

**Part Ten**  
***April, '76***

"Cheer up, mate," Sirius says, trying his best to be consoling. "It could be worse!"

James cracks one eye open, narrowed and bleary and, Sirius presumes, full of thwarted love. The little circles under his eyes, the dark twist to his lips, the wild tangle of his hair long uncultivated, gives him the air of a complete lunatic. Sirius supposes that's what love does to a bloke: fills him up with false promise, false hope, the occasional grope here and there, and leaves him with nothing at all in the end but the desperate need for a wash. Still, a good friend would never mention the smell.

"It's no use," James groans. "It's no *fair*. I didn't do anything *wrong*. I *saved* him, and this is the thanks I get?"

"You're the perfect hero," Sirius soothes. "With or without trousers. Not many can say that, I'll tell you, and if she doesn't recognize what she has when she has it--"

"Let's kill Snape," James interrupts. "We can hide the body. It doesn't matter anymore, she threw grapefruit juice in my face. I've no one left to please, nothing left to hide -- let's just do it. We can cut his body into little pieces and no one will ever be the wiser. No one will ever know he's missing. People will *thank* us."

"Only one problem with that plan." Sirius grins. "Finding somewhere big enough to hide his nose."

"We could put it in my sorrow, which is as boundless as the ocean," James says.

"You've got to stop having firewhiskey for breakfast, mate," Sirius says. "Eventually that stuff'll kill you."

"Makes me stronger," James mumbles. "Besides, look: I've finally got real stubble. Now that it doesn't matter what I look like, since there is no one on this earth worth impressing anymore. You do realize *you* lost me my girlfriend?"

"Yeah, I suppose. It's lucky for me no one else is willing to sink low enough to be your best friend."

"Remus is my vice-best friend," James says. "If you were killed, he would be instated and probably do a better job."

"He'd never do it," Sirius points out. James hates to admit that this is probably the case. "He's not bloody-minded enough. Who would blow things up with you, I'd like to know? Who'd make the walls transparent in the prefects' bathroom? Who'd put hippogriff manure in people's shoes? Well, Peter," he admits as an afterthought, "but he wouldn't be nearly so good at it. Admit it, mate: you're stuck with me. Explosions and gratuitous nudity are all you have left. We're back to the good old days."

"My life has no meaning," James bemoans gloomily.

"Yes," Sirius insists, "yes, it does. I bet you don't *know* what tomorrow is."

"Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow," James mumbles into his elbow. "I don't care what tomorrow is. It's just as bad as today only I get to dread it first."

"No." Sirius is trying to be patient. On the one hand, Evans is a fool. If you believe any idle Slytherin gossip then by default, you are a fool. On the other hand, she's been a fool just in time. Damned if he's going to let James turn into a whining consumptive broken-hearted noodle-head just because it appears he wants to turn into a whining consumptive broken-hearted noodle-head. Sirius knows better. Sirius knows he can't possibly want to slip into unattractive misery for all time. "Tomorrow," he presses, "*tomorrow* is the first of April."

"So?" James mutters. Sirius waits for it. It could, he reasons, take anywhere between ten seconds and a full minute. When it happens, it will certainly start in James' shoulders. "*Oh*," James says. His shoulders get a little firmer around the edges. Exactly fifteen seconds. Not as hopeless as Sirius originally thought. "*Ohhhh*."

"And we haven't done any planning or any re-stocking and we *certainly* haven't got any of the latest, newest and smelliest from Zonko's," Sirius adds, with a note of finality, of doom, of wicked improvisation.

"How many dungbombs do we have?" James sits up, a gleam of purpose behind his murky eyes. He runs his fingers through his hair, gets his fingers stuck, and gives up.

"Fifty-seven."

"Not nearly enough. *Damn*. What else *do* we have?"

Sirius pulls out The Inventory from behind his back. "I knew you'd wake up to it," he confides, grinning from ear to ear. "Chudley Cannons." He taps the long roll of parchment with his wand, whispering the password, and watches cheerfully as it unfurls before them, updating their current resources.

James surveys it with an air of professional purpose. "Right. So we've got...yes, yes -- and that'll do for the mirrors...Sirius, you realize there's not one thing on here that sets things on fire?"

"We have been terribly remiss in our duties," Sirius agrees solemnly. "And I'm near cleaned out." He pats his pockets with a mournful air. "Another unforeseen consequence of renouncing the comforts of the familial hearth: loss of the endless resources at my disposal as the Young Master. I could bully Regulus, but I don't feel like listening to his whining. Of course, what this means is that 1976 will be a year of great improvisation. Requiring all our resources and no distractions whatsoever. But! There's always matches."

"So...in a way..." James begins, sounding slightly cheered.

"Blessing in disguise, really," Sirius finishes, patting him on the back. "Come on. Let's go get you cleaned up."

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"I don't want to know," Remus insists, putting his hands over his ears. "Hear no evil. I'm a prefect, I'm a prefect, I'm

a *prefect*--"

"All right," Sirius says. He settles at the edge of the bed, bouncing up and down so the bedframe creaks. "Can I just give you hints then? All right, I'll give you a hint: it rhymes with 'arting' and it's the answer to the question 'What noise will Rodolphus LeStrange make any time he says something threatening to anyone?'"

"I didn't hear you," Remus says. "I didn't hear that, I didn't hear you, I'm not listening. La la la la la--"

"And the next bit rhymes with bungdombs and has to do with--"

"*Oh, to be in England, now that April's there--*"

"--someone who rhymes with Great-Big-Slimy-Git-Drape--"

"--and whoever wakes in England sees some morning unaware--"

Sirius takes one of Remus' wrists and tugs his hand gently away, finger making a slight popping sound as it wrestled free of his ear. "We've figured out a way," Sirius explains, "to use fifty-seven all at once. It's like a *bomb* made out of *bombs*. We're going to put it in his lunch."

"It's a lucky thing I wasn't listening," Remus mutters, "or I would have to report your trespasses immediately." Sirius grins. "And it's an even luckier thing that I've no idea what you have fifty-seven of and that I'm assured your mention of bombs has nothing to do with *actual* bombs, or I would have to lock you in a closet and throw away the key. For the good of humanity, of course."

"*Really*, Moony," Sirius says, affronted. "As if we would really use bombs. Such triteness! Such *gaucherie*! You've no faith in me at all, have you."

"I have faith in your great appetite for destruction and mayhem," Remus says. "Really, yourself. Don't you think Severus Snape has suffered enough?"

"No," Sirius says bluntly. "And who said anything about Severus Snape? You'd think you had something against him, the way you project your little fantasies of pain and dungbombs onto his innocent head. Now, Great-Big-Slimy-Git-Drape, on the other hand, *there's* a man who deserves to suffer."

"Well, I'm not going to participate."

"I wouldn't ask it of you. I knew you wouldn't, fine and upstanding young citizen that you are. As indicated by that shiny little badge on that clean and well-pressed sweater."

"It isn't pressed," Remus protests, "it's all wrinkly and it smells of chocolate--"

Sirius waves a hand airily. "The point remains that I would never ask you to do something so clearly, *rampantly* beyond your boundaries. Your participation in this Day of Days should be strictly on a voluntary basis."

"Now, wait," Remus objects, feeling insulted for reasons he cannot quite place, "beyond my boundaries? Aren't you

even going to try? You try every year."

"You are a Good Person," Sirius says earnestly. "There's nothing you can do about it, I'm afraid, and nothing I can either. Six years I've been trying. No, I'm afraid this is quite beyond your grasp. I'm not going to recruit you, and I'm not going to ask for your blessing, and I'm certainly not going to request your considerable research skills in digging up some way to change the passwords in the various towers."

Remus trembles.

"That's unfair," he says. "You're using my research against me."

"Well," Sirius shrugs, "everyone has their little weaknesses, don't they? I mean, I *would* have done, but we're on such *tight schedule*, and my fieldwork requires me to be elsewhere, and as we all know *one* man cannot be in two places at the same time. And I'm sure it would require speed-reading of an almost *epic* proportion, in a book possibly three or four *times* the size of a Prefect, capable of eating any lesser researcher alive in the space of perhaps no more than *five minutes*." Sirius shakes his head. "No, no, it's far too much, and your upstanding nature wouldn't allow it, so I could hardly ask such a grueling but challenging task of you. My conscience sings clear in me: I could not allow it."

Remus lips are white around the edges.

"I know what you're doing," he says. "I see your tactics."

"I don't know what you're talking about." Sirius presses one hand to his chest, hurt stamped plainly across his features. "I am merely saying that the Book of All Books and the Research Project of All Research Projects is currently living beneath my bed, behind a large box wrapped in brown paper which, if you value your life and your eyebrows and the hair on the top of your head, you should certainly not open, and it is just waiting for someone to make great use of it. Never *once* did I say, 'Moony, lad, friend, Marauder, we need your help in this matter, desperately, achingly, inside our researchless bosoms--'"

"When do you need the information by?" Remus grinds out.

"Twelve o'clock tonight would be lovely." Sirius flings his arms around Remus' shoulders, kissing him wildly on the cheek. "Good man! Good man."

"Big idiot," Remus corrects him. "Big sopping idiot."

"And so squishy," Sirius adds, squeezing him around the ribs for good measure.

"I love it when you flatter me," Remus mutters. It's no surprise when he pats him absently atop the head anyway.

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"All right," Sirius says around a mouthful of potatoes. "So. We've got stage one set for five hundred hours tomorrow. Stealth Operative Gamma, you will be positioned where?"

"In the passage under the humpbacked witch, sir! Having just pilfered as many tempting-looking edibles as possible, sir! But not without leaving the correct payment in a prominent place! Because there's honor among thieves, sir!" Peter yells, jerking to attention and knocking his knife off the table.

"Very good, soldier," Sirius says gravely, ripping off an immaculate salute. "At ease. At which time, Strike Force Alpha, you will be where?"

"Flipping the portrait and changing the password on the Slytherin tower so they can't get out to breakfast until someone says 'Severus Snape is a hideous pimple,'" James says. "Which was *my* idea in the first place. And I'm not calling you 'sir.'"

"That's insubordination," Sirius replies, looking superior. "I could have you demoted. Keelhauled. And you, Reconnaissance Unit Kappa?"

"I'll be in my bed, with my fingers in my ears, pretending I don't know what's happening," Remus recites dully.

"Precisely." Sirius nods. "And I--"

"What's your codename?" Peter hisses.

"I -- what?"

"What's your codename? We've all got codenames. Did you forget to give yourself one?"

"I did not *forget*!" Sirius says, highly offended. "I don't think it's necessary. You can all address me as 'Commander.'"

"I think you should be 'Offensive Agent Pi,'" Peter suggests.

"Oh yes," Remus says innocently. "And we can call you 'Offensive Pie,' for short, which I think suits you."

"Right," Sirius says. "I see none of you are willing to take this mission as seriously as I am. I see that you're willing to see this day, this *great and glorious day*, as just another chance to go to class and make fun of Sirius. Very funny, men. Oh yes; you're very funny. But I hope you're thinking of the traditions you're dishonoring: of the generations before us and the generations to come, who will look back on April Fools' Day 1976 and shake their heads in disappointment and despair, crying: *if only they'd pulled through! If only they hadn't let the side down!* Because that's what you're doing, soldiers. You're *letting the side down*. You're a disappointment to your God and your country, and frankly, you're a disappointment to *me*. Your commander. Who has sweated with you, and toiled along side you, and bled and sweated and -- and teared, and I know I said sweated twice so don't open your mouth Remus Lupin I'm looking at you. I just want you to think about what you're doing. I want you to examine your attitudes. Maybe you'll find they need to be readjusted. For *England*."

"You know," Remus says thoughtfully, "the generations before us would probably look forward to April Fools' Day 1976. Right?"

"Not necessarily," Peter points out, "if they were still alive in 1977 they could look back on it then."

"You're right, I suppose it depends on the generation--"

"Shut up!" Sirius yells. "Look, just -- I don't have a codename and I'll be putting dungbombs under Snape's bed during Operation Dungbomb Number Three, which means James and I will have the cloak. So everyone else will need to exercise extreme caution."

"Even me?" Remus asks.

"Yes!" Sirius snaps. "Who knows what the enemy would do, if they caught you pretending not to know what was happening? They might wonder what we were up to! Just...go under the blankets or something."

"Am I allowed a light to read by sir, is that all right with you sir, sir?" Remus asks. Sirius brings their faces very close, exercising what he hopes is a militaristic air of unforgiving, hard-jawed promise.

"Only if you are prepared for all possibilities, soldier! Are you prepared, soldier? Do you think you can *handle* what lies in store for you at the first sign of dawn, six-zero-zero tomorrow, soldier?"

"Yes," Remus answers. "Can you pass the potatoes?"

Sirius sighs, slumping back in his chair. "Well, you're no fun," he mutters. "Here, there's your bloody potatoes, I hope they give you indigestion."

"We're with you, sir!" Peter exclaims, though he gives the potatoes a longing look as they pass him by.

"I'm with him but it worries me," James says. "We're low on resources. Every last hit *must* count. Every last minute *must* be exploited down to the second. And so on and so forth. Here, can I have those potatoes, Remus?"

"Am I working with men or monkeys?" Sirius asks the ceiling. "I ask you for brave souls, daring recruits, friends who'll never give up the secret of the final dungbomb, and you send me the soft, the weak, the potato-fiends."

"I haven't had any potatoes," Peter protests.

"Go on," Sirius sighs, "I know you want them."

"Can I really?" Peter falls to eagerly.

"Good man," Sirius says. "You tried your best. There are few who can resist the siren call of the potatoes with rosemary. Only the strongest survive."

"You had three helpings yourself," Remus points out.

"Well then." Sirius beams. "Let's have a fourth, shall we?"

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April First, Nineteen Seventy Six. Dawn. The halls are quiet. The day is yet pale, the slim gray of sunrise. Those less dedicated to the cause are still asleep. Sirius Black has already gagged all the house elves in a hundred foot radius with kitchen utensils, although most of them, jaded by five years' experience, had already done so themselves by the time he entered the kitchen at four-thirty to keep them, as he always puts it, out of harm's way, or rather, as Remus would say, out of *his* way. The house elves make muffled soft sounds of understanding. They are bad house elves, they are meddlesome tripsy house elves, they should always have fork tongs in their gums, and knives too, many, many knives. Sirius leaves them with a warning finger to his lips, before rejoining James outside the kitchens and heading in a direction the professionals generally call 'down.'

The Slytherin common room is pitch-black. James is speaking in a low voice to the blank wall, which spits and rattles back at him.

*"You know the Mason's Word,"* it hisses. *"You can command me to change it."*

"Oh, please do hush," James says rather desperately, sending a frantic glance toward the dormitories. "I'd rather you cooperated, to be perfectly honest, it's much funnier if you can report to me exactly what happens."

*"Just say the Word and I will be bound to your will. I will not participate in your carbon-based games."*

"Look." It's a long shot, James knows, but it's worth a go. "Do you like Severus Snape?"

*"Like' is a word for glands."*

"Y...es. But does he, you know. I've seen him kick walls! Loads of times."

The wall remains silent. James thinks it might be mad, but isn't sure how he knows, and thinks later he might perhaps be thinking like a madman.

"And," James adds, after a moment's thought, "I once heard him say the password was stupid."

*"My passwords are never stupid."*

"That's what I said at the time," James says, loyally. "'Muggles smell of jam,' I think that's brilliant, personally. Cracking social commentary. But Snape, he goes on these..."

*"Your voice is unfamiliar. What is your name, student or recently-hired professor?"*

"Lucius Malfoy," James says, thinking fast.

*"I know you. You were in the seventh year two years ago."*

"Yes. And I my voice has finally changed. Didn't think those balls would ever drop. Look, I've, er, come back." James passes a shaking hand over his brow. "To learn more. You can never have too much learning, is what I always say. Listen, will you please just change it?"

*"He does not like my passwords?"*

"Hates 'em. Mr. Mock The Passwords, that's what we call him," James says. Silence. He wonders if this one might have been overkill, until he realizes the wall is frowning. It's a general frown lingering in the air that, later, James will never be able to explain. Right now it just makes him itchy.

*"He will not like this one."*

"No," says James. "Not one bit."

*"I will do it. I will not do it for you, Lucius Malfoy, but rather because Severus Snape dishonors the House that I protect."*

"Lovely." James finally allows himself to breathe out. "So...what's the password? Just to...confirm, like."

*"Severus Snape,"* the wall says, in its frozen, sibilant tones, *"is a hideous pimple."*

"And they -- er, we -- can't get out till they -- we -- say that."

*"Yes. I will not be moved."*

"Good man -- er, wall," James mutters. He wonders if he should pat it or something, or if that's too personal. "Thanks for, er, restoring the honor of the, er, bloody brilliant house of Slytherin."

*"It is my duty,"* the wall grinds out.

"Righto. Finite Incantatem!" The stones crack and settle back into silence. Mission accomplished, thinks James, and feels a comforting glow of pride. The big boys are back in the game, and Lily Evans and her big, shining, beautiful green eyes, framed by those tumbling locks of wild copper hair, can go hang.

Well, he adds, as he leans against a different wall in what he hopes is not an intimate fashion, he doesn't really mean it. It's just, you know, a saying. That's all.

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Sirius Black always thought Snape, being possessed of so great and arched a Cathedral for an echoing chamber, would snore with all the chaos and sound of a three ring circus. Sirius Black, crouched beneath Snape's bed, is glad to learn he was always right. He's surprised the bed isn't shaking with the force of it. He's surprised no one else in the Slytherin boys' dormitory has yet suffocated Snape in the night with a pillow to make the madness stop. He's surprised *he* hasn't yet suffocated Snape with a pillow to make the madness stop. And he would, oh, how eagerly he would, except that would ruin the first step in the Plan, and all the steps afterwards.

To the rumbling rhythms of Severus Snape and his nose-horn, Sirius sets the fifty-five dungbombs -- two are left, lonely and sad, in the chest beneath his bed, in case of emergency -- evenly amongst Snape's things for maximum



effect. He snatches a few books, as well, but then puts them back. *Stick to the plan, Black*, he tells himself. *Just stick to the plan. Don't give yourself away.*

In all the history of all the world, Self-Dissolving Dungbombs are, Sirius thinks, the most brilliant invention attributed to man. One day, when he is old and no longer capable of carousing on April Fools, his most prized holiday, he will sit down and attempt to achieve such greatness. He has many ideas, of course, for the beginning prankster, as well as the professional, and every class that lies in between, but none approach the sheer genius that is the Self-Dissolving Dungbomb. Such application of chemistry. Such precision timing. Such perfection in a tiny twist of darkly colored magic.

"Make daddy proud," Sirius says. He touches each with his thumb, a ritual, a prayer, an offering to the gods. "Tis a far, far better thing you do than ever you have done--"

"Snrgoggnnnk," Snape snores.

"May the force be with you," Sirius says, and flees.

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At breakfast, one table is conspicuously empty. The rest of the school sends curious glances at it, and there is much speculation, including a) the creation of a new, private room for Purebloods who don't want their food tainted by Muggle hands; b) an orgy gone out of hand; and c) a annihilating plague. No one seems to know which explanation is most likely, until the names "Black and Potter" come up in the context of "April Fools" and all of a sudden, everything makes perfect sense.

"I heard they let a dragon loose in the dungeons," a second-year Hufflepuff says, wide-eyed.

"Naw," scoffs his fifth-year prefect. "You wouldn't know, you've not been here long enough. I bet you they turned the whole dungeon into an enormous sewer."

"Must keep that one in mind," Sirius whispers to James across the table, who is vibrating with repressed laughter. "Genius."

"Heard some things about you two," Kingsley Shacklebolt says suddenly, in his voice like tectonic plates shifting, looming over them, as always giving the impression of a tree sprung unexpectedly from the earth. "Not going to get you kicked off the Team, is it? McCormack'll throw a wobbly." He jerks an enormous thumb at the captain of the Gryffindor Quidditch team, who is eyeing them with great suspicion from the other end of the table, looking quite frightening for someone so petite and blonde.

"Not likely," Sirius says. He flashes Kingsley a winning smile. "It's April Fools, Kingsley! Don't sit down there," he adds quickly, "we'll be smelling you for days. That's one of the Bad Chairs."

His fellow Beater gives him a long, dark look. "Black, you'd better hope I don't sit in anything I don't want to. You, too, Potter. Watch it. You can still Chase with two broken legs, you know, if you're strapped on."

"On my honor as a Gryffindor," James says. "I value my neck, thank you. And my legs. And all my other bits."

"Right," Kingsley says, granting them both with a short nod. "Carry on, then, with my blessing."

"That's a relief," Sirius mutters. "Could make a living cracking heads in with a Quaffle if he wanted to, that one." He grins after Kingsley and waves, until he slides into a seat at the far end of the table. "Arms like the mighty oaks. I think he's a little unhinged -- do you see that look in his eye? That 'I don't like you, unworthy peon' look?"

"That's just for you," Peter says.

"Kingsley is my *soul brother*," says Sirius, looking rather offended. "I have smacked Bludgers alongside him for many a long year. Sometimes he waves at me."

"Don't let him hear you call him that, or he'll smack one of those brotherly Bludgers right into your skull," says Peter, and then frowns. "Brotherly Bludgers. Blutherly brudgers. Blurther--bother."

"Nothing you say can bring me down on this most glorious day," Sirius says loudly, leaning back. "There should be drinks, drinks all around the table, drinks on my dear friend James Potter to celebrate our triumph." James makes a face.

"Have any of you seen Remus?" he asks.

"Nothing you say," Sirius repeats emphatically, "can bring me down on this most glorious day. Drinks, Potter. *Drinks*."

"He wasn't around when I woke up," Peter says. "I just thought that was because I was late."

"How can he not be here?" Sirius demands. "How? How, at this hour of our victory?" He looks sullenly over his shoulder at the empty Slytherin table. "Right now, I bet you, the howls of our vanquished enemy are echoing amongst the rafters and he is no doubt taking a bath with bubbles in or something else that defeats our Grander Purpose."

"He might be in the bathroom," Peter points out.

"Not at breakfast, Petey, thank you." Sirius folds his arms over his chest. "How do you like that. How do you like that? I have two extra dungbombs, James, what do you say to--"

"You told him to lie low," James says. "Didn't you?"

"I didn't *mean* it," Sirius mutters.

"You didn't make that clear." James claps him on the shoulder. "Tough luck all around, isn't it?" His eyes glance nervously down the table, then flicker innocently to the ceiling, lips quirking into a tuneless whistle. "Do you see her?" he asks, out of the corner of his mouth. "Is she looking at me?"

"She's looking at Kingsley, actually," Sirius says. "Tough luck all around, just like you said."

"I hate you." James digs his thumbs into his eye sockets as if actually trying to make them explode. "You realize *you* lost me my girlfriend to the Human Oak Tree? I wish you would just go die."

"No you don't," Sirius says reasonably. "Let me remind you of all those things you would have to do alone--the explosions and nudity and so forth. Well, you could do them with Peter," again as an afterthought, "but he wouldn't be nearly so devious -- would you, Wormtail."

"Not by half," Peter says helpfully.

"Anyway," Sirius continues, trying to ignore the scene behind James's left ear, in which a giggling Lily is caressing one of Kingsley's biceps, which happens to be about the size of her head, "this is but a passing fancy. A momentary phase. I give it two weeks before she comes crawling back and you can go have horrible little redheaded babies or whatever it is you two do for fun. Where in the hell is *Remus*?"

"Oh, go find him," James mutters.

"Can't." A grin like the sun spreads over Sirius' face and he fights it down valiantly, even twiddling his thumbs for innocence's sake. "Slytherins. Twelve o'clock. Phase one: complete. Enjoyment stage commencing: *now*."

"They look mad," Peter whispers.

"No sign of Snivellus, is there?" Sirius pretends to inspect a broken fingernail while peering out at the scene from underneath wild hair. "Do you think he's thrown himself out a window to end the shame and torment?" Sirius sighs blissfully. "Or perhaps he's flushed himself down a toilet. Or maybe -- if we're lucky -- he's found himself a dark and sooty corner to weep in until he shrivels up and *dies*. What do you think men, eh?"

"There he is," Peter says, and points.

"Down!" Sirius hisses. "Down! Utmost caution! Subtlety at all times! *Do not let the enemy know we know!*"

"We know what?" Peter asks.

"*Everything*," Sirius replies.

"Oh." Peter ponders this. "I understand."

"He's coming this way," James mutters from the corner of his mouth. "Quick. Look innocent. *Now*."

Snape hurls himself at them, looking even more like a furious crow than usual and smelling like something unholy. Sirius makes a horrible face and pushes his plate away. "Urgh, mate. Stand over there, will you? What'd you do -- fall in the toilet?"

"I did not fall in anything," Snape grinds out in deadly tones. "But I *know* that you are responsible -- you -- you--" The deep olive flush of rage suffuses his face, and he seems lost for words, capable only of trembling, fists clenched.

"Easy now, Snapey," James says. He holds up his hands amiably. "Can't exactly blame us for your personal odor problems, can you? Where *were* you lot, anyway? Oh, *urgh*, it's *all* of you!" Indeed, from the red-faced Slytherins clustered at their table is wafting an almost tangible miasma of stink. Sirius makes a *whoooof*! noise and waves at the air in front of his nose. "What happened? Peeves get into the sewage pipes?" If looks could kill, the Slytherins would not only have murdered James and Sirius in singularly nasty and imaginative ways, but also defaced their bodies and danced in the remains.

"I *told* you," hisses the Hufflepuff fifth-year prefect, "enormous sewer!"

Snape raises himself up to his full height, which isn't, Sirius thinks, all that impressive, with his skinny hands clenched into small, spiny-looking fists and his nostrils flared like the sails of a giant boat. "Baths," Sirius suggests. "An age-old custom. History tells us that it has been employed, in the past, to keep man from smelling like beast." Sirius sniffs, blanches, and waves a hand in front of his nose. "Some people," he finishes, "are trying to eat, Snivellus."

"You'd know all about *beasts*, wouldn't you," Snape returns. His lips are a tight, dark line, his face gaunt and angry, but eager. "You won't get away with this."

"Get away with what?" James blinks innocently.

"Don't know what you're talking about," Peter chimes in.

"You smell like an outhouse," Sirius finishes. "Begone with you, dung-boy."

"Beasts," Snape insists, then turns on his heel and stalks away.

"What a blight on the landscape," Sirius hisses. "Moony had nothing to do with it. I say we steal all Snivellus' underwear and put hot pepper in it--"

"Next year, maybe," James admonishes. "You're the one who wants to stick to the plan."

"How about next week?" Sirius attempts. "Maybe next month?" James' expression remains unconvinced. "A year is such a *long time*," Sirius groans. "I can't wait a *year*. I just had the idea *now*."

"There are only so many points we can lose, you know," Peter says. "Remember third year, when we actually went to negative thirty? I think we should try to avoid that."

"But that was so much fun," Sirius whines, regarding them piteously. "Oh, a pox on the selective memories of the depressingly law-abiding. Let us recall that part of that negative thirty was that one time, with the sausages--"

"Oh right," Peter says suddenly with his little cackle of a laugh, "yes! And the dwarves we painted blue--"

"Exactly," Sirius says. He settles back in his chair with a look of blissful reminiscence. "James. Jamie James. Don't say that doesn't bring a wistful smile of nostalgia to that long face of yours."

"All right, that was a good time," James admits, grudgingly. Sirius thinks he would probably consider it a surrender to show any trace of anything but the most heartrending misery, and wants to step on his foot. "But no peppers now. Points or not, it's a waste of energy. The Slytherins'll abuse him for us for at least the next month, until the smell fades."

"Wankers. Moving in on my favorite pastime." Sirius drums his fingers impatiently against the tabletop, whistling through his teeth, and then suddenly sits up like a hound at point and says "Moony! Where've you been at?"

"Oh," Remus replies vaguely, "about." He settles down at the table, leaning over for some milk, when he pauses, a look of pained intensity crossing his face. "What *is* that smell?"

"Success?" Sirius offers.

"Fifty-five dungbombs," James explains.

"Well." Sirius sniffs. "If you want to be literal about it."

"Slytherins?" Remus asks. He butters a roll, not seeming too surprised, perturbed, or even upset. "I take it the chairs are for later on in the day?"

"Festivities from dawn 'til dusk, that's me," Sirius coos. "Is this what you call lying low, eh?"

"There was a lot of noise in the hall. A Slytherin exodus, apparently." Remus snatches the jam from Sirius' teasing fingers and sets to with his knife. "Which I'm sure none of you had anything to do with."

"You missed Snivellus." Sirius frowns. "You could practically *see* the smell."

"It was brilliant," Peter agrees.

"Mmph." James flops forward into his plate. "She's *fondling* his *biceps*. She's *still* fondling his biceps. Isn't she?"

Sirius heaves a deep sigh and flings his arms around Peter's shoulders. "You and me, Pete," he says. "How's that sound? Two visionaries against the wet blanket of the *world*."

"You'd get me killed," Peter says flatly.

"Marauders!" Sirius stares around at them, frankly bewildered. "I feel like I hardly know you anymore! This is not Marauding behavior, this is -- this is -- we ought to be called The Wet Blankets! Well," he amends, "the Wet Blankets And One Very Lonely Marauder, which is not much better."

"Brilliant name for a band, though," Remus says thoughtfully.

"Pfah!" Sirius scoffs. "I am shocked at you, men; shocked and horrified. We've just pulled off a brilliant prank--and by 'we' I of course mean The Most Pathetic Person In The World and myself--Snake is about to be hung from the rafters by his own House, and Peter's got us stocked with enough snacks to last a lifetime. Why are there not celebrations? Why are we not drinking? Quaffing, even? Quaffing a celebratory ale?"

"I would like to be drunk," James says, confirming his status as Most Pathetic Person Ever. "We should go drink."

Remus is picking at his breakfast, looking slightly ill. "You haven't done anything to this, have you, Sirius?"

"Honor among thieves, Moony," Sirius reminds him, looking very wounded. "Honestly. What do you think of me?"

"It's just that it tastes -- it tastes strange." Remus puts the roll down, contemplating it with red-rimmed eyes. "That's silly. It's just bread and butter and some jam, isn't it?"

"The man can't even hold his jam, and you're speaking of getting drunk. Bah." Sirius folds his arms over his chest and stares moodily off in front of him.

"You all right, Moony?" Peter asks, as James sulks and Sirius sulks and Remus turns green around the edges.

"Don't know, actually," Remus says. "Right. Bathroom. Glurk."

"He just said glurk," Peter reiterates, watching Remus flee. "Hello, is that Snape looking smug?"

Sirius' brows knit together. Peter opens his mouth to say something, but shuts it again, recognizing how necessary it is not to interrupt. "The jam," Sirius says suddenly. He slams his hand down on the table so that it shakes, and a few Gryffindors voice their protest as only Gryffindors can. "Gits," Sirius mutters. "It's the jam. That -- that *rat!* He's put something in Moony's jam!"

"We did put fifty-five dungbombs beneath his bed," James points out. "Although they could have been in his lunch, so he should really be grateful."

"Stop being so reasonable!" Sirius explodes. "You're *no* fun anymore, James, no fun *at all!* Come on, Peter. Operation Pepper Pants begins as of *now*."

"Er," Peter says. He sits back down. He is rather too heavy to be dragged, so Sirius makes a noise of exasperation, abandons him as dead weight, and storms over to the Slytherin table. As he passes, he hears Rodolphus LeStrange hiss "Black, you'd better--" before he is cut off by an extremely vulgar *blat* which sets the entire room to giggling. Heartened by this development, he stalks down the table until he towers above Snape, arms crossed. Snape is, he is very pleased to note, sitting alone at a bench very far away from the rest of his house, who are giving off rays of singular hatred.

"Right," Sirius says. He twitches as the smell hits and switches to breathing through his mouth. "That's idd. Dake off your drouers."

"Take off my trousers," Snape repeats, looking at him askance. "Look, Black, I should have realized that all this idiocy and attempted murder was really just pulling my metaphorical *pigtails*, but I'd rather be slowly devoured by *carnivorous ants*."

"No," Sirius says. Anyone more attuned to his nature would understand the danger, however muffled with humor by a nose pinched tightly shut. "Off with 'ebb. I'b going to but pebber in a very bainful blace, and I'd rather do idd

dow than wait till you're asleep."

"Haven't you had enough fun with me for one day?" Snape turns around, pointedly ignoring him.

"This isn't about me," Sirius snarls, grabbing him by the neck of the robes and whipping him around, too upset to breathe only through his mouth. "What did you do to Remus?"

A horrible little smile curves the corner of Snape's mouth. "Whatever do you mean?"

"I think you know perfectly well what I mean."

"Hardly," Snape says, gazing at him blandly. "It's not my fault some people just can't hold their *silver*."

Sirius' molars grind together. "I'm going to kill you," he says.

"Ah," Snape sighs. "So it's not *my* pigtailed you want to *pull*. Am I right?"

"You've tried to *poison* him," Sirius spits out. "You're disgusting. You're pathetic. You smell like a diseased *monkey*. I'm going to kill you."

"By all means, Black," Snape says. "Do it. Here. In front of the entire school. Enough witnesses to put you in Azkaban for life -- I rather think my death will be heralded one day as a great sacrifice for so *noble* a cause." The corner of Sirius' eye twitches. He pulls his arm back, fist balled into impending, knuckly doom. "Do it," Snape challenges. His nasal voice sends spasms of disgust down Sirius' spine and deep into his belly.

"Wouldn't want to improve your face any," Sirius snaps. He pulls away, knocking Snape back down to the bench. Hard. "Watch out, Snivellus. Day's not over yet."

"I'm terrified," Snape says dryly. "I assure you. Your pathetic attempts at blustering masculinity aside, I'm sure there are a few *first year Hufflepuffs* who might be impressed by your bravado -- not to mention a currently vomiting werewolf, naturally -- but I am not so inclined."

"Like I said, Snivellus," Sirius repeats, "*watch out*."

"What happened?" Peter asks as Sirius returns to the Gryffindor table. "Did you beat him up? It didn't look like you were beating him up. It looked like you *didn't* beat him up."

"It was silver," James adds, looking animated for the first time in weeks. "Wasn't it?"

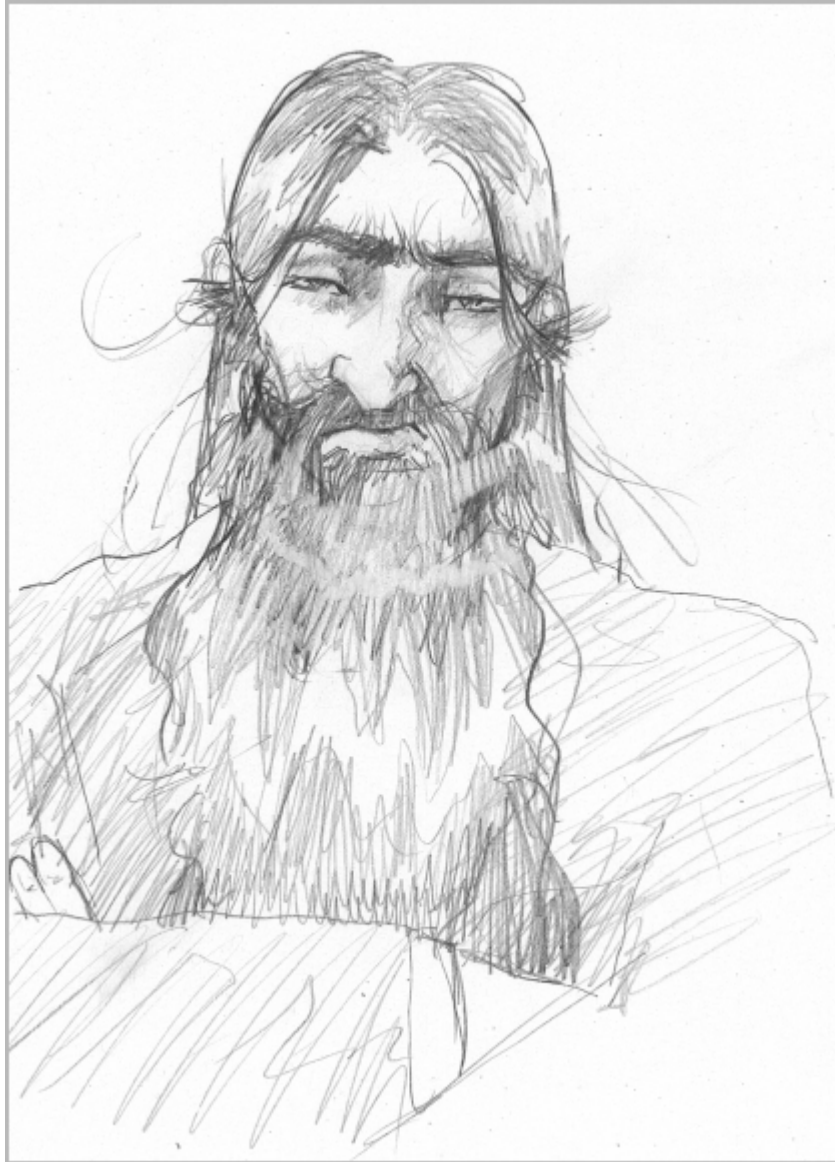
"You know what this means," Sirius says, twirling his silverware between his fingers.

James nods grimly. "Oh yes," he says. "*War*."

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*Thus began the famed Prank Week of '76, in which the following tasks were executed with so meticulous a hand that even Dumbledore, when at last the perpetrators were caught, was hard pressed to hide his admiration.*

**Day One, known as operation Hairy McHairyPants.**

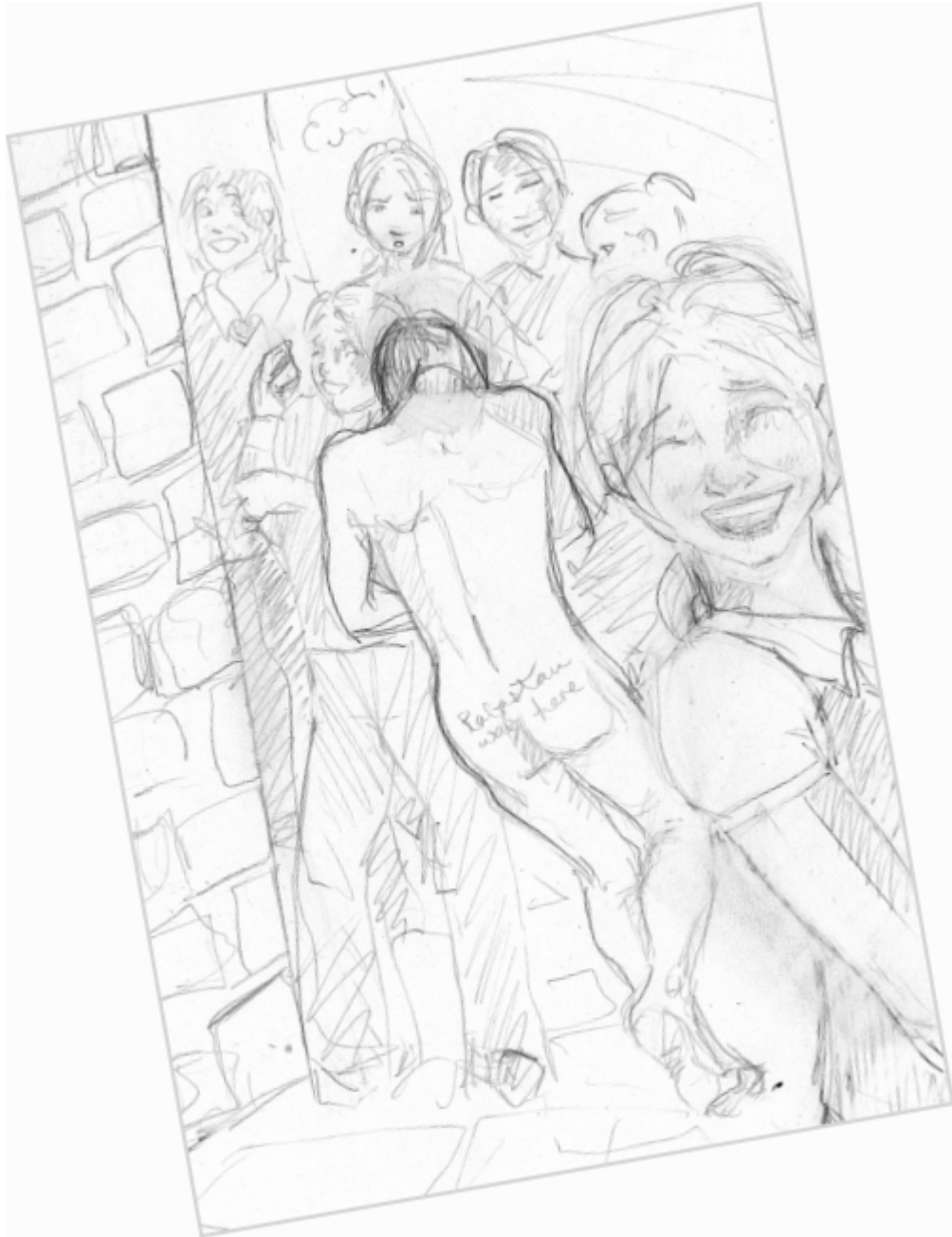




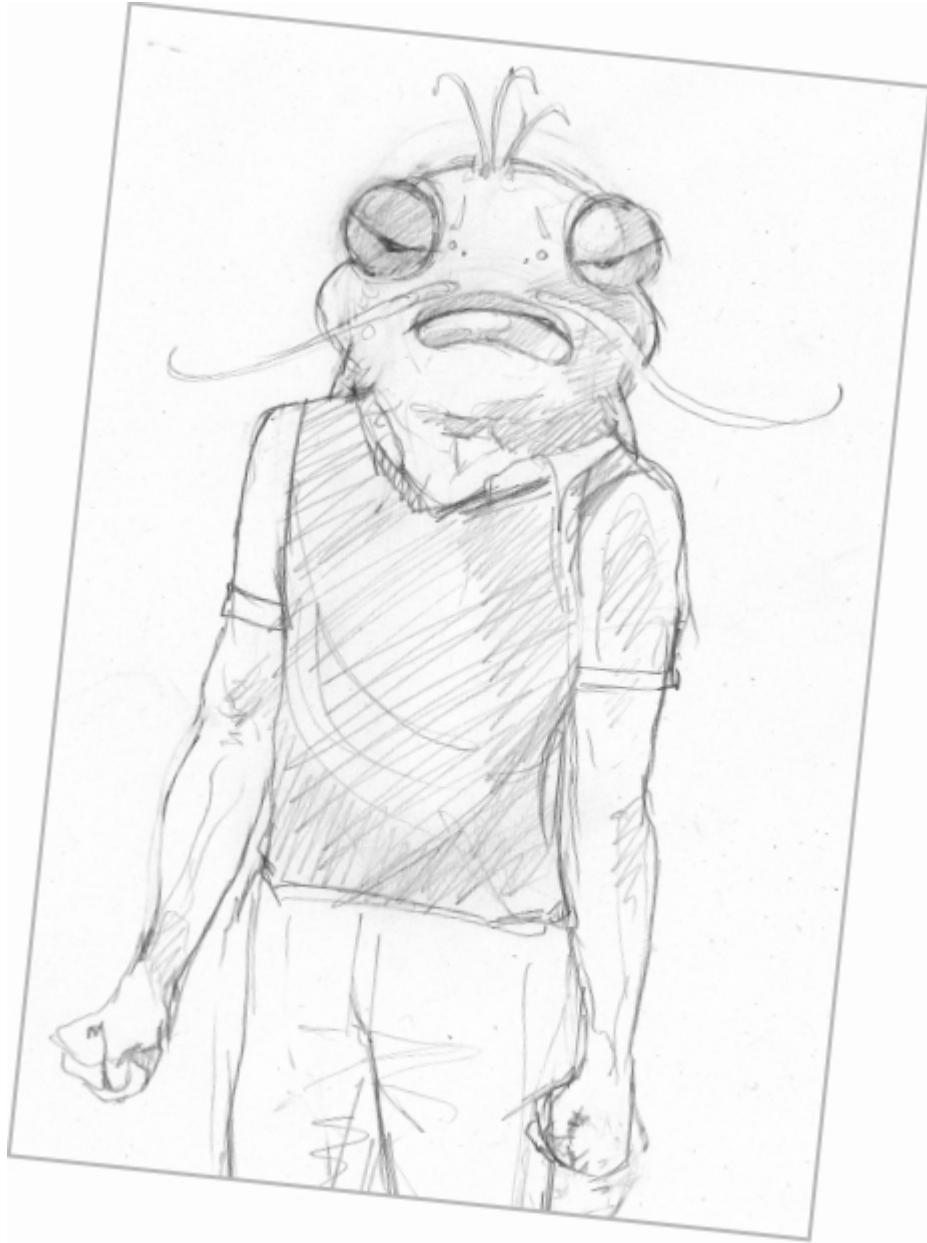
**Day Two.** Remus Lupin would like to affirm before the jury he had nothing to do with this, but was balling socks at the time of the incident.



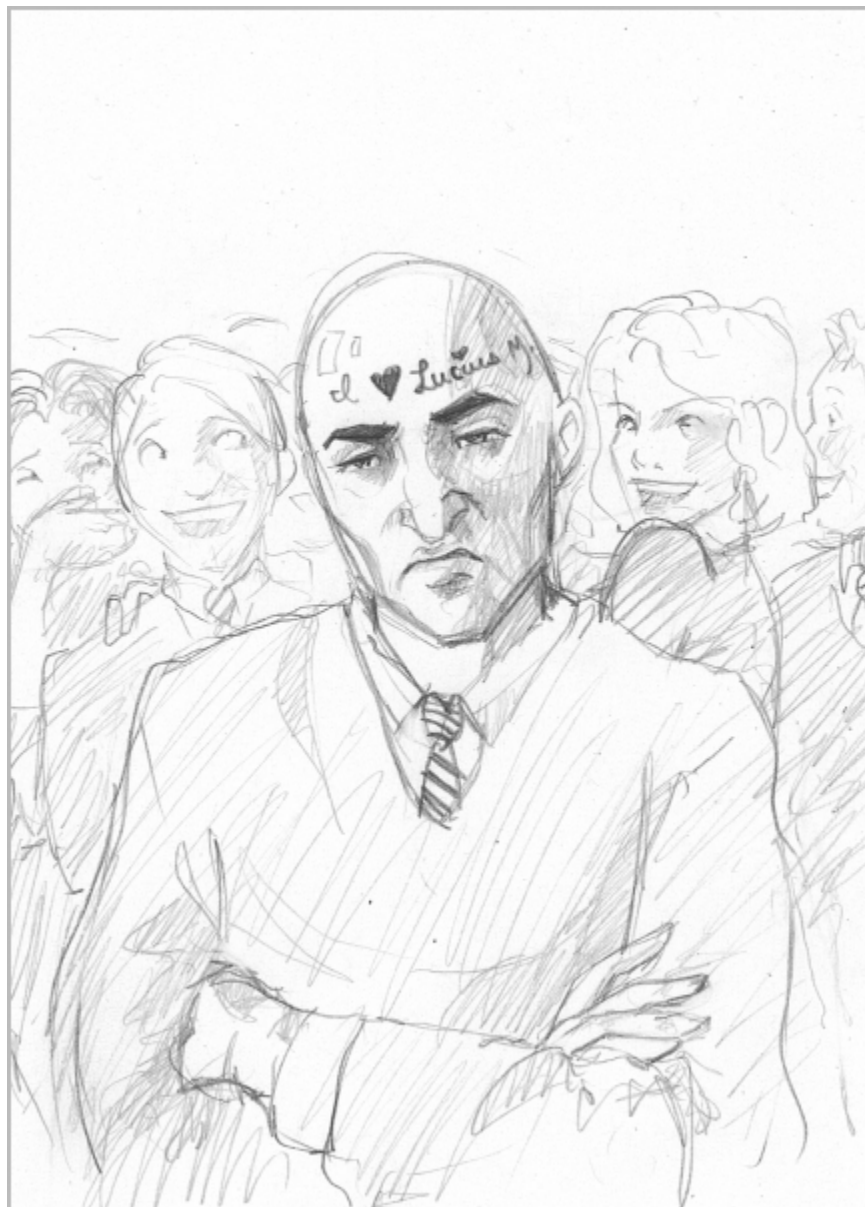
**Day Three. Rabastan was here.**




**Day Four. There are other fish in the sea. Thank God you didn't catch that one.**





**Day Five. It's more hygienic that way, trust me.**






Cowritten by  [dorkorific](#) and  [ladyjaida](#).

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The handwriting of Remus J. Lupin, Severus Snape and James Potter is done by  [ladyjaida](#).

The handwriting of Sirius Black, Peter Pettigrew and Lily Evans is done by  [dorkorific](#).  
Don't worry; Peter won't be stupidified. **Trust us** on that one.

We would like to take a moment to thank  [windjinn](#) for leaping down the stairs with  [ladyjaida](#)'s bra on his head.

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