

A Beginning

by Raira

James Potter Loves Lily Evans. Lily Evans hates James Potter - right? So, just how do they end up together?

A Beginning

Chapter 1 of 1

James Potter Loves Lily Evans. Lily Evans hates James Potter - right? So, just how do they end up together?

James Potter was morose. Evans would have accused him of sulking, but he did not sulk. He was far too cool for that. He brooded.

It was all her fault anyway. If she'd just said yes when he had asked her to be his date for the party, he wouldn't now be staring at her and Edmund White huddled together at a table in the corner of the room and watching them talking and laughing together, their heads bent intimately close. James could not possibly imagine what Evans would be laughing at with White. She'd never laughed at *his* jokes, and no way was the Ravenclaw in his league. The boy was as witty as a Remembrall.

The irony was that according to Evans, he was partly to blame for the situation. She'd come up with the idea of the seventh years' Valentine's Day party just after they'd come back from Christmas break, and he, fully intent on going to it with her, had been only too willing to help in the preparation. It was his idea to reserve the Three Broomsticks, and he'd been the one who'd talked Madam Rosmerta into it. A group of students had been delegated to organise the decorations, the menu had been heavily debated, and everything had seemed to be going to plan.

Three days ago, he'd decided it was time to formalise their date. He'd transfigured a fire poker into a bunch of flowers and ambushed Evans in the Gryffindor common room after class. He hadn't asked her in public, of course. He wasn't *that* stupid. Instead, he'd coaxed her into accompanying him to the Room of Requirement. Sensitive as always to his needs, it had transformed itself into a cosy sitting room with a huge, comfortable couch placed in front of a roaring fire. Classical music permeated the air, and occasional tables placed strategically about the room held bowls of water with scented candles floating in them. It was the perfect place for romance.

He'd sat her down on the couch, claiming a spot beside her and smiling winningly up into her eyes. He'd placed the flowers on one of the tables and taken her hands in his. Quite contrary to his expectations, he'd found himself to be quite nervous, and the words had refused to come out as clearly or confidently as he had intended.

"So, Evans," he'd said. "The Valentine's Day party is on Saturday."

"Yes, I know," she'd replied, eyeing him suspiciously. "We planned it, remember?"

"Of course I do," James had huffed. When he'd rehearsed this conversation, it had not started like this, and he'd felt vaguely annoyed with Evans for not following the script. "So, anyway, I was thinking..."

"Yes?" she'd prompted unhelpfully.

"Well, don't you think as Head Boy and Girl, we should go together?" he'd suggested. "Everyone would pretty much assume we would, don't you think?"

"You want to take me to the Valentine's Day party because you think it's expected of us to go together?" she'd asked incredulously, withdrawing her hands from his clasp. He'd tried without success to reclaim them.

"Well that and I want to take you," James had added hastily, aware that he'd just made a serious blunder. "You know I do," he'd added earnestly. "Haven't I been trying to ask you out since fifth year?"

"And you're so desperate for me to go with you that you've waited until *three days* before the party to ask me?" Lily had challenged. "We've been planning this for weeks, and it hasn't occurred to you to ask me before today?"

"Well, I wanted time to plan it, to make it special," James had hedged uncomfortably. He'd grabbed the flowers, holding them out to her. "I made these for you."

He never would have admitted to Evans the real reason for the delay; that it had just not seriously occurred to him that she might not say yes. Sure, she'd said no every other time he'd asked her out, but he'd been so certain that it would be different that time. Working so closely together during the year, they had become much closer than ever before, and so when Lily had suggested the party, he'd *known* that her real intention was to share the most romantic day of the year with him. All he had to do was to ask and the date was his.

Instead, she'd glanced down at the flowers, muttering dutifully, "They're very lovely," but she hadn't taken them. She'd grumbled, "Look, James, I appreciate this, all of this," waving her hand in a gesture that encompassed the entire room, "but the Valentine's Day party is the biggest social event between now and the end of school. Surely you must have realised that people have been organising their dates since we first suggested it?"

"Well, of course I have, but..."

"Edmund White asked me last weekend," Lily had said, interrupting him gently. "I'm going with him."

"*Edmund White*?" James had spluttered. "You can't go with him! He's such a boring git. Come on, Lily, I'll be a lot more fun than he will."

"James Potter, you must know me better by now than to think that I'd break a date just because I was asked by someone else," Lily had snapped, incensed. "Look, if you want me to come to a party with you, you need to ask me earlier than this, okay?"

Even brooding on it later, the pain and humiliation of that moment was sharp and paralysing. He still didn't know how he'd managed to collect himself enough to thrust the flowers at her once again and, in a pathetic attempt to retain his dignity, had muttered, "I made these for you. You might as well have them," and left them beside her. How he had gotten out of there, how he'd avoided all his friends and escaped to his bed without his embarrassment becoming public were yet more mysteries; mysteries he intended to leave unsolved.

With Lily going with someone else, James had fully intended to avoid the party altogether. Sirius, however, wouldn't have any of it.

"Show up with someone else and make her jealous," he'd suggested. "You know, Prongs, she's not the only girl around. Plenty of girls would jump at the chance to go with you."

But all of the girls he would have asked had already been taken. Sally Fisher all but came out and said that she would drop her date in an instant if he asked. James was tempted, but even though she'd humiliated him, he knew that if Lily ever found out that he'd persuaded another girl to go against the principles that she'd specifically refused to violate, she'd despise him. He couldn't bear that. Besides, all his plans for the event had included Lily at his side. No other girl would do.

And that was how he'd ended up here without a partner. It was his first Valentine's Day alone since fourth year, and he wasn't enjoying it at all.

Well, he wasn't *precisely* alone. He just didn't have a date. He, Sirius, Remus and Peter had claimed one of the largest tables in the room for themselves. Like James, Remus had come unaccompanied, but then Remus never dated, so that was cold comfort. Even Wormtail, who usually didn't date either (but in his case, not by choice), had a girl sitting by his side. Sirius had *two* and had seated himself between them, an arm slung over each of their shoulders.

"Have some more Butterbeer, Prongs," Sirius suggested jovially. "Stop pouting. It doesn't do anything for your image."

"I wasn't pouting," James retorted, tearing his eyes away from Evans and her date.

"Of course you were," Sirius laughed. "Here, I'll share Jenny with you." He slipped his arm from around the girl's shoulders. "You don't mind being James's date for a while, do you?"

Jenny smiled at James. "Of course not; he's as cute as you, Sirius," she said.

"But not cuter," Sirius reminded her.

"Of course not. Nobody's cuter than you."

"I *can* get my own partners, Padfoot," James grumbled, stung. Angrily, he got up, pushing his chair under the table so hard that the dishes on the tablecloth shook. Remus's glass spilt onto the tablecloth, spilling orange liquid all over Elizabeth, Peter's date. She squealed.

Ignoring her, James stormed over to the bar to order another drink.

He had to wait to be attended to, of course, and to pass the time, he glanced around the room irritably. On any other occasion he would have taken great satisfaction from the success of an event he'd planned. It seemed that every student in the year had turned up for the party, and some of them had even brought more junior students along as dates. He'd never seen The Three Broomsticks so crowded. The room was abuzz with conversation, laughter, and the clinking of glasses.

"I wouldn't have minded coming along with you," said a voice at his elbow.

James turned back towards the voice. It was Elizabeth. "You're here with Peter," he pointed out haughtily.

"Only because *you* didn't ask me," Elizabeth said hastily. "I thought if I went with him, maybe you'd notice me."

James stared at her, beginning to feel quite uncomfortable. "Don't you think Peter would feel a little upset if he knew that?" he asked.

"Why should I care?" Elizabeth responded eagerly. "I came because I wanted to be with you. Nothing else matters. James, you must know I've always loved you. You know I do. You must feel the same way about me!"

He glanced back at their table. Peter was deep in conversation with Remus. James turned back to the girl, not bothering to hide the anger he was feeling. Peter had been talking of nothing else but this date for weeks: how he'd been sure she wouldn't go with him; how he couldn't believe she'd accepted him; what he was going to wear; whether she might kiss him when he took her back to Hogwarts. All along she'd just been using him.

"You make me sick," James replied coldly. "You're Peter's date and he's my friend. I don't care what you think you feel for me, *you don't* use one of my friends to get to me."

"But, James, I love you so much!" she cried. Before he could react, Elizabeth launched herself at him. She flung her arms around him and pressed her lips against his. She tasted of Butterbeer and chocolate éclairs. The kiss was wet and faintly distasteful.

James struggled and finally managed to push her away from him. "Get away from me!" he snapped. "I told you I'm not interested. You are here with Peter. If you want to

kiss anyone, kiss him."

She stared at him in disbelief. "You can't mean that!" she said.

He just glared at her.

The colour drained from her face. "I'm going back to school," she retorted. "You can tell Peter that our date is over."

Before he could demand that she do it herself, Elizabeth had turned on her heel and had pushed herself through the press of students towards the door.

"Good riddance," he muttered under his breath.

It was only as he was making his way back to their table that he realised that every face in their group was fixed upon him. The girls were giggling; Sirius was looking amused, Remus, grave, and Peter, devastated.

"How could you, James?" Peter shouted when he was close enough. "Just because you couldn't get your own date, there was no need to steal mine!"

"I didn't!" James protested. "She attacked me!"

Sirius was plainly trying to stop himself from laughing. "Prongs gets that all the time," he said.

"You kissed her!" Peter accused.

"*She* kissed *me*," James corrected him angrily. "And it was very unpleasant. You know I'd never do that to you. You're better off without her, Wormtail."

Peter glowered at him. James stared right back. Neither of them moved for a long time, but eventually, Peter dropped his gaze. "I guess I should have known better," he grumbled.

"Yes," James said shortly. "You should."

Peter attempted a weak, deferential smile, but James noted that when his friend glanced away, his expression reverted to a bitter frown.

This Valentine's Day was going from bad to worse. The way James's luck was going Evans would have seen the whole thing and jumped to exactly the same conclusions as Wormtail. He glanced back over to the table where she sat with White.

Lily was looking out the window, her interest captivated by a snowball fight taking place outside. He should have been relieved that she wasn't staring accusingly at him. Instead, his attention was caught by what her date was doing. Edmund had produced a small bottle and was emptying its contents into her glass. The liquid tinged green for a moment and then faded back to gold. He slid the bottle back into his pocket and smiled winningly at her when she turned to him to point out some detail of the scene outside.

James had to do something. Whatever White had put in that glass, his intentions could not be good; otherwise, why had he waited until Evans's attention was elsewhere? They wouldn't hear him if he shouted. The noise in the room was too loud. He had to get to her. He shoved his chair back from the table hastily and crashed into a Slytherin who had been squeezing behind his chair to get past their table.

"What do you think you're doing?" the boy - Patrick O'Malley - snapped.

James didn't bother to apologise; there was no time. White had proposed a toast, raising his glass, and Evans had raised her own in response. "Get out of my way!" he yelled.

Patrick pulled himself to his full height. He was big, heavysset and hairy. "Make me," he growled.

James shoved at him. Patrick staggered back a half-step and easily regained his balance.

"Get *out* of the way!" James repeated, craning past him to catch a glimpse of the table in the corner. Lily had the glass to her lips.

"Evans!" he yelled.

He knew the attempt was futile. His voice didn't carry over the din. She tipped her glass back and drank.

Meanwhile, Patrick shoved him back. The boy was much larger than he was. James staggered back a couple of steps before regaining his balance.

Everything seemed to happen at once: Sirius and Remus pushed their own chairs back, rallying behind him to face the Slytherin boy; Patrick's friends, as gorilla-like in build as he was, assembled at their own friend's back; students shoved chairs and tables out of the way to make room for the altercation; Sirius's dates screamed and fled to the back of the room; one of the tables tipped over, sending glass and crockery smashing everywhere, and cutlery scattering all over the floor; Peter belatedly joined his friends, hanging well behind Sirius and Remus; and Madam Rosmerta advanced on the adversaries, a rolling pin in hand.

Patrick fished inside his robes for his wand. James took advantage of his preoccupation to smash his fist into the boy's cheek. The Slytherin swore eloquently, staggering back into his friends, and James quickly retrieved his own wand, pointing it unerringly at Patrick's left eye.

"I don't want to hurt you, O'Malley," he snarled. "Just get out of my way, and we can forget the whole thing."

"Do you think I'm scared of you just because you're Head Boy?" Patrick jeered.

"I don't care if you're scared of me or not," James sneered. "Move! Now!"

He was generous. He gave the Slytherin two whole seconds to comply before he hexed him. The belligerent look on O'Malley's face was all James needed to know that he had no intention of clearing the path to Evans.

The spell was a new invention of James's, something he'd been dying to show off for weeks. As the Slytherin's feet transfigured into those of a chicken, he stumbled, his balance upset by their new shape. Sirius let out a bark of laughter which was all the approbation James needed.

James took advantage of the confusion to turn to his friends. "Evans is in trouble," he hissed. "I need to get to her!"

He didn't need to explain any more than that. Together he, Sirius and Remus pushed through their opponents. At such close quarters, wands were virtually useless. Fists, elbows and feet flew. James was punched hard in the cheek, and he lashed out, his foot connecting hard with someone's leg. O'Malley yelped constantly as everyone trampled all over his oversized feet.

Finally, James managed to shove himself past the last of his opponents. One of them tried to grab him, but Sirius caught the boy under the chin with his fist, knocking him to the ground.

"We'll hold them off!" he yelled. "Go take care of Lily!"

James grinned at him, rubbing his aching cheek and turned towards the table that Evans and White had claimed.

Except that they weren't there any more.

A chill shot through James. Frantically, he searched the room, trying to locate them amidst those who were participating in or cheering on the fight. It was a futile gesture, he knew - Lily wouldn't have anything to do with the ever-widening brawl - but he had to make sure he covered all the possibilities. She and Edmund were nowhere to be seen. They must have left the pub. Grimly, he forced his way through the crowd to the door. As he left, a stray hex shattered the wall just inches from his fingers.

If only there had been a recent snowfall! The street outside had been trampled by hundreds of feet, their paths criss-crossing and erasing one another. There was no way to tell which footprints belonged to Lily and Edmund. After a long moment of aching indecision, James headed towards the Shrieking Shack. That's where *he* always took girls when he wanted to be alone with them. Perhaps Edmund had had the same idea.

For the first time that day, luck was on his side. Long before he reached them, he could see them standing together, their arms wrapped around one another. James began to race towards them. He had to get to her. White had drugged her, and he could not allow the boy to take advantage of her.

Edmund lowered his head towards Lily. Their arms tightened on one another and their lips locked. That was enough for James; he couldn't bear to wait a minute longer. He hurled a trip jinx at White. It hit him with such force that the boy was propelled through the air and landed on his back in the snow with a sickening thud. His face registered almost as much pain as James had hoped for. Evans, still in White's arms, was carried back with him. She wasn't thrown hard as he was, but she did topple over, landing sprawled on top of her date.

James raced up to them. "Evans, are you okay?" he panted, reaching a hand down to help her up.

Lily scrambled off Edmund, glaring at James, and spurning his assistance. "Did you do that?" she demanded angrily.

"Well, yes, but..."

"James Potter, how dare you?" she snapped. "You have no right to interfere in who I see or what I do with them."

"But..."

"Just because I wouldn't go out with you, it doesn't mean you have the right to ruin my date with someone else!"

Edmund scrambled to his feet, groaning. "Why can't you just leave us alone, Potter?" he growled. Lily helped him brush the snow off his clothes.

"He put something in your drink!" James snapped, angry now. "Do you think I'm just going to stand by and let some guy drug you and do what he likes with you?"

Lily paused mid-tirade, her mouth gaping open. Edmund, at least, had the grace to look sheepish.

Then the two of them began to laugh. "It was powdered Cassaroot. You know, for flavour?" Edmund spluttered. "My family grows it. Lily was saying how much she wanted to try it."

James looked from him to Lily. "Is that true?" he asked stiffly, humiliated that he was the source of so much amusement.

"Of course it is," Lily said, laughter in her voice.

"But he waited until you weren't looking before he put it in your drink."

"It was a *surprise*, you stupid git," Edmund said. "A Valentine's Day gift."

James turned to Lily, who nodded as solemnly as she could.

"Fine then," James growled sulkily. "But *he might* have been slipping you something." He glanced between them and then added sullenly, "I'll leave you two alone then."

He turned on his heel and stomped off. With every step, he hoped desperately that Lily would call after him and beg him to come back, but she did not, and he refused to look behind him. He did not want to see them kissing again. All the way back to Hogwarts, James relieved his feelings by mentally replaying that moment when Edmund White had crashed into the snow. He just wished he'd hurled that jinx harder.

"You've got to admit it's pretty funny," Sirius said that evening.

The four of them: Sirius, James, Remus and Peter, had taken possession of classroom eleven, with Peter on the lookout for any patrolling teachers and the Invisibility Cloak at hand in case they needed to hide. James's cheek had turned black and blue where he'd been punched in the brawl. Remus's hair had been singed, and Sirius's arm rested in a sling. Peter had emerged from the fight unscathed.

"It's not funny at all," James growled. "It's embarrassing. This is the *worst* Valentine's Day of my life. I wish I'd asked Sally Fisher after all. Who cares what Evans thinks, anyway?"

"Well, you'll know for next time," Sirius said cheerfully.

"I'm sure she didn't mean to make you uncomfortable, James," Remus broke in. He, too, was grinning, but at least the smile was leavened with equal parts sympathy. "You know Lily. She's not that kind of girl."

"That didn't stop her laughing at me," James said sulkily.

"We can't always help laughing," Remus pointed out reasonably.

Peter said nothing. He just stood by the door, staring out to the corridor, seemingly intent on his allotted task.

"In any case, it's time to give up on her," Sirius decided. "Come on, Prongs, we'll find you a girl worth pining over; one who will go out with you when you ask her."

"Maybe you're right," James sighed. He'd wasted years on Lily Evans. It was time to move on.

"Cheer up!" Sirius urged. "Tomorrow night we run with the werewolf."

They slipped through the portrait hole shortly before midnight. The Gryffindor common room was shadowy, lit only by the flickering light of the fire. The silence of the room was only broken by the crackling of the wood as it burned.

Peter scurried up the staircase well ahead of the others. James watched him go, thoughtfully. "Do you think he's still upset about Elizabeth?" he asked Sirius and Remus.

"If he is, he'll get over it," Sirius said with easy nonchalance.

Remus took the situation a little more seriously. "I'll keep an eye on him," he said. "If anything seems amiss, I'll have a word with him. I know you couldn't help what happened, but he'd probably take it better from me than from you."

James nodded, sighing. "Why do girls have to be so stupid?" he grumbled.

"Not all of us are," said a voice from one of the squashy armchairs, Lily's voice. "I've been waiting for you to get back, James."

James set his jaw stubbornly. "Yeah, well, I'm tired," he said. "I think I'll go to bed. I guess I'll see you tomorrow, Evans." Not if he could help it though.

"Can you wait a minute? Please?" Lily pleaded. As she stood up and walked over to them, James couldn't help but notice how her silhouette against the fire was as lovely as the rest of her. "I just want to talk to you for a moment," she said.

"I don't think so," James growled.

Remus leaned closer, muttering, "You know, you're going to have to talk to her sometime. It might be easier now rather than later." Louder, he said, "Come on, Sirius, let's go upstairs and leave them to it."

Sirius held his ground. "Is that what you want, Prongs?" he asked.

James had every intention of turning on his heel and storming up the stairs himself, but he had to admit that Remus probably had a point. "Sure," he grouched. "I'll be up soon."

"Okay then," Sirius responded, glancing at Lily and then back to James. "You know where we are if you want us."

He and Remus followed Peter upstairs, leaving James alone with Lily.

"Do you want to sit down?" she asked him.

He was about to bite out a sullen negative, but some part of him still ached to impress her, so instead he mumbled, "Sure," and escaped to one of the armchairs near the fire.

Lily followed him, taking the one next to him, and sat there in silence for a moment, staring into the flames.

"I'm sorry I laughed at you, James," she murmured finally, her voice quiet and wavering just a little. "I didn't mean to. It was just... Edmund was the ~~best~~ ^{fast} person I could imagine taking advantage of me like that. He's just not like that."

"I'm sure he's not," James responded haughtily, focussing his own gaze on the flames and determinedly not on her.

"Did you really start that fight in The Three Broomsticks because you were worried about me?" she asked incredulously. "Mary Alton said she heard you yelling out that I was in trouble."

"Yeah, I did," James muttered. "It was pretty stupid, considering."

"Wow. I thought she was making it up," Lily mused. "You know, James, I've always thought you were pretty shallow."

"Yeah, I know, you've told me. Many times," James reminded her grouchily.

"But what you did today, that was really sweet. If *ihad* been in trouble, well, you would have been there for me. That means a lot to me, you know."

"Yeah, well," James muttered, embarrassed again, but this time the sensation wasn't quite so unpleasant. "I wouldn't want anything to happen to you, Evans."

"So, I was thinking," she said, a little hesitantly. "Well, I haven't got any plans for the next Hogsmeade weekend, you know. Not yet, anyway."

Suddenly, James felt much happier. "Really?" he asked.

"I can't say I won't *make* plans," Lily said. He could hear the smile in her voice. "But I expect if someone wanted to go with me, and asked me early enough, as long as it was the right person, I could be persuaded."

James grinned. He wasn't sure if he could believe what she was saying, but he certainly had no intentions of passing up this opportunity. "Would you like to go to the next Hogsmeade weekend with me, Lily?" he asked.

"I was hoping you'd ask," she responded, smiling. "I certainly would."

"What about White?" he asked, "Won't he mind?"

"That wasn't really working out," Lily confessed. "Edmund's a great friend, but... I don't think I'll be going out with him again. I'll explain it all to him."

They sat for a while in companionable silence. James wished he knew that Evans wouldn't object if he reached for her hand, but he wasn't about to do anything to jeopardise this turn of events.

Her next words came out of the blue. "James, do you trust me?"

James was startled by the question. He frowned. "Well, sure I do," he said, confused. "What do you have in mind?"

"Would you close your eyes?" Lily asked.

"Okay," he said. He squinted his eyes so that only a little light shone through. "Done."

"All the way, James," Lily admonished him.

Sighing with resignation, he complied. For a moment, nothing happened, and then Lily's warm, soft lips pressed themselves against his. Lily's kiss was nothing like Elizabeth's. It was gentle and tender and full of promises of more to come. James reached up to draw her against him. His fingers tangled in her beautiful long, red hair. She felt wonderful. The kiss seemed to go on forever, but ended much too soon. When they broke apart, Lily whispered, "Happy Valentine's Day, James."

"Mmm," James murmured. Inhaling the scent of her, he reached over and brushed her cheek with the back of his fingers. It was warm and soft and felt like satin. "That was wonderful. Happy Valentine's Day, Evans."

"James?" she whispered.

"Yes, Evans?"

"Call me Lily."

It was the best Valentine's Day James had ever had.