James Potter looked at the pathetic, downtrodden, prone form of Sirius Orion Black, and thought, I should be nominated for Sainthood. “Saint Potter” had a nice ring to it, although he got the odd feeling no one he knew would be able to say it without laughing hysterically and shooting milk out of their nose. Even if they weren’t drinking milk.
Or Knighthood. Knighthood would work. “Sir Potter” sounded even better. Perhaps he could be both! If you were a Saint and a Knight, did you get stuck with one title or the other, or were you called Saint Sir?

This was a good thought, so he said it out loud.

His incredibly valid and brilliant question, however, got him nothing but a pathetic moan from the aforementioned Former Heir to the Noble and Most Ancient House of Black, and Current Sad Sack. “Prongs,” said Sirius, “How can you think of such things in my hour of need? Saint Sir? What is this gibberish, what is this madness? Have you cracked, too? We can’t both be cracked, it’s undignified.”

“Yes, dignity has always been our guiding star,” James said, considering Sirius’ feet swung up over the edge of the couch, and his face covered by a pillow. James hadn’t been able to sit for this entire useless conversation, and now was the time to fix this state of affairs, so he sat on Sirius’ legs.

Sirius didn’t even move. This really was serious—a Sirius situation, heh, that joke never got old. He had no idea what was really wrong, other than Sirius Black Being A Dramatic Berk, but regardless, by now they should be wrestling good-naturedly on the Common Room floor, neatly dispelling Sirius’ bout of melancholy and his couch-hogging. Hmmm.

“Now I think you’re mocking me,” Sirius said. He removed the pillow briefly to eyeball James, an expert eyeball that had years of practice considering its unwitting and ashamed victims. “Are you mocking me, Potter? I will not be mocked.”

“Yes, you will, but I wasn’t,” James said. “I was just thinking, you know? How many titles do you think I can acquire in my life? Sir Saint is a good start, but there’s got to be more. Saint Sir Lord Potter has a nice ring to it.”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” said Sirius. “You can’t be a Sir and a Lord.” The pillow was back over his face. Damn. “And I think you can only be a Saint if you’re dead,” he added, voice muffled once more.

“Well, some things are worth the wait,” James said. Time for the direct route. “So, who is it, then? And how do you feel about going nautical?”

“What are you on about?”

“You’re pining. Who are you pining over?”

There was a long, oddly weighted pause. “What was that about nautical?”

Ah. So it was that kind of crush. “Saint Sir Captain Potter?”

Sirius snorted. That pillow was going to be covered in snot. “Saint Sir Captain Mr. Evans, more like,” he said.

Which was distinctly unfair, James felt, considering the circumstances. He thought of a number of responses, all more cruel and uncalled-for than the last, and then, in a glorious and stunning bout of maturity, decided to take the high road. “Well, there are worse things, mate,” he said. “And I, for one, am not so backwards and neandertholic as to refuse to take the last name of my lady-love, my lily-flower, my—”

“Merlin’s balls,” said Sirius with a groan, and finally, finally, lifted his legs, upending James on the floor.
Only instead of lunging off the couch to grapple with him, he curled said legs up into himself and turned sideways, further into the couch.

From the floor, James gave him a considering look. “C’mon, mate, whoever she is, she can’t be that out of your league. Is it Dorcas Meadowes?”

Sirius didn’t even roll over. “Get with the times, Prongs, she’s been dating Marlene McKinnon for three months,” he said into the cushions. “Is ‘neandertholic’ even a word?”

James knew that, obviously, but he’d been hoping it would get Sirius to talk. He thought of a few of his own choice swear words, and got up to reclaim his place on the couch, shoving a bit for the principle of the thing. Dimly, in a moment of rare self-awareness, he wondered if this is what he was like, before he finally got over himself and Lily Evans said yes to him—but no, he was never this bad. Sirius is a dramatic entity unto himself. Yes. Obviously. Never this bad.

“That,” he said, “Is the most Moony-ish thing you’ve ever said.”

Of all things, that got a rise out of Sirius, though James would be dashed if he knew why. “Go fuck yourself,” Sirius growled, to his astonishment. “What would you know about it?”

“You do keep stealing his sweaters,” James said, curious and unwilling to back off. “You sure you’re not going to start drinking Earl Grey next? Want me to buy you a pair of argyle socks?”

“How dare you,” said Sirius, finally sitting up. “You know what happens when I have caffeine. Hibiscus raspberry is the only real tea, and don’t you forget it.” He wasn’t being sarcastic, either. Sirius and Remus had been known to get into passive-aggressive wars of attrition over tea—Remus loved spicy and dark flavors, but Sirius drank down huge quantities of the most fruity tea he could find, with as much sugar as he could physically pour into it without turning it into glop. It gave Remus heart failure. James was becoming more and more convinced Sirius overdid it just to see his scandalized face. To get Remus to counter-strike with darker and darker black teas. The Tea Wars, James thought. Mental. Every proper Englishman drank the stuff, but who on earth got that bent out of shape over it?

“I’m sure Emmeline Vance will be interested to hear about that,” James tried.

“Why? Does she like tea?”

“Oh c’mon, Pads, just tell me. Is it Peggy Bones? Hestia Jones? Don’t tell me it’s Dorothy Underwood, mate, you can do better—”

“I think you could probably tack ‘Admiral’ onto the end, though it’s not entirely proper,” said Sirius loudly, standing up. “But we can pretend the ‘Captain’ is nautical and the ‘Admiral’ is strictly military.”

“What?”

“Saint Sir Captain Admiral Potter?”

“It does have a nice ring to it,” James said, temporarily thrown off-course. “But surely we can add more.”

“Why not go legal?”

“Legal?”
“Saint Sir Captain Admiral Judge Potter Prongs. The Third,” Sirius said, with a trace of his old grin. “I’m hungry, and I want tea. Do you want tea?”

James narrowed his eyes suspiciously. “You’re trying to distract me. What are you trying to distract me from? Do you think they’ll have chocolate biscuits?”

It’s at this point that Remus entered the room, and James’ investigation had a major breakthrough.

“Did I hear the sweet and musical words ‘chocolate biscuits’?” Remus said, setting his books down on a table with a weighty sigh. “Because, if I can just get a cup of tea to go with that—”

“My man!” Sirius crowed happily, and took Remus’ arm. “Tea and biscuits, just the thing, for a dreary and dismal day spent listening to the natterings of one Saint Sir Whatever Judge James Potter. C’mon Moony, let’s leave this sad sack to his moping and carry onward to the rich rewards of food!”

“Now hang on just a minute—” James began, but Sirius was already steering Remus away, cutting off his confused protests and grinning brightly, where just a moment ago he’d been half-wilted under the Gryffindor couch pillows.

Sirius was not, however, quick enough to whisk Moony away before James caught a glimpse of his confused but pleased half-smile, the one he seemed to wear most of the time when Sirius was around.

Hmmm. Very interesting indeed. James felt himself smile broadly as the Fat Lady’s portrait slammed shut, Sirius no doubt ignoring her protests at having to open all over again.

“Your lady love?” said Lily two days later, as James repeated the story to her word for word, with perhaps a few minor embellishments to make himself sound forward-thinking and progressive, yet still impressively manly.

“Oh god,” said James. “Do you not like it? You don’t think it’s romantic? I’ve been calling you that non stop ever since but I can stop, I swear, just let me send a quick owl to cancel the monogrammed robes order—”

Lily, wisely, ignored this. “It makes me sound a bit like a heroine in a medieval romance—one that dies tragically so the hero can mourn and avenge her and eventually die from his wounds.”

“Hmm,” James said. “You have a point. Dying young and tragically isn’t quite our style, is it?”

“Oh no? I thought it would appeal to your misguided sense of nobility.”

James, wisely, ignored this. “Nothing noble about dying young,” he said. “In an accident with a hippogriff and a tin of beans, maybe, that’s a good headline—or saving sixty-two widowed orphans, I suppose.”

“Why sixty-two?” Lily said, sounding genuinely curious and enthralled, as she should be, because he was dashing and handsome and brilliant, and “widowed orphans” made complete and total sense.

But that wasn’t the point, so James waved it aside. “No, it sounds exciting, but on the whole I think I’d prefer to grow old.”

“And why’s that?”

James gave her a look that was pure surprise. Did she really not know? “Because the fiery blaze of
glory would be so much more epic at age a hundred and ten.”

Lily rolled her eyes, but she was biting back a smile. “Ah, right. Of course.”

“I’m going to have a beard like Dumbledore’s,” he continued. “It’ll catch on fire first, before the rest of me. They’ll be talking about it for a hundred more years!”

“Brilliant reasoning,” Lily said. He couldn’t tell if she was being sarcastic.

“Oh, and to spend more time with you, of course.”

“And who says I’ll be there?”

“Lily Evans, I fully expect you to start the fire. Are you saying you won’t start the fire of my death?”

“I’ve lost track of this conversation,” Lily said. “Weren’t we talking about Sirius?”

“Sirius can’t do it, he’s going to be with me on the motorbike,” James said. “We’re going to go out together, two ancient and wise men, flying off into the darkness in a fireball. It’s up to you to light the torch.”

“Two things,” Lily said. “One: the motorbike is going to be flying? And two: assuming I did stick around that long, why do you think I’d be willing to light you on fire so you can have a dramatic death scene?”

“Obviously it will fly, Lily, haven’t you heard Sirius going on about finding a motorbike and enchanting it to fly?” He’d done it already, of course, but Lily didn’t need to know that part.

“Isn’t that—”

“And it’ll be like Vikings. Vikings, Lily!”

“I don’t think—”

“You can’t pass up the chance to give us a sendoff! Anyway, you’ll probably be glad to do it by then, you’ll be dead sick of the both of us.”

Lily gave him an inscrutable look at that, the one he still hadn’t learned to read. “Right,” she said. “And where are Remus and Peter in all of this?”

“Pete will be too sensible by then to take part in any of this,” James said. “Obviously. And Remus and Sirius will have probably gotten it together, so Remus can help you light us on fire.”

“I’m sorry, what?”

“Oh, I didn’t tell you? That’s what I meant to tell you. Sirius is as bent as a coatslinger, and all over Remus Lupin.” He leaned back and beamed at her, sure he’d explained things to perfection, as he always did.

She just stared at him. “Coat—slinger? Wait, are you trying to say coat hanger?”

James waved that aside. “Yes, one of those things. The Muggle things, that are bent. Remember, you told me about them?” Lily’s Muggle-isms rubbing off on him was something he was far, far too proud of. Not that anyone minded—Sirius ate up the information with gusto, Remus found the whole thing amusing, and of course Peter was willing to go along with whatever the others thought it was cool.
“It would be interesting if they were Charmed to sling coats,” Lily said, far too thoughtfully for James’ liking. The world wasn’t ready for a Lily Evans that schemed and plotted.

On the other thing, it was also the hottest thing he’d ever seen in his life. “Lily Evans, are you plotting?”

“What? No, I just—”

But James had already spun her around and pushed her against a wall. “Make out with me. Right now.”

She laughed, and didn’t push him away, which was a nice change. “Later, Potter, we’re on patrol, the Head Boy and Girl can’t get caught snogging in the corridors.”

“You keep saying that,” he said, but stood back obligingly. “One day I’ll get you to change your mind.”

“Mm-hmmm,” said Lily noncommittally, but she leaned into the arm he slung around her shoulders as they kept walking. “Back to Remus and Sirius. You’re sure?”

“On my honor as Saint Sir Captain Admiral Judge Potter,” James said.

“Should’ve nipped that in the bud,” Lily muttered. He chose to ignore her.

There was a pause, in which they both waited for Mr. Norris, to go past, eyeing them balefully. Filch never did trust James, Head Boy badge or no, and had apparently passed this deep suspicion along to his cat.

“How many cats d’you think he’s had?” said Lily after a moment. “Is this the fourth Mr. Norris and he just replaces each one as they die?”

“Mr. Norris is too much of a bloody-minded bastard to not be immortal,” said James decidedly, not to be distracted. It was a good question, but he and Sirius had determined this years ago, and he had more important topics on his mind. “Anyway, what should we do?”

“About what?”

“Sirius and Remus! I can’t leave my best mate pining, we have to set them up. Maybe if I got them both extremely drunk—”

“No.”

Lily’s flat refusal did not deter him. “Fair, that would only end in regret. Remus drinks everybody under the table, it’s embarrassing. I suppose I could lock them in a room that they can’t get of until they—”

“No.”

“You’re right, there’s no spell for that. I could invent one but be fair, it’d take too long. I could get my parents to throw a party that they have to bring a date to and not tell them until the last minute and—”

“No.”

“Yeah, Sirius could get a date in a minute, and Remus just wouldn’t come. What if one of them got hurt and the other had to comfort him—”
Lily actually gave him a Look at that one. James mentally backtracked through the words that had just come out of his mouth, and grinned sheepishly. “Right. Would’ve happened by now, right? Unless it was Sirius who got hurt…”

“Can you think of a single way that Sirius might get hurt that wouldn’t just lead to Remus calling him an idiot and leaving him to fend for himself?”

James could, but they all involved full moon accidents and Remus blaming himself and other nightmares that did not bear mentioning to Lily. To keep up appearances, he shrugged casually, and if it was a little forced, hopefully she wouldn’t notice. “Well, I’m out of ideas. Do you have any?”

“I suppose ‘let them work it out on their own’ isn’t an option?” said Lily, without any real hope.

“Don’t be ridiculous Evans, have you met them? Oh, they’re not drooling idiots, I’ll grant you, but emotionally? Be honest, they’re still about twelve. Thirteen, on a good day,” said James Potter, Actual Shining Paragon of Emotional Maturity. “No, we’ll have to step in, and soon, before they both pine away into old age. We need a strategy, and fast. You know Sirius is a champion piner.”

“And Remus is the champion of emotional repression,” murmured Lily.

“Exactly,” said James, pleased she was starting to catch on. “So—”

“Wait, wait. Don’t get too far ahead of yourself, Potter. I mean—you worked out how Sirius feels, but what about Remus?”

That brought the Sir Admiral Potter Train Of Thought to a screeching halt on the Potter Mental Tracks. “What?” said James, intelligently. “Oh, right. Er—you know, now that you mention it—” He stopped. “He does always look faintly pleased to see Sirius but…”

“That could mean anything.”

“Yes, Remus pines rather more quietly than Sirius,” said James. “If he is pining at all, and now that you mention it, I’m not sure of that at all.” He had a brief, very faint sensation of James-from-two-years-ago staring at him in horror over the idea of admitting such a thing, but brushed it aside. That snotty kid had never known what he was on about.

“Hmm,” said Lily, thoughtfully. “It appears that step one of our plan, Saint Sir Captain Admiral Judge Potter, is to find out how Remus feels.”

She’d used the whole title. She’d actually remembered and used the whole title, and she had used it while scheming with him. James stopped dead in his tracks. “I love you so much,” he managed.

Lily smiled faintly, in a twist of the lips that James had learned to recognize as a mischievous expression. “Well, it does seem that our patrol is over,” she said. “And this classroom appears to be empty.”

James glanced at it. “Filch will catch us in a second. This secret room is better,” he said, and pulled her through a door that was concealed behind a tapestry.

They didn’t do much more planning that night, but James couldn’t find it in him to regret it.

Remus, it turned out, was a rather more difficult book to read than Sirius “Dramatic Mess of A Human Being” Black. It wasn’t that James had never given thought to what his quieter friend might be feeling or thinking—it was just that, honestly, he usually left the divination of said feelings and
thoughts to Sirius’s judgment. Remus almost never wanted anyone to know how he felt, but Sirius was eerily good at figuring out when they, as his friends, absolutely should know and care anyway, and when it was better to leave well enough alone. And so James, aside from occasionally taking it upon himself to ply Moony with chocolate when he’d been studying too long, generally let Sirius work out the difficult bits.

For obvious reasons, however, he couldn’t ask for Sirius’s help on this one. A week of trying to keep a stealthy but steady watch on Remus only accomplished arousing Remus’s suspicion, which meant that Remus asked him at least three times a day if he wanted something, did he have something in his teeth, are you feeling all right, have you dumped Lily and moved on to trying to woo me because if this is how you flirt with people it’s fucking creepy, Prongs (this last question made Sirius scowl ferociously into his pudding, which Remus did not seem to notice).

Under the circumstances, Jealous Sirius was the last thing James wanted (unless he could use that to get them together? Maybe? He’d have to ask Lily—actually come to think of it, she probably wouldn’t think hitting on Remus was a good idea, best to just leave it be), so it was time for Plan B: appeal to a higher power.

One revision for a Potions test later, and Lily was able to report back that yes, the crush was definitely requited. She wouldn’t say how she knew, until James asked her if it was some kind of Mystical Girl Thing, at which point she threatened to hex him until he took it back, and in the haze of apologizing and begging for his life, he forgot what he’d been asking. So that was sorted.

And now, only one thing remained: get the idiots out of denial and into each other—nope. Nope, James was ending \textit{that} Potter Train of Thought \textit{right now}. Get them dating each other. Yes. That was the thing.

After talking to Remus, Lily had advised him that the best thing to do was lay low for a bit, to make sure he and Sirius didn’t catch on to what they were up to. This, however, was Lily-Speak for “I realize I can’t talk you out of this but there is also no way I am getting involved in the inevitable mess,” so James nodded wisely, “laid low” for a day or two so he could Plan properly and also write a 10 foot Charms essay due the next day, and then flew into action.

The trouble with Planning, James quickly discovered, was that interpersonal relationships were not nearly as simple as pranks. He’d started a list of ideas that included everything from “douse them both with Veritaserum and lock them in a room” to the word “alcohol” underlined and circled, but all he had to do was picture Lily’s face at each suggestion to know that they were godawful ideas. He’d get them to spend more time with each other, but they already lived half in and out of each other’s pockets, and—

Wait. Wait. That was \textit{it}. James ran a hand through his already-frazzled hair, making it stick out in every direction, and gestured madly at his much-bedraggled scrap of parchment. Several first years scooted nervously away from him, but he didn’t notice. He was HAVING AN EPIPHANY. And it was VERY IMPORTANT.

All he needed to do was get Sirius and Remus to spend more time together. Alone. In private. \textit{Real} private, not James-or-Peter-could-walk-in-at-any-second private.

But now...how to make that happen?

In the end, James had to enlist Lily’s help after all, but it didn’t take much to get her cooperation. On one of the rare days that they managed to get away from Head Boy and Girl duties as well as the general hustle, bustle, and homework obligations of Hogwarts, he took her on a walk out by the
Lake. Once there, he stumbled and stuttered through a twenty-minute explanation that began with “just hear me out” and rambled through a plan that grew increasingly more complicated in the face of her unimpressed eyebrows, but when he finally got to the words “and I think, you know, that’ll just give them more space, time to be alone, that sort of thing,” the eyebrows went down and the skepticism was replaced by a thoughtful look.

James would’ve known how to proceed with Sirius, but Lily was still uncharted territory in some ways. He held his breath for as long as he could, waiting for her to say whatever she was thinking so hard about, until finally he couldn’t bear the suspense any longer.

“So—erm. D’you—you know. What do you think?” He managed, and nearly bit his own tongue in half from frustration. It wasn’t quite as bad as the time she’d given him a brilliant smile and told him he should probably ask her out before someone else did, but it was on the level of saying stupid shit in front of Lily Evans. What was the matter with him?

“Well, you’re not wrong that there isn’t much privacy around here,” said Lily, and a part of James nearly fainted from relief. “But your plan is godawful, to say the least.”

“Oh.” James tried very hard not to visibly deflate.

Apparently she was better at reading him than he was her, because she rolled her eyes. “Come on, James. No matter how good or stealthy the spells are, locking the two of them in the tower during a Hogsmeade Weekend is never going to work out. They’ll be suspicious and angry and spend all their time trying to get out. We want them to be happy to have alone time.”

Which was an incredibly fair point. This was why he had the other three Marauders in the first place—he was never any good at planning out schemes alone. “So how do we do that?”

“That’s the tricky part,” Lily said. “I can’t think of any way that they won’t feel left out and irritated if they’re stuck here alone.”

“I could tell them I have a big date planned with you and I’d rather they weren’t around?”

Lily snorted. “Sirius will take that as a carte blanche invitation to interfere, and you know it. Anyway, why would they have to stay here for that? They could just stay out of the way in Hogsmeade.”

Right again, of course. “And it wouldn’t explain why I have no issue with Pete,” he said.

“That too. We could talk McGonagall into giving them detention for something?”

“And then they’ll be in detention, and still annoyed,” James pointed out. “Also how exactly do you intend to explain this to McGonagall?”

“I could give them detention,” said Lily.

It was James’s turn to snort, and not dignify that with a response. “All right, but what if we—” He stopped. Literally. In his tracks. And stared into the deep waters of the Great Lake, where the sun was glinting off the water, and felt inspiration dawn on him like a light from the heavens. “Lily Evans, you’re a genius!”

“What? James, I was kidding. This doesn’t solve anythi—”

“Yes it does! Lily! You said it yourself, we’ll never get them to not feel left out! So what if we get their delicate feelings out of the way early?”
“By giving them detention?”

“Nooooo, nononono, not detention, you’ll just revoke one of their Hogsmeade weekends!”

Lily’s confused look subsided slightly. “And if I convince them I’m doing that instead of reporting them to McGonagall and giving them detention…”

“Exactly,” said James, grinning at her.

“So now we just have to figure out what I’m going to catch them at.”

“Oh, that’s easy. We’re overdue for a big prank, haven’t done one in months, you know? I’ll set them to doing something stupid for it together, tell you where they are, you catch them in the act, done and done. Pete and I will just do the real work later.”

Aaaand there was the Look again. “What?” he said.

“You are Head Boy,” said Lily. “You can’t just go pulling pranks like you’re still in third year!”

“What? In third year we hardly had any good pranks,” said James, and immediately regretted it. He’d put his foot in deeper. Shit. “Uh, I mean—”

Lily pressed two fingers to her temple, and he stopped talking to wait for his doom. “James—” she began, then clearly gave up. “You know what, never mind. Just don’t tell me, okay? Plausible deniability is good enough for me.”

James smirked, then immediately sobered up at the look on her face. “Sorry. It’s just. Remus used to say that all the time, when he was a Prefect.”

“I can imagine,” Lily muttered.

“We usually told him anyway, of course,” James continued. “No use being a Marauder if you don’t get to maraud.”

“No wonder you were worse than ever in fifth year,” Lily said.

James bit his lip, forcing back a burst of laughter that would’ve had to end with either a heaping pile of blatant lies or the revelation of his Animagus transformation and the beginning of their midnight jaunts, and forced himself to look very serious. “Have I mentioned to you lately how much I have Changed and Matured since then? How seriously I take literally everything, up to and including my Extremely Important Head Boy Duties?”

“I can hear you capitalizing, James Potter,” said Lily, more sternly than ever. “Quit it. And I’ll fucking believe it when I see it. C’mon, I’m getting cold and it’s dinner time, let’s go back inside.”

James followed her, grinning to himself. Lily Evans, plotting against her friends and swearing like a sailor. He was rubbing off on her after all—it was enough to make a bloke dizzy with how good his luck was.

She saw his smile out of the corner of his eye, and nudged his shoulder. He nudged back, and grabbed her hand with his when she swatted him. She didn’t drop it, not all the way back to the castle, not even when they walked into the Great Hall in full view of the entire staff and student body. Not even when Sirius saw them and made retching motions, or when a group of Slytherins that included Snape glared at them.
Yes, he was a very, very lucky man.

During one very memorable and rambling conversation, Lily had explained the Muggle system of categorizing storms to the Marauders. The most entertaining part had been watching Peter fall asleep, and Sirius tickling him with a floating feather until he sneezed and woke up confused and itchy—and then Lily had rolled her eyes and changed the subject, but James didn’t forget the conversation. Afterward, he and Remus had put their heads together and collaboratively come up with a system for classifying Sirius’s temper.

Which was why, when Sirius stormed into the dorm room the next Friday night, James immediately knew he was in for a Category 3. All of the warning signs were present: stomping up stairs, nostrils flaring, and Remus trailing behind, looking both annoyed and tired.

He did a mental victory fist pump. His and Lily’s plan had clearly gone off beautifully. Now all he had to do was look properly worried and sympathetic.

“What happened?”

“I’ll tell you what happened, your girlfriend happened, Potter,” Sirius said, flinging himself on his bed. “I thought you said she’d loosened up!”

James looked at Remus, who sighed. “She caught us trying to get into Dumbledore’s office. Right in the act, no explaining it away. Not that Sirius didn’t try.”

“There could have been a dangerous nargle infestation in his office,” said Sirius. “She didn’t have to take away a whole Hogsmeade Weekend for it!”

“What?” said James, in a beautiful imitation of a shocked and stunned friend. “Normally we just take away points! Or go to the Head Of House, which…”

“She did threaten that,” said Remus. “Said she was letting us off easy.”

“Easy!” said Sirius, a bit muffled from where he had rolled over facedown onto the pillow. “Fifty points from Gryffindor, how hard is that? And be on your merry way.” He rolled over again and sat up, spitting out pillow dust. “My one chance to get out of this stupid prison of a castle, gone!”

James gave him a skeptical look. “Sirius, once a month we run all over the Forbidden Forest in the middle of the night. We get out of the castle more than anyone else here.”

This incredible logic was nothing when up against a Sirius Storm, but luckily it was only a Category 3 and not any higher. Sirius just slid his eyes away, and looked vaguely guilty. “Yeah, well, not the same, is it?”

Remus sighed, and translated. “He usually talks to Regulus in Hogsmeade. If he can get him alone. It’s the only place he’ll even look at him.”

“Oh,” said James into the sudden embarrassed silence. He felt about two inches tall. Remus wasn’t looking at him—he was looking at Sirius, with an expression James couldn’t read. Sirius snorted softly, and was about to say something, but Remus sat next to him before he could, and he went still.

James felt his attention sharpen all of a sudden, and he held his breath, very carefully saying absolutely nothing.

Remus didn’t say anything either. He just sat there, looking at Sirius’s drooping head.
Finally, Sirius sat up a bit, and looked at Remus. “You should make James buy your mother’s birthday present,” he said, for all the world as though James wasn’t in the room. His tone had even gone softer, less angry and harsh.

Remus smiled faintly at him, so faintly James almost missed it. “I will. And you should give James a note to give to your brother.”

Sirius shrugged. “He’ll never read it.”

“Better than nothing.”

“True.”

James let them stare at each other for a minute before clearing his throat. “I can do both of those things,” he said when they looked at him. “And I can try talking to her—”

“Don’t bother,” said Sirius, temper gone as quickly as it had come on. Category 3’s never did last long. “Next time just let us have the damn Map.”

“I will,” said James. “It’s just, you know Peter needed it more…and I swear I didn’t even know Lily was going to be out and about tonight, she said she was going to be in the Library studying.”

“Must have finished early,” said Remus. He stopped. “Er…or late.” It was, after all, 2 in the morning.

“Surprised Madam Pince didn’t kick her out,” Sirius said. “Unless she hid in there?”

James judged it okay to laugh. “Knowing her, I wouldn’t be surprised. And seriously, I can—”

“Nah, not worth it,” said Sirius. “Remus thinks she was in a bad mood, it won’t do any good.”

“She was,” said Remus. “If she was up studying late that probably explains it. Maybe you should talk to her anyway just to make sure?”

James nodded, making a mental note to ask her if something was wrong and if it wasn’t, congratulate her on her acting skills. “Well, if you’re sure…”

Sirius looked at him gravely. “Yes. But I am, however, officially revoking your Admiral-ship.”

“What?! How dare you! I earned that fair and square!”

“Your what?” said Remus.

“You can’t be a Captain and an Admiral anyway,” Sirius said. “Saint Sir Captain Judge Potter it is. Deal with it.”

“I can’t believe this! I did nothing to deserve this! The ‘Admiral’ was your idea in the first place! I want an appeal! I want a lawyer! I’m a Judge, I overrule everything!”

“Are either of you even speaking English right now?” Remus wondered, apparently to empty air.

“This is a very serious matter—” James began, but was interrupted.

“Oh, shut up,” said Sirius, very unfairly. “Anyway, now we know all the passwords it isn’t.”

Remus coughed. “Uh—actually, we know which one it is.”
Sirius looked at him. “We do?”

“Yes, right before Lily came the last password we tried worked, the gargoyle were starting to move. I just managed to cast an Obfuscation Charm before she noticed. They closed up behind us after a few minutes.”

The look of glowing admiration on Sirius’s face made James wonder why the hell he hadn’t cottoned on sooner. It was actually embarrassing to look at. “Well done, Moony!” Sirius said, slapping him on the back.

“That’s good,” said James. “We can go back tomorrow night. Assuming Pete was successful—”

Right on cue, Peter burst into the dorm. “I got it!” He said, holding up the House scarves he’d been sent to get. There were three from each, just as they’d planned. “It was no problem, the House Elves barely guard the laundry, I didn’t need the Map at all! Cloak came in handy, though,” he said, tossing it to James.

James caught it on instinct, and couldn’t help but look at Sirius and Remus. Sirius was glaring, and Remus had a look of mild reproof that meant, in Remus-speak, that at this moment he would happily tie James up by his ankles and leave him there for a few days. James cleared his throat. “Uh—sorry. What did you want to get for your mum again?”

“What?” said Peter.

“You die,” growled Sirius, and lunged at him.

James thought, briefly, before he was forcefully pulled into a wrestling match, that he hoped his friends appreciated everything he did for them. And also that it was lucky that Remus reinforced the Silencing Charms on their dormitory every morning, or they would have gotten in trouble years ago for thumping around at absurd hours of the day and night.

Then Sirius turned into a dog and drooled on him, and he forgot to think about anything else. He was so busy yelling that he didn’t even think about how hard Remus was laughing.

He remembered it later, though, and was infinitely sure that his plan was going to work.

The next two weeks went by in a blur. At some point he and Lily had an attack of panic-guilt when they realized that Peter was going to be third-wheeling at Hogsmeade unless they did something fast, which ended with both of them dashing around at the last minute trying to find him a date. This then led to an inevitable nervous breakdown in the bathroom, starring Peter Pettigrew, while Sirius dripped disdain in the background and Remus looked worried and sympathetic but also utterly helpless.

At least, he did until Sirius actually said the words “Listen mate, birds are easy, you just bring flowers, make a joke or two, pay for dinner, and they’ll fall right into your lap, literally if you know what I mean, nudge nudge wink wink,” and Remus’s face went wooden, and he left the room without saying a word. And then Sirius’s remarks became even more caustic and unhelpful, so James had to kick him out, and was left with a hyperventilating Peter, completely unable to even try to mend the bridge between his other two friends—the one that, his subconscious helpfully reminded him, he had helped to create, or at least not made any better. While he was trying to do the opposite.

But he forced that Potter Train of Thought to take a detour and come back for another day, and focused on the task at hand. A few encouraging words, a great deal of back-slapping, and many
cheerful “buck up, mate!”’s later, Pete was fully self-esteemed and ready to go. At least, James hoped he was.

There was no time to worry about that any further. Right now, he had to focus on a way to conveniently lose the Invisibility Cloak and possibly the Map for a few days so that Remus and Sirius wouldn’t sneak into Hogsmeade.

This turned out to be easy. He just loaned them to Peter for a prank-related mission again, and let the inevitable odds—Peter had been way too successful last time—take their course. Next thing they knew both things were dropped in a secret passage with no way of retrieving them for a few days until Filch stopped being suspicious.

Well, less suspicious. And no one needed to know that James had put temporary Honing Charms on both objects, and that they had found their way back to his trunk almost immediately after being lost. After all, he didn’t want to take chances.

But there was no time to dwell on and stress about any of this. The only thing he could do was wave a sympathetic goodbye to Remus and Sirius, and try to enjoy himself in Hogsmeade.

It was only afterward that he realized the flaw in his brilliant plan. James could’ve kicked himself all the way to exile in the Slytherin dungeons when he finally saw it—it was so simple, and so stupid.

How would he know whether the plan had worked?

Sirius and Remus weren’t the type to burst from the dormitory holding hands and flinging rose petals and doves everywhere to announce that they were dating. He knew, because he’d suggested that he do that for Lily, and they’d both mercilessly beat the notion down, but more importantly, Sirius was a drama queen, and Remus was emotionally stunted. They’d both work themselves into balls of terror about what this would do to their friends group, what people would think, what fresh hell the Slytherins would cook up to torment them—no. No, they’d keep it a secret. James would never know unless he were to literally walk in on them.

Damn it.

Lily would remark philosophically that he’d done his best, or suggest that he just talk to Sirius about it. But of course that was impossible. So instead, James took a page out of Sirius’ book, and flung himself on the couch. Not to pout. Pouting was beneath him, and he’d matured beyond it. He just needed some time. To regroup. And fall face first into a pillow miserably, like the stupid clod he was.

This was fine. This was all definitely fine.

Sirius, of course, chose this exact moment to enter the room, take one look at James, and plop himself down on James’ head.

James responded to this assault logically: with a muffled yell, a confused flail, a nearly broken neck, and an I’m-not-embarrassed-I’m-annoyed glare. Sirius just snickered.

“What do you want?” said James, trying to recover his dignity.

“A seat, for one,” said Sirius, dropping into the recently-vacated spot on the sofa. James snorted and pushed his legs away, only for Sirius to put them in his lap, like an absolute prat.

“There are plenty of empty chairs in the Common Room,” James pointed out, with every shred of gravitas he had left. If he’d known he looked like a disgruntled cat, it would not have made him feel better.
“Yes, but I wanted this one,” Sirius said, grinning infuriatingly.

“You’re the worst,” said James, and made to throw his legs off his lap so he could go somewhere else and sulk—mope—regroup!—in private.

But Sirius didn’t budge. Instead, he eyeballed James, rather impressively, but still overbearingly.

“What are you pining over? You didn’t fight with Evans, did you?”

“Excuse me? I am not pining,” said James, and tried to stand again. Sirius’ legs did not budge. Good lord, when had he gotten calves this strong? “And me and Lily are doing fine, thank you very much.”

“Yes, I always lie face down on the couch when everything is fine,” Sirius agreed.

“I was regrouping,” said James, with considerable aplomb.

“Regrouping from what?”

“Nothing. A homework assignment. Potions, you know, such a pain. I should get back to it. I have to go!” James said, and nearly made it halfway to his feet this time. How was Sirius doing this? Was it a dog thing? Did dogs have the cat trick of making themselves as heavy as possible when you wanted to move them and they didn’t want to be moved? Could Sirius teach it to him? Could deer do the cat thing?

Sirius was giving him a skeptical look. Too late, James realized that he was acting shifty and not at all dignified and nonchalant. Shit. Before Sirius could ask any more questions, he hit upon the perfect topic. “Anyway, that’s all well and good, but what about you? You’re not still pining. What were you pining over, anyway?”

That worked. Sirius was far too easily ruffled, unlike him. “I wasn’t pining!”

“Pads, you were practically wilting. Come on, tell me. Was it Frank Longbottom? Because you know he—”

“Frank Longbottom?” said Sirius, outraged. “You think I can’t do better than Frank Longbottom?!”

“What’s wrong with Frank Longbottom? He’s a nice bloke, really blossomed out this year. Good at Defense.”

“Sounds to me like you have a crush on Frank Longbottom, not me. Anyway since when do you insinuate that I’m into blokes? The last list of likely candidates you threw at me didn’t have any in it.”

Uh-oh. Tread lightly, Potter. “Must you hold my close-minded past against me? You of all people should know better, Pads. I am wounded. Is it not The Year Of Our Lord Nineteen Seventy-Seven? Who am I, Saint Sir Captain Admiral Judge Potter, to judge where your heart lies?”

Sirius didn’t look convinced. Time for big guns? Medium guns, at least. This was another saying of Lily’s that had rubbed off on him, and he was rather attached to it. “Anyway, I think Kingsley Shacklebolt is shacking up with Frank Longbottom anyway, so you’re better off out of it, mate.” He looked at his friend expectantly.

“He’d better not be, Alice Prewett would have his head.”

“You think Alice Prewett could take Kingsley Shacklebolt? Shacklebolt the shacker-upper?”
Because Sirius clearly hadn’t gotten the joke the first time.

“I think Alice Prewett could have both of them flayed alive if she put her mind to it,” said Sirius. He sounded admiring. And his legs were still like two lead rocks. Lead rocks made of anvils.

James gave up. Big guns it was. “Anyway, I thought maybe you’d want an excuse to change your last name. You know. If it’s a bloke, either one of you can take a different name.”

Sirius just looked at him. James practiced his poker face, and tried very hard not to feel very very small. Finally, after what felt like an eternity in which James’ heart gave out, started again, gave out again, and finally thumped when Sirius started talking—Sirius said, “I know what you’re trying to do, and it’s not going to work.” Only his voice was a lot more soft and less mocking than he probably meant it to be.

“What am I trying to do?” said James, aiming for innocent and landing at steady. Mature. Sensitive—oh god. He was going to need a shower after this.

“You know,” said Sirius, and this smile was actually rakish. He actually managed it. “No matter what you do, I’m not going to admit my undying unrequited love for you, Saint Sir Whatever Potter.”

“Lily remembers the whole title,” said James, with actual dignity this time. “Anyway, I know it’s not me youuuuuuuuuuuuu—” FUCK. Mentally, he ran out in front of the Potter Train of Thought, waving his arms frantically, and thank Merlin it screeched to a halt.

“What?”

“It’s not me you would admit it to,” James said, recovering with, he thought, excellent skill and quick thinking. Now make it look natural, Potter. “I know you only secretly confide to Peter, don’t lie, Padfoot.”

Sirius snorted. “Right. Peter Pettigrew, the keeper of secrets. That’ll be the day.” He sighed, and, in a miracle from the heavens, light shining down and choirs of angels and everything, lifted his legs.

“Well, you’ve proven too thick a nut for me to crack,” he said. “Go back to your pining, Captain Admiral Judge.”

“You do remember the whole thing! My heart is aflutter,” said James, grinning. He had no inclination to go away now, though. Instead, he got up, shook himself a bit…and sat on Sirius’ stomach.

“Hey! Potter!”

“Revenge,” said James, grinning as Sirius squirmed. He knew for a fact that the Fabulous Potter Bottom was at least as strong as the Sirius Black Calves. “Also, I’m torturing you for information. Who was it, Pads? Was it Dorothy Underwood? Or was it her brother Howard? Oh! Wait, I’ve got it! Jake Thompson! He’s nice—”

“Christ, Prongs, will you shut it?” Sirius hissed, actually sounding angry this time. “If someone hears you—and if it gets back to my brother—you know I don’t care what the rest of those old twats think—the fun of being disowned!” The harsh note in his voice made James cringe visibly. “But Regulus…” He didn’t have to finish the sentence.

James stopped. He had forgotten. “Really? Your family’s—really?”

Sirius looked at him. He was trying to keep his face neutral, but his shoulders were tight, almost hunched, and there was a dark, hunted look in his eyes. “Oh, it’s fine for just messing around, you
know, boys being boys and all that, but god forbid anything prevent the Black Family from popping out little baby heirs. Got to continue the bloodline, you know, lie back and think of England, all that.” The lightness of his words did nothing to hide the acid in his tone. “So keep your little transgressions to yourself, and, you know—"

“No feelings,” said James grimly. He knew this line all too well. Not from his parents, who were decent enough about most things, but. Well. If you were a Pureblood, you heard things. You couldn’t avoid them. And come to think of it, he wasn’t entirely sure how his parents would react if he came home with that sort of revelation. He’d never had to worry about it—and with that thought, he felt suddenly and blindingly ashamed.

“Right,” Sirius was saying. “Not that my parents give a flying fat fuck about me anymore. Or they say they don’t, who knows what they really fucking think. They’d keep their well-behaved son away from me if they could, especially if they thought I was getting off with a bloke. They’d flay him alive as it is if they knew we talked at all at Hogwarts.”

“And they’d really hit the roof if they found out you were pining over a werewolf,” said James. At least, his mouth said that. His brain was screaming at him to stop, to force the words back in, and his Potter Train of Thought was veering wildly all over the place, but there they were. The words were said. Sirius had heard them. And—yes. Yes, there it was. The silence that was as loud as a scream. He had one last coherent thought—uh-oh—before everything went to shit.

Sirius stood up.

James didn’t try to stop him, not even with the Potter Bottom. He fell onto the floor.

Sirius stared at him.

James scrambled back onto the couch.

Sirius’ mouth opened and closed a few times.

James waited patiently, and tried not to look too much like a deer—heh—caught in headlights. Which was another Muggle expression he’d picked up. Sirius’ motorbike that he definitely owned legally had headlights! They’d never caught a deer in them but he was sure it could happen! Why was his internal monologue babbling when he was incapable of saying anything!


Sirius just flopped back on the couch, and groaned. James braced himself, but all he said was “Dammit, James. I owe Remus ten Galleons.”

It was James’ turn to stare. “What?”

“He was sure you knew all along. How long have you known?”

“Remus bet you ten Galleons?”

“Well, I bet him, and he said he wasn’t paying up if he was wrong, and I said he could pay me in—uh.” Sirius flushed, and didn’t finish that sentence. James was about to probe, before realizing abruptly that he didn’t want to know. This was weird. This was so weird. Why didn’t he realize how weird this would be? “Anyway, quit distracting me. How long?”

“Uh. Since. Since the day I caught you pining,” said James. “You lit up like a damn tree when he
walked in the room, mate."

"Trees light up?"

"They do if they’re on fire."

"Right," said Sirius. Remus or even Lily would have pursued this tangled line of thinking, but Sirius didn’t bother. "You want to go set a tree on fire?"

"Yes," said James, and then, "Wait. No. Later! I want to know. When did you two—you know—"

Sirius looked at him for a long moment, with an expression that James could read all too clearly—he was wondering how much to tell him—before huffing a resigned sigh. "That day. The pining day. James, we should set a pine tree on fire, I bet it would go up tremendously, all crackly."

"Yes," said James. "Burning pinecones."

"YES," said Sirius. He was mid-bound to leap up off the couch, but James grabbed a handful of robes and pulled, and Sirius plopped down again, looking at him reproachfully.

"We’re not done," said James grimly. "You told him that day?"

"Er—well. He told me, anyway, and I didn’t put him off." Sirius looked deeply uncomfortable. "Do you really want to hear this story, Prongs, because—" He stopped. Looked over his shoulder. Grinned like he always did when he was about to start trouble. "Oi, Moony, how long have you been there? Will you set a tree on fire with me, Prongs is being a prat."

"No," said Remus, who couldn’t have been there long. Sirius wasn’t in the habit of not noticing Remus when he was around. … Which really should have been James’ first clue, because that had been going on for years. Lord, no wonder Sirius had been convinced he had no earthly idea. He was almost as clueless as they thought he was.

James mentally slapped himself and paid attention to the conversation that had been happening during these musings, subtly observing them for signs of being madly in love. Which there really were a lot of.

"I can’t believe you won’t set forest fires with me, Moony. I thought you cared."

"I fail to see how burning softwoods to the ground is a sign of devotion," said Remus. His voice was drier than dry, as usual, but there was a hint of mirth in his eyes. James had to look for it, but Sirius must have seen it all along, because he pounced on it.

"Why, Remus, I can’t believe you! My love is like a burning forest—it’s almost poetry!"

"I’m all aflutter," Remus said. It was strange that he didn’t want to set fire to anything, because his voice was still dry enough to go up in flames at the drop of a match. James wasn’t fooled, and Sirius wasn’t either, but before either of them could say anything, he looked at James. "What’s that face?"

James realized abruptly that he had his chin in his hands and was staring at them both, grinning widely. "Er—" said James, then decisively threw caution to the wind and went for broke. "Sorry, you two are just so cute," he said, as dramatically as he could, sugar practically dripping from his voice.

Sirius and Remus blinked at him, then looked at each other. James couldn’t decipher the silent conversation they had—normally he could read Sirius’ side if not Remus’, but this was not a day to
begrudge them anything—but they seemed to reach a conclusion. “You owe me ten Galleons,” said Remus.

“Ugh, I hoped you’d forgotten.”

“You did not,” said James cheerfully. “It was the first thing you said.”

Sirius threw up his hands. “I am betrayed,” he said. “Betrayed! On all sides! By my dearest friends!”

Remus’s fond look really was ridiculous, now that he wasn’t trying to hide it. “Sirius, you said the same thing when Peter nicked your scone at breakfast.”

“Do not speak to me of his deeds,” said Sirius darkly. “I will be avenged.”

“Is that why you and Peter were having a bacon duel this morning?” said James, light dawning suddenly. He’d been talking to Lily and hadn’t known why bacon grease was suddenly flying everywhere, though he had gamely joined in almost immediately.

“No,” said Remus. “The scone was Peter’s reward for winning.”

“He cheated,” Sirius insisted.

“There was an entire basket in front of you, Pads,” said Remus. He was leaning against the back of the couch now, propping himself up on his elbows and looking faintly amused, and Sirius’ head was tipped back towards him, a wide grin that he couldn’t quite force down on his face.

Funnily enough, James didn’t feel like he was intruding. They’d had nearly this exact conversation hundreds of times, in patterns he could predict easily. Only now, he realized, the subtext that had been there all along had solidified into something real, something that warmed Remus’ face and left a contented glint in Sirius’ eyes—subtle changes, but there if you knew where to look.

But good ones. Definitely good ones. Remus always had been good at smoothing out Sirius’ rough edges—and Sirius had always brought out the wicked spark of life in Remus that made him fun to be around.

“You all right, Prongs?” one of them said. James jerked himself back into the moment—he’d been drifting. Thinking, as Sirius would say, scathingly.

“No,” he said, promptly. At their twin confused looks, he added, “I didn’t get any scones at breakfast.”

Sirius groaned, and Remus laughed. “Trust you to be thinking only about your stomach,” Remus said. “The pair of you are just as bad as the other.”

James had never heard that particular note of fondness in Remus’ voice, and realized with a strange jolt that part of it was meant for him. Which. Really? He was never entirely sure if Remus actually liked him. Not that it mattered, because he was infinitely likable and of course dear old Moony adored him, but—but. There was such a thing as being too good at hiding your emotions.

He shook his head to clear it. He was thinking way, way too much. And Sirius was looking at him oddly.

“Really, mate? If it’s that bad, we’ll go steal you some scones from the kitchen, you don’t have to look so tragic about it.”
“You are a true friend, Sirius Black,” James said, mostly automatically. “I will reward you nobly for this brave deed.”

“Right, then,” said Sirius, as though that settled it, and sprang up from the couch. “’C’mon, Remus, our tragic mess of a friend needs us.”

Remus rolled his eyes and trailed off without arguing, perhaps because he realized it would be a waste of time. That wouldn’t have stopped Sirius or James or even Peter, not really, but Remus was wiser than all of them sometimes. Okay, most of the time. Okay, all of the time.

It was five entire minutes after their departure that James backtracked far enough into his conversation with Sirius to realize that his friend had admitted to finally getting together with Remus well before James had ever set his Brilliant Plan in motion.

Which meant that all his plotting had been for nothing.

And they still hadn’t set a tree on fire.

He groaned, and flopped face down onto the couch again.

If Lily laughed at him for ten whole minutes when she found him and heard his tragic tale—if Sirius and Remus didn’t return to the Common Room for several hours—if James had forgotten all about scones in light of his woes by the time they got back—if Peter was loudly and unrepentantly clueless to the dramatics going on around him, but did have a very nice night drinking hot chocolate by himself—well. It was all just another week at Hogwarts, and eventually James would recover from the slight to his pride.

Probably.

In any case, as a secret punishment for his obliviousness, he did drop the “Admiral” from his name, and was Saint Sir Captain Judge Potter forevermore. Sirius never did ask why. Only Lily knew, and she laughed at him mercilessly, and told him he was a good friend, and kissed him, and he decided ultimately that he’d been called worse things, and would take it.

He did still think he should qualify for sainthood, though.

End Notes

A few things:

1. Please extrapolate the image of James giving Remus chocolate when he doesn't know what else to do, into James shoving apples and miscellaneous raw vegetables in his direction, then wandering away, muttering about vitamins and keeping his strength up. Bonus points if James is also in the middle of slamming down 3 - 4 eclairs while doing this.

2. Marauders Tea Headcanons that don't involve Sirius having my taste in tea (fruity, too sweet, possibly radioactive, spices are allowed but only if they're ginger) are invalid.

3. Honing Charms should've been a thing. I will invent spells if I want to and you can't stop me.
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