

Much Ado

Remus Lupin left Albus Dumbledore's office feeling tired.

Not that meeting with the Headmaster of Hogwarts tired him, no, though it could have – Dumbledore's power was so apparent, in its own quiet way, that most people left an interview with him feeling a bit tired, as if he had somehow stolen energy from them, although he was far too moral to do such a thing.

No, Remus had arrived tired, from something of a long trip he had made, on Dumbledore's – call them "firm suggestions," Remus decided. The Order of the Phoenix, after all, was a clandestine organization, and even as its leader, Dumbledore really had no power to give orders.

No power but what we give him.

And we give him a great deal.

The Order was dedicated to fighting Lord Voldemort and the Death Eaters, a difficult job under any circumstances, made harder by the small numbers of the Order and the enormous ones of the Death Eaters.

And our numbers grow fewer, not greater, as time goes on and they find out who we are...

Remus shook his head, banishing such gloomy thoughts. For the moment, anyway, he was safe enough, having successfully completed a mission.

Successfully, in this case, meaning I came back alive, not that I got anything done.

Dumbledore had sent him to some of the small, hidden settlements populated entirely by werewolves, in some cases only three or four houses, in at least one case a cluster of caves. He had been supposed to try to convince them not to join up with Voldemort, to come and fight for the light, or at least to remain neutral.

The trouble was that Remus was something that most of the werewolves in those settlements despised – a "passer." He hid his nature and tried to live among mainstream wizarding society, passing as human. He'd even attended Hogwarts, something unthinkable for a werewolf only ten or fifteen years ago. Many of the werewolves refused to listen to him, and those who did, did so with deep distrust, and a hint of jealousy, Remus thought.

But I think I got through to at least two of them.

He sighed, walking through the gates of Hogwarts. *Two. Out of, what was it, ten, twelve, that I visited?*

It's not working. Nothing we're doing is working.

And I'm getting depressed, which means I'm overtired and need to get some rest.

Which means I need to get back to Headquarters.

He dropped his small bag to the ground and held out his right hand over the lane as if trying to stop a taxi, and with a loud BANG, the Knight Bus appeared.

"London, please," he said to the conductor, handing over the fare. "Devil's Face Road." It still made James laugh that the headquarters of the organization fighting on the side of good was located in a place named after the personification of evil.

Remus sank into an armchair and held on as the bus took off with a violent jerk.

This may take a while. I know I have a book in here somewhere.

He dug around in his bag until he found it – a rather tattered copy of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Let's see, where was I... beginning of Act Two.

He made it all the way through Act Two, Scene One, and was just beginning Scene Two, where the villainous Don John plots to undo the marriage of Claudio and Hero, when the conductor tapped him on the shoulder. "Your stop, sir."

"Thank you." Remus got up, dropped the book back in his bag, and climbed off the bus, which disappeared in a cloud of vile-smelling smoke.

Now all I have to do is get to Number Three.

As he thought of the place, it appeared, magically materializing on what looked to everyone else like a vacant lot.

Fidelius Charms are amazing things.

He climbed the steps wearily. *I just want some peace and quiet...*

He opened the front door.

“AND YOU’RE UGLY, TOO!”

Remus ducked as something hurtled towards his face. He heard a smash behind him, and turned to see the remains of a painted vase lying in the road.

I knowthat scream.

“OH, I’M UGLY? LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT YOURSELF...”

That one too.

He stepped into the house. Sirius Black was standing in the front hallway, hands balled into fists at his sides, giving Aletha Freeman, who was standing on the stairs breathing heavily, a point-by-point and highly unflattering description of her at the top of his lungs. Remus skirted behind Sirius and joined James Potter, who was watching the fray from a doorway.

“Who started this one?” he asked as Sirius paused for breath and Aletha took over, returning his descriptions with interest.

“I think this one’s Letha’s fault. Sirius said, ‘Do I look stupid to you?’”

Remus winced. “She answered, didn’t she.”

James nodded.

“Are those two ever going to stop fighting?” asked Lily Evans, coming into the living room by the other door. “Hello, Remus, how are you?”

“I feel the same way I look,” said Remus dryly.

James looked him up and down. “Terrible.”

“Thank you for clarifying, Prongs. And no, I don’t think they ever will stop fighting.”

The front door slammed. So did a door upstairs.

“We have to do something about that,” said Lily, looking cautiously out into the hallway. “If they would just stop quarreling all the time, they’d see they’re meant for each other.”

Remus dropped his bag on the floor, now that it was safe from being a missile, and allowed himself to collapse into a chair. “Lily, I think I liked you better before you fell in love. Now you want to see everyone else in love too.”

“No, she’s got a point, Moony. I mean, when they’re not fighting, you have to admit they get along pretty well.”

“And when would that be?”

“Now you’re the one with the point.” Lily sighed. “They do seem to fight all the time.”

“Who?” asked Frank Longbottom, walking into the room. “No, don’t tell me. Sirius and Letha.”

“No one else,” said James. “Look what the kneazle dragged in, Frank.”

“Remus, good to see you, how are you?” Frank came over to shake his hand.

“Slightly better than I look, thanks.”

“You’re improving,” Lily noted.

“Friendly conversation does that. How’s Alice, Frank?”

“She’s fine – working late tonight, though. James, how soon is it safe to go near Sirius?”

“Define safe.”

“Without danger of grievous bodily harm to either of us.”

“Ah, ten minutes, I’d say.”

“All right.”

“What’s up?”

“I have test results for a couple of first-year Auror trainees.” Frank pulled two envelopes from his pocket. “Here, catch.” He tossed one to James, who caught it and ripped it open eagerly.

“So, what’s the damage?” asked Remus, leaning his head against the back of the chair.

“I passed,” said James absently, scanning down the list. “Hmm – extra points on the field test, for ‘unusual ability to locate hidden markers.’” He smirked slightly at Remus, who raised an eyebrow – he knew perfectly well how those markers had been located.

Aurors planted them, so they had human scent on them – and deer have excellent noses.

“Well, to get back to our earlier topic, a certain pair of people had better not be fighting during our wedding,” said Lily, leaning on James to read over his shoulder. “Which, need I remind you, is only one month away.”

“Yes, that would break the mood we’re hoping to set, the best man and the maid of honor having a screaming match.”

Something stirred in Remus’ mind. A man and woman planning a wedding, and another man and woman who ostensibly hated each other...

“I have an idea,” he said, sitting up. “Have any of you ever read *Much Ado About Nothing*?”

“I have,” said Frank, lifting a hand. “Wait... oh, no. Beatrice and Benedick?”

Remus nodded, feeling his spirits lift. “It worked in the play.”

“What worked?” asked James.

Remus grinned. “I think I know how we can trick Sirius and Aletha into falling in love.”

“No, you can’t,” said Lily.

“Why not?”

“Because they’re already in love. They just don’t know it yet.”

“Fine, so we’ll trick them into admitting it,” said Frank. “I think that’s all they did in the play, anyway.”

“What is this play?” demanded James.

“Your classical education’s been neglected, Prongs,” said Remus, pointing at his bag. “You can borrow my copy if you like.”

“It’s Shakespeare, darling,” said Lily gently. “I’ll explain it to you with little words later.”

“All right.” James turned back to his test results.

Remus counted in his head. He reached five before James looked up with a puzzled expression on his face. “Wait – what?”

Frank, Lily, and Remus all cracked up.

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Sirius Black was walking down one of the upstairs hallways of Headquarters when he noticed an open door, with voices spilling out of it.

“...sure Letha likes him?” asked Remus’ voice.

Sirius’ ears twitched. Well, probably not literally, since he wasn’t in dog form at the moment, but he felt like they did.

Who does Letha like?

Carefully, he slid closer to the door.

“Oh, Alice is positive. Says she found a sheet of paper in the garbage with all these names written in it.” That was Frank.

“Names?” asked James.

“You know, Aletha Black, Aletha Freeman-Black, Mrs. Sirius Black, that kind of thing.”

Sirius was grateful for the wall being so nearby. Otherwise, he might have fallen over.

“Lily says she cries herself to sleep most nights,” added James. “And talks about him in her sleep.”

“Talks about him?” asked Remus.

“Well, not about him. But she calls his name. Wails, actually, is what Lily said.”

“Poor girl,” sighed Frank. “She’s too good for him. Ungrateful idiot – sorry, you two, but it’s true.”

“No, you’re right.” Sirius heard a chair scrape on the floor and stepped back in alarm, but it seemed, from the footsteps, that James had just got up to pace. “There are days I want to punch him in the face, just to get his attention, and ask him what he thinks he’s doing. She’s perfect for him, she’s head over heels in love with him, and he’s too stupid to see it.”

“What do you think he’d do if she just told him?” asked Frank.

“Probably laugh in her face.”

“Honestly,” said Remus quietly, “I don’t think he deserves her.”

Sirius had heard enough. As quietly as he could, he slipped past the door and down the stairs into the living room, where he sat down on the couch and stared at the wall.

Am I really that bad?

I would not laugh in Letha’s face if she told me she... liked me.

At least I don’t think I would.

James wants to punch me?

He ran over his last few weeks of interactions with Aletha – the last few years, actually – and came to a highly unpleasant conclusion.

James should punch me. Remus should probably take a turn too. Maybe Frank and Peter should get in on it.

I’ve been a real prat.

And I don’t deserve her.

He shook his head. “She loves me?” he asked the room at large.

The room disdained to reply.

Sirius was undaunted by this. “Well, if she does – I’ll try and love her back, that’s all there is to it,” he declared.

And it won’t be too hard, either.

After all, we made good teammates.

Why shouldn’t we make a good couple?

He nodded, well satisfied with his logic.

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The listeners on the stairs exchanged expressions of satisfaction.

Everything was going according to plan.

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Aletha Freeman let herself into Headquarters, feeling rather weary. She, like Lily Evans, was living there at the moment, though Lily would be moving out within a month, so Aletha would have the room to herself for a while, until she could find a place of her own...

“Letha – do you have a second?”

Inwardly, Aletha groaned.

What did I do to deserve this?

“Hello, Sirius,” she said frostily.

“Hey, listen, I just... I wanted... well, I wanted to...”

Aletha crossed her arms and regarded him skeptically.

This is one of two things – either he’s trying to apologize or he wants to ask me out.

Either way, I don’t believe a word he’s got to say.

“I’m sorry for the other day,” Sirius finally got out.

Oh, you are, are you?"

"Yes, I am."

About to call him a liar, Aletha paused. There was something in his face that seemed... different.

"Apology accepted," she said with a curt nod. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I was just looking for a snack."

She turned and went down the hall towards the kitchen.

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Sirius smirked to himself.

Looking for a snack, is she?

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A man peered into a tarnished, gilt-edged mirror. "Lily, initiate Phase Two," he said. "You have incoming."

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Aletha opened the kitchen door.

"...heard Sirius say..." Alice Longbottom trailed off. "Oh, Aletha, hello, I didn't hear you come in!"

Alice and Lily, who was also sitting at the kitchen table, were both looking at Aletha a bit oddly. "Do I have something on my face?" she asked, frowning.

Alice flushed. "Oh, no, dear, no, not at all. We were just saying, er, saying..."

"How busy everyone is with their training, James and Sirius with their Auror work, and you with the Healer's program," said Lily quickly. "Would you like tea? I'll make some if you do."

"No, thank you, that's all right, I was just leaving."

They were talking about Sirius. And about me. I knowit, I knowthey were...

She walked quickly and heavily away from the kitchen door, then came back along the hallway as softly as she could and listened. Alice was speaking.

"... thought he was alone in the bathroom, he didn't know Frank was around, and he was almost crying, Frank says, and saying her name over and over, and asking why she didn't love him..."

"That's terrible," said Lily, sounding very slightly choked-up. "But why doesn't he just tell her?"

"Tell her? With the way they fight? He might as well paint a target on his robes and go out without his wand. She'd tear him to pieces."

Lily sighed. "You're right. Letha's ruthless when she thinks she sees a weakness. And love's the biggest weakness anyone can have."

Aletha was vaguely aware of clutching a fold of her robes in both hands and staring at it. It didn't seem to matter. All her attention was focused on her ears, and the unbelievable things coming in through them.

"She's such a fool," Lily went on. "Where's she going to find another man as good as Sirius? They don't come along every day."

"Honestly, Lily, I don't think she'll ever settle down. She's such a fault-finder, she'll nitpick any man who tries to get close until he gives up. That's if she doesn't shout him to death first."

"You're probably right." A chair scraped as someone stood up. "I should get upstairs, James wanted to ask me something..."

Aletha never knew how she made it out of the hallway in time. Her next clear thought came when she was sitting on one of the chairs in the dining room, feeling by turns completely amazed and somewhat ill.

My God. I never knewI came off like that.

And Sirius loves me? Despite everything I've said to him?

She swallowed hard. "I suppose I could learn to love him," she said quietly. "It wouldn't be too hard. He is a very good-looking man. And he can be sweet sometimes."

And I bet he's good in bed...

She jerked herself upright. *Stop that! You're a nice girl, you shouldn't be thinking of things like that!*

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Lily and Alice, listening outside the dining room, could hardly control their giggles until they were out of earshot.

"I thought I'd blown it when I was laughing at your story about him crying in the bathroom," confided Lily. "But I guess it sounded to her like I was crying myself. That blush when she came in was classic – how did you do that?"

"I have an image Frank taught me for when I need to blush on command," said Alice with a roguish smile, and whispered something in Lily's ear.

Lily gasped in shock and turned a fiery red.

"Yes, exactly," said Alice with satisfaction. "And I might add – it's *quite* enjoyable."

Lily's blush deepened, if that was possible.

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Sirius was sitting alone in one of the unused upstairs rooms, attempting not to stab himself in the forehead with his quill.

Why am I doing this? I'm no good at poetry. My English tutor used to say my work was good for toilet paper and not much else.

But it was traditional to woo the lady of one's heart with verses...

I guess my problem is that nothing rhymes with "Aletha".

Someone knocked on the door. "Come in," he called.

The door opened. Sirius quickly slid the parchment with his rather pitiful attempts at romantic verse under a stack of others and jabbed the quill into the holder.

"Dumbledore's here," said Aletha, standing framed in the doorway. "He's called a general meeting in the kitchen. Will you come down with me?"

Sirius rose and gave a small bow. "Miss Freeman, I would go anywhere with you."

Aletha's eyebrows went up, but she didn't look displeased – no, it was more... amused. "Anywhere?"

"With you by my side, anywhere." Sirius offered her his arm.

"Let's start with the kitchen." Aletha took it.

They walked down the hall arm in arm, then Sirius gallantly allowed Aletha to go first down the stairs, and by the time they arrived at the kitchen door they were holding hands.

"Er – hold on," Sirius said as Aletha made to turn the doorknob. "Let's... not go in there like this, all right?"

"What's wrong, ashamed to be seen with me?"

"No! It's just... you know how James gets. And Remus and Peter, for that matter."

Aletha nodded. "For your sake, then," she said with a slight smirk, which managed, on her, to be becoming, and dropped his hand before she opened the door. "Where has Peter been, anyway? I hardly ever see him these days."

"I'm not sure – I think his mother's been ill and she likes him to be home with her..."

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"Look at this," James murmured to Remus as Sirius and Aletha entered the kitchen. "They're talking to each other."

"Talking politely. Without screaming or name-calling. I think it's working."

"I think so too. Nice maneuvering getting her to go and get him, by the way, Lily."

"Thank you." Lily smiled. "They do make a good-looking couple."

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"Letha, do you have a second?" said Alice a few days later, leaning her head around the doorway.

"Something wrong?"

"No, not at all – I just wanted to tell you how you can get a good laugh."

"I can always use one of those..."

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"I'm telling you, she'll say yes if you ask her," said Frank the next morning, propelling Sirius along the hallway. "So go ask her. Women want to be asked. It's in their nature."

"Are you sure?"

"Who's the married one around here?"

"Right." Sirius straightened his robes and knocked.

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Someone knocked on Aletha's door just as she finished tying her shoes. "Come in," she called.

Sirius opened the door. "Good morning," he said brightly. Too brightly.

"Something I can do for you?" asked Aletha with a trace of suspicion.

"Er, well, yes." Sirius fidgeted. "Would you... I mean, will you... what I'm trying to say is, I'd really like it if you'd..."

Aletha crossed her arms and waited.

"Wouldyougooutwithme?" asked Sirius in a rush.

"You want me to go on a date with you?" Aletha repeated.

Sirius flushed. "Well, yes, but you don't have to if you don't want to, I mean, it's not like I've ever done anything to make you want to, and... aw, damn, never mind, I'm sorry, I'll just leave you alone..."

"Sirius."

"Yeah?"

Aletha smiled. "Yes."

"What?"

"Yes. I'll go out with you."

Alice was right. That is the dumbest I've ever seen him look.

"You will?"

"Yes. I will."

"Cool. Tonight?"

"I have to study for the entrance tests for the Healer's program. Tomorrow all right?"

Sirius grimaced. "I have late training. Maybe... Friday?"

"Friday sounds good. We can have dinner or something."

"Dinner. Yeah. All right."

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Around the corner, Frank and Alice smiled smugly at each other.

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Bmjdf:

J gpvoe uijt jo Bmfuibt uijoht. Xpvme zpv ipme po up ju gps nf?

Uibolt,

Mjnz

Q.T. Uif qbttxpse jt "Cfbusjdf".

Sirius frowned. "Look at this," he said to Aletha. "Does it make any sense to you?"

She took the parchment from him, perused it, and shook her head. “No. It must be some kind of code. So I’d assume, since we don’t understand it, it’s not for us, and we should leave it here and let whoever does understand it take it.” She set the parchment back on the table and opened the pantry. “And get back to the important business at hand. Finding a decent snack.”

“Funny, how it’s all written up in one corner,” mused Sirius, sitting down at the kitchen table.

“Hello, you two,” said Alice, bursting through the kitchen door. “Oh, thank goodness, there it is.” She picked up the parchment hurriedly. “I must run, I’ll see you tomorrow – at the wedding – are you all ready?”

“Got my best dress robes laid out,” said Sirius, leaning back in his chair. “They even match Letha’s.”

“That’s only because I helped you pick them out,” said Aletha, emerging from the pantry for a moment. “And if you want something to eat, Sirius Black, get off your lazy arse and come get it for yourself – I’m not your servant.”

Alice smiled fondly at them and left the way she’d come in.

“So tell me,” said Sirius, joining Aletha at the pantry. “You’re so fond of reminding me about all my bad parts – I’m lazy, I’m rude, I’m childish, I don’t take anything seriously – which one of them did you fall in love with?”

“All of them together,” said Aletha, smiling at him coyly from behind the biscuit jar. “How about me? Did you fall in love with my bad temper, my inability to take a joke on myself, my habit of eating far too much chocolate at one sitting?”

“Yes.”

“You know, I hate it when you give me a one-word answer to a multiple choice question.”

“Why do you think I do it?”

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Outside the door, Alice chuckled quietly.

“Beatrice,” she said softly, touching her wand to the parchment Lily had left for her on the kitchen table, and had to clap a hand over her mouth as she saw what it was.

Oh, tomorrow will be a day to remember...

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Sirius looked a little askance at Aletha, who was sniffing and blotting at her eyes with her handkerchief. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing – I’m just so happy for them...” She gave an extra-loud snuffle. “Besides, it’s traditional to cry at weddings.”

“This is the reception.”

“It still counts.”

“I’ll take your word for it,” said Sirius, shaking his head and watching Remus say something in James’ ear.

Women.

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“I got it,” Remus said quietly to James, handing him a folded piece of parchment. “Took a little looking, but I was pretty sure it was around somewhere.”

“Is it genuine?”

“Are you calling me a liar?”

“No – no more than any of us are.”

“Yes, it’s genuine. You look at it.”

James unfolded the piece of parchment and glanced at it. “You’re right,” he said, folding it back up and sliding it into his pocket. “Lily, you have yours?”

“Right here,” said Lily, patting the side of her white wedding robes. “If we’re lucky, we won’t have to use them... but if the truth’s ever going to come out, it’s likely to be today, and now we’re prepared.”

Ting, ting, ting, ting...

Everyone’s heads turned. Sirius was standing up, tapping his glass with a spoon. “A toast, ladies and gentlemen,” he said loudly. “To the bride and groom – may their happiness never falter.”

"To the bride and groom!" everyone chorused, and drank to it willingly.

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"It's traditional for the best man to make a speech at this point," Sirius went on, handing Aletha his glass. "And I do have a little something prepared. As little as possible, since I'm sure James and Lily are eager to get to the honeymoon portion of the evening."

The guests laughed.

"I've known James Potter and Lily Evans since we were first years together at Hogwarts. And if anyone had told me then that they would end up married, I would have told them they were out of their minds. James and Lily, in the words of our good friend Remus Lupin, went together like a fist to the eye."

Another ripple of laughter. Remus gave a small bow from where he was sitting farther down the head table.

"Their animosity continued as the years went by. By the time we were fifth years, Lily was proclaiming – in public – that James made her sick. Unfortunately for James, she had more than a little justice on her side. We were some arrogant little berks then, weren't we, Prongs?"

"What do you mean, then?" shouted a voice from the crowd, causing a wave of laughter.

"Thank you, Fabian Prewett," said Sirius sarcastically, glaring at the red-haired man. "Anyway, by seventh year James got his head deflated a bit, and Lily had to concede that he wasn't quite so bad after all. And from that concession, they progressed steadily to where you see them today – almost frighteningly in love and happily married – ladies and gentlemen, I give you James and Lily Potter!"

The guests applauded as Sirius sat down.

"Almost frighteningly in love?" Aletha asked him quietly.

"Hey, love's a scary thing. Anything that makes a woman like you cry herself to sleep..."

Aletha stared at him. "What?"

"Oh, come on, you don't have to hide it," said Sirius, a bit patronizingly. "I know you were crying yourself to sleep over me."

"I was not!"

"I don't blame you, not at all – I mean, it was kind of sad how you kept trying to tell me you liked me, and I just kept getting mad at you..."

"Well, what about you? Crying in the bathroom at work?"

"*What?*"

"That's right, I know about that. Frank heard you talking to yourself, wondering why I didn't love you..." Aletha put a highly sarcastic spin on the last few words.

"I never cried in any bathroom about you!"

"And I never cried myself to sleep over you!"

"Where'd you hear about this?"

"Lily and Alice were talking about it. Where did you hear about it?"

"Frank and Remus and James..." Sirius trailed off and turned around slowly to fix his friend with a glare.

James smiled back as innocently as he could manage, but the very faintest of blushes was staining his cheeks.

Sirius turned back to Aletha. "Madam, I believe we've been set up," he said formally. "I was tricked into thinking you loved me, and I have no doubt the same trick was played on you."

"So we're not in love," said Aletha, glaring over Sirius' shoulder at Lily.

"No. We're not in love."

"Shall we part as friends, then?"

"That sounds like a good idea."

They shook hands.

"Oh, no, you don't," James called out from his seat. "Look what I've got."

Sirius turned in his seat, and his heart sank as he recognized the piece of parchment James was brandishing. *Oh, no...*

My dear Aletha, when I look at you,

"I know that I must love you dear and true,

"And if I had to die tomorrow too,

"I'd still want nothing quite so much as you," James read aloud gleefully. "Pure Sirius Black, witches and gentle wizards, in his own handwriting, if you care to examine the evidence."

Sirius could feel himself turning bright red.

"And here's one to match it," said Lily, pulling out a sheet of parchment of her own. Aletha's eyes widened. "In Miss Aletha Freeman's writing, ladies and gentlemen:

"The star of all my passion,

"My eyes' delight, it's true,

"The centerpiece of fashion,

"My Sirius, is you."

Aletha fled the table. Sirius, with one final dirty look at James, followed her.

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"I am never forgiving her for this," said Aletha to herself in a muffled voice, her face hidden in her robes, sitting on an overturned bucket in a broom closet. "Never. That was a rotten, dirty, mean trick, reading that aloud in public that way."

"Agreed," said a voice, making Aletha jerk and look up. Sirius was standing in the doorway of the closet. "May I come in?"

"No."

He came in anyway.

"Whatever happened to common courtesy?" Aletha asked the ceiling.

"Yours was better than mine, if that's any consolation." Sirius shut the door and lit his wand.

"It's not. Oh, I could just *kill* them for this! For *all* of it!"

"Want me to do it for you?"

"You're not serious."

"I'm not? Then who am I?"

Aletha hit her forehead against the wall. "I can't believe I fell for that."

"Me either. Look, Letha..."

"What?"

Sirius swallowed, the sound audible in the enclosed space. "This may have started as a trick," he said quietly. "But it's not anymore. At least not for me. I know it was a really bad poem, but I did mean it. This is the kind of thing that I'd usually want to put off until tomorrow, but we're in a war. We might not have a tomorrow. So I'm going to say it today. Right now. I love you, Aletha Freeman. At least I think I do. Would you, maybe, be willing to at least try and love me?"

Aletha turned to face him. For once, his face was completely devoid of laughter. Not even a hint of merriment lurked in his grey eyes.

Either this is the best prank he's ever pulled, or...

The memories of the last month paraded through her thoughts, and she made up her mind.

"I can try," she said. "Even if that was a horrible dirty trick they pulled on us."

"We'll get back at them," Sirius promised, stepping a little closer to her. "We could always prank their wedding night."

"Oh, that's just too mean." Aletha smiled wickedly. "Besides, they'll be expecting it. We should wait until tomorrow."

"Good point." He moved a little closer yet. "What do you think we should do?"

"Hmm. Eggs in their bed?"

Sirius shook his head. "Too simple. Needs to have two parts, at least, to make up for this."

"Frogs in the bathtub, then?"

"How about worms?"

"Frogs *and* worms."

"And turn off their hot water."

"And steal all their good robes."

"And turn their hair green and orange striped."

"And make their breath smell bad..."

A moment of silence.

"On second thought, we could always finish discussing this some other time. Do that again."

"Just a second. *Nox*."

The light went out.

"That's better."

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Outside the closet, Remus smiled.

All's well that ends well.

Even if that is a different play.