

## Chance

A Harry Potter FanFic by Duva (aka Tove)

Sometimes, I really don't get the way people think. Really, I mean that. Two times in my life, I have saved someone else's, and what did that do?

Make them dislike me.

Now, call me naive, but I was under the impression that saving someone's life was going to earn you at least a 'thank you'. But not in my case, apparently.

The first person I saved from a premature death was Lily Evans. Way back when I could still talk to her without being scared out of my mind.

She was *The One*, you see. I would look at her, and all the other girls would just... pale. But this occurred before that. Back when I still thought girls were worse than vermin. More precisely, our second year.

It had all been a very stupid idea to begin with. I can't remember whose stupid idea, but it was probably Sirius's. He had a certain knack for stupid ideas. Anyway, someone had come up with the clever idea of sneaking out onto the roof, with the school brooms, to have a friendly little tournament of Swivenhodge. Gryffindor first years versus Gryffindor second years.

We should have realised right away that it wasn't a good idea. To start with, we didn't have a hedge to play over. The solution? Make the people who were not currently playing act as one. And yet more stupid ' we didn't have a decent ball to play with. So we'd used a bludger instead.

You can all see where I'm going with this, can't you?

She was lucky I was the one who was currently on a broom, whooping some poor first year's butt, because I'm not sure anyone else would have been able to catch her in time. She hadn't been too happy when I informed her of this, though. In fact, I think her exact words were 'insufferable big-head'.

Thinking about it, that could have been the moment she stopped being worse than vermin and became *The One*. But that doesn't really matter, does it?

The second person I saved was someone far less likeable. So were the circumstances.

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Looking back on it, I saw it as a breaking point. Our lives had all changed that day. Innocence had been lost, friendships had been strained.

It had made us grow up.

Funny, I thought to myself, that it had only been a few months ago.

It had done more than just make us grow up; it had forced us to grow up. A stupid prank, a rash statement, and it had nearly ended in tragedy. Of course it had changed us.

Peter had stopped blindly following me and Sirius around. No longer blind with admiration, he would look upon us as we really were, complete with all of our faults.

Remus had learnt how to put his foot down. He was no longer afraid to tell us off when he thought we were going too far. It had taken him quite a while to forgive Sirius, not to mention the time it had taken him to forgive himself.

Sirius had wallowed in guilt for a long time, wondering what would have happened if no one had stepped in. He had become less reckless, considering the consequences more than he had before. Of course, this didn't mean much, as he was still about twice as rash as a normal person, but still. It was something.

And I had realised, maybe for the first time, that I wasn't invincible. That even though I might not always agree with certain people, their opinions still counted and they should be respected.

Yes, I thought, sitting in the dark, deserted Common Room, on a late evening at the end of June. I had grown up. When I looked back upon the person I had been before, I was ashamed. Despite all of my regrets for the incident ever happening at all... I was kind of glad that it had. That something had made us all realise exactly just how full of ourselves we had been.

I was glad that I wasn't the person I had been before.

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Who had I been before then, you ask. Well... I was still the person I had always been. James Potter, born and raised outside of Nottingham, an only child, somewhat spoiled by my loving parents. Someone with a head full of way too messy black hair and terribly bad eyesight. A proud Gryffindor who would do anything for his friends.

Unfortunately, I had also been a bit of an idiot.

I'm quite willing to admit this. Up until the middle of my sixth year, I had been a complete moron. I don't really like talking about it; I'm not proud of it, after all.

In fact, I'm ashamed of it.

I had been too sure of myself. Too proud of my talents, too full of myself.

Way too arrogant.

And so had Sirius. Now, don't get me wrong. Sirius Black is my best friend in the entire world. He's closer to me than I suspect most brothers are. But, let's face it, he had been arrogant too. Arrogant and angry. Not a good combination.

Sirius and I met way back in our first year. Before the first year had even started, in fact. I don't know why, but we just clicked instantly. Sometimes that happens. It was the same thing with Lily Evans.

Unfortunately, in that case the clicking seemed to be pretty one-sided. But that's not the point here. After all, I'm talking about Sirius, not Lily. It's just that she has a sneaky way of showing up in the midst of my thoughts, no matter what they originally were about. Now, where was I?

Ah, yes. Sirius and I. Instant connection. Best friends and all of that jazz. We were alike in many ways; both of us pure-bloods, both of us with a good head for learning, both of us too sure of our abilities. However, his background was very different from mine. While I came from a loving home with encouraging parents, his was a home filled with insults and disparagements.

It had left him angry. Angry with his parents, angry with himself, angry with the world. I think maybe that was why he chose to believe in himself so much: no one else really would. Either way, he had a lot of anger built up inside of him. And he had never been one to think through the consequences of his actions.

Remus Lupin was almost the exact opposite of Sirius. We had befriended him a few weeks into our first year, despite his initial shyness. He was cool and logical, and far from being arrogant, he thought way too little of himself.

He also happened to be a werewolf.

Now, he couldn't exactly help this, could he? He had been bitten as a very small boy, and he lived in constant regret of the fact that he had been so reckless.

You know, speaking of reckless, that really ought to have been Sirius's middle name. But sometimes his recklessness had been a good thing. Without it, we probably would never have become Animagi. Me, Sirius and Peter Pettigrew.

Peter was the last one out of the group that I became friends with. If Remus was shy, it was nothing compared to Peter. Still, once we got him talking, he turned out to be someone who would always listen to what you had to say. Maybe he wasn't very independent, but he was a good friend.

Ah, what a group we were.

By now, you're probably wondering what all of this has to do with the second time I saved someone's life,

right? I'm getting to it.

It had happened on a cold night in the early November of our sixth year. The full moon had been up; Remus had already been tucked away safely in the Shrieking Shack, we were to join him later that night, and Sirius had just had a particularly nasty fight with his younger brother, Regulus. On his way back to the Gryffindor tower, he had run into his least favourite person. At school, at least ' I'm pretty sure his mother was his least favourite person in the world. Either way, he had run into someone he'd rather have avoided. Especially at that moment.

Severus Snape, with his greasy hair and obsession with the Dark Arts. Our sworn enemy. And he had asked Sirius where Remus was. He must have been on to something by then; how could he not have been, having read all of those Dark Arts books? And Sirius, in his anger, had told Snape how to find out for himself.

When he came back and told us what he had done, I had reacted instantly. Now, don't misunderstand. It wasn't that I was all that eager to risk my life for old Snivellus, though I certainly didn't want him dead, however much I despised him. Mostly, it was for the sake of my friends.

So, I had caught up with him, and I had rescued him. When I'd gotten back to the Gryffindor tower, Snape had already told Dumbledore about what had happened, and Sirius's actions had caught up with him, and he had been sitting, pale and trembling, in an armchair right by the door, waiting for me.

A lot was said that night. Even more was said during the days that followed. Sirius was given enough detention to last him all through the year, and an official reprimand was put in his record. As for Remus, he was disgusted with himself for what could have happened, and handed in his prefect's badge the next evening.

Guess who they gave it to?

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Of course, some things never changed. I still loathed Severus Snape, and the feeling was still mutual, now more than ever. I chuckled silently to myself as I stared into the flickering flames. Funny how saving someone's life would make that someone despise you even more. Soft footsteps from behind made me turn my head. My heart skipped a beat when I saw who it was.

'What are you doing?' a soft female voice asked, falling silent as I turned around. 'Oh, it's you,' she said in a harder tone.

I tried to smile, but somehow my mind would never quite work the way I wanted it to around her. It hadn't for the longest of times; I could hardly even remember a time when I had been able to talk to her without a nervous flutter in my stomach. Not her, not witty, elegant, charming, intelligent, compassionate, beautiful Lily Evans. I always made a fool out of myself around her.

'What are you doing up, Potter?' she asked in the same tone. I shrugged.

'Just thinking.'

'About yourself?' she asked, rather harshly, and I chuckled again.

'Yes, actually.'

She shook her head. 'Figures.' I shrugged again. 'You should be in bed, you know,' she added. 'The train leaves early tomorrow.'

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The train, yes. It was the last day of term, and we were all going home over the summer. I never really liked the train ride. I wouldn't admit it to anyone, but I always did get a bit travel-sick on it. There wasn't much to be done about that, however, and the next day, I boarded the train along with everyone else. It was my first train ride as a prefect, and although it did have certain good points (like getting to sit in the same compartment as Lily Evans, who was the other Gryffindor prefect in our year, for over an hour), I still much preferred travelling with my friends.

So, after listening to the Head Boy drone on and on and on (what was there to talk about? All we had to do was to make sure that no one caused mayhem on the train ride, that should be easy enough to understand,

right? I think he just liked the sound of his own voice. Or maybe he was just making the most out of his last duty as Head Boy.) I went back to my friends, who were sitting in a compartment near the end of the train, apparently playing Exploding Snap.

'Hey,' I said as I entered, sitting down next to Sirius.

'Prefect meeting fun?' Remus asked. I shrugged, and he laughed a little. 'Yeah, I know what you mean,' he said.

'Never mind boring old prefect meetings, are you ready for an entire summer with the one and only me?' Sirius asked, grinning. I shook my head. Sirius was coming home with me. He had shown up at our doorstep on Christmas Eve in our fifth year, carrying what looked like most of his possessions, and had refused to go back home. I can't say that I blamed him. I wouldn't have wanted to live in his house, either. In fact, I was pretty much thrilled that he was now living with me. Being an only child could get very boring. However, I couldn't exactly tell him this. His head would most likely inflate so much that it risked exploding.

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So, after a very uneventful train ride, we arrived in London, where my mum was waiting to pick us up. We went back to my house, and we did absolutely nothing. That's what you're supposed to do on your summer holidays, after all. Sure, we did some homework, played some Quidditch, caused a little mayhem, but most of the time we just lazed around the house, doing whatever we felt like. In Sirius's case, this included a lot of working on the motorbike he had purchased the previous summer. He was trying to make it fly, or something equally intelligent. Told you he had a knack for stupid ideas. I mean, a flying motorbike? How was he supposed to ride that thing undetected? Anyway, while Sirius was working on said disaster waiting to happen er, I mean, motorbike, I did a lot of thinking. Mostly about, you guessed it, Lily Evans.

Now, as I said, I couldn't pinpoint the exact moment when Lily Evans became the object of my affection, for lack of a better term. I had known her since first year, naturally, as we were in both the same house and the same year. We had never really spent any time together, though, apart from classes ' I had my friends, and she had hers. However, I had always liked her ' she was always nice to everyone, and was just all around likeable. Then, sometime way back, I became very aware of the fact that she was also drop dead gorgeous. She had this deep, dark red hair past her shoulders, and the most brilliantly green eyes I had ever seen. Add that to a face like a Veela and a body to die for (er, not that I checked out her body or anything!) and you've got one seriously beautiful girl. From there, it just spiralled. I started getting this fuzzy feeling in my stomach whenever I saw her, and all I wanted was for her to notice me. Problem was, she didn't seem to. I mean, obviously she was aware of my existence, but she didn't seem to think of me as anything but a fellow student. So, I had to come up with ways to get her to notice me, naturally. Which brings me to problem number two.

I was an idiot around her. My mind just went blank whenever she was around, and all I could think about was that there had to be some way to get her to notice me, to see me as I saw her.

She had loathed me for my efforts.

Well, at least she had noticed me. But not in the way I would have wanted her to. Instead of making her like me, it had made her think of me as a pathetic, bullying little cretin. That wasn't exactly what I had aimed for. I mean, she could at least have given me a chance. I was fifteen, I didn't know how to impress girls! I tried in every way imaginable, but none of them seemed to impress her very much.

Now, this brings us up to the present time. To another thing that had changed in the last few months. I no longer wanted to prove myself to her, I didn't want to try to impress her.

I wanted her to like me for who I was.

Still, this was pretty hard, considering that a) she wouldn't talk to me if she could avoid it, and b) the fact that I still found myself at a complete loss for words whenever she actually *would* talk to me.

I had been thinking a lot about the subject lately. Long, sleepless nights spent in front of the Common Room fire, thinking of nothing but her. I had hoped that once summer started, and I got away from her, I would be able to get my mind off of her. However, it was already two weeks into the holidays, and no such luck yet. Something had to be done, because I was going quite insane. So, I had come up with a solution.

It was time to let go.

Unfortunately, my heart didn't quite agree with my head.

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The whole letting go project lasted about a week. During that week, I spent half of my awake time thinking about her, and the other half trying not to. It was a hopeless situation. Obviously, the letting go was not happening. I couldn't stay in this... limbo, though. Either I had to let go, or get closer. And since plan A wasn't working, I really didn't see any solution but to try to get closer. I mean, I was a decent bloke, I had brains, I wasn't a total troll, there was no reason that she *shouldn't* like me. Well, maybe the part about me doing a lot of idiotic things to try to impress her, but come on! It was all for a good cause.

About three days into the planning of Plan B, Sirius figured out what I was doing. It didn't matter that I tried to tell him that I was not thinking about Lily Evans, he always could see right through me.

'Poor, love-sick Prongs,' he said dramatically, flipping himself down on my bed, motor grease all over his clothes.

'Shut up,' I mumbled, going all red. Great. An idiot covering my sheets in grease was going to have a laugh at my expense.

Sirius looked at me, tilting his head a little to the side. 'I wasn't teasing you, James,' he said without a trace of humour on his face. 'I hope you know by now that I wouldn't do that. I don't want you to feel as though you can't tell me about this.'

He was right, of course. After all, he was closer than a brother to me. He had, naturally, known about my infatuation since maybe before even I did, but he had never really mentioned it, apart from little remarks that never failed to make me blush. Sure, Sirius was a joker, but he could also be very serious, and he would never have done anything to hurt me or any of our other friends, he was fearfully loyal.

He also happened to have more experience in the female field than I did. I mean, sure, I had snogged a few girls, but nothing more serious than that, despite what certain rumours might say. And Sirius... well, Sirius hadn't particularly done a lot more than snogging, either, but he had snogged a whole of a lot more girls than I had. More than most people our age, I would say. I couldn't really say I blamed him, I mean, girls practically threw themselves at his feet. Even I, as a very straight male, could see that Sirius was pretty damn good-looking.

Anyway, all discussions of Sirius's hotness aside, he had helped me come up with a plan. The thing was, I didn't really know all that much about Lily Evans. I knew that she was Muggle-born, that her favourite subject was Charms, that she liked reading thick books and that she had a strong sense of justice, but I really didn't know what she liked doing in her spare time, what her taste in potential love interests were, or, horror, if she had a boyfriend. So Sirius had told me to go for an old classic: ask one of her friends about it.

Now, we were on our holidays, which complicated matters a bit, and I simply could not wait the four weeks it would take us to get back to school. I had to owl someone. So far, Sirius could help me. But then I was on my own again, and I ran into some trouble.

I had no idea of who to ask.

I knew who her best friend was, of course. Ever since third year, she had been practically attached to the hip to a tall Ravenclaw named Dorcas Meadowes. Normally, I would just have asked her, seeing as how she was the closest one to Lily and all that. However, I somewhat knew Dorcas from the prefect meetings, and she always struck me as kind of... strict. She looked very professional, with short, immaculate dark brown hair, and I knew that she was one of the smartest witches at school, with excellent skills in Defence Against the Dark Arts. There were rumours flying around school that the Ministry had approached her even before we took our OWL's, practically begging her to be an Auror, and it wouldn't have surprised me one bit if that was true. She didn't seem like the kind of person who would help a poor lad win her best friend over; more like someone who would give me a good kick in the crotch for asking. It had to be one of her other friends.

Faye Oldham was a fellow Gryffindor and had been friends with Lily ever since first year, but she wasn't even a candidate. I had gone on a date with her once, in early sixth year, and it was horrendous. Nothing, I mean absolutely nothing, in common. It would be too awkward asking her.

She was only friends with one other seventh year Gryffindor apart from Faye, and that was Catriona Bauer. Cat was on the Quidditch team with me, and while she was nice enough, she just seemed too... tomboy-ish, or something, to be of any assistance in this case.

Michaela McCullough, in Hufflepuff, was another of her close friends. I did not know Michaela beyond being able to attach a face to the name, and for the fact that she had spent a good deal of fifth year drooling over Sirius, only to realise that he really wasn't her type when she had finally worked up the courage to ask him out in sixth year. She seemed like someone who would understand my situation, though, and like someone who would take pity on a poor, lovesick chap like me. She was a definite option.

The other definite option was a sixth year Gryffindor named Sadie Alexander. I didn't know much about her either. Sirius knew her parents, they were, apparently, very much like his own, and Sadie was every bit as much of a 'blood traitor' as he was, always a good sign. She always seemed like a nice, easy-going girl to me, and that was enough, really.

So, it had to be one of them. Michaela or Sadie. Now I only had to figure out what to say. I mean, I couldn't exactly write a letter saying, *"Hi, you don't really know me, but I fancy Lily Evans and I know that you're her friend so would you please consider letting me know if she has a boyfriend and if she doesn't, do you think there's any chance she'd ever go out with me? Love from James."* I mean, they'd think I was a right nutter. It needed to be carefully planned.

After a few days of closely thinking through my options, I had decided to ask Sadie about it, and after a few more days, I had come up with something decent to write as well. Once I had gathered up my nerve, I had sent it. However, it had taken her almost two weeks to reply. During those two weeks, I had walked around feeling constantly nauseous, and even helping Sirius with his motorbike hadn't helped take my mind off it. The Thursday two weeks before school started, though, her reply had arrived, and I had torn it open with shaking fingers.

*"Potter,"* it said, *"thank you very much for your letter, it gave me a right old laugh. May I ask why you don't simply ask Lily herself? She probably wouldn't kill you, though I can't make any promises. However, since you asked nicely, no, she doesn't have a boyfriend. The rest you will have to find out on your own, though. Sincerely, S. Alexander."*

Damn it. I knew I should have chosen Michaela McCullough.

She didn't have a boyfriend, though. That was a good thing. A very good thing. As for finding out the rest myself... I probably could do that. There was something else in the mail that day, you see. Something that greatly helped me in my pursuit of Lily Evans's affection. A shiny, gleaming Head Boy badge, accompanied by a letter telling me that she was none other than Head Girl.

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'Who did you bribe with what?' My head flew up at the voice.

'Hi, Evans, nice to see you too,' I said, smiling. 'Congratulations on making Head Girl.'

She sighed. 'I guess I should say the same to you.'

I shook my head. 'No need, I'm not Head Girl.'

She rolled her eyes. 'You know what I mean, Potter,' she said, flipping her hair over her shoulder. I suddenly found it a little hard to breathe. 'But, as I was saying, who did you threaten in order to get this position?'

'I'm as surprised as you are,' I replied. It was the truth. I was still amazed at the fact.

'Maybe Dumbledore has finally cracked,' she said, but there was a small smile on her face. 'Right, I'd better get back to my friends. See you in the prefect's carriage later.'

It was the first day of term, and I was standing on Platform 9¾, waiting for Sirius who was away doing God knows what. I stared a little at the retreating form of Lily Evans. She really did have the ability to turn my brains into mush, now more than ever.

'Prongs!' A voice suddenly came from behind me, and I whipped around. Sirius was back, accompanied by Remus.

'Padfoot tells me you're Head Boy,' Remus said as a means of greeting, eyeing the badge on my chest. I nodded. Tilting his head, he said, 'Just who the hell did you bribe - and with what?'

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After the feast that night, I had figured out a few things. The first one was that I definitely preferred being Head Boy to being a prefect. (And being able to boss over Snape again was only part of the reason!) I also knew that I liked working with Lily Evans. When I could put a coherent sentence together, that was. As long as she didn't look at me, I usually didn't have a problem.

The first few weeks passed without much happening. I was insanely busy, with Head Boy duties, Quidditch practice and NEWT revising, and life was pretty much as dull as the weather.

On a grey, foggy Thursday at the end of September, I was sitting, as usual, in the Great Hall with the prefects, discussing this and that. I wasn't paying much attention to the meeting, however. I was staring, quite intently, at a sixth year Hufflepuff prefect, who in his turn was staring just as intently at Lily Evans.

Alright, people weren't supposed to be staring at Lily Evans in prefect meetings. Only I was supposed to do that.

It was making me surprisingly angry, watching that bloke watching her. By the time she announced that the meeting was over a few minutes later, I was fuming, and had decided to show that little creep that he wasn't the only one who found her pleasant to look at. I glanced up at the ceiling. It was grey, yes, but it wasn't raining.

'Evans!' I called, getting out of my seat. She was nearly by the door, but at my voice, she turned around and walked back into the room. Most of the prefects had already left, but there were some of them left, including the staring Hufflepuff.

'Yes?' she asked, crossing her arms across her chest. I suddenly got very nervous. This was not a good idea.

I couldn't exactly back out now, though, could I?

'Er, I was just wondering if you'd fancy a stroll around the lake,' I said quickly, stumbling a little over the words.

I could tell from her reaction that she didn't think this was a very good idea, either. She furrowed her brows together, crossing her arms more tightly. 'Are you asking me out?'

I was very aware of the Hufflepuff - Stephen Welsh; I think his name was - looking at me with something closely resembling amusement in his eyes. 'Er, yeah,' I mumbled, staring angrily at Welsh, who seemed to get the clue and scurried out of the Great Hall.

'No, Potter, I will not go out with you,' Lily said tiredly. My heart sank. The anger I had felt towards Welsh seemed to increase by a couple of thousand percent.

'Fine!' I snapped. 'Fine. I'm a horrible person, and you'll never go out with me, I get it.' I turned to stomp out of the Great Hall, the anger now mixed with embarrassment.

'I might have considered it if I didn't know *why* you want to go out with me,' Lily said.

'Oh, you know the reason, do you?' I asked, not turning around to look at her or stopping. I did slow down a bit, though.

'Yes, I do,' she said quietly, in a voice quite unlike the confident one she usually talked in. 'It bugs you that I'm probably the only girl who has turned you down.'

I froze. Did she just say what I think she just said? I turned around to meet her gaze, without even bothering to try to hide the disbelief in my eyes. 'Is that what you think?'

She shrugged. I didn't avert my gaze, but she did. She was staring down at the floor, and I had no idea of what to say. The anger from earlier and the disbelief I had felt at her words had completely vanished, leaving only one thing behind.

Hurt.

How could she think that? I wouldn't... I'd never... I needed to tell her this, that she'd gotten it all wrong, but I couldn't seem to find my voice.

'I'd never do that.'

Ah, there it was. Too bad I ended up sounding like a three year old who had just lost his favourite toy. Oh well, you couldn't have everything. She didn't look at me when she answered. 'Why, then?'

'It doesn't matter.' She looked up at me at this, tilting her head quizzically.

This time, it was I who wouldn't look at her. Shit, what had I gotten myself into? 'You're different,' I said very quietly, staring intently at my shoelaces.

'Different?'

I gave a deep sigh and locked my gaze with hers. Better do it fast and painless. 'I can group the girls I have dated into two categories,' I said harshly. 'The first one is the ones who only want to go out with me because I'm a decent Quidditch player. They'll talk to me, listen to me, but once I mention something unrelated to Quidditch, they become uninterested. They don't care about me as a person; they only care about me as a "the Quidditch star".' I drew a deep breath. Why was I telling her this? What good could possibly come from it? 'And the other is the ones who will only go out with me to get Sirius's attention.'

Lily's mouth fell open. 'People *do* that?'

I gave a short, humourless laugh. 'Oh, yeah. Remember Tara Wells? Once she had talked to him, she wouldn't waste any more time on me.'

'And Sirius is okay with that?' Lily asked, incredulous.

I scowled. 'Of course not! He'd never do anything that he thought would hurt me.' How could she even think that?

A heavy silence fell over us once again.

'And I'm... different?' Lily finally asked. I gave a curt nod. 'How?' she asked.

I laughed then. She looked surprised at my reaction. 'How?' I asked, not believing what she had just said. 'How are you not? You don't care about *what* a person is - it's *who* they are that matters to you. Not looks or talent, but the person inside.' Lily blushed at my words, and it took me a moment to recover enough from this to be able to go on talking. 'You're fair. You're intelligent. You have humour. You're interesting to talk to. I find you intriguing; I always have.' I glanced over at her, having avoided her eyes as I spoke. 'That's why you're different.' She opened her mouth to speak, but no words came out. That was just as well, because I had finally caught up with what it was I was telling her, and all I wanted to do was to run away. What was the *matter* with me? I sighed again. 'But none of that matters,' I said very softly.

'It doesn't?' Lily asked, apparently caught off guard by my words.

'No.'

'Why not?'

'Because,' I said, starting to walk towards the door again, 'you won't even give me a chance.' I opened the door. 'And I'll accept that,' I said as I exited, trying very hard to force myself not to run.

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My mood didn't exactly improve in the following days. I had never felt so down because of Lily Evans before, and that was saying something. It wasn't even the fact that she had turned me down once more that was the worst part - it was what she had thought of me that hurt. She seemed to have me painted up as some sort of a Casanova, dating every girl in the school.

How wrong could you possibly get?

It was true, what I had told her about my dating experience. It hadn't taken me long to figure it out, and once I had, I had kind of lost interest in dating. Of course, the fact that I was completely besotted with Lily hadn't helped, either. I had dated few enough girls to be able to count them on my fingers, and even less of them had ever come back for a second date. I had never had a proper girlfriend; my record was when I had dated a girl for a little over three weeks back in fifth year. What an accomplishment, eh? So, where this Casanova

image came from, I had no idea. It was stupid, and it was as far from the truth as you could get. In fact, it was pretty ridiculous. I wasn't even interested in any other girls.

I wasn't too happy when I came walking into the common room one late evening in early October, my Quidditch robes dripping from the rain outside, completely worn out, and noticed a big, yellow paper posted on the wall.

It could only be announcing one thing, and, sure enough, it told me that the first Hogsmeade weekend of the year was coming up.

Just what I needed. To go into the village, swarming with happy couples, and, if I was really lucky, get to see Lily Evans on a date with Stephen Welsh.

No, thanks.

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So, when weekend arrived, I stayed at the castle sulking, while my friends trotted off to Hogsmeade. Sirius had a date (something that didn't make me feel the least bit happier) and Remus and Peter were just going to fill up on our stocks from Zonko's.

I had sat inside for a while, even after finishing my mountain of homework, but the weather outside was calling to me. I was even finding it hard to sulk when it was such a lovely day. The sun was out, illuminating the yellows and reds of the leaves, and there didn't seem to be any wind at all.

After careful consideration, I grabbed my cloak and walked out onto the grounds. There were some younger students milling around the castle, but all of the higher classes seemed to be either inside or in Hogsmeade. Just as well; though my mood had lightened a little due to the weather, I still didn't particularly feel like talking to anyone.

I started walking around the lake. I had always liked it out here; it was so peaceful. Not many people seemed to come here, either, which was an added bonus. I wasn't expecting to meet anyone, which was why it came as a bit of a shock when someone behind me quite distinctively said 'Hi.'

Of course, it just had to be Lily Evans. Naturally. I mean, who else would it be? I dragged a nervous hand through my hair. 'Hi.'

'Nice day, isn't it?' she asked, catching up to me and starting to walk beside me. I glanced at her. Her cheeks were a bit red from the cold, and her hair was the exact same shade as the autumn leaves above us.

'Lovely,' I agreed, not taking my eyes away from her face. 'What are you doing out here?'

'Oh, Dumbledore needed someone to watch over the first years and I volunteered,' she said. 'They have all gone inside, though, so there isn't much left for me to do.' I chuckled a little, and she looked up at me.

'What about you? How come you aren't in Hogsmeade?' she asked, those damn eyes of hers boring into mine. I really couldn't think when she did that.

'Huh?' I asked intelligibly. Great. Now I had been reduced to one-syllable words. Fantastic. She quirked a brow at me.

'Hogsmeade. Today. Why aren't you there?'

'Oh,' I answered. Still a one syllable word. 'I didn't have anyone to go with.'

'Your friends?'

'I didn't fancy going with my friends,' I mumbled.

She laughed then. 'Oh, come on. You're trying to tell me you couldn't get a date?'

'Well, I'm glad you think so highly of me,' I said, chuckling. 'If you must know, I didn't try.'

'To get a date?'

I nodded. She wrinkled her brow, looking at me questioningly. 'Why not?'

I sighed. Was she really this dense, or did she just enjoy tormenting me? 'Because there's only one girl I would like to take to Hogsmeade.'

She looked down at the ground, a smile playing over her lips. I'm glad the situation was entertaining to someone. 'Why didn't you ask me, then?' she asked, grinning up at me. She actually *grinned* at me. Oh, sweet torture.

'There are only so many times a guy can be turned down without getting the point,' I told her. She laughed a little.

'Oh? And how many times would that be?'

'Thirty-six.'

'You've kept count?'

'Of course,' I replied, acting as though this was the most obvious thing in the world. 'I have even sorted the rejections into different categories. There are your regular refusals, the ones where you don't even answer, and, my personal favourite, those that come with an insult or two.'

She actually laughed then. Not one of her usual little half-laughs, but a full, throaty laughter. This fact had barely registered in my head when she did something even more unexpected.

She reached over and grabbed my arm.

She. Grabbed. Me. Lily Evans grabbed me. And it didn't end with grabbing, either. 'Come on,' she said as she tugged gently at the sleeve of my robes, voice still full with laughter.

'Where?' I managed to croak out, though I have to admit, anywhere would have been fine with me just then.

'Hogsmeade,' she said and linked her arm with mine, starting to lead me off towards the village. I gaped at her.

'What are you doing?'

She looked up at me, smiling, and I had to concentrate very hard on the task of walking to keep from tripping over my own robes. When she answered, it was in a soft voice, her serious tone tinged with playfulness.

'I'm giving you a chance.'

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It was funny; when we were sitting in the Three Broomsticks about half an hour later, my bad mood had completely vanished. In fact, I was feeling happier than I had in a very long time. It could have something to do with the fact that Lily Evans was sitting right across the table from me, smutting a Butterbeer, and telling me about herself.

'Yeah, my sister is pretty awful,' she said, chuckling. 'She's quite a bit older than me, and she doesn't like magic.' I looked questioningly at her. 'Alright, that was an understatement. She thinks I'm a freak.'

'What?' I asked, appalled. Lily smiled at my reaction.

'Yeah, I know. To tell you the truth, though, she's the freak. She's nearly thirty and she's getting quite desperate about not being married yet. She still lives with our parents.' She laughed at this, and I joined in.

'Your sister sounds almost as nice as Sirius's brother,' I said, chuckling. At her puzzled look, I added, 'Slimy little Slytherin fourth year. Rotten.' She nodded in understanding.

'What about you? Any awful siblings?'

I shook my head. 'Only child.'

'Ah, lucky,' she smiled.

'I guess,' I replied. 'Sirius lives with me though, and he's got enough crazy relatives to fill the entire world.'

Lily looked interested. 'I always wondered... that insanely scary girl in Slytherin? The one with the long dark hair? Her name's Black, isn't it?' I nodded. 'She's his sister?'

'Bellatrix?' Lily shrugged. 'Nah, not quite that bad. Cousin. She *is* scary, though.'

She laughed again. 'I know a few first years who have had nightmares about her. Recurring ones.' We laughed both laughed at this.

'You're not scary, though,' she said suddenly, smiling at me, and I felt my face go red. I had been having such a nice time talking to her that I had almost forgotten how nervous I got when she looked at me. 'You're actually quite nice; who would've known?' I laughed again at this.

'Thanks, Evans, I'll take that as a compliment,' I said, trying to sound confident. 'You're not too bad yourself. Although you are kind of scary.'

Lily raised her eyebrows. 'I'm scary?'

'Yup.'

She looked both amused and confused at the same time. 'Why?'

I shrugged a little. 'You just are. But you're not scary in a Bellatrix way. You're scary in a good way.'

'There's such a thing as being scary in a good way?' Lily asked, apparently very amused at my words. My stomach fluttered a little.

'Of course there is. Like a haunted house,' I explained, watching her eyebrows rise higher.

'I'm like a haunted house? I'm not quite sure I like the sound of this. Maybe I should be offended,' she said, but there was amusement in her eyes.

'Haunted houses are scary in a thrilling way,' I said. 'They scare you, but at the same time, you're excited, and once you know you'll get out of it alive, they are really quite a pleasant experience.'

She looked at me, her head tilted for a moment, then broke into a smile. 'You have a way with words, Potter,' she said, and I know for sure that I blushed then. All I had done was saying the first thing that had popped into my head; I was just glad that for once it hadn't made her upset.

'So,' she said, drinking the last of her Butterbeer, 'does this mean we'll be visiting the Shrieking Shack after this?'

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When I entered the common room that evening, Sirius, Remus and Peter had all gotten back, and were sitting around a table near the fire.

'Where've you been?' Peter asked as I walked over towards them.

'Hogsmeade,' I said, plopping myself down on the couch next to Remus.

Sirius scowled. 'What a mate you are, eh?' I gave him a very puzzled look. 'We all decided that we couldn't leave you here in that ruddy awful mood, so we have been back here, looking for you since early afternoon, and you have been in Hogsmeade all this time? I'm hurt,' he said, looking at me with decidedly fake hurt puppy eyes. I smiled.

'Thanks, guys, I appreciate the gesture,' I said, standing up. 'It was just such a lovely day; I couldn't bear to spend it in this old castle.' As I walked towards the dormitory door, their puzzled voices drifted past me.

'What is the matter with him?' Remus asked in awe.

'Multiple personalities?' Peter offered.

'PMS?' Remus suggested.

'Lily Evans,' Sirius said, and I smiled. He really did know me better than I knew myself.

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'Hiya,' came a perky voice and the couch I was sitting on sagged a little. I raised an eyebrow.

'Hi, Alexander,' I said, as she dropped her books on the table in front of us. I was sitting in the common room, taking care of some of the more unpleasant things you had to do as Head Boy. Of course, there was an advantage to this as well - Lily Evans was sitting in an armchair on the opposite side of the table. The small blonde shook her head violently.

'You can call me Sadie, now that we're almost friends and everything.'

I stared at her, perplexed. I hadn't talked to Sadie ever since the incident with the letter that summer. Lily seemed to be thinking the same thing, though hopefully, she didn't know anything about said letter.

'Friends?' she asked. 'Is there something that I missed?' I shrugged.

'Oh well, you know, you two are friends now, and I'm her friend, so by default, that makes us friends as well,' Sadie explained while rummaging through her book bag. Lily and I looked at each other in amusement. Sure, we had been spending more time together ever since we had been in Hogsmeade a few weeks ago, but all that time had been spent working. We hardly qualified as friends.

'You're off your rocker, Sades,' Lily said, smiling. My stomach churned. Every time I spent time with Lily Evans, I discovered something new I liked about her. It was becoming a bit annoying, really. I could hardly concentrate on anything else anymore. 'Anyway, Potter, I promised I'd help Sadie with her Arithmancy homework, so could we continue this tomorrow?'

'Sure,' I said, gathering my things and standing up. 'See you then.' She smiled at me, and it took me a minute to remember that I was supposed to be leaving.

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'Oh, for crying out loud!' Sirius said loudly, smacking me in the head. A few heads turned to look at us, but Sirius either did not notice or did not care.

'What?' I asked, though I already knew the answer.

'Would you stop the staring, it's getting pathetic,' he said, helping himself to a piece of bread. I gave him an angry glare. The Great Hall during dinner was hardly the place or time for this discussion. Good thing most people hadn't gotten here yet.

'I wasn't staring,' I muttered under my breath. Sirius simply gave me a stare that quite sincerely told me that yes, I had been staring. Could you blame me? Lily Evans had just walked in to the Great Hall, devoid of company and looking simply fantastic. I was entitled to stare. 'I wasn't!' I said again, but fell quiet as she approached the place where we were sitting.

'Hi,' she said simply, sitting down opposite Sirius and next to Peter.

'No friends today, Evans?' Sirius asked, without bothering to swallow his bread. I gave him a swift little kick under the table; he whimpered, and Lily gave him an odd look.

'Actually, I came down early to talk to Potter here,' she said, and my heart gave a leap. Me? She wanted to talk to me?

'Really?' Sirius said in a suggestive tone, and I kicked him once again, harder this time. 'Ow! Dammit!' he yelped.

'Sorry, Sirius, my foot must've slipped,' Remus quickly said, and I gave him a silent thank you.

'Er, what did you want to talk to me about?' I asked, ignoring the look that Lily was once again giving Sirius.

'Oh, I just needed to discuss some school business with you,' she said, drinking a bit of pumpkin juice. I

sighed. School business. Of course.

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Don't get me wrong. It was lovely to be spending some time with Lily Evans. Wonderful, in fact. However, I was beginning to fear that this was as far as we were going to get. Sure, she didn't think I was an immature prat anymore, but she didn't seem to think much about me at all either. I sighed. I was sitting in the library, working on the same thing I had been working on the previous afternoon when Sadie Alexander had interrupted me. That was what Lily had wanted to talk to me about; she had been given a huge essay to finish by tomorrow and could not make it to our appointment, and had asked me if I could please finish it by myself. She had promised to do it all next month, but I knew that was never going to happen. I valued working with her too much to give it up, even if it would mean less work for me. With a sigh of relief, I slammed the thick book I had been writing in shut, earning me a stern look from the librarian. Exiting the library, I yawned and looked at my watch. It was already past ten and I still had homework to do.

I gave the password to the Fat Lady, walked up to my dormitory and dumped my bag there, and then made my way downstairs to the common room again, the thick book in my hand. Glancing around, I spotted Sadie Alexander sitting in a corner with some other girls I didn't know.

'Hey,' I said, walking over to them. 'You wouldn't happen to know where Evans is, would you?'

'Lily?' Sadie said, glancing up at me from the braid she was making in someone's hair. 'Yeah, she's right over there.' She nodded towards a secluded part of the common room near the windows. I caught a glimpse of light reflecting on her red hair, but couldn't see anything else other than that.

'Alright, thanks,' I said, and made my way over there. I noticed that someone else was sitting opposite her, but I didn't really care. I was just going to drop the book off, then be off to do homework.

'Hey, Evans,' I said as I approached, and her head flew up to look at me. I frowned. She looked almost a little... guilty. But why would she look guilty? I shook it off and handed her the book. 'All done.'

'Thanks, Potter,' she said, but she wouldn't quite meet my glance. 'I hope it didn't take too long?'

'Nah, it was fine,' I half-lied. 'The library was pretty empty, so I got to do it in peace and quiet.'

'So there's where you've been all this time?' said the person who was sitting on the other side of the table. 'The library? We were looking for you.' Slowly, I turned around, feeling completely numb, staring at Sirius's grinning face.

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'What are you doing?' I asked angrily.

'What?' Sirius asked, looking puzzled.

'Don't give me that crap!' I snapped, slamming the dormitory door shut behind me. 'Just what are you playing at?'

'What are you talking about, Prongs?'

'Evans! Down there, with Evans!' I spluttered, feeling decidedly sick at the image.

'You know, I could ask you the same thing,' said Sirius, his voice raising. 'You're the one who hauled me out of there without a word!'

'Yeah, well, what did you expect?' I said angrily, not looking at him.

'I was just talking to her!' Sirius said in an equally angry tone. 'I'm sorry, I didn't know that that wasn't allowed. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have homework to do.'

I watched his retreating back and the door that he slammed shut behind him. Still fuming, I turned around and threw myself onto my bed, pulling the hangings shut.

Damn him.

Damn him and his good looks. Damn him for the fact that his brain didn't turn to mush whenever Lily Evans was around. Damn all of him.

I couldn't believe that Lily would do that. Not after I had told her that this had happened before, and that she was different. How could I have been so wrong? I sighed. Right now, having gotten to spend time with Lily Evans was not a good thing. It only made this so much more painful.

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During the next few days, I tried to stay as far away from Lily Evans as possible. Sirius was harder to avoid, especially when Remus and Peter kept trying to persuade me to talk to him, and trying to get me into situations where it would become inevitable. They finally succeeded on a Friday afternoon, three days after the incident in the common room. It was the longest period of time I had ever not spoken to Sirius for years.

I was walking down a hallway with Peter, when suddenly, he turned and walked into an empty classroom, dragging me after him. As soon as I got inside, Remus, who was standing right inside the door, performed a full body-bind on me.

Great friends I have, eh? Sirius chatting up the girl I fancy and Remus hexing me. I'd hate to know what Peter would do.

Sirius was sitting at a desk in the other end of the classroom, looking as though he had not slept for days. As Remus propped me up to a standing position, leaning against the wall, he slowly approached me.

'Listen, Jim,' he said, stopping just a few inches in front of me. 'I would never touch Evans. I wouldn't dream of it. I'm a better friend than that, I thought you knew that.' He nodded at Remus, who performed the counter-curse, making me almost tip over as it was lifted.

'Yeah?' I said, grimacing. 'That's not what it looked like to me.'

'For the last time, we were talking!' Sirius hissed. 'Just... please, James, you have to believe that. I would never touch her.' I looked up into his eyes. He looked completely sincere, and also quite a bit hurt. I lowered my gaze again, feeling a bit ashamed. He was right; he was a better friend than that, and I knew it.

'I believe you.'

The next moment, he had me wrapped in a bear-like hug. 'See, I knew you would!' he said happily.

'Yeah, yeah' I mumbled, a small smile tugging on the corners of my mouth. 'Let me go, would you?' He grinned at me and I shook my head. 'You're an idiot, Padfoot.'

'So are you,' he said, letting go and taking a step back.

'Don't push your luck,' I warned, brushing off my robes. 'What were you talking to Evans about, anyway?'

'Afraid I can't tell you,' Sirius said, and I looked up at him, surprised. 'Sorry,' he offered, shrugging.

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During the following days, I was very confused. I also felt very stupid for believing that Sirius would have anything going on with Lily. I was used to feeling stupid, though, so the confusion won out.

'Hi,' I said, sitting down. It had become routine; we always worked at this table, me sitting on the sofa, she in the armchair across the table.

'Hi,' she said, sounding surprised. 'I didn't think you would show up.'

'Why wouldn't I?' I asked, feigning ignorance.

'I've felt as though you've been avoiding me lately,' she said, looking curiously at me.

'Me? Avoiding you? Why would I do such a thing?' I lied, almost managing not to blush. Maybe I just imagined things, but I could've sworn she blushed a little too.

'No, no, of course not,' she said quickly.

'Alright,' I said, trying to break the uncomfortable silence. 'What do we have today?'

'A few things,' she said, handing over a few pieces of parchment. 'Mostly about Hallowe'en. This is a list of different dishes; we have to choose one, and then go down to the kitchens and inform the house elves of our decision.'

I smiled. 'The kitchens?'

'I have no doubt that you're perfectly aware of where the kitchens are situated, Potter,' she smiled at me. 'However, there are a few other things we have to go through first. Here, have a look at this...'

We worked in silence for a while, occasionally asking each other questions. I had never even suspected that there were so many decisions that had to be made for the Hallowe'en feast.

'Right, I'm done,' Lily announced just as I jotted down the final note on my scrap of parchment. 'Ready to go?'

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'A lot of firsts today for me,' she said as we were walking back towards the common room. 'First time I've ever been in Dumbledore's office, and first time I've ever been in the kitchens.'

'Well, it was the first time I was in either of those places without feeling nervous,' I said, and she laughed a little.

'How come that doesn't surprise me?'

'Ah, but I'm full of surprises,' I said, trying to sound mysterious. She laughed again.

'I'm sure you are.' Then her note turned more serious. 'In fact, I know hardly anything about you.'

'There's not much to say.'

'James Potter, reluctant to talk about himself? Pinch me, for I must be dreaming,' she said, laughing.

I smiled back at her. 'What would you like to know?'

'Well, we've already established that you're an only child,' she said. 'What else? Pure-blood, I suppose?' I nodded. 'Thought so. What are your parents like?'

I looked at her in surprise. This had not been what I had been expecting. 'Er, they're alright, I suppose.' She nodded.

'What do you like doing in your spare time? Except for playing Quidditch, of course.'

'You mean there's anything besides Quidditch?' I asked, feigning shock. 'Just the usual. You know, being with my friends. Sleeping.'

'Hexing people?' Lily offered. I felt my ears go a bit red.

'No. That was a long time ago.'

'I noticed,' she said. 'I'm glad.' The blush spread all over my face. Great.

'What do you really hate?' she asked, ignoring the colour of my face. We were still walking towards the common room; Dumbledore's office was quite some way away from it.

'Tripe,' I replied, trying to control the blush. 'Tripe and the Dark Arts.'

She smiled at me again. 'Interesting combination.'

'Yeah. Enough about me, what about you? What do you really hate?'

'Injustice,' she said immediately. 'Though I can't say I'm all that keen on tripe, myself.'

I smiled at her, thrilled. We were having a real conversation, and she seemed to be enjoying it. I hadn't been this happy since... well, since the last time we had had a real conversation, which had been in Hogsmeade, almost a month ago.

'How about -' I began, but then broke off suddenly, looking around in terror. I had just heard footsteps, footsteps that I knew only too well.

'What?' Lily asked.

'Filch!' I hissed. 'Quick, in here!' I grabbed her around her upper arm and pushed her inside the first place that looked as though you could hide in it that I could see, before I followed. I squinted. It was very dark, but we appeared to be standing underneath a staircase of some kind.

'What are you doing?' she hissed and pulled her arm from my grasp.

'I didn't want Filch to see us!' I hissed back. I think she rolled her eyes, but due to the darkness, I couldn't really tell.

'Just what do you think he'd do about it? We're Head Boy and Girl, on our way back from helping the headmaster!'

I stared blankly at her.

Alright, so I hadn't thought about that.

'Old habit,' I shrugged. She shook her head, although I couldn't tell if it was in annoyance or amusement.

'Where are we, anyway?'

'I'm not sure,' I replied, squinting even more in order to make something out. 'I'm pretty sure we're standing under a staircase, but I have no idea which one.'

She gave me a wry grin and my heart gave a little skip. 'Well, wherever we are, it doesn't appear to have been cleaned for quite some time. You've got dust in your hair.' She leaned over. I stopped breathing. She reached up, put her hand to my hair for a second or two while I silently prayed against all hope that it wasn't too messy, and then drew back again, the small dust-ball clutched between her fingers. 'See?'

I exhaled rather loudly, earning an odd look from Lily. 'You've got some in your hair as well,' I informed her.

Alright, so technically, maybe she didn't have any dust in her hair, but it was just too good of an opportunity to let it pass me by.

I stepped a little closer, feeling my damn heart doing that little skip again. My hand slowly reached towards her head, gently clutched at the dust that wasn't there, and then, for reasons unknown, stroked her hair. Stupid hand.

Now, I'm not exactly the master of self-control, and her hair was oh so soft... so I stroked it again. She looked up at me, raising an eyebrow questioningly and pursing her lips.

Her lips.

Lips, just a few inches away, barely visible through the darkness, looking softer than silk, calling out for me. I'm not quite sure how it happened, but the next second, my head was dipping towards hers while my hand tightened its grip on her hair. I saw her eyes widen, and then my lips touched hers.

My own eyes flew open in shock then. What the hell was I doing? Then, the fact that she hadn't slapped me registered in my head, and shortly thereafter, the fact that she hadn't pulled away. In fact, she was just standing there, her eyes closed, arms hanging limply at her sides, her lips against mine.

I may be an idiot, but I do know some things. Like the fact that just standing there, limply pressing my lips against hers, was not going to impress her. At all. So, I did the only thing I could do at that moment. I kissed her. Very, very gently, sliding my lips over hers ever so slowly.

And then, mother of everything that is holy and sacred, she responded. My eyes nearly flew open in shock once more, but somehow I managed to control myself enough to keep kissing her.

Kissing. I was kissing Lily Evans. Lily Evans was kissing me. I got a rather unpleasant feeling in my stomach at that thought, but then it vanished, because she did something I had never expected. She parted her lips slightly, and her tongue gently touched my lower lip.

Did I mention that I'm not exactly the master of self-control?

The next thing I knew, I had her pinned up against the wall, both of my hands entwined in her hair, kissing her like there was no tomorrow. My tongue was crashing into her mouth almost desperately; like this was the only chance I would ever have to do this. Then I realised what I was doing, and the fact that this probably was my only chance to kiss her like this registered in my head. I pulled away quickly, removing my hands from her hair and taking a step back. I stared at her for a moment, at her huge eyes, messed up hair, reddened cheeks and wet lips.

Oh, shit.

'I'm sorry,' I managed to croak out, before stumbling backwards out of our hiding place and running as fast as I could back to the common room, not caring at all if anyone would see me.

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'You look like shit,' Sirius said quite happily as we made our way down to breakfast the next morning.

'Thank you, Padfoot, you really know how to light up my day,' I said sarcastically. I knew he was right, though, and the reason was very simple. I had hardly slept at all that night. I had been too busy mentally kicking myself for being a stupid prat.

The Great Hall was, as usual, quite full of people. I did a quick scan of the Gryffindor table, but I did not see any red hair anywhere. I gave a relieved sigh, sat down and began piling bacon on my plate, listening to Sirius, who was reading out loud from The Daily Prophet about an attack on a Muggle village. Apparently Dark wizards were suspected to be behind it. I cringed; there had been a definite rise in these kind of things, and it scared me.

""There were people running everywhere," says Muggle Roan Little, aged 74,' Sirius read. ""All I could think about was - "" He stopped reading and grinned at a spot behind my shoulder. I was immediately filled with dread, and I turned around, knowing who it would be but hoping still that it would be someone - anyone - else.

Of course, it wasn't. I mean, life can't possibly be that good, can it?

'Morning, Potter,' she said briskly. I didn't dare look at her. Instead I mumbled a greeting to her shoes, my face rapidly growing redder. 'I was just going to remind you about the meeting tonight. Eight o'clock.'

'Right,' I mumbled to her shoelaces. 'I'll be there.'

'Good,' she said, before walking over to her friends and sitting down. I turned my attention back to Sirius, who was looking at me quizzically.

'What was that all about?' he asked, newspaper forgotten.

'Nothing,' I murmured, my face still a lovely shade of crimson. Sirius looked sceptical. 'Really,' I insisted, trying to calm my face down a little. 'Let it go.'

'Whatever you say,' he replied, still looking doubtful, and went on reading.

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The meeting that night was a very new experience for me. It was the first time I wasn't staring non-stop at Lily Evans. In fact, I was sitting as far away from her as possible, staring intently at the piece of parchment that lay in front of me. I wasn't really paying attention to what was being said, either. I was too nervous about being in the same room as her.

I was jostled back to reality when the people surrounding me all stood up and began to gather their belongings. I felt a great surge of relief that the meeting was over, and started putting my things in my bag.

Why did I think I was going to get away that easily?

Before I had even begun to stand up, Lily was by my side, apparently waiting for me to acknowledge her presence.

'What?' I said, rather harshly, glancing up at her.

'We need to go over this,' she replied, showing me a list of the preparations for the Hallowe'en feast we had been working on the previous night. Before I had gone all cave-man on her. For some reason, I seemed to have forgotten about everything that led up to that.

'Right,' I said stupidly. 'Now?'

'I need to run a few errands, so can I meet you in the common room in say, half an hour?' she asked, and I nodded. 'Great,' she said. 'Thanks.'

I groaned as I stood up and followed her out of the Great Hall. Half an hour left until doomsday.

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'Potter?' she said, in a somewhat aggravated tone.

'Yeah?' I mumbled, keeping my eyes intently on the desktop.

'Would it kill you to look at me?' I sighed and glanced up at her briefly. She was sitting next to me on the couch, her legs curled up, much too close to me for my liking, with her arms crossed over her chest, looking at me with a quirked eyebrow. The same quirked eyebrow she had worn before I jumped her underneath the stairs. I felt my cheeks grow red and avoided her gaze again. I had been hoping she wouldn't notice.

'Is this about what happened yesterday?' she said softly, and my cheeks grew even redder. I mumbled something incoherent, because my voice definitely wasn't working. I figured it had gone on vacation, apparently taking my stomach and parts of my brain with it. 'Look, I don't want you to feel... embarrassed or anything about that,' Lily said quietly. I snorted. Fat chance. 'Damn it!' she suddenly exclaimed, slamming her fist onto the desktop and making me jump. 'I don't care how embarrassed you are, we have to work together and I simply cannot work with you if you refuse to look me in the eye,' she said angrily.

I swallowed and forced myself to lift my gaze to meet her angry stare. Great. Not only did looking into her eyes turn me into an idiot; it turned me into a very red idiot. Her expression softened a bit when I finally did look up. 'That wasn't so terrible, was it now?' she said, her tone soft once more. I tried to smile, but I have a feeling it ended up looking more like a frown, because it made Lily sigh deeply and put her hands over her face.

'What do you want me to do, eh, Potter?' she asked from behind her hands. 'Do you want me to turn back time so that it'd never have happened?' I didn't say anything. As appealing as it sounded to never have screwed things up at all, I wouldn't want to not have the memory of kissing her for anything in the world, but I couldn't exactly tell her that, could I? She removed her hands from her face and looked at me again. 'If I kissed you, would that make us even?'

I stared at her. I think my mouth actually fell open. What? Then, next moment, she was starting to move closer to me, leaning in. And I could not move. She was staring into my eyes, and I couldn't look away. I always did turn into a blabbering fool when she looked at me. She put her hand on my cheek, but as she leaned in, her face inches from my own, I came to my senses.

'No!'

I backed away from her, nearly falling off the couch. She stood up, and this time, it was she who walked away.

Needless to say, I didn't sleep that night either.

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'Can we talk?'

I looked up from where I was laying. Lily was standing beside the couch, looking about as good as I felt, with dark rings under her eyes and matted hair. I sat up. 'Sure,' I said, though I really, really didn't want to talk to her at that very moment. Damn her and her ability to make me do whatever she asked me to. She sat down

next to me on the couch, staring at her fingernails. The common room was pretty deserted, none of my friends were anywhere to be seen, and neither was hers.

'I'm sorry,' she blurted out just as I was about to start apologising. I looked at her in surprise.

'For what?'

'About yesterday,' she said, shaking her head a little. 'I was out of line, I know it.' I stared at her. 'Look,' she said, looking up at me. I didn't look away this time. 'That... thing... that happened the other night ' ' I looked down again.

'I'm sorry about that,' I mumbled.

'Right. Well, that was... it was an accident, wasn't it?' she asked quietly.

'Accident?' I repeated, not really understanding.

'Just something that happened because of the circumstances,' she clarified. 'It didn't mean anything, did it?'

Bloody hell it did. I didn't say that, though; I'm not that thick.

'Right,' I said instead, venturing a look at her. She looked up at me too and smiled.

'I thought so. So... does this mean we can work together normally from now on?'

I smiled back at her, my stomach fluttering. 'Of course.'

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I would never have believed it if someone had told me, but we actually managed to work together without it being all awkward after that day. Sure, I still thought she was the most amazing girl ever to set foot on this planet, and sure, every time I happened to glance at her mouth I wanted to pin her down and snog her senseless, but otherwise, things were going just fine. I had been worried that she would want to keep a distance from me, seeing as how last time we had had a personal chat I had very nearly molested her, but thankfully, she didn't seem worried about that. Not that she needed to be; I wouldn't be that stupid two times in a row.

The Halloween feast was a huge success, and as November arrived, bringing a large amount of snow with it, we had to start working on the plans for Christmas. I didn't really see why we had to do it, as we were both going home for Christmas, but apparently it was tradition or something like that.

'I'm too tired to do any more of this,' Lily yawned, and put the long list of Christmas ornaments on the table in front of her. We were sitting, as we always did when we were working, at a table near the windows in the common room, she in 'her' armchair, me on the sofa. I glanced at my wristwatch; it was nearly eleven.

'We still have all these to go through,' I said, motioning to a pile of papers that lay beside me on the couch.

'I know,' Lily said, sounding rather miserable. 'Let's just take a little break, all right?'

'Sure,' I said, glad for the interruption. I had been wanting a break, too, but I somehow didn't quite dare to ask her for one.

'What are you doing for Christmas?'

'Nothing special, really,' I replied, stretching my legs out on the sofa. 'Just the usual, I suppose. How about you?'

'Same,' said Lily. 'My mum's best friend and her family are coming to stay at my house, though; it will be a nightmare.' She grimaced a little. I gave a sympathetic smile.

'That bad, huh?'

'Well, she's not too bad, it's just that she has four very loud children,' Lily sighed. 'Two of which will be staying in my room.' I laughed a little.

'Before we had a room fixed for him, Sirius stayed in my room for a couple of weeks, and let's just say that I know what it's like to never have any privacy,' I said. 'I mean, it's one thing here, where you know that you share the room with other people, but at home you have a room full of personal belongings, if you know what I mean?'

'Exactly,' she replied, then quirked her brow a little. 'How come Sirius lives with you, anyway? You two that attached to each other?' I laughed again.

'Well, that too,' I said. 'Mostly it's because of his horrid family, though.'

'Oh,' Lily said, and then fell silent. I didn't say anything either, I just watched her as she sat there. Damn, but she was beautiful. My stomach churned.

'Do you have any nicknames?' she asked suddenly, out of the blue. I looked at her, trying to appear as though I hadn't just been staring intently at her face.

'What?' I asked with a small laugh.

'Nicknames. I know that your friends call you Prongs, for some ridiculous reason, but do you have any other nicknames?'

'How'd you know that?'

'What?' she asked, puzzled.

'That they call me Prongs,' I explained, just as puzzled.

She smiled at me. 'I'm not deaf, Potter.' I blushed a little. Were we really that obvious? I would need to discuss this with the lads. 'So, do you?'

What? Oh yeah, she had asked me a question. Right. 'Er, not really,' I said, trying to cool my face down a little. 'Sirius calls me Jim sometimes, and my mum calls me Jamie, even though I have asked her a million times not to.' She chuckled. 'Why do you ask?'

'Just curious,' she replied casually. 'Anyway, we better get back to this, don't you think?'

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The last weekend of November was a Hogsmeade weekend, and I had planned to do my Christmas shopping then. Only problem was, so had half the school. I cursed loudly as someone stepped on my foot in a very crowded store, where I was trying to find something nice for my mum.

'This is insane!' Remus shouted to me. He was standing in a corner, pushed up against the wall and looking a bit blue in the face. I nodded.

'Outside,' I said, and we slowly pushed our way through the crowd. Once outside, Remus drew a deep breath.

'Remind me never to do that again, please,' he said shakily.

'Alright, but you have to promise to come back with me some day this week,' I muttered under my breath, brushing off my cloak from where someone had tread on it. I had forced Remus to come with me and assist me in my shopping, since Sirius had a very... odd... taste in gifts, and Peter was no help, either ' he always asked what I thought of everything before giving his own opinion, which is really not what you're after when you need someone to give their honest view on something.

'Fine,' Remus muttered. 'Can we go join the others?'

Making our way down the very crowded street, we entered the equally crowded Three Broomsticks, and spotted Sirius and Peter sitting at a table near the door.

'What is that, Sirius?' I asked, pointing to the glass in front of him, which was definitely not Butterbeer. He grinned up at me.

'An advantage to being of age,' he said as I slipped down next to him. 'Cheers!' I rolled my eyes. I had just placed my order (Butterbeer, thank you very much!) when someone tapped me on the shoulder. I glanced

over and broke into a huge smile when I saw who it was.

'Hey!' I half-shouted over the noise.

'Hey!' Lily shouted back. 'Mind if I sit down?'

That was one hard question. Not.

"Course not," I said happily, and scooted over nearer to Sirius to make room for her.

'People are going crazy,' she said as she sat down, removing her cloak.

'Yeah, tell me about it,' I replied, my leg tingling from where it was brushing against hers. 'So, what did you want to talk about?'

She looked quizzically at me. 'What?'

'What did you want to talk to me about? Does it have to do with Christmas?' I asked. She shook her head.

'Nothing special, I just felt like spending some time with you.'

I stared at her for a few moments. 'Why?'

'You know, I never thought I'd say this, but I kind of like your company,' she said simply, as she tried to get the waitress's attention. 'That reason enough?'

I looked at her in amazement, and in that moment, I realised something I had never considered before. Maybe it happened then and there, or maybe I just hadn't realised it before. I'm not sure, but either way, at that moment, the realisation hit me very forcefully.

I was in love with Lily Evans.

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Yes, I know that you might think I'm a bit of an idiot for not understanding that earlier. To be perfectly honest, the thought that I might be in love with her hadn't even really crossed my mind. Sure, I knew that I fancied her, but being in love with someone and fancying someone are two quite different things, if you know what I mean.

After my little revelation that day, I found it even harder to concentrate on anything else when she was in the room. Sirius noticed, and had a good laugh at my expense, but I didn't even care. Of course, I knew that she probably didn't think of me in any romantic way, but I couldn't help it. I was always trying to talk to her, whenever I had the chance, and she didn't seem to mind all that much, either.

'You there?' I shook myself out of my little reverie. It was quite late in the evening before we were all going home for Christmas, and I was working with Lily on a few last details in our usual spot in the common room.

'Sorry,' I muttered. She looked amused.

'What were you thinking about?'

Oh, just how my ideal Christmas present would be you, preferably wrapped in a bow and not wearing anything else. Don't worry, I didn't say that. Instead, I raked my mind for an excuse for zooming out.

'I was just thinking about whether Dumbledore dresses up as Father Christmas and has the house elves act as his elves during the feast,' I said quickly, then cringed a little. What a stupid thing to say. Lily just looked at me for a moment, then burst out laughing.

'Actually, I could see that happening,' she laughed. 'McGonagall could be Mrs Claus, and Hagrid could dress up as... as... as a Christmas tree!'

I joined in her laughter, which seemed to make her laugh even harder. 'He could wear an angel on the top of his head!' I said, tears streaming from my eyes from laughing so hard.

'Stop it, my tummy hurts!' said Lily, clutching her stomach. After a few minutes, I managed to calm down a bit,

and, judging from the silence of the room, so did Lily. I glanced over to where she was sitting. Bad idea. As soon as our gazes met, we started laughing again. She was leaning over one of the armrests, clutching her sides, tears streaming out of her eyes.

'Don't do that, I'm going to laugh myself to death,' she managed to say between bouts of laughter, making me laugh even harder. I mimicked her position, leaning over the armrest at the end that was closest to her.

'Sorry,' I said, still laughing like a madman. She looked up at me then, and just as I noticed that she had stopped laughing, she quickly leaned over and put her lips to mine.

Alright.

I have to admit, I was a little surprised. My laughter died immediately, and I managed to come to my senses enough to actually kiss her back. She was kissing me slowly, one of her hands resting on my cheek, and by Merlin, I couldn't remember her lips being that soft, or her scent being that sweet, or her touch so gentle. Maybe it had something to do with the fact that she was actually doing this out of her own will, rather than reacting automatically to my actions.

Oh, God. She was kissing me out of her own will.

We were still leaning over our respective armrests, and though I wouldn't have wanted to be anywhere else at that moment, the position was a little uncomfortable. Lily, bless her, seemed to agree with me, because as she deepened the kiss, letting her hand drift to the back of my neck, she stood up a little, and, letting me sit up properly, placed her knees on either side of my lap and gently sat herself down.

No complaints. At all.

I don't really know how long we sat there. At some point I leaned back towards the corner of the couch, so that we ended up in some kind of a half-laying position, with her still straddling my lap. It was one of those perfect moments, where nothing else in the world seemed to matter, not a thing except for her lips on mine.

I vaguely heard the portrait creak open, but I can't say that I cared very much. Lily didn't seem to, either, because she didn't draw back. We were sitting near one of the windows; if we were lucky, whoever it was that had entered would not see us at all.

Of course, life couldn't possibly be that good.

'Isn't that Lily?' I distinctively heard Peter say. I gave a little sigh. Great. Of all the people to come in at a moment like this, it just had to be one of my best friends.

'Yeah... I think it is,' Remus replied. I was vaguely disturbed by the fact that they were there, but Lily didn't seem to care at all. Either that or she hadn't noticed them.

'Oh, shit,' came Sirius's voice, and I sighed once more. All three of them. 'Let's just pray that Prongs hasn't seen this.' I chuckled a little against Lily's lips.

'Why?' Peter asked.

'She's snogging someone, you twat,' Sirius said impatiently. 'It'd just break his poor little heart.'

'Oh!' Peter said in understanding.

'Honestly, can we just give Lily some privacy? It's not our problem who she's snogging.' I felt a definite surge of affection for Remus at that moment. A door opened, and their voices drifted away as I heard their footsteps on the stairs.

A few minutes later, Lily drew back, sitting up straight. I think I groaned a little. She gently stroked my cheek with her thumb. 'I need to go to bed,' she murmured. I nodded stupidly. She grabbed my hand, stood up and pulled me with her. 'Goodnight,' she whispered before bringing her lips to mine once more for a short, soft kiss. She backed away and started walking towards the girls' dormitory. I remained where I was. For some reason, my legs didn't seem quite stable at the moment. As she reached the door, she hesitated for a while, and then turned back around, looking at me. 'Would it really break your heart if you caught me snogging some other bloke?'

I stared at her for a moment, then nodded. She cocked her head. 'Why?'

'Because I'm in love with you.'

What? Who just said that? Surely, it wasn't me. First of all, I would never have the nerve to tell her that, and since when was my voice that ragged? It had to have been someone else. The common room seemed very deserted, though, and it definitely wasn't Lily who had said it. That, and she was staring intently at me with those beautiful eyes. Must've been me, then. Sometimes I really hate myself.

Lily just stood there for a moment, looking at me. 'Goodnight, James,' she then said very softly, and opened the door and walked in.

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'Did you see Lily down there?' Sirius asked through a glitch in the curtains around his bed as soon as I entered our dormitory. I looked stupidly at him. My brain was a little foggy at the moment. Can you blame me? I had a lot on my mind.

'Er... yeah,' I said and winced at the words. My voice was still all ragged. Sirius looked concerned. I think he was talking to me, but I wasn't really listening. I was thinking about what had just happened, and something had just clicked in my head, making me feel as though I was walking on air.

'James?' Sirius said sharply, and I looked at him. 'Are you alright?' My face broke into a wide grin.

'Yeah, I'm fine.'

'You don't mind having seen Lily... like that, then?' he asked, and my grin grew even wider as I lay down on my bed.

'Nah, I don't mind.'

Sirius looked very confused, but seemed to accept my answer. 'Alright, then. Good. G'night,' he said, drawing his curtains closed again.

I lay down on my own bed, still smiling like an idiot. My worries about Lily's reaction to my little declaration earlier had completely vanished, leaving behind a feeling of absolute joy. I had realised something vital.

She had called me James.

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Now, would you expect a lad to sleep much after a night like the one I had had? No? Well, I did. In fact, I slept so well that when I woke up the next morning, I had ten minutes to spare to a) pack, b) get dressed and c) eat breakfast before the carriages left. Needless to say, I was a bit stressed. I managed, of course, but I didn't have time for anything else, such as finding Lily and snogging her some more, which was rather disappointing.

After I had downed my breakfast in three huge gulps, Sirius, Remus and Peter all eyeing me nervously, we dashed through the Great Hall, out through the Entrance Hall and sprinted across the lawn to the waiting carriages. Only one of them was still standing still; the rest had started rolling towards Hogsmeade.

'Would it have killed you to wake up a little earlier?' Sirius panted, clutching his side. The carriage started rolling as soon as we were all inside.

'Well, would it have killed you to, I dunno, maybe wake me up a little earlier?' I replied, craning my neck to try to look out the window. I couldn't see a damn thing inside the other carriages. Sighing, I leaned back, telling myself that I would at least see her on the train.

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We were the last students to arrive at the station, for obvious reasons. As soon as we boarded the train, I could sense that there was something wrong. There seemed to be a lot of commotion coming from the compartments up front. Frowning, I left my trunk with the lads in an empty compartment and made my way to the one where the prefects were supposed to be sitting. Opening the door, I immediately caught sight of what was causing the problem.

The Slytherin prefects were standing at one side of the compartment, all the others on the other. As I opened the door, the room fell silent for a while, then a small, mousy Slytherin boy spoke. 'Oh, look, it's Potter, the Mudblood lover.'

I felt my blood begin to boil, and was in half a mind to punch the stupid grin off his face, but as I started walking towards him, I felt a cool hand on my forearm. Looking around, I locked my gaze with the stony glare of Lily Evans. 'Don't make it any worse,' she said quietly, in a voice that was cold and controlled, but trembling a little. I stopped dead in my tracks and she cleared her throat.

'Alright, everyone, we seem to be having a... situation here,' she said in the same voice. I noticed her hand was shaking a little as she tucked it into her pocket. 'I think we need to work this out, seeing how we're supposed to be role models for the rest of the student body.' A few of the Slytherins sniggered. I saw Lily tense, and my will to punch someone grew stronger. She seemed to be able to control herself, however. 'Right,' she said, voice shaking a little more now. 'Girls, come with me, the boys can stay here.'

'What makes you think we'd take orders from a Mudblood like you?' a dark-haired Slytherin girl said harshly.

'She's Head Girl, that's what,' I said before I could stop myself.

'I can manage this myself, Potter,' Lily said coldly. 'Anyone who doesn't step into the next compartment with me right now will have fifty house points taken and enough detention to last until Easter, do I make myself clear?' The Slytherin girls grudgingly followed her out the door, and I was left with the boys and a horrible, sinking feeling in my stomach.

Potter?

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'So, let me get this straight. You and Evans were working, and all of a sudden she just snogged you?' Sirius asked, incredulous, as we were sitting in my bedroom later that night. I nodded dully. Alright, so I had left out a few parts, such as how I had technically kissed her long before she had kissed me, but he didn't need to know that. 'And then she called you James?'

'Yes,' I said exasperatedly. I had told him this over half an hour ago, in hopes to get his opinion on why she would regress to calling me Potter, but Sirius's mind seemed to have stuck on the detail that she had kissed me.

'And you didn't tell me? Instead, you let me make a fool out of myself by asking you if you were alright?'

'Look, would you let that go?' I said, and cringed at the desperation in my voice. 'Why the hell would she call me Potter today?'

Sirius shrugged. 'Maybe she was just stressed; it'd make sense with all of what was going on.'

'Or,' I said glumly, 'she's decided that last night was a horrible mistake and never wants to speak to me again.'

'That could also be it,' Sirius admitted. 'Did she act as though she hates you?'

My head flew up. 'Hates me? D'you reckon she does?'

Sirius didn't answer. He was glaring up at the ceiling, apparently deep in thought. 'Maybe she was drunk last night,' he muttered. 'I mean, there has to be a logical explanation to why she would kiss you.' I just stared at him in quiet despair. This wasn't helping. At all.

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I spent the next few days fretting over what Lily's calling me Potter meant, and then I realised that I had something else to fret about, and started fretting even more.

Should I send her a Christmas present or not?

I mean, I hadn't gotten her anything fancy to begin with, just some assorted sweets that I knew she liked and a bottle of colour-changing ink, but if she hated me, she wouldn't want me to send her anything at all, would she?

'You're going to wear out the floor if you don't stop pacing soon,' my mother said irritably as I walked past the kitchen for the fiftieth time that day. 'Sit down, would you?' I ignored her and walked up the stairs, where she couldn't see my pacing. The house was quiet; my dad was out running some Christmas errands, mum was baking and Sirius was outside, working on his motorbike again, even though it was raining. So much for a white Christmas.

The thing was, if she had indeed just been stressed and did want to keep on snogging me, sweets and ink wasn't really an impressive gift, was it? I mean, it wasn't exactly one of those romantic gifts that made girls swoon and fall head over heels in love with someone.

'Still thinking about whether to send Evans her gift, are you?' I jumped at least a foot into the air.

'Dammit, Sirius, don't do that,' I said, hand over my chest. 'One of these days you're going to give me a heart attack.'

Sirius grinned at me, his cheeks flecked with motor oil. 'I don't see what the problem is.'

'The problem?' I said rather loudly, not believing my ears. 'The problem is that I don't even know if Lily wants me to send her a present at all, since for all I know, she might like me as much as she likes tripe.' I drew a deep breath. 'Maybe she was just feeling lonely and wanted to snog anyone, and she knew I wouldn't say no,' I muttered under my breath.

'What was that?' Sirius asked, tilting his head to the side.

'Nothing,' I said quickly. 'And if she doesn't hate me, and wasn't drunk, she'll hardly be impressed by some dry ice mice and some old ink, and then she'll start to like me as much as she likes tripe anyway,' I said, slumping my shoulders. Talk about a lose-lose situation.

Sirius stared at me for a moment while wiping his hands on his cloak. 'Don't be such a drama queen, Jim,' he then said, throwing his oily cloak at me. 'Besides, what I meant was that I don't see what the problem with me giving you a heart attack is,' he added as he walked into the bathroom.

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With some very unhelpful help from Sirius, I finally decided to send the things I had bought to Lily, along with a letter. Now, letters weren't really my forte, as you might know, and this was indeed a Very Important Letter, so I spent a lot of time on it. I finally came up with something that didn't make me wrinkle my nose in disgust when I read it, which you have to agree is a good sign.

*Dear Lily, it said,*

*How are you? I hope things went okay on the train and that they weren't too horrible to you. I had to hand out a few detentions myself, but no one was injured, thankfully. I thought you could use some cheering up, so here are some things I think you'll enjoy. If you need more to take your mind off it, I'd be happy to take you down to Hogsmeade some time and buy you a Butterbeer or two, if you'd want to.*

*Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!*

*Love, James.*

I was really quite proud of myself. Who would've known I could come up with something like that? Not me, that's for sure. I mean, if she wanted us to just be friends, or whatever it was we were, the invitation to Hogsmeade could easily be dismissed as a friendly gesture. If I was so lucky that she was actually interested in a reprise snogging session, however, she would probably recognise it for what it really was. Now I only needed to find that famous Gryffindor courage and actually send it to her.

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Christmas passed without any remarkable incidents. I had finally gotten around to sending Lily her present late on Christmas eve, so I was unsure whether it had arrived in time or not. I was also quite a bit nervous about whether or not I would get anything from her. My head was saying that I shouldn't be expecting anything, but my heart simply couldn't resist doing so anyway. Needless to say, I was quite a bit depressed when I went to bed that night without having received as much as a Christmas card from her. Must be true as Sirius had suggested then - she hated me. Right at that moment, I did too.

I woke up rather early on Boxing day, and at first I couldn't understand why. Some sound had woken me up, but there didn't seem to be anyone in my room. Now, when you're living with Sirius Black, you can never be sure about anything, so I was a bit apprehensive about whether he was under my invisibility cloak until I remembered that I had left that at Hogwarts over the holidays. Glancing over at the window, I noticed my owl hovering outside it, pecking the window impatiently with his beak. I immediately jumped out of bed, instantly awake, and practically ran over to the window and opened it, impatient to see whether Lily had sent me a letter or anything. As my owl flew inside, my heart did a funny little flip flop and a huge grin spread over my face.

She hadn't only written me a letter, she'd sent me a package as well.

I tore the parcel away from the owl's leg and went back to my bed and sat down on it, opening the parcel. It contained a long, light, wrapped gift, a small, heavy one, and not one, but two letters. Curious, I opened the one which was closest to me, which resembled a Howler somewhat with its red envelope, only it seemed to be made of paper instead of parchment. Inside, there was a shiny card with a Christmas tree printed on it. I turned it over; it simply said Merry Christmas, Lily. Placing the card on my bedside table, I reached for the other envelope, which contained a letter.

*Dear James*, it said, and I felt my grin widen as my heart started hammering wildly against my ribs. James! Ha.

*Thank you very much for your presents! How did you know what my favourite sweets were? My sister is eyeing them as I write this; I think she's tempted to try some of the ice mice, but of course she'd never touch anything magical. The ink was really wicked, as well - I didn't even know they made ink like that. Do you think Binns will appreciate it if I write the essay about the history of British hags with it?*

*I'm sorry that this is so late - I bought you your presents ages ago, but I don't have an owl and I don't know your address, so I had planned to just give you this at school, but then your owl turned up and I decided to just mail them to you. I hope you like them, it's nothing special but I'd thought you'd like them.*

*Merry belated Christmas and happy new year!*

*Love, Lily*

*PS: If you hadn't asked me to go to Hogsmeade with you, I would've asked you. So yes, I'd like that very much.*

*PPS: I never thought I'd say this, but I kind of miss you. We never got to say a proper goodbye, what with the Slytherins and all that. I wish we had. Anyway, see you soon!*

I was grinning so widely that it was a miracle my face didn't burst. I had never been so happy about Sirius being wrong before, and that was saying something.

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'Would you please stop that? It's driving me mad,' Sirius said quite sharply as I wrung my hands nervously. We were sitting on a bench outside King's Cross, waiting for Peter and Remus, who should have arrived over fifteen minutes ago.

'Sorry,' I muttered, trying to keep still. 'Now, please remember, not a word to Remus or Peter, okay?' Sirius rolled his eyes.

'Yes, I know, you only told me about three billion times.'

'Because, you know, I might have misinterpreted that letter and even if I didn't, she might not want anyone else to know -'

'James, I know!' Sirius said loudly, causing quite a few onlookers to stare at him. 'Besides, you better stop blabbering if you don't want them to know, because here they come.' Indeed, Remus came walking into sight at his words, closely followed by Peter.

'We thought you meant the bench around the corner,' Remus offered as a greeting. 'We have been waiting for you for nearly half an hour.' Eyeing Peter, he added,

'Well, I have. Peter just showed up five minutes ago.'

'Very punctual, are you, Pete?' Sirius said, smiling. Peter scoffed at him.

'Whatever. We'd better get onto the platform,' he said, pushing the trolley with his trunk on it in front of him.

'So,' Remus said as we approached the barrier, 'anything interesting happen to you two during the holidays?'

'Weeeeell -' Sirius began gleefully, but fell silent as I gave him the coldest stare I could manage.

'Nothing,' I said, my stomach squirming with nervousness. 'Nothing at all.' Peter and Remus gave me some odd stares, but didn't say anything. Remus went through the barrier first, followed by Sirius, and then Peter. Taking a deep, shaky breath, I pushed my trolley through the barrier, closing my eyes as I crossed it. Walking over to stand with the guys, I quickly scanned the platform for any sign of red hair, my heart beating so loudly that it was the only sound I could hear. It doubled in intensity as I spotted her standing near the train, talking to her friends.

'I'll be right back,' I said in a very strangled voice to the lads, and Sirius gave me a clap on the shoulder as I went. Lily was standing with her back to me, but as I neared, one of her friends must have told her I was coming, because she turned around, her face alight with happiness. I felt my knees go all rubbery and had to force myself to continue walking.

'Hi,' I mumbled nervously as I came up in front of her, forcing myself to look into her smiling eyes.

'Hi,' she replied, and then simply reached up, put her arms around my neck, drew my face down to hers and kissed me.

'I don't think she minds that people know, James,' I vaguely heard Sirius call over the loud beating of my heart, but I didn't care. I brought my own hands up to Lily's hair and deepened the kiss, not caring about her giggling friends standing only a few feet away, the comments and questions from my friends, or someone wolf whistling further down the platform. I didn't care about anything but her lips on mine, and the beating of her heart against my chest, its racing rhythm matching my own.

I had gotten my chance. I wouldn't mess it up.