

Jack O'Lantern James

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Chapter 1 of 1

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The Great Hall was bustling with the sounds of hundreds of students tucking into the annual Halloween feast. Shimmering pumpkins grinned and smirked from the windows, and the castle ghosts were out in their very best finery entertaining the House tables and wistfully staring at the food they could never eat. At one end of the Gryffindor table, two dark heads leaned close, whispering.

"What are they up to now?" asked Peter, sitting down across from James and Sirius.

Remus rolled his eyes as he helped himself to more treacle tart. "Halloween prank, of course," he answered, mouth full as he reached for a glass of pumpkin juice. "Apparently we'll get to experience the glory in a few minutes."

Peter shook his head and began to serve himself. "I just hope we don't all get in trouble like the time they turned everyone's—"

He was cut off by shriek from the Slytherin table. Within moments Severus Snape was glowering behind them, red-faced and furious. He was also covered in straw: it was sticking out from his pants, from his sleeves, and around his neck. A large floppy hat fell across his dark eyes.

"Potter!" he shouted, drawing his wand and pointing it at James and Sirius. "Get up! I know you are responsible for . . . for . . ." He was sputtering in anger. ". . . for this!"

James valiantly hid his grin, turning around almost lazily to gaze with a blank face at Snape's ridiculous appearance. "I don't know what you're talking about," he finally replied as blandly as he could manage. "Ask Sirius."

Snape turned impatiently on Sirius, who simply raised an eyebrow. "A Snapecrow, huh? Wish I had thought of it. Think he'll scare away any pixies, James?"

James couldn't hold it anymore: he burst out laughing, and Sirius quickly joined in, clapping him on the back. Instead of infuriating Snape even more, their joking acknowledgment had the unexpected effect of calming him down. Snape appeared to manage his anger as he placed his wand in his robes and slowly nodded. James and Sirius stopped laughing immediately, thrown off by this unusual reaction.

"Good one, Black," said Snape, and he raised his own eyebrows challengingly. "But easy enough to overcome." His lips moved silently, and the straw disappeared; apparently Snape had mastered wandless magic far ahead of the other sixth-years.

James felt the tiniest bit of admiration tinged with jealousy; Sirius looked irritated. "Show-off," he muttered under his breath.

Snape smirked and moved his lips silently once more. Then he sketched a tight bow and left the hall without another word.

James felt a strange sensation in his bum. It was growing—very fast, very large, and apparently very round. He glanced at Sirius and saw a look of panic on his friend's face. They quickly stood up and excused themselves, ignoring whatever Remus and Peter called after them. By the time they had reached the Entrance Hall, they were

practically running, and the faint sound of laughter followed them.

They hurried back to Gryffindor Tower, fortunate enough to avoid meeting anyone in the corridors. Just as they shouted the password at the Fat Lady, however, the portrait opened and the last Gryffindor they wanted to see stepped out: Lily Evans.

James felt his face flush and was suddenly furious at Snape for putting him in such an embarrassing situation. He brushed by her without looking up and barely heard Sirius mutter a hurried greeting. Evans was sharp, though, and knew immediately that something was going on; being stubbornly curious as well, she followed them right back through the entrance into the common room.

Walking behind them, she could hardly miss it; even under their robes it was obvious. She snickered. James spun away from her and pulled his robes tighter around him, but to his horror she gracefully flicked her wand, and they flew off to land on the sofa. She cocked her head, green eyes dancing merrily.

"Turn around, Potter," she ordered. "I have to see this to believe it."

James looked desperately at Sirius, who simply shrugged; he wasn't the one who had been chasing after Lily Evans for two years and probably wouldn't pass up an opportunity to see James humiliated in front of her.

"Maybe she knows a counter-curse," Sirius drawled. "It would save us from having to look it up."

"Do you?" James demanded, hoping she would, but suspecting that even if she knew a counter-curse for their unusual condition, he was probably the last person she would give it to.

"I might," she answered nonchalantly. "I'll need to see it more closely, though."

Once again, James felt his face redden. He was not used to being in this position: he was both the victim of a prank he would have pulled himself and hostage to Lily Evan's superior wandwork. He could not have imagined a worse Halloween.

Slowly he turned around to reveal his backside. His bum had now burst the seams of his pants, magically charmed into a large orange pumpkin that was growing larger and more uncomfortable by the minute. He hadn't altered any of Snape's body parts; turning a man's arse into a pumpkin seemed unfair retaliation for a bit of straw sticking out of his shirt.

Evans burst into laughter, and even Sirius cracked a smile. A small part of James really wanted to join them, but his pride was too injured, and his sense of humor just couldn't compensate. "Can you fix it?" he snapped irritably.

She sniggered again, eyes twinkling. "Sure, just stand still." She took out her wand again and made a few elegant gestures. James felt a warm touch, but did not feel his backside return to normal proportions. He looked over his shoulder and his eyes widened in shock, for instead of removing the curse she had carved a large, grinning face into the pumpkin.

"Jack O'Lantern James!" she exclaimed, and Sirius doubled over with laughter. A few quick flicks of her wand and his own backside matched. With a sly smile and a parting wink, Evans gave them both a mocking curtsy and hurried through the portrait hole, leaving them alone in the common room with their newly decorated arses.

"Oh, Merlin, Mannan, and Morgana," said James, almost sick with disbelief. "Please tell me the last ten minutes did not just happen."

Sirius, however, seemed to be enjoying the prank far more. "Jack O' Lantern James!" he cackled. "That's even better than Snapecrow. We just got our arses whipped, James—twice!"

"Then why are you grinning like an idiot?" demanded James, irritated with his friend's flippant mood. He reached behind him to scratch his backside and came away with a handful of pumpkin seeds. He flicked them away in disgust.

"Come on, you have to admit they both got us good," replied Sirius cheerfully. "Besides," he added with a wink, "we've got every reason to get them back now, and I'm already thinking of how. Something to do with a Sleepwalking Curse, perhaps."

James couldn't help it: the thought of getting even made it much easier to accept their botched Halloween. "And perhaps a Repelling Jinx." With a grin, he hurried upstairs with Sirius to find the counter-curse and begin the settling of scores—with both Snape *and* Evans this time.

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Thank you to Kristy and Sandy for the inspiration behind this story!