Slow Dance of the Infinite Stars

by droid_girl

Summary

Marriage law fic!

When the Ministry of Magic enacts a ludicrous law against Muggle-borns as a political maneuver, Remus realizes to his chagrin that he might be Hermione Granger's best hope.

Following a union of convenience, despite the best of intentions and against their better judgement, both witch and wizard find themselves slowly orbiting closer to each other as the war intensifies around them.

Starts post OoTP and before HBP. Very slow start.
Warning: This is a very very Remus-centric tale.
There was a sort of magic in the air that only Muggles could have felt that August.

Strange, he thought, that the Muggles could feel and sense something he couldn’t. Not even with the weight of his gifts and his curse on his back, could he sense the cause of this dark foreboding.

“Here’s your cheque,” Martin said as he came up to the desk, unceremoniously shoving at him a small, white envelope.

Remus blinked at the Coordinator in confusion as he reached out to take the slip from him.

In the span of a decade, having been rejected from just about every job in the Wizarding world, the man had come to appreciate certain conveniences that hadn’t always been available to him.

Such as - direct deposit of his salary into his bank account, the account which had been opened at a branch run by actual, boring humans. Back with his people, while sickles and galleons might have manifested in his bank account in payment for most jobs done, the type of work he typically ended up finding usually required him to make actual trips to the bank itself, with literal money in hand. As far as he was concerned, those visits were never a pleasant experience. This turn of events was an annoying reminder of his own, recent past, but it wasn’t exactly the end of the world.

“Oh. Uh. I guess I should…” mentally, he was already adjusting his homeward route.

The wizard’s plan had been to find his way to the deserted alley out back, before he disapparated himself back to his quiet little village in Yorkshire.

Now, he supposed, he had to actually make time to go to a branch, with the slip he held between thumb and forefinger. He’d have to physically deposit the cheque into his bank account, which his mother, herself a Muggle, had insisted on setting up for him when he was but a boy.

The day the young wizard had gone to the bank for the very first time, Remus was too young to understand why he would ever have need of such a Muggle thing as a bankbook. Everyone knew the Goblins kept perfect tallies and records.

Thankfully, Hope Howell hadn’t left him any room for argument, and had continued maintaining his account, with small and regular deposits well into his teenage years.

“In case the kindness of Wizarding Britain runs thin.” Hope told him as they left the bank, her fingers tightening protectively around his little hand.

Merlin, but how he still missed that woman.

Inside the courier headquarters, Martin sighed irritably, gesturing to the room at large in such a way as to indicate that everything and everyone had done him wrong, somehow. “All our networks and machines are currently down. We have to be Y2K prepared and all that lark. Like anybody really thinks it’ll make a difference. It’s just a way for all these companies to make us buy new computers, really,”

“Y2K?” Remus looked at the other man quizzically. In the course of the last few years, he had
heard of this thing - this ‘Y2K’, which the non-magical folk around him murmured, as if it were
the name of the next Dark Lord.

Voldemort himself was unlikely to inspire such terror in the Muggles, most of whom had poured
their very lives into these machines.

“Our computers are old, and ill equipped for the switch in dates.” Martin eyed Remus as if he were
some primitive living out of a cave. “The moment those numbers switch from ‘99 to ‘00’, we could
stand to lose everything.”

“That bad?” he asked, hoping he came across as sympathetic. He still wasn’t quite understanding
what the fuss was all about.

Not so much about the concept of a technological apocalypse, anyway.

Remus was confused as to the risks pertaining to a courier service, which largely involved bicycles,
and the men who rode them.

“We haven’t upgraded since 1992,” Martin leaned forward, whispering confidentially. “I kind of
pushed for this. I know the millennium is two years out, but I got them to see the risks we were
taking.”

The man shifted away again. “Had I known it’d be this much trouble, I might’ve kept my mouth
shut.”

Remus couldn’t stop himself from laughing, which prompted Martin to let out a hearty guffaw
himself. The man reminded him of Horace Slughorn, albeit without the pretentious airs and social
climbing tendencies.

Nobody - not even his best mate, while he still lived - had any idea this was how he kept himself
afloat. More than afloat.

Nobody in his real life guessed that Remus Lupin moved through the world by riding door-to-door
on a very light, very quick bicycle, delivering important documents from one overly-pompous
Muggle establishment to another.

The hours were flexible, the days were never fixed, and he was paid for every trip he completed
successfully. While the job didn’t exactly pay a fortune, it was better money that he’d made in
years.

In Remus’s humble opinion, the job should have been any werewolf’s dream job.

When he had first started, soon after his ill-fated appointment as DADA professor, Remus had the
brilliant idea that he would simply apparate from one place to another in his effort to deliver the
stuffed envelopes entrusted to his care. It seemed a sensible way to avoid riding through what
appeared to be a rather frightening state of traffic.

All too quickly however, he discovered how weird it appeared to the courier offices that he would
return to their desks a mere eight minutes after leaving, ready for their next assignment whatever it
might have been.

Not, of course, that he didn’t still lean on his magic wherever possible. Still, it wasn’t the job itself
that was a challenge at the very beginning.

Muggle London had been overwhelming to Remus in a way he hadn’t expected.
As a boy, his mother had mentioned in passing of ‘The Knowledge’. That is, some lore that all the cabbies in London shared, which guided them through the city in ways mere mortals could never hope to traverse. It hadn’t occurred to him at first that it wasn’t simply some Muggle folktale, but a very real, tangible thing which defeated tourists and outsiders alike.

It took him a week to figure out how to operate a bicycle. To learn the city however, to gain a version of his own ‘Knowledge’, that had been an experience in and of itself. Over the course of two years, Remus had learnt a myriad of ways to weave a path through irate drivers, down lonely alleys, and past forgotten streets. Nonetheless, despite how far he had come, somehow, there always seemed to be new roads for him to travel in the old city.

But it wasn’t simply the cheque they deposited in his account that exhilarated him, or the education he received every time he was on the job.

The best part of being a courier, he found, was riding like some speed demon down the packed roads of London.

Occasionally, as he sped through the byways of the city, he found himself wondering what James or Sirius - especially Sirius - would have thought of his skills on a bicycle. They would have been amazed that old Moony, so disinclined to athletics, so disinclined to the physical nature of his body when he wasn’t wearing the skin of his wolf, could have been capable of being so damned fast.

Those thoughts were never without their sting of course. Sirius didn’t, and never would, have thoughts on anything ever again. Him and James both.

“See you tomorrow?” Martin asked cheerfully.

“Nah. I’m out for the rest of the week,” Remus reminded the man without blinking an eye. He gestured airily at his head and rolled his eyes self-deprecatingly. “I’m headed to my ashram, to get my house in order.”

“Ashram eh?” Martin sounded a little envious. “Most spiritual thing I’ve ever done was follow my Mum to church at Easter.”

The full moon was happening in a few hours, and Remus was eager to take off. Not only did he need to take his potion, now, apparently, he had to stop at the bank. Nonetheless, he always found himself able to spare a few minutes for old Martin.

“You should try Yoga or something,” Remus fibbed, having very little idea what the exercise actually entailed. “I hear it’s calming.”

“I hear all the birds are getting into it these days,” Martin brightened. “Maybe I’ll meet a woman.”

Now look what you’ve done, Sirius’s voice echoed in Remus’s mind as he stared at the balding, overweight man on the wrong side of forty-five.

“Perhaps,” Remus chastised himself for his uncharitable thoughts. Martin was a kind, sweet soul who deserved to have someone love him, same as everybody else did.

“You got yourself a girl mate?” the Courier Coordinator asked curiously, shuffling idly at the papers in his hand.

“No really,” Remus shook his head, banishing the memory of Tonks and the recent conversation he had been forced to endure with the woman. “I’m not the type of man most girls want to take home to their parents.”
“You’re having me on,” Martin sounded incredulous. “As if I could believe that a young man like you couldn’t find himself a decent woman.”

Young. He was closing forty, Remus thought with a grimace. Though to be fair, not everything about being a werewolf was terrible. The aging process, for one, was not exactly unpleasant.

“We can’t all be charming like you Martin,” he quipped.

“Aye…a gift and a curse my charm is,” Martin nodded sagely.

On the wall, the clock ticked inexorably towards sunset, and beyond that, moonrise. Nodding his farewell to the other man, Remus finally turned to leave, never knowing that the next time he saw Martin, his entire life would have been disrupted.

More or less, anyway.

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The Daily Prophet sat on the table, blaring its ridiculous headlines at him like some bad joke.

Tucked away in the darkest corner of his local, Remus grunted in more than a little dissatisfaction as his eyes scanned the article before him.

“To show solidarity with those of us who had not been born into this world, but who deserve a place in it nonetheless, we will prove that they are one of us, once and for all.” Rufus Scrimgeour declared silently, his hands gesticulating wildly on the front page of the Prophet. “We will show those that would think to divide us, that they cannot even begin to sunder our bonds. In the face of evil, we will show them that we are one.”

Showing Voldemort they were as ‘one’…by forcing every Muggle-born who was of age to marry a Ministry designated pure or half-blooded spouse. That is, assuming they weren’t already married or due to marry another pure or half-blood of their own choosing.

Without exception, they were expected to be wedded and bedded by end of August, which gave the poor sods exactly two weeks to get their affairs in order. This also applied, going forwards, to those coming of age in the foreseeable future.

They were to find a spouse, or one would be found for them on their seventeenth birthday, else face the fruit of their disobedience.

Ludicrous, Remus thought as a vicious scowl crept across his face. Has the world gone completely mad?

The consequences of not obeying such a law for a Muggle-born was to have their wands confiscated, and to have their memories wiped clean of the existence of the Wizarding world.

“These measures are in place to keep them safe,” some faceless Ministry goon was quoted as saying. “Should they not comply, by removing them from our community, these Muggle-borns would become less of a target.”

All too easily, Remus conjured up a horrific image of some poor wizard or witch screaming as he
or she died under the cruel hand of Voldemort’s minions without ever knowing why they had been chosen to suffer.

Predictably, his mind veered towards Lily as he slammed the paper down. Poor Lily, who had never lived a day among wizardkind without being reminded of her heritage.

How she would have despised the notion of being told that she had no choice but to wed whomever they commanded her to marry…though James would never have let it come to that.

No, Lily would have been one of the luckier ones. Not everyone had the luxury of having some pureblooded wizard or witch wrapped around their little finger.

Draining his pint of bitter and shoving aside his half-eaten steak and kidney pie, Remus’s thoughts drifted to the other Muggle-born girl he had become familiar with over the past few years. He wondered if even now, Hermione wasn’t raging at the unfairness of it all in the safety of her parent’s home.

At least, he decided as he stood up, trying to take comfort wherever he could, she wasn’t of age. Not yet. They couldn’t force her to do such a stupid, redundant, cruel thing.

At least she was young enough to escape this fate, perhaps even indefinitely, depending how things went over the next year. The law hardly seemed sustainable. Eventually, the people would protest being conscripted as it were into unwanted matrimony. They simply had to. Right?

Paying his bill, Remus unlocked his bicycle perched by the front door of the pub and sped home. Nearing the doorstep of his cottage, the man found himself face-to-face with a very, very serious McGonagall…and from the looks of it, she had been waiting for some time.

Thankfully, his time as a courier guaranteed that he did not end up pitching over the front of his handlebars at the very moment he yanked at his brakes in shock.

“Hello Remus,” she said quietly.

“I’m to transform in an hour,” he blurted out, climbing off his seat.

With dawning horror, it occurred to him that no one in the Order had ever seen him in one of his courier outfits. They were all of them, without exception, hideously bright neon tights, matched against skin hugging shirts.

He wondered if there was a convenient hole he could have crawled into, away from the stern eyes of the woman before him.

“That’s more than enough time for what I have to tell you. And should you transform as I speak, as long as you’ve taken your Wolfsbane Potion, you will listen to what I have to say.”

The older woman met his gaze unflinchingly, sparing no consideration for his embarrassment.

Half an hour later, after McGonagall had departed, Remus realized with nauseating panic that being seen in neon spandex was in fact, the very least of his concerns.

Chapter End Notes
For narrative purposes
Hermione is 1 full year older (17) than Harry and Ron (16)
This starts in 1998. But other than that, the sequence of events is the same for OoTP, and HBP, etc.
Hermione stalked the breadth of the small space she was in, like a lioness at the edge of her cage. Never in her life had she felt so angry, so helpless.

For all her cleverness and her machinations, Hermione Jean Granger had been outsmarted by a decree made by some decrepit politicians. Her fate, along with the fate of hundreds, perhaps thousands, had been decided by a small group of men in dark robes. Men who have never had to worry about anything as trivial as blood status a day in their lives.

Did they even understand the true impact of their decision, she wondered as she twisted painfully at her curls.

At age seventeen, the young woman understood exactly, the predicament she had been placed in, all because some Minister didn’t want to lose whatever election came next.

What’s a politician’s number one priority? Her father’s had asked over dinner only a few nights ago. The words had sounded like a bad joke then, but the remembrance of it was even worse now. To win the next election. Never forget that.

The current Minister hadn’t been elected - he had been nominated to succeed the preceding, weak administration. It was clear however, that he intended to do whatever was necessary to triumph in a few years during an actual election. Muggle or Wizard - power was power.

“It can’t be Fred or George,” Professor McGonagall told her. “The two of them, with Angelina Johnson and Alicia Spinnet in tow fled across the pond to speak their vows the moment the news broke. This doesn’t only affect Muggle-borns, you must remember that - they had no wish to be married to women they didn’t choose for themselves. As for Bill, both he and the Delacour girl undertook a portion of the binding ceremony the day they got engaged…which unfortunately disqualifies him as a candidate.”

What with Ron and Harry not being of age, and with the law triggering into immediate effect, Hermione understood with excruciating clarity, the risk she was currently facing, and the choices she had at hand.

Or rather, choice - singular.

A growl burst out of the witch’s chest as she considered the unfairness of her situation.

While it was true that she wanted to stay in the Wizarding world not least because Harry still needed her help, the bigger reason she was furious, was because Hermione hated that she had to choose between marriage, and her very identity as a person.

If she didn’t marry before her sixth year of schooling started, the Ministry would literally reach into her mind and divest her of all she held dear. They would scrape her thoughts from her mind, ripping away the happiest years of her life.

All too well, Hermione remembered what life had been like before she found out that she was a witch, As a girl, she had floated through life feeling more or less like a square peg in a world not built to accommodate her shape, whatever it was.

How many times had she caught her mother gazing at her in strange suspicion, over yet another
broken window which shattered at the exact moment Hermione lost her temper over some childish thing?

When Tina, the school bully, fell and broke her arm five minutes after teasing Hermione’s ‘beastly’ hair, the other girl had proceeded to shriek in rage and terror that “Hermione did this!”

The adults had gazed at each other in confusion. Everyone knew the Granger girl was a good twenty feet away from Tina when she tripped and fell down the stairs. The other children however, heeded Tina’s warning and took her words to heart.

The rest of Hermione’s childhood after that incident was a lonely existence, though what she lost in laughter and playground intrigue, she more than made up for with books and learning. By the time she was ten, she could have told anyone the basics of what it meant to conduct an emergency tracheotomy...well, at least she could have explained the theory of the process. Secretly, she prayed she would never actually be required to do such a thing in real life.

The day the letter from Hogwarts came for her however, when it was finally made clear that there was an explanation for all the weirdness that was Hermione Granger, it was not only the young girl who rejoiced.

Her parents had smiled at each other in relief, following the initial shock of learning that magic was real, and that their daughter was a witch. For the first time, they began to wonder what their little girl could be capable of in the right environment.

In the span of minutes, the Granger family stopped being afraid, and instead, shared an understanding at last, that there was nothing in the world wrong with their little witch.

In the course of five years, Hermione came into herself in a way both herself and her parents had never dreamed possible. Somehow, the girl found herself surrounded by friends, friends who loved her and who weren’t shy about telling her so. Her teachers adored her (with the notable exception of two or three of them) and constantly told her of a bright and shining future. Their enthusiasm was a far cry from the muted comments her Muggle teachers had made.

Not to mention - the things she could do, the well of power she could summon with a flick of her wand...five years on, and still, magic was novel to her, a wonderful and exhilarating ride each and every time.

Regardless - nothing of her precious experiences mattered to those who sat in power. They didn’t care that they were going to disrupt her life, and the lives of many of her peers. Rather, they were threatening to snatch all of it away, and for what?

The so-called greater good. Hermione bit hard into the knuckles of her right fist to keep from screaming.

An owl fluttered in the darkness beyond her window. Professor McGonagall had left the bird behind before she disapparated, instructing - no, pleading with Hermione - that she took the one choice left to her.

“He’s your best hope. I realize this isn’t what you wanted, because how could it be?” the older witch looked older than her years as she spoke. “But Hermione...consider that this doesn’t have to be the end of your hopes and dreams.”

Storming over to her desk, Hermione reached for a quill and dipped its sharp tip in her inkwell. Yanking at a convenient sheet of parchment, the young woman took a deep breath before she began
to write.

To give her consent, as it were, though the very thought that this was something she was doing of her own free will was laughable at best.

Three words and a signature later, she was back at the window with her answer to Professor McGonagall rolled up tightly in her hand.

In the Wizarding world, Hermione supposed that it would not have been out of the ordinary for her to get married the moment she left Hogwarts, or even slightly before. If anything, it appeared to be normal for witches to leave school and immediately settle into some form of domestic bliss.

Much as she loved the magical community, Hermione had always wondered how such an intelligent, powerful society could continue to remain stuck in another era. She had always wondered at the breathtaking ease by which half-blooded and pureblooded witches submitted to the sexist rules that defined their world.

But there was exactly the trouble, was it not? Hermione was a Muggle-born witch, born into a different society where women were not expected to simply settle into a life filled with cooking, cleaning and childbirth.

Regardless, nothing she wanted mattered anymore, she recognized with grim finality.

Summoning the bird with a flick of her hand, Hermione secured her reply to McGonagall against one scaled claw. Cooing a soft farewell, the barn owl soared off into the night, silently winging its way back towards her Transfiguration Professor.

For all of a moment, Hermione regretted the day she ever accepted the invitation to attend Hogwarts. If her parents had any idea…

Perhaps it was only her imagination, but somewhere in the distance, Hermione thought she could hear the lonely howl of a wolf, as he cried out at the uncaring heavens.
The Joining: Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The room was a frightful thing, painted in varying shades of peeling white and filled with Muggle folding chairs, arranged into somewhat neat rows. Desperately pink flowers charmed to bloom under duress were placed in all four corners, in some misguided attempt to make the place look charming and romantic.

Remus stood before the assembled group, carefully ignoring the scorching glares Ron Weasley insisted on casting his way. Him and his mother in fact. The youngest Weasley girl stared ahead, looking as if she had no idea, exactly, how she ought to react. A few times, he caught her sending apologetic glances his way, same as her oldest brother Bill, who did his damndest to look supportive.

Tugging at his mustard coloured dress robes, Remus wished for the hundredth time that he had followed through on his true instincts - that is, to wear his ratty Led Zeppelin t-shirt and his ripped denim trousers.

Harry, who was seated beside the Weasley delegates, looked torn as he gazed at his former Professor. The boy looked at him in wide-eyed frustration and confusion…and some emotion that resembled pure rage. It was as if a part of Harry wanted to gut the werewolf from neck to groin, but the other part still looked for the mentor who taught him how to cast a Patronus.

Towards the back of the room, McGonagall blinked at him, looking proud and sad all at once. Albus himself was nowhere in sight, though Remus supposed, he had never truly expected the man to attend this sad affair. Because honestly - why would he?

Allowing his grey eyes to drift over the sparsely filled chamber, Tonks met his gaze and offered him a watery smile, one he could not find within himself to return.

The man knew why she looked so upset of course; he understood why she cowered in a corner, looking for all the world like a puppy that had been kicked brutally and repeatedly. A part of him wanted to hold her and comfort her, but a greater part wished she had at least listened even a little bit, every time he had told her the truth.

A few shags did not a great romance make. A few nights spent in each other’s arms was in no way, and never would be, a precursor to some epic love story. What they had shared had been nice, but there had never been any real hope on his part that something would come of their dalliance.

Not that any of that made a difference now. As he understood it, his fate had become tied with a teenage girl, from this day till the day one of them died.

Over the course of the last two days, ever since the night of the full moon, Remus had considered owling the girl. He had considered sending her a message to express his apologies, his goddam condolences in fact.

He wanted to tell her he had changed his mind, and she really ought to start looking at enrolling herself into some Muggle junior college before the enrolment period was over because like hell he was doing this.

He had also considered writing to McGonagall, and outright telling her where she could shove her
brilliant machinations. Remus had imagined the satisfaction of it, of telling the woman that she had no right barging into his life, pathetic as it was, and telling him that he needed to do right by the Order, that he needed to step up and protect one of their own.

“Remus, don’t you see?” she had pleaded desperately. “She needs you…”

“Yes, yes, you’re repeating yourself now,” he had told her irritably. Under his skin, the wolf snapped its jaws in fury, sensing the invisible leash the woman was slipping over his neck.

“Will you do it?” she had asked hopefully.

He wanted to say ‘no’. Remus wanted to tell her to shove off, that he was done with the Order, because what had it ever given him other than heartbreak and despair?

Without meaning to, his imagination conjured an image of Hermione. The brightest witch of her age, condemned to life as a pawn, at the mercy for whatever wizard got their grimy hands on her person. He saw in his mind’s eye, a cowering, reduced version of the brave, clever young woman he had come to know.

“We could ask Snape, but the fact is, we can’t trust his loyalties,” McGonagall fretted.

“Snape?” he hissed, aghast at the very thought of Severus Snape being tasked with…well, with Hermione. “You would ask Snape, to handle this task?”

“If you didn’t do it, then yes, I’d ask Snape. In fact, I’d ask Mundungus Fletcher if that’s what it took to keep Hermione safe,” McGonagall snarled. Actually snarled, fierce and frightening as any damned wolf.

“I’ve watched her grow from a clever child to the brilliant young woman she is now. I’ve seen her risk her life for a senseless cause, time and again, for a world that would rather see her dead. Remus, by all means feel sorry for yourself all you want. But at least the Death Eaters would accept you as a member of Wizarding Britain. Do you know what they would do to her should she be left wandless?”

There was absolutely nothing he could have said to the older woman that might have refuted her words. It was true what she said, at the end of it. Werewolves might have been despised but they were still magic.

Hermione however…the Enemy viewed her as some sort of aberration. Some sort of stain to be eradicated, and wiped off the face of the planet. Hermione, the brightest witch of her age, who thought nothing of fighting for those whom she loved.

“If you won’t do it, tell me now and stop wasting my time,” McGonagall demanded, her faded eyes the brightest he had ever seen.

“What do you think?” he had asked quite churlishly. “What kind of man do you take me for?”

“I take you for a man of honour,” McGonagall lifted her chin. “I take you as a man who would do what is necessary, to protect that which needs protecting.”

“It will be a marriage only in name,” he paced angrily away from her, reaching for a vial of Wolfsbane Potion he had left out on the counter.

“The Ministry intends to apply old charms and spells to guard their plans,” she warned, even as her shoulders slumped in partial relief. “They expect at least, the consummation of such a union. It’s
barbaric and unconscionable but there you have it. Once that’s done however, they could care less, so there is that at least.”

“And I am the monster in this equation?” he had laughed mirthlessly, before tipping the bitter potion past his lips.

“You never were a monster,” she said very gently, reaching out and brushing his cheek in a motherly fashion. “If you were, I would never have come to you first. Never. I trust you never to hurt her.”

In the present, Remus shifted impatiently, paying no mind to the Officiant perched behind him. The wizened wizard cleared his throat incessantly, as if a constant ball of phlegm were lodged in his airways.

A small flurry of excitement started on the other end of the room. Remus drew in a sharp breath, and waited in anticipation even as his heart began beating rapidly in his chest. The wolf within growled in frustration, wanting for everything to simply be over.

Without further warning, his bride stepped into view.

For a moment, Remus found himself pleasantly surprised. Not because she was a vision in white, like some princess from a fairy tale; indeed, she wore no lace, nor was she dressed in silk, satin or samite.

Hermione Granger materialized, looking defiant as all hell.

The young woman was not in any way, shape or form, dressed as if she had put in any effort for her wedding day. Instead of some elaborate chignon, the bride’s hair was loosely bound, falling in escaping curls all down her back. Instead of formal robes, Hermione sported a pair of tattered sneakers, faded jeans, and a very graphic, very rude t-shirt that somehow adequately conveyed everything he was feeling in one image.

It was a cartoon depiction of a middle finger, raised up in an unmistakeable salute towards a world that had gone utterly mad.

Despite his inclination to glower menacingly at everyone, if only to prove his displeasure at this travesty, Remus found his lips twitching upwards every so slightly, curving into the beginnings of a smile.

As their eyes met, Hermione tilted her chin upwards, challenging his very presence. Her show of anger and rebellion didn’t last long however, as guilt began creeping across her features.

Surprising, that. Remus hadn’t expected guilt. He had assumed she would get even angrier at the sight of him. He had thought she would bristle in rage at the reality of her situation.

Hermione didn’t deserve any of this. She didn’t deserve to be saddled with an almost middle-aged man who had once been her teacher. The fact that he was a Werewolf, a creature that almost every wizard and witch spat upon, only compounded the ugly situation.

As their gazes held, Remus caught a hint of embarrassment in her dark eyes as they drifted over his robes. Dropping her gaze down to her own, casual Muggle clothing, Hermione grimaced. Slowly, she walked up to him, her hands empty of any flowers.

“Professor…” she started uncomfortably.
“Remus,” he said quickly, trying to hide his own distaste at the reminder of what they had once been to each other.

“Remus, I should have at least…worn a dress. I didn’t realize…” she sighed, ignoring the Officiant standing less than a feet away. “Bad enough you’re being forced to marry me…I could have at least worn heels…something.”

Forced to…Remus blinked, studying her wan features.

“Let’s get all this over with,” Hermione shook her head.

“One second,” the wizard held up a finger as he dug for his wand with his right hand. With a quick wave and a muttered incantation, Remus looked down at himself, pleased that it had worked exactly as he had hoped it would.

In place of dress robes, his outfit now more or less matched Hermione’s, albeit without the creative cartoon. Jeans, runners and an un-ironed button down shirt he had summoned from his closet miles away…

Allowing himself a smug smile, he looked up again at his bride, noting with some relief that she had cupped a hand over her mouth in an effort not to laugh.

It hadn’t been an easy spell, but it was well worth the trouble, he decided immediately.

“Now we can do this,” he nodded.

“That’s all very well, but I haven’t got all day,” the Officiant grumbled. “Now if you two would be so kind as to hold each other’s hands…”

Hermione’s grin faded away even as Remus froze in place, unsure of what he ought to do next. Huffing in annoyance, the young woman came to a decision. Faster than he thought possible, she whipped her hands out and grabbed ahold of his.

Without thinking it through, his fingers wrapped themselves around her slender wrists, and tightened ever so slightly.

Her hands were so very small. Her bones were so slight, so very fragile under her skin. It wouldn’t take very much at all to hurt the woman standing before him, Remus realized.

Ignoring the droning of the Officiant, Remus looked up and caught Hermione’s wide, slightly panicked gaze.

“What’s a bit archaic. I don’t need a man to…” Hermione sputtered, stopping only when she caught Remus’s eye. Lips curving into a forced smile, he shook his head ever so slightly, hoping that the young woman understood that arguments were futile at this stage.

“I do,” he answered, resigning himself to fate.

“Do you, Hermione Jean Granger…”

“Yes yes,” she shook her head as she looked away. “I fucking do. Alright? Might I move on with
my life now?”

The old man frowned at her, and muttered something about disrespectful chits with no respect for tradition, “…and that’s what you get for allowing mudbloods to infiltrate our…”

“That’s enough,” Remus said sharply.

The assembled group behind him muttered amongst themselves. Molly Weasley tutted aloud, though he knew her response was directed more towards his actions than the words of the odious little man to his right. “Finish this,”

Glaring at the werewolf and his bride, the wizard lifted his wand and began to chant, drawing strange patterns in the air. Strings of light flowed and gathered around Remus and Hermione, winding first around their joined hands, and then around their very persons.

Despite the fact that she was clearly still furious at the way in which she had been treated, Remus could see that Hermione was studying the magic encasing them with more than a little academic interest.

If the Officiant hadn’t been such a fucking prat, it was likely he would have been on the receiving end of a million questions the moment the union was done.

Without any warning, the light grew in intensity. Something tugged hard at his chest, causing his eyes to water very slightly; Hermione’s jaw visibly tightened at the exact same moment. A glowing, golden orb of energy pulsed its way out his chest, meeting the ball of blue that had floated out of hers.

As their magic collided, a shudder passed through Remus’s body. Hermione’s hands trembled violently, instinctively causing him to hold on just a little tighter.

Take my strength, he wanted to tell her.

Just as Remus started to wonder how much longer the ceremony would take, the lights were suddenly gone, and the Officiant was no longer chanting.

“If this marriage is not consummated by midday tomorrow,” the man said curtly. “This union will be nullified. And believe me…”

The little shit smiled an unpleasant smile.

“…we’ll know if it’s not properly done.”

“Fuck off,” Remus spoke through gritted teeth. “Before I make you.”

The old wizard took one look at his dark countenance, and backed away, leaving wizard and witch standing together at the altar.

Turning to look at him, Hermione offered the werewolf a small, shaky smile which bordered on gratitude, because of how he had handled the odious little man.

Consequently, and for all of a moment, Remus’s heart forgot how to beat as he stared at his wife.

Chapter End Notes
So...did I mention this is a Remus heavy story?
The assembled group milled about in Molly’s sunny back garden, speaking in low and sombre murmurs. Overhead, not a single cloud marred the brilliant blue sky. Golden rays of sunshine streamed down upon the wedding party, bathing the wedding party in the warmth of a late-summer evening.

Alone in a shadowy corner, hidden behind a trellis of climbing vines, Remus observed his fellow Order members as they tried to pass their condolences off as congratulations towards his bride.

For her part, Hermione held her head high, staring stoically ahead. While not clearly distressed, the girl…no, the young woman, he kept reminding himself - seemed determined not to show even a crumb of weakness in front of everyone.

He had always known she was clever. Everyone did. It probably chafed at her sensibilities that for all her brilliance, she was not allowed to escape the fate that had been shoved upon her. Briefly, his eyes drifted down to her bare fingers, and for a moment, he wondered if he ought to have at least dug out his parents’ rings from the dusty old case he kept buried away in his wardrobe.

Rings didn’t truly matter though. Their marriage was, as far as the two of them were concerned, a farce. All they had to do, was couple just the once. When it was over, she could go back to her life, same as he fully intended on doing with his own.

McGonagall - who was nowhere in sight - had assured him that both parties were of the same mind on the matter, a fact that both relieved, yet strangely saddened him all at once. Hermione deserved so much more than something so truly medieval.

The Ministry only cared about one thing to prove that their union was genuine. They were employing the oldest trick in the book, carried over from barbaric practices, to prove that a woman was bound to the man who had claimed her to wife.

Short of allowing Hermione to divorce him after fulfilling that quota - as the guidelines clearly stated that this union would be for life - the government did not care one way or another how these marriages played out in actuality.

All the men in dark cloaks sitting in their London offices cared about, was maintaining the appearance of doing something to combat the bigotry of the Enemy.

“Professor Lupin…” a familiar voice drew him out of his idle meanderings.

Looking up, Remus found himself staring into painfully familiar green eyes. Forcing himself to smile, he stood up to greet the teenager shuffling uncomfortably before him. “Not ‘Professor’ anymore Harry,”

Something flashed in Harry’s eyes that looked a lot like guilt. Fine lines had already began forming around his eyes, and unfortunately, the older wizard had a feeling that a lot of it had developed over the past few months, after…

“Remus…I…” Harry tried again, shaking his head as he wrapped his arms around his too thin frame. “I know this isn’t what you…I know this isn’t…”
“You don’t have to say anything.” Remus said gently, reaching out to grasp at the teenager’s shoulder, only to have Harry flinch away at the very last.

Something painful lanced its way through Remus’s heart.

“I’m sorry. I wanted to come over, see how you were holding up.” Harry sounded tired as his eyes dropped away. “I have to go back to the Dursleys soon, but I didn’t want to leave before I talked to you. It’s just…this whole thing is…”

“It’s utterly shite,” Remus finished, thrusting his hands into his pockets. “It’s monstrous, what they have done.”

Harry looked up at him, anger and guilt warring in his eyes still. “I would have married her. I would have protected her from these arseholes. There’s nothing I wouldn’t…”

Merlin, but it was hard to articulate everything that was in his heart in that moment as Harry’s eyes drifted. Watching the boy watch Hermione, Remus wondered…

“I couldn’t protect Sirius,” Harry intoned bitterly. “And now, I can’t protect Hermione,”

Sympathy flooded Remus’s thoughts, accompanied by a twinge of irrational annoyance. Somehow, Harry had made what was likely the worst day of Hermione’s life, into an excuse to wallow in his own pain instead. Sucking in a breath, he reminded himself that James’s son was still at the end of it, a teenager. Indeed, he had been saddled with a greater burden than most men Remus had met in his entire life.

“I won’t hurt her,” Remus said in a low voice. “I promise you, I would never, ever do anything wrong by Hermione. I only agreed to this farce, because the alternatives she had…”

“I know alright?” Harry bit out angrily, turning back to look at his former Professor. He was breathing hard, as if he had just run a race. “I know all that. I know the risks. I’m not a child like everyone seems to think I am.”

So stop acting like a child, Remus stopped himself from blurtting out.

From the other side of the garden, the voice of the witch in question rose slightly, just enough for his sharp hearing to pick up over the low hum of conversation. Turning his attention from Harry, Remus sought out that familiar head of riotous curls, the centre of the day’s nightmare.

“…like this was what I wanted,” she hissed from where she and Ron were sequestered under the shade of a willow tree.

“You didn’t even protest,” the seventh Weasley son said, sounding irate and broken all at once. “We could have fought this. Harry, the Ministry listens to him. We could have…”

“Ronald, the last thing I need is to draw more attention to myself.” Hermione’s voice was a controlled thing now, as if she were wont to explode at any second. “This was the easiest guarantee to see me back in Hogwarts come September, to fight beside Harry. I would rather we lost a battle, than relinquish the entire war…”

Stifling a sigh, Remus started to close the distance between himself and Hermione, ignoring the glances everyone was throwing at him. Despite the fact that he had eaten with them, fought with them, laughed and celebrated with them, they were just now all staring at him as if he were some stranger.
There was inescapable irony in their disapproving glares. They had married him to Hermione precisely because they thought they could trust the devil they knew.

“Are you telling me you’re doing this for Harry?” Ron demanded, his face reddening to a point it matched his hair. “It’s always Harry isn’t it? What about us?”

“What? What are you talking about?” Hermione stared blankly at her friend. “Us?”

“You know how I felt about you. You must have known,” the boy was all but shouting now. “I had thought this would be the year you and I made things official. I had thought after we graduated, you and I would have…”

“You thought we’d get married, have a dozen babies and settle down in the country? Would I have stayed home and cooked your meals?” Hermione barked a laugh, her control over her temper slipping with every second. Composing herself with some difficulty, she forced her breathing to even out before she continued.

“Ronald…that sounds like a lovely picture. But I’m afraid that was never going to be me.”

He couldn’t help himself; Remus winced out of sympathy for Ron. Out the corner of his eye, he could see Tonks looking over in wide-eyed curiosity. Molly, who had been gossiping with the Auror, turned a glare of epic proportions upon Hermione.

“Well I suppose it’s lucky you were commanded to marry someone then,” Ron spat as his own fury rose to the surface. “I can’t imagine anyone else ever wanting to spend their life with you if they had a choice,”

Remus watched as the witch curled an arm around herself, while lifting her other fist to her mouth. Slipping her knuckles past her teeth, the woman bit down hard enough to break the skin stretched over her fine bones, literally biting back her own fury and frustration.

The iron smell of her blood burned his senses; his little wife had teeth of her own.

“Hermione…” Remus called out, deciding enough was enough. “Perhaps it’s time you and I…”

“Remus…thank Christ. Yes, please,” she wiped hastily at her eyes. “I never thought I’d welcome this moment but here we are,”

Turning to look at everyone assembled, she cast them all a hopeless stare, one that melted away even Molly’s anger.

“Sweetheart, are you sure you don’t want to stay a little longer?” the Weasley matriarch said, hurrying forwards, flitting her eyes towards Remus in an almost accusatory fashion. Nodding in agreement, Ginny came to join her mother, her flowing summer dress fluttering in the evening breeze.

“Ron’s a right git.” The younger girl cast her brother a murderous look. “He’s never been known to see past his own nose. Please Hermione, don’t feel like you have to leave,”

Still doing his best to ignore their spectators, Remus reached for Hermione’s hand and clasped it in his own. To his surprise, she didn’t let go.

Gulping away his own nerves, the wizard said so only she could hear, “It’s up to you. We have to leave sometime, but if you want, we’ll stay right here. If they come for us, I’ll…”
“No. This is…please let’s just…” she murmured, turning her dark eyes up to meet his. There was a naked plea for rescue in her gaze.

“Alright,” he nodded at her, before he turned towards the crowd. “I think it’s time we were on our way.”

The words stuck oddly in his mouth, but he managed to get them out all the same. Forcefully, he reminded himself of the full bottle of Firewhiskey he kept in his tiny kitchen. And the bottle of white wine he had the foresight to purchase the day before, despite never touching the stuff.

“I’m sorry everyone, but…” Hermione’s composure finally broke as she sagged against him. “Remus, if you would please just…”

Helplessly, she waved her free hand, gesturing at the Burrow as a whole entity. It was all the prompting Remus required.

Stepping decisively to the left, the couple left behind what was probably the worst wedding reception in the history of the world.

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His brand new wife sat on his sofa, her face buried in her hands as she balanced her elbows on her knees. Despite appearances however, it didn’t appear that she was weeping, a fact that greatly relieved Remus.

The last thing he wanted was to bed a teenage girl who was sobbing her heart out.

Striding over to her side, he nudged her shoulder and shoved into her hands, a glass of cheap Alsace Gewürztraminer.

“Bless you Remus Lupin,” she muttered before taking a large sip. And then another. And another.

“Uh…” he suddenly regretted his decision to pour her a drink.

“Remus, I’m seventeen years old,” she said, suddenly over-pronouncing her words in a way that did nothing to alleviate his concern. “If you think I haven’t had a drink, think again,”

“Thank god. I couldn’t stand the thought that I might have married a non-drinker,” he blurted out without thinking.

Hermione stared at him in silence for a good ten seconds, before breaking out in a hearty guffaw. Two seconds later, he too collapsed in laughter, leading to the both of them leaning back into the worn down cushions behind them.

“Merlin…” she said as her giggles finally began to die away. “I can’t believe Molly thought Pumpkin Juice was up to the task today.”

“Of course she did,” Remus sniffed. “I doubt Arthur has had anything harder than a butterbeer in decades,”

“Explains a lot, really,” she laughed again, although her mood was quickly turning sombre once again. “Oh Remus…I’m so sorry about all of this. I didn’t want to agree to this. I didn’t want you to have to be the one to have to give up the rest of his life, saddled with…”
“Have you lost your mind?” he demanded bluntly, setting down his tumbler, turning to face her in full. “My life? Who cares about that? I’m a washed out, middle-aged werewolf who can’t hold down a job in the wizarding world. I can’t give you any sort of a life that you deserve…”

“All life I deserve, I had been looking to give to myself. If you think I mean to let this stop me…”

Her eyes were so very bright, he thought distractedly.

“I cannot imagine for a second, anything capable of stopping you from what you want,” he admitted. “Still though. You can’t deny that this whole affair. It’s basically…”

“State-sanctioned rape?” she asked, sounding not at all tipsy.

Remus said nothing, choosing instead to stare at his glass of Ogden’s Old. All traces of cheer abruptly departed the room.

“Stop it, stop feeling like I’m the only victim here.” she added after a moment, a note of contrition entering her voice. “You did this because you’re a decent person, not because you truly wanted to. The Ministry did this not only to me, but to us,”

“That’s not true,” he mumbled.

“What?” she looked at him suspiciously.

“Well, McGonagall said they would have gone to Snape next. Or Mundungus Fletcher. And I’ll be honest with you Hermione…” he paused, looking over at her. “I honestly considered just letting her,”

She gaped at him, looking nothing so much like a goldfish out of its bowl.

“I considered telling her to fuck the hell off,” Remus lifted his glass and took a long sip, before he concluded, “What does that make me?”

The woman beside him slumped backwards once again, all life drained out of her. Staring into her wineglass, she swirled what was left of its contents, before finally saying very softly, “You didn’t though. You went through with it,”

There was that, he supposed. He hadn’t said ‘no’ at the end of it. Perhaps that made him a completely different kind of monster than he had supposed.

“You came through. For me. You did this for someone you don’t actually know very well, and likely, wouldn’t have gotten to know,” she continued, her voice getting stronger with every word. “And let’s not forget… I’ve completely mucked things up between yourself and Tonks haven’t I?”

“What?” he frowned. “How did you…”

“Remus, you’ve met Molly Weasley I assume? That omniscient woman sees just about all, and I’m so sorry to be the one to inform you, but she’s seen the two of you together.”

He released a huff of pure irritation and took another sip from his tumbler.

“No, there was nothing. Don’t beat yourself up over it. You do understand that none of this is your fault don’t you?”

She kept her silence, choosing instead to drain away the last of her wine.
“I would have gone about our engagement differently you know, if this was the endgame,” Remus said, allowing alcohol to guide his tongue. “Because this whole thing was pathetic even by my sorry standards,”

He felt, rather than saw her smile.

“Oh?”

“I mean…let’s say I was utterly ridiculous enough to have, I don’t know, found myself attracted to a former student. A young woman I simply also happened to be acquainted with, from the secret society we were both nominally a part of,” he started.

“I would likely have spent months in denial. I would have pined…”

“Pined?” she inquired in amusement.

“Pined.” his voice now brooked no argument. “I would have pined and moped until the day I couldn’t take it anymore. Then, I would have probably said or done something stupid, like slip her a hint about getting dinner…”

“Where?” she prodded, tilting her head to peer at him. “Dinner where?”

“Somewhere romantic. Italian probably,” he chuckled. “Or some small pub,”

“I happen to favour a decent gnocchi myself, but do go on,”

“I would have talked her ear off about stupid things, if only to make her laugh, to see her eyes shine. Then when dinner was over…when dinner was over, I would have tried to keep the evening going. Perhaps we would have taken a walk around town, perhaps we would have gone and sat down in some cafe…and then only when it was finally past midnight...then I would have agreed to leave her at her door…”

“Holding her hostage are we?” Hermione asked, though her tone was joking. She leaned forward and placed her wineglass on the ground.

“Possibly, yeah,” he looked at her, observing the slight flush in her cheeks. To his chagrin, he found that he was rather enjoying making her blush. “As I was saying, before you so rudely interrupted me…”

“I assisted your story,” she corrected primly.

“You *interrupted,*” Remus chided. “I would have agreed to leave her at her door, for the price of a kiss. Something to tide me over, until the next time I got her alone, anyway,”

“That’s…that was lovely,” she said quietly, looking down at her limp hands. “I wish…”

“Yeah,” he nodded morosely. “Yeah, I know.”

“Remus?” she said, pulling herself upright. “I don’t want this to be awful. I know there’s almost no way this can be fine but…perhaps…perhaps we can pretend that…I don’t know. I met you in a pub or something, and you took me home for the night, and we’re both embarking on something that could be the beginning of a wonderful adventure,”

It horrifying, the stories they were telling to each other and to themselves, to distract away from the ugly truths that had bought them to the precipice upon which they currently perched.
As he studied her dark eyes, Remus made his first, real mistake.

It occurred to the werewolf that he owed his bride something. Pragmatic and clever though she obviously was, Hermione was after all still a young girl. While he wasn’t exactly an expert, doubtlessly, young girls did not dream of wedding nights that were more akin to business transactions.

The least he could do, he decided, was to at least give her a good wedding night. It was the only wedding night she was ever going to have after all, and what was his role in this, if not that of her new husband?

“Where do you parents think you are?” he asked, hating that he had to ask at all.

“They think I’m at Ginny’s birthday party at the Burrow,” she said. “They don’t expect me home until tomorrow afternoon,”

Setting his emptied glass down at his feet, Remus began the arduous process of pushing aside his own misgivings. After Hermione left, he could drown himself in booze and self-recrimination, but not before.

“We’re not strangers who met in a bar,” he said softly, reaching out to touch her hand. “You and I, we’ve known each other for years now,”

As before, she curled her fingers trustingly around his own, an act which in and of itself, took his breath away.

“Don’t…don’t let’s pretend I’m some girl you’ve been in love with from a distance either,” she said firmly.

Remus’s heart ached for the witch sitting before him.

“Maybe we’re both overthinking this,” she teased softly, reaching a hesitant hand up towards his cheek, hovering just a hair’s breathe away from actually touching him.

Shoulders sagging, Remus gave into his inclinations and leaned into the palm of her hand.

There was nothing for it now but to soldier onwards. Reaching for her, the man drew her face towards his own, until their lips were almost touching.

“I’m here,” he whispered softly. “I’m here with you. I promise I’ll take care of you…”

In answer, she pressed her lips against his. Before he could think of where to put his hands, Hermione had shifted herself closer, close enough that her body was suddenly all but moulded against his own.

Squeaking in surprise, Remus’s eyes shot open. Pulling back, Hermione giggled at his wide-eyed expression.

*Good show Moony,* an echo of Sirius’s voice mocked good-naturedly in his mind.

Huffing in annoyance at himself, Remus pulled her towards him and brushed his lips against hers, this time in full control of his faculties.

Slowly, his own hands began drifting across her back, before settling for the moment at her rounded hips.
Despite his almost hermit-like existence, Remus in no way led a monastic life when it came to women. While his encounters were almost all necessarily casual, he’d walked the earth for close to forty years, during which time he’d built an arsenal of skills when it came to seduction.

Indeed, it had only been three weeks ago when Tonks had settled on this very couch with him, and he had…

Remus opened his eyes as his fingers carded themselves into Hermione’s curls, loosening them from their hopeless bonds and causing them to spill in waves down her back. The first hints of the witch’s arousal filled the air, chasing the image of his last amorous encounter away, leaving him extremely aware of how attractive his former student had become over the years.

“God you’re sweet,” his whispered, before his lips descended upon her jawline, where he began pressing open-mouthed kisses against her soft skin.

“You don’t have to say such things. There’s no need,” she sounded a little breathless.

Her artless reactions stirred a very innately male satisfaction deep in his belly. Nonetheless, he found himself asking, “What do you mean?”

“You know what I mean. Endearing adjectives, sweet nothings…” she breathed sharply as his teeth found and nipped at her earlobe. “I’m a big girl, I know what’s what,”

The woman was made of wild honey and magic, Remus thought as he tasted her skin.

“But I like using endearing adjectives on you,” he murmured huskily as he kissed his way down the length of her slender neck.

For better or for worse, Remus was finding himself very interested in the sounds he was drawing from her chest.

With what he considered admirable restraint, he fought back a growl as her hands drifted to the buttons of his shirt. Slender fingers slotted themselves into the gaps she found, brushing themselves against his bare chest. “Are you telling me no adventurous boy has ever whispered sweet nothings to you?”

“Viktor tried the same thing, the very first time we slept toge…”

Remus did not allow her to finish her sentence. Instead, his mouth found hers in an urgent, searing kiss.

The part of him that was still alert, still sane, was endlessly grateful to hear that she wasn’t in fact a virgin. Right up to that moment, he had not understood how much he had dreaded the thought that he would be her first, true lover. Bad enough she had to bed down with a werewolf under duress. The man did not want to live with the knowledge that he was the one to ruin something that should have been a special rite of passage for her.

However, the moment she spoke some other man’s name, the werewolf realized that the last thing he wanted to discuss was anything concerning her intimate forays with a previous lover.

Moving to grasp possessively at her hip, he dug his fingers into her body hard enough that he knew he was going to leave bruises. The wolf within had no objections whatsoever to his actions, particularly as he scented Hermione’s ever-increasing arousal.

“Remus…” she murmured dreamily when finally he lifted his lips.
Mate, you planning on finishing this on your couch? The ghost of Sirius asked in his head as Remus felt a significant rush of blood in the southerly direction.

Forcing himself to focus, Remus did his best to form a complete sentence.

"Did you...that is to say...bedroom?" he managed to stutter.

Hermione smirked slightly at his inability to make words, though it was tinged with something both wistful and wary. The way she was looking at him made his heart wrench painfully in his chest.

"Let's not make a fuss..." she started.

Impulsively, he swept one arm under her knees and another under her shoulders. Winsomely, she shrieked softly in shock, kicking out very slightly.

"Never thought I'd see the day when you weren't two moves ahead of me," he laughed, striding towards his bedroom, glad he'd actually made an effort to change his sheets and make his bed that morning.

"Don't get used to it," she stuck her tongue out at him.

"Hermione, I have always thought you were singularly, the most intelligent witch I’ve ever met, and not only that…” he kissed her forehead as he set her down. In one swift move, he had her t-shirt tugged over her head and cast to the side. He forgot all he was about to say as he stared at her bra covered breasts. "Uh...I mean..."

"Do continue," she teased, all traces of sadness and hesitancy gone as she stepped back and perched herself on the edge of his bed.

Unconsciously, his eyes dropped to the scar that puckered the skin on the left side of her ribcage. It was a raised, pale rope of a thing, testament to the severity of the wound that had been inflicted on her. Following his line of sight, Hermione grew more and more self-conscious, evident in the way she began to fidget, and the way she began reaching for her discarded shirt.

Not that she was allowed to get very far, with Remus grasping tightly at her wrist.

"Was this…” he did his best to push down the surge of anger and protectiveness that welled up in his gut. “Did you get this…”

"Remus, it's fine,” she sounded discomfited. “I…”

She huffed and tried to pull away from him. “Will you just let me put on my shirt…”

“No,” he shook his head vehemently.

After what had happened in the Department of Mysteries, he hadn’t even thought to look in on her, to ask after her, despite knowing the injury she had taken during the battle. He had been so wrapped up in the loss of his friend, so utterly numbed by grief, nothing else really penetrated his consciousness.

“Who was it?” he asked, trying to keep his voice even as she stilled. “Do you know who…”

“Remus…” she said waringly.

“No, I want to know. I’m going to find him, and when I do…”
“Remus, he’s *mine* to deal with, do you understand?” her voice had become a cold, hard thing. Startled out of his own rage, he blinked rapidly only to find himself staring at a Hermione he didn’t recognize.

Her jaw was set, and her nostrils were flared. The woman before him - for there was no trace of the girl he had known - had no use for his childish proclamations…not when she clearly intended to take her own revenges.

Feeling incredibly stupid, he tugged her into a chaste embrace and stroked at her hair, trying to regain the ground they had covered but which he had so foolishly lost

“You do realize of course, that if this were a competition, I would win,” he said casually, keeping his voice light. “Wait till you see what I’m hiding underneath my clothes.”

Under his palms, he felt as her shoulders began to quiver. It took him far too long to realize that Hermione wasn’t crying. Quite the opposite.

Tilting her chin up so she could look him in the eye, Hermione’s lips curved upwards in a small, genuine smile. Standing on tiptoes, she reached up and pressed her mouth firmly against his own.

“That was a very chivalrous sentiment.”

“That’s me…chivalrous,” he muttered, before slanting his mouth over hers once again, dragging his teeth against her bottom lip.

It was obscene, he thought as his hands slid over the span of her smooth back, how much he found he actually wanted Hermione. Desire pumped through his veins in hot bursts as her fingers stroked tentatively at the nape of his neck.

Slowly, he began fumbling at the clasp of her bra.

Half a minute later, he was still fumbling, even as she giggled against his chest. Had the small bit of plastic and metal been welded together, or spelled so it could never be unclasped?

After a while, Hermione began undoing his buttons one by one, until his shirt was hanging open, and her hands had free reign over his own, bare skin. For a moment, his movements stilled. Despite his earlier joke, he rather doubted that she might find the sight of his numerous scars appealing in the least. Most witches didn’t.

Without missing a beat, Hermione ran her hands over his marred skin without a hint of disgust or apprehension.

Eyes fluttering shut, Remus breathed Hermione into his lungs…and proceeded to rip apart her brassier, turning the blasted thing into nothing more than scrap metal, plastic and fabric.

“I’ll have you know, I happened to like that bra,” she protested, and would have continued if his lips hadn’t found her bare breasts. Arching into his touch, the woman nearly fell off her precarious spot on his bed, though he was quick enough to catch her before she slid off the edge.

With a little more care, he reached for her jeans and made short work of them, sliding them off her smooth thighs with a few quick jerks. Lifting his attention from her right bosom, Remus smirked and gave her a slight shove, one which sent her bouncing onto his duvet with yet another cry of surprise.
Her curls spread out all about her, surrounding her like the rays of the summer sun. For a good half a minute, all he could do was stare at her, spellbound.

How the hell he had managed not to see the woman she had grown into, now felt like a complete mystery. Bracing herself on her elbows, she tilted her body upwards and glared at him, though it did nothing to lessen her appeal.

"Remus, I would appreciate it if you gave me some sort of warning each time you decided to manhandle me," she said, that familiar bossy tone entering her voice. She lifted her left arm to cover herself, breasts and scar both.

"Don't," he shook his head as he observed her actions. Desire guiding what was left of his conscious thought, he said, “Hermione…you’re…you’re perfect.”

Listening to the way her breath was coming in short uneven spurts, and considering her bright eyes and flushed cheeks, Remus wondered if she truly had no real idea how beautiful she was. The healed gash in her side only served to make her something tangible, something real in his eyes.

Slowly he crawled over her body and slipped one hand under her hip, sliding it easily under her still clothed bottom. Remus tipped her hips so that her body collided against his. Through the remaining layers of their clothing, he could feel her warmth calling to him.

The small whimper that emanated from the back of her throat was almost his undoing. Feverishly, he kissed her on her eyelids, her cheeks, her mouth, her chin, her neck…slowly, he slid his mouth down the length of her body, mapping every exposed inch he could find with his lips and his tongue.

Hooking his thumbs in the waistband of her knickers, he tugged at the scrap of plain cotton and dragged them off. He didn’t need to touch her, to know that she wanted him almost as much as he wanted her. Arousal was now coming off her in unmistakeable waves, and it was almost too much for him not to take her.

Pausing to gaze reverently at the goddess before him, Remus tried to gain some semblance of control over his thoughts and desires, all of which were fixated on Hermione, Hermione, Hermione…

Not to be outdone, the young woman hoisted herself to sitting, and began laying kisses across his overheated skin. Her thighs spread just a little wider, inviting and enticing him.

Reaching between them, Remus stroked insistently at her warm centre before pistoning one and then two fingers inside of her dripping quim. In his arms, the woman became a boneless, trembling bundle as she shuddered in pleasure. Without any warning, he pressed gently at her clit and watched hungrily as she fell apart.

“Remus, god, Remus…” she repeated his name in a glorious litany as she peaked.

Groaning, he separated from her long enough so that he could remove the rest of his own clothing. Naked as the day he was born, Remus moved clumsily over her reclining form. Somewhere in his mind, he berated himself for the pace at which things were moving.

The plan had been to take things slow. He had wanted to give her something good, something pleasurable, if only to take away the sting of what was being done to her by distant strangers even now.

Gazing down at Hermione, Remus silently admitted at last, what he had really wanted when out
there in his living room, he had decided to play the role of ardent husband.

What he wanted was for her not to hate him when all was said and done. What he wanted was not to see contempt and disgust in Hermione’s eyes once their coupling was at an end, once they were both transported back to cold, hard reality.

Selfish, but there it was.

Here, on the cusp of no return, Remus wondered if he ought to be frightened of something else, something much, much worse.

He had married a girl, never once suspecting he would be bedding down instead, with a beautiful, intoxicating, brave woman, who submitted to her fate for the sake of something she considered far greater than herself.

In that moment, just the thought of her running headlong into the dark and the unknown disturbed him to no small degree. She was so frighteningly small in his arms.

Under his scarred skin, the wolf strained impatiently, wanting him to fucking move...to claim his bride as it were.

“Come back to me...” she whispered, reaching up to touch his cheek.

He was so close to burying himself inside of her, but what if in doing so, he buried himself so deeply, he never found his way out?

“Hermione, if you want me to stop, tell me now,” he said through gritted teeth, dreading her response whichever it was. “I’ll do whatever it takes to protect you, I promise, I fucking promise...”

The witch raised an eyebrow. And smacked him on his shoulder.

“Remus John Lupin, if you even think about stopping right now, I swear to god I will hex you so hard you’ll...oh,” she lost her train of thought as he sheathed his cock inside of her in one smooth thrust. She breathed, "Remus, this...you feel...oh please..."

Remus stopped thinking as Hermione shifted her hips, urging him to move without words. Burying his face into the crook of her neck, he murmured endearments and oaths, praise and worship against her skin. Pumping his hips at an ever-increasing pace, he was too lost to care what it was he was even saying.

In return, she whimpered, calling his name over and over as she wrapped her arms tightly around him.

“Sweet girl...” he murmured, scraping his teeth against her clavicle. For him, the rest of the world had stopped existing. “My brave, sweet girl, come for me again...”

“Fuck, oh god, oh fuck Remus,” she hissed as her body twisted at the moment of her climax.

With a roar, he lifted his head and spilled inside of her with one last thrust.

The incomplete spells that the Officiant had cast during their ceremony, now, now they glowed all around them. Ropes of light encased them, binding and blinding them in ancient magic. Throwing his body over hers protectively, he shielded her from the all-encompassing glare.
When it was over, he slowly lifted himself up. As the pleasure began to recede, Remus looked down, unsure of what he would see in Hermione’s eyes…

Only to find that the witch underneath him had fallen asleep. Almost as if for effect, the woman let out a small snore and rolled onto her side.

He hadn’t expected Hermione to be the type of woman who fell asleep immediately after sex… but then again, there was lots of things he hadn’t expected from what he had just shared with her.

Not knowing what he was to do now that their union was fully consummated, Remus decided that Hermione had the right idea. Shifting his body, which felt extraordinarily heavy, he lay down beside her…and allowed himself one final indulgence.

Spooning himself against her naked back, Remus wrapped one possessive arm around her waist and pulled her close. Shutting his eyes, it wasn’t long before his mind fell away into a deep and dreamless slumber.

Chapter End Notes

This will be the last bit of smut for a very long while; and when the slow burn really begins.
Hermione’s eyes fluttered open, and for a second, stared at her surroundings in blind, still panic.

Where was she, and why was she naked?

It took her longer than she would have liked, but eventually, the memories of the previous day came flooding back, in technicolour glory.

Slumping deeper into Remus’s pillows, the young woman rubbed at her eyes, wondering what fresh hell awaited her…

Not, she thought as she glanced down at the arm encircling her, that everything that occurred was truly awful. In fact, some of it had been quite…unexpected. Thinking of what the previous night had entailed brought blood rushing to her cheeks, and heat to her belly.

Beside her, her new husband shifted closer, tightening his hold around her waist.

On the morning of her wedding day, Hermione had roused herself with the sole intention of getting through the day without screaming, or throwing a fit, or punching anybody as she was occasionally wont to do.

Draco Malfoy could probably attest to that last bit.

She had thrown on the rudest shirt she owned, and the oldest pair of jeans in her drawers. The shoes she picked were the tattiest she had in her possession. In her head, it had seemed like such a good idea to use her attire as a means to demonstrate how not cowed she was, in the face of the utterly insane rule the Ministry had put in place.

It was such a horrid outfit, her mother had peered as her as she was leaving, and asked point blank, “Darling, you’re going to a birthday party. The grunge thing is very chic right now, but can’t you at least throw on a dress? Surely they wear dresses in the Wizarding community?”

Hermione had no patience left within her, to deal with her mother’s passive aggressive habits just then. Wordlessly, she kissed her mother goodbye and strode off towards her fate, letting her rage build, and build, and build.

By the time she ascended the steps of the Ministry of Magic, she found herself fully prepared, on top of everything, to hate Remus John Lupin.

Logically, she knew that her former professor was likely not pleased about this whole debacle, but nobody was threatening to take away his wand, identity or memories. Nobody was holding a weapon to his head, threatening to destroy his entire life if he didn’t marry and fuck some pure or half-blood wizard.

No - the werewolf still had choices whereas hers had been stolen from her. In that moment, he was as much a tool of the system as Rufus Scrimgeour himself was.

Scowling, she had stormed her way into the wedding chamber at the Ministry, and in fact, had managed to hold on to her rage right up to the moment she set eyes on a weepy miserable Tonks, and a furious Ron. Not to mention a Harry who was barely holding it all together.

Their obvious distress, particularly that of the young Metamorphmagus who had all but proclaimed
her romantic intentions for Remus, put a dampener on her self-righteous anger. Who was she in the end to treat this disaster as if she were the only victim?

Hermione’s true downfall however, was getting herself a good look at her betrothed. The man had made some sort of effort to be presentable for her sake, she saw, and she had shown up looking like an overgrown child. True, his robes were a ghastly mustard yellow, but they were still formal robes.

From there, it had all gone downhill as her fury started leaking out of her like helium from a balloon.

It was to her immense relief when Remus transfigured his clothing so that they more or less matched each other in terms of bedraggledness. Relief and gratitude - here was a man who understood the symbols of her sad rebellion against a system that had failed her.

The ceremony itself had passed in a bright and nightmarish blur. While it was true she tried to distract herself from the awfulness of it all, by studying the spells they were using to bind her to Remus, she could hardly deceive herself into thinking that there was anything normal about her wedding day.

For one thing, the spells they used were archaic beasts, created during a time when it was likely considered just to punish a woman who tried to escape the terrors of her wedding bed. Nobody used them anymore - at least, nobody who wasn’t forcing hapless Muggle-borns to fulfill their political agenda. Had she attempted to flee from her husband before he took her to bed, the man could have easily found her, no matter where in the world she was.

Found her and taken her against her will…though she was hard-pressed to imagine Remus committing such a terrible, unforgivable violation against her person. From the little she knew of her former Professor, he would likely have tried to aid her escape, until the Ministry inevitably tracked her down, using the same spell signature from the binding ceremony.

The reception itself - if she could call it that - was just as ridiculous, what with Molly attempting to turn the situation into some sort of garden party. Well intentioned though the older woman clearly was, Hermione wasn’t exactly sure how an extra serving of potato salad was supposed to make everything better.

It didn’t help matters that her new husband seemed intent on avoiding her at all costs, as if she were suffering from a particularly virulent case of Dragon Pox.

She would have turned to her nearest and dearest friends for comfort, except for the fact that Harry had somehow taken on her situation as a personal affront, while Ron had decided to do what Ron did best - react.

At least Harry had a good excuse for behaving like a massive prat, what with losing Sirius and all. Ron however…

Hermione squeezed her eyes shut at the memory of their short and brutal fight.

She hadn’t wanted to burst into tears, not in front of everyone. As it were, everywhere she cast her eyes, all she could see were varying levels of pity emanating from her peers. Even Tonks, who likely had every reason to hate her, had approached her earlier in the afternoon, stumbling and fumbling over her words, trying and failing to hide the fact that she felt sorry for Hermione.

The last person she had expected to rescue her from Ron’s seething stare had been Remus. Still,
rescue her he did, and like some helpless little girl, she had accepted his help without so much as a protest.

Doubtless, she would likely pay for that misstep later on when she came face-to-face with Ron in all of his stubborn, hard-headed, insensitive glory. Not that their estrangement would be *permanent* of course - Ron could be an arse, but he was and always would be her friend. This she knew with confidence. She just wished there was a way they could speed past the awful parts, and move on back to where things were easy between them.

Not that she could ever go back to nursing what little, romantic interest she had held for him…that ship was sailing off, and sailing fast, its anchor lifted by no one other than Ron himself.

In the immediate present, Remus shifted once more beside her, withdrawing his touch from her.

To her immediate dismay, Hermione found herself feeling unmoored and bereft at the loss of his warmth. Resolutely, she forced her expression to remain neutral as she turned to glance at the man beside her.

She didn't have the words to express her fear at the prospect of what she would find, though if pressed, she had no idea at all what to expect, after...well...after.

"You're thinking very loudly," he blinked slowly at her, his voice gravelly from sleep.

"Is that a werewolf thing? Telepathy?" she asked, surprising herself with the ease in which she managed to dig up her sense of humour at all.

He squinted at her against the morning sun.

"Yes Hermione, it's part of my special lupine powers to sense when a human being is squirming like a crazed thing at...what is it...eight in the morning on a Saturday?"

"Not a morning person then," she observed dryly, grateful that he didn't seem exactly put out by her presence.

"Not exactly a normal morning for me," he admitted, dashing her hopes that they could avoid the subject of how she had ended up in his bed to begin with. A second later however, he grinned sheepishly at her as he sat up, leaning his back against his headboard. "I'm being a horrible host,"

"Not at all," she said automatically. "You've been so lovely,"

The look he shot her made her want to die out of sheer embarrassment.

"I mean to say you've been nothing but hospitable, and you have nothing to be worried about. If anything, I'm the one imposing and..." she sat up, tugging a sheet up to cover herself. An unreadable expression cut across his ridiculously handsome features as he observed her frantic actions.

"Hermione," he said very gently. "I'm not worried, you're not imposing, and the world's not ending."

Just the way he was staring at her sent Hermione reeling back to a moment that had occurred between them not six hours ago, if her math was right.

Last night, Remus had gazed at her with something that seemed suspiciously like reverence, just before he...
"Right," she croaked, mustering a weak smile. It was insane, but she found herself wanting to reach out and touch him, if only to convince herself that the previous night had in fact, happened.

Something flickered in Remus's grey eyes, the sight of which made her breath catch in her throat. Something that looked very much like hunger…it made her mouth go utterly dry, as she contemplated what it would be like if he were to fall on her once again.

Before she could have addressed the elephant in the room however, the man was already leaving the confines of the bed they had only just shared. Tugging on his trousers with admirable speed, he flashed her an easy grin, one that seemed sincere enough.

"Right then. Breakfast?" he asked cheerfully.

"I'll be right behind you," she nodded, not trusting herself to say more than that.

There was an awkward pause. Dipping his head, Remus turned and left the room, closing the door behind him.

Miserably, Hermione tucked her knees up to her chest and contemplated how much easier it had been facing Voldemort and his cadre of miscreants, than it was to look Remus in the eye after a night of mind-blowing sex. Hell, if the Dark Lord would be so kind to show up just then, she might just kiss Tom Riddle out of sheer gratitude, for giving her something she knew how to handle.

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The first time she'd slept with someone, that someone had been Viktor.

It hadn't exactly been the stuff of novels, or romantic comedies, but then again, she had told herself not to expect too much, so the experience hadn't really been as disappointing as it might have been. Hermione had never been the type of girl to fantasize endlessly about the magic of her first time. In other words, Hermione had never been Lavender Brown, or either one of the Parvati twins.

In the afterglow, Viktor had held her and kissed her forehead, telling her how much he had enjoyed her. The boy had made her feel safe and treasured, but even as she turned her gaze away, her mind was already on other things.

Such as - was Harry safe? Was he enjoying his summer? What were Ron and Ginny up to?

Eventually, Viktor had stopped speaking altogether, and it was a long time before she even deigned to notice the silence which had fallen between them. Smiling serenely into his dark eyes, she recognized that their romance had just about run its full course.

That hadn't been the last time they had coupled of course. Over a period of the three weeks, Viktor and her had both enjoyed each other, constantly finding excuses to explore all the ways they could make each other gasp and moan and sigh. Despite its non-academic nature, Hermione was pleased to find she was an apt a learner in the bedchamber, as she was at any other aspect of her life.

When finally it came time, their parting held no rancour, and Viktor, thankfully, did not seem particularly heartbroken or hurt the day she left his parent's home in Bulgaria. Indeed, over the span of the last year, their letters were still always filled with warm affection and genuine, friendly interest in each other's lives.

As Hermione dragged on her t-shirt, underwear and jeans, the young woman collected herself, forcing herself to stop thinking about how Remus had made her feel as he kissed her. How he had looked at her, and touched her as if she were the only woman in the world for him.
Instead, she reminded herself that she was exactly the type of person capable of treating sex as a footnote in a friendship.

Ducking into the bathroom in the corner, Hermione tried her best to neaten her hair, which seemed determined to remain a bestial thing. Retrieving her wand from her back pocket, Hermione began casting some familiar incantations aimed at her wild curls.

When Professor McGonagall had gingerly informed her that Remus expressed no interest in being a part of a true marriage, Hermione had filed that information away with indeterminable relief, though she had not been surprised in the least. Why would Remus even want to saddle himself with a girl her age?

Despite her knee-jerk resentment towards the wizard for his part in this sorry tale at the very first, after hours of contemplation, Hermione came to the difficult realization that it was a good thing that it hadn’t fallen to Ron or even Harry, to get her out of a mess that wasn’t her doing.

Not only did she maintain that she was too young to focus on any sort of serious relationship in the first place, much less a marriage, she didn't think it was quite fair to everyone involved, for them to become too attached to her.

The life she had lead ever since she joined Hogwarts had placed her in precarious position after precarious position. Depending on the day, she was occasionally categorized under a group of people who were being targeted for extermination.

Better that nobody pinned their hopes on her, for any sort of a future because frankly, when all was said and done, she wasn't sure if she had one before her. A real one, with family, children and all that stuff other people got to think about.

The fact that Remus had felt the same way was a boon in her eyes, and she could not, would not find it within herself to think any different even now.

Satisfied with her conclusions, Hermione sighed and tucked her wand away. Wandering out of the bathroom, she reached for the door, which separated her from her newly acquired spouse. With a deep breath, she stepped out into Remus's living room.

In the kitchen to her left, Remus was hurrying about the kitchen, putting together what smelled like bacon, eggs and toast. Her stomach rumbled, as she remembered with a start she hadn't had any supper the night before.

"Almost done," he called, pulling out cups and saucers with one hand, while waving his wand in the direction of the stove. Evidently, he had found himself a wrinkled t-shirt from somewhere. Truly, the man lived like a bachelor who was comfortable in his ways. "Milk and sugar in your tea?"

"Just milk. Well. Some sugar." she considered. “Yes, actually I'd like sugar. Lots of sugar.”

"So milk and sugar then?" he asked flatly, though there was amusement in his voice.

"If you want to put it that way,"

"Good god woman," he muttered good-naturedly.

"I heard that," she retorted, before turning to survey the rest of his living room.

The previous night, she had been so caught up with everything, she hadn't gotten a good look at her
surroundings. In the light of day, however, she found herself pleasantly surprised by what she was seeing.

Deliberately steering clear of the couch - and the glasses both herself and Remus had left on the floor - Hermione drifted towards the bookshelves lining the walls and ran her fingers over the spines of various tomes and paperbacks.

"You're a fan of Muggle literature," she stated in surprise.

“Yes. Why?” he said, setting down two plates of food on the dining table a few feet from her. Pausing for a moment as if he couldn’t decide on what he ought to do next, eventually, he moved to stand beside her.

"Orson Welles, William Gibson...Stephen Hawking?” she quirked a brow at him.

"What? He's a respected physicist," he sounded slightly defensive, though his lips were quirked in a half smile.

"Depends on who you ask," Hermione scoffed.

"I don't know a lot about the Muggle world, but I’m quite sure he's considered a genius,” Remus tugged the book out and flipped through its pages. "Maybe not a genius like you, but then who is?”

“Who is Neil Gaiman?” she wondered, pulling out a copy of what was obviously a comic book.

"Who is..." he sputtered indignantly as his eyes widened. "Are you telling me you've never heard of him?"

"I don't read comic books or fiction," she smirked.

“This explains a lot," he replied, though his smile belied his mockery. “First of all, that's called a ‘graphic novel’, not a ‘comic book’. You can borrow some of his stuff if you'd like. It'll change your world,”

Doubtful, Hermione thought, but decided against outwardly condescending against her host’s tastes.

"Perhaps," she sniffed instead, before bursting out in giggles at yet another surprise find. "Do I spy Jane Austen in your collection?"

"Let me guess, it's too girly for you," he sighed, reaching out and steering her towards the dining table by the elbow. She was too fascinated by what she was seeing on his shelves to even register that he was touching her.

Not until they were seated across from each other, until he had released his light grasp on her, that she found to her chagrin that she liked his touch.

"It’s not a fancy spread,” he told her apologetically as he picked up his fork.

“The fact that you even bothered making me breakfast instead of kicking me out on my arse is really more than I can ask for," she joked sardonically.

To her relief, he made a face at her, and replied, “I considered it, but then I thought you’d just jinx me the next time you saw me,”

“Oh come now,” she picked up a piece of toast and began slathering it in jam. “What’s a few
curses between friends?"

He seemed rather pleased by her choice of words, she noted. Good.

“So why don’t you read fiction?” he asked curiously, swallowing his food.

“Why bother, when real life is so much more exciting?” she asked lightly. “Ten months out of a year, I live in a castle. I’ve traveled backwards in time, and I’ve seen dragons not twenty feet away from me…”

“Point taken,” he laughed. “You know, I’ve never seen a dragon myself.”

“Oversized lizards with a temper.” she waved a fork flippantly.

“You should try some fiction sometime you know.” he sipped from his steaming mug. He took his tea without sugar or milk, she noticed. “I find fiction builds empathy. You get to see someone else’s point of view, someone else’s opinion of the world,”

“Are you suggesting if Tom Riddle had read more novels as a child, he might not be the rampaging madman he is today?” she asked thoughtfully as she licked her fingers free of crumbs.

Deliberately, she ignored the way his eyes followed her actions, or that strange hunger that flickered in those grey depths once again.

“You never know. Perhaps if he had read more…let’s see…” he rose from his seat and approached his bookcase. After a moment, he pulled out a small, thin paperback and waved it at her. “Had he been introduced to William Blake, he might have gained an appreciation for the world. Maybe he wouldn’t be so keen on watching it burn.”

“It’s just fiction, it’s not magic,” Hermione flushed once again as she parsed through her own words. Remus began laughing at her. Pushing aside her embarrassment, she asked in genuine curiosity, “Why do you know so much about Muggle fiction and literature? Hogwarts certainly doesn’t have an arts curriculum.”

“Ah, the tragic tale of my life,” he said playfully, though there was something sad in his voice as he said this. Replacing the book of poetry, he returned to his place across from her. “As you well know, I’m not exactly highly sought after for most professions. So like most unemployed people in the Muggle world…well, I considered going back to school. I took some courses here and there, read some books…”

“Fascinating,” she murmured without thinking, picking up her own mug of tea, still warm from some heating charm.

“Is it?” he asked quietly, looking away.

“Why’d you stop?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t really feel as if I belonged in the Muggle world…not that I’ve been made to feel as if I belong in this one either, even if it’s most definitely mine.”

“I have to be honest, your home isn’t quite what I expected,” she said after a long moment, changing the subject.

“What did you think it’d be? Some hovel set into the ground?” he asked evenly.
“No of course not,” she responded, pursing her lips. “It’s quite nice to be honest. Cosy…and clean, for a man living alone,“

“So now all men are dreadful slobs?” he teased.

“Not what I said,” she said hastily. “I mean…”

“Oh calm thyself,” he rolled his eyes.

The whole time she had known him, Remus had always been one of the the Adults. Capital ‘A’. First he had been a teacher, and then he’d been one of the senior members of the Order. The man seated across from her…the same man who had ravished her silly…she had no idea who he was.

Against her better judgement, she found herself suddenly wanting very badly to change that.

“Despite my earlier, failed forays into the Muggle world,” he started. “I have found myself the perfect career.”

Leaning forwards, Hermione waited.

“I’m a bicycle courier,” he waited on her reaction. “The hours aren’t fixed, and I get paid for every completed task.”

“That’s…” she blinked after a moment. “Oh but that’s bloody brilliant,”

He smiled smugly at her praise. “Gringotts has a system of transferring Muggle funds out of every bank in the world for a nominal fee. The goblins are nothing if not single-minded in their drive for profit.”

“It seems that you and I have made homes in each other’s world.” she laughed delightedly.

“This is your world too Hermione,” Remus said, suddenly turning serious. It rather spoiled the moment, in her opinion.

“Is it?” she asked. It was her turn to look away. “I don’t know if everyone feels that way.”

“Hermione…” he sighed, and now he sounded once again like her Professor. Like the man she was familiar with. “You can’t let this get in the way of what…of who you are. You’re a brilliant, powerful witch. We’ve done the hard part, and now you’re in the clear.”

The witch snorted.

“I’m serious. This…whatever this is…” he gestured between the two of them. “This is a blip. You already know, or at least I hope you do, that I don’t expect…”

“Yesterday we got married because they told me that’s what I had to do to be considered a fit member of this society,” Hermione interrupted. “What’s next? Shall I pop out a child to build the half-blood population? Or breed with a dozen other pureblood wizards as if I’m some sort of broodmare?”

Across the dining table, Remus sat, perfectly still. At last, picking up his mug, he took a sip from the dregs of his tea.

“No,” he said very simply.

“Remus…”
“I said ‘no’,” he had yet to blink. “That will never happen. I won’t allow it.”

“You and what army?” she asked, trying to bring back the jovial mood from before.

He continued studying her features for a long, quiet moment. Finally, he sighed. “With you at my back, who needs an army?”

Her shoulders slumped in relief.

“I’m serious however. None of what’s happened here should get in the way of your life. I will not stand in your way, not insomuch as I can help it.” he looked down. “I mean it Hermione…I will not stop you from doing what you want, or…or being with whomever you want,”

“Ah. So are we having the ‘let’s sleep with other people’ talk?” she asked, suddenly unsure where she ought to look.

Had she kept her eyes on him, she might have witnessed the fleeting, murderous expression which darted across his features. As it stood, she was too busy counting flecks on the ceiling to notice the way his knuckles whitened momentarily.

“I want you to be happy,” he said at last, sounding as if he were picking his words very carefully.

“I would like that for you as well,” Hermione closed her eyes. “I’m afraid however, happiness is in rather short supply as of late.”

For a long time, the both of them sat in silence, not looking at each other, or even anything in particular.

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Before she left, Hermione found Remus shoving a book in her hands.


“Read it,” he grinned. “You’ll like it, promise,”

“I rather doubt I’d like a comic book Remus,” she chided from the safety of his front stoop.

“You’ll like this one.”

He offered her his elbow; she hoped he didn’t take note of the split second she hesitated before she looped her arm through his own. The world slipped away, and when it came back, she found herself in London, watching the Muggle world from the relative safety of a sheltered alcove.

Clucking her tongue, Hermione tucked the book under her arm as she stepped carefully away from him. Finding her courage, she said very firmly, “I expect us to become better friends from now on. I hope you realize that.”

“Hermione…” he looked uncomfortable.

“I’m serious. It’s shameful that we don’t speak more often, especially considering that you were always my favourite Prof…member of the Order. I wish I had known you were a fellow bibliophile, though I suppose I should have expected that. Perhaps your taste is a bit on the wanting side, but…”

“That’s rather uncalled for…” he rolled his eyes, though a certain blush suffused his own cheeks.
“But the fact is…the fact is I want us to be friends.” she tried to sound imperious, and prayed he couldn’t hear the wavering quality in her voice.

“Friends,” he chuckled, leaning one shoulder against the grimy wall of the alcove. “Fine. Friends.”

“Good.” she smiled, and turned to leave. “My first Hogsmeade weekend is at the end of September. Expect to hear from me,”

“Bossy wench,” he muttered. “Are you sure you don’t want me to walk you home? Seems a bit…”

“It’s fine, I could use the walk.” her smile turned watery.

Nodding stiffly, his smile suddenly no longer quite so bright either, Remus simply watched as she turned to leave. Striding away into the sea of humanity with her head held high, Hermione had the distinct impression he did not once take his gaze off her for as long as she was in sight.
The Courtship: Chapter 1

Methodically, Remus cleared away the small mess he had made while preparing breakfast for two.

Refusing to succumb to misplaced sentimentality, with a wave of his wand, he shifted the glasses on the floor by his sofa towards the kitchen, and set about ensuring that everything would be scrubbed clean of his departed guest. For almost an hour, Remus set about scouring his kitchen and small parlour clean of any trace of Hermione Granger. When he was satisfied that he had succeeded, the wizard turned at last to his empty bedroom.

Crossing the threshold, it finally occurred to Remus how futile his efforts had been.

The room still smelled like Hermione. It smelled like Hermione, and woman, and sex, and everything he hadn’t meant to start wanting. Were he to clean his sheets, his more-than-human senses would still pick up the traces she had left behind for weeks to come. Still, he thought resolutely, still, he had to at least try.

Marching towards his bed, he began the process of ripping away the pillow cases and bedsheets. Rolling the fabric into a large bundle, he was about to deposit his burden into his laundry basket when his grey eyes spied the very last thing he wanted to see.

On the floor, a tattered scrap of cotton, metal and plastic waited.

It was, he understood, the piece of lingerie he had ripped from Hermione’s body the night before, when he’d started losing his goddamn mind. Dropping his burden, Remus slumped down on his bare mattress and stared at the ruined brassiere.

He was acting like a complete lunatic. So he had just slept with Hermione Granger, so what? How many times had he done the same thing with other women? What the hell was his problem now?

The plan was always to fulfill the archaic requirements set on them by Scrimgeour’s peons; there ought not be anything more than that.

Still however…still, as he sat alone in his bedroom, encased in the lingering scent of wild honey and magic, he couldn’t stop thinking of how she had felt under his hands mere hours ago. In the echoes of his memories, he heard again the way his name had spilled from her lips like an endless prayer. The young woman had writhed beneath him like a goddess come undone, and he had relished every exquisite moment of her unfettered abandon.

It didn’t help that she had woken up still wanting him, no matter that she seemed determined to resist her own inclinations. The heavy, heady hints of her arousal had surrounded him like a fog, and all he had wanted to do was bury himself inside of her again. All he had to do was touch her, and she would have opened herself to him once more…

He ought to be grateful that she didn’t hate him. That she had looked at him, and still wanted to call him ‘friend’.

Instead, here he sat, filled with an insane desire for something he had no right to want.

Though that last part wasn’t exactly true, a treacherous voice whispered in his head.

Growling, Remus rose to his feet and ruthlessly snatched up the tattered scrap of fabric. Digging for his wand, his first thought was to cast an Incendio - perhaps the smoke might clear his head,
along with further evidence of the witch who had given herself to him for all of one night.

With the spell on the tip of his tongue, Remus found himself reminded of the way she had gasped, the moment he had torn the bloody thing off her.

“Ah, fucking hell,” he swore aloud.

Remus curled his hand like a fist around the offending object and lowered his wand. Casting his gaze about his bedroom, he made a rash decision. Flinging open the door to his closet, he threw the destroyed undergarment somewhere into its depths and slammed the entrance shut.

***

Two days later, nursing a hangover that could have felled a giant, Remus was back at the Courier office as if nothing in his life had changed at all. For the rest of the week, he resumed his routine in London, racing past stuck traffic and dodging irate drivers.

More than once, he found himself ready and eager to inflict violence on yet another arsehole behind the wheel of a BMW. The only thing that stopped him from actually punching the daylights out of more than a few overly entitled brats, was the knowledge that he would have probably accidentally killed them, what with his considerably greater physical strength.

One long day passed after another, until finally, August came to an end.

Just as life started to feel like it could be normal again, like he could go back to a time before he had accidentally become a married man, the quiet war being waged under all their noses began very noticeably to implode.

First, news filtered through of Igor Karkaroff’s death. His passing mattered little to Remus, considering who it was he had once served. In the end, the man had been nothing but a turncoat, who had sold his allegiance to Voldemort for his own, sorry skin. If there was anything shocking about the matter, it was the fact that it had taken so long for the Dark Lord to exact his retribution on the former Headmaster of Durmstrang. To the werewolf's recollection, foolish little Regulus Black had barely survived a week after his desertion of the Death Eaters.

Then, Florean Fortescue, the man who had sold him his favourite ice-creams all his life, was dragged to his death by the followers of the Dark Lord. There was little doubt in anyone’s mind that he had suffered greatly before he was finally allowed to die.

How the simple vendor of treats had come to attract the attention of the Death Eaters, the wizard had no idea. Regardless, it felt like a deeply sobering loss, never mind that he had never really known Fortescue.

At last, Albus Dumbledore’s newest message arrived, with a mission suited to him and him alone. It wasn’t a new mission by any means but it certainly indicated the obvious.

The ravens of war were circling low, and they were getting hungrier by the second. Crushing Albus’s letter in one hand, Remus glared into the shadows of his own home, wondering whom he had offended in his previous life, to be born to such a time and such an existence.

***

The very first missive came to him in the middle of September, not two weeks after he was well aware that school had already started.
It also happened to be the week after he started the process of tracking his own kind down in the wilderness; his true brethren, none of whom were exactly the epitome of warmth and welcome.

Shuffling up to his front door, weary and disheartened, Remus stopped as soon as he saw the Horned Owl on his stoop, hooting impatiently at him, as if urging him to hurry up.

The large bird stretched one scaly claw out in his direction and waited.

"I haven't got any treats," he told the churlish creature. "If you peck at me, I'll be very annoyed and when I get annoyed, I stop being very nice,"

Blinking at him, the Owl flapped its wings, indicating wordlessly that it had better things to do, than sit around listening to the ramblings of a tired, middle-aged werewolf. Hesitantly, Remus reached out and retrieved the tightly rolled up scroll attached to the animal’s proffered leg.

As expected, the damned bird nipped sharply at him, before promptly soaring off.

"Little shit," he muttered, shaking his stinging hand as he let himself indoors.

Pouring himself a drink, he unrolled the scroll, and found himself staring down at a very, very short note, one which was penned with care and precision. There was no need for him to look for a signature, when he knew exactly who had written it; after all, he had spent an entire year grading her perfectly composed essays.

"I don't understand this comic book. Is this horror? Fantasy? Is Morpheus a superhero? I've been meaning to write, but I don't own an Owl, and I didn't know how Muggle post would get to you."

Remus couldn't stop himself from smiling, suddenly feeling much less tired than he did mere moments ago. Setting his tumbler down, he read and re-read her little message, wondering in the wisdom of responding to her at all.

By the time he had washed, and gotten himself ready for sleep, the wizard still wasn't certain what the best course of action ought to be. Not that it mattered - on his kitchen counter, the small square of parchment Hermione had sent him waited patiently for him to make up his mind, never protesting his deliberate disinterest in it.

***

The next night found Remus standing outside a shabby cottage, somewhere on the wild moors of Scotland, far from anything that remotely resembled human habitation.

"You think Albus Dumbledore would be the one to grant us a better life?" the woman before him questioned disdainfully. "If I fought on your…side…he’d what? Help me?"

Elsie had been staying out in the middle of this untamed landscape for months. The last of what goodwill she used to have among the people of her former village had been completely exhausted, he’d been told.

When he had found her, when he had taken in the lonely, and somewhat impoverished state of her existence, very briefly, Remus had considered offering her some career advice. Ultimately however, he decided it was far safer to stick with Albus's message.

"I think the alternatives are worse," the wizard stuck his hands in the pockets of his blazer, refusing to appear affected by the razor-sharp autumnal wind as it howled across the land.
The full moon was only a week away. While Remus’s own symptoms were kept under control by the Wolfsbane Potion he had been dosing himself with, in his eyes, it was clear that Elsie was far less capable at holding her own beast back. Prowling to and fro before him, the woman looked more wolf than human.

"I see he sends you out like an errand boy, like a faithful pet," she observed, her voice like sandpaper.

"I'm no one's pet," Remus said flatly, masking his irritation. Elsie was far from the first to make that observation…and she wouldn't be the last.

"I simply don't want to live in a world where people are being hunted down for the crime of being born," his voice was steady.

Stupidly, he found himself conjuring the image Hermione smiling at him from the other end of his small dining table; he conjured the sound of her laughing voice as she bantered with him on the merits of fiction.

In his lurid imagination, Remus found himself gazing upon a broken Hermione being brought down by a curse, flung at her by some faceless, pitiless Death Eater.

"It's a cruel world Lupin, you and I know that better than most. Why should I choose any side when no one chooses mine?"

"To do what's right?" he asked flippantly, already sensing Elsie was a lost cause.

"You look at me, and even you see a monster," she informed him.

"I..."

"Remus Lupin, don't be a fool. Don't fight a battle for those who would never fight for you," she sighed, moving closer to him, close enough she could have kissed him. Lifting a slender finger, the woman began tracing runic patterns against his covered chest.

"Stay with me. Run with me under the light of the full moon, and I'll give you my secrets. I'll whelp you a dozen cubs you can call your own. Together, we will build our own, perfect kingdom."

There was a wild beauty to Elsie, what with her brilliant copper hair and her piercing blue eyes. Gently, he reached up and plucked away her roving hand.

"I'm afraid that's not in the cards for me," he told her, though not unkindly.

"Bound to another are you?" she smiled a sharp smile.

"What?" grey eyes narrowed.

"Why else refuse my offer?" she demanded, placing her hands on her generous hips. Humour shone from her eyes like twin stars.

He had been quite wrong about Elsie’s lupine nature dominating her human form - in that moment, the being in front of him was very much a woman. A strikingly gorgeous one at that, he thought as he considered the curves of her bosom, the span of her waist. Grey eyes traced the way white teeth bit sensuously at a full lower lip.
"You're as lonely as I am, it's plain to see. These people you fight for, would they fight for you? Do they grant you succour when you need it?"

"I think..." Remus sighed and turned away from the lovely picture she made, under a sky full of stars. "I think this conversation has run its full course. Goodbye Elsie...though I do hope you change your mind,

"I won't." she promised liltingly from behind him.

It must have been Remus’s imagination, because out the corner of his eye, he saw the faintest glimmer of a scarlet wolf darting out into the grasses.

"I know.” he took a half step to the left, and manifested at his own front door.

Pushing past his heavy wards, Remus caught sight of Hermione’s letter, waiting in silence on his kitchen counter. Heart beating erratically in his chest, he summoned his quill with a quiet “Accio,”.

***

“Pay attention to the words and not just the pretty pictures.

How’s school? R.L.

P.S. Ever thought about using a bicycle courier?”

***

“The artist isn't as subtle as he thinks he is - he’s drawn phallic symbols everywhere, all thinly disguised as metaphor.

School is fine, though I’m not sure about Horace Slughorn.

(here, Remus saw traces of words that had been spelled away)

Between you and I however...there’s something wrong with Dumbledore isn’t there? His hand seems...withered, I want to say.

First Hogsmeade weekend this Saturday - can I entice you to lunch at the Hog's Head?

H.G." 

Fingering the letter, Remus stared contemplatively at her words, taking in all she had to say, and wondering what it was that she hadn’t.

***

"Wouldn’t you rather be with your friends, instead of a beat-up old wolf?

I don’t know what to make of Albus’s hand...the man has always kept his own counsel. I will say this - I shudder to think what could have been so dangerous, as to have inflicted such an injury on a wizard as powerful as he is.

How are things with Harry? And Ron?”

***
"Harry's driving me crazy; he's cheating at Potions, and has been since school started. Things with Ron are better, especially now that he's got a girlfriend who fawns over him and who can't seem to extricate herself from his elbow. A sticking charm couldn't have done a better job.

Between Harry's pig-headedness and Lavender Brown's company, I'll be happy for a change in scenery. H.G."

***

The pub was as dark and dingy as it had always been, although he had never quite remembered the window’s being quite as dirty…and that was saying something.

“Everything alright? Are we expecting trouble?” Aberforth had whispered the moment he was close enough to Remus, looking more than a little surprised to see the wizard.

“No, it’s not like that,” Remus shuffled, wondering if perhaps he had made a miscalculation in accepting Hermione’s invitation.

Had he any sense, he would have walked out the front door and sent the witch an owl much, much later, apologizing profusely for his absence.

“Oh.” the barman relaxed. “Drink?”

Remus sat down on a tall stool, careful not to lay bare skin on any surface. “Bit of Irish whiskey if you don’t mind. Whatever you’ve got,”

“Irish whiskey is it?” Aberforth looked amused as he peered at the wizard. “Not firewhiskey?”

He would have preferred a firewhiskey, but he was also aware it had a lower alcoholic content. And right then, Remus for some reason felt as if he needed a bit of liquid courage.

“I’ve developed a taste for it.”

“Well I suppose it’s five o’clock somewhere,”

Surprised, Remus turned around and found himself staring into familiar warm, brown eyes.

“I’m an adult. I can do whatever I want, when I want,” he informed Hermione, doing his best to sound stern.

Carefully, he took in her appearance, unconsciously trying to assure himself that she was well. Outside of looking a little pale, she seemed thankfully healthy.

“But isn’t being an adult understanding why you shouldn’t do what you want, when you want?” she questioned, hopping onto the stool beside him and undoing her fall coat. Wild chestnut curls were bound in a thick braid, though Remus could tell that her efforts had been nothing, if not an exercise in futility.

“Here’s your fancy whiskey,” Aberforth slid a glass across to Remus, eyeing Hermione in mild curiosity. It was a look that caused Remus to wonder how much the barman knew. What had occurred in August was no secret - which the werewolf supposed, was the whole bloody point of the marriage to begin with.

“Some Slytherins had demanded to know why she hadn’t been carted off yet,” the Professor sounded smug and angry all at once. “Miss Granger told them all quite clearly that she happened to
have found the solution to her problems. That was before she told them to shove it...I had to deduct points for language unfortunately...after all, she is a Prefect. Really, I should have awarded her points for restraint. In her shoes, I might not have been so kind.”

There was no stopping the grin that crept across his features as he took in the older woman’s words. All too easily, he could picture Hermione expressing her wrath efficiently through the excellent use of certain words.

If the older woman had anything to say of his reaction to her news, she kept it well enough to herself.

“Butterbeer for me please,” Hermione nodded her own greeting to the barman, before turning the weight of her attention to Remus. “Are you alright? You look a bit tired.”

“It’s fine. It’s just...” the werewolf looked around. Satisfied they weren’t within hearing range of anyone, he continued. “The full moon was last night, and...”

“Oh!” her hands began fidgeting as guilt creased her brow. “I wish you could have told me. I wouldn’t have insisted...”

“Hermione, I still need to eat,” he reminded her in amusement. “And it’s not like I haven’t done this before. You know, get out of bed after...well, after. It’s also not unknown for me to say, eat lunch, the day after a full moon,”

“Right,” she flushed sheepishly.

There was something fundamentally wrong with the way he kept on thinking of how nice it would be, if she would just lean a little closer...

“Have you finished the book?” he asked, finally reaching for his whiskey and taking a large sip. His gaze fell on the hideous, mounted hog’s head above the bar.

“I’m actually pretty close to the end now,” she accepted her beverage and took a sip. “I’m starting to enjoy it,”

“Hermione Granger, reading and liking fiction. A comic book at that.” Remus affected a shocked expression, clapping a hand to his mouth. “Well I never,”

“Oh shut up you,” she rolled her eyes and batted lightly at him.

“Do you want to tell me your favourite part?” he asked teasingly. “Would you like to regale me with your analysis on it’s deeper metaphors?”

Hermione scowled at him, which only made him laugh harder.

The afternoon passed quickly after that, and to his own surprise, Remus found he had enjoyed every minute of it. Even Aberforth’s inquisitive stares did nothing to detract from his pleasure.

For almost four hours, they spoke on what felt like nothing of any import, but still, the wizard found himself listening closely to all the young woman next to him had to say. In turn, she seemed eager to get his opinions on matters, ranging from the merits of Muggle scientific research, down to the discussion on why pop music seemed to have taken a downward spiral in quality as of recent years.

“...obvious, we live too comfortably. There’s no fight left in our music,” she concluded as they
finally stepped out of the dingy establishment. Somehow, she missed the irony in her own analysis. “I mean honestly, why anyone cared about the dissolution of Take That, I will never understand.”

In the cool air of early autumn, Remus spotted the telltale shiver that ran across her shoulders under her thin jacket. Quashing down the urge to sling an arm around her for the sake of keeping her warm, he fussed at his own scarf.

“This was fun, but how about I pick the place next time? This pub always leaves me wanting a bath,” he asked, casting a trepidatious glance over his shoulder, hoping Aberforth hadn’t heard him through the slightly open door. The barman was a good man, even if he wasn’t keen on hygiene.

“Next time?” she asked lightly, rocking on her heels.

Turning back to her, Remus tried desperately to think of a way to compensate for his little slip-up.

“There’s not a lot of places in Hogsmeade,” she pointed out, before he could start backpedaling. The clever witch had obviously caught on to his momentary panic. “Madam Rosmarta’s is always too crowded, Madam Puddifoot’s is nauseating…”

“Well…” he ran a nervous hand through his sandy hair. “It’s not exactly a hardship for me to apparate the both of us anywhere else…”

Hermione studied him in a manner that reminded Remus of the fact that the witch wasn’t quite as young as he kept on pretending she was.

“I suppose it’d be alright if I left Harry behind for a few hours,” she said quietly.

It occurred to Remus that until very recently, the only times he had ever truly interacted with Hermione was when she was running around with James’s son. Usually, she was aiding the brash, young wizard as he flitted from one misadventure to the another. Either that, or she was always outright risking her own life trying to save Harry, and all those around him.

With a hidden grimace, he recalled the long, puckered scar at her side. An extremely unfamiliar tide of resentment rose in his chest, as he considered that Hermione had earned that wound for the sake of Harry’s lack of forethought.

“He can take care of himself for a bit can’t he?” Remus asked, his voice tighter than he wanted it to be.

“I suppose so.” she looked around her. “Dumbledore’s just up the hill, so if anything happens…”

Pushing aside that flare of irrational something burning through his veins, Remus tried once more to articulate his thoughts.

“You can’t protect him all the time,” he said very carefully. “More than that, you can’t keep haring after him every time…”

“…he decides to run off into the unknown?” she nodded as a vertical crease appeared between her eyes. “I can’t seem to stop myself. He’s my best friend. I can’t sit by, knowing he might be in danger…you understand, I know you do.”

There wasn’t much he could have said in argument because she was right. In fascination, he studied the way in which lines started appearing at the corners of her eyes as she frowned into the distance.
In a few years, he reflected absently, perhaps even less, those lines would become a permanent fixture on her still-youthful visage. The crease in her forehead would never leave her, an inevitable scar inflicted by time and hardship.

“Next Hogsmeade weekend. I promise you, I’ll have you back in Hogwarts before they send out the Aurors to drag you back to your common room,” he said, ignoring the voice in his head telling him he was making a huge mistake.

Snapping back into the moment, Hermione looked up at him from under her lashes. The witch seemed pleased as she parsed his words.

“I’ll hold you to that,” she said softly.

Swallowing hard, Remus wondered what in the hell he thought he was doing.
“Harry’s still utterly obsessed with a certain Slytherin.

(Once more, he caught the hint of words that had been spelled away; this time, he thought he saw the faint outline of the word ‘berk’.)

As if Draco Malfoy is smart enough to be any sort of evil mastermind.

H.G.”

***

“You’re not Harry’s mother. You would probably have given Lily a run for her money though.

Stop worrying, you’re going to get all wrinkly before your time. You are making time for fun aren’t you? It’s supposed to be the best years of your life and all that rot.

R.L.”

***

An Order meeting had been hastily called, summoning Remus at the end of a particularly gruelling day riding through London. Descending a set of stairs with Martin, Remus’s gaze caught the tell-tale glow of an approaching Patronus coming down a side street.

“Bugger,” he practically groaned, clutching his bicycle to him.

“Everything alright?” the Muggle beside him asked in genuine concern.

“I…yes,” Remus thought fast, albeit not creatively. “Martin, I just remembered I have to run. I’m so very sorry to skip out on our pint…next week though, on me, promise,”

Leaping fluidly onto his bicycle, Remus rode at full speed. Spotting an alley just up ahead, the wizard swung sharply to the right, and in doing so, tilted both himself and his bicycle perilously close to the ground. Twisting his body and forcing himself to bend as one with the bicycle, the werewolf skilfully manoeuvred himself back to an upright position, before he sped down the dark and narrow passage.

As he intended, the bright shape of Arthur’s weasel trailed after him the entire way.

Finally, certain that there were no Muggles close by, Remus pulled to a stop and swung his bicycle around, feeling a massive rush of pride at all the stunts he had just pulled. Again, he wondered what James would think now of his bookish friend, displaying such a ridiculous amount of athletic prowess.
The *Patronus*, as if sensing his surrender, slowed down with far more grace, before it gave him its short and urgent message.

What relief Remus was experiencing sputtered its way to an ignominious death as the man took in the words, “There has been an attack at Hogwarts,”

Within the hour, the werewolf found himself standing by the hearth at 12 Grimmauld Place, hanging on to every word Snape uttered whilst doing his best not to betray the dread that crawled unmercifully over his skin.

“…meant for Harry Potter. No one knows who gave it to Katie Bell however. The girl will live, but her recovery will take a long time. The artifact itself…”

Snape kept up a lengthy explanation of what his findings thus far had been. When finally the other man paused to take a sip of water, Remus took a deep breath, praying that no one else in the room had noticed the way his shoulders had tightened to an impossible degree.

Unsure if his voice would give his innermost thoughts away, then realizing at last he couldn’t keep his silence, not on something as important as this, Remus asked, “Did anybody else get hurt? Did um, Hermione, or Ron, are they…”

While it was true he was absolutely appalled that this Katie girl had been so terribly abused, Remus was ashamed of himself, for not caring more that this unfortunate student had been poisoned in Harry’s stead.

“I would have mentioned it if your wife had been injured,” Snape scowled, his irritation at the fore. The former Potions Master spat the word ‘wife’ as a sharp accusation; as a weapon he was tossing against an enemy. The room shifted as one, as they all turned to stare at Remus.

“Hermione is safe,” McGonagall interjected. There was no mistaking the hard edge in her voice, or the distinctly disapproving manner with which she regarded Remus.

Cheeks flushing an ugly red in the face of public chastisement, a rush of resentment flooded the wizard. How dare these people judge him for something they had imposed upon him? He had done what they had wanted, and now…now they looked at him as if he was some delusional, middle-aged lecher, when all he had done was ask if two of his former students were safe.

Tonks cast him a curious look from the corner where she was standing with her arms crossed, even as Bill Weasley shrugged helplessly in what appeared to be actual sympathy.

From her armchair in the centre of the parlour, Molly seemed about to cry as she said, “Oh that poor girl. Who could have done such a thing? Oh Merlin, what if it had been Ginny?”

Standing behind their mother’s chair, Fred and George cast each other looks of utter exasperation, though it was clear that the tidings had shaken the brothers from their usual, jocular demeanour.

Belatedly, Remus remembered that the boys had been at school with Katie, and might even have been in the same year as the girl. As the twins shifted uneasily, his sharp eyes caught sight of their gleaming wedding bands. It was a sobering reminder that his wasn’t the only life that had so recently been disrupted.

The boys had fled to America, to avoid being conscripted into marriages with partners not of their own choosing. Despite the fact that they had wedded brides they had picked for themselves, the older wizard rather doubted they had imagined themselves tied down in matrimony at such a young age. Indeed, what with their new business, getting married had likely been the very last thing on
their list of priorities.

Compelling himself to focus on the issue at hand, rather than miring himself in a swamp of undeserved self-pity, Remus turned his attention back to Snape’s droning.

When the meeting finally adjourned, Bill strode over and peered at Remus in what seemed to be sincere concern.

“Did you maybe want to grab a drink?” the other wizard asked. “You look like you could use one,”

“Not tonight,” the werewolf shook his head as he donned his coat and scarf. “Next time,”

“Alright.” Bill sighed.

“Sorry,” Remus said tiredly. He looked to the rest of the Order, who in turn mostly seemed eager not to pay any attention to him. “It’s just…”

“No need to explain,” Bill muttered, blue eyes flashing in sympathetic irritation. “Everyone’s being a bit immature at the moment if you ask me. Don’t be a stranger though yeah?”

Unsure how he ought to respond, Remus ducked his head and hurried off.

***

“Will you bring me the third book this Saturday?”

H.G.”

***

Remus stared at her most recent note in annoyance; she had only just sent this, perhaps even less than two hours ago.

A girl had been attacked at her school, and here, she wanted to borrow more of his comic books?

Slamming her short letter down on his kitchen counter, the werewolf growled, reaching to pour himself another generous tot of Ogden’s Old.

It had only been two weeks since he had last seen Hermione in person, when he had brought her into Muggle London, far from the prying eyes of their own fellow wizards. They had chatted for hours about books and school and work.

Strolling through the crowds of shoppers and pedestrians, as they discussed the sense and senselessness of London city planning, Hermione had given him little indication that things at Hogwarts were getting more precarious. She wasn’t even giving him any real hints now, after what had only just transpired.

Taking a large gulp of firewhiskey, he almost missed the subtle way in which the air around him simmered and changed ever so slightly. That is, until a familiar scent breached his senses, causing him to rub tiredly at his face as he understood that his solitude was about to be quite disrupted.

Slowly and silently, Remus began counting backwards from ten. When he got to ‘two’, someone knocked at his door.

Because he really didn’t want to face his visitor, Remus dragged his feet as he approached his front entrance. On the threshold, the wizard hesitated for a long moment before reluctantly, he opened
Tonks stood before him, shuffling guiltily and looking as if she had no idea where to put her arms. Her hair kept shifting between colours, refusing to settle on any one shade. One second it was a metallic blue, the next it was a bright, emerald green. Likely, it reflected whatever emotional turmoil was occurring inside that restless brain of hers.

“Are you staying or going?” he asked resignedly. “The cold’s getting in.”

“I…yes. Right,” she smiled slightly as he stepped aside, allowing the Metamorphmagus indoors. Closing the door behind her, he observed as she drifted over to his settee, more careful than usual not to knock anything over. The woman paused for a second, before she folded herself awkwardly down upon the sofa.

Prior to August, while he wouldn’t necessarily have categorized his relationship with the Auror as a ‘romance’, he had nonetheless, spent enough time becoming intimately familiar with her habits and mannerisms. A lot of their interactions had taken place right where she was sitting, against those very cushions she now reclined against.

In the present, Tonks looked inquiringly up at him, her eyes settling into a steady aquamarine.

“How are you?” she asked, twisting to face him.

“I’m fine. I’m great.” he tried for a grin.

“You’re lying,” she observed with her usual frankness.

“Dora…” Remus wondered if it were possible to spontaneously combust without having to cast any spells. He really didn’t have much energy just then, to deal with whatever it was she wanted to discuss.

“Nowadays, every time I see you, you seem so lost and so tired,” the woman reached out to touch his knee, only to draw back when he flinched away unthinkingly. “And honestly, I’m getting tired of the way you’ve been looking right through me,”

“You’re taking it a bit personally,” he said, though he immediately regretted his words when he saw the hurt look in her eyes.

“You’re taking it a bit personally,” he said, though he immediately regretted his words when he saw the hurt look in her eyes.

“When you say ‘this thing that happened’, I assume you mean the part where I had to marry someone over some draconian law our people put in place,” Remus answered.

He tried not to twitch at Tonks’s use of the term ‘seeing each other’. They had seen each other
naked a few admittedly memorable times, that was true...

“Yeah. I do. And if I thought for a moment that you were blissfully settling into married life with your loving, doting wife, I wouldn’t be here.”

“Yes well, maybe you shouldn’t be here anyway.” he stood up and crossed his arms, knowing how childish he sounded.

“Why not? We all know this whole marriage business with Hermione is nothing more than a farce to appease those wankers down in the Ministry. Goddamnit Remus, you know I’m falling in love with you, and…”

“And I told you that what we had wasn’t like that.” He hadn’t meant to raise his voice. Hadn’t meant to bring back that kicked-puppy look on her sweet face.

How had he felt about Nymphadora Tonks?

The woman had burst into his life, all flirty giggles and unabashed interest more than a year ago. When it was clear he hadn’t imagined it, that she did in fact, want him, he hadn’t exactly fallen into bed with her at the very first opportunity. If anything, he remembered quite succinctly telling the young woman that he wasn’t the kind of man she ought to be wasting her time on.

“I don’t know if you’ve noticed but I tend to bite at certain times of the month,” he had told her often, half warningly and just a little flirtatiously because fuck it, he had a pulse and she was really very, very attractive.

“I like a bit of danger,” she always replied, utterly unfazed by his not-quite denials.

In hindsight, it might have been kinder to tell her the truth - that he didn’t really see himself ever investing in a relationship with her. She truly was wonderful, and funny, and kind, but how could they ever hope to build something lasting and true when each of them cared for such different things in life?

Tonks idea of a good Friday night was to get rip-roaringly drunk with her mates, which in all fairness, would likely been his idea of fun perhaps ten years ago - had he the privilege of doing such things at her age. For Remus, a good Friday night these days, was spent in front of his carefully concealed television set, watching re-runs of Sliders.

Then Sirius had died, and Tonks was there, and there was just that right amount of whiskey involved one night. There had been a multiple glasses of West Cork and Ogden’s involved, the lethal mix of which had ultimately convinced the werewolf that the young woman knew exactly what she was getting herself into, when she offered to take him home to bed.

Now, facing a distressed Tonks, Remus could have kicked himself for listening to whiskey’s advice. Whiskey gave bad advice; horrible advice, in point of fact.

All in all, whiskey had shite for brains.

“You wanted me. You had wanted me up to the day you married Hermione Granger.” her voice was suddenly a lot thicker than it had been. “What changed?”

“That’s the problem isn’t it?” he did his best not to betray his frustration. “Nothing’s changed. Not really. I told you before I even found out about Hermione that I didn’t see how I could give you what you’re looking for,”
“And I told you - I don’t care that you are all the things you think you are.” Tonks got to her feet and advanced upon him.

“I think I…oh sweet Jesus. Dora, I am poor, and I’m most certainly a werewolf,” Remus couldn’t keep his annoyance from seeping out. “And yes, while we’re on the subject, I am far too old for you,”

“But not for Hermione?” she demanded, stopping about a foot away from him.

“This has nothing to do with her, you know that,” he replied with complete honesty. “You’re not wrong about the fact that my marriage isn’t real, but still, I’m sorry I wasn’t clear before. Dora, I… I just don’t think…ah fucking hell. Dora, I can’t love you. Not the way you want me to. Do you understand? I’ve been trying to be kind;”

As the words slipped from Remus’s mouth, Tonks’s hair began rapidly to shift from one violent shade to another. Her face began to crumble as she clenched her fists by her side.

Watching the woman fall apart, the man was reminded once more of why he had avoided the truth. No matter what he didn’t feel for her, Tonks was still his friend.

Every instinct in his body urged him to rush forwards, to engulf her in a comforting hug. But even in the throes of his guilt, the logical part of his mind informed him that the last thing he ought to do was to offer her any sort of physical affection.

“Kind,” she repeated.

Merlin but he was rubbish at this sort of thing. Thinking back over the past months since their last tryst, he recognized with a sinking feeling that he could have made some sort of effort to at least speak with her.

As their liaisons usually went, the last time they had been together, they had met in a flurry of limbs and lust, and when it was over, she had wanted to talk about the possibility of them once more. Seeing as they had met at her small flat rather than his cottage, Remus found it easier to simply leave, than to offer his usual protestations as to why they shouldn’t attempt a real relationship.

In hindsight, the fact that he had crawled into her bed more than once had probably caused Tonks to think of his continued rejection as nothing more than trite efforts to hold his non-existent feelings at bay.

The wizard rubbed at the nape of his neck as he stared at the distraught young woman before him.

“Dora, I…” he stuttered at last. “I’m sorry, I’ve treated you horribly. Merlin, I’ve used you unforgivably…if Sirius were alive, he’d probably be ready to kill me just about now;”

That last part was certainly true. While his best friend hadn’t liked his family, he had always made an exception for Tonks. Very certainly, Sirius would have torn him a new one for the way Remus had been carrying on with his younger cousin.

“Oh spare me,” she scrubbed at her face. The woman’s eyes were red, but her face was dry. “And stop calling me ‘Dora’.”

He had called her ‘Dora’ when they were together because it always seemed to make her happy, seemed to make her believe there was some sort of intimacy growing between them.
“God. I should have realized you’re just another bloody waster. You were best mates with Sirius after all.” she blinked at him as though seeing him for the first time.

A queasy sensation rose in Remus’s gut, as he saw the truth in her words. How could he have done this to a friend? Exactly how selfish was he?

“I should go.” she said at length, when it was clear they had said all there was to say.

“No Tonks, please, I…” he pleaded, trailing in her wake.

“Merlin, stop,” Tonks gritted out, pausing in her movements. “Don’t do that thing, that pathetic puppy-dog thing. I’ll stupidly let you…god, I’ll let you in, like some sort of pathetic little girl,”

“I’m not trying to…”

“Maybe not,” she sighed, turning her now-violet gaze up to the ceiling. “Fucking hell Remus. Just because life’s dealt you a bad hand, doesn’t mean you get to treat your rotten luck like it’s some excuse to behave badly. I’m sorry mate, but we’ve all got our crosses to bear;”

With that, Tonks stepped out his door, out his life, and disappeared back into the freezing dark.

Chapter End Notes

Honestly, my opinion is that the break-up between Remus and Tonks probably should have also occurred in canon. While I didn't think Remus could ever have ended up with Hermione in the actual plot (though they fit so much better to me), the Remus/Tonks pairing always felt quite jarring - to me anyway.

The only thing I could think of when reading HBP/DH, was that Remus was upset over well, everyone in his life dying on him, and after Sirius, that's when he fell in bed with her. Which ended up in a pregnancy...

Don't get me wrong, I don't think Tonks got pregnant on purpose either. I liked her character a lot. The point is, in my head, those characters just never seemed to fit as a couple...

I'm done rambling.
The Courtship: Chapter 3

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Things with Ron were fine.

They were fine, in the sense that Ron wasn’t publicly sniping at her anymore, or yelling about her so-called choices in life. From that perspective, things had certainly improved.

The day she saw both him and Harry again at King’s Cross station, Ron spent his time talking only to Harry while she stood right there, feeling awkward and strange. By the time they arrived at Hogwarts, his tiresome little routine was still going strong, only by then, it had the added benefit of Lavender Brown drilling her tongue insistently into his ear canal.

Literally.

It was quite disgusting, and everyone was tolerating the display with varying degrees of patience.

The new romance - or whatever Lavender wanted to call it - had started during the train ride in, when her friend found himself the centre of the girl’s undivided attention. As the golden-haired witch advanced upon the wizard, Ron had looked over at Hermione in momentary panic. In response, she had shrugged helplessly, unsure of what it was she ought to say or do.

Something in Ron’s expression transformed as he observed Hermione’s reaction. Something cold entered his brilliant blue eyes, causing him to turn towards Lavender with obvious intent. An hour later, when she caught the both of them ducking into an empty compartment, Hermione could hardly find herself truly surprised, thought she felt just a slight bit affronted by the whole thing.

“He’s just trying to make you jealous you know,” Ginny said a few hours later, observing her look of consternation as she stared at yet another lurid embrace occurring in the Gryffindor common room between Ron and Lavender. “He’s still upset about the whole…thing.”

“So he’s getting back at me by licking away Lavender’s tonsils?” she asked with a frown, turning to the younger girl. “A bit unsanitary isn’t it?”

At that pronouncement, Harry snorted out his pumpkin juice and began coughing as if he were about to literally die. Absently, Ginny started patting at the Gryffindor Seeker’s back like he was some old infirm.

“My brothers aren’t very bright,” the redhead witch sounded apologetic. “Ron especially, he’s not very good at empathy,”

Turning her attention back to the happy couple, Hermione tilted her head, trying to work out if her best friend was attempting to swallow the other girl whole, like some sort of overly-hormonal python.

To her right, Harry finally managed to stop sputtering, long enough to brush Ginny’s hand away with what appeared to be embarrassment in his green eyes.

Shrugging, the younger girl turned her full attention to Hermione. “If you need to talk, you know where to find me,”
“She’s right you know,” Harry said earnestly as Ginny wandered off. The boy pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose, before gently reaching out to wrap his calloused hands around Hermione’s own twitching ones. “Ron’s just doing this to get back at you,”

“Get back at me for what exactly?” Hermione’s eyes narrowed. “I’m still not clear on the details of his revenge, or why he feels he needs to take it,”

“Be patient alright?” Harry smiled as he squeezed comfortingly at her fingers. “He’ll come around. Besides, you’ve got me,”

Rolling her eyes, Hermione nodded, and reached up to ruffle affectionately at his already messy hair. Turning away from Harry, she made to retrieve one of her new textbooks from her book bag. Already, she had flagged off several sections in the thick volume with multi-coloured Muggle post-it notes.

Flipping through her book, the witch caught the eye of another girl she’d never really spoken with. Lucy, she thought the other girl’s name might have been. She was a seventh year Muggle-born student, Hermione recalled.

The older witch cast her a small, sad smile, and looked meaningfully down at her left hand where a simple gold band rested. Swallowing, Hermione nodded back in understanding, before allowing her gaze to fall away in misery.

To her right, Harry looked oddly disappointed, but instead of saying anything, he simply sat himself down beside her, like a protective wall between herself and the rest of the world. Retrieving a dirty rag and a canister of broom polisher from his own tattered satchel, he proceeded to work on making his Firebolt as good as new.

***

Late in the night, and close to dawn, long after her roommates had all fallen asleep, Hermione stared at the blank parchment before her, wondering if she ought to carry through with her promise to Remus.

By her bed, she spied the book the werewolf had lent her…if she could call it a ‘book’, she thought with what felt like reluctant fondness.

In truth, she had taken a peek at the graphic novel’s contents and to her surprise, found that she hadn’t quite hated what she saw. Perhaps the wizard had been on to something when he recommended that she start reading more fiction.

Picking up her quill, she dipped the sharp tip into an inkwell, and considered what she wanted to write. It had been weeks since she had seen him, since they had…

Merlin, since he had lain her down upon his bed and made her body sing for him. In her mind’s eye, Hermione saw Remus as he was, when he stroked his fingers inside of her…

He had looked at her as if he meant to devour every inch of her. And god help her, she wanted to let him.

“Sweet girl…” his whispering voice echoed in her mind. “My sweet girl…”

Close by, Lavender grunted in her sleep. Bedclothes rustled as the girl shifted restlessly behind heavy scarlet curtains.
Startled out of her reverie, Hermione’s elbow slipped. Her quill left a large, black splotch on the blank parchment she had only just laid out. Gazing down at the ruined sheet, a strange rage began to crest in the witch’s chest.

Ripping at the delicate material to separate the ruined portion from its roll, Hermione levitated the thin, useless sheet up in the air, before causing it to crumble away in glowing ash.

Breathing hard, Hermione picked up her quill once more, and very resolutely, she began to write.

“I don’t understand this comic book. Is this horror? Fantasy? Is Morpheus…”

Rolling up her short missive - too short to be a letter, too personal to be anything else - Hermione tapped absently at the surface of her desk, wondering where her courage was, and whether or not it would lead her to the Owlery come morning.

***

In Potions, over a cauldron of Amortentia, Hermione breathed in the smell of fresh cut grass, new parchment, spearmint...and something else she couldn’t quite put her finger on. Something deep, dark and sinfully delicious, the scent of which made her hungry.

It should have bothered her more, this not-knowing, but then Harry started bloody cheating, and, Hermione forgot all about some stupid love potion.

***

The days began to move in a rhythm she was familiar with, in so much as she could feel like she recognized the world within which she existed. There had been a time, she remembered, when she thought she could conquer it - when this was the world where she thought she would belong.

A child’s dream, she saw that now, as she strolled towards her next class on her fourth day back in school. This world was as cruel as the one she had come from, no more, no less. If anything, it had conquered her, had forced from her a submission she hadn’t been willing to give.

“Mudblood,” Blaise Zabini called. Malfoy, standing beside his classmate, sneered, though oddly enough he said nothing. Likely, he wasn’t relishing the notion of getting punched in the face again.

“Shut your gob,” Ron retorted in her defence.

Even angry at her, Ron was still her friend in so many ways.

“Shouldn’t they have kicked you back into the pit you crawled out from?” the Slytherin asked imperiously. “Or did you find yourself some pathetic sod to marry? Let me guess, some Weasley runt took pity on you…”

“You won’t call my husband pathetic again,” anger lanced through Hermione. She hated that she had to defend her presence in the Wizarding world in such a manner. Hated that she had to fall back on the protection of a man in the most basic of ways.

Ron winced at the mention of the word ‘husband’, but for once, he seemed to understand what she was trying to do.

“In fact, call him anything at all, and I’ll have you running to Snape with your severed prick in your hands.”
“Miss Granger! Language!” Professor McGonagall’s irate voice rang out through the hallways.

Snapping her mouth shut, Hermione turned towards her teacher, while Ron hovered protectively at her side.

Behind her, she could hear Blaise laughing loudly as he stalked away. the sound of which made her sick to her stomach.

***

Her second week back in Hogwarts, Hermione still found rest evading her with a voracity she hadn’t believed possible. It was her thoughts - they wouldn’t leave her alone, wouldn’t stop churning, and it wasn’t as if she were even thinking about anything productive.

Almost resentfully, Hermione observed the way Harry melted back into Hogwarts as if nothing had happened since the previous school year. With what appeared to be breathtaking ease, her best friend threw himself into Quidditch, social gatherings, even Potions.

Secretly and uncharacteristically, she wondered if he had already forgotten the death of his Godfather, and oddly enough, the thought made her unaccountably sad for the sake of Remus. Handsome man though the werewolf was, even with the faint scars lining his face, fresh grief lent his smile a shadow that hadn’t always been there.

Why should he suffer, when Harry didn’t seem overly burdened by any measure of sorrow? Where was the fairness in that?

Still, as she tossed restlessly in her bed at night, Hermione realized that her anger at Harry was likely, simply borne of jealousy. Jealousy over the simple fact that her best friend always looked so well rested in the mornings.

In her less churlish moments, as she sat across from Harry by the hearth - Harry, who always did his best to sit up with her long after he should have been in bed - Hermione reflected with some guilt that her best friend had likely grown too accustomed to loss, and had learned to bury all that was in his heart under layers upon layers of masks.

Incapable of understanding her insomnia, and worried about what it might mean for her schoolwork and her personal relationships, Hermione found herself brewing sleeping draughts in the Room of Requirement. It was a good thing Horace Slughorn was more interested in praising Harry than he was in his Potions supplies.

Despite her very best efforts however, nothing changed. Even with a greater dose of sleeping potions than what was probably considered healthy, night after night, the witch continued to stare blankly up at the canopy of her four poster bed, awake and frustrated at her inability to simply go to sleep.

***

At one in the morning on her second Friday back in Hogwarts, for lack of anything else to do, Hermione finally stalked towards the Owlery with her rolled up letter to Remus in hand.

“Lupin cottage,” she whispered to the bird, stroking its soft feathers as she fed it a treat. “He bites, so be nice,”
Hooting affectionately at her, the bird ruffled its feathers before it soared away.

Wandering back to her dormitory, Hermione picked up Remus’s slim volume of Sandman Comics, and flipped carefully to the middle of the book where last she stopped reading.

***

“Miss Granger,” Snape said as he passed her in the hallway.

She stopped mid-step and looked inquiringly at her DADA Professor.

“Professor,” she greeted belatedly.

Peering at her with an inscrutable expression, Snape said quite flatly, “Try substituting the Rue with Ranogrin tonight. Brew the potion for forty minutes instead of an entire hour. You might find a better result,”

Staring at the older man, Hermione wondered if she ought to begin panicking.

“And for Merlin’s sake, stop overdosing yourself. Perhaps your imbecilic friends can’t see it, but I can certainly tell,” he continued. “Stop, or I’ll be sure to tell Potter what you’ve been up to. I can’t see him reacting well to this news,”

Unsure how she ought to respond to his sound advice, veiled concern and annoying threat, Hermione nodded curtly, before hurrying away in the direction of her Ancient Runes class.

That night, she managed about four hours of sleep, which admittedly wasn’t much, but it was still far better than her usual tally of much, much less.

Leaving her DADA classroom the next day, she hesitated before his desk, waiting for everyone else to depart. Harry and Ron cast her strange looks, but with a wave of her hand, she dismissed her boys.

“What?” the man demanded irritably, not looking up from his papers.

“Thank you,” she said at last.

“Don’t thank me,” Snape answered. “When I’m sure I have no idea what you’re on about,”

Sighing, Hermione turned and stalked away. There was simply no talking to some people.

***

It took him a two days, but Remus wrote back, even though a large part of her had been convinced that he wouldn’t.

Following their last parting, she had assumed that he would have returned to the life he had lead, before she had so rudely intruded upon it those few days in August. In that life, Remus Lupin had been her Professor, her mentor, yes…but a friend, no.

In that life, Remus had a lover who had looked at Hermione with such sadness the day of her wedding.

At three in the morning, the witch stared hard at Remus’s short letter, wondering how she ought to answer the werewolf. Picking up her quill, the witch started to write.
“…School is fine, though I'm not sure about Horace Slughorn. I miss Snape at the helm of Potions, if you can believe it.

He’s barely passable as a DADA Professor, but to be honest, after you, the bar’s been set too high. I miss your lessons, the way you spoke, the passion with which you imparted your considerable knowledge…”

Hermione panicked the moment she realized what she was setting down on parchment. Grabbing her wand, she spelled away her words and started all over again.

***

“Harry told me,” Ron said, as they walked down a long hallway together. “He told me about what you did for me,”

“I don’t know what you’re…” she started defensively.

“You Confunded McLaggen,” he grinned brightly at her, in a way he hadn’t done in months. Not since that awful day in his mother’s garden.

“Oh. That,” she shrugged, as if she made it a personal habit to jinx her classmates.

“Hermione…” he grasped at her elbow, his grip firm enough to give her pause. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry for what I said back in August, during…”


“I was a right arse, and I should have realized…”

“Ron, I said I got it,” she laughed, smacking him on his shoulder.

The way he made a show of being injured, the way he shoved her back…for the first time in what felt like forever, Hermione began at last to feel normal.

***

On the last Saturday of September, the first Hogsmeade weekend of the year, Hermione put aside her uniform and her Prefect’s badge and donned instead, her Muggle clothing. In the past month, the witch had taken on more than her fair share of nighttime patrols for the sake of keeping her Hogsmeade weekend free, a strategy which was working in her favour with the Head Girl.

Staring critically at her reflection, she charmed away the shadows under her eyes, and cast a spell to brighten her skin. It wasn’t vanity - she simply didn’t need Remus knowing that sleep had become such a hard commodity for her to find in recent days.

“Very pretty dear, even that hair looks neat today,” her mirror said encouragingly, if a little insultingly.

Scowling but nonetheless satisfied that she at least resembled a member of the living, Hermione tucked her wand into her coat pocket, before slipping towards the common room…

…where she promptly ran into Harry and Ron, who were waiting expectantly for her at the bottom of the stairs leading up to the girl’s dormitories.

“ Took you long enough,” Ron grinned.
Oh bloody buggering hell, she thought, taking in their hopeful smiles. Perhaps she ought to have mentioned the plans she had made, which for once, excluded the two wizards standing before her.

In all fairness, what with Ron’s awful attitude for the first little bit of September, and then Harry’s recent obsessive tendencies which prevented him from listening to reason, the three of them hadn’t exactly found the right time to talk about matters as trivial as Hogsmeade Weekends.

“I can’t,” she blurted out. “I’m meeting Remus,”

There was an awkward silence, and within it, Hermione watched as Ron’s cheer receded, leaving behind only his sullen self. It didn’t take a lot of brainpower for the witch to understand that their recent reconciliation had just been smashed to so much smithereens.

“Oh?” Harry asked, cocking his head to the side, an unreadable expression on his features.

“Yea. I’m sorry. I…Ron, I assumed you were heading down with Lavender, and Harry, I didn’t know if…”

“It’s fine,” Harry brushed away her concerns with a small smile, though his emerald eyes seemed oddly shuttered. “I’m a big boy Hermione,”

“Is this how it’s going to be now?” Ron demanded abruptly. “You’re done with us? You’re chucking us to the side for that…man?”

“Ron,” Harry started warningly.

“No, I mean seriously Hermione. First you up and…and give yourself to him without so much as a squeak of protest. And now you’re off gallivanting with him on weekends.” the boy was growing red in the face. “Must be a wet dream for you, sleeping with a Professor,”

“Ron,” Harry’s voice hardened as Hermione gaped at Ron’s sudden crudeness. “What is wrong with you?”

The other Gryffindors in the room peered over at the growing confrontation in curiosity.

Harry’s face was creased in dark anger. “None of us asked for this, not even Remus. So lay off her and lay off Remus. Are we clear?”

Hermione’s gaze swivelled to Harry, gratitude bursting in her heart like an endless fountain. For a second, she saw the man he was on the precipice of becoming, a powerful wizard brimming with power, and fury.

She also saw the weight of his sorrow and his guilt, both of which he had hidden away under the guise of a hearty, healthy teenage boy.

The third member of the so-called “Golden Trio” glared mutinously at Harry, though Hermione thought she saw hints of what might have been remorse in his blue eyes. “Yeah. Yeah I fucking got it. It’s always the two of you in the end though, when it comes down to it. Hell, she even married Remus so she could stay by your side.”

For the first time in her life, Hermione understood what it meant to want to kill a person as she turned her sharp gaze upon Ron.

“Ronald Weasley, I’ve taken enough abuse from you to last a lifetime,” she said icily. “You’re nothing but a fool, who would rather lose a war for the sake of winning a skirmish.”
Shoving her way past a seething Harry and a raging Ron, Hermione stalked away from the common room with her head held high.

She had a lunch appointment to keep, and hell if she was going to be late for it.

***

Seeing Remus at the Hog's Head didn't make her feel any calmer, though she couldn't help but feel as if his was the first truly friendly face she had seen in weeks.

Until she glimpsed his half smile and met his steady, grey eyes, Hermione hadn't realized that most of her peers, though amiable, had been looking at her with something like pity in their regard. Pity for the Muggle-born girl, forced to wed and bed a wizard just to stay in school.

The only one who didn't look at her in pity was Harry, but judging from his outburst earlier, her friend had apparently been silently nursing an unhealthy level of guilt.

That wasn't exactly helpful to Hermione either, at the end of the day.

Suppressing the urge to throw her arms around Remus, she smiled instead, and ordered herself a butterbeer. So close to him, she could pick out the minty aftershave he wore, and under that, something indefinably familiar. Something warm, dark and almost bittersweet…

That night, whether because of the butterbeer, or because the accumulated stress had simply reached a tipping point, Hermione slept the sleep of the innocent.

***

The weeks dripped away slowly at first, like molasses over a surface of sand. But time, with its own indeterminable magic, began rushing forwards as September passed into October. Leaves turned from green to gold and in the course of one windstorm, they all but disappeared from the boughs of the Forbidden Forest.

One not so very special morning, Hermione awoke, and found that the strange looks her classmates had been casting her, had all faded away like mist under the morning sun.

Likely, the student body had simply shifted their attention on to the next juicy piece of gossip, which made her thankful for the flightiness of her teenage peers.

“Most of it was just curiosity you know,” Luna offered as she floated past her in the Great Hall. Turning back, she smiled her somewhat absent smile. “They didn’t know better,”

Not for the first time, Hermione found herself grateful for Luna’s calming presence and strangely insightful ways. Close by, Neville, who had overheard the whole thing, cast Hermione the same shy grin he’d been giving her for almost six years.

“People can be real wankers. Just ignore them,” he said simply, shrugging at their schoolmates.

By the time the end of October rolled around, the witch found herself coming to the pleasant understanding that outside of finding a new friend in Remus, nothing in her life had truly changed in any way that mattered.

Books and learning continued to make her happy; Harry continued to make her worry; Ginny and
Luna continued to make her smile.

Remus's steady stream of parchments soothed her evenings, after long days spent studying and completing her homework. How many times had she found herself grinning, as she took in some clever witticism the man had jotted down?

Most of their letters never went beyond six sentences, but what they lacked in length, they more than made up for in warmth.

Along with, or perhaps because of, her new penpal, Hermione had also taken to perusing the fiction aisle of the library during the emptier hours of the early evening. The witch had been surprised at first, to learn that the Hogwarts library had a fiction aisle to begin with. How had she not known?

The sharing of this discovery had resulted in one quite annoying note from the werewolf, which read,

"Hermione, how are you so very clever, and yet also so very blind? Exasperatedly, R.L."

Her eyes had narrowed dangerously, if mirthfully at that. So Remus was under some sort impression that she was a cultural idiot, was he?

Smiling to herself, she tucked the square of parchment into a small compartment within her trunk, where steadily, a pile of the man’s letters were beginning to stack up.

***

The only person who persisted in behaving as if there were any true difference between herself now, and herself before she accidentally found herself locked in holy matrimony, was Ron.

The loss of their friendship was a palpable and unpleasant stain on her existence, and there were days she found herself fearing that the rift between them was in fact, permanent.

"He's an idiot," Ginny hissed often.

"He's your brother," Hermione always pointed out gently, though secretly, she was grateful for Ginny’s dogged loyalty.

"Ron's a bloody tosser," Harry usually contributed. This had become a common refrain from the her best friend, though he usually wore a constipated expression on his face as he uttered those words.

Upset as she was by the whole thing with Ron, Hermione hated very much how this stupid fight was affecting Harry. While the two boys still spoke with each other, their exchanges now held a note of tension that had never been there before, not since fourth year.

For every ounce of hurt she felt, Harry, she thought, probably felt it twice as badly. Ron was his first true friend, his very best friend at that. The closeness between the two boys had been the stuff of envy, and it was a bond Hermione loathed to see frisson because of her.

Still, as much as she regretted the cracks she saw between her best friends, not even for Harry would she give the ruddy-haired wizard an inch of her contrition. Hermione was simply not interested in offering Ron an apology in any way, shape or form, even if she missed him terribly.
every minute of every day.

It might have been easier if Harry’s obsession with Malfoy hadn’t increased by such sharp increments. Suddenly, the wizard saw shadows in every corner where the Slytherin was concerned, and nefarious plots at every turn.

Hermione didn’t believe that Draco was a Death Eater plotting some massive coup, not because she thought that deep inside, the boy held a shred of moral decency. The truth was, she simply didn't think Draco was clever enough to be a devious mastermind of any real sort.

“He’s got reason to be upset at Malfoy. The boy has never been kind.

If my sources are right, he’s been a right little shit in the past, especially where you’re concerned.

Try having a little more faith in Harry. R.L.”

Irritated at Remus for not immediately agreeing with her point of view, Hermione refused to answer him for days.

***

“Saturday? R.L.”

***

“Where are we going? H.G.”

***

“Wouldn’t you like to know? R.L.”

***

“Ah, so you don’t know. H.G.”

***

“Ye of little faith. R.L.

P.S. No, I don’t but I’ll figure it out.”

***

“Have you ever considered that a lot of this could have been avoided, if we hadn’t kept ourselves apart?” Hermione asked as she unwrapped her lunch.

Remus looked at her skeptically as he chewed on his roast beef wrap. Swallowing, he gazed at the people who surrounded them, and said, “We weren’t always apart. We started keeping ourselves apart when they started trying to burn us alive.”

“They weren’t very successful though, were they?” Hermione took a bite of her food. Swallowing a mouthful of egg salad sandwich, she added, “Maybe if we had just tried to talk it through with them, explain that there are bad witches and wizards in this world, just like there are bad and good Muggles, we could have worked something out.”

“Perhaps,” Remus sounded doubtful.
Anyone else, and she would have assumed that they weren’t truly giving what she said due
collection. The man next to her, she could see, was weighing her words in his head.

The two of them were seated in the middle of London, on a bench by the Thames. Heating charms
kept them comfortable, although Hermione was acutely aware that the cold would only get worse
the longer they lingered. Her heating charms needed some work, that much was certain.

Somewhere in the distance, a bell began tolling the two o’clock hour.

“Perhaps you’re right at that,” he continued after a moment. “Perhaps if we had tried harder to
build bridges, we might have formed an understanding. Hell, the Wizarding community might even
have been better for it.”

“I don’t know about that…” Hermione frowned as she observed a bored tour group wandering past
the duo. There were far too many socks with sandals in sight for comfort.

“You’ve lived among us too long,” Remus chuckled. He took a large bite out of his food, and then
another, demolishing his lunch in what she considered impressive timing. “The things the Muggles
have done with machines…the things they’re going to do. They’re developing their own kind of
magic, even as we speak.”

“I’ve seen some of those things,” she said indignantly, straightening her back. Hermione had never
liked it when someone told her she didn’t know something.

“Have you?” he teased. “When was the last time you tried using a computer?”

“I…” she stared at him, before realizing she couldn’t really give him an answer.

“You should give it a go. You, who worship knowledge. If you understood what the Muggles have
done with it…all of it.” he shook his head in awe as he stared at the people around him. “Our little
community on the other hand. We haven’t changed in millenia.”

Reaching for her beverage, Hermione sipped at her Coca-Cola, processing in her mind what Remus
was telling her. She took her sweet time savouring the sugary drink, which was denied to her both
at home and at school.

“Do you think if we had tried to forge a relationship with the Muggles, with their technology and
our magic, we could have built something wonderful?” she questioned almost wistfully, setting
aside her paper cup. Two fairly young teenagers passed them, tapping efficiently into brightly
coloured mobile phones in their hands.

The last time she had seen one of those devices, she was certain they had been far bigger, far
heavier.

She took another dainty bite of her food.

“Too late for regrets now,” Remus leaned back, crumpling the plastic wrapping of his lunch in one
hand.

“I suppose.” Hermione nodded slowly. “If they found us now, all they’d want to do is cut us open
to find out how we work.”

“We could give them the Dark Lord,” Remus said thoughtfully. “Or maybe just Dolores
Umbridge;”
Hermione laughed at the thought. After a moment, Remus joined in.

“How’s Harry?” he asked after she had finally finished her food.

“Fine. He’s fine.” Hermione cast him a sideways glance before she jumped to her feet and moved to dispose of her rubbish. Approaching the railing separating land from river, she leaned her weight against wrought iron.

“Keeping out of trouble?” her companion asked as he settled beside her.

“I do my best to help him with that,” she made a face at his disapproving look. “He’s in love.”

“With you?” he asked, quirking his right brow.

Casting him a withering look, Hermione scoffed, “Not me, Ginny.”

“Christ,” he murmured, making an odd face.

“What?”

“Merlin, that’s a bit oedipal isn’t it?” he was doing his best not to laugh. “Lily’s hair…”

Horrified, Hermione’s eyes widened at the implications, before she reached out and smacked Remus lightly on his arm. It only served to make him laugh harder.

“You’re a horrid man,” she said sternly, though her lips started twitching. “I’ve seen pictures. Ginny and Lily look nothing alike. The rate things have been going though, it’s not like it’ll come to anything. She’s with someone else, and I don’t think he has the courage to tell her.”

“Quite unlike his father,” Remus said, his cheer not subsiding. “I swear, I still think Lily only started going out with him because James wore her down to the bone. In hindsight, Harry’s father might have exhibited some rather stalkerish tendencies.”

Rolling her eyes, she turned her attention back to the frigid Thames.

Hermione pondered of the wisdom of asking Remus how Tonks was doing, and if the both of them had managed to pick up where they had left off. The words stuck in her throat however, and she found she couldn’t make herself speak those thoughts aloud.

“What about Ron? You don’t speak very much about him.”

“Ron is doing just fine,” Hermione said evenly. Pushing away from the railing, she smiled up at Remus. “Come on. I’ve got two hours left. Let’s take a walk through the city shall we? Besides. I wanted to tell you all about this novel I’ve been reading.”

“Wait, hold on,” he teased as he followed her. “You’ve been reading more fiction? Heavens help us, she’s becoming self-aware…”

“Ugh, fine,”

“No, no, tell me. Please,”

***

Then, Katie Bell touched a necklace made for Harry, and it was made abundantly clear that she had expected far too much from life in the middle of a war.
Chapter End Notes

It was a massively introspective piece. If you made it this far, I'm super stoked about it.
Trudging up the hill, Remus found Hermione waiting for him by the tall entrance to the castle. Twenty feet from her, the witch had yet to notice his approach.

The young woman was leaning against the ancient stone walls surrounding Hogwarts. All around, her schoolmates streamed past her, every last one of them eager to start their reprieve from school. Bright yellow canaries fluttered about her head like a living halo, controlled by the slowly spinning wand she held in her right hand.

Remus was no expert, but not for the first time, it occurred to him that Hermione had more power in her than even she herself knew. Conjuring a teacup was one thing. Conjuring a dozen or so living creatures - that was something else altogether.

This afternoon, her dark hair was worn loose. Soft curls cascaded past her shoulders in chestnut waves, framing her heart shaped face in a soft cloud. Without meaning to, Remus wondered if he had ever seen a sight quite as appealing. Fingers ached at the memory of how her silken tresses had felt under his touch…

*Just going to gawk at the girl and say nothing?* Sirius teased in his mind.

Forcefully, Remus reminded himself of all the things he wanted to take up with the young woman. Things that actually mattered. Before he could call out a greeting however, his eyes narrowed as he took in the sight of two vaguely familiar boys sidling up to the witch.

Something primal thrummed through Remus’s veins.

Before he had wedded and bedded her, Remus had been succinctly clear that it made no difference to him if Hermione started seeing others. If she wanted to fall in love even, with someone who wasn’t him.

Now however, staring down the very real possibility that some other male might be enjoying the young witch…

“Mudblood,” one of them hissed in barely concealed malice. “Your time is almost up. He’s coming for the likes of you…perhaps you’ll be lucky, and he’ll give you to one of us,”

Remus growled aloud as his understanding swerved towards a far different conclusion, pertaining to what was actually taking place before his eyes.

“Lucky,” Hermione murmured, never once taking her eyes off the dainty yellow birds fluttering in the air. Imperceptibly, her wand hand twitched into a different pattern. The number of canaries in the air doubled.

“I wonder how loudly you’ll scream, when we…” the second boy started.

A growl began clawing its way out Remus’s chest. Not stopping to think it through - actually, not caring enough to think it through - the wizard began reaching for his own wand. Consequences be damned, but he wasn’t going to simply stand by as those pillocks blatantly threatened Hermione.

Sighing in irritation, the witch straightened and gave the boys a dead-eyed glare.

“*Oppugno*,” she cast flatly.
Without further warning, the birds that had been so calmly flapping about, dove as one at the idiots who had thought to insult her. Suddenly the canaries didn’t seem very pretty at all, with their sharp beaks, and their cold, obsidian eyes.

In silence, the little creatures attacked the screaming boys, pecking at their bare skin, at their faces, at their eyes…a sharp tang of blood filled the wintry air, although Remus doubted that anyone else but him smelled it at all.

“Remus,” Hermione called out, finally turning her surprised gaze towards him. Her cheerful voice distracted him from the sight of the fleeing miscreants.

The birds followed, relentless in their hunger for the witch’s vengeance, extracting shrieks of agony and fear from the two boys. All around, passing students stared at their Prefect, whispering urgently amongst themselves.

Finding his voice, Remus withdrew his hand from his coat pocket and croaked, “Hello,"

“Shall we?” she asked, smiling at him as she strolled up.

The part of him that was all wolf wanted nothing more than to yank her into his arms. His lupine self wanted to lay claim to this powerful creature that feared nothing and no one, and who extracted blood in repayment for wrongs committed against her.

The part of him that was still wholly a man found it hard to disagree, though there was a sane little voice at the back of his head compelling him to remember that Hermione wasn’t his to claim…

*Though…wasn’t she? His? Oaths had been taken, and bindings had been cast. By the laws of men and magic, she was very much…*

Swallowing, Remus pushed aside those dangerous thoughts.

“I’ve brought us some food and a thermos of tea,” she explained as she steered them deliberately into a frozen copse of trees.

After a few minutes, all he could hear was the sound of ice crunching beneath their winter boots. Occasionally, some critter or bird would rustle overhead amongst the dry boughs. Once or twice, Remus thought he spotted the furry tails of scarlet foxes as the tiny beasts gambolled across the stark white forest floor.

At length, emerging on the other side of the tree-line, the wizard found himself dropped into a bucolic scene that would not have been out of place on a Christmas card. The witch who accompanied him, in her red coat with her wide smile and her charmingly flushed cheeks…she only added to the charm of the icy glade in which they stood.

Hermione pointed her wand at a snow covered wooden bench. Wordlessly, she cleared away the build up of ice, leaving behind not only a place to sit, but also a radius of dry ground all around them. With another unspoken spell, she piled together twigs and branches, and set them alight.

“Very nice,” he nodded approvingly. Not to be outdone, with a series of complicated gestures, Remus created for them an invisible dome, one meant to keep out the frozen breeze. With a final flourish, he cast a simple, “*Focillo,*”

Delighted, Hermione shrugged out of her coat and scarf. Following her example, Remus shed his winter jacket and gloves.
“We’ll be quite comfortable in here,” he grinned.

“You’ll have to teach me that warming spell. My own heating charms need work,” she flashed him a bright smile.

“I’ve noticed,” he replied dryly. In response, Hermione made a face at him.

Reaching into her small purse, she shoved a sandwich at him, before she sat herself down and laid out two mugs and a thermos she had somehow stashed within the same tiny carrier.

“That bag’s a bit small for all the stuff you’re carrying,” he observed curiously.

“I’m working on some extension charms,” she said with a happy grin. “They’re quite handy I find,”

Remus settled down beside her as she began telling him of her personal projects. When he was finished with his food, he poured himself a cup of tea and settled back on the bench, content simply to observe the way her expressive face lit up, every time she described a new discovery.

“I’m just blathering on and on over here…” she said after a while, finally noticing his silence. “Is everything alright?”

“Yes. Well…” he hesitated for a second, suddenly wondering if he ought to bring up things that might put a strain on their afternoon together.

It was too late for second-guessing however. Hermione was already developing that expression on her face. His reticence in sharing had just put her on some sort of warpath.

“What?” she demanded, straightening her spine.

The wizard sighed in crushing defeat, wondering how this slip of a girl always rendered him so cowed. Him, a big, bad werewolf, who used to be her Professor.

“I was wondering if we were ever going to get around to talking about that student that got herself poisoned,” he set the mug in his hand down upon the cracked bench.

“Oh,” she looked surprised. “Right. Katie. What did you…”

“Hermione…” he tried to remember what it was he wanted to say to her. “After I heard the news, I had asked everyone if you were alright…they told me you were, but to be honest, I was a bit surprised you didn’t…that is to say…”

The young woman pursed her lips, waiting for him to finish.

“I wish you’d dropped a note to tell me you were fine. I guess I wanted to hear it from you,” he muttered, staring down at his hands. “It makes me wonder what else is happening, that you’re not telling me.”

Shoulders slumping, Hermione leaned against the bench and dropped her head backwards, suddenly looking exhausted. Brown eyes slid shut as she drew in a deep breath.

“I’m sorry Remus, I don’t know what to say,”

Now that he had told her what had been bugging him, Remus wasn’t exactly sure either, what he expected from her.

“There’s not been a year that’s gone by since I entered this world, that something stupidly massive
hasn’t happened during the school year.” she continued after a moment. “Outside of Harry and Ron, and a handful of the Order members who get involved each time…frankly, I don’t know how to talk about these things with people who weren’t literally there,"

Fatigue crept into her voice as she spoke, the sound of which bothered Remus. The girl hadn’t even breached her eighteenth year. She had no business sounding as if she’d lived a whole lifetime fighting a senseless war.

Looking at her drawn features, the wizard frowned at the sight of faint shadows under her eyes. Caught up in the moment and incapable of stopping himself, Remus reached out and swept a few errant curls from her cheek.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to…” he murmured in genuine concern.

“I didn’t think. I didn’t realize you would want to know,” she said honestly, turning to look at him at last, as his thumb began tracing the shape of her left cheekbone.

“Of course I do,” he said quietly. “I…you’re my friend.”

“Right,” she blinked slowly, before she pushed herself upright and reached up to grasp at his fingers. To his shameful relief, she made no effort to push his hand away.

“My parents have no idea what happens here. It was so strange when I went home last summer, and I had to pretend as if a man - a friend at that - didn’t get murdered two feet away from me, in a battle that took place at a bloody government facility,”

Reflexively, Remus jerked away from her as if he had just been burned. The image of Sirius falling through the veil flashed behind his eyelids, bringing with him the same stinging pain it brought every single time the memory surfaced.

“Oh shit, Remus, I’m so sorry,” Hermione pleaded. Quickly, she moved so she was down on one knee before him. Her hands fluttered helplessly above his shaking ones, as if she wanted to hold them once again, but was now too scared to do so. “That was horribly insensitive of me…”

“No it’s fine. I mean, it’s not fine,” he breathed. “But…”

“I’m sorry, I’m so sorry,” her eyes were red.

“Stop it. You have nothing to be sorry for,” he shook his head. “Would you get up? You look ridiculous, crouched there the way you are.”

Reluctantly, Hermione rose to her feet and sat by him, looking even more anxious.

“Look I…” she started, turning her dark eyes to gaze at the treetops surrounding them. Close by, the fire she lit continued to crackle merrily. “I’ll get better at this friend thing, I promise. But this isn’t a one way street. Something tells me you’re not exactly forthcoming about your life either.”

“Some of the things I do for the Order, I can’t really talk about,” Remus said shortly, still trying to recover from the brutal reminder of his best friend’s passing.

“Right.” she twisted her lips in distaste. “But you want me to tell you when things go wrong on my side?”

She had a point.
“You have a point,” he admitted grudgingly. He peered over at her, allowing himself to calm down in the process.

“I usually do,” she informed him. Turning to her thermos, she proceeded to pour herself more tea, dispelling the tension that had arisen. “Shall we make a deal? Anytime some bad news breaks out that one of us is bound to find out, we’ll send each other something just so we know the other is safe and well. Agreed?”

“I can live with that,” he nodded slowly.

“Good. Now tell me - what exactly do you do for the Order that I can’t know about?” she smirked at him over the lip of her mug.

Groaning aloud, Remus wondered how long he would last before he folded like a cheap suit in front of the voracious witch.

***

“Will I see you at Christmas? Molly’s already sent me an invite to the Burrow.” Remus kicked at piles of dirty snow as they approached the gates of the school. Overhead, the sky was rapidly darkening.

“I’ll be spending time with my own family this Christmas,” Hermione said cheerfully. Too cheerfully, he thought, but he didn’t want to push it.

“That’s sounds nice,” he smiled.

That likely meant, however, that he was going to be spending Christmas alone, because the mere notion of spending unnecessary time around disapproving Order members sounded like hell.

Even though Bill and his twin brothers had taken to standing beside him during recent meetings, something had changed between Remus and the older members of the Order. Something fundamental, which also felt irreparable.

“I’m not exactly doing anything on New Year’s Eve,” she continued lightly, casting Remus a sideways look. Somewhere in that bag of hers, Hermione had the third compiled edition of Sandman comics stashed away.

“Oh.” he looked at her, wondering if she meant what he thought she meant.

“We’ll work something out,” she laughed. Unexpectedly, she reached out and squeezed his hand exactly once, before dashing for the gates.

Watching as she disappeared back into Hogwarts, Remus found himself grinning like an idiot at the prospect of spending some time with Hermione over the holidays.

***

“Here’s a secret. When I was young, I asked Santa for a Barbie doll. Instead, I received a stack of books.

He’s not very trustworthy, this Santa Claus fellow.

H.G.”

***
“I asked for a pony, but then I ate him during the full moon.

R.L.

P.S. I can still find you a Barbie doll.”

***

“Oh heavens, the whole pony? How do you stay so thin? H.G.

P.S. Only if she’s a Malibu Barbie

P.P.S. Please don’t.”

***

“Well I stay positive, drink lots of water, watch lots of porn…

Happy Christmas Hermione.

R.L.

P.S. No Barbie for you this Christmas then.”

***

“I always did suspect porn was part of a healthy, happy life.

Happy Christmas Remus…I’m looking forward to ringing in the new year with you…if you renege, I shall quite cross. H.G.

P.S. I was just getting my hopes up about the doll.”

***

“Heavens forbid Hermione Granger gets cross with me. R.L.

P.S. Barbie’s quite happy with Ken, if that helps. They’ve got a condo on the beach.”

***

New Year’s Eve found the two of them perched almost precariously upon the dim and deserted ledge of St. Paul’s Cathedral, immediately under its massive curved dome. Together, they gazed down upon a celebrating city.

“It’s the last year of the millennium,” Hermione observed. The witch sounded just a tad breathless. She didn’t like heights, she had informed him a few minutes earlier, though she hadn’t then asked for them to be apparated back down to the ground.

A thick cloud of anticipation floated over London. Somewhere, a clock struck midnight. As 1998 passed into 1999, the witch balanced herself carefully on tiptoes and kissed him lightly on his cheek.

“Happy new year Remus,” she murmured against his skin.

Perhaps he shouldn’t have done such a thing, but surrounded by her scent and the ancient magic of time itself, Remus found himself tilting his face ever so slightly towards the young woman. Softly,
his lips brushed up against the corner of her mouth.

Hermione’s eyes slid shut, and she made no move to pull away. Rather, she reached between them and grasped lightly at his twitching fingers.

Squeezing gently at her reassuring touch, Remus shut his eyes and let himself forget for a moment, the rest of the world, and all the reasons why not.

***

“I cannot see you this weekend. Albus has a lead he wants me to follow up on in Cardiff… Hermione, I don’t know why I’m doing this. The task is futile. It’s always been futile.

We’re asking these creatures to choose a system that has never treated them well. Why would they choose more of the same, when the other side is offering them elevation, if not outright acceptance.

R.L.

P.S. I’ll bring you the fourth book in February. I’m sorry, I got you hooked.”

***

“Remus,

What you’re doing is important - I firmly believe that. Not every werewolf has thrown in their lot with the Enemy...indeed, it rather appears I’m writing to an allied werewolf as we speak. A dear friend of mine at that.

It is however, hard to escape the reality of a system which has afforded them, and those like them, very little in the way of kindness. How can I possibly, truly blame the downtrodden among us, who are simply looking to be treated fairly?

Ideals aside, I hope you understand that I don’t like knowing how you’ve been risking your life, even if its for a good cause. Frankly, I prefer to imagine you riding through the streets of London on that bicycle of yours, though I suppose Muggle drivers aren’t exactly the safest lot either. My father relishes in describing the horrible car accidents that take place just outside his dental office.

Harry is losing more focus than ever; I wish he would work harder at the things that matter. He acts like a man possessed...sometimes he forgets that this war isn’t just about his vendettas. This war is being fought because there are some us who refuse to go silently into the good night, just because some lunatic decided this would be so.

Yours,

Hermione”

***

“I would rip Voldemort apart had I the chance for what he did to James and Lily alone. But you are correct that this war is larger than my personal stance on the matter.

The way this world has treated you, and those like you has been unforgiveable, barbaric even. To think wizards pride ourselves as being better than Muggles, when truly, we have reverted to medieval practices not used in centuries.

(here, Remus expertly spelled away words he hadn’t meant to scribble)
Promise me you’re at least trying to have some fun this year, and you’re not all cooped up somewhere, studying or plotting. Sometimes, I find myself imagining you with your nose stuck inside of a book, eternally trapped in the darkest depths of the library.

I find myself fearing that you’ll forget what fresh air smells like, or what the world outside the library windows can afford you. Sometimes, I even worry you’ll drive yourself mad worrying about Harry, and about this pointless struggle.

Yours,
Remus”

***

“You needn’t worry, I promise you that I’m doing my best to keep my sanity. Those books you bring me are helping far more than I expected.

Remus, I have come to terms with the notion that life isn’t fair. It is what it is, and I will take what I can get. It’s not so bad at the end of it. After all, I have Harry, Ginny, Luna…and nowadays, I have your friendship to keep my ship sailing at an even keel.

H.G.”

***

“You have me and you always will. But that doesn’t mean I don’t constantly wish for a better world for your sake…yours, and those like you.

I will write to you once I’m finished with this mission. Until then, be safe. I am looking forwards to seeing you next month.

Your
R.L.”

***

He was about to settle in for the night, when the tapping started at his window. A crescent moon hung in the clear night sky, casting just enough light to reveal the bright eyes of a large barn owl.

For over a week, he had not slept in his own bed, and just the thought of rising now from it, to intercept what was probably some dull memo from the Order seemed like a horribly painful thought. Duty however, overrode what reticence he possessed. With an audible sigh, Remus opened the window and snatched the rolled up parchment attached to the bird’s leg.

Twenty minutes later, he was standing at the main doors of Hogwarts, glaring hard at an insufferable Snape.

“You have no right to enter this school Lupin,” his childhood nemesis drawled.

“You can try stopping me,” Remus growled, losing patience by the second. “Or you can stop being a…”

“Are you threatening me?” Snape demanded, his eyes widening in what appeared to be glee as he blatantly fingered his wand.

“Are you keeping me from my wife?” Remus spat in return, so angry, he paid no mind to his own
words. “She’s not a prisoner, and I’m most certainly not going to allow anyone to treat her as such.”

Something changed in Snape’s expression, though the werewolf couldn’t say what.

“She’s safe you know. It’s not her who’s been poisoned.” the DADA Professor said at length, his voice suddenly quieter.

“I know all that, but I still want to see her,” Remus persisted stubbornly, hiding his surprise at Snape’s sudden shift.

Peering behind him into the shadows, the other man hesitated. Finally, he stepped aside, allowing Remus access.

“McGonagall’s going to have my head once she finds out,” Snape muttered.

“Honestly, she’s gotten quite unreasonable lately,” Remus agreed, not pausing even a second to take note of the fact that he and his childhood nemesis appeared to be on the same page for once.

“Miss Granger is in the hospital wing,”

“Why? You just said…” Remus demanded, glaring at Snape.

“Don’t be thick Lupin, she’s there for the Weasley boy,”

Forcing back the urge to snap his teeth like a wild animal, the werewolf held his tongue as he hurried along hallways that had once felt like home to him. After what felt like forever, he finally stood before the infirmary doors.

“Lupin, I can’t guarantee that they won’t try to throw you out immediately,” Snape cautioned.

“They can try,” Remus said firmly. “I’m not leaving until I see her.”

“Don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

Too filled with anxiety to care, he pushed his way across the threshold.

“Remus?” Hermione’s voice rang out.

The werewolf froze; he observed the manner in which Harry clasped a protective hand against the witch’s right shoulder. To her other side, Ginny sat up straight, staring at him in shock.

“Mr. Potter, Mr. Lupin has come for his wife.” Snape cast the boy a disdainful glare, though he sounded a touch too pleased in the way he announced Remus’s presence.

To the werewolf’s irritation, Harry kept his hand exactly where it was on Hermione’s person. Green eyes flashed in what was unmistakably an open challenge.

The witch staggered to her feet, looking paler than last he had left her, and more haggard than he had ever seen. Bruised shadows lingered under her eyes, testament to what the day had wrought.

“Hello,” Remus said stupidly, stepping forwards. His eyes darted towards the boy laying in the bed beside her, and for all of a second, all he could see, selfishly, was Hermione laying dead to the world in Ronald Weasley’s place.

“Remus, what are you doing here?” she asked, sounding flabbergasted even as he strode towards her and yanked her into his arms, practically snatching her from Harry’s grasp.
Closing his eyes, Remus breathed her in, allowing the tempest within his heart to die. The wolf he carried within stopped its own squalling, with the understanding that Hermione was safe, whole...and in his arms, away from Harry’s possessive touch.

“I saw your note, and I couldn’t…god help me, I had to know you were safe.”

Slowly, her arms wound themselves around his neck as she murmured, “I’m sorry, I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean to worry you…”

“It’s fine.” he said, burying his face against the crook of her neck. “It’s fine. You’re ok, so it’s all fine.”

“I’m sorry,” she murmured as her fingers combed through his hair. Distressed though he was, Remus didn’t miss the way her body relaxed against his, the way she clung onto him like he was her only lifeline. “I’m okay. I promise, I’m okay,”

Off to the side, he felt rather than saw Harry bristling…but in that moment, Remus could not find it in himself to care in the least.
The Courtship: Chapter 5

It wasn’t a particularly special day in November when a girl name Valerie burst into loud sobs in the middle of Arithmancy. Before the day was over, Hermione learned that the reason for Valerie’s histrionics was due to the fact it was the girl’s seventeenth birthday.

By the end of the week, the Muggle-born girl was officially and publicly married. Her husband was a wizard no one at Hogwarts had ever met, but whom the Ministry had deemed worthy enough to be her spouse. Somewhere down in Birmingham where he lived, the two consummated their marriage.

The following Monday, after getting a good look at Valerie’s wan demeanour, Hermione clenched her jaw if only to stop the screams from escaping.

In a handspan of days, Valerie was gone from the hallways of Hogwarts for good. From what Hermione understood, the girl was answering the summons of her new and demanding husband, a man who expected his wife to take care of his household while he himself went to work at the Ministry.

After Valerie, it was Seth, then it was Kylie.

Then it was Anna, a Hufflepuff in her sixth year. She disappeared into a fireplace in the teacher’s lounge one Wednesday, and came out with a ring on her finger, together with a Half-blood Ravenclaw named Walter. The entire time, Rachel, Anna’s Slytherin Pureblood girlfriend, was seen pacing to and fro in the Great Hall.

When the newly married couple emerged, Rachel had been the first to greet them. All three of their expressions were racked with misery. Walter’s brow were shadowed with as much dread as that which filled Anna’s and Rachel’s gazes.

The rumour mill told the school that Rachel had held a trembling Anna in her arms for a very long time, before finally relinquishing her into the reluctant care of Walter. By the end of the day, the binding was complete, but something irrevocable had occurred.

Alone, Anna sat in the Great Hall for the rest of the school year, while Rachel laughed just a little too loudly, lived just a little too gaily. If the two of them ever spoke, everyone knew to keep far enough away - even some of Rachel’s Slytherin brethren were known to cast the two young women glances of compassionate sympathy.

As for Walter, it was only a matter of days after his wedding, when it was announced that he would be transferring to Durmstrang, and would not be returning to Britain after the New Year.

In early December, a Muggle-born named Olivia simply disappeared. Everyone knew why, though nobody would speak of it. Justin Finch-Fletchley was the next to go.

Across the space that separated them, as she fought off her own, silently growing despair, Hermione failed to spot the growing remorse in Ron Weasley’s blue, blue eyes.

***
“This is unconscionable and ghastly. The Ministry needs to be held accountable for the lives they are literally ruining.

This isn’t be forever Hermione - you have to believe that.

Ever yours, R.L."

***

“I don’t know if I can believe that. But the fact is…most of us…we got to keep our wands didn’t we? Doesn’t that count for something?

H.G”

***

“Run away with me. I’ll take care of you.

I’m almost joking.

R.L.”

***

“They have a lovely library in the middle of New York City. I’ve seen pictures. There’s marble from floor to ceiling. H.G.”

***

“There are beautiful libraries everywhere. You’ll see them all someday. See you this Saturday… meet you at the Gates?

R.L.”

***

“Do you have a boyfriend stashed away in that school of yours?” her mother asked as the two of them moved around the kitchen trying not to get in each other’s way.

“Did I tell you how well I performed on my recent tests?”

“Five times, yes. Don’t change the subject.” Mrs. Granger checked on the turkey. “Sometimes I worry that you’re not having very much fun in your life…what about that nice Harry boy you talk about all the time?”

“Harry’s in love with Ginny,” Hermione replied automatically, scraping away the skin of her first potato.

“Pity. Oh, what about one of those twins you kept going on about for a while back there? Or that boy Ron?”

Realizing her mother was going to start listing the name of every single male she had ever mentioned in her entire life, Hermione made a snap decision.

“Actually, there is someone I’ve been seeing. And we’re meeting up on New Year’s Eve, by the way, so don’t wait up,”
It wasn’t exactly a lie - she had quite literally been seeing Remus, and they were indeed, meeting up on the last day of 1998.

“Really?” her mother stopped fussing with the carrots as she turned to her daughter in surprise.

Why did the woman ask her if she was seeing anyone, if she could barely believe her offspring was capable of finding herself a boyfriend, Hermione wondered sourly.

“Yes.” she said quite tersely.

“What’s his name?”

“Remus.” Hermione mumbled.

“When do we get to meet him?”

“Mother,”

“Oh come on sweetheart, I want to know who you’re kissing at midnight,”

“Mum,”

“Hermione,”

Turning to meet her mother’s eyes, the two women stared at each other in silence, before they burst out laughing.

“I’ll kill him if he tries anything. Magic or not, I happen to own some rather powerful weapons.” Her father called from the living room, from where he had clearly been eavesdropping. Her father, whose most powerful weapon was likely the dentist drill he kept in his office.

Shaking her head, Hermione diverted her full attention back to peeling the damned potatoes.

***

This was the first Christmas with her family, where Hermione realized she could finally show part of her world to her parents.

At age seventeen, the trace had been lifted off her, and magic was no longer out of bounds to her outside the grounds of Hogwarts. Seeing as she was with her own parents, the laws pertaining to performing magic around Muggles also did not apply to her. At least, not within the confines of the Granger house.

On Christmas morning, Hermione urged her mother and her father to sit at their sofa without first opening their gifts.

“Quite unlike you not to want to see what’s under the tree,” Mr. Granger yawned, looking just a tad resentful. It was still dark out, and his daughter could tell that he wasn’t fond of the reminder of how she used to bounce on her parents’ bed before dawn, every December twenty-fifth.

“Is there coffee?” Mrs. Granger asked, looking a little woeful. “Please tell me there’s some coffee. You made coffee right?”

“I’m going to show you two something,” she assured them with a nervous smile. They had never seen her magic in a controlled manner before. All they had ever witnessed, were her little accidents when she was naught but a child.
Waving her wand at the cold hearth, Hermione lit a small fire which crackled merrily. Overhead, she transfigured the ceiling temporarily into a wonderland of softly twinkling lights. On the end tables beside Mr. and Mrs. Granger, steaming cups of black coffee materialized, having been magically transported from the kitchen.

“Oh my,” Mrs. Granger was now completely awake. Light brown eyes stared at her daughter in surprise.

There was a moment of silence, before her father reached for his mug. It was his favourite mug, one a young patient had given to him - proof in his eyes that his job was not in fact, universally despised as that of a Master Torturer.

“So you’re a witch,” Mr. Granger said rather blandly after his first sip. “You do realize you’ve burnt the coffee,”

The three Grangers gazed at each other in silence, before finally collapsing into a pile of happy laughter.

“Oh my darling,” her mother said as she stroked at her daughter’s cheeks. “I always knew you were special,”

“That was nothing,” Hermione shook her head modestly.

“Don’t put yourself down. There’s plenty of people who will do that on your behalf in this world,” her father shook a finger at her.

“Allright,” she raised her hands in surrender, happier than she had been in a very long time. Peering at the shadows under the Christmas tree, Hermione spied tags with her name on it. “Now that’s done, it’s presents!”

“Now now…” her father cautioned her.

Not that it did any good. Hermione fell upon her gifts like a wild thing, ripping at the wrapping paper like she was still a child of seven.

***

Six days after, Hermione waited outside a Tube station, observing with interest, the way a nearby businesswoman tapped at what appeared to be a mobile computer.

In fascination, she studied the manner in which the woman drew up document after document, storing and arranging data in meticulous order. When she was finished, the woman stashed the slim little machine away into the confines of her rather small purse…

“I see you’ve discovered laptops,” Remus observed mildly from behind her.

“Is that what they’re called?” Hermione grinned, turning to greet him.

Nodding solemnly, though the corners of his lips twitched, he replied, “It’s because they sit on top of your lap you see. These engineers - however do they come up with their product names?!”

Staring at each other, it was hard to say who was the first to dissolve into silly giggles. Strolling out into the excited city, the witch wondered if Remus would mind it very much, if she slung her arm through his elbow, same as she would have done had he been Harry or Ron.
“Everyone seems to think this is the year the world might end,” Hermione observed as they walked through the city.

“The world’s been ending since the day it started,” Remus said wryly.

“They might be right this time,” Hermione shrugged, shoving her hands into her coat pockets. “The day Voldemort wins this war, he’ll turn his eye to the rest of the world. The Muggles will pay for their crime of being born at all when that happens.”

“‘If’, not ‘when’,” Remus corrected, sounding a little put-out. “When did you get so bloody dire?”

“I don’t know. I’m sorry,” she cast him an apologetic look.

“Hermione…” he stopped walking and looked down at her, caught between annoyance and oddly enough, fear.

Fear for her, she knew.

“‘If’. Not ‘when’,” she conceded at last, placating her companion.

The man was wearing a tweed jacket she’d seen him don before, back when he had been her teacher. The cuffs were ever so slightly worn at the edges, but for whatever reason, she found herself incredibly fond of the way the blazer looked on Remus.

Sighing, he turned away for a second, looking off into the gathering crowds.

“Do you trust me?” he asked suddenly, turning to her with a blinding grin, one which made him appear years younger than he actually was…though now that she was thinking on it, Hermione wasn’t exactly sure that Remus looked old at all. True, he sported lines around his eyes, and faint scars could be seen here and there…but…

The wizard looked far younger than most other men in their late thirties. Had she not known better, she might have assumed he was a man somewhere in his late twenties. Early thirties, if she wanted to push it. Now that he wasn’t half-starved and deprived the way he had been when first they had met three years before, Remus was a man transformed.

Based on the books she had been reading in her spare time, even outside of the full moon, werewolves owned an improved set of the five senses. Infected individuals were physically stronger than the average man, and could easily go up against any athlete in a footrace.

On the assumption that they were physically superior to a normal person, didn’t it make sense that their bodies too, aged slower than those of the uninfected?

“Hermione?” Remus’s smile faltered every so slightly.

“I trust you with my life, but why am I suddenly afraid?” she asked, deciding that she would do more research on the subject of Lycanthropy once she had a spare moment. Clearly, her studies in that area were not complete.

Without providing a halfway decent answer, or indeed, an answer of any sort, Remus slipped an arm around her shoulder. A second later, Hermione found herself staring down at a London bubbling with frenetic energy.

“Where…” she whirred around trying to get her bearings, and might have stumbled if Remus hadn’t steadied her. The aftermath of sudden apparition was still affecting her perceptions.
“Does it matter?” he grinned, releasing his hold on her right arm.

Staring up into his smile, the witch did her best not to remember what it had been like, when he had kissed her so thoroughly she had completely forgotten all else.

***

It was January, and the land was a frozen wasteland.

“I asked Rufus Scrimgeour why he did such a thing. Why he’s still doing such a thing,” Harry said without preamble as she strolled beside him around the iced-over lake. Against the rising wind, the two of them huddled close together for warmth.

Despite the cold, none of their schoolmates could be deterred from enjoying the beautiful, albeit freezing evening. Sounds of laughter and cheer surrounded both Harry and Hermione, providing such a contrasting backdrop to the topic of their discussion.

“And?” she reached up to tuck his scarf tighter around his neck.

“He gave me the same speech he gave to the papers. He told me it was all for the greater good… and that he won’t take down the law even for my sake.” Harry said quite bitterly, grasping for her busy hands and gripping tightly onto them.

“Oh Harry…” she sighed, and pulled him into a warm hug. “What matters to me is that you tried.”

“When this war is over, we’re going to fix this world,” Harry swore fiercely, his green eyes lit by a furious fire.

“For House Elves too?” she asked, trying to pretend she wasn’t crying as she pulled away. It was mostly happy tears - how lucky was she, to have a friend like Harry?

“For House Elves too.” he rolled his eyes as he dropped his hands to her hips. “Merlin Hermione, you don’t miss a trick do you?”

“That’s why you love me,” she stuck her tongue out at him.

Harry smiled wistfully. Shaking her head, she pressed a kiss to his cheek. Sighing, she leaned her forehead against his own. Their breaths mingled before their faces, forming a warm cloud which surrounded the two best friends.

“Hermione…” Harry’s voice dropped to a low whisper, tilting his face ever so slightly forwards. “I…”

The witch drew back; her expression was lined with familiar concern. Sucking in a deep breath, The Boy Who Lived tried again.

“Hermione, I’m…”

Before she could find out what it was Harry was trying to tell her, something cold and wet slammed into the side of Hermione’s face. Shrieking in shock, Hermione turned to find Ginny laughing in her direction.

“You do realize,” Hermione pulled away from Harry. “This means war. Run little girl, run fast and run far,”

Chasing after the other girl, the curly-haired witch never noticed the forlorn expression she left on
Harry’s face.

***

Ron’s birthday came around, and despite the fact that she wanted badly to wish him a happy seventeenth, she couldn’t bring herself to close the distance between them.

Instead, she contented herself with scowling into her homework while Ron stuck his tongue down Lavender’s throat, anytime the other witch wasn’t running around yelling “Happy birthday my darling Won-Won”.

Sometime during the afternoon, Luna appeared in the Gryffindor common room. With little fanfare, she handed Ron a small, wrapped present. The latter accepted the brightly wrapped package from the Ravenclaw almost shyly, a move which preceded about five minutes of stuttering from the ruddy-haired wizard.

Luna flitted amongst the Gryffindors quite happily, looking distinctly un-affected even under Lavender’s seething scrutiny. Considering her roommate’s threatening demeanour, Hermione couldn’t help but wonder quite uncharitably, if Ron somehow got off on his girlfriend’s ire.

As if his little romantic dramas weren’t aggravating enough, Ron somehow managed to ingest an ungodly amount of Amortentia, after eating cauldron cakes he happened to randomly find.

*On the bloody ground.*

It was hard to imagine that at one point, Hermione had harboured some form of attraction for the git. Even the Patil twins couldn’t help but roll their eyes at the state of things, and those two were the worst.

Of course, that was all before he was poisoned off some bad mead…and Hermione completely forgot why she was mad at him to begin with.

***

“We don’t know when he’s going to wake up,” Madam Pomfrey informed her in the middle of the infirmary.

In the minutes since the news had arrived from Ginny, of what had happened to Ron, Hermione had rushed through the world in a strange, dream-like state. Somewhere in the background, she heard the grating sound of Lavender’s voice as she wailed in distress. At the back of her consciousness, she heard Luna’s small voice as she asked to see the unconscious wizard.

As the words of everyone around her melted into a confused whine, Hermione gazed down at her friend’s pale face and marvelled with horrifying clarity, at the way she had been so stupid as to stay so mad at Ron for so long. At a time when nothing was certain; when no one she cared about was safe.

What had she been thinking?

Unbidden, a horrible thought occurred to the witch. She hadn’t heard from Remus in days, and the last time he had written, he had told her he was off trailing some werewolf pack in Cardiff. Gory images began pouring through her mind, as she imagined him hurt and alone in the wilderness.

Clapping a hand over her mouth, Hermione spun away from the concerned faces surrounding Ron. Hurrying towards the girls’ dormitory, she dashed off a short letter before she sprinted towards the
Owlsery with a rolled-up scroll in hand.

***

“Remus, I need to know that you’re fine…answer me when you get this, please. I don’t care how mad this sounds.

Ron’s gone and drank some poisoned mead, all because Slughorn’s a useless tosspot.

I just need to know you’re safe.

H.G.”

***

Back by Ron’s bedside, Hermione sat mutely, waiting for something, for anything to happen. To her right, Ginny’s back was rigidly straight as she kept her blue eyes fixed on her brother’s pale visage.

Behind Hermione’s uncomfortable chair, Harry stood like a sentinel with one hand clasped protectively at her shoulder. Every once in a while, he would squeeze his fingers against her, as if he meant to assure himself that she was there, and that she was safe.

The three of them stayed that way for hours, waiting, simply waiting.

It was just before midnight, when without any warning, the doors leading into the Hospital Wing burst open, admitting a frantic werewolf. A werewolf who was whole and unharmed.

“Remus,” she heard herself saying stupidly as she blinked up at the man. Grey eyes raked at her features, desperately seeking answers she wasn’t at all sure how she ought to provide. “Remus, what are you doing here?”

Before she quite processed everything that was transpiring, Hermione found herself unceremoniously yanked into Remus’s arms.

“I saw your note, and I couldn’t…god help me, I had to know you were safe.” he whispered, sinking his nose into her curls. So close to each other, she could hear the way his breath stuttered.

Instinctively, she wound her arms around his neck as she whispered urgently, “I’m sorry, I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean to worry you…”

“It’s fine.” his voice became muffled as he buried his face in the crook of her neck. His breath was hot on her skin, and it was all Hermione could do not to lift his face up so she could look properly at him.

None of this felt real, not yet.

“It’s fine. You’re ok, so it’s all fine.”

“I’m sorry,” she raked her fingers through his hair as his hands spanned protectively across the small of her back. “I’m ok. I promise, I’m ok,”

“What is the meaning of this? Mr. Lupin, you cannot just burst in here and accost a student…” Professor McGonagall’s aggrieved voice interrupted the moment, sending Hermione crashing back down to earth.
“Accost a student?” Remus released his hold on her as he spun to face the older woman. He sounded furious. “She’s my…”

“I know what she is!” the Transfiguration Professor interrupted. Looking at the assembled people in the room, the woman sighed. “Come with me to my office.”

Off to the side, Snape stared at the proceedings with bored indifference…though Hermione thought she caught a glimpse of something that resembled sardonic amusement.

“No,” Remus sounded like a child.

“It wasn’t a request,”

“Remus…” Hermione said very quietly. “Just go. Don’t leave the school without saying goodbye, but…can we not have a scene? Ron needs some peace and quiet.”

“Damn that woman,” Remus muttered, casting Hermione an exasperated look. Very quickly, he pulled her back in for one more hug, as if to convince himself that she was indeed, well. Reluctantly, the wizard stepped away from her, before following Minerva McGonagall from the infirmary.

Turning, she found herself looking at a scowling Harry, and an obscenely curious Ginny, though the latter appeared to be shelving her questions away for the moment.

***

She found him in the entrance hall, waiting patiently for her to show. Madam Pomfrey had summoned her from Ron’s bedside, murmuring to her that her visitor was leaving. Practically running through the castle, Hermione hurried towards a tired Remus waiting for her in the foyer.

“What are you alright? Did she…did Professor McGonagall yell at you?” her voice dropped to a hushed whisper.

Looking disgruntled, he nodded slightly. His hand floated upwards as if he meant to touch her face, but was afraid to.

Deciding she wasn’t quite up to playing any games just then, Hermione reached up and tugged insistently at his fingers, until he had no choice but to close the distance between them.

“You look tired,” he murmured. “Are you going to be alright?”

“It’s not me I’m worried about,” she shook her head.

“How are the others holding up? Are Harry and Ginny doing ok?” Remus asked, looking slightly embarrassed as if he realized he ought to have inquired sooner.

“Harry’s angry but otherwise he’s fine. Ginny is doing her best to stay calm.” Hermione felt utterly exhausted. “If not for Harry, Ron would probably be dead.”

“Promise me you won’t take anything Slughorn pushes on you.” Remus said almost jokingly, though she had a feeling he meant every word. “There’s been an update by the way. I’m done with my mission trailing after werewolf packs. It looks like myself and some other Order members will be patrolling the school from now on.”

“Oh?” she tilted her head, allowing herself to relish the feel of his hand against her skin. Relief
blossomed in her chest as she understood what he was telling her. Remus spread his palm in such a way as to cup tenderly at her cheek.

“I won’t be here every day. We’ll be trading shifts.” he shrugged, looking at her with that indecipherable glint in his grey eyes. “You won’t see much of me all the same. We don’t intend to publicize our presence.”

“Won’t see much of… Remus John Lupin, if you think you’re going to hang about here and not even say a decent ‘hello’ every once in a while, you’ve got another think coming.” Hermione said archly.

“Merlin, you really are a bossy little bint,” he gave a long-suffering sigh. “Fine then. I’ll be sure to let you know when I’m around, though, I don’t know how. It’s not as if I can send you a text message.”

Raising an eyebrow, Hermione stepped back and dug out her wand. Wordlessly, she cast a *Patronus*… only to receive a shock as an unfamiliar, wispy creature emerged from the tip of her wand.

Gone was her otter. In its place was a large, sleek jaguar.

The great cat prowled restlessly, muscles rippling under it’s shining skin. Settling on her haunches, the ghostly beast looked to her mistress, awaiting further orders.

“Cor…” Remus said, sounding genuinely awestruck. “That’s brilliant.”

Casting him a sharp look, it occurred to her that either Remus had never seen her original *Patronus*, or he had forgotten what it used to be.

“Just so you’ll recognize mine…” he grinned.

Pointing his wand at the space beside her jaguar, a wolf leapt out almost immediately. His beast growled at the translucent jaguar, which simply yawned in response, revealing a set of deadly-looking teeth.

“Yes. Right,” Hermione blinked.

“Or - I could get you a copy of our roster once that’s ready,” Remus paused for a moment, before leaning over and kissing her on her forehead. As his lips brushed against her skin, Hermione allowed her eyes to fall shut, as she indulged once more in the simple pleasure of his touch. “Stay safe. I’ll see you soon. Get some sleep alright?”

Not wanting to make promises she couldn’t keep, Hermione waved Remus away.

Long after he was gone, Hermione continued staring at the spot where her *Patronus* had manifested, wondering what the hell just happened.

***

Early in the morning, she snuck back into the infirmary with a couple of books tucked under her arm. Breakfast wasn’t due to be served for another hour, but it wasn’t as if she were getting any more rest.

The first book she turned to - a very slim volume titled *The Story of Happiness: The Patronus* - was filled with passages discussing the history of the spell itself. While interesting, Hermione did
not exactly find it valuable in helping her understand why her *Patronus* had changed its form.

So engrossed in her reading material, Hermione almost missed it as a reedy voice called out to her.

Looking up, Hermione found Ron trying desperately to hoist himself to sitting.

“Ron!” her voice shook as she rose to her feet. The library book she had been holding on to, fell to the floor. Rushing over to help him, she couldn’t keep her hands from visibly trembling.

“How long was I out?” he asked hoarsely, settling against a pillow she had stacked up behind him.

“Too long,” her cheeks were wet, she realized in embarrassment as she hurried to pour him a glass of water. “You had us so scared.”

“I’m sorry,” he said, trying to smile at her reassuringly as she passed him the filled tumbler. Sitting herself down once more, she watched as Ron took a long sip of water. When he was finished, he wiped at his mouth with the back of his hand. Convinced at last that he was awake, and she wasn’t simply dreaming, Hermione allowed herself to heave a sigh of relief.

“Where’s Harry, and Ginny?”

“Oh Merlin, what was I thinking? I’ve got to go let them know!” Hermione fretted, wringing at her hands as she leapt to her feet. “I’ll get Madam Pomfrey!”

“Wait!” Ron said quickly, reaching out to brush at her arm. “Wait a second. Stop being so…you.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” she demanded, pausing mid-step.

“Hermione there’s something I’ve been meaning to say and now’s a good a time as any.” he looked as pained as he was pale, though she was quite certain his discomfiture had nothing to do with the poison.

“Ron?”

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry ok? I’ve been acting like a massive git about this whole thing with you and Prof…with Remus. I’ve acted like a selfish child, and I can’t believe I blamed you for something that wasn’t your fault, or even *his* fault.” he said in a rush. “I’m so sorry I’ve been such an unbelievably horrible friend. Do you think you could find it in your heart to forgive me?”

“Oh for heaven’s sake,” Hermione sobbed aloud, though she was smiling through her tears. “I couldn’t sleep all last night worrying about you, and I snuck in here this morning just to sit by you. What do you think you over-dramatic idiot?”

“I think you’re a better friend than ever I could ask for and I-oof!” Ron gasped as Hermione engulfed him in a bear hug. “Woman, I’ve just been poisoned!”

“Buggering fuck shit,” she swore, looking frantic. “I’ll go get Madam Pomfrey!”

Ron looked ready to burst out laughing as he took in her vulgar outburst. Refusing to listen to his protestations, Hermione took off running.

Chapter End Notes
Ok so I'm gonna start messing with werewolf lore...that's my warning. lol.
He paced the length of McGonagall’s office, irritated that she had hauled him away like he was still just a child.

“I thought the plan was that you wouldn’t become involved with Hermione. No more than what was necessary!” the woman slammed her wand down on her desk.

Glaring at her, he bit out, “We’re just friends.”

“Oh come off it,” she scoffed. “I saw it. Snape saw it. Mr. Potter and Miss Weasley certainly saw it.”

“What is it they saw then?” Remus demanded hotly.

“They saw you losing your damned mind and demanding to be brought to your wife.” McGonagall’s voice was harsh. “Remus, this wasn’t part of the plan.

The wizard stopped his pacing and stared incredulously at the older woman.

“This wasn’t my plan. I did what you asked, what you wanted,” he said at last, finally giving voice to his frustration.

“I don’t know what you expected. It seems as if you honestly thought that we could share something so goddamn intimate, and then simply go back to our lives like nothing fucking occurred. I can’t believe I’m about to say this, but grow up Minerva,”

“How dare you?” McGonagall gasped.

“You can’t stuff the damned rabbit back in the hat just because it’s shat all over your house,” he concluded.

“Rabbits…what are you…” she frowned at him in consternation. Shaking her head to focus her thoughts, she tried again. “The whole plan had been constructed based on the notion that Miss Granger would be able to continue living her life as if nothing’s happened. I wanted her to be able to continue attending Hogwarts,”

“She is,”

“To be with her friends,”

“That too,”

“And maybe even build a life with someone her own age,” McGonagall finished at the very end, her voice becoming a sharp thing.

“What the hell makes you think I would stand in her way?” he demanded after a moment, wishing
like hell he wasn’t furious at the thought of Hermione building a life with someone who wasn’t him.

“Because it’s bloody obvious you besotted twit,” she thundered. “Sweet Merlin - Remus, I expected better of you.”

“Well I’m sorry if I’ve let you down.” he retorted, running his fingers through his sandy locks. “Hermione has had enough of her choices taken away from her. Shouldn’t we care what she wants?”

The woman’s eyes flashed angrily. “She’s still a very young woman. She might not necessarily want what’s best for her,”

“I believe someone else telling her what was best for her, then making her do exactly the opposite of actually that, is how we got into this situation to begin with,” he pointed out. “‘Sanctioned rape’ is how she put it, the night we…”

He squeezed his eyes shut.

“Christ Minerva, do you not understand that neither of us can simply turn a page and go on as if nothing has happened? This wasn’t just a fucking wedding, or a marriage, or a binding. They took away her rights as a person, and they turned me into their tool to do such a thing. Like it or not, Hermione and I are bound by those facts alone, and nothing you can do nor say will change any of that.”

From the deflated look in McGonagall’s eyes, he knew reality had finally hit home.

Those stated reasons weren’t the only reasons he felt so goddamned attached to Hermione of course, but frankly, whatever he felt for the young woman was none of the older witch’s business.

“While we’re on the subject,” he resumed his pacing. “Have you considered what might happen to her if something happens to me?”

“Mr. Weasley is of age as of today…which as I understand it, is why he’s currently laid up in Poppy’s care. Mr. Potter is next…” she sighed, sitting down and rubbing at her forehead.

“Ah. So now we’re talking about passing Hermione on to the next man every time a husband falls.” Remus said bitterly. “Christ, why aren’t we doing something about this? All these Muggle-borns, forced into matrimony just to keep the Ministry from scooping their memories and taking their wands. Shouldn’t we be storming the damn office and demanding that this shite be repealed?”

“One fight at a time Remus,” the witch said tiredly. “One fight at a time. I suggest you do your best to stay alive, if not for yourself, than for Miss. Granger.”

He was saved from having to press his point by Albus’s voice, as it came booming from McGonagall’s hearth.

***

Two days later, Remus was back in the castle, though this time, he didn’t need to kick up a fuss in order to be allowed in. Walking slowing along the edges of the school grounds, Remus tried to remember that what he was doing was important, and that it wasn’t boring.

Not even a little.
Five minutes into his patrol however, face-to-face with Tonks just outside the greenhouse, the wizard suddenly found himself wishing for a slightly less exciting evening.

“Hullo,” the Metamorphmagus said, giving him a small wave and a hesitant smile.

“Hi,” he said awkwardly, fiddling with his wand.

He wasn’t quite sure what he was to do next, but Tonks, ever more well-adjusted than he was, solved the problem by attacking the issue at hand.

“Gotten over yourself yet?” she asked cheerfully. “Because I’m ready for us to move on to the part where we’re friends and all that.”

“O-Oh?” he stuttered like an idiot.

“Yes, oh.” she informed him. Her hair was a brilliant purple, a shade which matched her eyes. “Look, I had some time to think, and…when I think about it, I think I heard what I wanted to hear, the entire time we were…you know. Shagging,”

There was no chance he wasn’t blushing to the very tips of his ears.

“The fault was mine, as much as it was yours, and don’t try to deny it, you didn’t exactly ward me off those first few times we got together.” she ended just a little sharply.

“I wasn’t going to deny it one bit.” he nodded, sticking his hands in his pockets. “I was a massive arsehole.”

“Yes, you were,”

“I’m glad we’ve established that,”

He ducked his head in shame.

“Anyway. I would like us to be friends, if that’s something you can manage in that tiny little heart of yours,” she continued, her lips twitching into a real smile. “I figured you might need one or two of those - friends, that is. Otherwise, you’d just sit at home feeling sorry for yourself, listening to sad music from the eighties,”

“I’ll have you know my music collection has gotten quite respectable,” he sniffed, as they began walking side-by-side.

“So you admit, you listen to some terrible rubbish,”

“We can’t all be fans of Boyzone,”

“We can’t all have taste, you mean,”

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“Harry thinks he’s so clever. He’s still using that book,” she grumbled, leaning against the stone walls of the castle entrance.

The witch was barely awake, seeing as dawn was only just approaching, but she had insisted the night before that she would meet him, before he departed the castle grounds after his patrol.

“Is it really that bad, considering he’s gaining something out of it?” he teased, rubbing at his eyes.
He planned to be at work in the afternoon, and desperately needed some sleep. Still, the sight of a rumpled and grumpy Hermione was oddly comforting. “Or are you just annoyed you weren’t the one to find the book?”

Huffing in annoyance, she opened her mouth to argue.

“I really have to get going. I’ll see you in two days,” he interjected. As had become his habit, he leaned forwards and kissed her on her forehead.

Fleeing before Hermione had time to explain in detail why she was right and Harry was wrong, Remus did his best not to dwell on how smooth Hermione’s skin felt under his lips.

***

The night Hermione passed her apparition exams, he snuck in a bottle of butterbeer. The two of them passed it back and forth as they sat atop the Astronomy Tower.

Overhead, the moon hung golden and dangerously close to full.

The full moon was in fact close enough, Remus’s senses were in overdrive. He could pick up every last detail about the young woman seated beside him. For instance, he could scent the way her sweat smelled upon her skin; the perfume of the balm she had spread over her lips; the shampoo she used to rinse her hair.

The werewolf could hear the cadence by which her heart sped up, each and every time their bodies brushed up against each other.

“Shouldn’t you be guarding us innocent souls?” she teased as she nudged him with her left shoulder.

“I don’t know what you call this,” he took a gulp of the sweet-sour butterbeer, and passed the half-emptyed bottle back to Hermione.

“Shirking.” she pronounced succinctly, hiding the hitch in her chest with an easy smirk as their fingertips brushed against each other’s.

“Now that you have your apparition license, where shall we go next Hogsmeade weekend? I don’t have to drag you about anymore, so if you get yourself splinched, well it’s all on you,” he grinned jokingly.

“Well actually I was thinking…”

“Well a museum again, I beg of you. Somewhere fun this time.” he groaned in almost genuine dread.

Beside him, the witch shivered as a cold breeze blew through the crenellated gaps of the tower. Without hesitation, Remus lifted his right arm and pulled her into his side, in an attempt to provide her some semblance of warmth.

Something changed in the air as traces of her desire flooded his senses. Hermione pressed up against him in a manner which had nothing to do with the cold.

Underneath his skin, the wolf waited patiently.

“This castle’s a bit odd you know?” Hermione said after a minute.
“How so?” he asked curiously as his thumb traced circles on her shoulder blades.

“Old castles - the telescopes were usually placed on the ground in an open field. Telescopes were quite massive as a matter of fact,” she explained, her voice taking on that lecture-y tone it occasionally did. “Even the magical ones. Our predecessors might have used spells to improve upon the Muggle inventions of the day, but most of them were too busy marveling at what they could find up in the skies with all these new tools at our disposal,”

Remus mused, “I was always interested in studies about the moon, considering my condition,”

“Fascinating isn’t it, the intersection of science and magic?” Hermione asked, turning to look up at him. “The moon that transforms you is in many ways, nothing more than a lump of dead rock and sand. I wonder if anyone has actually looked into how waves of light might play into werewolf physiology,”

Remus sighed. “Of course you would find that fascinating. You find the most tedious of things fascinating,”

Leaning her head back into the crook of his neck, she drained the last of their shared butterbeer. “There’s beauty to be found in the most unexpected of places,”

Humming contentedly, Remus stared up at the bane of his existence floating in the sky, and wondered if life could always be just like this.

***

“You do realize Westlife doesn’t actually count as a band,” Remus argued as they started their third pint. Bill chortled into his own glass.

“Old man, you’re out of touch,” Tonks snorted, looking to Bill for support.

“I have ears and I fully intend on keeping them in a functioning state,” Bill said with absolutely sincerity.

“Are you stuck listening to Led Zeppelin too?” Tonks sounded disappointed.

“Merlin, it’s as if you’re living under some rock where only bad music exists,” Remus shook his head.

Bill piped up as he set his lager on the table, “It’s almost as if you’re telling me you haven’t heard of Radiohead, or Travis, or…hell, anyone else,”

“I don’t really fancy slitting my wrists in the tub anytime soon, but thanks for the offer,” Tonks made a face.

The two men cast each other almost identical looks of abject despair.

The Auror’s gaze shifted to a spot somewhere above Remus’s right ear, as her smile turned into something familiar enough to set the werewolf’s face aflame. Peeking behind him, the wizard found the newest object of her attention.

Seated at the bar was some dark-haired fellow, who didn’t seem to notice that he had just been eye-fucked by a very pretty girl.

“D’yer need a wing man?” Remus asked, turning back to the Metamorphmagus.
“I’m trying to think of a world where you’re any good at it.” she snickered, taking another sip of her beer.

“Please. You think your cousin could have pulled as many girls as he did without my help?” Remus felt a smidge insulted.

“You know…don’t tell Fleur but…I suddenly wish I were a single man,” Bill said, staring in awe at Remus. “I bet you’re good at coming up with lines.”

“Well the strategy was always for me to come off like a fumbling idiot. Then Sirius usually came sweeping in, playing the suave, gallant hero,” Remus admitted sheepishly, though he immediately added, “So if you’re up for it…”

“Can’t hurt to watch you try,” she laughed.

“It might when I get punched in the face,” Remus muttered vaguely to himself, before squaring his shoulders and marching off.

Five minutes after, he returned, looking flattered but slightly embarrassed.

“Well?” the young woman asked curiously, tilting her head to the side.

“Uh. Well. I believe I succeed in rousing his interest…” he started.

The other two Order members waited.

“I mean, if I’m looking for a date on Saturday night, I have a guaranteed one lined up,” Remus concluded.

“You could do worse. He looks a bit like Sirius in fact, if you squint really hard. Actually, now that we’re talking about it, did the two of you ever…” Bill started.

“We weren’t talking about it. And I will not dignify that with an answer,” Remus buried his face in his hands.

Across from him, Tonks practically crowed, “Oh my god, you two did!”

“Oh for the love of…shut up!”

Somewhere out in the ether, Sirius Black was laughing himself stupid. Reaching for his drink, Remus took a long sip, and did his very best to forget how much he missed his best friend.

***

Winter had come for Hogwarts.

Sunset was on its way when Hermione appeared at the gates where he had been waiting for her. Despite the fact that the air had grown bitterly cold, Remus found himself quite incapable of leaving. At least, not without saying goodbye to the approaching witch.

“Everything alright?” he asked, observing her troubled expression.

“I think I accidentally destroyed Ron and Lavender’s relationship.” she handed him a small package.

Confused, he opened it, then immediately understood the contents for what they were. “Hermione,
“We were asked to brew anything we wanted in Potions. I tried my hand at Wolfsbane Potion - which turned out perfect, in case you’re wondering. I’d be happy to make you a batch every month actually.” she shrugged.

“That’s…” he was at a loss for words.

“As I was saying, I believe I have ruined Ron’s little romance.” she said dejectedly. “Though I suppose if that saves me from ever hearing the term ‘Won-Won’ again…”

“How did you ruin it?” he wondered, carefully tucking her gift away in the depths of his coat.

“She’s been accusing me of trying to steal Ron from her. I don’t think the idiot did anything to convince her otherwise.”

Standing there in the half-light, Remus prayed that Hermione couldn’t see the madness rising in his eyes.

Stifling the urge to grab ahold of the witch standing before him for the sole purpose of dragging her back to his lair, Remus choked out, “Is Ron what you want?”

Hermione cast him a strange look, as if he suffered from some heretofore unknown form of dementia.

“I didn’t like watching Ron and Lavender’s game attempts at swallowing each other’s faces, and god only knows she was insufferable the entire time they were dating. But I didn’t want for their fallout to happen the way it did,” she scrunched her nose. “She’s a nice person under all that…you know. Stuff.”

Remus couldn’t stifle his laughter at Hermione’s pronouncement, but he noticed she didn’t quite answer his question. Feeling a bit idiotic himself, but still wanting to know, he tried again. “Yes but now that Ron’s available…”

“Oh for god’s sake,” she stuffed her hands in her red coat. “The boy’s got the emotional capacity of a teaspoon and he can barely chew with his mouth closed. If I ever became his girlfriend, I’d be in Azkaban inside of a week, on charges of murder. Do you honestly think so little of me?”

All his unfounded jealousy evaporated in one puff, leaving instead, the understanding that Remus had prodded a very annoyed lioness, one who was capable of hexing him six ways from Sunday in methods he had likely never imagined.

“All you had to do was think a little more.” he said, mentally working out how this tiny witch always managed to send him - a fully grown werewolf - running for cover. “It’s getting late, I think it’s time I…”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to…” she looked miserable. “Oh sod it.”

Turning, she made to trudge off back towards the main entrance. Before she could get very far however, Remus laid a hand at her elbow. Gently, he steered her so she faced him once more.

“If I told you what I truly thought when it comes to you…” he said quietly, half-wishing he could somehow stop the words as they flowed out from him. “I might never stop speaking.”

“Remus…” she murmured very softly, reaching up to touch his cheek. “What I want is…”
In the depths of her expressive eyes, Remus saw what it was she wanted; that knowledge filled him with elation and panic all at once.

He simply couldn’t let her to finish that sentence. If she were to tell him here, now, that it was him she wanted, there was a very good chance he would hold on to her and never let her go. Not again. He simply wasn’t strong enough.

“Sweet girl,” he said wistfully, stopping her before she could go on. Carefully, he pressed his lips chastely above her brow as Hermione stepped into the protective circle of his arms.

McGonagall’s words echoed once more in his mind.

“She’s still a very young woman. She might not necessarily want what’s best for her.”

While he had argued then that Hermione deserved an agenda of her own, Remus did indeed see the truth in the older witch’s caution.

In the silence of the frigid evening, Hermione’s soft sigh was like a sweet and final benediction at the end of a long day. Wishing fervently that he could take her home with him, but knowing it was both impossible and unwise, Remus contented himself with simply holding her, long after the sun disappeared below the horizon.
Psychology and Your Patronus. It was a book written by a Muggle-born, Hermione noted the day she dragged the thick tome out of the school library.

On the twenty-seventh chapter, the witch found her answer as to why her Patronus had changed. The answer itself was far simpler, and more elegant than she had expected.

Indeed, if there was anything surprising about her findings, it was the fact that her Patronus had not transformed itself into something far larger and angrier...like a great, furious dragon perhaps, or even a rampaging bear.

In all fairness, it wasn’t anger she experienced in the face of an unfair system. Rather, it was bone-crushing wariness she felt, within the new world order she had inadvertently found herself existing in.

In the end, what were cats if not wary creatures? And what were jaguars if not overgrown cats?

Shutting the book (because it was boring even by her standards), the young woman reached out and stroked absently at Crookshank’s neck. Curled up into a fat, orange crescent, the half-kneazle purred in her sleep.

“Lucky beast,” the witch muttered, envious that her cat found rest with such ease.

Tiredly, she reached for the next book in her accumulated pile.

“...recent studies with two volunteer subjects have yielded some fascinating outcomes.

In Laboratory settings, over the course of eighteen months, the two individuals referenced above were subjected to regular doses of the Wolfsbane Potion. While at first, the differences in behaviour were minimal, recent observations have shown that...”

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At the top of the stairs leading down to the Great Hall, long after classes had ended and dinner was over, Hermione found herself running unexpectedly into Tonks.

“Wotcher’, Hermione,” the Auror waved cheerfully.

What was the necessary etiquette required, to greet the former lover of one’s husband, Hermione wondered, before something struck her - she hadn’t actually figured out if Remus and Tonks had ever found their way back into each other's arms, in the aftermath of the enforced wedding.

The wizard never talked about Tonks in his letters, or when the two of them were spending time together. While it would have been easy to infer that the man was still living the life of a carefree bachelor, there was also a very good chance that Remus had noticed the manner by which Hermione had come to regard him.

Perhaps Remus thought it would hurt Hermione if he spoke of his continued relationship with the other woman. Perhaps he had assumed it would be detrimental to their own growing...
friendship. Hadn’t it only been a few days ago, at the very gates of this castle, when she had come close to letting slip all that was in her heart? And in turn, had he not sought to silence her words in the most gracious way possible?

In retrospect, perhaps he hadn’t wanted to hear her schoolgirl confessions, because at the end of it, he simply did not feel the same way.

Just because they had learned to become comfortable in each other’s company, because they had learned to express their fondness for each other through simple touch, did not imply any more hidden depths in their interactions than what she shared with Harry.

Hermione forced herself to smile. “Pulling the night shift?”

The Metamorphmagus made a face. “Yes well, everyone else had a life, so here I am,”

“Please. I want to be you when I grow up,” Hermione replied, trying to remind herself that no matter what, she had always liked Tonks and that oughtn’t change just because…well. That.

“Funny, I said that to Remus just the other night,” Tonks replied with a laugh. “I said I wanted to be Hermione when I grew up.”

“That’s silly, I’m just a boring little swot,” Hermione’s smile wavered, as the Auror’s words sunk in. To her horror, something which felt a lot like jealousy started bubbling deep inside the depths of her belly.

Remus needed someone like Tonks to drag him out of his lonesome shell, she told herself, someone bright, and sparkling, and courageous. Hermione ought to be happy for him that he had someone so wonderful in his life.

“Are you doing alright?” Tonks asked, tilting her head sympathetically. “I’ve been hearing all these rumours about Lavender and Ron. Do you need me to kick anybody’s arse?”

“Well, there is Ron,” Hermione joked weakly.

“Not sure what you saw in him to be honest,” Tonks leaned in. “Nice boy but…”

“Right,” she pursed her lips. Again with the assumption that she had harboured secret affections for one of her best friends...though...she supposed it had been true at one point. “Got it,”

“We should catch up sometime when I’m not on duty. I got an earful from Moody the other night...something about spending too much time chatting with the students,” Tonks sounded remorseful, though the quirk in her blue eyebrow suggested otherwise.

As they parted ways, Hermione felt rather proud of the way she had interacted with Tonks. Not once did she betray her own disappointment, or that ache in her heart...or that sudden, secret desire to claw the other woman’s eyes out.

Please god, she prayed to no deity in particular, please don’t let me become Lavender Brown.

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“Are you sure there’s nothing going on between you and Prof...Remus? The two of you seem awfully cosy,” Ginny teased from beside Harry.

The three students were sitting together by the fire in the Gryffindor common room; across from
Hermione, her two companions were snuggled up against each other, looking content to simply *be*. Every few minutes, Ginny tilted her cheek towards Harry, who obligingly kissed her as often as the younger witch desired.

It pleased Hermione that Harry had finally gotten around to making a move on Ginny. If anyone deserved a measure of happiness, it was her best friend who had already lost so very much. Still, the sight of the canoodling couple drew out a strange sense of melancholy in her chest.

“Don’t be ridiculous, Remus has a girlfriend. *We* are just friends and that’s never going to change,” Hermione kept her eyes fixed on her schoolwork. As such, she missed the severely skeptical look Ron’s sister cast her way…and the hopeful glint that entered Harry’s eyes.

“Has anyone seen Ron?” Harry asked, rising abruptly to his feet.

“I saw him and Luna roaming around the lake,” Hermione said absently. “They’ve been there for hours,”

“Poor fellow,” Ginny chuckled. “I wonder what she’s on about now…”

***

The Potions textbook had been trouble, and Harry should never had touched it, but still, still he refused to hand it over.

“He almost killed Draco,” she told Remus as they sat across from each other in a cafe in the middle of Edinburgh.

The cafe had been Remus’s idea. The wizard had come across the establishment on one of his previous assignments, and had quite enjoyed it. Hermione had a feeling it had to do with the sweetness and viscosity of the delicious hot chocolate which they were both currently sipping on.

If her parents knew what she was putting her teeth through, she would be in so much trouble.

“He didn’t though.” Remus said pointedly, though she could hear the defeat in his voice.

For months, she had been telling everyone who would listen why the damned book was not to be trusted, and no one would listen.

“He was lucky he didn’t,” Hermione said darkly. “In the Muggle world, an equivalent attack would have put Harry behind bars.”

“Our world is a little more forgiving. On all the wrong things, I suppose,” he sighed, stirring absently at his cup. Picking up his teaspoon, very carefully, he licked away all traces of whipped cream.

Hermione swallowed and turned her dark eyes towards the expansive glass windows separating them from the outside world. As such, she failed to catch the ravenous expression creasing Remus’s handsome features, as his grey eyes turned sharply in her direction.

The moment passed quickly. Long fingers unclenched themselves from around a delicate porcelain cup; a hungry smile schooled itself into something far more civilized.

There had been a shadow looming at the back of the witch’s mind for months, and now, it was a menacing, dark, tangible thing. After all that Harry had learned of Tom Riddle, after all that had come to pass in the last few weeks, Hermione could feel it in her bones that *something* was about
to give.

“A storm is about to break. You feel it don’t you?” she asked, keeping her hands wrapped tightly around her mug.

“It’s a bit overcast…” he looked up at the springtime sky, wilfully misunderstanding what it was she was telling him.

“Dammit Remus, I’m not joking,” she persisted. The werewolf tilted his head, looking at her as if she were a little unhinged.

In truth, perhaps she might have gone a little mad in recent days. With Harry’s revelations regarding some of the magicks Voldemort had employed to grant himself reign over death, Hermione recognized with horrifying clarity, that the odds of them winning this war had dropped to dismal numbers.

“Listen to me,” he sighed. “The war isn’t worse or better than it was two months ago. We’re at a standstill,”

Hermione stared at the Muggles surrounding the two of them. Each and every individual was going about their lives with absolutely no clue that the world was going up in flames right under their very noses.

Now that she was thinking on it, why weren’t the Muggles told of the imminent threat that lay at their doorstep? Why weren’t they given the chance to protect themselves, or to flee?

By what right, Hermione wondered, did the the Magical community deem their lives more worthy than those of good people like her own parents? On the surface, the magic wielders were tasked with protecting the Muggles. Yet how could that be possible, when they could barely protect their own interests?

“I can’t stop this feeling like everything we’ve done so far. All the things we know, all the fighters we’ve amassed…it’s not enough. It’ll never be enough,” she intoned. “The other side doesn’t play fair. The Enemy casts to kill, and they don’t care how many lives they destroy to get what they want. Us on the other hand. Our shred of moral decency will be our downfall.”

“Stop it,” Remus said in a low voice.

“You know it’s true.” she pressed on, leaning forwards. “If we want to win, we have to start thinking like the Enemy.”

“Should we drag every pureblood wizard and witch out onto the street and set fire to them?” Leaning forwards, Remus growled, his eyes darkening in anger. “Because that’s what you’re saying.”

“Not quite.” she argued, though she paled at the picture he had just painted. “I mean that we can’t keep casting bat-bogey hexes, when they’re casting exploding curses at us.”

“You’re furious at Harry because he almost bled Draco dry.” Remus said coldly. “Now you’re saying those are exactly the curses we should be using.”

“Not exactly…” she answered very slowly. “How much do you know about Ginny’s first year at Hogwarts?”

“I heard some stories,” he shrugged, leaning back and crossing his arms. “I heard about a basilisk
loose in the castle. I heard it petrified a number of Muggle-borns, including you.”

There was a fiercely protective note in his voice which Hermione ignored with an ease borne of habit.

“Ginny was possessed by a book.” Hermione spoke earnestly. “She painted the walls in blood, and did the bidding of a thing which lived in ink and parchment.”

Remus stared at her, his mouth agape.

“Harry found a random textbook and immediately started obsessing over it. What do you think that looked like to me?” she refused to back off from the subject. For all her own love of learning, Harry’s fascination with the Potions textbook had seemed completely unnatural.

“When he tried to murder Draco, it occurred to me that the book had been planted to ruin him, if not possess him,”

Patiently, Hermione waited as Remus collected his thoughts.

“I stand by what I said. We are better than the Enemy, and we should at least try to take the higher ground. At the risk of being condescending, the difference between you and I, is that I lived through the first war, and I witnessed all the horrors which had been wrought at the hands of everyone involved. Everyone, do you understand me?”

“We won,” Hermione said, sensing that she was losing this fight; she felt quite annoyed in that knowledge.

“Did we?” he asked quietly. “Voldemort went away, but nobody brought back the minds of the Longbottoms. How many loved ones did Harry alone lose? How many years did Sirius suffer at the tender mercies of the Dementors?”

The wind fully taken from her sails, Hermione slumped back into her chair.

“If it makes you feel better…all you’ve done is echo what Sirius himself used to say, over and over during the first war. I seem drawn to a certain type of personality,” he said wryly, before he reached over and grabbed at her left hand. “By the way…”

The feel of his large, warm hand over hers was addictive, but she forced her mind away from unhelpful urges.

Hermione watched curiously as he reached back into his spring jacket and pulled out a small, brightly wrapped package. Glancing at his surroundings to ensure no one was watching, Remus raised a carefully obscured wand. Immediately, the package grew three times as large.

“Happy Birthday.” he shoved the present unceremoniously towards her.

“How did you know?” she pushed her curls off her face with her free hand.

Remus looked a little embarrassed. “Um. The day before our…well, our wedding, I demanded that McGonagall show me some proof of your age. She did, I saw, and here we are,”

“Got it,” Hermione nodded. Tugging her hand impatiently from Remus’s own, she proceeded to rip apart the wrapping paper.

“I figured you could use your own set of those books and…bloody hell woman, calm down,” he
seemed slightly taken aback by the voracity with which she tackled her birthday gift.

It was the *Sandman* series she’d been borrowing from him over the course of the year. Doubtful though she had been at the beginning, Hermione had indeed found herself gradually appreciating the excellent prose and artwork within the pages of the acclaimed graphic novel.

“Thank you,” she said sincerely. She noted with wistful pleasure, the last two books of the series of which she had yet to read. Peering up at Remus, she teased, “I suppose you’re just sick me not returning your books,”

“Silly witch,” he said affectionately, reaching once more for her hand. His fingertips trailed the inside of her wrist. “You don’t lend people books with the expectation that you’ll ever get them back,”

Seated across from Remus, enjoying his very nearness, Hermione forgot for a moment, the notion of pain, death and bloodshed.

If only it could have lasted.

Eventually, as the both of them finally left the city of Edinburgh, they had very little idea that this would be Hermione’s very last Hogsmeade Weekend.

***

It wasn’t very long after when Harry followed Dumbledore into the night. Her best friend left with them a dire warning, and a vial of *Felix Felicis*.

“Be careful,” Harry had warned, settling a heavy gaze on her person.

“You be careful,” she had admonished, wishing she could follow.

*Felix Felicis* had a curious effect, one that much later, she would admit she didn’t very much enjoy. The potion tugged at her limbs like she were a mere puppet, directing her to places she hadn’t quite meant to go. Her and Ron both, though Ron didn’t seemed to notice a thing as he left to guard the Room of Requirement with Ginny and Neville.

Outside the dungeons, dreamily, she observed as Remus and Tonks sprinted into view. With abstract interest, she noted the way the wizard grasped tightly at her forearms, demanding to know what had happened to her.

“You’re being silly,” she heard Luna tell him. “We’re not hurt.”

“She’s right,” Hermione agreed firmly. “We’re not,”

“I don’t believe you,” Remus said flatly.

Pointing his wand at her chest, he cast, “*Finite Incantatem,*”

Hermione blinked.

“I told you, I’m fine,”

Frowning, the wizard opened his mouth to protest, but a loud crash distracted them all. Ignoring Remus’s best efforts to keep her in place, Hermione twisted from him and ran towards the source of the disruption, her wand held at the ready.
Corridor after corridor, the potion in her veins carried her safely past moving staircases and shifting hallways. At the base of the Astronomy Tower, without a second thought, Hermione leapt straight into a raging battle.

The spells came easily to her as she fired curse after curse, hex after hex. Here she caught an enemy by surprise, slamming him into a wall hard enough, she could hear the crack of his spine. There, she cast a well placed Diffindo, permanently blinding a shrieking woman with a tattooed arm.

All curses aimed at her, somehow kept missing her by inches. On one side, Ginny flowed with the battle like some goddess of war, exacting punishment after punishment on their enemies. On the other, Luna floated through the chaos, bloodying those who sought to hurt them.

Caught up in both the rush of Felix Felicis and an overwhelming bloodlust, Hermione found herself filled with strange exhilaration as she fought.

That is, until she came across a scene which stopped her cold. The hulking man they called Greyback stood before her, taunting a furious, bleeding Remus.

Bleeding. Her husband was bleeding. Someone had to pay.

Snapping her dark eyes to the left, she took in the older wolf. She knew who Greyback was - how could she not? Here was the monster who had deliberately bitten Remus when he had been no more than a babe. Here was the beast who destroyed her wizard’s chance at a normal life, for no reason outside of petty vengeance.

At the older werewolf’s feet, Bill Weasley lay bloodied and unconscious, the sight of which only served to stoke at the witch’s burning rage.

Hermione lifted her wand and cast with a vengeance, “Confringo,”

Greyback’s screams were as music to her ears.

Chapter End Notes

Note: story and characters will start getting gradually darker...there will definitely be more brutality to come.
The Courtship: Chapter 8

Bill casually twirled his wand in his right hand as the three of them wandered around the edges of the castle. “I’m still not quite sure why she said ‘yes’.”

“How you looked in a mirror recently?” Tonks teased, punching the tall curse-breaker in the arm. “You’re not half-bad to look at yourself. Though I suppose once we add a few years and a few pounds on you, she’ll probably think about getting those vows revoked.”

The three Order members had spent the past four hours discussing the eldest Weasley son’s impending nuptials, though it was mostly a one-sided discussion. Somehow, Bill kept finding new ways to complain about his mother’s voracious nagging, and how it was driving his fiancé quite insane.

When he wasn’t bitching about his mother, the young man spent his time worrying at the prospect of being wedded to a woman far more attractive than he himself was.

The issue, Remus thought, was that Bill was whinging about his pithy problems to just about the two most single people in their little secret society - depending on how one looked at these things anyway. Kingsley was married to his job, Moody was…well…Moody. And the others were all mostly happily saddled at this point.

While Remus and Tonks tried their best to make polite, sympathetic noises, along with the occasional joke at Bill’s expense, the werewolf found himself sharing grimaces of sympathy with his ex-something, every time the ruddy-haired wizard wasn’t paying close enough attention.

There had been few moments during the course of the evening, when Remus seriously considered making a joke about sexless marriages. He had even formulated an outline of it in his head, and it went something like

“The magic’s gone before you know it. Something something wanking alone every morning, something something where did it all go wrong?”

“I’m not just a pretty face, I’ll have you know.” Bill sniffed haughtily as they rounded a corner. “I also happen to have a large…”

“Bill, you might want to hold that thought…” Tonks said, all playfulness gone from her voice as she looked upwards.

Confused at her sudden change in demeanour, Remus followed the Auror’s eye-line, which settled somewhere above the Astronomy Tower.

“…collection of broomsticks…” Bill trailed off in horror as he took in the Dark Mark floating overhead.
Without stopping to think, Remus cast a *Patronus*, and commanded, “The castle is under attack.”

Close by, the other two were casting the exact same spells, but Remus didn’t wait for them to finish before he began sprinting for the entrance of the castle. Already, his silver wolf was disappearing into the distance, carrying with it his vital message.

Past the heavy doors, he dashed down countless hallways and up several stairwells. Racing towards the Headmaster’s office, he shouted to every adult in sight, “Secure the children, we’re under attack!”

At the entrance to Albus’s office, Remus gaspingly provided the password he’d used only two days prior, but the doors refused to open, which meant only one thing.

Their Commander was not in the castle.

“Fucking hell,” he cursed, turning on his heel as he began racing towards McGonagall’s office. Skipping stairs and leaping across large gaps - courtesy of moving staircases - Remus landed at last upon the main floor.

Before he could recover from the impact and resume his mad dash through Hogwarts, out of the corner of his eye, he caught sight of two familiar figures as they emerged from the dungeons.

“Hermione…” he called loudly, urgently. This entire time, he had assumed she was safely sequestered away somewhere in Gryffindor tower. He should have known better; he should have guessed that the woman was going to get herself mixed right into the thick of things.

“Remus,” she said, turning to him. There was something strange in her mannerisms, in the sense that she wasn’t displaying any. Despite knowing that he had a larger duty to undertake, Remus couldn’t stop himself from striding over to get a better look at the young witch.

“What’s wrong with you? Have you been cursed?” he demanded with a frown, grasping at her forearms. “Are you hurt?”

“You’re being silly,” Luna said. “We’re not hurt.”

“She’s right,” Hermione agreed. “We’re not.”

“Hermione, Luna, you shouldn’t be here,” Tonks called out from behind, sounding almost as worried as he felt.

“I don’t believe you,” Remus made a decision. Stepping back, he pointed his wand at Hermione and cast, “*Finite Incantatem,*”

Instead of snapping out of it, Hermione smiled - actually smiled - at him and said, “I told you, I’m fine.”

Angrily, Remus opened his mouth to inform her that she wasn’t *fine*, only to be interrupted by a massive noise that came from the direction of the Astronomy Tower. Before he could catch her, Hermione was already sprinting off with Luna at her side.

Taking off in hot pursuit, Remus found to his shock that he could not catch up with either student.

Which was ridiculous - he was a *werewolf* for fuck’s sake.

“It’s a spell,” Tonks panted. “They’re under some sort of geas”
Swearing under his breath, he did his best to keep up with the duo, knowing that he had no choice but to stay calm, never mind that he was about to explode in panic.

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The pursuit led them to the base of the Astronomy Tower. Unceremoniously, the two senior Order members found themselves abruptly engulfed in a battle of life and death, as the Enemy aimed malicious, brutal spells at everyone in sight.

Instinct took over as Remus began fighting back, shooting at anything that moved, or that didn’t resemble a friend or a student.

Bloodlust filled his veins, as the wolf under his skin snapped and growled in excitement. Whipping out spells faster than the eye could see, Remus forgot all the best intentions he had expressed to Hermione only days prior. With all the speed and agility that he been gifted with, the wizard moved like a nightmare across the chaotic landscape.

Effortlessly, Remus cast spells which bled men dry, spells which crippled them and spells which caused Death Eaters to claw at their own faces in agony as they sobbed for their mothers. Someone flung a hex at him, causing blood to trickle from a wound at his forehead.

“Oppugno,” he hissed. Glass shards flew up from the ground and stabbed towards his assailant’s terrified face. Collapsing under the weight of his wounds, the man lay bleeding, and began to moan as pain set in.

Turning his head, he watched as a masked man stalked towards Hermione, who was too busy fending off a Crucio to notice that she was about to be attacked.

“Mudblood whore,” the pillock crooned as he raised his wand.

Growling, Remus lashed out with a Reducto, and watched in satisfaction as the man fell to the ground screaming, clawing helplessly at his shredded leg.

Above the din of battle, Bill Weasley’s scream rent the air, a sound which chilled Remus to the bone. Spinning on his heel, grey eyes searched desperately for the eldest Weasley boy, only to freeze as he found himself staring into a familiar, bloodied face.

“If it isn’t the prodigal son…” Fenrir Greyback greeted.

Noise began to filter into his consciousness; the smell of blood was overwhelming. Somewhere, he heard Harry’s voice as the wizard bellowed in rage and mourning.

Greyback smiled a gruesome smile at him; the older wolf’s mouth was coated in a layer of dripping ruby. Bill’s blood, from the smell of it - the monster had savaged the boy, and he wasn’t even wearing the skin of his wolf.

“I’m not your son,” Remus gritted out, stepping forwards.

“That’s your woman isn’t it? Your scent is all over her.” the older werewolf asked, nodding towards Hermione.

“Stay the fuck back,” Remus raised his wand.

Laughing, Greyback turned his contemptuous glare back upon Remus. “A woman like that is wasted on the likes of you. Don’t worry, I’ll take good care of her. She’ll whelp me a litter of pups
yet.”

Like hell, Remus thought, as the beast in his mind lifted its muzzle and howled. Lips splitting into an angry, possessive snarl, in that moment, he was more wolf than man.

“Confringo,” Hermione’s voice rang out. A ball of fire collided with Greyback, who understood too late that he was in the path of the witch’s rage. Shrieking in fear and anger, the older werewolf caught the brunt of the damage as his clothing exploded. Screaming, he began to run, disappearing from the scene of the battle.

Someone threw an Expulso, and Remus was barely able to erect a Protego in an effort to shield himself.

All around, the battle raged on.

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One minute, they were fighting for their lives, and the next, Remus found himself staring at a scene of destruction. Several Death Eaters lay on the ground, either bound, dead, or dying.

Tonks rushed past him in a blur of black and red, yelling, “They’re fleeing! Quickly now, we have to stop them!”

Taking off after her, he ran out into the cool spring night, allowing the fresh air to bring him back to the world. All around him, men, women and children were still shouting, and sparks were still flying. Something was burning in the middle distance.

Just as he began to jog towards the source of the flames, Remus caught sight of a familiar head of curly hair, bent over a crumpled figure laying on the ground. The young woman had her back to him, and from where he stood, he couldn’t tell if she was moving or not.

“Hermione,” he heard himself shouting hoarsely, as his feet began running of their own accord.

She looked up at him. That strange sheen he had noticed earlier, was finally gone from her dark eyes.

“He’s gone,” she murmured as he tugged her to her feet and wrapped his arms protectively around her. Burying his face into her smoke-soaked curls, Remus breathed, trying to get his heart rate to slow.

“Remus, he’s gone…” she repeated dully, pulling away and looking down. All around, people were starting to gather.

“No,” he heard himself saying aloud as he gazed upon the crumpled corpse before them.

Their side had just lost the battle…and quite possibly, the war.

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Harry stood apart from the Weasleys, looking as if the world had disintegrated under his feet; his green eyes had been transformed into black holes of anguish.

Gazing over at him, Remus admitted silently that he had never really connected too deeply with the boy outside of the year he taught at Hogwarts. When it came down to it, he didn’t actually know a lot about Harry Potter, outside of the fact that he was James’s son…though this fact, of course,
guaranteed the young man a special, permanent place in Remus’s heart.

From what little he did know and could tell, it didn’t take a genius to see that Harry had always perceived the Headmaster as a father-figure of sorts. While Remus could certainly understand why that might be, the werewolf’s own relationship with Albus lent him a certain perspective that most of his peers were unlikely to understand.

As a boy, both Remus and his parents had been extremely grateful to the late Headmaster for taking a young werewolf under his protection. For him especially, it had been proof at the time that the world might yet have a place for someone as cursed as he was.

Coming into adulthood, he began the task of repaying Albus, by following the man’s every order and command. When the wizard had asked Remus to act as a spy for the sake of the Order of the Phoenix, he had agreed without reservation, determined as he was to make the old man proud.

Days turned into weeks, and weeks turned into months. As time marched forwards, Remus started witnessing atrocities such as he had never dreamed.

"I know this is hard," Albus said, levelling his blue eyes at Remus’s younger self after a particularly gruelling report.

"But out of all of us, you’re the only one who can do this. We know the Dark Lord is using these packs as his foot soldiers, but that is all we know. Can you imagine what we could do if we understood their plans? No Remus, you have to do this because no one else can. You alone are able."

That was when Remus first came to see why the Headmaster had chosen to cultivate him, specifically, despite his affliction. Or was it because of his affliction that he had been chosen…

He told the Headmaster desperately, "They expect me to kill innocent Muggles. Professor Dumbledore, please..."

The aged wizard studied him in passive silence as he leaned back in his carved seat.

That coldness twinkling out at Albus’s eyes resembled nothing so much as the glow of a morning star. Staring at the old man, Remus remembered how Lucifer himself had glowed with holiness once, before his long and hopeless fall from the sight of grace.

"We're in the middle of a war," Albus said softly. "Sacrifices have to be made. If you only knew the things I have done to keep us safe, and the things I will do to win this fight..."

"I can't do this," Remus had breathed, feeling as if the weight of the world was crushing down upon his chest.

But. He could, as it turned out, and he did. He did in the end, because it was what his Commander had asked of him. For the sake of the mission, he had done the unforgivable, and in doing so, he won the trust of the packs he had been spying on.

Even so, it proved no easy task to run intelligence between both sides…but by then, Remus had ceased to care if eventual discovery meant his own death.

Nobody talked about it because nobody knew, though his long absences and dark moods did much in the way of sowing the first seeds of discord between himself and Sirius. In the end, it didn’t take very long at all, for those seeds to bear their hideous blossoms.
"Have you lost your fucking mind?" he had demanded from the other man one night, after fending off unsubtle accusations aimed directly at him. The five of them were seated around a roast dinner, which Lily had painstakingly prepared.

"Yes or no Remus, are you a spy?" Sirius had insisted, giving up on any pretence of courtesy. The Animagus’s wand hand trembled, as he levelled his dark strip of Elm in Remus’s face.

"Go to hell," Remus spat, shoving away from the dining table as the edges of his soul crumbled further into fine ash.

"Sirius, what the actual fuck?" James roared as he rose to his feet, even as Lily hurried to stop Remus from leaving.

Peter said and did absolutely nothing, outside of staring at Sirius with genuine fear in his eyes.

Striding for the front door, Remus refused to look back. He didn't need his friends to witness the hot tears running down his cheeks, tears of which blurred and stung at his eyes.

"Moony, please, don’t leave. He’s just being an idiot." Lily said, trying and failing to hide the distress in her voice. “You know how he gets anytime some stupid idea pops into his head,”

"I'm sorry," he said to Lily, brushing aside her staying hand. "I can't do this. Not right now."

At the end of the war, with the deaths of James, Lily and Peter still fuelling his hatred for Sirius, there was nobody he could have turned to, nobody he could have told, of everything he had done for the sake of the so-called ‘Greater Good’.

Thus, instead of lingering to see the remains of a broken world, Remus chose to fade away.

Years later, when Albus had appeared at his door asking him to return to Hogwarts, his first reaction had been to slam his warded door in the old man's face. The exact words he had then shouted through a layer of splintering wood, had been a succinct "Fuck off."

In those days, Remus had been poor, so very, very poor. All around the broken man, his home was falling apart, and he had started to go days without eating. All efforts he had taken to live any sort of a normal life had come to nothing. More than once, he had seriously considered putting an end to his own existence, before he became just another derelict.

It would have been easy even without magic. The right application of a blade, the courage to step off a ledge…

But starving and desperate though he was, Remus had preferred the thought of freezing to death on the streets, over the notion of having to answer to Albus Dumbledore ever again.

"Remus," the old man called from the other side. The man hadn’t even attempted to break through the wards the werewolf had thrown in place, despite the fact that he could have ripped through Remus’s spells as if they were no more than rotted parchment.

"For the sake of James's son, please listen to what I have to say. Don't let the mistakes of an old fool keep you from doing what's right...Merlin knows, you've spent enough time away from Harry. If you only knew how much suffering he has been forced to endure…”

…said the man who had orchestrated Harry’s suffering to begin with, as he came to find out much later from Minerva McGonagall.
Everyone had assumed Remus had returned to the world for the sake of a guaranteed supply of Wolfsbane Potion. But what everyone had failed to understand, was that he had spent a whole lifetime without having to rely on that vile mixture. Never mind that he had coveted the potion and its effects for years. Suffering was preferable to the idea of handing over any aspect of his life, back into the old man’s keeping.

So no, the fucking *potion* wasn’t why he came back. The truth was, it had been Albus invoking James's name which had ultimately cracked Remus’s determination.

Was he sorry now that his Commander was dead? Yes, of course he was. There were too many years and too many deaths between the both of them, for him not to feel *something*.

Would he mourn Albus for very long?

Remus wished from the bottom of his heart, that he had a better answer to give than ‘no’.

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He refused to relinquish Hermione as everyone gathered in the Hospital Wing. If anyone noticed his possessive and vaguely territorial behaviour, nobody said a thing. The only one who seemed to see what he was doing was Tonks, who cast the two of them more than a few inscrutable glances.

The Metamorphmagus wore a wistful expression, but for once, Remus found it hard to focus his sympathies on her latent hurt feelings.

A part of him knew he shouldn't resent Harry for dosing Hermione with *Felix Felicis*, but he found himself irrationally annoyed that The Boy Who Lived had left behind three teenagers to guard against Death Eaters. As if Hermione, Ron and the others were no more than his foot soldiers to command. The thought that the young man might have begun picking up some of Albus's nastier habits ate at him, but Remus wasn't quite ready to give voice to his opinions on the matter just yet.

Still, if not for the potion, things might have been far worse. After all, Hermione had emerged from the brutal fight practically unscathed...unlike Bill, who lay before them, recovering from the brutal wounds Fenrir Greyback had inflicted upon his person.

Moreover, Remus knew quite logically that it was unlikely Hermione would have taken the potion had she not *wanted* to. Not without being coerced by something as drastic as an *Imperio* anyway, and he rather doubted Harry would have resorted to such a thing.

Everyone had been provided the briefest of explanations on what had transpired in the Astronomy Tower. That is, that Draco Malfoy had arrived to murder Albus, and had in fact, even succeeded in disarming the older wizard before Snape had shown his true colours.

There was something about the story which bugged Remus...some false note which he couldn’t quite put his finger on...for one thing, how the hell had *Albus* gotten himself disarmed by a Sixth Year? Albus, who defeated Grindelwald himself...

A small fight broke out among the Weasleys, appearing to be centred around Fleur and Molly. The commotion drew Remus out from his dark meanderings.

"He'll wear those scars forever won't he?" Hermione asked softly as they watched the proceedings from a distance. His right arm was curled around her waist, bringing her body flush against his own.

Incapable of lying to her, and too embittered on Bill's behalf to speak, Remus buried his face in her
hair and nuzzled into her curls. It chafed at him that Greyback had tried to take someone from right
under his nose. Someone he liked, respected and counted as friend.

The fact the the older werewolf had specifically threatened Hermione…

The next time he saw Greyback, Remus was going to rip the old wolf apart with his bare hands.

"Luna and I were supposed to be watching Snape's office. I knew...I knew he was lying when he
told us something had happened to Flitwick. But still, like a mindless idiot, I let him go." her breath
hitched in her chest. "It was as if the potion was steering my body...I could have stopped him from
leaving, from getting to the tower. I should have done better."

"The potion likely saved you," he said gruffly. Powerful witch or no, Snape had once fought on the
side of the Dark Lord as one of his lieutenants.

Though that, apparently, hadn't actually changed. Had she tried to duel him, Snape would likely not
have spared her his worst. Just thinking of what could have been, caused the werewolf to tighten
his hold on Hermione.

"I failed today didn't I?" she sounded ashamed.

“No,” he told her firmly, his tone brooking no argument. "You lived and you fought. Fought well
in fact."

In answer, Hermione ducked her head in defeat. Unsure what else he could do, Remus settled for
stroking at her matted curls as he whispered soothing nothings in her ear.

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He hadn't been invited to the meeting, seeing as he wasn't faculty, but he slipped into the
Headmaster's...no, the Headmistress’s office anyway, as everyone else filtered out. Every last one
of the attendees appeared too stunned to question why he was there at all, as they slowly moved
past Remus.

Harry was the one who led the exodus. Despite the strained silence which had lain between the two
wizards ever since Remus’s wedding day, the werewolf couldn't stop himself from wanting to
comfort the haggard, forlorn figure. He reached out and brushed at Harry's arm, stopping the
younger man mid-step.

"Are you going to be alright?" he asked very quietly.

"I don't really have a choice," Harry replied, pushing his glasses up. Something in that simple
gesture made Remus's heart squeeze; it was so very familiar…so very James.

"He's going to come after everyone I've ever cared for," Harry said bleakly.

"He's going to try," Remus said very bluntly. “But we're going to stop him, because losing isn’t an
option.”

Harry smiled bitterly at him, though he didn't shrug Remus away. "Don't let's make promises we
all can't keep."

Nothing of the boy left in him then, Remus thought wryly, patting Harry gently on his back before
stepping out of his way. Hurrying up the stairway, he stopped before the large desk which
dominated the office, beside which the newest Headmistress of Hogwarts stood.
"I'm not leaving," he said to McGonagall without preamble.

"Of course you're not leaving," she replied. The woman looked as if she had aged ten years in a span of hours. "The castle has only just been breached. Moody is on his way, and so is Kingsley, along with a number of the other Order members. The elves are setting up guest rooms as we speak."

Remus had been prepared to put up a fight; the older witch's easy acquiescence to his demands hadn't factored into the speech he had prepared. Her response rather took the wind from his sails.

"Go ahead and find a house elf. They'll get you sorted. You should get some rest - it's been a long night." she said dispiritedly as she shuffled aimlessly at loose sheets of parchment.

"McGona...Minerva..." Remus started in genuine concern.

"Don't suppose you'll join me for a drink before I allow the Minister in here?" she interrupted dully, summoning a half-drunk bottle of Scotch from one of Albus’s many cabinets. "I don't think I can face that old fool just now without some help."

"Of course," he nodded.

 Conjuring two glasses filled with ice, he perched himself at the edge of the large desk and watched as McGonagall poured them both a generous tot of whiskey.

 There was something rather rebellious, Remus reflected, in disrespecting what had been Albus’s furniture, whilst sipping whiskey in the departed man’s office.

 "What will happen now?" he asked, swallowing a mouthful of the peaty liquor. It was supposed to be a fine Single Malt, better than he could afford…but it was also worse tasting by far, than most of what he usually drank. Why anyone enjoyed drinking liquid ash, he would never understand.

 "The students will all be sent home by the end of the week. I don't...I don't know what happens after," she took a gulp of the amber liquor.

 "Who is going to lead us?" Remus asked after a moment. "The Order, that is. The Enemy will be coming at us now, in full force."

 "I don't know," she sank into her chair. "I don't have answers if that's what you're wondering. I do know that without Albus, everything we have...it's not enough. It's simply not enough. He was our greatest weapon."

 Her words were an echo of what Hermione had told him only days ago, words of which he had tried to pretend away. Back then, all he had wanted was to spend a day with her where he didn't have to think about the goddamn war effort.

 "We'll think of something," he said at last.

 "Of course." the older witch agreed without any conviction in her voice whatsoever.

 Draining his glass, Remus set the empty tumbler down and left the woman to the tender mercies of useless bureaucrats.

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 The next few days saw Hogwarts transform into a place Remus did not truly recognize. Students
began leaving, first in ones and twos as anxious parents appeared at the gates, then in droves as they all started crowding towards the train station.

Classrooms sat empty, as half-finished assignments flapped forlornly in the warm spring breeze.

“I suppose the Muggles might have been right about the significance of 1999,” Hermione said one afternoon, as they strolled into a deserted Charms room meant for First Years. Various knick-knacks were piled in neat little stacks off to the side. On the blackboard in front of the room, a half-constructed sentence awaited completion.

“What do you mean?” Remus asked, picking up what appeared to be a crudely stitched together voodoo doll.

“It’s all a bit apocalyptic isn’t it?” she asked lightly, pointing her wand at the blackboard and erasing the unfinished statement written upon it. “All these terrified people, running from a big bad they don’t know how to face…”

“It’s still not the end of the world Hermione,” he sighed, dropping the item he’d been fiddling with. The limp, faceless doll collapsed into a splayed heap, the sight of which made Remus more than a little uncomfortable.

“Remus…” she tilted her face towards him, lowering her wand arm. “If I need your help someday. Really, really needed it…would you offer me your assistance?”

The wizard frowned at her.

“Hermione, you should know by now that I would never deny you my help.”

“Right.” she nodded, dropping her gaze. “Right.”

Keeping his gaze fixed on her, Remus closed the distance between the two of them. Slipping his left arm around her waist, he cupped his other hand over the curve of her soft cheek.

Since Albus had died, the man no longer felt most of his old compulsion to keep the witch at arm’s length. Moreover, it seemed to him that she as well, felt a far lesser need to hide away from him. There was an intimacy in the way their hands found each other’s in the dim light; in the way they so easily folded their bodies towards each other.

Moving through the growing shadows of an emptying castle, Remus constantly had a hand on her person, always coming just a little closer to finally bridging that gap between them.

“What would it take for you to look at me, and see something monstrous?” she asked him now, as his eyes dropped down to her lips. The hallway outside was deathly silent.

“Nothing. There’s nothing in the world that could compel me to think such a thing.” he murmured. “Hermione, are you going to tell me what’s going on? Or should I wait and find out for myself? Because I promise you…I will.”

“No you won’t,” she placed a hand on his chest. “Promise me that you won’t try.”

Swallowing, the wolf clawing at the bars of his human cage, Remus leaned down and pressed a kiss to her forehead as he had done hundreds of time before.

“I always keep my promises,” he spoke against her skin. Pulling back slightly, he traced the shape of her cheekbone with his fingers “Much as I would prefer to stay here with you, unfortunately, I
have duties to attend to,"

“I will need to ready myself for the funeral.” she tilted her gaze out an uncovered window, towards the setting sun. “Will you come find me later?”

“I’ll always find you,” he promised.

Caressing her face one final time, Remus turned and left.
For the first time since she started school at Hogwarts, Hermione deliberately chose to hang back from the other students. Patiently, she waited until she knew Ron and Harry had settled into their own train car, before she found her way towards the back of the train where she claimed a cabin for herself.

As a Prefect, she should have been patrolling the aisles and guarding against those who would seek to cause trouble. But not only were there were less than fifty students left who were taking the Hogwarts Express into King’s Cross, with actual Order members strolling up and down the narrow passageways, her duties had become less than meaningless.

Staring wistfully out the window, Hermione released a small sigh as she leaned against the hard wooden back of the train seat, enjoying her small moment of relative isolation. Reaching for her satchel, she unclasped its metal latch and pulled the bag open.

In the last few days, Hermione had brazenly filched books directly from what had been Dumbledore’s office; to her mind, it was what the departed wizard would have wanted, considering the circumstances within which they were all trapped.

However, those texts were not all she had taken from the castle.

Peering into the generous depths of her deceptively small bag, Hermione once again took in the sight of multiple tomes, containing literature she had more or less stolen from the Restricted Section, right from under Madam Pince’s watchful eye.

Sitting under multiple tomes of rare and potentially dangerous books, were Remus’s recent birthday gifts…gifts of which had been carefully spelled, to guard against the possibility of becoming damaged under the weight of her new library.

The wizard would likely never know the pains she had taken to keep those Graphic Novels safe, safer than just about anything else in her keeping.

There would come a time soon when those books would be the only things she had left, which might remind her of what it had been like to be close to Remus.

Footsteps tapped towards her compartment, and immediately, Hermione re-clasped her satchel. A familiar silhouette hovered on the other side of a frosted glass door, the sight of which caused her heart to leap in wild happiness, breathless anticipation and an ever-present dread.

For the past week, a new ease had manifested in the way Remus seized every available opportunity to rest his hand against the small of her back, in the way he curled his fingers against the crook of
her waist. In the darkness of the castle, the man had taken to brushing the back of her hand with the pads of his thumb as they wandered about, with their fingers loosely interlaced.

Hope was a commodity she could ill afford, but hope Hermione unfortunately did. Never mind the fact that every kiss he laid on her bare skin made her heart clench in guilt…

Deep in her heart, she knew she ought to have tried harder to resist Remus’s protective, addictive hold. But since the death of Albus Dumbledore, since it became clear that their lives were all about to change in irrevocable ways, Hermione couldn’t seem to stop herself from indulging in her own impulses.

It had been Ron who had noticed this change. Not Harry, or even Ginny.

“I know Remus is…” Ron started saying only the day before.

“What?” she asked sharply. “He’s what?”

“I know Remus is your husband, but I thought…”

“Don’t. Don’t start this shite again.” she warned him, not willing to play into his childish whims one second longer than she had to.

“Hermione, he’s old enough to be your father. I thought for sure the two of you had done what you had to do, to fulfill that stupid law…but now…” Ron’s words came out in a rush anyway. “Are you certain this what you want?”

“First of all, my father is fifty-five years old. Secondly, it’s not really any of your business what I choose to do with Remus,” Hermione gritted out a little more harshly than she had meant to.

Taking in Ron’s flustered expression, she softened her tone and added, “Besides, we’re just friends. You do realize that Remus and Tonks are an item?”

Ron had stared exasperatedly at her as if he couldn’t quite believe his own ears. Impatiently, Hermione continued, “Now if we can get back to the matter at hand before Harry gets back…”

At the door of her train carriage, Remus knocked quietly. Hermione knew full well that she ought to let him perform his responsibilities, but selfishly, she couldn’t bring herself to care.

Not right now, not even with Tonks possibly a mere twenty feet away.

“Come in,” she called.

Sliding open the rickety door, Remus stepped in. Arching a brow at her lack of company, he cast her an inquiring stare.

“I didn’t feel like sitting with the others today.” she explained, wondering how it was humanly possible to want something so much.

“Oh?” he asked as he shut the door behind him. Sliding into the empty seat next to her, he nudged his shoulders against her own and asked, “Am I intruding?”

There was precious little time before they had to emerge into the real world, and the next time he saw her…

The next time he saw her, he might not look at her the way he was gazing at her now, like she was something precious and to be protected. With all her heart, Hermione wished she could hold on to
this moment, when they were both between places and times.

Taking in his beautiful, youthful face, Hermione reflected once more that his infection was truly a gift as much as it was a curse. It was a pity most people never thought to look beyond his rumpled clothing and unkempt hair, to see what him for the wonderful soul he truly was.

Nobody except Tonks, she reminded herself.

“Not you,” she told him honestly with a small grin. “Never you. Though I’m sure you have better things to do then sit and chat with errant students.”

“‘Errant’ is hardly the adjective I would use to describe someone such as you,” he laughed softly. “‘Bossy’? Yes. ‘Verbose?’ Absolutely. ‘Scary?’ Beyond a shadow of a doubt,”

He was so close. All Hermione had to do, was to lean in and tilt her face upwards, and she would be kissing him. She would be availing herself to the man who, by the laws of men and magic, should have been bound to her and her alone.

Nothing, save a complicated blood rite performed with two willing parties, could sunder their marital bonds. Well, that, and the eradication of a pesky, miserable law.

There was a loud clatter in the corridor outside, the noise of which caused Hermione to start in surprise. In a matter of seconds, her friends were pushing their way into what had been her private space.

Ron shoved his way towards a window seat with Luna close behind; Harry moved a little slower than the rest.

Awkwardly, Neville stumbled into the carriage, before he settled himself beside the werewolf, looking equal parts shy and curious. Looking at the assembled crowd, Hermione searched for Ginny’s face but to her disappointment, did not find her.

“We were wondering where you had disappeared off to. Didn’t realize you’d snagged yourself some prime real estate,” Ron made a face, deliberately ignoring the empty state of the train. “Remus, I can’t believe you’re in on this conspiracy,”

To her right, the older wizard jerked in badly-hidden surprise at the friendly manner with which Ron had addressed him.

“Not everybody picks compartments based on how soon the snack carts are likely to get to them,” Harry said lightheartedly.

Loud squabbling ensued, arguments of which somehow pulled in even sweet, mild-mannered Neville.

“Professor…” Luna said, above the din.

“Not quite, Luna,” Remus sighed, his body relaxing into Hermione’s side as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

“Mr. Lupin then,” she smiled. “I remember enjoying your classes a lot. I just wished we received a little more practical experience with the eradication of Nargles.”

“Uh…” he looked to Hermione, as if expecting assistance from the older witch.
“I agree,” Hermione said severely, keeping a straight face. “I myself, was very disappointed we did not end up covering the subject of Nargles in my third year.”

“In hindsight, I suppose that’s why I’m just a simple a courier now, rather than a Professor,” he nodded gravely, affecting a shamefaced expression.

“What’s a courier?” Luna asked curiously.

As Remus began explaining bits of his other life to the younger witch, Hermione leaned her head against the window. Observing the chatter and the cheer happening all around her, the witch found that she was already missing this life, as though it was something that was already finished and done.

Though, she thought when they finally pulled into King’s Cross, her time at Hogwarts really was. Over, that is.

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At the station, she held Harry close to her for several seconds longer than she usually did.

“We’ll see you at the end of July,” she murmured, pulling away from Harry and kissing him lightly on his cheek.

“I know,” he tugged gently at a stray curl. “Hermione, promise me you’ll be careful. They’ll be coming after you and Ron. You especially. If anything were to happen to you…”

“Let them try,” she interrupted, a dangerous edge to her voice.

Nodding hesitantly, he finally stepped away, but not before he pressed a quick kiss to her hair.

Somewhere in the background, Remus ceased his conversation with Tonks.

Ron came next.

“Don’t stay away too long,” he punched lightly at her shoulder. “I’ll see you soon.”

“Promise me you’ll be careful what you say around your mother,” she warned under her breath as she hugged him tightly.

“Yeah yeah,” he sounded offended.

Hermione felt the familiar presence of Remus as he came up behind her. With a hesitant grin, Ron waved his farewells to the both of them, before he strode across the platform to greet his family.

“I’ll see you soon?” Remus asked as she turned towards him. “It’s going to be hard isn’t it, with you not owning an Owl and all that? Though…I suppose I’ll see you at Bill’s wedding. You are going to set up wards around your parent’s home aren’t you? I could come by and…”

“You don’t own an owl either,” Hermione teased, poking at him with a pointed finger. “You keep the Hogwarts owls hostage until you’re ready to write back,”

“If it makes you feel any better, those wretched beasts certainly seem to enjoy tearing my skin to ribbons,” Remus sounded aggrieved as he rubbed at his shoulder. Only part of his annoyance was for show.

“Remus…my point is, we’ll work something out. I promise, you’ll see me long before the
wedding,” she gave him a watery smile.

“Stay safe,” he ordered softly, stroking his knuckles over her cheekbones.

“You as well. I couldn’t bear it if anything were to happen to you,” she murmured, pressing the palm of her hand briefly to his chest.

“No. I don’t think I would bear it well either, if you got hurt,” his fingers dropped to sweep tenderly at her jawline. “I don’t think you know how much I mean that,”

Before she could change her mind, impulsively, she stood on her tiptoes and kissed him on his cheek, exactly as she did for Harry.

Not trusting herself to speak for fear she’d start crying, the young woman turned and dashed towards her waiting parents on the non-magical side of the invisible barrier.

***

"That letter from your school tells us you're home early because of an emergency shutdown. Are you going to tell us what that's all about?" her mother asked as they loaded the back of her Dad's station wagon.

Had Hermione been anyone else, she would have stuttered through some explanation about security breaches and safety exceptions.

"Hogwarts is having an air filtration problem. The sewer grates have been leaking toxic gas for weeks without anybody noticing. You know how these old castles get," she lied blithely.

"Oh dear," the older lady tutted as they slammed the trunk. "Do you think you should get yourself checked out by Doctor Svetlana tomorrow? Just in case?"

"I'm fine Mother," Hermione smiled fondly at the older woman. "They started evacuating us as soon as they figured it out. It only affected the cellars,"

"Good, very responsible of these people," her mother sighed. "Sometimes I wish you were normal like every other child on our street."

Hermione stiffened.

“I simply meant I wish you could have stayed here to complete your education. I don't like having you so far away, ten months out of the year," Mrs. Granger continued hurriedly, seeing the expression on her daughter’s face.

Immediately, Hermione’s anger melted away, leaving only a creeping sadness in the young woman’s heart. Wrapping her arms around Mrs. Granger, Hermione savoured the comforting familiarity of her mother’s embrace.

"Don't I get a hug too?" her father asked, finally emerging from the driver's seat where he'd been waiting.

"No, you just sat there like a lump while we did all the heavy lifting," Mrs. Granger said snippily. Rolling her eyes, Hermione spread her arms and gathered her Dad into a family hug.

Crookshanks meowed sorrowfully at them from his carrier. He didn't like enclosed spaces, and he wasn't shy about letting everyone know.
She had to be clever, and she had to be quick. There were too many things that could go wrong, she thought.

The moment she arrived home, rather than unpacking, Hermione grabbed her wallet and her Barclays bankbook from her old desk drawer, before stuffing them both into an empty schoolbag. Hurrying down the stairs, she kissed her mother a quick farewell, saying, “I’m going for a walk,”

“Ow!” her mother rubbed her head.

“What’s the matter?” Hermione asked in concern.

“I…Nothing,” her mother sounded a bit put-out. “You are coming home for dinner aren’t you? I’ve already bought a chicken, and…”

“Yes, of course,” Hermione told her with a shaky smile. Surreptitiously, she stuffed away the few hairs she had snagged directly from her mother’s scalp.

On her front step, after carefully ensuring that no one was watching, the witch drew a short, sharp blade from her pocket. Making a small incision on her index finger, she smeared a streak of blood by the side of her parents' front door, all while muttering a very soft, very carefully pronounced cantrip. The small slash of scarlet glowed hot against the painted surface, before it faded from sight in a puff of metallic smoke.

Satisfied that no one who didn’t share her blood could now enter the Granger house - not even Remus or Harry - with a soft crack, she apparated herself to the middle of Diagon Alley.

Hurrying through the shops, Hermione began filling her purse with all sorts of magical supplies. Upon leaving the wizarding street, she stopped at a random Barclays branch.

Emerging from the bank, which happened to be situated by a tube station far from home, Hermione carefully patted at the side pocket of her bag where a white envelope filled with about seven thousand pounds in cash was being stored.

All her worries about uncomfortable questions from the banking staff had come to nothing. The young cashier who assisted her had been too disillusioned with life in general, to really give a damn.

Every cent she carried, had been deposited by her Mum and Dad. They had made her promise that she would use that money for the sole purpose of travel and self-discovery, but only after she was finished with school. Somewhere in Gringotts, there was another thousand or so galleons left after her shopping spree, but that allowance was meant for purchasing supplies and necessities only, “…not candy. Or non-essentials,” her mother warned at the beginning of every school year.

Hurrying down a side alley, Hermione shifted to the right and landed on her very Muggle street, behind a large oak tree.

The rest of the afternoon, behind the her closed and warded bedroom door, Hermione brewed a batch of Polyjuice Potion.

Over dinner, Hermione listened as her father explained to her the plot of some film he had recently
watched called *The Matrix*.

“It sounds a lot like *Dark City*,” she commented, a film she had watched the previous summer with Mr. Granger.

Her father was a massive fan of Science Fiction films, and since age six, Hermione had always loved settling on the sofa beside her Dad as the two of them discovered recent releases together. Over the years, her appreciation of these films had only grown, despite the fact that her real life was occasionally much more exciting than anything Hollywood could think up.

Hermione’s deep fondness for on-screen Sci-fi had more to do with the fact that she associated these films with bowls of popcorn set between herself and her Father, than an appreciation for the work of Ridley Scott or Stanley Kubrick.

Not that *2001: A Space Odyssey* wasn’t a bloody fantastic masterpiece, even if Mr. Granger himself fell asleep towards the end.

“But *Dark City* took place on a spaceship,” Mr. Granger protested in genuine distress. "Christ, you don't think the Wachowskis stole the plot of *The Matrix*,”

“I don’t know - I mean, replace sentient machines with zombie aliens…” Hermione teased, ignoring the way her heart felt was though it were being pulverized.

An hour after her parents had gone to bed, the witch padded her way carefully to the little study in the Granger house, with Crookshanks following curiously at her heels. The small room was dominated by the computer terminal on her parents’ desk, several bookcases, and a solitary liquor shelf.

"*Accio*,” she whispered, flicking her wand. Immediately, two maroon booklets flew into her waiting hand.

Staring at her parents’ passports, Hermione frowned as she pondered her best course of action. It wouldn't do to simply change the names that had been printed on the first page. No, she had to be far smarter than that.

By the time she was finished, Mr. and Mrs. Wilkin’s travel papers had been charmed to grant her parents safe passage anywhere in the world. Not only that, but authorities would be compelled to grant the two British nationals their full protection. No men nor machine would stand in their way, no matter where they ended up.

Knowing the strength of her own spellwork, the charmed documents would last them for as long as they lived...which hopefully, would be decades more, if she had any say in the matter.

Flicking her eyes about, she cast another summoning spell. This time, a Barclays bankbook flew out into her hands. Scanning the two names on the front page, and surveying the rather hefty balance - far, far more that seven thousand pounds - Hermione nodded grimly.

Using largely the same charms on the banking documents as what she had used on her parents’ passports, the witch completed the first part of her plan.

Healing the bloody gash she had sliced into her left palm, Hermione finally went to bed, wondering why everything always came down to blood.

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Early the following day, her parents went into work at Granger Dental, complaining about the busy day ahead of them. As she picked up her purse, Mrs. Granger hinted a bit strongly that perhaps Hermione ought to make everyone dinner for a change.

“For God’s sakes Mum, did you want me to burn the house down?” the witch asked quizzically.

Complicated Potions involving the chopped-up liver of rare fire lizards? Certainly.

Complicated recipes requiring weird ingredients like tarragon and kale? Emphatically, no.

“It was just a suggestion,” her mother raised her hands in surrender. “When you go off to uni, there won’t be people picking up after you, and cooking for you. None of those…what do you call them? Elves?”

Mrs. Granger was clearly still holding out hope that her daughter would attend university after Hogwarts. What Muggle institution would accept a stack of parchment declaring a higher-than-average proficiency in Runes, Hermione had no idea.

Shaking her head, she kissed her mother farewell before the older woman practically ran out the door.

Alone, Hermione gulped down a cup of scalding hot coffee, before swallowing as well, a vial of Polyjuice Potion.

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Travelling into the heart of Muggle London, Hermione’s first stop was at the National Australia Bank.

“I’ve always wanted to visit the Sydney Opera House,” she told the bank clerk with a small, wistful smile.

“Now that you’re moving there, you can probably see it all you want Mrs. Wilkins,” the friendly young man told her. “Do you have any photo identification?”

“Here you go,” Hermione fought back a wave of nausea as she handed a passport over to the clerk.

“Now if you’ll just sign here…”

By the end of the appointment, Hermione held a brand new National Australia Bank bankbook in her hand, registered to one Monica Wilkins, along with two shiny ATM cards that could be used anywhere on the island continent.

At Barclays, the witch transferred half of her parent’s life savings over to the brand new bank account she had only just set up with NAB. The amount would be enough to get them settled, enough to help them find their feet…hell, it would be enough to see them through quite a few years without additional income, if ultimately, they decided to take their ease.

Dentistry, as it turned out, was quite a lucrative profession.

Hermione kept half their savings behind on the hope that someday, her parents would return to lay claim to that money, with or without her interference. She had instructions carefully written out on a piece of parchment, detailing what needed to happen should she not survive the wars to come.

They were to be carried out only in the event Wizarding Britain triumphed over the Enemy, and
they were charmed to be uncovered only by those who did not wish her or hers any harm… assuming her best plan didn’t pan out the way she hoped.

“That’s quite a bit of money you’re transferring, Mrs. Wilkins,” the Financial Advisor smiled like a shark as he read the name off the photo identification he had requested, as a means to verify his client’s identity. “Why are you requesting such a large transfer at this time, if you don’t mind my asking?”

“My husband and I are planning on purchasing some retirement property in Australia,” Hermione smiled her mother’s most charming smile. “We thought this would be the most convenient way to deal with finances, once we arrived on the other side…”

“Very clever of you to think ahead Mrs. Wilkins,” the man praised as he typed something out on his keyboard.

The Advisor slid Monica Wilkins’s passport across his polished wooden desk, back into Hermione’s keeping. “This should only take a minute… in the meantime, have you had a chance to review some of the investment opportunities we’re currently offering?”

“No,” Hermione feigned interest even as something inside her died. “But I’m all ears,”

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With her banking work completed, Hermione ducked into a public toilet. Fishing out a second vial of Polyjuice potion, she gulped it down as insurance. Catching her breath as the vile liquid slipped past her throat, Hermione gritted her teeth and told herself she didn’t have time to rest.

Marching out of the stall, she began to wend her way towards her final stop - a travel agency in a part of town she had never been to before, and would likely have no cause to ever be in again.

Strolling down the street, Hermione’s eyes widened as she took in the unexpected sight of Remus racing towards her on a bicycle. Her first instinct was to flee, because right then, she didn’t want to have to face him or any questions he might have, pertaining to what it was she was doing in the middle of Muggle London.

She wasn’t ready for that conversation, though in all fairness, she doubted she would ever be ready.

Sense prevailed, and quickly, the witch remembered that she wasn’t looking anything like her usual self.

Calmly, Hermione stared straight ahead and kept on walking. Behind her, she heard as Remus screeched to a complete stop. Several drivers and cyclists screamed obscenities, but his gaze continued to burn a hole at the back of her neck.

Silently, she prayed that he would just let this go. That he wouldn’t follow through on his heightened senses, and uncover who she really was underneath her borrowed skin. Polyjuice Potion hid a person’s true physical form, but it didn’t change other fundamental aspects, such as their scent…

Calmly, she reached for the brass handles of the travel agency she had been ambling towards, and pulled the heavy glass door towards her. Casually, she glanced towards her right, and noted to her immense relief that Remus was kicking off once again from the side of the curb.

Sighing in relief, Hermione entered the air-conditioned office.
“These tickets are a surprise for my husband,” she babbled at the travel agent, who seemed at best, politely interested.

“Oh, that’s nice,” the older woman nodded. “I’ve always wanted to visit, but you know what they say…”

“What?” Hermione asked blankly. “What do they say?”

“Everything in Australia wants to kill you,” the agent laughed, though she stopped as soon as she caught the dismayed expression on the witch’s face. Hastily, she added, “I’m sure you won’t run into too many crocodiles. Or spiders…or venomous snakes…oh would you look at that, your air tickets are ready!”

Understanding that it was much too late to change her plans, Hermione paid the woman in cash - money of which she had taken from her parents’ account.

The moment she stepped through the front door of the Granger house, Hermione raced up to her parents’ bedroom. Tossing all new banking documents into Mr. and Mrs. Granger’s suitcases, Hermione proceeded to fill each piece of baggage with clothing and other necessities.

Carefully, the young woman packed away a neatly written list of her parents’ current medical conditions, along with all the medicines they took on a daily basis. Every label stuck onto the small medicine containers had been transfigured to display the new names she had bequeathed unto her parents just the night before.

Satisfied at last that she had seen to the sustainability of their lives, at least for the short term, Hermione proceeded to float two filled suitcases down to the ground floor, where passports and air-tickets were already laid out neatly upon the coffee table.

Settling down with a cup of tea, Hermione forced her heart rate to slow.

There was nothing left for it now, but to wait.

At seven o’clock in the evening, she watched from behind a curtain as Mr. and Mrs. Wilkins climbed into a cab waiting to take them to the airport.

As the car pulled away from their street, the young woman collapsed by the front door and wept, knowing that very soon, she would not be able to indulge in frivolous privileges such as grief or mourning.

Even Crookshanks was gone, stashed away as she was in her little plastic carrier, at the back of the retreating taxi.

Alone, in a darkened house lit only by a full moon, Hermione sobbed her heart out, before finally, she curled up and fell asleep on the hard ground.
The following morning, the witch took a shower and made herself breakfast. Most of the food she prepared was left uneaten.

When at last she understood that she had just wasted precious minutes staring off into space instead of actually consuming anything, Hermione disposed of her eggs and sausages, along with all the perishables in her parents’ kitchen. She accomplished this with a simple vanishing spell.

With a few quick phone calls, the witch saw to it that all utilities were suspended, both for the house and for the office her parents owned. What remaining balance was owed to the power company was paid down, using a credit card she had taken from Mrs. Granger’s purse.

One short stroll later, Hermione let herself into her parents’ dental office. Rummaging through Wendy’s desk - the girl who worked as the front desk assistant at Granger Dental - she found a book containing a record of all upcoming patient appointments.

Using the phone at the receptionist’s desk, she called and informed each and every patient that unfortunately, Doctors Granger and Granger had been called away on a family emergency somewhere in British Columbia. They were not likely to return for many months to come, and thus, the practice was now closed.

Two hours later, there was only one loose thread left - Wendy.

Hermione dug the girl’s employee file from her mother’s filing cabinet. Dialling the girl’s number, she provided the receptionist the same story she had provided to everyone she had been speaking with.

“But…” Wendy whined plaintively. “I was saving up for a trip to Spain,”

“I’m sorry,” Hermione said politely. “Unfortunately, there’s not much I can do for you,”

Without another word, she hung up the phone.

Taking one last look around the office, the witch exited the darkened premises before firing a ‘Notice-Me-Not’ spell directly into the frosted glass doors of Granger Dental.

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Hermione spent the rest of the day stuffing her own belongings away into her satchel, now transfigured into a tiny beaded bag, together with the rest of her recent purchases. Towards evening time, the witch stepped out the front door and locked it behind her.

With a deep breath, the young woman turned around to face the rest of the world.

It was time, she thought, to put childish things aside. It was time at last, to face the future, and all the uncertainty it held.

With a sharp crack, Hermione disappeared from the street upon which she had grown up, leaving behind little trace that she had ever been there to begin with.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for dryness. I started overthinking how hard it is to actually make people
disappear. Etc.

Onwards to next chapter!
By the time Remus awoke the day after the full moon, he noted to his displeasure that he had slept well past noon.

Not that he was particularly surprised. The previous night's change had taken more out of him than it usually did, and he had more than his usual number of wounds to show for it.

Despite the fact that he had been faithfully dosing himself with Wolfsbane Potion over the past week, Remus found himself more restless than usual, while he had still been in the skin of his wolf.

Half the night had been spent pacing and growling. Every once in a while, he had offered up a mournful howl in the general direction of the moon, which he could sense like a glowing beacon even within the confines of his windowless cellar.

He knew exactly why his lupine self had spent hours wandering about in sleepless distress…and what it wanted, every time it tested the wards which Remus had cast to guard against his more bestial self. The wolf, much like the man, wanted nothing more than to seek out Hermione.

Part of his anxiety had to do with the fact that it had been two whole days since he had spoken to, or even heard from the witch.

Academically, he had known that this separation had been inevitable. However, the transition between Hogwarts and real life was turning out to be a lot harder than he had anticipated. After spending days practically stuck to Hermione’s side, suddenly, Remus found himself in a position where he had no idea where the witch was or if she were safe.

Still, he told himself, if something had happened to her, someone would reach out to him. After all, he was her husband…no matter that nobody cared for that little detail, their marriage had to count for something in the eyes of his colleagues.

At least that was what he wanted to believe as he slowly ascended the stairs to his living room, fastening his jeans as he went.

With a flick of his wand, he healed his most recent wounds. Broken flesh and skin knit itself back together, forming small, fresh scars.

The larger reason why Remus had spent the night in complete misery however, was due to the simple fact that he missed Hermione. Which was asinine, considering they had only just parted ways...

There were moments when he was on the job the previous day, when he was convinced that he had actually gone and lost his bloody mind. Racing down the streets of London, Remus had raised the ire of drivers and fellow cyclists alike, by stopping abruptly in the middle of traffic.
This had happened at least once.

Each time he stopped, it was because he thought he had caught Hermione’s scent in the air. Every
time it happened, he was always sure that he would find her just around the corner, but whenever
he set off in pursuit, he always came up empty handed.

_Honestly - he needed to stop acting like a besotted schoolboy_, Remus scolded himself as he began
making a pot of coffee. The war had just escalated itself, and he needed to be present, to be
vigilant…if not for the betterment of the wizarding world, then at the very least for Hermione.
Because what else were they fighting for, if not for her right to even exist?

As fragrant, dark liquid began to form in his coffee maker, which had been charmed to work
without electric power, Remus couldn't help but think of the odd manner in which Hermione acted
the day they arrived at King's Cross. The witch had been less animated than usual, and seemed
distracted by something he didn't quite understand.

Nobody else appeared to notice…though, he supposed, everybody was still recovering from the
recent battle.

He thought about how close he had come to truly kissing her in that train carriage as they sped
away from Hogwarts. In his mind, he pictured again the manner in which her eyelashes fluttered
against her flushed cheeks…

Dropping his head, Remus sighed.

He _needed_ to stop obsessing over every little thing the young woman did, or doubtlessly, he would
go insane.

Pouring himself a cup of coffee, he reflected grimly that perhaps it was finally time for him to step
out, to see if he couldn't meet someone who might take his mind off the witch if only for a few
hours.

So what if in recent days, Hermione and he had both acted as though all the rules they had once set
were no longer of any consequence? The truth was, nothing had changed between them. They were
still just two people, forced together by circumstance, not passion.

No, finding someone to warm his bed was the _right_ thing to do, and likely, it would grant him the
distance he needed from a situation from which there was no winning.

Never mind that it also felt as if he were betraying his marriage vows for even thinking about
sleeping with someone else. In the end, he couldn't betray a woman who wasn't really his, even if
it felt as though she belonged to him.

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It'd been over a year…no, longer…since he had last tried to meet a woman, Remus reflected
absently as he tidied his house.

He wasn’t worried, exactly, about what happened once he got them past his front door. Quite the
opposite.

As much as he sometimes feared what their reactions would be the moment they saw the scars left
behind from his many transformations, for whatever reason, women never seemed to mind overly
much. In fact, in his experience, some women seemed to appreciate his scarred body better than
others…though those were almost always Muggle girls.
Witches were usually the ones who ran screaming at the sight of his puckered skin, especially once they recognized the cause of his old wounds. That is, with the exception of Tonks of course, and… well…Hermione…

Unbidden, his traitorous mind returned to Hermione, to the way she had brushed her fingers across his marred skin, and thought nothing of lavishing her kisses upon him all the same...

Irritated, Remus forced himself to focus on his chores.

No, his real challenge lay in starting the conversation, and in keeping it going. While he wasn’t hard to get along with, he had been informed by Bill and Tonks that speaking endlessly on the cultural significance of the *Watchmen* comic books was not actually considered ‘seductive’.

Mentally, he started trying to think of subject matters he could safely bring up around women. Having always been a bit of an audiophile, especially when he could afford it, he figured that speaking on current music trends would likely work in his favour.

If the girl was younger, he could talk about whichever boyband was on the cover of Smash Hits. If she were older, he could wonder why bands like Travis weren’t getting more airtime.

If she didn’t listen to music, well then he was shit out of luck, and he was going to have to try his luck with somebody else.

Looking around, Remus finally found himself satisfied by the relative neatness of his home, compared to what it had looked like an hour ago when discarded clothing covered just about every surface. Dirty glasses and mugs had all been spelled cleaned and floated back into his cabinets, and his floor no longer appeared as if he hadn’t swept it in over a month.

*It was time*, he realized, ignoring the way his stomach dipped uncomfortably.

Sighing, he turned towards his bedroom with every intention of changing out of his current outfit - which comprised a tattered Depeche Mode t-shirt, and a pair of jeans which had seen better decades.

Before he could get very far however, Remus breathed in a scent which had been haunting his every waking hour for the better part of the past year.

Spinning on his heel, he crossed his small living room. Before his visitor could even knock, Remus was flinging open his front door.

On his front stoop, Hermione stared up at him in surprise.

“Hello,” she smiled uncertainly.

Stupidly, he gaped at Hermione, wondering if he had fallen into a dream. There was no magic on earth which could have allowed him to wish her into existence.

“Remus?” she asked after a while, when the silence had stretched too long. “Is…is now a bad time?”

Blinking, he realized he needed to say *something*, before the witch in front of him wrote him off as an imbecile forever.

“Never you. Not you.” he uttered truthfully.
Something flickered in her brown eyes.

As sense began to return to Remus, he saw at last that there was an emptiness in her gaze which hadn’t been there a mere two days before, when she ran from his side at King’s Cross.

“Remus…I’ve done something.” her voice cracked.

“What’s happened?” he snapped out of his stunned state. Stepping aside, he gestured for her to enter. When she didn’t immediately step across the threshold, Remus reached gently for a limp, cold hand and tugged her indoors.

Carefully, he peered out at his front garden and the road leading up to his property. He didn’t sense anyone else out there, but still, as he shut his door, he set up stronger wards that he usually did.

Turning his attention back to the witch, he found her staring off into space, that lost look still very much fixed upon her features.

“Would you…” he paused. “Did you need a drink?”

“As long as you have something stronger than tea,” Hermione smiled distantly. “Then yes.”

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They sat at his dining table, a bottle of firewhiskey between them. In halting words and broken sentences, the truth came out, syllable by painful syllable.

Slinging back his third drink, Remus listened to the methodical way in which Hermione had plotted her family’s escape, before packing them off to the other side of the world. With every word she uttered, he forced back the bitter taste of bile as it began to rise at the back of his throat.

There was a part of him that was utterly and completely horrified at the ruthless depths the woman before him was capable of sinking to.

The other part of him however…the other part longed to hold her, to comfort her with all he had to give.

It was crystal clear to his eyes that Hermione was slowly falling apart, as her mind began adjusting to the new reality she had created for herself.

When at last she ran out of words, she sat very still for a long moment, before emptying her glass of whiskey in one swift gulp.

The face she made as she swallowed, the way she scrunched her nose as the burning liquid slipped past her throat…it was strangely childish, and wholly incongruent with the situation at hand.

“And now?” she asked softly as she stared at the empty tumbler in her hands. “Now when you look at me, what do you see?”

Remus poured himself more liquor and threw it back. Slamming his glass on the table, he leaned back and asked, “Why the fuck didn’t you tell one of us what you were planning to do?”

Hermione laughed brokenly.

“All of you would have stopped me. You would have assured me that they would be safe, that they would be protected.”
“And we would have protected them,” his voice rose in anger. “Hermione you can’t fucking just take people’s memories. That’s…you know that’s wrong. You know it, or you wouldn’t have fucking married me. For fuck’s sake, that was the fate you were trying to escape!”

He stopped speaking, realizing that he had risen to his feet and that he was leaning over her in his frustration.

“Yes it was, wasn’t it?” she asked calmly, looking him in the eye as she tilted her chin defiantly. “I did what I had to do. I did the only thing I could do. Do you think for a second that I trust Wizarding Britain with my family’s lives?”

“No you don’t trust the Order?” he bit out, fighting down a strange sense of hurt. “Did you not trust me?”

“This isn’t about you or the Order. I trust you with my life! But honestly Remus, what choice did I have?” she questioned, getting to her feet. “A madman is calling for the extermination of not only Muggle-borns, but Muggles like my parents. Have we even tried to warn a single Muggle? What have we done exactly, to allow Muggles a chance to protect themselves?”

“That’s…we can’t…” he started and stopped, immediately understanding how weak any argument would sound in the face of the witch’s cold logic.

“Should I have waited until Antonin Dolohov came for my Mum and Dad before I acted?” she questioned, her own voice becoming louder. Tears had begun gathering in her eyes. “If I had a choice Remus, do you think I would have taken such measures to protect them? Did you expect me to sit back and let them take their chances against the likes of Bellatrix Lestrange?”

Even in the depths of his self-righteous rage, with every fibre of his being, Remus still wanted to take Hermione into his arms, if only to wipe her tears away. He wanted nothing more than to make her forget everything about a shitty, fucked up world which demanded terrible things of her.

“I can’t afford to have them used as bait, if ever they got taken by the Enemy,” she continued after a moment. “Our mission is too important. Which is why I’ve come to you for your help.”

“Mission?” he asked, wary of what else she was about to tell him.

“Harry, Ron and I, we have to leave soon. Nobody knows Remus, do you understand? They can’t know or they’d stop us,” she said in a rush, blinking away her tears. “I have the counterspell to restore my parents’ memories in my bag, and I need to ensure that if I don’t survive, that someone will find them, and give them back their lives when this is over,”

“You’re what?” he asked sharply, reaching out to seize at her wrist. “Where the hell are you three going?”

“I can’t…”

“Yes. You can. You are,” his voice dropped to a dangerous octave as his grip began to tighten. “Tell me. Now.”

“Not until you promise me…” she breathed as she rose to her feet.

“No. I am not going to promise you a damn thing. I don’t owe you a damn thing.” he pulled her close. “Hermione, I swear to God, I will take your wand and tie you to this chair until you fucking tell me what it is you’re hiding,”
“How dare you…” her eyes narrowed.

Fulfilling half his threat, he reached into her clothing and retrieved her wand. With a careless toss of his hand, he threw it to the far side of the living room where it landed with a loud clatter.

“You bastard,” she snarled, and made to slap him with her free hand, a move which he easily dodged.

Deftly, Remus set her down on his dining table. Effortlessly, he pinioned her hands down against the scratched wooden surface.

“Tell me. Now.” he repeated softly, meeting her palpable fury with deadly calm. Her chest rose and fell sharply as her breathing became an erratic thing.

“If you thought for one second that I was simply going to let you walk out that door, onwards to some mission where you’d get yourself killed, then it seems you don’t actually know a goddamn thing about me.”

“Why do you care?” she raged. “What does this matter to you? I’m just some burden you got saddled with against your bloody will.”

“Let’s not play anymore shall we?” he hissed through gritted teeth. “You know exactly how much I care for you and what I would do for you. Just because you’ve gone and done something incredibly rash - I mean it, Hermione, it was rash - doesn’t mean I’m going to stop caring. Fucking hell woman…you’re under my skin. You’re in my blood. You’re so deep inside me, I can’t fucking see straight,”

She stopped struggling. Instead, her shoulders began shaking as sobs threatened to break free.

“Oh god…” her voice broke. “Oh god…what have I done?”

“It’s done. It’s done and you’ll have to live with it.” he said flatly.

“Please Remus…promise me…”

“No.” he said. “You still don’t get it do you? I won’t promise you because I’m not letting you leave, not without me. Should I perish with you, no one will give your parents back their lives.”

“Then who…” she gasped, no longer able to hold back her tears.

“We’ll think of something,” he promised fervently, pressing his forehead against her own. Slowly, his grip on her hands loosened. Sliding his hands up her bare arms, his touch transformed itself into something far softer.

Because there was nothing else to say, because he was done playing convoluted games, Remus tilted his face forwards and pressed his lips against her own.

The kiss started as a soft, tentative gesture, but it didn’t stay that way for long.

In a matter of seconds, something snapped within Hermione. Tugging hard at his already-tattered shirt, she pulled him into the curve of her body. Small hands reached up and cupped at his face as she kissed him hungrily.

With that one simple gesture, Remus’s resolve crumbled; all of his pent-up longing spilled past his ruined defences in one encompassing wave.
Hermione tasted like tears, and passion and hope, and it took him only a second to realize that he would never have been able to replace her, simply by finding another woman to warm his bed for the night. It was foolish to imagine that he could have done such a thing to begin with.

Tearing impatiently at her clothing, he slid her shirt off her body and once again, ruined another one of her brassieres. Pressing open-mouthed kisses against her clavicle, he fumbled at her trousers and slid them off her thighs, along with her underwear.

“Remus, I want this, I want you, but…” she shuddered as he ran his palm over her right nipple. Hermione slipped her hands under his shirt. Roving her fingers across his overheated skin, she breathed, “I haven’t…I didn’t place a contraceptive…”

“Don’t move,” he rasped, stepping back.

Pointing his wand at the naked woman, he muttered a familiar cantrip, before throwing his wand so it joined wherever hers had landed. Fumbling at his own trousers, he stepped back between her thighs and tugged at her hips, so that her arse was perched right at the very edge of the table.

Without further ceremony, he plunged inside of her, drawing a whimper from her chest as he did so.

“This…this is better than I remember,” he murmured as pleasure flooded through him. Canting his hips, he watched in keen fascination as she fell apart with a sharp cry. With one hand braced against the table and the other gripping tightly at the jut of her hips, he took her with every ounce of desire he had been holding back over the course of the past ten months.

“Please…” she keened brokenly.

Merlin but he relished it when she pleaded for him, Remus realized.

“You’re not leaving…not without me,” he told her, carding his fingers through her curls in such a way that she had no choice but to meet his fevered gaze. Roughly, he claimed her mouth for his own, swallowing her whimpers and cries as she came again.

“Hermione,” he whispered, breaking the kiss but not releasing her. Sliding his lips down the smooth column of her neck, he suckled hard against her fair skin, knowing full well that he was marking her.

Reaching between them, he stroked at her clit, tilting his hips purposefully against her.

Mine, a voice in his head growled.

“Remus,” she sobbed as her fingers dug painfully into his flesh.

“Darling…” he coaxed, as he too began to spiral. “For me…one more time. Please…”

Together, they tipped over the edge, holding tightly on to the other as the world faded away into so much noise.

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They lay together on the floor, his fingers tangled in her hair and their limbs entwined.

“Did I hurt you?” he asked softly, wishing he could keep the shame from his voice.

As he descended from the heights of pleasure, Remus started to see with a clarity gifted by
hindsight, how he could have handled the situation better.

Not their bout of lovemaking - *that* he didn’t regret.

Their coupling had been heated and rushed but necessary. The game they had been playing. It had been pointless at the end of it, he saw that now. He had wanted her, and she had wanted him, and denying themselves would only have prolonged the inevitable.

“No,” she shook her head, not looking at him.

What Remus truly regretted, were the harsh words with which he had greeted Hermione’s confession.

Thinking on it, if all it took was an *Obliviate* to save the lives of James or Lily or Sirius, he would have cast the exact same spells. To save their lives, Remus would have taken from them all memory of their loves and their joys with a goddamn smile on his face, because all of those things could be earned again.

Death on the other hand, was so very final. There were no second chances in death, no re-dos or opportunities.

No, he recognized as his hold tightened around Hermione, he had no right to judge her.

Summoning what courage he had, the Gryffindor courage he was told he possessed, Remus twined his fingers against her own and raised her right hand up between them. Pressing a kiss to the inside of Hermione’s slender wrist, the wizard prepared to commence the first stages of grovelling.

But it was Hermione who spoke first.

“Voldemort. The way he is now…we cannot hope to beat him.” she propped herself up on one elbow and looked down at him. Even in the dark, Remus couldn’t help but wonder in awe at how beautiful he found her.

“He’s split his soul into seven parts. We need to find all of them, to destroy each and every one of them. If Dumbledore was right, the lunatic has them well guarded, hard to find and even harder to dispose of.”

Forcing himself to consider her words, Remus mirrored her pose as he pushed himself up to face her properly.

“Where do you intend on starting this hunt?”

“The Headmaster told Harry certain things before he passed. Two Horcruxes have already been destroyed. That book which possessed Ginny in her First Year, a ring belonging to Salazar Slytherin…” she paused. “You saw Dumbledore’s hand. If you recall, you inferred that whatever had hurt the man so badly must also have been incredibly dangerous. You were right.”

He looked away for a moment.

“Did Albus mention anything else?” he wondered.

“He left some books. I stole all of them.” Hermione shrugged carelessly. “I didn’t think he’d mind. Not *now* anyway.”

Remus couldn’t keep himself from laughing at her flippancy, though he was the only one who did so.
“The Order needs you,” she said after another short stretch of silence. “You cannot come with us,”

“I don’t care,” he ran his fingertips over the sharp angles of her cheekbones. Perhaps it was only his imagination, but Hermione seemed far thinner than the last time he had seen her.

“One more fighter will not win this war. Not if what you’re saying is true. Besides, I’ve already told you…you’re not leaving without me.”

“There’s Tonks to think about,” she added as if he hadn’t spoken.

“What are you…” he frowned in confusion. “Tonks?”

“Tonks. The two of you are together, aren’t you?” she moved to cover her nakedness from his sharp eyes. Easily, he maneuvered their bodies in such a way as to prevent her from hiding herself from his hungry gaze.

“Hermione, I don’t know what you’re talking about.” he began pressing kisses all over her face. One hand traced carefully, the scar that had been carved into her abdomen. “I haven’t been with Tonks since the day we wed.”

“What?” she sounded surprised even as she arched into his possessive touch.

“I haven’t been with anybody else since the day I took you to bed,” he stopped moving as a thought occurred to him. “Have you?”

“Remus,” she sounded annoyed that he had stopped his ministrations.

He pushed a hard thigh against her burning centre. Underneath his body, Hermione trembled as desire overtook her once again.

“What?” she sounded surprised even as she arched into his possessive touch.

“I haven’t been with anybody else since the day I took you to bed,” he stopped moving as a thought occurred to him. “Have you?”

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He pushed a hard thigh against her burning centre. Underneath his body, Hermione trembled as desire overtook her once again.

“Have you been with anybody else since...”

His voice was coarse with jealousy as he pictured some faceless person touching his witch.

Deep inside, Remus knew he was being ridiculous. He would have known if anyone else had so much as grazed at her elbow because he always knew. Still, some horribly primal part of him wanted to hear her say aloud, that she had wanted no one else but him since the day he took her.

“Fucking hell,” she hissed, grinding against him. “No. No alright? It’s only been…fuck…it’s only been you,“

Flipping her onto her belly, Remus lifted Hermione onto her hands and knees. Nudging her thighs apart, he ran his fingers over her soaking cunt, before sliding his thumb into her eager warmth.

“Fucking hell,” she hissed, grinding against him. “No. No alright? It’s only been…fuck…it’s only been you,“

Flipping her onto her belly, Remus lifted Hermione onto her hands and knees. Nudging her thighs apart, he ran his fingers over her soaking cunt, before sliding his thumb into her eager warmth.

“You won’t leave here. Not without me,” he said as he stroked her into a frenzy. Removing his fingers before she could find her release, he licked ravenously at his hand, savouring the way she tasted.

“Yes,” she nodded, unconsciously tilting her hips upwards in an open invitation.

“Swear it,” he moved so that his cock brushed insistently at her entrance, but not enough so that she could find satisfaction.

“Remus please…” she whined.

“Swear. It.” the wolf under his skin commanded through gritted teeth.
“Yes, I swear to you. When we leave for the hunt, you will come with us. With me.” she dipped her head in defeat. “Dammit Remus, I swear,”

“Good girl,” he praised, and gave her what she wanted.

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When they were finished, he lifted her worn frame off the floor and carried her into his bed where, in his humble opinion, she belonged.

Curling himself around her body, Remus allowed his eyes to fall shut, deciding that further questions would have to wait until sunrise. Despite his earlier misgivings, he doubted very much that Hermione would go back on her oaths, especially those which had been given to her wolf of a husband.

Content for the first time in a very, very long time, Remus slept marvellously well.

Chapter End Notes

Ahem. So yes. That was the end of the first half of the story.

No really. First half.

Second half will start in the next chapter. DH plot will start to stray from here (slowly), so here's hoping y'all that are still here, continue to stay with me.

Much like a few of my other recent projects, this piece of fanfic also got away from me a little. Shrug. Oh well.
The Consummation: Chapter 1

The witch wasn’t in his bed when he awoke.

Scowling, Remus bolted upright. Then, sensing movement in the next room, the werewolf came to understand that although the woman had left his side, Hermione was still very much within his reach.

Calming himself, the wizard couldn’t help feeling more than a touch stupid. Dragging on his trousers, he padded softly out the open door of his bedroom, and spied the young woman seated at the dining table, poring through what appeared to be a veritable library.

“Morning,” he said gruffly, ambling over.

Inhaling deeply as he dropped a kiss to her forehead, something which felt very much like serenity flooded his veins. God but she smelled like him, and sex and everything he had ever wanted in this life.

By her right hand, her wand lay atop a stack of books. Very pointedly, he ignored its presence.

“I hope you don’t mind,” she said after a moment, still not looking at him. “I brewed a pot of coffee,”

Remus shook his head and decided she had the right idea. Apologies would have to wait until he was a little more awake. Wandering into the kitchen, bits of the previous night began drifting back into his bleary consciousness, bringing with it the remembrance of the harsh manner by which he had treated her when first she had arrived.

Fucking hell, but he could be a right arsehole.

Pouring himself a cup of coffee, he took a sniff and grimaced, before taking a large gulp. Despite the fact that the burnt coffee was acrid and far too bitter - for a brilliant girl, Hermione clearly didn’t understand ratios - Remus heaved a sigh of relief as the synapses in his brain began firing properly.

Hurrying back into his small parlour, he sat himself across from her. Carefully, he set his mug down amidst the chaos of paper and parchment she had created.

“I’m sorry,” he blurted out. “I had no right to judge you the way I did.”

Hermione looked up at him. “No. You really didn’t,”

Forcing himself to hold her gaze, he slipped his right hand across the table. For a moment, she stared at his open palm as though it offended her very sensibilities. Eventually, she reached out and twined his fingers with her own.

A crushing weight lifted from his chest. Remus found himself able to breathe again.

“It doesn’t discount the fact that you might have been right. I might have gone a bit too far,” she bit her lip as she turned to stare out the window. “Do you think I should try to find them? Should I try
“How?” he asked bluntly. “They might still be flying somewhere over Russia, or Japan, or who even knows where. You said it yourself - you purchased your parents the most convoluted flight path possible to throw off anyone who might go sniffing after them. Not to mention, apparating onto a moving craft is a terrible risk - death by splinching isn’t much fun from what I hear,”

“I could wait another day until I know for sure that they’re in Sydney,” she persisted miserably. “And do what? Take in a show?” he hated that he was destroying her hopes. “Even if you apparated onto the front steps of the Sydney Opera House, or found a Portkey or a floo connection, where would you start to look once you got to Australia? How?”

“There are blood rituals…” she sounded tired.

“There are.” he nodded. “But those take time and finesse… and unfortunately, as you say, we have a mission we need to focus our attentions on,”

Hermione tightened her fingers around his own.

“I’ve really fucked up haven’t I?”

Snapping his mouth shut, Remus decided that silence was the better part of valour in this instance.

“Are you sure you want to come along with us?” Hermione asked, turning away from the topic of her family. “It won’t be easy.”

“We’re not having this conversation again.” he said curtly, lifting his mug and taking another sip of his terrible coffee. “I will have to pick up a supply of Wolfsbane Potion of course. Can’t have me running amok in the middle of a delicate mission.”

Nodding thoughtfully, she tilted her head to the side as she considered something.

“Remus, how long have you been dosing yourself? Regularly I mean, without a break between transformations.”

“I’m not entirely sure. Since I started receiving steady paycheques, things have gotten significantly easier… so I would say it’s been two, perhaps even three years since I’ve had to miss a dose?” he shrugged. “Why?”

Shaking his hand off, Hermione began shifting through the mounds of scrolls and tomes between them until she found what it was she had been looking for. Shoving a book at him, he stared down at it in consternation.

“There’s been some new research in the last decade, that suggests prolonged exposure to a steady stream of Wolfsbane Potion might decrease dependency on the stuff. But that’s not all…” she began rifling through the slim volume, pointing out passages she had marked out using what appeared to be a yellow Muggle highlighter. “In here are several case studies and notes, which I have a feeling you might find interesting.”

“Hermione, there’s never been any proven…” he started.

“Wolfsbane Potion is a relatively new invention, and until recent years, it has never been widely available,” Hermione ploughed on. “Since its introduction however, patterns have been starting to reveal themselves in subjects who have been exposed to the potion for at least eighteen lunar
cycles - a number which you have far surpassed. Certain unexpected effects and advantages have been…"

Rubbing tiredly at his forehead, Remus found his patience being sorely tested.

“I’ve looked up every single text known to the magical world pertaining to Lycanthropy. I’ve never seen anything about some miraculous cure,” he interjected.

“Pay attention. We’re not discussing a cure." Hermione leaned forwards. "Quite the opposite, as a matter of fact,”

Narrowing his eyes, he took another look at what she was directing his attention to. Hermione’s eyes were taking on a glow he’d seen many times before, every time she discovered some new piece of knowledge she wanted to share.

"Right..." he scanned the words before him, trying to parse exactly what the authors were implying. Before he could finish reading a very long, very dry paragraph, the witch reached over and flipped the pages onwards.

Ignoring his glare of irritation, she pointed out another paragraph.

Suddenly, Remus had a very good idea why the boys constantly complained about Hermione when she was in her ‘study’ mode. It was one thing to find her charming when he wasn’t on the receiving end of her bossy tendencies, and quite another when he was the one being dictated at.

“If the research is to be believed, there’s been cases where certain subjects have displayed abilities to control certain aspects of their lupine form at will, outside of the full moon,” she explained.

“What kind of aspects?” Remus growled. This wasn’t the conversation he had been hoping to have with Hermione.

“The text is a bit vague on that portion, I’ll have to admit. But I assume it means you might be able to bring up certain physical traits which are more commonly associated with your werewolf self…” Hermione babbled. “When you’re in your wolf’s body, most hexes and curses bounce off you. You’re far stronger than you are when you’re in your human form. Remus, can you imagine the possibilities?”

"Of turning into a vicious killer as and when I feel like it?" he asked, wondering if Hermione was feeling quite sane.

“Ah but that’s the exciting part,” she grinned maniacally. “The research suggests that the defining property of Wolfsbane Potion is absolutely prevalent in all noted case studies...the werewolf subjects have so far retained all human sensibilities in every last lab test. When you really think about it, this research could benefit werewolves!”

"Even if any of this were true - which I sincerely doubt, by the way - it's unlikely society will simply decide to accept us, just because we can switch our furry problem on and off at will." Remus pushed aside the book. “If anything, they’d treat us more like the freaks they already think we are,”

“You’re not seeing my point are you?” Hermione’s excitement began to ebb away.

The werewolf honestly tried. Nonetheless, he failed to understand why this supremely intelligent woman sitting before him truly thought such a development might change society’s perception when it came to those of his kind.
Pursing her lips in disappointment, Hermione shook her head and stood up. Slowly, she began stacking her books and shrinking them.

"What are you doing?" he asked, though he had a fairly good idea what was running through the witch's head.

Remus wasn't sure if he ought to be irritated or amused.

Hermione sighed as she packed her belongings into the ugly beaded bag she'd brought with her. "I'm off to look for a place to stay of course. I'm not going back to...back home."

"Not thinking of heading to the Burrow then?" he raised an eyebrow.

"No," she looked sick to her stomach. "I'm not really up to answering Molly's questions just now, and I'm sure she would have plenty. She would want to know why I'm coming by so early, instead of simply showing up in a few weeks."

"Hermione..." he stood up and moved to stand directly in front of her. Gently, he took the small beaded bag from her and set it aside. It felt far heavier than it looked.

"In case you haven't figured this part out yet, in that wonderful brain of yours, you're staying right here. With me."

"Oh," she looked genuinely surprised. "But I thought..."

"You are the single most exasperating, hard-headed woman I've ever met," Remus gently tilted her chin upwards. "But you're also staying. You're free to come and go as you see fit of course, as long as you understand that this is where you'll be resting that brilliant head of yours every night for the foreseeable future."

Now that he had said those words aloud, the thought of her leaving the house all on her own disturbed him more than it probably should have. Muggle-born and Harry Potter's best friend... Hermione Granger was a walking target if ever there was one.

But it wasn't as if Hermione was helpless. Briefly, he thought of the fireball she'd sent careening towards Greyback, and the lovely screams she had pulled from the old wolf's chest.

"But...I thought..." she bit her lip. "If I stay..."

"Not 'if.'" he wrapped his arms around her. "And just so there's no further confusion, you'll be sleeping in my bed, right beside me."

"This feels as if it's going against the spirit of our initial agreement," her hands lay flat against his chest. "I didn't come here to disrupt your life."

"Sweet girl..." his voice dipped to a low thrum. "I think it's fair to say...the agreement hasn't been in effect for a very long time now, if ever it truly was,"

"But..." whatever she had been about to tell him, he rudely interrupted by pressing a kiss to her soft lips. Skillfully, he steered them back into his bedroom. At the foot of his bed, Remus pushed her gently back onto the rumpled sheets, before he crawled in after her, looking every inch the predatory wolf that he actually was. Determinedly, he swallowed her protests before she could get further words out.

"Conversation is beginning to bore me," he murmured finally, lifting his mouth from hers as he
began peeling away her clothing. "I can think of a few things I’d rather be doing."

"But...I need to...I have to try figuring out..." her own questing hands slid his jeans past his hips.

"Later," he promised. The feel of her naked skin sliding against his own began driving him wild all over again. “Now however…”

This time, it was she who lunged upwards, to draw him into a long, lingering kiss.

***

In the afternoon, he went into the city and resumed a half day shift from the courier office.

True, he was still physically exhausted from his recent transformation…not to mention, the hours he had spent making love to Hermione…

But some instinct told Remus that this part of his life was about to come to a close. Someday soon, he knew, he would lose the pleasure of speeding through the byways and the streets of London on his beautifully maintained Fuji bicycle. Someday very soon, the war would utterly and completely consume his life - and Hermione’s arrival, welcome as it was, had heralded this fact.

Still, even with that morose knowledge in mind, Remus’s smile must have been wider than usual considering Martin’s knowing and immediate reaction as he strolled into the small office.

“Finally found yourself a girl then?” the portly coordinator asked in jovial curiosity.

“I found her sometime ago actually,” he answered with a grin as he signed in for his shift. “She was a friend of mine. Though she’s still a friend I suppose. It’s all semantics,”

Martin looked a little envious as he responded, “You actually managed to escape the friendzone. You’re going to need to show me how that’s done,”

“What’s a ‘friendzone’?” Remus asked with a small frown. Was this some obscure Muggle maze?

“You know, where a girl tells you how much she adores you, and how wonderful you are, but constantly says things like ‘why can’t I just meet a bloke like you?’…” the other man affected a shrill falsetto at the end, before he shrugged sadly. “It seems I make an excellent friend,”

“That sounds…” Remus considered with a sinking stomach, some of the conversations he had once shared with Tonks.

“Awful.” Martin supplied.

His cheer ever so slightly dampened, Remus continued with his day.

***

Once his last packaged was delivered, much as he wanted to return to his cottage and the witch who waited for him within, Remus made his way to 12 Grimmauld Place.

There continued to be a question of who was to lead the resistance effort, now that the Commander of the Order was gone. Despite everybody’s obvious and best intentions however, the wizard couldn’t help but wonder how the group would hold together without the binding force that had been Albus.
McGonagall was still in mourning, and far too mired in bitterness to provide much rallying guidance.

Arthur Weasley didn’t like treading on the feelings of his peers, a characteristic which wasn’t very useful in the middle of a conflict. Inversely, his wife Molly was just a little too free with her opinions, a trait which lost her more allies within the Order than likely she even knew.

There was Moody, but his paranoia made him unstable as a General. Kingsley would have been a good choice, but for the fact that he seemed more interested in maintaining order amongst his official Ministry-mandated ranks.

There was always the younger generation of course…such as, the Weasley twins. However, although Fred and George were both boundlessly clever and resourceful, they were also incapable of seeing the big picture outside of the immediate present.

The truth was, in Remus’s opinion, Tonks would have made the finest leader out of everyone, but for the fact that her age put her at an immediate and distinct disadvantage where Moody and Kingsley were concerned.

As both men were her seniors in the workplace, and considering that at least one of them thought of her as no more than a flighty young girl, the Auror would never receive their respect or support in any way that counted.

Ultimately, by process of elimination, Bill Weasley was the only one left who could have taken on the mantle of leadership…

Bill, who was having absolutely no luck trying to make everyone understand the precipice upon which they were all currently teetering on.

“We can’t just sit here, hoping this ship will right itself.” the man growled more than a little wolfishly from the front of the room. “We can’t just hope that defending our home and hearth will be enough.”

Staring hard at his friend, Remus wondered if anyone had caught on yet to the fact that Bill wasn’t as un-infected as he had so claimed. Come to think of it, he wasn’t sure if Bill knew.

The other man might never transform fully, but there was now something sharing his skin that didn’t used to be there…something fiercer, with very sharp teeth. Flicking his gaze over to the younger wizard’s intended, Remus observed a flare of excitement in the half-Veela’s eyes as her betrothed snapped his jaws angrily at everyone present.

_Fleur_ seemed aware at the very least. And she _liked_ it.

“And how do you propose taking the fight to them exactly?” Kingsley demanded. “I will not have open war on these streets.”

“No one is talking about open war, are we dear?” Molly asked her eldest anxiously.

When Bill looked to him for support, all Remus could do was shake his head. In conciliatory tones, he said quite apologetically, “I’m afraid my role in the last war was on the espionage side of things. I know nothing about military strategy, or how we would even go about trying to launch an offensive.”

It wasn’t exactly the truth, but Bill could unfortunately no longer count on Remus as a lieutenant on this side of the fight; not when their roads were now diverging.
Had Sirius been alive, Remus thought, had Sirius never been imprisoned and thus robbed of hefty portions of his sanity, he might have made a good general. Even James, charismatic though he had been, had not possessed the Black heir’s ability to sway everyone to his way thinking.

How many times had the Marauders followed Sirius blindly into one half-baked idea after another? How often had Gryffindor house as a whole, rallied behind someone who cost them more house points than every scarlet-robed student combined?

“…patient for a little longer. Meanwhile, we should continue safeguarding our assets.” Moody said with a sigh. By ‘assets’, Moody meant ‘people’. The old Auror had always displayed a certain inability to show empathy in its simplest forms.

“We’ve got eyes on Harry, and the Burrow still has the security of the Fidelius charm.” Fred nodded.

From the shadowy corner of the parlour where he had been skulking, Remus held his breath as he waited on someone to comment on the state of Hermione’s emptied house.

“We’re warded to the teeth,” Kingsley nodded. “I’d like to see them try making a play on our domains.”

“We should also stop meeting here if we can help it. Severus Snape is perfectly aware of this safe house…” Bill sounded exasperated.

“I very much doubt he’d get past the hexes I’ve set up just for him,” Moody grunted, effectively brushing the other man’s concerns away.

The Auror’s arrogance was astounding, Remus thought scathingly - but he supposed that’s how Barty Crouch Junior ended up subduing the older man with as much ease as he had purportedly done.

“Son, I hear your concerns, I really do,” Arthur rose to his feet and patted Bill’s shoulder. Somehow, he completely missed the manner by which his son’s jaw tightened. “We’ll find a plan yet, I know we will.”

As everyone began shuffling about, Remus came to the uncomfortable understanding that the meeting was over…and not once did anybody even think to bring up the fact that Hermione and her family lived out in the Muggle world, exposed and unprotected.

Anger began rising in his belly, as he stared at the people who were all supposed to be fighting on the same side, who were supposed to protect those who couldn’t protect themselves.

Swerving his gaze upon McGonagall, he saw to his annoyance that despite her previous insistence on guarding her star student’s future, at present, she remained silent on the matter of Hermione’s current conditions. Rather, she continued glaring darkly into the crackling flames of the glowing hearth, seething in oblivious silence.

“Has anyone heard from Hermione?” someone asked as Molly shrugged on her coat.

Tonks.

The Metamorphmagus cast Remus a very brief, very guarded look.

“She told Ron she’ll be accompanying us the day we retrieve Harry from the Dursleys,” Molly explained briefly.
Like hell she was.

With a bright smile, the matriarch continued, “Does anybody fancy a bite before we break for the week? There’s a lovely chip shop down the street,”

Moody grunted, “I could use some dinner,”

Furious at the lack of concern everyone was displaying for his witch, Remus swept towards the front door.

Once outside 12 Grimmauld Place, Remus took a deep, steadying breath as he tried to catch a whiff of sanity. Staring up at the dark sky, the werewolf admitted silently that it wasn’t only the callous manner by which everyone treated Hermione which had gotten him so angry…though certainly, that hadn’t helped one bit.

Being compelled to return to 12 Grimmauld Place constantly, the house where Sirius had been all but imprisoned in during the span of his final days…that alone never failed to affect him in ways Remus hated.

The house was a symbol of everything that had gone wrong in all their lives, and sometimes, Remus wished he could raze it to the ground. It was too bad that in his addled state, his best friend had gone and bequeathed the pile of rotting wood and brick to Harry.

Remus would never deny James’s son anything. Anything except…

“I went by her house today to check on her,” Tonks said from behind. “I was watching her as she left King’s Cross with her parents, and overheard them talking. Her parents have no idea at all, of what’s been going on.”

You don’t say, Remus thought sardonically.

“No. She doesn’t like worrying them.” he answered instead, schooling his features into bland amicability.

Tonks continued, moving to stand beside him. “I tried to knock, but next thing I knew, I found myself somewhere in the dodgy end of…well, I found myself in Harlesden. ‘Mione’s put up some mean wards…but that’s besides the point. I don’t think there was a single soul stirring in her house.”

“People tend to go out sometimes,” he hid a smile as he considered his witch’s abilities. “You know. To get to work, to go shopping, that sort of thing.”

Tonks hummed.

“You’ll keep her safe won’t you?” she asked after a moment. “I don’t like to think of her facing a horde of Death Eaters all on her own. Though I wager, she could probably to flay a few of them alive for even looking at her wrong. I wouldn’t want to be on the wrong end of her wand, that one,”

He couldn’t help it. Remus began grinning openly.

However as quickly as his smile flared to life, it died as well. It was the look on Tonk’s face that did it, that wistful, sad expression she still wore sometimes when she thought he wasn’t looking.

“You care a lot about her don’t you?” she asked.
“Of course.” he shrugged. “We all do. She’s Hermione, she’s Harry’s best friend…”

“Right.” Tonks nodded, clasping her hands behind her back. “That’s all there is to it. Of course,”

Remus remembered his conversation with Martin as he looked at the woman beside him, and wondered if he ought to try apologizing again for the way he’d completed fucked everything up where she had been concerned.

“Don’t start that guilty shite again Remus,” she rolled her eyes, as if she knew exactly what he was thinking. “I better get going anyway. I’ve got a date tonight.”

“Oh?” he raised an eyebrow.

“He’s a sweet lad. A bit sweeter than I usually like them…” Tonks grinned, though he couldn’t help but see the sadness tugging at the corners of her lips. “But I could use a bit of that once in a while.”

Before he could say anything else, she was off. One soft pop later, he knew she was gone.

Suddenly exhausted, Remus followed suit, unlocking his bicycle from the small, wrought iron fence set in front of the looming townhouse. With a half step to the left, he was back in Yorkshire once more.

Stepping into his cottage, Hermione looked over at him from where she was seated, surrounded by her books and her scrolls. A smudge of ink was streaked across her nose.

Despite her bright smile of greeting, Hermione was clearly just a little dazed. Likely, she hadn’t tried to fix herself anything to eat all day.

It wasn’t healthy to dwell on such things, but he couldn’t help but think on how carelessly Molly and the rest had pushed her out of their minds. They had mostly ignored the state of her existence, even as she sat alone, trying to work out a plan to rid the Wizarding world of its worst Dark Wizard since Gellert Grindelwald.

Crossing the room, the man knelt beside her and wrapped his arms around her waist.

“You do realize it’s only been six hours since last you saw me,” she demanded in consternation. Despite her tone, Hermione threaded her fingers affectionately through his hair.

“I’m not the one who’s been counting the hours,” he pointed out, allowing his anger and his misgivings to slip away. On that very spot, Remus decided that he would treasure every and any moment he had with the witch in his arms, because hell if he knew what the next day would bring.

With a rueful smile, the woman kissed his forehead. In answer, Remus buried his face into her side, losing himself in the fog that was all Hermione.

Chapter End Notes

Warning: the next few chapters are going to be heavily centred around Remus/Hermione learning to exist together in the same space...etc.
For months now, Remus had laboured under the notion that he had come to know Hermione rather well.

For instance, he knew that Hermione adored and abhorred sweets all at the same time.

Every time she sank her teeth into a slice of chocolate cake, or into the smooth filling of a lemon pie, her eyes rolled back in almost obscene pleasure. Yet - the hint of guilt at her brow was completely unmistakable.

Once, when he could no longer keep his curiosity at bay, he asked, “Does something about eating sweets pain you? I don’t understand why you always look as if you’ve been forced to swallow a Roach Cluster, immediately after you’ve inhaled a candy bar.”

“I keep expecting my mother to pop up around the corner, to start lecturing me on all the damage I’m doing to my teeth.” she explained sheepishly.

“How do I put this…my mother’s a bit like Walburga Black, if Mrs. Black had been militant about refined sugar, rather than Muggles. When I was six, my neighbour gave me a leftover cupcake from her daughter’s birthday party. My mother marched over and lectured the poor woman on the evils of sugar. Let’s just say I didn’t have many friends on my street, especially after that row…”

Despite her wry laughter, the wizard caught on to the unspoken hint that Hermione had lead a rather lonely existence before she had entered the Wizarding world.

In the last year, Remus had come to know the way Hermione smiled when she fancied herself clever (which she usually was), the smug look on her face when she was proven right (which wasn’t as often as she would prefer), and the scowl she wore when people dared to disagree with her (which happened more often that she preferred).

He had come to know the irritated manner with which she flicked at her hair when she was trying to accomplish the impossible; he had come to appreciate the happy smile she wore, when she eventually succeeded.

It was nuances like these, which had deluded Remus into thinking he knew Hermione inside and out.

Five days into living side-by-side with the witch however, the wizard came to an unpleasant realization that perhaps he wasn’t as well-versed in the young woman as he had imagined.

The first time he woke up in the still watches of the night with no witch beside him, Remus had scrambled for his wand, wondering if some miscreant had dared to sneak into his home to steal the woman out from under his nose.

When finally his eyes caught faint lines of light streaming in through the edges of his closed bedroom door, and when he caught the comforting scent that was Hermione drifting through from the other room, Remus relaxed…though not by very much.

Pulling on his pyjamas, the werewolf opened his bedroom door. In momentary silence, he observed
as Hermione paged feverishly through a thick, dusty book.

Against the dim light of an old lamp, the shadows under the witch’s eyes never looked more pronounced. Her cheeks, he noted with some concern, had grown noticeably hollower.

Chestnut curls she so despised (but which he personally found quite fetching) were piled in an unruly mess above her crown. The way they were gathered, Remus knew she was going to have a horrid time in a few hours, untangling snarl after snarl.

It took a few minutes for Remus to understand that Hermione hadn't noticed his lingering presence. Her dark eyes scanned the page before her with feverish intensity, as her lips formed the shape of the words she was reading. Constantly, her fingers twitched the pages back and forth, as though she was unsure of what it was she was even taking in.

This wasn't a side of Hermione he was familiar with, and what he was witnessing worried him.

Back when he had spent every other night patrolling the hallways of the castle, occasionally, Remus caught glimpses of the witch as she sat and laughed with her friends. Passing the library, he would catch her deep in the throes of revision, looking up only to offer her opinion and her mentorship every once in a while, with dedicated and unfettered enthusiasm.

Whenever he chanced to spend time with her, as with Harry, Ron, Luna and all the rest, she grinned easily, looking hale and healthy if not always happy.

Gazing upon the manic witch now, Remus finally understood that Hermione had obviously been making an effort to hide her true state - both physical and mental - away from everyone.

"Hermione," he murmured.

Nothing. She acted as if she hadn't even heard him.

Frowning, he walked to her side and placed a gentle hand on her shoulder. "Hermione?"

"Oh," she blinked owlishly up at him. "Did I wake you? I'm so sorry, I was trying to be..."

"I was worried when I found myself alone," he confessed.

Plucking the heavy book she had been reading from her hands, he skimmed its contents, noting that it concerned the destruction of objects constructed by means of dark spells. Sighing, he set the heavy volume aside. "It's late. You need to get some sleep,"

"I can't," Hermione shook her head, though her yawn belied her statement. "I have to…"

Carefully, he slipped an arm under her shoulders and another under her knees.

"Not right now." he kissed her hair, smiling slightly at her mutinous scowl.

"I believe I've mentioned before that I don't usually appreciate being manhandled," she grumble. "Remus please, I need to..."

Depositing her under his sheets, Remus lay down and wrapped a strong arm around her waist, effectively trapping her in place. He would have felt a bit guilty about essentially restraining her, if he wasn’t certain she was going to hurt herself if she kept on going.

"You think that if you could only try a little harder, you'll find that one chink in the Enemy's armour. How much valuable information do you think you missed in those texts, tired out as you
are?"

Momentarily, Hermione stilled. The whites of her eyes were beginning to appear bloodshot. Again, he kicked himself for not noticing sooner that she had been spelling herself into the picture of youthful health.

"I don't know what else to do," she said at last. "I haven't had a good night's sleep in months. It seems so pointless, wasting these hours spent awake,"

In a hand span of days, Remus had completely destroyed the illusion that they were asexual partners locked in a union that had been forced upon them. Indeed, the man had taken great pleasure in showing Hermione almost all the ways he had been holding himself back where she was concerned.

In doing so, he had figured out quite a few other details.

As with the first time he had ever bedded her, Remus had noticed to his unending amusement that the woman tended to fall asleep immediately after sex almost every single time.

He even joked about it once, knowing full well he was risking her ire.

"Shouldn't I be the one to roll over and fall asleep immediately?" he teased after she awoke from a short nap, following a languorous bout of sex on his sofa.

Pulling irritably at her clothes, she replied, "Well if you're going to make fun of me, I swear, that's the last time we..."

Hermione never got to finish her threat, as he set about demonstrating to her that he fully intended on taking her again, and again...for as long as she would have him, anyhow.

In the present, Remus began tracing the shape of her ear with his lips as his hands drifted past the waistband of her pyjamas.

"This is very unfair," she murmured, squirming to face him.

The intoxicating scent of her arousal flooded his nostrils as his hand grew bolder in his explorations. Carefully, he drew an experimental finger across the cleft between her thighs; to his unending delight, he found her eager and ready for him.

"Jesus," she hissed, arching as she dug her fingers hard into his back.

Laying kisses along the crook of her neck, he teased lightly at her clit, touching her just enough to draw out her whimpers. Sliding down the length of her body, his mouth worshipped every patch of exposed skin he could find as he slid her pyjamas off.

Without thinking, Remus vanished the cotton scrap of her panties with a deft show of wandless magic. The only bit of wandless magic he knew, actually, a trick which had served him well many times before...

"Shit," he thought, as his gaze shot up to meet Hermione’s eyes. True enough, that little portion of skill he had just displayed, had the witch gazing at him as if she had a thousand questions brimming at the tip of her tongue.

Taking the offensive, Remus plunged two fingers inside of her and fucked her rapidly until she was nothing more than a quivering mess.
Sure at last that he had properly gotten her distracted, he slowed his movements and withdrew his touch, grinning smugly at her mewl of disappointment. Trailing his lips across her softly curved belly, he palmed her legs apart. Past her soft pubis, his mouth hovered briefly above her soaking cunt.

“Remus, please…” she begged ever so softly.

Leaning forwards, his tongue flicked at her clit. Hermione’s body twisted and arched immediately as she whimpered into a pillow.

“Darling girl,” he whispered, right before he tasted her. Slowly, he laved his attention on her, taking care to build at her arousal until he could feel her pressing desperately against his mouth, single-mindedly seeking an elusive climax….

“Please…please don’t stop. I’m so close…” she begged raggedly. “God, fucking hell, Remus please just do it, do me now…”

Perhaps it was Hermione who really ought to re-visit how well she thought she knew him, Remus decided as he sat back to regard the naked, pleading woman. He was more awake now, than he had been only a few minutes before.

Ignoring her frustrated noises, the man smirked…and started the process of teasing her to the brink of madness once more, relishing every last plea she offered up to him.

The next day, they both slept long past the noon hour.

***

As a student, while Remus had not reached the same academic heights as Hermione did, he was nonetheless no slouch when it came to learning.

In the aftermath of the last war, with his inability to land a steady job, the werewolf had found himself set adrift without a purpose. This was how he came to spend a considerable amount of time in libraries around the country, devouring book after book in order to distract himself from reality.

Not all of what he had read had been fiction in the end, though he had become enamoured enough by the likes of Milton and Orwell, that he had considered taking up further studies in English Literature at a Muggle university.

No, some of those years spent popping in and out of all sorts of libraries, were spent delving into magical studies not covered within the Hogwarts syllabus. Indeed, the subjects that most fascinated him were often not actually counted as ‘light’ magic.

When Albus had hired him on as the DADA Professor, it was true that the old man had done it largely to manipulate him back into his ranks for the sake of another misbegotten war. There was no doubt however, that the other wizard had recognized that Remus had become quite well versed in the Dark Arts, in ways most of his peers were not.

For all his experience with certain types of books however, Remus had been a little taken aback, when he finally saw the kinds of texts Hermione kept stuffed in that little beaded bag of hers.

"How the hell did you even get your hands on this?" he asked in awe, stroking reverently at the spine of the Necronomicon with his forefinger. Casting her a sharp glance, he asked, "Or do I even want to know?"
"You're familiar with the Muggle world aren't you?" she affected an air of nonchalance, but the tiny smirk creeping across her lips told him exactly how smug she was, that her genius was being noted. "You know what a Xerox machine is, I assume?"

In his life as a courier, Remus had spent a considerable amount of time wandering in and out of mailrooms, watching as office workers wrestled furiously with paper jams trapped within those demonic machines.

“What, you snuck the original volume out from under Pince's nose, and brought it to a copy shop?” he asked in disbelief. “Didn’t anybody start asking questions when the machines all began glowing a deep red? Or as hooded monks appeared out of nowhere, to chant the praises of Yog-Sothoth?”

“No, but can you imagine?” Hermione chortled.

“I’m trying not to,” he grunted.

“I simply found some empty books and cast a spell of duplication in the general direction of the Restricted Section. I’ve been doing it for half a year, at a rate of one book a day,” Hermione sighed. “On top of actually restricting physical access, Madam Pince’s wards also prevent wizards from magically summoning the books into their possession. What those protections don’t do, is stop someone from simply siphoning the content of each book into a suitable vessel.”

Hermione tapped at the cover of the *Necronomicon*. “This used to be an empty notebook from a Muggle stationery shop. I bought it over Christmas…I might have transfigured the cover so it looks a little more…well…looming.”

“Merlin...are you sure you weren’t really sorted into Slytherin?” he stared at her half in terror and half in admiration.

Considering the fact that Hermione had only recently committed some serious identity fraud, now, combined with the knowledge of her thievery from one of the most well guarded libraries in all of Wizarding Britain, it occurred to Remus that he might well be married to a felon.

A very attractive, very clever felon, to be precise. Fitting really, considering he was the Last Marauder Standing. Idly, he wondered what the sentence was, for werewolf spouses who harboured their fugitive wives…

"If you get me arrested, we're never speaking again.” he stared down at the book, feeling as if he had to say something. After all, he was a law-abiding adult - he really shouldn’t encourage this sort of behaviour.

"I don't know," she said, picking out a set of scrolls. Unravelling them, she continued, "Some of those Muggle handcuffs might be fun."

Almost immediately, he forgot his concerns about Hermione’s criminal status. Instead, he suddenly found himself lost in a very, *very* vivid fantasy, involving the witch, some restraints, and very little in the way of clothing.

Swallowing, Remus forced himself to pay attention to the text before him even as the witch in question smirked knowingly into her reading material.

***

As the days passed, and as the familiar joy of simply *learning* returned to him, the werewolf settled into a pattern he couldn’t help but enjoy.
Remus found that he liked waking up beside Hermione in the mornings; he liked doing something as simple as toasting bread for the both of them; he liked shoving steaming cups of coffee under her nose.

In the afternoons, he found himself riveted by the sight of Hermione fiddling about in his kitchen, making them pots of tea.

All while he pretended to read whatever book she had tossed at him of course.

On nights when she couldn't sleep, he took his time drawing out her gasps and her whimpers, until she could focus on nothing else in the world apart him. When at last she slumbered, nestled into the protective curve of his own body, Remus would run his fingers down her naked back, listening intently for the sound of her breathing.

Oddly enough, this was as close to peace as the man had ever gotten to in his life.

Of all the mundane concerns he had during those dreamy, golden days of summer - days of which were all tinged by darkness, true - money, surprisingly, was not as high on his list of worries as Remus had imagined it would be. Taking stock of his assets one afternoon, the man realized that somehow, he had amassed a decent amount in savings.

Thinking on it, the small stash of money he had managed to accumulate made sense.

The largest expense he had on his ledger was his monthly purchase of Wolfsbane Potion; food and such came in second. There was the monthly budget he set aside for books and music, but that didn’t exactly add up to a massive sum.

As he outright owned the cottage he lived in - thanks in no small part to the tiny inheritance his father had left him - his combined expenses were, when tallied, more than manageable.

Thus, it was with some ironic satisfaction that Remus came to understand that he had achieved some form of economic stability. If he were very careful, he could likely stretch his funds out for almost a year, maybe even a little longer…and that was factoring caring for both himself and Hermione.

The only problem with all of that, was the little matter of the both of them actually surviving the year. That relative financial stability should finally be his, now that money mattered little…

Shaking his head in resignation, Remus had shuffled away his financial documents with a sentiment that bordered on grim amusement.

***

After two weeks of pure research within the small confines of his cottage, Remus’s restlessness began to grow ever so steadily.

While it was true the two of them took plenty of breaks - which largely consisted of Remus teasing Hermione until she was begging prettily under him - and though they did occasionally wander out of the cottage in search of sustenance, the werewolf began finding himself longing increasingly for open spaces and fresh air.

More often than not, his mind drifted to the beautiful fixed gear waiting patiently for him against the side of the house, under an old plastic tarp. Fingers flexed against invisible brakes at times, as Remus daydreamed of flying through the streets of the city. Sometimes, he wondered what Martin was up to, and if his regular routes had been taken by some other drifting soul.
One afternoon, having clearly had enough of his beleaguered sighs and morose scowls, Hermione set her book aside with a gentle thump, and rose to her feet. With little ceremony, she reached for his hand and tugged insistently at him.

"What?" he demanded, slightly irritated.

The last few hours had been spent trying to decipher ancient runic letters scribed upon one of her countless scrolls, and his efforts had yielded exactly nonsense.

"It's time we went out for some supplies. As you say, we're going to need a supply of Wolfsbane Potion." she smiled up at him in a coaxing manner. "Besides, I'm going a bit spare, cooped up in here like this."

Glad for the opportunity to be anywhere else at all, Remus gladly followed her out the front door.

***

Despite what everyone else in the world chose to believe, London was occasionally capable of churning out a perfect day. As Remus and Hermione walked towards the Leaky Cauldron, and as he squinted up into the endless blue sky, the wizard felt his mood lifting from the mire he had accidentally fallen into.

The restless twitch of his muscles had been replaced by a bounce in his step as they entered the shadowy establishment. Eager to get back out into the sunshine, Remus hurried across the dining room.

“Not a lot of people in here today,” Hermione observed, looking ever-so-slightly discomfited.

“It’s a weekday,” he pointed out. “And it’s mid-afternoon. Some people have jobs, just like I used to do.”

Casting him an apologetic look, Hermione looked as if she were about to say sorry for something that wasn’t her fault. Saving her from her own daftness, Remus slung an arm around her shoulders and kissed her soundly on her lips…

…before realizing instantly that he was kissing a much, much younger witch in the middle of a very public place.

To his surprise, Hermione didn’t make so much as a peep of protest. Instead, her lips lingered on his for a long moment, before finally she pulled away and made for the back door. Nothing in her demeanour suggested that she minded his boldness one bit.

Glancing around him at the admittedly empty pub, Remus hesitated a half second before he followed after her.

Across the threshold of the brick wall properly separating them from the Wizarding world, Remus couldn’t help himself. He stayed a good foot away from her as they strolled the familiar cobblestoned walkways of Diagon Alley.

“I’ve got to get to Gringotts before I collect some supplies on my list,” she said, not appearing to notice his sudden, awkward reticence. “Are you going to be alright getting together all the ingredients?”

“I was just going to get the bottled potion…” he started.
“Honestly Remus,” she sounded affectionately exasperated. It was enough to make him smile once again. “Just get the ingredients and I’ll take care of it. I’ll meet you in Flourish and Blott’s when I’m finished up. I shan’t be too long,”

Standing on her tiptoes, Hermione kissed him lightly on his lips. This time, he lifted his hand to cup at her jaw, and held her in place a moment longer than was strictly necessary. The little grunt of pleasure and satisfaction he extracted from her made him wonder why he was being such a wanker about everything.

“I could come with you,” he murmured, no longer wanting to be very far from her.

A second exasperated sigh and a rough shove later, Remus found himself obediently traipsing off towards The Apothecary.

As he wandered down the street, a different sort of discomfort began to take ahold of him.

Diagon Alley was far emptier than usual. Many of the shops were shuttered, and a cursory inspection through dirty windows told Remus that their shelves had all been emptied out. In a few cases, store-fronts had been smashed in, and it appeared no one had bothered to replace the glass panes.

Picking up his pace and ducking his head, Remus felt a chill in his bones that not even the warm summer sun could bring comfort to.

Entering The Apothecary, a bell heralded his arrival.

“Hello?” someone called warily from the back.

Remus took a good look around him. The shelves here were almost as bare as their abandoned neighbours’ shelves.

“Nicholas?” he called in response, slowly drawing his wand.

“Oh, it’s you,” the owner poked his head out from under the counter. Rising to his feet, Nicholas dusted off his clothing, though very noticeably, he did not keep away his own wand.

“Same order as always?”

“Somewhat,” the werewolf nodded, not pocketing his weapon. “I’m under orders to purchase the ingredients of the potion instead of the potion itself,”

“Under orders?” the proprietor of the shop asked. Nicholas wasn’t an elderly man. In fact, Remus wagered they were likely of an age.

“Orders. From a very small, very scary witch,” Remus said. “We’re looking at putting together supplies for about…well. A long time.”

With a sweep of Nicholas’s wand, different vials and packages floated towards the counter.

“Good idea,” the man behind the counter said. “I don’t think I’ll be staying open much longer,”

“Right. I can’t help but notice…”

“The evacuation?” Nicholas looked grim. “That’s what it really is you know. Since Albus Dumbledore died, everyone’s been trickling off to whatever safe house they’ve got hidden away.”
“I see…and you’re thinking of leaving too?” Remus inquired curiously.

“Last war I lost my Mum and Dad,” Nick nodded glumly. “This war, I have one little girl and another on the way. I shouldn’t even be open. I don’t know why I’m still here. I suppose a part of me hates the idea of running,”

As the man behind the counter spoke, he began shrinking and packing away large quantities of herbs.

“Nick,” Remus said quietly, finally shoving his wand into his back pocket. “I can’t afford all of this. The money I’m giving you barely covers half of what you’re packaging up,”

“You’ve been a good customer…not only that, but you’re a good man Remus Lupin, that much is obvious. Not many werewolves are so willing to part with the galleons for the sake of a bit of Potion,” Nicholas remarked. “Just take it. I won’t be here after next week, and all this stuff will only end up being stolen by those no-good looters anyway,”

Speechless, Remus watched as the other man finished packing away his purchases before shoving the bags towards him. Shaking his head, he took out what money he had on him and passed it to the Apothecary, who insisted on accepting only a fraction of Remus’s currency.

“Merlin knows if money will mean anything come this time next month,” Nicholas muttered. “Now go. Get back to your scary little witch. Take her somewhere safe, if such a place can be found,”

Earnestly, Remus said, “Nick, I’m not going to forget your kindness. Keep your head down alright? I hope to see you again, when all this shite blows over,”

“This shite will never be over,” Nicholas laughed darkly. “If it isn’t this Dark Lord, it’ll be some other Dark Lord,”

There was no response he could have given, that wouldn’t sound like a lie. Grabbing his shopping bags and what money Nicholas refused, Remus nodded curtly and left, wondering if he’d ever see the other wizard ever again.

Out on the street, the wizard walked as quickly as he could without drawing attention to himself. Despite the fact that only an hour ago, he wanted nothing more than to be outside, Remus found that all he wanted in the present was to find Hermione and to bring her home.

Entering the bookshop, he stopped for a moment and reached out with his senses. With more than a little relief, he located what he was looking for immediately and strode over to the aisle where he found Hermione engrossed in some thick volume.

“We should go,” he said without preamble.

“One minute,” she said absently. “I think I might have found some interesting…”

“Buy it. Buy all of it if you have to, but we need to go, now.” Remus pronounced quietly, urgently.

Finally, he received her attention. Looking up at him in concern, she snapped the book shut and reached up to touch his cheek. She opened her mouth to say something, only to be interrupted by someone calling out her name.

“Hermione!”
Remus’s heart stuttered for a second, before he realized it was just Molly Weasley.

The both of them turned to regard the approaching woman, who in turn stopped in her tracks as she took in Hermione’s companion.

“Oh hello Remus, I didn’t expect…” she stopped, then continued with a small frown, “Funny, you being here with…”

“Mrs. Weasley,” Hermione greeted warming, stepping forwards. “We were just taking a walk through Diagon Alley. It’s such a beautiful day don’t you think?”

Doing his best not to remember how Molly had flippantly discounted Hermione from everyone’s mind during the last Order meeting, Remus tried for a genial smile.

“It really is,” the woman agreed, peering over at him strangely, though she continued addressing Hermione. “Did you come with your parents? I haven’t seen them in such a long time.”

Stomach dropping, Remus stepped close to the younger witch without thinking, which only served to make Molly even more suspicious. Old irritation flared to life, as he considered the way they treated his concern for Hermione. Like it was something wrong and perverted.

Thinking about it however, he did have her wrists restrained against his headboard only two nights ago…in fact, he had whispered some rather deliciously filthy things in her ear as he…

“They’re fine,” Hermione said in a clipped tone, drawing him from his pleasant memories.

“These summers are so short,” Molly said brightly. Too brightly. “Any-hoo, I’m just here getting a one of those wedding books. You’ll come by soon I hope, to help with the ceremony preparations? I know you’ll want to spend the summer with your family of course, so I wouldn’t blame you if you didn’t want to lollygag about with us,”

“I’m at your disposal,” Hermione said a little stiffly.

Seemingly oblivious, Molly hugged the smaller witch before turning to Remus. “We’re meeting later at the usual place for…dinner. I trust we’ll be seeing you.”

Remus didn’t bother saying anything. Not that he needed to - the woman was already hurrying off, empty-handed, as it were.

“That was odd.” Hermione said.

“Oh?” he wondered, though he was in full agreement.

While he assumed seeing the both of them together might have discomfited the Weasley matron, Molly was not one to keep her thoughts to herself on any subject.

No, something else was at play.

“She doesn’t want me at the Burrow,” Hermione muttered, then rolled her eyes. “It’s Ron. He must have gone and said something he shouldn’t have. I should have placed a curse of silence on him,”

That made sense. The boy didn’t have a lick of subtlety in him. Shaking his head, Remus focused on the present.

“Hermione, buy what you need to buy. We’re leaving.” he said in a voice that brooked no argument.
For a second, it looked as if she might have protested anyway, but to his relief, Hermione finally did as he wanted.

Half an hour later, back in the warded confines of the cottage, Remus heaved a sigh of relief as he pulled Hermione into his arms and held on firmly.

“Are you going to tell me what happened at The Apothecary that’s gotten you all worried?” she asked, squirming until she could look him in the eye. Her brown eyes were filled with confusion.

“We can’t go back to Diagon Alley. Not for...I don’t know. Not right now anyway, or anytime soon.” he said very seriously. “I’m afraid it’s no longer safe.”

A look of understanding and infinite sadness entered her dark eyes. Hermione burrowed back into his embrace, curling her arms around his back.

“They’re taking everything aren’t they? They’re winning.” she said.

Closing his eyes and breathing her in, Remus fought back the ever rising tide of darkness that threatened to overtake their every waking moment.

Chapter End Notes

hope y'all still with me :)

(also, its a Canuck long weekend up here, so I'm posting this earlier than usual...)
The Consummation: Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Warning: we're still in the slow-ish phase of the story...

Things begin to pick up after this chapter however. More or less.

“I’m coming with you,” Hermione told him as she organized ingredients in the kitchen. “To the Order meeting tonight,”

Whatever Remus had been doing behind her, he stopped. Bracing herself for the inevitable argument that was sure to erupt, Hermione began measuring out crushed Wolfsbane, followed by drops of Morleyroot extract.

“I don’t really…” he paused. She waited. “There’s no real need for…”

Deciding she would fill in the blanks for him, Hermione turned around to look at the werewolf, who had been paging through her new purchases.

“Let me guess…you don’t think I’m ready to be a part of the conversation. Or wait, hold on - you think I’m too young to be at one of these meetings.” Hermione tapped her chin, trying to remember all the excuses Molly had given in the past. “Oh, this one’s my favourite. Getting involved in Order business will put me in a danger,”

The wizard glowered at her in irritation.

Hermione fought back the urge to say something condescending like ‘you’re so cute when you’re angry’. Though not, she reflected, that Remus was unattractive when he was angry.

When she came to Remus that night at the very beginning of July, Hermione hadn’t known precisely, how the man was going to receive her actions. True, a part of her had always suspected that he wouldn’t be thrilled by what she had done…

But Hermione had held on to faint hope that Remus out of everyone around her, would understand. After all, hadn’t the man lost literally everyone in his own life at one point? It stood to reason that he would see the rationale behind her actions, that he would understand her need to commit the unthinkable if only to save the lives of her family.

When the man she had come to think of as a good friend - confusing feelings aside - offered her his brutal judgement, his anger hurt far more than Hermione had expected.

Still, as the man brutally ripped apart all the defences she had built for her case, Hermione was forced to face certain things she had actively been trying to pretend away.

Not only did Remus force her see the true impact of what she had done to her parents, but the young woman was also made to face certain other truths…

*You’re under my skin. You’re in my blood.*
She knew well that Remus had been half drunk when he said those things. After all, the man had consumed the better part of a bottle of whiskey in a very short span of time. Werewolf and grown man though he was, those things did not make him impervious to the effects of alcohol.

Despite her admittedly limited experience in such things, Hermione understood that liquor didn't cause lies to be uttered. If anything, it was as effective as *Veritaserum*.

The way he had kissed her immediately after...with one brush of his mouth against her own, all of her resistance against the force of nature that was Remus fell into ruin. All the walls she had carefully erected, all the wards she had placed around her self-control...he tore them apart like they were nothing, less than nothing.

These days, with their desires out in the open, the notion of taking a step back to where they had started seemed impossible. Laughable, even. Every time he touched her, every time he fucked her, every time he so much as *looked* at her, Hermione felt as if she could well die from sheer *want* alone.

Even the way he was gazing at her *now*, as he abandoned all pretence that he was going to let her demands go without a fight...the woman felt a molten rush of desire stabbing through her veins as Remus focused the full weight of his attentions upon her.

Desperate, shameless desire aside however, Hermione had no intention of backing off from her intentions. She couldn’t afford to.

"I'm done waiting for someone else to decide my fate Remus. Half the reason this fight is happening is because there are those among us who would purge the earth of Muggle-borns like myself. The other half is because Voldemort is trying *murder* my best friend Harry. If you think I'm going to just sit back now and do nothing, then you're out of your fucking mind,”

Only as she ended her tirade did Hermione realize she was shaking. Closing the space between their bodies, Remus reached out and grasped tightly at her shoulders.

"I'm not asking you to do *nothing*,” he said with a touch of frustration, before he gestured towards the mess of texts laid out in his living room. "What the hell do you call all this? What the hell do you call running off into the unknown to find a bunch of cursed items that might kill you for even *thinking* about destroying them?"

“I won’t have you telling me what to do,” Hermione said petulantly. “I mean...it’s just a bloody *meeting* Remus. Be reasonable,”

Pressing his forehead against her own, Remus shut his eyes.

“First off, you’re not my prisoner, which means you can do whatever it is you want. But since we’re on the subject of putting yourself in harm’s way...Hermione...if anything were to happen to you...” he stopped speaking.

They hadn’t spoken in explicit terms, of the changing nature of their friendship, and much less of the terms of their *marriage*.

“I expect you to support me in this. Please Remus,”

Nodding very slowly, Remus pressed his mouth against the corner of her lips. Long, graceful fingers spread themselves across the curve of her cheek, as his other hand gripped at her hip.

"If anything were to happen to you, I have no idea what that would mean for my continued..."
"existence," he admitted quietly. "I'm not the same man you met on that train all those years ago… and frankly, it's completely your fault."

"I can't tell if you're displeased," she murmured as her hands flattened themselves against his chest. Imperceptibly, his hold on her tightened. "But so you understand, the thought of losing you sickens me. Even the notion of being apart from you…"

"You’re not going to be apart from me," his voice was soft but firm as steel.

Taking a breath, Hermione plunged onwards.

“Before you insisted on coming along on this…this mission as it were…I was dreading not seeing you, not getting one of your silly letters, not listening to you whinge about some fellow named George R.R. Martin..."

"For God's sake Hermione," Remus groaned theatrically as the tension between them eased. "Read a bloody novel once in a while."

"We don't have to leave for another hour or so..." she said as his hands began to wander.

“12 Grimmauld could go up in flames for all I care,” Remus lifted Hermione and settled her upon the kitchen counter…

***

They arrived together at the front door of a very intact 12 Grimmauld Place.

Despite the familiarity of the locale, something had changed. It took a moment before Hermione understood that it wasn’t the townhouse that had adjusted itself. It was her - she was the one who was different.

“You don’t have to do this,” Remus whispered, hovering immediately behind her.

Holding her tongue, the young woman gathered the shreds of her courage. Throwing her shoulders back and lifting her chin, Hermione strode up to the front door. Pushing through a heavy layer of wards, the witch entered the house and immediately heard…

"Filth! Scum! By-products of dirt and vileness! Half-breeds, mutants, freaks, begone from this place! How dare you befoul the house of my fathers— “

Lips drawing back in a pained grimace, the young woman raised her wand. Before she could incant the right spell however, a familiar voice beat her to the punch. Surprised, Hermione spun on her heel to find herself face-to-face with a certain someone she hadn’t expected in the least.

Charlie Weasley grinned down at her as velvet curtains swished into place, interrupting the dead Black Matriarch’s acidic diatribe.

“Aren’t you a sight for sore eyes? Ron didn’t mention you were joining us tonight, or I might have waited for you out on the street. God knows who’s lurking out there these days,”

Opening her mouth to greet him, instead, Hermione loosed a yelp of surprise as Charlie swept her up into a tight hug. Coming to the realization that her toes were dangling a good two inches away from the ground, she began laughing.

There had been a time when Hermione had imagined that Ron would grow into Charlie’s likeness
most, as he aged into manhood. In the present, wrapped up in the joyous man’s arms, Hermione came to the abrupt understanding that Ron would never in a hundred years, own the sort of careless grace that his dragon-taming brother wore so well.

Setting her feet back down on the ground, Charlie smoothed a fond hand over her chestnut curls. Gazing up into his perfect smile, Hermione was transported to an earlier, more innocent time when she bore an immense crush on this particular Weasley brother.

“Remus,” the wizard’s attention drifted. “Mate, it’s good to see you. You’re looking well!”

Remembering she hadn’t arrived alone, Hermione pivoted to find Remus staring very hard at Charlie with an indecipherable expression.

“Yes,” Remus said. His voice seemed a little more strained than it had been only half a minute ago, when Hermione stood with him outside the front door. “Good,”

“Everyone’s already here but we haven’t started,” Charlie explained cheerfully. Slinging an arm around Hermione’s shoulders, Ron’s older brother began steering her towards the parlour.

“I thought you were in Romania,” she asked, silently deciding to interrogate Remus later to find out if he was feeling alright. He had seemed fine when they left his cottage…

“I was commanded in no uncertain terms by Molly Weasley that it was time I came home to help out with my brother’s wedding,” Charlie said ruefully. “Consequences were discussed and suffice to say, I conceded my defeat in short order,”

“Wotcher ‘Mione…and is that Remus behind you?” Tonks called with characteristic exuberance, drawing Ron’s gaze to Hermione as the three of them entered the parlour. Bill Weasley sat between her best friend and the Metamorphmagus.

Had the younger witch been paying better attention, she might have caught the expression of blatant alarm Bill wore, as sapphire eyes began darting furiously between herself, Remus and Charlie.

Rising to his feet, Ron’s smile was bright as anything as he made to approach…only for Molly Weasley to swoop in between the two friends from out of nowhere with a tumbler of chilled pumpkin juice in her hand.

“Hermione! I didn’t expect you to be here tonight,” Molly tried to look innocent as she plucked Hermione from Charlie’s arm before depositing the younger witch into an armchair across the room from her youngest son. Far across the room.

“Yes,” she said coolly, accepting the glass the woman passed to her. “I asked Remus about that ‘bite’ you mentioned at the bookshop. Since I was hungry, I decided to join him,”

Something in her crisp tone caused Molly to start. A familiar presence materialized behind her, and a warm hand squeezed firmly at her shoulder. Looking up, she found Remus casting Molly a small smile that didn’t quite reach his eyes.

“Hermione has every right to be here. She’s one of us.” Remus said.

*Her* werewolf, she thought affectionately and gratefully.

“Of course…” Molly nodded in resignation. Then, sharp eyes dropped to where Remus was still touching the young woman. “Did you two come together?”
“Yes.” Remus said very tersely, before Hermione could answer for herself. “It made sense, since we were already spending the afternoon in each other’s company,”

Flicking her gaze from Molly’s disapproving demeanour, it occurred at last to Hermione that her companion didn’t seem keen on revealing the current state of their relationship with the rest of the Order. Abruptly, the wizard stalked away from the two women; folding himself into a dark corner like a lurking bat rather than a skulking wolf, Remus proceeded to glare at everyone present.

All he needed was a black cloak, and the man might have given Severus Snape a run for his money, Hermione thought wryly.

“I suppose it wasn’t necessarily a good idea for you to travelling alone in Diagon Alley anyhow, especially these days,” Molly conceded belatedly. “Although really, you could have come to any one of us for protection…”

Resentment bloomed in Hermione’s chest, as she wondered at the social realities Remus might have been facing all on his own, following their dismal wedding ceremony.

The conclusions she reached in her mind were none of them satisfactory.

“You had no issue wandering Diagon Alley alone today, as I seem to recall. I fail to see how I’m any less capable of defending myself than anyone else here might be,”

Hermione supposed she could have mentioned that within the past eighteen months, she had survived not one, but two battles without the need of Molly Weasley’s dubious protections…two battles and a forced marriage.

Wearing a sardonic smile, the witch continued, “And if I might add, the last time I checked, Remus was one of you. I mean…isn’t he?”

Molly gaped mutely at her.

“Right…I-I suppose…” the older witch stuttered at last. “I see,”

Snapping her mouth shut, Weasley Matriarch wrung anxiously at her hands, before at last she hurried away from Hermione.

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As the evening wore on, Hermione and Ron began casting each other quizzical looks. At first, there were a few quirked eyebrows. Those evolved into expressions of incredulity. By the end of the first hour, the both of them were openly gaping at the proceedings.

All around them, senior Order members were arguing with each other, seemingly incapable of deciding on a course of action on anything.

“I don’t see why the wedding can’t be moved,” Moody growled. “How are any of you not understanding that this is not the time for frivolity?”

“Now is absolutely the time for a celebration,” Molly had retorted. “We’ve got to prove that we will not bow to tyranny,”

“I wouldn’t mind cutting down on the guest list…” Bill started, holding out his hands placatingly. “Actually, neither does Fleur. I mean, when you really think about it, that might help with the cost and…”
“We will not compromise,” Molly hissed.

“Bill it’s fine,” George shook his head in warning at his older brother, although his eyes held a hint of glee at the sight of his sibling’s stifled annoyance. “We’ll have plenty of wards in place…”

“What about the safety of your guests?” Moody demanded furiously, his magical eye spinning wildly. “How will they be protected even getting to The Burrow?”

“The Burrow isn’t in the middle of a warzone!” Molly retorted.

Except...was that still true?

There was a time, the witch remembered, when Harry, Ron and herself had wanted desperately to be a part of the esteemed and capable Order of the Phoenix. It hadn’t occurred to her that without Albus Dumbledore’s driving force, the group was more disorganized than the small army her friends had once put together.

Wondering if she ought to speak, the young woman worried at her bottom lip as she shifted restlessly in her chair.

“Everyone, I believe Hermione has something to add,”

Glancing to her right, Hermione noted gratefully that it was Charlie who called attention to her anxious state.

Somewhere in the shadows, Remus stiffened ominously. Straitening up in his own chair, Bill began making frantic gestures at his younger brother.

“Shouldn’t we…” Hermione started, then stopped. Frowning, she tried to make sense of Bill’s bizarre behaviour.

Shuffling to his feet, Ron crossed the room to stand beside her.

“Shouldn’t we be discussing Harry’s birthday?” he asked, which brought Hermione’s attention back to the pressing matter at hand.

The entire room stared at both herself and Ron in silence.

“His birthday is extremely close. We need to get him out of the Dursley’s,” Ron supplied as his voice gained strength. “We all know once he’s come of age…”

“We’ve got a plan in place,” Moody spoke impatiently.

Lips twitching, Hermione counted to ten.

“What exactly is the plan?” she asked at last as Remus circled the small crowd. Silently, he positioned himself by her left shoulder like a looming sentinel.

“We’ve got it well in hand girlie, I don’t see…” Moody sounded aggrieved.

“My name is Hermione,” the witch reminded the Auror in a voice which could have frozen Fiendfyre. “Not ‘girlie’,”

“I haven’t heard this plan,” Tonks piped up, looking inordinately pleased at the way the younger woman was correcting her boss. “Hermione’s got a point. What are we doing, exactly?”
“Well we’re all just going to show up and get him aren’t we?” the seasoned Auror barked as he rose from his seat. “He’ll be safe with all of us present.”

“That’s the plan?” Remus asked, breaking his silence. He sounded a tad incredulous. “We’re just going to show up as a group and hope for the best?”

Even Kingsley started looking a little dubious, now that it was all being spelled out.

“I’ve…” Tonks hesitated.

Everyone looked to her.

“Yes? What is it?” Moody sounded rather put-out. Obviously, he was not accustomed to being questioned.

“What about if we had decoys?” the Metamorphmagus asked, looking around the room. “Think about it. If they don’t know where Harry is when we bring him to safety…”

Hermione began smiling.

“You mean we should put out some sort of bait for the Death Eaters,”

“Exactly!” Tonks beamed back at her.

“How would we go about doing such a thing?” Arthur asked, looking confusedly between the young women.

“That’s a good question…”

“Well…” a creaky voice interjected. Everyone turned in surprise as Mundungus Fletcher began speaking; Hermione especially, because she had overlooked his presence entirely. “I might have an idea…”

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“It’s a very risky idea,” Charlie said very seriously to both herself and Ron as they stood in the foyer. More to Ron than to her, which was fully understandable, though he kept on casting concerned glances in her direction. “Are you sure?”

“We can’t all be fighting dragons, but it’s not as if we’re completely useless,” Ron answered indignantly.

“And it’s not like we’re about to sit back and let you lot fetch Harry without us.” Hermione said firmly, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with her best friend. “I’ve watched over him for six years of my life. I don’t intend to stop now,”

“Right.” Charlie ran a hand through his messy red curls, a simple act which left the witch feeling just the tiniest bit breathless.

The woman used to spend a lot of time watching him tousle his hair ever so carelessly from the other side of the Gryffindor common room, exactly as he was doing right now…

“How can I help you?”
"You mentioned you wanted to speak with me," the wizard sounded quite annoyed as he strode up to the trio, unceremoniously and literally coming between herself and Charlie.

Ron snorted. Turning to his brother, her best friend whispered very loudly, "I thought subtlety was not my strong suit."

There was nothing vicious in his words however.

From around a corner, Bill careened ungracefully into the entranceway.

"You," he huffed at Charlie. "I need a word with you. Now. In the kitchen. Come along,"

Fixing his older brother a very odd stare, Charlie shrugged apologetically at everyone present before he hurried after an impatient and anxious Bill.

"Why don’t you come over to the Burrow for tonight?" Ron asked, turning back to Hermione with an eager smile. "We have uh…things to discuss…and I’m sure your parents wouldn’t mind if you slept over for a night."

Stumbling backwards ever so slightly, Hermione tried to control her faltering expression as she slammed back into the present. Again, she wished she had thought through her actions in a less objective manner. If only she had taken the time to consider the weight of what it truly meant to obliviate her parents…

"N…not tonight," Hermione stuttered.

"I think it’s time we got you home," Remus murmured, a wall of strength at her side. One hand came up and grasped tightly at her forearm.

Slumping into the protective crook of Remus’s arm, Hermione cast a surprised Ron a weak smile, before she allowed herself to be swept out the front door.

A few steps later, she found herself one very short walk away from Remus’s cottage.

***

The moment they were indoors, Remus ripped frantically at her clothes as he practically devoured her mouth in searing kisses.

Caught off-guard, Hermione managed to breathe, "Remus are you feeling ok? You seem a bit…"

Swallowing her protests, Remus pushed her backwards onto the couch. Discarding his robes, the werewolf crawled over her, before pressing two fingers insistently against her molten centre.

"Are you with me?" his voice was caught in a low growl.

"What?" she gasped in mindless ecstasy as his thumb pressed at her clit.

"Are you with me Hermione, here and now? Yes or no?" he demanded. She could feel him rubbing against her thigh, and all she wanted was…

"Yes, oh god please Remus, I need you, I need…"

The witch found herself rudely interrupted as Remus plunged inside of her in one brutal thrust.

"My good girl," he breathed against her skin. His words made her buck almost uncontrollably. It
was as if her body wanted nothing more than to obey his every wish, bend to his every whim. “My good, sweet girl…”

With a short scream, Hermione clenched around his cock.

Above her, Remus smiled ravenously and kept on fucking her. Long fingers threaded through her curls, before his grip tightened possessively at the base of her scalp.

Lowering his mouth to her shoulder, sharp teeth scraped against her skin. When at last he bit down into her flesh, Hermione’s cry was one of pain and pleasure intermingled.

***

The days began to rush forward.

On a list by her right hand, Hermione had tabled all the objects Dumbledore had inferred as likely Horcrux candidates. In front of her was a constant mountain of books documenting the last known locations of each item and their pre-existing magical qualities…but absolutely nothing on how to properly destroy each object.

“I can’t help but wonder if it’s even worth looking for these Horcruxes at all.” Remus said one day, setting a plate of buttered toast in front of her.

“What do you mean?” the witch asked crossly, snatching a piece of food and cramming it in her mouth. She didn’t want to eat, but Remus made it a point of feeding her at least twice a day.

The last time she ignored his efforts, Hermione had found herself plucked from her place at the dining table and deposited onto the sofa with food indelicately thrust onto her lap. The row that ensued had been nasty, but the make-up sex had been…well. Nothing short of phenomenal.

“It’s far from likely Riddle’s told many people about his Horcruxes,” Remus said thoughtfully, pacing the living room. “Let’s assume for a moment that he did indeed, boast to one of his follower’s about his so-called ‘accomplishments’…”

Chewing slowly, Hermione leaned forward as she listened.

“Now, I don’t know about Bellatrix Lestrange, but let’s say I’m one of his other Death Eaters who’s constantly worried about falling out of favour with the Dark Lord…now that I’ve found out that there’s this object preserving my master’s immortal life…this thing that could spell the guaranteed end of his existence, it’s incredibly likely that I would see a Horcrux as a window of opportunity…”

“You would use the Horcrux as a leash to rein him in. To control him.” Hermione considered the implications as she chewed at the last of her toast.

“Why wouldn’t I? The most powerful dark wizard for the ages, dancing to the beat of my drum,” Remus smirked.

“Now there’s a thought. Forcing Voldemort to pick up after your discarded socks - honestly Remus, would it kill you to tidy up every once in a while?” Hermione ignored the wizard’s injured look.

“I’m willing to bet that for every bullied Death Eater, there’s another who genuinely loves that creature. As you say, someone like Bellatrix would never use his own tools against him, but it’s those followers we need to worry about. If we destroy his body, they would only try to bring him
back. Again."

Weariness crept across his features, causing the witch to start in guilt. She hadn’t meant to toss cold water on the man’s ideas.

Rising to her feet, Hermione moved towards the kitchen to inspect her cauldron full of brewing Wolfsbane Potion. The full moon was one day away, and the day after that was when they were due to fetch Harry from the Dursley’s. Already, vials of the potion had been carefully packed away into her beaded bag, in preparation for their journey ahead.

“Have you considered my suggestion about spending tomorrow night at the Burrow?” he asked quietly from the living room. “It’ll only be for one night. There’s also a decent bed and breakfast up the road…or so I’ve been told.”

The werewolf hadn’t liked the idea of her being in the house as he transformed from one state to another, but had seemed even less enthused about her staying anywhere else.

“I’ve considered it.” she said lightly, not turning to look at him. “I’m not going anywhere,”

To her relief, Remus didn’t seem interested in arguing the point.

***

She could hear him scrabbling in the cellar, occasionally loosing little yips and small howls.

Incapable of finding sleep, Hermione got out of bed and emptied her little beaded bag. Slowly, she began re-organizing everything once again.

The last items to go in were two almost identical packages - one magically shrunk tent for Harry and Ron, and another for both herself and Remus. The latter tent, she had purchased that day in Diagon Alley when they had run into Molly…

Packing every item carefully back into her beaded bag, Hermione glanced at the clock on the wall and found to her displeasure, that dawn was still hours and hours away. Downstairs, even Remus had quieted down. Evidently, sleep favoured the werewolf over her, as it always did.

 Unsure what to do, and not quite willing to resume poring through ancient texts about cursed objects, Hermione spied several thick novels on the night stand stacked beside Remus’s side of the bed.

“A Game of Thrones. What nonsense are you reading now?” she demanded aloud, reaching to pick out one of the novels.

From the cellar, Hermione heard a dry bark that sounded a lot like laughter. Rolling her eyes, she stamped her right foot lightly against the floorboards. Shrugging, the witch crawled back under the covers, surrounding herself with the scent of Remus.

Sinking into a pile of pillows, Hermione opened the book and began reading.

“‘We should start back,’” Gared urged as the woods began to grow dark around them…”

***

“Did you get any sleep?” Remus asked.

Hermione startled awake, before immediately turning her gaze down to the paperback in her hand.
To her relief, she saw that her thumb still marked the spot where she had stopped reading.

At the foot of the bed, Remus hopped from foot to foot as he removed his jeans. Squinting at him, it was unclear to Hermione why he had even bothered putting his trousers on if he was going to shed them so soon.

“I did fall asleep eventually.” she yawned, hunting for a bookmark. Giving up, she grabbed at a ripped piece of parchment and shoved it into the novel, before allowing it to fall shut.

“Are you enjoying that book? Or is it simply far too frivolous for the likes of you?” he asked, falling onto the mattress beside her. Deftly, his arm reached out and wrapped itself around her waist, pulling her close.

“I might be liking it a little,” she confessed, submitting to his sleepy attentions as he kissed the nape of her neck. “I’m quite fond of this Eddard Stark character. He seems to be the only decent one out of the lot. I assume he’ll be the one sitting on the Iron Throne at the end of this tale…”

Remus stilled for a moment. Then he began guffawing in earnest.

Irritated, the witch tilted her chin towards him.

“Oh darling…” Remus shifted to look her in the eye.

In the morning light, Hermione’s breathe caught in her chest as she stared up at Remus’s beautiful face. Stroking his cheek, she studied his clear grey eyes with something that felt almost like awe.

“Good morning,” she tried for a smile as the wizard’s mirth transformed into something impossible to quantify.

Carefully, her husband kissed her eyelids. On the wall, the clocked ticked inexorably onwards as time led them both into a murky future.
They spent the day in bed, both of them refusing to leave until there was no longer a choice. When they weren’t dozing, they made slow, lazy love, learning and relearning each other as the seconds ticked by. Time flowed at a syrupy pace, and for a while, it was as if the universe itself was making room for the two of them to simply be.

Except time, in the end, wasn’t truly forgiving.

In the early evening, as Remus reluctantly pulled on a plain t-shirt, the man found himself once again uncharacteristically resenting Harry Potter and everything the boy-wizard stood for.

Over his shoulder, he watched as Hermione emerged from his bathroom in a swirl of steam. The witch’s skin was damp, and she smelled strongly of shampoo and soap. Underneath that artificial layer of floral perfumes however, the werewolf could still scent out the smell of wild honey, magic and him.

Sweeping his gaze over her flushed, naked form, Remus found himself fully aware of all the words they had yet to say to one another.

“Change your mind,” he blurted out.

“Pardon?” she raised a brow at him as she bound her hair into a severe bun.

Unbidden, he recalled at last that Hermione had once been a General herself, in that failed little project dubbed ‘Dumbledore’s Army’. Like others who came before her, she had marched to the beat of that old bastard’s war drum time and time again.

Albus Dumbledore had been nothing if not proficient in making soldiers, whether or not they even realized what it was he had been doing.

“This insane scheme,” he moved to stand before her. “Change your mind. Don’t come tonight, please,”

Bad enough she was the Muggle-born girl who was Harry Potter’s best friend. Now she had to be Harry.

“We’re not talking about this,” she said as her face became an unreadable mask.

In the three years since he had known her, Hermione had grown from a gawky adolescent into a woman who bore the weight of the world upon her too-thin shoulders. The lines he had once silently predicted would become imprinted upon her smooth forehead…they were becoming more apparent with each passing day.

Brushing past him, Hermione dragged on a light coat and pulled out her wand. “Are you coming?”

Grinding his jaw, Remus followed in her relentless wake.

***

In the back garden of the Dursleys, Remus watched drearily as each appointed Harry-decoy threw back vials of Polyjuice potion.

“Merlin’s saggy balls…you’d thought I’d be used to this by now,” Hermione grimaced, as her face
began very rapidly to shift into someone else’s features. Bones twisted and re-shaped themselves under her cheeks, as her wild mane of curls grew dark and short.

“Used to this?” his eyes narrowed as he looked down upon her temporary visage.

Taking a deep breathe, Remus came to a somewhat disturbing realization that despite the fact that his witch was now wearing Harry’s skin, to him, she was still unmistakably Hermione.

Christ, but he better not develop any odd attractions towards Harry tonight.

Gazing at her in growing discomfort, Remus made a face as smug understanding dawning rapidly on Hermione’s changed features.

“Don’t…don’t be weird about this,” he warned as she smirked up at him, looking for all the world as if she were about to say something extremely crass.

A sudden revelation struck the wizard.

“Hang on a minute…a few weeks ago, in London, I thought I caught your scent as I rode…”

“Remus,” Hermione interrupted sweetly. “Darling…I think you look absolutely smashing in neon spandex. All that material really highlighted your…um…assets.”

A horrified noise squeaked past his lips as Remus pictured the skin-tight fluorescent outfit he had been wearing on his delivery route, that afternoon he found himself chasing down traces of Hermione all around the twisting streets of London.

“Kingsley, you’re with Hermione,” Moody barked at the assembled crowd. “Remus, you’ve got George. Does everyone know their route?”

Snapping his attention towards the old Auror, the werewolf regained his senses as he growled, “Hermione’s with me,”

“Hermione is with whomever I say she’s with,” Moody grunted.

All around, five Harrys stared at him in confusion and impatience. One Harry stared at him in understanding, and the last, in blatant annoyance.

“Let it go Remus,” Hermione said sharply. Even in Harry’s voice, he could plainly recognize her undisguised aggravation.

“But…” he turned to catch at her sleeve, only to find her slipping deftly out of his reach. Clearly, Hermione had gotten a bit too familiar with the way his body moved.

Mouth hardening into a thin line, Remus searched and found Kingsley staring curiously over at him. Drawing his lips back into an undisguised snarl, his said, “If she gets so much as a scratch on her…”

“Remus!” Hermione gritted out, this time sounding as if she were about to murder him. Despite her irritation, the witch paled in obvious fear as she climbed upon the Thestral which had been harnessed for the sake of their mission.

Rubbing at his face, Kingsley sighed, and informed the fuming wizard, “I fully intend on guarding Hermione with my very life,”

“See that you do,” Remus warned.
Appearing at his elbow, a slightly trepidatious George squinted at Remus through a transfigured pair of eyeglasses that mirrored Harry’s own.

“I’m really sorry. I would switch with Hermione, but…” he sounded apologetic.

Too furious to assuage the young man’s misplaced guilt, Remus shook his head and straddled the Firebolt the Weasley twin had brought with him.

As the ground fell away from under their feet, without any warning, all hell broke loose.

***

“Fuckfuckfuckfuckfuck…” George swore endlessly as the two men soared through the sky.

Clinging on for dear life with his left hand, Remus snarled as he flung curse after curse at their pursuers. Streaking through the sky, it was clear that they were no longer flying in any particular direction other than away.

“Are we losing them?” George shouted above the rushing wind.

Remus snapped his teeth at the shadowy figures soaring less than fifty feet away from their own, shared broom.

“No,”

“Shitfuckbollocksshit…I have an idea! Hold on tight!”

Before Remus could demand to know what the hell it was George was meaning to do, the older wizard yelped in shock as his companion tipped their broom ninety-degrees south. To his panic, the ground below started rushing up towards him at an impossible speed.

*I’m going to die*, he pondered wildly.

“Trust me, you’re not!” George yelled in reply.

*Ah, so I said that bit aloud,* Remus thought.

“Yes, you did! But trust me!”

Crashing through a thick layer of foliage, George abruptly righted the broomstick and began racing through what was surely the darkest forest in the world. His wand provided scant light as they wove through narrow gaps, between what felt like a million trees.

In the background, Remus could hear the snapping and splintering of at least three broomsticks as their enemies smashed themselves into the thick trunks of old oaks…though that sound could just as well have been the sound of Death Eater bones, as they shattered upon impact.

Several men screamed in the dark. The scent of blood exploded all around him.

“Mother of all things good and holy,” Remus wheezed as George elevated their broom once more. Lifting his wand, he fired a simple hex at the trees below; like kindling, the forest sparked to blazing life. “George Weasley, you’re a goddamn lunatic.”

“I’m flattered Monsieur Lupin,” George snickered as he brought them back up into the sky at a steady pace. Tilting his head, the boy’s eyes widened as he caught sight of the burning forest immediately below. “Blimey. You’ve exploded our enemies,”
“Sorry?” the werewolf shrugged unapologetically.

“Sorry? Have you lost your mind? That was a touch of brill…” the younger wizard turned his brilliant grin towards Remus as his hair shifted from black to scarlet.

“Sectumsempra!”

George screamed in agony, releasing his hold on the broom.

“Jesus fuck!” Remus fought to regain control of their shared transport.

A shadow flitted away, and a familiar, pale face vanished into the night.

“Snape!” He roared as their broomstick finally stabilized. In front of him, George moaned in pain, his head lolling in a manner Remus didn’t like one bit.

“Stay with me,” Remus prayed for a moment of respite as he lowered them down into the middle of an open field. Behind them, the forest crackled loudly and hotly. “George, can you hear me?”

“This hurts…” George moaned, clutching at the side of his face. Tears ran down his cheeks, cutting a steady track through oozing blood and dirt.

Prying the young man’s hand aside, Remus hissed in horror and fury. Where the wizard’s left ear had been, there was now only a gory mess.

“I know it hurts, but I need you to stay still,” Remus wiped at his face with one hand as he raised his wand with his other.

*Snape will pay. He will pay in blood,* the wolf promised him as it shifted under Remus’s skin.

When at last he was sure that George was no longer in any immediate danger of bleeding out, Remus scrambled to his feet. Whirring about, the werewolf peered into the shadows, trying to pick out hidden enemies. In his chest, his heart thudded like a wild thing.

“I think…” George said weakly, pushing himself off the ground and cupping at the hole on the left side of his face. The effects of the Polyjuice potion had completely expired, and it was blue eyes, not green that gazed at him in growing fear. “I think we’ve been betrayed. And fuck me, but Alicia is going to *kill* me when she sees what’s happened. She wanted me not to come…”

Fighting back a fruitless growl of frustration, Remus extended an arm to support his wobbly companion.

“Mate, I think you’re going to need to do the rest of the steering,” George rasped faintly. Upset at himself for failing to protect Bill’s younger brother, Remus clenched his jaw and reached for the fallen but unbroken broom.

***

Toppling into Molly Weasley’s garden, Remus braced George up in his arms to soften the impact of his clumsy landing. The man had never been much use with a broomstick; flying was James’s thing, not his.

Making for the back door, the werewolf flinched as Molly and Ginny spilled out into the night with small shrieks of alarm pushing out from within their throats. From behind them, shoving her in-laws aside, Alicia Spinnet raced towards her husband.
The agonized expression marring the women’s features made Remus want to hurt someone. Badly.

“What’s happened to his face?” Alicia asked fearfully as she took up George’s other shoulder. Together, they carefully maneuvered the weakened wizard indoors.

“Treachery,” he said through gritted teeth, depositing his travelling companion upon Molly’s overstuffed sofa. “George will live but his hearing might be…”

“A bit off,” George managed to whisper, reaching for his wife.

Backing away, Remus spun on his heel and reached out with his senses for that one person he needed to see. As sharp eyes combed through Molly’s parlour, Remus caught sight of someone looking on in horror at the bloody tableau.

“What creature sat in the corner the first time that Harry Potter visited my office at Hogwarts?” Remus snarled as he strode towards the bespectacled figure. Roughly, he yanked that-which-looked-like-Harry away from a gawping Ginny.

“A G-Grindylow!” Harry stuttered.

Sighing in not-quite relief, Remus released his unforgiving hold on The Boy Who Lived. Letting go of his suspicions, the werewolf breathed deep, and found Hermione’s absence aching like an open wound: his witch was nowhere close.

Spinning on his heel, he took in the sight of Ginny Weasley pointing her wand directly at his chest.

For a split second, Remus seriously contemplated demonstrating what he was capable of, with or without the use of spells. The girl stood between him and the front door; she stood between him and a world that wanted to hurt Hermione.

“Mind telling us what that was all about?” the girl’s voice shook only very slightly.

“We’ve been betrayed,” the wizard held his fury back behind his sharp teeth. “I had to be sure he was Harry,”

“Oh,” the girl had the decency to look a tad embarrassed as she lowered her casting arm. At the same time, he caught the sounds of rustling robes as both Alicia and Molly put away their own wands.

“I have to go,” Remus started for the door. “I have to find…”

“Where would you even start?” Harry demanded, following on his heels. “You don’t know where they are.”

“I have to try,” he refused to stop moving. “I can’t sit by, knowing she’s out there…”

“You’re going to have to do exactly that,” Harry’s voice hardened.

Shooting the younger wizard a venomous glare, Remus stilled at last. He waited. Under his skin, his wolf slavered and snapped angrily at the fucking daring of James’s son.

“If something happened to you because you ran off like an idiot, and if I let it happen, I don’t think I would ever be able to look Hermione in the eye again.” Harry drew himself to his full height. “Remus, if you broke her heart by doing something as stupid as dying, I swear on my father’s grave I will never forgive you,”
Remus glared at the young man, fully cognizant that he had just been bested. Ruthlessly, Harry pressed on.

“You need to start trusting that Hermione is perfectly capable of taking care of herself. She’s not a child. And as long we’re on the subject…” the boy paused. “Don’t make the mistake in thinking that you’re the only one who cares about her. I have cared for Hermione, worried about her, loved her far longer than you have,”

For a split second, the wizard hated Harry, absolutely and completely. Hermione had taken the wizard’s face for the sake of protecting her best friend, and here he stood, safe and sound while the woman in question was nowhere in sight.

Harry’s expression softened. He pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose.

“If I thought running off into the night would bring both Ron and Hermione back, safe and sound, I would have been out that door ages ago,”

“She’s Hermione,” Remus rasped. Slumping against the wall, he squeezed his eyes shut.

“I know.” Harry’s voice sounded kind now. It was enough to restore to Remus, the underlying affection he would always bear for the other wizard. “I understand better than you think. I lo… Hermione’s my dearest friend,”

Had things not been so dire, Remus might have laughed aloud at that sentiment. Harry was still labouring under the impression that his feelings for Hermione were well-hidden.

Harry was his father’s son, more than he would ever know.

***

They sat under Molly’s watchful eye as Harry recounted the events of the night. Or at least, most of them sat. Remus spent his time pacing back and forth, desperately trying not to lose his mind.

From everything they understood, the Dark Lord himself had come to collect, and despite their numerous precautions, the dark wizard had immediately pinned his entire focus upon the true Harry.

In hindsight, Remus probably could have told the Order what a stupid plan the Polyjuice Potion fiasco was. If he could pick Hermione out from a crowd of a thousand lookalikes, there was no hope in hell Voldemort couldn’t have easily spotted the true Harry.

“You ought to consider using a different defensive spell every once in a while,” Remus sniped uncharitably. “I distinctly recall teaching you more than one, back in your third year,”

Flushing in embarrassment, Harry dropped his gaze. Sighing guiltily, Remus stopped his restless steps. Gently, he reached out and patted the other wizard’s shoulder.

After a moment, he resumed his pacing.

At last, after what felt like hours, from out in the front hallway, bodies burst through the Burrow’s front door. Refusing to waste a single second longer than was necessary, Remus leapt over several pieces of furniture and sprinted towards where he sensed Hermione was.

There was no point interrogating Kingsley - to Remus, there was no doubt whatsoever, that Hermione was Hermione, and that she was standing before him, safe and whole. Relief poured
through his veins like a soothing balm as grey eyes met brown across the dim expanse of Molly’s hallway.

“You’re safe,” she exhaled, looking as if a burden had been lifted from her shoulders. The witch crossed what remaining distance lay between them for the sake of flinging her arms around him.

Burying his nose in her hair which had reverted back to a natural chestnut, Remus breathed Hermione in, allowing her familiar scent to calm his racing heart.

“When I didn’t find you here, I thought…”

“I’m here, I’m safe,” she assured, pulling away slightly. Gently, she trailed her fingers over his cheek.

“Don’t I get a hug?” Kingsley asked wryly from where he had been standing.

“Sod off Shacklebolt,” Remus grunted as he attempted to push Hermione behind him. “What took you so long?”

Indignantly, the Assistant to the Prime Minister looked as if he were about to offer a scathing retort when Hermione spoke up.

“Leave Kingsley alone. This man saved my life a dozen times over,”

Visibly placated, Kingsley nodded at the witch. “As you saved mine. You’ve got quite the vicious casting hand there Miss Granger,”

Outside, the sound of more arrivals filled the air.

***

Remus watched from a window as Harry fled. As always, Ron and Hermione followed.

An air of mourning filled the Burrow, as the Order took stock of the evening’s losses.

*Another soldier down*, Remus reflected. Another life lost for the sake of some megalomaniac’s crushing dream. While it was true he hadn’t ever been close to Alastor Moody, the man had still been a comrade at arms at the end of it.

Though nobody had found Moody’s body - yet - Remus knew, just as everyone did, that had the man survived their catastrophic night, he would have already materialized at their door, or sent a message of assurance.

At least everyone *hoped* he was dead. Better dead than suffering at the tender mercies of Voldemort and his followers.

Moody wasn’t the only one lost however. Nobody knew exactly, what had happened to Mundungus Fletcher, other than the fact that the coward had fled at the first sign of trouble…

The implications of the lowlife’s flight brought with it, troubling conclusions. Someone had tipped off the Enemy, that much was obvious. The chase had been too brutal, their formations too organized. Although it seemed unlikely to many of his peers that Fletcher had been the turncoat who sold them all to the Enemy, the grimy pillock’s abrupt desertion was something Remus found too suspicious to be ignored.

“Harry has a flair for the dramatic,” Bill observed lightly, stepping into place beside the
contemplative man. Keen eyes searched the darkness of his parents’ extensive back garden.

Turning to his companion, Remus considered again, the broad, brutal marks Greyback had left upon the other man’s face. Bill would never again, be the handsome, boyish figure he had once cut; however, his scars lent the Curse Breaker an aura of danger most women and some men probably found irresistible.

“Harry is his father’s son,” Remus answered, running a tired hand through his sandy locks. “James constantly felt responsible for things he had no control over,”

“Right…” Bill shifted. Overhead, the sky was carpeted in stars. “Those Death Eaters tonight. At least one of them was supposed to have been locked away in Azkaban.”

“We have traitors among those we count as allies” Remus said bluntly. “Indeed, we have a traitor amidst our own ranks,”

The eldest Weasley son said nothing for a long moment. Glancing down, for the first time, Remus saw that Bill had yet to relinquish hold of his wand. In fact, the man was gripping the wand so tightly, the skin across his knuckles were stretched white over his bones.

“Alastor is lost to us, likely forever. My brother sits upstairs, maimed and disfigured for the rest of his life.” the Curse Breaker’s voice held a low, deadly promise. “Whomever it was, he stood within three feet of Fleur tonight, Fleur and my family. If it is who I think it is…”

“Fletcher’s got a lot to answer for,” Remus promised softly. “When we find him, I expect we should deal with him as all traitors ought to be dealt with. Treachery cannot be tolerated. Not now, when the stakes are so high,”

The two wizards regarded each other in silent understanding. In Bill’s eyes, Remus recognized the fury of an enraged wolf.

“One other thing…” Bill hesitated, glancing briefly about the room as if he sought to ensure that there weren’t any eavesdroppers listening in. “Hermione.”

Keeping his features impassive, Remus waited.

“Ever since…well. Ever since the battle at the Astronomy Tower…I know I said I didn’t acquire much in the way of…certain symptoms,” Bill started haltingly. “But the truth is, things have changed. Noticeably so.”

“Oh?” the older man asked, rocking backwards on his heels.

“I can see in the dark. And by that, I mean that nothing is hidden to me,” Bill nodded out the window. “I can hear quite a bit better than I used to as well. For instance, Fred’s being a little rude about George’s new scar upstairs. And Merlin, Remus, the smells…at first, it was all I could do, not to gag constantly at the smells,”

Crossing his arms, Remus waited for what he knew was coming.

“There’s no easy way to say this…” Bill paused. “I’ve known Hermione since she was a little girl. I’ve watched her playing with my brothers and my sister. I’ve seen her grow from a bossy little brat, into a brilliant young woman. She’s not blood but she’s family.”

“Are you ever going to get to the point?” the older man asked, rocking backwards on his heels.
“She’s a bit young and…”

“She’s a bit young and…”, Remus retorted, tired of hiding behind half-truths. “You were there when I took a vow to bring her under my protection. I would never hurt her - not in a million years.”

“What I was going to say,” Bill said very patiently. “Is that she’s a bit young and it shows when she thinks she can do just about anything without any repercussions. Kingsley told me of how she had fought like a hellion…and how reckless she had been with her own life. According to him, she fell off that damned Thestral at one point, and would have fallen to her death had Kingsley not been thinking on his feet…in a manner of speaking anyway,”

That shut Remus up.

“You two are obviously involved with each other on a level that’s clearly surpassed mere friendship,” Bill tapped his nose with an exhausted sigh. “And yes, we are all aware of your marital status. I was there when McGonagall broke the news to us about your nuptials. I didn’t like it one bit, but I didn’t for one second, assume that you would take advantage of the situation. For fuck’s sake Remus, do give me some credit.”

Belatedly, it occurred to Remus in that moment, that he had somehow made himself a true friend in the red-headed wizard standing by his side.

“I’m sorry. I’m just…” Remus gestured to the room behind them. “I feel like everyone looks at me like I’m some sort of lecherous old pr…”

“What of it? Anyone with eyes can see that Hermione is mad for you,” Bill said carelessly. “If you suppose that any of us are brave enough to get in that witch’s way, then you’re very much mistaken,”


The hellion in question was currently returning with her two best friends. Harry seemed to be dragging his feet, paler than he was when he had run out.

“What I’m trying to say is - I thought if there was anyone who could talk sense into Hermione, it would be you. I don’t think she’ll take it from any of us. She sees us all as idiots she just so happens to love. You, on the other hand…you, she respects and she obviously lo…”

“What makes you think she’ll listen to me?” Remus interrupted, not wanting to hear Bill’s surmise of Hermione’s sentiments. “She insisted on coming along tonight, despite my express wishes.”

“I’m not asking you to forbid her from anything,” Bill shuddered. “Merlin, we’ll be scraping werewolf out of the rug for months. I’m asking you to make her see how she ought to place a higher value on her life.”

“Easier said then done.” Remus shook his head. “Bill, I don’t suppose you’ve got any whiskey stashed away somewhere? This feels like the sort of night where alcohol ought to be applied in copious amounts.”

“As a matter of fact…” Bill looked around furtively. “Don’t tell my mother but I do have a bottle of West Cork hidden away.”

Somehow, Remus found himself able to offer a true grin despite the evening’s horrors. “William
Weasley, you do realize you’re an excellent leader. Under your hand, the Order might thrive yet.”

The grimace on the other wizard’s face was picture worthy.

Bill schooled his features and cast Remus a half-hearted threatening gaze. “This goes without saying but I’m saying it anyway. If you do hurt Hermione, I’ll see to it that nobody will ever find your mutilated corpse. I’ll have your guts for garters.”

“Right, and Harry’s the dramatic one…” the olde man shook his head despairingly. The corners of Bill’s mouth twitched upwards.

“If I hurt her, I will let you end me.” Remus promised. Hesitating, he continued. “Bill, I need to know that you won’t tell anyone about what’s about to happen…especially your mother…”

***

“I’m not sure if I should leave,” Hermione whispered quietly in the vestibule. “Perhaps I should stay the night…”

Controlling his impulse to simply scoop her into his arms and drag her away with him, Remus forced himself to retain his composure. The wallpaper in Molly’s front hallway was extremely ugly, and he didn’t want that ghastly plum-coloured monstrosity to be the last thing he ever saw as Hermione murdered him.

“If you’re staying, I’m not leaving.” he said evenly.

“Oh,” she bit her lip. “I’m sure Molly will put you up in a…”

“Us.” he corrected stiffly. “Molly will put us up,”

“Be reasonable, Molly will lose her head if we went to bed together.” Hermione argued with a frown. Tilting her head, she touched his face placatingly. “I want - more than anything - to fall asleep beside you…but Harry needs me,”

The werewolf sighed, resigning himself to the fact that he would not be laying beside her that night. ”Fine. But we are going home tomorrow,”

“We have to anyway. All the stuff I’ve put together in still in the bedroom,” she smiled, before kissing him lightly on his lips.

The fact that she didn’t refute him when she referred to his cottage as ‘home’ took away the sting of not having her in bed beside him for one night.

***

Molly lead him to a guest room near the attic, looking the slightest bit lost in her own home. Though he wasn’t exactly the Weasley matriarch’s biggest fan at the best of times, Remus couldn’t help but experience a gut punch of sympathy, guilt and anger.

“The sheets were changed recently,” Molly bustled about, pulling pillows and duvets out from seemingly nowhere. “If you need anything, let me know, I’ll try my best…”

“Molly, I’m so very sorry,” he interrupted from the doorway. “I didn’t see Snape coming. If I did, I would’ve…”

“Oh hush,” Molly sat heavily down upon the springy mattress, looking as if she were about to cry.
“You got him home. That’s what matters.”

Carefully, he approached the older witch.

“You have no idea all the things I was imagining,” she laughed shortly, betraying the sweet-sour scent of Ogden’s Old on her breath. Apparently, the Weasleys were all imbibing liquor in secret.

“I kept imagining my sons being killed, or tortured, or Merlin knows what else. So what if George lost an ear? He’s alive isn’t he?”

“He was very clever. And very brave,” Remus said lamely. “If not for George, I probably wouldn’t be standing here.”

“Remus John Lupin you saved my son’s life. I owe you my gratitude,” the woman stood up and wiped her tears away with the back of her hand. Chin tilted upwards, she cast him a luminous smile.

For a moment, Remus was reminded of an earlier, more innocent time when Molly had been naught but a girl at Hogwarts.

Molly had been pretty then, but motherhood had since rendered her beautiful.

The witch turned to leave him alone, only to stop right before she crossed the threshold of the guest room.

“Those children are planning something.” Molly sounded grim. “I don’t suppose you know what they’re plotting? Ron tells me he’s not going back to school.”

Shuffling guiltily, the wizard reached for the right words. If he told the matriarch the truth, likely, both himself and Hermione would be expelled from the Burrow at a moment’s notice.

“They’re not children, Molly.” Remus pointed out eventually, neatly side-stepping the woman’s questions. “Not really.”

Making a noise of displeasure, the Weasley matriarch swept out, closing the door behind her.

Falling back onto the hastily made bed, Remus removed his boots and with a wave of his wand, the rest of his clothing. Shifting under crisp sheets, he waited in vain for sleep to arrive.

An hour later, a familiar presence entered the room and joined him under the thick duvet Molly had provided.

“You’re on my hair,” Hermione whispered in annoyance as she tried to make herself comfortable.

“Your hair is everywhere. I could be halfway across the room and still be on it,” he protested as she squirmed restlessly.

A few minutes after, Remus fell asleep with his witch encased within the protective circle of his arms. Though his dreams were dark and at times disturbing, the scent of wild honey and magic saw him through the worst of it, if only from the edges.

***

Hermione’s hand felt small in his, as the four of them strolled out into Molly’s marshy back garden. In the murky skies above, storm clouds hovered.
A strong wind gusted through the surrounding bullrushes, whipping Hermione’s chestnut curls into a frenzy. In halting words, the witch explained to her best friends that instead of three, now they would be a caravan of four.

“That’s brilliant,” Ron said sincerely, to Remus’s immense surprise. “I was honestly worried we were going to get ourselves killed within a day. With Professor Lupin around, we might stand a fighting chance yet,”

Harry on the other hand, seemed more than a little troubled by Hermione’s stumbling words.

“I don’t…” he sounded aghast. There was genuine panic in Harry’s eyes as he fixed his emerald gaze upon the older wizard. “I don’t want these two risking their lives for me, but now you’re in on it too Remus?”

Tightening his hold on his witch’s hand, gruffly, Remus stated, “Hermione’s made it quite clear that she will be coming with you. Since I’m certainly not letting her leave without me, here we all stand. That’s just how it is Harry, so you best get used to it.”

“You can still leave now, all of you,” Harry all but begged. “You can still have a life outside of all of this,”

“Harry, you don’t understand.” Hermione said as grief took ahold of her. Taking a deep breathe, she ploughed ahead.

“It’s too late for any of that. I’ve…done something. I erased my parents memories and sent them away. I didn’t want them used as bait to lure us out. In the near term, reversing the spells I used on them is impossible. This is it, this path is my path now,”

Wrapping an arm around Hermione’s trembling shoulders, the older wizard studied closely, the way James’s son regarded his little wife.

Harry looked upon Hermione as if she were his entire world…one he couldn’t save, no matter how hard he tried.

“Goddamnit ‘Mione…” the boy’s voice was a cracked thing belonging to a man at the end of his rope. Abruptly, the young man turned and stumbled off into the surrounding marshlands.

“He’ll cool off,” Ron said matter-of-factly, as if his best friend’s heart hadn’t just been put through a wringer. Remus wasn’t quite sure how he felt about Ronald’s flippant attitude. “I don’t suppose the two of you would like to help me out, with the setting up of my own decoy.”

“What?” Hermione asked in confusion, pushing her hair off her face. The woman seemed completely unaffected by her other best friend’s blatant display of his truest feelings. “What are you on about Ronald?”

How was it possible for someone to be so brilliant, and yet so emotionally obtuse, the werewolf pondered with despairing fondness.

“If anyone came here looking for me, I would like them to find me.” Ron said brightly as he started back towards the house.

Leaning down, Remus pressed a lingering kiss to Hermione’s mouth. Relishing the feel of her fingers as they curled around the nape of his neck, irrationally, the man felt as if he were betraying James Potter himself.
Overhead, thunder rolled through the sky as fat drops began to fall from the broken heavens.
The Consummation: Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Note: This is a two chapter post
Warning: A bit of exposition
Warning: gratuitous smutlet ahead

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hermione had always prided herself on being sensible, rational and all around, coolly efficient.

In taking a good, honest look at her years at Hogwarts however, the young woman was forced to reconsider her assessment.

One night, shortly before they went off to fetch Harry from the Dursleys, the young woman listed out the following on a stray piece of parchment:

- **First year:** Faced a hellhound, a vine that wanted to kill me…played a game of chess that wanted to kill me…there was a Dark Lord in that mess, somewhere. I think I set fire to a Professor? Or was that another year?
- **Second year:** Went Basilisk hunting with a compact mirror and not very much sense
- **Third year:** Fooled around with time travel, messed up Draco Malfoy’s face (sorry-not-sorry), faced down a horde of Dementors…what didn’t I do in third year? Oh right. I didn’t fail my exams. Ha.
- **Fourth Year:** Viktor Krum on a rug by his parent’s fireplace. Alright so it wasn’t rash but…it deserved some sort of mention. I mean…Viktor’s arse. God.
- **Fifth year:** I didn’t do anything too rash in my fifth year. Umbridge, Forbidden Forest, Centaurs
- **Sixth year:** Something something Remus, Felix Felicis, memory charms…
- **Seventh year:** ?? Assuming the world doesn’t end, I’m sure I’ll work out something appropriate

Finishing with her list, Hermione stared down at her list of dubious achievements, and came to the understanding that she really wasn’t as level-headed as she had imagined herself to be.

“What are you doing?” Remus asked curiously, as he came up behind her with a cup of tea.

“What’s this about a hellhound? And vines? A hellhound vine? That sounds fucking awful, I hope we’re not thinking about getting one,”

“Nothing,” Hermione crumpled the sheet hastily and vanished it before the wizard could snatch the parchment from her.

A small tussle ensued, one which resulted in Hermione straddling her werewolf on his sofa, laying wet kisses all over his face as he grimaced playfully with his hands up her shirt.

No, she thought. She really wasn’t very sensible was she? If she were, she wouldn’t be so happy in the middle of a fucking war.
“You’re getting that constipated look on your face again,” Ginny advised as the two witches battled Doxy infested curtains in dusty guest rooms. “Are you daydreaming about Professor Lupin?”

The older witch made a small noise of protest as she blasted another Doxy straight into the afterlife.

Somewhere else, Harry was probably moping at the ceiling.

“Oh give it up ‘Mione. We all know what’s going on. Well, Mum’s in denial but the rest of us aren’t blind,” Ginny shoved her friend good-naturedly. “I suppose we were all a little surprised at first. We thought the plan was for the two of you to…you know…do what was necessary before moving on with your lives.”

“We did,” Hermione said very carefully. “We are. Going on with our lives that is.”

“With each other,” the girl sighed as she bound a few squirming, shrieking creatures with a lasso spelled of pure light. “The way the two of you look at each other…it’s bloody romantic and nauseating all at once.”

“That’s very flattering,” Hermione said flatly, wishing they could get off the subject of herself and Remus.

“Honestly though, I wish…” Ginny disposed of a few other pests with more aggression than Hermione thought was strictly necessary. “I wish Harry would look at me, period. These days, he doesn’t seem to remember that I even exist.”

“He’s got a lot on his mind Gin,” Hermione tried to be gentle. She wasn’t quite up to pointing out the fact that Harry’s attention was currently invested in plotting the downfall of a deranged Dark Lord.

“He’s got time for you and Ron and Remus,” Ginny persisted petulantly. “I understand why we…why he…I understand alright? But I thought we could at least stay friends.”

“I don’t think your friendship is in question,” Hermione shook her head. “Ginny, you have to trust that Harry cares a lot about you.”

“You four are leaving aren’t you?” Ginny demanded bluntly.

"Um..." Hermione wasn't exactly sure how to respond.

“Hermione, you're not very good at hiding things,” Ginny scoffed. "So don't even try. I know you four are up to something, what with your secret conversations that always seem to end the moment anyone walks by."

“Ginny…”

"And Harry mentioned something about 'bumping' off Voldemort.” Ginny concluded fiercely. "I don't understand why he won't let me be a part of this."

"Because it's dangerous and he doesn't want you in harm's way,” Hermione replied. Too quickly, she found herself getting sick of the conversation they were having.
When it came to the subject of Harry Potter, Ginny somehow always devolved into a thirteen-year-old child. Every. Single. Time.

"But it's alright for you and my brother? To be put in harm's way?" the other witch sounded incredulous.

"We insisted." Hermione turned to leave, well shut of the interrogation as it were.

"I insisted too 'Mione." Ginny sniped, sounding quite a bit angrier than Hermione anticipated. "Why were you allowed, but not me? Why does Harry want you by his side?"

Hermione scowled. "Harry is my best friend and I'm not going to second guess his every decision,"

"You can’t be serious. You literally do that all the sodding time,"

Point Ginny, the older witch admitted.

"Yes, fine, alright. But not this time." Hermione spun around. It was blatantly obvious what the other girl was so transparently insinuating.

"Just so we're clear, Harry and I are friends. That’s all there is, and ever will be. Harry doesn’t see me like that - he sees me like a sister," Hermione paused. “Not in a Lannister way, mind,”

The way Ginny was staring at her held no rancour. If anything, she looked a bit baffled; her expression betrayed the same fond exasperation Ron often wore around Hermione. Without warning, the younger witch flung herself at Hermione and pulled her into a tight hug.

“I don’t know what ‘a Lannister way’ is, but I’m going to miss you when you go you daft girl. Promise me you'll stay safe, and that you'll keep him safe." the other witch’s voice was thick with unshed tears.

"I promise I'll keep him safe." Hermione nodded, feeling extremely bewildered. Still it wasn’t as if she was going to look a gift horse in the mouth.

***

Much later, wrapped in the familiarity of Remus's bed and basking in the afterglow of the man's careful attentions, Hermione pressed a sleepy kiss to his shoulder and said, "Ginny and I had the oddest conversation today."

"Let me guess. It was about Harry," Remus sounded distinctly disgruntled.

"Got it in one," Hermione yawned. “For some reason, all his girlfriends always assume there's something going on between the two of us. It’s annoying is what it is,"

Remus propped himself up on his elbow and cast her the exact same disbelieving stare Ginny had offered her earlier.

"What?" she demanded, as her contentment abruptly vanished.

"How about the fact that he can barely function without you by his side, or the fact that you can't go an hour without speaking his name?" Remus asked testily. "I'm surprised he can tie his own shoelaces when you're not around to provide him emotional support,"

"Oh god. Not you too." she flopped away from him. With her arms spread out, naked though she was, Hermione never felt less like a sexual creature.
Remus hesitated for a second, looking off into space. “Hermione...do you want...what I mean is, do you have any..."

"No. I don't have romantic feelings for Harry. Not even a little bit. Not before, not now, not ever.” she clarified tersely, correctly identifying that her companion was expressing some ridiculous form of jealousy.

"I knew that," he sounded sheepish, though his relief was evident.

*Unbelievable*, Hermione thought angrily. They had just had sex, and here he was, inferring that she might have feelings for another man. Huffing, she twisted her body to face away from him.

"Not to bring up Harry again," she said pettily. “But he needs to find a way to shield himself from Voldemort. A door once opened, opens both ways - it's been over a year, yet I'm still having the same conversation with him. All this secrecy will be for nothing if he betrays our plans to the Enemy by accident."

"Promise me you won’t bring this up tomorrow, alright?" Remus asked, shifting to spoon himself against her, as if utterly oblivious to her aggravated state.

The way he ran a placating hand down her side however, betrayed the fact that he wasn’t as obtuse as he was pretending to be.

*Prat.*

"It's his birthday. We should let him enjoy himself."

Sitting up, Hermione rubbed frustratedly at her eyes. "I want him to have a happy birthday, Merlin knows I do. But I can't help but feel as if he's not taking this hunt seriously enough. You heard how he tried to get us all to travel to Godric's Hollow - it’s almost as if he doesn’t understand that we don’t own the luxury of time for sightseeing tours…”

The werewolf’s expression transformed into a cold, angry mask.

"Christ Hermione…sightseeing? That’s where his parents are buried for god’s sake,” Remus growled.

She watched in shock as the man climbed out of bed and tugged on his trousers.

"Can't you see the boy is lost? He just wants something to ground him."

"I get that, I do...but we can't just let sentiment guide us. We don't have the luxury of time," Hermione insisted.

“Fine, do whatever you want," he grunted, pulling on a t-shirt. “You always do anyway,”

"Where are you going?" she demanded, doing her best not to let her panic reveal itself.

“Out,” he ran an impatient hand through his tousled locks as he stalked out of the bedroom. Two seconds later, the front door was yanked open, and then slammed shut with inhuman force. In the kitchen, dishes rattled.

Alone, Hermione shifted uncomfortably in the silence of Remus’s cottage, and wondered what the hell just happened.

***
Perched on Remus's sofa and clad in her pyjamas, Hermione re-read for the fifth time, page 235 of *The Trick to Occlumens*.

Nothing was sinking in. All she could consider, was that the wizard had been gone for almost two hours, and that he was a known member of the Order of the Phoenix, and where the hell had he bloody gone, it was three am and...

Taking a sip of Chamomile tea, Hermione forced herself to stay calm. Carefully, she turned her attention back to the top of the page.

An hour later, her fruitless efforts were interrupted by the sound of the front door rattling open. Literally bounding to her feet, she threw her book aside and flew over to where Remus had just shuffled in.

"I'm sorry," he whispered, as they wrapped their arms around each other. "I didn't mean to be gone for so long. I didn't mean to lose my temper the way I did. Shit Hermione, I'm so..."

"Shut up, it was my fault." she pulled back to meet his gaze. "I'm sorry."

Steering her back to the sofa, he sat down and pulled her close, so that her legs were curled over his thighs. Cupping her face, he pressed his lips against her eyelids and her cheeks, soothing away her distress as only he seemed to know how.

"I failed James and Lily you know. Or at least, that's what it feels like sometimes," he said eventually as they settled into a familiar and comfortable shape.

Hermione nuzzled into the crook of his neck and waited.

In her presence, Remus spoke sparingly of his old friends - those whom he had treasured, loved and lost. Whenever he did raise their spectres in conversation, the palpable pain in his eyes was always unmistakable.

"After they died, I didn't even try to find Harry. When I look at him now, all I see is this fucked up young man whose been messed about more times than most grown men I've met in the course of my life," Remus continued, his voice rough with fatigue and emotion.

"I look at him and I think that I should have tried harder, been better. If Sirius had been a free man, he would have never allowed Harry to live with those monsters Albus left him with. I did however. I allowed James's and Lily's child to grow up in a loveless, abusive home. You know, I held Harry in my arms the day he was born…I promised Lily I would always look out for him…god, but what a fucking joke that was,"

"You couldn't have saved Harry…" Hermione said softly. "Back then, it wasn’t as if it were legal for you to become his guardian, what with being a…"

“A werewolf?” Remus chuckled bitterly. “Hermione, I didn’t even try to rescue Harry all those years. Do you understand?"

"Why didn't you?" she asked at last, when the silence between them stretched too long.

Remus’s eyes slid shut as he pronounced, “Cowardice.”

There was a lot she still didn’t know about the man in her arms, Hermione reflected as she studied Remus’s profile in the dimly lit room. Before he had entered her life back on that train from King's Cross Station four years ago, this man - this man who was now her husband - had lived an entire
life she hadn’t been a part of.

Something ached in her chest as she wondered what Remus must have been like when he was young. Before hardship, and war, and death took all of his innocence and twisted that up into iron knots of regret.

"You're no coward Remus Lupin," she said softly and truthfully as she ran her fingers over his sharp cheekbones.

Remus’s grey eyes were shadowed as they gazed back into her own. After a moment, he shook his head and pressed a kiss to her forehead. Without another word, he lifted her up as he had done dozens of times prior, and carried her back to bed.

Eventually, drifting off to sleep, she wondered groggily at the words Remus was whispering against her skin. Still, soothed by the slide of his bare skin against her own, she didn't wonder for very long.

By the time morning came around, his soft confessions from the night before had melted away like so much frost under the glare of a rising sun.

***

As evening fell, Hermione ran her fingers down the spine of the book she had only recently acquired - her inheritance as a matter of fact. Seated on a small bench tucked away behind some flowery trellises, the witch was safely hidden from most of the world.

Within the thin walls of the house, Hermione could hear traces of an ongoing passive aggressive civil war being waged between two matriarchs. The battle was nasty, vicious, and filled with thinly-veiled cutting remarks.

The menfolk on the other hand - Harry and Ron included - were drinking themselves into a stupor on the far side of the back garden. Through the gaps of her green barricade, she spied the tell-tale flame of Ron’s new lighter as he played with his new ‘toy’. Occasionally, a small golden snitch hovered in the air above everyone’s head.

Staring down at The Tales of Beedle the Bard, the witch carefully turned the book this way and that, studying every last aspect of the slim volume which had been bequeathed unto her. Gingerly, she leafed through its delicate pages for the umpteenth time, searching for something, anything that wasn’t simply fairy tales written for children.

From the clump of inebriated men, a lone figure separated himself from the group. Slowly, Remus made his over and sat down beside her.

“Still haven’t figured out Albus’s cryptic message?” Remus asked with a lazy half-smile as he slung a loose arm around her.

“I’m still not sure this isn’t some sort of veiled insult,” she admitted, kissing his cheek. Scrunching her nose, she asked. “How much have you had to drink?”

“Not enough for you to worry about,” he smirked.

Blood rushed to her cheeks as she considered his implications.

In a gravelly voice, Remus murmured, “Sweet girl, the day I took you to wife, I sat right here, watching you,”
“Did you now?” she asked, allowing herself to fall under the mesmerizing spell of his voice and his eyes.

“Oh yes. I watched as you wandered about under the summer sun, and thought to myself how pretty my little bride looked. I kept on thinking how sweet it would have been, if only my bride would seat herself beside me, behind this wall of leaves and blossoms…” Remus’s breath ghosted against the shell of her ear. “Darling girl, I would have claimed you right here in this very spot if you had given me half the chance…”

“God you’re so full of it,” her shoulders shook with laughter. “That afternoon, you avoided me as if I were some sort of plague carrier. Then, when you finally got me alone, you were shaking you were so nervous,”

“Fine,” he sighed in a beleaguered manner as he slumped against the wall. Easily, he pulled her so she rested against him. “Fine. I suppose you spotted that,”

“You’re not the smooth agent you think you…”

Rudely, the man cut her off mid-sentence. Pressing his mouth insistently against hers, Remus left her no room for coherent thought. On his tongue, Hermione tasted the sweet-sour of firewhiskey.

“Sweetling, you’ll need to be quiet for me. Can you do that?” his whispered against her lips.

“What are you…” her eyes widened as clever fingers undid the clasp of her jeans. Deftly, he slipped his hand down the front of her knickers. Sly as any hungry wolf, he teased at her sopping cunt.

“Remus, we’re out in the open,” she warned weakly even as she arched against his touch.

What a wanton he’s made of her, this man.

“I don’t care. I’m claiming you now as I should have claimed you then,” his voice was rough with want. Slanting his mouth over hers once more, he swallowed a gasp of pure pleasure as he pumped long fingers in and out of her.

Unnoticed, the book she had been given tumbled softly to the ground.

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter will be posted immediately...
He was tugging on his old mustard robes when he heard Hermione making a noise of protest from behind.

“It’s the only set of dress robes I own,” he hoped his voice didn’t betray his embarrassment.

“But. Mustard. Why?” she asked, circling around to face him, tugging and pulling at his clothing.

“I’ll have you know, this colour was very popular when I purchased this outfit,” Remus tilted his chin challengingly. “Granted, it was the eighties, and people were a little funny about colours back then…”

The room surrounding the two of them was felt oddly empty to his eyes. Most of his personal belongings had been packed into Hermione’s tiny beaded bag, an object of which he still eyed with no small measure of awe.

Somehow, the witch had expanded on her extending charm to the point that she was lugging around both their wardrobes, two sets of full-sized tents, an entire library of books, an unholy amount of Wolfsbane Potion, any number of herbs, a full-sized cauldron…

…and Merlin only knew what else.

“Stand still,” she instructed, stepping back.

“What are you…” he started.

Hermione muttered a small cantrip, the effects of which became immediately apparent as the fabric on Remus’s person began adjusting and shifting.

A few seconds later, where once his suit had hung loose upon his slender frame, now, it sat quite comfortably across his shoulders, and down his arms.

“Next time, some warning might be nice,” he grumbled, uncomfortably conscious of the fact that the woman had just cast a shrinking spell in his general direction.

It took every ounce of willpower and maturity in him not to immediately peer down the interior of his trousers…

“Shush, I’m not done,” she waved his concern away.

With a decisive swish of her wand, the wizard glanced down to find himself wearing a dove grey suit, over a crisp white shirt. His waistcoat was gone, having been transfigured into a blue, skinny
Sighing, he pointed his wand at his worn shoes and muttered a quick spell; old, brown loafers transformed into a pair of black, polished Oxfords.

Turning to look in the mirror, he shrugged in relief over the fact that he didn’t look too much like a soft dandy. Assessing his modified wardrobe, Remus supposed he could have made more of an effort with his clothing over the years…after all, he wouldn’t have been the first impoverished wizard to cheat a little where his attire was concerned.

But that sort of thing required effort, forethought and a sense of style Remus had never possessed; besides, it was so much easier to go around in \textit{comfortable} clothing anyway.

Turning to thank Hermione for her thoughtfulness, he caught the woman’s frankly appraising stare as dark eyes raked across his body. A familiar rush of desire burned its way through Remus’s veins as the werewolf breathed in the beginnings of his witch’s arousal.

“Like what you see?” his voice dipped low as he stepped in close.

The witch was herself, dressed in a set of fetching scarlet robes, which perfectly accentuated the curve of her waist and the flare of her hips. Without offering her any form of warning, Remus yanked at Hermione so she rested flush against the length of his body.

“Little girl,” he murmured. “Don’t you know you shouldn’t go around tempting big bad wolves?”

“We really need to go if we don’t want to be late…” she murmured, though the way her fingers reached for his tie, Remus doubted very much that she wanted to leave just yet.

“I don’t particularly \textit{care} if we’re late,” he growled, before he spun her about so she faced the foot of the bed. Reaching for her hands, he bent her over and flattened her palms upon the mattress.

Softly, he commanded, “Stay,”

The delicious way she shuddered only served to stoke at his rising lust. Wasting no time, he flipped up the hem of her dress and trailed his fingers against the scalloped edges of her cotton underpants. Pushing aside the small scrap of cotton, Remus found Hermione wet and wanting.

“So very eager…” he laughed.

Tilting her hips, his witch loosed a soft whimper.

Undoing his trousers, Remus began stroking at his half-hard cock; ravenous eyes gazed upon Hermione’s pert arse raised in the air, squirming and begging for his attention.

“What do you want?” he asked softly.

When she didn’t answer, Remus reached out and grasped tightly at her left hip. With his right hand, he smacked at her bare bottom. A gasp of surprise, pain and arousal, all twined into one, slipped from between Hermione’s rouged lips.

“You. I want you,” she begged.

“Not enough,” he growled hungrily as his control began fraying slightly at the edges. “Tell me what you want or you won’t get it,”

The tips of her ears were flushing red, he observed with deep fondness.
“I want…” she breathed, then hissed as he landed yet another slap on her arse. “I… I want you to…”

“Come on now,” he prodded. “Brightest witch of your age… you can do so much better…”

“Please Remus… please…” she was shaking. “I don’t know what it is you want to hear…”

“Are you so truly at a loss for words?” he teased as he stepped close between her parted thighs. “Sweetling, be a good girl and tell me what you want,”

“Remus, I want… no, I need you inside me. Please,” she begged.

God but he loved hearing her beg, he thought adoringly.

To be very precise, he loved…

Pulling himself back from an unseen precipice, Remus slammed his hips forwards. Thrusting quickly, his hand swept her neatened curls away, and found the nape of her neck as he fucked her with an intensity that was just shy of being outright brutal.

When finally the two of them came as one, somehow, Remus still owned the presence of mind to catch a shaking Hermione before she toppled over. Sliding towards the ground, sweaty and disheveled, the two of them grinned at each other in shared satisfaction.

“We really, really need to leave now, if we’re going to make it to the ceremony on time,” Hermione said as she forced herself back to wakefulness.

“Whatever you say dear,” he said unthinkingly as he stroked affectionately at her curls.

Then, his muscles froze. Momentarily, the man regretted his little joke, his allusion to the fact that the both of them were indeed, engaging in what was starting to feel like a true marriage.

Observing the way her eyes softened as she looked upon him however, and the way her smile widened almost imperceptibly, Remus wondered if it were possible for him to hold on to this moment - with both hands - for the rest of his life.

***

The ceremony was perfect and beautiful, and Molly Weasley had outdone herself.

Remus found his heart brimming with gladness for Bill’s sake, as his friend dashed down the aisle with his glowing bride. The other man’s happiness shone so brightly, for a while, it was as if his scars had never existed.

Nevertheless, a small part of Remus’s heart twinged at the understanding that the woman beside him would never have a chance at a wedding as lovely as all of this. His own wedding with Hermione had been the exact opposite of the one they were currently in attendance of.

By comparison, their wedding had been pathetic in every way that counted. Had he the power, Remus would have sold what was left of his tattered soul, if only to give Hermione her day in white silk and fresh flowers…

“You’re thinking very loudly,” she murmured out the side of her mouth as the tent around them peeled back to reveal the surrounding beauty of the countryside.

“Bit of the pot calling the kettle black, if you don’t mind my saying,” he whispered back. The woman smelled intoxicatingly of their recent, frenzied coupling.
"Are you two going to be nauseating all night?" Ron asked as he sauntered towards them with Luna in tow. "Tell me now so I know to avoid you."

Raising his brow, Remus noted that Ron and Luna were traipsing about with their hands entwined.

"What Ronald is trying to say, is that the two of you make a very handsome couple tonight," Luna explained as she squeezed at the boy's upper arm. "Mister Lupin, you look like a Muggle movie star in that suit."

Hermione looked bit shocked as she took in the couple standing before her. Shoving her glass into Remus's hand, the witch smacked Ron on his shoulder.

"How could you not have told me you and Luna were dating?" she demanded irritably.

"What the hell Hermione!" Ron looked at his best friend reproachfully, before turning to pout at Luna and Remus both. "She hit me,"

"She didn’t hit that hard," Luna shrugged.

"I don’t know," Remus said in the spirit of male solidarity. "I’ve been on the receiving end of her violence. It’s not pretty."

"Hermione Granger, you violent beast," Ron tsked.

Laughing, Remus returned Hermione her flute of champagne.

"You mustn’t blame Ron. He hadn’t wanted to tell anyone," Luna explained, acting for the first time a little hesitant, as she glanced at the wizard by her side. "I told him that we don’t know what tomorrow brings. I told him that when you really think about it, all we have is today, and each other, and now…"

There was a pause as they all took in Luna’s words. Observing the tender look on Ron’s expression as he gazed at his small, blonde witch, Remus did his best not to fuss at the itch at the corner of his eye.

It wouldn’t do at all, for a big bad werewolf to start bawling in front of the assembled crowd.

"Still," Hermione cleared her throat testily, effectively breaking the poignant moment. "You should have said something."

Sighing, Remus bent down and pressed a kiss to the woman’s crown; Hermione was terrible at expressing human emotions.

"Where’s…" Hermione looked around.

"Cousin Barry?" Ron interrupted meaningfully, before gesturing as subtly as he could in a certain direction.

About ten feet away, a heavyset redhead shuffled uncomfortably. The look of trapped bewilderment was unmistakeable as the ‘Weasley relative’ dealt with an overenthusiastic distant ‘Aunt’.

Remus had seen James wearing that expression enough times to know exactly who he was actually looking at.

Just as he was about to crack a joke at both Ron and Harry’s expense, across the tent, Minerva
McGonagall caught his eye. The older witch did not look pleased in the least, as her hawk-like gaze settled upon where his arm was circled loosely around Hermione’s waist.

Swallowing hard, his mirth dispelled, Remus moved to extricate himself with every intention of ducking for cover. Before he could step away however, a loud voice called,

“Herm-own-nee!”

Ron loosed an audible groan.

Remus on the other hand, glanced around in utter confusion, unsure of what it was he had just heard. He didn’t have to look very long however.

A giant hulk of a man descended on Hermione and drew her into an embrace that seemed just a touch too familiar.

The world narrowed; McGonagall and her disapproval became promptly forgotten. All Remus could see was this strange man holding Hermione, pawing at what didn’t belong to him.

“Viktor! Oh but it’s so good to see you!” Hermione exclaimed in genuine pleasure.

The only thing keeping Remus from completely losing his head, was his witch’s friendly reaction towards this Vicktor fellow. Under his skin, his wolf snarled against the bars of his cage, demanding satisfaction.

“You are…how do you say this…a vision?” the stranger stood back and swept his gaze over Hermione. To Remus’s mounting irritation, the other man kept his hands on the young woman’s hips.

“Viktor, you know Ron, and perhaps Luna, but I don’t think you’ve met my…” Hermione turned to him with a bright grin, which visibly wavered as she caught sight of his glowering expression.

“You haven’t met Remus Lupin have you?”

“It’s nice to meet you Remus. Interesting name no? Do you have a brother named Romulus perhaps?”

“Is he having a laugh?” Ron asked incredulously. Luna shushed the boy before she dragged him away.

“No,” Remus answered shortly, stepping forwards to receive Viktor’s proffered hand. It was a bit of a hardship not to crush the Bulgarian brute’s bones.

Viktor smiled as he withdrew his un-broken limb. “How do you know Hermione?”

_Biblically_, Sirius supplied in his head.

“I see we have a lot to catch up on. Viktor, why don’t you tell me how these past months have been treating you?” Hermione spoke before Remus could tell the smug tosser exactly who he was where the woman in question was concerned.

Grinding his teeth, Remus veered off abruptly, leaving behind a slightly bemused Hermione glaring after him. Spying the bar where plenty of canapés were being served, he decided food might be a good distraction.

Childishly filching an entire tray of appetizers to himself, as Remus munched unhappily on tiny
quiches filled with ham, cheese and black truffle oil, he observed disdainfully as a quartet of very un-talented witches began to sing.

Judging from the agonized expression on Bill’s features as the four women launched into some insipid ditty about cauldrons and love, the older wizard guessed correctly that the groom hadn’t been allowed to choose the soundtrack for his own reception.

“Decent music,” Tonks said as she materialized by his side. The Auror was in a strappy black number he had never seen before, which matched the current dark of her hair colour.

“You would say so,” Remus snorted, keeping his eye on Hermione and Viktor.

“Or…just stand about and be sour at the wedding event of the season. Why not?” Tonks rolled her eyes. The woman tapped her fingers against the bar top behind him. Immediately, a glass of red wine popped softly into existence.

“Like it would kill them to play something good,” Remus grumbled, before immediately realizing what a curmudgeon he sounded like. Unrepentantly, he added, “Bloody Backstreet Boys would have been better than this shite,”

“Are you…” Tonks feigned a look of concern. “Are you quite well Remus? Did someone curse you on your way over? Next you’ll be telling me how much you appreciate the artistry of Robbie Williams,”

“Who?” he asked with a scowl, finally turning to look at the smirking woman.

“Alright, I can see you’re determined to be unpleasant,” Tonks sighed theatrically. Peering towards the dance floor, she asked very seriously, “Why the hell are you here when she’s over there?”

“I don’t know. Because if I had to listen to that prat fawn over my…over Hermione for another minute, I was likely going to throw up all over my fancy suit. Or break something.” Remus said sulkily.

Rebelliously, he picked up another quiche and chomped it down.

“Speaking of…good job with the suit tonight,” Tonks said, eyeing him like he was a particularly choice side of beef.

Remus flushed to the roots of his hair as he caught a familiar gleam in her ice blue eyes. The last time Tonks had looked at him in that manner, the two of them had ended up shagging on the floor of her flat, two feet away from her front door.

“It’s all Hermione,” he muttered, dropping his gaze. Shaking his head, he drained off the dregs of his champagne. “She made some improvements.”

“Good on her,” Tonks laughed. Peering up, the man found to his relief, no lingering traces of hurt or sadness in his friend’s gaze. “Remus, don’t look now, but it looks like Hermione’s ex might have his hand on her arse,”

Whipping his gaze back towards the dance floor, Remus remembered belatedly, what Hermione had told him the very first time he had bedded her.

The man currently holding Hermione more intimately than he had any right to, had once seen the woman naked. Viktor Krum had once enjoyed his little witch, and likely, knew all the wanton
sounds the woman made while in the throes of an orgasm.

“This is getting very old, very fast,” Tonks sounded bored. “Will you just go over already and stop frightening everyone from the bar? Some of us would like to have some fun. Remember fun?”

“You are such a brat,” he muttered and took off.

Approaching the swaying duo, Remus found himself accidentally eavesdropping on something he absolutely did not want to hear.

“…found out about the law only after I came home from the retreat. Herm-own-ninny, you must know I would have crossed oceans for your hand if I had only found out sooner,” Viktor intoned earnestly. Boldly, the interloper swept an errant curl from Hermione’s cheek.

Viktor Krum’s Quidditch career was on the cusp of being over, mostly as a result of the multiple injuries the werewolf was seriously contemplating inflicting upon his person…

“Viktor that’s very sweet, but I think I’m doing just fine,” Hermione told the hulking athlete.

“This Remus man, he’s a bit old for you isn’t he? He looks as if he’s celebrated thirty name days… and if I’m not wrong, he’s got a wolf inside of him…” Viktor sounded uncertain.

“You’re right about one of those things I suppose,” Hermione smiled. The woman turned her gaze towards where she knew Remus had been standing the entire time. “I hate to be rude Viktor, but I do believe my wizard is here to claim his dance,”

Crossing the final gap, Remus not so subtly shouldered the Bulgarian man out of his way.

“It was nice meeting you Viktor,” he said. “Best of luck with the next season and all that. Remember not to overstrain your Beater arm,”

“I’m a Seeker,”

“I really don’t care mate, go harass someone else’s woman,” Remus couldn’t help himself. “This one’s taken.”

“Remus!” Hermione chided immediately. All around, guests were casting curious glances over in their direction.

“Hermione,” Viktor bowed ridiculously like some old fashioned butler, before he stormed off into the crowd of wedding guests.

“That was unnecessary,” Hermione poked Remus in the chest. Easily, he caught her hand and swept her into the rhythm of the dreadful music.

“I disagree. I didn’t like Viktor’s cologne. I did not like his stupid face, his ridiculous unibrow and most of all, I really, really didn’t like how he was touching you,” he said with feeling. “So yes, I think it was absolutely necessary he understood all of that,”

“Remus John Lupin, for a very clever man, you can truly be an idiot sometimes,” Hermione made a face.

Wisely, the man refrained from informing his dance partner that she wasn’t much better at expressing her emotions in a healthy and mature fashion. He was rather hoping to survive the rest of the reception; there were tiny spring rolls on the way, or so he had heard. Also, cake.
“You do realize you’re the only man I’ve been thinking about over the past year. I can’t seem to get my mind off you, even when I really should be focusing on other things. Do you understand how distracting all of this has been for me? I’ve never been like this with anyone. I…”

In full view of the rest of the world, Remus interrupted Hermione’s monologue by pressing his lips against her own. Slender arms wound themselves unhesitatingly around his neck.

There would be no more hiding for either of them, he understood with a certain sense of finality. That part of their relationship was over.

Ending their kiss before it became something he wanted to pick up in a more intimate venue, he murmured, “I have some idea what you’ve been going through,”

“Good thing I suppose,” she whispered softly.

Pressing his forehead against hers, Remus wondered again, if there was even a chance he’d be allowed to keep this moment forever.

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They danced, and ate, and drank, and did their best not to think of what the next day would bring. The live quartet went away - thankfully - and better music finally started.

In the end, admitting at last that he wasn’t much of a dancer, Remus chose to settle down at the edges of the dance floor, to watch as Hermione attempted some sort of twist with Charlie.

Charlie, whose date to Bill’s wedding was a very handsome fellow from someplace called Toronto.

“It’s not all Polar bears and hockey,” the newcomer said a tad defensively.

“Idiot, nobody said it’s all Polar bears,” Charlie sounded both embarrassed and proud at the same time, before Remus could even ask where the hell Toronto was. “But you have to admit, you lot love your hockey. I really don’t understand the game by the way - there’s not a single broom in sight, just men beating each other up with sticks as they slide around on ice,”

“Heathen,” the man - Russell - sniffed haughtily as his boyfriend landed a placating peck on his cheek.

The werewolf had laughed at the exchange. All previous offences Charlie had accidentally committed, dissolved into so much nothing.

Overhead, as the first strains of “I Only Have Eyes for You” began to fill the air, Remus took a large sip of fine brandy as ‘Cousin Barry’ approached Hermione. Happily, Charlie relinquished his hold on the young woman’s hands, and folded himself into Russell’s welcoming embrace.

It hadn’t escaped Remus’s notice that Harry had spent all of five minutes in Viktor Krum’s company before he made a beeline for Hermione. No doubt, Krum’s obnoxious mannerisms had that effect on any one of Hermione’s besotted wizards.

The ease by which the woman in question slid into the protective curve of Harry’s arms settled uncomfortably in Remus’s stomach, but he forced himself to remain seated.

You do realize you’re the only man I’ve been thinking about, she had told him not two hours before.
If there was any chance this was going to work, Remus supposed he had no choice but to start acting like a grown-up, rather than an ill-tempered, jealous wolf all of the time.

“I see you’ve reneged on the agreement,” McGonagall said by way of announcing her presence. Sinking into a chair beside him, she sat with her back straight and her eyes fixed upon the side of his face.

“Hello to you too, Minerva,” he said evenly, effecting an air of calm indifference.

Remus had a feeling it annoyed the Transfiguration Professor whenever he addressed her by her first name. That form of address made them equals, more or less... though yes, she could still make him feel about ten inches tall at any given time.

“The understanding was that you wouldn’t stake a claim on Miss Granger,” she pointed out.

“My agreement with Hermione was that I would never stand in the way of what she wanted,” Remus corrected. A part of him hated how much he still wanted the older witch’s approval. The other part simply didn’t care. Didn’t want to care, at any rate. “I’m still honouring that.”

“Are you certain?” McGonagall asked, watching him watch Hermione. “Are you sure?”

“Only as long as she is,” Remus answered truthfully.

The woman fell silent, as her gaze flitted outwards to where Harry was slowly swaying with Hermione; James’s son handled the woman he loved, as if she might shatter in his arms.

“Are you doing alright?” Remus asked at last, for want of something to fill the silence.

“Mr. Lupin,” she said, same as she used to when he was naught but a silly fifteen-year-old Gryffindor. “Do you suppose I have a choice?”

“No,” he shook his head. Remus had always appreciated McGonagall’s stoicism.

The survivors of the first war looked out at the assembled crowed, sharing a melancholy moment only a precious few others could have understood.

Just before the clarions sounded, disrupting their lives for good and always, McGonagall turned to him and asked, “I don’t know the details Remus, but you’ll watch over all three of them won’t you?”

“I solemnly swear,” he grinned. After a short pause, he added, “I can’t vouch for Ron Weasley however. The boy’s a bit of a loose cannon,”

“Oh,” she nodded as she sipped on her beloved Lagavulin. “Absolutely. My god but I’m glad he wasn’t the one who married Miss Granger. She would have been shipped off to Azkaban inside of a week on charges of murder and dismemberment.”

Two seconds later, the both of them were hunched over with laughter, although no one else could possibly have guessed why.

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The Patronus landed. All was screaming, and panic, and fear…

The world spun and squeezed…
And then there was only the sound of London traffic.

Chapter End Notes

Warning:

From here on out, the characters in this Alternate Universe will start having to have to make morally dubious decisions, partly because, well, it's a war, and partly because I essentially threw a jaded soldier-man into the middle of this struggle...which for better or worse, will influence his companions in certain ways.

Just fyi anyway.
Hermione ran towards him, breathless and determined, dragging along a very confused Harry in her wake. Rising to his feet, all traces of insobriety cleared from Remus’s head as he reached out to touch her outstretched hand.

“Ron!” Hermione barked, her voice a rough command.

“Here,” the boy wizard yelled as he grabbed at Harry’s elbow.

The air twisted about them; the wedding reception faded into a grey dot, and then it became nothing at all as space folded in on itself.

When the world re-materialized, Remus found himself breathing in the smell of sewage, stale urine, and human filth.

“Where…” Ron stuttered. “Luna. Fuck, Luna! I have to go back there!”

“I saw her disapparate,” Hermione promised, though Remus could have sworn he heard the lie in her voice. “She got away safely, I’m sure of it,”

Forcing himself to stay calm, the werewolf tilted his face and took in the sight of a busy street flowing past the entrance of the alleyway within which they stood.

Tottenham Court Road, he realized. This was a street he had traversed though, thousands upon thousands of times on his bicycle - sometimes all in the same afternoon.

“We’re in Muggle London,” he heard Hermione telling the other two. “You’ll both need to get out of those robes… I have clothes in this bag somewhere…”

“No time,” Remus muttered. Scooping his wand from the inner pocket of his suit, he cast a quick transfiguration spell in Harry’s direction. Immediately, the younger wizard’s dress robes shifted, turning themselves into a dark blazer worn over a button down shirt and a pair of Muggle jeans.

A heartbeat after, Hermione followed his example and transformed Ron’s outfit in a matter of seconds. When she was finished, the woman tucked her wand into her coiled up hair, effectively disguising her weapon as nothing more than a fashion accessory.

For the first time, Remus noticed with a start how Hermione’s own wrap dress had been sewn in such a way that the woman would not have been out of place in either the Muggle or the Wizarding world. The woman hadn’t gone to the wedding unprepared for their flight, it seemed.

“Where next?” Harry asked, as his hair began fading to its natural dark colouring. The shock of their frantic escape had likely leeched away the effects of the Polyjuice Potion.
Thinking quickly, Remus grabbed at Hermione’s hand and started towards a specific direction, gesturing that everyone ought to follow him. Just in case someone thought to investigate the distinctive sounds of apparition, they could not afford to hang around in the alley for much longer.

“We need a place that’s safe,” Hermione hissed urgently as they stepped onto a crowded sidewalk. “This is a bit…”

“Do lighten up darling,” Remus slung a casual arm around the witch’s shoulders. “This night has been brilliant and I’m not ready to see it end. I could use another pint though. What do you boys think?”

He stared hard at Hermione, willing her to play along as the shifting crowd directed his steps.

This trick wasn’t new to him. How many times had he blended himself into a thronging mass, in order to escape the seeking eyes of his enemies? There was no better place to hide sometimes, then in plain sight. Despite the fact that they were far from the Burrow, Remus was far from convinced that they were safe from the seeking eyes of Voldemort’s minions.

“Another pint sounds amazing,” Harry agreed amiably.

“Can’t have too many of those,” Ron added awkwardly.

“Fine,” Hermione’s dark eyes remained hooded. An empty casting hand twitched towards her ‘hair accessory’, but to his relief, the witch settled for patting at her chignon as if she were simply fussing at her curls. “A pint it is. Any port in a storm?”

“Anywhere we can relax in peace for a few minutes,” he promised meaningfully.

Squeezing her shoulders, he did his best not to growl at anything that remotely resembled a threat. Already, the lighthearted joy of the past few hours was fast becoming nothing more than a distant memory.

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The diner they found themselves in was largely empty, with very few patrons seated around the dingy establishment. Nobody paid any mind to the four individuals as they crowded into a corner booth, right beside the back exit. The disaffected waitress behind the bar cast them all a bored glance, before her attention shifted back to the telly perched on the opposite side of the room.

Ron’s distress, which had been growing with every step they took, bubbled over as soon as he sat down. “I have to know if my family is alright. If Luna is…”

“We can’t go back Ron,” Hermione bit out irritably. “In case you haven’t figured it out…”

“The war has started,’ Remus said softly. “The real war. The Wizarding world as we know it is no longer safe. The Ministry has fallen, and the Death Eaters have free reign,”

Hermione sucked in a sharp breath, even as his other companions paled.

“We should…” Harry sounded as if he were grasping for control of some sort. “We need safe haven,”

Easier said than done.

Over the past days, the four of them had met and spoke endlessly of what was to come, but none of
their words had come to anything. Harry spent the majority of his time poring over the Daily Prophet, searching endlessly for any mention of Albus. Hermione and Ron on the other hand, constantly descended into senseless squabbling.

Remus - the only ‘adult’ present - tried time and again to bring everyone’s focus back to the priorities at hand…but all his endeavours had felt akin to an exercise in herding cats.

“We could try Hogwarts,” Ron suggested. “The castle is warded to the teeth,”

“Right,” Hermione snorted in disgust. “So your mother can find you and drag you home by your ear,”

The boy made a small disgruntled noise, though he didn’t seem inclined to disagree.

“Your cottage…” she looked to him.

“Will likely be surrounded by now,” he stated grimly. “We have to assume that all weapons of the enemy are now squarely aimed towards every last member of the Order,”

“Bumper,” Hermione cursed softly.

“There’s Godric’s Hollow…” Harry started. “Voldemort would never return to the place of his greatest defeat. By the way, Aunt Muriel mentioned to me at the reception that Professor Dumbledore’s family had…”

“Harry, we’ve been through this,” Hermione gritted out.

“Fine,” Harry retorted irritably. “What about 12 Grimmauld then?

Before Remus could explain why not 12 Grimmauld Place - because Severus-Bloody-Snape knew where it was - the air shuddered ominously all around them in such a way as to cause his mouth to snap shut.

Two figures materialized through the front door, whereupon they began to survey their surroundings with intense, unnatural interest. Narrowing his gaze, Remus caught a whiff of blood and smoke emanating from their persons.

“You lot, shut up,” he hissed softly, interrupting the ongoing bickering which had yet to show signs of letting up. Drawing his wand, he warned, “We have company,”

Just as he was about to wordlessly fire off a confundus charm, a familiar voice called out, “Remus Lupin! Fancy seeing you here!”

Fuck. It was fucking Martin, Remus thought frantically, swivelling his gaze to meet the bright eyes of the rotund coordinator, who managed the courier office he frequently reported into.

A deafening crack filled the air, as a whip of sparks flew across the room. This was followed by screams, and the sound of furniture exploding.

“What in the fu…” Martin asked, scrambling to the side in terror.

The remaining other patrons dashed for any exit within reach. Upon realizing that all manner of escape was lost to them, the Muggles dove behind the bar together with the shrieking waitress.

“Martin, duck!” Remus bellowed as he leapt out of the small booth to deflect a curse aimed at his friend.
After that, there was no room for talk.

It was all Remus could do to fire curses whilst dodging vicious looking hexes thrown his way. Close by, Harry and Ron created a small whirlwind, sending it careening off towards the Death Eaters. Skillfully, Hermione side-stepped a brutal-looking curse, before she released a punishing spell of her own in the direction of their murderous opponents.

“If the halfbreed is here, that can only mean one thing...that my sweetest, most favourite mudblood is here too, in this very room,” a heavily accented voice called above the chaos. “Don’t worry Miss. Granger, I’ll show you what a real man feels like in a little while. You’ll be gagging for it by the time I’m done, I promise,”

Risking a glance at Hermione from behind a broken table, Remus watched as her features transformed from pure panic into unmitigated fury. The witch clutched at her side...at a scar which lay wrapped away under the silken bodice of her red dress.

Suddenly, the werewolf knew who it was who had just spoken.

Rage exploded in Remus’s chest. Flicking his wand, he whispered a single word.

Overhead, burning arrows rained down, aimed directly at the dark wizards’ heads. Their hair and robes caught fire, which drew from them, shocked and fearful cries. Frantically, the two men tried to douse the magical flames with water streaming from the tips of their wands. When that strategy didn’t work, they started batting at the flames with their bare hands.

Remus unfolded his body and stalked amongst the smoking ruin that had been a diner only mere minutes ago.

Easily, he tossed aside the one he was sure was named Thorfinn Rowle, ignoring the sickening sound his body made as it collided bonelessly against the wall. Rowle was human scum, but he didn’t wear the skin Remus was intent on flaying right at that moment.

Antonin Dolohov doused the last of the flames from his robe and bared his teeth at Remus with his wand raised in challenge. Faster than the human eye could follow, the werewolf whipped a hand out and fastened his fingers around Dolohov’s throat, causing the latter to drop his weapon in blind panic.

Desperate hands reached up and clawed desperately at the werewolf’s merciless grasp.

“Please,” the Death Eater choked as his face began to turn purple. Hazel eyes darted back and forth, before settling on the witch who had stepped in close. Somewhere to the left, Ron was checking Martin for injuries, as Harry cast a full body bind on an unconscious Thorfinn Rowle.

Clearly, the other Death Eater had survived Remus’s show of brute strength...though his legs were certainly bent at a very odd angle.

Both boys kept on glancing at their former, mild-mannered professor in wide-eyed shock.

“Stop,” Hermione laid a hand on Remus’s wand arm. “Don’t.”

“Give me one good reason why not,” he snarled, staring into the terrified eyes of the Death Eater who had once caused his wife to bleed out in the middle of the Ministry of Magic. “This man hurt you. He almost killed you,”

Hermione said evenly. “I’ve told you before, he’s not yours;”
I would never stand in the way of what she wanted, he had told McGonagall in what now felt like another lifetime.

Growling, Remus squeezed his fingers just a little harder, taking sadistic pleasure in the dark wizard’s tangible fear. An unmistakable reek of piss filled the air around them as Dolohov soiled himself.

Abruptly, Remus released his hold on his quarry, allowing the useless pillock to crumple to the ground.

“He’s mine,” Hermione continued as she snapped the Death Eater’s dropped wand underneath her heel. Her voice was cold as ice as she cast, “Depleo,”

One bolt of dark purple light later, Dolohov was screaming in unadulterated agony as he clutched at his right side. Remus had no need to rip aside the other man’s black robes to know what he would find branded into the man’s flesh.

“Yours was a good spell Dolohov. But I’ve made some improvements,” Hermione informed the dying man.

Staring at his witch’s stone-faced profile as she continued glaring down at a bleeding Dolohov, Remus found himself filled with dreadful admiration for Hermione Granger.

“Remus?” a trembling voice called.

Shit, he remembered. Martin.

***

The time for moralizing on the ethics of violence and its dubious necessity was over, Remus reflected numbly.

Also finished - a time when it was possible to weigh the decency of every action taken.

Even understanding that what he was doing was for the sake of saving his friend's life, Remus found that he couldn't evade a sharp stab of guilt as he gazed into Martin's blank eyes.

"You're going to go home, and you're going to fall asleep. When you wake you, everything you saw tonight will be forgotten," he said. Nearby, Hermione, Ron and Harry did the exact same to the other patrons of the diner. The waitress was already stumbling off into the night, her obliviation complete.

"You have never met a man named Remus Lupin," he continued, forcing himself not to waver. "We have...we have never spoken, or shared a pint, or talked about girls on a Wednesday afternoon."

It wouldn’t do to have Martin running around, shouting in a panic about the magical battle he had just witnessed. That is, the one involving his friend Remus Lupin, a bespectacled, scarred, teenage boy, and two men in dark capes.

While Muggles certainly wouldn’t take him seriously, it was quite likely Voldemort would seize Martin, if only to question him on what he saw, or thought he saw…and the Dark Lord would not think to spare Martin his worst.

Death would be sweet relief by the end.
Lowering his arm, Remus dropped his gaze down to the dirty ground. A warm hand found his empty one, lending him comfort and strength.

"We have to go," she murmured, kissing him on his cheek as all the Muggles left the dark alley. The panic she had hidden so well during the fight was starting to reveal itself in the frayed edges of her voice. "I don't know how those two found us, but we cannot afford to linger,"

Not trusting himself to speak, Remus turned and held on tightly to Hermione as she apparated them away.

***

The street in front of 12 Grimmauld was - to Remus's immense surprise and relief - largely empty.

Harry had insisted on seeking shelter in Sirius's childhood home, and nobody had the strength left to argue with him. Had he the fortitude, Remus would have told Harry that sentimentality was going to get them all killed.

However, the reason he was so utterly spent was because he had just scrubbed away the memories of a man he had once called friend. In the end, who was he to lecture anyone on the proper application of sentimentality?

Tapping at the doorknob with his wand, Ron led the way into the house. As the door slammed shut behind them, something shifted in the shadows at the end of the hall. Before any of them could say a word, a figure had risen up out of the carpet, tall, dust-coloured and terrible.

Already knowing what it was he was looking at, Remus controlled his patience as he forced himself to take a deep breathe. His tongue froze before he could explain what was happening to the other three.

Too bad, because it was Hermione who found her voice first. The witch screamed in terror, in an octave shrill enough to make Remus clap his hands over his ears in agony.

To their right, Mrs Black started shrieking her slurs as heavy curtains flew open. Alastor Moody’s voice joined the cacophony, lobbing accusations and judgement upon the head of a man who wasn’t present.

All this time, the grey figure continued gliding towards them, faster and faster, its waist-length hair and beard streaming behind it, its face sunken, fleshless, with empty eye sockets: horribly familiar, dreadfully altered, it raised a wasted arm, pointing at the quartet.

"It wasn't us," Harry gasped.

"It's not real," Remus sighed as his voice came back. Turning towards the false, furious spectre of Albus Dumbledore, he all but rolled his eyes in contempt.

The night Alastor had cast the damned ward, Remus had stood next to Bill, and the two men had shared looks of deep skepticism. Later, as they stepped out of the townhouse, Remus had wondered aloud if such theatrics would actually succeed in subduing Severus Snape into a cowering mess, on the off-chance the blackguard ever darkened the doors of 12 Grimmauld ever again.

Raising a scarred brow, Bill had replied, “Alastor is addled, that he thinks seeing a ghost would stop such a man as Snape, who is neither a fool, nor a child. If anything, we’re the fools for wasting our time on the conjuration of useless illusions, when really, we should be forming ranks,”
In the present, Remus called out wearily over the ruckus, “We didn't kill you Albus,”

Abruptly, the figure exploded in a great cloud of dust.

"Mudbloods, filth, stains of dishonour, taint of shame on the house of my fathers…" Walburga Black continued.

"Shut up!" Harry roared in frustration, pointing his wand at the offending painting. Dusty velvet drapes slammed shut at once. Silence fell over the dilapidated townhouse.

Ignoring the two wizards, Remus crouched down by a trembling Hermione, who had shrunken herself into a tight ball. Carefully, he pulled her into the protective circle of his arms.

"It's ok," he assured as he ran a soothing hand over her curls. "It's alright. It was just a little welcoming party Alastor had set up. I should have said something…"

"I thought..." she continued shaking like a leaf; the stress of the past few hours had finally broken through her crumbling facade of calm. "I honestly thought..."

Tightening his hold on Hermione, Remus nuzzled into her hair, wishing he could lend her what strength he had left.

Distantly, he supposed Alastor had succeeded in mentally scarring some teenagers…

"Fucking hell," Ron panted, leaning against the wall. "Any more welcome wagons we should be aware of?"

Then, just because the night wasn't interesting enough, Harry emitted a loud groan of pain, right before he stumbled where he stood.

***

By the time they managed to get themselves to bed, dawn was a mere three hours away. The vision Harry received did not seem to indicate any immediate threat to them just yet, though Remus still found himself unnerved by the incident as a whole.

He had never really seen one of those episodes for himself, though he recalled Hermione's distress on the matter every single time. Now though - now he understood why she would be worried.

Pulling off his suit, Remus watched Hermione as she cast a series of scourgifies over the dusty bedding.

The room, like every other room in the house, had been in utter disarray when they found it. Drawers had been emptied, papers had been scattered...the place had been searched from attic to cellar.

The question was - by whom?

With Hermione's help, the wizard set up the strongest wards they could possibly conjure, guarding almost every possible entryway into the townhouse. They left the existing alarms in place by the front door, seeing as no one could possibly miss the shrill voices of the dead should anyone think to trespass.

Discarding his sweat and smoked soaked shirt, Remus found himself wondering at the strange fact that not only would he would be sleeping under Sirius's roof - something he hadn't done in ages - he
would also be laying in his dead friend's former abode together with his little wife.

Like him, Harry had declined the master bedroom in favour of bunking down in some other guest room. Despite the fact that 12 Grimmauld was his house, much like his godfather before him, it was obvious the younger man didn't regard the place as a home of any sort.

As if reading his mind, Hermione turned to him with a tired smile, and offered, “I realize this arrangement must be hard on you. This place, that is. This isn’t forever…for better or for worse, this isn’t forever,”

Impossibly, Remus managed to summon a very faint smile. So Hermione wasn’t completely oblivious after all.

"I suppose I shouldn't tell you about that one time I got home to my parents house, only to find Sirius going at it with Cassie Finnegan in my bed while Mum and Dad were asleep two doors down. This was over the summer hols before our seventh year, before my parents moved to the cottage,"

Hermione's face scrunched in distaste at the mental picture he had just provided. "Suddenly, I'm even more grateful we're not taking Sirius’s bed, even though its far bigger."

Remus shook his head, ruthlessly quashing his grief away as he joined Hermione under the covers. With a wave of her wand hand, she cast, “*Nox,*"

"You never talk about him," Hermione said after a few minutes of silence.

"What would you like me to say?" he asked tiredly.

"I don't know," she admitted. Casting him a furtive glance in the dimness of their temporary bedroom, Hermione asked curiously, "Did the two of you ever..."

Despite his fatigue, his sadness, and yes, his fear, Remus found himself chuckling at her words.

"Are you sure you want to know?" he inquired.

Hermione nodded.

"Well. In all honesty…” Remus looked up at the ceiling. "I went through a phase where I thought that perhaps…just perhaps…I preferred the company of wizards over witches. Sirius - who was going through a phase of his own where he tried to shag *anything* that moved - offered to help me find out…"

The witch propped herself up on one elbow, looking shamelessly riveted.

“IT seemed like a good idea at the time…mostly because we were stupid teenagers. The two of us fumbled for exactly two minutes behind the greenhouse, before I realized that I very, very much prefer witches," Remus found himself smirking at the memory as he pulled Hermione so she lay half-sprawled on top of him.

“Although, I suppose, that could have been because Sirius was such a terrible, horrible, no-good kisser. There was also something grotesquely incestuous about the entire, sorry episode, if you want the truth,”

"You must have broken his heart," Hermione said earnestly.
At that, a true, honest laugh welled from his chest.

"You silly, silly girl," he murmured against her curls.

_I love you_, he thought silently and fervently. _I will love you until the moon falls from the sky, and even then, I will love you still._

Listening to the sounds of early morning traffic seeping in through decaying walls, Remus waited for sleep to take him.

Chapter End Notes

I wasn't a massive fan of film-Hermione's dress. In this AU, I was thinking of something slightly more structured, less busy. Just a thought anyway.

In a less interesting note that has more to do with hazards of my job, apparently, loading a draft and saving it, causes ‘update date’ to be the day you load the draft, not the day you post. I’m wondering if this is expected behavior. From an end-user perspective, this doesn’t seem particularly ideal. I have now started testing the subscribe function.

Egh. My brain.
It was one of the few times Hermione managed to sleep past dawn without stirring. Remus on the other hand, lay tossing and restless beside her. The air that surrounded them was too still, too dank; the light too bright, too intrusive…

Shortly past sunrise, he managed to fall into a fitful doze, only to find himself roused by the sound of feet shuffling about, somewhere in the bowels of the house.

Climbing to his feet, Remus tugged on a pair of trousers and a sweat-stained undershirt.

Barefoot, the werewolf left the guest room. Silently, he padded down the hallway with his wand drawn. The noise was coming from Sirius’s old room, he realized with a start of discomfort.

In his overactive, sleep-deprived imagination, Remus wondered if he would find the shade of his best friend rifling through his old belongings, desperately trying to regain a semblance of true existence.

With his heart in his mouth, the wary man pushed open the bedroom door…

Only to find Harry, seated on the floor, surrounded by what appeared at first glance, to be a whole lot of rubbish.

"Couldn't sleep either then?" Harry asked. The young man squinted warily up at him out of red-rimmed eyes.

"Not really." Remus tucked his wand away into his waistband. "Are you alright? Did you have another..."

"No," Harry shuddered.

The older wizard couldn't blame Harry for his obvious fear at the thought of glimpsing the world through the eyes of the Dark Lord once again. For all he himself had witnessed throughout his wretched life, Remus had no desire to play spectator to all the methods Tom Riddle employed, to punish those that failed his expectations.

Still. In another life, Remus supposed he might have felt genuinely sorry for Dolohov and Rowle as they screamed their throats raw…as Tom Riddle flayed their skin from their living flesh…

“I couldn’t sleep and I got a little bored," Harry picked up a piece of parchment from one of the piles he had created. "I found some letters. Some of them were written by my parents, some of them by Sirius…there’s a few from someone named Marlene,”

“Oh?” Cautiously, Remus stepped into the room and sat down beside Harry. He tried not to touch anything. "What did they say?"

"It's all...normal,” Harry frowned in genuine confusion. "It's all thank-you notes, and Quidditch speculation, and invitations to dinner..."

Remus swallowed as his heart squeezed in his chest. It hurt him to understand that most of what
Harry knew of James and Lily concerned the manner by which they had been murdered, rather than how they had once lived, and how they had thrived.

"We used to do that a lot...we met for dinner and drinks all the time. We even had the occasional fondue party, if you must know. Even after you were born, before..." Remus stopped speaking.

After a moment, he continued. "Even after you were born, for a short while, we would all gather at your parents’ flat, and allow Lily to force-feed us her horrible cooking,"

The hungry look on Harry's face was almost too much to bear, but Remus could not find it within himself to deny the boy.

"Your mother was convinced she was a culinary genius. She used to experiment on us all the time with her grandmother's recipes. Peter developed a strategy of vanishing his food bit by bit, every time she got distracted," Remus smiled faintly at the memory.

Even knowing now, how Peter had betrayed them all, certain facets of their shared history simply couldn’t be tarnished.

"Sirius loved your parents too much to say anything, and I...well. I usually took a tongue numbing potion to help with the copious amounts of salt your mother always added to every bloody thing," Smiling, Harry observed, "You loved them,"

"You have no idea," Remus admitted. He looked down at his spread, scarred hands. "I know everyone thinks I loved Sirius best...but the truth is, I loved all four of them, so very, very much. After my mother passed, my father...he wasn't ever the same. James, Sirius, Lily...even Peter...they became a surrogate family of sorts,"

"How come I haven’t found any letters from you? In fact, I haven’t found a single photograph with you in it," Harry looked about him in puzzlement.

"Well." Remus cleared his throat. “When Sirius took it into his head that I was spying for the Enemy, I think he might have destroyed everything that reminded him of my presence in his life. Of our friendship."

His companion’s eyes widened in shock.

"Your Godfather had a habit of jumping to impulsive conclusions, as I’m sure you noticed,"

"I always thought it was all those years in Azkaban that affected his judgement," Harry’s brow furrowed in consternation.

“No doubt, towards the end, some of his instability resulted from his time in Azkaban. But you have to understand...a lot of what you saw was really Sirius being...Sirius,"

For some reason, Remus felt as if he were confessing to some deep secret.

“The truth is, even as a student of Hogwarts, your Godfather betrayed a measure of that infamous Black brand of sanity, if you get my meaning. He constantly catapulted between extreme cheer and dark despair. Both extremes typically led to the obliteration of House Points. Once, his actions almost resulted in Severus’s death...you must see how that’s not exactly...normal,”

Harry looked troubled as he considered what he was being told. In the quiet that ensued, Remus could pick out the faint rhythm of Harry’s heart, as it thudded rapidly in the hollow of his chest.
"I assumed the two of you were thick as thieves," Harry said after a while.

"We were. For all his madness, I loved him like the brother I never had. So did your father, and I’d like to think, so did Peter...once, anyway," Remus nodded slowly. "But...the first war...it destroyed many things."

"At least you two cleared the air before he died though yeah?" Harry asked earnestly, as he pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose.

This part, Remus wasn't so willing to talk about...the part where Sirius and he had both acknowledged silently, that they couldn’t ever go back to a time when things had been easy between the two of them. Years of loss, sorrow and death had taken their toll on both their souls.

Years of grief and heartache had taken from them, the best of their love and friendship, leaving behind only a shadow of all it had once been.

Had Sirius lived, perhaps there might have been time to rectify all that had soured between them...but in the present, there was no point thinking of what might have been, as Remus well knew.

"Harry..." he said quietly. "I'm sorry,"

"What are you..."

"I'm sorry I failed you," Remus forced his voice into a semblance of strength. "I wasn't there for you when you were growing up. I didn't even try to find you. I was a selfish, self-absorbed creature who was too wrapped up in his troubles to realize that my best friend's child needed someone who cared..."

The younger man looked away, his jaw working furiously under the taut surface of his skin.

"Sometimes..." Harry started.

"Sometimes, when I think on it, I realize that while I never knew my parents, you had them for years before you lost them. You had to learn what it meant to live without them. If anything happened to Hermione or Ron, I think I would be completely destroyed. I have no idea how I would go on. The truth is - and I’m so ashamed for thinking such a thing - I think that if not for Hermione and Ron, I wouldn’t bother fighting at all. The world could go hang if the both of them aren’t in it...no offence to you or anyone else of course,"

"None taken," Remus said wryly, with complete understanding.

Someone shuffled at the doorway. Glancing up, Remus spied Hermione's pale, tear-stained face.

Before either wizard could react, the woman was flinging herself at Harry; she tackled him so hard, the bespectacled wizard pitched clumsily backwards.

"Harry Potter, you're not losing me," she promised weepily as she hugged him. "Don't be thick,"

Harry clutched at Hermione, looking as if he had never experienced a happier moment in his life. In that moment, Remus couldn't find it within himself to be jealous at the sight of his witch holding another man - one who was clearly besotted with her at that.

"Thank you," Harry murmured, pressing a kiss to her hair.

Sniffling, Hermione clambered to her knees and turned to wrap her arms around Remus next.
Gratefully, he breathed her into his lungs as he acknowledged the uncomfortable fact that he suddenly had so much to lose.

Clearing his throat, Harry began rifling through some of the other items on the ground.

"I found something written here about Bathilda Bagshot," Harry tugged out yet another piece of old, ripped parchment. "It might offer us some clues about Dumbledore,"

"Let me see," Hermione reached out and snagged the letter from her friend's fingers.

"I think it’s time we went to Godric's Hollow." Harry bounced energetically to his feet.

Frowning, Remus shook as he climbed to his feet. "Much as I don't think staying here is a wise idea, I don't see how Godric’s Hollow is a better option,"

"Why not?" he demanded.

"Because understanding more about Dumbledore’s life isn’t actually all that relevant to our mission," Hermione said patiently from where she still sat on the floor. Raising her hand up at Remus, she drummed her fingers against his thigh meaningfully. "Besides, we still don't know how those men found us last night. I don't want us running off and getting ourselves caught up in another fight if we can help it."

“When she’s right, she’s right,” Remus took the unspoken hint and hoisted his witch to her feet.

Huffing impatiently, Harry stomped out of the room, leaving Remus and Hermione casting each other looks of genuine concern.

The occasionally bratty Boy Who Lived didn't stay quiet for very long however. Two seconds later, they heard him yelling, "I think I found something!"

***

Remus Lupin was hardly a genius, but he had never considered himself stupid.

Not, that is, until the moment when he pieced together who the owner of the initials R.A.B. was, anyway.

When Hermione had first raised the subject of the locket, Remus had admittedly been too preoccupied with their burgeoning relationship, to think extensively on who R.A.B. might possibly be. Then, in the weeks that followed, he had been altogether too caught up in the ensuing storm of events, to fully consider the implications of those blasted initials.

In hindsight, the whole thing with the locket reeked of Regulus’s stupidity, like a badly written saga of betrayal and youthful idiocy. All too easily, Remus was able to conjure an image of that sallow-skinned, vain little tosser, who had wanted to follow Tom Riddle into some fairy-tale future built on the blood of Muggle-borns and Muggles alike.

Silently berating himself as he paced the length of the kitchen, Remus half-listened to the ramblings of a slightly deranged house elf, until another name caught his full attention.

“Mundungus Fletcher?” he whipped his gaze around to glare at Kreacher. “He took the bloody locket?”

“Kreacher is sure,” the wrinkled little pillock confirmed sulkily, refusing to look at the werewolf.
Remus loosed an extremely vulgar expletive; to his right, Ron stared at his former Hogwarts Professor, looking absolutely scandalized.

“Tell us more about Regulus,” Hermione prodded gently.

“Master was…”

“I’ll tell you about good old Reggie,” Remus hissed as he stopped in front of the house elf. Just looking at its wizened, mean face made the wizard furious - it reminded him too well, the part Kreacher had played in the death of Sirius.

The only reason he hadn’t wrung the hideous creature’s scrawny neck, was because it would have upset Hermione.

“Regulas was a soft, weak-willed little shit who joined You-Know-Who because he actually believed in his master’s vision. When the reality of his stupidity became too much to handle, that knobhead tried to fuck off out of there, only to be hunted down like an animal and slaughtered in a matter of days.”

The wretched elf pulled himself to his full, puny height. Angrily, he started, “You dare stand in Master’s house, calling him…”

“I’m standing in Sirius’s house you little…” Remus interjected hotly.

“Actually it’s my house,” Harry said very calmly as he took control of the situation. “It was bequeathed to me, if you recall,”

“I can’t look at him.” Remus shook his head and stalked away from the kitchen.

Leaving the trio with the treacherous little fucker, Remus stormed upstairs, doing his best to cool his temper. Stepping into his temporary bedroom, the man turned his mind to the problem of Mundungus Fletcher…but that only stoked at the raging fire within his chest.

In his head, Remus could still hear the way George had screamed, as Snape callously sliced the boy’s ear off. Horribly, he could still hear the way the other wizard had wept, and begged for the pain to stop…

Gazing out the window, the man tried desperately to collect his emotions.

On the road outside 12 Grimmauld Place, a man whizzed past on a beautiful bicycle, the sight which abruptly doused Remus’s fury. In its place, hollowing guilt filled his belly as the wizard found himself thinking of Martin.

Martin, who had the shite luck of being at the wrong place at the wrong time.

To think - he had raged at Hermione, for what she’d done to her parents. In light of what he had just done to Martin, certainly, his previous, lofty stance now held a distinct sheen of stinking hypocrisy.

In the harsh light of day, Remus supposed he needn’t have wiped Martin’s memories to the extent the other man no longer recognized who he was. Yet…would it have been possible to look his friend in the eye again, and to act as if nothing had changed between them? As if he hadn’t reached into Martin’s mind and stolen away moments of his conscious existence?

No, he concluded drearily. It was better Martin no longer knew who Remus John Lupin was. It
was better that the other man had no idea that he had been so horribly betrayed by someone he had once counted as a friend of sorts.

Something fluttered ominously out the corner of Remus’s eye.

Flicking his gaze over the surrounding buildings and rooftops, Remus spotted a cloaked figure strolling down the pavement on the other side of the street. Frowning, sharp grey eyes scanned the rest of the avenue, and sure enough, there were at least two other similarly cloaked individuals lingering in the immediate vicinity of their hideout.

_Sentries. Sentries too assured in their own place in the world to even cast disillusionment spells over their persons._

That did not bode well.

“What the hell was that all about?” Hermione demanded as she stormed into the room. “You can’t just abuse Kreacher the way you did. What gives you the right…”

“He caused my best friend’s death. _Wilfully_ and _deliberately_,” Remus answered as calmly as he could, turning his attention to the irate woman. “I will never forgive him, Hermione, never. And frankly, this is one of those few times where I do not particularly care for your opinion on the matter, one way or another,“

The anger began draining from her as she contemplated his words.

“Merlin’s beard…you and the boys…” she dragged herself over to the bed and sat down. “Kreacher’s a product of his environment. A product of generations of enslavement. What did any of you expect?”

_Culpability_, he wanted to say. Hermione had labelled house elves as individual creatures who deserved the freedom to choose; she ought to recognize at least, that Kreacher had absolutely proven her point.

The little villain had _chosen_ to utterly destroy a good man.

Sighing, Remus bridged the gap between himself and Hermione, before settling heavily beside her. Slipping an arm around her shoulders, he ran his fingers through her curls. Almost resignedly, Hermione dropped her head into the crook of his neck.

“Did you get anything useful out of that little…out of Kreacher?” Remus asked.

“He’s off to find Mundungus Fletcher,” Hermione answered.

Remus nodded. “That traitor has much to answer for,“

Levelling her dark eyes in his direction, the witch waited for him to explain.

“We were betrayed, the night we retrieved Harry from the Dursleys,” Remus said.

“I thought we established…”

“We didn’t carry out our mission on Harry’s actual birthday, in case you didn’t notice. We picked a random day beforehand. The Dark Lord certainly knew _when_ to show up didn’t he?” Remus persisted. “He certainly wasn’t fooled by our careful disguises either…”

The expression of shocked understanding on Hermione’s brow assured Remus that, like him, she
too had missed a blindingly obvious answer to an easy puzzle. Rapidly, cold rage suffused her features.

“Also…” Remus cocked his head in the direction of the window. “We’ve got a small problem. I do believe we’re under surveillance,”

Somehow, her dark scowl became even darker. Slipping away from Remus, she approached the window and peered cautiously out at the world beyond their crumbling walls.

“Bollocks,” she swore succinctly, evidently having spotted the Death Eaters. Rubbing at her forehead, she looked exhausted as she said, “I suppose we’ll just have to be extra careful. I’ll make sure the others know,”

“And I’ll check the wards again. I’ll probably take a look up near the attic as well, just in case there are any gaps on the roof they can exploit,” Remus nodded grimly.

“Right. And once you’re done, since you’re such an expert on the subject,” Hermione gave him a look that told him she wasn’t quite finished being annoyed at him. “You’ll come to the study and tell us everything you know about Regulus Arcturus Black.”

“Now hang on a minute…” he started indignantly. What kind of world was it, that a girl half his age was ordering him about? He had been her Professor for goodness sake.

“Remus, if you don’t get your arse over to the study, I promise you, we will not be sleeping together tonight,” she threatened, placing a hand on her hip.

Was she…? She was. Hermione was being completely serious.

Keeping his eye fixed on her, Remus raised himself off the bed and approached his witch. Cupping her jaw, he bent down and leaned in close enough to kiss her.

“You think I’m yours to command do you?” he asked, his voice a husky growl.

“I…” her eyes grew hazy.

“Hermione…” he nipped at her lower lip. “I’ll do as you so politely requested. But if you think I’m sleeping in the parlour…”

Smirking at the way she was unconsciously tilting her body towards his own, Remus slowly released his hold on her.

Whistling, he sauntered out the bedroom and made his way to the stairwell. When finally, he turned to witness his handiwork, the dark and frustrated look of thwarted desire Hermione sent his way was everything he could have hoped for.

The small snarl she emitted as he ascended the stairs - that was just an added bonus.

That would teach her to order him about, impertinent wench…

***

Three days later, Remus found his considerable patience being sorely tested.

Ron and Hermione had not stopped arguing in hours, over the stupidest nonsense that shouldn’t matter. The boy wizard wanted to leverage tried and true paths - that is, to return to Hogwarts - while Hermione absolutely refused to budge on her wary stance.
Much as he adored his little wife, Remus found it hard to side with her when she was so firm in her belief of her own *rightness*. In her own way, Hermione was just as bad as Ron.

Tired as he was of their endless struggle, the werewolf found himself doing the unexpected.

Hidden in the dimly lit cellar away from the bickering duo, Remus began reading *The Modern Lycanth: Research and Findings Post 1995*. The book written by Leonard Lyesmith Jr. and Sheldon Hullen, researchers of whom were based out of California.

The book was the very same volume Hermione had tried to get him interested in, back when she had first come to him for help. While he had dismissed the publication at the time, in the present, for want a distraction, Remus found himself skimming through its dubious contents.

Hermione had been right about one thing at least - the topics being presented would not have been available twenty years prior, when the Wolfsbane Potion had been no more than a hopeful dream for many werewolves such as himself.

Generally however, Remus still found himself skeptical, though, certain passages did prove somewhat interesting:

“…regular application of the potion over a period of eighteen months. The subject, Penny H., demonstrated to us her ability to cause certain limited traits of her lupine nature to manifest at will, through a series of mental exercises.

*It is important to note that the demonstrations were all scheduled in the middle of the lunar cycle (that is, the full moon was always two and a half weeks behind each demonstration date).*

*Mental exercises sometimes included yoga, meditation, and the complete focus of thought…*”

Putting the book down, the werewolf stared up at the ceiling. Somewhere above, Hermione thumped her closed fist angrily against the solid surface of a wooden table. Further upstairs, Harry traipsed through the old house, looking for more memories to add to his collection of trivia surrounding his parents and his Godfather.

Feeling a little silly, Remus took a deep breathe and shut his eyes. Nothing happened at first…not for what felt like a very long time.

As his mind sunk into a soft, formless void, Remus began to picture himself racing across an open field, under a clear night sky. Overhead, the full moon shone brightly down upon him. The wind that blew - and which ruffled at his fur - was wintry cold.

In the distance, a figure in red waited patiently for him. Eagerly, Remus sprinted towards the woman’s welcoming smile, the soft curve of her arms. Loping across a layer of living grass growing out of rich, dark earth, the wolf relished the way his body moved, the way he felt unfettered, strong and *free*…

Something shifted ever so slightly in his perception.

Raising his right arm without opening his eyes, he could almost feel as his fingers began to stretch and curve into an inhuman shape. A small, still voice whispered in his mind, that his overactive imagination was once again playing tricks on him…

Remus’s already strong sense of smell and hearing suddenly sharpened quite noticeably.

For the first time, he noticed the scent of mould, the drip, drip, drip of water down cold brick
walls, the movement of multiple rats living within the walls of 12 Grimmauld Place…

On the street, a child wailed. A passing Death Eater, to Remus’s dark amusement, spoke gently to the infant and its Muggle mother. He didn’t know the Sentry’s name exactly, but the man’s voice was familiar.

There was no hint of a threat in the dark wizard’s voice. Instead, the young man commiserated with the beleaguered Muggle, on the difficulties of raising babies when they were still so young.

“…used to sleep eight full hours,” the Death Eater bemoaned. “I used to think I was busy,”

“Christ, yes, I miss sleep,” the woman yawned. “Nobody told me it would be like this,”

Abruptly, his concentration was broken as overhead, Moody’s dead voice started to speak.

Snapping his eyes open, Remus glanced at his right hand and saw to his shock, a layer of coarse grey hair receding rapidly under the smooth texture of his fair skin. There was nothing remotely human in that vanished pelt, he recognized. Nothing that might belong to a man, as it were.

Despite the gravity of what he had just accomplished, there was no time to gape. Scrambling to his feet, Remus sprinted up the stairs and out to the foyer, where a very calm Bill Weasley stood, saying, “It was not I who killed you Albus,”

On the stairs, Harry lowered his wand the moment he recognized their visitor.

“How did you find us?” Hermione asked, slowly approaching their visitor as Ron strode forward to gather his brother into a strong embrace.
“I wasn’t trying to find you,” Bill admitted. “I’ve been meaning to drop by, to ensure we haven’t left anything behind which might give away what little secrets we have.”

Remus scowled. “Mundungus beat you to it, it seems,”

Upon the werewolf’s pronouncement, Bill’s smile fell away. Sighing heavily, he gestured in the direction of the parlour.

“I suppose we should trade stories,” he said. “I bring ill tidings, I’m afraid,”

Chapter End Notes

I apologize for the half-assed crossover with TBBT. I couldn't resist.
As Bill spoke, Hermione felt a curious mix of horror and anger washing over her as she took in everything which had been occurring outside the walls of 12 Grimmauld Place. Bitterly, he spoke at length, of the overnight changes which had taken place in the Ministry, following the death of Rufus Scrimgeour.

The man spoke of Muggle-borns being rounded up and carted off into the depths of the Ministry. He spoke of the accusations being lobbed at those like her, who had been born to non-magical families…

To the witch’s left, her husband had a strong arm wrapped around the breadth of her shaking shoulders. She could feel his own, dark rage building as he listened, although much of it was broken by moments of fierce concern for her sake.

On her right, her best friend’s hands twitched almost uncontrollably; Harry’s wand lay exposed, clenched within the grip of a white-knuckled fist.

“What news of the Burrow?” Ron asked in a tremulous voice. “Is everyone…”

“They’re safe. Many of us were held and questioned by the Death Eaters after you four disappeared.” Bill rubbed at his unshaven cheeks. “A few of us suffered a crucio or two…”


“Ministry workers,” Bill hesitated. “Tonks, Remus…they did it to Tonks,”

Hermione instinctively leaned into Remus’s side. Even in the depths of her despair, she knew that it could not have been easy for him to hear that his former lover had been put under the cruciatus.

“What about Luna?” Ron asked desperately. “Is she safe?”

With a start of guilt, Hermione realized she hadn’t considered much, the fate of her best friend’s girlfriend. Not since the night she lied to him, telling him that she was certain the young, eccentric woman had safely escaped the festivities of his brother’s wedding.

"I think she’s safe," Bill said hesitantly, betraying the fact that he too, had not thought to find out how the Lovegoods had fared amidst all the madness. "I'll send someone out to look in on Xeno and his daughter,"

"Our ranks grow thinner by the day," Remus curled his fingers tightly at her shoulders.

“At least the Order is finally in agreement that this house is no longer safe. Frankly, I don’t know how you lot haven’t been found by our enemies. One would think Snape would have betrayed this
place by now,” Bill considered. Shaking his head, he leaned forwards and asked, “Speaking of treachery, what’s all this about Dung?”

There was a sharp glint his blue eyes, something feral and deadly. Hermione had seen that look before in Remus’s gaze, that hungry, vicious glare which spelled retribution for those that would think to cross him, and what he considered his.

"He ransacked this house from top to bottom, and stole some Black heirlooms," Remus nodded, holding the other wizard's gaze. "That little wretch Kreacher - he's gone looking for him. Once he gets back..."

“I want answers out of him,” Bill said decisively. “We're going to need to take some measures as well, to deal properly with that traitor,”

"You're not…not serious are you?” Ron stuttered in shock.

"Gravely so," Bill turned to his sibling. “Brother, you're to be an uncle soon - Fleur's two months along. If Fletcher had been the one who betrayed us the night we retrieved Harry, then he also put the lives of my wife and my child in danger. Do try to remember - Fletcher might be the reason George has been maimed for life,”

Ron's face grew red. "But I didn't think we were the sort who engaged in…you know…torture,”

Bill laughed shortly. “You're getting a bit ahead of yourself. I didn’t actually say anything about torturing anyone. But Ronniekins, we're fighting a war. What do you think would happen if let’s say, myself, Remus or Hermione got captured? Or even you?”

The youngest Weasley boy stared at his older brother in horrified silence.

“Perhaps you think they’ll make you a nice cup of tea, serve you some chocolate biscuits, ask you politely to tell them everything you know...” Bill sighed. “I hate to be the one to break it to you Ronald, but our enemies will be far more likely to rip your fingernails out one at a time, until you sold them not only Harry, but Mum, Dad, Ginny...your girlfriend...”

Reaching into his robes, the Curse Breaker withdrew from his cloak, a copy of the Daily Prophet. Harry’s face was plastered all over the front page of the paper; loud headlines proclaimed him the most wanted man in all of Wizarding Britain.

“Oh, brilliant,” Harry sounded aggrieved as he picked up the publication Bill had tossed onto the coffee table.

Overwhelmed, Hermione pulled away from Remus's hold. Rising to her feet, she moved to stand by the hearth, where wandlessly, she ignited a small, crackling fire.

One year ago, her choices were taken from her simply because of the circumstances of her birth. Never mind that she was quite happy with Remus in the present - the fact that she had been forced into marriage in the first place, still chafed horribly.

Now, the world was claiming that the power flowing through her veins was stolen.

Remus paced over to her. Pulling her from the fireplace, he slide his hands down her arms and twined her fingers with his own, a gesture which comforted her more than words could ever have expressed.

"I expect you lot have been through your own fair share of troubles," Bill asked, flicking his gaze
from face to face, stopping finally at Ron. There was pride in the way he looked upon his little brother. “They think Ron is still in the attic of the Burrow, down with Spattergroit. Smart bit of work that,”

"We ran into some problems on Tottenham Court Road after we disapparated from The Burrow," Harry explained, flitting his green eyes in Hermione’s direction. Hermione and Remus both. “It became a bit of a bloodbath to be honest,”

"Bloody hell," Bill's eyes widened in shock. "They're certainly not hiding anymore are they?"

"No," Ron shook his head miserably.

"Bollocks," Bill sunk back into his armchair looking haggard. "I suppose I should have seen it coming, now that the Dark Lord basically controls the government through his puppet minister. All checks on him are now as good as gone."

“Is that true?” Hermione asked faintly. "Are we so bereft of allies who wield any sort of power?"

Behind her, Remus traced small circles on the back of her hand with his thumb, as his lips brushed gently against her hair.

"We can't do very much," Bill shook his head in resignation. "There was a time we might have been able to take the fight to them. Now all we can do is act as a resistance of sorts."

"There is still the question on how they found us to begin with," Ron spoke up. "We shouldn't still have the trace on us now that we're all of age..."

“That's a puzzle we haven’t solved,” Remus admitted. "We didn't draw attention to ourselves... hell, we barely cast any spells before the fighting started..."

Between herself and Remus, they had been trying to understand to no avail, how Dolohov and Rowle had found them in the now-wrecked diner. Each theory they arrived at, seemed weaker and more implausible than the last, which frustrated her to no end.

"I'll owl McGonagall when I get back, to see if she has any ideas," Bill paused, looking out the window. "Do you think you're going to be putting up here for very much longer?"

“I don't know," Hermione shook her head as Remus slipped his arm around her waist. "We'll have to see."

"Bill you're not going to tell Mum where I am are you?” Ron asked, suddenly panicked for a whole different reason.

"What, and tell her I left you here, instead of dragging you home?” Bill snorted. "I'm a lot of things. Suicidal isn't one of them. I'm probably not even going to tell Fleur."

"Keeping things from your wife?" Remus quipped. "Not the best way to start a marriage,"

Even Hermione laughed a little at that. Before she could turn to make a dig at Remus for his not-so-well-hidden views on Viktor, which Bill had accidentally-on-purpose let slip, a loud crack interrupted her.

**Visitors**, she thought as her casting hand darted towards the wand in her pocket.

A very frightened man began shrieking and cursing in unholy terror. Remus and Bill exchanged an
ominous look as they recognized the voice of the distressed creature.

“It looks like it’s shaping up to be your lucky day,” her wizard observed as he straightened his spine.

“Can’t say the same for ‘Dung however,” Bill growled as he rose to his feet.

"We're not really going to hurt him are we?” Ron asked plaintively.

"Stop being a fool Ron,” Hermione said sharply. “This is war, not a duelling lesson at Hogwarts,”

***

"He looks comfortable. You're comfortable aren't you, Mr. Fletcher?” Bill asked, circling the cowering mess that was Mundungus Fletcher. The Curse Breaker had shed his cloak upstairs, leaving him in a navy blue button down shirt and dark trousers.

"I swear, I didn't..."

"Already denying things and the real questions haven't even been asked," Remus observed casually, stroking his forefinger down the length of his wand.

The only person not in the cellar was Ron, who had chosen to beg off. From her place against the wall, Hermione observed the proceedings dispassionately.

"Tell us what you told the Death Eaters," Harry said, not bothering with the games the older men seemed intent on playing.

"I didn't tell them anything," Dung lifted himself slightly from where he was kneeling. "I swear, I was as surprised as everyone else that night...”

“Now why is it I don’t believe him?” Remus asked Bill.

“He lacks a certain credibility,” Bill shrugged, twirling his wand. "'Dung, believe it or not, I don't want to hurt you. The problem however, is that I won't abide a traitor either, do you understand? You’ve put me in a very uncomfortable position, and I can’t say I like it,”

"I...please, I..." the man stuttered pathetically.

"You can't deny it can you?” Hermione asked softly. "You told them when we were going to be there. You told them who was assigned to guard Harry,”

The cowering man gazed at her through tear-filled eyes. Beady eyes flicked towards Bill’s unforgiving countenance. Sagging back on his heels, in a cracked voice, Fletcher whispered, “I got stupid...I was afraid, and...and the money was..."

Bill swore aloud, running his fingers through his scarlet hair. Grinding her jaw, Hermione swept her wand in a downward arc. A thin streak of red blossomed on the traitor’s begrimed face, drawing a pitiful cry from between his lips.

No one protested what she did, not even Harry.

"A man is dead because of you," Remus had his wand pointed in Fletcher's face. "George Weasley is scarred for life. Do you know what they did to traitors in the old days Mundungus Fletcher? In the days when Muggles and Wizards lived as one?”
“Remus, please, you’ve always been kind…”

"They hung traitors in cages in public squares, naked as they day they were born,” Remus continued. Slowly, he crouched down and leaned in close.

“It didn't matter if it was summer, or winter. Those...poor, stupid people...they were left to starve, to thirst, to sate the attention of sadists that dwelled on both sides of the magical divide. Only when it was decided that the turncoats had suffered enough...only then, were they whipped through the streets, all the way to the executioner’s block. If the poor wretches were very, very lucky, the man who took their heads knew what he was doing, and their deaths came swiftly. If not...well...I'm sure you can imagine how painful that must have been for those sorry fools, as the blade came down over, and over, and over…”

In wide-eyed horror, Fletcher tried to pull back from the werewolf’s calm gaze.

Hermione tried to understand if she ought to be horrified at the cruelty in Remus’s words; in the way he uttered such terrible things without so much as a tremor of guilt. She tried very hard to recognize in her, anything resembling sympathy for Mundungus Fletcher.

But she couldn't stop thinking of the way Fred looked as he gazed upon his twin, pretending as if he wasn't going to fall apart. Or how pale and afraid Alicia Spinnet had been as she held her husband close, him still dressed in his blood-soaked robes...

Remus had ridden with George that night, she recalled. The man who shared her bed...he had been a hair's breadth from death, all because of this pathetic, snivelling creature shivering before her.

"What else did you tell them?" Bill asked coldly. "What else did you give them that you stole from this place?"

Sobbing, he started speaking. It didn't take very long for all of it to come out, because ultimately, all he had done to give up the date and time of Harry's extraction. He hadn't even given the Enemy their Polyjuice scheme.

All he had taken from 12 Grimmauld, he explained at the end, in heaving, retching gasps, had been jewelry. Nothing but gold, and silver, rubies and emeralds.

"There was a locket," Harry tilted his wand at Fletcher. “What did you do with it?"

“A locket? What..." Fletcher looked confused.

A small jinx was thrown at him, sending him sprawling back; it had come from Bill, who didn't even know what they were truly inquiring after.

"We could encourage you further," Remus said thoughtfully. Without warning, he jammed the tip of his wand into the flesh of Fletcher’s meaty neck.

"I took a lot of things..."

The werewolf offered the trembling man a kindly smile which didn’t reach his grey eyes. In a matter of seconds, Fletcher began to scream in pain. Smoke began drifting from the place where Remus’s wand was touching the traitor’s skin.

"The locket 'Dung, what did you do to the locket?" Harry asked again, sounding strangely gentle.

"I gave it away," Fletcher gasped in pain. "I had no choice, she was going to have me locked up!"
Harry prodded. “Who is she?”

"A woman who works at the ministry!” Mundungus wept like a child. “Ugly she was, squat like a toad…she wore a pink suit, and a large bow!”

Without meaning to, Hermione choked out a soft laugh. Looking over his shoulder, Remus arched an inquiring brow at her.

"We're done here. We know who he gave it to." she lifted the stasis spell she had cast over Fletcher’s legs and arms.

Nodding, Remus unfolded his body and stepped away.

"What should we do with him?” Bill asked quietly, as four pairs of eyes fell on the shivering man in the middle of the cellar.

"As you say, he's the reason Moody is dead, and George is maimed. He sold us, all of us…” Hermione moved to stand before the fallen wizard. “At present, he knows where Harry is. That’s not a good thing is it?”

“I won’t, I swear, I…”

Rolling his eyes, Harry cast a silencing spell at Fletcher.

"I know a place in Egypt. A tomb. Few of us know where it is, and those few, I trust with my very life,” Bill pondered aloud. “I've fought shoulder to shoulder with those people against the fearsome *Djinn*, who raged at us for our daring. A creature like this won't pose any problems for those friends of mine. ‘Dung will be fed and watered, and locked down in this place…and if he grows tiresome, well, the river gods are always hungry…by gods of course, I mean the Nile crocodiles,”

“Portkey?” Hermione wondered.

“In my pocket,” Bill nodded. “Fleur has one too. It’s a worst case scenario precaution.”

“Do you hear that ‘Dung?” Remus said with a toothy grin. “You're going on a trip to Egypt you lucky bastard. You might even get to see some of the wildlife, which I hear is *spectacular*,”

At their feet, the traitor shuddered violently.

"Get yourself together man,” Bill scoffed. "The wounds you've taken today won't even leave a scar,"

***

Ron waited for them at the top of the stairs. Carelessly, Bill levitated an unconscious Fletcher up to the ground floor.

“What did you do to him?” Ron voice took on a vaguely accusatory air.

“Much less than he deserved,” Harry replied coolly, saving Hermione from having to waste further words on the subject.

“What are we going to do now?” Ron asked, a little green in the face. “Surely we’re not going to…”

“He’s going somewhere out of reach,” Bill tapped the man’s forehead and cast a disillusionment
spell over Fletcher. “Somewhere safe,”

“Safe…” Ron repeated faintly.

“Are you lot going to tell me what’s going on with this locket?” Bill asked, speaking to all of them, but looking at Remus.

“No Bill, we’re sorry but…” Harry started.

“What I don’t know, they can’t torture out of me,” the wizard shrugged. “I only wish I could help. If it’s a cursed object, you know I have experience with those.”

Biting her lip, Hermione weighed her options and decided to ask a simple question.

“Is there a fool proof way to destroy any cursed object?”

The unofficial leader of the Order of the Phoenix contemplated her question quite seriously, before saying, “There are few things flame cannot cleanse.”

“Fire?” she sounded skeptical.

“Sometimes regular fire would work,” Bill answered. “There are many types of flames however. Some burn hotter than others. The trick is to control the flame. Easier said than done though - it took me literal years to master the strongest of those charms. I have scars I could show you, as proof of my efforts… but somehow, I think both your husband and my wife might object to that demonstration,”

Remus barked a laugh at that.

The Curse Breaker turned to Ron. “Stay safe yeah? Don’t get yourself killed.”

“That’s not exactly high on my list of priorities,” Ron answered sarcastically, though he relented in the face of Bill’s earnest expression. “You too alright? Promise me you’ll be safe. Congratulations on the baby. I bet Mum’s over the moon,”

“Right,” Bill sounded tired again, as tired as he had been when first he had materialized at the door. “Who would have thought that us Weasley boys would be being entrusted with such important things in this life?”

“No one,” Ron hugged Bill close. “No one with any sense that is, but here we are,”

“Just promise you won’t embarrass me,” Bill ruffled Ron’s hair, before he pulled away and grimaced at the floating body. “I’m off. I have to deal with this waste of space,”

Quickly, he moved towards the front door with Fletcher’s body following lifelessly behind him. Tapping his wand on his own head, Bill faded before their eyes as the disillusionment spell took hold.

The moment he was gone, Hermione sagged into Remus. Out the corner of her eye, she could see that Harry too, looked as if he could have used a supportive hand.

“Let’s get you upstairs,” Remus murmured, holding her carefully.

“Umbridge,” she said instead.

“Pardon?” Remus looked perplexed.
“Dolores Umbridge, she has the locket,”

“Are you sure?” Remus asked uneasily.

“Unfortunately, yes, I am.” Hermione nodded miserably before adding, “That old toad,”

Nobody disagreed with her.

***

They developed a new pattern amongst them.

Each day, two of them would leave the house, leaving the other pair to guard the property, and to pore over books and maps.

The two who left, they relied on disillusionment spells, and *notice-me-not* charms as they escaped the watchful eye of the sentries at their gate; Harry’s invisibility cloak once again became integral to their strategies.

Wandering close to the gates of the Ministry, they searched constantly for a bright pink suit wrapped around a squamous form. Try as they might however, they could see no path which would take them to Dolores Umbridge, in all her odious glory.

Time passed, and a full moon eventually came back around. In the cellar of 12 Grimmauld Place, Remus prowled restlessly in his wolven form.

One floor above, Hermione thumbed through spell books, describing a milieu of magical flames which had been employed throughout history. There were flames used to combat the wrath of dragons, flames used to cleanse caves full of demons…

Alone in the kitchen, Hermione sipped on a cup of herbal tea as she did her best to learn all she could of fire spells. When she fell asleep, she could not tell.

The witch woke at dawn, to find Remus carrying her to bed. She was also wrapped in a red blanket she didn’t remember possessing the night before. Ascending the stairs, the werewolf ripped determinedly at the scarlet fabric with an urgency she didn’t exactly understand.

Pressing her hips into their borrowed mattress, Remus stripped off her nightclothes as he covered her body with his own. Nipping and caressing every last patch of skin he could reach, he spread one large hand over her tender mound and stroked his fingers insistently against the slippery skin of her wet cunt.

“Mine,” he told her in a gravelly voice as he scraped his teeth against her left nipple.

“Yours,” she agreed with a cry as she broke against his knowing touch.

“Mine…” he breathed as he slid inside her. “Mine, as I am yours,”

Falling asleep in his arms in the aftermath of their lovemaking, all memory of a warm red blanket faded from her memories.

***

One morning in the middle of August, Hermione waited impatiently for Harry and Ron to leave the house. Likely, there was nothing prudent in what she had planned, but she couldn’t resist. Against the darkness they were all up against, surely, no one would fault her for wanting a little joy…
The moment the front door shut behind her best friends, the witch approached her husband, who was only just finishing his breakfast in the kitchen.

“Do you know what day it is?” she inquired.

“It’s…a Thursday?” the man frowned up at her in confusion.

“Remus,” she smiled, and stopped.

Setting down his fork, Remus’s handsome face creased in contemplation. Rolling her eyes, Hermione dropped a kiss to the man’s lips.

“Remus John Lupin,” she admonished. “It’s been a whole year. Don’t tell me you’ve truly forgotten,”

“Oh,” his eyes widened in belated understanding. “Oh, I see,”

With a hastily muttered cantrip, Remus’s trousers came undone. Kneeling in front of him, Hermione met the werewolf’s unsteady gaze as she leaned forwards. To her amusement, he didn’t seem to know how to make words, which was a surprisingly pleasant change from the arrogant lover he typically was.

“Happy anniversary darling,” she grinned crookedly from between his thighs…

Much later, in the privacy of their temporary bed chamber, as she traced the shape of protective runes into his naked skin, Hermione murmured very quietly,

“I didn’t choose you then. But now…but now you’re the only one I would choose. I couldn’t want anyone else Remus. Not a one.”

In the overwhelming silence that ensued, Hermione slowly stopped the soft caresses of her wandering fingers. As the seconds ticked past, she found herself growing afraid in a way she had never before experienced.

“This isn’t the life I would have chosen for you.” he said eventually.

Rolling away from Remus, Hermione turned her gaze upwards.

The ceiling above had once been tinted a deep, lush, scarlet. Veins of gold had been threaded through blood-red paint, and if the witch had to guess, the Blacks had used real gold, not paint, to ornament their seat of power. At the height of its glory, the interiors of 12 Grimmauld Place had shone like facets of a gem, by the light of carefully appointed lamps.

Even now in its sorry state, traces of the house’s old magnificence remained. Hints of its old, proud nature still peeked out from under layers of filth and cobwebs.

Despite all of that however, as Hermione contemplated all she had lost, and all she had given away, all she could see as she gazed up at the ceiling was a sucking darkness that wanted to take her whole.

Chapter End Notes
Thinking about this chapter, I apologize a little for the torture scene...just a little anyway. Dung was a traitor from everything I gathered in the books. In real life, traitors typically not treated kindly by either side of the enemy divide...I felt he got off way too easy in canon.

I also didn’t think Remus, with his old war experience, was likely to let this sort of thing slide, good man though he generally is. This iteration of Remus anyway, with the filled in backstory I provided in certain spots...Hermione on the other hand, has always been quite vindictive (ie poor Marietta Edgecombe and her lasting scars on her face)

Warning..things will get a bit darker still in case anyone is still reading after this chapter.
Remus took his time re-discovering the curves and planes that made up Hermione, a year to the date since he had taken her to wife.

Every gasp brought him back to the moment twelve months ago, when first he had lost himself with a speed that should have been impossible. Every shudder brought back in him, the wonder of that first time.

With his hands, his mouth and his cock, he brought her to ecstasy again and again, and recognized in the depths of his lust that he should have simply surrendered to her from the very first.

Wrapped around each other in the afterglow, Remus’s body was still thrumming from the intensity of their lovemaking when Hermione told him, “I didn’t choose you then. But now…but now you’re the only one I would choose. I couldn’t want anyone else Remus. Not a one.”

Taking in her words, Remus wondered at the flood of relief which filled his heart. How long he had been waiting to hear her say those words? To hear her tell him that their union was no blight on her life, and that their marriage was no scar on her existence?

Looking up at the gold-threaded ceiling, what he wanted to say was this:

_I love you. I have loved you since the night you joined your life to mine. I have found in you, the home I have always longed for._

What he found himself saying instead, because it was also true, was, “This isn’t the life I would have chosen for you.”

Because it wasn’t. Hermione hadn’t deserved to be married off at seventeen to a man twice her age. She didn’t deserve to live her life hiding from madmen who wanted her very existence erased.

And she sure as fuck didn’t deserve a wedding anniversary spent under the rotting beams of a house that was filled with nothing but bitter memories.

What she deserved and what she received was so heartbreakingly far apart, it made Remus want to break down in tears for her sake. Hermione deserved the world, and all she received in return was a broken down life, with a broken down werewolf.

In the deafening silence which ensued, the young woman beside him stiffened noticeably. Shifting her body, she left behind a sudden and unwelcome gap between their bodies.

_You’re a the biggest idiot that every idioted_, Sirius whispered in his mind, sounding far more vehement than Remus was used to. Despite being a figment of his imagination, his friend’s voice seemed much angrier than he would have expected.

“Oh should go…read something,” Hermione muttered as she swung her legs off the side of the bed.
“But…” he started as he raised himself to sitting. For some unfathomable reason, Remus unexpectedly began to feel very much like an awkward teenager, who was about to get his heart kicked to shit.

“Remus, just…” Hermione’s voice was tight with something. Shooting him a dark look he absolutely didn’t understand she gritted out, “Stop talking alright?”

Tugging on a pair of un-laundered jeans and a loose sweater, the witch muttered, “Get it together Granger, seriously.”

Alone under a pile of rapidly cooling sheets, Remus tried to make sense of what just happened.

***

Remus continued not understanding anything, and he very much didn’t like it.

In the days that followed their anniversary, though they slept next to each other, Hermione always lay just out of reach of his arms. When the four of them read together in the library, she made sure to place herself on the other side of the room. Far on the other side.

In an effort to reach her, whenever they were alone in the house, Remus had knelt at her feet and he had worshipped her as fervently as he could. He had kissed her and touched her until she was gasping his name and breathing him in, only him…

He listened for her gasps and her whimpers, her cries and her pleas, and he gave her everything.

In the heat of those moments, his hope had been that every peak would bring her back to him.

Yet somehow, despite their passionate moments, still he found himself watching from the sidelines with jealous eyes as she fussed over Harry.

Harry and only bloody Harry.

Not even Ron received the same amount of attention and care…though he supposed that part wasn’t entirely unexpected. Ron and Hermione were after all, constantly immersed in a war all their own.

In silence, he observed the easy way Harry touched Hermione’s hands, the way James’s son looked upon his wife with barely hidden ardour. He saw how she smiled at Harry with undisguised affection, how she bestowed upon the other wizard, her complete focus…

In his heart of hearts, Remus knew that Hermione did not love Harry - not like that and not in the present. Yet, observing the way they became lost in their own little world, the older wizard found himself beginning to wonder if she could love Harry…which frankly, still didn’t seem that far outside of the realm of possibility.

Sirius himself, in one of his last lucid moments, had once remarked in surprise that Harry had yet to make a move on Hermione.

“She’s Lily reborn - surely you must see that,” Sirius had observed, gesturing with a glass of cheap Sherry as he spoke. “Bossy, pretty, clever…”

“Our opinions don’t count. We see Lily and James in everyone,” Remus had replied with a small chuckle as he played with a sprig of holly Sirius had charmed into sparkling softly. “There are similarities, I’ll give you that at least. Regardless, Harry has plenty of time to make a move on
Miss Granger yet, and don’t pretend you’re not glad he’s not James, who practically stalked his poor lady-love into marriage. Those two would have beautiful children however, what with his green eyes and her lovely curls…”

“Miss Granger’s a bit young for you to be noticing her lovely curls,” Sirius had teased. The other man’s calm mirth, Remus recalled, had taken years off his ravaged face. “Though…is Moony finally noticing girls again? Alert the presses, they must be informed at once,”

“Ah yes, I can see the headlines now. ‘Thirty-Something Werewolf Seeks a Bride’,” Remus had laughed as he sipped from his own drink. “Women will be lining up at my door with marriage proposals,”

That Christmas, Molly hadn’t known that it was him who had sneaked the bottle of Sherry into the townhouse, for the express purpose of sharing it with his best friend. Later, Remus would regret that small act of rebellion when he heard the mocking whispers about Sirius’s inebriation. Later, he would wonder why their friends thought it so shameful for a grown man to imbibe, especially considering the circumstances under which Sirius existed.

The memory of that December afternoon now made Remus sick to his stomach, for more than one reason alone.

In the entire year they had been married, it hadn’t occurred to Remus that there would come a day when he might truly lose his witch. Those months he spent hiding from his own desires, he had known deep in his heart that Hermione had wanted him back, that he wasn’t alone in his feelings. Now however…now when she looked at him with her distant dark eyes, Remus could plainly see the beginnings of a chasm between them.

Had they the luxury of time and even liberty, Remus would have taken the necessary steps to insinuate himself back to a place where Hermione looked at him as if he were the only man she could ever want.

But how could he build a bridge when he had no idea where to even start?

***

One morning, Hermione followed Harry out of the house under the protective confines of the Invisibility Cloak.

Harry had been almost defiant when he asked Hermione to accompany him that day, to hold their so-far pointless vigil at the gates of the Ministry. Green eyes had flashed angrily at Ron, as if daring his friend to say something.

James’s son had thought to spare him a guilty look at least, but Hermione hadn’t bothered bidding him any sort of a farewell. How the werewolf had managed to hold his tongue, Remus would never recall, but remain silent he did.

Alone with Ron, Remus tried to fight off the mental image of Harry and Hermione huddling together underneath the limited confines of that blasted cloak, but his efforts amounted to nothing. In his fevered imagination, he envisioned their bare hands brushing up against each other’s, as the two of them fumbled in the shadows, always on the verge of getting caught…

Useless as he was in the library of 12 Grimmauld Place, the wizard mentally recounted with seething annoyance, the conversation he had overhead the day before. It was the discussion which had prompted Harry to pick Hermione instead of Ron for his next watch at the Ministry, of that
Remus had no doubt.

Ron and Harry had sequestered themselves in the attic, mistakenly believing that they would not be heard from there. It still astounded Remus how naive the boys could be.

“…she’s still waiting for you,” Ron had spat bitterly. “While you’re here, making eyes at another girl,”

“For the record, I never asked Ginny to wait…and I don’t know what the hell you’re talking about with the other stuff,” Harry had retorted.

“Oh give it up Harry. I’ll bet you a hundred galleons Remus knows you’ve been sniffing around his woman.” Ron had warned.

“His woman? Ron, for the last time, Hermione’s not bloody property,” Harry hissed.

No, Hermione wasn’t property, Remus had silently agreed. But Harry was in complete denial if he honestly thought the witch in question wasn’t his.

Upstairs, the Boy Who Lived continued his angry tirade.

“That’s exactly what you have always failed to understand, Ron, which is why you never made it work with her. Just a tip mate, if I were you, I’d watch that sort of talk around Luna,”

“What goes on between myself and Luna is none of your business,”

“You stuck your nose in mine, so why shouldn’t I do the same in return?” Harry demanded.

“Regardless. Even if I did want Hermione, so what? She doesn’t…she doesn’t see me. I don’t think she will ever see me as anything more than a friend, so don’t go talking about things you don’t understand,”

This was followed by the sound of a slamming door, though it didn’t take a genius to know who had left the conversation so rudely and angrily.

In the library, Ron dozed off in his chair. Unwilling to put up with the boy’s snoring, the werewolf locked himself in the cellar and focused on finding some measure of peace…and on willing another transformation into the body of his wolf.

***

The moment the front door slammed shut, Remus didn’t waste a single second. Sweeping Hermione back to the privacy of the room they shared, he took her frantically and urgently, until all traces of Harry was nothing more than a lingering memory on her skin.

“What’s gotten into you?” she asked when it was over, blinking up at him in genuine concern.

“You,” he admitted as he ran his fingers over her soft cheek. “Always you,”

“Oh?” Hermione asked softly.

“Yes,” he promised, before he kissed her deeply.

“What else could it be? I want you all the time,”

“Want me,” she laughed softly. Remus didn’t miss the bitter edge in that sound. “Professor, if you don’t mind, I have work to do,”
Wrenching herself away, Hermione left Remus alone once more, with only his misery for company…misery and finally, an inkling of what he had done wrong.

***

Outside the four walls of 12 Grimmauld Place, Muggle-borns continued to be rounded up for questioning. Severus Snape had been promoted to the post of Headmaster of Hogwarts, and Bill… Bill was off doing whatever it was leaders of secret resistances did, in the middle of a war.

"Has the world gone completely mad?" Hermione muttered as she tucked herself in bed. “How is Hogwarts still open? Why would any sane parent allow their child to return to that castle?"

His witch was wearing one of his old Joy Division t-shirts; that, and a blue pair of cotton knickers. In her hands, she held on to the same novel she'd filched from his personal library - the one she had deemed to be ‘nonsense’ when first she set eyes upon it.

Observing the pretty picture she made, Remus couldn't help but feel just that tiniest bit chuffed. Hermione's journey into literary fiction had started because of him and no one else.

"I rather suspect truancy will now be punished with a well place crucio," he observed as he climbed into bed.

"I never thought I'd say this, but it seems I'm living in a dystopia of sorts," Hermione grumbled as she tried to find her page.

"Look at you, throwing around science fiction terminology," Remus teased. The wizard knew well, the reason she was currently being especially ornery. Grown man though he was, he couldn't help feeling pettily glad that the object of her ire was currently Harry.

"We can't just keep sitting here doing nothing," the boy wizard had told the witch not four hours ago, as he curled his fingers around Hermione's wrist. "We're going in tomorrow."

“You’re not serious? Are we not even going to discuss things properly?” Hermione had shaken Harry’s hand away in annoyance. “This isn’t sane. If you’re so desperate to get yourself caught, why don't we just wrap you up in some shiny paper and floo you into You-Know-Who's drawing room? I’ll even put a big red bow on your head,”

“I think you’ll find that Tom Riddle would prefer a green-coloured bow,” Harry joked, which only enrag ed the witch further. “Anyway, we are discussing things. This is the discussion. ‘Mione, we can’t afford to sit around waiting for a Horcrux to fall into our laps…not when we know who holds one, and where that toad can be found,”

Outside of his own dissatisfaction with Harry’s blatant need to constantly be at Hermione’s elbow, Remus found himself agreeing heartily with the other wizard. The werewolf was growing tired of achieving exactly nothing despite all their considerable efforts.

"A disillusionment charm might work," Remus said contemplatively as he casually tugged Hermione away from Harry and into his arms. Green eyes darkened to an unfamiliar shade as the younger man glared at his old mentor. “Though I suppose they’ll have wards against that sort of thing at the Ministry,”

"Or," Ron said, munching on one of the chocolate biscuits Kreacher had taken to baking. Whatever the other three had done, the wretched elf now seemed intent to feeding them to death. "Polyjuice Potion?"
Automatically - their rivalry momentarily forgotten - both Harry and he had shared a look of deep
disdain as they considered that vile potion.

“I suppose that will have to do,” Remus said at last. Peering down at Hermione, the werewolf
inquired cautiously, ”I don't suppose I could convince you to stay back?”

"If we're going to die, at least let’s go at it together,” Fixing everyone an ominous look that
promised she wasn’t done being furious, Hermione had proceeded to stomp off towards the kitchen
where her cauldron sat.

Now, in their borrowed bed, the witch sniffed irritably.

“Yes, ‘dystopia’. I can even spell that word out for you if you like,” she told him rather haughtily.
“Tasty” I happen to like science-fiction films,”

Remus hadn't known that. For whatever reason, he had never thought to ask what films she liked,
when really, it was something he should have done a long time ago.

"I suppose sometime, when all this is over, we could watch one together,” he said, holding his
breath. Ludicrous to think he was

scared

of his wife’s answer to such a simple question. Ridiculous
to consider that they had never done anything so mundane as to go to the cinema together.

"I would...I would like that,” Hermione murmured.

“We could get popcorn,” he smiled tentatively. “Maybe even a candy bar,”

“Oh,” her eyes glazed over slightly as she considered the prospect of sweets.

With a mischievous smile, knowing her parents would never have allowed her anything actually
tasty, he asked, “You like Maltesers I hope,”

“I’ve never had those. Mum never let me buy candy at the cinema,” she admitted. “Not even
chocolate covered raisins…”

“I’ll fix that,” Remus promised, feeling faintly horrified. “I’ll buy you so much candy, they’ll have
to find a winch to lift you out of your seat,”

Grinning, Hermione leaned over and pressed her lips to the corner of his mouth. Resisting the urge
to deepen their kiss, curiously Remus glanced down at the chapter she was reading.

“Aren’t you finished with the book yet?" he wondered, tucking himself closer to her side. “You’re
taking an awfully long time,”

“We’ve been busy, in case you haven’t noticed. Also, I take back what I said. Eddard cannot take
the Iron Throne,” Hermione settled back into her mountain of pillows. "He's got a stick up his arse
the length of the English channel, and he’s actually very stupid under his veneer of honour,”

“Who would you nominate to rule Westeros then?" Remus asked curiously.

"I don't know. Jon’s a bit mopey...I suppose Joffrey mightn't be so bad..."

Remus sat up, disturbed. Clearly, she hadn't reached the end of the novel. Either that, or she was
joking.

“Oh for Merlin’s…Joffrey’s a little shit. He's Draco Malfoy with an army,” Hermione giggled at
the expression of relief Remus wore with heartfelt sincerity. "Now let me read a bit so I can forget
the fact that we're all likely going to die tomorrow."

"Hermione..." the man stopped, wondering if he ought to speak what was on his mind. 

*She’s right - you might be dead by this time tomorrow. So say something meaningful, idiot, Sirius’s voice was genial this time.*

Despite his best try however, Remus still found himself incapable of uttering aloud, certain fundamental truths.

The problem was that everyone he had ever loved tended to die. They all died cruel, horrible, lonely deaths. What was the point in expressing something so pointless as love, when it always came to nothing anyway?

"I wish you wouldn't come with us," he said at last. "I can't bear the thought of you getting hurt,"

Very stiffly, Hermione replied, "I appreciate what you're saying. But my decision is non-negotiable,"

In the blink of an eye, all traces of their tenderness had disappeared once again.

Resigned to his fate, Remus flopped onto his back and shut his eyes. In doing so, he missed the wistful look Hermione cast his way, though certainly, he heard her breathy sigh.

It wasn’t very long before the witch set the book aside. With a simple ‘Nox’, she engulfed the room in darkness.

To Remus’s pleasant surprise, Hermione snuggled in close. Slender arms and legs wrapped around him like he was a giant stuffed bear, and chestnut curls tickled at his nose.

Gathering what words he could offer, Remus murmured, “You do know that you are everything to me. You’re my entire world, as a matter of fact,"

In the inky dark, Hermione laughed.

"Remus John Lupin..." she said softly. “You are honestly the *most* infuriating man I know. Not Ron, not Harry…you,"

Raising herself up on one elbow, Hermione leaned over and captured his mouth in a kiss filled with sweetness, longing and affection.

Returning her fervour, he crushed her small body against his own.

“I’m sorry.” he peppered her face with kisses as he rushed to fix what gaps were left between them. “I’m sorry, I’m so sorry…”

“Shush,” she chided softly. “I don’t care. There are more important things. I shouldn’t have tried to force a conversation, not right now when we have a thousand catastrophes to deal with…”

“There isn’t anything more important,” he said against her skin. “Not to me…”

“You silly, silly man,” she told him. “My *idiot* husband,”

Grinning foolishly, Remus forgot for a few hours that they were on the cusp of what was most likely, certain death.
Remus glared in disgust at the Dark Mark on his arm.

When first he had stunned the Ministry worker and dragged him into the alley, he hadn’t thought to identify the man. Not until it was far too late, anyhow.

It was only after Remus’s body had twisted and changed itself, and he found his arm thusly tattooed, that he thought to take a good look at the face of the wizard he had subdued…the face he now wore, that is.

Gazing down at the visage of Corban-bloody-Yaxley, Remus choked back a howl of absolute fury.

“We have to hurry,” Hermione urged. The clothing she was slipping into - they belonged apparently, to a woman named Mafalda Hopkirk.

Angrily, Remus stripped the motionless Death Eater. He took care to properly bruise the man as yanked away billowing black robes. Removing the dark wizard’s shirt, the man made sure to bounce the pillock’s skull hard against the filthy ground.

Slipping his arms into the finest fabric he had ever worn his entire life, the werewolf felt horribly sullied.

“Ugh,” Ron winced as he looked down at his own shabby disguise. “Can’t we have picked better-looking people?”

“Don’t be vain Ronald,” Hermione tried to sound commanding. The tremor in her voice rather ruined the effect.

Off to the side, Harry eyed his accomplices with horrified fascination. Restless hands toyed at his father’s invisibility cloak, betraying his own fraying nerves.

Hermione patted self-consciously at Mafalda’s greying hair with trembling hands. Without thinking, Remus reached a comforting hand out towards her, with every intention of soothing away her worry.

To his chagrin, Hermione flinched away as if she were afraid of him. Belatedly, he understood that the reason for her fear, was the same reason he was furious at the body he was now inadvertently wearing. Indeed, the hideous Dark Mark was peeking out from under his sleeve.

“I’m s…sorry,” she stuttered. “It’s just…”

In the time since they’d been together, Remus had never truly seen Hermione afraid. Angry and nervous, yes…afraid, however…

No.

Huffing in frustration, the werewolf turned from the group, and grunted, “Let’s get this over with,”

Marching towards the entrance of the Ministry, Remus steeled his resolve for the imminent onslaught.
The Marriage: Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

A/N: First of all, if you're still reading this story, I want to thank you for sticking around. I realize I totally meander. Honestly, I am super appreciative of every last comment!

Second, I will probably keep posting to the bitter end of this tale (unless you know, aliens invade and they cut off my wi-fi connection)...because I made a personal promise to myself never to leave a fic WIP...though hell, this is the longest fanfic I have every written. Gah.

Trigger Warning: Mentions of suicidal thoughts and contemplations of methods. If you are the sort of person who might be affected by this, I suggest skipping the centre portion of this chapter and going to the last section to get caught up.

Warning: I took liberties with canonical conversations
Warning: Character death ahead (not one of the four main characters!)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When first Remus had heard of the horrors Hogwarts had endured under the rule of Dolores Umbridge, the wizard had wondered if perhaps the rumours weren’t all being wildly exaggerated for effect. In hindsight, he should have known that Hermione at the very least, wasn’t the type of person to indulge in random flights of fancy.

Five minutes into meeting Umbridge, Remus decided that the woman was every bit as vile and awful as any monstrous creature he had ever encountered, and which thrived in the shadows.

“What a stroke of luck it was that I ran into you Mr. Yaxley,” the toad-like creature simpered as she waddled towards himself and Hermione in the newly renovated lobby of the Ministry. Stopping before him, she patted at her hair and flashed him a smile which he knew, was meant to be coquettish. “I was just beginning to worry I might not have the pleasure of your company for today’s hearings.”

The witch was flirting, Remus realized. Without meaning to, his bottom lip curved downwards in blatant disdain. Offering Umbridge a disgruntled grunt, he fell in step with her. Thankfully, it didn’t seem odd to the older woman that Hermione was trailing behind the both of them, in the guise of Mafalda Hopkirk.

For all her faults, the wizard couldn’t deny that the one-time Headmistress of Hogwarts was right - it was indeed a stroke of luck that their quarry had basically offered herself up within minutes of their arrival. Flicking his gaze surreptitiously this way and that, Remus tried not to consider that he had no idea what both him and Hermione was supposed to do next. The original plan had been to find Umbridge’s office…

The batrachian woman kept up a steady stream of chatter, seemingly unbothered by her companion’s sulking silence.
On and on she went, about the most boring of topics, so much so that Remus began to wonder if being evil was actually as glamorous as twats like Lucius Malfoy always made it out to be. Based on everything he was hearing, the business of running a cruel regime sounded like it was filled with the exciting business of obtaining signatures and sending memos.

There was however, some noticeable form of dark magic wafting from the woman like a repugnant miasma…

Apropos of nothing, or perhaps atrocity had simply become so mundane that it fit in easily with the subject of filing and office birthday pools, the squat woman began speaking on the solutions the new Ministry had recently put in place, to deal with the Muggle-born problem.

“The effort to locate and bring these thieves to justice has been going very well,” Umbridge tittered proudly.

“The only trouble of course, is the effort we’ve have to expend towards this worthy cause. I’m putting together a proposal that will help us process these individuals faster. With the right signatures, soon, we won’t even need a hearing. Indeed, I have put new researchers in place, looking into methods we can use to identify Muggle-borns simply by the sound of their voice alone - did you know, these animals have a unique signature all their own? Whatever it is, the process of eliminating these unwanted creatures from our society is about to become so much more efficient. Mr. Yaxley, I’m sure you’d agree - we are truly lucky to live in such a wondrous age!”

“Efficient…wondrous…” Remus echoed as he fought off a wave of nausea. Out the corner of his eye, he watched as Hermione’s cheeks turned an ashen grey.

“Oh I knew you would agree Mr. Yaxley! Or if I may, Corban,” Umbridge giggled as she placed a plump hand on his arm. “Mr. Yaxley is fine,” he gritted out.

Something gold and thick flashed garishly out from under Umbridge’s pink collar as they passed through a set of heavy wooden doors. The sight of it made Remus horribly uneasy, and he began to suspect what it was which lay at the end of that golden chain the woman wore.

“Oh Corban, you are so funny,”

Fighting the urge to gag, Remus smiled tightly.

Turning a corner, the temperature dropped abruptly. Shuddering, the wizard found himself looking upon a tableau that almost caused him to swear aloud.

Dementors floated about the room, hovering over several people who cowered under the scrutiny of their captors. Without exception, the individuals seated on long hard benches all looked drawn and exhausted. Palpable despair rolled off their hunched forms in thick, dark waves, so much so that Remus could practically taste their boundless dread.

“Are all these creatures necessary?” Remus demanded bluntly as the squat figure beside him cast a Patronus. Not to protect her prisoners of course, but simply to clear a path through the looming demons.

Umbridge sighed, sounding horribly put-upon as she did so.

“I tried to tell the others that all we really needed were two Dementors. These numbers are a such a waste of resources,”
The fury building in Remus’s chest threatened to boil over, even as hopelessness and misery began to sour his belly. Considering the life he had led, the man had always found it far too easy to slip into a dark abyss of melancholy…and the presence of Dementors always hastened that descent.

Already, his mind was dredging up memories of sitting alone at his dining table, with only a bottle of whiskey and a canister of pills for company.

Alprazolam, was what the label on the plastic container read.

While he was no expert at non-magical medicine, Remus had done enough research to know what those pills did, and what happened when you mixed a heavy dose of it with alcohol.

At one point in his life, whiskey and pills had both tempted him constantly into taking that final step. It had been mesmerizing, the way they silently called to him, the way they quietly promised one last magical journey that would remove him from all his grief and his loss…

As Umbridge turned from him, Remus was startled out of his meandering, crushing thoughts by the feel of Hermione squeezing hard at his limp hand.

Comforted by his witch’s simple assurance, Remus longed to pull her close if only to calm himself with the very scent of the witch. Risking a glance, he found to his alarm, a woman absolutely frozen with terror.

The woman he loved was brave. Exceptionally so. She had faced his unfettered wolf when she was much younger, and despite that episode, had still thought nothing of trusting him with her very life.

Being brave however, was not the same as being fearless. Granted, only an imbecile would be fearless in this situation.

It was the knowledge that Hermione was incredibly close to breaking down, which dragged Remus from the all consuming pit of blackness which had so threatened to overwhelm him only a minute ago.

Taking a deep breathe, Remus tugged firmly at Hermione’s elbow, practically forcing her to resume the long walk through the crowd of ravenous demons and their hapless prey. In his mind, he was no longer praying for success. The only thing he wanted now, was for them all to make it out of this hellhole without succumbing to further darkness.

***

“They’re frightened. They think I might not come home,” Mary Cattermole whimpered in the stand. Two Dementors hovered closely behind her. Scabbed hands twitched covetously in her direction, as they fed off every last ounce of the woman’s hope.

All it would take was one moment of carelessness, and those floating, hideous nightmares would administer their ghastly kiss to everyone in the room, including Dolores Umbridge.

“As long as we get what we came here for, your children have nothing to fear,” the wizard chose his words carefully, while keeping his face blank of his true sentiments.

Before himself and Hermione, Umbridge’s patronus strode back and forth, warding them from the worst of the Dementors’ effects.

“Hem hem…” Umbridge shuffled some papers. “A wand was taken from you upon your arrival at the Ministry today Mrs. Cattermole, eight and three quarter inches, cherry, with a unicorn hair
core. Do you recognize that description?"

The bound woman nodded tearfully.

“Could you tell us from which witch or wizard you took that wand?”

The doors behind them fluttered open and shut, though no one appeared to have entered, nor left. Taking in a small breathe, the werewolf nodded slightly in relief.

_Harry._

On the stand, Mary cried as she stuttered, “I…It…chose me!”

Hermione’s hand was fisted around her quill so tightly, Remus wondered if her knuckles would break through skin.

Deciding enough was enough, one hand reached for his wand. Focusing his thoughts, he raised his wand and caused a silver wolf to float into the open. In satisfaction, the wizard watched as his lupine _patronus_ stalked towards the Dementors with its teeth bared in a fierce, practically audible snarl.

“….wands only choose witches or wizards. And you are no…” Umbridge trailed off as Remus stood up and loomed over her.

“_Stupefy,_” Remus hissed. In satisfaction, he watched as she fell over. Reaching for the gold chain under her collar, the werewolf ripped at the gaudy thing. Staring down at his prize, he took in the sight of a gold locket, inlaid with emerald stones set in the shape of an ‘S’.

Someone’s voice whispered in his mind, and it didn’t belong to Sirius. The voice called him by name.

Hastily, Remus extended the locket towards a speechless Hermione, who took the thrice-damned thing away from him.

Coming back into awareness, the werewolf saw that James’s son had cast his own _Patronus_ and he was already moving to free Mary Cattermole. Quickly, Harry guided the sobbing woman out of the courtroom. In the process, he left behind only Hermione and Remus…and Dolores Umbridge.

“Remus,” Hermione said quietly. Tilting his chin, Remus took in the cold, deadly light in the witch’s eyes. “Move aside. We can’t have her telling her cronies we took the necklace,”

“No,” he said as he recognized Hermione’s true intentions. Crouching down, the man pointed his wand at a wide-eyed and frightened Umbridge.

For a moment, she looked like a frail, old woman who was truly confused as to why she was being subjected to such punishment.

Then, the man recalled what Umbridge had told him as they hurried towards the courtroom.

“We are truly _lucky_ to live in such a wondrous age,”

With Mary Cattermole’s sobs still echoing through his mind, a bright green spark flew from Remus’s hand, and it hit the older witch square in her chest.

Umbridge’s wide eyes grew blank; her jaw fell slack.
Rising to his feet, Remus grabbed for Hermione’s hand. Together, they left the courtroom and joined Harry out in the hallway, where the Dementors were being held at bay by the force of his silvery stag.

“All good?” Harry asked, oblivious to what had just occurred.

Instead of answering, Hermione cast her own Patronus.

“‘Mione!” Harry uttered in surprise. “What happened to your otter?”

“Not now Harry!” the witch said impatiently. “I’ll explain later,”

Shoving aside that familiar queasy feeling at the back of his mind, Remus turned his full attention towards escape.

***

The ensuing half hour was filled with pure chaos as they fled through the Ministry.

Somehow, they managed to locate Ron, though later, Remus would never remember how it happened. There had been far too much excitement exploding all at once, and it didn’t help that upon re-appearing on the front stoop of 12 Grimmauld Place, Hermione immediately snagged all of them, and whirred them away in an ambitious side-along…

Too ambitious.

By the time Remus caught his bearings, he found himself someplace green and unfamiliar…and surrounded by the smell of blood.

Lots of blood.

***

“I’m sorry, I’m so sorry…” Hermione repeated as she tended to a bloodied Ron.

The four of them were in the middle of a small clearing, in a forest far from human civilization.

Remus and Harry exchanged exasperated glances. It was hard to tell what the witch was apologizing for, considering she seemed to be blaming herself for everything which had gone wrong during their mission.

Hermione apologized for accidentally betraying 12 Grimmauld to the Enemy; for splinching poor Ron; for not anticipating every last curse that had been thrown at them as they fled.

“Will you also be apologizing for the sinking of the Titanic? Perhaps you’re to blame as well, for not having been born early enough that you could have spotted that damned iceberg…” Remus quipped, when at last she stopped for breath.

“Moony, you’re not nearly as funny as you think you are,” the woman scowled.

“And you’re not as responsible for everything as you believe you are,” he pointed out drily.

Ignored as he was, Remus reached for her ridiculous beaded bag. Pointing his wand at the small opening, he summoned his clothing from somewhere within its murky depths. With a quick wave of his wand, the werewolf found himself clad once more in his own, worn belongings…all of which felt a thousand times better than the ruined silks of a Death Eater.
“I should have kept my wits about me,” Hermione sounded fatigued as she wiped Ron’s blood from her hands. “I should have spotted the fact that we were being followed.”

“Mione,” Ron winced in pain. “Don’t take this the wrong way, but you’re under some sort of impression that the rest of us were all cool as cucumbers,”

“You can’t shoulder everything,” Harry added with a decisive nod. “If you hadn’t had the presence of mind to apparate us out of there as fast as you did, who knows what else could have happened?”

Knowing Hermione wasn’t yet ready to listen to reason, the wizard summoned from the bag, tents which the witch had purchased weeks ago.

Picking up a small, square package, Remus still remembered the day his witch had first shown him what she had obtained from the camping section at Wiseacre’s. Somewhat sheepishly, he recalled how he had laughingly told her that there could never have been any use for such expensive frivolities…

“Ron, stop squirming, you’ll undo all my work,” Hermione ordered as she began to pace.

Gazing upwards, she twirled her wand in an intricate pattern and began murmuring softly under her breath. Parsing through her Latin incantations, Remus understood quickly, what it was Hermione was trying to achieve. Setting aside the packages in his hand, the wizard drew his wand and cast several traps at the peripheries of the protective dome his witch had only just erected.

On the off-chance their enemies breached her powerful wards, they would not breach those thresholds unscathed.

“What’s that you have there,” Harry asked curiously, ambling over to look at the packages Remus had left on the ground.

“Tents,” Remus explained. “Hermione’s thought of everything.”

“Blimey, so she has,” Harry marvelled.

Off to the side, the witch in question shook her head as she pondered their campsite.

“Unless anyone has a better idea, unfortunately, all of this is likely the best we can do for now,” Hermione groused as she stomped towards her beaded bag. “Though if Volde…”

“Don’t say it!” Ron interrupted in a panic. “Don’t say that name!”

Harry and Hermione shot each other a look of consternation. Remus, on the other hand, tilted his head as pieces of a puzzle began to fit together in his mind.

“I’m sorry but…that name feels like a…a jinx…” Ron continued sheepishly.

“That’s because it is,” Remus sighed, feeling like an old fool as he pinched the bridge of his nose. “Fucking Riddle has made that name into a bloody Taboo. Christ, how could I have missed something so obvious?”

“Oh! That night at the diner…” Hermione snapped her fingers as understanding dawned across her wan features.

“Will someone please share with the rest of the class?” Harry asked impatiently. “What’s this got to do with Vol…”
“Stop!” Hermione whirred to look at her best friend. “Don’t you see? That name is what summoned Dolohov and Rowle to the diner the night of Bill’s wedding. The Dark Lord knows that we have no fear of his name - no doubt because Professor Dumbledore has always made it such a point that we should speak it fearlessly,"

Harry’s jaw tightened, while Ron simply looked aghast.

“It’s not the end of the world,” Remus said at last.

“All right then,” Harry allowed himself a tight smile. “I suppose we’ll just need to refer to Riddle by his actual, given name,"

“If that gets old, I suppose ‘Cockface’ might work,” Hermione said absently as she began setting up camp.

All three wizards stared at her.

“What?” she asked blankly. “Arseface? Is that better?”

Staring up at the green canopy above, Remus wondered very seriously if Hermione had thought to pack any whiskey.

***

In the dim interior of their new tent, Remus did his best to focus on the text in front of him.

Their collection of books had only grown since their brief stay at 12 Grimmauld Place, where several tomes had been filched from the Black library; every last volume was currently stored in the ugly pouch Hermione carted around, which contained just about everything they owned.

These days, there was even a portrait of a dead headmaster somewhere within the bag’s the shadowy confines. Hermione had stashed the ridiculous thing away with the intention of using Phineas Nigellus as her own personal spy into the Headmaster’s office at Hogwarts, should the need ever arise.

Through a thick layer of canvas, Remus listened as his witch argued with Harry over his newly conceived course of action - that is, his decision to wear the locket they had all risked their lives to retrieve.

Listening to Harry’s muffled and defensive words, the older wizard couldn’t help but think: the locket was the antithesis of life itself.

The Horcrux felt like entropy and corruption, and it scraped at his mind like the edge of a sharp rock against living flesh. Even now, the damned thing whispered to him at the peripheries of his conscious thought. Underneath his skin, Remus’s wolf bucked and snapped, and he wanted nothing more than to reach for his witch if only to whisk the both of them as far away from that unnatural object as they could humanly get.

Except of course, he couldn’t - that locket had been the whole point of their disastrous mission.

To think the Umbridge woman had worn a Horcrux around her neck for weeks. The only way anyone could have lived with such a thing, was if the person was already rotten to the core…

Dolores Umbridge, who was now quite dead.
Seated on the not-uncomfortable pallet, Remus put away the book he was pretending to read. Bracing his elbows on his knees, he buried his face in his hands.

To Remus’s left, the tent entrance fluttered open as Hermione stepped in. Sealing the flap, she moved to sit down next to him. Nudging him with her right shoulder, the woman joked, “You don’t look so well. Was it dinner? I know it wasn’t exactly the best meal you’ve ever had but…”

Curling an arm around her waist, Remus slumped into the witch’s side. “We just stole into the Ministry of Magic, liberated assets and prisoners and…I…well, you know what I did,”

Hermione said nothing. Gently, she reached up and swept the tips of her fingers over his cheekbones.

“What you did today to that horrible woman…what you did, was far more merciful than my own, previously flawed attempt at ending her life,”

Belatedly, Remus recalled that Hermione had in fact, once left Dolores Umbridge to the brutal, rapine mercies of the Centaurs.

Rubbing at his forehead, Remus said quietly, “Please understand that I don’t truly regret killing her. She was truly an evil person if ever there was one. But today was simply another horrible reminder of the times we currently live in,”

“It’s not forever,” Hermione murmured.

Carding his fingers through her loose braid, Remus pressed his forehead against her own.

“For your sake, I’ll likely do it again. I can’t bear the thought of someone trying to hurt you, and that woman would have. Dolores Umbridge would have murdered you with a smile upon her face as she declared your death an acceptable sacrifice for the better world she was building”

“My sweet wolf-man,” his witch sighed in response as she cupped at his cheeks. “If you must know…I wouldn’t hesitate to hurt and to kill anyone who tried to take you,”

Swallowing hard, Remus nodded, and took a breath.

Chapter End Notes

Just a reminder: suicide should never be considered a solution to someone's problems. Things might look dire for a moment, but life goes through series of bends and turns. If in doubt, listen to:

Yeasayer - Ambling Alp

Which got me through some really bad moments in my life.

Or whichever song cheers you up :)

As a commenter kindly and respectfully pointed out, suicidal thoughts are a complex issue. While I have mentioned music as therapy above, I do wholeheartedly agree that seeking professional help is key to helping you through something as serious as this.
Per my initial A/N, please talk to someone about suicide if it’s on your mind. **Can’t stress this part enough.**

Again, if you're still reading, thanks! Things will start gradually lightening up as this story moves along from this point...I mean, yes, Ron will still be a dick but certain things are fixed-points.
For most of his life, Remus found himself attuned to his surroundings in a preternaturally sensitive way most of his peers couldn’t begin to comprehend. The slightest change in the air, the shift in the breeze, the smell of trees as they budded in the springtime…all of it eased his way in a world that was otherwise lonely and occasionally, cruel.

Though most of wizardkind regarded werewolves as unnatural symbols of rot and corruption, almost all lycanthropes understood at a very fundamental level, that they were agents of nature herself.

Which was why for the rest of his time on earth, Remus would never forget what it was like to have something as wrong as a Horcrux in such close proximity to his very soul.

In accordance with the rest of nature, the werewolf wanted nothing more than to expel the damned thing back to the depths of hell, where it rightfully belonged.

***

“With Ollivander missing and Gregorovitch dead, it’ll be a wonder if Hogwarts can survive another year,” Remus observed mildly, following Harry’s latest report from yet another forced sojourn through the Dark Lord’s mind. “I must admit, Riddle’s obsession with the wandmakers….that’s…interesting to say the least…”

Shadowed green eyes glared back at him in open resentment.

Dropping his chin, Harry’s emerald gaze narrowed as he studied the way Remus’s fingers were twined with Hermione’s own. Shifting irritably under the younger wizard’s scrutiny, the man unconsciously tightened his grip on his witch’s hand.

“Harry…” Hermione sounded concerned. “You said Tom couldn’t defeat you the night we came for you. You said the wand he used against you failed…might I take a look at your wand? If you don’t mind that is…”

For a split-second, Harry appeared almost murderous as he turned his hate-filled focus upon his best friend.

Remus counted to ten, praying desperately that the former Gryffindor Seeker wouldn’t do anything stupid. The last thing he wanted to do, was to hurt James’s boy…

Close by, Ron dithered nervously. Blue eyes darted from face to face, as if he was having trouble trying to understand whose side he should actually be on. As if he was confused by the notion that he had to choose sides at all.
Finally - after far, far too long - Harry passed Hermione his wand.

“We’re going to need to do something about this…” Hermione studied the object in her hand. “Nothing overly dramatic - just cosmetic. This is really just another way to conceal your identity… after all, I have no doubt Riddle knows what wand it is you own,”

With a minor transfiguration spell, Hermione completed the disguise. The second she was finished with her task however, Harry snatched his wand from her with more force than was strictly necessary.

Curling her fingers in shock, Hermione stumbled backwards into Remus’s protective hold.

Stifling a growl, the werewolf moved to shield Hermione from Harry’s dark regard. In a low voice, he stated, “It’s best you took off that locket and gave it over to one of us,”

Glowering at his friends, Harry said nothing.

“Harry, please,” Ron pleaded softly.

Slowly and very stiffly, as if he were fighting unseen bonds, Harry removed the ugly piece of jewelry from around his neck. With hands that were shivering ever so slightly, Ron received the proffered Horcrux.

Almost immediately, all malice faded from Harry’s expression. Gratefully and tiredly, he looked down at the transfigured wand in his hand.

“Thank you,” he murmured to no one in particular.

“This thing is much heavier than I expected,” Ron admitted, looking a little troubled as he fingered the locket. “I think…or perhaps I’m simply imagining it…I can hear the sound of a heartbeat…”

Warily, Remus stared at the green gems glittering on the metallic surface of the locket.

“We have to keep moving,” Hermione said firmly. Already, she was gathering all their belongings with a sweep of her wand.

“But…” Harry stared forlornly at the spot where his bed had been.

Sympathetically, Remus clapped Harry’s shoulder, before he moved to assist his witch.

***

On a hillside in Brighton, Harry asked, “You fought with Dumbledore in the first war didn’t you?”

“Fought for him, under him…never with him,” Remus corrected, pulling his scarf tighter around his neck. In recent days, frost had begun creeping insidiously over the surrounding countryside.

“What was he like?” Harry asked after a moment.

Grey eyes met green. Sighing, the older wizard straightened, and began telling a story - his own story as a matter of fact. It wasn’t a tale he enjoyed telling at the best of times, but there were certain things Harry deserved to know, especially considering his recent obsession with the Old Man…

Remus spoke and spoke, until there wasn’t much else left to say.
Harry’s voice, as dawn peeked over the horizon, was cracked and old. “That’s it isn’t it? We were all simply soldiers to be moulded in ways he saw fit,”

Dreamily, Remus wondered if Hermione was stirring in their tent; he wondered if she would mind very much, holding him for a few hours while he sought out some form of slumbering oblivion.

“The more I think about it, the more your story sounds like mine. He took a rejected child, and lavished him with acceptance, only to guide him towards violence for the sake of his own agenda…” Harry kept his eyes trained on an invisible spot in the distance.

“It’s not quite that simple,” Remus said. Leaning backwards, the wizard wondered why the Old Man couldn’t have the common decency to stay buried, so long after his own passing.

***

The locket hung heavy around his neck, like an anchor dragging him to his doom.

The first time he wore it, Remus found himself fighting off waves of anger and fury. In response to simple questions, he snarled his answers, sounding more wolf than man.

In the face of Harry absently touching Hermione as he always seemed inclined to do, Remus heard echoes of a stranger’s voice as it whispered…

*The liberties the Potter boy takes. It is arrogant, no? And Weasley…the disrespect he offers you…*

*Perhaps Moony, it’s time you showed them who you really are, and what you’re capable of…they think you a tame wolf…but we know better, don’t we?*

The voice of the Horcrux was a cold, lonely thing.

*All that power inside of you…you could be something bigger, better. We could bend this world to our whims. Together we could cull the weak and raise only the strong…you could keep your witch safe forever, from the filthy eyes of every man who would think to gaze upon her…*

It was like going mad, but for the fact that Remus knew the voice was horrifyingly real. In the depths of his being, his wolf twisted and snarled. Everything in him despised the intrusive presence of the interloper.

*What if I told you the secrets of time? The magic of the clock itself? I know the words we would need, the implements…we could reclaim what’s meant to be reclaimed…James, Lily, Sirius…*

*We could make it so Hermione was wholly yours and yours alone. How sweet would it be, to break Krum’s fingers as a babe so they never knew the feel of her bare skin?*

When finally the locket was lifted off him by Hermione’s own soothing hands, the wizard clutched at the woman like a drowning man. In the silence of their tent, Riddle’s voice told him,

*All you have to do is raise me from this prison…and I will give you everything you have ever wanted. I will even strike down that shell of a Dark Lord, parading about with my name; everyone you care about will be safe…*

*For all you have given, for all you have lost…isn’t it time you took something for yourself…Remus?*

***
“Where to next?” Ron inquired. It had become part of his constant refrain when he wasn’t complaining about the state of their largely empty larder, or grumbling about his radio.

*Potterwatch.* Remus had snorted the first time he heard the name of the wireless channel dedicated to Harry’s supporters. How their allies thought that name was safe, the man would never understand.

“Ronald, if you can’t make yourself useful, then please, go stand in a corner. Or better yet, go home to your mother!”

Vitriol and spite coated Hermione’s every word, every time she fingered at the locket resting against her heart.

“Better with her and the Order than hanging about here doing nothing,” the red-headed wizard bellowed more than once.

When it was his turn, Ron constantly clutched at the Horcrux with frightening intensity.

“That’s what we’re doing, you realize that don’t you? Nothing. We don’t know where the other Horcruxes are, and we’re just wandering aimlessly in the wilderness,”

“Shut up,” Harry spat when it was *he* who donned a piece of Tom Riddle’s soul. “Everyone, just shut up,”

Prowling constantly like a wild animal, Remus simply glowered as he listened to a voice that refused to leave him alone.

Not even while he dreamt.

***

At night, in the silence of their tent, Hermione would confess to him in slow, halting words, the things the voice whispered to her.

“He says my mind is wasted here, fighting for a cause that has already failed,” she told him in dull, dead words.

“Do you believe him?” Remus always asked as he trailed his fingertips down the curve of her hip.

In the darkness, resting in its place on a wooden chest, the locket’s emeralds glinted at them like the eyes of a patient serpent. Despite Harry’s explicit wishes, Remus refused, firmly refused for that thing to share a bed with them.

“What kind of fool do you take me for?” she asked, though there was no rancour in her words. No conviction either. Those nights, Hermione spoke as if all colour had been leeched from her soul.

“I don’t know that we aren’t all being taken for fools,” Remus confessed raggedly as he held her close.

***

No matter what they endured, it was Harry, Remus knew, who suffered most…and who raised in the werewolf, a growing need to protect Hermione from dangers he hadn’t anticipated.

While he had never felt fully comfortable with the fact that Harry was obviously in love with Hermione, increasingly, Remus found himself having fend off the overt hostility the younger
A wizard seemed inclined to mete out, not only in his direction, but in Hermione’s too.

“Must you *always* be touching her?” Harry demanded one day, as they settled into their new campsite. “Or are you *afraid* she’ll run to me the moment your back is turned?”

“Harry what are you…” Hermione frowned, stiffening in shock. She would have gone to the her best friend’s side had Remus not held her back.

‘Mione, for a smart girl, you can truly be so *stupid* at times,” Harry sneered at her. As he stalked towards the both of them, the werewolf bared his teeth. “Letting yourself be used by this mutt, when I’ve spent years waiting, just waiting for you…what manner of whore have you become in service to this beast?’

“You will be silent,” Remus warned. He wasn’t speaking to Harry; he was addressing the shadow behind the other wizard’s green eyes. “Your days are numbered. But I’m sure I could find ways to make what time remains for you, as hellish as the place you’re bound for,”

“Harry, take the locket off.” Ron urged worriedly as his blue eyes flitted worriedly between the two wizards.

Their tents were only half erected, their wards still un-cast. They were open to attack, and this was probably exactly why the Horcrux was pushing itself to the fore.

Not taking his eyes off Hermione, Harry’s lips twisted into something hideous. Impulsively, Ron reached out and plucked the locket from Harry’s neck.

It was only when it was clear that nobody would be hurt, that Remus found himself able to start breathing once again.

***

“You see it now don’t you?” Remus asked in their heavily warded tent, as Hermione readied herself for sleep before their full length mirror. “I mean, you must. You can’t be *that* obtuse,”

The locket was nowhere in sight. Ron had charge of it for the night while his tent-mate paced the curved perimeter of their small camp all on his own.

“See what?” she asked warily.

“You know what,” he got off the bed and moved behind her. Sweeping her hair aside, he kissed and nipped at the soft skin of her neck.

“Harry loves Ginny,” she melted into him as he slipped her shirt off her shoulders. “Everything he said was because of that locket. His words meant nothing,”

“He told Ginny to stay behind.” Remus trailed kisses all along her shoulder. “*You*, he can’t bear to part with. This was long before we found the first Horcrux, ‘Mione,”

“I’m not his type. He likes pretty, athletic girls,” she protested as he palmed away first her jeans, then her panties. “Cho Chang, Ginny…”

Glancing up, Remus cast her a dangerous smirk in their reflected selves. One large hand cupped at her right breast, while the other tilted her chin so she had no choice but to face her own nakedness in their mirror.
It amused him that he was still fully dressed, whilst she was laid bare to his eyes.

“Sweet girl,” he whispered, watching her watch herself. “You’re not only pretty. You’re perfect…”

He ran his mouth over the shell of her ear.

“…you’re clever…” he murmured, dropping his left hand to ghost his fingertips at her damp slit.

“Remus…” she panted. Her hips jutted lewdly into his touch.

“…and you’re mine,” he slipped his fingers inside of her. One and then two and then…

Hermione’s eyes slid shut as her head fell back.

Pumping his fingers in and out of her cunt, Remus whispered, “Say it. Open your eyes, look at me and say it,”

“Wha-what?” she asked breathlessly, looking feverishly confused. Her hands fluttered towards his occupied hands, instinctively seeking to increase her cresting pleasure. “Remus, please, I need…”

“Say you’re mine,” he met her dark eyes in their reflection.

“I…”

“Or you can forget about coming tonight,” he promised, slowing his strokes with deliberate intention.

“Darling please…”

A knowing thumb swept lightly at her clit, causing her knees to buckle as she practically wept for want of him.

“I’m waiting,” white teeth grazed the crook of her neck. Biting down, the woman gasped as he marked her.

“Yes, god…I’m yours,” she breathed, turning to press desperate kisses under his chin. Eager hands reached for his belt. “I’ll be whatever you want me to be, just don’t sto…”

Remus pressed his fingers hard into her willing flesh.

“Come for me,” he ordered. To his endless delight, Hermione did as she was told. Shuddering as she peaked, the small scream she emitted only sharpened his appetite.

“Good girl…that’s my good girl,” he praised, guiding her trembling body down to lay upon the hard ground. Spreading her thighs, he took in the sight of his sweet wife, wet and ready for him…him and only him.

Lunging towards his waiting witch, Remus managed to forget most of his troubles for the night. Though try as he might, he still could not block out the sound of that whispering, foreign voice.

***

Shortly before moonrise, Hermione apparated the both of them to a deserted valley.

“Where are we?” he asked in awe as he gazed upwards at the craggy walls of rock which
surrounded them.

No werewolf could have scaled those steep surfaces. The place was silent as death; remote and grand too, in its barrenness. The branches and tips of long-dead trees reached for the sky like supplicants praying to a deaf, cruel god.

“I found a picture of this place in a book once - shocking, I know. It was a book about the loneliest places on earth,” Hermione replied as she tied her hair back. “I had the will, the intent, the image of the place in mind, which is how I got us here. But I don’t know for sure where we actually are. We might not even be in England anymore, in all honesty. Perhaps…France? Germany? Somewhere in between?”

“I’ve always wanted to know what it was like get myself properly splinched,” Remus observed dryly as he unbuttoned his shirt and folded it on top of his trousers. Somewhere in those layers, his wand waited. “Was it supposed to be so…”

“Lifeless?” she shrugged, as she cast a heating spell all over his bare skin. “I have no idea,”

The woman kissed him in temporary farewell, before she levitated herself upwards with great care. Settling on a broad tree bough a few feet off of the ground, Hermione rested her back against a gnarled, dusty trunk. She was still low enough, he knew her fear of heights wouldn’t kick in.

Still…

“You’re going to roll to the ground should you fall asleep,” he warned as the itching on his skin worsened. The wolf was almost to the surface now, and neither him, nor his bestial self liked the idea of Hermione smashing her bones to pieces upon the cold forest floor. “Go back to camp, I’ll find you in the morning,”

“Remus, have some faith in me,” Hermione chided gently, before she cast a sticking charm upon her person. Making herself comfortable, with a simple lumos to grant her light, she drew out his copy of A Game of Thrones from the depths of her cloak.

By the time she found her bookmark, human speech was beyond Remus, though emotions were not. Growling worriedly at his witch, he stalked on all fours upon the rocky ground, trying to figure out where best he ought to lay himself, so she could fall on him if necessary. Likely, it’d result in a few broken ribs…

But he’d rather bleed than see Hermione hurt.

In the weeks since they departed Sirius’s childhood home, Remus had yet to stop practicing his newfound abilities to partially transform from man to wolf at will. Most of his personal research was done in the latest, loneliest hours of the night, when he alone stood guard over the campsite.

Armed with his best warming charms - which could not quite conquer the freezing winds of winter - Remus worked hard on controlling the rate and speed by which he changed. It required much of his concentration, but every attempt found him moving ever closer to a full transformation.

During those moments, not once had he ever lost control over his bestial nature.

It was precisely because he had full control all those other times, that it proved horribly disappointing to find that the full moon continued to pose the same challenges to his lupine nature same as it ever did. Something about the alignment of the celestial bodies still made Remus more beast than man, in ways which he knew would always chafe at his human sensibilities.
The urge to bite, to infect, to *kill* was still very much alive. With the help of Wolfsbane Potion, those instincts might have been tamped, but they were never truly far from the surface of his pelt.

Hermione, for all her affection and acceptance, understood. Which was why she always knew to keep her distance. For all that passed between them, Remus understood deep in his heart, that this was the one divide the both of them would never fully bridge.

In the middle of the grey, frigid valley Hermione had brought him to, Remus rose up on his hind legs and moved to explore his surroundings. While his enhanced senses told him nothing - absolutely nothing - lived in this grey place, his human mind still found the idea incredibly alien, and just a little discomfiting.

***

Two hours of exploring turned up…well…nothing. Not a rodent, not even an insect. It was almost unnatural, this valley which Hermione had brought him to. Disillusioned, but more importantly, *bored*, Remus returned to the foot of his witch’s tree and curled up on his side. Closing his eyes, he drifted to sleep…

…only to find himself waking to a familiar shriek halfway through the night. At first, thinking they were under attack, Remus leapt to his feet. Automatically, he swiped a vicious claw out…only to meet empty air for all his efforts.

“You little *shit* Joffrey!”

Yellow eyes blinked in surprise as they looked up to meet his little wife’s burning gaze.

Hermione sputtered, “That’s why you *laughed* when I said Eddard Stark should be the one to take the throne…oh my god, what’s this cheap melodrama you’ve got me *reading*? *What have you turned me into Remus Lupin*?”

Barking up at her in sincere amusement, un-hindered by the corrosive influence of the Horcrux, Remus recognized the depth of his adoration for Hermione Jean Granger.

Above, Hermione regarded him almost exactly as she usually did when he wore his human skin. That is, with a mixture of affection and irritation.

The rest of the night, between bouts of fitful dozing, Remus watched warily as Hermione began casting one fiery spell after another at a fixed point in mid-air. Each flame burned hotter than the last, each fire became harder to douse. Half-asleep, every once in a while, he offered her little yips of encouragement.

When the sun finally rose, at the foot of her tree, Remus floated Hermione’s slumbering form down into his waiting arms. Pressing a kiss to her forehead, he took a deep breath and apparated them back to camp.

To camp, to their friends, and to Tom Riddle’s accursed soul.

Chapter End Notes

Oh in this story, Nagini isn’t a person.
“Fiendfyre - cursed fire - it’s one of the substances that destroy Horcruxes, but I would never, ever have dared use it, it’s so dangerous”  
Hermione, Deathly Hallows

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By a riverbank in Wales, Ron began to crumble at the sound of five words.

“They were punished, and cruelly,”

***

Phineas Nigellus in his ruined portrait was the one who ended up offering the four of them the reassurances they all needed to hear.

Ginny Weasley had been spared the worst, despite the fact that the girl and her friends had apparently attempted to rob Snape himself. Certainly, it seemed no unforgivables were meted out, which was as much as they could have hoped for at the end of it.

Listening to the dead Headmaster’s pompous words, Remus’s thoughts wandered and circled.

Why hadn’t Snape killed Ginny? Indeed, why hadn’t Snape betrayed 12 Grimmauld to the enemy? Come to think of it, why hadn’t that greasy git killed George the night they retrieved Harry, instead of simply maiming him? God knows, he was absolutely within range, and held no great love for the twins...

“…I believe that the last time I saw the sword of Gryffindor leave its case was when Professor Dumbledore used it to break open a ring.”

“Albus used a sword?” Remus blinked in genuine confusion, as he re-entered the conversation.

Close by, Hermione’s eyes shone in sudden understanding, as both herself and Harry exchanged a significant glance.

The third member of the so-called Golden Trio stood to one side in sullen silence; Ron’s blue eyes were fixed to the ground, and his fists were clenched tightly at his side. For once, he wasn’t clutching at the golden locket hanging against his chest, immediately atop his heart.

“Fascinating,” the witch murmured.

Without warning, the witch shoved the protesting portrait back into the dark confines of her bag. Turning towards Harry, she flung herself into his arms with a joyful whoop.

Shoving down a familiar wave of jealousy at the sight of his witch in the enthusiastic embrace of James’s son, Remus frowned and said, “I get the feeling I’m missing something…”

“Do remember what I told you about Harry killing a basilisk in his second year?” Hermione looked positively gleeful as she turned from Harry to launch herself at him, like a very tiny, very curvy missile. “How he killed the beast?”

“As if I could forget,” Remus laughed despite himself as he spun Hermione in a half-circle, caught up in her infectious cheer as it were.
"Harry," Hermione chirped between kisses to his face, "Used the Sword of Gryffindor to end the Basilisk. Now, assuming you’ve actually read *A History of Magic*, you would know that the sword is made of Goblin steel. As we all know…"

"Goblin-made blades absorb that which strengthens them," Remus quoted. Fortunately or unfortunately, he *had* read that textbook from cover to cover, during one of his duller years in isolation. "Albus used the sword…"

"…to destroy a Horcrux!" Harry finished, sounding more excited than ever the werewolf remembered. "I destroyed Tom Riddle’s diary with a Basilisk tooth myself! It’s all coming together now…"

"The sword absorbed the Basilisk venom! *That* was what Dumbledore was relying on, to destroy the Horcruxes…which is why he bequeathed it to…" Hermione faltered. "But…Rufus Scrimgeour *denied* us the sword…and it's not like we can get to it from here…"

In a split second, both Harry and Hermione deflated.

James’s son sighed, and removed his glasses. Rubbing at his forehead, the other wizard aged decades before their eyes.

"We can’t do very much without that stupid sword. Which means…what exactly?"

"Albus was a lot of things but he wasn’t stupid. This feels like a very strange oversight," Remus pondered thoughtfully as he rubbed comfortably at Hermione’s back. "The Old Man was cryptic as hell, and incapable of providing straight answers yes, but stupid? No,"

"As you say, either we’re missing something, or this is another cryptic clue," Harry ran a hand through his messy hair in frustration. "Perhaps the sword isn’t what we think it is…perhaps he means for us to seek out a Basilisk. Does that even make sense though?"

"Honestly, Basilisks aren’t just roaming the country unchecked," Remus couldn’t help but smirk. "Potter, you’ve said some ridiculous things in your life but this one takes the cake,"

The werewolf froze abruptly as he understood what he had just done.

Instead of appearing stunned or offended, Harry offered him a bright, genuine smile which held no shadows. There was no mistaking that he understood exactly what just transpired. Indeed, Harry seemed altogether *too* pleased that Remus had momentarily forgotten he wasn’t speaking to his own, long-dead best friend.

Remus had seen Sirius making that same mistake dozens of times - that is, forget that Harry wasn’t James. Personally, the werewolf had found his old friend’s behaviour less than healthy, not only for the unstable man, but for the mental state of a young, vulnerable boy who was still coming out of years of familial abuse.

To be sure, he hadn’t appreciated the way Molly Weasley handled the situation. If anything, he had *despised* how the Weasley matriarch seemed perfectly oblivious to the fact that she had unwittingly and publicly humiliated Sirius through her overt condescension…but none of that detracted from the fact that secretly, Remus had agreed with the bulk of Molly’s sentiments when it came to the way his best friend related to Harry.

In the middle of nowhere-Wales, witnessing that rare expression of unfettered gladness on Harry’s face…Remus considered at last that perhaps *all* of them had been far too quick in their judgement of Sirius. Perhaps even in his damaged state, the Animagus had recognized that the boy needed a
reason to smile.

Grinning back at Harry, Remus allowed himself to let go of a portion of his misgivings.

“Where’s Ron?” Hermione asked suddenly.

The three of them stared uncomprehendingly at each other.

***

“Remembered me have you?” Ron asked scathingly when finally they found him.

With what he considered admirable restraint, Remus reminded himself that he was a grown man, who shouldn’t get into verbal snits with teenage boys.

“You three carry on. Don’t let me spoil your fun,” Ron spat from where he was laying, staring up at the bottom of Harry’s bed. The two wizards had been sharing a bunk bed that appeared sturdy, if not comfortable.

“Ron, maybe it’s time you took a break and let one of us take the locket for the night…” Remus started evenly.

“Someone like you? So you can start growling and snapping at anyone that comes within a foot of Hermione?” Ron laughed in a way that sounded positively unhinged. “Though I have to say ‘Mione, you must be enjoying yourself, what with having two grown wizards fighting over you.”

“I beg your pardon?” Hermione asked sharply. Unbidden, Remus found himself recalling the canaries she could summon on a whim, and how vicious those songbirds could actually be.

“What? It’s true. I don’t know how you’re too thick to see it but it’s true,” Ron twisted his body and rose to his feet. “These two want nothing more than to crawl under your skin and stay there. I mean, one of them claims to love my sister…”

The ensuing silence was so loud, Remus could have heard a pin drop from ten miles away.

“Ron, you might want to see to your mouth,” Harry rasped. “It’s open, and noises are coming out,”

“You told Ginny before you left - you told her you loved her. I know you fucking did,” Ron face matched his hair now, as he marched up to Harry. “And here you are, making a complete arse of yourself over someone else’s woman. It’s like you don’t even care that Ginny’s gone and got herself in trouble for your sake,”

“I never told her I loved her,” Harry responded; his fingers tightened over his drawn wand. “We’ve been through this,”

Ron retorted. “Stop denying it. You led my sister on you goddamn prick,”

“Ronald Weasley, that’s enough out of you…” Hermione gritted out.

“Honestly ‘Mione, would it kill you to shut up once in a while? Shame on you by the way, for teasing Harry the way you’ve been doing. All that touching and hugging…right under your husband’s nose too…” Ron sneered as he turned reddened eyes towards her. “I never took you for a slag but here we are,”

“Weasley, you’re going to want to hold your tongue,” Remus was no longer interested in diplomacy. “Before I decide to relieve you of it. Hand over the Horcrux. Now.”
“Right. Threats…of course,” the red-headed wizard threw back his head and laughed. The crazed sound emerging from Ron’s mouth made the werewolf want to draw blood. “You don’t think I’m afraid of you, surely? Not when you’re on such a tight leash, you filthy mutt…”

“You want to see me off my leash? Because I don’t think you’ll like what you’ll find,” Remus growled and took one step forwards.

Immediately, Harry circled around to Ron’s side with his wand raised. No matter that he was clearly furious at the red-headed wizard, James’s son seemed to understand that Remus was being deadly serious with his promises of retribution.

Overhead, an autumnal storm rumbled. The first raindrops began to fall like stones against the canvas roof of the tent.

“None of this matters anyway.” Ron scoffed. “Nothing we do matters. We have a Horcrux - so what?”

Underneath the boy’s angry tones, Remus could hear the familiar, oily voice of something else speaking.

Ignoring his protective stance, Hermione shoved past Remus. Taking a deep breath, she smoothed out her angry expression.

“We’ve found a weapon to destroy the Horcruxes,” she sounded placating. “It’s the Sword of Gryffindor…”

“Should I skip up and down in joy?” Ron drawled. In his eyes was an unfamiliar spark of dislike. “We don’t have the sword ‘Mione, it’s just one more thing to add to the list of things we don’t bloody have, or know how to find,”

In answer, the woman’s jaw tightened.

“Harry, mate, I expected you to have had some sort of idea. Instead, here we are, sitting around about our thumbs up our arses, waiting for a solution to fall from the sky!”

“So this is my fault?” Harry turned to glare in disbelief at his friend, unconsciously shifting so he now stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the other people in the tent. “Mine?”

“Ron,” Hermione said quietly.

“What the hell did you expect Weasley?” Remus demanded. “That this was a bloody field trip? We’re trying to find a way to bring down the Enemy for fuck’s sake,”

“You’re only here because of Hermione. Merlin but you should be ashamed of yourself, taking advantage of her the way you are. She’s half your age and…”

Before either Harry or Remus could have stopped her, Hermione closed the distance between herself and Ron. Shoving her wand into her back pocket, the witch raised her right hand and slapped her best friend across his cheek. The sound of flesh striking flesh rang out above the noise of what was now a rainstorm.

“Hermione,” Ron sounded stunned as he raised a hand up to touch the place where he had been struck. “I…”

“I’m fighting for my goddamned existence in this world, and you’re here whining like this was a
Quidditch match that wasn’t going your way,” Hermione hissed. “You will stop acting like a child now. The things I have sacrificed for this mission, the things I have done…the things I will do to keep us all safe…”

Thunder rumbled above them.

“‘Mione, please I’m…” for the first time that night, Ron looked as if he were finally present.

Remus wanted to reach for his witch, if only to stop her from what she was doing, to save her from herself. There was a certain horror in her words, an echo of Albus Dumbledore he couldn’t ignore.

“The next words you say had better be an apology. To all of us,” Hermione spat hotly.

“Hermione, maybe…” Harry said quietly as he reached out to tug her back.

“Fuck ‘maybes’. It’s time we talked about this!” Hermione turned her blazing gaze towards James’s son, who immediately raised his hands in surrender. “Ron spent half a year practically calling me a slag to my face, since the day I was forced to get married. And he just did it again! You’re not seriously expecting me to consider his hurt feelings at this juncture are you?”

Rage spiked in Remus’s chest as he took in Hermione’s words. Turning to Harry, he asked, “I’m sorry, but do you mind explaining exactly what it was that Weasley here has been fucking saying about my wife?”

“Ron just apologize alright?” Harry’s green eyes widened in alarm as he took in the werewolf’s darkening visage. “I’m not joking…”

Whatever moment of clarity Ron had been experiencing, it faded away into pure malice. Swiftly, he reached for his wand and spat, “Pungo!”

A flash of vicious yellow sped towards Remus, Harry and Hermione.

“Protego,” Hermione shouted, faster on the draw as she always was. The force of her spell not only repelled Ron’s vicious stinging hex, but it also sent the boy stumbling backwards.

Blinded by fury, Remus snarled aloud, and would have drawn blood, had Harry not placed a staying hand on his casting arm.

“What the hell do you think you’re playing at?” Harry seemed torn between rage and panic. “Ron Weasley, think about what you’re doing. Fucking Think!”

Breathing hard, the boy ripped the locket from his neck and threw it to the ground.

“I’m done with all of this,” Ron pronounced as turned towards the flapping entrance of the tent.

As he marched out into the open, a bolt of lightening illuminated the horizon, turning him into nothing more than a shrinking, black shadow. One muffled crack later, he was gone from sight.

Falling to the ground, Hermione stared blankly at the space where Ron had been just before he disapparated, and said absolutely nothing.
Chapter Notes

Warning-ish: Hermione makes a different choice from what she did in canon.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Through the rain and the muck, Remus guided a silent Hermione back towards the tent they shared. Silently, he raged against Ron, although he had a very good idea what had caused the boy to lash out as he did against his companions.

It was that damned Horcrux. It was Tom Riddle’s corrosive influence, speaking and feeding all of Ron’s darkest impulses, just as it had been trying to do with all of them.

Through its perpetual, maddening whispers, the locket leveraged to its benefit, their hidden discontent, their unspoken insecurities, their silent resentments, all for the purpose of driving them apart. United, the four of them devoted their attentions towards the destruction of the Horcrux; apart, they sought to destroy each other instead.

Which made sense - that was how the Dark Lord achieved his ends in the real world after all. By spreading his hate and his anger, Voldemort turned friend against friend, brother against brother…

Of course, the locket did not account for everything Hermione had revealed. That is, about all that had transpired after their coerced wedding.

In the entire time since their initial joining, Hermione hadn’t once uttered a word about the slights she had tolerated from those whom she had counted friends.

Casting his mind back to his wedding day, Remus found himself recalling Ron’s exceedingly cruel words with stunning clarity.

“I suppose it’s lucky you were commanded to marry someone then. I can’t imagine anyone else ever wanting to spend their life with you if they had a choice,“

Back then, he had naively attributed the boy’s insensitive words to misplaced jealousy and stress. Indeed, he had foolishly assumed that their altercation would have smoothed itself out the moment the trio returned to Hogwarts.

Despite their letters, their meetings - despite the fact that they now shared a bed - Hermione had never so much as hinted at the fact that Ron Weasley had continued his unpleasant, churlish behaviour long after they had traded vows. Come to think of it, she had never been the one who informed him of any of the indignities she had been forced to suffer in the aftermath of their wedding.

All that he knew, he knew because McGonagall had bothered to tell him…or because they were truths he happened to stumble on. Christ, he hadn’t even known she had spent the better part of the previous year not sleeping until they began living together.

Taking in Hermione’s ashen cheeks, Remus wondered queasily what else the woman might have been keeping from him. Pulling off her soaking clothes and brushing her wet hair from her
shoulders, he began casting warming charms all over her too-cold body.

“Hermione,” Remus hated the way his voice was cracking at the edges. “Say something, please…”

“Stop,” she muttered at last, stilling his ministrations with a firm hand. “I’m angry, I’m upset, but I’m fine…for the most part,”

“Why didn’t you tell me?” he asked as he guided her to sitting. Kneeling at her feet, he gazed up into her dark eyes. “About Ron, about the shameful way he’s been treating you…”

Infinite sadness flickered in the depths of her stare. Not for the first time, Remus wondered if perhaps their shared decision to keep their union transactional at the beginning, had been the right decision to make. What was the point in vowing to protect this woman when he hadn’t even been there to do such a thing?

Come to think of it, he should have asked for his old teaching job back so he could have been present for Hermione when she needed him. Albus wouldn’t have refused him, of that Remus was certain. In life, the old man had been practical to the point of cruelty, but he hadn’t been completely heartless.

_Could have, would have, should have…_ Sirius muttered in his brain. _Aren’t we finished with all our regrets yet?_

“I suppose I didn’t feel like sullying what we shared back then, with Ron’s utter stupidity. You were the only person I could talk to who didn’t seem to feel sorry for me…though I suppose maybe you did. Christ, is that all this is? An extended pity fuck for the girl whose whole life was being ripped apart?”

Wrapping his arm around her naked waist, Remus kissed her soft belly and put aside his self-recrimination for her sake.

“The morning after you and I…consummated…our marriage, I found an item of clothing you left behind. It was quite destroyed actually. Nothing more that scrap cloth and metal…I’m not sure if you even know what I’m talking about right now,” he murmured.

“Oh god, I do remember. I _liked_ that bra,” Hermione’s brow furrowed as she reached out to stroke his hair.

“Regardless, I thought about burning it because I didn’t want any reminders of what we shared. Not because it was awful, so don’t give me that look…” Remus grasped tightly at her wandering hands. “I didn’t want any reminders because I couldn’t stand the thought of never touching you again. If you looked at the bottom of my wardrobe right now, you’ll probably find that damned thing still laying there, gathering dust,”

“Your wardrobe is a nightmare,” Hermione pronounced succinctly, though her voice shook ever-so-slightly. “You’re actually a horrible slob,”

Warming to his story, Remus continued as if she hadn’t spoken.

“Then we started going out on our ridiculously frustrating little ‘dates’…or whatever it was we told ourselves they were. Whenever I was with you, I kept wishing our time together wouldn’t ever end. Even those boring museum visits - I wanted _those_ to last forever. Actually, since we’re on the subject, it’s time I confessed something: I lied when I said I loved Monet - I bloody hate Expressionism. It’s all just sodding _dots_ Hermione, admit it.”
Hermione chuckled. “You mean ‘Impressionism’, not ‘Expressionism’. And frankly, I get the feeling you’re actually referring to ‘Pointillism’,”

“Exactly my point - pardon the pun. I don’t care for modern art, I never have and I never will. Anyway, where was I?” Remus tapped his chin contemplatively. “The whole time we went on those frankly un-platonic dates, there was nothing I wanted more than to have my way with you. It didn’t matter if we were standing beside a Tang dynasty vase, or some musty pile of bandages Bill lugged back from Egypt to sell to the Muggles for an exorbitant price…” he paused for effect. “I desperately wanted to take you right there between those stuffy old exhibits,”

“Christ…” Hermione wiped at her face. “Can you imagine?”

“Woman, pay attention. That’s exactly it, I did imagine. By the way, all those letters you wrote to me? They’re all in a box under our bed at home. Every last one of them.”

“Oh,” she breathed as she swept aside a curtain of curls. “I kept yours too you know…they’re in my trunk…under our bed…”

They were smiling at each other now, and Remus found it possible to remember that some things were more important than their mission.

“The point I’m trying to make is…” the man cleared his throat as he gestured between them. “If this was supposed to be an extended pity fuck, then I’ve been cocking it up terribly,”

“Shut up for a second…” she tugged her fingers away from his grasp, and ran them through his hair as her lips curved softly upwards. “Remus, I love…”

Lunging upwards, he swallowed the words she meant to say.

***

“We have to get out tomorrow morning, bright and early,” she stated, much later in the night. “I don’t trust him not to bring…not to bring his mother back.”

Nestled against her chest, he listened to the cadence of her heartbeat as it slowed down bit by bit.

Ronald Weasley was lucky - lucky - that he had left with his limbs intact, Remus decided as he nuzzled into Hermione’s skin. Were he anything like Greyback, Ron would never have survived that last confrontation.

Turning his gaze upwards, Remus’s mind drifted to Harry, alone in his tent and likely, feeling the weight of Ron’s betrayal all on his own. Tomorrow, he would reach out to Harry, to offer him what solace he could. Tomorrow, he would bridge the gap that had formed between them. There was too much at stake now, for them to continue their division.

“I’m so sick of feeling helpless and powerless,” Hermione said into the silence. She sounded tired…and old. “I’m sick of the way my life is being ripped away from me, inch by bloody inch,”

Stroking Hermione’s arm, Remus closed his eyes.

“I know,” he murmured simply. “Believe me, I know,”

Curling into each other, they fell asleep under a still-raging sky, taking what comfort they could from each other.
True to her word, Hermione roused both wizards before dawn could light the sky completely. Eradicating all hints of their passage through the Welsh countryside, the witch made quick work of their tents.

Extending a hand towards Harry, wordlessly, she demanded possession of the locket. The younger wizard, usually reluctant to relinquish hold of the Horcrux, took one look at her dark countenance and did as he was being silently commanded to do without complaint.

Once she was satisfied by the state of their emptied campsite, grasping tightly at both Harry and Remus, the young woman took a half step forwards…

…and landed the three of them, in yet another wild wood.

Swiftly, she erected their temporary home and put up the necessary wards, while the menfolk both proceeded to lay down traps at the edges of their campsite.

All was proceeding rather normally despite the lack of Ron, until Hermione cast an "Expelliarmus" aimed at her remaining companions.

Stunned, Remus glanced down at his bare casting hand, and then back up at his determined wife.

“You two are going to sit down and talk. I refuse to suffer through another bout of idiocy because of something as stupid and as pointless as male ego. Are we all clear?”

“’Mione, give me back my wand,” Harry tried to sound threatening.

“Darling…” Remus sighed.

“Talk.” she barked, before disappearing behind a tent flap.

Remus knew there was no conceivable way he could have breached the threshold of their tent; she would had already warded it to the teeth in a span of a few seconds.

“You can’t treat us like children,” the werewolf found himself yelling petulantly after her.

“Hermione, give us back our…”

A small hex flew out of nowhere and landed a few feet away from the two men. Staring at the smoking ground, it was Harry who spoke first.

“Maybe we should…”

“Right,” Remus rolled his eyes. “Harry, mate, take a good look, because that’s the woman you’re in love with. She’s a bossy know-it-all who is also PRESUMPTUOUS AS ALL HELL,”

The werewolf paused, breathing heavily.

“And I’m not afraid of you Hermione. Not even a little bit!”

Harry cracked a wry grin at that.

***

“Its a bit early for a drink,” Harry took a swig from the brown bottle Remus had shoved in his
direction.

“I’m not sure if you’ve noticed,” the werewolf remarked. “But we haven’t exactly been operating within the realms of normalcy. This is the first drink I’ve had in months. Considering the circumstances, it’s mad that I haven’t become a raging alcoholic,”

“Hermione can be such a terror,” Harry grimaced, before looking down at the bottle in his hands. “Where did you even get this? Does she know?”

“No she does not, and I’ll thank you not to tell her. I picked up a few during our last supply run, and I was saving these for a special occasion,”

Harry drank deeply.

“I suppose we can’t blame her for being…well…a bit Hermione right now,” Remus sighed, sitting across from James’s son.

There had been a picnic table set that came with Harry’s tent, and it had been put to extensive use, proof of which could be seen upon the worn wooden surface currently separating the two wizards.

“She’s just lost her best friend. But then so did you,”

“Ugh.”

“She’s not exactly wrong though.” Remus continued reluctantly. “We probably should talk about what’s been happening, before that blasted Horcrux drives us to the point where we’re all trying to slit each other’s throats in our sleep,”

“But I don’t want to talk about it,” Harry developed a mutinous expression.

“Yes well, neither do I. But Hermione’s given her marching orders.” Remus’s shoulders slumped disloyally.

The younger man winced.

“So Harry…you’re in love with Hermione Granger,” the werewolf looked pained as he said this. “How long has…”

“I don’t know,” Harry interrupted, peeling at the label on his beer bottle. “I didn’t figure it out until after that ridiculous marriage law happened. That was when I realized she was about to marry someone who wasn’t…who wasn’t me. And that was when it all hit me like a Bludger. At the back of my head, I always thought there would be plenty of time for all us to sort that stuff out later, after - if - I bumped off You-Know-Who…”

“If it helps, she wasn’t exactly thrilled to become my lawfully wedded wife,” Remus shook his head. “Why didn’t you do something about it after? I’m sure it was common knowledge that ours wasn’t meant to be a real marriage at that time, just something to appease the lawmakers. We were free to pursue whomever and whatever we wanted.”

Not anymore however, was the unspoken addendum to his last statement.

“I did try…a little bit,” Harry admitted. Sulkily, he added, “But Hermione’s a bit oblivious when it comes to certain things,”

Remus choked back a laugh at Harry’s blatant understatement.
“Sirius had just died, and I had only just learned that there was a prophecy about me being the one to kill Vol…You-Know-Who. Malfoy was skulking about, Dumbledore had me running covert spy missions on Slughorn…” Harry explained.

“The times I wasn’t trying to fight this war, she was off meeting you, and whenever she came back, she looked so…happy. Happier, anyway, than being at Hogwarts, having to put up with Ron’s shite, having to put up with the general nastiness that was occurring because of that stupid law…there was simply never a right time. Also…she was being a bit of a pain about my Potions textbook. Or should I say Snape’s textbook…”

This time, Remus did laugh. “Mate, you have no idea how much I had to hear about that,”

“I don’t know if there was ever a time I didn’t love her. Well, alright, maybe in our first year,” Harry acceded. “It’s not just that she’s brilliant as hell. She’s also ridiculously loyal, and she loves…unconditionally. Stupidly, even. When Hermione’s not on my side, she’s still on my side…if that makes sense.”

The young man took a deep breath.

“So you tell me - how was I supposed not to fall in love with her?”

There was a warmth which lit Harry’s green eyes as he spoke of Hermione; a small smile tugged at his lips as he considered the witch they were discussing. Remus had seen that exact same expression hundreds of times before, every single time James brought up the subject of Lily.

“I can’t answer that,” he said gently and a little sadly. Not sad for James for once - sad for Harry, who had yet to experience life like a normal person.

“I probably shouldn’t have tried to start anything with Ginny,” Harry looked ashamed. “I just…I wanted to move on, you know? I didn’t mean to hurt her.”

The older man made a face as he considered Tonks.

“Don’t beat yourself up over it…just remember that people aren’t there to be used and discarded,” the werewolf heard the hypocrisy in his own words, even if Harry didn’t.

“Right,” Harry finally met his gaze. “Remus, I might love Hermione, but I’ve made my peace, more or less, with the fact that I’ve missed my chance with her. All I want now, is for her to be safe and happy. The first part is a bit complicated at the present time…but it doesn’t make my feelings on the matter any less true,”

Taking another sip of his beer, Remus was a little ashamed that out of the two of them, Harry was behaving more like the grown-up that he was supposed to be.

“Thank you,” the older man said at last. “I think.”

“Fair warning, the minute she decides she’s done with your sorry arse…” Harry smirked.

Reaching over, Remus smacked Harry very lightly across the head. Grinning, the young man drank his lager. Tilting his head slightly, he asked, “You do love her, don’t you?”


Silently, the man wondered if he would ever be able to say those words to the woman in the next
tent.

“I love her maybe even more than I loved your parents and Sirius, though I suppose that’s quite a bit different. I’ve never wanted to snog your father or Lily, or…oh alright, there was Sirius I suppose, but he barely counted. He was such a terrible kisser…far too much tongue, honestly,”

Harry looked scandalized. “This is what it’s like when people say they don’t want to think of their parents having sex,”

“Well lucky for you, we never got that far. Though not for lack of trying on Sirius’s part, certainly,” Remus smirked. “Honestly, drool everywhere. You should have seen it, it was a god-awful sight,”

With that, Harry drained the rest of his beer.

“That Horcrux…” Remus turned serious. “You do realize that’s what’s driving everyone insane don’t you? When you wear it, you look at me like you want me dead. Every time she wears it, Hermione gets so depressed, I try to keep her in sight in case she does anything…foolish. As for me - it has me behaving like a crazed stalker.”

“I expect that’s why I haven’t been so subtle recently, about…” Harry gestured vaguely in the direction of the other tent. He sounded grim. “I can only assume that’s why Ron was acting like a right git last night…more than his usual self, anyway,”

“It’s taking our darkest impulses and pulling them out into the open.” Remus pointed out. “Your insistence that one of us should be wearing it at any given time - pardon me if I’m wrong, but I rather suspect that wasn’t your idea, if you take my meaning,”

“I didn’t want us to lose it…” Harry stared at Remus as horrible understanding filled his emerald eyes. “It’s what the Horcrux wanted. It wants to stay close to us, to control us.”

“A hundred points to Gryffindor,” Remus said dryly. “We need to destroy it before it destroys us further. Look what it’s already done, ripping us apart as it did.”

“Even if we destroyed it, that’s still only one Horcrux. Ron’s right - we have a list of items to find, and no way to find them.” Harry’s voice was bitter. “Dumbledore bequeathed unto me a sword, and neglected to explain why. Honestly…I wish I didn’t place as much stock as I did in the man…”

“Albus had a policy of not sharing very much with his soldiers,” Remus answered stiffly, as he recalled his many dealings with the dead Headmaster. “I believe he simply didn’t trust the rest of us to do exactly as he wanted.”

Harry opened his mouth to respond, only to be interrupted by a loud scream coming from outside the tent.

The two wizards needed no further prompting.

Wandless, they raced outside to find Hermione on the ground, scrabbling away from a pit, from which emerged bright, hot tongues of flame. The fire burned hotter than anything Remus had ever seen in his life, and it was licking hungrily towards the soles of the woman’s feet.

*Fiendfyre*, he recognized in dreadful panic. No other flame burned this hot, or with such raw savagery. Only once in his life had he ever seen it, and those flames had been cast by Albus himself, in a frightening demonstration of power and control during a short battle a very long time ago.
“My wand. Now!” he shouted about the roaring noise of the fire.

Climbing to her feet, Hermione reached inside her jacket and yanked out the filched wands, before passing them back to the panicked wizards.

“Finite Incantatem!” Remus yelled, but it did nothing, absolutely nothing.

“Aqua Eructo!” Harry cast.

Immediately, large jets of water burst forth from his wand, but those too did nothing to quell the rising flames.

“Fuck,” Hermione swore as the flames began to spread.

Forcing himself to focus, Remus tried to remember everything he knew about Fiendfyre.

Praying he had the right idea, he raised his wand. With every last ounce of strength he possessed, he cast, “Resurgemus!”

The ground beneath them heaved and surged. Angry fingers of stone erupted out from under the earth and reached up into the sky. Twisting and warping, with a loud groan of protest, a wall of solid rock formed an impenetrable cone over the flames.

In the silence that ensued, Remus heard only the sound of his own harsh breathing, along with everyone’s heartbeat racing in time with his. Sweat rolled down his skin, and soaked his sweater.

“Hermione?” Remus wheezed, bending over from the effort of his spellwork. “Care to explain?”

“It was what Bill said - fire burns just about everything. It just needs to be hot enough,” Hermione explained shakily. “I found references to Fiendfyre in one of the books I…”

Remus rounded furiously upon the witch. “You could have killed yourself. You could have killed all of us and destroyed this entire swath of the country while you were at it!”

“Yes alright?” she retorted, moving away from him. “I knew it was dangerous, but Ron was right. We’ve been sitting around twiddling our thumbs, doing nothing…”

“So you picked experimenting with Fiendfyre as a means to prove him wrong?” Remus demanded, disbelief colouring his voice.

“I thought…” she looked away, catching her breath. “I’m just…goddammit Remus, I’m tired of feeling helpless, of feeling like we’re completely impotent!”

The werewolf turned his attention back to the small structure he’d pulled from the ground. With any luck, the flames he had trapped within the stone cage would be doused, what with having nothing living to consume. Surely, what micro-life existed in that small, confined space would have been destroyed in the face of such hellish heat leaving behind only stone.

After all, stone was stone - it didn’t live, it only existed.

“You hold your life with too little regard. You’re reckless,”

“I don’t need a lecture on…”

“Hermione, what the hell were you trying to do with Fiendfyre anyway?” Harry interrupted, wiping soot from his cheek.
“I was trying to figure out a way to destroy the Horcrux,” she bit out.

Deciding their inevitable argument could wait, Remus approached the cone. Behind him, the other two followed cautiously.

“Diffindo,” he whispered softly, slicing a gap into the solid surface.

A small, weak wisp of smoke emerged, but nothing more. No crackling, no flames.

“Reducto,” he cast with more conviction, and watched as the rocks collapsed into the space underneath.

There was an overwhelming sense of relief, the moment he realized they were all safe from the ravenous, corrupting flames of Fiendfyre. More than that however…

“Do either of you hear that?” Remus asked.

“Hear what?” Harry asked, pale and frightened. “I don’t hear anything,”

“Exactly. No voice whispering vile things in my head, no evil miasma…”

Despite his simmering anger at the witch for placing her own life in danger, Remus couldn’t help but find himself hopeful.

“Accio Locket,” Harry murmured. Immediately, the pile of rubble began to shift as something tried to rise to the wizard’s summons. After a few seconds, a small, twisted piece of metal flew out and landed neatly at their feet.

It wasn’t very much to look at, twisted and blackened as it was.

“Sweetling…Hermione…” Remus crouched down and hovered his hand over the still smouldering chunk of what had been Salazar Slytherin’s locket. “That was incredibly careless, what you did. But…it certainly looks like you achieved what you set out to do…”

Looking up at her wide brown eyes, he managed to find a small smile. “You’ve destroyed the damned thing.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: hope that chapter didn't bother anyone; just figured this Hermione has had different experiences than Canon Hermione, so she would probably make different choices...
She stood before Harry and Remus, feeling a little as if she were on trial. Fighting the urge to chew at her nails, Hermione kept her arms resolutely crossed at her chest instead.

“I got tired of feeling useless and helpless…there was a passage in one of Dumbledore’s books…”

“Which we should have discussed as a team,” Remus glared.

“…pertaining to the destruction of Horcruxes,” she continued with a grimace. “It was - as you’ve both probably guessed - the Fiendfyre curse.”

“Did the book mention how the flames are bloody uncontrollable?” Harry blinked owlishly at her as if he wasn’t exactly sure who it was he was looking at.

For a moment, Hermione considered lying.

“Yes,” she sighed. “I knew the risks…but I was getting so tired of having that thing controlling our emotions and thoughts like a puppet master…”

“Arrogant,” Remus rose to his feet. There was an unfamiliar note of disappointment in his voice, and Hermione hated the sound of it. Never before had he spoken to her in such a manner…not even after she told him she had wiped away her parents’ memories.

“You got arrogant. You could have killed us, and everyone within a ten mile radius,”

“I’m sorry,” Hermione shook her head. “I was…I didn’t think…”

“No, you didn’t did you?” Remus pressed on ruthlessly. “Its one thing for Ron to behave like an utter git. You on the other hand…I expected better Hermione, much better. Even when we were in a house full of adults, you were the only one I thought would always weld the voice of reason. Now however…”

“I got careless because I was tired of feeling powerless,” her own ire began to rise. “I said I’m sorry, and I bloody mean it,”

“Hey,” Harry stood up and walked to stand before her. Clapping his hands on her shoulders, he said very seriously, “If ever you picked a time to get stupid, you certainly chose a good one. You destroyed a Horcrux Hermione, that’s…that’s huge is what it is,”

_Stupid._

Hermione’s jaw tightened as she pulled away.

“Harry,” her husband said stiffly as he moved towards her. “If you don’t mind excusing us,”
“Honestly Remus, she’s done us all a huge favour,” Harry said earnestly.

“I’m not arguing that the ends were precisely what we wanted and needed.”

The way Remus spoke, Hermione thought, harkened back to a time when he was her Professor… one who was about to hand her a detention slip, at that.

“How about if you have a moment?”

Resentful at being spoken to like she was still a child, Hermione considered hanging back in Harry’s tent. Considering the steely glint in her wizard’s grey eyes however, the witch had a feeling refusing him wasn’t actually an option.

Straightening her spine, Hermione tossed her head back and unfolded her arms. “See you in a bit for supper Harry. Professor Lupin wants a word.”

Rolling his eyes, Remus reached for her hand and dragged her firmly back towards the privacy of their tent.

***

In her third year, Hermione received a letter from her mother.

Not that letters from home were unusual of course - but this letter, she remembered. Mostly because it had been the letter than caused her to think of her parents not just as ‘Mum’ and ‘Dad’, but as people in their own right.

Between updates on how work was going, and how home renovations were progressing, Mrs. Granger let slip a particularly troubling sentiment in her long, carefully penned missive.

“…in my forties, but I still don’t feel particularly like a grown-up. Unfortunately, there isn’t a handbook to this phenomenon known as ‘adulting’ - though really, someone should consider writing one. It would have been nice if someone had explained to me that marriage wasn’t all roses and candlelit dinners…it would have been nice if someone told me that marriage was a full time job. Mother tried to warn me I think, but…”

Back then, the young woman hadn’t known quite what to think of her mother’s little written outburst. Very politely, she also did not point out to her mother in her subsequent reply, that there were literally thousands of self-help books written about the subjects the older woman was referring to.

Standing in their own tent staring at Remus, Hermione was reminded uncomfortably of her mother’s words, in more ways than one.

Remus was still angry, that much was obvious. Nonetheless, underneath that anger, she saw genuine fear in his grey eyes.

“I don’t understand why you didn’t talk to us - talk to me - about what you were planning…”

“I already said,” she hated how her voice rose in childish impatience even though she knew she was the one at fault. “I got careless. What more do you want?”

Approaching their pallet, Remus slumped down and settled his elbows upon his knees. Despairing eyes met her own, across the space spanning between their bodies.
In recent weeks, her husband’s wavy hair had grown positively shaggy. Days of not shaving was transforming his scruff into the beginnings of a beard…and despite his constant fussing and complaining at it, Hermione secretly found herself hoping he’d keep up his new aesthetic.

_Her own, wild, wolf-man_, she thought sometimes, with deep affection.

“I could have easily walked out to find a smoking corpse where you used to be.”

“I’m sorry alright?” she melted a little. “It’s not an excuse, but so much has happened recently. Last night with Ron…it shook me a little more than I care to admit. I just…I just wanted to prove to myself that we aren’t in fact, sitting on our arses doing nothing. I wanted to stop feeling powerless,”

“You’re not powerless,” Remus shook his head obstinately. “You’ve never been powerless,”

“But I am aren’t I?” she couldn’t stop herself. “I couldn’t control when and whom I married. I can’t stop what’s happening my fellow Muggle-borns. I can’t…god help me Remus, I can’t even keep us all safe and together…”

“I’m sorry about the marriage bit, you know I am,” There was wounded hurt in his eyes.

“I don’t regret you. Not even a little bit. You know exactly what I meant,” Hermione protested. Stepping close, she sat herself down beside him.

“I’m sorry. I promise you - I swear it in fact - I will think twice before I do anything quite so drastic ever again.”

The wizard reached out and took her hands in his.

“I want, more than anything, to keep you safe,” he said. “But I can’t protect you from yourself. All I can do is trust that you won’t throw your life away,”

“Right,” Hermione smiled ruefully. “I don’t intend on a repeat episode,”

Remus didn’t act as if he believed her. Sighing, the witch rested her head against his shoulder.

“I’m sorry,” she said quietly. “I promise you, I won’t let my temper get the better of me again,”

“I want to believe you…” Remus paused. “I don’t suppose I have much of a choice do I?”

“Not really,” she closed her eyes.

After a long silence, she asked, “Tell me, you’ve lived longer than I have. Did you imagine marriage was going to be such hard work?”

“Honestly?” Remus sounded thoughtful. “I have no idea. When I was a child, I never once saw my father kissing my mother in front of me. They always treated each other with something like professional courtesy…odd, I know, but there it is. There was what James and Lily shared of course…but they also went and died young. There were times I wondered how the ensuing years might have treated them,”

The matter-of-fact manner by which Remus uttered those words took Hermione by surprise. No one had ever dared to question the sanctified perfection that was Harry’s parents.

Shaking his head, the man concluded, “The point is, I have no real frame of reference for what a
good and lasting marriage should resemble,"

“My Mom and Dad were happy I think,“ Hermione mused. “At least for a little while. I think when my magic started manifesting, before we understood what was actually happening, it started placing a strain on their relationship. Even after I started attending Hogwarts, I always sensed a sort of distance between the two of them that didn’t used to be there when I was much younger.”

“You don’t blame yourself for that do you?” Remus asked in consternation. Carefully, he pulled her down so they were laying in bed together, facing each other with their hands joined between them.

“Sometimes I do, yes,“ she confessed tiredly. “Perhaps…perhaps they’re happier these days…now that they’re living a life where they’ve never had a daughter. I don’t know,”

“Oh Hermione…” Remus’s brow creased as he stroked a thumb across her cheek. “You can’t be responsible for the happiness of other people,”

“Right. I’m learning that,” she sighed. “I’m learning a lot these days, I suppose,”

“Learning is…a good thing. I think, anyway,” he looked regretful as he said it. “It’s a shame some of our lessons have to be so…unkind,”

Hermione shifted forwards and pressed a chaste kiss to his lips.

“I wish…” her voice cracked ever so slightly. “I wish I could see my mother. I miss her. I wish I could have been a little more honest with her and Dad. I wish I could tell them about you, and how sometimes I want to kill you and kiss you all at once, and how you drive me absolutely insane with your inability to put your clothes away…”

“This is getting a bit personal,” Remus chuckled, though there was sadness in his laughter. “Surely I can’t be all bad,”

“No obviously not.” she sniffled a little. “But honestly Remus, would it kill you to keep your dirty socks away even once?”

To her embarrassment, Hermione burst out into heaving sobs.

Thankfully, Remus seemed to understand it wasn’t the damned shirts laying around the tent that was causing her to cry like a little girl. Running his fingers through her hair, he whispered soothing assurances in her ear, and held her as she wept.

***

“I still think we’re likely to find at least one of the Horcruxes back at Hogwarts,” Harry said earnestly in the middle of December, two days away from the next full moon. They were somewhere close to Cornwall. From where their camp was perched, the three of them had a good view of Christmas lights strung up between people’s houses and upon the main streets.

The notion that Voldemort might have stashed one of his Horcruxes at Hogwarts was an idea which Ron had dismissed out of hand weeks and weeks ago. With the Locket destroyed, it was becoming clearer all the time that many of their previous decisions needed to be re-evaluated.

“Tom himself was an orphan, and Hogwarts was the first real home he ever knew,” Harry persisted, gesturing with his hands. “If I were in his shoes, and trust me, I’ve been in those shoes, I would absolutely hide something as important as a piece of my soul in my true home.”
“I don’t like comparing you to a raving lunatic, but I see your point,” Remus stated gruffly, as he sipped on a cup of weak tea.

Hermione didn’t like to admit that she was beginning to worry about the state of their supplies. Unfortunately, there was something to be said about the prospect of running out of basic necessities, what with the winter months closing in on them. Foraging was no longer an option, and trapping game was completely out of the question.

For all that Remus was part wolf, apparently, the man hadn’t the slightest idea how to kill and dress game animals. Which was ever so slightly…disappointing.

“Not exactly keen on that thought myself,” Harry said sardonically. “But it is what it is.”

“Alright, let’s say we have a Horcrux that can be found at Hogwarts. Then what? How do we get in?” Remus rubbed absently at his freshly shaven chin.

“There are passages in and out of the castle. You of all people should know that Moony,” Harry smirked. Without the influence of the locket, it was shocking how well the two men got on.

If Ron had only stayed just a little longer, Hermione thought wistfully, things might have gotten so much easier.

“I am shocked at your lack of respect for your elders. Shocked. And appalled.” Remus shook his head in mock annoyance. His sandy locks had been trimmed back with a simple spell, leaving him looking as youthful as the Professor she had met on the Hogwarts Express years ago.

Transferring her attention back to the text in front of her, for fear of getting caught staring at Remus like some besotted schoolgirl, Hermione turned a page. Allowing her gaze to drift downwards, she was confronted by a symbol which had been confounding her for some time.

“If you stare any harder at that book, I’m quite certain it’s going to burst into flames,” Remus prodded at her shin with his foot. “And we all know how that turned out last time,”

Huffing, the witch set her tome down upon the scratched surface of the picnic table. Pointing at the sketched diagram which was the source of her vexation, she admitted, “I don’t know what that symbol is, and it’s killing me.”

“You don’t know something?” Harry affected a look of shock. “Remus, we need to get Rita Skeeter on the phone now,”

“I hear that woman’s bugged everything,” Remus joked. When Harry didn’t laugh, the older wizard’s smile faded ever so slightly. “You get it don’t you? Bugged? Because she’s a…”

“Remus, everyone gets it. Skeeter’s an actual bug in her animagus form,” Hermione said in a pitying voice. “It’s just not a very funny joke,”

“Ow,” he clutched at his chest.

“Actually hang on,” Harry snatched at the book. The way he handled its pages made Hermione wince. “I’ve seen that symbol.”

“What do you mean? Where?” Hermione demanded.

“Luna’s Dad was wearing robes with this symbol stitched on it at Bill’s wedding,” Harry glanced up at his companions. “Viktor Krum…”
“Tosser with a tiny prick,” Remus mumbled.

“…was going on about how this was the mark of Grindelwald,” Harry finished.

“That’s like saying it’s a Dark Mark,” Remus growled impatiently. “Which is patently ridiculous. The Tales of Beedle the Bard was something I grew up with. There’s nothing dark about that symbol, which shows what Viktor-sodding-Krum knows,”

“Someday, you’re going to get over your ridiculous hatred of Viktor. You do understand, he happens to be a very dear friend of mine?” Hermione took the book back from Harry. “Did Krum say anything else?”

“Viktor said a lot of things that night. Such as…how very pretty you looked, in that red dress you were wearing,” Harry responded with a sly grin. “Something about how his Hermy-own-ninny was all grown-up and sexy, and how much he would like for you to visit him again in his parent’s home in Bulgaria…”

“His Hermy…visit him again?” Remus sputtered. “No. Absolutely not. Hermione, you cannot honestly expect me to ever like that wanker,”

“How are you such a child?” Hermione stared daggers at Harry, silently daring him to add more fuel to the fire.

The Boy Who Lived shrugged unrepentantly at her, and grinned his evilest grin; in that moment, Hermione knew that the entire conversation Harry had just described, was a complete fabrication. Crumpling up a piece of parchment, the witch lobbed it at her friend’s head, only to have him catch it out of mid-air.

Something thumped repeatedly against her head. Tilting her gaze towards her werewolf, the witch realized that Remus had spelled a paper plane so it kept on smashing into the side of her curls. A split second later, the plane swivelled and swooped towards the last true Marauder, courtesy of Harry’s wand…

Quickly, Hermione conjured up balls of wet parchment to pelt the faces of both idiot wizards.

For about fifteen minutes, the three of them tried to best each other with paper weapons. Ducking and swerving, they made a mess of their shared space, until at last, they realized that there would be no winners in their small civil war.

“Back to the actual matter at hand…didn’t Skeeter mention in one of her stupid articles that Professor Dumbledore and Gellert Grindelwald were actually very close at one point?” Hermione asked, after the last of their shenanigans died away.

“I have no idea,” Harry shrugged, though a strange light came into his eyes at the mention of both names. “Perhaps we should think about visiting Godric’s Hollow…I mean, Dumbledore lived there. What if he kept the more clues hidden somewhere close to his old home?”

“I think that’s a brilliant thought actually,” she answered. “Yes, I do believe it’s time we paid the place a visit,”

“I mean think about it. It was his home and all that, and…” Harry ploughed on earnestly.

“Harry, I said ‘yes’,” Hermione repeated very gently.

“Oh,” he blinked in surprise.
“Why so generous?” Remus inquired, then added hurriedly. “Not to say of course, that you’re not usually generous.”

Sighing, Hermione explained, “Clearly we can’t rely on Fiendfyre to destroy Horcruxes, and I got to thinking...last time we discussed the Sword of Gryffindor, we decided it was another clue in a long line of cryptic what-have-yous...if there’s truly a chance that Dumbledore’s leaving us a trail of breadcrumbs...”

“Exactly!” Harry nodded excitedly.

Digging through her pile of books, she drew out *A History of Magic*.

“Also, Bathilda Bagshot has a fascinating passage in here about Godric Gryffindor...”

“This is all lining up!” Harry sounded ecstatic. “Ginny’s Aunt Muriel told us at the wedding that Bathilda Bagshot lives in Godric’s Hollow. It’s settled then. If we go now, we can...”

“Harry sit down,” Hermione summoned her patience. “We can’t just up and go. You’re the most wanted wizard in Britain, and we’re talking about visiting not only Albus Dumbledore’s hometown, but your childhood home. Surely you don’t think you can just stroll into Godric’s Hollow looking like...well...you,”

The speed at which Harry deflated left her feeling just a tad guilty.

“I suppose I shouldn’t bother asking how we’re going to get to Godric’s Hollow, looking as we do,” Remus sounded just a tiny bit bitter.

Kissing him on his cheek, Hermione whispered a quiet apology against his skin.

***

Winter truly arrived on the night of the full moon. White flakes swirled through the sky, and landed upon the earth in thick drifts.

On a small, tidal island, Hermione found herself seated beside Harry, within an abandoned stone turret charmed to keep the wintry breeze out.

In the depths of the castle, Remus roamed a maze of frozen passages. Every once in a while, Hermione could hear the distinct scrabbling of claws against stone outside their warded door, and it took everything in her not to let her husband in, so that he might sleep beside her, by the blazing fire of the ancient hearth.

“I’m not exactly a fan of horror stories, or fantastic tales,” Harry mused, as he stared out into the snowy night through a small, uncovered window. The surrounding countryside was empty, deserted and silent, but for the occasional cry of a distant wolf and the hoot of a hunting owl. “Still. There’s something to be said about a place like this, on a night like this...”

“Scared Potter?” the witch teased, affecting her best Malfoy drawl.

Somewhere below them, Remus howled up at the moon, the lonely sound of which wrenched painfully in Hermione’s heart.

“Please,” he scoffed. “Ten months out of the year, we live in an actual, haunted castle. This place isn’t even magical,”
“Ah,” Hermione put down her novel. “But that’s where you’re wrong,”

Harry stared uncomprehendingly at her.

“Places like these…” Hermione rose to her feet and went to join him at the window. “Were built in a time when Muggles and Wizards lived as one people. Wizards used Muggle technology as a way to sustain their lives, while Muggles relied on their magical brethren’s powers to harness nature. Together, we built kingdoms that are still spoken of in both worlds. Surely you’ve heard tales of Avalon and Camelot, even when you didn’t know that magic is real?”

“Arthur and his knights?” Harry wondered.

“Merlin,” Hermione smiled gently. “Don’t you forget about Merlin, whose name we still invoke,”

“Do you think…” Harry started, then stopped.

Propping her right shoulder up against an ancient, dusty wall, Hermione waited.

“Do you ever miss the Muggle world?”

“Sometimes,” the witch turned her eyes towards the snowy landscape. “It’s occurred to me that we’re living in a world that hasn’t truly changed in centuries. The Muggles on the other hand… their world is always in flux. They’re practicing their own brand of wizardry as we speak; they’re making their own potions, crafting their own magics…”

“Make you wonder doesn’t it?” Harry replied. “All this talk on superiority…”

Wandlessly, Hermione conjured a ball of blue fire with her bare hands. The heat from those flames were warm, and lovely, and the shifting colours were very beautiful.

“Sometimes, I wonder about what might have been, had I remained in the Muggle world…but when I own such power at the tips of my fingers…”

Glancing up, Hermione startled at the realization that Harry was now only inches away from her. Meeting his emerald gaze, her breath caught in her throat.

The ache in her chest grew…but now, her heart was hurting for the boy before her, rather than her erstwhile wizard.

“Remus and I had a very interesting talk,” Harry’s hovered one hand by her cheek.

“Did you?” she extinguished her conjured flames and stepped backwards.

“Yes,” her friend’s fingers closed into a loose fist. “‘Mione…I want you to be happy. You know that don’t you?”

On the other side of a crumbling door leading into the turret, a large, looming creature listened.

“Harry…” Hermione felt wretched. “If I ever did, or said anything which caused you to…”

Harry laughed. “It wasn’t anything specific you did or said, so don’t be ridiculous,”

“What about Ginny?” she asked foolishly.

“What about her?” Harry punched her shoulder lightly. Looking towards their bedrolls, he asked, “Don’t suppose you have anything interesting to read,”
Outside their small, heated space, Remus turned away, feeling ashamed and relieved all at once.

Understanding their conversation on Harry’s feelings was now over, Hermione returned to her place by the crackling hearth and handed her friend a thick novel.

“You’ll like it. It’s got swords and knights and tons of violence,”

“Really?” he asked with sincere interest.

“Also, incest,” she smirked. “Can’t leave out the incest,”

“Oh,” Harry looked a bit put out at that.

“You’ll like it,” she assured again as she dug out another novel she had filched from Remus’s personal library.

On a floor immediately below her, Remus curled himself into a warm circle, and fell asleep to the whispers of fading ghosts. In dusty, creaking voices, they spoke of the old and ancient glories of the castle within which they still existed; they told him of their long-ago lives, their losses and their victories. Fervently, they begged him to remember their stories, because without living memory, they were nothing, and less than nothing upon this earthly plane.

When Remus woke in the morning, the world looked surprisingly lovely, carpeted in white as it was. Leaving behind nothing but silence, he went to find his witch, and gave no further thought to his ghostly companions who clung so desperately to the past.

***

Christmas Eve found temperatures dipping far below freezing.

As she doled out doses of Polyjuice Potion, Hermione wondered what her parents were doing, and if they were having a warm Christmas.

Sneaking up behind her, Remus wrapped an arm around her waist and kissed the nape of her neck. Carefully, the man picked up one of her carefully measured flasks and studied it with not a little distaste.

“Old and grumpy, young and curvaceous or…”

He was obviously trying to recall all the Muggles they had encountered in the nearby town they had crept through, whom she might have stolen ‘materials’ from.

“We both get ‘old and grumpy’,” Hermione informed him quite archly. “Harry gets to be our moody teenage son,”

“What’s that now?” Harry asked, ambling over. “I’m to be your brat? Blimey Hermione, how young did you even start?”

Flushing in embarrassment, Hermione shoved Harry his share of the potion.

“Drink up brat-of-mine,” she said sweetly. “And take your Invisibility Cloak,”

Before her eyes, Harry’s face grew far more angular, and about three years younger. His hair lengthened as his eyes became a brilliant sapphire blue.

“A bit paranoid are we?” Remus threw back the potion.
Inhaling sharply, Hermione followed suit.

As usual, the agonizing effects were immediate; her muscles twisted and her skin stretched. With watering eyes, the witch set aside her emptied flask.

“Darling,” Remus gazed lasciviously at her out of unfamiliar hazel eyes. “You do age well,”

Hermione laughed as she brushed back her grey-brown hair. “Promise me you’ll never, ever grow a moustache. You look like a porn star from the 1970s,”

“It was a dignified career while it lasted,” the man shook his head sadly. Then, rather suspiciously, he asked, “How the hell do you know what porn stars from the 1970s looked like?”

Schooling her features, she answered, “Curious minds wanted to know,”

“Is that right?” the werewolf pressed her closer “Well, if you really want, I could pretend I’m the plumber and you could…”

“I think I’m going to be sick,” Harry intoned morosely, sounding every inch the upset teenage goth boy he now resembled.

“Alright, I guess it’s time we were on our way,” Remus sighed regretfully as he disentangled himself from her. “Are you ready Harry?”

“Ready as I’ll ever be,” Harry answered grimly. “Let’s go home,”

Chapter End Notes

Also happy Halloween to everyone in North America!
The Marriage: Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Warning - bad attempt at horror story narration ahead, plus not-great action scene
warning - deviation from canon

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I still can’t believe they actually gave your father a great big honking statue,” Remus marvelled, staring up at the monument which had been placed in the middle of the town square. “Wherever he is, James’s ego no doubt, has been inflated three times the size it used to be when he was alive,”

“Did he…” Harry appeared mesmerized. “Were his nostrils truly so…wide? Oh god, do my nostrils look like that?”

“I’ll tell you what else they got wrong,” Remus grumbled. “Your father was on the verge of losing his hairline the last time I saw him…I suppose you have that to look forwards to in a few years,”

Staring at the two men in silent awe, Hermione wondered if she was witnessing the famed and esteemed art of English self-repression playing out before her eyes.

“Mother looks like she’s about to murder statue-me,” Harry pointed. “Was I really that ugly when I was a baby?”

“You’ve certainly improved with age, I’ll give you that much,” Remus ruffled his hair.

“Boys,” Hermione called, hating that she had to disrupt their levity, no matter that their jovial demeanours seemed overly forced. “There’s an interesting graveyard over here, with some familiar names up front. If you don’t mind…”

“Of course sweetheart,”

Casting her an exaggerated wink that did nothing to dispel his antique porn-star aesthetic, Remus jogged up and kissed her cheek.

Wincing against his horrid moustache, she supposed could have picked a better disguise for the man. Still, the smirk he wore, combined with the decidedly less-than-innocent gleam in his eyes as he raked his eyes over her form…

“This little get-up might have its merits,” Remus murmured, pressing a curious hand against her currently curvier bottom.

Starting to grin despite herself, Hermione was about to reply in kind when something cold slammed into her neck, causing her to stumble and shriek. Brushing snow out of her collar, she caught Harry’s laughing green eyes.

Unbidden, her memories returned her to another snowball fight back in Hogwarts…one initiated by Ginny, as she and Harry…

Oh.
“If you two are done being nauseating, perhaps we should get a move on,”

Sharing a small laugh, Remus and Hermione walked hand-in-hand away from the statues gracing the town square, enchanted so it would never be seen by Muggle eyes.

Not for the first time, she marveled at the incongruity of how light-hearted her boys made her feel, even in such a dire time.

Aside from gathering ‘materials’ for their Polyjuice scheme, the day before saw the three of them sneaking their way through a green grocer’s to pick up a small supply of food so they could keep going for a little longer. The town itself had been wholly Muggle, but like most places in recent days, the cold, slithering presence of unseen dementors was unmissable.

Hurrying away from the beleaguered settlement with as many tins and frozen dinners as they could manage, Hermione wondered with more than a little dread, if eventually, even the comforts of the non-magical world would be lost to them.

In Godric’s Hollow, past the wrought iron gates of the graveyard, the three travelers stared up at a rather imposing grave marker.

“This appears to belong to a dead Dumbledore,” Remus muttered.

“I wonder who she was,” Harry whispered back.

Looking around, Hermione’s eyes settled on another weathered gravestone on an adjacent plot. Upon its stained surface, a familiar runic symbol greeted her.

Considering the sanctity of the hallowed ground upon which they trod, Hermione was forced to concede that Remus’s flippant assumptions were correct. That is, there was probably nothing particularly nefarious about the line, the circle and the triangle. The mark was likely, simply a quirk of Wizarding culture neither she nor Harry had been exposed to as children.

Which begged the question once again: why had Albus Dumbledore left her a storybook filled with children’s tales?

Irritably, she began to entertain seriously, the prospect of seeking out Xenophilius Lovegood… perhaps the eccentric man held the answers she sought…

Lost in thought, Hermione started drifting between old grave markers. Behind her, Harry trailed slowly along. Every once in a while, he reached out and stroked his gloved fingers against old, cracked surfaces. Some of the graves were so ancient, names which had been carved into stone had become nothing more than scrawls of unintelligible scratches.

“Harry,” Remus called from the other side of the graveyard.

Looking over at her wizard, Hermione watched as old grief shrouded the man in its murky embrace. Despite the fact that Remus was currently wearing somebody else’s face, the shadow which fell over his brow was unmistakable. His eyes were fixed upon a very particular spot.

Tilting his chin towards his former mentor, Harry swallowed. Slowly he weaved his way towards Remus. From where she stood, Hermione watched as her best friend hesitated ever so slightly, before he turned towards the grave markers her husband had yet to lift his eyes from.

Side-by-side, Harry and Remus regarded the graves of James and Lily Potter.
“Your father would have been so very proud of you,” Remus spoke in a voice Hermione didn’t recognize.

“Do you really think so?” Harry’s voice cracked. “I’ve done things I’m not proud of in this life. And I’ve failed them terribly in so many ways,”

Feeling like an intruder upon a grief of which she owned no part, Hermione ducked behind a large oak tree.

“You haven’t failed them,” Remus sounded every inch his age now, and more. “You couldn’t,”

“You don’t know that,”

“I was there you know, the day you were born. I saw how James held you in his arms, and how Lily gazed at you, like she could hardly believe she had somehow created something as miraculous as you. The two of them loved you so much. Had they lived, I promise you, they would have loved the man you’ve become,”

“How can you be so sure?”

There was a cynical note in Harry’s words that never used to be there, Hermione noted. The presence of it made her chest hurt for the little boy she met on a train, years and years before.

“Because I know,” Remus answered simply.

Casting her eyes up to the sky, Hermione tried to name the constellations she could see through the boughs of the massive tree she was hiding beneath.

If only her vision would stop blurring.

“Why didn’t you try to find me?” Harry asked almost plaintively. “All those years, why not?”

Everything within Hermione wanted to emerge from her hiding spot, if only to lend Remus what strength she still possessed. Unfortunately, her Gryffindor courage chose that moment to fail her terribly.

In the darkness and the cold, all she could do, was to wait and to listen.

“I thought if I set eyes on you…you, with Lily’s eyes, and James’s face…I thought I would fall down and never get back up. I was a coward Harry, and I don’t expect your forgiveness,”

Biting down on her glove covered knuckle, Hermione squeezed her eyes shut.

“Christ Moony, but you do tend towards overdoing it on the drama don’t you?” Harry sighed resignedly. “You’re not a coward Remus. You’re…that weird bloke who used to be my Professor, and who is currently married to my best friend. These days, you’re also kind of a good friend…I’m not sure what Mum and Dad might think of the middle bit, but here we are.”

“I’m certain your mother would have some choice words about the current state of affairs,” Remus acknowledged wryly. “Speaking of my little wife…I believe she’s been listening in on our conversation behind that tree over there,”

Wiping away her tears, Hermione stepped out from her isolated spot. Running towards the two wizards, she flung her arms around their necks.

“She’s getting snot all over my hair,” Harry complained.
“That’s nothing. She drools in her sleep,” Remus grunted.

Smacking the both of them, Hermione stepped back and rubbed at her nose. “It’s ok to feel feelings you know? Every once in a while?”

Shuffling sheepishly, both wizards made faces at her.

“I suppose we should get on with what we came here for,” Harry said after a second.

“One moment, please,” Hermione pulled her wand from her pocket and pointed it at the gravestones of Harry’s parents.

A wreath of roses materialized like a splash of life against the falling snow.

“The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death,” Harry’s eyes narrowed as he finally read the words which had been etched into his father’s marker. “Is this a joke? It sounds a bit…Riddle-ish, if you get my drift,”

“It’s from the Bible,” Remus sounded sincerely aghast. “Wait a second. Hermione, you know where this verse is from don’t you?”

“Me?” Hermione frowned. “Of course but…”

“You know, while I was teaching at Hogwarts, I rather suspected the curriculum for Muggle Studies had gone downhill. You children aren’t learning proper history are you?” the wizard sounded genuinely aggrieved. “When I was in school, we covered a history of Muggle theology, which overlapped heavily with certain Wizarding practices a few centuries past,”

“Professor, don’t get your knickers in a twist,” Hermione kissed his cheek. “And I’d be careful who you call children, considering what we got up to just last night,”

At that, Harry spun on his heel and marched himself out of the graveyard with his hands pressed against his ears. Left to themselves, Remus pressed his forehead against Hermione’s own, and clutched desperately at her hand.

“I’m sorry,” Hermione murmured as he trembled ever so slightly against her. “Remus, we don’t have to stay…”

“We’re here on a mission,” he rasped. “I haven’t forgotten,”

Slanting her mouth against his own, Hermione gave her husband all the comfort she could afford.

“Can we please stop with all the snogging?” Harry called, before yet another snowball smashed against Remus’s head.

Collecting himself, the man in her arms schooled his features as he turned to face Harry.

“Potter,” he knelt down and picked up a handful a snow. “Run,”

The two wizards raced off.

Casting one final glance at her pristine surroundings, Hermione folded her collar up and made to turn away…

Something pale flitted at the edges of her vision.
Pausing mid-step, the woman took a closer look at the shadows creeping across the white snow. Very softly, she incanted, “Homenum Revelio,”

Nothing.

A frigid breeze gusted past, and the witch became uncomfortably aware of the fact that she was currently outnumbered by the dead.

In her mind, snatches of her conversation with Harry about ghosts came back to her.

Step-by-step, she picked her way towards the gates. The moment she was past the threshold, Hermione began to run. She didn’t stop running until she found Remus and Harry, and even then, under the bright sodium lights of the street, she did not feel safe.

“Harry, put your invisibility cloak on,” she ordered breathlessly.

Both wizards cast her odd looks.

“I don’t understand,” Harry asked petulantly. “We’re already in disguise. I even charmed my eyes so it looks like I’m wearing eye-liner.”

“Don’t argue,” Hermione huffed impatiently as they meandered onto a residential street.

Dragging his cloak over his shoulders, Harry muttered something rude under his breath. Whatever he said caused their werewolf companion to laugh. Tamping down a flare of irritation, Hermione observed warily as Remus trailed his bare fingertips along an unkempt hedge, leaving behind small, narrow furrows in the still powdery snow.

Rounding a corner, the wizard froze; his smile fell away with breathtaking speed. Startled at Remus’s drastic change, Hermione followed his desolate gaze.

The cottage loomed like a dark, menacing monster. Covered in dead ivy and snow, it’s empty windows stared out at them like blinded eyes. Where the front door once hung, now the opening resembled nothing more than an open maw, waiting to swallow any who entered.

Half the structure’s roof was gone; it was as if something powerful had blasted its way through layers of shingles, bricks and wood.

“Was this…” Harry’s voice came from her right.

Before Hermione could protest, one of his hands slipped out from between folds of invisible fabric. He opened the latch of a small swinging gate standing between the three wanderers and the cottage grounds. As battered wood creaked open, a signboard emerged from the frozen earth, like a bizarre and ugly flower.

The golden words etched into its surface read:

“When this spot, on the night of 31 October 1981, Lily and James Potter lost their lives. Their son, Harry, remains the only wizard ever to have survived the Killing Curse. This house, invisible to Muggles, has been left in its ruined state as a monument to the Potters and as a reminder of the violence that tore apart their family.”

“You should know Harry, that this place wasn’t always a tourist trap for sightseeing wizards,” Remus said with an angry growl. “Your parents were real people for fuck’s sake,”
Before Hermione’s distressed eyes, Harry lowered his hood. “The place is a lot bigger than I thought it would be. Why do you suppose no one tried to fix it up?”

The werewolf’s anger must have steadied Harry’s nerves, judging from the even tone in his voice.

Ignoring his former students, Remus stalked towards the dark doorway.

Resisting the urge to drag him back to her side, Hermione forced her attention towards the white signboard.

“This thing has been *vandalised,*” Hermione hissed in shocked indignation. “The nerve of these idiots,“

“I think it’s brilliant,” Harry laughed.

“Harry please. Pull on your bloody hood,” she begged quietly.

For a moment, her best friend looked as if he were about to protest. Then, sulkily, Harry did as Hermione wanted.

“I happen to like what these people have written,” Harry’s disembodied voice retorted.

“Only because they’re all saying you’re a hero,” she shifted restlessly. “Really, all you did was sit there and let You-Know-Who try to kill you,”

“It was *heroic* sitting,” Harry sniffed haughtily.

Turning her gaze towards the house, Hermione noted with some panic that Remus was nowhere to be seen. Before she could call out his name, the sound of heavy footsteps crunching against a frozen surface broke the silence of the night.

Dread filled the woman’s belly, as she whirred towards the noise.

Out of the swirling snow and over a layer of ice, a cowled figure lurched and slid determinedly towards them. Holding her breath, Hermione waited, and wondered why she felt no urge whatsoever, to lend the frail figure her helping hand.

Eventually, the tiny creature stopped a few feet away from where they stood. The woman - for it seemed to be woman-shaped - crooked her head towards Harry.

“She can see me, can’t she,” the wizard murmured.

“Oh yes. Yes she can,” Hermione watched in mesmerized apprehension as the stranger raised a bony hand.

“Hermione,” Harry whispered. “Do you think maybe she’s Bathilda Bagshot?”

Not waiting for an answer, he slung back his apparently-pointless cloak and began to approach the cowled figure. Sucking in a deep breath, Hermione reached for her wand and fell in step behind him.

“Miss Bagshot?” he inquired.

The figure nodded, and beckoned once more.

“Get the hell away from that thing,”
At the sound of Remus’s warning, instinctively, Hermione pointed her wand at their new ‘friend’.

“Remus, I think this is…” Harry started.

“This creature hasn’t been alive for a very long time. I can smell the rot from here even if you can’t,” Remus snapped his teeth. “I said get away,”

Several things occurred at all once.

Harry turned his attention towards Hermione. Whipping out a sturdy hand, her best friend circled his fingers around her wrist and began to drag her backwards, away from the walking corpse.

Unfortunately, he didn’t get very far. Before Hermione could reach out to steady him, Harry fell to his knees with a short scream. Simultaneously, something large, long and sinuous slid itself out of a pile of crumbling, rotting fabric. A strong scent of decay stained the wintry air, and for a second, the witch was convinced she would empty her stomach of its contents.

Quashing away her fear and disgust, Hermione raised her wand and yelled, “Confringo!”

Mid-lunge, the attacking serpent - oh fuck that had to be bloody Nagini - writhed in agony as it burst into flame.

Behind her, Remus swept Harry off the ground as Voldemort’s familiar twisted desperately about in the melting snow. Bracing the younger wizard up by his shoulders with one arm, the werewolf snatched Hermione away from the burning snake.

“He’s coming,” Harry heaved. Around his shoulders, his invisibility cloak flashed in and out of sight. “He’s coming now!”

“Hold on!” Remus ground out.

Still fighting for breath, Hermione’s world constricted into grey nothing…

…before it expanded once more. Rolling into the clearing wherein they had left their tents, Harry screamed as he pitched onto his hands and knees.

“Harry!” Hermione gasped as she righted herself. “Ron, go get me the Essence of Dittany, now if you fucking please. Remus…”

Realizing her mistake, the witch swore aloud even as Remus sprinted towards their shared tent. Kneeling beside Harry, she placed a gentle hand between his shoulder blades.

“I’m not hurt. I’m not hurt at all. I just felt his rage…” her friend panted.

“Oh thank Merlin…oh Jesus fucking Christ,” she fell backwards as a wave of relief washed through her.

“My sentiments exactly,” Harry’s cheeks were ashen. To her immense surprise, he began to grin. “Hermione…you do realize…you burned Nagini!”

“She did what now?” Remus asked as he emerged from under a flap of canvas. Shoving a flask of pain relieving potion into Harry’s hands, her husband turned towards her, and tugged her into the circle of his arms.

Circling an arm around his neck, the witch’s heart thudded furiously in her chest.
“He’s probably furious,” she muttered, more to Remus and herself than to Harry.

“Oh yes he very much is,” her best friend laughed.

Sharing a trepidatious look with her husband, Hermione said nothing.

“Shit. I guess we didn’t actually accomplish a damned thing on our little jaunt,” Harry said as he picked himself off the ground.

Snorting, Remus asked, “Do you feel up for a return trip?”

Wryly, Harry shook his head. Pushing up his eyeglasses, he said, “The visit wasn’t a complete loss. Anything that pisses Tom off can’t be that bad,”

“In case anyone’s interested…it’s past midnight…which means…” Remus kissed Hermione’s cheek. “Happy Christmas. Harry, if you don’t mind, I think I’ll be taking my wife to bed now,”

Without a hint of jealousy, Harry laughed cheerfully and said, “Happy Christmas you two. And Remus, mate, if you hadn’t been there tonight, things could have gone a lot differently,”

Waving him away, Remus began to guide Hermione towards their tent.

“Are you alright?” he asked softly the moment they were out of earshot.

“Not really,”

With a quick _Finite Incantatem_, Remus lifted the effects of the Polyjuice Potion from her.

“I should have known, should have realized…”

“Stop that,” he interrupted impatiently. “You couldn’t have known,”

Flicking his wand, he too, faded back to himself.

“I won’t let anything happen to you,” he promised. “I swear it,”

“You can’t always be there Remus,” she traced the shape of his face with her fingertips as he started to undress her.

“Can’t I?” he settled his hands on her hips and pushed her backwards.

“No,” she shook her head. “One of these days…”

“Today wasn’t one of those days,” he stroked her curls from her damp cheeks.

As he shrugged off his shirt, Hermione’s eyes drank in the sight of her husband’s scarred body.

“I would die to keep you safe,” Remus declared as he nipped at her bottom lip.

“Like hell you will,” Hermione halted his ministrations with a firm hand to his chest. “You’ll do no such thing. If you were to put yourself in harm’s way and leave me alive and alone for the sake of some heroic ideal, I swear to you Remus Lupin, I will never forgive you. Never,”

Taken aback by the voraciousness of her declaration, Remus’s barked out a laugh.

“Quite right too,” he admitted.
“It’s settled then,” Hermione tilted her chin haughtily. “You and I, we shall always fight back-to-back. Not just for each other, but with each other.”

“Those should have been our vows, I think,” he grinned ravenously. “Now…where were we?”

Effortlessly, he had her flat on her back, upon the thin but not uncomfortable mattress of their pallet. Crawling over her breathless form, Remus’s voice became a husky promise.

“Allow me to explain why little girls shouldn’t get in the way of big, bad, wolves…”

Chapter End Notes

Hope that was an ok chapter.
The Marriage: Chapter 11

The first thing he saw as he stepped across the threshold of the burnt out husk of a cottage, was a dusty old mug sitting on the coffee table.

He knew whose mug it was of course, stained with age though it appeared. After all, he’d seen Lily sipping from it countless times in his life. She had brought it to school in her fourth year, convinced it was the most subversive thing she could have done back then.

The faint illustration of a unicorn smoking a joint printed on one side of the mug was still faintly visible, and suddenly, Remus wondered why he had entered the cottage. Why had he come indoors, after making such a loud fuss about how this place was no longer a home? Why had he bothered entering this tomb?

Rubbish was strewn will around a weathered, mouldy sofa, and cigarette butts littered the ground. Likely, it was detritus left behind by Muggle teens and drifters, who had no idea the significance of the cottage.

In his mind, he conjured the image of James and Lily sitting down in this very room, after yet another empty day spent staring out their windows at a world they could not touch.

All too easily, he pictured his friends huddling against each other, as they sunk into their battered cushions. Doubtless, they must have whispered to each other, assuring each other that the war would be over soon. Towards the end, they must have so craved liberation from the four walls within which they had been confined…

*James, who had loved to soar,* he thought. *Lily, who had loved nature, and the beauty of the outdoors.*

From the gate, he heard Hermione’s voice rising in displeasure. He heard the note of fear in her words, accompanied by the soft crunch of fresh snow, as she paced impatiently like a nervous lioness.

Scrubbing at his eyes, he wondered if he ought to call Harry in.

This wasn’t his first time in Godric’s Hollow. In the past sixteen years, Remus had returned to the graves of his friends at least once a year, if only to stand by their resting place in morose silence. Religiously, he had avoided venturing very far from the centre of town, precisely because he had no desire to see the place where it all happened…

Tonight had been the first time he had returned to Godric’s Hollow with company…with James and Lily’s son to boot.

Their little discussion in the graveyard had taken from him the better part of his composure. Had it not been for Hermione’s steadying presence, Remus knew he would likely have thrown caution to the wind, and found his way to the nearest pub in search of a stiff drink.

With every minute that passed, Remus found himself longing for the dubious comfort of their campsite, yet duty continued to nag at him.

They had come to Godric’s Hollow for a reason, and that reason had yet to be fulfilled…

Tilting his face, Remus caught a subtle change in the air. Pivoting on his heel, he froze
momentarily as his more-than-human senses scented the approach of something foul.

Squaring his shoulders, the werewolf readied himself for battle and strode back out into the night.

The dead would stay dead…but right then, the living needed him.

***

Hours later, laying by Hermione’s side as he studied her sleeping profile, Remus recognized that for the first time in his life, leaving Godric’s Hollow did not feel as if he were leaving a chunk of himself behind with the ghosts of the departed.

Even with the confrontation that had taken place, even with the ghastly sight of serpents wearing the half-rotted husks of a dead women…

…everything he valued, and held dear, everything he cherished was currently snoring gently beside him. And drooling just a tiny bit.

Grazing her cheekbone with his thumb, Remus wondered if Hermione knew exactly how much power she held, where this old wolf was concerned.

“I love you,” he whispered very softly into the darkness.

In response, she mumbled something unintelligible, before she burrowed her way deeper into his arms. Content, he allowed himself the privilege of sleep.

***

Christmas at the Lupin household had always been a bit of a mixed bag, but never in his memories, had any of them been bad. Indeed, Christmas was the one time a year his father allowed himself a reprieve from the all-encompassing guilt which marked the majority of his days.

Every December 25, Hope would roast the smallest turkey a family of three could consume, while his father spent the day lazing about with his little boy. Particularly, Remus remembered with some pleasure, a working muggle train set he had been gifted at age nine, which had circled the Lupin tree in a winding track.

The toy set had obviously been a second-hand purchase, and small non-essential portions of it were not in good working order. In spite of its worn condition however, the little werewolf had been exceedingly pleased with his new toy. Pleased and fascinated.

“Is it true that the Hogwarts Express is actually a Muggle train?” Remus had wondered, as he gazed up to his father for answers. “Why would we use something Muggle, when magic is superior in almost every way?”

“The Hogwarts Express is a magically modified Muggle vehicle,” Lyall corrected with a smile, which seemed just the tiniest big smug.

Later, Remus would understand that his father had been proud of him for being smart enough to have made such an observation at his tender age, instead of accepting all things at face value.

“Still…you are correct that the Express is very much, a Muggle contraption. For all our magical know-how, we’ve never been very good at mass transportation. Portkeys make people sick, Floos get people dirty…and apparition is more of a lone person’s game - a lone adult’s game at that, which requires a certain level of learning,”
Staring worshipfully up at his father - the keeper of all knowledge as far as Remus had been concerned back then - the boy had pondered the man’s words with all the gravity a child could muster.

The next few Christmases displayed a marked change in the sort of gifts he received from Lyall.

First came the slightly tattered encyclopaedias. Then came the battered science textbooks. Regardless of their physical states however, Remus had loved every single one of those volumes, and he had treasured them with great fondness. Those books had been his gateway drug so to speak, to the wide and varied universe of Muggle literature. Even at his poorest, he had refused to sell those early tomes for a badly needed pittance, if only because they meant too much to him to even consider parting with them.

Wonderful memories of past holidays aside, there was something to be said for waking up beside a beautiful woman at dawn on Christmas day, and spending the better part of the morning making slow, sweet love to her. Laying by her side, sated and giddy, Remus was hard-pressed to imagine better ways to spend the holiday.

Although…he supposed they could be at home, snugged up in a real bed…

However, if wishes were horses, then Dark Lords would off themselves on behalf of the lot of them.

When Hermione insisted at last, that it was time they face the world, Remus had followed after her with a satisfied smirk plastered on his face, which set her blushing intensely.

At the entrance to Harry’s tent, the other wizard gazed out at the couple in disgruntlement. In a sleep-roughened voice, he protested, “‘Mione, it’s bloody Christmas! Can’t we take a break from research for one day?”

Seizing the opportunity, Remus lifted his little wife’s surprised body over his shoulder and carried her back towards their own temporary abode.

***

With the coming of night, the three of them gathered around the tiny picnic table in Harry’s tent, dining on magically warmed microwaveable meals they had purchased during their last supply run. Between the three of them, they shared a bottle of cheap French Pinot, which Remus had the bright idea of procuring at the same shop.

“This was a surprisingly nice day,” Hermione said with a yawn as dinner drew to a close. Easily, she leaned her head on Remus’s shoulder.

“It wasn’t completely horrible,” Harry nodded. Settling back on his palms, James’s son smiled. “This was a nice Christmas, come to think of it, and I’ve had enough rotten ones to know what I’m talking about,”

Grinning at Harry, Remus found it hard to disagree.

***

The air had grown so cold, their strongest warming charms made almost no difference whatsoever.
While Remus would have much preferred to remain tucked up beside his witch under the covers of their snug pallet, the part of him that still occasionally felt as if he were still Harry's teacher, guilted the werewolf into emerging from his comfortable nook.

It didn’t help that he would have rather remained at Hermione’s side, given what she had told him of the significance of their current campsite.

“My parents,” she said earlier in the evening as she turned her damp eyes westwards. “We camped here one summer, shortly after I started at Hogwarts. My father insisted that I learned how to start a fire from nothing. I can still do it, you know, even now. Mum thought it was silly because she wasn’t insane. She argued that lighters were invented for a reason…despite all that, she still brought me as many branches as she could get her hands on, to help me along…”

In the present, tugging his woollen coat tightly around himself and shoving his chapped hands into his padded pockets, Remus ambled towards Harry.

The other wizard was perched upon a rocky outcrop, reading a familiar novel by the light of a shining wand.

"I really ought to speak to Hermione about lending my things out without asking me,” the werewolf grumbled half-heartedly.

"I'm glad she lent me this book," Harry said absently as he turned to the next page. "This story is ridiculously addictive. And horribly violent,”

Remus sighed. “Why don't you go to bed? I'll take watch until morning," Once Harry was gone, he fully intended on practicing another bout of willed transformation.

"I'm alright,”

Taking note of the dark circles lining his companion’s eyes, Remus stiffened slightly. “Did you enter You-Know-Who’s mind again?”

In the five weeks since Christmas, Harry had not displayed any further sign that Voldemort was invading his mind.

"Yes," Harry answered with a shudder. "He's still angry…and he’s taking his rage out on those he supposes failed him. I don’t like any of his stupid minions, but watching them suffer…it’s getting a bit much,”

Shifting uneasily, Remus cleared his throat. “Not to echo Hermione, but perhaps its time we revisited the basics of Occlumency,”

"I think you might be right,” the Boy Who Lived sighed the sigh of Atlas, supporting the weight of the world upon his shoulders.

Remus tried his damndest not to wince at the sight of Harry folding down a page corner of the novel in his hands. Because the werewolf wasn’t much of an actor, the other wizard took note of his distress immediately.

"Oh for the love of…” Harry sounded torn between amusement and aggravation. “You and 'Mione are peas in a pod aren't you? Second year, she almost murdered Ron and I for cracking the spines of our textbooks,”
“I don’t like seeing books receiving abuse,” Remus heard the whine in his voice, and flushed in embarrassment.

"Honestly mate, sometimes I think..."

Before Harry could finish his sentence, a silvery light began to suffuse the dark. Not waiting to find out what his companion thought of his reading habits, Remus’s drew his wand.

"Moony..." Harry breathed.

“I see it,” the older man whispered in disbelief.

A few feet away from the two wizards, a silver doe stared patiently at both men. Slowly, it inclined its head, and began to canter away. After a few steps, the deer paused, and cast the men a meaningful look.

“She wants us to follow her,”

“Harry,” Remus cautioned.

*The dead did not come back to life, they simply did not.*

To his everlasting frustration, Harry began to run after the retreating doe as it started to race away between the dark shadows of the Forest of Dean. Resignedly, Remus left a tiny gap in their wards to allow for their return, before he too, began to give chase.

Through the dark and the cold, the two men sprinted, pursuing the silvery phantom as it darted in and out of sight.

The creature they were running after should not exist, Remus thought at first, because her mistress was long dead and buried.

Yet as he loped through the dark, the werewolf began to see that the doe they pursuing, was not in fact, Lily Potter’s *Patronus*. The spots on the creature’s pelt were wrong; the slope of its shoulders, the curve of its back…

No. This was something else. *Someone else.*

The question was - friend or foe?

Without any warning, Remus found himself crashing into a clearing, and standing on the shores of a frozen lake. Deep within its icy depths, something glittered and beckoned.

“That was stupid of you to run off,” Those were Remus’s first words. His next were, “What in the hell is that down there?”

“I don’t know, but I mean to find out,” Harry huffed in exertion.

The *Patronus* had disappeared, fading into the night as if it had never been. Uncomfortably, Remus found himself very much aware that both he and Harry were well outside the bounds of the wards Hermione had raised. It didn’t help that his sharp sense of smell was becoming confused by the scents of other campers who had once lingered where the two men now stood.

Straightening his back, Harry raised his wand and cast, “*Accio,*”

The glimmering object shimmered and twinkled, and to Remus’s eyes, it appeared to be trying to
answer its summons. Stuck under layers of ice as it was, the thing remained fixed in place.

“Shit,” Harry tugged at his messy hair. “What now? Do I go for a swim?”

“Harry, are you a bloody wizard or not?” Remus grumbled. Kneeling into the snow, he dug his wand onto the iced-over surface of the lake. Focusing his mind, he murmured, “Diffluo calidum,”

Ever so slowly, the ice cracked, then rippled, then flowed, steaming ever so slightly in an expanding radius from Remus’s wand. Frost began to recede from the shoreline, spreading out inch by painful inch.

“Diffluo calidum,” Harry intoned to his left, doing as Remus had done.

For what felt like hours, though truly it was probably only twenty minutes all said, the duo imposed their will over the thick ice. Eventually, the lake liquified partially into a languid pool. Small waves lapped gently and incongruously against snow-covered shores.

To Remus’s left, Harry rose up abruptly, and tried another summoning spell.

Again, the glimmering object shifted - but this time, it sailed smoothly upwards through warm water. Breaking the surface, the thing flew straight at Harry in a forceful trajectory. Widening his eyes, Remus turned and tackled Harry to the ground.

That which had lain under the lake, landed with a loud thump where the younger wizard had only just stood. Sharp edges gleamed dangerously in the bright starlight.

“Ow! A little warning next time if you please!” Harry complained as he rolled away.

“You’re welcome you ungrateful little git,” Remus climbed to his feet and approached what was unmistakably a sword.

“Cor…” Harry lost that petulant edge in his voice as he stumbled forwards. “It’s…it’s the bloody Sword of Gryffindor,”

Picking up the weapon by its bejewelled pommel, Harry raised the longsword and gazed at it in wonder. “This is larger than I remember,”

“Are you sure it’s the sword?” Remus demanded. Sacred sword or no, the blade had almost impaled Harry upon its deadly point.

In many ways, the entire episode seemed like some laboriously laid trap…

Though if it was a trap…shouldn’t their enemies have sprung by now?

A branch cracked in the woods. Snapping his attention towards the tree line, Remus studied the shadows with a low growl.

Harry lifted both his wand and the sword at the same time. Resisting the urge to roll his eyes, the werewolf muttered, “You’re probably going to stab yourself with that thing,”

“Don’t be ridiculous. I killed a basilisk with this sword once,” James’s son scoffed.

“Showoff,” Remus muttered. In a louder voice, he called, “Whose there?”

“It’s only me,” a very familiar voice said. “Lumos,”
The tip of a wand glowed, illuminating the blue eyes of one Ronald Bilius Weasley.
“Stop. Not one more step,” Remus said evenly.

“I’m Ron Weasley. I’ve been friends with Harry Potter since the day we both started at Hogwarts,” Ron assured a little shakily.

“Not enough,” Harry shook his head. “Everyone knows that,”

There was a moment of silence before Ron spoke again. “You told me once, after I dreamt about buying shoes, that it meant I was going to be eaten by a giant marshmallow,”

Out the corner of his eye, Remus could see Harry’s shoulders relaxing.

“Bit of a leap isn’t it?” the werewolf asked, dropping his wand and addressing Harry. “I always thought shoes indicated a want of dinosaur erotica myself;”

“I was going through a phase,” Harry shrugged. “Sexy dreams about the Marshmallow man and all that…you know, the one from the Ghostbusters film,”

“Nope,” Remus shook his head. “Stop,”

Ron, who was being pointedly ignored, flicked his eyes in consternation between the two wizards. Hesitating briefly, the young man continued his approach.

Before he could get much closer however, Harry raised his wand again, and stuck it directly in his best friend’s face.

“You deserted us. You left. What the hell are you doing back?”

It wasn’t a conversation Remus thought he ought to be a part of, really. This was a personal thing between Harry and Ron. Still, it wasn’t as if he could leave Harry here, alone, outside the safe confines of their wards.

“I was under the influence of the Horcrux, you know I was.” Ron seemed genuinely sorry and desperate. “I didn’t mean anything I said;”

“What about the part where you made Hermione’s life a living hell last year?” Remus asked despite himself. “You weren’t wearing a Horcrux back at Hogwarts were you?”

“I behaved abominably, I get that now,” Ron sounded miserable. “I promise, I’ll make it up to Hermione. To all of you. I’ll even do double time on that blasted locket…”

“It’s gone,” Harry said shortly. “‘Mione took care of it…the day after you left actually. Maybe it was always you who was in our way;”

The Weasley boy appeared stricken.

“Harry,” Remus rubbed at his forehead. “Ron’s back. He’s done being a tosser. *Right, Weasley?*


Glaring at the red-headed wizard, Harry’s jaw worked angrily as he weighed his options. It took him a full half minute before he finally came to a decision. Tucking his wand into his back pocket, he shoved the Sword of Gryffindor at Remus, who took it without comment.

Marching up to Ron who was backing away with his hands held up in a universal sign of surrender, Harry pulled his right arm back and slugged the other wizard straight across his left jaw.
“Ow,” Harry cried out in pain and rubbed at his closed fist in surprise.

“Fuck!” Ron moaned from the ground.

“Next time you punch someone, do not tuck your thumb in,” Remus admonished as he hurried towards Harry. “That’s how thumbs get broken. I know because that’s how your father broke his, that one time he hit Sirius on a dare,”

“Guess Potter men all hit alike,” Harry groaned.

“You mean badly? Hermione’s going to need to fix you up when we get back,” Remus said in annoyance. “That is, if she doesn’t kill the both of us for running off without waking her,”

Turning to regard a still-stunned Ron, Remus waited a moment before he reached down and hoisted the boy to his feet.

“You and I. We’re not ok. We’re not going to be ok until I know Hermione’s forgiven you, and then probably not for a while after that. If you ever insult her again, if you even look at her wrong, I promise you, I’ll be mailing pieces of you back to Molly. Are we clear?”

“Yes,’ Ron said meekly as he rubbed at his purpling jaw. “I’m sorry. I was a wanker. If it helps, Bill - who took me in only after hours of begging - told me he was surprised you didn’t kill me, considering…”

“Your brother’s a clever man,” Remus agreed amiably, patting Ron on the back with more force than was strictly necessary. “Since we have an understanding, I think we’re all going to get along just fine.”

The hopeful look Ron cast at both himself and Harry did much in the way in melting the anger from Remus’s heart.

Well…some of it, anyway.
Had Remus been any slower, he would likely not have reached Hermione in time. Despite his best efforts however, the witch managed to land at least two smacks on Ron, before the werewolf could tug her away.

While he could sympathize with Hermione’s need to exact revenge on the idiot boy, Remus didn’t fancy the thought of his wife doing something she would permanently regret.

“’Mione, I’m sorry,” Ron implored, as she squirmed in Remus’s arms like a wild thing.

“Sorry?” she hissed. “You coward, you left us,”

“Ron’s learned his lesson,” Remus coaxed.

“Not yet he hasn’t,” she growled.

Harry shrugged. “I don’t know, she deserves quite a bit more satisfaction in my opinion. Ron was being a right prat all year. I told her so several times. Remus, you probably don’t know this, but he continued being quite unkind even after she confunded another boy, just so Ron could get on the Quidditch team,”

Sighing, Remus released his hold on Hermione.

Instead of resuming her assault on the red-headed wizard, the woman stood stock still. Her breathing was erratic in her rage, and her heart thumped loudly under her chest.

“Don’t speak to me.” Hermione spat at last. “Don’t come near me. If I even think you’re going to do something stupid again, don’t be surprised if I hex you into next Tuesday,”

“But…”

“Time,” Remus mouthed silently at Ron, shaking his head in warning.

Wretchedly, Ron turned towards him. “I don’t suppose you want to hear what happened after I left the three of you,”

“All of it, yes,” Remus said genially. “I’d like to know where you’ve been, who you’ve spoken to…how you found us…”

Since Ron had appeared to them by the lake, the werewolf had found himself wondering how the boy had found them. It shouldn’t have been possible, and yet here he was…

Not, of course, that Ron was the only one who had found them.

Were he not more certain now, that the owner of the doe Patronus meant them no harm, Remus would have them break camp immediately. As it stood, nothing untoward had befallen them outside their wards. Instead they had returned from their short jaunt with a weapon they sorely needed, but which he never thought they would find.

“We know you’re you,” Remus gestured towards a bench. “But how can we be certain that you’ve
not been placed under some other sort of spell, meant to expose us or to harm us?”

“You can’t be serious?” Ron paled.

Harry said nothing, choosing instead to keep his green eyes trained expectantly on Ron.

“Mr. Weasley,” Remus smiled politely. “Sit,”

Blanching, the boy took the hint and did as he was told.

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Society, it seemed, was turning in on itself.

It was no longer safe to wander the world as a free man, not without the threat of Snatchers looking to make an easy sickle.

“It was truly awful,” Ron’s normally ruddy complexion transformed into a delicate shade of green as he narrated his tale. “They took our wands and had us bound together like we were livestock.”

“Where were they trying to take you?” Harry asked. His own discomfort was partially caused by Hermione, who was prodding gently at his hand with her wand.

“They were going to sell us to the Ministry. They’re looking for anyone they think is Muggle-born. I knew if they handed me over to the authorities, my family would be in tons of trouble. The Death Eaters think I’m still in Mum’s attic with a bad case of Spattergroit if you recall.”

“How did you escape?” Remus kept his wand trained on Ron. “You said they took your wand,”

“Charlie gave me a pocket knife two Christmases ago,” Ron dug into his pocket and drew out a small, red item. “It’s very sharp, and most importantly, it’s not magical. They didn’t think to check us for non-magical objects.”

“So you cut away your bonds. What then?” Remus pressed.

Off to the side, Harry cursed softly as Hermione began casting bone-setting spells on his broken thumb.

“I tackled the nearest Snatcher and took his wand,” Ron answered. “Then I apparated myself to Shell Cottage. Bill’s home, that is,”

Staring at the younger wizard, Remus wondered if he ought to trust what he was hearing, or if he ought to dig further.

Ron shook his head impatiently. “If you think I’m here to lead the Enemy to you, you’d all be dead by now. And if you think really think I’ve been placed under the Imperius curse to spy on you, why don’t you go ahead and cast a finite incant…”

Raising his left brow, Remus did exactly as Ron suggested. Un-repentantly, he flexed his wrist and added a very slight twist to his non-verbal spell.

Before his eyes, Ron slammed backwards, and tumbled down to the ground. Staring up at his former Professor in slack-jawed shock, the younger wizard turned a stunned gaze towards the other two occupants of the tent.

“Remus, he’s been beat up enough for one night,” Harry pointed out.
“You’re right,” Remus nodded, tucking his wand away. Rising to his feet, the older wizard reached down to help the boy up.

“Despite your little Swiss Army Knife, I assume you don’t actually have a clue what being in an army is like. In Muggle armies, deserters are tried as criminals and punished accordingly. Our people on the other hand…deserters of ancient wars were subjected to the Dementor’s Kiss the moment they were found.”

Mouth opening and shutting like a goldfish, Molly’s youngest son appeared lost for words.

“This isn’t the army, and there isn’t a sentence,” Remus released his hold on Ron.

“I suppose you can take your old bunk,” Harry flexed his newly healed fingers contemplatively. He didn’t seem capable of looking at his best friend.

“Alright,” Ron nodded slowly, even as Remus pointed his wand and healed away the large bruise Harry had left on his jaw.

“There’s still the question of how you found us,” Harry continued conversationally as he bent to pick up a piece of fallen parchment. “Anything we need to worry about?”

“Nah mate,” Ron reached into his pocket.

Standing back warily, Remus watched as the boy withdrew an object he’d seen Albus Dumbledore fiddling with numerous times over the course of their association. Back then, he had assumed that the Headmaster probably owned a smoking habit he didn’t wish to share with his soldiers, or broadcast among the student population.

“Remember what Professor Dumbledore left me? As it turns out - what this thing does, is that it tells you when people are talking about you, and shows you where they are,” Ron grinned shakily. “It was very hard to track the lot of you down, to tell you the truth,"

“Sounds right,” Harry shrugged. “But how often did you stumble on Lavender talking about her Won-Won?”

“I’m off to bed,” Hermione said stiffly, interrupting the stilted conversation. “We start out early in the morning. It’s clear this place is not secure as I’d like,”

Looking beseechingly after her, Ron gazed first at Harry and then at Remus, as if seeking assistance for the plight he had created for himself.

“She’ll come around,” Remus’s heart thawed even further. Clapping the boy on his shoulder, he couldn’t help but joke, “Bet court martial is starting to look better and better eh?”

Observing Ron’s stricken expression, Remus regretted his flippant words.

***

The scene he walked into back in his own tent, was one of barely controlled chaos. As far as he could tell, Hermione had pulled out every last item she had packed into her beaded bag, and had placed them upon every available surface.

Stacking and re-stacking piles of books, clothing and supplies, she kept on muttering under her breath.
It’d been a while since he had seen her like this; the last time had been before Bill’s wedding, after a particularly fruitless day of research.

Back then, the both of them had the luxury of taking a few days to put everything back in order, organizing sessions of which were punctuated by cups of tea, walks in the country and intense bouts of lovemaking.

Now however, now that they literally on the run, Remus found the sight before him extremely worrying, and a little more daunting than he’d like to admit.

“Hermione…” he picked his way across the mess to her side. “Hermione, stop. Please,”

“I’m dragging around all this stuff,” she kept on rifling through their belongings. “I don’t even know if we need all of it. Perhaps it’s time I did some manner of purging…”

“What you need is to do, is to calm down,” he tried his best to keep his voice firm. “We can sort this stuff out tomorrow…”

“There’s no time Remus,” she said sharply. “We’ve spent too long faffing about doing exactly nothing,”

“We haven’t done nothing. We’ve destroyed a Horcrux…” he tried to pull her into a comforting hug.

“By accident. Honestly, it’s like you’re not even paying attention,” she sniped.

Twisting from his arms, Hermione went back to her frenzied curation effort as if her very life depended on it. There was a strong possibility of course, that in her mind, her life did depend whether or not she ought to take with her, both the 1985 and 1995 editions of Cursed Objects and You.

“That’s not fair,” he growled in irritation. Reaching up, he ran a frustrated hand through his hair. “I was there to fix that accident in case you’ve forgotten,”

Wilfully, the witch ignored him.

“How could it not be?” she laughed shortly. “Or at least, he’s part of it.”

“He’s still your friend, you understand that don’t you?” Remus rubbed his chin. “Just because he went and made a dumb mistake, doesn’t make him any less your friend,”

“I know all that,” Hermione huffed. “I’ve been his friend longer than I’ve been yours Remus Lupin, which is why I know he’ll do this again and again, over and over. There will never be a time when Ron Weasley won’t allow his worst impulses to act as his guide,”

Leaning against a supporting post in the middle of their tent, Remus crossed his arms and waited.

“By this time tomorrow, Harry will have forgotten everything Ron went and did. Again, I might add,” Hermione shook her head.

“And you don’t think others forgive you, your…um…idiosyncrasies?” Remus asked gingerly, doing his best not to stare at the mess which she had created in her fury.
“Of course not,” Hermione glared. “The boys have no problem ignoring me for weeks on end if I so much as cross a line they don’t like…”

“If it helps, I don’t think I would ever want to go more than a day ignoring you. I don’t think I could,” Remus snagged her drifting hands before she could start ripping at her curls. Gently, he pulled Hermione towards him, until her back rested flush against his chest. Curling his arms around her waist, he dropped a kiss to her hair.

“I like hanging around you, even when you’re being the bossiest, swottiest creature on the face of the earth,”

Despite his tender assurances, the tension did not leave her shoulders. Not that he expected otherwise, of course…nonetheless, breathing her in made him feel better.

“It’s not just Ron is it?” he murmured.

“Well, there’s the little fact that Muggle-borns are being rounded up and sold like cattle,” Hermione muttered.

Tightening his hold on her, Remus tilted her chin up and slanted his mouth over hers, wishing again that he had the power to right all the wrongs which had been inflicted on her, and those like her.

“We could still walk away from this. There are ways, I’m sure…” he said quietly after some time. “We could just buy some plane tickets and get the hell out of Great Britain. I know how to live in a world without magic, and I wager you can as well. We could find us a bookshop to work in, and a small apartment overlooking some famous river…how does Paris take your fancy? Or Shanghai? New York City seems like a good city to disappear into,”

“New York City…I’ve always wanted to go. Living there would be amazing I’m sure*…if we had a kitchen, I could learn to cook,” Hermione looked thoughtful. “Really cook. I could learn a new language perhaps…oh, we could take in shows on Broadway whenever we wanted…”

“…when it gets cold, we’ll build snowmen in Central Park, and give it a carrot for a nose. We’ll make hot chocolate from some horrible powdered mix,” he grinned as he pictured their idyllic Muggle life. “You’ll complain about my socks lying everywhere, and I’ll get irritated at you for lending my paperbacks out to the neighbours…”

“…and eventually, when we have children, we could walk them to school in the mornings,” she peered carefully up at him. There was something strangely shy in her gaze.

Remus’s breath caught in his chest.

What had started out as a silly fantasy of life in the Muggle world, suddenly stopped being very silly at all.

Children, he thought with wonder. She was speaking of having his children.

“I don’t mean for us to start making babies tomorrow. If we live through this, I fully intend to get a job and all that,” she said hastily, as if fully aware she had accidentally broken what spell they had only just begun to weave together.

Now might be a good time, Sirius’s voice prodded in his head, to tell her you love her.

“Aren’t you worried they’ll inherit my werewolf genes?” Remus asked instead.
Hermione’s smile disappeared as she levelled a contemptuous glare up at him. “Professor, I know you’re far too intelligent to actually put any stock into that silly myth. You know that’s not how it works.”

Ducking his head, Remus hid his incongruous happiness.

Wiping at her nose, she straightened and looked about her in dismay. “Oh sweet Merlin, what have I done?”

“Well…” Remus tried to banish the thought of a daughter with Hermione’s curls and his grey eyes. “You might have gone a bit…um…ballistic,”

“I suppose I should pack all this away,” Hermione placed one hand on her hip. Sighing, she reached for her wand and swept it in a wide arc. Immediately, the entire mess flew haphazardly back into her bag.

“By the by, I don’t suppose you know where that book The Modern Lycanth has gone?” she asked as she bustled about, picking up the occasional parchment her spell missed.

“Not a clue,” Remus lied, scratching the back of his neck. For whatever reason, he still hadn’t found the right moment to tell her all of his own discoveries when it came to his wolven nature.

Isabel, Remus decided dreamily as he moved to help his wife. They’d name their daughter Isabel.

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“I think it’s time we paid a visit to Xenophilius Lovegood,” Hermione said the moment the new campsite was set up.

“Why?” Harry frowned. “What’s the point?”

“It’s quite unlikely that Albus Dumbledore would have left me a book of fairytales, simply to provide me with deeper insight into a regular wizarding childhood,” Hermione pointed out. “Since present company and Viktor Krum…”

“Wanker,” Remus coughed.

“…can’t actually pinpoint the true meaning of the line, the circle and the triangle - which has been popping up everywhere - it can’t hurt to get a third opinion,” Hermione shrugged. With a mischievous smile, she added, “Besides, I’m getting bored with seeing only your faces all the time,”

“And you think Luna’s father might know something?” Harry asked doubtfully. “The more I think about it, the more I think he’s a bit too loopy to really know a lot about anything…sorry Ron,”

In Remus’s opinion, the Boy Who Lived didn’t exactly look like the Boy Who Was Actually Sorry.

“Well…he was wearing that symbol on his robes at Bill’s wedding wasn’t he?” Hermione frowned. “He doesn’t seem like the sort of man who has a penchant for making fashion statements…”

“Are you so sure about that?” Remus grunted as he dug into a cold can of beans. “He used to wear
some fairly ridiculous things in school. I mean, I never knew there were so many shades of purple. James used to try getting Xenophilius to bring us whatever mushrooms he was obviously on...he kept hunting Xeno down and shoving galleons in his face. One time, Xeno actually followed through, and brought us a small bag of enchanted cannabis from Morocco after the Christmas hols, and I...

The disapproving glare Hermione shot Remus, might just have been scorching enough to warm the baked beans in his hands.

“...I told Xenophilius that drugs were bad, and it was extremely irresponsible of him to bring drugs into a school filled with impressionable children,” the werewolf finished meekly.

“Really?” Harry laughed. Curiously, he asked, “Did my Mum ever…”

“Your parents were paragons of virtue. They barely even touched butterbeer,” Remus cleared his throat. “I abstained completely. It was Sirius who was the bad seed. Drugs and sex and all that…”

“Developing a bit of a cough there Remus?” Ron asked with a small smile.

Their newly returned companion had been busying himself with the task of staying quiet, and speaking only when spoken to. In the older wizard’s opinion, silence was likely the wisest thing Ron could have practised. No matter what Hermione assumed, he doubted that even Harry was ready to slide back into the trio’s old dynamics just yet.

With every passing hour, Remus found himself growing increasingly sympathetic towards Ron, who seemed to finally understand that he had fucked up in an extremely fundamental way. The wound he had inadvertently inflicted would heal, but it would take a long time before the other two fully trusted him again.

“Back to the topic at hand,” Hermione interjected icily.

“‘Mione…” Ron started, only to immediately understand he wasn’t at a place yet where he owned the privilege of calling her by her nickname.

“Hermione,” Ron began again. “I think your idea is a great one. I can’t imagine there being anything to lose. I agree that we should find out what Xenophilius Lovegood knows…it could help with the mission.”

“You’re just saying that because you want to see Luna,” Harry snorted, unimpressed.

Flushing an unattractive shade of puce, Ron snapped his mouth shut.

“He’s right though,” Hermione avoided addressing Ron directly. “At this juncture, we have very little to lose…though admittedly, what little we have to lose, is precious indeed,”

“Luna’s Dad has been writing really good things about Harry in The Quibbler. Things that aren’t complete bunk anyway,” Ron added earnestly.

“If Hermione thinks its right thing do, then I don’t see why not,” Harry said reluctantly, as he caught Remus’s eye.

“We’ll take precautions…” Hermione started.

Taking in the suddenly apologetic expression she wore, there was little doubt in Remus’s mind, what his wife meant when she said ‘precautions’.
It was less than a week away from another full moon, and the man had already started his regular dosing of Wolfsbane Potion. Setting the half-filled can of beans down on the picnic table, the man found himself incapable of hiding his annoyance at the thought of having to imbibe yet another vile potion…

Which barely worked in their favour, anyway.

Fetching Harry had resulted in the death of a good man, visiting Godric’s Hollow had almost resulted in Voldemort himself getting his scaly hands on Harry…if Remus wanted to really think about it, he was sure he could find more examples related to the inefficacy of Polyjuice Potion.

“Our efforts with Polyjuice have almost always resulted in catastrophe,” he ground out, summarizing all their misadventures in one neat sentence.

Peering at his witch, he watched Hermione as she struggled to find a way to refute his logic.

“Those books you have - especially the ones that concern dark magic. Surely there must be better concealment charms we could employ…” he pressed.

Narrowing her eyes, Hermione seemed as if she were storing certain choice words for his benefit once they were alone.

“You’re not wrong I suppose,” she said at last. “It’ll take a few days more than I had hoped though,”

“I doubt that matters,” Harry scraped noisily at his own, emptied tin. “A few more days wouldn’t hurt. Besides, unless I miss my guess, perhaps we ought to wait until after Friday night,”

Here, he gazed meaningfully at Remus.

“Right,” the werewolf grinned triumphantly. “It’s settled then. No more Polyjuice,”

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In the end, it was decided that they would cast a spell that would bind all four of them to a state of concealment. All the spell required, was a complex series of incantations and a bit of blood from each of them.

“The only time someone who isn’t one of us would see us, or sense us, is if we specifically address him or her…or if I lift the spell,” Hermione intoned as they pressed their bleeding hands together. “This will last us a day, which is more, I think, than what we actually need,”

And it would have worked too, had they even a smidgen of good fortune…

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“I want to go back!” Ron roared even as Harry ripped his wand away from his best friend.

“You can’t,” Hermione insisted, her eyes were red with unshed tears. “I’m sorry Ron, but you can’t go back!”

Remus braced himself against the trunk of a slender birch; white bark peeled off and splintered the palm of his right hand. Against the scrape of a frozen breeze, his heart had yet to stop racing, both in panic…and in fury.
Fury at Hermione, to be exact.

She had silenced him purposefully, the moment the Death Eaters had entered Xenophilius Lovegood’s home, though he hadn’t known it at first.

Before his startled eyes, Remus had watched as Hermione raised her wand towards Harry, before tapping him lightly on his shoulder. There was a shimmer in the air, as both Harry and Hermione’s concealment fell apart.

For a wild moment, the werewolf wondered if his witch had lost her mind.

“Hermione what…” Harry’s green eyes were filled with shock.

The Death Eaters themselves had blinked owlishly at the sight of their quarry, as if they couldn’t quite believe their luck…until Hermione loosed an offensive spell, which caused their enemies to leap into action.

“Potter,” one of them howled as he cast a binding hex. “Your luck’s run out you little shit! You and your pet mudblood!”

Instinctively, Remus opened his mouth to shout a curse at the Death Eater…only to find himself incapable of making a single sound. Glancing at Ron, he found his confusion mirrored on the boy’s distraught face, as the latter too, found himself ineffectually mouthing out spells.

Spinning his gaze back towards the fray, the werewolf understood in a heartbeat that his momentary distraction had just cost the four of them the battle. While Hermione and Harry fended off the advances of one Death Eater, the other had fired off a Dark Mark.

All of them would be surrounded in seconds if he didn’t do something.

Roaring silently, the werewolf focused his energy. Silently, he slashed his wand in the direction of a man he almost recognized.

Travers, he thought as the man’s flesh rent and bled. Verbally, Remus’s spell should have utterly incapacitated him.

Reaching for Hermione, he signalled frantically at Harry, who very thankfully took his hint and dived immediately towards their fourth companion.

Loud cracks of apparition began to fill the air, even as the werewolf twisted Hermione’s body a half step to the left…

…back to the safety of their remote campsite, half a country away.

On the ground, with the silencing spell lifted off of him, Ron screamed, “I have to get to Luna! I have to save her! Please Harry, let me go!”

Harry held his friend down with ruthless, heartbroken determination.

“You can’t march in there alone! You can’t take them all by yourself!”

“Then come with me!” Ron demanded wildly. “I don’t bloody understand why we’re hesitating!”

“Ron, they think you’re still hidden up in your mother’s attic!” Hermione reminded him in hoarse voice. “If they catch you…”
“Think Ron,” Harry begged raggedly. “It’s not only Luna’s life in the balance. They’d kill every last one of your brothers and Ginny, not to mention your Mum and Dad!”

Mouth forming into a grim line, Remus marched over to the young woman. Plucking her wand from her unsuspecting fingers, he hoisted her surprised form over his left shoulder.

“Put me down!” the witch demanded, as Remus tossed her strip of vinewood in Harry’s direction. Seeker reflexes kicking in, Harry effortlessly caught the wand from mid-air. Uncomprehendingly, he gaped at the werewolf.

Not breaking his stride, Remus called over his shoulder, “My wife and I have some things we need to sort out,”

He should have known she would have pulled something so stupidly Gryffindor, he thought angrily as he carried her struggling form away from their companions. Casting a muffling spell on her, Remus found himself appreciating the irony of his own actions as he strode onwards.

When he was finally satisfied that they would not be overheard, Remus deposited his furiously squirming bundle so her feet landed squarely on the ground. Small fists instantly began pummelling at his chest, though he put an immediate stop to her onslaught by capturing both her slender wrists with one large hand.

“Stop your childishness right now,” his voice was a rough growl. When she kept on struggling, he tightened his hold ever so slightly.

“You don’t seem to understand how angry I am at you right at this very moment,” he murmured, keeping his grey eyes fixed on her dark ones. “Hermione, I swear to God, stop struggling or you won’t like what I’ll do next,”

Something in his expression must have betrayed the fact that he was deadly serious, because finally, the witch stopped moving. Still however, she glared at him with a force that would have hurt at a different time.

Remus had no intention of truly hurting the witch in front of him of course. Had it come down to it, he would have simply cast an incarcerous spell on Hermione, so she had no choice to but sit still and listen.

“You put yourself and Harry in danger today,” Remus kept his voice even. “The both of you could have been killed or taken. And you had me fucking silenced,”

I was protecting you, she mouthed. Her face remained twisted in unabated rage.

“I thought we agreed,” he continued. “That when it came down to it, we were to fight back-to-back,”

Hermione’s face was red from the effort of trying to speak through his Silencio.

“Had anything happened to you, I wouldn’t have hesitated to kill Lovegood for betraying us, and for causing me to lose you, do you understand?”

Without warning, a small gloved hand darted out and snatched his wand from his firm grip. Literally jumping a few feet away from him, Hermione hastily cancelled his spell before he could get his hands on her.
“I was trying to protect you and Ron! I didn’t want them knowing you were there for god’s sakes!” she burst out immediately, though he could hear the first traces of guilt in her voice. “I was trying to save Luna…and besides, it didn’t exactly stop you from doing magic!”

Snatching his wand back, Remus bit out angrily, “You did what you thought was best for everyone without consulting anyone!”

“I got all of us out safe and sound didn’t I?” Hermione demanded hotly.

“Xenophilius Lovegood was the only one who could have seen or heard us,” he was no longer able to keep his voice down. “We could have walked out the front door, and those bastards would have been none the wiser,”

“They would have killed Luna if they thought her father had lied to them about Harry being there,” Hermione spat. “I thought if they saw Harry, the Lovegoods would be spared…”

“Luna is as good as dead,” Remus said harshly. “She might already be dead. Had either one of those pillocks been quicker on the draw, you and Harry might have joined her and for what? The life of a man who sold us all out?”

Clearly, it hadn’t occurred to Hermione that the Death Eaters might already have disposed of Luna Lovegood. What use was a Blood Traitor’s daughter to these fanatics? A blood traitor and an annoying political dissident at that.

“Shit,” Hermione swore as understanding finally pierced her consciousness.

“The things I would have done to get you back…” Remus murmured as the fingers of his left hand tangled themselves in her thick curls.

“I’m…”

Remus pressed a bruising kiss against her mouth, gathering her body tightly against his own. He kissed her until she was shaking from need and contrition both, until she seemed to understand that she had truly, completely shaken him to the very core with her rash behaviour.

“Don’t ever break your word to me again Hermione Granger,” he whispered brokenly against her mouth.

“I’m sorry…I…” she breathed. “Remus, I didn’t mean to scare you,”

“I know, “ he nodded as he kissed her over and over. Already, his anger was beginning to melt away. Instead, he all he wanted now was a reassurance that she was here, alive and with him.

Tugging at her trousers, he pressed her backwards into the gnarled trunk of the tree behind her.

“I tried to kill one of them…” she gasped as they undid each other’s clothing. “I don’t know if I succeeded…”

“I don’t care,” he breathed against her skin. “They didn’t kill you, and that’s the only thing that matters to me right now,”

With one hand gripping the nape of her neck, he lifted a slender thigh with his other, and thrust forwards.

Under his hands, Hermione’s back arched as she loosed a silenced cry.
“Fuck...” he rasped.

In reply, she whimpered and twisted against him.

Sliding his hand under her sweater, his fingers skated the edges of her brassier before he moved through a gap and rolled gently at a stiff nipple. Gasping, she quivered almost violently against him.

“Remus, please...” Hermione begged prettily.

Swallowing her words, Remus thrust his hips against her own with increasing urgency. Clutching at his sweater, the witch came with a short scream.

Lost in the feel of her flesh as it clenched around his cock, Remus roared loudly as he found his own completion. As he came down from his high, he pushed her curls away and nipped lazily at the crook of her neck.

“Mine,” he whispered as his lips caressed the mark he left behind, whilst still buried inside of her.

“All mine,”

Bracing the witch’s body carefully so she wouldn’t drop her bare arse into a thick layer of snow, Remus righted her clothing even as he pressed comforting kisses all over her face and lips.

“You’re the loveliest thing I’ve ever beheld,” he said softly, caressing her cheek.

“I’m sorry I scared you today,” she told him earnestly.

“Don’t ever do that again Hermione,” he pressed his forehead against her own. “You’re more important to me than Harry, do you understand? You’re more important to me than the state of this sorry world. I don’t trust myself not to do something completely foolhardy or destructive, if I thought it might save you.”

“I won’t ever do something like this again,” she shook her head urgently. “I swear,”

Kissing her full on the mouth, Remus understood in his heart that his wife honestly believed that she wasn’t lying. Hermione’s intelligence was rivalled only by her loyalty and her bravery, and wasn’t every last one of those qualities the reasons he had found himself so drawn to her right from the very beginning?

***

The following days passed like a bad dream.

As the quartet floated across the frozen rural landscapes of Britain, encountering more foxes and hares than they did humans, Harry spiralled into a new iteration of obsessive brooding.

For hours on end, James’s son stared at the Golden Snitch which Albus had left as his inheritance, doing his best to decipher what the old man had meant to tell him when he had bequeathed such a gift.

Murmuring constantly to himself in a never-ending monologue, Harry turned the small object this way and that, in an effort to find a way to breach Albus’s wards. Since their visit to Xenophilius, the younger wizard had become absolutely certain the Snitch was connected to the fabled Resurrection Stone, despite having no proof whatsoever that this was true.
Remus had always favoured Harry since the day he met the boy for the first time, though it was true that this was mostly owed to the love he had borne for James Potter. In the past months however, his affection for Harry had turned into actual friendship in spite of their brief rivalry for Hermione’s attention.

To see him falling into another cruel puzzle a dead man had left behind, to watch as Harry lost all sense of reality…it all hurt a little more than Remus expected.

Like Hermione, he didn’t for a second believe that the tale of the Deathly Hallows held any real weight, though even if it did, what good was the Resurrection Stone at the end of it? The tale of the Deathly Hallows itself, had been nothing more than a fable, preaching with laughable earnestness, the futility of wanting the dead to return from the grave.

Ron wasn’t in a better state. Day and night, the boy stared morosely into space, unmotivated and ineffective. When he wasn’t pretending to research, the wizard spent an inordinate amount of time tuning his blasted wireless machine.

At all times, his blue eyes remained rimmed in red. It was plain to see that the boy suffered in the knowledge that he could not even try to save the girl he was in love with…not without putting the rest of his family members at risk, anyway.

Had there been any hard feelings leftover from his previous desertion, all of it was gone from himself, Hermione and Harry.

If anything, Remus found himself pitying the Weasley boy. In Ron’s shoes, the werewolf would already have lost all pretence of playing at being a civilized man. Likely, he would have ripped the world at its foundations if it meant he could regain his witch.

***

“I can’t help either of them,” Hermione said to him one cold afternoon towards the end of February. The both of them had twined their naked bodies around each other, forming a shape that was all their own.

It was an unspoken understanding now, that they had all given up any pretence of knowing what was to happen next.

The texts were exhausted, every last one of them. Even assuming Albus had been right, and the remaining Horcruxes were known to them as Rowena Ravenclaw’s Diadem, Helga Hufflepuff’s cup and Voldemort’s own familiar, there was no way for them to know how it might have been possible find them, let alone destroy them.

Having the Sword of Gryffindor meant nothing, if there was no enemy upon which to use it.

“Harry will snap out of it,” Remus murmured as he traced patterns upon his witch’s bare skin.

This was all the two of them did anymore, day after day.

They touched and they fucked, in what felt almost like a concentrated effort to stave off despair. More and more, the snippets of news coming through the wireless told them that the world they had left behind was almost completely conquered. Increasingly, the werewolf was tempted to voice the opinion to the quartet at large, that it was time see the truth for what it was.

The Enemy was winning.
True, all was not lost, but facts were facts. The Order had gone underground, relying on weak radio signals to band their forces. Every night, Bill or Tonks came on air to read off a list of dead or disappeared names, in grieving, cracking voices. Though that list was usually short, if their experience with Xenophilius Lovegood was any indication, Remus had a horrible notion that those lists were frighteningly incomplete.

The manner in which Bill and Tonks rattled off every name, it was as if syllable weighed deeply on their souls, as if the loss of every innocent was somehow their fault. Increasingly, Remus found himself wishing he could reach across the empty spaces to comfort his friends. Increasingly, he prayed he would not return to a life without them in it…

There had been a time, Remus reflected, when he honestly assumed he would never again forge with anyone, the type of bonds he had shared with James, Lily and Sirius.

Peter too, at that.

Then his ill-conceived marriage had occurred, and oddly enough, that had acted as a catalyst to draw him back into the world…a world where he not only had a woman he treasured and who in turn, treasured him…but also, friends.

Still, for all his newfound understanding of his place in the world, Remus knew that sentiment was all but useless in wartime.

Increasingly, his thoughts turned to the notion that were the four of them to cross the channel, they might yet find themselves in a place where true resistance might mean something, against the rising tide of darkness.

Although he childishy hated the idea of Hermione being anywhere close to Viktor Krum, Remus understood that the Bulgarians might be their best hope. Them, or the French…

That is, if they could get past the magical barriers which had been erected at their borders...assuming what they heard on the wireless was true.

In their small pallet, Hermione sighed, drawing Remus out of his silent plotting. “I wish I could make Harry understand that the Tales of Beedle the Bard are exactly that. Tales,”

Gently, Remus stroked at the fine lines set into the corners of her eyes. “I can hardly blame him. He’s lost so very much,”

Shifting their bodies so she straddled his hips, Hermione’s damp cleft brushed against his naked cock, which immediately became half-hard under the slight weight of her body.

The both of them had become such lean creatures in their literal deprivation. Food was becoming even harder to source, and what supplies they still had was being carefully rationed out by the little witch in his arms.

“The stories aren’t real. They can’t be…” Hermione gasped as he stroked his fingers against her cunt. After a moment, he slipped inside of her.

The woman was panting, but it was not only passion which was causing her breath to stutter.

Remus knew - knew with more than a little dread - that she was growing physically weaker by the day, same as the other two.

Lycanthropy, he reflected with old resentment, was as much a curse and a blessing as ever. Even in
his human guise, he was likely to outlast all his companions over the coming days. Should food and supplies completely run out, Remus would live to see them all wither away before his eyes…

“Sweet girl,” he whispered as he pushed himself to sitting, with his little wife still impaled upon his cock.

Carefully, Remus pushed aside Hermione’s dull, lank hair, and buried his face into the soft skin of her neck. Sliding his right hand possessively over her left breast, his fingers brushed across her sensitive nipple as he moved in slow, sure strokes. “My own, sweet girl…”

Brokenly, she cried out as she peaked, her body shuddering with far more force than it should.

Swallowing back a sharp stab of worry, Remus forced himself to focus on the feel of Hermione. On the heat between her legs, the small moans he pulled out of her chest, the unrestrained affection he saw in her eyes…

“Hermione…I…” he gasped. I love you.

This time, it was his woman who closed the distance between their lips, and kissed his words away.

As he clung to Hermione, it finally occurred to Remus that he desperately wanted her to know without a single doubt, all that he had been hiding within his heart.

Hermione had granted him a new lease in life. Without her, Remus would have continued to wander through the world like a ghost, existing only in grey and fading memories. Without her, he never would have found himself surrounded by those he now counted friends, with an eye towards a life which was so tantalizingly close, but still an entire universe away.

Remus wanted to slip his mother’s ring on her finger, wanted to comfort her after a long day at work, wanted her sons and her daughters. He wanted to listen to her hopes and her dreams, to support every last ambition her tireless mind could fathom. He wanted to sit down to dinner with their friends, as together, they laughed and lived and dreamed; to show her off on his arm as the greatest treasure any man could ever dream of touching.

In all its totality, the man wanted to surround himself in her wild honey and magic for the rest of his days, to drown in her brilliance, her kindness and her love which she so freely offered him.

With a cry, he came buried deep within her body.

“I love you,” she whispered against his skin as she peppered his cheeks with kisses.

And like a fool…like the biggest fool there ever was, Remus simply held her body against his own, saying not a damn word.

***

It was coming towards the evening, when they finally dragged themselves over to the boys’ tent. In her hand, Hermione dangled the beaded bag that held almost everything they had been depending on for the past months.

For almost two weeks now, she hadn’t bothered unpacking any of their books - there was nothing left for them to pore through, that they hadn’t read about a million times over. Their supply of Wolfsbane Potion was still at an acceptable level, though Remus had to wonder what they would do when they finally ran out.
As they sat down to another dinner of stale bread and cold beans, Ron wordless re-started the wireless, tuning back in to Potterwatch.

If Ron’s intentions had been to fill the silence that had fallen over the quartet, it succeeded, but it only added to the pall of despair that hung over them, as once more, Bill rattled off a litany of names belonging to those who were lost to them.

One name in particular caught Remus’s attention.

“Ted Tonks…” he murmured, placing his fork down on the weathered picnic table. “Oh god…Dora.”

“Oh Merlin,” Hermione stared at their companions with tear-filled eyes. “Tonks!”

Remus buried his face in his hands. All he could picture was Tonks, alone and grieving.

The voices of Bill, Fred and George came crackling through, turning the conversation towards other matters.

“Fuck,” Harry swore sharply, slamming a fist down on the cracked surface of the table between them. The wizard looked worn and fatigued, and every bit as old as Remus felt. “Fuck I can’t take this. I’m sitting here safe and sound, while everyone else is fighting the good fight,”

“Mate, I wouldn’t call this safe or sound,” Ron pointed out, his voice surprisingly strong. Blue eyes filled with concern were fixed on his best friend. “We’re trying to fight the good fight the only way we know how, we are…”

“Our friends are literally fighting for their lives while I drift about the countryside, looking for Horcruxes we have no hope of ever finding!” Harry rose to his feet as he voice lifted to a shout.

“We are doing our best Harry,” Hermione started, though even Remus could hear the cracks in her resolve. The witch stood up, the better to look Harry in the eye. “We always knew this was going to be hard,”

“Harry, you can’t take the weight of all that’s been happening on your shoulders,” Remus said, putting aside his pain.

It was time to bring up what it was they had to do next - that is, to seek real, tangible help. “I’ve been thinking…”

“It’s time we stopped simply thinking and started doing,” Harry began to pace like a trapped lion. “It’s time we took this fight to the Enemy. Voldemort cannot…”

“Harry!” Hermione screeched in horror. Remus’s eyes met Ron’s in pure alarm.

The world fell utterly silent for a few seconds. Then, all too rapidly, the quiet was shattered by the unmistakeable sound of intruders apparating into the vicinity.

Dinner forgotten, Remus’s wand was in his casting hand before he quite knew what he was doing. To his left, Hermione grabbed her beaded bag and shrunk it down to the size of a plum, before shoving it deep into her sock. Without offering any warning, she pointed her wand at a shocked Harry and hexed him to his face, turning it into a swollen mess.

“Don’t lift it! It’s there to protect you! If we hurry…” she said urgently, reaching to touch the hands of her companions. Before she could make contact, the woman drew back with a hiss of pain
as a stinging curse found her bare skin.

Roaring in fury that she’d been so boldly attacked, Remus rounded on the intruders bursting their way into the tent. Somewhere outside, he heard the shrieks of at least one man who had been caught in one of his invisible traps.

“Diffindo,” he slashed angrily at the one who had struck his witch. With a scream, his opponent crumpled to the ground in a puddle of his own blood.

Slicing open the side of the tent, Remus turned and yelled to the other three, “Go! We’ll find each other later!”

They would reconvene at an agreed upon spot in Lancashire, a place they’d agreed upon months ago. At least, that was the plan they came up with, in the event they ever got separated - Remus could only pray that everyone remembered that conversation.

“Remus!” Hermione screamed in alarm, causing him to turn his attention back towards their attackers.

During his time as a courier, Remus had seen more than his fair share of accidents. Once, he watched as an Audi smashed itself into a cyclist, sending bicycle and rider flying through the air like twisted Bludgers. He had spent many nights after, dreaming of the moment when both objects had slammed finally into an unbending metal post, in a sickeningly fatal crunch.

As a powerful curse struck Remus full in his chest, he had a split second to wonder if this was what it felt to be struck by a speeding automobile.

All went blissfully dark however, and then he knew no more.

Hours later, when the wizard finally came around, it was to the fruition of all his worst nightmares coming true.

Chapter End Notes

*until she sees the rent

Sorry for the long chapter; flow-wise, I couldn't find a reasonable place to break (personally).

But seeing as I'm gonna be taking a week off of posting anything this coming week on account of Thanksgiving, I suppose it's not so bad it's long, to those of you who are still reading :)

Also, I hope I haven't oversold the cliffhanger...gulp
The Marriage: Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The four of them sat in the Great Hall, in their customary places at the Gryffindor table. They were the only ones present, which was very strange.

Sirius looked as handsome as he might have, had he never been inflicted with Azkaban, while James and Lily appeared as hale and healthy as the day they had gotten themselves hitched.

Gazing at them in wonder, it took Remus a few seconds to realize that none of his friends were smiling. Indeed, they were all scowling heavily.

“What’s the matter?” the werewolf questioned in confusion.

“Moony, you can’t stay,” Sirius said in a low voice. “I can’t tell you how much I miss you, but you can’t stay,”

“Harry needs you,” Lily leaned forwards. “Please. She needs you too! You have to go,”

“But…” he frowned.

Dropping his gaze, Remus noted that Sirius and James were both dressed in very fine looking wizarding robes. Lily too, wore a lovely, flowing gown, which served to accentuate her green eyes.

Himself - he wore a pair of stained jeans, an old woollen sweater and a blood-soaked blazer. Absently, he rubbed at his throbbing head.

“Your wife needs you Moony,” James stood up, looking everything and nothing like Harry. “If nothing else, think of Hermione,”

At the edges of Remus’s consciousness, panic began to seep in. All around, shadows began to lengthen slowly and menacingly. The Great Hall faded away, leaving him standing upon a desolate plain with his dead friends.

“Hermione,” he kept his voice calm. “What do you mean? How can I help her?”

Sirius glared at him like he was a half-wit. “You know what to do. You know what you are. Use your gifts,”

“My gifts?” Remus echoed stupidly. In the distance, a woman screamed for mercy.

“You’ve spent this long mustering your wolf…but hasn’t it ever occurred to you that you are the wolf?” Lily urged. “For Merlin’s sake Remus, you need to stop hiding. There was never anything wrong with you, you must know it by now…”

“Moony old man, I’m sorry for what I’m about to do, but…” James sounded apologetic as he pulled his arm back. “…sometimes for a very clever man, you can be extremely dim,”

Before Remus could tell James to untuck his fucking thumb again, his friend’s knuckles caught him square at the edges of his mouth.

Very real pain greeted Remus as his eyes shot open. That, and the sounds of Hermione’s desperate,
agonized screams.

“Fuck,” he cursed, scrambling to his feet from the stone floor upon which he had been lying. The side of his face stung, as if he had actually been punched in the face.

“They’ve got Hermione,” Ron rushed over to him. The ginger wizard was wild-eyed and hysterical. “They took our wands!”

He was also clutching tightly at a bedraggled and emaciated Luna Lovegood, whose eyes seemed far too haunted for comfort.

Spinning in a small circle, Remus found himself in a dark, cramped cellar that smelled unpleasantly of human refuse and fear. In a corner, a man who could only be Garrick Ollivander huddled beside a barely-conscious goblin, alongside another boy who might once upon a time, have been Remus’s student.

“Who are they? Where are we?” the werewolf demanded. Upstairs, Hermione pleaded for mercy. The sound of it made Remus’s heart constrict painfully in his chest.

“We’re in Malfoy Manor,” Harry’s voice said in the dimness of their makeshift dungeon.

Remus turned to regard the younger wizard, who was glaring hard at a set of stairs. Following Harry’s gaze, the werewolf found himself peering at a formidable looking, locked door.

Upstairs, Hermione begged their captors to stop hurting her, but her words were blatantly ignored.

There was fury in Harry’s eyes, such as Remus had never seen. The other wizard’s fists were clenched around a shard of glass. Blood dripped down his skinny wrists, and trickled the length of his bare elbows.

“We have to do something,” Ron’s voice was a rough sob. “We have to save her!”

“Quiet,” Remus growled as he scented the last thing he could have hoped to scent.

Greyback.

“Don’t tell me to be quiet!” Ron ground out as he ripped himself away from Luna. “They’re hurting Hermione!”

“I don’t know where the sword came from, please, please stop please…”

Luna reached for Ron. Tugging him back into her embrace, she made small, soothing noises in an attempt to calm her wizard down. Not that the young witch was in a better state herself, considering the tears which were coursing down her dirt-covered cheeks in a continuous stream.

Flinging the glass in his hands to the ground, Harry clenched his bloody fists. “Remus, I can’t get pass the door. I can’t break through on my own. I’ve already tried…”

“Please no…please,”

A growl tore out of Remus’s aching chest. With a sense of finality, the werewolf understood that he had finally run out of options.

You know what to do. You know what you are, Sirius whispered in his mind.

Grinding his teeth, Remus reached out and grabbed Harry’s shoulder, “Do you trust me?”
“Remus?” Harry’s frown deepened. “Of course I trust you, but…”

Shoving James’s son towards the rest of the prisoners, Remus turned towards the stairway leading up to the locked door.

“All of you, don’t be alarmed…stay back if you wish, but I can promise you - I will not hurt any of you.”

Closing his eyes, Remus took a deep breath. The smell of blood - Hermione’s blood - permeated his senses. With great difficulty, he wrenched his emotions into a semblance of order.

As the seconds ticked past, he began to hear the heartbeats of his trapped companions. Underneath the screams and the shouts happening above him, the werewolf could pick out the breathing patterns of every single one of his fellow prisoners; he heard the rasp of an crushed windpipe and scented the bitter, acrid tang of Goblin blood.

Somewhere, Bellatrix Lestrange laughed, and the demented sound of it almost undid Remus’s efforts…

The world began to fade away.

Underneath a field of stars Remus loped swiftly through an expanse of tall grass. Immediately ahead, a familiar figure waited on his arrival; her dark eyes were filled to the brim with profound emotion…

Rapidly Remus’s body began to twist and transform. Human skin pulled back to reveal thick, lupine fur. Blunt teeth lengthened into cruel fangs, as bones curved themselves into inhuman shapes.

Lifting his snout, Remus howled as his true strength filled him.

Opening his eyes, the man tilted his sharp gaze and found himself staring a slack-jawed group of wizards, as well as one awestruck witch. On the ground, the remnants of his clothing lay in shredded ribbons.

Pulling his dark lips back in a silent snarl, he heard as Ollivander squeaked in terror. Ignoring his audience, Remus leapt up the stairs in one single bound. Swiping a talon against the locked door, the werewolf ripped through solid wood as if the thrice-damned thing was nothing more than rotted paper.

Stepping into the hallway, Remus found himself face-to-face with a man he knew well. Far, far too well.

“What’s all the noi…” Peter Pettigrew stopped in his tracks. Ashen faced, he stuttered, “Re…Remus? H…how? It’s daytime…”

Snapping his jaws in rage and frustration, with his every thought curdled to viciousness, Remus knew he didn’t possess the time to do as he truly desired where Peter was concerned.

Not now, not when Hermione needed him.

Reaching out, Remus curled a claw around Peter’s throat. Ignoring the traitorous arsehole’s pained gasps, the werewolf flung his childhood friend down into to the cellar. With any luck, the boys would have enough presence of mind to take Wormtail’s wand from him…
Spinning on his heel, Remus began to run. Careening wildly in the direction of Hermione’s screams, he skidded across polished marble in his haste.

Crashing through a glass door, he landed on all fours. In doing so, he shoved a familiar figure into the wall with a loud crash.

Lestrange.

The woman slid towards the ground in a daze.

Turning, he froze as he beheld the sight of Hermione’s limp and bloodied form, dangling limply in Greyback’s grubby, possessive grasp.

To Remus’s right, Draco Malfoy stumbled backwards in abject fear, before falling onto his sorry rump. The rank stench of piss grew stronger.

Some of that reek, Remus knew, came from Hermione. Doubtlessly, they had hurt his little wife badly enough, she had lost control of her bodily functions.

Alarmed, the wizard took note of the way the witch’s head was lolling listlessly from side-to-side in Greyback’s brutal embrace. What clothing she had been wearing on her back had been reduced to bloody shreds of fabric.

“It’s impossible! The sun hasn’t set…” Greyback gasped. “This is impossible…how…”

Snapping his gaze momentarily towards his maker, Remus saw that the other man’s eyes were filled with shock, fascination and wonder.

Hermione lifted her head and caught his eye.

At the peripheries of his vision, Bellatrix shook herself from her temporary stupor. Shrieking like a damned banshee, the witch charged at him with a bared blade… only to be stopped by Hermione, who wrenched herself from Greyback’s slackening grasp, for the sake of literally throwing herself at the older woman.

With nothing standing between himself and the pathetic creature who had made him what he was, Remus yipped in fiendish delight and lunged forwards without a single trace of hesitation. Widening his jaws, he snapped down upon Fenrir Greyback’s throat. Flesh and bone parted underneath his sharp teeth, as a ragged scream tore through the other werewolf’s savaged windpipes.

Gurgling and mewling, Greyback clawed fruitlessly at Remus like the dying animal he truly was.

*This was for his childhood and his ruined life. For Bill Weasley’s scars. For what terrors he had inflicted upon Hermione.*

Somewhere in the background, Harry arrived with a shout of anger. Lucious’s son yelped in shock as several wands scattered to the ground. Diving towards them, Harry reached down and scooped all the wands up, before firing a myriad of spells at their opponents.

Lifting his bloodied snout from Greyback’s corpse, Remus heard Bellatrix cast a spell he couldn’t quite make out…

Before his horrified eyes, Hermione collapsed in a spreading pool of blood.
Whipping his attention towards the insane witch, Remus dove towards Bellatrix, only for her to disappear at the very last with a loud, final crack. Without having to think on it, he transitioned back to his human form as he skidded towards his witch.

A large wound had been slashed across Hermione’s chest, leaving behind a deep, scarlet gash from which blood would not stop flowing from, in hot, gushing spurts. The woman’s eyes were half closed, and the cadence of her heart grew slower with every second that passed.

“No…” he took her in his arms. “Hermione, love, stay with me…”

Someone grabbed his bloodied hand, and tried to take his wife from him. In his mouth, Remus could still taste Greyback’s blood.

“Please, let me help her…” a familiar voice urged.

Bill…where had Bill come from, Remus wondered distractedly.

“Hermione,” he stroked her matted curls back. “Love, please…”

“Fuck,” Bill’s voice was rough with panic. “You gormless git, yell at me later!”

Something struck Remus across the back of his head. Then, the world went dark again.

***

There was no soft limbo this time. No familiar faces appeared to guide him or to comfort him. Instead, there was only darkness and fear.

Fighting his way back to the world, Remus jerked upwards with a gasp like a man who had been held under water for too long. To his right, Hermione lay on her back, pale and motionless.

“Hermione,” he pushed back his nausea. “Darling…”

Reaching for her shoulder, he moved to shake her awake, just as a door opened behind him.

“Remus, calm down…” Bill stepped into view.

“Why won’t she wake up?” Remus hoisted the woman so she rested in his arms “Bill, what…”

“We gave her a sleeping draught,” Bill sounded ragged and broken. “She’s sleeping off…off everything.”

“What…” Remus stared at his friend as the events of the last few hours began to sink in. “What did they do to her?”

“Nothing…almost nothing permanent,” Bill’s blue eyes were filled with unnameable dread as he glanced towards Hermione’s arm. “She’ll live Remus, I promise. And you’re safe. You’re in my home…”

Casting Bill a look of apprehensive disbelief, Remus shifted his gaze. Almost immediately, his nausea returned in full force as he took in the deep and unhealed scar which had been carved into her forearm.

Mudblood.

“We can’t seem to heal those scars. We tried, Merlin knows we tried,” Bill sounded sickened. “But
whatever Bellatrix used…”

“I’m going to kill Bellatrix Lestrange if it’s the last thing I do,” Remus lowered his voice as he stroked Hermione’s curls from her slumbering face.

Bill hesitated. “You’ll find that those aren’t Hermione’s only wounds. Most of them will heal, some of them will leave scars too. But what you see here on her…on her arm, is as bad as it gets…”

The man paused for a second. Trying to sound assuring, he concluded, “The point is…she’ll be right as rain in a few hours,”

*Right as rain…* Remus clung to that thought as he buried his nose in Hermione’s curls and breathed her in.

“The others are fine as well, mostly,” Bill said after a while. Running a tired hand over his face, he settled his elbows on his knees and clasped his hands. “Someone did get badly injured. He might lose a leg, but he’ll live, so there’s that,”

“Who?” Remus asked. Dread settled in the pit of his stomach like a lodestone.

“The house elf that rushed in to save everyone. Dobby, I believe his name was. Poor little wretch…Harry had somehow summoned him. He apparated here with Ron, Luna, and Dean. Ron and I insisted on following Dobby back to Malfoy Manor, for all the rest of the prisoners…you can guess the rest I assume. The poor elf got himself badly splinched on the way back.”

Remus winced in sympathy, before a strange realization entered his mind.

“Bill…does it strike you as odd that we’re all still alive? If Bellatrix Lestrange knew she had Harry in her clutches…why in the hell are we still here? Shouldn’t Harry already be dead at the Dark Lord’s hand?”

“That bit puzzles me too,” the unofficial leader of the Order shrugged, looking equally confused.

Turning to smooth a hand over Hermione’s lank curls, Remus mulled over what facts he had at his disposal.

“Remus…I saw you. I saw what you did to Fenrir…” Bill said slowly. “I saw what you were, and how you turned back to yourself…how…”

Turning sharply towards his friend, Remus tried to school his features into some sort of composure. In his distress over Hermione’s state, he had forgotten about the fact that he had inadvertently exposed his newfound abilities to both friend and foe alike.

Choosing his words carefully, he explained, “It appears that prolonged exposure to Wolfsbane Potion produces abilities that weren’t previously known. Such as, the ability for a werewolf to shift themselves in and out of their lupine bodies at will…the ability for a werewolf to retain their full sensibilities in that state…”

“Fascinating.” Bill whistled. “I wonder how that would work for those who are only partially infected…”

Remus narrowed his eyes. “You’re not thinking…”

“I have a family to protect,” Bill stated. “Surely you must see how what you’ve just described
sounds appealing…"

A jolt of unease shuddered through Remus. In the wrong hands, this knowledge could easily become a very, very dangerous weapon.

Then again, this was Bill he was speaking with, not some depraved Death Eater.

“There was a research paper written on this, but the test subjects could only demonstrate partial transformations. The study was de-funded very quickly…what you witnessed, was the result of months of self-discovery,” Remus said quietly. “I don’t know if it’d work on you, in your state. Perhaps when things are less volatile, it will be something for us to study. Carefully, and secretly. God knows, we don’t want someone like Rabastan Lestrange knowing how to use such a weapon…”

Hermione’s voice interrupted Bill before he could respond. “Imagine my surprise, when I saw my own husband so transformed before me. In the daytime no less, and weeks away from a full moon,”

Immediately, Bill rose to his feet. The wizard seemed torn between fleeing the room and offering his care towards the young witch. Gesturing carefully, Remus indicated that the other man was free to escape.

Gratefully, Bill inclined his head, and all but ran from the oncoming wrath of Hermione Jean Granger.

“Hello darling,” Remus shifted slightly, and peered down at the pale oval of Hermione’s face. A small pink tongue flicked out, and licked at dry, bloodless lips.

There was a chance Remus had never seen a more beautiful sight than what he beheld in his arms, never mind that Hermione still looked as if she were on the brink of death.

“Hello yourself,” Hermione’s rasped. “I suppose I know now, what happened to my book…how could you have kept such a thing from me?”

“Because, sweetling,” Remus pressed a kiss to her forehead. “While I am absolutely your creature, I still have a right to keep certain things to myself. I simply wasn’t ready to share this with you, or with anyone else for that matter,”

Raising a shaky hand, she caressed his stubbled cheek with all the tenderness in the world.

“How are you feeling?” he asked softly, hoping to prolong the moment before she looked down the length of her arm, to see what had been permanently carved into her flesh.

“As if I’ve been screaming myself hoarse,” she tried to smile. “And as if someone took a cursed blade to my arm, to write out a very unpleasant word with my own blood,”

Pressing his forehead against her own, Remus reached for her hand and held on tight.

“She’s mine to kill. You won’t steal this quarry from me. I will break the bitch, and I will end her for what she has done, are we clear?”

“Remus…”

“Are we clear?” he repeated with his eyes squeezed shut. “She took my best friend, and she damned near took you. I will not suffer this witch to live,”
“Yes,” Hermione said after a while, as she carded her slender fingers through his sandy locks. “Yes, we’re clear.”

Heart thudding in his chest, the man lifted his head and looked Hermione in the eye. Summoning all his courage - for it was so much easier to promise vengeance upon an enemy than to speak aloud, all that was in his heart - Remus uttered,

“I love you,”

Pale lips curved upwards into a smile. “I know,”

“That’s it?” he murmured, making a face. “I suppose I shouldn’t be surprised I’m Princess Leia in this scenario,”

“Pardon?” she wrinkled her nose in consternation.

“That was a Star Wars reference,” he sighed shakily, trailing kisses down her nose. “I thought you said you liked science fiction,”

“Keyword being ‘science’,” she sniffed haughtily.

“If I didn’t love you so much, I would suggest we start filing for a separation,” Remus shook his head in mock despair. “I cannot take such an insult upon one of the best films that’s ever been made,”

Hermione managed to choke out a hoarse laugh.

“I love you, you big furry lump,”

Tightening his hold ever so slightly on her slight form, he sighed in incongruous contentment.

“Hermione, I want to spend the rest of my life with you. I want to wake up beside you every morning, and fall asleep beside you every night. I want your tears and your laughter, your sighs and your smiles…I want to give you as many sons and daughters as you can stand…”

She grimaced. “Let’s have that conversation in ten years. Though since we’re on the subject, we’re stopping at two. I’m not a vending machine you know…”

“If you were a vending machine, then I suppose that makes me robo-sexual,” he joked weakly.

“What do you think, if I changed my name to Hermione Granger-Lupin?” Hermione asked tentatively. “I’ve been thinking on how much I like the sound of that…”

“I think I hardly deserve those syllables. But so you’re prepared, as soon as we get home, I fully intend on slipping my mother’s ring on that finger of yours,” he promised.

“These terms are acceptable.” Hermione’s smile widened. “I suppose I’ll allow it.”

Holding his entire universe tightly in his protective embrace, Remus allowed himself a brief moment of peace.

Chapter End Notes
Hope this weirdness was acceptable. Per a few previous comments, this scene in my head was what inspired this ridiculous epic...which maybe should have stayed a short story? argh.
Despite the fact that he would rather have spent the next forever in Bill’s guest room with Hermione safely ensconced within the protective curve of his embrace, his little wife was rather disinclined to share those sentiments.

After only a few more minutes of whispered promises and chaste kisses, the woman insisted that it was time for them to face the rest of their small party. When Remus tried to apply his persuasive powers of seduction, employing strategies of which had never yet failed him, the witch pushed him away with an impatient huff.

Observing Hermione as she covered her lacerated - albeit healing - back with a clean shirt, studying the way she tugged her long sleeves carefully over her bare arms, Remus willed away a brief flare of intermingled rage and sorrow. Crossing the space between them, he reached for her, and pressed his lips to her hair.

“You’re perfect,” he told her, and meant it.

“Before you…before you arrived, I was promised to Fenrir Greyback,” she murmured softly into his chest; her breath hitched only slightly.

“He’s dead,” Remus stated with grim finality. At the back of his throat, the man could still taste the iron edge of werewolf blood.

The feel of it satisfied a certain facet of his soul.

“Fenrir’s dead, but our mission isn’t over,” the woman allowed herself to sag tiredly against him. “We have to go back out there, to continue our search. We’ll continue to be hunted for a long time to come, I think.”

“Right…” Remus’s thoughts began to move in a different direction. Pulling away slightly, he gazed contemplative down at his companion.

“Hermione, I’ve been meaning to talk about our mission. That is, I think we really need to start re-evaluating our strategies…”

Lifting her gaze to meet his own, the woman tilted her head, and waited.

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They were met with the sounds of excited discussion, and Bill’s voice as it rose in blatant objection.
“…madness. Complete and utter madness,” the oldest Weasley son threw out. “You can’t just walk into Gringotts and enter the Lestrange vault. You simply cannot, do you understand me?”

Entering the small parlour, Hermione asked lightly, “What have we missed?”

Outside the window, the sun was only just setting. The air was filled with the salt-tang of the sea, while waves could be heard crashing against tall, limestone cliffs, under the cries of a thousand gulls.

Every occupant in the room turned to look at the witch at Remus’s side. Ron was the first to approach. The boy almost slammed Hermione into the ground as he literally tackled her into a bear hug. Had it not been for Remus’s reflexes, both his wife and the boy might have ended up with more bruises than they had already suffered.

As Ron released Hermione, Harry stepped forwards.

At first, James’s son simply gazed at the witch in a wordless daze. Gingerly, he reached up to touch her cheek.

“Are you…” Harry murmured into the strange silence which no one, not even Remus, seemed inclined to break. “How do you…”

“I’m fine Harry,” the young woman assured. Curling an arm around her waist, James’s son crushed Hermione’s body tightly against his own, shaking form.

“I’m sorry, I’m so sorry,” Harry whispered. “I wanted so badly to save you, but I couldn’t. I couldn’t stop them, I couldn’t…”

“Hush…” Hermione wore an unreadable expression on her features. Methodically, she stroked his messy hair. “You have nothing to be sorry for,”

Frowning, Remus noted the uncharacteristic manner by which Hermione stiffened in Harry’s embrace.

From where they stood, Bill and Ron shifted uncomfortably. Distantly, the werewolf had an inkling that his current sentiments were being wildly misread.

“Harry…” Ron reached a cautioning hand out in his best friend’s direction. Wordlessly, Remus waved away the Weasley boy’s concern.

For all they had been through, Harry deserved a moment with the woman he loved.

“I swear, I will kill her,” Harry swore with one hand fisted in the witch’s sweater. “I will end her existence on this earth,”

“You’ll need to wait your turn,” Hermione said dryly as she began to disentangle herself. “I promise you, I’m alright,”

Not to be put off, Harry pushed her curls back from her face. Holding his breath, Remus desperately hoped the other wizard wasn’t actually planning on kissing Hermione…

“Your hands,” the young woman sucked in a breath as she caught sight of the healing red marks on Harry’s palms. “What happened?”

Abruptly, James’s son withdrew into himself. Shoving his hands into his pockets, he tilted his gaze
away. “I cut myself as we were trying to escape,”

“Oh,” the witch nodded understandingly.

Deciding he had been mature enough for one afternoon, Remus cleared his throat.

“What happened to Pettigrew?” he asked curiously.

At that, Ron’s eyes flitted quickly to Luna, who up till then, had remained perfectly quiet. Remus
captured the way she flinched at Peter’s name, and spotted the way her hands shook almost violently.

“He won’t be a problem for us,” Ron stepped close to his witch. “Not anymore,”

Gazing at Luna’s pained expression and haunted eyes, terrible suspicions began forming in the
werewolf’s mind. Even now, it pained Remus to wonder how lost to honour Peter had truly
become.

Deep in his heart, he found himself hoping against hope, that his fears were in fact, unfounded…for
Luna’s and Peter’s sake.

Judging from the visceral reaction of the blonde witch, and the shadows in both Ron and Harry’s
eyes, Remus had a feeling he would never truly find out what had happened to his once-friend,
after he had thrown the traitorous worm down the cellar stairs…

“So what’s all this about robbing Gringott’s?” Hermione interjected with forced-cheer as she made
her way to Luna, and caught her schoolmate’s right hand. There was something childish in her
gesture, except that there was nothing childish about the moment, or the impetus.

Bill heaved a loud, put-upon sigh, as Harry started saying, “Perhaps we should start from the…”

Before he could continue, out of the blue, the dark-haired wizard clutched at his scarred forehead.
Uttering a strangled cry, he crumbled where he stood. Before he could stumble further, Ron steered
his best friend towards a nearby armchair, with Remus and Hermione following closely behind.

Crouching before him, Remus demanded, “You alright there Potter?”

Shocked green eyes gazed back at him. “You’re not going to believe this, but Tom Riddle…he’s…
he’s found the Elder Wand,”

Deathly silence settled over the room’s stunned occupants.

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“So what you’re telling us,” Hermione started. “Is that the Elder Wand is real. Not only that, but
before Dumbledore died, he had been Master of the wand, all because he won it from
Grindelwald…who had in turn, stole it from Gregorovitch - the famed wandmaker - himself?”

Unhappily, Harry nodded. “That’s about the gist of it. Of course, now, Riddle has it in his
possession,”

“Wait…” Remus’s head ached.

As evening fell, a slow mist had started to roll in. From their corner, Remus could almost make out
the soft words being exchanged between Fleur and Luna…

“Back in school, how were we not told that winning another’s wand in a duel made us masters of
our opponent’s wands?” Hermione appeared floored and angry all at once. “All those times we worked on disarming spells in school…are you telling me that Cormac- lousey-McLaggen is the Master of my wand?”

Casting his wife a sharp, disturbed glance, mentally, Remus began to question every spell which had gone awry since his days at Hogwarts.

Leaning against his mantelpiece as he nursed a tumbler of Ogden’s Old, Bill appeared equally irate. “As children, ever since we were old enough to listen, we were told that it is our wand that chooses us. But if Ollivander is right…then our wands are truly ours only through conquest.”

Remus flicked his eyes down towards the wand Harry had handed him.

When Harry had tackled Draco Malfoy the ground, James’s son had not only gained the upper hand, but he had also gotten ahold of the several wands the Malfoy boy had been safeguarding. Apparently, Bellatrix Lestrange had entrusted the young Malfoy heir with the duty of safekeeping her magical weapon while she carried out her gruesome tasks…much as Fenrir Greyback had also done.

Fenrir Greyback, whose wand Remus was currently clutching.

Assuming wands truly were owned through conquest, that would explain why he felt as if he had been using the wand in his hand for an entire lifetime, though he had never once touched it before.

“Harry…MerlinJesusfuckingChristandallhissaints…do you understand what all this means?” Remus sputtered as his thoughts began to race. “In the Astronomy Tower, when Draco disarmed Albus, that one act made him the Master of the Elder Wand. And today, you defeated Draco in open combat…”

“Oh…oh!” Hermione’s cheeks flushed in nervous excitement. “Harry…you…oh Merlin…”

“Is everyone drunk?” the Boy Who Lived peered at his travel companions as if they all had gone mad. “Bill, how come I don’t get a drink? Are you playing favourites? Because if so…”

“Harry, you’re the master of the Elder Wand!” Ron finished, sounding thrilled beyond all measure. Before their eyes, James’s son paled drastically as understanding sank in.

“But You-Know-Who…” he faltered.

“It doesn’t matter. He could stick the damn thing up his arse and keep it there, and the Elder Wand would still be yours,” Ron crowed, though everyone else winced at the mental image.

“Bloody hell,” Bill pronounced heavily, as his wife laid a comforting hand on his shoulder.

“What does this mean?” the French witch asked, her eyes wide with fear and fascination both. “For our side?”

“It means Harry is truly the prophesied Chosen One,” Hermione explained slowly. “The one who will defeat the Dark Lord once and for all. And I’m willing to wager my last galleon on the idea that the fool has no idea,”

“So you’re saying…” Bill’s features began to light with glorious hope.

Remus fixed his gaze on Hermione, even as a steady weight grew in his gut. “There’s a very good
chance we can win this war still, and that chance is sitting right here, in front of us. For one thing, at present, the Dark Lord cannot defeat Harry with his precious wand…”

“Ah fuck,” Harry swore despondently. “So what? Do I just march up to the Dark Lord ask him politely if he’d like to have a bit of a duelling exercise? I mean, we still have our mission to think about, let’s not forget.”

“About that…” Remus interjected. “I’ve been having some thoughts,”

Everyone turned their attention towards him. Gulping nervously, the werewolf tried to find the right words. Sweetly, Hermione reached out and clasped tightly at his hand, expressing her silent support.

“Now that we know about the Elder Wand,” he rasped. “I think there’s never been a better time to start re-evaluating our strategy…and I don’t really think it’ll hurt to let at least Bill in on what we’re up against.”

“Me?” Bill perked up.

“You,” Remus nodded. “I doubt my idea will put you in more danger than you’re already in…”

Working his jaw, hesitantly, Harry nodded.

“I’m not leaving this room, in case you’re wondering,” Fleur spoke up. The woman placed one protective hand over her pregnant belly, and rested the other upon her husband’s arm.

“Me neither. For Ron’s sake,” Luna insisted. The sound of her cracked voice hurt the older wizard’s chest. “I’m tired of being left out in the dark, never knowing if Ron’s living, or dead, or worse. I’m tired of being helpless,”

Taking in her words, for a moment, Remus wondered what it would have been like if Hermione had taken off without him on this hopeless mission Albus had set Harry upon…

“I suppose there’s little reason why they shouldn’t know,” Harry said reluctantly. “After all, we’re all on the same side,”

With nothing left for it but to move forward, Remus sighed. “I suppose we should at least catch everyone up…Harry, perhaps you out to start from the beginning. From what happened the night Albus died…”

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The four of them took turns speaking of the horrors, the travails and the trials they had each undergone, for the sake for hunting down and destroying the shattered shards of Voldemort’s soul.

At the mention of *Fiendfyre*, Bill bounced to his feet in unfettered excitement.

“But that’s just it, the *Fiendfyremonths* to learn properly…”

“Do you mean you have a counter spell to extinguish it quickly?” Hermione frowned.

“Not quite,” Bill grinned. “We have a modified version I can teach you. Better yet, I can show you.”

Before anyone could stop him, the Curse Breaker raised his wand and conjured into existence, a
floating, metallic marble.

With a flourish, Bill cast an angry jet of bright red fire, flames of which licked greedily at the hovering object. The difference between the fire he had created however, and Hermione’s conjured blaze, was that scarred man’s flame was encased in a translucent bubble which encased both Fiendfyre, and the focus of its destruction.

In a matter of seconds, both flame and bubble disappeared. A trickle of black ash descended upon the hardwood floor.

“Scourgify,” Bill gestured. The ash faded away into so much nothing.

Harry whistled in appreciation. “Brilliant!”

“But…” something troubled Remus. “If such a powerful weapon was so easily within reach, how is it that Albus never even tried to use it? The man rotted his hand out trying to destroy Horcruxes…”

“I’m not surprised,” Bill twirled effortlessly at his wand. A small wisp of smoke lifted from its tip. “Us Curse Breakers aren’t exactly forthcoming with our methods. Also…it’s not as if anyone bothered asking. Well, Hermione asked I suppose, but I wasn’t lying when I said our methods take practice…”

“Considering the way Albus kept the search for Horcruxes to himself to begin with, I suppose it didn’t occur to him that he might have wanted to involve the likes of someone as mundane as a Curse Breaker,” Remus pondered wryly.

“Perhaps we shouldn’t have kept our mission as secret as it was,” Hermione’s voice was filled with rapt admiration.

To Remus’s amusement, Fleur’s spine straightened as her sharp gaze fell upon his little wife. Unnoticed by almost everyone else, the part-Veela woman bared her teeth ever so slightly, as her fingers curled possessively around her husband’s shoulder. Tsking in annoyance, Bill brushed her hand away.

In an effort to placate their hostess, Remus enfolded his witch into his embrace, and planted a soft kiss under her right ear. To his unpleasant shock, Hermione twisted away from him immediately. Wrapping her arms around herself, she made sure to stand a good two feet away from him.

Glancing at Fleur, the werewolf caught sight of the older woman’s softening expression and concerned frown.

“Now we have two weapons to use against Horcruxes,” Harry grinned. “Fiendfyre and the sword of Gryffindor!”

“Oh yes, but the Goblins will want to have the sword back, especially now that you’ve gone and showed that thing Griphook,” Bill snorted. “Honestly Harry, you really need to start thinking before you act,”

Flushing in embarrassment, Harry ducked his gaze.

“Well that’s all fine and well that we have a second way to deal with these cursed objects,” Remus said impatiently. “Since the locket however, we haven’t been able to pin down the locations of the other Horcruxes. In the meantime, the Enemy might grows stronger, and they have all but won this god-forsaken war we’ve been fighting,”
Harry's eyes darkened. “It occurred to me that Bellatrix’s obsession with the sword - that is, the reason why she was obsessed with Hermione to begin with - was because she was afraid we had broken into her vault at Gringott’s. If you recall, the Enemy is under the impression that Snape sent the sword to the Goblins, after Ginny and the other DA members tried to steal it from the Headmaster’s office…”

“You think she was afraid because Vol…Tom Riddle might have stashed one of his precious Horcruxes in there?” Ron frowned.

*Or - Snape’s intentions are a lot less transparent than everyone assumes*, Remus found himself thinking.

“Even if that were true, Lestrange might not even know what it is she’s been tasked to guard,” the werewolf considered aloud. “Only that she’s guarding something of her Master’s. I cannot see Riddle sharing such dangerous knowledge with his minions, no matter how high they rank amongst his troops;”

“Is that why you want us to break into the bank?” Hermione asked Harry. The witch’s eyes were wide as saucers.

“Yes,” Harry nodded. “Exactly,”

“I hate to be be the one to say this, but…” Remus paused. “Harry, that’s a terrible idea,”

Before anyone could protest, the werewolf raised his hand to beg patience.

“Everything you’re suggesting is mere conjecture…and frankly, all the risks we have been taking thus far, because of mere suspicion…all those risks have been far too great;”

In the silence that ensued, the Boy Who Lived looked a little put out at that assessment, though Remus could see that his words were resonating. Bolstered, the older wizard continued, “It’s time we reconsidered our entire strategy because in all honesty, we could be better expending our energies elsewhere,”

“You mean to bring the fight to You-Know-Who,” Harry’s voice was tight with frustration. “But come on Remus, you already know that simply killing him won’t make a difference - not unless we destroy all means of bringing him back,”

“Not true,” Remus breathed. Steeling his resolve, he said, “If we wiped out all of his followers in one fell swoop, there will be no one left who would willingly bring him back,”

Across the room, Bill practically shuddered in vicious enthusiasm at the prospect of such a thing.

Not that anyone could, or should, blame the man. How many nights had Remus heard the defeat in the other wizard’s voice over the wireless, as bit by bit, their world went up in flames? Was it any wonder that Bill longed to exact his brutal revenges against their shared enemies?

“Before we found out that you’re the master of the Elder Wand, frankly, I thought our best hope was to flee to Bulgaria or France, to seek out their protection and their help,” Remus explained. “Now however…now I see that what we ought to do, is to summon their best fighters to our aid. Now, I say we challenge Riddle for what is ours by right, on the soil of our own country which he is trying so hard to rip away from us;”

“Remus, you can’t be serious,” Ron sounded taken aback.
“Why not?” Hermione demanded loudly, firmly. “It’s quite perfect. At this very moment, Tom Riddle believes himself the master of the Elder Wand…except if what Ollivander says is right, Riddle cannot hope to defeat Harry by using the wand against him.

“But…” Ron shook his head.

“The wand would never hurt its master,” Remus supplied. “It cannot, do you understand? At least, not if everything we had just learned from Ollivander is true. Should we issue a challenge against Riddle, the idiot will overestimate himself against Harry, and not only that, he would also summon the best of his lieutenants to witness the moment of his greatest victory…”

“A trap! You’re speaking of a trap!” Luna’s expression brightened as understanding flooded her pixie-like features.

“Our enemies would not expect the strength of the French on the field of battle,” Fleur declared stoutly. “Or the might of the Bulgarians,”


“Harry think about it,” Remus crossed the distance between the both of them and laid a hand on his shoulder. “Let’s say we take ten years to find and destroy the other objects. Then what? By then, not only will the Enemy likely have complete control of Wizarding Britain, he might also have conquered more than what he already has at present time. Every moment that passes, makes him more unassailable than the last,”

“And who is to say the madman wouldn’t have created more failsafes against his immortal life by then, if ever he comes to realize what we’ve been up to?” Hermione asked cautiously. “Tom Riddle isn’t exactly the picture of sanity…”

James’s son scowled darkly at the prospect.

“Are we really doing this?” Ron asked, looking a little green. “Are we truly going to start a fight?”

“With an eye to finish this war once and for all,” Remus said with more conviction than he felt. “This struggle has gone on for far too long.”

Bill sighed. “I will notify the Order, and let them know. After we have contacted the French and the Bulgarians of course. I doubt our intentions shall be well received, but I don’t mean to bandy words for hours on end with my own mother,”

“Molly will not like this one bit,” Fleur sighed. Rising to her feet with some difficulty, she said, “I will floo my contacts. I will make it clear in no uncertain terms, the risks we face,”

“And I will reach out to Viktor right after I visit with Dobby…that poor thing, risking his life for us the way he did,” Hermione’s lovely mouth curved downwards.

Spinning on his heel, Remus couldn’t keep himself from growling at the mention of the Quidditch celebrity’s name.

Eyeing him calmly, Hermione said, “Grow up Remus,”

“Fine,” he sulked.

“Everyone, no matter who you reach out to, remember - secrecy is our best hope of winning this,” Bill warned. “If for any reason you feel that your contacts cannot be trusted…”
Fleur and Hermione exchanged a glance. As one, they nodded at Bill before they parted ways. Trailing after Hermione, Harry dug out a familiar, fluttering snitch from the depths of his trouser pockets and fixed his emerald gaze upon the damnable thing once more.

Ron reached for Luna, and led her somewhere presumably more private.

“It’s rather too bad you left,” Bill said, coming up behind Remus and handing him his own glass of firewhiskey. “You should have lead the troops. Merlin knows, nobody listens to a word I say,”

“Nah mate,” Remus gulped half the burning liquor in one appreciative swallow. “Don’t get all misty-eyed on me. This plan might get us all killed yet,”

“That’s the spirit,” Bill shook his head.

Toasting each other, the two men finished their drinks in solemn silence.
In the deep watches of the night, Remus awoke to the sounds of Hermione’s soft cries. Coming into wakefulness, he found the woman twitching and begging for a mercy that would never be hers.

“Hermione,” he whispered urgently.

When her whimpers grew louder, Remus hastily reached for his wand and cast a *Muffliato* over the confines of the room.

Pointing his wand at his wife, not even sure if it would work, he spelled, “*Ennervate,*”

With a gasp, Hermione’s eyes snapped open. Tears streamed down her pale cheeks in thin rivulets, the sight of which wrenched at Remus’s heart with a force he hadn’t thought possible. In that moment, there was nothing he wouldn’t have given for a time-turner to return them back to a point where he could have prevented all the atrocities that had been committed against his wife.

“I’m sorry, I must have…” she breathed as she tried to gain control of herself.

Gathering his witch into his arms, Remus kissed her hair.

“Don’t,” he ran his hands protectively over her back, no longer as smooth as it had been even forty-eight hours ago. Healing spells had sealed her wounds, but as Bill had rightly warned, her skin would not remain unscarred. “Don’t ever apologize for this,”

As he held a sobbing Hermione, Remus leaned down to brush his lips against her own…only to find her stiffening against him.

Drawing back from her, snippets of their earlier conversation came back to him.

“*I was promised to Fenrir Greyback,*” she had told him.

When he had crashed into the drawing room at Malfoy Manor, Greyback had been clutching at Hermione like she was nothing more than his prize; her clothes had been ripped to nothing.

*Don’t overreact,* Sirius’s voice whispered in his mind.

With some difficulty, Remus reminded himself that Hermione hadn’t actually been raped. Had she been violated in that unspeakable fashion, he would have known immediately, and Greyback’s death would not have been as *easy* as it had been.

Still, the fact that she had not suffered that final blow, did not mean that she had escaped the horror of it.

Cursing himself for a fool, Remus sat back.
“What’s wrong?” she wiped the tears from her face. There was confusion in her eyes.

“We don’t have to do anything,” he started softly. Carefully, he twined their fingers together. “I don’t want you to feel pressured,”

Under the silver light of the crescent moon streaming in through Bill’s windows, Hermione’s eyes blazed to life.

“You think I’m become a weak little victim,” she bit out. “That you’ll need to start handling as if I’m always about to shatter,”

“Hermione, you don’t have to be strong about everything,” Remus leaned back against the headboard. Deciding he wouldn’t dance around the issue, he pointed out, “You were almost raped today for god’s sake. I was an idiot not to have recognized earlier, what you must be going through right now,”

Angrily, Hermione rose to stand before him.

“If I let those bastards destroy what you and I share, then I might as well throw up my hands and run for the hills,” she said bluntly. “I can’t let them win Remus. I can’t let another part of my life get destroyed at their hands.”

“I understand that…” Remus sighed, clenching and unclenching his fists in frustration. “But I don’t want to hurt you. That’s the last thing I want,”

“Should we just go ahead and resign ourselves to a sexless existence?” she demanded.

“Of course not,” he ran a tired hand through his hair. “You’re being a bit melodramatic,”

“I will get past this,” she promised. “With or without your help,”

Anger spiked inside of him. Without thinking, Remus yanked his little wife firmly onto his lap.

“And just what do you mean by that?” he growled angrily, as visions of Hermione wrapped up in another man’s embrace filled his lurid imagination.

Despite her yelp of surprise, Remus caught the familiar tang of her arousal.

The witch tilted her chin and met his gaze. “I simply meant that should you truly choose to be withholding… I will find my own pleasure as often as it takes,”

Abruptly, the werewolf’s imagination went down a different route as he pictured his witch on her back, with her hand between her legs, making herself come over and over against the movement of her clever, clever fingers…

Slytherin, he thought.

“I’m now utterly convinced that you were sorted into the wrong house,” he murmured appreciatively. Swiftly, he moved their bodies so that she was seated on the edge of their bed with her thighs spread wide. Kneeling before her, Remus ran his hands along the silky expanse of her skin.

His mouth followed the trail his hands left behind, at an agonizingly slower pace. Pressing soft kisses against her flesh, his fingers continued their steady work. Thumbs circled her skin in idle strokes, moving closer and closer to her core, until they slipped under the edges of her underwear,
and ghosted against the edges of her damp slit.

As his mouth neared apex of her thighs, and as her little breathy moans graduated into a crescendo of expectation, Remus withdrew his hands and his mouth, only to start the entire process all over again.

Trailing soft, open mouthed kisses against her warm skin, the man did all he could to tease out her trembling, shuddering whimpers.

At last, Remus reached for the flimsy piece of cotton separating him from that which so whetted his appetite. Without warning, the wolf ripped at the small scrap of fabric, and left her bare to his ravenous appetites.”

“Remus,” his wife begged, squirming enticingly.

“Sweet girl, I expect you to always be available to me whenever I want you,” he smiled before he moved closer to where she clearly wanted him. Gently, he slipped one finger inside of her and stroked…

“Whatever you…” she choked out, straining her hips against his hand. “Whatever it is you want…it’s yours,”

“Good girl,” he chuckled, before he allowed himself to taste her. “That’s my good girl.”

***

For hours, Remus loved Hermione without indulging overly much. No matter what she had protested, or what she told him, he forbade himself from faltering in his resolve not to hurt her.

Had he not noticed the brief moments of hesitance and reluctance he still sensed every few minutes, perhaps the night might have gone differently. But Remus had become too familiar with his little wife, not to know when his attentions were not wholly welcome.

Nonetheless, the abandon with which she lost herself the rest of the time told him that this state of affairs would not be forever…that in short order, she would give herself to him without reservation once more.

For Hermione, Remus would wait as long as it took, so long as it left her happy and content.

Close to dawn, as he laid his head down on the pillow beside hers, she cast him a questioning look as she yawned into the back of her hand. Silken curls fell fetchingly about her face, as she reached out to stroke his cheek.

“You didn’t…” she mumbled sleepily.

“I’m fine,” he adjusted their bodies so her back rested flush against his own. “You need your rest,”

Closing his eyes, he allowed himself a moment of peace, knowing that none of it was to last.

***

In the days that followed, the French and the Bulgarians answered their call.

They came over the Channel, in boats steered by oars and not magic. They trekked along the coast, under the cloak of disillusionment spells and invisibility charms. They arrived in the dark of night, away from the seeking eyes of the enemy, who focused their attention on the Floo networks, on the
anti-Portkey wards, on the apparition alarms which had erected all along the borders of the country…

They came slowly at first, then in greater numbers; they, the men and women who saw the dire potential of the Dark Lord, and knew better than to sit back and let the mad man spread his dark shadow. Allied spell casters found the secret passage to Bill’s door, and accepted the risks laid out to them. In careful dribs and drabs, these people dispersed around the United Kingdom, waiting for the moment they would be summoned again.

Kingsley was one of the last to appear. The man materialized in shock silence one early morning, following a message carried to him by Nymphadora Tonks, the woman he had thought of as his underling.

“Sorry boss,” she had told him almost sympathetically in Bill’s parlour. Her hair was a poppy red that day, but then, it hadn’t changed colour in a very long time.

In sullen aggravation, Kingsley glared at Bill and Remus both, as soon as he understood the extent by which battle plans had proceeded without his qualified opinion. Disgruntled though he was however, the Ministry man realized in very short order, that he hadn’t much in way of argument against the solidifying plans.

In the end, capitulating with little fuss, Kingsley took the news back to the Order, before he ingratiated himself with the growing war counsel.

Together, witches and wizards pored over offensive and defensive spells and curses, even as others studied maps and planned and replanned formations of attack. In the course of plotting, someone suggested the use of Hogwarts as the place where they would make their final stand - but it was a plan that was immediately discarded.

“There are children present in the castle,” Kingsley had hissed sharply. “Try again,”

And so it went.

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In those frantic days, Remus frequently saw Fleur bringing both Luna and his wife steaming cups of tea at all hours, before murmuring with them in brief spurts of low conversation. The three of them became their own little refuge, a development the wizard had not expected. After all, there had been a time when his little wife had scorned the delicate part-Veela woman for her overtly feminine style, and a time when Hermione had condescended slightly upon Luna’s whimsy…

That time was clearly over, and later, he would come to think of the women’s burgeoning friendship as the death of a certain innocence. For all the bonds which blossomed between them, their closeness had come at a price.

Each night after the crowds departed, Remus continued his other personal mission. In the inky darkness of Bill’s guest room, the man dedicated himself to the mission of making Hermione forget all that she had suffered. Carefully, he lavished his undivided attention upon every inch of her, if only to assure her that she was still unbroken, and perfect to him.

Clasping her against his chest each night as she fell asleep, Remus found himself praying constantly to any and every god that would listen, that he hadn’t inadvertently triggered a mistake that could not be rectified.

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It was perhaps three weeks after they had escaped the comforts of Malfoy Manor, that Harry came knocking at an unexpected hour.

In answer to the other wizard’s soft rapping, Remus dressed himself carelessly, quickly and quietly. Stepping past the threshold of Bill’s guest room, the werewolf shut the bedroom door behind him, before he turned to face Harry.

“Hermione’s asleep, in case you were wondering,” he grumbled with sleepless ire.

To Remus’s surprise, Harry told him, “I didn’t come for her. I came for you,”

Mute, the werewolf stared.

Lifting his clasped hand, Harry revealed a familiar, fluttering Golden Snitch. “I think… I think I know how to get to the Resurrection Stone,”

“How?” Remus’s grey eyes traced closely, the delicate movements of the Snitch.

Harry shrugged. “Will you come with me?”

Meeting the other wizard’s emerald gaze, Remus contemplated what it was Harry wasn’t telling him. Carefully, the werewolf listened for the sound of Hermione’s breathing coming from behind the closed door at his back.

“Yes,” he said. “I will,”

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The two men stood under a cloudy sky, twenty feet from the edge of the world. Below them, the sea crashed noisily against pillars of rock and salt.

So close to the full moon, Remus’s senses were in overdrive. He could scent the wet grass under his bare feet, the smell of growing things under the frozen soil, the thick perfume of dampening earth…

Despite Winter’s chokehold, spring was on her way.

“Are you sure this is what you want to do?” Remus questioned.

Strange anticipation blossomed like a lonely flower in his chest as the younger wizard nodded. Drawing the snitch up to his lips, Harry closed his eyes, and whispered,

“I am about to die,”

A chill slipped down Remus’s spine. Time stopped flowing for a brief second, as the snitch stilled its restless fluttering. Gold hinges snapped opened, and out slipped a small ring, upon which was set a cracked and antique stone.

“What now?” Remus breathed in wonder.

Without answering him, Harry turned the ring once. He did it twice more.

Mist began to coalesce around them like a damp blanket, and shapes began to grow in the darkness… shapes which Remus recognized with aching, desperate clarity.

“Hello Harry,” Lily said lovingly, reaching out an insubstantial hand towards her son. At her side,
James grinned at his boy, like Harry’s own smiling reflection.

“Mum…Dad….” Harry croaked shakily.

From where he stood, Remus could see that his living companion’s right fist was clenched so hard around the Resurrection Stone, that his knuckles had become a stretched white.

“Well at least he’s got all his faculties in order,” James remarked casually.

“Don’t be rude,” Remus heard himself saying automatically, before he realized he had just scolded the ghost of his best friend.

“I’m dead so I think that grants me some leeway,” James smirked. Brushing at his own jaw, Harry’s father said, “Sorry about hitting you in the face that time. It worked though,”

Eyes widening, Remus began to remember snatches of a dream he had…or what he had thought was simply a dream.

“I think it’s time you and I had a heart-to-heart,” a familiar voice piped up. “I think we need to talk about why you would insist on referring to me as ‘too-much-tongue bloke’,”

Turning slowly on his heel, Remus found himself staring into the smiling eyes of Sirius Black.

“Moony,” Sirius smirked, wagging his fingers in a cheerful wave. “Nice to see that you’ve been getting laid on the regular.”

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“First of all, you were ‘too-much-tongue bloke’. Secondly…mate, tell me you’ve not been haunting my every waking moment,” Remus demanded.

Never had he dreamed that those would be the first words he uttered to Sirius Black after years spent mourning him.

Part of him was incredibly exhilarated at the realization that he was speaking with his dead best friend. The other part was appalled at the idea that the voice in his head - the one that sounded a lot like Sirius - was perhaps not his subconscious, but the voice of a nosey dead man.

The latter idea was too mortifying to consider. Had Sirius been getting a first hand look into the more private aspects of his life? Such as the way he and his witch had been literally shagging all over the bloody country?

“No doubt, you’re wondering whether or not I’ve been spying on your sex life,” Sirius’s grin grew just a little more evil.

“Pads, I’m really glad to see you but tell me the answer is ‘no’. Please,”

“We only get glimpses into your lives when we’ve been summoned,” Sirius finished in a rush before Remus could explode with anxiety. “That is, when you think about us, or speak of us. You know what they say…the dead are always with you as long as you remember them. Well, someone says something like it,”

“Oh,” Remus said with a measure of relief. Thankfully, thoughts of the ghost in front of him almost never occurred when he was locked in embrace with Hermione.

“How are you still so easy to wind up?” Sirius gloated.
“How are you dead, but still such a prat?” Remus asked softly.

“Oh that note, I don’t know how much longer I get to be here,” Sirius admitted as sadness suffused his features. “But I wanted to say a proper goodbye to you. And to Harry. I didn’t get to the last time…”

The two old friends gazed morosely at each other, sundered by an invisible divide that all living souls would eventually cross.

“I miss you,” Remus told him bluntly, shoving his hands in his pockets as he blinked away his tears. “I miss you every day…you and James and Lily…”

“I miss you too, but so we’re clear, I don’t want to see you anytime soon on this side of things,” Sirius nodded gravely. “You don’t know how thrilled I am for you, that you found a girl who loves you the way Hermione does. Frankly, I never thought it would be the two of you in the end. I suppose when I think about it, you two are absolutely perfect for each other though, aren’t you?”

“Yeah,” Remus mustered a shaky smile. “Sirius, you do know I’ve forgiven you don’t you? For… for all that stuff that happened between us? For your pigheaded inability to see the obvious?”

“Kind sentiments indeed,” Sirius’s sniffled. He lifted a translucent hand to his cheek to flick away at something. “I forgive you too. For all those years you hated me,”

With all his heart, Remus wished he could have embraced the other man. Instead, he settled for scrubbing at his damp face.

“I have to say goodbye to Harry…” Sirius paused. “Remus, promise me you’ll take care of yourself;”

“I promise,” the living man pressed his right palm against his heart. “I love you Pads,”

“I love you too Moony.” Sirius mirrored his gesture. His voice sounded like it was coming from such a long way away.

As Sirius drifted towards Harry, the werewolf remained on his own, observing from a small distance as the ghosts of his friends converged around the other wizard. Turning his gaze towards the sea, he wondered if every soul present would think less of him if he were to start bawling his eyes out.

He wasn’t alone for too long however. To his surprise, James and Lily came over to join him.

“It’s good to see you Remus.” Lily smiled that same smile she wore in life, though now it seemed strangely faded and colourless.

Beside her, James slipped his hand into his wife’s own. “Thank you for all you’ve done for Harry…”

“It wasn’t all for Harry,” Remus shook his head. “And I could have done more,”

“Oh Remus…” Lily sighed, and the sound was like a cold breeze over a frozen forest. “I had hoped that time would have helped you with that burden you placed upon your own shoulders…”

“I miss you both horribly,” Remus said matter-of-factly. “For years, I considered offing myself on the chance I’d find you,”

“Don’t even joke about it,” James warned. “You’ve got far too much to live for. Especially now.
Despite appearances, death is more final than you think,"

Looking back at Shell Cottage through stinging eyes, Remus felt a tug against his heart as he considered his curly-haired witch who slept under its gabled roof.

“We miss you. But as Sirius doubtlessly already told you - we don’t expect you to join us anytime soon,” Lily sounded stern, though there was heartbreak in her voice. In the half light, her eyes flickered like an old and broken Muggle television screen.

“I know,” Remus sighed. Forcing himself to smile, he forgot himself as he reached out to touch her face.

“This is goodbye…but not forever,” Lily’s smile turned wistful as she met his hand with ghostly fingers.

Touching her was like touching nothing, the wizard realized. Flicking his eyes to James, the man nodded sympathetically.

Close by, Harry turned to meet Remus’s gaze. There was something desolate in his emerald eyes.

“You have to help him let go,” James said quietly. “You have to help him stop looking back,”

“I’m not exactly an expert on either subject,” Remus rasped. “If you’ve been hanging around, you would know that,”

“Aye,” James’s voice regained a familiar, impatient quality. “But don’t you think it’s time you learned that lesson too?”

Working his jaw, Remus allowed his eyes to squeeze shut for a moment. Then, loudly, he said, “It’s useless Harry…we can’t keep them here,”

Everything in him hated the fact that he had to do this to James’s son - though James himself looked on approvingly at the proceedings.

“Why can’t I keep them?” Harry asked forlornly, sounding and looking like the lost little boy he had never been allowed to be.

“Because…it’s no good looking to the dead for hope of the future,” Remus walked over to Harry. “We have to see to the living. The world needs you to be strong. Hermione needs you,”

As Remus expected, the invocation of Hermione’s name had the desired effect. Sighing, Harry looked over at his parents and Sirius, before he stared down at the ring in his hands. “What do I do with this?”

“Throw it in the sea darling,” Lily said at once, looking proud and sad all at once. She stepped closer to Harry, obviously aching to touch her child. “Loose it so that it’ll never plague another living soul ever again,”

With his green eyes filled with infinite grief and mourning, Harry whispered, “I love all of you. So much,”

Turning to Remus, Harry dropped the ring into the werewolf’s waiting palm. Nodding sharply, the older wizard turned his back to James, Lily and Sirius. Steeling his resolve, he lifted his casting arm. With all the strength he had been blessed with, Remus threw the Resurrection Stone into the cold and the dark.
After a moment, the crash of the surf filled the air once more. An owl hooted as it soared overhead.

“They’re gone,” Harry sounded a little plaintive. “The whole time, it was like I was speaking to figments of a dream. A very real dream, but a dream nonetheless. They’re really gone aren’t they? And nothing is ever going to change that.”

“No,” Remus said. “No, nothing is ever going to change that,”

Curving his arm around Harry’s shoulder as if the other wizard was still no more than a child, Remus peered up at the stars and at the golden moon.

“So…Sirius said something rather disturbing. He said he saw you and Hermione having sex in my tent, one time I was walking around the parameter of the campsite all on my own…”

“You godfather…” Remus pinched the bridge of his nose. “Can be such a twat,”

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“You know what I still don’t understand?” Harry said as they walked up the small pathway towards Bill’s cottage.


“No, seriously…why did Dumbledore have to make everything so complicated? Why all the puzzles and the secrecy?” Harry pondered. “Why in the world did he leave me the Resurrection Stone when all it achieved was…nothing?”

Stopping immediately outside the backdoor, Remus pondered.

“Albus was a lot of things. Cruel even. But…perhaps the Stone wasn’t the worst thing he could have given to you. Consider that we both managed to find our goodbyes to the people we lost…I would say some good came of it, don’t you think?”

“I’m not so sure,” Harry sounded wretched.

Remus was saved from responding when the door flew open, revealing a very worried Hermione.

“Where have the two of you been?” she demanded, stepping aside to allow them entry. Remus frowned - she ought not have been so quick to let them in…

“Don’t give me that look Remus,” Hermione shook her head. “Bill and I put up some new wards around the parameters of the house yesterday - blood wards attuned only to us and our new allies,”

“Blood?” Harry goggled even as Remus calmed himself down. “Hermione, did you steal my blood? When? How?”

The witch snapped her jaw shut and moved towards the stove where a kettle was just beginning to whistle. Levitating the boiling water off the hob, she set it down upon a trivet. “Let’s not get sidetracked…”

Before she could speak another word, Remus closed the distance between himself and his witch. Tilting her chin up, he pressed his mouth against her own. Like a man deprived, he relished in the whisper of her breath, the warmth of her skin, the thrum of her heartbeat.
“I love you,” he murmured, cupping her cheeks with both hands.

“I love you too…” the woman frowned.

Behind the couple, Harry shuffled uncomfortably.

Eyes narrowing, Hermione flitted her sharp gaze between both wizards. “Now tell me - what have the two of you been up to?”

Obviously resigned to the realization that Hermione was not going to let things rest - though he seemed oddly relieved to be able to share what it was that ate at him - Harry pulled up a seat of his own and starting explaining all which had transpired in the last few hours.

When it was over, Hermione had her arms twined around Harry’s neck.

“I guess the dead are never gone from us. Not truly,” she sniffled as she kissed the other wizard’s cheek.

Meeting Remus’s sombre gaze, Harry patted gently at the witch’s arm. “Yeah. Yeah, maybe,”

Stepping back, Hermione wiped at her nose with the back of her sleeve. Spinning on her heel, she threw herself into Remus’s arms, and brought his face into the crook of her neck.

“I’m alright, I promise,” Remus assured, stroking her back.

“I think it’s past time for me to turn in,” Harry yawned, though he seemed less tired than awkward.

As Harry fled towards his own room, Hermione took Remus by the hand and led him back to their temporary bed.

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That night, Remus finally made love to his wife once more, allowing her to take him into her body, to offer him all the comfort she was determined to give.

By the time morning finally rolled around, as he ran his fingertips over the planes of her slumbering face, the man knew with utter certainty that it had come time to start the business of living.

There was only one thing left to do - one battle left to fight.

By all that was good and holy, Remus meant to win.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry, I had to slip in the Resurrection Stone at some point...

By the way because of the holidays I might not post a couple of weeks...so merry Christmas to everyone still reading...and happy holidays, and so on :)
“Do you ever wonder what things would have been like, if you and I never…you know, got married?” Remus asked, as he and his wife walked hand-in-hand along the cliff’s edge.

The sky was bathed in the fiery orange of a beautiful sunset; all around, seabirds screeched as they flew towards their nests, all of them set into the treacherous crags of the limestone cliffs. Waves rolled and crashed on the distant shore below, producing a sound like distant thunder.

Somewhere in the depths of the channel, Remus knew that the Resurrection Stone was slowly becoming nothing more than a bad memory.

“I’ve never been given to fanciful flights of imagination,” Hermione laughed in the idyllic evening. “Not even with all your recent forays into fiction?” he tucked his free hand into his trouser pocket.

With the onset of Spring, the air was slowly warming…but still, the passing breeze held traces of Winter as it cut its path down the coast.

Gazing down at her smiling, peaceful expression, Remus fought the urge to plead with her once again, that she ought to change her mind.

Tomorrow, they would rise. Tomorrow, with their forces and their soldiers, they would march to victory or to their deaths, or both. Failure not was an option they were willing to face, and Remus could only hope that their secret plans had not been betrayed. For all their precautions, who knew what tidings the Dark Lord might have caught…

“Reading fiction doesn’t make me a writer Remus,” Hermione’s manner softened as she turned her eye towards Shell Cottage.

Under the eaves of the small house, Ron and Luna stood with their heads tilted closely towards each other; despite the distance, it was plain to see their mutual devotion and affection.

“Hermione…you do understand that even if we win this coming fight, I can’t give you the life you deserve,” Remus said quietly. “I’m still a middle-aged werewolf who can’t hold down a job in magical Britain. In the Muggle world, I’m nothing more than a bicycle courier…your parents, they’re dentists yes? Qualified Doctors? I can’t imagine them approving of someone like me,”

“Remus,” Hermione said very patiently as if she were talking to a particularly slow child. “I don’t plan on having you give me a life I deserve. I plan on taking it for myself. Besides…who will care for our son and our daughter while I’m at work, if not my doting, caring house-husband?”

“Oh, is that how things are going to work?” he asked in mock indignation even as his heart beat joyfully in his chest. “I’ll be the one staying home, and cooking, and cleaning and watching the
children while you go off being all important and fancy?"

“Do you really mind all that much?” Hermione chuckled, reaching up to cup his cheek affectionately.

“No,” he admitted.

“You know, our library will be quite formidable once I’m done with it,” she added blithely as she tiptoed upwards to lay a kiss on his lips. “I’ve been thinking of ways we can add an extension charm to the cottage…”

Crushing her smaller body to his own, Remus nipped at her lower lip mischievously, though there was a certain gravity in his tone as he murmured, “I’m holding you to this life you have painted for us, Hermione Granger-Lupin,”


“Ah, the arrogance of youth,” he smiled, wilfully forgetting the fact that they were all on the precipice of certain disaster.

“Remus, I’ve always meant to ask…” Hermione turned her gaze towards the sea. “Do you ever think about how you and Tonks might have worked things out, had I not gotten in the way?”

“Is there any way I can avoid this discussion?” Remus dropped his face into his hands.

“We never discuss it, actually,” Hermione smirked, though there was a certain note of insecurity in her voice. “What’s the matter, should I be jealous?”

Pointedly rolling his eyes at her, he said very shortly. “No,”

“Was it just animal sex between the both of you then?” Hermione stated lightly. *Too* lightly.

“We enjoyed a physical relationship, yes,” Remus admitted. Catching her glare, he scowled in annoyance. “Don’t ask questions you know you won’t like the answer to,”

The young witch began fiddling with her wand. “Do you ever think about her?”

“Between running for our lives and trying to work out if you’re about to do something stupidly *Gryffindor*, yes, occasionally I do wonder if my good friend is alive and happy,” Remus tilted her chin up. “Hermione, I’m in love with you. What you and I share is the best thing that’s ever happened to me. Can we end this ridiculous interrogation now?”

“Yes,” his little witch nodded sheepishly.

“Good,” he kissed the tip of her nose.

In companionable silence, they stared out at the setting sun, marvelling at the fact that such beauty existed in the world, at such a very terrible time.

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Morning came far too soon.

Before the last star of the night faded from view, the occupants of Shell Cottage - with the exception of poor, frustrated Fleur - disapparated from the small house, to gather on a lonely, spreading hillside upon which their allies were all waiting.
“Everyone has their orders then?” Bill had asked his lieutenants the night before in his front
garden, under a sky full of stars. “Everyone knows what’s expected of them?”

“Aye,” Svetlana, the Bulgarian faction’s leader responded. Though her accent was much less
grating to Remus’s ears than Viktor Krum’s own, the woman’s understanding of English grammar
and usage seemed to fall on an archaic side of the spectrum.

“We three, we shall fall on them like the wolves we truly are, no?” she had asked both Bill and
Remus.

There had been something feral and hungry in Svetlana’s grin, which was answered first by Bill,
and then by Remus himself.

Now, in the clear light of dawn, Remus gazed out at a field barely come back to life after a bitter
winter.

“Whatever happens today Hermione,” Remus clasped tightly at Hermione’s hand. “Know that I
love you,”

“I love you too,” she said, with her gaze fixed on the horizon. “Will you transform today, do you
think?”

“I mean to win this battle as a man,” Remus grinned, though he allowed his wolf to manifest in his
smile. “Besides, magic allows me a certain degree of flexibility where brute strength does not,”

Humming in response, Hermione tilted her head and tugged him down for a final kiss. Pressing her
body against his own, he memorized the way she felt in his arms, the scent of her hair, the way she
made the whole world fall away…

“Oye,” Ron called out, almost but not quite able to hide the tremor in this voice. “Cut out the
mushy stuff will you? It won’t do for me to throw up now,”

“I love you Ron,” Hermione turned towards her two best friends. “And you Harry. I love you too…
oh come here! The both of you!”

Flinging herself bodily towards the other wizards, the witch clutched tightly at both Harry and
Ron.

“Harry, you’re being a bit…” Remus frowned as he caught the way Harry was looking at his
witch.

“Sorry old man,” Harry did not so much as spare him a glance. “Hermione, I apologize for this.
You can kill me later…if there is a later anyway…”

Unceremoniously, Harry curled an arm around Hermione’s waist and yanked her into his tight
embrace. Burying his other hand in her hair, he planted a firm kiss on the woman’s lips. In
response, Hermione squeaked aloud in shock.

Realizing he couldn’t very well rip Harry’s head off, or be angry at
Hermione
Remus spun on his
heel and glared off into space.

“Everyone’s getting snogged,” Ron sounded faintly miffed. Turning to Remus, he joked shakily,
“Don’t suppose you and I ought to give it a go?”

“Sorry Weasley,” the werewolf growled. “I don’t go for gingers,”
“Ouch,” Ron clutched his chest. “My feelings,”

“I’ll kiss you little brother,” Fred Weasley’s disembodied voice rang out from somewhere on the right. “Although now that I’m really thinking about it, I feel a little sick,”

“You could vomit all over a Death Eater,” George’s voice chimed in. “I doubt they’d like that very much,”

“I’m a little late to the game…” Percy Weasley spoke up. “But little brother, it’s good to see you,”

Surprised, Ron turned towards the voice of his prodigal sibling, who for so long had been persona-non-grata with the Weasleys. “Perce, is that really you?”

There was a whispered incantation and suddenly, the Weasley siblings were all present. Including Percy and Ginny Weasley.

“Son, you might want to make your peace,” Remus said in a low voice, remembering all that had passed between himself and Sirius, and all the words they had failed to tell each other while the other man still drew breath. “Do it now, fast,”

Not needing to be told twice, Ron raced towards the arms of his materialized older brother. Arthur and Molly Weasley too, came into sight. Quickly, their little spot on the field became a Weasley love-fest as the family held tightly to each other.

Awkwardly, Remus wondered if it was safe yet to turn around. Luckily, his unspoken question was answered by the sound of an awkward cough. Tilting his gaze, he took in the sight of James’s son shuffling sheepishly on his own, while Hermione scurried to get away.

“That was unacceptable Potter,” Remus warned none-too-gently, still feeling torn between his instincts and his good sense.

It wasn’t as if Hermione wanted the other wizard to kiss her, and Harry was…well, Harry was about to go off to face his doom wasn’t he?

Surely, Remus couldn’t grudge the young man one kiss from the woman he was in love with.

“Bite me Moony,” Harry retorted.

“Gladly,” the werewolf took one step towards the other man as the best of his intentions dissolved.

“That’s enough,” Hermione said frostily. “This is immature and stupid. Harry, you can’t just kiss people without their consent,”

Deciding his wife had the situation under control, Remus swallowed away all his angry words.

“Nothing for it now,” Ron nodded grimly. The rest of his family was once again no longer visible. “Let’s do this,”

Sighing, the four of them took up positions with their wands raised.

Carefully, Harry uttered the Dark Lord’s name.

There was a series of loud pops, as Snatchers materialized all around. Casually, Remus began to send a few hexes flying, same as Ron and Hermione.

“It’s him, it’s really him,” one of the scruffy blackguards said in frightened awe. “It’s sodding
Harry Potter,
“Tell your Master I have something he wants.” Harry’s voice grew taut with genuine apprehension.
“A certain Resurrection Stone and an Invisibility Cloak. Tell him I’ll give them both to him, in
return for safe passage out of Britain. I’m done with this fight. I give up. Tell him,”

“We just want to get away,” Hermione sounded scared and tired. “I don’t want to die. Please…”

Without a word, the Snatchers disappeared.

Sharing glances of uncertainty, everyone on the hillside, visible and invisible, held their breaths.

Without warning, the blue sky began to darken; it was as if the sun itself was being blotted out. The
warm, early morning breeze ceased as every songbird stopped their cheerful singing all at once.

Under a black sky, foul magic filled the air.

“Riddle surely knows how to make an entrance,” Remus muttered.

“It’s half the fun of being an Evil Overlord I suppose,” Harry mused. “Now if I were an evil
overlord, I’d have a big black cape. My minions would all wear standard-issue starched
uniforms…”

Remus snorted. “I suppose next you’d be wanting a black helmet and a perfectly composed
soundtrack. Perhaps you’d also like a Death Star maybe?”

“Fuck yes,” Harry nodded decisively. “Tom could take a few lessons from good old Darth Vader
when you think about it,”

“What the hell are you both on about?” Ron demanded.

“Don’t ask,” Hermione said with contempt.

Shadowy figures dropped from the sky. A few at first, and then dozens. Someone lifted a wand and
shouted, “Mosmodre,”

From the unhinged, feminine note of the caster’s voice, it didn’t take Hermione’s level of intellect
to know who had cast the Dark Mark. Growling low in his throat, Remus bared his teeth in
Bellatrix Lestrange’s direction.

As the green skull became fully formed, one final figure dropped onto the field.

A pale, ghastly face emerged from the masked crowd of his followers.

“Potter,” Tom Riddle’s high, cold voice called. “I see you’ve come begging for your life,”

“I see you’re still a dick-face who deals in cliches. Seriously, have you considered recruiting a
professional writer to your cause?” Harry asked. “All the best villains have them,”

All around, anti-apparition wards were being silently erected around the battlefield. A risky move
of course - the strategy meant that both allies and enemies alike, were now effectively trapped. No
one would be escaping the imminent fight without making a literal run for it.

“I will enjoy cutting that insolent tongue out of your head,” Riddle said almost dispassionately.
Turning to his men, he commanded, “Take Potter and search him. As for the others, kill them,”

Not even for a second, had anyone in their company thought that Voldemort would show any form
of mercy. Already their wands were raised, firing curses and jinxes at their approaching enemies.

All around their allies came into sight as they fell on the Death Eaters.

Roaring in unadulterated fury as he finally understood that he had been tricked, Voldemort lifted his own wand and sent off a bright spark into the now jet-black sky. It was a magical signal meant for the rest of the Dark Lord’s followers who were not already present.

Shadows began to fall at the edges of the field in dozens, and then hundreds, thwarted by the wards as they were. Black cloaked bodies shouted in anger as they crossed the threshold, and began firing curses left, right and centre.

Men and women converged like tidal waves, and with that, the battle was joined.

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Much as he hated it, Remus knew that it was only inevitable that he would lose sight of his wife as the fight progressed.

Ducking away from a vicious spell, Hermione yelled indignantly as bits of her curls became singed.

That was the last he saw of her for sometime. His other companions had already disappeared into the melee, flicking in and out of the corner of his vision.

Over the din of warfare, surrounded by the smells of blood and sweat, piss and shit, it was hard for Remus to pick out exactly where his allies were. Forcing himself to keep his focus, the wizard fought in earnest.

At some point during the battle, someone managed to land a good blow on his torso, which sent him sprawling into a cluster of beleaguered wizards and witches. Not bothering to ask if everyone was alright, Remus clambered to his feet and snarled out a hex at his attacker.

Blood began to drip from a wound underneath his ruined shirt.

Making his way through the field, firing at anyone with a black mask, or whom he knew for certain was not a fighter on his side, Remus allowed his bloodlust to guide his every move. All laws had been thrown out the window. Order members and Death Eaters alike were tossing unforgiveables about, along with any number of jinxes and curses.

Smoke filled the air, as corpses began to appear. Some, he noted to his anger, were men who had fought shoulder-to-shoulder with him in previous fights. More, to his dark pleasure, belonged to the side of the Death Eaters.

“Dementors,” someone shouted in warning. Immediately, dozens upon dozens of silvery grey shapes floated out into the sky, charging at a black cloud of Dementors as the creatures attempted to descend into the fray.

Remus’s sharp grey eyes caught a glimpse of Hermione’s jaguar, as it raced towards his own ghostly wolf. In tandem, before animals charged towards the demons.

Thunderous cracks filled the sky, as several giants were transported onto the battlefield. Deafening crashes filled the air as the massive creatures stumbled about.

“The wards,” Remus heard himself hollering even as he lifted his wand to do the necessary.
Thankfully, he was not alone in understanding that some of their precautionary measures had been breached.

The French wizards and witches - the ones intimately familiar with Giant warfare in the crags of their own land - turned their attention towards the literal, massive threats they were now faced with.

At their backs, the Bulgarians exacted revenge on anyone who thought to tread on their allies.

***

As he fired yet another curse at an enemy, Remus stumbled upon the very quarry he had been seeking.

Bellatrix Lestrange danced about in deranged fury, loosing *crucios* and *avadas* with every sweep of her wand. Molly and Ginny Weasley, though working in tandem, displayed signs of flagging energy as they moved in intricate patterns to defend themselves.

“Scum,” Bellatrix screeched. “Blood traitors!”

Snarling, Remus aimed and shouted, “*Diffindo,*”

The spell struck Bellatrix’s casting hand. Even amidst the chaos, Remus picked out the sound of tearing flesh and bone, as the witch's severed hand fell away from her. Scarlet spurted from her dismembered wrist, as the madwoman shrieked in agony.

“*Reducto,*” he gritted out, pointing at her left kneecap. Before his eyes, her leg exploded in a shower of bloody shards.

Addressing the women who were staring at him in fright, he hissed, “Leave. This one’s mine!”

Without protest, Molly and Ginny did as they were told. Stepping into Bellatrix’s line of sight, Remus kept his wand trained on her heart.

“Half-breed,” Bellatrix rasped from the ground. Her dark eyes were glazed and unfocused. “Did your little wife like the gifts I left on her?”

“You don’t get to speak of her,” Remus’s voice was a cold, alien thing.

“When we win, I’ll flay the flesh from her bones, and I’ll…”

A green bolt flew from Remus’s wand.

Striding away from the corpse of Bellatrix Lestrange, the wizard continued to fight.

***

No matter where they were in the field, one thing remained constant, and that was the maniacal screams of the Dark Lord himself.

Bursts of raw power exploded from the centre of the fighting, betraying easily, the locus of the battle. Every time Remus attempted to move in that direction, somehow knowing that his wife was likely somewhere close to Harry, some other opponent got in his way. Easily tossing aside those who would block his path, Remus found sick satisfaction every time he felt bones crumbling under
his fingers.

A few times, his hands weren’t hands at all, but curved, wicked talons. The transformation was coming to him easier now, and faster.

Nonetheless, even Remus’s magic and wolf strength were not enough to stave off the minor wounds he’d received throughout the battle. Blood streamed down the side of his face, streaking through the film of dirt that had accumulated in a film on the surface of his skin.

Loping towards the centre of the battle, a few times, he thought he saw Tonks and Bill fighting in tandem, blasting a clear radius about them. Indeed, looking around, Remus could see quite plainly that the deaths of their enemies outnumbered the deaths of their allies.

In the midst of another attempt to get to Harry’s side, a burst of raw power exploded beside him. That burst of malicious magic sent Remus diving towards the ground. Coughing hard, he tried to rise to his feet…only to fall backwards once more, as someone struck him with a stinging hex.

His wand rolled away from his hand.


Antonin Dolohov.

“Dirty halfbreed…” the dark wizard stood above Remus, emaciated and thin, scarred and tormented.

Dolohov had obviously been healed of the wounds Hermione had bestowed upon him once, in a diner in another life. But new injuries had since been inflicted upon his person.

The Dark Lord did not abide failure well.

There was no mercy in the other man’s hate-filled eyes, and no hesitation in his gestures. Raising his wand, the Death Eater pronounced gleefully, “Avada Kedavra!”

As a bright bolt of green light raced towards him, Remus closed his eyes and focused his thoughts on the memory of Hermione’s smile…

Something large slammed into him, knocking him out of harm’s way.

Yelping in shock, Remus came back to the world. To his horror, he found himself gazing at an unmoving Arthur Weasley, whose blue eyes were staring unseeingly out into nothing.

An angry roar tore itself out of Remus’s chest, and nothing about it sounded human. Leaping to his feet, the man had no idea what a terrifying figure he cut, with his beast only just barely obscured by the human skin he still wore.

Grey eyes turned yellow, and human fingers lengthened to sharp claws.

Sweeping forwards with all the grace and speed he owned, Remus pinned a horrified Dolohov to the ground. There was a brief struggle, during which the Death Eater managed to erect a quick shield. Exerting a little more force, he sent Remus sprawling back.

“You freak!” Dolohov gasped. “Avada…”

“Sectumsempra!” Hermione’s voice cried out directly behind Remus.
Antonin Dolohov fell to his knees, bleeding from every conceivable part of his body.

“Avada Ked…” his witch began to say, to finish the job she had started.

Malice filled Dolohov’s eyes. Twisting his wrist, with his dying breathe, the Death Eater croaked out something unintelligible.

A jet of black energy blasted towards Hermione at top speed.

“No!” Remus screamed. On all fours, he scrambled towards Hermione, to drag her out of harm’s way…

Later, he would think on that moment, and understand that he was always going to be too late. As the spell hit his witch square in the chest, Remus reached out and caught her as she fell.

Close by, both Arthur Weasley’s and Antonin Dolohov’s corpses remained undisturbed. All around the werewolf and his witch, the fighting began to slow.

“Re-Remus…” Hermione smiled dreamily into his perfectly human face. “Have I…have I ever told you…h-how handsome y-you are?”

Her face was becoming a ghostly white; it didn’t escape his notice that she was beginning to resemble the shades of James, Lily and Sirius.

“Don’t, please…” he urged frantically, prying her wand from her hands. Hurriedly, he began casting every healing spell he knew upon her person.

“I-I h-had such a c-crush on you i-in my th-third y-year. I t-thought you were s-so clever, and s-so attractive,” she confessed. “l-loved our life t-together, I really d-did…R-Remus…I love you…I’m sorry I can’t…”

Dark eyes fluttered and fell shut. Hermione’s heartbeat faded to nothing but a thin thread.

“Don’t leave me,” he begged. “Please, Hermione, not now, not when we’re so close. We have a whole life planned, remember? Please…”

At least she was still breathing; as long as she stayed breathing, there was still hope.

Somewhere close by, Voldemort released yet another angry scream. Green curses filled the air, but Harry’s voice rose above all of them.

“Give it up Riddle, your side is losing, your men are dead. It’s bloody over;”

“I’d rather die,” Tom Riddle sounded as furious and as unhinged as Bellatrix did, when she gasped her last. “After everything I’ve worked for, all the things I’ve done…”

“So die,” Harry’s voice was a hard, cold thing. “Fall off the surface of this earth, and rid us of your madness and your corruption,”

The crowds parted just enough. From his place on the field, Remus watched as James’s son circled the deranged megalomaniac.

Voldemort’s highest lieutenants were still close at hand, and they were all trying to cripple Harry from the sidelines. Their efforts however, were repeatedly thwarted by the skillful spellwork of the most senior members of the Order.
Remus knew he ought to be fighting with his friends, but how could he do anything at all, when his entire world was languishing in his arms?

“You first,” Voldemort hissed, sounding everything like the snake he already resembled.

The dark wizard’s familiar - Nagini - slithered forwards, only for Snape - fucking Severus Snape - to step forwards.

Uttering the same spell Bill Weasley had demonstrated to them only recently, Snape set the reptile on fire in a confined globe filled with *fiendfyre*. Despite the distance, Remus recognized the sensation of unravelling Horcrux Magic, as Tom Riddle’s blood spells fell apart…

“Severus! You traitorous filth!” Voldemort quivered in rage.

A jet of vicious red light flew towards Snape. Flying backwards, blood began to seep from the Potions Master’s eyes and mouth. When he landed, his body twisted and convulsed in pain.

Minerva McGonagall swept forwards with a furious battle cry…only to be immediately met with a killing curse. The impact of the spell sent her limp body slumping over a still-dying Snape.

Without thinking, using Hermione’s wand, the werewolf sent a curse of his own towards the Death Eater that ended Minerva. Numbly, he watched as Thorfinn Rowle died.

Someone settled beside Remus with a loud gasp.

“’Mione!” the wizard breathed.

*Ron*, the man registered vaguely as he clutched his witch closer to his chest.

“Is she…” Ron questioned. His voice was filled with grief. “Please, not her too…Percy…I saw him…I watched him die,”

Stomach lurching, Remus’s shoulders trembled as he took in what Ron was saying. This was everything he had feared when first he had raised the banners for this very battle.

Why in the name of god had he done such a thing? Was one madman worth all of this?

“Arthur…he…” he turned towards Arthur Weasley. Following his gaze, Ron sobbed brokenly as he careened towards the still body of his father. “I’m sorry Ron, I couldn’t…”

Ahead of them, Voldemort swept his wand down in one terrible motion and snarled, “*Avada Kedavra*!”

As the curse flew towards Harry, the Boy-Who-Lived shouted, “*Expelliarmus*!”

There was a bright light, followed by a horrible, grinding sound. Twisting his body over Hermione’s to shield the both of them, Remus waited for the ringing in his ears to go away, before he dared to raise his eyes.

In the quiet aftermath, almost every eye was turned towards the sight of Harry standing over the crumpled remains of Tom Riddle…and a shattered Elder Wand. In Remus’s arms, Hermione remained as still and as unmoving as ever.

“Help,” Remus said into the thick silence. Then, very loudly, he begged, “Somebody please, help! It’s Hermione Granger, she’s been hurt!”
It was her name that did it. The world started to fall into motion very quickly after that.

Tonks was the first at his side, followed by Kingsley.

Somewhere in the distance, he heard the wails of a hysterical Charlie Weasley crying out for Percy, over and over…

Bill snarled orders in a magically amplified voice, commanding that all remaining enemies were to be brought in alive if possible, but dead if not.

“You have to let us take her to St. Mungo’s,” Tonks coaxed, her firmness belying her tears.

“Moony, you have to let go…” Harry’s pale and frightened face floated before him.

“Remus, let go…”

Chapter End Notes

Happy New Year and (merry belated Christmas)...

This massive epic is almost over. Thank god. I think.

Yeah ok so I wrote this entire trap scenario because I kinda thought 'hey what if the Order hadn't been caught with their trousers down'. I probably did not do the final battle justice but what the hell, fan fiction.
There was a particular year in Remus’s life, when he spent countless nights seated beside Lyall Lupin in the cloistered wards of the hospital. In silence, the two of them had existed in the same space, waiting in dread for the inevitable and the unstoppable. Magic and Muggle know-how had both failed his mother, and there had been nothing for it but to wait on Hope to die.

Remus had sat and stared, red-eyed and miserable, at the fading receptacle that used to house his mother’s soul, wondering how he could miss someone when she was still right there, right in front of him. His entire life, his mother had loved him unconditionally, had doted on him like he was her little prince, never mind that once a month he turned into a ravening beast.

Much like him, his father had gazed upon his dying wife with despairing grey eyes. What grief Lyall experienced however, he kept locked away in a small box somewhere deep within his heart.

Now, seated by Hermione’s bed, watching as she lay unmoving and unresponsive, Remus wondered how his father had remained so calm and so still. For two and a half days since the battle, he had been as a ball of thwarted energy, seeking, ever seeking for a way to save his witch within the pages of the library Hermione had carted all round the country.

Stubbornly, he ignored anyone who wasn’t a Healer, but who would insist on speaking with him… not that the Healers of St. Mungo’s were any sort of use. The only promises they could give him, were assurances that they were desperately trying every possible treatment to see if they could draw his wife out of her magically induced coma.

Nobody seemed willing to broach the fact that the cadences of Hermione’s heartbeat and breathing were slowing infinitesimally from moment to moment. Regardless, these facts were readily apparent to Remus.

Studying their filched books of magic, poring through word after memorized word, the man did his best to find some heretofore unknown spell that would draw Hermione back into the world of the living.

For all his efforts however, Remus kept on coming up short.

“You have to get some rest,” Tonks pleaded one afternoon, looking herself, ragged and worn. “You’re no good to her if you fall over from exhaustion,”

“There is not to be any rest until she comes back to me,” he stated numbly, refusing to meet his former lover’s gaze.

To her credit, Dora had stayed with him for a few hours anyway, constantly pushing coffee into his hands whenever she spotted an opening. Doggedly, she replaced each empty cup as they grew cold.

Someone had thoughtfully cast a few cleaning charms on his person, if only to ensure he didn’t sit in the filth of the battlefield for days on end…however, the werewolf had no idea who had done him such a favour, but neither did he really care.

Harry flitted from ward to ward within the hospital, visiting the sick and the injured who were dear to him. Whenever he arrived at Hermione’s bedside - which was often - the younger wizard sat
across from Remus, staring hopelessly at the face of the women he too, loved. Every once in a
while, James’s son would bring with him sustenance of some variety, which he’d shove
determinedly at the werewolf.

“Eat,” he would tell the older man. “Or when Hermione comes back, I’ll tell her you’ve been
starving yourself. You won’t like what she’d do then,”

His threat was typically seconded by a sombre Ron, who seemed determined to stay present
whenever Harry wasn’t around.

For all the comfort those he counted as friends tried to provide, for all the tomes at his disposal,
Remus found it hard to stave off that old, creeping despair which had haunted him for much of his
life…despair of which was made far worse now, by what it was he saw in a future without his own
Hermione.

All the dreams his witch and he had barely started sharing - of the life they both wanted to truly
start - all of it was beginning to crumble into so much ash, with every minute her eyes stayed shut.

How, he wondered, was he supposed to forge onwards without this woman by his side? Was he
supposed to grieve, and to try moving on again?

Doubtless, unlike the end of the last war, people like Tonks and Harry and Ron would be there to
force him into some semblance of life. Perhaps even Bill Weasley, if the man forgave him his part
in his father’s death. But did he even want to accept their friendship and to keep on moving? Did
any of it matter?

How many people was Remus going to have to mourn before he finally accepted that for him, there
was nothing but grief in this whole, wide world?

***

In the middle of the night, Ron saved Remus from falling out of his chair.

“Mate, I’m sorry, but I cannot allow this to continue,” the younger wizard declared kindly and
decisively as soon as he set the fatigued werewolf properly back in his seat.

With a swish of his wand, against all odds, the grieving boy produced a silvery Jack Russell.

“Come. Quickly, Remus needs us,” Ron told his Patronus, and sent it bounding off.

Two minutes later, Bill and Molly both materialised. Tired and shattered though all the Weasley’s
seemed, Molly still found the energy to tsk in disapproval the moment she took in the wretched
state that was Remus.

“I don’t want to leave,” he protested weakly, and started in shock at the ease by which the Weasley
matriarch dragged him to his feet.

“Now you listen to me young man, it’s time you got some food and some sleep. For goodness sake,
you’re wasting away to absolutely nothing,” the older woman glared at a row of uneaten
sandwiches the wizard had abandoned on a sideboard. “Bill, if you’d be so kind as to bring Remus
back to the Burrow, and see to it that he gets fed and rested, I would be ever so appreciative,”

“You heard my mother,” Bill sighed, “I commanded an army, but far be it from me to defy Molly
Weasley,”
“I can’t…” Remus attempted to extricate himself from the matronly woman without physically hurting her. “I can’t possibly accept your hospitality. Not after…”

“Not after what?” Molly demanded hotly. “Not after my husband saved your life? The one you’re currently throwing away?”

“Mum,” Ron interjected bravely. “That’s enough. Leave Remus alone. You can’t blame him…not right now anyway,”

The older woman sighed, and ran a hand over her haggard face. Releasing Remus, she stifled a sob as she gazed towards the pallet upon which Hermione lay.

“I’m sorry. It’s just…” Molly gestured helplessly. Without being prompted, Ron moved to stand beside his mother. Very gently, he wrapped his arms around her shoulders.

“Bill, do what Mum says will you? Remus, I swear…I’ll stay here with Hermione, and guard her with my life,” Ron said quietly. “Harry will be along soon anyway. We won’t let anything happen to ‘Mione. Promise,”

Realizing he had lost this tilt, Remus approached Hermione’s beside and planted a kiss on her forehead. Reluctantly, he turned to follow Bill.

***

Landing in the small living room of the Burrow, Remus immediately stumbled towards the sofa, and sank down upon its overstuffed cushions.

“You’re going to want to wash up before you sleep,” Bill summoned a clean change of clothes from somewhere.

“Why are you being so…” Remus gestured helplessly. “I’m the reason your father’s gone,”

“You really are a self-centred git aren’t you?” Bill snorted harshly. “My father’s dead because he chose to fight, to stand up for what’s right. He sacrificed his life so that someone else could live. I would appreciated it if you didn’t turn his good intentions into another excuse for a good old fashioned pity party. Honestly, I have no idea how you make it through life being such a selfish bastard all the fucking time,”

Tossing the summoned clothing in Remus’s general direction, Bill proceeded to stalk away into the bowels of the house.

Feeling unaccountably sheepish, the older wizard grimaced.

***

Following a hot shower and a change of clothes, Remus was forced to admit that he did indeed, feel better. The heaviness in his heart was still there, and would be there, he knew, for as long as he didn’t have his witch back with him…nonetheless, there was something to be said both about being cleaned up, and about soundly chastised by a man ten years his junior.

It had been Ron who had seen to it that his wand was returned to him after the battle, and thankfully, it still seemed to respond to him just fine. Before a small bathroom mirror, Remus sloughed away a week’s worth of facial hair with the use of a familiar spell.

Stepping into Molly's kitchen a few minutes later, dutifully, Remus did as Bill had commanded,
and made himself some food. Settling down, he began methodically to demolish a simple ham and cheese sandwich.

As he finished up, Bill entered the room, and settled down in a dining chair across from him.

“I was being unfair,” the other wizard said without preamble. He looked as if he had aged decades in a span of a week. The scars on his face stood out starkly upon his pale skin. “I’m sorry for the things I said earlier…”

“I refuse to accept your apology,” Remus said bluntly. “I believe I’ve been acting exactly as you described - I’ve been behaving like a self-centred git. We’ve all lost something in this struggle, and I have - as you so accurately pointed out - been making everything all about me. You and your family…your losses are insurmountable…”

The two men stared at each other.

“I’m so sorry Bill. For your father. For your brother,”

Bill shook his head. “Charlie…fuck. He’s refused to leave his room since…well. Since. He barely eats a damn thing we send up to him. It’s almost as if he wants to follow Percy to the grave. His wife meanwhile…Penelope’s been beside herself, weeping unendingly, day and night,”

“Do you want me to try speaking to Charlie?” Remus asked tentatively. “I’m not sure what I can say however…”

“I’m not sure anyone can get through to him right now,” Bill shook his head. “We’re a close family, as you well know. But these few years tore a rift between us such as we had never known…a rift we never really mended. All the nice words and the platitudes we uttered at the end…Charlie’s feeling the worst of it, because he thinks he should have tried harder to breach that gap…”

Remus’s heart twisted painfully.

“What about Ginny and the twins?” his voice was shockingly firm.

“Fred and George have been trying to drink themselves into oblivion, while Ginny…she’s just sitting outside Charlie’s old room, waiting for him to come out. She’s upstairs right now, if you want to go sit by her,” Bill laughed bitterly.

“Me? I’m doing my best to sort out Dad’s will and things. Did you know that when a man dies, he leaves behind not only broken hearts, but a mountain of paperwork? God…but the man was shite at organizing his life. I’m sorry to say such things about a dead man…but it’s all painfully true,”

“Tell me how I can help.” Remus wiped at his face. “Please.”

“For starters, you can stop worrying Mum. Worrying me for that matter,” his friend said very seriously and bluntly. “Mum’s worried you’re going to try to off yourself,”

Until three hours ago, the woman hadn’t been completely off the mark, Remus admitted silently to himself.

Now that he was being dragged back to the world, it was finally occurring to the werewolf that ending his existence was less than fair to everyone he cared about, and who cared about him.

“Right. I’ll just settle for a kip on the sofa,” Remus nodded, cramming the last of his sandwich into
his mouth. “I’ll run up and see Ginny when I’m done, before I get back to St. Mungo’s…maybe I’ll take her with me. Seeing Harry might do her some good…”

Bill nodded.

“You do that. I’ll have Fleur check on you in a bit to see if you need anything,”

Rising to his feet, still feeling a bit like a scolded schoolboy, Remus started for the living room, only for his friend’s voice to stop him mid-step.

“If the worse happens, promise me you won’t do anything stupid,” Bill said quietly, intensely. “It’s enough I’ve lost my father and my brother in one day. I can’t…I can’t bear the thought of losing my friend too,”

Hanging his head, Remus murmured gruffly, “I can’t promise I won’t be a real arsehole, if the worst does happen,”

Recognizing suddenly that he was in fact, too exhausted to form anything more coherent, the man wandered back towards the sofa. Slumping down upon its soft cushions, he closed his eyes. To his surprise, sleep came far more easily than he had expected.

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“Remus, wake up,” Ron’s urgent voice broke through his slumber.

“What?” he asked, instantly alert. “Hermione? Is she…”

“No,” Ron said grimly, beckoning him towards the fireplace. “But we have to go to the hospital. Now,”

“Tell me what’s wrong,” Remus growled, though he followed Ron anyway. “Is she…”

“You’ll see when you get there,” Ron sounded angry.

Realizing that answers would not be forthcoming from the red-headed wizard, Remus stepped into the green flames as Ron pronounced succinctly, “St. Mungo’s Hospital,”

Two seconds later, Remus was racing from the floo towards Hermione’s room. Bursting into the chamber where his witch lay, Remus found himself greeted by the sight of Harry and Severus Snape pointing their wands at each other.

Evidently, Severus had survived whatever curse Voldemort had thrown at him on the battlefield…And the rage of the Order.

“What the fuck is the matter with the both of you?” Remus demanded indignantly, circling the two wizards to get to Hermione’s side. His own wand was drawn, and pointed at Snape.

“Snape here claims…”

“Do not presume to speak for me,” Snape hissed, shifting slightly in his stance. For the first time, Remus caught sight of the flask in the other man’s hand. “I came because I know how to fix Miss. Granger’s current state,”

“How?” Remus asked immediately; his entire attention was suddenly fixed on Snape. “What, even?”
“I spent a long time listening to Antonin’s endless vitriol…”

“Because you’re a fucking Death Eater,” Ron spat, having finally caught up. “Just because you did one good deed…”

“Weasley, what reason would I have to try murdering Miss Granger now?” Snape demanded heatedly.

“You’ve never liked her,” Harry bit out before Ron could offer his own opinions on the matter.

“What does that have to do with anything?” Snape sounded incredulous. “Just because she’s a swotty know-it-all…”

“Enough!” Remus thundered. Without another word, he shut the door and charmed it so it would be warded to no more than the four people in the room.

“Remus, wha…” Harry started.

“Silencio, Expelliarmus,” Remus cast.

Harry and Ron’s wands both flew towards him. Before the younger men could comprehend what was happening, the werewolf placed a strong binding spell on his former travelling companions.

“Now Severus, as you were saying,” Remus kept his own wand pointed upon the bane of his youthful existence.

Not, of course, that Severus Snape currently resembled anybody’s bane. Dark shadows stained the underside of his hollow eyes, and his cheekbones were unhealthily pronounced. The other man’s once-haughty shoulders were bowed under a burden Remus was only just beginning to see.

A familiar shape began to form in the werewolf’s mind.

In another time and another place, Remus might have sympathised at the cross Severus now bore, and which they both shared…courtesies of Albus.

“Antonin loved his homemade curses,” Snape said after a moment. “It was how he rose in favour with the Dark Lord to begin with. When your wife here…when she saw fit to repay that arsehole his goodwill, he spent months obsessing over the perfect curse for her. Each time Riddle punished Antonin for allowing a Mudblood to best him, the man only grew more creative…”

“What did he do?” Remus demanded impatiently.

“Your wife…she lingers on the edge of wakefulness and dreams constantly. Reality and nightmare for her are one as we speak. Antonin meant to drive her insane. He wanted her final moments to be filled with nothing but suffering and madness…and to give her no hope for recourse,”

His breath hitching, Remus cast a glance at the unmoving body of Hermione.

“Can you cure her?”

Snape held up the flask he had been clutching at.

“Remus, I know we’ve had our differences, but I can save her. Please…”

“Do it,” Remus growled. “She’s dying. I know she’s dying. I’ve felt it for days. No one else seems capable of saving her. But Severus, you should know…”
The werewolf dropped his wand, and heard it as it rolled away.

“…If this cure of yours hurts her, I will rip your throat out where you stand,” Remus looked down briefly at Harry’s wide, furious eyes. “Harry, if any harm befalls Hermione…do with me as you please,”

Snape dashed forwards. Carefully, the Potion’s Master held the witch’s mouth open and tipped the contents of his flask past her lips.

“I can’t promise this will fix everything,” Snape warned, massaging Hermione’s throat. “There could be complications from Antonin’s spell we don’t understand yet,”

On the bed, Hermione began to cough and her eyelids began to flutter.

“Will she live?” Remus demanded, rushing towards his wife.

“Yes,” Snape nodded, wrapping his dark robes tightly around his too-thin frame as he stepped aside.

Jerkmg ever so slightly, Hermione leaned onto her right arm, to pull herself upright. It was an effort that failed rather spectacularly…though Remus was there to catch her before she fell over.

“Remus?” she asked weakly, as Harry at last broke free from the spell the werewolf had cast.

“I’m here,” Remus assured, stroking her curls from her sallow cheeks. “I’m right here.”

Sinking against his shoulder, Hermione’s arms curled around his neck. “Oh god…”

“You’re okay,” Remus whispered softly.

“Are you real?” she choked. “I don’t know…I don’t know anymore. I’ve been tricked so many times…”

“I’m real” he breathed. “I’m real. This is real,”

Breathing each other in, neither Remus nor Hermione noticed the silent departure of everyone else.

Chapter End Notes

One last chapter to go...
The place hadn’t been swept in a while, that much was obvious. The roof, the grounds, the fence… they all looked like nature had finally come to reclaim what was hers to begin with.

“Really,” she started, sounding a little peeved. “It doesn’t cost that much to hire a gardener to come in once a week,”

“Spoken like a spoiled brat,” her husband replied, though he didn’t sound as annoyed as his words might have implied.

The witch shook her head, before she magically cleared a path to the front door. Taking a step past the border separating Lupin cottage from the rest of the world, her knees began - very rudely - to give out.

Had it not been for Remus’s reflexes, likely, she would have fallen flat on her face. Effortlessly, her husband hoisted her into his arms, and strode up to the front door.

“We didn’t do this properly before,” he smiled charmingly down at her. It made her almost-embarrassing fall almost bearable.

Almost. Any day now, she’d remember that she was still in recovery mode.

“We’re going do it properly today,” Remus declared as he kicked his door open.

“We haven’t done anything properly,” Hermione pointed out. “Perhaps we should discuss engagement rings,”

“That…” Remus carried her past the threshold. “…is going to have to wait a year. Though Kingsley tells me my new salary is going to be quite generous,”

“He does put a crimp on my other plans.” Hermione rubbed at her nose as Remus deposited her upon his dusty sofa. “What do we do in eight years when I decide it’s time to get me all sprogged up? Whose going to stay home with our baby?”

Remus wandered off into his bedroom. Loudly, he began to rummage through his belongings.

“If in eight years, I still have a job, I will likely beg for a few months off to spend time with our offspring. Or just outright resign.”

Hermione made a small noise of disgruntlement at her husband, the new Head of Research of Magical Creatures.

“What in the world are you doing in there?” she called after a while. Sitting alone on his sofa, she felt quite neglected. And bored.
Allowing her eyes to rove over his bookshelves, she scoffed again at his collection of fiction…and made a mental note to steal a volume or two when her husband’s back was next turned.

“[speech] I was hunting,” he re-appeared with two boxes in his hands.

Closing the distance between them, he snapped open two ancient, velveteen boxes. The one to the left held a gold band, peppered with small diamonds.

“I told you I was going to slip a ring on that finger of yours…” he said quietly. “It’s not exactly an engagement ring with a massive rock…”

Tearing her eyes from the proffered wedding rings, Hermione caught her wolf-man’s nervous twitch.

“Give it,” she demanded with a grin.

To her delight, Remus slipped the diamond band unto her finger. Holding her hand up to the light, she admired the way the ring shone.

“Now you,” she commanded imperiously.

“Bossy wench,” Remus laughed, before slipping on the ring from the other box. Lyall Lupin’s own wedding band, if Hermione wasn’t much mistaken.

“Are you sure you’re alright with me going back to school to finish my seventh year?” Hermione asked, as Remus gently moved her so he could sit beside her. Settling herself in the crook of his arm, she closed her eyes in absolute contentment.

Remus pushed his nose into her hair.

“As long as you come home to me every night, Mrs. Lupin, I don’t see why that should matter to me,” he caught her lips in a playful kiss. Smirking against her mouth, he added, “Besides…that school uniform of yours has such potential. We could pretend I’m still your Professor, and you could be my wayward student who is in need of, say, a better grade?”

“Oh for fuck’s sake,” Hermione loosed a bright peal of laughter. “How is that in any way a believable fantasy? But yes, of course I will come home every night. It’s unorthodox, but it’s not like anyone dares says ‘no’ to me these days…”

“I suppose that’s true,” he growled and slanted his mouth over her own.

“Remus…” Hermione breathed after a while.

“Yes love?”

“As much as I would like you to fuck me until I saw stars…” she said bluntly, a soft smile curving her lips as she observed her husband’s ravenous expression. “I would prefer it if we at least changed the sheets and did some dusting…”

“Hmm…” gently, he pulled her from the couch. Carefully, he guided her towards their bedroom. “How about ‘no’,”

A few minutes later, Hermione forgot why she had wanted to wait. Actually, she forgot a lot more than that.

But it was ok, because she was home at last, with the man she loved with all her heart.
It took them a few weeks to work out where the Diadem was kept

Standing in the Room of Lost Things, they decided that Ron ought to be the one to smash the Horcrux with the Sword of Gryffindor.

Remus, Harry and Hermione had already destroyed one. It seemed only fair he got to destroy another.

“Blimey,” Ron wiped the sweat of his brow. “Nasty bit of magic, that,”

“You don’t say,” Harry said flatly. “Could really have used you that first time,”

Observing his guilty flush, all his companions chuckled. His best friends even slapped him on his back, to demonstrate exactly how forgiven he was…

If Hermione hit him just a little harder than was strictly necessary…well, Ron wasn’t about to point that out.

He had lost too much in too short of a time, and if gaining back his best friends’ trust and affections took some doing, then there was nothing for it, but to actually commit himself.

***

There was a new funeral to attend every other day.

First it was Arthur, next it was Percy. Minerva McGonagall was buried close to Albus Dumbledore’s own grave on a sunny Thursday afternoon.

Despite Kingsley’s best efforts at keeping the students of Hogwarts safe, a good many funerals were held for more young people than Remus cared to number.

A boy by the name of Colin Creevey, whom Hermione wept over for a good day and a half; a girl named Cho whose death caused Harry to exist in impenetrable silence for a whole week; a student named Hannah, whom Remus had remembered as being sweet, and bright, and kind, if not overly clever…

And so it went.

***

The last Horcrux took more doing. There was paperwork involved, and an unfortunate need to navigate several layers of bureaucracy. In the end however, access was granted to the Lestrange vault, seeing as Rabastan and Bellatrix Lestrange both had not only died in the final battle, but had been labelled war criminals of the worst sort. Everything they once owned was now considered property of Gringotts, with the exception of one, significant artifact.

Once they accessed the vault, there was no stopping Bill from gleefully hacking Helga Hufflepuff’s Cup into smithereens.

Gaping at the sight of his friend’s savagery, Remus laughed. “Remind me not to get you anything sharp for Christmas,”

***
“Why not?” Bill demanded. “I’m very responsible. You know, now that you mention it, I’ve always wanted a sword…Mum wouldn’t let me have one growing up,"

“Pity. You looked quite dashing there for a minute. Tell me, have you ever considered taking up fencing?”

Hermione stared at Bill with wide-eyed hero worship. It was enough to make Remus pull her tight against his side, if only to remind his wife which wolf she was actually married to.

In the end however, he shouldn’t have worried. All too quickly, Remus found himself staggering under the weight of a sobbing witch, who was kissing him like there was no tomorrow.

“It’s over…” she smiled through happy tears. “It’s really, truly over,”

In the aftermath, Bill handed the ancient weapon to Griphook, who inspected the sword for damages.

“I mean, all of this is just for show,” the Goblin admitted to the five of them once they were alone. “After you saved my life, it wasn’t as I was going to hold it against you if the sword was a fake again. Though…it’s…it’s not a fake though, is it? I mean…I’m not going to hold it against you, but Gringotts…”

“No,” Hermione answered at once. “It’s not a fake. You have my word on that, if that counts for anything that is;”

“Ms. Granger, your word is as bond around here,” Griphook smile a sharp-toothed grin. “Thank you. Thank all of you, really. I’m glad we could work things out."

“Mr. Griphook, thank you for helping us swing the law in our favour,” Remus assured.

“Nonsense,” Griphook hesitated, then turned towards the only witch in their midst. “Darling, you should know - whenever you’re done with Hogwarts, we have a role open and ready for you. Talent and intelligence like yours do not come along every day, and Gringotts - we value both beyond all measure;”

“I’ll accept only if all my friends are also guaranteed jobs,” Hermione said loyally.

The goblin muttered something about a lack of an athletic division as he glared darkly at Harry and Ron.

As his sharp gaze swept over Remus, Griphook’s toothy smile returned.

“As I mentioned, us Goblins do like talent,” the gnarled creature said contemplatively. “From what I recall, you’re a special kind of werewolf, aren’t you Mr. Lupin? Perhaps you would like to hear what we might be able to offer you…”

Swallowing, Remus remembered too late that the goblin had been present when he had transformed at will, in the cellar of Malfoy Manor…

***

“Aren’t you going to ask me to come in?”

Remus stood on Severus Snape’s front step, smiling genially up at the one-time Headmaster of Hogwarts.
Whatever it was Snape had shown the Aurors in a Pensieve behind locked doors had guaranteed his freedom…as well as the grudging respect of Kingsley.

“Why the fuck would I do that?” Snape sneered, though his expression lacked his usual bile.

“Because right now, I get the feeling you really need someone on your side,” Remus explained. “Because I get the feeling that you and I…we have more in common than either of us know,”

For a whole minute, the two men stared at each other in silence. As the seconds ticked past, Remus began to wonder if this was such a good idea after all. The dour man smelled as if he were soaked in Scotch; cheap, shite Scotch at that. The peaty scent of the brown liquor burned Remus’s nostrils.


*Step into my parlour, said the spider to the fly*, Remus thought with dire dread as he entered the Potion Master’s unlit home.

Peering at his surroundings, the werewolf couldn’t help but think of 12 Grimmauld Place as a haven of cheer and happiness by comparison.

Not a single lamp was glowing, and all the windows were shuttered. Papers and books were strewn haphazardly across every surface. Dirty plates and empty bottles were piled into a corner, baiting invitingly at vermin.

“Cozy,” Remus couldn’t help but quip.

“Why are you here?” Snape brushed past Remus to settle in an armchair by a cold hearth. Picking up a half-empty tumbler filled with more of the vile Scotch he had clearly been imbibing on, the man swallowed most of its contents in one gulp.

“I wanted to thank you. For what you did for Hermione that is…and to see how you’re holding up,” Remus shook his head to clear his thoughts. “Last time I saw you, you looked like shit. Now, you look like utter shit.”

“What do you care what this old, failed Death Eater gets up to?” Snape asked, contemplating the meagre contents of his glass.

“I can only assume you’re not actually a traitor,” Remus answered as he gave up his attempts to find a clean place to sit. “I saw how Minerva McGonagall reacted when Voldemort attacked you. I don’t believe she would have been quite as upset if she truly thought you had sold us all...”

“None of that matters. Everyone still thinks I came around because my side was losing,” Snape hefted the glass in his hand thoughtfully.

Without any warning, he flung the tumbler against a wall.

“Did you?” he asked instead, walking over very slowly as if he were approaching a twitchy animal. It hadn’t escaped his concerned notice that Snape’s wand was nowhere in sight.

“I’ll ask again - what does it matter? To you, anyway,” Snape slumped into his seat. “Just leave me alone. Please Lupin, I beg you…”

“Unless I’m completely remiss in my understanding, my guess is this: Albus Dumbledore put you
up to some ridiculous, overly-complex set of plans, and insisted that you stuck to your guns, no matter the cost to your soul,” Remus crouched before Snape. “It didn’t matter to him that in the process of fulfilling his grand plan, you alienated yourself from everyone who should have been on your side. From those who should have been there for you when you needed them most,”

Snape’s eyes were wary as they tracked Remus’s every move.

“I understand far more than you think, about what it means to be Albus’s soldier,” Remus murmured. “All the terrible things he’s capable of making one do, for the sake of the ‘greater good’,”

“Well done,” Snape said sardonically, lifting his hands to clap slowly and mockingly at Remus’s monologue. “You’ve nailed it perfectly,”

“I can’t claim to understand all you’ve gone through of course,” Remus rose gracefully to his feet. “And frankly, I’ve behaved like a right arse towards you in the past. But I’ve been in your shoes Severus. I’ve been on your side of things, and its a horrible side to be on. I’m not going to force you out of this refuge you’ve built…”

“I’d like to see you try,” Snape snorted, though he seemed incapable of meeting Remus’s eyes.

“…but when you’re ready to rejoin the world…” the werewolf turned to leave. “I’ll be more than happy to buy you a pint,”

“Lupin,”

“Snape?”

“You have no right to swan in here, and act as if you know anything about anything,” the Potions Master said flatly, though there was a distinct lack of spite in the way he said it. It was as if all the fight had gone out of him.

“Whenever you’re ready Severus,” Remus sighed, and turned to leave.

“I loved her so much,” the former Potion’s Master murmured. Glancing over his shoulder, Remus wasn’t sure if he was the one being addressed. “I still love her,”

“Who?” the last remaining Marauder asked curiously.

“Lily,” Severus kept his eyes fixed on nothing.

In his mind’s eye, Remus saw a ghostly doe leading him to a frozen lake; he remembered his confusion when first he had seen the Patronus. Understanding, surprise and sympathy flooded his veins…

Gazing at the other man’s hopeless stare, Remus once again caught reflections of the man he himself had been.

“I loved her too you know. Very much. I miss her every day,” he said quietly. “But Severus… Lily’s dead. She’s been dead a long time. You on the other hand - you’re still alive. You can’t hold on to the dead forever…trust me, I’ve tried,”

Shutting his eyes, Severus appeared determined to ignore Remus’s continued presence.

Shaking his head, Remus strode out the dank, dark house at Spinner’s End. Already, he knew that
he would be back next week, and the next, and on and on, until Severus either moved without
telling him where he was relocating to, or until Severus agreed to rejoin the world…

With any luck, the stubborn idiot would see the light yet.

***

She eyed his backpack anxiously, wondering if he had packed enough sweaters.

Or enough shorts, in case where he was visiting somewhere warm.

She voiced aloud her concerns, only for Harry to put his hands on her shoulders in a placating
manner.

“I’m fine Hermione, I’m not going to freeze to death. Or die of a heatstroke. Or both, at the same
time,” he assured her.

“I don’t understand why you’re leaving,” Hermione huffed. “I was so looking forwards to us
spending some quality time together for a bit, without having to worry about a madman trying to
murder us,”

“Honestly, bumping off a Dark Lord might have taken quite a bit out of me,” Harry admitted as he
sat down beside her on his lumpy mattress.

“Right, of course,” Hermione nodded, trying to be understanding about the whole thing. She
supposed after months spent with Harry in the wilderness, it wasn’t that out of the question that she
was experiencing a weird separation anxiety over his whole ‘I need to get away for a bit’ thing.

“Are you doing alright?” Harry asked carefully. On his lap, his fingers twitched restlessly, as if he
wanted to reach out for her hand but was having trouble stopping himself.

That was the other thing: there had been a time when physical affection was easy between the two
of them. They were Harry and Hermione, best friends forever and ever. Sure, he had been in love
with her, but so what?

Then Harry had gone and snogged her before the battle.

It hadn’t been a bad kiss. In fact, Hermione had been quite surprised to find that Harry was rather a
decent kisser. The only problem was…Harry wasn’t Remus.

Since the battle, suddenly, Hermione found that both she and Harry had become horribly aware of
each other, all of the time, in an awkward fashion that never used to be there.

Not being able to fully express herself around him now was quite frankly, hell.

“I’m feeling stronger every day if that’s what you’re asking. Walking isn’t such a terrible trial
anymore,”

Harry’s green eyes studied her closely, as though he was seeing through her half-truth.

Only Remus knew of the way she had taken to screaming herself back to wakefulness on nights
when sleep was possible.

The other nights found her pacing the length of the cottage’s small living room, trying to
understand if she was awake, or if she was sleeping…if she were dreaming, or she were lucid.
Dolohov’s last, vicious spell had left no scars this time; at least, no visible ones that most could
“If you say so,” Harry said at last, cautiously reaching to tuck an errant curl behind her ear. It was such a familiar gesture, it made Hermione want to sob in relief. All too quickly, he withdrew his hand.

Knowing it was a mistake before she even spoke aloud her thoughts, Hermione blurted out, “Ginny will miss you,”

“Yeah?” he asked wryly, before he stood up and sealed his backpack.

“I think she’s still carrying a torch for you,” Hermione pushed on desperately, unsure what it was she was hoping to achieve anymore. “You and her, you were…”

“I used her,” Harry said very bluntly. “Like a massive, giant arsehole, I used Ginny because she was there. The whole time I was with her, my mind was on…it was on you Hermione,”

They existed in a frozen silence for very a long moment.

“Hermione…if Remus hadn’t…if the two of you hadn’t been forced to get married,” Harry spoke after a while, refusing to meet her gaze as he moved his bags to the ground. “Do you think…did you maybe…”

Would it be kinder if she lied?

“You know I love you. You know I would die for you if it came down to it,” Hermione said, gathering what courage she still had as she stood up. Grasping his hands rather forcefully, she forced him to look at her. “I mean all of that. But Harry…I’m not…”

“Ugh,” he shook his head, looking beaten. “Don’t. I don’t know why I asked,”

Tugging his hands free, he cupped the sides of her head and pressed a kiss against her forehead.

All at once, Hermione found herself remembering a time when Remus had been so careful not to offer her anything more than a few chaste kisses against her forehead…

“I don’t think I’m the man for Ginny,” Harry said quietly as he stepped back. “And I don’t know that there’s another woman out there for me,”

“You’re being a tad melodramatic,” Hermione pointed out, hoping that he couldn’t tell she was about to cry. “You’re eighteen years old - somewhere out there, is a very attractive, very kind, very loving woman waiting for you to find her,”

For a split second, Harry’s eyes darkened to a shade she didn’t exactly recognize. There was a strange slant to his mouth that seemed completely alien on his usually kind face, as he raked her features with something like acute disdain…

“Harry?” unconsciously, Hermione reached for her wand. “Are you…”

“She won’t be you,” Harry shook his head.

Suddenly, the young man before her was her friend again.

“This won’t be forever. I’ll be back soon, I promise. Sooner than you think, even. I mean, I don’t speak Thai, and I rather doubt they’d want to keep me there longer than my tourist visa allows. Actually, I also don’t speak Spanish, so I’m not sure how I’m going to survive Columbia…”
“You better come back soon,” Hermione nodded, as her tears finally spilled. “Or I swear, I will hunt you down Harry Potter,”

“Is that a threat? Or a promise?” he smirked.

The only answer he got, was an armful of sobbing witch.

***

“How do you not see how selfish you’re being?” she raged.

“Selfish?” Remus hissed from the kitchen where he was clutching at a tumbler of firewhiskey. “Do you have any idea what could happen, if this knowledge fell into the wrong hands?”

“You can’t make these decisions for people,” Hermione insisted, her hair practically sparking with magic as she paced in front of him. “They should get a choice to decide what they want to do with this information,”

“How do you think the rest of the population would like it, to know we can transform into ravening killers at any moment?” Remus fired back as he slammed his glass against the counter. “To them, we’re sub-human **freaks** as it were!”

“You’re not a mindless beast though are you? Dosed with Wolfsbane Potion, you’re perfectly aware of your actions when you **deliberately** transform. If the population understood that, it could change **everything**. You heard Griphook - you could be ensuring employment for a whole group of marginalized people!” Hermione growled, sounding more than a little bit like a beast herself.

“You’re oversimplifying a complicated situation!” he declared heatedly.

“And you have a responsibility towards other werewolves to share this. Not only that, but as Head of Research…”

There was no reasoning with her when she got this way, Remus knew. Stalking to the door, he strode out into the warm summer evening, slamming the door behind him.

***

He was ploughing through a pile of papers when the news broke over the wireless he had left switched on in the background. Putting down his quill, Remus listened carefully to the solemn tidings as it streamed through the air.

When at last, the announcement was completed, and regular programming resumed, the werewolf suddenly found himself feeling quite out of sorts. Reading through the reports of his team no longer seemed as though it held any sort of priority.

Pushing away from his desk, he wandered towards the small break room. Thoughts swirled around his mind like a small tempest. Absently, he waved his wand over an empty mug and muttered, “**Aguamenti, Diffluo calidum,**”

Slowly, the cup filled with boiling water. Mechanically, the wizard made himself a cup of tea.

Eventually, Remus made it back to his desk, only to find his office not as empty as he had left it.

“Hello,” Hermione said nervously, wringing her hands.

Gazing at the witch in her spiffy school uniform, Remus found himself missing her worn jeans, her
faded sweaters, her tattered sneakers…

“Hello,” he replied. “I assume you heard,”

“Of course I did,” the woman said excitedly.

*His* witch, he thought, though suddenly he wasn’t quite sure.

“It’s been repealed. All those Muggle-borns who’ve been expelled…they can be brought back. The ones married against their will, they can break their bonds…”

“Yes,” he nodded slowly, giving her what berth he could as he circled around to the other side of his desk. “They can, can’t they?”

“You’re not thrilled,” she frowned.

“I…” he hesitated, shuffling unseeingly at the papers before him. “No, I am happy. The law was unjust, and terrible. It ruined people’s lives,”

“So why…” she sounded genuinely confused.

“Because I’m…” he sighed, finally looking up at her. “I’m not ready to lose you. But if it’s what you want…”

“Lose me…” Hermione’s face lit up in understanding, and then frustration. Her hair was, as usual, attempting to escape her thick braid. Closing the distance between them, she reached out to still his restless movements. “Remus, how many times do I have to tell you that I’ve *chosen* you?”

Pursing his lips, the man gazed searchingly into her dark eyes.

“You weren’t really given a choice,” he said quietly.

“My own idiot man…” Hermione smiled fondly. Drawing her wand, she turned towards the door of his office and silently flicked it shut. The latch fell in place, ensuring that the entrance was locked. “Would you like a demonstration of how much I love you? Should I prove to you how much I enjoy being your adoring little wife?”

Feeling simultaneously foolish and turned on, Remus couldn’t stop his lips from curving upwards in unadulterated happiness. Looping an arm around her waist and cupping at her jaw, he leaned down and pressed a kiss to her forehead, relishing in the scent of wild honey, magic, and him.

“I would like that very much…” he murmured. “But sweetling…”

“Hmm?” dark lashes fluttered enticingly.

“This is a place of business,” he finished with a chuckle as she began to pout. “Don’t think I won’t want proof of your affections later however,”

“But why not…”

“Be a good girl,” his voice dropped to a husky growl as his hand tightened at her narrow waist; the pads of his fingers pressed light bruises into her soft skin. “I expect to find you completely bare, and *ready* for me by the time I get home. Do you understand?”

“Yes,” she breathed.
“And one more thing…” he tapped lightly at her nose with a forefinger. “Don’t you dare come… not until I’ve given you leave,”

“Alright,” she cast her suddenly shy gaze down to the ground.

It boggled Remus’s mind that his little minx of a wife, who had all but demanded a shag in his office only minutes ago, was now oddly abashed at the prospect of her own pleasure.

“Don’t you have an essay to write or something?” he asked. Reluctantly he stepped away from her before he did something stupid, such as actually bending her over his desk.

Hermione rolled her eyes, suddenly all business. “Christ, going back to school is far more boring than I anticipated. Everyone’s too scared to talk to me, and none of the Professors seem interested in actually engaging me in proper conversation. Do you know, I suspect I could stop attending all my classes and still graduate at the top of this year’s class?”

“You could always drop out again,” Remus laughed, tugging affectionately at her curls. “And be a good little house witch,”

“Oh I’m sure you would like that - I could wear a dress, a string of pearls…an apron even…” she kissed him on his cheek and folded herself back into the circle of his embrace.

“Mmm…” he pecked at her nose. “That sounds heavenly. Will you be learning how to cook do you think, before any of that happens? I don’t fancy burnt chicken every night…”

The werewolf was rewarded with a sound smack to the side of his head.

“I’ve half a mind to ask Kingsley for a proper job. I don’t know how much longer I can take the boredom of Hogwarts…words I never thought I’d say,” Hermione pronounced glumly.

“It’s only two more months love,” Remus said sympathetically. “After that, we can look forwards to becoming co-workers,”

“It won’t be that bad,” Hermione assured as she shifted away from him. Immediately, he missed her warmth. “I’ll see you at home in a bit yeah? I trust you have dinner well in hand?”

“As always,” he promised.

With one last smile, she turned towards the floo. Grinning ruefully at her disappearing form, Remus decided with certain conviction, that he truly was the luckiest man alive.

***

“Remus, Leonard Lyesmith and Sheldon Hullen are ready to see you,” Luna’s voice floated towards him, through the door separating him from his team.

A high pitched and whiny voice protested, “It’s Doctor Sheldon Hullen,”

Remus briefly wondered if he was making a mistake. After months of correspondence, floo conversations and yes, emails, he had come to understand that the man known as Sheldon Hullen was a bit of a pain in the arse to deal with.

With luck, the news he was about to offer to the Americans waiting outside would improve Hullen’s disposition. That is, that the Ministry of Magic in Britain was offering the two men waiting, more funding for their research on Wolfsbane Potion.
While this strategy wasn’t the grand announcement Hermione had truly hoped for, Remus had an inkling that taking a slower approach was likely the better way to accomplish their shared goals.

“I’m sorry Doctor Hullen. By the way, I don’t know if you’ve noticed the Nargles hanging about your head…” Luna said flippantly.

Stifling a groan, Remus raised his gaze to the ceiling.

“What?” the man shrieked. “What do you mean?”

“Sheldon, calm down,” Doctor Lyesmith Jr. sounded exasperated. “What exactly are Nargles, Miss. Uh…”

“Mrs. Weasley,” Luna opened the door, looking pleased to be able to introduce herself in such a manner.

Ron Weasley had certainly wasted no time in locking the girl down in matrimony. Indeed, Remus thought he could sense a faint, second heartbeat coming from her desk…

“Oh, so you’re married. Of course you would be. A pretty lady like you, why wouldn’t you be? Not of course, that you’re just a pretty face. I mean…”

Standing up to greet a disgruntled Hullen and an amorous and babbling Lyesmith, Remus had a distinct feeling it was going to be a very long afternoon.

***

One bright day in early October, Remus found himself strolling alone through Muggle London on his lunch break, enjoying an uncommonly warm afternoon.

It was only until he found himself standing before a very familiar set of steps, leading up to "Speedy Couriers", that Remus realized where his feet had unconsciously been guiding him towards. Through transparent glass doors leading into a small courier office, the wizard spied a familiar face, tapping diligently away at a keyboard.

Taking a deep breath, Remus ascended the stairs. Pushing open the doors, he dropped his arms and waited.

Martin looked up from where he had been working and cast the wizard a bright, achingly familiar smile.

"Good afternoon, how can I be of service today?"

"Hello," Remus shuffled awkwardly. "I uh…I don't suppose you're hiring any couriers,"

In the tiny confines of the courier office, the werewolf found himself missing the feel of hot city wind rushing through his hair. He missed the urgency of meeting deadlines as he sent contracts and paperwork all throughout the city…

He missed his friend.

"Always," Martin grinned without a hint of recognition in his expression. "But you can fill out an application online and send it in. Someone will look into it and get back to you…though between you and I, if you can ride a bicycle through this traffic, you're already hired,"

"I've survived this long," Remus rasped, wishing he could ask Martin how he had been doing, and
if he had finally found himself a girlfriend. "I'm sure I'll manage,"
"Looking forward to seeing your application then, Mr....er..." Martin frowned. "Do I know you? You seem awfully familiar..."

For a wild moment, Remus wondered if somehow, he might get his pal back after all.

"Hold on, didn't I just see you on the telly, on some detective show?" Martin snapped his fingers. "Are you here researching a new part?"

"Not really." Remus muttered after an excruciating pause.

Fleeing back out into the bustling city, the wizard kept on walking, and did not stop until he found his way back to Magical Britain.

***

Harry dreamed.

In his dream, he sat on a bench at King’s Cross train station, waiting for the Hogwart’s Express… …which was odd.

As far as he knew, he’d just stepped off a plane in Chicago O’Hare, and was currently checked into the Waldorf Astoria.

“You haven’t won you know?”

There was an undeniable beauty in his companion’s features, which even Harry appreciated.

Harry, who had managed to sleep with a girl in just about every city he had landed in since he left Britain almost a year and a half ago.

Some of his trysts had functioned as futile bids to flush his affections for another witch from his blood; most of it was because the women he had encountered were beautiful…and he was young and alive.

Piercing blue eyes glanced at Harry from underneath a shock of dark hair. “I’m still here,”

“Know,” Harry made a face. “I’ve always known,”

“One of these days, I’ll take back what’s mine,” Tom Riddle nodded. “When you least expect it, I’ll take my life back. I’ll use your own hands to do it too. Just see if I don’t,”

“Do you think so?” Harry tried not to sound as bored as he felt.

The conversation he was currently immersed in was old.

“I’ll kill that witch too. I never understood why you just stood by and let that mutt have her,” Tom said conversationally, brushing a speck of imaginary lint from his dark robes. “She could have been yours. No matter, she’ll be dead when this is done, and you can watch from in here as I snuff the life out of her body,”

“Dumbledore was a bit of an arsehole,” Harry sighed. The two men looked at each other in
momentary commiserating silence. “But he was right about some things. For one, you don’t understand what love is…”

“I don’t see…”

“I love Hermione. I always will - her happiness is everything to me, even if she doesn’t spend her life by my side.” Harry squinted at a peeling advertisement for wrinkle potion, which had been pasted to a brick column.

“Oh spare me the sermon,” Tom huffed. “I’ve heard it all before,”

Harry stood up. “There’s no sermon Tom. It’s over. It’s been over for some time now,”

Enraged, Tom rose as well.

“Are you so arrogant you think you can control me?” Voldemort snarled.

“No, you idiot,” Harry said tiredly. “You’re so arrogant, you still think you matter. You don’t. You never will again,”

The shade of Tom Riddle opened his mouth to answer, but nothing poured forth from his mouth.

“Goodbye Tom,” Harry turned away. Allowing his gaze to drift, he began to forget.

Later, when he awoke, all Harry could remember from his dreams was a moment of brief darkness, but not much more than that. Peering out at the brilliant summer sky, he wondered if that hollow pit in the depths of his belly, was what people called ‘homesickness’…

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Fremantle, it turned out, was a very quiet suburban city, which did not lack for beauty. Casting her curious gaze upon the shops lining the avenue upon which she and Remus strolled, Hermione wondered to her husband that such a lovely place could hide so many hidden dangers.

“Sweet girl,” Remus laughed quietly in response. "I do believe the two most dangerous creatures in the immediate vicinity might be us,"

Grimacing, Hermione conceded with a nod.

"It's just...you hear about these spiders, and saltwater crocodiles," she looked ambivalently towards a low shrub, as if at any moment, a massive reptile would spring forth. "The scariest animal we have in Britain is Ron when he's hungry,"

"Not true," Remus said. "I would say it's me, when I haven't been allowed to stay in bed on a Sunday,"

"It's a waste of time to sleep in so late," Hermione wrinkled her nose, trying to hide her nervousness.

"Who said anything about sleeping?" Remus raised his eyebrows suggestively, tightening his grip on her hand.

"Remus," Hermione dropped her casual tone as they approached an intersection. Hanging a right, they started down a residential avenue lined with some sort of palm tree. "What if they hate me?"

By her side, the wizard didn't say a word. Instead, he slipped his arm around her shoulders to give
her a comforting squeeze.

"Say something," she murmured.

"I don't know what to say," he admitted, as they passed several nice looking houses.

“They might hate you. Or they might choose to listen, and find understanding in what you did to protect them,”

“Right,” she replied, unconvinced.

"No matter what happens," Remus stopped walking in front of Number 88 South Street. Turning to face her, the man grasped firmly at both her hands. "I'm here for you. Always."

"I'm scared," her voice shook.

"I know," he leaned down and kissed her softly on her lips. “I know,”

Sighing, Hermione turned from her husband and walked towards the front door. Raising her hand, she knocked once, twice. Gingerly, she stepped back into Remus's protective embrace.

"I love you," he told her quite seriously.

“I love you too,” she promised.

The door swung open.

The End.

Chapter End Notes

A year ago, I thought I'd have a four chapter, 45000 word Remus/Hermione story.

One year later, an accidental 160000 words later and a trope series that draws ambivalent affection, I have this.

Which I do love. And which allowed me to speak with lovely people in the comments section.

Thanks to everyone who made it here! Please read and comment on Violet City if you have time...you all are great. I mean it.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!