

I Married a Werewolf: The Bait

by Kailin

Kailin decides to play a dangerous role for the Order of the Phoenix. Remus is not happy about it.

Tea with Tonks

Chapter 1 of 5

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Chapter 1: Tea with Tonks

It started on a Saturday morning.

Remus is an early riser by nature, and while I have to do the same on the days I work, Saturday is my day to sleep in. I'd just cracked an eyelid to check the time and, pleased to see that it was only eight in the morning, was burrowing back under the covers when I heard a rapping at the front door. That was followed by Remus' footsteps moving from the kitchen to the living room, then the creaking of the door as it opened.

Then I heard Arthur Weasley's voice, and wondered what it the world he was doing here at this hour. And then I remembered. I sighed and climbed out of bed, threw on my robe, and wandered out to the living room.

"Kailin! Good morning," Arthur greeted me cheerfully. "Had a good lie-in?"

I wanted to say *No, thanks to you, Arthur*, but I refrained. My attention was taken immediately by a large birdcage sitting on my coffee table.

And then by the brown and white owl sitting serenely on a perch within it.

"Here's your new owl," Arthur said proudly. "A beauty, isn't she?"

I managed a smile. Ever since returning from the States a month ago, Remus had taken to borrowing other people's owls to keep up with Order business. There was, quite simply, no other way to communicate since his deportation from Great Britain. There would be no more trips to the wizarding post office in Diagon Alley until his situation changed dramatically. As a result we were now the proud owners of this owl.

"So," I said, "you brought our new pet."

"No, no, she's not a pet." Arthur corrected me at once. "Many people have that misconception. Pets are something you keep for companionship or amusement. An owl works for you."

In truth, the owl worked for Remus. If it worked for me, I'd teach it to dust the shelves or run the vacuum cleaner, duties I found useful.

"She, you said? Does she stay in the cage all the time, or does she have someplace outdoors where she stays, or does she fly loose around the flat? *God forbid*, I thought.

"Not loose around the flat," Remus said. "She'd stay in her cage when she's indoors."

"I see what you mean, Remus." Arthur Weasley had wandered over to examine the two small stained glass windows which flanked the fireplace. "Your owl could easily come and go through one of these. They're on the side of the building, so they're not easily viewed from the street. We could fix the window so that it swivels open when the bird lands. That way, even if someone did catch a glimpse, the owl would be gone from sight rather quickly."

I'm not really a bird person. They're pretty to look at with binoculars and fun to feed, but keeping one indoors always seems wrong to me, somehow. Besides, they're not cuddly and affectionate as is usually the case with cats or dogs. I knew this all was quite necessary, but I wasn't particularly happy about it.

"How do you handle it? Her?" The one time I'd observed owls up close at an animal sanctuary, they were being tended to by keepers with very thick leather gloves.

"Like this," Arthur said, opening the cage door and making some smooching noises. The bird fluttered out at once and onto his proffered arm. "I bought a little bag of owl treats, if you'd care to fish them out of my coat pocket, Kailin. You can give her one and start to make friends."

Just what I wanted to do on my Saturday morning. I reached into the pocket Arthur indicated and pulled out a folded paper bag. Inside were small morsels of something which reeked to high heaven. Grimacing, I plucked one out.

"What are these?" I demanded, wrinkling my nose.

"Mousie Munchies," Arthur told me cheerfully.

Something told me that they were the genuine, chopped-into-tiny-little-pieces, article. "You know," I said through gritted teeth as I inched my hand toward the owl, "if I hadn't married a wizard, I wouldn't be having this pleasure."

Arthur looked startled. "You're right, by Jove! See how well fate works things out?"

My little stab at sarcasm had sailed right over Arthur's head and was winging its way towards continental Europe. Before I had a chance to correct his impression, the owl lunged at my hand as though it hadn't seen food in weeks. I shrieked, dropped the Mousie Munchie, and leapt backwards.

"Not to worry," Arthur soothed. "They move a bit jerkily, you know."

"Are you all right?" Remus asked me solicitously. "Did you get nipped?"

"No," I said, feeling a little silly now.

"You'll get used to it. They're rather nice, actually."

"Yes," Arthur put in. "I'm sure the fact that you're a Muggle won't mean a thing to your owl."

Swell. I might be the proud owner of a bigoted bird. "I think I'll grab a shower," I announced. "You boys work on the window problem."

So much for my leisurely Saturday morning. I stood under the hot shower for a while, then took my time drying my hair and dressing. By the time I was presentable, one of the fireplace windows was on the kitchen table, and Remus and Arthur were hovering over it.

"I was just thinking," I announced. "What if Mr. Najib happens to come by and notices what you've done with the window? I doubt that we're allowed to change it."

"That had occurred to me," Remus admitted. "But I don't think he'll be able to tell it's different unless he tries to open it in the usual way. And I'll certainly change it back whenever we move from here."

We'd already reviewed our lease to see what it said regarding pets. While the size and number of pets was limited, there was nothing in writing which prohibited 'exotic pets'. I took that to mean that we could house a leopard as long as it didn't exceed forty pounds.

I gave up worrying about the window to watch Arthur Weasley in action. And I had to smother a grin almost at once.

A homemade leather pouch was sprawled open on the kitchen table. In it was an array of Muggle tools that Arthur had clearly collected over the years, and included everything from screwdrivers and wrenches to ice picks, nail clippers, and paper clips. Arthur had a rapt expression on his face as he showed Remus how to remove the screws from the window hinges.

Remus saw the look on my face and winked at me. He knew full well how to use a screwdriver, but I knew that Arthur would have been hurt if his enthusiastic demonstration was declined.

While Arthur rambled on about which tool to use for what job, I wandered back into the living room to stare at the re-caged owl.

"Kailin," Remus called, "while we're doing this, why don't you think of a good name for the owl?"

"Me? You want me to name it?"

"Why not?"

I reappeared at the kitchen door. "What do people normally name their owls?"

Remus shrugged. "Anything you like. Doesn't matter."

"You may remember," Arthur put in, "that our owl's named Errol."

I knew that, but the information was less than helpful. There are names which are typical for certain animals, such as Lady or Duke for dogs and Fuzzy or Fluffy for cats, but I had no idea if there was a standard moniker when it came to owls.

I went back to the living room and sat on the sofa, studying the bird.

"So," I said to the owl, "what name would you like? Are you a barn owl? Maybe Barney would fit."

The owl looked at me indignantly, and I remembered at once that he was a she.

"Okay, not Barney then. Barnette? No, that's stupid. Let's see..." What did owls do? Well, they were nocturnal, they hunted, and wizards used them to send messages. Which pretty much summed up my knowledge of owls. "You fly," I said aloud. "Are you a good flier? I suppose you must be. Hmm... a girl flier... How about Amelia, after Amelia Earhart?"

It was the only female flier I knew, and the only reasonable name that sprang to mind. It would have to do.

"Amelia," I repeated, and the owl blinked at me. Well, she wasn't flying at the bars of the cage in a murderous rage, so that must mean she found the name tolerable. 'Amelia' it would be.

I leaned back against the sofa pillows and watched the bird fall asleep on her perch. And thought.

In the month since our return to Britain, life had become increasingly stressful. Scarcely a week went past without news of some Death Eater activity. Two more Hogwarts students had been orphaned, and a half dozen Muggles were found murdered under mysterious circumstances.

The Ministry was spinning its wheels, of course. No one in the Order of the Phoenix believed that Lucius Malfoy's ascent into an advisory position at the Ministry and Amelia Bones' death were coincidental. Even though Bones had been dead four weeks now, Malfoy remained in 'temporary control', in no apparent hurry to find a suitable replacement for her.

With Malfoy at the wheel, mere lip service was given to the investigation of dark activities. Aurors were sent on wild goose chases, checking out false leads and red herrings. To the public, the frenzy of activity gave the impression that the Department of Magical Law Enforcement was hot on the trail of Dark Wizards. Those Aurors who were also members of the Order of the Phoenix knew otherwise.

They were, in fact, furious about it. Nymphadora Tonks showed up at our flat to rant and rave one night last week, loudly threatening to reduce Lucius Malfoy to a eunuch if she ever had the opportunity. Kingsley Shacklebolt, Remus told me, had thrown his broom against a wall so hard that it splintered.

Remus faced his own frustrations. His chores within the Order had changed, although for the better, in my opinion. There would be no more missions for Dumbledore, no tailing Death Eaters, nothing where he might be spotted and his presence in Britain reported. Now his job entailed coordinating communications between Order members. In short, he was out of the line of fire, and I was happy about it.

But while Remus had accepted the change willingly, it hadn't stopped him from feeling perturbed at being kept out of action.

"I'm beginning to empathize with Sirius, cooped up at Grimmauld Place for so long. At least I'm not confined to the flat," he told me the other day.

"Do you think anyone can get Malfoy out of power?" I had wondered.

Remus' smile was weary. "I don't know. At this rate, possibly not until Voldemort's finally defeated."

"Couldn't someone from the Order do something to Malfoy the way he did to Amelia Bones?"

"We could. But then we'd be no different from the people we're fighting."

Sitting in my living room now, watching the sleeping owl, I wondered about the absurdities of the war. Until Voldemort decided to make a sweeping move, the British wizarding world was being held hostage. The immediate concern of the Order was to get Malfoy out of power, but that was certainly easier said than done. More than once, I'd wished there was something I could do to help. But as a Muggle, the best I could do was to support Remus in whatever way I could.

Or was it the best I could do? I sat straight upright, thinking hard.

Moments later, Remus and Arthur marched in with the window, ready to put it back in its frame. My husband glanced at me.

"What's up?"

"Can I send a note to Tonks?" I asked him.

"Of course. Arthur thought he'd send a message to Molly, just to introduce the owl to her, but if you want to send something to Tonks, that's fine. I'm sure the owl's up to both."

"Can you show me how?"

Remus looked surprised at my sudden enthusiasm. "Now?"

"I'll get the window back in," Arthur offered, and went to work. Remus went hunting for paper and string.

"Okay," he said, handing me a piece of paper. "Go ahead and write your note, and then I'll show you how to attach it to her leg. Did you come up with a name?"

"I did. Her name is Amelia."

"Amelia, eh?" Remus smiled. "Sounds like a fine name. What made you choose that one?"

"Amelia Earhart," I said, writing Dear Tonks on the paper. "Famous American female aviator."

Moments later, the message was completed. Remus showed me how to fold the paper, roll it tightly, then tie a string around it. Then he opened the door to the cage and coaxed Amelia from her perch. The owl didn't look pleased, especially when Remus instructed me to tie the message to her leg.

"How tight?" I asked nervously, torn between watching what I was doing and eyeing the bird's looming beak.

"Not too tight, not too loose."

Well, that was helpful. My fingers shook a little, but I managed to get the note tied on without being nipped.

"Now what?" I asked.

"Just tell her who's to receive the note," Remus said calmly.

"Uh..., " I said helplessly, "take this to Nymphadora Tonks, wherever she is." And when the bird failed to budge: "Please," I added.

"You might want to give her a Mousie Munchie," Remus murmured in my ear.

Of course: bribery worked for all God's creatures. I reached for the paper bag sitting next to the birdcage, gingerly pulled out another disgusting morsel, and placed it in the open palm of my hand. The owl fluttered into the air, neatly nabbed the Munchie, and took off through the partly open window, clipping Arthur Weasley's shoulder along the way.

"How long until I get an answer?" I asked.

Remus shot me a look of pure exasperation. "She's only just left, Kailin. You need to give her an hour or two."

Exactly one hour later, Amelia returned, bearing a message from Tonks:

Hi, Kailin. I'd love to get together. What's up? Want to meet for tea this afternoon? How about that Muggle tea shop near you? Lalley's, isn't it? Four o'clock okay? If not, let me know. Is this your owl? She's a cutie.

"A cutie, huh?" I said dryly, staring at the now preening Amelia.

Amelia shot me a disdainful look that seemed to say *Of course I am. What did you expect?*

Some seven hours later, I was scanning the patrons at Lally's, looking for whatever brilliant shade of hair Nymphadora Tonks was currently sporting. It's impossible to overlook her, even in a crowded tea room. All I had to do was head straight for the most colorful person in the place.

"Wotcher, Kailin," she said, smiling hugely as I approached the table.

"Pretty color," I said, admiring her bright turquoise blue hair.

"Like it? I was thinking of how I'd like to be sunning myself on the Riviera, and this shade came to mind."

"How are you?" I asked, pulling out the chair across from her and taking a seat. "Any better than last week?"

"Afraid not. You won't believe what we went through yesterday. Kingsley and I got a tip about some supposed DE's, and it turned out we were chasing one of those Muggle ice cream trucks that make the rounds. I tell you, if the wizarding population knew where their tax dollars went..."

The waiter approached just then. While Tonks placed her order, I was busy picturing the best Aurors Britain had to offer, pursuing lead after lead, only to have it turn into a Mr. Frosty or whatever the British equivalent was called. Worst of all was knowing that Lucius Malfoy sat somewhere, laughing up his sleeve, while Voldemort's followers went on about their business, unimpeded by little things such as the law.

"And you, ma'am?" the waiter asked me.

"Tea and the chocolate mousse, please."

"So." The waiter had barely left when Tonks folded her hands in front of her and looked at me expectantly. "What's up?"

I tried to organize my thoughts. I liked Nymphadora Tonks, but she and I were hardly the best of friends. My invitation to tea had come out of the blue, and she knew it. I decided to plunge ahead without benefit of preliminary small talk.

"I had a crazy idea this morning, and I wanted to run it by somebody from the Order."

Tonks raised an eyebrow. "Remus not around?"

I hesitated. "He's around. I just wanted an unbiased opinion."

"Does that mean he's not going to like your idea?"

"That means he's going to hate my idea."

"Must be a doozy," Tonks remarked with a grin. "Go ahead. What is it?"

I took a deep breath. "As I understand it, everyone's ready to pull their hair out due to the situation at the Ministry."

"When you say 'everyone', are you referring to the Order or the DMLE? Actually, I suppose it doesn't make a lot of difference. Never mind, go on."

"What if..." I paused, wondering briefly if there'd be any going back after this. "What if Malfoy discovered that I was still alive?"

Tonks blinked. "What?"

"What if I wrote a letter to Malfoy, taunting him because I escaped the fire at the cottage?"

"I'd say you're bloody mental, that's what," Tonks said, frowning. "Why do you want Malfoy to know you're still alive?"

"Because his pride would be wounded and he'd want to finish what he'd started."

"Any why would you want him to do that?"

I gulped. "Because there'd be a team of crack Aurors watching nearby, waiting to arrest him for attempted murder."

The barest hint of a smile made the corners of Tonks' mouth twitch. "Go on."

"If Malfoy was arrested for attempted murder, it would ruin him at the Ministry, right? As long as he's controlling the Ministry, the Order's getting nothing in the way of cooperation. If he was gone..."

"If he was gone, I'd waltz naked down Diagon Alley." Tonks said wistfully. From the expression on her face, she was doubtless envisioning Lucius Malfoy being carted away in very heavy chains. "Kailin, there's probably a good deal of merit in your idea. Trouble is, there's absolutely no way in the world that Remus will let you be the bait in an entrapment scheme."

"That's what I'm afraid of."

"You realize that I'd sooner stare down a squad of Death Eaters than face Remus Lupin and tell him that we're going to let Lucius Malfoy go after his wife again."

I fiddled restlessly with my napkin. "But you could guarantee my safety, right? The whole thing would be a set-up."

Nymphadora Tonks regarded me with frank sympathy. "I'm supposed to say 'yeah, we're the best, you're safe with us'. But things happen, Kailin. We'd certainly do our damndest to ensure your safety, but as far as a guarantee goes..." She left the rest unsaid.

I tried a different tack. "Okay, what about this: you're a metamorphing wizard person. What if you changed your appearance so that you looked like me? I wouldn't even have to be there."

"Metamorphmagus is the word you're looking for. Yeah, I can change my appearance, but not to look exactly like somebody. It doesn't work like that."

"It doesn't?" I asked, puzzled.

"No." Tonks leaned forward in her seat. "You see, I can make myself the same size as you, plus take on your eye and hair color, but that wouldn't make me your exact double. Just think how many women are your height and your weight, with dark hair and blue eyes. See what I mean?"

"Oh." I saw exactly what she meant, and immediately my shoulders sagged in disappointment.

"There is one thing, though..." Tonks said thoughtfully. "Have you ever heard of Polyjuice Potion?"

I shook my head.

"With Polyjuice, all I would need is a tiny bit of you, such as one of your hairs. If I drop it into the potion and then drink it, I would turn into you. An exact duplicate of you. For one hour."

"So it's possible, then."

She nodded.

I exhaled slowly, trying not to get too excited too soon. "What do you think? Could it work?"

Tonks tapped a long purple fingernail against the table top. "I don't know. I'll need to think it through some more. Can I get Kingsley's opinion as well?"

"Of course."

"Then we'll need to talk to Dumbledore, and we'll have to get Remus to go along with it. And you need to decide whether you really want to go through with this."

"I wouldn't have offered if I wasn't sure," I reminded her.

"You say that now. What if I asked you to write a letter to Malfoy right now? Would you do it?"

She had a point. I said nothing.

"See?" Tonks glanced up briefly as the waiter brought the tea and my dessert. "Better to sleep on it, Kailin. And talk to Remus."

"Alone?" I asked wryly. "No backup?"

Tonks laughed. "That may well be the most hazardous part of the plan."

She was right. Despite Tonks' suggestion that I sleep on it, I decided to broach the subject with Remus as soon as I got back to the flat. Predictably, he erupted.

"Are you mad?" he hissed, obviously trying to avoid screaming at the top of his lungs. "Let Malfoy know you're alive? Kailin, you nearly died four months ago!"

"You didn't let me finish," I persisted. "Tonks mentioned something called Polyjuice Potion, which turns her into me for an hour. I wouldn't even have to be there."

"And what if there's not a 'there'? What if you send the letter, and nothing happens? What if Malfoy decides he doesn't want to risk his position to go after you, and sends some lackey in his place? The lackey's arrested, Malfoy remains in power, and you're still a target."

I hadn't thought of that, but I was sure Tonks would. "Tonks said she would discuss it with Shacklebolt to see if it's a viable plan. And she's going to talk to Dumbledore about it."

"And when was she going to discuss it with me?" Remus demanded angrily.

"I think she said she'd rather face a flock of Death Eaters," I said, wincing.

Exasperated, Remus threw up his hands.

"Okay," I continued, "forget for a moment that I'm even involved. Just picture this: Lucius Malfoy discovers that a Muggle he thought he'd disposed of is still alive and rubbing his face in it. He's furious and decides to get revenge. He has to; he's not the type of man to let it go. He goes to Meeting Point A to finish off the Muggle and before he can do so, an entire herd of Aurors leap out of hiding and slap him in irons. He's ruined, he's out at the Ministry, and somebody on our side can take over again. Can you see the plan working?"

"You've been watching those Muggle crime shows again," Remus said darkly.

"I have not," I protested. "Look, if the plan turns out to be workable and it gets rid of Malfoy, what's the problem?"

"The problem is, half the time Nymphadora Tonks can't walk across a room without endangering herself and ten other people."

"I told you, Kingsley's going to help her. Besides, with the Polyjuice Potion I'd be miles away from there and perfectly safe."

Remus glared at me. "Where Death Eaters are concerned, there is no such thing as perfectly safe. Besides, what about Snape? We couldn't go after Malfoy through legal channels because it would expose Snape as a spy for the Order."

"I thought about that," I said triumphantly. "You said it yourself: we couldn't go after Malfoy through legal channels, because it would require us to come up with a witness. And the only witness we had was Snape, and Malfoy's confession to him."

My husband didn't answer. I continued.

"If we do it this way, what we're saying is 'I bet it was you, Malfoy, and guess what? I'm still alive!'. Look, Remus, no one else has come up with a way to get rid of Malfoy"

"All right, fine," Remus stated flatly.

I blinked. He was giving in this easily? "What?" I asked, not sure I'd heard correctly.

"I said, fine. If Dumbledore and Shacklebolt agree that it will work, I'll agree to it on one condition."

"What?"

"You do what I've been asking you to do for months. You go home to the States until the war is over."

My jaw dropped. "We've been over this. I can't leave you," I protested.

"But you can endanger yourself for the sake of the Order," he countered.

"That's what you do," I argued.

"It's my job."

"And what about my job?"

"You'll get a job in the States. You yourself said that nurses can always find jobs."

"I'd have to send you money. The Ministry cut off your dole when they kicked you out of the country, remember?"

Remus shrugged. "You wouldn't have to send me much. I could give up the flat and stay at Grimmauld Place. It's Harry's, now; he won't care."

I stared at him, at a loss. "Please, Remus. Don't make me do this."

"That's my offer, Kailin. Take it or leave it. If I have to lose you, better for it to be temporary than permanent."

From the set of his jaw, I could see that he was determined. I'd boxed myself into a corner now, I thought unhappily. "What about this: if the plan doesn't work for some reason, I'll go back to the States. If it does work, I stay here."

We locked eyes. Finally, Remus spoke up, his voice hoarse. "Why do you have to make this so difficult?"

"Because I love you and I want to help. It's not just a wizarding war, R. J.. Muggles are dying, too."

Remus sighed, then reached out to cradle my face in his hands. "I don't want to lose you," he murmured. "As much as I detest Malfoy for what he tried to do to you, and for what he's done to gain power, he could rot in that position as long as you and I were together and safe."

I blinked back sudden tears. "If I thought my idea would endanger either one of us, I wouldn't have suggested it and you know it."

"You know, a hundred years ago, a wizarding husband could order his wife about," Remus told me. Almost wistfully, he added, "Those were the days."

"Then wizards are way ahead of the rest of us. It hasn't been that long since Muggle men ran the whole show. They still do in some places..." My voice trailed off as Remus lowered his head to mine in a tender kiss.

I shivered at the feel of his lips on mine. I had a feeling we were about to seal the deal in a rather spectacular fashion.

Just Desserts

Chapter 2 of 5

Kailin decides to play a dangerous role for the Order of the Phoenix. Remus is not happy about it.

Chapter 2: Just Desserts

I woke up in the middle of the night, feeling achy and feverish and nauseated. Evidently I'd been felled by a flu bug, and I lay in bed cursing the ability of microbes to render a human being completely unable to function. I spent the next day dragging around the house, alternating between throwing up and laying miserably in bed, the whole time assuring Remus that he'd be next to catch it.

But Remus didn't catch it, and the symptoms persisted. I ended up calling in sick once more, and when I was still ailing on the third day, I convinced myself to see a doctor. Before I could leave the flat for my appointment, however, Remus brought an article in the *Times* to my attention:

Dozens of Diners Struck by Flu-Like Illness

More than forty people, all of whom dined at a popular tea room on Saturday, have reported flu-like symptoms over the past two days. Preliminary tests indicate that a variation of the Streptococcus bacteria is responsible for the mystery illness. It has been determined that all of the victims had eaten at the Lally's Corner Tea Room on Granleigh Road. All who dined at the establishment on Saturday are encouraged to contact their physicians. While the illness is not dangerous, complications from the bacterial infection can arise, such as...

I groaned aloud. Not the typical food poisoning, but bad enough that I'd need to go on an antibiotic.

"Do you suppose Tonks is ill as well?" Remus wondered.

"She didn't eat anything," I grumbled. "She only drank tea. I had to go and have the chocolate mousse."

The doctor gave me a prescription for an antibiotic and told me to take the rest of the week off work. I didn't mind having a few more days off, but my supervisor would doubtless be less than happy. In the ten months I'd worked at London Heart Hospital, this would be my second extended absence, the first being my recovery following the cottage fire in March. At this rate, they'd be more than happy to see me resign my position and go back to America.

Remus was pleased.

"That isn't so bad, is it? We'll have more time to spend together this week," he told me when I returned from the clinic.

"I feel like death warmed over," I said caustically. "Yeah, I'll be great company."

"I can take care of you," Remus offered.

"Good. Would you like to start with a foot rub?"

By the end of the week, I was feeling much better, although it was definitely the hard way to lose those pesky Last Five Pounds. All in all, I would be happy to return to work the following Monday.

Then, on Saturday night, an owl arrived with a message from Albus Dumbledore. He wanted to discuss my offer, the message said. Could we meet with him here one evening during the coming week?

On Wednesday evening, Remus and I were just finishing supper when there was a knock at the door. It was Albus Dumbledore, looking completely incongruous in a Muggle apartment hallway, his richly bedecked robes shimmering as he stood there.

"Good evening, Remus. Sorry to be early for our appointment, but something has come up, and I need to be back at Hogwarts rather soon."

"Come in, Albus. It's no problem at all." Remus opened the door wider for the Hogwarts Headmaster to pass.

"Ah, Kailin! How are you, my dear? I heard you were under the weather." Dumbledore spotted me at the kitchen table, his eyes taking in the remains of our dinner. "I'm

terribly sorry to have interrupted your supper."

"I'm doing quite well, and you've not interrupted at all," I said, rising from my seat. "We were just about to have some dessert. Can I offer you some?"

"No, I don't think -"

"I made a cheesecake last night," I began, and the Headmaster brightened at once. I remembered then that the man had a rather vicious sweet tooth.

"Cheesecake, you say? Well, perhaps a sliver..."

Remus cleared away the dinner dishes while I pulled the cheesecake from the refrigerator and cut three slices. Dumbledore took a seat at the end of the table.

"Coffee?" I asked as I fished dessert forks out of a drawer.

"If you happen to have some. I don't want to put you out at all."

"It's no trouble," I promised him, smiling inwardly. The world's most powerful wizard could be brought down by a slab of fat and sugar and a cup of caffeine.

Five minutes later, the three of us sat around the kitchen table with our cheesecake and coffee while Dumbledore praised my baking abilities. My face reddened at once; my culinary skills rarely deserve enthusiastic reviews, and even when I do manage to make a tasty dish, it hardly rates such accolades.

"Actually," I said, "Remus is a far better cook than I am. He usually prepares the meals. I seldom make it into the kitchen until the weekends."

"Cooking," said Dumbledore solemnly, waving around a forkful of cheesecake as he spoke, "is a magical art in and of its own. I salute those of you who are proficient at it. I'm afraid my talents in that area are sorely lacking."

I smiled. The man always had such a way with words.

It was several minutes more before he pushed away the remnants of his second helping of cheesecake and came to the point of his visit.

"As you know, I'm here to discuss the message Nymphadora Tonks sent me the other day. She told me that you, Kailin, had an interesting idea, and then went on to elaborate."

I blushed even more. I was suddenly very aware of the fact that I was an amateur playing at a game of high stakes: a game run by players who were quite unlike me, with skills I didn't possess.

"I outlined my thoughts to Tonks, and she said she'd discuss it with Kingsley Shacklebolt, to see if the idea would fly." When Dumbledore didn't reply at once, I added, "That's a Muggle term."

"I'm aware of that," Dumbledore said dryly. "They have, in fact, discussed it, and believe it would 'fly,' as you say. I do want to bring it in front of the entire Order, however. I feel that everyone should approve it."

I nodded. Albus continued, "The question I have for the both of you is whether you truly wish to pursue this? While your idea does seem quite promising, Kailin, it's possible that we could find another way to provoke Malfoy into leaving the Ministry."

Remus and I exchanged glances.

"Kailin and I have discussed the matter," he said guardedly. "Personally, I don't approve of her involvement at all. But I told her that I would agree to it, as long as you and Kingsley felt it was a workable plan."

Dumbledore turned to me. "How do you feel about that?"

I shifted uneasily in my seat. "I wish that Remus approved wholeheartedly. But I feel that it's a contribution I can make to the Order. Voldemort's declared war on Muggles, too, not just wizards."

"Quite true. However, you have already paid a high price in dealing with Mr. Malfoy. If you want to withdraw your offer, we would understand."

"No," I said simply. "I want to go through with it."

"We've reached a compromise of sorts, Albus," Remus interjected. "If, for whatever reason, the plan doesn't work, Kailin has agreed to return to the States for the duration of the war."

Dumbledore regarded us gravely from beneath his bushy eyebrows. "That would be a great sacrifice for both of you."

The comment fell into a pool of silence.

"We are fighting a war on two fronts these days," he continued, sighing. "The obvious struggle against Voldemort, of course, but now against our very own Ministry. I wish this were not necessary. I confess I never saw Malfoy's grab for power coming. So you see, the rumors that I am omniscient are just that." Dumbledore's smile was pained.

"If the Order approves, do you have any idea how soon this plan could take place?" I asked. Maybe Remus was right about me watching too many crime shows. I had to stop myself from asking when it would be 'going down.'

"Probably in three or four weeks."

Remus looked up at once. "If I could beg one small favor, Albus, could it be scheduled for a time other than the full moon?"

"Of course. Kailin, what do you need from us?"

I managed a smile. "I'd prefer a guarantee that this will go without a hitch, but I know that's not possible. I suppose what I'd like is a chance to give my two weeks' notice at work, if it comes down to that. I've never left a job without adequate notice, and I don't want to ruin my work record."

"You may not have two weeks. If Malfoy doesn't take the bait, you'll need to clear out immediately," Remus reminded me. Dumbledore held up a hand at once.

"If you are unable to complete the two weeks," Albus said gently, "we'll see to it that your work record, as well as your supervisor's memory, are altered to reflect that you left your job with adequate notice."

Which I took to mean that my personnel file would be modified. I had no idea how wizards managed to accomplish such a thing, but I nodded agreement.

We sat in brief silence. "Well," Dumbledore said finally, "that's that, then. I'll bring this up at the next meeting of the Order. If the plan's approved, Nymphadora and Kingsley will personally come to discuss it with you, Kailin."

And after a few pleasantries, he was gone, leaving Remus and me with a stack of dirty dishes and the sense that our future together might be very much in doubt.

The Order met five days later. There was, Remus reported, a great deal of discussion back and forth about the merits of my idea, but it was basically agreed that the plan was worth trying. Everyone wanted to get Malfoy out of the way.

And then we waited.

The following week, Tonks and Shacklebolt came to discuss what I had christened the MGRP: the Malfoy Good-Riddance Plan.

"Here's the timeframe," Kingsley said, unrolling a long parchment on our kitchen table. "We want to set the encounter - that's when Tonks, acting as you, confronts Malfoy - for noon on the first of September. That's the day the students leave for Hogwarts, which means that a lot of people will be tied up that day with seeing their children off to school. Malfoy may go to the station himself to say goodbye to his son."

"He was there to greet him in June," Remus put in.

"Great dad, isn't he?" Tonks commented wryly. "Part of his image improvement plan, more like."

"Anyway," Shacklebolt went on, "the train departs at eleven, and if all goes well, Malfoy will meet you an hour later. We're assuming he won't be booking his calendar very heavily for that day, or at least will have nothing scheduled until afternoon."

"We've already begun brewing the Polyjuice Potion. What we would like you to do is to copy this note," he said, pointing to a paragraph further down the parchment, "and we'll owl it to Malfoy the morning of the first."

I leaned forward to read the note 'I' would be sending:

Mr. Malfoy: I would like to congratulate you on your efforts to kill me this past March, and point out that you failed miserably. I guess the joke's on you, isn't it? I plan to inform the Daily Prophet that you're a murderer. Of course, I could be reasonable about this - say to the tune of ten thousand Galleons? Meet me at the west entrance to King's Cross Station at twelve o'clock noon on September first.

- Kailin Lupin

I blinked. "I'm trying to get money from him? I don't understand."

"No," Tonks said, "you wouldn't. But he would. It's the language he speaks. Remember, Kailin, your idea was to let him know that you're still alive in an effort to get him to come after you. The trouble is, he'd do it as his leisure. He could toy with you for weeks or months. We don't have the manpower to wait around until he's ready to make a move. We want him to come to us on our terms, so we're sweetening the pot. We want to get him good and mad so he'll take the bait."

I wanted Malfoy gone, but not at the expense of my innocence. "Couldn't I be charged with attempted extortion?" I asked, aghast.

"Only if we deny having anything to do with you," Shacklebolt said with a grin so humorless that it made my blood run cold. "Not to worry. All we need is a confession that he tried to kill you, and it's all over."

Once more, the point was being driven home that I was an amateur at this cat and mouse business. "Do you think he'll reply to this note, or just show up?"

"We hope he answers. More incriminating, you know. But if he doesn't, it's no problem," Tonks assured me.

"Oh." I frowned.

"Is there a problem with that?"

"It's just the timing that bothers me. When Malfoy saw my name badge at the Leaky Cauldron, he could also see that I work at London Heart Hospital. You don't think he'll show up there before the meeting time, do you?" It was a scenario I'd played out in my head as I contemplated the ramifications of my proposal over the past month.

Tonks glanced at Kingsley. He was frowning. "We weren't aware that Malfoy knew where you worked," he said, the tone in his voice implying that the plan was now in jeopardy.

"Well," argued Tonks, "we can shadow him that morning, can't we? Make sure he doesn't decide to do something rash?"

Shacklebolt looked murderous. "This was supposed to be a quick op," he muttered to her. "You know we can't spend all day on this."

"We'll talk to Albus about it and work out all the bugs, Kailin," Tonks assured me. "By the way, you need to let us send the message to Malfoy. You don't want to take the chance that your owl could be traced back here to your flat. We don't need him finding out that Remus is back in Britain."

"You've got that right," Remus said grimly.

"What happens after Tonks takes up her position at King's Cross?" I asked.

"The Polyjuice Potion works in increments of one hour, as you know," Kingsley said. "She will take the first dose at eleven forty-five, then go to the west entrance at eleven fifty. I'll be waiting just inside. And I intend to take Polyjuice Potion as well, just to be on the safe side."

I was sorely tempted to ask Shacklebolt who he was going as. It reminded me of some sort of bizarre costume party.

"You said 'first dose,'" I pointed out. "Do you really think it will take longer than an hour?"

"We just like to have a decent time cushion, that's all," Tonks said. "If anything goes wrong, if the encounter is prolonged, then I'll have a little flask with me just in case I need to 'freshen up' a bit."

She winked at me, which was a good thing. I was beginning to get very cold feet over the whole thing.

"When Malfoy arrives," Shacklebolt went on, "two things could happen: he could tell you - Tonks, that is - to take your bribe and bugger off. That's the worst case scenario for you, Kailin, because it means Malfoy will still be after you."

I nodded. "And I'll need to catch the first plane out."

"Exactly. Best case, Tonks accuses him of setting the cottage fire, he calls her a bunch of names his mother never taught him and gives her a bag of Galleons to keep quiet. Tonks and I immediately arrest him for attempted murder."

"Do you think there's any chance he'll attack you there at King's Cross?" Remus put in.

"Not if he has half a brain in his head," Tonks snorted. "Curse me right there in broad daylight in front of a million Muggles?"

"You need to write the note, Kailin," Kingsley told me. "We'll let you know when we plan to pass it on."

"Do you want me to write it now?" I asked, already knowing the answer.

"Yes," he said, nodding. "Use Muggle paper, not parchment. And a Muggle ink pen. He wouldn't expect you to use a quill or parchment."

Resolutely, I tore a page from a legal pad laying nearby and dug a pen out of the bottom of my purse. Shacklebolt pushed the parchment towards me, and I began to copy the words they wanted me to say.

I couldn't shake the feeling that I was writing my own death sentence.

September First

Chapter 3 of 5

Kailin decides to play a dangerous role for the Order of the Phoenix. Remus is not happy about it.

Chapter 3: September First

The day dawned sunny and bright, an ideal day for a picnic or a trip to the zoo. I don't know what sort of day you need for what we were about to do, but the early morning sunlight and the chirping of the birds seemed completely incongruous as I showered and dressed.

My state of mind could best be called chaotic. As Remus and I sat at the breakfast table, he ate while I picked at my food. He tried gamely to spout platitudes, I ignored him. Nervous to the point of feeling ill, I stirred my once crisp cereal into a gooey mush.

"It will be all right, won't it?" I asked for the ten millionth time, abandoning any pretense at eating.

Remus reached over to squeeze my hand. "Dumbledore thinks so. Tonks and Kingsley think so. Another six hours and it will all be over. Malfoy will be in custody, and we can get on with our lives."

"Or I'll be on the way to the airport," I sighed.

Last evening, Tonks had stopped by to go over the plan one final time. The extortion note, she told us, would be sent at eight a.m. to coincide with Lucius Malfoy's usual arrival time at the Ministry. If he replied to the message, the response would go directly to Kingsley Shacklebolt's desk. He would notify us immediately.

I still worried that I could be accused of a crime, but Tonks assured me with a wink that it wouldn't happen; not only had she charmed the writing on the note to blur to the point of illegibility after being read, the paper itself would disintegrate. Malfoy would never be able to prove that I had criminal intent in mind.

It made me feel slightly better. I knew that this plan had been polished and honed by some of the finest British Aurors, yet I still had the sense that I was deliberately stepping out in front of a speeding locomotive. And it was all my doing.

"What if Malfoy tries to reach Kailin before the meeting time at noon?" Remus had wanted to know.

"Get to her at work, you mean?" Tonks shook her head at once. "Not possible. My sources tell me his schedule is booked solid until ten forty-five, at which time he heads to King's Cross to send off darling Draco. And just in case, we placed one of our interoffice memos in Malfoy's office and charmed it to fly straight to alert us if he leaves the building."

There was nothing to do now but wait for the time to crawl by.

As I left for work, I glanced at my packed suitcase, waiting by the door. I didn't want to use it, didn't want to leave Remus or Britain. At once, Remus saw which way my eyes were looking. He pulled me into a reassuring embrace.

"It'll be all right, dearest," he murmured.

I wondered if he was trying to bolster his own confidence as well as mine.

Remus accompanied me on the Tube, then kissed me goodbye as I left him in the Family Members Lounge on the main level of London Heart Hospital.

"Promise me..." I began, but Remus was already fishing my cell phone out of his pocket, a smile on his face.

"I promise. I'll call just as soon as I hear anything."

The only bright spot to the day was that it promised to be a busy one; there was a full load of scheduled surgeries, not to mention the emergency bypasses that come through. I was glad of that; it meant I would have less time to dwell on what was scheduled to take place at King's Cross at noon.

I don't assist in the surgeries themselves; I care for the patients as they meander their way back toward consciousness. The Post-Anesthesia Recovery Suite where I work is a large area just off the operating rooms. There is space for thirty-five stretchers in PARS, which means it's essentially one large ward with curtained cubicles. Additionally, there are offices, storerooms, a utility room and a break room, all adjoining a long corridor.

By eleven business was booming. The ward was ninety percent full of semi-conscious patients. The voices of the staff mingled with the occasional groan of discomfort, and all the while, electronic IV administration pumps and heart monitors beeped and buzzed and chimed. It was a noisy place, so I wasn't surprised that I didn't hear my supervisor call my name the first time. When it finally got through to me that she wanted my attention, I could see her miming picking up a receiver and mouthing the word 'telephone.'

My mouth went dry. I walked toward the nearest phone, my stomach writhing in panic. "Hello?"

It was Remus. "Good news," he said tersely. "Tonks says everything's on target. The message was sent out on schedule, and right now Malfoy's at King's Cross, seeing the train off."

"Did he respond to the message?" I wanted to know.

"No. But," Remus added quickly, "you remember that she wasn't necessarily expecting him to do that."

"Right." I was disappointed. I'd wanted him to threaten all manner of retribution; it would have given my accusations a bit more weight.

"Are you all right, dearest?"

"Just great," I said, managing a pained smile. "Thank God we're busy. It helps to keep my mind off things."

"It won't be long now. And I'm just upstairs, if you need me."

"I know. Wish you were down here."

"Next time, get a job someplace with a waiting area close by, would you?"

Remus' gentle teasing had the desired effect: I managed some genuine laughter, despite my heightened anxiety.

"Are you all right, Kailin?" My supervisor, a kindly, older woman by the name of Georgia Tate, was eyeing me with concern when I hung up the telephone. "You've looked tense all morning."

"I'm fine, Georgia," I lied, smiling.

"All right, then. You just seemed a bit jumpy, that's all."

Jumpy? She didn't know the half of it. I was ready to jump out of my skin, pure and simple.

"Really," I repeated, shaking my head, "it's nothing."

"Was that your Remus?" Georgia wanted to know.

"Yes," I said, smiling. I loved that term, 'my Remus.'

"Oh. I thought that might be him, calling back." As if that explained everything, Georgia nodded in satisfaction and walked off.

Something wasn't adding up. I mentally ran her words through my brain one more time. "Wait, Georgia," I called after her. "What did you say?"

The woman turned back to face me. "I just meant that I wasn't surprised when he called back."

"But he didn't call before," I pointed out carefully.

"Not for you, no. But he did phone a bit earlier to see if you were in. Didn't he realize you were working today?"

My blood froze.

I hurled myself at the telephone. My hands were shaking so hard I could barely dial my own cell phone number.

It seemed to take an excruciatingly long time for the connection to go through. Finally, I heard Remus' voice at the other end.

"He's coming here!" I gasped without preamble. "He called here to see if I was working today!"

Suddenly, there was a flash of light, and an enormous bang resounded throughout the ward as the doors at the far end flew into the air and crashed to the floor. I dropped the phone with a clatter while, amid gasps and cries from the staff, a figure clothed in black appeared out of the smoke and dust.

Lucius Malfoy stood there, his cold eyes darting from person to person. He was clad entirely in black, long blond hair cascading over his shoulders, a wand resting loosely in his right hand.

Georgia's eyes widened and she marched straight toward him. "This is a restricted area!" she snapped. "What in the world do you think you're doing? Get out! You don't belong in here!"

My feet felt suddenly, utterly, rooted to the floor. I heard a different voice urging someone to call Security. I wanted to laugh; hospital security guards against a Death Eater? They'd be slaughtered in seconds.

"Nobody move!" he hissed.

But Georgia wasn't finished ranting yet. "These are patients who've just been released from surgery!"

Malfoy's eyes flicked toward her. He raised his wand and murmured something, and immediately a bolt of red sizzled from the end of it. Georgia spun in a circle and toppled to the floor.

Screams erupted from the staff. It was obvious to me that Lucius Malfoy would mow down each and every person, nurse and patient alike, if need be.

Protect the patient.

It was a moral Marvy had drilled into me long ago when telling me tales about her nursing career. Malfoy was not after the patients or the staff, he was after me, and I had to draw him away from the area at once. All I could think was that I would die protecting my patients, and Marvy would be proud.

I bolted for the door next to me; it opened onto the hallway that housed the storeroom, Georgia's office, and our break room. At best, I thought, I could only divert Malfoy for a minute or two, but it might give Remus time to notify Tonks and Shackbolt and get them here. I was barely through when I heard something impact the door frame with a loud bang. I tore down the hall to the storeroom.

I skidded inside the room and slammed the door shut behind me. I locked it. I have no idea why I thought a lock might deter a Death Eater but it seemed the appropriate thing to do. I heard footsteps running down the hall. At once I started looking for a place to hide.

When supplies are delivered, they typically stack up for a day or two until someone has a chance to open boxes and shelve the items. With a sinking feeling, I realized that someone had taken the time yesterday to sort things out, so the notion of hiding behind a stack of cartons was out of the question. My only choice was to squeeze behind one of the massive, mobile shelving units, but they offered limited protection, depending on what the shelves contained.

I ran to the end of the room, shoved one of the last units aside and slid behind it. The shelf in front of me held liter bottles of bleach, the cheap, effective disinfectant which not only made your towels sparkling white, but also killed the AIDS virus and a host of other nasties. It was the solvent of choice for cleaning just about everything in hospitals these days. As cover went, it didn't conceal much, and I prayed that help would arrive by the time Malfoy found me.

There was silence from the hallway. Malfoy, I hoped, was unsure which door I'd gone through. Not that it would take him long to find out; there weren't many to choose from.

As if to bear me out, I could hear a door being blown off its hinges. It sounded as though it might be Georgia's office, next door. That meant I had possibly ten more

seconds before Malfoy reached the storeroom.

Please, Remus, please help me! Get Tonks, get Shackbolt, and help me!

Then the storeroom door blew open, and I stifled a whimper. Wasn't there a limit on how often any one person should face death in the space of six months? A small voice reminded me that early on in our courtship, Remus had tried to warn me against getting involved with him. Another small voiced hushed the first one, saying that it was too late now to worry about that sort of thing.

"Filthy Muggle!" Lucius Malfoy hissed at the room in general. "I know you're in here! How dare you try to intimidate me?"

I could hear the overhead speakers paging all available Security Officers to the Post-Anesthesia Recovery Suite. Perhaps taking out his wrath on the poor unsuspecting guards would occupy Malfoy for a couple of minutes, anything to keep me alive for a little longer, to give Remus more time to get here...

"You bastard! You tried to kill me!" I cried, my whole body trembling now.

"So you realized that was me, did you?" Malfoy said smoothly, pulling back a shelving unit and peering behind it.

"It wasn't that hard. But why?" I knew why, but for my own satisfaction, I wanted to hear him say it.

"Because you're an ignorant Muggle, my dear." Another shelving unit slid out of position. "And as an ignorant Muggle, you are both expendable and useless."

"Not to my friends and family!"

"The werewolf? No wonder the two of you get on so well. You're both expendable and useless."

One more shelving unit slid away. Only a few more to go, and I would be looking Lucius Malfoy in the eye.

"Why not kill you?" Malfoy continued. "You do realize that after the Dark Lord takes over, which will be any day now that I have the Ministry in my pocket, Muggles will be steadily eliminated."

"And you don't think the rest of the world will notice?"

"Let them." The next shelving unit slid to the side, and I could clearly see Malfoy shrug in indifference. "Tell, just how did you manage to escape the cottage fire? I've been burning to know."

Burning to know... That bastard, I seethed inwardly. I had to fight back, to do something. But what?

My eyes focused on the bottle of bleach in front of me. Slowly, I slid my hand in my pocket and pulled out my bandage scissors. "I don't think I'll tell you," I shot back at him. "Muggles have skills of their own, you know."

Malfoy chuckled. "Play your little game, if it makes you feel better. I can assure you that I'll have no trouble getting the answer from you."

Clumsily, I used my scissors to spear the bleach bottle below the neck, then hastily sliced around it. It wasn't easy; my hand was shaking so hard I could barely work the scissors.

The top third of the bottle came off just as the shelving unit filled with bleach bottles slid away from me.

"Ah, there you "

I hurled the contents of the bleach bottle directly into Lucius Malfoy's face.

My aim was perfect. A gallon of caustic, burning bleach hit Malfoy squarely in the head and chest. He uttered a choked cry of pain, and his hands flew up immediately to his face.

I dropped the bleach bottle, grabbed an IV pole off the rack on the wall behind me, and brought it down on his head as hard as I could.

There was an enormous, thudding crack, and I wondered briefly if I'd shattered his skull. Malfoy staggered sideways into a shelving unit and dropped to his knees, cursing and choking.

I was raising the IV pole again when Tonks came rushing into the room.

"*Stupefy!*" she screamed, and a bolt of red shot from her wand to hit the sputtering, floundering Malfoy.

With a sob, I slumped against the wall. No cavalry charge had ever been more welcome than Nymphadora Tonks and her flaming pink, today hair.

"Get out into the hall, would you, Kailin? I'll take care of dear Lucius here." Tonks waved her wand, and ropes flew from the end of it. She began to tie up Malfoy on the spot.

I didn't have to be told twice. I stepped over Malfoy's legs and ran for the door.

The corridor was full of people. Kingsley Shackbolt appeared to be telling the hospital security guards that everything was under control. A group of witches and wizards I didn't know were milling about, looking grave. From inside the ward, I could hear a loud voice assuring the nursing staff that absolutely nothing amiss had taken place, and I caught the word 'Obliviate.' Evidently troops from the Ministry had arrived. I wondered how much trouble Tonks and Shackbolt would be in for this unauthorized little escapade.

"Kailin!" I heard Remus' voice and looked around wildly to find him.

And then he was fighting his way through the crowd of Ministry officials, and I was running toward him.

Remus enfolded me into his arms, clutching me to him fiercely. "Kailin," he mumbled, "dear God! I didn't I couldn't "

He couldn't finish, but it didn't matter. I was safe. Somehow, some way, safe. I began to cry into the depths of my husband's shoulder.

The Expectation of Hope

Chapter 4 of 5

Kailin decides to play a dangerous role for the Order of the Phoenix. Remus is not happy about it.

Chapter 4: The Expectation of Hope

A lot of memories were modified that day.

The immediate staff of the Post-Anesthesia Recovery Suite, a crowd of the curious from the OR, a dozen hospital security guards and a handful of Muggle police were all tended to by Ministry Obliviators. By the time a television news team showed up to investigate the rumored ruckus at London Heart Hospital, not a soul recalled anything extraordinary about the day, other than the fact that a department supervisor had taken ill and left the premises.

While all this was going on, I was sitting in Georgia Tate's office. Remus had deposited me there when my legs began to tremble almost to the point where I could no longer stand. It was shock, he assured me, although I'd already figured that out for myself. And so we huddled in the office while the corridor swarmed with Ministry officials and Tonks and Shackbolt tried to keep the chaos under control. I sipped a glass of water Remus brought me and thought over the events of the past ten minutes.

"Is Georgia dead?" I wanted to know the answer, but dreaded hearing it just the same.

"I honestly don't know," Remus answered gently. He sat down in Georgia's desk chair and leaned forward to clasp my free hand. "You said the light from his wand was red, so it was likely a Stunner, not the Killing Curse. On the other hand, we don't know what damage was done. She'll get good care at St. Mungo's, Kailin."

I was skeptical. "This is the first time you've ever had anything good to say about St. Mungo's."

Remus raised one eyebrow and gave me a wry smile. "Let me rephrase that. If you're not a werewolf, you get good care at St. Mungo's."

"I thought no one else would have to get involved," I said after a moment. "I didn't want anyone to get hurt. That wasn't very realistic, was it?"

"It's a war, dearest."

"If you want to say I told you so, I wouldn't blame you," I muttered.

"Why would I do that?"

I'd been studying my glass with more concentration than it warranted, and now I looked up at my husband, hoping that he wasn't teasing me. His expression was perfectly serious. "Because you didn't like this plan to begin with. Because if I hadn't gone through with this, Georgia would be sitting here right now."

Remus squeezed my hand, his face grave. "Don't second guess yourself, Kailin. I've tried it, and it doesn't work. Trust me."

There was a knock on the doorframe and Tonks peered inside. "How are you doing, Kailin? Are you all right?"

"Just dandy," I said faintly.

She came into the office and patted me encouragingly on the shoulder. "You were magnificent," she told me. "Tossing the bleach at Malfoy was bloody brilliant, you know that?"

"There aren't a lot of weapons to be had around here," I pointed out.

"Well, it was inspired. His hair didn't need the bleach job, of course, but you definitely lightened the shade of his clothes!"

I couldn't help but laugh at the notion of Lucius Malfoy wearing all white; he'd look like a deranged angel. "I just wish you'd gotten here earlier. I could have done without the suspense."

Tonks perched on the edge of Georgia's desk. "Lucky that Kingsley and I were upstairs with Remus when you called."

"I thought you weren't planning to be here."

"We weren't," said Tonks, shrugging. "It was just a hunch. When Malfoy didn't return to the Ministry after the Hogwarts Express left, Kingsley decided that we'd better check things out here."

"It's a good thing you did," Remus told her.

"We got down here just as Malfoy showed up," Tonks said matter-of-factly. "I saw him curse that woman and chase after you, Kailin."

"I wanted to draw him away from everybody," I explained. "And I thought if I could buy some time, Remus might have time to get downstairs and help me."

"Very smart move." Tonks nodded approvingly. "Gave me time to play along with the situation a bit."

"What do you mean, 'play along with the situation'?" Remus looked up at once.

"I wanted to see if I could use the situation to our advantage. Kailin boxed herself in, and Malfoy started toying with her. When he began to incriminate himself, I decided to hold off intervening as long as I could."

My husband stared at her. "Let me get this straight: Kailin was in danger, and you waited to help her until Malfoy confessed?"

"Getting him to confess was the whole idea of the operation, Remus," Tonks reminded him.

"And the idea was also for Kailin to be miles away from Lucius Malfoy," Remus said through gritted teeth.

Tonks glared at him. "We're not amateurs, you know. This was a professional operation, but there's never a guarantee that things will go exactly according to plan!"

"I think that would be a gross understatement," Remus said, his voice icy.

"Hey, you two..." Kingsley Shacklebolt appeared at the office door, a scowl on his face. "Keep it down, will you? These Obliviators aren't a happy lot to begin with."

"What do I do now? Make my statement?" I'd had enough confrontation to last a lifetime, and even Remus and Tonks sniping at each other was like rubbing salt into a raw wound. Right now, I just wanted to go home.

"Yes," Kingsley nodded. "Tonks, can you take care of that?"

Remus climbed to his feet. "I'm taking my wife home. You can talk to her later at the flat."

Tonks and Shacklebolt exchanged glances before nodding agreement. "Would it be all right if we stopped by this evening?" Kingsley asked, trying to smooth the ruffled feathers.

"That's fine." Remus turned to me. "Kailin, do I need to ask someone's permission for you to leave work? Not that it matters. You're going, and that's that."

"I'll leave a note on Georgia's desk," I said listlessly. "Someone will find it."

And I scribbled a letter to the effect that I'd felt ill and was going home. By the time I collected my purse, the majority of the staff in the Recovery ward was already back at work.

I spent the remainder of the day in bed, a living, breathing example of how stress causes physical exhaustion. Even the simple act of sitting up to eat a bowl of soup for lunch seemed to require an excessive amount of energy, and I crawled back under the covers until late afternoon when Tonks and Shacklebolt showed up to take my statement.

Remus was all for putting this off another day, but I wanted to get it over and done with. At least he had calmed down about the way Tonks handled the situation at the hospital, deciding that an Auror's professional judgment was probably trustworthy after all. He offered a brief apology shortly after the two arrived.

"No problem, Remus," Tonks assured him. "I would have reacted the same way if I'd been in your shoes."

Writing my statement took only thirty minutes or so. I'd gone over the process with Kingsley and Tonks while we were still in the planning stages. Even though the plan had not gone as anticipated, the end results were the same. We finished just as it grew dark outside.

"Will you two be in any trouble?" I asked. Neither Tonks nor Shacklebolt had so far mentioned any fallout from our unsanctioned little operation. I was sure that precipitating a major breach of the Statute of Secrecy wouldn't bode well for them.

Kingsley chuckled mirthlessly. "You won't believe this, Kailin. It hasn't hit the papers yet, but everyone's so happy to be rid of Malfoy that our boss is now in the running to be the next Minister of Magic."

"Scrimgeour?" Remus asked, surprised.

"Yeah," Tonks snorted. "We made him look good, didn't we? It's the first real progress against Voldemort in months, of course, and now his name's apparently at the top of the list."

The *Evening Prophet* arrived while the pair was still at the flat, and Remus unrolled the wizarding newspaper, displaying the headlines for all to see.

"Malfoy Arrested on Muggle Harassment Charges"? It should read, 'Malfoy Arrested on Charges of Attempted Murder,'" Tonks complained. "Those people at the Prophet are such idiots..."

"Not to worry," Kingsley told her, waving the parchment that contained my statement. "This time tomorrow, the *Prophet* will have lots more to say about Mr. Malfoy."

"True. Are you planning to go back to work tomorrow, Kailin? You still look a bit peaky."

"I want to go back," I said at once. "The longer I stay away, the harder it will be for me to face going back in there."

"I'd rather you stayed home one more day," Remus commented, with the resigned air of a man who knows his argument is futile.

"Yeah, how about it?" Tonks said brightly. "I could pop by the hospital and make a few adjustments to your work schedule. Would you like the rest of the week off?"

"Thanks, but I really think I want to go back and get it over with. The thing is, what do I say to people?"

Kingsley shrugged. "Doesn't matter. You'll be the only one who remembers what went on there today."

"At least Georgia's going to be all right." The last word from St. Mungo's was that Georgia would be released in a day or two. Learning that my boss had suffered no major injuries from Malfoy's curse was the best news of the day. Her memory would be modified, of course, but at least she was alive.

The next day turned out to be more stressful than I would have ever believed.

There was literally no clue that anything unusual had happened in the Post-Anesthesia Recovery Suite. The same staff I'd seen shrink from Malfoy and scream in horror behaved as though the most dramatic event of the previous day was that the hospital had begun serving Mexican cuisine in the cafeteria. It was bizarre to watch my co-workers behave almost abnormally normal. After a while, it made me want to scream. I'd been attacked in this very location twenty-four hours ago, but that fact was no longer a part of their reality. Although I had wanted the diversion that work would bring, I found it hard to concentrate. My mind seemed to wander of its own accord. More than once I had to literally tell myself to focus on whatever task was at hand.

Physically, the Post-Anesthesia area was in fine shape. Doors that had been blown off their hinges now hung straight and level, and even the storeroom looked no different than usual. The Ministry had done a fine job restoring the space, but what they hadn't seen fit to dispel was the lingering odor of bleach. I don't know if I was more sensitive to it because of yesterday's events, or if it was stronger than usual. At any rate, the smell promptly sent me to the bathroom to lose my breakfast. One of the other nurses, a middle-aged woman named Frannie, regarded me sympathetically as I hung over the sink in the bathroom, splashing cold water on my face.

"Affected me the same way," she told me. "Perhaps some dry crackers would help. Want me to see if I can round up a few for you?"

"What?" I tried to process her words as I fumbled for a paper towel.

"Couldn't stand that bleachy odor when I was pregnant. Had to practically put a clothespin on my nose for the first few months."

"But I'm not pregnant," I protested at once.

"Oh." Frannie looked nonplussed. "Are you sure?"

I could only stare at her, trying to correlate dates and memories while my stomach threatened to revolt once more. When my shift ended hours later, I headed straight for the pharmacy instead of bolting for the Tube.

"How was your day?" Remus wanted to know as soon as I walked in the front door of the flat. "You look exhausted. You really should have stayed home today, you know."

"I'm fine," I muttered, pausing long enough to hug my husband before making my way to the bathroom, my purchase in hand.

"Dinner's ready, but you need to see the *Daily Prophet* first morning and evening editions."

"Be there in a sec."

My hands shook as I unwrapped the home pregnancy kit and tried to familiarize myself with the directions. It wasn't easy; my thoughts were leaping wildly from what Remus would say, to whether it would be a boy or a girl, to what if I wasn't pregnant after all? When I left the bathroom a few minutes later, I felt the most peculiar sense of detachment that can only result from one's life changing radically.

"Here you go." Remus, looking pleased as punch, held the wizarding paper out to me.

"Could I read it later?" I took the newspaper but didn't unroll it.

"Of course. To sum it up," he said smugly, "no one wants to admit to being hoodwinked by Lucius Malfoy's transformation from bad boy to paragon of virtue. The Department for Magical Law Enforcement is now the darling of public opinion, and its head, Rufus Scrimgeour, is likely to be named Minister of Magic tomorrow. Tonks and Shacklebolt are furious, of course. After all, it was your idea and their hard work, but they'll likely get nothing more than pats on the head and a stern warning about unauthorized entrapment plans. And now the Evening Prophet is reporting that an unnamed Muggle woman accused Lucius Malfoy of attempting to kill her last spring by setting fire to the cottage where she was staying, and that Malfoy came after her yesterday at her workplace."

When Remus paused for breath, I reached up to place my hand over his mouth.

"Remus. Stop."

"Stop?" He regarded me curiously.

"Do you remember, back in the spring, when we talked about having a family?"

"Of course."

"Well, we're having one."

A sudden silence descended.

"I'm pregnant," I added, when the stunned expression on Remus' face indicated that he hadn't quite grasped what I was telling him.

If I'd been in the mood for revenge at that moment, I couldn't have asked for a better reaction. Remus' jaw dropped abruptly, then floundered up and down for several seconds; he blinked, apparently in an attempt to refocus his eyes. Finally, he managed to force air past his vocal cords. "You're pregnant?" he sputtered.

I nodded, waiting anxiously to see what happened next. The world's widest grin spread over my face. "Is it all right? I mean, I didn't plan to get pregnant just now..."

"A baby!" Remus' voice quivered with emotion. "We're going to have a baby."

I couldn't stop the burble of laughter that escaped me. "You're going to be a father. And I'm going to be a mother," I added needlessly.

"But this means that you were pregnant yesterday."

"Of course," I agreed.

"Kailin... *Damn it!*" Remus exploded, one hand flying to rub his forehead and the other akimbo on his waist.

I felt my stomach sink abruptly to the floor; I was quite sure that it had nothing to do with the hormones of pregnancy.

"I don't understand. You were taking that pill."

"I was. It must have been the food poisoning. I must have thrown up the pill and didn't get enough of the hormones to prevent a pregnancy."

"Do you realize that you could have died yesterday?" Remus snapped. I could see the naked fear in his expression.

"Of course I realize it. I was there."

"I could have lost you! I could have lost both you and a baby I didn't even know about! Just when did you find out that you were pregnant?"

"A whole five minutes ago," I retorted. "Do you think I would have gone through with everything yesterday if I had known?"

"I don't know. Would you?"

I paled at the clearly accusing note in his voice. "I can't believe that you would ask me that. You evidently don't know me very well, do you?"

Remus opened his mouth to speak, but nothing came out. I stalked away to the bedroom, hurling the *Daily Prophet* across the room as I went.

Once in the bedroom, I slammed the door shut and dropped wearily onto the bed. It was dusk, the late summer daylight fading away earlier and earlier each day. As I stretched out, cradling the pillow beneath my head, I thought how nice it would be to have a good cry. Trouble was, I'd already depleted a goodly supply of tears over the past two days, and to succumb to histrionics again seemed more defeat than release. My husband's light tap at the bedroom door, moments later, did little to improve my spirits.

"What?" I grumbled, barely loud enough to be heard.

"Kailin..." Remus slipped quietly inside the room. "I'm so sorry. I know you weren't expecting that reaction from me."

"Well, *that's* an understatement."

"I'm sorry. It was just such unexpected news."

"You think?" I said sarcastically, still not bothering to sit up. "I want an apology, Remus. You actually think I would have knowingly endangered our unborn child, just to

allow Lucius Malfoy to chase me around the storeroom at work?"

"I did say sorry twice," Remus pointed out. It was apparently a blind, ill-timed stab at injecting some humor in the situation. I could almost hear the smile fade from his voice. When he spoke again, his voice was low and intense. "God in heaven, Kailin, do you have any idea how frightened I was? How frightened I am?"

"I suppose it may be about as how frightened I was. And how frightened I am." I sighed and patted the bed next to me. "Please?"

Remus came over and crawled onto the bed, curling up behind me. He draped one arm over me, and I took his hand and placed it on my lower stomach.

"R.J.," I murmured, "this is our child. Child, this is your silly father who can't get over the notion that life might actually turn out well for him."

There was silence, except for the tell-tale shaking of my husband's shoulders as he wept.

The Rewards of Hope

Chapter 5 of 5

Kailin decides to play a dangerous role for the Order of the Phoenix. Remus is not happy about it.

The Rewards of Hope

It took Remus until the following morning to completely overcome his anxiety about my pregnancy.

"Sod Voldemort!" he cried, juggling toast and scrambled eggs and juice at breakfast. "We'll live. We'll manage. This is just so incredible! When is the baby due?"

"Early May, I think."

"May!" he blurted. "That's an eternity!"

"It'll probably be here before we know it," I said encouragingly. "And there'll be a lot to do in the meantime."

Remus left the kitchen long enough to enfold me in his arms. "A baby," he whispered, and then, "I'm going to live, Kailin."

"I certainly hope so," I replied, having no idea what he meant.

"I'm going to live," he repeated. "Through this war, I mean. I had reason to live before, but now, more than ever. I have you, I have a son or daughter... I'm going to survive."

The matter of Lucius Malfoy was handled discreetly.

So discreetly, in fact, that there was no public trial not because Malfoy didn't deserve it, Albus Dumbledore told me, but because the Ministry had a bigger fish to fry in the form of Lord Voldemort. Rufus Scrimgeour, the new Minister of Magic, chose to downplay Malfoy's arrest, saying only that the Ministry had been negligent in releasing him from Azkaban a year earlier and displayed further carelessness by allowing him to ascend into a position of power. Nevertheless, Scrimgeour assured everyone in a *Daily Prophet* interview, a Death Eater had been caught and imprisoned, and Voldemort's supporters were now depleted by one.

I read between the lines, and when Albus Dumbledore visited Remus and me a week after the attack at the hospital, I brought the matter up.

"Tell me," I said carefully, "if I were a witch instead of a Muggle, would there have been a huge public outcry over the whole thing?"

Sitting on our sofa, still incongruous in his riot of robes, Dumbledore regarded me over the teacup poised in his hand. "Sadly, that would be my opinion as well. Not that they've swept the affair under the rug, mind you. Malfoy got what he deserves. But the wizarding population tends to worry first and foremost about its own, Kailin. That's neither right nor wrong. It's just---"

"---human nature," I finished for him. "It's all right, really. I don't want the publicity."

I sincerely meant it. I was perfectly happy being the anonymous Muggle woman who sent Lucius Malfoy up the river. That didn't mean, however, that there wasn't fallout from the entire debacle.

First and foremost, the Order of the Phoenix officially commended me for my role in getting rid of Malfoy. I was made an honorary member, earning a round of applause from the diverse group of witches and wizards at the very next meeting.

Secondly, while the final Aurors' report indicated that my plan was basically successful, it was strongly recommended that I continue to maintain a low profile and worse yet change jobs.

"What?" I was appalled. Changing jobs was the last thing I wanted to do. I liked my job and had no plans to leave it.

Nymphadora Tonks, obviously not pleased to be the one relaying this news, tried to look as though she commiserated with me. "I'm really sorry, Kailin. But now that it's public knowledge that Malfoy went after someone at London Heart Hospital, anyone could probably find out who with just a little detective work. It would be safer if you found a job elsewhere."

"Does this mean she's still in danger?" Remus wanted to know, and I could sense the old issue of me returning to the States rearing its ugly head.

"Not necessarily. It's just a precaution. After all, you're expecting a baby now. You don't want to take chances, do you?"

"No..." I trailed off. I was fighting a losing battle here. If I changed jobs, there was a chance that Remus might be pacified.

For after his initial dejection, then absolute elation, over my pregnancy, my husband had turned back into a very obsessive worrier.

His basic concern was housing. Though we lived in a two bedroom flat, Remus was adamant that we find something larger. There was absolutely no way, he told me, that he could continue to transform in the second bedroom once it became a baby's nursery.

"But that won't be for a while yet," I pointed out.

"It doesn't matter," he insisted. "It makes me ill just thinking that our child will be sleeping in there someday."

I couldn't blame him. No matter that Remus was fastidious when it came to cleaning up the room once the moon began to wane. No matter that the baby could be moved into our room for that one night each month. The very idea of our child sharing a room with a werewolf was unthinkable to him. To be brutally honest, the idea didn't sit well with me, either.

And so I began to hunt for a new job. Nursing jobs were plentiful enough, but choosing one was dictated this time by location. Was the job in a decent, affordable neighborhood? Or was there an easy commute from a decent, affordable neighborhood? It was altogether frustrating, because one thing hinged on the other, and nothing ever seemed to pan out.

And if that wasn't stressful enough, the ultrasound report from the doctor indicated that I was carrying twins.

I'm sure I spent at least a full sixty seconds spluttering like a fish out of water. Remus and I were sitting in the doctor's office, across the desk from a man who had delivered this news before and was waiting to see whether it would blow up in his face or be met by rousing cheers.

"Do either of you have twins in your family trees?" Dr. Whitman asked as the Stunned Silence finally moved in the direction of Thoroughly Strained.

I shook my head wordlessly. Remus still looked as though he'd been hit in the head by a two by four.

"Uh...yes..." he managed shakily.

I stared at my husband, all the while trying hard to bat down a rising hysteria. "You never mentioned that there were twins in your family," I said in a panicked tone of voice.

"Well, I forgot, Kailin," Remus turned to look at me, his eyes wide with shock. "That is well, we weren't close to that branch "

The doctor was speaking, but I could understand little of what he was saying. I'd tuned out his voice completely. There was a recording playing in my head, one which was repeatedly issuing little warnings of doom. Twins? How were we supposed to afford twins? How could we manage the logistics? How was I supposed to keep my sanity? What if it was a boy and a girl? Did that mean we needed four bedrooms instead of three? One for a boy, one for a girl, and one for a wolf?

I remember nothing from the rest of the doctor's visit. On the way home, neither Remus nor I said much until suddenly abruptly he blurted, "This is wonderful, Kailin!"

"Wonderful?" I echoed weakly. It kept me from screaming, *Are you crazy?*

The look of shock on his face had been replaced by one of pure joy. "Wonderful," he repeated. "Don't you see? They'll always be there for each other. They'll never have to wonder if they'll have friends!"

Remus fell silent again after that, but it was a telling description of his own childhood.

The doctor's news, however mind-blowing and earth-shaking it might have been, at least marked the turning point of our fortunes.

We received a message from Minerva McGonagall the very next day. Her sister Miranda she of the Kent cottage which Malfoy had set ablaze had decided not to rebuild on that site; she wanted to move farther north, where there was more room for her massive dogs to run about and fewer Muggles to ask questions. The land, some six acres in all, was available. Were Remus and I interested?

My first inclination was to turn it down flat. I'd only spent a matter of hours in Miranda's cottage, but they were hours I'd sooner forget. It was Remus who pointed out that the asking price was fantastically low. I had to trust him on this one, as I had absolutely no idea what wizarding property sold for. And so we made the trip out from London to see it, Remus with his high hopes and me with my low expectations.

I fully expected to be struck with horrific memories the moment we approached the place. After all, I'd nearly died there. In my mind's eye, I could see the sealed windows and doors, the flames, the dog door which had been my only hope for escape.

What I found was a lovely little piece of land. The cottage was no more, razed to its very foundations. There was even a small pond nearby something we hadn't noticed that dark night in March and a smattering of fruit trees and flowers. The day itself was lovely: leaves were changing into their autumn colors, and there was a crispness in the air that reminded me of school, warm baked goods, and bright yellow Number 2 pencils.

"What do you think?" Remus was looking at me anxiously. He'd been in favor of buying the place as soon as Minerva had broached the topic.

I honestly hadn't expected to consider living here. Out in the country? Me?

"The cottage was so small," I reminded him, looking back towards the stone foundations of the house. "There wouldn't be enough room."

"We don't have to use the existing foundation," he said at once. "But if we wanted to, we could build up. Two stories, you know."

And I had a vision of two little Lupins running through the grass to throw rocks in the pond or wiggle their toes in the water, and I was hopelessly smitten.

I changed the remainder of my bequest from Marvy from pounds to Galleons and handed a considerable sum over to Miranda McGonagall.

That done, we started looking for a builder, and I began searching for a job in Kent.

The job turned out to be the easiest part of the equation. A doctor from the London Heart Hospital was moving his practice to Gravesend. As soon as he heard I was moving east as well, he approached me and asked if I would be interested in working at his clinic. It was an opportunity falling directly into my lap from parts unknown, and I would be foolish to pass it up; once again, Marvy was looking out for me, and I was grateful.

Wizarding builders, it turns out, are people who literally function in No Man's Land. They use magical techniques to build a house, but the materials are strictly Muggle. Some magical contractors deal strictly with new goods; they go to a builder's supply store just like any other Muggle. Others use a combination of new materials and salvaged supplies from demolished houses. The shadiest of the lot manage to acquire their supplies by a vast array of illegal means.

Mundungus Fletcher, that dodgy con-man who had somehow found his way into the Order, was determined to steer a number of his acquaintances our way once he learned that Remus and I planned to build. Remus constantly had to invent reasons why we couldn't use his friends' services. Still, that didn't prevent an assortment of building goods some which obviously had been taken fresh out of someone's home, and without permission from appearing at the building site.

The absolute limits of our tolerance were reached one day in October, when Fletcher offered us an entire house, provided we could come up with enough wizards to dematerialize the thing where it sat and rematerialize it in Kent. Remus dropped any pretense at politeness and told Mundungus just what to do with his house.

The real blow, however, was when I realized that our wizarding house, on wizarding property, was not on the Muggle grid. I may be able to adjust to a good many things, but giving up my hair dryer is not one of them. I don't know exactly how the builders managed to get the Muggle authorities to hook us up, but I'm sure they learned a lesson about dealing with a hysterical pregnant woman that day. We were soon wired from top to bottom.

As our new home took form, it was easy to sit back and pretend that life was normal and all was going smoothly when in fact, things were difficult. Attacks on Muggles related in some way to the wizarding community occurred with horrifying frequency. Scrimgeour was deposed and Voldemort's shill, Pius Thicknesse, replaced him. Although Scrimgeour, during his brief reign as Minister, had cleared Remus' name along with a host of other 'undesirables' that Malfoy had managed to eject from the country during the summer, Remus felt anything but secure. The Order of the Phoenix was now so far underground as to be virtually non-existent. And Harry Potter, Hermione Granger, and Ron Weasley had gone missing.

Our concerns took various forms as winter headed toward spring. I had begun the new job in Gravesend, which meant a commute from London each day. Remus was haunted by the idea that my train would be attacked by Death Eaters one day, and while I repeatedly scoffed at the notion, I couldn't quell my own private fear: that that as one of the Marauders, Remus would meet the same fate as his friends leaving me alone with two children to raise.

Work was no respite from the wizarding war. It wasn't that the job itself was difficult; the hard part was working everyday with people who viewed the random deaths or persons gone missing as an inevitable part of the evening news. They were in a war, though they didn't realize it. And while I realized it, I could discuss it with no one.

The house was completed in February, a two-story stone cottage with three bedrooms for humans and a garage which could house a monthly half-human. Remus was ready to burst his buttons with pride at the thought that he, a werewolf, owned a home.

I was merely ready to burst.

I'd done amazingly well with the pregnancy, having none of the complications which often accompany multiple births. Moving was taxing, but it would have been taxing even if I hadn't been pregnant. There's nothing quite like having a group of wizarding friends who can transport all your worldly goods by magical methods.

I bought a small car to drive back and forth to work in Gravesend. I'm sure I looked a sight: enormously pregnant, squeezed behind the wheel of a tiny automobile. I made the comment that I felt like a whale. Remus kindly said nothing.

Just as babies are not always conceived according to plan, they are not born according to plan either. I went into labor two weeks early, just hours after Remus had closeted himself for the full moon.

And so I paced the floor hour after hour, timing contractions and cursing at life in general for the fact that he was unavailable to me when I needed him most. I sent Amelia with a message to Molly Weasley, hoping that my friend might be able to be with me through the rest of labor. By early the next morning, I still hadn't received a reply, and when the contractions were close enough together that I could finally venture a trip to the hospital, I waddled to the car and drove myself.

I can laugh about it now, but I'm sure the nursing staff didn't buy my story that my husband couldn't be with me because of illness. I noticed the nurses whispering a lot, and I suspected that they believed him to be at a pub, too drunk to make an appearance at the hospital.

Molly arrived at the hospital around nine in the morning, apologizing profusely for having been unavailable sooner. I was never so glad to see anyone in my life, and I told her so. For the next eight solid hours of labor, I was either in tears or ranting to Molly about the injustice of Remus missing the birth of his children.

My aggravation was the motivation I needed to finish bringing my two little boys into the world. Sirius James Lupin and William Mitchell Lupin were born in the late afternoon of April twenty-third.

Molly Weasley sighed happily as she cuddled one of the little bundles. "They're so beautiful, Kailin. It reminds me of when Fred and George were born. Of course, to look at the big lumps now, you'd never know how precious they were when they were small."

Arthur Weasley brought Remus to the hospital that evening. I knew that he would come the moment he had the least amount of strength to do so, although he clearly could have used another twelve hours of sleep. I'm sure the nurses took one look at his haggard post-werewolf appearance and decided that their assumptions about the pub were correct.

The look on his face, as he held Sirius and Will in his arms for the first time, was one of a man richly blessed by fortune and scarcely able to comprehend it. He studied their tiny faces and their perfectly formed features while tears of joy streamed silently down his face.

"They're perfect," he whispered in awe. "So tiny and so perfect. Can you believe it? I have two sons, Arthur!"

Arthur stroked one of the fuzzy little heads gently. "Now we need to get rid of Voldemort. These boys need a safe world in which to grow up, don't they?"

* * * * *

December, 1998

It's been six months now since Voldemort was defeated mortally wounded by Harry Potter, the last of his wretched souls destroyed. Many were lost: Albus Dumbledore, Severus Snape, and Mad-Eye Moody were counted among the dead. I would always remember Moody in the bedroom next door to ours at Grimmauld Place.

Harry Potter and Ron Weasley are beginning Auror training, while Hermione Granger is planning for a career in wizard law. She intends to take on discrimination in the wizarding world, and I believe that if anyone can make a dent in it, she can.

Emboldened by my support and that of his friends, Remus has written letters to the editor of the *Daily Prophet*, complaining of the pervasive prejudice that exists. Others who have been discarded by wizarding society have joined with him in protest as well, and I think he sees a glimmer of hope that someday, opinions will change. A new magazine called *Magical World Times* was recently started up; it's sympathetic to our cause, and Remus has been asked to contribute a few articles on the subject of tolerance.

We have finally convinced Grandpa Billy to get a passport and come to Britain. I think he decided that seventy-eight really wasn't too old to fly around the world, and that he should get a first-hand look at these new great-grandsons of his. He'll be here in a week, spending the Christmas holiday with us, and I can't wait to see him.

Sirius and Will are fat and sassy, sitting in their high chairs and watching as Remus and I put up our Christmas tree. Remus is like a kid himself this Christmas: fatherhood fits him like a glove, and he knows it. There aren't a lot of stay-at-home dads in the wizarding world, but he's enjoying the role thoroughly. While I work, Remus takes care of the babies. He takes them for long walks in their pram, plays with them, feeds them, puts them down for their naps. During the full moon, Molly watches them if I'm unavailable.

"It's so lovely to have babies in the Burrow again," she sighs, pleased to get back into practice before Bill and his wife Fleur welcome their first child in the spring. And as well, it distracts her from the loss of her beloved Fred.

Sirius gurgled happily from his baby seat, drawing my attention by alternating a goofy little grin with blowing spit bubbles. I pointed it out to Remus.

"Wait until he gets older. He's going to be a little dickens," I said, shaking my head.

"Well, we did name him Sirius," Remus reminded me soberly. "Be scared."

But *scared* is not a word in my vocabulary any longer. I am living a full, wide life, richer than I ever thought possible.

All because I married a werewolf.

A/N: A million thanks to my faithful reviewers. I was always anxious to read your comments, and they've been 100% encouraging. I guess that means I did something right.

I also want to thank Jo Rowling for inventing this marvelous universe of Potter and then generously allowing us to play in it. I was overjoyed when she allowed Remus to find some happiness with Tonks, but needless to say, I was less than happy with the outcome. So I will continue with my private little rebellion and allow Remus to live happily with Kailin.