

All Hallows Eve

by kodiak

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: This is a response to the Halloween Challenge on Enchanted Sanctum.

31 October 1982

The autumn wind sliced through cloak and shirt alike as Remus stepped briskly across the main road. The only business open at this time on a Sunday was the Public House behind him. As he continued toward home, the sounds of friendly banter faded in his sensitive ears, replaced by the soft hiss of the breeze.

The shop fronts were dark, and the brown paint and quaint architecture that had drawn him to this town seemed cheap and contrived in the orange light of evening, a pale imitation of what he had left behind. He felt his pulse quicken as he turned the last corner to his house. Would his wishes be indulged? He breathed a sigh when he saw the dark house. No company tonight. Good.

"Mr. Lupin!" a shrill voice called from across the street. Remus carefully tucked his package into his cloak. He did not wish for the contents to be recognized. He turned and forced a smile at Tim Jones. Keeping the confusion out of his expression was a demanding task. Tim was draped in a mostly white sheet. Only his eyes and his trainers were visible. This must be one of the costumes that Walsh had complained about while wrapping Remus' purchase.

"Good evening, Mr. Jones. You make quite the frightening ghost." He must have kept a straight face because the sheet was thrown back to reveal a brilliant smile.

"Good, 'cause I'm... going to scare Sally and Jess." There was a sparkle of mischief in Tim's brown eyes. "See you tomorrow. Happy Halloween."

He forced himself to draw another breath. "Thank you, Mr. Jones. To you as well." Then he turned and escaped to the solitude of his kitchen.

Not daring to encourage costumed children, he drew the curtain closed and lit a candle. Light he would normally welcome as soothing lent a gloomy note to the room tonight. It was a nice cottage, clean, he would admit, and any young couple would be thrilled to have its let for a time. However, he was older than his years and alone most nights. It was far too isolated for a man standing at the brink of despair.

The chalice sat steaming on the table, just as he'd expected. No note, but he was hardly surprised. Two nights before the full moon, the wolf was close to the surface, and he could smell the traces of the man in his home. Better that he had been out, really. He paused a moment, placing the brown parcel on the table and chewing a bit of bread, before taking a deep breath and swallowing the Wolfsbane as quickly as he could. Merlin, that was foul. Now, he simply had to wait for the potion to metabolize before he could begin his new Halloween tradition. Thirty minutes, Snape had told him. It would seem like an eternity.

He reached into the cupboard and drew out a candle and a box. He lit the candle and closed the curtain on the dying light of evening. Any other night he would happily

greet the children. Tonight he wasn't home. While that might not be physically accurate, there was a deeper emotional truth to that statement that he would rather avoid considering. He looked at his watch. Twenty-nine minutes to go.

There was no harm in being ready, so he reached back into the cupboard for a tumbler, and his hand brushed the book. Against his better judgment, he drew out both the book and the glass and settled at the table. He stared at the cover of the Maurice Sendak book and chuckled bitterly. It was a Muggle children's book, for Merlin's sake! Leave it to Petunia to ban any mention of magic in her home. As long as she took care of Harry, he supposed... as long as Harry was kept safe from those who wished him harm... He lost himself for a time on an island of monsters, imagining the day he could sit and read with Harry, until he'd turned the last page and remembered he was alone in his kitchen. Twenty-three minutes more.

Remus sighed as he lifted the lid off the box. The ghosts of friends wafted up to him in their lingering scent. The first photo was Alice. She was dressed for graduation, waiting by the lake. The wind occasionally lifted her hair; otherwise she was still, at peace. Dear Alice, brave Alice. She was always still now, but hardly at peace. The next was Frank with a Beater's bat, getting ready for the final Gryffindor/Ravenclaw match. *It was the last time Frank had ever played Quidditch*, Remus thought. *We always said we would play, but never found the time, and now, there will never be time again.*

He flipped past a few other photos and found the few he had of Peter. One showed the boy sitting in a tree. In another Wormtail tried to steal the Christmas star, gripping the branch precariously with his toes while desperately clutching the glittering metal. A '*Reparo*' was required before it was over. Poor Peter... The diminutive boy had always stayed on the edge of their group. The last to join in a game, the last to enjoy a share of their stolen desserts, the last to find his animal form. *Peter. Bumbling, foolish, frightened Peter, whatever were you thinking going after Sirius? Why did you finally have to take a stand?*

Lily was lovely in every picture Remus had. He would wager that Lily was lovely in every picture, period. The green eyes that smiled up at him were kind, understanding. There was no one in the world who could find the good in a person as quickly as Lily. It was though she could see a man's soul, but rather than finding him wanting, she told him his worth and made him want to attain it. The next picture was Lily holding Harry. Remus wiped his eyes. If there was such a thing as prophesy, that photo must have crossed its path. Her eyes were filled with love but also a form of hope built on a spine of determination. Lily would die for her child, if that's what it took. Well, that's what it took.

Nine minutes left.

He turned the next photo face down on the table and resolved that tomorrow, when he was sober, he would sort them into a logical order. He would never again be surprised by that image that cut him to his soul. The next was of James, and he lost himself for a time in memories of pranks and brooms, but also of a friend handing him clothes in the cold light of dawn, showing him the way home, assuring him that for another cycle of the moon, his hands were clean of blood. James, brave and faithful, strong and true. James, petty and arrogant on occasion, and always so certain he held the moral high ground. Oh, James!

His fingers began working carefully to untie the parcel. Layers of brown paper peeled away, leaving the bottle of amber solace. "Your favorite brand of whisky, James. I could never stand the stuff." He tipped a healthy portion into his glass and raised it to his old friend. Glancing out the window, he saw clumps of children walking in the moonlight. The whole world was celebrating that night, the Muggles with their costumes and candy and the wizards with their fireworks and victory dances. No one remembered the price of freedom.

Six minutes.

He stared at the white back of the photo on the table. He wouldn't turn it over. That betrayal was too bitter, the cut too deep. The man should rot in Azkaban, surrounded by Dementors. Remus thought of the cold despair that followed these Dark creatures. A traitor deserved to spend the rest of his days haunted by all he'd betrayed. He turned the photo over in anger. "You're getting your 'just desserts,'" he told the vibrant youth in the image. But he wondered what Sirius would look like now. Haggard and emaciated, no doubt. Surely the life would be gone from his eyes and his beautiful hair matted with sweat and grime. *Sirius. No one deserves that. Sirius.*

Three minutes left. Close enough. "Here's to you, Old Friend."

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Nox