

I Married A Werewolf

by Kailin

Thanks to a bequest from my beloved grandmother, I decide to take an extended vacation in Great Britain.

Introduction

Chapter 1 of 12

Thanks to a bequest from my beloved grandmother, I decide to take an extended vacation in Great Britain.

Once upon a time, before JKR found a woman for Remus (yay!) then killed them off (boo!), I felt sorry for poor Professor Lupin and decided that he needed a little romance in his life. This story, previously archived elsewhere, is the result. It's actually several stories which, had I thought them all out ahead of time, could have been made into one huge story. As it was, I wrote the first story as a stand-alone version, but then I kept coming up with more adventures for Remus and his OC wife.

And about the OC wife: she's a Muggle named Kailin. Please believe me when I say that because my penname is Kailin, this story is no Mary Sue. I first used the name Kailin for a character in a Star Wars fanfic a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away, and I really liked it. At the time I wrote that story, I was new to the internet, new to fanfiction, and had no idea that using a character name as your author name is bad form. At any rate, I wanted to use the name Kailin again someday, so she's the heroine (sort of) of this story. The reason that I chose an OC for Remus is that I was fascinated by the way a Muggle might respond to discovering the magical world, just as Harry reacted to his new reality in SS/PS.

This story was originally posted at FF.net in a much abbreviated version. It can also be found at the Sugar Quill (which isn't nearly as active in the realm of fanfiction as it used to be). I have decided to post the story here because I love TPP and wanted to give Remus a little more exposure. It was originally beta'ed by the fabulous Suburban House Elf. And since you've gotta love a wizard who thinks chocolate is the answer to everything, this series of stories is dedicated to my favorite werewolf.

Introduction

Adrenaline Junkies. A nurse I used to work with used the name to describe people like me. I merely thought I craved action and adventure, but now that I look at my present situation, the name truly fits. Adrenaline Junkie, I am.

My name is Kailin Curtis. Yes, Kailin is a rather unusual name for someone about to turn thirty; I hear of all sorts of little girls named 'Kailie' or 'Katelyn' these days, so I suppose I'm finally fashionable. My Grandma, however, thought the name was the height of fashion and lobbied long and hard to convince my mother that her baby girl should be named Kailin instead of Susan or Janet or Barbara.

She got the name, you see, from Lady Kailin Ford-Burke, a British socialite of the late 1930's who was renowned for some rather scandalous activities. Gran was in the throes of teenage rebellion at the time and was much impressed by the nerve of the vivacious Lady Kailin. Originally she thought to use the name for a future daughter. But a daughter was a long time in coming; my uncles Frank, Martin and Roger all made their appearances before my mother was born. Then, when that day finally came, Marvy lay in the hospital with my mother in her arms and blurted the first name that came to her mind: Louise. She never had a chance to use the name Kailin, so she redirected her efforts at getting my mother to consider it. I don't know how long it took, but I imagine that my poor mom finally gave in just to get her to shut up.

Grandma's name was Marva McClain. I was supposed to call her Grandma Marva, so as not to confuse her with Grandma Ruth from Dad's side of the family, but 'Grandma

Marva' was a lot for a small child to get her tongue around. I ended up calling her 'Marvy' until the day she died...a crushing day for me...just six months ago. We were so much alike, she and I. I was closer to her than my own mother, and she was a better friend than many of my contemporaries. The fact that I am in Great Britain currently can all be traced to her.

Marvy was British. She, like me, was the adventurous sort. During World War II she became a nurse, tending to the wounded when Hitler's V-1 and V-2 rockets rained on London. She also tended to a wounded young American flyer named Billy Mitchell and fell instantly in love. Marvy was one of the thousands of foreign war brides who settled down in America with their GI husbands following the war, but she never forgot her British roots. I loved going to visit her and Grandpa Billy during my summer vacations. We held elaborate tea parties, and she taught me to make the most delicious scones and tarts. But most of all I loved listening to her tales of life in Britain, especially the stories of how she saved this person and that person as a war nurse. I made up my mind that I, too, would become a nurse and follow in Marvy's footsteps.

Trouble was, when I found myself studying nursing in college, World War Two was long over, and the field I had expected to be romantic, exciting and fulfilling was complicated by drudgery, politics and insurance regulations. I kept plugging away, even when my parents were killed in a car accident during my junior year.

Eventually, I found my niche in Intensive Care nursing. It felt good to keep a wary eye on my patients, waiting and watching for the first signs of danger, being the one to call a 'code' when death threatened. I took a course in Flight Nursing just for the thrill of caring for a critically ill patient as we raced the clock to save a life. I flew for the better part of three years until a helicopter engine malfunction forced an emergency landing, reminding me of my own mortality and scaring the daylight out of me. From that point on I decided to have my adventures while keeping my feet on the ground.

I gave up my apartment and signed on with one of the traveling nurse agencies that provided short-term staffing solutions for understaffed hospitals across the country. For six months I worked at a large hospital in New York City, spent another three assigned to a tiny clinic in rural Montana, and finally endured two very long months working the night shift at a Miami inner city emergency room, where I felt lucky to leave with my life every morning. It was then that I received the news that Marvy was sick.

It took a massive heart attack to fell my beloved grandmother. I was able to spend one precious week at her bedside, listening once more to her tales of life in Britain and her handsome American flyer, until her big heart finally gave out completely. I was heartbroken. After the funeral, it seemed best to request a new work assignment as soon as possible. I was in the middle of doing so when I heard from Marvy's lawyer.

Marvy had left me forty thousand dollars.

To say I was stunned is an understatement. I knew that Marvy and Grandpa Billy were typically middle class; they didn't starve, but neither were they extravagant spenders. I called Grandpa Billy at once, blubbing all over myself about how I couldn't take the money, that it was his, that I didn't deserve it. He flat out refused.

"Marva loved you, Kailin. Out of our four kids and eight grandkids, she loved you more dearly than anyone. She set aside some money for you when you were born and kept adding to it over the years. I think she'd planned to give it to you for a wedding present or a down payment on a house...." Grandpa Billy's voice trailed off.

It was unnecessary for him to say more. I understood. As far as marriage was concerned, I was all for it; the problem was, I had yet to meet the right man. And buying a house was out of the question as long as I maintained my gypsy lifestyle. I had unwittingly spoiled my grandmother's plans by failing to marry or stay in one place long enough to own property.

So what to do with forty thousand dollars? The obvious choice was to invest it, but somehow I knew that wouldn't follow Marvy's intent. I was able to support myself, and she knew it. This money was gravy, icing on the cake. I tried to picture Marvy as a young woman confronted with a sudden windfall, and suddenly I knew exactly what I was going to do with it.

I was going to England. I was going to take six months off from working as a nurse and use that time to visit the places Marvy had so often described. I was going to see the Changing of the Guard, tread the moors, eat at pubs. I was going to have tea, shop at Harrods, and ride a double-decker bus.

Marvy, I knew, would be proud.

King's Cross: June 1996

Chapter 2 of 12

A horrible train trip ends in a promising meeting.

Chapter 1 takes place immediately after Harry is met by his 'welcoming committee' at the end of Order of the Phoenix.

Chapter 1: King's Cross, June 1996

I was in a bad mood. The train trip from the Yorkshire Dales was excruciatingly long, thanks to a coach full of happy football (that's soccer to us Yanks) fans, intent on celebrating their team's win. They had enough food and drink to stock a small pub. I spent several hours sitting with a snoring drunk slumped against my left shoulder and two alert drunks making crude sexual suggestions from the seat across from me. My feet hurt from my Dales hiking holiday, my head hurt from the noise level in the coach, and PMS was gnawing at me. The train couldn't park itself at the station fast enough, as far as I was concerned.

My trip to Britain was half over. It had gone well enough; I'd rented a small furnished flat in London and used it as a home base for my travels. So far I'd seen more museums and historic sites than you could shake a stick at. I had accomplished my early goal of finding what was left of Marvy's family in England, was politely received for a brief visit before it became clear that I was close to overstaying my welcome. I was footloose and fancy-free, doing everything I'd ever dreamed of, and still had plenty of money.

And I was tired and lonely.

It would have been so delightful to share this trip with Marvy. She would have been thrilled to accompany me on this adventure, having the time of her life. I told myself that if I ever had a wad of money to bestow on someone, I would be sure to do so before I died.

The train came to a final, shuddering halt at Kings' Cross. I pushed the snoring drunk off my shoulder and collected my bag, not caring if I stepped on the toes of the still exuberant fans clogging the aisles. Only a taxi ride separated me from a hot bath, and I was determined to make the wait as short as possible. I pushed my way off the train and down the crowded platform, dodging other passengers when suddenly, without warning, things began spilling from my backpack.

The backpack had five separate sections, and unfortunately the one doing all the spilling was the one with my valuables. Coins, bills, credit cards, makeup, passport and even several tampons tumbled all over the platform. Aghast, I stopped in my tracks, not knowing what to grab first. One of the drunken football fans stumbled into me,

knocking me flat onto the pavement and nearly landing on top of me. Several of his equally drunk friends helped him upright, then one of them turned and made a nasty comment about Americans in general and American women in particular.

I floundered around, trying to grab my belongings. A throbbing in my right knee told me I had probably torn my jeans and removed a decent amount of flesh when I fell. People were detouring around me, no one bothering to stop and give me a hand. Anger coursed through me. If only someone would stop and help, I seethed inwardly, I wouldn't be blocking traffic anymore. A glint of gold caught my eye and I looked up just as the tube of my favorite lipstick rolled off the platform and under the center of the train. It was ridiculous. I didn't use lipstick that much, actually, but it was the last straw. I sat back on my heels in the middle of the platform, covered my face with my hands and burst into tears. Suddenly a male voice penetrated my misery.

"Miss? I saw what happened. Can I help?"

I hastily wiped at the tears with the back of one hand.

"Oh! Uh, thank you," I stammered. A man was stooped down in front of me, picking up the things I hadn't managed to collect, piling them up at my knees. I fumbled with my backpack, trying to see what had caused the problem and looking for a new storage spot for the errant items. The zipper of the offending section, I determined after a few seconds, worked perfectly. Then what---?

"You go on," I heard the man say to someone. "I'll meet you back at the place later."

I glanced up, just in time to see an odd-looking couple nod, then turn and fade into the crowd. The woman had bright pink hair, I was certain; it was hard to miss. But the man.... Were my eyes still so blurred with tears that his one, electric blue eye seemed enormous in comparison with the other? And moving independently?

Ridiculous. I turned my attention to my backpack. I still didn't know what the problem was, but I had to empty out the problem pocket before it emptied itself of its own accord.

"Just put everything in here," I muttered, sliding another zipper open so he could dump the items inside.

It took us another minute to determine that we'd collected everything except for the lipstick. I would have been desperate enough to crawl under a train to get my passport or credit card, but the lipstick would simply have to rot there, a souvenir of the miserable end to a miserable train trip.

"Are you sure?" the man asked, waving toward the lipstick tube. "I could try to reach it for you."

"No, it's quite all right. You've been very kind. I won't have you crawling around under the coaches. You'll ruin your clothes."

The man stood, then helped me to my feet. He wore an amused smile, and as I got a better look at him, it occurred to me that ruining his clothes was probably the farthest thing from his mind. The sweater-jumper, I reminded myself, looked like it had been darned more than once, and the trousers seemed almost threadbare in places. Embarrassed, I wrenched my eyes from his apparel to his face.

Kind. That was my first impression. The second impression was that he was middle aged, or close to it. It was hard to guess an age, I decided. His brown hair was longish and tinged with gray, and there were creases in his face that looked as though they'd arrived earlier than necessary. And there was a tiredness in the eyes that made my own fatigue seem amateurish in comparison. The third impression, as he smiled directly at me, was that he was quite attractive.

"I need to apologize," I said. "I usually don't burst into tears when I get off a train."

"Oh, I don't know." He glanced toward the lobby of the station, the direction in which the drunks had disappeared. "If I had to travel with that lot, I'd burst into tears myself."

I grimaced. "They were all over my coach. And my compartment. And me, as a matter of fact. One of them was in a stupor, and he was sprawled all over me. He absolutely reeked."

"I'm sure," he chuckled. "What happened with your knapsack? Broken zipper?"

"I don't know," I muttered, hoisting it up for a closer look. The crowd was thinning now, and I could easily swing the backpack into my arms without wiping out other passengers in the process. I probed at the zipper again, then at the pocket.

"Here," he said, reaching out with a slender finger. "Look, the zipper itself has ripped away from the canvas."

"Oh." I wondered briefly if it could be repaired. I liked the backpack immensely: it was generally sturdy, had plenty of pigeonholes for storage, and had seen me all over Britain during the past three months. "So it has."

"I'm Remus Lupin, by the way."

The name was odd, but by now I was accustomed to some of the names the British gave their offspring. For every Thomas or James or William there were twice as many more Dougals, Ansons and Crispins. Not that I should talk; my own name was a British oddity.

"Pleased to meet you, Remus. I'm Kailin Curtis." I held out my hand, and he took it.

"Kailin. That's an unusual name. A family name?"

Not unless I was actually related to the promiscuous society maven. "No, but it was my grandmother's favorite. And it doesn't shorten to anything, which is another reason I like it."

"Remus' is the same in that respect. You can't make any silly nicknames out of it."

Remus Lupin was smiling, and I decided I liked the look of his smile and the way it made the corners of his eyes crinkle. I couldn't help smiling in return.

"I really can't thank you enough," I said earnestly.

"It was nothing. Any gentleman would have done the same."

"Well, I truly appreciate it." The time had come for me to start walking. After all, I had my lost articles and there was no reason to hang around on the platform. But for some reason, I was reluctant to budge.

"Not at all."

Remus was still smiling and unless I missed my guess, he was every bit as reluctant to leave as I was. The thought filled me with a pleasant giddiness. Perhaps the drunken football fans were to be thanked after all.

"Would you---" I hesitated, praying I wasn't overstepping my bounds. I hadn't noticed a wedding ring, but with my luck, he probably had a loving wife and half a dozen darling sons and daughters. But then I remembered the strange man and woman that had been with him. "Would you like to I mean, if you have the time could I buy you a cup of tea? I believe there's a place just across from the station..."

Lupin's face went through an amazing metamorphosis in the space of mere seconds: expressions of relief, happiness, and concern sped past, and I was left staring at a

very surprised man.

"That would be very nice, thank you."

The crowds had thinned considerably now. We walked through the station to the entrance doors. Fortunately, my memory hadn't failed me; there was a small restaurant down the street, and a respectable-looking one at that. In short order, we were seated at a table next to the window. Remus Lupin and I were face to face, and suddenly I felt overcome by shyness. I was spared the search for an opening line when he reached into his pocket, pulled out my tube of lipstick, and placed it in the middle of the table.

"I believe this is yours," he said, smiling.

I stared at the lipstick. The last time I had seen it, it was probably four feet beyond the wheels of the train and well out of reach. "How did you get that?" I asked.

"A lucky grab. Have you figured out what happened with your knapsack?"

I hadn't. I had settled for being grateful to have most everything returned and safely within an intact pocket. "No. Snagged it on something, no doubt."

A waitress appeared and looked curiously at each of us in turn. "Decided what you'll be having yet?"

"Tea for me," I said. "Remus? Tea or something else?"

"Tea is fine, thanks."

"Would you like something to go with it? This is my treat. It's not every day I get rescued." By a handsome gentleman, I wanted to add, but it sounded distinctly like a come-on. I've never picked up a man in my life (still hadn't, I reminded myself). I was merely repaying his kindness.

"Well..." He looked hesitant. "I'll have a biscuit, perhaps."

The waitress disappeared, leaving Remus and me to study each other. I broke the awkward silence by shedding my lightweight jacket. I'd intended to shrug out of it, then drape it over the back of my chair. In a flash Remus was on his feet, helping me out of my coat like the gentleman I'd already taken him for. I couldn't remember the last time any man had been so chivalrous around me. Most seemed to think helping a lady with her coat had gone the way of walking with her curbside or standing when she entered the room.

"You're American?" Remus asked when the jacket had been firmly ensconced on the chair next to me.

"Yes." I told him the whole story, about Marvy, about my heritage, about the inheritance. Somewhere in the middle of my recitation, our tea and biscuits had arrived. So far I had monopolized the conversation. Now I was more than happy to munch while Remus did the talking. "What about you?" I asked. "What do you do?"

A faint expression of dismay appeared on his face. "I've done some teaching," he said cautiously.

"Oh, really? Where?" Oxford, or Cambridge, I was thinking. That's why Remus looked the way he did. It was that mussed, sort of casual academic look.

He hesitated. "A small private school, northern Scotland. Actually, I'm not teaching right now."

"What's your subject?" Literature, no doubt.

Lupin shot me a measuring look, then: "Self-defense."

"Self-defense?" I was frankly surprised. He didn't seem the type. I was trying to picture him wearing the white judo-type garb, and it wasn't working. "Like tae kwon-do, or karate or something?"

"No." A broad smile split Lupin's face. "I'm working with a group of... citizens," he said, feeling his way through the words. "We're attempting to head off a criminal element that's been making inroads lately."

I was intrigued. "Like the mafia? Or gangs, or something?"

He nodded, but failed to clarify exactly what he meant. I thought I understood. "So the information is restricted, I assume," I said.

Another nod.

What did that make him? Local police? National security? The thought *'poor man's James Bond'* crossed my mind, and I had a vivid mental image of Remus leaning against one of the King's Cross platform pillars in debonair style, murmuring "The name's Lupin. Remus Lupin." I was so busy fighting off a giggle that I missed most of his response.

"...true, in fact. I'm not at liberty to discuss it."

"I understand," I assured him. "Are you a Londoner?"

"I've lived all over. Work has... taken me a lot of different places over the years."

"Me, too." Something else we have in common, I thought excitedly. I told him about the traveling nurse jobs then, and he listened with a smile on his face.

The conversation eventually drifted on to other subjects, and we talked and talked. He was so easy to be with. At one point, I found myself thinking that I could listen to him all day. That's why it came as a complete surprise when the waitress came over and asked if we'd be staying for supper. Supper? It was the middle of the afternoon. And then I glanced at my watch and discovered that we had been sitting for the better part of two hours.

"I had no idea," I told Remus. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have kept you this long. I'm sure you have other obligations."

Remus studied me intently. "Ah... well, I don't actually. Have any other obligations, that is."

"Oh." I realized then that we were regarding each other with the same reluctance to part that we'd shown back on the station platform. "Would you like to have supper with me?"

"Very much. If... if *you* would. If you're not tired of me yet."

"I'm not tired of you," I said, wanting to add, I don't think I'll ever be tired of you.

And so it was that we ate dinner together also. I kept wanting to pinch myself. Was Marvy looking down from heaven and clapping her hands together with glee? Had she arranged all of this somehow? I certainly wouldn't have put it past her.

It was nearly eight by the time Remus and I finally left the restaurant. I offered to share my taxi with him, but he declined, saying that he was going in the opposite direction.

"I can't tell you how much I've enjoyed making your acquaintance," I said honestly.

"The same here, Kailin. Would you like to get together again soon?" Remus stood with his hands in his pockets, his eyes on mine. He was looking anxious, almost as if he expected flat-out rejection.

"Very much," I assured him. "When would be good for you?"

"Well... I have a meeting tomorrow night, and then it's the full..." He broke off suddenly, his face flushing. "That is, my schedule's rather full until Friday. Would Friday night be all right?"

"Friday night would be fine." And even if it weren't, I would move heaven and earth to make sure I had the night free. "Shall I give you my number, then?"

I dug around in one of the backpack compartments until I came up with a pen and a scrap of paper, then I hastily jotted down my phone number and gave it to him. Remus hailed a taxi for me, politely kissed me on the cheek, then made sure I was tucked in the back seat.

"See you Friday," he said.

"Absolutely. Good night, then." The taxi pulled away from the curb and I settled back, feeling utterly pleased with life.

I'd been back at the apartment for about an hour, humming and dancing around like an utter idiot, when I thought to check out the damage to the backpack. I found the compartment that had caused all the problems and inspected it upside down and inside out.

There was no tear. No defect. No hole. If I hadn't seen Remus poke his finger into the rip at the station, I'd swear I had imagined the entire thing. How on earth could a backpack repair itself?

Mystery Man

Chapter 3 of 12

Thanks to a bequest from my beloved grandmother, I decide to take an extended vacation in Great Britain.

Chapter 2: Mystery Man

Raleigh's was one of the new breed of bookstores which offered books, music, food, and occasional live entertainment. It was the live entertainment which brought Remus and me here on Friday night for our first date. He'd called the day after we met, apologized again for being unable to see me again until Friday, then suggested that we meet at Raleigh's for tea and guitar music. I was a bit surprised. It was a pleasant enough idea, but the truth was that I'd been hoping for more. In fact, he called just as I was making tentative plans to shop for a killer dress that would knock his eyes out, something black, slinky, and suitable for a candlelit dinner in some fancy restaurant. Black and slinky was definitely overkill for Raleigh's.

Low-key though it was, the date turned out to be delightful. We enjoyed our tea, listened to some passable New Age guitar music, and browsed the aisles of the bookstore. And we talked, again with the same easy rapport we'd established at the beginning of the week. And at the end of the evening, he again bundled me into a taxi with a chaste kiss on the cheek.

Our next date was an afternoon spent prowling through several art galleries. We discovered that our tastes in art were similar, and had great fun making fun of some pieces while admiring others. The conversation eventually turned to our respective histories. Remus was somewhat reticent about his, but I put that down to his work and whatever restricted information was involved.

The following excursion was a trip to some of London's many antique shops. I was mildly interested in antiques and collectibles (my grandparents had their fair share) and it was educational to see what the British antiques dealers sold in comparison to American shop owners. It was in one of these stores that something odd happened.

I'd been admiring a heavy silver pitcher and had put it back on the shelf, although too close to the edge. It was already tumbling off by the time Remus, standing next to me, could react and make a grab for it. I had opened my mouth to thank him when he winced in pain and released the pitcher at once. It fell to the floor with a clatter.

"Here now, mind the merchandise!" the shopkeeper chided, peering at us from behind the counter.

"Sorry," Remus said, while I picked up the pitcher and returned it to the shelf. As I did so, I noticed him cradling his left hand.

"Are you all right?" I asked, concerned.

He forced a smile. "Fine."

"No, you're not." Frowning, I pulled his hand toward me. I could see an abrasion, and around it, a large red welt.

"It's nothing," Remus assured me. "I scraped my hand this morning, and I suppose I grabbed the pitcher handle right there. I have a bit of a silver allergy."

"A silver allergy? Really?" I'd never heard of such a thing, but you could become allergic to just about anything. "Do you have some medicine with you? That looks kind of nasty."

"It'll be fine." Remus withdrew his hand from mine and moved on to look at something else in the shop.

At the end of the afternoon, we made plans to meet again in three days, this time for dinner at my flat. During those three days, I had plenty of time to reflect on my relationship with Remus Lupin.

From the very first day, I had felt more comfortable with him than any other man I'd ever known. It seemed to me that Remus and I acted and interacted more like old friends than new acquaintances. We had advanced to holding hands as we strolled, and the good-bye kisses had moved from cheek to lips. He was always the perfect gentleman. But was he too perfect? I kept waiting for a burst of passion, but it never came. Remus Lupin was an enigma. Apparently I was involved with the world's slowest romantic. Certainly he wasn't gay, I thought; all signs seemed to indicate that he was sexually attracted to me. Several times I'd found him gazing at me with what seemed like longing in his eyes. Yet something was holding him back.

Then there was the matter of his choice of activities. Fun and offbeat though they had been, I was struck by the realization that they were also inexpensive to the extreme. Remus had sprung for tea a time or two, but that was it in terms of spending money on me. No visits to the movies, the theatre, anyplace where there was an admission charge of any sort. I had to admire his resourcefulness, but did this mean he was dirt poor or delightfully offbeat?

Remus arrived for dinner precisely on time, again sporting the worn but spotless clothes, praising my apartment for its cosy comfort after a brief look around.

"Supper's almost ready," I told him, starting back towards the kitchen. "Why don't you have a seat? It'll only take me a couple of minutes to get things together."

He remained standing. "Kailin, could we talk?"

Surprised, I stopped in my tracks and turned around. "Sure. Let me turn down the oven before anything burns." Frowning, I adjusted the knobs on the stove so that the food would stay warm instead of turning a crisp black. Remus wanted to talk, and before we ate, at that. Surely that could mean nothing good, I thought grimly, and plastered a smile on my face before I rejoined him.

He took my hand and led me to sit on the sofa. Now I could see the nervousness on his face and feel the moistness of his palm. No, this wasn't good.

"Is there a problem?" I asked faintly.

Remus took a deep breath. "What are your plans, Kailin?"

"Plans?" I echoed blankly. "For this evening, you mean?"

"No. I mean, what are you plans in general? You intend to return to the States, I suppose."

"I suppose."

The question had caught me off guard, and I couldn't think where this might be leading. "I don't really know what I want to do, to be honest."

It was true. My vacation was half over, but so far I'd refused to consider what might come after. I knew that I'd have to give the matter serious thought some day. Arrangements would have to be made, notice given on the flat. But it was hard to get motivated when I had no idea where I wanted to go next or what I wanted to do.

I think that subconsciously I'd been expecting this trip to change my life somehow. I'm sure I'm not the only American who's trotted off to Europe with vague hopes of falling in love with royalty, or becoming part of some international intrigue. These were silly ideas and I knew it, but a part of me was still dragging my heels, waiting for the unexpected.

Besides, I wasn't sure what to do once I got back to the States. The travel nursing I'd been doing had lost much of its original appeal for me. I was in more of a mood to settle down now, but Where was a big issue. Home was the greater Chicago area, but for some reason I was reluctant to put my roots down there.

Remus had been studying me intently, and now he cast his gaze downward. "The thing is, Kailin, I've enjoyed our dates very much. Too much, possibly. I've become quite fond of you. But one of these days you'll be gone and I'll be just a memory in your scrapbook."

I started to protest that he was more to me than that, but Remus wasn't finished.

"I almost didn't come tonight," he confessed. "I thought perhaps I'd just cancel and get it over with."

"Get what over with?"

"Our relationship."

I was startled. "I don't understand. Why do we have to end? I've grown fond of you, too. I'm here for another three months, and after that well, I don't know what after that. Remus, I'm from America, not another planet. There are such things as planes and telephones, you know."

I must have looked incredibly hopeful, for Remus smiled and squeezed my hands. "Let's eat, shall we? We can talk more later."

"No, I want to talk now," I said. "I want to know what the problem is."

An odd expression passed over Remus' face. "Kailin, it's not that easy..."

"Just tell me," I demanded. "You're married, aren't you? That's what this is all about."

Remus was stunned. "What? No, of course not. Do you think I would be here with you if I was?"

"What then? Are you gay? 'Gee, Kailin, it's been fun, but I'd like you a lot better if you had a beard?'"

A nervous laugh. "Not at all."

"What, then? Are you afraid that you'll get hurt, and ditching me now is better than getting ditched somewhere down the road?" My voice was rising steadily, as was my ire.

Remus was silent for a moment, and I wondered if I'd hit the nail on the head. *Of all the nerve*, I thought darkly. *I'm good for a laugh for a week or two, but don't get too close to me or I'll break your heart.*

"Kailin..." He looked searchingly at me, a silent plea for understanding. "There are complications. Trust me, I want us to continue. As friends, and possibly more. But there's so much about me that I simply can't tell you. Not now, and possibly not ever. That's just not fair to you."

I lifted my chin in indignation. "Why don't you let me be the judge of that?"

"I told you, it's not that easy. I wish I could tell you everything, but I can't. Can you honestly say that you would become seriously involved with someone who has gaping holes in his past?"

That silenced me. I'd never been faced with that question before. "I don't know," I stammered. "But you've never given me any reason to mistrust you."

"I'm glad to hear that, but you need to realize that at some point, that won't be enough to continue a romantic relationship," Remus said gently.

I frowned, deep in thought. Could I love Remus, knowing so little about his past? It was fair to say that I ~~was~~ love with him now, but what if things became serious enough to consider marriage? I reminded myself of the old adage about crossing bridges before coming to them and took a deep breath. "Can I ask you a few questions then?"

He looked wary. "What questions?"

"Just some simple yes or no type questions. No details involved."

"I suppose."

"Well, for starters, are you involved in anything illegal? Do you have a prison record?"

Remus visibly relaxed. "I'm pleased to say no to both. What else?"

"Are you deep in debt?"

An amused smile flitted across his face. "Not at all."

"Do you have an addiction of some sort? Drugs or alcohol or gambling?"

Remus shook his head.

"Pornography?"

"No."

I blinked, completely at a loss. Outside of mistreating his pets, there wasn't anything else worrisome I could come up with at the moment. "Remus, I feel ridiculous now. You're the perfect man. You just have secrets."

He laughed at that, then sobered, reaching once more for my hand. "Tell me what you want me to do, Kailin," he said earnestly. "If you want me to leave, I would understand completely."

"No." I shook my head at once. "I don't want you to leave. That is, if you don't want to leave -"

"No." Remus squeezed my hand. "Believe me, I don't want to leave."

We sat smiling at each other like idiots. Finally, Remus reached up and, drawing my head gently forward, kissed me tenderly. I wished that we could continue like this forever, but with pots bubbling on the stove and a roast roasting in the oven, it wasn't going to happen.

Supper turned out quite well, and from the volume of food that disappeared from the table, I could tell that Remus enjoyed it. We went for a walk after dinner and chatted of inconsequential things. He left just after ten, but not until we made plans to visit a flea market on the weekend.

As soon as the door closed behind him, I sank down onto the sofa and wondered just what I'd gotten myself into. This was certainly the oddest courtship I'd ever been involved in. And courtship was indeed the right term. Remus was courting me in the best, old-fashioned sense of the word. He was moving slowly, deliberately, no rush to the bed or groping in the dark. He was learning all about me, trying my character and determining my limits. It was almost, I decided, as if he were testing me.

But testing me for what?

Friends and Lovers

Chapter 4 of 12

Thanks to a bequest from my beloved grandmother, I decide to take an extended vacation in Great Britain.

Chapter 3: Friends and Lovers

By the time two more weeks had passed, there was no doubt in my mind that Remus and I were in love. He never told me in so many words, but his tender actions spoke volumes. If anything, I had the distinct impression that he was trying not to confess his feelings to me. This restraint was also accompanied by an almost fierce longing in his eyes - not the sexual longing I expected to see, but what seemed like a desperate desire to tell me the secrets he withheld.

For my part, I avoided asking him questions about his life, past and present. Whenever he told me he had a meeting with his co-workers, I took it at face value. Without thinking one day, I asked where they met and was told that they usually convened at someone's house. Out of idle curiosity I inquired if the newspapers mentioned anything about the 'criminal element' his group was fighting. I figured that while Remus needed to be skimpy on details, the *Times* might at least give me a general picture. I was rewarded with a wry smile and told that most newspapers were unlikely to cover the story.

Towards the middle of July, I planned a picnic for the two of us. The weather was warm and the sky was blue, and we'd found a perfect grassy spot in the park to unfurl the picnic blanket. Children played nearby, people walked their dogs, and it was just a lovely day in general. Remus, who'd shown himself to be attentive to a fault during the three weeks I'd known him, seemed unusually quiet. When I failed to get any response after commenting three times on a rambunctious terrier frolicking nearby, it was clear that Remus' attention was elsewhere. Finally I asked him about it.

"Sorry." Remus flashed me a look of regret. "My mind was wandering, I'm afraid."

"Your job?" I guessed.

He smiled ruefully. "No, it's not that. I realized this morning that it's been exactly a month since my friend Sirius was killed."

"Oh. Today must be very difficult for you," I commented sympathetically, but inwardly I was wondering about his use of the word 'killed'. When Remus told me about his good friend Sirius Black on one of our early dates, he'd merely said that the man had recently died. If Black was killed, was it accidental or intentional? "Look, if you want to forget the picnic, I'd understand. We could just pack everything up and head home."

"I won't hear of it, Kailin. You went to a lot of trouble, and it's a beautiful day. I'll try to cheer up, I promise."

I couldn't help but laugh at his earnestness. "Remus, you can't pretend that everything is fine when it's not."

"I know. But that's no reason to spoil your day." Remus put down the chicken leg he'd been toying with and stretched out on his side, propping up his head with one hand.

"It's not spoiled," I said, dismissing his apology with a wave of my hand. "You could never spoil my day. Besides, when you lose someone you care about, you just don't get over it right away."

"No. You don't."

He almost looked as if having someone empathize with him was a rare event. It started me thinking about Gran Marvy's death earlier in the year. I opened my mouth to comment on my own issues in dealing with the death of a loved one, but Remus spoke up first.

"He'd barely begun to live again, you know?"

He meant Sirius, I assumed. Remus had never given me the specifics about his friend. It appeared he was about to.

"In what way?" I prompted gently.

"He was imprisoned for twelve years for a crime he didn't commit."

"That's terrible. It must have been dreadful for both of you."

Remus stared past me at the traffic swirling past the park's perimeter. "The unfortunate thing is, I didn't know he was innocent until two years ago, which meant I'd thought the worst of him all that time."

"What crime was he accused of?"

"Murder."

"Murder? Whose?" I was stunned, to be honest. I imagined the late Sirius Black being put away for mail fraud or something else vaguely victimizing. Remus Lupin did not seem the kind of man to consort with suspected murderers, guilty or not.

Remus had the Look on his face, the one that said There's So Much I Want To Tell You But I Can't. I was becoming quite familiar with it. "It was a couple we knew from school. Along with a dozen or so bystanders," he added with a pained smile.

Multiple murders? I was truly taken aback now, but tried not to show it. "So they finally found the real murderer?"

"Yes," he said softly. "We found out who did it."

I waited for more information, but Remus was silent. "You said Sirius was killed. How did he die?"

There was the Look again, then a faint smile. "He fell."

"Then it was an accident?"

The expression on Remus' face was one of infinite sadness. "No. It was no accident."

There was surely much, much more to the story, but I sensed that I was treading on extremely private ground. I was casting about for a delicate way to change the subject when he abruptly climbed to his feet and dusted off his pants.

"Look, maybe you're right. Perhaps we should just call it a day. This has to be depressing for you, Kailin, listening to me prattle on about my woes."

I smiled and shook my head, starting to put lids on bowls and put things away. "I don't mind listening, Remus. But I do get the impression you'd rather be alone today."

"You're right, I think. Look..." He knelt down again and began to help me gather up the food. "I'll be unavailable for a few days. But I promise, as soon as I get back, I'll ring you up. In fact, why don't we make a date for Wednesday night?"

"Wednesday it is," I agreed. "You know, I've been wanting to make a little side trip into France. I can do that while you're gone."

We finished repacking the lunch, folded up the picnic blanket and started for home. Remus saw me to my door, then enfolded me into his arms. It was the usual restrained embrace, but I made sure to get in an extra squeeze or two to let him know that I meant it.

"Thank you," he murmured. "For letting me ramble on out there, I mean."

I smiled into his shoulder. "My pleasure. Tell me, would Sirius have liked me?"

Remus chuckled, a low rumble into my ear. "Are you joking? He would have loved you. In fact, I would probably have had to fight him for you."

"I've never had men fighting over me before. It might have been fun. As long as you won, of course," I added.

He stepped back, and the look of longing in his eyes - real longing for me, not the regret for keeping unrevealed secrets - took my breath away. But as always, Remus merely gave me a parting smile and took his leave.

* * *

Having seen so much of Remus over the past three weeks, I assumed that I would enjoy my solo trip to France. Instead, the opposite was true. I found myself wanting to tell Remus about the sights I'd seen and the shops I'd visited, and I puzzled again that he was not reachable by phone. It seemed only natural that someone working with issues of safety and security should have a mobile phone. I did; I'd bought one when I was assigned to the Miami inner city hospital, and it made me feel better to feel connected to help at the push of a button. But Remus had said he had no phone, mobile or otherwise, and that was that. I would have to wait until I returned to London in a few days to share my experiences with him.

As I lay in bed in my Paris hotel, I found myself unable to sleep. I missed Remus, I had a headache, and the heavy drapes at the window of my room didn't quite meet all the way, allowing bright light from the full moon to shine directly onto my pillow.

I got up and padded to the bathroom, downed a couple of aspirin, then fought once more with the draperies. They seemed to have a mind of their own, but I finally held them shut with a chair pushed against the window sill.

I climbed back into bed and waited for the aspirin to take effect, pleased that I'd finally got the best of the silly curtains.

And I wondered what Remus Lupin was doing this night.

* * *

I was barely back in my London flat for five minutes Wednesday afternoon when Remus called.

"I missed you," I told him at once, dropping into the chair next to my telephone. "Paris was nice, but it would have been a lot more fun if you were there."

"Wish I could have gone," Remus said wistfully.

"I'll tell you all about it tonight. What time are you coming by?" Just hearing his voice on the phone brought a broad smile of anticipation to my face, and I couldn't wait to

see him this evening.

"That's why I called. I'm afraid something's come up. We have an emergency meeting tonight, so I won't be able to make it."

Disappointment flooded over me in waves. "Oh. Well, that's all right. I understand."

"I hate not seeing you," Remus said quickly. "Really. I wish I didn't have to cancel."

"No, it's all right. You do what you have to do."

"What about tomorrow? Could we get together then?"

"Of course."

We set a time to meet tomorrow, and I tried to tell myself that waiting one more day to see Remus wouldn't kill me in the long run. I would be mature about this, even though I'd been on the verge of succumbing to the giddiness that comes with being in love.

Tonight's cancellation was distressing in another way: I now had no reason to put off cleaning and doing my laundry. I was always ready to avoid these chores, but without Remus in the picture, there was little excuse for procrastination. It was with a distinct lack of enthusiasm that I emptied out my travel bag and put a load of wash in the flat's washing machine. I was also hungry, but there was little to be found in my refrigerator since I'd been gone four days.

"Great. Thanks a lot, Remus," I muttered aloud. I'd have to add grocery shopping to my list.

I know the old maxim about never shopping on an empty stomach, but there was little else I could do unless I wanted to live on granola bars for another day or so. I headed off to the grocery, trying virtuously to load my basket with a fruit or vegetable for every piece of junk food that caught my eye. Standing in line to pay, I glanced over the magazines and newspapers on sale and added today's edition of the *Times* to my pile of goodies, thinking that I might as well catch up on what was happening in the world.

An hour later I'd eaten a turkey sandwich, downed a cupcake, and was on my second load of laundry. There was still that pesky cleaning to be done, but I decided to delay that a bit longer in favor of reading the paper. And so I curled up on the sofa with the comics and the editorials and the news of the world and tried to forget all about dust bunnies and Remus Lupin.

'Mid-East Peace Accord Hits Snag'... Well, what else was new, I wondered; I could probably pick up any newspaper from the last twenty years and see the same headline. 'Football Fans Outraged at Officiating Scandal'... I would leave that article for the true sports fans. 'Couple Found Dead, No Signs of Foul Play'... I sighed. There was no escape from violence, it seemed. I began to read.

A couple was found dead last evening in their Wentworth, Sussex home. According to local police, the bodies of Edward and Constance Creevey were discovered by their sons, fifteen-year-old Colin Creevey and thirteen-year-old Dennis Creevey around eight p.m. There were no signs of forced entry to the house and no evidence of foul play. Autopsies are scheduled to be performed today in order to establish a cause of death. Police Officer, Derek Daily, told reporters that suicide has not been ruled out as a cause of death. A neighbor, Donald Rutgers, told investigators of seeing a strange greenish glow in the vicinity, although it is not clear whether the two events are related.

In a similar case two weeks ago, a Hillerton, Leicestershire man was found dead by a family member...

What a shame, I thought, moving on to an article about a bootleg video sting. Why would a couple decide to kill themselves, knowing that their children would find their bodies? It seemed an unspeakably selfish act. As for the green glow, I had no idea what to make of that.

A Trip to the Ice Cream Parlor

Chapter 5 of 12

Thanks to a bequest from my beloved grandmother, I decide to take an extended vacation in Great Britain.

Chapter 4: A Trip to the Ice Cream Parlor

I nearly missed Remus' call the next morning, thanks to a vacuum cleaner that could drown out any noise save that of an atomic blast. By the time I finally grabbed the phone, Remus was on the verge of hanging up.

"Sorry," I said, trying to untangle my feet from the electric cord and talk at the same time. "The landlord's evil vacuum is out to get me."

Remus chuckled. "Do I need to come over and save you?"

"Would you? You'd be my knight in shining armor." I sighed. "Don't you wish you could just wave a magic wand and your house would be clean?"

There was silence on the other end of the phone. I was about to check if we'd been disconnected when Remus spoke up. Even then, his voice sounded a bit odd.

"What time would you like me to come by, Kailin?"

"Any time's good if it gets me out of house cleaning. Around one, do you think?"

"One is good. See you then."

By the time Remus arrived, the flat was in good shape and so was I. I had showered and dressed, taking great pains with my makeup, even dabbing on some of the French perfume I'd bought on a whim.

When I opened the door, his eyes lit up at the sight of me. My breath caught in my throat, and when I opened my mouth to speak, nothing came out. I finally managed to find my voice and mumble a greeting, all the while thinking, *I am totally, completely in love with this man*

"Hello." Almost shyly, Remus reached out to touch my cheek. Then, without warning, he swept me off my feet in a massive embrace. The man I knew to be so reserved, so

undemonstrative, was hugging me within an inch of my life it seemed, and I was positively delighted. What did it matter if my ribs were crushed, if he was finally displaying his affection?

I was laughing by the time he put me back down. "What brought all this on?" I demanded.

The sparkle in Remus' eyes was a marked contrast to the sadness they'd displayed on Saturday when he called off the picnic. It occurred to me that right now was the first time I'd ever seen him look truly happy.

"May I come in?" he asked, glancing over the top of my head to the interior of the flat.

"Oh, of course. Sorry! Some hostess I am," I said, taking his hand and pulling him inside.

"Well, we were rather occupied," he said, with a boyish grin.

"That we were. Are you feeling better than you did the other day? I know you were upset about your friend."

"Much better," he assured me. "As you said, things don't improve overnight."

"Please, sit." I motioned toward the sofa.

Remus sat, stretching out his long legs and simultaneously reaching for my hand. "I missed you, Kailin," he said frankly.

"I missed you, too." I smiled at this. We'd already covered this ground in yesterday's telephone call, but it was worth repeating.

For a long moment, Remus studied me, his own smile beginning to waver. "I need to talk to you, Kailin. I know I've been terribly evasive sometimes, and it's not without good reason. But we can't go on this way. The thing is, I've fallen in love with you."

My heart threatened to burst out of my chest at his admission. "It's a good thing," I managed to gasp, "because I've fallen in love with you, too."

"I thought you had, although I could only be certain of my own feelings."

"What does this mean?" He looked almost as though he would have preferred me to laugh in his face. I was instantly uneasy. "I don't understand what you're trying to tell me. Is there something wrong with us being in love?"

"Well, nothing... but maybe everything..." Flustered, Remus jumped to his feet and began to pace. "Kailin, here's the thing: I love you, and I don't want to lose you. Ever. But there are things about me which will probably drive you away, things that are painful for me to tell and painful for you to hear. I needed to make certain of your feelings before I told you any more than what you already know about me. I couldn't bear to see you hurt."

We were back to his mysterious past, the stumbling block, which I'd sworn would not prevent me from caring for him. "Why don't you start at the beginning?"

"Before I start, I want you to know that the past month has been the most incredible of my life. I've enjoyed it more than you'll ever know. And if you decide that we shouldn't continue, I'll always have that wonderful memory."

I smiled and nodded encouragingly at him.

Remus took a deep breath. "I never expected to fall in love with you. That first day, at King's Cross, I was merely trying to be helpful. But when you looked up at me and smiled... I don't know, Kailin, something in me snapped. I wanted to get to know you. I didn't expect it to lead to anything but a brief friendship. After all, you were an American tourist. I thought you'd be home by now and I'd be on about my business.

"But you were still here, and when I was with you I felt almost normal. I've thought a lot about it while you were away the past few days. Finally, yesterday I had a long talk with Sirius."

"You what?" My stomach dropped smartly away. Sirius Black was dead. And what did he mean by feeling 'almost normal'?

"Don't you ever chat with your grandmum?" he asked me, surprised.

Oh. I caught his drift and relaxed again, the 'almost normal' part temporarily forgotten. I laughed. "I do, actually."

"Well, there you are. I had a long chat with Sirius. About you. About my life. I wish you could have known him, Kailin," he said fervently. "He was so talented and smart and funny. Any time there was a commotion, you could be certain that Sirius was in the midst of it. He was a ladies' man, a horrible practical joker, a bon vivant who loved life to the fullest. Even after his horrendous experience in prison, I think there was still much of the man he once was. Or could have been, given half a chance.

"There were four of us together at school: me, Sirius, James Potter and Peter Pettigrew. We called ourselves The Marauders, because we were all rather hell-bent on mischief. Well..." Remus chuckled. "Sirius and James were, at any rate. Peter and I were more or less along for the ride. I was the law-abiding, boring one who didn't want to make waves."

I laughed. "Is that a bad thing?"

"Of course not. But I realized yesterday that if Sirius were alive now, he would box my ears."

"Why?"

"Because he'd remind me that life is too short to spend it deep in regret. That rules are made to be bent or broken. That taking a chance can be the greatest gift to yourself. And that in general, I've been a great bloody prat." Remus searched my eyes for understanding. "Kailin, the things I need to tell you are complicated. Very complicated. Today I'm going to tell you some basic information. There are other things you need to know, but those will have to wait a bit longer. Just rest assured that if you can accept... that is, you will find out everything in time."

I nodded. What happened next was completely unexpected.

"I'm a wizard, Kailin."

I burst out laughing. "I don't understand. You mean you're in a fraternal order... or something?"

"No. I mean that I can perform magic."

"You you pull rabbits out of hats?"

"No, those are illusionists. Muggle entertainers," Remus said quickly. "I'm talking about real magic."

"There's no such thing as magic," I pointed out, my smile beginning to strain at the corners.

"Magic is real," Remus stated. "There is a entire world of witches and wizards and magical creatures that co-exists with the Muggle world."

"Witches?" My smile was completely gone by now. "You mean, like devil worship or something?"

"Not at all. Magic has nothing to do with that. You see, about one in every fifty thousand or so people are born with magical properties. They're talents, just like any other unique abilities people may have."

Except that the talented people I knew played the piano or did watercolor painting. "So if this world exists, why doesn't anyone know about it?" I said acerbically.

"It's kept well hidden from Muggles."

"What in the world are 'Muggles'?" I asked crossly. I didn't like this conversation one bit.

"Muggles are non-magic people. You're a Muggle, for instance."

"I'm a Muggle."

A nod.

"Witches and wizards are real, and they can do magic."

Another nod.

If only Remus would leave, I thought, I could have a good cry. I needed a good cry. Why was it that other women could find perfectly wonderful men, while I found the one who was crazy as a loon?

"I think," I said unsteadily, "that you should probably leave now."

"Kailin, if I were in your shoes, I would be reacting the same way. Will you allow me to prove to you that what I said is true?"

I just looked at him. "You can't possibly prove it. It's not real."

With that, Remus reached into his jacket and pulled out a wooden stick about a foot long. He handed it to me and waited for my reaction.

I fingered the wood, completely nonplussed. "What is it?"

"It's a magic wand. When we talked earlier on the phone, you said you wished you had one to clean the flat, remember?"

"It's a stick of wood," I said flatly, turning the 'wand' over in my hands. Remus was smiling at my response, and I found it completely infuriating. I wanted him to remain the perfect man I'd believed him to be, not some lunatic who thought he possessed supernatural powers.

"I'm afraid it is a real wand, dearest. A wand has no power in and of itself, of course. It's simply a conduit for the wizard's power. They come in all varieties of size and flexibility, depending on the wood from which they're made. But each one has a magic core, such as tail hair from a unicorn, or possibly phoenix feathers."

Unicorns? Phoenixes? My jaw took a very undignified plunge. He fed me this line of bull and then had the nerve to call me 'dearest'?

"Fine," I said coldly. "If this is a real wand, do some magic for me."

Remus' smile faded. "I can't. I'd be fined for using magic in front of a Muggle. There are laws about such things, and frankly, I can't afford to pay the fine. It's a tad steep."

"Then it's time for you to go," I said angrily.

"Kailin..." He took a deep breath. "You said you were in love with me. Please, if you truly meant it, would you trust me for one more hour?"

"Why?" I asked suspiciously. "What would that prove?"

"I want you to go with me to get some ice cream."

I blinked. Ice cream?

"It's a very special ice cream parlor," Remus continued. "Most people don't even know that it exists."

I'll bet they don't, I muttered inwardly. I wanted to say, forget it. Forget everything. Forget the wonderful times we'd shared in the past month. Forget us.

But something stopped me. Maybe it was the earnest look in Remus' eyes. Maybe it was the fact that he had never given me cause to mistrust him. Maybe it was the fact that I desperately wanted to believe he wasn't insane.

But to go with him to this supposed ice cream parlor? They'd probably find my body in a dumpster and *d'd* be tomorrow's headline in the *Times*. Still, it was daylight and the streets would be crawling with potential witnesses. And if nothing else, I'd know for a fact that Remus Lupin needed to be heavily medicated.

"All right. I don't believe any of this, but I'll go with you. Where is this place?"

"It's in a shopping district called Diagon Alley," he told me.

"I've never heard of it," I pointed out.

"You wouldn't have. It's the wizarding shopping district."

"And I wouldn't know about it because I'm a Muggle."

"Muggle."

"Whatever."

The trip to Diagon Alley meant a long trip on the Tube. Remus kept shooting me encouraging smiles, while I responded with a stony silence. How had I let myself get taken in by this man, anyway? I was an intelligent woman...

We exited the Underground at Charing Cross. While we walked, Remus told me that he had been educated at a place called Hogwarts, a training school for witches and wizards. I listened only half-heartedly. He lived in a marvelous fantasy world, and it was breaking my heart.

Finally, we stopped and Remus took my hand. I started to pull it away, but he held it firmly.

"Do you see the bookshop across the street there?" he asked, pointing down the block.

"Yes," I said stiffly.

"Do you see the shop next to it? What does the sign say?"

"It says 'The Leaky Cauldron'."

Remus withdrew his hand from mine. "Do you still see the sign?"

"Yes. So?"

"What's written on the sign?"

I started to retort that it said the same thing it had said two seconds ago, but a second glance stopped me.

The sign was blank. I frowned. It had clearly said 'The Leaky Cauldron' the first time I looked. Or had I been looking in the wrong place? I searched the stores, looking for the Leaky Cauldron sign. It wasn't there.

"Kailin?" Remus' voice prodded into my thoughts. When I didn't answer at once, he took my hand again.

The words 'The Leaky Cauldron' appeared, plain as day, on the store sign next to the bookstore. And then, Remus released my hand once more and the words were gone.

"Is this some sort of optical illusion?" I asked uneasily.

"No." He smiled at me patiently. "It's magic."

"Remus! Hello!" A woman's voice caught my attention.

Remus waved to a plumpish, red-headed woman heading in our direction. "Glad you could make it, Molly. I appreciate it."

The woman, who looked as if she'd walked blindly through a thrift shop and donned a bit of everything she could grab, beamed at me. "This must be Kailin."

"It is. Kailin, this is Molly Weasley, a good friend of mine. I asked her to meet us here."

I wanted to say "Why?" but then assumed that the woman was probably there to help dispose of my body.

"How do you do, Kailin?" She stuck out her hand enthusiastically. "I'm so pleased to meet you. And I'm so pleased for Remus. I think it's wonderful that he's found someone special. If there's anyone more deserving, I don't know who it would be. And Remus, you didn't tell me that she was so pretty?"

Remus was blushing crimson. "I believe the word I used was 'beautiful'."

I eyed the woman's hand with suspicion, but finally managed a polite enough handshake. "How do you do, uh, Molly, is it?"

"That's right. Molly Weasley, dear." The woman turned her attention to Remus. "You know, Remus, Arthur would have been simply delighted to help you with this, given how much he adores Muggles."

"I know, but I can't very well ask him to leave work for it. Besides, if there are any repercussions, I don't want to jeopardize his position at the Ministry." Remus nodded in the direction of the mysterious sign. "I was just showing Kailin the Muggle protection wards on the shop."

"Ah." Molly nodded knowingly. "Effective, aren't they? You'd never notice the sign, would you, Kailin?"

She took my elbow, and I found that immediately I could read the words 'The Leaky Cauldron' once more. So this wasn't just some trick Remus had concocted... Before I could reply to her comment, Molly had begun to propel me across Charing Cross Road.

"Shall we go in, then?" she continued.

I looked back helplessly at Remus. He was following behind us, and it occurred to me that, just possibly, he looked slightly less insane than I'd thought several minutes ago.

"But what is the Leaky Cauldron?" I asked helplessly.

"Famous wizarding pub," Molly answered cheerfully before Remus could respond. When she reached the door, she pushed it open and headed straight in, tugging me along behind her. "Now never mind what you see, dear," she said cheerfully. "I know there are some rather odd customers here from time to time, but everyone is mostly quite normal."

The room was dimly lit and rather smoky; evidently the smoking bans that were becoming commonplace hadn't hit here yet. As my eyes adjusted to the lighting, I became aware that the clientele looked absolutely nothing like the people I saw at the pub down the street from my flat. It was a sea of pointed hats and jewel-bright colors contrasting with lots of black. Eyes turned to look at me, and suddenly I understood what it felt like to be the black sheep in a field of white ones. Remus must have sensed this, because he stepped forward and placed a protective arm around my shoulders.

"Afternoon, Mrs. Weasley," the barkeep said, glancing up at our little entourage. "Can I get you folks anything?"

"Maybe later, Tom," she told him. "We're headed out back to do a bit of shopping."

He nodded and turned away. We walked through several rooms of the tavern, and then we were outside in a small, dead-end courtyard. Abruptly, Molly whisked something out from under her poncho and I was stunned to see that she, too, had a wand much like Remus'. She tapped several of the bricks in front of us while I watched, bewildered.

The bricks slowly rearranged themselves into an open archway.

Once more, Molly charged ahead, but all I could do was stand there and gape. A brick wall had just opened itself up because this strange woman tapped it with a stick.

Unless... it really was a magic wand...

I felt sweet relief sweep over me in waves. Remus wasn't crazy. There was no other reason for the brick wall to vanish other than...

Magic.

At Diagon Alley

Chapter 6 of 12

Thanks to a bequest from my beloved grandmother, I decide to take an extended vacation in Great Britain.

Chapter 5: At Diagon Alley

A crooked, cobblestone street stretched out in front of us. It was quaint, charming, and reminded me at once of something out of a Dickens novel. Remus saw my wide-eyed expression and took my hand, squeezing it gently.

"Are you doing all right?" he asked solicitously.

"Fine," I gulped, "I think. Remus, I-I don't know what to say--"

"You don't need to say anything, dearest."

"But I thought you were... were..."

"Crazy. Yes, I know. Let's look around, shall we?" He tucked my hand through his arm and we walked toward the shops.

The street was a busy place. Women bustled in and out of stores, most sporting the pointed hats I'd always associated with witches. Two teenaged girls, wearing cloaks over denim jeans, stood on the sidewalk and hunched over a magazine, giggling at something. A man clad in dark robes similar to a graduation gown walked along, unrolling a piece of paper and reading as he went.

"Try not to stare," Remus whispered in my ear as he steered me toward a shop window.

I realized that I'd been doing just that. Swallowing hard, I tore my eyes away from the people to where Molly Weasley was standing. The store's sign read 'Quality Quidditch Supplies', and the three balls dangling beneath it reminded me of pawnshops back home.

"What's Quidditch?"

"Wizards sport. All my boys are absolutely insane about it," Molly told me, rolling her eyes.

I had to smile at that. Apparently the male obsession with sports was a universal addiction.

"Although," she went on, "my daughter Ginny's positively mad for it as well. She's on her house team at Hogwarts."

"How is it played?" I asked.

"Well," Remus said, "if you have a year or two, one of Molly's sons can explain all the finer points of the game to you. Suffice it to say that it's rather like Muggle football, except on brooms."

"Excuse me?" I stopped dead in my tracks. He hadn't said that. He hadn't.

"It's a lot like football, except instead of one goal at each end of the pitch, there are three--"

"No, no, no," I interrupted impatiently. "You said brooms."

Remus' smile was almost apologetic. "Yes, Kailin. Brooms."

I don't know why that struck me as more absurd than walking through a solid brick wall, but it did. I had lived through almost thirty Halloweens in my life and seen countless pictures of witches on brooms. Somehow the newly discovered notion that there was indeed an alternate reality was inconsequential next to the idea that witches actually did fly about on broomsticks. Remus was gently pulling me closer to the window.

"Look," he said, pointing to several of the brooms on display. "Just like Muggle automobiles, they can be fancy or plain, and the price varies accordingly."

The brooms sported names like Cleansweep, Nimbus and Firebolt, and the placards accompanying them listed attributes such as fantastic speed, fabulous cornering ability, and superior braking. It might have been ads for the latest models from Ford and Chrysler. As I stared at the window's contents, it occurred to me that I was no longer speechless. Instead, I had a million questions.

"How do you sit on them? How do they work? Is there a steering mechanism? There's no fuel, right? Are they as uncomfortable as they look? What does the letter G next to the price stand for?"

Poor Remus. It was his own fault, I thought, as I became the one pulling him by the hand from window to window and peppering him with questions. The multiple shocks of the day were wearing off, and now my relentless curiosity was taking over. To think that all this was possible, let alone real... At one point, I heard the whine of a jet engine overhead, the jarring note, which reminded me that I wasn't on another planet completely. Then I found that if I listened very carefully, I could make out traffic sounds from the other side of wherever we were.

Our next stop was Flourish and Blotts, and even I could tell that it was a bookstore. The shop could best be described as 'cozy', nothing like the massive sprawl of the bookstores with which I was familiar. Even the books, which I presume were new, looked extremely old. The titles all related to magic and what I thought of rather broadly as 'the occult', although they seemed to run the gamut from fiction to non-fiction, biographies to textbooks.

"What are Hogwarts letters?" I asked, puzzling over a sign that said 'Hogwarts Letters Will Be Arriving Before You Know It: Shop Early!'

"Supply lists for school, primarily," Remus said.

"But why do you have to go to school to learn how to be a wizard? I thought you were born with the ability."

"It's no different from a musician who has to study for many years. You may have the talent, but developing the skills take time."

"Do most magical children go there?"

Remus nodded. "Nearly all -- in Britain, that is. There are other schools scattered around the globe."

"Even in the U.S.?" I asked.

"Even in the U.S."

"Incredible," I muttered.

"Remus taught at Hogwarts," Molly put in enthusiastically. "He was a wonderful teacher. The children just adored him."

I racked my brain. "You told me you taught... how did you put it?"

"The course I taught was Defense Against the Dark Arts," Remus explained. "What I actually said was that I taught a course in self-defense."

I fingered a book called 'Hi-jinks with Hexes', remembering our first real date weeks before. "This is a lot different from Raleigh's, isn't it?"

"What's Raleigh's?" Molly inquired.

"It's a chain of bookstores. Very large bookstores, actually," I told her. "Besides the books, they have a tea room and live music sometimes."

"They sound quite charming," she said without a trace of envy in her voice.

Next up was a place called 'Madame Malkin's Robes for All Occasions'.

"Robes?" I turned to Remus questioningly, nodding toward several men walking briskly past us. "Like they're wearing?"

"Yes."

I studied a pair of store window manikins clad in dark-coloured garb. "Do all wizards wear these?" I asked in a hushed voice.

"Oh, yes," Molly said. "Both men and women wear them. Black robes are traditional, although they come in a wide variety of colors. And in warmer climates, they make them much more lightweight."

I tried to picture the Wicked Witch from the 'Wizard of Oz' wearing a hot pink robe instead of her usual black. The thought of it absolutely boggled the mind.

"I've never seen you wearing a robe," I pointed out to Remus.

"Yes, well, if I'd been wearing a robe you'd have had a lot more questions for me before now, wouldn't you?" He grinned. "Besides, my robes have seen far better days, I'm afraid. They're not nearly as grand as the ones in the window."

Molly Weasley was looking wistfully at an auburn-colored robe with a fur-trimmed hood. "That's beautiful, isn't it? Oh, well, perhaps some day..."

A sign near the robe display said 'See Our Sales Advertisement in the *Daily Prophet*'. "What's that?" I asked. "What's the *Daily Prophet*?"

"That's the wizarding newspaper," Molly informed me.

"Do wizards really wear robes with moons and stars on them?" I asked, suddenly thinking of Mickey Mouse surrounded by rampaging brooms with buckets.

Remus chuckled. "It's done, although that sort of look would be rather garish for most people."

"I've seen pictures," I began, but Molly shook her head tolerantly.

"We like to let the Muggles have their own odd ideas, dear. It keeps them entertained."

I didn't know what to say to that.

We continued down to the end of the street where I met my complete undoing, even beyond the revelation that the bank was run by goblins of all things. I stared at the sign outside Ollivander's wand shop, incredulous.

"Are they serious?" I gasped. "Three hundred eighty-two *B.C.*?"

"I believe so," Molly told me nonchalantly. "I suppose they could be fudging a bit give-or-take a few years, but wizarding history is rather well documented."

"Incredible," I muttered. It was fast becoming the most used word in my vocabulary.

We turned and started back towards the Leaky Cauldron, window shopping along the other side of Diagon Alley. Halfway back, Remus pointed out a small café. "That's our destination," he said, and shortly we were seated at an outdoor table at Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlour.

"There really is an ice cream parlor," I said, watching the other customers enjoying their treats.

He looked surprised. "I said we were going for ice cream, didn't I?"

"Yes, but at the time I thought your grasp on reality was a bit tenuous."

Remus chuckled. "Happier now?"

"You have no idea," I said fervently.

We ordered our ice creams -- Remus strongly recommended the Chocolate Brownie Chunky Raspberry Sundae Supreme -- and waited in the dappled sunlight of the summer afternoon. Molly Weasley told me about her family, her seven children and the husband who worked at the Ministry of Magic.

"There's a Ministry of Magic?" I asked, intrigued.

Remus' attention was elsewhere. I followed his gaze towards two men, both wearing purple cloaks, walking purposefully toward us. He grimaced.

"Speaking of the Ministry..." he muttered and began to climb to his feet.

At once Molly put a restraining hand on his arm. "I'll handle this, Remus." She rose quickly and bustled toward the two men, intercepting them several tables away.

"Is something wrong?" I asked Remus.

"They're from the Ministry," he said quietly. "They'll be wanting to know why we've brought a Muggle into Diagon Alley."

"You mean I'm not allowed to be here?"

"Yes and no. You have to understand that there are all sorts of secrecy laws, which prohibit us from disclosing ourselves to Muggles. Of course, there are Muggles who know about the wizarding world. Some witches and wizards are Muggle-born, with one or more Muggle parent, so naturally the parents and siblings are aware. And there are mixed marriages between wizards and Muggles. Still, we're not allowed to give the information to just anybody."

Well, I thought, it was good to know I wasn't just anybody. "Are they afraid I'd tell people? Who would believe me? They'd think I was crazy."

"That's one thing they count on."

"Wait a minute," I said, frowning. "How do they know I'm here? Did someone see me and turn me in?"

"No. There are safeguards. An alarm of sorts is triggered. They're just following up on it to be sure we've not brought you here as a lark."

My frown deepened. Someone knew I was here and was checking up on me? It smacked of Big Brother and grated on my distinctly American civil-rights-at-all-costs-sensibilities. I was certain that the U.S. wizards, whoever they were, enjoyed a lot more freedom than this. This type of thing did not go down well at all on my side of the Atlantic.

"That's an invasion of privacy!" I said, bristling with righteous indignation.

"They're trying to prevent an invasion of privacy, Kailin. Invasion of the wizarding world's privacy."

I was still contemplating this unhappy fact when Molly returned to the table. The purple capes were retreating, I noticed, and I wondered what she had said to call them off. Remus beat me to the question.

"No problem," she assured him, looking quite pleased with herself. "I told them Kailin was a distant Muggle relation of mine, and that you were her fiancé."

Remus looked relieved. "Thank you, Molly. I owe you."

"It was the least I could do. Don't even think about it."

The waiter brought our ice cream just then. The Chocolate Brownie Chunky Raspberry Sundae was truly massive, and I gasped aloud in dismay. "Why didn't you warn me? We could have shared one!"

"Nonsense," he said with a wink. "Everyone should experience a Fortescue's sundae at least once."

"I don't suppose they're magically unfattening," I muttered, picking up a spoon and prodding a scoop of ice cream.

"Heavens, no!" Molly cried cheerfully. "That's part of the fun!"

We each dove into our own sundaes, and I was pleased to find that wizarding ice cream was not vastly different from Muggle ice cream. It was as delicious as Remus had promised, but I knew there was no way I could finish the entire bowl. I whittled away at it, thinking back over everything I'd seen in the past hour. "I have a question," I said finally. "What happens if -- for whatever reason -- I decide that Remus and I have no future, and I return to the States? Do I have to swear on my life that I won't tell anybody about all this?"

Molly and Remus exchanged glances. He put his spoon down and wiped his mouth with a napkin.

"For everyone's good, the wizarding authorities would perform a Memory Charm on you. You would forget everything you had seen and heard today."

"Everything? Would I remember you?"

Remus cleared his throat. "I don't know. Depending on the circumstances, you might recall only that a nice man helped you pick up your belongings in the train station."

I stared at him, definitely not happy about the idea of someone messing with my memories. Then a light bulb went on in my head.

"You used magic to get my lipstick from under the train," I said. "And you fixed my backpack. After I got home that night, I never could find the rip in it."

"Well," he said, shrugging, "you said you liked that knapsack a lot."

I didn't know what to say. "Thank you," I murmured. "That was very sweet of you."

"Remus is very thoughtful," Molly added, and from the look Remus shot in her direction, I could tell that he didn't appreciate her efforts to build him up in my eyes.

We finished our sundaes -- gave up on them is probably a better description -- and rose to go. I paused once at the Eeylops Owl Emporium to peer at the handsome birds for sale. Remus explained the wizarding mail system to me, and while it seemed a clever idea, the thought of getting my fingers anywhere near these birds of prey made me nervous.

While I was admiring the owls, Remus and Molly chatted behind me. I could hear bits and pieces of their conversation.

"When... tell her?"

"-- night, I think."

"-- good head on her shoulders --"

"-- can't imagine what she'll think --"

I turned around. "Whatever are you two talking about?"

Remus hesitated. It was Molly Weasley who patted his arm and spoke.

"We'd like you to meet more of our friends, Kailin. Tomorrow night. Would that be all right with you?"

"Of course. I'd love to meet more of your friends," I said enthusiastically. This had been the most incredible (there was that word again) day of my life. What could be better than more amazing discoveries tomorrow? I took Remus' proffered hand and we continued our stroll. His smile, I noticed, seemed more resigned than happy.

Back through the brick wall (courtesy of Remus' wand this time) and the Leaky Cauldron, back out into what I could no longer refer to as The Real World. We bade Molly Weasley goodbye and headed toward the Underground once more.

"Molly seems very nice," I commented.

"As is her entire family. You'll meet more of them tomorrow night," Remus said absently.

"Remus, it was lovely to meet her and all, but -- well, why was she here? I mean, you obviously invited her."

He smiled wryly at me. "I wasn't sure if you'd be amenable to going inside the Leaky Cauldron with me, for one thing. I rather thought you'd think I was completely mad by the time we got here."

I burst out laughing. "I did, actually."

"I know, and I'm sorry for that. At least you know that's not the case."

I was silent for a moment. "Why did Molly talk to those Ministry men instead of you?"

Remus didn't answer immediately. When he did, it was obvious that he was choosing his words with great caution.

"It would have aroused more suspicion if I had done it," he said simply.

"Suspicion of what?"

A pained look crossed his face. "I can't tell you yet, Kailin."

"Because it's complicated?" I guessed.

"Right in one." He smiled and slung an arm around my shoulders, pulling me close as we walked. I don't know if he was hoping I'd change the subject to non-wizarding things, but there was much on my mind now that the dam had been breached.

"So if Sirius was a school friend," I said, "then he was a wizard, too. You both went to that Hogwarts school."

"Correct."

"You said that he was accused of killing a couple you knew from school --"

"James and Lily Potter."

The first name rang a bell. "Didn't you say that James Potter was one of your close friends?"

"Yes. As was Lily, although she wasn't part of the Marauders."

"So if Sirius didn't kill them, who did?"

Remus exhaled, avoiding my eyes. "That's part of everything I need to tell you tomorrow night."

And he would say no more about it. We boarded the Tube for the return trip, making idle small talk about any but what I'd just seen and heard. By the time we reached my flat, the entire afternoon was beginning to seem like one enormous illusion. If I hadn't been stuffed to the gills with Fortescue's ice cream sundae, I would have wondered if it was all a dream.

"Would you like a cup of tea?" I asked, unlocking the door to the flat.

"I can't stay, I'm afraid. I have some errands to run," he said reluctantly.

"Of course." In truth, I wasn't too upset. I rather welcomed the chance to be alone and mull over the day. "What time tomorrow night?"

"The meeting starts at eight. I thought we could get there a bit early so that I could introduce you to everyone."

"What do I do while you're having your meeting?" I asked out of curiosity.

"You can wait upstairs. There'll be others there who aren't in the Order, so you're not the only one banned from the room," Remus told me, smiling.

I nodded. We chose a time for Remus to pick me up tomorrow evening, then he kissed me tenderly.

"I'm glad you're not crazy," I told him.

"So am I, frankly." Remus ran a finger along my jaw line. "I take it I've not scared you off yet?"

"Far from it. This is absolutely fabulous. I feel like I've been entrusted with an incredible, unbelievable, secret." My eyes sparkled with the excitement of it all.

His smile was forced. "I wouldn't be too happy about it, if I were you."

I cocked my head curiously. "Why?"

"Tomorrow night, sweet. I'll tell you more then."

"Fine, be that way," I teased.

Remus hesitated, studying my face intently. "I do love you, you know."

My throat tightened. "I love you, too, Remus Lupin."

"Please don't think I'm being callous about putting you off. I want you more than you can imagine, Kailin. It's just --"

"-- complicated. Yes, I know." I smiled at him, rising on tiptoe to plant a kiss on his cheek. "See you tomorrow, dear heart."

Discovery

Chapter 7 of 12

Thanks to a bequest from my beloved grandmother, I decide to take an extended vacation in Great Britain.

It was another long trip on the Underground to where Remus' friends met. The neighborhood, to my dismay, was not one of the nicer parts of London, although Remus seemed unfazed by this. I suppose it happens everywhere: neighborhoods wax and wane, once impressive homes fall out of fashion and slip into decline. Some areas manage to keep up with the times, but this one definitely had not.

"Who is it that lives where we're going?" I glanced around at the once-grand houses, which had clearly seen better days.

"It was Sirius' family home. It's empty now, and we use it to hold our meetings."

"Oh." I spotted a couple of seedy-looking men eyeing me from across the street and instinctively drew closer to Remus. If I had to be here, I reasoned, best to be with someone who possessed a magic wand. I still had no idea what all he could do with said wand, but the mere thought of it was comforting.

"I suppose it's time for me to reveal a bit more, isn't it?" Remus commented idly.

"I was wondering when you were going to get around to it," I said. So far this evening, he'd seemed disinclined to say much.

His sigh was audible. "Kailin, I'm afraid this part is going to sound rather like a bad Muggle television show."

I grinned. "Go on, I'm listening."

"Very well." Remus paused, then: "There's an evil wizard on the loose."

Had I not seen all the wonders of Diagon Alley just yesterday, I would have laughed in his face. But there was no hint of humor in his expression, and I waited patiently for him to go on.

As calmly as if he were talking about the weather, Remus told me how a boy named Tom Riddle had grown up to become evil personified, going by the name of Lord Voldemort. How Sirius Black had allegedly betrayed James and Lily Potter, leading to their deaths. How the fourth Marauder, Peter Pettigrew, had become one of Voldemort's accomplices and framed Sirius for the murders of innocent bystanders. How James and Lily's son, the infant Harry Potter, defeated Voldemort some 15 years ago.

"So Voldemort's dead?" I asked.

Remus shook his head grimly. "Initially, he was believed to have died. But it was never proven, and now he's returned to human form. Bit by bit, he's regained his strength and his supporters, and now he's as powerful as he ever was.

"The group I work with is called the Order of the Phoenix, and we're trying to prevent Voldemort from taking over. What it all boils down to is that we're in the midst of a wizarding war."

"A war?" I echoed, realizing for the first time that Remus' notion of self-defense wasn't about going for the crotch or the eyeball.

"A dangerous war." Remus glanced a warning in my direction. "You need to be aware of this, Kailin. There's a very real possibility that I could be killed, just as Sirius was killed."

"Voldemort killed him?" I gasped.

"No, not Voldemort. One of his followers. They're called Death Eaters."

Well, I thought, that title left little to the imagination.

"There's also," Remus continued, "the probability that if I am attacked at a time when you and I are together, you will be killed as well."

I felt the blood leave my face. But Remus wasn't finished yet.

"You may think that this is an internal wizarding affair that has nothing to do with Muggles. The truth is that dark wizards and their followers have always raped, tortured and killed Muggles just for the sport of it, even Muggles with absolutely no connection to the wizarding world. And not just on a small scale, either. Some of the crimes you've seen reported in the news through the years are actually the work of dark wizards."

In a sense, I found Remus' last statement to be just a tiny bit comforting. Perhaps the human race the Muggle contingent, that is was less violence-prone than I'd believed.

"Voldemort's primary agenda is to promote pureblood wizarding values. He wants the wizarding world purged of anyone who's not of pure stock, which means he targets Muggle-born wizards and their families. Just the other night, two Hogwarts students lost their parents in a Death Eater attack. Both parents were Muggles."

Something jogged my memory and I thought back to yesterday's newspaper article. "I read an article in the *Times* the other day. Two boys found their parents dead in their home. The police thought perhaps it was suicide..."

"That would be the Creeveys," Remus interrupted softly. "Colin and Dennis Creevey's parents."

I sucked in my breath, my brain scrambling to recall details from the newspaper article. "There was something about a strange green glow..."

"The Dark Mark. Following a raid, one of the Death Eaters will cast the Morsmordre spell above the scene. It's a display of green sparks in the shape of a skull with a snake coming out of its mouth."

My irreverent side wanted to comment that Death Eaters must go in big for ostentation, and I had to remind myself that this wasn't a bad Muggle television show. It was instead a headline-making reality, and it wasn't funny. Not in the least.

"Kailin, I don't say these things to frighten you. Well, maybe I do," Remus sighed once more. "Whenever someone learns about the wizarding world, the first reaction is usually a giddy excitement at the discovery. You felt it yesterday."

I had, and he'd warned me against it.

"The thing is, as in all of life, there are two sides to any coin. Yes, witches and wizards can do many marvelous things, but it comes at a price. For all the wonders, there are extremely dark alternatives. Quite frankly, the wizarding world is a dangerous place to be right now. You need to be aware of that in order to reach a decision."

"A decision?"

"In light of all this, you need to decide if you want to continue our relationship."

I laughed nervously. "You don't mince words once you get started, do you?"

"I can't sugar-coat it, Kailin," Remus said flatly. "I care too much for you to do that."

I thought about this. Right now there was a brilliant mid-summer sunset in progress, and the notion of some dark wizard running down this street to kill us seemed about as

likely as winning the Lottery.

On the other hand, this new world I'd glimpsed, the one where owls delivered mail and witches flew on brooms and goblins ran banks, was still foreign to me. If those things were true, was it so hard to believe that the rest could happen?

"I'm not going to turn tail and run, Remus. I care too much for *you* to do that."

He chuckled mirthlessly. "Let's see how you feel at the end of the evening, shall we?"

I glanced sideways at him. "It almost sounds like you're trying to get rid of me. Do you want me to go?"

"Do I want you to go, or do I think you should go? Of course I don't want you to go. But if I were in your shoes, I'd seriously consider turning and running as fast as I could. And I wouldn't blame you in the least."

"We Yanks are a pretty tough lot. We don't scare easily."

"You haven't seen it yet," Remus said softly. "You haven't seen anything yet."

"I'm not leaving," I shrugged. "Deal with it, R.J."

"R.J.?" he repeated, smiling.

"I thought it was a rather fetching nickname," I said. "Do you like it?"

Remus laughed. "Coming from you, it sounds wonderful." He took my hand and we walked on into the balmy night.

One more block, then we turned onto a street called Grimmauld Place. The houses here were particularly shabby, it seemed. Remus led me to Number Eleven and paused.

"Is this it?" I asked him.

"No. We want Number Twelve, but it's heavily guarded." He gestured toward the next house. We walked a few paces toward it, then Remus stopped once more. "Here we go."

"Where?"

"Right here."

"But isn't that Number Twelve?"

"No, that's Number Thirteen."

"But---"

"Trust me." Remus cast a sideways smile at me, then took my hand. We turned to cross the small lawn between the two houses, and immediately the grass became a paved walk. My eyes widened.

The walkway, as we continued forward, suddenly became a stairway. We began to climb, and when we reached the top, a door appeared. And then, out of nowhere, an entire house materialized around the door. I stared up at it, my mouth hanging open.

"I suppose," I managed to say, "that there's no point in asking how this is possible, is there?"

Remus, chuckling at the stunned look on my face, merely winked and said, "It's magic." He turned to the door and rapped lightly.

"Of course," I muttered. Magic. Would this odd world of his ever cease to amaze me?

A smiling Molly Weasley opened the door. "Come in, come in," she urged in hushed tones.

Remus motioned for me to enter first, and I did so. The entry hall was large and dimly lit by gaslights, giving it a sad, neglected feeling. I glanced around. The stairs were in front of me: great dark, yawning chasms leading to upper and lower levels. The wall to my left was covered with the ugliest, heaviest velvet drapes I've ever seen, and all I could think was that someone must truly hate daylight to block it so viciously. All in all, the hall looked like it should have been swathed in cobwebs, though it was apparently clean. One thing I had learned through the years about large houses: they're seldom truly clean unless you have full time help. About the time you finish cleaning, the dust bunnies have already regenerated and it's time to start all over again.

"I hope I'm not too much of a distraction this evening," I told Molly. "I don't want to disturb your meeting."

Molly put her finger to her lips again, and I wondered why.

"Sometimes distractions can be a good thing," she murmured, glancing pointedly at Remus, who was busy relocking the front door. "Come downstairs, the two of you. We're just having a bit of a snack before the meeting starts. Not everyone is here yet."

I watched Molly head purposefully down the darkly lit stairs and wondered if witches and wizards were born with good night vision. Remus sensed my hesitation and pulled his wand out of his pants pocket.

"Lumos," he muttered, and light spilled from the tip of his wand, illuminating the way.

At the foot of the stairs, Molly threw open a door to a brightly lit kitchen, and I breathed a small sigh of relief that I'd be able to see my hand in front of my face again. More than a dozen pairs of eyes looked up to eye me curiously, reminding me of our entrance into the Leaky Cauldron yesterday. Here, however, the majority of the eyes seemed to belong to redheads.

"Everyone," she called, "Remus is here, and this is his friend, Kailin Curtis. Remus, you make the introductions, why don't you? I need to refill some of these dishes."

Molly bustled off, obviously appalled that the snack bowls had been emptied of their contents. Remus took me by the hand and led me around the table.

"Kailin, this is Arthur Weasley, Molly's husband. He works at the Ministry... Their son Bill, does curse-breaking for Gringotts, the bank I showed you yesterday... Fred and George, they're twins, as you can see.... Ron Weasley, Ginny Weasley.... I think I'm finally done with Weasleys," he joked, "although you can never be too sure. Hermione Granger, Harry Potter.... Arabella Figg.... Kingsley Shacklebolt and Nymphadora Tonks, they're Aurors... Sorry, about that, Tonks. Don't ever call her Nymphadora, Kailin, unless you want to be hexed from here till Tuesday and back... Mad-Eye -- sorry, Alastor Moody.... Hestia Jones..."

My head swam with names and faces. What were Aurors, I wondered, and was this the same Harry Potter that had vanquished Voldemort the first time? And were these people relying on children as part of their defense?

There was a faint knock at the front door. One of the Weasleys got up to answer it since Molly was busy refilling snack bowls. There were footsteps on the stairs, then two more people joined the group: a stern-looking, older woman in a tall pointed hat and a scowling dark-haired man dressed in black. Remus introduced the two of them as teachers from Hogwarts, the wizarding school. Both of them regarded me with some degree of disdain, the dark-haired man being the worst: he stopped just short of sneering at me. Remus quickly ushered me back to where Arthur Weasley was waving and pointing to an empty seat.

"Remus! Let Kailin sit here. I want to talk to her."

Remus grinned and pushed me gently in that direction, but not before whispering a warning in my ear. And so I found myself seated next to Arthur Weasley and discovered in the space of thirty seconds that Remus had been correct; the man began plying me with all sorts of questions about Muggles. Someone shoved something called Butterbeer in my hand and I tried to take sips of it between explaining about computers, compact discs and DVD's. Technology isn't really my strong suit; I'm satisfied just knowing that the things work, and I leave the details up to brains larger than mine. But then someone asked what field I was in, and when I replied that I was in medicine, Arthur Weasley positively glowed with delight.

"Really! I was hospitalized last Christmas for a short spell, and my Healer was quite open-minded about alternative therapies such as Muggle medicine. We tried stitches on my wound, but they apparently don't work well on magical injuries."

I stared gracelessly at him, contemplating the fact that these people viewed modern medicine as an alternative therapy. It stoked my curiosity, and I wanted to know just what sort of medicine these people practiced, and if it worked, why couldn't it be available to the rest of the world? But before I could turn the tables and start badgering Arthur with questions, there was a sudden stirring and the room quieted.

Another wizard had entered the room, an elderly man clad in ornate and richly bedecked robes. The power just seemed to ooze from him, and I knew at once that now that this man was here, the meeting would begin. Sure enough, Molly Weasley hopped to her feet and announced in no uncertain terms that the meeting was starting and those who didn't belong here needed to go. Two of the redheads stood, as did the Potter boy and the curly-haired girl next to him. I rose as well. Remus beckoned to the curly-haired girl.

"Hermione, would you take Kailin up to the front parlor?"

"Of course, Professor."

Remus squeezed my shoulder. "See you after the meeting," he said, smiling.

I followed the girl up two flights of stairs to a sitting room that felt every bit as stuffy and abandoned as the rest of the house. The other teens, I noticed, were heading on up to the next floor. One of them called to her.

"You coming, Hermione?"

"Be right there. Ginny, could you bring some magazines down for Kailin? There's absolutely nothing to do down here except read the Black family tree, and I don't think she's interested in that." Hermione turned back to me, her eyes shining conspiratorially. "I just wanted to say that we all think it's wonderful -- you and Professor Lupin, that is. He's such a nice man, and he deserves some happiness."

I wasn't quite sure how to answer that. "He is nice," I said, smiling in return. "But why do you still call him 'Professor Lupin'? He's not your teacher anymore."

"Force of habit, I suppose. He was absolutely one of the best teachers we've ever had. Knows a ton about Defense Against the Dark Arts. It's just such a shame..." Hermione's voice trailed off, leaving me wondering what was such a shame. "Anyway, I'm sure this must all be quite confusing for you. I know it would have been for me. My parents are Muggles, and I had absolutely no idea about the wizarding world until I got my Hogwarts letter."

"How do your parents feel about you being involved in this?" I asked, taking a seat on a threadbare sofa.

"In the wizarding world, you mean? They want me to do my best and make the most of my potential and all that, although I'm sure they wish I would have gone into practice with them someday. They're dentists," Hermione added by way of explanation.

"But what about this war against Voldemort? They're not worried?" It was hard to imagine any parent not being frantic with all that was apparently going on.

"Well, we're not of age yet, so we're not allowed to be part of the Order. And I haven't really told them much about the war, to be honest. I wouldn't want them to worry."

"Did you have any inkling that you were a witch before you went to Hogwarts?" I was curious to find out how magic manifested itself in children from a non-magical background.

"No, not really," Hermione told me. "I could make my bath toys zoom 'round the tub when I was tiny. I thought it was the water pushing them, though. And once I hurled a book off my desk when I was angry. That is, I was across the room from the desk when the book went flying."

"What did your parents think when your letter came? I would think it was a hoax of some sort."

"Oh, they did," the girl said, smiling. "They threw it out with the trash. But then another one came, and then Professor McGonagall came by to explain -- oh, good!"

The red-haired Weasley girl ran into the room, her arms laden with magazines. "Here you are, then. Hope you find something you like."

I took the magazines from her. "Thank you, uh---"

"Ginny," the girl volunteered.

"We'll be upstairs if you need anything, Kailin," Hermione said. "First door on the right. Just knock if you need anything. And I'll check in with you in a bit."

I thanked her. The girls disappeared back up the stairs and I settled in with my reading material. The magazines, I found, were the wizarding equivalent of Muggle teen fashion publications. Like their Muggle counterparts, they devoted countless pages to clothes, makeup, and how to attract boys. Some things were universal issues for teens everywhere, I decided, and it was a comforting thought in this odd place. I'd gone through two magazines and was just starting to read an advice column in a third ("I really like my boyfriend, but his broom is an absolute embarrassment when we go out on a date. What should I do?") when Hermione reappeared.

"How's it going?" she asked brightly.

"Fine. These magazines are a lot like their Muggle counterparts, aren't they?"

"I suppose. I don't read the things myself. They're Ginny's."

I laughed at the look of outright disgust on Hermione's face. "What do you read?" I asked.

"I like nonfiction as well as historical novels, although I really don't have much time to read for pleasure. We've just finished O.W.L.'s, and next year it's N.E.W.T.'s, so I spend most of my time studying."

I assumed that Owls and Newts were tests of some sort. It was clear to see where Hermione's priorities lay. "What do you want to do when you finish at Hogwarts?"

"I'd like to do something that'll really make a difference. The wizarding world is so far behind the Muggle world when it comes to social justice issues. But I may have to go

to Muggle university for that, I'm afraid. None of the wizarding ones in Britain has a decent program of that sort."

Hermione was a girl of strong convictions, it seemed. "Social justice issues? Like what?"

"Well, there's a terrible amount of prejudice among wizards, you see. There's all that pure-blood business, of course. And the way they treat other magical creatures is absolutely horrible. You would think that wizards, being in the minority in the world, would stick together, but they seem hell-bent on divisiveness. Year before last I tried to form an organization to support house-elf rights, and the way people reacted, you'd think I had asked them to break their wands in two or something."

"What are house-elves?"

"They're creatures that do housekeeping for the wealthy. And they're at large institutions, such as Hogwarts, to do the cooking and cleaning."

A house-elf sounded like a fine idea, I thought, and wondered how wealthy you had to be in order to acquire one. By this point in the evening, I was feeling pleasantly warm and comfortable, relaxed by the Butterbeer and bored by the magazines to the point where I was quite drowsy. Hermione was continuing her diatribe, and since my knowledge of the wizarding world was limited to my experiences of the past two days, I wasn't paying a whole lot of attention. It was when she said, "Take Professor Lupin, for example", that I sat up straighter and listened more attentively.

"...ridiculous that a man that capable and talented is discriminated against simply because he's a werewolf. It's a disgrace that---"

Exactly what was a disgrace, I didn't catch. Hermione's mouth was moving, but I couldn't hear her: there was a strange roaring in my ears that began with the word 'werewolf'. Time seemed to have slowed to a crawl. Finally, it appeared to dawn on Hermione that I was no longer paying attention to her.

"Kailin? Are you all right?"

"I'm sorry." My voice didn't sound like my own. "You said... werewolf?"

"Of course." Hermione frowned, then her eyes grew huge and her face contorted into a stricken expression. "You didn't know?" she gasped.

Werewolf. I tried to speak, but no sound emerged. I tried to inhale, but my diaphragm was failing to cooperate. The man I loved, Remus Lupin*Werewolf.*

I found myself climbing to my feet, then moving toward the doorway. Behind me, Hermione was asking in a squeaky voice if I was all right. All right? Of course I wasn't all right. I had to talk to Remus, and to hell with their meeting. Was this what he meant when he said things were 'complicated'?

And then I was stumbling down the dark stairway toward the entrance hall. When I came to the last two steps, however, I misjudged them in the dim light and found myself sprawling toward the floor. I landed flat on my face, hitting my forehead with a loud thump. I groaned aloud and climbed up to all fours. At once the ugly velvet curtains I'd seen upon our arrival sprang open and a screeching female voice filled the hall.

"Filthy traitors! Think you can stop the Dark Lord! Get out of my house, you vermin, you scum---"

I staggered to my feet and tried to focus my eyes on the source of the noise. A painting was behind the drapes, not a window. And the subject of that painting, a dour, scowling woman in black was standing with her arms akimbo. She caught sight of me, let out a blood-curdling shriek, and pointed a bony finger at me.

"Muggle! A Muggle! Get it out of my house! You filth, you vermin! You are not worthy to set foot in this house!"

Prior to yesterday, the sight of a moving, talking painting would have shocked me. At the present time, however, I was beyond the ability to be shocked any longer. I stumbled backwards several paces; already off-balance, I found myself tumbling sideways into a large hall table topped with a marble slab. My head struck the edge of the marble and another pain seared through my head.

Hope it's not a head wound, I thought briefly. I'll bleed like a stuck pig. My last conscious thought was that the cool floor felt very, very good.

The Truth Comes Out

Chapter 8 of 12

Thanks to a bequest from my beloved grandmother, I decide to take an extended vacation in Great Britain.

Chapter 7: The Truth Comes Out

I heard running footsteps, urgent voices. Strong hands lifted me, and I wanted to protest that I liked the cool floor just fine, thank you; it felt quite good on my aching head. Then something cold was pressed against my forehead, and I reluctantly opened my eyes. I was stretched out on the couch in the sitting room, and Molly Weasley was perched beside me.

"There now, that feels better, doesn't it?"

The gaslights, which had seemed dim before, now acted like searchlights trained directly on my face, and I grimaced. I reached up to probe at my scalp and found two good-sized goose eggs, one from the fall down the stairs and the other from the marble-topped table.

"The painting was screaming at me," I mumbled.

Molly clucked her tongue sympathetically. "That was Mrs. Black, dear. She really doesn't like us much."

I heard someone sniff loudly from the other side of the room, and I painfully turned my head to check out the source. Hermione was standing by the door, wringing her hands and looking tearful. Remus stood next to her, arms crossed and a despondent expression on his face.

Remus.

I remembered suddenly why I had my double headache, and my stomach churned in response. I shut my eyes once more. "Could Remus and I be alone, please?"

"Of course." Molly rose from the sofa at once. "I'll see if I can find something for your head."

I heard footsteps heading out into the hall, accompanied by Molly's remonstrations and Hermione's sniffles. Remus came over to take her place. I struggled to sit up.

"No, no," he objected, trying to push me back down. "You should lie down, Kailin."

"I don't want to lie down. I want to sit up." I managed to get upright, and the cold cloth on my forehead plopped into my lap. It vaguely registered that the ice-cold cloth was not wet in the least, and I supposed there was some sort of freezing charm witches used to make it that way. The difference between the Muggle world and the wizarding world, I realized, was not just a chasm: it was an abyss.

Remus regarded me, his face a mask of misery. "I'm so sorry," he said hoarsely. "I never intended for you to find out this way."

"And just how did you intend for me to find out?"

"I planned to tell you tonight. After the meeting," he added, gesturing uselessly in the direction of the stairs.

"I see. And do you have any more revelations for me?" I asked faintly.

Remus shook his head.

"So..." I inhaled deeply, trying to think clearly despite my pounding headache. "There are such things as werewolves. And you are..."

"...a werewolf," he whispered.

I began to laugh, a hysterical, hurting kind of laughter that had absolutely nothing to do with humor. "I've fallen in love with a werewolf," I gasped, waiting in vain for the bright side of all this to appear. Well, I'd wanted an adventure in England. It seemed I had found one.

Remus didn't answer. He stared at the floor as if hoping to see the answer to his problems written there. "Kailin, I'm so sorry," he muttered once more. "Bloody hell, I should never have rung you up after we met at King's Cross."

I wasn't in the mood to listen to his self-recrimination. "Can you please just start at the beginning and tell me what all this means?"

He hesitated. "It means that once a month, when the moon is full, I transform into a werewolf. I was bitten when I was only seven, you see. My parents had rented a house in the country one summer; I wandered away from the house during a full moon and was bitten. There's no cure."

"Do you... go around biting people?"

"I've never bitten anyone. Never," he assured me quickly. "Every month, I would be locked up in a safe place where I couldn't possibly hurt anyone. The only person I could hurt was myself -- which, unfortunately, I would do on a regular basis. I spent a bit of time in Hogwarts' infirmary, I'm sad to say."

"Why?" I asked sharply.

"With no one around to attack, I would turn on myself. Biting, scratching..." Remus' voice trailed off.

"You mutilated yourself?" I was incredulous.

He didn't answer directly. "Nowadays, thank God, there's the Wolfsbane Potion. I still transform, but I keep my mind and my wits about me. It's not like the old days. I don't feel the --" Remus hesitated and then forced out two words as though it was the most painful thing he'd ever said: "-- the bloodlust."

Bloodlust. I felt completely numb inside now. But Remus wasn't finished.

"What this means," he said, turning to look me in the face, "is that I'm virtually a pauper. There's a law, you see, that makes it almost impossible for me to find work. No one will hire me. My teaching stint at Hogwarts was one of the few real jobs I've ever had, and that ended because word of my condition got out. By wizarding standards, I'm considered to be a half-breed. I live in a room in Ministry-supported welfare housing, and every month, I get a Ministry dole. In short, I'm nothing, Kailin."

I thought of Hermione's righteous anger. Tears filled my eyes and spilled over onto my cheeks. "So -- that explains why -- uh -- you never spent a lot of money on our dates --"

"Right. I'm... pretty well flat broke."

"You -- live in welfare housing, you said?" Remus had never told me where he lived, other than to say that he had a room somewhere. I swiped at my cheeks, not wanting to cry. I had the feeling my headache would be much the worse for it.

"Yes. My room is quite small, but then I don't own very much." Remus' smile was so faint as to be nearly nonexistent.

I buried my face in my hands and tried to think. We sat side by side, not speaking, until Molly Weasley returned and knocked softly on the door frame. I sat up and dabbed at my cheeks once more. I couldn't help but notice that Remus was doing the same thing.

"I found a Soothing Potion for you, Kailin," she said, looking terribly apologetic for interrupting us. "This'll put your headache to rights."

I eyed the glass she held and wondered what it would do to my unsteady stomach. It wasn't likely, I thought, that potions came in cherry or grape flavors. "Thank you," I said, taking the glass from her and sipping tentatively. The liquid within tasted somewhat herbal, and I was relieved to find that it seemed content to stay down. I downed the rest of it in three gulps, and remarkably, my headache began to change from a throbbing pain to a dull ache.

"I've ruined your meeting, haven't I?" I muttered.

"Not at all," said Molly. "They're still going strong downstairs."

"Oh." I glanced at Remus. "You should probably get back then."

"Absolutely not," he said firmly. "I'm seeing you home first. I'm sure someone will fill me in later."

We left number twelve Grimmauld Place a few minutes later, both of us quiet and subdued. The trip home seemed to take forever. While my head felt better, my throat was now scratchy and raw, and I wondered if the Soothing Potion was responsible. By the time we arrived at my flat, all I wanted in life was to crawl into bed and pull the covers over my head.

"Would you like to come in?" I asked without much enthusiasm.

Remus seemed to sense that my invitation was mere formality. "I think I'd better go."

I nodded. "I'm going straight to bed, I think."

"Are you all right?" he asked.

"In what way?" I joked feebly. "Physically, mentally, emotionally? Doesn't matter. I think the answer to all of them is probably the same."

"I hate to leave you like this, Kailin."

"I'll be all right. That potion Molly gave me was quite impressive. As for the rest of me," I said, sagging against the doorframe, "I honestly don't know."

"Tell me what you want. I'll leave and never come back if that's what you want me to do. Or I'll give you however long you want to think about it. Just -- just don't lead me on. Don't tell me everything's grand when it's not. I'm not naïve." He smiled, a sickly travesty of the real thing. "I'm quite used to rejection, actually. I suppose I'm to the point in life where I thrive on it."

I was horrified. "Don't be ridiculous," I said. "I wouldn't--"

"I know," he interrupted, "you wouldn't dream of treating me that way. I've heard that far too many times."

I fell silent, aware that I was quite out of my depth here. Remus shoved his hands into his pockets.

"Look," he said quietly, "the smart thing to do would be for you to go back to the States and forget about me. You deserve a -- an investment banker or a barrister, and a fine big home in the suburbs. I can give you nothing, Kailin. Nothing."

A lump the size of Texas rose in my throat, and I found myself on the verge of tears once more. Part of me yearned to tell him that he was wrong, but I couldn't play the hopeless romantic anymore. Any innocence I'd had in that regard was now dead and gone.

"You can give me some time," I ventured.

"All right. Tell me how long."

"I don't know. A week, I guess." It would be the longest period we'd gone without seeing each other. "I don't know how long it takes to think about something like this. I've never had to do it before."

"Of course. I'll be back in touch with you a week from today."

I nodded wordless agreement.

"Goodbye then, Kailin." Remus started to walk away, and immediately my heart cried out in revolt.

"Wait," I said, and he turned back to look at me. "Could you hold me? Please? I could really use a hug right now."

Remus looked startled, and I wondered if he found it surprising that I still wanted him to touch me. At once he enfolded me into his arms and buried his face in my hair, stroking it gently. "Kailin..." he whispered moments later, his voice a choked whisper. "God, Kailin, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry..."

Sobbing was a bad idea, I discovered; it made my head start throbbing once more. I managed to rein in my emotions after a few moments, but I stayed in his arms, content to let the tears stream quietly. "Remus..."

"Yes?"

"Please don't be too angry with Hermione. She honestly had no idea."

"I know."

"And Remus..."

He waited.

"I still love you," I said. "I just -- I just don't know --"

"I know," he said hoarsely. "I know."

And I was sure that he did.

* * *

It was not a good night.

My dreams were populated with elves who went about my house cleaning and singing "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf", while numerous letters from my dead parents, asking me to come home to America, appeared in the mail. The mail carrier himself had an owl perched on his shoulder, and he winked at me knowingly every time he came to the door, assuring me that he wouldn't tell a soul about magic. As a result, I spent eight hours in an endless cycle of nightmares and drowsy semi-awareness. When I awoke the next morning, my throat hurt, my whole body ached, and my nose was running like a sieve. I'd managed to snag a summer cold, one of my least favorite things in the whole world. I'm not normally a person who likes to linger in bed even with a cold, but on this day I couldn't find the energy to crawl out from under the blankets.

Then there was the matter of the two-ton weight that seemed to be crushing my heart, a discomfort totally unrelated to the virus running rampant in my sinuses. Another really good cry would have helped, but I had already cried buckets, and to continue would have swollen my nasal passages to the point where I'd be unable to breathe at all. I settled for staring listlessly out the window and trying to think -- or not think -- about the whole situation.

I was the self-proclaimed adrenaline junkie, I reminded myself. So why had this news hit me like a ton of bricks? To all appearances, Remus Lupin was the perfect man -- not that I expected perfection from any man. And I could understand why "Guess what, I'm a werewolf" hadn't been the first words out of his mouth. Easing me into the wizarding world before breaking the news of Voldemort or his own condition made sense.

Maybe it was the idea that I was in love with a penniless, unemployed man. I told myself that I was certainly more open-minded than that. Still, I had to admit that if I'd known up front that Remus was on welfare, I might not have been so interested in pursuing the relationship.

Finally, I decided that I simply had no frame of reference to know how to deal with loving a werewolf. My knowledge of the wizarding world was still so new, it was hard to put everything in some sort of context.

I'd been staring at the mockingly bright sunshine outside for the better part of an hour when there was a knock at my door. I found my robe and struggled into it, finally making it to the front door by the third time the visitor knocked. Somewhere between the bed and the door, I'd remembered Remus' warning about Death Eaters and me being a target by virtue of my association with him, so I cautiously opened the door just a crack. Not that I would have had a clue what to do if it had been a dark wizard, of course -- unless I could have run them off with a good fit of sneezing my germs on them. As it turned out, it was not a dark wizard at all, but Molly Weasley.

"Molly! Good morning," I said, trying to sound cheerfully normal.

"Remus told me where you lived. Thought I'd pop round to see how you were doing and bring you some more Soothing Potion," she said. "How's the head?"

"Eclipsed by the nose, I'm afraid." It was no use trying to pretend otherwise. My red nose and watery eyes were a dead giveaway. "Please, come in."

"Oh, dear. You have a beastly cold as well, don't you? I'll need to get you some Pepper-Up Potion. Do you mind if I just Apparate back?"

I stared at her, understanding absolutely nothing she said past the part about the beastly cold. "Uh..."

"No? Fine, I'll be right back."

And Molly vanished with a pop, leaving me staring open-mouthed at the spot where she had been standing. Was that Operating, or whatever she had called it? And what was Pepper-Up Potion? If it was anything as effective as last night's Soothing Potion, I hoped she'd return with a gallon jug of the stuff. I closed the door and went to wait on the sofa, my box of tissues close at hand. Several minutes later, there was a loud pop behind me: Molly had returned directly to my living room, bypassing the front door entirely.

"Here we go. Do you have a glass?"

Caught in mid-sneeze, I motioned in the direction of the kitchen with one hand and grabbed for the Kleenex box with the other. I could hear Molly rummaging through my cabinets while I tried to find some skin around my nose that wasn't already sore to the touch.

"Have you heard from Remus today?" she called.

"No. We agreed not to see each other for a week while I sort through everything."

"That's a good idea. You need a little space now and then. I just wondered if he has the cold, too."

I didn't say anything. I was gloomily wondering what werewolves did when their noses ran.

Molly reappeared, a teacup in her hands. "This'll do," she said and poured bits of both potions into it. Clouds of steam rose from the cup, steam I wasn't sure had anything to do with the temperature of the liquid. I was feeling too miserable to care and decided that if the stuff ate holes in my esophagus, I'd just have to deal with it. I drank it down as quickly as I could. Almost immediately, it felt like small bursts of flame were shooting throughout various parts of my body. The only thing I could compare it to was the time I had adventurously downed a shot of whiskey in one gulp -- although I soon realized that I felt a heck of a lot better now than I had on that occasion.

"That's the ticket!" she cried, and I wondered from the approving tone in her voice if my skin was turning some horrific shade of red. "Have you had anything to eat today?"

"Well, no,--"

"Then let me make you a spot of tea."

"You're don't have to do that," I protested. "You're my guest."

"Don't be silly. I'm not a guest, you didn't invite me, now did you? I'll make the tea, and you lean back against that lovely fat pillow and relax."

Molly disappeared into the kitchen again, and soon I heard the sound of water running into my tea kettle. "Arthur's fascinated by Muggle technology, you know, so I've picked up quite a bit of information from him. Your heating thing, here: do I turn the whistles to the left or right? And about how far?"

I had visions of the flat going up in flames; I hoped my landlord carried ample insurance.

"To the right, and about halfway."

"Right," she said happily. A few moments later, she reappeared. "Takes a while this way, doesn't it?"

I sneezed in response. Meanwhile, Molly was making herself at home on the sofa, undaunted by the number of used tissues that were scattered about. I remembered the number of red-haired children at Grimmauld Place the previous evening and thought that only a mother could disregard germ-ridden clutter so effectively.

"Tell me about yourself, Kailin. We didn't get to chat much at Diagon Alley the other day."

Despite the Pepper-Up Potion, my sore throat still wasn't conducive to spending much time talking. I gave her a condensed version of my life and how I happened to be in Britain, then turned the tables on her so my throat could rest.

Molly, as I had guessed, needed little encouragement to talk. She told me how she and Arthur had met at Hogwarts; about the educational and professional achievements of all her children, although the twins had chosen another path entirely and she still wasn't convinced they would do well by it; and by the time she was describing the home she referred to as the Burrow, the teakettle was whistling its readiness.

We were sipping our tea and munching on the biscuits Molly had found lurking in my pantry when she finally got around to what was probably the main purpose of her visit.

"About Remus, Kailin..."

We'd skirted the issue thus far. Her visit had provided enough distraction that my emotional distress had faded a bit, and I wasn't eager to jump back into the fray. To my relief, Molly seemed to sense this.

"...I know you are struggling with everything you've learned about him, --"

"Not just him," I assured her. "About your world in general."

"Of course. That's as it should be. It wouldn't be normal if you weren't totally shocked or appalled or something. It's just that... well... Remus Lupin is one of the finest people I know," Molly said, her usually lively eyes now quiet and hopeful. "If you decide that you can't accept him as he is, please let him down kindly. He's lived a terribly hard life, and kindness is the very least he deserves."

I nodded, unable to speak because those blasted tears were back, welling up so suddenly and spilling over so rapidly that I was caught completely unawares. My defences weren't just down, I realized, they were completely missing in action. Mother-hen Molly pulled me into her arms and cradled me like one of her red-headed chicks.

"He's the most wonderful man I've ever known," I sputtered between sobs. "I don't know what to do, Molly!"

"Of course you don't," she said soothingly. "Things will sort themselves out, Kailin. You wait and see."

There are some people you can know for years and yet they still feel like virtual strangers. Then there are those, and Molly Weasley is one, whom you can know for less than forty-eight hours and they feel like family. So I wasn't surprised at all when she told me to pack a bag because she was taking me to the Burrow for a rest.

It was tempting. The idea of sitting around my flat for a week, surrounded by constant reminders of Remus, was not a terribly appealing prospect. There was truly nothing to keep me here. And just maybe, I would acquire more insight into the wizarding world.

"That's very nice of you, Molly. Are you sure? I don't want to be an inconvenience."

"Don't be silly. You're not an inconvenience. It'll be lovely having a visitor."

"Do I take a cab to get there, or the Tube?"

Molly burst out laughing. "I forgot to tell you, didn't I? The Burrow is in Devon."

"Oh." I felt less certain now. Molly's home was some distance away, and I truly didn't feel like dealing with travel just now.

"I know there's a Muggle train that goes nearby," she went on. "It stops in Feniton, and from there you could take a taxi."

I didn't have the heart to say no. She looked so enthused that I suspected that it was just easier to do it. "Well... All right. Feniton, you said?"

"That's right. I'll write down the directions for the taxi driver, once you've reached Feniton."

So I would be spending some time in Devon, it seemed. I consulted my trusty travel guide to the British Isles and found that I could catch an afternoon train if I got a move on. I threw some clothes into my backpack, along with an ample supply of tissues, and closed up the flat.

At the Burrow

Chapter 9 of 12

Thanks to a bequest from my beloved grandmother, I decide to take an extended vacation in Great Britain.

Chapter 8: At The Burrow

Molly's dose of Pepper-Up Potion began to wear off somewhere between London Waterloo Station and the town of Feniton. The farther I traveled, the more congested and miserable I became, and I wondered what had possessed me to undertake this trip today instead of waiting for tomorrow. I already knew the answer, but was loath to admit it: I didn't want to spend another miserable night at the flat, thinking and wondering about Remus. No, a change of scene was for the best, even though I was exhausted by the time the train reached my stop. I paused long enough in the Feniton station to find the drinking fountain and take a regular Muggle cold capsule, then flagged down the first taxi I saw.

"Where to?" the cabbie asked.

"The village of Ottery St. Catchpole, please."

"Right," he said, taking a final puff on his cigarette and tossing it out the taxi window. "Whereabouts once we reach the village?"

I pulled out the paper Molly Weasley had given me and tried to focus. "According to this, you go through the town and cross the river on the hatchery road, look for the two-track road--there's a barn there--"

"Why don't you tell me all that again once we get there, eh?" the taxi driver interrupted, sounding a bit annoyed that I didn't have a street address to give him.

You asked, I thought dully.

Despite my best efforts, I drifted off after a few minutes. I awoke to the sound of the driver's voice announcing that we had arrived in Ottery St. Catchpole and asking what were the bloody directions again? I re-read what Molly had written. The man didn't look any happier about it than he had back at the Feniton station.

I straightened up and looked out the window. Ottery St. Catchpole was completely charming from what I could see of it, and I hoped I would be able to spend time there. We crossed the Otter River on one of those lovely arched stone bridges, and then were back out into the countryside. A mile or two down the road, the driver pulled the taxi off onto the shoulder.

"This it?" he demanded.

I peered around. There was a narrow, unpaved lane leading off to the right, and a deserted barn stood to our left. There were no signs anywhere, no other vehicles, and no indication of life.

"I don't know," I said blankly. "I thought my friend would be here to meet me."

"Huh." The driver pulled out a pack of cigarettes and lit another, at least the third I knew of since climbing into his taxi. "Your friend's not here, you say?"

"No."

He glanced over his shoulder, studying me appraisingly. "How 'bout you and I head back into the town for a bit? Nice pub there. I could buy you a pint. Hate to see a pretty thing like you waitin' out in the middle of nowhere."

I moaned inwardly. Given a choice between the open road and the taxi driver, I'd take my chances with the wildlife of Devon. I was about to issue the standard curt refusal when an enormous, albeit timely, sneeze came over me. There was nothing else to do but grab a tissue and blow. By the time I was finished, the man was scowling, obviously regretting his offer. I stuffed the tissue into my pocket and hoisted my backpack onto one shoulder, thinking that sometimes viruses came in mighty handy.

"Afraid not," I said politely. "How much do I owe you?"

The man peered at the meter and grunted out the price of the ride. I held out the bills in his direction, and he took them delicately as though I'd infested them with the Black Plague. I climbed out of the car. He shot me one more look of disgust, then gunned the engine and sped off. I couldn't help but grin. This was the first time since last evening's unpleasant revelations that I'd cracked a smile, and it felt good. I began to wonder if I might live.

I also began to wonder if I was in the right spot.

I paced along the side of the road for a few minutes, looking hopefully for any sign that I was near the Weasley home. Five minutes passed, then ten minutes, then a redheaded figure finally appeared over the rise of the two-track road. I breathed a sigh of relief.

"Kailin!" Molly looked distressed as she bustled up. "I'm so sorry that I wasn't here when you arrived. Have you been waiting long?"

"About ten minutes," I said, eyeing the apron Molly wore. It bore a number of food stains, apparently fresh, and I wondered if there'd been a melee in her kitchen.

"Did you have a pleasant trip? Any difficulties?"

"Other than the cab driver trying to take me to the pub, no."

"Cheeky bugger," she muttered, reaching for my backpack. "Well, you look completely done in. I'm going to put you to bed straightaway."

"I can carry that," I protested. "It's pretty heavy, but I'm used to it."

"It's not a problem," Molly said firmly, whipping her wand out of the apron pocket. The next thing I knew, my backpack was levitating in front of her. I stared, stunned.

"You see? I told you it wasn't a problem."

We started walking down the two-track road, the backpack bobbing in front of Molly's outstretched wand.

"Is it very far?" I asked hopefully.

"Not at all," Molly assured me.

Still, there's something about walking down a road without benefit of landmarks and cross-streets that makes the distance seem twice as far as it truly is. I was ready to sit down and whine by the time the Burrow came into view.

"There we are," she said cheerfully.

I stared at the bizarre building in front of me. "That's your house?" I asked as politely as I could.

"Yes. I know it may look a bit odd, but we've added on at various times over the years -- whenever the children arrived, you see."

The house truly looked as though a stiff breeze would dismantle it with little effort. I had no time to dwell on this, however. Molly hurried me through the kitchen and up two flights of stairs to a small bedroom and announced that this room would be mine.

"Here you go," she announced, crossing to the window and throwing it wide open. "You'll be quite comfortable in here, I think."

"I'm not putting anybody out, am I?"

"Not at all. This is Percy's room."

"Percy?" I wracked my brain to recall if I'd met Percy at Grimmauld Place.

"Our third son," she said, and I couldn't help but notice that the light had gone from her eyes. "He works for the Ministry and has a place of his own in London."

"Oh."

"Let's see... I pointed out the bath on the way up, so you should be all set. Will you be coming down for supper, do you think?"

"I don't know. Right now, I can't think past getting into bed."

"I understand. I'll check in on you later." Molly started for the door, then turned around. "Oh, and I'll try to keep the racket down so you can get some rest."

I nodded gratefully. She had already told me that I could expect to see the four Weasley children from Grimmauld Place, as well as their friends Harry Potter and Hermione Granger. Molly Weasley was apparently one of those women who invited chaos and then thrived in it. When she closed the door behind her, I dropped my bag to the floor and walked to the window to inspect the view. I could see the broad sweep of the back yard--more a field, actually--and a garden and pond beyond.

I went to the bed and perched on the side, trying out the mattress. Thankfully, it didn't seem too hard or too soft, not that I particularly cared at the moment. I was bone-weary both physically and emotionally, and could probably have slept standing if I had to. The small room, cramped though it might be, was a homey and cheerful respite from the memories of Remus which assaulted me from everywhere in my flat. Yes, this was a good idea, getting away from it all. I turned down the bedcovers, changed into an old, soft tee-shirt, and crawled in.

The warm air wafting in the window, along with the droning of a bee in the honeysuckle outside my window, lulled me into blackness, and I slept. I was awakened sometime later by a gentle tapping on the door. I opened my eyes blearily to find Molly coming through the door with a tray.

"I brought you some broth and tea and a dose of Pepper-Up Potion," she said in a hushed voice. "And I've told everyone that you're ill and need rest and quiet."

I wanted to protest that it was only a cold, that she needn't marshal the household into enforced silence on my account, but I was still drowsy. Besides, I suspected that Molly wielded untold power in her home, and its inhabitants were probably used to toeing the line. And so I gratefully accepted the potion, sipped the contents of the tray and then, amazed that I could possibly still be sleepy, dove under the comforter and back into the darkness.

* * * *

By the next morning, I began to believe that I would live. I didn't know what was in the Pepper-Up Potion, but whatever it was, it definitely had something going for it. For the most part, I could breathe and go without a tissue for five minutes at a stretch. All in all, it was a major improvement.

I found some bath linens on the chair just inside the door and decided that a hot shower would revive me further. I had just concluded that wizarding bathrooms were no different from Muggle bathrooms when the lavatory mirror told me that my nose was too red and I should really take more Pepper-Up Potion. By this time, there wasn't much that could surprise me anymore. I managed to not squeal in shock and merely stuck my tongue out at my image. I dressed quickly and went downstairs.

It was clear where the Burrow had gotten its name. The house additions Molly mentioned were evidently made in a rather pell-mell fashion, and the end result reminded me somewhat of a patchwork quilt. With a quilt, however, there's usually a pattern - and there was virtually no rhyme or reason to this floor plan. It would be enough to drive an architect to drink, not to mention the poor soul in charge of issuing building permits. Whether the wizarding world bothered with such things, I didn't know. The house in Grimmauld Place, despite the obvious neglect and disrepair, was to all appearances normal in most respects. This must be Weasley eccentricity at its finest.

When I reached the kitchen, I found a sea of red hair sitting around the table.

"Good morning!" Molly beamed at me. "How are you feeling?"

"Much better," I said truthfully. "I can't believe I slept so much."

"You needed it. How's the nose?"

"Your bathroom mirror told me it was too red."

"Silly thing. I should have warned you."

"That's not so bad," the girl I recognized as Ginny Weasley volunteered. "You haven't lived until it laughs at you when you're trying out a new hairstyle."

"Sit, Kailin," Molly urged. "Let me get you some breakfast. What do you prefer? Eggs? Sausages? Porridge?"

I requested scrambled eggs and toast, then gratefully accepted the coffee Molly passed to me. The conversation moved on to the upcoming school year at Hogwarts, prompting the twins Fred and George to boast that their days of higher education were behind them, now that they were entrepreneurs. There was much speculation about who would be the new teacher for Defense Against the Dark Arts. Nobody, Ron Weasley told me, had been as good at the job as Remus; at the mention of his name, I felt a pang of anxiety, reminding me why I was here in the first place. Hermione Granger, I noticed, looked suddenly guilty. I made a mental note to reassure her that I didn't blame her for the fiasco at Grimmauld Place.

After breakfast, the twins announced that they needed to Apparate to their shop. Everyone else wandered off to whatever activities they'd planned for a summer's day, leaving me alone with Molly.

"Is it always like this?" I asked when dead silence had descended upon the house.

"Lord love you, dear, you're not used to being around a lot of children, are you?" Molly chuckled.

"Well, no."

"I'm used to it. I tell you, Kailin, during the school year, the quiet is nearly unbearable."

"They're all very well-behaved, aren't they?" I commented.

"Usually," she said with a wry smile. "But they're good kids, every one of them."

"Molly... How long have you known Remus?"

"Oh." She considered the question briefly. "Not that long, actually. Only about a year now, ever since Dumbledore reactivated the Order of the Phoenix. And of course the children had him at Hogwarts a couple of years ago."

"Have you ever seen him when he's... uh... I mean, when he--" I broke off, unsure what word I was looking for.

"Transforms?" Molly finished gently. I nodded, but she was already shaking her head. "No. He never lets anyone see. He locks himself into his room before it happens. Even after he regains human form, he's terribly exhausted and has to sleep it off for a day or so. It's evidently quite painful, even with the Wolfsbane potion to keep him from going mad."

Going mad. I nearly winced aloud. "What Hermione said about all the prejudice: it's true? He can't get a job just because he's a werewolf?"

Molly snorted in disgust as she rose to her feet and went for the coffee pot. "Prejudice is the wizarding world's dirty little secret. I can understand why some wizards might feel superior to Muggles simply because we can do magic. But the nonsense about purity of race is ridiculous. A human being is a human being, whether magic or Muggle. And as for superiority over other magical creatures... Well, a few wizards have lorded it over certain creatures for far too long, and one of these days, it's going to backfire in their faces. Charlie, our second son, works with dragons in Romania, and let me tell you--"

"Dragons!" I choked violently on the coffee I'd just sipped, to the point where Molly had to pound me on the back. "Dragons are real?" I finally managed to gasp.

"Yes."

"In Romania?"

"Oh, not just in Romania. They're quite common in most of Europe," Molly said matter-of-factly.

My response was a massive sneeze. I found the tissues just in time. "Everywhere," I echoed weakly after I'd blown my nose. "Dragons are real. Werewolves are real. Magic is real. Vampires?"

"Real, although all those Muggle movies about them are preposterous for the most part."

"How on earth do you keep all this hidden?"

"It's a full time job, of course. Remember the men in Diagon Alley?"

I nodded. "But wouldn't it be simpler just to let the truth be known?"

"Think about it, Kailin: all throughout history, what's the usual fate of minority groups?"

"Oh." I pondered that while Molly refilled my coffee cup. It was a question of damage control versus perpetual subjugation.

I sat for a moment, thinking that a week ago, I didn't know any of this. "Molly," I said finally, "what would you do if you were in my shoes?"

"Go back to bed for a while," she said briskly.

I laughed. "You know what I mean. About Remus."

"Oh, no you don't," she objected, smiling broadly. "You won't trick me into that."

"But this is all so complex. I have absolutely nothing to use as a frame of reference."

Molly replaced the coffee pot on the stove. "Well, you have a lot of time on your hands. We have all sorts of textbooks lying around from the children's classes, so you can read up on our world. Come to think of it, Hermione would be an excellent resource. Right little bookworm, that one. If you have a question that you can't find the answer to, I'd bet a pile of Galleons that she could not only steer you to the right book, she'd point out the chapter and page and then quote the line itself. And she'd do it from a Muggle perspective, since she was raised Muggle."

Which brought up another issue. Molly's invitation to the Burrow hadn't specified any particular length of stay. "I'm really grateful for your hospitality, but I don't quite know how to put this: how long do you intend for me to stay?"

Molly Weasley just chuckled in response.

"As long as it takes."

* * *

I flopped onto my bed with an armful of books: heavy books that looked as though they'd come off the printing press in another century instead of the last ten years. Hadn't wizards ever heard of paperbacks? After fluffing up the pillows and making sure my box of tissues was close at hand, I chose *A History of Magic* and settled down to read. *A History of Magic* was a textbook, so I skimmed through the information rather than read it in depth. Still, what I found confirmed what Remus had told me: another world happily coexisted with the one I knew, and the close brushes and narrow misses with each other had fostered the fables and fairy tales I'd known since childhood.

From there I moved to *Distinguished Witches and Wizards of the Twentieth Century* and found a few names there that I recognized: Dumbledore, Voldemort, Harry Potter. A quite humorous read was *Understanding the Muggle World*, apparently the primer for a class in Muggle culture for young wizards. Some things which I took for granted, which included about every modern convenience known to man, were almost always viewed as oddities by the wizarding world. *Fantastic Beasts & Where to Find Them* made my flesh crawl. Not only were dragons, leprechauns and unicorns real, there was a host of horrific creatures afoot that I'd never heard of before. I was finally so unnerved that I threw the book aside and went downstairs.

Molly was nowhere to be found, so I took an apple from a bowl in the kitchen and went outside to enjoy the sunshine for a while. I found Hermione Granger sitting on the grass, watching something at the far end of the field. "Mind if I join you?" I asked.

I think she said 'not at all', or something to that effect, but I failed to catch her exact words. There, several hundred feet away, were three small figures flying on...

"They're flying on broomsticks!" I gasped, pointing at Ron, Harry and Ginny darting in mid-air.

Hermione laughed at my expression. "Yes, they're flying on broomsticks."

I fell silent. It seemed like I'd used the word 'incredible' ad nauseum in the past few days and could think of nothing else to say. I could only goggle at the sight.

"I'm not much on flying myself," Hermione was saying.

"Why's that?"

"I just don't care much for heights." She shrugged in indifference.

I could sympathize in that I'm not that fond of heights myself. But still, just to have the ability to fly like that... I glanced at Hermione, who looked as though taking off on a broomstick was an odious chore, and felt suddenly, insanely jealous of these people.

"Kailin, I'm really, really sorry about the other night at Grimmauld Place." Hermione turned to me, her brown eyes full of worry. "I thought that Professor Lupin had already told you about his lycanthropy. I would never have said anything if I'd known."

"Lycan -- what?"

"Lycanthropy. It means he's, you know, a werewolf."

I mentally added the word to my new wizarding vocabulary. "Don't blame yourself, Hermione. He meant to tell me later that night anyway."

"But it would have been much better coming from him."

"It wouldn't have been good coming from anyone. Please don't worry about it." I hugged my knees to my chest, watching the flying teens and thinking of what Hermione and I had talked about the other night before the conversation led to my hysterics. "I was wondering: what do your parents tell their friends about you? Do they just come right out and say that their daughter is going to a school for witches?"

She giggled. "Of course not. People would think they were mad. I believe they just say that I'm attending an exclusive public school in the north, or something. It is a bit hard for them though, once their friends start going on about their own children."

"I can imagine."

The sun felt wonderful. I stretched out my legs and relaxed while Hermione talked about her experiences at Hogwarts, and I found myself wishing that I'd been half as motivated in school as this young woman. She clearly intended to accomplish a great deal in life. If her determination was any indication, downtrodden wizarding creatures could look forward to an early liberation. Remus should have nothing to worry about, I thought with a smile.

Molly appeared in the doorway. "There you are. Lunch is ready. Where are the rest?"

"Down at the end of the garden," Hermione said. "Shall I call them in?"

"Please do. After lunch, your lot can do a bit of de-gnoming."

I climbed to my feet and followed Molly inside, wondering what in the world she was talking about. I found out after we'd all eaten our fill of stew and crusty bread.

"Garden gnomes?" I said, bemused.

Harry Potter flashed me a grin. "Not what you think," he assured me.

Not what I thought, indeed. After fifteen minutes, I was hurling the wrinkled brown creatures over the garden wall with the best of them, having received yet another lesson in How Little I Knew About The Wizarding World. I was startled to learn that the nasty little buggers were commonplace in North America as well as Northern Europe.

"But how?" I demanded. "I've never seen these in my life. No one I know has ever seen these things. How can these they be all over the place?"

Ron Weasley shrugged, having just bested Harry's last toss by a good ten feet. "You have to know how to look for them, I s'pose."

How to look for them. Some things about the wizarding world quiet simply made my head hurt.

The Yearbook

Chapter 10 of 12

Thanks to a bequest from my beloved grandmother, I decide to take an extended vacation in Great Britain.

Chapter 9: The Yearbook

As the days went by, my cold faded into minor sniffles, and my heart began to heal as well. At the Burrow, everything was ordinary and yet extraordinary at the same time. Perhaps my sense of astonishment was becoming dulled by the constant parade of new and different experiences. Perhaps when I returned to my Muggle existence, all this would seem like a bizarre dream. But one thing I knew for certain: I would never take anything at face value again.

Meanwhile, I was getting nowhere in my personal dilemma. One minute, I couldn't imagine closing the door on Remus Lupin. The next, I was ready to pack it up and fly back to the States. After three days of running in mental circles, I finally convinced Molly Weasley that she could be a sounding board without being required to give me advice.

"Are there many witches or wizards who are married to Muggles?" Sitting at the kitchen table, I watched as she set a lump of dough to magically kneading itself.

"Heavens, yes," she replied at once. "Quite a few -- which, of course, is partially what the fuss is all about these days."

That surprised me. "Then it's not a rarity?"

"Not at all. The wizarding race would probably have died out if we hadn't married Muggles along the way."

I thought about that. "If I were to marry Remus -- which is a moot point, since we hadn't gotten around to talking about marriage yet -- would I have to leave the Muggle world?"

Molly, who had just picked up a spoon to stir a bubbling pot on the stove, turned to look at me in astonishment. "Gracious, no! Why would you need to do that?"

"I don't know. It seems like wizards try to avoid the Muggle world, for the most part. I thought perhaps you were supposed to stay put in one place or another."

"We all live in one world, Kailin," she said, stirring vigorously. "The difference is that we can see the Muggle portion, but Muggles can't see ours."

"Arthur finds me fascinating," I interjected, smiling. The man had cornered me more than once over the past few days. The last time, he'd wanted to know all about rollerblading.

"I knew he would, of course. Has an insatiable curiosity about Muggles, my Arthur does. Unfortunately, many at the Ministry take a rather dim view of his hobby."

"Is it considered in bad taste for wizards to marry Muggles?" I asked, trying to steer the conversation back onto track.

"Again, some would say it is." Molly reached for the salt shaker and sprinkled a liberal amount on top of the bubbling stew. "But isn't that true of Muggles also? Don't some Muggles take offense if their children marry into 'the wrong sort', whatever 'the wrong sort' may be?"

"Yes. That's very true."

"People tend to congregate with their own kind, Kailin. It's human nature, I think. But for the most part, I've always heard that wizarding mixed marriages are managed easily enough."

"You said 'for the most part'," I pointed out.

"Well, there are always cases where expectations aren't made clear prior to the marriage."

I was silent for a moment. "Remus doesn't act as though he's unfamiliar with the Muggle world. Or put off by it either, for that matter."

"Yes, well, thanks to the way he's been treated by most wizards over the years, I believe he's learned to adapt to just about anything." Molly's head snapped up. She looked obviously flustered. "Oh, dear, that didn't come out right, did it? I meant that he's had to survive as best he could in both worlds."

"But the Ministry supplies him with housing, and that potion," I began.

"The Ministry does as little as they can get away with." Molly slammed a lid down onto the pot with somewhat noticeable vigor. "I'm not supposed to say anything bad about them of course, since Arthur works there. But the fact is, they hand out Wolfsbane and ratty accommodations and a pittance to live on and claim that they're looking out for the disadvantaged. If they were truly looking out for the disadvantaged, they'd see to it that werewolves were treated no differently from anybody else."

"Besides, the Wolfsbane solves a myriad of problems for them, don't you know. No need to worry anymore about rampaging werewolves once a month. It's not that they feel any pity for the poor werewolves."

"How long has Wolfsbane been available?" I asked curiously. "Remus said it hadn't been that long."

"I think about five years or so. We didn't know Remus then, so I didn't pay the news much mind, other than to think it was about time that somebody found a solution." Molly placed a lid on the stewpot and sat down at the kitchen table next to me. "As for the housing, that's a recent development."

"Really?"

"Of course. Take all your problem citizens and put them in one place where you can keep track of them."

"A ghetto," I said dully. I was beginning to think less and less of the wizarding world by the minute. "What did Remus do before that?"

"Lived rather hand to mouth, I believe. Other than the year he spent at Hogwarts, that is."

I sat outside that night, staring up at the stars and wondering what I should do. The bottom line, I decided, was that I loved Remus Lupin. And certainly I could live with the fact that he was a wizard, as long as my being a Muggle didn't matter to him. The werewolf part -- considering that was what had plunged me into this soul searching in the first place -- seemed to matter less and less. To hear Molly tell it, his condition was a minor inconvenience: Remus drank a potion, shut himself up in a room for the night, and spent the next day sleeping it off. I doubted that Remus himself took it quite so lightly, but when Molly put it that way, there seemed little to make a fuss about.

Instead, it was the consequences of marrying a werewolf that set me to thinking.

To commit my life to Remus meant giving up what most American girls dreamed of: the husband with the big salary, the large house in the suburbs, staying at home with the three adorable kids. But had that ever really been my dream? I reminded myself that I had done absolutely nothing in the way of settling down so far. The travel nursing, with its inherently gypsy lifestyle, was my attempt to search for something -- but for what? Was this it?

Loving Remus Lupin meant staying in Britain, finding a job, and supporting the two of us indefinitely. To say 'yes' seemed an incredible leap of faith, even for someone like me.

I fell asleep still debating the issue in my head and awoke the next morning no closer to an answer than I'd ever been. After breakfast, I wandered around the Burrow looking for something to do. I was tired of reading magic textbooks, bored with Ron's back issues of *Martin Miggs, the Mad Muggle* and annoyed by my own lack of

emotional progress. As a result, I found myself looking through the adult Weasleys' hodgepodge of books for some optional reading material.

There were several books of magical cures and remedies that I would have given my eye teeth to show to my old nursing instructors, a tome on home repair which relied less on carpentry than on magic spells, and a well-thumbed copy of *Parenting Skills for the Modern Witch and Wizard: Easier Than You Think* by what was apparently the wizarding version of Dr. Spock. It was then that I found the Hogwarts yearbooks.

There were a half-dozen, which seemed to be from Arthur and Molly's era. I'd spent enough time around the Potter-Weasley-Granger trio by now to know all about the four houses at Hogwarts, and I easily located pictures of an impossibly young Arthur Weasley and sweetly coquettish Molly Prewett in the Gryffindor section. They waved at me cheerfully from their respective pages, blissfully unaware that seven children lay in their future. I caught myself wondering what they would have done, had they known that.

A few obviously newer yearbooks lay beneath, probably from the older Weasley boys' years at school. Sure enough: Charlie the Dragon Slayer and Bill the Curse-Breaker were there. And on the very bottom of the stack sat one more yearbook.

This one was much older than the others, and I couldn't quite place the decade. Twenties? Too early, I decided, glancing briefly at the hairstyles. Thirties? Forties? Must have been one of Arthur or Molly's parents, I decided. The Weasleys were one of those wizarding families where aunts, uncles, cousins and all variety of relatives in between had gone to the same school.

I was thumbing pages with disinterest since no one I knew would be in it, - and then something caught my eye. I didn't know whether it was the picture or the name, but an odd shiver went down my spine, and my hand faltered. Frowning, I leafed back a page or two, trying to find whatever had grabbed my attention.

I turned one more page.

And froze.

Time crawled to a stop. My heart thudded painfully in my chest, and it seemed so loud that I wasn't sure if I was merely feeling it or actually hearing it. What I was seeing was incredible, so incredible that I couldn't pull my eyes away -- couldn't blink, for that matter.

My hands shook to the point that when I tried to stand, I nearly dropped the book. I gasped aloud, terrified that if I lost the page, I'd never find it again. And I had to find it. I needed to show it to Molly. Now.

"Molly? Molly!" My legs seemed like lead as I raced through the Burrow, looking for her. Where was she? I had to find her. Had to.

"Kailin?" Molly came racing down a flight of stairs from the attic, panting for breath and a fearful expression on her face. "What is it? What's wrong?"

I thrust the yearbook at her. "Look," I croaked, breathless myself.

A fleeting expression of relief that her family and home were intact passed over her face, followed by one of total bewilderment. Molly took the book from me and scanned the page. "What am I looking for?"

I was already thrusting my finger at the picture in the middle: Marva McClain, Hufflepuff, Class of 1941.

"It's Marvy!" I cried. "It's my grandmother Marvy. Marva McClain!"

"Marva McClain," she repeated. "Your grandmother? Are you sure?"

What a ridiculous question. "Of course! I know my own grandmother, Molly!"

"But this means that your grandmother was a witch."

I knew it did, but hearing her say it made it seem all the more improbable.

"Is that possible? Do witches ever stop being witches and live as Muggles? She never said anything about magic, or did any sort of magic, and I was almost closer to Marvy than I was to my own mother!" I blurted. "She would have told me, wouldn't she?"

"No one stops being a witch or wizard, Kailin. It's what you are. But I'm sure that some live as Muggles or just neglect their skills to the point where they seldom think to use them anymore." Molly looked thoughtful. "Imagine that! Your grandmother went to Hogwarts! You have a witch in your family tree. I wonder if there are any others."

I wondered, too. My family, like all families, had its share of high achievers and downright embarrassments, but as far as I knew, every last one of them was as Muggle as they come. But then, I'd thought that of Marvy, too.

"Is there a pay phone in the village?"

"Of course," she said, then added proudly, "I used it once."

"Where is it?" I started for the stairs and began taking them two at a time.

"By the butcher shop, I believe. Why?"

"This is completely, utterly incomprehensible, Molly. I have to talk to my grandfather about it! I just have to!" I rushed into my room and started upending my belongings, looking for my purse.

"Kailin, wait! You can't do that!" Molly followed me into the room.

I stopped my searching to look up at her and my heart contracted painfully. If there some sort of silly wizarding law prohibiting discussion of witchcraft with Muggle family members, I was going to scream. "Why not?" I demanded angrily.

"Because it's only nine in the morning. I don't know where in America your grandfather lives, but I suspect it'll still be rather early for a felly tone call."

Sweet, silly relief swept over me, and I sank onto my bed, overcome by laughter.

We headed for Ottery St. Catchpole just after lunch. I was back to peppering Molly with questions as we walked. Were wizards who 'went Muggle,' in my words, ostracized? Did a wizarding couple always produce wizarding offspring? What were the odds for a wizard and a Muggle? I think Molly was frankly glad when we arrived in town so I'd find the phone and talk to someone else for a change.

When we reached the pay phone, Molly stood politely outside the booth waiting and killing time by studying the Muggles while I fumbled with my wallet, the phone card, and the calling instructions. In my nervousness I misdialled at least twice. Then, finally, I stood fidgeting while Billy Mitchell's phone rang in Rockford, Illinois.

"Hello?"

I recognized the voice with a dual rush of relief and homesickness.

"Grandpa? It's me, Kailin."

"Kailin?" Billy chuckled. "Hiya, honey, how are you? How are things in merry old England?"

"Just fine, Grandpa. I'm having a great time. Wish you were here."

"When are you coming home?" he wanted to know.

"I don't know yet. Listen, Grandpa, I need to ask you a few questions. Is this a good time?"

"Good a time as any. I'm an old geezer, remember? Nothing better to do."

I smiled at the gentle teasing. "You're not old, Grandpa."

"Well, I'm sure as heck not young. What do you want, sweetie?"

I laughed, then sobered quickly. "I need to ask you about Gran Marva's background."

"Her background," he echoed. "You mean like where her family came from and all? I thought you looked them up already."

"No, it's something else I just discovered."

"Oh, you found out about all that witch stuff, didn't you?"

I'd been prepared to believe that Marvy had never told anyone about her abilities, which would have explained why I'd never heard about it until now. Billy's offhanded question startled me.

"You knew?" I gasped.

"Sure, I knew. She was always real upfront with me about it. How did you find out?"

"I -- I made some friends who are witches and wizards," I stammered. "They went to the same school where Marvy went. I found her picture in an old yearbook."

"You don't say. How about that!" Grandpa enthused. "Are you upset about that, Kailey honey? Because it's not that nasty devil worship stuff you hear about."

"No, no," I assured him, "I know it's not. It's just that, well, why didn't she tell me?"

There was brief silence, then: "Well, she just didn't think it was important, I guess."

"Not important?" I was dumbfounded. "This is just so amazing! So incredible! How can it not be important?"

Another brief silence. "Not everybody sees it that way, honey. The notion that someone's a witch doesn't play too good in farm country, if you know what I mean."

I knew. I couldn't imagine Marvy revealing all to the Rotary. "So she never did magic after she married you?"

Grandpa Billy laughed. "No, I wouldn't go that far. She used to love cleaning off the dinner table with that wand of hers. She --"

"Do you still have the wand?" I interrupted eagerly.

"No, I believe she lost it years ago. Never used it anyway, once the kids came along."

Which probably explained why I'd never heard any family rumors about it. "Why did she go into Muggle nursing?" I asked. "The wizards have Healers. Why didn't she do that instead?"

"For Pete's sake," he chortled. "Muggle! I haven't heard that word in years. Well, Marvy was real interested in politics and in the war. It was going on when she graduated from that Warthog School --"

"Hogwarts," I corrected promptly.

"Oh, yeah. Hogwarts. Anyway, she wanted to do her part in the war. Guess the wizards weren't taking an active enough role for her, so that's when she signed up for regular nursing school. Ended up with me as a patient one day. She used to say I was the meanest patient she ever had. We'd only known each other for a month when we got married. She ever tell you that?"

"I just knew it was a brief courtship."

"Brief' is the word, all right. We fell smack dab in love like we were hit by a ton of bricks. 'Course then the army had to go and mess us up, tell me I'm shipping back to the States in less than a week... So I asked Marva to marry me, figuring she'd turn me down cold since we hadn't known each other that long."

"And she didn't," I finished for him. I knew this part of the story well.

"Nope, she didn't. Got married three days later and had fifty years of wedded bliss until last fall."

"Did she ever miss doing magic?"

"I don't know," Grandpa said in a strained voice, and from three thousand miles away I could sense that the memories were becoming too overwhelming. It was only nine months since Marvy had died, and if my loss was painful, his was acutely so. "I asked her that once. She told me..."

"Yes?" A lump formed in my throat as I waited for him to finish.

"She told me that she didn't really miss it. Said she'd found something better." His voice cracked.

Something better. His words struck me as hard as if I'd been slapped in the face. The similarities between my situation and my grandparents' situation were striking: utterly convinced of love despite brief courtships, giving up one world for another. What were the odds that while in Britain I would run into a wizard and fall in love? That his friends would have a yearbook which proved my grandmother had been a witch? Was Marvy peering down from heaven even now, delighted that her last bit of magic had been to land me at King's Cross Station at the same time as Remus Lupin?

Out of nowhere, a memory surfaced: I was fourteen, and Marvy and I were baking cookies. I was bemoaning some burning adolescent issue while she patiently listened to my ranting. I have no idea now what I was complaining about, but I would always remember her words: "People worry so much about how long they're going to live, Kailin. They should be worried about how wide they're going to live."

I knew at that moment that I wanted to live wide enough to include Remus Lupin in my life.

Clutching the receiver with both hands, I pressed my forehead against the cool glass wall of the phone booth, my shoulders shaking with sobs. While I cried in Britain for Remus, Grandpa Billy cried in America for Marvy. Outside, Molly Weasley saw me and tapped at the glass in concern, silently mouthing a question to see if I was all right. I

took a deep breath and waved her off.

"Grandpa," I managed finally, "are you okay?"

"I'm fine, honey. It just hits me kind of hard some days," Billy said shakily.

We talked for a few minutes longer before I reluctantly rang off, although not until I told Grandpa that I was in love with a wizard. I didn't mention the rest of it, because it simply wasn't the right time and, quite frankly, right now it didn't matter.

"What happened?" Molly regarded me with motherly concern as I stepped out of the phone booth.

I gave her a blow-by-blow replay of the phone call as we walked home to the Burrow and finished by telling her that I had my answer in regards to my own dilemma. I needed to talk to Remus, I told her pleadingly. Was there a way? Could she contact him, or could Arthur contact him from work? A message wouldn't do; owls were too slow for what I needed. Could I speak with him in person somehow? Molly promised to do her best, and when we reached the Burrow, I was treated to the bizarre sight of my hostess with her head stuck in the fireplace, talking animatedly to her husband.

"He thinks he knows where to find him," she reported to me. "How about if we invite him to supper?"

"That would be wonderful," I said fervently.

Arthur promised to report back as soon as he could. Still, it was nearly an hour before he reappeared in the fireplace.

Remus would be dining with us.

Author's Note: I was quite sad when one of my British readers informed me that British schools don't have yearbooks like we have in America. Therefore, I've used the author's prerogative of altering customs in the British school system. And since the story is AU anyway...

Living Wide

Chapter 11 of 12

Thanks to a bequest from my beloved grandmother, I decide to take an extended vacation in Great Britain.

Chapter 10: Living Wide

The rest of the afternoon crawled liked molasses.

I managed to work myself into a fine state of anxiety, and Molly finally threw me out of the kitchen and told me to go after the children and get them to wash up.

I was watching the Weasleys' odd clock when the hand with Arthur's name on it swung into place at 'Home', and almost simultaneously I heard male voices. It had not occurred to me that Remus would come home with Arthur, but suddenly, there he was. My palms were damp and my heart was racing as I saw him for the first time since the night at Grimmauld Place. There was a sudden aching chasm in my stomach which had nothing to do with hunger, and I had a ridiculous urge to disregard common manners and throw myself at him. Molly was bustling around, welcoming Remus to the Burrow, and it took a moment before he noticed me. Then his eyes caught mine and held them.

My feet propelled me towards him of their own accord.

"Hi," I managed, unable to stop what felt like the world's dumbest grin from spreading over my face.

"Hello," he offered, almost shyly. "How are you, Kailin?"

"Fine," I told him, sincerely meaning it in every sense of the word.

Remus leaned forward and pecked me awkwardly on the cheek. "I'm glad. Arthur told me you'd been sick--"

He broke off when I gently redirected his head straight towards me and kissed him on the lips. When the kiss ended, the look of hope that was blossoming in his eyes made my heart ache. I knew then that he'd expected me to end our relationship.

"Dinner's ready!" Molly announced, putting an abrupt finish to our tender moment. "Everyone to the table!"

Remus' expression of resignation mirrored my own, and I suspected that this would be the world's longest meal.

The Weasley offspring, along with Harry Potter and Hermione Granger, were piling into the room now, and Remus turned his attention to greeting them. I helped Molly get the rest of supper on the table, and in short order we were all seated and ready to eat. The conversation dwelled initially on whatever had gone on at the Ministry that day, then changed to Ron and Harry's dissection of the latest broom models coming out soon. Finally, there was enough of a lull for Molly to speak up.

"Remus," she said brightly, "Kailin made the most extraordinary discovery today. Kailin, do show him that book. "

I retrieved the Hogwarts yearbook from the living room and brought it back to the table. I'd placed a bookmark at the correct page, so I flipped it open at once and passed it across to him.

"That's my grandmother," I said. "Marvy. The one I told you about."

Startled, Remus looked from the photograph to me. "Your grandmother went to Hogwarts?"

"Yes, believe it or not." I told him about my long-distance conversation with Grandpa Billy, saving the emotional aspects until we had a chance to talk privately.

"Kailin, this is wonderful!" Arthur seemed more enthused than anyone else at the table. "Your grandmother was a witch! What a delightful discovery! McClain, was it? I'll have to do some detective work and see if there are any others in the family on this end. You went to see them, you said?"

"Yes. Right after I arrived in Britain. They were a bit stand-offish, though," I said, frowning at the memory. "It's only one of Marva's cousins that's left, Arthur, along with her children and grandchildren. I don't know that you'll find any more wizards about."

"Perhaps not from later years," he said, waving his fork, "but possibly earlier on. They were stand-offish, you say? If they knew your grandmother--Marva, is it?--was a witch, perhaps they were afraid that you'd be asking questions about that. Many Muggles try to hide the fact, you know." His expression said that he couldn't possibly believe anyone would be disgraced to find a witch or wizard in the family, but then, Muggles were a rather odd bunch, don't you know.

The yearbook, meanwhile, had been whisked away by Ron and Harry, who were snickering at the hairstyles and fashions of the early 1940's. Ginny and Hermione were clamoring to see it as well. Finally, Molly snatched it away and returned it to the living room bookshelf.

"Would you lot please finish your dinners? You can look at it later, for heaven's sake. And how would you like someone to laugh at *your* Hogwarts pictures in fifty years?"

Dinner proceeded, with a decidedly more festive air at the table now. As soon as everyone began to push back from the table, Molly insisted that Remus and I get some fresh air while everyone else handled the clean-up chores. There were general moans and groans from most quarters, but Remus wasted no time. He grabbed my hand and we headed outside. Once the door closed on the bedlam of the Weasley household, we headed away from the house, hand in hand.

"I missed you," he told me.

"I missed you, too," I murmured, squeezing his fingers for emphasis. "Have you been all right?"

"Me? I've been fine."

Something in the tone of his voice didn't sound quite convincing, and I thought back to some of the conversations I'd had with Molly about the difficulties in Remus' life. "I'm glad I came here this week," I told him. "It's been good, seeing a wizarding household and finding out more about the wizarding world. And it's given me plenty of time to think."

The sudden silence that descended was thick with uncertainty. "Does this mean that you've reached a decision?" Remus asked hesitantly.

I smiled. "I have. I love you and I'm not leaving you."

Remus stopped in his tracks and searched my face as if wanting to confirm that he had heard correctly. "You're saying that you're...I mean..."

"I'm saying that I have no problem with who or what you are," I finished for him.

He inhaled then, almost as if he'd had to remind himself to breathe. "I thought perhaps that Arthur invited me here so you could tell me that you'd decided that we couldn't go on."

"Tell me," I said, the corners of my mouth twitching, "do you always assume the worst?"

"To be honest, it's worked fairly well for me over the years," Remus said, sounding a bit bewildered.

I took both his hands in mine and looked directly into his eyes. "Then you're going to be disappointed this time, R.J. Having you unavailable for one or two days a month is a small price to pay for the pleasure of your company the rest of the time."

He said nothing, and I went on.

"When I talked with Grandpa Billy today, something he said finally convinced me. He said that he'd asked Marvy once if she missed the wizarding world, and she told him that she'd found something better. I think that what happened to her happened to me, too. I've found something better, and that's you, Remus."

He looked like he wanted to believe me more than anything in the world. "You're sure?" he asked unsteadily.

"More than sure."

"I mean, you didn't say that it doesn't matter, and that's absolutely the worst thing you could ever say."

"It does matter, but not as much as you matter to me," I assured him. "There was something else I remembered today, something Marvy told me once. That I shouldn't worry about living long, but about living wide. In other words, not to shy away from different experiences or be content with the ordinary," I said, smiling. "And you're definitely not ordinary."

Abruptly, Remus' face fell. "Kailin, before you go any further, you need to know that I can't go back to America with you."

I was completely lost. "What?"

"I can't go back to America with you. I have to stay here. I can't leave the Order, not with everything that's going on."

"I didn't expect you to go back to America with me," I said blankly. "I intend to remain in Britain. As soon as I get back to London, I'll find out what's required to get my nursing credentials, and then I'll get a work permit and a job. And a more permanent address. I think my flat's booked as soon as my six months are up in September."

"Oh!" Remus stared at me. "You're certain?"

"Absolutely, positively certain."

"If you ever change your mind, I would understand--"

"I know you would. Just don't wait for it. I'm yours for as long as you want me."

"Forever," he blurted, and I could hear the relief in his voice. "And I'm yours for as long as you want me."

"Forever," I echoed, laughing now.

Remus looked flustered, as though he didn't know whether to jump up and down or hug me. "I want to marry you, Kailin. I've known it for weeks. But I want you to take plenty of time to think about it. I don't want you to rush into a decision."

I put my hands on my hips in mock indignation. "You are the most cautious, frustrating--"

"I need to be. You understand why." The leery expression on his face spoke volumes.

"I want to marry you, Remus," I assured him earnestly. "If it'll make you feel better to wait a year and propose again on bended knee, you can do that, but I'd rather just say 'yes' now and end the suspense."

"But--"

"And if you ask me one more time if I'm sure I'm going to take Molly's frying pan and beat you over the head with it!"

Remus laughed and enfolded me into his arms. "There's just one thing..."

My head snapped back and I searched his face anxiously. "What do you mean, there's 'just one thing'? You told me that there wouldn't be any more surprises."

Startled, Remus stared at me blankly for a moment before his smile returned. "There are no more surprises, dearest. I promise. I meant only that... well... I want you to go through a full moon with me before you decide for sure."

"With you?" I asked carefully. Surely he didn't mean that he wanted me to watch him transform...

"In your flat. Or at Grimmauld Place. I only have the one room, so staying there's not an option. Wherever you say, just so you're in the same building and can understand what it means to share a living space with me when the full moon comes around."

I nodded.

It was the final step needed to seal the agreement. We held each other tightly and for now, his concerns, our differences, even the looming threat of Voldemort faded completely away.

The light was fading rapidly when we finally made it back to the Burrow. The house was silent, but voices from the garden told me where everyone had gone.

Molly, who was sitting outside with Arthur and Hermione, glanced up as Remus and I appeared in the doorway. "Everything all right? You two were gone for quite a long time."

"More than all right," I said, a happy smile spreading over my face.

Remus beamed. "You three should be the first to know: we're unofficially officially engaged to be married--providing Kailin lives through being in the same flat with me come the next full moon."

Hermione squealed with delight, and Arthur, who had been reading the *Evening Prophet* by the light of his wand, leapt to his feet.

"How simply grand!" he cried, wringing first Remus' hand, then mine. "Congratulations, the both of you! We needed a good reason to celebrate!"

"I'm so happy for you two," Molly added, dabbing at her eyes as she climbed out of her chair to hug us.

"Where's everybody else?" Remus asked, peering around into the dusky twilight.

"Off flying. It's dark enough that they can risk it over towards the orchard." Molly started toward the kitchen. "It'll be pitch black out here soon, though, and I have a bit of leftover fruit crumble. We can have a bit of a party as soon as everyone comes back in."

Remus glanced at the gathering darkness and then at me. "Have any of them taken you up on a broom this week?"

"No," I said. No one had volunteered, and I'd been reluctant to ask. It seemed the sort of activity where I'd have to hang on tight to anything I could grab, and I was reluctant to put a teenager in that sort of compromising position.

"Spare broom, Arthur?"

"Shed," Arthur replied at once.

"Come on, Kailin." Remus took me by the hand and led me across the darkening yard toward a weathered wooden shed. He poked around in it by the light of his own wand while I waited, shivering with anticipation. After a few moments, he found a broom he considered airworthy enough and straddled it. "Hop on," he said.

"Front or back?"

"Back. Hold on tight around my waist."

I did as instructed, and suddenly the wind was rushing through my hair and the ground was dropping away, and I was soaring through the sky with the man I loved. I gasped and clutched Remus even tighter.

I'd been worried that broom handle would be uncomfortable to sit on, but just the opposite was true. It felt like there was no broom at all, that Remus was soaring through the air on his own with me clinging to him. It was, quite frankly, terrifying. I like to have a reassuringly solid fuselage around me when I'm airborne, and there was nothing reassuring about this. I looked down once, saw the ground speeding by, and immediately regretted it. It brought to mind the emergency helicopter landing of two years ago and why I'd chosen to give up that line of work. As soon as we landed, I swore to myself, I'd join Hermione, Molly and Arthur and sit out the remainder of the evening there.

"Hey, look at Kailin!"

"Great flying, Professor!"

It was a couple of the Weasley kids cheering us on as we swooped into their territory, but I wasn't about to reply. By that time, I had my face pressed into Remus' shoulder blades. We took a few sharp turns, and I moaned aloud.

"How are you doing, Kailin?" Remus called over his shoulder.

"Fine," I mumbled weakly.

He must have detected the note of desperation in my voice, because we landed soon after. I suppose the landing was smooth enough; having never landed on a broom before, I had nothing with which to compare it. All I knew was that solid ground had never felt so good. Remus stood up at once, still straddling the broom. I tried to stand, but my legs quivered. When I let go of him, I overbalanced and sat backwards on the ground with a little squeal. Immediately, he hoisted me to my feet.

"Are you all right?"

"I think," I said shakily, "that there's a very good reason I'm a Muggle."

"So this was your first and last broom ride, I take it?"

"You take it correctly. I'll stick to airplanes from now on."

Remus laughed and hugged me to him. Suddenly, the whole thing seemed hilariously funny. I joined in his laughter, and when the laughter subsided, we were looking at each other with broad smiles on our faces and an almost painful longing in our eyes. "How long do you plan to remain here at the Burrow?" he asked.

"Molly said to stay as long as I needed to, but I really think I'm ready to go home."

"How did you get here? Train?"

"Yes."

"I doubt there's another train tonight," Remus said, glancing at the sky the same way I'd look at my watch.

"Even if there was, I'd still have to get a cab from the village into Feniton. Heaven knows how long that would take."

"How was your first broom ride, Kailin?" Arthur asked eagerly as soon as we'd returned to the house.

"Nerve-wracking," I said fervently, and Hermione Granger laughed aloud.

"Now you see why it's not my favorite activity," she told me.

I told Molly that I would be leaving in the morning, and she nodded agreement.

"Of course. Now wasn't it better spending a few days here than being shut up in the city?"

I laughed. "The perfect cure. I heartily recommend it."

* * *

As we'd arranged, Remus met me at noon the next day at London Waterloo Station. His face lit up when he spotted me, and it gave me enormous pleasure to bring joy to him merely by being present.

"Rather like déjà vu, isn't it?" he commented as I walked up. "Isn't this when your knapsack

starts spilling things and I stop to help you pick them up?"

"Wrong station," I quipped. "The only thing you need to pick up is me."

"Gladly. May I carry your completely intact knapsack for you, miss?"

"Absolutely." I swung the bag off my shoulder and we kissed briefly.

"What's in the other bag?" Remus asked, eyeing the bulging tote bag I held in my left hand.

"Molly packed up a bit of food for me in case I starved between Devon and London. And when I told her that we were going to meet for lunch and discuss the future, she felt compelled to cater it."

Remus chuckled. "I should have known. Molly's a dear, isn't she?"

"She certainly is," I said, smiling fondly at the memory of Molly Weasley bustling around her kitchen that morning, still excited over my engagement. "I think she probably packed enough to feed an army, though. I doubt I'll have to shop or cook for a week."

We found a taxi outside the train station and headed for my flat. The previous evening, Remus and I had decided that as soon as I returned to London, we would sit down and begin making plans for the future. The two of us had already given careful consideration to the commitment we were making, and I wanted to extend that to the details of our life together. I was no starry-eyed nineteen year old, worried more about what wedding dress I should buy than the practical aspects of marriage.

The flat, when we arrived, was warm and stuffy and littered with abandoned tissues.

"Oops," I said guiltily. "I forgot. I didn't pick up before I left. I was in rather a hurry. Here, if you'll open the windows and get things aired out, I'll start decontaminating the place."

"Not to worry." Remus whipped out his wand, muttered something Latin-sounding, and the Kleenexes vanished into thin air.

My eyes widened. "Can I assign you the cleaning chores from now on?"

"Absolutely. I live to serve."

Ten minutes later, there was a pleasant breeze blowing through the flat as Remus and I sat around the dining table, hunched over a legal pad and nibbling on Molly's Welsh rarebit.

The first issue, that of me getting a work permit and a job, was not something that particularly worried me. Nursing shortages were a worldwide phenomenon, and it was more than likely that British authorities were eager to assimilate well-credentialed foreign nurses into their ranks. I recalled ads from my travel nursing days, offering good salaries and other enticements to anyone willing to work outside the States. I had even, I told Remus, glanced at the London job openings on several occasions during the past few months, mostly because I was curious to see what British nurses with my education and experience were earning. I should be able to support the two of us with little effort, I told him, and watched carefully to gauge his reaction.

Remus nodded, eyeing the Welsh rarebit with far more scrutiny than it deserved. "I wish it didn't have to be that way. I'd much rather be the one to support you," he said, not meeting my eyes.

"I know," I said gently. "And someday, if conditions in your world change, that may happen. Meanwhile, I'm happy to work, I don't mind working, and I don't know what I'd do if I was idle, to be honest. There's more work in a relationship than what you do to earn a salary. I wasn't kidding about the cleaning chores."

He grinned at me, and we moved on to other issues. By the time lunch was over, we'd decided to keep what remained of my bequest from Marv in the bank, earning interest, waiting to be used as a down payment on a house. Meanwhile, we would start searching for a permanent flat to lease. Where we lived hinged largely on where I managed to find work, Remus told me. He could live anywhere, since it was simple enough to Apparate or take the Floo wherever he needed to go. As long as he could meet up with the Order at their meetings, all would be well.

Out of curiosity, I asked him what he would do if the discrimination which dogged him was gone. I was sure that Remus had long ago banned 'what-ifs' from his life as depressing and unproductive, but I was curious to hear his answer.

"Teach again," he said immediately, and I was astonished to see the mask of resignation, the look of Sorry-For-Wanting-Something-That's-Impossible, drop so abruptly over his features. "Or write. I think I would like to write."

"Write? Really? What would you write?" I asked, intrigued.

"I'd possibly do something along the order of editing textbooks, I suppose."

"What about fiction? Don't witches and wizards read stories?"

Remus smirked. "Our reading material is rather insular, I'm afraid. To be honest, I prefer Muggle fiction."

I burst out laughing. "Then write Muggle fiction, why don't you?"

He joined in the laughter, already shaking his head. "I don't know. It's not quite me, I'm afraid."

"Hmm." I rested my chin in my hands, staring at him. "What about non-fiction? I'm not talking about textbooks. Why don't you write about the war?"

"Write about the war?" Remus seemed as startled as if I'd asked him to waltz down the street in a tutu.

"Why not? Don't people want to know about it?"

"To be honest, they'd much rather forget it exists. Denial was the official line up until the beginning of the summer. There is no denying it, now that people are dying."

I shrugged. "There you go then. You're in the Order of the Phoenix, you taught Harry Potter, and you were best friends with his dad and godfather, not to mention Peter Pettigrew. You're in the ideal position to write about it."

Remus wore a bemused smile on his face. "Why not just paint a large target on my head, Kailin? One that says 'Death Eaters Aim Here'?"

"Oh," I said, sheepishly. "A retrospective then. You could start working on it now and have it virtually done by the time the war ends."

"Perhaps." Remus still looked unconvinced, but I had a feeling that I'd planted a seed, one that might in time bear fruit.

Other issues rose and fell. Household chores would be Remus' responsibility, although we'd both take turns with cooking and do our own laundry. Children? Two, when the war was over and life was safe once more. As for the wedding itself, we decided not to set a date until I had more information about when I would be gainfully employed. That left just one more thing.

"We talked about being together during the full moon," I said, feeling suddenly awkward. "Would you like to move in with me?" I asked.

Remus studied me, and I wondered if he was weighing this as carefully as the decision to marry.

"For the time being," he agreed cautiously. "I don't want to give up my just room yet, for I'll have to go back on the waiting list if it doesn't work out for us for some reason."

I nodded. "I understand."

That afternoon, Remus collected some of his things from his furnished room. I went along, curious to see what the Ministry of Magic deemed acceptable welfare housing. It was a sad experience: not because Remus was unhappy to leave the Ministry-funded rooms, but because of the people who had to remain behind. The occupants of the welfare hotel stared at us hungrily, just as orphans would regard the one who was adopted.

There were all sorts who lived there, I discovered: other werewolves like Remus, wizards and witches addicted to their Firewhiskey, those more than a bit out of touch with reality. My heart broke when I saw the tiny room where Remus lived and the communal bath he'd had to share not so much because he'd lived in such conditions, but because he was so perfectly willing to go back to it if I was unable to cope with what he was.

The rest of the day was spent making room for Remus' belongings, precious few though they were. We talked at length about what sort of flat we should look for, how we should furnish it, our likes, our dislikes, our idiosyncrasies. The evening was lighthearted and pleasant, and I decided that it was largely because tonight, for the first time, the specter of the werewolf wasn't hanging poised to destroy our relationship.

We were both nervous when bedtime came. And yet, when we lay curled together in the bed and the gentle summer breeze played over us, I knew that we were exactly where we were supposed to be.

Beginning

Chapter 12 of 12

Thanks to a bequest from my beloved grandmother, I decide to take an extended vacation in Great Britain.

Chapter 11: Beginning

I heard the sounds of breakfast preparations as soon as I awoke, and it prompted a wide grin to spread across my face. Over the past two weeks, Remus had risen early each morning to prepare breakfast for us. I'd made my own breakfasts since leaving home for college, and I found this daily ritual to be something of a treat.

Our first morning together, I awoke to find him working happily in the kitchen, brewing tea and trying to scratch up some breakfast with a combination of magic and ordinary cooking skills. Initially I'd protested that he didn't have to go to these lengths, but rather quickly I found that Remus derived a lot of satisfaction from performing this simple chore for me. He might never be able to provide me with jewels and furs, but making my breakfast was a means of demonstrating his love for me. I decided that it was a luxury I could live with.

There were footsteps in the hallway. I expected Remus to stick his head in the door and announce that breakfast was ready. Instead, he nudged the door open with an elbow and came into the bedroom, a tray in his hands.

"I could have come in there to eat," I pointed out.

"I know." Remus waited while I scooted myself upright in bed, then placed the tray on my lap. "I wanted to surprise you."

"You did. You're spoiling me," I said, surveying the tray with delight: besides the tea and toast, there was a votive candle from the living room and a water glass filled with half a dozen yellow rosebuds. The roses looked vaguely familiar, I thought. "Are these...?"

"From the bush by the front door, yeah. I'm sure the landlord won't notice that a few of them are gone," Remus said, climbing into bed next to me. "Anyway, you're on your own for breakfast tomorrow, so I thought I'd make this one just a bit special."

I laughed. "You're a treasure. I'm so glad I snagged you."

His smile was guarded. "We'll see how glad you are tomorrow morning."

I pounced on a piece of toast and began to nibble. "I keep telling you, it won't make a bit of difference. I'm going to marry you, Remus. Get over it."

Remus' only answer was to change the subject. "What's on the agenda for today?"

"Well," I mumbled as I chewed, "I thought I'd apply at a couple more hospitals."

"I thought you said that you'd already received an offer."

"I did, but that doesn't mean I'm going to take it. I want to see what else is out there."

Remus had been greatly impressed by the idea that nurses were in demand. For a man who was virtually unemployable in his own culture, the notion that more than one place might want to hire me was a revelation.

The day after my return from the Burrow, I visited the British Nursing Society and applied for my U.K. registration. Once again, timing was everything: Britain was just as short on nurses as the United States, and the government had recently initiated a campaign to recruit nurses from other countries. As a result, I was received with open arms. The eager welcome meant that I could expect to be certified in three months, as opposed to the usual six. I wasn't complaining; when it came to bureaucratic time frames, three months was positively expeditious. I silently thanked Marvy for her intervention once again and began to investigate job openings at various hospitals.

Another benefit to the government-sponsored recruitment push was that a work visa was part of the package. Again, this meant a shortened wait: in legalese, 'brief' as opposed to 'interminable'.

That was a good thing. Ordinarily, Remus and I could have married, and as the wife of a British citizen, I would have been entitled to remain in the country. But Remus was part of the wizarding world and 'off the grid', so to speak. I could argue my point until I was blue in the face, but since the British Muggle government had absolutely no record of his existence, I was not legally allowed to remain in Britain past the terms of my entry visa. Thank God for the nursing shortage.

"How about you?" I asked. "What do you need to do today?"

Remus shrugged. "Other than take my final dose of Wolfsbane potion? Nothing much."

Several times over the past few days, I watched as Remus hauled out a cauldron, carefully measured out a gelatinous mass from a jug, and heated it for a prescribed amount of time. The bright yellow jug had the words *Property of St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries* stenciled on it. A week ago, when Remus had prepared to take it to the wizarding hospital for his monthly refill, I'd offered to go with him.

"There's nothing to see," he said, shaking his head. "I go in, give the jug to a Healer, and get a full one in exchange."

"But I'd love to see what the hospital is like," I protested.

"They wouldn't let you past the front door, Kailin. It would be different if you had genuine business there. They don't take kindly to Muggle sightseers, even if you are a medical professional in your world."

"Why are the jars bright yellow?" I asked out of curiosity.

Remus snorted. "So we're easily identified, of course. You should see the people scatter when one of us walks in."

"Do the staff treat you well?"

"For the most part," he said, shrugging. "A few act as though they'd rather be on Mars than in the same room with me."

"Why can't you make your own Wolfsbane Potion?" I found it curious that he had studied Potions for years at Hogwarts, yet was reliant on St. Mungo's to provide it. "Is it really tricky or too costly or something?"

"A bit tricky, yes," Remus replied. "It's still a fairly new potion. I suppose in the future they'll refine it so that it's not so difficult to do, but for now it's best left to the professionals. The thing is, Kailin, it's not like making Pepper-Up, where if you don't do it quite right, you're left with the sniffles and sneezes. One little error with the Wolfsbane and you're no better off than if you hadn't taken it at all."

I understood. The absolute worst that could happen, in a werewolf's eyes, was to receive a bad dose of Wolfsbane when you were expecting an uneventful transformation.

"Well," I said now as I wiped toast crumbs off my fingers with a paper napkin, "would you like to do a little flat-hunting today?"

Remus shook his head. "No. It's sort of useless to attempt anything productive. Even after all these years, you know what's coming and you want to mentally prepare for it."

I nodded. My monthly routine, then, would not include amusing Remus on the day of the full moon in an attempt to keep his mind off it. "What will you need tonight? Physically, that is?"

"A large bowl," he said quietly. "For water. And some newspapers, to spread on the floor. In case I need to--well, you know."

Remus left the sentence hanging there. I nodded, keeping my facial expression carefully neutral.

After breakfast I showered and dressed. Remus and I planned some menus for the coming week and then went out to buy some groceries. Lunch came and went. I settled down for the afternoon with a book, while Remus killed time by doing a bit of laundry. About four p.m., he heated the Wolfsbane Potion and drank the final dose.

"Can't they do something about the taste?" I asked, grimacing in sympathy as he swallowed the foul-tasting stuff.

"Sugar renders it ineffective. Besides, I think it's one more way of punishing us for being werewolves."

"What about supper?" I checked my watch. "I don't know what time you need to--uh--do what you need to do."

"I really shouldn't eat anything," Remus said, shaking his head. "Food isn't supposed to affect the potion, but I don't care to take any chances. Anyway, I don't have much of an appetite right now."

"Would you like to play checkers or something, or--"

Remus laughed and pulled me into his arms. "I'm sorry, Kailin. I know you want to do something to help, but believe me, there's nothing you can do."

"But I'm a nurse. I'm used to doing something to help."

He kissed me on the forehead. "You've already done more than you can know."

Half an hour later, Remus kissed me goodnight and locked himself in the second bedroom.

Although the moon was rising, it wasn't yet bedtime. I watched television for a bit, my ears straining to hear any sounds coming from the second bedroom, all the while wanting to hear and yet hoping I wouldn't. When I finally turned off the TV and went around the flat turning off lights, I heard a snuffling sound at his door, as though a large animal behind it was trying to catch my scent. Then, as I lay in bed, I heard the muffled clacking of paws on the hardwood floors. I could also detect a faint odor in the flat, no more so than that found in houses with pets, but clear evidence that another creature was sharing my living space. I lay there for a very long time, thinking *there's a werewolf down the hall* and reminding myself that I would be doing this once a month and sometimes twice, for the rest of my life.

The next thing I knew, sunlight was streaming in my windows and driving me from my bed. I padded down the hall to the kitchen and ran into Remus, who was heading for the bathroom.

He looked hideous: his eyes were red-rimmed and his unshaven cheeks gaunt. He had a blanket slung around him since he was apparently naked underneath and was hunched over as though in pain. A downy layer of fuzz clung to what skin I could see, and the faint odor I'd noticed hours earlier was now a distinctly feral scent that quite literally made my hair stand on end.

"Good morning," I said, my voice forcibly bright and cheery.

"Morning," he mumbled and pushed past me.

I went on to the kitchen and began to make a pot of coffee; this called for something stronger than plain old English tea. Moments later, I heard Remus shuffle back to the bedroom and close the door. As the coffee perked, I wondered what to do next. I knew that I should probably leave him alone until he was ready to emerge, but quite frankly, I wanted to get a closer look at him. I sat and drank my coffee and debated, finally deciding to leave him be. He would come out when he was ready, I told myself.

But when I passed his door on the way back down the hall, curiosity got the better of me. I summoned my courage and tapped lightly on the door.

"Remus?"

There was a faint sound that might have been a response. I tried the door and found it unlocked. Quietly, I opened it and peeked in.

He was laying on his stomach on the bed, arms hugging the pillow beneath his head. At the sound of the door, he opened his red-rimmed eyes and regarded me blearily.

"Need to sleep," he mumbled.

"I know. I'm sorry--I just thought I'd see if you needed anything," I said quickly.

"No... Just sleep..."

"Okay. Well, I'll be in and out today. There are a few errands I need to run." I was starting to babble. Time to go.

Another grunt. On impulse, I crossed the room, leaned down, and holding my breath against the wild odors, kissed the top of his head. Suddenly, Remus' shoulders started to shake. For one dreadful moment, I thought he was having a seizure of some sort. And then, I realized that the accompanying rumble in his throat was nothing more than laughter. I backed away, perplexed.

"You've made your point, Kailin," he chortled from the depths of the pillow. "Now get out. I stink and you know it."

"Yes, sir." I grinned and headed for the door.

By the next morning, Remus was his old self again. I turned the tables and brought him breakfast in bed.

"How are you feeling?" I inquired solicitously.

"Like I've gone through a case of Firewhiskey, but it's nothing I can't handle. I'm used to it."

"Good," I said, "because I thought maybe we could talk about setting a date for the wedding."

He'd been about to take a sip of tea, and now he set the cup down abruptly, sloshing the hot liquid onto his toast.

"Are you certain?"

I shrugged. "Like Molly said: you take your potion, lock yourself up, and sleep it off for a day. Is two weeks from now too soon?"

Remus stared at me, stunned. "Uh--no,..."

"Good. You get a message to Molly and Arthur when you're feeling up to it, and I'll get the want ads and start looking for flats."

* * *

Molly Weasley gave me a crash course in wizarding weddings. There were, she told me, two parts to the ceremony: the legal contract, which actually bound us as husband and wife, and the celebratory Gathering afterwards. The contract portion was a simple matter of going to the Ministry's Registry Office in Diagon Alley, filling out a form, and having it witnessed. The second part of the wedding, the Gathering, sounded much like the usual Muggle receptions I had been to, except that it began with a declaration of vows in front of our guests. Molly insisted that we hold the Gathering at the Burrow, and I didn't argue with her. If the guest list was to be comprised entirely of wizards, then my wedding reception should be held on wizarding turf.

My only regret was that Grandpa Billy, bless his heart, couldn't come. He was thrilled when I called to tell him of my engagement. Marvy would have been happy, he said, so happy that her life had come full circle in this way. But coming to the wedding was not an option, no matter how much I begged him. His hip was bothering him to the point where he'd be needing surgery, and a long plane ride was out of the question. Besides, he said, he didn't even have a passport. I lamented the fact to Remus, who batted around the idea of finding some wizarding solution to the problem. I blanched at the idea.

"You can't fly him across the ocean on a broomstick!" I protested, aghast.

Remus laughed and reassured me that he was thinking along the lines of a temporary, magically produced passport. I called Billy back at once, but he thanked me for the offer and said that his hip still hurt him too much to travel, and could I please send him some pictures of the wedding? He'd always liked the way Marvy's wizard pictures had waved at him. I could only shake my head at the bizarre way my two worlds had come together.

And so, on a lovely August day, Remus and I went to the nearest Official Registry and completed the form which legalized our union. The form had spaces for our names, nationalities and wizarding status (Kailin Curtis, American Muggle; Remus Lupin, British wizard, half-blood), and among a hundred other strange questions, a place to indicate whether either of us possessed any magical disabilities.

"What are magical disabilities?" I teased. "If you break your arm and can't use your wand, is that considered a magical disability?"

Remus wasn't smiling. "No," he said flatly. "But being a werewolf is."

If I found that appalling, I was shocked when the registry woman at the counter took one look at our completed application, gave Remus a withering glare, and demanded to know if his data in the Werewolf Registry was up-to-date.

"Yes. It is," he replied.

"You realize that half-humans are required to provide change-of-address information," she continued coldly.

I gasped aloud. Remus glanced at me and shook his head in warning. "I'm maintaining my current address for the time being."

"I see." The woman pursed her lips and scanned the rest of the form. Eventually she decided that everything was in order.

"Sign here," she ordered, handing Remus a quill and turning the parchment toward us.

We each signed the form—I'd practiced using a quill so I wouldn't be all thumbs—and the woman witnessed it. Then, giving us rather half-hearted congratulations, she summarily dismissed us and we turned to go.

"Is that what you face all the time?" I hissed, furious at the woman's rude behavior.

"No, it's usually worse," Remus said matter-of-factly.

"But 'half-human'?"

He sighed. "Just leave it, Kailin. It's the way things are, and I'm used to it. Anyway, don't you want to kiss me or anything? We're married now, you know."

"Of course I do," I said sheepishly. In my anger, I'd forgotten that small fact. Making sure that the nasty registry woman at the counter could still see us plainly, I threw myself into my husband's arms and gave him a long, wet, sensually satisfying kiss. The woman, I noticed as Remus took my arm and escorted me outside, looked utterly revolted.

"You do like to make your point, don't you?" he said, chuckling.

I was immensely pleased with myself. "I hope she loses her lunch over it."

* * *

The air was warm and the sky blue and cloudless as we stood, several hours later, in the Weasleys' field and exchanged our commitment vows. Remus had asked Harry Potter to stand with him, the next best thing to having James Potter and Sirius Black there. It seemed only appropriate for me to ask Hermione Granger to be my witness, given the fact that she was Muggle-born and had been responsible for spilling the beans about Remus.

Albus Dumbledore stood with the four of us under an enormous floating wreath of flowers and ribbons, asking what promises we wished to make to each other. Remus declared me to be a precious gift of which he was undeserving and promised to protect and love and honor me with his life. I swore to share my life, my love and my earthly possessions with him for the remainder of my days. And the assortment of witches and wizards from the Order of the Phoenix raised their glasses to us in salute.

At my request, and to Remus' surprise, Arthur Weasley proposed a toast to loved ones present only in our hearts. And so we toasted Marva McClain Mitchell and Sirius Black, and quick tears had filled Remus' eyes as glasses were raised once more.

Toasts and sentiment behind us, the party began in earnest. Molly, in her role as hostess and proxy mother of the bride, was having the time of her life. I had exchanged quite a few pounds for galleons at Gringotts to enable her to buy sufficient provisions, and as I watched her load the serving table with mountains of food, it seemed she had cooked for a small army. I'd been concerned all week that I was overworking her, but she merely laughed at me and confided that she hoped this would give her son Bill some ideas. He and his French girlfriend were getting on well, and she was itching for some grandchildren.

The afternoon was warm and lovely, and everybody seemed to relax and enjoy themselves when they weren't discussing the latest news of the war. At one point, I passed a table where Minerva McGonagall was in an intense conversation with Arthur Weasley. From what I could tell, the topic was the release from prison, just that morning, of one of Voldemort's followers.

"Disgusting," she muttered. "The Wizengamot needs a complete overhaul. It's bad enough that he's out of prison. How can they say he wasn't guilty?"

"You know how, Minerva," Arthur said darkly. "The system is full of great bloody holes if you have deep enough pockets or the right connections."

"It's ridiculous, trying to fight a war against what's obviously evil without having to fight the system, too." Minerva spotted me just then and brightened considerably. "Kailin, you look absolutely lovely today, have I told you that yet?"

She had, but I suspected that the latest compliment stemmed from a desire to change the subject. I'd found that details of the wizarding war were generally not discussed in front of me. Even Remus didn't give me much more than a filtered version of events. I don't think that it was due to a lack of trust because I was a Muggle, but rather because I hadn't been around long enough to deserve a full accounting or appreciate the implications.

Arthur Weasley excused himself to refill his plate, and I took his seat. "Thank you, Minerva. I'm so glad you could come today."

"Well, given the war, these opportunities to socialize and have fun are few and far between. I think everyone appreciates it."

I understood what she meant. Only two nights ago, another Hogwarts student's family was attacked. This time, however, the Order learned of the impending raid and whisked the Muggle-born father to safety with only minutes to spare. Everyone was on edge, wondering who would be targeted next.

"What you've done is wonderful," she went on.

"What I've done?" I asked in surprise. "What have I done?"

"You've married in the middle of a war, of course. It reminds us how to celebrate life in the midst of great difficulties. And best of all, you've given Remus Lupin hope." Minerva leaned over and solemnly placed a hand on my arm. "Good show."

I grinned. The usual staid Professor McGonagall had been enjoying Molly's special punch quite thoroughly. I hadn't asked what was in it.

"Thank you," I said, patting her hand. "My grandparents did the same, and it worked quite well for them."

"Well, I salute you and Remus. And your grandparents," Minerva added kindly. She peered down her nose at the gold band on my finger. "Lovely ring."

"It belonged to Remus' mother," I said, watching the sunlight glint off the braided gold. As wedding rings went, it was completely unpretentious. It contained no precious stones and was rather narrow, the braiding being the only aspect to lend it an unusual touch. But it was, Remus had told me, quite literally all he had to offer me, and for that reason alone I adored it.

"Will you be going on a wedding trip?"

"No. We've just found a flat, and we need to set up housekeeping."

"Of course. Your own home! I'm sure Remus must be simply delighted."

"He is," I agreed, smiling at the memory.

We discovered the flat on Bannister Row only two days ago. It was sunny and pleasant, not too large and not too small, with two bedrooms. The landlord was an Indian gentleman by the name of Mr. Najib, and noting that Remus and I were engaged, made certain to point out how suitable the second bedroom would be for a nursery. Poor man. If only he knew that we were more concerned with housing a werewolf once a month.

"You know, Kailin," Minerva went on, "I've known Remus since he was a first year, and I have to tell you that this is the happiest I've seen him since his school years. He's always been a good man, a pleasant man, but now when he smiles, it reaches his eyes. Do you know what I mean?"

"I do." The general air of sadness that used to surround Remus Lupin was gone.

"He finally has a chance for a normal life. That's no small accomplishment for a werewolf, you know."

As the party wore on, I found myself studying the guests, many of whom I'd never met until today. Witches and wizards could be an odd lot, I thought, but then the same could be said for some Muggles. What a strange world I'd happened upon.

A lot of brides, I suspected, spent part of their wedding days wondering what their lives would be like a year into the future. Would a child be on the way? The new house under construction? Would the husband's big job promotion come through?

I realized that I had absolutely no idea how to contemplate my future, other than to hope that Remus and I were still alive, still untouched by the horrors of Lord Voldemort. Yes, I had definitely found my adventure in Britain.

And I would have it no other way.

Author's Note: This ends Part 1 of I Married a Werewolf. It's not the end of the story, however. In the next part (a one-shot), Kailin meets up with the world of the Dark.

I've been remiss for some time in failing to say that I didn't invent Remus Lupin or the wizarding world. I suspect everyone knew this, but just in case a blood-thirsty lawyer is licking his/her chops, everything of value in this story comes from JKR and not me.

I also need to credit an excellent story at Fanfiction.net called "The Summer of the Phoenix", by JolieBlack. She was the one who came up with the idea of Remus living in 'welfare housing', as well as St. Mungo's dishing out the Wolfsbane Potion.