

The Proposal

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Summary: It's the summer after their 7th year, and James is ready to propose to Lily. The catch? She's gone home to be with her parents. What's a bloke to do?

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"Ten steps toward the fireplace. Stop, curse, turn around. Ten steps back toward the dining table. Mutter, rake hands through hair, wave arms wildly, turn back toward the fireplace. Repeat *ad nauseam*," the obviously amused voice said from where the owner sat on the sofa.

James Potter stopped mid-pace to look at his friend. "*What* are you talking about, Padfoot?"

"That's what you've been doing for the past..." Sirius checked his watch, "twenty-two minutes. Prongs, what the *hell* is going on?"

"Sod off, Sirius. I'm not in the mood."

Remus slowly lowered the book he was reading to his lap and watched his friends with a small grin on his face. "Now, James," he said. "You have to admit that this is a bit out of character for you. Something the matter?"

James waved his hands dismissively. "No, no, 'course not. Why would you think that?" He raked his hands through his hair again. "Where's Peter?"

"Changing the subject, Potter?"

"No, Sirius, I'm not changing the subject. I need to talk to you. *All* of you. Where is he?"

"I'm right here, James," Peter said, coming out of the kitchen holding a sandwich in one hand and a bottle of butterbeer in the other. He looked at Remus and Sirius, "Hasn't he done pacing, then? He's driving me barmy."

"I wasn't pacing." James stopped at the looks of stunned disbelief on his friends' faces. "*What?* I wasn't," he insisted.

"Right. That's why there's a path worn in the floor between the table and the fireplace," Remus said.

James blushed slightly. "All right, maybe I was pacing. I'm a bit nervous."

"No, *really*," Sirius said sarcastically. "We never would have guessed. Now would you get on with whatever it is you have to say to us? I'm meeting someone in an hour."

Peter flopped on the sofa next to Sirius and took a bite of his sandwich. "Rewwy?" He swallowed. "Sorry. Who's it this time?"

Sirius rolled his eyes at Peter. "Sally Ann Knowles. You know, the Hufflepuff? We started talking on the train home, and I thought I might as well ask. She said yes, so...."

"Oh, she's nice. Not bad looking, either. I like her hair—" Peter broke off when Remus cleared his throat and nodded at James, who had started pacing again. "Right. Sorry, James. Go ahead."

James cleared his throat nervously. "You, er... you know that I went to my vault yesterday?"

"Yeah, *and*..." Sirius said, motioning impatiently for James to continue.

"Sirius, would you let the man speak, please," Remus rebuked.

"If he'd just get on with it, then I wouldn't have to give him a hard time about it."

"Right, well, I went to the vault, and I picked something up. And now I'm trying to decide what to do with it. Well, not *what* to do with it exactly, just *when* to do it, you know? I don't know if I should just go over there right now, or if I should wait, or..." James trailed off as Peter shook his head.

"Is anyone else as confused as I am? Or is it just me?"

"No, Peter, it's definitely not just you," Remus said slowly. "James, maybe you should sit down and tell us what's going on."

James dug something out of the pocket of his trousers before sinking into the armchair facing the sofa.

"James?" Remus prodded.

James took a deep breath. Then he took another, and another, until Sirius got up from his seat on the sofa, walked over to the kitchen, and then reappeared a few minutes later with a bottle of firewhiskey and four glasses. After filling a glass for each of them, he handed them around and said, "Drink. You especially, James. You're hyperventilating." He sat back and sipped his drink slowly, watching as James downed his firewhiskey in one gulp. "Now talk."

James opened his hand and revealed the item he'd taken out of his pocket—a small, black velvet jeweller's box.

"Is that what I think it is?" Remus asked.

James took another deep breath. "I'm going to ask Lily to marry me. So I went to the vault to get this." He opened the box to reveal a simple but elegant engagement ring made of a flawless, solitary ruby set in a gold band. "It's been in the family for generations—my great-grandmother was the last one to wear it."

"That's brilliant, James," Remus said. "So why the pacing?"

James stood up, agitated. "Well, she's not here, is she? She went home to get her things and spend some time with her parents before coming back."

"She'll be back in a couple of weeks, Prongs," Sirius said. "You waited six and a half years before she'd even talk to you, and now you can't wait thirteen more days?"

"You don't understand, Padfoot."

"Then explain it to me," Sirius shot back.

James looked at Remus for help and was rewarded with a shrug. "Don't ask me, mate. I haven't gone out with anyone since Christmas. How am I supposed to know why you can't wait?"

"I'm not saying I can't wait," James retorted, frustrated. "I'm just saying that I'm not sure if I *should* wait. I want it to be perfect. Lily deserves for it to be perfect," he finished quietly.

"Why don't you just go over to her parent's house and see her?" Peter asked.

"Why don't I just go over—" James started incredulously.

"You know, James, that's not such a bad idea," Remus said. "You're obviously going mad sitting here—and that thing's just burning a hole in your pocket. Besides, being a Muggleborn, I'd bet Lily would love it if you asked her father for permission to marry her."

James gulped audibly. "A-ask her father for permission? But I... They don't really *do* that, do they?"

Sirius grinned. "Course they do, Prongs. You don't think someone would make that up, do you?"

"Well...er...yeah. That's so old-fashioned. Seems almost...medieval or..." James looked at Sirius with narrowed eyes. "Hang on. How would *you* know, Padfoot? You're not Muggleborn."

"It's a widely known fact, Prongs," Sirius replied smugly. "No, really, it is. Ask Remus."

James swung his gaze back to Remus, feeling a little sick. "Is he...is he having me on?" he whispered.

Remus' lips quirked, but he said with a straight face, "'Fraid not, Prongs. It's a tradition."

"Bloody hell." James sank back in his chair. "How do I go about doing that? I hardly know the man. I mean, I've met him a few times, but our conversations consisted mainly of him asking me about school and me responding, 'Yes, sir' or 'No, sir'. We haven't talked at all about me and Lily."

"Like I said, Prongs," Peter said, waving his now empty hand around, "go over there to see her. You don't have to talk to her father right then—"

"Well, not about Lily, anyway," Sirius supplied.

"Is that supposed to be helpful, Padfoot? Because it isn't," James said.

Peter continued on as though he hadn't been interrupted, "—just talk about every day kind of stuff. Let him see what kind of man you are, let him know you have prospects. That sort of thing."

"Prospects?"

"You know—you've a job lined up, a place to live, money in the bank, that sort of thing."

"Right. Prospects. I can do that."

"But don't brag, James," Remus cautioned. "You don't want to come across like you think you're better than them. Just be yourself."

"Your *new* self," Sirius added. "Don't be that prat you were back in school."

"I wasn't a prat!" James protested.

"Yes, you were," Remus said. "We all were. That's why it took Lily six and a half years before she'd talk to you. But you're not a prat now."

"Tell them my prospects, be myself," James repeated. "Anything else I need to know?"

"Do not, under any circumstances, get pissed," Sirius replied, deadpan. "You're an obnoxious drunk."

"Shut it, Padfoot! Like you have any room to talk. I wouldn't do that. I'm not stupid."

Remus stood up and gently removed the empty glass from James' hand. "Best let me have this, then, mate, or you'll be drunk before you get there."

"I'll sober up before tomorrow."

"You're not going tomorrow, Prongs; you're going tonight," Sirius said. "Sooner rather than later, if I've anything to say about it."

"If you go now, you'll get there in time for dinner," Peter added helpfully.

"*Tonight? Now?*" James asked in a panicky voice. "Get stuffed! No way. I'm not going tonight. I-I'm not ready."

Remus rolled his eyes at him. "Yes, James, tonight. I, for one, can't stand the thought of being around you like this for any longer than I have to. Now, are you going to Apparate on your own, or do we need to find some other way to get you there? And James?"

"Yeah?" James said warily.

"Remember who you're dealing with before you make that decision."

James looked around at the determined faces of his three best friends, remembered that they weren't known as the best pranksters in Hogwarts' history for nothing, took out his wand, thought about Lily's neighbourhood, and Disapparated.

He thought he heard a faint "Thank God" right before he disappeared.

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James arrived at the corner of Summerdale Place and Meadow Crescent with a soft pop. He immediately checked his pocket for the jeweller's box, then glanced around to familiarise himself before turning and walking toward where the Evans' house should be located. He'd never been there before, but Lily had described the neighbourhood to him in such detail, he knew he wouldn't have any trouble finding her parents' house. As he walked, he started rehearsing what he was going to say when he saw her.

"Lily, what a surprise!" he muttered. "No, that's stupid; it's her house, *she'd* be the one to be surprised. What about, 'Hi, Lily. Fancy meeting you here.' No, that's worse than the first. Um... 'Hello, Lily. Can I talk to you?'" He groaned. "That last is my best bet, I reckon. Pathetic."

He paused to wipe his hands on his trousers and take a deep breath before turning the final corner onto her street. "Okay, calm down, Potter. Just be yourself, don't be a prat, don't get drunk. You can do this," he muttered. Resolute, he started walking again, only to come to a sudden halt ten yards from the house. At least he *thought* it was the Evans' house. It looked just like Lily had described, except...there was a man—a *huge* man, he corrected himself—and a skinny, horse-faced woman getting out of a car parked in front. Confused, he searched his memory, trying to come up with any detail that might tell him he was in the right place. Then he caught a glimpse of red hair. He let out the breath he hadn't known he was holding and ran his hands through his hair one more time. He had just taken the first few steps toward the house and was getting ready to call out to her when she noticed him.

"James? James, is that you?" Lily started running toward him, and he met her halfway, catching her in a big hug and twirling her around before setting her on the ground.

"Hello, love," James said. He could feel himself grinning like an idiot at the sight of her.

"What are you doing here?" she asked.

"Hmph. If that's the sort of reaction you give a bloke after not seeing him for several days..." he trailed off, giving her a cheeky grin.

"Several days, my foot. You just saw me the day before yesterday," she retorted. "Unless you're telling me that you forgot that kiss on the train?"

James blinked. "Forget the kiss? Er, no, love. That's not something a man's likely to forget. Ever. Why do you think I'm here now instead of in two weeks?"

Lily blushed prettily before grabbing his arm and dragging him toward the house. "Well, come on, then. You're just in time for dinner. I'll get Mum to set another place, and you can join us."

James hesitated. "I don't want to intrude. I'll just come back after you've eaten."

"Oh, no, you don't, James Potter. You're coming with me. It'll be no trouble. Mum always cooks too much food." She gave him a grin. "Besides, I need you to help keep me sane. My sister and her husband came for dinner."

"Your sis—oh, you mean that—"

"That overly large man you saw getting out of the car is my brother-in-law, Vernon; the woman is my sister, Petunia."

James' eyes narrowed. "You mean the sister who wrote you a letter telling you not to bother coming to her wedding because she didn't want a *freak* there? *That* sister?"

"Now, James..." Lily placated. Or rather, tried to placate.

"Don't you 'Now, James,' me, Lily Evans."

"It's okay, really. I've forgiven her."

"I don't care. I haven't," James muttered.

"She just...she doesn't understand," Lily said quietly. "That's just the way she is. She's never understood things that are different, even when we were growing up. It's not worth getting upset over. I learned that a long time ago."

"She hurt you."

"She wasn't the first, and she won't be the last."

James felt his shoulders tense. "Who else hurt you? Did they apologise? Tell me, so I can make sure they—"

"Oh, James. You're very sweet, trying to protect me like this, but, really, it isn't necessary. I'm a big girl. I get over having my feelings hurt."

He stopped and turned to look at her. "You shouldn't have to."

She stood on her tip-toes and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek. "Everybody has to, James. It's part of being an adult. I'm fine with it. I wish you would be, too. Are you hungry or not? Come and meet mum and dad."

"All right, but I'd better not hear anything that sounds remotely like *freak* come out of either of their mouths."

"You won't."

"I'd better not."

"You're really cute when you're riled up, you know that?" She patted his arm as they walked to the front door.

"You're always cute," he responded seriously.

"Why, thank you." She leaned up and gave him a lingering kiss before sending him a flirtatious smile and opening the door. "Flattery will get you everywhere." She winked and left him spluttering in the doorway, sweeping in calling, "Mum, Dad, James is here. I invited him to stay for dinner, if that's all right."

William Evans stuck his head around a corner. "Of course it's all right, Lily. You know your mum always makes more than enough food. Why don't you bring him in the lounge? Vernon and I were about to have a drink, and he can join us."

"All right, Dad. Thanks." She walked back to where James was waiting and grabbed his hand. "Come on in, James. Dad said it was fine for you to stay, but..."

"But what? I don't like the sound of that."

She looked at him apologetically. "But you're going to have to go into the lounge with him and Vernon. They're having drinks, and Dad specifically said you should join them."

James groaned. "Lily, I came here to see you, not your giant of a brother-in-law."

"Please?" she pleaded. "For me? I'll make it up to you, I swear I will."

James sighed before saying, "All right. For you. But you owe me one."

She stood on her tip-toes again and whispered sweetly in his ear, "I always pay my debts, James. You should know that by now. Now go on. It won't be that bad."

James turned toward the lounge like a man facing his worst nightmare—or worse, his hopefully future father-in-law—but turned around when Lily grabbed his arm to stop him. "Wait," she said before pulling his head down to kiss him thoroughly.

"What was that for?" James mumbled.

She shot him an embarrassed grin. "Luck. Oh, and James, please don't hurt Vernon, even though he is an overbearing lout. It wouldn't make a good impression. I'll be in the kitchen helping Mum if you need me." She gave him a gentle push toward the lounge and headed off down the hall to the kitchen door.

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James stood uncertainly in the doorway, trying not to fidget. He'd met Mr. Evans before, of course, but he'd never had to talk to him without Lily there to help. *And I've never been planning to ask him for his daughter's hand in marriage, either*, he thought. He looked around the room, taking in the tasteful decorations and the myriad of photographs that adorned the room. There were several pictures of each of the daughters as they grew up, and others of the family together, placed on tables or the mantelpiece. He couldn't help but smile, looking at the photos—Lily had been just as beautiful as a small child as she was now.

Mr. Evans noticed James standing in the doorway and motioned him to come in, saying, "Ah, James, there you are. Stop by to see Lily, did you?" He gave the younger man a knowing look.

James cleared his throat nervously. "Er, yes, sir. I'm sorry to pop in unexpectedly like this, but I was just..."

"Missing my daughter," the other man said with a mischievous twinkle James thought he had seen somewhere else. Don't worry about it, James, I understand perfectly. Here, come in, sit down, have a drink. The ladies will let us know when dinner is ready. What would you like?"

"Oh, er, anything is fine, really. Whatever you're having looks good. I'm not much of a drinker." *Not a total lie*, he told himself. *Not much of a drinker of Muggle drinks, in any case.*

"All right then," Mr. Evans said and went over to the sideboard to pour James a drink. "James, have you met my son-in-law, Vernon Dursley?"

"No, sir, I haven't had the pleasure." He stuck his hand out to the beefy man sitting on the sofa and winced when Vernon squeezed—hard. "James Potter. Pleased to meet you."

"Potter," Vernon said, squeezing harder, as if trying to prove his superiority over James.

So that's how it's going to be, eh? James thought. *All right then. Two can play at that game. He may be bigger than I am, but I'll wager a hundred galleons that I'm stronger.* James shook Vernon's hand firmly, adding a bit more pressure than was necessary. He took in the look of shock on the other man's face before letting go, turning to accept his drink from Lily's father. "Thank you, Mr. Evans."

"Call me William, James. You've finished school; you're an adult now."

"All right, Mr. Ev—William."

"Have a seat, James. Rose said it would be a few minutes until dinner is ready."

James looked around the room again and chose an armchair across the room from Vernon. He couldn't bring himself to sit next to the man, and, he admitted to himself, he found himself fascinated by the large...caterpillar on the other man's upper lip.

"Where did you and Lily meet?" James was startled when he heard the question. Vernon had spent so much time droning on about his job at Drunnings... Gunnys...something like that, that James knew without a doubt that the man had no sense of common courtesy. Even Mr. Ev—*William*, he corrected himself—had hardly been able to get a word in edgewise.

"We went to school together," James replied cautiously. He didn't know how much Petunia had told her husband about Lily—and he didn't know what Vernon's reaction

would be if he discovered she was a witch if he hadn't known before. Based on the little he'd seen of the man, though, he was convinced that it wouldn't be good.

And as he watched Vernon's reaction to the news, he knew that he was right. The man's eyes got very large, the colour left his face, and he started to breathe heavily before he pushed himself off of the sofa and said in a panicky voice, "You-you're one of *them*. I-I need...please excuse...I-I need to go find Petunia." He then waddled as quickly as his legs would carry him off toward the kitchen.

James looked over at William, prepared to apologise, and was shocked to find the older man struggling to keep himself from laughing.

"Oh, I say, James, that was wonderful. He's not known for his tolerance. And I know about the letter he and Petunia sent Lily before they got married. You handled that very well."

James grinned, relieved. "Thanks. I didn't want to tell him about the wizarding world if he didn't already know, but I didn't exactly want to lie, either." He looked at Lily's father curiously. "If you don't mind me asking...why was he so terrified when he found out I was one of *them*, as he so succinctly put it?"

"Ah, that. He got on Lily's bad side one day and met up with the wrong end of her wand, if you know what I mean."

James nodded ruefully. "Yeah, I'm *quite* familiar with Lily's temper. What did she do to him?"

William grinned. "Turned his hair blue and green. Then, when he started yelling at her, she added red and gold stripes to his face."

"That's my girl," James said proudly, missing the fond expression on her father's face.

"Indeed; my response exactly. What do you say we go see how dinner is coming along? I'm getting hungry. Besides," William added, leaning closer to James conspiratorially, "I want to watch Vernon squirm some more."

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James sat in his chair at the dining table and listened in disbelief as the Vernon droned on—again—about the new house he and Petunia had recently purchased. *Does he ever stop talking about himself? To think Remus warned me about coming across like I thought I was superior to everybody. Although...he does seem nervous...keeps shooting suspicious looks over at Lily and me.*

"It's in an excellent neighbourhood. Number Four Privet Drive. There's a play park down at the end of the street—it will be perfect for when Petunia and I decide to start a family."

By some miracle, James was able to hide his shudder at the image that comment brought to mind. Of course, the soft snicker from the beautiful woman beside him didn't help the situation any.

"I'd hate to see what their children are going to look like," Lily whispered softly.

James snorted, causing both Vernon and Petunia to look at him fearfully. He quickly coughed and apologised, "Sorry, something caught in my throat." He chanced a glimpse at Lily, who was trying to stifle a giggle.

"Stop that," he whispered at her. "You'll get me in trouble. I'm *trying* to make a good impression here."

"Don't worry about that," she whispered back. "You've already made a good impression. My dad loves you. He's much more relaxed around you than he's ever been around that...that..."

"Giant bag of gas?" James offered helpfully.

"Exactly. What did the three of you talk about earlier?" she asked.

"Hm. Not much, actually. We ended up listening to Vernon prattle on about his job, and his house, and his car, and his—"

"All right, all right, I get the point."

"After I scared him off, your dad mentioned the...improvements you made to his appearance in the past." James winked. "Vernon seemed a bit nervous to discover that I was one of, and I quote, '*them*'."

Lily rolled her eyes. "He did, did he? I'll just bet you loved hearing that."

"Well, I have to admit it was a shock, to hear that my sweet, innocent Lily would do something so Slytherinish," he said, giving her a roguish grin.

"Oh, because you've never seen me lose my—"

"Ahem. Lily, dear? Would you and James like to share your conversation with the rest of us?"

Lily blushed and looked at her mother guiltily. "No, Mum. Sorry."

Rose smiled indulgently at her daughter. "It's all right, dear. I just didn't want you to ignore the rest of us. It's been so long since we've seen you. And we do want to get to know your young man better."

James bit his lip to keep himself from laughing at Lily's disgruntled expression. After he felt he had himself under control, he apologised. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Evans, I was just telling Lily about the house I just moved into. I didn't want to bore everyone with all the details." He studiously avoided looking in Vernon's direction while he spoke.

"Call me Rose, dear. You've moved into a new house, you said?"

"Yes, I went straight there after seeing Lily off the other day," James replied, relaxing as he saw the house in his mind's eye. "It's in a small town called Godric's Hollow. It—the house, I mean— isn't anything fancy, but it's nice and cosy. It'll be a nice place to come home to after work. Of course, it needs a bit of work still. I haven't had a chance to get it completely set up yet."

"Oh, you have a job, then, Potter?" Vernon asked belligerently. "What does someone of your...*kind*...do for a living?"

James absently patted Lily's arm when she bristled at Vernon's question and then grabbed her hand when he felt her start to go for her wand. He shot her a warning look, before turning to answer Dursley.

"Oh, I accepted a job in the MLES. Law enforcement," he qualified when he saw the blank looks he was receiving.

"Law enforcement?" Petunia spoke for the first time. "Oh... you mean a *police constable*. How...*quaint*."

James could tell by her expression—largely by the way that her nose was stuck in the air—that what she really meant was, "How plebeian." He squeezed Lily's hand in reassurance.

"Yes, well, it's a special division in the government. We specialise in tracking down the real villains—the ones you need rigorous training to catch," he responded blandly. "It's actually quite competitive; they base selection on your marks in school, your scores on the end of the year exams, and a practical exam they give to all the applicants." He didn't bother mentioning that he'd been the top-ranked applicant in this year's training class, outscoring the nearest competitor by nearly a hundred points.

For some reason, James' answer seemed to agitate the Dursleys further. He looked quizzically at Lily, who just shrugged at him before turning back to her pudding. James watched the Dursleys for a few moments more before shrugging his own shoulders and following Lily's lead, turning his attention back to the piece of cake on his plate. He kept up a steady stream of conversation with Lily and her parents while they all finished, and he couldn't help but notice that Vernon and Petunia had grown strangely silent.

Finally, as though he couldn't stand it any longer, Vernon burst into the conversation saying, "Right. Petunia and I need to be going now. Early day tomorrow, you see. Have an important...meeting at work. Mr. Evans, Mrs. Evans. It's been a pleasure. Potter. It was..." he hesitated before continuing with a slight grimace on his face, "nice to meet you. Come along, Petunia."

"Good night, Mother, Father," Petunia said formally. "I'll see you again later this week. Lily, Mr. Potter, it was good to see you both again. Don't bother to see us out. I know the way." Then she took Vernon's arm and left the room.

James looked curiously at the rest of the people left at the table. "Was it something I said?" he asked.

Rose gave him a small, sad smile, and said, "No, dear. It wasn't anything you said or did." She straightened her back and asked with dignity, "Would anyone like anything else? More cake, James?"

"No, thank you, Mrs—"

"James, I've asked you to call me Rose," she corrected gently and began to clear the table.

"Right. Sorry about that," he replied nervously and stood up. "Here, Rose, let me help. Better still, why don't you and Lily go and relax in the lounge, while William and I clean up?" He looked at Lily's father for confirmation and was met with an assessing look.

"Right, Rose. You and Lily did all the work getting dinner ready. The least we can do is clean up the mess. Go on, you two." William shooed them out of the dining room toward the lounge. "We'll bring some tea in when we're finished."

James suddenly found himself alone with Lily's father. Consequently, he suddenly found himself extremely nervous, so he started to stack the plates to take into the kitchen.

"All right, James, what was that all about?" William asked.

"What was what all about?"

"Shooing the women out, volunteering to do the dishes. Are you trying to make a good impression?"

James gulped. "Um, well, you see, sir..."

"Sit down, James. There's nothing to be afraid of; I hope you know that. I also hope you know that Rose and I like you. I personally think you're very good for Lily. She tends to be a bit too..."

"Serious?" James supplied with a small grin.

"Yes, serious is an excellent description of my youngest daughter. She's learned to enjoy life more, since she's known you. Thank you for that."

James gave William a small smile and cleared his throat. "Yes, well, I'd be lying if I didn't tell you that Lily has also been good for me. I-I've learned a lot from your daughter. I never would have got that job if it weren't for her." He grinned. "I'd never have made it through *school* if it weren't for her."

"Somehow, I don't think that's what you wanted to say to me, James."

"No, not exactly. Partially. But not...not completely." James stood up, adjusted his glasses on his nose, and ruffled his hair. He took a deep breath, and plunged ahead. "Mr. Evans—I-I know you asked me to call you William, but I really feel like I need to be more formal when I do this." He watched William nod his acceptance and tried his best to get the words out properly. "Mr. Evans, I'm in love with your daughter. She's the most important thing in my life. I have a job, and some money in the bank, and I own a nice little house. It does need some work, like I said earlier, but mostly what it needs is a woman's touch. That house is a lot like me, Mr. Evans," he said earnestly. "I need some work, but mostly what I need is a woman's touch—wait, that didn't come out right. What I need is Lily's touch. No! That didn't come out right either, damn it." He stopped, closed his eyes, and took another deep breath. "What I'm trying to ask without making a total fool of myself is...may I have your permission to ask Lily for her hand in marriage? I promise that I'll take good care of her and that I'll love her until the day I die. But I'd like your blessing before I ask her."

He opened his eyes cautiously and looked at Lily's father, who gazed at the young man seriously before he stood up. "That took a lot of courage, James. Of course, you have my permission to ask Lily to marry you. I'd be proud to have you as a son-in-law."

James stood and stared at William until he noticed that his mouth was hanging wide open. He shut it with a snap and asked in a whisper, "Really?"

William laughed and stuck out his hand to the younger man. "Really," he said, shaking James' hand and pulling him unexpectedly into a fatherly hug. "Welcome to the family."

James gave him a relieved grin. "Thanks, but maybe you ought to wait to welcome me until Lily agrees."

"Oh, she'll agree," William said. "She hasn't talked about anything but you since we picked her up at King's Cross. I've never seen her like this before." He clasped James' shoulder and started to direct him to the lounge. "Why don't you go on, now? She's waiting for you. The back garden is beautiful this time of night, and you'll have privacy out there."

"What about the dishes?"

"Don't worry about the dishes; Rose and I will take care of them. You go and talk to Lily."

"All right, I will. Thank you again."

William waved his hand. "Go on. Off with you."

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James stopped at the door of the lounge and looked in. Lily sat with her mother on the sofa, her feet curled up under her as they talked quietly. He felt like he could stand there and watch her forever. He felt his cheeks flush when she looked over and saw him standing there.

"James," she said, gracing him with a brilliant smile. "Done already?"

"Not exactly. Your dad told me that I didn't come all this way to talk with him, and that I shouldn't be wasting my time with an old codger like him when there was a beautiful woman waiting. Told me to come and get you and take you for a walk, if that's okay."

"I said nothing of the sort, young man," William called out from behind him.

"No, but that's what you meant," James retorted with a grin.

"True. But 'old codger'? Couldn't you think of a better description? 'Ruggedly handsome bloke' or something like that?"

"Possibly, but I got distracted by your daughter." He walked over to the sofa and extended his hand. "Lily, love, would you go for a walk with me? Your father assured me that the garden is beautiful this time of night."

She looked at him curiously before uncurling her legs and standing up. "All right, James. Let's go." She took his hand and started walking toward the door. "Er, Mum? Is it all right with you if we go for a walk?"

"Of course it is, dear," her mother replied. "Have a good time."

As they reached the door, Lily gave James' hand a quick squeeze and leaned up to give her father a quick hug and a kiss on the cheek. "Thank you, Dad," she whispered, then took James' hand again and led him toward the back door.

"So, Mr. Potter, what did you say to my father to get him to be so agreeable?" Lily asked once they got outside.

"What makes you think I said anything?" James asked, tucking her arm in his and leading the way to a bench situated in a corner of the garden. The air was heavy with the scent of roses, and he inhaled deeply before turning to face her.

"He had this...look, I suppose. Like he knew some secret. One that involved you."

"Mmmm," James said noncommittally.

"James Potter, you had better tell me what is going on *right this instant*, or you'll be very sorry." Lily crossed her arms across her chest and fixed him with a glare.

"Now, Lily."

"James..." she warned.

"Lily, sit down. Please?" he pleaded, indicating the bench beside them. "I promise it's nothing bad."

"All right, but this had better be good. I don't know why you had to—mmph."

James lifted his lips from hers and looked her in the eye. "Bloody hell! How's a bloke supposed to ask the woman he loves to marry him if she won't stop talking long enough for him to get a word in edgewise?"

"JAMES POTTER! I can't believe you just tried to shut me up by *kiss*— Wh-what did you say?"

"Which part? The one about not being able to get a word in edgewise?" he asked.

"No, before that." Lily waved her hand for emphasis.

"Bloody hell," he supplied helpfully.

She looked at him exasperatedly. "*After* that."

"Ah. The middle part, then." He slid the box out of his pocket. "Lily Evans, I love you. I love your temper and the way your eyes sparkle when you're angry. I love your passion and your sense of humour. You are the best thing that ever happened to me, and you bring out the best in me." He stopped to wipe away the tear that was trailing down her cheek and gave her a gentle smile, opening the box to display the ring. "Lily, will you do me the honour of being my wife?"

He watched her eyes widen and almost fell off the bench when she flung her arms around him. "I—you—"

"Is that a yes, then?" he asked hopefully.

"Yes." She pulled back to smile brightly at him. "Yes, that's a yes."

~*~

Remus took a deep breath and looked at Harry after he finished the story. "They were so much in love, Harry. I'd never seen your dad in such a state as he was that day he told us all he wanted to ask your mum to marry him. And then when he left to go to the Evans' house...we were afraid he was going to splinch himself, he was so nervous. Lily's parents gave him a hard time, especially her father, but it wasn't because they didn't like him—you should have seen them at the wedding. They were so proud. Your aunt...well, I can't make much of an excuse for the Dursleys. You know how they are."

Harry snorted at that. "Yeah, I know how they are." He paused and then asked, "Remus, how did you know all of this? You weren't there when Dad talked to my grandfather, right? Or when he...*talked* with Uncle Vernon."

"Ah, that. That was your mother's doing. As soon as she discovered she was expecting you, she had all of us—including your father—record our memories in a Pensieve. 'For posterity,' she said. I have it here." Remus indicated a large box on the floor by his feet.

"Professor Dumbledore also asked me to give this to you." He handed Harry a small, black velvet box. "He seems to think you'll have need of it in the near future."

Harry took the box from his friend and ran his hand over the soft black velvet before opening it. He stared for a moment at the ring nestled there and then closed the lid with a decisive click. He lifted his eyes to meet Remus' and asked, "He said that, did he?"

"Yes, he did. Seems to think you might have someone in mind—" He broke off as Harry stood up and pocketed the box. "Harry?"

"What was that advice you gave my dad? Let them know what my prospects are, I've a job lined up, a place to live, money in the bank, right? Just be myself, don't be a prat, don't get pissed? Anything else I need to know?"

"Harry?"

"Oh, and I should ask permission, too." He nodded decisively. "All right, then. See you later, Remus."

"Harry? Where are you going?"

Harry shot Remus a quick grin. "The Burrow, of course," he answered, and disappeared, leaving Remus standing, dumfounded, in the middle of the room.

The End

A/N: Written as a response to the great aggiebell90/ohginnyfan challenge of 2004. For a look at what she challenged me with, see

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/aggiebell90/19326.html>

I had so much fun with this! Kudos to ohginnyfan for suggesting it—and for getting me writing again. Thanks to her for the amazing beta, and to Bring and Fly for the Brit-picking and pre-betaing. The story is better, for sure, because of the efforts of these two wonderful ladies! Finally, many thanks to those of you on my f-list who supported me while I was writing this! Y'all are awesome!

And about the last section: Remus was being very persistent in the early stages of writing this fic—he kept trying to make it from his POV. This is the only way I could get him to be quiet and let me write about Lily and James—the ones the story was supposed to be about.