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A Dangerverse Datebook

1 April 1987: Pranks Ahoy!

31 March, 1987

The dark-haired, rakishly handsome man cautiously opened the door and looked down the hall. No sign of anyone else. He took a moment to change forms and sniff. Only his own scent and that of his partner in the noble and most ancient art of prank. They had not been detected.

“Are we clear?” his partner asked from behind him.

Sirius Black changed back to human and grinned. “Yep. My turn.”

“Act casual,” Remus Lupin advised him as they strolled down the upstairs hallway of the house known (to its inhabitants) as the Marauders’ Den, which the two remaining true Marauders shared with their wives and the four children they were raising. “We have a perfect right to be here, after all.”

“Not according to the law,” Sirius pointed out with some justice. “If the Ministry ever got wind of where we are...”

“That’s not what I meant and you know it, Padfoot. And tell me the truth, what are you more afraid of – the Ministry finding us here, or Aletha finding you setting up a prank for her?”

“You have a point – but it goes both ways, Moony. Would you rather face an Auror, or Danger in one of those moods of hers that makes it *really* clear how she got that nickname?”

Remus winced. “As you said, it goes both ways.” His wife’s temper was formidable when it got going.

“They’re going to be mad when they figure out what we pulled, aren’t they?”

“Yes, for about twenty seconds, until they start laughing. That’s the way it always works.”

“Yeah, but a lot can happen in twenty seconds.”

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A life can change in twenty seconds, Remus reflected as he leaned against the doorframe, keeping watch while Sirius worked. That was all the time it took for me to recognize that little boy in the park five years ago. And that led to this – a household in hiding, a Pack of eight, where only the youngest child was actually born to any of the people raising her – her older siblings having been inherited, stolen, and given to us, in that order...

I love my life.

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Two of the four children of the household (“cubs of the Pack,” in family parlance) were currently in the back yard, making arrangements for their own celebration of the first of April.

“Reggie, this is Hesseh,” said the blond boy to the black-haired one, holding up a long, thin, green thing that might have been mistaken for a thick piece of string, except that it was moving. “He’s a friend of Siss’ – you remember Siss, right?”

“Sure. Hi, Siss. Hi, Hesseh.” Reggie waved at the similar green thing coiling itself around his brother’s leg and extended his arm so that Hesseh could slither onto it. “He’s soft.”

“Yeah, they’re not slimy like people think they are. And they’re really nice once you get to know them. Come on, let’s show them the bedroom. Are you sure they’re using Padfoot’s?”

“Positive – think about it, Jamie. Who sleeps heavier, Moony or Padfoot?”

“Padfoot.”

“Right. So Danger and Letha can pull the move on him loads easier.”

“OK, I get it. If we’re going in, I gotta tell them to hide. You ready?”

“Ready.”

Jamie leaned over to whisper something to Hesseh, who promptly slid down the front of Reggie’s shirt, making him laugh. “That tickles!”

Jamie repeated his whisper to Siss, who slithered up his offered arm and inside the sleeve of his T-shirt. “Now we’re ready,” he said, straightening up.

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In the bedroom the two Marauders had vacated a few minutes earlier, a brown bushy head peered cautiously around the door.

“What you see?” whispered the smaller girl behind her.

“It’s empty. Come on.”

The girls made their way, on tiptoe, across the bedroom to the door of the master bathroom beyond, and inside. There, the four-year-old climbed onto her sister’s back and snagged a certain bottle from the high shelf inside the shower.

“You have the stuff, Pearl?” the bigger girl asked, lowering her sister to the floor.

Meghan Black produced two small bottles from one of her pockets. “Which one, Neenie?” she asked.

“Let’s use the strawberry. Save the other one for Padfoot.”

The girls shared a giggle, then went to work.

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Jamie and Reggie came in through the back door. “*Everyone still with us?*” Jamie asked in the peculiar hissing whisper that only he could manage.

“*I am fine, my heart’s egg,*” Siss answered indulgently from her position coiled around his shoulder.

“*I like it here,*” Hesseh said from inside Reggie’s shirt. “*This is a nice place to bask. Very warm. Can I stay here?*”

Jamie giggled.

“What’s so funny, Harry?” his brother demanded.

“Hesseh likes it inside your shirt, Draco. He wants to stay!”

Draco Black was about to make a blistering retort, but his eyes widened. “Ssssh!”

Footsteps were coming down the stairs, on the same side of the house they were on.

“*Don’t come out,*” Harry Potter hissed to the two snakes. He and Draco ran down the hall into the front room, where the stairs ended, and into their Pack-fathers’ arms.

“Oof,” Padfoot said, absorbing Harry’s hug and swaying a little. “You’re getting too big to run at people like that, Greeneyes.”

“Am not.”

“Oh, you most certainly are,” Padfoot said, knuckle-rubbing Harry’s head. “You’re going on seven now, and you were big enough to do some damage when you were just four. Remember, Draco?”

Draco nodded, eyes solemn. “Uncharm us?” he asked Moony. “Please?”

“Are you going back outside?”

Both boys shook their heads.

“All right. Don’t forget, now.” Moony pulled out his wand and removed the glamour charms the boys wore, returning Harry’s hair to its natural black and Draco’s to its silver-blond.

“Now you boys go and play,” Padfoot said, “and don’t get into mischief.”

Moony sighed. “Padfoot, that’s like saying, ‘Water, don’t be wet.’ They’re our sons. How can they not get into mischief? The day before April Fool’s, no less?”

“We’ll be good,” Draco said. “Promise. No pranks on you.”

“What about the girls? Are you planning on pulling anything on Neenie and Meghan?”

“No way,” Harry said quickly. “Neenie’s too smart. She’d figure it out.”

“B’sides,” Draco added, “it’s hard to prank someone when you share a bedroom with them.”

The Marauders laughed. “We managed pretty well when we shared a dorm,” Moony said reminiscently. “But all right. Go on, boys, and please at least try to be good.”

The boys waited until they were at the top of the stairs to laugh.

“They never asked us about Danger and Letha,” Draco said exultantly.

And we're *not* gonna prank Moony'n'Padfoot," Harry finished, grinning. "That's the girls' job."

"Ouch," said a faint voice from the vicinity of Draco's stomach.

"Hesseh, are you all right?" Harry asked.

"I do not think I like it so much in here," the snake said ruefully. "I was squashed when you greeted your sire, human boy who does not speak my language."

"I told you to stay on the arm!" Siss scolded her friend, sticking her head out of Harry's collar. "You don't get hurt when you do that."

Harry translated the conversation for Draco, making both boys laugh again, as they made their way down the hall toward Padfoot and Letha's bedroom.

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Meghan restored Padfoot's bottle to its original place, then froze. "You hear that?"

"Hear what?" But just as Neenie asked, she did hear it. Voices from the bedroom.

"Uh-oh," Meghan said, sliding off her sister's back, a worried look on her face. "We gonna get in trouble?"

"Don't know." Neenie followed Meghan out of the shower stall and closed it carefully. The voices stopped at the *ka-chunk* sound it made. Very slowly, Neenie reached for the handle of the bathroom door –

Only to have it open before she touched it.

"Nenie!" Harry exclaimed in relief. "We were afraid Padfoot Apparated upstairs or something."

Hermione shook her head. "Nope, just Meghan and me, and we're all done."

"Perfect. I'm about to tell Siss and Hesseh what to do – you want to listen?"

"OK," Meghan said, climbing up on the bed. It fascinated her when Harry spoke Parseltongue.

The two small garden snakes were coiled at the bottom of the bed. Harry, Draco, and Neenie gathered around them, and Harry began to speak.

"Tonight, after darkness, a man with dark head-fur and a woman with dark skin will come to this bedroom. You need to stay under the bed and out of sight while they are here. Near the morning, a woman with head-fur like this –" Harry indicated Neenie's brown mess. *"– will come in. She and the dark-skinned woman will use their magic sticks to float the man out of the room. Then she will get in the bed with the dark-skinned woman. Any time after that happens, you can climb up into the bed. But only go up their legs to the knee, please. Understand?"*

Both snakes hissed an emphatic yes.

"Great. Thanks again for doing this for me, Siss, Hesseh."

"Anything for my little human eggling," Siss said, weaving her tail around Harry's fingers.

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Gertrude Granger-Lupin, known to her Pack and their friends as Danger, parked her truck in the driveway and climbed out.

Must watch my back tomorrow. Just because our fifth wedding anniversary was two days ago does not mean I get any mercy from that prank-happy husband of mine, or his even more prank-happy best friend.

And to think I used to wonder what a more exciting life would be like.

Living in the same house with a supposed criminal, married to a werewolf, and helping to raise my baby sister, my best friend's daughter, and a pair of boys who are officially missing – yes, I would call that exciting.

Not to mention magic. It's so much fun, when you're twenty-one years old, mostly normal, and just trying to get by, to discover the reason your dreams have been weird lately is because you've become a witch.

But it's not without its rewards.

She let herself into the house. "I'm home!" she called.

"Danger!" The cubs scrambled down the stairs and mobbed her, hugging her from every angle. Remus came in from the kitchen and unceremoniously levitated two of them out of the way so he could get a kiss.

How was work? he asked her mentally.

Work-like. Customers all want the latest romance novel by Valentina Jett, and of course the manager in his infinite wisdom decided it

wasn't going to be a big draw, so he didn't order many of them.

Was it bad?

No, because a foresighted employee who shall remain nameless ordered three boxes on her own initiative, and even got "Ms. Jett" to autograph a few for her.

I wonder who that could be, Remus said dryly.

Danger gave Sirius a thumbs-up. "You saved my life with those autographed copies," she said. "Oh, here." She fumbled a packet of letters out of her handbag. "Catch."

"Ah, mail from my devoted fans." Sirius chuckled, flipping through the letters. "The only problem with writing under a female pen name is that I don't get any marriage proposals. At least not any I'm inclined to take."

"Dadfoot, you can't get married," Meghan said. "You already married."

"I am?" Sirius pretended astonishment. "Well, who's the lucky girl?"

"Mama Letha!" Meghan laughed, just as a pleasant chiming sound – the signal for a Floo connection being made into the Den's fireplace – rang out from the other side of the house.

"She's home, she's home!" The cubs started for the music room, where the Floo fireplace was, but Remus clapped his hands twice and they all stopped in their tracks.

"What's the rule?" he asked them sternly.

Neenie sighed. "We wait until she calls us, because she might have someone with her, or it could be a firecall from someone who isn't a Pack-friend and shouldn't see the boys without their glamours on," she recited.

"Very good."

"I'm home!" called Aletha Freeman-Black's musical voice.

"Now you can go," Sirius said to the cubs' rapidly departing backs.

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The rest of the night was peaceful, as much as it ever was in the Den. There was a certain mood of suppressed excitement, however, and everyone was being very carefully polite to everyone else. The cubs, in particular, were very polite at dinner and afterwards, clearing their places without being told and offering to help with the dishes.

The adults were cautious while trying to look nonchalant, just in case someone had decided to anticipate the holiday. Offered food was given a careful second look, chairs were double-checked before they were sat on, and everyone shook out their nightclothes before donning them.

No one found anything, and the Pack settled in for the night, the two married couples in their bedrooms and the cubs all in the same room, in their one enormous bed, which was retained by popular demand. They knew perfectly well that in a so-called normal family, two almost-seven-year-old boys, a six-and-a-half-year-old girl, and an almost-four-year-old girl would not even share a room, much less a bed. But they were not a normal family. They were the Pack.

And that was the way they liked it.

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At six-thirty, the alarm clock Danger had charmed to be audible only to her went off. She came awake immediately, careful not to broadcast her excitement through her mental link with Remus. He was a fairly light sleeper, and if he woke up, everything would be spoiled.

Ever so carefully, she slid out of bed, leaving the covers down, and padded down the hallway, passing through the concealed archway in the wall between the two halves of the house, which had been a semidetached before they had bought it and made it into their Den. Aletha met her on the other side of the wall, grinning wickedly. "Let's do it," she whispered.

Aletha conjured a stretcher, and Danger levitated the sleeping Sirius onto it. He grunted, but didn't wake up. Aletha maneuvered the contraption through the hallways to Remus and Danger's bedroom, where she dotingly tucked Sirius into bed next to Remus.

The women made their way back to the other master bedroom, where they exchanged high-fives. "Now we just wait for them to wake up," Danger said, sliding into bed next to Aletha. It was early morning, after all, and still chilly, and she had brought her current book.

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Meghan woke up at the sound of Danger passing their room. Quickly, she began to wake the others, covering their mouths with one tiny brown hand until she was sure they were awake enough to stay quiet. Draco slid out of the bed and retrieved everyone's dressing gowns, and Harry hung over the edge of the bed to hunt for slippers underneath it.

Then they waited for the screaming to start.

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Sirius dreamed. He was holding Aletha tightly against him, her back to his chest, and stroking her hair. "You need a haircut," he murmured. His hands moved down her face. "And some new earrings." Down some more. "And you need a shave..."

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Have your hands gotten bigger overnight? a groggy voice said in Danger's mind. She giggled and didn't answer.

"Are they waking up?" Aletha and Sirius lacked the connection Danger shared with Remus.

"Oh, they're starting. I think another couple seconds ought to do it."

Aletha, about to answer, instead stiffened. "There's something on my leg," she said in a tight voice. "There is something *crawling up my leg!*"

Danger was about to laugh when she felt it too.

The women looked at each other and flipped the covers back simultaneously.

A green snake was wound around Aletha's left leg. Another was coiled around Danger's right.

In perfect unison, they screamed.

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"Yes!" Harry and Draco slapped each other's hands, high, low, and sideways.

"The idea-master scores again," Draco said, looking highly pleased with himself.

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Remus bolted awake, certain of two things.

First, Danger was in trouble. Her mental touch was panicked, and she was screaming.

And second, something was wrong with his ears. Her screams sounded far away, but he knew she was next to him.

He rolled over, frantic to see what was wrong –

And met a pair of very startled, very familiar *gray* eyes.

Which did *not* belong to his brown-eyed wife.

Both of them yelled and pulled away from each other. Sirius actually fell out of the bed onto his rear, trying to get up too quickly. Remus pulled a last-minute save, landing mostly on his feet. **What is going on?** he demanded.

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"Score one for our Pack-mums," Neenie said with a grin as Meghan squealed with glee.

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I'm fine, I'm fine, Danger assured Remus, though her voice "sounded" a bit shaky. **I'm going to throw our younger son out the window, but I'm fine.**

What did he do ?

Oh, nothing. Just persuaded a pair of snakes to climb our legs.

Remus burst out laughing.

"What?" Sirius asked, pulling himself upright.

"Harry's done us one better. Talked a couple of his long and slender friends into climbing the ladies' legs."

Sirius snorted with laughter. "I love it. The boy's a true Marauder."

The wife of your uncouth friend there wishes you to inform him that she is coming over to demonstrate to him first-hand how very amusing the prank was.

"I wouldn't be laughing if I were you, Padfoot. Letha's on her way over. With one of the snakes."

Sirius' eyebrows went up, and he scrambled to his feet in time to dodge Aletha's first lunge at him through the door. There followed a rather furious chase, Sirius always just out of Aletha's reach, until finally he made it into his own bathroom and locked the door.

"I'm taking a shower," he shouted through the door. "Leave me alone."

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Neenie and Meghan, listening through the wall, developed a full-fledged case of the giggles.

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With the hot water cascading around him, Sirius began to relax from the adrenaline high of waking up in bed with his best friend, instead of his wife. It had been a good prank, he had to admit. That woman he'd married had style. And Danger was no slouch either.

He grabbed his shampoo, squeezed a good squirt into his hand, and began scrubbing his hair. Then he paused, sniffing the air.

I should definitely have checked that before I used it.

But it was too late.

I just hope it was the cubs who pranked it, and not Moony. Because if Moony did it, there will be visual effects along with the, ah, aroma...

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Remus was just about to get into the shower himself when he heard someone knocking.

"Who is it?"

"Sirius." The voice was not coming from the door.

Remus opened the mirrored medicine cabinet over the sink and looked through at his friend in the other bathroom. "What part of 'lather, rinse, repeat' are we missing here?"

"I know, I know. Check your shampoo. Somebody scented mine."

Remus sniffed. "Raspberry. Very nice." He reached into the shower stall and opened his own bottle. "Sure enough. Strawberry. I think I'll use it anyway, just to make them happy."

"Who?"

"The girls. This is probably their prank, where the snakes were the boys'."

"Makes sense. So that's everyone, isn't it? The ladies, the boys, the girls, and you and me..."

"SIRIUS VALENTINE BLACK!" a furious voice shouted from behind Sirius. He turned to look.

Aletha stood in the doorway of the bathroom, hands on hips. She was wearing the everyday robes that she wore to work. But they were just a little different today. Remus gave an appreciative whistle.

"Save it for your wife," Aletha snapped, and fixed her husband with her famous dragon glare. "I have to go to work. And if you think I am going to work in semi-transparent robes, you are out of your mind. Fix it. NOW."

I think I'll stay out of this. Remus closed the medicine cabinet, turned around, and had a hard time keeping his mouth shut. Danger's jeans and T-shirt, like Aletha's robes, currently appeared to be made of gauze. Thin gauze.

"So, do I get a whistle?" she asked, striking a pose.

Remus looked over her shoulder at the bedside clock. "Considering it's seven in the morning and I don't have work until ten..." He gave her a slow smile. "I think you rate a little more than a whistle."

Danger returned his smile. "I was hoping you'd say that."

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Overall, it was a most satisfactory day for everyone involved.

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A Dangerverse Datebook

4 July 1987: Leaving Home

4 July, 1987

The four children known as the cubs of the Pack gathered at the bottom of the stairs. "Tell," Harry Potter said quietly. "What happened?"

Hermione Granger shivered. "It was Professor Grumpy," she said. "He grabbed me – I screamed–"

Meghan Black hugged her big sister around the waist. "You OK now," she said as comfortingly as a four-year-old could manage. "Moony saved you."

Draco Black shook his head. "No, Neenie saved herself," he corrected. "Moony said so. Wha'd you do?"

Hermione smiled a little. "He was holding me like this," she said, demonstrating with Meghan. "I used my elbow." She jerked her elbow backwards, hard. Both boys winced.

"Wow," Harry said, and meant it. It took a lot for a boy of almost seven to be impressed by his same-age sister.

"And then Moony Disarmed him, and I got his wand and went up the tree with it, and Moony tried to Obliviate him, only I think he got away," Neenie finished.

Draco looked worried. "Did he say where he was going?"

"The Ministry," Neenie said quietly.

The cubs looked at each other. They had always known they might someday have to leave their Den, if someone who was not-Pack found out about it. Professor Grumpy, in their opinion, was about as not-Pack as one could get.

"We better get ready to go, then," Harry said. "Come on."

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Hermione lay on her side on the floor of the upstairs hallway, ear pressed to the heating vent. *These things conduct sound really good.*

She was taking advantage of the talent Draco had discovered in her by accident after Meghan had flushed all his model broomsticks down the toilet – an incredible memory, quite possibly what Moony called "eidetic." Neenie had remembered every single model Draco owned, so he could tell on Meghan with perfect exactness.

The small thumping noises from the other end of the hall were only slightly distracting.

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Harry knelt and cupped his hands. Meghan put her foot in them, steadied herself on Harry's shoulder, and swung herself upwards as Harry lifted. Her other foot landed on Draco's shoulder, and Harry lifted her first foot to join it, quickly moving his hands up to hold her around the waist as she took her foot away.

Their Pack-parents kept the key to the attic on a high peg beside the door. Meghan, standing on Draco's shoulders, was just – barely – tall enough to reach it.

The key fell. Harry lifted Meghan off Draco's shoulders and lowered her quickly to the ground. Draco bent down and picked up the key, slid it into the lock, and turned it. The attic door opened.

"What I do now?" Meghan asked Harry in a quiet murmur.

"Go pick out your favorite toys," Harry said. "We can't take everything." Meghan nodded and went down the hall to the cubs' room.

Harry and Draco went carefully up the attic stairs. Harry flicked on the light, and they looked around. "Trunks," Harry murmured. "Trunks, trunks..."

"There," Draco said, pointing them out. "How many?"

"Two. One for the boys, one for the girls."

Together, the boys lugged two of the large trunks down the stairs, being excruciatingly careful not to bump the wall on the way down. That would be sure to bring an adult to see what the noise was. They got the trunks into the cubs' room and relocked the attic door. Harry pocketed the key.

"We better pick out our favorites too," Draco said. "Won't be much room if we're sharing one."

"Yeah, not with all your clothes," Harry joked. Draco loved to look nice, and always wanted to change his shirt if he got even a little spot on it.

Draco made a face at him and went into the cubs' room, where he started pulling books off the enormous bookshelf that dominated one wall. Harry joined him.

Neenie came in a few moments later. "Nothing too interesting any more," she said. "We're going somewhere else in London for tonight. Then we're going to America in the morning, to visit Letha's aunt. They're just talking about how to do it."

"OK," Harry said. "Where in London?"

Neenie shrugged. "They said it kind of quiet. I think it was Number Twelve something."

"Doesn't matter," Draco said. "Look, make you a deal. You and Meghan are good at folding clothes. You fold up our clothes, we'll pack up your books and things. Deal?"

"Deal," Neenie said, after a glance at Meghan.

The cubs worked efficiently, the girls taking shirts and pants from the boys' drawers and shaking them out, looking them over, and either refolding them and dropping them into the trunk or asking the owner's opinion. "Harry, you gonna keep this?" Neenie asked, holding up a shirt which had probably, at one time, been red.

"Nah, you can leave it. What about this one?" Harry showed her the book in his hands.

"Keep that. And anything by that author. She's good."

"Draco?" Meghan asked, holding up a pair of underpants with a big hole in them.

Draco blushed as the rest of the cubs laughed. "Give me those!" He snatched them and stuffed them in his pocket.

The trunks were almost filled when someone knocked on their door.

"Come in," Harry called, sliding a few more books into Hermione's half of the girls' trunk.

Padfoot opened the door. The look on his face made Harry wish he had a camera.

"What are you doing?" he asked in surprise.

"Packing," Neenie said in an "isn't-it-obvious" tone.

"And why are you packing?" Padfoot asked.

"Because we're leaving," Draco said. "Right?"

"Right," Padfoot said with a sigh. "All right, who listened on the stairs?"

"Nobody," Harry said as innocently as he could.

"Who listened at the vent?" Letha put in from behind Padfoot.

Don't lie to the Pack-parents unless you're covering for someone. It was one of the cub-rules. Neenie raised her hand timidly.

"Should have known," Moony said from the hallway. He came past Padfoot into the room and sat down on the bed. "We raised Marauders, Padfoot. Slippery as a greased dragon and twice as fast."

Harry grinned. *The Pack-parents appreciate finesse.* It was another cub-rule, and it meant that a great deal was tolerated at the Den which would not be tolerated elsewhere. The cubs knew where the absolute boundaries were – no spying on the bedrooms during the night or the bathrooms when they were occupied, no pranking the stove or the fireplace, and never repeat yourself.

"We're almost ready," Draco said. "Where're we going?"

"Number Twelve, Grimmauld Place," Padfoot said. "My family home. It's likely to be quite dirty, so don't touch anything until we get it cleaned up."

"I thought you had a house-elf," Letha said.

"We did – we do – but he probably went mad when my mother died, since I'm the only Black left. Officially," Padfoot added, smiling at Draco and Meghan. "He hated me when I was little, and the feeling was mutual."

"Our own cubs, putting us to shame," Danger said from the door. "We need to pack, Remus. Come on."

"We should get packing too," Padfoot said to Letha. "Behave yourselves," he said to the cubs. "You can come and watch us pack when you're done, if you like."

"We help?" Meghan asked, putting down the shirt she was folding.

"Of course you can help," Letha said, holding out her hand. "Come on, sweetie, Mama Letha's socks need somebody to roll them up nice and neat."

Neenie shook her head. "Harry, can you finish these?" She nodded at the pile of shirts Meghan had abandoned. "They're the last."

"Sure." Harry folded up the shirts and put them on top of his own pile. "All done."

"Me too," Draco said, sticking a few last books into his side. "And Meghan."

"And now me," Hermione said, folding a last shirt onto her pile. "I'm gonna go help Danger and Moony."

"I'll go with you," Draco said, closing the boys' trunk.

Guess I'll help Padfoot and Letha then. Harry followed his siblings into the hall and turned the other way.

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Hermione handed her older sister an armload of socks. "Danger, why're people looking for us?" she asked.

"Aren't you supposed to have a perfect memory?" Danger teased, flicking Neenie's nose with a sock. "People are looking for Padfoot because they think he did wrong things, you know that."

"They think he killed people," Neenie said. "Like Wormtail."

"Yes. Like Wormtail."

"But he didn't kill Wormtail," Draco said, wiggling out from under the bed with two of Danger's shoes in his hand. "He didn't kill anyone. Why can't we just tell people that and not hide any more?"

Danger sighed. "I wish it worked that way, little fox."

"So do I," said Moony, coming out of the bathroom with a red leather bag over his shoulder. "I think that's everything from in there, Danger. Don't forget my good shoes, they're in a box in the closet."

"I know where you keep your good shoes, Remus Lupin. Probably better than you do."

"Well, if we're going to use full names, Gertrude Granger-Lupin..."

Hermione and Draco exchanged looks of disgust as Moony and Danger got mushy right in front of them.

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Harry sat on Sirius' shoulders, looking at the items from the top shelf of the closet. "Bag full of stuff for shoes?"

"Leave it."

"Purple shiny thing?" Harry said in perplexity, pulling a sequined tank top out of a bag.

"Give me that." Sirius pulled it down and looked at it.

Harry felt his godfather laughing. "What's funny?" he asked.

"We made Prongs wear this for three days straight once. It was wonderful."

"I remember that," Aletha said from where she was sitting with Meghan. "He looked good in purple and sequins. Lily thought so too, but of course she wouldn't say so to his face."

"Let's take it," Sirius said, tossing it into the open trunk. "We'll need some laughs from now on."

"Oops," Aletha said, picking one sock out of the pile Meghan was working on. "This isn't mine. Meghan, whose is this?"

"Dadfoot's!" Meghan giggled, pinching her nose shut with one hand. "Dadfoot's stinky sock!"

"My socks do not stink," Sirius said with dignity.

"Oh, yes, they do," Aletha said with finality. "I married you. I ought to know."

"Tell me more about myself," Sirius said, hands on hips.

"Fine." Aletha got up and started coming across the room, ticking off points on her fingers. "You snore, you hog the covers, you leave your underwear on the floor, and you're an incorrigible prankster." She was right next to Sirius now. "And I love you." She leaned in...

"Ew," Meghan said.

"Can I get down now?" Harry asked.

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The house that occupied Numbers 71 and 73, Crozer Street, lay silent and deserted that night. There was very little left to show that for five years, it

had been the home of a group of people who called themselves the Pack, who had banded together against a hostile world, caring for one another and the children who needed them – one inherited, one stolen, one born, one given...

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A Dangerverse Datebook

4 July 1987: A Chat with Severus

4 July, 1987

"Let me tell you," Dumbledore said very calmly, "exactly what you have done, Severus, and what those actions mean."

Snape winced. That was not a promising beginning.

I have a feeling I will indeed remember this day for a long time.

Merely not in the way I had hoped.

"You have invaded a peaceable, law-abiding home, whose inhabitants were doing no harm to anyone and who merely wished to be left alone. You have disrupted their lives in the highest degree – I believe it is not unreasonable to say that you have destroyed the lives they have hitherto led. Not to mention terrorizing an innocent child."

Snape shifted uncomfortably. "I did not hurt her," he protested feebly. *Quite the opposite, actually.*

"No, you simply used her as a pawn and terrified her. I wonder if you have considered, Severus, that she will be one of your students in a very few years?"

"One of my students?" Snape repeated dumbly. "She will attend Hogwarts?"

"Miss Granger is magical, not yet eleven, and lives in England. If there is another requirement for attendance, I have yet to hear of it."

Wonderful. I have had students who hate me – most of the Gryffindors, many of the Hufflepuffs – but never one with quite such a personal reason for doing so...

"And unless I am greatly mistaken, she will not be your only problem in that year." To Snape's annoyance, Dumbledore seemed to find telling him this somehow amusing. "Two boys of a similar age live in that household as well. As you are well aware, since you mentioned them by name while you were there." He stopped and regarded Snape with a look the Potions Master knew well. It meant "And now, you tell me what that means."

"They will be Miss Granger's yearmates," Snape said, thinking it through. "Probably her Housemates, in the noble House of Gryffindor, no doubt." He allowed just a bit of venom to seep through. "So that I will have them all in class at the same time."

"You have the right idea, Severus, but you are missing a vital point. How do the adults of that household think of the children?"

How should I know? was Snape's first reaction. He controlled it and thought. "Lupin called the girl his daughter," he recollected. "Though she can be nothing of the kind. I would assume, then, that they regard them all as their own children."

"Making the children what to one another?"

"Siblings. Brothers and sisters..." *Oh.*

Dumbledore must have read the answer on his face. "Exactly. You have now prejudiced the three of them against yourself. To Harry Potter, to Draco Black, you will always be the man who frightened their sister when she was seven."

"I would imagine they thought little enough of me in any case, considering what the girl called me," Snape retorted. "Taking into account the so-called 'adults' of the household, I am not surprised." Something registered in his mind. "Draco *Black*?"

"If I understood correctly, it was his mother's express wish that he take a different name. Considering the current residence of his birth father, it seems only fair to the boy. Besides being an effective break with a most unhappy past."

I cannot help but agree. Lucius Malfoy deserves imprisonment probably more than any of the other Death Eaters I was... privileged... enough to know. But still, that name would suggest...

"Headmaster, can you be sure the boy's present is any happier than his past? To go from Lucius Malfoy's hands into those of Sirius Black – is this an improvement?"

"What makes you think Sirius Black is involved in any of this, Severus?"

"Simple deduction, Headmaster, based on common knowledge."

"Do share this common knowledge with me."

I will. And perhaps you will descend from your damned cloud and deign to give me a few scraps of the information you so obviously know and are enjoying watching me struggle for. "It is commonly accepted that Sirius Black has Harry Potter in his... custody, if it can so be called."

"Why?"

Are you going to make me go over everything? “Their appearance together in Diagon Alley some years ago, followed by Black’s snatching the child up and Disapparating, would seem to indicate as much. Also, it is self-evident that Black escaped from Azkaban to steal Potter from his relatives’ home...”

Snape stopped. Dumbledore was shaking his head, and damn it all, he was *smiling!* “Ah, Severus, even you were taken in. The *Daily Prophet* is rarely so helpful as it was on that occasion. Because the headlines came in that order – Sirius Black escapes, Harry Potter missing – most of our fellowship assume the events occurred in that order. But buried in the story about Harry was the fact that he had been missing for two days at the time of the writing. Sirius Black was still in his cell in Azkaban when Harry Potter was kidnapped.”

Snape felt his headache returning. “So, Black did not take Potter. Who did?” But as soon as he spoke, he realized it. “Of course. Lupin. The faithful wolf, taking his friend’s *cub* as his own. And did he also help Black escape Azkaban?”

He wasn’t really expecting an answer, and was taken aback when Dumbledore said solemnly, “He did. For the best of reasons.”

Oh, Merlin, not another “friendship conquers all” lecture. Snape kept his mouth shut and simply spread his hands in a “so-tell-me” gesture.

“As much as you will dislike hearing this, Severus, I feel you must know. Sirius Black is innocent.”

Snape was on his feet. “*Innocent?* Headmaster, that’s not possible!”

“It is. Sit down, Severus, and I will explain.”

No. No. Not when I had finally won. Not when I was finally better than he – I, the redeemed sinner, who had seen the light and returned, and he, the fallen angel, Black by name and black by nature... no.

This cannot happen to me now!

But he sat, and he listened, and by the end of the story he had to admit it was possible. It was even probable. He hated Sirius Black with a passion, but his realistic side forced him to see that Pettigrew made the likelier traitor.

“So Black is innocent,” he said at the end. “That explains why Lupin would help him. It does not explain how.”

“Why, Severus, I believe you’re interested.”

Pride warred with curiosity. Curiosity won. No one would ever know about this, after all, except Dumbledore, who had already seen him without any pride whatsoever, at the lowest moment of his life, when all his convictions had been shattered... “Yes.”

“Very well.” Dumbledore leaned back in his chair. “It begins in a park in Surrey, on a cool spring day...”

It was a long story, but it answered most of his questions. Questions such as, how were the girl who was responsible for a lot of his pain and Lupin’s wife related (sisters, twenty years apart), was Aletha Freeman’s four-year-old daughter Black’s as well (yes), was she therefore illegitimate (no, they’d been married for five years), and how in Merlin’s name had the former Draco Malfoy ended up in their household at the age of four?

I was as surprised as everyone else by Narcissa’s sudden conversion to the light. It makes a bit more sense in the context of protecting her son. Lucius will have a harder time harming him from Azkaban, and the household to which she sent the boy was safely hidden from all its foes...

Until I found them.

Severus Snape experienced an odd feeling in his chest and abdomen. It took him a moment to recognize.

It was guilt.

What in the world do I have to be guilty about? I did what I thought was right. It turned out badly. That is not my fault.

He wished he could convince himself of that.

“This belongs to you,” Dumbledore said, handing Snape his own wand, which he had last seen in the hand of the Granger girl. “I received it in conjunction with a letter informing me that the house which you entered today is no longer anyone’s place of residence. Having been invaded in such a way, they feel unsafe, and are therefore embarking on a journey.”

In such a way, and by such a person. That is what he is too polite to say.

“They did not inform me of their destination.” Dumbledore sighed. He looked old suddenly, as old as he was, old and tired. “And I cannot set inquiries in motion to find out without drawing attention to them, in the least safe way possible.”

His eyes fixed on Snape. They were filled with the quiet disappointment that was somehow worse than anger. “Severus, until this rash action of yours, I had at least a modicum of control over this situation. That has now vanished. There were things I could do to help these people, to protect them, had it become necessary. No longer. They are on their own now.”

“By their own choice,” Snape felt obliged to point out. “They could easily have told you where they are going.”

“They feared the communication might be intercepted,” Dumbledore said heavily. “I cannot blame them for wanting to be cautious. They have little enough reason to trust anyone.”

"Surely, if they are such paragons as you make them out to be, they will have no trouble surviving in the world without your help," Snape said, not sure if he was being snide or not.

Dumbledore gave a small smile. "Paragons they are not. What they are, is brave, intelligent, cunning, and loyal to one another. I only hope it will be enough." He rose. "If you will excuse me, Severus, I have some business to tend to. Should I have the house-elves send something down for you, since you missed dinner?"

"Thank you, Headmaster, but no. I am not hungry."

"As you like." Dumbledore went to the door.

"Headmaster?"

"Yes?"

"Why have you told me this story? Black and Lupin and the rest of them –"

"They call themselves the Pack," Dumbledore interjected politely.

"Very well, the Pack. They have no reason at all to trust me. I cannot believe they would wish me to know their story."

"Odd that you should say that, Severus. The letter I received from them had something to say on that very point." Dumbledore pulled a small piece of folded parchment from his pocket. "If Professor Snape should ask about us, please tell him what you feel he needs to know," he read from it. "We may have had our differences in the past, but when he knows the truth, I hope his sense of justice will overcome his wish to seek revenge. Please also tender him our apologies for hurting him. It was done out of necessity, not spite."

Snape snorted mentally. *And pigs are doing Quidditch maneuvers around the moon.* "Thank you, Headmaster."

"Severus, I must confess, I have also told you this for a reason of my own. I will not lie to you – your actions today have hurt me. I trusted you, and you have in some measure betrayed my trust. I told you this story to the end of helping you regain that trust. You have information now that only two other people have, not counting myself. In the terms of those most closely involved, you have become a 'Pack-friend,' in a very real way responsible for their safety."

Snape stared at the other man. He literally could not speak for shock.

"Have a good night," Dumbledore said, and let himself out.

Responsible for their safety. The words played on a repeating loop inside his head. *Responsible for their safety.*

I do not WANT to be responsible for the safety of Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, or Harry Potter!

Which is probably why the interfering old coot told me all of this. He specializes in making people do things they do not want to do, but which are good for them.

Snape's guilt was returning full-force. *Why couldn't you just have left well enough alone,* it whinged at him. *If you'd never gone looking for them, you would never have had to know all this, and you wouldn't be stuck being responsible for them...*

I KNOW! he shouted mentally. *Will you just SHUT UP!*

His headache chose this moment to reassert itself.

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Dumbledore looked at the postscript on the letter and smiled.

While I was writing this, Danger fell asleep on my shoulder and said, "In time, the raven will take his place with honor beside the phoenix, the dragon, and the cat." I assume it's a prophecy, and because of the context I'd say it's meant for you. So there it is. If you ever figure it out, do let us know. And we will be in touch soon.

RL

"I think I understand it well enough," Dumbledore said softly to himself, reaching a hand up to stroke Fawkes' head feathers, and thinking of Hagrid's lifelong pet-owning ambition and Minerva's favorite way to relax, which involved a string tied to a doorknob. "Yes, I think I understand it quite well."

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Snape dreamed that night of the Pack.

Lupin and his wife (with that *absurd* nickname of hers), and Black and his (for her, he felt a grudging admiration, for having been able to keep up the façade of being unmarried and having no idea where Black was for five years), and their eclectic collection of children – the Potter boy, the Granger girl, Draco Black, and Freeman and Black's daughter Meghan.

He saw bits and snatches of their lives – mornings, afternoons, evenings. He watched them talk, eat, play, fight, and laugh. They were always laughing, it seemed. For a household in hiding, they were remarkably happy.

And they have had to flee their home, to leave everything they knew, because of me. He squirmed, feeling again the unaccustomed, and highly unpleasant, sensation of guilt.

I wonder if this is how Peter Pettigrew feels...

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A Dangerverse Datebook

23 December 1990: Andy and Aletha

23 December, 1990

Aletha Freeman-Black was bored. There was no better way to put it.

Of course, being in jail is supposed to be boring. That's why you stay out of jail if you possibly can.

To pass the time, she had taken to rewriting Sirius' novels in her head. She found she enjoyed playing with the characters and the worlds he had created. Occasionally she would laugh aloud as she came up with a truly enjoyable or memorable moment.

I wish there was some way to save this, she thought wistfully. Or maybe share it with other Valentina Jett fans...

"Letha?" said a voice, jolting her out of her half-trance.

Aletha looked up. "Andy," she said, torn between delight and embarrassment. "Of all the people to visit me in jail. It has been a while, hasn't it."

Andy nodded thoughtfully. "Six years. No, six and a half. We last saw each other while I was shopping with Dora to get her ready for Hogwarts, and she'll be finishing school this summer."

"That's right – she's in the same class as Charlie Weasley."

Andromeda conjured herself a chair and sat down. "I'm not going to pretend I'm surprised that you know the Weasleys," she said quietly. "I'm not going to pretend anything. Letha, I knew you had Draco. I've known for years."

Aletha stared at the other woman. "How?"

"Dora. She's so used to seeing her own face change that the changes you laid on Draco didn't fool her the way they did the rest of the world. She saw him when you used to bring him to Hogwarts. And then again when she went to visit Charlie over the summers. And now I know a few other things."

"Like what?" Aletha asked warily. Andy's tone was not of the friendliest.

"Like your daughter. You claimed she was adopted. She's not. And I know who her father is. My cousin." Andy leaned forward, her eyes almost accusatory. "Your husband."

"And I know what you must think of me for marrying such a man," Aletha said, realizing the difficulty. "But I think I can explain. At the very least, I can try. Will you listen?"

Andy hesitated, then nodded slowly.

Aletha told Sirius' story as succinctly as she could without leaving anything out. When she finished, Andy leaned back in her chair, eyes closed. "It explains a lot," she said distantly. "It explains just about everything. It's... almost too good."

Aletha sighed. "It's the truth. It's all there is."

"And you're afraid it won't be enough, tomorrow."

"I am. Truth to tell, I'm just plain afraid about tomorrow. Hell, I'm afraid about right now. I'm worried sick over the cubs – the children," she amended hastily. "I have no idea where they are."

"What?" Andy sat upright in her chair.

"We were following Danger's instructions," Aletha said, feeling the familiar weight press on her heart. "We owe her everything, after all, and she's never been wrong before... she took them downstairs to the cellar, and only about a minute later we found her unconscious there, alone. Have you seen her?"

"Yes. She was one of the reasons I was called here."

"Anything you can share?"

"I didn't tell Remus this," Andy said slowly. "He looked as if he had enough to worry about. But... her soul seems to be missing."

"Missing?" Aletha repeated faintly.

Andromeda was obviously unhappy about this. "The closest equivalent I could think of was... someone who'd undergone the Dementor's Kiss."

Aletha felt as if the room had suddenly chilled ten degrees. "That's impossible. We would have known – we would have been able to feel its effects..." She shivered suddenly, recalling...

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Sirius blinked and put a hand to his chest. "That's odd. This thing just got cold."

"Mine too," Aletha said, touching her chain. "Do you think it means something?"

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"Oh, God, no," she whispered, suddenly able to imagine, all too clearly, living without Danger. The all-important alto line would be missing in every song, every joke would seem incomplete without her hearty laugh, and the cubs would set eight places at the table every night out of habit and make everyone cry over dinner...

Assuming there would be dinner. None of us can cook worth anything. Harry's probably better in the kitchen than we are.

She had to laugh at the thought of her black-haired Pack-son taking full charge of the kitchen at the ripe old age of ten and a half, and the sound pulled her back to the present.

"You care a lot about her," Andy said softly.

"As much as you care – cared – about Narcissa," Aletha answered in the same tones, then could have bitten her tongue for being so foolish. But Andy was watching her, so there was nothing to do but go on. "She's been a sister to me these past years. Remus has been a brother. They're the family I always wanted."

"What about Sirius?"

"Oh, he's just my reason for getting up in the morning," Aletha answered lightly. "Just the first and last thought in my head over the course of the day, and a good deal of the ones in between. Just the man I love more than life itself."

"And your... cubs?"

Aletha blinked, but the room stayed blurry. *I am not going to cry. End of story.* "They're the reason there is a Pack. They're everything to us. They're all so sweet, so different, and so devoted to each other and to their friends, you wouldn't believe it – Draco's been writing to you, so you know he's very much interested in music – he sings, he plays the piano and the flute, and the recorder–"

"I've seen him play," Andy said quietly. "I came to the place where they play Quidditch. The Weasleys' orchard. I saw him play. And I saw your Meghan dance. She's beautiful."

"Thank you." *I know where she is,* Aletha reminded herself. *She's safe. She'll be fine.* "Harry loves to fly. I don't know if you remember James Potter – if you remember how much he loved flying–"

"I do."

"Harry's just the same. He'd spend the whole day in the air if he could. Except for eating. And the occasional book. He does like to read sometimes. But he's not our bookworm. That's Neenie."

Andy looked quizzical. "Neenie?"

"Hermione. She's crazy about reading. She thinks all the answers are in the books, and all she has to do is find them." Aletha turned away for a moment to pull out her handkerchief. "I can't wait until that girl falls in love..." She pressed her face into the cloth, feeling the wetness of tears spread on it. "Nothing like... love... for curing that..."

I guess a new story is going to be written.

She was sobbing, hard, wracking things that hurt to come out of her. "I don't know where they are," she managed to say. "Moody thinks they're dead – but Danger wouldn't do that – but I don't *know!*"

"I'm sorry," Andromeda murmured, the true sympathy of one mother to another. "I'm so sorry."

"Don't – it's all right–" Aletha got herself under control. "I mean, thank you. I guess I just need to keep trusting Danger. She's never let us down before. I mean," she closed her eyes, "if it wasn't for her, I wouldn't have Sirius or Meghan or anyone..."

Of course, Andy wanted to know what that meant, and of course, Aletha was only too happy to tell her. *I have to keep my mind on the good times. Keep my spirits up.* So stories were shared about games and pranks, holidays and traveling, and the everyday life of the Pack. Aletha had almost forgotten over the years that it wasn't normal to share one's home and life with another couple, or to hold children in common with them.

"Don't you ever run into discipline problems?" Andy asked. "I mean, can't they play you one against another?"

"We really don't have too many hard and fast rules," Aletha answered, thinking it out as she spoke. "And everyone knows what they are, and what the penalty is for breaking them. More minor things, like a slap or a kick in a moment of anger, are usually just dealt with by whoever's closest at the time. The cubs know we'll do our best to be fair to them exactly as long as they return the courtesy. They tried playing that game once. 'Padfoot said I had to do this, but you won't make me, will you, Letha?'"

"They call you by your name?"

Harry always did, and Hermione learned from him, and Draco from them. Meghan calls me 'Mama Letha,' and Sirius 'Dadfoot.'"

"Dadfoot," Andromeda repeated with a chuckle. "That's darling. Did she come up with it all on her own?"

"By her very own self. She's a smart little thing. Sneaky, too."

Andy smirked. "Sirius' child and yours? No surprise."

"I am not sneaky!" Aletha exclaimed.

"And who exactly was it that hid her husband for five years in her house, then hid from the entire world for three more?" Andy demanded – with, Aletha had to admit, a fair amount of justice. She looked at her watch. "Oh, damn. 3:15 already. And I told Remus I'd be back in an hour, and I haven't even seen Sirius yet – look, Letha, Remus asked if there was anything I could do to get you moved together. Not in with him, of course not, not tonight, but you and Sirius could be together, and be near him. There may not be much hope for it, it's against all the rules, but what do you think?"

Aletha nodded firmly. "He needs us," she said. "Now more than ever, with Danger gone. Please, if you can, do it."

"All right." Andromeda rose, then stopped. "Letha?"

"Yes?"

"Sirius really didn't... I mean, it wasn't him."

"It wasn't him."

"It's just... I've been thinking of him in that way for so long... it's hard to change all of a sudden..."

"Think of it as a change back, rather than a change," Aletha suggested. "Remember how he was when you knew him at Hogwarts, and after. How he loved to laugh. How he would play pranks on anything that would hold still, and a few things that wouldn't."

"Like me," Andy said tartly, but with an echo of laughter in her voice.

"But if he gave his word on something, you could trust him."

"I do remember. He was very proud of never breaking his promises."

"He still is. What hurts him most about all this hiding is that people see him as a traitor, as someone whose word is no good. If he was just wanted for simple murder, it wouldn't bother him nearly as much." Aletha paused. "That sounded so wrong."

"But I understand." Andy took a deep breath. "Letha, can I trust him?"

"I do," Aletha answered simply.

"Even now?"

"Even now."

"Then I will too," Andy said decisively. "I hope to see you again very soon, Letha. Thank you. For everything."

She strode off down the hall, and Aletha lay down on the lower bunk in her cell and stared at the bottom of the upper one.

Sirius, take your own advice, she prayed. Don't do anything stupid.

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A Dangerverse Datebook

24 December 1990: Trapped Like a Rat

24 December, 1990

He came awake slowly, feeling vaguely disquieted, though he couldn't pinpoint why. He wasn't in pain the way he had been when Fred and George had tried to pull out all his whiskers, or when Charlie's blundering girlfriend had stepped on his tail. He didn't feel ill the way he had after he'd eaten most of a Chocolate Frog, which was a lot for someone his size. He didn't even feel hung over.

I almost wish I did. It would be nice to get drunk again. There are disadvantages to being the pet of a young child – and I'm going to a younger one still this fall, so I won't get near alcohol for years.

After all, when he got drunk, the dreams stopped.

They weren't quite as frequent as they had once been, but they were still unpleasant when they came. He had stayed awake most of his first few years in hiding, with the result that he almost always seemed to feel sleepy now. Which, of course, meant that a dream could ambush him at any hour of the day or night.

They were never quite the same. Some featured James and Lily, alive and happy, playing with Harry, while others had the same couple cast as restless dead, looking for the one who had betrayed them, or even as avenging angels. He had grown more accustomed to these over the years – after all, they were frightening, but they couldn't really happen.

What scared him most were the dreams that he knew were possible.

He'd barely slept or eaten at all for several very tense months in the middle of 1982. Percy had worried about him, since he was losing weight and shedding like crazy, and had dosed him with a foul rat tonic. But gradually, he'd begun to realize that as long as he stayed where he was, he was safe enough. At least, he'd realized that in his waking hours.

His nightmares were another story.

Sometimes the Sirius of his dreams was Hogwarts-age, the grinning boy he'd played pranks with and on for seven years. Sometimes he was the man that boy had become, still reckless and brash, but loyal and brave to a fault. Sometimes he was the man in the newspaper photograph, gaunt, bearded, scowling. But whatever he looked like, there was no escaping him. "I'll kill you," Sirius would snarl at him, wand ready. "I'll kill you like I should have done that day. And then the world will know the truth."

The dreams had begun to ease off as months turned into years, with no sign of Sirius anywhere in the waking world, except that one sighting in Diagon Alley, which confirmed everyone's suspicions about Harry Potter. That had triggered a rash of dreams with Harry, not the child he remembered but the boy he now would be, a sturdy three-year-old (and four, and five, and so on as the years passed), looking at him pleadingly and asking unanswerable questions. "Where my mum?" the boy would query. "Where my dad?"

Very occasionally, he dreamed of Remus, mourning for the friends who were dead (or so he thought) and the ones who were lost to him. "Peter," Remus would call to him, tears streaking his face. "Peter, why couldn't you have been smart? Why couldn't you have left Sirius alone? Then at least we'd have each other."

Those were the dreams from which he awoke weeping. Or he would have, if he were human.

Dreams of Sirius awakened him screaming.

But he hadn't dreamed at all in this sleep. Why was that, he wondered, and his mind (amazing things, minds) came up with the answer; it was because he'd been drugged.

Ron and the little neighbor girl, a few years younger than he was, had taken him by Floo to Hogwarts, and claimed to Hagrid (who had called the child Meghan, he recalled) that their pet rat wasn't sleeping well and needed something to help him. Which was utter nonsense, of course, since he was sleeping just fine. And even if he hadn't been, he was still Percy's pet. If anyone was going to take him away for treatment, it should be Percy.

But the drug had been mixed with honey, and he had always had a sweet tooth.

And besides, what harm could sleeping for a while do him?

He stretched and yawned, and realized that part of his disquiet was that he felt wrong, subtly, all over his body. As if something was missing that should be there...

He shivered a little and opened his eyes.

The world looked far too small. And very white. White walls, white ceiling, white bars, white sheets on the bed he was lying on...

He sat bolt upright.

He *could* sit upright.

He was in human form.

He was behind bars.

And these were not the friendly, keeping-the-world-out bars of his cage. No, these bars were very obviously there to keep him in.

I have to get out of here!

He began his transformation –

And squeaked in dismay. Nothing was happening.

He tried again. Nothing again.

Clunk. Clunk. Clunk.

Someone was coming down the hall.

Oh no, oh no, oh no, something's happened, something's gone terribly wrong, they must know who I am, they must know what's going on...

"Three o'clock, the boy said," growled a voice, and Alastor Moody limped into view in the corridor beyond the bars. "And three o'clock it is. You missed a lot while you were napping, Pettigrew." He threw something into the cell. It hit the floor with a papery smack. "Have a look."

Peter Pettigrew bent slowly down to retrieve the item.

It was a special edition of the *Daily Prophet*, with a headline larger than any he had ever seen, so large that the three lines of text took up the entire top half of the front page.

Daily Prophet Special Edition, Monday 24 December 1990

SIRIUS BLACK INNOCENT!

True criminal Peter Pettigrew

Family declines comment until after Christmas

His hands shaking, he unfolded the paper to see what was on the rest of it.

Two photographs and a paragraph or so of text occupied the bottom half of the page. The text resided below the smaller of the photographs, which was of him, in human form, asleep and quite obviously snoring.

The saga of Sirius Black ended today, in a totally different fashion than anyone expected. Before a packed courtroom and the entire Wizengamot, Black proved his innocence in the murders of thirteen people and the betrayal of James and Lily Potter to He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named by producing the true criminal, Peter Pettigrew, supposedly one of the dead, who is an illegal Animagus and has been hiding in rat form for the last nine years.

During the course of the trial, Black's legal right to the guardianship of Harry Potter was codified, as was his heretofore unknown custodianship of Draco Malfoy. Black is shown in an emotional reunion with the two boys, an unidentified girl, and his daughter Meghan. Also cleared of charges were Black's wife, Aletha Freeman-Black, and his friends Remus Lupin and Gertrude Granger-Lupin...

Movement in the larger picture caught Peter's eye. He looked at it almost unwillingly, and found that he couldn't stop looking.

That's Harry – it must be. He looks so incredibly like James – we always knew he would...

The boy in question was embracing a kneeling man, a man who was smiling and crying at the same time, a man who was, without a doubt, Sirius Black.

"Got anything to say about it?" Moody asked from beyond the bars.

"They... they look happy," Peter faltered out.

"They are happy. 'Cause you've been caught. Peter Arnold Pettigrew, you're under arrest for twelve counts of murder, treason by way of serving Voldemort –" Moody laughed shortly at Peter's flinch. "Two counts of accessory to murder, and a few other things we'll sort out later. You'll be tried in a court of law at some point. In the meantime, you'll do your waiting in Azkaban. We'll be transferring you there as soon as your escort arrives. Which should be any time now. Got anything to say before you go?"

Peter's mind seemed to have frozen.

Azkaban.

It was a word to frighten gullible children with, a harsh necessity of wizarding life, not a real, tangible place where one might conceivably go.

But Sirius went there. And you were glad of it. Because it meant he could never tell the world the truth.

I wonder if he's glad I'm going there...

"Does Sirius know?"

"About you going to Azkaban? You can bet he does. Why do you want to know, traitor?"

Peter flinched again. "I thought he might want to see me," he said very quietly.

Moody laughed harshly. "He's got better things to do. Told me so himself. 'I'd rather be with my family,' he said. 'Wormtail doesn't matter now. The truth's out.'"

Peter stared at the photograph again. *I don't matter?*

After all I did to him, I don't matter?

"He'll testify at your trial for sure. Jury might even listen to him if he asks for your life. Otherwise you're more than likely to get the Kiss."

Peter whimpered in sheer terror.

"Ah, grow up," Moody said disgustedly. "Merlin's beard, evil's got no standards these days."

He looked down the hall and made a small noise of satisfaction. "Here they are."

Who? Peter wanted to ask. But before he could, he felt it.

The creeping chill across his limbs, and in the pit of his stomach.

Then the sinking sensation in his chest, as if he'd never be happy again...

And now he could hear the long, rattling breaths, and he shrank back against the wall of his cell as the horrid things came into view, two of them, with their long, flowing black cloaks, and their gliding movements, as if they did not walk but floated...

"Yeah, this one," Moody said, pointing grimly to Peter. "Take him."

A wave of his wand opened the cell door, and the dementors glided in and took Peter by the arms. He thought he might faint at the slimy feeling of their flesh against his own.

He stumbled as he tried to walk – it had been a long time since he had tried to move on two feet, and he kept expecting to have his tail available for balance – but the dementors' grip kept him upright. He suspected that it was all that was, and that if they let him go unexpectedly, he would fall on his face.

Another Auror waited at the end of the hallway, this one with a length of rope, which each dementor took in its free hand and wrapped twice around Peter's wrists. Before he could wonder what it was for, a jerk behind his navel made him realize that it must be a Portkey.

They landed in a dark, forbidding hallway, with horrible howling sounds echoing everywhere. His escorts half-dragged him along it and stopped in front of a cell like any of the others. One of them released him long enough to push the door open, the other one pushed him inside, and the door closed seemingly of its own volition. He almost screamed as he heard the definite thud of a bolt shooting home.

Then the reality of his situation began to set in, and he did scream.

Caught.

I've been caught.

I'll never get out. Never.

I'll have a trial, and they'll convict me, and they'll put me back in here – if they don't sentence me to the Dementor's Kiss –

He screamed again, the sound mingling with the other shouts and screams he could hear and losing itself, losing its meaning...

Everything loses its meaning here. The prisoners all go mad.

I'll go mad. I'll go mad in here, I'll never get my reward from my master, I'll never get anything I was promised... respect, prestige, power, I'll never get any of it...

He realized suddenly that he was still gripping the newspaper in one hand.

He stared again at the photograph of Sirius hugging Harry, with other people circulating around them – several, he realized with a shock, that he could name – Remus was there, grinning his head off, his face looking almost younger than Peter remembered him, not older – Aletha Freeman with a child in her arms, looking radiantly joyful through her tears –

Sirius' child. The article said they were married, and that Sirius had a daughter.

And a boy with a face almost as familiar as Harry's, though in a very different way. Instead of his expression reminding Peter of his father, as Harry's did, it divorced the child from his parent, so much so that Peter had to look twice and reread the article before he was convinced.

Lucius would never smile like that. Or cry at all, for any reason. And Draco is doing both.

A woman and a girl, who looked very much alike, rounded out the photographic family. From the way Remus was kissing the woman, Peter thought, she must be his wife. And the girl was probably her daughter by someone else, since Remus couldn't have children himself...

Photographic Sirius and Harry pulled apart suddenly, looking indignantly at the large wet blotch that had just landed in the middle of their space. They grinned at each other across it, then maneuvered around it to embrace once more.

Peter held the newspaper out of the way of more tears and wiped his face on his sleeve.

This is stupid. I shouldn't be crying. I shouldn't care about these people. I gave them up when I took the Mark. They mean nothing to me, nothing at all.

And I mean less than nothing to them...

I used to mean their freedom. But now that they have that, they're more than willing to forget me forever.

And they're happy now. Now that I've been caught. Now that I'm here.

He summoned anger at the thought, anger and a thirst for revenge. But it wouldn't come. All that surfaced in his mind was the one thought he had been trying to avoid, in one form or another, for more than ten years.

If I'd never changed sides – that could have been me.

He gave up and began to sob brokenly.

They hate me. And they should hate me. I'm on the wrong side, I did such awful things, I lied, I betrayed, I killed – and for what? For the chance to live as a rat for nine years, and now this?

But he knew it was too late for repentance now.

He cried for a long time anyway.

When he was done, he looked around his cell. There was a pile of rather musty straw in one corner, which he assumed he was supposed to sleep on, and a hole in another, for excretory purposes, judging by the smell. The light coming in was very weak, just barely enough to let him read by if he sat in the strongest of it, directly by the door, which was solid wood and had one barred window, just above his eye level. He could see out if he stood on his toes.

He felt a vague urge to giggle, but it wasn't strong enough to produce any actual reaction. *Yes, out. To the hallway lined with other barred doors.*

And it's all I'll ever see again.

His questing hand discovered a sizable chunk of rock sitting by the door. He picked it up and looked at it dully. Then, very slowly, he began to strike the wall with it, chipping away tiny pieces of the hard stone.

Maybe, in thirty years or so, I can make a speaking hole into the next cell.

It would at least be something to do.

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A Dangerverse Datebook

24 December 1990: Letting Go

24 December, 1990

Sirius Black sat by the fireplace in the music room of his family's home, the Marauders' Den, a cardboard box filled with file folders beside him. He picked up the first of them, opened it, read a few words from the first page therein, and closed it again with a sigh.

It's over, he told himself. The world knows the truth. It's time to let go.

But he couldn't. Not yet. It seemed as if something was missing...

xXxXx

Aletha Freeman-Black roused from her sleep. Something was missing.

She turned over and realized that it was her husband. The rest of their family, the Pack as they called themselves, was still fast asleep, lying here and there on the mattresses that covered the floor of their "den room," which was currently dominated by a Christmas tree with an incredible number of packages piled under it.

But our best present came today. Finally, after all these years of hiding, the truth is known – and my beloved is free.

And by Sirius' exoneration, the rest of the Pack was freed as well.

She looked fondly at Remus Lupin, who had chosen a life in hiding with his friends over one using his own name but alone. His wife, the usually sweet-natured but occasionally accurately named Danger, slept by his side, their hands entwined. Danger's baby sister Neenie (still twenty years younger than the woman, but not a baby anymore, Aletha had to admit – she was ten now, and would be going to Hogwarts with her brothers in the fall) was curled up near them, with her hand near her mouth – she no longer sucked her thumb, but it seemed to comfort her to have a hand there anyway.

Hermione was the first cub of the Pack. Harry made two, when Remus and Danger stole him from his relatives. Aletha hissed silently at the thought of them. I hope their lives were so ruined by that Curse that they never recover.

Harry Potter slept near his sister, his feet almost but not quite touching hers. Aletha felt privileged that she had been able to watch him grow from the frightened, starving baby he had been when the Dursleys had "cared" for him into this strong, confident boy.

We'll have to watch him, though. He's more like his father than he knows – and James could be awfully arrogant at times...

Then had come her own child, flesh of her flesh and blood of her blood, the ultimate gift of love from wife to husband, from husband to wife. Meghan Lily Black was seven and a half years old, looked delicate, and was anything but. She had inherited her father's charm and (setting aside false modesty) her mother's poise. She was the darling of the Pack, and fiercely competitive, always wanting to keep up with her three older Pack-siblings.

For the Pack had not been complete until the unexpected addition of a fourth cub. He had joined them under rather complicated circumstances...

Suffice it to say, his father is where he belongs – in Azkaban – his mother is dead, poor woman, and the boy is ours, by her wishes, by ours, and by his own.

Draco Black, age almost ten-and-a-half, was curled protectively around Meghan, as if wishing to shield her from harm. The two had been close since the day Draco had come to the Pack, which had happened to be his fourth birthday. Meghan had been just over a year old then, and she had fascinated the silver-blond child, who had obviously never seen a baby before. And when she had smiled at him...

We all played a part in giving Draco a real life to live. He's come an astonishingly long way – now if we can just keep the reporters from making his life and Harry's miserable...

Sirius, she knew, could take care of himself.

But where is he?

She got up, wrapping herself in the cream-colored dressing gown that contrasted so strikingly with her skin.

I smell a fire. He's probably in the music room – he likes to watch the flames and think...

She slipped through the kitchen, bare feet making almost no noise on the hard floor, and stopped where the carpet began again.

All right, now I know where he is, I don't want to bother him, so maybe I can sneak out before he sees me...

xXxXx

Sirius looked up at a small noise and saw his wife of almost nine years, framed in the doorway of the music room, observing him quietly.

Have I told you lately you're beautiful?" he asked her.

She smiled. "Only twenty-three times today."

Sirius considered, then shook his head. "Not nearly enough. You're beautiful, Letha. You're one of the most gorgeous things I've ever seen."

"One of?"

"There's always Meghan to consider." He beckoned her into the room. "I'm glad Molly and Arthur were willing to take the cubs this afternoon. I've never had an experience like that in my life."

"The only other time I can think of with this much emotion involved was the night you came home, and you were in no shape for *that* then."

"True enough." Sirius noticed Aletha looking at the box curiously as she sat down. "I was waiting for something," he said. "I guess you're it."

"May I ask?"

"What I'm doing?"

Aletha nodded gravely.

Sirius sighed deeply. "It goes a long way back," he said, pushing the box out of the way so that he could sit beside her. "All the way back to when Remus pulled me out of Azkaban." Even after so long, it still took all the courage he could muster to think and talk about the place.

Her head rested on his shoulder, offering him comfort, which he took gladly. His hand sought hers and found it halfway to his own already. Their fingers entwined as they had on that April night in 1982, when he had walked through an archway and found her sitting at her piano, singing "As Time Goes By," their song, from the first movie they had ever watched together, the first movie Sirius had ever watched at all.

That day was like going straight from hell to heaven – first I got Remus back, then he gave me Harry, and finally we went home, and Letha was waiting for me there...

"I'm sure you remember I was a bit of a mess those first few weeks – months," he corrected himself.

"Anyone who had lost his best friends to the betrayal of another supposed friend, then been wrongfully imprisoned – in Azkaban, no less – would be," Aletha said, gently but with a hint of a snap in her voice.

"And you remember how Danger taught me to type."

"I remember you making sure *Reparo* worked on typewriters." She smiled reminiscently. "Then you didn't have to worry about breaking the thing."

"And how I'd spend hours up there, typing something or other, but I would never show you what or tell you anything about it, and you were all always too polite to ask."

"Didn't stop us from being curious," Aletha said lightly.

Sirius took a deep breath. "I think now I'm ready to show you."

"All right."

He reached behind him and picked up one of the folders. "It's not pretty," he warned her, handing it over. "Not nice at all."

Aletha flipped the folder open and began to read. Sirius watched her skim down the first page, turn to the second, then riffle through the pages in the folder quickly, stopping every now and again to peruse a short section.

"You never told us." Her voice was very carefully neutral, not accusing, just stating a fact.

"You'd already done so much for me. I didn't want to dump all this on you too." Sirius lifted another folder out and opened it, already knowing what he'd see. They were all pretty much the same. "And the writing helped. It helped me to see it all set out in black and white. Then it wasn't just something in my head, something that didn't exist anywhere else. It had a physical existence, and I could separate it from myself and put it away."

"Is all of this..."

"Rants and graphic descriptions of what I wanted to do to Wormtail, self-pitying moanings, 'I-should-have-known' type deals, yeah, that's pretty much it." Sirius stopped, realizing it wasn't quite true. "Except these." He picked up a rather thinner folder from beside him. "These, I think you might like."

Aletha accepted the folder from him and opened it to the first page. These papers, instead of being typed like the others, were handwritten.

xXxXx

31 July, 1982

Dear James and Lily,

Wherever you are, I hope you can see us, because if you can't, you missed a hell of a birthday bash today. Harry's two, and he celebrated it about the same way he celebrated being one – by yelling and throwing cake everywhere. We had a good time, but I couldn't help thinking, and I know Remus and Letha were too, that it wasn't right, that something was missing.

That something, of course, was you. He's your son. You should have been there with us. None of this should ever have happened.

But it did. And it's Wormtail's fault – but you know that. And it's not fair – but you know that too. And if anything I could do could bring you back, I'd do it in an instant – but it's not going to happen. As much as I don't even want to write it, you're gone for good.

At least it's not as bad as it could have been. We're together now. Harry's not with your sister anymore, Lily – did you see what Remus pulled off on that woman? Him and his wife, and yes, Prongs, I know, Moony with a wife, kind of weird – Mr. "Who, me, date?" got married? Yes, he did, and they're almost sickening together, or they would be if it weren't so nice to see Remus happy for a change.

And now for something completely different – well, no, actually, it's almost exactly the same. I got married too. Yes, I finally asked Letha to marry me – at her instigation, I might add – and of course she said yes. It had to be a Muggle ceremony, since I'm still a wanted man in the magical world, but it's legal...

The letter went on for another page or so, detailing the happenings of the previous months, and closed with:

I think I'll probably write again on Halloween. It seems fitting, somehow. I miss you every day and every time I look at Harry. Damn Wormtail anyway.

Sirius

Aletha closed the folder quickly and turned away so as not to get the letters wet.

"It's beautiful," she said in a voice that trembled and didn't sound like hers at all. "Have you been writing to them all this time?"

"Harry's birthday, mine, and Halloween – three times a year. I don't think I've missed yet."

"What are you going to do with them?" Aletha asked, getting herself under better control.

"I thought... maybe, when Harry's older, I'd give them to him. Let him see himself growing up through my eyes. The other cubs, too. Meghan especially – the three letters right after she's born are almost nothing but her..."

xXxXx

"I'm not surprised," his wife said, wiping her eyes and smiling at him. "You were so utterly besotted, Sirius. I suppose all new fathers are that way, but you were just so completely entranced by her."

"She was my baby. Our baby. It was almost as if I'd never seen one before."

"You know who you sound like."

"Who?"

"James." Aletha's arms rose into a cradling position, almost, it seemed, without her awareness. "When I got back and saw Harry for the first time, James told me about the day Harry was born, and how he felt as if Harry and Lily were the only things in the world, and he would have been glad to die to keep them safe..."

"And he did." Sirius stared at the fire he'd lit in the grate. "They both did."

"And we made sure their sacrifice was not for nothing," Aletha said in a quiet voice that nonetheless sounded like a trumpet call.

How does she do that?

"Speaking of sacrifice." Sirius picked up one of the hefty folders from the box. The weight of anger and bitterness in the paper almost seemed to make it heavier than it should have been. He looked at it for a moment –

Then hurled it into the fireplace.

"What are you doing?" Aletha said in surprise.

"Lightening my load."

"Translation?"

Sirius sighed. *I know why I'm doing it, but I can't put it into words...*

On second thought, if I can't put it into words, maybe I don't know why.

"This may take a minute. Bear with me?"

Of course.”

“I told Moody today that Wormtail doesn’t matter to me anymore,” Sirius began, his hands sketching circles in the air as he tried to define his thoughts. “But as long as I have these, that isn’t true. If I hold onto them, I’m letting him define me. I’m letting him tell me what to feel. I’m letting him have power over me. And I don’t want that. He had power over me – over all of us – for too damn long.”

“How will destroying all of this help you?”

“It’s like saying – look, I don’t have to care any more. It’s over. I got what I deserved, you got what you deserved, end of story. But – it also has to do with time.”

“Time.”

“We each have a certain amount of time on earth. It’s limited. It runs out. James and Lily’s ran out much, much too soon. And that’s Wormtail’s fault. But I’m not doing them, or me, any favors by spending my precious time hating him.” Sirius reached over and caressed Aletha’s hair in its tight braids. “After all, why should I waste time hating him that I could be putting to so much better use loving you?”

xXxXx

My God. I don't believe it.

“Sirius,” Aletha said softly, enjoying his slightly lopsided smile and the love that filled his grey eyes. “Do you know what you’re doing?”

“I just told you.”

“No, I mean in a bigger sense.”

Sirius looked thoughtful for a moment. “No.”

“You’re growing up, my love,” she told him, smiling to see the look of surprise on his face. “You’re becoming... mature.”

“Oh, no. No, please, anything but that,” Sirius mock-begged. “Ugh. A death worse than fate. Please, say it isn’t so.”

Aletha shook her head, laughing quietly at his antics. “I’m afraid it is.”

“Well, I suppose I couldn’t be a husband and a father for all this time and not grow up a little,” Sirius said in the tone of a man accepting his fate. “Do me one favor, though?”

“What?”

“Don’t tell Remus. He’d never let me live it down.”

“Of course not. This is our secret.” Aletha picked up one of the folders from the box herself. “Now let’s get rid of these and get Wormtail out of our lives for good.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

They began to toss the folders into the fireplace, two at a time, waiting until the previous ones were burning before adding more.

Aletha sang softly as they worked.

God rest ye merry, gentlemen, let nothing you dismay,

Remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas Day,

To save us all from Satan’s power when we were gone astray,

Sirius joined her on the chorus.

Oh, tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy,

Oh, tidings of comfort and joy.

When all the hatred was ashes, they sat together for a long time, watching the fire burn down.

“Happy Christmas,” Aletha said finally.

“The happiest,” Sirius answered.

They kissed, then returned to the den room and were asleep within a few minutes.

Life was very good.

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A Dangerverse Datebook

22 March 1991: Gift of the Founders

22 March, 1991

Remus Lupin absently scratched his nose with his quill. *What a puzzle.*

He looked back over the notes he'd been compiling on what was starting to be called the Pack-pendants. Each Marauder wore a set, four small medallions on a fine gold chain, which possessed certain magical properties, including that the carving indicating a certain person would glow if that person was in some sort of trouble. But in order for that to be helpful, they had to know which carving represented which person. Thus Remus' current project.

Everyone seems to have the same third one – dragon and cat on one side, two birds on other – one bird surrounded by flames, probably phoenix – other bird unidentifiable but has a corvid look –

"Which in English means it looks like a crow," Remus muttered to himself.

The older cubs all have the same second one – male lion and wolf paired on one side, dog and winged horse on the other – the dog looks like Padfoot, and the other forms match, so this is probably us – Meghan has a lion on one side, a wolf on the other – why?

"Probably has to do with being born a cub," he decided aloud.

The adults' second ones all differ by one – each is missing him/herself – so mine has the wolf alone on one side, the dog and winged horse on the other –

"Because if it's us in danger, we probably won't need a warning."

The adults' fourth ones are all the same, wolf, fox, cat, and doe – the cubs' fourth are each missing one, each a different one – Harry the wolf, Draco the fox, Hermione the cat, Meghan the doe –

"Again, because they don't need warning about themselves."

All the first ones are different except Hermione and Danger – they both have a book on one side, a rose on the other...

The sisters' mother's name had been Rose, Remus knew. And she had loved her garden, and the plants that grew there... and their father, David, had been a scholarly man, fond of reading, especially fond of Shakespeare, and had allowed the fondness to spill over into naming both his daughters after Shakespearean queens...

Meghan's first one has the dog and winged horse again –

Because Sirius and Aletha were her birth parents. It was looking more and more like the first pendant in everyone's group represented birth parentage, or family in some cases.

Sirius' has a serpent in the shape of a B on one side, and a star shape on the other – representing his family heritage, mostly in Slytherin, and their habit of naming children after celestial objects? Draco also has the serpent B, but his other side has a narcissus...

Perfectly appropriate, in both cases – Sirius' birth parents had never cared for him, nor he for them, but his heritage was still part of him, so the symbols of his past were present, but they were more general than the others' were. Draco's birth mother had loved him – had given her life for him – so her symbolic presence, in the form of her namesake flower, was appropriate.

And B for Black – Lucius Malfoy is not even present by allusion.

Draco had hated his birth father for a long time with a child's fierce hatred, which was gradually waning as his memories of the man grew dimmer, buried beneath his seven years of loving care from and with the Pack.

Aletha's has a musical note and a feather –

Remus knew that his Pack-sister's father had loved music dearly, and had taught his daughter his love. Aletha herself had told him that her mother had worked with birds, injured hawks and falcons, rehabilitating them and either releasing them into the wild or caring for them at a center if they were too badly injured to live free.

Harry has a stag and a tiger –

The stag was obvious to the Marauders – it could be no one but their friend Prongs. The tiger had baffled them for a short while, until Sirius had recalled that James always used to drive Lily mad by calling her "Tiger Lily." Coupled with a vague memory of Lily's Patronus, the one time he'd seen it, being something feline, Remus was willing to bet the tiger stood for Lily Evans Potter.

Mine has a quill and wand on one side, and a violin on the other...

Remus smiled sadly, looking at the tiny, perfect pictures on his pendant. His Muggle mother, like Aletha's father, had taught her child to love music,

and had instructed him in playing the instrument she cared so much about. And maybe his father had been only a clerk at the Ministry of Magic, but he had been a good clerk, helpful and dependable and prompt...

The wand's spitting sparks. A reminder of what happened, perhaps...

His parents had been vacationing in a Muggle resort town, the summer before his last year at Hogwarts, while Remus had been staying with the Potters and Sirius. The hotel where they were sleeping had caught fire. His father had made it outside. His mother hadn't.

And he never really recovered from that. He survived a few years, but he was never happy... it was almost a relief when he went... the war was getting really nasty around that time, and James and Lily were starting to talk about having a child...

You look horrendously sad and far away, and there is an enormous blotch of ink on your nose, said a voice in his mind. A tissue appeared in front of him. **You can tell me to go away, but you're at least wiping your face before Sirius sees you like that.**

Oh, it can't be that bad, Remus protested silently, taking the tissue from his wife's hand.

Can't it? Danger pulled a small mirror out of her pocket and handed it over. **You tell me.**

All right, it can, Remus admitted, scrubbing at his face with the tissue. **I was just trying to work out our Pack-pendants, and got into thinking about my parents.**

Hold still. Danger drew her wand and removed the ink from her husband's face with a quick Cleaning Charm. **So are parents part of the pendant scheme?**

I think so. The first pendant seems to stand for blood parents, or family in some cases – the second one is the adult Marauders, you and me, Sirius and Aletha – the third one I haven't quite figured out yet, but the fourth is the cubs.

What's the third one, dragon and cat, phoenix and another bird?

That's right.

Danger retrieved her own pendants from within her blouse and looked at them speculatively. **Pack-friends,** she said finally. **Phoenix for Dumbledore, cat for McGonagall, dragon probably for Hagrid –**

He used to say he wanted a dragon, Remus recalled. **It makes sense – which means our unidentified corvid must stand for Snape...**

Danger smiled suddenly. **It's a raven. The day we left the London Den, I fell asleep on your shoulder and made a spot prophecy – in time the raven, something, something, beside the phoenix, the dragon, and the cat.**

It was "In time, the raven will take his place with honor," Remus supplied. **I think you're right.**

They looked at each other.

We're not telling Sirius about this, they said simultaneously.

You owe me a butterbeer, Remus said quickly.

Nuts. Danger made a face at him. **Will you settle for a kiss?**

Can I get both?

Only if you ask very nicely.

May I please have both, Madam Granger-Lupin?

Oooh , I'm a sucker for proper grammatical forms... come here, you big lion you.

The notepad and quill slid to the floor unheeded.

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A Dangerverse Datebook

31 December 1992: Tell Us a Story

31 December, 1992

Snow blew past the window of the largest bedroom in the house.

“Tell us a story? Please?”

“Please?” echoed the occupants of the other three beds.

The man chuckled. “Aren't you a little old for stories?”

“You told me once, you're never too old for a bedtime story,” one of the boys said.

“Oh, all right. What would you like?”

“Tell the one about the great warrior,” begged a girl. “The one about how he grew up, and his friends, and his battle.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes,” bounced eagerly around the room.

The man glanced at the door. “Don't look at me,” said the figure leaning against the door frame. “You thought it up. It's your own fault they keep asking for it.”

“All right, here goes...”

xXxXx

In ancient times there lived a great and evil wizard, so great that most feared even to speak his name. His deeds cast a shadow over the land, and it seemed likely that the tiny forces of good would be swamped and overwhelmed by the evil he wielded.

But a prophecy was made of a child to be born, one who would defy and defeat the Dark Lord, and the prophecy came to pass. The Dark Lord came to the child's home, led by a traitor, with murder in his heart. Both the boy's parents gave their lives to protect their son, and the Dark One could not kill the child. He fled, defeated, and the people rejoiced.

But one man sorrowed. He had been a friend to the boy's father, and wished that the child he loved could be with him. But it was not to be. The boy had been hidden, and hidden he must remain, decreed the leader of the forces of good.

The man wept, too, for one friend whom he believed a traitor and another whom he thought dead. Until one day, when he came upon a woman, tending two children, and his heart was moved, for they were like in age to the warrior-boy he had loved.

When he saw their faces, and saw that one of them was, indeed, the very boy he longed for, his joy knew no bounds. He swept the child into his arms and almost wept for joy. He spoke fair to the woman, and they grew to know one another. She, too, cared for the boy, as much as she cared for her own small sister, and hated the people he was hidden with, who spurned him in favor of their own son.

As well, she sought his counsel, for he was a wizard, where she was untaught in magic. Her dreams troubled her, for they showed her things she did not understand – but he did, and he was astounded, for the dreams showed truth, and the truth was not what he had thought. His great friend was imprisoned for the treason of another, whom all thought dead.

Together with the prisoner's lady-love, who had remained true to him despite his supposed wrong, they laid their plan. They would steal forth by night and take the warrior-boy, then free the prisoner, and flee together into a hiding place. There they would live until the boy was grown enough to be trained and taught for his great destiny.

And this plan they carried out. The prisoner and his lady-love, and the savior and the seer, were married, and the boy and the girl were raised as brother and sister and loved by all. Thus the parents of the warrior are four. The savior of the warrior looks weak, but stands strong. His lady-wife, the seer, has power no man truly understands. The man imprisoned wrongly fights for the truth to be told always, and the lady beside him strikes that no other may believe a falsehood of their love.

Over the years, they were sometimes found. The leader of the forces of good knew where they were, and three of his most trusted soldiers also came to know. One evil wizard did find them, and tried to take revenge for the downfall of his master. His lady, though, renounced her evil and helped them, and thus they escaped, taking with them the evil wizard's most precious treasure.

For a time, they traveled, and came back to their homeland to settle anew. The truth of the traitor was finally told to all the world when the warrior-boy, in his first great triumph, captured him and brought him to justice, with the help of his friends.

The friends of the warrior are seven, and many are the gifts they bring to the battle. Three of them are of the warrior's own family, and four are his greatest friends.

The warrior himself is known for his courage, and he is called the wolf. The brother of the warrior is known for his cunning, and he is called the fox.

Of the sisters of the warrior, one is known for her knowledge of lore, and she is called the cat. The other is known for her gentleness and healing hands, and she is called the doe.

Of the warrior's friends, one is called the hawk, for his eyes can see the traps and the openings where others cannot. Another is called the owl, for she sees what is dark to others. A third is called the shade, for no one regards him, but he sees much. And the last is called the lynx, for she is small but a mighty warrior. It is she whom the warrior chooses, she out of all the world, to stand at his right hand and fight by his side.

These friends, along with his parents, stood with the wolf at his last great battle with the Dark One, who had returned to threaten the world again. The boy-warrior was a boy no longer. Ten years with his family, and seven years of training, had passed since the time they last met. Twelve strong, the wolf and his pack faced the Dark One, and the Dark One fell.

Another would come – evil is never defeated forever – but for the time being, the warriors had done their duty, and they could rest.

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"And now it's time for all of you to rest," the man concluded. "Because you are the warriors, you know."

"Yeah, we know," said the boy who had asked for the story, smiling sleepily. "G'night, Moony."

"Good night, Harry." Remus Lupin leaned over to the next bed. "Good night, Hermione."

"Night, Moony," said his wife's little sister, yawning hugely.

"Good night, Meghan." He stroked the cheek of the younger girl in the third bed, who murmured something as her eyes fluttered closed.

"Good night, D—" He stopped, seeing that the occupant of the fourth bed, who was so sure he wasn't too old for a bedtime story, was already asleep. "Well, good night to you too," he finished.

"Honestly, anyone'd think Meghan was yours instead of mine, the way she listens to you," Sirius Black commented as they made their way downstairs.

"Most people think Neenie's mine," Remus countered. "Or at least they think she's Danger's. It's the whole twenty-years-between-sisters bit. There's no question about Meghan, though. She's the image of Aletha, except the eyes. Your eyes, Padfoot."

"Kind of reverse Harry, isn't it?" Sirius said, smiling with just a tinge of sadness. "He's got James' face and Lily's eyes..."

"At least he knows that," Remus said quietly. "He might not have, if we hadn't taken him."

"Oh, he would have known by now. He's in his second year at Hogwarts, people would surely have told him who he looks like at some point." Sirius rolled his eyes. "Probably everyone. It's only the first thing everyone says when they see him."

"True enough."

Gertrude Granger-Lupin, known to all and sundry as Danger, was waiting for her husband at the bottom of the stairs. Aletha Freeman-Black joined them in the room a few moments later, carrying a tray with four flutes of champagne on it.

"To a Happy New Year," Remus said, lifting his glass.

"To a Happy New Year," toasted the adults of the Pack, welcoming in the year together for the tenth time.

Outside, the snow continued to fall.

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A Dangerverse Datebook

17 September 1998: Every Story

Sirius Black peered more closely at the explanatory plaque about Egyptian numerals.

So three of those, two of these, and one of the little things right there, and that makes howmany days we've been Voldemort-free. Nearly a year... Merlin, peace feels good. Takes maintenance, of course, but so does everything else in life.

He and Remus were doing their part for that with this day out. They'd started to notice Danger and Aletha looking a little worn recently (parenting might be like riding a broomstick, but that didn't mean you couldn't still fall off) and this morning had invoked their rights as the men of the Pack to declare today a cub-free time and drag their wives out of the Den for a trip to London. Aletha had started humming before they'd gone more than a mile down the road, and Danger had initiated a bad-joke-telling competition shortly thereafter which had lasted most of the way to the city.

It's taken us a while, but I think we may finally have got the hang of this marriage thing.

Though it was only September, the day was a bit too crisp to spend much time outdoors, so the Pack-adults had elected for a trip to the British Museum. They were currently in a section devoted to ancient Egypt, at least Sirius and Aletha were. Remus and Danger had disappeared somewhere near a display of scarab beetles.

We'll find them at some point, or they'll find us. No rush.

He turned to look at the rest of the room. The central display was a life-sized mannequin of a woman dressed in royal finery, but there were several other cases around the room, and the hem of a cream-colored skirt had just whisked past one...

Looks like someone wants to play.

Pretending great interest in the contents of the nearest case, a collection of papyrus fragments, Sirius worked his way around it, tossing glances at random towards the other end of the room where Aletha was earnestly studying the reproduced wall paintings. Every time he looked, though, she was in a different spot, and once their eyes met. Both of them froze, as if caught looking at a stranger, then quickly looked away again. Sirius moved to the next case, and heard Aletha doing the same. In a moment, he could begin to look for her again.

Like tag, only with eyes instead of hands.

Finally, he came around the front of the central case, only to find her there, studying him as she had the artifacts. "Do I know you?" she inquired.

"I'm not sure." Sirius played along. "I do seem to recall you from somewhere."

"Yes, but I'm sure we haven't met before." Aletha eyed Sirius' white shirt and tan slacks, then her own calf-length ivory dress. "Though we match rather well, I think."

"Yes, we do, don't we?" Sirius abandoned the game and threaded an arm around Aletha's shoulders, looking up at the mannequin. "I like powerful women," he said. "They make me feel at home."

"You're improving. I could tell that was a compliment without having to think about it for more than ten seconds." Aletha leaned her head against his arm, following his gaze to the mannequin's plaster-white face, sculpted into sternly beautiful features. "Bit off-color, isn't she?"

"They probably don't want scholars telling them she's the wrong shade." Sirius let his mind paint the face behind the glass with different colors of skin and animate it. The resultant picture tangled itself up with his earlier thoughts about peace and what had come before, and the conglomerate thought tumbled through his game with Aletha, growing like a snowball as it did.

"You have your Valentina Jett look on," Aletha commented. "What are you thinking?"

"Just wondering what the world would be like if Voldemort had won after all."

Aletha shuddered. "Don't even joke about that. Please."

"You're right. Too soon." But the story now blossoming in his mind refused to be denied. "So what if Grindelwald had won, then? What if he'd gone through with his 'wizards must rule for the greater good' scheme?"

Aletha laughed. "I'd be a peasant. Or a slave."

"Slave princess, maybe."

"Slaves don't have princesses."

"They do if they were princesses before they were slaves."

"And how exactly would I get to be a princess?"

"Work with me here. Let's say your father was a leader of a secret rebellion, a movement to give Muggles power again. They might want to crown him king—I'm sure Grindelwald would have done it, and the only proper opponent for a king is another king."

"My father, a king." Aletha shook her head. "Tell me another one."

"I'd probably be a prince, or something close to it."

"Going to marry the princess?" Aletha glanced at the mannequin again.

"I might have been," Sirius said, struck by the idea. "If Grindelwald made himself king, he'd need an heir, and the best heir is always one of the bloodline, especially if he was hoping to rule the purebloods. So whatever his actual preferences, he'd have tried to father a kid or two. Probably hoping for a son, but what if all he got was a daughter?"

"Marry her off to the purest blood they could find, and hope for better luck next time," Aletha supplied. "And I've seen your family tree."

"And by extension that of most of pureblood Britain. So as long as I'd never done anything too disqualifying—and I probably never would have run off if they could have given me something fun to do, something like shutting down Muggle rebellions—I'd be prime princess-marrying material." The story began to unfold in Sirius' mind, playing out in flashing scenes, moments between people, notes of music. "Until I met this beautiful slave girl, and stopped her from being sent off to a work assignment that would kill her because, although I could never admit it even to myself, I was wildly attracted to her."

"Would you give her to your fiancée as a gift?" Aletha said archly.

"That would be unethical. Not to mention a horrible thing to do to both of them."

"That sounds like a yes."

"It is," Sirius acknowledged. "Would the beautiful slave princess be attracted to me in return?"

"She'd never admit it to herself either, but yes, I think she would. She might have a few half-friendly conversations with you, then realize she was fraternizing with the enemy and snap at you before running off." Aletha hummed a few notes of a song. "Would you know she was a princess?"

"No, but my personal slave would."

"You have a personal slave?"

"Of course I have a personal slave. And he comes from the same place as the princess, so he knows who she is. He's almost always with me, and sometimes tries to find ways to hint to me that I shouldn't be involved with this slave girl, it's too dangerous."

Aletha looked sideways at him. "And who are you thinking would be this so-helpful slave of yours?"

"Oh, I don't know. Maybe a man I spend a lot of time with, one who'd have been not much more than a slave under the rules Grindelwald wanted established..."

"That's what I thought. Promise me one thing?"

"Hmm?"

"If you ever tell him about this, I get to watch." Aletha grinned. "I want to see what he thinks up to do to you for casting him as that."

Sirius laughed. "I promise. And just think, he comes with a built-in lady friend who'd hail you as the princess when he takes you out to the camp where your people are living in squalor. They bring out the closest thing they have to royal finery for you to wear, and you realize how terrible it is of you to even be thinking of me that way, that you have to be the princess of the downtrodden and not the mistress of their conquerors' prince..."

Aletha lifted an eyebrow. "Mistress?"

"Possibly a bad choice of word?" Sirius hazarded, hearing the dangerous tone in his wife's voice.

"Possibly."

"'Paramour' work better for you?"

"It will do." Aletha gestured broadly in front of them, as though indicating a path. "Please, continue."

"Well, sooner or later the wizards are going to catch up with the Muggle leaders. One of whom would be your father. So you'd have a dilemma on your hands."

"Do I cling to the terrible oppressor whom I happen to love, or do I fight for the father whose cause is almost certainly lost?" Aletha stopped at her own flippant tone. "That's not as funny as I thought it would be."

"No, it's not, and I'd have troubles of my own; I'm supposed to marry the princess, remember. The magical princess, not you. But I wouldn't want her."

"Are you sure about that?"

"Yes," Sirius said firmly. "I'm sure. No matter what world I was in, if you were there too, I would never want any other woman."

Aletha smiled lazily at him. "We need to go out on the town more often, if it makes you say things like that."

"We need to go out on the town more often if it makes you look like that." Sirius returned the smile and told a few other parts of him that they were just going to have to wait. "So I'm in love with you and you're in love with me—I'm sure I'd tell you sooner or later, but not to your face, I'd write you a letter or some such—but I'm under parental pressure to not blow our family chances at a throne and you can't turn your back on all your fellow slaves."

"And since when did parental pressure get you to do anything?"

"Good point. I'd tell them off and storm out. But my parents weren't stupid. Bigoted beyond a doubt, but not stupid. They'd figure out about you, and decide the best way to get me back would be to get rid of you. So off go the Hit Wizards to find you, at the camp with the other slaves..."

"And when they call for me, another steps forward in my place," Aletha murmured, eyes half-shut.

"Hey, who's telling this story?"

"Am I wrong?"

"No, you're right... it's just..." Sirius shook his head. "Never mind. So a particularly brave Muggle woman, or more likely a certain Muggle-born witch, dies in your place, and you get away, and come to see me one last time."

"To tell you goodbye." Aletha clasped Sirius' hand. "And that if you really love me and want to help me, you'll marry the princess and try to change the way the world works. But that can't be all there is to that moment..."

"It isn't." Sirius saw it as plainly as he could see the museum room in front of them. "The princess would be listening. She'd hear everything. And she'd know she'd lost me forever, that even if I married her I'd never love her. Because I love you."

"I feel so sorry for her," Aletha said, gazing up at the mannequin's impassive face once more. "She'd probably have been dreaming about you since you were both children, and suddenly to have you taken away, by a slave, no less? It would hurt her, hurt her more than I can understand, because I've always expected I'd have my own life, but she'd have been trained to subsume her whole self into that identity of 'wife'..."

Sirius pulled himself out of pity for a person who had never really existed. "So you'd go to free your father, but the guards catch up with you, and my slave and I catch up with the guards..."

"Your slave protects us with his life, and you free my father yourself, so that he can keep fighting to free the Muggles from the wizarding tyranny." Aletha smiled at his half-open mouth. "I'm starting to catch the rhythm of how this works. At any given crossroads, you do whatever hurts most, because that's how you keep the audience's attention, by forcing the characters to make hard choices."

"Not quite how I'd put it, but more accurate than I like to admit." Sirius heaved a sigh. "And that would blow my cover completely. I'd have no choice but to admit I loved you, and I was willing to betray wizards to help Muggles. And they'd kill us both for it."

"I'd like to think the princess would intervene for us, though." Aletha's eyes were closed now, and Sirius wondered if the look of intense concentration on her face resembled his own as he thought out his plots. "Not enough to spare us, she couldn't do that, we're dangers to her people, the people she's going to have to rule on her own now, but maybe enough to let us die together..."

"And I'd make you a promise first." Sirius caught Aletha's hands in his, meeting her eyes as she opened them and seeing the same memory in them he was living himself, the memory of a stone room and cold laughter as they were forced to pervert the vows they had sworn in love. "No matter what happens to us, no matter how long I have to search, I'll find you again. Always. I swear by my magic."

"And I by mine," Aletha whispered, gripping his hands tightly. "And I by mine."

They stood gazing at one another for a moment, then began to laugh, albeit shakily.

"But since Grindelwald did not win, and neither did Voldemort, we don't have to worry about it," Sirius said, releasing one of Aletha's hands but keeping the other in his grasp. "What we do have to worry about is finding our alphas, and then finding some food. I'm famished."

"We ate three hours ago, Sirius."

"But that's twenty-one hours in dog time..."

It might have seemed to the Blacks, had they looked up as they left the room to the sound of their own affectionate banter, that the features of the mannequin had taken on the faintest of smiles.

But then again, it might not.