

When We Were Alive

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Marauders' days of glory.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: Written in Polish for M. for her birthday, translated into English for amazingly_me at the Fall Fandom Free-For-All challenge. Beta: Melusin.

Sirius, who had just returned from detention with McGonagall, threw himself on his bed without taking off his shoes and grabbed the Quidditch equipment catalogue, clearly indicating that he wasn't listening to what James, and the others, were saying to him.

"Care to explain why you started barking at McGonagall?"

Sirius turned the page in a very theatrical manner.

"Guh! I could do with a pair of these gloves. If I lammed Rookwood in those, I wouldn't feel a thing. Take a look." He turned the catalogue to James, shoving the picture of the padded gloves right before his angry, red face. "You could do with a pair, too..."

He didn't get to finish the sentence. James snatched the catalogue and threw it blindly across the dormitory. Peter, who was standing with his eyes bulging out near Sirius' bed, managed to dodge the flying brochure but knocked his head against the bed-post. Remus, who was perching on the absent Frank's bed to be as far as possible from the epicentre of the typhoon that was currently rolling across the fifth-years boys' dormitory, didn't notice the approaching object and got hit in the arm.

"Ow!" Disorientated, he jumped off the bed and rubbed the aching spot. "Have you gone mad? Do you want McGonagall to give us all detention 'til the end of the year for fighting in the dormitory? I've never seen her this furious before."

It only fanned the flames.

"And thanks to whom, if I may ask?" James jabbed his finger into Sirius' chest.

Sirius, who had just seemed to have dropped his defiant attitude a bit, jumped up and shoved James. Hard.

"Get lost, Potter! Look who's talking! Because you don't know what 'detention' means! You've never made anyone furious!"

"Not in the moment like this, Sirius! Not like this! What's got into you?"

Now, all of them were regarding Sirius with a questioning look in their eyes. Sighing resignedly, he sat on the edge of his bed with his head bowed.

"I couldn't bear it," he mumbled. "She moved her whiskers in such a way... And when she pricked up her ears and sat on her... uh... hind legs, as if readying to jump, Padfoot in me just had to bark at her." Sirius looked up pleadingly at James. "I couldn't stop myself."

During his confession, the boys' faces changed their expressions from astounded to amused. Remus turned his head away and shook with silent laughter. The corner of James' lip twitched. Peter looked from Remus to James and back, not sure if it was allowed to laugh.

Sirius still moped.

"Did you see," Peter began carefully, "how she swished her tail? She knocked all the rolls off her desk."

That was their undoing. Right then, James burst out with thunderous laughter, throwing back his head. Peter and Remus followed suit.

Sirius smiled faintly.

"Her teeth are sharp as needles," uttered James. "And isn't she temperamental! She put all of her Scottish soul into hissing at you."

"Good thing that you didn't change into Padfoot. We would have had to separate you." Remus caught a breath sufficient for one sentence and again doubled up with laughter.

"Close shave," said Sirius quietly.

The laughter ceased at once, and deadly silence reigned over the room. Unsure if they'd heard correctly, the boys exchanged shocked looks.

"You're joking," said James slowly.

"Not this time, mate. I felt the skin crawling on the nape of my neck. I had to release the tension somehow to not get carried away. And I just couldn't stop barking at her."

"But so fiercely? You ran to her desk!"

Sirius shrugged.

"Most dogs like to chase cats. Apparently, Padfoot does, too."

James sighed and ruffled his hair. "Clearly, we still have some things to work over. The mere ability to transform is not enough; we have to control it in various circumstances." James bit down on his lip and stared at the wall. After a moment of consideration, he continued, "We don't have enough time as it is...what with OWLs looming over our heads and everything. And now your detention... We will have to work during lunch..." Peter moaned sufferingly. "Or at night..." Now it was Remus' turn to moan. "There is also the map. We have to refine it, and fast. It seems that it doesn't cover all the people and nooks of Hogwarts."

Sirius gave James a meaningful look, and for the first time since his arrival from detention, he appeared to be amused. He raised a brow and opened his mouth as if to say something, but for some reason, James wasn't curious and quickly started to talk again, twice as loudly.

"So! Everything's fixed: Transfiguration at night because it requires peace and quiet, and no witnesses, and during the day, when everyone's hanging around the castle...the map..."

James suddenly broke off. The door to their dormitory opened slowly, and the head of a surprised Frank Longbottom showed in the crack.

"Hi! I thought you would all be asleep by the time I came back. I crept upstairs, not to wake anyone, and here's James shouting at the top of his lungs about some map. What map?"

Uncharacteristically for him, James froze with his gaze fixed on Frank as if he didn't understand what Frank had just said. Peter hid behind Remus, and Remus looked at Sirius, who was casually sprawled on the bed, clearly not concerned with their slip-up.

"The map of the sky of the northern hemisphere, of course." Sirius smiled broadly, propping himself up on one elbow. "The Astronomy homework."

"But we handed it in two weeks ago." Frank, who had just stepped inside and closed the door, looked suspiciously at Sirius. "You, too. I remember it well because Peter couldn't find Sirius... um, sorry... the Dog Star, which is rather a spectacular achievement."

James glared at his best friend for making up such a lousy excuse. Sirius only smiled more broadly and crossed his legs at the ankles.

"Peter can't find his shoes under his own bed each morning, although he puts them there carefully each evening, so let's not talk about such distant objects as the stars. Well, back to the map..." he continued, undaunted by the fact that behind Frank's back, James was running his finger across his throat threateningly. "We agreed that they could be improved, and that's exactly what we intend to do. We wouldn't like to think that there would only be those imperfect, half-baked, let's face it, *shoddy* maps of the northern hemisphere's sky left in the Hogwarts' archives after us. In accordance with that, unanimously, we have decided..."

"Nutters," Frank stated wearily, interrupting Sirius' flow of words and going to his bed.

James breathed a sigh of relief, Remus started to change into his pyjamas with surprising speed while Peter scanned their faces, unsure if the show was over.

Frank, noticing that the cover that he always left spread carefully was slightly creased, experienced a new surge of energy.

"Who, for Merlin's sake, rolled over my bed? What, you don't have your own? Lupin!"

Remus, who was just about to jump behind the curtains, reluctantly turned to Frank.

"What?"

"You know very well, what! Why did you lounge on my bed again?"

"I didn't lounge. I perched for a moment."

"Can't you perch on your own bed?"

Remus looked around. He didn't want to mention the quarrel that had rolled here a while back so not to lead Frank onto the dangerous subjects again. Unfortunately, he couldn't think of any reason quickly enough that wouldn't sound stupid. He waited for the backup of his friends, but they were all, as one man, very busy with the buttoning down of their pyjamas.

"Erm... Yours is more comfortable," he ventured at last.

As it turned out, it wasn't the right approach to the matter.

"More comfortable?" Frank repeated in a deceptively sweet voice. When Remus nodded, he threw himself at his own bed, tearing the cover off, grabbed a pillow and duvet, and in a bound was at Remus' bed. "So, we're switching," he announced. "I don't care; even better, I will be closer to the door when I return from..." He bit his tongue. "When I return late, and you're all asleep."

This was exactly the reason why the beds in their dormitory were allotted in the way they were. Remus' bed was closest to the door while Frank's, the farthest. Marauders'

nightly escapades were risky enough; there was no need to increase this risk.

James and Sirius came to the rescue. They grabbed Frank under the arms and started to forcibly walk him back to his own bed. The normally gentle boy groaned like a wounded boar and started to fight against his attackers with a surprising strength.

"Frank, take it easy. Don't be so nervous. It's late. Let's get some sleep. Everything will be easier in the morning." James tried to reconcile him, but Frank wouldn't be persuaded.

"You heard Remus. Do you want your friend to sleep in an uncomfortable bed?" Frank jiggled with every step, simultaneously trying to break free and not drop his bedding. James and Sirius didn't loosen their hold on him.

"Remus doesn't think that your bed is more comfortable." Taking the initiative, Sirius changed tactics from persuading to denying.

"He said so himself just a moment ago!"

"He just wanted to be polite. You know Remus. Your bed isn't all that comfortable."

"What do you mean, 'isn't'? Then why does he lounge on it all the time?"

"I do not!" Remus lost his usual composure.

"He perched on it, not lounged. Let's not hurl rash accusations." Sirius tried to pry Frank's fingers open from his bedding and divert his attention from the essence of the conflict at the same time. "If you must know, mine is the most comfortable." He managed to pick the pillow out of his dorm-mate's tight grip and threw it on the mattress.

"Is it? So why doesn't he 'perch' on yours, huh?"

It didn't go so easily with the duvet because Frank now had only one thing to guard.

"Because," panted Sirius, struggling with Frank while James tried to prevent his return to Remus' bed, "I've never let him. I was being egoistic. I didn't realise how badly Remus needed to perch on a comfortable bed. I didn't realise that this burning...let's not shy from this word...desire would drive Remus to such a desperate move as his perching on your impeccably made bed."

Unexpectedly, Frank went floppy in their grip, allowing them to take his duvet and, for the second time that evening, announced in a defeated voice, "Nutters."

"Frank, give it a rest. You're tired and cannot appreciate our words of wisdom. By the way, where did your obsession with impeccably made beds come from?"

"Obsession? I was raised in a respectable house. My mother always says that you can judge a man by the way his bed is made."

"Am I getting this right? I have to barge into somebody's bedroom to judge their character? And you call it respectable? I'd call it a drastic case of over familiarity, or even insolence..."

"I'm going to sleep!" Frank yanked the curtains, dived under his duvet, and burrowed his head under the pillow.

"Damn right," stated Sirius calmly, turning to the rest of the room. "Gentlemen, tonight is the last night we will get to sleep whole. Seize the opportunity while you can."

Remus jumped into his four-poster like a scalded cat. Peter clambered in slowly and, already kneeling on the mattress, looked under his bed, hanging upside down. He straightened the shoes that were lined up there and tied them together by the laces, just to be sure.

Sirius and James lay down, not shutting the curtains completely. Silence reigned, broken only by the hissing of the candle's flame when it burnt a bit of dust. From time to time, a bed creaked when somebody turned over, searching for a more comfortable position. There were a few coughs, and finally there was only the sound of deep, even breathing audible.

James caught the edge of his curtains and pulled them carefully.

"Put out that candle!" A voice suddenly reverberated in the dormitory. The shout was accompanied by the disgruntled groans of the half-awake people interrupted in their well-deserved sleep.

James froze. Sirius...quite the opposite. He sat up on the bed and threw the curtains wide open.

"Frank, how many times do I have to tell you that I can't fall asleep in the dark! When I feel like I'm falling asleep, I'll douse the candle."

"You'll fall asleep and burn us all!"

"I won't. Have I ever? Have you ever woken up to a burning candle? No. Admit it." Sirius was hurt to the quick. "Show a bit of trust."

"I can't recall ever benefiting from trusting you!"

"Watch the flickering flame of the candle, Frank, and relax," tempted Sirius.

"If you keep on watching that 'flickering flame' of yours, you'll start to pee in your bed."

"As long as I piss in my own bed, it's none of your business. Go to sleep, Longbottom, and let the others sleep. You're nothing but trouble, really." Sirius' voice dripped with condemnation.

Frank gave up, turned on his other side and threw the duvet over his head. "Nutcase," he muttered.

James rolled his eyes. The corner of Sirius' lips travelled upwards in a self-satisfied smile. They both dropped back on their pillows and lay with their eyes open. When the silence, interrupted only by deep breathing, spread over the dormitory again, both boys sat up at the same time as if on cue and from between the curtains stuck out their hands, wielding wands.

There was a quiet, double '*Accio, Peter's shoe!*', and the shoes from under Peter's bed soared in different directions, unravelling the laces along the way. One landed on the outstretched hand of James, the other...of Sirius. They grinned at each other and levitated their hauls to different places: Sirius...onto Remus' canopy and James...onto the curtain rod. They winked at each other and lay back down, not dousing the light yet.

"Frank is a tad too highly strung," whispered James.

"We have to take better care of him. Our methods weren't sufficient. It's a harder case than we anticipated." Sirius was evidently concerned and ready for further actions and sacrifices on his friend's behalf.

James' lips twisted with doubt.

"I fear that since we've started taking care of him, his condition has worsened."

"It's temporary, I assure you, Prongs. It's the hardest phase...a turning point. We can't give up, now. It would be unfriendly. Soon, material fatigue will occur, and we'll have a brand new Frank. Trust me."

They both laughed quietly at their favourite joke.

James pointed his wand at the candle.

"Nox," he whispered.

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