

Getting There is Getting By

by Fenrir

A story about becoming the person you want to be and the getting to the end with someone you care for.

I'm Going to Get There

Chapter 1 of 5

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Disclaimer: These are not my characters, nor my world. There are some HBP spoilers, so be wary.

Getting There Is Getting By

By A. R. Taloff

Chapter I: I'm Going to Get There

Remus pulled books out from the boxes they had been packed in and shelved them carefully. Once before, he had placed the books on these same shelves. After emptying the box, he wiped his hands on his trousers and glanced about the room, nodding. "Well, I'm home, I suppose."

Checking his watch, he pulled out a bit of chocolate and popped it in his mouth. Chewing thoughtfully, he smiled, walking to his desk to review his syllabi for Defense Against the Dark Arts, levels one through seven.

When he had received a letter from Professor McGonagall two months before, he had been surprised to read that she was offering him the D.A.D.A. position again. Tonks had written back a few weeks later with a congratulatory message, and he was happy to hear that she and Kingsley were getting along fine whilst tailing Harry, Hermione, and Ron.

He grinned at a picture of them in a goofy hug, smiling and muttering as they scuffled over some popcorn. It perched on the shelf above his desk, the only photograph to take up residence in his rooms. Blowing a bit of his shaggy hair out of his face with a sigh, he shook his head, thanking Merlin that he and Tonks were figured out.

Tonks had told him she loved him like a brother. When Sirius had died, she needed something more, and Remus had provided it; a loving relationship, cuddling, and yes, sex. After a couple months, though, the feelings had worn out. What healing that had needed to be done was finished, and Tonks had apologized for any pain she might cause.

It had hurt, just a bit, when she'd told him she wasn't happy with the relationship anymore. It was a response anyone would have to being told that they were no longer of immediate interest. At the same time though, Remus had realized it was a blessing. Tonks was too nomadic for his homebody tastes, and he was too steadfast for her capricious attitude. Instead of complementing, they clashed. Now, three months after the fact, Remus felt better about the situation on the whole.

To be quite honest, he got the impression Nymphadora was happier too.

Here he was though, providing a service to the school, without worry that students' parents would become angered or that he'd be discovered. It pleased him greatly that he

would be able to teach again, specifically, to teach Defense Against the Dark Arts. He had known that Severus had taught the students last term, and he frowned.

Now *that* had been shocking. Severus had killed Dumbledore in a move that had laid everything bare; the act alone caused farther reaching ripples than even the Order knew what to do with. Still reeling from the force of Snape's betrayal, the Order had faltered, but was slowly regaining strength.

Now it was partially in Remus's hands to train the students to protect themselves and each other, and no amount of knowledge was too minimal, none too simple. Anything could be used in the fight against the Dark Lord. Quiet knocking came on his chamber door, and he barely had time to register the sound through the haze of thoughts before the door opened. A head of long, thick blonde hair came into view, long before Remus could see the person...a girl, to be precise.

She stumbled over a trunk and gave it a look, as though wondering why it chose to be in her way. As she picked her way through the rest of the empty trunks and boxes, Remus took stock of her.

Something about her seemed very familiar. He must've known her from when he taught here before, though he wasn't entirely sure. She was dressed in a pair of patchwork jeans, a multi-colored knit sweater that was rather form fitting, with a hood, and neon green sneakers; a wand was tucked into her back pocket. After mastering the room gauntlet, she brushed her hands off on her jeans and glanced around with a satisfied sigh. Meeting his eyes with her own silver blue ones, she smiled.

"I see you are here, Professor, and I was wondering if I may ask about adding Defense Against the Dark Arts to my schedule? Professor Flitwick said that I should push myself more and I realized that I had enjoyed you as a Professor when you were here previously, so I thought to add it. Here are my O.W.L. scores." She handed him her grade sheet, eyes watching his reaction.

He opened it, then flickered a look at them and then her wand. "You should never put your wand in your back pocket. I've heard that many a good wizard has lost an errant buttock to such a mistake," he said, utterly serious.

The girl merely shrugged and pulled it from the disagreeable place and set it behind her ear, which made Remus chuckle.

Glancing at her sheet with intent, he found her scores to be exemplary, and he had more than enough room in his class besides, as most of her year mates had done atrociously.

How had she managed such a letter in it?

"I see no reason to withhold you from the class." He turned and set down her grade sheet before opening the ledger to scrawl her name. Luna Lovegood. Why did that name ring bells?

The girl plowed forward. "That brings me to my next query. Where are the books for the class? The librarian would not even talk to me about them," Luna said with a sigh, as though the whole concept of someone being annoyed was too trying to even bother with.

Remus chuckled again. "Madam Pince is very angry with me, actually, as I had very little time to get my book list to the Headmistress and her, so they had to be ordered late. As it is, they are hard to find, but I have a few personal copies. I would rather not irritate her further with a request to find yet another, so you may borrow one of mine." Walking around a box on the floor, he reached over and grabbed a worn, leather bound book from a shelf, and turned to hand her it.

Luna smiled, pleased. "That was very nice of you. I'll take care of it, promise!" With that, she was dashing through the obstacle course again and out the door, leaving Remus shaking his head at her.

Remus watched the classroom as they went through simple exercises. He was attempting to evaluate their skills in order to decide what they needed to be taught this term. Luna Lovegood and Ginny Weasley were paired together and seemed to have finished the trial run. They were now finding quicker, more efficient ways of getting through the tests.

He watched as Luna reached over to the boy next to her and pointed out how to do something right. The boy, Micheal Denman, looked put out and went back to practicing as he did before, completely ignoring what advice she had given. Luna was left with a strange look on her face, something akin to mild apathy and confusion. Shrugging, she turned back to Ginny and they began talking in hushed tones.

Ginny was a conundrum. Last term, she had been seeing Harry, though Lupin had learned that was no longer the case.

Unfortunately, Ginny had taken the break up entirely differently than Remus could have imagined the smiling and bright girl would do. Her hair, still termagant red, was cropped rather short, and she wore dark eyeliner and lipstick. She rarely looked as serious as her make-up implied, but she also seemed very forced, something he'd never seen from her.

At first glance, she and Luna seemed to be quite a contrast, though upon further examination they were more alike than it seemed. Both were excellent students, taking on a full load of classes and managing them well from what the professors said. Both were on the quiet side, and Professors Flitwick and McGonagall both attested to their higher levels of maturity. What concerned Remus, however, was his discovery that both seemed to know more than the rest of the class added together. He found himself wishing that the other students hadn't been so ill trained.

After a quick check of the time, he waved his wand, and the lights flickered, stopping the tests. He began rounds to test each student individually, hoping that it wouldn't take the rest of the period.

Luna and Ginny walked down the hall, mostly in silence. Occasionally something would roll off their tongues, but generally they were noiseless as they traversed the hall from Defense Against the Dark Arts to the Great Hall.

Luna knew that she had a lot on her mind, and took it at face value that Ginny did as well. They seemed to be that way more and more as of late, not talking to each other much in public, but sneaking into each other's dormitories under the cloak of night to talk to each other. Both were seen together nearly constantly, though observers would be hard pressed to say that either looked entirely friendly towards the other.

Luna's dreamy look covered her more serious thoughts up quite well. Though most of her thoughts dwelled on her classes, there were other, darker things she pondered as well.

Glancing at Ginny's heavily made up face, Luna sighed before looking back to the staircase in front of her. It was almost strange, their sudden jump to close friends. Luna admitted that it was probably not only the desire to talk to someone who truly understood what they faced and also knew that other facets of their different and separate lives were tainted by it. Voldemort and his entourage had insinuated themselves deep into the Wizarding world, causing good and pure things to rot away. Specifically, Ginny's relationship with Harry, and Luna's relationship with her father.

Both were marked by the changes that working against the Dark Lord could bring. Ginny and Harry had broken up, from what Luna understood, because Harry didn't want Ginny involved. Luna's father believed that the Dark Lord was a conspiracy that truly was the elitist intellects masquerading underneath disguise to keep the average wizard down.

Luna had gone from dreamer to coherent thinker in an abrupt shift, and couldn't figure out where she really stood. Her father had always been a great thinker in her eyes, creative, believing in things that should be believed in. Now his words merely fueled her anger, and every time he mentioned his own ideas about Voldemort, he antagonized her further. She hadn't told him about the fight. Hadn't said a word, and now she was happy she hadn't. If Luna had, her father would say she had been

brainwashed, as he frequently told her Harry had been. It wasn't that he was so very wrong. It was that, years ago, if she hadn't known Harry or been there, she would've hung on every word as though it was a glistening jewel. That stung more than she could ever truly admit.

How many instances had there been, one could ask, that she had allowed herself to be misled entirely? Were there more? Thoughts of this nature kept her up later than they should have, darkening the doorstep of her mind and playing havoc with her ideals.

She supposed, as she and Ginny sat down, fixing themselves plates with the food laid out on the tables, that was the reason why they got along. Both of their belief structures had been shaken up a bit. Ginny had been as sad on the outside as Luna felt on the inside, and unfortunately, was taking a different route than Luna did to deal with the sudden changes.

Luna had caught her necking with a prefect one night, and two nights before then, had found her in a compromising position with yet another boy. Both times Luna had fled the scene, leaving Ginny to crawl into her bed at late hours and silently cry on Luna's shoulder for no reason that she seemed able to voice.

Luna picked at her food, aware that her rumbling stomach was unimpressed with her disinterested display. Taking a bite calmed it to a degree, and she took another four before she could no longer stand to sit there and eat. She left the table and went back to her common room to study for Divination.

The halls were dark at night, and Luna found them to be soothing to a fault. As long as you stayed out of Mrs. Norris's range of interest, no one caught you. Ginny had taken them for a silent yet companionable walk a few weeks after school resumed, and now, three months into the term, Luna continued to take advantage of the silent walkways.

Curling up in one particular windowsill, she pulled her slippered feet close to her body and snaked her hands into her sleeves. Sighing softly, she stared out into the night and allowed her mind to wander.

Her classes were going well, even Defense Against the Dark Arts, which had worried her. Professor Lupin seemed to never know what to do with Ginny and her. Her anxiousness when he asked her and Ginny why they knew so much wasn't too hard to deal with, but still was unnerving. When she had voiced her qualms to Ginny, the redhead just shrugged and said that Lupin would no sooner ask when the next moon was. *That* comment had puzzled Luna, but she took the statement at face value and tried to push those nerve-racking thoughts out of her mind.

Luna sighed, blowing a lock of hair up for a moment, only to have it fall back over her eyes. Letting one hand back out of her sleeve, she twirled a finger around one of the two long braids she'd plaited her hair into. She was going to stay here for winter break.

The decision hadn't been one made by her, but instead had been made by circumstance. She had visited home during the last school break and found her father gloating about a new expose on Harry Potter as Lord Voldemort, and how the mysterious 'death' of Dumbledore hadn't been truly a death, but merely a ruse.

It had been then, finally, that Luna had lost her quietly honed patience, and told him how stupid he sounded.

Needless to say, her father had found her outburst, along with the following argument they got into, rude and disrespectful. To put an end to it, he had asked her to return to Hogwarts and not come back until she saw clearly the lies that distinguished her life.

Making a low growling noise in her throat at the memory, she shook her head. *Lies, indeed. Truths, more like. If only he would just listen to me... Maybe ...* "Maybe nothing, Luna," she whispered softly.

The sound of a throat clearing in the midst of her mental discussion made her jump and press herself against the very cold windowpane. Then, feeling the jolting freeze against the small of her back, she jerked away from it to the floor, where she slipped and fell unceremoniously onto her bum.

"Oooh...ouch." She got up on her knees and rubbed her posterior gingerly *Damn that hurt...*

A soft chuckle echoed throughout the room and Luna looked up to see a hand reaching to assist her. Gripping it tightly, she pulled herself up to her feet, wincing at the slight pain. Glancing at the person who helped her, she grumbled a quick thank you before taking a second look.

Wide eyed, she stammered, "P-P-Professor Lupin!" Looking around she hazarded an excuse. "I, um, was, uh...sleepwalking." The excuse ended with a mumble, as she was quite sure that sleepwalking would not explain anything other than her own idiocy.

He snickered and shook his head, his white teeth gleaming with a smile. "I'll not tell, though why are you out?"

Luna looked up, gauging his reaction. "Just thinking...really. Having a moment to myself, if you will. I can't sleep often anyway, so I come here to take a minute and sit in silence."

He lifted a brow and moved closer to where she stood. "You didn't seem worried that you would be found."

Biting her lip, she waved a hand in a blasé manner. "Mrs. Norris doesn't come by here, and I'm not doing anything bad, just thinking. There is no strange graffiti in this passageway and I have no inclination to break windows or write strange, innocuous phrases in the frost."

Professor Lupin smiled softly. "Ah."

Blinking, Luna stared at his profile and almost matched his smile, before she realized that she was intruding on his personal time. "I'm sorry, you obviously were out, intent on pacing or thinking or whatnot. I'll leave you this space, it is quite nice, truly..." She smiled at him then, a fleeting, quick moment of upturned lips.

He turned and shook his head. "No, it was my intrusion on your time, please excuse me for it, I didn't mean to kick you away from it."

"It's all right, it's about time to get back for Gin " Luna clamped her mouth shut, annoyed that she had almost let out that she and Ginny snuck into each others' beds. "Ginny said that I should get back before midnight, so at least I can pretend to get some rest."

The Professor arched a brow in a manner that she construed to mean he surely thought she was lying entirely. "You are doing very well in class, by the way, Luna."

Luna suddenly felt very hot under his compliment. It was mildly strange and an utterly foreign feeling indeed. "Thank you, sir. The classwork is challenging to be sure, and I like the subject quite well."

Leaning against the windowsill, he crossed his arms over his chest. "I'd say you would make a good Auror, but I have noticed you are not enrolled in Potions."

She felt herself relax a little. "I don't seem to have the interest to keep at a potion. There is always something else to think about, something different I could be doing at that moment. I am impressed that I passed as well as I did." Luna shrugged, and added, "Besides, there is always a chance I could poison myself or the recipient. I'd rather not have to live with the guilt." Grinning a little, she noticed he shared her smile.

The silence stretched out between them, their smiles fading. Luna felt the tension heighten, suddenly aware that something had changed imperceptibly. Wracking her brain for a topic, lest things change more, she found one and asked about the woman Tonks? that he had been with last term.

That seemed to make him uncomfortable. "She and I are no longer attached. It seems that we were not meant for a lengthy relationship."

"Oh," Luna said, finding that his eyes on her made *her* uncomfortable. "I'm sorry?"

Professor Lupin chuckled then, a warm and rich sound. "There is nothing to apologize for and we're happier now, so asking was not bad form."

He cleared his throat softly and pushed off the wall. "There are a few books that I'd like to lend you for further study in Defense Against the Dark Arts. Your quick learning is quite impressive, and since you like the subject, I wouldn't mind letting you read them for more in depth information," Professor Lupin said, a smile once again upon his face.

Luna looked up, her eyes wide. "Thank you, I think I'd like that. I think I'm going to go for the evening. I hope you sleep well, sir." She turned quickly and swiftly walked away, trying to ignore how his smile made her feel.

A/N: I'd like to thank M for beta-ing, it was definitely a delight. Other thanks include James, who sent me the song that is driving this piece, Getting There is Getting By, by Punchline. Check it out sometime. Hoped you enjoyed.

Tie Me Here in Time

Chapter 2 of 5

Amid wanderings and wonderings, Luna and Remus find themselves drawing ever closer to similar conclusions, and similar feelings.

A/N: Once again, I am wandering about the halls of Rowling. I do not own Harry Potter.

Getting There is Getting By

by A.R. Taloff/Fenrir

Chapter II : Tie Me Here in Time

Remus wandered the halls once more, particularly the passageway that Mrs. Norris did not go down.

It was ridiculous. Completely and utterly ridiculous, but still, he thought Luna Lovegood was someone who needed something, and Remus couldn't let what she said go out of his mind. It was mostly the things that made the nice part of him believe that she needed guidance or companionship or something. It was that something that led him to seek out the passageway again.

But, he highly doubted, it wasn't responsible for that strange feeling in the pit of his stomach when she wasn't there *That* feeling was one he would not bother fannying about with. It had been three weeks since they'd talked that night, and every time he saw her in class or in the halls, that strange feeling happened again. For the life of him, Remus couldn't put a finger on it.

Couldn't or wouldn't? he dared to ask himself.

There was no response to it, and Remus found that satisfying. Denial was a good thing, and denying to look into it was for the best.

He passed the books back and forth between his hands, one on the dark creatures of the English countryside and one on the darkest incantations one could use, the theories behind them and their counter-curses.

Allowing himself to walk over and sit in the windowsill, he stared at the space she had sat. It was truly introspection that brought him to the hall that night he'd found her. Thoughts of Tonks, Defense Against the Dark Arts, and of what his life consisted of, which was teaching and Defense Against the Dark Arts.

It was not wholly thrilling to realize that he'd lost most of his friends, and the one friend he had left was off shagging about with Kingsley Shacklebolt while they swept cross country, following Harry and his entourage. Remus was left with the rest of the pieces of the Order, to clean up and be the replacement he couldn't be. Not that he wanted to be sweeping anywhere, but the thought was still there, that he had the broken Order, classes, and teaching. Minerva didn't talk to him much, and the other professors were working themselves to the core.

Remus pulled out a bit of chocolate and ate it, thinking how he shouldn't want to be friends with Luna Lovegood and how he hoped she would show up.

It was two weeks before the Christmas holidays commenced, and Remus walked up the aisles of the classroom, watching the partners work with miniatures of themselves. Curses and counter-curses flew back and forth. Most had gone through several fights.

When he got to Ginny and Luna, they were lounging and not-talking. 'Not-talking' was what he had begun to refer as their ability, or in their particular case, *inability*, to actually *talk* to one another. He hated to admit it, but he watched them often enough, and they didn't speak a word to the other, just exchanged looks and head tilts that seemed to be communication enough. It was amiable, yes--nothing strained, true--but they didn't talk either. Therefore, it had become 'not-talking' in Remus' mind, the act of companionable and friendly silence without the dragging weight of needing to say anything.

Their models were battered, but they fought on, and Remus approached warily. Luna's model had a badly broken arm and Ginny's had an obvious foot injury. Both had dents and chips. He cleared his throat and they looked up.

"Would you two still be fighting, really? Your models look worse for wear, and they are both badly injured." Remus watched them look at the other and 'not-talk,' then Luna raised an eyebrow, and Ginny's lip twitched.

"I have a strong will. I think I'd be able to continue with that, sir," replied Ginny in a dull voice, not meeting his gaze. She waved her wand and cast a curse at Luna's model, which barely ducked and sent a return curse after righting itself.

"I just have a broken arm. They aren't that painful to deal with, Professor." Luna turned. Her silver-blue eyes burned, challenging him to say otherwise.

Remus felt his interest peak, and his mouth suddenly went very dry. Vaguely, he heard Ginny cast the Cruciatus Curse and watched as Luna turned to the redhead, who was smirking.

Shrugging, Luna said, "Guess you won."

Nodding briskly, Remus about-faced and went to watch the other students and get his mind off how Luna Lovegood could've known about working with a broken arm.

Remus was listening to Madam Pince drone on about some of his books for the next half of the term and was trying not to yawn when a shimmer of silver-gold hair caught his attention. He flickered his eyes over to see Luna glancing about in a mildly surreptitious way and climbing up the stairs to the second floor section.

The second floor was restricted to all but professors, as there were mildly dangerous collectives up there. As it was, there were chains and a large sign that said that students who took the books would be punished. Luna handily tapped her wand and walked on in as the chains parted. Lifting a brow, he smirked. *Bit of a rule bender, isn't she?*

"A-HEM."

Feeling his insides shrivel at the forceful throat clearing, Remus turned his head to smile charmingly at Madam Pince, who had not seen Luna's transgression. "Yes, ma'am. That will be no problem."

Madam Pince glared threateningly. "Is there anything else you have need of, Professor?"

Remus thought for a moment and shook his head innocently. "Thank you for your time. I'm going to nip up to the second floor to take a look at the collectives. Is that all right?"

Rolling her eyes and nodding, Madam Pince walked away, whispering archaic nonsense about youth and similar.

A few moments and some stairs later, Lupin tapped the chains with his wand and whispered the password. Walking through the little gateway, he smiled at the thought of startling Luna again. He heard her whisper something and moved towards the sound, grinning mischievously, while the rest of his mind screamed that this was a very bad idea, thank you very much.

Another even lower whisper answered Luna's, and Remus froze. *There was someone else up here?* Sneaking through the aisles of shelves and then sliding down another one, he drew closer to the hushed tones. Every step he took increased the roiling in the pit of his stomach. Why was he so upset?

Because she's in a restricted section of the library with someone else, his inner voice answered.

You, yourself, snuck up here with a girl.

That was entirely different.

Was it?

Things are different now... changed.

How? Boys and girls still sneak about to make out and, yes, even have se-

That is quite enough of that.

Lupin shook his head to clear the thoughts that had began to unfold. He had no proof Luna had snuck off to do just that. Warily, he took a quick peep around the corner.

It was Luna and a boy.

He gritted his teeth against the inflammatory words that wanted to bubble out at the thought of her with another boy, *kissing* him, having...he stopped himself before the thoughts started again.

Thankfully, the two were facing in different directions. Mildly disgusted at the instant feeling of relief, he took another, longer look. Luna was with Michael Denman! Resisting a growl, Remus kept staring, trying to figure out what was going on.

Luna leaned in and pointed to the book and began talking in hushed tones, gesticulating a little with her hands. Her wand was holding up her hair in a bun, and Lupin had to resist grinning at it.

What book was it? The answer slapped him in the face quite rudely: *Defense Against the Dark Arts*. Their homework. He grimaced as he remembered that Michael had been struggling badly for the first month. Then, almost miraculously, his work had improved, and he had managed decent grades. Remus moved out of view. A satisfied grin worked its way over his face. She wasn't snogging another boy. She was helping him with difficult work. That was all.

Lupin walked back to his study. He dove into the homework papers he'd received that morning and tried to rationalize, and then forget, what he'd just done and felt.

Remus decided to leave the books in his study, certain that she would show up then. That was how the world tended to work, and since Lupin had not seen her every time he had brought the books, he was certain that this time, if he didn't bring them, he'd see her. And if he didn't, he'd just go back to his room and drink Firewhisky until he could forget the facts that were staring at him disgustedly.

As he neared the hall, he heard the sounds of someone gagging, and after a moment's consideration, began running. Rounding the corner, he saw Luna, clad in pajamas, standing next to a hunched figure who was vomiting against the wall. He breathed for a moment, fighting off a grin of satisfaction and taking a closer look at the scene. Luna's hair was braided again, and she was cooing, rubbing the person's back. Or, at least she was, until she turned with her wand at the ready. Lupin's hands shot up, and he shook his head.

The baffled look on her face was enough to make him feel even guiltier. He shouldn't be here. It was a stupid, ridiculous thing.

The figure squatted more and gurgled out a sob.

Merlin, it's Ginny.

Luna, he saw, must've realized that he knew and waved her hands, looking at him with pleading eyes and a mortified look on her face. Remus merely gaped in complete body shock. He could smell the alcohol and vomit and felt with utter assurance that Ginny had snuck out to drink and party. For the life of him, he could not understand why she had done it.

Glancing up at Luna again, he stared at her, still immobilized. Luna whispered something to Ginny and walked over to him, putting her hands firmly on his chest and bodily pushing him back.

Remus felt himself warm all over, suddenly very aware that his clothes were much too heavy and he was overly hot underneath the layers. Unable to initially resist, she had gotten him partially around the corner before he stood against her. "Wait a minute," he whispered. "What is going on, Luna?"

Luna glanced back at Ginny and looked as his lapel. "She's really sick with the flu..."

Lupin rolled his eyes and opened his mouth to harass her, but she beat him to it.

"... Or at least what Poppy will tell everyone is the flu. She's... she's just really sick. Too much to drink, I think." Luna sighed, "I'm trying to get her to the hospital wing. Please, please, please, don't tell the other staff members. I know I'm asking a lot, but you can't. Punish me if you need to punish someone. I don't care. Just don't tell them."

Remus stared at her, very aware of the fact that her hands were still on his chest and her body was mostly pressed against him. Her eyes were filled with that fire again, staring at him intensely, and he felt as though he was going to do something wretched.

Kiss her.

Consciously, he forced himself away from her, taking a step back. Clearing his throat, he spoke, "I'll help you take her there."

Luna visibly relaxed, and Remus tried very hard to remember that he was a teacher. They wandered back to Ginny, and Luna muttered, *Scourgify*," and the vomit and bile disappeared.

Remus looked at Luna, then Ginny, then scooped Ginny up in his arms. The redhead was mildly conscious, but soon her head lolled, and she fell into a stupor. Walking briskly to the hospital wing, he watched Luna move around to the secret door that led to Poppy Pomfrey's room. She talked to the painting, and a few minutes later, one of the hospital doors opened and Poppy, dressed in a flannel nightdress, came out and ushered them in.

Lupin gently set the redhead down, was pushed out of the way and told to leave by Madam Pomfrey, who had begun to talk to Luna in lowered tones. Remus stared at the scene and turned, walking out the door.

Several paces from the passageway, he stopped and turned around again.

You're making a mistake. A big mistake.

It's not a mistake that I'm making. Anyone would be nice enough to wait for a person.

But you aren't waiting for a person.

That's right, I'm being a good mentor and teacher and waiting for Luna.

Mentor and teacher are not what you are being at this moment.

That's enough.

Luna slid out of the doors quietly, and he watched her, his brown eyes pensive. She looked at him with brows furrowed. Walking up to him, she shook her head mildly. "What are you doing here?"

Luna had been told by Poppy that Ginny would be better by morning and gave her a vial of liquid.

"Slip this in her water or milk or juice. I gave her a vial that she could take, but I guess she didn't use it or it ran out." The nurse sighed, "Most likely it is that she didn't use it. Just try to give it to her, Luna. It should make her less inclined to drink, and that would help, I think."

It was frustrating to see Ginny doing this to herself, more frustrating that Luna didn't have the guts to ask her why she did it. It might've been the crying, empty and broken, silent and so alone, that made Luna incapable of interrogating the girl. Whatever it was, Luna remained quiet and comforting.

Sneaking out of the hospital wing, she was confronted with the very realistic problem of Professor Lupin.

He was just waiting, staring at the door, or maybe it was her. She thought about that for a moment, thinking about what he could be wondering at that very moment. He could just be thinking that she tried to seduce him into helping.

God, why hadn't she moved?

Because part of her liked to let herself touch him that closely... and maybe he liked it, too...

Luna veered her mind away from that and walked up to him. "What are you doing here?"

Professor Lupin looked surprised, opened his mouth, then closed it, and then opened it again. "I wanted to give you those books. I haven't had the time to remember, so I went to see if you were at the passageway of no Mrs. Norris. That's where I found you."

She felt like a little butterfly was loose in her stomach, flapping about and making her feel nervous and wonderful all at the same time. Quelling those feelings, Luna nodded. "Where are the books?"

Professor Lupin looked amazingly uncomfortable for a good long moment. "Uh... I, em..." Clearing his throat, he paused and continued, "I forgot them. I thought if I saw you, then we could return to my office and retrieve them."

Luna nodded thoughtfully. "You can dole out whatever punishment you see fit to deign on me then, too."

He paused and then turned, walking towards his office. "I plan to."

Eyes widening, she almost didn't follow him. *What did he mean?* Luna wondered as she trailed behind him.

Well, you are a beautiful girl, Luna. You surely can't believe a man would try to find you merely for 'books,' do you?

He's not like that, I don't think.

He's a man, Luna, not a saint. You are beautiful, young, and you made the first overture anyway.

I beg to differ. I never made any overture!

You pressed against him, and stayed that way, long after you could have moved away.

But I didn't--

You did like it, and you admitted that to yourself. You really wouldn't mind though, would you, if he kissed you right here, or even if he had kissed you back there? You wouldn't mind if...

Stop!

But it wasn't so easy. Luna felt like her body was both nervous and filled with wretched anticipation for whatever Professor Lupin might do to her. It was really wrong, and she knew it, but he had said that he hadn't been with that girl. Maybe he needed some relief.

Though, as he opened the door and let her in first, she became horribly conscious of the fact that they would be alone. Those feelings that she had were happening again and, Merlin, she was utterly worried she'd do something stupid, like flee.

Remus lit some candles and Luna clasped, unclasped, then reclasped her hands, and after a moment's breath, she gave that up in favor of fidgeting. The study looked so different now. It was still clean, but it looked lived in, more homey. Wax was on the floor and quills and inkpots were on the table, with neat piles of homework parchments. Books were stacked every which where, and Luna looked down at her bare feet and then at her pajamas.

Good LORD! she thought. *I'm wearing my exercise hippo bottoms! I'm a fine piece of work. Exercising hippos. Good grief!*

What, afraid he will kiss you?

In my exercise hippo jammies? I highly doubt I cut the sexy style in them. They are hippos!

Afraid he'll kiss you in them, and it will be your first kiss memory?

Hippos are exercising on my pajamas.

Afraid he won't kiss you?

They're bench pressing, swimming, golfing, and playing badminton.

He may find that endearing.

This is totally ridiculous.

Afraid he'll notice you wear nothing underneath them?

Luna felt her face burn a little with that. Glancing up, she saw that he had left the room entirely. Sighing, she tied a knot in the tie cord holding the bottoms up, and her eyes fell on a chessboard.

Moving closer to investigate, she realized that it was a regular chessboard. Ordinary pieces, to be moved by hand. Luna liked that very much, indeed. Studying the board, she realized that the two players had gotten into a rut. After short examination, Luna moved a pawn, taking a rook and sacrificing her bishop for a shot at the queen. At least, that is what she hoped the other person would do.

Looking over the books on his shelves, Luna found a few she wouldn't mind perusing. Hearing a door rattle, she rushed back to the middle of the room, her heart racing like a thoroughbred at a derby.

Professor Lupin walked into the room and looked at her, smiling slightly. Luna bit her lip, trying not to giggle out of sheer anxiousness. Crossing the room, he handed the two books over. Hands brushing slightly, Luna almost lost all her nerve and dropped them, causing them both to fumble and their hands to touch even more. Taking a shaky breath, she pulled them to her chest and smiled weakly at him, praying to every deity she'd ever read about, and some that she'd just made up like the lint fairy, that he wouldn't notice her pajamas.

"I think you will enjoy them very much, Luna," he said, still smiling softly at her.

Luna smiled back and looked at the titles, the gears in her mind turning with delight. She had a particular interest in magical creatures; she had done so well in the class that she had decided to continue it. "Thank you. I think I will too." Meeting his eyes, her smile relaxed, even with her hippos exercising.

Their eyes met and held, and Luna felt herself melt a little. It was really not that hard to share this with him. In fact, that strange feeling was building up again, and she was finding that she liked it a lot more than just a little. His eyes were a deep, reddish chocolate brown, and they were so deep and so sweet that...

I could kiss him.

Yes, you could.

Right now.

That is true.

I wouldn't mind.

Not at all.

Luna blinked and stepped back. "I'll bring them back when I am finished, sir. Thank you again."

She turned and left the room, trying not to appear as though she was fleeing, but knowing that to a casual observer, she was doing just that.

Three nights later, Luna was in Ginny's room, staring at the ceiling and trying not to reach over for the *Compendium of Dark and Mystical Creatures of the British Countryside*. It had been glued to her face for nearly two days straight, and she was starting the other one tomorrow, just because she could never, ever just read one book at a time.

Ginny turned over, and Luna glanced up to see that Ginny was awake. Rolling a bit to face the redhead, she smiled. "Hi."

Ginny's lips twitched, as close as she ever seemed to get to a smile. "I was thinking of staying here for winter break."

Luna nodded in return, replying, "Me too."

Eyes lighting up a bit, Ginny moved closer. "We could go Christmas shopping together, have cappuccino and biscotti in the mornings, take sleigh rides, and go ice skating."

Luna smiled. "Well, all except for ice skating. I'm not too fond of that. I'll watch you, though."

Ginny nodded. "I'm glad. And then we don't have to sneak into each other's rooms. We can just wander around." The redhead moved closer, leaning her head on Luna's shoulder. "It will be so nice," she whispered, falling asleep again.

Snow glittered in the twinkling lights of Hogsmeade as Ginny and Luna wandered around, occasionally popping in and out of shops to nab a gift item for someone or just peruse. Luna snuggled deeper in her thigh-length black tweed coat and multicolored scarf and hood.

She saw Ginny swerve into a shop, Simple Seductions, and Luna giggled at the display through the window: kaleidoscopes, bouncing balls, mobiles, self-lighting candles, the gamut of simple pleasures. Stepping inside as well, she began to look around. Coming upon the kaleidoscopes, she paused and brought a few to her eye. Luna smiled at the colors and once again thought of Professor Lupin. The last class before break they'd been informed that upon return, they would start half-term testing. Luna had bit her lip when he'd said, 'Against me.'

The whole class understood what that meant. He would pull no stops, attack them, and try to beat them. It was a frightening concept to a class that had barely finished Patronuses. Luna and Ginny had produced superior Patronuses and taken to helping others.

"Would you like that, Miss?" the shopkeeper asked, her dark black eyes twinkling. "It is often nice to have something to take off the strain, and kaleidoscopes do that for me. I can't tell you the number of times that I've been stressed by bills or customers, gone over here to put things away, and just paused to look through them. They make the world better, I think."

Luna looked at the shopkeeper, her lips parted a ways; it was certainly a tactic for purchasing, she thought. But... at the same time, though, hadn't she just smiled, even when she was thinking about her father and how much she missed him? Even when she was worried about going up against Professor Lupin?

"I'll take this one," she said quietly, and then carefully chose a slightly larger one, with a bronze shell. "This one, too."

Walking outside, Luna found Ginny flirting with two Hufflepuffs and sighed. The purchases were in a paper bag, and she smiled, thinking about what *he'd* think of getting a gift like this.

A/N: Thanks to James, who introduced me to the song of the story. It is by the funky Punchline, and I do recommend it, as the lyrics definitely seem to fit life's idiosyncrasies. Thanks to the lovely and delightful NSS, who took up the difficult job of deciphering my crazy scribbles and making them tolerable for humankind. For this I am immeasurably grateful.

Are Your Breathing Patterns on Time?

Chapter 3 of 5

Time moves ever onward as a chess game draws out the parts of Remus and Luna that they didn't expect to show.

A/N: I do not really own Harry Potter and all things therein. I like to, however, write fun stories about them for my own delight and others.

Getting There is Getting By

By A.R. Taloff/Fenrir

Chapter III: Are Your Breathing Patterns on Time?

It was evening, and a deeper, silver silence had descended upon Hogwarts during the winter break. Remus was just settling down for the night; it was the first time since the beginning of term he was able to do so without having to clean the red ink from his fingers. He was haphazardly brushing his teeth, shirtless, and staring at the small pile of gifts he'd acquired. Tonks, Minerva, Rolanda: the whole lot of them had decided that this year they would all splurge and buy everyone a gift.

But there was one lonely gift that wasn't from a colleague. It was a medium-sized box, wrapped with colorful paper and a festive bow with ribbons. The card said:

'For the times you need to smile, may this be what colors your day.'

He couldn't figure out who had given it to him. It had shown up only a day before, and while he was never prone to present shaking, he found his patience waning towards this one. He put his thoughts on hold to scrub a bit with the brush, and hearing a knock at the door, grunted around the toothbrush and foam.

The door swung open, and Luna Lovegood burst in, smiling.

Lupin stared in utter shock as her face froze and then melted in mortification. He hadn't seen her about the grounds or in Hogsmeade. He hadn't even realized she was still here.

Glancing down, Remus realized what he was--or wasn't, as the case happened to be--wearing and turned, searching for something that resembled clothing. Pulling his toothbrush out, he began babbling various apologies and excuses, each increasingly worse than the previous one.

Finally deciding he had no other choice, he ran towards her, nicked a coat off the rack, and retreated amidst more apologies. He begged for her to stay, saying that he'd be right back, more dressed than he was at present.

Once inside the bedroom, he sagged against the wall. Of all people he had expected, she was the last person he thought would walk through his door. Nymphadora even ranked higher.

What was she doing here, of all places? Didn't she have a home and family?

Those were questions he'd ask her later, he decided while looking for a shirt.

It wasn't that he was terribly upset about her being there or even seeing him minimally clothed. He'd had fantasies about her where he had worn even less clothes, but then again, she'd been just as unclothed as he. Lupin shook his head at the thought.

I shouldn't be admitting to things like that.

Why? She's old enough. Weren't you there the day she turned 17? Ginny made her wear that sparkly hat that blinked and shot small fireworks.

Regardless, she is a student, and I am her educator.

That's been in your fantasies too, you know...

Shaking his head again to refocus his thoughts, Remus began to button his shirt. He didn't think a tie was necessary, nor a complete buttoning to the very top. Making sure his face and mouth were clean of foam and his pants were zipped, he opened the door quietly to see Luna bending over the chessboard.

It was strange, because some time back a move had been made for the white, and he could not remember doing it himself. It hadn't even seemed like a play he'd ever consider making; it was too reckless. Yet there it had been, so he'd played against it, snatching the white bishop.

Nevertheless, there she was, examining the board properly with a half-smile on her face. Luna, he'd discovered, half-smiled more often than not; she usually did it, though, when she was aware of something no one else knew or when she had a secret. It was an expression that made his blood pump faster than normal.

Stepping closer, his eyes trained on her, he tried to figure out what she was thinking. Remus stopped when she froze momentarily and turned her head.

He grinned lopsidedly at her. "It is a manual movement board. I got it from Arthur Weasley a while back. The pieces are so very attractive, and this way, they never break."

Luna straightened, the half-smile still in place, and he took another couple of steps towards her, leaving only three feet between them at best. "Do you play, Luna?" he asked quietly.

Luna nodded. "In passing, really. Nothing too impressive." She licked her lips, and he felt his own go very dry.

Remus stared into her unnerving silver-blue eyes. Her eyes were very different. It was almost as though he was looking at a very bright autumn sky through gossamer fabric so that the color became diluted.

Taking another step, he continued, "I can't think of what to do next. Strangely, the last time I even had an idea, I don't even remember moving for the white pieces."

Luna's breathing had gone very shallow, and he found that to his liking. She was wearing another hooded sweater of a really deep green, and he could see her pulse bouncing around at the base of her throat. Lupin watched her nod.

Swallowing, he asked, while taking yet another step, "What would you do?"

Luna took a baby step towards him, and he felt each little hair on his body raise up. "I would take the queen," she replied, her voice a little husky.

Tilting his head towards the board a little, he felt a half-smile of his own work its way across his face. "Then why don't you?"

Holding his gaze steady, she moved her rook to take his queen. "Check."

You could kiss her. Right now, at this moment. Just bend a little closer and press your lips against hers.

No, I couldn't.

Yes you could. She's waiting. Look at her. She's waiting for you to make the first move.

I shouldn't.

Why not? She is right there. Her lips are soft. Look, they are already parted, just waiting for you to kiss them.

Her lips *had* parted a little, but Remus moved back a step and inhaled raggedly, glancing at the chessboard. Looking up, he caught Luna looking away with an odd look on her face.

Trying not to think too long on it, he smiled at her softly. "Would you like to play?"

Luna flickered a glance about the room, blinking as though she'd just woken up. "I... I should really be going. It's just that I wanted to--"

Remus had quelled her babbling by placing a hand on her arm, and now she was staring at it.

"Please. I've not had a decent opponent in a long time, and you seem to be rather good at chess." He smiled, hoping that he had charmed her just a bit.

Luna looked up at him, eyes seemingly trying to puzzle him out. Shrugging, she slid into the plush chair, folded her jean-clad and very long legs up, and tucked her sock-covered feet underneath her bum. "This game probably won't go on that much longer," she said.

Remus smiled and looked at the board, then moved his king over one square. In response, she moved her other rook three squares down. "Checkmate."

His smile kept getting wider as he realized she had thrown him into checkmate. "That was quite brilliant. Another game?"

Luna met his eyes, and he felt himself sink into the silvery blue. "Are you sure?"

Nodding at her, he replied, "Unless you have something more pressing you'd like to do. Perhaps you'd like to discuss the books I lent you?"

She grinned and glanced over to his worktable where the compendium and encyclopedia were stacked.

"You finished them already?" he said, incredulous.

Fixing him with her half-smile, Luna nodded. "I'm a fast reader, and those are two topics I like. Couple that with the fact that I've had nothing else to do, and I finished them very quickly." She shrugged and began moving her pieces back to the front of the board. "I'll be white; you can be black."

Remus felt his chest swell at her and tried to keep a goofy grin off of his face. "That is fine."

It was three games, two hours, two pitchers of pumpkin juice, one plate of baked goods from the kitchens, two wins for Luna, and one win for Remus later, and Lupin felt as though he could just take flight. Luna's moves were well thought out and followed no general pattern, though Remus felt as though she took it very seriously. After her second win, he asked if she indeed played more than just 'in passing.' She had replied with a softer voice that her mother, and she had played quite often.

Suddenly, something flickered in Lupin's mind. "Luna, why aren't you at home?"

She froze, mid-move, then put the piece down and leaned back to sip her water. Long, silver-gold bangs framed her heart shaped face as she paused in thought. Somewhere in the middle of their first game, she had taken her wand out from the little pocket in the front of her sweater and used it to pin her long hair in a bun. The result had probably been the reason Lupin had lost terribly; it was a sexy and utterly unplanned move--something he appreciated. Tonks had often spent far too long with her ever-changing appearance. Luna seemed to care very little about her own, choosing not to give it more than a passing consideration.

Glancing at her furrowed brow, he lifted an eyebrow in response.

In reply she shook her head. "No one would be there. Business trip, you see."

Remus nodded. In other words, don't ask. She wasn't going to tell him anyway. He moved his bishop and took a pawn.

Luna stared at the board, and then swiftly took revenge by snatching his bishop with her rook.

Lifting a corner of his mouth as she half-smiled, he began looking for a way to beat her. "Luna, you said you broke your arm before, remember? When did that happen?"

Luna looked up, catching his eyes with her own and blinking. Her lips parted slightly as she looked over his shoulder at nothing and thought. He took the moment to stare at her unobserved. Her lips were a very nice color, a dusky rose, and when they were damp, they were enormously delectable, he decided, which made a simple act like her licking them or chewing them almost unbearable.

Meeting his eyes again, she answered with a quiet and steady voice, "I was nine. Just a mistake, like accidents tend to be: a mistake with unfortunate consequences. I had to go find my father and tell him what happened. It wasn't altogether difficult to deal with. The pain of my arm, I mean," she ended, looking at the board and then at him. "Are you going to move, or are we going to just sit here, staring at each other?"

Remus grinned and searched the board again. He settled on moving a pawn. Smiling at her, he saw she was dreaming again. Every once in a while, Luna seemed to leave entirely and retreat to her secret place where things seemed far more interesting.

She reached up and moved a bishop. "Check."

Remus smiled. "Luna, I think I have figured out why you and Ginny seem to be so very good at Defense Against the Dark Arts." Moving his king behind a small blockade of pieces, he looked at her.

Luna, still only partially with him, nodded. "And why is that, sir?"

"It was whispered," he began, "that there was a secret society known as D.A. They stood behind Harry and faced Umbridge."

In response, she took his rook with her knight.

"They practiced things from Defense Against the Dark Arts." He watched her eyes, gauging her reaction. She sighed softly, her nose turning a bit red. "They learned everything from Patronuses to simple countercurses."

Luna looked up and met his eyes. "Yes, they did."

Nodding, Remus smiled. "I always wondered if you had been a part of D.A." Chuckling, he moved a pawn up within range to capture her knight. Running a hand through his hair, he smiled ruefully. "At least you didn't go to the Ministry that night."

She moved a bishop up and grabbed his other rook. "Why do you say that?"

Remus lifted his eyes. There had been something in her voice. Even though she ignored his look, he knew. The air crackled. "Why do you ask?"

Shrugging, she yawned and leaned back, exposing a line of creamy skin and her belly button. Lupin felt his mouth water a moment, and then brought his focus back to what was unfolding between them.

"I just mean, why is it so good that I wasn't there?" Sinking into the chair, Luna opened her eyes and looked at his bookcase.

That tone: it was her tone that was getting to him, and he ventured a little. "Why don't you tell me, Luna?"

"It's your turn, Professor Lupin."

He jumbled a knight forward, leaning in. "You were there."

She maneuvered a rook slightly. "Check."

Moving his knight back, he hissed out a breath. "That night, weren't you?"

The rook snatched his last bishop. "Check."

He took the rook and glared at her. "Why didn't you just tell me?"

A pawn closed in on his queen. "Check."

"Did you see Sirius?" Lupin felt his chest cave in, leaving him unable to breathe. "Did you see him die?"

His breathing was ragged, remembering the sound when Sirius had moved beyond the veil. It had been a moment of shocked silence and the lack of everything, like the whole world had simply ceased. His best friend, the last one he had left, dying. Harry had carried on, and Remus had to behave like the adult and ignore his own feelings.

"I'm sorry," came Luna's soft whisper. "So sorry."

He scoffed. "What would you know?"

She didn't respond.

After a time he looked up to see her opening the door. Turning back to him, she cast a dark look at him, and he felt himself grow cold.

"I suppose I would not know at all how it feels to lose someone you love dearly. I shall leave you be, *Professor*."

I suppose I would not know at all how it feels to lose someone you love dearly...

The words kept Remus's thoughts spinning as he quickly moved to the Hallway of No Mrs. Norris.

Turning the corner, he sighed. She wasn't there.

He felt like a grade A cad after she'd left, and he'd properly cooled down. To make matters worse, he began digging through files of her. Every professor had a file on their respective students to know what to expect and what home they came from. It made it easier to zero in on the Muggle-raised kids to help them more if they so needed it.

In Luna's file he found information on her father and mother, particularly the part where her mother had died in an experiment gone awry when Luna had been nine. What right did he have to scoff at her? What right did he have to mourn when she had her mother taken at such an age?

Moving to the window, he braced a hand on the framework. Glancing down at the frost-covered panes, he traced a finger around the paisley patterns. Eventually, the ice melted, and his brow furrowed in thought.

Taking his time, he began to thaw a message for her.

I'm sorry, Luna

Luna jolted awake. Glancing around, she realized Ginny was not there. Curling under the covers, Luna felt both worried and mildly ashamed. She was worried that Ginny was somewhere, dead or alone, as all she'd left was a note saying:

'Gone home for the night. Mom said Ron and Harry and Hermione might be dropping by!'

Luna tended to be very disbelieving of those notes, as she'd received many like it, only to learn that Ginny was just out partying with boys.

She was ashamed, having been jolted awake by her first sexual dream and liking it. Never having a mother to explain the birds and the bees, Luna had learned textbook knowledge of procreation, menstruation, and anatomy of the sexes. She'd also borrowed a few trashy novels from a friend to get the general gist. But she'd never, *ever* had a sexual dream. Not once in her life. And now, having one was proving to be a mortifying, if not pleasant experience. Her eyes fell shut at the memory of the dream, at the memory of what had been happening between she and Professor Lupin.

Professor Lupin.

It still hurt, what he'd said. She didn't know why; a lot of people didn't know, didn't care to know, and said ridiculous things like that to her before. It was fairly commonplace, but she'd never felt so pained before. Now it was different. *Now* she cared.

Sighing, she crawled out of bed and glanced at the clock: 4:30 am. Putting some slippers on her feet, she padded down the staircase to the common room, exited out the portrait hole, and started through the passageway.

After some carefully made turns, she approached the Hallway of No Mrs. Norris. Rubbing her hands up and down her arms, she sighed again and thought about the sleigh ride that she and Ginny had planned on later that morning. She paused to lean against the wall. Hopefully Ginny would show up for it.

The plan was to take a sleigh ride into Hogsmeade, and then have breakfast and shop some more. Luna hoped Ginny still wanted to go. The last time they'd had more fun than Luna had ever had with another female. Being friends with a girl was nice. Just being friends with another person was nice. She could definitely get used to it.

Playing chess with Professor Lupin had been mentally stimulating. More than that, it was nice to talk to someone about books and learning. Ginny, while brilliant, was prone to not talking to other people about things of that nature. Neville had been busy with other pursuits, like Herbology, so Luna left him well enough alone, as he was getting on well with a fellow Ravenclaw. She didn't want to butt in and ruin anything for him. He'd had it rough, and Victoria was a sweet and gentle girl who deserved a sweet and gentle guy like Neville.

Moving to her windowsill, she paused and bent down to look at the frost.*What did that say?*

Straightening, Luna bit her lip, exhaled, and read: *I'm sorry, Luna.'*

Clouds lightly covered the sun, and it looked as though it might snow. Luna waited with the sleigh driver in front of Hogwarts. Glancing at her watch, she smiled at the driver, who had already waited fifteen minutes.

"Five more and I'll go. I'll pay you for your troubles. I am very sorry," she apologized. She was very glad her cheeks were probably already rosy from the chilled air so that he wouldn't see her embarrassed blush.

The driver shrugged and took a sip of something warm from his thermos.

Luna shifted her weight from foot to foot, trying to keep herself a little warmer. Her hooded, fur-lined coat--brushed from chinchillas, as Luna was a firm believer in old fur going to use--was rather nice in winter, and with the hood up, it made a nice little pit of heat. Her jeans, however, weren't altogether helpful between her calf-high boots and mid-thigh coat.

The driver looked up and smiled, then waved. "OI!" he cried. "Took you long 'nuff! She's been waiting for nigh on twenty minutes!"

Luna grinned and turned, pushing her hood down and shouting, "GINNY!"

Professor Lupin smiled back, lifting an eyebrow.

Grin fading, Luna eyed him warily as he approached.

"Hello, Professor Lupin," she said evenly.

His eyes were soft, "Good morning, Luna."

The driver grunted. "Getting on?" he queried.

Luna looked at the driver, then turned back to Professor Lupin. "I have to--" She blinked at the empty space where the Professor had been. Glancing around, she saw him holding out a hand at the entrance to the sleigh.

"Are you coming?" he asked quietly.

Mouth agape, she merely goggled at him.

Smiling gently, he reached out and took hold of her hand, pulling her towards the sleigh.

Partway, she forcefully pulled her hand out of his and mounted the sleigh without his aid. Luna sat as close as humanly possible to the side, and looked away. Lifting a brow, Lupin climbed up as well, sitting next to her and smiling at the driver, who harrumphed and smacked the reins against the horses' rumps.

Luna tried to ignore him as much as she could, but found herself failing miserably. Their legs were touching, side-by-side. And if that were not bad enough, she felt like leaping at him, begging for them to be all right again, and finding out if indeed *he* was the one who'd written the message in the frost.

Plus, he was staring at her, which unnerved her to no end.

"I *am* sorry, Luna. I meant it."

Ducking her head, Luna felt like dying. Why did he do that?

She looked at him for a moment, and then looked away. "It's fine."

"No, it isn't. I didn't--still don't--have the right to say those things to you, or anyone else." He sighed. "The wounds are still too fresh."

Luna nodded. She knew about fresh wounds. "It's understandable."

"Is it?"

She felt his eyes upon her, and Luna turned to meet them. "Yes." Biting her lip a little, she continued, "It happened not long back, and then there was Dumbledore. I imagine that would be very difficult to bear."

Lupin's eyes were so deep and wistful. He looked utterly conflicted, and that confused her a little. But nothing worried her more than the desire to kiss him. He was so close... close enough to just press her lips to his, to taste him, to feel what it was like to give and take from someone.

Shivering, she pulled away and focused on the floor of the moving sleigh.

"Are you cold?" he asked, leaning closer to her.

Luna turned and looked at him, trying to avoid eye contact, for surely he would know how badly she was reacting to him. "A bit, yes," she said quietly, catching his eyes. There was something in his gaze that looked like he wanted to--*no, that is silly.*

The sleigh jerked to the side, and they were thrown apart. Luna took the moment to quickly try to hide her guilt over such feelings. Reigning in any desire she had for him, she took a deep breath and turned in his direction, surprised to find him holding a blanket. He carefully gave her an edge, and when their hands brushed, she felt sparks in her hand. She looked up quickly, his eyes meeting hers, and she swallowed, busying herself by tucking the blanket around her legs.

The only problem was that it drew them even closer together.

"What brings you out today?" she asked, finally able to speak.

He cleared his throat. "I just wanted to clear my head. Walks generally help with that, I find."

Luna nodded. "That's what I do, though you already know that."

Professor Lupin smiled. "What brings you out?"

Sighing, she looked out to the woods. "I was supposed to go on a sleigh ride with Ginny, though it seems she is not here." Luna didn't want to dump her exhaustive life on him; they weren't that well acquainted.

"I take it," he replied thoughtfully, "that this will be a long ride?"

Luna once again was enormously thankful that she was already red cheeked. "Yes--er, well, no. Not exactly... I'm not sure. Ginny set it up, but our goal was to take it to Hogsmeade."

He laughed then, a deep, hearty, rich sound, which made Luna's body react in ways reminiscent of the dream that had awoken her so suddenly the night before.

"It's all right. I don't have anything to do. It's the holidays, so I don't entirely mind actually having company and doing something other than sitting in my room."

At that, Luna felt deeply pleased. He enjoyed being out today, even if it was because he pitied her.

When the sleigh slowed to a halt, Luna was laughing, and she felt high as a kite: high above everything with not a care in the world. It felt wonderful and liberating. Professor Lupin was laughing too, and for once she didn't mind the feelings that were slowly building up inside of her. She would ignore those feelings for these brief moments of utter happiness that they were sharing. Merlin, she wished they'd never stop, but here was Hogsmeade, and the sleigh ride was over.

Lupin helped her down, and she paid the driver double the galleons that the ride had cost. The driver smiled heartily at her and wished her a wonderful Christmas.

Luna turned and looked at Professor Lupin, smiled at him, and tried to think of a way to say good-bye without begging him to stay or revealing how horribly depressed she would feel if he left.

He looked around, inhaled, and then met her eyes. "Would you like to go have breakfast?"

Luna felt her smile widen even more. "I'd really like to. I'm quite hungry," she said, trying very hard not to jump up and down.

Professor Lupin grinned too, and she thought, for just a moment, that he looked relieved.

That is just silly.

He pointed to a place, and they started towards it while Luna tried to ignore the feelings that were threatening to burst from her like confetti from a New Year's popper.

Extra A/N: Once again, I hope this chapter passes the test! I'm thankful to all those people who've reviewed; you guys are sweet and nice to write thorough commentary. This is my first HP fanfic, and while I'm sure it showed, I still appreciate the interest you've shown. Also, thanks to the lovely NSS who kindly took my little fic and translated it into decent wordage for the masses. Thanks also still go to James; your song is driving this little fic along quite nicely.

Stumble Out of Bed, Like Thoughts Into Your Head

Chapter 4 of 5

A ball looms on the horizon as Luna and Remus find a moment to realize that getting there will mean taking a leap.

A/N:I don't, obviously, own HP.

Getting There is Getting By

By A.R.Taloff/Fenrir

Chapter IV: Stumble Out of Bed, Like Thoughts into Your Head

Remus scribbled on someone's parchment, his face screwed up in disappointment. *How had Eileen gotten it so wrong? Maybe I'll mention it to Luna.* Scribbling finished, he leaned back, stretching so that every vertebra popped successively down his spine, and then sunk into the chair.

He sighed at the five papers left: Luna's, Ginny's, Michael's, Markus's, and Penny's. Lupin had learned to put Michael, Ginny, and Luna last because their papers were all very good...Michael's because it had been corrected and fixed by Luna and Ginny's and Luna's because they still were his finest students.

Luna... he thought with a smile, only to immediately choke it back. He was getting worse at hiding his feelings for her outside these rooms, and Remus was sure that it was because he wasn't controlling them well enough behind the doors.

It certainly did not help that Luna and he talked nearly every other night, sometimes more, over chess, tea, books, or while walking in the halls late at night. Her personality was quietly passionate, and it had taken weeks for her to open up to him. *Like a flower scared of the sun...* he thought.

It had taken him just as long to open up to her though. He knew very well that he shouldn't get this close to a student, but as time went by, she became less of a student, more of a friend, and in these last weeks, the simple want for her had turned into something far, far worse.

His denial wouldn't let him come to face with it, and he felt utterly guilty not telling her. She would come to his rooms and just talk some nights, but she would always leave at nearly the same time. Remus never asked why, but he desperately wanted to know. He wanted to know if she was in love with someone, if that's why she seemed so confused sometimes when they awkwardly became closer and Remus wanted to kiss her.

That was the worst. How painful it had become, almost, to stop himself from kissing her. Lupin knew that if they continued, there would come a day where he would pull her close and do just that. Kiss her until he couldn't breathe, until she knew how he felt, though he couldn't say.

There had been so many times that he'd gotten close to doing just that, only to tear himself away or for her to do the same. Part of him thought...no, wished...that it was because she secretly wanted to kiss him too. Thought about how they may laugh at that some day, how he had watched her lips while she talked and she had tried to ignore his eyes because he would know she love...

Stop.

"Stop, stop, stop," he muttered to himself and went back to grading papers.

Remus smiled as he walked back to his office, talking with Penny Thomas, a girl who'd, for some reason or the next, had begun following him after class.

It was two days into February, and he had awakened to find the entire school in a dither about the impromptu school dance for Valentine's Day.

A small letter had also been waiting for him on his desk.

Dear Remus,

The professors have decided to hold an impromptu ball to alleviate the tension and seriousness the school has felt. We thought you would be a perfect coordinator for the event.

Lupin looked up from the note, growling. He *hated* dances. Never interested in most of the girls when he was in school, he had not attended with a date, but instead, he went with Sirius, James, and Peter. Now, in his elder years, dances seemed even less thrilling. He glanced down.

We decided you'd like this position best, as it would allow you to miss chaperoning the event entirely.

Remus grinned.

Two student body members from each house will be assigned to help you with the event; enclosed are their names. They will contact you with the times they meet. Do make sure we know what the theme and foods will be!

Minerva and the staff

He realized he wasn't thinking about what Penny was saying and glanced at her; she was reaching in her bag for something pink and shimmering. *Oh, Gods, no,* he thought to himself, worried that she'd taken a secret fancy to him.

"...I thought this pink and maybe a dark red would do nice, and the other Houses agreed, is that okay?"

He blinked owlishly at her and stared at the bits of fabric, paper, and the small tray of glitter. "Uhh."

Penny tossed her brown hair as a boy walked by and watched for his reaction out of the corner of her eyes.

Remus flickered a glance over to her quarry and watched as the youth stumbled and then continued, his friends picking on him. Lips twitching to a smile, he looked back at

Penny's satisfied look. "Anything else, Penny?"

The brunette shook her head and smiled at him with a polite good-bye.

As she walked away, he found himself glad that he'd never experienced that in school. How would he have ~~ever~~ concentrated? Turning to his study, he found the little box that he hung out there for questions, parchments, and extra credit chock-full and simply took the whole thing off its hook and shoved open the door.

Tossing it onto the nearest chair, he leaned against the casement and shut the door, rubbing his neck with the other hand.

Looking across the study, he saw his favorite gift and wandered over to it, smiling despite his neck aching and the thought of hundreds of parchments to correct. Picking the kaleidoscope up, he sat in a chair and placed it to his eye, slowly turning it.

He didn't know who had given it to him. The note was written in a script he didn't recognize. Perhaps a clerk had written it for the gift giver. In any case, it had been the unmarked package, and when he'd opened it, it had caused him a wave of relief and a smile of unadulterated joy.

Remus had wanted one when he was a child. It was a simple toy, full of imagination and wonder. The idea that someone had purchased one with him in mind made Lupin think better of the world on a whole. Luna even thought it was quite clever. It had crossed his mind that she might be the mystery gift giver, but he had no proof and didn't want to ask for fear she'd realize how he felt.

Pulling it from his face, he sighed in pleasure. Luna had helped students today, along with Ginny and two other kids, Kirsta and David. He liked that approach. That way, he could practice with kids who needed more help, and the students were working together towards the common goal of mastery. Her hair had been braided back by Ginny during the lecture, and the long plait had glittered with the light from the sun reflecting the snow outdoors. She was patient, kind, helpful and courteous.

But beyond that, when something caught her mind, she was passionate and talkative, her eyes lighting up and face glowing...times like those left Remus wanting more. Wanting to drag her against a wall and kiss her, asking if he made her feel even a Knut's worth of that passion.

A knock on the door had him turning, a half smile on his face, thinking it was she.

McGonagall lifted an already arched brow and stared at him as though he belonged in Azkaban. "Remus, have they decided colors yet?"

He stood and tried to remember where he'd tossed the colors while she wandered about his office.

"Ah-ha!" he whispered triumphantly, turning to see her playing with the kaleidoscope.

Minerva pulled it from her eye and slid her glasses back on. "I haven't seen one in years, and though the staff each had a round with it after we made sure it wasn't cursed, I still wanted to try it again."

Lupin grinned at her. "I still don't know who gave it to me."

Taking the fabrics and colors, she nodded and handed it back to him. "Whomever it was, Remus, I'd give them plenty of thanks when you find out."

Staring at Ginny, she shook her head. "I'm not wearing this anywhere, much less the Valentine's Day ball, Gin."

Luna looked at her reflection and sighed. The dress was nice, albeit a little too pink for her tastes. The top part tied around the back of her neck and left half of her back open, and the skirt portion went to her calves. Ginny had put her in heels too, and while a very sedate part of her was ignoring the obvious, it was rather clear that she looked very attractive.

And that bothered her a lot.

"You look good though," was Ginny's response.

Tearing her disturbed eyes away from her reflection, she looked at Ginny with a pitiful face. "I just don't want to be seen like this. I don't even like dances."

"Pleeeeeeease, Luna?" Ginny begged, her bright brown eyes like a sad little puppy's.

Resolve hardened. "It just shows off too much... *of everything!* I feel like everyone is going to stare at me and not stop!"

Ginny shrugged. "You look great, like the Muggle I got the dress idea from. Her name was Marion, Melinda, M... Marilyn?" Pausing to think for a moment, Ginny closed her eyes before reopening them. "Yeah, Marilyn Monroe. She was very voluptuous, and so are you!"

"What's that supposed to mean?" Luna said, her voice squeaking.

"Just that," the redhead began, "you've got boobs and hips. My mom thinks you're getting too skinny, but you're nicely figured. So was Marilyn Monroe. Everyone thought she was so pretty, and I bet they'll all think you are too!"

Fear clutched at Luna's throat. She didn't *want* anyone to find her attractive. Well, she did. There was one individual who she wanted very badly to find her beautiful.

The thought of Remus seeing her like this made her palms sweaty. He might ask her to dance, and then, they might enjoy that and find themselves in the gardens. He might kiss her, or she might kiss him. *Oh Gods*, she thought, her heart beginning to pound. *I wish I could just kiss him instead of stopping myself.*

She looked at Ginny, who was looking at her own dress. It was black, lacey, and filmy...all the things that made boys drool over her. Luna suddenly felt very awkward. "Gin, why don't we just stay in and have popcorn?"

Ginny turned and lifted a brow at Luna, smiling. "Come on, Luna, just come with me. It'll be great. We'll dance, and people will admire how lovely we are. Won't it be nice to just relax?" Realizing that no logic would work, Ginny resorted to the worst. "Pleeeeeeease, Luna, come on! It'll be soooooo much fun. Pleeeeeeease? Pretty pleeeeeeease?" Ginny whined.

Luna felt her insecurities and walls cave, and she sighed heavily, rolling her eyes. "All right! No more of that. I'll go," she replied tiredly, beginning to take the dress off.

Alone this night, Luna curled into the pillow and smiled softly. Remus had beaten her at chess, and they had whirled around the room, leaving her breathless and weak-kneed.

There had been a moment, longer and more breath stealing than before, where they'd almost kissed. She was sure he must've wanted the same thing. His eyes were so dark and penetrating, wanting.

They'd almost kissed, so close. She had pulled away and smiled, handing him a cookie and laughing. He'd echoed it, and Luna had tried to ignore how stupid she'd felt. Her heart felt like exploding every time she saw him, every time he smiled at her and she smiled back.

He had opened up to her, laughed with her, told her stories of his mother and father and of Sirius and James, his friends of old. She told him stories of her mother and father, and of her times with Ginny. They talked endlessly about learning, and he never laughed when Luna brought up Crumple-Horned Snorkacks or Nargles.

They even talked of the darker past...her fight with her father and his small crush on Lily Evans.

That had brought her blood to a deep simmer. The thought of his heart tangled with another girl made her angry and at the same time, utterly miserable. Granted, he'd only felt that way for only a few years, but Luna still felt wretched about it.

Luna wanted him to be tangled up with her. Those first warming feelings had grown now into something nearly all consuming, threatening to make her someone entirely new if she let them. She wanted nothing more than to reach over one night while they played chess, or even while they walked the halls, and take his hand. She wanted to know what he would do. Would he would pull her against him to kiss her, would he smile and accept it, or would he shun her?

The last made her want to cry. It was that bit that rendered her speechless, made her freeze when they'd nearly kissed, made her pull back. Luna didn't want to lose the friendship they had. Didn't want to have it fall apart if he didn't want her that way. Even when it seemed so certain he'd also wanted to kiss her, she couldn't trust herself.

Cuddling closer to the pillow, she sighed and closed her eyes, willing herself to slumber.

Luna wandered the halls, the sounds of the ball growing quieter the farther she went from it. Her heels clicked against the cobbles, and she constantly looked around herself, waiting for an errant drunkard to leap out and try to fondle her breasts.

The night had started fine. She had entered, Ginny towing her, and every male eye had watched them both. Luna had nearly lost it then. She hated that many eyes undressing her.

Ginny, though, loved it. Ate it up like biscuits at tea. Boys had flirted with her, danced with her, offered her fruits and drink, and Luna had gotten fed up.

Walking out forty-seven minutes after she'd arrived, Luna didn't know where to go, and before she knew it, she'd found herself walking to Remus's rooms.

She knocked on the door, a little out of breath from the fast pace she'd taken up the stairs, and looked up as Remus opened the door, shirt half unbuttoned.

"Luna," he said, mildly breathless.

The warm feelings took over again, swirling through her body and making her feel like doing something crazy, like taking hold of the lapels of his shirt and kissing him. He was looking at her like she imagined someone lost in the desert looked at water and felt her pulse pick up.

She knew she looked beautiful. Ginny had done Luna's makeup with a gentle hand and had also curled her wavy hair. Her legs, Ginny had said, were long looking, and her boobs would make men stare, jaws agape like fish.

Remus was staring at her, all of her, and Luna liked it. A lot. When his eyes finally met hers, it wasn't for long, but he cleared his throat and swallowed. Moving to the side, he asked if she wanted to come in.

Walking through the doorway, she brushed against his chest and felt him tense up. Forcing herself to keep moving, she sat on the little loveseat and crossed her legs, painfully aware that he was watching her exactly how the boys in the Great Hall had. Like he was undressing her.

He met her eyes again, and Luna managed a smile.

"What brings you up here?" Remus asked, clearing his throat.

Luna fidgeted with her dress. "I was just... Ginny is so beautiful and popular, and I'm not much for social gatherings. I don't like the attention. And I knew if I went to the dormitories, someone would already be in there, snogging or whatnot, and I didn't want to deal with that just because, well, I shouldn't have to."

She felt silly until she looked up to see him nodding.

"I didn't like dances much either. Sirius had so many girls after him, James had Lily, Peter was too glad handed, and I just didn't like the attention. They were never my cup of tea."

Smiling and relaxing, she looked at him calmly. "I didn't see you there... I thought you might be ill."

Remus laughed at that, and she felt warmed by his husky chuckle.

"No, but had I gone I might've been. As I mentioned, I hate dances...all the noise, the hormones, and the lights. I think that Minerva might've remembered. She asked me to head the coordination of the dance, and by doing so, I wouldn't have to chaperone." He looked to the sofa cushions he was sitting on and picked aimlessly. Glancing up, he continued, "Had I known it would've been that bad, I might've gone down to lighten the mood."

Luna smiled and looked down, catching a glance of the book she had loaned him, asking him if he read it. He snorted.

"He is such a pompous arse about that. Can't he see that Muggles simply discovered a different way of dealing with things? I mean, so they don't know about some of our world, we don't know about parts of theirs!"

Luna took her feet out of her heels and nodded, tucking said feet under her bum. "I know. He acts as though wizards and witches are so higher up, like we know all..."

Luna suddenly woke up, her head coming up from the edge of the loveseat. Remus was breathing heavily across from her on the sofa. "Remus?" she whispered.

He didn't move, just kept breathing.

Luna crawled out of the makeshift bed, quietly moving across the floor and knelt beside him. *He looks so peaceful.* Before she could stop herself, she brushed her lips against his.

Even if he would never know, she would. Pulling back, she smiled, that butterfly drunkenly flapping away inside her. She summoned a blanket, gently covering him.

Summoning a blanket of her own, Luna curled back up on the loveseat and fell asleep watching him, utterly content.

Remus woke up, suddenly needing to use the bathroom, and blinked, trying to figure out where he was. Realization hit when he saw Luna sleeping on the loveseat, directly across from him. One of her long legs peeked out from the blanket, and he tried to not stare at it too long. Her legs were fantastic. Hell, *she* looked fantastic. Seeing her at his door had taken away all ability of speech or coherent thought. Her silver-blue eyes were even more stunning, her hair curled softly, glittering in the candle and torchlight. Her body was wrapped in a sexy pink dress, which showed off those fabulous legs and her cleavage.

What hit his gut more was the knowledge that under all her attractiveness was a quick mind and a desire for learning. She was the whole package, and she didn't mind the fact that he sucked at chess.

He went to the bathroom and re-entered the main room to see her rolling over; that creamy leg turned too, the skirt riding even higher. Wanting to turn away, he found that he couldn't, noting that she wore no hose. Remus walked closer, forcing himself to cover her up.

"Remus."

The voice nearly made him shoot right out of his skin. He quickly looked to see if she was awake, and he blinked when she moaned softly. Kneeling down beside her, he watched her mumble and settle back into deep slumber.

"You're so beautiful," he whispered softly. He leant closer, pressing his lips softly to hers. Even if he'd never yet had the courage to tell her, he would do it before the world came crashing in at least. He would let her know he loved her... somehow. Even if he died.

"Luna Lovegood, Luna Lovegood, wake up!" a little voice was telling her in a hushed, strangled whisper.

Luna jerked awake, searching around, and coming into contact with a pair of bulging green eyes.

She ran a hand down her face. "Wha--?"

The house-elf tugged on her arm. "You must come! You must, Luna Lovegood."

Sitting up, she looked at the elf and stared at Remus. "What is it?"

"Lirul was sent to get you for Madame Pomfrey!"

Eyes suddenly came into focus. "What?"

Lirul pulled on her arm until she stood. "Ginny Weasley is in the infirm--" Lirul didn't even finish, and Luna began running to the infirmary, leaving a befuddled and nervous house-elf to straighten the blankets.

The infirmary was silent, save for Luna, who pattered up to the only bed with a lamp on. Poppy intercepted her.

"Luna!"

Staring at the bed, Luna nodded. "Poppy, what--?"

Poppy shook her head. "I found her. She... she was very drunk and beaten quite... quite badly."

Tears stung Luna's eyes. *Dumb, dumb Luna. You left her alone, you stupid, stupid fool!* "She's all right?"

The mediwitch sighed and looked very serious. "She's just bruised and a little cut. They... they almost got to her before the house-elves happened upon them. They sent little spells and scared the boys off."

Luna tried to get to Ginny, fruitlessly. Poppy wasn't finished apparently.

"Where were you, Luna?"

Opening her mouth, Luna tried to think of a way to explain herself. Explain why she'd left Ginny alone. Nothing came out.

"She's been asking for you. I put her on some pain-stoppers," Poppy finally moved and let Luna go to the bed to sit in the chair near it.

"Gin?" she asked, trying to rouse the redhead. "Ginny?" Luna held her hand, feeling like a git. "I'm sorry, Gin. I let you down tonight."

Ginny sleepily awoke. "Not... not your fault."

Luna leaned closer. "What?"

Eyes slightly glazed, Ginny seemed to try to focus, and then she stopped out of sheer difficulty. "They knew 'bout me and a professor. Knew we'd... we'd done stuff. Wanted to do stuff, too."

Feeling the oxygen escape her lungs, Luna merely gaped.

"Sorry, didn't tell you. Know you're... you're upset. Professor didn't want you to know. They like you all right. Didn't want you mad. Just wanted to... to feel. It's so hard. Being alive now. People dying."

Luna bit her lip. *Wait... Like me all right? Does she mean...? No, she couldn't. He wouldn't. Not with her.*

"S hard when you're all alone. No one to feel alive with."

Tears finally dropped, remembering Lupin's sad words one night...how his friends were dead, all but a scant hand count. How lonely it could be. "Who, Ginny? Who was it?"

"Doesn't want me to tell you, 'specially not you. Likes us all right. Thinks we're special," Ginny mumbled.

Holding Ginny's hand, Luna leaned onto the bed, the little butterfly withering inside her and floating to the bottom. She remembered the time in the hallway three weeks back when Remus had said she and Ginny were special and that they would do great things.

Oh, Merlin, I am a fool.

"So... so sorry, Luna."

"It's all right, Gin. It'll be fine."

A/N: This whole chapter was written under serious duress from my muse. The only time I actually wanted to listen to music was the last bit where I listened to "When You Love Someone" by Bryan Adams, Canadian God of Song. While mostly I am driven by Punchline, it felt right to hear that song. Hope you all enjoyed!

Southern's Notes: Oh, no! She's thinking it's Lupin. Who the hell is it? I'm quite intrigued!

Who do You Turn to When You Don't Know Who You Have Turned Into?

Chapter 5 of 5

It takes Ginny to make Luna truly realize what needs to be done, while Remus discovers salvation in a bar, in the final chapter.

A/N: I do not own HP.

Getting There is Getting By

By A.R. Taloff/Fenrir

Chapter V: Who do You Turn to When You Don't Know What You've Turned Into?

Remus woke up to the insistent poking of his shoulder only to find the person doing the poking was none other than Minerva. He cringed back into the sofa.

"What?"

Minerva rolled her eyes and poked at her watch. "The staff meeting was two hours ago, Remus. We've been trying to find you all morning!"

Feeling the burn of scolding, Lupin scowled, but he then remembered Luna, looking to the loveseat where a neatly folded blanket sat.

"Ehm. Minerva, what... what's wrong?" he managed between the tapping of her foot and the crick in his neck.

Sighing, she sat, nearly on his feet. "Remus, why are you on the couch?" she asked, eyes trained on him, making Remus felt like a school kid.

"Just fell asleep reading," he hazarded.

Minerva raised a skeptical brow. "With a blanket?"

Remus managed a scoff and eye roll. "It was cold, Minerva."

Not looking satisfied, but obviously not interested in pressing the issue, she straightened her robes and looked at him with an even more serious expression. "One of the students is in the infirmary."

He looked over, confused. "What?"

"Ginny Weasley must've been cornered last night and said no to the wrong boys," Minerva explained, looking slightly ill.

Shocked, Remus ran a hand through his hair. *Explains why Luna isn't here, but why didn't she wake me? Probably because she didn't want me to worry* Looking to the loveseat, he tried to piece things together. "Ginny, is she--?"

"Fine. Bruised and sore, but they didn't... nothing happened. House-elves walked in and stopped the boys." The headmistress managed a faint smile. "Used a few tricks. They are all very worried for her."

Lupin grinned for a moment. *Those house-elves are probably getting complimented left and right. Good for them.* Thoughts turned to Luna again. Was she all right? He wished she had been there this morning. Wished he could've pulled her aside and kissed her. Remus knew that after last night there would be very little to hold him back; her murmuring his name and the soft moan that accompanied it proved that some part of her must like him. *Gods were her lips soft beneath mine*, he thought.

"... Monday. Luna Lovegood will pick up her homework until Ginny is back on her feet."

Remus realized that Minerva hadn't stopped talking and focused. "Do they know who did it?"

Shaking her head, Minerva sighed. "The house-elves were too worried for Ginny, and the boys ran away immediately. Ginny can't remember either."

He sighed. *Well, so much for that.*

Minerva stood, once again straightening her robes. "I'm going to go check on her. Perhaps you could do the same. I know those two are liked by most of the staff, so the professors have been in and out all day." She walked to the door and opened it, pausing. "Oh, and Remus?" she added.

Looking at her, he nodded in question.

"Do try to sleep in your bed; it hurts your neck less."

Remus walked to the infirmary with a pretty bouquet of flowers and a teddy bear for Ginny. He had begun steeling himself for how badly she was hurt so that he didn't grimace if she looked horrible. He nodded when Poppy answered the doors, a bottle in her hand and fire in her eyes.

"Oh, good! I thought it was another boy to try to see her. I just keep telling them to go away," she said, tone firm and brooking for no nonsense. "Well, come in, then," Pomfrey hastily added, swinging the door open and looking around him in the event his coat was housing a student.

"She'll like those. Has a whole garden of flowers practically. Luna's been keeping up with them, making a small botany project of it."

At the mention of Luna's name, he quickly searched her out, finding her gone.

Nudged a little by the nurse, he glanced down. "Ginny's a little woozy, but Luna, when she gets back, will take those flowers off your hands. She needed to change and use the facilities."

They got to the tiny paradise that was surrounding the littlest Weasley's bed and smiled at the live bouquets and little balloons. Poppy leaned down and whispered, rousing Ginny a bit.

Remus looked at her and felt his stomach disintegrate. Her uncommonly pretty face was quite swollen and bruised in places, one eye nearly closed with puffy tissue. One arm was in a brace, and the other was bandaged quite a bit. He ignored all this and leaned over, handing her the teddy and smiling deeply.

"Hi there, Miss Sunset," he said, making the smile ring through his voice.

She looked a little sad, and a tear dribbled down. "Dad calls me that."

Remus nodded. "Came by to say hi. Are you're parents about?"

Ginny blinked and shifted a bit. "They're visiting off and on. Harry left a message, and they're trying to get things in order."

Sighing, he pushed those thoughts away and pushed her hair back. "Brought you a bear to keep you company, he's quite stout, and a small measure of flowers to remind you that the world misses you." Chuckling, he waved to the flowers. "I see that I'm not the only one who wants you to remember that."

Nodding, Ginny sniffled. A couple more tears dripped. "I'm going to miss your class for a few days. I'm sorry."

Gently wiping the tears away for her with a finger, he smiled. "No worries. I just want you to get better, so you're not crying so."

A throat was cleared, and he stood up. Luna stood, hands in her sleeves and hair tied back into a severe braid. She avoided eye contact with him, and he felt his stomach reappear, only to feel like it was dipping lower inside him.

She walked to the other side of Ginny and helped the redhead blow her dripping nose and wipe her leaky eyes. Once that was finished, Luna straightened and managed a quick smile to her friend.

"I'll take those and leave you two to talk," she said curtly. Finally looking into his eyes, he saw, with a sinking feeling, her eyes were simmering with anger. "She's just had a dose of Sleeping Draught, so let her sleep if she needs to." Taking the flowers, she turned and walked off, leaving him feeling confused and desperate and trying not to show it to Ginny.

Remus smiled and tucked Ginny's blanket around her and nestled the bear nearby before he backed away and looked around to find Luna at another bed close by, folding clothes neatly and setting them on a chair. Wandering up to her, he wondered exactly how he would tell her. She seemed upset, but with the words nearly bursting from his lips at every moment, he realized that he could tell her, and then ask how she was.

Gently pressing a hand on her shoulder, he smiled and lifted his eyes to her. "Luna, I l--" He stopped when she backed away from his hand and person.

"Is Ginny asleep, Professor?" she queried, looking interested in folding more than anyone could rightly be.

Feeling that dip in his stomach again, Remus cleared his throat and nodded. "Yes, she nodded off. I tucked her in--"

"That's so nice of you. I'm sure she appreciated that more than I can know." Luna finished folding and picked up her rucksack.

"That was an odd wording. Are you all right? You left last night, and this morning I was worried that something happened until I found out what happened." He moved out of the way as she rushed by him, walking fast.

He jogged to catch up. "I wanted to tell you something, but I'm wondering first if you're all right, Luna. I worry that something even worse is wrong." Grabbing her hand, he pulled her back.

Faster than he imagined, she wrenched her hand from his, looking at him with those angry eyes. "I'm fine, and you shouldn't worry about me. I'm just taking care of Ginny. She is my best friend, and that's what friends do. I might be late to classes, just to warn you, but I'm sure you'll be fine without me there. I'm such a know-it-all anyways."

He looked at her and noticed her nose was turning pink. "Are you sure? If you're busy--"

Luna interrupted him almost immediately, "Yes, I am busy. I need to read the homework assignments and make sure that they're done and also get Ginny's homework."

"Maybe you can stop by later. You look really upset, and we can play some chess and talk maybe," Remus finished lamely. *I love you endlessly. I'm sorry it took me so long to admit it, but I want to spend this time with you, as much as I can. Please, let me make it up to you.*

Glancing up, he felt his insides freeze. Her eyes had gone cold, completely...her face a study in complete hate.

"I don't think so, Professor Lupin. I'll be quite busy, I'm sure, with other things of more importance. I've wasted too much time anyways, ignoring studying and other things." Luna backed up to the fireplace and tossed a bit of powder in. "Besides, we're not friends or anything, just student and teacher. That's the way it is. All it will *ever* be, Professor."

Lupin felt like his chest was filled with holes. "But I thought--"

Her cold eyes turned away from him as she whispered her destination to the fire. "You thought wrong, I guess," she answered quickly and went through the flames.

Lupin felt like hell and called off his class for Monday morning to the assured appreciation of his students.

Walking through the doors of the Leaky Cauldron, he quirked a brow to see the hawkish face of Rolanda Hooch drinking at the bar. *What the bloody hell might she be here for?*

Wandering up, he sat down and sighed. When he felt her eyes starting to bore through his head, Remus glanced over. "Yeah?"

"Didn't think I'd ever see you here, prissy boy," she said, filling her glass up with the bottle left there.

He glared and grabbed the bottle. "Didn't expect to find you here drinking a bottle either, Ro."

"That's mine, thanks," she retorted, nicking the bottle from him before he took a sip. "Barkeep, get this grabby boy his own bottle, please. On me!" Ro topped off her glass and took a deep swig as the bartender set another bottle in front of Remus, sighed, and walked off.

Lupin stared at the bottle and grabbed a spare glass from the set she had made a tower from. "Why are you here, Ro?"

"Need to get out of the castle and drink my shame away."

"Odd wording," he replied casually, pouring himself a glass. Rolanda, like much of the other staff, had thrown herself into her teaching, doing everything from defensive flying to casting while flying to proper maneuvering and stealth spells.

Downing another shot, she put the glass down, massaged her temples, and stopped. "Broke the rules, Remus...the rules we're not supposed to break."

Sighing, he glanced up at the mirror where he saw her face. It looked strained, exhausted, and echoed his forlorn expression. He wasn't sure which rule, but there were a few that professors were never, ever, allowed to break. Lupin himself was, and had been, breaking a few more than normal this year. Number one was loving Luna. Numbers two through six were all the things they had done and shared. Surely Rolanda was doing better than him.

"I 'fraternized' recently," she said, making the appropriate quotation gesture. "And I bloody well fucked up. Didn't realize... didn't know we were being watched."

Remus filled her glass up, a commiserating look on his face.

"Now, she bloody well is in the infirmary."

The alcohol burned far more than normal as it seared his esophagus, and with it came the realization that Rolanda and Ginny had done something, which had led the boys to think they were allowed rights. His head turned and searched Ro's face.

"Yeah. It was my fault. I didn't... it's not easy, Remus. You wake up, and... there's nothing. She was lonely, and we had a few. It was an accident! We didn't make it a constant thing. Just the once." Ro's husky and derisive chuckle was almost too sad for Lupin to stand. "But I guess once is always more than you should cheat."

Remus nodded, his throat tight. He knew what she meant. It was hard to swallow that this might be the end, the last spring they knew, the last moon they might see. Living like this was a plague, a leprosy. It tainted everything until you couldn't feel, and soon, you were doing anything to know that somewhere inside you were alive, that you could find your humanity. He couldn't hate Rolanda anymore than he could hate himself. Hadn't that been the first inclinations toward Luna? Hadn't he expected just to find a friend to help him forget that he might not see another year?

Rolanda ruffled her shaggy hair. "What're you here for anyways? Minerva send you?"

Shaking his head no, he could practically feel her interest pique. "I guess you could say I broke a few rules myself." Taking another sip of the alcohol, he was pleased to find that it didn't burn so much this time. "I didn't expect to."

She folded her hands on the bar and leaned her head down. "What'd you do?"

"Fell." The words hurt. God did they hurt. Her flaming blue eyes, the accusation. He couldn't even figure out why it happened, what happened. Had she realized he kissed her? Been disgusted?

Instead of a scoff from his colleague, Ro scooted closer and nudged his shoulder. "Girl or boy?"

Swallowing the ball of fire down with another gulp, he managed to say, "Girl... woman. She's a woman."

Ro nodded, taking another drink. "Luna."

Lupin's neck hurt bad from the force he swiveled his head at, but the alcohol began taking the edge off the pain as he gaped.

She shook her head. "Ginny said that Luna wandered around a lot and that she followed her one night to your rooms. She didn't know if you two were at it, but she wasn't surprised sounding." Taking a moment to swig straight from the bottle, she continued, "Can't say it surprised me. Luna was always quiet like you. You both are too bookish for me, but you have a clear-cut idea of what to do when action is needed. Neither of you can stand for people to be unhappy, even when you're unhappy; it's the other person first. Luna has been keeping care of Ginny for months. You took care of Harry and Tonks."

Smiling softly, she pushed his jaw up, effectively shutting his mouth. "I didn't tell anyone."

Ro slid a finger along the top of the glass. "I think, Remus, if you love her, no matter what, you've got to tell her. You'll at least be able to spend a few moments with her, and this way, you won't regret it. Holding onto that feeling without sharing it is selfish and horrible. What if she loves you back? You can't risk it. These are dangerous times, and we don't know... Well, you get my point."

Lupin looked at the amber liquid and took another sip. "Just give me a minute." He hadn't realized... any of it. Ro seemed to understand what he couldn't, seemed to know what words to say that he needed to hear. For the moment, he just wanted to stay here, to know that someone understood him and that someone else needed him, too.

Luna came into the infirmary to find it empty and Ginny slowly folding one handed. A smile worked its way across her face, only to melt as she saw the bear that Remus, no, the professor, gave Ginny.

"Hey," Luna said amiably, looking at Ginny's slightly healed wounds.

Ginny nodded. "Hey Luna, um..."

"Where'd your mum go?" Luna said, suddenly aware that a Weasley hadn't accosted her yet, unlike that morning when she'd been fallen on by all manner of members of Ginny's family.

Rolling her eyes at Luna, Ginny responded, "She went to get their affairs checked."

Luna nodded, taking over folding, and hearing Ginny sigh, ignoring the sting of annoyance.

After a few moments, she sighed, herself. "Ginny... why... why didn't you tell me?"

The redhead lifted a brow. "What didn't I tell you?"

With an exasperated sigh, Luna turned. "That you ran around so much. I guess I don't understand why you did. Why did you?"

"Well, I didn't think you really wanted to hear, as you fled the scenes so quickly and then never talked about it. I mean really, Luna, what was I supposed to do, bring it up over tea?" Ginny's ability to keep control of her temper was already at a low due to the insulting owls she was getting from her classmates, her parents' hovering, the pain, and now, Luna was lecturing her.

"You could've explained why you cried or what you needed, Ginny," Luna replied, patronizingly calm.

Nostrils flaring, Ginny yanked the shirt Luna was folding out of her hands. "I thought you understood already, Luna! What the bloody hell was I supposed to do? Tell you how lonely and hurt I was that Harry left me and might die? I'll not be able to tell him I love him before he gets sent off to the shadow lover? That I've studied so hard and long and tried to forget so much that I just need to know that I am a person and not some knowledge-filled shell of a human being? I thought you knew what it was like, Luna, not knowing how to feel, what to think!"

Keeping her composure, Luna began folding another t-shirt. *That's right. Ginny, you needed to feel. It's about you, isn't it? You, you, you. We're all so worried about you; we just take care of you. I know I didn't say I liked Re...Professor Lupin, but did you have to go that far?* "I don't know. It would've been nice to know why you were so sick all the time and gone nearly every night and why you were given a separate room. None of your old roommates tell me why. I never asked. I would've thought we could tell each other those things."

Ginny glared. "You didn't really tell me things either, Luna, like what you were thinking and how come you went off on your own."

Shrugging, Luna began making the bed only to have Ginny rip it apart. Sighing, she replied, "Ginny, I just don't understand how you could've slept with them..."

"Because it felt good, Luna! It felt good to be wanted! Made me feel alive, made me feel like if I died, at least I'd die knowing that I hadn't given up my life before then. At least I was honest with myself, and you already knew." She gritted her teeth. "At least I'm not some frigid bitch."

Luna's mouth gaped. For all she had taken care of Ginny those nights, all the times she'd lied, all the moments she'd held Ginny through tears, this was what thanks and gratitude she received, and it felt horrible. Suddenly, anger, white hot and burning her stomach clean, hit her. "Well, I didn't think that becoming a slut to feel and a drunkard to boot made you human, *Gin*. I thought it just made you an alcoholic whore!"

The slap echoed in the infirmary, and Luna lost vision for a moment in her left eye. Tiny prickles sparked on her skin as the pain crept up like hundreds of needles poking at her skin. Eye watering from the pain, she could do nothing but stare, jaw slack, at Ginny, who was beet red and crying.

"You're right. I am a drunk, and I was a harlot. But at least you knew."

Luna's anger surged back. "I didn't know you slept with *him*, though, Ginny!"

Baffled, Ginny searched Luna's face. "Who?"

Whirling so that her back was facing the redhead, Luna kicked herself mentally. "Lupin, Ginny. Why'd you... why'd he... He's our professor!"

"I never slept with Professor Lupin. It was Professor Hooch."

She turned back to Ginny. "What?"

Ginny nodded. "You like him, don't you? I heard you arguing that day. You liked him. That's why you were so mean to him. You thought he'd had sex with me."

Luna felt both of her cheeks burn, this time with embarrassment.

Looking down, Ginny shook her head. "You know, Luna, you shouldn't have thought he would, and you need to go to his room to talk to him. I bet you didn't shag him, did you?" She paused, but not expecting an answer, she continued on. "No, you probably didn't even kiss him. You need to go there, and tell him how you feel. It's not right, living now with the kind of secrets we used to. There might not be time to spare, the time we all thought we had. Things might come crashing in before you can blink. Tomorrow might not come, but today, you've got to tell him."

Ginny watched as Luna walked out of the infirmary and sat down on the bed, holding the stuffed bunny Harry had given her.

Lupin waited in the Passage of No Mrs. Norris and hoped like hell Luna would pass through. He needed to tell her. He had promised himself at least that. At least she would know. Even if she hated him or thought he was a lecher, it would all be worth it...just so that he would know he told her. There still was a chance for them, if he just waited.

Luna tapped the doorknob to Remus' room. "Kappa." The door swung open and revealed the study area.

"R-Remus?" she whispered, moving about quietly.

She walked up to the bedroom and went to open the door. Her hand froze a moment before taking hold of the knob and twisting.

His room was empty, bed made. Sighing, Luna glanced around, realizing that he wasn't here.

Pattering back into the study, she folded herself up on the couch, taking off her shoes and curling up with the blanket she found there. It smelled of Remus.

Tears welled up, burning her eyes and tightening her throat. Wiping them away with the blanket, she saw the kaleidoscope she'd bought him. She'd tell him. Tell him when he came back. Tell him everything. How she didn't mean to, but here it was: her love. It was just sitting there, staring at her, and wondering why the bloody hell she hadn't said a word.

Leaning back against the couch, she watched the fireplace.

Lupin walked through the fireplace and rubbed a hand over his five o'clock shadow. Looking up, he felt the air in his lungs freeze.

Luna was curled on the couch with his blanket. Her blonde hair was mussed, loose, and falling around her shoulders.

He walked over slowly, hoping this wasn't a dream or a delusion, and that when he got there, she'd still be covered in his blankets, sleeping.

Feeling about, he sat on the edge of the cushions, close enough to kiss her if he wanted. And he wanted. "Luna?" he said quietly. "Luna?" Passing a hand down her soft cheek, he felt his heart pound as her eyes blinked open.

She opened her mouth. "Remus," she whispered.

Time stopped for a long moment, and Remus realized he'd never much liked his name until she'd said it just then. Then, he realized he was kissing her.

Luna's eyes were wide as he pressed his lips to hers. Hands cupped her face and head, and she tried to get her mouth to move properly. He pulled away for a moment. "I love you," escaped his lips, and Remus took one look at her damp, slightly open lips and kissed her again. *God help me if she slaps me, but Merlin this feels so damn good.*

Closing her eyes, Luna met his tongue with her own and felt her body come to life a little. His kisses were amazing, and she enjoyed their interplay for a moment, sliding her hand up his chest to his neck. Her fingers gently played with his shaggy hair. The kiss went on for what felt like only a moment, and he was pulling back, breathless.

Luna touched her lips and then his with her fingers. Remus' tongue rasped against the tips, and she felt a tremble work its way up her spine. Pulling her hand away, she looked at him. "I love you."

A smile worked its way over his face, and he gathered her close. "I was afraid to tell you." He pressed a kiss the crown of her head. "I realized I needed to tell you."

"Me too," she replied, enjoying being so close to him.

Gently, Luna pulled away and smiled, pressing a light kiss to his lips as a sharp knock came to his door and it opened.

Minerva walked in, face white, with a letter in her hand.

Luna felt all the blood drain right from her face as she and Remus stared at Minerva in absolute shock.

Remus came to first, gently moving Luna to the side and standing. "Headmistress, I..." he began, only to be interrupted by a swipe of her arm through the air.

"There is no time. Voldemort is on his way, hot on Harry's heels. We have to evacuate Hogwarts of all fifth years and below." Minerva swallowed, and Remus felt his blood run cold. "We have perhaps a half a day. Luna, you should owl your father and anyone else you want to. Same goes for you, Remus."

Turning to walk out of the room, she paused, and looked back. "You might not be able to tomorrow."

A/N: Well. There it is. The end of the first HP fic I ever wrote. I know it was a long chapter, but I hope you all liked it. Thanks, immeasurably so, go out to Sun, Theresa, Meredith, James, Adam, and all those who read, reviewed. It was nice to have you all part of the process in some way. Sun, Theresa, and Meredith took my angsty little scribbles and made them look shiny and new, James helped me with the song (and I hope once he finishes book six, he carts his bum over here and likes the story!), and Adam, who is my own little romance monkey. And to the readers, you guys make my day, a lot!

Southern's Notes: Lovely ending here, but I'm so nosey. I'd love to know which characters live and what not. Hehe Glad these two finally admitted their feelings.