

Hope's Span is Long

by LiteraryBeauty

After leaving Ron, Hermione escapes to Grimmauld Place where Remus and Tonks reside. She feels a pull toward Remus, who is experiencing a similar draw. Can they find happiness despite all the forces trying to keep them apart?

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 23

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By: literaryspell

Beta: Rachael

Warnings: minor D/s, anal, rimming, minor bloodplay, rough sex

To the Moon

Oh gracious moon, now as the year turns,

I remember how, heavy with sorrow,

I climbed this hill to gaze on you,

And then as now you hung above those trees

Illuminating all. But to my eyes

Your face seemed clouded, tremulous

From the tears that rose beneath my lids,

So painful was my life: and is, my

Dearest moon; its tenor does not change.

And yet, memory and numbering the epochs

*Of my grief is pleasing to me. **How welcome***

In that youthful time -when hope's span is long,

And memory short -is the remembrance even of

Past sad things whose pain endures.

by Giacomo Leopardi

I.

Crossing the threshold of number twelve Grimmauld Place was, for Hermione, a sort of homecoming. She hadn't been back for some time, not since Remus and Tonks had taken up residence there after the war. She'd been living at the Burrow with Ron, as well as Harry and Ginny and numerous other Weasleys.

But now, with suitcases in tow, she felt like she was finally where she belonged. Or, at least, she was no longer where she *didn't* belong. The door of Sirius' ancestral home had been left unlocked, and the wards, as always, allowed her entry. As far as she knew, the occupants of the house were unaware of her untimely arrival. It was, after all, nearly three in the morning.

She had become embarrassingly used to the fights she and Ron had had, knowing they'd grown more vocal and vitriolic over the years, and it had gotten to the point where she was no longer compelled to take their fights outside, or even throw up a Silencing Charm. Instead, she would let her emotions flow freely, and Ron had done the same. The fights had been satisfying in the beginning. It had felt good to finally say what she kept inside. But the satisfaction was closely followed by guilt and regret. It hurt to see Ron hurt and to be hurt by him. The fights had become more effective, and they broke all the rules: they got personal, name-called, went to bed angry, and brought up long-dead issues. After their final fight...and Hermione was determined that this one was, indeed, final...she'd realised she no longer cared if they made up at all. She'd even thought for a long, betraying moment that it would be so much easier if they *didn't* make up. Because then it wouldn't hurt the next time they fought.

After all, you're only supposed to say you're sorry when you never plan on making the same mistake again. So when she apologized, it always felt empty because she knew and he knew the fight would carry on the next day, the next week, *forever and ever amen*.

What was the fight about? Who could know anymore? Maybe the dishes, or Ron's latest bout of drinking, or the fact that Hermione was unhappy in her job or that Ron just couldn't get that promotion. It didn't matter. If it wasn't one thing, it was another. It was always *something*, and she was just so, so tired.

And that was how Hermione Granger wound up sleeping on a couch in the parlour of the Noble and Most Ancient House of Black, directly below the bedroom of one werewolf and one Metamorphmagus. Her tears wore out about the time the moon fell and glitters of a new day danced across the worn carpet upon which sat her forgotten matching luggage.

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Remus felt the wards tingle sometime in the night and then heard the door open. He sprang from his bed, intending to protect hearth and home...and Tonks...from unknown danger, but upon opening his bedroom door on the second floor, he was immediately assaulted with the scent of fresh tears and the unmistakable aroma of Hermione Granger. Her smell had always been quite strong, not unpleasant...quite the opposite...but hard to escape at times.

He wanted to go downstairs to make sure she was all right, but her stifled sobs stopped him. He paused at the top of the stairs, listening. He had a pretty good idea what had happened; Harry kept him informed of the goings-on at the Burrow, and it seemed things were getting increasingly unfriendly between the epic couple. Remus had been sad to hear Ron and Hermione were unhappy, but he'd always had a feeling they weren't right for one another. Sometimes opposites attract, but like lasts.

An empathetic tug in his chest compelled him to both go forward and stay back. Uncertain, Remus returned to his bedroom and gently shook Tonks awake.

A loud sniff and a, "Hmm?" greeted him. She didn't open her eyes, but directed her face to where she assumed his to be.

"Hermione's here, Tonks. She's upset, I think. Could you see if she'd okay?" He wasn't afraid to go to her himself, but he thought Tonks might be better equipped to deal with a crying woman. Tears always made Remus exceedingly uncomfortable; the smell was too fresh, too pained.

"Oh, Remus. I'm sure she's just upset over a fight with Ron. I'll talk to her in the morning." Tonks promptly emitted a soft snore, and Remus hesitated. He wanted to go to Hermione, but couldn't be sure if she wanted company, and Tonks sounded sure she would be okay.

With reservations, he got back into bed, careful not to disturb his bed partner. His brow furrowed; now that he was still and quiet, he could hear her tears even more distinctly. He fell asleep as soon as her breath stopped hitching, glad that he had the next day to himself and could sleep in.

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"Hermione, sweetie, I'm sure this is for the best."

"I think it is. I really do. It still hurts, though. We were together so long. I still love him."

"Of course you do! You were together for five years, best friends more than a decade. I'm not going to lie; it will probably hurt for a long time."

There was a pause, during which Remus began to question Tonk's ability to handle Hermione's delicate situation.

"You're right. I'm okay, really. I just... did I give up too early, too soon?"

"Only you can know that, Herms. I don't think so. If anything, you let it go way too long!"

And *that* was Remus' cue to enter for damage control.

"Good morning, Hermione." He smiled warmly at the exceedingly small-looking young woman at his breakfast table. She had her hands curled around a mug of tea as if it kept her grounded to this world. Her eyes were red-trimmed and her wild hair competing...and winning, certainly...for most unconquerable mess of the year.

"Good morning. Thank you for having me over." She laughed softly, adding, "Not that I asked."

"You don't have to ask, love," Remus reminded her as he sat at the table, pouring himself a cup of tea from the service. "You are always welcome here, for as long as you need."

Hermione nodded, placated as always by Remus' warm words and soft topaz eyes. He had always seen through her, even when she had been thirteen years old. *don't have to be strong here, I am safe here*. She knew it like she knew her own name.

Tonks agreed with Remus, patting Hermione a little awkwardly on the shoulder. "Well, darlings, I have to be getting to work. Bad guys to catch and all that jazz. Be good!" She went to put the tea service on the counter, but Remus stopped her, more out of concern for their dishes than an attempt to be polite. She smiled down on him, nodding to let him know she understood his intentions. He smiled sheepishly.

"Remus, could you please make an appointment for the Medi-witch for me? It's about time I had a check-up. Better make one for yourself as well. Also, could you finish up with the downstairs bathroom today? It'll be good to have, especially with Herms staying here." Tonks winked at their houseguest, and Hermione felt a little uncomfortable

at putting them out. Tonks continued, "Oh! And if you could take a look at that shed in the back yard, I think owls are nesting or something. If you have time!"

By the time she finished, she was already out the front door, Auror robes and broom in hand. Remus sighed and immediately got up to send an owl with a request for their Healer appointments. Hermione watched him with undisguised curiosity. It was strange to see him so... domesticated. She immediately felt ashamed at her thoughts, but she couldn't help them. She could sense his disquiet and saw that his skin was practically crawling from captivity.

She knew he'd never been an Alpha wolf, and he'd never displayed outwardly wolf-like behaviour, but she'd seen bits and pieces of it over the years. However, he was still a little sickly looking, a little aged. Hermione had been surprised when Harry had told her Remus was essentially a househusband, only doing odd jobs for a wizarding bookstore and sometimes substituting at Hogwarts for various subjects, but not really holding a consistent position. She'd always thought he was destined for great things, and from his uncomfortable stature right now, she suspected he resented his position in the house.

But she could be reading entirely too much into the situation. His discomfort, after all, might come from her presence. Hermione felt sad at the thought; she didn't really know Remus at all, and here she was making judgements. She took a moment to think about her presumptions and realised she was projecting. Ron had tried to turn her into a perfect mini-Molly and she'd rebelled, unable to fit the mould he'd structured for her. Now she assumed the same was happening here, except Tonks was Ron, and that was all wrong. Remus probably enjoyed his freedom, after having to work so hard his entire life. Maybe he relished his time to himself.

Not everyone is like me, she reminded herself, fighting against any and everyone who tries to change me. Maybe Ron is right...

"Hermione?" Remus' gentle voice broke her reverie. She looked up at him, wondering how much of her thoughts showed on her face. She suspected most. She smiled at him to continue.

"I'm going to take your things to your room. Would you like me to show you which one it is?" Hermione knew all the rooms in the house, but agreed anyway, to be polite. She followed him to the parlour where she'd slept and insisted on carrying the larger bag. She'd managed to get them all here, after all. She had packed a few changes of clothes, but most of the pieces of luggage...there were three bags...were filled with books. She just couldn't part with them, and if she were honest with herself, she would admit she'd been a little afraid of what might happen if Ron's temper got the best of him. He'd been known to toss her things around, even *Incendio*ing a book or two in a royal fit. Many of her books were first or second editions, and she would not appreciate seeing them perish.

Remus grunted as he went to lift a smaller bag, obviously expecting it to be much lighter. He smiled at her, and she knew he knew what she'd packed. If the multiple bookcases in the house were any indication, he understood her plight.

The room he led her too had never been occupied, and for this, Hermione was grateful. She would be devastated to have to stay in Sirius' old room, or even the room she'd shared with Ron when they'd stayed here over the years. Remus seemed to understand and so took her to a room on the third floor. It was not even close to being above Remus' own room. Hermione had the brief but wildly inappropriate thought that perhaps this was because Remus was quite loud in the sack. Rolling her eyes at her gumption but blushing all the same, Hermione threw her bag onto the bed. Despite being the bigger bag, it was lightest as it carried clothing. Remus placed the other two gently on the floor.

"Hermione..." She turned to him, hugging her upper arms lightly. "I'm so sorry about you and Ron. I want you to know you really can stay as long as you like. You can move in here if you need to. We wouldn't mind having you around at all. In fact, the company might be nice."

Hermione nodded, suddenly overwhelmed by the gravity of what she had done. Ron had been her true love; she had thought they were soul mates, but they just fought so much... Tears welled in her eyes as she turned away from Remus, wanting to hide her weakness, though she suspected she hadn't been silent in her devastation the night before.

She wondered if it was silly to want to go back to Ron, to feel his arms around her, making her feel safe and loved. But even as she thought it, she knew it had never been and would never be enough. Drawing a shaky breath, she began to unzip her bag. Before she even opened it, a sob escaped her. She placed her hands flat on the luggage, willing her frailty away, and suddenly she felt warm arms surround her from behind. One arm circled her waist and the other came across her chest, grasping her opposite shoulder.

The man really knows how to hug.

Hermione couldn't stop the tears as she leaned back into Remus' silent embrace. It was times like this that she truly missed the unconditional acceptance that her parents had always provided. But their memories had been irrecoverable, though not for lack of trying. They did seem happy in their new lives, and Hermione wouldn't begrudge them that; she just missed them.

Her hands clutched his muscled arms, and she felt the crisp hair beneath her fingers. Her head fell back against his chest, and she just cried for all she'd lost, all she'd given up. She had never expected it to hurt so much, to feel so *raw*. She'd expected to be numb, like she'd been for so long. Numb to the pain, to the fighting, to what it really meant. That she'd failed, hadn't been good enough, and just couldn't cut it. It just *hurt*...

Somehow, Hermione turned in Remus' arms and found herself facing his broad chest. Her hands clutched at his shirt, and she felt momentary embarrassment at how wet her tears were making his clothing. She tried to sniff delicately and failed, but Remus graciously pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and gave it to her. She cleared her face and tried to smile. She couldn't deny his arms felt good, and they were unlike Ron's hugs, which had always seemed to be an endeavour to steal her breath away. This was different; it was pure comfort, pure Remus. And he smelled so...

Hermione quickly pulled away, recognising the dangerous direction of her thoughts. Remus looked a little shocked at her abrupt departure from the circle of his grasp, but ever the gentleman, he smiled at her and asked in that quintessentially comforting voice if she was all right.

No. "Yes," she answered. He held her gaze, and again she had the feeling that she had no secrets from him. He nodded sagely, however, and withdrew from her room. She waited until she couldn't hear his footsteps and fell onto the bed. She didn't feel like crying anymore; now she just felt tired. Fitting her body around the luggage in the middle of her bed, Hermione succumbed to a troubled sleep.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 23

After leaving Ron, Hermione escapes to Grimmauld Place where Remus and Tonks reside. She feels a pull toward Remus, who is experiencing a similar draw. Can they find happiness despite all the forces trying to keep them apart?
This story was beta'd by Rachael.

Remus had just finished checking the shed for an owl's nest, of which there were none, and was now changing his clothing into shabbier items in order to work on the bathroom. It was easy work; he was very used to doing odd jobs, and the bathroom only required a little grout work, and possibly some plumbing. He'd already retiled the shower and installed a new vanity. The rest was paint and moulding, which could wait. He and Tonks were slowly working through each room, updating and fixing things as they went. So far they'd renovated most of the second floor bedrooms and bathrooms, as well as the kitchen, sitting room and sunroom. The main floor still needed work in the parlour, foyer, dining room, and study. The entire third floor had been neglected. He'd been hesitant to put Hermione up there, but he'd thought she might enjoy the privacy after the cramped quarters of the Burrow.

Having donned a pair of old jeans and a black long-sleeved shirt, Remus grabbed his tool belt and headed to the bathroom. Most of the work could, indeed, be done by magic; but doing it manually would make it stand up better against wear and tear, as well as make Remus feel useful for a few hours.

He tried not to resent the way Tonks left him a verbal list of Things To Do every morning, but it was difficult. He'd always felt leashed, but as he grew older, the feeling grew inexplicably stronger. He did enjoy the feeling of accomplishment that came with the completion of each room in the house, but he feared the day when the last job was completed. Would there be any use for him then?

Wiping some excess grout on his pants, Remus thought about Hermione for a moment. He'd never seen her so distraught. In fact, he doubted he'd even seen her cry before. It had seemed like she wasn't used to it; she hadn't covered her face as though she was embarrassed, she'd just... cried. Noisily and unashamedly. And then when it was done, she'd left his arms. He wished she'd needed him just a little longer. It felt good to be needed. Tonks certainly didn't need him; if anyone could take care of herself, it was his girlfriend. But of course, so could Hermione; she'd been dealt a blow, that was all. Soon enough, even she wouldn't need him, and he'd be completely useless. He was still anticipating the day when Tonks realised it would be easier to hire a handyman and get rid of him altogether. He didn't feel as distraught at that thought as he used to. Tonks was a sweet girl and a good companion. He knew he was lucky to have her. But something just never felt right with her, and Remus was afraid of what that meant for them. As a member of the Black family, Tonks had more right to Grimmauld Place than he did, technically. But it was Harry's, and Harry had told him to stay here. He'd feel so wrong if he asked her to leave, though. It'd been his idea for her to move in, after all.

Remus sat back on his haunches, stretching out the muscles in his back. He pushed the hair off of his forehead and got to work on the plumbing. Thoughts like this never led anywhere productive, they just made him feel guilty and ungrateful, which made him try even harder to please Tonks, which in turn made him feel pathetic.

Looking over a job well done, Remus left the bathroom for the day. He'd gotten everything done that Tonks had asked, and once the owl came back with their scheduled appointments at the Healer, he felt very accomplished.

At this time of day, he usually curled up with a book or went to sit outside and enjoy the sun. There was a walking path down the street, and he sometimes strolled there if he felt ambitious. Today, though, he decided to have a nap. Tonks was due home in about two hours, and that was exactly how long he planned to sleep, if things went according to plan. After a quick shower, Remus threw on his trousers, a white oxford shirt and a grey cardigan, deciding it would look better to wake up in rumpled clothes than greet Tonks in pyjamas. He went back downstairs and stretched out on the parlour couch, figuring he would hear her come in the door and be up quickly, in case he didn't wake up before she came home. Satisfied with his plan, Remus allowed his eyes to fall shut.

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Hermione awoke with a start. It was still daylight out, but just barely. She wasn't sure what had woken her, but she was glad something had. She wanted to be able to sleep at night and wouldn't if she kept napping.

She found Remus on the couch when she ventured downstairs to get some water. He looked so peaceful that she couldn't bear waking him and only smiled when he made a small growling noise in the back of his throat. She suspected there was more wolf in Remus than he liked to admit. Chuckling to herself, Hermione grabbed a glass of water and went to the back porch. There was a patio set there and a porch swing that called to her. It was nice out here. Grimmauld Place sported a large yard that needed trimming but was otherwise well taken care of. She suspected there was a charm on the yard because she couldn't see any neighbours, though she knew they were there. The yard appeared to be without boundary on either side.

Hermione wasn't sure how long she had stayed out there, pushing herself on the swing with her feet on the ground, sipping her water and wondering how the hell she'd ended up here, anyway. She hadn't heard the door open and Tonks enter, but she suddenly heard her voice.

"Honestly, Remus, what is it you do all day?" A forced laugh followed, and Hermione suspected this was a question to which Tonks thought she already knew the answer.

"Well, I did everything you asked, and I just lied down for a nap. Didn't know that wasn't allowed." Hermione distinctly heard bitterness in Remus' soft voice.

"But do I always have to tell you what needs to be done? Can't you ever take the initiative?"

A long silence followed during which Hermione felt uncomfortable; worse than when her parents fought in front of her, but not as bad as when she and Ron would fight in front of the Weasleys.

"You're right, Tonks. I'm sorry." Hermione heard them kiss and felt a mysterious clenching in her gut. "I'll just get dinner started. Why don't you relax a bit?" His voice was a forced sort of cheerful.

Hermione felt safe to enter the house again through the open back door. She saw Tonks disappear up the stairs, and Hermione entered the kitchen where Remus was getting a salad prepared.

"Can I help?" she asked, feeling out of place but wanting to be useful.

"Sure." His voice was strained, but he smiled at her nonetheless. "Could you put the salad together while I start the fish?"

She took the bowl and vegetables from him and started chopping. A slightly uncomfortable silence followed, in which both parties wanted to say something: Remus wanted to apologize for what he knew she'd overheard; Hermione wanted to apologize for overhearing what they both knew she'd heard. Instead, the silence reigned.

"So, how are you..."

"Anything else I..."

Both laughed softly at having spoken at the same time, and Hermione gestured for Remus to continue.

"How are you feeling?" he queried, a look of concern on his features.

Hermione thought about lying and saying she was fine. But she'd had years of doing that, and Remus deserved the truth.

"I feel pretty shitty. I miss him but I just don't want him anymore. I feel lost and scared, but also really free. I've lost an entire family, and possibly even Harry, too. They were my only connection to all of our friends. Without Harry, I wouldn't even be close to you, Remus, and if he sides with Ron, I won't feel okay staying here."

Remus listened to her fears as he stuffed almonds into the seasoned salmon. Washing his hands, he met her eyes and held them. "Hermione, everything you're feeling is normal. I don't think Harry will choose a side; he loves you and Ron equally. And even if he does, you are my friend. Understand? I want you here, and I always will. So, please don't be afraid of that. I make my own decisions, contrary to recent evidence." He smiled self-deprecatingly, and she returned it.

"Thank you," she answered simply. Her breath nearly caught as he smiled brilliantly at her, and she realised she'd been remiss in never noticing how captivating his smile really was. Taking a deep breath, she returned to the salad at hand.

Remus saw Tonks hovering in the doorway, looking at Hermione appraisingly. He immediately knew what was coming, and for a moment, he hated Tonks for it. This was not what Hermione needed right now. He hated himself for being too weak to stop her.

"Hermione, can I talk to you for a minute?" Her smile was forced, and Hermione looked a little apprehensive. But she nodded and followed Tonks from the room.

Remus couldn't overhear, but he'd heard it before. Tonks was telling Hermione how hard it had been to get him to agree to date her. She was telling her how difficult he'd been, how resisting, but how she'd persevered. And Hermione would be nodding blankly, wondering where it was going but somehow knowing. Then Tonks would drop the, "So I don't expect anything to come between Remus and I, because we love each other very much and *nothing* will change that," to which Hermione would gasp, appalled. He did hear the gasp, and he gripped the pan so tightly his knuckles went white and ached. He'd told Tonks so many times not to pull this shite, that she shouldn't be so jealous, that she made herself look like a fool. But Tonks didn't care; she informed him there was nothing wrong with staking a claim, and that he should know all about that.

Only he'd never claimed Tonks, not in the slightest. And he had never, and would never, press his teeth into her skin to mark her. Never.

Hermione was quiet all through dinner, her face pale and tight. She wouldn't meet Remus' eyes, but nodded appropriately as Tonks cheerfully chattered on about her day at work. She informed Hermione that Harry had not yet heard about her leaving Ron, and that Ron himself was avoiding Harry.

"Don't worry, I didn't say anything." Tonks winked conspiratorially, and Hermione gave a smile that might have been thankful but just looked forced.

Remus sighed heavily, and Tonks' gaze fell upon him. He tried to grin at her, but failed. She smiled cheerily at him and told him how delicious dinner was. Hermione was quick to agree, but still did not meet his eyes. Remus felt sick at how hurt Hermione was. He knew Tonks was a lot to handle at times, and though he sometimes wished things were a little different, he knew she loved him, and he loved her as well, and so he put up with her foibles because she put up with his. He tried to ignore the chant inside his head that spoke up whenever he felt worthless (*too old too poor too dangerous*), but it was times like this, when he had to witness the awkward hurt of one of his female friends, that he wondered why he couldn't just man up and tell Tonks that he'd had enough.

He tried to catch Hermione's gaze, but Tonks cleared her throat meaningfully, and Hermione immediately excused herself, fairly running up the two flights of stairs to her bedroom.

That was enough for Remus.

"You should not have done that, Nymphadora," he told her sternly, using her full name in an attempt to showcase his seriousness.

"Do what, love?" She was all innocence, but her eyes betrayed her voice. She knew exactly what he meant, of course.

"You shouldn't have made Hermione feel so guilty! She only just left Ron yesterday. Do you honestly think she's already set her sights on me? Don't you see how ridiculous that is?"

Tonks pursed her lips. She might appear to be considering his words, but he knew she was considering her next ones instead.

"Remus, a girl can never be too careful. Hermione will be on the rebound, and we both know what an amazing catch you are. I just wanted to make sure she knew how happy we are! I don't think there's a problem in that, and besides, she seemed very understanding."

Remus gaped. She honestly believed she had done nothing wrong. "Merlin, I'm old enough to be her father! And she sees me as a friend and nothing more, I assure you. This petty jealousy has got to stop." His voice had taken on a pleading tone, horrified at the thought that Tonks believed Hermione wanted him. It was too mad to even consider.

Tonks put her hand over his, gripping it tightly in a show of affection that thinly veiled a show of control. He itched to yank his hand out, but resisted. She said, "Oh, Remus. You just don't know your own appeal. Age doesn't matter; look at us! But you're right. I was too hasty. I shouldn't have given her 'the talk' so soon. I'll apologize to her tomorrow. I'm going to get a shower and call it a night, darling. I'm knackered and the bed is calling." She winked at him, and he pretended not to see. It was an invitation, but he suddenly felt ill at the thought.

"Goodnight, dear." He leaned down for a kiss and she obliged. She tried to hold the kiss for longer than he really wanted, but he pulled back. She didn't try again, heading up the stairs instead.

Remus sat heavily at the dinner table. Hermione had barely eaten, he noticed. He cleared the dishes and set them to washing with a quick spell. He put away the food, hoping Hermione would come down later and have a bite. He knew she'd slept during the day, so she might be up a little later. He didn't want to hang around down by the kitchen and scare her off, so he retired to the sitting room with a book. He didn't get to read as much as he liked these days; Tonks gave him a hard time about it, and it was usually easier to just put the book down.

He smiled when he heard Hermione's light steps into the kitchen followed by the larder door opening. He didn't hear a chair pull out, so he pictured her eating while standing up, trying to be quiet, and not knowing he was in the next room. He thought he heard a soft moan of appreciation, but it might have been his imagination. He waited a few minutes, and when he thought she was finished, he got up. He wanted to talk to her, but didn't really know what to say. He watched her pluck a book off his shelf and quickly hop up the stairs, back to her bedroom. He missed his chance to tell her he was sorry for Tonks' behaviour; no matter, they had the day tomorrow.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of 23

After leaving Ron, Hermione escapes to Grimmauld Place where Remus and Tonks reside. She feels a pull toward Remus, who is experiencing a similar draw. Can they find happiness despite all the forces trying to keep them apart?

Hermione didn't unpack her bags. She suspected she would not be staying at Grimmauld Place much longer, if that talk from Tonks was any indication. That had been the most awkward two minutes of her life. She just couldn't comprehend someone seeing her as a threat. Had Remus said something to his girlfriend? Had he thought the hug they had shared had been inappropriate? Had she upset him somehow? That thought disconcerted her infinitely more than the idea that she'd done something to offend Tonks herself, for as much as she liked Tonks, Remus was a true friend.

But he'd acted completely normal toward her...genial and platonic, as always. Hermione had a sneaking suspicion that Tonks had done this before, but she would do as had Tonks implied, and stay away from her man.

She woke up slowly the next morning, her first morning in years waking up alone. She felt bereft. More than missing Ron, she missed the ~~the~~idea of Ron. What he represented: security, company, friendship, the idea that she would not grow old alone. She missed the abstract warming comfort that was Ron. But she just couldn't bring herself to miss *him*, him in all his flaws and features, the things that made him Ron. She was sure she'd made the right choice, but she could still admit that she would not be okay right away. She'd given a lot of her life to him.

Hermione didn't bother getting dressed. She wasn't planning on going downstairs until Tonks got home later. She had heard the Auror leave over an hour ago, and then she'd fallen back asleep. Now she was propped against her headboard with her borrowed book in her hands, trying to figure out exactly how long she could go without food. She figured if she really wanted to torture herself, she could last until Tonks returned. Contradicting her positive thoughts, her stomach growled and suddenly felt empty. Hermione groaned.

Biting her lip, she put the book down. There was nothing to be done for it. She would have to go downstairs during the day. She showered in the adjoining bathroom, grateful for the products that Remus or Tonks had provided, for she'd been in too much of a hurry (and a rage) to bring her own. It had made perfect sense to her to pack her bedraggled copy of *Famous Witches in History and the Wizards Behind Them* and not her toothbrush.

She walked hesitatingly down the stairs, trying to suss out where Remus was so she could avoid him. She hated that it came to this, but she didn't want to invoke Tonks' wrath, and she worried that Remus had asked Tonks to say something. It was a humiliating thought.

But as her luck was wont to run lately, Remus was sitting at the kitchen table, tea in front of him, and a heavily worn, dog-eared book in his hand. He looked up as she entered and graced her with a smile. It wasn't as brilliant as his others had been, and Hermione's stomach sank.

"Hi, Remus," she said softly, opening the fridge and taking out some orange juice. "Mind if I make some toast?"

"Of course not. For as long as you're here, please feel free to help yourself. You don't have to ask every time you're hungry, love." His words were kind but had an edge to them, like he was frustrated at something. Hermione nodded complacently and set about making her toast. She sat at the table, as far from Remus as she could, considering the table only sat six. She quietly nibbled on her breakfast, relieved when the empty feeling in her stomach dissipated. How on Earth had she thought she could make it all day without food? It was barely eleven in the morning!

Remus kept glancing over at her, looking like he wanted to say something. She tried not to meet his gaze, but felt his eyes on her. Finally, he sighed and roughly pushed his hair back from his forehead.

"Er, Hermione... I know what Tonks said to you. Or at least, I have a good idea. I want you to know I had absolutely no hand in it. She's always been very... possessive, though I've never given her reason to feel jealous. I know she probably hurt your feelings, but I hope you don't let it bother you. She's young and impulsive, and you *are* a beautiful woman..." Remus stopped, looking as though he'd said more than he'd meant to.

"My gods, Remus, I would *never*! If I did something to make either of you think..."

Remus cut her off, waving his hand dismissively. "I know that. And that she said those things to you only a day after you left Ron, well, it was in exceedingly bad taste, to say the least. I know you don't see me like that, nor would I want you to. I count you among my good friends and would never jeopardize that."

"Neither would I." Hermione smiled at Remus, relieved it was just Tonks' insecurity and not something she herself did. The warmth was back in his smile, and they shared an easy conversation.

Remus left to get some chores done, and Hermione relaxed on the couch in the sunroom, enjoying the warmth of the sun and the beauty of her novel. She would have to go to work the next day. Her shifts were sporadic and had been cut down considerably in the last month. She worked for the Ministry as an executive assistant, one of three, and she had the least seniority, so she suffered when the Ministry experienced cutbacks. She wouldn't be surprised if she were laid off completely in the next month, things were getting so bad. The worst part was that she'd been promised a full-time gig once she'd paid her dues, but it had not been given to her, and now it looked like she would never get it. It was a very disheartening situation, but she tried to enjoy the free time by catching up on her reading...not that she'd exactly fallen behind.

Hermione was jolted from her page when she heard a knock on the front door. She couldn't see Remus and wasn't sure which room he was working on at the moment, but since he didn't come to answer it, she doubted he'd heard it. Uncertain what the protocol was for answering someone else's door, she walked slowly to it.

She waited another brief moment to see if Remus would come, but when he didn't, she shrugged and answered it.

Ron was standing on the stoop, looking very awkward and out of place. His face lit up briefly when he saw hers.

"Hermione," he said, taking a step into Grimmauld Place. "Tonks told me you were staying here." *So much for solidarity*, Hermione groused.

"Ronald, I'm not sure we should see each other right now. It's still too soon."

"What are you talking about? I gave you space to cool down, now it's time you came home. Everyone misses you. I miss you." His face was sincere, his tone pleading. Hermione cringed at the realisation that he wasn't aware they were no longer together. She'd thought she'd made that indisputably clear.

"I miss you, too. But I'm not going home. I'm so sorry. I don't want to be with you anymore. I still love you, but it's like a friend. I hope..."

Her words were cut off by the urgent grasp of his fingers on her upper arms. He looked into her face searchingly, and she held her breath, meeting his eyes. Obviously not finding what he wanted there, he began to shake her, his grasp tightening to the point of pain.

"Do you know what I've given up for you? All that I could have given you, if you'd given me half a chance? You are the only one for me! And I love you so much... you can't tell me you'll ever find someone else who loves you like I do!"

Hermione tried not to cry out, but his fingers were digging into her flesh and her neck was snapping with the force of his shakes. "R-Ron!"

The sound of her salvation came in Remus' voice as he called from upstairs, "Hermione? Are you all right?" She could hear him running for the stairs, and just as he was descending, Ron threw her harshly to the ground, looking close to tears and shouting, "I love you! Only me, Hermione." He went to throw himself at her prone form, but Remus intercepted him. Despite the fact that Ron was physically larger and looked stronger, Remus threw him against the wall by the front door, his arm pressed tightly against Ron's throat, a look of pure rage on his normally docile features.

Without looking at her, Remus bit out, "Hermione, are you hurt?" She was in shock, certainly, but she thought she was okay except for a sore back and bottom and rapidly bruising upper arms. She drew a shaky breath and shook her head.

Realising he couldn't see her as his gaze was trained on Ron...who was turning an interesting shade of blue...she answered quickly, "I'm okay. Don't hurt him!" She wasn't sure if she actually believed Remus would really hurt Ron; she only knew that Ron was one of her oldest friends, and though he was enraged, he would never intentionally hurt her. She would think about what had just transpired later; now, she had to stop Remus from actually killing her ex-boyfriend.

Remus snarled at her words, pressing his arm even harder against Ron's neck. Ron was spluttering, his eyes beginning to roll back in his head, and he was no longer actively fighting, only making small jerks.

Terrified of his anger, but knowing she had to stop what was happening, Hermione lurched to her feet, ignoring the temporary blindness that assailed her. She stumbled to Remus and placed her hands on both of his upper arms from behind, pressing her body against his back in the hopes of calming him. "Remus," she whispered desperately into his ear, "Please stop. If you do this, I'll lose you, too." A sob choked her, though she wasn't crying.

Immediately, Remus' grip loosened, and Ron promptly fell to the floor. He wasn't unconscious, but he didn't move. Remus took a few steadying breaths, and Hermione stroked his arms with her hands. Ron was watching them avidly, for once wisely remaining silent.

Remus nodded, and Hermione knew the danger was over. She took her hands away and stepped back from his body.

Remus stepped back as well and offered a hand to Ron. Ron stared at it incredulously, but took it. Remus yanked him to his feet and before anyone could react, Remus had him up against the wall again, a hand on his chest this time, but no less threatening than before.

Hermione stood close behind Remus, ready to intervene again if she had to, but she felt confident that Remus was in control again.

His words were sharp and promised violence, and Remus fairly spat them at Ron. "You are no longer welcome here. Do not ever come back here. You are to never touch Hermione again. I will not allow myself to be restrained if I hear of any violence, verbal or physical, against her. *Do you understand me?*" His voice had lowered to a whisper, and it was more frightening than the growled words.

Ron nodded, looking extremely uncomfortable, but to his credit, not quite scared shitless. He looked over Remus' shoulder at her and began to whisper, "I'm sorry..." but Remus interrupted.

"Do *not* speak to her in my presence. Leave. *Now.* "

Remus lowered his hand, and Ron took the opportunity to ungracefully bail out the front door. He left it open behind him, and Hermione watched as he ran past the wards and Disapparated without a glance back.

Hermione and Remus both stood motionless, breathing heavily. She wasn't sure if she should say something, do something. Ron had just... barged in here and assaulted her. He'd pushed her. He'd never been violent with her before! Her things, maybe; inanimate objects that he'd deemed expendable, sure. But never before had he so much as laid a hand on her with hurtful intentions. She drew a shaky breath, then another and another, faster and faster. *This can't be happening.* And Remus was just standing there, facing the wall, shoulders twitching and hands clenching.

Hermione sank back down to the floor against the wall, eyes wide in shock. Remus must have heard her, because he turned around to face her. She nearly flinched at the look on his face, one of rage and hate. She'd never seen him lose himself like that; he'd been truly formidable. But he had... saved her? From *Ron*? That didn't feel right, but it was the truth. Merlin only knew what Ron might have done; he'd been beyond her reach and about to throw himself at her.

Remus must have seen the fear in her face at his expression, for he immediately schooled it. And then all at once he seemed to come back to himself. He gasped, and his face flooded with regret. He knelt beside her quickly, but gave her space.

"Hermione, I'm so sorry! I don't know what I was doing. He just... he hurt you, and I saw you on the floor and then all I saw was red. I didn't...I didn't hurt you, did I?"

His eyes searched hers, and she could see he needed reassurance as much as she did.

"Of course not, Remus. I'm not hurt at all. He just...I've never seen him so... and I was *scared*! I've never, ever been scared of him. But somehow I knew...and then you were there. So... thank you. Thank you."

Through her stilted and hitching speech, Remus only looked dejected. He didn't acknowledge her gratitude, and she put her hand on his arm, trying to make him meet her eyes. When he did, she was shocked at the emotion there. His eyes were turbulent, a dark gold she'd never seen before. He touched the hand that she'd put on his arm with his fingers, gently reassuring her.

"I just wanted to protect my..." he stopped, took a breath, and continued, "...friend. I do hope Ron's all right, but I meant what I said. Even if you do decide you want him back, he is no longer welcome here as long as I live here." His words were stern, and he seemed to be beseeching her to understand.

And she did. "I don't want him back. I didn't before, and I certainly don't now," she said firmly, knowing it to be true. Even if she'd entertained the notion of their reunion, it had been under duress, and this latest episode just cemented her already formed decision. He would no longer be in her life as a lover, never again.

Feeling somewhat out of control from the adrenalin, she couldn't stop the tears that welled in her eyes, but she was able to restrain them from overflowing. Mistaking her glistening eyes for heartache instead of relief, Remus gathered her into his arms. He tucked her head under his chin and rubbed her arm with one hand as the other circled her back. He held her so snugly that she couldn't help but feel completely safe.

Remembering all too well the last time he'd held her in his arms when she'd cried, she vowed not to make a spectacle of herself again. She willed the tears away and they obeyed, letting her appreciate his warmth and wordless noises of comfort. The hand that had been soothing her arm found its way into her hair, and he carded his fingers through it with a little difficulty. His fingertips brushed her neck and her breath caught. His hand gently settled on her neck with his fingers on her nape, his thumb stroking the soft spot beneath her ear. It felt so sweet, so peaceful, that Hermione allowed her eyes to fall shut, her head resting on his warm chest, his even breathing lulling away her sorrow.

She was startled awake before she even realised she'd slept. The door banged open and Tonks crashed in. Remus and Hermione were still embraced on the floor in the foyer, leaning against the wall. Hermione blinked to clear her blurry vision in time to see Tonks' gaze settle upon them. Remus didn't thrust her away as she expected, but stood up slowly, helping her to her feet.

Hermione felt a little fear...perhaps unreasonable, perhaps not...at the anger she saw simmering beneath the surface in Tonks' normally mirthful eyes.

Remus must have seen it, too, for he pre-empted whatever she was about to say.

"Ron came over. He got violent with Hermione, and I returned the favour. She was understandably upset."

Tonks looked at Hermione and bit her lip. When she spoke, her voice was full of compassion as she crossed the floor and gathered Hermione in her arms.

"Oh, no. I'm so sorry! Are you hurt? Do you want me to file a report?" Tonks pulled her back and took in her bruised arms. Her face hardened. "Thank Merlin Remus was here. Who knows what that little shit would have done, otherwise."

Hermione nodded, saying, "I don't think I want to press charges against him, Tonks. I don't think he'll ever be back here. I'm safe here. And he's never acted like that before, I swear. I wouldn't have put up with it."

Remus shook his head. "Of course you're safe here. After all, Tonks is one of the best Aurors in the force." Hermione didn't doubt that...but it wasn't Tonks who made her feel secure. Remus was continuing, anyway. "But I think you should at least file a report, Hermione. That way, if it ever happens again, there will be something on paper to support you." Tonks was nodding in agreement.

Hermione bit her lip. She couldn't erase so many years of knowing Ron as relatively peaceful, if hot-headed, with one moment of anger. Really, he'd scared her more than he'd hurt her.

"I'll think about it, but I'd rather just forget it even happened, to be honest." They both looked disapproving, but accepted her decision.

"I... I think I'll go to my room for now. I'm feeling a little tired." Tonks nodded understandingly, but Remus looked as if he were going to protest. He met her eyes and she sensed urgency there, though what it meant she couldn't be certain. Giving him a shaky smile, she retreated up the stairs to her bedroom, where she finally felt able to

draw a satisfying breath. Not wanting to analyse what had just happened, Hermione lay down atop the bedclothes and closed her eyes. The scene with Ron played out before her eyes a few times, but she mercifully fell asleep shortly.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 of 23

After leaving Ron, Hermione escapes to Grimmauld Place where Remus and Tonks reside. She feels a pull toward Remus, who is experiencing a similar draw. Can they find happiness despite all the forces trying to keep them apart?

Remus couldn't remember ever feeling so angry. He was furious. His blood was still boiling and had been ever since he had seen Hermione lying on the foyer floor, abject fear in her eyes. His anger had raged even after he'd scared Ron off and had Hermione sleeping in his arms. And now, with both women in bed and his dinner rotting a hole in his stomach, Remus felt positively ill with fury.

He hadn't meant to get so out of control with Ron. Before today, he'd considered him a good friend...a little naïve and quite possibly wrong for Hermione, but relatively harmless. He knew Harry trusted the man with his life, and that had been enough for Remus. But Remus knew dark intent when he saw it and it had been abundant in Ron's eyes. He'd wanted to hurt Hermione, and would have if Remus hadn't intervened. Remus felt completely justified. Tonks had said she was going to tell Harry what had happened, as they worked on the same Auror squad. He was glad Ron was on a different team, because he doubted Tonks would be able to work with him after what Remus had told her.

Few things pissed Tonks off more than spousal abuse. Unfortunately, one of the things that did was infidelity, of which she promptly accused him once Hermione retired upstairs.

He'd dutifully listened to her scathing comments about finding his hands on Hermione when she'd walked in the door. He'd refuted each and every claim, but he was afraid things might get uglier for Hermione, despite his vehement protests against any improprieties.

This day certainly called for a Firewhisky. He poured himself a generous glass while sitting at the rarely used dining room table. He didn't want to sit at the table where he'd been forced to listen to Tonks' accusations only moments ago. He hated that she was so possessive of him. She was entirely correct when she told other women that she had worked hard to garner his attention. He hadn't given her a second glance, despite knowing she wanted him. She just wasn't what he looked for in a woman, though he'd long since given up on finding exactly what he wanted.

So, in a moment of desperate loneliness, by which he was assailed more often than he'd care to admit, he'd allowed her in his bed. The sex with her was good; it was regular and predictable, but not really boring. It was good. After the first time, it had become easier and easier to go to her when he was lonely. And when he had been tired of coming home to an empty house, it had seemed natural to ask her to move in. She'd been hinting at it for ages, anyway.

And now it seemed silly to dislike her for the same reason he'd noticed her in the beginning: her jealousy. He almost felt as if he'd encouraged it by not asking her to stop at first. Now it was a part of her, and he wasn't sure he could ask her to change that. But with Hermione it felt doubly wrong: Hermione was so young and a friend only, but she was also very newly single. He knew Tonks' discussion with the younger woman had devastated her...after all, she probably saw him as a father figure. But try as he might, Remus couldn't deter her, and he'd seen the familiar glint of determination in her eye as she'd kissed him goodnight.

He tossed back a second helping of libation, telling himself he would warn Hermione tomorrow and hopefully explain a little better what drove Tonks to act as she did. As if he himself knew.

Remus hauled himself to his feet, trying not to think of what he'd almost called Hermione instead of 'friend' when he'd been explaining his actions. He'd thought of her as a *pack member*. Like he was some sort of animal. He hadn't thought that way about anyone other than Sirius, James, and Peter... even Harry hadn't quite invoked those kinds of associations within him. Tonks certainly hadn't.

He'd really thought the wolf within him had been tamed.

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Hermione awoke early the next day, making her way downstairs before showering. She hadn't eaten dinner the night before, and her rumbling stomach hadn't failed to remind her. She saw Tonks sitting at the kitchen table, eating toast and sipping tea.

"Morning, Hermione. How are you doing today?"

"Oh, I'm okay, Tonks. Thanks for asking."

"Good, good. Listen, can I talk to you for a second?"

Hermione's stomach dropped. *Not again*. But she sat at the table and poured herself a cup of tea.

"Sure thing. What's up?"

"You remember the chat we had the other day?"

Like I could forget. "Of course. And again, I would never, ever do that to you, or to Remus. He's just a friend."

"Well, that's just the thing. I know you were upset and everything yesterday, but I really didn't like seeing you and him touching like that. I mean, you knew I'd be home any minute...you could have waited for *me* to comfort you!"

Hermione felt her face flush. Tonks made her feel two feet tall and worth about a Knut. She didn't think the other woman was being reasonable, but couldn't see how to explain herself. She wanted to stay here at Grimmauld Place, but if this kept up, she knew she'd never be able to.

"Tonks, listen to me, please! I don't see Remus like that at all. And he was only hugging me because Ron had just attacked me! Otherwise, he would never even think to touch me. He loves you, Tonks, only you."

Tonks smiled widely. "I know that, dear! It's not him I'm worried about." Her smile didn't fade, but her features hardened as she continued. "Remus is very attractive, both

physically and as a partner. I know women are jealous of me for being with him; I've come to expect it. But I fought hard to win him, and I am not going to give him up any time soon. And I know you're probably on the rebound or whatever, but Remus is too smart to fall for your charms, so just... lay off. I don't want to see you two touching again. Okay, sweetie? Just for both our sakes."

Hermione only nodded blindly. This was far worse than the previous dressing-down. It almost seemed like Tonks wasn't all there. The accusations were completely unfounded and disturbing.

"Good girl. Well, I'm off to work now. See you tonight!" She walked off, and Hermione heard her greet Remus on her way out.

"Morning, love! How was your sleep?"

His voice came back, scratchy and low. "Just fine, dear. And yours?"

"I had trouble sleeping actually, but I think I solved what was bothering me. Have a great day, and don't forget to pick the paint for the bathroom and get started on the Crown moulding. Also, could you pick up some milk? We're just about out. Eggs, too, actually. Thanks a mil!"

Hermione knew Remus would be coming into the kitchen soon and slipped out the other door, hoping he wouldn't come into the connecting dining room. She quietly sat down, finishing her tea. She heard him bustling about the kitchen, muttering under his breath, but she couldn't quite make out the words. She thought she heard him say, "Nothing more than a fucking house-elf," but she figured she must have misheard. The Remus she knew never swore, after all.

She heard him leave the kitchen after taking his tea and making breakfast. She waited until she heard him running the shower before she slipped her cup into the sink and returned to her own room.

This time, she would remain there until she had to leave for work.

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True to her word, Hermione remained locked in her bedroom until just before she had to Floo for work. Remus was working in another part of the house and therefore didn't see or hear her when she went to make herself a quick snack before work. She would be working late tonight and would be home long after Tonks already returned. She Floo'd as soon as the last bite of sandwich reached her mouth, not wanting to chance running into Remus.

She spent her time at work thinking about where else she could possibly stay until she found a place of her own. But even if she found someplace, it would take her some time to save up enough money to move out on her own. She was not in the best financial position right now. She and Ron had had money troubles for years, thanks to his well-meaning investments and an overall lack of proper budgeting (despite her best efforts), and she had almost no savings to speak of. She didn't really know anyone else who might take her in. All the Weasleys she was close to still lived at the Burrow, and she hadn't kept in touch with many other people from her school days.

Basically, she was stuck. Hermione was shocked that Tonks had such a jealous streak, but she had pursued Remus with such single-mindedness that perhaps it shouldn't be so surprising after all. Now that she had what she wanted, it appeared that Tonks would not put up with anything or anyone she deemed to be a threat to her happiness. Hermione couldn't be sure Remus was aware of the extent of Tonks' possessiveness, but she could only surmise that he knew what his girlfriend was like. They been together quite a while now; he couldn't be totally ignorant. He had tried to make Hermione feel better after the first talk, so he knew something at least.

The only thing to be done was to avoid Remus as best she could, get back on Tonks' good side, and tough it out. The situation couldn't last forever. Maybe once she proved herself to Tonks, she would no longer be considered a threat, and they could carry on being friends. She hated to think she might lose Remus as a friend over this. He was the only one with whom she'd felt a true affinity; their intelligence was matched, and they were both prone to introspection.

Hermione avoided the train of thought that suggested that perhaps *she* was a better match for Remus than Tonks. That was dangerous thinking and would only get her kicked out on her arse.

Hermione also avoided thinking about Ron. She hadn't reconciled his behaviour yet. He really had changed, more than she had realised. She felt lucky that she'd gotten out when she had, even though she'd never suspected he could be violent.

At her desk, Hermione let her head fall into her hands. So much had changed in such a short time, but the only thing that really mattered to her was that she keep Remus as a friend. She never felt as alone as she did when she thought about losing him.

Her boss walked out of his office and immediately inundated her with tasks. Hermione had no more time for self-pity and got to work with her customary enthusiasm.

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Remus was aware that Hermione was gone the minute she exited through the Floo. To be certain, he checked the house for her, but knew she was no longer in it. Not only was her distinct scent absent, he almost felt liked he could sense her when she was here, and when she left, that sense left him. It made him feel empty, and he didn't like it.

By noon, when Hermione had not come down to lunch, Remus knew Tonks had submitted her to yet another talk. Remus had already decided he would not be putting up with this anymore and planned on having a talk with his girlfriend when she returned home. More than his happiness, Hermione's was at stake, and he wouldn't allow it to be sabotaged for the sake of Tonks' insecurity. It just wasn't right.

He felt unreasonably bereft without Hermione there, even if she'd only been with them less than a week. He enjoyed her presence and felt like she was a part of the family. His family.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 of 23

After leaving Ron, Hermione escapes to Grimmauld Place where Remus and Tonks reside. She feels a pull toward Remus, who is experiencing a similar draw. Can they find happiness despite all the forces trying to keep them apart?

A week went by without any further confrontations from either Ron or Tonks. Hermione avoided Remus as best she could, coming down only for meals and returning to her room as quickly as possible. She picked up as much overtime as she possibly could and was able to put a little money away, after giving Tonks some for her share of the

food and board. Remus wouldn't take it when she'd offered it, so she'd given it to Tonks, who, after a half-hearted denial, took the money gratefully.

Remus kept meaning to talk to Tonks, but was pleased at the lack of friction in the house, though he knew Hermione was unhappy, and that hurt him more than he'd anticipated. In the spirit of maintaining the status quo, he did not have the chat with Tonks he'd been meaning to.

But with three people walking around giving off sparks, the powder keg was bound to ignite eventually, and when it did, it was catastrophic.

Hermione was sitting in bed reading a book when someone knocked on her door. It was still early for Tonks to be home, so she knew it must be Remus.

"Yes?" Not wanting to invite him in, Hermione tried to sound busy.

"Can I come in for a moment?"

Hermione sighed. When he used that sweet voice, she could deny him nothing. She unwarded the door and it gently opened.

Remus entered with a tray of food: sandwiches, cookies, tea, and juice. Hermione hadn't realised how hungry she'd been, and she licked her lips unconsciously.

"I thought you might be too busy to come down, so I thought I'd bring dinner to you before..."

Before Tonks gets home and we have to deal with her, Hermione silently added. She smiled gratefully and gestured for him to join her on her bed. He set the tray on her bedside table and sat gingerly on the edge of the bed.

"What are you reading?" Remus asked, grabbing a triangle of sandwich. He'd brought enough for both of them in the hopes that they could re-establish the camaraderie they'd enjoyed in the past.

"Mmm, it's a Muggle classic. *Dracula*. I've read it before, but it always haunts me." Hermione had enjoyed the book when she was younger, but it resonated with her more than ever, now that she knew that magical creatures that frightened the Muggle world were real here in the wizarding world. Why, one such creature was perched on her bed at this very moment.

"Oh, I hate epistolary novels. They are so dry," he drawled, laughing.

Hermione smiled. "I usually do, too, but I can forgive it in this novel."

"Maybe you could loan it to me after you're done with it? I haven't read it since my school days."

"Of course. It would be nice to talk literature with someone."

Remus smiled that everlastingly warm smile, and Hermione felt more at home than she had in over a week. Suddenly, Remus' face lost the smile and his features contorted briefly before they became impassive. He got up abruptly and left her room.

Hermione was stunned, but the reason for his speedy departure became clear when she heard Tonks' voice in a shrill intonation she'd never heard before.

"So, Remus, leaving the little whore's bedroom, are we? Did you get what you wanted, or did I come at in inopportune time?"

Remus made a noise suspiciously like a growl and said, "You shouldn't talk like that, Nymphadora, it makes you sound like a bitter old hag."

Tonks gasped. Hermione suspected they were in the hallway and grasped her wand, getting out of bed and standing on the far side of it in case Tonks barged in.

"How dare you? How *dare* you?" Tonks was spluttering, and it seemed like she wanted to say more, but couldn't think of what.

"Please, don't do this." Hermione cringed to hear Remus beg. "You know there is nothing going on between Hermione and me. You're being wholly unreasonable, and you're only pushing me away."

"Oh, I'll show you 'pushing you away,' you mangy bastard."

Hermione heard stomping and raised her wand, training it on the door. Her heart was racing, but she didn't actually believe Tonks would hurt her.

She'd thought the same of Ron. She had been wrong before.

Tonks came in, wand thankfully tucked into her robes. However, Tonks had no intention of fighting like a witch, as Hermione quickly realised. Tonks crossed the bedroom floor, slapped Hermione's wand down with one hand while bringing her fist back to punch Hermione right in the cheek.

Hermione cried out, shocked to have been attacked manually rather than magically. She rallied quickly, slapping Tonks soundly on the recoil and then putting her wand in the older witch's face.

"Do *not* hit me again," she growled. Remus had witnessed the exchange, which had lasted only seconds, but had not been fast enough to stop Tonks. Tonks went to pull her wand on Hermione, but Remus grabbed her arms. She struggled against Remus' hold in the face of Hermione's wand, but the wizard did not let her go.

"Go!" he roared at Hermione, wanting to get her out of harm's way. Hermione gasped. *Surely he doesn't think this was my fault?* But the look on his face was enough to propel her forward.

Hermione paused only to grab her purse and, hearing Tonks shout, scream and swear all sorts of violence against her, she walked out the front door of Grimmauld Place with absolutely nowhere to go.

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Remus had only felt like rage like this once before. It had been just over a week before, but at the moment, it was as if he were reliving it. He'd sent Hermione out and hadn't seen the ineffable sadness on her features. He hoped she was somewhere else in Grimmauld Place, unable to witness what he was barely able to contain himself from doing.

"*Nymphadora Tonks*. .." he spat, voice so low she had to strain to hear, but she seemed nervous to come closer. "You disgust me. I have put up with your childish antics for far too long. I am only sorry it took me this long to see through your facade of good nature. I actually believed you loved me. Now, I want you to leave."

Despite his harsh words, Remus felt his heart breaking. It was not usually in him to confront other people, but twice now he'd broken out of his traditional role... both times to protect Hermione Granger. When Tonks had hit Hermione, something inside of him had snapped, worse even than with Ron. He'd never felt more animalistic, and instead of hating and resenting the animal side, he was grateful for it. He knew instinctively he'd do anything to protect his pack member, even if it was against her former mate and his own spouse.

But somehow, he knew Ron was *not* her mate, just as he knew Tonks was not his. So the pain he felt was diminished by the intrinsic knowledge that he could never have been truly happy with Tonks anyway. They did not belong together; they did not belong *to* one another.

Tonks was staring at him, her face crumpled but her anger shining through. "Are you fucking kidding me right now, Remus? You think you can kick me out like trash? I'm the reason you are who you are! Before me, you were a kicked puppy, whimpering and begging to be taken into a warm home! And I did that for you, you prick. And now you'd just evict me from your life the minute that little harlot wheedles her way into our home? I was right about her all along, wasn't I? How long have you been fucking her?"

"So, you're finally letting your true self show, are you? It's about time. How could I have missed that beneath that cute and clumsy exterior laid a vicious and hateful bitch? Well, it's only too clear now. You have ten minutes to gather your shit and get out. I'll have the rest packed and sent to your mother's house as soon as I can bear to look at it. Don't you dare say another word to me. Just. Get. Out."

Remus abruptly left the room, slamming the door behind him so soundly it splintered and shattered the doorjamb.

He ignored the unearthly scream that came from Hermione's room and left Grimmauld Place in search of the only member of his pack.

*

Hermione had escaped to Muggle London. It sometimes gave her relief to be back in such a comparatively simple world. To and fro, never stopping, thinking only of themselves... Muggles were pretty easy to understand.

With what very little savings she had from all her overtime, Hermione got a room at a 'no questions asked' motel, the only one that did not need a credit card. She thought that it might be wise to get one of those for occasions such as this.

With her black eye and swollen cheek, she was sure she was a sight to behold. But the motel stood by their motto, and the man behind the desk wordlessly gave Hermione a room key.

Settling in and trying not to think about all the bodies that had frequented the bed before she'd gotten to it, she lay back on top of the covers.

She'd never been punched before. It bloody well *hurt*. Her neck hurt more than her cheek though, it had snapped back so quickly. She wished she'd punched Tonks instead of slapping her, but she didn't really know how to punch properly.

Hopefully Tonks hadn't turned her anger on Remus. He was a powerful wizard and a strong man, but Tonks was an Auror and had extensive training. But then, Remus had told Hermione to leave, so he must be comfortable with his choice. She had never expected him to choose her over his girlfriend, anyway. He did the only thing he could: get rid of the problem.

Hermione sighed and turned on the television. It felt like it had been ages since she'd watched the telly. She quickly remembered why she hated it so much and cursed the fact that she had recently finished the only book she had in her purse at the moment.

She knew she couldn't stay here forever, or even another night. She just couldn't afford it. There was a number she could call that would transfer to a wizarding operator, who would take a message and have it delivered by way of owl to anywhere in the wizarding world. It was convenient for circumstances exactly such as this. It also suited witches and wizards who had been exiled from the wizarding world for whatever reason, or for Muggle parents who needed to contact their magical kin. Her parents had used it a few times, before...

There was only one place she could possibly go, but before she did, she needed to make sure it was safe.

She called the number and gave the operator a message for Harry Potter, care of the Burrow.

Harry,

I know you may not want to hear from me after what happened with Ron. I'm so sorry if I've hurt you. But I need your help. I have nowhere else to turn. Is Ron at the Burrow right now? I'd like to come there for a few days until I can figure out something more permanent. My only other option is to stay in the Muggle world, and I just don't have the resources.

If Ron is there, I will not be able to come.

Please get back to me ASAP. Send your response with the operator owl, and I will get the message where I am.

Love, Hermione

The operator repeated her message back to her and informed her that an owl would be sent out immediately.

Hermione curled up on the bed, waiting for sleep and feeling more alone than she ever had before.

*

Remus had had to return to Grimmauld Place around midnight. He'd searched everywhere he could think of and had sent owls to as many people as he could without risking his owl's health.

He knew he wasn't going to find her tonight. Obviously she did not want to be found. It devastated him to think of Hermione out there, alone, unsafe. She should be here, with him!

Remus went to sleep with the thought that he would continue his search tomorrow and would not stop until he knew she was safe.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 of 23

After leaving Ron, Hermione escapes to Grimmauld Place where Remus and Tonks reside. She feels a pull toward Remus, who is experiencing a similar draw. Can they find happiness despite all the forces trying to keep them apart?

Hermione awoke to a loud ringing. It took her a minute to place the sound (*telephone?*) and another moment to become aware of where she was (*motel room?*).

With those realisations out of the way, she quickly reached for the phone.

"Lo?" Her voice was raspy from sleep.

"Miss Granger? I have an owl missive here for you. Shall I read it?"

"Oh, yes, thank you."

The operator cleared her voice. "Hermione. I am so glad to hear you're okay. Remus Floo'd us about four times yesterday, looking for you. He seemed very upset. What is going on? Ron is not here at the Burrow, his team is on a mission in Scotland. Please come home. Ginny is beside herself, and Molly is extremely concerned as well. We are expecting you. Love, Harry." The operator's bored and monotonous voice made the message sound quite odd, but Hermione could hear the inflections of Harry in the words.

"Thank you very much," Hermione said, already out of bed and getting her things together.

"No problem. Have a safe trip." Hermione heard the dial tone and replaced the phone in the cradle. Sometimes she missed technology, but there was something to be said about the intimacy of an owled letter rather than a phone call.

She gave her key back to the man at the motel counter and quickly traversed through the Leaky Cauldron into wizarding London. She Apparated to the Burrow and took a deep breath. She held it while she knocked on the door. Harry opened it and immediately drew her into his arms. His kindness made tears prick at her eyes, and she allowed him to draw her into the house.

Ginny was in the living room, and she embraced Hermione as well.

"Mione, what's going on? Remus said he thought you were in danger!" Harry's voice was laced with concern.

"I don't think I am anymore. Can you owl Remus and tell him I'm all right?" She was surprised to hear he was so worried, since he'd been the one to kick her out.

Ginny got up to send the owl, and Harry bade Hermione sit.

"Tell me everything."

Hermione sighed. She hardly knew where to start. "Well, you know I left Ron. I just don't love him anymore, Harry." She winced, waiting for him to jump in to tell her how he thought she was making a mistake.

"Yes, he's told us. It's your choice, Hermione. We only want you to be happy. You must know that by now." She smiled in relief and Harry returned it. She felt bad for thinking he would automatically take Ron's side. Harry had grown up a lot, enough to know there were no sides.

"Well, I went to stay with Remus. Things were going well, but Tonks kept acting like I was coming on to Remus, and she kept telling me to stay away from him!"

"Are you serious? Tonks?"

"Yes! It was mad! I didn't know how to handle it. I tried to avoid Remus, but then Ron came 'round..."

"Yeah, I heard from Tonks that Ron picked a fight with Remus at Grimmauld Place."

Hermione frowned. "Well, that's not exactly how it happened. Ron came over and started yelling at me. He grabbed me and shook me and then threw me to the ground. Remus saw that and almost strangled Ron. He told Ron never to come near me again. I've never seen Remus like that!"

Harry looked stunned. "Ron hurt you? Oh, 'Mione, I wish we'd known. That's not right!"

Hermione looked chagrined. "I didn't think you'd understand. I'm so sorry! Anyway, Remus was comforting me when Tonks came home. She saw him hugging me and freaked out again. I avoided Remus as much as possible for a week, but then he brought me some snacks in bed, and Tonks saw him leave my room. She went barmy, Harry! It was unreal. She started shrieking at him, and then she came into my room and...and punched me!" Hermione almost laughed at the memory, it was just so absurd. She lowered the glamour she'd placed over her bruised and swollen cheek.

Ginny entered the room as she did and gasped. "Hermione, what the hell happened?"

Harry blurted, "Tonks punched her!"

"What?"

"It's true. Tonks got jealous of the idea of me and Remus and punched me. Then Remus kicked me out, and I went to Muggle London for the night."

"Sweetie, you should have come right here! What were you thinking?"

Harry looked positively venomous. "Oh, I don't know," he spat at no one in particular. "Maybe that Ron would be here and assault her again?"

Ginny's mouth fell open. "What are you saying?" Harry repeated what Hermione had just told him. Everyone was silent for a moment, and Hermione didn't know what to say to break the tension.

Hermione heard Remus' voice in the other room, and her head jerked toward the sound. Harry jumped up and went to the hearth. She could hear Remus asking to come through the Floo, but Harry said it wasn't really a good time.

"Please, Harry. I need to make sure she's all right."

"She is, no thanks to your girlfriend! Seriously, what the hell? And how could you kick her out? She had nowhere to go!" Hermione cringed; she felt so pathetic.

"Nymphadora is no longer my girlfriend. She will not be able to pass the wards at Grimmauld Place. Hermione is perfectly safe to come home. I can protect her here! And I didn't kick her out; I told her to... well, go. But I only meant to a different part of the house until I could get Tonks to leave!"

Hermione heard Harry sigh. "Well, I'll let her know you said that. But I think it's best if she stays here for the time being, until she gets her bearings."

"But what about Ron! I won't have him near her!"

"Ron isn't here, and now that we know what happened, he won't be allowed back until she says so."

"Harry, Ron can Apparate directly into the living room right now if he so chose. She isn't safe there! Please, let me talk to her."

"Remus, we appreciate your concern, but it's no longer up for discussion. It's Hermione's choice, and she can make it by herself. I'll have her owl you later if she wants."

Hermione heard something suspiciously like a snarl before the Floo connection was cut.

*

Hermione stayed at the Burrow for two days before anything of note took place. But when excitement came, it saw, and it conquered.

She was in the sitting room with Ginny. Harry was fixing lunch, and the rest of the family was in the backyard. Hermione hadn't felt like joining them, and Ginny was trying to convince her.

"You know, you have to rejoin the world eventually. I know you were hurt, but that's no reason to withdraw. We all love you here."

"I know that Ginny, and it's not that I'm scared. I just feel out of sorts, and I'm finding it hard to focus. Your family moves so fast, surely you can see that?"

Ginny laughed. Of course she knew her family was a handful. But she made one last attempt at drawing Hermione away from her reading and out into the yard where everyone was having fun.

Suddenly, the front door swung open. The women turned their head toward the noise, but couldn't see who had entered. They took no more notice, as the comings and goings of the Weasleys were infamous. But Hermione felt her heart drop when Ron appeared in the doorway.

Ginny was immediately on her feet, warding him off. "Ron, you shouldn't be here right now. Isn't there somewhere you can go?"

Ron's face instantly twisted. "Why should I leave my own house?" he demanded.

"You forget, this was Hermione's house for a long time, too. And now she needs our support, more than you do. So I think you should leave."

Ron's face crumpled. He tried to walk toward Hermione, who was on the couch trying not to cringe at the sight of him. It was unnerving how quickly their love had turned into something ugly. Ginny headed him off, raising her hands in front of her. She called for Harry, who appeared immediately.

"Ron, mate, can we talk in the kitchen?"

"No, I don't want to talk to anyone but Hermione. I owe her an apology." Ron crossed his arms in front of his chest and put on his notorious stubborn face. Harry and Ginny both sighed, and Hermione hoped they wouldn't leave her with him. Luckily, they were smarter than that.

Harry simply stated, "Say it, then. We aren't going anywhere."

Ron nodded. Ginny moved out of the way, but warned him not to get any closer. Hermione didn't like being in a subordinate position on the couch, so she stood, putting them on equal footing.

"Gods, I'm so sorry. I don't know what came over me. I was just so hurt and angry... but there's no excuse. I know...I know it's over. It's really over. But I want to be friends. If we can."

Hermione looked away. He looked so earnest, and she desperately wanted to believe him. But it was all too easy to recall the way his face looked when he'd shaken her, too easy to remember the way her neck had snapped back and the thud when she'd hit the ground.

Steadying herself, Hermione spoke. "Ron, I did want to be friends. Part of me still does. I don't think the love between us will ever completely die. But you hurt me, and even if I can forgive, I won't ever forget. I hope we can move past this, but I just don't feel safe around you anymore."

Ron looked close to tears, his face suspiciously red like he was holding back. He nodded, shook his head, and then turned away. He said only, "I can respect that. I'll leave."

But now it was Hermione's turn to shake her head. "No, I think it's time I stood on my own feet. I don't want to kick you out of your own house; that's not my place. I don't know where I'll..."

But she was interrupted by the flash of green and the sound of the Floo being activated.

Hermione's bad day got worse when she saw that Tonks had come through and was aiming her wand directly at Hermione's face. Her own face was contorted in fury, her eyes flashing.

"Hermione Granger. I never thought you'd be stupid enough to return to the arms of the man who you claimed hurt you so badly, but I guess my expectations of you were too high all along."

Harry had immediately drawn his wand on Tonks upon her entry and it was trained on the raging Metamorphmagus. When he spoke, his voice was low and hard and brooked no argument. "Tonks, you need to leave right now. If you make one more move, you will be stripped of your Auror duties when this gets out. And I will not cover for you."

Tonks seemed to absorb the threat and weigh the consequences. She lowered her wand, but did not sheath it.

"You stupid bitch," she spat at Hermione, who recoiled from the viciousness of the words of a woman who was once the epitome of good humour. "He chose you, you know. Are you happy? Does it feel good? You've ruined everything! He'll tire of you. He needs a real woman, and you are so far from that, it's pathetic. No snivelling little bookworm could ever keep him happy for long. Enjoy the time you have, because one way or another, it *will* be short."

Harry glared at her. "Was that a death threat? You know what, I'm taking you in."

Tonks started, tearing her attention away from the shocked Hermione. "It wasn't a threat, it was *advice*! Merlin, Harry, we've worked together for ages! Don't you have any loyalty?"

Harry took her arm, but she did not struggle, much to the relief of everyone else in the room. Ron took her other arm, looking surprised at her outburst and more than a little jealous, probably taking Tonks' words about Remus choosing Hermione to be fact.

"Of course I have loyalty. To those who have earned it. That's why I'm taking you out of here. I won't have you hurting her every chance you get. You're out of control, Tonks. What's happened to you?"

They marched her back to the Floo, and Harry threw in the powder, announcing his destination at the Ministry of Magic. Tonks only laughed at his question, causing Hermione to tremble a little at the madness she was sure she heard in the older woman's voice.

Hermione fell back into the sofa, breathing heavily. She felt silly for freezing up when Tonks had come in; she hadn't even drawn her wand. How could a witch like her, having gone through what she had in her short life, become so stupidly helpless in the face of danger? Other people wouldn't always be there to rescue her! She needed to defend herself better.

Mentally berating herself, Hermione accepted Ginny's hug. Molly Weasley came into the living room, and Ginny launched into what had just happened, focusing on the bravery of her dear husband. Hermione took the momentary respite to think to herself about what Tonks had said. Remus had chosen her? In what capacity? Was Tonks

totally full of it, or did her words hold weight?

Realising that Remus was alone and most likely devastated, Hermione knew she had to see him. The urge came over her like a flood, and she suddenly couldn't bear the thought of being away from him. She felt like... he needed her. Almost like he was asking for her.

Knowing that made absolutely no sense, Hermione ignored her brain for once and trusted her instincts.

"Ginny, I have to go. Remus is alone...he might need my help. I'll owl you later, okay?"

With her brief exclamation, Hermione threw powder into the hearth and left the two Weasley women looking astonished behind her.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 of 23

After leaving Ron, Hermione escapes to Grimmauld Place where Remus and Tonks reside. She feels a pull toward Remus, who is experiencing a similar draw. Can they find happiness despite all the forces trying to keep them apart?

When Hermione appeared in the Grimmauld Place fire, she immediately went to Remus' room. She couldn't explain the feeling she had, but she was worried that something was wrong. What if Tonks had unleashed her anger on him? What if he were hurt...?

Not pausing to think about the absolutely sickening feeling in her gut when she thought about this, Hermione knocked none too gently on his door. There was no immediate response, so she opened it. He wasn't there. She checked the bathroom, calling his name, and jaunted up to the third floor, but it appeared to be empty.

Back on the main floor, Hermione checked every room in Grimmauld Place. He wasn't in the house, nor was he in the backyard. But she had the inexplicable sensation that he was *here*.

Working herself into a frustrated frenzy, Hermione sat at the dining room table, pulling viciously on her brunette strands.

And it hit her like a tidal wave, so suddenly that she actually swayed backward in her chair *Last night was a full moon!* There was a cell in the basement of Grimmauld Place, with thick metal bars and a heavy lock. Remus didn't trust himself, even on Wolfsbane.

Hermione bolted toward the cellar door, wondering why he would still be down there. He usually came up at sunrise and crawled into bed, from what she remembered seeing over the years. *But who would have released him?* she demanded of herself. Tonks was probably the one who unlocked the cage for Remus. And Tonks had said they'd broken up...

Manoeuvring the steps so quickly it was a miracle she didn't tumble, Hermione came upon the door beyond which she somehow knew beyond a doubt was Remus. She pulled the heavy wooden door open and stepped inside. The cage took up the far half of the room, and she stepped toward it, into the pitch blackness. She immediately heard groaning and a slight rustling.

Looking for a lamp but finding none, Hermione whispered, "Remus? Are you here?" It unnerved her to be in the room in the dark, but she was not afraid of Remus in the least. She'd seen him at his worst, without Wolfsbane, and she wasn't scared.

The rustling stopped, and Hermione held her breath. "Hermione?" he whispered. She let out a gasp of relief and ran to where she knew the bars began. She clutched them in her hand, somehow wanting nothing more than to see Remus and ascertain his health.

"Remus, where's the key? I can't see anything. I need to get you out of there!" She tried to disguise the panic in her voice, but it was clear to her and therefore must have been to him.

"There's no key. Tonks wasn't here to lock me in, and I couldn't do it by myself." Hermione knew the lock was inside a solid steel box which couldn't be reached by the prisoner, but if it wasn't locked...?

Hermione froze, suddenly more afraid for Remus than ever. "Then... why are you still in there?"

There was a long pause, and Hermione tried to imagine what he was thinking. "There didn't seem to be a reason to get out." His voice was so desolate that Hermione felt her heart breaking.

She tried to inject positivity into her voice, but his melancholy was practically palpable. "Well, I'm here now, so let's get you upstairs." She caressed the cold bars with her fingertips, wishing it were him instead. Just to make sure he was okay, of course.

"You should just leave. You can't... you can't help me."

Hermione felt her panic rising in her chest, constricting it and turning her voice into a harsh whisper. "Of course I can help you! I've helped you recover from the full moon before! Please, Remus..."

There was a long pause in which Hermione bit her lip to keep from begging him to do as she asked. Suddenly the overhead lamp flickered on, and Hermione was forced to wonder how she hadn't smelled the blood before this moment, because the stench seemed to be overwhelming now that she saw it.

Remus was standing at the back of the cage, one hand holding his wand, the other pressed tightly to a wound on his abdomen. He was covered in dirt and blood, and in the low light, she could hardly differentiate between the two. More than the blood, more than the wounds, Hermione was affected by his eyes. They were truly haunted. He looked half-dead and as if he wished it wasn't only half.

Hermione's cry slipped forth from her lips before she could restrain it. Remus sat heavily on the wooden bench in the cell, the only piece of furniture available. Before she could stop herself, Hermione yanked on the door, and though it protested, it opened under her persuasion. What stopped her was Remus' cringe. He shrank back into the corner of the cell, and Hermione was sure she'd never seem him look so very... afraid. Not of her though... of himself? She didn't like it at all.

She raised her hands in front of her in what she hoped looked like a show of submission and took a step closer. When she did, she was stopped again, this time by what sounded like a growl. Hermione gasped and Remus turned his head away immediately, looking ashamed. But the noise sounded again when she moved, and Hermione

tried desperately to recall everything she'd learned about werewolves over the years. It was a lot, but nothing pertained to this situation. Hermione knew she had to help Remus; he'd lost a lot of blood and looked sickly, pale and weak. She couldn't just leave him, that much was certain.

When thinking of werewolves brought no ideas, Hermione thought of wolves. *Wolves do not like being approached when in a weakened condition.* He was only trying to protect himself. He was in an animalistic state due to the closeness of the full moon and his injuries. She would have to approach him as a pack mate would... show him that she was not a threat and meant only to help him.

Swallowing her not insignificant fear, mostly due to Remus' rapidly failing health, but somewhat attributed to what she was about to do, Hermione slowly knelt on the unforgiving stone floor.

Once on her knees, Hermione fell forward on her hands. Keeping her head down and not making eye contact, Hermione slowly crawled forward. Remus did not make a sound but she could feel his eyes on her. When she was in front of his knees but not touching him, Hermione looked up to his chest, avoiding his eyes. She slowly tilted her head to one side, letting her hair fall behind her shoulder and baring the long expanse of her neck. She closed her eyes and held the submissive position.

For a long moment nothing happened, and Hermione felt a little embarrassed. Then she heard a rumbling noise from Remus, which she somehow knew was approval. Gaining confidence that she was doing the right thing, Hermione leaned forward. Remus' hands were white-knuckled on the bench beside his knees, gripping it with all of his admittedly meagre strength. Keeping her neck exposed, Hermione saw a comparatively small scratch on the back of one of Remus' hands. It wasn't bleeding now, but obviously had been during the night. Closing her eyes against the very human side of her telling her to run away, Hermione placed a small, timid lick on the wound. She knew werewolf blood was only infectious while he was in wolf form, so she wasn't worried... about *that*, anyway.

The taste of gritty blood invaded her mouth, but she ignored it. She paused a moment, hovering over his hand, waiting for either sanction or censure. When she received neither, Hermione repeated her action, this time using the flat of her tongue instead of the hesitant tip. Remus made another approving grumble, and Hermione nearly keeled over in relief.

She continued to lave the cut, ignoring the bitter taste and focusing on helping her friend. She picked up his hand in hers to get at it better. When it appeared to be clean to her human senses, Hermione finally looked up at Remus.

His face was a mixture of visceral pleasure and human sorrow. He looked like he wanted nothing more than to stop her, but couldn't.

"Remus," she whispered, appealing to the human side she knew was right there beyond the surface. "Let me take you upstairs so I can clean you properly."

Hermione was afraid she'd done something very wrong, because his face immediately shifted into displeasure. She broke eye contact and stretched her neck further to the side, lowering herself right to the floor. She took his hand and rubbed her cheek against it gently, moulding his fingers to her face and leaning into his touch. In her peripheral vision, Hermione saw him nod once, and then he got to his feet.

He was unsteady and swaying slightly, and Hermione immediately rose, supporting him. He accepted her help without contest, and she slowly walked him up the stairs. She was having a hard time accepting that she had just prostrated herself in front of her former professor... that she had *licked* the wound of her friend, like an animal.

But beyond her initial disgust, she had gained a very real comfort from cleaning him, healing him. Trying not to think about it beyond the fact that it had worked, Hermione let Remus lean heavily on her, and together they made it to his bedroom on the second floor.

Once he sank back into the large bed, he looked at her with such a heavy apology in his eyes it nearly took her breath away. He closed his eyes and, after a moment, seemed to have fallen fast asleep. Hermione watched him for a few minutes before launching into action. Boiling water and sterilising cloth, she cleaned his wounds as efficiently as she could the Muggle way before performing healing spells to the best of her ability. She had never seen him so injured, not in all the years she'd helped him in recovery.

There was only one reason he would be so completely demolished like this. He must not have taken the Wolfsbane. Hermione didn't know what that meant, but she suspected he was so distraught over Tonks' leaving that he either hadn't been able to physically get it, or he'd forgotten. She did not consider the option that perhaps he simply no longer cared, or that he had hoped the horrible transformation would kill him.

Exhausted from a long day of facing people she'd hoped not to see and then having to become a wolf in order to get Remus to listen to her, Hermione lay at the foot of the bed and curled up into a small ball. She was careful not to touch Remus; she only wanted to rest a moment anyway. Sniffing away the tears that finally threatened, Hermione blanked her mind against the onslaught of horrifying images of Remus in wolf-form, tearing at his flesh and throwing himself against the bars of his cell. She took comfort in his deep breathing and before long, her own matched it breath for breath.

*

Remus awoke to the uncomfortable sensation that he had done something very wrong. The sensation flooded him, yet he could recall no earthly reason for such an emotion. He cautiously opened his eyes, immediately noting that it was one day past the full moon and that it was night time. Beyond that, he knew nothing other than a rather incongruous weight on his feet.

When Remus cast his eyes down to ascertain the origin of the weight, the events of the previous night flooded him, and he had to close his eyes against the barrage.

Pain. Fear. He was growling. She was pleading with him. He liked hearing her plead. The human half of him shrank from her approach while the wolf dared her to come closer. She was on her knees. The wolf was roaring with approval. She crawled to him... she cleaned him. She licked him, licked the blood and dirt from his wound like a good little mate. He decided she met his approval, so he allowed her to move him and tend to him. The wolf went back into that deep place inside him, and Remus fell fast asleep.

More than anything, Remus hated being an animal. All his life he had been judged by the public for something he did not want and could not change. But worse than the public's fear and disgust was his own. He loathed himself at times. It couldn't be healthy to reject such a large part of oneself, and Remus had often wondered why other werewolves weren't as sickly or frail as he was becoming. But he didn't want to live like an animal, so he tolerated the illness for the facade of humanity.

And now he had to live with the memory of Hermione's hot tongue on his flesh and how very right it had felt. He hadn't felt out of control...it was Remus right there at the forefront, not the wolf, but the wolf was making its presence known quite vociferously, and Remus found he was not as afraid of it as he usually was.

Needing to move but finding himself trapped by Hermione at his feet, Remus gingerly stretched and sat up. Her scent immediately surrounded him, and Remus couldn't contain the low growl that started in his chest. She smelled so sweet, so perfect. And when he looked upon her, he could no longer deny what he had suspected but suppressed from the very first moment he'd met her, the first time he'd been assailed with her scent, even though she'd been just a child.

This girl was his mate.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 of 23

After leaving Ron, Hermione escapes to Grimmauld Place where Remus and Tonks reside. She feels a pull toward Remus, who is experiencing a similar draw. Can they find happiness despite all the forces trying to keep them apart?

Remus stared at Hermione. He wanted to feel aghast, disgusted with himself. But for some reason, he couldn't bring himself to feel anything other than peace. He felt at peace with himself for the first time in years, maybe for the first time ever. A part of him wanted to reject this discovery, to rebel against what he knew in his blood to be true. But either he wasn't strong enough, or he was too strong. Either way, he would have Hermione. He needed her like water, and some undiscovered part of him knew she could be his salvation.

Without further reservation, Remus leaned down and grabbed Hermione. She barely shifted as he hauled her up to lie beside him and didn't awaken when he tucked her body beneath him. He draped one leg over hers and firmly held her upper body in his arms. Breathing deeply of her hair, Remus was hard-pressed to remember why this might be wrong. Her body felt like it was made to line up with his, and her smell fired his senses as though she was the most delicious feast and his to devour.

Remus buried his face in her untameable hair and kissed her shoulder lightly. She seemed to be an extremely heavy sleeper, so he felt safe in doing so. Moving her hair over her shoulder so he could see her neck, Remus lightly traced her cheek with his fingers. Her skin felt so smooth, and he wanted more.

Nuzzling her neck, he lightly ran his fingers up her arm. She was wearing the same clothes she'd worn the day before, and she seemed to be a little dirty from crawling in his cage. Remus felt a shudder run through him as he recalled the heat that had flooded him upon seeing her kneel submissively before him. He'd never thought of Hermione in such a sexualised way before, but that one gesture brought out his most basic instincts. She had known exactly what to do to appeal to his animal side, and she had done it without preamble. Remus felt humbled that she cared enough to try, instead of just leaving him in the dark to brood and heal on his own or not at all.

Remus hadn't noticed that he had bared his teeth upon thinking of Hermione crawling, or that he was nipping the soft flesh on the juncture of her neck and shoulder. He realised he didn't want to wake her like this. But when the unbidden image of Hermione on her knees came before him yet again, this time it was not because she wanted to heal him. Remus' imagination provided him with a stunningly detailed portrayal of a dirty and dishevelled Hermione on her hands and knees in his cell, chest against the filthy ground and smooth, pert arse high in the air to receive him...

It took quite a bit of strength for his teeth to puncture Hermione's flesh since his incisors were not nearly as sharp as the wolf's, but his bite was quick and instinctual; he knew how to claim her without causing her too much pain, and his human side had nary a moment to rebel before he felt the salty warmth of her blood flood his mouth.

Hermione jerked and bolted from the bed in a second. She stared at him in the dim light, but he doubted she could see him as well as he could see her. She raised her hand to her neck and gasped when it came back bloody.

Remus was thinking he probably shouldn't have done that.

"What the...what the *fuck*, Remus?" Her voice was a breathy whisper, but he could sense more than hear the rage in her voice. Her eyes were darting around rapidly, and her chest was rising heavily with each panting breath. Remus was fascinated by the movement, but forced himself to answer her.

"I tried to do it so it wouldn't hurt," he offered as if that explained everything.

"Well, it did hurt! It hurt a lot! Why did you *bite* me?" Her voice sounded close to panic, and Remus finally felt regret at claiming her without at least warning her first.

"I didn't just bite you. I claimed you. You're my mate." Remus wanted her to come back to bed, but he doubted she would want to now, if she ever had before. Remus had only just discovered his true feelings for her; it was possible...likely...she hadn't realised hers, or that she didn't feel the same at all.

"*What?*" Her eyes were wide, her mouth open. Blood was trickling from the oval of teeth marks on her neck, creating a slick trail onto her shirt. Remus had to tear his eyes away, but he couldn't help licking his lips. When he did, he realised he still had her blood on his mouth. *I truly am a monster*, he thought forlornly when he couldn't refrain from taking the blood into his mouth and savouring the heady, coppery taste.

"Hermione... I'm sorry. I should have told you. I just... had these thoughts, and then suddenly I was claiming you. It was the wolf in me. He sensed that you were my mate and... made me bite you." He looked away, wishing he had better words to articulate what had happened.

"You can't use lycanthropy as an excuse to act like an animal! You're only a werewolf on one day of the month...that's what ~~you~~ you've always told us!"

Remus slowly slid off the bed, but when Hermione took a step back, he sat down on the edge of it, hands on his knees, the picture of self-restraint. He looked searchingly at her, and her eyes settled on his. She gasped quietly and Remus wondered what she saw.

"Or are you? The wolf... you talk about it as though it's separate from you, but as though it controls you. Who is in control now, Remus?"

Remus had to think about it. Unless he was looking at her blood, or the way the strap of her tank top had slid off her shoulder and bared an extra inch of flesh, Remus felt the human was in control.

"Me... mostly."

"So, the wolf is always there, beneath the surface? Not just when you are a werewolf? Remus... why didn't you ever tell anyone?"

Remus felt anger below his stoic surface and fought to contain it. "Because I didn't want to admit to being out of control! I didn't want you...all of you...to think I was a monster!" His voice ended abruptly, and he pursed his lips tightly. He hadn't meant to say so much, but it was the truth. He had only ever wanted to be a normal wizard.

Hermione was standing before him instantly, her compassion apparently winning out over her fear and anger. She stood between his knees and gathered him into her arms, his face pressed against her chest. He tried to move back, but she knelt between his legs, her hands on his thighs, gently rubbing.

"Remus, you really scared me. I don't know why you think I'm your mate, or how that works, but you shouldn't... bite people." She sounded consternated at the end of her sentence, and Remus suspected it had sounded better in her head.

"I know. I can't excuse it. I am so sorry I hurt you." Remus couldn't stop the watery glitter in his eyes. He'd hurt his mate. It was unthinkable. It was supposed to be impossible, but he'd done it. She'd never accept him now.

She stilled her hands, looking earnestly into his eyes. "What does it mean to be a mate?" Remus saw that she was feeling half curiosity and half anxiety.

Remus forced himself to speak. "Nothing, really. Not anymore. It used to be a fairly powerful thing, but werewolves had to evolve. So few were finding true mates and those that didn't would die young. In order to perpetuate the race, werewolves slowly became able to choose any person...mostly other werewolves but sometimes humans...to be their mate. At this point in time, it's sort of like... being engaged."

Hermione stared. "So, you just felt like proposing?" Her smile was shaky, and Remus ran his fingers over her cheek, noticing with glee that she leaned slightly into his

touch.

"I couldn't stop myself. I should have more control, after all these years. I just *had* to do it; it was like I had no choice." He ran his fingers over the wound on her neck, and she winced. His fingers came back a little bloody; he'd forgotten she didn't heal as rapidly as he did. Which reminded him...

"About last night, Hermione," he began.

She interrupted him. "I did what I had to do. I'm sorry if I embarrassed you." She looked a little sheepish, and Remus could only stare.

"No... no! It was... amazing. No one's ever done anything like that for me before. I hate that you saw me like that, so out of control. But you were perfect... beautiful." He couldn't explain the depths to which he desired to see her like that again. Remus was usually able to quell his dominant sexual urges, but he was finding it nearly impossible right now, with her on her knees again.

"Remus, I...I liked it, too. It felt... right." She broke off, biting her lip and looking away. Remus could tell she was fighting her human side; he'd seen the look all too often in the mirror. He knew every person had a bit of wolf in them, a bit of primitive nature that was usually easily restrained.

"It felt right to me, too. You are one clever witch, Hermione; but you knew that. I was right in choosing you to be my mate. I know it scares you, and I know it's fast. And I know I'm probably all wrong for you," Remus paused as Hermione shook her head rapidly, but continued. "But if you could give me a chance to at least try to make this work. I've never..." He laughed nervously. "...I've never felt this way before."

Her eyes widened, and he could see the wheels turning. He pre-empted her: "Not even Tonks." She nodded mutely, taking in his words. She was so beautiful when she was thinking. Which was always.

He needed to hear her thoughts, needed to know she wasn't going to push him away. He'd felt that rejection too many times throughout his life; he just needed her to want him half as much as he wanted her. Just half.

"I won't say sorry for claiming you. But I will be very sorry if you decide not to allow me to... court you," he finished lamely. What did people her age call dating? Had things changed so much?

Hermione snorted and shook her head. "You're pretty cute, you know that, Lupin?" She got up to sit on the bed beside him, and while he felt a momentary loss at having her leave her spot between his knees, it was diminished when her thigh was pressed snugly against his. She grabbed up his hand and brought it to rest in her lap with both her hands wrapping around it.

"I really like you, you know. You're an amazing man, the best kind. Any witch would be lucky to..."

"But not you," he finished for her. Her sad brown eyes met his, and Remus felt his heart clench *Happiness is always just out of reach...*

"It's not for any of the reasons you think. I just... I need time after what happened with Ron. He...he hurt me and I hurt him, and I need to know it won't be like that. If I hurt you... it would kill me."

"How can I prove it to you?"

Hermione looked away. "I don't have anything in mind. But we don't have to... be dating, in order to... be intimate, Remus." Her voice dropped to a whisper, and she looked only at the clasped hands in her lap.

Remus swallowed thickly. Gods, he would kill to have her... but it wouldn't be right. She deserved better, and he wanted more. Despite all his faults, he knew he could be good for her if she'd give him a chance.

"I can't do that, Hermione. It wouldn't be fair to either of us. I want you so much, I won't lie. But what's between us is not casual, and I can't treat it as such."

She nodded. "So it's all or nothing, then?"

Now Remus looked away. He wouldn't give her up, let her walk out of his life, if she chose nothing. He knew he could win her over, given time. It would be worth it in the end to stick to his decision now and work for what he wanted.

"I'm sorry. Yes."

She drew a deep breath and Remus had to tear his gaze away from her rising chest. She tempted him just by *breathing!* She looked like she was about to cry, and Remus wanted to take his ultimatum back. But she steeled her features and nodded once, as if to herself. Meeting his eyes fully, Hermione let go of his hand. He brought it back to his own lap, feeling like he'd been cured and then cursed again.

"I choose 'all'."

Remus started. "You... what?"

"Remus, I choose 'all'!" She smiled widely, and he could only stare. She placed both her hands on the sides of his face and kissed him soundly, her closed lips mashed against his in a brutal meeting that appealed to his wolf side. But his wolf did not appreciate the way she was trying to dominate him.

Remus pushed Hermione back onto the bed against the pillows, covering her body with his. His kiss was demanding and unrelenting, and Hermione relinquished control immediately, making Remus growl in approval. He trails kisses down her jaw and throat, tilting her head to the side to expose the sore bite mark on her neck. He gently kissed it, thrilling in the rush that went over him when he saw the perfect outline of his teeth in stark relief against her pale throat. Pure possessiveness flooded him, and he dropped his pelvis to meet hers and ground roughly against her slight body.

Hermione moaned at the contact, her arms circling him and stroking his body lightly. He loved the tentative touch of her fingers, the uncertain motion of her hips; all this was evidence of her inexperience, and Remus couldn't be happier with his mate.

He had to pull himself away from her to regain control of his mind. He felt more like an animal around her than he'd ever experienced before. She caused him to lose his sanity and he loved it, loved being able to give in to the wolf, loved that his forced timidity could be overrun by his natural passion. And by the dark look in Hermione's eyes and the unobtrusive thrust of her hips when he'd slowed his, she loved it as well.

"You're sure?" he asked softly. He needed to know she meant it, that she wouldn't change her mind or take it back.

"Never more," she assured him.

"Hermione... you are amazing. Thank you..." He tried to express to her through his eyes how grateful he was for this chance, but she would have none of it.

She pulled his face back down to hers and immediately sought his mouth. As soon as he returned her kiss, she ceded control once again. His mate knew exactly how to appeal to him. His ran his hands roughly over her body, bunching her shirt in his fingers and tearing it over her head. His mouth wet at the sight of her breasts, a small handful each and perfectly edible. He lowered his head to one and took a nipple roughly into his mouth. Hermione's back arched to meet his mouth, her hands carding through his hair. She tasted so sweet, so pure. He roughly tongued her nipple, giving it a nip before he turned to lavish the other with the same attention. Her body was writhing relentlessly beneath his, and Remus knew his control was slipping.

He let her pull his own shirt off and quickly tore away her bottoms, taking her panties off at the same time. He divested his own clothing and settled atop her again. Hermione threw her head back at the contact of his cock against her belly. Remus put one arm beneath Hermione's body along her shoulder blade so his hand held her shoulder from beneath. Her legs fell open beneath him, and Remus pulled his lips back in approval at her submission.

"Remus, I want you," Hermione whispered, her lust-filled eyes meeting his matching ones.

Unable to tease either of them any longer, he slipped into her slick, willing body. Her tightness immediately stole his breath, and Hermione froze at the intrusion. He was likely the biggest she'd had by far, and he could feel her body fighting to adjust.

Remus recovered first, rocking gently into her warmth, using his hand's grasp on her shoulder to leverage himself into her body, his other hand holding her leg against his hip. Hermione was making the sweetest gasping noises as the base of his cock relentlessly rubbed her clit. Remus delighted in watching emotions on her face; she was so expressive, so responsive. His slow pace was driving him mad, but he would never hurt his mate.

Hermione solved the problem for him. "Harder... more..." she panted.

Remus stopped holding back. He hitched both her legs around his waist, and she wrapped them tightly around him. He plunged into her heat deeper and deeper, bottoming out on every thrust and making her cry out in abandon.

He pounded into her, watching her face for signs of pain or discomfort but seeing only passion. He could feel her body clenching around him, and her eyes screwed shut as her orgasm approached. She seemed to stop breathing, and the moment her body gripped him so tightly he could no longer thrust, Remus dug his fingers into the bite mark on her neck. Hermione screamed, a tear slipping from her eye as she rode out wave after wave of pleasure and pain.

Remus held still above her, knowing he'd hurt her. The claiming was complete; she was his. She met his eyes and nodded for him to continue. He was so close after seeing her come apart, it only took a few short thrusts to take him to his end. His fingers were bloodied from reopening her wound, and he gripped her shoulder again. Seeing her flesh smeared with crimson brought his bloodlust to the fore, and he came with a violence he had never known before this day. Her body milked every drop as he rocked against her, and she held him in her arms until he was able to move from atop her body to gather her into his arms, holding her so tightly they both knew he'd never let go.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 of 23

After leaving Ron, Hermione escapes to Grimmauld Place where Remus and Tonks reside. She feels a pull toward Remus, who is experiencing a similar draw. Can they find happiness despite all the forces trying to keep them apart?

When Hermione awoke next, it was midmorning. She'd dozed off for a few hours, her body requiring time to recuperate, but now her mind needed time to adapt as well.

She didn't regret the passion she'd shared with Remus, not at all. She'd never seen that side of him, that animal half that had taken over. He had been everything she didn't know she wanted in a lover, and Hermione could say beyond a shadow of a doubt he was the best lover she'd ever had.

When he'd bitten her, Hermione had been terrified. It had hurt, certainly, but it was more than that. She wasn't pleased that he had done something like that without warning her first; not that she would have been agreeable if he had. But it all felt so permanent. Here she was, only weeks out of a long-term relationship, basically engaged to another man. But she didn't know if Remus did want to actually marry her, and she wasn't sure how she herself felt on the subject.

Remus was a *good* man. He was one of the few men who she could count on for anything, who would never let her down. He always put other people before himself, and he cared about the wellbeing of his friends. Hermione would be lucky to call a man like that her own.

But he was a werewolf. This was not something Hermione had ever had a problem with when they were only friends. But she'd also never seen him *act* like a wolf on any day other than the full moon. But now, she'd heard him snarl, growl, *howl*... he was more an animal than she'd known. And it scared her a little. She doubted his compassionate nature was a facade, but then what was it about her that brought out his feral side?

Her brain was working so hard she was afraid it could be heard outside her head. Maybe the best way to handle this would be to just see how it went. Remus was sexy, funny, sweet, charming, brilliant, an amazing wizard... he would be a good match for her. And she believed she could be good for him as well. They would balance one another, and Hermione needed an equal after so many years with Ron; they had both acted like she was his superior, but she needed more than that now.

It was always easier to sleep when a decision had been made. Hermione snuggled up to Remus, cradling her head in the crook of his shoulder and draping an arm and leg over his resting body. Remus shifted slightly in his sleep, a small smile on his lips. He turned his head toward her and inhaled deeply. She kissed him lightly on the neck and promptly fell back asleep.

*

After Hermione cuddled into him, Remus had remained awake. Her sweet kiss on his neck had awoken him...in more ways than one...and now he was simply holding her lightly in his arms, marvelling over the peace and gratitude he felt.

Any other woman would have been terrified by his animalistic actions. For Merlin's sake, he had *bitten* her! What woman would put up with that? She'd seen him at his worst and still accepted him. He sighed in contentment. *Maybe it's finally my turn to be happy.* Remus decided there and then he would deserve her trust and acceptance.

Smiling into her wild hair, Remus ran his hands over her silken body. He'd never felt anything like her skin. It was unadulterated temptation. She murmured in her sleep and pressed her body closer to his. Remus' eyes rolled back a little when her thigh slipped between his legs and gently nudged his erection.

His resolve was no match for her naked body.

Remus gently pushed Hermione onto her back, and she tossed her arms above her head, her face falling to one side. Her breasts were high and pert, her nipples firm from being exposed to the air. Remus propped himself up on one elbow beside her. At first he only looked, but before long he had to touch.

He smoothed his hand over her flat belly, up her sides and back down over her rounded hips. The sheet maintained her modesty, but only just. He let it be for now. Turning his attention to her breasts, Remus questioned the intelligence of molesting his new mate in her sleep. But she'd been so amenable to his passion for her the night before,

so he decided she would enjoy the wake-up he had in mind.

Wetting his fingertips with his tongue, Remus grazed her tight nipples. He blew on them gently, watching her squirm slightly without waking. Growing bolder, he leaned down and took one into his mouth, flicking it lightly with his tongue and rolling it gently with his lips. When this garnered no response, he gave the opposite nipple a sharp nip before soothing it with soft kisses. All the while his hand was drawing intricate circles over her belly, moving lower and lower until his fingertips slipped just barely beneath the sheet. He could feel the slightest hint of her curls before he drew his hand back.

"Are you going to tease me all morning, or is your bite just as good as your bark?"

Remus smiled and covered her smirking lips with his own, prying her lips open to plunder. She returned the kiss with abandon, apparently quite affected by his ministrations. He leaned the length of his body into hers and her thighs parted. He slipped one leg between hers, trapping her in the sheet. He reached a hand down beneath the sheet and unceremoniously plunged a finger into her waiting wetness. She gasped into his mouth and he smiled, gently thrusting into her body. Her hips met his movements as she accepted the brutality of his mouth.

He couldn't stop his hips from rutting lightly against her thigh, and she lowered a hand to his desperate cock. He gave an approving growl as her cool fingers tightened around his length and stroked him. When her thumb slipped over the head of his cock, spreading his pre-come, Remus finally broke the kiss. With her lips swollen and nearly bruised, her eyes darkened with lust and her hair like a halo on the pillow, she was the picture of a debauched angel. *Mine*.

Hermione kicked the sheet to the bottom of the bed. "Remus..." she whispered against his lips. She tried to push him onto his back but he froze, baring his teeth at her for a mortifying moment before regaining control of himself.

Her hand didn't stop in its sure movements on his cock, and she looked at his chest when she asked, "Remus, will you lay on your back? I want to ride you."

The wolf was immensely pleased, but Remus was horrified. He immediately did as she asked, and if her hand hadn't been continually moving on him, he would have wilted from self-castigation. Hermione kissed him gently, showing him he was still in control despite his position.

"It's okay, Remus, I don't mind. I know it's a part of you, and I...I like all of you."

She didn't seem sure of the right thing to say, but there was a force behind her words that made him believe she was telling the truth. His eyes flickered over the bloody, bruised mark on her neck, and he nodded. She smiled brilliantly and he melted.

She quickly straddled his hips, leaning down to kiss him quickly while lining his straining erection up to her molten core. He grabbed the back of her head and made her hold the kiss. When she began to sink onto him, Remus thrust into her from below, holding himself deep within her as she adapted to the intrusion.

Hermione gasped, her eyes moving heavenward and her mouth falling open. He watched ecstasy flit across her face and knew, yet again, she was the perfect match for him. Tonks had never let him take control like this during sex... and that would be the last time he ever thought that name while balls deep in Hermione.

She began to move over his cock, rotating her hips expertly while kissing and sucking on his neck. He knew what she was doing, could feel his blood rising to the surface to bruise, but he allowed her to mark him. The wolf didn't like being claimed by a submissive, but Remus loved it. His hips met her thrusts halfway, and Hermione straightened up to admire her handiwork. Grinning like a Cheshire cat, she met his smiling eyes. Her grin faltered slightly, but grew wider when she saw he didn't mind. Her eyes had darkened to a rich chocolate, and Remus knew he wanted to keep them that colour as often as possible.

Now riding him with purpose, Hermione leaned back and braced herself on his thighs. Instead of thrusting, she moved in deliberate circles on his cock. His hand centred on her clit and rubbed her with singular intent. He was rewarded with gentle keening noises as she began to ride him harder and faster. One of her hands trailed from his thigh to his balls, the position thrusting her breasts out deliciously. When her nails trailed over his sensitive sac, Remus groaned and thrust even deeper into her velvet sheath.

They came together with matching cries; Hermione's clenching drawing every drop from his throbbing cock. She fell forward onto his chest as she panted, her body damp from exertion. Remus wrapped her tightly in his grasp, not minding the sweat in the least.

"Remus... you are an untapped resource," Hermione moaned, licking the love bite she'd left on him.

"Oh, I don't know. I think you're trying your damndest."

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The next day, Remus admitted he had not taken the Wolfsbane that month. He wouldn't tell Hermione why, but she suspected it was because of the way Tonks had left. She didn't know the details behind the break-up, and she wouldn't push him to find out more.

They were sitting at the kitchen table enjoying their afternoon tea, chatting like nothing had changed between them. Both had to work that evening, Hermione at the Ministry and Remus at the wizarding bookstore where he was needed for inventory that week. They would have to leave in about an hour and wanted to enjoy the peace together.

Of course, all that was bound to be disturbed by the knock on the front door. Remus went to answer it while Hermione bolted upstairs to get dressed. She'd been wearing only an oxford shirt that she'd stolen from Remus. He, on the other hand, had no qualms about opening the front door in nothing but black slacks. He at least buttoned the top clasp...he was no cretin, after all.

Swinging the door wide open, Remus looked past Harry and Ginny and directly at Ron. A growl escaped his lips and Ron immediately paled, stepping down a couple steps on the stoop. Remus was only somewhat mollified by his retreat and stared hard at him.

"I thought I said you were no longer welcome here," he snarled. Harry stepped forward to placate Remus, but when the snarl was turned on him, he stopped and raised his hands in surrender.

"I...I'm sorry, Mr. Lupin. We only wanted to make sure Hermione was all right after what Tonks did. I'll wait out here," Ron stuttered.

Remus shook his head. "No, you will not. Get off this stoop and go home. I don't want to smell your presence for another second."

Harry protested, "Remus, this is still my house. Ron should at least be able to wait outside."

Remus turned to him. He loved Harry, but the boy was threatening his dominance. In his house, his word was final. "Harry, if you want him to stay, I will be leaving and Hermione will be coming with me."

Harry's mouth dropped. Ron unwisely questioned, "Why would Hermione go anywhere with you?"

Ginny tried to wave Ron back, but Remus was on him in an instant. One step above Ron, he grabbed the youth's robes by the front and pulled him onto the tips of his toes. "Hermione is my mate. She goes where I go. You will no longer have anything to do with her, do you understand?" Remus' voice was gravelly and forceful. Ron nodded quickly, looking like he wanted to fight back but found himself unable.

"Good. Now *leave!*"

Hermione came to the door just in time to see Ron run down the road to the public Apparition point and disappear. She smiled a little confusedly at Harry and Ginny, hugging them in turn. Remus walked back into Grimmauld Place, and Hermione graciously asked her friends to come in.

Remus was sitting in the parlour in an armchair. His legs were spread and his arms were crossed against his chest somewhat petulantly. Hermione wasn't sure what had happened in the brief minutes during which she'd dressed, but she doubted it was good. Harry and Ginny looked shaken, and Remus looked murderous.

"Please, sit! I'll get the tea. Remus and I both have to work soon, but we have time for a quick visit. Right, Remus?" She gifted him with her gentlest smile, and he looked suitably reproached.

"Of course. It's good to see you, Harry, Ginny."

They responded in kind, but Hermione thought it sounded forced. She prepared the tea quickly, bringing the service into the parlour and setting it on the coffee table. Ginny offered to pour and Hermione went to pass Remus' chair to the loveseat beside it.

She didn't quite make it there because Remus reached out and pulled her into his lap. He wrapped both his arms around her waist and declined to loosen his grip.

Ginny gasped and Harry looked even more confounded.

She smiled patiently at her friends, while glancing behind her with a glare for Remus. *Really, how childish. Staking his claim, again!*

"Hermione..." Ginny began, looking from the perfectly attired, though bushy-haired, young administrative assistant to the dishevelled, half-naked werewolf.

"You heard what I told Ron. Hermione is my mate," Remus told them without preamble.

Hermione gaped. "What happened out there? You told them already?"

Remus shrugged. "I had to. Ron wouldn't leave." To him, it was as simple as that.

Harry finally rallied. "What do you mean, she's your mate? I thought Tonks was..." He trailed off when Remus' face darkened at the name.

"Tonks was my girlfriend. Now, she's not. Hermione's my mate. I claimed her." He went to pull at her collar to show them, but Hermione fended him off. That was not something she felt Harry was capable of digesting at that moment. She was still dealing with it herself.

She whispered to her lover, "That's private, Remus." He smiled wolfishly at her and she knew he approved. They were definitely going to have to talk about this excessive dominance. It was one thing in the bedroom (it was very, very welcomed there), but it was quite another for him to announce to the world he'd claimed her and act as though he owned her. This wasn't the Remus she knew from only a week ago. She squirmed a little in his lap, and his hands tightened on her hips. She stopped when she realised what he was warning her about...a growing hardness in his slacks. Heat flooded her despite the fact that she'd been thoroughly satisfied only hours ago. Something about this man set her aflame.

Hermione met Harry's disbelieving stare. "It's true, Harry. Remus and I are together. He was there for me when I needed someone, and it... evolved into something special."

Harry scoffed. "When did it have time to evolve? You can't be over Ron already! His bed probably still smells like you!"

Remus roared, "Harry, that's enough!" Harry started, and Remus lowered his voice immediately. His words were no less firm for their reasonable volume. "I won't tolerate talk like that against Hermione. She's been through enough and needs your support, not condemnation. I'm not going to hurt her, Harry. That's the last thing I would ever do."

"Harry, you of all people know Remus is a good, loving, and stable man. He is good for me. I know it's a lot to absorb, but I hope you can be happy for us." Hermione's voice was slightly chiding, and Harry's cheeks glowed from her admonition.

Ginny piped in, "I'm happy for you! I know my brother's a dolt. He tries, but you weren't right for each other. You and Remus seem like a good fit! And I bet he's bril in the sa..."

"Ginny!" Harry sounded exasperated and Hermione smiled, knowing he had to deal with her inappropriate comments on a regular basis.

"Well, it's true! Look at how he's holding her hips! Whew!" Her voice was a stage whisper. Remus chuckled against Hermione's back, and she felt her cheeks flame.

Deciding it was time for an intervention, Hermione announced they needed to get going. Harry and Ginny rose immediately, Harry looking relieved and Ginny looking decidedly envious as Hermione and Remus rose and he put his hands on her shoulders from behind.

"Remus, I'm sorry for being a jerk. I do think you make a good couple. I just need time to... adjust."

Remus nodded understandingly. "We didn't mean to make our relationship public so early, but I'm glad you know. I'm sorry about the thing with Ron, but he really can't come back here."

Harry agreed. "I know. I'll tell him. He won't like it, but..." Harry trailed off. Remus shrugged. He didn't care if Ron liked it or not. He had hurt Hermione and would never be forgiven.

The visiting couple let themselves out with a promise to come by again soon.

Hermione was still standing with Remus' hand on her shoulders. They slid down her arms and she felt a thrill run through her. His hands were coarse and scratched her skin lightly.

"Hermione..." His voice was low and close to her ear. Her eyelids fluttered closed, and she tilted her head back to rest on his chest. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have let myself lose control. And that show in the parlour... I understand if you..."

She turned in his arms. Despite his possessive attitude, she still wanted him desperately. They would work through this strange development together. "Remus, we'll talk about that later. Now, we have fifteen minutes before we have to leave for work. Why don't I..." She bit her lip and flicked open the button of his trousers. "...Relieve some tension?"

She backed him against the wall, kissing him fiercely and making a show of her own dominance. He didn't seem to mind, moaning as she unzipped his pants and let them fall to the ground. She smirked, raising an eyebrow at him when she saw he wore nothing beneath them. He shrugged one shoulder, and she dropped to her knees smoothly.

Wasting no time, as there was none to waste, Hermione took his half-hard cock deep into her mouth. He stiffened almost immediately, and she danced her tongue over his member, alternating between sucking and licking, never relenting. One hand stroked the section of his shaft that she could not fit in her mouth, and she brought the other to tease his balls and press into his perineum. He groaned at the assault and she bore on.

She finally felt his cock grow impossibly harder, and she flicked the mushroom head rapidly with her tongue. "Hermione..." he warned, but she didn't move. He shouted as he came, flooding her mouth. She swallowed as much as she could around his cock, but a trickle escaped the corner of her mouth. Once she'd emptied him, she swallowed and rose quickly to her feet and pressed her lips harshly against his, making him taste himself.

Remus growled and immediately spun her against the wall. He ravished her mouth, licking up the trail on her chin. Her head fell back against the wall. *How could I ever*

have thought he was passionless?

But the Grandfather clock caught her attention just as Remus' hand cupped her sex. She regretfully pulled his hand away.

"I have to go to work, Remus," she mourned.

"Skip it," he demanded.

She sighed. She had to learn to resist this irresistible man sometime, and there was no better time than the present.

"I can't. I need the money. And when I get back tonight, we're talking about what happened with Ron, okay?" He might be the Alpha in their little pack, but she could boss with the best of them.

They left for work together five minutes later with only seconds to spare.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 of 23

After leaving Ron, Hermione escapes to Grimmauld Place where Remus and Tonks reside. She feels a pull toward Remus, who is experiencing a similar draw. Can they find happiness despite all the forces trying to keep them apart?

Work for Remus that went by agonisingly slow. The bookstore was such a mess that half the inventory had to be done by *Accio*, and then the books were placed on a cart to be re-shelved in the correct place. Books were flying all over the store from the commands of himself and two other employees. Only two thoughts paraded around his mind for the entirety of his five-hour shift: *There has got to be an easier way to do inventory...we're wizards, for Merlin's sake!* and *Hermione will never fall in love with a beast like me.*

For that was what he wanted. To be loved. It wasn't too much; it wasn't moving mountains or raising the dead. But it seemed just as unlikely for Remus Lupin.

He sighed as a copy of *Worpin's Wizarding Remedies* crashed into his thigh before finding its way to his colleague on the upper level. He didn't understand the possessiveness he felt around her. Or maybe he did understand it, but he certainly couldn't explain it. It had never happened with Tonks or any other girlfriend...few that they were...he'd had over the years. And it had started even *before* he'd marked her, so it wasn't entirely that, though it certainly wasn't helping.

But his behaviour was completely unacceptable. If he wanted to keep her in his life, he would have to treat her with more respect. He *did* respect her, more than anyone else he knew other than Harry. He lauded her brilliance, her compassion, her bravery. He recognised all that about her and more. And yet... the wolf in him...

No! No more excuses, no more blaming everything on the wolf. You are in charge here, the wolf is nothing more than a facet of your personality, not an alter ego. He chided himself. He would do well to remember that.

Remus fortuitously *Accioed* a battered edition of *Mates: Myths and Methods*. He'd never read it, knowing that in werewolf culture, mates were usually nothing more than glorified boyfriends or girlfriends with none of the benefits or side effects of times past. Nonetheless, he felt a certain pride in having claimed someone for his own and wouldn't mind reading more on the process. He put the book aside on the small pile he invariably made for himself during inventory. On some days, half his paycheque went toward books, even with the generous discount employees were given.

*

Hermione was too tired to make dinner by the time she got home. She grabbed a muffin and climbed into bed. Remus was due home any minute, so she wanted to finish eating before he caught her. Most people didn't appreciate their lovers bringing crumbs into their beds, but she was starving. There were extenuating circumstances. Nonetheless, she was immaculately careful as she peeled the wrapper off over the garbage can.

Upon heading to bed, Hermione had wondered where to go. Her old room was upstairs, probably just as she'd left it. But something told her Remus would want her in his bed. There was something thrilling about waiting for him to come home from work in his bed... naked. Hermione munched faster, certain that a face full of blueberry bran would not increase her sex appeal.

But Remus knew all her tricks. He was standing in the dark hallway where she couldn't see him. He'd watched her undress and climb into bed, her lovely lithe thighs sliding beneath the sheets and her sweet breasts bouncing with the effort. She pulled the sheet to her underarms and delicately bit into a muffin.

Giving up his voyeuristic post and crossing the floor with stealth, Remus approached the bed and stalked across it toward her. Her eyes had widened when he'd entered, and she looked so deliciously guilty. The muffin was immobile, halfway to her mouth, and Remus took a bite of it, chewing thoughtfully.

"You know, I usually don't like bringing food to bed..." He ate the last bite of the forbidden muffin and swallowed, smiling at her consternation before he pulled her flat against the mattress and settled between her legs. "...But since you're already here, I'll make an exception."

Hermione squealed as he unceremoniously parted her thighs. He licked each of her hips and the juncture where they met her thighs, eliciting sweet whimpers from his mate. Moving down, he parted her lower lips with his fingers and delved into her honeyed folds. Her taste was beyond compare, and Remus lamented not having done this before.

Her moans were musical as he tongued her relentlessly, teasing her by circling but not touching her clit. He saw her hands clench the bedspread and took pity on her. Using two fingers to penetrate her depths, Remus finally licked her hidden pearl in time with the thrusts of his fingers. Hermione's body rocked with the movements, and she kept a steady stream of whimpers and whispers of his name.

Feeling the telltale flutter of her pussy around his fingers, Remus redoubled his efforts. In moments she was crying out, her hips surging forward, hands buried in his hair. When the clenching around his fingers subsided, he withdrew them. He refrained from savouring the flavour on his fingers as he came up to lie beside her, opting instead to offer it to Hermione. Her eyes were doubtful as they met his, but he smiled softly at her, and she opened her mouth.

He tried to withhold the grumble in his chest, but his approval was made known. He brought the fingers to her waiting lips, and she tentatively tasted her essence. Watching his face carefully, Hermione took his fingers into her mouth and swirled her tongue around them, cleaning him of any lasting evidence.

"Good girl," he murmured.

He removed his fingers and replaced them with his tongue, kissing her brutally. She excited him beyond reason with her simultaneous innocence and lust.

But the day wore heavily upon them and soon the kisses became languid and lazy. Her arms were loose around his neck as he explored her mouth with practised precision. Eventually, when she pulled back to catch her breath, he saw her eyes drift closed and he smiled.

Kissing her lightly on her slightly parted lips, he whispered, "Goodnight, love."

Her groggy answer barely reached his ears as he curled his body around hers.

"Sweet dreams."

*

Hermione worked again the next day, a longer shift than she was used to these days. By the time she got home it was nearly dinner. Remus had owed the owner of the bookstore and asked if he could come in during the day to tend to the inventory. His request was granted as long as he didn't endanger the customers with errant *Accios*. It would make the job harder and longer, but would free up his evening with Hermione. It was a more than fair trade.

He was waiting for her when she walked in the front door. Within seconds she was against the foyer wall being kissed breathless. Remus loved that she was so willing, even if she was surprised.

She was breathless when she moaned his name. "Remus... take me upstairs. I've missed you."

He only moved his kissed to her neck, coaxing her thighs apart with his knee and filling the gap with a muscled thigh of his own. He gently licked the healing wound on her neck and, whimpering, she reflexively ground her hips against his intrusive thigh, delighting in the friction. Remus unbuttoned her robes and let them fall to the floor, her shirt quickly following. The heat from her body scorched him as he tore off her trousers and undergarments, stepping back slightly to take in her naked and blushing form.

"This is hardly fair..." she whispered, indicating his fully clothed body.

"Life so rarely is," he reminded her. She unzipped his pants and pulled out his throbbing cock, stroking it with an eager hand. He thrust into the fist she made around him, and suddenly he could stand it no longer.

Hitching her legs around his waist and pressing her into the wall, Remus held her thighs and bottom and delved upward into her moist heat. Hermione threw her hands around his neck and used her legs to lever herself onto his cock.

Remus kissed her wildly, not taking the time for accuracy as he thrust into her like a madman, his roughness tempered only by the restrictions of the position. Hermione was calling out his name like a prayer only he could answer, her head tossed back against the obliging wall, her thighs gripped vicelike around his waist.

Again and again he pummelled into her, and as she cried out that final time, he scraped his teeth over the claim mark on her neck. The slight pain made her gasp as her slicked sleeve grasped him, and the satisfaction of tasting his claim brought Remus to a dizzying climax. He filled her waiting body as the pleasure rolled through him like waves. They were both gasping for air as Remus sunk to his knees, Hermione still impaled on him with her back to the wall. He rested his head against her shoulder as his heart slowed and their breathing evened out together.

Hermione tenderly touched his cheek, and he met her whiskey eyes. "That was the best homecoming."

He laughed. "I'll make sure we have many to compare it to."

*

Remus made dinner for them that night. He enjoyed cooking, though he wasn't particularly good at it. The nuances escaped him, and he found himself measuring each and every ingredient in order to achieve the desired outcome, and yet the food was never as advertised.

But Hermione didn't seem to mind and ate his dry, bland chicken and lumpy potatoes with gusto. She didn't go so far as to compliment the meal, but she smiled heartily at him, grateful for his effort.

"What would you like to do tonight?" Hermione asked. She wasn't used to doing nothing. At the Burrow, there was always work to be done, whether it was general housework, babysitting, errands, or any other number of chores. She had been kept busy at all times, and she'd had the unkind thought that the busyness was meant to ward off idle thoughts which might lead to attempted escape. It certainly explained why she had remained in that stifling household as long as she had.

Despite how glad she was to be out of there, she missed the productivity of it. It felt good to contribute, and at Grimmauld Place there really was nothing to do.

"Actually, I have to go pick up the Wolfsbane for this month. I usually go during the first week after the full moon. The man who makes it is very busy and makes a special trip to London just to meet werewolves."

"Do you mind if I come? I'd like to get out of the house for a bit."

Remus shook his head and began to tidy up the dishes. Hermione instantly rose to give him a hand, but he unceremoniously plunked her back into her chair.

"I'd love your company. Actually, I wanted to ask you something."

"Of course." She felt silly just sitting at the table watching him clean, so she got up to make tea.

"I need you to lock me into my cell in three weeks at the next full moon," he stated nonchalantly.

Hermione was surprised. It was obvious Remus didn't actually need the cage locked; even without the Wolfsbane he'd been unable to open the latch on his cell. Thumbs were handy things.

"You don't need me to do that, you know. You won't unlock it, and even if you do manage to, with the Wolfsbane, you're harmless."

Remus scoffed. "I'm never harmless; the wolf is always there, ready to destroy and demolish. After you lock the cage, I want you to go to a hotel. I won't have you stay here while I'm not myself."

"I won't leave you, so you might as well drop it right now," she declared stubbornly. She didn't like being told what to do, and she liked it even less when it meant the man she cared about doubted his own humanity. "Don't you think that, as your mate, the wolf would recognise me and keep me safe?"

Remus didn't know. But he would never risk her life on an uncertainty. He knew he felt an overwhelming sense of protectiveness and possessiveness toward her in his human state; he imagined it would only be heightened in wolf-form. But not worth the risk to find out.

"We'll discuss this again later. I don't want you in danger, least of all from me. What if..." Remus couldn't finish. The truth was that if the wolf *did* recognise his mate, it would not have cuddly and gentle feelings. The wolf would most likely want to mate, and the need to mate was even stronger than the need for freedom or destruction. He could

kill her just trying to get close to her. He closed his eyes against the barrage of images that flooded him. He would never, *ever* risk her like that.

Deciding the subject was closed for now, Remus grabbed his cloak and Hermione's coat. She seemed to prefer Muggle dress for simple errands, and he certainly loved seeing her in her foreign-looking clothing. The clothes were much more snug and form-fitting than witches' robes, especially those jeans... but she wasn't wearing them today. She was wearing a black skirt with a pretty red cardigan set. He loved her in red.

They Apparated to Diagon Alley. Walking to the shady alleyway where his contact liked to meet, Hermione apparently wanted to take up the earlier discussion.

"I just don't see how you can expect me to leave you alone. Didn't Tonks always stay?" He frowned at her name. Hermione must be serious about this if she was willing to pull precedence.

"Well, yes. But it wasn't the same. The pull I have for you is much more intense." Deciding to tell her the honest truth, Remus continued, "Hermione, if I get out in wolf form, even *with* the Wolfsbane, I'm going to want to mate with you."

Hermione looked a little shocked. She met his eyes, and he tried to project the seriousness of what he was trying to say.

"I see. Okay, I'll lock you in the cell, but I'm not leaving." She nodded her head decisively.

But Remus couldn't allow that. "I'll be able to scent you, Hermione. It'll drive me insane, trying to get to you. I might actually get out. And you'd be in real danger. I can't know for sure, but I think the need to mate with you might override even the Wolfsbane. I can't risk it."

"And I won't leave you alone just because you have a hunch. If you begin to act out of control, then I'll leave. Not before."

Remus figured that was the most he was going to be able to negotiate her down to. "I want you to promise me you'll leave if you get scared, even just a little."

"I promise, Remus," she whispered.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 of 23

After leaving Ron, Hermione escapes to Grimmauld Place where Remus and Tonks reside. She feels a pull toward Remus, who is experiencing a similar draw. Can they find happiness despite all the forces trying to keep them apart?

They'd arrived at the alley. It was hidden from sight with special charms designed to encourage people to look away or not take any notice, unless someone was specifically looking for it. Remus would meet the man who called himself Mr. Johnstone, pay for the Wolfsbane and both would leave. The alley was used for many means, nefarious and harmless alike, but would likely remain empty until Mr. Johnstone arrived.

Remus gathered Hermione in his arms. She didn't look cold, but she did look damn sexy, and he found himself unable to take his eyes off her. He'd never felt like this with anyone before. Even with Tonks, he'd hated public displays of affection and went out of his way to avoid them. She'd hated that, being a naturally affectionate person; but to Remus, it had always felt inappropriate or wrong. But with Hermione, everything was different. She was so perfectly touchable, and she seemed to encourage his embraces. She never forced herself on him, which he appreciated, but let him know she was there with comforting touches and sideways smiles.

Now, she wrapped her arms around his waist and smiled into his chest. He slowly rubbed the long line of her back, fingertips trailing to just graze the top of her buttocks. She raised her head to smile at him, and he immediately took her lips, slowly and sensually invading and exploring her mouth. She moaned softly, melting into the embrace until he was practically dipping her backwards.

A sharp crack of Apparition reluctantly drew their attention toward the arrival of Mr. Johnstone. He was a squat man with wild grey hair and a beaming smile. Remus had to grin at the sight of him; he epitomised the crazy inventor. And he was the only man besides the late Severus Snape who could brew the Wolfsbane potion so precisely.

"Ah, Remus! So good to see you. You are looking well, my boy! Very well, indeed! And who is this lovely young thing? Too young for you, I might add! But not for me!" He barked a laugh.

Hermione's mouth gaped open, and Remus grinned. Without letting her go, he said, "Mr. Johnstone, it's nice to see you again. This is my... friend, Hermione. But I assure you, even if she is too young, I keep her on her toes." And on her back, his perverted brain added.

Hermione squeezed him in response and smiled at the diminutive man. Remus let her go to get the money from his robes.

"Of course, of course! Well, I am so very pleased to see you have a lady friend. A man like you should not be alone, no, indeed not!"

Remus laughed good-naturedly. He'd put up with years of Mr. Johnstone's unobtrusive hints about his love life; he was pleased to see it would, if not stop, at least take a new direction. He'd never brought Tonks with him to meet his supplier, nor had he mentioned her. He handed a small pouch of coins to the smaller wizard and took the Wolfsbane from him.

"All set, then?" Remus asked.

"That's everything, my boy! Best of luck to you, and to you, missy! See you next month, son! All the best, all the best!"

He popped away with a resounding cackle, and Remus chuckled. He was a true character.

"Well, that was interesting! He seems very... nice." Hermione was smiling, and Remus was drawn to her like a goblin to Galleons.

"Yes, he's very nice. And you know someone else who can be very... nice." He nuzzled her neck, brushing her hair away. Hermione shuddered at the sensation, and Remus smiled. He loved having an effect on her, and she always responded so quickly.

"Nice... yes. I suppose you can be that... and other things," Hermione murmured, tilting her head back for another kiss. He obliged, softly moving his lips against hers, tilting her head so he could deepen the kiss. She moaned into his mouth, and before he really knew what he was doing, Remus had pushed her against the brick wall of the alley.

Hermione gasped when her back hit the chilled, rough wall. She snaked her arms around his neck, and Remus trailed his fingers from where her hands met around his neck, down her arms, then her sides and hips, and he bent his knees a little to gather the hem of her skirt in his hands.

She immediately went to withdraw her hands, presumably to stop him, but Remus caught her hands in one of his, holding her wrists in his grasp and pressing them against the wall above her head. He kissed her with passion, showing her how amazing she made him feel with only a kiss in an alleyway.

She whimpered softly when he drew his hand up between her thighs, caressing the silky skin of her inner thigh. She tried to bring her legs firmly together, but Remus had pre-empted her by pressing one of his thighs between hers. Her head fell against the wall, her mouth open and drawing deep breaths. The look in her eyes was enough to make his cock throb; she looked wild and desperate.

His fingers grazed against the dampened front of her panties, so softly she might have imagined it, and her hips jerked forward to meet his hand. Remus smirked and touched her gently again with just his fingertips.

"Remus," she whispered, a plea in her voice.

"Yes, love?" he teased, rubbing her lightly through her underwear.

"Touch me harder, please. More," she whined, circling her hips lightly, trying to get as much as she could from his fingers.

He decided he liked the way she begged and obliged her, yanking her panties down to just above her knees. His fingers immediately slipped into her wet folds, and she smiled and groaned at the contact. He pressed her wrists harder against the brick, scratching the backs of her hands against the rough surface. He watched her face to make sure he hadn't hurt her in a bad way, but her eyes promised she was thrilled by the treatment. He'd never thought little Hermione Granger would like pain with her pleasure, but it was always the quiet types you had to watch out for. He laughed softly, thinking about his own reputation for quietness. Yes, it seems to be a trend.

He thrust his fingers into her hot sheath at the same time he pressed his tongue into her mouth. His mouth was gentle and slow, however, while his fingers were hard and rough. He fingered her brutally, first with only one, then two fingers, using the palm of his hand to grind against her clit mercilessly. Her quiet mewls turned to impassioned gasps and cries as she came closer to completion.

"Do you like this, Hermione?" he demanded of her, needing to hear her say the words.

"Gods, yes. Yes, Remus! Feels so good..." Her words came haltingly, and he bared his teeth in a feral grin at the lust-filled tone of her voice.

"Tell me what you like," he whispered into her ear, licking the shell and sucking on the spot just below it. When she didn't answer right away, he growled, "Tell me!"

She gasped, trying to find words. "...I like your fingers... they're so thick, a...and they know just where... where! Oh... to touch. And when you hold my hands up...I li...like that too, makes me feel...oh! out of control," she finished, gasping at the effort. Her eyes were closed, her head thrown back, and Remus fit a third finger into her tight pussy, moaning when it contracted sharply against the added digit.

"Remus!" she begged.

Remus loved the way his name sounded on her lips. She sounded as though she was requesting something. "Yes, love?"

"Please... bite me. Bite me where you did before! I'm so close..."

Remus slowed his fingers, shocked at what she was asking. But maybe he shouldn't have been; after all, he'd wanted to bite her again since he'd tasted her the first time. Her wound hadn't quite healed, though. But he knew that area would always be an erogenous zone for her now, extra sensitive and completely eroticised.

He sped his fingers back up, thrusting with singular purpose. When her soft cries became louder, he sank his teeth back into the wound on her neck, not enough to break the scab, but enough to bruise her again. She came with a sharp cry, her body thrusting against his hand, her cunt tightening impossibly around his fingers. He took his mouth away to watch her face, making sure she wasn't hurt. But she appeared to be overtaken by her orgasm, her eyes closed and an expression of bliss on her features. She slumped against the wall, and when Remus let go of her wrists, they stayed up for a moment before they fell boneless against her sides.

Remus was grinning widely. There was nothing better than seeing his little mate come apart in his hands. She returned his smile, head lolling slightly to the side. He slid her panties down off her legs and threw them aside in the alley. Fixing her skirt, he smirked at her.

"Now we've marked this territory."

She laughed breathlessly, and they walked back to the Apparition Point to return home.

*

The next two weeks passed by more quickly than either wanted. Their schedules were often such that they worked opposite shifts: Hermione during the day, and Remus often leaving as soon as she walked in the door.

Hermione noticed that Remus' possessive streak had decreased significantly since the first few days after he'd claimed her, and she was grateful. He was still extremely passionate in bed, taking her to places she'd never even heard of, let alone had been to. The first time they'd made love slowly was a memory she would treasure forever. He'd been so gentle, taking his time and making her come three times. The last time, she swore she fainted for a while. She'd never been able to come more than twice, and even that was a rarity. But something in him brought out the wolf in her, and now she firmly believed there really was a wolf in everyone; it just took another wolf to bring hers out.

She'd even had Harry and Ginny over a couple times on weekends, and Remus watched Harry hug her with nary a complaint. There was no over-the-top show of dominance, and she had been able to sit on the sofa instead of on Remus' lap. Hermione was only slightly disappointed that the over-protectiveness had disappeared. Though the feminist in her railed against such behaviour, something inside her felt so sexy and desired when he expressed his control over her. It was confusing, but now she wouldn't need to examine her feelings about it.

A week before the full moon, Remus had begun his doses of Wolfsbane. He had to take it every night for a week, and tonight was the fourth night. She suspected he increased his dosage a little to be on the safe side. It pained her that he really didn't seem to trust himself, but she knew that was something they would have to work on together. And she was more than willing to do so; her feelings for Remus grew stronger every day and were already beyond the gentle affection she'd held for Ron.

She wanted to be concerned about how fast things were moving, but she just couldn't bring herself to question such a good thing. Remus was unlike any man she'd ever known. He was brilliant, sweet, passionate, and amazing in bed. He understood her on a level she barely understood herself, and that was a rare and beautiful thing. She wasn't willing to risk it by overanalysing it.

Remus was at work while Hermione was preparing dinner. She'd invited Harry and Ginny over again, as the last time had gone so well. She missed them a lot, having gone from seeing them every day to only once a week. They brought her news of the Burrow and all the members of the Weasley family and the extended families beyond them.

She'd chosen simple black trousers, a white camisole with a lacy bodice and a red cashmere cardigan. The cardigan had been a gift from Ron, but since Ginny had really chosen it, she didn't see any harm in wearing it. She'd only just dug it out of the bag of clothes Ginny brought for her from the Burrow the week before. She knew Remus liked her in red, so she thought it was perfect. Even though they were living together and saw each other every night, if not every day, she was still excited to see him all the time. Waking up next to him was the best feeling in the world.

Hermione hummed as she whipped a salad together. She enjoyed cooking the Muggle way, but it was times like this that she needed magical help; she felt as though she was running out of time, but everything was coming together nicely, despite her rush.

A knock on the door made her drop what she was doing and run to open it. She was so excited to see her friends. She swung the door wide open, grinning when she saw her best friend.

"Harry! It's so good to see you!" She smiled broadly, taking her smartly-dressed, if slightly uncomfortable-looking friend into a big hug.

He pecked her lightly on the cheek. "It's good to see you, too. You look amazing! Wow. Remus is really good for you," he teased, winking at her before entering the house.

Blushing, Hermione took the proffered bottle of wine and led Harry into the sitting room. "Where's Ginny tonight?" she asked, getting glasses and a corkscrew for the wine.

"She got stuck babysitting Victoire, actually. She told me I wasn't to break our dinner date, so here I am. I'm glad, too. I love Victoire, but she's a handful!" He took the wine and corkscrew from Hermione, opening it with a flourish. Pouring them each a healthy glass, he sat back on the sofa. "Where's Remus?"

"He's at work. He should be here any minute, though. He's been working more and more these days, which I think is great. He hates being bored, and Hogwarts hadn't needed him much this year. But I miss him when he's gone," she admitted.

Harry nodded. "I know how you feel. Whenever Ginny's off playing Quidditch with her team, I miss her like crazy. I mean, there's Apparition, but sometimes it's nice to come home to her, you know?"

She did know. She hated walking into an empty house, and she hated leaving one as well. "Well, it would be nice if we both worked full-times jobs where we had the same schedule, but I don't think I'll be made full-time anytime soon. To be honest, I'm lucky to still have the job, with all the cutbacks."

"It's getting ridiculous," Harry agreed. "It's at the point where no one is safe. Do you have a back-up?"

Hermione laughed. "I know of a few places I could work, but none with the same opportunities to move up like at the Ministry. And I still have nearly no savings, but I'm working on it."

"Good, keep that up. I would hate to see... well, I know Remus will always take care of you, so maybe I don't have to worry."

Hermione frowned. "Well, you don't have to worry, but not because Remus will support me. You know I would never allow that." She paid her way around Grimmauld Place, which was why she was having a hard time saving money. Remus hated taking her money, but it wasn't a negotiable point, as far as she was concerned.

Harry was quick to backpeddle. "That's not what I meant! I only meant... should anything happen, he won't let you struggle. Ugh, never mind. I'm obviously not going to say the right thing to get out of this."

She had to laugh. Harry could still be the same awkward teenager she'd known for so long. Patting his arm patronisingly, she teased, "Obviously. But I love you anyway!"

They both laughed, and Hermione startled when she heard a throat clear in the doorway.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 of 23

After leaving Ron, Hermione escapes to Grimmauld Place where Remus and Tonks reside. She feels a pull toward Remus, who is experiencing a similar draw. Can they find happiness despite all the forces trying to keep them apart?

"Remus! We were just talking about you!" Hermione stood up from the sofa to greet him, feeling as though she hadn't seen him in days.

"Oh, really? Because I thought you were talking about how much you love Harry here." His voice was light, but his eyes hard. Hermione frowned.

"Well, of course I love Harry, but..." She was interrupted by Remus grabbing her upper arm. He pulled her close to him and smelled her hair. Hermione tried to jerk her arm away, embarrassed at his actions in front of Harry. Remus growled and held her tighter. He sniffed her sweater and met her eyes, a snarl on his lips.

"I can smell Ron Weasley on you, Hermione," he accused, looking at her with something akin to disgust.

Hermione stared. This was unbelievable. "Remus, you're acting very strange. Ronald gave me this sweater, yes, but it shouldn't smell of him!"

Harry was watching intently, ready to intervene, but he was also shocked at the change in Remus' attitude.

Remus laughed mirthlessly. "Actually, all of your clothes have smelled of him for the last few days. Even the damn bedroom smells like him! Is there something you want to tell me, *mate*?" He fairly spat the last word, and Hermione's eyes widened. She shook her head in denial. She didn't want to be afraid, but his grip on her arm was tightening and the look in his eyes was unnerving.

"So, I come home from a long day at work to see you drinking wine, touching *him*..." He jerked his head at Harry, who stood up. Remus growled warningly at him, and Harry paused. "And telling him that you *love* him, and now you reek of your ex-boyfriend? What would you have me believe?"

Harry spoke up, "Remus, you know Hermione and I are only friends. She loves me as a friend and nothing more! And she probably smells like Ron because Ginny brought her clothes back from their room, where he still stays. You're being unreasonable!"

Remus looked at Hermione, his face hard and unchanging. "Harry, you should leave now."

Hermione was trying to decide how not to anger Remus further and chose to remain silent for the time being. Her protestations seemed to enrage him more.

Harry laughed a hard, biting laugh. "You must be kidding. I am not leaving Hermione here with you when you're acting like a... like an animal!"

Remus slowly turned to face Harry. "An animal? How interesting you should say that, since *am nothing but an animal!* And you've both known that all along. I've tried to

tell you, haven't I? Hermione? But you didn't listen. And now you have the gall to act *afraid* of me?"

Remus let go of Hermione, and Harry went to grab her and leave with her, but she held up a hand to him. He frowned, but stayed back.

"Remus, look at me," she demanded. She was still within his arm's reach, but he looked like he'd rather cut off his arm than touch her again. But he did look at her, and she could have cried at the torment and confusion in his light brown eyes.

She smiled softly. "Remus, you're my mate. You'd know if I'd done something inappropriate with another man. Smell me again and tell me it's ~~for~~ on my clothes, or Ron's *scent* from being in the same room for so long with my clothes. Think back to what you heard when you first came in. Was I anything but friendly with Harry? Really think about this. You know the answer."

Remus looked at her intently. "Take the sweater off," he ordered. Hermione did as he asked, tossing the offending garment to Harry, who caught it.

"Come here," Remus told Hermione, his voice only slightly softer than before. But she obeyed, stepping up to his chest, baring her neck both to offer her scent and show her submission. She suspected the nearness of the full moon was at fault for Remus' shift in behaviour, and she didn't want to blame him for something beyond his control.

That didn't mean she wasn't *pissed*.

Remus inhaled deeply of her neck and chest. He smelled her hair and even bent to sniff her belly. He nodded, as if to himself. Returning to her neck, he caressed the claim mark, which had healed but scarred. She shuddered at the sensation; it felt just as though he was caressing between her legs. He lowered his lips to the mark, licking it softly and biting it gently. Hermione moaned. She didn't want to do this in front of Harry, but Remus was in control right now.

He pulled her body tightly against his before turning to Harry. "I'm sorry, Harry. I... I'm not myself, it seems. I was unreasonable. However, I still need you to leave." He went back to kissing Hermione's neck as though there was no audience.

Harry scoffed. "Absolutely not. How do I know that, the minute I leave, you won't go back to yelling at her?"

Hermione gasped at a particularly long lick, her head falling back to offer more of herself. Tears gathered in her eyes at her conflicting emotions.

Remus spoke against her skin, loud enough for Harry to hear, but just barely. "I'm not going to yell at her. I'm going to fuck her. And you can't watch, so you need to leave."

Hermione groaned, completely humiliated now. Remus' mouth on her was so soft and so at odds with his crude words. He whispered to her, "Tell Harry to leave, baby."

She met Harry's eyes, certain she looked wanton and depraved. "Harry, it's okay. It's... it's the wolf. It's so close to the full moon. You can leave. I'll be fine." She explained as best she could, but knew Harry would not like her request.

She was right. "Hermione, he might hurt you!"

Remus snarled, and both Harry and Hermione were startled by the noise. "I will *not* hurt my mate. *Never!* She is safe with me, *only* safe with me. Now leave, Harry, or I will make you."

Remus didn't wait to make sure Hermione's champion had actually exited the room before he thrust a hand between her legs, rubbing her harshly through her pants. Hermione distantly heard the front door close, and the sound brought her back to herself for a moment.

She reared her hand back, restricted slightly by Remus' tight hold on her body, and slapped him across the face. His head barely moved, and he laughed, "Hit me, will you? Do we need a reminder as to who belongs to whom?"

Hermione shook her head. "Remus, you hurt me and embarrassed me! Let me go!"

Remus stroked her back with his calloused hands, gripping her arse and pulling her hips against his. "I'm not sorry; I had to reassert my claim. And I can smell your heat, Hermione. You want me to show you that you belong to me."

"But you belong to me, too! I have a say!" Hermione had the feeling things were spiralling out of control here, and she wanted to make sure she could get them back.

"Of course I do, love. I'm sorry I scared you. I hate thinking of *him* touching you. But I'm not sorry for making sure you remember who you are. *Mine*. Isn't that right, Hermione?" He kissed her, hard and demanding, not waiting for her compliance before forcing his tongue into her mouth. She only put up the smallest defence; she was angry, but she wanted him like she'd never known. It was out of control, it was hard and rough, and it felt *good*.

"That's right, Remus," she agreed softly, succumbing to the sensations, giving in to her mate. She moved her hips lightly against his, and he yanked her shirt off in retaliation.

"Say it, love. Tell me," he pleaded, unbuttoning her pants and taking them off. He took off her bra and turned her around, pressing her back flush against his front, pulling her arms up to encircle his neck.

"I'm yours, Remus Lupin. I belong to you, I'm yours." Her voice was quiet but clear. His hands cupped her breasts, holding them proprietarily before tweaking her nipples. He was kissing all along her neck and shoulder, nipping her skin at the same time as he pinched her nipples. Her mind, which had been racing, slowed down to a snail's pace, thinking only of the way her body was reacting to his words and hers, of the way they fit together perfectly like this.

His hands trailed over her ribs and flat belly, stretched from her position. He held firmly onto her hips, pressing her back onto his granite erection. She gasped at the contact, wishing there were fewer layers between them. He slid his hand into her underwear, immediately seeking and pinching her clit. She was so wet, so ready for him, and somehow she knew he wouldn't tease her.

Taking her arms from around his neck, he led her over to the arm of the sofa. Without preamble, he bent her over it, and Hermione whimpered a little at being exposed thusly, but was unable to deny her desire. He yanked her underwear down and threw them across the room. He spread her legs and knelt behind her.

With his hands on the back of her thighs, Remus licked a long trail from her engorged clit, all the way across her slit, and ending at her tight back hole. Hermione whipped her head around, speechless. *No one had ever...*

But Remus was humming with pleasure at her taste, and she couldn't move if she'd wanted to. He feasted equally on her slick pussy and her clenched rosette. She couldn't explain the sensation; it was dirty and utterly decadent. He tongued her mercilessly, prodding her back tightness until he breached the tight muscle, and she gripped the sofa cushion to contain herself.

"Ready for me, love?" Remus asked her, using his fingers to draw her wetness out.

"Yes, I'm ready!" she cried, having never felt so damn empty in her life.

"Good, because I can't wait to be inside you. It's all I ever think about. It's all I want," he rasped, standing and lining his cock up to her entrance.

"Well?" he demanded. Hermione wasn't sure what he wanted, but she knew ~~what~~ *she* wanted, so she begged, pleaded for him to fuck her.

"You beg so prettily. I might have to punish you more often," he told her. She wanted to deny that this was punishment, but rightly assumed her words were not needed.

He thrust inside her with one stroke, filling her completely and nudging her cervix harshly. She cried out at the invasion, wanting even the slight pain that came with it.

He was holding her hips and pounding into her without rhythm or care. One hand snaked between her legs, flicking and tugging on her clit. She'd never had such rough treatment, never felt so completely under his power.

His other hand was on her arse, his thumb lightly caressing her arsehole in soothing circles completely contrary to his demanding thrusts. His thumb left her for a moment but came back slickened. He pressed it into her slowly, and Hermione moaned at being breached. She'd never had anything in there before; it felt uncomfortable and stung a little, but it also felt incredibly stimulating. He worked his thumb in a deep as he could, flicking her clit with his other hand and pounding his cock into her without regard to anything but their imminent explosions.

When he pulled his thumb most of the way out and plunged it back in at the same time as he thrust his cock into her and pinched her clit, she came with a hoarse scream, feeling her orgasm right down to her clenched toes, and she rode the waves flooding her.

Remus withdrew his thumb and pounded into her yielding body ruthlessly, finally coming hard and deep inside her, flooding her with wet heat. Hermione felt lightheaded from her position, head nearly upside down over the arm of the sofa. Her body sank backward, slipping over the arm toward Remus, and she would have ended up at his feet had he not caught her and picked her up lovingly, arms under her knees and shoulders. He was still fully dressed with only his pants open, and Hermione shook her head at her shamelessness, but she wouldn't have changed a thing.

She would think about what it all meant in the morning. When Remus placed her in their bed and undressed, getting in beside her and pulling her into his arms, she only spared a brief moment's regret; not for the way things happened between her and Remus, but for the way she'd worked so hard on a dinner they'd never gotten around to eating.

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"So, did you want to explain your behaviour last night? I'm sure Harry will never come back here, now."

Remus sighed. He was completely chagrined by the way he'd acted toward his old friend's son, but he maintained that he was only doing what came naturally to him: protecting what was rightfully his. However, he knew that he'd embarrassed his mate, and he was sorry for that.

"I shouldn't have acted like that in front of Harry. I'm sorry, love." His fingertips stroked her bare belly below the sheets, but she moved his hand away. He frowned, but did not try to touch her again.

"But that implies that you would have been right to act like that as long as Harry *wasn't* here, and that isn't right, either. You can't treat me like that. I'm not a possession."

"Well, maybe not technically, but I do possess you. You *are* mine," he asserted. Before he'd met Hermione, he hadn't believed the werewolf talk about the incredible jealousy that came with having a mate. He thought it was an excuse for people to act poorly toward others. But knowing that he'd insulted Harry *and* fucked his mate in a rather undignified fashion made a believer out of him.

Hermione put a soft, cool hand on his cheek. He hadn't realised how warm he was until her hand felt nearly icy against his skin. "Maybe so, but you're mine as well. And you wouldn't like it if I behaved like that to you in front of your friends."

Thinking that over, Remus would have to disagree. He'd probably feel a real thrill at seeing her assert her dominance in front of an audience. He wouldn't like her trying to dominate him *per se*, but he might enjoy her staking her claim a little.

However, to keep the peace (or get it back), Remus replied, "I suppose not. But there's something about you that makes me absolutely mad. Rationally, I know Harry would never touch you and vice versa, but irrationally, I hated hearing you say those words to him."

Hermione looked puzzled for a moment. Remus pursed his lips and looked away. He hadn't meant to give away that her words were the main issue. She'd told Harry she *loved* him.

"Anyway," he continued before his meaning came to her, "I'll try to be a good dog from now on. Promise." He crossed his fingers over his heart, and she smiled softly. He knew she was still hurt and upset, but he didn't know how to fix it when he still felt that bone-deep jealousy.

Hermione sighed. "I suppose I have a lot of laundry to do today if I'm to completely eradicate Ron's scent."

"I'll help you."

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 of 23

After leaving Ron, Hermione escapes to Grimmauld Place where Remus and Tonks reside. She feels a pull toward Remus, who is experiencing a similar draw. Can they find happiness despite all the forces trying to keep them apart?

Hermione was dissatisfied. Remus had apologised (kind of), but things seemed strained. She was a little embarrassed about the way she'd reacted to his attentions. She'd slapped him and then promptly succumbed to his seduction. She was afraid to consider what he must think of her. And if she didn't make her point now, would he continue to act this way? And why now? He'd been a perfect gentlemen for more than two weeks, and suddenly he was back to being unmanageable.

And how...dear Merlin, *how*...was she so very turned on when she thought about how he'd dominated her like that? Bending her over the sofa and licking her so intimately...

Hermione blushed as she folded her laundry. She'd made sure to charm clean each item Ginny had brought, as well as many that had been in the same drawers as the 'contaminated' clothing. She felt foolish for not realising how Ron's scent would be all over her clothing, but she was upset that Remus hadn't said anything earlier. He'd said she'd smelled of Ron for *days*... so why not say anything before?

She knew Remus had written an owl to Harry to apologise, but she suspected Harry would not be as easily appeased as she apparently had been. Harry tended to see things in black and white, and he was very, very protective of his friends. He was likely confused and hurt by Remus' actions, and Remus would probably have more

reparation to do before Harry forgave him.

Hermione almost wished she had the same fortitude. But her feelings for Remus grew ever stronger, and she'd ~~known~~ he was a werewolf, with wolfish tendencies beyond the full moon night. He'd bitten her, for Merlin's sake! She couldn't exactly overlook that. He'd bitten her, and she'd absolutely loved it. He awoke a side of her she'd never known existed... or maybe he'd *created* that side.

While Remus was putting dinner together that night, Hermione escaped to the Black library. Not only was it a place to relax and calm her frazzled nerves, she also planned on doing a little research. It would behoove them both to find out exactly what this mating thing consisted of, because Hermione suspected there was more to it than simply 'being engaged,' as Remus had suggested.

By the time Remus called her for dinner, she hadn't learned much. It seemed that, as part of the evolution of werewolves, mates were no longer the fixed concept they once were. It was more of a choice, and mates could be 'divorced,' so to speak; whereas, in older times, mates were a rigid ideal, and after the claiming they were inseparable for life. A mate could not reject the other and often died soon after the other did. It was basically what Remus had already told her.

She did find one thing interesting. In a book on ancient mating habits of werewolves, she read that there was a bond, almost like marriage, performed between two mates. It was magical in nature and essentially a confirmation of the claiming. It was no longer performed because it had become unnecessary, but werewolves had tended to be volatile and irrational, especially in regards to their mate, without this bond. There was a reference to another book that allegedly contained more information, but Hermione hadn't seen it in the expansive Black library. She did make a note of it, however.

Dinner was... interesting. Remus tried so hard to cook for her and always seemed a little disappointed when his results were not as he'd hoped. Tonight was no exception. He was upset when she didn't exclaim over the meal, so she tried to remedy the situation. He seemed slightly moody today, which was why she'd been... not avoiding him, but *giving him space*.

"Remus, this is really good. You know, I appreciate you cooking for us. Ron couldn't cook worth a damn, though he didn't need to; Molly always cooked for the entire house." She smiled brightly at him, but he didn't return it. Biting her lip, she returned to the meal.

A moment later, she tried again. "What did you put on the potatoes? They're delicious."

Remus snorted. "Nothing."

"Oh, no? Well, I like them. So, did you want to do anything tonight?"

"Like what?" he countered.

She considered that for a moment. "Well, maybe we could play chess, or I could read to you." Hermione loved their sedate evenings, even if she did miss watching television at times.

He shrugged. "Actually, I think I'll call it a night pretty early. I'm not feeling too well."

She immediately took his hand. He looked as though he wanted to jerk it away, and Hermione was shocked. He'd gone from being unable to keep his hands off her to not wanting her touch at all. Blinking away premature tears, she asked, "Do you want a potion to help? I have them for headaches and stomach-aches, and anything else I might be able to brew for you."

Remus looked away. "I'm perfectly capable of brewing my own potions, Hermione."

"I know that! I only thought it might be nice for someone to look after you, for once. I didn't mean any offense. I know you're a talented wizard." Hermione couldn't help but feel that no matter what she said, her words would be misconstrued. The sweet, compassionate man who had hugged her so sweetly when she'd cried seemed a mere memory. Now it was either angry, controlling Remus, or sulky, withdrawn Remus. But she still... still cared for him. Still wanted him.

He nodded in response, not saying anything more. Hermione got up to make some tea, and Remus left the kitchen. She leaned heavily on the counter, mentally reciting her favourite charms in order to keep the tears at bay. *Who is this man?*

Like she'd done every other night for the past five, Hermione poured Remus' Wolfsbane into a goblet and put it on a tray with the tea. He'd wanted to do it at first, but she wanted to feel involved in the process, and he'd approved of her carefully measured portions. She knew it took a lot for him to trust her with this, and she vowed to make him proud. She felt confident in her abilities to help, but making him feel confident was just as important.

She brought the tea service into the sitting room and saw Remus sitting at the large desk in the corner. He was reading something, but put it away and came to sit in an armchair. Hermione thought she heard him growl at the sight of the Wolfsbane, and she wished there was a way to make it taste better for him. He took it and downed it in one burning gulp, immediately drinking some tea to wash down the taste.

Hermione had sat in the opposite armchair. She crossed and uncrossed her legs, trying to get comfortable, but he was watching her. She tried to pretend she couldn't feel his scrutiny and poured herself some tea to distract herself.

Eventually, she had to meet his gaze, and she couldn't hide her sadness. He'd hurt her with his short remarks and distance, and she wanted the old Remus back. His eyes mirrored her sadness.

Deciding this was too important to not fight for, Hermione stood and crossed the distance between them. She paused at his knees before sinking to the ground in front of him.

It wasn't about being submissive this time. It wasn't about letting him know that he was in charge, that he was the Alpha, the dominant, and that she ~~was~~ *was*. No, this was just a woman trying to show a man that he could trust her, that she would care for him, no matter what. It was simply a show of unconditional affection.

And Remus saw that. He sighed heavily before stroking her hair lovingly. His fingers became tangled almost immediately in the wild mane, but he gently withdrew them to caress it again. Hermione laid her head against his knees, hugging his calves against her body. She kissed each trouser-covered kneecap softly before looking up to meet his eyes.

They were a light gold, a pretty shade that reminded her of sunflowers. He had the most extraordinary eyes, so expressive when he allowed them to be. She'd missed this open lightness over the past day; it felt like so longer because of the distance he'd put between them.

"Remus, you're so beautiful," Hermione murmured, laughing softly at her silly thoughts. She rubbed her cheek against his leg, enjoying the heat of his body and their closeness. He didn't push her away, and she knew he wasn't just tolerating her presence.

"Love," he whispered to her, fingers touching her cheek lightly. "I'm so sorry. I didn't want this to happen." She looked up, not certain what he meant by that, but he didn't elaborate and looked away when she tried to catch his eyes.

She ran her hands over his legs, up his stomach and down his arms. She liked feeling him, how hard he was, how solid, how ~~real~~ *real*. There was power there, but softness as well.

"Come to bed?" she asked gently. She hadn't planned on retiring so early, but she didn't want to sit alone in the sitting room. She sensed that he needed her, and she wouldn't abandon him, despite his shift in attitude toward her.

He nodded and helped her to her feet. Together, they ascended the stairs and undressed silently. He held back the cover for her, and she drew herself close to him. He wordlessly took her into his embrace, holding her tightly against his chest. He whispered the spell to turn off the lamp, and they were ensconced in darkness.

"Goodnight, Remus," Hermione whispered, wishing she could say everything without saying a word.

"Goodnight," he said gently, pressing a kiss into her hair. When Hermione fell asleep a few minutes later, she did not notice the salty dampness that trailed into her hair.

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The next day passed just as the previous had: both too quickly and not quickly enough. Remus avoided Hermione and Hermione tried not to take it too personally. She was quickly coming to the realisation that being claimed as a mate didn't necessarily mean she was involved in the thought-process of her other half. And unlike with Harry or Ron, she couldn't just demand Remus tell her the truth. Being with an older man was difficult like that, especially because she didn't want him to recognise her youth as an issue between them. She didn't see it as such, but she did wish she had more experience in dating so she could figure out how to get Remus to confide in her.

He drank his potion obediently, and they went to bed early, having only spoken a few words the entire day. At first she was going to stay up and try to read some more, but she decided the closeness of being in his arms for the night was more important. Like the night before, he pulled her close, kissing her hair softly, and they both welcomed the night together, alone.

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When Remus awoke the next day, he'd made a decision.

Hermione was obviously being affected by his mood, and he didn't like to see her so down, even more so because it was all his fault. He hated that thought and hated more the knowledge that he would disappoint her and let her down so many more times because she wised up.

Remus had been beside himself trying to think of a solution to his transformation. Obviously he had to transform; he'd accepted that long ago. But now, with Hermione in the picture, things had changed. She wasn't going to leave while he was a wolf, and he needed a way to protect her. He would do anything to keep her safe, and when the answer finally came to him, it was so simple he wanted to slap himself. He'd created this artificial and nearly unbearable distance from his mate for *days*, for no reason. He'd pulled away from her when all he wanted was to make love to her and then fuck her blind.

For such a smart man, he could be very dumb.

In order to keep Hermione safe from the wolf's mating desires, all he had to do was block her scent. Around other people during his transformation, Remus was relatively safe. He sometimes disliked peoples' scents and thus avoided them, but he had never attacked anyone, nor felt the urge to do so, under the influence of Wolfsbane.

So, if Hermione insisted on staying at Grimmauld Place during the full moon, he couldn't smell her, or he might not be able to control himself. Solution ~~Don't~~ *smell anything!*

It was a very simple potion, if one had the ingredients and knew one's way around a lab. Which Remus did, on both counts. While Hermione was at work on the last day before his transformation, he whipped together a simple Olfactory Obstructing potion. For about thirty hours, he would be unable to smell anything. Perhaps not the ideal solution, especially as Hermione had promised to cook tonight... and she was an *amazing* cook...and he wouldn't be able to enjoy it nearly as much as he'd been hoping to. But it was better than the alternative... Remus shuddered at the thought. It was horrible, too horrible to contemplate. Not only might he force Hermione, he would force her as a werewolf. Remus burned in shame as he thought of how disgusting his primal form was. *It would be rape...* It was unconscionable.

But he'd found a way around that! Hermione could remain nearby, out of danger, and everything would be fine. He nearly shook with relief.

Of course, there was the matter of exactly how angry she was over his treatment of her for the last few days, not to mention that night Harry had come over... But Remus had steeled himself to the idea that she might never forgive him for his actions that night. He wished he could claim it was beyond his control, but he'd known what he was doing the entire time, from snapping at Harry, to deliberately manipulating her claim mark to ensure her docility, to tonguing her... well. Suffice it to say, Remus had been in control of himself that night. But she hadn't left him, and the other night, she'd sat by his legs and tried to comfort him. He'd managed to hold back his emotions at her gentleness and sweetness, but when he'd held her that night, her arms so welcoming and accepting, he'd been unable to refrain. He'd cried into that ridiculous mass of curls, thanking Merlin that such an undeserving man had been rewarded with such a compassionate woman. It was unthinkable, but for whatever reason, the gods had given him a boon, and he would do anything to keep it. To deserve it.

With this thought in mind, Remus downed the potion to dull his most heightened sense, and almost immediately, the house became foreign to him as he became unable to distinguish room from room on smell alone. He couldn't smell that nearly overpowering aroma of *Hermione* that he'd grown addicted to. He couldn't smell the moon's orbit, ever closer, or the way his skin smelled a little bitterer when his transformation approached. The only thing for which he was grateful was the distinct lack of *Ron* that permeated Grimmauld Place, both from Hermione's luggage and belongings and from the times he'd stayed here over the years. It was a relief to be free of that aggravating and underlying stench which served only to subtly annoy him throughout the day.

It was an odd sensation, especially for Remus, who relied so heavily on his sense of smell, and he caught himself breathing through his mouth just to get a hint of flavour in the air. It must have looked fairly silly, and he had to train himself not to do it so Hermione wouldn't notice when she came home.

It had been nearly impossible to keep himself away from Hermione these past days. He'd wanted nothing more than to ravish her without discretion, and he'd scented her enough to know she wouldn't be averse to the idea. But he'd held himself in check for two reasons: firstly, he kept up a distance in case she decided to leave him over his unreasonable behaviour the other night, or for the unreasonable behaviour he was sure to enact on the night of the full moon; secondly, he wasn't entirely in control of himself around her lately. It was the same as it had been the first week after he'd claimed her; he felt drawn to her with a strength heretofore buried, and he was afraid of pushing her away with his roughness. He was not used to being so rough, and he felt as though he'd led her on in a way. He'd made her believe he was a gentle and soft man (and he himself had firmly believed this his entire life), only to change and become nearly the opposite, rough and hard. He didn't want to lose her, but he didn't understand it when the compulsion came over him to pin her against a wall and rut against her, or pull out of her as he was coming to shoot onto her belly and chest and then rub it into her skin. It was animalistic and dirty, and he was sure no woman would want that part of him.

He'd pulled away from her because it was easier to control himself when he wasn't constantly touching her and smelling her, because Merlin, she smelled ~~an~~ *unbelievable*. Like wildflowers and fallen leaves after rain, earthy and pure. He was barely able to keep his instincts in check, but he wanted her to stay with him, so he pushed them deep into himself, at least until he understood them better.

If he didn't know better, he'd think this draw to her was akin to the way werewolves *used* to feel, before they'd evolved away from traditional mating habits. But Remus did know better; there had been no cases of such matings in hundreds of years.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 of 23

After leaving Ron, Hermione escapes to Grimmauld Place where Remus and Tonks reside. She feels a pull toward Remus, who is experiencing a similar draw. Can they find happiness despite all the forces trying to keep them apart?

When Remus felt the tickle of the wards allowing Hermione through, he was grateful for the few moments he'd have to school his features to impassivity. The truth was he was more excited to see her every day than he'd ever been over Christmas as a kid and summer as a teenager. Put together.

Multiplied by a hundred.

But he tried to act causal, launching himself into an armchair and picking up a discarded Muggle classic that must have been Hermione's. He'd never read *Frankenstein*? It sounded familiar... He opened to a random page and tried to look enthralled, or at least suitably distracted. He wasn't sure why he felt the need to put on a front just now; he knew Hermione couldn't suspect the potion he'd just taken to quell his sense of smell. If she knew of it, that meant she would want to know *why*, and he'd be forced to tell her he didn't trust himself not to... *rape* her. Remus closed his eyes against the word, revulsion rising in his throat.

But when Hermione walked into the sitting room, all thoughts, self-deprecating and otherwise, were wiped from his head as though they were chalk and she, the eraser.

"Evening, Remus." Hermione smiled winningly, throwing her briefcase onto the loveseat. That was unlike her; she usually put it on the desk and went about unpacking it right away.

"How are you, love?" he asked composedly. Inside, his mind was racing. *She's so beautiful, so lovely, so amazing... How could you even think of spoiling her? She'll never stay, never stay. She doesn't smell right, not at all, I don't like it, I should be able to smell her, maybe I need to get closer, yes, closer, that will help...*

Remus was on his feet, moving toward her before he'd given his brain the signal to rise. He pushed her hair back over her shoulder; it was always in her way, and he wondered why she didn't just wear it up... He'd love to see her slender throat and that decisive claim mark...

"I'm fine, a little tired. I haven't been sleeping well," she admitted. He knew. He'd tried to hold her while she tossed, but she was stronger than she appeared.

"Why not let me take care of dinner tonight, then?" He punctuated his offer with a light kiss to her lips and realised immediately how long it had been since he'd done even that. Days, though it felt like weeks. He was such a fool, such an arse to push her away when he needed her so badly.

Hermione looked sceptical, and he grinned. *He knew* she'd been faking when she said she liked his cooking!

"I can make sandwiches, if that's all right with you. And maybe some soup?" He nuzzled her neck with his nose. He wished he could smell her. It had comforted him more than he had realised. Now, it was as though he was cheating on his mate because he couldn't scent her familiar smell. It was almost as though she was a stranger, and that thought disturbed him. But if he focused his attentions on his other senses... Sight: her soft smile, her limpid brown eyes, her soft and lightly bitten lower lip. Sound: the softest of sighs escaping her lips when he licked her collarbone. Taste: the deliciousness of said collarbone, sweet and familiar. *Touch*: the misleading frailty of her arms, silken and smooth, tempting. Oh, yes, there were many ways to experience Hermione Granger, and he would do just fine without his sense of smell.

He would rid himself of it forever if it meant she was safe from the monster in him. And after tonight, he would know if such drastic measures were necessary.

"Sandwiches sound..." Hermione sighed. "Just fine. Perfect." She looped her arms around his neck, and he could scarcely believe she was so willing to forgive him for the detestable way he'd been avoiding her. It had hurt him as well, and he *knew* his reasons. He couldn't imagine how she had felt *without* knowing them.

It didn't take long for Remus to decide the sandwiches could damn well wait.

He led her to the sofa, pulling her onto his lap and settling one of her legs on either side of his.

"Remus, gods, I've missed you, missed this," Hermione whispered against his lips. He ran his hands over her body, settling on her hips. He dragged her body lightly over his groin, letting her feel exactly how much he'd missed her in return.

"I know, and I'm sorry. I know I seem to say that a lot, but I mean it. I didn't want to hurt you. I want you to always be safe with me," he told her softly, unbuttoning her blouse and kissing each bared inch as he freed it.

"You've never hurt me. You've scared me, maybe, but not hurt me. I... I really care about you, and I need you to trust me. Whatever you're afraid of, we can tackle together. We're a team now, and I want us to work together. Please, Remus, don't push me away. I hated that."

He paused in his ministrations to look at her, really look at her. She was entirely in earnest. She really did want to be his partner, his mate. Her eyes were slightly wide, and they were shining so brightly, he'd be even more of a fool than he already was not to believe her words; not when she obviously believed them.

He pushed her shirt off her shoulders, fingers running along the delicate bones of her arms and wrists before he took her hands in his and brought them to his lips.

"I hated it, too. From now on, we work together. I promise," he vowed, trying not to wince as he thought of the potion he'd taken not long ago...another secret he had to keep from her.

Hermione smiled gratefully and ran her hands over his chest, unbuttoning his shirt and touching his bared skin. He always felt so heated when her fingers touched him, and now was no exception. Her fingers trailed up his arm, across his shoulder and neck to his jaw, where they moved to his lips. Hermione looked at him intently as she traced the outline of his mouth, and Remus held back from nipping at her explorative digits.

When she gently pressed one finger inside his lips, he no longer felt the need to hold back. Biting her finger and licking it while it was trapped within his mouth, he yanked her skirt up harshly so that it rested around her hips. Hermione moaned, pulling her finger away and replacing it with her tongue, and he nipped it instead. Her kisses were always so sweet to begin with, but Remus knew exactly how to draw out the passion from within her.

One hand caressing between her thighs and the other holding the back of her neck so she couldn't break the intense kiss, Remus felt the wolf step into the fore. He moved her panties to the side so he could slide two fingers into her, eyes closing at the wetness he felt already. She was always so ready for him, and it drove him mad.

Unbuttoning his pants but not removing them, Remus freed his desperate erection. Without fail, she made him hard in mere moments, dripping pre-come and ready to plunge within her.

Hermione had the same idea, because she rose up and took his member in her hand. She slid slowly on him, balancing herself with hands on his shoulders with a look of concentrated bliss on her features.

Remus moaned at the beautiful tightness of his mate, and she mirrored his noises with the sexiest whimper that made his cock pulse in response. She began to slowly move her hips, leaning in to kiss him gently. Remus permitted the slow lovemaking until he could take no more, and then he dominated the kiss, warning her that he was about to change things.

He gripped her hips tightly and pulled her down firmly on his cock. She threw her head back and Remus grinned, loving to see her lose control.

He held her in place and thrust up into her, beginning with slow and deep plunges but eventually moving faster, bouncing her hard against his lap. She made delicious broken moaning noises, and Remus brought her head back in for another torturous kiss. Moving from her lips to her neck, Remus laved the claim mark, biting it gently and relishing the responding clench of her tight walls.

"Hermione... you're beautiful," he told her, feeling that, for some reason, she just needed to know that right now. She smiled and thanked him sweetly before swearing ferociously when he slammed her onto him particularly hard.

"Tell me," he whispered against her lips.

She knew what he meant and said in a low voice, "I'm yours, Remus. I belong to you. Yours!" The last word was almost a shriek as her orgasm flooded her and she clamped down on his cock so hard he could barely move, but it didn't matter because a moment later he was coming, too, straining into her and calling her name like a prayer.

Hermione slumped against him bonelessly, and Remus chuckled. He never felt as complete as he did after he'd come inside his mate. He only regretted that he couldn't smell her. Her scent after orgasm was like ambrosia to his heightened sense, and it made him crazy for her. *Crazier.*

But the mood was inevitably broken when he noticed the time. The moon would be rising within the hour, and Remus wanted to be in his cell with more than enough time to spare. He also had to take the final dose of Wolfsbane; the transformation was always easier with the final draught fresh in his veins.

"Come on, love. I have to get downstairs, and you're to go up to our room and stay there until morning."

Hermione looked ready to fight, such a rapid change from the look of utter peace the moment before.

"Remus, can't I stay with you during the change? Won't you feel better knowing I'm right there?" Her voice was soft, almost cajoling, and he knew she believed he'd give in to her. But he'd made his decision and wanted her nowhere near him as he transformed.

"It doesn't matter how I feel. I need to know you're safe. You know it would destroy me if anything were to happen to you, even if I were to only scare you."

Hermione kissed him, kneeling up so he slipped from her wet embrace. She readjusted her panties and pulled her skirt a little over the thighs, but Remus wouldn't remove his hands from cupping her arse, so she couldn't fix her skirt properly. She gently placed his spent cock back into his trousers and lovingly zipped them.

"I want to at least come down with you, just for a moment to say good night. That's it...then I'll leave."

Remus searched her eyes. "Promise?"

She nodded solemnly. "I promise. I know this is important to you."

"Okay, then. Let's head down."

He let her get up, and she half-criinged, half-shivered at the feeling of slickness between her thighs. Something primal in her felt marked, and she knew she would go to sleep without showering to keep the feeling. At another time in her life, she might have balked at the thought, but she felt good to be declared *his*, and if she couldn't have him by her side, she would have him inside her instead.

She led the way, grabbing the bag they'd prepared for the next morning. It had lots of water, fresh clothing, bandages, salves and disinfectants, Remus' wand, and a special Galleon to alert her if he needed her. It also had a small amount of food, but Remus said he rarely ate right after. The bag was new; it made her feel like she was taking care of him. She would leave it beyond the bars but within his human reach. He wanted her to lock him in the cell, and she would hate doing it, but she would do as he asked *for now*.

Once settled in the small cell, Hermione sat beside him on the bench. Her mind flooded with memories of when she'd first appealed to his baser nature, licking his wound and baring her throat.

Remus must have seen her blush, because he chuckled and took her into his arms. He kissed her softly, but pulled away before she could take it further.

"It's getting close, love. Time for you to head up." He nodded in the direction of the stairs, and she followed his gaze as though the doorway led to hell itself.

"Okay. Well, be safe, and... and I'll be thinking about you." She hugged him hard, wishing for the first time that things were different. She didn't mind the werewolf half of her lover... in fact, she often enjoyed it. But she knew it hurt him, made him feel ashamed, and she wished she could take that away.

"Sweet dreams, Hermione. And thank you." He kissed her again, hard this time, his passion spilling forth to show her he was not unaffected.

She turned to leave.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 of 23

After leaving Ron, Hermione escapes to Grimmauld Place where Remus and Tonks reside. She feels a pull toward Remus, who is experiencing a similar draw. Can they find happiness despite all the forces trying to keep them apart?

Remus watched his witch lock him in, leaving the key in the bag she'd packed for him. Her kindness knew no bounds when it came to him, and he was forced, yet again, to question what he had done to deserve such an amazing, thoughtful, sweet...

He heaved a sigh. The truth was *hedidn't* deserve her. But he wasn't going to give her up now that he had her.

Remus hated his muted sense of smell. This close to the full moon, he should have been practically attacking her, if the days leading up to it were any indication. It was pretty evident that his libido was directly tied to the phases of the moon. But without being able to smell the scent of his mate, the wolf in him was as tame as it had been before he'd claimed her. He found he missed the feral side of himself. He always felt so free, so in control when he was acting on instinct, which was distinctly oppositional to everything he'd thought he'd known about himself. He'd always restrained the beast, denigrated and abhorred it. But now he came to realise he might have been denying the inevitable.

He could also predict his transformation using his sense of smell, and it was unnerving to not know when it would hit him. Unlike last moon, this time Remus had faithfully taken the Wolfsbane and was looking forward to a change without raw animalism.

The shift came over him like a fire, lighting his nerves and flooding his body from the inside out. Piercing pain speared him, bones cracking, flesh shifting, and hair sprouting. The elongation of his jaw blinded him momentarily as his eyesight refocused.

Panting on the floor like the animal he was, Remus tried to regain his senses. He automatically took short breaths through his nose to make sense of his surroundings, but halted when he remembered what he'd done. It was *horrible*. It was like he couldn't figure out where he was, what was happening. He felt vulnerable. Remus howled, long and low, wishing his mate was here to comfort him. Without even an ounce of her scent, the wolf felt as though she'd left him forever.

Remembering why he'd taken the Olfactory Obstruction potion in the first place did nothing to alleviate his despair. He was glad she was safe, safe from *him*, but he needed her. Needed to know she was okay, alive, *his*. Like this, he wouldn't be able to smell if she had another's scent on her. The thought made him growl low in his throat. He wanted to lunge at the bars of the cell, his wolf form even going so far as to claw at them mercilessly, but he knew he couldn't escape.

This time his howl was plaintive and ended with a whimper as he curled into the blankets in the corner of his cage.

*

A chill ran through Hermione at the second howl. She'd never known Remus to make noises like that while transformed. As far as she knew, he usually slept through most of it. It was breaking her heart, and she didn't know how long she could lay in bed chasing sleep and listening to him.

She really didn't know why he was so worried about her presence. He kept his mind with the Wolfsbane. And she was his *mate*! She was supposed to be there for him in his times of need. Wouldn't a werewolf's mate be the perfect companion during the full moon? Wasn't that part of her purpose in the first place?

Convinced she was right, Hermione slipped a pair of snug shorts over her underwear, grabbed a tank top from her dresser and made her way downstairs.

Once in the cellar, she stood outside the last door, slightly nervous. Although she wholly believed Remus had been overreacting, she didn't want to anger him, in wolf or human form. And he'd remember that she'd been there. He might yell at her, or worse, ignore her.

She bit her lip, worrying it. The wolf on the other side of the door had stilled, the restless pacing ceasing. She sighed. Even if he hadn't been on the potion, he would be able to smell her scent as his mate, and he wouldn't hurt her. She felt certain of that fact. The Wolfsbane was additional insurance against a danger she didn't believe existed.

She opened the door slowly and stepped into the dark room. She whispered a small *lumos*, just enough to set a soft glow around the room. She couldn't see the wolf, but she did see two green glows. His eyes. She placed her lit wand on the chair that sat outside the cell and approached it. He was watching her movements intently, not a hair bristling.

Upon reaching the cage, she dropped to her knees to know submission. Even if the wolf was Remus, he still had many basal instincts, and she would be wise to remember that. She huddled close to the ground, her neck bared and cheek against the cold stone, legs bent beneath her.

The wolf made a huffing noise and walked up to her on his side of the cage. He sniffed her for a long time before making a whining noise that made her heart clench. She didn't know what it meant, but she didn't move.

Finally, he gave a quiet bark, backing up and kicking his back legs against the floor. He stopped, looked at her, and barked again. She remained still, wishing she had a wolf dictionary or something.

Then the wolf came back up to the cell bars and lied down on its stomach, paws coming through the bars, close to her hands. He rested his head on his arms, his snout poking through the bars. He was looking at her so *sadly*; it gave a new meaning to 'puppy dog eyes.' He whimpered again, and she braved raising her head.

"Remus?" she whispered. He woofed quietly, tail wagging. She grinned widely, and so, it seemed, did he.

She reached out slowly and let him sniff her hand. He licked it a few times and she moved to pet his head. His fur was soft and rough at the same time, and she found she quite liked the feel of it. He held very still, allowing her to stroke him without moving; only his eyes followed her and his tail moved back and forth.

"I'm sorry I broke my promise. I heard you howl, and I knew you needed me," she said quietly, trying to find Remus within those doleful brown eyes. His tail slowed a bit, but nothing else happened, and she wasn't sure why she had expected a response.

She turned onto her side, her knees beginning to bother her because of the hard floor. She lay down facing the cage, with her hand always rubbing Remus' fur. He really was beautiful, a dark gold colour all over, and very, very large.

She leaned over to place a kiss on his snout, and he returned it by giving her a long lick up the side of her face. She laughed and wiped her cheek before curling up again. She would sleep here, now that she was already with him. She really wanted to be in the cage with him, but she didn't think he would like that very much. Maybe next moon.

*

Remus awoke with the customary raging headache. He tried to stretch gently, his body protesting against the move, popping and cracking. He was immediately flooded with the scent of his mate, and he almost cried in relief.

Though the potion wasn't supposed to have worn off until sometime in the early hours of the next morning, he suspected it had been metabolised faster because of his lycanthropy. He should have thought of that...what might have happened if it had worn off while he was still a wolf?

He had wanted to be angry with her. When he'd heard her come down the stairs, he'd been prepared to either ignore her entirely or growl at her angrily. But seeing her so sweet and submissive in her little pink shorts and white top made him forget his ire completely in favour of playing the puppy. The wolf in him had wanted to establish dominance, and if she'd been within the cage instead of outside it, he suspected he would not have been able to keep his desires at bay. He'd wanted to pin her down, hold her throat in his jaws and, yes, mate with her.

Even with the Wolfsbane, he was a dangerous creature.

But instead, he'd goofed around and tried to play with her as if he was a six-week-old Labrador instead of a werewolf three times her size.

It had been disconcerting to not be able to smell his mate, even though he saw her right in front of him. But it was worth it to keep her safe, and having her sleep beside him made for the most peaceful full moon he'd ever known. It was a complete one-eighty from the last moon, through which he'd suffered and struggled.

Looking at her now through the bars, Remus simultaneously cursed and thanked the gods. She was sleeping, snoring lightly, which was most likely due to her position as she did not normally make a peep... except those delicious little moaning noises, sometimes...

Remus felt blood pool in his cock. He wasn't usually so damn horny the morning after a full moon, but now that he could smell her sweet, earthy smell, he wanted her.

He watched her breasts rise and fall, her nipples peaked in the chilly, slightly damp cellar air. She was on her back, knees bent but twisted to rest on the floor beside her, body turned somewhat awkwardly. Remus could see the bottom of her arse cheeks as her shorts had ridden up, and her midriff was bared as well. All that exposed skin made his mouth water, but what made his thoughts turn the corner from appreciation to lust was the way her head was turned away from him, her neck bared, pale and long, and his claim mark standing in vivid relief. He thought selfishly that he hoped it never fully healed.

He reached an arm through the bar to caress her ankle and foot, the only part he could reach. He could, of course, get the key from the bag she'd left him, let himself out, and join her. But a part of him wanted her to come into the cell with him, like she had last time. He wanted her to clean him and tend to him like before. He wanted to know his mate still wanted him, that she wanted to take care of him. If she came into the cage, she came into his world, instead of bringing him into hers. It was an acceptance that he'd never gotten from anyone else, and he realised that it was that journey into his true life that had changed his feelings for her, even before he'd claimed her.

Remus stood up, trying not to groan as his body's discomfort made itself known. It was true that he could put a bed or at least a pallet of some sort in the cell, but half of him was afraid to destroy it, and the other half... the other half believed he was paying penance, the pain his just desserts.

After donning only his trousers, he lay down on the long bench, only slightly more comfortable than the stone floor. He was on his back, watching his mate sleep soundly, when she stirred. Her arms stretched over her head, her back arching to an impossible degree as she worked out the soreness in her body. Her breasts pointed heavenward, her stomach flat and tight from the position that was entirely too sexual for Remus to be uninterested.

She turned onto her side, her hair a wild halo, her face pale but smiling in the dim light. Her soft brown eyes opened, focusing unerringly on him. He let her look over him, quickly assessing him for damage. It was true that the last time she'd seen him he'd been a bloody wreck, quite literally. This time, with the help of the Wolfsbane, he had only minor scrapes and bruises, most of which would clear up in record time.

She must have approved of what she saw, because she smiled softly, and Remus' heart clenched at that simplest of expressions.

"Hey," she whispered, smiling a little at the absurdity of sleeping on the floor, three stories below her perfectly capable bed.

He nodded lightly at her, not trusting his voice after his howls the night before. His body usually took some time to readjust after a transformation. His eyes, his hearing, his sense of smell and taste and even touch all remained highly sensitised for some time afterward.

Hermione crawled a few paces over to the bag with the key. She unlocked the cell door and put the bag in, crawling in after it.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 of 23

After leaving Ron, Hermione escapes to Grimmauld Place where Remus and Tonks reside. She feels a pull toward Remus, who is experiencing a similar draw. Can they find happiness despite all the forces trying to keep them apart?

Even though it wasn't like the last full moon when he'd been unstable and volatile, Remus' wolf made its approval of Hermione's submission known in a rush of blood to his cock. He remained perfectly still, feeling his instincts rise to the fore and, for once in his life, actually permitted them, *wanted* them to take over.

Hermione crawled with grace, though the stones must have hurt her knees. She knelt in front of the bench, just as she had last time. Something inside Remus told him to sit up, that reclining in front of a pack member, even his mate, was not proper. He needed to be higher than her, elevated, ready.

She continued to look down, and he let a pleased growl pass his lips. He might have been shocked at the sheer animalism of his actions, but he'd pushed the rationality aside. *She accepts me. She knows, and she still wants melt* was heady and arousing. After spending his entire life hiding and being ashamed of the wolf within, he'd found someone who wanted him, equal parts wolf and man, not despite his affliction. Not *because* of it, but *with* it.

He watched Hermione squirm a little at the sound of his growl, and a moment later, her undeniable scent of arousal reached his searching nostrils. It was nearly too much, but Remus reined in his lust to continue the game.

He placed a finger beneath her chin and tilted her head up to him. Meeting her eyes, he nodded at her. She immediately opened the bag she'd brought and pulled out a washcloth, wetting it with water from a bottle. Hermione had excellent instincts, and she seemed to know what he meant with him having to actually say anything.

Placing the washcloth aside, Hermione slowly reached toward him, placing her hands on the button of his trousers. She looked at him questioningly, and he wondered how wise it was to bare his arousal at this point. He nodded his assent, and she quickly but gently unbuttoned his trousers. He lifted his hips slightly and she removed them the rest of the way. He watched her face carefully, noticing that she bit her lip upon seeing how turned on he was, but didn't look too long at any one place.

Hermione tied her hair back with an elastic that had been around her wrist, and Remus quite appreciated the uninterrupted view of her slender neck. He felt his arousal surge, and he wanted to take her right then. But he called up his self-control and remained perfectly still. Wetting the washcloth, Hermione set to work, cleaning dirt and blood from various wounds on his body. She washed his cock as well, panting lightly through her ministrations, and Remus was hard-pressed to ignore her scent permeating the air. She wanted him.

She moved the cloth to his thigh, but kept her eyes on his straining member. Without watching her actions, she dragged the cloth firmly over a lightly scabbed cut on his inner thigh. He growled at the pain of having the wound reopened, and Hermione gasped, falling motionless, waiting. Beads of crimson welled at the wound, and Remus waited to see what she would do. The cloth was still in her hand, but she was looking at the blood.

She poured more water onto the cloth and gently cleaned the blood away. She held the cloth firmly to his flesh to staunch the flow, and after a moment, pulled it away. The wound was still dirty, but it wasn't bleeding anymore. Placing her hands on both of his thighs, Hermione came closer between his spread legs and flattened her tongue against the wound. The wolf roared, but somewhere inside him Remus cringed, though his cock jerked appreciatively. She licked the wound again and again, each time bringing a slight sting to Remus' awareness, but it was nothing compared to her submissive pack behaviour.

After a while, her long licks turned to softer, shorter ones, and then to soft, open-mouthed kisses, where she pressed her lips to his torn skin and let her tongue dart out against it. She moved her kisses up his thigh to the juncture of his hip and leg, and then to the hair surrounding his turgid length. She pressed her face into the musky hair there, inhaling deeply and nuzzling his sensitive skin. Remus groaned, something primal tearing at him. She continued her trail of kisses to his cock, which was deep red with neglect. Once she'd kissed up to the flushed crown, she engulfed him completely. Remus gasped as his throbbing hardness met the back of her throat, and he barely restrained himself from holding her head steady and fucking her mouth.

Hermione only got three bobs on his cock before he pushed her away, hard. She fell sideways onto the cold stone ground, and he sank to his knees behind her. He pulled her into position so her arse was high in the air and pushed her shoulders down so her spine was curved deliciously. She moaned a long, aroused moan that the wolf met with a growl.

He yanked her shorts down around her thighs, trapping them together and restricting her movement. His knees were outside hers, and he knew this position would make her unbelievably tight, even more so than usual. Her pussy was slick and flushed with blood, but Remus ran a finger down her slit just to be sure she was wet enough for him. Finding his finger fairly soaked, he lined his cock up to her desperate sheath.

He plunged in with one hard stroke, gripping her hips single-mindedly. He gave her absolutely no time to adjust and immediately thrust into her again. Her pussy was tighter than should be possible, her cries the sweetest music. His cock felt desperate for release, but he knew to hold back, pounding into her pliant body with ferocious movements.

Hermione's body inched forward from the vigorous thrusting, so every so often he had to haul her back up into position, keeping one hand between her shoulder blades to make sure she stayed down. He wasn't entirely sure why he needed that, but neither was in the position to question his motives.

He felt her begin to flutter and tighten around him, but he was nowhere near finished with her. He fucked her straight through her orgasm, never giving her a moment's respite. Her screams turned into panting, and she murmured his name over and over. Her body was trying to sink down, but he was relentless, and before long, she was panting was renewed desire rather than exhaustion.

Remus put his middle finger into his mouth, slicking it thoroughly. He withdrew from her pussy, plunging back in at the same time as his finger sank into her arsehole. Hermione wailed at the intrusion, gasping and shaking.

"Do you like it?" he demanded of her in a rough voice.

"Yes, yes," she chanted back, moving her hips to meet his thrusts. He fucked her with his cock and his finger, revelling in the way she tightened around him every time.

His other hand was bruising her hip with his grip. He felt his orgasm approaching and began thrusting with renewed force. They would both be bruised and sore from this mating, but Remus didn't care.

She began to tighten around him again, and with two more rapid-fire jerks, she was crying through another orgasm. Her noises and the grip her body had on his cock brought his own completion, and he roared with satisfaction at owning and filling his mate.

Remus held their bodies still for a few moments. Hermione was breathing deeply, and he could see her ribcage expanding even through her shirt. The guilt was on him almost instantly, but he buried it. He wanted Hermione with him, but the wolf was a part of him. He couldn't stifle it anymore, and if she accepted him, he had no right to question her choice.

He gingerly pulled away from her body, feeling a savage joy at seeing his come slide out and down the side of her thigh. He pulled her shorts back up, knowing he was trapping his come against her body and liking it that way. He could have cleaned her up, but then she wouldn't smell like him all day, reminding him of her complete surrender to him.

He helped her up, pulling her body against his. He sat cross-legged on the floor and settled her bottom on his thighs with her legs around his waist so she faced him. Her face was sweaty and flushed, and her hair had completely rebelled against the messy knot she'd wrestled it into. She smiled breathlessly at him, and he was flooded, again, by the pure, glowing happiness that shone in her face. She wasn't just putting up with his animal side as Tonks had; she *wanted* it, loved it, and certainly got off on it. It was more than he'd ever expected and quite more than he deserved. But it was his, and he planned on guarding it jealously.

She tilted her face up to him, her eyes smiling. There were small scratches on her cheekbone, and he frowned before realised they were from the rough floor her face had been pressed against.

He touched them tenderly with a fingertip, but she said nothing, kissing his lips softly and tracing them with a gentle and searching tongue. It wasn't a ravenous kiss, but it was filled with... what? More than acceptance, less than love.

How much less? How much less could he bear, knowing he'd essentially forced her into a relationship with him? He decided less was more than enough because it was more than nothing.

He returned her soft kiss, trying to show her how much *more* than *less* he felt for her. Maybe he couldn't say it, but that wouldn't stop him from showing her.

Eventually, the two stood. Or rather, Remus stood with Hermione still locked around his waist. Leaving the bag for now, he carried her up the stairs to their bedroom and from there, their en suite bathroom.

He set Hermione on her feet and started the tub to fill. He wanted to shower first, getting rid of the worst of the grime before he soaked. He stripped unabashedly, and Hermione blushed at the sight. Despite all they'd shared, all he'd put her through, the sight of a naked body still embarrassed her.

Once he was in the shower, he was surprised to be joined by her. He tried to look away from her slick nude form, quite certain she wouldn't be able to handle another coupling after the pounding he'd put her through earlier. His own body tried to argue, but Remus was in control, the wolf whining in a corner of his mind.

"You know," Hermione said in a suspiciously casual voice. "I found a book the other day about mating rituals over the years. In a footnote, there was a reference to another book, and I was wondering if you could see if your bookstore carries it. There's so little known about werewolf history, and I find it very interesting."

Remus found it a little difficult to focus on her words with the way her breasts were bouncing as she washed her hair.

Taking a deep breath, he said, "Do you remember what it was called or who wrote it? I can check tomorrow when I go in."

Hermione nodded. "It was *Mates: Myths and Methods*, by T.M. Lycansmythe. Do you recognise it?"

He thought it sounded familiar and tried to place it among the thousands of books he handled on a daily basis. Then it hit him, and he laughed.

"Actually, I bought that book not long ago. I'm sure it's on my desk downstairs."

"Well, isn't that fortuitous?" Hermione asked rhetorically, smiling. "I hope it has some interesting facts in it. There's so little written I might write a book myself, just to fill the

gaps."

Remus washed his mate's back softly, trying to keep his sex-ravaged brain on the topic at hand. "If anyone could do it, it would be you," he told her confidently.

His hand trailed down to her firm and perfect arse, washing it beyond what was necessary for proper hygiene. Hermione writhed a little at his ministrations, parting her legs and tossing her head back slightly. Remus hoped she didn't choose this moment to turn around, because his smile was ferocious.

With a quick move, he turned her to face the back wall of the shower so he was blocking most of the water but it still trailed down her back. He put her hands on the wall in front of her and put one hand beside hers, pressing his body against her left side, rubbing his highly interested cock against her soft cheek.

The hand that was washing her so thoroughly slipped lower between her legs, caressing her pussy gently. She felt a little swollen, and he heard her gasp when he went to slide a finger inside her.

"Sore?" he asked softly, taking his hand back to knead her behind, kissing her shoulder.

"Yeah, but it's okay," she whispered, circling her hips in a most enticing way.

"I won't hurt you," he told her firmly.

She hung her head a little, and he knew she was too sore for sex. Moving backward to rinse off fully before getting into the bath, he paused when she spoke.

"You could... you know..." she said quietly, but Remus didn't know. There were a lot of things they *could* do, but he wasn't really interested in anything that didn't give them both equal pleasure.

"Tell me," he demanded softly, moving behind her and reaching around to palm her slick breasts.

"Take me... um... where you finger was, earlier." Her voice trailed off at the end, but Remus' unholy smile was back as he realised what she was asking. It wasn't something he'd done a lot, but he'd enjoyed it when he had. If nothing else, he knew how to make it feel good for her.

"So, let me get this straight," he murmured intensely, close to her ear, hand sliding into her back crevice. "You want me to fuck your arse?"

Hermione exhaled sharply at his words. His finger circled her tight rear hole, pushing only a fingertip in before withdrawing it completely.

"Yes," she answered, her voice nearly impossible to hear.

"Good. Now tell me what you want."

"I did," she said confusedly.

"No," he said. "Tell me *exactly* what you want." His voice was a vibration against her ear, his finger continually teasing her.

Hermione panted softly, hips moving in steady circles. "I want you to fuck me up the arse, Remus."

To reward her, he sank his finger within her tightness, breaching her muscle easily with his soap and water slicked finger. Her moan was low and long, and his cock twitched in sympathy.

"You're so fucking wanton, aren't you, love?"

"Yes..." she hissed, moving to impale herself on his finger.

He slid a second finger into her, pumping very lightly and spreading his fingers to stretch her. He *Accioed* lubricant from under the counter, and it slapped satisfyingly into his hand. Removing his fingers, slicking them, and quickly replacing them, Remus stopped rutting against her arse cheek, knowing he wouldn't last if he kept it up. It might take a long, slow fuck to get her to come for her first time like this, and he would have to be in control.

A third finger joined the first two, and she whimpered a little in discomfort, but her hips didn't stop their movement.

"Okay?" he asked, getting into position behind her and moving her hair so her claim mark was revealed.

"Fine, just... go slow, okay?"

"Of course. And you'll tell me if..."

"Yes," she interrupted quickly. "Please, Remus."

"Please what, love?" This was Remus' favourite part. Well, one of many.

"Remus, fuck me, gods, fuck my arse," she whispered, rolling her hips desperately.

"Beg," he commanded.

"Please," she sighed breathlessly. He didn't move, and she continued, "Please," louder, "Please! Please, please, Remus, you fucking bastard, please, now!"

He chuckled darkly and said, "Hold yourself open."

Hermione took her hands off the wall and spread her cheeks for him. He only took a moment while lubing his cock to admire her complicity before lining up to enter her. She was incredibly tight, and he knew it would be uncomfortable for her, but she didn't make a sound.

Once his head pressed through the tight ring, he waited a moment. She was breathing heavily, and her muscles were clenching him, but her hips rocked to encourage him, and he sank in deeper. He got about halfway before stopping again, this time to grit his own teeth against what his body was demanding.

He thrust the rest of the way in, and her body fell forward against the wall, cheek pressed against the cool tile and breasts pressed flat. But she didn't move her hands from her arse, and Remus heartily approved.

"You can put your hands back," he told her as he pulled about a third of the way out. She did, after a few moments. Remus snaked a hand around to caress and flick her swollen clit, and she gasped.

"How is it?"

"It's good, better than I thought. Feel so full... I like it..."

Remus was glad of that because he wasn't far from coming, and the torturously slow strokes were seriously testing him. Her arse clenched just like her pussy did when her orgasm was coming, and he played her clit harshly, ripping her orgasm out at the perfect time.

They both cried out, coming at the same time. Remus had never felt so strangled, and Hermione kept making sweet gasping noises.

He had to pull out because her body just kept stimulating him and it was too much. He wrapped his arms around her and kissed her claim mark softly, without the intent to arouse. Her head lolled back onto his shoulder, and she smiled a little dopily.

"Have you done that before?" he asked, wondering why he hadn't earlier. She shook her head in denial, and the wolf made an unexpected reappearance, congratulating Remus for marking virgin territory. Remus rolled his eyes at his unenlightened thoughts.

Hermione turned in his arms, wrapping encircling his neck and pressing her cool cheek against his chest. The water was losing its heat and Remus was glad they'd filled the tub with only hot water.

"You're amazing," Hermione whispered, sounding sated and tired. Remus felt exactly the same.

With his lips against the teeth-shaped scar on her neck, he mouthed the three words he couldn't quite say yet.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 of 23

After leaving Ron, Hermione escapes to Grimmauld Place where Remus and Tonks reside. She feels a pull toward Remus, who is experiencing a similar draw. Can they find happiness despite all the forces trying to keep them apart?

Hermione and Remus slept half the day away. Apparently, sleeping on unforgiving stone was not conducive to a good night's sleep, so the pair took comfort in one another's arms in the sinfully soft bed.

Hermione woke first. Stretching so fiercely that her limbs began to shiver, she thought about the book she wanted to read. Even if it gave fallacious or misleading information, Hermione had been sincere when she'd mentioned writing her own book, and this other book would give her an idea of what information was out there. She had a perfectly articulate and brilliant werewolf from whom to gather research, and she expected they could fill a niche in the mating literature market.

Sighing softly, Hermione pushed the hair away from Remus' face. He didn't even stir, and she knew he must be exhausted. She wished that he would allow himself some comfort in his cage, but she knew he so vehemently rejected his werewolf self that any pain was perceived to be deserved.

Kissing him briefly on the lips, Hermione left the bed, putting on pyjama shorts, as they seemed to drive her lover mad with lust, and Remus' oxford shirt. It smelled just like him, musky and woodsy with maybe some citrus and sandalwood in there as well. It was uniquely Remus and completely erotic.

Hermione quietly left the bedroom for the sitting room. She wanted to have a look at that book now, so she got her parchment, quills, ink, and notebook ready before she went to find it on Remus' desk.

Uncovering it quickly among a number of other new books, mostly fiction but some biographies and historical texts as well, she sat on the couch and was just about to crack the spine when someone knocked on the door. Hermione hoped the tingling wards hadn't awakened Remus. She couldn't feel them since she was technically a guest, so the knock startled her.

Answering the door, she was surprised to see Harry standing there. He looked a little sad and maybe even nervous. She silently held the door open for him, and he came inside. She led him to the study because it was far from the stairs and Remus wouldn't be disturbed by the noise, and she sat him while she made some tea. Hermione wondered what had her friend looking so down.

Bringing back the tea service, she sat beside him. "How are you, Harry?" she asked, embracing him tightly because he looked like he needed it. He returned the embrace, hugging her so securely she wasn't sure she'd make it out.

"I'm doing okay. I just wanted to see you and make sure everything's all right. Where's Remus?"

She sat down on the leather loveseat and patted the seat beside her. "He's sleeping. We had a long night."

Harry blushed, making Hermione laugh. "Full moon," she explained. Though where his mind had gone was not exactly incorrect.

"Ah. Well, maybe it's good that I came today, if he's weakened."

"What do you mean? And Remus isn't weakened. In fact, after the full moon, he's more tuned in to the wolf than ever. If you've come to yell at him, you'll need to leave. He's not himself on the days before and after the full moon. Well, he's *himself*, but he's not the way we always thought he was."

"I haven't come to yell at him. Like I said, I'm just checking to make sure you're okay. Hermione, what happened last time I was here was really scary. I was terrified for you. It was like he was controlling you or something. And then I got his owl saying he was sorry, and I just don't buy it. Why has he changed?"

Hermione sighed. It was hard to explain when she didn't have all the answers. Remus would be better able to tell Harry exactly what was going on, but not today. "Harry, I'm fine. Things got a little out of control. I was scared, too, to be honest. But I trust Remus, with my life and with my heart. And I don't think he's changed, I just don't think we knew him as well as we could have. Or rather, I think he hid it really well."

Harry didn't look convinced. "So he didn't hurt you? After I left?"

She blushed a little, remembering just what he *did* do. "No, he didn't hurt me. He just alarmed me. Being his mate is hard, you know. It's unusual, strange and new. But I really don't want anything else. He's what I want."

He slowly nodded. "You love him, then?"

The two were quiet for a few long minutes as Hermione thought about her feelings. She knew, of course she knew. But would saying it aloud change anything? Would she be jinxing it? She smiled at her childish thoughts.

"I do love him, Harry."

Harry sighed, long and slow. "I thought so. Does he love you?"

Hermione could only shrug softly, looking away. "I don't know. But it doesn't matter. We have a lot of time for that, if he doesn't. If he does, lucky me. But he hasn't told me, nor I, him."

"I think he does. Remember how wild he went after Tonks punched you? He was beside himself!"

"I didn't see it, but I heard about it. Are you okay with this?"

Harry only smiled softly. "Okay with one of my best friends falling in love? How could I hold that against you? I love you, Hermione, and your happiness is so important."

Hermione hugged Harry again, though the embrace was slightly abbreviated. She didn't want to get Remus into a state when he found out Harry was here. And just at that moment, she heard her name called by the man she loved.

"In the study, Remus!" Hermione smiled at the suddenly nervous and alert Harry before standing up to open the study door.

Before Remus even reached her, he asked, "Harry's here?"

Hermione nodded, trying to warn him with her eyes that she didn't want any repeats of his last visit. Thankfully, for whatever reason, Remus seemed to be in a better position to control himself this time.

He pulled her into a hug, inhaling her scent before pushing her away almost roughly. His nose wrinkled, and he looked disapprovingly at her, but didn't say anything. She went to sit in one of the armchairs, leaving the sofa open for Remus.

"Hi, Remus," Harry said, his voice quiet but steady. He looked poised to fight, and Hermione had to be thankful of how protective he was of her.

"Harry, I'm glad you're here. You got my owl?" Remus took the seat next to the younger man.

"I did. And at first I wasn't willing to listen, but I think Hermione's explained things to me in a way I can understand. And I'm glad you two have one another. I think I'll just make it a point to stay away before and after the full moon."

Remus was looking at Hermione, who was trying to rein in the possibly overflowing amount of love she felt for Remus. She'd avoided the words so long, even inside her head, and now they just wanted to spill out.

"I think that would be for the best. But I do need you to know that I would never hurt Hermione. Even if I could, and I don't think I can, because of the mate bond. It's stronger than anything I'd anticipated, but it is not unwelcome. I'm grateful to have been... accepted."

Harry nodded thoughtfully. "You know, both Ron and Tonks were suspended from Auror duty. It's very strange how all this happened at once." Harry's tone was pensive, and Hermione wondered exactly what he *wasn't* saying.

Remus agreed, "It is rather a coincidence. Though I knew about Tonks' jealousy before, I'd never known her to be violent outside of her job. I still can't believe the things she said and did."

Hermione bit her lip lightly before softly adding, "It's the same with Ron. He had a temper but it was never directed at me. His behaviour was really unexpected. I can't explain it."

She looked to Remus who appeared to be attempting to contain his anger. Hermione hastened to add, "But at the same time, I wouldn't change what happened. I'm sorry it came about the way it did, but I'm grateful because now I have you, Remus."

He stood to cross the small space between them and pulled her up into his arms. Her body was sore and protesting, but her heart was willing. Holding her tightly, he leaned in and captured her lips in a possessive declaration of their feelings. He continued to ravage her mouth, and she continued to let him, until their noises became nearly obscene and Harry's throat-clearing sounds brought them back to reality. Remus pushed her gently back into the chair, and she fell gracelessly, catching her breath.

"Thank you for coming, Harry. And thank you for the second chance. I promise I will make her happy, and I will try to keep the wolfishness to a minimum." Hermione whimpered lightly at this, and Remus continued with a mischievous grin, "At least while we have company."

Satisfied, Hermione sighed softly. Harry looked a little uncomfortable, but otherwise content.

"I know you'll make her happy...just be sure you keep her that way." Remus nodded, apparently deciding to take the words as a helpful suggestion rather than the censure they sounded like.

"Let us walk you out, Harry. And maybe you could come with Ginny for a longer visit in a few days?"

"I'd like that," Harry said, leading the way to the front door, where he stopped and shook Remus' hand.

However, when Harry reached for another hug from Hermione, Remus stepped slightly in front of her. "She already smells of you; there's no need to mark her further," he said disapprovingly.

Harry looked at Hermione aghast, shaking his head as if to tell her that wasn't what he'd intended, but she only smiled and shrugged.

"We'll owl you with dinner plans, Harry," she told him, reaching around Remus to touch his arm gently. Harry nodded and slipped out the front door.

"I can't believe I can't even hug my friends. You know, Remus, this might get a little old," she said, half serious.

"You already hugged him...twice, if my senses are correct. That's more than enough. Now, I think you should get out of those clothes. I don't like my mate smelling like other men, even if that man is Harry."

"Remus, I was going to get started on that book. The smell will wear off. I'll have to do laundry every single day if you keep this up." She was walking back toward the study to tidy up the unconsumed tea she'd made.

Remus stopped her from picking it up, holding her arms and looking seriously into her face. "Hermione," he said in a low voice, "take off those clothes."

She felt a thrill of excitement that directly contradicted the annoyance she probably should have felt at the soft command. Meeting his eyes, she slowly stripped off the shirt she'd borrowed from him, baring her breasts and ridding herself of the aroma of Harry. Looking at Remus challengingly, he only raised an expressive eyebrow at her and indicated toward her shorts. She took them off too, standing bare naked in her lover's study while he remained fully dressed and staring.

"Very good. You smell much better now," he told her lightly, taking her slightly chilled body into his arms. He kissed her chastely, at first; small pecks on her neck, cheeks, and lips, pulling away when she tried to deepen them.

"Remus," she whined a little pathetically, but with no real care. He took pity on her, as he almost always did, and kissed her softly on the lips. She opened her mouth to admit him immediately, but he took his time, exploring her lips and tasting her teeth, gently delving until his tongue only just flicked the tips of hers. She tried to draw him

back into her mouth, but he controlled the kiss entirely. Her denuded body was shamelessly pressing against his, trying to entice and seduce him. She felt his growing hardness and tried to slip a hand between them to caress it, but he held her still.

Finally, he pulled away from the teasing kisses and growled, "Lay down on the sofa."

Hermione hurried to do so, her body teased and ready. She wanted his real touches, his hard, firm and sure strokes of her yielding form. She lay back on the sofa in what she knew must have been a suggestive pose from the wildness in his eyes as he looked at her.

But he shook his head and amended, "Facedown."

Hermione paused for a moment before turning over, laying flat on her stomach with her head cradled in her arms. Her legs were together and her arse exposed to his perusal.

"You're so good to me," he whispered, coming up beside her and tracing her body lightly with a callused hand. His fingers slipped between her thighs and spread her wetness, some soreness from earlier completely forgotten in her desire for him now. He spread her legs until one was off the couch entirely and knelt on the sofa between them.

Hermione only heard the whisper of a zipper being pulled to warn her before her body was filled in one sure thrust. "Remus," she gasped, hips automatically rotating to adjust and entice.

"So wet for me, love. Tell me why you're so wet," he whispered roughly, slowing withdrawing and filling her again.

"You make me that way, Remus. When you tell me what to do, I want to obey. I have to. And you're so gorgeous, so strong, so I let go. I can lose myself with you and know you'll find me."

"That's lovely, but that's not why you're *wet*. Tell me why you want me to fuck you harder, Hermione."

Her breath was becoming short as his thrusts became deeper and deeper, grinding into her as he bottomed out. "Because you make me feel like an animal, like all I'm made of is need and desire. And your cock is so perfect; it fills me just right, like it was made for me. I always want you. I think I walk around wet with the hope that you'll fuck me." She might have felt embarrassed by her crass words, but his mastering of her body was too efficient, and she could only answer his demands in the hope that he'd fuck her harder. The soft, slow pace was punishment as much as pleasure.

"My cock was made for you, just for you," he panted, picking up speed slightly and slipping a hand beneath her hip to manipulate her clit. He didn't have to move his hand at all; the movement of his hips caused her body to surge forward, again and again, over his hand until all her thoughts were centred on the orgasm she could practically taste.

With his other arm braced on the arm of the sofa, he began to pound her in earnest, each thrust earning a cry from her and a grunt from him.

"You like feeling like an animal?" he demanded of her, his punishing cock drilling deeper until she saw stars flicker into her vision.

"Yes! Gods, yes. Only with you, only you," she moaned, rocking back into his body, grinding mercilessly against his hand beneath her.

Remus laughed breathlessly and leaned in to bite her neck. As his teeth clenched over her hypersensitive claim mark, Hermione screamed. Her body shut down, stiffening to prolong the intense feelings flooding her until she remembered that she had to breathe. A rush of warmth inside her told her Remus came just as she did, and her clenching walls milked his cock for every drop of offering.

Remus stayed inside her for a few long moments, licking her neck and kissing her shoulders and back. "So beautiful, so mine," he told her, a soft claim that she knew was undeniable.

"Yours," she agreed, sighing contentedly and wriggling beneath him to get more comfortable. Pulling from her wetness, he rotated them both until he was on his back on the sofa and she was reclining on top of him. She cuddled into his neck and exhaled warmly into his sweaty flesh.

His hands roamed her body in an exploratory way, not meant to create desire, just comfort. She kissed his throat and lightly bit his neck at about the same place as her claim mark was. He chuckled and held her body tightly to him.

They fell asleep together yet again.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 of 23

After leaving Ron, Hermione escapes to Grimmauld Place where Remus and Tonks reside. She feels a pull toward Remus, who is experiencing a similar draw. Can they find happiness despite all the forces trying to keep them apart?

When Hermione finally awoke on the couch, the room was dark, she was covered in a thin blanket, and the smelling of burning assailed her.

Sniffing the air, she decided it was only food and not the house, so she could afford to get dressed before she went to investigate the odour. Her clothes were wrinkled and not quite fresh smelling, but the study didn't exactly contain a variety of garments from which to choose, so she would have to settle for a freshening charm.

Padding into the kitchen, she watched as Remus threw a smoking frying pan into the sink and swore vociferously. He turned on the cold water and the smoke thickened before dying out. Pouting quite prettily, she watched Remus yank open the fridge door and take out... yep. Sandwich meats.

"Want me to whip something up?" she asked in a tone that she hoped was helpful and not condescending. The man really did need to learn how to cook.

"Oh, Hermione! Sure, if you'd like. I was only going to make a sandwich for myself. I thought you'd sleep a while longer."

Stretching obscenely, she walked over for a kiss, breaking it before he was inspired to take her again. Her body just wasn't used to the attention, and she needed some recovery time.

"I'll just make some soup, a salad, and maybe some rice if you're in the mood. What time is it?"

"It's around seven. We slept nearly all day... well, with a couple interludes, so to speak."

Allowing him his innuendo, Hermione set to putting a makeshift dinner together. She looked forlornly at the abused frying pan and asked, "What was this?"

Remus shrugged. "We'll never really know."

Nevertheless, he cleaned it and helped with dinner. They decided to eat in the sitting room, Hermione's bottom too sore to withstand the wooden kitchen chair.

"I want to look at that book after dinner," she informed him. "I wanted to earlier, but then Harry came, and..." she trailed off, pointedly ignoring Remus' smirk.

"I hope it has something useful, though I can't imagine it will."

They finished eating in companionable silence, and Remus cleared away the dishes while Hermione finally sat down with the book.

Cracking it, she smiled at the sound of Remus pattering in the kitchen. She'd never expected to enjoy the domestic life with Remus, thinking one could have either passion or friendship but never both. Now she knew better, and Remus was proof that a man could be both sweet and generous, and sexual and wild. Absently touching her claim mark, Hermione went straight to the chapter on *Mating Rituals and Ceremonies of Old*.

Just as Remus had told her and as she'd read before, werewolves used to perform a binding ceremony, not unlike a wedding, which solidified the bond and settled the magic of the two partners. It was a fairly simple affair, involving an incantation, witnesses, and an exchange of intentions. After that, the pair was as good as mated for life.

The author, Lycansmythe, spoke a little on the way this procedure had become outdated and eventually unnecessary. He mentioned that very few werewolves still adhered to the old binding, but that it was an important part of werewolf culture that should not be overlooked.

When Hermione began the chapter on *Pre-mating and the Werewolf's Community*, her fingertips went cold with shock.

Once a werewolf has recognised his mate in another, whether the mate is human or lycanthrope, the community will instinctively act to bring the pair together. This often includes altering or obliterating any obstacles in the way of the mating. Some instances of this include pack members banding together to purchase a home for the werewolf so he or she can live with his or her chosen mate, or pack members driving away a werewolf or human that is standing between the mating, such as an unhelpful family member or previous partner. These actions, even when evident in non-werewolf community members, are sometimes so basic that the act may be completely unconscious. There have been situations wherein a werewolf is intimately involved with another community member and then recognises his or her mate in another person. The partner may then be compelled to break ties with the werewolf so the werewolf will be free to pursue his or her mate.

Unfortunately, these instincts, which are induced by the pack mentality and the proximity of the instinct-driven werewolf, often contradict the non-mate partner's own desires. This is more prevalent when the partner is a non-werewolf. In these cases, the partner may become unstable because their instincts are warring with their desires.

In conclusion, the werewolf's community, made up of werewolf, human, or other species, will subconsciously recognise the bond between a werewolf and his mate and strive to make the joining as seamless as possible. Those standing in the way of the joining may suffer until the binding is complete, and the werewolf's instincts are satisfied that his or her mate is secured.

Hermione gently closed the book, her trembling fingers the only evidence of her discovery. If Hermione was reading correctly, and she believed she was, this could be the explanation behind Tonks' and Ron's sudden aggressive behaviour. Because Remus was a werewolf, they were all considered part of his community. When Remus recognised Hermione as his mate, their instincts told them to back off and allow Remus to pursue Hermione undaunted. But their human desires superseded their instincts, and they became, as the book put it, unstable.

It was their fault, hers and Remus', that Tonks and Ron had become violent. And the only way to make them return to their normal, jovial, and peaceable selves was to have this binding and placate Remus' instincts.

Hermione dropped her head into her hands and breathed deeply through her mouth.

It's all my fault.

*

Remus came back from cleaning the dishes with pruned fingers and an uncharacteristic desire for a house-elf to see Hermione looking despondent, with suspiciously sparkling eyes.

"What's wrong, love? What's happened?" he asked softly, taking a seat beside her and pulling her into his arms.

"It's us," she whispered, shaking her head and struggling to get out of his hold. He tightened his grip, not allowing her to escape. "It's our fault."

"What is?" Remus asked, confused. He saw the book he'd purchased on werewolf mates sitting on the table, open to a page on community. He'd heard a little about what was referred to as the werewolf community. It was essentially a group of people surrounding the wolf, consisting of friends, family members, a mate, and the mate's own community. It was a somewhat outdated notion. It had never been proven that the 'community' was affected by the instincts of the werewolf.

"Ron and Tonks, getting possessive and violent. It was because of us."

Remus forced Hermione's face up to meet his. Her eyes were sorrowful in that all-consuming way that only she managed to convey. It was heartbreaking to see her so sad, and he railed against whatever had made her so, vowing to destroy that which hurt her. Even if it was himself.

She gestured weakly toward the book, and he read the excerpt that had obviously upset her.

Dear Merlin, he thought. How could it be? These things were unheard of in modern werewolf culture. The last binding he knew of had taken place before he'd been turned, and even that had been done for ceremony and not necessity.

Somehow, he and Hermione were a throwback to an older, more complicated time. That meant... Remus' eyes widened. That meant they were ~~were~~ true mates. That meant there was *no one* else for either of them. That meant that he, as a werewolf, had been bound to her inextricably even before she'd been born. She was the ~~the~~ only one for him, and he for her.

They were more than mates, they were *soul mates*. A concept he'd believed werewolves had evolved out of generations ago.

"Oh, Hermione," he whispered into her hair. "It's not our fault. It was fated. We were truly made for one another. Ron and Tonks... they were never right for us. It never could have worked."

He clutched her even more tightly as she began to cry silently, her trembling shoulders the only betrayer of her emotion.

"What do we do? We have to help them! It's our fault they could lose their jobs, Remus!"

"We will help them," he promised her.

"How?" she questioned plaintively. He could see how affected she was, and he was again struck by the generosity of her nature. She had just learned something life-altering, and she was worrying about Tonks and Ron instead of herself.

"Well, he began, "we'll do the binding. We have to anyway, and it will stop the instinctual battle that is making them so disturbed."

"What do you mean, 'we have to anyway'?" she cried, finally pulling away from him and raising accusatory eyes to his.

Remus bent to lightly kiss his lover's lips, but hers remained unmoving beneath his. Sighing softly, he said, "We don't ~~have~~ to, I suppose. But I want to. Hermione, I want to be bound to you, even more than I already am. I know that for the rest of my life I only want you by my side. If you don't want the same thing, then I will still take whatever I can get. I'll want you even if you can barely tolerate me, but I'll do my damndest to make sure you love me as much as I love you."

Hermione stiffened and sat up straight. Remus had to look away from the intensity of her eyes, which were burning bright and fairly glowing.

Her lips parted and words spilled out as though she'd meant to stop them. "You love me?"

Remus suddenly felt naked. More stripped than any of the numerous times he'd been completely nude before her searching gaze, more bare than any of the times he'd told her of his fears or dreams. Suddenly she wanted to hear the words he'd only whispered after she'd fallen asleep or left the room. Suddenly he had to say aloud what he'd known since the beginning of time.

"I love you."

And it was easy. Despite her wide eyes and adorably gaping mouth, it was easy. Having her know the truth made him feel whole, and he knew the part of him that had always searched for his 'other' could finally call it a day. He wouldn't be alone.

And then she was holding him tightly, her arms around his neck not like a noose but like a lifesaver, pulling him from treacherous waters where he was always barely treading, barely keeping afloat, into the safety and warmth of her arms where he truly belonged.

"I love you, too. I'm sorry it took so long to say, so long to understand. I love you, and it's different and it's new and it's ~~hard~~, but it's perfect."

Even though Remus had known Hermione was his mate, hearing the words made it real. Finally he had someone to hold on to, someone to trust, to love him despite and because of everything he'd always feared about himself.

Finally, being a werewolf had given him something *good*.

Into his chest, Hermione murmured, "But I don't want this binding just because of Tonks and Ron. I mean, I'll ~~do~~ it for them, but I wish it was our choice, not something forced upon us by nature and magic. I've had so much of my life dictated by circumstances beyond my control. I just wish this decision wasn't stolen from us."

"I know, love. I want you to know I would have suggested the binding even if we didn't need it. Maybe not so soon, but I do want to be bound to you."

"Really?" she asked, and she sounded so young that he had to remind himself that her heart was delicate, and she'd been hurt before. He had a responsibility to be gentle with the gift she'd given him.

"Really. I will never lie to you about that. I do, have, and will ~~always~~ love you."

Hermione climbed into his lap and kissed him in a way that left no doubt that she mirrored his sentiment.

Chapter 19

Chapter 19 of 23

After leaving Ron, Hermione escapes to Grimmauld Place where Remus and Tonks reside. She feels a pull toward Remus, who is experiencing a similar draw. Can they find happiness despite all the forces trying to keep them apart?

Hermione decided mornings didn't have to be so bad when one had a mate who enjoyed lavishing one with attention.

A very *specific* kind of attention.

Running her fingers through the softly greying hair of her lover (her love), Hermione's hips bucked as she came to full awareness with a nip to her inner thigh.

"Good morning," he whispered huskily, leaving a trail between her thighs that ended at her insistently throbbing clit.

She could only moan in response, her hands pressing his face more firmly against her body, her hips moving without her permission. His tongue worked her steadily until orgasm was only a few flicks away, and just as her body began to tremble, his tongue moved to plunge into her pussy instead. Tasting deeply of her, he moaned at her taste, sending vibrating shockwaves through her body and making her wonder if he planned to kill her with this torture.

Twice more he teased her, backing off just before she fell over the edge and eliciting a shriek of frustration the last time.

"Hermione," he called quietly, bringing her floating mind back to reality for an ugly moment.

"Yes?" she cried, trying to grind her hips up and get some much desired friction.

"Do you love me?" he asked, a smile in his voice.

"Yes!" she shouted, hands making fists in the sheets and tossing her head.

"Show me," he commanded. He moved away from her writhing body to sit against the footboard. He watched her intently as her eyes widened in disbelief and then

embarrassment. Her body was spread on the bed, flushed and slick, completely exposed to his penetrating gaze.

"How?" she asked, starting to get up to go to him, but he raised a hand to stop her, and she fell against the bed, body humming with denied orgasm.

"Show me how much you want me, what you want me to do to you," he whispered, never looking away from her eyes. She shivered at the heated stare, his eyes so light a gold that her body clenched with desire.

Tentatively, she slid a hand over her ribs and belly, resting it lightly on her mound, looking to him for approval. His growl was indication enough that she was pleasing him, so she moved her hand lower.

Parting her lips with a nervous finger, Hermione circled her clit lightly, trying to watch Remus but failing as the pleasure began to build immediately. Her head fell against the pillows, and her hips circled to meet her steady finger. She felt completely exposed, her body completely pink with a heady combination of arousal and embarrassment.

"Use your other hand, too," he directed, watching avidly.

Hermione's breath hitched at the softly spoken words. Her other hand joined her first before sliding lower, two fingers slipping within her slick heat. She moaned at the invasion, moving her hand unsteadily as if it weren't hers, imagining it was Remus'.

Wet noises reached her ears, and Hermione's flush darkened. She couldn't remember being so thoroughly embarrassed and so completely turned on.

When her long-awaited orgasm finally came, her body clamped down on her pumping fingers, her body rising from the bed in a desperate jerk. She cried out Remus' name even though he was merely a bystander to her pleasure. Her fingers slowly left the apex of her thighs, resting lifelessly on the bed beside her as she panted.

"You are so beautiful," Remus told her, crawling alongside her body and gathering her limp form into his strong arms. She lowered her hand to his cock, intending to tease him into a similar show for her, but found him limp.

When she looked at him questioningly, afraid that he hadn't enjoyed watching as much as she'd thought, he trailed her fingertips through the sticky come on his belly.

"We came together, as it should be."

*

Telling Ron that his strange behaviour of late had essentially been Remus' and her fault was easier than she'd expected. He'd been so grateful that he wasn't going crazy, and so thankful that she'd forgiven his actions against her, that he would have accepted space aliens as a plausible explanation.

"So, what does this mean?" Harry asked.

Remus and Hermione had arrived at the Burrow just after dinner. They'd immediately sat down with Ron, joined by Ginny and Harry, and explained their discovery.

"Well," Remus began in his best professor voice. "It means that Hermione and I are an outmoded concept. Nothing like this has happened in hundreds of years. But because of my lycanthropy and your instincts, Ron, as a friend and a former lover of my mate, you were directed by your subconscious to back away from Hermione. Your human desire fought with those instincts, causing a temporary mental unbalance. We believe it will completely disappear once Hermione and I are bound."

"You mean, I didn't really mean to hurt you, 'Mione?" Ron asked quietly. He seemed to find it difficult to meet her eyes, but she smiled at him regardless.

"That's what we mean. It wasn't your fault. Tonks', either."

"Remus," Harry started, "did these instincts or whatever also cause Hermione and Ron's break-up in the first place?"

It was a good question; Hermione didn't know the answer.

Remus looked thoughtful before responding, "I don't believe so. I think the instincts only initiate when I actually recognise my mate. I didn't do that until after she'd already moved in with Tonks and me. That does mean, however, that these instincts did cause my breakup with Tonks."

Hermione squeezed Remus' hand. She knew how guilty he felt for the way things had happened with Tonks. But Hermione knew that even without the intervention of their instincts, Tonks could never have made Remus truly happy. Not like she could.

The Floo sounded and Hermione and Remus both tensed. They had asked Harry to invite Tonks to come to the Burrow to talk. It was a neutral place, but no one could be sure how she would take the news.

"What's going on, guys?" Tonks asked before her gaze fell upon Remus and Hermione, sitting closely together, Remus' hand on his mate's thigh. Her eyes narrowed but she made no comment.

"Tonks," Hermione began slowly, "we need to tell you something. Will you have a seat?"

She did, taking the last chair and crossing her arms in front of her chest protectively. "Well?" she asked snidely.

Remus tsked disapprovingly, and Tonks glowered at him. He handed her Lycansmythe's book, open to the informative chapter. She looked at him questioningly, but he only gestured for her to read.

As she did, Hermione watched her expression carefully. Tonks' eyes widened and her mouth dropped open. Once she finished, her eyes closed and she leaned back. A sigh of what could only be relief escaped her lips.

"I'm not crazy?" she asked softly, eyes still closed.

"No!"

Hermione was surprised by Ron's passionate exclamation. He looked a little chagrined at his loud tone, but he continued.

"It wasn't your fault, Tonks. I mean, the jealousy, yeah, that was all you. But you getting violent and hurting Hermione, that wasn't really you. It was like... their love pushing us out of the way, so they could be together."

Remus matched Hermione's smile at the simple and effective way of putting things. Tonks' eyes met Remus' and he smiled encouragingly. "I know it wasn't you, Tonks. I'm sorry about all of this."

Tonks shook her head. "I'm happy for you, really. Beneath this anger that I have, I am happy. I love you, and I think I always will, but I know we weren't meant to be together. At least, I do now." She sighed again, looking like a weight had been lifted. Her gaze turned to Hermione, who met it steadily.

"I'm so sorry for what I did to you. It was so wrong, and even with an explanation, it doesn't excuse it. Or the way I behaved before. My jealousy has always gotten the best of me, but I am working on it. I'm sorry for hitting you."

Hermione nodded, saying, "Thank you, Tonks. I'm sorry for all of this as well. But I love Remus, and I will take good care of him. We're happy, and I promise I won't hurt

him."

Tonks looked a little more cheerful, a little more like her former self. "So, are you going to do this binding thing? Because I'd really like to get back to work."

Ron laughed, "You and me, both!"

Remus smiled in that long-suffering way of his. "We will be doing the bonding. In a few days, actually. After that, you can both expect to feel completely normal."

Ginny piped up for the first time. "Hermione? Only a couple days? You have a dress and everything picked out already?"

Hermione chuckled softly at her friend. "No, Ginny. It's not like a wedding. It's a simple ceremony, only the two of us, the person performing the binding, and two witnesses."

Ginny frowned. "It sounds an awful lot like a wedding. Why can't you wait and plan a big to-do?"

Remus squeezed her hand lightly, and she felt everyone's eyes on her. "We can't wait because other people are counting on us. I'm sure Ron and Tonks wouldn't appreciate staying on probation until I can decide between fondant and butter cream icing. It's not a big deal, Gin. But we do want you and Harry to be our witnesses."

Harry smiled broadly. Any uncertainty he'd had before had diminished when they'd told him about the fact that they were true soul mates. If anyone respected the power of love, it was Harry Potter. "We'd be honoured," he stated formally.

Ginny whimpered, "Can we at least shop for a dress?"

Remus laughed. "You should, Hermione. It'll be fun."

Hermione finally agreed and they made plans to go out the very next day.

Tonks cleared her throat and stood. "As fun as hearing about my ex getting married truly is, I think I'll leave. I'm not myself enough to be able to handle this without getting upset. I'm sorry. Congratulations." And with that, she hurried through the Floo and was gone.

Her abrupt departure left the remaining five in an awkward silence, but Ron broke it by saying, "Well, I'm going to head out as well. It feels good knowing I'm not mad after all, and I'd like to celebrate. Best of luck to you both, and let me know when I can expect to be my usual self again!" With a somewhat tight smile, Ron left as well.

"I really am happy for you both. It's easy to see how perfect you are for each other, and even the universe agrees."

Hermione smiled at Harry's kind words. She felt so relieved to receive his approval. It meant a lot to her, and she knew it was important to Remus as well.

"Thank you, Harry. It means more to us than you can know."

"So when exactly will the binding be? And where? And what should I wear?" Ginny asked in a rush.

Hermione fielded her excited friend's question. "This Saturday, at Grimmauld Place. And you can wear whatever you like. I mean it when I say it won't be a big thing. It shouldn't take more than half an hour."

Ginny looked as though she wanted to say more, but Hermione caught Harry giving her a little squeeze, and she only smiled.

"I suppose the blue dress with the lace will do just fine."

*

"I really can't believe you're getting married," Ginny declared for the seventh time. Hermione had convinced her friend to shop in Muggle London rather than going to Madame Malkin's, where gossip abounded and Hermione's news would be spread faster than Muggle margarine on toast.

Hermione sighed as she passed over row upon row of pretty gowns and outfits. There was simply too much choice in the Muggle world, she realised.

"I'm not getting married, Ginny, for the last time. Honestly, can you stop this? I was promised a nice, fun outing with my girlfriend, and that is so not what I'm getting." Hermione was huffy and beginning to get petulant. She just wanted to go home to her full moon-impassioned boyfriend and get fucked silly against a wall, on a table, or over a couch, depending on which room he found her in first.

"I'm sorry! It's just that... well, you only get... *bonded* once, and you act like it's another chore on your errand list! I hate to think that in twenty years you'll regret not having your special day."

Hermione pulled a simple black sheath dress from the rack and held it up for Ginny to look over. Her red-haired friend's mouth gaped in horror, and Hermione took that to mean this was not the dress after all.

"I just want to be with him. I don't care about a ring or a dress or a party. I just want Remus to be mine, and I want to be his, just like werewolves were ages ago. And I want Ron and Tonks to be happy as well. I won't regret not getting married because I'm with the man I love," Hermione said with only a touch more conviction than she actually felt.

She'd never been the little girl who'd danced around in her mother's veil. She hadn't made her Barbies get married, nor had she doodled other men's last names in place of her own. She was a realist. She'd expected to get married when the time came, a small ceremony after which she would keep her name and everything would be pretty much the same.

So she had to quell the voice that was unhelpfully chiming in that she *wanted* that white dress, and she *wanted* that gold ring. It wasn't fair to herself and it certainly wasn't fair to Remus. He'd never expected to get married, he'd said as much to her on several occasions. And she wasn't going to be the one to bully him into doing so. The binding ceremony would be small and short, and it would be perfect. Afterward, she would be as good as married. She would have her mate, her love, all to herself. Her friends would go back to normal, and instincts all around would be satisfied.

It was a very reasonable and sound decision.

So she hoped Ginny didn't see when her fingers lingered over a white, lacy, floor-length gown before moving on to a soft yellow one and placing it over her arm to try on.

Author's Note: For those who read *Some Things Change*, the sequel is now posting under the title *The Only Constant*. It can be found here or at my livejournal under my penname literaryspell.

Chapter 20

Chapter 20 of 23

After leaving Ron, Hermione escapes to Grimmauld Place where Remus and Tonks reside. She feels a pull toward Remus, who is experiencing a similar draw. Can they find happiness despite all the forces trying to keep them apart?

After spending altogether too many hours shopping, Ginny had finally approved of the yellow dress Hermione had chosen. It was tea length with a fitted bodice and lightly flaring skirt. Its thin straps accentuated her delicate shoulders and collarbones, and if she wore her hair up, her claim mark would be clearly and proudly visible. Remus would love the dress, they were sure.

Hermione spent the next two days slaving away at work. She was in the running for one of the only full-time positions available, and it would be a bloodbath before the victor was chosen. She knew she was the best person for the job, the most experienced and the most qualified, but such matters were rarely taken into account in the nepotistic and opportunistic Ministry. She could only put in her hours, do her work, and hope for the best possible outcome.

She'd been afraid to ask for the weekend off, but when she'd finished her projects in record time, handing them in early and flawless, she'd been granted her request with the caveat that she remain available in case of an emergency. She had no compunction agreeing to this request, especially as it meant she would be called in to fix a mess before another employee made it entirely unfixable.

When she finally arrived at home on the eve of their impending binding ceremony, Hermione felt uncharacteristically nervous. She wanted this, more than anything. But it seemed like it had happened so fast. In the span of only about two months, she'd moved in with, began a relationship with, and fallen in love with Remus Lupin.

It had been exhausting. But despite the speed, nothing had ever felt so right. Looking back, she could respect Ron's sweet and safe love. She could easily picture another witch being more than happy with everything he had to offer. But it just wasn't for her. She needed to be challenged, and Remus certainly did that, both intellectually and sexually. She had never imagined doing the things she did with him, but now she couldn't picture life with him. He had truly ruined her for any other wizard, so he'd better follow through with this whole 'until the end of time' bit, or she'd be extremely disgruntled.

She was disgruntled anyway, but for a different reason. She'd been so worn out at work that she simply didn't have the energy to engage in any kinky, animalistic sex. And as they got further from the time of the full moon, Remus' wild, uninhibited, and downright *dirty* side was being pushed aside by a more regular sexual side. Which was completely fine with her...she needed to recuperate, after all. But she'd wanted to make the most of their completely unhindered nights together, and now it appeared that the next time she'd be up for it would be when she was a bonded woman.

"Excited?" Remus' soft voice broke through her reverie.

"Yes," she admitted. "And a little nervous."

"Why nervous? It's only a formality, really. And it'll just be me beside you, and Harry, Ginny, and Mr. Johnstone."

"Mr. Johnstone?" Hermione asked, surprised. "That crazy old guy who sells you the Wolfsbane? Why would he be there?"

"Well," Remus said, smiling as he led her up to their bedroom. "He happens to be a very competent Officiant. He can perform a number of wedding and bonding ceremonies, not least of which is the very werewolf ceremony we need. I hope you don't mind. I thought he'd be rather perfect."

Hermione smiled softly, undressing quickly in an effort to get to cuddle with her soon-to-be-bonded mate. "I don't mind. I do think he'll be perfect."

"Good, because I don't think I've ever known him to be so excited. His owl was so smothered in exclamation points I nearly went deaf reading it," Remus said wryly.

"If anyone could do it, it would be him," Hermione agreed, holding the covers back.

Remus crawled into the bed, immediately taking her into his arms. His chin rested on the top of her head, and she could hear him inhaling her scent.

"Are you sure this is how you want to do this? It doesn't feel very fair to you."

Hermione tilted her head up for a kiss and was obliged. "I only want you. I know it seems sudden, but to me, nothing's ever felt more right. I really love you, Remus Lupin, and I want to be bonded to you. More than anything."

"I want that, too," he whispered, trailing fingers over her collarbone and following the path with little nibbles. "But I hate thinking that one day you'll regret doing it like this rather than having a big day like you deserve."

"It almost sounds like you're the one who wants the big day, Remus," Hermione probed, watching his face for clues.

He hesitated, before shrugging one shoulder. "In a perfect world, maybe. But, like you, I can't stand to think that we're affecting the free will of our friends, even if they are exes. I'll always care about Tonks. She was the first woman to ever show me I was desirable. I don't want to hurt her."

Hermione nodded. Ron had played a huge role in her development, and he, too, was the first man to ever make her feel like more than just a head full of knowledge. She knew he would make another woman very happy one day; but that didn't stop her from being incredibly grateful that it wouldn't be her. What she had with Remus went so much deeper than happiness. It was a soul-deep sense of rightness and belonging.

No *one* had ever made her feel so good. Remus made her whole.

"It's going to be fine, I promise. This time tomorrow we'll be bonded, our friends will go back to normal...whatever that is...and we can start the rest of our lives together."

"You're such a romantic," he teased, nuzzling her neck and nipping at her claim mark. The scar remained, and she hoped it would forever. She never thought she'd be the type to want to be marked in such an obvious and permanent way, but it made her feel wanted, needed, safe. And she knew Remus loved it, in the way he was always touching it, looking at it, and baring it was any indication.

"We should probably get some sleep," Hermione weakly protested. Her body was dead tired but awakening with a speed only Remus could induce.

"Probably," he agreed, pushing her gently onto her back and cupping her breast lightly with one callused hand.

"We have a long day tomorrow," she reminded him.

"And today was quite long as well," he rejoined, though without stopping his actions as his words would suggest, rolling a taut nipple between skilled fingers, making her stomach quiver.

"Well," she breathed, "another hour shouldn't make that much difference."

"No difference at all."

His mouth slowly lowered onto her, and he took his time with his sweet seduction. Though they made love as often as they fucked, it still wasn't usually slow. Remus always made every move, every gesture count, and by the end of any unhurried foreplay, she was always begging for harder, faster, *more*. But this time she was determined to let him take her at the pace he chose. She knew that despite his leisurely tempo, dominance was at the forefront of his mind, and he wouldn't appreciate her taking charge tonight.

In a week or so, toward the middle of the moon phase, he would have absolutely no issue with her exerting herself a little more. But right now, she was his to play with.

His hand left her swollen nipple to traverse her ribcage and belly, gentle fingers making every movement feel like sex itself. She loosely wrapped her arms around his neck, not trapping him, merely letting him know she was involved. She wanted to pull on the hair at the base of his skull, but she intuitively knew better. She gently ran her fingers through it instead, returning his kiss with fervour, but careful not to try to overpower him. There would be a time when these thoughts would become second nature to her, as her body and mind became as attuned to the lunar phases as his, but for now, her overactive left brain made sure she made the right moves.

Hermione moaned softly into Remus' greedy mouth as his fingers lightly slid between her lower lips. She was ready for him, so ready, but his hand was teasing, circling her clit without any satisfying pressure.

Her hips rolled lightly, and her arms moved from his neck to his shoulders, with one hand reaching straight for his already straining cock. They both sighed as she enclosed it in a tight fist, knowing he liked the firm grip.

The kiss still did not break as he gently parted her thighs and moved between them. She immediately bent her knees, gripping him tightly and trying to entice his cock into her body with slow gyrations. His hand, no longer teasing, rubbed her clit and set off quick lights behind her eyelids.

"Remus," she whispered against his lips, her hand attempting to guide him within her. He drew it away, however, and draped both her arms around his neck again, where she clasped them tightly together to stop her from gripping his arse and forcing him to fuck her. She wanted to beg, to plead, to demand, but she did none of these. She felt like any dirty words from her would ruin the sweet, lingering lovemaking, and she didn't want it to turn into something tawdry.

Finally, she felt his arousal press against her wet entrance, and she nearly groaned with relief. He slid within her, slower than he ever had, making her feel every inch of penetration. The gradual insertion made her more aware than ever of his size, of his power. That he could hold back when she was shaking with the effort not to thrust herself onto him was awe-inspiring.

When he was fully sheathed, he hesitated, resting inside and kissing her languidly. She was sure she'd never been kissed for so long or with such precision, such passionate intent. They broke only to breathe, and even then, he didn't stray from her lips; instead, he exhaled softly against her wet mouth, cooling the swollen lips and making her crazy with his sweet breaths. She could feel him throbbing inside her, but this intimacy of being so closely connected but not actually moving was the most intense sensation.

Remus gathered her small body into his arms, holding her against himself under her shoulder and back until she rested on his arms instead of the bed. His body was pressed perfectly against hers, and they were connected in every possible way. Hermione felt as though her mind was completely exposed, that if he opened his eyes for a moment, he'd know all her secrets, and she wouldn't be ashamed or embarrassed because she would know his, and together they were more than just a man and woman with decades of baggage and mere minutes of love comparatively. But for the two of them, in this beautiful moment of life on pause, it was more than enough, more than they'd ever need to get through the inevitable trials ahead of them.

"I love you," she gasped, unable to keep her eyes open against the onslaught of emotions. Making love had never seemed so poignant, so meaningful, and she fought to keep her poise as he slowly ground into her body.

Remus neither slowed nor quickened his pace, and the steady thrusting caught her in a storm of sensation. Her orgasm was unexpected, and she bit her lip to keep from screaming, feeling as though any overt expression would make the moment disappear.

He must have come at the same moment, because his gasp reached her ringing ears, and his body stilled as he filled her with warmth.

"I love you," he finally whispered, his voice raspy and reverent. He looked down into her eyes, and she was struck, as always, by how much of himself he allowed her to see. His eyes were open and warm, and he looked completely awed. She smiled self-consciously under the scrutiny, and he dropped small, gentle kisses along her lips and jaw.

"My mate," he said softly, giving her the Remus smile.

"Yours," Hermione agreed, safe under the comforting weight and protective gaze of the man she loved.

Chapter 21

Chapter 21 of 23

After leaving Ron, Hermione escapes to Grimmauld Place where Remus and Tonks reside. She feels a pull toward Remus, who is experiencing a similar draw. Can they find happiness despite all the forces trying to keep them apart?

"Oh, my gods, I'm so nervous!"

Hermione smiled as her friend frantically tried to pin up her long red hair. For once, Hermione's hair was behaving, and it was Ginny's that gave her a hard time.

Hermione patiently extracted a few ill-placed pins and reinserted them, firmly securing the mass of curls.

"Why are you nervous? You're not the one getting bonded today," Hermione teased, knowing full well that her friend was nervous on her behalf.

"I know, it's just... I'm so happy for you. For you both! I can't believe this is happening. I mean, it feels like just yesterday you were telling us you were together. And now you'll be as good as married!"

"Yes," Hermione agreed softly. "As good as."

She stepped into the pale yellow dress she'd chosen for the day's ceremony. It had a fitted bust and waist, dropping into a full flare with several layers of crinoline, before

ending with a lacy trim just below her knees. It was a very pretty dress, and Hermione was pleased with how it showed off her delicate frame. Her hair was tied into a French braid on Ginny's insistence...any other style would not be borne. Her make-up was understated, as it always was. Only a light blush and some eye make-up adorned her face. She left her lips bare, anticipating the kiss that would seal their bonding.

Ginny also looked beautiful in a dark blue gown with lace overlay. It was almost too dressy for the occasion, but Ginny wouldn't be deterred, and Hermione didn't mind. Ginny was essentially a bridesmaid, and she knew her friend would want to play the role seriously, short though the courting, 'engagement,' and ceremony all were.

After slipping her feet into delicate strappy stilettos, Hermione stepped in front of the mirror in her bedroom. Remus and Harry were getting ready in a spare room the next floor up, and Mr. Johnstone was waiting patiently in the parlour, where the ceremony would take place. The furniture had been moved or Transfigured so that the room was basically empty. Ginny had gone candle-happy, and hundreds of soft white candles were lit, scattered on every available surface and floating in the air. Hermione had only seen it for a moment when she'd shown the Officiant to the room.

He'd been thrilled to see Hermione, remembering her from the day they'd met in alley when Remus had purchased the Wolfsbane from the man. He was more subdued that she remembered, or perhaps he just knew it was an important day. Either way, the small, white-haired inventor had kind words for her and Remus, and he'd immediately put her at ease.

Once she was satisfied that her appearance was acceptable, Hermione cast a Tempus spell. Only a few minutes to go. At that moment, she heard Harry's voice, followed by a soft murmur that she immediately recognised as Remus. Hermione ran to open the door, but Ginny grabbed her arm and swung her around, leaving them both tottering dangerously on their heels.

"What are you doing?" Ginny stage-whispered. "You can't see him!"

"What do you mean? I want to!"

"I don't care what you want!" Ginny exclaimed incredulously. "You cannot see him before the wedding!"

"Ginny," Hermione sighed. "For the last time, this is not a wedding. It's a simple ceremony. It means the world to us, of course, but the traditions we're used to don't apply."

"Please, Hermione," Ginny whispered, looking dangerously close to tears. "You only get this day one time. What harm will it do to stick to a couple old traditions? For my sake?"

Ginny looked so earnest that Hermione really had no choice but to capitulate. Not that it mattered, because she'd heard Remus and Harry walk down the stairs anyway.

"Are you ready?" Ginny asked, all smiles now that she'd gotten her way.

"Yes," Hermione answered.

"Just one more thing," the redhead said, presenting Hermione with a smallish box. She looked at her friend questioningly, but Ginny only smiled. Hermione opened the box, unsure of what she was looking at. It appeared to be some sort of netting.

"Gin?" she asked, feeling silly for not knowing what the gift was.

But Ginny smiled understandingly. She picked the small piece of fabric up and placed it on Hermione's head, fitting it so the netting covered Hermione's face to the tip of her nose. There were small diamonds glittering in the netting, which was large enough that Hermione could easily see through.

"It's a birdcage veil," Ginny explained. "It was my mother's. I know that... that your parents couldn't be with us, but my mum had always considered you a daughter. And she wanted you to wear this. It would... it would mean the world if you did. I know you don't think you're a bride, but you *are*, Hermione. You are."

Hermione's eyes were sparkling as much as the accents of her veil. "It's absolutely beautiful. And I would be honoured to wear it." And it was true. But as much as she loved the accessory, seeing Ginny beam as tears spilled over and dropped onto the silk of her dress was the real gift.

"You're ready now."

*

Remus wasn't nervous. In fact, he couldn't remember a time in his long and listless life where everything had fallen into place so seamlessly.

For a man who never truly believed he deserved love, he was incredibly fierce about never letting it go, now that it was his.

He'd had to laugh when Harry had come over early to 'help him get ready.' Apparently, this meant dressing the older man. Remus' chosen robes had been tossed aside for brand new, deep chocolate brown dress robes. They were crisp and sharp and everything his usual attire was not. He couldn't say how much he appreciated the gift, but he tried. Harry's acceptance and approval meant the world to Remus, as he was his old friend's son, his best friend's godson, and the best friend of the love of his life. They were all connected in so many ways that Remus knew he would never be without family again. Having Hermione in his life had changed more than just his sex life. The love of his amazing woman made him strong, capable, worthy.

When he and Harry had descended the stairs to wait for Hermione in the parlour, he'd stopped outside her room, wanting to make sure she was okay. Harry had been completely aghast, telling him he would be permitted to do no such thing. Remus had been swayed, and now he stood with Harry and Mr. Johnstone amidst a glimmering sea of candlelight, waiting for the moment when all his fears were put to rest.

For Remus did have fear. He couldn't help the niggling feeling that unless he declared their love official, Hermione would leave him. This bonding would set their friends to right, and that was the main reason for doing it so quickly.

But that was not the main reason for doing it at all. After today, Hermione *was* his in the eyes of the entire werewolf community. No other wolf could smell her enticing scent; no other wolf would see her on her knees, on her back. This was the true claiming. And maybe it was primal, maybe it was archaic, but he didn't care anymore. After a lifetime of trying to outrun his lycanthropy, Remus had finally accepted that this was who he was. And Hermione loved him for that. *Not despite it.*

He heard their bedroom door open and the clacking of high heels on the hardwood floor. Harry met his eyes, and they both smiled anxiously. Mr. Johnstone was practically bouncing in place.

When Hermione stood at the top of the stairs, Remus' world disappeared.

My mate.

He'd never seen her look so beautiful; he'd never seen her look so sure. Her smile was pure sunlight, and it warmed him even from the distance between them, which she was closing eagerly. In her pale yellow gown and glittering hairpiece she looked solar, and suddenly it all came together.

The only thing that can defeat the moon... the sun.

She was smiling shakily as she walked to her place beside Remus. Ginny's broad smile was contradicted by the flood of tears on her face, and he absently heard Harry laugh softly at the sheer volume.

Remus immediately reached for Hermione's hands, and she lifted her face to him. Had Remus had any reservations beforehand, they would have been washed away in the radiance of her eyes.

Mr. Johnstone began talking in a low, sure voice, outlining the ceremony in which they had to do little else but repeat his words and seal the bond with a vow of intention and a kiss.

"Remus John Lupin. Do you take into your heart Hermione Jean Granger, to honour, protect, and cherish, until rendered incapable by the strictures of death?"

"I do," Remus said firmly, not looking away from Hermione's beatific face.

"Will you renounce all others, remaining faithful both in body and spirit?"

"I will."

"By ancient Werewolf Law, will you love this woman wholly and unreservedly until the transitory parting of death?"

"I will," Remus whispered earnestly, his grip on Hermione's hand enough to hurt her, but her face showed only elation.

"Hermione Jean Granger. Do you take into your heart Remus John Lupin, to honour, protect, and love, until rendered incapable by the strictures of death?"

"Yes, I do."

"Will you renounce all others, remaining faithful both in body and spirit?"

"I will."

"And by ancient Werewolf Law, will you love this man wholly and unreservedly until the transitory parting of death?"

"And longer," she promised.

"Excellent. I am honoured to proclaim you Bonded in the eyes of werewolves, Mated by ancient Werewolf Law. Please state your vows of intention. Remus?"

Remus took a step closer to Hermione. Harry and Ginny could hear only if they strained, and Mr. Johnstone, while close enough to overhear, looked at the ground to give them privacy. This part of the ceremony wasn't imperative to the outcome; it was simply a declaration, a promise made by two parties to begin as they meant to go on.

"Hermione... I have loved you..." Remus stopped, taking a deep breath before lifting her hands to his mouth to kiss her knuckles. She smiled encouragingly and with just enough of a glint of humour that Remus felt ready to go on. "I have loved you since before I knew you. You were the ideal, the one I always wanted and never believed I deserved. And when you took me into your heart, I knew peace in a way I never thought possible. I will honour you, I will make you proud. I will make you *happy*. I will worship you, earn you, fight for you, and make love to you until the day I die. You are my equal, my perfect other half. You make me whole. I love you."

Ginny snuffled loudly and Harry sighed, whether at his wife's loud noise or the romance of the moment, Remus wasn't sure. A single tear had finally dropped from Hermione's glittering eyes, and he smoothed it away with the pad of his thumb under her veil before brushing his thumb over her lips. He knew it wasn't time yet, but he leaned in kiss her softly, tasting the salty wetness he'd placed there and knowing it meant that she was happy.

"Hermione?" Mr. Johnstone prompted.

"Remus," she whispered, her voice barely a breath across his cheek. "You were the man I dreamed about when I was old enough to know what I wanted. Someone to challenge me, to teach me, to learn from me, to love me. Before you, I didn't believe love could be so honest, so pure and yet so... real. Having your love makes me feel capable of anything. I want to see the world with you and never leave our bedroom." The tension in the room lifted a little as everyone chuckled, and Remus smiled, despite his eyes blurring. "I will love you, desire you, stand for you, kneel for you, and expect all of that in return. You are my one true love, Remus."

Remus drew a sharp breath when a golden light seemed to effuse from Hermione. It gave her a gentle, throbbing glow before it expanded, tendrils forming and encompassing him. He met her widened eyes, and when he looked down at himself, a similar glow, only silver, was surrounding him. The magic sparked and tickled along their skin as it caressed them, entwining and twirling in a carefree fashion, both colours enveloping them both until all they could see was one another.

As though he was born to do it, as though there was no other choice, Remus leaned in and kissed Hermione. Her lips were soft but sparkling with magic, and it took his breath away. She gasped into his mouth, and he knew his lips must have felt the same. As his tongue gently touched the tip of hers, he had two simultaneous thoughts: *Mine, and Finally.*

The first was certainly his, but the second had a more feminine cadence to it. It was Hermione's.

When he broke the kiss, she was smiling shakily, nodding to confirm she'd heard the dual thoughts as well. But when Remus reached out to hear another, there was only the tumult of his own mind. He felt a momentary loss, but he couldn't be sad for long, with the woman he loved in his arms, his in the eyes of ancient law.

Suddenly, the gold and silver swirling lights drew in closer before exploding in a brilliant firework, showering the witnesses with their bond. Remus slowly became aware of the room around him once more, dimly hearing Mr. Johnstone speaking.

"Beautiful! Just beautiful. Don't get to perform many of these, indeed not. But when I was young, your age, son, I performed a few, and I can honestly say beyond a shadow, a *shadow* of a doubt that those were the brightest auras, the most secure magics I've seen...the loveliest and most sincere. And I swear I've never said those words to another soul, no, certainly not."

Harry was nodding rather dumbly while looking at Remus and Hermione, who had eyes only for one another.

"Best be off, kids, best take my leave. I expect these two'll be wanting some privacy, kids, yessir! I do believe that'll be just the ticket. An honour, it was! An honour, indeed."

And with that, Mr. Johnstone was off. Remus absently heard the front door closing, but he saw only for the woman in his arms. Harry cleared his throat in the background, and Ginny shuffled her feet. Remus bent to take Hermione's lips again. There was just no way he could leave them so bare and lonely.

Whispering voices had an iota of his attention, somewhere behind him and far away, but only Hermione mattered. She was making that whimpering noise that made him absolutely fall apart, and her hands were gripping his robes as though she was drowning.

"Time to go, Harry," Remus murmured, breaking the kiss only to move his lips to that bare, delicious neck.

"Thank you both so much. We'll owl you later. We should... have dinner, or... something..." Hermione trailed off, closing her eyes and letting her head fall back.

Remus heard more whispering, but he didn't care. He lowered Hermione to the floor where they stood, neither one having the inclination to traverse the steps to their bedroom.

"Okay!" Harry exclaimed. "At least wait until we're gone to consummate!" Ginny cried out as Harry grabbed her hand and sped them both to the door. "Animals," he muttered under his breath, an amused chuckle taking any sting out of his words.

Hermione's legs fell open as Remus settled between them. He tried to think about why getting her to their bedroom was a good idea, why taking her right here on the floor of their parlour was rather unseemly, but reason failed him. *Why not here?* he thought. Why not here among the flickering glows of a hundred candles, here in the very room where they had been bonded for life?

Truly, there was no better place for a consummation than the exact spot in which the vows themselves had taken place.

With his decision made, Remus brought his attention back to Hermione's silky neck. She always knew just how to tilt her head so the long, creamy column was exposed, that vein lightly pulsing, a dark purple buried beneath the honey of her skin. He nipped it solidly, feeling the pounding of the blood against his lips as she became excited.

"Remus, shouldn't we..." she began, trailing off again as his hand slipped between her thighs, her dress raised lewdly around her hips.

His fingers slid without preamble into her body, moving the thin lacy panties to one side to access her more quickly.

"We should do nothing but this," he whispered, mouthing her claim mark, which seemed to be glittering with the remnants of their bond's fireworks. Her moan was an aphrodisiac, her fluttering pulse a drug.

"Yes," she agreed mindlessly. "Just this."

Then she was pulling at his robes, stripping them off of him in record time. She was usually so willing to play the submissive role that this aggression was both unusual and highly arousing. Though he may have preferred to take complete control to the point where she couldn't even move except to writhe beneath him, her frenzy was proof of her desire for him, and that was a very potent and heady feeling. He was willing to let her take charge for the moment...she would, of course, remain beneath him, however.

She made short work of his clothing, and he removed her dress and undergarments. He sat back on his heels, taking in the unbelievable sight before him. Hermione, his Hermione, lying on the floor, legs wantonly splayed, arms above her head, hips moving as though he was still touching her. Completely naked except for the mesh veil over half her face and her white high heels. A more debauched angel was never seen. And would never be.

And she was his.

Lightly holding her arms in their position, Remus entered his mate slowly, making sure she felt every inch as he claimed her. The ceremony was words and pretty sparkles, but *this* was the real magic.

Remus thought about making love to her slowly, as he had the night before. Showcasing his love through gentleness and quiet passion. But that wasn't who they were, not really. And he had promised to begin as he meant to go on.

So his thrusts were immediately punishing, both to himself and to Hermione's delicate body. He gave no care to the brutality he laid upon his knees, her back, their bodies.

Her soft cries made the wolf roar. It was so close to the surface right now, he could practically taste the bristling fur, the cracking bones, the torn clothing. The wolf was howling, pining, desperate to be released, to be freed in a way Remus had never allowed.

But now was not the time for such selfishness. Not when he couldn't control or predict the outcome.

"Love you," Hermione gasped breathlessly as he pounded his unyielding cock into her body. He coaxed her legs to clamp around his waist, driving deeper than before. Her veil was slightly askew but he made no effort to fix or remove it. This was an image he would remember for the rest of his life. His mate, the formerly prim and proper Hermione Granger, willingly and greedily accepting his cock, body flushed with desire, shaking with the force of his thrusts. White shoes pressing painfully into his arse, sparkling veil crooked because of the way her head tossed from side to side in her ecstasy.

She was so completely his. It was irrefutable, now. She was marked. No wolf would ever come near her.

And he would make it so no man would ever come near her, either. At least, no man with lascivious intentions. But that was for another day. Right now, all that mattered was the boiling blood in his veins and that sweet metallic taste near her neck.

Remus, driven by instinct as he had been only once before, timed his next move to perfectly coincide with Hermione's agonizing orgasm. When she cried out his name, he bit down...again...into the soft flesh of her neck, indelibly marking her in the exact same place.

He would have chosen a new place, had he been in control, but his actions were guided by ancient forces beyond his control.

"Goddamn it, Remus!" she shouted, exasperated but still obviously taken away by her orgasm.

Remus, job done, thrust into her lazily until he came hard and fast, pulsing his seed into her and marking her inside and out. Breathing heavily but somehow keeping his weight off of her, he tried to follow the instincts that were telling him to stay inside her as long as possible, because he was supposed to breed with her, now that they were bonded.

And since he'd marked her for the second time, it was possible that his first claiming had been... premature.

"What did I say about biting people?" she demanded, not looking very authoritative with her wedding attire and flushed cheeks.

"That I should ask first?"

"Yes!" she exclaimed incredulously. She slapped his arm lightly and he chuckled, leaning over her to lave the freshest wound. It wasn't bleeding as badly as the first one had, but there was another set of teeth marks slightly off to side from the last. They would scar separately.

"You said it was okay," he informed her, swallowing to clear his mouth of the heavy taste of her blood.

She was silent and most likely fuming, so he elaborated. "When you promised to 'protect, honour, and love' me."

"That wasn't permission to bite me all the time, Remus," she said impatiently, wrapping her arms around his neck. He knew she wasn't too mad because she was embracing him, but he knew he'd gotten carried away again. He would have to work on that.

"You honour me by allowing my claim to rest upon your body. I love you. Thank you."

Hermione sighed loudly. "No more claim marks, okay? They really do hurt, you know."

He didn't know. But his mate wouldn't lie. He rubbed their noses together in apology before returning to the mark and licking it thoroughly, beyond what was necessary to clean and heal it. Before long, his attentions on her unique erogenous zone elicited mewling noises that roused his cock.

They made it to the bed that time, but only just.

Chapter 22

Chapter 22 of 23

After leaving Ron, Hermione escapes to Grimmauld Place where Remus and Tonks reside. She feels a pull toward Remus, who is experiencing a similar draw. Can they find happiness despite all the forces trying to keep them apart?

Hermione and Remus spent the next week on vacation. They went to a sweet little resort in northern Ontario, Canada, in a little known wizarding town. The sun shone cooperatively every single day, and because neither had ever been on a vacation like this, they made the most of all the amenities the town and resort had to offer.

The 'honeymoon' had been a gift from Harry, who still struggled with the myriad fortunes bequeathed to him. He loved nothing more than spending it on his friends, and though Remus tried to demur, Hermione would have none of it. She knew her mate had so rarely travelled, though she knew he would have done so extensively, if circumstances had been a little different.

Harry owled them on their last day in Canada to let them know that both Ron and Tonks had been taken off probation, and Ron was his old jovial self again. The bonding had done its job, and everything was back to normal.

On their last day there, Hermione had made an important decision.

"Remus?" she asked softly, knowing her lover was awake but still resting. They'd spend much of their vacation in bed, one way or another, and right now they were enjoying the sunlight streaming through the open patio door, waking up slowly from a long, lovely sleep.

"Yes, love?" he responded, voice scratchy with sleep. She watched him turn to face her, his eyes clearing and face becoming more lucid.

"I'm going to write a book," she said decisively.

"Wonderful idea," said Remus, gathering her into his arms and pulling her firmly against his body. She allowed the move, snuggling closer. This sort of intimacy was foreign to her. She knew that sometimes he just wanted to hold her, not for sex, just to make sure she was there. She had the feeling that he feared she would up and disappear, but she knew no such thing would ever happen. There was no leaving him, not now, not ever.

"That's it? Don't you want to know what made me decide that? Or what the book will be about?" she said, pouting.

"Well, I think you decided because you've been thinking about it for months, years really, though the subject matter might have changed. And I believe you will be writing on modern werewolf matings and how wolves should hold out for their true mates, so everyone can be as lucky as we are."

Hermione's mouth gaped. "What...how do...Remus! How did you know that?"

"I know *you*, love. You want to help everyone. You want to heal everyone. And this way you can get across to the largest number of people."

"Hmm," she said, still sticking out her lower lip, causing him to lean forward and nip it. She perked up, saying, "I want you to write it with me."

She'd finally managed to say something he hadn't expected. Gloating, Hermione watched his expression change from surprise, to pleasure, to anxiety. She knew that he still had ingrained feelings of worthlessness. He'd so seldom been able to contribute anything, despite that fact that he had so much to offer. The year he'd taught at Hogwarts had been the best year of his life (except this one, he'd told her). People just weren't willing to give werewolves a chance. But this could mean he would really be able to be a part of something greater than himself.

"Why? I'm sure you don't need my help. I mean, I could certainly help with the personal testimonial part, but to actually co-write?"

Hermione slowly pushed Remus on to his back. Since it was halfway between moons, she knew he felt almost no inkling of the wolf and was more than happy to let her take charge. Straddling him, she leaned over and placed her hands on his cheeks, forcing her to look at him.

"I do need your help, Remus. You're a brilliant wizard, and you have a beautiful way with words. If you really don't want to, I'll understand. But I want to do this together. Will you think about it?"

He still looked hesitant, so she kissed him lightly, trying to show him just how much she needed him. It was true that she could write the book herself, but she didn't want to. She wanted him there beside her, helping her and guiding her. She wanted him to say all the things he hadn't been able to say over the years, due to his lycanthropy. It was important that Remus have a voice, and she was determined to help him find it.

"I'll think about it," he promised. "Now, how about some breakfast?"

But his hands were trailing down her back to cup her arse, and she had the distinct impression that he wasn't talking about food.

One Year Later

Remus did indeed think about writing the book with Hermione. And all of a sudden, a million different ideas for chapters and content came to him, and after a few weeks, he was completely involved even before having officially made his decision. Hermione had smiled and asked if he'd chosen to co-write after all, and without even needing to think about it, Remus had said, "Of course."

So on the first anniversary of their bonding, Remus was anxiously awaiting Hermione's return from work. She'd finally been made full-time, but he knew she hated her job more than ever. The pay was insultingly below what her time was worth, and her boss always took advantage of her time and intelligence.

But today was a good day. The first draft of their book had been completed and sent in two months ago. They had worked day and night on the second draft, and a prototype had been sent to their house that very day.

The timing was absolutely perfect.

Holding the book and a little surprise behind his back, Remus waited by the Floo for the love of his life. When it lit up to expel her, he was waiting.

"Remus! I missed you," Hermione laughed, trying to fall into his arms only to discover they were held behind him. "What's going on?"

"I have a surprise," he told her, a mischievous grin spreading over his usually sincere features.

"Oh?" she asked coyly, pressing her body a little more firmly against his. "A surprise for me?"

"Yes," he laughed, taking a step back. "A real surprise."

Hermione looked a little anxious, and Remus decided not to draw it out. He revealed the book and held it out in front of him. The cover bore a moving picture of a man shifting into a werewolf, and then the werewolf stalking around in circles before lying down in front of a fireplace. It wasn't Remus, but many people might assume it was. The title was printed in white, standing in stark relief against the dark, greyscale photo. It read: Modern Bonding: Ways of the Werewolf and its Mate. At the bottom of the cover were two names: R.J. Lupin and H.J. Granger.

Hermione gasped, taking the book into her hands so delicately one might think it was made of spun glass. Her finger traced over the names at the bottom, coming back to run over *Lupin* a few times.

Remus anxiously waited for her to open the book.

When she did, she stared down for a long moment, before looking up to meet his eyes, perplexed.

"What...?" she whispered, a hesitant finger hovering over the white gold diamond engagement ring he'd placed inside the book.

He smiled and picked it up off the page, taking the book and setting it on the sofa beside them. He had to look away from her huge brown eyes, because the tears there were always enough to set his own off.

Taking her left hand in his, Remus bent to one knee. Even if Hermione wasn't the traditional witch, and their relationship not the typical one, Remus was an old-fashioned kind of man. He wanted to do this right.

"Hermione Granger, for the last year, you've made me the happiest I've ever been. I never thought love like this was real, let alone for me. When I'm with you, it's like nothing else in the world exists. I want to be with you, always. I want you to have my children; I want you to grow old with me. I want to be able to say you're my wife. I want us to be married in the eyes of Wizarding Law. I want it all. Hermione, will you marry me?"

"Remus... oh... oh, gods, I love you so much. Yes, I will marry you. Yes, to all those things you want, and yes to a million more." Yes.

Remus didn't notice the shaking of his hand as he slid the ring over her left fourth finger. They both stared in awe for a couple minutes at the perfect fit and sparkling light-play of the ring. Remus had been saving for months and had spent a portion of his half of the book advance to buy her this. Nothing made him happier than making her happy, and even though he knew implicitly that the ring wasn't what made her cry, he believed she deserved every little bit of happiness he could offer.

Hermione fell to her knees as well, hugging him so tightly that his back popped, causing them both to laugh recklessly through their tears.

"And you're sure this is what you want?" Hermione asked softly, crawling into her lover's lap. "You know I was content with being your mate. I hope you don't feel pressured..."

"Hermione," Remus interrupted. "The bonding, though beautiful and perfect, was forced on us. For the sake of Ron and Tonks, we had to do the right thing. Now, though... now is our time to be selfish. To do this thing because we want, because we deserve it. Your yellow dress was beautiful, but a woman like you deserves to wear *white*."

"White?" she asked, somewhat sceptically.

"White," he confirmed, pulling her so that her legs were wrapped around her waist and the core of her pressed against his groin. "With flowers. And delicious food. And dancing into the night. And all those Muggle traditions you want but wouldn't ask for. And all the wizarding ones as well. I'll make this day perfect for you, I promise."

"You do too much for me," she whispered.

"It's never too much when you love someone."

And then they were undressing, a slow removal of barriers between them. Remus smiled when he saw Hermione admiring her ring as she unbuttoned his shirt, and he took her hand and kissed each fingertip, nibbling a little on each one. She always tasted so amazing that he found it difficult not to lick and bite her all the time.

Despite his promise of 'No more bites,' he had, in fact, bitten her once more in the past year. It had been on his birthday, and she had said *Anything you like*, which he had taken literally. However, he had managed to ask her permission, even if she had been in a state of constant arousal. He'd bitten her on the inner thigh, drawing from her both blood and an incredibly intense orgasm.

She'd been a little annoyed later on, but whenever she pressed her legs together and the new mark was caressed, a wave of arousal would surge through her, and she couldn't be all that angry. And later that week, Remus had discovered it was possible to make her come just by a steady manipulation of the claim marks. He'd been licking and sucking on the one on her neck while gently stroking the one of her thigh when she'd unexpectedly cried out, shocking them both with her spontaneous orgasm.

Remus was very, very happy with his mate.

And now he intended to make her very happy as well. Shifting so he was cross-legged, Remus cradled Hermione's body as she wrapped herself around him. He lifted her body and sank into her slowly. The move from engagement to lovemaking had been so quick that she'd barely gotten wet, so they both felt the penetration strongly, but on the first withdrawal, the way became much easier, and Remus was able to move her faster, harder.

When he kissed her, he felt the golden and silver swirls of magic again, for the first time since their bonding. He opened his eyes, but there was nothing. The magic was inside them, binding them and joining them. A look into Hermione's glowing visage and parted lips told him she felt it as well. It was hot and cold at the same it, sweet and strong and only theirs.

Hermione's arms were wrapped tightly around his neck, and her kisses were persistent but soft. He met her lips without guiding them. Ever since the bonding, Remus had been less inclined to control every aspect of their lovemaking, though his jealousy hadn't actually dissipated. He was much better at controlling himself now and rarely felt as though he was more wolf than man.

Hermione's body was rocking against his, and while she wasn't moving very far off his cock, he could feel himself bottoming out inside her, and the extra stimulation was bringing his orgasm ever closer.

"So good, Remus. You're always so good. I want this... forever," she whispered against his neck, her hands convulsively clutching any free amount of skin within her reach.

"You'll have it forever, love. Just us, always," he answered breathlessly, holding her body against his so they were one person. Her breasts and belly were moulding against his chest, her face buried in his neck, nibbling and licking his skin, sucking on it and leaving a mark. In response, he lowered his mouth to her claim mark and began licking in the short, quick strokes he knew she favoured.

Soon enough she began to cry out, and Remus hurried to meet her, letting the sensations overtake him and embracing the magic flowing between them. When she bit down on his shoulder and clamped down around his cock, Remus cried out only a second later. He poured himself into her, giving her all of himself, everything he always thought no woman could ever want.

But she'd said yes.

Only the epilogue left, which will be posted on Christmas Eve. Happy holidays, everyone!

Epilogue

Chapter 23 of 23

After leaving Ron, Hermione escapes to Grimmauld Place where Remus and Tonks reside. She feels a pull toward Remus, who is experiencing a similar draw. Can they find happiness despite all the forces trying to keep them apart?

Their wedding was perfectly lovely.

Though large, it maintained all the personal touches of the couple, so that every attendant knew, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that this was *their* wedding.

Mrs. Weasley made the cake, the first peace offering she'd extended since Hermione had told her of her impending nuptials. While Mrs. Weasley obviously didn't want to hold a grudge, she seemed to have a little difficulty accepting that Hermione was no longer her would-be daughter.

The cake was delicious, and Ron inviting Tonks to be his date for the wedding went even farther in placating the Weasley matriarch.

Ginny got to wear a *real* bridesmaid dress, and not simply something she'd already worn a number of times. It was dark green and did amazing things for her softly pregnant figure. Harry looked impossibly handsome in black dress robes with green lining that matched Ginny's ensemble perfectly. His face was close to splitting with happiness that day, and for the first time in his life, he accepted congratulations from strangers with nary a complaint.

The ceremony was short, but meaningful. Many of the vows were reminiscent of the bond Hermione and Remus had performed, something only the maid of honour and best man recognised. The first kiss as husband and wife went on entirely too long to be appropriate, but Harry shushed the audience when people began to get uncomfortable.

"Animals," he whispered fondly.

The couple only broke apart when Mr. Johnstone called out for them to 'hurry it along so he could imbibe, already!'

Hermione did wear her white dress, and it was perfect. The lightest, flowing silk draped over her curves, flaring softly at the hips and trailing behind her in an elegant train. The gown opened to a vee at her throat, exposing an expanse of light golden skin. She chose not to wear a glamour over her claim mark.

When she had walked up the aisle, Remus immediately noted the veil she wore. It was the same one from their bonding, the one she'd worn while they'd made love that day.

Only Hermione really heard the growl low in his throat, and she smiled, a little smugly, as she walked to meet him.

During their first dance, Remus held his wife in his arms, neither remembering the steps to the dance that they'd painstakingly learned the week before. Both were content to sway slightly, looking into one another's eyes with promises of every good thing passing between them.

"My wife," Remus whispered, bending to place a kiss on her softly smiling lips.

"My husband," she confirmed.

The party continued at the finally restored and redecorated Grimmauld Place. It seemed to go on for days, but Hermione and Remus never noticed.

The Silencing Spell on their bedroom made sure of that.

*

A year after their wedding, Hermione and Remus moved out of Grimmauld Place. Their book was a critical success, though obviously not well received in all circles. Companion books were plotted and planned, but the couple gave themselves more time with these, writing their experiences as they happened.

For example, before they moved into their new home, neither could have expected that the wolf in Remus would drive him to mate with his wife in every single room. Nor could they have predicted that the wolf gave no distinction between 'room,' and 'closet' or 'hallway.'

Hermione didn't allow Remus to put a cage in the basement. A simple locked door was enough. The Wolfsbane had never, ever failed him, and improvements were being made to it on a regular basis. The pain was less debilitating, the recovery time faster. Remus began to learn to trust himself.

Hermione spent full moon nights in the basement with Remus. At first, Remus forbade her, but as they both knew (or, as Hermione always knew and Remus quickly came to learn) the fastest way to get Hermione to do something was to make it verboten. She would sneak down in the middle of the night to see the werewolf, who was always playful and calmed by her presence.

Remus' Olfactory Obstruction potion had been completely unnecessary, he soon found out. The wolf's desire to keep his mate happy was stronger than its desire to mate. As the wolf found his humanity, so did Remus.

Now his wife slept on one of the two large beds in the basement. She had no problem sleeping beside the werewolf, but he tended to move a lot, and Remus wouldn't risk accidentally scratching her in his sleep. But as soon as the transformation ended, she could always be found wrapped in her husband's arms.

*

Remus' and Hermione's physical expressions of love for one another became first famous, and then infamous in their group of friends. They were always granted the room farthest from anyone else when they went to visit. People stopped gaping and staring when Remus pulled Hermione into his lap for a vigorous snog in front of everyone.

Even Molly Weasley eventually smiled and said, "You kids," which made Remus blush and Hermione snort.

Remus' jealousy did temper a little. Hermione could hug her friends and even tell them she loved them. However, she could always feel the contemplative stare of Remus' golden eyes upon her, making her feel wanted and safe. Many people didn't understand it, but they didn't matter. Only Remus and Hermione did.

Obviously, their publisher had not thoroughly read their latest chapter when he complimented Hermione on her lovely earrings. Hermione graciously smiled, and Remus raised an eyebrow but otherwise did not react.

When the man reached out to touch said earring (possibly asking if they were real pearl...they were...but Remus didn't hear any of that), Remus had him against the door so quickly Hermione barely had time to roll her eyes.

"Why are you touching my mate?" he growled, holding the poor, middle-aged wizard against the solid oak.

"I wasn't...I just...the earrings... my wife. Anniversary."

Remus wasn't sure if his rage was distorting his hearing or if the man was actually making no sense, but he snarled and pushed the trespasser outside of his own office, locking the door behind him.

"Remus," Hermione scolded gently as she slowly lifted herself up on Mr. Backworthy's desk. "You should learn to control yourself."

"No," he corrected, stalking toward her. "Other men should control themselves around you!"

Biting her lip, Hermione wondered if what she was about to do could be considered a reward for bad behaviour. Perhaps that could be the next chapter.

Remus' sneer turned into a feral grin as he watched his wife slowly pull up her skirt, revealing the fact that she'd decided against knickers that day. Her legs spread in invitation, and she rested her weight on her hands behind her, scattering Backworthy's family photos.

Remus was in front of her and inside her in moments, filling her and fucking her to reassert his claim.

His lips were on the mark on her neck, and Hermione knew this was going to be hard and fast. Sure enough, Remus' pumping became pounding, and her desperate cries were shaky and interrupted by his movement.

Her legs were tight around his waist, drawing him into her deeper. His kisses were hot and demanding, never backing down, never giving up dominance even for a moment. When he felt her begin to tighten and her moans became pleas, he took her left hand and drew her ring finger into his mouth, wetting it and biting in just above where her wedding band rested.

Hermione knew what he meant. "Yours," she confirmed quietly before throwing her head back with the force of her orgasm. Her body was not her own as she was flooded with sensation.

Remus growled in agreement to her assertion, pumping his hips until his balls tightened and roaring as he filled her.

The bonding was enough. The marriage was enough. But he still liked to claim her every single day.

And looking back, though they made love nearly every single day, they both liked to think that was the moment their first son was conceived.

*

Allen Sirius Granger-Lupin was born on a quiet morning when the sun shone brightly. He was a very clever child, having inherited both parents' sense of mischief and general disregard for rules (within reason). Remus even had to create a smaller version of the Marauder's Map, showing their quaint home and grounds, because Allen had a knack for fitting into small spaces and falling asleep. The Allen Map saved both Hermione and Remus from hours of frustrated, concerned, and panicking searches.

Remus regularly used it to sneak up on his wife, which was usually unappreciated because Hermione tended to startle easily, thanks to having a toddler around.

One afternoon when Allen was visiting with his Uncle Harry, Aunt Ginny and their kids, Remus was enjoying a hot cup of tea and looking out the kitchen window over the property. They were lucky to have a lot of land where Allen, and hopefully future children, could explore and yet feel safe in. Allen had encountered the boundary wards many times, bouncing away from them as if they were made of the softest of rubber. They sparkled a little at Allen's eye level so he didn't run face-first into them, but that rarely stopped the child once he realised he wouldn't be hurt by bouncing off the wards. It soon became one of his favourite activities, and Hermione quickly added a Cushioning charm to the ground near the wards.

Hermione had gone for a walk nearly an hour earlier. She loved to walk the property, claimed it helped her think of new ideas for their books. They had a series now, the latest one having been written on the topic of a mated werewolf couple's pregnancy. Now, when they found the time, they wrote on Allen's development. Their books had a loyal following, many people reading not just for the information on werewolves, but the fascinating way in which the couple wrote their life story. The love in their family was evident in every single word, and they'd become something of celebrities, thanks to their unusual beginnings and compelling stories.

Remus fondly recalled Hermione's pregnancy. He hadn't even believed it was real, that such a thing could ever happen to him, but the little stick had said Pregnant, and Hermione seemed to readily believe it, and he wanted it so badly that he did, too.

However, hearing the Healer say it made it all the more real.

He knew he'd been horribly overbearing. He'd never let her stay on her feet too long, or eat too much or too little. He wouldn't let her go anywhere by herself and didn't allow company to remain too long.

He'd helped her when her instincts told her to clean the house and get the baby's room all ready, even when she was only a few months along.

He hadn't uttered a single word about his fears that his son would be a werewolf. He kept them to himself, keeping a bright smile and a hearty attitude for Hermione.

His fears had been for naught. Allen was born with absolutely no indication of lycanthropy.

Nor were Rachael, Alexander, or Alina.

*

"Mum!" Alina whispered, interrupting Hermione and Remus as they reminisced about their own Sortings.

"Yes, love?" Hermione said distractedly. She was looking around for Allen, now in his fifth year and entirely too devilish to be allowed out of her sight for long, much to his chagrin. Ah, sitting with some Ravenclaws. Sitting with his sister, actually. Rachael was right at home in Ravenclaw, and she wore her colours proudly.

There had never been any doubt that Allen would be a Gryffindor, but he did spend a lot of time with Rachael at her table. Alexander sometimes followed him, but he didn't much like to stray from his Gryffindor friends, especially as he was hoping Alina would be Sorted into Gryffindor with him. Though a year apart in age, the two were very close. All their children were close, though they knew to give Rachael her space when she had a book in hand or an idea in mind.

"What are you *doing* here?" Alina demanded, sounding exasperated. Hermione was amused to see her actually stomp a foot.

"I'm here to see you get Sorted, love. Why aren't you in line with the others?"

"Um, I don't know, because you're *humiliating me*?" she said in a squealing whisper.

"Honestly, Hermione, stop humiliating our child. Control yourself," Remus pretended to admonish, winking at Alina, whose eyes widened in frustrated anger.

"Oh, relax, Alina," Hermione huffed, not quite used to the way Alina pushed her away. Her other children hadn't done that; even Allen hadn't been too embarrassed to give her a hug and bear her kiss on his cheek when she'd arrived. Alina was more image-conscious than her other children. "Your father's teaching this year, and I was invited by the Headmistress. Would you rather I stayed in the rooms alone while my family is here, together?"

Alina frowned. "But with Daddy teaching and now you living here, I'm not going to have any fun!"

Remus chuckled, tightening his arm around Hermione. "Well, if you go have a chat with James Potter, he might know a way to avoid your lame old parents so you can get up to no good..."

"Remus!" Hermione cried.

Alina had bolted before Hermione had been able to grab her by the robes, and she was now, quite precociously, approaching James Potter, now in his final year. She couldn't hear them, but she could very well guess. Alina pointed to Remus, and James followed her finger, raising an eyebrow questioningly at them. Hermione shook her head rapidly, but Remus nodded and smiled. James grinned widely and said something that made Alina smirk very devilishly, indeed.

"You will pay for that, husband," Hermione promised.

"He was going to give the map to Allen next year, anyway. He didn't want the Slytherins to have it, so he couldn't very well give it to Albus Severus."

"We'll never be able to keep her under control, now!"

Remus pulled Hermione closer. She almost went to resist, but there was no point. Resigned, she folded herself into his arms.

"We never could control her, anyway. And you don't really want to."

"I want her to be safe," Hermione said, biting her lower lip. She looked at the Ravenclaw table in time to see Rachael push some boy's hand off her lower back. Hermione grinned. *That's my girl.*

"They'll be the safest kids in Hogwarts, with us here," Remus reassured her. "And I brought the Allen Map, you know. Only a few readjustments, and it'll tell us where they are at all times. Just them, though."

Hermione didn't pout, but it was a near thing.

They went to sit together at the head table, a seat reserved for Hermione as she would likely take most meals here with her husband. When the Sorting began, Hermione shifted anxiously. After Albus Severus had been sent to Slytherin, her children knew that house was nothing to be ashamed of; Albus was a sweet and thoughtful young man...just very ambitious. Alina was the most likely to go there, with her cunning, conniving ways. But she was also loyal to a fault, with a sense of fairness that only a younger child could feel so keenly.

Finally, the Gs were being Sorted. After Eliza Gindlehorn, Alina Granger-Lupin was called. The Sorting Hat did seem to deliberate longer than it had with her other children, especially Allen, but that could have been Hermione's nerves talking.

Soon enough, though, the Hat called out heartily, "Gryffindor!"

Everyone cheered. Even Rachael put down her novel long enough to give her sister a hug on her way by. Her two brothers looked very pleased, even though they'd acted as though they wanted her in any house but theirs.

Remus put his hand on Hermione's thigh, and she shivered. "The house is certainly going to be empty from now on. I'm glad we have this year to be with them."

Hermione nodded, her eyes prickling a little. Remus' contract as Defence Against the Dark Arts professor was only for a year while the regular instructor was on maternity leave. After that, Hermione and Remus would return to their cosy home and write full-time, though they didn't need to. Their books had begun as documentation but were now more like self-help with a lot of personal anecdotes. Werewolves had been coming out of the woodwork, the demand for literature growing ever higher. Werewolves like Remus, who had been afraid to have children for fear of continuing the disease, now felt more comfortable in procreating. There had not been a single case of hereditary lycanthropy to date. Hermione did most of the writing these days, with Remus as her primary editor and helper. She did let him write a lot of the sexual parts; she still got a little embarrassed revealing those sorts of details, but Remus did it in a very abstract way.

When dinner was over, Hermione and Remus said goodnight to their children (stealthily, of course...they may have accepted Hermione's presence, but they didn't want it all over the school that their Mummy kissed them goodnight).

In their quarters on the second floor near Gryffindor Tower, Remus sat down on the couch and beckoned Hermione to him. She immediately shucked her robes and straddled his lap. There was something about a man in teaching robes... no, there was something about *her* man, full stop.

She felt a little like a student again, sitting in his lap in Hogwarts...though she'd certainly never done such a thing the last time he'd held this position, though she might have kicked herself for not thinking of it. Her eyes must have darkened with promises of role-play, because Remus had that wily look about him.

"What can my lovely wife be thinking of?" he asked, unbuttoning her blouse.

"Hmm... just those dashing robes on you," she said, working on getting them off despite their appeal.

"I see," he whispered against her ear, pushing her shirt down her shoulders but not all the way off, trapping her hands. Her bra was next, and Remus immediately took a pouting nipple into his mouth.

Hermione moaned, trying to struggle out of her clothes so she could undress him and feel his unbearable heat against her body.

"Remember when we first moved into the cottage?" he was asking, and Hermione stopped moving to hear him better.

"Of course."

"Remember what we did for the first two days?"

Oh, Hermione remembered well. They'd barely made it in the front door before he'd had her on her hands and knees in the foyer. Then, they grabbed a drink in the kitchen, and she'd only had two sips before he'd spread her over the table.

And on it had gone until each and every room...

Oh.

"Yes, wife, I am going to fuck you in every single classroom, broom closet, office, and hidden alcove in this castle."

Hermione's pussy throbbed at the low, possessive tone he'd taken on. "What...what about the students' dorms? That... that wouldn't be right," she said, half hoping he'd

contradict her.

And she knew him so well.

"That's what the summer is for, no? We can have the kids go to Harry's for a few weeks while we make our way through..."

"A few weeks! There must be hundreds of rooms!"

But Remus didn't elaborate further on his dastardly plan, and Hermione promptly forgot to ask about logistics.

He picked her up and carried her into their bedroom. "Get undressed," he ordered gruffly, unbuttoning his own robes and letting them fall. Hermione hurriedly got out of her trousers, panties, and shirt, popping the cuff buttons in her rush. Once naked, she climbed onto the bed and watched as Remus undressed without taking his eyes off her. He still made her feel like the most beautiful woman alive. He made her feel perfect.

"How do you want me?" she asked, moving her arms above her head and stretching languidly. His eyes tracked her every shift, his cock bobbing as he crossed the distance and got onto the bed.

"Just like this," he said, and they both knew he didn't just mean her position.

He kissed all over her body, including each of her four stretch marks. One for each child, she liked to think.

Soon, she was begging. He did so love to hear her beg, and he always told her she did it so prettily.

"Open your legs," he whispered, and she immediately obeyed.

He positioned himself between her thighs and lined his cock up to enter her.

"Please," she begged, unashamed. He would take care of her, he always did.

Remus sunk into her slowly, and Hermione pulled his head down for a kiss. His lips were soft and smooth but they demanded everything she had, and she gave it all willingly, and then some.

As he made love to her, he watched her, and Hermione him. He didn't look much older than he had when they'd been married. An easier life and breakthroughs in Wolfsbane had done wonders for him. Hermione knew she had aged, but she still felt the same age as she had that first time they'd made love. Everything in her life was centred on that moment. Every time they'd made love, she remembered how it had felt to be claimed, to be so desperately wanted.

And she still felt that.

Remus lowered his lips to her silvery claim mark. It had not faded like other scars; it was perfectly preserved, his teeth marks clear to those who cared to look close enough.

A flash of arousal rushed her, making her cry out as his tongue manipulated her mark.

Hermione met every thrust of his cock, urging him deeper, harder, faster, *more*, until he gave her what she needed.

With her mouth on her neck and his cock inside her, Hermione had everything. She let the flood overtake her, let his body work her like he'd been doing it his entire life, and she knew that was how he felt, as well.

Nails digging in, Hermione cried out his name, for there was no other word in the world.

Remus rode her climax until his own found him moments later. A sharp bite to her neck sent renewed heat through her, but the sensation of him filling her was so much better.

"I love you," Remus said, still sounding as though he was astonished to be allowed to say such things.

"I love you, too, Remus," she answered, no longer astonished, just grateful. And content.

They had their home, their had their work. They had a family...a pack.

They had each other.

Fin.