

All is Bright

by *LiteraryBeauty*

In non-magical Victorian England, Harry Potter is a street urchin who Sirius Black begrudgingly takes in on Christmas Eve. There is an instant connection between the two—but what happens when they uncover their real relationship?

Oneshot

Chapter 1 of 1

In non-magical Victorian England, Harry Potter is a street urchin who Sirius Black begrudgingly takes in on Christmas Eve. There is an instant connection between the two—but what happens when they uncover their real relationship?

Author: literaryspell

Betas: rainien, Krystle Lynne

Author's Note: I had an absolute blast writing this. As an English major with a focus on Victorian literature, this fic really let me have fun with the things I love most (Victorian England and Harry Potter!). I hope you all enjoy.

"Merry Christmas, sir," came a soft voice from a dark doorway.

Sirius slowed his steps. He'd seen the little urchin nearly every day for the past few months, but the boy had never spoken before.

"Do you not have anywhere to go, even on this day?" Sirius barked. It was the day before Christmas, and even beggars should have a fire to sit before.

The shaggy black head shook in denial. He didn't look up.

Pushing back his own messy fringe with gloved fingers, Sirius sighed. "Unfortunate," he said softly.

As he turned to walk away, the boy looked at him, and Sirius was pierced by his eyes. They held him in place as the world around him spun and sputtered. The boy had the most beautiful green eyes he'd ever seen, electric both in colour and intensity. His features, though dirty, were fey-like and sweet. He could easily be mistaken for a girl.

Sirius took a deep breath and walked on. It just wouldn't do to be taken in by pretty eyes, not even on a night like tonight.

Upon reaching his doorstep, he turned back. The boy was visible from where Sirius stood. He looked impossibly tiny. The wind whistled down the street and brought the smells and sounds of happiness, undoubtedly unfamiliar to the boy.

Shaking his head, Sirius entered and locked the door behind him. Placing his heavy files on his kitchen table, he set to lighting a fire, stoking it and basking in the warmth. It would take a few hours for his home to heat, but when it did, it would be glorious.

He set dinner to starting, a hearty stew that would soon enough fill the house with the aroma of health and fullness. He didn't think about the boy, hungry, cold, and alone.

Sitting at the table, Sirius organised his files. There was much work to be done, even on an evening like this one. He worked very hard as the bookkeeper for the local law

office, and he was lucky enough to have been given leave early tonight...any other day of the week would have seen him working until seven at night. It was only five now, though from the nearly set sun, one would have thought much later.

It didn't take him long to realise he was missing a pertinent file. "Damn," he muttered, searching fruitlessly. He didn't have the second quarter's earnings, and without that, he'd never be able to balance the year. "Where is your head?" he admonished himself.

He took the pot away from the fire, which he banked until the embers glowed in resentment. *Hereally* didn't want to go back out... but the office would be closed on Christmas and for a week afterward, and his balancing was due when they returned. There was no choice.

Sirius donned his gloves again and pulled on his overcoat. Leaving the growing warmth of his house was agony. He had almost passed the homeless boy when he had an idea.

"Boy," he said, nudging the blanket-covered heap with his boot.

Green eyes peered at him from between folds, and then the boy pushed the blankets off him completely, as if embarrassed to have burrowed into the warmth. "Yes, sir?"

"How would you like to earn a guinea?"

His face was immediately suspicious. "I don't think so, *sir*," he said snappishly.

Sirius' eyes widened at the change in attitude. He'd've thought the young man would be eager to earn some money for food or perhaps a candle. "It's only a moment's work," he coaxed softly, the law office feeling so very far away.

"That's what they all say," he muttered, covering his head again.

"Hey," Sirius said, crouching beside the lump. He pulled on the threadbare blanket until the black hair revealed itself, horribly messy and statically charged. "You'd only have to walk down a few blocks to my office and pick something up. That's all."

Those haunting eyes searched his. "That's it?"

"Promise."

"All right," the boy said softly, standing. He was wearing torn and ragged clothing, not enough to keep him warm in autumn let alone mid-winter.

"Excellent. Just come with me to my house..."

The boy sighed heavily. "You said your office. Your office is that way," he said, pointing the way Sirius had been heading and sounding almost disappointed.

"I know where my office is," Sirius said irritably. "I need to give you a note so my secretary will hand over the files. Or did you think they'd just give away important information to any street rat that asked? Come, then."

Sirius turned and began to walk, but the boy didn't follow. He jerked his head, beckoning him to come, but the boy stood resolutely.

"What are you waiting for?"

The boy took a step forward, but hesitated. His eyes were uncertain and frightened, but his hand was holding his belly unconsciously, as if considering the food he could buy if he did as he was bade.

"If you come back quickly enough, I'll share my stew with you. I promise. Is that enough to convince you?" Sirius was shivering, his cheeks already reddened from the wind. He was desperate to get back inside.

"Stew?" the boy said as if the word were foreign.

"Yes, stew."

The boy took another step. Then another. Sirius began to walk again, waiting on his stoop for the tentative child to approach. He opened the door and held it open for the boy. He'd have to lend the boy his cloak; he couldn't make him go back outside in his dismal rags.

"Shut the door, then," he said, not waiting to see if he was obeyed. The cessation of the shrieking wind was indication enough of that. "Stew," he said, pointing at the pot on the table. The boy stood on his tiptoes to look within, gasping as the aroma reached him.

"I can have some of that?" he said quietly, inhaling deeply.

"Well, it isn't done yet. It needs to be hot to be properly enjoyed. It should be all right by the time you return."

"I'll go right now!" he cried, not taking his eyes away from the food.

A piercing anger went through Sirius at the thought that a boy like this was without *anyone*. But more than that, he was furious at himself for using the child, for passing him every day like so much refuse.

Rubbing his eyes with the palms of his hands, Sirius grabbed up a quill and began to write a note to his secretary. He made sure to use the nickname Sirius often used so he would know the note was legitimate.

"What's your name?" he said gruffly to the child, who was a little more than a child, now that Sirius was able to look at him more closely. He certainly wasn't a man, not yet, but his frail features and vulnerability made him seem younger than he obviously was.

"Harry," he said in a soft voice.

Sirius nodded and opened his front closet to look for a cloak he wouldn't mind not seeing again if Harry decided the stew wasn't worth it and took off. He held an out-of-fashion garment to Harry, who didn't seem to know what to do with it.

"It's cold out," Sirius said by way of an explanation. "I really need that file. It wouldn't do for you to freeze to death on the way."

Harry still didn't take it, looking sceptically between it and Sirius, his lips pursed. Slightly annoyed, Sirius wrapped it around him. Harry was nearly lost within the cloth; where it came to Sirius' knees, it brushed the floor on Harry.

Harry's eyes were so huge and green that Sirius couldn't resist giving him gloves, a hat, and a scarf as well. It was a wonder the boy wasn't a millionaire with those eyes.

"Here is the note. Give it to the first man you see. His name's Brandon and he's very nice. Can you read?"

Harry's proud nod made Sirius laugh. "Good boy. The sign for my office says *Woodhouse and Knightly, Barristers*. Can you remember those names?"

Repeating them solemnly, Harry took the note and carefully put it into the inner pocket of Sirius' cloak.

"Good. When you get back here, we'll have some stew and you can sit by the fire a bit."

Sirius ushered Harry outside, not entirely sure why he watched the boy walk quickly down the street until he could no longer be seen.

He put the stew back on the fire and stoked it until the flames licked higher than ever before. He wanted the house to be warm for when Harry returned.

It was hard to believe that Sirius was looking forward to another Christmas alone. It hadn't been that long ago that he'd had everything a man like him could want: good friends, good company, even women, if he desired.

Even men, if he desired.

But when Sirius began his current job, he hadn't had the same time for his friends, and they'd begun to drift apart. Then two of his friends had tragically died, and he'd had a falling out with his remaining friends. It had been so long ago...fourteen years...but it still ached like it had just happened.

He hadn't heard from Remus Lupin, one of his best friends, in more than ten years. They'd quarrelled over the custody of the Potters' young son. James had always promised he would be godfather, but the rift between them meant Sirius had never even met the child. He could admit, now, that Remus was the better choice. He'd wanted the child so that he could always have a part of James with him, and so he could prove to himself that he wasn't a horrible friend.

In the end, Remus had left with the child, and Sirius had never heard from him again.

Sirius poured himself a glass of whiskey and stared at the fire. Maybe that was why he felt so... sympathetic to this Harry child. He had the same impish quality James Potter had had.

One thing for was certain, hardened though he might be, Sirius couldn't even consider sending Harry back into his bundle of blankets to weather the coldest Christmas on record. He wasn't a monster.

Sirius was so deep in thought he didn't even hear the first timid knock on his door. Another, louder knock made his fingers clench on his glass, and he stood quickly, wondering how long Harry had been gone for.

Opening the door, he could see the child was covered in snow and drenched. The cloak was dripping wet and looked to have been dragged through knee-deep puddles.

"Good heavens, child," he exclaimed, pulling Harry inside and shutting the door behind him. "What happened to you?"

Harry held out Sirius' files with shaking hands. They were a little wet, but no matter. Sirius threw them on the table and tore the cloak off Harry's trembling frame.

"I-I'm s-sorry, s-sir," Harry said, teeth chattering. "It was s-so icy, and I f-fell."

"All you all right?" Sirius asked. He couldn't see any injuries, but the boy was about five minutes away from catching his death. Sirius despaired to think of what would have become of Harry that night if Sirius hadn't been too lazy to get his files himself.

"Y-yes, sir."

Sirius ran his hand through his hair, wishing he knew what to do. "All right, let's get you out of these clothes," he said decisively, pulling on Harry's arm to lead him to the bedroom.

"No, p-please, sir!" Harry cried. "You said. You p-promised."

"Promised?" he asked, uncertain.

"That I could have some stew," Harry said quietly, biting his red lower lip.

Sirius absently pulled the lip from Harry's sharp, white teeth, remembering how chapped his own used to get from that habit. "You can have all the stew you want, Harry. But I think we should get you into dry clothes before you eat. You'll be uncomfortable if you sit around in wet and icy clothes, not to mention the havoc you'll wreak on my chesterfield."

"Oh," Harry said in a small voice, looking longingly at the pot by the fire. "All right."

"Good boy," Sirius said for the second time that evening.

Once in his bedroom, Sirius searched his wardrobe for something that he wouldn't mind going without, since he didn't think he could take the clothing away from Harry once he put the boy back on the street. Which he would do, of course.

"Take those rags off," Sirius said absently, pulling out a pair of stiff wool trousers and heavy shirtsleeves. He also grabbed up a fur-lined jacket. He'd be sad to see it go...it had been quite pricy and was still at the height of fashion.

Sirius turned to make sure his direction was being followed and swore when he saw Harry tugging desperately at a button. His hands were stiff with cold and not able to handle the task.

"Harry," Sirius said, sighing. "Have you ever had a bath?"

"Of course!" Harry said almost snottily before stepping back quickly as if Sirius had advanced on him. "I mean, yes, sir."

"I think it'd be best for you to warm up in some water."

"Sir, I'd, er, rather not..." Harry's fingers began working on his button again, and he whimpered a little when his nail caught and ripped.

Sirius stopped the desperate action. "You're not afraid of water, are you?" he asked, unconsciously rubbing the small hand between his own to warm it.

"No, I..."

"Good, then. Here, put this on." Sirius handed him his own dressing robe. Harry went to pull it on himself, and Sirius laughed, pulling it away. Harry's eyes widened and his lower lip trembled, making Sirius frown.

"I wasn't teasing you," he assured the boy, assuming that was the reason Harry looked so disappointed. "You need to take your wet clothing off before you put it on or else it won't help at all. I'll help you with your buttons and then set to boiling the water for your bath."

Without waiting for an answer, Sirius efficiently opened Harry's shirt, his fingers brushing against the smooth coolness of his chest and belly. He unhooked Harry's trouser placket, which was worn thin from age and use. It was a wonder his rags hadn't fallen directly off his body.

Sirius left the room, but returned to tell Harry not to put his wet clothing on the furniture. His words froze in his mouth as Harry stiffly slid the shirt off his shoulders. The

boy's body was frail and reedy...he either hadn't had his growth spurt or had missed it entirely. Sirius stared at his pointed shoulder blades...like wings, he thought...but came back to himself when the boy dropped his trousers. He wore nothing beneath them, and his pale arse, pert and high, made Sirius realise how very long it had been since he'd last held anyone intimately.

Part of him knew he shouldn't be thinking of Harry that way...he was so young...but he was enchanting nonetheless.

When Harry half-turned to pick up the dressing robe, Sirius left quickly. He shook his head to clear it of any indecent thought and set about filling small pots with water...they would heat faster than one large pot, and the sooner he could get Harry into clothing, the better it would be for both of them. He had to put the stew aside, which was regrettable, as he was rather hungry, himself.

He turned when he heard the rustling of the robe over the wood floor. Harry held the garment together with his hands, his head down, the robe trailing behind him like a royal cape.

"Sir, I..."

"My name is Sirius," he interrupted without thinking. Part of him knew it wasn't appropriate for someone of Harry's station and age to refer to him by his given name, but he didn't like to be called sir...not like that, anyway.

"Sir-Sirius," Harry said, stumbling over the title. He smiled softly, and Sirius beamed at him. The kid had a great smile, though likely little occasion to use it.

"Yes?"

"I couldn't tie it," Harry said in a small voice. Sirius could see his hands were shaking and nearly blue.

"Come here, then," he directed, and Harry did, but he tripped on the hem of the garment and fell headlong into Sirius, who caught him against his own body. They both froze, and though Harry's body was cold, he lit a flame within Sirius that made the older man growl.

Harry pulled back, clutching at the side of his robe with white-knuckled fingers.

Gathering himself...again...Sirius tied the robe, his fingers gently smoothing over Harry's belly without his mind's permission. He saw Harry bite his lip, and Sirius pulled it from his teeth with a gentle thumb.

"You shouldn't do that," Sirius chided softly, still unbearably close.

"I have a lot of bad habits," Harry said, sounding like he was repeating something someone else had told him instead of admitting it himself.

"Well, you are only human," Sirius said jokingly, as if he didn't doubt that very fact because of how drawn he was to Harry.

Nodding, Harry wrapped his arms around himself. His gaze wandered over to the stew on the table, but darted quickly back to the ground in front of him, as if embarrassed to have been caught.

"The water has to heat first," Sirius said gently, hating that this boy was likely starving right before his eyes. "And while you're in the tub, I'll put the stew in the fire."

"Is there something I can do?" Harry asked, looking around.

Sirius' house wasn't exactly impressive, but it was clean, tidy, and well-tended. "How do you expect to do anything when you can't even tie your robe?"

Sirius had meant his words to be teasing, trying to get Harry to see he was a guest, but Harry took it to mean Sirius was disappointed, and he was horrified to see tears well, making Harry's green eyes even brighter.

"Good lord, boy," Sirius said, aghast at the reaction. "I only meant I want you to relax so you don't hurt yourself."

Harry shook his head as if to say he wasn't really upset, but Sirius could clearly see otherwise. Sighing, Sirius checked the water in the pots and found them satisfyingly warm. He dragged his copper tub away from the corner and set it up in front of the fire. A few moments saw the metal warming up, and Sirius emptied the water into the tub, refilling the pots and also placing the stew by the fire.

The tub had only about a foot and a half of water in it, but it would be enough until the rest of it finished heating.

"Get in," he said to Harry, who was still looking at the floor. Sirius left to get a towel for after Harry was finished, and when he returned, Harry hadn't budged.

"What's wrong now?" he asked, trying to be patient.

"The water's hot," Harry said quietly.

"How would you know? You haven't touched it."

"Things that come from fire are hot. I don't want to be hurt."

Sirius was almost beside himself. He had very little experience with children of any age, and this one was confusing the hell out of him. He dipped his own hand into the water to demonstrate its safety. "It's not even that hot," he said. "And it will cool quickly, so you might as well get in."

Still, Harry didn't move, only eyed the tub distrustfully.

"Harry," Sirius said pleadingly. "Trust me."

Wide green eyes finally met his, and Harry seemed to be taking his measure. Sirius was patient under the scrutiny, relieved when Harry finally nodded and stepped toward the tub. His fingers seemed to have regained their strength because he undid the knot Sirius had tied on his robe with minimal difficulty.

Sirius turned away when Harry glanced at him sharply, amused that the urchin still had his modesty, but glad for some reason as well.

He left again to collect his cleaning supplies...a cake of soap and a couple flannels, ignoring the razor as Harry didn't seem to need one...and when he came back, Harry was immersed in the water, his knees drawn up to his chest, his arms encircling them.

"Here," Sirius said softly, placing the items on the built-in ledge on the edge of the tub. "For cleaning."

Sensing that Harry didn't want an audience, Sirius picked up the document he'd had Harry collect and straightened it. It had a few water spots on it, but was undamaged otherwise. Harry must have protected it with impressive fervour, judging by the way the boy himself had been completely soaked from head to toe.

After a few moments of organising his files, Sirius realised there was a distinct lack of splashing. He turned a little and saw Harry was sitting still as a statue with his eyes on the soap.

"Harry?" Sirius said soothingly, not approaching. "Is everything all right?"

Harry nodded quickly and looked away, into the fire.

"Please be honest with me." The boy was more skittish than a hackney carriage horse after a day's work.

"I don't know what to do."

"Just wash yourself up, love," Sirius said, falling easily into the way his mother had spoken to him.

"I don't know *how*," Harry said angrily, finally splashing a little.

"Hey, hey, it's all right." Sirius slowly walked up to the bath, letting Harry see him the entire time. He knelt beside the tub. "I thought you said you'd had baths before."

"I have," Harry insisted. A moment later, he added, "But not inside. Not with hot water. And not with... that stuff." He pointed at the soap and flannel with an accusing finger.

"Oh," Sirius said slowly, realisation dawning. Of course the boy wouldn't have come from any sort of money. The sort of bath he was describing...a dip in the lake, or if he were lucky, in a rain barrel, was more indicative of his station. "It's really easy." Sirius took the soap and dipped it into the water, wetting his hands. Harry watched carefully.

"Give me your arm," Sirius directed, lathering the soap between his hands. Harry offered up his arm and Sirius rubbed it with the soap, trying to be businesslike as the silkiness of the boy's skin met his fingers. "See?" He pushed Harry's arm under the water, not surprised when the clean skin came back a shade paler than the rest of him. "Easy."

Harry took the proffered soap, making an enthusiastic lather and rubbing it up and down his arms. "What's this for, then?" he asked, referring to the flannel.

"It's for getting rid of dirt that's deep down," Sirius explained. He soaped up the piece of material and scrubbed it over one of the coltish knees that stuck up out of the water. Harry giggled and squirmed, and Sirius smiled at the sound. The boy had a beautiful smile and an even better laugh.

"Good as new," Sirius said, tossing the flannel in the water and splashing Harry, who spluttered, affronted. But he didn't retaliate; he set to washing with a diligence with which Sirius noted Harry did everything.

Sirius watched under the guise of supervisor as the delightful child washed himself unabashedly. When Harry blushed and brought the flannel below the waterline, Sirius stopped him. "Let me do your back, and then you can... finish up."

Harry nodded and handed the cloth over, searching in the murky water for the discarded soap.

Running the cloth over the boy's long and slender back, Sirius wondered what the fuck he was doing. He wanted this boy, wanted him desperately, and that was really not a good idea for oh so many reasons. But it didn't stop his cock from twitching as his trailed the cloth over Harry's flawless...once cleaned...skin. He spent entirely too much time washing Harry's lower back, forcing himself to stop when his fingers touched the bare skin of Harry's tailbone, almost by accident.

Almost, but not quite.

Sirius dumped more hot water into the cooling bath, smiling when Harry let out a long sigh of pleasure.

"Your hair, now," he said, gesturing for Harry to lean back. Harry quickly dunked his head and came up sputtering, smiling brightly and nearly looking the child he should have been.

"May I?" Sirius asked, wanting to run his fingers through that thick, sable hair.

Harry nodded wide-eyed, and Sirius worked up a lather and applied it to Harry's head. There were tangles galore, and Sirius was sure at least one twig fell from the boy's locks, but his fingers moved slowly and surely, massaging as much as washing.

Harry's eyes fell closed and he leaned back, letting Sirius support him as he continued to rub the soap through. Sirius took the opportunity to watch Harry, slowing his actions so he could look his fill.

High cheekbones for a boy, but that was to be expected for someone so thin. His cheeks were flushed with warmth, and it wasn't difficult for Sirius to imagine them suffused with blood from another type of heat. As if echoing his thought, Harry squirmed a little and bit his lower lip.

"Under now," Sirius said very quietly, hating to break the spell. Harry nodded but didn't move, allowing Sirius to lower him enough that he could cup water and sluice it over the boy's head. He looked much younger with a helmet of hair slicked against his scalp. Sirius took in the oddly shaped scar on his forehead with a frown. Unusual.

Harry sat up a moment later with Sirius' urging. "Are you sure it's clean, sir?" he asked quietly, touching his hair with wrinkled fingers.

"It's clean," he assured, though he wouldn't deny wanting to wash it all over again.

Harry nodded. His face was still quite dirty, and Sirius told him so, offering to wash it for him.

To his surprise, Harry's face fell and he looked away, shaking his head. Unsure what had happened, Sirius just handed over the cloth and watched from the kitchen area as Harry scrubbed mercilessly at his face, splashing the water about and making a bit of a mess.

Sirius gathered together bowls and utensils. The stew wouldn't be boiling, but it would certainly be hot enough to warm the boy up from the inside.

"I'm done, sir," Harry announced. His face was red all over and looked almost raw.

"Sirius," he corrected again. "Go ahead and get up, then. The towel's there." He pointed.

"Could you... could you turn away?" Harry asked shyly.

Sirius raised an eyebrow but did as requested. He turned back after he'd heard rustling with the towel, and he saw immediately why Harry had wanted Sirius to look away.

The boy was hard.

Sirius nearly groaned at the sight. The towel was tenting with Harry's arousal, and Harry tried...and failed...to look nonchalant as his hands hovered in front of his shame. He was blushing bright red...or maybe that was the effect of his overly vigorous scrubbing.

Pretending to busy himself, Sirius tried to give Harry privacy as he dried himself off and donned the dressing robe again. Sirius pulled out two glasses and an old bottle of the moonshine his younger brother...rest his soul...had called fire whiskey on account of the horrible burn. It was Christmas, after all, and he was feeling nostalgic.

"Your clothing is in the bedroom," Sirius reminded Harry a moment later, when he had nothing more to do with his hands.

As Harry was dressing, Sirius hauled the tub to the back yard and emptied it onto his snow-covered lawn. It was blistering cold and the hot water made a satisfying array of steam as it poured over the ground.

When he returned, Harry was standing stiffly in front of the fire, absorbing its heat and trying to look as though he were not. The black trousers were much too long, pooling around his delicate feet, and the waist was too wide as well, though Sirius was a slender man. Harry was holding on to the trousers as if for dear life. The shirtsleeves were also too large, but they covered him decently.

"Let me get you some braces," Sirius said, laughing at the sight of the boy in too-huge clothing. He was absolutely edible.

Harry pouted...*pouted!* ...at the laugh, but he remained still until Sirius returned with and tied on the braces, adjusting them to fit the smaller frame. The trousers would not be falling down now, he thought.

Pity.

"Have a seat, Harry. I'll dish out supper."

Harry obediently sank down on the sofa, hands on his knees, watching raptly as Sirius ladled soup into the two bowls. He passed one to Harry and followed it with a spoon. It was most uncouth to eat dinner on the sofa, but the table was far from the fire, and he wanted to make sure Harry didn't suffer from his venture into the blizzard.

After watching to make sure Sirius took the first bite, Harry tore into his food with unrivalled zeal. The boy made almost obscene noises as he ate, distracting Sirius from his own food on more than one occasion.

When the spoon scraped against the bottom of the bowl, Sirius set aside his own dinner to get Harry more.

"I've never had anything like it, sir... Sirius," Harry said shyly, accepting the seconds. "Or maybe I have, but I don't remember."

"It's only stew," Sirius said with affected modesty, preening at having someone compliment his cooking.

"*Only...*" Harry said in a reverent voice. He shook his head. "I don't mean to be rude and disagree, but it's the most delicious thing I've ever tasted, and I'd swear to it!"

Happy to hear the boy speak freely, Sirius encouraged the conversation, asking Harry about how he'd learn to read and whether he'd been educated.

Apparently the young man had been taught the basics by his uncle, but the man had died when Harry was still very young. He'd then been sent to another uncle and his aunt, who had a son a little older than Harry, and he'd been educated along with the other boy. Eventually the family had sent Harry to the workhouse, which from the sounds of it, was really no different than living with his family in the first place.

Harry had eventually run away when his friend had died...of starvation and exhaustion, from what Sirius could extrapolate...and they'd simply tossed his body in the rubbish and told Harry to take over the boy's workstation.

That had been when he was no more than ten. He'd been on the streets since then.

Harry had pulled his feet onto the sofa and sat with his arms hugging his knees. Sirius knew this was a protective move, and he longed to make the child feel safe, though he had no idea how to go about it.

"Have a sip of this," he said cheerfully, passing Harry the whiskey he'd poured. He took a bracing drink of his own, licking the smoky liquid off his lips with a satisfied sigh.

Harry watched carefully and then took his own drink, gulping too quickly and spilling his glass as he hacked around the alcohol.

Placing the now-empty cup on the floor, Sirius pounded on Harry's back until the choking boy coughed free of the drink.

"I should have warned you," Sirius said, shaking his head and rubbing the boy's back. Harry trembled a little under the touch, making weak coughing noises.

"What was that?" Harry sounded almost accusatory, and Sirius laughed fully. The boy had so much spirit...it did them both good to let that side out.

"Regulus used to call it fire whiskey," Sirius said, mopping up the mess with a dinner napkin and tossing it aside.

Harry looked abashed at the mess, biting his lip and tensing all over.

But Sirius pulled the lip loose and patted Harry on the thigh. "No harm done," he assured. He filled up both their glasses and handed Harry's back. The boy looked at it with undisguised scepticism, but took it with a wary hand.

"Slow sips, let it touch your tongue and slide into your throat," Sirius directed. He watched as Harry did as instructed, wincing a little but licking his lips with a pink tongue to gather the dewy liquid. He smiled a little at Sirius, who looked away quickly, embarrassed to have been caught staring.

"I don't mind, you know," Harry said, and Sirius started.

"Don't mind what?" Sirius' inappropriate staring?

"The taste," Harry said a moment later. "It is like fire, but I like it. Makes me feel warm."

They both looked toward the actual fire in the hearth, Sirius lost in his own thoughts. He watched from the corner of his eye as Harry took in the room.

"What are those?" Harry asked breathlessly, looking to the corner of the room. Sirius followed his gaze.

"Ah, those are gifts," Sirius said. Most were from his colleagues, though some were still to be given to the few friends he claimed. Most were for the people Sirius saw regularly...the grocer, the butcher, the chandler, and many more men and women who deserved recognition for mostly thankless jobs.

"Gifts?" Harry sounded puzzled, but then he beamed at Sirius. "Oh! Dudley used to get those *all* the time! Are they all for you?"

Sirius chuckled. "They are mostly for other people, but there are a few for me."

Harry squirmed over on the sofa, closing the space between them. He held his cup out shyly, and Sirius automatically poured another dram.

"How can you stand not to open them? Don't you want to know what they are?"

If previous years were any indication, Sirius already knew what they were: scotch from the men and bonbons from the women. "Would you like to open one, Harry?"

Harry's eyes widened, but he shook his head rapidly. "Oh, no, Sirius! I wouldn't even know what to do."

"What's to do? You rip the paper off to see what's beneath. No trick to it." Sirius frowned. "Have you never been given a gift before, Harry?"

Biting his lip, Harry took a drink as if to avoid answering, but Sirius wouldn't look away and Harry eventually sighed. "I have. My friend from the workhouse, Ronald, gave me a thimble. He'd stolen it from this older girl. I was always pricking my fingers and bleeding on the cloth I was to sew, and I would be... punished for it." Harry's face became dark. "But it wasn't worth it."

"Why not?"

"Because the girl found out and told, and they hurt Ron, worse than when they hurt me for bleeding."

Sirius wanted to destroy something.

"And then another year," Harry continued, his voice now bright again, "this girl Hermione...isn't that a silly name? I only just learned to say it right, but she never minded...she gave me a book on swords from the middle ages because she knew I liked to hear about knights and things. But I don't have it anymore."

Sirius dropped his head into his hands. Harry's sweet voice talking about the atrocities committed against him was enough to drive any man to madness with impotency.

He gathered himself together with great effort. "Would you do me the favour of opening one for me?" he asked, forcing himself to sound cheerful when he'd rather be threatening the lives of those who hurt his... his Harry.

"Oh... sure, if you'd like," Harry said, still smiling. "Shall I get one?"

Sirius nodded. "One of the rectangular boxes," he directed, knowing they were almost certainly sweets.

Harry took a long time touching and moving the boxes under the pretence of finding the right one, but Sirius didn't mind at all. The boy finally chose one from the bottom of the pile and brought it back to the couch, where he sat even closer to Sirius, their thighs touching.

"Open it," Sirius said when it didn't seem Harry would. He was tracing his fingers over the wrapping and fingering the ribbon, but making no move to rip the paper.

Harry obediently tore back a strip where the end was secured, and Sirius watched with reserved merriment as Harry's entire face lit up. He'd unwrapped, as Sirius had predicted, one of what was sure to be many boxes of chocolates. Such a treat was expensive, but Christmas always saw him with too many.

"Someone gave you chocolate," Harry said unnecessarily, awe and envy written all over his face.

"Ugh," Sirius said in mock disgust. "I abhor chocolate!" So far from the truth it actually hurt, Sirius said the words he knew would make his guest happy, and suddenly that was the most important thing in the world.

"How is that possible?" Harry asked. Both of his hands clutched on the box as if Sirius would throw the gift in the fire to appease his pretend disgust.

Sirius shrugged. "Just never got the taste for it, I suppose."

Harry smiled softly. "I'm sorry I opened one that displeased you."

"Oh, Harry, no," Sirius said quickly, backtracking. Harry was so unpredictable that Sirius found himself unable to understand let alone follow the changes in his manner and mood. "It works out much better this way."

"I don't understand."

"Well," Sirius said slowly, "before, I would always throw the chocolate away. And I do hate to waste. So now it will go to good use."

Harry's eyes were bright when they met Sirius', a hope he obviously dared not speak shining from within.

"I'd like you to have it, Harry. And I'm sure there's more..." But he didn't get to finish because Harry launched himself into Sirius' lap and wrapped his arms around his neck.

Sirius chuckled and allowed the embrace, holding the slight body against his. Harry was warm and sweet smelling, so full of gratitude that it made Sirius ill to think about.

"Thank you, Sirius," Harry whispered, smiling shyly and placing a chaste kiss on Sirius' cheek.

But then Harry froze all over and his eyes grew intent. He nibbled on his lower lip, and Sirius forced himself not to look away from those verdant eyes. Then Harry kissed him again, on the lips this time, and not quite so chaste.

Sirius held perfectly still, letting the boy kiss him, neither rejecting nor encouraging him. Soft lips grazed his in a half-innocent, half-manipulative seduction. Sirius wasn't made of stone; he groaned, hands clenching on Harry's hips as the kiss went on.

But when he felt Harry's lips part beneath his, he pulled back. "Harry..."

"It's okay," Harry said. "I want this. I'm so... so glad I met you, Sirius. And I want to show you..."

Sirius gripped Harry by the upper arms, holding him back so he could look. "I think you have the wrong idea. I'm not asking you for any sort of payment here, and the last thing I want is for you to feel obligated to... reimburse me with sex." Sirius was disgusted at the situation and with himself. But a small part of him wished he were a worse man so he could take advantage of the boy's offer without guilt.

But Harry shook his head. "I think *you* have the wrong idea. I'm not offering myself as a whore for dinner and treats." Harry was almost trembling with outrage and Sirius was again shocked by his transformation. There was real strength there.

"I know you," Harry asserted. Sirius looked confused, and Harry barreled on. "You can't possibly remember, but I do. It was four months ago, in front of the Wentworth building on Tremont Street. My friend Neville from the workhouse had just been kicked out for messing up again, and we were trying to get some money for dinner. I hadn't eaten in... well, that's not important. But Neville was starving and a little sick, so we were begging, him on one side of the street, me on the other."

Sirius knew Tremont Street...he did his banking there. But he could say beyond a shadow of a doubt that he'd never met Harry. He would have remembered, no question about it.

"Neville was awkward and always tripping or dropping things. Someone jostled him and he lost his footing, dropping his tin and sending his money everywhere. I couldn't cross the street in time, but you were there. When someone tried to grab the coins, you made them go away. You gave Neville the money he'd spilled and some of your own, too. Neville ate the biggest meal of his life that day."

"I... I don't even remember," Sirius whispered. And he didn't. Except... there was a memory of a tin and him stuffing a banknote inside because a pudgy boy looked so pathetic...

"I tried to run after you to thank you. People don't help people like us, you know. But you were gone. And I went back to Tremont Street even though it was very far from where I usually went and I never made much money there, hoping to see you. And I did. One day you were strolling by, easy as can be. I followed you all the way home, and I settled down the way a bit so I could see you to remind myself that kind people existed. And you were always kind to me."

Sirius wanted to hang himself from the rafters. He could count on his fingers how many times he'd given Harry money even though he had more than enough for himself. He couldn't remember the last time he'd spared the boy a thought, not when he enjoyed a hot bath, not when he bought new clothing or things for his home. Harry had starved every day outside his very door and *he'd done nothing*.

Jesus Christ, he should be the one prostrating himself before the child, not the other way around!

"Harry, I..."

But Harry shushed him with a finger against Sirius' lips, and he realised that in his shock, his grasp on Harry's thin arms had faltered. The boy was now pressed against his chest, leaning in so their foreheads touched. Harry's eyes fell closed and he sighed softly, even his breath tasting sweet and new.

"So you see, I've loved you." Harry kissed him. "I've loved you always."

Sirius knew, *knew*, that Harry spoke not of love but of infatuation or gratitude or even just human desire, but lord how he wanted him anyway.

Harry was the forgiveness for every horrible, fucked-up and selfish thing he'd ever done. Harry had seen ~~the~~ *one good thing* Sirius had done in ages, and he'd held onto it, made it important, made it count. And Sirius just didn't want to let that go. He wanted to be the good person for someone. He wanted Harry to think he was better than he really was. Or maybe he just wanted Harry to *see* him when it felt like everyone had been passing through him since James and Lily had died and Remus had gone away.

Harry somehow made the past all right.

With his hand tight on messy hair, Sirius pulled Harry forward into a bruising kiss. Maybe it wasn't absolution for everything he'd done wrong in his life, but it could be the beginning of a new way, if he'd let it. This kiss was suddenly the most important thing in the world to him, and if he didn't let it go on, it would mean nothing had changed. He needed it to go on; he needed things to change.

Harry hummed a little against his lips, kissing back with enthusiasm that more than made up for a lack of finesse. His tongue daringly tapped against Sirius' lips, and he opened his mouth to it, surprised that the reserved young boy had taken such initiative.

But Harry's tongue retreated back into his own mouth, apparently having used up the quota for boldness. No matter...Sirius deftly followed, tracing Harry's lips before dipping inside, teasing his tongue and flickering softly against Harry's palate. He could kiss the squirming youth in his lap all night and well into the next day.

Sirius was shocked into gasping, stealing Harry's breath from him, when Harry rocked his hips against Sirius'. Harry was hard, panting now, and Sirius had to slip his hands beneath Harry's borrowed shirt. His skin was nothing less than pure silk, heated by the fire and more. The delicate bones were like those of a bird when Sirius traced fingers against his ribs and the knobs of his spine.

"Are you sure, Harry?" Sirius whispered, closing his eyes so Harry wouldn't see how very desperate he was. He didn't want to scare him away...he wanted him in his bed forever, this young man who thought he loved Sirius, this harbinger of forgiveness.

"Sirius, really, it's Christmas. Let me give you something... give me something back."

Sirius let out a bark of laughter...it was almost too much, this naïve seduction, as if he needed to be seduced.

His mind made up, he stood with Harry still on his lap, who instinctively wrapped his legs around Sirius' waist and buried his face in his neck, where he bit and licked until Sirius was in danger of dropping him. Which he finally did...onto his bed.

Harry bounced with the grace of youth and scrambled into the middle of the huge canopy bed. Sirius watched as Harry undressed himself, throwing Sirius' overlarge clothing to the floor with no regard, of which Sirius heartily approved. Before climbing into bed with the little sprite, he lit the fireplace and stoked it until flames crackled and made the room smell even more like Christmas.

Lying on his back on the bed, Harry slowly stroked his slender cock, unabashedly watching Sirius as he unbuttoned his shirt and tossed it away. His trousers were next, and Harry's eyes were fixed on his crotch as he lowered his pants.

Harry's teasing hand stilled, but Sirius could see his cock throb even without the attention. He took a moment to bask in the obvious appreciation, but the room was still too chilly to be without a naked, writhing boy in his arms, so Sirius crawled onto the bed and settled himself over Harry. He had a moment's regret that he hadn't taken the time to undress Harry, or let Harry undress him, but the thought was less than fleeting when his body lowered onto Harry's, and the heat of him seared Sirius in a way he thought he'd never feel again.

Harry lifted his hips against Sirius', their cocks sliding together with delicious friction, but Harry was too small for this position to bring maximum pleasure, so he turned onto his back and took Harry with him. The younger man settled easily with his legs on either side of Sirius'. He knelt over Sirius' body for a minute, and Sirius took the time to take in the sight. It was truly inconceivable. Only a few hours ago, Harry had been nothing more than a means to an end...a way for Sirius to avoid the blistering chill. Then he'd been a nuisance in wet clothing. Now he was nothing short of the most beautiful thing Sirius had ever seen...the answer to his questions, to his prayers.

"I've done this before, you know... just so you're not expecting..." Harry looked embarrassed, and his cheeks flushed red in a way that would have been becoming if the boy wasn't so obviously uncomfortable.

"So have I," Sirius quipped, trying to lighten the mood. It worked, and Harry laughed, a full-throated certain laugh that made Sirius feel a little better about his age.

"But I haven't done it enough to be good..." Harry continued, burning even brighter.

Sirius chuckled and pressed his cheek against Harry's heated one. What an enchanting creature. "I have," he said softly, trailing his fingers lightly over Harry's back and delighting when the boy arched into the touch. *So responsive.* "So just let me show you."

He pulled Harry down for a kiss, slowing it when Harry began to move too quickly. Sirius needed to know that Harry wanted this, that he was ready. Harry got the message and slowed a little, his hips stopping their near-frantic movement in favour of a slow grind that made Sirius want to take back his intention to take it slow.

When his hand touched Harry's cock, Harry nearly jumped off Sirius altogether. He immediately settled down with a soft moan, his hips shifting to get more from Sirius' grip.

Sirius was busy thinking about all the wonderful things he wanted to do to Harry, all the things he wanted to show him. He wanted to swallow that pretty cock down, he wanted to thrust past those pink lips, he wanted to taste Harry's most intimate places... he wanted to spend all the night torturing and teasing him, not letting him come until Sirius said.

But beyond all that, he wanted to be inside Harry, and he was never a man to deny himself.

Pushing himself up into a sitting position and taking Harry with him, Sirius turned Harry around...the boy was so pliant, so agreeable, *seager*...so his back was to Sirius' front.

"Spread your legs a little," Sirius directed softly. Harry was only too obedient, falling forward onto his hands and knees and arching his back so Sirius could see all of him. Biting back a groan, Sirius reached for his bedside table where he kept his oil. He hadn't had the pleasure of using it with another person in quite some time. Slicking his cock quickly, Sirius was about to stretch Harry with his fingers when he suddenly leaned forward and laved a stripe up Harry's crevice.

Harry cried out and jolted away, turning to stare at Sirius with accusing eyes and a flushed face.

"Didn't it feel just a little bit good?" Sirius cajoled, remembering his nervous apprehension the first time someone had tried that on him. He'd quickly changed his tune, though, and he was hoping Harry would be similar.

"That's not the..."

"That is the point," Sirius said, gripping Harry's firm arse and opening him further. Harry was still staring at him when Sirius slowly leaned forward again, but he didn't protest, so Sirius tasted him.

The bath had given him a delicious young flavour, and Sirius made his appreciation known as his licked and nibbled along the ridged hole. Harry whimpered but thrust his arse back, and Sirius chuckled. When Harry had loosened enough for Sirius' tongue to enter him, he pulled back, any regret at stopping overruled by the anticipation of continuing.

Using two fingers immediately, Sirius pressed into Harry's body. He almost cursed at how tight and hot he was, but Harry definitely did curse, though it didn't sound like a request for mercy. Sirius began to thrust his fingers inside, crooking just so on the way out, making Harry cry out and move to follow his fingers.

"Fuck yourself on them," Sirius said hoarsely. His own cock was sadly neglected, glistening with oil and in desperate need of that tight sheath. Harry obediently began to press back into his hand, and Sirius pulled his fingers farther away so Harry had to back up to get the same fulfilment.

He eventually cried out in frustration and dropped his head onto the bed. "Please, Sirius. I've been good, haven't I? You want me, don't you?"

Sirius suddenly realised he was teasing Harry in ways he himself probably wouldn't have been able to handle. That wasn't exactly fair.

"You've been very good," Sirius reassured him, withdrawing his fingers and caressing his arse cheek. "So good."

Harry gave a happy sigh, which turned into a strained groan when Sirius finally lined his cock up to his hole. He rubbed the head against him for a moment, torturing himself, but finally, he pressed inside.

There was only a brief moment of resistance before Harry's body accepted him. He gave small thrusts until Harry was completely filled, then drew Harry up and against his chest. He sat back on his haunches, Harry's knees outside his. The position would give Harry power, and it would also be easier to graze his prostate.

Sirius rolled his hips, drawing out only an inch or two before sinking back in. Every time he did, Harry gave a whine of pleasure. Burying his nose in Harry's shoulder, he ran his hand over Harry's chest before grasping his cock. He stroked lightly, again teasing his lover, but he wanted this to last. He didn't want Harry to come too soon and be uncomfortable with Sirius fucking him.

Harry reached up, stretching backward, and put his arms around Sirius' neck. The move lengthened his body, and Sirius took advantage, pinching and tugging on his pebbled nipples. Harry began to move, grinding down on Sirius' thrusts, rolling his hips until Sirius was the one being tortured.

"Yes, yes," Harry chanted softly, his fingers tugging on Sirius' hair as he fucked himself on Sirius' cock.

His small verbalizations were too much for Sirius. "Can you come?" he rasped, gripping Harry's hip to bring the slight body hard against his own.

"God, yes," Harry said, panting.

Sirius clenched his eyes closed. His climax had been waiting for just those words. He wanted to bite into Harry's neck and mark him, but he settled for a hard kiss. "Come, then," he demanded, determined to bring them both off together.

He needn't have worried. Harry cried out as Sirius' hand passed hard over the head of his cock, and Sirius cupped the strands of come as they left Harry. The tightening of Harry's body was too intense, too perfect, and Sirius grunted as he came, his cock milked for every drop as he filled Harry.

Sirius let the scent and experience of Harry flow over him for a moment. He'd never felt so sated, he was sure. Harry's small puffing breaths made his back press against Sirius' chest, and every movement of the slight body was affirmation that good things happened to people who were really neither good nor bad.

When Harry would have slumped forward, his limbs boneless, Sirius held him firmly, not wanting even a centimetre between them. He shifted so they both lay on their sides, Sirius still inside Harry, though he was slipping out.

"Are you all right?" he asked quietly, hating to break the spell but needing to know that Harry wasn't hurt.

"Never better," Harry said with a small laugh. "And I mean that. Never."

Sirius withdrew completely, only just resisting the urge to part Harry's cheeks and see how much of a mark he'd left on his body. He coaxed Harry to turn over and face him.

"It's after midnight," Sirius said. He placed a small kiss on Harry's cheek, and then paused just beyond Harry's lips. He needed to know he was welcome. Harry's eyes fluttered closed and he leaned in to close the distance. His kiss was shy and chaste, everything that the moment before hadn't been. Sirius knew he had only experienced a small fraction of who Harry was, and he knew he absolutely had to learn more, as much as he could, everything.

"Merry Christmas," Harry murmured.

Sirius wondered if Harry remembered that had been the first thing Harry had ever said to him.

"Merry Christmas." Sirius drew the covers over them, knowing he'd have to get up shortly to stoke the fire and possibly place the copper bed warming pan by their feet.

But all that could wait. Right now, Harry was his, and he couldn't have let go if he'd wanted to.

*

"Sirius," said Harry in a soft voice as they sat curled together on the sofa before the fire. Sirius was pulling strands of Harry's hair as if to straighten the wayward tresses, and Harry was idly tracing designs on Sirius' chest. "I have to leave soon."

Sirius barely kept himself from laughing. Where would his little nymph need to go, especially on this day? "Where?"

"I have to see my parents."

Fingers freezing on Harry's head, Sirius played the words back to make sure he'd heard them correctly. "Your parents? Where are they? Why aren't they taking care of you?"

"I mean I have to go see their resting place," Harry clarified, and Sirius winced at his insensitivity.

"I'd be more than happy to escort you. You really shouldn't be alone, it's much too cold, and..." Sirius trailed off when he caught the look Harry was trying to smuggle into his shirt. "What?"

"It's very kind of you to be concerned, but I've been taking care of myself for years. I think I can manage just fine."

Sirius was sure he could. "Be that as it may, it would make an old man feel better to know you were in capable hands and not in any danger. Surely you couldn't begrudge me such a simple request?"

Harry laughed at the formal, stilted tone Sirius had affected, nuzzling into Sirius' chest and exhaling, making Sirius feel hot and sticky...not the worst feeling in the world when it came to Harry.

"You can come, I don't mind. I don't usually stay long, just enough to say hello. I go on my birthday, too. And theirs. I'd like to go on their wedding anniversary, but I don't know when it was."

Sirius would have pulled Harry closer if the boy weren't already practically a part of him. "I'd be honoured to be by your side." And he surprised himself with how true that was. He wanted to be a part of Harry's life, difficult as it was, imperfect as it was. Would it be mad if he asked Harry to stay with him? Was he just indulging in the lonely side he'd always known he'd been cultivating just below the surface? Was it fair to tie such an effervescent and brilliant young man to him?

Could Harry ever feel anything more than gratitude toward him?

"Would you like to go now?"

Harry gave a little shiver, and Sirius rubbed his arms and back absently. Keeping Harry warm could get to be a full-time job, but it was one he'd gladly do pro bono.

"Yes, please. Before church lets out."

"Of course." Sirius stood and Harry scrambled to keep his balance, clutching at Sirius and laughing as he nearly fell. "I'll get together some clothing for you."

"I can just wear what you lent me yesterday," Harry protested. "I didn't get them dirty or anything."

But Sirius was already on his way back into his bedroom. Unlike the day before when he'd gathered items he wouldn't miss, now he put together an outfit that would keep Harry warm. The clothing was, of course, too large, but it was well-made and maintained, and Harry wouldn't suffer from the ill fit under so many layers.

Yesterday, if Harry had not deigned to return with Sirius' paperwork, Sirius would have bemoaned the loss of his cloak. Now if Harry left, he would grieve the loss of the boy, not his clothing. Could he have lost himself so quickly, so completely?

"There," said Sirius, tilting his head toward the garments on the bed when Harry entered the room. He got more items from the closet for himself...if Harry wanted to go traipsing around a graveyard on one of the coldest days of the year, Sirius didn't want to feel it.

It never even crossed his mind to allow Harry to go by himself. If he had anything to say about it, the boy's time spent alone was over.

*

The walk wasn't a long one. There was a reason Harry had stayed so close to the area...he hadn't wanted to leave his parents' graves.

Sirius held back a little as Harry approached the graves. They were adorned with simple markers, the kind the city paid for when there was no one to foot the bill.

He watched as Harry traced the names with a gloved fingertip, though he couldn't make out the writing from where he was standing. He watched, sure his heart was breaking in two, as Harry took something out from inside his cloak and placed it beside one of the tombstones. He wasn't sure what the boy said, but a murmur reached Sirius' ears.

It was the box of chocolates Sirius had given him the day before.

Biting his lip, Sirius turned away. He couldn't watch, it was too raw. There was no love lost between himself and any of his family, but he missed, so desperately, the only family he had had...Lily, James, Peter, and Remus. His godson, who was out there in the world with Remus, living the life Sirius finally knew he wouldn't have been able to give the boy. Why, he must have been Harry's age by now. Actually, Harry and his godson had a lot in common, now that he thought about it. They were both orphaned around the same age, having lost both their parents.

A sinking feeling settled in Sirius' stomach. Harry pulled the cloak over his face, but by the way his thin shoulders were shaking, Sirius knew he was crying.

A hiss of wind covered the sound of his footsteps as Sirius approached the markers.

James Potter. Lily Potter.

Nausea overwhelmed him as his mind tried to make desperate connections. His godson. He'd *ducked* his own godson.

No one was more despicable than he.

Sirius did the only thing he knew how to do, the only thing he'd ever done in the face of pain.

He ran.

*

Staring with empty eyes at the windowsill, Sirius marvelled at how much it had snowed over the last day. When he'd left the...

Left his...

Yesterday, Christmas day, it had snowed like the Earth was getting revenge for something. Now he could hear the howls of the wind even over the roaring of his fireplace. No matter how hot the coals, how long the flames, he couldn't seem to get warm.

He'd slept in the extra bedroom. Even after ten years of sleeping in his bed, it smelled more like *say it, you coward!*...smelled more like Harry than it did of Sirius.

Punishment. Deserved.

Sirius shuddered. Harry would be all right. Children were resistant, perseverant. Harry'd been on the streets for ages; there was no reason to be so afraid for him. He wondered idly what had happened to Remus; his friend was not the type to shirk responsibility. He must be dead. The knowledge added to the sickness in his heart, but he couldn't bring himself to mourn. He didn't deserve it.

Yesterday, faced with the innocent sweetness of Harry (*Potter*, his beleaguered soul reminded him), Sirius had been able to convince himself he'd been doing the boy a favour with his attentions. A warm place to say, food, a bath... all of which Harry would have gone without for who knew how long until Sirius offered it.

Now, in the harsh reality of the day after, he knew he'd treated his own godson like a whore.

A particularly blustering wind rattled the glass of his window. The snow encroached halfway up, depicting a scale of how punishing the weather had been that day.

And his godson was out there somewhere. Alone, cold, discarded. How many people had left Harry over the course of his short life? How many had hurt him?

How could Sirius bear to be another?

He had his cloak on before he'd even realised what he was doing but hesitated at the door. Harry would not be pleased to see him. He'd promised him another dinner, a day in front of the fire, time spent together. And then he'd left him in the graveyard like discarded Christmas wrapping. His sweet lover, his Harry, who gave gifts of chocolate to the dead even though he sometimes didn't eat for days.

His sweet Harry who said things like, *Does it displease you? or How can I make it better for you?*

His sweet Harry who'd been orphaned and left and starved and worked and used.

Sirius knew he was something of a bastard. He was selfish and sometimes cruel, uncaring about the plights of others. That Harry claimed to be in love as a result of an act of kindness Sirius could barely recall...and that was certainly the only of its kind for as long as he could remember...made Sirius feel all the more useless and undeserving.

He was a bastard, but he wasn't a monster.

He had to find his godson.

The streets were every bit as cold as they'd seemed from inside, with none of the protection of distance. The first place he looked was Harry's small alcove, where Sirius had spoken with him for the first time. Could it only have been two days?

But Harry wasn't there. The small pile of rotted blankets remained, or what he assumed were blankets beneath the mountain of snow.

He almost decided to make the trek to Tremont Street before he realised where Harry must be. The graveyard. It was possible he'd never even left. Had he turned around, face pale and eyes red with grief, only to find himself alone? Had he searched for Sirius, thinking maybe he'd just gone to relieve himself? Had he been completely unsurprised by being cast off yet again? Had he eaten the offering of chocolates, knowing that he wouldn't be sharing Sirius' dinner table that evening?

Seeing a small form slumped against a headstone filled him with simultaneous glee and dread. The form was so very still.

Running, Sirius stumbled a little in the thick snow before falling to his knees beside Harry...

...who turned to look at him with the most accusing eyes Sirius had ever had set upon him.

"I'm sorry," he said lamely, brow drawn and eyes earnest. "I made a mistake."

The chocolate box was unopened and had been cleared of snow.

Harry rested his head back against the marker and did not answer.

"Harry, please. There's something I have to tell you. I'd like for you to come home with me."

Sirius waited long moments for a response, but there was none. The snow was picked up by the wind and danced with. "I won't leave you again," he said in a low but insistent voice. "I swear it."

Harry shivered almost violently, and Sirius couldn't stop himself from pulling him into his arms. He was as cold as the tombstone he clung to, but Sirius tugged him away and into his embrace.

"Let me go," Harry protested weakly. "You left. You left."

The truth of the accusation stung Sirius more than the biting wind against his cheeks. He closed his eyes, but opened them a moment later with renewed determination. He hauled Harry into his arms, unmoved by the half-hearted struggle. He could feel the heavy coldness of the limbs that were trying to assault him; Harry would not have made it through the night.

By the time Sirius reached his front door, Harry was no longer fighting, but the trembling of his body was almost as hard to contain.

Sirius filled the fire with too much wood, and then did the same in the bedroom after he placed Harry on the bed. Then he tended to his godson, whose muscles were spasming from the cold. The clothing was awkward to remove, stiff and frozen, but Sirius managed. Harry's skin was red and chilled, but that was better than blue. Drawing the covers back, Sirius guided him beneath. Harry didn't move except to help Sirius place him.

He pushed the hair from Harry's face and then pressed a hand against his cheek, absorbing the cold there. Harry was still practically vibrating.

"I'm going to heat water for a bath," he said gently, noticing but not understanding why his own hand was shaking.

He didn't expect an answer and wasn't disappointed. He set up the pots and the copper tub as he had the day before, a much more desperate and pleading tone to the actions. There would be no pleasure in seeing Harry's frail form enter the tub.

When he came back into the bedroom, Harry was crying. The action wracked his body with a different tension than the cold, but it was the tears that gave it away. They flooded his eyes but would not spill, and Harry looked at anything but Sirius as he struggled to contain himself.

"You left me." His tone wasn't even accusing, as if he didn't believe he had the right. It was a statement of fact, nothing more. No more than he should have expected, no more than he deserved.

"I... discovered something," Sirius admitted. He stared as if in a trance at the way Harry shook. The water wouldn't heat fast enough, and even if it did, the abrupt change in temperature might be damaging. "I know you're angry with me..."

But Harry shook his head in denial. Sirius didn't know what it could have meant, so he continued. "But I think it might be best if I come beneath the covers to share body heat. If you'd rather I didn't..."

"It's all right," Harry whispered, his lips quivering.

Sirius undressed perfunctorily, not taking his eyes away from his charge. When he was in his pants, he moved to the other side of the bed and got under the covers. The sheets were just as cold as they had been before Harry'd gotten in the bed; he wasn't warming up at all.

Harry hissed when Sirius pressed his front against the boy's back. He pulled and prodded until Harry was pressed against him at every juncture, from the bottoms of Harry's feet against his shin, to the back on his neck against Sirius' collarbone. He wrapped his arms around him and held tightly, exhaling slowly down the boy's back to warm him with his breath.

After a few minutes, Harry's constant trembling slowed to a sporadic shake now and then. Sirius left only to take the bed warmer out of the fire and place it as near Harry's front as he dared, warning him not to move too much.

"What did you discover?" came Harry's sweet voice almost an hour later. Sirius jolted a little, having dozed a little after Harry's back had warmed.

"Harry..." Sirius exhaled against his back, and when Harry shivered, it didn't seem to be from cold. Suddenly realising how his body was reacting to their proximity, Sirius pulled away. Harry turned to face him, a question in his eyes. "I knew your parents."

The look of unadulterated joy on Harry's face secured Sirius' place in hell. "I did. We were friends. We went to school together. Your father was one of my best friends, along with Peter and Remus. We were..."

But Harry broke in. "You knew Uncle Remus, too?"

And Sirius realised Remus was the first uncle Harry had mentioned...the one who had educated him. The one who had died not long after his parents.

Remus.

"Very well," he said, his voice breaking a little.

"How come knowing my parents made you leave me?"

Sirius dropped his head into his hands. "I fought with Remus after your parents died. I'd drifted away from them, our friendship suffered. But then they died, and I heard about their son... You'd been charged to Remus, even though... even though James had always sworn I'd be the godfather. I thought I should have had you." *It's all my fault.*

Harry touched Sirius' cheek with a fingertip. After a moment, he cupped Sirius' neck and squirmed forward, closing the distance. Sirius froze, but he didn't fall away.

"Why are you sad? You have me now."

Sirius broke. "Aren't you angry? Your entire life, everything bad that's happened to you, that's *my* fault! If Remus and I hadn't fought, I would have known he'd died. I would have been there to take you! You never would have been given to your bastard uncle or ended up without a home, you never would have been put in the workhouse, none of that! We would have shared a life together, you could have been... mine."

Harry kissed his lips, but it was chaste, reassuring. "I've already lived all that. It's over. It's not like I have to live it again, is it? Everything's easier when it's in the past. It's all right now. Isn't it? Can I be yours now?"

Tears spilled from Sirius' clenched eyes, but he forced himself to open them, to face Harry. "I took advantage of you."

"Don't you remember?" Harry asked. "I've loved you." He kissed Sirius again, but Sirius pulled away and left the bed altogether. The temptation to accept the forgiveness was too great.

"Do you want me to leave?" Harry asked in a wooden voice.

"No!" Sirius exclaimed, shocked. "No, god, no. I want you to stay with me. I can't be your father, or even Remus, but I can make sure you never go hungry, never get scared, never feel pain." They were brave promises, but Sirius owed them. He would work every day to keep them.

"Don't be silly," Harry chided. "Just never leave."

Never.

"April twenty-first," Sirius said suddenly, making Harry frown in confusion. "Your parents' wedding anniversary. April twenty-first. It rained."

"Thank you," Harry breathed, eyes wide and grateful. Sirius looked away.

"It's getting late," he said. He needed time to think about things. He was being forgiven, he knew. Not just by Harry. By James and Lily. By Remus. He had them back, in a way. And the first thing he would do was alter his will, leaving everything to Harry. His godson would want for nothing, and he'd never be abandoned again.

Harry pulled back the covers in response. "It's your bed," he said shyly, biting his lip. Sirius yearned to tug it from his teeth.

"You want..." Sirius backed away a step.

"Of course. Don't you?"

God, yes. "It wouldn't be right," he said instead.

"It wouldn't be wrong!" Harry countered fervently.

But Sirius kissed him softly on the forehead, avoiding Harry's lips when he tried to make Sirius' kiss into something different.

"Good night."

*

Sirius woke up very warm. He stretched luxuriantly before he realised it was still dark outside. Had Harry called for him?

"Couldn't sleep," came a mumbled voice from beneath the covers. The source of the heat peaked its head out and smiled sheepishly at him.

Sirius carded his fingers through the wild array of hair, unable to resist. "Just for tonight."

But Harry shook his head and pressed his lips against Sirius'. Too shocked to disallow it, Sirius was forced to accept that there was no way he could live with Harry and not love him in every possible way.

Harry's tongue smoothed against his; Sirius hadn't even realised he'd opened his mouth. A warm moan made him throb, and suddenly Harry was pressed all against him.

"Want you," Harry whispered, and the evidence was irrefutable.

Sirius kissed him again. He knew at that moment he'd never refuse Harry, never let him down, never hurt him.

Never.

The end.