After the Storm

by HatakeKaede

Summary

Wars tend to do a number on people, hell, they do numbers on whole societies. Especially one as small as ours. They leave behind a trail of dead bodies, families torn apart, injuries and broken minds. We won the final battle, we won the war, but now that the feat is done many struggle under the weight of the memories. Post-war AU.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Prologue

Prologue: May 2nd 1998

Tonks ran down the stairs taking them two at a time, holding tightly onto her outstretched wand. She continued her frantic search for Remus whom nobody had seen since Aberforth had run into him when her husband was duelling Antonin Dolohov. The Auror remembered from her training that the average fight between two skilled wizards took twenty minutes at most. She had to hurry if she wanted to make it in time to assist Remus in his fight.

*If you still can help him*, a small voice at the back of her mind whispered. She swallowed and tried to push the dark thoughts away.

The witch approached the explosions and flashes of light from the hexes being thrown around on the battlefield. Three opponents surrounded her all at once, their faces not concealed by Death Eater masks. Tonks recognised two of them as Ministry officials she had passed a few times on her way to the Auror office. She wondered if they acted under the influence of Imperius or if they had joined the wrong side willingly and simply had yet to earn the privilege of being able to hide behind a mask.

She heard a loud chuckle followed by a maniacal explosion of laughter from the other side of the room as a small body crumpled on the floor. Tonks' blood ran cold and she shivered. She deflected a spell from one of her opponents and aimed three quick stunners in their direction. All spells hit their targets and she took off towards Bellatrix only stopping to tie the three men's hands behind their backs.

She got a glimpse at the body and a wave of rage erupted inside her. The boy was still in his robes, the Gryffindor emblem a sad reminder of his bravery. He could have been sixteen at most and Tonks recognised him as one of the boys she saw on more than one occasion with Ginny Weasley the year before. What kind of monster could take the life of somebody's son, someone's brother, someone's friend so easily and not even have the decency not to laugh about it? Colin Creevey's face quickly turned into Teddy's in front of her eyes and she advanced on Bellatrix with a cry of fury sending off one spell after another driving her aunt to the corner of the room. All the Death Eater could do was deflect the attacks. Tonks was about to shorten the distance between them and point her wand at the Black sisters' throat when she was disrupted by a cry of pain somewhere behind her. Remus. She froze. The eldest Black daughter didn't hesitate and was quick to use Tonks' moment of distraction.

There was a loud crash as Bellatrix's spell hit the wall behind Tonks' back. She took a few steps sideways in order to avoid the flying rubble when her right foot hit a small rock and she came crashing down. She reached out the palms of her hands instinctively in order to soften her fall and her wand slipped out of her grasp. Tonks breathed in the damp smell of the floor for a second to steady herself and tried to reach her weapon. Her fingers were almost touching the piece of wood when she felt a crushing weight on the small of her back. Bellatrix leaned down and retrieved Tonks' wand stashing it into her robes. She grabbed the younger woman by the neck roughly and they both disappeared in a puff of black smoke.

They reappeared only a few hundred feet away at the outskirts of the Forbidden Forrest. When Tonks looked up she was staring straight into the face that could have easily belonged to her mother were it not for the mad glee shining from the dark eyes and the widest of grins, utterly out of place in the middle of the final battle of a long fought war. A chill ran down the young Auror's spine when she fully grasped the reality of the situation. She was going to die. It was inevitable. In some deeply hidden corner of her mind she had long prepared for this moment. The faces of her loved ones -
Teddy, Remus, her parents, the Order, her friends would appear in front of her eyes and she would welcome death as an old friend knowing that she sacrificed her life so that her son could live in a better world.

Many an Auror dreams of a hero's death. In their imagination it's all glorious and they think of the honours, medals and fame. Despite being younger than most of her colleagues, even in her tender age Tonks knew better than that. She had to learn better. Death didn't claim its victims in the form of heroic tales but in the form of bodies never recovered. In the end she wouldn't mind her body being found with no wand or sign of struggle, simply hit by the briefest flash of green. As long as she stayed true to herself, it didn't matter what tale history would spin of her life.

But of course she wouldn't escape that easily. Bellatrix had been waiting for this moment for long, perhaps even since before Nymphadora Tonks was born or even thought of by her parents. She would take revenge on her sister for betraying her family and their cause. And what better way to do that than toying around with her prey? When they find the body, it will remain unscathed safe for a small message to be delivered to the mother who had her heart torn out even before she sat her eyes on her daughter's dead body.

Even if some part of her brain was expecting it, she couldn't stop the reaction as Bellatrix lips formed to create the despicable word.

"Crucio!"

She had only delivered her baby a few weeks ago, so Dora knew more of pain than most men who had ever walked the earth yet she couldn't stop the involuntary whimper when her whole body shook with the onslaught of excruciating agony. She wasn't sure how many repeats of the curse her body still weak from childbirth could take before it would eventually crumble.

Childbirth. Teddy.

You have to survive!

How could you leave your son behind without a mother and perhaps even his father?

But you have already made your choice! You have already left him behind in the safety of his cradle his hair turning from shockingly turquoise through the black of the dynasty that had forsaken him all the way to the inconspicuous sandy brown he inherited from his father. You ignored your husband's pleas and those of your mother and you have failed most profoundly in the most important job of your life even before your work on it had actually begun.

No! Don't let me go there. Tonks muttered to herself as the curse hit her unprepared.

She was almost expecting another attempt at physical torture but the Legilimens incantation caught her long before she even considered setting up the wall to protect her innermost thoughts.

Tonks was standing in front of the Burrow looking at Remus' silhouette hastily walking towards the protective wards so that he could run off far away from her. Even into the throngs of his biggest enemy rather than into the warmth of her embrace.

She wrapped her cloak tighter around to protect herself against the imagined chill of the warm night of the midsummer. Tonks could feel the colour evaporating from deep within her soul as her spiky
pink hair turned to the shoulder length mousy brown. She had made a mess of things. Not only may her newfound cousin never wake up from his sleep ever again, she also managed to destroy the friendship with the man she had come to love over this past year by demanding more of him than he was willing to give.

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Tonks was standing in front of the enchanted crib looking at the bundle of blankets and small hands, fingers and feet that was her baby. Merlin, her baby. Remus had gone off to tell the Order of the good news. After all, many of them could use the uplifting tidings in these dark times.

The young Auror considered the small form of her son distrustfully. She had no idea how to do this. Only hours ago she had felt so strong, Teddy hidden deep within the safety of her belly where she could fend off all the evil that intended to harm him.

Now she was standing next to him, her belly feeling very empty all of a sudden. She was still feeling weak and there were cramps in her lower abdomen.

But worse still was the emptiness that threatened to overtake her heart where the unconditional love for her son should have been. She was supposed to love him deeper than any other love known to men yet when she looked at his small sleeping body she only felt a gaping hole.

"Even the little shape-shifting freak can't stand her own cub," a voice snarled.

When Tonks registered it, it took a while for her to connect it to Bellatrix.

No, you don't go there! Something in her hissed and the force of that thought broke the power of her aunt's curse.

When Tonks came to, both of them were crouching down on their knees panting for breath.

The reprieve lasted only shortly as Bellatrix murmured the next curse even as she was still catching her own breath.

This time Tonks didn't merely whimper, she creamed out so loud that she could feel a dull ache in her throat which wasn't directly connected to the effects of the Cruciatius.

Her body was still shaking slightly as Bellatrix started the next onslaught on her mind.

Tonks was sitting in the uncomfortable wooden chair next to Sirius' bed in St. Mungo's trying to fend off the feelings that were threatening to suffocate her. Her cousin lied limply, his face paler than a Malfoy's. Only the beeping of the charm that monitored his heart rate betraying that he was still alive. Barely alive. Most likely to spend the rest of his years unconscious because she had failed to best Bellatrix in a duel. The last few days had been marked by all of her failings. Just as she had failed to prevent Sirius' injury she had also failed to protect the man she loved from the worst imaginable enemy. His own lack of self-worth. Instead she had given him even more ammunition to set him off to a journey into the throngs of his worst nightmare.

When the next unforgivable reached her bones she almost felt grateful. In some ways she found the physical pain easier to bear with, she could grit her teeth or scream her lungs out as the sensations were so strong that they pushed out every single one of her thoughts.
The poking around in her brain was much harder to bear as she found herself staring into the outskirts of the pit, of the never-ending void that had embraced her so many times during the last two years.

The December chill bit into her fingers as she walked through the streets of Hogsmeade. A solitary snowflake fell down on her nose. She picked up her pace as she longed to get away from the cheer that Christmas had brought to the village even in the middle of a war. She didn't know how long she had been wandering when she realised that she had walked straight to the Shrieking Shack. Oh, the irony. An unnatural mist fell down on the surrounding mountains. Tonks gripped her wand tighter as her teeth chattered once the swarm of dementors floated closer.

They kept moving closer and closer, surrounding her in a circle. She raked her brain for a memory strong enough. Her mind was coming up blank. She had faced them one too many times and the good times had become too few and far between. Just for the briefest of moments she flirted with the idea that for once in her live she could give up and succumb willingly.

A silver lynx tore through the middle of the dementor crowd running them off. Tonks stood as if glued to the spot not daring to look up at Kingsley as he admonished her in his soft deep voice: "What were you thinking?"

Bellatrix didn't give her niece any time to compose herself before she fired off another spell. Cruciatous came after Legilimens, only for Legilimens to make room for yet another Unforgivable. Tonks could no longer tell apart the physical pain from the mental ache. She felt dizzy and it was as if her brain had turned to mush under the weight of her tangled thoughts. The only way she was going to survive this was if Remus was still alive, he was the only one on their side capable of hearing her cries. She decided to hold onto that tiny sliver of hope. If Remus was still out there, she owed it to him to try to think of an escape strategy. But how does one evade torture with no available escape routes? At best she could only attempt to sustain the onslaught while she waited to be rescued.

Bugger, she thought.

Ending up as the damsel in distress wasn't really part of her plans when she endeavoured to join this battle. She had to cast that thought aside. If she somehow managed to live through this day and walked away with her pride being the sole thing scathed, she could probably count herself lucky.

His wife's tortured screams pierced his ears even from a few hundred feet away due to his heightened werewolf senses. Remus' heart skipped a beat, momentarily distracting him from his duel. The flash of green from Dolohov's wand would have hit him square in the middle of his chest were it not for the invisible wall which Kingsley had managed to cast between the two men. Remus spared a brief nod into Shacklebolt's direction before firing off a series of vicious hexes towards his opponent barely leaving him enough time to defend himself yet alone attack. As Dolohov fell down and remained motionless, Lupin secured his body in a full body bind jinx before taking off into the direction of the Forbidden Forrest ignoring Kingsley's confused cries. He only stopped to send a spell towards one of the Death Eaters that Neville Longbottom was valiantly battling against.

He followed into the direction of Dora's screams, his nostrils wide trying to catch her scent. The smell of pink tulips mixed with the battle sweat and the subtle hint of baby powder that he had come to associate with her only recently. Remus slowed down when he caught sight of the dark figure crouching over his wife. Once he saw the tormented grimace on Dora's face something deep inside him came alive. A beast much more ferocious and bestial than the wolf to whose every whim his humanity had catered during so many moons.
"Avada Kedavra."

Remus whispered the incantation, his lips barely moving but it did not matter. His resolve to kill had been so strong that the spell did its magic.

He hastened to come to his wife's side. He grabbed her by the shoulders and looked into her eyes. There was something glassy in them and he wasn't sure if she could even see him.

"Dora," he breathed out.

No response.

Before he could get any further he heard a mass of feet falling on the ground heading into their direction. He got hold off his wife and dragged them both behind a tree and murmured a quick disillusionment spell.

At the sight of Harry's motionless body in Hagrid's hold he could practically feel his stomach turning into stone. It was only the desire to protect his family that stopped him from unveiling himself. Instead he swallowed down his scream and suffered his moment of anguish silently as was his custom.

Remus waited until Voldemort's procession reached the castle and then he set to follow them half carrying his still unresponsive wife with him.

By the time he reached the castle he could see Neville Longbottom standing ahead of the group of fighters from their side.

As the Centaurs joined the battle and all hell broke loose, Remus pushed his wife beside himself and tried to avoid direct confrontation, wary of the danger that it could cause Dora. Instead he concentrated on aiming spells to help his friends in their ongoing battle.

From the corner of his eyes he saw Flitwick striking down Dolohov while Ron and Neville put an end to Fenrir Greyback. At the same time George Weasley and Lee Jordan defeated Yaxley and Percy conquered Pius Thicknese with the help of his mother.

Kingsley and McGonagall were dueling Voldemort himself and Flitwick ran to join them once Dolohov fell down. A green flash of light almost hit the transfiguration professor into the chest were it not for Remus' shout of Protego.

Then suddenly Harry appeared out of nowhere and threw himself in front of the Order members to face Voldemort himself to defeat him in a brief battle in which only two spells were cast.

Remus led Dora to the Great Hall where the other survivors had gathered. A few moments later Kingsley joined them, relief at seeing both him and Tonks alive passing over his tired face briefly.

"What's up with Tonks?" the senior Auror asked.

"Bellatrix," Remus answered.

Kingsley nodded accepting his friends' explanation.

"And what became of her? I didn't see her after the initial battle...," Shacklebolt said thoughtfully.
"Dead," Lupin whispered.

"Good," the other man answered not inquiring further. He gave Remus a brief squeeze on the shoulder and rasped: "You should get her to Madame Pomfrey, just in case..."

Kingsley didn't finish his sentence but both men knew where his trail of thought was heading. There were at least three wizards who had found themselves at the wrong end of Bellatrix Lestrange's wand who now resided in the irrevocable spells damage department of St. Mungo's.

"You'll have to excuse me now, it seems that I am needed at the Ministry," the auror said apologetically and added: "Apparently they are in a want for a new minister and the old man had told me once that I should make myself available for the post should the opportunity ever arise."

Remus didn't miss the twinkle in his friend's eyes and not for the first time he wondered how far beyond his grave Dumbledore had orchestrated their lives.

He led his wife to the group of people who were waiting for their minor injuries to be tended by Madame Pomfrey and a small group of healers that seemed to have arrived from St. Mungo's in the wake of the battle. Remus spotted a middle aged witch in muggle clothing in their midst. Once their eyes met he recognised Hestia Jones. She hurried over to the pair.

"Remus, Tonks, are you alright?" she asked, her voice a mixture of relief at seeing her comrades alive and of worry that they might not have walked away from the battle unscathed.

"I thought you were with Harry's relatives?" Remus asked quizzically.

She pursed her lips.

"Yes, well, I figured that Dedalus could deal with them on his own for one night and I might make myself more useful here. Back to the point, any injuries, Remus?" she asked him sternly just as she used to after every full moon when he was living Grimmauld Place, daring him not to hide the damage from her.

The werewolf shook his head vehemently.

"A couple scrapes at worst, but I'm no worse for wear than I was before tonight," he tried to smile as he brushed against his temple at the mixture of sweat and blood that threatened to trickle down, suppressing the wince that almost escaped him when he moved his injured shoulder.

Hestia looked at him sceptically before her inquisitive eyes fell on Tonks.

"And you, my dear?" she asked kindly before admonishing: "Running off to fight Death Eaters a few weeks after childbirth, don't let me hear anyone say that Hufflepuffs are a bunch duffers ever again."

When she received no response from the young Auror, she scrutinized her from head to toe and she waved her wand around in a couple of complicated motions her face turning grimmer by the second.

"I found her like this...," Remus said weakly sitting his wife down on the floor suddenly feeling too weak from carrying her weight.
"Do you know what hit her?"

"I'm not sure. It was Bellatrix. Crucio for sure, but there might have been something more."

Before they could continue they were interrupted by Bill Weasley, his scarred face ashen and grief stricken making Remus only now realise that the Weasleys were one family member short when he walked by the corner of the Great Hall where they all had huddled into a small group.

"The aurors that Kingsley called in have just recovered Bellatrix's Lestrange's body at the outskirts of the Forbidden Forrest," Bill started and as he looked at Remus he added: "I thought you wouldn't be surprised as they found her with this," he said pulling out a rowan wand.

"According to Proudfoot this belongs to you," he offered the piece of fine wood to Tonks who didn't seem to register the presence of the oldest Weasley son yet alone move a muscle to retrieve what was hers.

Bill looked between her, Lupin and Hestia but when none of them offered an explanation he simply shrugged his shoulders and handed over the young Auror's wand to Remus.

"And there's also the matter of this," he pulled another wand turning to Hestia: "Perhaps you can make some use of it to find out what happened? It was Bellatrix's."

The healer took the recovered item and crouched down to continue her examination. With that Bill turned on his heels to join the fray of grieving Weasleys once again.

Hestia moved her hand in front of Tonks' eyes and then asked her to follow her finger and shined a small light at the tip of her wand into the eyes that were set on the amber colour the young mother had currently favoured to match her son's latest choice of iris colour.

"No reaction whatsoever."

Jones turn her attention to the wand she had received from Bill as she tapped it with her own saying: "Priori Incantatem."

In her last hour of life Bellatrix had cast only two incantations but she had repeated them for a staggering amount of times.

Hestia let out a frustrated sigh.

"As far as I can tell there is no magical damage caused by the spells, but her psyche seems to have been deeply disturbed. No wonder, I have only ever seen someone being done such atrocious number on once and still see the light of the day."

An uncomfortable silence settled over the two for Remus had comprehended that she was speaking about the Longbottoms.

"So, what can we do?"

"First we wait and see and monitor closely. It might just be temporary and it might loosen up gradually. I'm sorry, Remus, if I knew of a spell that could help here, I would...for now all I can offer are sleeping and nutritional droughts to care for the physical wellbeing...some calming droughts too perhaps."
Remus nodded slowly, an invisible emptiness gripping at him from the inside.

A large silver eagle chose that moment to fly into the Great Hall circling around a few times until the Patronus found its target and headed for Tonks delivering the message in the strained voice of her mother.

"Andromeda," Remus gulped and grabbed his wife looking at Hestia apologetically.

The healer smiled and looked around and when she was satisfied that Madame Pomfrey and the other healers had total control of the situation she told her friend: "I'll come with you."
Chapter I

Matt Granger stacked his hands deep into the pockets of his ripped jeans. He was feeling quite apprehensive about the upcoming meeting. He wondered briefly if his patients went through similar sensations when they were heading to his office.

The Pret a Manger was bursting at the seams with the first groups of tourists that overcrowded the streets of London during the summer months. Not that you could tell June was almost knocking on the door by their attire. He noticed a group of Spaniards still wrapped in their winter coats. The group chattered animatedly and he would have almost missed the lone young woman sitting at the table right behind them. Even if he had not seen Hermione for almost two years, he would have recognised the bushy brown hair anywhere. After all most mornings found him struggling to get his similar strands under control, even if his were a tad darker, a legacy inherited from his Caribbean side of the family.

Hermione was bending over a thick book and some papers which he only recognised to be ancient looking scrolls once he approached closer. Matt stopped abruptly a few steps away from the table. He wasn't sure how to act. It only hit him now what was making him feel nervous like a thirteen year old on a first date. For years he had considered his cousin to be a surrogate little sister that he had never had. But that was all before she turned eleven and was whisked away to a world he did not belong to. Now they were practically strangers. In the last seven years they only ever met briefly during Hermione's short visits to her parents which seemed to be getting shorter by the year. Then last year his aunt and uncle took off without leaving a trace and their daughter seemed to have disappeared from the face of the earth as well. They had returned about a week ago claiming that they had decided to take a spur of the moment sabbatical down under and just forgot to tell the rest of the family. While Matt's own parents accepted the explanation, albeit they still seemed somewhat puzzled, he himself felt rather sceptical and suspected fool play. Perhaps Hermione would provide him with the whole truth now.

He looked at the spine of her book and whistled: "Werewolves: the complete and unsolicited truth as written by a werewolf. So they're real, eh?"

The book fell out of his cousins' hands with a loud thump and she looked up quickly pointing a long thin piece of wood at his chest.

"Merlin, Matt, you scared me," she said when she realised it was him.

The older Granger could not stop himself to see this situation in a somewhat professional manner. While it was true that his cousin might have just been engrossed in her book as was her custom, they had a scheduled meeting, so there was something unnatural about her reaction.

If nothing else than the drawn stick was a sure-fire sign of anxiety. He studied Hermione's face quizzically. There was something different about her compared to the last time they had crossed paths. For starters she had definitely grown up. But he could read something else in her expression and overall demeanour. He had often seen it in the faces of soldiers and first responders that found their way to his office. It was the expression that people who had looked death into the face wore.

He put his weight on his other foot awkwardly when he realised he had been staring. Hermione still didn't relax, instead she let out a long breath and asked: "What book did you let me read the summer I turned eight that my mom strictly forbid me to read?"

"What?" Matt asked raising his eyebrows.
"Just answer. Humour me," Hermione pleaded.

"The Catcher in the Rye, wasn't it?"

"Yes," Hermione exclaimed and jumped up and enveloped him in a tight hug.

"I'm sorry about that," she said sheepishly: "but there are still some people out there who might wish me dead. I just had to make sure it was really you."

Matt had no idea how to react so he decided to broach the subject carefully: "These people wouldn't be werewolves, would they?"

The young woman shook her head: "I don't think so."

"So why are you reading about them?"

"I'm just doing some homework for the Minister."

"The Minister?"

"The Minister for Magic."

"Figures that you have your own guy. Well I hope he's better than our lot."

"He's pretty good. Actually he was kind of an acquaintance of mine before he became Minister."

"Blimey, the next thing you'll be telling me that you have friends who are actual werewolves."

Matt's eyes widened as Hermione grinned.

"You actually do, do you?"

"Ehm, just one friend."

"Oh, I see...," he couldn't quiet stop himself from teasing his cousin despite the absurdity of the situation.

Hermione shook her head vehemently at this.

"It's not like that. He's married."

"But isn't that dangerous?"

"Werewolves are only dangerous one night a month and even then they can be made harmless if they get their hands on the Wolfsbane potion."

"And if they don't?"

"Then other arrangements are made," Hermione said and at Matt's incredulous expression she jumped into a lengthy explanation: "Look, it's kind of like muggles - that's what we call folks without magic - who get HIV/AIDS. They are not dangerous unless under some specific conditions. Nonetheless both sufferers of HIV/AIDS and of lycanthropy suffer in two ways. Not only do they have to deal with their sickness, they also have to face a society that is prejudiced against them from the get go. Most people don't look at them long enough to see the person beyond the condition."

"I think I understand...somewhat," Matt said finally.
Hermione looked at him expectantly.

"I assume you didn't actually want to meet so that we could discuss the parallels between werewolves and HIV/AIDS sufferers?"

The young witch smiled.

"Of course not. Why don't you sit down?" she offered and waved at the Polish waitress.

Once she brought Matt his croissant and cappuccino he said: "Well?"

"I think it's best we eat first," Hermione answered closing her book and finally turning attention to her omelette.

They were mostly quiet during breakfast except for the few niceties they exchanged about their parents. The psychologist couldn't stop himself from examining his cousin from the corner of his eye. He noted that she still seemed tense, eyes darting around the room as if expecting some killer to pop in any minute and she kept rubbing at her neck. He wondered briefly if he should propose that she take off her scarf if it was irritating her that much, but he decided to let it go. Hermione wasn't his patient and it was not the time to dare her to face her anxieties.

The Granger girl took a sip from her very cold tea before she launched into her explanation. Later Matt couldn't believe that they had only been sitting in the café for a little over an hour as the amount of information that Hermione managed to cram into it could fit into a very long movie. He kept mostly quiet, albeit some parts of her tale had him gasp. Hermione for her part seemed to be surprised that he didn't interrupt her.

When she voiced this concern he whispered: "I would like to say that it's all because being a psychologist makes you a good listener, but I'm sorry to tell you that it's all just so incredulous that I couldn't find the right words even if I tried. I mean, blimey, there was a whole damn war going on without anyone knowing? And you and your friends defeated the most powerful dark wizard?"

"That was mostly Harry. And we had a lot of help," Hermione said modestly and added: "I know it's a lot to take in and I understand if you don't believe me."

Matt shook his head so vehemently that his dark curls clouded his vision.

"No, of course I believe you. Things might have changed but you're still 'Mione."

She beamed at him, obviously not expecting him to accept her version of the events that had transpired in the last two years so readily.

"I appreciate that you told me all this and I think you might have even more to tell," the young man said nodding towards her neck: "but take your time and whenever you're ready, know that I am here to offer you an understanding ear."

"Thank you, Matt," she said.

"No worries. But that still doesn't explain what is the ask you had in mind?"

She scrunched up her nose and tried to put her thoughts into words: "Wars tend to do a number on people, hell, they do numbers on whole societies. Especially one as small as ours. They leave behind a trail of dead bodies, families torn apart, injuries and broken minds. We won the final battle, we won the war, but now that the feat is done many struggle under the weight of the memories. Kingsley, the minister is very aware of this. He used to be an Auror, it means something like a policeman, so he
has seen the damage that a battlefield leaves behind many times. We have a whole generation of scarred children and young people let alone the older people who have lived through two wars. And we want to make sure that they receive the care they need. That's where you come in."

"Me?" Matt squeaked. "But don't you have spells or potions for that sort of thing?"

Hermione smiled sadly.

"Our healers are great when it comes to fixing injuries and spell damage, but I don't think they ever gave much thought to the psyche. It's only understandable if you can just provide a pepper up potion or a dreamless drought, why bother? But those potions are not a cure, they are just a band aid that hides the real problem."

"Is that like the wizarding worlds' version of benzos?" Matt chuckled, not able to resist the jibe at his colleagues in the field of psychiatry.

"I suppose," Hermione answered laughing half-heartedly. "So what do you think about my offer?"

"Hermione, I'm really honoured that you thought to ask me and I would be very happy to help, but I'm not quite sure I'm the best person for the job. You see, in the last two years I've been working mostly with catatonic patients."

"Catatonic?" Hermione asked thoughtfully.

"Yes, in simple terms it means unresponsive…,"

Hermione raised her hand to stop him: "I know what it means. It's just that I have had an idea. You might be just the right person to help in this case."
Chapter II

Patient info: Nymphadora Tonks Lupin, age 25. Married, lives with her mother, husband and their two month old son. Law enforcement officer. Mother cites some history of previously untreated mental illness/instability. Has been subjected to major trauma recently. Pregnancy was difficult according to mother. Husband confirms frequent nightmares.

Examination: The patient appears to be unresponsive to external stimuli. Exhibits stimming behaviour - pacing, rocking etc. Current mood appears dysthymic. Patient might presently be in the midst of a hallucination.

Diagnosis: PTSD. Possible post-partum depression. Possible major depressive disorder.

Remus rubbed at his eyes to chase away the sleepiness as he put the kettle on. Twelve hours had passed since the full moon yet the chances to rest his sore muscles and find some sleep had been scarce. Andromeda spent most of the night trying to calm down Teddy whose werewolf genes manifested in the form of extreme fussiness around this time of the month. Even now Remus could still hear the toddler crying while his grandmother sang him an old wizard lullaby about fairies. Harry and Hermione were kind enough to volunteer for what Remus and Andromeda had dubbed as 'Dora watch' last evening. But the young Potter had to report at the Ministry early for his new auror duties and his friend had excused herself shortly before breakfast saying that she had to run an errand for Kingsley.

And even if the Tonks matriarch insisted that Remus should lie down and she could handle looking after her daughter and grandson at the same time for a few moments, the young werewolf felt like he was already stretching her kindness far enough as it was. And albeit he'd never actually confess it, he was determined not to let his wife's parents be right about their daughter marrying the wrong person. He checked his wand to see if he was getting any response on the spell he had set up to monitor Dora's current state for the short moments in which he had to leave the room. Tonks had turned to a creature of the dark in the days following the battle, restlessly wandering the rooms of the small cottage or rocking back and forth in a chair and sometimes they’d even catch her blinking excessively with her otherwise unresponsive eyes. During the waking hours she mostly kept to their bed and slept fitfully. Every once in a while her heart-wrenching screams would alert them to the nightmares that occupied her mind. Remus had taken to reading Alice in Wonderland to her as she slept, his voice seemingly having a calming effect on her as her facial features softened into an almost peaceful expression.

While Remus considered all this, the water in the kettle had come way past the boiling point. He waved his wand to cool down the contents of the kettle somewhat. As he poured the warm liquid into the ceramic mug, his concentration was disrupted by a knock on the door.

"Who is it?" he asked warily his fingers circling firmly around his wand.

"It’s Hermione," came the soft reply.

Both the Granger girl and Harry Potter frequented the Tonks-Lupin residence in the weeks following the final battle. It was their way of giving the Weasleys some privacy in their grief. A courtesy which Remus didn't think they needed to extend given that he knew exactly how much Molly considered the both of them to be a part of her family. Nonetheless he welcomed the distraction that their visits provided. Harry played with his godson for hours while Hermione chattered away to Tonks pretending not to notice that the other party didn't seem to be all there for their conversations. When it was just him, Dora, Andromeda and Teddy the tension was palatable and whenever they all found
themselves in the same room he felt as if he were only waiting for the volcano of suppressed emotions to erupt.

He relaxed slightly, but it didn’t stop him asking a security question: “What form does a boggart take in my presence?”

“The moon when it’s full,” said the young witch.

When Remus opened the door he was astonished to find not only Hermione but one more guest on the other side. The young woman’s visit wasn’t surprising in the least, but her choice of companion had Lupin staring at her mouth agape for a good few minutes. They had decided not to lift the protective enchantments on the cottage even though more than a week had passed since the day the war had ended. After all, one half of their household was unable to protect themselves should some of the remaining Death Eaters that the Aurors hadn’t managed to round up yet choose to attack them. Additionally their house also served as pseudo headquarters for the occasional meetings that the Order still held to monitor the post-war situation. Therefore it was rather unusual for Hermione to bring unexpected company along as it required Kingsley to disclose the location of the house that was still hidden under the Fidelius charm which he had cast almost a year ago.

The newly appointed Minister for Magic was scarce to find these days, but Remus supposed that he still could find some time for personal favours, especially if the person asking was Hermione. "May we come in?" the girl finally broke the silence.

Remus quickly closed his mouth and tried to recover his good manners ushering the duo into the small kitchen.

“Would you care for some tea?” he offered.

Matt opened his mouth to decline saying that they had just had tea and coffee a few minutes ago, but his cousin beat him to it.

“Sure, we’d love some,” she agreed.

Remus had just taken two more mugs out of the cupboard and was about to pour some tea into them when Andromeda appeared in the kitchen door. Her hair was shaggy, her clothes rumpled in places and there were dark circles under her eyes. But the small triumphal smile on her face let Remus know that she had finally won the battle and Teddy had succumbed to sleep.

“Everything alright?” he asked carefully.

His mother-in-law nodded slowly, her eyes keenly studying the two visitors.

“Hello, Mrs. Tonks,” Hermione greeted and added: “As I was just about to tell Remus, this is my cousin, Matt Granger. He is a muggle psychologist. Which means that he treats people who are struggling with their mental health. And his current focus are catatonic patients who appear to be unresponsive.”

“I see,” Andromeda said, her face turning into a polite mask.

“And you think he could help Dora?” Remus asked, finally connecting all the dots.

Hermione nodded her head enthusiastically.

“And exactly what is his experience with dark magic?” Mrs. Tonks asked sharply.
“I don’t have any experience with dark magic, that’s true,” Matt cut in, trying to change the direction of the conversation that was taking place around him so that he became a part of it himself.

“But the healers seem pretty certain that magic is not the cause in this case. Hestia told me just this morning,” his cousin added.

“There is plenty of dark magic that the healers have never heard of,” Andromeda responded.

Remus who had been silently considering the young man during the exchange, turned to his mother-in-law.

“If there’s even a small chance that Matt can help Dora improve, I think we should at least try. If nothing comes of it, we won’t be any worse off than we are as it is now.”

Andromeda’s black eyes bore into his as if challenging him, but Remus held her gaze steadily until she finally conceded: “Very well.”

She retrieved a glass from the cabinet, poured some water into it and fell into the chair next to Remus.

“I suppose you need to hear what has happened?” Lupin asked before adding: “I’m not sure how much Hermione has already told you.”

Matt cleared his throat: “Actually I prefer to see my patients for myself first before getting their history so that any preconceived notions don’t affect my judgement.”

As if on cue a loud beep sounded from Remus wand.

“Well, it looks like she’s awake now,” Andromeda said.

When the four of them walked into the master bedroom, Tonks sat on the edge of the bed still in her pyjamas. It seemed as if she were looking out of the window, but when Matt approached he could see that her eyes were frozen to a spot on the ground.

“Mrs. Lupin?” he asked.

When the woman didn’t respond he tried again but to no avail. He tried putting a hand on her shoulder, but the young witch didn’t seem to register his touch.

He clapped his hands and voiced a few questions. No matter what he did, the woman remained in the same position, hands in her lap, gaze on the floor.

To conclude the exam he observed her quietly for a few minutes while he put together some notes that he scribbled down into his notebook. He was about to tell the relatives that he was done for the day, when the woman stood up and started walking around the room in a few short strides as if on a mission. When she was finished she lay down in the bed and closed her eyes falling into a quick sleep.

Her husband covered her sleeping form with a blanket and brushed a tangled strand of mouse brown hair away from her face.

“Let’s talk a little downstairs,” the psychologist proposed quietly.

"Does she have any history of mental illness?"
Remus and Andromeda shared a short look, the former looking down in shame as he breathed out: "Yes."

"Care to elaborate?"

"Nymphadora underwent a period of major emotional upheaval last year," the witch’s mother explained.

"Symptoms?"

Hermione decided to step in as she had talked with Tonks many times during the year that the auror spent stationed at Hogwarts: "She's usually very cheerful but she was outright depressed for most of the year. Worried too. Also she had troubles with her metamorphosing. Both her and little Teddy are Metamorphmagi, it means that they can change their appearance at will. But she couldn't use her abilities for several months when she was feeling down."

"Any idea what was the underlying cause?"

Mrs. Tonks glared at Remus who conceded: "Me."

At Matt's questioning gaze he added: "I was being erm...rather difficult. She wanted us to have a relationship but I had my reasons why I couldn't allow it. Also, I spent most of the year on a rather dangerous mission."

Hermione jumped in so that her cousin wouldn't poke around too much in Remus' explanation as she could see that this line of questioning was making her former teacher quite uncomfortable. She concluded that it would be preferable to tiptoe around the whole werewolf issue for now.

"Based on our conversations, I would say she had even more on her mind. She was seriously injured in a fight and the person who continued her duel almost died and has been in a coma ever since. And on top of that he's her great-cousin. Also, she spent most of her working days chasing away dementors."

"Dementors?" Matt asked, rolling around the unknown word on his tongue.

"They are dark beings. Not so long ago our Ministry used them to guard the wizarding prison Azkaban. However the Ministry lost control and most of them joined Voldemort. Being in the presence of a dementor makes you feel like you will never be happy again."

"So they're kind of like a personification of depression?"

"Precisely. But even worse because of their kiss. When they kiss you they suck out your soul."

"You're joking, right?" the young man turned to his cousin, eyes wide.

"I wish," Hermione whispered.

It took Matt a minute to regain his composure and continue his questioning.

"What was her pregnancy like?"

" Mostly uneventful, I guess."

Andromeda seemed to consider her son-in-law for a moment before she cut in: "That's not entirely true. Dora had a lot of cramps and pains throughout the pregnancy. I think it has something to do with carrying a metamorphmagi child because mine was the same when I had her. Not only is there a
child growing inside you, they are also constantly changing shape putting pressure on you from the inside."

Remus furrowed his brow.

"But Dora never mentioned anything to me."

"She didn't want you to worry and fret any more than you already were. She knew what you would think if she were to tell you."

“I see,” Remus whispered, his face turning into a painful grimace. The fact that his wife felt like she had to hide away her pain from him was making him feel nauseous.

"What about the childbirth itself? Was it traumatic?"

"No, not really. It was rather fast."

"How did she appear in the weeks after giving birth?"

"Definitely worried. But it's only understandable with all that was going on. Somewhat distant perhaps," Remus said thoughtfully.

“Distant?”

“I don’t know, it was a little bit like she was just going through the motions, if you know what I mean? But as I said there was a lot going on.”

Matt nodded and made a note into his notebook.

“What was her relationship with little Teddy like?”

“Pretty normal, I think. She cared for him.”

“Did she appear to bond with him?”

“Is there any point to all of these questions, Mr. Granger?” Andromeda burst out. “How are you going to use any of this to help her?”

“I understand your concerns, Mrs. Tonks,” Matt started. “But I need to get a complete picture of your daughter’s mental health when she was attacked in order to develop a treatment that will suit her needs.”

“I’m not sure if she bonded with him. To be completely honest we didn’t talk much after he was born. It was all about sleep schedule, feeding, changing nappies and so on,” Remus explained guiltily.

“Alright, I think I have all the information I need for now,” Matt concluded and turned to Hermione: “From what I gather the woman who attacked her used a spell that allows a person to see the other’s thoughts, correct?”

“Yes,” his cousin agreed.

“Everything I have seen seems to support your conclusion, Hermione. The mental attack coupled with the physical pain seems to have trapped her inside of those memories that the woman was trying to see,” he explained to Remus and Andromeda.
“And now we only need to find a way to lure her back into the present,” the young werewolf asserted.
Matt looked around unsure of himself. He was convinced that he had arrived at the correct address. There was just one problem. Instead of the small cottage that he had visited with his cousin Hermione, he seemed to have parked nowhere, middle of. He closed his eyes and pressed his hands against them. Perhaps you had to make yourself imagine the house being there before you could see it? He knew that the Minister for Magic himself had put some special wards on the Tonks-Lupin residence, but that shouldn't be preventing him from seeing the cottage as he had disclosed the secret to him the week before.

Sandy, the yellow Labrador mix who accompanied him for today’s journey let out a small bark. Then she whined and pulled on the leash so hard that Matt barely managed to avoid falling down. He wasn’t expecting the movement on the dog’s part, after all she was a therapeutic dog and had always been obedient. Any animal that he reserved for the cases that proved the most difficult to treat had to be trained to subserviently follow every command. Of course, they were both treading unknown waters and perhaps her highly sensitive nose was better suited to find their destination than his human senses. Sandy kept pulling until he conceded and followed her lead. She stopped abruptly in the middle of the field and jumped up seemingly hitting something with her front paws. It wasn’t long before her scratches alerted the cottage’s occupants to the unexpected guests.

Remus Lupin opened the door barely managing to conceal his surprise in a low ‘oh’ before his face settled on the polite neutral mask that Matt had seen during his previous visit. The young psychologist noted that the man seemed much less peaky than before although there were still dark circles underneath his kind eyes.

"Hello, there," he greeted warmly.

There was some commotion behind the wizard as Andromeda Tonks arrived at the door in a few short strides holding onto her grandson with one hand while pointing her wand at Matt with the other.

"Oh, it's you," she said, some of the tension leaving her face but she still kept the hold on her weapon.

She turned to Lupin and asked: "Security question?"

Remus seemed to consider for a moment whether such a precaution was necessary with this particular guest but in the end he decided to grant the wish of his mother-in-law.

"Where did your aunt and uncle, Hermione's parents, spend last year?"

"On an impromptu sabbatical down under," the muggle answered trying to keep his voice steady.

His response seemed to have appeased the witch as she stashed her wand into her robes and returned to her previous activity, feeding the toddler from a bottle that kept the milk reasonably warm with an enchantment.

Remus moved aside from the door in order to let him pass in and beckoned Matt inside.

"You have to excuse our wariness," the young werewolf explained warmly: "But it's not every day that a muggle just wanders up to our house."

"On second thought I should have probably consulted Hermione before coming here," Matt conceded.
"Probably. How did you even find us?"

Matt gestured to the dog. It was only now that he noticed the Labrador looking at Remus distrustfully and growling.

"Calm down, girl," he chastised her and turning to his host he apologised: "She's not usually like this at all."

"It's quiet alright. Most dogs tend to have that reaction when faced with me," Lupin explained making Matt feel like the other man wasn’t disclosing the whole truth.

"I think I have just the thing to make sure that we're going to be the best of pals," Remus laughed as he retrieved a piece of ham from the plate that was on the table.

Sandy approached the werewolf's outstretched hand somewhat warily, only biting a bit off from the ham before she was convinced that the man proved no danger. Once the dog calmed down, Matt thought it was time to approach the reason for his visit.

He was about to clear his throat when Lupin said: "It always astounds me how muggles manage to compensate for not having magic by finding the most extraordinary means to make their lives easier, such as befriending amazing creatures like dogs."

"I'm not quite sure I follow. Are you saying that dogs are magical creatures?" Matt inquired.

"Kind of," the wizard smiled. "They are exceptionally remarkable, even if they might not possess any magic as such."

The man's words added fuel to the psychologist's optimism about his immediate plan.

"Well I was very much hoping that we could let Sandy work some magic in this case."

At Remus' quirked eyebrows, he added an explanation: "She's a therapeutic dog, you see."

As Remus laid the young man with the dog upstairs to the bedroom, Matt asked: “I assume there has been no change from last week?"

“Not really,” the wizard shook his head.

When they walked into the room the muggle could make out the silhouette of the witch who seemed to be intently studying the pattern on the wall from her position on the bed. Only when they approached he could see that her eyes appeared unfocused and glazed over. She didn’t seem to take notice of their arrival.

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Tonks was just about to send a hex into Bellatrix's direction when the flash of red hit her and sent her flying backwards thumping down the stairs. Her head collided with one of the steps and she saw stars appear in front of her eyes before the darkness completely overtook her.

***

She maneuvered the broom as Ron sent a pair of stunning spells into the direction of the Death Eaters that were chasing them. The pair barely managed to avoid the flash of green that a dark figure had aimed at them. A chill ran down Tonks' spine as she recognised the form of her mother's sister flying towards them. The other Death Eaters disappeared having given up on pursuing them for
some reason or another. But Bellatrix Lestrange was still on their tail firing curses one after another
forcing Tonks to do several loops around their destination before she finally skidded to a stop right in
the middle of Auntie Muriel's vegetable patch.
"Blimey, that woman wants you quiet bad, Tonks," Ron muttered as his face scrunched up and
became his own once again.
***
All of them save for the twins were anxiously waiting for the last pair to arrive in the cramped
kitchen of the Burrow. As Bill and Fleur strode inside Tonks could immediately tell that something
was wrong. As Molly released her eldest from the hug, Bill turned to Remus and said: "Mad-Eye's
dead."
Dora didn't hear the rest of Bill and Fleur's tale. She could feel a bile rising up her throat and as she
fought against it, it was almost as if the ground shook under her feet. She leaned into Remus to
prevent falling. He put a protective hand around her waist.
***
Matt released the dog from the leash and gave her the command to walk towards the patient. Sandy
walked slowly and purposefully towards the woman sitting on the bed and whined to get her
attention. When she received no response, she nudged the witch’s hand with her muzzle. Even
though Sandy’s actions didn’t result in the desired effect and Tonks’ hand remained unmoving, the
Lab mix didn’t give up and gave it one final try. She jumped up leaning her front paws on the
woman’s shoulders and licked her face. At that the young woman seemed to look down and for the
first time actually see what was happening around her as she buried her face in the dog’s fur.
“Dora?” Remus voiced her name hopefully.
His wife didn’t react to the question nor to his touch. When Matt saw the disappointment in the other
man’s features, he placed a reassuring hand on his shoulder.
“Don’t despair. It might not seem like much but it’s a huge step. What seem like baby steps for the
rest of us are giant ones for her. How about I come around with Sandy tomorrow around this time
again?”

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The Order members of old started trickling into the Hidden Cottage slowly, there was ancient
Elphias Doge, Dedalus Diggle and Hestia Jones and the various members of the Weasley clan.
But they made up a minority of the occupants of the crowded kitchen as they were joined by
younger faces of those who had fought in the final battle after they answered the call of the galleons
that once belonged to the student group Dumbledore’s Army.
"Is everyone here?" Bill wondered.
"We're just waiting for Kingsley now," Hermione answered. "And Ron said either him, Harry or
Neville would try to get here later to give their report on rounding up the Death Eaters."
As she finished there was a loud bang from behind the door as someone apparated straight onto the
front porch. Remus hurried to open the door and he was greeted by Kingsley's form. He got inside
shutting the door behind him and murmured a few enchantments.
He looked at the expecting faces all around him and said in his deep velvet voice: "I'm sorry to have
kept you all waiting. But I needed to shake off Proudfoot and Savage first."
George and Lee Jordan snorted at that. It was no secret by now that their friend turned minister didn’t
take well to having his own security details given his years of experience as an auror.
Kingsley brushed off some dust from his robe and admonished them: "It's no laughing matter.
Voldemort and his closest co-workers might be gone, but there are still those sympathetic to his cause
in the midst of our society. Just today I found this on my desk."
He took a scroll of parchment from his pocket.
"What eez it" Fleur drawled.
"It's a list of people whom I should consider when it comes to appointing my first secretary. I don't
think most of you will like the first name on it."
"Don't tell me it's the old toad again?" Ernie Macmillan bellowed.
"The one and only," the minister nodded grimly. 

The kitchen erupted with outrage and dissent, but surprisingly the voice that managed to cry out louder than anyone else in the room belonged to Remus, his face turning even a paler shade than it already was in the weeks following the battle: "You have to be joking! That's not what we stood for."

"I know, Remus. It's not the outcome we were fighting for. It's part of the reason I called this meeting in the first place. To make sure that we don't repeat the mistakes from last time around."

When the werewolf was about to protest, Kingsley raised his hand to stop him: "I know that the situation was different then. It's not meant as a criticism, I just want us all to learn from the past. Voldemort might be defeated for once and all, but his ideas live on. They were here long before he was born. If we carry on the way we have, it's only a matter of time before we have the next Voldemort or Grindelwald on our hands. We have won the war, but now we are facing another battle. The one to change the thinking in our society."

"Ear, ear," George shouted.

"As for this," the minister continued ignoring the disruption and took the scroll and set it on fire. "Luckily for us they also put Percy's name on the list. I believe I can count on you accepting this job offer, Mr. Weasley?"

Percy's face flushed with tomato red when all heads turned to him. Nonetheless he nodded quietly. "I still don't get it. Shouldn't Umbridge be punished for her crimes?" Dean Thomas wondered aloud. "She's claiming to have been imperiused," Kingsley explained. "And we have no way of disproving it not unless we also want to cast suspicion on innocent people who really were forced to do bad things under the spell."

"Can't you just use Veritaserum?"

Hermione shook her head. "The committee that sanctions the use of potions during interrogations has managed to pass a ban on using Veritaserum. And before you ask, the minister has already tried to overrule them, but didn't succeed."

"What's even the point of such a commission?"

"It's a result of a good thought gone wrong. The whole point of that commission was to prevent innocent people ending up in Azkaban. What we didn't count on was how many friends Umbridge still had at the ministry. Once again that's another reason why I called all of you here. I'm hoping that many of you will be able to support our cause from the shadows and might help me. Miss Granger has already kindly agreed to accept my offer for an internship position and while she finishes her studies at Hogwarts she will do some research into ways how we could change some of our more unfair laws. Yes, Minerva?"

The newly reappointed Hogwarts' headmistress provided an update on the repair works that the castle was undergoing following the damage that it had sustained in the last battle. Following a call to find people who could offer their skills to help, many of the young wizards and witches offered to help immediately and accompanied McGonagall on her return journey to Scotland.

Soon only the Weasleys, Hermione and Kingsley remained.

"We should also get going," Percy voiced nervously looking at his mother who was sitting in a chair seemingly deeply concentrated on using her wand for knitting a miniature piece of clothing. The young man exchanged a worried look with his brothers and sister. They had seen their mother like this before, following their father's death. She had buried herself in housework when Arthur had perished after he was bitten by Voldemort's snake more than two years ago and Molly seemed to be heading on the same path following Fred's death instead of dealing with her grief.

A loud cry interrupted the trail of Percy's thoughts as Mrs. Tonks walked down the stairs, carrying her grandson whose tuft of hair turned a shocking shade of yellow for the night. Andromeda handed the infant over to Remus and Teddy seemed to almost immediately calm down once he felt his father holding him.

Andromeda turned to Molly: "How about you come round for tea tomorrow? It has been a while since I've seen you."
Percy gave Tonks’ mother a thankful smile, he knew that the two women had bonded over the mutual loss of their husbands and the fear of what could happen to their children in the war they were all directly involved in the fighting over the past few months.

“Thank you,” Molly squeaked and let herself be escorted home by her sons. 

Once the Weasleys had departed, Kingsley turned to Remus: “Have you given my proposal any thought?”

“What proposal?” the werewolf’s mother-in-law inquired. 

The minister looked to his friend for confirmation on whether he could disclose this piece of information with her and as the other man nodded he said: “I have offered Remus a job at the Ministry. Hermione has been working on proposals for new laws in regards to our treatment of werewolves and other magical creatures, but there is plenty of work to be done in order to gain their trust and I thought that Remus is just the man to help with that.”

“You should take it, Remus,” Andromeda said, seemingly startling the young werewolf.

“Do you know why Ted and I weren't thrilled when we heard Nymphadora wanted to marry you? The real reason,” she added when she saw Remus was about to provide the explanation that he himself considered to be obvious.

"Let me do the actual talking before you jump to any conclusions. It wasn't because you are too old, too poor or too dangerous. We didn't care about what you were, it was more about who you were. Because we recognised your biggest shortcoming. Which isn't your condition but rather your wish to be universally accepted. For here was our daughter who had always embraced that not everyone would be endeared by her uniqueness and who despite all that remained true to herself falling in love with a man who would rather destroy those close to him than condemn them to a life that was less than his rather childish wish to be loved by all. I believe you owe it to your wife and you owe it to your son to take the Minister up on this offer."

Before Remus could react, three silver stags galloped into the room one heading for Hermione, another one for Remus and the last one for Kingsley. When they realised that all three of them currently occupied the same room they merged into one and delivered the message with a note of excitement in Harry Potter's voice: "Sirius is awake."
Chapter IV

The Janus Thickey Ward for permanent spell damage on the fourth floor of St. Mungo's was uncharacteristically busy on this afternoon in late May, bustling with mediwitches and mediwizards and other hospital staff alike. They chattered away excitedly, their attention turned on one particular room at the end of the corridor. Two junior healers stood in front of the door alongside a young auburn haired witch, her wand drawn in warning to anyone who would dare disturb the occupants of the guarded room.

A handsome wizard popped his golden curls out of one of the other rooms, convinced that all the people in the corridor had gathered here in order to obtain his autograph. He put on his best smile and offered his quill left and right, almost oblivious to the contents of their whispers. Only here and there a word or two would seep through to his brain. Black. Potter. Impossible.

"But how is it even possible?" Andromeda asked, turning to Remus as they made their way through the crowd.

"The best explanation that the Unbreakable Kingsley spoke to could come up with was that he was unconscious until now because the Veil felt it was owed a body from the moment that I pulled him from there."

"But what has changed?"

"It seems like the Veil feels that the equilibrium has been restored."

"Bellatrix," the woman let out, barely a whisper.

"Most likely," agreed Lupin, expression grim at the mention of the name, now acutely aware that he was very close to the place where his friends from the first Order of the Phoenix spent the last seventeen years of what could hardly pass as full lives. And they landed here after hours of torture at the hands of the person whose name his mother-in-law just spat out. Torment that left capable young Aurors who had once stood up to Voldemort himself only shells of the witch and wizard they used to be, unable to form coherent speech or to communicate.

It was the memory of their smiles that haunted Remus the most these days. He couldn't stop himself from drawing the comparisons between what happened to the Longbottoms and what had befallen his wife in the Battle of Hogwarts. A young cheerful witch who was ready to stand up and fight for what was right who had her spirit crushed by the very same of Voldemort's most loyal followers as Neville's parents. When he looked at it from this angle, he felt like Dora was already doomed, like fate had the same destiny for her in mind.

A hand grasped Remus shoulder, dragging him out of his depressive thoughts.

"You alright, Lupin?" Kingsley asked, voice firm, but not void of kindness.

The werewolf shook his head briefly in acknowledgement of his friends' presence. Truthfully he had not noticed when the other wizard had joined them.

"But why hasn't he woken up sooner? Bellatrix has been dead for weeks." Andromeda asked, choosing to ignore the way her son-in-law had zoned out.
"There have been gradual changes in his vital stats ever since the battle. His body was probably just taking its time to get used to his mind being back after all this time. That's what the healers think at least. I don't think they will ever be able to figure out how this one happened," Kingsley launched into an explanation.

"Let's just be happy that he's back with us then," Andromeda commented and turned on her heel, resolutely heading into the direction of her cousin's room, ushering Remus ahead of herself.

Ginny greeted Remus and Andromeda at the door and stood aside, the two junior healers followed her suit. The witches and wizards standing in the corridor went silent, all heads turning in expectation of what they would see on the other side of the door. But before their curiosity could get satisfied, the velvet voice of Kingsley Shacklebolt boomed about their heads: "I believe you all have better things to do than stand around and gape. Disperse at once."

The spectators bowed their heads and shuffled away, muttering amongst themselves. Interim or not, one could hardly speak against the orders of the Minister for Magic.

When Remus and Andromeda walked into the room, Harry was sitting on the chair next to Sirius' bed, chattering away about Quidditch. His former DADA teacher smiled at that. It was rare to see Harry so at ease these days and even rarer still to witness him being the teenager that he ought to be rather than the battle worn hero that he was. Then he turned his eyes on Sirius. His skin was still almost as pale as in the long days and hours that he sat vigil by his bed following the battle at the Department of Mysteries. But at the same time he managed to look a hundred percent more alive as he spoke to Harry animatedly.

"Moony! Andy!" he beamed at his two new visitors.

Andromeda hurried forward and enveloped him in a quick hug, leaving the patient quite confused as his proud Slytherin cousin was not usually prone to such open displays of affection. He considered the new lines, that had creased her face since he had last laid eyes upon her, carefully and then turned to Harry and Remus, expression suddenly sombre.

One of the last things that Sirius could remember before the force of Bellatrix spell sent him falling towards the veil at the Department of Mysteries was seeing Tonks limp form falling down the stairs.

"Is Tonks alright?" he asked referring to the battle.

An uncomfortable silence filled the room.

"Tonks is...." Harry started and tried to search Lupin's face to get his help but the werewolf was very keen on studying his shoes.

Instead, it was Andromeda who came to Potter's rescue as she said in a tone that didn't leave room for any more discussion: "She's alive."

Sirius looked from his cousin to Remus, and then to Harry and noted the changes in them. Andromeda still looked almost like a mirror reflection of her crazy sister were it not for the warmth in her eyes, but even those seemed to glisten a shade darker in the dimly lit hospital room. His oldest friend carried even more scars and his eyes were sunken and there were dark circles under them, all sure-fire signs that it had been full moon recently.

But there was something else about him making his expression look hollow and vacant which Sirius couldn't quite place. He turned to his godson last and his mood darkened. Harry was very cheerful most of the time they spoke, but his overall demeanour had changed from the stroppy teenager whom
the younger Black brother remembered. Harry had grown up to become a man, one who had been to hell and back by the looks of it, and he had missed it and once again failed miserably in his promise to James and Lily.

"How are you feeling?" Andromeda asked gently.

"I'm okay," Sirius answered almost truthfully. "You don't have to worry about me. I will be up and about in no time. And then I can go and find Bellatrix. I figure I owe her."

His words didn't lead to the reaction he intended. He had hoped to lighten the mood somewhat at best, at worst he expected a chastising from all of them.

Instead, all of his visitors seemed to be in a silent conversation with their eyes.

"Bellatrix's dead," Remus whispered finally not daring to look up.

"And it was you? What's up with that gloomy face, Moony, you did the world a favour getting it rid of that bitch," Sirius croaked.

"I'm not sorry she's dead. I'm just...," the werewolf struggled to find the right words.

"Sorry that it had to be you," Harry supplied for him, not daring to look at his godfather.

"How long exactly have I been out? And what the hell did I miss?" Sirius wondered aloud, agitated.

Before any of them could provide an explanation, Hestia Jones walked into the room and unceremoniously told them that visiting hours were over.
Chapter V

Chapter Notes

Thanks to everyone reading this story and even more so to everyone who left kudos.

@dameofpowellestate, thanks for the reviews. I'm glad you like the story. I started writing it mostly for myself, but it's wonderful to see someone else enjoy it as well.

On to the story, I thought the it was overdue a little Remus/Teddy fluff.

Chapter V

The wooden cottage was quiet but for the occasional buzz of a mosquito that found its way inside. Now, that a week had passed since the full moon, Andromeda had deemed Remus capable of taking care both of his child and wife at the same time and had departed for a brief visit to Molly Weasley, seeking reprieve from being cooped up between the same four walls for weeks.

Remus walked into the master bedroom, holding a drowsy Teddy in his arms. The little boy was ready for his afternoon nap after having finished his bottle of formula. His parents had been disappointed when Dora had to stop breastfeeding pretty early on. At that time Remus wrote it off as an effect of bringing a child into this world at the height of a war, but now after several of Matt Granger’s visits he had to wonder whether there were several more layers to the whole thing. He couldn’t suppress the suspicion that the reason why his wife had not come to him seeking help was, because she felt like she needed to hide the damage from him, lest he push her away again.

He had tried to pinpoint the moment when her issues had started, going over his own memories in a battered old pensieve, he had even talked to every single one of their friends, relatives and fellow fighters in the hopes of uncovering a key to Dora’s recovery. So far he had not succeeded in this endeavour which frustrated him to no end. But he had to hold himself together both for her and for their son's sake. Which was why rather than continuing to mull over his thoughts, he decided to take some of Matt’s advice. He was going to make sure that the three of them spent time together, and he would even try to engage his wife in their activities and would try not to get discouraged if he received no visible reaction from her.

Remus put the infant down on the bed next to his mother’s rigid form. She lay on the covers, hand clenched tightly as if around her wand, eyes moving quickly from one side to the other, mouth quivering as if going over spells.

“Dora?” Remus asked gently. “I’m going to put Teddy down for his nap. I though you might like it if all of us spent some time together.”

After he had watched Tonks interact with the therapeutic retriever Sandy and saw her bury her face in the dog’s fur on several occasions, he half expected her to at least acknowledge her own son’s presence. He had to swallow the lump of disappointment in his throat as she once again showed no reaction to Teddy’s proximity.

As if sensing his anguish, the infant let out a small howl.
“Shh, it’s okay, little one, “ he tried to calm him, conjuring a few multicoloured stars from the end of his wand.

Teddy squealed and his tuft of hair started changing colours, trying to match the little stars.

Remus couldn’t suppress a smile, but it died quickly as he turned to look at Dora and the mousy brown strands falling onto her sweaty forehead.

Sirius braced himself for the side along apparition and took hold of Harry’s and Ginny’s offered hands. As they reappeared on a quiet London street, his vision blurred, and he staggered back and if Harry had not supported him he might have fallen backwards.

“You alright?” his godson sent him a worried look.

Sirius shook his head and finally looked around to examine their surroundings. He inhaled sharply as he set his eyes on the small gap between the two houses.

“Really? Out of all places you bring me here?” he asked raising his eyebrows at Harry.

Before the young wizard had a chance to answer, they were approached by a silver terrier that whispered in Ron Weasley’s voice: “You need to come home, Gin.”

“Will you be alright?” the witch turned to her boyfriend.

“Yes, we will,” Sirius answered for Harry abruptly.

Ginny shot the Potter boy an apologetic look, turned on the spot and disappeared with a loud pop.

“It’s probably just wishful thinking on my part hoping that the reason why I don’t see that place is because it no longer exists?” Black asked half-heartedly.

“Oh, right, I forgot, sorry” Harry apologised as he passed a crumpled piece of parchment to his godfather. “Kingsley put Fidelius on all the Order connected places in the wake of the battle, in case some stray Death Eaters decide to come after us.”

“Is that wise? What if they get to him?” Sirius wondered.

“That’s when Bill’s enchantments come in,” Harry supplied.

The older wizard didn’t seem completely convinced but turned his eyes to the neat handwriting of the interim Minister for Magic.

The Potter-Black residence can be found on Number 12, Grimmauld Place, it read.

“Potter-Black residence?” Sirius turned to Harry, mouth agape.

The boy only shrugged his shoulders and beckoned his godfather to follow him inside.

Sirius reluctantly entered, making sure to avoid the troll leg umbrella stand, fondly remembering the many times his young cousin stumbled over the thing back when the house served as headquarters for the Order of the Phoenix. He took one look at the house elf heads on the staircase, and he huffed: “How wonderful to be home again.”

The sarcasm in his voice didn’t escape the young Potter’s attention. He knew fully well how much
his godfather despised this house and everything with it, and he could hardly blame him. Harry wouldn’t be exactly thrilled if he ever had to return to live at Private Drive again either.

“Mind you, it seems surprisingly tidy here. I might go back on my decision to strangle Kreacher the moment I set eyes on him just yet.”

“Sirius!” Harry chided him and added, exasperated: “I told you about Regulus and how much Kreacher helped us.”

“That you did. Doesn’t change the fact that he sold us out to Bella and Voldemort.”

Harry pursed his lips and they stared at each other.

“You believe I ought to forgive him,” Sirius let out finally.

“And you think I’m too much like my father for believing it,” Harry jumped in.

Sirius sighed and walked up to a cabinet, relieved to find his stack of fire whiskey almost untouched. He poured himself a glass and belatedly conjured another one, turning to his godson: “You want one? Sorry I tend to forget you’re of age now.”

“No, thanks,” Harry refused and added: “And I’m not sure if you should have one either.”

“You know, it should be me who mothers you, not the other way around,” Sirius furrowed his brow. “Besides, I’m not sick, a bit weak perhaps, but technically there’s nothing wrong with me.”

Just as he said it, a wave of nausea hit him, and he thumped down on one of the chairs.

He chose not to acknowledge Harry’s raised eyebrows and instead he returned to his line of questioning: “So why here? Why not at Remus’ place or even the Burrow? Not that I am protesting against not having Molly Weasley coddle me, mind you. Or why not get your own place?”

The young wizard looked astonished at the suggestion as if the thought had never even crossed his mind.

“Mainly because it’s convenient. It was much easier and quicker to enhance the enchantments here than some new place. And the Burrow is cramped as is with everyone,” he tried to explain weakly.

Sirius did not miss the omission of Remus’ place or the implication that the protective measures were intended mainly to protect him as he would present an easy target for the remaining Death Eaters while his body recovered from its long sleep.

“Besides, I thought what better signal could we send out to the community than making this former dark magic dwelling a place of good?” Harry added sheepishly.

If his godfather wasn’t happy with this explanation, he kept his reservations to himself.

“Alright then,” he started trying to change the topic. “So, when will you finally tell me what’s going on with Moony and Tonks?”

In the days following his awakening, Sirius room at St. Mungo’s flooded with visitors, yet he had not seen his closest friend since his initial visit with Andromeda. But from what the healers told him, both Remus and Tonks were among the few people who frequently sat by his bed when he was lost in his comma.

“I…,” Harry staggered over his words. Hestia Jones had cautioned him against overwhelming Sirius
with tales of the events he had missed during the last two years all at once. Therefore, he had tried to offer explanations to his godfather in short doses.

Yes, the war was over. Obviously, they had won. Voldemort was dead. How? That was a long story for some other time. Moony and Tonks had got married and had a kid now. Dumbledore was gone. Kingsley was the new Minister. Harry and Ron were Aurors now.

All throughout his explanations the young wizard had tried to avoid speaking of the losses their side had suffered. Right on the first day he had accidentally let it slip that Emmeline Vance had been killed prompting a sudden loss of consciousness on Sirius’ part. It wasn’t until he spoke to Hestia later that day, that he found out about the nature of the relationship between Emmeline and his godfather.

“Come on, Harry. My body might be somewhat weak at the moment, but I’m not fragile. I’m not going to crumble when you tell me.”

Harry released a resigned huff and started: “You’re not going to like it though. It’s…it was Bellatrix.”

Sirius winced and growled: “Of course it was. She had it out for us. Probably wanted to prune the family tree of us bloodtraitors and filthy half-breeds.”
Chapter VI

Remus turned the page of the book he was reading quietly in order not to wake his sleeping son or wife, trying to use the brief time when they were both resting peacefully to study the pile of books he had surrounded himself with. He had gathered every single title that referenced catatonia when he visited the Karnac Books bookshop on his most recent trip to retrieve some necessities in London. He scrunched up his feature in distaste as he once again stumbled over yet another mention of electroconvulsive therapy. ECT seemed to be the primary course of treatment in cases similar to Dora's, but no matter how much the muggle authors assured him that it was perfectly safe as patients were first put to sleep, then given anticonvulsants and only remembered having a nap afterwards, resulting in the therapy sometimes being referred to as sleep therapy, Remus could not shake the feeling that this solution was rather barbaric, especially when the patient was in no state to consent to it like Dora at the moment. The other cures the muggles had come up with sounded tamer in comparison as they came in the form of medications, though some of those could also result in severe consequences as some like the benzodiazepines tended to be extremely addictive.

Unfortunately there was no way of knowing how the medications would act when administered to a witch. After all, from the little Remus could understand, there were some differences in the genetic make-up of muggles and wizards. And his wife's metamorph abilities served to widen the gap between her and an average non-wizard even more. Not for the first time Remus wished that he possessed better potions skills, he might yet find a way to translate the muggle pharmaceutics into potent wizarding cures.

Wizarding healers had not spent anywhere near as much time on researching non-physical ailments as the muggle doctors. If something could not be solved with pepper up potions, chocolate and healing spells, more often than not, they deemed the patient beyond their help. And the sufferer ended up back in his family's care or in the worst case scenario found themselves a permanent resident of St. Mungo's.

Just as Remus put Catatonia: From Psychopathology to Neurobiology on top of The Madness of Fear: A History of Catatonia and wiped at his eyes to chase away the tiredness, the alarm which let him know that the defences of his family's residence had been breached set off. He jumped up from the bed at once, completely alert, wand drawn, straining his werewolf ears to catch a clue as to who the intruders might be. Teddy stirred, but did not wake. His father moved his wand in a few complicated motions to put up some extra protective enchantments on the room and conjured his corporeal Patronus.

"Protect them at all costs," he whispered to the wolf.

The silver animal showed his set of perfect teeth in response and Remus set off down the stairs. As he approached the landing, he relaxed somewhat as he took in the familiar scent of two people, but did not drop his wand hand as he reached the door in three short strides.

"Who is it?" he called hoarsely.

"You know fully well who it is, Moony, so just go on and let us in, would you?" his oldest friend growled from the other side.

Remus chose to ignore Sirius and directed his next question to his companion: "Harry, what colour was my wife's hair the first time you two met?"
"Eh…it was violet, wasn't it?" Harry asked, not completely sure of himself.

Satisfied with the response, the werewolf opened the door and ushered the pair inside.

"Sorry," the younger wizard mouthed from behind Sirius. "There was no stopping him."

The boy who lived looked between the two older men, unsure if he was expected to take part in their conversation.

"Harry, could you please keep an eye on Teddy?" Remus asked, noticing his uncertainty.

"Erm, sure, where is he?"

"Upstairs, in my and Dora's bedroom," Remus navigated him.

He waited until the thumping of shoes on the stairs stopped and only then did he release his hold on the Patronus and turned to the other Marauder.

"So…," Sirius started, struggling to find the right words now that he had actually arrived here.

Before either of the two men managed to form a complete statement, there was a commotion on the stairs behind them and Tonks came running down the stairs as if on a mission, but her eyes were glassy and unseeing as she barrelled directly into her cousin. Sirius took a deep breath as he tried to stand up and hoist the young witch with him, but his muscles were still too weak from his long sleep, and he found himself incapable of supporting their joint weight. His vision blurred as he was hit by an onslaught of memories and emotions.

********************************************************************************************

He was fighting Bellatrix in the Department of Mysteries, countering one spell after the other, only turning slightly away from his own battle to mutter a swift Protego between Mad-Eye and one of Bellatrix's misfired spells. He noticed the spell that his aunt fired towards him a moment too late and unable to dodge it at the last second, a force hit him square in the chest and barely aware of the fall down the staircase he succumbed to the darkness.

**************************************************************************

He was outside the Burrow and Remus was looking at him with a silent plea, and he knew where this conversation was headed, just as the dozen others they had had over the long summer in the short moments he managed to corner the werewolf following Order meetings. He felt panicked, furious and sad all at once as he listened to Remus explaining his suicide mission with Greyback.

**********************************************************************

He was at Hogwarts' and Snivellus slammed the gate shut into his face as he insulted his new Patronus, the malice evident in his voice. Angry red flared before his eyes as he stomped away from the castle.

*************************************************************************

He was at the Three Broomsticks and Proudfoot shouted at him: "Hey, Tonks, wanna join us?" He shook his head in decline and headed in the direction of his room.

"What did you even call her for? Might as well spend time with Moaning Myrtle," Dawlish drawled to his other colleague behind his back.

*************************************************************************

He was staring at his pale reflection in the mirror, scrunching up his face in concentration trying to change the mousy brown of his hair to a different colour, but managing only to turn his hair ends a shade darker.

*************************************************************************

He was surrounded by a swirl of Dementors from all sides, grasping for happy thoughts that would just not come, only managing to conjure slivers of silver that quickly dissipated in the surrounding
mist. He put down his wand had, resigned.

He was in the Hospital Wing and Dumbledore was dead, and he was holding onto Remus' coat as all eyes were set on the two of them. But the werewolf would still not meet his eyes as he repeated his tiring mantra.

He was curled up on the sofa with his hands holding his lower stomach. Mad Eye was dead and Remus was completely distant, and he could not make him see that the fact they would bring their child into this world was a good thing.

He was at the Tonks' house, Andromeda was stroking his hair as he wept silently, cursing the day Remus Lupin was born. He had pushed him away again, but it stung even more than the previous time now that he was bearing his child.

"Padfoot, can you hear me?" a distant voice yelled to Sirius.

He blinked and opened his eyes and found himself back at the cottage. He took in a sharp breath, gathering all his strength before slamming his fist into Lupin's face.

The werewolf staggered backwards both from surprise and from the force behind his friends' hit and clutched his bleeding lip.

"Sirius Orion Black, what in Merlin's name do you think you're doing?" Andromeda's strict voice sounded from the door.

"Sorry, Moony," Sirius said sounding decidedly unapologetic. "But you had it coming to you."

End Notes

Just a few short notes:
- This will be an AU story in terms of some survivals but will try to stick with canon where possible both in regards to characterization (let me know if I'm doing any good with that one) and in regards to pairings
- I am not a native English speaker, so please excuse any mistakes and the lack of British expressions and the possible mix of British/American English that results from a person learning British English at school and watching too much American TV
- I have around 12k words of this already written on my computer and a lot of the story planned out, so hopefully I can keep updating this at least semi-regularly
- Also please note that this story won't be very heavy on plot beyond the prologue, I prefer playing with the characters more than focusing on adventures
- For this chapter: I took some liberties in regards to the timing of the battle

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!