ignoring Dorcas's comment. "But it isn't true. The end is what matters."

"I don't think so. I...don't know what I think. I have to get out of here. I need to go clear my head." Lily said, walking briskly to the door. She had made Remus rounds with James just to avoid him, while she took Mary, but she was starting to wish she had seen him.

She could use some closure.

"I'll go with you. It isn't safe." Emmeline said, hoping up.

"Emmeline, no, you can't." Mary said quickly. "You have to stay here with me."

All eyes were on her, as Mary went crimson. The less people who knew the better. Emmeline may be in no real danger, and until then, she was not going to jeopardize Regulus's life. She had to prioritize, Emmeline's being hurt, or Regulus's being killed. And, life was worth protecting more than injury.

"Never mind. I was just, worried for you. You know, with um, the people you were once acquainted with."

"Please, he's doesn't even exist to me." Emmeline said coldly, following Lily out.

—

Regardless of intention, the girls had parted ways, Emmeline saying she needed to get something from her room, and that she would meet Lily back upstairs. Lily didn't notice she had slipped out of the common room.

Lily herself wanted to be alone. She had merely grabbed a book, and sat by the fire, trying to make herself think of other things. Things beside stupid ex boyfriends. She had scarcely heard the sound of someone approaching behind her, so immersed was she in trying to read the book in front of her.

"Lily?"

Lily started, she been expecting it to be Emmeline, not the familiar voice of the person she was trying not to think of. "James?" she called softly, not turning around.

"What are you reading?" he asked, stepping behind her. Before she could answer, he bent down, and took the book from her hands. "Edgar Allen Poe? A bit depressing, don't you think?"

He took the book and skimmed it over, "But a waking dream of life and light hath left me broken hearted."

"Poe may be depressing, but he understands misery." Lily said, snatching her book back.

"Are you miserable?" James asked, leaning against the chair. Lily felt as if they had lived all this before, and refused to turn back to face him again. "No. Just not entirely happy."

James crosses, until he was standing in front of her, placing a hand on either arm of the chair, holding himself above her. "That's my fault isn't it?"

"Don't give yourself so much credit." she said, wishing he would back away. The last time he was so close, she had felt some undesirable feelings.

"Tell me what to do Lily. Tell me and I'll do anything. Anything to make things right." he pleaded. There was a raw desperation in his voice that set her insides on fire. It was as if he needed her.

"And what is right? The way things were? What was so right then?" she snapped bitterly.

"We were in love. And we were happy."

"Doesn't matter."

"Why won't you just forgive me? I never meant to hurt you." he argued.

"This isn't about you hurting me. This is about you inadvertently setting Mary up to be hurt. This is about your hiding this from me. It's about you not being honest. And yeah, it's about me, but that's not what hurts the most."

He could not find the words to say, his eyes meeting hers. In the dim light, with her looking at him so, he couldn't help but lean forward, and bring his lips to hers. And she couldn't help but let him kiss her. There was something almost innocent in it, slow and soft, like first kisses, and first loves.

Lily gasped, pushing herself back from him, flying a hand over her mouth, her fingers tracing her lips.

"I'm sorry, I wasn't thinking, I—" he was cut off, as Lily lunged forward, grabbing him by his shirt pulling him forward, kissing him with a mad intensity.

She wasn't thinking, acting on impulse alone. She wanted to feel that familiar heat, the old tingle, the shiver from her head to her toes. His arms left the side, wrapping around her, pulling her against him, and she leaned back, depending on the chair's back for support.

However, this wasn't the best idea, as the combined weight caused the chair to fall back, nearly taking them with it. Lily let out a sharp cry, falling as James backed away from her, and then crying again when he reached forward and yanked her by the arm to her feet before the chair could crash.

"Wow. Who knew that kissing could be so dangerous?" James joked.

Dangerous was the exact word she would use to describe kissing him, but she wouldn't let him in on that. "This shouldn't have happened."

He sighed, unconsciously reaching a hand up and toying with her hair. "I didn't mean for it to. It just sort of...happened."

Kissing someone doesn't just sort of happen." Lily shot back.

"I wasn't the one who came back for seconds."

Lily crossed her arms, trying to fight the blush rising to her cheeks. "Point made. Lets just forget this happened."

"Do you really think its that easy?" he asked, grasping her arms, pulling them apart until he could join his hands with hers.

"No, it isn't. But thats what I want." she answered, letting his hands go, taking a step back.

"If thats what you want. But...maybe we could be friends. Start again. A fresh slate." he said hopefully.

"Friends?" Lily repeated. That was the last thing she would expect was for him to settle.

"I'd rather have you as a friend, than not have you at all."

Lily took a breath, and a second to think about it. She did miss him—whether she wanted to or not. And, since she was not about to get back together romantically, it was the next best thing. She could have her cake and eat it too—as long as she only took the occasional bite.

"Yeah, maybe we could be friends."

Chapter 30

A week had passed since the hesitant friendship had re-started, and it was clear that they would be taking baby steps. The occasional hello and goodbye. Waving in hallways. Discussing school related things, discussing Quidditch. All in all, the were stuck in safe mode.

James hadn't expected them to become close friends suddenly. He knew deep friendships were as intense as romances, and he loved all his friends as much as Lily, in a completely different way. Though, he did not fantasize about kissing them.

Or telling them he loved them. Which, was not something he could ever do again with Lily. They were back to being sort of okay, and he had to work to regain her trust. And, he was willing to wait. And also willing to not do anything stupid, like punch Bertram Aubrey in the face for spending too much time around his girl.

Because, as she had well stated, she was not his girl anymore.

But, things seemed to be going okay, and Mary had even looked at him without murder in her eyes earlier in the morning. Dorcas and Alice were cool with him again, since Lily was they saw no reason not to be.

Though, James did suspect their was some sort of rift in Mary and Lily's friendship because of her deciding to be friends with him. Lately, he had seen Mary and Emmeline together a lot more often, and while he knew they had all became close, them being attached at the hip was a bit extreme in his eyes. He supposed that was another reason Lily was spending so much time with Bertram. Not that he always minded. Lately, Dorcas and Caradoc (who said Alice and Frank were in some sort of premarital bliss, also known as wedding planning) had taken to hanging out with them. And no boy would make a move while those two were standing around.

However, not everyone was as content as he. Sirius had stopped speaking to Mary, stopped chasing her. It had confused them all, but he had mentioned something about her boyfriend, and not being in the way. James found that odd, but he thought it was for the best, they needed time away from each other. He only wished Sirius had not chosen to take this time to bring strange women into the room, as he had the last two nights.

The longer he lived, the more James was appreciating the wonders of the Silencing Charm.

Remus was also unhappy, because of Dorcas. He had seemed to given up winning her, saying she deserved better—and nothing he nor Sirius nor Peter said could convince him otherwise. What bothered him was her research on werewolves. She had completed her project, but had kept researching.

Maybe it was that the full moon was fast approaching, but he felt as if she was on to him. He claimed she had been sending him funny looks all week.

James personally thought that whatever looks she was sending had more to do with the fact that they had once dated, than anything else, but Remus was convinced. Lately, he had been making schizophrenics look less paranoid than he was.

Which was why he was currently late to his meeting with Lily, because Remus was having an anxiety attack.

"Moony, no one knows."

"You haven't seen the way she's looking at me."

James sighed. "Lily said Dorcas thought you were being a bit mysterious, but she never mentioned that Dorcas thought you were a—" James paused glancing around the common room to make sure no one heard, "a werewolf."

"She was researching them. She could have added it all up."

"She's down in the library right now with Lily, Caradoc, and Bertram, if you want to see if she knows, come down with me. If she knows, she'll pull you aside and ask." James said, defeated. If Remus was dead set on being a paranoid mental case, there was not much he could do to stop him.

Remus took a breath, then looked over at James. "And if she does?"

"I'll cover you."

"Lets do it."

—

When the two arrived in the library, they saw Lily and Bertram, pouring over a book together, so lost in it they didn't notice them. He said something to make Lily smile, and James could have almost liked him for that, Lily didn't smile as much as she once had. But, it was supposed to be him making her smile.

Caradoc, who was seated on the couch looking bored, called out a greeting to them. Dorcas turned and looked their way, before looking away again. Remus sent James a pointed look.

"I have to go. I'll see you around." Bertram said, barely acknowledging James and Remus.

"Don't miss me too much." Dorcas called. The librarian sent her a severe look, and she instantly placed a finger to her lips. Lily rolled her eyes at the gesture, walking over to James and Remus.

"I didn't know you were bringing Remus with you. But it can't hurt to have another study partner."

"Actually, I was just here to see—" Remus started, then deciding mentioning Dorcas may not be best, finished "—Caradoc. I was here to see Caradoc."

"Try not to fling him into a wall this time." Dorcas joked, sending a smile his way. She had reluctantly gotten over that incident. And, she had also decided that her and Remus could be friends.

"I'll try. Whats that?" he said, gesturing to the books in her hand.

"I never got around to returning them. The books for my project. It's some interesting stuff. Did you know you could know a werewolf and never even know it? Its kind of interesting, to think that you could know someone, even have a friend, that had that problem, and you were clueless." she answered.

"Ah, and if lets say you did know someone, and you found out they were hiding something like that, how would you react?" he asked nervously.

"I don't really know."

"Would you be upset?" he prodded.

"Of course I would be upset. I would feel hurt that they wouldn't trust me enough to tell me, that they would feel they had to hide it from me. I would feel bad that they would think I would judge them, for something that wasn't even their fault. I would stand by my friends no matter what. It wouldn't change anything." she answered.

A wave of relief swept through Remus, and he grabbed her, wrapping her in a hug. "Uh, Remus?"

"Sorry, I've just missed you, thats all."

She arched a brow. "Okaaaaay...moving past the creepy psycho ex boyfriend moment. Me and a few other people are meeting tonight, okay, a lot of

There going to be a party in the Ravenclaw common room, don't ask how I know, I have my sources. You wanna come?"

"Sure I—" he stopped, remembering what night it was. The full moon. "I can't. I want to, but I can't."

"Why not?" she asked curiously. If he said he had to study, she was going to burn his text books.

"You wouldn't understand. But, trust me, theres nothing I want more than to be able to go with you."

She shook her head, tossing her books unto the nearest table. "What I don't understand, is how you tell me that you miss me, and then every time you get the chance to spend time with me, you turn me down."

"Every time? Dorcas, you don't understand—"

"Understand what? I always felt like you were keeping hiding something from me, but I figured that was about James and Sirius, but I still feel the same way. So how can I understand, when you push me away? If you haven't noticed, I've been waiting all week for you to talk to me, but you haven't even spoken to me in days." she cried.

"If you wanted to talk to me, why didn't you come to me?"

Dorcas threw her hands up in frustration. "Because I wanted you for once to be the one to do something. We never would have got together if I hadn't asked you. I see you looking at me, but then you tell me you miss our being friends, when I know that being friends is not what you really want. I wanted you to get up the nerve and come to me, but I guess thats too much to ask."

Remus could not reply, she turned and stormed out of the library. Caradoc hopped up from his spot, set to follow her. "Look at what you did to her. Every time she's near you she gets upset. Just stay away from her." he snapped, following Dorcas.

"I should go see if she's okay. Rain check on the studying?" Lily said to James.

"Yeah, sure. But I think Caradoc has it covered."

"Or he may make it worse. I think its the potion, we were helping Bertram, she was breathing in the fumes. It's probably just some mild reaction." Lily explained, heading out.

Remus watched her go, glancing over to James. "I wouldn't call that mild."

James shrugged. "Just wait until they test out the finished result."

"Can they do that?" Remus asked.

"Lily said Bertram is trying it on himself. But I wouldn't put it past Dorcas to volunteer herself."

"Lets hope not." Remus replied, but the pair were kept from farther talking, when a sharp shriek distracted them.

"No running in the library!"

The source of this shrieking was soon apparent to them, as Peter approached them, at top speed. Which for him, was not very fast.

"What's wrong?" James asked, looking at the panting Peter with curiosity.

"Did you run all the way here?" Remus added.

"It's...Betty. She..." Peter started. "She knows...about"

"Knows about what?" James prompted, waiting for Peter to regain his breath.

"The Order. She knows about the Order."

Remus and James both paled. This wasn't going to be good.

—

Emmeline had been grateful, that after the night she had snuck off, none of her friends had asked where she had went. She was sure they all knew, but that none of them pressed her made her eternally grateful. Going off to see your ex, who happened to be in league with the dark lord, was not something most girls would deem fit.

But, it seemed as if Mary had taken to looking out for her full time. And with all the attention Sirius was giving her (in the times she was away from Mary) was enough. Which was why she was finally going to confront her about it.

"Why are you doing this?" she asked suddenly, interrupting Mary on her talk about plans for Christmas. It was still a month away.

"Doing what?" Mary asked, slinging her bag higher up on her shoulder. What was in that bag one could only guess. It certainly wasn't school supplies.

Emmeline sighed, focusing her eyes on the shadows dancing across the wall of the hall, across from the window. It was easy to wander around, and get lost in Hogwarts. It made the school being so big a good thing, but it also made one realize how small and alone they were.

Execpt, she wasn't alone, because Mary seemed to be applying for the job of becoming her new shadow.

"Following me. Sticking close to me wherever I go."

"Because we're friends, thats all." Mary said pleasantly, but she looked away, shifting her gaze to out the window.

"It has something to do with Regulus, doesn't it?" Emmeline accused.

Mary gaped at her a second, then shook her head. "What would make you think that?"

Seeing as she wasn't going to get any answers, Emmeline decided to drop it. Whatever it was, if she had to, she would go get the answers out of Regulus himself.

"It doesn't matter, lets just—ah!" Emmelines shriek caused Mary to turn quickly, to see Emmeline lifted off the ground, legs slicing the air, held up by Avery.

"Let her go!" Mary shouted, reaching for her wand instinctively.

It flew from her hand with ease, shocking her, until she looked farther past Avery and Emmeline, and saw Mulciber. Soon, Mulciber had crossed the distance, catching hold of her.

Avery glanced over in his direction, face red with effort. "Can't we stun them or something? This one is hard to hold." At his words, Emmeline's heel connected with his knee, causing him to let out a loud swear.

"Mulciber pointed his wand at Mary's head, maintaining his grip on her with the other arm. "One more move and your friend gets an unforgivable. I think you'll remember Alice, we wouldn't want that again, would we?"

Emmeline stopped moving, fixing a glare on Mulciber. "You're disgusting."

Mulciber released Mary, walking toward Emmeline. Immediately, Emmeline started wiggling again, and Mary was on her feet, stumbling from where Mulciber had pushed her as he let go.

"On the ground MacDonald!" Mulciber ordered, pointing his wand at her. Mary glanced over at Emmeline, who nodded. Mary sat.

"Wish Snape would have came. It would have been easier to have one person hold the wand, and the other two get the mudbloods."

"You know how he is about the rules. He's pratically fucking married to them." Mulciber spat.

"She really is very pretty for a mudblood. I can see why he liked her." Avery said, looking down at Emmeline with a hungry look in his eyes.

"She's off limits." Mulciber snapped. "And so is the other one. Wilkes said not to leave anything that could connect it to us."

"We could wipe their memory." Avery suggested.

Mary and Emmeline exchanged looks of fear. Whatever lesson there was to be taught, Mary was afraid the Mulciber and Avery were going to go about it in the worst possible way.

"Then what would be the point?" Mulciber snapped. "We take them out to the forest, torture them, and then alter their memory to forget who, but not to forget what. We can't have anything to link it to us."

Avery accepted his answer, tightening his hold on Emmeline.

Get up.” Mulciber demanded, yanking Mary to her feet. “Either of you make a wrong move, and I’ll hex the other one. Get moving.”

Chapter 31

Just what he was supposed to do, James did not know. After he and Remus had spent minutes questioning Peter, all they could gather was the Betty had heard of the Order, but had no idea what it was. Which made Peter’s panic a bit overly exaggerated, but she was asking questions, and he didn’t know if he could not tell her.

James had told him not to say a word, and Remus had agreed with the decision. If it came to it, they would invent a lie, and Betty would leave the matter alone. It was a comfort at least, to know now why she had been interested in Peter in the first place.

Which meant that he would have to deal with Peter’s heart being broken, and with Remus’s insanity, and Sirius’s current string of women—that would likely lead to more problems, probably of the sexually transmitted type. All this was making him wonder why he was the one who was dealing with all this.

Because really, if anyone needed stability, or things as tiring as talking about their feelings, they should go to Remus, he was much better suited.

But did that happen? No, he was listening to Peter go on about how he thought Betty had really liked him. And was Remus helping? No, he was making things worse, by giving the someday you’ll find the right girl speech, which everyone knew meant that the person saying it thought someday was in the far distant future.

James never thought he’d live to see the day, but he was starting to think that his odds with Lily were better than any of his friends romantic prospects.

—

Lily had left Caradoc with Alice and Frank, and had taken Dorcas along with her, to help Bertram with his potion. Dorcas had recovered quickly, and was back to her usual ways. Currently, that was pestering Bertram.

“So, can I try it?”

“It isn’t safe to test it on people.” Bertram answered.

“But you’re testing it on yourself.”

“I have an antidote.”

“So you can use the antidote on me. I think it’ll be fun.” Dorcas prompted.

“If Lily thinks its okay.”

Lily sent a glare toward Bertram. Trying to make her play the bad guy wasn’t fair. “I don’t think either of you should, but since Bertram knows how to make the antidote, it might be better to give it you.”

“I imagine it’ll be something like being drunk. But without having to drink. You could market it, and make loads.” Dorcas said, taking the vial Bertram held out.

“Since its the first trial, don’t drink the...whole thing.” Bertram instructed voice dropping as Dorcas kicked back the potion, before he even had a chance to complete his sentence.

“Oops.”

Lily and Bertram exchanged glances. “Maybe I should give her the antidote.” Lily suggested.

“I don’t know, it looks like it isn’t working.” Bertram replied, observing Dorcas.

“I kind of feel funny, like...” Dorcas trailed off, tilting her head back and humming.

When she looked back at them, her eyes were dancing, and she had a slightly flushed appearance. “Is it just me, or is it hot in here?” she said, kicking off her shoes, and her tossing aside her jacket.

“Dorcas, you’ve taken to much, you should take the antidote.” Bertram explained, at Lily’s fervent glare.

Dorcas took it in her hand, and observed it. “You know, I don’t think I want to. I like this feeling.” she said, pouring the antidote on the floor. “In fact, I’ve never felt better.” she added, hopping up on the edge of the table, crossing her legs.

Bertram placed a hand on her arm. “I’ve made the potion to strong, Dorcas if you don’t take the antidote, you could become violent, you’re a danger to yourself and others.”

Dorcas looked at the hand and scoffed, wrenching it off. “Don’t touch me.” she snapped, pushing him backwards.

“This place is boring, and you two are boring. Maybe you should take a sip Lils, it may help break you out of that good girl mold you’re trapped in. Who knows, maybe you’ll even stop being such a prude.”

Lily gaped at Dorcas as she sauntered out the door, an decidedly un-Dorcas like sway to her hips. Bertram looked after her as well, then turned to Lily.

“I can brew another antidote. You get her, before she hurts herself.”

Lily nodded, flying out of the empty classroom, that Slughorn had so generously let them use. She barely had time to look around her, but she did see a familiar face, one she had no desire to see ever again. Snape may have felt the same way, as they were in such a hurry to get past each other, they collided, bumping shoulders.

Lily was a good ten feet farther down the hall, when she stuck her hands in her pocket, and felt a slip of paper. She pulled it out, reading the few words written on it.

MacDonald and Vance. Forbidden Forest. In danger-Sev.

Lily felt her hands shake, and turned on the spot. “Severus, wait!”

—

On top of all his other problems, James now had to face the anxious Bertram, who was explaining the situation with Dorcas to him.

“So, I sent Lily after her, but she hasn’t came back yet.”

“And you think Dorcas could have hurt her?” James added.

“Dorcas would never hurt Lily.” Remus said hastily.

“Can she hurt Betty?” Peter pipped.

Bertram sent Peter a unamused glance, then turned back to the other two. “You need to try to find her. I have the antidote. If you can, find other people to help.”

“I’ll go get Alice and Frank.” Remus offered.

“I’ll try to get Emmeline and Caradoc.” Peter said.

“I’ll get Sirius and Mary.” James offered last.

“When you find her, bring her back here to the library. We can all meet in an hour.” Bertram ordered.

—

James swung open the door to the room, without bothering to knock. It seemed the last few days, his roommates had discovered the wonders of actually drawing the curtains that hung around the beds.

“Sirius!”

A loud feminine giggle was the response he heard, and from behind the curtains, and very pretty blonde stepped, or more so, stumbled, out. From her disheveled appearance, he could guess what he had walked in on.

“Sirius has requested that you go the hell away, and come back in fifteen minutes.” she said, smiling, eying him over. “You’re kinda hot, actually. You wanna jump in?”

Sirius's head appeared behind the curtain. "Never mind. He can stay, you can leave."
The girl looked between them and shrugged, walking out sending a little wave at James.
Sirius's head disappeared behind the curtain again, and moment later he stepped out. "What is it? Good thing you saved me from that, who knew she was one of those girls."
"We have a problem. Dorcas drank Bertram's potion, and is missing."
"So, what's the worst she can do? Hook up with a few random people?" Sirius remarked.
"Maybe, if she hadn't overdosed. Bertram says she could do something to hurt herself."
"Right. Remus know?"
"Yes, he knows. Oh, and Betty is a problem we'll have to deal with too. Peter will tell you later. Now, we have to find Dorcas."

—
The empty classroom Snape had pulled her into felt as if the walls were closing in. She had no idea why she had called to him. She should have just went herself, and saw if it was true. But, she did not trust him, and she didn't want to walk into some trap set by Death Eaters.
"Are they really in trouble?" she demanded.
"Mulciber and Avery have them. They wanted me to help. It's Wilkes idea."
Bringing up Wilkes was enough to cause Lily to believe him. But, still, she was suspicious, she had to be sure. "Why are you telling me this? Why would you want to help? And why did they take Emmeline?"
Snape let her finish her questions, looking away from her momentarily. It seemed he found it hard to look directly at her, as if he looked to long, his eyes might burn, like she was the sun. Lily found it hard to look away, it was like something dark and tangible was lingering in the air between them, something cold and unwavering, that tightened around her heart.
"They took Vance because her...liaisons with Regulus Black."
"How do they know? No one knows, except Emmeline's friends, and we haven't told anyone." Lily demanded.
"I saw them together, last week."
"Oh, so that's it. It's guilt that's making you tell me." Lily said bitterly. Well, that would explain it, it certainly was easier to believe than that he was telling her because he still cared.
"No, it isn't guilt. Why should I feel guilty, if the girl was stupid enough to involve herself with someone like him?"
Lily was aware that her Sev never would have said something like that, but he wasn't her Sev anymore, she had lost him to people like Mulciber and Avery.
"So why tell me?"
His eyes met hers for a brief moment, and it was like she was fifteen again, that day playing in her head. His words ringing in her head. Regardless of the sudden sharp pain in her chest, the way she suddenly felt as if all the air had been sucked from the room, she couldn't look away.
"The same reason you never went to Dumbledore about me aiming to be a Death Eater."
"Because of what it was," she said softly.
"Because of what it was," he echoed.
There was a stagnant pause, in which both looked at the ground, rather than each other. Whatever unfathomable emotion Lily was feeling intensified, a rush of memories running over her like water.
"You're...you're a witch"
"Does it make a difference, being Muggleborn?" "No, it doesn't make a difference."
"This is it! We're off to Hogwarts!"
"You'd better be in Slytherin."
"...thought we were supposed to be friends? Best friends?"
"He fancies you, James Potter fancies you!" "I know James Potter is an arrogant toerag."
"I can't pretend anymore. You've chosen your way, I've chosen mine."
"I have to go save them. Thank you for telling me Severus." Lily said, her voice constricted from the sudden urge to cry.
"You're going?" he asked, his voice filled with genuine shock. "Shouldn't you send someone else, someone like Potter, he would save them for you, I've seen how much time you spend together." His hand caught her mid arm, from walking out the door.
Lily's eyes darkened. "How do I know this isn't a trap? That you aren't trying to set him up to be attacked by Death Eaters?"
The thought made her heart drop. The thought of his dying, of his being hurt, it nearly floored her. She could not imagine his not being in her life. He was a constant thing to her. First, a constant annoyance, then a constant persistence toward gaining her affections, then her boyfriend, now her friend.
She could not see a future that did not have him in it. She would not let him be lost to her.
"Because Lily, if we were trying to lure him into a trap, we would have taken you." Snape answered coolly.
Lily swept her eyes over his face, there was nothing there that made her believe he was not telling the truth. "Just so you know, what we once were may prevent me from doing anything now, but after we leave here, and we're on opposite sides of this war, don't think it will stop me then. You're already dead to me anyway."
Snape let go of her arm, looking away. "You've changed." he remarked, his tone unaffected. She couldn't see his face to gage if it was sincere.
"So have you," she said back, her tone heavy laden with remorse. It wasn't the time for nostalgia to grip her, she had friends to save.
One last look was exchanged between them, and Lily hurried away. She thought she heard him call for her to be careful, but she thought that could just be her imagination.

—
Lily had been in such a hurry to get help, that she had nearly flew up to James's room. "James, you have to help."
"We know about Dorcas." Sirius said. Lily, who hadn't noticed him, glanced his way and cringed.
"No, it isn't that its..." she paused glancing again at Sirius, unable to look at him and finish, she cast her eyes back to James. "Mulciber and Avery. They've taken Mary and Emmeline into the Forbidden Forest. They're going to hurt them. Wilkes planned it all."
She didn't hear James reply, as Sirius swept past her so fast, he nearly knocked her off her feet. "Sirius, wait, you can't go after them alone!" Lily called, hurrying after him, James on her heels.
"I have to save her. Them. I have to save them."
"And get yourself killed? Do you even have your wand?" Lily scorned. Sirius stuck his hands in his pockets, then did a 180. James and Lily followed cue.
"I'll get my wand, then I'll go save her. I mean them."
"I'll come too. I can try and find some of the others, we can—"
"There isn't time for that." Sirius snarled. "I have to find them. I shouldn't have let this happen."
"There wasn't anything you can do, it isn't your fault—" Lily started, but he cut her off.
"Not my fault? They take the only two muggleborns in school screwing Death Eaters? That isn't a coincidence. I should have known Wilkes would come after Mary, I should have protected her, and Emmeline, after what...I was the one who told her about Regulus. I promised her I would look out for her."
Lily looked toward James. She had no idea how to handle the situation. "We'll both go. I'll see if we can grab Alice and Frank on the way. You stay here

and find Dorcas."

Lily looked at him disbelief, speechless for a moment. "Those are my friends there, I'm coming too!"

"Lily, listen to me. You're a muggleborn, hurting you won't mean anything more than hurting them. But we, me Sirius, Alice and Frank are all pure bloods, and you-know-who is trying to recruit as many as he can. They won't kill us."

Lily opened her mouth to object, but James spoke before she could. "Lily, please."

Lily nodded, then said, "Fine, you four go, I'll find Dorcas then head out to help."

The two boys set off, leaving Lily standing there, feeling sick about her decision. Watching them walk away, she felt a sudden pang of fear, more than she had ever felt in her life. "James!"

He turned at her tone. "Be careful."

--

"I haven't got time for this Betty, I'm looking for someone." Peter said, to the annoyingly persistent girl following him. She had been trying to pry information from him the last five minutes. He had run into her looking for Dorcas. Caradoc had set off with Remus, for the matter of his safety, seeing as Dorcas may not be to happy to see her ex, and as Bertram said, she was dangerous.

"I need this internship at the Prophet. This story would get me in. I thought you cared about me."

"As much as you cared about me." he answered, attempting to sound angry. His tone came out more sulky than anything.

"Okay yeah, so I may have slightly exaggerated my feelings, but why does that matter? I'm still here."

"Until you get what you want." he bit back.

Betty crossed her arms and sighed. "Peter."

"I'm not telling."

"Tell me about it now."

"Peter!"

The bickering pair turned to see Lily racing toward them. "Peter, have you see her?"

"Not yet. Remus and Caradoc are looking outside. Alice and Frank are--"

"They're busy. I'll explain later." Lily said, casting a pointed look toward Betty.

"Is it something about the Order?" Betty demanded.

Lily glanced over at her, then toward Peter. "The Order? If you wanted to know about that, you should go down and ask Bertram. I need Peter to help me now."

"Bertram knows something?" Betty asked.

"Of course he does. Why wouldn't he?" Lily said back, turning to walk away. "Peter?" she called over her shoulder.

"I'll catch you later Peter." Betty said, hurrying away.

"Does he really know about the--" Peter started.

"He hasn't got a clue. But we had to lose her, didn't we?"

"What is it you had to explain?"

Lily sped up her walk. "I'll tell you while we're looking. It's about Mary and Emmeline."

--

The wind whipped around her face, sending her hair flying around her. It was dangerous, to stand on the edge, but there was something so exhilarating about one wrong step from death. It was strange, she had never really liked being on top of the astronomy tower.

Sure, one could stand on the very top, but she preferred to use a window. But, she felt alive, as if she could fly. She had taken a broom, and she figured it was as goes as time as any to learn. Sink or swim, or rather, fly or crash.

"Dorcas, get down!"

The voice startled her, and she nearly fell, dropping the broom beside her. Of course, it had to be Remus. "Remus, have you came to rescue me? To save me from myself?" she called, laughing bitterly.

Remus stood with Caradoc behind him, eyes fixed on the girl before them. To approach her could actually cause her to jump. It was a delicate situation. Whatever effect the potion had, Bertram had made it far too strong.

Dorcas was hardly herself. The Dorcas that Remus knew for one, would not stand on the ledge of a tall building. Sure, she may be brave, but she was not stupid. And, she would be dressed in such a provocative manner. She was wearing something short, tight, red and sparkily, the sort of dress one may see a girl where to a cocktail party, or a prom.

She stuck a foot out, spinning herself, gingerly walking across the edge. "Why don't you come and get me? Or are you too scared?"

"Dorcas, he's right, you have to come down, it isn't safe." Caradoc called. Dorcas shifted her gaze over to him, meeting his eyes for a moment, then focused back on Remus.

"It's okay you know, I don't want you anymore anyway. I've moved on. Why would I want a man—no a boy, who keeps things from me? Whose to afraid to tell me how he feels? Do you still want me?"

"Dorcas, this is the potion talking, you aren't well--"

She laughed. "No, this is all me Remus. The real me. Do you like it?" She turned, facing them, her back to the drop.

"Dorcas, stop moving, you're going to fall." Caradoc cried, panic in his voice. Dorcas turned her eyes to him.

"You would hate that wouldn't you? Because you've already lost one sister, and would hate to lose another? Isn't that what you told me, when you took that curse for me?" she taunted. "But that isn't it, is it? Mary thinks you're in love, but it isn't Emmeline, no she was wrong about that, wasn't she?"

Remus could only watch in a sort of mix of horror and fascination as they spoke. He had suspected as much, somewhere in the back of his mind.

"Dorcas--"

"Do you love me?" she asked suddenly.

"Dorcas, you have to come down. Me and Remus can bring you to Bertram, he has the antidote." Caradoc tried to reason. Remus had the feeling he was more likely to be able to get her down, so he didn't intervene.

"Answer the question." she snapped.

"Get off the ledge." he answered, taking a hesitant step closer. He sent a backwards glance toward Remus, as if asking him did he think it was a good idea. Remus was unsure himself.

"Tell me if you love me."

"Get down." he said, ignoring the question, taking another step.

Dorcas let one foot slip off, wobbling on the edge, almost falling backwards. "Do you love me?!"

"Yes! Yes, I love you!" he cried, rushing forward, grabbing her arm as she nearly fell back. Both men had jumped forward at her near fatal slip, Remus to concerned with catching her to ponder Caradoc's confession.

Caradoc who was closer naturally was the one to pull her off the ledge, after which she burst into tears, burying her face into his chest.

"Is she alright?" Remus asked, unable to bring himself to mention what his friend had said. It may have very well been to get her from off the ledge.

Caradoc wrenched her away from him, placing his hands on her shoulders, looking her over, before releasing her. "I think so."

Dorcas stopped crying, looking up at him, and in a move that could be considered comical, would be comical, Remus thought, if it had not been his ex girlfriend, she lunged forward, and kissed Caradoc. Though anger would have been better, surprisingly, what Remus felt was relief. He would no longer have to force himself to let her go, only to protect her. She would set herself free, without any pushing from him.

Still, he didn't think he could bear to actually, watch, and luckily, he didn't have to, as Caradoc pushed her away. "Dorcas, we need to get you the antidote. This isn't you."

"Isn't it? Maybe it is. I mean, who am I anyway?" Dorcas said, this time, her voice tiny. Remus decided to step forward, careful not to glance Caradoc's way. He still preferred to believe he had spoken to keep Dorcas from falling.

"What ever you are, it isn't this."

She flashed her eyes over to him, turning, a big smile on her face. "And how would you know? Maybe its the real me, the one I hide. You would know all about that, wouldn't you Remus?"

"What are you talking about?" Remus asked, paranoia creeping into his mind. What if she knew it, in some subconscious part of her mind, and the potion allowed her to grasp it?

"But you weren't the only one keeping secrets. Right Caradoc? Ha, I must have something wrong with me, I attract only men who can't tell me how they feel. And both are here to save me, as if I needed to be saved."

Caradoc and Remus exchanged looks, Caradoc deciding to be the one who spoke. "Right. Well, like you said, we both love you, and would like to save you, even if you do not need to err—be saved. But we still want you to have the antidote, so you can go back to being yourself. The you that doesn't consider leaping off tall buildings."

"You both love me? That's a laugh. Remus never loved me, he was infatuated with me. And I never was in love with him, it was a silly, juvenile crush." she scorned, then her face softened. "But I do love you both, so I'll forgive you."

"Then, please, come with us." Caradoc said, holding out a hand.

"We don't know what will happen to you. We wouldn't want this potion to hurt you." Remus added.

Dorcas looked between the two boys in consideration, stepping forward, ready to answer, when she swayed, and fell unconscious, both boys cradling her in their arms.

—

Running across the grounds, map in hand, Sirius, James, Alice and Frank ran into the Forbidden Forest. It was so easy to get lost, none knew how long it would take to find Mary and Emmeline, and if it wouldn't be too late.

Chapter 32

Being dragged through the Forbidden Forest was not something Mary had ever imagined happening in her life. As a general rule, she tried to avoid it. It gave her the creeps. Emmeline did not seem nearly as frightened as her, almost as if she had been into its depths before. Or, it could be that she still had her wand, and was waiting for the chance to use it.

Either way, Mary was terrified that any second, Mulciber would loosen his grip on her arm, toss her down, and hurt her. And when it came to him, she knew from the past, that he really liked hurting people.

"Don't you think we're far enough? I don't want anything that lives in this forest hurting us." Avery said, a nervous edge to his voice.

"It won't be what lives in here you'll have to worry about, once our friends realized we're gone." Emmeline said with certainty.

"Right, because your friends know exactly where you are, and who you're with." Mulciber said sarcastically.

"Leave her alone. If this is about Wilkes, tell him to deal with me himself, but leave her out of it, he has nothing to do with her." Mary cried, seeing the glint in Mulciber's eyes.

"Shut up." he snapped, tightening his grip on her arm. "We can stop here if you're scared." he bit to Avery, who looked momentarily embarrassed, then shrugged. "If we leave them to far out, they'll get lost, and we can't have them go missing. The school with think its Death Eaters."

"Nice to see there are some brains to this operation." Emmeline remarked, causing Avery to turn to face her, where she was firmly held behind him, his hand around her wrist. As soon as he turned, Emmeline yanked her arm forward, pulling him forward with it, and kneed him in the groin.

He released her and fell to her knees, her pulling her wand out of her pocket, pointing it down at him.

"I'd drop that if I was you."

Emmeline spun, wand in hand, to see Mulciber with Mary held in front of him, wand to her head. "Drop the wand, or she gets it."

Emmeline pointed her wand back at Avery, "Let her go, or he gets it." she threatened.

"You think I care?" he said back, an edge of laughter in his voice. "You won't kill him, you don't have it in you Vance. You hurt him, I'll just get Snape or Roiser to fix him up."

Emmeline looked at Mary, then back at Avery, then toward Mulciber, an idea forming in her head.

"I know what you're thinking, but do you really want to take the risk?" Mulciber taunted, "There isn't a clear shot, and you may hit her instead of me. And something tells me you wouldn't be willing to sacrifice her to save yourself. So unless you want her hurt, Drop. The. Wand."

"Aren't you going to hurt her anyway? So why should I?" Emmeline challenged.

"Emmeline, watch out!" Mary shrieked, as Avery recovered enough to lunge forward, catching her by the legs, spiraling her to the ground. There was a struggle as the two fought over the wand, Mulciber unable to help, and risk letting Mary go, or hitting Avery. Losing him would even the odds, if she got back the wand, and he wasn't so sure that she wouldn't attack him, Mary as his human shield or not.

Regardless of her struggles, Avery did physically over power her, and managed to wrench the wand away, rising and cursing. "Fucking bitch!"

There were three cuts oozing blood on his face, compliments of Emmeline's fingernails, and a black circle forming around his eyes. In horror, Mary watched as he backhanded Emmeline, making her fall flat on to the ground. He then lifted her up, shoving her against a tree, a hand closing around her throat.

"Avery!"

Avery released her at Mulciber's command, glaring at the other boy. "What was that all about? Giving her permission to hurt me?"

"What are you going to harp on about your feelings?" Mulciber sniped.

"We're supposed to be friends, I wouldn't let her hurt you."

Mary was shoved unto the ground, with a warning not to move, as Mulciber and Avery continued their argument in heated whispers. Across the distance, Mary meet eyes with Emmeline, a dark purple bruise forming across her right cheek.

Were they ever going to escape?

—

Remus and Caradoc rushed into the library, Caradoc holding Dorcas in his arms, where she was slumped over, unmoving. He would have carried her, but it was all he could do to run as fast as he could. It was almost twilight, almost time for him to leave, before it was too late.

"Bertram!"

Bertram rose from where he was sitting, his exasperated expression turning to one of horror. The girl beside him rose as well, her eyes wide, both rushing forward.

What happened to her?" Betty asked, looking down at Dorcas's still form. Remus pushed her out of the way, Caradoc behind him, lying Dorcas down on the ground. Bertram dropped to his knees antidote in hand.

"Betty," he called sharply. Betty looked in Bertram's direction. "Go distract anyone who could come over." For a second, Betty only stood there, staring at the unconscious girl, before Bertram snapped her name, and she went off.

"Will she be okay? Will it work?" Caradoc asked, his eyes fixed on Bertram, wide with fear. Remus could relate, but he wasn't asking questions, there was no point, it would or it wouldn't, and there was only one way to know.

"We're about to find out." Bertram answered, uncorking the antidote. Caradoc lifted her head, Remus took her hand, and Bertram forced her the antidote down her throat.

For a few brief, terrifying seconds, they were all sure it would not work. Then, Dorcas stirred, rising, looking around in dazed confusion. "Where am I? And what am I wearing?"

"It worked." Bertram said, breathing out a sigh of relief. "I'm going to get rid of Betty. You two take care of her."

Dorcas looked down at her and Remus's twined hands, and pulled hers away, lifting herself from Caradoc's arm. "What happened, what did I do?"

Remus and Caradoc exchanged looks, and both replied at the same time, "Nothing."

Dorcas looked between them, and frowned. "Now I know it must have been bad."

Remus looked down, and met her eyes. "You made clear some feelings you've been holding toward me. Apparently, that I was only a silly, juvenile crush."

Dorcas opened her mouth to speak, but no words came out. "Remus..."

"It's fine. It's better to know," he said, rising. "I have to go. Can you take her to see Pomfrey, just to be sure?" he directed toward Caradoc.

"Yeah, sure."

Dorcas sent him a look, and he turned to her. "I'll be back."

Caradoc followed Remus out into the hall. "Thank you, for not telling her."

Remus, back still to him, replied, "So, it wasn't just something you said to get her down?"

Caradoc cursed low under his breath, and began pacing. "I would never try to take her from you. I knew she was yours. I only wanted her to be happy. I never meant for it to happen. I thought the reason I loved her so much, was she was there for me, after Kayla. Her and Frank, they were the only ones that could make me feel...But then, it started to change, I don't know when, but..."

He paused, then went on, "I wasn't going to try to steal her from you. But she wasn't happy with you, so I wanted you to stay away. I'm not stupid, I know its you she wants."

Remus turned to face him. "It isn't me she wants. Not anymore."

"I think she was only trying to make you mad, kissing me like that."

Remus looked away from him. That could be true, everything she said could have been to hurt him, but that brought on more questions. If she wanted him, she wouldn't have wanted to hurt him. And she asked Caradoc how he felt...there was something about that, something that was likely hidden in her subconscious, that she would have to deal with.

"It doesn't matter. Dorcas and I are over. She...she needs someone else, who can give her all the things she wants, she needs. That person isn't me. And its like she said, I was never in love with her. I loved her, but...it wasn't so much like that. We should never have become involved, its wrecked our friendship." Remus said. Then he looked back at Caradoc, "But you do love her, don't you?"

"It doesn't matter. She doesn't, she never will, love me. And I'll let her go, let her be happy. Even if it is with someone else." Caradoc answered.

Remus laughed. "Maybe she was right about us. We both love her enough to let her go, but neither of us love her enough to fight for her."

Caradoc had no reply for that, and Remus started away. When he was a few steps farther, he stopped, calling back,

"Take care of her for me. She's yours now."

"We both know Dorcas isn't the kind of girl who needs taken care of. And we both know she isn't mine." Caradoc called back.

"Better you than me." Remus answered, so softly, it was hard to be heard. The saddest thing, was he knew it was true.

—

Lily ran to the library, hoping that one of the others would have brought Dorcas back. Peter was on her heels, both nearly running into Remus as he turned the corner. Peter took one glance at him, and hurried off behind him.

Lily was about to question them, when Remus called back that Dorcas was inside. She decided not to follow them, but instead to see Dorcas. Again, she had barely set off, when someone else nearly ran into her.

"Bertram, how did it go, is she okay?"

"She's fine. Caradoc is going to take her to Pomfrey to be sure."

Lily nodded. She had to hurry. Remus and Peter had probably rushed off to help Mary and Emmeline. Not that she was sure how Remus could know, unless James or Sirius had met him along the way. But what else could it be?

"Then I have to go. It's important."

"What was with Betty. She told me you sent her to me to ask about some sort of order."

Lily froze, placing a false smile on her face. "I have no clue what she was talking about, but I was trying to find Dorcas, so I had to get rid of her. Sorry about that."

"It's okay. She isn't so bad. Compared to some things. Like getting a molar pulled."

"Right. Bertram, I have to go." she said quickly, rushing off.

"What's wrong?"

"I can't tell you. Only that you can't follow me. It isn't safe."

"Lily—"

Lily shook her head. "No, you aren't coming. I'll be fine. James will be there."

"James." Bertram said, his voice cynical.

"Yes, James. I have to go. Goodbye Bertram."

—

"How much farther could they have taken them?" Alice said, panting. Her arms were covered with scratches, where they had traveled so quickly through.

"It'll be getting dark soon. Then it doesn't matter if we find them, we'll all be lost."

Sirius and James traded looks. Almost dark. Almost night.

"I think I hear something." Frank said, erasing Alice's look of fear. Instead, there was on of deliberate calm.

"Lets go." James spoke, then turned to Alice and Frank. "You two wait here. Let me and Sirius see if they've heard us."

"We'll call for you." Sirius added.

Alice looked on he verge of protesting, then Frank answered, "They may have already spotted us, be trying to lure us in. We'll wait for your call."

James and Sirius crept forward, seeing Mulciber and Avery standing between the girls, their words inaudible. Emmeline was seated on the ground, her knees pulled up to her chest, eyes staring blankly. Mary was slumped back against a tree, from her latest attempts to reach Emmeline, after she had tried to crawl away, motioning Mary to follow, while the Death Eaters argued.

Mulciber had caught her, and threw her back, she head hitting a tree, square in the forehead, it steadily bleeding. It looked worse than it was, Mary knew that, it always did in the forehead. It was a trick pro wrestlers used. At least, that was what her grandpa told her, but that was hardly important. It was looking like she would be seeing him again soon. After this happening, there was no way her mother wasn't pulling her out of school.

What Avery did to Emmeline was worse than just hitting her head on a tree, he had cast some sort of spell on her, one Mary had never heard of. But Emmeline was shivering, her lips turning blue. It looked similar to hypothermia setting in. From what Mary could guess, the affects were probably the same. Either way, Emmeline was shivering too much to run away, and her eyes were unfocused.

If James and Sirius had taken time to think, they would have signaled back for Alice and Frank, but Sirius was rash, seeing Mary, seeing her bleed, he didn't stop to think, he ran out, wand in hand. James could only follow, calling out for Alice and Frank to join them.

It had taken mere seconds for Sirius to disarm Mulciber, and only seconds more for Avery to disarm him in return. Before Avery could fire attack, James had him blocking his own. Alice and Frank ran in, Alice running toward Mary, Frank toward Emmeline.

Sirius had not taken the time to pick up his wand, or given Mulciber the chance to reach his. He had flew at him, knocking him to the ground, beating him with his bare hands. James had managed to knock out Avery rather easily, and turned to see his friend, repeatedly hitting Mulciber, his hands smeared with blood.

"Sirius!"

James cry caused Alice to turn and shriek, running forward. "Stop it! Stop it! You're killing him, Sirius, stop! You're going to kill him!"

It took both her and James to pull him off, and Mulciber's face was barely recognizable. His nose and his jaw was broken, and he was missing teeth. James was fairly sure that Sirius had broke his wrist as well, as it was also bleeding. Though none of that would have been so bad, had he not been coughing out blood.

James and Alice looked at him in mild horror, and he felt as if he was looking at them through some foggy haze. "You can fix him, enough he doesn't"

Alice nodded, turning around, muttering spells to stop Mulciber from bleeding.

Sirius ignored the way James was looking at him—he wouldn't have killed him, he was only making sure he got what he deserved. He had hurt Mary, he deserved it. He swept toward her, lifting her chin in his hand, meeting her eyes.

"Mary, are you okay?"

Mary did not answer, looking at him as if she had never seen him before. It slowly dawned at him that he had scared her. Because he had almost killed someone. Because if James and Alice had not pulled him off, Mulciber may be dead.

"You—Mulciber—he—theres so much blood. What did you do, Sirius?"

Sirius looked at her, her eyes wide. Was she afraid of him? Or afraid for him?

"I don't wanna be here. Please, just take me back, I wanna go home." Mary said, her voice small. Sirius swept her up, carrying her, her head resting on his chest.

Behind them, Frank carried Emmeline, James and Alice dragging the unconscious Mulciber and Avery.

They were going to have to invent a hell of a story to cover this up.

Chapter 33

The wind was starting to howl again, the light slowly fading, as two people trudged forward. Curiosity was a dangerous thing, it turned even the most rational people reckless. And the girl following had always been leaning more toward reckless to start with.

"Dorcas, we have to get you to Pomfrey."

Dorcas ignored the boy behind her. It was so like Remus to leave him as her babysitter. Besides, Caradoc would never understand. "I told you, I'll go after I see where Remus is going."

"Could you at least put on some shoes? Change that dress?"

"There isn't time. Come with me."

Caradoc stopped in his tracks. "Dorcas, I will toss you over my shoulder and carry you back if I have to."

Dorcas laughed at him. "Right, because I couldn't so kick your ass. I have to know. Either you're coming with me, or you can leave."

"Why do you care so much. You two broke up," he called.

"Because wherever he's going, it may be the reason. It has to be important, why else would he leave me, after what happened?" she argued, walking on.

Caradoc ran to catch up with her.

"Because, he doesn't want to lead you on. He—" Caradoc stopped speaking, looking away from her. Dorcas stopped, turning to face him.

"What did you say to him? Because in case you didn't catch on, that look I gave you meant go out there and make sure he didn't hate me because what I may have done." Dorcas said.

"He could never hate you."

Dorcas blinked, feeling a blush creep up her cheeks. Something in his tone... "Caradoc, did I—did I say anything to you?"

He gave her a half hearted smile. "Nothing important."

"You're lying. Caradoc, what did I do?" she asked, walking forward, gripping his arm. The sudden uneasiness came back. Whatever had happened, there was more about him and Remus and her that he was telling.

"You kissed someone. Remus saw," he answered.

"I kissed someone? Who? Did he kiss me back?" she fired, mortified. Naturally, promiscuity was to be expected with that sort of potion, but that she did in front of Remus, that was cold.

"Doesn't matter. Just some guy you wouldn't have, if you were yourself. He wanted to kiss you back, but I wouldn't let him."

Dorcas looked at him a second, then shrugged. "We have to hurry, come on."

The rest of the walk stretched on in uncomfortable silence, save from the occasional call that Remus may have seen them, and to stay farther back.

"Is that the Whomping Willow? Did he just go inside? That's what they were talking about in Hogsmeade." Dorcas cried, rushing forward.

"Dorcas, you can't just run in after him, it may be dangerous." Caradoc said, grabbing her arm.

"Dangerous? How?" Dorcas asked, casting him a skeptical glance.

"Maybe he's on some sort of mission for the Order. Maybe it's secret." Caradoc tried.

"Maybe so." Dorcas agreed, smiling brightly. That would make everything better. "Maybe I should just walk away."

"Right. Walk away. You're acting like you're afraid he's a Death Eater or something." Caradoc said, extending his arm to her. She probably shouldn't exhort herself, so soon after drinking the antidote.

Dorcas's face paled, and she looked back in the direction Remus had headed.

"You thought he was." Caradoc said, astounded.

"What? No, I would never—" Dorcas defended, before he cut her off.

"You did. For a second there you did, I saw it in your eyes." he argued.

"It doesn't matter. I know him. I know he wouldn't ever be that." she said, following Remus's path. Caradoc followed quickly behind her.

"Don't tell me you're going in there?" Caradoc asked.

"Okay, I won't tell you." Dorcas replied, going inside. Caradoc had no choice but to follow.

Dorcas rushed ahead, stopping dead in her tracks. There in front of her was Remus, his face contorted into one of intense pain. She called his name, but it wouldn't be heard over his own shouts.

Dorcas watched in horror, as he changed. Suddenly, everything was clear. The reason why he hadn't tried harder to keep her. Why she always felt as if he was hiding something. It all made sense.

She had to leave before he saw her. Remus or not, he was dangerous in that state, that much she knew. She turned, seeing a rat seated between her feet, peering up. It looked strangely like it was looking up her dress. Dorcas gave it a swift kick, and it ran off.

"Dorcas!"

Caradoc's voice brought her sharply back to reality, and she turned and ran in the other direction. She very nearly ran into him, instead, catching him by the arm, pulling him along behind her.

"What's going on?" Caradoc asked, running along beside her.

"We have to run. Before he sees us." she panted, running harder.

"Before who sees us?" Caradoc asked.

"There's a werewolf." Dorcas explained.

Caradoc stopped dead in his tracks. "A werewolf? What about Remus? You go, get out, I'll go back for him."

Again, a feeling of confusion washed over Dorcas. Caradoc would fight a werewolf for Remus? She knew they were friends, but she didn't think they were that close. But, they all would do the same for each other. And Caradoc had always been rash (a certain trip to Hogsmeade had proved that) so it wasn't so far a leap.

"I saw him escape, out the other way." Dorcas lied.

"The other way?"

"The one that leads into Hogsmeade. I think this is some sort of shortcut the Order uses." Dorcas invented wildly.

"It could follow him out. It could follow us out. Someone has to stop it." Caradoc argued.

"He isn't hurting anyone." Dorcas cried.

"He could kill Remus if he gets loose." Caradoc said. He was unable to grasp how calm she was. There was a creature only yards away that could kill them all.

"You would die for him?" Dorcas asked, her anger starting to evaporate. Given the circumstances, she couldn't blame his reaction.

"I would die for you."

For a moment Dorcas felt her breath leave her. A rooftop, a question...what had she asked? What had he answered?

"Looks like you'll have to, if we don't get out of here. Come on." she said quickly, grabbing his hand again, and running.

—

"James!" Lily shouted, seeing him come first from the Forest. He was covered in blood, he was hurt, and it was her fault, all her fault. She ran forward, her fears for James withering a little, as she saw Mary and Emmeline.

"Oh no."

"It isn't as bad as it looks." James assured. Lily's eyes meet his, lowering to the blood soaking his shirt.

"Not mine." he answered, tilting his head down to the boy he was dragging.

"What did you do to him?" Lily asked, voice breathless.

"That's compliments to Sirius." James replied. Lily turned her gaze to Sirius, then to the sleeping girl in his arms. Well, if someone had tried to hurt James, who said she would do any different? Hell, she may have did worse.

The thought shook her. She was not supposed to think that way anymore.

"Lily, do you think you can help me back here? Avery weighs a ton." Alice called, interrupting her thoughts. Lily ran to her side, and they all walked on in silence.

—

They all made it there at the same time. Pomfrey only had to look at them, before she began gesturing them to different beds.

"What happened?"

All eyes looked away from the questioning adult. What was there to say? That Mulciber and Avery had taken Mary and Emmeline, and they had found them, by going off into the Forbidden Forest, and got in a fight, in which Sirius had drained Mulciber of most of the blood in his body? That would get them all expelled.

"It was my fault." Dorcas spoke, everyone looking her way. "You see, I was playing guinea pig for this fifth year, working on a potion, and ah, it kinda worked to well. It was a disinhibitor, and I wasn't myself, so I went off into the Forbidden Forest, and my friends here went after me. And then we were attacked, you know, by those dangerous creatures living there."

There was a collective sigh of relief, as Pomfrey preached the dangers of testing such a potion, and that they were lucky not to be killed. But, they were all off the hook. Even Mulciber and Avery, but they could handle them later.

As soon as Pomfrey was out of sight, Dorcas grabbed Alice and pulled her to the side. "Care to tell me what's really going on?" Alice explained to her, and Dorcas resisted the urge to go beat in both of their faces.

"Dorcas, have you seen Remus? He and Peter ran off."

"Peter?" Dorcas said, her voice high. What if Peter had gotten curious too? What if he hadn't ran away? But Remus wouldn't...he couldn't...could he?

"I've been with her the whole time, we haven't seen them." Caradoc answered for her. Dorcas had a sneaking suspicion that he was catching on.

It wasn't but a moment later that Pomfrey kicked them out into the hall. The only ones left inside were those hurt, and Sirius and Lily. Lily was talking to Emmeline first, figuring that if Sirius cared enough about Mary to go hopping around the Forbidden forest, she could let down her bitch radar for a few minutes.

"Hey." Mary said groggily, as she opened her eyes. Sirius Black was not who she expected to see, but she was too tired to care, too tired to be angry.

"Hey you. How are you feeling?" he asked.

"Like I collided head first with a tree. How are you?" she said, smiling. Sirius reached up, tracing the cut on her forehead, pulling his hand away.

"I'm perfect, now that you're here." he answered, taking her hand in his. She didn't pull away.

"When I heard that you were gone, I was so scared. Scared that I would never see you again, scared that they would hurt you. I couldn't think, I couldn't breathe. I need you. You're like oxygen, I need you to breathe. Even if you hate me, just knowing you're okay, that you're happy..." he broke off, pulling his hand away.

Mary considered taking it back, but thought better of it. "Sirius..." she didn't know what to say. Words were hard to come by. She only hoped that one, they would be able to figure it out. So, he had lied to her, had had some stupid bet. He also risked his life to save hers.

He said he needed her.

"Right. You hate me. I'll go." he said, rising. Mary reached out and caught his hand. "No...don't go. I...I don't want to hate you for a little while. So, just stay with me, just for now?"

From her spot with Emmeline, Lily watched their joined hands, with a pang of heartache. It looked like her and Mary were going to have to face some

uncomfortable truths soon.

It was nearly morning, Lily still there with her friends. Sirius had long since left, Lily talking Pomfrey into letting her stay. She may not have agreed, if not for the frightened look in Emmeline's eyes. Though, Mary had told her, Emmeline had been much braver than her.

"I still can't believe she made you stay all night." Lily said, to the waking Mary.

"Yeah, well, I don't think she really bought Dorcas's story." Mary replied.

Lily didn't speak for a minute, then said hesitantly, "It was Snape who told me about you."

Mary's eyes widened. "Really?"

"Yeah. The funny thing is, he told me to send James to save you both. Like he was concerned or something." Lily answered.

"Maybe he was taking a stroll down memory lane. Nostalgia kicked in or something." Mary replied.

"Maybe, but that wasn't the weird part. I thought maybe it was some sort of trap, some way to hurt James. You know they consider him a blood traitor. And all I could think, was that I would rather die, than let them hurt him." Lily said, voice shaky.

"You still love him." Mary said softly.

"I don't know how to stop. I thought being friends with him would be enough."

Mary wrapped an arm around Lily's shoulder. "It's never enough. Do what makes you happy. Lily, don't give him up because of me. He fought to protect me, I've forgiven him, you can too."

"Anyone ever tell you you're good at this whole best friend thing?" Lily said with a smile.

"Not lately, but I do improve with compliments."

Lily's smile broadened at her words, and then faded. "What about Sirius?"

Mary sighed. "I'm still working on that one."

Chapter 34

The sky was turning a hazy pink, the sunset making it alive with color. Lily rose from the ground, shielding her eyes against the light. Her hair hung around her in waves, falling prettily around her shoulders. Her bare feet were wet with the mist on the ground, as she walked forward, searching, forever searching.

What was she looking for? Something she lost. Where was it? Better question, could she find it?

She spun around, the white dress she was wearing spinning with her. Farther in the horizon, she could see James, so far off he was only a speck, but it was him, she knew it.

"James!"

The harder she ran, the farther away he became. If she stopped, it felt like she was being pulled backward. She had to reach him, she had to tell him.

***Tell him what?** A voice in her spoke, the voice that knew this was only a dream.*

That you love him.

Lily shot up, gasping. Beside her, Mary roused. "Lily, what happened?"

"I fell asleep, sitting her beside you. I had a nightmare, that's all." she answered, trying to shake the dream. It was only a dream.

"What was it about?"

"I was trying to get something, something I really wanted, but the more I tried to reach it, the farther away it was."

"Hmm." Mary replied, rising and stretching. "Maybe the dream is telling you to let it come to you."

"You think so?" Lily asked.

"Isn't that how the saying goes? Good things come to those that wait. With the exception seats on the bus, if you get there late, you're always stuck standing, or crammed up with some old guy who is staring at your rack the whole time and—"

"I get it." Lily cut in. She didn't really feel like hearing Mary rant. Mary ranting meant Mary was avoiding thoughts of Sirius, which meant that she would wake Lily at three in the morning, to talk about Sirius.

Which would be fine, if Lily also wanted to discuss James. Which she would not.

"Hey, where's Emmeline?" Mary questioned, glancing over at the empty bed next to hers.

"She probably snuck out. Can't say I blame her." Lily said, placing a hand to her stiff back. Those beds were not fit for the living.

"We should go too. Pomfrey only said she was keeping me until the a.m." Mary said, nearly skipping to the door.

"Please don't tell me a few minutes of holding hands with Black has you this happy." Lily teased.

"Don't you know Lily, he's very good with his hands. One day, when you grow up, you'll understand."

Lily groaned. "More cracks about my virginity. You know, in some cultures, virginity is a virtue."

"Of course it is. That's why they start with the same three letters." Mary pipped.

"What do letters have to do with anything?"

"Sirius initials are SOB." Mary answered with a grin.

Lily laughed. "Okay, yeah, in that case maybe."

Emmeline walked over to where the boy—not just any boy, the boy, the boy who had wrecked her world, who had sent her spiraling into a sort of slow insanity—the boy whose shirt she was wearing and nothing else, because he had went to see her, and she had followed him. And they had ended up where they always did.

It was strange, the greater part of their relationship was clothing optional. She had figured out that he had likely warned Mary—the reason for Mary sticking to her like glue—and Mary, wanting to protect him, had cast some sort of memory charm. That was easy to deduct, the Sorting Hat didn't almost put her in Ravenclaw for nothing.

She had listened to him apologize for thirty minutes, ten of which involved near groveling, but he would never let himself drop so far, before she had told him it was okay. That she knew it wasn't his fault. How that had ended up in Regulus's bedroom, she didn't know.

"We can't keep doing this." she said quietly.

"I know. I just had to see if you were okay."

"Because you were so clearly concerned for me the last time we met." Emmeline snapped.

"I already said I'm sorry for that. We were both mad. I...I never meant to hurt you." he answered. His back was still to her, and she stepped forward, placing a hand on his shoulder. "But you did."

He looked at the hand, reaching up, and taking it in his. "I never wanted you to really care. I was so angry, and you...you were like this bright, happy place that I could drink from. I know I've said some things, but the only thing that really matters, is what I've never said."

Emmeline held her breath, her world was suspended on this one moment. The one that would break her heart.

"I love you."

Tears slid down her face, and she pulled her hand away. "I love you too. But...it's too late. For us. It can never be."

"I know that, Em, don't cry. I hate when you cry. Stay close to my brother okay?, he'll look after you."

Emmeline nodded, unable to form words, to say that she could look after herself, because it seemed really, she couldn't. She was fading, and she knew it. "So this is it? The final goodbye?" she said, attempting to smile.

"Yeah. For now. One day Em, one day I'll be free of all this, and I'll come back for you. When the war is over. When I can get away. It may take awhile, but someday, Em, I promise." he said, taking her face in his hands.

"Someday? When the war is over? When you're free? Who says I'll wait?" she spat. His forehead rested against hers.

"I don't deserve you, I know that. But, I'll always be holding out for you, so one day, when the time is right, if you'll still have me, we'll be together."

She took her hand, and wrapped it around his. "Then you better give me something worth waiting for."

--

James was becoming difficult to find. He and Sirius had rushed off somewhere, in a big hurry. Which was horrible, because Lily really wanted to talk to James. Maybe not get back together, but start over. A fresh plate.

A lot of things had became clear to her, with all that happened. The thought of losing him was enough to make her realize, that like it or not, she was still in love with him. And that was something you could not fight.

However, she could not find him, and therefore could not tell him.

Why was love so complicated?

--

Dorcas swiped at a smudge of dirt covering her nose. She had went out, looking for Peter, to be sure he was okay. So, when she had ran into James and Sirius, she was a bit surprised. Especially when they did not seem surprised that Peter was missing.

And then, after only about five minutes of walking around, James came back, and told her that he had forgotten, but Peter was off somewhere with Betty.

But, of course they would know. It would be hard not to notice your roommate disappearing every night on the full moon. So, she let them lead her away, let Sirius comment of her dress, even managed to shot back some flirtatious response, and then they had left.

And soon after they had, she had gotten dressed, and trekked back out only to see them back, and changing form. It seemed she was learning a lot of secrets as of late.

So, she did what anyone else would do. She waited until morning, snuck inside, and ambushed her ex boyfriend. Not the most well thought out plan, but for her it worked.

Which was lead to them sitting there, on a patch of clean green grass. She herself was rather dirty, from waking Remus. Apparently, when woken, he tackled people. Of course, he claimed he was still mostly asleep.

"So you just followed me out here?" he asked, an edge of anger in his voice.

"Um, yeah. Caradoc tried to stop me, but I didn't listen. I was probably rude towards him."

"Wait, Caradoc knows?" Remus asked, alarmed.

"No, I didn't tell him. I would never tell anyone. Its your secret, and I'll take it to my grave. Promise." Dorcas assured.

"At least now you can see why we can never be together." Remus said, his voice strangely empty.

"It doesn't matter to me. You know it doesn't. You're still...Remus." Dorcas said, shocked.

"Will you answer a question for me, answer it honestly?" he asked, not looking at her.

"Yeah."

"Were you in love with me?"

Dorcas took a second to consider, then answered slowly, "Almost...but no, not quite."

"It's the same here. But if we were together, then I would fall for you. And I think it would be the same for you. And if I loved you, really loved you, I'd be too selfish to ever let you go. I'd try, but I'd come back. I know myself. And what kind of future can I offer you? I won't be able to get a job, I'll have no money. You deserve more."

"I deserve to make that choice myself." she argued.

"Then make the right one. I do love you, I'll always be your friend, but I can't give you anything more. I'm letting you go. I love you, and you love me, but that doesn't mean we're meant to be. It's easy, to get it confused, friendship and love. But we always were better as friends. And we will always be good as friends." Remus said.

"Just friends." Dorcas said, her voice hollow.

"Just friends. Someday, you'll find the right person, and you'll be glad I wasn't in the way."

"And I guess you'll find the right girl. As long as she doesn't have the pink hair, thats my thing." Dorcas said, smiling. As hard as it was, things felt right between them.

"I promise you, she won't have pink hair. Though I do find weird hair colors oddly attractive." Remus answered, standing, lowering his hand to help her up.

They walked back to the school, as if romance had never exited between them. And for the moment, both thought it was for the better.

--

"Hi James."

James nearly winced at the overly bright voice. Which belonged to Lily. "Um, hi. Are you feeling okay? You sound...different."

"Oh." Lily said, blushing. She was just trying to look inviting. Waiting for him to come to her.

"So, where are you headed?"

"To class." Lily answered, looking at him oddly.

"You wanna ditch?" he asked casually, as if they were not strolling down a hall way full of teachers.

Lily considered it. When was the last time her and James had some fun? The alone time was scary, but promising. She could use it to gage her feelings.

"Sure."

James eyes widened, and he stopped dead in his tracks. "Wow, I wasn't expecting that. Let me go grab something, I'll be right back."

Lily watched him hurry away, and wondered what she had gotten herself into.

--

"Do you have to throw the door open? Some of us are trying to sleep." Sirius grumbled, from his bed, where he was previously trying to sleep.

"We have class. You should go. I'm skipping out with Lily, you can work with Mary." James said.

"You're skipping with Lily?" Sirius asked, his mind contemplating which was more tempting, more sleep, or more Mary.

"Yes. Remember she wanted to learn to play Quidditch? I'm going to teach her. And I'll need to borrow your broom." James answered, not waiting for a reply before taking it.

"My broom?"

"For Lily to ride. I've decided to win her over by proving that I'm willing to be whatever she wants. Even just friends. I'll let her make the first move."

Sirius's mumbled reply was lost, as James swept out the door.

--

Lily held back a moan when she saw James emerging with two brooms. That left little time for talking. However, it did allow for close contact. Close contact with the ground when she busted her ass, anyway.

She had to think positively. "Please don't tell me those are for what I think they're for." "Quidditch lessons. I told you I'd teach you." he said, handing her a broom. "You did." Lily said, taking the broom. It could be fun, it was last time. "But I think I need to master riding it first." "That's easy, I'll show you when we get to the field." James replied. Easy wasn't really the term he would use, but he had no doubt Lily could learn. Once she set her mind to it, he was sure she could do anything. The sky was a crisp clear blue, not a cloud in sight, the wind only barely blowing. All in all, a perfect day for flying. "It looks nice. Maybe we should enjoy the day down here." Lily suggested. "What kind of couch would I be if I did that? Get on the broom." James answered. Rolling her eyes dramatically, Lily did as he said. "Don't be afraid, you're holding on to tight, that's why you can't steer. You have to balance your weight. Be one with the broom." he instructed, circling around her, where she hovered mere feet off the ground. "Be one with the broom?" she snorted, raising a hand to cover a laugh. As soon as she let go, the broom swayed, and James reached out grabbing her waist to steady her. She could feel his hands all the way through her clothes, sending warm tingles straight to her toes. Swallowing a lump in her throat, she turned her head to look at him. "Thanks for th-" Whatever words she had left died in her throat as she realized at what close proximity they were. Her face was suddenly very close to his, lips only centimeters apart. Both stood motionlessly, breathless, waiting for the other to make the first move. Anticipation ran through Lily's veins, as she silently willed James to just for the love of all that was holy, kiss her already. After a long pause, when it was obvious neither was making the first move, they both pulled away, looking embarrassed. Both backed away, Lily jumping off the broom, putting distance between them. "Err—maybe we should take a break." James suggested, not looking at her. From what she could see, he was blushing as hard as her. "Right. A break. Good idea." Lily agreed hastily. If there was a prize for awkward moments, Lily thought this one would win for sure.

Chapter 35

There was an awkward tension between Lily and James the next few days. Neither mentioned what happened, and preferred to pretend it never happened at all. It was only an almost kiss, not a real kiss. Totally different. However, the time to face their problems came around, as Saturday rolled in, and it was time for detention. At least now, they could all be sure they wouldn't be throwing things at each other. That was the first detention, the second had been rescheduled, and the third was about to start. And Lily was about to be late. Her hair whipped behind her as she ran toward the kitchen. Punishment today was dish duty, giving the house elves some free time. Only, she had to mail back Petunia, she had just gotten it in the mail, the invitation to the wedding. She knew it was happening, but she had not yet expected an invitation. She had so much to do, as soon as winter break came, she had to go try on a dress, she was being a bridesmaid. It may be the chance to repair her relationship with her sister. "You're late." Lily cringed at the sound. McGonagall was going to be furious. "Yes ma'am, I know, but I got a letter, from my sister, and I had to reply. It was urgent." "Was there some sort of family emergency?" "No, she's getting married. I just got the invitation. I had to RSVP." McGonagall eyes her a minute, before answering briskly, "Don't let it happen again." Lily nodded, rushing around to the others. Avoiding eye contact with James, she placed herself beside Remus, helping him scrub. She would talk to James, in fact, she had a plan. Only, she had to wait to get him alone. And not lose her nerve. "So, how are you doing Remus?" she asked brightly. "Is that some sort of vague way of asking about Dorcas?" he asked, a smile gracing his face. Lily glanced over to Dorcas, who was at the moment locked in a soap sud fight with Alice, Frank, Caradoc, and Peter. Her and Alice were winning. "Nope. Just wondering. My sister is getting married. I had to tell somebody. I got the invitation today." "Pass on my congrats." Lily continued to chat amiably with Remus, finding it easier to avoid James when properly distracted. Once she got him alone, she could ask him.

— Being stuck between Sirius and James was not what Mary had planned. But, that was where she ended up, when Lily had came, and frolicked over to Remus, who was her escape strategy. Besides, Lily was supposed to be the brave one. She loved James, he loved her. It was really that simple. For them. Not for her. Things were much more complicated for her and Sirius. Still, she thought it was time for a change. He had saved her, along with James, Alice and Frank, and that earned him something. "Sirius." she said suddenly, causing his conversation with James to cease—it seemed their Seeker's mom was in the hospital, and he had to leave school, and miss the next Quidditch game, against Slytherin. With a pointed look to James, he turned to her, James going over and joining in the sud fight. "Yeah?" Mary took a deep breath. "Don't make a big deal of this or anything, but I've decided I don't hate you anymore." Sirius smiled at her, and she went on before he could speak, "Don't get any ideas. That doesn't mean I like you, just that I don't hate you anymore. Don't get your hopes up." She sighed, seeing the way he was looking at her. "Don't look at me that way." "What way?" he asked innocently. "Like you are completely ignoring everything I said and thinking what you want." "That pretty much sums it up." he replied. Mary rolled her eyes. "I'm walking away now. I'll go talk with Peter." she said, turning swiftly, stepping away. Sirius followed quickly behind her. "How about you and me—" "No." Mary said quickly. "—skip the rest of detention—" Sirius went on, as if she hadn't spoke. "No." "—and go somewhere?" he finished. "No!" Mary shouted, exasperated. "This conversation has a familiar ring to it." Sirius noted. "Really? Then you know how it ends." Mary snipped, doing a 180, walking back to where they were previously standing. Everyone was watching them, she knew it. "Any chance you'll change your mind?"

Mary gritted her teeth, then put on a falsely sweet smile. "Yeah, totally. I'd love to spend massive amounts of time alone with you."

"Good, lets go." Sirius replied taking her arm.

"That was sarcasm, in case you didn't notice darling." Mary said dryly, pulling her arm away.

"I failed to read that." he said cheerfully, recapturing her arm.

"If you don't let my arm go, you'll fail to read anything, because I'll claw your eyes out."

"You wouldn't." Sirius said surely. He knew her, she may throw things, and slap things, and yell at them, and a number of other actions, but the clawing of eyes was not up her alley.

Still, he let go of her arm.

—

Finally, the time had came to get James alone. They were all taking a lunch break (though some had never started at all).

"Hey." Lily said, catching James attention. He was trying to dry him self off, the sud fight had turned into a full out water fight. He, Caradoc, and Peter had lost.

"Oh, hey Lily." he said, too busy wringing out his shirt to look at her. "Could you hold these a minute?" he asked, handing her his glasses. Lily took them, eyes going wide seeing what he was doing.

James pulled his shirt over his head, wringing it out onto the floor. Lily nearly dropped his glasses, eyes traveling down his chest, to his abs, and back up to his arms. A slow blush spread across her face, and she was glad that she had his glasses, so he couldn't see. She was mesmerized, following a drop of water sliding down, hitting the waist band of his pants, her thoughts taking a very naughty turn.

She was just in the middle of imagining being trapped between him and wall, hot and wet, and panting, when he said her name, breaking her out of her fantasy. "Yeah?"

"You kinda zoned out there. My glasses?" James said.

"Oh, right. Here." Lily replied, sticking out her arm. She hoped her thoughts weren't written all over her face. At least he had put his shirt back on. "You wanna go take a walk?" she asked, averting her eyes.

"Yeah. Emmeline is supposed to stop by. She's going to sneak in and let us borrow her wand. We can finish faster that way. Then we can leave."

Lily didn't respond, walking out, him following behind her. Once she had reached a nice secluded corner, she took a breath, and turned to face him.

"James, I have to ask you something."

"What is it?"

"My sister is getting married, and she sent an extra invitation for my date, and I was wondering, you know, if you would go with me?" she asked, then seeing his shocked expression, quickly added, "As friends, I mean. I could always bring Mary, but I can't dance with her. Well, I could, but it would look funny. Except to cousin Shelly, who we all think is a lesbian, but she's never admitted it. But if you don't want to, I could just ask Bertram. Or, I could just go alone and hang out with Shelly, since she'll be alone too, and—"

"Lily." James cut in, making her stop talking. "I'll go with you." He was surprised Lily would want to go to her sister's wedding, with all the problems between them. And Lily only wanted to go as friends.

"You do? Thanks. But her boyfriend is a jerk, so avoid him, and my cousin Diana will probably hit on you, but just ignore her, because she does that when she's been drinking, and there'll be champagne at the reception. And don't mention the lesbian thing to Shelly, she's really pretty, and I'm sure thats some sort of male fantasy—" Lily explained, before James cut in again.

"Okay. I'll avoid your cousins all together, hows that? And the groom."

"Right, And you have to promise not to laugh at my dress. I'm a bridesmaid, and I know Petunia will have me in something pink and frilly." Lily said, cringing.

"I'll be the perfect date, I promise. When is this wedding anyway?"

"It's in spring. Here's your invitation." Lily said, handing him one of the small, elaborately designed white pieces of paper.

"Emmeline just brought—"

James and Lily looked over toward where the voice came from, and saw Sirius, followed by Mary, who it looked like had kicked him rather hard in the leg.

"What was that for?"

Mary cast her eyes between Lily and James, and frowned in disappoint. She had hoped there was something to interrupt. "There was a spider. On your leg."

Lily nearly laughed, covering it with a hand. She would have to give Mary a full report later. "That mean we can skip out early?"

"Yep, I'm so happy I could dance." Mary answered brightly.

"Dance? Oh no, I'll have to dance at Petunia's wedding." Lily groaned.

"So?"

"I can't dance." Lily said, glancing over to James. "Can you dance?"

"Define dance."

"I can dance." Sirius's voice cut in. All three looked at him in disbelief.

"What? My vicious harpy of a mother made me learn for my cousins wedding. Bellatrix Black and Rodolphus Lestranger, the social event of the season she said. Everyone who mattered would be there. I didn't want to go. There was this fountain, with champagne, I was mad at Bella, so I dumped spiders in it. One got in Narcissa's hair, never heard her scream that loud. I blamed it all on Regulus, because I was mad at him too. No one believed he did it. That was the summer before I started Hogwarts."

"The more I hear about your childhood, the harder I find it to believe you're the good brother." Mary replied.

"Can you teach me?" Lily asked.

Sirius shrugged. "Yeah, I'll borrow Mary and you can watch how—"

"I don't think so." Mary said quickly. Sirius looked disappointed, then shrugged it off, grabbing Lily by the wrist.

"I don't remember much. I'll show the waltz, anyone who can count to three can do the waltz."

"You can count to three?"

Castng a dark look toward Mary for her comment, Sirius positioned Lily. "It's easy for you, you just have to follow me. Try not to lead, you are the girl."

"I don't try to lead."

"You're already trying."

"I am not." Lily defended.

"That was my toe Evans."

"Sorry." Lily said wincing. James was trying very hard not to laugh at her.

"I feel sorry for the bloke who you drag along." Sirius mumbled, cursing as Lily stepped on his foot.

"That would be me." James said.

"Then you should come dance with her."

Lily wanted to protest, being held close to James was something different than Sirius. Sirius was safe, she didn't fantasize about doing R rated things with

him. James, however, did not give her time, as he came over, taking her other hand, placing the other on her waist. "This can't be too hard right? I mean, if Sirius can do it, anyone can." he said, looking as nervous as she did. "What about you Mary, I can teach you the waltz." Sirius offered, flashing her a grin. "No thanks." "How about the horizontal tango, I'd love to teach you that." "We've already danced the horizontal tango." Mary said, grinning back. "Always good to practice." "Who says I haven't been? There's lots of eligible dance partners out there." "I think our teacher has forgotten us." Lily said, smiling at her friends conversation. "We can teach ourselves."

Being so close to him was very distracting. Lily was painfully aware of his hand around hers, of his hand on her waist, of how their bodies brushed together when she forgot what step they were on, and she stepped forward, instead of back. Every nerve in her felt alive, buzzing with excitement. When he improvised, and twirled her out, she was relieved. It put much needed distance between them for a second. Until he pulled her back, dipping her low, her foot slipping, causing him to tighten his hold on her. Again, she found her face too close to his. Noses brushing, lips nearly touching. She felt her eyes flutter closed, not caring about the world around her. Hogwarts could be burning to the ground around her, and she would not have noticed. "Oh shit, there's McGonagall coming." Mary cried, breaking Lily out of her trance. Lily blushed, she had forgotten they had an audience. James and Lily separated, neither looking directly at the other. There was a certain familiarity to the situation, one Lily nor James wanted to mention. They didn't say anything to each other, letting Dorcas explain that they were finished cleaning. When McGonagall gave them permission to leave, they set off in different directions.

--
"So I asked him, and he had this weird look, like he was...I don't know, like it wasn't what he wanted, so I told him I only wanted to go as friends." Lily finished. She had been explaining what happened with her and James to Mary. "Trust me Lily, he does not want to be just friends. He was probably just surprised you asked. You and Petunia aren't exactly best friends. He probably just didn't want to see her. It would be a bit awkward for him. Not to mention he doesn't know how to act around muggles. There's a hundred reasons for why he had that look, but none of them are because he doesn't want you." Lily buried her face in her hands, flopping backwards on her bed. "I feel like an idiot. Why didn't I consider that?" "Because love makes us crazy." Mary answered. "Speaking of love, what's going on with you and Sirius. You're back to flirting." "No, he is flirting. I am dishing out rejection." Mary corrected. "What was that saying, about the river in Egypt..." Lily started. "I am not in denial." "If you say so." Lily answered. "I do say so. And don't give me that smug look." Mary said, tossing the pillow from her bed at Lily. "Wow, that was an awful shot. You missed me by a mile." "I did that on purpose." Mary defended. "Riiight..." "Shut up."

--
"So, which color do you like best, purple or yellow?" Alice asked, holding up two patches of fabric out to her friends. Lily, Mary, Dorcas, and Emmeline were helping her pick out dresses for her bridesmaids. Dorcas was maid of honor. She had planned on making the other three bridesmaids, but with Lily already in one wedding this year, she decided to use her two favorite cousins. "I like the purple." All five girls startled, looking up from their spot hunched up on the common room floor, up to James. "Really? I can't decide. I wanted bright colors, but Frank said that would divert the attention from me. So its pale yellow, or purple. Well, lilac, technically." "I'm the maid of honor, and I say yellow. Yellow suits you, its a happy color." Dorcas said. "I'll be right back." Lily directed to Alice, ready to stand and see what it was James wanted. "Actually, its not you I'm here for. I need Mary." Mary glanced up at him. "Me?" "The Quidditch game is tomorrow. Our Seeker is gone, we need a replacement." "You want me? To play Quidditch?" Mary said dumbly. "You're a natural. All you have to do is catch the Snitch. It'll be easy." "But I don't know the rules." Mary protested. "Just look for the Snitch, and stay out of the other players way. That's all you need to know, for one game." Mary considered what he said. It was only one game. "What if I mess up, and can't catch it? Everyone will be mad at me." "If you don't catch it, we lose. If you don't play, we'll have to forfeit, and we'll still lose. Either way, the team will just be happy to play." "Okay, fine, I'll do it."

--
It was the game that everyone had been waiting for. The fact that Gryffindor had to play a substitute Seeker was something that gave Slytherin an advantage. And the reason Lily was going to watch the game, from a seat as close as she could get. Usually, she avoided being too close, she didn't want James to see she was there. But, they were friends now, and it was the first game that his team got to play. Hufflepuff had forfeited, and Ravenclaw was the last match. "Lily, you know, you aren't allowed back here." Mary said, inclining her head to where the other players were changing into their Quidditch robes. "I know, but I had to wish you luck. Be careful out there, Slytherin's team is underhanded. There'll be Bludgers heading straight for your head." "Don't worry. I'll protect her." Sirius said, popping up behind Lily. "I feel so relieved." Lily said sarcastically. Sirius stepped around her, facing Mary. "Kiss for luck?" Mary gave him a dark look. "I think that only works if its someone off the team." "Don't look at me." Lily said, before any ideas could be formed. "Aw come on. I think our captain would appreciate the support." Sirius said back. "What support?" James said, walking toward them. "Lily's just offered to give us a kiss for luck." Sirius answered, ignoring the glare Lily was sending him.

"Really?" James asked, looking at Lily.

"Only if you think you need luck, Captain Potter." she said with a wry smile.

"A little luck could never hurt."

"Luck is for those who lack skill."

"Then maybe you should kiss me, because I'm screwed." Mary said glumly.

"I'll kiss you." Sirius offered. Mary rolled her eyes, ignoring him.

James and Lily stood looking at each other heatedly, neither paying attention to the two friends beside them. "So, do I get that kiss for luck? Kissing the Captain gives the whole team luck you know."

"Really? And how is that?" Lily asked. They were flirting, actually flirting.

"Magic." he replied.

With a laugh, Lily placed a hand on his shoulder, placing a kiss on his cheek, very near the corner of his mouth. "Good luck out there."

—

Alice, Frank, Dorcas, and Caradoc sat in the row behind him, Lily crammed between Remus and Emmeline, Peter on the other side of Remus. The game was close, it all came down to which team could catch the Snitch. James was playing perfectly, but the Slytherin team wasn't playing fair, and Slughorn was showing favor to his house. There were already three obvious, unmistakable purposeful attempts to knock the players off their brooms.

But, it seemed there was hope, as a flicker of gold was seen in the sky, both Seekers spotting it at once. Mary and Regulus both shot up after it, trying to reach for it, colliding. For a moment, it seemed both Seekers would fall off their brooms.

Emmeline grabbed Lily's hand, both girls terrified. All of them seemed to be holding a collective breath, as Mary toppled backward, her arm shooting up, hand closing around the flying ball. There was a loud cheer from the crowd, as they realized Mary had caught the Snitch, hanging from her broom by one hand, and one leg looped over.

She barely had pulled herself upright, when her team was around her cheering. "Mary, you were brilliant." James complimented.

"Bloody amazing." one of the other teammates agreed.

The team went down to the ground, talking loudly. A slew of people were approaching them, among them Lily and the others.

"I can't believe it, you won us our game." Sirius complimented, lifting Mary by the waist, spinning them in a circle. Mary grabbed a hold of him, hugging him back. He was the forth boy on the team to do that to her so far.

Her feet hit the ground, their arms still around each other, and in a moment of pure euphoria, he kissed her. What the hell, she thought, they had won, she could celebrate a little. Her arms tightened around him, pulling him closer, her teammates letting out catcalls.

Mary pulled away, grinning. "I think I got a little carried away. But that was one hell of a congrats."

Sirius looped an arm back around her waist. "Should I pretend to apologize?"

"Let's just consider it a job well done sort of kiss. One teammate to another." Mary said back, unable to keep the silly grin off her face.

"As long as you don't go kiss the rest of the team."

Chapter 36

Lily ran across the field, ready to congratulate Mary—only to see Sirius was already giving her one she didn't think she'd be able to top. Well, that was bound to happen, sooner or later.

"James, you guys were great." she said, a bright smile on her face, shrieking as her lifted her off her feet, spinning them in a half circle. "What was that for?"

"You gave us luck." he answered, setting her down.

"Some more than others." she replied, inclining her head toward Mary and Sirius, who were still standing together.

"Can't blame him, hell, I almost kissed her; did you see that catch?"

"I was focusing more on whether she and Regulus fell to their death, but yeah, the catch was pretty good."

James reply was lost, as a great portion of the crowd yelled in approval of Sirius's declaration of a celebration party in the common room. Another cry was let out as he and some other members of the team said they were suppling the booze.

"Let's just pretend we didn't hear that." Lily said, grinning up at James.

James put a hand to his heart, pretending to be shocked. "Lily Evans, breaking the rules...for fun?"

"We all have our dark side."

"I think I could blame this on my influence." James said, in mock seriousness.

"That's what I blame it on." Lily said cheerfully.

"Then I'm afraid its too late. I've already corrupted you." he said, extending his hand to her, "Come on, lets go get sloshed."

"Oh no," Lily said, taking her hand back, "Last time I got sloshed, I woke up beside Dorcas in Caradoc's bed."

James eyebrows rose. "Wait, don't talk, I'm trying to create a mental image."

Lily slapped him in the arm. "I was there because...well, I can't remember, only that I woke up, rolled off and squashed Caradoc. Then he carried me to Pomfrey."

"Next time you get sloshed, you can squash me, and I'll carry you to Pomfrey." James assured.

"There will be no next time. The morning after is awful."

"That's what they all say the first time."

Lily shook her head in exasperation, laughing as James got pulled away by the team. "I'll meet you in the common room." he called.

The jostle of people trying to head back in the same direction nearly knocked her over, until a hand caught her by the arm. "Lily."

Lily had to strain her ears to hear, it seemed nearly the whole Gryfnndor house was down here, many of them still cheering. "Remus, where's the others?"

"Peter, Dorcas and Caradoc headed back to the common room. Alice and Frank are waiting for us."

What about Emmeline?" Lily asked, following behind him through the crowd. From farther away, she heard someone call her name. Scanning her eyes, she saw Bertram, waving toward her, from the Slytherin side.

"I have to go see what he wants. Wait for me?"

"I'll go with you. We did just beat the Slytherins, they won't be happy to see a Gryfnndor."

They crossed the distance, it was much easier, seeing how most of the Slytherins had left already. "Hey Bertram."

"Check it out, I'm a prefect." Bertram said, showing her his badge.

"You are? How?" Lily asked.

"One of the other prefects left. His parents didn't like how Dumbledore was running the school. Means that were a bunch of you-know-who supporters probably." Bertram explained.

"That's great Bertram. We have a meeting this week. Now I'll have you, Mary, Remus and James there with me."

Bertram wrinkled his nose at James name. "Yeah."

"I know you don't like him. But he isn't as bad as you think." Lily said, then adding with a smile, "Sorry you lost."

"No you're not." Bertram said, then, grabbing her wrist, pulling her closer, whispering, "I need to talk to you later. Betty is set on this order thing. She wants

a story, and she'll do whatever it takes to get it. Even fabricate things."

"I can handle her." Lily answered, sending a sideways glance toward Remus.

"Just guard your secrets. Especially Emmeline."

"You know about Emmeline?" Lily asked in a hushed voice.

"I saw her with your friends brother, the way they were talking made them look a little closer than just friends. You should tell her to be careful, I know the people he hangs around, they aren't good guys."

A little late for the warning, Lily thought bitterly. "I'll watch out for her. Maybe you could try to reason with Betty." Bertram agreed that he would try, not that it would do much good, and Lily and Remus departed.

"What was that all about?" Remus asked, pulling Lily closer to him as a Slytherin yelled out a snide remark to her. "Ignore him."

"He isn't worth it. Bertram said to watch out for Betty. She wants to know about the Order. He said to guard our secrets."

For the life of her, Lily could not figure out why Remus suddenly turned so pale. She would ask James about it later.

—

How the game had gotten started, she did not know, but somehow, Lily had been riled into a game of spin the bottle. She had believed it was Dorcas who had pulled her into it, along with Mary. Alice had declined, saying her and Frank didn't want to kiss anyone else besides each other—then proceeded to proving, as they had been making out in a corner most of the night.

Caradoc and Remus looked unhappy to be there, as Dorcas had also pulled them in. Sirius had pulled in James, who Lily was dreading would land on her. Their first kiss on the way to being reunited, she had hoped would not be a public affair.

So far, no one as getting lucky kissing who they wanted. There were a few other students who had been playing, two other girls, Peter, and two other boys. Peter had left, to go sit with Emmeline, who had been alone, and didn't want to play. One of the girls had left with one of the boys, leaving only two other people besides her friends. Ivor Dillonsby, who had had a little too much firewhiskey, and Gladys Gudgeon, a girl who was only in her third year, and was only playing because the other girl, who had left was her older cousin and had pulled her in.

James spun, and luckily, did not land on her, but he did however, land on Gladys. "Aren't you a little young to be playing with us?"

"Um, I'm just waiting for my cousin. She left with that other guy."

"That was your cousin. I know her, you won't be seeing her again tonight." Sirius said, looking over to where the girl was engaged in a game of tonsil hockey.

Gladys glared at him. Ivor spoke, "Just kiss her already or spin again. I think she's kinda hot." Gladys slid away from him, closer to Remus, who was on her other side. "I think I'll just go." she said, hoping up, scurrying away.

James spun again, it landing on Ivor. Both looked at each other in horror, before James pushed the bottle toward him, "Your spin."

"Come on, I wanna see you kiss." Dorcas prodded.

"Yeah, we want to see some man on man action." Mary added.

"No way." James answered.

"Come on, I'll kiss Mary if you kiss him." Dorcas offered.

"But you have to go first." Mary added.

Lily thought maybe Ivor wasn't the only one with a bit too much firewhiskey.

"Hell, I'll kiss him to see that." Sirius said.

"That's because you're drunk." Remus replied.

"Kiss Remus." Dorcas said.

"Yeah, that's who we want to see make out." Mary edged on.

"I don't know them." Lily said, burying her face in her hands.

"Remus—" Sirius started.

"Move any closer and I'll kill you." Remus threatened.

"Then lets just spin. I haven't made out with anyone yet." Dorcas said, disappointed. Not that there were that many appealing options.

Ivor spun, and landed on Lily. Lily held back a groan. Why was she playing this game? Right, to keep an eye on Dorcas and Mary. The things she did for her friends. She leaned forward, kissing him, shocked when he tried to push farther. He was pulled back from her, Lily wiping her hand across her mouth. She looked to where James was, wondering if it was him who had pulled Ivor off.

She thought not. Shouldn't he be jealous? Not sitting there so calmly? It irritated her, but she brushed it off, spinning the bottle. It landed on Dorcas. "Your spin. I'm not kissing you."

"Finally." Dorcas said, spinning the bottle. Both Remus and Caradoc looked at it in absolute horror as it landed on Sirius.

"Um..." she said, looking over at Mary, then Remus then back to Sirius. Sirius reached out and grabbed her hand, bringing it to his lips, then dropping it.

"There, you've been kissed. Give me the bottle."

He spun, it landing on Mary. "You already kissed me once today. Not happening again." she said snarkly, taking the bottle, giving it a spin. It landed on Caradoc. She kissed him with enthusiasm, probably for Sirius's sake, Lily guessed. She supposed that remark about knowing the girl earlier had really gotten under Mary's skin.

Sure enough, Sirius was not happy, and if looks could kill, Caradoc would have died three times over.

"Not that that wasn't fun and everything, but could you not use me to piss him off? Kiss Ivor or something." Caradoc said unhappily. The only girls who ever kissed him were the ones hung up on ex-boyfriends.

"I'll kiss you." Ivor said, eyes sweeping over Mary.

"Stay away from my girl." Sirius snapped.

"I'm not your girl!" Mary protested loudly.

"Lets just have Caradoc spin, shall we?" Dorcas cut in, tossing the bottle to him. Ivor rose, saying that he had to go. He had only made it a few yards away, before he was throwing up. Remus said that one of them should probably go help him to his room. None of them moved.

Caradoc took his spin, eyes going wide when it landed on Dorcas. "I think it's pointing in the space between you and Lily. I'll re spin."

"Don't worry, it's pointing at me." Dorcas said, mistaking his nervousness as that of his possibly having to kiss Lily, and get on James bad side.

"Maybe I should go help Ivor." Caradoc said, casting a quick glance toward Remus.

Dorcas rolled her eyes. "Remus is the last guy in the planet who would hold something like this against you. It isn't like you're in love with me or something."

—

Whatever he would have said was cut off, as Dorcas leaned forward, meeting their lips in a chaste kiss. She pulled back, looking at him in shock. She rose a hand to her lips, her expression confused. "That felt...familiar somehow."

"I'm going to go help Ivor." both Caradoc and Remus said at the same time, rising. Dorcas looked between them, color suddenly rushing to her face, and she stood, rushing away.

"I'll go after her." Mary offered. She didn't know what was going on, but it looked like something Caradoc and Remus should be explaining. "Shouldn't you two be helping Ivor?"

they walked away to do so glumly. Sirius offered to go with her, and Mary told him no. After that, he went over to Emmeline and Peter. Leaving Lily and James alone. Lily knew she should go after Dorcas, but Mary had it covered. And she would go, in just a minute.

"Guess we're the only ones still playing." James said.

"Guess so." Lily answered, a feeling of nervousness filling her. "Sort of limits the options."

"Think of it positively. At least I'm not Ivor." James replied.

"Did you pull him off me?" Lily asked, trying not to fidget. Any minute, she could be kissing James.

"No, Remus did. He was closer." James answered, then he added, "I might have hinted that he should."

Lily smiled, feeling a warmth flood through her. "I thought I was going to have to punch him."

"Have I ever told you I hate this game?" she added.

"So why play?"

She didn't answer for a moment, then turned the question on him, "Why did you play?"

"I thought that was obvious." he answered, moving closer to her.

There he was sitting beside her, his arm brushing hers, his eyes peering down into hers, feeling warm and inviting. He had played for her, for a chance to kiss her. His hand raised her cheek, pulling her nearer him, their lips almost meeting, before a voice called out his name.

"What?" he called, through gritted teeth.

"Um, Peter sort of...collapsed." Emmeline said. Lily and James looked to where she and Sirius were standing, over the sprawled out Peter.

"Had a few too many I think." Emmeline added.

"Help me lift him. He's too fat to carry alone." Sirius called.

"Sirius!" Lily recoiled sharply.

"What? He's can't hear me. Besides, he knows he's fat, he complains about it. Almost like a girl."

"I have to go help him." James said apolitically to Lily.

"It's fine." Lily said back, placing a false smile on her face.

She could wait.

—

"Dorcas, are you okay? What's wrong?"

"Nothing." Dorcas said, sinking farther down the wall.

"You know, I think Caradoc might take it the wrong way, if you run away after kissing him. I didn't think he was that bad." Mary said lightly.

"I kissed him before. That night, with the potion." Dorcas said blandly.

"Oh." Mary said, seating herself beside Dorcas.

"Remus was there. They both lied to me about it."

"They probably just didn't want you to feel bad." Mary replied.

"I kissed one of my best friends. In front of my ex boyfriend. Who also happens to be his friend too. How am I supposed to not feel bad?"

Mary opened her mouth then closed it. The reason why Caradoc insisted it wasn't Emmeline was suddenly clear. "It'll all be okay."

Dorcas didn't answer, and Mary was glad. Their life was turning into a soup opera.

—

The next time all of them would be together was the following detention. Dorcas was trying to avoid both Remus and Caradoc, especially the latter, which was very difficult as he was the best man to her maid of honor, and they both were helping Alice with wedding plans. Mary was avoiding Sirius, because she 'needed time to think' as she had told Lily.

This time to think involved Lily staying close to her, so that she could have her there to think aloud to, which meant Lily had not had a chance to see James, as he was usually with Sirius, who she was not allowed to go near.

By the time detention came around, they had all somewhat moved past there differences. Dorcas was still upset, but due to many apologies, and explanations, coming from Caradoc on he and Remus's behalf, she had decided to forgive them.

And, on the bright side, this detention, they hadn't had there wands taken away. And, it was actually a fun detention. At least, Lily thought so.

They were decorating for Christmas, something the house elves had already been doing, but they were assigned to hang the rest of the remaining decorations. Alice and Frank were doing the mistletoe, (and making sure to use each one personally). Dorcas, Caradoc, Remus, and Peter were decorating a smaller tree, to be placed in the common room. Mary and Sirius were supposed to be hanging garland, but they had disappeared somewhere, leading Lily to believe that all the thinking Mary did had led her toward forgiveness.

Or, maybe it was the holidays. They made people sentimental.

"I guess we'll be doing all the garland ourselves." Lily said, turning to James. He was working with her.

"Sirius and Mary left us?" James said, glancing around. He had thought they were going after another box, then coming back.

"All alone." Lily replied, yanking out a strand of beaded garland. It was red, and tangled completely with a strand of blue. Lily dropped it back in the box.

"All alone?" James repeated.

Lily realized he was right. They were in the Great Hall, Alice and Frank were off all over the castle, Mary and Sirius were gone, to only Merlin knew where, and the others were decorating a tree.

"All alone." she replied, eyes locking on his.

"You know, I we never did finish playing the other night." he said, dropping his gaze down to her lips. Lily didn't answer, taking a step forward at the same time as he.

This time there were no interruptions, and finally, the moment she had been waiting for could just happen. His face lowered towards hers, much to slowly in her opinion, and then his lips met hers, soft and sweet.

It was as if it was the first kiss all over. She had forgotten just how good he was at this. It was the sweetest sort of torture, his mouth exploring hers slowly, driving her crazy, until his hands reached up, tangling in her hair, pulling her low ponytail loose, tilting her head, kissing her harder.

She melted into him, kissing him back with an urgency she didn't fully understand. Her back hit the wall, pulling him with her, his hands leaving her hair, traveling down her arms, to her sides, one going to the small of her back, pulling her closer against him, the other tracing slowly up her stomach.

There was too much space between them, Lily thought, even while they were pressed together so. And her lungs were becoming painfully aware of their lack of oxygen, but she didn't want to pull away. It was like kissing him was life. He broke away from her, for one second, her taking in a shocked gasp of air, before his lips were back on hers.

Every bit of her felt as though it were burning. Every part of her that he touched felt on fire, dancing with life. Every part of her he didn't was burning with the longing to be touched. She let out a groan, low and feral, into his mouth. The sound seemed to bring him back to reality, and he pulled away from her, Lily taking in a ragged breath of air, looking up at him confused.

"Lily, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done that. It was a total mistake. We're just friends, and just friends don't...do what we just did.."

Lily stared at him in amazement. After all that, he still thought she wanted to be just friends? Or, a far scarier thought, maybe he wanted to be just friends.

So what it he was kissing her, she had already established that the holiday's made people feel sentimental. Maybe it was just a bit of nostalgia dripping

in. Maybe she had pushed him away. He said he would wait forever, but people could only wait so long. And like everyone else in her life, she had pushed him away, and he wasn't coming back.

"I have to go." she said quickly, brushing past him. She would not allow him to see her cry. She would not be that weak.

"Lily, wait." James called after her. She ignored him, walking faster, rushing out of the Great Hall, leaning against the first wall she came to, taking in huge gulps of air.

She had ruined everything. She was always going to be alone. Sinking farther into the wall, she let the tears fall.

Chapter 37

She had been driving him crazy, pure and simple. That was all there was to it. First, she had to wear her hair in those two braided pigtails, which just sent off the whole naughty school girl thought. Because really, what girl above the age twelve still wore french braids in pigtails? Not to mention that her shirt kept riding up her midriff, every time she reached up to hang a strand of garland. And not no one should wear pants that tight, when they had to bend over so often, exposing a wide span of lower back.

The thought of pulling her aside, finding some secluded area, alone, was too much to resist.

"I thought we were getting more boxes of garland. This is an empty classroom." Mary said, eyes sweeping over the room. There was no garland anywhere in sight.

"I may have stretched the truth." he replied, stepping closer behind her, letting the door fall closed with a soft click.

"You lied to me. That's not altogether surprising." Mary said. "Why did you drag me here?" she added.

"Because you're driving me crazy." he answered, closing the distance between them, no space behind her. She could feel her back against his front, shuddering when he placed a light kiss to the nape of her neck.

"You do know luring girls into secluded areas and trying to seduce them is sexual harassment." Mary said, trying to keep her voice firm, as his hands found their way to her waist.

"Do you feel harassed?" he asked, his mouth near her ear, his breath tickling her.

"Very." she answered, leaning her head back as his mouth traveled down from her ear to her shoulder, leaving a trail of kisses. She let out soft hum, as one of his hands moved her waist, under her shirt.

"Move that hand any higher and you'll lose it." she warned.

"It might be worth it."

Mary turned to face him, ready to give him a piece of her mind—what the hell was he thinking anyway, that she would just make out with him in some empty classroom, because he was feeling an itch? Well, he was wrong, and she had every intention of telling him so—until he kissed her.

In the long list of things she could never refuse, Sirius was in the top ten. Top five on good days. Top three on great days. She completed her half turn, never breaking away from him, winding her arms around his neck, molding herself against him.

His hands were on her waist, lifting her off her feet, her instinctively wrapping her legs around his waist, hooking the, at the ankles. Her back slamming into the wall didn't hurt, not so much. More of a knock to her brain, asking what exactly was she thinking.

She pulled away from the kiss, stretching her arms above her, digging her nails into the wall, as his lips occupied themselves with kissing other parts of her. "I...think...we should...really stop." she said, between breaths, panting, as the hand she had threatened to remove was working on the buttons on her shirt.

Alice's shirt, actually, which was why it was a bit too small. But it was red, and she thought it had matched with her red nail polish exactly. She wondered if Alice would appreciate what she was doing in it.

"We should." Sirius agreed, before recapturing her lips with his. He lifted her from against the wall, falling back into a chair, pulling her into his lap.

"I'm going to hate myself for this later." Mary said, breaking away for air.

"You'll hate me too." Sirius replied.

"Who says I don't hate you now?" she countered.

"Do you?" he asked, suddenly serious.

Mary locked her eyes on his, thinking. "I don't know."

"You did kiss me." he reminded.

"I was caught in the mmm..." she trailed off, as he kissed her collar bone, working his way up to her jaw. "Caught in the what?" he asked, his lips near hers.

"In the moment." she answered, returning her lips to his.

"Not to ruin 'the moment', but this leads me to believe that you do not hate me." he said, breaking away from her.

"I didn't mean to lead you on." she said, dropping her lips back down to his.

"I think we should talk." he said. Mary looked at him as if he had lost his mind. Never in a million years, would she expect those words from him, at a time like this.

"You have me sitting in your lap, ready to have hot sex in a public place, and you want to talk?" she said, her voice coated in disbelief.

"When you put it like that...yes." he answered, nearly wincing at the words.

"About what?" she said, defeated.

"About us."

"There isn't an us." she said back, shocked out how harsh her words came out.

"That's what I want to talk to you about. I don't know what I can do, to make you see that I'm sorry. More sorry than anything else I've ever done to be sorry for, and I've done a lot of things to be sorry for."

"I know that, but it doesn't change—"

"I was an idiot." he cut in. "Is that what you want to hear? I'd do anything you want, if you would just give me another chance. I miss you."

Somewhere in her heart, she was hurting. She was sure he had never spoke like that to any other girl. But, she wasn't sure if it mattered. Then again, he was sorry. And he had said himself he was an idiot. Despite of how hurt she had felt, she had never really gotten over him.

"I miss you too." she said softly.

"Enough to give things another go? I'll make it up to you, I promise."

Mary took a breath. "Maybe. But we have to have ground rules. I'm still really pissed off at you."

"Whatever you want." he said quickly.

Whatever she wanted? Well, she would have to test that. Sort of a trail run of them being back together.

"First, no sex."

"None?" he said in disbelief.

"None at all. I want to know you like me for my brain, not my body." she said.

Even though he found that horribly unfair, and even cruel, he would agree to it. "Done."

"And no flirting with other girls. Or making out in public places anyone can walk in on."

"Only broom closets from here out." he replied. She wrinkled her nose at his response. "Or wherever you want." he added.

"Okay," she said, smiling.

"Okay," he repeated.

"I cannot believe I'm getting back together with you," she said, shaking her head. "I would have pegged Lily to cave first."

"I give credit to my irresistible charm."

"Don't flatter yourself," she said, much too happy to pull off a sarcastic tone.

There was a silence after her words, which he broke, talking, looking almost nervous. "You know that I—I've never said this before, I—I think I love you."

"You only think?" she said lightly. Getting emotional with him wouldn't be good. They were the sort of people who hightailed at words like love.

"I love you. I have, longer than I would admit. I could never forget you, no matter what I tried to do. The Quidditch, the girls—"

"Girls? What girls?" she cut in sharply.

He could have hit himself for saying anything. That was not something to mention to her. "They didn't mean anything. I thought you hated me, and I was trying to move on. It was only sex—"

"Only sex? Oh, so you tell me you love me, but you've been sleeping around. You couldn't even keep it in your pants for a few months—" she started.

"Like you weren't sleeping with your boyfriend."

"I never slept with him. I broke up with him because of you." Mary snapped.

"How was I supposed to know that?"

"You thought I would sleep with him? I didn't even like him."

"Then why were you dating him?" Sirius asked.

"To make you jealous!" she cried.

"Which obviously worked."

"Obviously. I cannot believe I thought—you'll never change. You're the same boy that I hated at the beginning of the term."

Whatever his reply was, it was cut off, by the door swinging open, a weeping Lily stepping inside, not noticing them at first, too busy swiping furiously at her eyes. The position to be found in was not a good one, she was straddling his lap, clothes half undone. Lily lifted her eyes, gaping at them, moving her mouth as if to form an apology, turning red, spinning back around, hurrying out of the door.

"Was she crying? I have to go after her," Mary said, jumping up to follow her out, leaving Sirius seated in the chair.

"You might want to button up first," he called helpfully. Mary froze, dashing back inside the doorway, slamming the door, leaning against it, hands shaking so badly she could hardly button her shirt. Sirius rose, crossing the room to her, pulling her hands down, buttoning her shirt with a sort of fluid rapidness that only reminded her that he must be well practiced in the act.

He dropped his hands, looking down at her. She crossed her arms, lowering her gaze to her feet. Lily needed her, and she didn't have time for going through this. Not again.

"Mary—"

"Don't," she cut in, sweeping past him.

He didn't follow her out, and she hadn't expected him to. After all, she was just a thing to be forgotten.

Chapter 38

"Lily, what's wrong? Why are you crying?" Mary called, dashing behind her friend.

"It's nothing. You should get back."

"That? That I can explain," Mary replied, nearly tripping over her own feet, as she rushed forward, falling into step beside Lily.

"It needs no explanation. A picture is worth a thousand words, and none of them I want to hear," Lily said.

"Lily, what happened? You caught me in a classroom with a boy, and didn't even scold me. You're crying. Talk to me."

Lily stopped, her eyes looking at the floor. "James doesn't love me anymore. He only wants to be friends."

"What? Lily, that's crazy," Mary protested.

"It's what he told me."

"What were his exact words, maybe you...interpreted wrong," Mary suggested.

"He kissed me. Then, after, he said he didn't mean it, because we were just friends."

"Maybe he said that because he thinks that's what you want," Mary said. Lily could be so daft sometimes. Whoever said love was blind was wrong. It wasn't blind. It was retarded.

"After the way I kissed him, he'd have to be the world's biggest fool to believe that," Lily said, swiping at her eyes again.

Mary placed a shoulder around her arm sympathetically. She was going to have a talk with James later. At least one of them deserved their happily ever after.

—

James and Sirius reached their room at the same time, both wearing equally miserable expressions. "What happened with you?" Sirius asked, walking in the door behind James, flinging himself onto Remus's cleaner bed.

"I kissed her. And she ran away," James said in monotone. "How about you?"

"I passed up the opportunity to have sex with Mary, so I could convince her we should get back together. Then I may have mentioned there were a few other girls after her, and she hates me again."

"We are two very depressing people," James spoke.

"I understand why suicide rates go up during the holidays," Sirius replied.

"I heard they're higher in summer, actually," James mused.

"So, what are you going to do to win her back?" Sirius asked.

"I'll let you know when I figure it out. All that comes to mind is divine intervention," James answered glumly.

"I think the divine powers that be are too busy to worry about failed romances. All those summer suicides you know," Sirius replied.

"What about you, what are you doing to win Mary back?"

"Begging and groveling seem the best choice."

"Wonder if it would work on Lily," James thought out loud.

"I wouldn't count on it. She walked in on me and Mary. She was crying."

"Great. I made her cry."

"It's not that bad. She'll come around. Maybe," Sirius said.

"Was that supposed to be encouraging?" James asked.

"You do remember the part where I told you I passed up sex with Mary?"

"We're both too discouraged to be encouraging," James said back.

"If I could talk to Mary, I could get her to calm down. If she'll talk to me."

"Then go talk to her," James said simply.

"I don't know where she is."

James sat up. "You don't, but Dorcas, Alice, or Emmeline will."

The tree was finally completed, Remus, Dorcas, and Caradoc sitting on the couch looking at it, Peter in the chair across from them. Dorcas still felt a bit strange around them, Caradoc had told her he didn't tell her what happened, because he hadn't wanted things to be weird, and that he had asked Remus not to, and Remus had agreed. She thought there was more to it than that, but she didn't want to push it.

It was almost Christmas, and Caradoc would be spending it without his sister, and as his friend, it was more important to be there for him, during a time that was sure to be hard.

"The star on top is crooked." Peter announced, the other three looking up. Remus straightened it with a wave of his wand.

"It doesn't matter. Everyone will be home, with their own trees." Caradoc said.

"Not everyone. A few will stay." Dorcas said.

"They won't care about a tree." Caradoc muttered under his breath. "They'll be thinking of how they have to stay here, because they haven't got anywhere to go. Trapped here, with people they don't want to be with, this place that doesn't have any memories of Christmas. I wish I could stay."

Dorcas shifted, turning to face Caradoc, from her spot on the couch between he and Remus. "It's going to be hard, but you and your family need each other."

"I can't go back there. Back home, without her there. All of us, pretending its going to be okay, that one day we'll be okay. But they won't, they never will."

Dorcas took his hand in hers, looking him in the eyes. "It will never be okay, but it will get easier. If you need me—any of us, all you have to do is call. I'll be there, I promise."

The devotion in her voice caught Remus off guard, of course, that was part of who she was. She would always devote herself to her friends, she would always take care of them, look after them. He was surprised to find that he didn't mind her directing that devotion away from him—he wanted her to be happy.

Suddenly the couch seemed to small to hold all three of them, as if their shared sadness required his seat. It felt improper to watch them, almost as if he were spying on them doing some sort of lewd act. Not that there was anything romantic about it, it was need, pure and simple, people needed one another for comfort, for support.

Suddenly, he felt very lonely.

"I'm heading to the library. Want to come Peter?" he asked, standing.

"You spend way too much time in there. You should pitch a tent." Dorcas said, casting him a smile. He smiled back at her, and he reached out and caught his hand, stopping him. "The same thing goes for you too you know, if you need anything—"

"I know. I'll see you later Dorcas."

Outside, James and Sirius saw them on the way in the common room, asking for Mary. They said they didn't know where she was, but that she had said something to Dorcas, who was inside.

"Dorcas, I need you." Sirius said, watching both her smile at the wording. Caradoc had left from his spot next to her, and was heading up the stairs, sending them a wave.

"You missed your chance." she said, referring to the game of spin the bottle.

"As alluring as the offer was, I do have morals."

"This coming from the boy who once told me he would kiss anything with boobs." Dorcas jibed.

"That excludes you, love. Still shopping in the training department—"

He was cut off by a particularly hard poke in the side. "That isn't funny."

"Right. Do you know where Mary is?"

"She passed through. She told me not to tell you where she was if you would ask. She didn't tell me why, though."

Sirius sighed, there was no way he was going to be able to find her.

"Don't give up, it isn't that big of a school." James said encouragingly.

"What? This place is huge." Dorcas said.

"Not helping."

Mary propped herself up Frank's bed, legs swinging. She had been hoping to find Alice, but the room was a good a hiding place as any. She had a lot of things to hide from.

Sirius. Dumbledore(as she had not yet answered his question about the Order.) Herself. And wasn't that the main one, the thing she was always hiding from?

The fact that despite all her efforts, she was fucked up. She would never be able to fully trust someone, not without that edge of doubt. Her jealousy was more caused by deep set insecurities than envy. She couldn't even say three little words back.

Logically, she really shouldn't care what he did when they weren't together. But he had wanted to forget her. He had given up on her. That was enough to make her want to cry, but she refused to give into misery. Anger worked so much better.

The door swung open, and Mary started, taking a breath of relief when she saw the boy in the door. "Its just me." Caradoc said, his eyes asking the silent question of why she was there.

"I'm hiding." Mary said simply.

"Why not hide in your room?"

"I was hoping Alice would be up here. I didn't want to hide alone. Gives you too much time to think." Mary said, giving him a half smile. Suddenly, an idea clicked in her head. "Caradoc,"

"Yeah?" he said, walking toward his own bed.

"Do you wanna fuck?"

His eyes went wide, and he stared at her. "What?"

Mary rolled her eyes. She should have known he would make it difficult. "Do you want to fuck?" she said, crossing the small distance.

"Can I ask why?"

Mary spun away from him, gritting her teeth. "Because if Sirius can be a slut then so can I." Without thinking, she kicked the post of the bed, swearing as she did, bouncing on one toe. Caradoc put a hand to her shoulder, directing her to sit on his bed.

She caught his arm pulling her toward him, he backing away almost comically. "Mary, I don't think—"

"Good, you shouldn't think. This doesn't require thinking."

He looked at her a second. "Are you going to kick me if I say no?"

"What?" she asked, looking at him as if he were insane. (Which, giving the circumstances, he thought was quite funny.)

"Mary you don't want to do this. You don't even like me that way." he rationalized.

"This isn't about like. This is about revenge." Mary said, her voice hard. "And why not? You'll be two for two in the girlfriend stealing category."

"What are you talking about?" he asked, alarmed.

“Dorcas. Have you told her how you feel? Don't bother denying it. But I won't tell I promise.” she said.

He strode back over to her, taking her by the upper arms. “You should go.”

“Fine, you won't help me, someone else will. It would be better to have one of his friends, but if you're to afraid-”

“I'm not afraid, you are. You say this is about revenge, but I don't believe you. I don't know what happened with you two, but you aren't doing this because you're mad. I think you're in love, and that maybe you think he is too, and that scares you shitless, because you don't know how to handle it. This isn't about revenge, its about you trying to sabotage yourself, because you're afraid.”

Mary opened her mouth then closed it. What was there to say to that? The truth hurt. “I'm really fucked up, aren't I?”

“No more than any of the rest of us.”

Mary quirked a smile. “Don't tell him about this, okay?”

“Are you serious? I thought he was going to kick my ass over a game of spin the bottle, you think I'd tell him about this?”

—

“You do know this is crazy?” Bertram asked, sending an exasperated look at Lily.

“I know, but...I can't help being in love, that isn't something you can control.” Lily said. She had been explaining her story to Bertram, telling him how she felt, hoping to get a man's opinion on the matter. She had forgotten that Bertam did not like James, and his opinion would likely reflect that.

“Then you have to tell him how you feel. He can't be as bad as I thought, if you're in love with him.”

“I can't.” Lily said, letting her head drop unto the table. The library was empty except for them, and Remus and Peter, who were seated farther away. They hadn't seen her yet.

“Why not?”

“Because, it isn't that simple. And why tell him if he doesn't feel the same? I'll lose him as a friend, and at least this way I have him.” Lily said, with a frustrated moan.

“Why don't you write him a letter? You know, saying how you feel. It'll be easier than telling him in person. And you don't have to send it until you're ready.” Bertram suggested, a plan forming in his mind.

“That's not a bad idea. I'll probably chicken out, and never send it, but-” Lily paused, looking at him. “I'll give it to you, and then when I want to send it, I'll tell you, and I won't be able to back out at the last minute, and rip it in half instead of attaching it to my owl.”

“I'll do it if thats what you want. All I want is for you to be happy. Here, you can use my quill.” Bertram answered, handing Lily his supplies. “I'll give you a few minutes alone. Tell me when you're ready to give it to me. I won't look at it, I promise.”

Lily watched him walk away, then bent over the letter, pouring her heart out.

Chapter 39

The insistent rapping on her window let her know that it was not only the wind, but something more. Mary hopped up from her bed (she had left Caradoc's with a bit of her dignity left, and ever so glad that for once a boy had told her no) and approached the window, wand in hand. A girl had to be ready, in all cases.

What she saw there, she was not ready for.

There, on his broom, not sitting, but standing, knocking on her window, was Sirius Black.

“Sirius?! What are you doing? Have you lost your mind?” she cried, not quite able to believe her eyes.

“I had to talk to you, and Caradoc said you would be here. But I can't get up the stairs, so I came up with this. James said it was a bad idea, so did Remus actually-” (Of course, simply walking in would be too easy, she would wonder how, and he would have to tell her that he could turn himself into a dog, which was the last thing he needed to discuss at the moment.)

“They both were right. You could get yourself killed!” she shouted, then winced, afraid that her shouting may startle him, causing him to fall, causing him to die...

“And I'll die a happy man, you being the last thing I see.”

Mary wrinkled her nose. “Who gave you that line?”

“James actually. I thought it might sound better aloud than in my head.” Sirius confessed, wobbling slightly.

“Sirius!” Mary cried, nearly reaching out the window grabbing him, but he steadied himself. “Sit down!” she demanded.

“I can't.” he answered.

“Why not?”

“I won't sit down until you forgive me.” he said, once again nearly falling.

“Don't be stupid, sit down.” Mary snapped, watching him flail on the verge of falling.

“Do you forgive me?”

“Sit down!” Mary shouted, ignoring the question.

“Do you forgive me?”

“Sirius!”

“Do you forgive me?”

“Yes! Yes, I forgive you!” Mary yelled, Sirius jumping into her open window. The moment he landed she grabbed the nearest object (which, thankfully, was her throw pillow) and began to plummet him with it.

“What is wrong with you, you could have gotten yourself killed?! You stupid, bloody jerk! You bastard, I-” her words her cut off, as he caught her wrists, propelling them backwards, landing on the bed, her pinned under him.

“Actually, James was down below ready to levitate if I fell, so there was never any real danger.” he said, causing her to stop squirming beneath him, locking him in a fiery glare.

“I hate you.”

“And I love you.”

She sighed, closing her eyes. Everything was so complicated.

“I take it you didn't really mean it when you said you forgave me? The other girls-”

“It wasn't about that.” she cut in. It was about it, partially, but not on the whole. “You wanted to forget me.” she added, her voice softer, her eyes opening back up, looking up into his.

“I thought that was what you wanted.” he said back.

“I didn't know what I wanted.” she answered. Then, taking a breath of air, trying to calm her nerves (as if they could be calm, laying under him, in her bed) she added, “I was just scared. I think that I was looking for reasons to push you away. Love is scary, and you already hurt me once...so I guess I was just trying to get it out of the way.”

Guilt never was a pleasant emotion, and she had the rare ability to make him feel it, more so than anyone else. “I'll never hurt you again. I promise. I'd rather hurt myself.”

“Yeah, I know. And that scares me too. That you love me. That I love you.”

“You love me?” he said, seeing her smile.

"Some days, yeah." she said, rolling her eyes. "But, I don't know how to do this. I don't know how to handle something real."

"I'm scared too, but I'd rather be scared with you, than be without you." he said back, meeting her eyes.

"Me too." she answered, after a long pause, sliding her wrists from out of his hands.

"So, we're back together? Third times the charm?" he asked.

"Back together. But this time, I want it to be for real, so we can drop the non-boyfriend girlfriend stuff." she answered.

"Does that mean—"

"The no sex policy is still in affect." Mary cut in, grinning at his look of dismay. "I may be swayed, eventually."

"You are a horribly cruel tease MacDonald."

"Don't pretend you don't love it." she said, leaning her face close to his, pulling back before they touched, "Oh, yeah, one more thing. If we're going to be in a serious relationship, I want you to do one more thing."

"What?"

"I want you to meet my parents."

The time seemed to fly by, Lily and James avoiding each other, Mary and Sirius spending every possible (though sexless) moment together. Alice and Frank were still planning their wedding, Dorcas and Caradoc helping out, being in the wedding party. This left James to spend the majority of his time with Remus and Peter, Lily spending hers with Emmeline or Bertram.

In this manner, time passed, and soon it was time to travel back home, for Christmas. The train ride home was especially awkward, since all four Marauders wanted to sit together, (James and Sirius going to the same place) and Mary wanting to sit with Sirius, Lily wanting to sit with Mary. In the end, Lily shared a compartment with Bertram and Emmeline.

Both girls were glum, and there was not much conversation. Bertram however, seemed to be looking at her oddly, and she could not fathom why. Lily supposed that he was worried for her. As soon as the train stopped, they all rushed to get off, Lily ready to be as far away from Hogwarts as possible. Bertram made an excuse that he needed to grab something, and to go on without him. Lily promised to write, and told him goodbye, her and Emmeline going on without him, the first two to get off.

In another compartment, James was waiting, Remus and Peter had went on ahead, but he was waiting for Sirius, who was saying his goodbyes. "And remember, use muggle transportation, my dad doesn't trust the magical ways. And remember what I told you about—"

"I got it." Sirius cut in, James wanting to roll his eyes. He had heard this speech most of the ride.

"Okay. So, you're okay with this right? I mean, meeting my parents doesn't freak you out?" James heard Mary's voice ask. As if that wasn't a loaded question.

"No, I'm glad you want me to meet your parents." Apparently, Sirius had realized this too, because that was a lie if he had ever heard one. No one wanted to meet a girls parents, especially her father.

It was with a sufficient amount of impatience that James heard them say their goodbyes (and was glad he could not see them) and watched Mary saunter out, giving him a particularly frosty glare. He had a feeling she much wanted to confront him, for Lily's sake, but she had not, namely due to Sirius.

"I am not glad. What the hell do you say to a girls parents?"

"How would I know?" James answered, watching Sirius grab his belongings, them heading out.

"There is a silver lining. If her parents like me, she says I'll be getting a very good Christmas present." Sirius added.

"I wouldn't mention that to them. No man wants to know your diddling his daughter. Especially that his liking you is whats gaining you access." James answered, peering around. He had wanted to catch Lily, to say goodbye...maybe for the last time, the ways things were looking.

"If you wanted Lily, you should have followed Mary." Sirius said, making him cast his eyes back to the boy beside him.

"No, its—Sirius, I think you should head over there." James said, forgetting what he was saying, seeing Emmeline, standing alone, looking upset. People were jostling by her, bumping into her, and she was unmoving, eyes vacant, staring out. Staring out, at a group of Slytherins, one who happened to be Regulus, and another who happened to be a girl who had her head lying on his shoulder, his arm around her waist.

"I'll meet up with you in the usual spot." Sirius said, disappearing into the flow of people, heading toward Emmeline, who, James thought, would be with Lily.

"Potter." the sound of his voice, coming from behind him, full of distaste made him turn. Bertram approached him, looking unhappy to be there.

"Bertram," he said, keeping his voice pleasant enough. Chances were, they would never like each other (and he did inflate the guys head, so he understood why he disliked him) but he would civil, for Lily.

"I need to talk to you. About Lily." Bertram said, his hands going into his pockets.

"What about her?" James asked warily. He hoped this wasn't some sort of warning to stay away from Lily, because she was his now, etc. If so, Bertram would be sadly mistaken.

"Do you love her?" Bertram asked bluntly.

"Of course I do, she's a good friend." James started, seeing his face twist into a frown.

"That isn't what I meant. It doesn't matter. The answer is obvious, to everyone except her, anyway." Bertram said, pausing, but no allowing James to answer back, going on, "I have a letter, that she's written to you. If you're in love with her, you had better do something about whatever it says, if not, pretend you never had it, never mention it. That would only hurt her, then I would have to hurt you."

Bertram paused, and James, though finding the idea that Bertram could hurt him a funny one, realized that what he was saying was true. If there was a fight, he may win, but Bertram would at least try to kick his ass. "I would never do anything to hurt her."

"You mean anything else?" Bertram said, the words cutting a little more than they should, again not giving James a chance to answer, fishing in his pocket, handing him the letter. "Like I said, don't hurt her. She means a lot to me."

"She means a lot to me too." James said taking the letter, feeling a bit odd. If Lily had any idea how many men loved her, she would be shocked. There was him, there was Snape (who he hardly counted as a person, but more of a filthy snake) and now Bertram. But Bertram would recover, and love someone else, that James could see. But he would never move on.

"Why are you giving me this? Does she know?"

"No, she doesn't. If she did, she would be mad. But I can handle it. I want her to be happy, and you...you make her happy, happier than I can. And I'm happy if she's happy." Bertram answered.

"Thank you." they were the only words he could think of, the only ones he could say. Because the fact was, whether he liked it or not, that eventually, had he not won Lily back, she would have been with someone else, and that someone very well could have been Bertram. He was the leading candidate.

"Yeah. By the way, that girl, Emmeline; tell her not to be upset. The girl she saw was Evan Rosier's girlfriend, her pet cat got lost, Evan left her with him to go find it. She was crying. I guess he was trying to make her feel better."

With that, he was gone, and James was left with the letter in his hand. He could see that Sirius was talking to Emmeline, and actually had an arm around her shoulders. She looked upset, he had time to read his letter, Sirius would be with Emmeline awhile. Unfolding it carefully, he saw Lily's hand writing (it was so much neater than his) some of the letters a bit slanted, or crooked, as if her hands may have been shaking when she wrote it. Preparing himself for whatever it may say, James began to read.

Dear James,

This is one of those letters. You know, the ones you write but never intend to send. But there are some things that I want—that I need—to say to you. Things about us.

Our relationship always was strange, how we hated each other, then you loved me, while I hated you, then eventually, I loved you too. We were happy, at least for awhile. Then, I found out about the bet, and I hated you again. At least, I wanted to hate you, but I never really could.

No matter what happened, you were always there for me. You were always the person I could turn to. You know me, better than anyone I sometimes think. You see me, all of me, even the parts I hate, the parts that scare me, and you still stuck by. You still loved me, and even after we broke up, you were still my friend.

I guess that it made you one of the only people I can be myself around, one of the only people that I really trust. I know that I had some issues with trusting anyone, and you know my reasons for that. And I trusted you, and we were happy. Then I found out you had been lying, and I was so mad. Because you had lied, and I thought you were the one person who never would.

So, I fooled myself into thinking that I didn't have anymore feelings for you. But we both knew that was a lie. I thought having you as a friend, that it would be enough. That as long as I had you, I would be okay. I hadn't realized how much I had made you a part of me.

But the truth is, it isn't enough. I still love you. I never stopped, and I probably never will. It isn't that I haven't wanted to, I have. I've tried. We've both hurt each other in so many ways over the years. I was horrible to you, you lied to me. But, looking at the world around us, none of those things seem to matter. I think we both have to forgive each other, and move on.

Love is the most important thing, it outweighs all the wrongs. What we were may not have been perfect, but what we had was real, it was once in a life time, head over heels, crazy, die for you love. And I think that's rare, it's rare that people can find it, especially so early. That your first love can be your true love, your one and only love—that's not the sort of thing that happens to everybody.

No matter how different we are, we were perfect for each other. And I think we still are. I don't know what you want, if you still want to be just friends, or if you still love me too. Whatever it is, that's what I want, because that's what love is about, and I love you.

I really love you. More than romance, more than friendship. The sort of love that lasts a lifetime, regardless of its form. So, if you want to be friends (I hate putting the just before it, because I think friends are just as important as lovers, and that if you really are in love, you should be friends, like we are now) I'll be okay with that.

But, if you still love me, like I love you, then let me know. Come tell me the instant you finish reading this. This was one of the hardest things to ever write in my life. But I had to, because if there was even a chance, only a chance to have us back, I had to take it.

Still, chances are I'll never send this. If somehow I do, take a chance on me. You said once you would wait for me forever.

If it takes that long, I'll still be waiting.

Love, Lily.

James stared at the letter in his hand, almost unable to believe it. He swung his eyes around, looking for Lily, seeing a dot of red far away. It was her, it had to be. He ran through the people, catching up to her, pulling her to face him.

It wasn't her. The girl had to be at least five years older, and her eyes were blue, not green. "Sorry, I thought you were someone else." The woman gave him a highly affronted look, before walking away.

"James!"

Sirius was there, trying to get to him, Emmeline not with him. "Lily's already gone if you're still looking for her. Emmeline told me. What's wrong?" Sirius said, seeing James pale.

"She can't be gone. She wrote me a letter. She told me that she loves me. I have to find her." James said frantically.

"You could write her back." Sirius suggested.

"I have to see her. In person."

"Go to her house." Sirius said.

"I don't have her address—wait, the invitation, the one to her sister's wedding, there's a number to RSVP to." James said, digging in his pockets.

"I thought you wanted to see her in person."

"I do. If there's a number, then I can use it to get an address. Then I can find her." James said, giving a cry of triumph when he found the crumpled piece of paper.

"I guess I'm not the only one who'll be meeting the parents this Christmas."

Chapter 40

"I'll get it!" Mary cried, jumping from her spot off the couch, running toward the door, not giving the boy outside time to knock. "Please tell me you did not drive that." she said, looking around him to the motorcycle parked on the curb.

"You said use muggle transportation." Sirius replied.

"I meant a car. Or a bus. Even a unicycle. Not something my dad will think is a death trap." she hissed.

All things considered, she was not making this any easier on him. She was, in fact, making it worse, when he was already nervous enough. The thought of leaving did cross his mind, but that would not bode well, he knew.

"I thought you would like it." he said instead. It was the sort of thing she would enjoy, fast and dangerous.

She smiled at him broadly. "I do. It's my parents that will be the problem." Casting a quick glance over her shoulder, she stepped out her door, pulling it too quietly. "How long has it been since I've seen you? Three days?"

"Three long days."

Grinning she bent forward, wrapping her arms around his neck. "Mary?" Cursing she pulled back before their lips met. "That would be Daddy. Come one." she instructed, grabbing his hand.

"Here we are Daddy." Mary said, leading him inside, smiling sweetly. "Sirius this is my dad. Daddy this is Sirius. I'll go get Mom, be right back."

The urge to yell for her not to leave him was an overpowering one. But, he restrained it. The way her father was looking at him was scary enough. "So, how long have you known my daughter?"

"We've known each other for years, being in the same house and all at school. We became close last year." Better not to mention that last year he had slept with her, calling her the wrong name was his definition of close. "We've been friends now for awhile."

"Right. I want you to know, my Mary is a special girl. It's not just anyone who can win her over. If you hurt her—"

"I would never hurt her. Sir." Sirius answered quickly. What was taking Mary so long?

"Good. But before you leave, I need you to do me a favor."

"What?" Sirius asked, wishing Mary would hurry back.

"I need you to write your name on this." Mr. MacDonald said, reaching in his pocket, holding out something to him.

"Is that a—"

"Shotgun shell?" Mr. MacDonald finished. "Yes."

"Daddy!" Mary's voice rang out, giving him a chastising glare. Behind her, her mother, her looked almost exactly like her, only older, stood, giving him the same glare.

"Sirius, this is mom."

"Pleasure to meet you." Mrs. MacDonald said, smiling. "Ignore what my husband said. I'm sure if Mary chose you, you must be a nice young man. Have her back by ten."

"Eight." Mr. MacDonald said.

Both women turned their glares back on him. "Fine, nine then."

"I'll have her back as early as you want Mr. MacDonald."

"Suck up." Mary mouthed to him.

"What are your intentions with my daughter?"

Both Mary and her mother looked ready to laugh. Laughing was the farthest thing from Sirius's mind.

"Nothing...dishonorable sir, if thats what you mean. I respect your daughter. She had very high morals for that sort of thing. Morals you taught her, I'm sure." he answered. That was nearly impossible to say with a straight face, but he managed.

"Well, in that case...nine thirty, but not a minute after."

Mary smiled at him, clearly amused. "Bye Mom, bye daddy." she called, taking Sirius's hand. "Hurry before he notices the bike." she whispered. "Mom's going to handle that one for me."

"Did I pass?" Sirius asked, once they were out the door.

"With flying colors. My favorite was the last bit. Though I have to say, I never took you for such a brown noser."

"The stakes were high." he replied.

"Yeah, yeah. Lets hurry up and get out of here."

Lily sighed, looking at herself in the mirror. There was no way her sister could actually expect her to wear such a hideous thing. It was pink, a frilly, and ruffled, and it looked horrible on her.

"It's perfect. We'll take it."

"We will?" Lily asked, looking at Petunia in dismay.

"You don't like it?" Petunia snapped.

"Doesn't matter. Your wedding." Lily answered, forcing a smile on her face. She was ready to escape.

Thankfully, there was only another two hours until she had to meet up with Dorcas. Bar hopping was not her favorite past time, but it would be fun. Distracting, anyway.

She only had to manage not to kill Petunia until then.

"That was today?" Sirius asked, following Mary into the bar. It was bawdy, loud, and not very appealing.

"Yes, remember, I sent you an owl yesterday?"

He didn't remember, but he wasn't going to tell her that. "I think the owl may have gotten a little lost."

Mary shrugged. "There's Dorcas. Caradoc is already here too. He doesn't look to happy. I wonder where Alice and Frank are?"

"Are we all going to be here?"

"Yeah. Lily should be showing up any time. So should Remus."

"So, Lily won't be at home?" Sirius asked, Mary looking at him oddly. "No. Why?"

"No reason. I'll be right back."

He had to tell James.

James knocked on the door, expecting it to be opened by one of Lily's parents. "What?!" the person who opened the door snapped. James looked down to see a woman with blond hair, and a horse like face, with a long neck glaring up at him.

"You must be Petunia."

"Yes, thats me. Are you a friend of Vernons?" she asked, placing a smile on her face.

"No, I'm a friend of Lily's."

Petunia rolled her eyes. "She isn't here." she said, letting the door fall from her hand, nearly closing. James caught it.

"Petunia, wait!"

Petunia stopped, glaring at him. "What?"

"Do you know where she is?" he asked.

"Why should I tell you?" she said, giving him a once over. "If she wanted you to know, she would have told you herself."

James could not decide if this was her being annoying, or just watching out for Lily's best interest. Chances were the first one, but he preferred to believe the latter.

"You don't understand. I have to find her. I love her. You're about to be married, you can understand that. Whoever this guy is you're marrying, Lily is to me what you are to him. She's it, she's the one, and I have to find her, to tell her that, before its too late." James said pleadingly.

Petunia looked at him a moment, then sighed. "Fine, but only because I like you better than that other awful boy."

She turned her back on him, reaching out and grabbing her keys off the small table near the door. "I'll give you a ride."

"they give me cat scratch fever" Mary and Dorcas sang, from their spot in the small little stage, designed for things as humiliating as karaoke. Sirius was sitting at a table nearby, Lily across from him, Remus beside him. Peter was running late, no surprise, as he had to wait for his mother to leave to escape. James had not responded on the two way mirror.

Lily seemed to be happy enough. Her face was pink, her eyes shining. Her clothing was very unLilylike, wearing jeans that were skin tight, and green halter top that matched her eyes perfectly. It might be a good thing James was not there, the way men's gazes kept lingering on her. At least she wasn't clad in leather pants like Dorcas, that may have drew too much attention.

"Where are Caradoc and Emmeline?" Remus asked.

"Emmeline is going on stage next. I think she'll sound better. Dorcas is a little...less than completely sober I think. Or it may be all the sugar. Caradoc is with her. I think they're trying to make him sing too." Lily answered, fanning her face with her hand. She had spent the last few minutes dancing with strangers.

Alice and Frank approached them, flopping down in table next to them. "Where's James?" Alice asked.

Sirius shrugged.

Before one of them could question farther, there was a round of applause as Dorcas and Mary finished their song. Emmeline assisted Mary from the stage, while Dorcas jumped off, Caradoc grabbing her before she fell and busted her ass on the floor. Remus made a point of not looking her way.

"Why won't you two smile? It's almost Christmas." Lily said, rising. "I'm getting more eggnog. You want anything?" she directed toward the two boys sitting near her. The both shook their heads, the minute she was out of ear shot, Sirius began explaining the situation to Remus.

Lily leaned against the bar, waiting patiently. The bartender had to turn eventually, and she wasn't going to try to get his attention, being underage. This was all Dorcas and Alice's idea anyway, to help Caradoc not feel so depressed about his sister. It wasn't like they were doing anything wrong—she wasn't drinking, she wasn't smoking, and she wasn't making out with strangers in corners.

"Hey," the man next to her said, sliding closer, nearly stumbling. Lily forced a smile and gave a polite 'hello' back. The man leered at her. "What's your name?"

Lily." Lily said back, casting her eyes around the man who was eying her like she was lunch special and he hadn't eaten in weeks. It was creepy. "You wanna get out of here Lily?" he asked, laying a hand on her arm. "No thanks." she said quickly, pulling her arm back. "Why, you don't think I'm good enough for you?"

"I'm only seventeen." Lily said back, ready to leave and walk away, forget her drink. The man was obviously not going to leave her alone, and getting into a argument was the last thing she wanted.

"That's okay. Come on, it'll be fun." the man said, Lily ignored him, turning to walk away. He caught her arm. "Where are you going?"

"To my friends. Let me go." Lily said, keeping her voice calm. The man was drunk, he wasn't thinking clearly. A punch in the face may sharpen his senses, but it may also turn into a brawl. The man held on tighter. "Not until you agree to come with me."

"Let me go." Lily snapped, bawling her arm, nearly pulling him to the ground, but he still did not let go.

What happened next, Lily could not say was precisely her fault. Dorcas had came to get a drink as well, and had seen what was going on. She had told him to let her go, and he had refused, calling her several names that would make a sailor blush. All the while not letting go of Lily, and actually trying to drag her off. So, Dorcas, being the true friend she was, had jumped on his back, catching him in a choke hold, telling him until he let Lily go, she wasn't letting go of him.

While this did accomplish the goal, the man also fell backwards, slamming Dorcas into a wall, which set all the boys on their feet (Remus and Caradoc first, naturally) toward him. Seeing them coming, his own friends had jumped in, and thus a massive brawl had begun, with people swinging wildly at each other, and the bar tender calling for order.

Dorcas was brawling with the boys, Alice was calling out something about peace and love, and goodwill to men, while Mary and Emmeline were to pull the boys away, as the barman announced he was calling the police. Lily was watching it all with mute horror, as that moment, James walked in, Peter at his side(he had met him at the door.)

"James, watch out!" she shouted, as a chair went flying, another scream escaping her as a hand grabbed the back of her shirt, pulling her back. Her fist lowered when she saw it was only Sirius, pulling her out of the way of a big man falling over.

"You and Mary get out of here!" he called, over the yelling, before punching a rather ugly man in the face.

"The police are coming, we all have to get out! We're underage!" Mary yelled, gaining a few shouts of agreement.

They were all pushing their way through, when James reached Lily, catching her by the hand. "Lily, come on." he said, pulling her with him into the empty bathroom, then, with a pop, apparating them outside. It seemed the others had followed cue, as Sirius along with Mary and Emmeline appeared beside them, followed by Peter, Alice and Frank, then Dorcas, Remus and Caradoc.

"What the hell is going on?" James demanded.

"Oh, Lily started a bar fight. You know, same old." Mary replied, James gaping at her.

"I did not. Dorcas did. Actually that man, since she was only trying to make him get his paws off me." Lily defended.

"What man? Where is he?" James said, turning back to the door. Remus caught him by the shirt. "We have to go, before the police get here. We aren't of age."

"Yes we are." James argued.

"Not in Muggle society. We have to be eighteen." Lily said, in her annoyed 'don't you ever pay attention in class' voice. James shot her a smile, which after a moment, she returned.

"We can go to my house. My Mum is spending the night at Gran's. It'll be empty." Peter suggested, Alice clapping at his suggestion. "Yeah, lets go. Party at Peter's!"

James shot a longing look at Lily. It seemed he'd never find the right moment to tell her.

The party was quickly adapted to a sleepover party, the boys parents didn't care at all, as they did not mention the girls. The girls only had to tell Caradoc's sob story (as Mary and Dorcas did an excellent job, even putting tears in their voice) and that they simply had to be there for emotional support.

Then came the job of picking rooms, Peter had his own, then there was his Mum's, which they could clean, and then there were two guest rooms. Peter took his own, along with Remus and Caradoc. Mary and Sirius took one guest bedroom, Alice and Frank the other. Dorcas and Emmeline took his mothers room, as they were only sleeping. That left Lily and James in an awkward predicament.

After a moments discussion, it was simply decided that they could sleep in the den, no one ever used it, and it had a couch that turned into a bed, and another couch, that one or the other could sleep on. Both said that it was fine, that they were friends, and that it didn't matter. Mary had offered to kick Sirius out of her room, and let Lily room with her (to which Sirius looked horribly offended, until she asked him would he rather share a bed with James, or have her and Lily share one while they both had couches) but Lily said no. She had an inkling sleep was not what Mary had in mind, and she was not going to stop her.

As Mary said, sometimes a girl just needed to get laid. And, as Lily thought, sometimes, she just needed to accept that sharing a room was as close as she would get to having the love of her life.

Once everything died down, (which did not take long, as some of them were ready for bed, to continue on with a two person party) Lily and James walked into the den, its hardwood floors creaking beneath them. It was spotless, even if not used, because that was the sort of women Peter's mother was. The couches were both peach colored, matching the cream walls. There was a fireplace on one side, which James set burning, as soon as they entered, because there was a bit of a draft.

"This is awkward." he said aloud, Lily smiling a forced smile at him. It was easy around their friends, the holidays helped, generating general feelings of cheer, but they were alone now, and that made things harder.

"Lily, I need to confess something to you." James said, stopping in front of her, where she stood, her hands held out to the fire, warming them. They dropped to her side, as she turned to him, breathless. "What is it?"

"I read your letter."

Lily's eyes went wide, her mouth opening in shock. "He gave it to you?!"

"Yes, but don't be mad, he was trying to help." James said, not wanting a sour mood to ruin his confession of love.

"I'm not mad. I'm humiliated. How can you even look at me, I know that you don't want me anymore, and now you have to sleep here with me all night, and it's going to be awful, and there's no way I can still trade with Sirius because I don't want to walk in there and see that, and-" she started, her face red, her vice rapid, until James raised a hand, pressing it to her lips.

"Lily, could you listen just a minute?" he cut in, and she nodded. "I read your letter, and as soon as I did, I tried to find you, but you were already gone. I went to your house, and I had to get a ride from your sister to find you."

"Petunia helped you?" Lily intruded, awed. That was a miracle. It had to be a sign they were meant to be, if even Petunia saw it.

"Yeah, but don't worry, she wasn't very nice about it." James answered.

"Figures." Lily replied, smiling. She still hadn't heard what James felt, she was almost afraid to, that maybe he was only letting her down gently.

His eyes met hers. "I read your letter, and I...I finally had hope again. Because you still love me, and I never thought that would happen. Not this fast. I told you I would wait forever, and I will. But I'm glad I don't have to."

"Are you saying what I think you're saying?" Lily asked, her voice barely above a whisper, taking a step closer to him, their bodies nearly brushing.

"I love you Lily. I always have, I always will. You're it. You're the one." he said, a huge smile forming on her face. "I've waited so long to hear that." she said,

linging his arms around her, hugging him tightly. She was hugging her back, lifting her from the ground.

Suddenly, all the world was right. Everything was as it should be.

James set her feet on the ground, looking down into her eyes. Lily seemed on the verge of speaking, but whatever it was, he didn't let her say, crashing his lips to hers. She clung to him, as if he was the very air she breathed. Her mouth moved urgently under his, as if breaking contact would be fatal. She shuddered, feeling his hands run along the bare part of her back, pressing herself closer to him.

After what could have been ages, they broke apart, breathing raggedly. Taking a deep breath, Lily looked to the ground, reaching up, pushing her hair to one shoulder, undoing the clasp on her halter.

"Lily, what-" he asked, looking at her, sounding nervous.

"I love you James. And I want—I mean, I think that I'm ready," her face was red again, her eyes on the ground.

"Are you sure? Because I wouldn't want to—you know, if you weren't sure." James said back, a part of his brain kicking him for asking, but the greater part of him caring for Lily's feelings.

"It's what I want. I mean, if that's what you want," she said, sound embarrassed. Instead of answering her with words, James took her face in his hands, lifting it up to look at her, before kissing her again, her arms twinging around him, he catching her under the knees, carrying her to the bed.

A futon was not the way she had imagined her first time, but things were not always what one expected. She and James were proof of that.

He laid her down, hovering over top of her. He was looking at her so intensely, she had to ask "What?"

"I'm going to spend the rest of my life with you," he stated, the certainty of it making her smile.

"Of course you are James Potter. You think I'm letting you go?"

He kissed her, then pulled away. "Are you nervous?"

"A little. But I trust you," she said, propping up on her elbows. "Don't me that James Potter, Quidditch star, ego-maniac, is nervous?" she teased lightly, kissing his jaw, her fingers working the buttons of his shirt loose.

"I wouldn't want to disappoint you. I see what happens when men touch you the wrong way," he answered, her rolling his eyes (one little bar fight, and he would likely be telling their grandchildren about it one day, she figured) as he pulled his shirt off, then doing likewise to hers, eyes scanning her body. She was wearing her awful pink bra that he had seen that day in the rain. He liked that, it was as if things had come full circle, the entire future before him.

The entire future. That was a thrilling, enticing, exciting thought. But for the moment, he would concentrate on tonight.

Chapter 41

James opened his eyes, smiling at the sight in front of him. There lying in front of the fireplace, clad in only his shirt was Lily, already awake. "Good morning," he said softly, her turning and smiling back at him. "Good morning to you too."

James leaned in to her, kissing her briefly. "How did you sleep?" She grinned at him, the fire making her eyes seem to sparkle more than they were. "I don't remember getting much sleep last night. Your idea I think. Not that I'm complaining."

She propped herself up on her elbows, looking away from him for a moment. "You know, I never imagined doing this. Especially in Peter's house. I suppose I should feel guilty."

"And do you?" James asked, sliding closer to her. She frowned for a second then smiled at him, "I don't know. But I love you."

He took her face in his hands, pulling her closer. "And I love you," he said back, kissing her. She sunk into him, letting him pull her unto his lap, her mind traveling to that familiar hazy place. With a slight groan, she pulled away from him, sliding off his lap.

"You can't just go and kiss a girl like that. Not when there isn't time to finish what it starts."

"Of course I can. Builds anticipation," he replied, her shaking her head. "You are awful, leaving the love of your life wanting," she said back, grinning. She could not help but to grin. She had never been so deliriously happy. "I'll make it up to you later," he promised.

The smile on his face died, a more solemn expression there suddenly. He reached over and took her hand. "I know this isn't the right time, not with your sister about to be married, and Alice and Frank about to have their wedding, I wouldn't want to steal their spotlight, but after all of that is over, I'm going to ask you to marry me."

Lily felt the air rush out of her. "You are?" He nodded and she swallowed a rising lump in her throat. "When you ask, I'll say yes."

"I thought that maybe, we could pretend for awhile. Until I get you a ring anyway," he said.

"What does that make us?" she asked, feeling as if her heart would burst. People could not be so happy. It was unnatural. She could hardly believe it.

"Engaged to be engaged," he said, causing her to laugh.

"Engaged to be engaged," she repeated. "I like that. It seems so hard to believe that we're here now. I thought I would hate you, for keeping the bet from me. I guess I never was very good at hating you the way I wanted to. You're too easy to love. But I'm glad there is no more secrets between us."

For a second his face changed, then he smiled. "None that matter to us," She frowned. "What does that mean?"

"It means, that there are some things that you don't know, but that I can't tell you. But you have to trust me, it isn't about you. It's something I have to hide for a friend, and I need you to know that I can't tell you, but that I'm not doing anything that would ever hurt you," he explained.

"Is it about Remus?" Lily asked, James eyes going wide. "What?"

"Is it that he's a werewolf? I mean, if it is—I've suspected as much. I mean, with what Severus told me, and the getting sick at exactly the full moon, the way Dorcas seems to be hiding something about him. I never believed it was true...but I think that was only because I didn't want it to be. I didn't him to have to live with that."

Lily looked at her awestruck, not speaking. "It doesn't change anything for me, if it is true. I still love him, he's a great friend, and he's like family to you, which means he's family to me too. I would never tell anyone, his secret will be safe with me."

James didn't say anything for a minute, then smiled at her. "So, you love him. Should I be concerned?"

"Just wait until you hear that I love your other friends too," Lily said.

"Peter I can believe, but Sirius?"

Lily shrugged. "He's sort of grew on me. Besides, I have a feeling he will be very involved in our lives. Maybe one day our son can marry his daughter. I think him and Mary will end up together for the long run."

"Our son and his daughter, so you're sure it will be a boy? And you can see them two? Married?" James asked, shaking his head slightly.

"I never said married. And yes, our son. Our daughter can marry Alice and Franks son," Lily replied.

"Glad to see you have it all planned out," he answered.

Lily turned on her side, looking at him intently. "Not really. I only know that I want to grow old and die together. I want that, I want us to be happy. To be normal. After the war, after its all over. That's what I want, and I want it with you."

James took her hand. "And that's what you'll have. I promise."

Chapter 42

Lily crept into the kitchen to see Mary already in, as well as Emmeline. Emmeline was holding a letter in her hand, a wistful smile on her face. "Regulus wrote me. I—I'm not going to write back, he said as much, but..." she stopped, shrugging.

"I know," Lily said, giving her a smile back. Emmeline sighed. "I think I'll go chat with Peter. He seems a bit lonely, everyone pairing off."

"Everyone?" Mary said, arching a brow. Emmeline shrugged again. "I don't know. Unless Dorcas is into threesomes."

Lily and Mary looked and each other and shook their heads simultaneously. "Nah."

Dorcas wouldn't do that. At least not today." Mary said, then grinned. "How was it?" Lily held back a smile than sat across from her at the table. "Amazing. Though it does hurt to cross my legs." "It hurts me to walk. Those Quidditch players have some serious stamina." Mary replied. "But I haven't told you the best part. We're engaged to be engaged." Lily whispered. "Ordinarily, I would think that was silly, but with you...it fits. Congrats." Mary said. Then she leaned closer to Lily, "But I was thinking, we still never did get our revenge for that stupid bet thing. So, I was thinking..." She leaned in and whispered her plan into Lily's ear. Lily grinned, then laughed. "It's brilliant."

0o0

Dorcas sat on the couch, nestled between Remus and Caradoc. It felt like an very odd place to be. For one, Remus would not look at her, for another Caradoc would not stop looking at her. Luckily, the awkwardness was broken by James trailing in. The look on his face made Dorcas gasp, then grin.

"Way to go Potter, you finally scored?"

James smiled at them. "Finally. You know, all those corny sayings about love are true, I feel like I'm walking on air."

He walked over to them, glancing down at them, then looked at the three of them. "Tell her how you feel. You haven't got forever you know."

Dorcas looked over at Remus the Caradoc in confusion, but before she could question it, James took her face in his hands. "Be prepared to be a bridesmaid again soon, I'm engaged to be engaged."

He walked out with a skip in his step, Remus watching him. "Engaged to be engaged?"

His words were ignored as Dorcas turned to him, staring at him intently. "Remus?"

Remus looked at her realizing what she was talking about, then looked away. Dorcas looked at him a second longer before turning to her other side, "Caradoc?"

Caradoc refused to answer, then suddenly rose, then immediately sat back down. "It's-" He stopped, looking over at Remus. Remus stood to leave. Dorcas caught him by the wrist and hauled him back down.

"I—this isn't how I wanted to tell you—not that I planned on telling you, that is." he stopped, and took a breath and collected himself. "I love you. I have now, for the longest time. I never realized, at first it was because you were there, and as a friend, and then it grew and I thought maybe, maybe it was the way I loved Alice, like another sister, but—"

Dorcas too in a sharp breath of air. "But?"

"But it isn't. I never wanted to tell you because I knew you would never feel the same. And then there was Remus—"

"I never tried to stop you." Remus cut in.

"You didn't try, but it doesn't mean—"

"Wait, you knew?" Dorcas intruded, whirling to face Remus. "I knew. I told him to go after you." Dorcas gaped at him. "Why?"

"Because, he loves you. Truly loves you, in a way that I...that I don't. I'll always care about you, love you as my friend, as a very dear friend, and I may like you...but he loves you. He loves you, and that's what you deserve."

Dorcas stood, wringing her hands together. She looked at Caradoc. "Is that true?"

"Yes. You mean—you mean everything to me. I'll be whatever you want. Even if it is just your friend, even if you do want him more."

Dorcas shook her head, then sighed. "The thing is, I like you both. Remus, you've always known, and I've always known. But Caradoc, you were different, it was this thing, lingering in the back of my mind, something I never wanted to think about, because you were my friend. And then there was Remus, and you were his friend, and I didn't want any of us to be angry with one another. So, I ignored it, and it was like it wasn't there, and most of the time I could convince myself that it wasn't."

Dorcas looked between them both. "The thing is, Remus, I know that we're over. If I were a different sort of girl, if I loved you the way Caradoc says he loves me, then I would fight for you, but the thing is, I don't think I do. And if I loved you Caradoc, I wouldn't still want Remus any at all but I do, and I can't give you my heart, not if he still has part of it, it isn't fair to you."

"Can't we just—" she pushed a bit of hair back from her face, taking a breath, "Can't I just love you both? Like it is now, with us all being friends? Do I have to chose right now? I can't, I need—I need a little time. Can't you give me a little time, to move on," she looked over to Remus, "and to move forward?" she said, looking now at Caradoc.

"I'll be here. I told you I'll be whatever you want, and I meant it. I will always be here Dorcas, and I'll always be waiting." Caradoc said.

"And I won't. I'll always be here for you if you need me, as a friend. But that's all I can give." Remus said, his voice tight.

"It's all you would give anyway, whether you could or not." Dorcas said, sparing him an irritated glance. "So are we all...okay?"

Caradoc and Remus exchanged glances, Remus answering. "Yeah Dorcas, I think we are."

0o0

Weeks later

"I can't believe they expect us to do this." Sirius said, trying not to look at his friend. It was just like them to do something like this. Like Mary anyway, he had expected Lily would be against it.

"Yeah, well you know the old antage, hell hath no fury..." James said, to which Sirius sighed.

"You do know Moony has his camera." Sirius said.

"He had his camera. It was unfortunately lost in a tragic accident." James replied, smiling.

"Have I told you I love you?" Sirius said back.

James glanced down pointedly, "I'd rather you not tell me, at the moment."

"Lets do this already." Sirius said. James agreed and after a count of three, they ran out into the Quidditch field, completely naked.

From the stands, McGonagal started shouting, along with a few other teachers. Most of the students were wither gasping or laughing, or cheering. Lily and Mary were laughing, Dorcas was cheering, Alice and Frank were both laughing, while Frank covered Alice's eyes with his hands. Remus and Peter and Caradoc were all laughing, as well as Emmeline.

Mary leaned into Emmeline who was seated on her right, while Lily was on her left. "So, which Black brother looks better naked."

"I'll just say we're both lucky girls." Emmeline said, putting a hand over her eyes.

"I'd say we all are." Lily said, blowing a kiss back towards James as he threw one to her, before he and Sirius were caught. They were let go to find clothes almost immediately. Pulling on his robes, James ran over to where Lily was seated.

"Are you happy now?" he said, smiling as she smiled.

"Very. But naked men always make me happy, you know me and Mary were just saying, its a shame that you had to streak with Sirius, because he really does look bet—"

James cut off her joke with a kiss. There, with a thousand other people watching, she kissed him back as if she would never stop.

His name being called by a very mad McGonagall was what made him pull away. "I believe you've gotten me into trouble."

"We'll be graduating soon, she won't be too harsh." Lily answered.

"We will, won't we? Then what?"

Lily tilted her head. "I don't know."

"Happily ever after?" James suggested.

Lily linked her arms around his neck. "Happily ever after is the end of the story. Ours is just beginning."

Chapter 43

Mary walked silently toward the gravestone, no tears in her eyes. Her hair had grown a little longer over the years, making it easier to hide her face. Her face that now had a few lines and a few wrinkles, along with a few scars along her body.

Most of those had been obtained in France, while she was working there as a Healer. She had went straight there after Lily and James wedding(which was only about a month after graduating), maintaining a sort of causal long distance thing with Sirius. They both had other lovers. That she could live with, but what she could not was not helping with the war. So, a man she treated told her about an organization, sort of the French version of the Order, except far more secret.

Mostly because its members were made up of people who were rightly supposed to be in jail. Involvement had made her have to lose touch with the others for a while, with Lily, with Sirius. It wasn't safe, especially when she became a wanted criminal. Death Eater supporters had gained control of the government, and muggle borns were thrown in jail for anything.

She had returned back home to see Alice and Frank when Alice owed her about her pregnancy(Lily found out about her own pregnancy just hours before she arrived.) She loved the time, getting to reconnect with her friends (and with Sirius, who still had her heart.) it had hurt to see how much things had changed. Dorcas and Remus were close, all romantic drama faded away. It was on her stay there that Dorcas and Caradoc finally got together (and she had walked in on their consummating their love, but really, one would think that people would learn to lock a door.)

It wasn't too long after that she had to return, for the deaths of Dorcas and Caradoc. Caradoc had went missing (the body was never found) and Dorcas had went looking for him. It was said the Dark Lord himself killed her, which was quite an honor, but horrifying. She had stayed a few weeks after that, living in sin with Sirius in his too small, too crowded flat. Peter was living at his moms at the time, and Remus had to be off on business for the Order soon after the funeral.

During that time, she had heard about what was happening with the Death Eaters, and wanted to come home. Sirius told her to go back to France. He thought it was safer. The others had agreed. Emmeline especially, saying she wished she could go to France as well. It seemed Regulus was never something she could get over, and she waited for him until the day she heard of his death.

Mary had heard from Emmeline, who had kept in contact with her even while Lily and James could not, being in hiding, and Remus was off spying on werewolves. Sirius wrote occasionally, but he was never good with words and things left unsaid had been enough to choke her anyway, and it was better not to write him at all. Peter had never been good with those sort of things, writing letters, and even if her were, it would be too difficult to tiptoe around the issue of Sirius.

The exact details were a haze, as the death of Regulus and the torture of Alice and Frank came so close together. It was shattering. She wanted to be there to help, but she couldn't leave where she was. It was unsafe, and she had left too many times already, and she was close to going to jail, though the Order did try to help out when it could, because it knew her groups intentions were good. Emmeline told her that Sirius had taken it badly, but of course, that was to be expected. Em also wrote to say that she had stayed with him, that she had spent all night crying at his house, and some of the members of the Order thought they were involved. She wanted to assure Mary that they weren't.

Mary had wrote countless letter to Sirius, that she would never send, because she did not know what to say, and she did not want to make things worse. As if things weren't bad enough with Alice and Frank. Poor Alice had been broken badly enough after Caradoc and Dorcas, and Frank hadn't been much better.

Things were better for awhile, she made plans to go visit little Harry and Neville, once it was safe, of course. But she never got the chance. She got word her parents were killed in a car accident. It wasn't too long after that she got word from Emmeline again.

Lily and James were dead, and Sirius had killed them, along with Peter. The world had stopped spinning. She would not eat or drink for nearly a week after that. Emmeline had went to see her to bring her back for the funeral. Neither wanted to believe it were true, but Emmeline confessed that they all suspected his involvement in the Death Eaters. He had once talked of joining as a spy (and they all knew what he meant was to save Regulus, though none of them said so out loud) and they feared he might have.

It wasn't hard to imagine, after all his sanity had been questionable after hearing of his brother's death. Emmeline thought he may have done it, not their Sirius, but one who had simply lost it. Mary sent her regrets to Peter's mother, not having the nerve to go to the funeral, to face Remus. Remus agreed with Em, that Sirius had finally snapped.

None of them hated him. They thought he was unwell, not their friend, but some other thing merely living in his body. It was easier that way, to imagine it. Still, Mary did not like to believe he was capable, (but part of her did) so she lost contact with the others completely for awhile. What there was left of them. And who was there, but herself, Emmeline and Remus? Alice and Frank were more dead than alive, and all the others were dead. Oh, she owed Bertram once, but he had became happily married, and she hadn't wanted to damper his joy. He had lost touch with Lily a long time ago anyway. (Later she heard his wife died, along with his unborn child.)

She couldn't bear to see them, to hear from them. It all reminded her of Sirius.

So she did the only thing she could think of to do. She moved on. She reconnected with a fling she had before, and had a passionate affair that made her feel for awhile. Emmeline, (who always mailed her, even when she had stopped answering) had met a muggle man who wanted her to marry him. She turned him down, saying her heart died a long time ago, and he needed someone whole.

That had concerned Mary, so she ended her own affair. Later, she began dating Darcy, the man she would marry(Em was her maid of honor). He was as broken as her, his true love killed in the war. She had been in the same organization as Mary, as was he, though he had been away, in Italy, helping to spy on the vampires. His mother had been half vampire. When he asked, she told him her love died too. The truth was too painful to admit.

She had loved him in a different way, a lesser way than Sirius. He reminded her of Remus actually, with a little of Lily rubbed in, and a dab of Frank. He was smart, and kind, and gentle and sensitive and was the stuff of nightmares if you set off his temper. He was her best friend, and maybe she wanted something good, to try to be normal.

Then he had died, killed in fighting. It was a Death Eater that killed him. So, he had tracked him down and killed him. It had been an accident, she only wanted to turn him in. But things got out of hand, and there she was, something she never thought she would be.

Emmeline and her kept writing. Emmeline told her she never saw Remus anymore. He was a man who had nothing left to live for, and his only friends left were two girls from school, and one of them was off in France and the other was in the same shape as him. War did that, death did that. People broke.

Then Emmeline sent her another letter, saying she needed to talk. It was urgent. What she had to say couldn't be written in word. So, Mary went to meet her. The news made her heart shatter and reform all at once. Sirius was out of jail. He was innocent. The Order was protecting him.

Remus took her to see him first, under a oath or secrecy, after telling her the whole sordid affair with Peter's involvement. And there it was all over. Love, the thing worth fighting for. They had both changed over the years, they had grown up, but they were the same, underneath it all. They still fit.

She told him about her life. He told her about Azkaban, how the thought he was innocent was the only thing that kept him from going crazy. All the other good thoughts left, he said that place stole them from you. He said she was the first thing that left. (And the last he had wanted.)

The first night was spent talking, catching up, rediscovering life. It was almost awkward, she wasn't a school girl anymore, and he wasn't the same boy and things like flirting and fighting weren't things they had done in awhile. Azkaban had limited offers, and she had given up on the whole thing. So, she plucked up her bravery and kissed him goodnight accidentally on purpose letting her kiss land a little too close to his mouth.

And the next night, she was back, there to meet him again, along with Remus and another woman. The girl was Tonks, and Mary loved her instantly. It was the hair, at first, all pink (it reminded her of Dorcas, even if the girl did not.) Suddenly, it made sense why he had never succeeded with any past relationship. This girl was who he was meant for, even if they refused to see it just yet.

And of course, that she was related to Sirius made her easier to love. She was the daughter of the other family outcast, and the only real family Sirius had left—family by blood anyway, as he still said Remus was family. Emmeline he said was as well, though as soon as he returned, she had taken a bit of a break. Seeing him was painful, after all these years, her ghosts never went to rest and he was a blinding reminder of his brother.

So, Emmeline didn't stay as close as she could, but she still came around. And so did Remus and Tonks and Mary went with them, and she went back to referring to herself by her maiden name, because she was still wanted in France. But it was the second night that started the affair, the night where she had looked at him and he had looked at her and he kissed her.

When one puts that many years of repressed longings in one kiss, it isn't hard to imagine what happened next. Needless to say, Tonks and Remus teased them about it, but they were beyond caring. After all, love was love and when you never knew how much time you had left, you couldn't waste a moment.

So, she moved in with Emmeline, into her basement, and hid her face during the day, and hoped for a chance to see her Sirius during the night.

The next two years were almost blissful. She had Sirius back for awhile, and Remus as a friend, and news of how Harry and Neville were doing. (Though they all decided not to bring her around till later, it might hurt a little too much, to have such a full on collision with their parents past, she being so much a part of it.)

Then, once again the world ended. Sirius was dead. It was Remus who told her the news. She had refused to believe him, crying and screaming at him, even hitting him once. He had let her, he blamed himself. That she could not bear, so she had cried with him, until she could cry no more.

She quietly packed her things up and left Emmeline's a week later. She couldn't deal with the pain and Emmeline wanted time away from the Order. They both needed space. In the grander scope of things, Emmeline had become her best friend over the years, and she was terrified of losing her as well. So, she left, already afraid it would happen.

France was out of the question, so she traveled to Italy, to the home of her brother-in-law, Carl. Her late husband's brother took her in. Carl was unmarried himself, (she actually believed he was gay, not that she minded) and was happy for the company. Not that she was any sort of company. She spent the next few weeks in her room, doing nothing more than breathing and eating and bathing when she was made to.

She had flirted with the idea of suicide. Thoughts of Emmeline and Remus were the only things that stopped her, that and the letter received from Em and Remus, as well as a few now and then from Tonks.

Life became very difficult next. Dumbledore died. She didn't attend the funeral, too risky. Emmeline died. Remus and Tonks were getting married. There was only one thing to do. Put on a brave face and go forward with life. She attended Emmeline's funeral and cried. She attended Remus's wedding and cried. The world all hung in a fragile balance between one happy moment to hang on to and overwhelming darkness.

Remus and Tonks mailed her (they sent letter together now) for which she was grateful. Remus never was good at mailing everyone, but Tonks seemed to help him with that. And, maybe he knew that Emmeline was gone, so he felt responsible for her. She heard the news that Tonks was expecting and squealed. She made plans to go and visit the baby, as soon as the war was over, as they knew it soon would be.

Then came the deaths of Remus and Tonks, along with so many others. The war was won, but lives were lost. And everyone had to rebuild. Only, she had no foundation. She traveled to see Teddy, the child of her last dear friend, to perhaps meet Neville and Harry. One look at Harry, she knew better. He was finding a future, he didn't need her dragging up the past.

Things fell into place, the truth about Sirius and Snape and Regulus came out. Mary thought it was the deepest unfairness, that Regulus died trying to do the right thing. Of course, the truth did not mention all parts—but it said he died trying to help bring down the Dark Lord, and that was enough for her. That Snape on the good side didn't surprise her so much. After all, Lily had once been his best friend, and it only made sense that some of her goodness rubbed off. Mary only wished it happened sooner.

And Sirius being proclaimed innocent was the best thing that could have happened. She felt no remorse for Peter's death. The Peter she knew as a teenager would have been quite incapable as what the Peter as an adult did. She liked to think of them as separate beings. But the truth had been told, and Sirius's name was clear, and she would like to believe that he was somewhere up above, with all his friends, and Regulus, and they were all happy together, looking down on her, the last survivor of their little group.

She went to visit Alice and Frank, and she told them stories, even if she knew they could not understand. She later met Neville, and became good friends with him and his wife. He loved to hear stories of his parents when they were young, and she loved to tell them. And eventually, by word passed on by Neville, Harry heard about her and met her. And she told him some of the same stories.

So, with them, they future seemed bright. Her friends may be dead, but there lived on their children, who had the opportunity to live in a new world free of war. And that was what they all would have wanted, everything they had lost and sacrificed would have been worth it, only to see them happy and at peace.

Given the chance, they would all do it again, the exact same way.

Though, even if there was Harry and Neville grown up and happy, there was still the matter of Teddy. Remus's son, and Sirius cousin. Cousin twice removed, but part his nonetheless. And that made him touch a special place in her heart. Andromeda and her became fast friends, and soon, Andromeda was becoming as dear to her as Emmeline had been those last years.

She found a place of her own, and visited Andromeda often. Time to time, she left and visited her brother-in-law, who she was pleased to hear had found the love of his life (thus proving her right about his being gay, though she thought the man was wonderful.) She even once called and chatted with Petunia, just to make sure she was okay. It had been awkward to say the least.

She still missed her friends terribly, but then, in an unexpected turn of events, she found herself face to face with Bertram. Both had not recognized the other, but had thought they seemed familiar. After a few seconds, they realized who the other was. They agreed to get together to catch up, and hash over old times. His story was as sad as hers, and in him she found another good friend. Many months later, that friendship evolved into something more. They both knew that had experienced the great loves of their life already. They both knew that given the choice, she would chose Sirius and he would chose his wife (whose name was Heather.)

A few months after this romance formed, Bertram proposed to her. She accepted. Andromeda was her maid of honor, and all her extended families were there. Carl gave her away (which was a bit odd, but for her it fit) and when she tossed the flowers, Andromeda was the one to catch them.

All in all it was a happy day. The sort that made her believe in happily ever after. And that was just the thing, it was possible to be happy, regardless. No always happy in the way you would expect or hope, but happy nonetheless. And from that moment on, she lived for the future. She stopped to glance back at the past, but she did not let it consume her. From then on, she was happy. Not all day, not everyday, but happiness reigned supreme. She had a life and she was going to live it. But she wouldn't forget those who had lost theirs.

Which was what she was doing here this morning, walking forward to the grave before her. She did this every week. Going to place flowers on the graves of the ones she loved.(And Heather, for Bertram.) She always saved Sirius for last. She had a smile on her face as she reached the tombstone, setting the flowers down. She brought her hand to her mouth, and blew a kiss up to the air.

The sound of footsteps behind her made her turn her head. "You need a minute? It's starting to rain."

Mary shook her head, grinning as she felt a raindrop fall, fat and plump, hitting her square in the forehead. She began the walk back over to Bertram, taking his hand in hers when she reached him. His fingers interlocked with hers. "You sure? I can wait. I don't mind the rain."

"No, it's okay. I don't have to say anything. He already knows. Besides, I'll see him next week." she replied. His hand on hers tightened, and she smiled back at her.

Mary looked up to the sky and suddenly her smile broke out into a wide grin. "Look!" she said, pointing up with her other hand. Bertram followed the direction of her hand.

There in the sky, breaking out through the rain was a rainbow, bright and beautiful hanging there as if meant for them to see.

THE END!!