

The Uncle

Author's Note: Just some AU silliness I came up with, featuring a crimelord called Uncle, Dumbledore's usual oblivious self, and the Dursleys getting what's been coming to them, Sopranos style.

It never occurred to the Remus who was raised to be a good, solid, dependable man by his parents, and reinforced in those beliefs by Gryffindor house.

The other Remus -- the one whose parents abandoned his werewolf ass on the street when he was ten and becoming too much trouble, and who went into Gryffindor strictly out of self defence -- the Remus who was even less picky about rules than James and Sirius, and more vicious (though less obvious) in his actions...

It occurred to that Remus that there were a number of extremely useful applications that magic could be put to in the Muggle world.

Granted, it was highly punishable, but then he was young and ruthless and intelligent, and he got around the safeguards the Ministry put up like a safecracker confronted with a shoe-box. Picking locks and lifting cash from inside bank vaults was just the beginning. The big crime families, such as they were, didn't have much on an ambitious young werewolf with a wand and a determined look in his eye.

So when news reached him that the son of James Potter, who'd met a tragic death at the hands of Voldemort -- whom Remus hated not because he'd had power but because he'd unwisely misapplied it -- was going to attend Hogwarts, Remus called in a few favours.

He had the Dursleys whacked.

Tactfully, of course, and well after Harry left the house. Then he called in some loans. He'd amassed a considerable fortune in debts, and most of his investments paid off well. He could afford to let the welshers go with merely painful reminders of their failure to measure up.

Then he contacted Lucius Malfoy, and with about a quarter of his bank account gone, got himself appointed Muggle Studies Professor. Harmless, friendly Professor Lupin. Another large sum of cash took care of that pesky werewolf problem; Severus Snape might be a proud, arrogant sort, but he wasn't a fool and he brewed the new experimental potion happily, for the pay and prestige Lupin could bring him. Even Dumbledore remarked that Remus, whatever he had been up to out in the Muggle world, seemed to have found his feet. Indeed, he'd never met such a confident, self-assured young man.

In June, when Harry would have had to go to an orphanage, Kind Professor Lupin suggested that perhaps he ought to adopt the son of his dear friend, who had become like his own son to him.

His first day of summer holiday, Professor Lupin -- Remus -- sat his new son down, and showed him the trick to circumventing the Ministry's underaged-wizardry restriction safeguards. The second day, he introduced him to some of his Muggle business associates, and Harry began to realise what his new guardian got up to, on holidays. Harry was a very quick, eager learner, and you rarely saw Remus Lupin, who was known in the Muggle World as Uncle, without his clever-eyed, black-haired kid in tow.

Really, when you were the Boy Who Lived, the son of the most powerful crime lord in western Europe, and had green eyes all the girls swooned over, the world was at your feet.

Oh yes.

Harry learned very quickly indeed.

When Harry Potter came back to school after his first summer with his adopted father -- all entirely legal, as the Dursleys, his former guardians, had been mysteriously yet efficiently killed in their beds some time previous -- his friend Hermione remarked that he must have learned quite a lot from spending three whole months with Professor Lupin.

"I mean, he might teach Muggle Studies but I hear he's wicked in charms," Hermione said, and Harry had to admit that she was right. Wicked was, in fact, the word for it.

"A few," he admitted. "And I learned some card tricks."

"Card tricks?" Ron Weasley asked. "Muggle playing cards, like?"

"Yeah, this guy who worked at a pizza restaurant we ate at taught them to me," Harry answered. "Here, I'll show you."

Three weeks later Ron won Draco Malfoy's entire year's allowance off him in a Muggle Poker game.

Harry, of course, excelled at sports as his father had, and since Hermione was good with numbers it was Hermione that he and Remus picked to run the book on the Quidditch games, which became carefully orchestrated exercises in timing, for Harry. Oh, he never threw a game, because Remus was an old school Up House lad, but Harry learned that the point spread was what really mattered anyhow.

Sometimes they arranged things specifically so that Lucius Malfoy lost a bundle, which was only payback since Remus had bribed him to get the position of professor in the first place. Once they doped Flint's broomstick, just for fun (and because Remus was a born teacher, it was also a valuable practical lesson for Harry.)

When they finally did find the Chamber of Secrets, at the end of that year, Harry was wise enough to have worn mirrored Ray-bans one of The Uncle's "business associates" had brought him -- because nothing is cuter than a twelve-year-old wiseguy -- and brought Remus' favourite pump-action sawed-off shotgun along with him. It was efficient, and designed for this kind of work; two taps in the head and the serpent was toast.

Harry was also less than impressed with a talking diary picking on one of His.

You did not mess with one of Harry's.

Tom's diary met a sad end in the paper shredder Remus kept in his classroom for demonstrating Muggle technology. Harry had been all for keeping it and charming it to make Tom say funny things, but Remus knew that old enemies had a way of catching up with a fellow, and then you had to kill them anyway, and that was always messy.

It was quite an educational year. Hermione learned what a cannoli was and nobody would play cards with Ron anymore, though when he got home he taught his father. It appeared that skill with a card quick-change ran in the family, though Arthur was really more fond of an honest bluff.

Remus just shook his head and told Harry there was no helping some people, and that Harry should finish his cannoli.

Harry spent most of the summer after his second year mooching around with Bolts the illicit wizarding safecracker and a number of men who all answered to the name Jimmy and fumbled for matches when Remus -- Uncle, to the Muggle world -- wanted a light. It wasn't a bad sort of summer; he had endless entertainment, and Remus kept things interesting. Remus didn't believe in sheltering children, after all. He took Harry along with him on all kinds of interesting trips, and let him sit in on business meetings occasionally. They watched The Godfather together and made fun of it.

Remus also procured a Dementor -- they were grown on a special farm from larval boggarts, and could be smuggled out to interested private parties for a price. With it he began to teach Harry the Patronus charm, not -- as he said -- because Harry would need it, but because he had a special project in mind and Harry might have to defend himself in a pinch.

"What're we doing?" Harry would ask, and Remus would finger the pistol holstered under his left arm.

"This Christmas we're getting you a special present," was all he'd reply.

And so Harry was packed off to school with Professor Lupin riding up ahead with the driver, and with the knowledge that a great adventure awaited him at Christmas, which all in all made for a pretty decent first term. Ron had been practicing his magical card sharpening skills on Muggles in the local pub all summer, and came to school flush with Galleons to spend on their trips into Hogsmeade. Harry had his own earnings, from the magical pickpocketing Remus had started him on (because a boy had to start somewhere) and with Hermione's investments from her cut of last year's bookie ring, the three of them had their pick of anything in Zonko's or Honeydukes.

Harry, like a good son, brought his adopted father a slab of Honeydukes Finest Chocolate whenever he went into Hogsmeade, which -- after he and Ron blackmailed the twins into handing over the Marauder's Map -- was more than strictly legal. Still, nobody ever said Gryffindors had to be law-abiding. Remus wasn't, after all. Hermione, who had moved on from gambling odds to Arithmancy, found the maths almost simple after keeping Quidditch books, which just went to show that crime could pay, if you had a Beater's bat and a determined look in your eye.

They went home for Christmas to the elegant town-house in Oxford -- they had one in London, too, but Remus preferred to holiday outside of the city where he did most of his business. There was plenty of fun to be had, as Remus had left one of the multitudinous Jimmys in charge under a heavy Imperius-style curse which would prevent a double-cross, should such a thing have entered his mind.

"I don't think I've ever seen you take a real holiday," Harry said, as they were filing into church on Christmas Eve. (As with most British career criminals, Remus was strictly and devoutly C. of E.)

"I thought we might spend some quality time together," Remus answered, as he put a special cashier's note for a thousand pounds in the offering plate.

The next morning Harry received a new suit from Bolts, a fitted Corinthian-leather shoulder holster from an Italian associate of the Uncle's, a real nickel-plated hand-crafted .22 of his very own from Remus --

An a train ticket, terminating at Inverness.

"A train ticket?" he inquired. "I mean, I'm sure Inverness is nice and all..."

"Well, the real gift is what's at the end of it," Remus answered. "Or rather, just offshore. We're visiting Azkaban Prison."

"What's in Azkaban?"

"The man who killed your parents." Remus gave him a wicked smile. "We'll use the train-ride up there to plot and plan a little. We're going to break Sirius Black out of Azkaban, Harry, and then you may kill him yourself."

On the train to Inverness, that Christmas holiday, Harry and Remus studied maps of Azkaban. They were scrawled in the shaky hand of a Wizard cartographer who'd done five years for some crime or other, and drawn maps to keep himself sane; when he got out, Remus had purchased the originals and kept them for years. After all, imprisonment in Azkaban was proper punishment for Black, and he had always intended to let Harry kill him, when the time was right.

It was ages since he'd done this sort of work himself, he told Harry, as the countryside sped past. The Uncle had always been better at management than actual crime, with a tidy, organised mind and a unique way of seeing the Muggle world. Harry sensed that the danger was a heady thrill; Remus was excited as any kid on a holiday with family.

They would wait, in Inverness, until New Year's; Remus had several bribes to make to the human guards who kept watch on the island beaches and the hollow-eyed administrator who supervised the less dangerous prisoners that ran the kitchens and such. Barring the Dementors, their path to solitary confinement would be clear, and the Administrator knew a fellow who had a particular knack for drawing Dementor attention when he wanted it.

On New Year's Eve, close to midnight, they unrolled a flying carpet bought illicitly from some Russian chaps who had a reciprocal agreement with the Uncle: he turned a blind eye to their gambling businesses in London and in return they sent him a crate of vodka and some heavy artillery every Halloween. The vodka was smooth as silk and highly alcoholic, and the Uncle used it for entertaining people he wanted to disarm. He hexed the firing pins and sold the artillery to American militias, who could never figure out why, when aimed at an actual person, they always failed to fire.

The carpet took them over the sea and the darkened guard tower (bribe number one), then through a window carelessly left open (bribe number two) into the floor above solitary confinement. The cells were silent as the grave, and Harry felt a heavy weight of misery settle on him. He thought happy thoughts; loud family dinners with the Italian mafia, camping trips with Remus and some French arms smugglers, a sunny breakfast with the smiling, plump mistress of a bordello Remus was interested in acquiring. It nearly worked, until chains rattled nearby.

"Uncle," said a hoarse voice, and a pair of hands reached through the bars. Remus passed the carpet through, and picked the lock manually.

"Give us the count of one hundred," he said, "and then start the diversion. We won't need the carpet; if you make it to mainland, get to London and look me up."

"Bless you, Uncle," said the man, shakenly, and stepped out under the window, gazing happily up at the moonlight.

Remus, map in hand, led Harry down a byzantine maze of corridors and stairwells, dodging shadowy shapes at a distance, until they came to a stop behind a stone column. There was a Dementor, scaly hands tracing the walls as it seemed to float idly in front of one cell. Inside there was a soft whimper.

"Bellatrix Lestrange," Remus whispered. "Two beyond her is Black's cell."

Screaming started upstairs, and the Dementor cocked its cowed head, as if listening to a pleasant Vivaldi piece; then it slithered away, and Remus moved forward carefully. Past a cell marked B Lestrange filled with hoarse breathing, past an empty cell with the name scratched out, to a third.

There was a black dog lying in the cell, looking nothing so much as bored.

Harry watched, excited now, as the black leather collar and lead Remus carried snapped around the dog's neck, and a muzzle buckled itself behind his head when the nosepiece was fitted over his mouth. The dog's eyes clouded, and it stood, docile, and slipped through the bars easily.

They made their escape almost too simply, out a window and down to the sand, Remus murmuring about bribe number one again as they reached a rickety boat. Harry almost shouted gleefully when the boat, powered by Remus' wand, shot out from the sands towards the mainland. The dog sat quietly, under an imperio enchantment Remus had burned into the leather collar sometime previously.

An hour later they were back in their lush hotel suite in Inverness, safe and sound and listening to a Floo Broadcasting Network report that two dangerous criminals had escaped from Azkaban.

"Well, that's nice, he got away," Remus said. "I didn't think he would, but Marks was always a resourceful sort, we knew each other when we were younger. Don't, Harry," he cautioned, when Harry reached out to touch the dog's fur, curious. This was Padfoot, Harry knew, Sirius Black's animal incarnation, but he looked like a starving dog who was in need of an ear-scratching, and Harry had a very hard time reconciling his look with the

caution -- coming ironically out of a crimelord's mouth -- that "He's a murderer and a ruthless bastard."

Harry watched as Remus unbuckled the muzzle and undid the lead; still the dog sat quietly, collar hanging loose on his neck.

"You remember how we practiced, Harry," Remus said, in his best lecture voice. "Avada Kedavra, a flick, wave, flick."

Harry did remember. He hadn't been allowed to actually whack anyone himself yet, but he had managed to take out a fair-sized cow eventually. Good eating on that cow, too.

"Can...can I talk to him first?" Harry asked hesitantly.

Remus gave him a blank look. "Why?"

"So I can find out why he did it."

"He did it because he's an awful person and he picked the wrong side --" Remus began, but Harry gave him a stubborn look.

"Fine," he sighed, and wrapped his fingers around the collar, lifting the dog's head forcefully. "Change," he said, and the dog stretched and howled and then Sirius Black, skinny and ragged with matted hair and deep-sunk eyes, stood before them.

Harry had no idea the man was so short. Remus towered over him, and Remus wasn't exactly the picture of good posture.

Both of them were startled when Sirius burst out into hysterical laughter, and Remus shook him by the collar like a rag doll to stop him.

"I knew you'd come for me one day, you reprobate," Black said, hooting with laughter. "But I didn't think even you had the stones to bring a kid along with you and kill me in front of him..."

"I'm not going to kill you, Sirius," Remus said, almost gently.

"I am," Harry said.

The laughter stopped abruptly.

Both men looked at Harry, who raised his wand.

"Now, Harry," Remus said slowly. "Er, let me step back first..."

Harry flicked his wand a little, as he'd seen Remus do with a pistol when he was telling someone to step away, and Remus moved backwards.

"You're wearing that collar so you have to answer me honestly," Harry said to Sirius.

"I do if you tell me to," Sirius answered. Harry took a deep breath.

"You killed my parents."

"I did," Sirius said, but a strange spasm crossed his face. Harry slid his eyes to Remus for a second; he'd never seen his adopted father cry, but now he looked close -- less like the Uncle, who knew how to handle a handgun and struck deals with powerful crimelords around the world and scared the living shit out of England's underworld. He looked like Professor Lupin, the mild, kind, and understanding teacher who always gave extensions when he was asked and never dreamed of hiring hits on his trouble students.

"Why?" Harry demanded.

"I suspected Moony was the spy."

"You son of a bitch --" Remus surged forward, but Harry cried "expelliarmus!" and Remus was shoved backwards, into one of the chairs. He stared at Harry in shock.

"Explain yourself," Harry ordered.

"What is there to explain?" Sirius asked.

"You betrayed my parents."

"And Remus," Sirius said, with a pained, toothy smile that seemed to stretch his skin taut across his cheekbones.

"How?"

"I was the reason Voldemort discovered their secret."

Harry felt his mouth go dry, but he continued hoarsely. "You were their secret keeper."

Sirius was silent. There was a strangled noise from Remus.

"Were you their secret keeper?" he asked, from the chair. Sirius seemed to struggle, and finally answered.

"No."

Silence settled on the room.

"I need a drink," Remus said, rising and crossing to the bar nearby. He poured a glass of brandy, drank, and filled it with water, offering it to Harry, who took it, tasting the remnants of alcohol.

"Who was the secret-keeper, Sirius?" Remus asked. "Don't lie, or I'll take Harry's present away from him and torture you to death myself."

"I can't lie," Sirius said, still looking as though he was struggling.

"Who was it?"

"Wormtail."

"You killed Wormtail."

Sirius shook his head, almost mechanically. His eyes had fixed on Harry.

"It was faked. He framed me. We didn't tell anyone, not even Dumbledore. I thought they would be safer..." and for a second the Imperio was conquered, and Sirius took a halting step forward. "I'm sorry, Harry -- "

Remus caught him by the collar, and Sirius made a choking noise. They were still, briefly, and then Remus' hand flipped the catch on the collar, and Sirius stumbled forward as if whatever had been holding him up had vanished. Remus caught him one-armed.

Harry watched as Sirius Black, the man he'd learned to hate from Remus' stories, clung desperately to Harry's adopted father like a drowning man clutches at rocks on the shore. He watched as Remus raised his godfather up and pulled him close in an embrace, the way he did his partners in crime when they met to talk business. Equal to equal.

Harry watched and stood, alone, and dropped his wand to his side as his godfather sobbed in the arms of his adopted father. A hardened crimelord and an escaped convict, while not precisely unfamiliar to Harry, normally didn't behave like this. He didn't know what to do.

Then Remus extended one arm and gestured with his clever, criminal's fingers for Harry to join them, and Sirius stepped back.

"It's not a lie," he blurted.

"We know," Harry said. Remus eased the other man into a chair, and reached out to put a hand on Harry's shoulder, gripping him tightly. Harry, for the first time in nearly three years, felt as though he was finally Remus' son.

"So now we have to find Wormtail," Harry said. He reached across his chest to touch the butt of the pistol he'd gotten for Christmas. "And he's going to die a lot slower."

"That's my boy," Sirius and Remus said, in unison.

They had given their carpet to a fugitive and hadn't planned on bringing a third party back to Oxford with them, which put Remus "The Uncle" Lupin and Harry "Boyo" Potter into a somewhat iffy predicament that New Year's Night in Inverness. It would be unwise for them to even be seen in the area, and there wasn't a moment to lose; the flight on foot to the midnight train south, with a big black dog keeping pace behind them, for all he looked like he was a meal away from starvation, was one of the most thrilling moments of Harry's young life.

They went as far as Glasgow in the train and caught the Knight Bus from Glasgow to Oxford, a journey that took longer than it should have, since the bus had heavy traffic during the holidays. It left them off a quarter of a mile from the town-house on the evening of January first, and they walked in the rain, though Remus didn't seem to notice and Padfoot certainly didn't mind. He positively frolicked in the puddles.

Few of Remus' Muggle associates and even fewer of his Wizarding friends understood why he kept a butler; the wizards especially wondered why he didn't just buy himself a house elf. House elves were silly, annoying creatures, however, and easily tricked. Remus' butler, who had his own shady past, knew how to keep his mouth shut, and if he skimmed a little off the top it was a skim that Remus could well afford (and use as blackmail someday, if need be). His wife, Esmeralda, was a much younger woman who not only knew how to keep her mouth shut but also was excellent at getting bloodstains out of tuxedo shirts.

Another reason to keep a butler was that Remus' butler in particular was utterly unflappable.

"Alfred!" Remus roared, as they let themselves into the townhouse. "Alfred, where the bloody hell are you!"

The well-dressed, middle-aged man appeared in the front hallway, and barely lifted his eyebrow at the two humans dripping on his carpet and the large black dog shaking himself near the ficus plant.

"Good evening, master Lupin," he said, and signaled Esmeralda, who had also come running at the summons, to bring fresh towels and put on the tea. He helped Remus out of his coat and brushed raindrops off of his waistcoat. "Out for a stroll in the rain, catching strays? Off with your coat, Master Harry, you'll catch cold."

"Thank you, Alfred," Remus said, accepting a dry handkerchief while Alfred cleaned Harry's dirt-smudged face with another. "Please prepare the yellow bedroom, we'll have a houseguest for several days. It's all right, Sirius, Alfred can keep a secret."

Alfred did not even blink as the dog spiraled up into a human, with torn clothes and matted hair, unwashed and clearly underfed. "Right you are, sir. Will Master...?"

"Black," Remus answered.

"Of course sir. Master Sirius Black, I presume? Will you take a bath, sir?"

Sirius looked hungry. "Yes. I will take a very large hot bath. And a steak. Rare. And potatoes and onions."

"Very good sir. Ah, Esmeralda," Alfred said, accepting warm towels from her, "A large rare steak dinner and a large glass of brandy to be delivered to the Yellow Room. In the meantime, have it aired and draw a bath."

Esmeralda hurried off, and Alfred examined his charges critically.

"If you have no further use for me, Master Lupin, shall I show Master Black to his rooms?"

"We'll take care of ourselves," Remus agreed, setting wet shoes near the door. "Come along, Harry."

Half an hour found Remus sitting on the counter of a palatial marble bathroom, while Harry leaned next to him and Sirius sat in a gigantic tub, dignity preserved mainly by soap suds, as Esmeralda applied herself with comb and scissors to making him decent again. It wasn't the most elegant haircut in the world, but they would make do, and certainly Sirius seemed happier with a clean-shaven chin and a belly full of steak.

"You haven't kept idle, Moony, have you?" he asked, sliding under the water, which had already been drained and changed twice to carry away the muck of twelve years in Azkaban. He'd scrubbed his skin until it was red, and Esmeralda was eyeing his broken fingernails next, as if she'd like nothing more than to give him a full manicure.

"Not quite," Remus answered with a smile, when Sirius resurfaced, short, spiky hair now plastered to his skull. Esmeralda carried away the barbering tools, giving Harry a smile and a hair-tousel as she did so.

"I'm grateful to be clean," Sirius sighed blissfully, leaning his head back on the edge of the tub. "Though one does wonder where all the marble and gold came from. I thought you said your father was poor."

"He was," Remus replied. "You've no idea who I am, do you, Sirius?"

"Course I do, you're Moony," Sirius answered. "And that's Harry, and grateful I am you've taken him in, seeing as I wasn't in much of a state to give assistance."

"I'm the Uncle," Remus said quietly, and Sirius' eyes snapped open.

"Uncle of who?" he demanded.

"The Uncle. It's a sort of honorific -- "

"The Uncle? The one who runs the smuggling rings?" Sirius demanded. Remus looked pleased that his name had made it as far as Azkaban's solitary confinement. "Bloody hell, you're the reason half the wizards in Azkaban are addicted to Muggle cigarettes."

"One of my minor operations, yes. Their families pay good money and I fancy I give good value for the sickle," Remus answered modestly.

"Well, that explains things, doesn't it? Reckon that's not your first jailbreak," Sirius said, as Esmeralda returned with a tea service and began to pour.

"My first in Azkaban," Remus answered.

"And you were going to have me killed!"

"That was my Christmas present," Harry said, only a trifle petulantly. "It was going to be the first time I ever whacked someone."

Sirius raised his eyebrows at Remus, who shrugged. "He was going to find out what I did sooner or later. Might as well teach him some valuable life skills."

"Whacking, jailbreaks, and illicit smuggling are valuable life skills?" Sirius asked.

"Well...yeah. I mean it's not just anyone who could go into Azkaban and come out with Sirius Black, terror of the Wizarding World," Remus replied. "He's learning independence and initiative-taking leadership, if you ask me."

"You should open a mafia summer camp."

"Tut! I am not mafia. That's the Italians. I am an independent businessman with diverse interests in all sectors of society."

"You're a werewolf with more money than God."

Remus gave him a toothy grin. "And you're a dangerous armed fugitive. Finish your tea and get out of that bath, we clearly have things to discuss."

"Towel please," Sirius grumbled.

"Modest, Padfoot? You never minded at school," Remus said, winking at Harry. "In fact if I recall you wandered around stark bollocks -- PADFOOT!"

Sirius, grinning, had gone canine on them, and was standing knee-deep in the water, shaking out a newly-clipped coat and flinging soapy water everywhere. He leapt out, shook again, and allowed a towel to be draped across his back.

Esmeralda, laying out pyjamas for their new houseguest in the Yellow Room, heard laughter and barking from the bathroom, and quietly withdrew to allow Master Lupin and his son and houseguest their fun in peace.

When Harry returned to Hogwarts in the spring of his third year, life returned more or less to normal. For the usual given Wizarding value of normal, of course, which on reflection was not, in the slightest, normal in any way.

Of course there were Dementors to be dealt with, since two dangerous criminals had escaped Azkaban prison and one of them was Sirius Black, Voldemort's right hand and murderer of Harry's parents. He wasn't, in actuality, and had in fact spent most of January tagging along at the heels of Harry and Remus as a big black dog while they strolled around Oxford. It wasn't that great, being a dog in public, but it beat the hell out of being a dog in Azkaban prison.

At any rate, Harry had learned the Patronus charm from Remus in preparation for the Azkaban expedition, so although the Dementors seemed especially interested in him, he rarely had any trouble fending them off. Gryffindor won the Quidditch cup that year (and Remus covered the spread, which meant Harry got a new Firebolt) while Hermione and Ron plotted to take their new-found team-bookie skills to the Quidditch World Cup in the fall -- Ron acting as a plant to get people to hike their bets. Remus offered to doctor Bulgaria's brooms, but Hermione said they ought to at least give the poor sods betting on it half a chance.

It was true that Remus tended to keep the Wizarding world and the Underworld somewhat separate; it was all right to use magic to get a leg up in organised crime, but using crime to get a leg up on wizards seemed...well...dishonest somehow. Instead they devoted that summer to several enjoyable pastimes.

Remus, realising the power inherent in having a "pet felon" (as Sirius called himself), often called people into his office and spoke to them in very measured, reasoned tones about the money they owed or the trouble they were making or the loyalty they had sadly betrayed, while Sirius lounged indolently in the shadows. It was remarkably effective, and Sirius seemed to enjoy it. He was uninterested in management, but he could menace like nobody's business. He and Harry spent hours perfecting "the lean" and "the scowl" while Remus was out making the rounds of his various establishments -- which ranged from quite legitimate bookshops to quite lavish bordellos. And sometimes, which said something about Remus' passion for books, the two were combined.

Remus had a couple of Aurors on "the payroll", and one of them came through with him for tickets to the Quidditch World Cup. They also dealt with the on-site patrols to look the other way while Hermione -- who did, it was true, have a good innocent face for it -- quietly went about making illegal book. She took Padfoot along for security reasons, and people tended not to menace a thirteen year old girl who had a dog that came up to her shoulder at her disposal.

Harry preferred his shiny .22, which fascinated Arthur Weasley to no end; Remus had to lecture Harry on subtlety when he caught the boy giving Arthur, Ron, and Dung Fletcher a shooting demonstration on the outskirts of the campgrounds. Hubris, Remus said, was for crooked cops and dead criminals, and although he was okay if Harry wanted to be the former, he was definitely against Harry becoming the latter.

Sirius had a fantastic time lifting his leg on the tent of every Auror, old school rival, and selfish berk who wouldn't give him a sausage from their campfire.

The game itself was brilliant, of course, so brilliant that Harry completely forgot to keep track of scores and odds and wonder about bets; Remus, next to him, was clearly swept away too, and while Hermione -- whose interest in Quidditch was purely monetary at the best of times -- kept her head about her, Sirius and Ron were also keen on the outcome more than on the possible money to be made. Hermione threw a fit about a few

last minute bets placed with Leprechaun gold, but Remus was willing to be beneficent and told her to take the losses out of his cut.

Harry was woken that night by Padfoot chewing, gently but firmly, on his arm, and dragged outside to witness a fleeing crowd, and a troop of masked Death Eaters striding through camp. Remus, emerging from the tent next door, sent Sirius with Hermione and the Weasleys, and pulled out his own double pistols, which he normally kept stored away in a hip-holster belt when he traveled in the Wizarding world. Harry saw him pulling them on, and went to fetch his own shoulder-holster.

By the time the Death Eaters realised what was happening and put up shielding spells or scattered, Remus had picked off five with six shots, and Harry had managed another three with the same, plus he'd winged Lucius Malfoy. The few wizards that were witnesses were all Aurors, and swore up and down they'd no idea who'd done it. Those who weren't on payroll were just as glad to see someone else handling things in a calm and collected manner.

After all, as Remus said over tea when the furor had died down, they might be crooks, but they couldn't be having with that sort of thing. Necessary violence was one thing, but senseless violence was bad for their image. Harry, who was feeling quite chuffed at having finally got to use his pistol, nodded agreement and slipped a bowl of butterbeer under the table for Padfoot to lap up.

"Let's not be subtle. I'll fuck whom I wish to fuck, you capisce?"

Harry Potter, adopted son of the biggest crimelord in Britain and godson of a fugitive convict (not a convicted felon, of course, since there'd been no trial, but a convict nevertheless) was used to a certain amount of foul language. However often The Uncle had cautioned his associates to be polite around the kid, once in a while someone slipped up. Truth was, Harry was growing up in a crime family and crime was a foulmouthed business.

He'd just never heard Remus speak like that before.

Remus was, first and foremost, a manager of people and things, and secondly a scholar, and only thirdly a crook. It was the fact that he'd learned to use magic to manage crime that had gotten him where he was, but at heart Harry suspected Remus was one of Nature's Librarians. Which was why, when he heard that particular sentence spoken in Remus' voice, he paused in the hall and pressed his ear to the crack in the door, listening. What kind of crimelord's kid would he be if he didn't eavesdrop?

Remus was meeting with Ivanovich, one of his Russian pals, who liked to take them on shooting trips. Ivanovich was a Muggle, but he was a good solid character, and his advice, Harry had found, was usually sound.

"Listen, Pemyc, my friend," Ivanovich said, and Harry saw through the crack that he was sitting on a comfortable brocaded chair, his hat on his knee, while Remus paced the room. Remus had on one of his 'meeting with criminals' suits, the kind that looked like it had come out of an American gangster movie. He could have gone swing-dancing in it and not looked out of place, although the idea of The Uncle swing-dancing was patently absurd. He was more the type to sit at a table and toss a coin in his hand while others swing-danced. Except that was a showy American sort of thing to do.

So really swing-dancing didn't come into it at all, except that Remus and Harry shared a passion for the music and Remus liked ridiculous clothing.

"Far be it from me to be your moral compass," Ivanovich was saying, "But let me be your eyes and ears out in this world of ours. You purchase ten whorehouses, people say eh, he is a businessman, it is a business. You purchase two, even you, and people say...it is a hobby. He is a dabbler, he likes women, he likes his privacy."

"I don't dabble in anything, Ivanovich. I am The Uncle," Remus snapped.

"They are very popular," Ivanovich agreed. It was true; the literary bordellos Remus owned, where you could spend a quiet hour with a book or a not-so-quiet hour with one of its characters, were immensely popular. Polyjuice was of little use in turning ordinary people into literary embodiments, but a few disguising charms and a little imagination got the job done. Quite satisfactorily, if Remus' profits on them were anything to go by – especially just after final exams, when the university students (and quite a few professors) wanted to blow off steam. And if the latter ever caught the former in one of them, they could always claim they were "just here for the rare first-editions!"

"Yes," Remus said, "They are."

"But you did frequent them -- which is fine quality control," Ivanovich added hurriedly, "and it is good to avoid romantic affairs in our line of work. People worry now, though. Because you have stopped, you see. Who is the new love of the Uncle? Why does he no longer kiss the hands of women at the parties?"

"I haven't been to any parties -- "

"Precisely!"

"Harry's been here, I haven't had the chance, have I? He's getting older, you know, I have to have at least a little discretion."

"Perhaps it is time to take him along to your -- "

"No. He's too young."

"Christmas is soon. He's home for the holiday, da?"

"He's fourteen, you pervert!"

Ivanovich shrugged and grinned. "When I was fourteen -- "

"Leave Harry out of this."

"Fine. But I am curious. Who is she? This woman for whom you forsake the others?"

Harry strained to hear. He'd wondered, too, why Remus didn't go out anymore -- well, not on pleasure, anyhow. He seemed to prefer to stay in with Harry and Sirius and a good book. He'd had guests over the years, but their town-house had a lot of spare rooms and Harry was never sure which were staying in a guest-bed and which were staying in Remus'.

Now it was just them, really, and had been ever since last New Year's, when they'd brought Sirius home. And, from the sound of it, during the school year too -- now that Remus had retired from teaching Muggle Studies, Harry only saw his adopted father on holidays or Hogsmeade trips.

He noticed that Padfoot was curled up under Ivanovich's chair, and staring at Harry. When Padfoot caught his gaze, the dog winked and lolled his tongue out a little.

"There is no woman," Remus said firmly. "I'm consolidating my efforts on running my businesses and raising Harry, that's all. Besides there are....rumours," he said.

"Rumours?" Ivanovich asked. Padfoot looked mildly alarmed.

"That Vol...that an old business rival of mine is returning. Or might be. I thought he had been dealt with, but it looks like I was wrong. Harry and I had a run-in with his gang a few months ago at a sporting event."

"Oh? And how did the little Uncle do?"

"Did fine. Did more than fine," Remus said proudly, and Harry grinned. "Listen, if anyone asks you, you tell them that I'm taking care of my business, number one, and number two, I'll -- "

"Fuck whom you wish, yes," Ivanovich said with a grin. "I understand. Good day, my friend. I'll show myself out."

Harry ducked back behind a column in the hallway and held his breath as Ivanovich passed; he heard footsteps at the door, and then Sirius' voice.

"Harry?" he called. Harry didn't reply; it didn't sound as though Sirius wanted to speak with him, but rather as though Sirius wanted to make sure he wasn't still eavesdropping. The footsteps receded, and Harry quietly crept back to his eavesdropping post -- with the door closed, he had to press his ear to the keyhole.

"Of all the insolent, nosy, meddling things -- " Sirius was saying, but Remus cut him off.

"Do be quiet, Sirius," he said, sounding tired. "He has a point, you know. People are starting to talk about me."

"You gave him a valid excuse."

"I suppose. Harry's not going to be in the dark forever, though."

"Listen, Moony, you said it yourself -- "

"That's big talk in front of a business associate. This sort of thing could ruin me."

There was silence for a moment and Harry heard a strange noise, almost like --

He turned and peered through the wide keyhole, into the room. His adopted father, the kingpin of Muggle crime in most of western Europe, was passionately kissing his godfather, the terror of the Wizarding world. And not just on the cheeks like the Mafia did when they invited Remus and Harry to dinner. There were tongues involved. Hands were roaming. Harry wondered if he should take notes for the day he was old enough to visit one of the bordellos.

"You got smarts," Sirius said, in a fairly good imitation of an American accent. "We'll be all right."

"Between your moxie and my .22," Remus added, and Harry realised this was some kind of private conversation they had all the time.

"Bloody right," Sirius said. "I'm with Ivanovich, by the way -- I think it'd be a nice treat for the boy -- "

"Maybe next Christmas, when he's fifteen," Remus said firmly. Harry felt a little disappointed, but it wasn't as though he didn't have the pinups

Johnny the Mooch had sent him to hang in his dormitory room. Johnny was a collector of vintage girlie pictures, and had selected a few choice ones to send to Harry in return for five pounds of fizzing whizzbees, which you just couldn't get in the Muggle world.

Well, that was one mystery solved, anyhow, and it just went to show you the benefit of listening at doorways. He really was going to have to talk to the twins about finishing up those extendable ears -- they hadn't been interested in most of Ron's criminal enterprises, but that didn't mean their 'jokes' couldn't be used that way. Remus liked cultivating up-and-coming young Wizarding wise guys -- said it was a step towards better Muggle-Wizard understanding, at least in some things. The mob didn't discriminate, after all.

Harry grinned to himself as he abandoned his father and godfather to their pursuits. Certainly they embraced some people with wide open arms.

Harry's fourth year at Hogwarts, after the excitement of the Quidditch World Cup, was an exercise in caution; Alastor Moody had come to teach Defence Against the Dark Arts at Hogwarts, and he was a famous retired Auror. Aurors, like police, were mistrusted by Harry, who was very much his gangster father's son.

Harry and his friends got up to a lot of rather criminal mischief at Hogwarts, to which Dumbledore, if he knew about it at all, had always turned a blind eye (infuriating Severus Snape, who still didn't know what had happened to his clothing after they stole every pair of trousers he owned, third year). Alastor Moody, however, was known to be the most honest Auror in the business or out of it, and it made Harry anxious.

"I wouldn't worry too much about it," Remus said to Harry, that Christmas holiday, when Harry voiced his concerns. "I've found the only police that ever really need watching are the ones on payroll. Besides, he trusts you -- he knew me when I was an up-and-coming in the Order."

"The what?" Harry asked. Sirius, seated on the couch next to Remus and reading a biography of Whitey Bulger, glanced up.

"You haven't told him?" he asked, and Remus sipped his wine.

"Never was any need to. It was just an...assembly of people, devoted to the cause of fighting Voldemort. Nothing more."

"Reckon it was your criminal springboard," Sirius said with a grin.

"Reckon it was, I made a lot of money whacking Death Eaters who desperately needed to be whacked and then stealing their jewelery to make it look like a burglary," Remus answered. "Cheap, though, compared to what I do now."

Harry grinned to himself as he returned to his homework; what Remus did now, he had reason to know, was mostly Sirius.

That was the year Harry participated in the Triwizard Tournament, which meant that Hermione, in addition to all her schoolwork, went absolutely mad making book on point spreads and long odds; being the only bookie allowed access to the school, and best friend of one of the players, she was the natural choice for most of the really hardcore gamblers. She had to cut off Ludo Bagman after some goblins he owed came after her for his winnings, however, and after that Harry -- and his .22 -- were rarely far from her side. When he couldn't be there, Ron was, carrying the .35 Harry had bought him to cheer him up after his rat Scabbers mysteriously vanished last summer.

Harry had put his pistol away, however, for the final Triwizard's challenge, because as Remus always said, he preferred not to use Muggle solutions to Wizarding problems except where absolutely necessary. After all, in some sense, the magical world was Their People more than the world of crime, and you protected Your People. You took their bets, sure, and occasionally you had to break a leg or two when they didn't pay off their loans, but Remus tended to be on the lenient side with the magical ones.

It was a shame, too, because a .22 would have come in handy for shooting Peter Pettigrew that night he sacrificed his hand for Voldemort, and even more handy for shooting Voldemort himself. It was all, as Remus said later, one enormous mess, but at least now they had an idea where Peter was. Remus had invented entirely new torture charms specifically for use on Peter, when they got hold of him.

There were several consolations to be had, however; the twins, who had been betting on Harry from day one, made a small fortune on the tournament, and Harry added his winnings to the pile as a silent partner. Remus even had very unique papers drawn up, which gave Harry a share in Weasley Wizard Wheezes, but awarded him prototypes of new ideas and a say in the management rather than any shared profits. It was Harry's first shady semi-legal business deal, and he swore he saw Remus wipe a tear of pride away as he witnessed the document and paid the notary.

That summer was one of the best, if the least easygoing, of Harry's young existence; a few days after his fifteenth birthday, Sirius broke them into the old Black townhouse on Grimmauld Place, and said humourlessly to Harry, "All this is yours."

Harry, who unlike Sirius had no associations with the house, went to work at once with the rest of the Order of the Phoenix and a good number of the Multitudinous Jimmys that Remus employed, scrubbing and sorting and cleaning until Grimmauld Place was a bare canvas on which Harry could put his stamp.

But only after he and Sirius spent an afternoon with Remus in the front hallway, smoking cigarettes and talking, burning hole after hole in the screaming, shrieking portrait of Sirius' mum, until it was a whimpering patchwork of charmarks and scorches.