

Snapshots

by Rhea Silvia

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Memories

Chapter 1 of 2

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"Family photos," Sirius says offhandedly; then spends ten minutes trying to figure out whether the beautiful redhead in the wedding gown is Lily or not before Ron, strolling in with Hermione and Ginny, plucks the picture from his hands.

"Mum's wedding photo, how'd you get it?" Ginny exclaims, leaning over Harry's shoulder to look.

"Your great-aunt Lucretia..." they nod, "she's my dad's sister." All three make faces. "Forced us to attend, well, I was around four years old at the time, so didn't make me do much, but..." he rummages in the pile and grins suddenly, dragging out a dustier snap-shot.

Two young girls, barely into their teens, in formal, rather uncomfortable-looking dresses. Both very pretty, in a dark, gypsy way. "Bridesmaids, both." The elder of the two carries herself like a queen, rather like... "Yeah, that's Bellatrix," Sirius says, looking up at him with a smile. "She was in... well, she'd ended third year, and Andromeda first year... A long time ago, we were all kids then." His face darkens and Hermione eagerly reaches for a random photo.

"Who are these?" Her plan has worked, it seems. Sirius' face clears. He gives a genuine smile, suddenly looking his real age. Harry peers at the photo: all boys, this time...

"Lucius, of course," Sirius says, pointing at a tall blond who looks like a taller, broader version of Draco. "He was fifteen, Slytherin prefect." There are two small boys standing very close together, slightly behind the blond, both dark-haired and mischievous. One of them, a dark mirror for Lucius; the other...

"Isn't that my dad?"

Sirius nods, surprised. "Of course... you don't know. Your Grandma Potter was my great-aunt Dorea Black. My mum's... you don't want to know this I suppose?"

Harry frowns, shaking his head. "Not if you don't want to tell me..."

"It's not that... your gran was my mum's dad's sister... There were five years between our mums, but James teased me about being his nephew all first year..." He frowns again, staring at the photo. "We were about to start school, Meda... Andromeda, she was Head Girl, Bella had already left school the year before, got married that year, I think. Photo should be in there," he adds, turning to Ginny.

It is, a large one, the type that is usually framed. Bellatrix in the middle, beautiful in a white robe and a black-edged lace veil. Rodolphus beside her, slightly uncomfortable in his regalia. "Poor sod," Ron sniggers, "robes weigh almost as much as he does."

"More, I'd say, staff and all." Hermione chips in.

Rabastan and Lucius, about the same age, Rabastan perhaps a bit older, clearly the groomsmen. "Rabastan was best man, I think," Sirius mutters, then points to the girls. Andromeda and Narcissa, the bridesmaids, a complete contrast in terms of looks. "Everyone wanted Meda to marry him. Hate to admit it, but they'd have made a nice couple, as far as looks go, at least." It's true, Harry realises, all six of them look properly coupled off.

Another photo of the wedding, the children... Sirius and his dad, aged eleven, whispering in a corner... two other boys, slightly smaller, visibly retreating from the Marauders. One of the boys is pale and has blond hair; the other is dark and black-haired and looks like Sirius, but without the cool arrogance evident even in his eleven-year-old self. "Regulus," Sirius snaps, "and Barty Crouch... they were nine years old."

There's another boy in the picture, older than Sirius but clearly not old enough to be in the bride's photo. Harry decides he likes this boy, he looks honest and happy, his brown eyes smile up at Harry, content and unafraid. "That's Frank Longbottom, Neville's father," Sirius barks, and it's as though a shadow is cast on the happiness these five boys feel and so terribly cruel that Frank should not know that the nine-year-old he's indulgently smiling at will torture him into insanity. He looks up, almost afraid to meet Sirius' eye, but his godfather smiles at him, and his friends, he sees, have lost interest in the tattered photographs.

"Guys, would you mind if we didn't go to the library just yet..."

Hermione, always sensitive to everyone's emotions, takes the hint. "Sirius, can we... D'you mind if we rummage a bit more... only Remus said there might be some really valuable books in the library, disintegrating for lack of care and..."

Sirius smiles conspiratorially at him, then turns to Hermione. "Books being destroyed, you say, 'Mione? Can't have that happening, now can we? No, no, you go right ahead."

She grins at him and slips out, Ginny towing a still-confused Ron. "Why'd you want them gone, Harry? Not that I mind this... haven't had a chance to be alone with you in a long time."

"That's why," Harry mutters, ducking his head and pulling at another snapshot, which seems to be stuck with the next.

"Easy, boy; these are older than you are," Sirius growls, separating the two gently. The top one was of the Black brothers, Sirius around fifteen, Regulus thirteen. Harry realises he had been right, Regulus was eerily like Sirius, yet unlike... the arrogance, the determination, were missing.

The other picture shows Bellatrix, beautiful, probably twenty, and beside her, smiling up at her... Sirius. "I was twelve and she was beautiful and intelligent and strong and caring... She was my idol and I her pet." He looks up. Sirius' face has darkened ominously and he looks fully capable of murder. "Then we grew up, James and I, and went into Gryffindor, and decided being Voldemort's lackey wasn't such a good idea, and perfect cousin Bellatrix decided we were filthy blood-traitors, and I haven't seen her for... oh, twenty years and more." He shrugs. "Happens all the time, Harry. People grow up, families grow apart." But these two wouldn't have, Harry thinks, looking down. They were too alike, too close. They wouldn't have grown apart unless...

The other photos, it seems, are of people Harry does not know, though Sirius smiles fondly at one of a middle-aged man and mutters, "My uncle Alphard," in answer to Harry's enquiring look. But then Sirius gives out a sudden bark of laughter and pulls out one more snap from the pile. "Didn't think this was still around," he whoops.

"Who are in that photo?" Harry asks.

"See for yourself," he says and places it on the floor between them. It's a large photograph, nearly big as a poster. It's a lot more casual than the other pictures, all the children, grouped around a couch. Bellatrix, in all the glory of her position as Head Girl, poisonously beautiful. Andromeda, at fifteen a more amiable version of Bella, sitting beside her, fingering her prefect's badge. Narcissa, on Bella's other side, strangely out of place beside her darker sisters, features starting to shed the chubby sweetness of childhood and gain an icy blonde beauty. Sirius and James, not quite ten, leaning over the back of the couch, muttering to Bella. "Probably planning how to injure someone," Sirius puts in dryly. Regulus sitting at Andromeda's feet, head leaning against her knees. "She petted him a lot, 'cause he was more delicate than any of us, little runt." Sirius mutters again, and Harry, looking up, catches sight of a genuine smile. Frank Longbottom lounges on the arm of the couch, leaning in to talk to Andromeda. "He'd just started school and Ted was already using him as an envoy. Tried to get Lucius to do it at first. That..."he pauses, searching for the right words, "didn't work out too well. Ted ended up in the hospital wing... for a week."

"But... Lucius... Mr. Malfoy was in third year, wasn't he?"

"Well, yes, but he had both the Lestrage boys backing him up. Poor Ted, never knew what hit him." He should be feeling sorry for Ted Tonks, but Harry cannot help thinking Sirius, both then and now, feels only joy that Lucius was so good, at spell-work and strategy, as to be able to defeat a fifth-year at thirteen. Maybe even a bit of pride at knowing Lucius.

Certainly, the boy in the photo turns away from his best friend, turns away even from his favourite Bella to look adoringly at Lucius Malfoy, seated on his other side, on the arm of the couch, whispering to the girl he will someday marry. He turns, half-amused, to run a hand through Sirius' hair, and the younger boy dodges, laughing.

At Narcissa's feet sits Barty Crouch, a pale bundle crouching against her legs. "Always sucked up to both of them," Sirius comments. "Bella insisted he just liked not being the only pale one."

Again Harry feels it is somehow unnatural for that tone to be in Sirius' voice when speaking of these people. Instead of saying anything, however, he watches his father pull Bellatrix's hair and get smacked soundly. As James sticks his tongue out, however, he finds his voice again.

"Why aren't the Lestranges in this snap... Rodolphus and Rabastan, I mean?"

"Oh, they weren't Blacks, not part of the family. They were in the wedding snaps because... well, obviously. The ones you see here, they were family." He says it easily, none of the usual bitterness in his voice, as if it is the most natural thing in the world for Lucius Malfoy and Bellatrix Lestrage to be referred to in the same terms as James Potter and Frank Longbottom.

"Even Barty Crouch and Neville's dad?"

"Well, not directly, but... Look, Harry, it's complicated." The usual, hunted look has begun to reappear and Harry knows that much though he dislikes the way Sirius was reacting to Bellatrix and Lucius, he likes this even less.

"Can you explain it, please? I'd like to know." He most certainly would not, but he does like the way Sirius smiles, it's so rare.

"Well, Reg and I are... were brothers. Bella, Meda and Cissa are our first cousins on our mother's side. Then there's Jamie. His mother was our mum's and their dad's aunt." It is natural, Harry realises, natural that Sirius should address his father by a childish nickname in the same sentence he addresses the Black sisters by theirs. He has never heard his dad addressed by that nickname before, but then, he doesn't know anyone else who knew his father as a child. "Reg and I are Blacks on both sides, Meda's lot have a Black father and James a Black mum. Frank and Barty were distant connections, not as intimate as the rest of us. Lucius, on the other hand, doesn't have any Black blood in him, his mum and Cissa's were sisters. They're first cousins, those two. That's why the boy is so sickly." He's speaking about Draco, but Harry's hackles don't rise. It's natural, after all, that Sirius should comment on the health of his first cousin's son.

"Not too sickly," he finds himself saying. "Then, why were you all together?" Sirius hesitates, and he wonders whether he has damaged this all-too-fragile tranquillity, where loyalties have been suspended for a moment and the Malfoys and Lestranges are just people.

"It was part of a plan... a take-over bid, in a way. We were the scions of the best pure-blood houses, the crème-de-la-crème of the next generation. All wealthy, all powerful, all capable of controlling the wizarding world for years..."

Harry stares at him, shocked. "Even my dad? He was in it as well? My grandfather didn't refuse? But..."

"It wasn't a 'let's-kill-all-the-Muggle-borns' sort of a plan. We would have been groomed anyway, groomed to take our places as the leaders of wizarding society. All our parents suggested was that we should be brought up together, the nine of us, so that we could learn to work in concert from childhood." He pauses, looking at the stunned expression on Harry's face, and sighs. "Stupid plan, maybe, but really, more rational than Voldemort's. But the plan concerned the adults... To us, it was an excuse to stay together and create as much mischief as we could. We were kids really, all of us." He lifts an eyebrow, sceptical, and Sirius smiles. "Yes, Harry, even Bella and Lucius. It was fun... growing up everywhere, our town house, Lucius' manor, the Longbottom and Potter estates, Crouch's huge farm-house, Uncle Cygnus' hunting lodge up in Scotland..." He's not here, Harry realises; Sirius has forgotten that he's sitting in an attic with his godson... He's playing in apple orchards with his cousins, sliding down marble banisters, camping in the woods and playing pranks. Sirius is far away and he feels cold and lonely.

Sirius shakes himself out of his reverie, with what seems to him like a painful effort. "Then Voldemort came, and my parents decided this was an easy way to get their ultimate objectives and put us in control. Uncle Charlus declined, so did Frank's father. Bella and Lucius joined the Death Eaters. I got sorted into Gryffindor with James. Andromeda married a Muggle-born. In less than two years, we were all broken apart. Regulus obeyed his parents. Barty disobeyed his... and now here we are... two of us are dead, two are insane, three have been to Azkaban, one barely stayed out by lying and one lives in obscurity with her Mudblood husband." Harry looks up, stunned by the word, but Sirius looks too threatening, too murderous to talk to.

Gradually, by degrees, he calms, forces a smile on his face. "My parents were rather stupid, weren't they, Harry?" Harry can only sit still, not trusting himself to react. Sirius stands, effortlessly hauling him up as well. "Best get going, or one of the books will squash Hermione. Nasty hexes on them."

"Yeah, best get going," Harry repeats tonelessly. "Sirius, can I keep this photo?"

Sirius has reached the door. He turns with a hand on the knob. "Sure. Why d'you want it?"

"Just... don't have any snaps of my dad at that age." Sirius shrugs, walks out.

Harry, looking at the picture, watching Bella smack his dad, watching Andromeda speak to Frank and pet Regulus, watching Narcissa chatting amiably with Lucius and Barty Crouch, watching Lucius smile at her and ruffle Sirius' hair, realises that he has added another crime to Voldemort's ever growing list of atrocities.

Sunrise

Chapter 2 of 2

Nigellus' eldest son was named Sirius.

Gnaeus Vorenus Nigellus surprised his peers by forsaking a promising political career and remaining in Britain, the only Roman officer to do so.

Artorius later rewarded his loyalty with an estate. A place in the military councils was Nigellus' due, and in those turbulent early years, he showed a highly tactical mind, often reining in the Sarmatians, especially Lancelot, Artorius' second, who became a close friend.

Nigellus' eldest son was named Sirius, perhaps as a remembrance of his posting in Egypt. Sirius Nigellus caught Lancelot's eye, as a child.

--Andromeda Tonks, *Toujours Pur*, (Hogsmeade: Wandlit Publications, 2004), pg. 3.