

The Fifth Gryffindor

by MMADfan

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In Gryffindor Tower

Chapter 1 of 1

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I was the fifth Gryffindor. The one that everyone forgot. James and Sirius, no one ever forgot them. They were larger than life from the time they stepped off the Hogwarts Express and into the boats to carry them across the lake. Remus and Peter, they went along with James and Sirius. You could hardly think of Potter and Black without seeing Lupin and Pettigrew at their sides. Me, I was the afterthought. "Oh, yes, and Mr Burton," they would say, remembering me suddenly, as though I was a phantasm that flitted into their consciousness and then away again, surprising to notice, but then as quickly forgotten.

It could be handy, that: being quickly forgotten. Even Prongs, Padfoot, Moony, and Wormtail would forget me, whispering together late in the night, forgetting me until they weren't whispering any longer, me behind my scarlet bed curtains, listening to everything. It was better than the wizarding wireless, listening to them talk. The things they got up to! The schemes they hatched! The practical jokes they played! And I could listen and participate...vicariously, but nonetheless, I drank in their fun and excitement.

Sirius had an infectious laugh. Sometimes I would have to stuff my pillow in my mouth to keep myself from joining him when he got going. Peter would always laugh at any jest that Sirius made, no matter what it was, and keep laughing after everyone else had stopped, trying to show that he got it, that he appreciated Black, that he was one of them. He'd sometimes even begin laughing before anyone else, as though afraid he would laugh too late and he would be found out. It wouldn't have mattered, though; the other three knew that he wasn't very bright, wasn't very imaginative, wasn't very *cool*. But they liked his fawning, Potter and Black, especially.

Remus was always quieter, more introspective, even as a first-year. A bit apart, even from his three best friends. Not as apart as I, but somehow separated from the others, not by hanging red bed curtains, but by ... *fear*, an atmosphere of wariness that cushioned him from the world, even from his three friends. Of course, I knew why. I knew why even before his three friends figured it out, although that was inevitable. It was obvious, after all. Lupin disappeared every full moon, always with some strange excuse about a sick relative. But I'd seen him when he was supposed to be away. There's something to be said for being the fifth Gryffindor, the forgotten one. I could watch, observe, calculate, and figure. No one bothered to be careful around me or to look to see if I was overhearing something I shouldn't or seeing something not meant for my eyes.

When I realised that Remus was a werewolf, I did laugh out loud. I was in the library, and Madam Pince gave me a look to kill. What sort of parents, especially ones with the

unfortunate name of "Lupin," would name their son "Remus"? They were just begging for a sick, twisted werewolf to camp outside their home, waiting for the full moon to rise, waiting to create a new werewolf, waiting to be the instrument of destiny.

I never said anything about it, of course. I may have been the forgotten Gryffindor, but I was a Gryffindor, and that was enough, even without any schoolboy code silencing me. And I never told anyone when the four would sneak out to Hogsmeade, using their map to avoid being caught. On those occasions, though, I would make sure I wasn't forgotten when they returned. I'd be waiting for them, my bed curtains drawn back, a mess of books scattered on my bed...when people did notice me, I was "the swotty one," and although I didn't think that was a particularly apt appellation, it was a convenient pigeonhole...and I'd look up when they came through the door, the four of them pink-cheeked and exhilarated from the high they got from getting away with it, from getting away with anything. I'd greet them, remind them of my presence, and they'd be generous with me, Potter, especially. He'd always bring back acid pops for me, knew I liked them. He also didn't want to have to part with the only acid pops they'd nicked...or, more commonly, purchased...and he knew that when I had my pick, I'd always choose a couple of pops, a box of Fizzing Whizbees, and occasionally some pepper imps, though they were a bit flashy for me. So Potter always brought me extra. "Here you go, Burton," he'd say, tossing me my bag of sweets, "with my compliments," then he'd grin, and a minute later, he'd have forgotten me, busy doing whatever it is that golden boys do, what golden boys have always done, I reckon.

A bit patronising, was Potter, but he couldn't help it. He was bright, handsome, athletic, and out-going, and without that congenital bit of a mean streak that all the Blacks, even Sirius, possessed. He was a good influence on Black, though. Where Black had a mean streak, Potter had a generous one...usually, if you didn't get on his wrong side. I was not the sort to get on his wrong side, and for that, I was grateful. Once you were on it, Potter could be almost as nasty as any Black. And that's where Black was a bad influence on him. Still, while Black might have brought out Potter's less kind characteristics...and usually when Potter felt like showing off, which was rather often, to my great entertainment...Potter never lost his innate sense of right, of honour, duty, and fair play. He could be a bit of a prat sometimes, but there were lines he wouldn't cross. Sometimes Black trod right up to the edge of that line, and Potter would be there, holding him back. But there were times when Black just didn't see the line that Potter saw. Must have been something about being a Black that blinded him to what anyone else would find obvious. Such as the little social nicety of not putting a fellow student in mortal peril, no matter how much you hated him.

Black had a game, a game of fantasising things he would do to one of the Slytherins...Severus Snape, in fact...making up gruesome things he could do to the other boy. I think he would lie awake at night thinking of some of these things just so that he could retell them later. James would usually laugh, though express disgust with some of them. Peter would join in, enthusiastically agreeing with whatever Sirius said, sometimes trying to add his own suggestions, which usually fell flat, and then he'd end with, "ah, we really should do that, shouldn't we, Sirius?" and Sirius would laugh. Remus would sit in the corner, listen to Black, and shake his head... always smiling at the right moments, though. I think he didn't much like Black's game of "things to do to torment Snape," but he never said anything. Just sometimes, when the other boys weren't looking at him, I'd see an expression cross his face ... maybe he was thinking, "there but for the grace of God go I." After all, he was a werewolf, reviled by almost everyone in wizarding society; if luck had gone differently, he might have been on the receiving end of Black's unfortunate sense of fun. I think that Black sensed his disapproval, and he didn't like it.

Me? What did I do? I listened. I admit I never spoke up, but then, I never did speak up about anything. I wasn't there, remember? I was the fifth Gryffindor, the invisible one. Sometimes, I will confess, I chafed at being invisible, but it was a role I fell into quickly and easily, right from the start, and once in it, there was no way out. I did try a few times to join in the fun...not just with the four of them, but down in the common room...and I'd always get strange looks, as though people were trying to remember who I was, who was this strange boy who was trying to fit in, so I would subside back into my usual role. I wasn't entertaining, but others were, and they needed an audience, I supposed, and that was my destiny.

There was one time, though, one occasion, when I did more than just sit invisibly and listen from behind my bed curtains. One of Black's fantasies was about to become reality. He and Pettigrew had been whispering and laughing about it for a few days, but then they didn't mention it again, and I thought it was just another one of Black's games of make-believe. He never shared this one with James and Remus...after all, Remus was supposed to be his friend, and this fantasy, well, it wasn't very friendly toward Remus, and James wouldn't have appreciated that bit of it, either.

The gibbous moon grew fatter, and I saw that Black was becoming all nerves and suppressed excitement. I wondered at his mood, but I dismissed any thought that Black was going to act on his fantasy, play out his game in reality. After all, there are certain things one simply does not do. At least, not if you're normal. Black was always just a shade off normal, though.

"Potter! James," I said, calling him softly but urgently, beckoning him from the shadows of one of the library's massive bookcases. He looked surprised. I rarely spoke to him, let alone sought him out.

"What is it, Burton?"

"I have to talk to you," I whispered.

"I'm revising for our Charms exam..."

"This is more important than Charms."

There must have been something in my voice or my demeanour that persuaded him, because he nodded and began to close up his books.

"Leave those. There's no time," I said. I could feel Madam Pince's hard eyes drilling into the back of my head from across the library, but I took hold of Potter's robe sleeve and tugged.

"All right, all right, I'm coming!"

As soon as the library doors shut behind us, I turned and looked up at Potter, hoping he would believe me, hoping he could do something. "I heard Black tell Pettigrew that he told Snape about the knot in the Whomping Willow. They were laughing about it. Snape might already..."

"What? Wait! What did you hear?"

"Black is tricking Snape into going after Lupin. You know what will happen." I could not stop my voice from trembling, and even my hands shook. I balled my fists. "I know what you lot get up to. I never said anything before, but now..."

I didn't even manage to finish my sentence. Potter was off, dashing down the corridor. It was too late to stop Sirius, but maybe it wasn't too late for him to catch Snape.

I found a window overlooking the Whomping Willow. Potter was beautiful as he raced across the lawn towards the Willow. I could see Snape already there, a long stick in his hand, the Willow stilled for him ... I was too late, I feared. Potter wouldn't reach him in time. Snape disappeared beneath the trunk of the tree. But just as the Willow began to stir again, Potter dove through its waving branches to the crack at the base of its trunk. He hit the knot again, and the crack widened. He vanished from view. I waited. One minute, two minutes, three minutes ... and then they were both there, Potter dragging Snape out of the Willow's trunk, pressing the knot to stop the Willow from Whomping. He staggered out of reach of the Willow's branches, and Snape crawled a few feet before standing and stomping over to Potter. I couldn't see very well despite the light of the full moon, but I don't think I imagined that Snape was screaming at Potter. Potter said something, then shook his head, turned, and walked back towards the castle, leaving Snape standing there, furious, holding his left shoulder with his right hand, as though it hurt. I didn't think he'd been bitten, though.

I turned from the window and returned to Gryffindor Tower. Oddly, Potter never mentioned it to me after that, but he also didn't tell Black how he'd learned of his "joke." Maybe he even forgot that I told him about it.

Nothing changed after that. I was still the beneficiary of the Marauders' unauthorised trips into Hogsmeade, though they were less frequent than they once were. Black didn't seem to hold a grudge against Potter for stopping Snape, though it did puzzle him, and Potter was just a little quieter than usual for a while. Snape, it seemed, held a grudge quite well, and blamed Black and Potter equally. I was just as glad he didn't know of my own little role in the affair. As for Lupin, well, he stayed in school, still making his monthly visits to the Shrieking Shack and ending up in the infirmary for a day or two after them. Hard to imagine how he coped, missing so many lessons, but he did. I wasn't surprised he wasn't sent away...the headmaster obviously had arranged for the Willow, the Shack, and for Madam Pomfrey's care. I was a little surprised that

Black stayed on, though, that he wasn't at least encouraged to leave school immediately following his end-of-year exams, even if he wasn't expelled. But he did tone down his pranks after that. They were less liable to cause bodily harm, anyway.

Pettigrew had protested his innocence to Potter when the latter cornered him the day after the incident. He hadn't thought that Black would really do it, he claimed, or that Sirius actually had done it even when he told him about it. He thought it was just another of Black's make-believes. I didn't buy that for a minute, but Potter seemed to think that Pettigrew was just dim enough to think that way. After that, I thought Pettigrew was slimier than Black.

We left school, and I went on to work in my father's menagerie in Diagon Alley. Potter married Evans...a good choice on his part, and a much steadier influence on him than Black...and apparently took up with a secret group fighting He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Pettigrew had a job for a while charming the ink presses at the Quibbler, but then he gave that up...or was sacked, I never learned which. Black lived off of money his uncle gave him, and I don't think he ever tried to find work. Lupin had a tougher time of it, though his friends helped him as much as he'd allow them to. But when a few days every month, you turn up to work too ragged to be of any use, and always around the full of the moon, even the dimmest employer will twig to your affliction and sack you.

I may have lost track of my fellow Gryffindors, no doubt, if that was all that happened after we left school, but you all know what happened after that: the Potters targeted by You-Know-Who, Pettigrew supposedly killed, Black arrested and sent to Azkaban...evidence of his guilt seemed incontrovertible, though now it does seem that a trial might have been a good idea. Then Lupin, alone without his three best friends, did what he could to make ends meet. I hear he finally found happiness...a wife, a child, good friends...before the end.

And now I stand here in Godric's Hollow, looking at grave markers and memorial plaques, and I think that I didn't really amount to much, that I have led a rather dull life. I'm still working in my father's shop, though I'll be taking it over in a few years, and the farthest I've ever travelled is Brighton. I have a wife, two children...my little girl will be starting at Hogwarts next month, and I hope she's Sorted into Ravenclaw or Hufflepuff...and a small house with a tiny back garden.

It's time to go home to my tea, to my family, and to remember four Gryffindors...and one Slytherin. All of them famous, just as I might have predicted back in school, all larger than life. And me, I'm just a shopkeeper. Still the forgotten one. But I'm not the fifth Gryffindor anymore. I'm the lone Gryffindor.