

Had We Never Loved So Blindly

by MahsaFF

Tonks seeks a deeper connection in her relationship with the elusive Remus than mere sexual intimacy. Her attempts to gain his trust are thwarted by a series of misunderstandings, leading to a disastrous encounter with Sirius.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 3

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Had we never lov'd sae kindly,

Had we never lov'd sae blindly,

Never met...or never parted...

We had ne'er been broken hearted

- Robert Burns

Chapter 1

The subject first came up in bed. And that in itself was odd, when she came to think about it later, because it was a place where they rarely conversed. Chatting was for the library with its musty books on Dark Magic, for supper in the kitchen with Order comrades, or for their solitary rambles through Muggle London; the bedroom was for bodies, not for minds: for sleeping, and also for touching, sucking, stroking, thrusting, biting, fucking, and...when it was close to the full moon, as it was that night...for more fucking.

That night, Remus and Tonks lay in a boneless heap amid sticky, tangled sheets. A faint breeze came from the open window, ruffling the mildewed curtains and playing over their flushed, sweaty skin. When the air turned chill against the damp hair at her neck, Tonks shivered and sat up with a sleepy grumble to locate the duvet. The bed creaked as Remus shifted behind her; he always seemed to be restless under the waxing moon as if the moon plucked at his skin until it became too hot and tight to contain him.

She finally found the bedcovers piled in a heap on the dusty floor and yanked them back up onto the bed, resigned to the idea that they'd be on the ground again before morning. In contrast to his daytime calm, Remus was a fretful, unquiet sleeper, muttering and thrashing his way through the night as if it were a dense thicket that had to be hacked through in order to reach the dawn. By morning, the sheets would be bunched under him, or wound around an ankle, and the duvet would be on the floor collecting dust or...given the nature of this house...something worse.

As Tonks smoothed the sheets, the moon emerged from behind a cloud and filled the room with its radiance. The furniture took on a pearly sheen quite out of keeping with its station, a former servant's bedroom at the top of Grimmauld Place. In the revealing glow, Tonks cast an appreciative eye over her lover's lean body, painted pale and smooth by the moonlight. She delighted in his lanky frame as it stretched from one end of the bed to the other: broad shoulders tapering to a flat hard belly, narrow hips, long legs. Unclothed, he appeared younger and rather more fit than the grey in his deep gold hair suggested.

She ran a hand lightly over his abdomen, tracing the thick ridge of scar tissue below his shoulder, moving down to his ribs, and then to the line of hair that led lower. His lovely cock stirred in its nest of wiry curls as if it felt the silvery touch of the moon. She looked up into his face through her lashes, half expecting him to reach for her yet again, but Remus was staring into space, the ghost of a frown on his lips and a telltale wrinkle between his eyebrows.

She wondered what he was thinking. Something she'd done quite a lot of in the three months since they'd started sleeping together. His look of worry wasn't new, although she'd never before seen it in bed. In the early days of their relationship, she'd often asked what was on his mind, making her curiosity a bit of a joke each time, to let her skittish new boyfriend know that she wasn't pressing him for confidences he wasn't ready to give. And invariably Remus would brush her off, politely, but no less firmly for that.

So, after a time, she'd stopped asking and tried not to feel hurt by the exclusion, although occasionally...in truth, often...she was. She reasoned to herself that Remus was a private man, so private that it bordered on obsession. But she'd been aware of this aspect of Remus for almost as long as she'd known the man, so how could he be blamed? And it wasn't as if it was directed solely at her; he kept everyone at a distance, except possibly his oldest friend, Sirius. Those two communicated by a subtle code that defied Tonks's best attempts to unravel it. In the end, Tonks knew, without knowing quite how, that the biggest mistake she could make with Remus would be to try too hard to get closer to him. Remus could, and would, drift out of her tenuous hold just as effortlessly as he'd drifted in. So she kept as much emotional distance as she was able, hoping he'd gradually open up to her.

Remus had propped himself half-sitting against the pillows on the headboard, arms crossed behind his head. Tonks lay down and nestled against him, pulling the duvet up to her chin against the predawn chill. She breathed in his musky male scent, which she always found to be, paradoxically, both comforting and arousing. Her fingers continued to play along the taut muscles of his stomach...her hands couldn't seem to resist his body, even when the rest of her was sated. Remus didn't respond to her touch, and after a few minutes, she looked up again to see him still deep in thought. She wrapped an arm around his waist and, breaking what was by now an unwritten rule, murmured into his chest, "Remus... Will you Can you tell me what's troubling you? Is it..." she tried to sound nonchalant over the tightness in her throat. "Is it me?"

And in the silence that followed, she imagined her words like pebbles dropped into a still pool, spreading soft ripples into the darkness. Then she felt him draw in a breath and pause, as if reading one of his customary non-responses ("Oh, just wondering how Buckbeak's getting along. I thought I might've heard him." "Now what could be worrying me when I've got a naked witch in my bed?" "Hm? Nothing important. I've forgotten already. See?"). But instead, he draped an arm across her shoulders and pulled her tightly against him so that her head lay pressed to his heart. She listened to its steady beat and felt his chest rise and fall with each breath. For a long time, he didn't speak, and she wondered if this was simply a new way of putting her off. But then he said quietly, "No, never you, Dora. It's Sirius. I'm... I can't stop thinking about him."

And even now, even as she felt inordinately happy at this tiny break in his shell, her first impulse was to make a wisecrack, maybe in mock affront that her bloke was mooning over another man whilst in bed with her. But she kept silent, counting the slow thumps of his heart and hoping he'd say more. Instead, Remus slid down to lie alongside her face to face, their bodies touching along their entire length. Cupping the back of her head with his hand, he drew her to him, and they kissed.

The next few minutes were spent in gently exploring each others lips, tasting, nibbling, sucking, sharing warm breath. Tonks could feel one of Remus's hands behind her, stroking the sensitive skin at the nape of her neck while his other hand rested possessively on her thigh. She closed her eyes and concentrated on the places where their bodies were in contact, feeling her skin come alive everywhere they touched. When she opened them again, Remus's amber eyes were glimmering inches from her own. He ran one long-fingered hand up her thigh to rest lightly on her hip. Toying with her hip bone, he whispered. "Every day, he seems more unstable. More... moody and unpredictable."

Tonks's breathing was slightly unsteady now, and her mind had to scramble to remember who Remus was talking about.*Sirius. Right.* Tonks tried to process what Remus was telling her, to find a way to encourage him, subtly, to keep talking...because wasn't this what she'd been wanting?...but his hands were roaming over her legs and back in slow, deliberate movements that were making it impossible for her to think. What she really wanted was to rub herself against his hard body, to wrap her legs around him, and...

She felt him sigh into her ear. "It would be so very like him to do something stupid." Remus kissed a line along her neck, teeth scraping along the soft skin.

A moan escaped her, and she replied a little breathlessly, "Ah. Um. Stupider than usual, d'you mean?" There. She'd done it. Played it for a bit of a laugh, even though she'd meant not to. She waited for him to huff and smile and say, "Yes, you're right. It's ridiculous, isn't it, love?" and redirect their interactions towards more... physical pursuits. But this time, he didn't walk out through the open door she'd left for him.

His mouth still at her neck, he ran a hot, wet tongue along her jaw. When he sucked hard just below her ear, her body responded with an erotic shiver, and she felt the heat kindle between her legs. Sex with Remus usually fell on either end of a spectrum: sometimes fast and urgent, sometimes a slow teasing build-up. Each of them sparked a different sort of intensity, and it appeared that this time Remus was in no hurry. He took his mouth from her skin long enough to murmur, "I suppose 'dangerous and impulsive' would be better words than 'stupid'. He isn't stupid. Far from it."

Tonks almost laughed that Remus could still deliberate over the best choice of words to use to describe his troubled friend while she was having trouble thinking of anything but him sliding into her, thrusting deep, filling her. She felt the delicious, throbbing ache at her core grow at the thought.

Remus pulled his face away from her slightly, chewing his lower lip in that maddening way he had that made her want to bite it for him. "Dora, he isn't used to being alone with time on his hands. He wants I know him, you see, I - I know him so well, even after all those years apart. He wants..." Remus stopped, apparently trying to marshal his thoughts. Tonks dipped her head to bite gently at the juncture of his neck and shoulder, relishing the answering rumble from deep in Remus's throat. Finally, he said, "Part of it is that he's jealous of me. Of us. He doesn't want to be, but he is. And that only makes it worse for him. Every day that he spends shut up in this house, he's forced to see me getting everything that he wants."

Tonks opened her mouth in surprise, but before she could speak, Remus was kissing down her neck, his hot mouth making his way to her shoulders and then to her breasts. She tangled one hand into his hair when he reached her erect nipples and lapped at them, first one and then the other. The pleasure from his tongue on her quickly became almost too intense, too overwhelming. She was growing lightheaded with desire, but she wanted to say something. If there was enough blood left in her brain for it to supply the words.

With an effort, Tonks wriggled away from Remus's mouth, and he lifted his face to her. She managed to say, "What are you Are you suggesting that Sirius wants to get into my knickers, and he's going to do something drastic because you're getting into them instead?"

"No. Yes. No, I mean. Not exactly." The wrinkle between his eyebrows cleared, and Remus's lips twitched for a moment before becoming more serious. He drew her in for another gentle kiss, gazing down at her face as he traced a warm thumb along her lips. Her tongue darted out to taste the faint tang of salt in its wake. As she licked the tip of his thumb, Remus let out a low growl that seemed to flow through her entire body, settling in a pool of wet heat between her legs.

Remus lifted his thumb to his own mouth and sucked it thoughtfully. Tonks stared, panting slightly at the sight. It was almost embarrassing, really, how he did this to her every time. Taking his thumb from his mouth, he brought it down between her breasts and drew a damp line down her chest, and then lower between her ribs. He pushed her firmly onto her back and, under the duvet, his hand moved lower, down her belly. At her navel, his thumb stopped to trace a circle around the soft skin there, creating an answering tingle in her nerves that felt almost magical.

"There's something you need to understand about him, Dora." And Tonks came close to whining in frustration. There was something she needed, all right, but it wasn't to understand Sirius. Tonks fought down an urge to grab Remus and suck his tongue into her mouth to shut him up. *Talking is what you wanted*, she reminded herself. She just hadn't anticipated that he'd ever become so confiding right in the middle of foreplay, for God's sake.

Oblivious of her frustrated state, and continuing to trace a pattern on her belly with his thumb, Remus went on, "He doesn't look it now, but he's always been a - a ladies' man, I suppose you'd call him. Back then, in the first war, he invariably had a woman. Or two. The rest of us Well. Sometimes we got lucky. Sometimes not. More often not." He let out a silent puff of amusement. "But Sirius was... It was simply part of who he was. If you could have seen him then, you'd know what I'm trying to say. Picture it: Cast off scion of a rich old family. Founding member of the Order of the Phoenix. Dashing into danger at a moment's notice and coming home with a few new curse scars and another war story to tell. And always, always a beautiful, willing woman warming his bed, eager to spread her legs for him."

At Remus's last words, Tonks felt his erection pulse against her thigh. She smiled into his chest. "Hm. Is that what he's jealous of, then? The way I spread my legs to welcome my hero home from battle?" She lowered her voice to a sexy purr and asked again, "Is that what I do for you?"

She looked up into his face. Remus's eyes had darkened to reflect the desire that his body had already revealed. Now, in one unhurried movement, he pulled off the duvet to reveal her nude body. She shivered as he pressed her back into the mattress, his eyes raking over her exposed flesh. Moving his mouth to hers, he captured her lips in a searing kiss. His tongue slid against hers and then pushed deeper into her mouth, claiming her, intensifying their connection until her body felt as if it were full of liquid fire.

Remus broke their kiss but kept his face against hers, their lips barely touching. "Yes. Yes, you do that for me," he said in a husky whisper, "among other things."

God, but she loved the night before a full moon. She moved her hand between them, running feather light fingers along his rigid length. At her touch, she saw hunger burning in the golden depths of his eyes, and her body answered with a sudden ache for him that was almost unbearable.

She said, with effort, "Um... Remus, listen. Sirius was in Azkaban for years. You say how difficult it is for him to be alone now, but... He was alone in prison, yeah? He had years to learn to deal with it. And did deal with it, by all accounts, remarkably well. And..." She gasped as Remus brought a hand to her breast to tease her taut nipple. She arched into his hand and then swallowed a groan and went on breathily, "Sirius is with us, Remus. With all of us. He isn't alone anymore. We won't let him do anything stupid."

"Mm," he replied, if it was meant to be a reply at all, rather than a reflection of how he felt about his hand roaming over her breasts. Remus's mouth renewed its exploration of her body, sucking and biting at her neck, her shoulders, her ears, her jaw. He stopped now and then to blow cool air against the reddened skin he left in his wake.

She couldn't believe how easily he could turn her on. Her fingers tightened on his cock, and he began to rock his hips, moving hard and ready through her soft fingers. He let out a low groan that sent shivers down her spine. God, she wanted him. He lowered his head to her breasts, replacing his hands with his mouth, and began again to lick and nibble her erect nipples. When he turned his cheek to rub its roughness against those sensitive nubs, she sucked in her breath at the exquisite sensation of pleasure mixed with pain.

Remus's eyes glinted at her reaction. Reaching for her wrists, he pulled them sharply up over her head, pinning her arms there without effort in one strong hand.

This aggressive lovemaking had been a revelation to her; something she wouldn't have predicted before their relationship began. She had never thought of herself as particularly submissive or that she would be turned on by anything remotely rough or painful, but domination seemed to come naturally to Remus. His need to be in complete control was the driving force in their sexual acts, especially this close to the full moon. And no man had ever made her feel this way before.

As ever, Remus led her along step by step, from the first brush of their lips to the final push over the edge. He took his pleasure from her at whatever pace he chose, and Tonks marvelled again at how fresh and exciting it was for her to relinquish control and give herself up to him. Moving his mouth from her breasts, he nipped and licked his way up to her lips, capturing them in another hard kiss...this time fucking her mouth with his tongue as his hips moved in tandem. She could feel his cock sliding warm and thick against her hip, and instinctively she tried to twist so she could wrap her legs around him.

But of course Remus wasn't allowing that kind of initiative on her part, not at this time of the month. With one hand, he continued to hold her arms immobile while the other reached down between her legs, pushing her thighs apart. She was already swollen and sensitive from their earlier lovemaking, and as his fingers began to stroke and tease her, she moaned. "Merlin, Remus. Please..." But Remus kept to his tormenting pace, caressing, circling, dipping in tiny thrusts.

Just when Tonks thought she might fly apart from the sensations Remus was causing in her, he leaned close to her ear and told her, "Open your legs for me, love."

She was almost delirious with arousal and sensation, gasping and uttering incoherent little mews. She spread her legs wide, exposing her sex to him, her body arching under his fingers in desperate supplication.

Remus was panting himself, now, his cock pressing itself into her hip like a hot brand. Suddenly, he pushed two, and then three, stiff fingers into her wet slit. Pumping them slowly, he passed his thumb very lightly over her clit. She cried out, bucking so hard her arms yanked against the hand that pinned them, and he tightened his grip on her.

"Is this what you want?" he asked hoarsely.

"Ohgodohyesremus," she breathed, almost sobbing.

His fingers sped up their thrusting and then, agonisingly, slowed down, occasionally brushing her engorged nub. He kept up this tantalising cycle for what seemed like an endless age until she was a quivering mass of need and want. Tonks began to lose herself; she felt as if she were dissolving, as if only his fingers inside her anchored her to the world and kept her from disappearing entirely. All she could do was arch, and feel, and be. She wondered if she might die from the intensity of this plateau he kept her on.

"Do you want to come, Dora?" Remus asked in a ragged whisper.

Nothing was left of her but tingling nerves and shameless desperation, and she whimpered and moaned in answer, finally managing to draw in enough breath to whisper, "Please."

But he wasn't done drawing out his pleasure. He breathed into her ear, "Is there anything you wouldn't do for me, Dora?"

Again, she worked to draw breath and answered, "No, Remus. A-Anything. *Ohpleaseohplease*."

Remus's need for her was evident as he rubbed the slippery tip of his erection over her hip. In his growing excitement, his hand squeezed her wrists. The delicate bones pressed together, causing sharp needles of pain that seemed to travel straight down to her core. She bucked against his fingers, and his thumb ground down roughly over her swollen clit. Her brain felt as if it were exploding behind her eyes, and she cried out, calling his name as her back arched off the bed again and again, dizzying spasms of ecstasy wracking her body.

As she lay quivering, spent, and gasping, Remus pulled his fingers from her and brought them to his lips, closing his eyes briefly as he savoured her taste. Then, he pushed her pliant body onto her stomach and jerked up her hips with a rough urgency so that she was on hands and knees.

Growling deep in his throat, he covered her with his own body, and Tonks felt his heat against her back and his breath on her neck. Remus bit down against the nape of her neck, not hard enough to break the skin, but hard enough to be an emphatic signal of his dominance. Lowering her head and raising her arse, she submitted to him eagerly, relishing both the pain and indescribable delight that were coming. As the moonbeams fell on their crouching bodies, he rammed his thick length into her from behind, showing an aggression that was never seen outside the bedroom.

At this time of the month, Remus was almost insatiable, and he always took her roughly from the back, like an animal, grunting harshly with each massive thrust. As with so many other things, it wasn't something they discussed, but after three months, she was familiar with his cyclical behaviour.

Remus slammed into her again and again, his heavy balls swinging against her sex, as instinct drove him. The headboard was crashing into the wall with each thrust,

making the peculiar swallowed thump of a good Silencing Charm. As his pace increased, it seemed to her as if Remus were driving his own pleasure far into her body. She cried out at the intensity of this deep penetration.

Truthfully, it hurt enough that she saw stars each time he pounded against her cervix. Merlin, he was big, and so hard. How could it not hurt? But the pain was overlaid with a primal satisfaction she'd never known with any other lover. The pain seemed to take her to another level of feeling, until she was floating above herself in a state of fulfilment and indescribable euphoria. To submit completely to him as he took her this way was intoxicating, so she fisted the sheets and bit into the pillow to muffle her cries.

He fucked her relentlessly until he was at the edge of his endurance, his body slicked with sweat, while she floated in a space where nothing existed except his cock and her cunt. Finally, his thrusts became erratic and bordering on brutal as he pulled her hips back into him with a bruising grip. She stifled a scream as he slammed in as far as his considerable length would allow, and at last she felt him pulsing, his hot seed filling her to overflowing, as he cried out in completion. His spent body crumpled onto hers, pressing her down into the mattress, and she felt his release running down her thigh.

After a moment, he rolled silently to her side, and they both drifted towards sleep as the moon set in the deep blue sky of dawn.

All thought of Sirius, of their earlier conversation, and indeed of anything, had emptied from her mind. But the last thing Tonks heard before sleep claimed her was Remus's hoarse whisper.

"Someone like Sirius wasn't meant to be shut up. He needs to feel like a man. He needs to be a man."

*Author's note: The first chapter of my first story ever, so constructive criticism is very welcome. Thanks **tomelusin** for her Brit-picking, quick beta, and the encouragement to post.*

Coming up next: Tonks's patience is tried, and Sirius is (momentarily) mystified.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 3

Tonks's patience is tried, and Sirius is (momentarily) mystified.

Chapter 2

Tonks managed a few hours of sleep before the mysterious workings of her internal clock woke her. She scrunched down under the covers to block out the racket of birdsong coming through the window and yawned mightily, rubbing her eyes with the heels of her hands. Snaking one arm out from under the bedclothes, she groped for the watch on the bedside table and brought it back into her dim cave. She squinted at the time and swore softly under her breath.

Emerging reluctantly from the covers, Tonks blinked in the morning brightness. By day, the bedroom lost what little charm it had possessed by moonlight. A small, boxy room, its walls were a sickly shade of grey-green, spotted here and there by patches of mildew that even Molly's strongest cleaning charms had been unable to dispel completely.

Considering that he'd lived here for almost a year, Remus hadn't imprinted much of his personality on the place: Aside from a bed and table, it held only an old wardrobe and a squashy armchair that looked as if it had been liberated from one of the better appointed bedrooms downstairs.

She'd never seen his room before he'd led her up those endless flights of stairs...at least, they'd felt endless at the time...on their first breathless night together. The next morning, she'd asked why on earth he'd chosen such a poky, out-of-the-way place when he had the run of the entire house. He'd shrugged amiably and asked if she had the correct time, as his watch seemed to have stopped. That was the first question he'd ducked. A milestone of a sort, she thought ruefully, although she hadn't noticed it at the time.

She slipped quietly out of bed, feeling sticky, sore, dishevelled, and distinctly in a hurry. Twenty minutes left her just enough time to dress, have a cup of tea, and Apparate to work. She wasted the first minute looking fondly down at Remus, sprawled quite peacefully at the moment. As always, he was uncovered, save for most of a sheet that had somehow twisted itself tightly around his left thigh. He never slept under covers that she'd seen, and she'd first come to his bed in January, shortly after the big Azkaban breakout.

Was it a werewolf thing, or simply a Remus thing that he was never cold?

Well, she'd just have to tack that question onto her growing mental list as Remus had a seemingly bottomless well of personal information that he didn't care to divulge. Not that she would have had the courage to ask, anyway. And that, in a nutshell, was how the boundaries of their relationship had been marked out. The rules were defined in its silences: in questions evaded, in subjects changed, in conversations deftly redirected.

With a sigh, Tonks got up and tiptoed across the room to find her clothes, discarded in haphazard fashion across the floor. She smiled as she remembered their arrival in the bedroom last night. She'd spent most of supper time making surreptitious eyes at Remus across the table as Molly, Arthur, and Bill had chatted about Charlie's latest letter from Romania.

For his part, Remus had met her glances with the same friendly but indefinably remote expression he used with everyone else; he was nothing if not self-controlled, even on the night before a full moon. Over his plate of spaghetti Bolognese, he'd asked Molly politely about the dragon colony's latest acquisition, exchanged observations on Romanian politics with Arthur, and even teased Bill about Fleur's extended visit to Paris to see her family. Sirius, luckily, had been off skulking somewhere, which made for a far more pleasant evening for everyone.

Congenial as the company had been, she knew Remus had been impatient to leave. He'd made their excuses early, murmuring something about a report from Dumbledore's contact in Helsinki that he wanted Tonks to see. Not that this fooled anyone at all; their involvement was an open secret.

Tonks hadn't understood at first why Remus continued this little fiction. Anyone as observant as he was could surely see the indulgent smiles such a remark prompted. But over time, as she grew to understand him better, Tonks realised that this was Remus's characteristically indirect way of asking his colleagues to respect his privacy in the matter. Thus, no one alluded to their affair, even casually, at least when they were present. Except Sirius, of course. He was always the exception to every rule, and Tonks suspected he prided himself on that, if nothing else.

So last night they'd climbed sedately upstairs to Remus's room, bodies not touching except where his hot fingertips had rested lightly behind her elbow. Somehow this slow buildup, the cool glances over supper, the trivial small talk, the unhurried leave-taking, the chaste walk to the bedroom, had ignited something in her nerves that never failed to grow into a desire bordering on desperation. For both of them, she suspected; Tonks had barely pulled the bedroom door shut before Remus was tugging off her clothes. She'd just had time to cast a somewhat breathless Silencing Charm before he had her pinned against the wall, her face pressed to the musty green wallpaper, as he had pushed into her with an urgency that was at once flattering and slightly intimidating.

"I don't have all day, dearie," complained a tarnished mirror, breaking into her thoughts.

Tonks glared at the mirror, mounted on the wall beside the rickety wardrobe. She hissed a soft "Shh," glancing nervously behind her to see if Remus had awoken. After their dalliances near the full moon, she liked to survey her body privately. Bruises and minor contusions were easy enough for her to fix, as advanced healing charms were a standard part of Auror training. She wanted to rid herself of any marks in case Remus woke up; the few times he'd noticed bruises, he'd become noticeably upset, although...typically for him...he'd demonstrated it by spending the rest of the day answering her in monosyllables and avoiding her eye. Not an easy man to reassure.

Grabbing her wand from the scarlet robe puddled at her feet, she started with the bruises on her hips. Each side sported five finger-shaped marks, livid in the morning light. As she flicked her wand over each one, it stung for a moment and then flickered to invisibility. Next, she examined her wrists, removing bruises that stood out like purple bracelets where Remus had squeezed too hard. Finally, she turned her attention to the love bites. They were harder to eliminate, but she could generally make them fade, if not completely disappear. She took care of one at the base of her throat and another just under her left ear. She suspected there was a third at the back of her neck, but she left it alone as it would easily be hidden by longer hair.

Satisfied, she cast a strong cleaning spell over her body and then changed her hair from pink to the bright purple she often wore for work, letting it grow long enough to touch her shoulders. As she reached for her underthings, she heard Remus moving on the bed. She looked over her shoulder and gave him a sympathetic grin. He sat up and stretched. His tawny, silver-shot hair was standing up on one side, and he looked far more exhausted than she felt. Dark circles were sketched under his red-rimmed eyes, but he returned her smile and said in a croaky voice, "Not late, I hope?"

"Nah, loads of time yet. I was just going down for a cup of tea. Make one for you, if you like. How d'you take it?"

Something subtle changed in Remus's face as he said lightly, "Oh, any old way is fine. However you want to make it."

Sudden moisture prickled in Tonks's eyes, and she turned away from him, telling herself sternly that she was being an emotional idiot. Blinking back the definitely-not-tears, she reached down for her knickers and began to pull them on, saying in a bright voice, "Well, I must say you're easy to please, aren't you?" Still not looking at Remus, she cast around for her bra, finally locating it behind the armchair.

When she did look up, Remus was gazing at her with an indefinable expression. He said tentatively, "Slow down a bit with that, will you, love?" His eyes crinkled. "You know I like watching."

That was an understatement, straight from the master of understatements. Remus was forever asking her to dress and undress for him, and she generally enjoyed it as she'd always been something of an exhibitionist outside the bedroom. She liked showing off for people, changing her hair or her nose or wearing unusual clothes. But it was Remus who'd encouraged her to develop a talent for striptease. Hitching up her smile, she tried not to think about why Remus invariably moved things in a sexual direction whenever he dodged a personal question, even such a trivial one. She'd only asked how he liked his ruddy tea, for pity's sake. Dead sexy, he may be. But there was no denying the man had some strange issues.

She finished dressing more seductively, running sensuous hands over her stomach and breasts as she pulled on her bra, wand holster, and shirt, swaying her hips as she stepped into her jeans, running her wand suggestively between her legs before slipping it into its holster. It was hard to look provocative putting on heavy boots, but she gave it a shot. Judging from the rapt way Remus's eyes followed her hands, she'd been fairly successful. When she finished, she picked up her Auror robes, draped them over her arm, and walked over to the bedside. She looked down at the erect cock jutting up against his stomach and raised an eyebrow. He gave her that lopsided smile she loved, the one that had the power to make her forget her own name.

"You see what you do to me, Tonks?" Remus said huskily. "But I know you don't have time, and I'm completely knackered in any case."

She reached down and drew a finger lightly along his jawline, whispering into his ear, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak, hm? I could take care of that for you with minimal effort on your part. Wouldn't take long either, I reckon."

He reached up and held her hand against his cheek. "Uh uh," he chuckled. "You know you need to go. Besides, I can take care of myself." Seeing her dubious look, he added teasingly, "I do know how, you know."

Laughing in spite of herself, she gave him a quick kiss, saying, "I'm sure. Well, I'm off, then. I'll pop back up in a few minutes with your tea. And I'll be try to be back for lunch if I can manage it... supper for certain."

As she clomped across the landing to the toilet in her regulation boots, she heard his voice calling faintly after her not to bother with him, that he'd be fine, that he was going to sleep most of the day, anyway.

Tonks clattered down the stairs and pushed her way through the basement door into the kitchen. A quick glance at her watch told her that she had ten minutes unless she wanted to face Scrimgeour's wrath at the weekly staff meeting. If she was in luck, Molly would still be puttering around the kitchen at this hour. Molly, bless her, could always be counted on to take pity and brew Tonks a quick cup of tea while remaining ostentatiously incurious about which bed she'd slept in.

Pushing open the door, however, Tonks encountered not Molly, but an unconscious Sirius slumped over the table.

"Bugger!" she muttered between her teeth. Her first panicked thought was to hustle him out of the kitchen before Molly saw him...she'd have kittens...but then she recalled that the Weasleys had intended to return home to the Burrow last night. Tonks sent fervent thanks to Merlin for that small favour.

Even in repose, Sirius looked decidedly uncomfortable. Lank black hair fanned across his pallid face, and one cheek was squashed damply against the scrubbed wooden surface of the table. Tonks leaned close, sniffed, and then wrinkled her nose. Firewhisky. Glancing around, she saw that he seemed to have stashed the bottle somewhere else before passing out. Such were the self-protective impulses of a drunk.

As if sensing her disapproving presence, Sirius muttered angrily in his sleep, and the hand resting on the table curled into a fist.

Tonks backed away and bit her lip with a sudden pang of guilt. Immersed in her own happiness with Remus over the past few months, she'd not spared Sirius much thought except to be irritated by his often-boorish behaviour. The poor bloke did look miserable, even asleep. He seemed to have gone downhill since Christmas. Of course, the entire Order were all feeling the strain since the holidays. The day after she and Remus had taken the kids back to Hogwarts for winter term, ten Death Eaters had escaped from Azkaban to rejoin Voldemort. And Sirius, to his often expressed frustration, had been unable to join the rest of them in trying to track down the escapees.

Still, Tonks didn't think he looked like a man about to do something rash, as Remus feared. He looked much more like a man who was determined to drink himself blind.

Tonks tiptoed over to the counter and filled the kettle as quietly as possible. It wasn't so much that she cared about waking him...the man had chosen to pass out in what was practically a public place, after all...but better a Sirius asleep than a Sirius awake and making sarky comments about her and Remus. That seemed to be Sirius's preferred style of conversation with the two of them these days, and unlike Remus, she had a hard time not rising to his bait.

With a wave of her wand, she got the fire going underneath the kettle and set about locating the tea things. She found milk, sugar, and a tarnished silver tea tray embossed with the Black family crest. Putting them on the worktop, she rooted in the cupboard for cups. As she reached to take them down, her hip knocked the tray to the floor where it landed with an earsplitting clatter.

Sirius jerked his head up from the table with a snort and looked about him wildly. In one swift motion, he jumped to his feet and pulled out his wand, jabbing it purposefully in the air in front of him. Tonks blinked at him for a moment, her mouth hanging open, and then began to clap her hands. "Oh, *well* done, Sirius!" she enthused. "Fantastic! Caught me in the act, you did, sneaking tea off to the Death Eaters."

Tonks picked up the tea tray and tossed it onto the worktop with another reverberating clang. He winced so expressively that Tonks guiltily decided to make a fresh attempt to get off on the right foot. She plonked herself onto one of the kitchen chairs.

"Wotcher, mate!" She offered him a bright, if belated, smile.

Sirius lowered his wand and yawned hugely. Without looking at her, he muttered, "Sorry. Bad dreams."

Sticking his wand in his back pocket, he sunk back into his seat and dragged his fingers through his hair in an unsuccessful attempt to smooth it. As he did so, Tonks looked at the self-inflicted prison tattoos on his knuckles and wondered idly why he'd never removed them now he was free ... or if not actually free, she amended, at least out. The spark of irritation she'd felt with Remus flared up again as she thought, *But he's not in the least like Remus, all closed off. All I have to do is ask Sirius, and he'd tell me anything.*

Pushing her irksome boyfriend from her thoughts, she resolved to be more supportive of Sirius, starting now. Giving him a sympathetic smile, she said, "So... um. How've you been, Sirius? Seems as if we never have a chance to talk properly anymore."

He fiddled with a knot in his hair with pale fingers and appeared to consider. "I feel like utter crap. But so kind of you to ask," he replied bitterly. "And do we never talk, Nymphadora? Can't say I noticed. Must be because you're far too busy banging Moony."

Tonks bristled at the unfairness of this comment, as it was Sirius who was avoiding everyone these days. He always seemed to be either up with Buckbeak or brooding over his dingy family heirlooms.

She started to say, "You know that's absolute b..." when the teakettle shrieked out a sudden whistle. Tonks rose abruptly, thankful that it had interrupted her before she could rise fully to Sirius's taunting. Somehow lack of sleep and her unhappiness with Remus were conspiring to rob her of her usual agreeable disposition. And to think she used to consider herself a morning person.

Fighting a sudden and altogether ridiculous urge to burst into tears, Tonks added tea and boiling water to the teapot. After setting milk, sugar, cups, and teapot on the tray, she carried it carefully to the table and sat down again. She swallowed against the tight feeling in her throat and said with careful calm, "Listen, Sirius. I'm not feeling so very chipper myself this morning, and so I..."

"Awww. Had a little tiff with Remy-poo? Makes a change from all that f..."

"...AND SO, I was wondering if we might call a truce, just for this morning? Please, Sirius?"

"Yeah, sure." Sirius yawned again and looked at her for the first time. He must have seen something in her face because he reached over and squeezed her hand affectionately. "Tonks, listen. I'm... I'm sorry. Shit." He scrubbed at his face with his free hand and said in a muffled voice. "I haven't been sleeping lately, that's all. Feel like Hippogriff dung warmed over most of the time. Don't know why I..."

Tonks shook her head impatiently to stem this flow of apologies. "'S'nothing. Really. Let's forget it."

She and Sirius looked at each other with faint smiles, possibly for the first time in months. Sirius did look very tired and unhappy. She pulled her hand gently from his. "Listen, d'you fancy a cuppa? Or," she found a teasing smile, "were you planning to have firewhisky for breakfast?"

"Ha bloody ha, Tonks. Yes, since you so kindly offer, I would like a cup. Two sugars, no milk."

And there was that stupid lump rising in her throat, again. She waited for it to subside before asking lightly, "Any idea how Remus takes his, at all?"

"Splash of milk."

"Thanks." She added sugar and milk to the cups. As they waited for the tea to brew, Tonks resolutely thought about not thinking about Remus. And was doing it very well, she thought, until her mouth betrayed her by blurting out, "How do you know?"

Sirius looked at her sleepily. "Know what?"

"How Remus likes his tea. Did he ever tell you?"

"Huh?" Sirius shook his head slightly as if he thought he might not have heard her right. "Uh. Lived with the bloke for seven years at school."

"And Sirius..." Once started, she found that self-restraint was no longer possible. Not that it had ever been her strong suit. She leaned forward and spoke urgently as if her question were the most important thing in the world. "Sirius... Why did you never Charm off your prison tattoos?"

He blinked at this apparent non-sequitur. He peered at her carefully. Tonks could feel her face flushing as she waited for his answer. "Are you feeling well, Tonks? Uh... Well, I swore I wouldn't take them off until, well..." He shrugged and held out the backs of his hands to her, and she read L-I-L-Y on one and J-A-M-E-S on the other.

Tonks's insecurities about Remus, which were never far from the surface, came bubbling up. She looked away from Sirius's hands and quickly picked up the teapot and filled three cups. To her mortification, she found her hand trembling. And when she felt her eyes fill with tears, real ones this time, she set down the teapot and rose from her chair.

Sirius frowned and shifted in his seat, scratching his head. "Hey, hey. Tonks. Um. Are you..."

Turning away, Tonks sniffed and wiped her eyes with the back of her sleeve.

"Don't cry. Please. It - it's alright. You know, the tattoos. It's just a thing I..."

Turning back to him, Tonks yanked her Auror robe off the table in sudden anger and pulled it over her shoulders. Fastening the front with jerky movements, she said vehemently, "He's such an *utter* git!"

If it were possible, Sirius would have looked even more puzzled. "Who is?"

Tonks looked down at her fingers, still fastening the robe. She said stiffly, "Well, I must be off. I'm late. Take this tea up to Remus, would you?"

Without waiting for an answer, she pushed open the kitchen door and stalked down the hall to the front entrance of Grimmauld Place.

After the door closed, Sirius looked at the tea tray for a long moment, trying to work out what had just happened. Finally, with a shake of his head, he grabbed the cup Tonks had made for him and drained it. Then he picked up her own still-full cup and took a meditative sip. When he'd finished it, he regarded the last cup, with its splash of milk, as if it might contain the explanation for why Remus was such a git. Well. Sirius had never been much for scrying, but it wasn't the first time he'd heard a woman call Remus a git, or worse. Probably the usual reasons. He lifted his shoulders briefly, picked up the cup, and carried it upstairs.

Thanks to **melusin** for the Brit-pick and quick beta, the admins for accepting my first story (eep!), and to everyone who takes the time to read, rate, or review.

Coming up next: Sirius attempts to make a point. Remus resists. Tonks learns more about men than she ever wanted to know.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of 3

Sirius attempts to make a point. Remus resists. Tonks learns more about men than she ever wanted to know.

Chapter 3

As Sirius walked up the stairs, he could feel his irritation mounting as well. What was he thinking, getting involved in this idiocy? Why not let the screwed-up pillock get his own damned tea? And what did Tonks think Sirius was, anyway, an over-sized house-elf? It was Kreacher who ought to be delivering the fucking beverages around here. He perked up at the thought, entertaining a brief but pleasing vision of the filthy house-elf, roused from one of his hidey-holes and muttering darkly about having to wait on the werewolf and his shape-shifting slut.

Unfortunately, Sirius didn't know where any of Kreacher's hidey-holes were, so rousting wasn't currently an option.

When he finally reached the top floor, he was in a fairly foul mood, made worse by the fact that he had to stand in the dank, rodent-smelling landing outside Remus's room for a minute to catch his breath. Twelve years in Azbakan hadn't done much for his wind.

Sirius rapped smartly on the door and then stepped in without waiting for an answer. Remus was sitting on the side of the bed with his back towards Sirius. His wand was sketching a Cleaning Charm, the unique motion of which would have been instantly familiar to anyone who'd ever attended Flitwick's second year "Health and Hygiene for Wizards" seminar. In this case, that would be Sirius.

Sirius grinned at Remus's bare back and remarked, "So you're reduced to tossing off again, huh? Bad luck. But welcome to the club." He shut the door with a sharp kick and strolled the two steps necessary to arrive at the centre of the room. "I take it Tonks only comes up to do your laundry?"

Remus responded with a two-finger salute offered casually over his shoulder before easing himself off the bed and heading to the wardrobe, a shaky looking structure decorated with a chipped bas-relief of coiling snakes. He reached in and pulled out an old tartan dressing gown, which he wrapped around himself and belted tightly. Pocketing his wand, he slumped...most inhospitably, Sirius thought...into the only armchair in the room, looking as exhausted and ill-tempered as he always did on the day of his transformation.

Sirius eyed him and tutted in mock sympathy, "You look like something that crawled out from under a rock and no mistake, mate. No offence."

Remus's lip curled. "As it happens, you don't look so bloody handsome yourself, Padfoot. Did you want something, or have you only come to annoy?"

"Wanker."

"Mm. Already established, I think." The corner of Remus's mouth twitched, but he didn't smile. "Anything else?"

"Brought you a cup of tea, courtesy of your lady love. She had to run off to her job, or she would have done it herself. You're familiar with the concept? Of a job, I mean? Thing where you contribute to society while earning yourself a bit of dosh?" He handed Remus the cup of lukewarm tea. "And thinks you're a shit, too, in case you care."

Remus took the tea, looking startled. "Who does?"

"Little Miss Nymphadora. Actually, she said 'git'. I'm interpolating."

Remus let out a half-amused, half-irritated snort, repeating what sounded like "interpolating" under his breath, and then said mildly, "Go to hell."

Sirius glanced around theatrically. "And here I was under the impression I'd already arrived. Speaking of which, this room smells like a cheap bordello. Ever consider..."

"You'd know..."

"...washing your sheets? Reeks in here."

For a moment, Remus appeared to be reconsidering the position of Unforgivable Curses in the overall scheme of life. Then he raised his cup to his lips and sipped, his face taking on the expression of bland neutrality he assumed whenever Sirius succeeded in getting under his skin.

From long experience, Sirius could see Remus arriving gradually at the realisation that he was about to be argued with rather than simply annoyed. And this invariably meant that Remus...never the world's chattiest sod...was going to Stop Talking. Not that this ever hampered him in a debate, unfortunately. Far from it. Remus was a long-time master of that quirk of the lip that implied, "You're full of shit", that lift of the eyebrow that suggested, "Bugger off". In disagreements with Remus, one generally had to supply both sides of the dialogue oneself. Never a difficulty for Sirius, except that even in Sirius's head, the slippery bastard always seemed to get in the last word.

Sirius walked to the open window; tall and narrow, it overlooked Grimmauld Place's tiny park, a square of green filled with elderly plane trees. In the spring sunshine, even those trees looked cheerful, their angular new leaves shimmering in the breeze. A memory came out of nowhere: of himself as a boy climbing in that park with his brother, the plane's shaggy bark peeling beneath his fingers, and Reg laughing maniacally as they pelted each other with the spiky fruits. *God, I need to get out of here*

He sniffed the fresh air pointedly and, glancing at the unmade bed, asked, "Anywhere clean to sit? I mean, somewhere where you and Tonks haven't been doing the deed?"

Wordlessly, Remus Conjured a hard straight-backed chair with an irritated flick of his wand.

Sirius hooked the chair with his foot and turned it backwards. Straddling the seat, he sat down facing Remus and rested his arms on the chair back. And waited*Two can play at Stop Talking*, he thought with satisfaction.

For a few minutes, Remus toyed with his teacup, one finger running around the rim in a habitual nervous gesture. Finally: "She really said that?"

Sirius just stared at him.

Remus shifted uncomfortably in his chair and scuffed one bare foot against a mouse-gnawed edge of the carpet. "That is, did she say why?" Remus drank more of his tea and turned towards the window, the very image of a man who emphatically did *not* want to hear what his girlfriend thought of him. Or why.

Sirius frowned in thought. "My guess? Because you like a splash of milk in your tea." He laughed without mirth. "Silly ideas women get sometimes, eh? Must be that time of the month for her, too."

Chewing at his lower lip, Remus stared into the middle distance, looking as if he wished he were anywhere but in this room with Sirius. *You and me both, mate*, Sirius thought.

Sirius rubbed his hands over his unshaven face and muttered, "Fuck it." He pointed a finger at Remus, the one with Lily's Y. "Listen, Moony, you're my best mate. I've loved you like a brother from the time we were eleven..."

Remus refocused on him, and his finger, in mild alarm. "Sirius..."

"Shut it, you sorry arse...and I watched you fuck up with half-a-dozen birds before you were twenty years old. Didn't say a word to you about 'em. Not one word. Even offered to help a few of those girls pick up the pieces, purely out of the kindness of my heart. But now..."

"Sirius..."

"But *now* we're talking about my cousin..."

"Second cousin..."

"First cousin once removed...never argue genealogy with a god-damned Black...and I think you might want to consider...just consider, mind you...pulling your head out of your hole. Just for a change, eh? A girl like that..." He shook his head in frustration, momentarily at a loss for words, which was something of a novelty. "You need to start giving her the kind of attention she deserves," *you useless berk*. Finished, Sirius crossed his arms in front of his chest and leaned back to see if Remus looked properly nettled. Not quite. "Oh, and in case there's any confusion on the point, I'm not talking about your dick."

Remus closed his eyes. Possibly he was counting backwards from fifty in Sanskrit, or reviewing the twelve uses of dragons' blood, or working through another of his tried-and-true calming techniques. The muscles along his jaw were shifting; Sirius suspected he was clenching his teeth.

Finally, Remus took a deep breath, looked Sirius in the eye, and began quietly, "I'm..." He stopped, let out his breath, and sucked in another one. "Sirius, I'm not in the mood right n..."

"Well, *that* must be quite a new sensation, from all I've heard about..."

In an instant Remus was out of the armchair, his face flushed and hands clenching at his side. Deliberately, he opened one fist and reached into his wand pocket. He didn't draw, but his intentions were implicit in every tense particle of his body.

Sirius let the silence hang between them for a long moment. He fought an insane desire to provoke this even further, to see just how far it would go, purely for the excitement of the thing. If only to make *something* happen around here for a change. And had it been anyone else...but this was Moony, a friend. One of the few he had left, if not the only. Sirius blinked a few times, sighed heavily, and muttered again, "Fuck it." And then more loudly, "I don't have time for this shit."

He stood abruptly, banished the chair, and walked to the door. He put his hand on the knob and paused. Without turning around, he said, "Listen to me, Moony. She was down in the kitchen sniffing into her sleeve because you wouldn't tell her *how you take your bleeding tea*" He huffed out a little laugh. "You know, sometimes even I find it hard to believe how abysmally stupid you can be...have you learnt nothing these past fifteen years? She's... she's a sweet kid, Remus, and she's just starting to figure you out. So, do me a favour? Cut her loose or give it a bit more effort. Right?"

Sirius opened the door and stepped out. Closing the door, he leaned his forehead against the cool wall of the hallway. It was a change, at least, getting the last word in with that stubborn git, but... *Merlin help me, I'm tired*. And now a headache was beginning to throb against his temples. Shit. He definitely needed to switch to something besides firewhisky of an evening. But at this moment what he needed most was a change of company. He headed for the stairs to feed Buckbeak.

Tonks arrived at the Ministry with about thirty seconds to spare before the weekly staff meeting. It would have been more, but she'd tripped and broken the heel of her boot on the steps of Grimmauld Place. She'd had to apply a hasty Sticking Charm before limping off to Apparate from a nearby alley.

For the sake of speed, she bypassed the Ministry's lifts, sprinting up the stairs to her cubicle. Pushing impatiently through the parchments, sandwich wrappers *Daily Prophets*, quills, and other debris at her desk, Tonks grabbed the status report that she'd finished the day before, and then proceeded at a more dignified fast walk to Scrimgeour's office. She skidded to a halt in front of his door just as his secretary, Lydia, was pulling it shut. Lydia gave her a conspiratorial wink and said, "Just in time, dear. And he's breathing fire today, so you'd best scoot right in."

An hour later, a thoroughly dispirited Tonks trudged out of her boss's office holding her duty sheet. As the Aurors drifted back towards their desks, Williamson fell into step beside her. He said sympathetically, "It isn't so bad, Tonks. Stakeouts can be boring, but we've all had to do them occasionally. Besides, you just might catch him, and we know how important that would be. I mean, do we really want some mad blighter going around inflicting regurgitating urinals on an unsuspecting public? Think of the mayhem!" He snickered.

She elbowed him in the side. "Thanks, Will. Appreciate the support from a seasoned veteran."

"Hey, anytime. And let me know if you need any help beating a confession out of the job when you nail him. You probably hit like a girl." He chuckled. As they approached their desks, Williamson detained her with a hand on her arm. "Listen, Tonks, all joking aside. I was wondering if... Well, what do you say we go to the Leaky for a drink after work?"

Tonks was nonplussed. Williamson was easily fifteen years her senior and far above her in rank. She'd actually had a bit of a crush on him last year when he hadn't noticed her at all, of course. Except for that time she broke his favourite coffee mug. She stammered, "Oh, well... Erm. That's sweet of you to ask, Will, but, um. I'm busy tonight." *And every night*, she thought. Better make that clearer. "I, um, I have a bloke I'm quite serious about is the thing."

Williamson looked surprised. "I didn't know that! Is it someone in the Ministry? How long have you been seeing him? I mean, you didn't bring him to that awards dinner we had a month or two back. I remember, because you looked...you looked well, and you came on your own."

Ah, right. She remembered that night all too well. Remus had categorically refused to accompany her, no matter how much she'd pleaded. Until that night, she'd always assumed that the reason they never went out was that Remus had no money, and he didn't want to take any of hers. But this would have been free for both of them. Drinks, dinner, dancing. A night on the town. A chance to show him off to her friends. Sirius had even offered to lend him dress robes. But he wouldn't hear of it, wouldn't discuss it at all, in fact. She'd been ready to strangle him, and not for the first time.

Finally, she said, "Yeah, um, it just didn't work out that night. You know how it is."

Williamson nodded. "Sure. Well, uh, good luck on the stakeout, then."

"Thanks, Will. See you around."

Tonks headed down to reception where she was due to meet her assigned partner for the stakeout. Her duty sheet indicated it would be someone from Magical Law Enforcement, not another Auror. When she got to the lobby, she was pleased to see Ann Ollivander waiting for her. She and Ann had shared law enforcement classes when they were both cadets: Tonks in the Auror program and Ann in MLE. They'd become close friends for a while and still occasionally worked out together in the MLE weight room, but Tonks had far less time for her friends since joining the Order of the Phoenix.

Ann was a tall, sinewy woman with short dark hair and a quick smile. Her rangy body always seemed to be full of nervous energy, which she channelled into a dedication to the martial arts. They'd both taken a course in judo as part of their cadet physical training, and Tonks had been struck both by Ann's strength and her lightning reflexes.

Ann had further impressed her by correctly guessing the core material of Tonks's wand. When Tonks had marvelled at this, Ann had shrugged modestly. "You can often recognise unicorn hair by the silvery coloured edge in your shields...remember last week when Moody had us casting Shield Charms in Magical Defence? I noticed it then. I worked summers as a teenager in my great uncle's shop. Ollivander's, you know. Sort of a family tradition, so I couldn't easily refuse, but I have absolutely no interest in wand-making. The idea of being stuck in a dusty shop like that all my life still gives me nightmares."

She and Ann both wore identical disgruntled expressions as they trudged over to the phone box that would elevate them into Muggle London. On the way up to the surface, they struggled in its confines to remove their robes. Tonks's scarlet one and Ann's bottle green would definitely not blend in with the Muggles they'd be mixing with. Tonks had transfigured both of their robes into shopping bags and was tucking her wand back into her holster when the box stopped at street level.

Ann studied her map. "Let me see... If we take that street over there," Ann pointed her chin to the left, "and then head south, crossing the next three streets, we should see the public urinal we're supposed to watch."

They walked along the crowded pavement, teeming with Muggles of all description: sweating business men in their strange suits and skinny neckties, harried young mothers pushing prams, beautifully dressed ladies with shiny handbags, shuffling old men wearing too many sweaters and muttering to themselves. Tonks loved being out in Muggle London. She never tired of it: everything at once so similar and yet so different from her own world.

Turning around to admire one youth, who was decked out entirely in black from hair to toes except for one striking lock of ice-blue hair, Tonks dropped behind Ann. As she hurried back to her, Tonks asked, "What are we supposed to do when we get there? D'you know? This is my first stakeout. Aurors don't usually do 'em; it's more in your department's line. I mean to say, we can't simply waltz into a urinal and eyeball everyone suspiciously."

Ann laughed and shrugged. "Dunno, really. I think we'll need to figure that part out when we get there. MLE didn't exactly volunteer on this one either, you know. It was that fellow in... hm... was it Muggle relations? Wesley I think his name is. He apparently looked at all the reports we have for Muggle-baiting and figured it out: for the past three Fridays in a row, someone has Charmed one of these particular urinals. Although this Wesley chap called it cursing them." She rolled her eyes. "That's why you Aurors are involved. Daaark Magic." She laughed. "So, this Friday, we stake the place out and hope to catch the loony."

They turned the corner and continued south. Ann said thoughtfully, "Wesley, though... I wonder about him. Frankly, I don't know why he cares so much, you know? It's a silly practical joke. No one's been hurt, only got a bit wet and smelly, that's all. Do you suppose he believes Dumbledore about You-Know-Who and thinks the Dark Lord has returned in order to curse Muggle loos?" Ann laughed. "If it happened in the magical community, no one would even consider sending in the law. But I suppose Muggles have to be protected from this sort of thing. I only wish it wasn't the two of us who have to..."

She broke off, glancing at Tonks. "Are you limping?"

Tonks grimaced. "I fell on my way to work this morning. Grazed my shin." She looked down at her heavy-soled boots. "And now I think my heel's coming unstuck again, too. I'll do something about it when we have a minute."

When they arrived at the urinal, it quickly became obvious that they would have to position themselves inside it or at least somewhere where they would be able to look inside. Otherwise, they'd be unable to catch their perpetrator in the act.

Tonks told Ann, "Don't know about you, but I don't fancy Disillusioning and spending the day pressed up against a dirty wall in there."

After some thought, they decided to base themselves on top of the small structure. With Ann supplying the necessary stealth and Tonks supplying the shield charms, silvery edged and all, they were soon ensconced on the corrugated metal roof and, it was to be hoped, invisible to passers-by. Ann enchanted the roof to one-way transparency so that they could peek down on their suspects. As they finally settled onto Conjured cushions and looked down through their surveillance "window," they congratulated each other on a job well begun.

Four hours later, however, they weren't feeling quite so cheery about their situation. Ann was sharing her lunch with Tonks, who hadn't thought to bring anything and wouldn't have had time if she had. As they both munched on carrots, Ann remarked, "Get your boot off, then, and let's have a look."

Tonks had all but forgotten the morning's mishap as she yanked off her boot and handed it to Ann. While Ann tapped her wand along the heel, Tonks pushed up the leg of her jeans and examined her shin. It sported a large purplish bruise and felt tender to the touch, but it didn't look too serious.

Ann peered over her shoulder and remarked casually, "Oooh, doesn't that look ugly," before turning her attention back to the boot. Finally, she looked up and told Tonks, "I reaffixed the heel onto the sole as it was coming loose again. But you really ought to go back to where you bought this." She glanced at the sole. "Gepetto's, was it? 'Cos they'll have special repair charms that'll be more permanent than anything I can do. And speaking of repairs, you've done quite a nice job as well." She touched Tonks's shin lightly; there was no longer a trace of a bruise.

"Yeah, well, I get a lot of practice. You know how I'm falling over my own feet half the time." Tonks took back her boot and began putting it on.

Ann sniffed. "And you wouldn't be, if you'd just come back and train with me." Ann, devotee that she was, had been trying off and on for over a year to convince Tonks to take up judo again, claiming it would improve her coordination, and hence, eliminate her clumsiness.

"I don't have the time, Ann. I'm so busy now. What with the Azkaban breakout, I'm putting in overtime at work, and..."

"Right, right. There's always an excuse, but still...tell you what, at least let's get back to working out together, alright? We both need to do it, and it's probably the only way we'll make time. I miss how we used to hang out together."

Tonks wrapped her arm around Ann's waist, suddenly feeling sad that she'd not made time for her over the past months. "Me too, Ann. Alright, then, how about Wednesday after work? I should be able to manage it, if..."

"Tonks," Ann interrupted, in a strangely tight voice. "Have a shufti at this."

Tonks hastily dropped her arm and knelt down on hands and knees to look into the urinal below. "What do you see?" she asked Ann excitedly. "Which one is it?"

With a trembling hand, Ann pointed to the centre urinal below them. "That one. Isn't he... Isn't that Kingsley Shacklebolt, from your office?"

Tonks immediately leaned back and closed her eyes, clapping her hands over them as Ann's suppressed laughter finally broke out. Through her chuckles, Ann said, "Oh, if you could have seen your face, Tonks. Still, I suppose I should look," she went on virtuously. "There was some thought that the mad urinal charmer might be a Ministry employee, given that this location is midway between the Ministry and the Leaky." There was a pause, and then she went on cheerfully, "Oh, my! My goodness gracious, Tonks. Look! He's..."

"Stop, stop, stop. Not listening. Not listening!" Tonks hummed a few bars of a Weird Sisters song to drown out her friend's voice and then pleaded, "Will you please shut up, Ann! Kings and I are *friends*. I'm friends with his *wife*, and I'm having coffee with them tonight. Just tell me when it's over."

"Alright, he's leaving now, you lily-liver. You can peek again. If you've got the stomach for it, that is."

When Tonks took her hands from her face, Ann was watching the scene below her with distaste. "You know, I don't think I can take seeing this many willies in one day. It's enough to put you off men entirely. Take a look at that bloke down there, the one with the green cap? He's splashing all over the porcelain, and he acts as if he doesn't even notice. No wonder it stinks in there. Men are disgusting pigs sometimes, don't you think?"

Tonks giggled down at Green Cap as she reached for another carrot. "Mm. Absolutely."

Ann looked sidelong at Tonks and added, "Of course, *your* fellow wouldn't come under that heading, I'm sure."

Tonks waggled her carrot stick at Ann good-humouredly. "And who told you I had a fellow, Miss Nosey Parker?"

Ann smirked and reached out to touch the faded love bite under her ear. "Elementary, my dear Tonks. Or as you Aurors would say, 'Constant vigilance!'"

They both giggled again as Tonks blushed and rubbed her fingers over the mark. "Yeah, well. He may not be a pig, but he can be extremely... provoking at times."

"Mm. Sounds interesting. Do I get to meet this extremely provoking gentleman someday?"

"Uh. Probably not, Ann."

"Oh." Ann looked disappointed. "You splitting up?"

"No. Or...I don't think so, that is. He's been..." Tonks shook her head in frustration and chomped more carrot.

"What? Don't just leave me hanging, here! He's been what? Shagging Scrimgeour? Forgetting to buy you chocolate? Charming regurgitating urinals? What?"

"Oh, I don't know how to describe it, Ann. He's lovely, really. In almost every way. But he's incredibly secretive."

"Secretive as in... seeing someone else on the side?"

Tonks shook her head.

"Well, what then? I'm dying to know about your mystery man, Tonks. Spill it."

"It's... There are some things...lots of things...he simply won't talk about, and it's driving me batty."

"Mm, that sounds lovely. A man with secrets and inner turmoil, eh? Does he pace the misty moors with a heavy tread and all?"

Tonks rolled her eyes. "This, Ann, is why we don't have these sorts of heart-to-heart conversations more often."

"And here I thought it was because up until now your love-life has always been perfect." They snickered over that for a bit, as Ann had been privy to some rather unfortunate romantic incidents from Tonks's past. Ann went on, "Oh, but you know what men are. They're not sensible creatures like us, ready to share each innermost secret with their twelve very best friends. A lot of them aren't comfortable talking about the important things."

"But that's just it, Ann. It isn't only the important things. It's the unimportant things as well." She laughed to herself as she stared down at a portly gent relieving himself at the leftmost urinal. "Today, for instance, he wouldn't tell me how he liked his tea." When Ann snorted with laughter, she went on defensively, "I'm overreacting, I know. I was buzzing like a hornet this morning, but I've calmed down since. Thought I might bring him some supper as a peace offering. Sometimes, I think I'm being an idiot when he's so wonderful in every other way, but I hate that he doesn't seem to trust me at all."

Ann looked at Tonks shrewdly. "You're in love, aren't you?" Tonks was flushing pink as Ann went on. "I don't believe it. In fact, I'm floored. Whoever would've thought it of tough Auror Tonks? Completely head over heels, and don't deny it," she raised her voice as Tonks attempted to speak. "Don't bother trying to deny it, it's written all over your face."

Tonks rubbed at her burning cheeks and didn't attempt to deny it.

Ann waited for Tonks to say something and finally prompted, "So, your love interest. He's wonderful how? I mean, he drives you up the wall, but he's still wonderful?"

"Well, let's see..." Tonks began counting on her fingers, "Kind, handsome, funny, intelligent, polite, well-read, brave, loyal, really skillful wizard..."

She flushed brighter pink when she got to the last finger and added, "And, um, you know."

"Ah, I see." Ann grinned and waggled her eyebrows. "He's wonderful in that way, is he? Tell."

Tonks bit at her lip and then leaned over to Ann and whispered in her ear. Both of them covered their mouths to smother their mirth. When she had regained some measure of control, Ann punched Tonks repeatedly on the shoulder. "I can't believe you told me that, you shameless hussy."

They both continued to laugh as Ann leaned against Tonks's shoulder. "Well, Tonks, it's not as if we don't all have our burdens to bear. And if I understand you right, yours is a man who's sex on toast but hesitates to reveal his favourite colour. I haven't any advice to offer you, my poor dear. But... Tonks? If you do break it off with him, could you introduce me?"

*Author's note: Thanks to my reviewers for giving me the motivation to keep posting, **tomelusin** for Brit-picking, and to my new beta, **ladyinthecloak**.*

Coming up next: Sirius enjoys an intimate moment. Or two. Remus receives a special treat.