The Benefits of Being Bored

by Daily

Summary

The Marauders’ first Hogsmeade visit turns into a nightmare as Death Eaters attack.

Notes

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"Are you guys ready?"

Remus nodded enthusiastically at James' question, waiting in line to leave the castle.

"Yes! Did you know it is the only purely Wizarding village in all of Britain? Hengist of Woodcroft..."

"You've told us that seven times already!" Peter rolled his eyes, making Remus flush.

"Ah, let him be excited, Pete," Sirius hummed, looking through a brochure as they waited. "Where would you like to go first?"

"Honkeydukes!...or Zonko's!" James cheered.

"Why am I not surprised," Remus laughed but Peter frowned.

"Not Spintwitches?"

"I'm sure we'll stop by there, but that shop won't interest these two half as much as it does us," James indicated to Remus and Sirius.

"Well, that might be true but I'm sure there's shops we'll want to see that don't hold your interest either," Remus smiled as they were finally past Filch and made their way down the lane.

"True, but there's time to visit everything. Do you want to send a postcard to your Mum when we pass the post office?"

"That would be nice."

"There's a post office?" Peter asked.

"There is even a hairdresser if you want to get rid of that mane of yours," Sirius commented distractedly as James steered him away from walking into a tree as his eyes were still on the brochure in his hands.

"What on earth are you reading that has your interest so much?" James accepted the brochure when it was held out to him. "Duel competition?"

"Professor Flitwick gave it to me, said I might be interested," Sirius said. "It is during the Easter holidays so if I can manage to stay at Hogwarts, he offered to take me there."

"To watch people duel?" Peter frowned as he looked at the folder as well.

"You'd be a good participant," Remus said but Sirius shook his head.

"I'm no better than James is."

"Are you kidding me? You can do things with your magic that leaves me drooling," James exclaimed. "The only reason I usually win our duels in the club is because you withdraw the moment you think I've been hurt."

"Yeah well, I don't want to hurt you."
James used the grip on his hand to pull him in and wrapped an arm around his shoulder. "You don't have that problem with other opponents, you make toast of them!"

"I don't care about them," Sirius smiled as he leaned into the half embrace.

"Maybe you could join, it would be interesting to see," Remus grinned.

"I'll think about it. But why are we talking about duelling when we're going to Hogsmeade?"

"Because you don't seem as excited as the rest of us," James pulled away again so they could resume walking.

"Sorry," Sirius sighed. "I'll try harder. I'm just not very interested in Wizarding shops."

"I agree that a Muggle village would be more interesting for us," James nodded thoughtfully.

"Not just Muggle villages," Sirius put the brochure into his pocket. "There are so many different cultures out there, but we hardly even learn about those."

"We learn about the Goblins," Peter argued.

"About their many wars, yes. But what about their culture, their way of life? Surely not every goblin works for Gringotts?"

"I've never really thought about it," Remus admitted, seeing Sirius' point.

Although they learned about the Goblin wars, they knew little to nothing about the Goblins behind those wars or what they did in between.

"And not just Goblins, what about Merpeople, giants or even just Wizards in other countries?"

"All we learn is magic and about wizards," James agreed. "But you're following Muggle Studies now, surely you learn something there?"

"Only about Muggle technology. I read through the book but it says little to nothing about their religions or culture. Traditions and values are glossed over enormously. The only magical creatures I've learned anything about are ghouls, and that's because I follow the specific subject."

"Then I guess we'll just have to study it ourselves," James decided.

"Another side project?" a hesitant look slid over Peter's face.

"No worries, we'll do the research and just share our findings with you," James patted his back reassuringly.

"Do we have time for side projects?" Remus wondered. "We are swamped in classes and that's not even taking Sirius into account."

"I don't follow that many classes," Sirius protested.

"You follow thirteen classes!" Peter exclaimed.

"Technically fourteen, if you count Muggle Art," James corrected him. "But we won't be swamped. We've asked the fourth and fifth years what assignments they'd gotten in our year, remember? And got copies of several students' notes."
"So that you could get a head start at the assignments since aside of Defence, they are always the same each year, Professor McConagall confirmed as much," Peter parroted. "But how does a small head start prevent you from being swamped?"

"They've been working in advance since starting Hogwarts. What do you think they are doing while we're doing our homework each evening?" Remus glanced at Peter, surprised he hadn't noticed what the two had been doing.

"How far did you work in advance?" Peter looked up to Sirius.

"We've just finished the required essays for after the Easter holidays."

"But it's not even Christmas yet!" Peter squeaked.

"Exactly, so we won't be swamped in homework and can both help you guys with your homework and have time for side projects," James grinned. "And since we don't slack off and use our study hour to keep working in advance, we won't lose any progress."

"Well, no one can accuse you of not thinking ahead," Remus chuckled. "But what am I taking notes for then?"

"It helps you remember better when you take notes and since you write in shorthand, they will make perfect study notes for exams," Sirius smiled. "And I do read them."

"I know you do, that's why I wondered. And you are one sneaky guy because you were the one who advised me to write in shorthand in the first place," Remus fondly shook his head as the dark-haired boy smiled at him guiltily.

"Always wonder why you read those notes, the two of you are the best students of our year!" Peter exclaimed. "Always have been."

"Only because we work hard and study instead of secretly reading comics in class," James poked Peter in the side, making him squeak.

"Think we could set some time aside tonight to help me with my transfiguration?"

"Sure, McConagall was unfair to make you practice that. Your tortoise was almost perfect."

"He still had spots and breathed steam," Remus sighed.

"You would have gotten it perfectly next class."

"So you say," Remus readily agreed, aware that Sirius was rarely wrong about his progress and could usually point out exactly what he was doing wrong.

"So, where do we start? Honeydukes so you can stock up on more chocolate?" Remus flushed at Sirius' teasing.

"I don't..." Remus trailed off as two dark-haired boys turned to him in unison. "I'll pick what I like and not complain about the costs."

"Good boy," Sirius patted him on the shoulder. "Uncle Alphard and Grandfather sent me some money, so if you guys see anything you want for Christmas, warn me."

"What did they send you?" Peter asked.
"Twenty Galleons so that I could get you guys something nice and treat to some ice cream if I wanted."

"In this weather?" James laughed. "Might be better to treat us to hot chocolate. I'll buy us something to go with that."

"One day I am going to take you guys out on my treat," Remus sighed.

"You bring the games, remember? And you share your candy with us," James waved him off.

"Candy you usually buy me in the first place," Remus looked around as they entered the High Street, enjoying the sight of snow covering the cottage and shop roofs, giving the entire village a Christmassy look.

"Not always. You always bring various Muggle candy after holidays for us to try," Sirius disagreed as he looked around as well. "It's like the picture on a postcard. Do you think they'll sell them with this view?"

"It would be a good marketing move," James hummed. "So, Zonko's or Honeydukes?"

"Let's take Spintwitches first, that's the first shop we'll pass. Zonko's after that, Honeydukes and I can see a sign for Tomes and Scrolls at the end," Sirius suggested.

Agreeing to that logic they followed James as he almost skipped into the sports shop and they had fun watching him drool over the various equipment.

They calmly worked their way down the street, not paying attention to the students hurrying up and down the street around them to make sure they got to certain shops first.

In Zonko's they had a look at all the prank products that were sold, but to Remus' surprise Sirius and James were very selective in what they picked out, not even sparing the Dungbombs or tricks a glance.

"Why didn't you get any Dungbombs?" Peter asked, his pockets full of them and as a consequence Remus was walking on the far side, the smell making him nauseous.

"They just smell bad and affect him even when they're not in use," James indicated to Remus.

"You didn't get any because of me?" A wave of guilt washed over Remus, aware how popular the things were.

"No, you're just the other reason. Neither of us sees the fun in making a stench and although they could come in handy when needing a distraction, there are plenty of other methods to do so," Sirius explained.

"Should I bring them back?" Peter glanced at Remus worriedly.

"Nah, just put them in an isolated bag when we get back to the castle because I really don't want the whole dorm to smell after them," James warned him.

"I will."

"Honeydukes is next," Remus grinned as Sirius looked at him specifically. "You pick any chocolate you'd like, got it?"

"Didn't I already say I would?"
"Good," James laughed as they stepped inside, the smell of chocolate and candy immediately infiltrating Remus' nose.

"I think he might drooling, James," Sirius teased him, poking him in the side. "Go look around, I'll follow you."

"You'll pick some stuff, too?" Remus asked as the other picked up a shopping basket.

"If I see something I'll like," content with the promise, Remus made his way through the shop, trying and failing miserably to not have Sirius and James fill the basket with everything he looked at.

"Now that that is done, Tomes and Scrolls?" James looked entirely too smug with himself as he shrunk the large bag of candy they'd bought so that Remus could pocket it as Sirius put a few sugar quills he'd bought into Peter's grateful hands and they made their way towards Tomes and Scrolls.

"Next time, I'm wearing eye patches."

"That would be a sight," Sirius grin quickly turned into a frown. "Pete?"

"I think I lost my wallet," Peter sounded absolutely miserable as he felt in his pockets.

"How did you manage that?" James frowned as he patted Peter's pockets down.

"You used it to pay in Honeydukes, so why don't we return there to see if we can find it?" Sirius suggested.

"We'll go with you," Remus immediately offered but Sirius shook his head.

"No, you and James just continue on to Tomes and Scrolls while Peter and I go back. It's quicker to manoeuvre with just two and you can pick me something I'll like in the time you're browsing without us."

"All right, we'll wait for you there then," James said. Remus frowned as they watched Sirius and Peter hurry back the way they'd come from.

"Shall we?" James turned as the two disappeared in the mass, Remus quickly following him.

"Do you think they'll find it?"

"I hope so, but luckily he didn't have much money left in it."

"He spent most of it in Zonko's and Honeydukes," Remus agreed.

"Sirius said Peter placed a special order for some Muggle sweets."

"He did? What kind?"

"Gummy Bears," Remus laughed at the face James pulled.

"You don't like them?"

"I can't say it's my favourite sweet in the world, no. Do you like them?"

"They are all right. I know Sirius doesn't like them at all."

"Sirius doesn't really care about sweets in general. I used to call him weird, because what teen
doesn't, but we know the reason behind it now and that just makes it sad," James sighed. "But Gummy Bears and wine gums are a specific brand of dislike for him and I can't really blame him as they have a weird rubbery taste to them."

"It's why I rarely bother to bring them from home," Remus smiled. "Have you got any idea what you'll get him for Christmas yet? I found Peter and you easy, but it's difficult to find something for him."

"You could always get him another book. He's enjoyed the ones you've given him so far," James blew in his hands to warm them up. "Gosh, it's cold, could give him one of your sweaters."

"Won't that give him the feeling we're not all right with him stealing our clothes at times?"

"I don't care if he'd wear my shirts and sweaters every day, he knows I don't mind and he draws comfort out of it when he's upset or scared," James sighed. "But you could be right that it might give him the wrong idea even if it is meant well."

"What are you getting him?"

"I bought him a cat," James confessed softly, looking down at his snow covered shoes.

"Because he loves them and his owl was killed a few weeks before term, which you feel guilty about," Remus allowed a small smile to cross over his lips. "You do know it's not your fault, right?"

"I managed to make him admit that they killed her so he couldn't communicate with unacceptable people any more."

"So?"

"For your safety, Sirius doesn't communicate with you during the holidays and Peter never writes letters if he can help it. Meaning that I am the only one who he was corresponding with."

"That still doesn't make it your fault," Remus frowned.

"So Sirius keeps telling me, but that doesn't make me feel less guilty. And he won't let me buy him a new owl either."

"What would stop them from killing that one, too?"

"Nothing, which is why I decided to get him a cat. She can come with me during the holidays he has to go back to that place and keep him company all through the school year," James said.

"He'll love it; I assume she'll be delivered on Christmas morning?" Remus smiled.

"Yes, she's a Muggle cat I found at the Shop. Madam Pomfrey said she wouldn't have a problem getting her in time for Christmas."

"I didn't think the Shop sold other things than school supplies and some sweets," Remus said surprised.

"Normally they don't, but I figured it was worth a shot and she hunted down several catalogues for me when I told her who it was for," James blinked. "What was that?"

"What was what?" Turning to see what James was staring at, Remus was almost knocked off his feet by an explosion and only James grabbing his arm kept him on his feet.
They both stared at the chaos that followed in shock, students running from the place the explosion had occurred at and Remus tried to control the ringing in his ears when the first students reached them.

"Death Eaters are attacking!" Someone screamed and panic broke out.

"Sirius and Peter are there!" James pulled his wand, immediately beginning to make his way through the students trying to get away.

"James, that explosion looked like it was near Honeydukes," Remus called to him as he ran after him, not even thinking of leaving their friends behind to get to safety. "If they were near, then Sirius will be fighting."

More explosions followed as jets of light hit both people and buildings, some people beginning to fight back, though even more lost their head completely in the panic and chaos.

"They're all coming this way," James noted as they fought their way through the crowd.

"That can't be accidental," Remus pulled James to the side to avoid being trampled as the float of people became even thicker.

"No, they are being guided here."

"So either the Death Eaters are rounding them up like livestock for the slaughter..." Remus stared out over the crowd of panicked students.

"Or someone is trying to herd them together to make it easier to protect them," James began to push stray students into the large stream so they'd automatically follow the rest like cattle. "Sirius is doing this."

"How can you be sure?" Remus automatically followed his lead, blocking some stray spells from hitting the students they were now assembling.

"I just do, it's what I would do if I were in the middle of things. Get people together someplace as far as possible, so that it's easier to protect them. Sirius' shielding is fantastic, if he rounds the people up and puts them under his shield together they'll stand a better chance of surviving than when they're all running around in full blown panic," James was on the move again as the end of the mass came into sight, beams of spells being shot back and forth visible now as people were clearly fighting back.

Remus hurried after James' quickly vanishing form, having less difficulties getting through than his friend had as he was both taller and broader than him.

"James! Remus!" Sirius appeared out of nowhere, blocking two jets of red light from hitting James as several Death Eaters came into view and Remus' heart missed a beat as Sirius narrowly sidestepped a green one, immediately turning to shoot several spells back.

"They are locking the students out," Sirius yelled over the noise.

"What?!" Remus blocked a curse send his way, returning fire with the spells he had both learned in duel club and from the two dark-haired boys fighting beside him.

"The cowards closed up their shops. The students are sitting ducks out here, there's nowhere to go," Sirius fired off several more spells as the last students passed them. "The Death Eaters placed anti-Apparition wards around Hogsmeade and the few shops still open are being targeted so they can't
flush the students out through the Floo system."

"What about the streets?" James inquired.

"As far as I can tell, they are covering all exits," Sirius blocked another attack, pushing James aside as a jet of purple light came his way. "There's an old man fighting on the other side, he's sending students to his house to send them through his Floo and I know two other shop owners are trying the same thing."

"They're connected to Hogwarts?" Remus ducked to avoid another spell he couldn't identify.

"Does it matter as long as they get the hell out of here?" James yelled but Remus couldn't answer him as they were forced apart by their separate fights, needing all his concentration to keep up with the spell casting.

He lost sight of both James and Sirius as he ducked behind a wall to briefly catch his breath. Despite the training his friends had insisted on giving him, he was quickly tiring and his spell range still limited.

He gasped as someone roughly grabbed his shoulder and pushed him away from the wall, blinking furiously as the wall exploded moments later under a rain of spells and someone cried out in pain.

"Sirius..." Remus allowed his friend to manhandle him out of the way of another spell, immediately opening an attack on another Death Eater and Remus hurriedly glanced around to find the man he'd been fighting himself lying unconscious on the ground.

"Get out of here, Remus," Sirius ordered him, but Remus barely heard him as several people were on the ground, the street blown up and fires ongoing all around them.

"Remus!" Sirius' warning blinked Remus back into awareness, but he couldn't avoid something from slamming into him.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

A/N: So...I've seen Captain America: Civil War earlier this week, and I must say, it is the best movie of them all so far in my eyes. All three of my favourite superheroes in one movie and all actually on the same side, yay.

It's got nothing to do with the new chapter, but I see people write personal notes all the time so I thought I'd give it a try as well. That said, on to the new chapter. Hope you will have fun reading it!

The breath was knocked out of Remus as the magical equivalent of a shove slammed into him with enough force to make him trip over his feet, crashing into another student.

A jet of green light shot past where Remus had been moments before and Remus' heart hammered in his throat as he realised his best friend had just saved his life.

But as he pushed himself away from the other student, a bluish white barrier formed before his eyes, spreading over the large group of terrified students like a globe.

"Sirius!" realising what his best friend was doing, Remus tried to avoid getting trapped by the protective shield, but a second magical shove pushed him back once more and he was trapped by the shield with the other students as it closed.

A red shimmer crept up over the bluish barrier and for a moment Remus feared it would break the normally impenetrable shield, but he noticed it was actually merging together, strengthening it.

James reappeared at Sirius' left, looking a little ruffled but fairly uninjured, making Remus wonder how the other had managed to avoid the shield.

He yelled out a warning as he saw a flash of purple light, but James deflected it easily and both boys countered the attacking Death Eaters without hesitation.

Most students in the barrier screamed as spells slammed into the shield, but Remus wasn't too worried about the shield collapsing that easily.

He could sense the power the two had put into it initially and that Sirius was still pumping into it even as he fought and knew it wouldn't be that easy to break.

He hadn't been joking when he'd said Sirius would be a good contestant of a duel competition and watching his best friends fighting now, he knew he'd be more than good.

James was good, but Sirius was amazing.

The boy was blocking, attacking and covering James' blind spots; all at the same time.

And although Remus wasn't too bad in a duel, he knew he wouldn't have stood a chance against the Death Eaters.
A few older students not protected by the shield attacked from the other side, even as a red jet of light hit James and he collapsed screaming.

The sound pierced through Remus as he slammed his fists into the barrier, unable to do anything to help James as he writhed on the ground in pain for a long moment before his attacker's concentration broke.

The masked man's arms had suddenly changed into tiny chicken wings and another spell had him collapsing in a boneless heap and Sirius pulled a heavily breathing James to his feet while deflecting another curse send their way.

Sirius said something, too low for Remus to catch, but he did not miss the unreadable, tight expression that crossed James' face as he nodded.

Both were immediately attacked once more as the Death Eaters seemed to realise the two thirteen year olds were the most dangerous of their opponents and responsible for the shield, but the two held their ground.

To Remus' surprise they were even gaining some as Sirius kept up his unorthodox spell casting, aided by James.

Transfiguration was where James shone and he made good use of his knowledge alongside Sirius.

Body parts were rendered useless as they changed shape and form, wands dropping from wings and fingerless paws even as other Death Eaters folded double as their arms suddenly became made of lead and one even grew elephant feet that brought him down in a tangled mess.

For every student that fell, four Death Eaters were taken down as rocks grew arms and rolled around to unbalance the Death Eaters and Remus actually dared to hope they might win this thing.

But out of nowhere Sirius was suddenly slammed into the shield by a strong jet of red light that Remus had quickly begun to identify as the Cruciatus Curse.

"Sirius!" he slammed his hands against the shield at his friend's side as he fell, uncaring that it hurt his fingers and made the mass behind him scream in fright as he was desperate to get to his friend.

Before his eyes, Sirius fired off several spells even as he was still under the curse and broke free, rolling out of the way as the dark shadow attacking him had to raise a silver shield to protect himself.

Remus' heart clenched as the dark form stepped forward to reveal an unmasked man he only knew from the Prophet. Voldemort was even scarier in reality than he'd been on the pictures in the paper as his chalk white skull shone eerily in the sun and his blood-shot eyes almost seemed like they were demonic.

Choking, Remus redoubled his efforts to break through the shield as the man's high pitched laughter rang through the air, silencing the terrified students.

"Well done, not many can break free from the Cruciatus Curse or force my hand like that," Voldemort stopped a few feet from Sirius, his remaining Death Eaters falling back behind him respectfully. "But your resistance is futile. I do not wish to spill such talent; step aside and neither of you shall be hurt further."

"In your dreams," James spat out. "We won't let you slaughter innocent people!"

"Very well, Crucio."
The red beam never reached James, a rock slamming into its path as Sirius rose to his feet.

"Take them down," Voldemort hissed in anger and his followers wasted no time to follow his orders as he turned to the shield, Remus backing up instinctively as those red eyes trailed over the students inside the barrier before he raised his wand.

Students screamed as his spells hit the barrier, but even while Remus' heart hammered in his throat, the shield held steadfast no matter what Voldemort threw at it.

Red eyes narrowed as Voldemort turned to James and Sirius, who were kept busy by his Death Eaters, and a new torture curse sought its way to James but was blocked as Sirius countered with a spell of his own, a rain of sparks falling down around them.

"Who are you?" Voldemort hissed as he turned his full attention to Sirius.

"One who's sick of your cowardly ways," Sirius growled as he blocked another spell thrown his way.

Remus watched with morbid admiration as the two began to duel, his friend actually managing to hold his own against the Dark Lord himself, despite not being able to shield himself against everything.

"Avada Kedavra," green light roared towards Sirius, but even as Remus screamed out a warning, Sirius had already acted.

All of a sudden a Death Eater, who had been about to attack James from behind, was pulled into the path of the killing curse and collapsed, lifeless.

But as Sirius' attention was pulled away to protect another student from a second killing curse, several torture curses connected and the dark-haired boy was slammed into the shield once more and fell to the ground, screaming.

"Sirius!" James ran forward all of a sudden, punching one of the responsible Death Eaters squarely in the jaw while cursing another and Sirius managed to roll out of the curses' path again, unsteadily getting to his feet once more.

Blood was running down his temple and his left arm was twitching uncontrollably, but he wasted no time to counter another spell sent his way, placing a few well placed kicks on another Death Eater coming near him.

The masked man had clearly not expected psychical attacks as he gasped and fell to his knees where Sirius' foot once more connected with his head and the man dropped like a sack of potatoes.

"Release the shield," Sirius sidestepped another curse sent his way and Voldemort growled.

"Over my dead body," something slammed into Sirius' shoulder, making him cry out in pain but still blocking another spell as he tossed his wand into his other hand.

"Siri..." tears welled up in Remus' eyes as he realised that might just be how this would end up as his friends would never willingly let up the shield to leave them all to be slaughtered.

"That can be arranged," Voldemort hissed as he attacked once more.

Remus slammed his hands into the shield, wanting nothing more than to get his friends to safety even if it might mean bringing himself into danger as well.
Behind him a few others had begun to try and break through the shield as well, determined to try and help James and Sirius fight, but most were huddled together at the far end of the shield as they cried.

"Remind me to have Black and Potter teach me that Protego," a voice to his right spoke up and Remus' head snapped up to see Alice stand beside him.

"I'd rather learn how to break through it," Remus mumbled. "They are fighting while..."

"We're standing by. It doesn't sit well with me either," the older girl agreed. "The shield caught me by surprise or I'd be fighting out there with Frank and them. But they are holding their own, something I'd never have expected from two third years."

"How can you remain so calm?" Remus choked out as James managed to take out his last Death Eater and join Sirius in fighting Voldemort.

"Oh trust me; I'm not calm at all. But we've got to be ready when the shield comes down. As strongly as they are fighting and holding their ground, they won't be able to hold him off forever. When the shield collapses, we need to be ready to fight."

"If it collapses," Remus corrected her. "Don't underestimate them."

Blue eyes turned to the battlefield before them. "I don't, but Black is putting all he's got into maintaining the barrier, even with Potter backing him up he won't be able to hold on for much longer. Not when he's also trying to protect the others who are fighting at the same time."

As much as Remus wanted to disagree, he knew she was telling the truth. Sirius was getting slower as he tired and even with James' help he was still taking more hits than before, stumbling now and then.

They'd been fighting for what seemed like a long time and the constant attacks were taking their toll on both boys as Voldemort ruthlessly threw spell after spell at them.

Another student went down on the other side, freeing two Death Eaters to join their master and Remus' clenched his hands, wishing there was something he could do as the female Death Eater targeted Sirius specifically.

He stared at the barrier, suddenly remembering how James had strengthened it before and wondered if he might return the favour for his friends.

"Maybe..." he knew his Protego Charm was hardly anything to be proud off, but it might just be enough to give them a small breather and Sirius had taught him that intent often played a large role in the power behind your spells.

Taking a deep breath, he flattened his hands against the barrier and focused on Sirius and James and his desire to help them.

"Crucio!"

Sirius was visibly bracing himself for impact as he stumbled, unable to move out of the way again, but before the jet of light could hit him a green shield shimmered into existence before him and James was quick to step closer to him as it closed around them.

Shocked grey eyes locked with Remus' for a split second and Remus breathed out relieved while putting everything he had into maintaining the shield for as long as he could as spells slammed into it.
The two dark-haired boys wasted no time, turning to each other to presumably take care of their injuries, even as Voldemort and the Death Eaters' assault on the shield made it shimmer and crack in mere moments.

Remus screamed in frustration and defeat as another spell shattered the shield but even as both Sirius and James were clearly ready for it, new people arrived at the scene and attacked the Death Eaters.

Recognising the uniforms as those from the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, he choked out a relieved sob.

A tall man in a brown trench-coat blocked a spell aimed at Sirius, helping him and James fight and within minutes the few remaining Death Eaters were forced to withdraw.

People cheered as Voldemort and the masked woman at his side Disapparated, calling a retreat that his followers immediately followed, taking as many of their downed comrades with them as they could while others were quickly taken into custody.

But although Remus felt relief at the victory just as much as the others, he couldn't focus on anything but his friends as they hadn't released the shield yet.

The grey-haired Auror barked a few orders to the others, who hurried to do as he said before turning to the two dark-haired teens, clearly startled to see two wands raised at him.

"Lower your wands right this instance, both of you!" An older student, who Remus vaguely recognised ordered.

"How do we know it's not a trap?" Sirius ignored her.

"They are Aurors!"

"So? Do you honestly believe there are no traitors among the Ministry?" James snorted.

"You both have got good heads on your shoulders. Constant vigilance will save your lives," the man pushed his wand up his sleeve and spread out his empty hands for them to see. "Now I'm unarmed while you are not."

"Do we look stupid to you?" Sirius stepped before James in what looked like a protective move, but as James tangled his fingers in Sirius' belt loop, Remus realised he was actually supporting them both to remain upright and that the wand James was subtly holding against Sirius' side was in fact the one covering them both.

"Good lad," the man actually chuckled at his words, his dark eyes gliding over their stance, seeing it for what it was. "My name is Alastor Moody. What are yours?"

At the name, James withdrew his wand, slipping it into his sleeve and indicating Sirius should do the same. "I've heard about you. I'm James and he's Sirius. You vouch for your Aurors?"

"Yes, I do," Moody confirmed.

"Good," Remus almost stumbled as a nod from James had Sirius suddenly withdrawing the barrier he'd still been leaning against.

"Sirius! James!" he rushed forward to pull them both into a hug, one that was readily answered by both boys.
"Sorry," Sirius whispered in his ear, stepping back as James' arm found its way to his waist.

"That was quite an impressive shield you had going there," Moody complimented as Remus scanned his friends for injuries.

Their robes were ripped in several places and although Sirius had clearly healed as much as he could underneath Remus' shield, he could still detect the blood lingering on them both.

"Had to protect as much people as we could," Sirius met Remus' eyes, offering an amused smile as he was clearly aware of what he was doing.

"How's your back?" Remus remembered his friend being slammed into the shield twice with a back that had been hurt recently and the fact that James wasn't touching it now even though it would've made more sense told him it was hurting him.

"Sore and probably bruised," Sirius answered honestly.

"Not surprising with how you were thrown into the barrier," James grumbled. "He still has at least three broken ribs that I don't know how to fix."

"I can..."

"No," James cut Moody off before the man could finish his offer, clearly not comfortable with the man coming closer to his friend. "Remus can take care of that."

"No problem," Remus had already noticed Sirius was breathing shallowly and drew his wand to heal his ribs, receiving a grateful smile in return.

"We'll still get you to St Mungo's right away," Moody eyed their still visible injuries with almost admiration.

"No, we'll take care of it ourselves," James cut him off once more.

The older student's eyes widened in shock as she'd clearly taken their injuries in as well.

"Don't be..."

"You've heard him, Meadowes, we'll handle it ourselves," Sirius cut her off, turning to James to cast a diagnostic charm over him so that he could determine what he had left to heal.

Moody and Meadowes watched speechlessly as Sirius easily healed James' wounds.

"All right, I can see you can indeed handle yourself very well, but I still have to insist that you at least let Madam Pomfrey take a look at you," Moody spoke up as James healed what he could of Sirius' wounds.

"If it'll make you feel better," James shrugged. "But there are others who can use her more than we do."

"How are the others anyway?" Sirius inquired. "The other students fighting and those who first came across the Death Eaters?"

"I don't know any exact numbers yet, but I do know there were a few casualties. The others who were fighting are being transported to St Mungo's for a thorough check-up as well as others with serious injuries while those with minor injuries are treated here by my medical support team. You are the only ones among the more serious injured who are refusing proper medical attention," Moody
directed the last part to James.

"Then we'll make our way to Madam Pomfrey. Can you walk?" James asked Sirius.

"Not too far," Sirius admitted. "My back's on fire."

"We can use the Floo to travel to Hogwarts," Moody indicated to a side street. "The Hog's Head Inn's Foo is connected to Hogwarts, a Patronus has already been sent to alert the Headmaster of what happened here."

"We?" James wondered.

"Yes, I cannot in good conscience let you travel on your own and I still need a statement on what exactly happened here today."

"Fine with me. Rem, do you have some chocolate to spare? It'll help against shock setting in," Sirius eyed James' trembling form.

"Of course," Remus hurriedly pulled his purchased chocolate out of his shrunken bag and handed them both a large piece, relieved as James almost immediately lost some of his tenseness upon biting into it while he tucked the bag away again.

"Chocolate might help some, but you both still need to be checked out properly," Moody insisted.

Remus automatically wrapped an arm around Sirius' waist as James manoeuvred him into his side.

"Lead the way then."

"Right," the man cleared his throat but didn't comment on the clear protective motive James had by putting Sirius in Remus' care as he led them to the shady looking Inn down the street until Sirius suddenly stopped.

"I locked Peter up."

"You what?" Only then did Remus realise Peter hadn't been with them. "Where?"

"Honeydukes. When the screaming began I pushed him and the others there into the cellar of the store and locked them below a hatch I spotted before leaving to find you guys."

"We'll retrieve your friend," Moody half turned and called forth an Auror. "There are students locked in the back room of Honeydukes, trapped underneath a hatch."

"It's difficult to detect as it has the same colour as the floor," Sirius warned.

The Auror immediately hurried off and Moody turned to Sirius. "That's quite smart; you know you'd make a fine Auror?"

"No thank you. I don't like fighting very much."

"Yet you did so anyway."

"I dislike monsters like them even more," Sirius shrugged.

"When we saw most students uselessly losing their heads, we knew we had to do something," James added as they entered the Inn where several students were being treated.
"You boys all right?" a scruffy voice inquired, making Remus look up to see a grumpy old man approach hurriedly.

"We'll be fine, are you, Sir?" Sirius politely asked.

"I wasn't put under the Cruciatus Curse repeatedly," the man grumbled.

"No, but you did fight four of them at the same time while leading students to safety."

"Not everyone is capable of making a fancy shield like you did," a tiny amused smile appeared around thin lips, transforming his old face into something much friendlier, startling Remus as bright blue eyes became clearly visible.

"Benefits of insanely paranoid relatives, they build good defences," Sirius' stony expression gave way for a smile. "I'm Sirius and these are my friends James and Remus."

"At last, a name to go with the face, got a last name to go with that?"

"Irrelevant."

The man considered that for a moment. "Fair enough, I'm Aberforth. You've saved a lot of lives today."

"We weren't the only ones fighting," Sirius objected.

"No, but nonetheless, most kids your age were running around screaming their heads off. So well done."

"Didn't seem like such a good idea when there were flying curses everywhere. But right back at you. Most shop owners closed doors when Voldemort's Death Eaters showed up, leaving students as open targets."

"You're not afraid of the name?" Moody started as did Aberforth.

"There is no power in a name as far as I know," Sirius cocked his head to the side as Aberforth snorted. "And until I find proof there is, I refuse to shiver around a stupid name some self-proclaimed lord gave himself."

"You'd get along well with my brother," the man grumbled.

"From what I've seen so far, I think you're definitely my favourite of the two," Aberforth blinked surprised before he barked out a laugh.

"You've got some nerve, little star. I think I might actually like you."

"Oh goodie, does that mean we'll get a discount if we come in here for drinks on the next visit?" Sirius grinned brightly and Remus couldn't help but watch the exchange in disbelief.

Everyone knew the old barman was stringy and as moody as a goat, to see him interacting with Sirius so easily was odd.

"No sane student will want to step foot in Hogsmeade any time soon, kid."

"I think Voldemort and his little bug club will think twice before attacking Hogsmeade again, there's no way the Aurors won't patrol on a next visit. It would be a suicide mission that he won't want to send his Death Eaters on, so I think I like my chances of returning here," Sirius' logic seemed to
make the man think for a moment.

"Fine. Tell you what, if you are right then I promise you and your friends will get drinks on the house next time you show up here."

"Deal," Sirius and James shared a grin as Aberforth shook his head in disbelief.

"You're both insane."

"Not the first time someone's told us that," James winced as he stepped into the Floo and Remus led Sirius in as well.

"You're supposed to go one by one," Moody objected as Remus stepped in as well, not letting go of Sirius.

"If you think I'm letting either of them out of my sight then you are sorely mistaken," Remus took a more firm hold of both of his friends as James grinned.

"We'll see you next time, Aberforth," Sirius waved as Remus threw in a handful of Floo powder.

"Hogwarts infirmary!"
Remus' stomach turned as they swirled around, gripping Sirius more firmly around the waist as they stumbled and James threw out a hand to slow them down.

Stepping out proved to be a bit of a challenge as James didn't manage more than a step before he abruptly turned to the side and lost his breakfast.

"Oh my, here dear," Madam Pomfrey hurried towards them and pushed a bucket into James' trembling hands, swiftly cleaning up the floor with a wave of her wand.

She guided James to a bed, allowing Remus to focus completely on Sirius, who had taken on an alarmingly pale tint and was shaking.

"Note, don't use Floo when dizzy," James gasped while Sirius blinked rapidly several times as Remus slowly helped him to the bed.

"Duly noted," Sirius murmured, sitting down gratefully.

"From the sight of you, I assume you were right in the middle of things?"

"They fought You-Know-Who himself," Moody had appeared through the Floo as well.

"Poor children, how badly..."

"They fought him and held their ground while protecting others," Remus couldn't help but think Moody would've been smarter to start with that, but didn't comment on the man's words.

"They what?!"

"You heard me," Moody barely spared the newly arrived McGonagall a glance before turning back to them to see what Madam Pomfrey was doing.

"You fought You-Know-Who and survived? How...you're thirteen!" Madam Pomfrey exclaimed, pausing in her diagnostic casting.

"Thirteen?" Moody's eyes widened and he cast a more thorough look at James and Sirius, clearly seeing for the first time just how young they truly were. "How..."

"We're part of the duel club," James pulled a face as Madam Pomfrey handed him a potion.

"I was part of the duel club in my time, at your age, I did not have the spell range you boys do," Moody grumbled.

"Sit down, Remus. As you seem the least hurt I'll look after you last," Madam Pomfrey ordered and Remus automatically sat down beside Sirius.

"I'm not hurt. Sirius pushed me underneath the shield he raised to protect the students."

"A shield they kept intact despite several Death Eaters and You-Know-Who targeting them specifically," the awe in Moody's voice was unmistakable as he stared at them.

"We did what we could," James looked up to Madam Pomfrey. "Why aren't you taking care of him first? He's the one more hurt."
"Because that would be wasting my time as we are both well aware he won't let me look at him until I have had a look at you," Madam Pomfrey's displeasure with that was easy to hear, though Remus couldn't stop himself from stifling a laugh as it was completely true.

It wouldn't be the first time Sirius refused treatment when he wasn't the only one injured and Remus had no doubt it wouldn't be the last time either.

"It is still an amazing feat," Moody ignored the little exchange. "I have never seen a shield that You-Know-Who couldn't break."

"My relatives are known for their wards so I used their knowledge to develop a proper shield."

"Alice wants you to teach her how to make one," Remus suddenly remembered.

"I wouldn't say no to that either," Moody agreed wholeheartedly.

"It's infused with my personal DNA."

"That is highly advanced magic," McGonagall gasped.

"I was bored so I dragged them into researching it with me."

"You research when you are bored?" Moody raised an eyebrow. "You know most boys your age would be playing games or fooling around, right?"

"They get bored a lot," Remus explained, smiling at the disbelief on the man's face.

"You would think they are being kept busy by all their classes," if Remus didn't know better, he'd have said McGonagall sounded resigned. "But despite the average of eight classes, they still play plenty of pranks."

"It's not our fault that the classes are so alarmingly easy," Sirius objected, making James nod enthusiastically in agreement.

"We are growing boys; we need to be kept busy! And since classes don't manage that, we train and research stuff."

"I can assure you, Mister Black, that hardly anyone shares that mindset and I do wish you would find other ways to remain busy than playing pranks."

"Black?" Moody's eyes widened. "Sirius Black...you are the heir to the Black family?!"

"Unusual, I know," Sirius sighed. "And even scarier, my best friend is a Potter."

"Had already figured that one out," Moody seemed to compose himself so he wasn't gaping at Sirius any more. "The hair is a dead give-away. I know both your father and grandfather fairly well."

"I know, that's how I recognised your name," suddenly James pouted. "It's always the hair that gives my identity away."

"That or the glasses," Sirius teased.

"He doesn't wear any glasses," Moody noted as he pulled out two chairs so that McGonagall could sit down as well.

"Yet," Remus and Sirius said in unison, making James grumble unintelligently.
"Are you done yet? I'm completely fine."

"So it seems," Madam Pomfrey gave him a knowing look. "But I still want you to take it careful and bandage your arm after you've cleaned up. Your turn, Remus, a little room to work, please?"

"I'm fine," Sirius spluttered as she turned to him and Remus hurried to get out of the way.

"Of course you are, that is why you almost keeled over when stepping out of the Floo and you are as pale as a sheet," Madam Pomfrey raised her wand.

"This is completely unnecessary," Sirius grumbled as she cast her diagnostic charm and for a moment Remus half hoped it would reveal more than what his friend openly displayed so he could get proper treatment. But Madam Pomfrey gave no indication of that as she finished and healed a few smaller wounds, turning to retrieve a few potions.

They'd promised never to reveal what they knew about Sirius' home life, not wanting to make things worse for him. But if someone else would discover it on accident, surely they'd try to help him.

But as Remus met James' eyes for a moment and caught the small shake of the head, he realised that wouldn't necessarily be true and might just make life even more difficult for their friend than it already was.

"What's the verdict?" None of the adults had caught their silent exchange and Remus shifted uncomfortable as he knew there was no way Sirius had walked out of that unscratched and no idea how much he was hiding from them.

"Besides the obvious bruising and cuts, he pulled a few muscles and received some burns. And that is after most of his injuries were already healed," she sighed. "He'll be fine as well, but after you clean up I want that arm in a sling so it'll get some rest and the muscles you pulled can properly heal. I am not going to have to remind you to take it easy, do I?"

"No," Sirius shook his head as she fed him several potions as well.

"Good, overall they both got extremely lucky. Remus?"

"Yes?"

"I'm putting you in charge of these; make sure they take them before breakfast and bed. They will both experience some cramping. Rub the cramping muscles with this salve, it will help."

Accepting the items, he pulled his bag out of his pocket and put them in there after enlarging it again.

"When did you learn that?" McGonagall's eyes widened.

"We looked up a few useful spells when we felt our book bags were too heavy," Sirius spoke for him, grimacing as he was handed yet another potion.

"Is there anything I need to keep an eye out for?" Remus asked Madam Pomfrey as he put the bag away again and McGonagall gaped at them in utter disbelief., despite the fact that she really should know them by now.

"Disorientation, distraction, dizziness and headaches. If any of those occur, bring them back to me. The same goes if the muscle spasms hold on," she gave all three of them a stern look. "I mean it, boys. I know you are quite capable of taking care of yourselves, but I expect you back here at any sign of those symptoms."
"But they are dizzy now," Remus said even as both boys immediately protested.

"If it holds on overnight. Neither of them has a concussion so it should lessen soon enough, but if they still feel dizzy in the morning you should bring them back."

"I will."

"And no magic! Your magical reserves are exhausted after all the magic you've used and will hurt you psychically if you don't take proper rest. Drink plenty of fluids and eat iron rich food."

"We will," Sirius and James chorused, making Madam Pomfrey roll her eyes fondly.

"Right, if they are fine then I would like to hear exactly what happened and how you came to protect all those students."

"How many did we manage to keep safe?" James stretched a little.

"From the quick readings my Aurors took upon arrival, there were a hundred and seventy two students underneath your shield. That is not counting the students that were brought into safety by guiding them to Floos or hidden away like your other friend and the thirty-two other students with him."

"You found Peter?" Sirius sounded relieved as Moody nodded.

"All of them are all right, ruffled from being shoved in a dark place without much of an explanation, but no worse for wear. They are being checked over and questioned before they'll be brought back to the castle with the other students."

"At least they are alive," McGonagall breathed out relieved.

"That is more than we could have ever hoped after today. So, can you tell me what happened?"

"Are our guardians not required to be present at the questioning of a minor?" Remus asked.

"I hope not," Sirius' muttered words made Remus wince, aware his relatives would not like that he had made a stand against Voldemort but James shook his head.

"Our Head of House is present and unless we're the ones in trouble that is enough."

"I can assure you that the last thing you are is in trouble," Moody cleared his throat as Madam Pomfrey handed out chocolate. "I would just like to know what happened to form a picture of past events and make a case against the Death Eaters you managed to take out."

"Peter and I were in Honeydukes when the first explosion occurred."

"You were not together with your friends?" Moody interrupted Sirius as he made notes.

"No, Peter lost his wallet so we split up for a short time. Sirius and Peter returning to Honeydukes where he'd last used it, while Remus and I continued on to Tomes and Scrolls," James explained.

"All right, so you separated. Continue with your story before I'll hear your version," Moody directed at Sirius.

"Right, someone screamed that Death Eaters were attacking so I pushed everyone in Honeydukes with me to the back room, where I noticed the hatch and decided to have them hide there."
"Why didn't you hide with them?"

"James and Remus were out there so I went to find them and if I could get some people to safety while I was at it, well...how could I not try?" Sirius said.

"How did you get the idea to protect people under the shield?"

"They were targeting the students who were making it easy by running around in a blind panic. If I left them at it, they would all have been killed. Herding them together would give the ones fighting a better chance of protecting the others," Sirius looked at Remus and James and the latter slipped a hand in his as he continued.

"I found them while herding the last of the students I could grab and realising we wouldn't stand a chance if we'd have to try and protect them from every stray spell, we formed the shield to be able to fight freely while at the same time protect them all."

"We had just reached Tomes and Scrolls..." Remus shifted closer to Sirius, wrapping an arm around him as he realised once more how close he'd come to lose his friends.

The action made Moody raise an eyebrow, but Sirius didn't seem to notice as he listened to James' side of the story.

"Do you need us for anything else?" James asked once he was done, squeezing Sirius' hand.

"No, you should go fresh up and get some rest. If we need something else I will contact your Head of House or your guardians," Moody put away his writing equipment.

"Head of House is fine," Sirius immediately said, causing a small twitch on Moody's lips as he clearly thought about where Sirius came from.

"Then I shall contact your Head of House, should we need more information," he rose to his feet. "Once we have heard everyone on the scene, I'll contact you about possible rewards."

"All I care about is a hot shower and my bed," Sirius rose to his feet as well, the others following his example.

"Make sure you don't forget to tape those ribs after you've had a shower," Madam Pomfrey warned them.

"We won't," Remus promised. "While the two of you take a shower, I'll see if I can find us something to eat."

"Actually, I think we might need your help," Sirius admitted. "I can't lift my arm properly and neither can he."

"Just this once I will have the house-elves bring something to your dorm so you can remain there for the rest of the day should you like to," McGonagall eyed them for a moment. "Elf!"

Immediately a small house-elf appeared, one Remus recognised immediately.

"Hello, Tiffy," Sirius and James greeted her, to McGonagall's clear surprise.

"What's Siri and his Jamsie done this time?" Tiffy squeaked, rushing forward to examine them.

"We got caught up in a Death Eater attack," Sirius gave a tiny jerk of his head as the large eyes narrowed. "We'll be fine."
"You know one another?"

"We've seen each other at late nights in the common room. No reason for her not to be able to do her job just because we're making it a late night," James shrugged.

"I see," McGonagall eyed them oddly. "Take them to their dorm and arrange for some dinner to be brought up to them."

"Tiffy," Sirius cut in before the little house-elf could reply.

"What?"

"Her name is Tiffy and would it really hurt to say a please and thank you when requesting something?" Sirius asked, making all three adults stare at him and Remus wince while James tried to hide a smile. "House-elves are living sentient beings and although they love to serve, that doesn't mean they don't deserve respect for what they do for us."

"I..."McGonagall blinked and to Remus' surprise her usual stiff posture seemed to deflate a little. "My apologies...Tiffy. Would you be so kind as to take them to their dorm and arrange for some dinner for them to be brought up?"

"Of course, Mistress," Tiffy bowed low, making Remus smile as Sirius slipped a hand in his while James did the same on his other side as Tiffy reached out to place her hand on Sirius' leg.

Remus' stomach rolled as the small house-elf side-Apparated them directly into their dorm, effectively avoiding any curious students left behind.

Sirius gasped as he threw out his injured arm to prevent James from stumbling over his own two feet upon arrival.

"How is it that you are the one more seriously injured, yet manage to appear perfectly gracefully?" James complained as he wrapped an arm around Sirius to support him as the other protectively shielded his arm from more harm.

"Practice, thank you Tiffy."

"Jamsie and Remsie take care of yous now?" The elf eyed Sirius worriedly.

"They will," Sirius' answer told Remus he'd been right in believing his friend had been hiding part of his injuries, even from Madam Pomfrey's watchful eyes.

"Tiffy will have food ready in thirty minutes. You leaves clothes in bathroom so Tiffy can cleans them."

"Don't bother, I think these are a lost cause, Tiffy," Sirius indicated to their torn clothes.

"Silly Siri, Tiffy will make them," the little elf shook her head fondly.

"Thank you," Sirius smiled, waving as the house-elf Disapparated.

"All right, let's see the actual damage," James steered Sirius to the bathroom. "We're picking up my medical training the moment we're back on our feet."

"You already know more than most."

"Yet not enough to heal your injuries like you healed mine," James sighed. "Can you take off your
"Robe yourself?"

"No, I wasn't lying when I said I couldn't move my arm properly."

"I'll help," Remus stepped forward to carefully remove Sirius' over-robe, making quick work of the torn sweater and shirt as well.

Unlocking the rune his friend usually kept active, Remus winced as deep marks were revealed, the skin on Sirius' torso and upper side already turning yellow. "Turn."

His back was even worse and the recently healed white scars stood out eerily in contrast to the rapidly discolouring skin.

"Would the anti-bruise cream help with this?" James sucked in a deep breath, not that Remus could blame him as it was a difficult sight for him as well to see their friend beat up again so soon after he'd finally finished healing from the previous beating.

"Every little bit helps," Remus retrieved the first aid kit and placed it on one of the sinks along with three pair of clean pyjamas.

"Let's get into the showers so that we can see exactly what we're dealing with without dirt being in the way," James suggested.

"I..." Sirius flushed in clear embarrassment. "I don't think I can manage on my own."

"Then we'll help you," Remus undressed, aware his own clothing was covered in dirt and some of his friends' blood and just when had he become used to that? "Honestly, you never have a problem helping me or James."

"I know, it's silly..." Sirius looked down at his feet, sighing.

"You feel like a little kid, incapable of taking care of himself?" Remus asked knowingly. "I felt the same when you first had to help me. But you were the one who taught me it's all right for friends to lean on each other in times of need."

"No, it's just...I just managed to shower on my own again. It makes me feel useless to need help again so soon," Sirius sighed as he carefully kicked off the rest of his clothes.

"Trust me, if there is anything you are not, it's useless," James snorted, already undressed. "Now show me how much movement you have in your arm, because from the state of it I'm surprised you managed to hide it."

Remus couldn't help but agree with that statement as the arm was completely discoloured, from the wrist to the neck.

"I twisted it painfully when pulling Remus away from an exploding wall and then I couldn't avoid both a bone crushing spell and something I couldn't identify completely," Sirius admitted. "But it's kind of numb due to the potions Madam Pomfrey fed me."

"I'm sorry," Remus carefully examined the shoulder. "It's dislocated."

"I know, but I couldn't let her see any injuries that would require me to remove my clothes."

"Why? I thought the rune hid whatever you wanted it to?"

"Not entirely. While it does hide most, a diagnostic charm could still reveal it if the caster notices
something off and specifically scans for hidden injuries."

"Meaning you have to hide every injury that might raise suspicion," James realised. "You know how to reset his shoulder, don't you?"

"Yes, I've had to do it for myself often enough. But it is fairly painful."

"I think this will hurt more in the long run, don't you? At least now he's still sedated it will be a bit less painful," James glanced at Sirius' shoulder. "Well, slightly less painful."

"Maybe we ought to wait until after the shower so his muscles aren't all tensed up."

"So you can try to catch me unaware and it might not hurt as much?" Sirius gave him a tight smile. "Just do it."

Not bothering to ask if his best friend was ready, Remus swiftly pushed the shoulder in place again. James tensed beside him as Sirius let out a strangled whimper, but their youngest gave no other sign of distress.

"H-how are your injuries?" Sirius asked after a long moment as James rubbed his shoulder carefully. "My arm's sore from casting spells so much and I have no doubt I'll be stiff as a board tomorrow morning, but you treated everything else."

"We'll rub some ointment into your muscles after the shower," Remus gently pushed Sirius under the stream of warm water.

The water they stood in quickly turned pink as he rinsed and washed Sirius' hair and body, but Remus wasn't alarmed as he knew that water always made blood loss seem worse.

"Are you dizzy?" James eyed the water warily before skimming over Sirius' skin. "No and it's not as much blood as it seems. When blood mixes with water, it makes it appear in much greater volume than it truly is," Sirius reassured him. "I'm neither bleeding nor dizzy, are you?"

"Not so much any more now that my stomach is not being rolled around," James admitted, looking down at his own feet. "You know, I really don't like that you know that kind of stuff."

"I read it in the medical journals Madam Pomfrey gave me," Sirius' eyes were mostly shut, presumably to prevent the shampoo from getting into his eyes, but Remus still tried to hurry up helping them as they were clearly tired.

Shutting off the water once he couldn't detect any lingering smell of blood or dirt on them, he reached for towels.

"Not going through that hell again," Sirius glared at the towels, a sweep of his wand having all three of them suddenly dry.

"When did you learn that?" James wondered as they dressed, leaving their tops off so Remus could rub the ointment into their stiff muscles and wrap bandages on the places Madam Pomfrey had indicated.

"A few weeks ago, after the fiasco of having to let you try and hurt me as little as possible when drying my back, I started looking for an easier way to dry off without it hurting," Sirius admitted, shifting uncomfortably as Remus wrapped bandages around his ribs and arm.
"Good call," James wasn't the only one who winced as Remus, too, remembered the agony they had to put their friend through when the wounds on his back had still been open and they tried to clean them properly.

"Figured it would come in handy some day, just didn't think it would be this quickly. I'll teach it to you both later."

"It's a handy spell indeed," Remus remarked as he carefully rubbed the ointment into James' skin, making the other sigh relieved as the effect was immediate.

Sirius had worked his way into his pyjama shirt before sighing as James held out the sling Madam Pomfrey had given them.

"Do I have to?"

"You heard her, that arm needs complete rest," he helped Sirius into it as Remus had to turn away not to laugh at the pout on his face.

"Why doesn't your arm need to be in a sling as well?"

"Because I overstrained it while casting spells around while they tried to take your wand arm out of commission," a sly smile spread over James' lips. "Too bad they didn't know you're ambidextrous."

"And ever so glad we decided to learn that," Sirius answered his smile with a similar one.

"You are both mental," shaking his head, Remus guided them back into their dorm, where a tray with food was waiting for them, and the meat already cut small as Tiffy had clearly anticipated their restricted mobility.

"Do you think she knows how much we love her?" James grinned as he bounced onto the bed, wincing as the moment jolted his muscles.

"You'd think he would have learned to be more careful by now," Sirius chuckled. "We'll send her chocolate for Christmas as a thank you."

He took more care to shuffle onto the bed, popping a Brussels Sprout into his mouth.

"I still can't believe you can stand to eat that," James grimaced.

"Iron rich food is important when you've been injured, something Tiffy clearly thought of as almost everything on here is rich in it," Sirius picked up some strawberries, handing some over to both of them.

"Roast beef contains iron as well, no need to eat Brussels Sprouts."

"Fair enough," Sirius reached out to pierce a piece of roast beef onto his fork, tensing as the movement strained his back.

"If the two of you could just be patient for a moment, I could place the tray onto the bed between us," Remus laughed, knowing that if he was hungry his friends had to be starving after all that activity.

"But we're hungry," James complained good-naturedly, making room so that the tray wouldn't be unbalanced as Remus joined them on the bed.

"Then eat, you starving monster, before you eat us instead," Sirius unsteadily picked up another
"I guess our fine motor skills will be put to the test this week," James eyed him. "We can fight with our non-dominant hands easily, but can we write?"

"We could also charm our quills to record what we're saying when we do our homework. I don't know about you, but I intent to be out of this thing by the time classes start again."

"You did hear Madam Pomfrey say no magic for a week, right?" Remus looked at his friends sternly, not surprised to see them both freeze.

"Do you think she'll find out about me magically drying us off?" Sirius asked sheepishly.

"Not if we don't use magic from now on," James collected both of their wands and placed them on the night-stand. "Remus can take care of any magical stuff this week."

"Sure, but after you're cleared to use magic again, we're picking up our training. I don't ever want to feel as useless as today again."

"You weren't exactly useless, Rem. That was one heck of a Protego you produced," Sirius complimented him.

"That was one moment of pure luck. I mean it, Siri. It is pathetic how limited my spell range is and my stamina really needs some work."

"Then we'll work on increasing both and add another training to our schedule," James decided.

"Do you think Peter will join us this time?"

"With exercise?" James snorted. "Only if it would be towards the kitchen."

"We need to work on that. I don't ever want to be forced to lock him in a cellar ever again."

"What does that have to do with him having to exercise?" Remus asked confused, surprised when Sirius looked down embarrassed.

"You locked him in there because you didn't think he'd be able to keep up with you, didn't you?" James' voice was soft but enough to make Sirius look up, eyes full of guilt.

"I feel horrible, but yes. I'd have felt better if I could have kept him at my side, but I needed to find you guys and ...well..."

"Peter's not made for quick moving," Remus sighed. "Well, we'll change that. We'll force him if we have to."

"Do you think he will be mad?"

"For saving his life?"

"No...I kind of shoved him down there with the others without a word and locked the latch before he could say anything."

"He might be a bit upset about that, yes," Remus acknowledged. "But you did it to save his life."

"And apparently thirty-two others. How on earth did you manage to squeeze them all in there?"
"I think it's a tunnel actually," Sirius admitted. "I was going to enlarge the space behind the staircase, but they kept moving further into the hole and I could fit them all in easily."

"A tunnel, huh?" James' eyes took on a curious glint. "Where do you think it leads?"

"I have no doubt that you'll want to find out in due time," Sirius said, suddenly groaning. "I haven't gotten a Christmas present for you yet. I had planned to get you that book you've been talking about at Tomes and Scrolls."

"Ancient History of the Maya Wizarding Culture?"

"That's the one. I couldn't order it at the Shop here as it is officially considered a work of fiction."

"I'm sure that if you talk to Madam Pomfrey, she'd be willing to pick up the order for you. Lots of students haven't been able to get their Christmas presents," James said.

"I'll stop by on Monday, unless you think she'll open extra tomorrow after what happened today?"

"I doubt Christmas presents are on anyone's mind but yours right now, Siri," Remus chuckled. "But I'll need to order something for you as well."

"Why don't we go together then?" Sirius yawned. 'I hope Pete will return quickly, I'm knackered."

"It might still be a while if he's coming with all the other students," Remus eyed his two friends. "Why don't the two of you take a nap while I wait for Peter?"

"Are you sure?" even as he spoke, Remus could see James had slipped down a little, eyes drooping and Sirius unsuccessfully tried to stifle a chuckle.

"I don't think you would be able to stay awake, even if you did try."

"Like you are any better," James shot back.

"At least my eyes are still open," Sirius laugh turned into another yawn that he hurriedly hid behind his hand.

"Yes, but for how long? Go get comfortable, I'll wake you in time for supper."

"I can't believe it is just barely past noon," Sirius worked himself underneath the comforter while Remus cleared away the leftover food, placing it in the cooled cupboard the house-elves had arranged for them at James' request when Sirius had been so ill earlier in the year. Although they had been ready to return it once Sirius had been on his feet again, the house-elves had told them to keep it as it would come in handy with their tendency to order take out on Saturday nights.

He was thankful for that now as it would keep the leftover food fresh longer than when they'd used spells, though he didn't think it would last long once Peter had returned.

"We did leave early this morning, and only visited a few shops before they attacked," Remus also cleared their purchases away while he was at it and picked up the potions Madam Pomfrey had given him. "Hey, don't for..."

The sight of two sleeping boys curled up together had him momentarily taken aback.

"I guess you were more exhausted than you let on," he whispered, straightening the comforter around them carefully and pushing a pillow behind Sirius so he couldn't roll onto his back, but neither boy so much at twitched.
Grabbing a book from their stock, he pulled a chair up beside the bed to keep vigil over them and wait for Peter to return.

With his enhanced hearing he was able to eventually hear the students return, discussing what had happened between them.

Thankful for the advanced and modified silencing charm James and Sirius had placed on their dorm, he moved to the door, knowing the students couldn't hear him move around.

He was saddened to learn three students had been killed in the initial explosion and two more during the fight.

But he knew it could've...would've been a lot worse without Sirius' quick thinking and both of their efforts.

He tensed as someone tried to come up to their dorm, but it quickly became clear the person couldn't come even near.

"There's a spell on the stairs, I can't even set a foot on them!" someone complained.

"What did you expect? There are two heirs to old Pure-Blood families living up there, there's no way there won't be extra protections on their dorm."

"We're all Gryffindors! What do they think we'll do?" the first snapped, clearly offended.

"Try to enter their dorm without permission, kind of what you just tried to do," the second dryly replied.

"I just wanted to see if they were there!"

"That's none of our business. Even if they were in there, you'd not stand a chance of getting in as they've shown just how capable of shielding they are," a third added.

Tuning out the bickering that followed, Remus returned to his chair, only to notice a single brown eye peering up at him.

"I had hoped they hadn't woken you."

"How long have I been asleep?" James made no attempt to move as Sirius was curled up against him, looking much like an oversized cat.

"Almost three hours, the students are just returning. How are you feeling?"

"Sore and tired," James yawned. "Pete back yet?"

"Not yet, he's still asleep?" Remus indicated to Sirius.

"Out like a light, I'm not surprised with all the potions she fed him and how much magic he's used," James' voice was still rough with sleep. "Heck, I feel like I could sleep for a week."

"You look like it, too," Remus laughed, tensing as he realised how loud the sound was, but Sirius didn't even stir.

"It's weird, he usually sleeps as light as a feather," James mused, his expression soft as he gazed down at the sleeping form at his side.
"James...what did Sirius say to you?" It was something Remus had wondered about, but hadn't been sure he wanted to know. "When you were put under the Cruciatus."

"He told me to curl my back and focus on shooting back any spell I could think of so I could break free, should it happen again," James' expression tightened. "Merlin...I can't even explain how much it hurts, and he's been put under it enough to build up a strategy against it."

"Put it to good use, too," Remus softly said, aware his voice was thick as he listened to James' words. "The way he was fighting, it was both terrifying and amazing."

"I know," James gave out a low chuckle. "And to think he doubted he'd be any good in a duel competition when he held his ground against Voldemort himself."

"Yeah," Remus bit his lip. "Same goes for you, you know?"

"Maybe I could talk him into entering it together," James mused as he shifted to get comfortable again.

"Are you kidding me? When word gets out, no one will ever dare to duel against you again," Remus exclaimed, taking care to keep his voice down.

"I somehow doubt that, we made quite a few enemies today."

"And gained quite a few admirers as well," Remus eyed him as James yawned once more. "Why don't you sleep some more? You're not going to be able to move any time soon anyway, so use it to your advantage."

"Yeah, but I feel bad about you. From the sound of it, you'll be just as restricted as we are, just in a different way."

"This is a very thick book and I have plenty of snacks and drinks," Remus nodded to the full cupboard. "I won't be bored so go back to sleep before he wakes up as well."

He wasn't surprised the threat worked as he'd known James wouldn't want to wake his best friend from the rest he so badly needed.

James was quick to settle again, not taking long to fall back asleep again as he was clearly still knackered.

As Remus resumed his vigil to keep watch and wait for Peter, he vowed that he would work as hard as he could so that if anything ever happened again, he would be fighting right alongside his friends instead of being protected.

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