

Part Two
Six Records, Three Photographs and Two Memories, '75



Remus can tell when the clouds knit together that the storm is a Siriusbinger.

A Siriusbinger, for those unused to Remus' world, is like a harbinger, only far more dangerous, loud, and unsubtle. It's a shift in the weather, a change of humidity, a darkening or even brightening of the sky, or a new direction of the winds which bears with it a certain smell, imperceptible to most noses, but something Remus has long since trained himself to recognize. In his room, book propped open on his bent knees, hair uncombed, Remus pauses with a halfway bite into his sandwich. He strains to look out the window. Somewhere just beyond his reach is a rumble of thunder, low beneath the thick clouds but rolling closer, louder. The wind is shaking through the trees. The end-of-summer heat has a chill edge to it that signals rain. Remus knows that any sensible young man in his position would roll down the window and lock the shutters, but the storm isn't a Siriusbinger for any one of those sensible

young men.

Remus finishes his bite of the sandwich, chews exactly twenty-two times, and swallows.

The clouds break. He lifts his nose to the smell of rain, which he likes, and listens for the rumble of a motor -- more distant than thunder, and harder to hear, but there, unless his instincts have failed him. It's only a simple matter of time.

Sirius leans in close over the handlebars, the rain-thick wind whipping his hair into ropes around his face. They were twenty miles from the Welsh coast when the rain started, at the time warm and gentle, drumming gently on Sirius's skull and making round, comical sounds on James's helmet; now the rain roars around them in glassy sheets, and thunder rips the sky out magnificently on all sides of them, and they are so bone-soaked they almost can't tell they're wet anymore.

He spits out water and grins ferociously into the mouth of the storm, gunning the bike into an even higher gear. James, behind him, lets out a tiny yip of muffled horror and tightens his grip on Sirius's stomach. If it were anyone else behind him Sirius might be more cautious, but it's a summer's end storm and this is James with his knees digging into Sirius's hips and they haven't seen Remus in months, and it would be pointless to wait five extra minutes and save their hypothetical necks. Ahead of him, gray through the wild lines of rain, he can almost make out the crooked little shadow of Remus' house, pinned against the edge of its little village like a fly on paper, and he thinks of how Remus will yell at them when he sees them. Well, he won't yell exactly; Remus never yells. But he'll get that look on his face like the two sides of his mouth are trying to squirm in opposite directions, that look he gets when he's trying to be serious and wanting to laugh, and he'll give them some very pointed words; and even so he will have to turn around, as he always does, as if to keep Sirius from seeing that warm, incongruous, goofy smile breaking out over his face.

As they draw closer Sirius squints through the lashes of rain and sees, suddenly, like a wink, the small gray figure lean up in the yellow window; and he whoops and waves and swoops in to him.

The easy answer is: Sirius Black is trying to kill him. But when, Remus admits, isn't Sirius Black trying to kill him? There was the time Sirius tricked him up onto a broomstick and then sent him whizzing off, utterly alone, into the afternoon, so that he lost all his lunch and half his breakfast when James finally rescued him. There was the time Sirius decided it would be a grand idea to jump out at Remus halfway through Remedial Potions, just as Remus was adding the key ingredient, causing the cauldron to explode, singeing Remus' eyebrows off so he looked like some sort of albino rat waiting for them to grow back in. There was the time Remus doesn't think about, which was worse than killing, which doesn't factor in to any of his equations -- a variable he calmly and methodically erases from each and every list his life has to offer. And now there's this time, Sirius swooping toward his small, hapless, helpless bedroom window, gutting motor oil and rain onto his mother's pristine curtains, and nearly smashing the window frame into the comic shape of a motorbike: big and brassy and made up of smooth circle lines, admittedly attractive, if you're into that sort of thing.

The easy answer is: Sirius Black is trying to kill him. There are more complicated elements, and the question is

what really counts; the little thrill which laces Remus' blood like lightning and thunders in his belly, and the lurch of longing surging up within him just seeing his friends again. It isn't a reunion -- and he feels bad Peter can't be here for it, really -- but Remus always imagines his friends are going to disappear over the summer, when James and Sirius vacation together and Remus is left inevitably behind to wonder at the laughter they're sharing. He insists he isn't jealous. It's envy. There's a difference. Even now, framed in his window, backlit by the occasional slash of lightning against the storm-dark sky, they have grown irretrievably closer to one another. They are the dark hair and wicked eyes in Remus' life. They are inseparable in the way only two boys, two best friends, can be. They share Quidditch and motorbikes and a penchant for wandering about naked without any shame at all, without the imposition of maturity forcing shame upon them.

Remus, feeling distracted by his own gladness despite, touches his right thumb to the left corner of his mouth. "Hullo," he says. "Still don't check the weekly weather forecast in the Prophet, I see. Some things never change."

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For a moment Sirius, hanging in Remus's window, wet and bedraggled as a dog and grinning insanely, reflexively, has to steal a few seconds and take Remus in: the pale, contained seriousness of him against the warm amber of his bedroom lamp, his light hair uncombed and his skinny ankles jutting out sharply from the bottom of his trousers.

He says, nonchalantly, "I was in the mood for a shower anyway."

"Yeah," James agrees. He's grinning too, wet hand slick and freezing against Sirius's neck. "It's been a month and a half, you know, since last he set hand to washcloth. Vile."

"Won't you unwashed masses come in," Remus says with dark amusement, making an ushering gesture like sweeping air toward himself. "Unless you'd rather come in downstairs, like normal people."

"Oh no," Sirius says cheerfully, "we'll do from here, thanks--" and he plants a muddy, jingling boot on Remus's white windowsill, just to see the anguished, wrinkled, parental face that Remus makes, the one that Sirius thinks is rather wonderful.

"I think not," Remus says firmly. He pushes at the toe of Sirius' boot with ginger fingers. "You can come round the back." He looks up to them, his mouth twitching, and Sirius for the first time gets a glimpse of the two long, angry scars running the span of his quiet, sharp-boned face. Involuntarily, he hisses in a sharp breath and recoils -- a little, enough. James straightens against him and says, startled, "Moony!"

Without thinking, Sirius reaches out and touches the pad of his thumb to the little, tapered place where the top scar stems, right below the vulnerable eye.

Remus jumps back ; quick as wires twanging, Sirius thinks, or like a potion sweeping in and popping when you add the last crucial ingredient. "Don't," Remus says. His voice is strange and a little high.

"Sorry," Sirius whispers. He pulls his fingers back carefully. "It just surprised me." Remus is looking up at him with the wariness of small wild things, and Sirius feels stupid, and wants to make things right. He forces a laugh.

"It looks brilliant," he says, "really, Moony, just like you got it in a swordfight."

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"You're getting wet," Remus says. He doesn't quite look up at his friends, still getting rained on, still without any umbrella, still waiting for him to give up his inhibitions and let them muddy his entire room with wet footprints. There's a knot of something more heavy than fire in his stomach, regret perhaps, the true pain of a scar -- remembering the scar -- buried inside him. Outside, behind the clouds, he can almost feel the moon waning. It is now not quite a circle, not quite anything at all, one edge too straight as it shifts in its monthly rotations and pulls the ocean and pulls at Remus' bones, his achy, near-arthritic joints, all at once, even unseen. He watches for it in another flash of lightning, but sees nothing behind the roiling clouds. "Well, all right," he mutters. "Take your shoes off and get in. I'll find the towels."

James laughs. "Good man, Moony!" he says. The clamor of two boys clambering, bedraggled, off an equally bedraggled motorbike, is impressive. The squelch of their wet socks on the floorboards is as well, and makes Remus wince. He can't leave his friends sitting like two right idiots out in the rain. He can't leave them standing her dripping rainwater onto the floor, either.

"Stay where you are," he says, "just, stay, and I'll be right back with towels and some tea."

"Can I--" Sirius begins.

"The motorbike stays outside," Remus warns. There's a look in his eye, guarded, firm, the sort that channels something deeper down, but with carefully measured doses.

"Towels and some tea," Sirius echoes.

"Yes sir, very good sir, on your order sir," James quips. He salutes, grinning cheekily, but wetly.

"I'll only be a minute," Remus says, and ducks out of the doorway, more relieved to be alone for a time than he ever thought he could be. He listens to the house creak with the rain, the rain on the roof, the rain against the windowpanes, and eases the hammering of his heart as he eases down the stairs, rubbing the back of his hand over the bridge of his nose, his cheek, the length of his scar across the length of his face, feeling stupid, self-conscious and bare.

"I'll only be a minute," Remus says, and vanishes down the stairwell like lightning winking out. They follow him with their eyes for a moment.

"*Phwoar*," breathes James, raising his eyebrows at Sirius, and Sirius nods grimly. "That's something, innit? It didn't look that bad in the photo." He scrubs at his wet hair with one hand, thoughtfully.

Sirius watches the dark door where Remus has gone, absently shrugging off his jacket. He is not a particularly deep

thinker when it comes to other people -- their tics, their surprises, their strange animal needs, all seem to him something of a waste of time and much better communicated by straight talk or at least straightforward deceit -- and so it unsettles him that he is so much aware of every part of Remus's existence. There are times when Remus's presence in a room makes him feel like the sun, and then there are times like this, when Remus makes him feel large and clumsy as a blind elephant. Sirius, who has been trained to move elegantly since he could barely move at all, cannot decide if this off-footedness that Remus inspires in him is horrible or fascinating.

On the other hand, he's never liked being bored -- he can't even count sheep to get to sleep, because being *that boring* is harder work for his brain than just zoning out to thoughts of how to solve his Arithmancy problems. By unsettling him almost constantly Remus can't possibly bore him. There was a time maybe when he thought Remus was boring, was a wet blanket, was unwilling or unable to have any fun, and he looks back on that time and feels more or less an ass.

"You don't think he minds that we came, do you?" James asks, his voice muffled by his arms over his head, peeling off his soaked t-shirt and hanging it gingerly off the windowsill.

"Oh yeah," says Sirius with more certainty than he feels. "He's glad. He just doesn't know it yet." James grins at him. Not for the first time Sirius is hugely, breathtakingly grateful for James, who understands him and laughs at him, and with whom he is always certain. They look each other up and down.

"You look a right berk," James says, which is particularly ridiculous coming from gooseflesh-covered, drowned-cat James. He looks astigmatically about for a dry surface for a few moments, finally is forced to polish his glasses on the soaked waistband of his trousers.

Sirius regards him fondly, and then says, with utmost contempt, "Sod off, Potter," and then yanks his own t-shirt over his head just in time to see, through the transparent cloth, the shadow of Remus, appearing in the doorway with a tea-tray in his hands.

"Well hello there," he says, with as much dignity as he can possibly manage with his shirt wrapped clinging around his head like a boa constrictor. Yet again he's on the wrong foot, confused and tangled up with everything in the wrong place and strangely, inexplicably happy about it. "Are you the house help?"

"Yeah," James snickers, "and do you take hopeless cases?"

"I'm not stuck," Sirius says, with all possible stateliness, and wriggles out of the shirt to prove it, dropping it in a sodden gray heap on the floor.

"I'm not stuck," Sirius says. He flails around in his shirt for a moment longer and then manages to pull himself free, all boy-limbs with half-man definition, his elbows sharp from the smooth muscles of his upper arms, his hands the square lines of thumb from wrist. It pieces together a juvenile geometry that Remus thinks he can spend his life attempting to formulize with teenage theorem after teenage theorem. It must have something to do with playing Quidditch, he assumes, that ease with which Sirius and James can undress in front of people. They don't have scars like Remus does, or gangly arms like Remus does, and they aren't awkward angles like Remus is, and it's habit for them like it isn't for Remus.

As always, Sirius can state an untruth like it's one of the main principles upon which life operates. His stubbornness or his conviction or that dark inner light that fuels him vibrantly makes it true. He's out of his shirt and it's a lump of wetness leaking more wetness over the wooden floor. Remus clears his throat, and tries to twist the smile off his face. Instead he feels his skin stretching, tugging, pulling, against the scars. He wonders if he looks like a harlequin as much as he feels like a harlequin, something dressed up behind a shoddy mask, with sections of him sewn hastily together.

"Towels," he says. His words are easy and calm and just a little bit dour, with the wry twist from his quirked lips. He's spent a lot of time measuring himself this way, giving enough humor so Sirius and James and Peter will always realize he isn't quite as much of a stiff as he has to pretend he is, for his own sake, not theirs. "And tea," he adds, towels over one arm, tea on a tray balanced neatly on the other. "And extra jumpers in that drawer, over there, because I'm not Jillian and you aren't nearly as bronzed as you lead me to believe you were. Such deception." Setting the tray down on a squat table by his bed, he can't quite disguise his helpless comfort at their arrival -- half naked as they are and shining with rain still, hair stuck down to their foreheads, dripping with water over their noses, into their eyes and ears.

"Good man, Moony," James says again. He pushes wet hair out of his myopic eyes, which Remus can see are only somewhat focused on him. James, irrevocably nearsighted. Remus gives him his towel first, then dangles the second from thumb and forefinger like a dead thing.

"If I didn't take hopeless cases, Prongs, I'd've locked you out the second you got here, and I'd've kept all the tea for myself." He's had to train himself to wickedness, as well, a mischievousness that isn't quite his own. It's a refined job at patching James' and Sirius' habits together and adopting them, a third nature grafted over his second nature, which stands tall ever, cement and concrete and marble and so much stone, over the first. Those are instincts he wasn't born with, but they're entirely his own. He positions himself resolutely against them. It's a constant struggle that can't afford Sirius shaking water over him, touching him with wet fingers along marred skin, remnants of past moonlight.

"I'd've kept all the tea for myself," Remus says with a grin. He is holding the remaining towel tantalizingly in one hand while his eyes flick over to Sirius, who heaves a long-suffering sigh and sticks out a hand. Remus's cheeks are slightly pink, whether from the exertion of climbing the tottering stairs or maybe the steam of the tea, which mists around his face and curls the tips of his disheveled hair.

"Towel," Sirius says sternly. He can feel water trickling down the back of his neck to pool on the floor around him. Remus gives him an insolent look that goes all the way down the length of his outstretched arm, and something shivers in his stomach. It makes Sirius want to snap his fingers, to act even more like a fool, to show he doesn't feel it. "Smartish, if you please."

"Sirius, what have we learned about manners?" Remus yanks the towel just a little bit out of reach. Remus can be utterly ridiculous about this sort of thing. As if Sirius hadn't been learning manners, real manners, manners that require large textbooks to keep straight, a mother's thin fingers on your shoulders and her breath at the back of your neck, when Remus was still toddling round his garden in dirty nappies.

There are things, though, that Remus has known since he was barely out of said nappies. They're things that Sirius can't imagine a toddler having to know, things that require an understanding that Sirius even now doesn't think he has. It's this about Remus that has made him grow up before his bones, so that now at sixteen he seems lost in his own body, moving with immense, thin care and precision, like a foal just off its first legs.

"Can I have a towel, please, o most patient and understanding of hosts, on whose territory I have done nothing but trespass and drip," Sirius amends. Remus's smile bursts over his face, awkward and lovely before he gets control of it. In this moment of distraction Sirius lunges for him, seizes the towel, and wraps it around his freezing shoulders.

"Can I have a towel, please, o most patient and understanding of hosts, on whose territory I have done nothing but trespass and drip." Sirius is most politic. Remus sees it in the cunning slant of his eyes, the sudden twitch of his shoulders, the way his muscles tighten about his abdomen. He realizes, too late as ever, that he's lost the upper hand. Sirius moves at him, snatches the towel away, and sets to rubbing his unfortunate hair dry, just as James has already done, set apart, suddenly, from their antics.

"Well," Remus attempts, "since you were so very polite about it." He tugs at a frizz of hair near his cheek. No longer laden with chores, with towels to hand out and tea to serve, his arms feel empty. No longer all business, he wants the un-boyish want to hug his friends, both of them, and get wet himself, and cast off the shirt with it's little hole at the left wrist hem where he used to chew it. Instead, he pulls up three chairs in a semi-circle around the scuffed coffee table -- which, until now, served as a bedside rest for his books. "Sirius is three sugars, and more cream than tea, in the blue cup; and James, you're the red cup with two sugars." Settling down into a chair is easier said than done. He folds himself up against the back and stares down at his right thumb. There's some dirt up beneath the nail.

"Remus," James says, incredulous. "You haven't seen us for three whole months and--"

"Well," Remus excuses himself, "someone has to pretend it isn't twelve and you haven't just ridden here in a thunderstorm on a great ugly motorbike."

"Well," Remus says, a little bit coldly, "someone has to pretend it isn't twelve and you haven't just ridden here in a thunderstorm on a great ugly motorbike."

James shoots Sirius a Look.

"Bollocks to this!" Sirius is astonished and slightly, secretly hurt at Remus's total lack of enthusiasm, after they flew here, in the pouring rain, for four hours just to see him. It's stupid, and a peculiar kind of stupid that is utterly intolerable coming from your best friend, and Sirius is finished with it. He plants himself squarely between Remus and the tea-table, dripping and impassive.

Remus eyes him.

Gently, like offering your hand to a strange dog, Sirius removes the saucer from Remus's hand and places it on the

table.

"What are you--" Remus starts, but stops, as Sirius tackles him violently.

It's a good tackle, a proper flying tackle as one might execute in a particularly nasty match if one didn't mind being carded for the rest of one's natural life, and Remus says "oof!" as Sirius smacks into his stomach and barrels him over. James, by the window, is laughing.

"What in the name of--" Remus struggles upright onto his elbows, but Sirius headbutts him as gently as possible and knocks him to the floor again.

"I *missed* you," Sirius says, plaintively, nuzzling Remus's neck like a dog. This is a way of loving someone that he knows: something physical, basic, at home in any form. The skin of Remus's wrist grazes his bare, damp shoulder.

"Get off," Remus yelps, "get *off* me, you're all wet and *hey!* that was definitely Inappropriate Touching. Get *out* of there -- *Sirius!* Help, James, get him off me!" He's laughing nonetheless and despite, struggling, laughing, pushing against Sirius's arms with his hands. He looks at last like the boy he is, instead of a butler in a bad Muggle picture.

"There are people who would give their eyeteeth to be groped by me, you know," Sirius says, sounding as offended as he possibly can, when Remus is finally sparkling beneath him, reminding him why they drove all that way and got this damp and mildewed in the first place. He growls just a little, in the back of his throat, but comfortable, un-hungry, and scrapes his teeth along the delicate skin of Remus's throat.

"James!" comes the frantic screech from under his arms, bubbling with laughter. "*James!* -- haha -- help!"

"Right," James drawls, and saunters over to the pair of them and sits on Remus's head.

"There," Sirius says, immensely pleased with himself. "Aren't you glad we came now?"

"Aren't you glad we came now?" Sirius asks. It isn't a question. Remus wriggles beneath Sirius at his chest and James on his head.

"Gnhghhf ganoof breefmh ungh," he says. It doesn't quite come out as he meant it to.

"What's that, Moony?" Remus can just see James -- cupping one hand around his ear, batting his lashes, as if butter wouldn't melt in his angelic smirking mouth. "I'm afraid I can't hear you through my trousers."

Remus, left with no other options, has no choice but to do what any sensible boy in his position would do. It's either bite James in the rear or suffocate.

"Disgusting." Remus makes a great show of spitting out soggy trouser germs as James stands with a howl of indignant pain.

"He bit me!" James's expression is glorious disbelief. "He bit me, Padfoot, he's got sharp teeth and he *bit* me with

them!"

"It was that or go all blue because I couldn't breathe." Remus folds his arms over his chest. His cheeks are flushed; he can feel them, hot and damp. His mouth tastes like wet corduroy. It isn't a delicate flavor. In this instance, it also involves motor oil. "I can safely say," he continues, licking his lips and wrinkling his nose, "that I got the shorter end of the stick." Boyish delight comes over him then, catching sight of the laughter in Sirius' eyes, and the fading, gleeful outrage in James' mouth. "Now. Where were we? Ah yes. Revenge."

It's always been easy enough for Remus to give as good as he gets. Sirius is bigger than he is, and James as well, taller and broader in the shoulder and with muscles you can see in their postures, in their firmness of adolescent pride. He doesn't have that, shorter and trimmer, with wrists that just look like wrists rather than teenage boy wrists, and shoulderblades that poke out rather than slip into a plane of tight muscle. Still, he can take Sirius three falls out of three (which never really ceases to surprise either of them) and with this in mind he twists forward and bludgeons Sirius back with his body, knocking them opposite, on top and yowling as James joins in the fray. The three of them roll about, elbows in eyes and someone's finger up his nose and a knee precariously close to between his legs, curling and stretching and laughing until the nearly solemn cough in the doorway gets through to them.

Remus freezes. He has a mouthful of Sirius' hair, and Sirius is breathing hard against his neck, and James' arm is caught between their bellies, and James himself is struggling to get himself free, no doubt to leap upon, and therefore murder, them both. Remus thinks he might have a black eye in the morning.

"Uhm," he says. "Hi, dad."

"The basement's flooded," John Peter Lupin says. "And a motorbike is trying to break down our front door. Hello, Sirius. Hello, James. Are either of you very good at bailing water?"

One (1) pair glasses, formerly belonging to James Potter. An unfortunate casualty of the Battle of Flooded Basement.







