

Confessions of a Coward

by Celisnebula

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Chapter 1 of 1

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"Hero-worshipped Black and Potter. Never quite in their league, talent-wise. I was often rather sharp with him ... Stupid boy ... Foolish boy ... He was always hopeless at dueling..."

-- Minerva McGonagall

"If you made a better rat than a human, it's not much to boast about, Peter."

-- Sirius Black

"Your devotion is nothing more than cowardice. You would not be here if you had anywhere else to go."

-- Lord Voldemort

"Sirius, Sirius, what could I have done? The Dark Lord ... you have no idea ... he has weapons you can't imagine ... I was scared, Sirius, I was never brave like you and Remus and James. I never meant it to happen ... He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named forced me ... He -- he was taking over everywhere! Wh -- what was there to be gained by refusing him? You don't understand! He would have killed me, Sirius!"

-- Peter Pettigrew

You have to understand what it was like I wasn't handsome like Sirius, or good at Quidditch like James, and I certainly wasn't as able as Lupin. I was the last to master becoming an Animagus, the last to produce a Patronus; I was pretty much the last at everything.

My parents feared I was a Squib, until that fateful day my Hogwarts letter arrived. It validated me in a way I cannot possibly describe. I was more than just *poor Peter*; I had my own magic my own destiny to fulfill.

I was in awe the first time Mum took me to Diagon Alley. So many witches and wizards of every sort walking around, picking up items for school, practicing magic as they wished; I was so envious of that. I felt like I had been kept in the shadows my whole life, and now that I'd been proven *worthy*, I could now enjoy the sunlight of life. I wanted to try everything absorb though every fiber of my being what it meant to *be* a wizard.

At Ollivanders, I went through countless boxes before I found the wand that called to me. It was 8 ³/₄ inches of beautiful yew with a dragon heartstring core. As soon as I

touched it, I felt as though I had found a piece of me, something that I hadn't even realized was missing, until that moment. I made a vow to myself that day that I would do whatever was necessary to ensure I was worthy of this gift.

Later that afternoon, I met Sirius Black.

Here was a boy that embodied everything I desired. He exuded a type of confidence that spoke of being able to accomplish anything. I yearned to have that sort of presence. I thought if I could spend time around him that maybe a bit of it would rub off on me.

My Mum went on and on about how it was *anhonor* to have meet someone from the Black family much less receive an offer to ride on the Hogwarts train with one. I didn't care what family he was from. I wouldn't have cared had he been Grindelwald's love child; all I cared about was the fact that this boy this boy who had what I wanted offered me a place beside him on the way to Hogwarts.

Can anyone really ever understand the anticipation that runs along your spine when something this wonderful is about to happen?

The rest of summer seemed to drag on every day felt like ten. I wanted, desperately, to use my wand to feel its power coursing through my veins as I twisted the world by only my will. My parents, however, refused to let me even touch my wand. They were afraid I'd harm myself; all those years of wondering whether or not I was a Squib made them overly cautious. It sat, in the Ollivander's box, until the day I took the Hogwarts train.

Instead, I spent the time reading *Hogwarts: A History*. My head filled with visions of earning a place on the Quidditch team, becoming a Prefect, followed later by becoming the Head Boy. In my daydreams, I envisioned myself as the leading sway for my House to win the House Cup. I was destined for greatness, and Hogwarts was the first step.

I literally could not eat the morning of departure. I was desperate to leave my parents' house, desperate to leave the cocoon of their oppressive concern. What had been my home for eleven years had, in the dying months of summer, felt like a prison. My palm itched to feel the grainy wood of my wand pressed against it; my heart skipped at the very thought of feeling my magical powers thrum through my body.

I raced, pell-mell, across the train station. I had no patience for the calls to slow down I was emerging from my isolated existence. I pushed through the womb of the platform barrier into a world unlike anything I'd ever known.

Sirius Black called me over as I emerged from the brick wall, and I noticed the others surrounding him. At first, I raged against the injustice of it all. I was supposed to be the one at his side. How dare those others encroach on my biggest achievement?

Lupin and Potter small, thin boys with bright smiles that made my stomach churn with rage.

Somehow, we made it onto the train, all in the same compartment. I didn't know what to say. I plastered a fake smile across my lips and watched them chat away. Lupin was quiet and reserved. His reticence relieved me in some ways; I didn't feel so overwhelmed. Little did I know the reason for his reserve.

Potter radiated the same sort of charismatic persona that had drawn me to Black; he was brash, loud, and so utterly unafraid of the world. Potter and Black Black and Potter, they were as thick as thieves.

By the time we arrived at Hogsmeade, I felt better. I wasn't shunned wasn't abandoned for someone flashier, smarter, or better with magic, which was my real fear. Black, Lupin, and Potter seemed willing to include me in their little group, and I was more than willing to be included.

We all scrambled into the same boat when that giant of a man, Hagrid, called over the first years. A small, dirty little boy with lanky hair and an enormous nose ran into Black as we settled into the boats. His stench lingered in my nose long after he had gone. He pushed past us with a sneer, jabbing Black with the tip of his wand. Sirius retaliated by pushing him into the lake.

It was the beginning of our feud with Severus Snape.

Hogwarts was gorgeous. It was everything I'd imagined it would be over the summer. I couldn't help the grin that spread across my face as we ambled up to the door. None of us knew what to expect; none of us had any idea how we would be sorted into the Hogwarts Houses. I'm sure we were all apprehensive and scared as Professor McGonagall lead us into the Great Hall.

I was sure I'd be placed in Slytherin, the House of the powerful and ambitious, along with Black.

I watched as Black swaggered up to the rickety stool; his face serene as the floppy hat fell over his face. My heart skipped a beat as that tattered piece of cloth screamed out Gryffindor. A Black in Gryffindor; I was appalled.

I had constructed a summer of ideas and plans based on becoming a Slytherin with Black. "*Blacks are always in Slytherin*," my Mum told me the day we met Sirius in Diagon Alley.

Names and children whirled by as I panicked. I wanted to be in Slytherin, but I wanted to be a friend of Black's more.

By the time I was called up, I was ready determined to please my parents by being Black's chum. I would be in Gryffindor. It was a strong, noble House.

The hat barely touched my head before screaming out Gryffindor. I don't know if it considered another House for me. Lupin and Black sat at the long table, cheering as I scurried over to where they sat. I wondered if Potter would be joining us, and I wasn't sure if I wanted him to join us. However, the Sorting Hat screamed out Gryffindor for him, and he joined us at the bursting table.

That night, basking in the glow of newness, I felt as if I belonged. I was on a grand adventure it was the start of all my dreams.

How utterly wrong I was.

The first year was easy enough. We struggled along together, giving one another moral support protecting ourselves from the atrocious Slytherins, especially that evil little twit, Snape. I never felt so connected.

Lupin was the only one who religiously studied. At first, I thought it was because of his *'illness'*; little did I know it was guilt. I hadn't known about Lupin's propensity towards turning into a flesh-eating monster I, like everyone else, assumed Lupin had some sort of wasting disease. I didn't find out about Lupin's actual condition until nearly the end of my second year, though Black and Potter had apparently deduced what was wrong at the beginning of the year. It wasn't pleasant, finding out the truth.

Black and Potter those two were daring; they caused all sorts of interesting mischief. From finding out how to get into the kitchen during our first year, and bribing a house-elf to deliver food to our common room without going to the kitchen, to discovering the hidden passageway to Honeydukes at the end of our third year, they were constantly on the go.

Not that I complained I was enjoying the fruits of their labor far too much.

In fact, the map our Marauder's Map was a direct result of Black and Potter's obsession with castle's hidden passageways. They wanted a way out of Hogwarts, a way of knowing who was where, and all that rot. The map really was a brilliant piece of work, taking nearly two years to complete, and at the time, so utterly worth it.

In some ways, Lupin's condition was the catalyst for creating the whole damn thing. Black wanted a way of knowing who was where, and when, as well as having a risk-free method for getting out of Hogwarts.

I discovered Lupin's secret just before the spring holidays. I'd like to say I recognized all the signs listed in our textbook, but I hadn't.

I'm not sure what it was that woke me that night; the room was filled with moonlight, illuminating everything. I noticed that their beds were empty; they were always sneaking off to the kitchens, and I thought this was just another example of them rushing off without me. I crept down to the common room, expecting to see food all laid out and the hearth fires going. Instead, I found Potter and Black struggling under the weight of Lupin as they tried to carry him through the portrait hole.

I must have gasped, or made some sort of noise, because James called me over to help. I rushed over and grabbed Lupin's feet. He looked sickly, his flesh pulled tight against his pallid skull as his body twitched in our arms. I tried to tug his feet towards the staircase leading to the infirmary, but Potter stopped me.

I listened, with a sickening sense of dread, as he explained why we needed to get Lupin out to the Whomping Willow and the tunnel it protected.

Needless to say, I went home for the spring holiday. I needed to get away from Hogwarts, needed to get away from them and that monster I had called 'friend.' A werewolf attending Hogwarts a dark creature sleeping in the same room as innocent children, attending classes as if he were normal.

By the end of the spring holiday, I was resigned to the situation. I wasn't completely over their deception; I'm not sure I was truly over the whole werewolf aspect of Lupin's life, yet there was nothing I could do, since Lupin was there with Dumbledore's full approval. In light of their normal behavior, once school resumed, it was hard to maintain my distance, and life fell back into its customary pattern.

As our second year came to a close, Black got the brilliant idea that we all should become an Animagus. He didn't want his *poor, pathetic* pet werewolf to be alone during such a harrowing time. I'm not sure where his deductive reasoning came in, but he had this theory more like an absence of intelligence that Lupin wouldn't be driven to kill us if we were in animal form; as if a hungry werewolf only hunted humans.

I'm not sure how he thought we'd manage it it took a powerful force of concentrated magic to transfigure something large, and that's not considering the fact that when you try to become an Animagus you're basically transfiguring yourself. However, he and Potter were adamant about this.

I swear, there were times I was sure Black was a shirt lifter, and Lupin his little knuckle biter he was so solicitous of that fucking animal. In this though, I think Lupin was oblivious; he would have been far too *concerned* for our welfare to allow it to happen; more likely far too scared that he might rip into one of us.

Again, this was just another example of how I wasn't good enough.

Potter, the clever little swot, somehow found a way to do it by the end of the summer holiday at the end of our fifth year. He, in turn, began to teach Black. By the time our sixth year started, Potter could fully transform and Black was able to transform a part of his body. Whereas I, due to the time spent working in my cousin's shop, hadn't the chance to practice the involved transformation.

My parents, I have no idea what possessed them, in a stroke of perceptive brilliance set me to work in my cousin's shop, Borgin and Burkes. I quite enjoyed the whole interaction with various people. My cousin, Caractacus Burke was an interesting man. He was an older fellow who collected an odd assortment of odds and ends, often reselling certain notorious items, for a price.

But I digress...

Our fourth year is the year that sticks out most in my mind. Potter made it onto the Quidditch team as a Seeker, no less. I didn't even make the team. Lupin excelled at his studies, while I struggled to keep up. And Black ... what can I say? There was no way I could compete with him.

I simply could not keep up. The others had it so easy. Spells came to James and Sirius like drops of rain on a tropical island, while I struggled to survive subsisting on the muddy leftovers.

Oh, Remus tried to help with that condescending smile of his ... Bloody Werewolf! Yet, even with his tutelage, I couldn't keep up.

In my mind, it was better to be friends with them, despite my growing resentment. Potter and Black, especially Black, were protective of their friends, and I had no desire to walk the halls of Hogwarts without their protection not when there was a chance of being hexed by that bastard, Snape.

Such a delightful prey Snape gave as good as he got, and there were times when I gleefully had to be the dutiful friend and deliver Potter or Black to the infirmary. Here was the one place I excelled. I could twist a situation around, hexing with impunity, and I was protected. Funny, how easily they ran to protect me poor little Peter bumbling through everything, an easy target for that nasty Slytherin.

It was one of my greatest pleasures, baiting *Snivellus* Snape. Easy to do, considering how much Black and Potter hated him. Snape was utterly vicious, and he completely loathed us. Sirius had a way of causing him to hex us in front of a Professor, normally McGonagall, who would immediately assign him detention.

Our sixth year could be summed up in one word Lily. Lily Evans, to be precise. She was a Gryffindor, but she wasn't really *our* type a Muggle-born with no concept of how the real Wizarding world worked. Don't get me wrong, she was pretty enough in a coarse way, and the fact that she was one of old Slughorn's pets indicated she was intelligent enough, but there was just something off about her. Perhaps it was the fact that she was Snivellus' lab partner in Potions and Transfiguration.

Lily was one of the few girls Potter and Black could not charm. I have no doubts that she disliked each and every one of us; Potter and Black for being so brutal, Lupin for being so permissive, and me for going along with it all. In fact, she often displayed hostile disdain for all of our actions she was a girl, and girls of that age are known to not have a sense of humor. Yet, some how, in our fifth year, she made an impression on James.

He tried to attract her notice, often his antics would entice some young girl to profess her undying devotion, but nothing he did interested Lily. He went to desperate lengths started studying more, tried to be more serious, James even went as far as trying to be civilized to Snivellus but nothing worked.

Towards the end of our fifth year, Potter was actually making some headway, or at least he thought he was, until the afternoon he decided on a little impromptu revenge. As I've mentioned, Snape was a vicious little bastard. That morning, as we were coming into the Great Hall for breakfast, Snape hexed Black.

It was an ingenious piece of work. All the seams on Sirius's robes and undergarments slowly unraveled. None of us noticed it. By the time we were done with breakfast, the hall full of students, the seams were none existent. When Black stood up, his clothes literally pooled at his feet a huge mass of useless cloth leaving him naked as the day he was born.

We tried to end the hex bloody hell, even the professors tried to end the hex, but nothing would work. Overall, it was brilliant work it hit Sirius where it hurt the most, his masculine pride. In the end, Black had to return to Gryffindor tower shielded by the three of us, though I am sure every single person in the Great Hall got a good gander at his dangly bits.

It was only a matter of opportunity before one of us struck back, although with O.W.L.s taking place, the chance might have never come. Snape should have known better should have realized that even if everyone was tense and going mad about revisions that we would be bent on revenge. After a particularly grueling exam session, opportunity knocked.

I can remember it as though it were yesterday. Potter caught the sneaky bastard unawares. In a matter of moments, he and Sirius had Snape wandless and at their mercy. Needless to say, the sight of Snivellus's graying, girlish knickers is etched in my memory as one of James's finest moments.

Evans was livid. She charged up the grassy knoll from water's edge, her green eyes snapping with anger as she drew out her wand. Snape twisted in the wind as she yelled at Potter, telling him to let the slimy git down.

Of course, Snape was his normal self. Called her a "filthy Mudblood," after all she went through to help him not that I blame him; being saved by someone like her would be more humiliating than being strung up by Potter. The irony of the situation wouldn't hit me until years later. Snape calling her a filthy Mudblood when he wasn't all that pure himself. Needless to say, it did not advance Potter's agenda into her knickers. Put him back to square one, it did, and he spent all of our sixth year trying to get back into her good grace.

One thing is sure she never found out about Black's little werewolf prank. If she had, I doubt Potter would have gotten past a little slap and tickle, much less married her. I'm surprised ole Snivellus didn't bandy about the whole sordid tale it would have harmed Potter's chances with Lily.

The underlying theme throughout our years at Hogwarts was the growing power of a mysterious Lord Voldemort. My cousin claimed he was doing Wizarding kind a favor by ridding the populace of undesirable elements, and many of his patrons seemed to agree. I remember long discussions during the summer months over what a positive impact the man seemed to make with the affluent aspects of the Wizarding world.

As I got older, tales of Lord Voldemort and his group of followers turned darker. By the end of my seventh year, no one was willing to claim any positive association with the sinister figure. It seemed as if the methods Voldemort employed left a lot to be desired it was whispered that he was the newest Dark Lord, as evil and twisted as old Grindelwald had been.

Potter and Black jumped into the fray ready and willing to battle this newest menace, dragging Lupin and me along for the ride. Thinking back on it, it hadn't seemed real the danger the Dark Lord posed. We were playing at war protesting the movement of radical hatred only to go back to work the next day, or rather I went back to work the next day.

I eagerly discussed what was happening with my cousin and his partner something I often did since I started working for them. I didn't understand the nature of the game didn't understand the real stakes, until it was too late.

I didn't realize how much simple conversation could reveal. I wanted things that my friendship with the estranged son of the esteemed house of Black could not provide. How utterly unaware I was.

By then, I was fully entrenched; caught between a rock and a hard place. I foolishly allowed my comfort with certain people override my good judgment. I practically handed the Dark Lord the Order of the Phoenix, and I hadn't even realized it until it was too late.

My cowardice led me to this bitter end a creature in the Dark Lord's army. Some days I want to rail at the injustice of it all; Black's bright idea led to my failure.

You have to understand, the Dark Lord is very persuasive. He can have you tripping over yourself in an effort to please him and I, I was not immune to this. I swear I hadn't realized he meant to kill James and Lily. I thought he only wanted Harry little did I know he wanted to kill Harry. The Dark Lord made his position sound so reasonable. Imagine my shock when I heard that he killed them only to be stopped by a baby.

Black was insane with grief. He loved James I think James became his family after that fiasco with his mother. He was out for my blood. I could see my death in his eyes, and nothing I could say would have stopped him.

I didn't think, I just reacted. I did not deliberately sever my finger that was Black's little war trophy. The explosion was only supposed to camouflage my transformation into a rat those Muggles were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. I'm frankly surprised Black survived the blast.

How was I to know I'd end up being a rat for twelve years?

Not that I had a choice. Black took the fall for the Potters' deaths, and the Dark Lord's followers would have never let me survive, had it been known I lived. It was a difficult situation all around. As a rat, I was the dead hero of the day; as myself I was signing my death warrant.

Each year it became easier to be just a rat. I was well fed, well taken care of, and didn't need to worry about anything. I could have happily spent the rest of my life as someone's pet; especially the pet of one of the Weasleys. They were chosen completely at random, but I couldn't have chosen a better family to hide myself away with. Until Black escaped from Azkaban.

He wouldn't have let me live.

In the end, I had no choice but to go back to the Dark Lord. Black wanted my blood, Lupin wanted justice though I wasn't inclined to go for the Dementors' brand of justice, and I had lost my cushy home as a pet.

Everything I've done since that confrontation in the Shrieking Shack has been done in an effort to save my life. The Dark Lord does not take failure kindly, nor does he take rejection well I am his servant because I would not live to see another day if I left him.

I've sacrificed so much for this war my pride, my closest friends, twelve years of my life, and now my hand. Yes, the Dark Lord replaced my hand with something stronger, more versatile than the original flesh he kept his promise in that regard but that isn't the point.

I wonder who will win in the end. Harry so like James in many ways doesn't seem strong enough to fight the insidious nature of the Dark Lord. Voldemort slips deeper into his psychotic dementia, so perhaps that will aid the young man. Either way, I will lose. I live on the Dark Lord's sufferance if I displease him in any way, I forfeit my life. If he dies, then so, too, do I I have no doubts the Dementor's Kiss is in my future should Harry defeat the Dark Lord.

A/N:

Written for the SH Deathday festival (which is now being posted so I can finally share this after hoarding it away for months - gods that was hard). Many thanks to Deviant Author and Larilee for their betaing services.