

## Registration

"This is nuts," Sirius said firmly.

"Really? Can we swap? I've cinnamon," Remus answered. Sirius growled. "What?"

"This! Not the sticky bun!" Sirius said, waving his arm at the front facade of Hogwarts, which was shut tight. Remus nibbled at his bun and glanced up at it.

"No, that looks like stone," he said finally. Sirius flopped down on the steps and put his face in his hands. "Oh, come on Padfoot, I'm just teasing. Well, not about the bun, are you sure there's nothing but cinnamon?"

"Bloody Lily Potter and her bloody machinations," Sirius grumbled.

"That's no way to talk about the mother of your future godson," Remus replied, sitting next to him. He offered a bit of his half-eaten bun, and Sirius waved it off.

"That's the problem, though, isn't it?" he said. "I mean, when the love of your best friend's life comes to you and says, oi, Sirius, your godson's got to get signed up for Hogwarts, of course you say yes, Lily, indeed he does."

Remus listened sympathetically, licking the icing off the bun.

"And she says well good, Sirius, can you give us a hand? of course you say -- "

" -- me being Sirius -- "

" -- right -- you say yes, sure, do I need to fill out a form? Permit slip? Get myself listed in case someone hexes him into a ferret?"

"A ferret?"

"It could happen. And she says no, really there's just this little favour, and there you sit, on the steps of Hogwarts, saving a spot in line for bloody Potter, who's planning on fucking around and not coming to relieve me until six."

"Buck up Padfoot, it could be worse," Remus said, patting him on the shoulder.

"Oh yeah?"

"Well, yes," Remus continued, resting his chin in his hands and looking out across the Hogwarts grounds. "I mean, your best friend could have come up to you and said Oi, Remus, how about a night on the town? I'll drive, and then proceeded to fly you to Hogwarts to sit with him while he waits in line for bloody Potter, who's actually planning on fucking around and not coming to relieve you until eight. Furthermore, Hogwarts could be inApperanteable, meaning that your only choices are to remain with said nameless friend until James arrives, or walk to Hogsmeade and listen to his howls of abandonment the whole way there."

"Is that all," Sirius sulked.

"Oh, and he could have brought only cinnamon buns," Remus added gently.

"That little carpet lizard had better be grateful to his godfather, that's all I have to say," Sirius announced. "He's still in his nice warm womb -- "

"Sirius, yuk!"

" -- and I'm out here with a whiny werewolf and blasted cinnamon buns, when I specifically said almond buns," Sirius concluded. Remus picked up the white bag that sat between them, peered in, and pulled his wand out of his trouser pocket.

"*Transfigurati Nucleux!*" he announced, stirring the insides of the bag with the wand. There was a sharp popping noise.

"What did you do?" Sirius asked.

"Popcorn?" Remus said. "Sorry. Tried to turn the cinnamon bits into nuts, I think it's nux instead of nucleux. Pretty good though. Sweet."

Sirius took a handful of popcorn and began eating it kernel by kernel, still looking sullen.

"Honestly, Sirius," Remus said, because "Seriously" just became troublesome when talking to his best friend, "don't you think it's rather fun? Or will be, when someone else shows up. I remember the Signing Days when we were at school. All the nervous parents waiting until the doors opened at midnight so they could register their children – remember the one year we charmed waterballoons to chase the stragglers like bludgers?"

Sirius chuckled. "I did a month's detention for that."

"Wouldn't have been more'n a week if one of the Damp hadn't been a bigwig at the Ministry," Remus said ruefully.

"Wouldn't have done it alone if I wasn't such a very good friend," Sirius said. Remus rolled his eyes.

"Honestly, Professor," he said, imitating the high, adolescent voice Sirius'd had before it changed, "James and Peter told me not to and Remus was in the library!"

"Well, James took the fall for me on the whipped cream stunt later that year, so I can't fault him, and Peter's...Peter," Sirius answered. "You, however, still owe me a month's detention."

"I'm sure we can come to an arrangement," Remus said, hiding his grin behind some popcorn. "Listen, the point is, it's always terribly exciting and now we'll have come full circle, won't we? I mean, we'll get to be the ones who parade into the great hall at Midnight and put down a name, just like we used to watch other people do and, you know, just like our parents did."

"My parents never stood in line, you can be sure of that," Sirius grumbled.

"They have to, don't they? It's the law. Even Board of Governors members have to stand in line, that's what Dumbledore always said."

"Probably polyjuiced someone else up to look like them," Sirius answered. "My mum didn't leave the house when she was pregnant. For love of Merlin, she called it her 'confinement'. And you can be sure Dad never did anything so...democratic," he mock-sneered.

"Well, my parents took pictures, they were that proud," Remus answered cheerily. "Oh, I should have brought my camera."

"You can't think of staying for the whole thing," Sirius said. "We're going to be here all bloody day as it is!"

"Well, why not? It's a rite of passage, and it's not like I'm going to have kids."

"Why wouldn't you have kids?"

"Don't be dim. A werewolf has a one in four chance of fathering a werewolf."

Sirius considered things for a while. "Right. Well, you could adopt."

"Yes, because if I'm not allowed to be a legal godfather I'm sure they're going to let me adopt," Remus said drily. "It's fine, I'm not actually all that fond of children."

"Liar," Sirius said, but Remus fell silent, so he didn't press the point.

The sun was just barely rising above the Forbidden Forest; they'd left the night before around one a.m., and Remus had been enjoying the motorbike ride too much to notice that they'd been flying for a bit longer than it took to get to Sirius' favourite pub on the outskirts of Watford. By the time they touched down at Hogwarts after a stop to pick up breakfast in Newcastle, it was nearly morning, and Remus had napped on the steps for a while until Sirius, fuming, had woken him. Now they were just waiting for everyone else to arrive, as they undoubtedly would, and glare daggers at the pair of clearly-too-young-to-be-parents who'd gotten there first.

"Did your parents really take pictures?" he asked.

"Oh yes," Remus answered. "They made a trip out of it. Mum wasn't very far along, see, so they decided they'd take the train up as far as Muggle trains go, and did some touring, and a weekend in Hogsmeade and all. They did up a scrapbook of the whole thing."

"Your mum and scrapbooks," Sirius groaned.

"You're in most of them, you should feel honoured," Remus teased. "Everyone's always asking who the handsome young bloke next to me is in the photos whenever she brings them out. And then I tell them that's James."

Sirius shoved his shoulder, and popcorn went flying. A couple of magpies flew down and began fighting over them, and Remus added another handful to the white kernels scattering the ground.

"Four for a boy," he said, pointing to them.

"Five for silver," Sirius added, as another one fluttered down.

"Doesn't count, I said four first," Remus said smugly. "Look, someone else is coming."

"HALOOOOO LADS!" boomed a deep voice from across the grounds, and a familiar figure came into view. Sirius stood and waved, grinning.

"It's Frank!" he said, and took off down the hill, leaving Remus to sit on the steps and feed popcorn to the five magpies, two ducks, and squirrel now vying for it. It was starting to taste more and more like cinnamon, the lower in the bag he got.

"Well, how're you then?" Frank Longbottom said, as he and Sirius reappeared at the steps to the school. "Hallo Lupin, how's things?"

"Fine thanks, Frank, and yourself?"

"Couldn't be better! Am I number three?"

"Number two, we're both here for the Potters," Sirius answered.

"Roped you in, did they?"

"Godfathering business," Remus said, nudging Sirius as he sat again. Frank stood, hands in his pockets, the picture of a cheerful young upper-class wizard. "Yourself?"

"Neville Longbottom, Class of 1998," Frank said. "Cor, there's a scary thought, isn't it?"

"No scarier than Anonymous Potter, Class of 1998," Sirius replied.

"Haven't they named that kid yet?" Frank asked.

"They're still pondering." Remus rolled his eyes. "Lily wants a nice normal name -- "

"Sirius is a perfectly normal name!" Sirius protested.

"A normal Muggle name," Remus corrected himself, "And James wants to name him after a Greek god, and Sirius has clear ideas on the matter."

"Well, my mam's making me name him Neville, but it's a nice enough name, I don't mind," Frank said. "I think she's more excited about the baby than we are. Can't imagine why," he added thoughtfully. "Look, isn't that little Brenda Rourke?"

"Finnegan now," Remus said, as a petite, enormously pregnant woman puffed up the hill. "Sirius, don't be an ass, go give her a hand."

"You give her a hand," Sirius said. Remus rolled his eyes and stood, offering his arm for Brenda to lean on.

"Spendid, we've enough for Bridge now," Frank said. "My god, Brenda, is that twins?"

She glared at him, and he stepped back a bit. "By all means, ladies first."

Brenda eased herself down onto the step where Remus had stood, stretching her legs out. "It's not twins, it just looks it," she sighed. "A nine-stone woman carrying a twelve pound baby -- "

"Twelve pounds?" Frank asked, eyebrows raising.

"I'm going to kill Jonathan," she growled. Sirius edged away a bit, on the step.

"Why are you here?" Remus asked. She glared at him. "No, I mean -- shouldn't your bloke be here?"

Brenda crossed her arms over her enormous belly. There was a moment of dangerous silence.

"You know, when Little Finnegan starts levitating the dog, you're going to have to tell his father you're a witch," Frank said. Brenda burst into tears.

"No worries, I've got it," Sirius said, pulling out a mostly-clean handkerchief. "Been spending a lot of time with James and Lily, she does this all the time...it's hormones, that's all, isn't it duck?" he asked Brenda.

"Did he just call her Duck?" Frank asked Remus.

"Now you see why he got the godfathering job," Remus replied. "He's a big softie under the leather."

Brenda, drying her tears on Sirius' handkerchief, gave them both a baleful look.

Remus glanced down as something tugged on his trouser leg. A small, woeful face looked up at him.

"Is this the line for Hogwarts Signings, tall sir?" the house-elf asked.

"Are you here to bring us cocoa?" Remus inquired hopefully. The little green creature bowed, and shook his head.

"Dobby has come to stand in the line, sir," he said. "For Master Draco, sir."

"Master Who?" Sirius asked.

"Master Draco, who is being born next Tuesday," Dobby wrung his hands. "Please is this the line, taller sir?"

"It is, but house-elves aren't allowed to sign, I'm sure of it," Frank answered.

"Master Malfoy is arriving this evening," the elf said, slightly more complacent now. Sirius growled so loudly that Dobby took fright and hid behind Remus' leg.

"Bloody Narcissa," Sirius muttered. "Fine, well, you're behind Longbottom there, who's behind Finnegan, who's behind Remus and me. Sorry, Brenda, Lily'd kill and eat me if she knew I let anyone get in front of me."

"As long as he gets his name on the register I don't care," Brenda replied.

"This is what Master Malfoy is saying," Dobby said hesitantly, "Only he is adding 'who I have to push over to get there' onto the end."

"He would," Sirius said. "Is there any popcorn left, Remus?"

Remus looked down into the bag. "There's half a bun and some suspicious looking red things that might be exploded cinnamon bits," he said. "And it's the bit of bun I licked all the icing off of."

"I've got Chinese rice," Brenda said, digging in a large bag she'd been carrying. "And some ice cream. Still fresh, has a chilling charm on it."

"Nah, give me the bun," Sirius said, and Remus passed the bag over.

"Black, you're a pig," Frank said, as Sirius began to eat the bun.

"What? S'no worse than borrowing pants off each other and we did that all the time in school," Sirius said, around the food.

"Remus didn't lick those first!" Frank exclaimed.

"I hope to god not," Remus said calmly. "Funny-cinnamon-bit?" he offered, holding out what looked like a red plastic piece of popcorn. Brenda opened the pint of ice cream and transfigured the end of her wand into a spoon to eat with.

"Is anyone up for cards?" Frank asked, taking a pack out of his back pocket. "Looks like we'll be here for a while."

"All right, show me how to play Bridge again," Remus said, and Sirius groaned in the background.

"It's useless, Frank, I've tried three times," Sirius said. "I think he doesn't really want to learn."

"Show me again anyhow, at least Sirius will have something to laugh at," Remus said, settling on the ground near the steps. Frank sat next to him, and set the cards carefully on the air, where they hovered and began shuffling themselves.

"Remus, will you hold my place? I have to pee," Brenda said. "And probably will again in forty or fifty minutes."

"It's going to be a long day," Remus sighed.

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By four in the afternoon, Brenda had peed every forty minutes on the dot, Remus still had failed to grasp the basic rules of Bridge, Sirius had talked Dobby into playing instead with painful results (who knew House-Elves were card sharps?) and the Patils had arrived just before Bill Weasley, who came bearing food from the kitchens. Beyond Bill, others were arriving -- some not known to the little crowd on the steps, some simply too far back in the line to talk easily. There was a certain carnival element to the gathering, with Hogwarts students occasionally wandering past and gawking, and those at the end of the line looking quite anxious.

"Mind yourself," the eldest Weasley brother said, sitting just behind the circle of Bridge players, the better to indicate where the end of the line was. "There's a couple of Slytherins planning on hexing the first parents through the doors."

"We'll hex 'em right back, and it's no use trying that trick to get us to let you go first," Sirius answered, playing a card.

"It's no matter to me, I've made arrangements with McGonagall," Bill said loftily. "She agreed to put the kid's name down out of sheer pity for our mum, I'm standing in line mostly for the form of the thing. Plus, gets me out of classes."

"Another boy?" Frank asked sympathetically.

"This makes six. Mum says she's cutting dad off after the next one, and we're just hoping she doesn't mean literally," Bill said. Ram Patil played a card.

"I think Sara's cutting me off after these two," he said, with a smile at his wife, who was sitting with Brenda, sharing a heaping carton of chips Bill had brought with him. Sarasvati Patil smiled back, and gave him the two-fingered salute.

"We're having twins, you know," Ram said.

"So you mentioned. Five or six times," Sirius replied.

"And I thought one was bad," Brenda said to Sara, sympathetically. "I can only imagine. Do you get the little vein things?"

"Oh yes. And the swollen ankles. And the bloating," Sara complained.

"And the strange cravings," Brenda agreed. "And the discha -- "

"NO MORE," Sirius boomed. "NO MORE TALK OF PLACENTAS AND FLUIDS!"

Sara grabbed him by the collar and pulled him close.

"Do not yell at a pregnant woman," she said darkly. Sirius gulped. Remus gently pried her fingers off his shirt.

"I tell you what, Bill, I'll hold your place," Remus said, "And you can run inside and get some butterbeers and pumpkin juices from the kitchen, and then nobody will attempt to kill anyone else."

"Right," Bill said, dusting off his trousers as he stood. "Can't have the future leaders of our nation traumatised en utero. Still got enough chips, Ms. Finnegan? Ms. Patil?"

"Yes, thank you Bill, I'll just toddle along with you," Brenda said. "My forty minutes are up."

Bill gallantly offered his arm to Brenda, and they vanished around the corner of the school.

"We could sneak in, you know," Sirius said thoughtfully. "Duck in the side-gate and -- "

"Remember the last dad who tried that? I think he's still got hooves instead of hands," Remus said.

"That was brilliant," Sirius agreed.

"Oh look, another one," Frank remarked lazily, as someone began walking up the line towards the doors. "Got your Resolute Face on, Sirius?"

Sirius pursed his lips as the grandfatherly-looking wizard approached. "Not for sale!" he said, indicating his place in the line. The man sighed.

"Worth a try," he grumbled, slinking back down the line. Sirius tossed a card down.

"Breaks your heart," Remus said thoughtfully.

"Yeah, breaks my heart to see a chap who got here at four in the afternoon try to buy his way to the front," Sirius snorted. "We suffered for this spot!"

"Yes, cinnamon buns and half an hour of utter solitude, early this morning. Oh how we suffer," Remus drawled.

"Still, you know if he thought hexing me into next week would get him up here, he would," Sirius replied. "People are vicious when it comes to their kids."

"When you have one of your own you'll understand," Frank said. "The kid isn't even born yet and already I'm fitting new locking spells on the doors."

"Not gonna have kids," Sirius said. "That's what godkids are for."

"Amen to that," Bill said, coming around the corner. "Every time she pees she swears at her husband like it's his fault."

"It IS HIS FAULT," Sara and Brenda chorused.

"You ovulated!" Sirius shot back.

"Oooh, if I could move comfortably I'd give you such a thumping," Brenda groaned. "Remus, punch him for me."

Remus obediently punched Sirius in the arm, and Sirius punched back, and they tumbled around in the dust, wrestling.

"First one unconscious loses his place in line!" Frank called, as the people behind him craned their necks and began taking bets.

"Gotcha!" Remus crowed, pinning Sirius with his legs and lifting his hands over his head in triumph. Several people groaned and paid a select few, who were grinning smugly. An owl drifted down and settled on Sirius' chest, looking at him with a quizzical expression. Remus grabbed it and pulled the letter off while it squawked, before handing the fluttering creature to Sirius and rolling away.

"It's from James," he said. "Dear Sirius -- oh, they're going to be a bit late," he said, folding the letter up again.

"Late?" Sirius inquired.

"Sure, but you can go at eight and I'll stay here -- " Remus grabbed for the letter back, but Sirius had already plucked it up out of his hands.

"FALSE LABOR?" Sirius shouted.

"Oh, the poor -- " Brenda began, but Sirius took no heed.

"Dear Sirius, Lily gone into false labor, staying the night at St. Mungo's, sign the kid up for us and I'll buy you dinner," Sirius read, furious. "All bloody day I've been here! If I hadn't kidnapped Lupin I'd have killed someone out of sheer boredom, probably that bloody House Elf!"

Dobby skittered quickly behind Frank, who made frantic silencing gestures.

"Now, you see what you get when you don't let me lie to you?" Remus said petulantly, rolling off Sirius and dusting down his shirt. "You could have gone home and had a nice sleep, guilt free, thinking James was coming to relieve me, but no, you had to go wanting the truth."

"Well, you ought to be a better liar," Sirius muttered.

"When's the wedding?" Frank asked Remus.

"Wedding?" Remus asked.

"I want to know where the two of you are registered."

"Don't think just cos he pinned me I couldn't beat the tar out of you, Longbottom," Sirius threatened.

"You're just after my arse," Frank said haughtily. "Now then. Someone's got to go for dinner and it might as well be Black. I'd like a turkey on twelve-grain with no mustard."

Sirius looked at him blankly.

"You're going to the Three Broomsticks," Frank said, "Because I had to eat industrial-grade Hogwarts food for seven years and I don't care how good they are at roast chicken, a house-elf cannot make a simple sandwich to save its life."

"Oooh! Oooh! I want wheat bread, meatballs, and extra onions!" Brenda said.

"Do they have sprouts?" Sara asked.

"Firewhiskey," Remus said. "If I'm trapped with you for another eight hours, I want firewhiskey."

Sirius buried his face in his hands and shook his head. "Send round the parchment," he announced. "I expect to be tipped."

"If you're prompt and polite," Remus answered, as Brenda produced, from the bottomless carrybag, a roll of parchment and a quill and ink.

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By the time dinner had come and gone and night had fully settled, the little encampment of first-comers had arranged a fire to gather around, and were having brew up, since Sirius desperately needed something to do and even Dobby was getting tired of cards. A couple of students who followed in the footsteps of the legendary Potter and Black tried various mild hexes and pranks, but as they happened to be the Legendary Black, the Nearly-But-Not-Quite-Legendary Lupin, and a fully trained Auror (as well as two extremely cranky women and one Ministry Solicitor) they brushed off the amateurish tricks with ease.

"I think we should have been more thorough in leaving behind instructions," Sirius remarked. "If we tried these pathetic things we'd be laughed out of the Mischief Club. Of which you are the treasurer," he added.

"Yes, well, you'd have nicked the money for dirty magazines and James would have spent it on chocolate and Peter would have lost it," Remus answered, nursing his fourth firewhiskey. Sirius took the bottle and added a little to his tea, including Frank in the libation when the other man held out his mug. This wasn't so bad; the fire was keeping them warm, and there had been good food a while ago, and he was drinking firewhiskey that was definitely above-par -- Sirius had good taste in this as in all things, and the money to afford good taste.

"We should tell ghost stories," Brenda said, reclining on a pad that Sirius had transfigured out of a pile of their sandwich-wrapper leavings.

"All right then," Frank said. "I've got one. Last week, right, we were called out to this little town in Wales because they had this spook who would NOT move out -- "

"Not REAL ghost stories," Brenda stopped him.

"What do you mean, real ghost stories? What other kinds of ghost stories are there?" Sirius demanded.

"Muggles make them up," Remus said. "My mum used to when I was little."

"What's the point in that?"

"Scariest, aren't they?" Brenda said. "There's one about a man, right, and he sees this other man carrying a coffin one night, and the man turns to him and says There's room for one more and so the next night he's going to get in an elevator and the man running the elevator is the man he saw carrying the coffin, and the man says again There's room for one more, but he's scared so he doesn't get on, and the elevator falls and everyone dies." She paused. "Which isn't the best way to tell it, really."

"What's an elevator?" Frank asked curiously.

"Muggle culture is lost on magic-borns," Remus said with a sigh. "Look at Sirius. Fine specimen of a man, has a flying motorbike, top NEWTs, Hogwarts boy, and yet refuses, absolutely refuses, to even try to understand the Muggle cinema."

"I like the candy," Sirius protested.

"Candy is not the majority of the Muggle Cinematic Experience!" Remus exclaimed. "I took you to see Star Wars and you picked it to death!"

"Well, who cares about Muggles throwing fireballs at each other and racing things that can't fly more than four feet off the ground," Sirius grumbled.

"Two hours," Frank announced, putting away his pocketwatch. People down the line a bit cheered; other campfires had been arranged, and the smell of various things roasting, from sausages to marshmallows to clothing (accidental) rose in the air. Up above them, students crowded around the windows to watch, or occasionally hurl an increasingly bored hex. Remus, propped on one elbow, stole a sip of Sirius' tea, and made a face.

"That's not spiked tea," he said, "That's tea-flavoured whiskey. You'd better be able to write the kid's name, come midnight."

"Can you, now?" Sirius asked, with a grin. Remus traced "Potter" in the dirt with his finger. "Oh bugger that's right, they still haven't picked a damn name. Do you think they'll take 'Potter to be determined at a later date'?"

"Oh, just put something down," Remus sighed. "Name him Sirius if you really must."

"I'll tell Lily you told me to," Sirius threatened.

"Well, if I'm going to die over his name, we ought to at least name him Remus. Or perhaps anything but Remus," he finished thoughtfully. "James Potter Junior?"

"Lily vetoed," Sirius sighed. "What would you name a kid if you had one?"

"Got to start with an R. Old family tradition," Remus said. "Richard's good. Rory. Roland, I quite like Roland," he added. "The horn of Roland in the passages of Spain..."

"Padma and Parvati," said Sara, smiling shyly at her husband. "What about you, Brenda?"

"Good Irish name," Brenda said. "Thinking of Seamus."

"And Longbottom's mum picked Neville, and the Weasleys -- "

"Good lord, at this point, draw one out of a hat," Bill said.

"It's planets and things in my family," Sirius said. "Perseus and Mars and Polaris and all."

Silence fell over the little circle, and Remus finished his drink, while Bill helped himself to some tea and got swatted away from the bottle of firewhiskey. After a while, Sirius raised his mug and gestured across the fire.

"Nother one coming," he sighed. "You'd think they'd have learned by now -- "

"It is Master!" Dobby exclaimed. He quickly scuttled into "line" outside of the fire and stood there at attention. Lucius Malfoy, immaculate in a knee-length black frock coat and annoyingly shiny shoes, was walking along the line, stopping here and there to speak idly with friends, in no hurry to relieve Dobby of his post. Sirius began making up dialogue under his breath, until Remus leaned closer to listen.

"Good evening Lestranger, what awful hair I have. Yes, I know, I do dress like it's still the early nineteen forties, because I am an oik. Must be going, many other people to bore. Oh! Hallo, you aren't worth my time but I am still an oik, so I will smile smarmily at you and move on to someone who

actually interests me. Do you like my cane? It's not like the fact that I have a very small -- " Sirius ended with an Oof as Remus poked him in the ribs.

"Elf," Lucius said, as he finally approached Dobby, who began to tremble, "What DID I say about getting to the front of the line?"

"Dobby is very sorr -- "

Dobby flew a good ten feet as Lucius practiced his golf swing with the ebony cane he carried. He made a disappointed little moue. "I've done better," he sighed. "All right, who's first amongst this happy party?"

"I am," Sirius said, leaning forward so that the fire illuminated his face. "Hello, Cousin Lucius."

Lucius' lip curled. "Cousin? Oh no, my dear boy. Did you forget you've been disowned and shunned?"

"Thank god, I thought I was still stuck with your sort as family," Sirius sniffed. "It was a sad day when Narcissa lowered herself to marrying a Malfoy."

The cane whistled through the air, stopping two inches from Sirius' cheek. He didn't flinch. Remus did, however, tumbling backwards into the dust, much to Sara and Brenda's amusement.

"Watch how you speak of my wife," Lucius growled.

"In 1592 a Malfoy sold herself into indentured servitude in the house of Black," Sirius said. "And in 1870 a Black was forced to divorce a Malfoy -- "

"That is unsubstantiated rumour, whelp!"

"But a better-bred whelp than you are," Sirius said with a sly grin. "And first in line."

Lucius let the cane slide through his fingers until it once again rested near his hip. "Fine," he said. "Forty Galleons."

"Not for two hundred," Remus said, staring up at the sky. He turned his head.

"I didn't ask the half-breed," Lucius said, lip curling.

"I was actually going to bargain with you for a while, just to see how desperate you'd get, right up until you said that." Sirius began to rise, but Remus grabbed his arm.

"It's fine," he said, using Sirius as leverage to pull himself up. "Better half-bred than inbred, I always say."

Lucius' hand went to the head of his cane, and he twisted, revealing a wand where a normal gentleman would keep a sword blade.

"Oh look," Frank said, leaning forward as Sirius had done, until his face was lit. "A stick. Inside a stick."

Brenda giggled.

"I'm sure you wouldn't want to hex an innocent, inexperienced young man in front of an Auror," Frank continued pleasantly. "Or indulge in bribery as a method of assuring you child a place at Hogwarts School. Especially as your house elf has been holding your place as seventh-in-line and winning at Bridge all day."

"Seventh?" Lucius asked, incredulous.

"Sure. Unnamed Boy Potter, Maybe Seamus Finnegan, Neville Longbottom, Padma and Parvati Patil, and Another Weasley are all ahead of your child, but I'm sure there will be room."

"Hey, that'd be a great name!" Bill exclaimed. "Hi, my name is Another," he said, introducing himself to Brenda. "I'm gonna ask mum if we can name him that. Dad's stuck us all with boring Muggle names."

Lucius, sensing himself at a disadvantage, withdrew slightly, scattering the people standing behind him and putting a little distance between himself and the cheerful campfire.

"Give my love to Cissa!" Sirius called, then made a disgusted noise as he tossed a nearby stick on the fire. "Big fit blond bastard."

"Yes, what a curse on us that he should be so handsome," Remus replied, reaching around Sirius to take another sip of the now-cold tea-flavoured-whiskey.

"Bet you his child's a right squib," Sirius continued. "Hope the whole Malfoy clan goes squib. Serve them right. Blacks too. Cept for me. And Andromeda," he added thoughtfully. "She's not a bad sort."

"Almost time for the doors to open, and people are going to really try to start line-jumping soon, I bet," Frank observed. "Might want to actually sort

into a line of some kind."

"Yaarhgh," Sirius agreed, pushing himself to his feet and dusting his trousers off directly onto Remus, who sputtered and stood quickly to get out of the way. Frank kicked dirt on the fire and formed up behind them with Brenda and the Patils, and Bill provided an appropriate buffer between Lucius and the people who had just offhandedly insulted and embarrassed him.

Remus leaned on the door to Hogwarts, picking at a loose sliver of wood, while Sirius conjured a dim light on the tip of his wand. "Hope Lily's doing all right," he said.

"Bet you they went out for dinner and just didn't want to come," Sirius sulked. "Well, if I put down the name Another Potter, it'll only serve them right."

"Makes me feel old," Remus said.

"You? How d'you think I feel? If James and Lily kill each other, as they're bound to do sooner or later, I'm stuck with a kid. I've got to be a role model and all. You get to be fun uncle Remus."

Remus grinned. "Yeah, I guess. S'not really what I meant, though."

"Oh?" Sirius asked. "Enlighten me, great one."

Remus leaned back against the wall, the firewhiskey catching up with him. "It's just, you know, I feel tired. I mean, James and Lily've got something real. They've got a baby, and it's theirs, and the rest of us are...treading water. I keep waiting for my life to start, Sirius, and instead what I get is the war. I'm tired of the war. I'm tired of fighting on the one hand and on the other trying to make enough to feed myself. I feel old."

Sirius opened his mouth to speak, but just then the great front doors began to creak, and both men stepped backwards as they opened and Minerva McGonagall appeared, a lamp in one hand. When she saw who was at the front of the line, she pursed her lips.

"Mister Black," she said, disapprovingly. "I suppose it's too much to hope that you've made an honest woman of whoever it is you're standing in line for."

Sirius gave her his most charming smile. "James went ahead and did it for me, ma'am. I'm here to sign for Potter, Male, Name Indeterminate. Look, I brought the good influence with me," he added, grabbing Remus by the back of the neck.

"Remus Lupin!" McGonagall exclaimed. "Are you drunk?"

"No, ma'am," Remus answered, carefully. "Just a bit tired, Professor McGonagall."

"Hmmm," she said. "Your tired smells like firewhiskey."

"Bit of a nip round the fire, that's all, ma'am," Frank Longbottom said from behind them, and McGonagall's look softened slightly. "Almost time, then?"

"Just about," she agreed. "When the bells ring midnight you will follow me, please, quietly and in good order. Rowdiness," she added, with a sharp look at Remus, "will not be tolerated."

"Understood, Professor," Sirius said amiably.

"On a personal note," McGonagall continued, lowering her voice, "It's good to see you boys in such high spirits. Though perhaps a little too high, in some cases."

Just then the bells in Hogsmeade began to chime midnight, and a murmur went through the long, winding line that led back from the Hogwarts main doors. McGonagall turned, leading the way through the echoing stone corridors, towards the great hall. Sirius, still cautious against hex-throwing students, casually gave three pranksters a bad case of petrificus totalus before proceeding at a leisurely pace behind her.

They entered the Great Hall, where Albus Dumbledore sat at the high table, behind a large roll of parchment and an enormous pot of ink.

"Mr. Black," he said, in a deep, expressionless voice.

"Headmaster," Sirius replied, just as deadpan. Remus was snickering behind him, and he paused to tread on the other man's foot.

"I can hardly think your own offspring bring you here tonight, Sirius," Dumbledore continued, as the two made their way down the long central corridor where they'd walked for their Sorting nearly ten years before. They could hear Brenda behind them, and Frank give her the offer of the loan of his arm.

"My godson," Sirius announced, the words echoing pleasingly off the high, enchanted ceiling. "James and Lily's firstborn."

"Ah, of course. And Mr. Lupin?"

"Babysitting Mr. Black," Lupin replied with a grin, leaning over Sirius' shoulder.

"You'd best be getting on with it then," Dumbledore said, unrolling the parchment and flattening it with a muttered charm. "The child's name on the left, expected date of attendance, and your names as signers on the right, please."

"We haven't got a name yet," Sirius hissed as they came forward.

"Put any old thing," Remus hissed back. "Didn't Lily say she liked Harry?"

"Blow that for a lark," Sirius declared. "He's having a proper wizarding name."

"Sirius -- "

"Come on Black," called Frank, "They're rattling the sabers, put the name down already."

Sirius noted the year, and then bent over the parchment and wrote with great concentration for a few seconds. Then he signed his name and, after a warning look at Lupin not to protest, passed the quill over.

"You can't be -- "

"Just sign!" Sirius said impatiently. Remus sighed.

"James is going to have our heads," he said, and signed.

"Thank you, gentlemen," Dumbledore said. "Please remind Mr. and Mrs. Potter that this is legally binding, and should the child's name be altered significantly he may be required to be re-registered."

"We're in for it now," Remus said. "Let's take James out and get him drunk before we tell him, all right?"

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Harry stared down at his birth records. Remus looked apologetic.

"What you have to remember, Harry," he said, "is that we were both very young and your parents had more or less abandoned us, and we didn't actually know that the name on the parchment was binding."

Harry continued to stare.

"Are you all right, Harry?" Remus asked, worried. He'd followed time-honoured tradition and had a few butterbeers with the boy before arranging to inform him of his real name; sooner or later he'd have to know, since it would go on his Hogwarts diploma. "Listen, I'm really sorry, but it's mostly Sirius' fault."

Harry was silent, still staring.

"See, the thing is, he explained it all to James and me later, he wanted you to have options..."

"Sirius Roland Dionysus Harry Potter," Harry read aloud, incredulously. "My name is Sirius Roland Dionysus Harry Potter?"

"It could have been worse -- "

"My name is SIRIUS ROLAND DIONYSUS HARRY POTTER."

"Well, it could have been Harold..."

END