

Cold Moon

by chivalric

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Bad News

Chapter 1 of 7

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Only the caring hands and everlasting patience of my wonderful betas, shellsnapeluver, Sampdoria, and CharmedForce, made it possible to post this story. *hugs all of you*

Warning: If you are offended by male-male relationships, please do not continue reading.

1: Bad News

The meeting in Harry's house at number twelve, Grimmauld Place was just half way through, but everyone was already more than eager to get home. Over three years after Voldemort's downfall, those meetings sometimes got massively annoying.

"Can't we quit for tonight?" Ron mumbled, playing with his wand. "We won't come up with any useful ideas anyway, with half of us missing."

It was early around nine and for more than an hour they had tried to figure out a way to get closer to the last few Death Eaters from the late Dark Lord's inner circle. To no avail, though. Maybe it was the weather, maybe it was the nearly full moon, but tonight, they didn't try too eagerly to find a solution. Tonight, everyone was silent and hoped for an early end.

"Without Mum cooking dinner, the meeting is only half as successful," Ginny Potter said, already hearing her pillow calling. "And I am sure no one would object if we called it a day."

Not only Arthur and Molly Weasley were missing, as they were baby-sitting little Victoire, but Hermione Granger was in Venice, Fred and George were busy in their shop, and Minerva McGonagall was in bed with the flu. And Remus Lupin... well, Remus was a different problem. A problem no one wanted to discuss.

Even Severus Snape was tired. He still spied on his former Death Eater colleagues for the Order, and the last few days had been stressful, to say the least. He had followed Dolohov on a twenty-four hour basis for three days in a row, but had lost him eventually. His feet hurt, his head was pounding, he was hungry he wanted to go home as badly as everyone else. Silently, he stretched out his long legs and arched his back against the chair in order to ease the uncomfortable tension in his bum and shoulders. He hoped that this meeting would be over soon; he needed his bed and several hours of sleep.

Albus Dumbledore cleared his throat, about to make an announcement. Until now, he had been atypically silent, and Snape wondered what was going on in the old man's

head. For some reason, the sight of Dumbledore's weary eyes, his stern expression, and his slumped shoulders made the Potions master uneasy. Sitting up straighter, he expected, completely irrationally, to hear bad news.

Dumbledore took off his half-moon glasses and shot a quick glance out of the window into the darkness. The moon was just about to rise, casting silver shadows through the curtains; Snape saw Albus shiver.

"There is something I have to tell you," the Headmaster began, very obviously unhappy about the content of his news. "It is not easy for me, and I hope you will understand my hesitation to share this... information." He sighed deeply. "I must inform you that Remus Lupin might have gone wild."

Snape's head shot up and he stared at Dumbledore, but the old man didn't seem to have made a cruel joke. "Impossible," he snapped. "Who told you such nonsense?"

"Well..." Dumbledore swallowed and then said, "Tonks has a strong suspicion about the matter. Remus has not taken the Wolfsbane in the past months. He has divided himself from his family. She says he is aggressive, uncooperative, and refuses to look after Teddy. Actually, she is afraid he would harm the boy, and therefore, she has asked me to inform the Ministry. She has as well begged me to find another solution."

"Erm..." said Harry, reaching out to catch his wife's hand. "What exactly does it mean for a werewolf to become wild?"

Snape ignored him, his concentration focused on Dumbledore. "Lupin picked up the Wolfsbane regularly every month." His voice was cool and reasonable. "Most times, he took it under my roof and stayed for the night. There is no reason why he should have gone wild. I would have known. I would have seen the signs!"

The Headmaster turned his glasses in his fingers, played with his beard, then pinched the bridge of his nose. Wearily, he sat down and just shook his head. "He hasn't done so recently, has he?" he asked. "Stayed at your house for the transformation?"

Snape shook his head. "He wanted to be with his family," he replied coldly.

"And you believed this?" Surprise was clearly written in Albus Dumbledore's face. "You know exactly how much he disliked anyone seeing him during the change. Especially his family."

"Oy!" Harry exclaimed. "Can anyone tell us what this is all about?"

Snape stared at him until Harry looked away. "Just wondered..." he said uneasily. "Where's the problem here?"

Dumbledore sighed. "Severus, Remus has not taken the potion. He went into the woods instead and hunted prey. Without Wolfsbane, he was fully wolf, and Tonks said he enjoyed it. He has changed lately. In a bad way. We all know that he has not been here with us for a long time. Tonks is certain he turned wild."

"This is ridiculous!" Snape snarled, but despite his denial, cold fear was spreading in his chest. "Going wild means becoming a wolf for good. Staying in his wolf form every day of the month for the rest of his life. Shedding his humanity. Remus wouldn't do that. Never!"

"Doesn't a wild werewolf usually kill his family first?" Ginny asked with a small voice. "I think Hermione once told me a few things. A wild werewolf is even stronger than a normal one and has nothing but murder in his mind. And they are about ten times as dangerous as any other living creature. Doesn't... doesn't the Ministry hunt down wild werewolves?"

Dumbledore nodded. "Always. A wild werewolf must be killed. Especially because they are resistant to magic. Sometimes, even a Killing Curse can't harm them. The Ministry sends out a special squad armed with special weapons. Remus... he has to be shot with a silver bullet. If he really went wild, there is no way he can turn back human. Tonks is terrified that he will kill before they find him."

"But... it is not certain, is it?" Ron cast in. "I mean, does she know for sure?"

"She is convinced," the Headmaster replied. "But she has talked to me first so I could decide what to do. And as he hasn't taken the Wolfsbane in the past months..."

"Is it certain he didn't take it?" Ron asked. "Maybe..."

Harry interrupted him, shooting Snape an awful look. "Maybe *he* didn't take the potion and it wasn't as good as it could have been!"

Ginny gasped and snatched a hand over her mouth. That her husband was accusing Snape was nothing less than a catastrophe, given the nasty temper of the pale man.

Snape slowly got his wand out and placed it silently in front of him. "Are you saying I gave Lupin a worthless potion?" he said, nearly purring the question. "Are you accusing me of carelessness whilst brewing it, or of lack of skill, or simply of cruelty, Potter?"

Harry didn't budge but was at least wise enough to keep his own wand sheathed. "I always wondered why Remus trusted you," he pressed. "You despise him, and he knew it! If the potion wasn't working properly... if he turned into a wolf just because you didn't care about brewing it correctly... Maybe he hasn't turned wild, maybe he..."

Dumbledore rose a calming hand. "Enough!" he said sternly. "Harry, you don't know what you are talking about. Remus had every reason to trust Severus; they have been friends for years." He turned to the Potions master. "You did nothing wrong. Apparently, Remus has been losing it for weeks, Severus. The circumstances... the life he had to live obviously proved to be too much for him. Not being an Auror anymore... No chance to find a new position... The freedom of being a wolf, all the time and not only around the full moon, must have been far too tempting for him after all."

"Utter rubbish," Snape snarled. "Lupin isn't a man who gives in to temptation; after all, he's the only werewolf who decided not to join the Dark Lord's army. And he hates being in his wolf form. I do not believe that he's gone wild he has a child to look after!"

"But he didn't. Teddy has been looked after by Tonks's mother," Ginny said quietly. "Since the summer, actually. She told me that she feared Remus would... that he wouldn't be able to control himself when she wasn't home."

Sighing, Ron rested his head on his arms. "He shouldn't have given up his Auror post. At least he earned some money at the Ministry."

"They wanted to get rid of him anyway, with him being a werewolf," Harry said. "And so he decided to give Tonks the opportunity for a career, staying at home and looking after Teddy instead of her."

"Precisely," Snape growled. "Lupin would have never hurt his boy!"

"Even Tonks feared he would!" Ginny objected. "She was at work most of the time; she couldn't be sure that his instincts wouldn't take over. And apparently, being at home all day worked on his nerves. He was practically locked in, and it proved to be impossible to find another job. I would call that a lot of temptation."

"The transformation is painful he might have thought that going wild, become a wolf for good, would save him a great deal of trouble." Quiet words, spoken by Ron. He had been one of the few who had raised a voice at him leaving the Auror group. "That, and the fact that they had to live in her mother's house." It was common knowledge that Ron had always admired Lupin for his gentle nature and friendly humour. "Andromeda Tonks is a right dragon, and she despised the fact that her daughter had married a werewolf."

Snape stood up and slowly turned to the Headmaster. His voice was dangerously quiet when he said, "You are aware that most of this is your fault, old man?"

"Severus!" Dumbledore was evidently hurt by the words and the cold accusation in the Potions master's voice. "That is not true! I always tried to help them as much..."

"You *fired* him!" Suddenly, Snape's black eyes seemed to burn with icy wrath. "He was a damn good teacher, but apparently, that wasn't enough for you to keep him. He never wanted to become an Auror, but had no choice after he had to leave Hogwarts. A few parents complained and you just fired him, although you knew that it would be harder, even impossible, for him to find another job! You made it clear you didn't trust him since then, no one even thought about employing him!"

"I had no choice," the Headmaster said quietly.

Snape crossed his arms over his chest as if to hinder them from taking his wand off the table. "If you had kept him at Hogwarts, what the hell do you think would have happened?" he hissed. "Maybe some idiots would have sent their brats to other schools. However, since there aren't any other Wizarding schools in England, most parents would have thought twice about sending their offspring to the continent only to avoid a werewolf teaching them. I am teaching their children. I, a former Death Eater! They can cope with that, so don't you dare tell me you had no other choice. You just chose the easiest path."

Dumbledore had gone pale at the words of the tall, black-haired man. He opened his mouth to find an answer when Snape said, "Did you tell the Ministry? Are they already chasing him?"

"What difference does it make if he is dead now or tomorrow," Harry cast in bitterly.

Snape made no effort to hide his disgust. "It makes all the difference, Potter. Until he is dead, it can be reversed."

Dumbledore stared at him in horror. "Chasing a wild werewolf is madness," he whispered. "You can't be serious! Remus will kill everyone and everything that gets in his way!"

Snape just snorted at that and continued staring at Dumbledore. "Have you?"

"Not yet," Dumbledore answered. "I wanted to tell you first. I considered it is only fair that you know."

Snape snatched up his wand. "Don't you dare to tell anyone else, old man. Not before tomorrow night." His face was white as the snow that had fallen during the day. "I don't believe he's gone wild. And even if you know as well as I do that an injection with Moonflower juice can reverse the transformation if given before the full moon. Which is tomorrow. Are you really telling me that Lupin isn't worth the try?"

Dumbledore placed both his hands flat in front of him on the smooth surface of the table. "It is possible to reverse the change; *it theory*, Severus. The Moonflower potion you are talking about hasn't been used for over two hundred years! It is a rumour that it works, nothing more. And you would need to get near him, close enough to touch him. Remus would kill you without hesitation he wouldn't even recognise you. It doesn't work, and you know that. *It is not possible!*"

For a long moment, Snape just stood and looked at the old man. "Give me one night, Albus. I will find him; I will inject him with the potion, and you better not try to hinder me."

Ginny stared at the door through which Snape just had left. "If it's true, he will die," she said weakly. "Remus will kill him. And he can't even use his wand in defence."

"They will both die." Dumbledore said, apparently unaware of the tears shining in his eyes. "Remus will kill Severus. I will inform the Ministry, and they will kill Remus."

"You can't let that happen!" Ron exclaimed.

Dumbledore ignored him. "I have no reason to doubt Tonks. She knows her husband. If she says he's gone wild, I believe her. It means that Remus is very, very dangerous. Severus might find him, but he has no chance whatsoever to survive a confrontation. Nor to save him."

Harry swallowed hard. "Then why... I thought you liked Snape! Why didn't you stop him?"

Heavily and suddenly looking as old as he was, the Headmaster sat down. "If I had held Severus back or deprived him of the possibility to at least try and save him... I couldn't do that. Remus is his only friend. I wouldn't be able to endure the hate in Severus's face for not letting him go."

A/N: The name of the Moonflower potion I took with friendly allowance from Ehmaz's story "Moonflower," which is posted at www.sycophanthex.com

Used Prompt:

34. AU: Lupin and Tonks aren't killed in the final battle. What does Lupin do for a living now that he's not needed in the Order any longer?

Preparations

Chapter 2 of 7

Snape goes after Lupin and seeks out Tonks to learn of his hiding place. If he doesn't find the werewolf before the full moon rises, it will be too late.

2: Preparations

No one saw the black-dressed wizard leaving the house, no one saw him running down the street, and certainly no one saw him Disapparating when he was around the next corner, which was a miracle in itself, as he took absolutely no precautions for not to be seen. In his mind Snape ticked off the few things he would need: the Moonflower potion, naturally, a warm coat, a flask with water, and some bread. *I either find him quickly and he will kill me, he thought, or I don't find him and the cold will finish me off. Great opportunities.*

Severus Snape was not a man who rushed head over heels into danger. He always thought things through, he always had a backup plan, and he never allowed his emotions to manipulate his brain. Presently, he thought about the potion that hopefully would reverse the changes Lupin already had undergone and how to get close enough to the werewolf for injecting him.

"Why did you do it, idiot?" Snape murmured, arriving with a small 'Plop' in his own street and walking up to his house. "Why you didn't talk to me?"

Well, he knew why. Because of the humiliation the werewolf had felt, mainly since his son had been born. Those looks everyone had cast him; the fear most had felt when he was near. The whispered words which had screamed *werewolf!* His inability to get a job. His failure to provide his family with food and shelter. Living with a mother-in-law who despised him had changed him; Snape knew that Lupin more often than not actually believed that he was a monster, not a loving husband and father.

Embarrassment at all of this had prevented Lupin from talking to Snape, although the Potions master knew him well. Ginny had been right the temptation to flee from his unbearable life must have been enormous. Becoming wild, leaving the human world for good, might have been enticing enough for Remus.

The first step had been not taking the Wolfsbane and becoming a wolf at least once a month.

The next logical step was to become a wolf on a full-time basis.

Snape shook his head in disgust. Lupin wouldn't have done it, under no circumstances what so ever. This explanation was too easy and therefore wrong. Remus would never endanger his family, and a wild werewolf was not only dangerous, but mad as well. He would slaughter his own family first. Remus knew that, so there was way he could have chosen this path.

Snape murmured some words and thus lowered the wards around his house; the door opened at a snap of his fingers. He didn't have much time.

Looking into the darkness, he remembered how and why he and Lupin had become friends against all odds.

After Albus had fired Lupin, Remus had had been forced to seek out the Potions master for the Wolfsbane potion. It was most complicated to brew; not many mastered this task and Lupin didn't really have a choice. Each month, Lupin arrived shortly before moonrise, snatched the phial out of Snape's hand and left as quickly as possible. They never spoke, they barely shared a polite nod. They disliked each other, had so since childhood. No reason to talk. No reason to linger.

Then Remus married Tonks and moved in with her and her mother. Things changed, for all of them. Lupin was still unemployed, Tonks worked on a full-time basis, and Teddy was born.

The war came, and they won. Barely, with lots of losses, but they won. Lupin had played a role, was considered a war hero. And still couldn't get a job.

About a year after Voldemort's death, Remus showed up in Hogwarts' dungeons in the afternoon instead of late evening. He looked even more shabby than usual. His brown hair was streaked with grey, he looked tired, and there was a gaze in his eyes even Snape couldn't ignore. Haunted and scared, Snape thought, and wordlessly opened the door to his private rooms wider.

Snape ordered tea and a big pile of sandwiches. "You look like a living scarecrow," he stated dryly. "Eat something before you drop dead on my floor and I have to explain your untimely death. No one would believe I didn't kill you."

Lupin refused to comment on that. Instead, he emptied the plate bite by bite like a man who hadn't eaten in days. The Wolfsbane he drank with flaring nostrils, as if despising the smell of it.

He didn't leave afterwards. Sitting in the chair next to the fireplace, he wordlessly stared into the flames for hours. Snape watched him suspiciously, expecting an outburst or an attack or something equally unpleasant.

Lupin didn't move and didn't talk. He just waited.

Then the moon came up. "Hope you don't mind," the werewolf said bitterly, got up and took off his clothes so as not to tear them apart during the transformation. "Don't want Tonks to see this. Can't stand doing it alone in the woods any longer."

For a moment, Snape considered protesting. Bright, vivid flashbacks of Remus changing into a werewolf when they both had been boys jumped into his mind.

But Remus was in the grip of the moon already; it was far too late to throw him out. Therefore, Snape just watched with fascination how his old enemy transformed right in front of him. It only took a few minutes the time the moon needed from first peeking over the horizon to be fully up. Snape had thought it would be a horrible, awful sight. It certainly was a painful process for the werewolf, but it was powerful magic as well. Snape couldn't stop himself watching, intrigued by the smoothness and perfection one body changed into another.

The Potions master was absolutely dumbstruck at the disgusted look in Lupin's face. Obviously, the werewolf didn't know that the transformation was beautiful in its own way and that his animal form was nothing anyone would shy away from.

On all fours, Lupin looked like a larger, stronger, extremely dangerous wolf. His eyes were intelligent and human, his fur was a dark grey streaked with white, and he looked oddly misplaced in Snape's rooms. Muscles were playing under the thick fur, the ears twitched restlessly, and it was obvious that this creature belonged in the woods, not between walls.

Lupin, though, backed off until he hit the wall behind him, trying to get out from under Snape's eyes. Even as a wolf, he looked embarrassed for not being fully human.

Snape turned and sat at his desk. Determinedly, he began to correct his students' essays, giving Lupin as much privacy as he could in the constriction of his dungeons.

Lupin wandered the room for hours until he finally became tired and laid down. For the rest of the night, the werewolf hid under the table, snout covered by tail.

Snape hadn't made a sarcastic remark at that. Instead, he provided a dressing gown the next morning and breakfast, as Lupin was shaky and cold and obviously starving. It even didn't cost the Potions master much effort to keep any snarky comments to himself. The desperation in Lupin's voice and the lost look in his eyes had been a bit too obvious.

A month later, Lupin was back, equally early, but a bit more talkative.

"You again," Snape snapped. "It's only noon and you bother me. I have essays to correct; prepare for classes. I need to think of new ways to torment students."

Lupin waited, hands in his pockets, head down.

Snape sighed. "I guess I can think whilst you lay under my table. Get inside before anyone sees you and believes I've become soft."

Slowly, Lupin made it to the armchair. He held on his mug with tea Snape had offered him like a drowning man. "She's killing me," he murmured. "My mother-in-law. I

swear, if I have to live under her roof for much longer, I'll either commit suicide or murder."

Snape snorted, amused that the werewolf showed his teeth for a change. "That bad?"

"Worse. She is pure poison. She calls me dangerous and monstrous; she accuses me of scaring my son. She believes I will hurt him one day. Yesterday, I saw her talking to Tonks. And my wife... I fear she is unsure about me. She..."

Snape wordlessly handed him the Wolfsbane and ordered lunch for two. He listened to Lupin's outburst without interrupting him. He neither corrected essays that day nor did he leave his rooms to brew some potions. Lupin needed company, and Snape was willing to stay and listen.

Later, they had dinner together, and this time, Lupin was less angry when the moon turned his skin into fur.

Over the months, over the next few years, they had become friends, unnoticed by most people. Only Albus seemed to have known about it, given the harsh words he had cast at Potter. *Possibly the first time that he has scolded the boy* Snape thought, still standing in the doorway of his house. But then did it matter? His only friend apart from an old, manipulative bastard with twinkling eyes had decided to throw the bit of life he still had away, and Snape simply refused to accept that. And as Lupin wouldn't risk the safety of his family, the werewolf had another reason for his decision than simply despising his life.

Snape knew Tonks. She didn't make false accusations, and she knew her husband well. If she said he'd gone wild, she was probably right.

That left only one explanation: Lupin wanted to commit suicide in a quite unique way by getting killed by the Ministry. They wouldn't hunt down a normal werewolf, especially as Lupin's role during the war was common knowledge and because everyone knew he took Wolfsbane. But a *wild* werewolf was a different matter. They would find him, corner him, and kill him.

And of course the Ministry would look after his widow and his son afterwards. No more financial problems. Tonks would be able to move into her own house, far away from her mother who told her son what a monster his father was.

That was a temptation Lupin quite possibly hadn't been able to resist.

Snape was certain that he was right. It meant as well that there might be a piece of humanity left in the werewolf enough to allow a friend to come close without killing him immediately.

If he was right, they both might survive the night. If Snape was fast enough and found Lupin in time *not, good riddance to me*, he thought and headed for his workroom.

His house was cold and dark, and Snape swore under his breath until he had cast Lumos. As soon as he had some light, he went to get the potion he had brewed for Lupin years ago. Despite the fact that he had been shocked at Dumbledore's words, he had expected Lupin to do something stupid living with Andromeda Tonks would drive any man into suicide. And Lupin was a gentle character, mild, friendly, and incapable of cruelty. He was no match for his mother-in-law, but couldn't afford to move out of her house.

Snape pocketed the phial with the potion and snatched up a syringe from his worktable.

The Moonflower potion; the cure for a wild werewolf, if the tales were correct. Snape had found the recipe in an ancient book from Hogwarts' Restricted Section in the library and had of course no idea if it would work. And there was the other major problem as well: he would have to inject it into Lupin's body whilst the werewolf was awake, free, and neither stunned nor sedated.

Naturally, that was impossible. A wild werewolf was, per definition, wild.

Ah, well, he would think about it when it was time. When he had found Lupin.

His chances to be successful, to save the werewolf without dying himself, were about one to a million, positively figured.

Snape shrugged his shoulders and left his house and went to tell Tonks what he planned to do.

"You can't be serious!"

"I most certainly am."

"But... he will kill you!" Tonks's face was white, so was her hair. Somewhere in the back of the house little Teddy whined for his father to come home. "I know him he has changed in a way you can't imagine. When he left today, he was not himself anymore!"

Snape looked at the young witch thoughtfully and had to admit that Lupin had chosen wise when he had taken her for his wife. She was obviously very much in love with him and didn't care about the fact that her husband walked on all fours once a month.

Now, his friend's wife looked at Snape with tears in her eyes. She was very clearly devastated by the fact that her husband had decided that living as a wolf was better than living with her. And of course she knew that he was as good as dead as soon as the Ministry sent the hunters. No one cared much about werewolves; they would always rather kill the creature than try something utterly mad. Even if the werewolf in question was a war hero.

But she hadn't had a choice. If Remus killed someone... if he came back to kill her and Teddy...

From the kitchen came the voice of a woman, loudly complaining about her worthless son-in-law.

Tonks cringed at the words and the voice. Apparently, she wasn't happy about living with her mother, either. Equally apparently, neither she nor Remus had been able to talk some gentleness into the old woman.

Snape, who disliked body-contact under normal circumstances, took Tonks gently by the shoulders and pushed her backwards until she sat on the couch.

Then he went into the kitchen. Andromeda Tonks sat at the table, watching little Teddy eating his dinner. Fish fingers and mashed potatoes the boy made a mess of his food, mainly because he was confused at the bitter words pouring out of his grandmother's mouth. With big eyes he stared at her and missed his mouth nearly every time he tried to put something in.

Andromeda was muttering the nastiest swearwords in one constant flow. Only when she saw Snape, her mouth clamped shut audibly.

The Potions master placed his hands right in front of her on the smooth surface of the table, blocking the boy's sight to his grandmother, and murmured, "If you ever insult Remus again, if you ever say anything that as much as indicates you don't like him where his son can hear it, I will personally mix a nice, tasteless and colourless potion in your tea that will make you wish you were never born. Did I make myself clear?"

Andromeda Tonks blanched and stared at the tall, dark man with hateful eyes. "You can't talk to me like that in my own house," she hissed, but moved back a bit in her chair to get some distance between herself and the Potions master. "That worth..." She flinched at the look in Snape's eyes and began anew. "He's a werewolf. Filthy. Dangerous. He will come back to kill us. I told Nymphadora that if she won't tell Dumbledore, I would go to the Ministry myself. She didn't want to, but I forced her. And I... I can call him whatever I want. No one cares anyway."

Snape lowered his head a bit and was now only a few inches away from the woman's ear. For someone outside, who could neither hear the words spoken nor the cold hate in the man's voice, it might have looked as if Snape was about to kiss her cheek. "Your daughter cares, which should be enough for you to hold your tongue," he whispered. "But on top of it, I care. Remus is one of the very few friends I have. I will go after him, and I will bring him back. And you know he would never harm his boy. So do you really think you should mess with me?" Straightening, he turned and left the kitchen, leaving Tonks's mum speechless and a good deal more frightened than a few minutes ago. Absent-mindedly, he tousled Teddy's hair on his way out. The boy smiled at him with big, sleepy eyes and managed to eat a fish finger without smearing it into his hair.

Tonks was still sitting on the sofa, but her eyes were dry. Red-rimmed and sore, but no tears were flowing. "I apologise for my mother. She's... worried about us. I know she dislikes Remus..."

"You will move as soon as possible," Snape interrupted her. "Living under her roof is bad for you, for Remus, and for your child. Do you not know this?"

She blushed. "Of course. But we simply can't afford..."

"When he's back home, you can discuss the financial side of this. First, you need to tell me where he is."

"You can't go after him," she exclaimed. "I love him, but I will not tell you where he is, I can't allow you..."

"You do know that it's too early, don't you?" Snape interrupted her once more. "One day too soon for any intelligent, determined werewolf to go wild. One day too early for the transformation he is in a half man, half wolf state, and I agree that he is dangerous, but he is not yet fully wild. If you tell me where he is, I can find him. If you tell me where he is hiding, I will inject him with the antidote and bring him back to you and your son."

Tonks stared at him. "What do you mean, too early?" she whispered. "An antidote? A werewolf goes wild whenever he feels like it. It's the one thing they can do without the moon. And the only thing that can be done is... killing him!"

A quick glance at the big clock at the wall told Snape that it was time for him to go. Still, it was necessary to calm the woman, Remus's woman, so she would tell him where her husband could be found. "I spent many a night with Remus," he said as gently as possible. "He... needed someone to talk to, and he told me a lot about being a werewolf. He told me as well about the wild ones, and I know that it is too early for the change."

Ah yes; now he had her full attention. "He is not fully transformed yet," he assured Tonks, and as expected, she was confused by his words. "It needs the light of the full moon to make him entirely wild; until then, there is some of his humanity left in him, which is the reason why no werewolf who really and earnestly has decided to go wild will change as much as an hour before the full moon is up too risky that someone interferes."

"But... but the full moon is tomorrow!"

Snape sighed. "Correct. And therefore, he is vulnerable in this half state. He doesn't want to get wild, he wants to get killed. Is his way to free you. Idiotic, of course."

Tonks's eyes narrowed at Snape's words. "Kill himself? He wants the Ministry to hunt him down so I get a widow's pension?" She sounded incredulous and relieved as well.

"Yes."

"He's such an idiot!" Tonks exclaimed, and her hair turned from white to a furious red. "I will kill him for that! How can he... How dare he to make such a decision!" She fished for a tissue and loudly blew her nose. Now that she had an explanation she understood and could accept, her brain began to work again. "What about the Ministry? Are they already hunting him? And that potion you spoke about... do you have it? Can it really save him?"

Goodness, thought Snape. *It is never a good idea to give people hope they will cling to it even if they have no reason to.* He was pretty certain that, despite his words, he didn't have a chance to even find Lupin, lest to get close enough for applying the potion. But aloud he just said, "I was able to persuade Albus to give me until tomorrow night to find him. And of course I have the potion. So tell me where he is."

Tonks was quiet for a few long moments. In her face Snape could easily see the fear she felt and the hope he had given her. "He is in the Sherwood," she said.

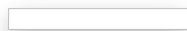
"Thank you." Snape slightly bowed his head. "You will learn if I have been able to find him tomorrow night; if I don't contact you, you can assume that I was not successful." Quietly, he closed the door behind him and Disapparated, heading for the big forest north of Lupin's house.

Hunting a Werewolf

Chapter 3 of 7

It's dark and cold in the woods. And it's not easy to find a werewolf who doesn't want to be found. It proves to be even harder to stick a needle in an unwilling victim.

3: Hunting a Werewolf



Snape had been never afraid in the darkness; not as a boy, and certainly not as an adult. He welcomed the darkness under normal circumstances, as the shadows and the absence of light allowed him to hide his deeds more easily and to act unobserved. The night was friendly towards him, hid his lanky features and his pallid face. His movements didn't get tracked under a cloudy sky and he could believe that all was well.

But tonight, under the light of a nearly full moon, things were different. One couldn't call it dark: the silvery light shone through the thick branches of the age-old trees, casting shadows everywhere. Snape pulled his cloak tighter round his bony frame. "Madness," he muttered under his breath. Frosty white clouds emerged from his lips. "I'm a fool, chasing him. I should have thought twice, doing so. In fact, I should have stayed at home, getting thoroughly pissed."

But that would have meant that in a few days he would have had to attend a friend's funeral, which was an utterly impossible, even revolting, thought. He had seen too many people die; he had killed too many himself. He had lost his love to Voldemort, his mother, Order members as well as Death Eaters he had called friends. He wouldn't allow a stupid werewolf to die, and he certainly wouldn't attend anyone's funeral but his own.

Still, this night was spooky, and the woods breathed danger in his ear. He imagined hearing Lupin's light step everywhere around him, thought he smelled the faint, smoky fragrance of the werewolf's fur. He imagined seeing the graceful movements of the werewolf in the light of the moon, and the darkness wasn't friendly and welcoming tonight. On the contrary it caused the Potions master to wish he had brought someone else along. A hunting party, maybe.

An owl swooshed by, just touching Snape's head with the tip of its wing. He nearly jumped, cursing the blasted animal, and then decided that it was time for a break. He had been walking through the woods for hours now it was way past midnight, he was more than tired and wasn't that the scream of a squirrel, getting killed by sharp teeth?

The small hairs in Snape's neck stood up at the sound as well as at the fact that it was real and not only happening in his overactive head. There it had come from his left, that tiny sound of the dying squirrel, and so Snape turned left, sped up a bit and pushed through the bushes and the nettles, his hair getting caught in the twigs of the trees and his trousers getting ripped as well. Impatiently he snatched the branches out of his way then he suddenly nearly fell when the undergrowth opened to a clearing.

In the clearing a werewolf was just ripping the flesh from the corpse of a small animal. Blood was dripping down his chin, his overlarge hands were far too big for the tiny bundle, his fur was covered in mud and leaves. Round his neck hung a thin chain; on the chain Snape could see the glittering of a golden ring. Remus's wedding ring.

The werewolf was oblivious to his surroundings, and Snape, having stopped dead in his tracks at the sight of his friend or of what was left of him at the moment barely dared to breathe so as not to startle him. He was relatively certain that Remus wouldn't attack; but then, getting close enough to apply that damn potion was equally unlikely.

Small crunches indicated that Lupin was down to the bones of the squirrel. Seeing the man the wolf devouring raw flesh was highly disturbing for Snape. He knew that Lupin was as close to being a vegetarian as it was possible for a werewolf, not eating meat under normal circumstances and if he had to, never rare. Killing was equally out of the question; at least killing the innocent. Remus would fight if he had to, but unlike Snape, was a most harmless, gentle creature. He wouldn't kill a fly. Usually.

Not now, though. The squirrel wasn't his first victim, as bloodstains and bits of fur and feathers proved, stuck to the werewolf's claws. He began to hunt as soon as he had transformed.

Snape drew a silent, deep breath, and Lupin jerked round, dropped the carcass and jumped, attacking the man standing beneath the trees.

For a single moment Snape's feet were very close in persuading him to turn and run, but in the last second he could suppress the urge to flee. Luckily if he had done so, if he had taken his eyes off Lupin's face, he would have been dead. The werewolf would have ripped his head off in an instant, unable to control the instinct to chase and kill a fleeing prey.

But Snape stood his ground, not moving an inch, always staring at Lupin. And the werewolf's attack faltered. Only a few feet away from Snape, Lupin stopped, dropped to the ground, and eyed the human in front of him suspiciously.

He was not fully transformed, as Snape had suspected. But it was obvious that Tonks had been right Lupin was nearly wild. Taller than Snape had ever seen him, with eyes like fiery pools and claws too dangerous to be looked at. So Snape looked into Lupin's eyes and tried to see his friend under the fur.

With a sigh, Snape realised that he had been right: Lupin wanted to be killed. It stood written in his eyes, and Snape felt goose bumps appearing on his back, knowing only too well how logically it sometimes seemed to just leave this life behind. He had thought so himself, now and then. Maybe that was the reason why he and Lupin had become friends after all those years of mutual dislike they knew that life could be most cruel, and both had suffered from the beatings fate sometimes liked to share.

Snape hoped Lupin wouldn't attack him not yet, anyway. But the werewolf wouldn't come close enough either, the wolf part being too scared of the human standing in front of him.

Snape lowered himself carefully on one knee. Lupin was a bit more than an arm's length away, a bit too far away to reach him. "Let me help you," Snape said with a low, calming voice.

Lupin jumped up, turned, and ran off.

"Fuck," Snape said wearily, and got up again, following the tracks that were visible on the wet ground.

The sun was up when Snape found Lupin the second time. It hadn't been hard to follow the werewolf's tracks, not when one had a wand and knew a tracking spell, but still, Lupin was fast and Snape quite a bit slower on only two legs and with bones so tired he could barely move on. But he was stubborn, and he was determined he didn't have much more time left as he was certain that Dumbledore would inform the Ministry with the rise of the moon.

Occasionally, Snape had the feeling that Lupin was watching him, but he didn't make the same mistake twice and called out for him. The offer of help had freaked the werewolf out. "He doesn't want help," Snape muttered whilst crossing a shallow brook. "He wants to get killed. I really wonder how I shall get close enough to put that damn potion inside his body."

The potion, yes. Snape had to admit that he couldn't be sure if the Moonflower potion would work, as it was hundreds of years ago since last a werewolf got injected with it. The effect was easy: it would reverse the transformation the werewolf had already undergone, bringing him back into his human form. Simple, really, and it only worked for wild werewolves whose hormonal household differed massively from the one of a normal werewolf. The potion if it worked would effectively prevent Lupin not only from turning wild once more, but acted as a permanent Wolfsbane as well. Remus once had tried the Moonflower potion, hoping it would free him of the necessity to down the Wolfsbane regularly each month. But it hadn't worked, had shown no effect whatsoever.

Turning a corner, Snape found himself on a small clearing, which was a relief after hours and hours fighting with branches and twigs and bushes. He had eaten the piece of bread long before sunrise, the flask was empty as well, but Snape was neither hungry nor thirsty. He only wanted to find Lupin, inject him with that damn potion, take him back home, and get some sleep. "Idle wishes," the Potions master grumbled.

Then, he saw some fur and knew that maybe those wishes had been not only idle, but stupid as well.

Lupin had transformed a bit more. He was on all fours now, and his face was nearly completely that of a wolf. His fur, brown streaked with grey, showed signs of his journey through the woods. A low growl came from his throat at the sight of the human, and he retreated back into the brush.

"If you think I chase you any longer, Lupin, you are bloody mistaken," Snape snapped, as he was quite exhausted and anxious to fulfil his task on top. "If you want me to kill you, you have to at least stay still."

It was a tricky moment Lupin was still enough human to understand the Potions master's words, and therefore, he remained just a step away from the trees. On the other hand, his instincts must be telling him to attack, to kill the man in black who had chased him down. Lupin was clearly trying to follow both voices in his head: a step forward, two paces back, a growl, bared fangs, and more growling came from his direction.

Snape pressed on. "What, wolf, are you scared now?" he mocked and came a bit closer. He knew that if he offered help once more, Lupin would run again. And yes, Lupin remained rooted to the spot.

"You know, it would have been a lot easier if I had allowed Dumbledore to inform the Ministry," Snape went on. He was less than five feet away from the werewolf and

could smell his fur, the wild fragrance of the wolf, and the blood between his fangs. He had smelled it before more than once. Remus had been in his house at full moon, his mind preserved by the Wolfsbane, but his body obeying the call of the magic. But here, out in the woods, the smell was stronger, harsher, wilder. More dangerous. "But I thought I should kill you myself. Consider it as payback for all the nasty tricks you and your friends played at me when we were children." Another step. Lupin hadn't moved so far.

Snape could see the muscles tremble under the fur a clear sign that Lupin was either close to fleeing or close to attack. Both possibilities bore certain problems. The Potions master was certain that he wouldn't be able to chase down the wolf once more if Lupin decided to run. But it was equally sure that he wouldn't survive an attack.

Oh, damn, Snape thought and continued annoying his friend. Maybe, if he found the right balance between annoyance and soothing, he could get close enough to inject him and still survive the day. *Highly unlikely, though.*

At that moment, Lupin leapt and hid behind a tree. Swearing silently, Snape said, "Coward!" loud and clear.

Lupin, who had been just a heartbeat away from vanishing into the woods, froze. And Snape smiled he knew exactly how unnerving it was to be called a coward when, in fact, one wasn't. Lupin had made a bitter decision: forced by circumstances and a nearly unbearable life, he had come to the conclusion that he would be better off dead than alive. And when he was killed by the Ministry, his family would get a high compensation; enough, in any case, to guarantee his son a life without financial sorrows. If, of course, he managed to get killed. And he wouldn't get killed if he continued to run away.

Slowly, Lupin turned and faced Snape. In his eyes was a hint of humanity left the sole reason why he had changed a day before that full moon, so he would be able to control his instincts to kill at least for a while, hoping the Ministry would find him during that time.

Snape, standing lazily in front of him, provoking him, calling him a coward, saw the change in the werewolf's manner and took a step back out of sheer self-protection, but Remus was incredibly fast. Instead of retreating further into the woods, he turned on his hind legs and leapt across the bush and the brush back onto the clearing right to the spot where Snape stood. His paws barely touched the ground. Then he hit Snape, knocked him off his feet, and ripped open his jacket, shirt, and chest with his long, sharp claws.

Snape didn't even have time to cry out, so fast came the change in events. One moment he had tried to hinder Lupin to get away, the next moment he felt his own blood soak his shirt, having the hot breath of the werewolf in his face and the long fangs only inches away from his throat. His wand was somewhere behind him on the half-frozen ground. Well, it wasn't a wand he needed, but a needle.

Time stretched like chewing gum at least, it seemed so for the Potions master. He expected to feel those fangs ripping him to pieces any second, he felt the werewolf's hind leg claws butchering his right thigh, he felt the front paws once more digging in his shoulders and all the way down his back. Still, there was time to get his hand into his pocket, to pull out the delicate little syringe, uncup it, and to thrust it deep into the werewolf's neck, emptying its contents into Lupin's blood system.

Snape didn't know who cast the low, long cry himself, out of pain, or Lupin, out of shock that he had been betrayed. But it didn't matter, really. The heavy, furry body collapsed on top of the Potions master, forcing the air out of his lungs, before the werewolf once more struggled, then lay still. Snape, being positive that Lupin's slashing claws had not only ripped his flesh, but had at least cracked some ribs, had to force his panic down as the weight became even greater when the wolf's muscles became limp. He felt quite sick all of a sudden, and his head became light, his vision dizzy. *Inconvenient timing,* he thought, slightly bemused. Then he drifted into unconsciousness himself.

Hogwarts

Chapter 4 of 7

Snape is safely back at Hogwarts. But what about Lupin? Is he dead or alive?

4: Hogwarts

□

The cold woke Snape up, and he was nothing less than dumbstruck at the fact that the light was already fading. It was late afternoon he obviously had been gone for the better part of the day.

Confused and light-headed, he tried to move and found that even lifting as much as his fingers was not a good idea. Pain shot from his toes up to the base of his neck, and he couldn't suppress a moan. He felt like a big haunch of raw meat, slashed here and there and still bleeding out of various wounds. At least the ground around him seemed dry, and the place where he was lying was sheltered from the wind. Small comfort, but definitely better than nothing.

Winning, Snape managed to roll to his side only to see the world shift around him. His head pounded, breathing was terribly uncomfortable, and only after a few minutes did he manage to open his eyes again he had squeezed them shut in order to keep the heaving ground at bay.

He got up on staggering feet. With one arm pressed against a tree, he supported his swaying body, worked his way up nearly as slow as a caterpillar, and had a wave of nausea wash over him the second he stood more or less upright. Unceremoniously, he threw up the sparse dinner from the previous night. Unfortunately, this unpleasant action forced him down to his knees again. Before his eyes, tiny, colourful stars exploded.

I'll kill him. The thought echoed through Snape's mind a few minutes later when he tried to get up once more. *I'll kill him and skin him and hang his bloody fur on my wall.* Well, he would have to find Lupin first, though. Again. Find him and check if the potion had worked, after all. Pity he had to move for that task. If he found him, though, he would certainly... well. Not kill him. Beat him maybe, for his idiocy. Or at least scold him.

Snape's right leg nearly gave way when he tried to take a step on the frozen ground. The sun was down now, and the moon would be up soon. If the potion had worked, Lupin would be and stay in his human form even under the light of the Cold Moon, the first full moon in winter. The potion was supposed to be powerful enough to reverse the transformation and to suppress it for a full twenty-four hours after it had been injected.

Therefore, Lupin should be here, somewhere, anywhere. Snape shivered. If he only could keep his eyes focussed on the ground, and if only he didn't feel so awful. The Potions master didn't even know if Lupin had bitten him during the fight or after he had passed out. Maybe *he* would turn into a werewolf! *I'm certain that would stretch Albus's willingness to employ me,* Snape thought dryly, right before he tripped over a log that brought him to his knees once more.

Cursing, Snape just managed not to land face first on the ground by reaching out, protecting his aching chest from slamming into the fallen tree. It was not only the fading

light that prevented him from seeing to clearly where he was going, but his dizzy head as well and the pounding pain in his leg, his back, and his chest. *Poppy won't like the sight of me*, Snape thought and then, belatedly, realised that it hadn't been a log he had stumbled on but a body. Not a furry body with snout, tail, and claws, but a human body. A pale, slightly blue, naked, male body. Face down to the ground. Breathing?

"Great," Snape mumbled and searched with cold fingers for the pulse in Lupin's throat, leaving bloody tracks on the werewolf's limp body. "If you dare to be dead, wolf, you can count on me coming after you, simply to shout at you for your stupidity of falling unconscious whilst being nude."

But there it was, the pulse. Lupin was barely, but definitely, alive. He was equally definitely not a wolf anymore.

Above the trees, the moon came up, huge and silver, casting its light on the clearing and the two men on the ground. Snape's head snapped up, and for a moment he stared at the night sky, half blinded by the bright light of the moon. Watching his friend again, he expected fur to grow and claws to show, feared the man would turn into a beast for good.

Hastily, Snape's hands came down to Lupin's shoulders, turned him round, and stared at the worn, haggard face which was sad even with closed eyes and slack mouth.

The cold moon poured its light onto the werewolf. Shadows danced across the frostbitten skin. Melted by his breath, a former ice-drop trickled down Lupin's cheek.

Nothing happened. The Moonflower potion had worked all the way through and had successfully stopped Lupin to make the biggest mistake in his life. Unfortunately, if Snape didn't get the man into the warmth and himself into the caring hands of a mediwitch or wizard, they would both die out here in the woods. It was too cold to be outside even with clothes on. Naked, Lupin wouldn't survive another hour.

Unsteadily, Snape waggled his fingers and wasn't surprised that nothing happened. He was too weak to conjure wandless magic; he could barely concentrate on breathing. Therefore, he looked around for his wand only to find that the moonlight had changed the world into a place where he wasn't able to see more than ghosts and shadows. Finding something as small and thin as a wand amongst all the leaves and twigs would be nearly impossible.

Moments passed before that realisation reached his brain, moments in which Snape on all fours patted with his bare hands on the ground, hoping to find his blasted wand. Remus must have knocked it away from him during the attack, and why the hell was he so damn cold? Where was he?

Snape was getting more dizzy by the minute when he, by accident, bumped against a tree stump with his injured shoulder. Cursing, he clutched it, lost balance, and reached out only to find his wand right next to the stump. That he had found it at all was close to a miracle; that his fingers remembered how to use it stunned him, as he couldn't even feel his fingers anymore.

A quick flick and he had light, at least.

Bad idea. In the light he saw not only Lupin's unconscious body a few feet away, but also the long, deep slashes in his own thigh and his chest as well. From collarbone across his ribcage down to the hipbone the claws had ripped open his pale flesh. *A bit deeper and he would have disembowelled me*, Snape mused dreamily, his head sinking back to rest against the stump.

Someone moaned with pain himself, apparently. *Hmmm, guess I'm not well*. The thought was not a pleasant one. "If I die, Lupin dies," he croaked. Even a less pleasant fact, and such a useless thing to happen after all his effort. "Get up," Snape told himself with a voice dangerously small. He wouldn't allow the circumstances and his own weakness to finish them off. He had his wand, he was more or less conscious, he only needed to get Lupin to St. Mungo's...

Another bad idea. It was full moon, and Lupin was a known werewolf. Anyone, even the Healers, would cast a Stunning Spell first just in case he wasn't that unconscious and ask questions later. And Stunning might kill the werewolf, especially with the potion running through his veins, working its own magic.

Now that didn't really leave many options. None, in fact. Snape couldn't take Lupin anywhere and on top came the problem that he didn't know if Dumbledore had meanwhile told the Ministry about the situation. If they were out there, searching for the werewolf...

"Damn," Snape muttered, trying to find his feet so he could get up. They seemed to be miles away, and when he finally had fought himself into a more or less standing position once more, he swayed like a branch in the wind. With one hand pressed to his ribcage, Snape managed to keep himself upright and finally realised that there was no way out of here for both of them. Leaving Lupin behind was the only solution for this stalemate.

He needed to get help. At least it was easy to decide whom to seek out there was only one man Snape trusted enough and who might be able to handle the situation with success. "Hope you kept your promise, Albus," the Potions master breathed. "Hope you are where you are supposed to be." Then he gathered the rest of his dwindling strength and Disapparated.

Hogwarts looked most beautiful under the full moon, but Snape, having managed to Apparate right outside the wards of the school, wasn't in the condition to see anything else but his feet and the ground he needed to cover in order to get closer to the big gates. He suffered from the strange sensation of being an unwanted guest in his own body, as his body clearly refused to obey his orders. Straight walking was impossible, keeping his eyes open was a challenge, ignoring that his legs felt like jelly a most unpleasant necessity. His body demanded to lie down, to rest. His consciousness was stubborn and pushed the body onwards, step by staggering step.

There were the doors, and they opened under his touch, recognising a teacher. Snape would have landed flat on the face when the gates swung open; only the stonewalls inside caught his fall.

He had lost his sense for time and was only dimly aware that it was dark. After curfew? After midnight? Would there be students around or his colleagues? Was anyone awake at all or would he have to find his way to the Headmaster's office on his own?

Now that was highly unlikely, as Snape didn't even know in which corridor he was located at the moment. The walls looked all the same, the torches only cast shadows, and what the hell he was doing here, anyway?

Ah, yes. Albus. Headmaster's office. Lupin.

Taking a deep breath, Snape turned left and was extremely relieved to see the statue that guarded Dumbledore's rooms staring down at him unwillingly. He murmured the password, had to repeat it twice before the lousy thing finally allowed him to enter, and nearly had to creep upstairs on all fours. *Damn stairs*, he thought, then finally reached the door and banged against it, barely making more noise than a fly battering against a windowpane.

Ages later, so it seemed, through the still closed door came the Headmaster's tired voice. "Didn't I make it clear that I do not want to be disturbed?"

Now that made Snape massively angry, and he got his wand out with shaking hands, more than willing to blast the damn door open. He had chased a werewolf, he had survived a werewolf's attack, he had found his way to Hogwarts and up here, and then Dumbledore refused to open the sodding door? Unacceptable. "Albus!" he gasped and slammed his fist to the solid wood. "If I die out here because of you... I will... haunt you every single minute... for the rest of your... damn, worthless life!"

Suddenly, the door opened. Snape felt strong arms round his chest, a massively painful embrace that threatened to send him screaming up the walls. He heard his own name, called in disbelief; then he was led to a chair and could finally sit down.

"Albus," he croaked, "I need your help."

"That is very obvious, my dear boy!" Dumbledore said, staring down at the man slumped in his armchair, in his office, a man he hadn't expected to see again and who was

clearly more dead than alive. "You are... that is... what I mean..."

"Stop babbling, old man," Snape hissed, not because he was angry, but because he didn't have enough air left to shout. "Go get Lupin."

Dumbledore placed his hands on the shoulders of his friend, which made Snape wince with pain. "He's alive?" the Headmaster asked and took a closer look at the wounds at Snape's chest. They were very clearly caused by claws.

Snape's eyelids were getting far too heavy to be kept open. The room became too warm within the blink of an eye, the lights flared too bright, and his head was far too heavy for his aching shoulders. "Freezing," he murmured. "Attacked me; I gave him the potion. He's not dangerous anymore. Get him. Find him. Take him... somewhere safe." His head dropped to his chest, and if Dumbledore hadn't caught him, he would have slipped off the chair.

"Where is he, Severus?" Dumbledore urged. "Tell me where he is!"

But Snape wouldn't tell anything anymore he finally had lost consciousness.

"You never fail to surprise me, my boy," the Headmaster murmured. "I wouldn't have believed to see you alive again after you have left Harry's house last night, but here you are, and on top of that you claim of having saved Remus as well. Extraordinary. Absolutely extraordinary."

There was danger lurking in the darkness somewhere behind him, danger and terror and the promise of pain. The wind was blowing his hair into his eyes, he couldn't see properly, but he was certain that he was not alone in the woods. Something was there, or maybe someone, but when he tried to run he found his feet rooted to the spot. Already he could smell blood and that specific fragrance of fear it seemed he was frightened of whatever was hiding behind the bushes, and he doubled his efforts to get away, but couldn't.

Useless. Moving was impossible, as there was a weight on his shoulders holding him down to the soft ground. Hadn't he been standing a moment ago? Why he was now lying in the grass? Struggling, he tried to get away from the weight only to hear a voice through the mists, calling his name.

Now that wasn't good: someone knowing his name and calling it out in a dark, foggy wood. Maybe, if he fought some more, if he put all his strength into the attempt to get free...

With a hoarse scream, Snape awoke, fighting against his attacker only to find himself being held closely by strong arms who made sure he wouldn't hurt himself any further. Those arms wouldn't let go of him even when Snape realised that he wasn't in a wood, that it wasn't dark, that there was no fog and no enemy he needed to flee.

There was only a soft bed, white sheets, sunbeams through the windows and Albus Dumbledore, now lowering him back down onto the pillow but keeping his hands on both his Potions master's trembling shoulders.

"Easy, my dear boy," Dumbledore soothed. "Everything is fine. You are fine. Will you stop fighting, please, Severus?"

"Ouch!" winced Snape. Where did the pain come from?

Dumbledore sat back into the chair that stood next to the bedside. Slowly, he released his grip and looked more than happy that Severus didn't try to jump out of bed immediately. "Do you know where you are... and what happened?" he asked gently and caught the Potions master's hand in his just when Snape wanted to examine the bandages around his chest. "I wouldn't do that, Severus. The wounds are still quite fresh; you could tear them open. Just lay still for a moment, will you?"

"What... how... when...?" Snape managed, tremendously relieved all of a sudden at the fact that not only he wasn't back in the woods, but that Albus was holding his wrist down to the mattress as well. Only moments ago, back in his nightmare, he had felt so very lost and lonely on top of his fear. The simple human contact, the ridiculous fact that Albus considered it necessary to soothe him, did exactly as intended: it calmed him and allowed him to gather his thoughts.

Dumbledore looked into the snow-white face of his friend. "You are in the infirmary. I took you here three days ago, after you came staggering into my office and eventually choose my floor to have a rest. Poppy has taken care of the wounds on your chest, your back, and your leg. You've been in a remarkably bad condition, but I think it could have been worse after having been attacked by a wild werewolf."

"Half wild," Snape breathed. "He did it deliberately, changing a day too early... He wanted to give us time to kill him safely."

"How very sensible of him," Dumbledore said mildly.

Snape's eyes snapped open. Dumbledore, sitting quite close, looked down at him. "You look awful, old man," Snape croaked, and Dumbledore gave a delighted smile.

"So do you, my dear boy, so do you. But you are alive, which is a lot more than I would have expected."

"Lupin?"

Dumbledore sighed, and Snape felt cold fear creep down his spine. A quick look round confirmed his guess he was the only patient in the infirmary.

Dumbledore, having seen Snape's reaction, just tightened his grip. "Remus is fine," he said quickly. "I found him I had to take the location out of your mind and he is as good as new. Don't you worry about him."

Good news for a change, Snape wondered and tried to push himself up a bit. Unexpectedly, Albus helped him until he sat propped up against the pillows. "Where is he?" he then asked, and Albus sighed again.

"You know, you put me into a quite impossible situation, Severus," he began. "First, you force me to withhold information from the Ministry; secondly, you insist in getting yourself killed; thirdly, you survived. On top of that, I now have a werewolf down in the dungeons, holding hands with his dear wife, rocking his son on his knees, and I don't have a clue on how to break the news to you that you won't teach Defence Against the Dark Arts anymore. Truly, Severus, how very impolite of you!" Twinkling, Hogwarts Headmaster took his glasses off and began polishing them so he could pretend not to see his Potions master's thunderstruck face and his effort to get his mouth closed.

"Won't I?" Snape finally got out, and wrapped his arms round his waist to stop his hands from shaking. Suddenly, he didn't feel tired anymore, but remarkably well.

"Won't you what?" Dumbledore asked innocently.

"Teach Defence Against the Dark Arts. Stop playing with me, old man!" Snape snapped.

Dumbledore got up and turned round. "Hello, Poppy," he greeted the matron who was carrying a tray with salves and bandages. "I'm afraid he woke up looking after him won't be that easy from now on, I'm sorry to say."

"Ah, well, I will chuck him out anyway in a day or two," the matron answered merrily. "And until then I can always Stupefy him if he doesn't behave himself." She sat on the now vacant chair and began to loosen the bandages on Snape's chest.

Irritated, he wiped her hands away. "Won't I?" he called after Dumbledore, who was already halfway out through the door.

"But of course not, Severus," Dumbledore called back. "I had a long talk with Remus he told me everything, including his reasoning and why you are still alive remarkable, his self-control. Lupin is now the only living werewolf who is not depending on Wolfsbane to remain human under his fur at the full moon. Therefore, I had no reason not to

employ him again. Unfortunately, he only teaches Defence Against the Dark Arts. Sorry, dear boy, that means you are solely stuck with your cauldrons once more."

"Stupefy," Poppy sternly threatened at this precise moment, and Snape, being unexpectedly overwhelmed with a wave of emotions, relented to her caring hands.

Equally unexpected, Poppy held her word and released Snape from the infirmary the following evening after having some severe words with him. "You will rest until the weekend, Severus, is that clear? You will come by tomorrow morning so I can check on you, and if I see you anywhere near a classroom or your lab, I will personally take you by the ear and drag you back into one of my infirmary beds. Do we understand each other?"

"Quite," Snape grumbled, then walked slowly and carefully down to his chambers. He had been scrubbed clean, he had been treated with an impossible amount of potions, pills, and salves, and he was more or less whole again. No more pain, just a few more scars; it could have been worse. Nevertheless, quick movements were out of the question at the moment.

A few students stared at him wide-eyed whilst he went by, but no one dared to get into his way despite the fact that the Potions master seemed slightly distracted. He didn't even see the snogging couple, and if he had, he doubted he could have been bothered to give them detention.

The dungeons seemed farther away than usual, but finally, after about half a million years and miles, he reached his doors. As always it was blissfully quiet and dark down here, and all Snape longed for was a nice, warm fire, the biggest mug of hot chocolate possible, and a book. A harmless, eventless evening in his armchair after nearly a week at the infirmary and two days in the woods and... how long had he been out spying before that? Anyway, he doubted he could get closer to paradise than by continuing precisely as planned.

But then he opened his door and found himself attacked by an orange-haired witch who, surprisingly enough, managed to wrap her arms round his waist and hug him tightly before he could get his wand out to hex her. Luckily, she was small and light; otherwise she might have knocked him over.

Out of the corner of his eye, Snape saw a smiling werewolf sitting in his armchair. Well, lying on his own living room floor with Nymphadora Tonks on top of him whilst her husband was watching good Merlin, what a dreadful thought! "Tonks," Snape weakly objected to the hug, looking down at the impossible orange glow propped against his chest. "Tonks, would you..."

"Thank you, Severus," she just said and hugged him once more. "Thank you so very much for... everything."

Awkwardly, Snape patted the woman's back, feeling extremely relieved when she finally let go of him. He saw her wiping her nose with her sleeve, and for a moment she looked like a schoolgirl, ridiculously young and vulnerable. Clearing his throat, Snape asked, "What on earth are you doing in my rooms?"

She laughed a bit shakily and stepped away from him right next to Remus. "I'm thanking you for saving my husband's life," she answered with a smile. "I hope... I didn't hurt you, did I, Severus?"

Very nearly, Snape would have blushed. Usually, people were only too eager to get away from him, and he could count on the fingers of one hand the people who truly cared for his well-being. That Tonks was concerned about him not only showed how grateful she was, but also that she knew how badly Remus had injured him. An embarrassing idea, Snape found, and coughed to conceal it. *Too much friendliness, lately*, he thought. *It's more than time that I go back teaching so I can torment as many students as possible.*

He just snapped out of his thoughts in time to see Tonks waving good bye, pushing the door open, and calling "See you tomorrow, love," before she vanished in the dark corridor.

Snape, slightly at loss of what was going on, raised a questioning eyebrow towards Lupin. "Aren't you going with her?" he asked in confusion.

"Does it look like it?" Remus replied curtly and didn't move a limb.

"Apparently not," Snape growled. "So tell me what you want that can't wait until another time. I was looking forward to a quiet evening in. Without company." Irritated, he slumped into the second chair, crossed his arms over his chest, and stared at Lupin.

The werewolf just lowered his head and avoided Snape's eyes. Silence filled the Potions master's quarters, silence that felt odd and wrong and demanding at the same time. Silence that cried for words to be spoken, but Snape, having been always lousy to find the right words at the right time, just clenched his jaws and waited for Lupin to spit out what was bothering him.

Only he didn't. The werewolf, looking positively at a loss for words himself, just sat in his chair and seemed to wonder about his footwear.

"Lupin!" Snape growled after a considerable length of time. "What are you still doing here?" It was unnerving him, this silence.

Finally, Lupin seemed to have found his tongue again. "Why did you do it?" he asked. "Why did you come after me? I mean, you are usually not that daft, and then you don't have anything better to do than chasing a wild werewolf?"

Snape closed his eyes for a moment. His quiet evening tiptoed away. "Not entirely wild," he corrected his friend. "And talking about stupidity you shouldn't have changed a day too early if you didn't want me to save you. You have told me too much about the ways of werewolves, Remus. You knew that I knew you weren't fully transformed. If you didn't want me to come after you, you should have done it under the full moon like every sensible werewolf who truly wants to go wild. But no, all you wanted was to commit suicide. Pity, really, that you didn't even manage to do that properly!"

Now, that had come out a bit differently from his original intention, Snape realised. He had shouted at the man opposite of him, something he hadn't planned to do *Where did that anger come from?* Snape wondered, but remained seated although he wanted to jump up and shake some sense in Lupin's haggard body.

"I didn't manage it because you got in the way!" Lupin growled. "I changed a day earlier so I wouldn't kill anyone attempting to kill me. I certainly didn't expect you to come after me, or I would have taken precautions. Like not telling my wife where I'd be." Staring at Snape, he continued, quieter, "This life my life had become unbearable. I would have thought you of all people would have known what it means, having to live a life one can't stand anymore!"

"I never tried to kill myself," Snape pointed out coldly.

"You aren't alive, either," Lupin exclaimed. "Apart from me, you don't talk to anyone, not even to Albus. You don't have any friends, you don't have a family; there is no one you love, and no one who loves you. You might move and talk and teach, but you are not part of this world. You could just as well be dead!"

"Then don't blame me for not allowing the only friend I do have to kill himself," Snape snapped. "Consider me foolish and soft-hearted, but I couldn't stand the thought of you being slaughtered like an animal; I couldn't stand the thought of visiting your grave!"

Remus dug his nails into the wood of his armchair. "It was what I wanted, for me and my family, and you deprived me of it!" The words hung in the air for a moment; only silence followed them. The Remus added, more calmly and with a sub note of disbelief, "Albus hired me to teach here again, without even asking me first."

Snape cringed; he felt exhausted by this battle of words and even more by the fact that he had opened up to the werewolf, had told him the truth, had revealed his feelings. That was quite unlike him, and it felt odd. *He* felt odd, and strangely vulnerable on top of it. "He didn't ask me either if I would be willing to step back from my post, that is," he said. "But then, I wasn't really in the condition to answer questions."

Instantly, the mood changed once more. Had it been angry and heated at first and sarcastic only a moment ago, it was now dark and bitter.

"You know why I had to try it. Release for me; a future for my wife and son," Remus said. He had been pacing the room the past minutes, but now stopped and stood directly in front of Snape's chair. The fire was behind him, and Snape couldn't see his friend's expression. However, he heard how much it cost him to get the words out.

Sighing, Snape nodded once, and then summoned a decanter and two glasses to the little table next to his chair. He poured the dark wine and handed one glass to Remus, taking the other one between his long, cold fingers. Although it was warm in his rooms, he felt a chill nagging on his bones the words Remus had spat out earlier on were still ringing in his ears. *Few friends; no love; no life.*

They were true, of course. "I couldn't let you die, Remus," Snape confessed and took a generous swig from the glass. "I know why you did it, but I didn't find it in me to let you continue with it. And I hope... that things will work out for you now."

Lupin drained his glass in one go. "Getting away from Andromeda, taking Teddy out of her grip, having a job... there is not much more I can wish for," Remus answered. "And I am not depending on Wolfsbane any longer you have no idea what a relief that is. I had nightmares of forgetting to take the potion in time, of ripping Teddy to pieces, of killing Tonks..."

"Enough," Snape interrupted him gently, putting the glass aside. He hadn't eaten yet; if he weren't careful, the wine would go straight to his head. "It is over. You can get on with your life, and I assume suicide is not as appealing as it was a week ago with those new options at hand. You will find a house for your family very quickly. You can move as far away from this hag who calls herself Tonks's mother as possible. Just don't ask me to baby-sit."

Suddenly, Remus came closer to Snape's chair and looked down at the lean figure of the Potions master. For a moment, he seemed lost for words and apparently hadn't heard a word of what Snape just had said. The werewolf opened his mouth only to close it again until, after several attempts, he said, "Take your shirt off, Severus. Please."

It didn't happen often that Severus Snape felt like punched in the stomach by mere words. Remus's question, though, not only seemed to knock the wind out of his lungs, it caused his mouth to gape as well. "What?" he managed after a heartbeat, very certain that he had misheard. Somehow.

But Remus was serious, and he had a reason for his plea. "Take your shirt off. I... I need to see what I have done to you. This is the main reason why I stayed. To talk to you and to see the damage I have caused. Maybe it will hold my nightmares at bay if I see proof that I haven't managed to kill you even whilst being worse than a monster. Please, Severus. I beg you."

Snape couldn't even remember the last time someone had pleaded him to do anything. He had been ordered, he had been told, he had followed demands. No one had ever just begged him for a favour. Therefore, he just undid the buttons of his shirt, showing his friend the scars he had caused and sincerely hoping that one brief look would be enough for Remus.

Last Time

Chapter 5 of 7

Remus sees the wounds he has caused, touches them even. What he doesn't expect is Severus enjoying his touch.
What they both don't expect is the resulting kiss.

A/N: Please do not continue reading if you are offended by male-male relationships.

5: Last Time

□

Snape sat in his armchair in front of the happily crackling fire, his shirt open and half cast down over his shoulders. He looked strangely embarrassed; it was obvious that he would have preferred it if Remus hadn't asked him to show him the freshly healed scars on his chest. In the golden light of the dancing flames, Remus could sense his friend's uneasiness and assumed that right now, in this moment, an urge to cover himself washed over Severus. Remus wouldn't have been surprised if the Potions master had grabbed him by the arm and thrown him out.

But he didn't. Severus just grabbed the armrests with dry, cold hands and bowed his head, thus allowing the werewolf to do what he needed to do: see him. Maybe even touch him.

Remus's face was covered by shadows as he stood still with his back to the fire, but his body-language spoke of how shocked he was at the sight of the scars. He didn't move; he didn't speak. His mouth was clamped shut, and his hands were balled to tight fists. His eyes roamed across Severus's chest, and involuntarily, he took a step closer. Reached out a hand and touched the pale skin of the man sitting in front of him.

With a slight push, Remus ordered his friend to lean back.

Staring, the werewolf saw with his own eyes what he had done. He observed the long scars running from the Potions master's left collar bone across his chest, his abdomen, and down to his right hip. Five parallel lines, deep and red. They looked as if some mad artist had painted them onto the pale flesh; they didn't seem real.

Like a dreamwalker, Remus placed his fingertips on Severus's shoulder, one finger for each line. He had to spread his hand wide: a werewolf's paw was larger than a man's hand.

Gently, almost tenderly, Remus ran his fingers down the healed wounds he had caused. His touch was hesitant and determined at the same time; he seemed eager to get behind the secret of those scars, as it was utterly impossible that he had made them. He was a friendly man and hated violence. He was a loving man, and he would never cause harm willingly. The wizard who was at the moment shivering under his hands was his friend, had been so for years. They had spent countless evenings together, sitting and talking. They had eaten together; they had become merrily drunk together. Most importantly, they had laughed together they were *friends*, for Merlin's sake, and the werewolf was revolted at the evident proof of his murderous brutality.

And Severus had seen him at every full moon change into a wolf, had watched over him when being vulnerable something no one else had ever done for him for such a long time. How could it be that there were scars from his claws on the Potions master's skin?

"How could I do that to you?" Remus whispered, then pulled off the Potions master's shirt completely, tossed it away carelessly. He needed to see all the damage he had

caused, not only the long scars on the chest but...

Damn. Good grief, the back didn't look any better, and by the strangled sound Severus had just made, the wound still hurt as well. But Remus needed to see. He needed to see with his own eyes what he had done so he would never, ever forget about his stupidity. In his desperate attempt to free his wife and son from his presence without leaving them absolutely penniless, he had nearly killed someone he held dear.

"I'm so very sorry," Remus murmured, and placed both his hands on Severus's shoulders now, trying to reassure him that he hadn't meant to really kill him.

The Potions master didn't say a word. He sat bent forward now, both elbows on his knees and head hanging low, accepting and enduring the werewolf's touch. He was breathing hard, and from his position Remus could see that his eyes were squeezed shut and his jaw set.

Suddenly, Remus became aware of the fact that Severus was trembling, shivering, and that he didn't talk because he had clenched his teeth together. Both of Severus's hands were balled to fists he looked as if he were awaiting a beating.

Slowly, Remus stepped behind his friend, never taking his hands off him. After a moment, he rested his palms on Severus's neck before tracing one of the scars down to the hem of the black trousers.

The dark wizard gasped. It was a tiny sound, barely audible, but a werewolf had exceptional hearing abilities. In this case, Remus couldn't hear his friend's heartbeat speeding up, but he could feel it under his fingertips.

"Severus," Remus murmured, bending lower. "Tell me when was the last time someone touched you with no other reason than giving you pleasure?"

Such a harmless question. But the Potions master's muscles tightened, got hard as stone under the soft touch. He didn't answer.

Remus wasn't in the mood to let it go. "When was the last time you have been touched at all?" he asked in a low voice. "By a lover; a woman. By anyone you wanted to be with?" His fingertips found Severus's ribs under the silky texture of the skin; they followed the spine upwards. They wandered to the neck, parted the dark curtain of the Potions master's long hair and revealed the pulse hammering in his throat.

"I cannot remember," Severus breathed. "Why do you... ask?"

Remus painted circles over Severus's shoulder blades, leaving goose bumps in the wake of his touch. Out of an impulse, he stepped round the chair and knelt down to be at eye level with his friend. Something had changed, had changed completely in only a few harmless moments, and he very badly wanted to find out what it was.

"Severus, I know you are not gay, but you react to my touch like a starving man reacts to the prospect of food," Remus stated calmly. And because he had foreseen the reaction to that statement, he was able to stop Severus from jumping up and getting out of the situation by simply holding him down with sheer force. "I think... I believe you like to be touched by me. Tell me if I shall go on, and I will. Happily. Otherwise, tell me also, and I will leave. But you have to tell me!"

Too many options, obviously. Severus turned his head away, his face hard and forbidding, his eyes nothing but small slits. What he didn't do, though, was shake off Remus's hands.

Ah, well, the day has begun strange, it might as well end strange. Remus thought and brought one hand up to Severus's face. The other he kept on the Potions master's knee in a hard grip. Somehow, he felt like a hunter chasing prey. "When have you last been kissed, Severus?"

Black eyes narrowed. "I have to pay for a shag," Snape bit out. "Kissing is not included in the price. Stop mocking me, wolf!"

"I'm not," Remus said, locking his hand behind Severus's neck and pulling him down, out of the chair and onto the floor. It was surprisingly easy after a moment, both men were kneeling in front of each other right before the fireplace, warmed by the flames. Shadows danced across Severus's chest, disguising the scars.

Remus, really not sure if he should do what he was about to do, took his friend's face in his hands and just touched Severus's pale, cool lips with his own.

To be honest, Remus expected to get knocked out at least, maybe hexed, but definitely he didn't expect to get the chance to enjoy the kiss. He would have sworn Severus would pull back immediately.

But he didn't. Instead, the Potions master seemed to be frozen to stone.

Reluctantly, Remus broke the kiss he really didn't want to force himself upon someone too shocked to react.

Well, it hadn't been a real kiss, just the brushing of skin against skin. Remus released his friend's face and lowered his head. "I'm sorry," he said. "I know you don't..."

Fast and nearly brutal, Snape reached out and pulled Remus closer. Their lips connected again, but this time it was more than a brief contact. Hot and demanding was the mouth of the Potions master; his tongue forced its way into the werewolf's mouth, and Remus welcomed the kiss, deepened it. Breathing fast, they kissed each other hard enough to crack lips.

Simultaneously, they sunk to the floor. Remus, being stronger and knowing exactly what he wanted, pushed his friend down, his hand on the Potions master's naked chest, feeling the wild heartbeat under his palm. At his thigh, he could feel Severus's hardening cock, and his own heart flipped.

Still they kissed. It was a battle, a dance; it was hunger and power and greed. It was a fight they fought with their mouths and tongues, and in one swift movement, Remus placed his longing hand high on the inside of Severus's thigh. An invitation, a question...

A gasp, deep and harsh, emerged Snape's throat. Remus, lying on top, had him pinned down with his left arm and his full weight. Staring into Severus's face, he nudged up his chin and gently kissed the tall, dark wizard's neck. His right hand moved higher, found hardness, and began to rub it through the fabric of the Potions master's woollen trousers.

Hard. Big. Hot. *I want him*, Remus thought, surprised. He hadn't slept with a man in years, but now, here, totally unexpected, he was craving for action. And so was his somewhat innocent partner.

"Tell me what you want, Severus," Remus rasped, getting hard himself. "Tell me, and you'll get it. Whatever you want. Tell me. Please!"

Instead of an answer, Severus arched his back and pressed his groin against the werewolf's hand. The feeling of a hand other than his own on his cock was overwhelming, entrancing, and he had no intention to end this experiment anytime soon. His whole body, a moment ago aching, empty and lonely, was now burning with need. The werewolf's scent, wild and rich, turned him on in a way he hadn't thought possible. That a man could turn him on at all was disturbing; but then, what the hell. His plans for the evening hadn't been that interesting.

The hand between his legs moved higher and began to unbutton his fly, and Snape groaned with desire. He couldn't remember when he had been at the brothel the last time, not even when he had touched himself in the quiet hours of the night. Those were needs he usually just didn't have. That he was lying on his back on the floor of his own living room, shirt open and trousers open and getting a hand-job by a werewolf was... well, he certainly hadn't expected this turn in their conversation.

Remus impatiently pushed down the Potions master's trousers and wrapped his strong fingers round Snape's length. Unlike the hesitant, tentative, gentle touch of a woman, the werewolf's grip was hard enough to be painful.

Wonderful. Perfect.

"Don't... stop!" Snape managed, his heart beating a maddening rhythm in his chest. Blindly, he reached up and caught Remus's neck, pulling him down for another kiss. He could feel his hips bucking under the werewolf's stroking hand, his strong fingers. His cock thrust into a fist that wasn't his own and gods, it felt so goddamn good, especially because he got kissed at the same time, and not tentatively and gently, but forceful and demanding. Was that him moaning for more? Yes, definitely.

That left the question of what he wanted. But it was hard to think when having a hand round one's cock and a tongue in one's mouth and Snape only knew that he wanted this to continue.

"I don't want you to come in my hand," Remus's voice purred in his ear and was it really possible to become harder than he already was?

Yes, it was. Rock-hard, stone-hard clichés, but the Potions master certainly hadn't been that hard in decades. Or ever, even. "What?" he managed, digging his own hands in Remus's back, sending the buttons of his friend's shirt flying across the room and shredding the shirt itself only a moment later. He wanted to feel naked skin against his own, he wanted to feel muscles and bones under his exploring hands, and how did Remus manage to get out of his trousers without him noticing it?

Snape had never, ever as much as fantasised of being with another man. He had believed himself entirely heterosexual. Or asexual, considering the lack of physical contact in his life. But gay? No. That another man could arouse him had been a ridiculous idea less than half an hour ago. There was nothing soft on a male body, nothing round, nothing welcoming. Remus was all bones and muscles, hard flesh and flexible sinews. He owned a flat belly, a haggard chest, a sandpaper chin. The hands were too big and too strong; the kiss was rough, the lips not soft and female as they should be.

But those lips were giving Snape the best kiss he'd had in decades, and that arse under his hand felt marvellous. The hoarse, rough gasps in his ear told him that he wasn't the only one aroused.

Still, there was an open question. And he didn't even have to answer it, as Remus was phrasing his wishes clearly.

"Come inside me, Severus," the werewolf rasped.

Simultaneously, Snape heard his friend casting a spell, a small and quick piece of magic. "What?" he asked again, taken off-handed by the whispered words. But there was no mistaking the meaning of the spell: Snape felt his cock getting slick and so experienced first hand the works of a Lubrication spell. He wanted to say something, to argue maybe, but then he was kissed again and he nearly spilled at the sensation and the sudden realisation that Remus really, really didn't want to stop right now. The Lubrication spell was perfectly timed truly, sometimes it came in handy to be a wizard.

The hand on his cock still moved up and down, but now the Potions master was craving for a different kind of action. "Say that again," he urged, grabbing Remus's face between his hands and forcing his friend to look into his eyes.

Remus didn't hesitate. "Fuck me," he said. "Now. Here. Fuck me until we both come."

There was possibly no clearer way to express one's wishes, and therefore, Snape took his friend's shoulders and forced him around, face down onto the thick, soft carpet they were playing on. After a moment of consideration, he wrapped his fingers round his own cock, thus spreading the lubricant over his hand. Hesitantly, Snape then touched Remus's arse only to have it pressed against his palm instantly.

His cock twitched. The dark-haired wizard brought his left arm up and pinned Remus down to the carpet, slipping his right leg across the body underneath him. Now, the werewolf was immobilised, and Snape was free to touch wherever he wanted to touch. Shoulders and spine, thighs and hips. Buttocks. Mainly buttocks. And the small, puckered hole in between.

Remus moaned, deep and longingly. His hands and fingers crumpled the carpet, his shoulders moved in the attempt to get closer to the body behind him. "Fuck me!" he groaned, sheer need in his voice.

Willing to experiment in every direction Remus suggested, Snape pressed his cock against Remus's hip and began to move in a slow, shagging movement that drove him half crazy and assumingly didn't do anything to calm the lust that burned in Remus, either. His hand spread the werewolf's buttocks; his fingers found the anus. Circling it, Snape vaguely wondered how to continue.

"Severus!" Remus managed, his voice strained with desire, and Snape suddenly knew what to do. He wanted to be inside this lean body, wanted to feel tightness and heat around his cock. Slipping on top of the werewolf, he rubbed his cock along the cleft.

With a jerk of his hips, the werewolf moved his arse and at the same moment clutched his hand deep in Severus's buttock, forcing him on.

Remus growled with lust when his friend's cock slipped inside him in one long movement, and Snape just grabbed his friend's hips with both his hands, eager to fuck, eager to find release. They only needed a few moments to find a rhythm that suited them both, and Snape used his knee to spread Remus's legs a bit wider so he could adjust to this body underneath him and the needs of his partner.

"Slower!" Remus rasped, and the Potions master obeyed.

"Touch... me," Remus begged, and found his lover's hand with his own. He pulled, and Snape followed. A moment later, the Potions master's fingers were wrapped around a cock again, only that it wasn't his cock this time, but the werewolf's.

Ah, but now the rhythm got more complicated. Remus's head was resting at his friend's chest, and Snape could just see the side of the werewolf's face. His eyes were closed, the mouth wide-open. Moans spoke clearly of how much Remus enjoyed this. And hell, he enjoyed it massively himself. To feel Remus's hardness in his hand, to feel muscles clench round his cock, and now, to feel the werewolf come, seeing him spill over his hand.

Groaning, Snape thrust once more inside the body that shuddered underneath him and came, released his own lust and heard his own, harsh groans in the candle-lit darkness of his room.

They made it to bed after their first time in front of the fireplace, mainly because they weren't twenty anymore, and a hard floor was not the most comfortable place to rest, carpet or no carpet. After they had found their breath again, and after they had cast a Cleansing Charm or two, they got up and found the bedroom, falling onto the mattress whilst kissing, making the bed creak in protest.

With a wave, Snape lit some candles. Usually, sex didn't last long when he went to the brothel or, sometimes, was forced by his need to go for a knee-trembler in the darker corners of Knockturn Alley. There certainly was never time for tenderness afterwards, time to look at what he had got himself for the few Galleons he could spare for a whore.

But now there was light, there was time, there was warmth, and there was someone who didn't mind to get looked at. Remus was lying spread-eagled on the bed, one arm propped under his head, an amused smile playing on his lips.

"Like what you see?" he asked and reached out to pull his naked friend next to him.

"I've seen you naked before," the Potions master pointed out and placed his hand on the werewolf's chest. The heartbeat he felt beating under his palm sped up a bit at the

gentle touch. He smiled usually, he couldn't make a heart speed up whatever he did, as the woman was usually all too eager to get away and towards the next customer. He liked the sensation of being wanted, simply because this was very, very rarely happening to him.

Carefully, Snape ran his hand up to Remus's throat, then higher to his cheekbones, the mouth, the eyebrows. The night had just begun, and he was more than willing to explore whatever the upcoming hours offered him.

Remus allowed his eyelids to fall close. The touch of Severus's fingertips was so very tender, as if his friend was surprised of something. *Maybe of the fact that he wouldn't sleep alone in his bed, for a change*, Remus thought. He knew that Severus was a solitary man who didn't seek company, spent his days and nights alone. Usually.

And now he sat in his bed, this tall, dark, silent man, and caressed the one friend whose life he just had saved with a delicacy that took said friend's breath away.

"Gods, Severus, I didn't know how much I have missed that," Remus murmured whilst Severus trailed his fingertips down his shoulders towards his hands.

"Missed what?"

"Missed being touched by a man. Missed *being* with a man. A man smells differently; a man's voice can drive me crazy; the fact that a man is hard and bony and muscular where a woman is soft and softer and even more soft... I missed it."

Severus's voice was mildly curious when he asked, "So you haven't been with a man since... a while?"

Remus laughed softly and could barely think of anything else but those hands on his skin. Severus had long, thin, cool fingers, and they were immensely skilled in giving pleasure by simply touching, caressing, arousing. "No, definitely not," he answered. "Before I married Tonks, long before. I never found one I wanted to stay with. And after a while I got tired of meaningless sex." Opening his eyes to the golden darkness, he looked directly into Severus's eyes. "Believe me I never thought about you in this way before tonight." Catching the long black hair in his fist, he pulled until Severus's face was only an inch away from his. "This is a surprise for me," he murmured and brushed his friend's lips. "And it's a first time as well I have never kissed a virgin before."

As expected, Severus tried to pull back at this statement, but Remus didn't let go of the black strands. Instead, he used his other hand to force Severus to lie down next to him, skin to skin, and rolled over so now it was Remus who looked down at his friend, not the other way around.

"You can hardly call me a virgin, wolf," Severus objected. "I lost my... virginity at the age of sixteen, so what are you actually talking about?"

Remus brushed the hair out of Severus's face, then went lower and placed both his hand on his friend's narrow hips. "Have you been ever caressed by a man, Severus?" he teased, sitting up. "Have you ever been touched by a man, got aroused by a man's hand; have you ever been fucked by a man?" With his words, he placed himself between Severus's legs.

Severus looked positively stunned. "No!" he managed after a while.

"Then you are a virgin in this area, and I have every intention to pleasure you out of your chastity before the night is over," Remus stated matter-of-factly, leaned over, and kissed him.

Several minutes passed, and not much was to be heard but the breathing of the two men. Finally, Remus reluctantly came to the conclusion that if he went on kissing he would spill over his friend's belly like a teenager, and freed Severus's lips. He was getting hard already again despite his recent orgasm. *I want him*, Remus thought once more. *I want him bad, and I shall be damned if I don't get him.*

Placing his hands together as if praying, Remus cast another little spell and felt his hands warm up instantly. Placing them on Severus's chest he began to knead the muscles, rubbing scented oil into the marble-white skin.

Severus's voice was hoarse when he asked, "What are you doing?" but he didn't move an inch, clearly enjoying Remus's touch.

"I am massaging you; arousing you and it's a nice difference to a Lubrication spell. I want you to close your eyes, and I want you to be silent. I won't hurt you; I won't do anything you don't want me to do. Don't talk unless you want to tell me to stop. Understood?"

Black eyes stared for very long time into brown ones. Then Severus placed his own hands on Remus's knees and closed his eyes without saying a word.

I think that's the first time ever he willingly obeyed an order Remus thought and ran his hands from Severus's shoulders over the rib cage down to the shadowy hollows above the hip bones. From there he worked his way up again and then down the upper arms to the wrists, where he rested, remembering those hands grabbing his own hips. Remembering Severus shagging him.

The memory made him completely hard, and he growled. That sound, deep and animalistic, seemed to heat the Potions master's desire as well. *Good*, Remus mused and lightly brushed his palm over Severus's length. "I want you hard; I want you wanting me!" he whispered.

His cock began to ache, and with a casual movement Remus rolled Severus to his side, getting closer himself. One arm held his own weight; the other hand he placed on Severus's bum and squeezed.

Severus gasped and then yelped when Remus slipped his warm, oily fingers lower and between the Potions master's legs, gently adding pressure to the tender hole. Involuntarily, Severus spread his legs to grant better access; one pale hand found the bedpost and held on tight.

By then, Remus had trouble thinking straight, given his desire and the sight of Severus's body. Not only had he never slept with a virgin, so to speak, but he had never slept with a man who had been straight until a few hours ago, either. He vaguely remembered that the first time could be painful if one wasn't careful. And the last thing he wanted was to cause pain. What he wanted was to strip Severus of his rationality, his control, his coherent thoughts. He wanted the man underneath him to shake with pleasure; he wanted to leave Severus breathless and speechless.

And he wanted to fuck him. Gods, how much he wanted to grab Severus, bury his length inside him, and make him scream out his name.

Instead, the werewolf murmured, "Do you want me to stop?" and left the place between Severus's buttocks, instead wrapping his fingers round his friend's cock. With a small flip, Remus pulled back the foreskin, revealing the velvety head.

A harsh gasp was all the answer Remus needed. Running his fingertips over the thin slit at the top, the werewolf felt wetness. Severus quite obviously needed release as much as he did. And so Remus moved closer, pressed his length against the fair skin and held his friend's cock in a tight embrace at the same time.

Severus hissed through gritted teeth, which turned Remus on even more he didn't talk, as ordered, but expressed his wishes clearly by pressing the whole length of his body against his partner.

Foreplay was nice, Remus decided, but enough was enough. He released Severus's hardness and brought his hand to this wonderful, pale arse once more. With his thumb, Remus circled the anus, felt Severus's breath hitch, added some more pressure and smoothly slipped first one, then a second, finger into the tight hole.

A deep moan was his reward, a growl of delight, and Remus began to move his hand in a slow, gentle, careful rhythm, in and out, neither too deep nor too fast so as to hurt his friend.

Severus threw his head back and grabbed the bedpost even tighter. His legs were spread wide now, and his breathing came in harsh gasps.

"Are you enjoying this?" Remus whispered, entranced by the sight of his engaged hand and his bobbing cock, which clearly was ready for action.

"More!" Severus rasped, the first word he had said in an hour.

"You will get more, don't you worry," Remus assured him, and his fingers pushed on, pulled back, pushed again. They both knew that this was only the beginning.

Severus trembled under his hands, but didn't move himself, just laid on the crumpled sheets and allowed Remus to do whatever he wished to do. Like pressing his forehead against the Potions master's fine-boned shoulder, inhaling the sweaty, salty scent and rasping his tongue over the delicate skin. Like nipping the soft spot between Severus's throat and shoulder with sharp teeth. Like pressing one hand on Severus's hip, thus holding him down, immobilising him, whilst he finger-fucked him.

Harsh moans of lust escaped the Potions master's mouth, and he reached behind him, searching for Remus's cock. As that wasn't an easy task under the circumstances and because Remus was too far gone by now to want anything else but to fuck anyway, the werewolf removed his fingers. Before Severus could do anything, Remus mounted him and breached the strong muscle that protected this secret entrance with a smooth, but nevertheless forceful push.

"Gods, yes!" Remus hissed, and slowly and even more carefully, he began to fuck his friend properly, hearing his own gasps and the ones from Severus.

"Tell me... if I should... stop," Remus rumbled and moved his hips, driving deeper, leaning fully onto his friend. His arm slipped over Severus's pelvis and found his cock once more, hard as his own and screaming to be touched.

"Remus!" Severus yelped and nearly broke the bedpost. His shoulder muscles stood out as he pushed himself backwards to meet the werewolf's thrusting hips, and "Harder!" he urged Remus on only a moment later, half screaming it out into the dark room.

And Remus fucked him harder, deeper, and faster, fucked the dark wizard who had been nothing but a friend until a few hours ago until they both came again, spilling their seed once more.

And laid still, bodies entangled, minds empty, lips smiling.

After an eternity, Severus turned and slung one arm around Remus's body, still trembling in the aftermath of his orgasm. With his other arm, he fished for the bedcover, couldn't find it, and summoned it from somewhere on the floor. Pulling it over both of them, the Potions master got as close as possible, bathing in the heat that radiated from the werewolf.

Remus brushed his lips over Severus's shoulder, precisely on the spot where he had bitten him earlier on. Although a Scourgify had vanished every trace of their love-making, there was still a musky scent hanging in the air, speaking of sex, of sweat, and of a double climax.

Severus murmured a few words and after a moment, soft piano sounds flooded the room, entwined with the rough, melancholic voices of a violins and cellos. It was music Remus hadn't heard before; Severus usually tended to either silence or classic. This melody spoke of wide plains, rumbling rivers, sand that got chased by the storm. It spoke of loneliness and loss; it told of freedom and death. It was eternal beauty, laced with purest sadness.

Quite unexpectedly, Remus felt the small hairs in his neck stand up, felt goose bumps all along his spine although it was warm and comfortable under the duvet and in his lovers embrace. "What is this?" he murmured and brought his hand up to Severus's face. It was wet.

"Something that suits the mood," the Potions master said quietly, obviously not at all ashamed that tears were running down his cheeks. "You have caused emotions I didn't expect and which I have trouble to deal with in my usual way."

A tiny finger snap, and the candles ceased to cast light into the bedroom.

"I... this... made you sad?" Remus was shocked at the possibility that he had hurt his friend so deeply simply by making love to him.

Severus moved until his head rested on Remus's shoulder. "In a way," he answered, wiping a sated, tired hand across his tear-streaked face. "You tore down the walls I had built around me, and you left me... exposed... to a world that has, until tonight, not done much more but beaten me. I fear it will be quite hard to rebuild the walls. I fear I might not *want* to rebuild them. Which will make me more vulnerable than I am already." One arm found the way across Remus's waist.

Deep and longing, the violins sung of tears and pain.

It took Remus several attempts to answer. "I didn't know you call yourself vulnerable," he finally managed.

"Remus, you said it yourself: I have no love and no life. This here, us, tonight, just made it even clearer than it was before how lonely I am."

"But..."

"You didn't really think that there would be another night like this, wolf?" Severus asked, a hint of coldness in his voice.

"Hell, Severus, you can't..."

"Don't talk anymore," Severus harshly interrupted him, then added, a little softer, "Please."

The music, piano and cello and violins, filled the darkness with tenderness. Remus, though, bound to accept his friend's wish of silence, stared into the night with burning eyes long after Severus had fallen asleep and long after the music has ceased.

A/N: The music I'm referring to is "The Assassination of Jesse James" by Nick Cave. Nothing but piano and strings it's adorable. I listened to the CD whilst I wrote this chapter, and I was unable to resist the temptation to add it to the bedroom scene.

The wording "pleasure you out of your chastity" I borrowed from the book "Flesh and spirit" by Carol Berg. Read it, it's more than worth it.

Breakfast

The morning after – always a tricky time. The question is who behaves more stupidly, Snape or Lupin.

6: Breakfast

□

When Remus woke up, he was alone in the big bed and not at all surprised about it. Had Severus been lying next to him, he would have thought him a ghost, given his comments the previous night. An eerie silence lingered in the bedroom; the few burning candles and the chill, resulting from an empty fireplace, left the werewolf shivering.

He got dressed quickly, well aware of the fact that Severus would want him out of here, out of his rooms and out of Hogwarts as soon as possible. Actually, he was stunned that he hadn't woken him, hadn't urged him on so far.

But then, the Potions master had an ability of self-control that was remarkable. Last night, when he had gasped out Remus's name, had been the first time ever the werewolf had seen his friend lose this self-control or, rather, given it up voluntarily.

Better not think of last night, Remus thought and tied his laces. *Better forget about it entirely, if I want as much as a chance to keep his friendship at least.*

Sitting on the bed they had shared for one night, Remus took a look round, being absolutely certain that he wouldn't get in here ever again. Often, when he had required the Wolfsbane Potion during term, he had come to Hogwarts, had stayed for twenty-four hours, had even slept in his wolf-form on the rug in front of the fire place. Every single time he had found a blanket draped over his body in the morning. And always there had been a soft, even fluffy, dressing gown waiting for him, as he couldn't stand clothes too shortly after fur had covered his skin.

The werewolf couldn't imagine this happening again. For one part, he didn't need Wolfsbane and thus wasn't dependant of the Potions master's brewing skills any longer. Although he would have to change into a wolf on the full moon, he was equally certain that Severus would tell him in clear words that now, as he would live in his own house quite soon, there was no reason to hide in his dungeons any longer when the time for transformation came. He would have a cellar of his own.

Sometimes, sex can truly fuck up everything, Remus thought warily. Mainly if the sex had happened between a werewolf and a man who fancied women. And especially if the two men in question once had been friends.

In Remus's experience, friendship didn't survive sex. Friendship crumpled into nothingness under a kiss, as, for some reason, both participants were unable to look into each other's eyes afterwards ever again.

And he and Severus had done a lot more than just kiss last night.

Setting his jaws, Remus got up and left the bedroom in order to finally face facts.

What he had to face instead was a table laden with breakfast and a Potions master hiding behind a newspaper, not looking up when Remus entered the living room. Just one pale hand emerged from behind the paper, found the cup, and vanished again.

Not a sound was to be heard apart from the rustling sheets and the crackling fire.

"Good morning," Remus said and poured himself a cup of tea. He wouldn't go without having eaten, he promised himself, however cold Severus might act.

"More like good afternoon, wolf," the dark wizard corrected him absently and fished for his toast. "You've slept all morning. I didn't know a human being could sleep that long at all."

Crunch. Severus bit his toast and still didn't show his face. For a moment, Remus was tempted to remind his friend that he had had every reason to sleep past lunch time but dropped the thought instantly. No use to pick and nag. This was difficult enough without unwelcome reminders of the night's passion.

"How long have you been awake then?" Remus asked and found that eating had lost its appeal even before having taken the first bite. His stomach was clenched as he expected to be thrown out any moment now.

Silence. Another sip from the cup. Another bite. Finally, Severus said, "Since around eleven," as if he were embarrassed for not having been up at sunrise. "I was... quite tired. You snore. And you stole my blanket several times. Actually, it is a miracle that I was able to sleep at all."

Very carefully, Remus put his cup down on the saucer and placed his hands on the table. Those words surely he had misheard? "I... don't snore," he finally stated. He wouldn't have believed it possible Severus referring to the past night.

The Potions master snorted and folded his newspaper, placing it on the table. "You do snore. You do steal blankets. And you will eat breakfast before you go home, lest Tonks hunt me down for letting you starve. I have no wish to face her, explaining why you were too... upset to eat."

Remus took some toast and crumbled it to little pieces. "Why the hell should I be upset?" he asked, incredulous at that ridiculous accusation. He was sad, still tired, and furious. What he wanted to do and what he actually had to do were two entirely different things grabbing Severus and kissing him back to bed on one side, pretending nothing had happened for the sake of their friendship on the other side. It wasn't easy, and that Severus was so damn cool didn't help a bit. Yes, upset was a quite accurate description of his mood, and he disliked Severus having it observed so pointedly.

Lazily, the Potions master leaned back in his chair and looked at his friend. "You are upset, for whatever reason. Usually, you are ravenous in the mornings, but you haven't eaten a bit so far. You are fully dressed, although I know that you prefer a dressing gown at the breakfast table. You didn't have a shower, either I would have heard. So something is nagging you, and I can only assume it is because of last night. Be assured it meant nothing. Go home to your wife and forget about it."

Goodness, that man could drive someone crazy in less than ten minutes, that much was certain. For the first time Remus wondered how awful it must be to have him as a teacher. "Nothing?" he said as coolly as possible. "Are you quite sure about it? Because last night I had a different feeling about that matter."

Severus didn't even blink. "Last night is in the past, wolf. You need to go home; you need to find somewhere to live. You have a removal to organise. Your wife and son are waiting for you, and you will have to teach here after the Christmas break. And to set you to peace as you don't depend on the Wolfsbane any more, you don't have to seek me out any longer."

Strange, how painful a few true words could be. "It seems you have rebuilt those walls more quickly than you had guessed, Snape," Remus snapped and was pleased to finally see the man sitting opposite flinch. They had stopped referring to each other with their family names years ago, when Snape had confessed in a drunken moment how unnerving he found it that no one apart from Dumbledore called him by his given name. That Remus now called him 'Snape' was nothing less but an insult, and Severus knew it.

Remus felt lousy all of a sudden. But his heart ached, and he needed a way to soothe the pain. Hurting the one who caused the pain seemed a sensible course of action.

Snape just picked up the newspaper again. "You are wrong," he answered. "But you have just proven how vital it is for me to hurry with this task." He began to read.

Just another few moments, and my heart will break my chest, Remus thought bitterly. *How on earth did I manage to make such a mess out of this?*

Slowly, he got up, pushing his chair back with a scrape. It would be best if he left fast and quietly.

But then the werewolf found that it was impossible to leave. They had gone through too much to part like that. They were friends, for Merlin's sake! He wouldn't allow one night of passion destroy that.

Two steps, and he stood in front of Severus's chair. One quick movement, and the newspaper was clawed in half. A growl, and Severus got up himself, looking angry and annoyed.

"I won't allow you to do this," Remus hissed. "We have been friends for years. A week ago you saved my life. Because of you I have a job and a future. If you can't cope with last night, leave it. Forget about it. I will not mention it ever again, if this is what you want. But I refuse to be chased out of your rooms like a dog!"

"You are talking nonsense, wolf," Severus stated, anger tightly controlled, and dropped the remnants of his paper. "It's not me who has a problem with last night, it's you. It's not me who has a marriage to protect, who is loved by a wife; it's you. So don't you dare tell me what I can cope with or not." Casually, the Potions master reached out and put his long, strong fingers round the werewolf's throat. "Last night meant everything to me, *Lupin*. But I will not force you away from your family. Tonks loves you; you love her and your son. Come back here for a glass of wine whenever you like, come back here for your transformation during full moon. And if you don't like it, leave it. But never, ever accuse me of treating you like a dog. Because I never did and never will."

With that, the Potions master pushed hard and sent his friend staggering back against the wall. In the same movement, he wiped his arm across the breakfast table and sent everything atop of it flying to the floor, including a half-full pot of steaming hot tea.

Finally, Remus understood. *How could I have been so blind?* he mused and rubbed his bruised neck. *So very blind and so fucking stupid?*

Severus stood with his back to him, tall and proud as ever, his long, open hair flowing halfway down his back. Unlike the werewolf, he was dressed leisurely, wearing only soft trousers and a wide, grey shirt. He was barefoot, as the floors in his rooms were heated to please someone who was sensitive to the cold.

And he had given the werewolf every opportunity to go on as usual. He had set up breakfast as if Remus had come here for a transformation. They could have eaten together without mentioning that night, and Remus could have gone home pretending absolutely nothing had happened. Severus had shown him a way out, assuming the werewolf would need a way out given the fact that he was married and father of a small child.

"You are such an idiot, my friend," Remus said and flicked his wand. Cups, pots, cutlery, food and tea went neatly back onto the table. "I do love Tonks. I married her because she loves me as well. When she courted me, I told her not only that I am too old and too poor for her, but that I... um... like sleeping with men as well."

Slowly, Severus turned round and pierced the werewolf with his charcoal black eyes.

Remus sat down and buttered some toast, added marmalade, and devoured it in a few bites.

"She was so immensely relieved, you wouldn't believe it. She told me how much she loved me, how much she wanted me..."

Severus snorted.

"... and how glad she was that I am bisexual. Because, coincidentally, she is as well. Bisexual, that is. She likes women in her bed as well as me."

Severus sat and stared at his friend with open mouth.

"Tonks and I sleep with each other, and we enjoy it. But for years now she has a girlfriend whom she loves, and I don't mind at all. I'm glad she has more than one who loves her. And I know she wouldn't mind if I were to find someone someone male, that is I wanted to be with. Someone I loved. Someone who loves me. Not a shag, someone for just one night, but someone for good. Someone for forever. You."

Severus didn't say a word, but leaned back in his chair, poured himself some tea, and downed it without bothering to add milk and sugar. A second cup followed quickly. Remus's words had stunned him into speechlessness.

Remus heaped ham and eggs on his plate. Looking for a fork, he found one and pointed it at his dumbstruck friend. "Which part didn't you understand, Severus?" he asked. "You look as if you didn't get a word of what I have just said."

Severus was too restless to remain seated. "You don't want this to end?" he asked, quite matter-of-factly as if he was discussing his next Potion classes. "You want to come back into my bed, because..." The pause indicated that he didn't have a clue why Remus might want to come back at all, not to talk about coming back for making love.

"Because I enjoyed last night as much as you did?" Remus offered, left his chair behind and approached his friend until only a hand might have fitted between them. "Sleeping with you was beyond perfection. All I can think about since I woke up is your mouth on mine. I want to go back to bed, now, immediately; otherwise I won't have any other choice but taking you over your breakfast table!"

"Ah," said Severus, and leaned forward, wrapping his arms round the werewolf's waist. He took a step, taking Remus along. The wall stopped them, gently pushing its stones into the werewolf's back; then Severus touched the werewolf's mouth with his lips.

Remus grabbed Severus's arse with one hand and his neck with the other, pulled the taller man down and returned the kiss with all his might.

"Bedroom," the werewolf growled when they needed a break to breathe.

"Table," Severus objected and pulled Remus's shirt out of his trousers, slipping his hand on his friend's heated skin.

"Good idea," murmured Remus and leaned into Severus's touch. "I wouldn't make it to the bed, anyway."

"Then the wall might be the even better choice," the Potions master suggested and began to unbutton the werewolf's shirt.

"Oh, Merlin, it seems I have chosen an inconvenient time to check on you, my dear boy," said Albus Dumbledore and chuckled into his impeccable white beard at the sight of the two quite engaged men.

Severus whipped round, and if a glare could kill, Albus would have dropped dead on the spot. Blocking the Headmaster's view of Remus, who tucked his shirt back into his trousers, the Potions master only needed a moment to snarl, "What the hell are you doing here, Albus? And how were you able to come inside? I've warded my door!"

Albus stepped to the table and dipped his finger into the honey. Thoughtfully, he licked off the drop. "Have you forgotten that Remus lived in your rooms for the past few days? I had altered your wards so not only he could get in, but me and Poppy as well. He needed care, so it was a logical step."

Remus rubbed a hand across his face. "Bugger. Should have told you, Severus," he said, but there was a slight hint of amusement in his voice. Apparently, he enjoyed seeing his lover slightly distressed. At least there was no way of keeping their relationship under the carpet now.

Severus, though, just pressed his lips together and stared at the breakfast table. For once, his thoughts were clearly written in his usually so guarded face: What if Albus had come in a few minutes later?

"You aren't blushing, Severus, are you?" Dumbledore mocked and twinkled mildly over his half-moon glasses. "Oh, dear, you are! And you blush even deeper when you're

told that you blush. How... wonderful!" Obviously unable to stop himself, the Headmaster laughed out loud, clearly enjoying that his Potions master wasn't in control neither of the situation nor his blood pressure.

"He will hex you, Albus," Remus said, and pushed a chair into Severus, causing him to sit down. Then he asked, "Why did you come down here?"

"Because, dear Remus, Severus has failed to appear at the infirmary this morning. Poppy is worried. She imagined him lying dead in his bed and sent me down to check on him."

Remus grinned. "We... got up late. It was near dawn when we fell asleep."

"Good grief, wolf," Severus grunted. "Why don't you share the details with him?"

Dumbledore chuckled. "I take it that there is no... animosity between the two of you? I'm referring to the fact that you, Remus, will take over Severus's position in Defence Against the Dark Arts. And of course to a certain fight that nearly cost both your lives."

Finally, the Potions master seemed to have regained his snarky nature. "You don't need to fear me killing him because of a job, Albus," he snapped. "Maybe because of indiscretion, possibly because he can't keep his damn mouth shut, but..."

Remus reached out and put his hand on Severus's arm to calm him down. "Is this a problem for you, Albus?" he asked. "Us?"

Dumbledore took off his spectacles and pinched his nose. Solemnly, he said, "Won't it be a problem for Tonks? And then do you expect me to keep this quiet? Because I have not the guts for secrets anymore. There have been too many in the past years. Actually, Severus, I'm glad someone has the nerve to put up with you."

Remus grinned. "Good," he said. "And you don't have to keep this quiet. We won't advertise it, of course. Tonks won't have a problem at all, and if you don't object..."

"Do I have a word in this at all?" Severus asked, somewhat desperately.

Dumbledore and Remus both looked at him. "What would you like to add to this discussion?" Dumbledore asked. "It appears as if everything has been said. If two of my teachers decide to have a relationship, I certainly have no reason and no right to object. Otherwise, I would have to say a few things about Sibyll and Filius as well. Or Minerva and Poppy. It's none of my business, my dear boy."

"Erm..." said Snape, at a loss for words. Then he caught the werewolf's expression and snapped, "Stop grinning like a fool, wolf. As soon as this here becomes common knowledge, you'll find out that people tend to despise anyone who is as much as friendly to me."

"And you might find out that I don't give a damn," Remus replied dryly. "I'm a werewolf. It possibly will be me who ruins your reputation, not the other way round."

Dumbledore chuckled. "It seems you two have a lot to talk about, so I will take my leave." But when he was already half outside the door, he turned once more and said, "Severus, one more thing. I got a letter of complaint today, and I expect you to sort it out to my satisfaction. If she writes to me again, I will have to order you to attend to her wishes."

"Albus..."

"And because I am a nice person, I will tell Poppy that you are doing fine, that you have eaten, and that you will stay in your rooms today. She will expect you to come to the infirmary tomorrow. Please don't miss the appointment; otherwise I will have to come down here again." With that, he vanished into the dark corridor.

"Now, who complained about you?" Remus asked, still grinning, but meanwhile buttering another toast. "Who did you manage to annoy bad enough for sending a letter to Albus?"

Snape crossed his arms over his chest and tried for several minutes not to answer. But then he decided that Remus would get this bit of information out of him anyway and grumbled, "Granger."

Surprised, Remus dropped some honey on the table. "Hermione? How did you manage to annoy her? She's in Paris, as far as I know."

"Precisely," Snape replied. "And she required my help. Apparently, she found some new and dangerous potions, and she wants me to have a look at them. I refused. I have better things to do than making sure a little girl doesn't poison herself with potions she can't handle."

"But you don't have anything better to do than spending a week or two in France with a beautiful young woman who has fancied you since she's left school," Remus pointed out.

Somehow, the cup hopped out of Snape's hand and landed with a loud clatter on the floor.

"And whom you fancy since she's ended her relationship with Ron Weasley," the werewolf continued, unimpressed.

Silence.

Finally, Snape said, "When have you gained the ability to read me like an open book, wolf?" glaring at his friend most threateningly.

Remus leaned back in his chair and tipped his head. "I have been able to do so for years, Severus. Since I began sleeping on your hearth rug. Since we began to talk. I know you like Hermione. I never dared to ask why you don't ask her out for a date, though."

"That is obvious, isn't it?" Snape snapped. "Former Death Eater? Voldemort's supporter? I nearly killed Dumbledore, I made Potter's life a living hell, and severed George Weasley's ear. I was her teacher and taught her to fear me, if nothing else."

Remus stretched out his legs. "Go to Paris. Help her with the potions. Pretend you do so because Albus told you to, but ask her out for dinner whilst you are there. You managed to end up in bed with me; it should be easy now to seduce her."

The Potions master snorted and then leaned forward, ignoring plates and toast being in the way. "You talk too much, wolf," he said, voice dark and low. "You certainly shouldn't have said a thing about seduction."

Remus crossed his ankles and shoved his hands into his trouser pockets. "In my opinion, this table looks far too... hmmm... innocent for its own good," he mused. "Far too unoccupied, one could say. After all, such a table wants to see something different than just cutlery and teapots."

Severus leaned back as well. "This table is made for teapots." He placed his hand on the surface and wiped a few crumbs to the ground. It was a nearly tender gesture. "Whereas my workbench, for example, is made for more complicated tasks. Brewing potions. Enduring hexes and charms. Used to curses and kicks. My workbench is strong enough to carry a man's weight even under unusual circumstances. Shall I introduce you to it?"

"Definitely," Remus answered, and then they didn't talk for quite a while.

Epilogue

Chapter 7 of 7

It took her a while, but Hermione is back from Paris. And hears some surprising news.

7: Epilogue

□

It was a nice evening in early spring; not quite warm enough to sit outside, but certainly the perfect night to go out for a drink. Harry and his wife Ginny, Ron and his fiancée Lavender, and Luna and Neville Longbottom had arranged a meeting in a small Muggle bar somewhere in Covent Garden. Remus and Tonks would try to join them later, but it depended on Teddy and his new babysitter, Percy Weasley.

"What about Hermione?" Ron asked for at least the fifth time in the past half hour. "You really think she will find the place?"

Harry and Ginny sighed heavily for the tenth time, as Ron hadn't been the only one who had asked that specific question. "She knows where we are," Ginny reassured her brother.

And Harry added, "She was the one who suggested this place, remember? She's back from Paris since yesterday evening, so give her a little time to settle in. When she's ready, she'll turn up."

"Well, I just thought..." Ron mumbled, then turned to peck a kiss on Lavender's rosy cheek. She was just visibly pregnant with their first child, the wedding would be in a month, and Ron simply wanted to tell one of his two best friends about it. He hadn't owed Hermione the news, knowing she was bound to be back from France after half a year of finding and selling potion ingredients. "I just want to see her and make sure she's fine," he said, his arm round his fiancée's shoulder. "Her last letter was a bit strange, she didn't write about books and potions at all but about places she had visited, and I think something's fishy here."

Ginny laughed. "Did you consider the possibility that she's finally met someone? A French beaux, maybe? Someone who snoggs her senseless and takes her to all the places she hadn't found the time to visit before?"

"A tall, dark stranger," Luna said in her dreamlike voice. "With long hair and strong hands. As headstrong as she is and not afraid of her temper."

"Huh," said Harry and eyed Luna suspiciously. "You sound as if you knew something we don't."

Neville took Luna's hand protectively. "She has just a way to sense things," he said. "And anyway, she'll tell us herself there she is!"

He was right. Hermione had arrived whilst they had been talking about her, throwing her jacket over the empty chair in the midst of her friends and shaking her hair back. "Hi!" she said, and then she was drowned in embraces and kisses and shoulder pats, was covered with "Hello's" and "How are you's" for several minutes.

Finally, she managed to sit down, and someone had organised a glass of wine for her. "Tell us everything!" Ron urged, with a wide grin in his face. "I'm going to be a father and a married man as well, but you must have more interesting news than that. Tell us!"

Smiling, Hermione leaned back in her chair, wine glass in her hand. She had a tan, her hair was lighter than it had been last autumn, and there was a glow on her skin that hadn't been there ever before. "Tell me the gossip first," she ordered. "Neither of you wrote as often as promised, and I haven't got a clue on what has been going on in the last months. Who has married, who is pregnant apart from you, Ron, Congratulations! who has died and who has caused a scandal? Come on, I want to know!"

"Well," Harry began. "There are rumours that McGonagall will marry Madam Pomfrey this summer. Malfoy has been left by Pansy and is now a single father she ran off with a Muggle boy and has left Scorpius behind. I heard Malfoy is quite good at changing nappies by now." Harry smirked at the thought.

Ginny placed her hand on her husband's arm. "You have heard about Remus, Hermione, haven't you?" she asked. "That he's gone wild? And that Snape saved him?"

"What?" Hermione gasped and nearly dropped her glass. "I heard something happened last winter, but that he's really gone wild... but... that means... don't tell me he's dead!"

"Ginny!" Lavender scolded. "Don't scare her. Look, Hermione, Remus is not dead, and he's not wild, either. It's been a hoax Albus told. Remus is fine, he'll possibly join us later."

Harry and Ron said in unison, "It wasn't a hoax!"

"It certainly wasn't the truth, either," Lavender insisted. "Everyone knows that it is impossible to cure a wild werewolf. As Remus is perfectly healthy, teaching at Hogwarts, and living with his family in a nice little house in Sussex, it must have been a hoax. Plus, Snape is fine as well. Remus would have shredded him to pieces if he really had been wild." Smugly, the young woman leaned back in her chair, clearly thinking, *I rest my case.*

Ron and Harry looked at each other. "Snape went after him," Harry insisted. "He was quite upset by the news, and he left to get a potion he said could cure a wild werewolf."

Ron added, with a somewhat hushed voice, "It's said that Remus nearly killed him that night. That Snape had to spend several days at the infirmary. That he is covered with scars."

"Well, no one will ever be able to prove that," Ginny snorted, "as it would be necessary to see Snape naked to do so. On the other hand, it's said that Remus spends a lot of time in Snape's rooms down in the dungeons." Leaning forward, she continued, "I heard they do more than just talk. Nonsense, of course. So you see what rumours are a lot of old rubbish."

Hermione smiled, a tiny curving of her lips. "There are rumours that Professor Snape and Remus Lupin are... together?" She picked up her glass and took a sip. "Neville, as you teach at Hogwarts as well, what's behind this?"

The young man, teaching alongside with Professor Sprout, reddened slightly. "Just as you said," he mumbled. "Rumours. Remus and Snape are friends, that's no secret anymore. They are often seen together. Snape even smiles every now and then when he talks to Remus. Scary sight. Makes me think he'll turn around any second and give me detention." Shuddering, he moved a bit closer to Luna, who put a reassuring arm around him.

"Let's stop talking about Snape," Harry cast in. "Remus is married proof enough that he's not gay. He and Tonks are happy together. Whatever happened last winter, it's over, and I'm really glad that he's back at Hogwarts. How about you, Hermione? How was Paris?"

Hermione's smile widened. "Paris was beautiful," she stated, a comment that caused several jaws to fall open. Usually, Hermione didn't care about the town she visited to purchase goods, and she definitely never cared enough about a place to know about the sights to visit there.

"Don't you tell us you've seen the Eiffel Tower!" Ron managed and placed his hand across Hermione's to check if she had developed a fever.

"Eiffel Tower, Louvre, Sacre Coeur, Notre Dame, Montmartre..." Hermione purred and closed her eyes as if she was seeing the places again. "A boat trip on the Seine, dinner in some really exclusive French restaurants, the Rodin museum my, he did some marvellous sculptures! Several walks through moonlit parks... Anything else you want to know?"

Harry placed his face in his hands and stared at her intently. "Yes. One thing. What's his name?" he inquired and managed not to yelp when Ginny pushed her elbow between his ribs.

"Don't listen to him, Hermione!" she said. "It's none of his..."

Luna waggled her hand through the air. A few tiny little stars dropped from her fingertips. "The tall, dark stranger isn't that strange at all," she mused. "Were you surprised when he turned up?"

Hermione gave her a sunny smile, not in the least intrigued at the fact that Luna knew more than she possibly should. "Quite surprised. And even more when he actually managed not to snarl at me as soon as I opened my mouth."

Ron ran his hands through his already quite unruly hair. It stood out in every possible direction and spoke clearly of his confusion. "What? You... you... erm... I thought you had met someone in France? A stranger? And now you say you knew him beforehand?"

"I never said I met a stranger. But I have met someone, and I guess it's serious."

"What is serious?" a curious voice asked, and Hermione shot up to hug Remus Lupin and his wife Tonks in one go. It took them a while before they were seated, cramped in between Lavender on one side and Neville on the other. Both the werewolf and the Metamorphagus looked more than happy having made it to the pub.

"So, Percy is doing fine with little Teddy?" Ron asked, quite suspiciously. "I would have thought he'd run before the little boy is in his pyjamas. He's scared of children, you know."

"Then why offer to baby-sit?" Hermione asked.

Ron grinned. "Penelope threatened to leave him if he didn't agree on children sometime soon. So he decided to get some practical experience before the real thing turns up." Chuckling, he kissed Lavender, pressing a caring hand on her belly.

Remus put one arm round his wife's shoulder. "Actually, Ron, your brother is hopeless with children," he confessed. "He explained to my son how the Ministry of Magic handles law issues concerning broken cauldrons and couldn't understand why Teddy insisted on showing him his toy brooms instead. And when my boy began to attack him with a lion cushion, he indeed decided to take his leave."

"He ran. Coward." Harry grinned. "Then who's looking after little Teddy?"

"Severus," Tonks said and smiled. "He's quite good with children. Maybe it is because Teddy is yet too young to annoy him on purpose."

Stunned silence fell over the table. Everyone stared disbelieving at Remus and Tonks. Everyone apart from Hermione, who seemed to find a burn mark more interesting than anything else.

"But... Snape might use your son for a particularly nasty potion," Lavender pointed out, obviously horrified at the thought that Snape could look after ~~her~~ child one day. "He might even chop him to pieces, or lose him deliberately, or scare him to death, or..."

"...feed him, bath him, and read him a good night story," Remus cast in. "It's not the first time he is babysitting, although we haven't seen him for a while now. He's been in France as far as I know. In Paris, wasn't it?"

Hermione painted circles on the table. "Where he went to the Louvre with me," she said and looked straight into the werewolf's eyes.

Remus laughed. He leaned back in his chair and returned Hermione's gaze. "So he took my advice then! How long did it take him to ask you out?"

"About a week," Hermione answered and grinned. "And nearly a month before he first kissed me. You don't mind then? Given... the rumours?"

Harry and Ron, mainly, but the others as well, followed the exchange of words with open mouths.

Remus shook his head. "Of course not. I pushed him hard to give in to your complaint, and eventually, it seems as if he couldn't stand my constant nagging anymore. Brilliant. I'm happy for you two."

"Erm... Hermione," Ron piped up. "We are not talking of the greasy git, are we?"

Hermione pushed a loose strand of hair behind her ear and pierced her friend with a terrifying glare. "His name is Severus," she said, her voice dangerously nice. "And because I know you won't stop asking we've been for dinner, we talked, we took long walks, and yes, there are some quite nasty scars on his body."

"Which I caused, last winter," Remus added. "But have healed well."

"Um..." said Harry.

"Ahm..." said Ginny in unison with her brother, who had paled to an ashen grey.

"Well, but that..." managed Neville and decided to shut up before something wrong came out of his mouth.

"How do you know they have healed well?" Luna asked curiously, nibbling on a crisp. "And I always wondered is he a werewolf as well? Did you bite him? And how is bedding him?"

"Luna!" Neville croaked, and tried to shut her up by putting a coat over her head.

"I've seen every inch of his body naked, I didn't bite him so he is not a werewolf, and it's wonderful," Remus answered calmly.

That was the moment when Ron shot up and smashed his fist to the table. "Stop that!" he shouted, and Hermione as well as Remus looked at him in surprise. "Hermione, do you sleep with Snape?" he demanded, and his face was as red as his hair. "Do you know about his scars because you actually *shag* him?"

"Yes," she said simply.

He just stared at her with narrow eyes, several different questions clearly showing in his face. "Is he nice to you?" he finally snapped. "Does he treat you well? Because if he doesn't..."

"Very nice," Hermione assured him. "In fact, so nice that I decided to give our relationship a real chance. I have just talked to Dumbledore he will order his school supplies from me from now on, so I am financially sorted out and can settle down. With Severus, by the looks of it. He insisted I should stay at his house at Spinner's End. And so I did. Move in with him, that is."

"Right," Ron said, breathing heavily, then turned and accusingly pointed at Remus. "And you you sleep with him as well?"

"Oh, yes," Remus replied mildly, his fingers entwined with his wife's. "Despite the fact that I nearly killed him, we are still friends. And more. I slashed his chest, his back, and his leg. He saved my life and my sanity, and because of his interference, I could move out of my beloved mother-in-law's house. I am teaching at Hogwarts again. And as my wife does not have any problems with me having a lover does anyone else?" Maybe there was a tiny threatening subnote in his voice.

Harry raised his hand as if he were back at school. Hesitantly, he searched for a way to ask his question and finally settled for, "Not a problem, but... You all don't mind? I mean... this... you and Snape and Hermione and Snape as well... It seems... erm... unusual!" He sounded completely dumbstruck at the concept of shared love.

"No, we don't mind," Tonks said. "It might be unusual, but it is perfect for us." Then she flashed a knowing smile at Hermione, who blushed slightly and didn't say anything at all.

A/N: Thank you for staying with me through this story and sorry for not having warned you at the beginning that this would turn into slash. I didn't know the time I began writing it.

Again, many thanks to my wonderful betas. I would be lost without you, my dears.