

Part Twenty-One A
March, 1977



"Next time," Remus says, "I'm choosing the vacation spot. And there is going to be no sand. Do you hear me? *No sand.*" Remus is certain he has sand in every hole, even the holes people don't think about and the holes people don't want to think about and the holes people don't even know they have. This is the magical property of sand. Sand, no matter how old he becomes, still manages to bunch up at Remus' rear, launching an assault from behind that will never be pleasant. If there is sand, haunting vistas and stunning seascapes cease to be beautiful and begin to chafe. There is nothing less awe-inspiring than sand down your pants. "No shower will ever make me clean again," he adds, without any spite or accusation or even grumpiness. It is almost impossible to be grumpy while on vacation, even with the sand.

"I think," Peter says, "that some people don't get sand everywhere."

"It's not true," Remus assures him. "Everyone gets sand everywhere. However, some people are too completely off their nut to care."

"You mean like James and Sirius."

"It's a sickness," Remus confirms. "But I think they might even enjoy it."

There is really no "might" about it. James and Sirius do enjoy it. They are That Kind of Boy. They like sunshine, and excessive movement, and being buried in scratchy substances on purpose. Right now they are in the water, diving and leaping about idiotically, like otters, and yelling, and risking jellyfish and probably sharks, and other more dangerous things, which Remus would contemplate except the sunshine has drained the life from his brain and body. He feels like he weighs about six hundred drowsy pounds. It is, he has to admit, sort of glorious. When they first got down to the seashore he tried to read a book, but ten minutes of attempted literacy left him feeling dizzy and rubbery and like a drying curl of seaweed, and now he is using the book as a sunshade, where it is doing vastly more good. Idly, he picks sand from his teeth.

"I think Sirius is coming," Peter says confidentially, after what might be about five minutes or might be about three hours.

"Oh dear," Remus sighs, trying to care.

"He's going to drip on you," Peter says. "He has that look."

"I can't move my legs, so that's too bad for me," Remus says. "Oh, bother, Sirius, you're blocking the sunshine. Do go away."

Sirius is dripping on purpose. One has to give him credit; he achieves very good dripping angles. No one else can drip like Sirius Black, with such stunning accuracy, with such frightening determination. "Haha!" Sirius says. "I am dripping on you. What are you going to do about *that*?"

"Get wet," Remus replies amiably. "Oh look. I already have. Your move."

"And he doesn't even swim," Sirius laments. He flings himself down into the sand, wet and gleaming, and rolls around until he looks like a breaded cutlet. "Sand, sand, sand. It is glorious. It is prickly and invasive. Like freedom."

"Where's James?" Peter asks.

"Getting attacked by a jellyfish, I think. But if any man of mine dies by jellyfish, it's my right to leave him behind; it's simply too ridiculous." Sirius flops over onto his back. Now he resembles a breaded cutlet ready for the frying. Remus thinks it may be time for lunch. "I've decided," Sirius continues, "that after I graduate I'm going to be a pirate. I'm going to buckle a thousand swashes a day while the rest of you are, I don't know, crying in the lavatory during your lunches. If you can rescue James from the jellyfish, Remus, I'll let you come along with me."

"If I move," Remus says, "the sand does unpleasant things."

"I understand," Sirius says. The way he says it is almost violating, but very wise nonetheless.

"You look like a cutlet," Remus replies. "It makes me hungry. Can we eat?"

"Can we eat," Sirius snorts derisively. "Can we! Listen, you -- *you* -- this is a Beach Community! Do you know what that means? It means we never do anything ever. We don't even have to eat if we don't want to. We can get other people to eat for us, and then spit the pre-chewed food into our drooling mouths!"

"I just want a sandwich," Remus says, feeling pathetic. "If you take away the chewing you take away my exercise for the entire week."

"You know," Sirius exhales with great contentedness. "You know, would you believe I have always thought March is the most useless time of the year? It isn't March that's the problem, though. It's only March in certain soggy, bookish-smelling places. Why didn't we do this years ago?"

"Because we don't have any money," Peter answers, ever pragmatic.

"Well, really, we might have remedied that sooner." Sirius shakes his head, now encrusted with sand and seawater. "We might have held someone hostage. Or married Remus off to a wealthy dowager, then staged a broom accident. Robbed Gringotts..." Sirius trails off, looking happier than he has in months. It is the euphoria which settles over him whenever he is pondering the intricacies of mayhem. Remus recognizes the expression all too well, and, though he is used to running as quickly as he can away from it, finds that he is too drugged by vacation to care.

"Yes," he agrees. "Wealthy dowager. Broom accident. Sandwich?"

"I know what he wants," Sirius tells Peter. "He wants me to eat for him, and then spit the pre-chewed food into his drooling mouth."

"Like birds," Peter adds helpfully.

"Like lazy, lazy Lupins," Sirius finishes.

Somewhere down the beach, James is engaged in an epic battle with a jellyfish. Remus shades his eyes with his book, trying to make out who's winning. "Round two," he says, "goes to the jellyfish. I think it's actually dead. I'm not sure what James is doing."

"He's going to stuff it and mount it and bring it back to Evans and say he caught it. Like Moby Dick, only I told him that sounded a bit fruity. He wouldn't listen. Would you look at that water, both of you? It's really, really... *blue*."

"Yes," Remus agrees. "I...yes. Food?"

"It is more than blue," Sirius goes on, lost in a dream of color, the sort of bliss which only comes to people who spend much of their lives being a dog. "Aquamarine. Azure. Cer...ooooo...lee an."

"You sound like an idiot," Peter informs him, but without any real malice.

"Well, you look like an explosion in a tomato cannery, but I haven't said anything," Sirius points out. It's true, as Peter doesn't so much tan as he goes directly from the color of dough to the color of stewed strawberries.

"It isn't my fault I have a delicate complexion," Peter protests, as James comes panting up the beach, flushed and limping and looking depressingly triumphant.

"I am a subduer of mighty beasts!" he says, flopping down in the sand, a cloud of which settles in Remus's ear. "Although I cannot feel my left leg, and my right one feels like mince. Do they look swollen?"

"Don't say mince to me," Remus says forlornly. "Do you still have it? The jellyfish, I mean. I'll eat it if you still have it."

"I couldn't hold on to it," James says. "Jellyfish are slippery. And they sting. They are evolutionarily quite sound. Nonetheless, I drink from the keg of glory."

"You should probably be drinking from a keg of antiseptic," Peter says wisely.

"One day, I'll catch him," James vows. "Or perhaps another unfortunate jellyfish that looks just like him. Or perhaps just another jellyfish."

"Careful there, Ahab," Sirius says. "You're getting ahead of yourself. You'll forget all about jellyfish by tomorrow. You'll be collecting seashells for Evans instead. 'Do you hear that? It's the sound of my heart. Beating only for you. Like the waves of the vast ocean, wherein swims my jellyfish.' I can just see it now."

"Well," Remus says. "At least I'm not hungry anymore."

"I was going to chew some cake into your mouth." Sirius grins. "Really, Remus, your stomach is too sensitive."

"I am *not* going to collect shells," James mutters. "I would *never* collect shells. Not for Lily, not for *anyone*."

"But what were the ones you picked up yesterday for?" Peter asks. It almost succeeds in 'innocently' but veers off suddenly into the realm of 'absolutely wicked.'

"Hello," Remus says, blinking, "is that McGonagall?"

"Don't toy with my heart so when I haven't had time to become bronzed and godlike," says Sirius. "It's not McGoogles. She lives at school."

"No," Remus assures him, blinking. "No, I'm, er, fairly certain it's McGonagall."

Sirius rolls up onto his elbows, squinting. "It's the sun. You've got to be -- it's the sun. Isn't it?"

It is not the sun, but Remus really does understand where Sirius is coming from. There is a certain haze that surrounds a teacher out of context, a kind of surreal blur, compounded in this case by a) the sun, which seems to bleach all the reality out of everything; b) her red-and-gold swimming costume, which seems to include some kind of corset and apparently dates from 1896; and c) the young, extraordinarily handsome man lounging by

McGonagall's side in royal-blue swimming trunks and whispering into her ear.

"Oh, my sainted aunt," James breathes

Sirius dives with shocking alacrity under his beach towel. "Are you -- is that a -- I can't believe it, when -- how could she?! How could he?! I--!"

"It's her *boyfriend!*" Peter yelps, too loud, and the objects of their scrutiny look up and directly at them.

There is a moment of horrified recognition on all sides. However, McGonagall is far better versed than they are in matters requiring composure, maturity, and being slick. She smoothes the hair at her left temple idly, giving them all a long, measured look. It says, quite clearly, *Now I have seen you all in the equivalent of your underwear. You are lucky there is so little time left between us as professor and student. It's going to be hell.* It doesn't seem to mention that now they've seen her in the equivalent of her underwear, probably because it's a far more pleasant sight.

"I knew she'd never love me for long," Sirius attempts. It falls short. They continue to stare in horror.

"What's she doing here?" James asks. "Doesn't she have papers to grade?"

"Oh God," Sirius says. "She's *coming over here.*"

"She looks good in that swimsuit," Peter points out. "I mean, did you ever think that--"

Sirius shoves his head into the sand. The rest of his words come out like he's speaking through a jellyfish. *Hoodle wurhdle hurhk.* Remus, surprisingly, agrees. *Hoodle wurhdle hurhk,* indeed. And she does look all right in that swimsuit.

"Hello, Potter, Lupin, Pettigrew," McGonagall says, with a nod for each. She's wearing wire-rimmed sunglasses. She makes being old look cool, Remus thinks, and wonders how it is that he cannot manage to do the same thing when he has the added advantage of not really being old. "And I assume that lump under there is Black?"

"Tell her I'm asleep," comes a frantic hiss from beneath the towel, pitched so only Remus can hear. "I can't bear it."

"I think he's asleep," Remus says dutifully. "He has tired himself out with being a nuisance. Are you, ah, enjoying your term break, Professor?"

"Gurhgk," James says, and spits up sand.

"Quite, thank you, Lupin," McGonagall replies, ignoring him. "What a, er, fascinating coincidence to find you boys here as well."

"FASCINATING!" shouts Peter, who, Remus has noticed, has sometimes at times of stress trouble controlling the volume of his voice. "COINCIDENCE!"

"I, er," Remus says. There are a thousand questions he can think to ask, perfectly normal, socially acceptable, even charming questions, but the ones that are clamoring horrifically around his mouth all have to do with a very golden young man in rather brief blue swimming trunks, lounging like a sultan on McGonagall's lion-embroidered beach towel. With great effort, he bats aside *How old is your escort?* and comes out with "Have you -- are you taking a room up the hotel, as well?"

"I have my own accommodations," McGonagall replies faintly.

Remus cannot stop staring at her friend, whose abdominal muscles are glistening in a way that is perhaps unhealthy. They are at least mercilessly bright. It is possible that McGonagall oiled him this way -- but such thinking leads Remus down a dark and dangerous path into the forest of uncertainty and from there the swamp of *Take My Eyes, I No Longer Want Or Need Them*. That McGonagall should have a life outside of Hogwarts is perfectly understandable and Remus isn't surprised at all. That she should be oiling a man panther is another matter entirely. Remus is no longer hungry.

"*What's happening now?*" Sirius hisses through the sand.

"Er," Remus says.

"Hello." The sprawled abdominal man panther shifts and grins and offers a hand. "It really is a coincidence. You must be some of Minerva's students. I've heard so much about you. Is one of you by any chance the one who exploded the toilet?"

"TWICE," Peter booms, pointing at James. "IT WAS HIM."

"So you're *those* students. I'm Caradoc, by the way."

"Nice to meet you," Remus says. It's a reflex. If one banged his knee, chances are he'd probably come out with a "how many sugars do you take in your tea?" before a kick.

"The pleasure's mine," Caradoc says. "You're sort of famous. I feel as if I know you already. Really, the one who exploded the toilet."

"TWICE," Peter repeats.

"*What's happening now?*" Sirius asks. Remus kicks him.

"Well," McGonagall begins, sending a brief, slightly desperate glance over her shoulder, "er, conveniently, we must be off."

"Oh yes," Caradoc the manslave agrees. He flashes his teeth, which are nearly as shiny as his pectorals. He is gathering up the towels. Probably that is what he does; he is the Towel Boy. How can McGonagall pay for a towel boy on a professor's salary? Oh God, oh God, oh God. "Important, you know, swimming. Can't miss the sun, can we?"

"Arfgh," James mewls, almost inaudibly. Remus would kick him, too, but he is far away and despite the urgency of the situation he is still weak and limp with sunshine, like a washed up jellyfish draped around a little lump of panic and morbid curiosity.

"Indeed," McGonagall says dryly. "Well, enjoy your holiday, boys. I do hope we won't run into each other any more than is strictly unavoidable. Give my regards to Mister Black, when and if he awakens."

"Pleasure's all ours, I'm sure," Remus replies, still on autopilot. Surely most humans do not have that many muscles. Remus knows for a fact that he himself does not have that many muscles. In fact, if he, James, Sirius and Peter were to somehow absorb each other into one huge blob of boy, altogether they still would not have as many muscles as Caradoc.

Caradoc drapes the towels over his left arm and salutes. Remus is horrified to note that when McGonagall crooks her finger he follows, cheerfully, all down the length of the beach. Glistening. How can that be possible? His conclusions are more than Remus can bear to draw. He is never going to be able to learn transfiguration from Professor McGonagall again and will live his life as an unformed, unfinished wizard, all because of Caradoc the Towel Boy's abdominals.

Very slowly, Sirius pulls his head out of the sand.

"It doesn't work that way, you know," Remus murmurs. "Even if you hide your head in the sand McGonagall still has a Towel Boy."

"With her," Sirius whispers hoarsely. "At the beach."

"He was very shiny," Remus says.

"D'you think, McGoo-- McGah-- Do you think *she* rubbed him up and down all shiny like that?" James asks, then makes a sound like dying and rolls into a fetal kind of ball. "Let's all forget I said that."

"I AM BLIND," Peter whimpers, though somehow his voice still maintains stentorian tones.

"I have never seen muscles like that on a human being before," Remus continues. "How do you even *get* muscles like that? I wonder if he can wear shirts."

"Obviously," Sirius mutters, "he doesn't have to."

"I ALSO WANT TO BE DEAF," Peter adds. "RIGHT NOW."

"You're making *me* deaf," James snaps suddenly. "Get a hold of yourself, Pete! Be a man!"

"You're one to talk," Remus says, rather shocked. "You just made noises the whole time."

"I know," James says, deflating. "It's just...you know I have a thing. With abdominals. And me not having them. It makes me cranky."

"I don't like what just happened," Sirius informs them all. He sounds like Remus feels, which is, roughly, as if he just died.

"I guess it's only reasonable," Remus attempts. "Her having a...life, and everything. I mean, surely she did all along. Right?"

"A life!" Sirius yips. "Not a manslave!"

"OR A BATHING SUIT," Peter adds, but claps a hand immediately over his mouth.

"Good morning, gentlemen!" someone says, cheerfully, from just above and just behind them. Against the sun, Lily is a golden vision in white-rimmed sunglasses; when she moves out of it, James observes that the sweet little sunburn she acquired yesterday has evolved, inevitably, into a tomato-like all-over body peel. It is a relief; he is not really in a mental place which can accommodate golden visions of sun-hazed beauty. "Don't you all look like breaded chickens. You'll never guess who I just saw up at the cabana."

"If it was McGonagall and she was dancing with the human muscle we really don't want to hear about it," Remus says happily.

"Abdominal muscles like the Greeks had," Lily says. "It's like he jumped off an amphora. How did you know?"

"They passed this way," Remus replies. "As you can see from the carnage and emotional wreckage."

"Poor boys." Lily eases back into the sand, flipping off her beach shoes and gingerly avoiding any of the really raw burns. James frowns down the length of his chest to his own abdominals, or lack thereof.

"You don't really *go* for that sort of thing," James says. "Do you?"

"Of course not. *Obviously* I don't." Lily's grin is wicked. "Don't worry. I don't like a male specimen who is chiseled like a statue and carries my beach towels and dances like it's actually fun. I don't like any of those things. I like white string beans with fourteen left feet. Sometimes I worry that I must have been dropped on my head."

"She's insulting you, James, old boy," Sirius explains, as if it were truly necessary.

"I don't *need* abdominals," James sniffs. "I have many other charms."

"Lunch," Remus decides, standing and brushing sand as discreetly as he can manage out of his privates. Twelve showers later and he'll still be feeling it, gritty and granular and everywhere it is the most embarrassing. He still holds that they should have gone somewhere completely lacking in sand. That way, they would never have had to face a professor in the midst of her apparently very active and very disturbing personal life and Remus would be able to have a sandwich without swallowing equal parts lunchmeat and sand. "Ptooey," he adds.

It is night; it is night on holiday, which is vastly more dark and warm and long than any other night; and it is night on holiday in an incredibly posh hotel, which means that, despite James's best efforts, the night is dark, warm, long, and conducted in an extremely tiny room.

"I can touch the sink with my feet," Lily informs him drowsily. "Look at that." She flicks the faucet on and off with her toes. "Convenient. Cozy."

"That's very sexy," James says. The weird, horrible thing is that it sort of really is. With some effort, he readjusts himself so that he can get an arm around her waist; she sighs and drops a kiss atop his head, one leg curled around his own. There is a curious divide in James's brain, between the part of him that is utterly helpless and like pudding and the part of him that is jangling and twitching insanely, like bells on a shop-door at Christmas eve. "How's that burn coming along?"

"I am unbelievably good at charms," Lily says with dignity, "as you know."

"So you are soothed," James says. "You are not hurting. This is a step forward! At some point in your life maybe you will stop looking like a raw steak."

"And at some point in your life maybe you will stop looking like a broomstick," Lily counters. "Oh wait, no you won't. Don't get cute with me."

"I am always cute." James would bristle, but in the end they both know who has the upper hand. Really, James has never felt so helpless in all his life as he feels when he is with Lily. She is one hundred percent, probably two hundred percent, in charge. He doesn't know how she manages it, but she never looks panicked and never feels nervous and hardly ever says anything stupid. Even when she is pink and shiny with sunburn she can still turn faucets on with her toes and make James realize the futility of his protestations. Terribly enough, it's a wonderful feeling -- in the moment. Later, when they're apart, James catalogues the million and twenty ways he has embarrassed himself and wants to sprawl out on the beach like a jellyfish and be shriveled up, juiceless, by the sun. James supposes this means he really is in love. It started out fun enough, thrilling enough, but now he knows that it is humiliating and terrifying and leaves him feeling stupider and stupider each time, so it must be love after all. It wasn't what he was expecting. He thought there would be a lot more exciting and a lot less nervous. Then again, being nervous is almost the same as being excited. Maybe, it's even better. It means there's something to lose. So in fact, James revises, he thought there would be a lot more nervous and a lot less wanting to throw up. Being in love is like having a prolonged stomach flu and, perversely, obstinately, insanely, never wanting to recover. Most of the time James isn't even in control of his basic bodily functions. For example: he has wanted to take a piss for the past twenty-five minutes, and cannot bring himself to comply with the demands of his bladder. That is either madness or true love, James realizes; not allowing yourself to take a piss when it's clear your very life depends on it.

"You are sometimes cute," Lily amends. "And cute enough so that the other times are worth it."

"Cute enough that I don't need abdominals, eh? *Eh?*" James revels in the compliment. It makes him wonderfully squirmy. Lily is good with compliments; they never seem ridiculous but they always manage to make him feel good, like he knows what she's really saying underneath all that. James, at his age, is two parts microscopic ego and twenty parts continuously turned on. It's hard to reconcile those two. The two parts

microscopic ego always seem larger than the rest, but the rest are more immediately noisy. James moves to put an awkward hand on Lily's shoulder.

He misses.

"Oh, I see," Lily murmurs. "We're getting fresh, are we?"

"We are," James says. He could have said something else, something cute, something like, *Your shoulders are awfully soft today*, or *Nearly as fresh as that burn of yours, Sunshine*, but something about Lily's breasts, the warmth of Lily's skin under her damp green polka-dot bikini, put him in a mental state where rearranging words passes for repartee. It is pathetic. He is pathetic. And then Lily climbs up over him and her hair is all dangly in his face, and she breathes warmly around his ear region and her fingers start doing things to his scalp and all of a sudden his entire brain is sort of going nghhhhashhfaagkhl?! and word-inversion starts to look pretty witty. He holds on to her thighs for dear life.

"You know, I've been thinking," Lily whispers. "You know, I'm -- we're both -- anyway, I like you. You're not a terrible kisser. And this is a very nice holiday you've taken me on."

"It is," James agrees, struggling to breathe.

"So. You know. I was thinking, maybe..." With difficulty, James brings his eyes up to her face. It's hard to tell, with the burn and the low light, but she certainly seems to be blushing. "I don't know. There isn't any way to ask it that isn't stupid. Well -- you know. I thought...if you wanted to...try...it...we could do that."

"It," says James idiotically.

"Believe me, I'd love to be more grown up about this," Lily mumbles, who is definitely blushing -- he can practically feel the heat radiating off her face -- "but I worry I'd sound like, I don't know, a doctor. And, you know, if you go too far in the other direction, you sound like some horrible film or something. You know. Anyway -- what do you think?"

The problem with the question is that it implies that James *is* thinking something. He is, of course, but if directly translated, it would come out something like "HAGHFUFKGH HAHH NNNNNN," which is not helpful or sexy.

"We don't have to," Lily says, almost immediately. "I was just -- it was silly of me, but I thought, you know, it seemed like -- well, let's face it, you're *never* alone, there's always Sirius or Remus or Peter or someone, or I'm not alone, but we're alone *now* and it seemed like this was the right sort of *moment*. Only what do I know about the right sort of, of *moment*. I *don't*, you know," she adds. "Know anything. About the right sort of. *Moment*."

"Neither do I," James manages. Somehow. It requires Herculean effort. "Look, no, I think we should."

"You do?" Lily sounds breathless. James is trying not to think about how naked he feels already, not even naked yet. He has the sinking feeling this could either be incredible, wonderful, all the wows in the world, or absolutely disastrous. With his track record -- James is excellent at getting everything right the second time around, once he's had a trial run -- the sinking feeling starts sinking a little lower. All of his organs are jumbling

around in the very bottom of his stomach. He wants to get up on the bed, start jumping around, and scream yes until everyone, even his mother, can hear him. James Potter, king of the world, only he has the feeling that the crown isn't going to fit and he's going to look like a right arse.

"I do," James says. Instinctive. He can't take it back. He doesn't want to take it back. He wants to know what he's doing. "I, uh. Neither do I. I said that already, but I just, you know, want to make that clear."

"Nothing at all," Lily agrees.

"Just making sure we're both. Uh." James swallows. "Well, that's all right then."

"Maybe," Lily suggests, "maybe we should try being quiet." She starts to pull away, and all of James' organs start to go with her, until he realizes she's just getting enough space between them to tug the top of her bathing suit off and for a moment James thinks *It's time to look away or she's going to punch me so hard my jaw goes through the back of my head*. He doesn't look away; thinks, *These are Lily's breasts and Oh my God and nghhhhashhfaagkhl?! Lily naked never seems to lose its brain-melting novelty.*

"I am," James says hoarsely. "I can be quiet."

"Shut up," Lily tells him, slamming a hand over his mouth. "Let's just. You know. It's not like people stupider than us haven't managed this before." She tucks her hair back behind her ears and bites her lip, which he's seen her do at the beginning of particularly difficult exams: it's a gesture that says, I am going to get this done, and get this done well, if it kills me. "So."

"Okay," James agrees, and Lily kisses him, and everything becomes a little unclear.

The ceiling of their room is very interesting. There are entire constellations in the plaster; there are long cracks which could have been caused by any number of things, and James is trying as hard as he can to imagine what those things could have been, because if he does not imagine them he will have to face where he is and what he has done. Out of the corner of his eye he can see Lily doing the exact same thing. She has managed to put about ten inches of space between them, which is about as good as anyone can manage in this particular room, and the sheet is yanked up to her chin. James wants to die. The silence roars around them.

"Well!" he says, too loudly, in an absurdly chipper voice.

"I'm going to go clean up," Lily informs him, and rolls off the bed.

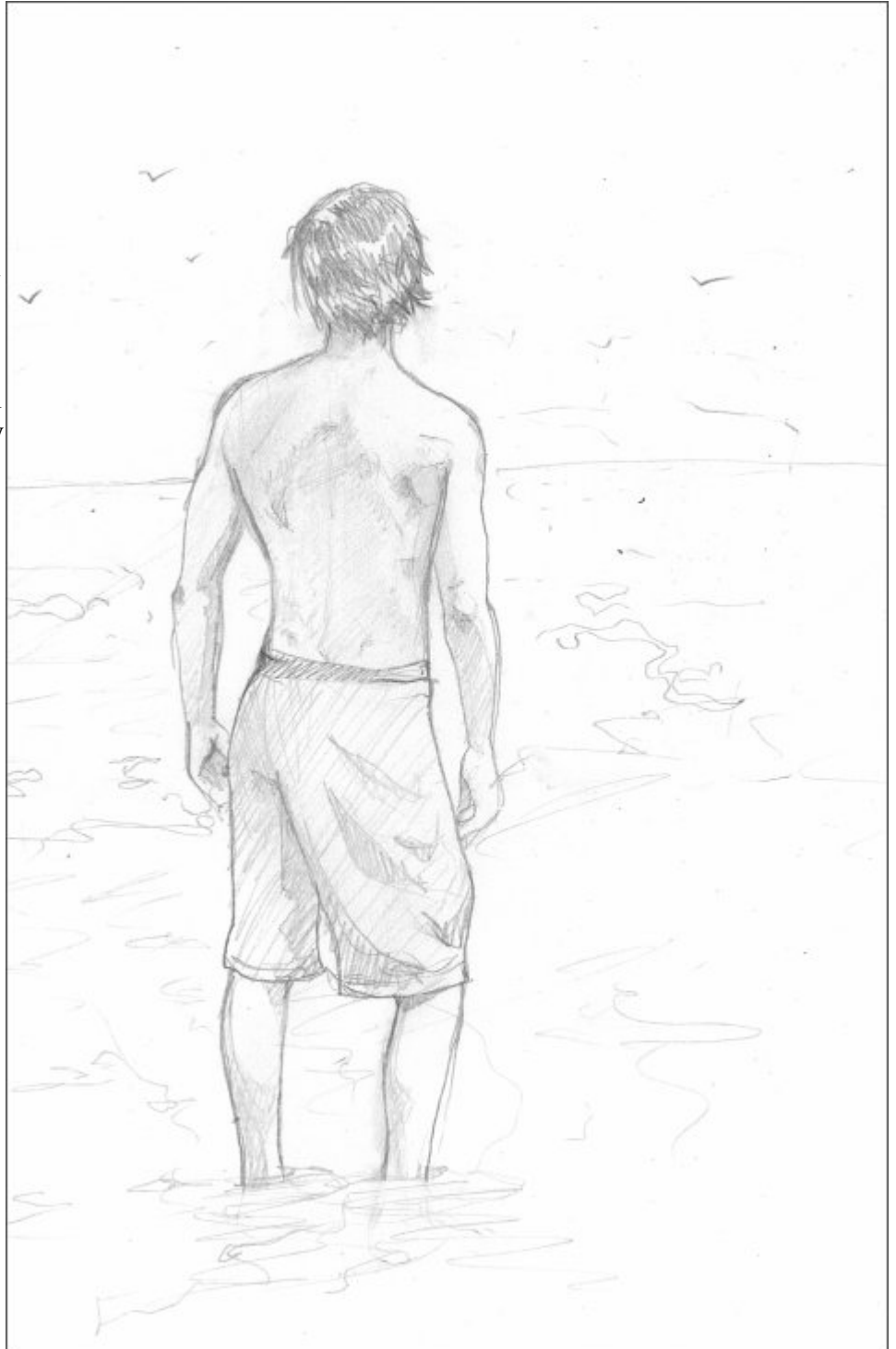
James is left, for the moment, blissfully and terribly alone. It wasn't, he tries to tell himself, exactly that it was an epic failure. There were parts of it that were less of a failure. There were even parts of it where it seemed like things would take a turn for the better, veering into the land of all right. But then there was -- and then there was -- and everything got worse again -- and didn't get better even once before the end. Sometimes it didn't seem as if James knew what better was. It isn't exactly his fault. It's both their faults, James figures reasonably. It's both their faults and the only sensible reaction now is to move to different parts of the globe, perhaps the solar system, splitting their friends and family up and never once again mentioning each other's


names.

Perhaps he's overreacting. James tries to calm the little hysterical swell of panic until he can breathe and see straight and then, after a few deep swallows, get control of his thoughts. It's going to be all right. It's possible that it's supposed to be an epic failure and everyone else since the dawn of time has been too embarrassed to admit the truth. It's possible that sex is just an enormous fabrication brought on by the human condition, by a silent agreement amongst people not to humiliate one another publicly.



They do it privately instead, James imagines. In the claustrophobic comfort of their own beds.



James makes a small noise of despair and burrows deep into the slightly sticky darkness of the pillow.




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The handwriting of Remus J. Lupin, Severus Snape and James Potter is done by  [ladyjaida](#).

The handwriting of Sirius Black, Peter Pettigrew and Lily Evans is done by  [dorkorific](#).

Don't worry; Peter won't be stupidified. **Trust us** on that one.

We would like to take a moment to thank  [windjinn](#) for leaping down the stairs with  [ladyjaida](#)'s bra on his head.

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