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Answers in a Bottle by Kat

Buckbeak pushes aside an empty Firewhisky bottle with his hoof, skidding it across the floorboards. It rebounds off a wall, scraped clean of wallpaper by that certain Hippogriff beak, and rolls to a stop by Sirius's foot. He gazes blankly at it for a moment before leaning back against Buckbeak's flank and closing his eyes. A hand brushes vaguely against the Hippogriff's wing.

"Y'know, Beaky," Sirius says, slurring a little, "you're like my bes' friend."

Buckbeak says nothing to this compliment, though his tail swishes and he blinks away a fly.

"I mean it," Sirius continues, grabbing at the neck of his next bottle, "only sympathetic ear in this dump anyway. Ev'ryone else is too bloody busy, doin' all this Order stuff. You an' me, Beaky," he raises the bottle in salute, "we're two of a kind."

He knocks back a slug of Firewhisky, and then another for good measure. Buckbeak tugs at a shredded bed curtain, ripping off a long strip and worrying at it. It comes apart easily; like everything else in this house it is ancient.

"S'pose you miss the other Hippogriffs," Sirius goes on, "miss runnin' around in the field with them and stuff. Did you have a particular mate in the herd?" He screws up his face. "Mate as in friend, that is. Not like, y'know, mate mate. Unless you had one of them."

Buckbeak clicks his beak. The curtain has been reduced to threads.

"Good for you," says Sirius vaguely. "I never got as far as a lifemate or whatever. Not f'lack of trying, or attention. Just never did." He rubs his face and smiles. "Had a mate though. Good old James. Always a class act. We were quite the double act, y'know, makin' trouble around the school." He snorts with laughter. "Never forget the time we...we did something funny. What was it?"

Again, Sirius seeks the answer in his bottle. It isn't there, but that doesn't stop him from having another good long look.

"Doesn't matter. James was a good mate. Always had time for a trick or a laugh." He frowns at the floor. "'Til he got a girlfriend anyway. Had less time then. Always off with...with Lily, or snuggled up in a corner with her. No time for me."

Buckbeak twitches his flank and shifts a leg. Sirius takes this as an admonition.

"Not that I didn't like her," he protests, "she was a lovely girl. And it's wrong t'speak wrong of the dead. But she was lovely. Prettier'n an Autumn afternoon. I know I've got good memories of her, somewhere. But they got taken away from me, by those...those..."

Sirius takes another drink from the bottle, probably of courage. The Firewhisky is as golden as that Autumn sun.

"Dark things with the slimy hands and sucking mouths. Took away my good memories, sucked all the fun out of 'em."

He shudders. Buckbeak settles a wing against the man's shoulder. His beak pushes gently up to Sirius's side as a comfort.

"I did like Lily. I think I loved her, in a way. But now all I get when I think of her is odd little feelings of resentment. And I hate that. But it's like...like some big mire of resentment and bad feeling and I just get stuck in it. It just isn't fair."

The pull from the bottle is longer this time, and the level goes down a long way.

"Only joy I get is bein' horrible to Snivellus. Mutual hatred can be so...so satisfying." He scowls viciously. "I loathe that greasy little bastard. He's the guilty bloody one round here."

Minutes are passed in angry reflection, interrupted several times by a visits to the bottle. Eventually, Sirius sighs.

"Hatred gets kind o'repetitive after a while though. I mean, there'sh good shtuff ash well, like Sha...Ha..." Sirius collects himself and shakes his head. "Harry. That's the boy. Dead spit of James, 'cept he's got her eyes. Green...green an' happy. Good kid though. Him an' that Wizzly...Weasley kid, reminds me a bit o'me an' James at his age. A bit more reluctant though. Got some good friends though. Better'n some o'mine turned out, I hope, f'r his sake. Most of mine've all gone now."

The bottle is drained at last and is dropped to the floor. A third is ready and waiting with a promise of forgetting.

"Still got you though, Beaky." Sirius pats Buckbeak's feathers fondly. "You're a good mate, y'are." His eyes close and his head falls back. "Hogwarts, Hogwarts," he begins to croon, "Hoggy Warty Hogwarts, teach us something please..."

The door opens slowly and Remus comes in, giving a little snort at the smell. He sees Sirius and sighs, going over to him.

"Whether we be old and bald," Sirius continues to warble, losing sight of any tune, "or young with scabby knees." He stops as Remus tugs at his arm. "You always had...had scabby knees, Remusss. Too much time grubbing about in the forest, heh."

"Of course, Sirius." Remus manages to pull the other man to his feet. He looks at the bottles on the floor disdainfully. "I have got to stop Mundungus sneaking these in for you."

"He's a good mate!"

"Of course he is, Sirius, of course." Remus manages to support Sirius's weight and begins to guide him out the room. "Now come on, let's get you to bed, yes?"

Sirius drags back, trying to drop to the floor. "Sleep here," he insists, "s'a nice room."

"No, it isn't," Remus tells him, "it was your mother's, remember? And now it's Buckbeak's. Let's get you to your room. It's more comfortable."

Sirius's arm drapes over his friend. "What'd I do without you, Remy? We'll always be bes' friends, right?"

Remus smiles. "Of course, Sirius. Always."

And they go out of the room arm in arm. Just like old times, only not.