

Seriously, Sirius?

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“You cannot be serious!”

Harry Potter was both astounded and outraged. But his godfather merely grinned, which annoyed him even further. The Marauder then made a big show of patting himself down and checking that all his limbs were attached.

“Nope, everything seems to be in place. I am, in fact, me,” he proclaimed pompously.

Harry huffed in irritation while beside him Hermione rolled her eyes and shook her head at the tired pun.

Things had been pretty crazy for the past month. The sequence of events that had brought them to this point began during Harry’s History of Magic OWL exam, when he had a vision of his godfather being held prisoner and tortured by Voldemort. That led to a late night thestral ride to the Ministry of Magic, followed by the discovery of a prophecy in the Department of Mysteries and a running battle with a dozen Death Eaters.

Harry and his five companions – Hermione, Ron, Neville, Ginny, and Luna – had been separated into two groups and most of them had been injured, Hermione’s being the most life-threatening. The nightmare had culminated with Harry surrounded by his opponents in the amphitheater that housed the death veil. But then Sirius had arrived with several members of the Order, followed a few minutes later by Dumbledore.

In the ensuing skirmish, Sirius had narrowly missed falling through the veil during a duel with Bellatrix Lestrange when Harry had knocked him away from it at the last second. Following that, Bellatrix had attempted to flee, but Sirius, with Harry right at his heels, had pursued her back up into the atrium of the Ministry building.

There the two cousins had resumed hostilities. They were relatively evenly matched, but Sirius gained the upper hand when Harry joined in the attack, forcing the insane Death Eater to defend from two directions simultaneously. But no sooner had she been disarmed and securely bound than an even more dangerous opponent arrived on the scene – Voldemort himself.

Sirius managed to duck the dark lord’s initial killing curse, but was off balance from that point on as the powerful wizard pressed his advantage. Once again an attack from Harry distracted Voldemort enough for Sirius to rally, but he was soon knocked out of the fight when another killing curse blew apart one of the statues on the fountain and he was caught in the back of the head by some of the debris.

At that point Dumbledore entered the fray, and the two old foes began an exchange of spells which Harry could not hope to match. But although he had sensibly stayed hidden behind another statue that the headmaster had animated and sent to protect him, he got off some hexes of his own whenever the opportunity arose, enough to make a nuisance of himself. Combined with the effect of the dark lord’s earlier exertions during his clash with Sirius, they gave Dumbledore a decided advantage.

The light side finally prevailed, but not before a last desperate maneuver on Voldemort’s part. Just as he was about to be disabled and disarmed, he attempted to take possession of Harry through their scar connection. It was touch and go for a few seconds, as Harry experienced more pain than he could ever have imagined. But focusing on thoughts of his parents, Sirius, and his friends, all of whom had sacrificed themselves in one way or another for him, enabled him to drive the dark lord from his mind, severing their connection at the same time.

The consequences had been dramatic, to say the least. Dumbledore’s defeat and capture of the dark lord, assisted by Harry Potter, was witnessed by a crowd of Ministry personnel, including Fudge himself, who had somehow been alerted to the fact that a major conflict was taking place on the premises. Not only that, but it was apparent that Sirius Black had been fighting alongside them, rather than in opposition.

When Madame Bones and her investigators in the DMLE finally got things sorted out, assisted by veritaserum testimony of Sirius, Bellatrix, and the other Death Eaters that Dumbledore had captured, Harry’s godfather had been cleared of all charges. Eventually the information gained from the Death Eaters led to more raids and arrests, and most of the rest of Voldemort’s supporters, including Peter Pettigrew, were rounded up and incarcerated.

While this was going on, Harry hurried back down to the Department of Mysteries to check on his friends, and discovered that they had already been taken to St. Mungo’s. Somehow, the rumors of the epic battle had preceded them, and the revelation that these were friends of Harry Potter, who along with Albus Dumbledore had just defeated He Who Must Not Be Named *again*, guaranteed them the best and most prompt treatment available. Harry’s own arrival a few minutes later raised the level of attention another order of magnitude. He insisted on remaining at Ron and Hermione’s bedsides until they had both regained consciousness, and no one there was about to deny him anything.

Since that night Sirius had been gradually reestablishing himself as an influential member of the wizarding community in Britain, and assuming control of the Black family assets. Now he was also able to assert his rights as Harry’s godfather, and had just that afternoon returned from Gringotts with a trunkful of documents from the Potter family vault.

Finding Harry and Hermione in the library at Grimmauld Place, he proceeded to drop the bombshell that had Harry in such a state of agitation.

“Dammit, Sirius, you know that I mean,” Harry snapped. “Is this for real or some sort of sick joke?”

“Hey, don’t take it out on me,” Sirius protested. “I’m not the one who entered you into a marriage contract when you were just one year old. Blame your father.”

Hermione broke in. “I noticed that you avoided Harry’s question,” she challenged. “Is this real or one of your pranks?”

Sirius managed to look offended. Then he adopted a solemn expression and raised his hand. “It’s for real. Marauder’s Honor,” he pledged. Harry’s shoulders slumped, but Hermione still looked suspicious. But before she could question him further he turned back to Harry.

“Hey, it’s not that bad really,” he tried to assure his godson. “This sort of thing isn’t that uncommon in the wizarding world. And it’s not like you don’t know the girl – she’s one of your best friends!” Both of the students’ heads snapped up at that information.

“Who?” they chorused.

Sirius paused for dramatic effect, and then, just as Harry appeared to be on the verge of an explosion, revealed the girl’s name.

“Miss Ginevra Weasley.”

It was several seconds before either of the teens was able to speak.

“G ... Ginny?” Harry stammered weakly. “I have to marry Ginny?” He turned and shared a wide-eyed look of astonishment with Hermione, whose own mouth opened and closed soundlessly. “How ... how ...?”

“How could Mr. Weasley and Harry’s father even consider doing such a thing!” Hermione demanded indignantly. “What were they thinking?”

“No. I mean ... that’s a good question too, but I was going to ask how did they even know each other that well?” Harry interrupted. “I mean, they weren’t anywhere near the same age, so they weren’t at Hogwarts at the same time, and they didn’t exactly move in the same social circles, right? How would my parents have come to that sort of arrangement with the Weasleys?”

Sirius was a bit surprised at that question, but had a ready answer. “Well, they were both in the Order, you know, and with the way things were going at that time people tended to have a pretty fatalistic attitude. So that may have had something to do with it,” he added to Hermione, who was still aghast at the idea that such a thing was not only still practiced in the wizarding world, but that someone like Mr. Weasley would be a part of it.

“But still,” she began hotly. Harry cut her off once again.

“No they weren’t,” he corrected. “Moody showed me a picture of the original Order last summer. Mrs. Weasley’s brothers were in it, but she and Mr. Weasley weren’t.”

This time Sirius was definitely caught up short. He stared at Harry while trying to come up with a response, then replied haltingly. “Well, I suppose they worked with the Order, in the background, you know, even if they didn’t go on actual missions.” He thought some more, then continued. “Yes, that’s it; I remember more clearly now. They already had a whole house full of kids by then, you see, so Molly wasn’t too keen on Arthur getting more involved. “But we definitely knew them.”

Harry shrugged and he abandoned that line of questioning but Hermione’s eyes narrowed, as she began to grow suspicious about the evasiveness in Sirius’s responses. But the Marauder quickly changed the subject.

“Look, she’s a wonderful girl, right?” he declared. “She’s bright, clever, plays quidditch. And loyal too, look how she supported you this year and came with you to the Ministry. Not to mention that she’s turning into quite the looker.” He noticed that Harry had gone silent, apparently into one of his quiet, pondering moods. “She’s perfect for you, don’t you think?”

Harry still didn’t answer, and Sirius noted that Hermione was gearing up for another rant, so quickly added, “Tell you what, I’ll go fetch her and the two of you can have a talk and maybe ... you know ... get to know each other better.” He leered at Harry as he added that last part, but his godson merely looked up and stared at him. The boy was clearly trying to work something out in his mind, but Sirius couldn’t tell what.

“Hermione, why don’t you come with me so we can give the two of them some privacy,” he suggested. This finally got a response from Harry.

“I’d rather have Hermione stay,” he protested. Sirius rolled his eyes and tried to explain how Harry and Ginny would have some *personal* issues that were best discussed between the two of them in private, wondering how the boy could be so clueless about this.

But the young witch ended the discussion, surprisingly in his favor. “No Harry, I’ll leave,” she decided. “I’ve got something I want to discuss with Sirius anyway.” This revelation caught the man’s attention, making him nervous about exactly what she would be discussing with him, but he smiled gamely and led her from the room.

Ginny? Harry mused to himself after they left. *I guess you could call her one of my best friends, although I don’t really know her that well. It’s only been this year that she’s even been able to talk to me without blushing or getting all tongue-tied. Yeah, I suppose she’s pretty but more importantly, she’s ...*

His thoughts were interrupted when the door of the library burst open again.

“Tell him!” Hermione shouted. “Tell him right now!”

Hermione, calm down," Sirius urged, stumbling into the room from a shove to his back.

"Sirius Black, you tell him this instant or I'll ... I'll transfigure you into Padfoot and neuter you!"

Both males in the room winced at that threat, and Sirius turned pale. "OK, OK, I'll tell him," he agreed. "But you have to promise not to hex me." Hermione glared at him for a few seconds, but then nodded.

"Tell me what?" Harry demanded.

"It was a prank," Sirius admitted. "There's no marriage contract."

Harry stared incredulously. "Are you ... never mind," he hastily amended, not wanting to trigger another serious/Sirius pun. "And you thought that was funny?"

Sirius nodded and grinned. "Had you going pretty good, too," he boasted. Harry scowled and fingered his wand, prompting his godfather to back away as his grin faded.

"But you swore that it was for real," Harry pointed out. Sirius's grin returned.

"Yeah, I said 'Marauder's Honor,'" he explained. "Get it? What was the Marauders' primary reason for existence? Pranks!" But his smug expression promptly vanished as a stinging hex from Hermione's wand impacted his bum.

"Ouch!" He whirled to confront his assailant. "Hey! You promised not to hex me!"

"I lied," Hermione responded with an unconcerned shrug. "And you deserve it."

"But ... you lied? How ... what happened to the perfectly behaved young lady who'd never dream of breaking rules or lying to an adult?" he asked in disbelief.

Harry snorted, smiling for the first time since the episode began. "Boy, you really don't know Hermione very well at all," he claimed. "She's broken more rules at Hogwarts than pretty much any student at the school! And she's been lying to teachers too, from McGonagall first year all the way to Umbridge just last month!"

Hermione tried to turn her glare on Harry, but couldn't maintain it, so she settled for rolling her eyes and shrugging. "Only to protect my friends, I'll have you know," she asserted. "I just happen to have a friend who needs a lot of protecting." She and Harry shared a look of affection before they both turned back to Sirius and scowled again.

"You know, I think your earlier threat was a bit excessive," Harry suggested to her. "But perhaps a shrinking charm would be appropriate."

Hermione nodded. "I agree." She leveled her wand as Sirius stared at them in disbelief. "*Reducio !*"

A silver streak flashed just past Sirius's hip as he jumped aside. When he whirled around to see what its effect had been, he spotted a miniature chair just behind where he'd been standing. Hermione calmly walked over and picked it up, examining it before showing it to Harry. It was a tenth of its previous size, now resembling a piece of doll house furniture.

Eyes still wide, the older man slowly backed up until he reached the door, then scrambled through and slammed it shut, as the two teens discussed the possible usefulness of the toy sized chair, and whether Hermione should make a matching set.

Outside in the hall, Sirius blew out a breath of relief at his narrow escape. For some reason, witches always seemed to want to use that hex on him. He remembered one time back at Hogwarts ...

He shook his head to return his thoughts to the issue at hand, and a sly smile crept back onto his face. Just then another Marauder poked his head up the stairs. "What's all the racket?" Remus wondered.

Sirius's sly smile broadened. "I just pranked Harry and Hermione." He quickly related the story of what had just transpired. Remus rolled his eyes.

"That's pretty juvenile, Padfoot, even by your standards," he pointed out. "Not to mention worn out. "How many times did you and James try to pull that one while we were students? Between the two of you, it seemed you were in marriage contracts with half the witches at Hogwarts at one time or other."

"Just the pretty ones," Sirius corrected as he led his friend down the stairs and into the drawing room on the first floor. "But that's not important now. This one's not finished yet."

Reaching their destination, he closed and sealed the door, then picked up two nearly invisible strings with earpieces attached. Remus decided to go along with whatever the mutt had in mind, and accepted one of them. As they put the ends in their ears they picked up on the conversation of the two teens Sirius had left in the library.

"Well, then, what do you think of Ginny?" Hermione was saying.

Back in the library ...

Once the door slammed, the two friends looked at each other and chuckled. "You missed," Harry teased.

"No I didn't," Hermione countered. Harry looked puzzled for an instant, then understood, and smirked.

"He got the message you intended to send," he concluded. Hermione nodded with satisfaction, and the two of them turned away from the door. Harry grew silent once again, and Hermione began to worry as they settled themselves at either end of the sofa next to the bookshelves.

"Well, that was an unexpected bit of drama," she prompted, trying to get him to talk about what was on his mind. But he only nodded and muttered his agreement.

"You had a pretty strong reaction," she observed. "Not that I blame you of course. So what upset you the most?"

"What do you mean?" he asked. "The whole thing."

"Well," Hermione tried to explain. "There's the idea of being forced to marry, having to marry someone you didn't pick out yourself, or ..." she hesitated a second, then pressed on, "having to marry Ginny specifically."

"Oh," Harry responded. "I see what you're getting at. All three, I suppose." He didn't notice Hermione letting out a breath she'd been holding. "I guess the worst part, by far, was not having a choice in the matter. Both whether I get married and who I'll marry."

When he didn't comment further, Hermione tried a different approach. "So, have you ever given any thought to marriage?"

Harry shrugged. "Haven't really had much time to think about stuff like that, have I?" he pointed out. "Surviving long enough to finish Hogwarts, what with Voldemort trying to kill me every year, has been a full time occupation."

"But he's gone now," she pointed out. Harry looked up at her and nodded warily, conceding her point.

"Well, then, what do you think of Ginny?" she inquired.

"Are you serious?" he demanded in surprise. Hermione merely raised an eyebrow in response, a smile curling its way onto her lips. Harry groaned and hit his forehead with his palm.

"Right, I've got to find a different line," he muttered. "OK, how's this? Surely, you're joking!"

Her smile broadened. "I'm not joking. And don't call me Shirley." Harry's response was a perplexed frown.

"Haven't you ever seen that movie?" she asked. "It's one of the funniest I've ever seen." He shook his head slowly, and she decided that she needed to invite him over to her house to watch movies on their VCR this summer. They'd call it – Movie Night at the Grangers.

"But that's not the point," she continued. "What about Ginny? It seems to me that she's just the kind of girl you'd be looking for. She's a good match for you, right? She's pretty, she plays quidditch, she's witty and outgoing ..."

"She's Ron's sister," Harry broke in, in a firm tone intended to close off that line of speculation.

"Well, yes, that might be a problem at first, but he'd come around eventually," Hermione suggested, although without the usual fervor she brought to an argument.

"No, you don't understand," he persisted. "She's Ron's sister. And Fred's sister. And George's sister." From Hermione's puzzled expression it was clear she didn't understand; she didn't expect that Harry would be someone to be scared off by the twins' pranks.

"And, they've all frequently said that I'm like a brother to them," he concluded. "And that means Ginny's like my sister. It's always been like that. I thought you knew." With that, Hermione's face brightened as she finally grasped what he was saying.

"Oh." She paused to gather her thoughts and correct her faulty assumption. Ginny was *not* going to be happy to hear *that*. "I see now. And you don't think that could change?" Harry shook his head.

She smiled, trying not to look too relieved. "OK. How about some of the other girls at Hogwarts?" she continued. "After all, the wizarding world is a pretty small place. It stands to reason that most of us will probably end up marrying someone we go to school with."

To her surprise, Harry grew contemplative again. She then proceeded to suggest names, starting with some Gryffindors, and continuing with the female DA members. She intentionally excluded Cho Chang.

Harry quickly eliminated Angelina and Alicia, since they were two years older, and widely considered to be with Fred and George. He briefly considered Katie, but then ruled her out because she was taller than he was. He only snorted derisively when she mentioned Lavender and Parvati. This caused Hermione to smile more brightly, and she teased him briefly about his apparent preference for girls who were more serious, and not so giggly. He promptly agreed with her.

"How about Susan Bones or Hannah Abbott, then?" she offered, moving on to Hufflepuff house. He shook his head again without any hesitation. "Why not?" she wondered, thinking that Susan possessed many admirable qualities. "I know Susan doesn't have much of a figure yet, but ..."

Harry shook his head more vigorously. "I'm not Ron," he declared a bit testily. "If that were my criteria wouldn't I have given Lavender more consideration?"

Hermione hastily backed down, realizing he was correct, not only about his own tastes, but Ron's as well. Both Cho and Parvati, the only girls that he could be said to have dated, were on the petite side, and would be considered below average in bust size. Whereas Ron was not at all subtle when he ogled buxom females such as Fleur Delacour, or Rosmerta at the Three Broomsticks.

"In fact," Harry offered with a smirk. "I'll make you a wager that Ron will end up dating Lavender sometime in the next two years." Hermione grinned and shook her head, conceding that he was quite likely correct.

"So what sort of girl *are* you looking for?" she asked, her curiosity now higher than ever.

Harry hesitated, looked directly at her for a disquieting moment, then drew a deep breath.

"Someone like you."

Hermione's mouth dropped open, and she briefly wondered if she'd heard him right.

"Are ... Are you serious?" she blurted out. This time it was his turn to raise an eyebrow. She blushed. "All right, I suppose I need to change my choice of phrasing as well," she decided. "But ... do you really mean it?"

Harry let out the breath he was holding and nodded, his relief that she wasn't upset by his revelation quite evident.

"But what about Cho?" Hermione wanted to kick herself as soon as the words were out of her mouth. Fortunately, Harry had glanced away, and didn't see her wince. He shook his head.

"I had a lot of time to think while I was sitting by you in the hospital," he revealed. "When you were injured I ... well I couldn't move – I could hardly even breathe. All I could think about was that you might be dead. It was easily the most terrifying thing about that whole night." Hermione slid closer to him and reached out to take his hand, giving it a small squeeze.

"Later, I got to thinking about why I reacted that way, and I realized that I just couldn't bear the thought of losing you. Now, I know that you fancy Ron, but ..."

"Hold on, time out!" Hermione interrupted. She hated to stop what was turning out to be a mind-blowing admission on his part, but needed to clear up *that* misconception immediately. "What makes you think I fancy Ron?"

Harry was brought up short. He'd devoted a bit of thought to how he was going to say this, and now everything was thrown off track. He looked back at her in surprise. "Well ... I mean, that's what everybody says, isn't it? The two of you argue so much, it's like ..."

"Like siblings?" Hermione cut in. "We fight like a brother and sister, Harry. Please don't give me that tired old line about arguing like an old married couple. That's a ridiculous analogy! Happily married couples do NOT snipe at each other the way Ron and I do."

"Oh," was all Harry could think of to respond at first. "Er ... well ..." He scratched his head. "What about the way Ron acted when you and Viktor ... you know ..." He'd never really figured out exactly how serious that relationship had been, and didn't really want to know either.

"Do you remember the way he acted last fall when he found out Ginny was dating Michael Corner?" Hermione reminded him. Harry nodded, a slight smile forming on his lips. That had been amusing, the way Ron instantly decided he didn't like the git, even though he didn't know who he was.

"And that was *exactly* the same overprotective brother act that he put on when he saw me with Viktor at the ball," she concluded. Harry could only nod numbly, not having any counter to that assertion.

"Now, please continue," Hermione requested hopefully.

Harry looked up into her shining eyes and swallowed hard. Being too nervous to say what he wanted to say while facing her, he fixed his gaze on the floor and resumed his explanation. "So anyway, I thought a lot about it, and about how you've always been there for me. How I'm comfortable around you, I can talk to you about things, how we work well together. How I enjoy being with you. And when I think about what I want the person who I'd share my life with to be like ... well, I decided I'd want someone like you. Now maybe you think of me like a brother, like you said you did Ron, but ..."

Suddenly Harry was unable to continue saying anything more, due to the fact that Hermione had grabbed him and was kissing him quite fiercely. And from the look of things, he wouldn't be able to talk again for quite some time.

"Yes!" Sirius pumped his fist in triumph. "Finally! I got him to tell her." Beside him, Remus nodded as he removed the earpiece, and then reached out to remove Sirius's as well, giving the two teens some well-deserved privacy.

"So, a prank within a prank," he decided. "Well done, Padfoot. Knowing them, if you hadn't tricked one of them into revealing their feelings like that, neither of them might ever have done it." Sirius grinned, accepting the praise.

"Are you going to tell them that's why you did it?" the werewolf wondered.

"Of course, Moony! That's way too juicy an opportunity to tease them about to pass up," his old friend declared. "I just need to figure out the most

embarrassing time to do it.”

“You aren’t at all afraid about what their reaction will be?” Remus inquired. “I thought Hermione sent a pretty obvious message before.”

Sirius shook his head. “Nah,” he replied dismissively. “Besides, she missed.”

Remus shook his head. “Sirius, I taught her for a year. I can guarantee you, she didn’t miss.”

“Then why ...?” Sirius wondered.

“She hit exactly what she was aiming at,” Remus insisted. “That was a warning shot. She’ll do anything to protect Harry. And you know Harry is just as protective of her as she is of him. If either of them thinks you’re hurting the other ...”

Sirius frowned and contemplated this information. “You know, old friend,” he decided. “I think this is one of those delicious items we’ll just have to keep to ourselves and enjoy remembering.”

Remus slapped his fellow Marauder on the back. “Good choice.”

Down in the kitchen, two twins removed a different pair of earpieces and stared at each other in wonder and delight.

“This is a gold mine,” one declared.

“We, my brother, are going to be rich!” the other agreed.

“How exactly are we going to accomplish that?” the first worried. “You aren’t seriously suggesting that we blackmail Sirius Black!” Despite his concern, he couldn’t help grinning at the double pun he’d just made, and his brother grinned back. “I was just thinking of pranking possibilities.”

“I think you missed an important detail, brother mine,” the second asserted. “Didn’t you catch the nicknames Sirius and Remus used for each other?” The first shook his head, mentally playing back the conversation they’d just eavesdropped on.

“First Remus called Sirius ‘Padfoot’, then Sirius called Remus ‘Moony’,” twin two revealed. Twin one’s eyes went wide, and the other nodded his head excitedly.

“Oh Sweet Merlin! We have leverage on the Marauders themselves!” the first brother exclaimed.

“I reckon we can ‘persuade’ them to help us with our joke shop. Maybe even ‘induce’ Sirius to invest some of the Black family fortune,” the second enthused.

After some jumping up and down and hugging of each other, the pair of pranksters calmed down enough to consider one last detail.

“So, Harry and Hermione are finally together,” the first noted. “Any ideas on how we should ‘celebrate’ this juicy little tidbit of intelligence?”

“Well, the potential for embarrassment is enormous,” the second agreed. “But there’s just one thing that worries me.”

“What’s that?” his brother wondered.

“The fact that Padfoot backed off when Moony warned him about how the two of them might respond,” the other sibling noted. Twin one pondered that information for several seconds.

“I have to admit, Hermione scares me,” he finally concluded.

“Hermione? What about Harry when he gets angry?” twin two pointed out. “You Know Who himself was afraid of him!”

“Right you are, my most favorite brother,” the other concluded. “No pranking or excessive teasing of Gryffindor’s new golden couple.”

Three floors up, in the library, blissfully unaware of the decisions that had just been made regarding their emotional well-being, the aforementioned new couple continued to explore the delightful new aspect of their relationship.

All was well indeed.

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