

Amidst the Darkness

by Sirius Girl 08

Sophia McKinloch is in her sixth year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Best friends with Lily Evans and Remus Lupin, this Gryffindor maybe shy and unassuming, but she is always ready to help a friend in need. However, in this, her penultimate year at Hogwarts, Sophia will be the victim of a horrific attack; one that will require her to rebuild her life in the aftermath. How will this girl, who hates to show anyone her true feelings, cope when the person who can help her the most is the jovial Sirius Black; and how will Sirius Black cope when circumstances force him to be mature?

Sirius Black/OC

Chapter 1: September 1st

Chapter 1 of 23

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Disclaimer: Sadly, I'm not JK Rowling so none of this is mine, apart from Sophia and the plot.

Author's Notes: This story is the first piece of fan fiction that I have written. I owe a huge thanks to Mudbloodproud and DracoGurlForever, who have beta'ed this chapter and helped me to get it suitable for public viewing. Please, leave a review to let me know what you think. I welcome any and all comments.

Chapter 1: September 1st

Beep...Beep...Beep...

Sophia moaned to herself as she rolled over and swung her arm out of her bed in a frantic attempt to hit her alarm clock.

Clang!

'Ugh!' she moaned into her pillow. The offending alarm clock had fallen to the floor after being hit by her flailing arm, and the resulting loud clatter assaulted her ear drums in a most unfriendly manner, ensuring that she would not fall back asleep. Sophia knew that she would need to get up in the next few minutes, but desperately clung to her pillow to delay the inevitable. She hadn't slept well last night, and her eyelids were heavy as a result; she welcomed the darkness that keeping her face pressed into her pillow provided. Eventually, however, she forced her muscles to begin their work for the day, wriggling her feet and then her legs as she slowly dragged herself out of bed

and to the bathroom.

She washed her face vigorously as the warm water from the shower washed over her and then turned her attention to her hair. Her hair was a constant source of irritation to her. Other girls seemed to have little or no problems with their hair they could scrape it up on top of their head and it would look beautiful, or they could leave it to dry naturally and it would still look styled. This was a luxury that she, unfortunately, didn't have. Sophia had inherited her father's hair type curly, with the approximate texture of wire wool. If left to their own devices, her dark brown locks would twist into a bushy knot not a look she particularly wanted to sport. Her father's solution to the problem was to shave his hair as close to his head as he could again, this was not a viable option. As a result, she was probably one of the most loyal *Sleekeazy* customers in the country. Her thoughts turned to the day ahead as she massaged the lotion into her scalp. She felt a mixture of sadness and excitement: today marked the end of the summer holidays, but it also meant that she was going to return to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, her home away from home.

Once she had finished in the bathroom, she returned to her bedroom and went over to her wardrobe, wondering what to wear for the train ride. Surveying the choice of clothes in front of her, she pulled out her favourite pair of stone-washed denim flared jeans with a white shirt, over which she pulled on a light woollen knit azure tank-top. She also pulled on a pair of brightly coloured striped socks before putting on her tan leather boots.

Going over to her bedroom mirror, Sophia was quietly pleased at the way she looked. The flares and tight shirt overlaid by the tank-top emphasised her slim waist, and she enjoyed the added height her boots gave her. She was not short by any means her natural height was about five foot seven but her heeled boots made her stand tall (she had to, or else she would fall over) and made her feel in control. The *Sleekeazy* had once again done its job, and her hair was falling into soft brown curls and ringlets about her shoulders without the slightest hint of frizz. She picked up her black mascara to put onto her long, dark eyelashes, which made her brilliant blue eyes look even brighter. She stood back to give herself one more look-over.

'Beautiful as always,' the mirror said in a soft, singing voice as her reflection gave her a thumbs-up and a beaming smile.

Sophia blushed, but could not help smiling at the mirror before turning and swiftly making her way downstairs.

As Sophia walked into the kitchen, she saw her mother, Anwen, making cups of tea; her father, Alasdair, was sitting at the table reading the Daily Prophet. Anwen was a similar height to her daughter, with straight auburn hair which was cut short, and brilliant blue eyes that came from her father's side of the family. Sophia had always been secretly glad that she had inherited this attribute from her mother rather than the murky green eyes of her father. Both Anwen and Sophia had eyes that would glisten and sparkle when they were truly happy, and Alasdair would often state that his wife's eyes had captured his heart and soul the first time he had met her.

Anwen was from a long line of very powerful witches and wizards, and she had married Alasdair when she was in her twenties. They had long tried for children, both wanting to raise a large family, but they had not been blessed with Sophia until much later into their marriage. After her birth, Anwen had suffered two heart-breaking miscarriages and the couple had decided to take the blessing that they had been granted in Sophia and had lavished her with as much love and affection as they could.

Alasdair was a Muggle-born wizard whose family came from Scotland, and he was very proud of his heritage. He had a classic Celtic appearance dark brown hair (like his daughter's) with fair skin, and he was tall with a very muscular physique. He appeared, on first meeting, to be a formidable man, which was a trait he used to full advantage in his job as an Auror. However, in reality, he was a very easy-going person who cared about the happiness of his family above all else.

'Morning, dear. Did you sleep well? I've just made you a cup of tea,' said Anwen as she carried Sophia's brightly coloured mug over to the table.

'Hmm ... not that well, to be honest. I guess I just have a lot on my mind with the start of school and everything. What time are we leaving for the train?' inquired Sophia, taking the tea from her mum.

A normal breakfast for the family would have been a quick bowl of porridge or some toast, but ever since Sophia's first year going to Hogwarts, Anwen had taken it upon herself to prepare a full English breakfast that the three ate together. This year was no exception, and the chunky wooden table was covered with plates filled with eggs, sausages, bacon, hash browns, fried bread, tomatoes, mushrooms, and a bowl of baked beans all of which Sophia readily started to help herself to.

'I think we will leave at about 10:30 you can Apparate with me, and your father can Apparate separately with your trunk. Just think, next year you can Apparate yourself to the platform providing you pass your test, of course,' replied Anwen.

Alasdair folded up the paper and laid it down on the table with a heavy look on his face. Sophia deduced from this look that there had been more attacks on Muggle-borns by people calling themselves 'Death Eaters'. She cast a quick look at the front page where she could see the date of September 1st, 1976, above the bold headline '*Dark Mark in Night Sky Five Found Dead*'. Sophia gave an involuntary shudder as she looked at the moving picture on the front of the paper clearly showing the skull and snake motif in the air, above a pile of rubble that had once been a family's home.

'Of course she will pass her test there's nothing our Sophia can't do when she puts her mind to it. Look at her O.W.L. results,' he said, giving his daughter a wink and a smile while helping himself to bacon and hash browns. 'Have you got all your things packed up and ready to go?'

'Yes, it's all packed and waiting. I just need to get Hamish in his cage you haven't seen him anywhere this morning, have you?' asked Sophia as she took a gulp of her tea.

'Sip your tea, dear don't gulp it,' her mother scolded lightly before continuing, 'and no, I haven't see Hamish. I daresay he's outside in the garden somewhere trying unsuccessfully to hunt down a helpless mouse or bird. Just rattle some biscuits, and I'm sure he will come running. You know how much that cat is controlled by his stomach.'

All three chuckled at this statement. It was very true that the grey cat was the epitome of gluttony. They only had to think back to a few years ago when the pantry door was accidentally left open and the way he had single-handedly cleaned the family out of all the ham, cooked beef, and leftover chicken legs they had, not to mention the single cream that he had knocked over and was licking up off the floor. Alasdair swore that if he hadn't interrupted the cat when he did, they would have been left with no food at all.

The three ate their breakfast and cleared up the kitchen before Sophia went on a mission to find her cat. Just as her mother had said, one rattle of Hamish's biscuits outside the backdoor had the grey cat running down the garden with his tail held up high, just a slight curl at the tip.

'Hello, you,' said Sophia. 'Are you ready to go back to Hogwarts, then?' She looked down at the cat whose green eyes were eyeing the biscuit tin greedily. 'Oh, fine, I know where your priorities lie,' Sophia said with a mixture of false annoyance and laughter as she took out a couple of biscuits to give them to him. Upon seeing the tin being opened, Hamish eagerly re-organised himself to sit up on his haunches, resting his front paws on Sophia's leg so that he could reach the biscuit a few seconds quicker than if he had remained with all four paws on the floor. Sophia smiled at her cat's antics, giving him a quick scratch on the head as he chomped enthusiastically on the biscuit. Once his mouth was free, Hamish meowed and stretched one leg further up towards the tin, clearly indicating that he would like more food.

'No more, Hamish,' Sophia giggled, 'or else you won't fit in your basket!' She clutched the tin under one arm before lifting Hamish up into her arms to escort him back upstairs to where his basket laid waiting. All the way up the stairs, Hamish fussed over the top of the biscuit tin, determined that his nose could work as well as any opposable thumb to open it. Once in her room, Sophia gently placed Hamish on the ground next to his basket, and he hopped into it without fuss. She took one last look around her bedroom and then picked up the cat basket to go downstairs. A few moments later, she heard her father muttering as he pulled her trunk down the stairs.

'What, in the name of Merlin, have you got in your trunk? Blocks of granite?' Alasdair asked incredulously. 'I swear, this thing gets heavier every year. Do you know how strongly I've had to cast this charm?'

'It's not that heavy, Dad,' Sophia said, looking a little sheepish, 'and most of it is books and school stuff. I am starting N.E.W.Ts this year, so the books are bound to be bigger, aren't they?' she finished defensively.

'Yes, I'm sure it's just the bigger books that have caused the trunk to become heavier than last year. Doesn't have anything at all to do with all the beauty products and new robes that you and your mum bought when we went to Diagon Alley, does it?' Alasdair asked, an amused tone to his voice.

'Right, are we all set, then?' Anwen said as she followed her husband into the hall. Alastair and Sophia nodded in response. 'Okay, then; Sophia, take my arm and we'll be off.' Sophia walked over and joined arms with her mother while holding onto Hamish in his basket. They spun on the spot and, with a *pop*, disappeared.

Anwen and Sophia Apparated directly onto Platform Nine and Three-Quarters and instantly saw the gleaming red steam train and heard the chatter of people both greeting one another and saying their goodbyes. A few moments later, Alasdair arrived with Sophia's trunk. 'Right, I'll go and put this on the train. I won't be long.' Alastair took the cat basket from Sophia and charmed the trunk to follow him over to the train.

'Do you know what time Lily is supposed to be arriving?' Anwen asked her daughter as she looked up and down the platform.

'She said she would be here about twenty to eleven, so we still have a few minutes. I'm just wondering if anyone else is here yet. I can't see ... Oh, hold on, that might be Lily coming now.'

Just then, a pretty girl with long, red hair came running up the platform towards Sophia and Anwen.

'Soph!' Lily shouted, launching herself at Sophia; they shared a tight hug before breaking apart. 'Hi, Mrs. McKinloch,' Lily said as she turned to face Anwen.

'How many times must I tell you, Lily please, call me Anwen,' Anwen said with a smile. 'Are your parents here, Lily? I'll go and chat with them while you two catch up.'

'Yes, they're around here somewhere I think that's them coming over now,' Lily said, scanning the crowd and looking for her parents before catching sight of them.

'Right, well, I'll leave you two for a few minutes, then,' Anwen said before moving over to speak to Lily's parents.

'So, how have you been since I last saw you?' Lily asked Sophia with a smile. The girls had last seen each other about two weeks ago, when Sophia had visited Lily's home. The visit had been great fun until Lily's older sister, Petunia, had come home from shopping and had made Sophia feel very unwelcome. This wasn't completely unexpected, as Lily had warned her that Petunia may give her a frosty reception, but it still put a damper on what had otherwise been a lovely day.

'I've been fine, thanks. We went to Diagon Alley last week to get all my school supplies and some new robes. Other than that, I've just been at home enjoying the last few days of the holidays. How about you? Have you been up to anything interesting?' Sophia asked.

'Nah, nothing very interesting, pretty much the same as you, really just enjoying the holidays and trying to avoid making Petunia angry ... not that I've had much luck there,' Lily replied, looking glum.

'Oh, Lils, don't worry about her. If she can't get over the fact that you're a witch, then that's her problem, not yours. Besides, I know how wonderful you are even if she doesn't. You're the best friend I could ever ask for,' Sophia said as she hugged her friend.

Since becoming friends in first year, the pair had had many conversations over the years about Petunia's attitude towards Lily. It made Sophia really angry to see Lily get so upset about this, but there was nothing that either of them could do to change Petunia's mind. Sophia had decided several years ago that the most she could do for her friend in this situation was to just be a good listener, something that Sophia had become very good at.

'Sorry to break up the reunion, folks, but I think you need to get on the train or it will leave without you,' Alasdair said as he arrived back. Sure enough, the crowded platform was slowly clearing as the students climbed onto the train. Lily's parents and Anwen came over and both girls turned to say goodbye.

'Take care, sweetheart! Study hard, and write if you need anything,' Anwen told her daughter as they hugged one another. Despite having done this for the last five years, Sophia could still hear the edge of worry and the threat of tears in her mother's voice.

'I will, Mum, don't worry,' Sophia said reassuringly as she turned to hug her father.

'Take care, lass, and we'll speak to you soon,' Alasdair said as he let his daughter go.

Sophia climbed on board the Hogwarts Express and went to a window to wave at her parents as the train started to leave the station. Once her parents were out of view, Sophia turned to find the cabin where her father had put her trunk.

She found it after a few minutes and, luckily, it was empty, so she let Hamish out of his cage, pulled out a book from her trunk (she had to admit, her father had a point it was indeed very heavy), sat herself by the window, and started to read with Hamish curled up on her lap.

She knew that Lily would be at the Prefects' meeting, so she would be guaranteed some time alone, for a little while, at least. After about half an hour, Lily came down and found Sophia and sat down in the seat opposite her. The pair chatted and caught up on news from the last few weeks of the summer holidays before Lily went on a patrol of the train and Sophia went back to her book. She continued to read, happy in her own little world, until she heard a knock and the cabin door slid open to reveal a tall boy with jet-black hair.

Chapter 2: The Hogwarts Express

Chapter 2 of 23

The Marauders and Sophia have a discussion.

Disclaimer: Sadly, still not mine.

Author's Notes: Once again, I owe a huge thank-you to DracoGurlForever who has helped me get this whipped into shape. Also, thank-you to everyone who read Chapter 1 as well :) With that, here is Chapter 2. I hope you enjoy it and if you do (or even if you don't!) please leave a review :) Thanks!

'Quick, Padfoot! Hurry up! We'll miss the train otherwise!'

James Potter and Sirius Black were running along the platform with minutes to spare. Sirius pushed his legs faster, stretching his stride as far as he could, despite the fact that he was pulling his heavy trunk along behind him.

'I know I'm going as fast as I can!' Sirius shouted in reply. The boys tossed their luggage in through the door and jumped onto the train just as it started to slowly move off

from the platform.

'Do me a favour next year, will you?' James puffed, leaning up against the wall. 'Get up on time.'

'Me?' Sirius blurted incredulously. 'I wasn't the one who insisted on spending forty-five minutes in the bathroom doing my hair!' James gave him a withering stare, but the effect was slightly impeded by the fact that he was still gasping for air like a fish out of water. 'Not that it looks any different to how it normally looks,' Sirius grumbled under his breath, trying to return his own breathing to normal. He couldn't wait until he was seventeen and old enough to learn to Apparate. The ability to appear and disappear in any location you desired was *definitely* one of the bonuses of being a wizard.

'I swear, you two are becoming more and more like an old married couple,' came a voice from down the corridor. Sirius and James looked up to see Remus and Peter walking towards them, each wearing a broad, if slightly smug, smile on their face. Peter continued, 'I think they should just make it official and announce their engagement, don't you, Remus?'

'I quite agree,' Remus replied with a smirk before both he and Peter started laughing.

'Hardy har har,' James replied bitterly, 'just give us a hand with these, will you?' James gestured to the trunks that were lying at their feet.

'Love to, but can't; I have to get down to the Prefects' meeting. I'll see you in a bit.' Remus squeezed himself past James and Sirius and walked towards the front of the train.

'I'll help you,' Peter replied eagerly. 'Remus and I picked a cabin just a few doors down.' Peter pointed with his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the cabin that he was talking about before bending down and helping James lift his trunk.

The three boys negotiated their way down the corridor into the cabin. Once in, they stored the trunks on the racks above the seats before settling in and discussing things that had happened since they had last seen each other.

'Oh, I heard a great joke the other day!' Peter chatted happily. Sirius and James exchanged a dubious look. Peter may have been a close friend, but his idea of a 'great' joke rarely corresponded with the idea of a 'great' joke for anyone else; in fact, more often than not, these jokes were incredibly *unfunny*.

Restraining the long-suffering tone from his voice, Sirius said, 'Come on then, do tell. You know Prongs and I like a good joke.' Sirius smiled warmly, and Peter beamed back at him.

'Okay, what do ghosts serve for pudding?' Peter looked like he was barely containing his glee at sharing his joke, but Sirius was struggling to restrain his groan. It was a sheer testament to how much he valued Peter's friendship that he managed it.

'I don't know,' James replied, trying very hard to sound interested, 'what do ghosts serve for pudding?'

'I scream!' Peter declared joyfully before he laughed loudly. Sirius and James shared a look before they both laughed mildly to keep Peter appeased and, especially, to stop him from telling any more horrendous jokes.

It was just then that Remus came back into the cabin, and the boys' talk was diverted for a short while to discuss the gossip from the Prefects' meeting. Sirius fought to hold back a chuckle at James's barrage of questions about Lily Evans, who worked with Remus as a sixth-year Prefect for Gryffindor. He only relented when Remus told him half seriously, half jokingly that he wasn't Lily's personal secretary, or keeper, or stalker, so he didn't know every detail of Lily's life.

After exhausting the Prefects' meeting as a topic of conversation, Sirius was feeling restless. He hated sitting still for too long and decided it was about time to see if they could find any fun elsewhere on the train. With any luck, they might bump into Severus Snape; he was always a great source of entertainment for Sirius. The two boys had been enemies almost from the moment they first met, and over the years, Sirius's impression of Snape hadn't improved by even the smallest of margins. Growing up a Black, Sirius knew the signs of the Dark Arts, and Snape reeked of them. To Sirius, being involved, or even mildly interested, in the Dark Arts was the most repulsive thing anyone could do, an unforgivable crime.

'Come on I fancy a walk.' He jumped up from his seat and clapped his hands together with a grin. 'Let's see who we can find, shall we?' His grin was mischievous and James clearly recognised it.

'Sure, Pads, but let's try and not wind up with a detention *before* we've even reached Hogwarts, eh?' James said with a slight chuckle.

'Spoil sport,' Sirius replied petulantly before both boys fell about laughing as they walked out of the cabin.

The others followed them, with James taking the lead, as they all strolled down the corridor, peering in through the windows where possible. Sirius noted to himself that James was probably on the lookout for the redhead who'd been the topic of their earlier conversation, and this was confirmed not a moment later when James suddenly knocked on a door and poked his head in to speak to whoever was inside. Sirius leaned over Peter's shoulder to see through the window and grinned when he saw Sophia McKinloch, Lily's best friend, sitting alone.

Although Sophia could be quiet on occasion, Sirius did get along with her reasonably well. She, at least, didn't seem to be as stuck up about school rules as Lily was. He'd only started to get to know Sophia after Remus had become friends with her back in fourth year, but even now she tended to only associate with them when Remus was around. In fact, the friendship between Remus and Sophia was such that Sirius often wondered if there was anything more than friendship between the two of them, but when the other Marauders had questioned Remus, he had flat-out denied it. Of course, the other boys believed Remus immediately, but that didn't mean they didn't still tease him about Sophia every once in a while.

All the same, the time he had spent with Sophia had been generally enjoyable, and he found that he was often able to twist things that she said or did much to his own amusement. Of course, anything of that nature was always done in fun after all, she was a friend of Remus and a Gryffindor, and Sirius protected those he thought of as being one of his own.

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'Hey, Sophia, mind if we come in?' James asked. To Sophia, James didn't appear as if he had changed much over the summer his dark hair was still sticking up at the back, and he still had that air of confidence (Lily would say 'arrogance') about him.

'Sure, be my guest,' she said brightly, gesturing to the empty seats. One by one, the four Marauders came in and sat down. James went to the seat opposite Sophia by the window, and he was followed by Sirius and Peter, while Remus took up the seat next to her. Looking at the other three boys, Sophia realised that, like James, they too had changed very little over the summer apart from all of them being marginally taller, and perhaps they had all filled out slightly as well.

The only one who seemed to have changed any more than that was Sirius, but Sophia couldn't pinpoint what it was that was different about him. Hamish, who'd been disturbed by the movement of the boys, got up and walked over to Remus, who absently started scratching the cat behind the ears, causing a loud and appreciative purr to come from Hamish's throat. For some reason, Hamish had a slight fascination with Remus whenever Remus was near, Hamish was sure to seek him out.

'So, where's Evans?' James asked, trying to sound as indifferent as possible, but failing miserably as far as Sophia was concerned. Sirius seemed to take the same view of James's behaviour; Sophia saw him roll his eyes and chuckle to himself.

'She's patrolling the corridors and before you ask, no, I don't know how long she will be away for,' Sophia replied with a knowing smile, noting James's apparent disappointment. 'How have your summers been, anyway? Got any interesting news?'

'Oh, summer was fine, thanks. I got made Gryffindor Quidditch Captain,' James beamed, puffing his chest out slightly as he did.

'That's great, James! Well done!' Sophia congratulated with a kind smile. While she didn't care much for Quidditch herself, she knew that it was one of James's main passions in life, and therefore she could guess how big an achievement this was for him.

'Thanks,' James replied before adding, 'Sirius has got some news too, don't you, Sirius?' James said, looking to his friend.

'Yeah, guess what? I moved out!' Sirius said, grinning wildly.

'You moved out? Out of where? Your parents' house?' Sophia asked, her voice pitching up in tone as realisation suddenly dawned on her. She had known, of course, that Sirius had radically different ideas to his parents, but she didn't think that he would actually move away from home. After all, he only went home during the summer holidays, which were eight weeks long she would have thought he could have lasted that short amount of time with them, but, apparently, she was wrong. 'Where did you go?'

'Moved in with James; his parents said they would take me in if I wanted when I went there after an argument with my parents, so I took them up on their offer,' he replied cheerily. So this was what was different about Sirius: he was ... settled, happy to be free of his parents.

'Well James, I'll say one thing. Your mother is a brave woman having you two living in the same house!' Sophia said, pointing at the two boys with one eyebrow raised and a stern look before her face cracked into a smile and everyone burst out laughing. 'Anyway, how did you do on your O.W.L.s?' she asked once the laughter had died down.

'We all did all right, thanks well enough in the subjects we want to continue with, anyway,' Remus replied, still scratching Hamish. 'How about yourself? Did you get the results you wanted?'

'Yes, and I can take all the subjects I need to become an Auror, so I'm happy,' Sophia replied with a smile.

'What's that you're reading?' Peter asked, pointing at the book in Sophia's hand with a quizzical look.

'Oh, this?' she asked as she raised the book and shook it slightly. 'It's a Muggle book called *Sense and Sensibility* by Jane Austen. It's a romance book, so it's probably of no interest to you lot, but it's very good and one of my favourite stories. My Gran gave me this copy of it when we went to visit her over the summer,' she replied with a forced smile.

Sophia was a private person, so talking about a romance book with four boys was stretching her comfort zone quite a bit. She would have happily talked to Lily about this book and related subjects, but talking about the same subject with these boys (two of whom were James and Sirius) seemed very ... unappealing. It was the fact that the subject could so easily spin into her own love life (which, for the moment, was non-existent, but that was *not* the point) that made her nervous; if it was anyone else's love life, that would be fine, but her own was strictly off limits to these four. She thought it prudent at this point to change the topic to save herself from this potentially uncomfortable problem, but luckily Sirius stepped in.

'Well, James, maybe *you* should try reading it. Might give you a bit of luck with Lily,' he said with a glint in his eye, nudging James with his arm. Sophia had to smile to herself; she did feel sorry for James on some level. She, along with the whole of the school, seemed to know how he felt about Lily, but he failed to realise that sometimes he was his own worst enemy. He somehow always managed to say or do the wrong thing around her. Sophia had failed to understand if it was nerves that made James mess up so frequently or if he deliberately did these 'stunts' in his misguided attempts to woo her. She feared it was the latter.

'You don't need this book, James,' Sophia said, 'you just need to get a better understanding of her, that's all.'

'Oh, yeah in what way?' James asked eagerly. Again, Sophia caught Sirius rolling his eyes.

Sophia leaned forward, making eye contact with James as she started to speak. 'Well, for one thing, stop putting her in a difficult position with Snape. You know that she was friends with him before they even came to Hogwarts, and when you two,' she pointed to Sirius and James, 'start hexing him for no reason, you put her right in the middle. And you two aren't any better either, letting them do it,' she finished, moving her attention to Peter and Remus they were refusing to make eye contact with her.

'Well, we don't always start it,' James responded defensively.

'Yes, but there are occasions when you do. Take the end of last year, for example. You were bored so you decided it would be funny to flip him upside down. I'm not condoning what Snape called Lily, either,' she hastily added, seeing the look of indignation on all their faces, 'but the fact remains that you did start it.'

'I'm not particularly keen on Snape either, but I respect the fact that Lily is friends with him ... or was, at least. I don't know what is going to happen to their friendship now, but it wouldn't hurt *your* prospects if you backed off him for a while. Lily needs to see that you have matured, James, that's all. Be someone she can depend on,' Sophia concluded before settling back into her seat. She looked at James and was pleased to see that she had shocked him into silence hopefully, this would mean that some of what she had said would filter through to his brain.

Almost on cue, Lily came back into the cabin, and Sophia saw her visibly stiffen when she saw the Marauders there. 'Oh ... er ... hi. What are you all doing here?' Lily asked.

'Nice to see you too, Lily,' Sirius replied, trying to sound affronted at Lily's briskness. 'We were just chatting with Sophia, that's all. If you don't want us here, you only have to say so.' Sophia wasn't sure if Sirius was saying this to wind Lily or James up, but either way, he seemed to be having great fun with the situation. Lily didn't seem to know how to respond, and James seemed to still be processing everything that he'd just been told by Sophia and was therefore incapable of speech.

*Men seriously can't multitask*, Sophia thought wryly.

'Come on, guys, I think it's time we left the girls to get back to whatever it was they were doing,' Remus said. As he stood up, Hamish glared at him before getting up and moving back to Sophia's lap. Peter seemed unsure whether to follow Remus's lead and turned to look at Sirius and James before moving. Sirius smiled and rose to his feet.

'Yeah, you're right, Remus, I guess we should get back to our own cabin and *geplanning* for the coming term,' Sirius said, with a wink at Lily, before turning round to pull James to his feet. Peter now followed Sirius, James, and Remus out of the cabin, leaving Lily and Sophia alone again.

'What did they want?' Lily asked, looking either angry or worried (Sophia couldn't tell which). 'And what did Black mean by 'planning'? They had better not be planning any pranks I will be less than amused with Lupin if he lets them. He's supposed to be a Prefect, for Merlin's sake!' Lily said exasperatedly as she sat down opposite Sophia, throwing her arms in the air in the process.

'Oh, you know that lot, a bit of this, a bit of that nothing important, although Black has moved in with the Potters now,' Sophia said, trying her best to sound casual and not laugh at her friend's naivety. 'Oh, and I would bet my last galleon that they *will* be planning something they wouldn't be the Marauders otherwise.'

However, Lily seemed to have reached that conclusion by herself and just looked resigned to the situation that would undoubtedly arise sooner or later (knowing the Marauders, Sophia assumed it would be sooner).

A short while later, there was another knock on the cabin door, and Lily and Sophia were joined by the three girls that they shared a dorm room with. Lucy Brewer was the first girl to come through the door, followed by Melanie Gambrell and Niahm Hill. Lucy was a petite girl with white blonde hair that was cut into a bob that sat just at chin level. She also had the most beautiful smile that reflected perfectly her bubbly personality. Lucy always joked that she wasn't short she was merely pocket-sized.

Melanie was almost the complete opposite of Lucy she had hair that was almost black in colour, and it would easily reach down to the small of her back if she didn't braid it into a plait. She was taller than Sophia and had an athletic body shape which suited her tomboy image. She had also been on the Gryffindor Quidditch team since third year, playing the position of Keeper.

Finally, there was Niahm, who was slightly smaller than Sophia with strawberry-blond hair and freckles over her face. Niahm also was prone to laughing at the smallest thing, which was fine in itself, but her laugh was so infectious that it would set all the other girls off too.

The five girls quickly caught up on everyone's news from the summer before the conversation turned to the subject of boys.

'So, come on, Lils,' Melanie said, 'what's going on between you and James? Are you not even tempted?'

'No,' said Lily, perhaps a little bit too quickly. 'Not in his wildest dreams would I ever go out with him.'

'Why not? He's actually a really good guy. If you would just give him a chance, you might see that,' Melanie continued. After being on the Quidditch team with him for three years, Melanie had gotten to know James fairly well.

'I've told you, time and time again no. He's so ... he's too ... he's just irritating,' Lily said with more than just a hint of frustration in her voice.

'I think the lady doth protest too much,' Sophia said, giving the rest of the girls a wink which earned her a swift punch to the arm from Lily. 'Ow! You know we're only winding you up,' she said, trying not to laugh and rubbing her arm.

'Yeah, well, don't,' Lily replied, the finality in her tone showing that she clearly didn't want to field any more questions about James Potter. 'Anyway,' she continued, sounding much friendlier again, 'I think we are here now. We should probably get changed.'

Sophia looked out of the window at the dark night's sky and the wild scenery and realised that they were indeed very close to Hogwarts now. The girls all murmured their agreement, and each quickly changed into their school robes before the train came to a graceful stop at Hogsmeade Station.

## Chapter 3 – N.E.W.T.s

*Chapter 3 of 23*

Sirius reflects on why he ran away from home as the first day of term starts and he and Sophia spend their free period together.

Sirius Black/OC

**Disclaimer:** Once again, not mine, just playing in the Harry Potter World for a little while.

**Author's Notes:** Again, a huge thank you to DracoGurlForever and to Madison who have helped me whip this chapter into shape. Also thank you to everyone who has read this story, and a bigger thank you if you have left a review. It's lovely to know that people are enjoying reading a story I first started writing over a year ago. I hope you enjoy this chapter, and I would love it if you would like to leave a review. :-)

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Sirius woke on the first day of classes with a smile. For so many years now, Hogwarts had been Sirius's favourite place in the world to be, and today it still felt just as good to be here. Since his first year, Hogwarts had been his safe haven from his draconian family and their pure-blood mania. Hogwarts remained his second home even now that he had left his parents' house for good and had moved in with the Potters. The Potters had become fond of him over the years that he and James had been friends. When he had turned up on their doorstep during the summer holidays after an atrocious argument with his parents, they had welcomed him into their home as a second son. As Sirius got dressed for school, he allowed his thoughts to wonder back to that fateful fight which had caused him to leave the Black house for the last time.

*'Sirius Black! Get down here ... now!'*

*Sirius gritted his teeth and let out a low growl as his mother's shrieks drifted up the stairs to his room, where he lay on the bed talking to James through a rather unique two-way mirror.*

*'Was that your mum again?' James asked.*

*'Unfortunately, yes it was. I'd swear I was adopted if I didn't look so much like the bloody lot of them,' Sirius grumbled bitterly.*

*'Listen, Pads, if you need to get out of there for a while, you know you can come here.' James's voice sounded upbeat, but he couldn't quite mask his concern.*

*'Cheers, Prongs,' Sirius replied in a similar tone, trying to repress the anger and hopelessness that was stirring inside him. 'I suppose I should go and see what the snakes want with me now,' he sneered. Sirius saw James nod his head slowly as he slipped the mirror into the pocket of his jeans before pulling himself reluctantly off the bed.*

*He slowly left the bedroom, locking the door as he did, before trudging down the dark hallway towards the sound of the raised voices downstairs.*

*As Sirius approached the stairs, he saw the small, hunched form of the Blacks' house-elf, Kreacher, walking in his direction.*

*'Master Sirius - lover of Mudblood, cause of so much of Mistress' pain. Kreacher hates to see Mistress so upset.'*

*Sirius looked down his nose at the house-elf with contempt. How he wanted to give the thing a swift kick that would, with any luck, send it sailing down the stairs, breaking its neck in the process. 'Move, Kreacher, and stay away from me, you loathsome creature,' Sirius commanded coldly.*

*The house-elf sunk into a low bow as he delivered his patronising response. 'Of course, Master. Kreacher lives to serve the Noble and Most Ancient House of Black.'*

*Sirius swept past the elf and continued his walk downstairs. He tended to avoid his family as much as possible, but there was only so long that he could keep his mother waiting when she was in a mood like this. Of course, he always endeavoured to push that limit as far as he could.*

*The voices were getting louder as he neared the sitting room. However, now that he had actually started listening to the noise, he realised that he could only hear his mother's ramblings, but there was no doubt that she was talking to or rather at his father.*

*'Wouldn't surprise me if the kiss-arse was in there, too,' he muttered to himself angrily, clenching his fists. He'd reached the sitting room and slowly walked through the door, holding his head high.*

*He quickly took stock of the room. His father, Orion, was dressed in black robes that were expertly tailored and only served to confirm the aristocratic air that surrounded him. Sirius hated the fact that he was almost the spitting image of his father.*

*His mother, Walburga, paced the room furiously, her beautiful face contorted in concentration. That was disturbing - anger he knew how to deal with, but he had a feeling from the look on her face that this confrontation was going to be different from the usual. Sirius was sure that this was not going to be a good day. Regulus stood behind a chair at the back of the room.*

*Perhaps he thinks it will offer him some protection if things start getting thrown, Sirius snickered mentally to himself. It wouldn't be the first time objects had been thrown or hexes uttered in an argument. Sirius thought about the small scar that he had on his left forearm. He had received it during an argument two years ago when his mother had launched a cup and saucer in his direction. It had hit the wall, but one of the shattered china shards had lodged in his arm.*

*Walburga's head snapped up when Sirius entered, and now all three occupants were aware he'd joined them. She surveyed her son with cold eyes as she spoke. 'Finally decided to grace us with your presence, have you?' If her eyes were cold, her tone was positively arctic.*

*Sirius steeled himself before he replied with an air of nonchalance. 'Well, Mother, perhaps you should ensure that your house-elf doesn't insist on wittering on at me. I would have made it down here a lot sooner if it wasn't for him. Perhaps you ought to take his head off and do us all a favour.'*

*'Enough.' Orion Black took a step toward Sirius and held him in a stern gaze. 'Sirius, the time has come for you to start towing the line. This ...' Orion paused to look over Sirius's choice of clothes, his lip curling in distaste, 'behaviour has gone on long enough. You have an opportunity here to repair the damage you have inflicted on this family over the past five years. As you know, keeping the family line pure is highly important, and as the oldest, you are expected to provide an heir. To this end, your mother and I have been in talks with Theodor and Belinda Rosier. We've reached an agreement among us, and you are to be engaged and married to Dahlia Rosier.'*

*Sirius was flabbergasted. He stared open-mouthed at his parents, but their faces were emotionless. He turned to Regulus, who looked like he was enjoying every minute of what he was witnessing. He was dimly aware that his father was still speaking, detailing the exact arrangements of when this marriage was supposed to take place and what behaviour was expected of him until that time. Sirius, however, heard none of his father's speech.*

*They want me to get married? To a Rosier, no less! Sirius was having a hard time processing all that had happened, but slowly the shock began to subside and anger bubbled up to the surface in its stead.*

*'What?' he shouted. 'You have got to be kidding me! Have you completely lost your minds, or has the inbreeding in this family finally come to the surface through this absurd idea? You must be deranged if you think that I'm going to go anywhere near that girl!'*

*'You ungrateful little brat!' his mother spat at him. 'You have no idea how hard your father and I have had to work to secure this marriage for you. After your disgraceful behaviour, it was nearly impossible for us to secure such a match.'*

*'Well, no one asked you to go to such trouble, did they, Mother?' Sirius's voice had lowered, but it still held the same fiercely angry tone as he spoke through a clenched jaw.*

*'Sirius, you will do this or face the consequences.' Orion had drawn himself to full height in an attempt to assert dominance over his son.*

*Sirius's mind, however, was made up consequences be damned. 'That's where you're wrong, Father,' he sneered. 'I'm a few months away from turning seventeen - and when I do, you'll have no control over me. If I marry, it will be to a woman whom I choose and not who you decide is suitable.'*

*'If you do not marry Dahlia, then that's it. You will no longer be part of this family. Do you understand?' Orion had closed the distance between them and bore down over Sirius, his voice devoid of any emotion.*

*'Yes it's crystal clear. But I suggest that you see if this deal can be transferred to Regulus, because I will not touch her!' Sirius turned on his heel to leave the room, but noted with grim satisfaction that Regulus was now standing frozen, with wide eyes, at the idea of being forced to marry Dahlia.*

*'You are no son of mine do you hear me?' Walburga screeched.*

*Sirius turned as he reached the door to answer his mother. 'Yes, I do; but, sadly, it is only in my wildest dreams that we are not related.' With that, he left the room and the house, hearing his mother's shouts all the way to the end of the street.*

*'Hey, Pads! You ready yet? I want to get to breakfast.' James's voice broke Sirius's reverie, and he gave James an answering grin.*

*'Sorry. Yeah, I'm ready. Let's get this show on the road.'*

*The Great Hall was filled with students, and the Marauders were greeted by the cacophony of morning chatter as they made their way to the Gryffindor table. Sirius took up a seat next to Remus, and James and Peter sat down opposite them. The boys all began to pile food onto their plates, and Sirius and James ended up fighting for the last sausage on the platter closest to them. James managed to claim victory over the sausage, spearing it with his fork and whipping it quickly out of Sirius's reach, and he then proceeded to take great joy in making a show of eating the sausage very slowly and very loudly. In fact, James was so vocal while eating the sausage that the third year who had been sitting next to him shuffled down the bench slightly, all the while giving James a funny look.*

*'You are a right git,' Sirius grumbled.*

*James smiled sweetly and took another bite of the sausage. 'You need to work on your reflexes, mate,' James replied smugly. 'I can't help it if I'm just better than you.'*

*Sirius pulled a face before settling into eating his own breakfast. He waited until James wasn't looking before he cast a quick charm on the jug containing the pumpkin juice. Slipping his wand back up his sleeve, he saw Remus looking at him with an enquiring eyebrow raised. Sirius held a finger up to his lips and gave Remus a wink. Remus replied with a small smile before continuing with his breakfast.*

*'Say, James, could you pass me the pumpkin juice please?' Sirius asked.*

*'Sure,' James replied as he reached out to lift the full jug. Just as the jug came clean off the table, the handle snapped where Sirius had weakened it with his spell. The jug tumbled back to the table, and the contents spilled all over James's lap and his plate. Sirius, Remus, and Peter all fell about laughing as James's cheeks flushed red.*

*'You git!' James shouted, causing everyone near them to look round to see what had happened. James quickly pulled out his wand and muttered, 'Evanesco!' causing the pumpkin juice to vanish, but the remnants of his breakfast were a lost cause. 'My robes are going to be sticky all day now!' James grumbled.*

Sirius wiped the tears from his eyes. 'Next time, don't steal *my* sausage.'

After breakfast, all the sixth years met with Professor McGonagall briefly to finalise their N.E.W.T. course choices before being issued with their timetables. Sirius didn't have any classes scheduled for the first period of the day, so he spent it relaxing in the common room with the rest of the Marauders before leaving for Arithmancy with Peter. When they got to the classroom, there were already a handful of students there, including, Sirius noted with glee, Severus Snape. Sirius gave Peter a nudge and walked over to the free seat behind Severus.

'So, *Snivellus*, have a good holiday?' Sirius swung back lazily on his chair as he spoke in a falsely sweet tone.

'Shove off, Black.'

'Now that's not very nice, is it? Here I am, just trying to be friendly.'

'I agree; that was very rude,' Peter picked up. 'Must be something about the way he was brought up; obviously, he wasn't taught manners in the pig sty.' Peter winked at Sirius, who was grinning evilly. Even from the back, Sirius could tell that his remarks were having the desired effect on Snape. Just then, though, Professor Kearney came through the door, and the class came to attention.

The class, and in fact most of the day, passed relatively quickly. All the teachers seemed to give the same speech about how important N.E.W.T exams were and how much they were expected to work. Soon, Sirius found himself packing up his things at the end of their first Defence Against the Dark Arts class of the term.

'Well, I'm off to History of Magic,' Remus said. 'Where are you all off to now?'

'Wormtail and I have Astronomy. What do you have, Padfoot?' James replied.

'I've got a free period now I think I might go up to the common room and see who is about,' Sirius finished as he looked around the classroom.

'Think you might get a head start on this homework?' Remus asked innocently.

'Yeah, Moony, that's what I'm going to do homework,' Sirius drawled with heavy sarcasm before adding, 'Oh, and look, pigs really can fly!' The two boys laughed as they picked up their bags and made their way out of the classroom, pausing by Sophia and Lily as they did.

'Hey, Lily, you are carrying on with History of Magic this year, aren't you?' Remus asked.

'Yes, I am. Are you?'

'Yep. Fancy making a move, then? Can't wait to hear the 'N.E.W.T.s are important' speech from Binns ... I'm sure it will be riveting,' he said sarcastically. 'What do you have next, Sophia?'

'Oh, I've got a free period, so I think I'll go to the library and start on McGonagall's essay,' she replied, swinging her bag over her shoulder as she did.

Sirius perked up and started to pay attention to the conversation. He didn't know who would be in the common room, and he wasn't keen on the idea of spending the period by himself, twiddling his thumbs. If Sophia was definitely free, then she was a much better option, even if he did have to do some work at the same time. Hopefully he could distract her with conversation and escape that fate too.

'Mind if I join you?' Sirius asked with a smile. 'I'll be all on my own, otherwise,' he finished with his best puppy-dog-eyed look.

'Sure, why not,' Sophia answered with some trepidation.

'Great, but can we go to the common room instead? I can't stand the silence in the library,' Sirius asked.

'Yeah, that and the fact that the last time you were in there, Madam Pince chased you out while beating your head with a book because she caught you writing in the margins,' James chuckled as they all filed out of the classroom.

It didn't escape Sirius's attention that Sophia seemed unsure about spending this free time in his company alone. As he thought about it, he realised that, despite having been friends with her for the past year and a half, he'd never had a conversation with her without the other Marauders being present. They meandered back through the castle to Gryffindor Tower where they found the common room to be nearly empty. They settled at a table by the window where Sirius could see out across the grounds to the Forbidden Forest.

'So, what did you make of the new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher?' he asked in an attempt to get Sophia talking. He'd noticed that she had been quite quiet on the way up to the common room.

'Professor Ward? He seems nice enough. I guess I'll reserve judgement for when we actually start being taught spells and not just a lesson on the importance of N.E.W.T.s,' Sophia replied, rolling her eyes.

'Oh, so you've had those speeches all day too, have you?' he replied with a chuckle.

'Yeah couldn't the teachers just all get together at the beginning of the day and get it over and done with in one go?'

'I know what you mean. James and I played hangman during them,' he informed her cheerfully, causing her to chuckle lightly. 'You know, I don't think we've ever had a conversation between just you and me, have we?'

'I did wonder if you would realise that,' she replied sheepishly.

'You're quite shy, aren't you?' he inquired gently.

'Compared to you, Sirius, I think anyone seems shy,' she chuckled, 'but yeah, I do tend to clam up around people that I don't know well.'

'Why is that? I mean, what's made you shy?'

'I don't know ... maybe it's a self-preservation thing. I guess I just like to keep to myself.' Sophia shrugged her shoulders and turned her attention to her textbooks, which were laid out on the desk.

'Sorry, I've made you uncomfortable, haven't I? How about a change of topic?' He leaned back on his chair while he tried to think of a topic that would help her relax around him. 'Will you be trying out for the Quidditch team this year?'

He noticed the strange look that she gave him before answering. 'Are you trying to be funny?' Sirius wasn't sure if she was joking with him or if she was slightly ticked off. When her stare didn't ease, he suspected it might be the latter.

*What did I say that was so bad?* he thought worriedly.

'Do you not remember flying lessons in first year?' Sophia raised an irritated eyebrow as she continued to glare at Sirius.



*Yep, she's definitely got her broom in a knot about something!* He was relieved to note, however, that it didn't seem like she was *too* angry; she looked more like she couldn't believe that he didn't know what she was talking about.

He thought quickly for a moment. All he remembered about those lessons was larking around with James and trying to knock others off their brooms ... 'Oh Merlin. Yeah, I remember now. James and I managed to knock you off your broom, didn't we?'

'No, *you* managed to knock me off my broom when I was ten feet in the air. I had to go to Madam Pomfrey with a broken ankle. I've tried to avoid brooms as much as possible ever since.' Her voice showed that she still hadn't quite forgiven him for that, even though it happened five years ago.

'I'm sorry. I never meant for you to get hurt. I actually didn't mean to make you fall off. It was stupid.' He gave her a sincere look as he spoke before giving her a sexy smile that he hoped would convince her to forgive him ... It would be a long free period otherwise.

'Well, that's noble of you.' She still sounded slightly cross, but after a moment of silence, she gave a big sigh, and he knew he would be in the clear. 'I know you didn't really mean to hurt me. I could tell that by your face as I was carted off to the hospital wing.'

'Still. It's given you a good dinner party story, hasn't it?' he joked, trying to lighten the mood.

'Yeah, I suppose it has,' she chuckled.

They spent the rest of the free period chatting about previous Hogwarts experiences before heading off to Charms class for the last period of the day. As neither Lily nor any of the Marauders were taking this class, they sat together near the back. Once again, they suffered the N.E.W.T.s speech, and Sirius found himself studying the girl whom, for the past five years, he'd barely noticed.

He'd never quite understood what Remus had seen in her. She was nice enough, but she'd always seemed quiet and, to be honest, a bit boring whenever he'd been around her. However, after talking to her by herself, he realised that while she was shy, she had a wicked sense of humour not too dissimilar to his own. He guessed she must have been slightly intimidated by being around all the Marauders at once. *Well, we can be a bit rowdy, I suppose*, he thought.

Suddenly, Sophia looked up from her notes and caught him staring at her. 'What?' she mouthed at him, obviously confused at what he was doing. He shook his head and turned his attention to the parchment in front of him.

As he doodled, his mind continued to process his changing perspective of Sophia. He thought back to the previous year. His memories showed him a plain looking girl who didn't seem that interesting; yet, now when he looked at her, he no longer saw a timid girl. She'd proved on more than one occasion this afternoon that she could hold her own against him. He'd liked seeing that side of her as it allowed him to tease and have fun with her in much the same way as he did with the other Marauders, but he also saw that there was still a softness and kindness about her. Yes, *now* he could quite understand how Remus and Sophia had become friends. He also wondered how he'd never noticed the vibrancy of her blue eyes and the way they seemed to twinkle when she laughed. They seemed so familiar to him, but he couldn't place why he recognised them. His musings were cut short when he heard the bell ring and everyone started moving.

Sirius spent that evening lounging in the common room with the other Marauders. He tried to apply himself to his homework, but that lasted all of an hour, and after that the four boys spent a disproportionate amount of time trying to come up with some new prank ideas. It wasn't until later that night, just as he was on the cusp of sleep in his warm bed, that his thoughts turned back to the enigma that was Sophia before his mind finally slipped into a dreamless state.

## Chapter 4: The Paths of Friendships

*Chapter 4 of 23*

Sophia and Remus have a friendly heart to heart, and there is a sticky situation between the Slytherins and Gryffindors.

Sirius Black/OC

**Dislaimer:** Still not mine.

**Author Notes:** Once again I would like to thank DracoGurlFurever for reading over this for me. Also, thank you to any one who has read this story and left a review. I hope you all continue to enjoy Chapter 4, and if you would like to leave a review then I would love to know what you think.

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### Chapter 4: The Paths of Friendships

Sophia found that the first week back at school went by relatively smoothly, even if it was rather tiring. She presumed the drain on her energy levels was due to the sudden change in going from being on holiday to going back to school and having to cope with all the associated work.

For the rest of the week, when Lily and the Marauders were in classes, Sophia and Sirius had spent their shared free periods together in the common room. However, just like Monday, they got very little work done. She could see a pattern emerging here; Lily would say that Sirius was being a bad influence on her, but in truth, Sophia was only a good worker when she had to be. If she could put something off to the next day, then she would. The fact of the matter was, talking to Sirius was a much better option than writing an essay on '*An In-depth Analysis of the Proper Wand Movements Required for Transfiguring a Raven into a Goblet*'.

The only problem was, it was now Saturday and she had to catch up on all the work she had put off during the week. So, she found herself sitting in the common room on Saturday morning, surrounded by piles of books, trying to work out the best approach to re-potting Devil's Snare for her Herbology essay while most of the other students were outside enjoying the last of the summer sun. However, her efforts were being slightly hampered by Hamish, who had originally decided that her quill was a deadly enemy that he had to fight and kill - which had resulted in several scratched lines of ink over her essay - and who was now, after having had a stern telling-off, sprawled over half the books, soaking in the sun that was streaming in through the window across the table top.

As Remus came into the near-empty common room, Sophia called out to him, barely glancing at him before she did. 'Hey, Remus, have you done this Herbology essay yet? I'm really stuck ... oh, sorry ... what's wrong?'

Now that she had looked up from her books to really see him, she saw that Remus' normally calm and friendly face was drained and that his brow was furrowed in thought. In short, she wouldn't have been surprised to see a great big thunder cloud over his head.

'Oh, nothing, Soph ... just ... sorry, what did you ask me? Oh, yeah, the ... er ... Herbology essay. I've made a start on it it's up in my room. Hold on a minute, and I'll bring it down.' With that, he turned and walked up the stairs to the boys' room, making a lot more noise than was strictly necessary as far as Sophia was concerned. Sensing that something must be seriously upsetting him, Sophia abandoned her work and followed him up the stairs, Hamish hot on her heels.

She opened the door to the boys' room; after a quick glance around, she was not surprised to see that it was quite messy compared to her own. Her eyes settled on Remus, who was slumped on one of the beds, rubbing his forehead. Hamish ran ahead of her as she hesitated by the door, leaping agilely onto the bed and butting his head into the back of Remus' head in a bid for some attention.

'Remus, are you sure you're okay?' she asked tentatively as she walked towards him and gingerly sat down on the bed beside him.

'Huh ... yeah, no, really, it's nothing for you to worry about,' he replied, still massaging his temples and refusing to make eye contact with her, though he did drop one hand and begin to rub Hamish's head, causing the cat to purr loudly.

'Remus, you know that I'm your friend, right? You know that you could tell me anything and I wouldn't think any less of you, don't you?' she said softly. She was trying to make eye contact with him, but Remus was steadfastly keeping his head in his free hand.

'Of course I do,' he said dismissively, and somewhat dejectedly.

Sophia paused for a moment. She was sure she knew what was troubling Remus she also knew that if she was correct, he would never confess it to her. Weighing her options, she decided now was the time to take a risk.

'So, there's nothing you want to tell me, then? Nothing at all? Nothing about, say ... your *furry little problem*?' she asked, looking pointedly at him. On the last phrase, his head spun up and he locked into eye contact with her. If it hadn't been such a sensitive issue, Sophia may have found herself laughing at the look of surprise on his face, but as it was, she merely gave him a soft, reassuring smile. Hamish took this opportunity to step into Remus' lap, where he started to knead the denim covering Remus' thighs.

'What do you mean? How did you ... when did you ... you know?' His voice was shaking, and it shot up an octave as he tried to process this sudden bit of information.

'Yes, Remus, I know that you are a werewolf. I have known since January,' Sophia said gently as she reached out to rub his shoulder.

Remus stared at her for a few moments before he spoke again. 'How did you find out?' he asked, his voice still unsteady.

'Well, after we became friends and started to spend more time together, I realised that something wasn't quite right, but I could never work out what it was. You would go through phases of becoming withdrawn and looking ill, but I would put it down to a cold or something trivial like that. It took a *long* time for me to notice the pattern, and I don't think I would have noticed had we not spent so much time together.

'Then I heard you talking to James and the other Marauders one day, and James said something about your "furry little problem." I must say, I was really confused by that I thought maybe you had a hairy back or something.' Sophia and Remus both chuckled. 'It took me a while longer to put all the pieces together, and then I watched you carefully for a few months to make sure. I always hoped that you would eventually tell me, so I never brought it up. I promise that I won't tell anyone else,' she added in an attempt to comfort him. 'Now, I'll ask again, what's wrong? I take it it's got something to do with that?'

Remus hesitated for a few more minutes, turning his attention to Hamish, who was now curled up in his lap. He reached out and stroked the top of the cat's head, again causing the sound of loud purring to fill the room. Sophia sensed that he was still worrying about sharing these details of his life with her. Eventually, though, he took a deep breath, sighed, and then spoke.

'Well, yeah, actually, it does. I'm sorry I never told you I do trust you, it's just hard for me to talk about, that's all.'

'It's okay, Remus, I understand. Now, what's happened? I might be able to help,' she said as she gave him another reassuring smile.

'Well, it's just that, before the full moon, my body aches so much, and I just feel so tired. I got into an argument this morning with Peter, and it wasn't his fault, but I just ...' Remus's voice faltered and he fell silent.

The silence hung thick in the air as Sophia watched Remus continue to look troubled. Her heart ached for him, and she realised that, in a smaller way, she did have some idea of what he went through, but talking about her own experiences could be difficult. Looking once more at him, and seeing his pinched and forlorn expression, she again decided that she had to at least try.

'You just feel crappy, and the smallest thing makes your anger flare up, right?' she asked, still looking into his eyes. He gave a slight nod, looking confused. 'What you fail to realise is that I have a small insight into what you're going through after all, I have my own time of the month,' she said with a sly smile. Remus was staring at her, the confusion on his face becoming more prominent.

Carrying on, she spoke in what she hoped was a light-hearted way, though she could feel her cheeks heat up the words came quickly, showing her discomfort no matter how much she tried to hide it.

'You see, if you are one of the more unfortunate girls, which I sadly am, then once a month thanks to Mother Nature you get terrible mood swings where you fly off the handle at everyone about the smallest thing. You feel fat and completely unattractive; you get terrible stomach cramps and your back hurts all the time; you can't get comfortable; you can't sleep properly, and all you want to do is curl up into a ball under your duvet until it passes. Then, when it's over, you have the *lovely* knowledge that you get to go through it all again next month. So, believe me, I can sympathise with you, on some level at least.'

'Girls go through all that? I had no idea,' Remus said; his cheeks were tinged with a slight pink blush, and he looked slightly dumbfounded at what he'd just heard.

'Yeah, well, some do. I swear, if men went through it and had to go through childbirth as well, the human race would have died out long ago,' she said with a laugh; Remus joining in.

'You probably have a fair point there,' he chortled.

'So, are you all right now? Have I at least managed to cheer you up a bit?'

'Yeah, thanks.' He reached over and took her hand, squeezing it gently. Sophia, in turn, gave it a squeeze in reply. 'I really am sorry I never told you, you know.'

'That's okay. I know it must be hard for you, but know that I think nothing less of you.' Her heart ached for him as she looked into his eyes and saw the pain there. He'd always been so kind to her. She wanted more than anything to take that pain away from him, but there was nothing that she could do other than just be there for him when he needed her.

Just then, James, Sirius and Peter came into the room. 'Oi, Moony, you in here?' James said as he opened the door. 'Oh, sorry ... didn't interrupt anything, did we?' he asked, a glint in his eye as he took in the sight of Sophia and Remus sitting on the bed, holding hands.

'No, James, nothing at all. Remus and I were just having a chat, that's all,' Sophia replied in a weary way with a bored look on her face, though she still let go of Remus' hand. She thought that, after nearly two years of teasing, they would have become bored with this subject by now, but apparently she was wrong.

Ever since she had become friends with Remus while working on a Herbology project, people had often made an assumption that they were more than just good friends none more so than the rest of the Marauders.

'I'm going to go downstairs. When you find your essay, will you come down and help me, *please*?' Sophia asked, turning her attention back to Remus.

'Sure, I know it's around here somewhere. I won't be long,' he replied. He had to strongly shove Hamish to remove him from his lap. Hamish gave him a baleful look as he did, and Remus stood to help Sophia up.

'Well, I won't hold my breath for your arrival if you have to find it in this dump!' Sophia joked as she left the room with Hamish, feeling glad that her friendship with Remus still seemed to be intact after their difficult conversation.

Wednesday evening that week saw James, as Captain, holding the Gryffindor Quidditch team try-outs. There were two vacancies on the team – the positions of Seeker and one Chaser. After much persuasion, Melanie had convinced Lucy to try out for the Seeker position, and Lily, Sophia, and Niahm had agreed to go down and watch for moral support.

The weather that evening was clear and cool, which provided ideal flying conditions for the try-outs. The girls all walked down to the pitch together before Melanie and Lucy went to the changing rooms and the other three went up into the stands, picking seats near the front so that they would have a good view. They weren't the only ones there to watch the try-outs. Sirius, Remus (who, Sophia noted, still looked pale and drawn after the weekend's full moon), and Peter sat a few rows back, obviously here to support James in his first role as Captain. There were also a few other Gryffindor faces scattered throughout the stand who had come to show their support of either other individuals or the team in general.

After about ten minutes, the team emerged out on the field to cheers from everyone in the small crowd. First to appear was James, followed by a Chaser – Kelly Jones, a fourth-year girl who had joined the team last year. She had light brown hair which hung past her shoulders. Despite her young age, she was one of the strongest flyers on the team.

They were followed by the two Beaters – Neil Jones, Kelly's older brother, a fifth-year who looked remarkably similar to his sister apart from having a bigger build, and Brendan Fuller, a seventh-year boy who was both tall and broad around the shoulders. Last to come out was Melanie, as the Keeper, closely followed by the hopeful contenders for the two spots on the team.

It became clear to Sophia that James was going to test all the Chasers first while allowing those trying out for the Seeker position to fly around for a while and settle in. There were four people trying out for the position of Chaser, and three for the Seeker. As James set up a training pattern to test the four potential Chasers, the three potential Seekers set off flying around the pitch, and Lucy came over to where Sophia and the other girls were sitting.

'All right, Lucy – how are you doing?' Sophia asked as Lucy came to a graceful halt in front of them.

'Okay, I think. My hands keep sweating though, and that's not exactly helpful. Remind me again why I agreed to do this?' Lucy asked, looking paler than usual.

'You agreed because you are a very good flyer and because you'll make a good Seeker *and* because Melanie kept nagging you until you agreed. Now get flying, and your nerves will settle down,' Niahm told her friend as the other two nodded their heads in agreement.

'Thanks, guys,' she said, trying to muster a smile; as she turned and flew away, she shouted back, 'Wish me luck!'

'Good luck!' they all shouted in unison.

The Chaser trials were pretty successful, with Rowan Caulder, a fifth-year boy, being selected after his good teamwork with James and Kelly. It was then time for the Seekers. James started by testing their hand-to-eye coordination and reaction speeds by getting the three potentials and the rest of the team to throw the Quaffle around to each other as they flew.

As the girls watched on, they saw Lucy start off with some difficulty – her nerves were obviously still a problem – but once she got into it, her true talent started to shine through. Due to the fact that it was nearly dusk, James was unable to release the Snitch, in case it wasn't caught in time, so he had devised a test of flying for the three to perform which would test their reactions, their agility, and their coordination. He watched each person in turn perform the requested tasks and, while no-one was perfect, Lucy made the least number of mistakes, and so James announced her as the new Gryffindor Seeker.

Sophia, Lily and Niahm left the stands to wait by the door to the changing room so that they could congratulate Lucy on her success. They were followed down by Remus, Sirius, and Peter, who were waiting for James.

Melanie and Lucy, who was wearing a huge smile on her face, were the first to emerge from the changing room, followed by James, who looked pleased, if a little frazzled and tired from the experience.

'Well done,' said all the three girls as they hugged Lucy in turn.

'See, didn't I say she would make a great Seeker? Why is it that no one ever listens to me?' Melanie said in jest, patting Lucy on the back.

'You flew really well, Lucy. We'll get you training with the Snitch as soon as possible – if not in the first session, then hopefully by the second,' James said as he approached the group, giving his new find a smile which served to make Lucy blush.

'I just hope I don't disappoint, that's all,' Lucy replied.

'Right, well, shall we head back up to the castle then?' Lily asked. 'It's starting to get cold for those of us who haven't been flying round.' Lily did have a point – sitting in the stands for two hours had meant that Sophia wasn't exactly warm, and the thought of the fire in the Gryffindor common room was rather appealing. All the spectators seemed to be thinking the same thing, and soon everyone was making their way back up to the castle.

When they had nearly reached the castle, they saw a group of boys just ahead of them; as they drew closer, Sophia recognised the familiar outlines. It seemed that everyone else in the group did, too; Sophia watched out of the corner of her eye as Remus and Sirius moved their hands to their wands, and she heard Lily take in a sharp breath.

'Well, well, well. What this – why, it's Potter and the filthy scum he calls his friends,' said one of the boys in an icy tone.

'*Snivellus*,' replied James with utter loathing, not taking his eyes off the boys in front of him. The group of Gryffindors had come to a halt, the Marauders putting themselves between the Slytherin boys and the Gryffindor girls. Sophia cast her eyes over the boys who stood next to Snape.

First, she noticed Evan Rosier, a well-built seventh-year Prefect (what Dumbledore had been thinking the day he made *that* decision still remained a mystery to Sophia) who was easily over six feet tall and very imposing. He would have been extremely handsome, with his blonde hair, blue eyes and tanned skin, had it not been for the fact that his face was currently screwed up in hate.

Next to him stood Regulus Black, who was looking at his older brother with contempt; while Sophia couldn't see Sirius's face, she was in no doubt that he was returning the look, probably with added ferocity. Regulus was slightly scrawnier when compared to his brother, but otherwise they were remarkably similar in their appearance, with both boys inheriting the characteristic Black hair and grey eyes. However, where Sirius' hair was attractively unkempt, Regulus' was neat and ordered, which highlighted his strong jaw line and haughty appearance.

Lastly, there was Rabastan LeStrange. He was a fellow sixth-year student, tall and lanky in build, a stark contrast to his older brother, Rodolphus, who had left Hogwarts a few years previously. What he lacked in physical strength, however, he more than made up for with his intellect.

"Where's the rest of your gang, Snivellus? Gone off to buy you some shampoo or something?" Sirius asked.

*'He's never one to miss an opportunity to torment Snape,'* Sophia thought to herself.

"You're one to talk, *dear* brother," said Regulus snidely. "You could do with getting a haircut yourself, or does living with blood traitors, and being one yourself, not allow for that?" he continued, casting his eyes over to James, then back to Sirius. Sophia could see Sirius's muscles tighten; he gripped his wand at hearing Regulus talk about James that way.

She could see the situation spiralling out of control right in front of her, but her mind would not work fast enough for her to figure out a way to stop it. Even if she could come up with a plan, she didn't think her body would be able to move to implement it. She just seemed to be frozen to the spot watching the events unfold in front of her, unable to do anything.

"I would rather be a blood traitor, as you so eloquently put it, than be like you and our *dear* parents," Sirius replied, his tone equalling his brother's.

Then Sophia heard a voice she didn't expect to. "If you are all done insulting each other's hair styles, we would like to go back to our common room," said Lily calmly, if slightly condescendingly, as she walked between James and Sirius.

"Why should we listen to you? After all, you're nothing but a filthy Mudblood," said LeStrange as a smirk crept across his face. "Isn't that right, Severus?"

*'So, this is it,'* Sophia thought, *'we'll finally see where Snape and Lily stand.'*

Sophia's eyes darted quickly around the group LeStrange, Snape, Lily, James before going back to Snape. Lily still held the same calm, dignified look on her face, while James's eyes, from what she could see, had narrowed; otherwise, they both stood perfectly still. For a split second, Sophia thought she saw Snape's eyes widen at LeStrange's choice of words, but now his face seemed completely impassive again.

*'What is he going to do now?'* she wondered.

"Yes, you're right, Rabastan. I see no reason why we should listen to someone like Lily Evans." He spoke so coolly and calmly that it was quite unnerving.

As quick as a flash, James had his wand drawn, and Snape matched his speed. They both cast their spells silently James's boil hex missed Snape by inches and passed over Rosier's shoulder as he moved out of the line of fire. Snape's curse missed James, but hit Remus, who was standing on James' left, resulting in Remus dangling by his ankle in the air. Sophia thought for a minute that the two groups of boys would start a duel; Sirius and Regulus both started to draw their wands, ready to fight, while Melanie and Lucy set about trying to get Remus down as gently as possible. Then, Sophia caught sight of Lily and instantly knew what was going to happen next; she decided to follow her lead.

"He's not worth it, James they're all not worth it," Lily said as she reached a hand out to touch James's outstretched wand hand and made eye contact with him, turning her back on Snape. Sophia couldn't think of any time that Lily had looked at James in that way she was looking at him not suspiciously or wearily, but with a genuine look of care, gratitude, and appeal. James seemed shocked by Lily's movement, and for a moment didn't respond.

*'So, she's finally stopped defending Snape - I guess their friendship is truly over now if she's going to side with James,'* Sophia thought to herself.

Following Lily's lead, Sophia reached out to Sirius, touching him on the shoulder in an effort to get him to back down along with James. He spun round to look at her, a wild look in his eyes.

"She's right, Sirius, they're not worth it. You're better than them don't sink to their level," she whispered to him, holding eye contact in the hope that he would back down despite knowing that, in these situations at least, Sirius' reasoning skills were the last thing to come into play. He looked over at James while Sophia looked at the group of Slytherins who seemed to be waiting to see what would happen between Lily and James as much as Sirius was.

"But, they called you -" James began before Lily interrupted him.

"I know what they called me, James, and I appreciate the gesture, really I do, but I don't want you or anyone else to get into trouble over something that isn't important. Please, just let it go," she implored, her pleading green eyes holding James's attention.

At that, James lowered his arm and his face softened. Sirius, in turn, also started to relax, though he still maintained his grip on his wand. Sophia expected the Slytherins to make some sort of joke, but when she looked over at them, Snape had already turned his back on them and had started to walk away, followed by LeStrange, who looked over his shoulder at Lily with pure hatred. Only Rosier and Regulus lingered behind, but after a few moments they too turned and walked away, deciding that four (or nine, if you included the girls) against two were not favourable odds.

"Well, shall we continue on?" Niahm asked, as if nothing had happened. Remus had been successfully lowered back down to the ground by Lucy and Melanie.

"I think that sounds like a very good idea, Niahm. Come on guys, let's go," Remus said, as he finished adjusting his robes.

Everyone started walking back to the castle, with the four boys walking in front; Lily had slipped back next to Sophia. Sophia knew how difficult the last few minutes had been for Lily not only turning her back on Snape, but turning to James to do it. Yet, James had done the mature thing the old James, the James from last year, would have ignored Lily's request and would have continued to fight. She was sure of that, but here, he'd done as Lily had asked him. Sophia wondered what Lily thought of him now, but knew that she would have to wait to find out that answer.

## Chapter 5: The Plan

*Chapter 5 of 23*

After the confrontation with the Slytherins, Sirius begins to question his feelings for Sophia with an unexpected result.

Sirius Black/OC

**Disclaimer:** Nope, still not mine.

**Author's Notes:** Again, a huge thank you to DracoGurlFurever for beta reading this and making it presentable. Also, thank you to freeluciusnow21, who has left me a

review on nearly all the chapters posted so far - I'm so glad you are enjoying the story, and your reviews really inspire me to keep going. To everyone else who is reading, thank you to you too, and if you would like to leave a review, then I would love to hear from you. And now, on with the next chapter.

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## Chapter 5: The Plan

The group of Gryffindors had made their way directly to Gryffindor Tower after their run-in with the Slytherins. The boys had then immediately headed up to their dormitory, leaving the group of girls in the safety of the common room. Sirius was barely managing to contain the anger that he was currently feeling after the confrontation; as soon as he reached their room, his tenuous control snapped.

'Can you *believe* the nerve of them?' Sirius shouted, kicking his trunk forcibly. The impact was such that it made the open top fall down and close with a loud and, Sirius felt, satisfying thud.

'I know. Where do they get off calling Lily that?' Peter agreed, his voice showing that he was just as angry as Sirius.

'Yes, but did you notice her reaction?' Remus asked, sounding calmer than the other boys. Sirius was pacing the room and flexing both his hands into fists in an effort to work off the adrenalin that was coursing through his veins. He turned his attention to James, who was sat on the end of his bed, staring into space.

'Prongs are you all right?' Sirius asked.

'Huh? Yeah, I'm fine,' James replied, trying to sound normal and waving his hand in dismissal. However, James continued to stare into space, and there were several minutes of silence before he finally spoke again. 'Please tell me that I didn't imagine her thanking me. I mean, that really happened, right?'

Sirius paused his pacing and took a minute to think. In truth, he was so enraged by what had been said that he hadn't really taken stock of everything else that had happened. He replayed the events quickly in his head.

'No, mate, you didn't. For once in your life, as far as Lily is concerned, I think you did the right thing,' Remus said warmly.

James let out a sigh and smiled as he fell backwards onto his bed.

Now, it was Sirius's turn to feel confused. After thinking about what had happened, he was confused by Sophia's actions. Well, no, that wasn't right. Her actions had been quite straightforward, but the meaning behind those actions and his response to her were what was puzzling him.

For the last few weeks, since the beginning of term, they had gotten to know each other really well during their shared free periods. In fact, Sirius would bet that he had learnt more about her in this short space of time than he had since they had come to Hogwarts five years ago. She had become more comfortable in his presence, and he felt like he was finally getting to know the real Sophia. He looked forward to his time with her, which was unusual for him - he never really looked forward to spending time with anyone other than the Marauders.

Yet, it was the way she had looked at him today that had really thrown him. As he played that picture back over in his mind, he tried to work out what he had seen in her face. There had been fear, definitely, and a pleading in her eyes, but there had also been more - something he couldn't put his finger on. Whatever it had been, though, he had felt compelled to respond to it. He'd never backed down from a duel in his life - especially not when his brother or Snape were involved - but somehow she had made him do exactly that. Okay, so, *technically* it had been seeing James lowering his wand after Lily's pleading that had made him lower his own wand, but Sophia had made him stop and think, and that was something of an achievement in itself. He began to wonder what had really motivated her to do what she did - and, probably more importantly, why he'd listened to her.

Throwing himself on top of his bed, he stretched out and looked up at the canopy overhead. The room had grown quiet, and Sirius allowed himself to really analyse his thoughts about Sophia. He thought about the last free period they had spent together, which had been the day before. Just like every other time, they had had their books out, but they had done very little work.

He felt his lips curl up into a smile as he remembered her reading a story she had found in the *Daily Prophet* that had proclaimed that drinking beetroot juice increased a person's stamina. He'd initially misunderstood exactly what she had meant by 'stamina', which had resulted in Sophia turning pink and stuttering, before he realised she meant stamina whilst *exercising*, and they had both then collapsed into fits of laughter.

He let his mind fixate on the image of her from yesterday - her smile wide as she chuckled, her blue eyes dancing with mirth. In that moment, she had been completely carefree and joyous, and it had allowed him to feel the same. '*She's pretty when she laughs*,' he thought to himself.

Then, another image came unbidden into his mind; it, too, was from the day before. It had occurred shortly before they had packed up to go to lunch. Sophia had been working like a good student, doing her homework, but he had wanted her attention on himself. Thinking the logical way to get her attention was to stop her from working, he'd swiped the book she had been copying from. Sophia had been frustrated with him, but not overly so, because she hadn't been able to maintain her straight face as she tried to chastise him.

He'd waved the book backwards and forwards in front of her, always just keeping it out of her reach. That was, until she'd done the unexpected. They had been sitting side by side on this occasion, and in her desperate attempts to get her book back, she had launched herself at him, ending up almost sitting in his lap. He'd been so stunned by her movements that he'd lost focus, and she had been victorious in re-claiming her book. Thinking about those brief seconds again, he decided that there were definitely worse things in the world than having a lapful of Sophia.

He tried to think back over previous conversations with her in an attempt to pick up any sign that she was attracted to him. She would definitely blush whenever he paid her a compliment, which, he guessed, could be a good sign, but after ten minutes of thinking, that was all he could come up with. The problem, he decided, was that she was only just starting to come out of herself around him. He realised figuring Sophia out was going to be a challenge, and he wasn't about to turn one down. A true Marauders' smile graced his features as he set about devising a plan that would help him in his pursuit of Sophia.

As Thursday dawned, Sirius was prepared to put his plan into action. It was really quite simple - his primary objective for today was to simply try to work out if she was attracted to him or not. He would start by being his most charming self, enquiring about how she felt after the events of the night before. Girls liked guys who showed an interest in their feelings, or so he'd been told. He figured now would be a good time to find out if there was any truth in that statement. Once he'd (hopefully) confirmed that she was attracted to him, he would take it from there.

Normally, after his Charms class with Sophia, he would meet with Peter and James for their shared free period, but today he told them that he was going to spend it with Sophia working on their Charms essay. It shouldn't be too hard to persuade her to spend that time with him; he knew Lily was in History of Magic with Remus. The actual class was quite straightforward, with Flitwick giving a lesson on the theory behind the Patronus charm. Sirius's mind, therefore, drifted to the girl who sat next to him and what he was going to say during the next three quarters of an hour. When the bell rang, his plan was put into action.

'Say, Sophia, don't suppose you want to work on this Charms essay now, do you?' he asked, giving her one of his dazzling smiles that had served him so well over the years.

'I suppose we could, yes. You're not meeting Peter and James, then?' She concentrated on packing up her bag.

'No - I think they're working on their Astronomy charts or something. Shall we go to the common room?' He held out his arm for her to take and kept the smile in place. Sophia eyed him suspiciously before tentatively linking arms with him.

Once up in the common room, they took their usual seats across from one another, and both pulled out their Charms books, though Sirius hoped they wouldn't spend too

much time looking at them.

'So, how are you today after what happened last night?' he asked, hoping his voice conveyed the right mix of sincerity and concern.

'Me? I'm fine, thanks.' Sophia looked up from her book, giving him a warm smile.

Sirius returned the smile, but he was a bit disappointed at her response. It hadn't left him much room to expand the topic and draw her into conversation. Then, a new idea came into his head. Perhaps he could steer her in the right direction if he brought up Lily and James.

'It was a bit weird though, wasn't it? I mean, that whole thing between Lily and James. Has she said anything about that to you?' Sirius fiddled with his quill whilst scrutinising her face.

'No, she hasn't, and I've not brought it up with her. With Lily, you have to let her bring things up when she's ready.'

'Hmm ... I see.' Sirius stroked his chin with his quill, wondering what his next move should be.

'Sirius, did James put you up to this?' Sophia asked softly, pulling him out of his thoughts.

'What? No, why do you think that?' He was now panicking slightly.

'Well, the questions about Lily, I wondered if maybe James had asked you to talk to me about her or something.' Sophia shrugged and turned her attention to her Charms book again.

*'Bugger! That wasn't supposed to happen,'* he thought to himself. He desperately tried to get back on track again. 'So, you sure you're okay then after yesterday?'

She looked at him, utterly confused, and paused for a moment before answering. 'Yeah ... I'm fine ... Are *you* okay?' She spoke slowly, as if talking to a three year old, and raised an eyebrow at him.

'No, yeah, I'm fine,' Sirius said dismissively. *'Why does she have to make this so bloody difficult?'* he thought to himself. *'Right, time to change tactics.'* This would be a risk, as it might anger her, but he was running out of other ideas.

'Can I ask you something?'

'You just did,' she replied with a smile, to which he rolled his eyes in exasperation. 'Of course you can what's up?' She put her quill down and leant across the desk to him.

'Well, if, as you insist, there is nothing going on between you and Remus, can I ask why not?'

She gave a sigh, and looked slightly annoyed, as she leant back against her seat and crossed her arms. 'I thought you wanted to talk about something serious.'

'This is serious. I'm genuinely puzzled, and I want to understand what is going on between you two. You sneak off together, and neither of you will tell us what you're doing.' He gave her a look which he hoped would show her that he was being serious.

She seemed to consider her answer for a moment before she spoke again. 'Well, there is nothing going on between us, and I don't think there ever will be anything between us. We are just very good friends, and that's it. When we 'sneak' off, as you put it, we really are just talking.'

'What do you talk about?'

'I don't know ... just things. I guess I can talk to Remus about stuff that I couldn't talk to Lily or the other girls about.' Sirius seemed bemused by this explanation, so she continued. 'Okay, let's see how I can explain this better. All right, let's say that I have a problem that I need a guy's perspective on it I'll talk to Remus about it. Likewise, if he needs a girl's perspective on something, he'll come to me. We can tell each other anything.'

'Hmm ... so if you are that close, why are you so sure that nothing will happen?'

'Simply because neither of us feels that way about each other,' she replied matter-of-factly, and Sirius was pretty sure that she was telling the truth.

'All right, I can accept that. So, do you have your eye on anyone else then?' He gave her a cheeky grin and waited for an answer.

'Um ... no ... not at the moment,' she replied, but Sirius noticed the slightly pink colour to her cheeks and the fact that she looked at her books as she answered. He smiled smugly to himself and settled down to work. He had all he needed for now.

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Sophia spent the majority of the rest of the morning trying to figure out what had happened between herself and Sirius. He had been acting very strangely, and she had no idea why. His inquiry about her relationship with Remus wasn't entirely out of the ordinary, even if it was a little annoying, but his later question about whether she liked anyone else had thrown her into a complete spin.

In her own thoughts, she would admit that she found Sirius highly attractive she wasn't blind, after all but she had never thought any further than that. He was flirtatious in general, so she knew not to read anything into his actions, and her mind had a tendency to get carried away, so it was just better for her not to even entertain those thoughts. Still, the fact that he had asked her such a question was highly puzzling and also made her worry. Was he asking because he liked her?

Don't be stupid, what could he possibly see in you? she asked herself. She'd seen the girls Sirius had dated in the past, and she certainly was not his 'type'. *Maybe he was asking because he knows of someone who does like me. It wouldn't be Remus, though, or James, for that matter, and I would doubt it would be Peter. But who, then? It just doesn't make sense!*

After letting her mind ponder the problem all through lunch and through her free period in the afternoon, she decided that the best thing she could do was talk to Remus about it during their Herbology lesson after lunch. He was one of her best friends, so she knew she could trust him, and he was close to Sirius, too. Perhaps he might be able to help her figure out what was going on.

Professor Sprout had the class working in pairs to tend to a crop of Alihotsy* plants. The plants caused hysteria if the leaves were eaten, but other than that they were fairly harmless. Remus and Sophia had paired up as usual and were progressing well, when Sophia plucked up enough courage to ask him her questions.

'Remus, is Sirius okay?' she asked tentatively, while piling dragon dung into a new pot.

'As far as I know he's all right. Why do you ask?' He took the pot from Sophia and looked at her intriguingly.

'Well, it's just that ... today he was acting really weird around me. I don't know, I just wondered if he had said anything to you guys.' Remus started planting a clipping while Sophia prepared a new pot.

'What do you mean by acting weird?'

'Well, he was just asking funny questions, like what was going on between us and if I had my eye on anyone I just didn't know what was going on with him.' She looked at

Remus as she waited for a reply. His brow furrowed in thought, and his whole face seemed to grow dark.

'Hmm,' he grunted, 'leave it with me. I'll talk to him tonight.'

She could tell by his tone that something was not right, but she also knew she wasn't going to get anything else out of Remus, so she left the conversation at that.

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Sirius mused over the day's events as he took a shower that evening. He was pretty sure that Sophia's blushing stemmed from the fact that she was attracted to him which was a good thing so now all he needed to do was plan his next move. The Hogsmeade weekend, which was in a few weeks, seemed like the best course of action, and he decided that he would ask Sophia to accompany him for the day. When he headed back into the bedroom, Remus was waiting for him.

'Hey, Moony. Shower's free if you want it,' Sirius said as he towel-dried his hair.

'I'm not up here to take a shower. I want to talk to you about something,' Remus said firmly, his arms crossed over his chest.

'What's up?' Sirius couldn't work out what would cause such odd behaviour in his friend.

'*Sophia* is what's up. What the heck are you playing at with her?' Remus' tone had gone from firm to bordering on becoming harsh. Remus was normally so placid and gentle that this change was worrying.

'Huh? What do you mean?'

'You know full well what I mean. She told me how you were asking funny questions today and acting weird with her. What are you planning?'

'Well, if you must know, I was intending on asking her out for the next Hogsmeade weekend. Is there a problem with that?' Sirius replied snidely; there was something about Remus' tone that was *really* beginning to annoy him.

'Yes, there's a problem with that.'

'Why? I thought there wasn't anything going on between you two? You have always denied anything, and she told me neither of you felt that way about each other,' Sirius replied. He was starting to get angry and couldn't work out what Remus' problem was.

'There is nothing going on between us, but I don't want you asking her out either.'

'What? That makes no sense whatsoever! You're not her keeper, Moony!' Sirius glared at Remus. He could *not* understand why Remus was behaving this way. All he'd done was talk to her; he hadn't even asked her out yet!

Just then, they were disturbed by James and Peter. 'Hey, what's going on in here we can hear you two shouting from outside,' James said as he looked between Remus and Sirius, who were eyeing each other with their arms folded.

'Moony here doesn't want me to ask Sophia out on a date for the next Hogsmeade weekend and won't tell me why,' Sirius replied harshly, not taking his eyes off Remus. Remus, for his part, stayed still and silent, though his eyes continued to hold their harsh glint.

'What? Moony, is that true? And since when have you liked Sophia, Sirius?' Peter asked, looking baffled.

'That's not the point, Wormtail,' Sirius retorted.

'No, that's *exactly* the point, Pads,' Remus snapped. 'It's just a passing infatuation that you have, and I don't want to see her get hurt.'

'Are you saying that I would deliberately set out to hurt her?' Sirius shouted.

'No, not deliberately, but you would in the end. The only reason you're interested in her is because she's a challenge. I'm right, aren't I.' Remus made it a statement more than a question.

'No ... that's not the only reason. I've just ... you know, gotten to know her, and I like her. What's wrong with that?' Sirius was beginning to feel like he was being backed into a corner by Remus. He failed to understand why he had to justify himself like this.

Remus sighed, and for the first time since the conversation had begun, his features softened, his voice returning to his normal, gentler tone. 'Pads, Sophia is like a sister to me or something. I *don't* want to see her getting hurt. I know her better than you, and she's not the type of girl to have a fling with. Do you remember last year when she went out with Brendan Fuller?'

Sirius took a moment to think back. He vaguely remembered seeing Sophia and the Gryffindor Beater in the year above hanging round together for a short while. 'Yeah, well, what about it?'

'They went out for about three months, I think, and she was crushed when they broke up. It was a mutual break-up, but she still took a heck of a long time to get over it and she changed because of it. She became guarded you must have noticed how long it takes her to feel comfortable around someone?' Sirius had to agree with that point and gave a brief nod before Remus continued. 'Listen, if you can tell me that you are *really* serious about her, then I won't stand in your way. Can you do that?'

Sirius thought about what Remus had told him. Sirius was not the type of guy to have a different girlfriend each week, but to be honest, the few girlfriends he'd had hadn't lasted that long.

He was attracted to Sophia and got along well with her, and he could count her as a friend. Yet, he had had no idea that she'd been hurt so badly until now. Could he, even unwittingly, cause her more pain? Maybe Remus was right; maybe he was only interested because she was a challenge the thrill of the chase. He gave a big sigh.

'No, you're right. I can't say that. I promise, I'll forget about asking her out.' Remus relaxed, though he still looked slightly troubled.

'Thanks. I'm sorry for being so ...' Remus faltered slightly, a contrite look appearing on his face.

'Heavy-handed?' Sirius suggested, his tone light enough for Remus to know that he was joking.

'Yeah,' Remus agreed, a slight chuckle in his reply. He paused for a moment before becoming serious again. 'It's not that I don't think you would be good for her; it's just, I don't know, I guess I'm just protective of her. She's been a good friend to me, and I know how sensitive she can be.'

Sirius smiled, 'It's fine, Moony, really. I'm sorry for shouting at you I can see that you're only looking out for her.'

Remus returned the smile, and Sirius knew that the matter had been put to rest. 'That's okay; so will you go back to acting normally around her for me, please? I'll just tell her you were fishing for dirt on me, or something.'

Sirius nodded in reply before giving Remus a slap on the back to prove there were no hard feelings. 'Just one thing are you *sure* there's nothing going on between you two?' Remus merely glared at him. Sirius held both his hands up, saying, 'Okay, okay ... just checking!'

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**End Notes:**

\*Alihotsy Leaves - created by JK and listed in 'Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them'. According to the Harry Potter Lexicon site, the leaves produce hysteria when eaten. <http://www.hplex.info/magic/herbology.html>

## Chapter 6: Of Halloween, Quidditch and Hidden Depths

Chapter 6 of 23

A visit to Hogsmeade, Halloween celebrations, a Quidditch match and a shock meeting with devastating consequences.

Sirius Black/OC

**Disclaimer:** Sadly, still not mine.

**Author's Notes:** Once again, this chapter has been beta read by DracoGurlFurever, so I'd like to thank her once more for her support. Also, thank you to you, yes, you, for coming on here and reading my little story.

**Please** note the warnings for this chapter. It does contain a scene of attempted rape. I have tried my hardest to treat this subject sensitively and respectfully. I will welcome any comments that people may have in response to this chapter - however, flames I will ignore. Thank you.

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### Chapter 6: Of Halloween, Quidditch and Hidden Depths

Sophia never did find out what Remus had said to Sirius but, whatever it was, it did the trick. She was deeply relieved; the next time they shared a free period together, they went back to their usual banter. Past that, she didn't have much time to dwell on the matter over the next two weeks, Sophia's homework levels increased to a dangerously high level.

The only respite she got from all her work was the Hogsmeade visit and the Halloween feast, which happened to be on the same day. Sophia, Lily, Niahm, Lucy, and Melanie went into the village together, stopping first at Honeydukes sweet shop, where they each topped up their own store of goodies. Sophia treated herself to her favourite Honeydukes' toffee chunk chocolate bars along with a few chocolate frogs and a couple of packets of Bertie Bott's Every Flavour Beans. Once they had finished there, the girls split, with Lucy, Melanie, and Niahm going off in the direction of Zonko's and Gladrags while Lily and Sophia went to the Three Broomsticks.

Sophia bought the first round of Butterbeers, and the two girls spent the rest of the afternoon talking about a variety of subjects; as Lily didn't bring up either Snape or James, Sophia respectfully steered clear of the topic as well. She knew Lily was probably still trying to sort out her own thoughts and feelings on the subject after being friends for over five years, she knew Lily well enough to let the matter rest until the redhead brought it up herself. As the sky outside began to darken, they were rejoined by the other girls for one final round of drinks before they all headed back up to the castle for the Halloween feast.

The Great Hall, as usual, had been expertly decorated there were carved pumpkins everywhere and live bats were flying about the hall, causing several of the female students to duck away in fear when one flew too close to their head. Melanie, in particular, seemed to have the most difficulties with low flying bats, and she resorted to honing her Keeper skills to knock the bats back as she tried to eat her meal. Luckily, she wasn't afraid of them like some of the other girls were, if the occasional shrieks were anything to go by.

After filling themselves to near bursting on the delicious food, the girls headed back up to the Gryffindor common room. There, Niahm, Lucy, and Melanie spent the evening chatting and reading the latest copy of *Witch Weekly* out loud to each other while Lily and Sophia played chess in front of the fire. That was, until Sophia lost for the third time in a row and refused to play anymore, much to Lily's amusement.

'Oh, stop laughing, will you?' Sophia retorted, just as Lily's white queen finished off her black king.

'Well, did you not even notice? You moved him straight into her path. What was I supposed to do? It's not my fault you are rubbish at chess,' Lily said, giggling, which just added fuel to Sophia's fire.

'Well, there's no need to rub it in,' she replied sulkily. Unfortunately, Sophia's humiliation wasn't over; Lily's laughter had attracted James' attention.

'What's so funny?' he inquired as he and the other Marauders looked over the back of an unoccupied sofa.

'Oh, it's Sophia. She can't stand losing and this is the ... I forget ... how many times have I beaten you now?' Lily asked her friend innocently, barely suppressing her giggles.

Sophia responded by chucking a pawn at Lily, causing Sirius to joke jovially. 'Catfight! Better stand back it's gonna get ugly!' This saw Sophia launch a pawn in his direction as well. Sadly, her aim wasn't as good over that distance, and it hit Remus on the forehead instead, sending everyone else into fits of laughter while Sophia rushed over to Remus to make sure he was okay.

'Next time you do that, make sure I'm nowhere near where you're aiming, won't you?' moaned Remus, rubbing his head.

'You might be safer if you're actually stood where she's aiming at, Remus,' Sirius said, in between laughs. Now that she was closer, Sophia managed to give him a slap round the head for his cheek.

'What was that for?' Sirius gripped as he rubbed the back of his head as well.

'For poking fun at me,' Sophia replied nonchalantly, kneeling on the sofa in order to examine Remus' forehead for any injury. She felt guilty for inflicting pain on an innocent bystander and silently cursed herself for not being better at directing projectiles. She tried to ease her guilt by reiterating an internal monologue of, '*I didn't throw it that hard. It can't have hurt too much.*'

The next thing she knew, Sirius had picked her up off the sofa and had slung her over his shoulder.

'Sirius!' she squeaked indignantly. '*What* are you doing? Put me down now!' Sophia pleas clearly fell on deaf ears as Sirius proceeded to spin her around. She balled her



hands up into fists and started pounding his back while thrashing her legs in an effort to make him comply with her wishes.

'It's called payback, Sophia,' he said calmly, plainly ignoring her flailing limbs. 'Now, Lily, is Miss McKInloch here ticklish?' he asked with a hint of enjoyment. Though she couldn't see his face, she knew that he must be smiling.

'Lily say nothing!' Sophia shouted, desperately hoping to regain control of her current state.

'Now, Soph, you know if you do the crime, you should do the time. You aimed a pawn at me, too, remember?' Lily said, clearly enjoying the torment her friend was in, despite the Marauders' involvement. 'Black, I think you'll find her feet would be the best place to start with.'

'Lily!' Sophia admonished. 'I will never speak to you again!' She put her kicking legs and pounding arms into over-drive.

'Thank you, Lily James, Remus, would you care to remove Miss McKInloch's shoes please?'

'Sure thing,' they replied in unison as they moved forward to take control of Sophia's legs before removing her shoes.

'Remus touch my foot and I'll kill you! Same for you, James back off!' Yet, it was useless, and she knew it.

Once her shoes come off her feet, Sirius dumped her, rather unceremoniously, back on to the sofa, where he and James then grabbed one foot each and started tickling her mercilessly. Everyone was laughing, and she couldn't help but laugh herself; she was *really* ticklish, which only infuriated her more.

In her effort to free her feet, she twisted and turned. Her upper body unsteadied her, and she quickly found her top half falling off the sofa while Sirius and James kept hold of her feet, causing her head to smack off the floor. The sight caused everyone to burst into even more laughter. Abruptly, Sirius and James had let go of her feet once she had fallen, and Sophia sat on the floor, becoming the third person in the room to rub the back of their head. After the immediate pain, not to mention her self-righteous anger, had subsided, she too started to smile and laugh at herself after all, if she hadn't been such a bad loser, none of this would have happened, she reasoned.

\*

The next Saturday saw the first Quidditch match of the year Gryffindor vs. Slytherin. Poor Lucy was feeling sick all morning at the thought of her first match and could only manage a glass of pumpkin juice for breakfast, and even that was pushing it a bit. The rest of the girls had tried to reassure her that she would be fine, but nothing seemed to be helping. Eventually, Melanie decided it would be best to take Lucy from the Great Hall to go down to the changing room. They were followed by James, who Sophia noticed was also looking slightly nervous.

Once they had finished their own breakfast, Lily, Sophia, and Niahm walked down to the pitch along with Sirius and Peter, ready for the match to start. Sophia knew that Remus was in his bed; the full moon was that night. She had seen him deteriorate throughout this week as his body responded to the changes in the lunar cycle in preparation for tonight's transformation. He had confided in her yesterday that he felt guilty over missing James's first match as Captain, but he knew as well as she did that he had as much control over when the full moon landed as she did over the weather.

The girls took up seats near the front of the stands by the Gryffindor goals, and Sophia found herself seated in between Niahm and Sirius. The weather was cold, with the sky an ominous shade of grey, but for the moment it was dry, and Sophia hoped it would stay that way until the match was finished. She pulled her scarf up to her chin and dug her hands into the pocket of her coat as she and the others waited for the teams to emerge on the pitch below.

First to appear were the Slytherin team, clad in green and silver. They were greeted by rapturous cheers from the Slytherin stands on the other side of the pitch. By the time they had reached the middle of the pitch, James was striding across the grass, followed by the rest of the Gryffindor team. Sophia and everyone seated around her leapt to their feet to cheer, clap, and whoop their support at the sight of the red-and-gold team. A quick handshake between the captains took place, and the match officially started.

The Gryffindor team took an early lead with James sneaking the Quaffle past the Slytherin Keeper, Simon Kells. This saw the Slytherin Beaters increase the ferocity with which they were hitting the Bludgers to the point that Sophia feared for the Gryffindor team's safety. Evan Rosier, the Slytherin Captain, roughly tackled Kelly Jones to get the Quaffle before flying at full speed towards Melanie, who was trying to decide which of the three hoops Rosier was most likely to aim for.

At the last second, Rosier dived and aimed for the hoop on the far left. However, his turn was not sharp enough. There was just enough time for Melanie to display an incredible turn of speed, and she managed to intercept the red ball before it passed through the hoop. The entire Gryffindor stand jumped to their feet to cheer the spectacular save as Rosier flew past to turn back up to the middle of the field.

'How does it feel to get out-foxed by a girl, Rosier?' Sirius taunted loudly as Rosier swooped past him. Peter let out a loud burst of laughter along with Sirius; Sophia saw Rosier flash them a look of pure contempt through the silver and green billow of his robes before turning his attention back to the game.

For the next hour, the game continued in a whirlwind. The score was standing at Gryffindor fifty, Slytherin forty, and there had been one attempt made by both Seekers on the Golden Snitch, but neither had managed to get close enough to it to bring the game to an end.

Brendan Fuller and Neil Jones, the two Gryffindor Beaters, were doing a supreme job of disrupting the Slytherins' play through well-aimed hits. On a couple of occasions, they also managed to clear the path for the three Gryffindor Chasers to fly the length of the field to the Slytherin hoops. The first time they did this, it resulted in Gryffindor scoring ten points, but the Slytherin Keeper, Simon Kells, was a quick learner and so stopped the Quaffle before it could find its target on the second attempt.

Sophia was trying to keep a close eye on Lucy throughout the game. She was easily the smallest player on the pitch, and Sophia worried that if one of the Bludgers was to hit her, Lucy could be seriously injured. Actually, if one of the Slytherin players collided with her, Lucy could find herself in the Hospital Wing, and judging by the way the Slytherins were resorting to more and more desperate actions, this was a strong possibility. Lucy had begun nervously, but was now looking composed and in control as she flew in methodical circles round the pitch, keenly looking for any sign of the Snitch. Sophia only hoped that Lucy would spot the Snitch before the game became any more volatile than it already was.

The game passed the two hour mark, and the threatening grey clouds kept their promise as the rain began to fall. Sophia, Lily and Melanie were all beginning to feel the cold from sitting in the stands, and the wet weather only added to their discomfort.

The two Marauders, however, seemed oblivious to the adverse conditions and were as enthusiastic as they had been at the start of the match. Every time Melanie saved a goal, they were sure to stand up and cheer, and Sirius almost always aimed a heckle at the unsuccessful Slytherin player who had tried to best the Gryffindor Keeper. Sophia noted that the more scathing the looks Sirius received in reply, the happier he seemed to be, and none of the Slytherin team could quite match Rosier's brooding scowl. In fact, the taunts that Sirius aimed at Rosier seemed to almost be personal insults, much more so than the taunts he aimed at the rest of the Slytherins. Sophia wondered what had caused such deep animosity to form between the two boys.

It was when the scores were even at eighty a piece three-and-a-half hours into the game that both Seekers tore across the field like lightning. Both stands of supporters quickly rose to their feet to gain a better view of the green-and-silver and red-and-gold blurs as they wove rapidly around the Slytherin goal stands before heading back up the field, where they climbed higher and higher until they were going in a near vertical lift in their pursuit.

Sophia couldn't help but lean forward in anticipation as her eyes tracked Lucy's slight figure, her robes and ice-blond hair flowing out behind her. The two Seekers turned sharply to the right and shifted to follow a downwards path back towards the field, giving the Slytherin Seeker, Belinda Mulciber, an advantage over Lucy.

The rest of the players seemed to come to a halt as the flashes of colour plummeted in pursuit of the nearly invisible golden ball. Sophia watched, her heart in her mouth, as Lucy flattened herself to her broom in an attempt to close the distance between her and her opponent.

Suddenly, the two players swerved violently to the left and swung back up in an arc, narrowly missing a gaping Rowan Caulder of the Gryffindor team. This turn helped Lucy, and now she was half a broom in front of Belinda as she stretched out her arm. Sophia heard Rosier bellowing to his Beaters to do something, but her eyes remained

fixed on Lucy as her fingers closed victoriously around the winged ball.

The Gryffindor stand all jumped to their feet and cheered as the Gryffindor team flew to the ground to where Lucy had landed before they all enveloped her in a hug. Sophia, Niahm, and Lily quickly left the stands so that they could congratulate Lucy, and the rest of the team, when they emerged from the changing room. They were followed closely by Sirius and Peter, who were loudly celebrating their team's win.

Once they arrived down at the changing room, the group didn't have to wait long for the soaked and sweaty Gryffindor team to emerge; the three girls immediately launched themselves at Lucy and Melanie, while Sirius and Peter heartily congratulated James.

'You were brilliant both of you!' Niahm exclaimed happily as she hugged Lucy and Melanie at the same time. Once they had been released by Niahm, Sophia and Lily took their turns at congratulating the two girls.

'I think this warrants a party in the common room, don't you?' Sirius proclaimed after he had congratulated James. 'Come on, Peter,' he said, beckoning for Peter to follow him as he started to walk in the direction of the castle, 'We'll sort out the food and meet you back up there.'

True to his word, Sirius, with the help of Peter, provided food from the kitchens for the celebration party. They had even managed to provide some bottles of Butterbeer as well. When Lily had asked where they had come from, Sirius' only answer had been, 'Ask me no questions, and I'll tell you no lies,' which he accompanied with a wink. Lily had wisely decided that, on this occasion, ignorance was bliss. The party went on until past midnight, with Lucy being picked up on to the shoulders of James and Brendan on many occasions throughout the evening.

\*

The next few days passed in a blur of classes and homework for Sophia. On Wednesday evening, she had been finding it hard to concentrate in the common room, so she had gone to the library with Lily to do some work. Lily had left at about half past eight, while Sophia had stayed to finish off her Potions essay.

She only realised that she was out past curfew when Madam Pince found her huddled in the corner of the library and demanded that she leave at once. Gathering her things together as quickly as she could, she left the library and began her walk back up to the Gryffindor common room and her bed. Her thoughts were so pre-occupied with how to finish her essay that she did not notice the tall figure coming down the corridor towards her until she heard a voice.

'Well, well, what do we have here? Miss McKinloch? Out past curfew?'

Sophia stopped dead in her tracks; her heart started pounding against her chest. It was Evan Rosier of all the Prefects she could have crossed paths with, he had to be one of the worst. He was bound to take as many points as possible for finding a Gryffindor out past curfew.

'Yes, I got ... I lost track of time in the library and ... and I'm just on my way back now,' she stammered. Why was it that she stammered just when she most needed to sound confident?

'You know, I could take house points for this, don't you?' he replied as he slowly stalked towards her. His tone was unnerving she knew that he would enjoy taking points from a Gryffindor, but this was different. There was something else in his voice a sense of pleasure and anticipation. Regardless of what the motive behind his tone was, it was enough to tell her that something was amiss, and that made her worry slightly.

'Or, you could just let me be on my way, and I'll be back in my common room in less than two minutes,' she said, trying her best to manage a smile but failing.

He was closer to her now, and she could see his features more clearly. He had tilted his head to the side and was smiling at her. No, he wasn't smiling; he was *leering* at her. 'Of course, I could leave the points and take something else from you instead...'

His voice was low and silky as he looked her up and down in a way that made her skin crawl. It took a few moments for the meaning of his words to sink in, but when they did, Sophia felt her heart rate spike and her palms began to sweat. The rational part of her brain was trying to tell her that she was over-reacting, tried to tell her that Rosier wouldn't *actually* hurt her and that he was just trying to scare her, but it couldn't completely override her wild imagination.

She was alone, and no one knew where she was. Lily would be expecting her back any minute, but when she didn't turn up, what would Lily do? Even if Lily did raise the alarm, would anyone find her before Rosier did something serious to her? She doubted it. Hogwarts was huge, and there were many paths from the library to the Gryffindor Tower that Sophia could have taken. She had left her wand in her room, thinking that because she was only studying in the library she wouldn't need it how she cursed that decision now! Without a wand to defend herself, Sophia knew she was in serious trouble. Evan Rosier was more than a match for her physically. Whatever way you looked at it, she was going to come off worse from this encounter.

A voice in her head was telling at her to run away as fast as she could as she watched Rosier continue to close the distance between them. She listened to it and tried to turn and run from the situation, but he was too quick. He grabbed hold of her left arm and swung her round quickly into his chest as his other arm retained a vice-like grip round her waist, pinning her right arm to her side. The force of his action crushed the air out of her lungs, and as she spluttered, she inhaled the smell of smoke mixed with belladonna, obviously from Rosier's previous Potions lesson.

Her heart rammed against her chest, and adrenaline pumped through her veins as her primal instinct to fight or fly kicked into gear. Every cell in her body felt like it was shaking she was utterly trapped, with no possible means of escape. He brought his head down level with hers as he whispered in her ear, and she flinched at the feeling of his hot breath on her neck.

'If you wanted to get this close to me, McKinloch, all you had to do was ask I wouldn't have said no.' She tried to shake him off, but his grip was simply too strong, and he began to laugh softly at her efforts. He dropped hold of her left arm and traced the line of her jaw with his finger before tilting her chin up to look at him.

She saw him smirk as he continued. 'You know, you blood traitors are almost as bad as the Mudbloods themselves. I wonder what the blessed Potter and Black will make of you after I've finished with you.' Again, she struggled, but it was to no avail; as he pushed her backwards, she had no choice but go where he directed.

She stopped as she felt the hard, cold stone wall against her back; Rosier's body blocked out anything else in her line of vision. His face was inches from her own now, and she felt his hot breath on her skin once more. She wanted to shout, to scream, to do *something*, but her body was paralysed with fear. The seconds seem to drag by as she wrestled with her body, willing it to make some sort of movement in an attempt to prevent what she was sure was inevitable.

All the while, she saw his smirk as he assessed her and the effect he was having on her. He seemed to be taunting her as he made no further advances; instead, he merely surveyed her with his cold, blue eyes, tilting his head from side to side as he did, like the snake that was his house's symbol. She knew it wasn't going to be swift he would take his time, and he would take his enjoyment from the fact that he was prolonging her torment.

Her breathing was quick and shallow in correspondence with her rapid heartbeat, but still, she couldn't move. Even when he ran the back of his hand over her cheek and caressed her neck with his fingertips, she didn't move. Instead, a single tear spilled silently from her eye, and she attempted to close down the walls in her mind so that she might separate it from her body and what was happening to her.

Rosier ran his fingers from her neck, then down the length of her body, which caused her shaking to become more agitated. He pressed his palm firmly against her body before running it into the small of her back and pulling her against him. She was nearly hyperventilating now through fear as she felt his nose touch her jaw followed by his lips; she heard him exhale rhythmically, as if whispering a laugh, as she flinched at his action.

He moved his face tortuously slowly across her own until he met her lips with his. He brought his other hand to her jaw and forced her mouth open so that he could plunge his tongue into her mouth, causing her to gag. As he moved his tongue about her mouth, she could taste oranges, and the acid felt like it was stinging her gums. He pushed his body closer to hers, and she was now completely trapped by his large, powerful frame; she felt the sharp edges of the stones in the wall stab her back, legs and

arms.

However, this invasion of her body awoke her Gryffindor courage. She had just enough room to draw her left knee strongly and swiftly upwards, and she struck him squarely in the groin, causing him to drop all contact with her as he doubled over in pain and shock. She took this opportunity to run from his grasp, screaming for all she was worth in the hope that someone, even if only Peeves the pestering poltergeist, would hear her.

However, she only managed to travel three strides before she felt Rosier painfully grab her again. He spun her quickly back against the wall with such force that her head was thrown backwards. She heard the sickening thud as a sharp pain ran through her skull.

'You'll pay for that,' he hissed; as she saw the anger in his eyes, she realised she had only made her situation worse. He quickly withdrew his wand and cast a silencing spell on her even if she did scream again, no sound would leave her mouth. There was no hope for her now, but that didn't mean that she would stop trying, for she had found her fighting instinct. She raised her hand in an attempt to slap him, but he grabbed hold of her arm hard, digging his nails into her skin in the process, before she had the chance.

He kicked her feet apart as he grappled with her robes, pulling them apart to reveal her clothes underneath. The angry expression left his face replaced by lust and greed as he began to pull her shirt free from her skirt, placing his free hand against her now-exposed stomach before running it up against her rib cage to her breast. He leant forward again and kissed her roughly as he squeezed the hand under her shirt viciously. The pain was horrible, but she knew worse was to come.

His fingers slid down from her chest to her skirt as he continued his pillage of her mouth, and she felt the fabric moving up her thigh, exposing it to the chilled air of the castle. Just as another tear escaped her eyes, she heard a noise of footsteps coming down the dim hallway.

'Who's there?' a familiar voice asked. Sophia could hear the person continue to draw closer.

*'Thank Merlin, someone heard me,'* she thought.

## Chapter 7: A Grim Discovery

*Chapter 7 of 23*

Sophia is discovered and must deal with the repercussions.

Sirius Black/OC

**Disclaimer:** \*Looks in the mirror\* Sadly, still not J.K. Rowling.

**Author Notes:** Once again, a huge thank you to DracoGurlFurever for her fabulous beta reading help. Also, thank you to you the readers for sticking with me so far. I hope you continue to enjoy the story, even if it is going through a dark phase at the moment. I've left the rating and the warnings in place for this chapter more as just a precaution than anything else.

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### Chapter 7: A Grim Discovery

The common room was particularly busy, not to mention noisy, on Wednesday night, so the Marauders had decamped to their room, as far away from prying eyes as they could get.

'I'm telling you this charm *will* work,' Remus said, mumbling a spell while waving his wand over the piece of parchment spread out on the wooden floor of the room. As he finished, the black ink that had been scrawled over the page began to disappear.

'Okay, but can you get it to reappear, then?' James asked excitedly. Remus nodded, mumbling the counter-charm, and the ink reappeared again.

'That's great, Moony! Do the same thing to the map!' Sirius said, sharing a wide grin with Remus. He moved the top sheet of parchment out of the way, revealing another sheet underneath. This second sheet of parchment was slightly larger and was covered with the outlines of a complex floor plan.

'Wait shouldn't we try to make up a special code or something that only we would know?' Peter interjected, looking at each boy in turn.

'Yeah, Wormtail is right. This charm is probably easily cracked. We don't want to lose this, do we?' James stated, pointing to the larger piece of parchment.

'Hmm ... I've got an idea.' Sirius pulled out the first piece of parchment again. 'Right, Moony, say the charm on here one more time.' Remus stretched over and repeated his earlier actions, causing the ink to once again disappear. 'Okay, let me try this now.' Sirius whispered another charm over the parchment. 'Right. Moony, now say, 'I solemnly swear that I am up to no good,' but keep your wand movements the same. If I've done this right, the ink should reappear.'

The four boys held their breath as Remus stretched his wand forward again and repeated Sirius' words. Slowly, the ink started to re-appear again.

'Brilliant, Pads!' James exclaimed as he slapped Sirius on the back. 'Can you do a similar thing to make the ink disappear?'

'Course I can,' Sirius replied, a little smugly, as he once again waved his wand over the parchment. 'Okay, Wormtail, why don't you try? Say 'mischief managed.'" Peter leant over the parchment and did as Sirius said; sure enough, the ink disappeared.

'Fantastic!' Peter looked up at Sirius, beaming.

'Right, okay so, you two work your magic on the map now,' James said, looking at Remus and Sirius with a grin.

The boys spent the next hour and a half working on their map, making their floor plan more and more detailed, before they finally called it a day on that particular project and moved their attention to a game of Wizard's Chess.

'I'm hungry,' Sirius moaned after the third game; it was just after nine o' clock.

'Well, if you're *really* hungry, why don't you take the map and test it? You could go down to the kitchens,' Remus said as he reset the board for their fourth game of the evening.

'You know, that's not a bad idea. Anyone want anything?'

'Could you get me a couple of sandwiches, please?' Peter asked.

'Yeah, and I'll have whatever you can get. Take the cloak if you want you know where to find it,' James added, waving his hand in the vague direction of his trunk while trying to decide on his first move.

'No problem; Moony, do you want anything?'

'Nah I'm fine, thanks.'

'All right, I'll be back soon.' Sirius picked up the map and slid it inside his robes along with his wand. After a few minutes of searching in James' trunk, he found the Invisibility Cloak and placed it carefully inside his robes along with the map before going downstairs and out of the common room.

Once he was out in the hall, he quickly removed the cloak and covered himself. He could hear the Fat Lady muttering something about insolent students disturbing her sleep, but he didn't listen too closely. He pulled out the map and activated it in order to make the trip down to the kitchen. Wandering along the corridors, he consulted the map at every corner to make sure the coast was clear. The little dots on the map told him *where* people were, but not *who* they were.

*'Hmm ... I guess that's the next thing we should work on it would be nice to see who we might be running into. I must remember to tell the others when I get back.'* Sirius thought to himself.

However, as it was nearly curfew, he decided it would be a good idea just to avoid all the dots as much as possible, in case one of them was Filch, the cantankerous caretaker, who would love nothing better than to give Sirius a detention.

As he was walking down one of the corridors near the library, he suddenly heard a loud scream that made him jump. The castle had been deadly quiet, and this sudden assault on his eardrums was startling. After his moment of shock had passed, he studied the map to locate the source of the noise. Scanning it quickly, he located two dots, very close together, one corridor down from where he was. He quickly folded it back up and walked briskly in that direction.

Sirius rounded the corner; glancing down the corridor, he saw a tall figure standing by the wall, but there was also someone else there a smaller figure behind the first one. He quickly deactivated the map before removing the cloak and storing both items in his robe. He could hear a low rumbling voice, which he guessed was the taller of the two people talking. He tightened his grip on his wand as he walked forward.

'Who's there?' he called out into the dim hallway.

The tall figure turned to face the intruder, and Sirius was close enough to see that it was Rosier, though he still couldn't see who was by the wall he could only tell that it was a girl.

'What are you doing here, Black?' Rosier called.

'What's going on? Who is that?' Sirius voice was a mixture of anger and fear, but he was close enough now to clearly see the girl's face. His stomach churned when he realised it was Sophia. Her face was ashen, and her usually bright blue eyes were wide in fear and glistening with tears.

'Soph? Is that you?' he choked out. His eyes flicked down, and he took in the state of her robes. His mind went into overdrive as he realised what he'd stumbled into. He quickly pointed his wand at Rosier's chest.

Rosier merely laughed as he spoke. 'What are you going to do, Black?'

'There's plenty I'd like to do to you, Rosier, so don't tempt me. Right now, though, I'm more concerned about Sophia, so *suggest* you leave. *Now.*' Sirius managed to steady his voice; his tone was low and dangerous. Rosier looked from Sirius back to Sophia. Sirius saw him wink at her, which caused a wave of hatred to flow through him; he had to exercise all his self control to prevent himself from casting the Cruciatus curse on Rosier.

Rosier then turned his attention back to Sirius. 'You're not worth the trouble; neither of you are,' he said before laughing to himself and walking away as if nothing had happened.

As soon as Rosier had disappeared round the corner, Sophia slumped to the floor as if her legs had given way. Immediately, Sirius was by her side, kneeling down next to her; as he took her hand, he realised that he was shaking nearly as much as she was. He gently lifted up her chin with his other hand and looked into her eyes.

'Soph, are you okay? He didn't ... he didn't ...?' A lump appeared in his throat, and he had to blink back tears as he tried to finish his sentence. She shook her head, barely able to contain the tears that were welling up in her eyes.

He studied her face she was looking at him with the strangest expression, and he didn't know what he was supposed to do. She lifted her free hand to her throat and pointed to it, continuing to look at him with pleading eyes. It took a moment for him to understand what she was trying to communicate, but, eventually, his anger at Rosier flared up again as he got the message. He quickly pointed his wand at her, muttering, *'Finite Incantatem.'*

As soon as the words left his mouth, Sophia began to cry softly, at first, and then as if it was consuming her. Sirius didn't know what to do, so he acted on instinct he pulled her tight to his chest and held her for a few moments, trying to give her some comfort.

Sirius soon lost track of how long they sat there in that manner, but, eventually, he broke the silence.

'Soph,' he said softly, stroking her hair with one hand while the other still held her next to him. 'You need to tell someone. You need to go to McGonagall.' When she didn't answer him, Sirius pulled back slightly to see her face, but she buried closer to his chest. 'Soph, you do know you'll have to tell McGonagall? I'll come with you, if you want, but you have to tell someone. Who do you want to go to, if not McGonagall?'

'Sirius ... I ... I can't,' she stammered, her voice hoarse from crying.

'You have to. There's no choice here, Soph. You can't let him get away with this.' Sirius was shocked; to him, it was black and white, and he couldn't understand why she wouldn't agree. Surely she wanted to see Rosier punished?

'Please, Sirius ... don't make me ...' She looked up at him now, and he saw her eyes filling with tears again before she closed them and brought her head down against his chest once more.

'It's okay, it's okay,' he soothed as he started stroking her hair again. In that one look, he had seen the pain and fear that gripped her, and he realised that she was terrified of reliving what she'd just been through. 'I know you can do this, Soph. I know you can be brave enough. *Please.*'

She hesitated, but then looked back up at him again, searching his eyes. 'You promise you'll come with me? Will you stay with me?'

'If you want me to, then yes, of course I will. Does this mean you will go to McGonagall, then?' he asked, looking down at her, trying his best to look and sound confident in order to reassure her. She nodded in response, and he slowly stood up, turning to hold her hand to help her get to her feet. She kept her head down as she pulled her robes back around herself. As she took a step forward, towards McGonagall's office, she stumbled.

'Soph come here,' Sirius said, reaching out to her. He carefully placed her arm around his neck and put an arm around her waist before he slowly led her off to see McGonagall.

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When they got to the office, Sirius rapped his knuckles on the door, and Sophia stood staring at the floor, waiting to hear McGonagall approaching. She heard the door open, but she couldn't bring herself to look up.

'Black? McKinloch? What are you doing here?' Professor McGonagall asked, sounding slightly annoyed; soon, however, her tone suddenly changed to one of concern as she readdressed them. 'What's happened?'

'Professor, it's Sophia ... she's ... she's been ... attacked.' Sophia could tell that Sirius was struggling with how to phrase that sentence, and she couldn't blame him. How was she going to manage to tell McGonagall what had happened? She hoped that the courage she had found half an hour ago would come back to her.

'Attacked? What do you mean, attacked?' Professor McGonagall was clearly shocked and worried by what she had just heard.

'Um, Professor, could we come in, please? I think Sophia could do with a seat,' Sirius asked tentatively. In her surprise, McGonagall had remained in the doorway while surveying them through her square glasses. Sirius's request snapped her out of her state of shock, and she quickly motioned for them to come in. Sirius guided Sophia into the room and sat her down in the chair in front of McGonagall's desk. Sophia kept up her resolute gaze at her knees.

'Thank you, Mr. Black, for bringing Miss McKinloch here,' Professor McGonagall said as she closed the door and walked over to her two students, 'but I will need to talk to her alone now. Could you please wait outside? I will call you back in when we are finished.'

Sophia felt panic rising in her chest again. She didn't know why; perhaps it was because Sirius had been there with her in the minutes after Rosier had left, but she felt that the only way she could tell McGonagall what had happened was if Sirius remained beside her. The thought of him leaving as she relived the experience was almost too much for her to think about.

On pure instinct, she reached out to grab Sirius's arm as he turned to leave the room.

'No, please ... please don't leave me ...' was all she could manage. Sirius looked from Sophia back to McGonagall to see what he should do. Eventually, McGonagall gave Sirius a nod and conjured a chair for him to sit in, as well. He pulled the chair over next to Sophia and held her left hand in his two larger ones. The warmth from his hands sent a wave of calm through her body, and she knew that she would be able to get through the conversation.

'I think that, before we start, a cup of tea would do us all some good,' said McGonagall as she walked across the room to her side table, where she set about making a cup of tea for each of them.

'Why is it that, no matter what is happening, the British always think a cup of tea will solve everything?' wondered Sophia, though even she had to admit a cup of sweet tea sounded very appealing at this moment in time.

McGonagall brought over a cup each for Sirius and Sophia before going back and picking up her own. She then seated herself on the other side of the desk. Sophia took a sip of the sweet tea and braced herself for what was coming next.

'Now, Sophia, I need you to tell me what has happened. I need to know what Sirius meant by saying that you have been 'attacked' what sort of attack, and by whom?'

Sophia summoned up all her courage and looked at her Professor as she spoke with as calm a tone as she could manage. 'It was Rosier and he ... well, he ... tried to ... I believe he was going to ...' She couldn't say it she couldn't get her mouth to form the word. She felt Sirius squeeze her hand as she took a deep breath, 'I think he would have ... raped me ... if Sirius hadn't turned up.' She could feel her eyes filling with tears once more as she noticed McGonagall look at her with utter bewilderment.

'Rosier? *Evan* Rosier? The seventh year Prefect?' Sirius nodded in reply; Sophia looked back down at her knees again. When McGonagall spoke again, her tone was soft and caring, 'Oh, Sophia. I'm sorry, dear, but I'm going to have to ask you to tell me exactly what happened. I hate having to do this, but this is a very serious situation, and I need to have all the details if I'm to take any action.'

Sophia nodded and began. 'I was studying in the library and lost track of time, meaning that I ended up being out past curfew. I was only late by a few minutes, though, so I was trying to get back as quickly as I could.' Sophia stopped and looked to McGonagall, who gave a small nod. Taking a deep, steadying breath, Sophia spoke again. 'That was when I heard Rosier's voice'

Sophia broke off as her throat tightened, the tears welling up in her eyes yet one more time. She knew she would have to do this, but she also knew that the possibility of getting through it without crying was well and truly past. Taking her time, she stammered, stuttered, and cried her way through all the events right up until the point when she had heard Sirius's interruption. Every time she had to stop, she would again feel Sirius squeeze her hand in reassurance; McGonagall was willing to give her all the time she needed and sat there listening in silence, only speaking to encourage Sophia to continue when she felt ready. Now that Sophia's part was finished, McGonagall turned her attention to Sirius.

'Sirius I need you to tell me the events from your side, if you please.' McGonagall's tone was still soft, but Sophia could hear her more usual stern note creeping in once more. Sophia herself now looked up at Sirius as he began to speak.

'Well, I was walking down a corridor near to where, as it turned out, Sophia and Rosier were. I heard a scream and knew something was wrong, so I went to find the source. As I neared the end of the corridor, I could hear a deep voice I couldn't hear what was being said, but I could hear enough to know that the tone was not a friendly one. I stepped nearer and could see a large figure holding someone else against a wall. I called out, and then I realised it was Rosier.'

Sophia was still holding Sirius's hand, and she could feel him begin to shake as his voice began to falter. 'He asked me what I was doing there, and I ignored him I was more concerned about who he had just been pinning to the wall. I continued to walk forward. Then, I realised that it was Sophia; as I looked at her face, I knew what Rosier had been planning on doing. Initially, all I wanted to do was hex him into oblivion ...' Sirius' tone had become filled with anger as he said this last part, and Sophia felt his grip tighten on her hand for a brief moment not in the reassuring way he had been doing earlier, but out of sheer frustration and anger.

McGonagall remained silent at this sudden outburst, and Sophia wondered if it was because McGonagall knew she would probably have felt the same in that situation. Sirius took a deep breath before continuing, 'But then all I wanted to do was to get Sophia out of there, so I told him to leave. I didn't expect him to go without a fight, but he did, saying that 'neither of us were worth it,' whatever that is supposed to mean. He turned around and started laughing as he walked off. He *laughed*, Professor,' Sirius said as he finished; again, the anger was back in his voice.

'I understand, and I wish to say thank you to both of you,' Professor McGonagall replied. 'Sophia, you have shown exceptional courage here tonight, and Sirius, you have shown a maturity which I have never seen in you before.' Sophia noticed that McGonagall's eyes sparkled as she turned to address Sirius. 'However, I do have one question which I must address to you, Sirius would mind telling me what *you* were doing out of the common room after curfew?' she asked as she raised an eyebrow at Sirius and looked at him over the top of her glasses.

Sophia hadn't thought of that what had Sirius been doing there, anyway? She had been so grateful that he had been there that she'd not given it any more thought; she turned to watch Sirius as he gave his answer. She saw the look of surprise on Sirius' face at the question; he sat slightly open-mouthed, staring at McGonagall. He took a few moments, but eventually spoke. 'I was trying to get down to the kitchens to steal some food, actually,' he said rather sheepishly, trying to avoid McGonagall's gaze. For the first time in the last hour and a half, Sophia found herself trying to smile this was so typically Sirius.

'Thank you, Black,' McGonagall replied with a slight smile. 'On this occasion, and this occasion *only*, may I say that I'm thankful you were breaking the rules? Now, Sophia,

do you have any injuries that you wish to see Madam Pomfrey about? You don't need to be specific,' McGonagall said as she turned back to look at Sophia.

'Thank you Professor, but no only my arm hurts,' Sophia said as she pulled up her sleeve to reveal her right forearm, which had some dark bruising already appearing on it, 'and I don't think there is much she could do, as it's just bruised. All I really want is a shower and some fresh clothes.'

'If you wish, you may use the Prefect's bathroom on the way back to Gryffindor Tower.' Sophia nodded quickly. 'Very well, the password is *'Abraxahm'*, and I will instruct a house-elf to deliver you a clean uniform. You may leave this uniform in the bathroom, and it will be disposed of, if you so desire. Now, we need to discuss what will happen from here. This is a very serious matter; however, it is not as serious as it could have been, thanks to Sirius. Sophia are you willing to tell the Headmaster what you have told me?'

Sophia froze. It had been bad enough telling McGonagall she couldn't imagine having to tell *Dumbledore* what had happened. No, this was something she wanted to keep as private as possible. 'No, Professor, I can't tell the Headmaster, and I would prefer it if he didn't know, to be honest.' Sophia turned to look at Sirius, who seemed confused by what he'd just heard, but stayed silent.

'Very well, I understand. In that case, I think the only thing that I can do is to inform Professor Slughorn don't worry, your name will not be mentioned and get him to impose detentions on Rosier for an agreed length of time. If you are sure that you want the matter to stay private, then I don't see how I could pursue any other course of action; revoking his Captaincy of the Slytherin Quidditch team or his Prefect status would lead to questions I'm sure you would rather were left unasked by the other students.' Sophia nodded in response. 'Right, I will contact Professor Slughorn once you have gone, then. If you're both ready, could I ask you, Sirius, to take Sophia back to your common room? If either of you have any problems or wish to discuss things further, please know that my office is always open to you.'

Sirius looked at Sophia to see if she was ready to leave. She gave a small nod; Sirius stood up and helped her out of her seat. Her legs felt stronger than they had done previously, but they were still not quite back to normal, so she linked arms with Sirius for added support. Professor McGonagall also stood and walked across the room to open the door for the pair as they left.

The pair walked in stoic silence to the Prefects' bathroom, where Sirius promised he would wait outside until Sophia was finished. She slipped into the bathroom and immediately turned on several of the taps on the large bathtub before removing her clothes. In the corner of the room, she could see the small pile of clean robes that a house-elf had already delivered.

She climbed into the hot water; pins and needles shot over her skin at the water's touch, and she was thankful for the brief respite it gave her from her thoughts. As her skin grew used to the heat, her mind replayed the events of the evening, and she broke down in tears again. In her anguish, she reached for a sponge which she covered in body wash before lathering it up and scrubbing her skin to the point where every touch burned. When she had finished cleaning her body, her skin was bright pink and sore to the touch but her tears had yet to stop. She threw the sponge across the room and proceeded to bang her fists against the water's surface, causing it to fly everywhere.

She let her emotions control her, venting her fury, her feelings of vulnerability, against the water's surface. She broke down until she felt exhausted mentally, emotionally, and physically. But, mindful that Sirius was outside and waiting for her, Sophia forced herself to finally stop crying. She had to control her emotions; she had already cried in front of him once, and there was no way that she would do it again. Taking a few minutes to compose herself, she ducked her head under the water and raised herself a few seconds later. The water calmed her stinging eyes, and she determinedly pushed herself back towards the surface.

She wiped the excess water from her face and hair before climbing out and wrapping herself in a white, fluffy towel. She found a brush on the pile of clothes which she quickly ran through her hair; she then dried her body and dressed in the new clothes before leaving the bathroom.

Sirius was waiting outside the door. He was sitting down with his back against the wall, but he rose to his feet as soon as he saw Sophia emerge from the bathroom.

'Are you feeling any better now?' he asked softly.

'Yes,' Sophia nodded, 'but could I borrow your wand, please? I don't want to turn up in the common room with wet hair; it will cause too many questions for tonight.' Sirius reached into his robe and pulled out his wand before wordlessly handing it to Sophia. She smiled gratefully at him, though it didn't reach her eyes, before she started to dry her hair. Once that was done, she handed the wand back to Sirius, then quickly tied her hair back into a ponytail.

'Are you ready to go back?' Sirius asked tentatively.

'Ready as I will ever be,' she responded. Even to herself, she acknowledged the hollow sound to her voice, but Sirius made no further comment as he linked arms with her again.

They slowly made their way back to the common room, going most of the way in silence before Sophia eventually spoke. 'Sirius, I'm not sure I can tell anyone else tonight what happened. I know that I will have to tell them sometime, but I'm not sure I have the strength to do that tonight.'

'It's okay. If anyone asks, do you want me to deal with them?' he asked, stopping and turning towards her as she looked up at him and answered.

'I was hoping you might say that. You don't have to tell them anything just say that, when I'm ready, I'll tell them myself.' He smiled gently at her and nodded in agreement, and they continued back to the common room. When they got back there, they found that the common room was pretty empty it was well past eleven o' clock now, and most people had gone off to bed.

However, James, Remus, Peter, and Lily were still up, although Lily was dressed in her pyjamas and robe and was curled up in a chair by the fire reading a book, obviously waiting for Sophia to get back. The other three were sitting around one of the tables by the window. James was the first one to spot Sirius and Sophia as they climbed into the common room.

'Sirius! Where in the name of Merlin have you been?' he said brightly as he got up and walked over to them. 'Oh ... been getting up to mischief, have you?' he said with a laugh, winking at Sophia.

'Drop it, James,' Sirius said shortly as he guided Sophia to the sofa by the fire. Lily had looked up from her book with an initial smile at the sight of Sophia, but it had vanished as she looked at her friend more closely.

James stood in confusion for a moment before turning to the sofa. Remus and Peter also joined him, looking on as Sirius sat down by Sophia, putting one arm round her and pulling her into his shoulder.

'Soph?' Lily said cautiously as she got up and went to kneel in front of her friend where she sat. 'What's happened?'

'Lils, please, I don't want to talk about it now. Can I just say that I'm fine and that I'll tell you tomorrow?'

'Sirius, what on earth has happened?' Remus was sounding worried, and Sophia couldn't blame him. She knew how cryptic she must be sounding and how that must be making them worry even more, but she didn't have the energy left to go through it all again so soon. She wished she could tell them, but she couldn't; they would just have to be patient and wait twenty-four hours.

'Remus, you heard what Sophia just said she's fine, and that's the main thing. Give her some time, and she'll tell you all tomorrow,' Sirius replied, much to Sophia's relief she just hoped that they wouldn't argue with him too much.

'Sirius Black, you will tell me what has happened right now or I swear' Lily started, before Sophia cut in.

'Lily, really, I promise I will tell you everything tomorrow,' she said, trying her best to muster one of her 'and-that's-the-end-of-it' looks.

Lily did pause, but she still looked worried. She threw a glare at Sirius when he squeezed Sophia's shoulder. 'Okay, well, at least come up to bed now, then,' Lily replied, taking the hint, but still trying to take control of the situation.

Sophia hadn't thought this far ahead. If she was honest with herself, she didn't want to leave Sirius he'd been there with her through some of the most difficult hours of her life. She felt so safe in his arms, and she wasn't sure she could do without that just yet. However, how was she going to convince Lily of this?

'No, Lils, I want to stay here for a bit. I'm not sure I'm ready to go to bed yet,' she answered as forcefully as she could. She could see that Lily was just about to protest, so she decided to cut her off before she had the chance to really get going otherwise, it would be like trying to stop the Hogwarts Express. 'I'm serious, Lily, I just want to stay here for a bit. You go up to bed, and I'll see you in the morning.'

'I'll stay with her, don't worry, Lily,' Sirius said, trying to be helpful.

'That is *not* a comforting thought, Black,' Lily retorted sharply, staring back at Sirius. Sophia wasn't at all surprised by this reaction, and she knew that her friend was just trying to take care of her, but the fact was that at this moment in time Sophia needed Sirius more than she needed Lily a thought that didn't make entire sense even to her.

'Lily, I promise, I will be fine here with Sirius. Now, please, can you all just leave me be for the night? I will explain everything tomorrow.'

That seemed to do the trick as, reluctantly, Lily got to her feet. 'Okay, if you're sure. I'll see you in the morning, then.' Giving Sirius one last stern look, Lily turned and walked up the stairs to the girls' dormitory.

'Sirius, are you sure you don't want us to stay?' James asked.

'Yeah, I'm sure. You three go off to bed, and I'll see you in the morning,' Sirius replied, giving them a weak smile. Remus hesitated as James and Peter turned and started to walk over to the stairs up to their dorm.

'Take care of her, won't you?' Remus asked, trepidation apparent in his voice.

'Yeah, of course I will,' replied Sirius. Satisfied with this answer, Remus left to join James and Peter up in the boys' room.

Sophia and Sirius sat quietly in front of the fire for the next hour. Sophia spent her time trying to process what had happened to her and what had *almost* happened to her. Just after midnight, Sirius asked her a question which finally broke the silence.

'Why didn't you want to tell the Headmaster about Rosier?' he asked, trying to sound casual, but Sophia knew he had wanted to know the answer to this ever since she had answered Professor McGonagall. Out of all the things she had talked about this evening, it was by no means the most serious, but it was still something that she had only ever shared with Lily, and she was worried how Sirius would react to it. She moved herself out from underneath his arm, folding one leg under her so that she could turn to face him on the sofa. Choosing her words very carefully, she answered him.

'I've only ever told Lily this, so I would appreciate it if you didn't tell anyone. However, I will understand if you would like to tell the Marauders.' Her voice was soft as she spoke; Sirius nodded in understanding, encouraging her to continue. 'The reason I didn't want to tell Dumbledore is because he's not just the Headmaster to me.' Sirius looked perplexed at this statement, but didn't interrupt. 'You see, Dumbledore is my great-uncle my mum is his brother's daughter.' She saw Sirius's grey eyes widen, but he still let her talk. 'It's not that I'm ashamed of being related to him, because I'm very proud of that, but I don't know him that well, and being related to the Headmaster does open you up to all kinds of problems, so I just kept it quiet.'

'What do you mean, you don't know him that well?' Sirius inquired.

'Well, I don't know the details, but my grandfather hasn't spoken to him since they were young, so I only ever saw him once a year at most. So, anyway, that's why I didn't want to tell him because it would be more than telling a teacher; it would be telling my family, and I'm not sure I want my parents to know.' Sirius didn't speak; instead, he opened up his arm, allowing her to fit against his side again, and she knew that he wouldn't ask her about it in the future.

As they sat there, Sophia's thoughts moved from Rosier and McGonagall to Sirius himself. She'd always thought of him as a bit of a joker one of the boys, a rebel. Yet, tonight, he'd been so different he had been strong, mature, and a source of comfort for her.

She knew that tonight had shaken him almost as much as it had shaken her, but he'd done more than she could have asked for. He'd saved her, he'd helped her, and now he sat here with her like her harbour in a storm.

She didn't mean to be harsh in her thoughts, but she'd never thought Sirius would be capable of such behaviour, and she had never thought that she would need him this way. If she was honest, she would've thought it would have been Lily or Remus she would have run to but, tonight, it was Sirius, and she was thankful he was here for her. His strong arms made her feel so safe; it was in these arms that she fell asleep, her head still swimming with thoughts.

Chapter 8: Repercussions and Realisations

Chapter 8 of 23

Sirius examines his reaction to the evening.

Sirius Black/OC

Disclaimer: Once again, it's not mine.

Author's Notes: DracoGurlFurever has, once more, passed her critical eye over this and weeded out my grammatical errors, so I owe her a huge thank you. Thank you also to you, the reader, for sticking with me and this story. I hope you enjoy this chapter.

Chapter 8: Repercussions and Realisations

Sirius sat staring at the fire that licked against the last remaining pieces of wood as he tried to sort through the events of the evening. He shifted his gaze to Sophia, who was now asleep, lying with her head in his lap; his arm was draped round her waist as she clung onto his hand.

He had feared she would be plagued by nightmares and had spent at least half an hour staring at her, watching for any sign that she was in distress while mentally kicking

himself for not asking for a Calming Draught potion when he had been in McGonagall's office.

However, she had been asleep for a while now and looked peaceful in her slumber, so his careful watch had relaxed slightly. One of her dark brown curls had fallen across the front of her face, and Sirius gently reached out to move it, noticing how soft it felt between his fingers. He stared at her features and listened to her steady breathing for another few minutes, still looking for any sign of distress.

As he watched her, his mind drifted to the image of her face when he had stumbled across her earlier in the evening. He would never forget that face – it was so far removed from the happy and bright face that he had become accustomed to seeing. He felt his stomach twist as he remembered the fear that had replaced the twinkle in her eyes how they had been wide, like startled prey. He remembered how her pale skin had been ashen and clammy, how she had collapsed to the floor, looking like a ragdoll, when Rosier had finally left – and then, of course, how she had cried while he had held her.

He tried to push the torturous images from his mind, exhaling loudly and letting his head roll back against the sofa. He closed his eyes as other thoughts and images started filtering through his consciousness, jumping erratically from one to the next.

Through the evening, his emotions had ranged from intense anger and revulsion towards Rosier, fear about what would have happened to Sophia if he hadn't been there to stop it, and feelings of inadequacy when he had tried to comfort her ... but the most overwhelming of all had been his intense desire to protect and care for her.

He'd been astounded by her bravery as she'd relived every moment in McGonagall's office. It had obviously been a huge emotional strain on her, but, somehow, she had found the strength to get from the beginning to the end. As he'd listened to her describe Rosier's actions, Sirius had felt his blood begin to boil once again. Knowing that that ... *bastard* had said those things to her, that he had *touched* her, made him want to storm into the Slytherin common room and blast Rosier to oblivion.

His dark train of thought was broken when he felt Sophia move. He quickly looked down and saw that her breathing had quickened and her brow had furrowed. He anxiously observed her for a few moments until she returned to a calm state and her face became smooth again.

Sirius let his head fall back against the sofa one more time, only then realising that his own pulse had quickened at her stirring. He dwelt on this unusual turn of circumstances in an effort to understand what had just happened to him. Since his discussion with Remus about dating Sophia, he had done his best to push those ideas out of his head. However, in his own thoughts, he had to admit that he hadn't been entirely successful.

He had been fascinated by her eyes; he'd often wondered how they could seem so familiar to him even though he could never place where he had seen them before. He knew the answer to that riddle now, although he also knew that he would never have made the connection between the young, beautiful girl who was currently asleep on his lap and the old Headmaster. He had to admit that she'd done a good job of keeping that a secret.

Besides, it wasn't just her eyes that had kept his mind occupied on many occasions – there were *many* parts of her anatomy that were highly appealing to him, and Remus *definitely* would have caused him bodily harm for those thoughts. It wasn't just her physical appearance that attracted him, however. He'd come to realise how thoughtful and kind she was while also being charming and witty. She would say something highly intelligent one minute and then ask the silliest questions the next. He found that the time he spent alone with her passed swiftly, and there was a part of him that was always sad when it came to an end. He was even doing better in Charms now than he had done in his O.W.L.s, and he was sure she was a major part of it.

Sometimes, when he was trying to get to sleep, he would think of something she had done that day that had made him laugh. Usually, it was something inconsequential such as her getting her words the wrong way round or the way she laughed at a story of his. He'd noticed that she had several different types of laughs; he loved each one, but his favourite was her deep belly laugh – which often caused a snort as well – when she found something really funny. Whenever she did snort, it would always send her into more fits of giggles through embarrassment, and her cheeks would go very red.

He smiled to himself as he remembered the last time he'd seen her laugh like that; it had been that very afternoon when he had been larking around during their shared free period. He'd been messing around levitating his quill. Sophia had warned him not to play with it, but he'd ignored her, joking that she was boring. She'd shrugged, but continued to watch him as he sent the quill into a spin. It was as the quill was spinning that the jet of ink had spurted out and splattered all over his face. As he'd sat there, stunned for a moment, Sophia had erupted into a long and deep bout of laughter. However, this memory was crushed as he wondered when he would next see that laugh again – he was sure it wouldn't be for quite a while.

The more he thought about her, he came to a startling realisation – he was well and truly taken with her.

'Moony is going to kill me,' he moaned to himself.

How could he not have realised this earlier? Even just a day would have been something! *Now* what would he do? He was totally stuck. There was no way he could tell her how he felt after the events of tonight. There would be no way that she would be in a position to accept the advances of anyone until she had put this whole mess behind her; Merlin only knew how long that would take.

After quickly assessing his situation, he decided he would just have to be there for her if she needed him – whether that meant he had to be a shoulder to cry on or someone she could vent her fury at or someone who simply did his best to cheer her up.

Then, perhaps, when she had put this horrific experience behind her, he might be able to discuss the feelings he had for her. What he was feeling now was different from how he had felt about her a month ago – *this* was far more powerful, like nothing he'd ever felt for a girl before – but he still wasn't sure that Remus would approve, especially given the circumstances.

Sirius was pulled out of his deliberations by the sudden arrival of a house-elf. The creature looked around the common room before spotting Sirius and Sophia on the sofa together. Sirius smiled at the small female figure, working hard not to laugh at the look of disapproval that she gave him. Sirius held a finger up to his lips to signal the house-elf to remain quiet; he didn't want Sophia to be disturbed.

Reluctantly, the house-elf turned around and started silently (and at a remarkable speed) tidying up the common room. Within a few minutes, the room was completely tidy, and the house-elf disappeared again after giving Sirius another dirty look.

Soon after the house-elf's departure, Sophia began to move again. Sirius watched helplessly as her face became twisted and her breathing became more ragged. He didn't know whether or not it would be a good idea to wake her – on the one hand, it would end her obvious nightmare; on the other hand, if the nightmare was indeed about what he guessed, then waking her up and startling her further was surely no better.

His decision was made when a deep, pained moan came from her lips. He couldn't bear to see her go through the obvious agony that the nightmare was causing. Cautiously, very gently, he stroked her hair and spoke to her.

'Sophia, it's okay, you're safe. It's time to wake up now.'

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Sophia woke with a start from her dream – her heart was racing, and her palms felt slightly clammy. Then, she realised that her hand was around something ... Where was she? Why wasn't she in her own bed? Her mind wouldn't work fast enough to give her the answers that she needed, and she felt her chest begin to tighten in panic. Just then, she heard a soft voice from above her, causing her to spin her head up to find the source.

'Hey, you okay?' It was Sirius; in the dim light from the dying fire, she could see that his face was filled with concern. It was then that everything fitted back into place in her memory. She was in the common room; she was safe, *safe* with Sirius. Her heart rate was returning to normal, and she took a deep breath as she rubbed her forehead. Sirius gently stroked her hair as he spoke again. 'Bad dream?'



'Yeah. What time is it?' she asked, not wanting to talk about the dream which had plagued her, partly because she didn't want to dwell on the images of Rosier that the nightmare had created and partly because she felt embarrassed at Sirius' having witnessed her having a nightmare in the first place.

'I think it's about half past three. A house-elf came in about half an hour ago and gave us both such a look of disgust ... It was something that I've never seen from a house-elf, or, at least, wouldn't have seen from a house-elf if I hadn't lived with Kreacher for sixteen years,' he said with a smile.

'Do you mean you've been awake this whole time?' she asked.

'Couldn't sleep even if I wanted to,' he replied, looking away from her. She suddenly became aware of how she was lying almost on his lap, and she sat up quickly.

'Sorry,' she said, covering her body defensively with one arm and rubbing the top of her other arm while looking down at the rug by the fire. Guilt flared up inside her for being even more of a burden on Sirius. He'd done *so* much for her already not only finding and rescuing her, but giving her the strength to talk to McGonagall and then getting rid of everyone so that she could rest, and now she'd fallen asleep on him and kept him awake all night; she should have gone to bed when she felt tired and ignored her desire to stay with him, where she felt safe.

'Oh, no, Soph, I didn't mean it like that. Really, I didn't,' he said quickly, peeling her hand away from her arm and drawing her attention back to him. 'My mind is just in overdrive and I can't switch off that's all I meant.' She looked into his eyes; seeing the sincerity there, she felt her feelings of guilt ease a bit. 'Besides, you looked so peaceful; I didn't want to disturb you.'

'Well, maybe I should go up to bed now, anyway at least that'll give you a chance to get some sleep, or else you won't make it through all your classes,' she said, though it was the last thing that she wanted to do.

'Well, let's just think about this logically for a moment, shall we?' Sirius stated seriously. 'I have Charms with you, so I can borrow your notes for that; *everyone* does Potions, so I don't really need to pay attention in that either; and then I have a free double period before Arithmancy, so I can sleep then. Really, I don't need to sleep now at all, if you want to stay here,' he concluded, a grin playing across his face.

Sophia let out a small chuckle, 'Do you ever pay attention in Charms anyway?'

'Well, now that you mention it no, not really, so tomorrow won't be any different from normal. I don't tend to pay attention in Potions either, now that I come to think of it,' he said, smiling back at her mischievously.

'I know the four of you are always larking about, and Lily complains to me about all of you for the whole lesson,' she said, trying to put on a stern face; she failed to keep it up for more than a few seconds before she started to chuckle again. She was amazed at how he could do this to her she had gone from feeling her absolute worst to laughing within a matter of a few minutes. Not that she was complaining far from it. She was happy to have her mind taken off the events of the evening, if only for a little while she just wished she understood how he did it.

'Does she? I had no idea,' he replied, trying to look innocent and surprised.

'Oh, yeah, like you didn't know that already,' she said as her giggles died away. Sirius's expression changed, and he became serious once again as he spoke.

'So, do you want to stay down here or would you prefer to go up to bed and be honest,' he said, giving her a stern look.

'Truthfully I would like to stay here,' she replied softly, giving him a small smile.

'Thought as much come here, then.' He opened up his arms to give her a hug. She moved closer to him and let him wrap his arms around her. She felt the warmth from his body and the strength of his arms it made all her bad feelings melt away. She felt safe once more. After a little while, she spoke.

'Sirius?'

'Mmm?'

'Thank you.'

## Chapter 9: Don't Take My Photograph

*Chapter 9 of 23*

Sophia explains to the rest of her friends about the events of the night before and tries to come to terms with what happened for herself.  
Sirius Black/OC

**Disclaimer:** Unfortunately, I've still not turned into JK Rowling, so I only own Sophia and not the rest of this marvellous universe.

**Author's Notes:** Thanks again to DracoGurlFurever for passing a critical eye over this chapter, and also to the PP admins who have helped me so much with this story. Also, thank you for reading this story, especially if you have left a review I treasure every single one.

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### Chapter 9: Don't Take My Photograph

Neither Sophia nor Sirius slept for the rest of the night. Instead, they sat together in silence, each of them lost in their own thoughts. When it was nearly six o' clock, they decided it would be a good idea to return to their own beds for an hour so that they would be there when their friends woke up. The repercussions and rumours that would occur from being caught on the sofa first thing in the morning with Sirius was not something that Sophia wanted to deal with at that time. She held onto to Sirius tightly as they hugged, savouring the feelings of absolute safety and protection he gave her, before he slowly stepped away and turned to walk up the stairs to the boys' dormitories.

She silently climbed up the stairs to her own room, gently opened the door, and crept over to her bed, where Hamish was curled up, asleep. He awoke and gave a soft meow in greeting to her, stretching out his body as he stood. She quickly put on her pyjamas, not caring that she had left her school robes in a pile on the floor, and climbed into her bed. Hamish moved from his spot to sit by his owner, and her hands automatically started to stroke him. He purred loudly at the attention, and the noise helped to keep her calm.

Now that she was alone, her bed felt cold, and she realised how much she missed Sirius. She wondered whether he had fallen asleep or if he was lying awake the way she was. Her thoughts turned to the conversation she had promised to have with Lily and the other Marauders. She wouldn't lie to herself she had to admit she was dreading it. She tried desperately to push its looming presence from her mind, but failed. Her mind played over all the various ways that the conversation could go until, suddenly, she heard someone in the room stirring. It sounded like it was coming from Lily's bed; sure enough, Lily soon came tip-toeing over to her bed.

'Soph? Are you awake?' Lily whispered.

She thought about pretending to be asleep, but it was only putting off the inevitable.

'Yeah,' she replied, her voice sounding loud in the quiet room even though she was whispering as well. She sat up in her bed and pulled her knees up to her chest. Lily perched herself on the edge of the bed; through the gloom of the room, Sophia could see she looked worried.

'What time did you come to bed? I was awake for ages, but you didn't come up. What happened last night? Have you slept at all?' Lily sounded as anxious as she looked.

'I got a few hours of sleep, but I've been awake since about half past three, I think.' She paused, but she could tell that Lily was not about to let her escape without knowing what had happened the night before. She took a deep breath and tried to stall just a little bit longer. 'About last night it's kind of complicated, Lily ... can I tell you and the others this evening? I don't think I can talk about it twice ...' Her voice faltered, and she felt tears welling up in her eyes once more. However, this just caused Lily to become even more insistent.

'Soph I *know* something serious happened last night, and if you think I'm going to wait around until this evening to find out what happened, then you are sadly mistaken. Now, *please* tell me what happened. You have no idea what it's like not knowing whether I can help you or not.' Sophia knew that Lily wouldn't give up, and she also knew that she wasn't being fair to her friend who was so obviously worried about her.

'Fine I'll make you a deal. We'll go to the boys' dorm and see if they are awake, too. If they are, then I'll tell all of you now; if they are not, then I'll tell you during our free period together this afternoon. Okay?'

'Why can't you just tell me now?' Lily asked.

Sophia could see the hurt in Lily's eyes.

'I'm sorry, Lils, but I've told you I need to tell all of you at the same time. I can't do this twice, and the boys have a right to know, too. I know that you are not particularly keen on James and Sirius' Lily scoffed, but otherwise didn't interrupt further, 'but Sirius knows, and Remus deserves to know, so I feel I should tell them all.'

The Marauders had always been good to Sophia since she had become friends with Remus and, while she knew that Sirius would keep this a secret if she had asked him to do so, she also knew how close he was to James. She didn't feel she could ask him to keep this a secret from his best friend when he'd already done so much for her. It was better if she told everyone in one go; then, it would be out in the open.

Lily still looked hurt, but she seemed to accept what Sophia had said. 'Right, well, come on, then let's go.'

The two girls got up, put their dressing gowns on, and left the room as silently as they could. They walked quickly through the empty common room before going up the stone staircase that led to the boys' dormitories. Once they reached the right door, Sophia knocked, waiting for a response. The girls could hear movement in the room, and then the door was opened by a confused-looking James. His normally ruffled hair looked worse than normal. He'd obviously just woken up; he was blinking more than was strictly necessary.

'Sophia? Lily? What are you doing here?' he asked, sounding sleepy and dazed before yawning loudly. Sophia heard footsteps coming quickly across the room, and the door was suddenly wrenched open further by Sirius.

'Soph? What's wrong?' He both sounded and looked worried. He reached out to grab her hand in a comforting gesture, and she saw James raise an eyebrow at the pair of them.

'I just wondered if now would be a good time to tell everyone what had happened that's all,' she said, mainly addressing Sirius, though, by this point, both Remus and Peter had also gotten out of bed and were over at the door, looking at the two girls.

'Are you sure you're ready for that?' Sirius asked, still looking worried.

'Yeah they deserve to know, Sirius.' Her voice was soft but determined, and she watched his face soften as he accepted her answer. James, Peter, and Remus, on the other hand, looked thoroughly mystified by the conversation that had just taken place.

'Okay, well, can we come in then, please?' Lily said slightly awkwardly, trying not to look at James.

'Yeah, 'course, come in,' James said as he snapped out of his confusion. Sirius kept hold of Sophia's hand and led her over to his bed; the others followed. They all squeezed onto the bed; Sirius, Sophia, and Lily sat along the top, and James, Remus, and Peter along the bottom. Sophia felt Sirius squeeze her hand again the way he had in McGonagall's office, and she readied herself to tell her friends what had happened.

Sophia was about halfway through the story when she suddenly burst into tears and fell onto Sirius' shoulder; he gave her a hug while the others sat in silence. She took a few minutes to compose herself before she managed to continue with the story, although the tears never completely left her. By the time she finished, Lily was in tears, James and Remus looked angry, and Peter simply looked shocked.

'That bastard wait till I get my hands on him; I'm gonna' James began angrily before he was interrupted.

'No, James you won't do anything,' Sophia said, looking him in the eye. Her voice was calm and authoritative, and she wasn't quite sure where it was coming from.

'What do you mean? You're going to let him get away with it?' James sounded shocked and confused like he thought Sophia was behaving completely irrationally.

'James, I don't want anyone else to know what has happened. I've told you because you guys are all my friends, and I feel you need to know. Between McGonagall and Slughorn, he will be punished, and that's the end of it.'

'Detention is not a punishment, Sophia! He deserves to be strung up by his' James began to protest loudly before he was interrupted again. However, this time, it was Sirius who spoke.

'James! This is Sophia's decision, *not* yours. You've heard what she's had to say, so just drop it, okay?' James opened and closed his mouth a few times without saying anything before finally closing it, unable to come up with another argument.

'Lily are you okay?' Sophia asked, looking over to her friend, who had tears running down her cheeks.

All Lily could do to respond was to reach out and hug Sophia before she whispered, 'Oh, Soph, I'm so sorry ... I'm so sorry ...'

'It's not your fault, Lils,' Sophia said, fighting back a fresh wave of tears.

'It is I left you in the library. If I'd stayed with you ... if I'd walked back with you, then ... then ...' With that, Lily burst into tears again.

'Lily, this is no one's fault but Rosier's. You couldn't possibly have known no one could've. There are so many what-if's *all* of which I've thought of over and over again all night. What if I'd left with you? What if I'd left five minutes before I did? What if I'd gone down a different corridor instead? What if I'd taken my wand with me? What if Sirius hadn't been walking that way?'

Her voice cracked, and she took a deep breath in an attempt to keep her composure before continuing. 'The point is, it happened, and there's nothing that anyone can do about that, so don't you *dare* go blaming yourself, Lily Evans, because you haven't *anything* to be sorry for. Okay?' Lily nodded slowly and wiped the tears from her cheeks. 'Now, I think we should all get ready for breakfast.' Sophia put on her best smile as she looked round at everyone in turn. Though she didn't feel remotely hungry, she was beginning to feel trapped in this room, and she desperately needed to be alone for a while. Breakfast seemed the only way to get everyone to move with as little fuss as possible.

'Yeah, 'course. We'll wait for the two of you in the common room,' Sirius said as he got up off his bed. Everyone else slowly started to move too, and Lily and Sophia left the boys' dorm to head back to their own.

In the time since Lily and Sophia left their own dorm room, Melanie, Niahm, and Lucy had gotten up and left already, meaning the two girls were alone. Sophia couldn't face risking Lily asking her any more questions, so she quickly escaped to the safety of the bathroom to take a shower. She let the water rush over her as she remembered the looks she had seen on everyone's faces after she had told them what had happened. She wondered then if their friendships would ever be the same again.

Peter had looked so shocked ... then, she thought of James ... she had never seen James look so angry before ... well, except for maybe when Snape had called Lily a Mudblood ... and Remus ... would he ever be able to look at her the same way again?

Then, there was Lily. Would their friendship survive this? Then, Sirius she knew their friendship had moved to a different place already. They had been brought together through this; she knew that much. No one would ever fully understand what it had been like for either of them to be in that situation ... but would this strengthen their friendship, or would it kill it slowly over time? Would she just become a constant reminder to him that he couldn't stand to be around any longer?

Then her thoughts turned to herself would *she* ever truly be okay after this? Would she be able to put this behind her and move on, like she so desperately wanted to? She felt empty inside she had cried so much in the last twelve hours that it felt like the tears had drained her of everything that had made her who she was. She began to wash her skin, and caught sight of her arm as she did. She could clearly see five dark blue marks where Rosier had dug his fingers into her skin. She gently ran her fingers over them, and winced as she felt the pain from this light touch.

*Lucky it's winter; I can wear long sleeves,* she thought wretchedly as she continued to examine her bruises. *This would cause a lot of questions otherwise.*

Brushing these thoughts aside, she finished washing herself and stepped out of the shower to get herself ready for breakfast. Once she was dressed, she looked at her reflection in the mirror. Her face looked tired, and her eyes were puffy and red from crying.

*Well, that's not surprising ... I've only had three hours of sleep.*

She thought about going down to the Great Hall for breakfast, a prospect which filled her with dread. There was a part of her, a very large part of her, that desired to simply crawl back into her bed and stay there for the rest of the day. She knew that nothing would happen to her down in the Great Hall Rosier wasn't that stupid but the thought of seeing him still scared her. Her only saving grace was the fact that he was a seventh year, so he wouldn't be in any of her classes.

Then, a horrible thought hit her what if Rosier had gone back to the Slytherin common room and bragged about what he'd done? If that was the case, then Snape was sure to know, and spending double Potions with him leering at her was not a pleasant thought. Actually, sitting in the Great Hall with that whole gang leering at her was not a pleasant thought, either.

*Oh, Merlin ... please just let me get through this day,* she thought desperately as she slowly gathered her stuff and left the bathroom.

Sophia went down to breakfast with Lily and the Marauders. James still looked to be full of fury, and Peter wouldn't make eye contact with her, but Sirius and Remus each gave her a timid smile when she and Lily arrived down in the common room. They all walked down to the Great Hall, where Sophia sat facing the Slytherin table (she was determined to at least put on a brave face, even if she did feel like running away and hiding) with Sirius on her right and Lily on her left.

Her fears about Rosier telling his group of Slytherins what he'd done the previous night were realised as she saw the looks they were giving her across the Great Hall. Sophia didn't feel at all hungry and refused to eat anything despite Lily's protests. She settled for drinking a cup of pumpkin juice, trying her best to ignore the smirking Slytherins. She knew that James definitely was still finding it hard to deal with the whole situation ... if the way he was treating his bacon was anything to go by.

The tensest part of the whole breakfast was when Rosier, Snape, Lestrage, and Regulus were walking out of the Hall. Sophia tracked them with her eyes as they walked over towards the door; she knew they were talking about her all four of them were regularly looking over in her direction, laughing every time they did so. She was beginning to feel a mixture of anger and shame, but tried to remain expressionless so as to not give them the satisfaction of getting a reaction out of her.

However, the Marauders were also witnessing the Slytherins' behaviour, and she could see that all four were nearing boiling point. Apparently, the Slytherins could see the Marauders' anger too, and they decided to play up to it as surreptitiously as they could. Rosier hung back slightly, letting the others pass him, and turned to face Sophia with a sly grin.

Her blood turned to ice in her veins, and her heart began to hammer in her chest once more that look took her straight back to the previous night. Sophia sat, paralysed, waiting to see what Rosier would do next. Ever so slowly, maintaining his smirk the whole time, Rosier blew her a kiss.

The four Marauders instantly made to move out of their seats with the intention of hexing Rosier into the next decade, but Sophia grabbed hold of Sirius and growled *'d'* at them all. Her Gryffindor courage had once again returned to her when she needed it most, and she was adamant that Rosier would *not* succeed in his attempt to wind her, or the Marauders, up. They all turned to look at her with a mixture of rage and surprise written all over their faces.

'You will all sit down right *now* he will *not* get the better of any of us,' she hissed under her breath, staring at them all until they returned to their seats, even if they did so rather begrudgingly. She looked back at Rosier, who seemed pleased with the reaction he had managed to get from the Marauders, before she saw him walk out of the Hall.

'Why did you do that? He would have deserved what was coming to him,' James said bitterly, tearing his eyes away from where Rosier had just been to look at Sophia.

'James, what did I tell you upstairs? I don't want anyone knowing what happened, and you four hexing Rosier across the Great Hall during breakfast is hardly going to achieve that, is it? The best thing we can all do is to just ignore him,' she replied quietly, not wanting anyone else near them to hear what was being discussed, although a few people seated nearby were looking in their direction. As she stood up from her seat she continued, 'Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to get my stuff and go to Charms.'

'Wait a second; I'll come with you,' Sirius told her, shovelling the last few mouthfuls of his breakfast into his mouth and standing up to accompany Sophia out of the Hall. 'Okay, we'll see you guys later, then have a good morning,' Sirius called out as he and Sophia walked out of the Hall.

The rest of the day passed in a blur for Sophia. She applied herself to her classes in an attempt to block any other thoughts from her mind, but she couldn't honestly remember what she had done during the day by the time she got to the end of it. After dinner, Sophia went up to her dorm room. Lucy and Melanie were at Quidditch practice, and Lily was studying down in the common room with Niahm, which meant Sophia could finally have some time alone.

She lay down on her bed and stroked Hamish as he curled up by her side. She still felt hollow that was the only way of describing it. Sure, she had moments when she would feel emotion, like when her temper had risen at breakfast, but for most of the day, she had simply drifted. She would give the appropriate response when necessary

laugh whenever someone made a joke, smile whenever someone spoke to her and, if asked, she would always say that she was okay but she wasn't okay, and she knew it.

Despite being determined that she would not let Rosier get the better of her, she knew that he was. Seeing Snape during the double Potions lesson that day had been a new kind of torture for her. Normally, he reserved his staring for Lily, but today he seemed more interested in Sophia, which had made her feel as if her skin was crawling for the whole lesson. She had been so distracted that her cauldron had nearly melted, and it was only thanks to Lily's quick reactions that she had been saved from that humiliation.

She spent the next few hours trying to figure out how she was truly feeling and how she was going to get through this. When the other girls came up to the dorm for bed, Sophia pretended to be asleep preferring to, for the moment, avoid a conversation with them. Once the room went dark, she opened her eyes and continued to lay on her bed until about midnight, when she decided to get changed into her pyjamas and go to bed properly. However, while she was getting changed, she decided that she would go down to the common room for a while; she knew she wouldn't sleep if she went to bed, and the sound of the other girls sleeping so soundly was starting to irritate her.

She crept down to the now-deserted common room and took a seat on the sofa by the fire. Her thoughts drifted back to the night before, when she had sat here with Sirius. She felt confused about a lot of things at the moment, and Sirius was definitely one of them. Where possible, he had spent all day by her side, which she had definitely appreciated, especially as she knew she didn't have to talk that much around him if she didn't feel like it. Now that she was here alone, she realised how much she missed him and needed him. She needed to feel his arms around her those arms which, the previous night, had made her feel so safe.

She sat there, staring into the dying fire, lost in her own thoughts, when she heard a noise coming from the portrait hole as it swung open and someone entered. However, it wasn't until the person stepped into the light of the fire that she finally saw who it was.

'Sirius? What are you doing up?' whispered Sophia.

'Could say the same to you,' he replied, flashing her one of his trademark smiles before taking up a seat next to her on the sofa. Sophia blushed slightly at his remark, and then blushed more when she realised that she was in her pyjamas they consisted of a pair of cropped trousers and a strappy top. Sirius, however, was still in his school robes.

'I couldn't sleep. You never answered me.'

'Sure I did,' he replied cheerily, causing Sophia to look up at him with confusion. 'I said, "Could say the same to you" it may not have been the answer you were looking for, but it was an answer.'

Sophia gave him a disparaging look. 'You know very well what I meant what were you doing out in the castle?'

'Ah, well,' he began as the confident air slipped away, 'now, don't get mad, but I'm just getting back from a detention.'

She eyed him suspiciously, trying to work out why she would get mad for him having a detention. When her brain finally cottoned on, she didn't know whether to feel angry or despondent.

'What did you do?'

'Well I didn't start it, it was Snape. I saw the looks he was giving you through Potions, and then, in Arithmancy, he was being even more of a git, and I guess I just saw red.' Sirius sounded like he thought she should be grateful for his behaviour.

'You still haven't answered my question what did you do?' She had decided that she was angry, and she spoke through a clenched jaw.

'I sort of ... hexed him under the desk,' he muttered. Sophia let out a sigh, but didn't speak as she stared into the fire. 'Please, Sophia don't be mad at me.'

'Why shouldn't I be mad? I specifically asked you *not* to do anything like this, but you did it anyway.' She didn't look at him because she knew he would be looking at her with his grey eyes sincere and pleading, which she knew she would find impossible to resist; she wanted to stay mad at him for a little while longer.

'Well, see, I knew you would say that, but you see, no one knows *why* I hexed him, and he's not going to tell anyone the real reason, is he? So, to the rest of the class, it won't really be out of the ordinary. Everyone in this school knows that Snivellus and I don't get on. Us hexing each other isn't that out of the ordinary, is it?' She allowed herself to look at him this time, and, sure enough, she melted under the look he was giving her.

'I suppose you're right, but please, next time, just try to ignore him, will you?'

Sirius raised his hand to his forehead in salute to her; with a smile, he said, 'Whatever you say.'

She turned her attention back to the fire, and they sat in silence until Sirius spoke again.

'So, how has today been?' he asked quietly, looking at Sophia out of the corner of his eyes as he studied his fingernails.

Sophia paused to think before answering. If she was honest with herself, it had been one of the worst and longest days in her life. However, she decided to continue with her strategy of brushing the issues under the carpet after all, how could she talk about all the thoughts swimming through her head if she herself couldn't make any sense of them?

'Well, it's been okay,' she replied, trying to muster a convincing smile; seeing the look on Sirius' face, she realised she hadn't been so successful. She sighed softly and looked at him. 'I'd rather not talk about it to be honest can we leave it for tonight, please?'

Sirius gave her a small smile and nodded gently, seemingly content to sit in silence for another few moments, allowing her to return to thoughts. She shifted her body, placing her feet up on the sofa and sandwiching her right hand between her knees while her left hand held her ankles. She didn't notice Sirius studying her as she sank further into her trance-like state.

'Does it hurt?' she heard him ask softly. She looked at him blankly for a moment as she tried to register what he was asking. 'Your arm does it hurt?' He pointed to her exposed forearm, where the five deep purple bruises were surrounded by a halo of green and yellow. She removed her right hand and held it up to examine it herself.

It did look pretty disgusting, she would admit, but it was only sore if she touched it. Sirius held out a hand to her, obviously with the intent of looking at it more closely himself, and she obliged, placing her wrist into his outstretched palm. He studied it closely in the dim light, and she noticed how he handled her wrist not so tightly as to cause her any discomfort, but not so loosely as to be barely touching her. He ran his free fingers over it gently, but stopped the moment she winced.

'Bastard,' he muttered shortly. Sophia tried to take back her arm, but Sirius maintained his grip, raising his eyes to meet hers again. 'Sorry,' he said softly, 'I just can't help feeling angry when I think about what he did to you, the pain he's caused you ...'

As she looked into his eyes, she saw the fire behind them that told her he would like to do serious bodily harm to Rosier given half the chance, but then they softened, and she saw the concern for her that filled him. Not able to hold his gaze any longer, she cast her eyes downwards and waited for him to release her arm again, but he didn't.

'Do you want me to stay with you again tonight?' he asked softly.

Sophia was stunned by his offer, but thought about it for a minute on the one hand, she very aware that she had hardly any clothes on and felt highly uncomfortable being dressed like this in front of him; on the other, she was desperate to feel his arms wrapped round her again as he protected her from everything that scared her.

In the end, the latter thought won out, and she gave a small nod. Sirius said nothing as he let go of her wrist and took off his jumper. He transfigured it into a blanket which he flicked out over himself. He lifted up the side by her and opened his arm, inviting her to come close to him again as she had done the previous night. Without hesitating, she scooted down the sofa and placed herself under the blanket and in his arms; they slept until the morning.

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The title for this chapter comes from a song called 'Uncomfortably Slow' by Newton Falkner (who is one of my favourite singer/songwriters in the world - the guy is just an amazing talent). A video of the song can be found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4HNNuFf9nA>, and the lyrics from the chorus are:

*'Don't take my photograph,*

*'Cos I don't wanna know how it looks to feel like this,*

*As cars and people pass,*

*It feels like standing still but I know,*

*I'm just moving uncomfortably slow.'*

The whole song, but particularly that bit, I think, sums up how Sophia feels during this period.

## Chapter 10: Comatose

*Chapter 10 of 23*

Sophia struggles to cope with her emotions, and Sirius sees just how deep her pain runs.  
Sirius Black/OC.

**Disclaimer:** Once again, just playing with JK Rowling's wonderful creation. Only Sophia is mine.

**Author's Notes:** A huge shout out to DracoGurlFurever for her brilliant beta skills and to the PP admins for all their hard work. Also, thank you to everyone who has stuck with this story so far and to anyone who has left me a review. It's lovely to read your thoughts and they really do inspire me. And a final thank you to my dear friend Meda who made this beautiful banner for me.

This is another chapter named after a song title. The song is 'Comatose' by Skillet. You can listen to it here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uZ7XcxPMYn0>, if you so desire.

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### Chapter 10: Comatose

Sophia drifted through the rest of the week, still in a battle with her thoughts. Since spending a second night on the common room sofa with Sirius, she had forced herself to sleep in her own bed. However, sleep was slow to come when she was alone, and even when it did, she was often haunted by dreams of Rosier, which left her waking with a start and her heart pounding. On several occasions, Lily and Remus had tried to talk to her about how she was feeling, but she found that she couldn't talk to them about it. Their persistent questions and concerned looks were slowly driving her insane. Instead, she tried to focus her mind on her schoolwork; when that failed, she often found herself making excuses to leave them, preferring the silence of solitude in her dormitory.

She had managed to keep everything a secret from Lucy, Niahm, and Melanie something that she felt guilty for. On the other hand, she couldn't bear the idea of anyone else knowing what she'd been through. It was bad enough seeing the pity and worry in the eyes of those who already knew without adding to it.

It was on Wednesday exactly a week after Rosier's attack that everything finally got too much for Sophia. She'd had a horrible day, full of small annoyances that were made worse by her lack of sleep, and she felt both tired and irritable by the end of the day. She had been working with Lily on an essay for Transfiguration in the common room; as they were packing their things up, Lily, once again, tried to ask Sophia about how she was coping.

'Lily please, just drop it,' Sophia said through gritted teeth. Normally, she would have tried to be more polite with her response, but she was too tired to care.

'Soph, it's been a week, and you haven't talked about it. I only want to help. This silence and self-imposed solitude is *not* healthy.'

Sophia could see the concern in Lily's eyes as she pleaded with her. However, Sophia also felt a familiar pressure build inside her at Lily's insistence, causing her to become defensive in her desire to be left alone.

'If you want to help,' Sophia hissed as she rose from her seat, 'then you will just leave it. I *don't* want to talk about it.' The two girls had attracted the attention of the Marauders, who had been playing chess by the fire, and Remus came over to see what the problem was.

'What's happening? Sophia are you okay?' he asked, giving Sophia the same look of concern that Lily was. This was the straw that broke the proverbial camel's back for

Sophia, and she snapped.

'Will everyone please stop looking at me like that and asking me if I'm okay?' She had been in the process of putting her Transfiguration textbook in her bag, but in her anger, she slammed the book back on the table with a loud thud, causing Lily and Remus to jump back slightly. Her hands had begun to shake as her emotions spiralled out of her control. She was dimly aware that the rest of the common room was now staring in her direction, but she found that she didn't care.

'If I've said it once, I've said it a thousand times. I am fine! Will you all just leave me alone?' Her voice rose in volume and pitch as she felt her eyes become watery, and this only added to her feelings of frustration and anger both at herself and the world in general. Now, she really did feel trapped, her chest feeling like it was tightening almost unbearably. She needed to get away from everyone she needed time and space to collect herself together again. Sophia turned on her heels and strode over to the portrait hole to leave the common room.

'Where are you going?' Lily asked.

'Out!' Sophia snapped over her shoulder.

'Out where?' Lily called back.

'Wherever my feet take me!' Sophia shouted as she climbed down out of the common room and disappeared from view.

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'What was all that about?' Sirius asked, joining a shocked Remus and Lily, both of whom were staring at the portrait hole that Sophia had just disappeared through.

'What do you *think* it was about? Lily was trying to get Sophia to talk about what happened, but she just flew off the handle and stormed out,' Remus responded despondently.

'All the same, you must have said something to her. I've *never* seen her act like that,' Sirius stated. He'd been shocked when he realised it had been Sophia's raised voice he had heard a few moments ago. He hadn't even known that she was capable of shouting at anyone; she'd always been so calm and reserved.

'I'm really worried about her,' Lily said softly, 'I don't think she's sleeping well, and I know she's not eating properly because I've been watching her. It's like she's just shutting down in an attempt to avoid what happened. This outburst proves it, in a way; the only time I've seen her lose her temper like that before this was another time when she'd been trying to hide how she was truly feeling.'

'What happened last time?' Sirius inquired, curious about this side of Sophia he didn't know existed. He was also feeling guilty that he hadn't done more to try to talk to her about how she was coping. He had seen how she was pulling away, but he had thought that she would talk when she was ready, so he hadn't pushed her. He now wondered if he had done the right thing.

Lily seemed to debate for a minute over how to answer before she spoke again. 'It was a while ago her grandfather had just died, and she was having a hard time coming to terms with it. The effort of keeping up the facade of being 'okay' got to be too much for her, but she wouldn't talk to any of us about how she was feeling. Then one day, when we, the other girls and I, asked one more time, she blew up exactly like she did just now. She just won't talk to me, though, and I don't know what to do,' Lily finished as she wrung her fingers together.

'Well, one thing is for certain I don't want her wandering the halls alone again, so I'll try to find her and get her to come back here,' Remus said.

'Wait,' Sirius started, 'why don't you let me try?' Remus and Lily seemed unsure about this suggestion. 'Well, you two have both tried to get her to talk and not succeeded. I might have more luck; after all, I was there.'

Lily shifted from one foot to another, obviously not sure what to do for the best outcome, but Remus seemed to be open to the idea.

'Okay, I suppose that makes sense. Just find her and try to get her to either talk or come back here, will you?'

'Sure thing, I'll be back in a moment.' Sirius turned and ran up the stairs to his dormitory; after rummaging around the untidy room for a few minutes, he managed to locate the map tucked inside one of the pockets of James' trunk. Placing it carefully into his robes, he ran back down to the common room and left through the portrait hole.

Once in the hallway, he pulled open the map and, touching it with his wand, muttered, 'I do solemnly swear that I am up to no good.' He realised the irony of the statement as he waited for all of the ink to appear for once, he was breaking the rules for a noble purpose.

His eyes flicked quickly over the map as he tried to locate Sophia's name. In the week since he had first set out to test the map, the Marauders had been working on getting each dot to be accompanied by a label telling the reader who was where he simply prayed that it was accurate, because they hadn't had a chance to properly test it yet.

After a few seconds of frantic searching, he managed to locate what he hoped was Sophia's dot. Apparently she was a few floors down, so he set off as quickly as he could in order to catch up with her. He scanned the map every thirty seconds or so first, in an attempt to keep up with where Sophia was heading (it appeared there was no rhyme or reason behind her movements) and second, because he needed to keep an eye out for any prefects, teachers, and Filch.

After trailing through the castle for close to fifteen minutes, Sirius finally ended up in the same corridor as Sophia.

He quickly touched his wand to the map and muttered, 'Mischief managed.' Making sure that the map was now blank again, he tucked it back into his robes as he quickened his stride to catch up with her.

'Sophia!' he called out softly when he was a short distance behind her. She stopped and turned slightly in his direction, but she kept her face to the floor.

'Sirius, what do you want?' Her tone was more weary than angry, which he hoped meant that he could coax her into talking to him.

'I just want to make sure that you don't get into any ... trouble, that's all. If you don't want to speak to me, then that's fine, but at least let me walk with you,' he replied, giving her a stern look.

The silence stretched between them before Sophia finally sighed. 'Fine, if you must,' she said, throwing her hands up in the air as she turned and started walking again. They walked aimlessly round the corridors for a few more minutes before Sirius plucked up the courage to speak again.

'Um ... Soph?'

'I thought you said you weren't going to speak?'

'Well, I was just going to suggest that if you wanted somewhere quiet to think, we could go to the Shrieking Shack, that was all.'

'The Shrieking Shack?' Sophia stopped walking and turned to face Sirius. 'What do you mean? We can't get out the gates.'

'There's a secret passageway under the Whomping Willow tree that I just happen to know how to get into but if you would rather wander the halls aimlessly, then who am I to question ...' he trailed off, letting a smirk grace his face as he raised an eyebrow at her.

He watched her emotions play out across her face before he saw that she was finally conceding defeat. 'Fine lead the way, oh wise one,' she replied sarcastically.

He led her out of the castle and across the grounds to the Whomping Willow, where he used a branch to press the knot at the base of the tree, immobilising the branches and allowing them both to slip down into the passageway to the Shrieking Shack. They had to stoop as they made their way down the long passage; eventually, Sirius opened the trapdoor, and they both emerged in the Shrieking Shack, only their elbows and hands slightly covered in mud.

He watched her look round the room, which was gloomy and covered in dust. The windows were boarded up, and there were hardly any furnishings. She didn't seem impressed by what she saw, but she said nothing to him. She walked over to one of the windows and positioned herself so that she could see the night sky through the broken shutters.

It was strange for Sirius to be here without the rest of the Marauders. He'd been here a little over a week ago with Remus, during his transformation after the Gryffindor vs. Slytherin Quidditch match. This building seemed to fit the mood surrounding Sophia at the moment, much like it had also fitted Remus's feelings over his lycanthropy despondent and hopeless. She looked like a haunted, empty shell of her former self. They stood in silence for several minutes until Sirius broke it.

'Soph,' he said gently, 'talk to me.'

Sophia sighed and kept her attention on the stars outside. 'There's nothing to talk about, Sirius.'

'There is,' he persisted. 'You may not feel like it, but you have to talk about what happened. You can't hide it from me. I was there. I saw the look in your eyes that night, so don't go telling me that you're fine and there's nothing to talk about.' His voice was becoming more forceful; he was determined that she wouldn't leave here without talking to him now.

'I *don't* want to talk about it, Sirius. If that's the only reason you've brought me here, then I'm going back.' Her voice was hard, with a bitter edge to it, as she whipped round and made to go to the trapdoor.

Sirius saw this coming and quickly made his way across the room to stop her leaving. He held the tops of her arms and tried to look into her eyes, but she turned her face away.

'Let go of me, Sirius,' she hissed.

He realised that she was again becoming defensive and angry, just like she had in the common room. However, after living with his mother's wrath, this didn't worry him in the slightest; at least anger was an emotion, and therefore better than her being completely non-responsive to him.

'I will, if you agree to stay here and talk to me. I only want to help.'

'If I hear "*I only want to help*" again, then I will *not* be held accountable for my actions! There is nothing that anyone can do, so will everyone just stop asking?' she shouted as she stared back up at him defiantly. Her face was hard, and her eyes were blazing fiercely. 'Now, let go of me!' She struggled to free her arms, but was no match for him, and he watched as her cheeks began to turn red, though he wasn't sure if that was through effort or emotion.

He passively and persistently maintained his grip on her arms until she was suddenly crying. He responded quickly to this change in mood, pulling her to his chest and wrapping his arms round her. He realised that this was the breakthrough she needed; he hoped that, once the tears were out of her system, he would be able to get her to talk.

'It's okay ... let it out,' he whispered to her, rubbing her back. Her body racked with the sobs as he maintained his hold on her. As she continued, the crying became worse and worse, and he began to realise just how much she must have been holding back from everyone. He had watched her closely this week as, in fact, had all the Marauders and Lily and a dull ache had settled in his chest as he'd seen her become more withdrawn. Now that he saw how deep her pain went, his insides churned, and the dull ache became a vicious stab right through his heart. He would give anything to take this pain on himself she shouldn't have to feel like this.

Eventually, the sobs started to lessen in their severity, and Sophia seemed to slowly regain her self-control. Sirius pulled his torso back slightly and looked down at her.

'You feel ready to talk now?' he asked softly, brushing the hair off her face with one hand while keeping the other tightly wrapped round her. She lifted her head slightly, and he saw that her eyes were red from crying, her long dark lashes clinging to one another, forming spikes; the dim light highlighted the paths her tears had made down her cheeks. She nodded meekly in reply before pulling away from him and walking over to the window again where she took a deep, shuddering breath before speaking quietly.

'I'm sorry, Sirius.'

'What on earth are you sorry for?'

'For everything ... for getting you involved in this ... for shouting at you ... for crying all over you ... for everything,' she finished weakly, still suffering the occasional hiccup from crying.

'Don't be so ridiculous do you think I would have rather left you?' He felt shocked and hurt by her comment, and his tone became harsh. 'Do you really think that I wish I hadn't found you?' He saw her wince at his words, and his anger died quickly as his voice became soft again. 'Why won't you talk to us about how you're feeling? We can all see that you aren't coping, but every time we try to help, you just shut down. I've watched you this week and it's like you are barely there it's almost like you're becoming catatonic. You just seem to drift through the day like a ghost of yourself. I can't bear seeing you like that anymore none of us can.'

He walked across the room with a sense of purpose as he closed the gap between them. When he'd gotten close enough, he gently reached out and turned Sophia round to face him. 'Look, out of all of us, I at least have an insight into what you're going through. I was there. I know you're not sleeping ... because I'm not sleeping either.'

He paused and took a deep breath. He hoped that, if he showed his own weakness, it would help her to open up to him. Since the Thursday night he'd spent with Sophia in the common room, he'd not had one full night's sleep. He'd spent the nights of Friday, Saturday and Sunday in the common room, endeavouring to stay awake for as long as possible in case Sophia came down again as she had on Thursday, but she hadn't. He had eventually fallen asleep on the sofa for a few hours each night, but his dreams were plagued by the image of her face when he'd found her. Since the weekend, he'd been sleeping in his own bed, but that didn't mean that his dreams were now peaceful. 'I just want to help ... I just want to make it better ... please ... just, talk to me.'

'I ... I can't ... I just can't,' she stammered, looking at the floor, desperately trying to hold back the tears that were threatening to spill from her eyes again.

'Yes, you can; I know how brave you are. You know it's okay to be upset don't you?' He tilted her chin up so that he could look into her eyes as he spoke to her, but she pulled away from him and looked down at the floor again.

'No ... it's not okay ... because he's won, hasn't he? Despite my best efforts, he's still won!' She looked back up at him now, and a harsh look was on her face. 'No matter how hard I try, he's always there ... I'm always wondering, always thinking: what if, what if, what if; it *never* ends. The only way I can get through a day is by concentrating on my classes and my work. I can't let myself think about it; it's just too hard.'

'He's not won, Sophia. He's only won if you let him rule your life. Shutting people out will not help you. I know that it's hard to talk about it, but please, just try.'

Sirius took her hand and led her over to the sofa where he performed a quick cleaning charm to get rid of the worst of the dust before they both sat down. He wrapped both his hands around hers and waited for what seemed like forever finally, she spoke.

'I just feel so ... so empty ... like I've lost everything that made me who I am, and I don't know how to get it back.' Sophia had stared down at the floor as she had spoken, but now turned to look at him; he saw the pain in her blue eyes. He stayed silent and nodded for her to continue. 'I just feel numb, and it feels like all my senses are shutting down. The only time I feel any real emotion is when I get angry, like I did tonight and I know that you all mean well, but it feels ... it just feels so suffocating, and I just blow

up. I always feel guilty afterwards, but I just can't help it.'

'It's okay, that's what we're here for. You don't have to keep it bottled up. Any time you need someone to shout at or punch, just let me know, and I'm there,' Sirius replied cheekily, giving Sophia one of his devilish smiles before turning serious again. 'It's going to take time, but you'll get there. I know you will. Just don't block us out, yeah? We want to be there for you because we care about you.'

Sophia smiled softly. 'Thank you, Sirius.'

'You're welcome. Now, maybe we should get back. I think Lily is worried about you, and I don't want to give that red-headed spitfire any reason to have a go at me well, any more than the usual reasons.' He gave her a wink and one of his best grins, which managed to initiate a small chuckle from her before it died suddenly on her lips.

'Is she really angry with me?' Sophia asked hesitantly.

'Huh? Lily no, not at all. Honestly, we are all just worried about you,' Sirius replied, hoping she realised how sincere he was being.

Sophia seemed to think about what he'd said for a moment before speaking again. 'All right let's go.'

Sirius smiled as he stood and pulled her up off the sofa before leading her back to the trapdoor.

Once back out in the open, the pair walked quickly across the lawn to the castle before Sirius stopped to activate the map.

'What's that?' Sophia asked curiously as she leant in over his shoulder to get a better look.

'This is our little brainchild,' Sirius replied proudly.

'What does it do? It just looks like a bit of parchment to me,' Sophia replied, obviously puzzled.

'Ah, but you see, therein lies the genius! Watch this. I do solemnly swear that I am up to no good.' Sirius couldn't help but grin as he tapped the parchment with his wand, causing the ink to re-appear.

'Is that ... Hogwarts?' Sophia sounded astounded.

'Yes it is; you know, your surprise is a little insulting,' he retorted.

'Sorry.' She looked up at him through her lashes, smiling sheepishly as she blushed.

Sophia's reaction was so normal that he forgot himself for a moment as his stomach seemed to flutter. Mentally slapping himself, he quickly pulled himself out of it before carrying on.

'You're forgiven,' he teased, in an attempt to lighten the mood again and hide his own discomfort. 'We've been working on it for weeks. I was actually testing it last week when ...' His voice faltered as Sophia looked away. Giving a quick cough to clear his throat, Sirius continued. 'Well, anyway, it was very helpful in finding you again tonight, when you oh-so-sensibly stormed off.' He gave her a wink to show that he was still joking, but that still didn't stop her cheeks going a deeper shade of crimson. 'Anyway, we'll just keep checking it, and hopefully we'll avoid detection on our way back up to the common room.' Sophia nodded, and Sirius turned his attention to the map again before leading the way back up to the Gryffindor Tower.

They safely reached the Fat Lady's portrait fifteen minutes later, having had to take a detour to avoid being spotted by Filch. Sirius said the password before helping Sophia up into the common room. Sure enough, the Marauders and Lily were waiting up for them, and Sirius briefly wondered how long Lily had been sitting with his friends by the fire.

'Soph, are you okay?' Lily said quickly, jumping to her feet and coming over to hug Sophia.

'Yeah, I'm okay. I'm sorry for shouting earlier. It wasn't anything personal. I was just a bit tense, I suppose.' Sophia still sounded ashamed about her earlier antics, which was something Sirius couldn't quite understand. Why did she have this insatiable need to please everybody? She was going through her own personal hell; she shouldn't be worrying about what anyone else was thinking.

'Oh, don't be silly,' Lily chided. 'All I care about is that you are okay. Now, shall we go up to bed? I don't mean to sound rude, but you look awful.'

Sophia chuckled slightly at Lily's comment. 'No offence taken. I think you're probably right.' She turned to face Sirius again. 'Thank you again, Sirius. I don't know where I'd be without you.' Her voice was soft, but the look she gave him was intense; again, his stomach fluttered slightly as he tried to muster a casual smile. She stepped towards him and gave him a tight hug before letting go and walking up to the girl's dormitory with Lily, both girls waving goodnight to the other Marauders as they left.

'Pads? You okay, mate?' James had walked over to where Sirius was standing, staring at the door Sophia had just exited through.

'Yeah, I'm fine,' he replied, trying to sound normal.

'How did it go? I presume you managed to get her talking. You were gone for ages,' Remus said; he and Peter joined them, and Sirius could see the worry etched over Remus' face.

'Maybe we should go upstairs, and I'll tell you there,' Sirius suggested, looking at his friends, who all seemed to agree with his suggestion.

In their dormitory, Sirius tried to occupy his hands with tidying something that he never did if at all possible as he waited for someone to break the silence.

'What happened? How's she doing?' Peter asked.

Sirius looked round, and each of the Marauders had taken up a seat on his own bed, looking at him expectantly. He sat down on his bed, a jumper still in his hands, as he answered.

'Not good, I'm afraid. I managed to get her to go to the Shrieking Shack, but when we got there, she obviously wasn't going to talk. I started to ask her questions, and she blew up like she did here. I had to physically stop her from leaving again. Then, through the anger, she just erupted into tears. Honestly, I've never seen anyone cry like that. Even last week, after it had just happened, she didn't cry that badly.'

Sirius paused, remembering Sophia's crying, until he looked at Remus' apprehensive face. Taking a deep breath, and lightening his tone, he continued.

'However, once the tears were out of her system, she seemed a bit more stable, and she started talking. She kept apologising for her behaviour, which I told her was ridiculous; then, she confessed that she'd just been trying to block it from her memory because if she thinks about it, then she goes to pieces and that makes her feel like Rosier has won.'

'Merlin, no wonder she exploded earlier. No one could keep all that bottled up inside,' James muttered.

'What did you say to her?' Remus asked gently.

'I just told her that the only way she would get over it was to talk about it and that, given time, she would feel better. I also said that we were all here for her and that we just

want her to feel right again. I didn't know what else I could say.' Sirius looked at Remus, awaiting his response.

'I don't think you could say anything else. You did a good job, Pads.' Remus nodded approvingly. 'If you'll excuse me, I'm going to get ready for bed; I've got a long day tomorrow.' With that, Remus stood up and walked into the bathroom.

James and Peter looked at Sirius to see if he would elaborate further on his comments; when he didn't, they too got up and started getting themselves ready for bed, leaving Sirius lost in his muddle of thoughts.

Chapter 11: Letting Go

Chapter 11 of 23

Sophia wakes to a new day and has a enlightening discussion with Sirius.
Sirius Black/OC

Disclaimer: Sadly, I'm still not JK Rowling, I'm simply playing in her world. Also, the song lyrics belong to the wonderful Katie Drake.

Author's Notes: Once again, DracoGurlFurever has passed her tuned beta eye over this and helped to make it presentable. I also want to thank the PP staff who have helped me so much with this story and getting it validated. And, thank you to you the reader for sticking with me and especially if you have left a review.

Once again, I associate this chapter with a song, this time by Katie Drake. She's a young woman just starting out in her music career and this song is probably one of my favourites. I can only find one video of it on YouTube which is here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkIFfixVooY> The video features horses because Katie is the niece of a Natural Horseman called Pat Parelli, so if you like horses, sit back and enjoy, if you don't then close your eyes and listen to the song. ;-) The video actually features one of Pat's UK instructors she's the blonde girl riding bareback and bridleless along the beach. I must stress, she has a very high level of communication with her horse, so please DO NOT try that if by any chance you are a horse rider!

Chapter 11: Letting Go

If you could see beyond these walls that I've erected

You might see a heart that's longing to be loved

If you could just stay long enough to really know me

I might just be ready to fall

Setting me free from all of my shame

Letting go of all of this pain

Break away from all that has kept me locked inside

I don't know the answers to all of life's questions

When my hands in yours I can take on the world

You see me through my trials conquer all my battles

You're my rock you're my everything

Come tear down these walls that

I've built around my heart

Now I've fought long enough

And now I'm ready to fall

'Letting Go' by Katie Drake

Sophia woke the next morning after her first full night's sleep in a week. She felt more refreshed for it although she did have a headache, which, she presumed, had been caused by the stress of the night before. She decided that, if it hadn't shifted by the time she had finished breakfast, she would go to see Madam Pomfrey before her Charms class for a potion that would bring her some relief.

She cringed when she thought of how she had cried last night in front of Sirius. It was the second time that she had broken down in front of him, and she hated her display of weakness. Crying made her feel like she wasn't in control of her own emotions, and last night had been the absolute worst. *That* type of crying was neither endearing nor dignified. No, instead it was the type of crying that made your eyes puffy, made you hiccup and gasp for breath, and blocked your nose, causing you to sniff ... loudly. She tried her best to forget that mortifying image as she got herself ready for the day.

As she sat with Lily, Melanie, Lucy, and Niahm at breakfast, she realised just how much of a weight had been lifted off her shoulders. Niahm was making comments about a Hufflepuff boy called Nathaniel who was in her Divination class. She was telling them of her desperate flirting techniques while reading his tea leaves, and Sophia found that she couldn't help but laugh along with the rest of the group. It was the first time she had felt even able to laugh in a week. Even her headache had started to ease as she ate breakfast, so she decided to go straight to class without stopping by the infirmary.

She felt two hands rest gently on her shoulders and a warm breath pass her ear.

'Are you ready to go to Charms?'

It was Sirius. She wasn't aware how close Sirius's face was to her own; as she spun round to respond, the pair nearly collided noses. He pulled back slightly, giving her a smile.

'Um ... yeah ... hold on a sec,' she spluttered quickly before lifting up her pumpkin juice and draining the last few drops in one go. Her slightly-flustered demeanour was not lost on Niahm or Melanie, who both gave her suspicious looks as she got up to leave the table. With her recent behaviour of the past week, she couldn't blame them for wondering if something was going on with her they weren't wrong there, either but ... Sirius?

Be realistic, she thought with a snort. *As if he would even look at me twice.* She quickly gave them one of her 'say-anything-and-I'll-hex-you' looks in the hope that they would get the hint. 'Right, ready,' she said brightly to Sirius, who was still waiting patiently behind her.

Charms class was interesting Professor Flitwick was allowing them to continue their practice of the *ocomotor* charm. She had been distracted, though, by Sirius, which had caused the large, heavy book that she was levitating to fly into the head of the Ravenclaw girl, Clara, who sat in front of her. Clara merely turned round and glared, not at Sophia, but at Sirius, who feigned innocence of the offence even though it was his distraction that had caused the book to go awry in the first place. Sophia found that she had to choke back laughter during this exchange of looks, and she noticed that Sirius was also smiling. At the end of the lesson, he invited her to join him for their free period before break, which she took him up on.

Once they were up in the common room at their usual table, they pulled out their books and started working. Of course, that lasted all of five minutes before Sirius started talking.

'You know, you could have at least *tried* to defend me in Charms class,' he grumbled playfully as he looked up at her through his dark locks.

'Defend you? It was *you* distracting me that sent the book sailing into the back of Clara's head in the first place,' Sophia stated firmly, although with a hint of amusement in her voice.

'Ah, yes, but, *you* were in charge of the book at the time so, really, it is still your fault,' Sirius countered, a smug look on his face.

Sophia had no comeback this time. She knew that, whatever she came up with, he would again counter the point with a new argument, so she admitted defeat in silence and turned her attention back to her books. Sirius, however, seemed to have decided that they weren't going to work during this time.

'It was good to see you laughing again this morning at breakfast,' he commented; she could feel his grey eyes staring at her as she doubled her concentration on the books in front of her.

'Was it?' she replied, in what she hoped was a casual manner.

'Yeah, it was. Makes me wonder what was said to make you laugh. Would you care to enlighten me?' She continued to work, but that became impossible when she realised that he had stretched forwards across the desk to her. His face was nearly flat against the wooden surface as he tried to look up at her face; she could see his impish grin was in place again. She pulled back from her work, and he mirrored her movements, obviously satisfied that he had won.

'Niahm was just talking about her disastrous attempts to flirt with a boy in Hufflepuff, that's all,' she recalled with a slight smile. 'It's just the way she tells things that is funny. I always seem to laugh whenever she starts laughing herself.' Sophia returned back to her work; as she did, she heard Sirius let out a frustrated sigh.

'Are we really back to this again?'

'Back to what?' she asked, keeping her attention focused downwards.

'This,' he said, gesturing between them with his hands. 'You not talking to me. I thought that, after last night, you might at least feel like you could trust me a bit more.' She could hear a touch of hurt evident in his tone. Sophia didn't respond, but she did sit up and look at him. She could see the worry and confusion flit across his face before he leaned across the desk in an effort to close the gap between them again. 'How are you feeling today?'

'I'm okay,' she said, with a tentative smile. 'I feel a bit better than yesterday, anyway,' she admitted, causing him to smile back. 'But how are *you* doing? Everyone seems to be worried about me, but you went through a bit of an ordeal yourself.'

'Oh, I'm fine,' he said cheerily, 'just concerned about you; that's all.'

She felt her cheeks go red as he expressed his concern for her. 'Well, thank you, but at the moment, I'm fine.' She paused for a moment before speaking again, a slow smile pulling at the corners of her mouth. 'You want to know something?'

'Always,' he replied mischievously, his grin broad and his eyes glinting with interest.

'I really don't know why we bother to take our books out we never get any work done, do we?' Sophia chuckled slightly as she made her observation.

Sirius also chuckled. 'You know, you are so right. How about we just make it official and go outside for a walk instead?' he asked hopefully.

Sophia looked at out the window and saw that although it was rather dull and overcast it was at least also dry. 'Okay,' she agreed, with a smile that Sirius returned. 'Let me put this stuff upstairs, and then I'll meet you down here.' Sirius nodded in confirmation as she gathered her things in her arms and went up to her room.

Once outside, their cloaks and scarves wrapped around them tightly to stave off the November chill, they walked around the edge of the lake as they talked about anything and everything that came into their heads. There was one question, though, that Sophia had been dying to know the answer to ever since the beginning of term, and she decided that now was as good a time as any to ask it.

'Sirius, can I ask you something, please?'

'Fire away,' he replied openly.

'Well, I was just wondering what caused you to finally move out from your parents' house. Don't feel that you have to answer, though, if you don't want to ... I guess I'm just being nosey.' Her voice faltered, and she suddenly felt uncomfortable about asking such a personal question.

She looked at Sirius cautiously, out of the corner of her eye, as they continued to walk. His light-hearted expression dropped and his eyebrows came together in a frown as he weighed up how best to answer.

'Sit down for a moment,' he said softly, stopping by a log. She willingly complied as he joined her, and she waited quietly for him to answer. 'Okay, well, basically, I left when they told me that they had arranged a marriage for me.'

Sophia couldn't stop the sudden intake of breath. She couldn't believe that his parents would go to such lengths in the name of keeping the family bloodline pure.

'Sirius, that's awful. Do you know who the girl was?' she asked shyly, not wanting to pry further, but letting curiosity get the better of her.

Sirius let out a short, bitter chuckle. 'You'll think I'm making it up.' He looked at her, and she could almost see him making the decision about whether or not to tell her. With

a deep breath and a touch of regret about his tone, he said, 'It was Dahlia Rosier.'

Sophia was stunned into silence for a moment. 'You mean'

'Evan's younger sister, yes. Ironic, isn't it? Both of us had our lives changed by the Rosiers.' Another mirthless chuckle escaped Sirius's lips as Sophia tried to process this new bit of information.

'But she's only a fourth-year she's not even fifteen yet!'

'Yeah, and since when did age stop the Black family? My mother was my father's cousin *first* cousin, no less before she became his wife. Trust me; they wouldn't bother about an issue like that.' His voice was dripping with disdain as he spoke. 'As if I would even consider getting married to her anyway,' he complained bitterly. 'When they told me what they'd done, and how *grateful* I should be, I just stormed out. I went straight to James', and his parents said I could live there if I wanted, so I did. I probably would have moved out sooner or later anyway; I guess it just speeded the process up a bit. I dare say I've been blown off the family tree now.' Sirius's face grew even darker as he mulled over these thoughts.

Sophia didn't know what to do or say everything seemed so inadequate but she realised she had to say something, no matter how stupid it might sound.

'Sirius, I'm so sorry. I guess we can choose our friends, but not our family, right?' she said, as light-heartily as she could, in an effort to raise him out of his dark reverie, reaching out to his hand as she did so. She placed it gently over the top of his, causing him to look down sharply before placing his other hand on top of hers.

'Yeah, I suppose you're right. Anyway, you don't need to be sorry. It's not your fault that I was born into a family of zealots.' His mood seemed to lighten again as he spoke; when he looked up at her again, there was a small smile gracing his features.

'Well, I suppose we should head back to the castle.'

'Urgh ... do we have to?' she protested. Sirius raised an eyebrow at her, obviously wondering what made her want to stay here. 'Double Potions the fumes play havoc with my hair,' she informed him, clutching a chunk of her curls for emphasis.

He let out a small bark of laughter. 'You don't want to go to Potions because it messes up your hair? Sophia, I'd never put you down for being vain,' he teased, nudging her shoulder with his own as he did.

'Yes, well, it's all right for you, with your perfect hair,' she joked, 'but my hair is like wire wool, and frizzes at the slightest hint of moisture in the air.' She gestured to the air around her.

'It doesn't look like wire wool to me,' he said thoughtfully, removing his top hand from where it had been sandwiching hers and reaching out to touch a curl by the side of her face. 'Or feel like it, for that matter.'

She could feel herself beginning to blush. 'That's what *Sleekeazy* will do for you. All the same, I still don't feel like sitting through double Potions today.'

He dropped the tendril and smiled warmly. 'Well, unless you want to skive in which case I'm more than happy to join you I'm afraid you have no choice.'

'Hmm ... so, I can either spend a double period with you or go to Potions and get frizzy hair?' She tapped her finger to her chin as she pretended to contemplate the decision. 'That's no choice at all! Potions it is.' She gave him a mischievous grin as she squeezed his hand one final time, leaping up from the log and making her way back towards the castle.

He quickly caught up to her again; as they walked along in a companionable silence, Sophia contemplated how comfortable she now felt around him. Back at the beginning of term, she'd always thought of him and James as being jokers and that alone both were good for a laugh, but you shouldn't count on them to be serious or rely on either of them for anything. She regretted now how badly mistaken she'd been. It had been wholly unfair of her to judge the pair of them so harshly.

There was now a level of openness between Sirius and herself that she had never shared with anyone: not even Lily or Remus, now that she really thought about it. It wasn't just her sharing her secrets any more he was just as willing to tell her about the difficult parts in his life and that made her feel good, made her feel special. She could stand being totally honest with him if she knew she could return the favour and listen to his problems. Yet, there was something more ... something was stirring inside her, and she couldn't work out what it was.

She decided that, after everything that had happened in the last seven days, her emotions were bound to be more than slightly frazzled, so she put these unexplained disturbances down to that cause and hoped that, in time, she would get back to feeling normal again.

Chapter 12: The Invitation

Chapter 12 of 23

Sophia receives a letter from home and Remus helps her hatch a most pleasant plan. However, Sirius can't help but be concerned about the implications of said plan. Sirius Black/OC

Disclaimer: Nope, still not morphed into JK Rowling ... damn.

Author's Notes: Firstly, thanks go to DracoGurlFurever for passing her trained beta eye over this chapter. Secondly, thank you to the readers who have stuck with this story and shown your support through your very kind reviews. I know the last part of the story has been very emotional, but now things take a lighter, and hopefully, happier turn. I hope you enjoy it and, please, let me know your thoughts. :-)

Also, my updates might take a little longer than usual from now on. When I started posting this story, I waited until my beta had looked at the first five chapters but now I've caught her up! So, as soon as I get a chapter back from her, I will post it here. However, the good news is, the whole story is fully mapped out and I've at least started, if not yet completed, all but two of the total thirty chapters. :-)

And now I shall be quiet and allow you to get on with the story!

The remaining part of November passed all too quickly under a haze of homework, class tests, and essay deadlines. However, Sophia found that, with each day that passed, she felt a little bit more like her old self again. It was still a slow process, but Sirius had been right; because she had talked about her feelings, she had begun the healing process she was beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

After her breakthrough or possibly breakdown with Sirius in the Shrieking Shack, Sophia had finally been able to confide to Lily and Remus how she was really feeling. Both had been equally supportive, and both had also given her the same advice that Sirius had. Sirius was still being as compassionate as ever; every once in a while, they would have a heart-to-heart during their free periods. Although she was now more open with Lily and Remus, she found that Sirius always seemed to draw more out from her than the other two ever could. She often marvelled at how close she had grown to Sirius in such a short space of time, but then, she reasoned, they had gone through an extraordinary event together.

One day, at the end of November, while sitting at breakfast with the rest of the girls from her room, Sophia's family's small barn owl landed in front of her.

'Hello, Neasa,' she said, greeting the owl with an affectionate rub of the feathers under her beak. Neasa clicked her beak and closed her eyes as Sophia rubbed her, then shook her wings importantly, holding her leg out. Sophia quickly removed the note that was attached to it and gave Neasa scraps of bacon from her plate. Neasa happily ate the offered bacon before flying back out of the hall. Sophia recognised her mother's handwriting immediately and opened the letter to read it while she finished off her pumpkin juice.

Dear Sophia,

Your father and I hope you are well and that you are studying hard but still managing to enjoy yourself.

We are both so looking forward to you coming home in a few weeks for Christmas. As usual, we have had an invitation to the Douglas' Hogmanay celebrations, which we have accepted. I know that you will be looking forward to seeing Hector again. They have also asked us to stay with them for a few days, which will enable us to also visit your grandmother while we are there.

Write soon to let us know how you are getting on.

All our love,

Mum and Dad x

Sophia felt her stomach clench uncomfortably as she read the short note. She had been so absorbed in her school work that she hadn't spared much of a thought to the Christmas holidays, which were now only three weeks away. She folded up the letter carefully, placing it in her bag as she stood up from the table.

'Where are you off to?' Lily asked, giving Sophia an enquiring look.

Sophia jumped at the question, snapping her attention to Lily as she tried to come up with a plausible excuse. Stuttering slightly, she replied, 'I've ... er, left my Herbology textbook on my bed, and I'll need it later. I'm just going to get it; I'll meet you in the library.' She didn't give Lily a chance to enquire further, striding quickly out of the Great Hall before she could say anything else. It was a true enough statement she *had* forgotten to pick up her textbook, although the book was not the reason behind her headache and the nauseous feeling rolling around in her stomach.

Once in the common room, Sophia slumped down on the sofa near to the fireplace. She was deep in thought, concentrating on the letter her mother had sent and the upcoming holidays, when Remus came in. He gave her a quick smile and a wave, which she returned half-heartedly. Sensing something was wrong, Remus made a detour on his short walk across the room and joined her on the sofa.

'What's up, Soph?' he asked, flopping easily into the space next to her, his long legs sprawled out in front of him.

'Oh, it's nothing important,' she replied with a forced smile.

Remus looked at her sternly. 'You *know* that won't wash with me. Come on out with it.'

Sophia glanced at Remus to see him studying her, curiosity and worry competing for dominance in his expression. Taking a strengthening breath through her nose, she gave him a tight smile. 'I just got a letter from my mum this morning, and it's thrown me into a bit of spin, I suppose,' she answered softly, almost ashamedly, as she fiddled with her fingers. 'She's so excited that I'll be coming home for Christmas.'

'This is a problem because ...?' Remus asked gently, letting the sentence hang in a prompt for her to elaborate.

Sophia took a deep breath as she thought how to answer. 'Well, obviously I *want* to go home for Christmas, but I'm worried that Mum will know something is wrong with me. My parents will keep asking me what is wrong until I'm forced to tell them, and I don't want to have to tell them what has happened. Mum will be hurt that I didn't tell them sooner, and Dad is likely to go into a rage.'

'Yet, if I stay here, I know I will regret not seeing them and not going to the Hogmanay party that our friends hold every year. They're even letting us stay with them just so that we can visit my grandmother. I'm just not sure what to do for the best, I guess,' she finished sadly with a sigh, scrubbing her face with her hands.

Remus sat pondering for a moment before he spoke. 'I have an idea that might just work.' Sophia looked up at him despondently, not very confident that he would have a practical solution. Instead, she presumed he would tell her to come clean with her parents a thought that made her feel nauseous.

'We, and by that I mean the Marauders, are all staying here for the holidays, right?' he said, looking to Sophia for acknowledgement. She gave a small nod, a slight frown of bewilderment on her face. She really had *no* idea where he was going with this. Remus smiled, obviously noticing her confusion before he carried on. 'So, why don't you stay here, with us, over Christmas? Write home and tell your parents you have to study or something, and then arrange to see them for a few days over New Year so that you can go to this party and see your grandmother. That way, you can do both the things you want.' He grinned triumphantly at Sophia as he finished.

Sophia mulled over the head quickly. Her parents certainly wouldn't protest too much if she said she had to stay here for academic reasons. Yes, they would still be upset that she wasn't there for Christmas Day, but they would accept it a lot easier than if she wrote saying she wasn't coming home because she didn't feel like it. Besides, she could be with them for the New Year. If she could arrange to get home for a few days over New Year, it would be perfect. She would still see her parents and ease her guilt on that front, and if they were at the Douglas' then there would be enough distractions to avoid any uncomfortable questions. A large grin grew across her face. 'You know, that's not a bad idea at all,' she said brightly.

'Well, I'm not a Marauder for nothing you know,' he said, with a chuckle. 'I have been known to come up with a good plan every once in a while. The only problem I can see is getting out of here during the holidays.' Remus turned serious in his silence as he tried to come up with a solution.

'Oh, I don't think that will be too much of a problem. I'll just speak to Dumbledore. I'm sure he'll let me Floo out to my home,' Sophia said dismissively.

'What makes you so confident?' Remus asked suspiciously.

Sophia wasn't sure how to answer. 'What do you mean?' she asked, noticing Remus' confused expression, which caused her to continue. 'Didn't Sirius tell you?'

Remus still looked confused. 'Tell me what?' he asked tersely.

Sophia frowned slightly as she answered, 'I honestly thought he would have told you. Dumbledore is my great-uncle.'

Remus' eyebrows shot up as he stared at her. 'What?' he nearly shouted, his mouth gaping at her slightly.

Sophia nodded, trying desperately not to chuckle at his expression. 'My mother's father is Dumbledore's brother.'

'Bloody hell,' Remus muttered in astonishment.

'That's why I never told Dumbledore what happened with Rosier though I dare say he knows anyway,' she continued quietly, Remus nodding sombrely in reply. 'I don't understand why Sirius didn't tell you; I told him he could if he wanted.'

'You are full of surprises sometimes, you know,' Remus said, the dumbfounded look still in place. Shaking his head slightly, he continued, 'Sirius never told us any of this. When did you tell him?'

'The night Rosier attacked me,' Sophia replied. Remus swallowed as he looked away from Sophia, blinking rapidly as he absorbed the information. In an attempt to move the conversation on, she continued speaking. 'Anyway, my point is, it shouldn't be too hard for me to arrange getting home for New Year.'

'No,' Remus snorted, 'I suppose not.' He remained quiet for a short while; Sophia just sat there, nervously wondering whether she should speak or not. Eventually, though, Remus turned back to face her, smiling warmly. 'Well, it sounds like we have a plan, then.'

Sophia breathed a sigh of relief and found herself grinning. 'I think we most certainly do. I'll write to my parents right away and see what they say. Thanks, Remus.'

'Not a problem I'm just glad I could help,' he responded as he squeezed her knee and stood up again. 'Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to find the others I told them I would only be gone a few minutes.' With that, Remus turned and headed up to the boys' dormitories.

Sophia smiled to herself, a sense of relief settling over her after her talk with Remus. Sighing happily, she stood and made her way up to her room. Her textbook was sitting on her bed, exactly where she had left it. She grabbed it quickly, and then made her way to meet the other girls in the library, feeling a great deal more hopeful about the approaching festive holiday.

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Sirius and the other Marauders were all seated in the comfortable chairs around the fireplace as it crackled merrily, its warmth staving off the November chill that was beginning to seep through the castle walls. He was lounging in his favourite chair, his forgotten Potions book still lying open in his lap. Only Remus was still working, and even that was a half-hearted attempt. It was only when Sophia came bounding up to them, a smile wide on her face and her blue eyes twinkling, that Sirius focused back on what was happening around him.

'What's put you in such a good mood?' Sirius asked suspiciously as Sophia dropped down into the seat next to Remus.

All four boys were now watching her with avid interest, but she only focused on Remus, a fact that caused Sirius to press his lips into a thin line of pique.

'I got a response from my parents,' she said excitedly. Sirius watched, becoming more confused by the second as he saw Remus' body tense in anticipation. Clearly, *something* had happened that he hadn't been told about. That hurt him more than he would care to admit, and he couldn't stop his look of pique turning into a petulant frown. In an ironic kind of way, it was a good thing Sophia was solely focused on Remus, because it meant she was oblivious to his childish reaction.

'So, what did they say?' Remus asked eagerly, leaning closer to Sophia as he did.

'They said that they were sorry, but that they understood, and they were happy that they would see me for a few days at least. That's not the best part, though.' Sophia stopped, but her grin was even larger now.

'Well, don't keep me in suspense!' Remus said quickly.

'Hold on a minute what in the name of Merlin are you two talking about?' James butted in. Sirius took a quick look at his friends and saw that they were obviously as much in the dark as he was. That should have been a comfort to him no, actually he shouldn't care that Sophia hadn't told him something in the first place but he *did* care, and he *wasn't* comforted.

'Oh, sorry,' Sophia said apologetically, snapping her attention to the other three boys for the first time since she sat down. 'I'm just so excited!' Her smile was contagious as she looked to Sirius, and he couldn't help but smile back at her, his proverbial feathers smoothed back down. 'Let me get the girls over, and I'll explain everything to you all together.' She got up quickly and left to go up into the girls' dormitory. Sirius gave Remus a questioning look, but Remus made no comment and just gave him a shrug of his shoulders.

Sophia returned a few minutes later with the other four girls, who all took up places on the floor. Lucy was mildly complaining that she was going to lose her train of thought in her Muggle Studies essay, but Sirius thought it seemed to only be a half-hearted protest. Once everyone was settled, Sophia spoke again.

'So, you all know that the Christmas holidays are coming up soon.' Everyone nodded their heads, and Sirius silently wished that Sophia would get on with whatever it was she had to say. 'I know that you girls are going home, while the Marauders are all staying here at Hogwarts, and I have decided to stay here for the holidays with them.'

Sirius inwardly smiled in triumph, immensely pleased that she would be at Hogwarts over the holidays. The other girls, however, didn't seem to know how they were supposed to react to Sophia's statement; they remained quiet, each sharing not-so-subtle questioning glances.

'However, I am going to go home for a few days over New Year, and this is why you are all here.' Sophia smiled, but Sirius noticed that everyone else seemed confused at that statement even Remus; again, that comforted him. Sophia continued. 'You see, every year my parents and I go to a Hogmanay party that is hosted by our friends Donald and Mary Douglas. They are Lairds, and they have an estate in northern Scotland. They live in a small castle on the estate; every year, they throw a Hogmanay party for the local village. Donald and my dad grew up together and are still really good friends.'

'When Donald found out that I would be staying here for most of the holidays and that some of my friends were doing the same, he offered to extend our invitation to anyone that I wanted to invite too. So, I'm asking you guys now if you would like to come to a Hogmanay party with me! What do you say?' Sophia sat, beaming at the group, obviously happy with the news she had just shared.

The whole group sat in bewildered silence for a moment before Peter piped up with a question. 'Sorry, Sophia, but what exactly happens at this party, and how would we get there?'

'Sorry I guess I should have elaborated a bit. Okay, the plan is that we would all Floo to my parents' house the boys and I would use the fireplace in the Headmaster's office, and Melanie, Niahm and Lucy would Floo from home. Lily, my parents have said that one of them will Apparate to your house and collect you, if your parents are fine with that idea. Then, from there, we will have to catch the Knight Bus up to the estate; Donald and Mary are Muggles, and they don't know a thing about magic.'

'They have invited us to stay with them for as long as we like; as my Gran still lives in the village, my parents and I will see her quickly on New Year's Day. We'll probably arrive there at some point in the afternoon on New Year's Eve and leave on the morning of the second, if that's okay with everyone?' There was a quick nodding of heads from everyone before Sophia continued.

'As for the party, it's a very traditional Scottish celebration. There is a meal where traditional Scottish food is served, then there is a ceilidh, and then we celebrate the New Year. It's always really good fun I promise you will enjoy it.' It looked to Sirius as if Sophia was recalling a wealth of fond memories as she enlightened them all about what

she had invited them to.

'So, what's this traditional food we have to eat, then?' Lucy asked, obviously keenly interested.

'Well, I expect there will be haggis, neeps and tatties' Sophia started, before she was interrupted.

'Whoa, hold on a second ... haggis, neeps and what-ies?' Niahm asked.

'Sorry,' Sophia said, a slight giggle in her tone. 'Neeps is the Scottish word for turnips, and tatties is the Scottish word for potatoes. Haggis is a bit more interesting. It's traditionally made from mincing up sheep's heart, lungs and liver with onion, oatmeal, suet and some other stuff, then putting all that in a sheep's stomach and then boiling it.'

'That's disgusting!' shouted Melanie and Lily together, looks of utter revulsion on their faces. There wasn't much that Sirius wouldn't eat, but this description of Haggis was definitely making his stomach churn; he was sure his face was pretty similar to the two girls'. He had to wonder how a girl who wouldn't eat a banana could stomach minced-up sheep entrails.

'It's not disgusting!' Sophia protested. 'You can't comment on it if you've never tried it.'

'I think you'll find we can!' Lily protested, though her tone was teasing. 'No *sane* person would enjoy eating that,' she added, smirking at Sophia as she did.

'Yeah, but whoever claimed Soph was sane?' Remus joked, earning him a slap to his arm from Sophia. Sirius had to muffle his laughter at Sophia's disgruntled look.

'Anyway,' James said pointedly, drawing the conversation back before it turned into a teasing match. 'After the weird food-fest,' he said, Sophia glaring at him slightly as he spoke, 'there's this ... what did you call it?'

'Ceilidh,' Sophia answered quickly, her face softening and her eyes glinting with excitement once more. 'Oh, I do love a good ceilidh,' Sophia said wistfully, Sirius presumed it was more to herself than anyone else. 'You know, I can always tell how good a ceilidh has been by the size of the bruises on my arms the bigger the bruise, the better the ceilidh,' she finished with a grin.

'Hold on ... you mean, you are seriously telling us that you enjoy this ceilidh thing*more* if you get big bruises?' Sirius said with surprise. He suddenly became worried that the crazy gene the Headmaster seemed to have could be inherited. Lily might have been joking with her comments over haggis, but really it *couldn't* be normal to enjoy doing something that left you black and blue.

'Yeah,' she said, still holding her matter-of-fact tone.

Sirius couldn't quite get past this revelation, but carried on with his questions regardless. 'Okay,' he drawled slowly, 'so what makes a ceilidh so great then?'

'It's all the traditional Scottish dances the steps are really easy, so you'll pick it up quite quickly; and most of the dances are lively and ... well, it's just good fun,' she said with a grin. The four girls seemed more impressed with the description of the ceilidh, but Sirius was even more dismayed at the description of this part of the evening than the food. 'Of course, you guys will have to get kilts'

'We will not!' the Marauders all exclaimed in unison.

'What do you mean? 'Course you've got to wear a kilt; all the men will be in kilts,' Sophia retorted firmly.

'I am NOT wearing a *skirt*,' Sirius responded; the other three nodded fervently.

'Firstly, a kilt is *not* a skirt don't ever let my Dad hear you say that, or you'll wake up a week later and you*will* all wear a kilt if I'm ever to speak to any of you again.' Sophia had a note of finality in her voice which let the boys know that she was not messing around. Sirius internally groaned, knowing that there was no way out.

'I'll come with you and make sure that you all look okay, so don't worry. Besides ... I've always found that a guy in a kilt is quite attractive. What do you girls think?' Sophia said smoothly with a sly smile. Taking their cue, the four girls all nodded and voiced their agreement. This pacified Sirius and the other Marauders slightly, thought they still maintained their mild mutinous looks at the idea in the hope that Sophia might take pity on them she didn't.

'Well, if you're looking forward to it, then so am I,' Lily said, smiling at Sophia. 'You'll have to thank your friends for being so generous in inviting us all.' Sirius found himself silently agreeing with Lily on this one. However bizarre and socially embarrassing this night would be (and it would be embarrassing, for sure, if he was wearing a *skirkilt*) if it made Sophia happy, then it had to be a good thing.

## Chapter 13: Shopping in Hogsmeade

*Chapter 13 of 23*

Sophia and Lily drag the reluctant Marauders shopping for kilts, and then the girls do some shopping of their own in preparation for the Hogmanay celebration.

Sirius Black/OC

**Disclaimer:** My attempts at brewing Polyjuice have not worked, so I'm still not JKR. (Luckily though, nor am I a cat like Hermione ...)

**Author Notes:** A huge thank you to DracoGurlForever for her amazing beta job, despite have some real life issues going on at the moment. Also, thank you for sticking with me so far, and I hope you enjoy the chapter and that it gives you a giggle.

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### Chapter 13: Shopping in Hogsmeade

The next Hogsmeade weekend fell on the last weekend of term before Christmas. The common room was a hive of activity; all the students who were third-years and above were preparing for their excursions to hunt down last-minute Christmas gifts. The weather outside was cold and blustery, the glass panes shaking in their frames as they were hit by particularly strong gusts of wind. Sophia and Lily were perched on one of the tables near the window as they waited for the four Marauders to emerge, and

Sophia gripped her teal coat tightly as she studied the weather outside.

Their plan for today was to go to Gladrags and find kilts for the four boys before joining Melanie, Lucy and Niahm to shop for dresses for the Hogmanay dance. The boys had upheld their rather vocal protests to Sophia's kilt idea (or, as Sirius called it, 'obsession'), but she had held firm. She had spent many free periods trying to convince Sirius on the matter, for he had protested strongly against the idea of wearing a 'skirt' in public. Eventually, however, they had all grumbled their assent though, she knew, they did so grudgingly. To be completely honest, she was actually rather touched that they *had* even agreed to the kilt idea, and she'd made a promise to herself that, if they still hated the kilts after trying them on, she wouldn't persist in asking them to wear kilts for the dance.

Sophia checked her watch quickly and saw that the boys were due downstairs at any minute.

'What time is it?' Lily asked, catching sight of Sophia as she pulled her sleeve straight again.

'Nearly nine thirty; they should be down shortly,' she replied, Lily nodding in silent agreement before turning her attention to her nails. 'Are you sure you want to come today?' Sophia asked. Lily tilted her head up to meet her eye. 'You know I don't mind taking them shopping myself. You could go with Melanie, Lucy and Niahm, and then I could catch up with you all later to get our dresses.'

Lily shook her head, a small smile on her lips. 'No, I'll come. I've got most of my Christmas shopping finished already, so I wouldn't have much to look for if I went with them. Besides, I'm rather intrigued to see how you put the kilt and everything together.' She shrugged in a non-committal way, but Sophia could detect a slight amount of tension in her friend's posture, which told her Lily was trying to suppress something.

'Uh huh,' Sophia replied somewhat sceptically, not totally convinced that she knew what her friend was hiding, but having a few ideas floating around her head. However, before Sophia could probe further, the Marauders came down the stairs. All four looked like condemned men, their heads hanging low, their feet slightly dragging as they walked. Sophia had to stifle a laugh at James and Sirius in particular, who were milking it for all it was worth.

'Alright there?' she said, her voice thick with a bright cheeriness in a deliberate attempt to wind Sirius up. It obviously worked; he looked up and glared at her.

'We're only about to become cross-dressers we're doing just peachy,' he replied sarcastically. She rolled her eyes dramatically at him and stifled a chuckle. When she looked at Sirius again, she saw the familiar glint in his eye that always let her know that he was messing around.

'And just what is it about our predicament that you find so amusing?' he queried, a slight tilt appearing at the corner of his lips.

'You mean, apart from the fact that you are all acting like a bunch of babies? Gee, I can't think of anything,' she replied, still giggling. 'Come on; the sooner we get down there, the sooner you will be free.' She threw her coat on, and the group made their way to Hogsmeade and Gladrags.

The path down to the village was a thick tide of students, each one walking swiftly in the bitter wind. Sophia adjusted her woollen scarf, bringing it snugly up against her chin, then buried her mitten-covered hand back into her pockets. Remus walked along beside her, his head bowed as he trudged down the path.

'So, explain to me a bit more about these outfits,' he said as they walked.

'Okay, well, you have the kilt part, obviously,' she started, 'and there will be lots of different tartans to choose from. Normally, you would wear the tartan of your clan, as determined by your surname, but as there is no 'Lupin' tartan, you can choose anything that you like the look of.' Remus smiled, and Sophia continued. 'Then, you always wear the same knee-high socks normally in cream, but sometimes black and black lace shoes that tie up around your calf. For formal occasions, you would wear a shirt with either a bow tie, or just a tie, and then there are two different styles of jackets to choose from. Oh, and finally, there is the sporran, which is worn around the waist and helps to ... er ...'

Sophia paused, her cheeks tinged pink. She really should have thought through her sentence before she had started speaking, she realized; now, Remus was looking at her intently, his eyebrows pinching together slightly in confusion.

'Helps with what, exactly?' he drawled, somewhat suspiciously.

'Um ...'

'Sophia.'

'It helps keep the kilt down,' she whispered quickly, staring at the path as she did so.

'What was that?' Remus asked, leaning closer to her.

She took a deep breath. 'It helps to keep the kilt,' she gulped, 'down.'

'WHAT?' Remus shouted, his eyes going wide as he stared disbelievingly at her.

Everyone else in the group stopped, then threw curious glances at them.

'Okay, that's it I am *not* wearing a kilt!'

'Um, what's going on?' Peter asked, looking slightly bewildered as he glanced between the pair of them.

'You know that sporran thing?' Remus started; at Peter's nod, he continued, 'Well, its sole purpose, it seems, is to keep the kilt *down*.'

'What?' James and Sirius said simultaneously, their panicked faces turning to Sophia.

'Eh?' Peter muttered. Then, suddenly, his small eyes grew wide too, almost doubling in size. 'OH!'

Sophia looked at the giggling boys in turn. 'Oh, relax, will you. It's not like I'm asking you to be a true Scotsman or anything,' she huffed. However, if she had hoped her comment would pacify the boys, she had been sadly mistaken; they now looked even more horrified. She exhaled sharply before speaking again. 'Listen, I promise you, you would have to be dancing pretty ... energetically ... to make the kilt fly up that far anyway. I'm *sure* your dignity will be kept intact.' The boys made no effort to speak, so Sophia resorted to begging. 'Please, just try them on, and if you really aren't comfortable, we'll sort out suits for you instead, okay?' She looked to each boy in turn, and slowly saw each one soften slightly.

The boys shared glances between them before Sirius finally huffed and shrugged his shoulders. 'Fine, we'll try them on, but we aren't promising *anything*.'

Sophia beamed at them and stepped forward to hug in boy in turn. 'Thank you, thank you, thank you!' she exclaimed excitedly, turning then to share a secret smile with Lily before the group continued on their journey to Hogsmeade.

Gladrags was located nearly at the other side of the village, its gold gilded sign swinging violently in the wind. Sophia pushed the door open the bell above it jingled merrily as she did and they were greeted by a petite witch with greying hair swept back into a bun. Half-moon spectacles framed her hazel eyes.

'Good morning, dears,' she said, her smile welcoming. 'My name is Rosabella; feel free to call me Rose. What can I do for you today?' she asked, studying the four boys who were standing behind Lily and Sophia as if they were about to be mauled to death by either Rose or one of the dresses.

'I was hoping you could find kilts for these four,' Sophia said, waving her hand lightly behind her. 'They are going to a Hogmanay celebration and need to be in the right attire.'

'Why, how lovely,' Rose said with a smile. 'Of course I can help you which of you would like to go first?' she asked, looking at the four boys.

'Remus will,' Sophia said firmly; stepping aside, she grabbed hold of his jacket sleeve and, ignoring his stutters of protest, pushed him forwards.

'Right, dear, now there's nothing to be frightened of,' Rose said, reassuringly patting the back of his hand as she did; Remus, however, looked like he would very much like to disagree with the aging witch. 'I'll just take a couple of measurements, and we'll get you trying on some kilts and see what suits you, okay?'

As she led Remus over to the fitting area of the shop, Sophia and the rest of the group took up seats just outside the changing room area. As Rose flicked her wand, a tape measure worked its way around Remus' body; she noted down each measurement. Once finished, Rose gave another flick of her wand, and three kilts came sailing to her outstretched arms.

'Here we are,' she said, offering the kilts to Remus to take. 'Now, you go try on your favourite from these three while I move onto one of your friends.'

Remus still looked unsure, but he took the kilts without protest and made his way to one of the changing rooms. Sophia gave him a warm smile, and Lily gave him a thumbs up as he passed. Rose plucked Peter from his seat and began to work on him.

'I can't believe we agreed to do this,' Sirius muttered a few minutes later. 'Can someone just remind me why we are?'

'You're doing this as a favour to me because you know it will make me happy,' Sophia teased light-heartedly, not noticing Sirius' sudden dip of his head. 'I'm getting a bit worried about Remus, though; he's been in there for ages.' She chewed her lip as she glanced over her shoulder to the changing rooms.

'He probably just doesn't want to come out; I can't say I blame him,' grumbled James, who was slouched in his chair, arms folded in protest.

'Right, well, he's coming out sometime, whether he likes it or not,' she declared determinedly. She walked across the store to Remus's changing room and gently called in to him. 'Remus are you ready yet?' There was no reply. 'Remus? Are you going to come out?' she continued, a little more forcefully, but he still didn't answer. 'Remus John Lupin, if you don't come out right this minute, then I will open these curtains myself, *regardless* of whether you have that kilt on or not!'

'Fine!' he shouted back, poking his head round the curtain, his eyes narrowing. 'But I look ridiculous!'

'I'm sure you don't; in any case, we need to see more than a floating head to give you our opinion, so will you please just come out of there?' she gently replied.

Reluctantly, Remus slid out of the changing room. He had picked out a Scotland the Brave tartan; it was mainly blue with purple, green and white. However, it was hard to tell how it really looked on him; he was still wearing his own jumper and socks. Sirius and James started laughing, and Sophia shot them a stern look.

'See? I look ridiculous. I'm not doing this, Sophia!' Remus protested as he tried to go back into the changing rooms.

'Oh no, you don't,' she replied, grabbing him by the arm while she addressed Sirius and James. 'You two can just shut up because, in case you've forgotten, you'll be doing this soon enough,' she said harshly, instantly causing them to sober up; she could now hear Lily's muffled giggles at Sirius and James' reaction. Turning her focus back to Remus, her voice softened as she tried to coax him. 'You don't look ridiculous ... it just looks a bit ... odd because you've not got on the rest of the stuff, that's all. Is it possible for him to try on a shirt and jacket, and maybe the other accessories?' Sophia asked Rose, who was helping a pale-looking Peter pick a kilt to try on.

'Yes, certainly, dear. The jackets are over there, and the shoes and sporrans are next to them. Jackets and shirts are paired, as are the shoes and socks. Just find his size, and he can try them on.'

Sophia and Rose set about helping Remus and Peter get all the various things together before directing them to the changing rooms to try them on. A few minutes later, they both emerged from behind the curtains at the same time. *Safety in numbers*, Sophia thought to herself with a chuckle.

'You look great!' Sophia exclaimed as she studied them both. Peter had chosen a Perry Dress tartan which was mainly red and black with yellow and white. Peter had a red tie to match his kilt, and was in an Argyll jacket which had a single button done up in front; Remus was in a Prince Charlie jacket over a black waistcoat and had a black bow tie. Sophia stepped up to Remus and began to undo the buttons on his jacket, missing the widening of Remus' eyes as she did. 'The only problem here is that the Prince Charlie jacket is generally left undone,' she said, popping the buttons free.

Remus breathed a sigh of relief. 'Thank Merlin for that I wondered what the bloody hell you were doing there!' Sophia looked up in surprise before chortling at him.

'So, anyway, how do you both feel?' she asked.

The two boys shifted about slightly before answering.

'Well, I suppose it's all right now that it's all on together,' Remus replied as he looked at himself in a mirror. He pulled at his cuffs and flicked at imaginary fluff on the jacket as he looked over his outfit.

'I quite like it. I mean, I wouldn't want to wear it every day, but for one night I think it will be all right,' Peter said cheerily.

'You know what they don't look that bad,' James said as he, Sirius and Lily stood up and walked over. 'I could be convinced that this might actually be a good idea.'

'Now, dears, are you happy with everything?' Rose asked. Remus and Peter nodded. 'Right then, you two get changed back into your own clothes, and I'll sort out your other friends now.'

James was the first to be measured, and Sophia took Sirius over to choose a jacket and shoes.

'Do I have to wear a jacket and waistcoat? It's just that ... well, it's not really me, is it?' Sirius asked, picking a jacket off the rack and holding it up to himself for emphasis.

'The jacket is more formal' Sophia looked at Sirius and saw that he was not impressed with where she was going. She gave him a smile before she spoke again. 'No, you don't have to wear the jacket if you really don't want to.' Gently, she removed the hanger from Sirius' grip, placed it back on the rail, and instead pulled down a cream cotton shirt with long sleeves and a v-shape cut down the front all pulled together by a brown leather cord. She held it out for Sirius to look at. 'Why don't you try a Ghillie shirt instead? You won't need to wear a jacket with it, and it will be cooler for dancing in because it's cut to be slightly bigger than a normal dress shirt.'

Sirius seemed pleased with this new option and took it from Sophia as she tried to find him a pair of shoes in his size. With this accomplished, Sirius then went over to Rose to be measured, and James joined Sophia to find a jacket. Soon, both boys had everything they needed, and they were pushed in the direction of the changing rooms.

After about ten minutes, both James and Sirius emerged; James was dressed in a Prince Charlie jacket, waistcoat, and bow tie just like Remus. He also had on a Wallace Tartan kilt that was red, black, and yellow. Sirius was wearing his Ghillie shirt and a Black Watch tartan kilt of dark blue and green.

'What do you think?' James said with a grin as he flung his arms open and did a spin.

'I think you look very nice,' Sophia giggled. She had known that she could convince them that wearing kilts was a good idea if she could just get them to try them on.



'Yeah you both look good,' Lily chipped in. James's grin grew even wider when he heard Lily say that. Sophia was sure she saw a slight smile appear on Lily's face; her cheeks looked slightly pink.

'How about you, Sirius? Do you feel comfortable in that shirt?' Sophia asked as she looked him up and down. She couldn't help but think how good he looked in the loosely fitting shirt and the kilt he definitely had a rugged appeal about him, and now, more so than usual.

'Yeah, feels great, thanks,' he said with a grin to match James.

'Great!' Sophia said, clapping her hands. 'Well, you two better get changed, then. Lily and I need to do our shopping now, and you won't want that inflicted on you. I know how much you all hate shopping.'

'Yeah, and I think I hear Zonko's calling our names; don't you, James?' Sirius quipped as he gave Lily a wink.

'That I do,' replied James as he turned back to the changing rooms.

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Lily and Sophia spent the rest of the day in Gladrags trying on a variety of dresses while chatting about how the morning had gone.

'You seem to be getting on better with them now,' Sophia said, sitting outside the changing rooms once more as Lily was trying on her third dress.

'Yeah ... well, after how they all behaved with that thing between you and ... er ... you know, I started to see a different side to them.'

'You seem to be getting on well with James, too,' Sophia continued, an enquiring tone in her voice.

'Yes ... well ... um ... anyway, what do you think of this dress?' Lily asked as she came out of the changing room. This time, Sophia was sure that she saw Lily blush and couldn't help but smile at Lily's reluctance to admit that she might have been wrong about James.

Lily was wearing a beautiful, pale green dress that perfectly complimented her eyes, skin tone and hair colour. It was a satin, knee-length dress with a boned top which nipped in at the waist before the skirt flowed out over her hips. Around the hem of the dress, there was a white satin band that was matched by a white satin belt tied at the waist.

'I think we have a winner! You look gorgeous!' Sophia exclaimed with delight as Lily did a twirl. 'It will be great for dancing in, too.'

'Honestly?' Lily asked cautiously before she broke into a grin as Sophia nodded emphatically. 'Good, because I *really* like this dress. You know what I think it's your turn now,' Lily said with a smile before going to get changed into her own clothes.

Try as she might, though, Sophia could not find a dress that suited her. She felt like she had tried on half the dresses in the shop, and yet she still hadn't found something she liked. Even after Niahm, Melanie and Lucy arrived sometime in the early afternoon and helped her look, she still couldn't find anything. Rose had pretty much left them alone since the boys had disappeared, but, just as Sophia was about to give up, the older witch came over to her.

'Not having any luck, dear?' she enquired.

'No, I'm afraid not. It's not that the dresses aren't lovely, because they are, but I just can't seem to find what I'm looking for.' Sophia sighed.

'I think I might have just the thing for you. Wait here a second; I'll get it for you.' Rose then disappeared into the back room and re-emerged a few minutes later with a long, blue dress. 'Here you are, dear try this on for me.'

Sophia smiled and took the dress into the changing room to try it on. She slipped the floor-length, silk, halter-neck dress over her head; the fabric felt smooth and cold against her skin. The skirt flowed and rippled around her legs as she turned to look at herself in the mirror. The dress was a mix of two different fabric designs. The skirt was a vivid azure colour down one side; it faded into smoky mauve on the other. The two colours were separated by a line of cyan coloured flowers of varying sizes that ran up the centre line of the dress from the low neckline to the floor, and this design was exactly mirrored on the back of the skirt.

The other fabric made up the hem line and top of the dress as well as being placed around the empire bust line. This fabric was more of a peacock blue with black printed flowers over it; the blue looked even more vibrant against the pale skin of her exposed shoulders and the upper part of her sternum. She studied herself and the dress in the mirror, realising that she had never seen a dress like it before in her life, but also knowing that this was exactly what she was looking for.

She stepped out of the changing room with a small smile on her face. 'What do you think?' she asked the girls and Rose, who stood chatting.

'Oh, Soph! It's beautiful!' Lily said, causing Sophia to blush.

'Really?'

'Yes, dear I knew it would suit you. He won't be able to resist you in this dress,' Rose said, giving Sophia a knowing smile.

'What do you mean?' Sophia inquired, sounding puzzled.

'Why, that boy with dark hair who got the Black Watch kilt,' Rose responded, a touch of surprise in her voice.

'Sirius? Oh, no, we're just friends,' Sophia said, trying to sound as natural as possible even though she felt her cheeks becoming hotter. She also noticed the exchanged glances between her friends at the older witch's comment.

'My mistake,' Rose replied, turning to walk away; Sophia could still see a twinkle in her eye.

'Okay, my turn now,' Lucy exclaimed delightedly; Sophia was glad for the change of topic. 'Soph, you go back in there and get changed, and I'll try these on.' Lucy held up the three dresses that had caught her eye before disappearing into the changing room next to Sophia's.

A few minutes later, Lucy emerged in a soft, rose-coloured, satin dress that sat just above her knee and was strapless. The top of the bodice was heart-shaped, and there was a matching ribbon around the waist that tied at the back of the dress.

'Lucy that looks beautiful,' Niahm praised as Lucy did a twirl; the other girls all murmured their agreement.

'I don't think I'm going to bother trying on anything else I just love this dress.' Lucy was giving them one of her dazzling smiles. 'So, who's up next?'

'Me!' Niahm said as she jumped up from her seat and grabbed hold of the dress that she had selected.

Niahm tried on four dresses before she found one that she liked. It was a floor-length A-line dress made out of silk taffeta in deep aubergine with pencil straps and draped bust detail. The deep colour contrasted nicely against Niahm's strawberry-blonde hair, and the cut of the dress suited her body shape.

This left Melanie. 'Come on, you time to play dress up,' Lily teased as Melanie frowned at the array of dresses the other girls had picked out for her. She was putting up a fight that was almost on par with the Marauders.

'You know how much I detest wearing dresses,' Melanie responded, not budging.

'Well, it's a good thing that we are only asking you to wear *one* dress, then, isn't it,' Niahm retorted as she emerged from the changing room. Melanie stuck her tongue out in reply. 'Real ladylike, Melanie,' Niahm sniggered.

'How about a compromise? You can wear black.' Sophia held out a floor-length, black dress for Melanie to try on. Reluctantly, Melanie stood, took the dress, and went to change.

When she emerged, Melanie was struggling to stop a smile appearing on her face, and the other girls had to hide their sniggers. The dress had Grecian-style gatherings around the bust, with wide shoulder straps that had small diamante buckles where the straps met the dress. It was plain and simple, but the simplicity was what made it elegant; hopefully, this would mean that Melanie wouldn't put up too much resistance to wearing it.

'What do you think?' Lucy asked as Melanie studied her reflection.

'I suppose it's not that bad; and, at least if it's black, I won't stand out too much,' Melanie replied evasively.

'Oh, give over,' Lily admonished. 'Just admit that you like the dress.' Melanie turned slowly to face the girls, her face inscrutable.

'Fine, I like the dress.'

The other girls clapped and cheered as Melanie's cheeks flushed, and she dived back into the safety of the changing room.

The girls left with their purchases and headed back up to Hogwarts, all extremely happy and excited about the Hogmanay celebrations that would be upon them in a few weeks.

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#### Author Notes:

Hogmanay is the Scottish term used for New Year.

The Marauders' tartans can all be found on the following [here](#). Just enter in the following codes in the search box at the top left.

Remus: Scotland the Brave Code 2563

Peter: Perry Dress Code 1214

James: Wallace Code 1208

Sirius: Black Watch Code 207

Just because my beta asked, I shall explain what tartan is to anyone who doesn't know. Tartan is basically a woven cloth of different colours (the same as plaid). In Scotland, the different tartan designs are usually associated with family names (e.g. Stewart, Ross), and were used so people could recognise what 'Clan' you came from by the tartan you wore. However, in recent years more generic tartans have been designed (e.g. the Scotland the Brave that Remus wears).

The rest of the Marauders' outfits can be seen here:

[Peter's Argyll Jacket](#)

[Remus and James' Bonnie Prince Charlie Jackets](#)

[Sirius' Ghillie Shirt](#)

Oh, and bonus points to anyone who can spot the adapted line from Friends ;-)

## Chapter 14: Christmas is a Time for Fun and Laughter

*Chapter 14 of 23*

Sophia and the Marauders spend the Christmas holidays at Hogwarts.  
Sirius Black/OC

**Disclaimer:** \*Sigh\* *Still* not JKR.

**Author's Notes:** Endless thanks to DracoGurlForever for beta reading; to the PP admins who work tirelessly, and to you the readers for reading and for any reviews you might have left me.

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### Chapter 14: Christmas is a Time for Fun and Laughter

It was the night before the start of the Christmas holidays and, as had become their tradition, Sophia and the other girls from her dormitory were spending the evening up in their room; a girls-only night was how they always spent the last night of term before parting ways for the holidays. The five Gryffindors were squished onto Lucy's bed, and the little space that was left was covered with sweets from Honeydukes. Hamish had also invited himself to the party and was currently curled up in Sophia's lap, his tail brushing over an empty sweet wrapper as he flicked its tip contentedly.

'Are you sure you're going to be okay on your own, Sophia?' Lucy asked as she took a bite into her bar of Honeydukes chocolate.

'Yes, I'll be fine. It'll be nice to get a bit of peace and quiet from your snoring,' Sophia replied, giving Lucy a cheeky wink. Lucy huffed and chucked a balled-up wrapper at her, causing Sophia to squeak as she threw her hands up to protect her face. Hamish lifted his head at the commotion, and glared at Lucy before settling his head back down on his paws and closing his eyes once more. 'Besides,' Sophia continued, 'I won't be completely alone I'll still have Remus, Peter, James and Sirius to keep me

entertained.' She shrugged her shoulders before leaning over to snatch a lemon drop from the centre of the bed. She untwisted the sweet from the clear foil, throwing it back into the centre of the bed as she popped the sweet into her mouth.

'Mmm ... and there's absolutely nothing going on between you and Remus, then?' Lucy continued.

'Oh, come on, guys,' she said, feeling exasperated; her words were slightly muffled by the lemon drop. She shifted it around in her mouth before continuing. 'How many times do I have to tell you there is *nothing* going on between me and Remus? We just get on very well; that's all.' She crunched the lemon drop slightly violently, as if to prove her point.

'Okay, but have you ever considered it?' Melanie asked as she raised an eyebrow at Sophia. 'I mean, you have to admit, Remus isn't bad-looking. Can you honestly say that you've never even thought about it?'

'*Damn*,' thought Sophia. She'd never been asked this question, and to answer it truthfully would result in so many more questions, but, before her mind could think of something suitable to say, her silence had given her answer for her.

'Aha!' exclaimed Melanie, a look of glee spreading across her face. All four girls suddenly sat up straight and fixed their attentions firmly on Sophia. 'So, come on tell us.'

'All right, fine,' she said, resigned to the fact she would have to tell them this secret that she'd kept for so long. She took a deep breath, deciding that the best way to tell them would be to be direct and to the point. 'Okay, well, there was a ... moment ... back in March when we ... when we ...'

'When you what?' Lily butted in, clearly frustrated by Sophia's hesitancy.

'*Okay, so the quick and to-the-point approach isn't working*,' she thought. 'Well, we kissed, if you must know. There, you happy now?' she said, focusing down on Hamish so she could avoid looking at the shocked faces of her friends.

'You and Remus' began Lucy.

'kissed?' finished Niahm.

'I knew it,' Melanie stated smugly.

'You never told me,' said Lily, looking hurt. 'I would have thought you would at least have told me.'

Sophia met the eyes of her best friend. 'Lils, I never told anyone, and neither did Remus. It was a mistake, and we both thought so, and that was it, really,' she answered with a shrug.

'How did it happen?' Niahm asked, her brown eyes showing her curiosity.

Sophia sighed resignedly. 'It was just after I broke up with Brendan, and Remus and I were talking. He was comforting me, and gave me a hug; as we pulled back, we just kissed. It was short, but then, when we looked at each other, we just knew it wasn't right, and we both laughed it off. I like Remus I even love him, but only as a friend. So can we *please* draw a line under this question? There is nothing more to tell,' Sophia said as she looked at each of her friends pointedly in turn.

'All right, but are you sure you have nothing else to tell us on the boy front?' Niahm asked, a hint of suspicion in her voice.

'What, in the name of Merlin, are you on about now?' Sophia replied, feeling decidedly uncomfortable. Lucy, Niahm and Melanie looked from one to the other, and all of them started giggling. Sophia looked at Lily for reassurance, but saw that Lily was fighting back a smile too.

'Well,' Melanie said, drawing the word out in a way that made Sophia nervous, 'you do seem to be spending a lot of time with a certain Mr Black, if you know what I mean ...' She left the sentence hanging; a sly grin graced her face.

Sophia felt her mouth drop open at what the girls were implying. To be fair to her friends, she probably couldn't blame them for thinking along those lines. It was true she was spending a lot of time with Sirius, and, as no one aside from Lily knew about Rosier and Sirius' part in that, it was a reasonable assumption to make. However, none of that would help her answer the question that had been put to her.

She would admit that Sirius was definitely attractive, and he always succeeded in making her laugh, and she knew that she could talk to him about anything; but she had never gotten the impression that he saw her as anything more than a friend. Also, she didn't feel ready to get close to anyone yet, so, surely that made this whole conversation quite pointless?

'What? No ... nothing is going on between us. We're just good friends,' Sophia stuttered.

'Like you and Remus are were just friends?' Lucy countered, holding the quizzical tone in her voice.

'Yes.'

'But you did kiss Remus once, didn't you?' Melanie stated with a smirk.

'Yes ... but that ... that doesn't mean anything. Stop looking at me like that!' Sophia said, half laughing, half annoyed. 'Sirius and I are good friends; yes, he's attractive, but I really don't think he sees me that way.' If she hoped that would be the end of the issue, she was sadly mistaken.

'What if he *did* see you that way then what would you think?' Lily asked quietly, looking up at Sophia through her eyelashes.

Sophia was stunned to hear Lily, of all people, asking that particular question. She always assumed that Lily would discourage any of her friends from getting involved with one of the Marauders. She gave Lily a questioning look before answering.

'Well ... I ... I don't really know, to be honest. I'm not sure I'd be willing to put myself through that. I mean, his previous girlfriends haven't exactly been long-term, have they? It would be like setting myself up for a fall. You guys know I could never do a fling; I'd get too attached and just end up getting hurt. Not that he would mean to hurt me,' she added quickly, 'but I just don't think that any girl would ever become more important to Sirius than the Marauders you would always play second fiddle ...'

She looked round at the other girls, who all seemed slightly crestfallen at Sophia's honesty. Maybe they had hoped to get a bit more teasing done before Sophia would admit how she really felt. However, they seemed satisfied with her answer, so she took that opportunity to move the conversation on. The girls spent the rest of the evening chatting and laughing before they all eventually crawled into their own beds and went to sleep.

The next morning, after eating breakfast together, the five girls stood in the Gryffindor common room saying their goodbyes.

'Have a good holiday; I'll see you soon,' Sophia said as she gave Lily a hug. Melanie, Lucy and Niahm were stood slightly off to the side, having already said their goodbyes.

'I will you take care of yourself, won't you? Don't let those boys bully you I'm counting on you to keep them in check while I'm away,' Lily said with a laugh.

'Me? What about Remus?' Sophia said chuckling.

'Oh, you know James and Sirius never pay any attention to him,' Lily said dismissively.

'What makes you think I'll have any better luck?' Sophia asked, bewilderment lacing her words.

'You hold more power over those boys than you realise,' Lily said with a wink; it really confused Sophia, but, before she could ask Lily what she meant, Niahm interrupted.

'Come on, Lily. We'd better get a move on, or else we'll miss the coaches down to the train.'

'Yep,' Lily agreed, nodding before turning back to Sophia one final time. 'Take care,' Lily said, giving Sophia another quick hug, then picking up her trunk to leave.

Sophia watched as the four girls left the common room before, waving until they were out of sight. Once alone, she took up a seat by the fire where she was joined by Hamish. She sat there, absentmindedly stroking the grey cat, while she tried to figure out what Lily had meant. *'You hold more power over those boys than you realise'* what the heck does that mean, anyway? she thought to herself.

She couldn't think of any situation where she had managed to stop the boys breaking the rules. Actually, thinking about it, she often found quite a lot of amusement in their tricks. Her thoughts were interrupted, however, when the Marauders climbed loudly into the common room and came over to join her.

Each of them fell down into one of the free seats around her, Remus sitting next to her on the sofa.

'Well, Miss McKinloch are you ready to be corrupted by us four for the next two weeks?' Remus said seriously.

'Absolutely,' she replied with a big smile. 'What are we going to do first?'

'Snowball fight?' James suggested, a devilish grin spreading on his face that was instantly copied by Sirius. Sophia suspected she was getting herself into trouble, but nodded her head along with everyone else. They parted briefly to change into warm clothes before venturing outside into the Hogwarts' snow-covered grounds.

The sky was a clear light blue, without a cloud in sight, and there was no wind as the group trekked to the open area near to the edge of the Forbidden Forest. The snow was soft and fluffy underfoot, making walking difficult, and the weak winter sun caused a harsh glare on the pristine whiteness that covered everything in a thick blanket. However, they finally stopped, having reached their destination, and Sirius took charge in organising the fight.

'Right, let's split into two teams James and I on one team; Remus, Peter and Sophia on the other and we fight to the death!' he declared theatrically before breaking into his trademark grin.

Remus, Peter and Sophia ran off to build up a base, and after a few spells were said, they had created a nice little bunker with a healthy pile of snowballs.

They heard Sirius bellow across the snow-covered grass. 'Ready? Let the fight begin!'

No sooner had the words left Sirius's mouth than Remus was hit on the side of the head by a well-aimed snowball. Both teams spent close to twenty minutes in the relative safety of their bunkers, but getting successful aims from there was proving difficult.

'We need to make a run for it if we're to stand any chance of winning,' Sophia said. Her face was flushed from the cold, and she had some snow on her woolly hat from where a snowball had hit her.

'Well, you're a faster runner than we are see if you can sneak up on them while we try to cover you,' Remus said as they dodged more snowballs that were sailing over the top of their bunker. Sophia nodded in agreement and gathered up as many snowballs as she could manage before looking at Remus and Peter. She had yet to master the Disillusionment charm, or else she would have used it to sneak up on Sirius and James.

'Right I'm ready! Cover me!' she declared in a loud whisper before turning to sneak out from the bunker.

She couldn't see Sirius or James as she crept around the edge of her team's shelter, so she presumed that they were lying down in the snow behind their bunker. She crept along as far out to the side as she could manage, using the shadows of the trees to help her, while she watched the snowballs flying backwards and forwards from the two bunkers.

She finally reached James and Sirius, both of whom busy creating more snowballs and so didn't see her coming. When she was close enough, she opened fire on them. She managed to get James squarely on the back of the head, causing him to fall face forward into the snow, before hitting Sirius on the shoulder as she started to retreat.

James pushed himself up, shouting, 'Get her, Sirius!' as Sirius stared to retaliate.

Sophia began to run away but was slowed down by the deep snow underfoot and the fact that she was laughing at the snowballs Sirius was hurling at her. He quickly caught her up and abandoned the snowballs in favour of picking her up and holding her securely over his shoulder.

'You're in for it now, Sophia!' he shouted with glee as he started to carry her over to a particularly deep part of snow.

'Sirius! Stop it! Remus, Peter, help me!' Sophia shrieked through her laughter. 'Sirius put me down!'

'As you wish!' he declared, rather abruptly dumping her into the deep snow. She screamed through the laughter as he tossed her through the air. She landed heavily on her back, and sank deeply into the snow, which meant that she was now well and truly stuck like a crab on its back. She looked up to see all four boys standing over her and laughing.

'I'm glad to see that chivalry is not dead,' she huffed as she took in her new cold and wet surroundings.

'I thought women wanted equal rights?' Sirius smirked, obviously pleased with his accomplishment.

'No, Sirius. We only want equal rights when it suits us,' she quipped with a grin.

'Surrender?' James asked, tossing a snowball up and down in his hand.

'Fine we surrender,' Sophia said begrudgingly. 'Now, help me up.' She held out her arms and Remus and Sirius reached out to help her up. 'What are we going to do now?' she asked as she brushed the snow off her jacket and bum.

'Don't mind it's up to you,' Sirius replied before adding, 'Do you need a hand there, Sophia? I'd be more than willing to help with the snow removal ...'

She wasn't looking at him and wasn't paying close attention, so it took a moment for her to register what he had asked her. When she did finally realise what he had implied, she turned to look at him with indignation, only then seeing that he was giving her one of his devilish grins. The other boys were in fits of silent giggles; it soon became loud laughter when they saw the look on Sophia's face.

'Why you little ... mind in the gutter ... you'll pay for that!' she said as she gathered up a handful of snow and started chasing Sirius, who had turned and started running. She caught up close enough to grab the back of his jacket and managed to ram most of the snow down his back.

'That's cold!' he whined as she let go of him.

'It's snow, Sirius it's hardly going to be warm, is it?' she replied sarcastically but with satisfaction. They walked back to where James, Remus and Peter were standing, still

laughing, before she spoke again. 'Well, I say we should go back inside and get warm. It must be nearly lunch time, right?'

James managed to stop laughing long enough to agree, and they made their way up to the castle, where lunch was waiting for them in the Great Hall.

\*

Sophia was woken up on Christmas morning by Hamish who was head-butting her shoulder and purring. She got up and gave Hamish some attention, including giving him his Christmas present, a mouse-shaped cat toy charmed to run around the floor. Hamish immediately started to stalk the toy, and Sophia giggled as she watched him leap down from her bed and skid across the wooden floor as he tried to catch it.

She threw on her dressing gown and opened her presents from her parents and the girls with whom she shared her room. Her parents had given her a voucher for Gladrags in Hogsmeade, a new swan-feather quill, and a selection of inks and parchments. Lily had given her a beautifully framed photo of the two of them that had been taken during the summer, and Melanie, Niahm and Lucy had pooled their money to get Sophia a selection of her favourite sweets from Honeydukes. She looked at the gifts and felt a brief moment of sadness that her friends were not here to share the experience, but she quickly brushed it aside, telling herself that she would see them in less than a week.

She then got up and picked up four neatly-wrapped parcels before leaving her room to go up to the boys' dormitory. She knocked on the door before poking her head into the room.

'Ah, I see you're all up, then?' she said with a smile as she entered the room. 'You've also cleaned since the last time I was up here.'

'Well, we knew you would complain otherwise,' James said cheerily.

All the boys were sitting on a rug on the floor, and they had already opened most of their presents. Sophia joined them on the floor and gave them each the gifts that she had bought for them while they returned the favour.

She had bought James a book about the Wigtown Wanderers, which she knew was his favourite team. The book also included training tips which she thought James might want to implement for the Gryffindor team. James beamed at her as he opened the present and quickly set about flicking through the book, pausing at pages that caught his attention.

Remus opened his gift to reveal a miniature chess set which he gave Sophia a hug for; he promised to play a game with her in the afternoon to try to improve her dismal skills at the game. This was quickly followed by a hug from Peter, who was delighted by the selection of items from Honeydukes that Sophia had selected for him.

Sirius opened his gift and grinned broadly as he looked over the selection of Zonko products Sophia had bought for him. 'These are great, Sophia! I'm sure we can have lots of fun with this lot.' He gave her a wink, and she laughed.

'That's fine; just don't tell Lily I gave it to you she'll have my guts for garters!'

Relieved that everyone seemed to like their presents, Sophia set about opening her own. James had given her a packet of Exploding Snap cards; Remus had given her a pot of self-correcting ink to go with the pack of Sugar Quills Peter had bought her, and Sirius had given her a necklace. She gingerly removed it from the box to look more closely at it. Hanging from the delicate silver chain was a series of three forget-me-not blue enamel flowers; they were joined together by two S-shaped silver bars.

'Sirius, it's beautiful,' she breathed, her eyes glued to the necklace. 'I can't accept this, though it must have cost a fortune!'

'Course you can; I want you to have it,' Sirius stated simply.

Sophia felt herself blush as she found herself utterly speechless and felt mortified by the now-pitiful presents she had bought for him. She looked into his eyes in an attempt to understand the meaning behind the gift, but she couldn't read anything in them other than sincerity.

'Well, put it on, then,' he said eagerly, gesturing to the chain dangling from her hand. Sophia tried to undo the delicate clasp, but her fingers wouldn't cooperate. 'Oh, give it here,' Sirius stated impatiently, though there was a hint of amusement there, too. 'It'll be New Year before you get it on yourself at this rate.' He took the necklace from her hands and slid round behind her before putting the chain carefully round her neck and doing it up. He moved back round so that he was facing her, a grin firmly in place. 'Lovely.'

Sophia instinctively reached a hand up and touched the necklace; she felt a smile forming on her face and her cheeks flushed red again. 'Thank you, Sirius I love it.'

She gave each of them a hug and thanked them again for their gifts, then left to get dressed.

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#### Author's Notes:

Sophia's necklace is actually a design by Sheila Fleet, a Scottish Jewellery Designer. You can see the necklace [here](#).

## Chapter 15: Journey to the Highlands

*Chapter 15 of 23*

The friends travel to the Highlands of Scotland for a traditional Hogmanay.

**Disclaimer:** Nope, not JKR and not making any money.

**Author's Notes:** A huge, huge thank you to DracoGurlForever for her beta reading skills on this chapter. Also, thanks to the PP admin team and to you guys, the readers, for sticking with me and leaving some lovely reviews. They do really help to keep me going.

I must apologise for the delay in getting this chapter up. Real life has really kicked my butt in the last month as my little pony, that I've had since I was about twelve, has been quite seriously ill. He's not really been responding to any of the treatments, so it's been a really worrying time. So, I have everything crossed that he will start to improve now that we have changed his drug dose. Anyway, as a result of all that, my writing has been put on the back burner for the last couple of weeks, but I hope to pick it up again and should be much quicker with chapter 16.

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## Chapter 15: Journey to the Highlands

Sirius had rarely enjoyed the Christmas holidays any more than he was currently enjoying this one. Since the start of the holiday, he'd spent his days having snowball fights, playing Wizard's Chess and Exploding Snap, and just relaxing with his friends. Of course, the fact that Sophia was there with him made it all the better, as far as he was concerned. He'd noticed a further shift in their friendship as well as in Sophia's general demeanour. She seemed to be more at ease now, like she was finally getting free of the lingering shadow of Rosier. He delighted in the way she was now beginning to tease and play-fight back with him ever since the day he'd picked her up and thrown her down in the snow.

Christmas Day had also been a highlight in itself. He'd spent a long time trying to find a gift for Sophia, trying to hide his extensive search from the attention of his friends all the while (Merlin only knew the grief he would have suffered if the other Marauders had found out he was worrying over what to buy a girl for Christmas, after all). Finally, though, he'd found the necklace. It had been tucked away in the corner of a display cabinet, and he'd been instantly drawn to the colour of the flowers the blue enamel reminded him strongly of Sophia's eyes. It was delicate, charming, and beautiful; he knew he'd found her the perfect gift. As he'd been paying for his purchase, James had found him, raising an eyebrow at Sirius' choice. Knowing he would have to explain it eventually, Sirius had been telling James that the necklace was for Sophia ... unfortunately, just as Remus had also appeared along with Peter.

*'What did you buy for Sophia?' Remus enquired.*

*'He bought her a necklace,' James replied on his behalf, sounding a little too smug for Sirius' liking. Remus raised an eyebrow as he stared at Sirius for a further explanation.*

*Sirius snatched the bag containing the necklace from the counter and turned quickly, striding out of the shop to the busy Hogsmeade lane. However, his friends were equally quick to follow him, and he knew he hadn't escaped their questions just yet.*

*'Since when do you buy jewellery for a girl, then?' Peter asked, scoffing slightly as he did.*

*'Since the girl in question has become a good friend and has also gone through hell in the last few months? Is that alright by you?' he replied, dodging a puddle as he continued to walk.*

*'But you've never bought jewellery for anyone ... ever!' Remus stated. 'Even when you were dating Katie, and it was her birthday, you bought her nothing more extravagant than a Honeydukes Premium Chocolate bar. Which, if I remember rightly, you only bought so you could steal chunks of it for yourself,' Remus added with a wry smirk.*

*'Hmm,' Sirius replied, in a non-committal way that fooled exactly no one.*

*'So, why are you buying Sophia a necklace, then?' Remus asked again, persistent as always, earning a glare from Sirius for his efforts.*

*'I've told you, Moony. She's been through hell and deserves something nice. I saw it, thought she would like it, and so I bought it. That's it, really,' Sirius stated, gesturing the finality of his statement with his hands.*

*Remus studied him for a moment longer before giving a small shrug of his shoulders. 'Fine, if you say so.'*

*Sirius relaxed slightly, glad that the questions were over with.*

*'So, can we see it?' Remus asked.*

*'Sure, once we're back at the castle and away from this freezing-arse weather!' Sirius replied jovially, striding off in the direction of the castle, his friends close around him.*

Now that Christmas had passed, all of them were looking forward to the Hogmanay celebrations they were attending. The Marauders had received their kilts by delivery owl the night before they were due to leave to meet Sophia's friends. The five friends had spent the evening playing Wizard's Chess; Remus was still vainly trying to increase Sophia's skill at the game. Hamish had also joined them, his attention being captivated by the moving chess pieces. Sophia had scolded him enough times for him to know that ambushing the pieces still on the board was not allowed, but that still didn't stop him from pouncing upon the pieces that had been removed from game play. Unfortunately for Hamish, the lost pieces were rather angry at having been sacrificed during the game and were therefore more than willing to fight back. Eventually, Remus had had to rescue the cat from a particularly irate Bishop piece that was fighting back with his staff; he settled Hamish on his lap as he plotted his next move.

After losing five games in a row even with James and Sirius both giving her hints and tips, Sophia had finally given up and gone to bed, declaring that *Chess is a stupid game that only dorks can master.* Remus had simply given her a smug grin for a reply; it earned him a hair ruffle as she passed him on her way to bed. The boys had stayed up a little while longer before retreating to their beds, and Sirius had spent a long time contentedly thinking about his enjoyable holiday before finally succumbing to sleep.

\*

'Wake up, Padfoot!' James shouted loudly, only to receive a grunt in reply.

Sirius clung to his pillow tighter in an attempt to re-submerge himself in his pleasant dream that he had just rudely been awakened from.

'Sophia will be annoyed if you're late ...' James teased from across the room. Sirius's eyes snapped open in surprise, and he lurched up into a seated position.

'What the ...?' Sirius quickly looked round the room and realised that he and James were alone. 'What are you talking about?' he whispered urgently.

James broke out in a grin. 'I'm not *blind*, Pads. I'm your best friend for a reason. You bought her a flipping *necklace* for Christmas.'

'Prongs, I have no idea what you are on about,' Sirius scoffed, as nonchalantly as he could; he could tell by the stare James was giving him that he hadn't fooled his best friend.

James' reply confirmed this theory. 'Pads, you can't fool me.'

Sirius was beginning to feel extremely wrong-footed, and panicked slightly. 'Does Remus know? Do you think *she* knows?'

'Remus believed you when you said you only bought it for her due to everything that she's been through. If you ask me, though, I think that he's ignoring his *extra* senses in favour of living in blissful ignorance. As for Sophia, I have no idea she's a girl, and who of us can figure them out, anyway?' James said with a snort of laughter as he dropped onto Remus' bed; it was next to Sirius'.

'Hmm, suppose you're right there,' Sirius grudgingly agreed.

'Course I'm right, I'm *always* right. You just normally choose to ignore me, which, more often than not, lands us *both* in detention,' James stated.

Sirius grinned. 'Yeah, but my way is always so much more fun than your way.'

James snorted quietly. 'Yeah, it normally is ... right up until I'm scrubbing out cauldrons listening to Flitch mutter about thumb screws.' James smiled before continuing. 'But,

going back to Sophia, why didn't you talk to me?"

'I don't know,' Sirius replied with a shrug of his shoulders. 'I guess after what Remus told me back at the beginning of term and then everything she went through, I just tried to push all my feelings to one side.' He played with the corner of his duvet as he spoke in an effort to avoid James's intense scrutiny. He only looked up when he heard James chuckling.

'I never thought I'd see the day Padfoot's all grown up! My ickle, ickle baby,' James mocked in a babyish voice.

'Shut up!' Sirius retorted playfully, hitting James with his pillow.

James's laughter subsided slowly as he spoke again, 'Listen, in all seriousness, if you feel this strongly about her, I really don't see what's holding you back. Remus only cautioned you before because he was worried it would just be a fling. I'm sure that if he knew you felt this way about her, he wouldn't stand in your way, and it seems to me as if Sophia is starting to move on, too. If you want my advice go for it.'

'This coming from the guy who has been chasing Lily since fourth year with so much success,' Sirius said sarcastically.

'Hey, at least I'm going for what I want. I'll have no regrets. Can you say the same?' James raised an eyebrow at Sirius as he stood up again. There was a moment of silence as the two friends stared at each other and Sirius thought about what James was telling him. 'Now, will you get up? Sophia really will hex you if you make us all late.'

'Yeah. I'll be down in fifteen minutes.' James nodded and started to leave the room. 'Hey Prongs,' he said as James stopped at the door and turned to face him, 'thanks.'

'Not a problem.' His serious expression turned mischievous once more. 'It's good to know that her name can be such an effective wake-up call.' James darted out the room as a pillow rebounded off the doorframe.

At eleven o' clock, the Marauders and Sophia found themselves in the Headmaster's office, preparing to leave Hogwarts for the next couple of days.

'I trust you are all ready for your short vacation?' Dumbledore asked as he shut the door to his office.

'Yes, thank you, Headmaster,' Sophia replied; Sirius noticed she blushed slightly. He knew that she must be feeling slightly uncomfortable the man was her great-uncle, but neither would show anything more than a student-teacher relationship as James and Peter still hadn't been informed of that secret. 'Thank you for letting us use your Floo connection.'

'Nonsense, your parents wrote and explained the situation; it was the least I could do.' He smiled at group of friends kindly before turning to reach for the pot of Floo powder on the mantelpiece. He opened the ornate box carefully and presented it to each of them in turn as they each prepared to Floo to Sophia's home.

\*

Sirius stepped out of the fireplace into a cosy sitting room and saw that Melanie and Lucy were already there; he gave them both a smile in greeting. Sophia and Remus were also in the room; next to them was a woman who Sirius presumed was Sophia's mother. His suspicions were confirmed when he caught sight of the woman's brilliant blue eyes. It wasn't long before they were joined by Peter and then James.

'Mum, this is Remus, Sirius, Peter and James,' Sophia said, gesturing to each of them in turn; they each gave a small wave to Sophia's mother as their names were mentioned. 'Everyone, this is my mum Anwen.'

The witch gave them a kind smile. 'It's lovely to finally meet you all. I hope that you will enjoy this trip to our friends. I trust that Sophia has explained that they are Muggles?' All the Marauders nodded. 'Good, though you may keep hold of your wands for the duration of the trip; after all, we are still in uncertain times. We're just waiting on Niahm, and Alasdair has yet to come back from collecting Lily, although he shouldn't be much longer.'

It was then that the flames turned green once more and Niahm emerged from the fireplace, dusting off the residue soot before greeting Anwen. Judging by the way the girls behaved towards Anwen and how they held themselves, Sirius guessed that they had all been to Sophia's home before. It was only a few minutes later that they heard voices coming from the back of the house.

'Look who I found!' A deep voice sounded through the house; Sirius saw a rather burly, and slightly intimidating, man come through the door, closely followed by Lily.

'Merlin, Anwen we seem to have been invaded by teenagers!' He feigned shock and horror as Sophia started giggling.

'Oh, Alasdair, stop your teasing and give your daughter a hug,' Anwen admonished as Sophia stepped forward into her father's open arms.

'Good to see you, lass,' the man said softly as he enveloped his daughter.

'Good to see you too, Dad.' As they released one another, Sophia turned to face the Marauders with a smile, 'You know the girls, but these are Remus, Sirius, Peter and James, my friends from Hogwarts.'

'Pleasure to meet you. I'm Alasdair.' The Marauders all quickly nodded in greeting before Alasdair spoke again. 'We should probably all get a move on. I told Donald we would arrive sometime after two.' With that, everyone slowly left the house, and Alasdair signalled for the Knight Bus.

The group went up to the uppermost deck, finding a group of seats towards the back of the bus. Anwen and Alistair sat slightly in front of the teenagers, who chose the sofa-type seats that ran along the back of the bus. Sirius had only just got himself seated when the bus lurched violently forwards, the force of the movement propelling him backwards. The girls, however, had been slower in getting their seats sorted, resulting in Melanie flying into a stunned Lily; Sophia also lost her balance, causing her to land half in Sirius' lap. Instinctively, he gripped her waist to steady her; she had reached out both her hands; one grabbed the back of the sofa as the other gripped his thigh. A few moments later, as the acceleration of the bus eased, Sirius saw Sophia blush as she quickly let go of her grip on his leg. Gently, albeit slightly reluctantly, he relaxed his own grip, allowing her to slide into the space beside him.

'Thanks,' she said quietly, her eyes darting nervously between him and her lap.

'Welcome,' he replied, feeling the tension between the pair of them. He was glad that Melanie and Lily were diverting everyone else's attention away from what had just occurred between the pair of them. He knew that, if James had seen it, there would have been numerous comments and significant looks for the rest of the trip. 'It was either grab you or risk you breaking my nose,' he said cheekily, bumping shoulders against her in an attempt to ease the tension.

Sophia laughed, all the worry leaving her face, and Sirius grinned.

For the rest of the journey, all the teenagers jostled against one another as the bus made its manic journey around the UK until, three hours later, they disembarked from the triple-decker purple bus, all slightly shaken, but otherwise fine. Alasdair took the lead, and they all slowly walked through the small Scottish village in his wake. The village was surrounded by high mountains, and the ground was covered by a good amount of snow, making everyone walk carefully lest they slip on any black ice.

When they finally reached the edge of the village, Alasdair led them along a small path that cut through a forest. The snow was thinner on the ground of the pine forest, protected as it was by the trees, though Sirius could see some icicles hanging from the branches of the trees as well. Sirius found his gaze lingering on Sophia's back as she walked ahead of him with Lucy and Niahm. They were all talking animatedly; several times, they all burst out laughing. Each time they did, Sirius found himself smiling at them.

Eventually, they reached the edge of the forest, and Alasdair came to a stop. 'Okay, it's not far now. If you all take out your luggage, I'll restore it to full size, and we'll go up

to the house. I'm sure you could all do with a warm drink after all this walking.' There was a murmur of agreement as they each removed their transfigured luggage bags from their pockets and laid them on the ground. A few waves of his wand later, Alasdair had restored all the bags and turned, once more, to lead them in the direction of the house.

'House', Sirius decided, was not an accurate description. 'Castle' would have been more appropriate. After all, the building was very large and had more than one turret on it. There was a large, arch-shaped door in the centre of the front of the building, and one side of the double door was pinned open. As they neared it, Sirius noticed a man and a woman emerging from inside. They both had wide smiles on their faces, and each hugged Sophia's parents.

'Well, Alasdair, these bairns must be Sophia's friends, I presume,' the man said in a thick Scottish accent. He was similar in build to Alasdair, but slightly shorter, with silver grey hair and dark black eyebrows. He swept his gaze over the teenagers in front of him and smiled warmly at them, the skin around his light blue eyes crinkling. 'Welcome, and I hope you enjoy your time here if you need anything, don't be afraid to ask. We don't stand on ceremony here.'

'Why don't we go inside and get you all warmed up?' The woman spoke with the same accent as her husband, and with an equally friendly tone. She was fairly short, standing at about five foot five, and had light brown hair that hung straight to her shoulders. As she slipped her arm around her husband, they both turned and led the way through the front door.

Upon entering, Sirius struggled to take in the imposing hallway. Immediately facing him, there was a highly polished, wooden staircase that split as it hit the far wall to run up in either direction to two landings. There were oil-painted portraits everywhere, through their subjects did not move, and these were interspersed with a large number of stag horns and the occasional sword and gun that were mounted at various points over the walls. The flagstone floor was covered by a number of Persian rugs. They all followed their hosts through to a room down the corridor to the left after leaving their bags by the stairs.

Once they were in the room, Sirius took a seat on the large sofa in between James and Remus, both of whom seemed to share his awe at the place they had found themselves in; this room was even more impressive than the entrance hall. He was only distracted from taking in his surroundings when he heard Sophia yelp in surprise.

He looked up to see a tall boy with light brown hair standing behind Sophia, covering her eyes. The boy leant forward and whispered something in her ear; Sirius watched as Sophia grinned and grasped the boy's hands with her own and removed them slowly. She turned round to face the boy and hugged him enthusiastically, throwing her arms around his neck, smiling and giggling as she did, while the boy gripped her waist firmly. Sirius was painfully aware of the clench in his gut as the boy proceeded to pick Sophia up and spin her around several times.

'Put the lass down, Hector,' the man with silver hair chuckled. Sirius exhaled the breath he hadn't realised he was holding once Sophia had her feet back on the ground, though she was looking at the boy fondly. Besides, they still held an arm around each other, which meant the twisted feeling in Sirius's gut still hadn't shifted.

'It's alright, Donald. It wouldn't be right if Hector didn't make me dizzy within ten seconds of seeing him, after all,' Sophia said jovially as she patted the boy affectionately. Hector grinned as he tried to ruffle Sophia's hair, something Sirius knew from experience she hated. Sure enough, she ducked and grabbed his wrists, pushing him away from her, each laughing richly.

'Aye, I suppose you have a point there,' Donald replied wryly.

'Good to see you again, Hector,' Alasdair said, shaking the boy's hand; this was swiftly followed by Anwen giving him a hug. It was clear to Sirius that the two families were close, and he began to wonder exactly how close Sophia and this Hector were, or had, been.

'Well, Soph, are ye nay going to introduce me to your friends?' Hector asked. Sirius wouldn't have thought it possible, but his accent was even thicker than his parents'; Sirius struggled to understand him properly.

'I suppose you're right. Donald, Mary, Hector, I would like to introduce you to Lily, Niahm, Melanie, Lucy, Peter, James, Sirius and Remus.' Sophia went round the group as they were seated; each gave a small wave as their name was called.

'Well, it's nice to meet you all though I hope you'll forgive me if I forget your names; it's a lot to take in all at once.' Hector flashed them all a smile, and Sirius noticed that Melanie seemed to have taken quite a shine to him. Well, that was fine Hector could have *her*, providing he kept his hands *off* Sophia. 'Shall I show you all to your rooms?' Hector looked at Sophia for her reaction.

'Yes, I think that would be a great idea. Perhaps we could go out on the estate after we're settled? We've been cooped up all day, and I'm sure we could all use some fresh air.'

'Sure, nay problem.' Again, Hector's beaming smile returned, and Sirius developed an irrational hatred for the boy then and there as he saw Sophia returning it. Hector turned to face the rest of the room, 'Well, follow me, then.'

Hector led them back to the main entrance, where they each picked up their bags and followed him up the staircase, going to the right when it split. Hector was talking as he guided them, but Sirius couldn't understand a word of it due to the heavy accent he assumed he was telling them about the history of the estate and the people in the paintings, if his gesturing hands were anything to go by. Hector led them down a corridor and stopped in front of a dark, wooden door.

'Sophia said that you were all use to sleeping in the same rooms, so Mum thought it might be best to stick to that arrangement, if it's okay by you?'

'Yes, Hector, that's fine,' Sophia affirmed.

'Okay, well, this room here is for you four boys, then, and the room over there,' he pointed to a door down the corridor on the left as he spoke, 'is for the girls. Sophia kens the house pretty well, so if you have any questions, she should be able to help, and if not, she kens where to find us. Anyway, I'll let you all get settled. Sophia, when you are all ready to go outside, come find me I'll be in my room.' Hector turned and left back down the corridor in the direction of the stairs, leaving the rest of them standing outside their rooms.

'Okay, we'll go and unpack quickly, and I would suggest you do the same. We'll come and knock on your door in say, half an hour, and then we can go outside for a bit, if you like?' Sophia asked the group.

'Sounds like a good idea I think a battle of the sexes snowball fight could be on the cards,' James replied, with a wicked grin.

'I'm sure Hector would be up for that. That's settled, then; I suggest you wrap up warmly, and we'll see you in thirty minutes.' Sophia gave the boys one last smile and then disappeared down the hall with the rest of the girls into their bedroom, leaving the boys to enter theirs.

The room was slightly bigger than the Marauders' bedroom in Gryffindor Tower and had a pair of single beds on either side of the room with two cherry wood wardrobes positioned on either side of the white-framed sash window which overlooked the grounds. On the right-hand side of the bedroom, there was a door that went through to a small en-suite bathroom. James and Sirius claimed the two beds on the left hand side of the room, leaving Remus and Peter with the other two.

'Can you believe this place?' Peter said excitedly as all the boys started unpacking their belongings.

'I know it's huge! They seem really nice, too,' James said, echoing Peter's enthusiasm.

'I suppose so; I can't understand what that Hector bloke is saying, though,' Sirius grumbled. 'Besides, where does he get off swinging Sophia round like that?'

'Hector?' Remus asked curiously. 'He and Sophia have been friends for *years*. She told me that they've seen each other every time she's been up to visit her grandmother since she was small.'



'Well, if you ask me, he wants to be a lot more than "just friends" with her,' Sirius huffed, venting his frustrations by yanking his jumper free from his bag.

'No way, I think you're reading too much into it, Pads,' James said confidently, giving Sirius a quick slap on the back as he passed to go to one of the wardrobes.

Sirius didn't say anything further, lest Remus grow suspicious, but he fervently hoped that James was right.

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**Author's Notes:**

Scottish word definitions:

'Bairns' children.

'Aye' yes.

'Nay' no or not.

'Kens' knows.

I can promise you, from living in Scotland for the last fifteen years, people really do use these words in everyday speech. Sometimes, it's very confusing!

## Chapter 16: Hogmanay

*Chapter 16 of 23*

Finally, the New Year's Eve celebrations take place.

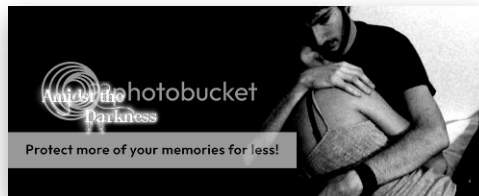
**Disclaimer:** Everything you recognise still belongs to JK Rowling. I'm just playing with her wonderful creations.

**Author Note's:** Firstly, I would like to wish all the readers and PP admins a belated Merry Christmas. I hope it was a good one for you all. I'd hoped to get this chapter up before Christmas, but time just vanished on me. Beta kudos, as always, goes to DracoGurlForever thank you! Also, thank you if you left me a review for the previous chapter.

And, in exciting news, my wonderful friend, Meda, gifted me with another beautiful banner for this story for Christmas. I love it because it is so completely Sirius and Sophia.

So, without further ado, here is the chapter, and if you would like to leave a review, I would love to know what you think of it.

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### Chapter 16: Hogmanay

'So, Soph, what's the situation with Hector?' Melanie asked as soon as the door to their bedroom was closed.

'Huh?' Sophia asked. 'He's just a good friend, and that's all why?' She put her bag on one of the beds and looked at Melanie curiously, only to see that her friend was looking ever-so-slightly flushed. 'You like him, don't you?' Sophia exclaimed, attracting the attention of the other three girls as well.

The flush deepened on Melanie's cheeks. 'Maybe,' she replied evasively. 'It's not as if he's bad looking, is it? You and he seem very friendly, though.'

Sophia noted the slight slump of Melanie's shoulders as she finished speaking. 'Melanie, there is nothing more than friendship between Hector and me, nor has there ever been anything there. We've just spent a lot of time together growing up after all, I've known him longer than I've known any of you here. We don't get to see each other that often these days, so, when we do, we have a tendency to get a bit excited. You should ask him to dance this evening; he's really good, so you'd be in safe hands,' Sophia replied with a smirk and a wink.

'Maybe I will,' Melanie replied shyly; all five girls started giggling.

The girls quickly unpacked their things before wrapping themselves up in warm clothes for the snowball fight. The Marauders were waiting in the hall for them, and Sophia quickly led them to Hector's room. After a quick knock, Hector emerged.

'So, what we doing?' he asked.

'Two words snowball fight,' Sophia replied with a grin.

'Brilliant,' came Hector's reply. 'Glad to see yer all suitably dressed, too. It's Baltic out there!'

The teenagers all made their way outside, and the snowball fight began boys against girls. For the next hour, the air was filled with the sound of laughter and shrieks as snowballs flew back and forth. Sophia concentrated her efforts on Hector, Remus and Sirius, whooping with pride when she managed to hit Sirius squarely on the back of the head and Remus squarely on the backside. However, it was Lily and Hector who had the best aims; apparently, the others had relied on magic to help guide their snowballs for too long. Eventually, the sky grew dark and the game came to an end, with the boys claiming victory.

'What do you want to do now?' Hector asked, looking around the group, rubbing his hands together for warmth.

'Not sure; what time is it, anyway?' Sophia muttered to herself as she looked at her watch. 'Holy moley, it's gone four o' clock! We need to start getting ready!'

'Getting ready for what?' Peter enquired.

'For tonight, of course!' Sophia exclaimed.

'Soph, the meal isn't until seven thirty. You can't *possibly* need three hours to get ready?' Remus asked, his face clearly showing his disbelief.

'Of course we do!' she responded, sounding equally shocked. 'Remus, we have one bathroom, and five girls you do the math. Anyway, we can't waste any more time arguing with you lot, so we'll meet you in the entrance hall at twenty past seven, okay?'

'Yeah ... okay, then,' Remus replied, still looking completely bewildered.

'Soph, I have to be with my parents in the ballroom from seven, so I'll see you in there. We are all at the same table, so come find me, and I'll take you to it,' Hector said before Sophia left. She nodded her understanding, and the five girls left to go back to the castle.

The girls took turns showering before also taking turns to help each other apply makeup and doing their hair. Sophia had decided to wear her hair up in a loose chignon; she had left a few curls free to frame her face. It seemed completely paradoxical that a hair style that was supposed to look slightly messy and natural took so long to perfect, she thought.

She had sought out Lucy's help to apply her make-up; the mascara made her naturally long and curly eyelashes look even longer and thicker. Her dress looked beautiful on her if she did say so herself, she thought wryly and she finished it off by putting on the necklace that Sirius had given her for Christmas.

'Everybody ready?' Lily asked. The four other girls nodded their heads, and they all turned to leave the room.

The Marauders were waiting for the five girls at the bottom of the stairs.

'Wow ... you look ... just wow,' James stuttered quietly, staring at Lily, who blushed slightly in reply.

'Well, don't you all look smart,' Sophia said cheerily as she got to the bottom of the stairs and saw the boys, who were all dressed in their kilts.

'Indeed they do!' Naimh chimed in, looking over each of the boys in turn.

'Shall we go, then?' Peter asked excitedly.

'Yeah, I would say so,' Sophia replied. 'The ballroom is down the corridor and to the left.' Sophia pointed in the right direction; Remus led the way as everyone else followed. Sophia was about to move off when Sirius held her arm.

'What's wrong?' she asked quietly, quickly searching his face for a clue to what the problem was.

'Nothing ... I ... just wanted to say that you look really beautiful tonight, actually,' he replied, looking deeply into her eyes. She felt her cheeks flush and found that she couldn't keep his gaze. 'You're wearing the necklace I gave you,' he commented quietly, his gaze fixed on the flowers resting on her chest.

'Yeah,' she replied, unconsciously touching the flowers. 'I thought it looked nice with the dress.' He looked back up to her and smiled brightly, causing her breath to catch slightly. In a desperate attempt to compose herself, she cleared her throat. 'Anyway, we should probably get going; they'll wonder what's happened to us.'

The ballroom had been decorated with a Scottish theme the dark panelled walls were covered with tartan banners, and the circular tables were covered with crisp, white linen cloths, on which were sitting vases filled with heather and thistles. The tables were arranged around the outer edges of the room in order to create a dance floor in front of the raised stage at the far end of the hall.

They located Hector, who led them to a table on the right-hand side of the room, near to the stage. Sophia sat down next to Lily, and Sirius sat on her other side, ready for the meal to be served at eight. At the arrival of the main course, Sophia had been forced to stifle her giggles at Lily's face when she saw the haggis.

'Good grief, Sophia,' Lily exclaimed. 'It looks vile!' For added effect, she prodded it suspiciously with her fork, wrinkling her nose up as she did so.

'Just try it, Lily,' Sophia answered.

'Aye, try it,' Hector added, taking a bite of his own haggis and smiling at her.

'I'm with Lily,' Lucy stated. 'It looks disgusting, and smells revolting, too.'

'I'll try it,' Sirius said; even though his stomach was churning at the idea, he was determined not to be outdone by Hector. Summoning his Gryffindor bravery, he sliced off a section of haggis, smothered it with potato in an effort to hide the food, or so it seemed, and shoved it straight in his mouth. Chewing quickly, he swallowed and grinned. 'Not bad,' he answered, to the unspoken question of his friends.

Seeing Sirius eat it and not die or vomit apparently gave the rest of the boys the push they need to try the haggis, too. After they had all eaten it successfully, Melanie and Naimh also braved it. While they weren't overly enthusiastic about it, they did say it wasn't completely unpleasant.

'Come on, you two, just try one bite,' Sophia coaxed.

Lily and Lucy looked at one another.

'I will if you will,' Lily said.

Lucy chewed on her lip as she looked at the food on her plate. Eventually, she gave a nod, and both girls simultaneously took a small bite. After two chews, their faces screwed up in distaste before they swallowed hurriedly and both reached for their glasses of water. The whole table laughed at their responses as both girls swore one bite of haggis was enough to last them the rest of their lives.

After the meal had drawn to a close, Donald appeared on the stage to address the guests and introduce the ceilidh band who would be providing the music for the evening. At the end of his short speech, he handed over control to the band.

'Good evening, everybody!' said the man playing the fiddle. 'Our first dance for the evening is the Military Two Step, so, gents, if you would like to take your partner onto the floor, we will run through the steps quickly before the dance starts.'

A few couples started to walk onto the dance floor, including Donald and Mary and Sophia's parents. Hector, who had been sitting next to Melanie through the meal, stood and asked if she would like to dance. Sophia suppressed a giggle as Melanie turned beet red before nodding in agreement and leaving the table. James, Remus, and Peter shifted about nervously; none of them apparently seemed to want to follow Hector's lead, but Sirius stood and held out his hand to Sophia.

'Well, Sophia would you care to dance?'

'I would love to,' she replied as she took his hand, giving him a friendly smile as she did so. When they reached their spot on the dance floor, Sirius leaned into her and whispered in her ear.

'I'm counting on you to make me look good; you know that, don't you?'

She couldn't help but giggle slightly as he did that partly due to what he was saying, but also because of the feel of his breath on her bare neck, which quickly sent goosebumps down her arms and spine. She nodded slightly to confirm that she would do her best.

All though the dance, Sophia gave Sirius short instructions about what he was supposed to be doing; after a few repetitions he was beginning to get the hang of it. Their polka was becoming fast and furious, causing them to start overtaking other couples as they toured the dance floor. By the time the band finished, Sophia was out of breath and dizzy, but she couldn't stop smiling.

'Well done! That was great for your first ceilidh dance,' she told Sirius as they walked back to the table.

'You know, I think I can see why you like this so much. I never would have guessed that dancing in a skirt could be so much fun!'

'Sirius! It's not a skirt!' she retorted, giving him a playful slap as she did so, which caused him to let out a bark of laughter.

Sophia danced the next dance with Remus, and found that he didn't have the same natural flair for dancing that Sirius did. Eventually, after nearly falling over their feet during one polka, Remus resorted to lifting Sophia cleanly off her feet and spinning her round for the polka sections, much to her amusement. The second dance also saw Lily and James up on the dance floor together, though Sophia noticed that they kept a respectful distance from one another. Still, it was a step in the right direction, as far as she was concerned.

Sophia partnered James for the third dance, which was the Flying Scotsman the first set dance of the evening. Sophia and James were in a set with Remus and Lily, Sirius and Niamh, and Peter and Lucy; they had all subtly decided to leave Melanie and Hector at their table alone.

The dance actually went reasonably well, apart from when Sophia and James got slightly carried away during one part of the dance and collided rather forcefully with the top two couples of another set. Not that either of them were bothered by the angry glares they received after doing it they were laughing too much to notice.

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'Well, I'm far too hot in here think I might go outside for a moment,' Sophia said, fruitlessly trying to fan herself with her hands.

'Think I might join you, if that's okay?' Sirius asked. Since he'd seen her walk down the stairs to the entrance hall, he'd wanted to get her alone to talk to her and ask her on a date, and this seemed the perfect opportunity.

'Sure,' she replied with a smile.

The night was perfectly still, with only a light covering of clouds in the sky, and the snow-covered ground reflected the light from the moon and the stars in an eerie fashion. They followed the cleared path around the edge of the castle in silence for a few minutes, Sirius staring at her surreptitiously all the while.

The ferocity of the dancing had caused her bun to start slowly unravelling; as a result, more strands of hair framed her face and neck, and her cheeks were red from the physical exertion. All of this gave her quite a dishevelled look, but, to Sirius, she still looked just as beautiful as she had at the start of the evening, when he had seen her walk down the stairs.

He'd watched her dance all evening, unable to do anything but smile at her as she skipped across the dance floor. He'd never seen her look so happy and alive it was almost like she was a different person.

'So, you having fun, then?' she asked Sirius, breaking his silent study of her.

'Yeah, it's great. I take it that you're enjoying yourself, too you haven't stopped smiling all night,' he chuckled.

'Oh, I just love all this. I can't wait until we do the Strip the Willow dance!'

Sirius's eyebrow shot up at this comment; all thoughts of his previous intentions were briefly lost as he seized the opportunity to have a bit of fun. 'My, that does sound interesting,' he said slyly.

'What?' she replied, sounding confused.

She really can be slow on the uptake on some occasions, he thought to himself. 'Strip the Willow?' he repeated, enunciating his words as salaciously as he could.

'Sirius! Get your mind out of the gutter!' He let out a bark of laughter when he saw the look of shock and righteous anger on her face.

'You are so gullible! I love it,' he said, putting his arm around her shoulders and giving her a squeeze as they continued walking, then leaving his arm casually draped round her. 'So, what's so great about this dance, then, anyway?'

Sophia's anger seemed to have passed as she enlightened him. 'Well, it's really easy and it's just a whole load of spinning done really quickly.'

'You'll have to partner me for it,' he replied.

'Okay, but you'll have to be the one to tell Hector. I always partner him for it, although I dare say he'll be happy to dance it with Melanie this year,' Sophia chuckled.

'You're probably not wrong there,' Sirius replied. There was a brief silence as Sirius attempted to steady his nerves before he spoke again. 'Soph,' he started, stopping gracefully and turning her to face him. She looked up at him curiously, and he felt his heart rate increase exponentially. 'I wondered if'

'There you are!' Hector appeared from around the corner, and Sirius let out an internal groan.

What's with this twerp? Why can't he just bugger off somewhere and leave Sophia alone? he thought bitterly, while doing his best to smile politely at the offending 'twerp.'

'You've got to get back inside it's nearly midnight!' Hector had reached them now, smiling broadly, seemingly oblivious to the fact that he had interrupted a private conversation. He linked arms with Sophia and proceeded to pull her in the direction of the front door again. Sirius sighed resignedly and followed the pair back inside.

Inside the hall, everyone was lining up around the hall to form a large circle. Sirius slotted himself into the line next to Sophia and Lucy and copied everyone else by holding hands with the person next to him. The leader of the ceilidh band was counting down to the New Year; as he reached zero, the whole hall erupted into cheers of 'Happy New Year!' The band immediately started up again, and Sirius listened as Sophia and everyone about him began to sing.

'Should auld acquaintance be forgot,

and never brought to mind ?

Should auld acquaintance be forgot,

and auld lang syne ?

For auld lang syne, my jo,

for auld lang syne,

we'll tak a cup o' kindness yet,

for auld lang syne.'

Sophia had started to swing her arms back and forth as the singing had continued, and had then let go of his hand to cross her arms over her chest. Sirius looked around the hall quickly to see everyone crossing their arms over their chest before grasping hands with their neighbour again, so he followed suit. Sophia gave him a wide smile as she continued to sing.

'And surely ye'll be your pint-stowp!

and surely I'll be mine!

And we'll tak a cup o' kindness yet,

for auld lang syne.'

Sirius watched in bewilderment as everyone around the circle started bouncing in place; as the chorus started, he felt himself being pulled forward by Sophia as everyone in the hall ran into the centre of the circle.

'For auld lang syne, my jo,

for auld lang syne,'

He'd barely managed to keep up with her before she stopped and ran backwards again to where they had started. The second time, he was quicker and felt more sure-footed as they raced to the centre of the circle once more.

'We'll tak a cup o' kindness yet,

for auld lang syne.'

As the band played the last notes of the song, everyone cheered and clapped before wishing everyone around them a Happy New Year once more.

'Happy New Year, Sirius,' Sophia said, grinning broadly as she hugged him tightly.

His hands wrapped around her waist and lifted her slightly off the ground. 'Happy New Year, Soph. I hope it's a good one for you.'

~~~~~

At some time after three in the morning, the girls returned to their bedroom; all of them instantly went to bed, exhausted from their long and eventful day. Sophia, however, lay on her back, unable to sleep. Her body was still buzzing from the ceilidh and her head was swimming with thoughts about Sirius.

*He told me I looked beautiful,* she thought to herself, unable to stop a smile.

*He was probably just being nice,* another voice in her head replied. *Besides, you've already decided that you don't want to risk the friendship you have with him ... right?*

*Yes, but when we outside together, I'm sure he was trying to tell me something before Hector arrived; and the way he danced ... it was amazing,* the first voice countered, a slightly wistful tone to it now.

*Yes, but he's Sirius he can make any girl feel special, and that's why it probably didn't mean anything to him; he just sees you as a friend. You know that, and if you keep up with these thoughts, you'll only make it worse for yourself,* the second voice argued, becoming more stern in its attempts to crush the first voice's wild imagination.

The argument continued in her head until exhaustion finally got the better of her and she fell asleep.

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#### Author's Notes:

'Auld Lang Syne' was written by the Scottish Poet Robert Burns, and it is traditionally sung at the chiming of the bells on New Year's Eve. There are several more verses, but typically only the first two verses are sung at New Year. It's also often sung at the end of Scottish wedding receptions or ceilidh and on Burn's Night.

If anyone ever gets the opportunity to go to a real Scottish ceilidh, I cannot recommend it enough. They are full of fun, laughter and dancing just be warned, they really can cause bruises. I know this from personal experience! In case anyone is interested in what some of the dances look like, try the following videos on You Tube:

[Military Two Step](#)

[Strip the Willow](#)

[Auld Lang Syne](#)

(I particularly like the part where he says, 'Please be careful!' It's a good warning because I have fallen over and brought down two people on top of me doing the running in and running out!)

## Chapter 17: Confusion and Chaos Reigns

Sirius spends some time contemplating his next move while Sophia deals with her own confused emotions.

**Disclaimer:** Everything you recognise belongs to JK Rowling.

**Author's Notes:** Once again, I must thank DracoGurlFurever for her superb beta work on this chapter. Also, thank to you for sticking with me and this story this far. I hope you like this chapter, and if you have any comments, I would love to hear from you. Thanks.

A couple of chapters ago, I posted a note about my pony being ill. Well, just as an update to that, his condition did improve slightly but then unfortunately, he relapsed, and there was nothing else for us to try. He was put to sleep peacefully on New Year's Eve. It was a horrible decision to make, and it was extremely upsetting, but I know it was for the best and he's now free from pain and at peace.



## Chapter 17: Confusion and Chaos Reigns

Sirius woke suddenly to the sound of James cursing loudly. His whole body felt as heavy as a lead weight, and he barely managed to keep his eyes open as he heard Remus speak from across the room.

'What is Merlin!' Remus shouted before groaning loudly. 'Oh, my muscles hurt!'

'I know!' James sounded slightly strangled as he spoke.

'You pair of babies!' Sirius huffed at the pair of them as he summoned his brain back from sleep so that he could sit up in his bed. 'You can't possibly be that sore after a bit of danc oh, bloody hell!' Sirius exclaimed. All the muscles in his arms, legs, and stomach burned as he tried to move. His calf muscles felt unbelievably tight, and his arms shook with effort as he tried to support his weight on them. He quickly allowed himself to flop back into the bed, thoughts of getting up and moving immediately far from his mind. It just hurt too much; even the longest game of Quidditch had never made him feel this bad.

'See?' Remus and James replied smugly, in unison.

'What is all the racket about, anyway?' Peter said groggily, his speech half-muffled by his pillow. 'Can't a guy sleep in peace?'

'Have you tried to move yet, Wormtail?' Remus asked.

'No, why?' There was a slight pause as Sirius heard Peter's bedcovers rustle. 'Oh, bloody hell, that hurts!'

'Precisely,' James said wryly. 'I think, if we just move really slowly, it will be better. Okay, on the count of three, we'll all try to get out of bed. One. Two. Three.'

After a few minutes of silence, Sirius spoke. 'Why didn't you move, Prongs?'

'Me? You didn't move, either!'

'No, because I was waiting to see how much it hurt you to move!'

'Thank you very much, then,' James said sarcastically. 'Well, we can't very well stay here all day, can we? We have to try to get up no matter how much it hurts.'

With that, all four boys carefully moved around in their beds. After much muttered curse words and sharp intakes of breath, they all managed to get into a sitting position, although none of them dared to try to stand up just yet; their thigh and calf muscles were still protesting after being forced to shift position.

'Merlin's pants, Pads look at your arm!' Peter exclaimed, his eyes wide and startled.

Sirius gingerly lifted up his left arm, his shoulder muscles just as sore as the rest of his body. Sure enough, along the inside of his upper arm was a very large purplish bruise, a yellowish green outer bruise surrounding it.

'Blimey, I guess Sophia wasn't kidding when she said these ceilidhs leave you with a bruise, was she?' The other three boys all started examining their arms to find that they too held similar marks, although none was quite as impressive as Sirius'.

Sirius was sure his was worse from dancing the final dance Strip the Willow with Sophia. They had gone at about twice the speed of everyone else as they had spun their way down the line. He had barely managed to keep his feet under him at one point, and he'd collided with Sophia with some force, linking his arm with hers quickly, trying to steady himself. Sophia, though, had been laughing as she quickly spun on her heel round him before letting go of him once more. By the time they had finished, he had been dizzy and out of breath but smiling broadly, fully understanding at last Sophia's enthusiasm for ceilidhs.

An hour later, the boys had managed to stand and had done their best to stretch out their muscles, easing the pain enough for them to get dressed and go downstairs. They found their way to the dining room, only to see that everyone else was already present, and they readily helped themselves to the buffet breakfast that was spread over the table.

'Good day, gentlemen, I trust that you slept well?' Mary asked.

'Yes, thank you, although getting up this morning was a different story entirely,' James responded jovially. 'I think we all pulled muscles we didn't even know existed.'

'Tell us about it,' Lucy stated as everyone round the table chuckled softly. 'Sophia was the only one in our room who could move with relative ease.'

'I'm just more accustomed to it, that's all,' Sophia said with a smile.

'How's your arm today, Sophia?' Sirius asked, eating a mouthful of porridge.

Sophia held her arm up for all to see. 'I'd say, by the size and colour of this little beauty, I had a very good night last night,' she grinned.

'You really are weird,' Remus said, an affectionate tone in his voice, softly shaking his head in disbelief.

'Only just worked that one out?' James chuckled, giving Sophia a wink as he did.

'Hey! What is this? "Pick on Sophia Day" or something?' Sophia shot back, failing to suppress her amusement at their taunts.

'I won't have anyone picking on my daughter,' Alasdair said sternly, causing James and Remus to jerk in surprise and pale slightly in fear. Alasdair pinned them both with a steely gaze as the tension around the table grew before he spoke again. 'That's my job,' he stated, breaking into a grin and letting out a deep belly laugh.

Remus and James let out a big sigh of relief before joining in with the rest of the table in their laughter.

'Dad!' Sophia exclaimed, frustration evident in her tone.

'Sorry, lass, I couldn't resist. Your faces were a picture!' Again, Alasdair let out a loud laugh before he continued eating his breakfast.

'Anyway,' Sophia said pointedly, 'Mum, Dad, and I are going to visit my Grandmother this afternoon. Will you all be okay to stay here with Hector?' The Marauders and the girls all murmured their agreement. 'Good, we shouldn't be too long only a couple of hours or so.'

That afternoon, once Sophia and her parents had left, the rest of the teenagers settled themselves in a room Hector called 'The Snug.' It was a cosy room; the fire crackled away merrily, warding off the winter chill from outside. It reminded Sirius somewhat of the Gryffindor common room, with its large comfortable sofas and thick rugs under foot.

Hector opened the door of a cupboard to reveal a selection of small boxes, each about the size of a book, with brightly coloured drawings and text on them. Hector told them to pick whichever one most appealed to them, and they would watch it on the television. Unsurprisingly, James was quick to select a film that shared his name. Hector's broad grin at the selection assured Sirius that James had made a fluke good choice as they all settled on the sofas to watch.

Despite knowing a small amount about televisions, it was an interesting concept to Sirius, one that he would be keen to learn more about. He was longing to ask questions about how it worked, but he couldn't do that without raising suspicions, so he was forced to sit in silence and let the moving pictures on the glass fronted box wash over him. Perhaps it was something he could ask Sophia about sometime.

The James on the screen seemed to make a living by travelling over the world killing the bad guys and getting the girls. However, this guy was also Scottish, and Sirius couldn't help but think of how another Scottish berk had stopped *him* from getting the girl last night. Well, maybe that wasn't entirely fair yes, Hector had interrupted them, but it hadn't been on purpose, and really, he'd been very hospitable to all of them since their arrival. Also, Hector seemed a lot more interested in Melanie than he was in Sophia, so that was just fine.

Sirius wondered what the best plan of action would be now, after coming so close to asking Sophia out the night before should he spend time planning his next move, or should he just remain as spontaneous as he could? He decided that, up until now, spontaneity had been working well for him; given how much time he now spent with Sophia at Hogwarts, he was sure he wouldn't have to wait long until the next opportunity presented itself.

His ponderings were cut dramatically short when the movie showed a blonde girl coming out of the sea in a white bikini. Yes, *this* James bloke certainly did have all the luck.

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Sophia was relieved to return to Hogwarts. She'd had a lovely time at the Hogmanay ceilidh, and dancing with Sirius had definitely made the night one she would always remember, but at the same time it had thrown all her emotions into chaos. Sirius now occupied her thoughts ninety percent of the time; each time she saw him or spoke to him, it got worse. She analysed everything he said or did around her to look for any clue that he might return her feelings, but even if she did spot something that might confirm her hopes, the pessimistic side of her brain dismissed it as wishful thinking. She refused to broach the subject with him because she was terrified of receiving a negative answer, not only for the obvious reasons of fearing rejection but also because she worried how something like that would impact their friendship.

Her reactions had also not escaped her mother's notice, and Sophia had faced a torrent of questions about Sirius when they had been to visit her Grandmother. Luckily, her mother had not brought up her suspicions in front of her father, or else it would have been very awkward.

It was almost a relief when classes started again, as it gave her something else to focus her energy on. However, this also meant that she had to endure the torture of Charms class with Sirius, not to mention the free periods that they shared alone. This was made worse on the second Monday back as Sirius was in a particularly mischievous mood and spent most of the Charms lesson trying to annoy her by pinching her side or knee and trying to whisper things to her. How he never got caught by Professor Flitwick, she didn't know, but she was thankful that she escaped without a detention and her cheeks turning only slightly pink.

The next day, this slow torture continued as she and Sirius shared a free double period between break and lunch while Remus and Lily were at History of Magic and James and Peter went to Astronomy.

'Oh, can we *please* go outside?' Sirius whined, tossing his quill down on his Charms book. They had taken up their usual seat in the Gryffindor common room, but the weather today was sunny, with only a slight nip in the air that a Warming Charm would fend off easily.

'Sirius, you know as well as I do that we won't work if we go outside. If you want to go outside, then I'm not stopping you, but I have to get this essay done.' Sophia didn't look up from her work as she answered him. It was the fourth time that he'd asked the same question in half an hour.

'It'll be no fun if I go out there by myself. You can't honestly want to be cooped up in here when the weather is this good. Who knows how long we'll have to wait for another day like this? I *promise* that I'll work we can sit by the beech tree,' he pleaded.

Sophia eyed him suspiciously, and he gave her a puppy-dog look which made her stomach do a flip-flop. It was the last push that was needed to break her resolve.

'Fine! We'll go outside, but you had better try and work, Sirius this essay has *got* to be finished for Friday.'

With that, Sirius eagerly packed up his things; Sophia took her time, and they walked down into the grounds together. Once they reached the beech tree, they sat down beside one another and pulled out their books again.

About ten minutes after starting, Sirius broke the silence and asked Sophia a question about the essay. Gradually, as time wore on and more questions were asked, the pair slowly lost their focus, as they were prone to do, and the conversation took a turn away from school work.

'You know something,' Sirius started, staring at her with a contemplative look on his face and causing her to feel slightly uncomfortable.

'What?'

'You look a bit like a yucca plant with your hair like that,' he replied before letting out a bark of laughter. Sophia felt her hair with her left hand, a soft frown appearing on her face as she did. Her hair had been annoying her while she was studying, and so she had twisted it roughly up in a bun; she could feel that there were indeed large pieces of hair sticking straight up in the air above her head.

'Charming,' she replied sarcastically, picking up her Charms book and playfully hitting him with it. 'You really know how to make a girl feel good.'

'Always a pleasure,' he retorted, with his trade mark grin, which caused her to roll her eyes. She needed to show him that two could play this game and racked her brain to find something that she could throw back at him. Smirking internally, she carried on with their conversation.

'Well, anyway. Moving on from your *brilliant* flattery techniques, have you heard what Peter has to take care of for his Care of Magical Creatures class?' she asked

innocently.

'Yeah I did hear him mention something what was it ... it's like a pig-type creature, isn't it?'

'That's right a Tebo. Apparently, Professor Kettleburn had real trouble getting the Ministry to allow him to have a few here. There's all sorts of charms on the pen to stop them disappearing. I think it's a bit of a shame that they have to be kept outside, though especially as its still winter at the moment, and they're originally from Africa,' she said.

'Haven't you heard how much mess they make? I mean, you could hardly keep it in your bedroom, could you?' Sirius said with a dismissive laugh.

'Well, why not? *You* stay inside, don't you?' she asked, raising an eyebrow.

'What?' Sirius shouted; Sophia started laughing. 'That was below the belt.' He theatrically clutched his heart, pretending to be mortally wounded.

Sophia continued to laugh at him, looking smug.

'You know, I think that calls for payback ...' Sirius' face changed into the look he usually got before playing a particularly good prank; Sophia suddenly stopped laughing and started to look worried.

'Sirius ... what are you going to do?'

He drew closer to her in a predatory fashion, a mischievous grin firmly in place, before he suddenly reached out and started to tickle her. They both started laughing as she tried in vain to push him off. She over-balanced and ended up falling onto her back, but Sirius was not one to be put off easily, and he continued to tickle her, positioning himself across her torso to avoid her legs which she had started to kick in reflex.

'Do you take it back?' he asked with glee, grabbing hold of her wrists and pushing them into the ground to stop her from grabbing at his robes.

'Yes! Fine,' she said between pants of breath from laughing. He was inches from her face and his hair had flopped forwards and was brushing her forehead, but she didn't notice that. She was lost, looking into his eyes, trying to decipher what he was thinking. They were frozen like this for several moments before Sirius moved down and touched his lips against hers. Sophia was shocked, but quickly forgot herself as she started to return the kiss; her eyes, fluttering, closed instinctively.

It started slowly and gently before growing stronger as she felt his tongue against her bottom lip. She responded without thinking and allowed him entry to her mouth. The kiss grew deeper and more passionate before he suddenly broke it off and sat up like a bolt of lightning. Sophia looked up at him in confusion, a million thoughts running through her head. His face was ashen, and his hands were trembling as he covered his mouth. She looked at his face, and all she could see was shock and remorse.

'Oh, Merlin ... oh, my I'm sorry ... I'm so sorry ... I should never have ... oh,*crap* ... I'm such an *idiot* ... please ... oh, what have I done!' he stammered, leaping to his feet and gathering his things.

Sophia was utterly confused for a moment; she didn't know what to do. She eventually got a message through to her body to move, however, and she propped herself up on her elbows, watching as Sirius swung his bag over his shoulder and walked quickly back to the castle without a backward glance, leaving Sophia to wonder what the heck had just happened.

End Note:

Yes, I know I can be very evil sometimes.

Did you guess the film they watched? It was, of course, the James Bond film, 'Dr No.' which was released in 1962. It starred Sean Connery as James Bond and Ursula Andress as Honey Rider. As I'm not completely sure when VCRs and video tapes became widely available, I hope you will forgive me if this wasn't possible in 1976/1977.

Finally, a Tebo is described in 'Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them' as a warthog-like creature native to central Africa that can become invisible at will. Again, it is property of JKR.

Chapter 18: A Matter of Trust

Chapter 18 of 23

Sophia and Sirius discuss what happened between them at the lake.

Disclaimer: Yeah, still *not* mine.

Author's Notes: Firstly, sorry for the slightly delay between chapters - I had a small crisis of my laptop completely dying on me. Even worse than that, I stupidly didn't have a single file backed up. *Facepalm*. Anyway, a week later and an IT genius managed to salvage my files, and I have a shiny new computer so all is well with the world once more *grins*.

Beta thanks, as always, go to DracoGurlFurever, and I have to thank the admin staff here who put in so much hard work. In addition, thank you to everyone who has stuck with me to this point, and extra special thanks if you have left a review. I hope you enjoy this chapter.



Chapter 18: A Matter of Trust

Sophia sat on the ground, trying to reason what had made Sirius behave the way he did. How could she go from feeling on top of the world one moment to feeling like her heart had been completely crushed the next? Moving slowly, still feeling numb and slightly dazed by the whole affair, she got to her feet, gathered her things, and walked back up to the castle. She made it up to Gryffindor Tower just as she heard the bell for lunch go. Deciding that she wasn't hungry, and that she didn't feel like facing Sirius, she retreated to the safety of her dorm room.

Once there, she sat on her bed; she could feel the tears starting to form in her eyes. The thing that she had been secretly hoping would happen for so long finally had, only for it to be ripped away again moments later. She lay down on the bed, her back to the door, hugging her knees to her chest as she let her tears fall. No matter what way she looked at it, she couldn't understand what had gone wrong.

He was the one who initiated the kiss. *He* was the one who had deepened the kiss. And yet, *he* had also been the one to break the moment.

But why? she thought desperately. She couldn't get the image of his reaction out of her head. Surely, if he had wanted to kiss her as much as she had wanted to kiss him, he wouldn't have reacted that way. *Then why did he kiss me to start with?* The thoughts kept running through her mind until she heard the sound of footsteps coming into the room.

'Here you are!' she heard Lily say. 'Why weren't you at lunch? We all wondered what had happened to you and ... what's wrong?' Lily's voice had gone from bright and breezy to full of concern. Sophia felt the bed dip as Lily sat down by Sophia's back and rubbed her shoulder. Sophia slowly rolled over slightly, looking at Lily over her shoulder.

'Oh, Soph! Come here what's happened?' Lily opened up her arms, pulling Sophia into a hug.

'I don't know,' Sophia sniffed, trying to stop crying. Lily let go of her, and the two girls just looked at one another for a moment.

'Well, start at the beginning,' Lily said gently as she held Sophia's hand.

'Ok ... well ... Sirius and I were outside, and we were just talking,' Sophia began through her hiccups, though she was managing to calm down; her voice was slowly returning to normal. 'Well, then, we started teasing each other you know what he can be like and then I said something to him and he retaliated by starting to tickle me. It was all in fun, but then ...' Her voice began to falter, and her eyes started to well with tears again, her upper lip trembling.

'But then, what?' Lily prompted.

'We kissed,' Sophia said softly.

Lily sat there, looking confused. 'But ... I would have thought that was a good thing? I thought that you liked him? It's obvious that he likes you,' Lily said gently.

'What do you mean? "It's obvious that he likes you"?' Sophia asked, rubbing her eyes.

'Well, we've all seen it. I mean he's always looking at you, making sure you're okay. He's never been like that with anyone, and even James has said that,' Lily replied.

Sophia couldn't process what she was hearing. None of it made sense.

'If that's the case, please tell me why he broke off the kiss before running back to the castle without a word to me, why don't you,' she said harshly.

'What?'

'Yeah, we were kissing, and then he leapt off me like I'd hit him with a stinging hex or something. He looked like he was about to be sick, and then he gathered all his stuff up and practically ran back up to the castle without a backwards glance.' Sophia paused, her temper rapidly giving way to her insecurities. Her voice softened as she felt her tears come back again. 'Am I that hideous? Is there that much wrong with me?' She couldn't help but let a few more tears roll down her cheeks. Lily still looked stunned, but quickly pulled Sophia into another hug.

'Oh, sweetie; no, look, I don't know what's happened, but this is *not* your fault. Do you want me to talk to him for you?'

'No ... I don't know what I want to do, but if anyone is going to talk to him, it should be me.'

'Okay, but I think I should tell James, Remus and Peter to find him, don't you think?' Sophia remembered that she had Herbology with Remus after lunch; she didn't feel like answering his questions. It would be better if he could learn that information from Sirius.

'Hold on,' Sophia said, feeling confused, 'what do you mean "find" him?'

'Well, he wasn't at lunch either; when you weren't there, I just presumed you were both together. I have no idea where he is now, though.'

Sophia let that bit of information sink in before nodding meekly in response.

'All right, you wait here, and I'll be back as soon as possible.' With that, Lily left the room, only to return a few minutes later.

'I found them and told them to speak to Sirius. I also warned Remus that you were a bit upset, and that it might be best if he didn't bring up Sirius during Herbology.' Lily smiled warmly, doing her best to show her support to Sophia.

Sophia gave a weak smile. 'Thanks. I'm not sure Professor Sprout would be too impressed if I started crying all over her honking daffodils.'

'No, I don't suppose she would,' Lily giggled.

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'What the heck have you done *now*?' Remus flung the door of the boy's dormitory open with such force that it ricocheted off the wall with a loud thud.

Sirius had been sitting on the edge of his bed, his head in his hands, cursing himself for what he'd just done. He instantly pulled his head up as he heard Remus, James and Peter come into the room, a slightly startled look on his face.

'Well, come on!' Remus demanded. 'What did you do to her?' Remus looked like he could have quite easily killed Sirius at that moment

'Easy, Moony let's hear him out. I'm sure there's a reasonable explanation isn't there, Pads?' James was trying his best to quell the hostility pouring out of Remus. Peter moved across the room and sat down by Sirius.

'Pads, we know something has happened between you two. Lily told us that Sophia is in her room, crying, but wouldn't tell us what had happened only that we should try to find you,' Peter said.

Sirius sat and thought for a moment; the self-loathing kicked up a gear. He'd successfully managed to upset Sophia and Remus in one fell swoop; he'd done *exactly* what Remus had told him he would do. Slowly, he picked himself up off his bed, walked over to the window keeping a safe distance from Remus and stared out to the beech



tree. He looked at the spot where he'd just been with Sophia, remembering her laughter and smiles, and then closed his eyes when he remembered what had happened next.

Taking a deep breath and prising his eyes open again, he began. 'I've right royally mucked things up, haven't I?' He couldn't look at his friends his shame was too great. Instead, he tried to take his frustrations out on the wall by kicking it. That didn't help at all; rather, it just resulted in his big toe throbbing painfully.

'Pads, tell us what happened,' James said again. 'Why is Sophia so upset?'

'I kissed her ... and, in doing so, probably brought back some of the worst memories in her life.' Sirius' shoulders were hunched over, his voice hollow, but he could at least now face his friends. Remus seemed slightly calmer now he was getting answers, but he still looked angry.

'What do you mean by that?' Peter asked.

Sirius took another deep breath, turning back to look out of the window as he spoke. 'We were larking around, and I started tickling her, and I ended up on top of her. We were both laughing and joking, and then I just sort of stopped thinking. Well, no, that's not right, because I *was* thinking. All I could think about was how perfect she was, and how much I liked seeing her smiling and laughing like that again. We were so close, and I just acted on impulse, I suppose. It wasn't until a few seconds later that I realised that I was holding her down ... like Rosier.' The hatred of himself flared up again, and he felt sick at the realisation. He turned his head sheepishly to look at the others.

'So, what did you do then?' James asked. It looked to Sirius like Remus didn't trust himself to speak just yet.

'Well, I stopped, didn't I? I was so appalled at myself that I came back here. I couldn't even bring myself to look at her; I was so ashamed at what I'd done.'

'Hold on a second. So, you're telling me that you kissed her on the spur of the moment and then ran off, just leaving her there?' Remus' resolve not to speak had failed, and he now sounded just as angry as he had when he had first entered the room.

'Yes ... no ... look,' Sirius answered quickly, huffing in frustration before continuing, 'I feel horrible, okay? I'm doing a good enough job at beating myself up without you joining in, Moony! It wasn't completely on the spur of the moment. I've been thinking about her all the time. At the Hogmanay thing, I was about a second off asking her out, but we were interrupted. I'm mad about her, Moony I never wanted to hurt her. Please, believe me.'

Remus seemed to soften at Sirius's honesty, but there was still a long silence before anyone spoke again.

'You really can be thick sometimes, can't you?' Remus said. The anger finally seemed to have slipped away, and now he sounded like he didn't know whether to be amused or exasperated at Sirius. 'Why didn't you stay there and talk to her?'

'I was mortified by my behaviour believe me. Besides, I thought she would want me as far away from her as possible,' Sirius explained. He paused, a confused expression on his face as he thought on what Remus had said. 'Why, do you think I should have stayed?'

'Well, *yeah*,' Remus, James and Peter replied together; all sounding as if they were stating something obvious.

'Pads, you're going to have to talk to her and get this sorted out as soon as possible. Problem is, she's probably going to try and shut down again to protect herself. This is going to require some planning, and we might need to get Lily on our side. Soph can be mighty stubborn at times, after all,' Remus said, looking at Sirius sternly. 'You up for that?'

'I'll do whatever it takes to get her to talk to me again,' Sirius replied, nodding fiercely.

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Remus had obviously taken Lily's advice to heart, spending the whole of Herbology doing his best to cheer Sophia up. He steered clear of any topic which was even loosely related to Sirius, instead laughing and joking the whole way through the lesson. By the end of the lesson, she was feeling much better ... until she remembered that she would see Sirius in Defence Against the Dark Arts.

She silently walked up to the class with Remus; luckily, Lily was already there, so Sophia sat down next to her while Remus went to the back of the classroom. Sophia fixed her gaze on her text book when she heard James's voice, knowing that Sirius would be with him.

The class dragged by, and, the whole time, Sophia felt like Sirius was staring at her. When the end of the class finally arrived, Sophia quickly gathered her things and went back to her dorm room, never looking to the back of the classroom, where the Marauders had been sitting.

Sophia refused to go down to dinner, insisting that she wasn't hungry. She spent the whole of the evening in the girls' dormitory, working on her homework in an attempt to push Sirius as far from her mind as possible. Lily had chosen to work downstairs in the common room and only came back up to the room after Sophia had been alone for a few hours.

'So, how you feeling?' Lily asked, sitting down next to Sophia on the bed.

'Trying not to think about it to be honest,' Sophia replied matter-of-factly, her eyes never leaving the open textbook in front of her.

'Sophia, I really think you should speak to Sirius,' Lily said, firmly but softly. It had to be serious if Lily was calling her Sophia.

'No, Lily ... not tonight.'

'But'

'I said no, and that's the end of it.' Sophia stated, keeping her focus on the book despite the fact that she had been reading and re-reading the same line since Lily had entered the room.

She was still in emotional turmoil she felt angry, hurt, and confused, but also scared. For the moment, all she wanted to do was hide in her room and not face up to the fact that she might be about to lose one of her best friends because, with her pessimistic attitude, she didn't see how this situation could end any differently.

Sophia finally looked up to face Lily. 'Listen, I know you're only trying to help, but I just can't do that tonight, so please don't ask me to.'

'All right, if you're sure, but you need to talk to him soon. You both need to get this sorted out,' Lily said as she got up off the bed.

'I will, Lils. Just, not tonight.'

Wednesday dawned, and Sophia had to drag herself out of her bed. There was a very loud voice in her head telling her that it would be better if she just stayed under her duvet for the rest of her life. However, she also knew that there was only so much sympathy that Lily would give her. She knew that if she didn't get out of bed by herself, then she would be forced out of it by Lily, and that was something that experience had taught her was *never* a good thing.

She successfully managed to avoid talking to Sirius until the last class of the day Charms. He came over to her as she packed up her stuff in Transfiguration, which they both had before their Charms class, and asked if she would walk to class with him. He seemed slightly subdued, and he looked like he hadn't slept much the previous night.

She didn't know how to feel about him as he stood there several conflicting emotions seeming to be going through her at once. However, she couldn't be rude, so she simply gave him a short nod of her head and turned to leave, forcing him to quickly catch up with her she would walk with him, but, in her current state, she didn't think it would be wise to talk to him.

Luckily, Charms was a theoretical lesson so all she had to do was take notes, which meant that she didn't have to communicate with Sirius at all. When the class ended, Sirius finally broke the silence.

'Soph, could we talk, please?'

'Sirius, there's nothing to talk about.'

'Yes, there is. Please, just let me explain.'

'Look, I have to go. Sorry.' Sophia swung her bag onto her shoulder and walked briskly out of the classroom. Her stomach churned with unease for leaving him like that, but at the moment she couldn't face dealing with the situation and getting hurt more than she already was.

She sat with Lily through dinner and, after much persuasion, agreed to work with her in the common room instead of returning to the girl's dorm room like she had originally planned. The two girls worked together late into the night, and by the time they had finished, the common room was empty save for the Marauders, who were sitting by the fire. Lily got up from the desk that she had been working at and stretched her arms above her head.

'Well, I think I'm going to call it a night,' she said, with a yawn.

'Hmm, I think I might join you,' Sophia answered, standing up as well.

'No, you're not. You are going to stay here and talk to Sirius,' Lily said sternly, giving Sophia her best impression of Professor McGonagall.

Sophia quickly looked over to the Marauders to see that James, Remus and Peter were all trying to make their way over to the stairs that led to the boy's dormitory as quietly as possible while Sirius remained by the fire looking ... nervous.

Well, that's odd, she thought, *I don't think I've ever seen him look nervous before.* She turned back to Lily, starting to feel angry. It was clear that this had all been set up and she couldn't see any way to get out of the situation.

'*Don't* even think about coming up to bed until this is all sorted out,' Lily threatened as she passed Sophia.

If she wasn't feeling so angry, Sophia probably would have laughed here was Lily Evans, recently the chief detester of the Marauders, forcing her to stay here to talk to Sirius Black. Wonders would never cease.

Sirius and Sophia looked at each other across the now-empty common room. He shuffled about before speaking.

'Would you like to sit down?' he asked, gesturing to the sofa.

'No, thanks,' she replied coolly. She was still upset that she had been manipulated into this situation.

'Oh, okay, right.' Sirius looked crestfallen; he didn't seem to know what to do next.

Sophia, however, was determined that she wasn't going to break the silence, so she simply waited for him.

'I need to apologize for what happened yesterday,' he began. 'I was an idiot, and I should never have done that to you I'm sorry.'

Sophia felt crushed. He really hadn't meant to kiss her. As far as he was concerned, it was a huge mistake. She hadn't realised how much she had hoped that he had returned her feelings until now. All she could hope for was that she still had him as a friend.

'Sirius, you don't need to apologize. Please, let's just forget the kiss ever happened shall we?'

'What? No, I mean ... I'm sorry for running off on you like that.'

'What?' This was all becoming too confusing for Sophia. 'You mean ... you wanted to ...' She couldn't form the end of that sentence and simply looked at him, her mouth slack and brain running in over-drive, trying to understand.

'To kiss you?' he finished. 'I thought that was obvious.' He gave her a soft smile, waiting for her to respond.

Sophia's head was spinning. She had hoped, yes, but a part of her never truly expected it. 'Well, obviously it wasn't obvious to me, was it?'

'Clearly,' he smirked, his grey eyes locked with hers and she felt the beginnings of a smile tug on her face in reciprocation.

There was a brief moment of silence before Sophia asked the question she really needed the answer to. 'Then, why did you run off, if you did want to kiss me?' Her voice was soft, almost unsure, as she remembered the hurt she had felt at Sirius' reaction to the kiss.

He hung his head briefly and let out a loud sigh. 'I got scared. I'd wanted to tell you how I felt for ages, but after all you'd been through, I didn't know how to do it. Then yesterday, it just felt so right, and so I just went for it and kissed you. Then, I suddenly realised that I was probably reminding you of Rosier; I couldn't stand the thought that I was reminding you of him, and I panicked.'

'What do you mean, "reminding me of Rosier"?'

'Isn't it obvious?' he said. Now, Sirius was joining Sophia in her confusion she shook her head in response. 'The way I was holding you; pinning you down like that.'

Sophia could tell that the thought still disgusted him, but she'd never even thought of it. She found herself beginning to chuckle, which was a bad move.

'What? What's so funny?' Sirius asked, beginning to sound angry. Sophia quickly stopped and walked over to him. She took hold of his hands and looked him straight in the eye.

'I'm sorry, Sirius. It's just that I never even thought of it that way. You could never remind me of Rosier, because I feel so safe with you. I know that you would never hurt me like he did. You're the first guy I've gotten close to since then. You're the first guy that I've felt safe enough around to get that close to.' She looked at him, realizing that he wasn't convinced that she was telling the truth she would have to prove to him.

'Sirius, tell me something. Did I ever give you the impression that I wanted you to stop? Did I ever struggle, or try to push you off?' She let go of one of his hands and touched his cheek. 'Or did I in fact kiss you back?' she finished softly with a smile.

'So, you really never made that connection?' Sirius' expression was still guarded, and she could tell he was thinking rapidly.

'Never. I thought that you had run off because you had kissed me but didn't actually like me in that way. That's why I've been avoiding you I didn't want to think that I might lose one of my best friends. It's got nothing to do with Rosier.'

Sirius finally broke into a grin, clearly reassured by Sophia's words. 'So, does this mean that we can maybe try again?'

'I think we could, providing you promise not to run off on me again. I might develop issues otherwise,' she said, giggling.

Sirius gave a soft bark of laughter. His features were soft now, and his eyes were intense with emotion as he looked at her. 'Okay, I promise to stick around this time,' he whispered, slipping one arm around her waist and pulling her into him while his other hand held the back of her neck, his fingers burrowing into her hair. Her own hands ran up his arms and came to rest on his shoulders. He tilted her head up as he leaned down to kiss her.

Just as before, this kiss started softly before deepening; as it did, Sophia's hands slid round the back of his neck and into his soft, black hair. When they finally broke apart, Sophia couldn't help but smile; as she looked at Sirius, she realised that she wasn't the only one.

'I've just thought of something,' she said as her fingers played with Sirius's hair and his hands maintained their grip around her waist.

'Sounds dangerous,' he said with a twinkle in his eyes.

'I'm going to be public enemy number one when this gets out, aren't I?' It was more of a statement than anything else. Sirius was normally ogled by at least half of the female population at Hogwarts; Sophia knew that as soon it became public knowledge that she and Sirius were together, she was in for some nasty looks.

Sirius let out a small laugh. 'Yeah, you're probably not wrong there. Does that bother you?'

'Not really I suppose.' She knew that he wouldn't be able to keep it a secret; he didn't have that level of self control, and to be honest, she didn't want to keep it a secret either. She had waited so long for this and didn't see the point in wasting time sneaking around.

'Besides, I think I'm in a worse position dating the Headmaster's great-niece,' Sirius chuckled. 'That's bound to cause problems, isn't it?'

'Hmm ... you've got a point there,' Sophia said quietly. 'Does that bother you?' She was genuinely concerned about this detail.

'Not at all,' he replied earnestly. 'I'm actually more worried about your grandfather he's not been overly impressed with us since third year, when we let his goats into his vegetable patch.' Sirius laughed at the memory.

'That was you four?' she asked incredulously. Sophia's grandfather, Aberforth, ran a pub in Hogsmeade; on the Hogsmeade weekends, she would often take an hour out to visit him and her grandmother. 'I remember him talking about it when I went to see him later that day he was so mad.'

'Yeah, it was us.' Sirius' eyes glinted with mirth and mischievousness. 'James had just mastered *Alohomora*, and we wanted to try it out on something. I found the goat pen and suggested it. Next thing we knew, all the goats were in the vegetable patch, and your grandfather was coming at us with what looked like a pitchfork, though, I have to say, none of us stuck around long enough to get a good look at it.'

Sophia found herself giggling at the image of the four boys running away from her grandfather. 'Well, we'll just have to re-introduce you at some point ... and keep you away from the goats.'

A few minutes passed before Sophia spoke again. 'Sirius can I ask you something?'

'Sure fire away.' There was an openness in his face which told her she could ask him anything and she would get an honest answer.

'Well, earlier on, you said you had wanted to tell me how you felt for ages, and, well, I wondered how long "ages" really was?' Her voice was soft as she asked the question. Her fingers dropped from his hair, and she looked down at the space between them.

'Look at me,' he replied softly, and she complied, fighting hard to maintain eye contact against the nervous rolling of her stomach.

Sirius appeared slightly nervous too as he licked his lips before talking. 'I started having feelings for you back at the start of the year, when we were spending time together during free periods. I'd never really gotten to know you before then, and I was surprised.' He smiled warmly at her, staring to look more certain the longer he spoke. 'I guess, because you spent so much time with Lily, I thought you'd be like her, which is not a bad thing,' he hastily added, when she gave him a stern look Lily was, after all, her best friend. 'It's just that she's not really my type.'

'Then, the more time I spent with you, I realised that you were not like Lily, and that made me curious. But Remus told me to back off, because he didn't want to see you get hurt, which probably would have happened, if my dating history is anything to go by. He's very protective about you, you know.'

Sophia could understand that because she felt the same way about Remus.

'Then, there was the night with Rosier, where everything changed.' Sirius' expression turned sombre, and he paused for a moment before continuing, though now it was he who looked down to the floor. 'I swear, I have never been more scared in my life than when I saw you there.' He flicked his gaze back up to her, and Sophia felt her heart clench at his words. 'Yet you were so strong, and I just found myself wanting to be with you, wanting to make you feel good again.'

Sophia could see Sirius's stormy grey eyes begin to shine with emotion as he told her this.

'You did. You did more for me than I think you realise,' she reassured him. Again, there was a pause, and Sophia waited for Sirius to continue.

'Well, anyway,' he said finally, shaking himself free of thoughts of Rosier, 'my feelings for you just didn't go away like I thought they would; all I could think about was you but I just didn't know how to tell you. After all you'd been through, I thought the last thing you would want was me chasing you, so I did nothing. Then, spending time with you over Christmas, when you finally seemed to come out of yourself again, I thought maybe now it was okay for me to tell you how I'd wanted you all this time, but I could never find the right time. I wanted to tell you at that Hogmanay thing, when we were in the grounds, but we got interrupted before I got a chance.'

'Then, yesterday ... well, yesterday, I guess my hormones got the better of me.' They both gave a small chuckle. 'But, like I say, I thought I had blown it, and so I ran off. I can tell you Remus gave me such a bollocking when they came to find me. He did forgive me when I explained everything, and then, between us and Lily, we arranged tonight so that I could explain to you.'

'Well, I had gathered that last part for myself, but thank you for telling me anyway.'

'What I can't believe is that you never saw it. I mean, you're normally so quick to notice things, but you honestly never twigged that I had a thing for you?' Sirius asked.

'I guess I just knew that you were a bit of a flirt, and because I was attracted to you, I also told myself not to read too much into anything.'

Sirius's smile turned into a grin. 'So,' he asked, drawing the word out, 'you were attracted to me then? That's interesting to know.' He raised an eyebrow at her, his grey eyes glinting with mischief as a slightly too smug smile pulled at his lips.

Sophia rolled her eyes. 'Yes, for some *unknown* reason, I am, although I'm sure I could get over it given time,' she teased.

'No way no one can ever get over Sirius Black.' He leaned in again and claimed her lips with his.

End Notes: Can I just say, YAY! I know I took a *really* long time to get here, but I had to give Sophia time to come to terms with what had happened to her. I really

appreciate those of you who have stuck with me up to this point. I hope it has been worth it.

There is still a lot more to come in this story (it's looking to end up being about 30-ish chapters in total most of which, you will be happy to know are at least drafted, if not polished yet), so keep an eye out for Chapter 19.

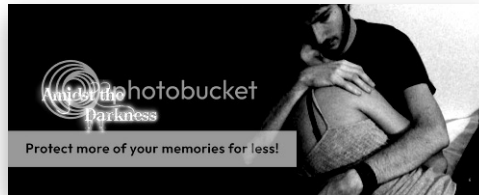
Chapter 19: New Beginnings and an Old Shadow

Chapter 19 of 23

Sophia is still on cloud nine ... that is, until the rain clouds open.

Disclaimer: Yeah, still *not* mine.

Author's Notes: As normal, beta credit to DracoGurlForever for her hard work and a huge thank you to all the Admin staff here who grapple with my grammar each time and make these chapters readable. I promise, I really am trying to learn! Also, thank you to you for reading ... I do hope you enjoy this chapter, and if you so feel inclined, I would love to hear your thoughts on it. :)



Chapter 19: New Beginnings and an Old Shadow

'So, did you get everything sorted out?' Melanie asked.

Sophia stopped in her tracks. Thinking that everyone would be asleep, she had crept into her room quietly, but she had been very wrong. All four of her friends were huddled on Lucy's bed, each dressed in pyjamas, all with an expectant look on their faces.

'I would say so, judging by the size of that grin she's wearing,' Niahm said, trying to suppress a giggle.

'What are you guys still doing up?' Sophia asked.

'What do you *think* we are doing up?' Lucy asked with astonishment. 'We want details!'

Sophia felt herself blushing and hesitated before she joined the girls on the bed.

'So,' Lily began, 'what happened?'

'I think you already have a fair idea, don't you?' Sophia replied evasively. She wasn't sure if she was quite ready to actually *talk* about what had just happened.

'Did you kiss?' Niahm asked, leaning forward in excitement.

Sophia didn't need to speak the grin that spread across her face as her cheeks went from pink to deep crimson was enough of an answer. The four girls squealed with delight and piled in to hug her. They quickly let go of her and resumed their seats on the bed, although they were all sitting slightly closer together now.

Melanie continued the line of questioning. 'Well, how was it?'

Sophia, again, hesitated before answering. 'It was ... it was just amazing.'

'Sophia and Sirius ... got a ring to it, wouldn't you say?' Niahm teased, causing Sophia to blush even more.

'Well, I, for one, am very happy for you,' Lily stated, 'but, if he hurts you, then he'll have me to deal with.' Lily's McGonagall impression was back.

'I don't think he will,' Sophia replied, a secret smile gracing her face as she remembered everything Sirius had told her a few minutes ago.

The next day, Sophia woke early, a satisfied smile on her face. She got out of bed and prepared for the day ahead with breakneck speed, then waited impatiently for Lily before heading down for breakfast. She could feel the butterflies fluttering round her belly as she walked down the stairs to the common room.

As she rounded the corner, she saw the unmistakable, tall figure with black hair propped up against the back of one of the sofas. Sirius had his head bent down and was playing with a loose thread in the fabric while listening to James, Remus and Peter talking. Her butterflies seemed to multiply by ten when she saw him, but they were joined by a smile that broke out across her face.

She saw James look in the girls' direction, and he gave Sirius a nudge in the ribs with his elbow. Sirius looked up, breaking into a happy grin as their eyes made contact which caused Sophia's cheeks to turn slightly pink. He stood up from his spot and moved a step in her direction as she and Lily reached the Marauders.

'Morning,' Sirius said, wrapping his arm around Sophia's waist and giving her a peck on the cheek.

'Morning,' she replied, thankful that the butterflies had finally decided to settle down.

'Aww ... Sirius has got a girl,' James teased in a babyish voice. 'I think I might be sick,' he added drolly. Sirius grabbed a cushion from the sofa and hit James round the shoulder with it.

'Just because you're jealous,' he retorted with a smirk. Sophia looked at Lily, who had dropped her gaze to the floor; James gave Sirius a murderous stare.

Peter quickly cleared his throat. 'Well, shall we get going?'

'Yeah, good idea,' Remus agreed, grabbing hold of James's arm and dragging him out of the common room. Peter followed them, with Lily being a step or two behind him. When they were safely out of earshot, Sophia rounded on Sirius.

'What were you thinking?' she whispered harshly as she slapped his shoulder.

'Ouch!' he muttered as he rubbed where she had hit him. 'I'm sorry ... I just didn't think. I didn't mean to tick him off or make Lily uncomfortable. I was just larking around.' He gave her his best puppy-dog look ... the one which she had yet to resist, despite her best efforts.

Sophia felt herself melt at the look before she rolled her eyes and sighed. 'Oh, look, I know you didn't mean any harm, but just think for a second next time will you? She's my best friend and she's starting to warm to you lot. I don't need you proving all her theories right.'

'And what theories might these be?' he inquired with a raised eyebrow.

'That you are all insensitive prats,' she replied with a smile. 'Anyway, we should probably get going they'll wonder where we've got to, and I do *not* want that rumour starting.'

They sat next to one another during breakfast, and as she had predicted, she was subjected to some rather nasty looks, but even those couldn't get rid of the goofy grin that was spread across her face. Sirius' sprits seemed to be particularly high today as well, and he and the rest of the Marauders spent the whole of breakfast trying to come up with new prank ideas.

Sirius and Sophia had Charms class first while James and Lily had Ancient Runes and Peter and Remus had a free period. As the weather was once again fine, Peter and Remus turned to spend their time outside, leaving the remaining four to climb the stairs up to their classes.

'We'll meet you outside, then, after this?' Sirius asked James as Lily left in the direction of the Ancient Runes classroom.

'Sure thing,' James called over his shoulder as he hurried to catch up with Lily.

'Tell me one thing,' Sirius said wearily as he looked at James's retreating form. 'Does he have a snowflakes chance in Hades of ever getting her?'

Sophia chuckled softly, linking arms with Sirius and dragged him in the direction of the Charms classroom. 'Let's just say that I don't think all hope is lost just yet.'

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James, Sirius, Peter and Sophia sat underneath the beech tree while trying to work on their own various assignments. Peter was working on an essay for Care of Magical Creatures; James was trying to decipher some particularly tricky runes, and Sophia was reading up on some of the defence spells they had covered in Defence Against the Dark Arts the day before.

Sirius, however, wasn't working. He was feeling far too exhilarated to work so was content for the time being to sit with his back against the tree, watching Sophia work. He picked at pieces of grass, watching her features become taught through concentration as she scanned her book before she lifted her head and closed her eyes, making small movements with her wand in an attempt to visualise what she had just read. Occasionally, her lips would move slightly as she quickly whispered to herself the directions for the spell. She would then divert her attention back to her book, and the process would start again.

While he watched her, he thought about the events of the night before and smiled to himself. He still couldn't quite believe that she hadn't noticed his interest in her. She was normally so good at picking up subtleties of people's actions, not to mention the fact that she was also the great-niece of Albus Dumbledore, one of the most revered wizards in the world; despite all that, she *still* hadn't twigged.

*For all her smarts, she sure can be dense on some occasions* she thought with a soft chuckle, causing Sophia to look at him intriguingly. He gave her a smile, gently shaking his head to tell her it was nothing. She returned the smile briefly before going back to her book.

It didn't really matter that she'd not guessed ... she now knew how he felt, and better than that, she felt the same way. His stomach swooped as he remembered the kisses they had shared the night before, and it was enough to make him feel fidgety. He pulled out a bit of parchment and his quill and scribbled a note down quickly.

*I can't stand the fact that you are giving that textbook more attention than me. By way of an apology, I insist that you come for a walk with me.*

He folded the note up and levitated it over to Sophia, placing it carefully over the page that she was reading. As it landed, she looked up at him, confusion and curiosity playing across her face, so he smiled encouragingly at her. He waited impatiently as she read, but finally, she folded the note back up and grinned at him. Taking that as his cue, Sirius jumped to his feet as Sophia hurriedly packed her things away.

'Leaving so soon?' James inquired drolly.

'What can I say, James ... you just don't hold the same appeal as you did yesterday,' Sirius quipped as Sophia joined him and he took hold of her hand.

'I'm hurt,' James replied, somewhat over-dramatically, causing Remus and Peter to chuckle.

'You'll survive.' With that, Sirius turned and led Sophia off around the lake.

'So, did you get the inquisitorial squad as well last night?' Sophia asked, humour lacing her words.

'Yeah, I did, but nothing too bad. Remember, I'd already faced ... and narrowly escaped ... death by firing squad,' Sirius chuckled in reply. 'Though Remus did do a "big brother" type speech.'

Sophia chortled. 'I can imagine. I should probably warn you that Lily would join Remus in hunting you down if you hurt me.'

'Is that so ... well, I guess I shall have to stay in your good books.' He let go of Sophia's hand and placed his arm round her shoulders, pulling her closer to him as he did, and he placed a kiss on her hair as they continued to walk. He was pleased when she took hold of the hand that was on her shoulder and interlaced her fingers with his.

They walked around the lake just enjoying one another's company before Sirius stopped and turned Sophia to look at him. He placed both his palms flat against hers, interlacing their fingers and pulling her slightly closer. Sophia was smiling at him, and though she looked slightly puzzled, she didn't speak.

'Soph, would you like to come to Hogsmeade with me on the next visit? It would just be us, for the day.' He didn't know why, but he felt slightly nervous asking her this question. After baring his heart and soul to her the previous night, it did seem slightly ridiculous to be nervous, but there was no denying his quickened heart rate.

'I'd love to,' she responded shyly, causing him to break into a grin before pulling her closer and pressing his lips to hers.

'Good.' He slipped one arm round her waist and they started to walk again.

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They finished their tour of the lake and ended back at the beech tree, where James and Peter had just been joined by Remus and Lily since it was now break time.

'Hi, Lils how was History of Magic?' Sophia inquired.

'Oh, you know Binns ... it was *riveting*, as always,' she replied sarcastically.

'I honestly do not know why you two chose to keep going with it,' Sirius stated. 'If you ask me, you both must be nutters.'

Remus was about to retort when a cold voice filtered through.

'Well, well, lads. Seems old Black here has decided to take up my cast-offs.'

Sophia's blood ran like ice through her veins. James and Peter climbed to their feet instantly as Sophia felt Sirius tighten his grip round her waist. Evan Rosier stalked over towards the group, closely followed by Severus Snape, Regulus Black, Rabastan Lestranger, Barty Crouch, and Jonathan Avery. Rosier wore a malicious grin as the others smirked at his comment.

'Back off, Rosier.' Sirius's voice was low and dangerous, and Sophia caught sight of him reaching for his wand out of the corner of her eye.

'Now that's not very nice, is it? Here I am, just trying to give you a few tips on how to handle her ...' Though Rosier's tone was light-hearted, his words were laced with venom.

He looked Sophia up and down in a way that made her skin crawl, but it also made her angry. She had worked too hard to put this behind her; she was *not* about to give him the satisfaction of crumbling again. Sirius let out a low growl at Rosier's words and moved to hex him, but Sophia grabbed his arm quickly to stop him.

'This is not your fight ... it's mine.' She turned her gaze back on Rosier and carefully freed herself from Sirius's protective grip, taking a cautious step towards the man who had haunted her nightmares for too long.

'You think you're so smart, don't you? You and your little cronies,' she said as she let a small, knowing smile form. 'Well, you're *not*. You see, I'm not afraid of you, and there is nothing that you can say or do that will *ever* make me scared of you.'

She could see Rosier's anger begin to play across his face; the rest of the Slytherins seemed unsure about what to do.

'You see, Rosier, I hold all the power. I never went to Dumbledore ... I never wanted this to get out. Push me, or my friends again, and I may just change my mind. I have witnesses, and even if I didn't, who do you think they would believe?'

'Are you threatening me?' Rosier growled, his grip tightening over his wand.

Sophia quickly cast a look down at it, one corner of her mouth quirking up into a half smile. She knew she was aggravating him, and there was a large part of her that was enjoying it.

'Damn right I am,' she said as quietly and menacingly as she could before lightening her tone. 'Now, I'd appreciate it if you left us alone.'

Sophia turned to go back to Sirius, but as she did, she glimpsed Rosier's wand arm begin to move. Without thinking, she quickly spun round to face him, silently casting a powerful shield charm which caused Rosier's spell to bounce back and hit Avery square on the face. Avery dropped to his knees, yowling in pain as he did as angry-looking boils erupted over his face and neck.

Before Sophia could fully register what had happened, the rest of the Slytherins started hurling hexes at her, Lily and the Marauders. She felt Sirius and Remus grab her arms and pull her behind them, placing her next to a scared looking Lily. The four Marauders were in full retaliation mode, with Sirius and James, at least, looking like they were enjoying themselves.

Remus was duelling with Rabastan; Remus' face was contorting in grim determination while Rabastan had a manic glint in his eye. Remus had initially used defensive spells only, but that changed after a few minutes, and Remus began to return Rabastan's hexes with added intensity.

Peter had his attention fixed on Barty. Barty had a svelte frame and was a similar height to Peter. Neither showed any mercy towards the other, and neither seemed to fight with the grace and tack that the other duelling pairs showed. There was no doubt in Sophia's mind that this was purely reactive duelling, with little pre-meditation taking place.

James and Snape were duelling as well. Unlike Peter and Barty, there were regular pauses in this duel where each party thought of their next strategy before carefully and exactly implementing it. James was already sporting a tear down one arm of his school robes, where he had been too slow to avoid one of Snape's hexes. Snape, for his part, was having trouble walking after James had successfully hit him with a sponge knee curse.

Meanwhile, Sirius was taking on Rosier and Regulus. Sophia looked on as Sirius blocked hex after hex that the two Slytherins rained down on him. At every possible opportunity, Sirius would retaliate, seeming to concentrate his attacks on removing Regulus from the fight first. However, the two brothers were evenly matched, and there was a part of Sophia that was deeply disturbed at seeing the vicious hexes being exchanged between the pair.

Lily and Sophia were huddled together, desperately trying to avoid being hit by any of the stray curses.

'We have to do something!' Sophia said, watching Remus dodge a jet of purple light before firing his own streak of blue back at Rabastan.

'There's not much we can do,' Lily replied, her eye's transfixed on James and Snape. 'We are going to need help to break this up. I'll go and see if I can find Professor McGonagall.'

'Okay, I'll stay here in case anyone gets seriously hurt,' Sophia responded. She flinched as she saw Sirius drop to the ground to avoid a hex from Rosier. Lily nodded before she ran back to the castle.

Sophia watched helplessly for a few minutes longer. Each of the boys were now looking worse for wear, but none of them seemed ready to back down. Sophia worried how far each party would be willing to go in order to win; she hoped that Lily would return with help quickly.

Indeed, Sophia didn't have to wait long, spotting Lily's red hair re-emerging from the castle. As she drew nearer, Sophia saw that Lily was being followed by both Professor McGonagall and Professor Ward, the Defence Against the Dark Arts professor. However, the boys seemed oblivious to their approach, and the two professors were forced to cast four shield charms in order to stop the duels.

'*What* in the world do you think you are doing?' Professor McGonagall asked coldly, looking around the group. All the boys were breathing heavily, each still focused on the person they had been duelling with, unquenched fury in all their eyes. 'Well, is anyone going to answer me?' she demanded.

'You should ask Rosier, Professor,' Sirius sneered, his stare never leaving Rosier's face. 'He's the one who started it.'

Sophia saw McGonagall give her a quick glance before the teacher rolled back her shoulders and turned to Evan. 'Mr Rosier ... what do you have to say for yourself?'

Rosier was flexing his grip on his wand, his upper lip drawing back over his teeth as he continued to glare at Sirius. Sophia's heart was still beating furiously, and the level of tension in the air seemed to grow exponentially as McGonagall waited for Rosier's answer.

'Mr Rosier, you are already in a world of trouble; I suggest that you do not try my patience any further. Now, what do you have to say for yourself?' McGonagall once again demanded.

'Nothing, Professor,' Rosier replied, his normal smooth tone in place.

McGonagall took a deep breath before speaking again, 'Very well, Professor Ward, will you please escort those who are in need of Madam Pomfrey up to the Hospital Wing, and I will see to the rest.'

The professor gave a nod of his head before herding Snape, Avery, Crouch, Peter and James up to the Hospital Wing ... clearly positioning himself between the two sides in case either decided to try to start round two of the fight.

'Mr Black, Mr Lupin, you will both report to me for detention tomorrow evening at eight o' clock, and you can notify Mr Potter and Mr Pettigrew that I will expect them at the same time,' McGonagall stated.

'Professor!' Sirius exclaimed. 'You can't be serious! They started it!'

Professor McGonagall shot Sirius a quelling look that froze him in place. 'Mr Black, do not question me again. You will *all* face detention for duelling on school grounds. You know very well that it is against the school rules, and I have no choice but to give you all detention.' McGonagall gave Sirius a firm look before turning to face the remaining Slytherins.

'Mr Rosier, Mr Black, Mr Lestrange, you will report to my office this evening for detention at 8 o' clock and you also can tell Mr Snape, Mr Crouch, and Mr Avery that I expect their presence at the same time. I shall also be notifying Professor Slughorn of your behaviour.

'Slytherin will also lose one hundred and sixty points ... that is, forty points each ... for this display, while I am also forced to remove a total of forty points ... ten points each ... from Gryffindor for their part. Now, the bell is about to go shortly, so I suggest, Mr Rosier, Mr Lestrange, and Mr Black, that you head off to your next class. I wish to have a final word with my Gryffindors.'

Without another word, Rosier, Rabastan and Regulus turned and left in the direction of the castle. Sirius and Remus moved slowly back to Sophia, with Sirius placing an arm about her waist. Lily and Professor McGonagall walked over to join them.

'I don't suppose that I need to be a genius to understand how this fight started. Miss McKinloch, are you quite all right?' McGonagall asked, her face softening from the harsh look she had held throughout her reprimand.

'Yes, thank you, Professor,' Sophia affirmed.

'Very well, rest assured that I will see to it that they are all suitably punished for their behaviour. Mr Black, Mr Lupin, I know that your actions were well meaning, but I'm afraid I cannot let this rule-breaking go unpunished. I hope that should this situation arise again, you will all think twice before retaliating.' She raised an eyebrow at the group as she looked over the rim of her glasses. A murmur of consent echoed amongst the friends. 'Good; I do hate having to remove points from my own house. If there is nothing else, I shall leave you all to make your way to your next class.'

The group waited until McGonagall was out of ear shot before speaking again.

'Sirius, are you okay?' Sophia asked, her concern evident in her voice.

'I'm fine; it was nothing I couldn't handle.' He gave her a winning smile while tightening his grip on her waist.

'How about you, Remus?' Sophia asked.

'I'm fine,' he replied, giving Sophia a confident smile. 'I just hope James and Peter get out of the Hospital Wing quickly. I don't see why they should get to miss double Potions when we have to go through it.'

'Too right!' Sirius joked; both boys laughed.

'Speaking of which, we should probably get going,' Lily stated as she picked up her bag.

Sophia, Sirius and Remus followed suit, with the two boys picking up James and Peter's bags, before they made the journey up to the castle, Sirius maintaining his grip on Sophia's waist all the way.

Chapter 20: Birthdays can be Emotional Things

Chapter 20 of 23

Lily's birthday does not go as smoothly as some might hope.

Disclaimer: Nope, I've still not managed the transformation into JK Rowling, so I only own Sophia and the plot.

Author's Notes: As with all the previous chapters, beta credit must go to the marvellous DracoGurlForever, and I must thank the Admin staff here, who've also helped me immensely with polishing up the chapters even further. I hope you enjoy this chapter, and I'd love to hear your thoughts by way of a review. :)



Chapter 20: Birthdays can be Emotional Things

The Marauders all served their detention with McGonagall that Friday evening for their part in the fight with the Slytherins the day before. Sophia had waited up until they all returned, and the rest of the girls had waited with her. They had spent the evening working on small pieces of homework before turning their attention to the latest gossip ... which mostly involved the other girls interrogating Sophia about her budding romance with Sirius, of course. Sophia had spent much of the conversation staring at Hamish and putting all her concentration into petting him as he sat in her lap, as uncomfortable as she was with her friends' insistent (and sometimes *very* direct) questions.

Hamish had luxuriated in the attention, purring loudly and turning himself so that he lay on his back, wedged between Sophia's legs as they stretched out in front of her. Sophia was relieved when the Marauders climbed through the portrait hole into the common room just after nine o' clock. Sirius and James were leading, talking animatedly between themselves; judging by the hand movements, Sophia guessed they were discussing something related to Quidditch, but she couldn't be sure what. The four boys headed over in the girls' direction, Sophia giving Sirius a large smile as he perched on the arm rest next to her.

'Hey,' she said. 'How was the detention?'

'It wasn't too bad ... we just had to clean the Transfiguration classroom,' Sirius replied, leaning down slightly to rub Hamish's stomach, his other arm draping behind Sophia on the back of the sofa.

'Yeah, I think McGonagall really didn't want to give us a detention, but the rules called for it. It's certainly the easiest one I've ever had from her,' James added. He, Remus, and Peter had all sat down on the rug, their backs to the fire, as the girls were currently occupying all the chairs.

'Well, you've certainly had enough of them over the years to be able to compare!' Melanie joked.

James gave a grin and a wink as his only reply.

'I'm glad it wasn't too bad,' Sophia said softly. She still felt a certain amount of responsibility over the whole mess. Hamish wriggled himself free from the V of Sophia's legs, jumping down to wander over to where Remus was. He plonked himself down on the rug, and Remus dutifully began to stroke the cat.

'What is with that cat and you?' Sirius asked, intrigued. 'He's obsessed with you!'

'It's my animal magnetism,' Remus responded suavely, cocking up an eyebrow as he gave them all a sly grin. There was a beat of absolute silence before the whole group erupted into a loud chorus of laughter.

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The next couple of weeks passed quickly and relatively smoothly. Sophia was aware that the Slytherins, and Rosier in particular, were still keeping a close watch on her and Sirius, but so far they had not approached again. Sophia was simply praying that they would eventually get bored and leave her alone ... this time for good.

During the last week of January, Sophia and the rest of the girls returned to the common room after dinner to find a notice about the start of Apparition lessons pinned to the notice board. It said that the lessons were to be held in the Great Hall every Friday evening for four weeks, beginning on 4th February. As the girls were reading the rest of the details, the Marauders also returned from dinner.

'What's going on?' Peter asked the girls, trying to get close enough to read for himself.

'Apparition lessons ... they're starting on the 4th!' Lucy answered.

'Apparition lessons?' Sirius repeated excitedly. 'Brilliant! Just think, James, a turn on our heels, and we can go wherever we want!'

James positively beamed at the idea, and Sophia instantly recognised the shared glint in their eyes. She turned her attention to Remus, who had a look of indulgent exasperation on his face, and they both giggled softly.

'Not anywhere you want, Black,' Lily corrected. 'You will have to pass your test first, *and* you can't Apparate inside Hogwarts.'

'Ah, Evans, you're such a wild child ... a right bundle of laughs to be around,' Sirius replied sarcastically. Lily rolled her eyes, ignoring the jibe, and turned back to finish reading the notice sheet.

Slowly, the group moved away from the notice board, everyone excitedly discussing the upcoming lessons. Sophia was about to follow when she noticed Remus lingering, so she hesitated.

'Remus, are you okay?' she asked, sliding closer to him.

'Hmm,' he muttered, dragging his attention from the sheet of paper to her face.

She could see a slightly haunted look to his face and worried instantly.

He seemed to shake him free of whatever was troubling him, giving her a tight smile, though it didn't quite reach his eyes. 'Yeah, I'm fine.'

'No, you're not. Tell me what's wrong,' she coaxed.

'I can't go to the first lesson,' he answered flatly.

Sophia's brow crinkled in a puzzled frown. 'Why not?'

'Give you one guess,' he responded, looking sadly at her.

Sophia blinked rapidly as she tried to work out what Remus was going on about, when it suddenly hit her. 'The fourth is a full moon, isn't it?'

'Bingo,' he replied, his voice sounding both slightly bitter and sarcastic.

'Oh, Remus, I'm sorry.' Useless words, she knew, but she couldn't think of anything else to say.

'Not your fault, Soph. It just is what it is.' He paused for a moment, glancing over to the rest of the group, who were still chattering away. 'I'm going to go up to my room for a bit ... if they ask, can you tell the guys I have a headache, but that I'm okay?'

Sophia nodded. 'Sure.'

'Thanks,' Remus replied before carefully making his way round the common room and going up to the boys' dormitory.

Sophia meanwhile, made her way back to the group. Sirius gave her an enquiring look, but she gently shook her head, smiling to reassure him everything was fine. He still looked concerned, but seemed to trust her judgement as he slipped an arm round her shoulders before turning his attention back to the conversation.

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The following weekend marked the end of January, and therefore Lily's seventeenth birthday. The girls had all awoken early to begin the celebrations, piling onto Lily's bed as she ripped the paper off her assortment of presents.

'So, how do you feel?' Niahm asked. 'Do you feel different now you are *officially* an adult?'

'Officially old and over the hill, you mean?' Melanie teased, resulting in a ripple of laughter from the other girls.

'No different, really, from yesterday,' Lily replied. 'Only today, I'm the proud owner of a really nice pair of boots.' Lily smiled, picking up and hugging the pair of sheepskin-lined, black suede boots that her parents had given her to prove her point. 'Oh, and I can't forget the charm bracelet that you guys got me!' She held up her wrist and twisted it, causing the bracelet to make a jingling sound.

The girls had clubbed together to buy the goblin-made gold chain bracelet, and then each had selected a different charm to place on it. Melanie had selected a gold '17', Lucy had chosen a gold 'L', Niahm had picked a gold four leaf clover that had a small Amethyst on one of the leaves to signify Lily's birthstone, and Sophia had selected a unicorn charm that stood out as the only silver charm on the bracelet.

'You really like it?' Lucy asked, sounding still slightly nervous.

'I love it, really I do.' Lily beamed at the rest of the girls. 'I promise to treasure it always. Thank you.' She leaned forward and (rather awkwardly, considering they were all still sitting cross-legged on the bed) gave each of the girls a hug.

'So, is the birthday girl ready to go down to breakfast?' Sophia asked as she and Lily let go of one another.

'Absolutely ... I just need to decide which of the clothes I want to wear from what my parents sent!' Lily replied, spreading her arms wide to encompass the clothes that were piled up both in front and around her.

'Oh, well I'm sure we can help speed up the process,' Niahm said, giving Lily a grin as she pulled out a forest green peasant top from the pile. The top had long sleeves that were tight to the elbow before flaring out as well as a square neckline; it was cut on an empire line with ties that tied at the back of the top. The top was plain, other than a small amount of lace that edged the neckline, but the fabric was crinkly, which gave it an interesting look. 'How about this with a pair of dark jeans and the new boots?'

Lily looked at the top for a moment before smiling. 'Good choice.'

The girls all showered and dressed for the day before bounding down the stairs into the common room. The Marauders were all there, waiting for the girls, and Sophia greeted Sirius with a hug and a chaste kiss, as had become their routine over the last few weeks.

There were repeated wishes of 'Happy Birthday' from the four boys, which Lily accepted with a smile. The boys gave her a present each, all identically sized boxes, each wrapped in identical paper.

Lily smiled knowingly and took a seat so she could open each of the presents.

'Would I be right in thinking that these were all bought in the same shop?' she asked, a merry glint shining in her emerald eyes.

The boys nodded and smiled back.

'Hmm, and it doesn't take a genius to work out that you all took the gift wrapping option in store.'

At this, the four boys exchanged sheepish looks, but Lily simply laughed.

'It's alright ... I'm touched you all bought me something.' She gave them a broad smile as she ripped into the first of the boxes.

The girls had informed the Marauders of their plans to buy Lily a charm bracelet, so the boys had each ordered her charms to add to it. Peter had bought a pair of gold dice; Remus had selected one that was the rune for the word 'friend'; Sirius had chosen a gold starfish, and James had picked a silver dove.

Lily thanked each of the boys and allowed them all to attach their charms to her bracelet. Sophia noticed that James continued to hold Lily's wrist once he'd attached the dove ... not to mention the fact that Lily did nothing to pull away from him. It was only when Peter complained about being hungry that James became aware of what he was doing and let go of her, though Sophia could see that he was reluctant to do so. When she looked back to Sirius, Sophia could see he'd noticed the same thing as she had. She quirked an eyebrow up at him, and he gave a small nod, a smirk evident on his face.

The Gryffindors enjoyed a leisurely breakfast together; Lily was beset by owls, each bearing more birthday cards wishing her well; some even carried more birthday presents for her to open. When it came time for them to leave, Sophia noticed James in front of her, clearly looking for Lily. A quick glance behind her and she saw Lily walking behind Melanie and Niahm. She didn't need a second look to know something was troubling her best friend.

'Sirius, I need to speak to Lily,' she whispered as they walked along, hand in hand. Sirius turned his face to see her better, his grey eyes questioning. 'Something's wrong ... I can tell. Could you distract James?' Sirius nodded, and she squeezed his hand before letting go and slipping back beside Lily.

Grasping the redhead's elbow, she steered them both down the corridor into a shadowy alcove. Lily looked startled by Sophia's action and quickly looked up and down the hallway before speaking in a hushed tone.

'What are you doing?' she asked.

'What's wrong?' Sophia countered.

Lily stayed silent for a moment, her fingers worrying in front of her. Looking down at her hands, she whispered, 'It's Sev.' Although Sophia couldn't see her face, Sophia could hear the tightness in her voice which told her Lily was very upset indeed.

'What's happened?' Sophia was very careful to keep her tone neutral as she spoke.

Lily took a steadying breath before speaking again. 'Nothing ... that's the thing.'

Sophia's brow knitted in confusion as she tried to work out what Lily meant by her statement. Drawing a blank, she reached out to still Lily's hands, the contact causing Lily to look up at her again. Sophia could see the tears brimming in Lily's eyes; reacting on impulse, she pulled her friend into a tight hug.

'Oh, Lily,' she whispered. 'Please, don't cry.'

Lily's arms wound around Sophia, and she gripped on tight as she continued to breathe erratically, clearly trying to stop the tears from falling.

'Talk to me, Lils.'

Sophia felt Lily shake as she held her. 'I don't know if I can,' she whispered.

'It's me, Lily. You can tell me anything. That's why we will always be friends ... we know too much about each other *not* to be friends,' Sophia joked, hoping she could cheer Lily up slightly.

'Oh, Soph,' Lily said, a slight chuckle to her voice. Slowly, Lily slackened her grip, and Sophia stepped away, though she still held onto Lily's hands. The two girls looked at each other for a moment, then Lily sighed and spoke once more. 'I'm being stupid,' she stated.

'Why?' Sophia enquired gently.

'I still thought he would send me something.' Lily looked ashamed as she cast her eyes to the floor once more. 'Stupid, right? We've not properly spoken since he tried to apologise for calling me a Mudblood, but I still thought he would send me a lily like he used to every year.' Lily shook her head, taking a deep breath as she did. 'I guess it didn't properly sink in until today that I've lost him forever.'

Sophia didn't know what she could say to comfort her friend. Lily had been so reluctant to talk about anything relating to Severus that Sophia had never been able to fully establish how Lily felt over the situation. Now, she was realising Lily was still mourning the loss of her friendship. Sophia eyed Lily speculatively.

'Lily,' she said, drawing the redhead's attention back from the floor, 'you and Severus ... you were just friends, right?'

Lily's eyes widened ever so slightly. 'Yes ... of course. Why do you ask?'

Sophia shook her head, 'Nothing; it's nothing.' She smiled warmly to put Lily at ease again, giving both hands a firm squeeze.

Lily nodded, though it was hesitant, like she was trying to reason why Sophia would ask her such a question.

Sophia decided to move the conversation along, determined to help her friend enjoy the rest of her birthday.

'Look, I may not be able to sort this out for you, but I do know where we could find chocolate fudge brownies ... fancy coming to find them with me?' Sophia grinned and was relieved to see Lily quirk a corner of her lips up in reply.

The girls spent the next hour in the kitchen being fussed over by the house-elves who gave them a rather large tray of brownies (they had doubled the size of the platter when they found out it was Lily's birthday). Feeling stuffed and not a little sick, Sophia shrank down the platter so that they could take the leftovers up to the common room for the rest of their friends to share between themselves.

The sixth years spent the rest of the morning and the afternoon celebrating Lily's birthday by playing games of Wizard's Chess, Exploding Snap and by just generally relaxing together, each of them glad to have a legitimate excuse not to work for a day.

The three other girls had helped themselves to two brownies each and the Marauders each fought over the remainder, which resulted in Remus and Sirius getting into a small scuffle over the last brownie.

Sophia had suggested they could split it in half, but *apparently* it was an all-or-nothing situation. As far as she could see, though, by fighting over it, all they had achieved was mashing half the brownie into the carpet and the other half into their clothes. She was certain that there was a part of the male psyche that she would *never* understand.

She had kept a close eye on Lily throughout the day after her small emotional outburst in the morning. However, she was pleased to see that Lily appeared to be back to her normal self, and she was even more pleased to see that Lily had accepted a seat next to James and had made no effort to move from that spot since. When it came time to go down to the Great Hall once more for dinner, Lily even went so far as to walk with James, chatting happily and sitting next to him during dinner that night as well.

Once back in the common room, Sophia was surprised to see that Lily wasn't with them. Panicking slightly, she turned to say something to Sirius, but halted when she saw him smirking.

'Just realised she's missing, have you?' he said, speaking quietly so no one else nearby could hear them.

Sophia just looked back at him, waiting for him to continue.

'Notice anyone else missing?'

Sophia quickly glanced around, and then it hit her. She turned back to look at Sirius, wide-eyed.

He nodded, a smirk on his face. 'Yep, James hung back with her as we all walked on. I think he's taken her up to the Astronomy Tower.'

'Oh, my,' Sophia breathed. She began to chuckle and smiled broadly back at Sirius. 'Good luck, James.'

'Indeed,' Sirius replied. 'We await the results with baited breath!'

They did not need to wait long to find out what the result was. It was presented to them when a sobbing Lily came running back into the common room before flying up the stairs to the girls' dormitories. James was hot on her heels, crashing ungracefully through the portrait hole in his desperate attempt to catch up with her.

'Lily! Lily! Please, wait! LILY!'

Sirius and Sophia had leapt up from their seats by the window.

James attempted to run up the stairs as he frantically followed Lily. However, by the time he reached the fifth step, the stairs had turned into a slide under his feet. He fell to the floor forcefully and slid all the way back down to land in a heap in the common room.

Sirius quickly helped James up, then had to forcefully stop him from trying to make another foolish and futile attempt to reach Lily.

'Out of my way!' James shouted, violently trying to shake free of Sirius' hold on him. 'I have to speak to her!'

'James!' Sophia snapped in an effort to get his attention. '*What* happened?' She was frantic with worry, but wanted to get the gist of the story from James before she tried to calm Lily down.

James ignored her completely and continued to struggle against Sirius.

'James, mate, listen to Sophia ... tell us what happened!' Sirius' face was slowly turning red from the effort of restraining him.

James gave a couple more jerks, but reason slowly seemed to filter back into his consciousness, and he finally relaxed in Sirius' arms. He glanced to the side and saw everyone in the common had stopped whatever they were doing and was staring at him instead. He swallowed nervously and, for a moment, looked like a rabbit caught in the head lights.

'All right, you lot, get back to whatever it was you were doing ... nothing to see here.' Sirius stared at everyone in the common until they had all, somewhat sheepishly, gone back to their previous occupations. He turned his attention back to James. 'Come over here,' he said quietly, tugging on James' arm and pulling him towards an empty corner of the room.

Sophia noticed Remus, Peter, Niahm, Melanie, and Lucy looking curiously up from the sofas. All of them seemed unsure what to do, so she waved at them to sit down ... reassuring them that she and Sirius could handle things for the moment.

'Okay, what the hell happened?' Sirius asked.

Sophia winced slightly as Sirius' phrasing ... if she had asked she would have been a little bit more tactful about it.

'I don't know,' James replied despondently.

'What do you mean? How can you *not* know?' Sirius asked in disbelief.

Sophia reached out a hand and laid it on Sirius' arm ... a non-verbal way of trying to get him to calm down.

'I just *don't*!' James replied harshly, frustration evident in his voice.

'Okay, James. Tell me everything that happened,' Sophia soothed, trying desperately to be the rational person in the discussion despite the fierce feeling of urgency she had in her gut telling her she needed to be with Lily right *now*.

James huffed. 'We were up in the Astronomy Tower, and we chatted about her birthday. I plucked this feather from the parapet and transfigured it into a flower. I turned round and held it out for her to take as I asked if she would go out with me. She didn't move, didn't even make a sound, and then she just bolted. I ran after her, but she wouldn't come back.' James looked utterly heartbroken and deflated once he had finished.

'What kind of flower did you turn the feather into?' Sophia asked, already dreading what she expected to hear.

'A white lily ... why?'

'Shit!' Sophia exclaimed, her worst fear realised; she ran up the stairs, oblivious to James and Sirius' startled looks or calls.

Sophia ran up the stairs two at a time and came hurtling into her dormitory to find Lily sitting on the edge of her bed, tears streaming down her face.

'Oh, Lily,' she cooed softly, seating herself next to Lily, reaching out to wrap her arms around her shoulders. Lily turned and buried her head against Sophia's shoulder; it didn't take long for Sophia to feel the dampness spread through her shirt. 'James told me what happened.'

Sophia held onto Lily as she cried, waiting patiently for Lily to be able to talk again. Slowly, Lily's shaking eased, and she broke the silence, her voice sounding strained.

'I loved him.'

Sophia didn't need clarification that 'he' was Severus. 'I know you did.'

'Along with you, he was my best friend, and I lost him.' Lily gave a deep sniff.

Sophia didn't know what she could say, so she opted to stay silent.

'It's my fault. It's all my fault.' Lily's voice sounded utterly hollow.

'Shh, Lily. It *wasn't* all your fault. Severus made his own choices. Even if he was angry and upset, it still doesn't excuse what he called you.'

'But I could have listened ... I could have given him a chance when he came to apologise. I didn't ... I told him to go and never come back. And he's held me to my request, Soph. He's *never* going to come back.' A fresh wave of tears consumed Lily as she finished speaking.

Sophia rubbed Lily's back as she cried anew, whispering nonsensical words as she did in an attempt to calm her friend's nerves. When Lily had regained some control, Sophia spoke.

'What about James?' she whispered, almost afraid to bring it up, but knowing Lily would need to talk about it.

'I ... I can't ... I just ... I need more time.'

Sophia nodded. 'Okay,' she breathed. 'It'll be okay, Lils. I promise.' Privately, Sophia prayed that it really would be okay at some point in the future.

She continued to sit with Lily until her friend had calmed down and fallen asleep, her cheeks still showing the evidence of all her heartbroken tears. Gently, Sophia moved Lily to lie on the bed, bringing a blanket up over her before leaving the room to make her way back down to the common room.

As soon as she entered the common room, James was on his feet and making his way over to her, Sirius close behind him. Knowing they would need some privacy, she walked over to an empty corner of the common room and waited for the two boys.

'How is she?' James demanded, worry clearly showing on his face.

'She's okay ... she's calmed down a lot. She's sleeping at the moment,' Sophia replied softly.

James breathed a sigh of relief, but then turned his attention back to Sophia. 'What happened?'

Her heart went out to James ... he had no idea what had caused Lily's catastrophic reaction. She couldn't tell him the whole truth ... most importantly, it would be a betrayal of trust between herself and Lily, but she also knew James' feelings about Severus Snape, and there was no way she was going to admit *this* to him and risk being in the firing line. No, if anything ever happened between Lily and James, then they could have that discussion privately or not at all.

'James,' Sophia began sadly, 'I can't tell you the full story.' He took a breath, as if to protest, but she stilled him immediately. 'No, James, this is *not* for me to discuss. Lily's reasons for her reaction are her own, and therefore she should decide whether or not to tell you. I'll warn you, though, that I wouldn't expect for her to explain this to you. I'd also advice that you don't badger her to find out. She's upset and hurting, and if you try to push her, you *will* destroy the tentative friendship you have built up this year.'

James looked not only puzzled but also hurt ... yet, Sophia knew it was better to prepare him.

'However, I did ask about you.'

At this, James' face changed to one of cautious hope, and Sophia smiled softly at him.

'She didn't rule out anything flat out, *but* she's feeling confused at the moment and she just needs time. Be patient with her, James,' Sophia implored.

James nodded slowly in understanding. Sophia knew he was still crushed by what had happened, but she was secretly impressed by the mature way he was handling what she was telling him. He turned his brown eyes back up to her, giving her a deeply sincere look.

'Just tell her ... tell her, whatever I did, I'm sorry. I never meant to hurt her, and if she will let me, I want to make it up to her,' he said softly.

Sophia nodded. 'I will, James.'

With that, James left Sirius and Sophia and returned to the rest of the group by the fire.

'Is she really okay?' Sirius asked as he gripped Sophia's waist on either side, pulling her a step closer to him.

'Yeah, she is.'

'You're not even going to tell me what happened, are you?' Sirius stated more than asked.

Sophia shook her head sadly. 'No, I'm sorry, but I can't. Lily trusts me to keep her secrets, I can't betray her. You would do the same for any of the Marauders, I'm sure.'

Sirius sighed resignedly. 'You're right. Besides, if I knew, I would want to tell James, and he wouldn't leave me alone until I told him, so it's probably for the best.' He paused and kissed her chastely on the lips. 'Are you okay, though?'

'I am; I have you.' She smiled warmly at him before he wrapped her in a warm hug and then led her back to join the group of friends by the fire.

Chapter 21: First Time For Everything

Chapter 21 of 23

Apparation lessons begin, and Sirius and Sophia share their first date.

Disclaimer: Everything you recognise belongs to JK Rowling. I'm simply playing with her creations.

Author's Notes: As normal, beta credit to DracoGurlFurever for her hard work and a huge thank you to all the Admin staff here. Also, thank you to you for reading ... this was quite a hard chapter for me to write for some reason, so I'd love to know your thoughts on it, and I hope the wait has been worth it. ;-)



Chapter 21: First Time For Everything

The next day, there was a stilted silence between Lily and James and an awkwardness that hadn't been there for much of the year. Sophia could tell that James was treading on eggshells in his efforts to avoid upsetting Lily again, and for her part, Lily was clearly embarrassed by her reaction and unwilling to talk about it. However, as the week dragged on, the pair slowly seemed to work their way back to a tenuous friendship, and Sophia fervently hoped that they would both work past this incident, given enough time.

The next Friday saw the first Apparation lessons take place in the Great Hall. Sophia and Sirius walked down to the hall hand in hand along with the rest of the sixth-year Gryffindors. The tables had all been pushed back against the walls of the Hall, and towards the front stood the four Heads of House, along with someone Sophia didn't recognise. She guessed this must be the Ministry official who had been sent to instruct them.

The students all gathered in the hall, a constant level of chatter filling the space as everyone anxiously awaited their first lesson to begin. Sirius was in an active discussion with the rest of the Marauders about the benefits of Apparation, but Sophia was too focused on observing the teachers, keen for the lesson to start, to participate.

Eventually, the small wizard she didn't recognise stepped forward and cleared his throat. The students all took immediate notice, and the chatter died down as everyone turned their focus to the front of the hall.

'Good evening, everyone,' he said, his voice slightly reedy-sounding.

Sophia's attention was captured by his thin, white hair. Even, Dumbledore, at his great age, didn't have hair that white, and this wizard didn't look old enough to rival the headmaster. He was also rakishly thin and frail-looking, and privately, she worried about his overall level of health.

'My name is Wilkie Twycross, and I am to be your Ministry Apparition instructor. My aim, over the coming weeks, is to prepare you for your Apparation tests.'

Twycross went on to emphasise that, under normal circumstances, Apparation was not possible within the walls of Hogwarts, and Sophia saw Lily give Sirius a smug grin at which Sirius merely rolled his eyes. Twycross asked the students to spread themselves out within the hall, and the Heads of House moved from their sentry posts behind the Ministry official out into the crowd of students, shepherding them into suitable positions.

Once everyone was placed correctly, Twycross flourished his wand, causing large wooden hula-hoops to appear on the ground in front of each of the students. Twycross proceeded to drill into the students what he called the 'Three "D's" of Apparation,' which were: 'Destination, Determination, and Deliberation.'

After a brief bout of instruction on how to use the 'Three "D's",' the students were allowed their first attempt at Apparation into their hula-hoop.

Sophia focused all of her mind on the hula-hoop in front of her, studying it so closely that she even began to note the grain of the wooden floor boards and the scrapes that scarred its surface after years of students' use and abuse. She noted the blackness that filled each dent and groove and the imperfect patterns the marks made on the floor. She then turned her focus to imagine herself occupying the space, her body folding in on itself, into nothing, from where she was now, only to unfold and re-materialise in the space she was focusing on a moment later.

Finally, on Twycross's command, she summoned all her magical strength to allow her to Apparate. Holding herself tight through effort and concentration, she turned gracefully on her heel, squeezing her eyes shut to allow herself to focus on the image of her re-appearing within the hoop.

However, as she spun, nothing seemed to happen; when she opened her eyes and saw the hoop, still empty, in front of her, she knew she had failed. Looking up and

around the hall, she quickly realised that she was not the only person to have struggled on their first attempt. Sirius was looking at his hoop like it had personally offended him, Lily looked despondent, and Peter ... well, he just looked confused.

For the next hour, Sophia focused all her energy on trying to Apparate, but to no avail. So far, no-one had been able to successfully make the trip five feet into their respective hula-hoops; as Twycross dismissed them, she knew that everyone was secretly wondering if they would *ever* master the skill.

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The following week followed much the same pattern as every other week, with only Sophia's level of homework increasing. She and Sirius were spending all the time they could afford together, though she did sometimes have to leave him and go to the library with Lily. Sirius really was a distraction as far as getting homework done was concerned, and the library was the one place she knew he'd never voluntarily enter if he had any other choice.

That Friday saw the second Apparation lesson take place. It followed much the same format as the first one. Twycross re-iterated the 'Three "D's"' to them before letting them loose to try to Apparate into a hula-hoop.

After forty-five minutes of fruitless attempts, and feeling slightly dizzy from all the spinning on the spot, Sophia suddenly felt her whole body being squeezed tightly. She panicked, thinking for a moment that her ribs would surely break under this amount of force, but then, as quickly as the crushing sensation had started, it ended.

Standing with her eyes still firmly shut, Sophia panted a breath, then began a mental check of her body. She did not feel any pain anywhere, so she was pretty certain she hadn't spliced herself. Slowly, she peeked one eye open and saw the hula-hoop surrounding her feet. She'd done it!

Snapping her eyes completely open, she broke into a stunned, but extremely excited, grin. It was then that she realised that everyone in the hall was looking at her; her cheeks flamed red quickly upon noticing all those sets of eyes staring.

'Well done, Miss ... er, what was your name, dear?' Twycross asked, having walked over to her while clapping his hands.

'McKinloch, sir,' she answered quietly.

He smiled warmly at her. 'Well done, Miss McKinloch. Do you now see what can be achieved by using *Destination, Determination, and Deliberation*?' he asked, turning his attention to the rest of the students in the hall. 'Now, we have fifteen minutes left, so keep practicing!'

Sophia managed to Apparate one more time before the end of the lesson, and Lucy had also managed one successful trip along with one of the Ravenclaw boys. Remus had come extremely close to managing his first attempt at Apparation, but, unfortunately, something had gone slightly wrong; he had managed to splice off his little finger. His yowl of pain upon arriving in his hula hoop had caused all four Heads of House to descend upon him. All the students had stopped to watch the proceedings, and, after a bang and a puff of purple smoke, the teachers had backed away to reveal a whole-again Remus, now looking decidedly embarrassed.

Once in the common room, Sophia settled herself next to Sirius, leaning into his side as his arm wrapped around her shoulder. The group of sixth years spent the evening chatting, Melanie and Niahm playing Exploding Snap. Sophia was relieved to see that, two weeks on, Lily and James seemed to be perfectly comfortable with each other once more. She just hoped James had enough sense to wait long enough before asking Lily on a date again.

When it came time to go to bed, she gave Sirius a long hug as their friends walked up to their respective dormitories.

'So, I'll meet you down here in the morning, then? And then we'll go into Hogsmeade?' Sirius asked, pulling back from their hug but maintaining his grip on her waist, his palms flat against the small of her back.

Sophia nodded. 'Yep, I'll be down about nine-thirty,' she replied, smiling brightly but beginning to feel oddly nervous about the idea of their long anticipated 'official' first date.

'Great,' was his only reply before kissing her good-night. As they let go of one another, Sirius squeezed her hands, grinning at her before he left to go up to his own bed.

Climbing the stairs to her bed, Sophia's stomach still rolled with nerves over the coming date, and she prayed that she would be able to sleep.

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'Hamish!' Sophia scolded as she emerged from the bathroom, her hair still hanging in wet tendrils around her face. Her grey cat lifted his head slowly and blinked at her sleepily but otherwise made no effort to move. Sophia marched over to her bed and carelessly dropped her hairbrush on the cover before hastily reaching over to drag her cat off of her jumper. 'There had better not be cat hairs on this, Hamish,' she muttered. Hamish, for his part, remained in his sleep-induced relaxed state, and as a result, was twice as difficult to move. 'You have the whole bed, Hamish. Why couldn't you sleep somewhere else, huh? You *always* have to sleep on my clothes.'

Lucy giggled from her place on the other side of the room. 'You know he does it because it smells like you, and because he knows it annoys you.'

'Hmm,' Sophia replied. 'Well, he certainly won't get any treats today,' she continued, pointing a finger at Hamish, who gave a pathetic-sounding meow in response. She picked up her jumper and surveyed it for any grey hairs, then decided to cast a quick *Scourgify* to be on the safe side.

Once certain that it was clean, Sophia pulled the jumper on over her head and then turned her attention to her hair. Picking up her wand again, she began to dry each curl and ringlet with meticulous attention to detail. She couldn't understand why it was that she was feeling nervous about her date with Sirius, a feeling made worse by the fact that one particular curl refused to hang properly and was instead sticking out at a right angle from her head.

'I hate my hair,' Sophia grumbled with frustration, glaring at the curl in the mirror.

'You do not "hate" your hair,' Lucy chided from the other side of the dorm room, barely managing to suppress a giggle.

'I do!' Sophia exclaimed, turning round to face Lucy. 'It never does what it is supposed to do!' Sophia focused her attention on her reflection again. The butterflies that had taken up residence in her belly were fluttering around chaotically, and her misbehaving hair was doing nothing to quell her nerves. Picking up the offending curl, she aimed her wand at it once more, muttering a charm to get it to hang straight. When she released it, and it jumped back into its former position, she threw her hands up in the air. 'Oh, for Merlin's sake, I give up! I swear, sometimes it would be easier to shave it all off and just have a wig!'

The rest of the girls giggled at Sophia's exclamation as Niahm went to her rescue. 'Hold still a minute,' she said as she spun Sophia forcefully round. Sophia watched in the mirror as Niahm took hold of the curl and won the battle that Sophia had just lost. 'There now, nothing to worry about,' Niamh soothed.

'Thank you,' Sophia said meekly. 'I'm being silly, aren't I?' She turned around to face the other girls sheepishly.

'Maybe just a smidge,' Lily replied, smiling warmly.

'I just want everything to be perfect ... it's our first proper date.'

'We know, but you have been together now for a month. I seriously doubt Sirius would break up with you because you had a curl out of place,' Melanie assured her, an amused grin on her face.

'Why do I feel this nervous? I mean, I've spent loads of time with him before now. It's not like we don't know each other.' Sophia fidgeted nervously with her hands as she glanced around at her friends.

'Stop worrying, will you? You're beginning to make me nervous!' Lucy joked as she walked over to where Sophia was. 'Just enjoy the day and let him take the lead. Then, this evening, you can fill us in on the details.' Lucy gave Sophia a wink which caused a few giggles to escape from Sophia. It was enough to take the edge off her nerves, for the moment, at least.

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'All set?' James asked Sirius as they prepared to leave their dorm room.

'Think so, yes,' replied Sirius, giving himself one final look over in the mirror. 'Now, you do remember what I told you, don't you?' Sirius asked, turning to face the rest of the Marauders.

'You mean, when you said that, if we do anything to muck this date up for you, you'll hex us all to within an inch of our lives?' Peter asked innocently.

Sirius raised an eyebrow at his friends, 'Yes, *that*. You do promise that you won't pull any pranks on Sophia and I today, right?'

'Us?' Remus asked, equalling Peter's look of innocence.

'Play pranks?' James continued, joining them. 'When have we ever done that?'

'Don't play coy with me, Prongs,' Sirius threatened, though there was a slightly playful edge to his tone. 'I still remember what you did when I was on that date with Julie last year. She broke up with me shortly after that little fiasco.'

'Ah, yeah, but she was stuck-up. In many ways, we did you a favour there,' James stated nonchalantly. 'Sophia would have seen the funny side.'

'It was a fantastic prank, too,' Peter said, clearly fighting back laughter from the memory.

'Your faces were a picture,' Remus added, a mischievous look gracing his features.

Sirius also had to fight back laughter at the memory. He'd been on a date with Julie Anderson, a Ravenclaw girl in their year. They had been enjoying a quiet moment on the outskirts of Hogsmeade together when the other Marauders doused them both with jets of water.

Sirius had seen the funny side of the prank, but, sadly, Julie hadn't been so impressed. How was he supposed to have known that you couldn't get a silk top wet? When Sirius had refused to reprimand his friends for their behaviour, Julie had broken up with him. James was right, she had been a bit stuck up, but that still wasn't the point. Desperate times called for desperate measures ... he had to get them to promise to behave.

'Okay, well, just remember that, if you ever go on a date with say, oh, I don't know...' Sirius paused to stare at the ceiling while he tapped his chin before looking back at James with a glint in his eye, '...Lily Evans, I have the right to payback ... with interest,' he said slyly. A smug grin played on Sirius's face as he watched the colour drain from James's.

'We promise, Pads,' James said quickly.

'Good,' Sirius said happily, giving James a pat on the back before leaving to meet Sophia in the common room.

He bounded down the stairs and glanced round the common room before he spotted Sophia by the portrait. She stood alone, her gaze fixed upon her hands, fidgeting. It was a clear sign that she was feeling nervous. Sirius quickly crossed over to the other side of the common room before he snuck along the wall to where Sophia stood. He was positioned just out of her eye line now as he carefully crept up behind her. He quickly reached out his arms and wrapped them around her waist as he leaned into her ear to whisper, 'Miss me?'

Sophia physically jumped in his arms as she let out a simultaneous shriek at his attack before relaxing. Her hand came up to clutch her heart as she breathed in deeply before answering him.

'You prat! You frightened the life out of me!' Sirius wasn't too put off by her choice of words as Sophia was laughing as she spoke.

'Sorry, Soph. I just couldn't resist,' Sirius said, through a large grin, rocking her in his arms. After a couple of seconds, he released his grip and stepped round in front of her. 'Hi,' he said, still smiling as he looked into her eyes.

'Hi,' she replied through her own smile before he pressed a gentle kiss to her lips.

'Shall we be off then?' Sirius asked as he held out his arm for her to take. She smiled and nodded; they linked arms and he led her out of the common room.

It was mid-February, two days before Valentine's Day, and there was still a cold nip to the air. The ground still showed evidence of the hard frost that had occurred the night before, but the sky was a crystal clear blue with only a few high, wispy white clouds. Sophia and Sirius carefully made their way down the path through the grounds of Hogwarts towards Hogsmeade.

'So, what are we doing today?' Sophia asked as they entered the village. The streets were filled with the usual sea of schoolchildren, and Sophia spotted quite a few faces that she knew, though she could not see any of the other girls or the other Marauders.

'Well, I thought we could go to Madam Puddifoot's, and I would treat you to lunch,' Sirius replied. He wasn't thrilled with the idea of going to the cafe, especially as it would be decorated for Valentine's Day, which would mean vomit-inducing levels of pink, frilly, lacy decorations, but he thought it would be the place that Sophia would expect to be taken to. However, the raised eyebrow she was giving him made him doubt his previous assumption.

'Madam Puddifoot's? With all the lace, frills and hearts everywhere? Do you honestly want to go there?' she asked sceptically.

'Yes?' Sirius replied hesitantly.

'Are you sure?' Sophia replied, still sounding very sceptical. 'If you really want to go there, then we can, but I would be just as happy going to The Three Broomsticks. I guess I assumed that is where you would prefer to go, too. I didn't have you down as being a pink lace kind of man.' Sophia gave a shrug and waited for him to answer, but a smile was desperately tugging at the corners of her mouth.

'Well, it would depend on where the pink lace was,' Sirius responded with a wink, making Sophia blush slightly. 'But you're right; I'm not keen on it framing a window. I just thought that would be somewhere you would want to go.'

'Well, it's an okay place, but if you're not keen on going there, I'm happy to go elsewhere.' Sophia gave him a smile which he returned, grateful for his reprieve.

'Three Broomsticks it is, then,' he said happily before taking her hand and leading her in the direction of the pub. As they entered, Sirius spotted the other Marauders sitting at a table in the centre of the room. His friends looked up at him, and each smiled and waved as Sirius and Sophia passed them, although none of them tried to engage the pair in conversation. Sirius and Sophia waved in return before making their way over to a corner booth at the back of the pub.

'What would you like to drink?' Sirius asked as Sophia removed her coat before sliding into the corner seat.

'A Butterbeer would be lovely, thanks,' she replied with a smile. Sirius nodded before walking across to the bar and placing the order with Rosemerta. She quickly sorted out his order, and Sirius was soon back at the table with two Butterbeers in his hands.

He slid carefully around the table and handed Sophia her drink. 'There you go. Cheers.' They clinked their bottles together gently before each taking a sip. He studied Sophia closely as she put her bottle down the table. She kept her eyes down slightly, and there was a certain amount of tension in her muscles. 'Soph, are you okay?' he questioned.

She looked up at him with a slightly panicked expression. 'Yeah, fine ... why?'

He shrugged. 'I don't know, you just seemed tense ... almost like you were nervous, or something.' He watched as her cheeks turned an attractive shade of pink. 'You are ... you're nervous, aren't you?' He chuckled.

Sophia let her face fall into her hands. 'I'm that transparent, aren't I?' she groused. 'You must think I'm mad or something.'

Sirius gently pulled her hands away from her face, a warm smile on his face. 'I don't think you're mad. In fact, I find it highly endearing.' He pulled one hand up and placed a gentle kiss on her knuckles, noting the way her cheeks flushed at his gesture. 'Besides, I'm not one to judge. I was feeling a tad nervous about today too.'

'Really?' Sophia's tone was slightly disbelieving.

'Really,' he replied, as reassuringly as he could. 'The last time I went on a date, the girl broke up with me two days later due to my so-called friends' actions towards us.' Sirius chuckled slightly. 'So I had to use some pretty strong persuasion techniques to ensure they wouldn't do a repeat performance today. Don't want you breaking up with me, too!'

Sophia giggled. 'What did they do the last time you were on a date, then?' she inquired, clearly relaxing now that the conversation had started.

'Well, let's just say that they doused us with water, declaring we needed to "get a room,"' Sirius replied, a hint of mirth in his tone causing Sophia to giggle once more.

'Sounds like something they would do, all right,' Sophia agreed.

'Yes, hence the reason I was so determined that they wouldn't interfere today!'

'Indeed. I mean, being doused with water is fine in late May, when it's warm, but if they did that to us today, we'd turn into icicles!' Sophia joked. 'If it's all the same to you, I would rather not turn into an icicle any time soon.'

'You and me both,' Sirius grinned, placing his hand over Sophia's that was resting on her thigh. She turned her hand over so that she could grasp his hand in acceptance of the gesture and gave him a shy smile.

The pair ate their lunch leisurely before ordering another couple of Buteerbeers to round off the meal. The conversation had flowed easily, and Sirius was pleased to note that Sophia was acting her normal self, her nerves from the start of the date now long forgotten. As they finished their drinks, Sirius decided it was time to move on from the Three Broomsticks to the next part of his agenda.

'You ready to go?' he asked, a bubbling excitement in his tone.

Sophia twitched an eyebrow up at him. 'Go?'

'Yes, go. As in, leave, vacate the premises. Surely you are familiar with the concept?' he teased.

Sophia playfully slapped his arm. 'Yes, I think I grasp the concept. What I meant was, where are we going?' she asked, chuckling slightly.

'Ah, well, that is the surprise, isn't it?' he replied, a large grin on his face.

'Hmm, so you're not giving me any clues, then?' she asked.

Sirius shook his head, still grinning.

Sophia picked up her glass and drained the dregs of her Butterbeer before turning back to Sirius with a smile. 'Let's go!'

Sirius paid for their meal and drinks before escorting Sophia back outside into the village. The weather was still cold but clear, and made for pleasant walking conditions.

'So, which way?' Sophia asked, looking up and down the main street.

'We are going that way,' Sirius replied, pointing in the direction of Hogwarts. Grasping her glove-covered hand in his, he led her down through the village, turning right down a lane just on the outskirts that led to a wood.

They followed a path into the woods and walked a short way until they came to a man-made clearing. In the clearing, there was a short wooden bench covered with intricate carvings of ivy twisting up the legs, arms, and back of the bench, and there was stone-carved bird bath that formed the focal point of the garden. Surrounding the bird bath were the outlines of a formal flower bed, but, due to the time of the year, no flowers were blooming yet. In from the edge of the trees crept a carpet of snowdrops.

'Sirius! This is beautiful!' Sophia gasped upon seeing the spot. She turned disbelieving eyes on him and he smiled, pleased that she liked it.

'I'm glad you approve,' he said, albeit somewhat smugly.

'It's ... well, it's ... how did you find this place?'

Sirius chuckled. 'I'm a Marauder, Soph,' he teased. 'Finding places no-one else knows about is just part of our repertoire.'

She rolled her eyes. 'Of course; how silly of me.'

Sirius grinned winningly before directing her to the bench and sitting beside her.

'Feeling cold?' he asked, seeing Sophia rub her hands together. He noticed the tip of her nose and the high points of her cheeks were pink also.

'Hmm, a wee bit, but I'll be fine,' she replied smiling.

'Well, maybe this will help. It's why I brought you here in the first place.' Sophia gave him an enquiring look as he pulled out his wand. With a swish and a flick, a ball of blue-bell flame was floating in front of them.

'There you go,' he said. 'You can warm your fingers on that.'

Sophia smiled, pulling off her gloves and holding her hands up to the flame to warm them. Sirius, meanwhile, reached into his coat and produced a packet of marshmallows and some sticks.

'Marshmallows?' Sophia asked, sounding surprised.

Sirius nodded, smiling broadly. 'A little bird told me that you love to roast marshmallows, and seeing as I'd never done it before, not to mention that the idea of legitimate

arson involving food was *very* appealing to me,' ... he winked ... 'I thought we could try it.'

Sophia giggled once more. 'Yes, I can see arson being very appealing to you, the pyromaniac that you are,' she teased, her blue eyes sparkling. 'And would this "little bird" happen to have long red hair?'

'She might,' Sirius replied. 'She told me this would be all we would need ... she did tell me the truth, right?' He raised an eyebrow in inquiry. He didn't fully trust Lily to tell him the full truth, thinking she might quite like him to look a fool.

'Yes, she did,' Sophia replied with a smile. 'Would you like me show you what you are supposed to do?'

Sirius nodded and handed over the various items and watched with curiosity. He'd approached Lily to ask for her help for something special to do on their date, trying to find out something that Sophia loved that he didn't yet know about. When Lily had first suggested roasting marshmallows, he'd been utterly confused. He didn't even know what a marshmallow was. In fact, he'd thought Lily was playing a trick on him. It was only the reassurance of Melanie that these marshmallow things were real that had persuaded him. At his request, Lily arranged for her parents to send two packets of marshmallows to Hogwarts ... one for his date with Sophia, the second for him and the rest of the Marauders to try ... and a packet of roasting sticks.

Sophia ripped open the marshmallows, pulling out a pink one and skewering it on one of the sticks before handing it to him, an all-too-innocent smile on her face.

Sirius raised an eyebrow, giving the marshmallow a critical look. 'A pink one?'

Sophia continued to smile but he could tell she was desperately trying not to laugh.

'Why can't I have a white one?'

'Because,' she drawled, making it sound like she thought him stupid, 'the white ones are my favourite.'

'They taste the same! Or I think so, anyway,' he argued, still refusing to accept the offending pink marshmallow ... it simply mocked his ... manliness.

'Well, if they taste the same, you won't mind having a pink one, then,' Sophia countered. Sirius decided she looked entirely too smug.

'Fine,' He sighed resignedly, plucking the stick from her hand. He watched as she speared her own (*white*, his subconscious muttered darkly) marshmallow before she turned back to him.

'And now we roast,' she state simply, gently placing the marshmallow into the blue flame.

Sirius mimicked Sophia's action, turning his marshmallow as Sophia rotated her own. When the marshmallows were golden brown around the outside, Sophia slid hers out of the flame and popped it into her mouth, pulling it off the stick with a smile.

Dubiously, Sirius copied her once more, careful to stop any of the marshmallow dripping over him as he brought it up to his mouth. Marshmallows, he decided, were *definitely* better roasted.

'Oh, *Merlin*!' he moaned, the sugary, sticky ooze of the sweet coating the inside of his mouth. 'This is bloody amazing!'

Sophia giggled. 'Even though it was pink?' she teased.

Sirius glared at her, but he couldn't hold it for long, instead breaking into a grin once he'd swallowed. 'Shut up and give me another one,' he demanded.

Sophia plucked his stick from her hand and slid a white marshmallow on this time. She roasted it for him before holding out the stick for him to take the marshmallow in his mouth. Her smile was brilliant as she watched him eat. As soon as he had finished, he reached out to her and pulled her towards him for a kiss. Her lips were sweet and slightly sticky, much like his own, but he didn't mind. Deepening the kiss, he slipped a hand into Sophia's curls, keeping her close. Sophia's own hands gripped his shoulders as she leaned into him.

Slowly, though, Sophia drew back, a shy smile on her face as she met his gaze. 'More marshmallows, I think, don't you?'

They sat there roasting and eating the marshmallows until they were all gone. Sirius ended the bluebell flame spell before standing from the bench, turning then to give a hand to Sophia. He didn't let go of her once she was standing, instead drawing her closer to him, wrapping an arm securely round her waist.

'Did you have fun?' he asked, using his free hand to brush her curls back away from her face.

'I did,' she replied softly, smiling warmly in gratitude.

'Good.' He punctuated the word with a chaste kiss. 'We should probably head back now, though,' he suggested reluctantly. It was only really the cold that was making him feel like returning to the castle.

Sophia nodded, slowly freeing herself of his grip on her waist and grasping his hand with her own as she turned to walk back out of the garden.

On impulse, he stopped, swinging Sophia back to him, a mischievous grin on his face. He barely gave Sophia a moment to steady herself as she squeaked at her sudden change of direction. He caught her securely in his arms before dropping her backwards.

'Sirius!' Sophia exclaimed.

Sirius just grinned before kissing her once more, feeling smug as he felt Sophia's hand at the back of his neck.

Suddenly, though, Sophia's foot slipped on the ice and they both crashed to the floor. Sirius just managed to brace himself on the arm around Sophia's back to stop him from crushing her completely, but both his knees and his elbow throbbed painfully from their hard collision with the ground.

Sophia groaned in pain, reaching a hand up to touch the back of her head, her eyes scrunched up in pain.

'Soph ... you alright?' Sirius asked, concerned for her.

'Yeah, fine, just banged my head,' came her reply, though her voice was oddly tight. Slowly, her eyes opened and she looked at him. 'And my bum *really* hurts,' she confessed, her cheeks turning pink; she laughed slightly as she spoke.

'I'll kiss it better, if you like,' Sirius replied, with a grin and an eyebrow waggle.

Sophia hit his bicep with her palm. 'I think you've done enough!' she giggled. 'Promise me, no more bouts of spontaneous romantic gestures? I think they cause more harm than good.'

'Okay, only planned, pre-arranged shows of romantic affection from here forward,' he said seriously. 'I'm sure I can manage that no problem,' he added, his tone self-deprecating.



Sophia snorted. 'True. How about a compromise ... don't dip me backwards for a kiss when there is ice on the ground?'

'Deal. I suppose we should get up, though,' Sirius said wryly.

Sophia nodded. Slowly, they untangled themselves, and Sirius struggled to his feet, wincing at the pain in his knees before holding out a hand to help Sophia up. Keeping a steadying arm around her, they both limped their way back to Hogwarts.

For the rest of the evening, Sirius was mocked by the rest of the Marauders for his failings, but Sophia had reassured him that she had loved the date, and for him, that was all that mattered.

## Chapter 22: Full Moon

*Chapter 22 of 23*

The full moon causes Sirius' life to become a lot more complicated than he would like.

**Disclaimer:** Do I really have to say, after twenty-one chapters, that I don't own any of this?

**Author's Notes:** As always, the beta credit goes to DracoGurlFurever and I must also thank the Admins here for all their hard work too.



### Chapter 22: Full Moon

It was a nearly a full week before Sophia could sit down again comfortably after her date with Sirius. She wasn't angry, though; if anything, she found it mildly amusing. When they had both returned to the castle, limping and sore, they had been in for some serious questions from their friends. However, once the truth was told, the Marauders certainly wasted no more time before they began teasing and tormenting Sirius for the misfortunate kiss. She felt extremely sorry for Sirius, and she'd assured him in front of everyone that she'd loved every moment of the date. Her heart had swelled at the grateful look he'd given her at her proclamation.

And it was true ... she had loved her date with him. He'd eased her early nerves, taken her somewhere private where they could talk, gone to the efforts of speaking to Lily and organising something special for them to do ... all so that she would have a wonderful time. It made her feel special. Also, the near-fatal kiss *had* been extremely romantic, if a little surprising, right up to the point where she had lost her footing.

The rest of February drifted by easily. The weather began to get warmer, though there was still the occasional cold night that caused a hard ground frost, and the days began to draw longer. Her classes and homework carried on as usual. The only slight change was that it was now even harder to get Sirius to work during their shared free periods when they were alone. He seemed to think of those free periods as mini-dates and insisted on dragging her out for walks or sitting with her on the sofas. In truth, though, he didn't have to persuade her *that* much to join him and forget about her work for a little while.

At the beginning of March, Sophia noticed Remus' complexion begin to pale, and he seemed to become more withdrawn once more. She didn't raise the issue with Remus; he always seemed reluctant to talk about what was happening to him, and she reasoned that if he wanted to talk, he knew where she was. That didn't stop her observing him closely as the full moon drew closer.

That month, the full moon was on a Saturday, and so, on Sunday morning, Sophia had risen reasonably early before going down to the common room to wait for Sirius so that they could go to breakfast together. However, twenty minutes later, neither Sirius, nor any of the Marauders, for that matter, had appeared. It was usual for her not to see Remus until late afternoon at the earliest the day after a full moon, but normally, the others would be around. She began to worry and so decided to nip up to their bedroom and make sure everything was fine.

After climbing the stairs, she found herself at their door. She rasped her knuckles against the door lightly, but there was no answer. She couldn't even hear anyone moving in there. Pausing and wondering what to do for the best, she finally decided to take a peek inside and at least determine whether they were there or not. It was possible Remus might have ended up in the Hospital Wing; they might all be away, visiting him. *That* thought made her feel ill and convinced her of her plan.

As quietly as she could, she twisted the door handle and prised the door open enough to poke her head inside the room. She had to stifle a chuckle at what she saw. All four boys were still in bed, all completely dead to the world. Her eyes fell on Sirius. His bedcovers were in a mess, all scrunched up as they covered his body apart from the bare foot that hung off the bottom corner of his bed. He was lying on his front; one arm also hung off the side of the bed, his knuckles nearly brushing the floor, while the other hand was shoved under his pillow where his head rested. He looked so peaceful in his sleep that she didn't want to disturb him. He clearly had to be exhausted, but she couldn't think of what would have caused him to become that tired since she'd said good night to him the night before.

A quick glance around the room told her that none of the boys had stirred at her intrusion, so she carefully withdrew from the room, closing the door softly before heading down to breakfast alone, making the decision to bring them back some food for when they awoke. She was sure they would appreciate it.

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Sirius slowly began to wake up, feeling like he'd been run over by the Knight Bus. His whole body felt tired and drained after the night's activities. He listened to the sounds of the room and realised his friends were all still sleeping deeply, so he allowed his eyes to close as he dozed. Clearly, there was no hurry for him to get up just yet.

The night had started out like any other full moon night. James, Peter, and himself had retired to their bedroom by ten o' clock, when they'd then squeezed themselves under James' invisibility cloak in order for them to sneak out of the castle once more. They had headed across the lawns of the castle in the direction of the Quiddich stands, the high walls of the stadium seats giving them ample coverage to complete their Animagus transformations.

Once all three had changed their forms, they'd stealthily made their way to the Whomping Willow. Peter, in his rat form, had pressed the knot at the base of the tree to immobilise the branches allowing all three of them to squeeze their way down the tunnel towards the Shrieking Shack. As James had opened the hatch with his horns, Sirius had heard Remus' sad howl, and he was glad his friend hadn't been left to suffer alone for any longer.

Remus had settled quickly once the three had joined him in one of the downstairs rooms, all of them content to curl up and sleep for a few hours. However, just after one in the morning, Sirius had stirred, waking up the rest of his friends. Bouncing and barking excitedly, he'd displayed his desire to venture out of the Shack and explore. Soon, they had all been outside, making their way through the woods to the outskirts of the village.

They had roamed happily, and Sirius had been pleased to see Remus' wolf eyes alight with curiosity and peace ... a peace he knew his friend would not have experienced if he'd been left alone, as he had once been in the past. Everything had been going brilliantly until Remus' head had whipped to the side, his nose straining as he caught the scent of something.

Suddenly alert, Sirius had raised his own canine nose, sucking in the air over his own sensitive receptors in order to find the source of his friend's interest. *Human.*

In that moment, panic had raced through him, and he'd leapt athletically through the air to land in front of Remus, baring his teeth as he issued a low, guttural growl in warning. James had been quick to join him, lowering his horns at Remus in preparation.

Remus' instincts though, were not so easily dissuaded. The werewolf within had been released, and it was prepared to fight to get to the prey it so hungrily desired. The three forms had clashed in a vicious tangle of sharp teeth and pointed horns. Sirius and James fought to simply push Remus back in the direction of the Shack, hoping that if they could just get him far enough from the human scent that hung in the air, the wolf's lust for blood would slowly die and he would return with them willingly.

James made good use of his horns, driving them down low to catch Remus behind his front legs, lifting him slightly, throwing Remus off balance, and using those split seconds to drive him backwards. Sirius, for his part, tried to aggravate Remus enough that the wolf would turn his attention to him and temporarily forget the sweeter tasting prey that was waiting further afield.

Together, they slowly won ground against their friend, but it was a tough fight. Remus' wolf form was bulky and powerful, his long paws tipped with sharp claws, his strong jaw incredibly dangerous. Though they knew that, in their Animagus form, they were not in danger of a werewolf bite because it would not cause the lycanthropy to spread, it would still hurt. A lot.

At one point, Sirius had been too slow to move out of the reach of Remus' paw, and had found himself lifted from the ground. He collided forcefully with James' horns, badly winding him. He'd struggled for a moment to suck air back into his lungs and then was back by James' side, fighting once more.

After what felt like an eternity, but was in fact only about quarter of an hour, the human scent faded away into the distance enough to help calm the werewolf down. The fight became easier, and slowly Remus was lead back to the Shrieking Shack.

Thinking about it again from the comfort of his bed, Sirius shuddered. They had come far too close to not being able to stop Remus last night. He knew that Remus would *never* be able to live with himself if he caused harm to another human being. If possible, Sirius would have kept the events of last night to himself. However, though Remus remembered little of what happened whilst he was transformed, Sirius knew Remus would feel the deep muscle pain just like he was this morning and would demand to know what had happened. Sirius knew it would not be a pretty discussion.

Eventually, he heaved himself out of bed, stumbling his way to the bathroom for a shower, leaving the rest of the Marauders in their beds. The hot water helped to ease some of his muscle ache; when he finally emerged from the shower, he was beginning to feel much better. That was, until he looked in the mirror. A deep scratch mark ran down from his right temple across his cheek to jaw, and above his left eye, he was sporting a large, black bruise. Tentatively, he touched his fingertips to the marks. They weren't as sore as the bruising to his ribs, but his ribs he could easily cover up. These marks were plain as day, and Sophia was going to see. Cursing his lack of knowledge of healing spells, he knew he would have to sneak his way to Madam Pomfrey before he saw Sophia.

Back in his room, he dressed quickly and quietly before leaving again, only this time going down to the common room. His hopes of a sneaky trip to the Hospital Wing died instantly, though. Sophia was sitting on one of the sofas by the fire.

'Morning, sleepy...'

Sophia's bright welcome died on her lips as she stared at him in disbelief. She rose quickly from her seat, reaching him in a few long strides before gently reaching out to his chin, holding it while she looked over his injuries.

'Merlin, Sirius,' she exclaimed softly; he could see the concern in her eyes. 'What on *earth* have you done to yourself? How did this happen? *When* did this happen?' Her voice rose in pitch as she spoke, and Sirius knew she was both concerned and suspicious.

'It's fine,' he assured her, giving his best smile. 'Just a scratch.'

'I can see it's a scratch, Sirius. A bloody big one. You're also ignoring the bright shiner you have over your other eye. How did this happen?' Sophia continued to stare at him, clearly baffled. Suddenly, her eyes narrowed to slits and Sirius felt nervous. Sophia in a strop was not something he cared to deal with; he was too tired. 'Did you get in a fight with the Slytherins? I don't remember seeing Snape or your brother in the Great Hall this morning.'

'What? No,' he protested; Sophia still held her steely gaze. 'Honestly, Soph, we did *not* get into a fight with the Slytherins last night. I promise you.'

Slowly, Sophia's face softened again, and Sirius breathed a mental sigh of relief.

'Okay, so what *did* happen? You still haven't told me,' she persisted.

Hoping to stall her to give him time to think of a plausible excuse, he directed her over to the sofa once more, pulling her down to sit beside her. Sophia twisted so she could more clearly see his face while he reclined against the back of the sofa, leg stretched out in front of him.

'I ... I ...' he swallowed. He only had one idea in his head, and it sounded positively ridiculous. However, it was all he had, so he went with it. 'I sleep-walked last night, if you must know.' He dropped his gaze to his fingers.

Sophia was silent for a long time, but he waited her out. Eventually, she spoke again. 'Sleep-walked? You did this *sleep-walking*?' The disbelief in her voice nearly made him cringe.

'Yes,' he confirmed, feeling two inches tall for lying to her. 'I think I stumbled round our bedroom for a while and must have walked into something to cause this...' he pointed at the bruise '...and I have no idea how this...' he gestured to the scratch '...happened, but I guess I did something to myself. First thing I knew about it was James standing over me, asking if I was okay before he started laughing hysterically.'

Sophia still looked dubious, and he knew she would be asking James if that was really what happened as soon as she saw him. Sirius *hated* lying to her, but he didn't have much choice. He knew she knew of Remus' lycanthropy, but she had no idea of his Animagus skills and, unfortunately, he couldn't risk telling her.

She studied him for a few moments more, and Sirius struggled not to shift under her gaze. This was the first time that she really reminded him of the Headmaster ... the way Dumbledore would look at you as if he could straight through you to the truth you were desperately trying to hide. Eventually, she sighed and said, 'You should really go to the Hospital Wing to get that seen to.'

'Yeah, I know. I was going to go straight there this morning,' he confessed.

Sophia nodded, smiling slightly as she did. 'Do you want me to come with you?'

Sirius thought quickly. If Sophia stayed here there was a risk she could talk to James before he got a chance to tell his friend the story he'd concocted. 'Yes, please. Might need someone to hold my hand,' he said with a wink, causing Sophia to chuckle.

'Indeed, you big baby. Come on, then,' she said, standing up and holding a hand out to him.

He grasped it firmly; instead of rising, he tugged her arm quickly, pulling her down towards him.

Sophia had to reach a hand out to the back of the sofa beside his head to steady herself. 'Sirius! What the...'

He held a finger out to her lips to silence her, grinning playfully as he did. 'You haven't given me my morning kiss yet, and I simply refuse to budge until I get it.' He figured the best way to get her over her suspicions was to distract her with other things. And, besides, he really did want his good morning kiss.

Sophia lips twisted into a grin of her own, and he let his finger drop.

'Why, how remiss of me,' she said quietly before leaning to give him a kiss that suddenly made this *avery* good morning.

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Sophia accompanied Sirius to the Hospital Wing, and Madam Pomfrey had Sirius patched up in no time. She still wasn't sure she fully believed his story about sleep-walking, but she couldn't think of any reason why he would lie. If James corroborated his story, then she wouldn't think about it anymore.

As they were walking back to the common room, Sirius' stomach gave a loud grumble, causing her to laugh and him to moan.

'Oh, I'm so hungry,' he whined pathetically, rubbing his belly with a forlorn look on his face.

'Well, you'll be glad to know, being the kind, caring girlfriend I am, I brought you back some food from breakfast.'

Sirius turned to look at her, a hopeful smile on his face. 'Really?'

'Yes,' she replied.

Sirius' smile grew to grin. 'You are the *best* girlfriend in the whole world; you know that, don't you?'

'I know,' she replied smugly before giggling lightly.

Once back in the common room, Sophia left Sirius on the sofa as she darted up to her room to grab one of the plates of food she'd brought back with her. Casting a warming spell over the plate, she brought it back down to Sirius, who took the plate quickly before shovelling a large forkful of scrambled eggs into his mouth, his eyes closing in bliss as a contented hum escaped.

'Merlin, Soph. You are brilliant. I love you.'

Sophia sat in shock. Did she dare draw attention to what he had just said, or had it just been his excitement over food that had made him say that? Stuttering slightly, she replied with a quick, 'You're welcome.'

However, her tone was off enough to break Sirius' concentration of his food. He looked at her quizzically. 'What's wrong?' he asked before biting the end off of a sausage.

'Nothing,' she replied, desperately wishing her cheeks wouldn't blush.

Sirius continued to chew, but he raised an eyebrow at her. Swallowing, he repeated his question. 'No, come on; what's up?'

Sophia's jaw floundered, opening and closing as she tried to think of something to say. Unbidden, the truth blurted from her mouth. 'Do you know what you just said to me?' *Someone kill me, please*, she groaned mentally as she watched Sirius try to think about what he'd just said.

Again, he looked at her in confusion. As she felt her cheeks flame red, she looked away to the side, still cursing herself for being so stupid. They'd only been dating a short while; just because she knew how she felt didn't mean Sirius was that far along yet.

'Soph, please, just tell me what I said that's upset you,' Sirius pleaded.

Taking a deep breath, she looked at him once more, trying her best to smile. 'You said you love me.' Sirius sat there, dumbfounded for a moment, and Sophia quickly tried to ease the situation. 'It's okay, though, I know it was a joke. It just, er, caught me by surprise, I guess. It's fine. Carry on,' she said, gesturing to the plate in his lap before looking about the common room once more.

'Soph,' Sirius started. She turned her attention back to him just in time to see him place the plate carefully on the ground by his feet, wiping his hands quickly on his trousers and turning to face her fully. She held still as she waited for him to continue.

'That was, admittedly, not the most romantic way I could have said that,' he said, giving her a self-deprecating smile as he reached out to her hand, 'but it's still true. I *do* love you.'

'Really?'

Sirius nodded, his grey eyes serious and sincere for once.

Sophia's previous anxiety left her in a soft giggle ... which she instantly regretted when she saw Sirius frown and look away.

'Oh, Sirius,' she said leaning over to grab his shoulders, trying to turn him to face her. 'I'm sorry. I love you, too.'

Sirius finally turned to face her; she saw he was grinning mischievously at her and she knew he'd just tricked her.

'Oh, you ... prat!' she spluttered, though she was still too happy to be truly mad at him.

'Ah, but you love me,' Sirius said proudly, like it justified everything. He grinned winningly while she tried to think of a comeback, but failed. 'See?' Oh, he was *far* too smug. However, he gave her no chance to protest further as he gave her a quick kiss before letting her go and picking up his breakfast plate once more, smirking as he chewed on a piece of bacon.

Sophia decided she was too happy to really care. He could win this one.

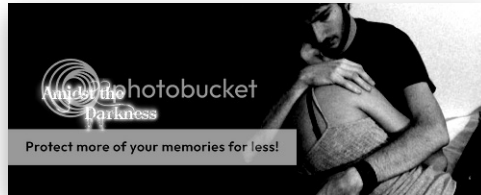
# Chapter 23 - Consequences

Chapter 23 of 23

Sirius' life becomes more complicated than he would like.

**Disclaimer:** Still just playing with JK Rowling's wonderful creations.

**Author's Notes:** Once again, I must thank DracoGurlForever for her help with this chapter as well as thanking the Admin staff here. Sorry for the delay with this chapter, I had quite a mental block whilst writing it, but I'm happy now with how it turned out. I hope it gives you a giggle as you read. ;-)



## Chapter 23 - Consequences

Once Sirius had finished the breakfast Sophia had saved for him, he left her in the common room, telling her he was going to check on Remus. It wasn't a complete lie ... he *did* need to check on Remus and help James and Peter explain the events of the night before ... but he also needed to speak to James before Sophia laid eyes on him and could quiz James about Sirius' sleep-walking lie. He briefly wondered when his life had become so complicated...

Upon entering his dormitory, he could see that Remus was still the only Marauder asleep. The bathroom door was shut, and he could hear a hideously off-tune melody filtering through the wood so he knew Peter had to be in there, leaving James over by his bed in far left hand corner of the room. He looked up from his trunk as Sirius entered the room and smiled easily.

'Morning, Pads,' James greeted brightly.

'Might want to check your watch, Prongs,' Sirius replied, being sure to keep his voice down so he didn't disturb Remus as he walked briskly across the room. 'Think you'll find it's now officially the afternoon.'

James flicked a quick glance down at his wrist. 'Well, bugger me,' he muttered quietly to himself. 'Oh, well, a lie-in never killed anyone, did it?' he continued, giving Sirius a smirk as he did.

'Indeed not,' Sirius replied, sitting himself on the end of James' bed as his friend continued to re-organise his trunk. 'Prongs, I need you to do me a favour.'

James lifted his head and raised an eyebrow.

'I had some bruising after last night, not to mention a bloody great scratch down the length of my face, and Sophia saw me before I could get to Madam Pomfrey; naturally, she demanded to know what I had done. So, if she mentions anything to you about it, tell her you caught me sleep-walking, alright?'

James chuckled. 'Sleep-walking? That was the best you could come up with? Pads, I'm appalled.'

'Yeah, well, I was still half-asleep and I panicked. What was I supposed to say ... "Oh, don't worry, Soph. These are just some battle scars I got from last night when James, Peter and I snuck out to see Remus as illegal Animagi, and then we had to fight Remus in his werewolf form so he didn't go off and kill some stranger he caught a whiff of. But don't worry, all is fine." Yeah, I'm sure that would have gone down *really* well,' he ended.

'What was that?'

Sirius and James whipped their heads round to the source of the voice that had joined their conversation.

Remus was struggling to sit up in bed, a worried look on his face.

'Aw, shit,' Sirius mumbled to himself. It really wasn't his morning. Of course Remus would just *have* to wake up at that precise moment.

'What were you saying about me? What happened last night?' Remus demanded.

Sirius and James looked at one another, silently trying to decide who would answer. James gave him a pointed look and Sirius knew he'd lost. He took a deep breath and look Remus in the eye. 'There was a slight ... er, problem last night.' He was rather proud of his careful phrasing until Remus' eyes narrowed in a shrewd look.

'What do you mean, "problem"?' His voice was heavily suspicious.

'Um, well, we sort of all went out for a walk last night,' Sirius began, noting the widening of Remus' eyes as he did, 'and, well, that is...'

'Spit it out, Padfoot.'

Sirius paused, looking up at his friend sadly, knowing what his next sentence would do to him. 'You smelt someone.'

Remus looked like he had been physically struck by the news. His already deathly-pale complexion whitened even further, and he looked truly aghast by what he'd done. 'You both had to fight me,' he stated in a whisper, his voice hollow.

'Yeah, but, Remus, we don't blame you. It's not like you have a choice...' James began, only to have Remus cut him off with a mirthless laugh.

'No, you're right; I *don't* have a choice. It's who I am! A cold-blooded, ruthless, murdering monster!' Remus shouted, his anger, frustration and shame all evident.

'No, you're not!' Sirius replied, desperate to make Remus believe him. 'The werewolf instincts aren't your own, Moony.'

Just at that moment, Peter emerged from the bathroom, whistling to himself happily, until he noticed that everyone was looking at him, and then he stopped, his expression startled but keeping quiet. Remus turned resolutely back to Sirius and James.

'The werewolf *is* who I am,' he replied coldly and simply. With that, he threw back his bed covers fully, and Sirius saw a long, angry red cut that ran along Remus' abdomen ... probably caused by James' horns the previous night ... before Remus went into the bathroom, closing the door forcefully behind him; they heard the lock slam into place.

'Well, that went well,' James stated sullenly.

'I take it you told him what happened last night?' Peter asked.

'Yep,' Sirius confirmed with a sigh. The friends were all silent for a moment as they thought of Remus, but eventually James spoke again.

'Come on, we'll give him some space to calm down. If he hasn't emerged by dinner time, then we'll do something.'

Sirius and Peter nodded in agreement before they all started to move to leave the room. 'Oh, Wormtail, if Sophia asks, I sleep-walked last night, okay?' Peter looked back over his shoulder, confusion clearly evident on his face. 'Just say you slept through it, alright? I can't be arsed to explain again,' Sirius stated wearily.

Peter again frowned slightly but added an 'Okay' as they left the room and headed down to the common room.

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Just as the three boys walked through into the common room, Lily and Melanie entered in through the Portrait hole. Sophia was still sat on the sofa where Sirius had left her, her attention focused on the book resting in her lap while one hand absently stoked Hamish where he lay beside her. As a result, it was Lily and Melanie who spotted them first, their greetings catching Sophia's attention as she too looked up to them.

'And so the sleepy heads arise. Good afternoon, James, Peter,' Sophia teased.

Sirius flopped easily into the sofa next to her while James and Peter stayed standing.

'Sleepy heads?' Lily repeated, trying to understand. 'Wait, have you two just got up?' she asked incredulously.

James shrugged. 'Yeah, why? There's not a law against having a lie in.'

Lily stared at him in disbelief. 'But it's...' she checked her watch '...nearly one in the afternoon, James!'

'Yeah, well, I didn't have the best of sleeps last night,' James replied defensively.

'I don't think I need to know *those* details, thank you very much,' Lily stated.

James rolled his eyes at her. 'If you must know, you can blame Sophia's boyfriend here.'

'Okay, I *definitely* don't need to know,' Lily muttered, causing Melanie to giggle and elbow her in the ribs.

James gave a sarcastic smile in reply; Lily had an innocent look on her face. 'Sirius was sleep-walking. Highly entertaining, but still, not good for getting a full night's sleep,' James clarified.

'You sleep-walked?' Melanie asked Sirius.

'Apparently,' was Sirius' evasive answer, looking over his shoulder to Melanie, who was stood slightly behind him.

'You should have seen it ... he was hilarious!' James exclaimed. Sirius gave his friend a wide eyed stare, wondering what he was playing at, but James just carried on grinning.

'Why ... what did he do?' Melanie asked, clearly intrigued.

'Well,' James began, 'I'm asleep, and I suddenly wake up to this noise.' The girls all nodded, giving their full attention to James and his story. Sirius continued to glare at James, but he knew his friend was enjoying himself too much at the moment. Clearly, this was to be his punishment for lying. 'So, I wake up, and I hear this noise ... a clucking noise.'

'Clucking?' Lily repeated.

'Clucking ... like a chicken,' James explained, his lips stretched into what Sirius could only describe as an evil grin. Oh, James was going to *pay* for this humiliation. There was a smattering of laughter from the girls, but James shushed them, waving his hands and saying, 'Wait, it gets better, believe me. So, I sit up in my bed, peering through the dark room and I see Sirius, standing up on his bed, flapping his arms and clucking like a chicken.'

Now the girls really were all laughing, Sophia included, and Sirius felt his scowl deepen.

'Honestly, he's strutting around on the top of his bed, his head bobbing backwards and forwards, arms flapping and making this clucking sound. I watched him doing this for I don't know how long, before he then fell off the end of his bed and hit his trunk ... I think that's when he got the black eye, Soph.'

'Good grief, Sirius,' Sophia said, her laughter stopping abruptly. 'You could have given yourself a concussion!'

*'I'll give someone a concussion all right*, he thought to himself, giving James a black look as he did. He quickly gave Sophia a tight smile to reassure her before her attention was pulled back to James as he continued, much to Sirius' annoyance.

'But, after the fall, I could tell he was alright because he got up quickly and then ran round the room, still clucking and flapping.' James was silent for a moment before his features lit up once more and he exclaimed, 'Oh, and then! Then he started mooing.'

James, Sirius decided, was a dead man walking.

'Mooing?' Lily asked again, still laughing.

'Yep ... crawling around the room on all fours, mooing like a cow. I tell you, one of the funniest things I've ever seen. Oh, and then, he stopped the animal noises and tried to climb up the inside of the fireplace.'

'What?' Melanie asked incredulously, still laughing hard.

'Oh, yeah, he fully disappears from view, up the chimney, and I hear this scrapping, scuttling noise for a few moments before he comes tumbling out in a puff of soot. *Then* he starts rolling around on the floor like a dog, rubbing at his eyes and nose with the back of his hands like they were paws!' James laughed loudly with this last statement,

and Peter, Lily, and Melanie joined in, each dissolving into uncontrollable giggles.

'Did you not think to try to stop him? Wake him up?' Sophia asked. She wasn't laughing like the others, clearly upset with the idea of Sirius possibly hurting himself during these escapades, which cheered Sirius ever so slightly, but she was still struggling to maintain a completely straight face.

James snorted. 'No,' he replied simply. 'Firstly, it was very, very funny; and secondly, you aren't supposed to wake someone up who is sleep-walking ... they can turn violent, don't you know? I didn't want a clucking, mooing, barking Sirius attacking me!' James finished, laughing loudly again.

Sirius sat there for a few moments, his friends laughing manically all around him - even Sophia was joining in now - before he'd finally had enough. He stood abruptly, saying, 'If you are quite done telling the story now, James, I'll go up and check on Remus.' He walked to his friend's side and squeezed his shoulder in a vice tight grip. 'Thanks, *mate*,' Sirius hissed through a clenched jaw. 'You sure know how to help a friend out.' Sirius patted James' shoulder lightly before striding off back up the stairs, leaving James rubbing his shoulder, still laughing.

Just before Sirius entered his dormitory again, he called on Pippy, one of the house-elves from the kitchen who he'd become a particular favourite of over his years at Hogwarts. The small elf popped into view with a *crack* and bowed low to Sirius.

'Pippy be answering little master's call. Pippy help how?' she asked with a squeaky voice, her large ears flapping as she lifted her face to him.

'Pippy, would you please bring me a cup of tea ... Oh, and some biscuits if possible, please?' he asked.

Pippy beamed at him before disappearing with another *crack*. Sirius rarely called on the Hogwarts elves like this, but he really need a peace offering to give to Remus. A few moments later, Pippy was back, a cup of tea and a plate of chocolate biscuits in her hand. Sirius relieved her of the refreshments, balancing the plate on top of the mug as he opened the door.

Remus was lying on his bed, peering at the door as it opened before allowing his head to loll back as he saw it was only Sirius. Instead of giving his friend a greeting, Sirius slipped into the room silently, striding over to the bed where Remus was lying still, trying to ignore him.

Casting a levitation charm on the plate and mug, Sirius left them to hover over the middle of the bed before seating himself at the foot of Remus' bed. Sirius continued to sit there, waiting, and Remus continued to ignore him and the offered tea and biscuits.

Eventually, though, Sirius grew bored and started to eye up the biscuits. Remus still hadn't made an effort to move, so, with a shrug, Sirius leant forward and plucked a biscuit from the plate, biting into it as he sat back once more. As he chewed on it, his eyes slid to the mug of tea, the steam rolling upwards from it still. Before taking his second bite, he leant forward and dunked it in the tea. This did manage to cause a upwards raise of Remus' brow, but otherwise his friend remained unmoved.

Sirius decided that while the tea-soaked biscuit was an improvement, he still needed something more to wash the treat down, so he grabbed hold of the mug and took a deep drink of the tea. He finished the first biscuit and went to reach for a second when the plate was suddenly pulled in the opposite direction from him.

'I thought these were for me?' Remus enquired.

'Well, they were, but you seemed disinterested, and I thought it pointless that they should go to waste,' Sirius replied.

Remus merely grunted, plucking his own biscuit from the plate and munching on it, his gaze staring off into the unknown distance.

'I'm going to need your help, when you are up to it,' Sirius stated.

Remus turned his attention to Sirius, his face still strangely blank.

'James,' Sirius qualified.

Remus raised an eyebrow.

'I had some injuries after last night that Sophia saw,' Sirius began. He noticed Remus drop his gaze down to his lap, but Sirius carried on regardless. 'I told her I got them sleep-walking.'

Remus' head snapped up. 'Sleep-walking?' he repeated, his voice flat.

'Yes, yes; I know ... very unoriginal. Anyway, I told her James witnessed it all, so of course, she asked him about it in front of Lily and Melanie. He told them how I pretended to be chicken, a cow and a dog ... Oh, and I apparently tried to climb up the chimney.'

'A chicken?' Remus repeated, a smile desperately tugging at the corner of his lips. 'Did you cock-a-doodle-doo, or lay an egg?' he asked before dissolving into laughter.

Sirius glared at him and used his wand to summon a pillow that Remus deftly caught before it hit him in the face. Slowly, Remus sobered and started to toss the pillow into the air before catching it and tossing it upwards again, though his eyes still glinted with amusement.

'So, you want revenge?' Remus asked, his voice still lifted from his laughter, settling the pillow over his lap and resting his hand upon it.

'Yep ... preferably something completely horrible ... and public. Got any ideas?' Sirius asked.

'Give me some time, and I'm sure I'll come up with something suitable,' Remus responded, giving Sirius a smirk. 'Now, give me back my cup of tea,' he demanded, holding out his hand.

'Oh, sure,' Sirius replied, handing over the mug. As he moved back to his former position, a silence settled over the two friends and Sirius braced himself to broach the issue he'd come up here to talk about in the first place. 'Moony, you do know that we don't blame you at all for last night, don't you?' Sirius asked cautiously.

Remus held the mug between his hands, staring into it, saying nothing.

'I mean it, Moony.'

Remus raised the mug to his lips and drank the tea. As he lowered the mug, he raised his eyes to Sirius. 'We can't go out any more,' he stated. 'I can't think about what could have happened. I can't risk it.'

Sirius didn't know what to say as he saw the sadness and shame reflected in his friends brown eyes, so he just nodded in agreement.

Remus nodded to himself and turned his attention back to his tea.

'So, you're good now?' Sirius asked.

Remus looked at his friend and thought for a moment. 'Yeah, I'm good.'

Sirius knew it was only a temporary 'good', but it was enough for him just now, so he let the matter rest.

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**End Notes:** If the scene with Remus and Sirius and the cup of tea seems familiar, it's because I was (heavily) inspired by a scene in the brilliant Richard Curtis film, 'The Boat That Rocked'.