

Bigger Than He Is

by LiteraryBeauty

Afraid of the world and of himself, Harry withdraws into Grimmauld Place with only Remus Lupin and his son for company. Remus uses unorthodox means to draw Harry from his shell, but has Harry retreated too deep to be pulled out again?

Oneshot

Chapter 1 of 1

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Warnings/squicks/kinks: explicit sexual content, D/s (mostly non-sexual service submission), compliant through DH except Remus didn't die (EWE)

Fear makes the wolf bigger than he is....German Proverb

Whenever Teddy was sleeping, Remus' arms looked empty.

Harry was so used to seeing Remus holding Teddy that whenever the child was in bed, Remus looked almost off-balance without him. Teddy was more than old enough to walk, but he was spoiled in the best of ways...by love.

The guest of honour for this little soiree was already long gone. Teddy's birthday had been a private occasion, just the three of them; this after-party was for the adults, really. Harry watched Remus' eyes sweep over the room without actually looking for anything, a portion of his mental faculties devoted toward his son's whereabouts and wellbeing even though Teddy was in bed. If Teddy needed his father, a spell would let them know...those sorts of things were necessary when Silencing Spells were being used around the child's room. The unobtrusive but impossible-to-ignore buzzing was something Harry had become accustomed to very quickly, living in the same house as Remus.

Harry stood apart, letting the ambient warmth sooth him. The bustle of the party was going on all around him, but he noted it only in bits and scraps, not really paying attention.

All this for a four-year-old child who wasn't even there to enjoy it. Not that he would have...Teddy was very particular and did not like crowds such as this one, and the Weasley family et al would never be anything but a crowd.

Teddy wasn't the only one uncomfortable in such settings. Harry stared, aloof, out the bay window, looking into the distance. The window was spelled so that the scene of warm rain cascading wasn't real, but even so, he was entranced by it.

Harry turned just as Hermione approached. He looked to Remus, as if for support, but Remus only stared back with an encouraging expression on his kind but tired face.

Hermione's hand lifted up as if to touch Harry, but fell quickly. Harry pretended not to notice.

"I'm so glad you had us over, Harry," she said, her voice infused with warmth and only a very subtle chastisement.

"It was a fun day," he said, non-committal.

She was gearing up for something, Harry could see.

"I wish you'd come to the Burrow, Harry, or even Ron's and my flat. Only for a little while, an hour or so. We wouldn't ask for any more than that, or even less, just for tea, maybe. You haven't seen the place and we *miss* you..."

"Hermione," Harry said, stopping her before she got too worked up and they both became upset. "I'm sorry. I can't. But this is good, isn't it? Let's not ruin it."

Despite what Harry thought to be placating words, the ensuing discussion began to drown out all other conversations, even when some people raised their voices to try to keep the attention off the two by the window.

Watching with the disheartening detachment of someone who knows exactly what was about to happen, Harry could do nothing as Hermione lifted her hand again, this time to place it on Harry's shoulder.

Harry wanted to recoil, could feel her fingertips right down to his bones as if she was clawing through to his marrow. With a look of pained resignation, Hermione removed her hand. Harry sighed in relief.

"Harry, if you'd just come out with us once in a while!" Hermione cried, holding her hand to herself as if she'd been stung, and maybe she really had.

Harry's face was stony, but his eyes were, as always, where the real fight went on. He knew from across the room, Remus would be able to see him struggle against himself. His desire for autonomy and freedom against his desire to be left alone. Remus understood. He never said anything, but Harry knew he got it.

Overwhelmed by the crowd and the day and the pressure and her closeness, Harry stepped back, the distance giving him some peace. "I don't understand," he began in a cold voice, borrowed but still chilling, "why you can't respect my wishes and let me live in *peace*!" The last words were shouted and the entire room fell silent, all eyes on Harry in pity, concern, and just the beginnings of annoyance.

"Harry," Mrs. Weasley called from her position on the couch. She hesitated when Ron put his hand on her arm, but she wouldn't be deterred. "Your friends are just trying to do the right thing. We've given you time, like you asked, but being here in this big house alone all the time..."

"I'm not alone," Harry interjected, feeling his cheeks begin to flush with colour. "Remus is here, and Teddy, too. I'm not alone."

"Yeah, but Remus works and Teddy's in preschool and daycare. You're *alone all day*," Ron said. He sounded as if he wanted nothing more than to just give Harry what he wanted, but that conflicted with his need to be a good friend.

With Ron on this side, like clockwork, the rest of the Weasley...including George, who Harry could barely look at these days...gave their opinions. Harry's temper flared.

Literally.

Harry couldn't feel it, but the sudden heat was fierce enough to even make Remus uncomfortable at the back of the room. People gasped and stepped back, and Hermione, the closest to Harry, cried out.

Having witnessed Harry's flares before, no one was really shocked, and the heat never actually burned anyone...only gave the impression of doing so. Still, it was things like this, Harry knew as he watched the reactions with dismay and some satisfaction, that made Remus worry about having Harry around Teddy.

"Harry," Remus said in a clear, firm voice that carried through the almost-suffocating warmth.

The voice connected and Harry pulled the heat back in immediately. Harry was ashamed as he raised his eyes to Remus'. But what did Remus expect him to do? He could barely control his magic, his feelings... Remus wanted him to be stoic and contained like him, but that wasn't Harry.

Remus' tone was low but meaningful. "Go upstairs to your room and sit on the bed."

Fury mingled with pride as Harry visibly shook, his hands clenched at his sides. But he knew his eyes were uncertain; scared, even. And he knew Remus saw.

Remus gave him a reassuring nod, and Harry took a deep breath, his thin chest rising and falling more quickly than it should have from a simple argument with Hermione. After a moment, Harry crossed the room. He would have walked right past Remus, but Remus reached out, touching his fingers to Harry's wrist.

"I'll be up to talk to you soon."

Harry didn't respond but the tension seeped from his being and when he ascended the stairs, it wasn't with trudging steps but a lightness that exuded grace and gratefulness.

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In Harry's absence, a silence fell over the room. Then Ron said something to George in a loud voice, obviously hoping to change the atmosphere a little. It did; people began talking again, some about Harry's behaviour and Remus' demand, but Remus didn't appear to be listening.

Harry was so troubled, so uncertain, so *angry* all the time. Everyone in the room had experienced those same emotions, yet no one knew how to help.

Finally Arthur begged off and the lot of Weasleys and their various companions made their collective way toward the door.

"I remember his skin was so soft."

Remus turned, looking confused. Hermione was standing beside him, short enough that he looked down on her bushy hair.

She smiled at the confused look on his face. "I always thought it was strange. Boys are supposed to be rough and scratchy, but he wasn't. I was jealous. Now I just wish... just wish I *remember* properly." Her voice was thick and her large brown eyes glittered unashamedly as she looked up at him.

Remus could only promise, "You'll know again."

It wasn't enough, not by half. But Hermione took it to heart. She touched his arm lightly...maybe in thanks, maybe in commiseration for what she knew he would have to endure when he went up to deal with Harry...and accepted her coat from Ron.

"Thanks for having us," Ron said. He matched Remus in height, where Harry hadn't grown much at all past fourth year. It was obvious that Remus felt responsible for them, even still. Especially Harry.

"Thanks for coming over. I'll be in touch soon."

Remus kept them up to date on Harry, who almost never left the house.

They both nodded. Hermione leaned into Ron, who wrapped an arm around her. There was comfort in the touch, given and taken. Remus closed the door behind him with a sense of finality.

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Instead of going to his room as he'd been told, Harry had made a small rebellion and went to Teddy's room, instead. He was conscientious of the child's light sleeping as he slipped into the dimly lit room.

Decorated with all things wizard, Teddy's room was Harry's doing. It had been very simple; he'd thought of all the things he'd wished he'd had and gave Teddy twice as much. The wallpaper was spelled to show a continuous looping of animated Quidditch games. All positions were highlighted in turn, even scorekeeper and announcer, in case Teddy wasn't a fan of the actual game. The players flew lazily now, but during the day, it was almost as exciting as a real game.

There were shelves lined with books enough to last Teddy until Hogwarts. Most were from Remus' own collection, but Harry added to it regularly. They took turns reading to Teddy, something Harry always looked forward to. There was a world so simple and undemanding in children's books. He suspected it was just as calming for him as it was for Teddy.

Teddy. Harry couldn't have known, when Remus had asked him to be a godfather, that he'd fall in love so hard. He knelt by the bed...he'd wanted to get a racecar one like he'd seen in a magazine, but Remus had drawn the line and gotten a nice pine bed to match the rest of the furniture. Teddy's light brown hair fanned over the pillow, corn silk soft. Harry touched it, careful not to disturb the sleeping child. With Teddy, Harry never had to fake anything. He could be himself and Teddy always loved him. It was so freely given that it made Harry feel selfish to accept it.

Harry froze as the door opened. He wondered how hidden he was by the dark. A foot nudged him, possibly by accident, and then a hand grabbed his upper arm.

"Didn't I tell you to go to your room?" Remus demanded, though he kept his voice low. Waking Teddy was the last thing either wanted.

Remus looked annoyed, even though Harry had no real reason to do as he said...he was an adult and this was his house.

"I did! At first." He didn't look away from Teddy.

"And then?"

"I thought I heard him crying..."

Even amidst the heavy shadows of the darkened room and the quietness of his words, Harry knew Remus could tell he was lying.

"You know I have the spell on him; I would have heard."

Harry wasn't used to seeing Remus so stern. "Yeah, but..."

Teddy stirred, his hair falling into his eyes as he gave a sleepy frown. Remus' fingers closed more tightly around Harry's arm and tugged, bringing him to his feet and from the room without another word.

"Stay here," Remus said, pushing Harry against the corridor wall and capturing his gaze. He waited until Harry gave a small nod before turning and re-entering the room.

Harry didn't know why he stayed against the wall, barely shifting. Something about the way Remus had spoken to him, so sure, so demanding. This was something Harry could do. He could follow these instructions. They were easy and took nothing to obey.

When Remus returned, Harry was still leaning against the wall, as ordered.

Giving Harry a brief nod of approval, he said, "Come with me," and led Harry to his own room, closing the door behind them and casting rather ominous Silencing Spells.

Harry was fastidious, he knew, when it came to his bedroom. It was almost impeccable, almost like he didn't live there. Harry liked it that way, the impermanence of it, the precision. He hadn't always been so neat, of course, but after he'd finished school, it had suddenly become important to have control over his surroundings.

"What's going on, Harry?" Remus sat on the neatly made bed, watching as Harry paused to deliberate between staying where he was and sitting.

Harry felt almost skittish...when had Remus ever given him reason to be afraid of him? After a few moments, he did sit next to Remus, though tentatively.

"I just don't like it when they're all here," he admitted, looking at his hands tucked between his knees.

"What was Hermione saying that bothered you?"

Harry shrugged; he'd known Remus had been watching. "More of the same. She misses me, wishes things were different, wants to tell me how to live."

"Do you really believe that last one?" Remus asked, cutting to the quick.

Harry sighed. He and Remus had had these talks before, but something felt changed, almost like Remus was... disappointed. The other times, Remus had been patient and understanding. Had Harry done something different, something wrong? He glanced up at Remus from beneath his fringe, wondering what the man saw in a boy like him. A recluse, avoider of responsibility, denier of the real world. Or perhaps that was simply how Harry saw himself.

"Are you mad at me?" he asked, changing the subject.

Remus' features shifted and the stern, dictatorial presence became something more familiar. Harry tried to relax, not understanding why he'd felt so at ease when given instruction.

"Of course not, Harry." Remus wrapped his arm around Harry's shoulders, watching his face for reaction.

Harry gave him none. He simply accepted the embrace. It was easier, different, when Remus touched him. With Hermione, there had been pressure behind her hand...not physical but something intangible, like she felt as though if she touched him, he'd become real again, like he wasn't real right now.

"I worry about you, but you know that. And so do your friends, and you know that, too. This can't last forever, and eventually you'll have to get used to doing things again, going out. What if Teddy wants you to take him to see a Quidditch game? What about sending him off to Hogwarts on Platform 9¾?"

"I'll be there!" Harry said defensively, part of him wondering if he could get away with wearing his invisibility cloak. "For Teddy, I wouldn't miss any of that."

"Then you'd better get used to it, and soon, because he's at the age where he's going to start wanting to explore, and Grimmauld Place isn't as big as it seems, Harry. But I don't just want you to do it for Teddy. Or even for me."

"I know, you want me to do it for myself." Harry allowed a small smile. Remus was pretty predictable, but he liked that about him. Actually, Harry liked everything about Remus. He was the only person that made Harry feel calm these days. His presence was a balm to Harry's fractured existence. He made everything fall into place so

easily. For a long time, Harry had been angry at Remus for not stepping into Sirius' role as his godfather, but now, he was grateful. It would make Harry's feelings for the man so much more confusing if they had that bond between them. He took a deep breath and said, "Thank you, Remus. I know how much you do for me, and I'm... really glad you're here."

Remus' arm tightened around Harry's shoulder, and the firmness of the hold loosened something inside him. Harry relaxed against Remus, his cheek against the older man's chest. His palms felt sweaty.

"Harry, I would do anything for you. And not just because you took me and Teddy in when you didn't have to, giving us a place to live, but because you're a true friend and a good person. I only want you to be happy."

Harry knew, of course, that Remus was grateful for Harry taking them in, though Harry hadn't even considered another option. Remus had needed a safe dungeon in which to transform during the full moons, and Teddy needed a stable home. Harry as a built-in babysitter was a bonus, but he certainly didn't mind.

The comforting scent of parchment and baby powder and clothes just old enough to take on the presence of a person washed over Harry. Without looking up, he slipped a hand up Remus' chest to rest on his neck. The touch felt intimate, baring, and Harry held his breath.

"Harry..." There was ugly rejection in the tone.

Harry had to stop it.

He lifted his face and planted his lips against Remus'. It was desperate and messy, but he had to show Remus he wasn't entirely useless. He'd followed his instructions, though he should have gone to his own room instead of Teddy's, but he'd just had to make sure Teddy was sleeping soundly...

Then Remus was kissing him back, and that seemed really strange because Harry had rather been expecting to get tossed across the room or hexed or at the very worst, pushed back gently as Remus turned him down with kind, sorry eyes.

Though Harry had initiated the kiss, that was the last of his control. Remus took ownership of the kiss, keeping it slow and closed-mouthed for a long time until Harry's hand tightened on his neck and he whimpered like an animal. Harry wanted to feel pathetic for his sheer neediness and lack of shame, but Remus' tongue was exploring the seam of his mouth, and Harry could do nothing but let his lips open and admit him.

Then, with decisive accuracy, Remus turned the kiss into something hard and, again, demanding. Harry fought to keep up...already this had outstripped any experience he had with men, having only kissed a bloke at a bar during the week after Voldemort's defeat. Remus didn't seem disappointed by his lack of experience; if anything, he was spurred on by it, kissing harder and deeper until Harry was nothing but a receptacle for Remus' desire. And Harry *liked* that, liked being wanted, being guided.

Remus pulled away but only enough to bite at Harry's swollen lower lip. Harry moaned, both his hands on Remus' shoulders. He fell into the kiss, knowing it was stupid to want and stupid to allow. He had to live with Remus, after all, and things would become so ugly afterward, so awkward. But it was only for a moment, he reasoned to himself. Maybe things wouldn't be so bad. Maybe they would just be roommates who kissed occasionally, though if this was how Remus kissed all the time, Harry couldn't imagine not doing more. At the very least, they would pretend it had never happened. Harry's gut twisted at that thought.

Harry was yanked from his thoughts by a sharp nip on his lip. It hurt, but the warmth was soothing and real; still, he jerked automatically from the sensation, eyes wide. Remus was like a different person when he kissed. There was a mountain of emotion that Harry honestly hadn't known the man was capable of before this.

"Oh, god, Harry, I'm so sorry..."

"Not that," Harry pleaded, words feeling foreign. His tongue poked out to feel his lip where Remus' teeth had closed down. A coppery tang told him blood had been drawn. "Anything but regret, please."

"I don't regret it," Remus said, his lips close enough to Harry's that their breath was joined. "It just wasn't the right thing to do."

"It felt really good, though," Harry said, feeling a little lightheaded. Had he remembered to breathe at all during the kiss?

They sat side by side in silence, Harry staring at his hands and Remus looking out the window, even though it was pitch black and nothing could be seen.

Finally, Remus spoke again. "When I told you to go upstairs, to stay in the hall... why did you?"

Harry wanted to say it was because he respected Remus, that he was obedient because it had been the right thing to do. Though those things were true, they weren't the real reason.

"The way you said it... it was like I couldn't say no. It was... important that I do as you ask." It was inadequate, but Harry couldn't explain any better.

"Did it make you feel good, to obey?"

The word *obey* seemed so strange, so old-fashioned or foreign, somehow. Was that really what Harry had done? Whatever the answer, Harry nodded. It had felt good. For those moments, he'd had a purpose.

Remus nodded, looking as though he'd had a much more important question answered. At length, he said, "Tomorrow, I'd like you to take Teddy to the park. It's only down the street and it's completely Muggle. For one hour, Harry. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Harry whispered, panic already seizing him. Without his permission, his hands reached out and grabbed Remus' shoulders again. His eyes caught Remus', light and gold and lacking the haunted, tortured look Harry's own eyes favoured. He wanted... something else. He leaned up to kiss Remus again...yes, that was what he wanted.

This time, it was slow and easy. Both seemed to know and accept that it was something that would happen again. When Remus pushed him back onto the bed, Harry was scared but excited.

Both feelings intensified when Remus cast a spell to tie Harry's hands to the headboard. He didn't question, didn't fight. If anything, he relaxed, his body melting from the top down until he was languid against the sheets, submissively accepting Remus' aggressive kisses. When Remus' teeth clamped down on Harry's lower lip once more, the pressure growing steadily against his already cut lip until Harry cried out, tears gathering at the corners of his eyes, hips jerking up for contact.

When Remus pulled away, there was a smear of red on his lower lip. Harry licked his own lips, tonguing the sore, indented cut there.

With the rushing of Harry's blood came the simultaneous rushing thoughts. His breath came short as he tried to explain his feelings to himself, even in the scant time that Remus looked down upon him, something indecipherable in his eyes, like Harry was a puzzle and only he knew where the final piece was.

The thoughts all slowed to a still as Remus moved farther away, off the bed. Harry struggled against the bonds for the first time; he wanted more, and now Remus was leaving him? That wasn't *fair*!

"Do a good job with Teddy tomorrow, Harry, and you'll be rewarded."

Harry nodded automatically, dumbfounded. He knew his face was pleading, but he couldn't bring himself to say the words to match.

Remus nodded and pulled the heavy coverlet over Harry's body. He tucked it around Harry's thighs and waist, patting Harry's cheek gently. Then he cast a spell that got rid

of Harry's clothes, and he squirmed with embarrassment, even though he knew Remus couldn't see anything. Just the thought that his former professor, his parents' friend, his housemate, had taken his clothes, knew he was naked... It was enough to make Harry flush dark red, but Remus didn't seem to mind.

"Good night, Harry."

In the dark of the room, white light from the street seeming too bright without the contrast of the indoor light, Harry tugged at the ropes that bound him to the headboard. He should feel panicked. He should feel scared. He had no control, no power. Anyone could walk in, hurt him, hurt Teddy and Remus. He was weak. He... couldn't do a goddamn thing about it.

He could do nothing.

Harry slept peacefully for the first night in over a year.

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"Come on, Teddy, time to go home," Harry said. A mum...or perhaps a nanny...smiled tiredly at him. She was similarly trying to coax a little girl off a swing. Harry looked away.

"I'm hungry!" Teddy cried as he dropped to his feet off the spider web of robes he'd tangled himself in.

"You and me both." They'd been at the park for most of the day. He'd had to take Teddy to eat at a doughnut shop, but luckily they'd had more healthy foods for Teddy, though Harry was regretting his own sugar intake. He was crashing, hard. The park sounded louder than before, though there were less people there. It seemed strangely dark, but the sun was still visible in the sky. Tempers were snapping left and right, and Harry just wanted to go home.

Teddy took his hand, mashing sand into the grip, and Harry held him tightly, trying not to tug him along as he stopped every few steps.

"I thought you were hungry," Harry said, a touch of anger creeping into his voice. Teddy reacted to it, stopping his dallying and letting Harry pull him along.

"Up, Harry!" Teddy cried, just as Grimmauld Place came into view.

"Sure," Harry said, hauling the boy into his arms. He rested Teddy on his hip, angling it out awkwardly to keep his balance.

Harry had almost had it in his head to lie to Remus. To tell him that they'd gone to the park, even though he didn't plan on doing so. Then Teddy had run into his room, just as the morning light splattered the bedroom floor. Harry'd lifted his hands to protect himself from flying child, only realising after he was able to that the bonds had disappeared. Had Remus snuck into the room in the middle of the night, or that morning before he'd left for work, and untied Harry?

What was it about the ropes that had allowed Harry to rest so deeply?

Why wasn't he panicking about the fact that *Remus had kissed him*?

There were years of discomfort between the two. After Sirius' death, when Harry had *needed* Remus... Remus just hadn't been there. It still hurt, but Harry had never brought it up. After the war, Harry had been needed, and he was glad of it. Remus and Teddy... they were his family. Teddy demanded so little and gave so much in return. Harry adored the boy, though he did wish he had more to offer than a dreary old house and a trust fund for him. Teddy would never want for anything, but Harry sometimes felt like an imposition, creating a place for himself in their lives when he should really just *give* Remus Grimmauld Place and find his own home where he wasn't bothering them. But he *needed* them, and that was why he couldn't just walk away.

He tried to make himself as useful as possible to Remus in the hopes that he wouldn't notice how much of a nuisance Harry really was. He did most of the cooking, almost all of the cleaning, he took care of Teddy when the boy wasn't at daycare or preschool, and he even took care of Remus when he worked too hard, which was always.

Opening the door to Grimmauld Place, Harry sighed. He felt so much more comfortable inside. It was so quiet, but not in a creepy way as he'd previously thought. Now it was a gentle silence.

Putting Teddy down and helping him out of his shoes and coat, Harry made sure the door was locked tight and went to see if there'd been any owls.

There had been. From Hermione. Harry put it aside, telling himself he'd deal with it after dinner was started. He almost left the sitting room when he noticed a letter on the floor in front of the Floo. Only Remus had Floo access.

Opening the blank envelope, Harry stared at the message, eyes wide.

For dinner, please make chicken with asparagus...soft, the way Teddy likes it, and mashed potatoes. Teddy needs a bath. The window in the second guest bedroom has a draught. Please see about sealing it (the magical home improvements book is on my desk). Have dinner on the table for when I get home.

Harry huffed out a breath in disbelief. Remus usually had no problem asking him to do things like bathe Teddy, and it was a given that Harry cooked, but he'd never *ordered* him to do anything before! There wasn't a single please or thank-you in the entire note.

Tossing the letter into the fire, Harry sat on the sofa, watching Teddy play with the army figurines Harry'd gotten him a few weeks before. He'd spelled small protective bubbles around the pieces so they couldn't break, poke, or be swallowed but still stood and did whatever Teddy wanted them to do.

Remus said he was paranoid.

"Your Daddy's lost his mind," Harry said casually, still in shock about the note. He was absolutely not going to just do as Remus said like *a/lave*. Why hadn't Remus *asked*? Why did he have to say it like that?

"He'll find it," Teddy said, rolling the army men into each other like he was bowling.

"Or maybe he's just tell me to," Harry grumbled, crossing his arms over his chest. After a few minutes, though, he got up. Dinner had to be started, chicken or not...though it would serve Remus right to get home to *no* dinner. Well, Harry would still feed Teddy, of course.

Casting the proper monitoring spells on Teddy, Harry ambled into the kitchen. There was chicken marinating in white wine on the middle shelf in the fridge. Harry sighed. If he didn't cook it, it would go bad. And Remus had gone to the trouble of getting it ready, so that was something. Maybe he'd assumed Harry had seen the chicken and was just reminding him. Or maybe he'd asked Harry before and Harry had forgotten. But that wasn't right...Harry never forgot when he was told to do something.

Since the chicken was prepared, he transferred it to a cooking pan and heated the oven. He was kind of in the mood for mashed potatoes anyway, so he got those peeled and prepared and ready to boil on the stovetop. Figuring the asparagus was really for Teddy, Harry decided to make that, too.

When everything was prepared for cooking, Harry put the chicken in the oven and set the timer. He went into the living room to gather Teddy for his bath. It was a little earlier than he usually had one...Remus was already home by then, most times, and they would take turns.

"Don't wanna bath!" Teddy cried, bolting as soon as Harry tried to pick him up.

"That's entirely shocking to me," Harry deadpanned, but of course Teddy didn't understand.

Eventually he got the four-year-old into the tub, and he sat on the toilet while Teddy played with the plethora of different coloured rubber duckies. Each time he picked one up, he'd scrunch his eyes and concentrate, and his hair colour would shift to match that of the ducky.

"Pick a good one to show Daddy," Harry said, laughing.

Teddy settled on a violent purple, and Harry washed the strands, carefully guarding Teddy's eyes.

"Like it, Daddy?" Teddy asked brightly.

"I'm sure your daddy will love it," Harry said after a moment's pause.

Teddy chattered on as Harry washed him, protesting when Harry pulled the plug and stood him up. He hated getting in the tub, he hated getting out.

Wrapping him up in a fluffy towel, Harry carried him to his bedroom and plopped him on the bed. He knew he spoiled Teddy by carrying him so much, but he loved the weight of him, the realness. Teddy needed Harry.

"This?" Harry said, holding up the adorable broomstick pyjamas he'd gotten for Teddy a few weeks back.

Teddy shook his purple-haired head.

"This, then." Harry showed him the puppy pyjamas the Remus had bought. The little dog looked like a small Padfoot, and Harry knew that Remus had been feeling nostalgic when he'd purchased them.

Teddy laughed loudly, though Harry wasn't sure why. He threw the towel off himself and let Harry dress him, giggling maniacally when Harry briskly rubbed the towel over his hair.

Casting the monitoring spells at Teddy's back as the child took off down the hall, Harry noticed as he walked past one of the spare rooms that a cool airstream was coming out. Frowning, he investigated. He sealed the crack in the caulking with a repairing spell. The room was right next to Teddy's...the child could have gotten a chill and that was unacceptable.

Passing Teddy, who was once again playing with his army men, Harry carried on to the kitchen to finish dinner. When it was ready, he set the table and cast stasis spells on everything.

It wasn't until he went to sit with Teddy and play for a bit that he realised he'd done everything Remus had told him...and what was more, he ~~fe~~*good* about it, like he'd really gotten something done, even though he did more work most days. For some reason, the feeling of accomplishment was so strong that he really hoped Remus said something.

When Remus did return from work, however, Harry was disappointed. He greeted his son and Harry as usual, praising Teddy on his stylish hair and carrying him to the dinner table. He settled him in and put food on Teddy's plate and then his own.

Remus asked Harry questions about his day, but nothing about the letter or the chores. Harry frowned, uncertain if he'd done something wrong. Was the asparagus not soft enough? Teddy seemed to be enjoying it.

It was the chicken, surely. It was a little dry. Wasn't it? Harry couldn't tell. He could barely chew. Why wasn't Remus *saying* anything? Did he think he could just get away with ordering Harry about and then not even appreciating his efforts?

After dinner, Remus did the tidying and Harry cleaned Teddy up. He stood in the doorway to the kitchen with Teddy perched on his hip, unsure what to do. Usually, the three of them would relax in the living room for a bit, Remus reading to Teddy or playing games. Harry would just sort of sit there, together but separate. He always felt like Remus should have private time with his son, but Remus insisted Harry spend it with them.

Feeling strangely let down, Harry left Remus to clean up and took a seat on the sofa with Teddy. "Go pick a book," he said, pointing toward the lower shelf of one of Remus' bookcases. Teddy ran over and spent a long time deciding before coming back with one about a kitten that could only play with a certain colour yarn and thus caused high-jinks while trying to unravel sweaters and curtains.

Teddy got comfortable on Harry's lap, opening the book and looking pointedly between it and Harry.

"Just wait for Daddy, okay?" Harry said.

"Want you to read," Teddy replied, sounding sleepy already.

Sighing, Harry knew he couldn't take out his confusion and frustration on Teddy, so he opened the book...which he practically knew by rote anyway...and began to read.

Halfway through, he settled against the arm of the sofa and arranged Teddy into a more horizontal position against his chest. As he continued to read, the drone of his own voice threatened to lull him to sleep, and once he was sure Teddy was out, he let his head fall back and closed his eyes.

He wasn't sure what time it was when he woke up, but Remus was kneeling in front of him with a soft smile. "Time for Teddy to get to bed," he whispered. He stood and relieved Harry of the toddler, making the transition so smoothly that Teddy didn't even stir.

After Remus left, Harry felt cold without the clammy heat of Teddy on his chest.

He banked the fire and made his way upstairs. It was still early, according to his Tempus spell, but it seemed better than waiting for Remus to return and things to get very awkward. He still hadn't sorted out his feelings on that front.

Once in his room, the first thing he saw was the ropes still tied to the headboard from the night before. He hadn't noticed them earlier. Something twisted in his stomach as he thought about the way it had felt, being secured like that.

Staring at the ropes, Harry undressed, turned down the lights, and got into bed. If he listened carefully, he could hear Remus saying goodnight, casting the spells to keep Teddy safe as he had a thousand times before.

Stretching, Harry wrapped the cords around his wrists, looping them until they were pulled taut. Even though there was no real difference from the night before, he didn't have the same sense of safety. Sighing, he unravelled himself and turned onto his side, prepared to face another sleepless night.

When Remus knocked on the door a few moments later, Harry almost didn't answer. He wanted to see him, and yet he didn't. He'd expected praise for his work that day, even though it was nothing more than he usually did. Why did Remus *telling* him to do it change everything?

Eventually, though, he realised he couldn't just shut Remus out like that. Not when he was the only one Harry really had.

"Come in," he said, voice lowered to make sure Teddy stayed asleep.

Remus slipped in and closed the door behind him. He spelled the lights to glow softly, shadows falling on him in shades of grey.

"Do you mind if I have a seat?" Remus asked, approaching the bed.

Harry sat up, his back against the headboard, the ropes effectively hidden by his body. "Not at all."

Remus sat by the pillows. He reached for Harry's hand, taking it between both of his. "You ~~did~~so well today, Harry. I'm really proud of you. You do so much, you know, taking care of the house and Teddy. I just wish you did more for *you*."

"Those are things I *do* do for me," Harry said, his cheeks burning from the praise.

Remus' finger stroked his cheek, smiling a little at the blush. His fingers carded through Harry's hopeless hair, settling on his neck. "I couldn't do this without you, you know."

"Get one free saviour with every dusty old house," Harry quipped. There was a strange tension between them, something Harry'd never really felt around another man. Around another person, really.

Remus just laughed off the comment, and the sound broke the thickness in the air. "Were you able to find the window draught all right?"

It was the first reference he'd made to the list he'd left. It had Harry out of sorts. He didn't want Remus to think he'd been left lists, but there had been a very real satisfaction that came from finishing the chores.

"No problem," Harry whispered. He tucked his hands between his knees and gave a small smile.

"And dinner was delicious." Remus smiled and Harry's heart pounded. When Remus leaned forward, looking like he was going to give Harry a kiss on the forehead, Harry angled his lips up, trying to catch a kiss. He hadn't realised how much that was exactly what he wanted.

But Remus avoided the intimacy. "I don't think that's a good idea," he said with the tone of someone who wished his words weren't true.

"We did last night," Harry reminded him. "And you said you thought I did well today."

"You did. I'm extremely proud. But I don't want things to change between us. I just came in to see if you wanted me to..." Remus gestured behind Harry at the ropes. "Tuck you in."

Being rejected stung, and having Remus be so kind about it, so willing to pretend it hadn't happened, made Harry just want to ask again. There'd been something about that kiss that he wanted again. However, a full night's sleep was hard to turn down when they were so rare.

He shifted down the bed and lifted his arms over his head, crossing them at the wrist beneath the ropes. Remus leaned over him and tied the knots, just tight enough that Harry couldn't slip out, but not too tight that he'd hurt himself. The raw scrape of the rope against his skin, sensitive from that same treatment the night before, sent waves of satisfaction through him.

"Thank you," he said, testing the ropes one last time. The tightness in his stomach that usually plagued him throughout the day had diminished and there was only a tired contentment.

"Thank *you*," Remus whispered. He pushed Harry's fringe off his forehead before turning the lights down and leaving Harry's room.

Harry was asleep before he'd heard the knob turn.

*

The next day, new instructions arrived. Simple little things, including what to make for dinner. Harry did them all without even really considering the other option. When everything was done, he took Teddy to the park, feeling like he'd truly accomplished something. As long as no one tried to talk to him, he felt almost completely normal.

The next night, Remus turned Harry down again, but he tied him up and a new record of perfect nights of sleep was born.

Still, something was missing.

*

It was nearly a week of sleep-filled nights and accomplished days later that Harry realised the build-up of tension inside him wasn't going anywhere. What he wanted in Remus, what he'd found there, wasn't something that would just fade away if ignored.

He slipped away early in the evening for a wank, desperate to get the time to himself. He hadn't even considered it during the week, being too contented with the sleep he'd been getting to risk it. He couldn't wait any longer, though.

A creak on the floorboard on the top of the stairs had him hauling the covers over himself, raising one leg to hide his erection. He wanted to cry from frustration.

"Come in," Harry said when Remus' unobtrusive knock sounded.

Remus entered and sat in what Harry now considered to be *his* spot at the head of the bed. He smiled down at Harry in that soft, almost sad way of his. "You've done so wonderfully this past week that I'd like to reward you."

Harry sat up quickly. Would Remus finally kiss him again as he had that first time? Harry couldn't think of a better reward than what he'd been asking for all along.

To his dismay, though, Remus took a small box from his robes pocket and handed it to Harry, spelling it back to its original size.

"A gift?" Harry said, trying not to let his disappointment show in his voice.

"I've noticed that you haven't had nightmares the past few nights. I wish I'd thought to try this solution ages ago. As it stands, however, I'm concerned for your physical wellbeing, should you decide to continue with this method of restraint."

Remus' meaning became clear when he reached for Harry's hand, a gentle finger smoothing over the redness and faint burns from the rope. Harry flushed; he liked the marks, which was why he'd never healed them.

"I thought... something more comfortable might put my mind at ease." Remus nodded at the box in Harry's lap.

Suddenly excited, Harry opened the lid. He wasn't sure if he went pale or blushed deeply...all he knew was that his face went tight and he had to close his eyes for a moment. In the box, lying amidst red velvet, was a set of beautiful shackles. Before that evening, Harry wouldn't have thought 'beautiful' was a word to apply to something more at home in a dungeon than his bedroom, but there was no denying it. The outer cuff was stiff, unforgiving leather, the aroma reminding him of Sirius' motorcycle jacket. On the inside was the softest fur, black like the leather and made of promises of comfort and pain together.

Holding them against his chest, Harry tried to speak. "I... thank you, Remus. These are..." His fingers clenched on the shackles. He had to wonder what the hell was wrong with him that he couldn't sleep without being tied down. What nature of man was he? What kind of coward? Still, the gift was thoughtful and perfect. It wasn't Remus' fault that Harry was all messed up inside.

"I know things are hard for you right now, Harry," Remus said in his soothing tones. "The world hasn't quite returned to the one you once knew. But it will, I promise you. And needing help, even to sleep... it doesn't make you weak. Don't ever be afraid to ask for what you need."

Harry didn't want to comment on the hypocrisy of Remus' words...when he *had* asked for what he wanted, namely, Remus himself, Remus had turned him down. When he looked up at Remus, he saw his own thoughts echoed in those warm, gold eyes. But there was no invitation there, only a reassertion that it would never happen.

Sighing, Harry slid his hand inside one of the shackles. He gasped when it clamped down around his wrist, the pressure perfect, the fur silken. Immediately, a sense of relief washed over him, making him bite his lip. He didn't want this weakness... but it was so hard to think about going without it now.

Remus took Harry's other hand and pushed the shackle on. Prepared for the movement, he didn't make a noise when it tightened. There was only a very short chain between the two cuffs, and it felt infinitely better than the less permanent-feeling ropes.

Like he had for the last week, Harry squirmed down in the bed and lifted his arms over his head. The action stirred a sense memory of lust in his gut, and he had to breathe through his arousal. If only Remus would kiss him... touch him...

As Harry tilted his head back and watched, Remus secured the cuffs to a metal ring on the headboard...that was new. It looked strong enough that he couldn't break through even if he tried.

"If you need out, just call for me. You won't be able to release these on your own," Remus said, his hand resting on Harry's arm.

Harry just nodded, knowing he wouldn't call Remus. That he couldn't escape made things more real. With the ropes, there had been the knowledge that he could have eventually untied them. These were probably reinforced magically as well.

"And you'll be able to turn over if you need to," Remus said, turning the ring to show Harry his range of movement.

"Thank you, Remus. I love them," Harry whispered. He knew he was hard and that Remus could see. But he felt no shame; on the contrary, he felt uninhibited.

"I'll send your chores around noon. Please take Teddy to his preschool tomorrow, and if you could speak with his teacher about maybe giving him some specialised attention regarding his Metamorphmagus abilities, I'd really appreciate it."

"Oh, you want me to... talk to... Yeah, I guess that's okay. No problem." Harry gave a strained smile and turned his head away, closing his eyes.

Remus touched his cheek for a moment before leaving, the darkness falling over Harry like a too-heavy blanket.

He'd have to talk with someone. A total stranger.

Arousal forgotten, Harry fell asleep despite the clenching pit that was his stomach.

*

Teddy was used to the glamour Harry used when he went any further than the park. It played on his natural appearance, altering him enough that he didn't look like Harry Potter, but he didn't look entirely unlike him, either. Thanks to Teddy's own abilities, he had an uncanny knack for sensing when someone tried to cover their appearance with a spell, and therefore wasn't afraid when Harry came out of the bathroom with a different face.

"Time for school, Teddy," Harry said, getting together the lunch he'd made and the little journal the preschool provided for communication between the teacher and the parent.

Harry felt like a coward, but whenever he'd thought about actually talking to the teacher, even though he'd met her before and she'd been completely decent to him, he got a racing feeling in his blood. He almost backed out of taking Teddy to the school at all, but he didn't want to disobey Remus when it came to his child.

He'd used the journal to write about Remus' question. He just couldn't talk to someone. He couldn't.

Teddy was murmuring about the toys he got to play with when Harry picked him up and Apparated them both outside the small building. There were other parents bringing their children in as well, and some of them smiled at him. He smiled back, or tried to, but he immediately felt ill.

"Remember to give Mrs. Newman your journal, okay, Teddy?" Harry said, kneeling and placing Teddy on his feet.

Teddy rolled his eyes and Harry chuckled, hugging him and sending him inside with a pat on his bum. He waited until he saw Mrs. Newman greet Teddy before Disapparating.

Once back in Grimmauld Place, Harry immediately went to his bedroom and sat on his bed. He wished he could put the shackles on his wrists. Why hadn't Remus considered that Harry might want to use them by himself? Why hadn't he bought something Harry could get out of *without* Remus?

Was it because Remus didn't want Harry tied up unless he was there?

Harry unhooked the shackles from the ring and put the cuffs on. He wouldn't be able to get out, but he could still do his chores, and Remus would be picking Teddy up from school, so he didn't have to leave the house at all.

Deciding to have a nap...it was a long time until noon when the chore list would arrive...Harry lay down, letting the sensation of being bound comfort him. He considered continuing that wank, but decided it would be too difficult with his hands tied closely together.

*

The list of chores had come at exactly noon, as Harry had known it would. Still, he'd knelt before the Floo and waited, practically catching note when came through.

Only a short list that day, Harry mused as he prepared the dinner as instructed. Without Teddy there, there wasn't much he could do regarding the child, and most days the instructions were based around Teddy.

That day, there was only the dinner to make, and Remus' room to tidy. Harry felt uncomfortable with the second instruction. Making dinner was expected and familiar, but Harry'd never even been in Remus' room since it had become thus. Would it be a disaster? Somehow Harry doubted Remus was the type to leave his room a complete wreck, and yet Harry had to wonder why Remus couldn't have just done it himself.

Once dinner was cooking, Harry decided to take care of Remus' room. He hesitated outside the door, feeling like he was mapping uncharted territory. Remus' room was very private; the door was always closed, and Harry hadn't even glanced inside since he'd helped Remus move in.

Shaking his head at himself, Harry opened the door. Working with the shackles was difficult, but the longer he wore them, the more comfortable he became and the easier it was to get things done.

The bedroom was rather anticlimactic after the build-up that had gone on inside his head. Remus had rich chocolate brown sheets with an enticingly fluffy duvet on a four-poster bed very similar to Harry's own...Harry remembered it had come with the house. The furniture was a little fancy for what Harry considered Remus' style to be, but there were touches of Remus everywhere that played down the fact that the room was quite stuffy.

A bottle of cologne sat on the dresser, and Harry sniffed it. It was Remus, all right. Feeling embarrassed, Harry aimed the nozzle at the shackles and sprayed it. The smell of Remus flooded the air, and when Harry sniffed the shackles, it was like smelling Remus and Sirius together, and that didn't make him sad to think about.

Harry wasn't sure what exactly needed tidying; the room was in good order already, but Harry had never been the type to keep his own room impeccable...until lately, anyway.

He smoothed out the sheets and straightened a pillowcase that had gone crooked. He dusted with a damp flannel and put away some clothing that sat on an armchair. He cast sweeping and freshening spells, he renewed the wards on the window and door, he refreshed the warming charm, and he spelled new oil into the lamps. In the adjoining bathroom, he cleaned mindlessly, not thinking about what he was doing. Remus was obviously meticulous already; there was nothing that absolutely *needed* doing. Still, Harry did things that didn't need doing. Remus had told him to.

Time passed without meaning. He refolded everything in Remus' drawers and reorganised which drawers held what. He sent all Remus' robes except one set to be cleaned and mended. He even sent the man's shoes to the cobbler; a few pairs looked a little worse for the wear, and the spell to send things away was simple. Harry could do so much without ever speaking to another person or leaving the house.

He was replacing the blade in Remus' razor when he realised he'd been working in the room *for hours*. Luckily the dinner was a stew, or he might have destroyed it.

Knowing there was absolutely nothing else he could do in Remus' room, Harry left and got the dinner table ready. Remus would be home shortly, he knew. Then Harry would have to confess two things: that he'd shackled himself in, though he suspected Remus would pick up on that fairly quickly, and that he hadn't spoken to Teddy's teacher as instructed.

He sat at the table and waited. He didn't want Teddy to see the shackles, so he couldn't wait at the door as he usually did. His body was starting to ache from all the work he'd done and the strange angles he'd pushed his body to with his bound hands.

"Harry?" Remus called from the foyer a few moments later, closing the door behind him.

The quick pattering of footsteps brought Teddy into the kitchen, crying, "In here, Daddy!"

Remus followed, saw Harry, and smiled. The expression settled the tension in Harry's stomach, but he knew it'd be back once he confessed to failing to complete Remus' list.

"This smells great, Harry," Remus said, inhaling deeply. He plopped Teddy into his chair and approached Harry, who pushed back from the table so Remus could see his hands in his lap.

Startled eyes met his, and Harry felt unaccountably ashamed. Remus had been the one to buy the cuffs...he'd known that Harry needed them! Harry flushed and looked down at his hands.

Instead of chastising him, however, Remus simply cast the spell to open the shackles and slid them off, placing them on the sideboard behind Harry. "Anything you need, Harry," Remus reminded him in a whisper before pressing a chaste kiss to his forehead.

Harry nodded, his throat feeling thick. He watched Remus seat himself and dish food out for everyone. He waited until Remus nodded at him to begin eating. Now that Remus had been so kind about the shackles, Harry worried that he would be even more disappointed about the teacher thing. He'd already let Remus down once; the shackles were supposed to be for the bedroom only.

But then... Remus had never said that. And Harry was supposed to listen to the rules. If it wasn't a rule, that meant he couldn't get in trouble, didn't it?

How had he even gotten the idea that Remus would *punish* him? Remus had never been anything but kind and generous to Harry. He had no reason to believe Remus would hurt him. That was just stupid, really. Remus could get mad all he wanted; this was *Harry's* house. He didn't have to do chores or anything if he didn't want to. Remus should be grateful for what Harry *did* do, which was a lot.

Even as he thought it, though, he knew Remus *was* grateful. He went out of his way to make sure Harry felt appreciated, even if he didn't give him that extra attention that Harry was desperate for.

Remus bathed Teddy alone that night, and Harry read in the living room, or pretended to. In truth, he could hear Remus and Teddy talking, the sweet, high voice of his godson warming his insides, and the low, melodic responses from Remus making him want to curl up inside the words.

He heard father and son move into Teddy's bedroom. With the door closed, all Harry could hear was the susurrant of Remus' words, and even that grew more and more quiet. Eventually Harry picked up his book and read again.

When Remus came down the stairs, having obviously put Teddy to bed, panic seized him anew. Without thinking, he slid off the sofa onto his knees, unable to look at Remus as he sat in his armchair, the weight of his eyes heavy.

"Talk to me, Harry," Remus said quietly.

"I didn't talk to Mrs. Newman," Harry blurted out. "I wrote the question about Teddy needing special attention in the journal. I'm sorry. I just couldn't... I couldn't. I can't."

Remus was quiet for a few minutes, but Harry wasn't willing to break the silence. He'd stay there all night if he had to, on his knees, head bent.

"I'm disappointed that you didn't follow the instructions, but no harm was done. The pertinent information was passed along. I already read what you wrote, Harry, and I spoke to Mrs. Newman when I picked Teddy up."

Harry's stomach dropped. Remus had known all along and he'd let Harry stew in his own fear and failure? Still, it was nothing more than he deserved.

"I'm sorry," he said again.

"Apology accepted," Remus said, his voice stern but not cold. "Now go on up to your room. I'd like you to get to bed early tonight."

Harry rose and would have left but Remus stood as well and stopped him with a hand on his shoulder.

"I saw the work you did in my bedroom. I'm very impressed. I appreciate the effort, even if it was much more than I'd expected. You did very well, Harry."

"I'll take care of your room from now on, okay?" Harry said, shifting nervously. He wanted to be able to go back in and smell that cologne again if he needed to.

"I would appreciate that very much," Remus said.

To Harry's surprise, Remus folded him into a tight embrace. He hadn't time to get his own arms around Remus' neck, but his hands were squashed against Remus' chest.

"You're doing very well," Remus said cryptically.

Harry blushed. It was just a little housework. When Remus released him, he ran up to his bedroom and lay down.

He listened carefully for sounds of movement, and it wasn't long before Remus came up the stairs and Harry could hear his bedroom door open and close. He wondered what Remus was looking at...if he'd noticed the way Harry had tucked the sheets in.

It was almost an hour later when Harry realised he wasn't any closer to falling asleep as he had been when he'd first got into bed. Immediately knowing what was missing, Harry snuck down the stairs to get the shackles from the sideboard so he could sleep.

But they were gone.

Punishment.

*

The next day was difficult because Harry had barely slept at all. He felt half-Inferus, completely incapable of making competent decisions. He'd never felt so out of it after missing only one night's sleep, but it was bad enough that he took Teddy to the daycare centre even though Harry'd taken to keeping him home when he wasn't at preschool.

He tried going back to bed but gave it up as a bad job after lying there for nearly an hour. He also gave in to the urge to wank, but he just couldn't push himself over the edge, no matter how hard he tried. Exhausted and sexually frustrated, Harry buried his face in his pillow and screamed.

Having a bath to cure his boredom, Harry passed out for a few blissful minutes before being woken by the sound of the Floo. He groaned. It was only noon.

Dressing quickly, eager to get his instructions, Harry ran down the stairs and grabbed up the envelope. Opening it, Harry read instructions to go to the market and pick up a few food items for a dinner Remus planned on making. As well, Remus told Harry to organise the potions stores by alphabet and help Teddy tidy up his room.

Why did Remus want him to go to the market? Their food was automatically delivered by a pre-determined set of instructions. Harry hadn't had to get groceries since before Remus and Teddy had moved in, proof that having them live with him was a mutually beneficial. Harry looked after Teddy while Remus transformed; Remus did any extra shopping. Perfect.

Harry searched the pantry for the things Remus wanted but he couldn't find any of them. He deliberated for all of a minute before jotting off a missive with the foods and giving it to Remus' owl to take to the grocer. He wasn't going to go out if he didn't have to.

The potions organising took nearly three hours, and Harry was sweaty and covered in filth by the time it was finished. Grimmauld Place had a very impressive potions lab, not that it got any use. Now it was even better, tidied and categorised. He took a quick shower, unimpressed as he nearly fell asleep standing up. What was it about the water that made him so sleepy? He wished he had time to actually have a nap in the tub, but it was probably for the best that he didn't...it wasn't the smartest idea he'd had.

As Teddy was in daycare, Harry couldn't very well help him clean his room, so he did it himself. He didn't go as all out as he had on Remus' room, but Teddy was generally a pretty tidy child to begin with. After that, Harry went into Remus' room in hopes that there would be more to do, but since he'd done such a great job the day before, there was nothing more for him to do except tuck the sheets in...Remus seemed to be a kicker...and put Remus' robes away in the closet. He didn't really look for the shackles, not wanting to invade Remus' privacy, but they certainly weren't in plain sight.

The owl carrying the shrunken package of Remus' ingredients arrived, and Harry put them away, mouth watering as he thought of all the things Remus could create with such food.

Every time he stopped moving, though, Harry's eyes grew tired and his eyelids heavy enough to slowly drop. He couldn't wait until Remus came home and gave him back the shackles. Maybe Harry could sleep while Remus was cooking. And all because Harry hadn't followed the stupid instructions to the letter.

"Oh, fuck," Harry said, staring at the delivered food. This was a test. Remus *knew* that Harry could very easily order everything on the list. He wanted Harry to go out, to talk to people, to leave the house. He would know if Harry didn't; he would know if Harry lied.

It was so simple. Harry needed the shackles to sleep. Without following Remus' instructions to the letter, he'd never get the shackles. Therefore, without doing as Remus said, Harry wouldn't sleep.

Harry threw up the glamour and left the house before he could convince himself that the sleep wasn't worth it. Without Teddy in his arms or by his side, he felt naked. He hadn't realised how much he'd been using Teddy as a shield from the real world. Knowing that, Harry decided to get the groceries before he picked up Teddy. It would be the first time he did something like that without either Remus or Teddy, or before, Ron or Hermione.

He was in and out of the market in less than a half hour, but it was enough. With the paper-bagged groceries in hand, he ducked into an alleyway to regain his breath. It hadn't been that busy, but he felt like he'd fought his way through a mob. It was hard to catch his breath. He wished he were home and he contemplated just Apparating back without getting Teddy first...he could tell Remus where Teddy was, and Remus would just go get him. He probably wouldn't even be mad.

But Teddy didn't deserve to have to wait. And Remus *would* be angry, whether he told Harry or not. He certainly wouldn't be willing to explore any more of that kissing, even though it seemed unlikely that he would whether Harry was good or not. Still, Harry didn't want to eliminate his chances totally. He wanted Remus, and since he was pants at seduction, he'd have to *earn* him, instead.

Getting Teddy only took a few moments, and he didn't even have to speak to anyone. He simply waved at the woman in charge and took Teddy from playing with the other kids. Teddy wasn't exactly eager to go, but Harry told him his daddy would be cooking dinner that night, and then Teddy was out the door before Harry.

Trying not to take that as a commentary on his cooking skills, Harry chased over and grabbed up his hand, walking them the twenty minutes back to Grimmauld Place.

He knew Remus was home when the aromatic smells collided with him as soon as he stepped in the door. He let Teddy down and tried to stifle his disappointment at being beaten home. Now Remus would know Harry had ordered the food. He hadn't planned on lying, just... not saying anything.

"Harry?" Remus called, and Harry walked down the stairs to the kitchen, following the amazing smells.

Teddy was right to disdain his cooking. Remus was an artist. Harry put the groceries on the counter, chagrined.

"Hey, Remus," he said softly, setting about getting the table ready for dinner.

"What's this? Did you forget something?" Remus peeked into the grocery bag.

Harry flushed. He couldn't meet Remus' eyes. It was so obvious what had happened, and he didn't want to have to talk about it in front of Teddy. To Harry's surprise, though, Remus said nothing, only put the duplicate groceries away and continued making dinner.

"I thought we'd give Teddy his bath after dinner. It might be messy."

Teddy wailed his opinion on that, and Harry laughed and agreed. During dinner, which was fish and some sort of amazing soup and a salad with things in it that Harry would never have put in a salad, like nuts and strawberries, they mostly listened to Teddy's babblings on his day at daycare. When Remus heard that Teddy hadn't been at

home with Harry, he raised an eyebrow but did not otherwise react.

By the time they had Teddy bathed, read to, and in bed, the tension was enough to make Harry run and hide under his covers, shackles or not. He and Remus returned to the kitchen to start the clean-up, and Harry waited for the inevitable.

"You did very well today, Harry. I'm proud of you." Remus' voice was warm and low, and Harry had to close his eyes against the sheer familiarity of it.

"I'm so sorry," Harry blurted, spelling the dishes to start washing and keeping his face down and turned away from Remus. "I was so tired that I was worried I might fall asleep and Teddy might get hurt, so I took him to daycare even though I know you would rather I watch him myself. And then I cheated and ordered the groceries instead of going to get them. And *then* I tidied Teddy's room without him because he was at daycare, obviously." Harry dropped his head. Why was it so hard to follow simple instructions?

"Harry, shh," Remus murmured, pulling Harry away from the sink and into an embrace.

Harry reached up almost desperately, twining his arms around Remus' neck and burying his face in that solid, warm, and earthy-smelling chest. "I'm sorry."

"There's nothing to be sorry for," Remus said, petting Harry's hair. "You did the right thing with Teddy. If I'd thought it through, I would have put that very thing on my list of instructions. I knew you'd be tired today, and it was my fault for not thinking that through properly. For that, please accept my apology."

"You don't have to be sorry for that," Harry said. He burrowed deeper into the hug; if Remus was allowing it, he planned on taking what he could get. "It was my fault I was so tired. If I'd just spoken with Mrs. Newman like you'd said, none of this would have happened."

"Did you think that you would be perfect the first time? Every time?"

The question seemed rhetorical, but Remus was clearly waiting for an answer. "... I don't think so. I didn't expect it to be so hard. Why is it so hard to just... go out there?"

He hadn't expected Remus to answer, and he didn't. Instead, he continued to thread his fingers through Harry's hair and rub his back as Harry clutched at him like a drowning man.

"It'll get better," Remus said with authority in his voice.

"Remus..." Harry whispered, tilting his face up. Remus' warm eyes looked concerned, but there was heat within them, too. Did Remus want him after all? Had the kiss not been a fluke? Harry got up on his tiptoes and kissed Remus hard on the mouth, unwilling to break it even when Remus tried to push him away.

In an instant there was a change, so fast it was shocking. Remus grabbed the back of Harry's head and mashed their lips together almost painfully. Harry whimpered into the bruising kiss, feeling himself go limp and arch against this man who was controlling him.

"More," Harry gasped, rubbing himself against Remus, pressing against him so hard it was like they were one being. He let Remus slam him against the counter, not even protesting when the ledge bit into his lower back.

Remus grabbed Harry by the waist and tossed him onto the counter, spreading his thighs and stepping between them, closing the distance again. Only this time, their heights matched and Harry could feel the searing heat of Remus' arousal pressed against his own.

"Gods, Harry," Remus said urgently, breaking the kiss only for a moment before taking Harry's mouth again.

His arms around Remus' neck and his legs around Remus' waist, Harry tried to keep the man against him as long as possible. As the devastating heat of the kiss died down, he could feel Remus pulling away, even though he hadn't moved an inch.

Sure enough, Remus tore his mouth away and forced himself from the circle of Harry's legs. Harry cried out at the loss, feeling wanton and abandoned on the counter as Remus looked at him with eyes half ashamed and half clouded with lust.

Then Remus turned and left the room, leaving Harry to catch his breath as the dishes idly washed themselves beside him.

*

After Harry finished cleaning, he crawled into bed, resigned to another sleepless night. It occurred to him how strange it was that he'd become accustomed to sleeping only while tied after a mere week. Would he ever be able to sleep without it? It was a scary thought.

Harry reached up and grabbed the headboard, concentrating as hard as he could on the *incarcerous* spell. It worked, sort of. Loose ropes looped around his wrists, but no matter how he tried, he couldn't tie himself sufficiently. He was able to get out too easily.

To make matters even worse, he couldn't stop thinking about Remus' strangely heated, incredibly powerful body slamming him against the counter. He'd thought, when he'd first met Remus, that the scholarly professor was a rather timid sort, not one to express himself through actions rather than words. But there had been a violence to his domination of Harry, and Harry had eagerly submitted. Now he wanted more. He was hard enough to ache, but too tired to actually do anything about it. He would have cried if he hadn't been so bloody exhausted.

Harry jolted when Remus entered the room without knocking. He had the shackles in his hand; Harry wanted to weep with relief. Not a word was spoken as Remus disposed of the sad excuse of bindings Harry had been trying to work with and replaced them with the sturdy shackles, sliding them over Harry's wrists until they shrunk down to fit him.

Heaving a sigh, Harry thanked Remus, who had yet to meet his eyes.

"Have a good night, Harry," Remus said quietly, leaving the room as quickly as he'd entered it.

The ring the shackles attached to allowed for some movement, so Harry shifted onto his stomach, his throbbing cock immediately coming into contact with the sheets. Harry groaned. There was no way Remus hadn't noticed that...and there was no way Harry would be able to sleep without taking care of it. He tried for all of five minutes to ignore it and wait it out, but it continued to plague him.

Using his hands on the headboard as leverage, Harry began to grind against the bed. He could already feel the sheet becoming damp with his precome, and the sensation as he slid through it made his breath catch.

On a particularly loud moan...it was, after all, the first time he'd been close to getting off in over a week...Harry heard a creak outside his door. Too close to stop, Harry just hoped it was Remus and not Teddy. The sheets worked their way off his body, and he knew he was going to regret that after he was sated and tried again to sleep.

The door opened again...when had Remus forgone knocking? He groaned and halted his movements, though it was obvious what he'd been doing.

"I heard a noise," Remus said, looking at the floor in front of him.

Harry panted and nodded. "I didn't mean to be noisy."

Instead of leaving, Remus took a step forward. He lifted the sheets and pulled them back over Harry's body, his fingers grazing Harry's shoulder. When he turned to leave,

Harry gasped out his name.

Remus didn't turn around. "I can't."

"Why?" Harry asked, trying not to sound plaintive. His hips jerked of their own accord.

"It's not really me you want, Harry."

"What do I want, then?" Frustration laced his voice, but he was tired of this dance...they both wanted the same thing. Harry was sure of it; after the episode in the kitchen, how could he doubt it?

"You want something familiar, something that reminds you of an easier time in your life. You want the excuse to never have to leave the house. You want a pack."

"A pack?" Remus was wrong. Harry'd never even thought about a pack.

"A built-in family so you don't have to be alone."

"So?" Harry cried. He struggled to get his knees beneath him so he could shuffle forward and sit awkwardly against the headboard. "Isn't that what everyone wants? Isn't that what drove you to Tonks after Sirius... after Sirius died?"

Remus did turn, and his eyes were cooler than Harry could ever remember. "I loved Tonks."

"That's exactly my point! What I feel for you isn't some desperate need to be with another person. I care about you. So what if I don't want to be alone? It's more than that with you. What starts as a need to not be alone can turn into something better, like what you had with Tonks."

"You're too young to be making decisions like this..."

"How old were you when you fell in love with Sirius?" Harry demanded, acting on a hunch. "He never said anything, but I knew."

Remus sat on the edge of the bed. "Harry..."

"Remus, please. Don't turn this into something ugly. It's not like that. You make me feel... so peaceful, so safe. Don't you understand? I've ~~never~~ had that. Not in a person. I felt safe in Hogwarts, sure, but home has never been a person for me before." Harry gulped. He hadn't quite intended to bare himself so completely. It seemed the shackles were equally freeing and restraining.

"How can you know it's what you want when you don't have any other options? How can I know what you feel is real when you've never even tried to find it in another person?"

"Why would I keep looking after I found it?" Harry opened his hands, still attached to the headboard, to show his sincerity. "I didn't always feel this way about you. It's only recently that I realised I wanted... needed... more. You know how to deal with me when no one else does."

When Remus spoke, his voice was absent, wistful. "You always needed someone to guide you, to help you along. You've lost and found that again and again over the years. I recognise what you need, but I fear I've created a problem where there was none. I wanted to be the one you needed, but it worked too well."

"So what happened in here a week ago, when you kissed me? And what happened in the kitchen? Was that just you trying to guide me?"

"That's not..."

"And where were you when I really needed you? After Sirius died, what happened? Why didn't you... I don't know... step in as my godfather? Didn't you think I could have used guidance *then*?"

Remus' face went white. He reached forward and touched Harry's face before pulling his wand and pointing it at the cuffs.

"No!" Harry said, curling over the shackles. "I need them."

"I'm not taking them away," Remus said, his voice thick and raspy. "I won't do that."

Harry met his eyes and saw his sincerity. He nodded, and Remus loosened the bonds. Harry pulled his hands to his chest, rubbing a raw spot over the rather sharp wrist bone.

Remus took his wrists, rubbing the back of Harry's hands with his thumbs. "I won't ever be able to go back and fix what I did. I should have done as you said. I've never... since Sirius went to Azkaban, there was only me. I've never had anyone depend on me. And I didn't think you would want me. Sirius, he..." Remus broke off and chuckled, shaking his head. "He was wild and fun and he understood young people in a way I didn't even when I was one. It didn't occur to me that you'd want to be stuck with a bookish former professor."

"I want to be stuck with you now," Harry said quietly. He changed the hold Remus had on his hands so their fingers were interlaced. "I don't need a godfather anymore, but I still want you."

Remus smiled a little sadly. "You're young and very attractive. You don't have to attach yourself to the first person you see to fend off loneliness."

Harry inched closer. "You think I'm attractive?"

"I'd have to blind not to see that," Remus said. His gold eyes darkened a little as he took in Harry's near-nude state, apparently for the first time.

"What if this isn't about loneliness?" Harry asked, sliding his hands up Remus' arms to gently cup his shoulders. "What if it's just about happiness?"

With his hands now free, Remus didn't seem to know what to do with them. He placed them on his knees where they clenched whenever Harry moved. "I have to think about Teddy, too."

"I love Teddy!" Harry said insistently. "I'm his godfather. I'd do anything for him."

"He's just had so many people leave his life, Harry. He's so attached to you. I don't think he could get over it if you left."

Suddenly, Harry realised what the problem really was. Taking a deep breath, he said, "Remus, I won't leave Teddy. No matter what. And I won't leave ~~you~~ *you*."

Remus' eyes went wide. Was it possible even he hadn't realised what he'd really been saying?

Harry went on. "If we try this and it doesn't work, I'm not going to kick you out and I'm not going to leave. I'll always be Teddy's godfather and you'll always be one of my best friends." Harry smiled. It felt good and real to say it. In the time they'd been living together, Remus had become so much more than just his parents' friend.

Still, Remus looked uncertain. "There are things that I like... that I need, really, that I couldn't expect you to..."

Leaning forward so Remus couldn't see the flush that was sure to come from his words, Harry whispered, "Things like tying me up? Like telling me what to do?" He rested his lips against Remus' neck, knowing he was right.

"It's different when it's not in context of your daily life."

Remus might be trying to protest, but he wasn't pushing Harry away. For someone who liked to order Harry around, he was sure making Harry do a lot of the work. "I want it to be my daily... and nightly... life. I like it when you tell me what to do. I want it. I want you to teach me."

Remus pulled back, his hands on Harry's neck, thumbs tracing his jaw. "This will change things," he said seriously, his face a mixture of concern and desire.

"It's time for things to change," Harry whispered, and he leaned forward to kiss Remus.

Immediately taking control, Remus pressed Harry against the pillows, stretching out beside him. Harry groaned when he felt Remus' arousal press against his thigh. He rocked his hips up to get contact for his cock, but Remus stayed out of reach.

"Put your hands back up," Remus said, his voice rough.

Harry did as he was told, raising his arms over his head and sliding them into the open cuffs, sighing with relief as they tightened. All thoughts of how tired he was fled him as Remus' hands explored his body.

"I've wanted this," Remus said, his fingers plucking at a pebbled nipple.

"How long?" Harry asked, arching into the touch, wanting more.

"Too long, Harry." His hands moved over Harry's concave belly to tease the hollow of his hip, slipping beneath his pants for a second before returning.

"I've thought about it, too," Harry confessed. "I like that you want me." He blushed at his own forwardness. It was only the cuffs around his wrists that stopped him from hiding his face.

"Open your legs." Remus waited for Harry to obey before kneeling between them, running his hands over Harry's legs from feet to groin and back. He slowly pulled down Harry's pants, freeing his cock so it bounced against his belly, making Harry turn pink with embarrassment until he looked at Remus' face. The embarrassment turned to pure, raw *want* as he saw the darkness of Remus' eyes, the way he seemed to consume Harry.

Being completely naked and spread out before Remus, who was still dressed and looked to be utterly collected, made blood rush through Harry's body. He felt exposed, like Remus could see every part of him, inside and out. He liked being known in that way, liked that Remus cared to know him.

Harry drew his legs up so his knees were bent, knowing it exposed his most vulnerable area. He wasn't sure what instinct encouraged him to do it, but he knew he needed Remus more than he could even rightly express.

He tried to listen to the spell that Remus cast to make his arse slick, but he was too distracted by the sensation. He'd known, of course, what it was that men did together. It had been on his mind frequently since about the time he'd had a moment to himself, free of pressure and panic. But he'd never been able to pursue his needs or even really explore them solitarily.

"I wish you could see yourself," Remus said, sounding awed. His fingers caressed Harry's crevice, circling and then settling on his hole.

Harry couldn't help but flush. Remus' gaze was so... relentless. He felt devoured. Using the shackles, Harry's arched his body up, into the touch. It sent shivers through him, reminding him of what was next.

Remus moved almost too slowly. His fingers, which Harry had always thought of as artist's fingers, breached him gently but surely. His actions were confident, and Harry gained comfort from knowing that Remus knew exactly what to do.

"Uh!" Harry grunted when Remus grazed his prostate. He closed his eyes, unable to see Remus' knowing smile. The touch was so intimate, so precise, meant to draw Harry's reactions however Remus wanted.

"You feel so good," Remus told him, kissing one of Harry's bent knees. "I can't wait to be inside you."

This new side of Remus thrilled Harry. Gone was the quiet and shy bookworm. In his place was a self-possessed and experienced man who was willing to teach Harry about his own body and maybe even Remus', as well. "Don't wait," he panted, rolling his hips into the gentle thrust of Remus' fingers. "Please."

Remus leaned over Harry, bracing himself with one hand on the bed beside Harry's head. Forgetting he was bound, Harry tried to reach out to touch Remus. He groaned in frustration, but Remus just smiled at him, kissing him softly on the cheek and then the lips. Harry lifted his head to follow when Remus pulled away, eager to keep the kiss, keep the fingers inside him, and yet get more all at once.

"I hadn't planned on fucking you tonight," Remus said, his voice a whisper of warm breath and promises of pleasure. "But I'm not strong enough to resist."

Harry didn't care if Remus put the blame on him if it made him feel better. Harry just wanted Remus inside him, with him. "Don't resist," he begged, knowing he wasn't capable of more impressive language than that. His mind was a muddle of pleasure and need, and he had no intention of clearing it.

Remus whispered that elusive spell again, and his fingers slipped from Harry's body to be immediately replaced with the nudging head of his cock.

Harry tried to be quiet, he really did. He didn't want to wake Teddy, and he really didn't want to embarrass himself with noises. But everything Remus did seemed to be geared toward getting a response. The way he nipped Harry's lower lip, the way he forced eye contact even though Harry's cheeks burned... the way he teased Harry's hole with his cock, pressing in enough to start that wonderful stretch but not enough to satisfy.

"Tell me you want it," Remus said. His eyes were so dark that they were almost lost in the shadows of his face, but there was a golden glint that reminded Harry of sunsets and the DADA classroom.

"I want it," Harry gasped, lifting his legs higher to give Remus complete access. "I want it. I want you."

Remus groaned and smiled all at once, looking both thoroughly pleased and aroused. He pressed forward, his cock sliding through Harry's tight ring of muscles, making him cry out at the intensity of the feeling. There was pain, and it was sharp difficult to ignore, but there was so much more. Just... pure sensation. Harry was overloaded by it. Remus was everywhere, around him, inside him, with him.

Harry threw his head back, breathing through the penetration until Remus' hips rested against his arse.

"God, you're perfect," Remus said, leaning down to bite at Harry's nipples, tonguing them and leaving them hard and needy for more.

"Remus, just... please, you have to fuck me. Please."

"I intend to," Remus said with a breathless chuckle. He pulled out and plunged back in, showing Harry none of the mercy Harry'd always thought him the epitome of.

"Harder," Harry said almost immediately, needing the impact, the fulfilment to feel truly sated.

"Harry," Remus chided, burying his hand in Harry's hair and tugging it. "Let me take care of you."

"Sorry." Harry smiled up at Remus, showing him he was relinquishing control. And *that*, he realised, was what he'd wanted all along. That was what Remus had been trying to give him from the start. It was all about control, all of it. Harry had it and didn't want it. Remus didn't need it but knew what to do with it. "God, yes," Harry groaned, half in pleasure at his realisation and half because of the way Remus was pounding into him.

Harry groaned when Remus pulled out and away. He felt empty without Remus inside him, empty and without meaning. But Remus simply turned Harry over, the shackles turning at the ring. Harry automatically pulled his legs up under himself, his arse high in the air.

Remus took immediate advantage, sinking into Harry and resuming a punishing pace. His fingers made grooves in Harry's skin, and Harry pushed back into the pain, into the need. Just as he'd promised, Remus did take care of Harry. With his front pressed snugly against Harry's back, Remus fucked him so thoroughly and for so long that Harry just slipped away. He was present, he was certainly there in body and spirit, but his mind just became nothing more than a sequence of receptions of pleasure.

When he came, it was more than just the culmination of amazing sex. It was like... the climax of his entire life. For a brief and blissful moment, everything made sense to Harry. He'd been pushing people away because he was scared of being alone. In reality, he needed to do the opposite...draw people closer, keep his loved ones near.

The fact that Remus could make Harry realise all this just by giving him a thorough pounding was awe-inspiring. As he slumped down directly onto the wet spot, he thought about how much he could make hiring Remus out to fuck the epiphanies from people, but he decided he liked the idea of having Remus to himself.

Remus left his body again, and the emptiness wasn't as uncomfortable as before. He was about to ask if Remus had even come, but as he shifted, he felt a stickiness between his arsecheeks that answered his question.

"Harry..." Remus whispered, laying down beside him and stroking the damp hair from his forehead. "It's all right."

"Of course it..." Harry cut himself off when he felt the thickness in his throat. He pressed his face against the pillow; there was definitely wetness there. Why...oh, Merlin, *why*...had he been crying? "I'm sorry," he said, the words muffled.

Remus didn't answer, only released Harry's wrists from the shackles, placing a kiss on each before letting Harry take them and bury his face in his arms. A sob choked him. He didn't even know why he was so upset...he'd just had the best sex of his life, the only sex he'd ever had with a man, and he'd made the most important realisation about the way his life had been going.

Then Harry knew that he *wasn't* sad...he was just overwhelmed. He let Remus hold him, listened to the sweet things Remus whispered into his messy hair, felt the warmth of Remus' hands against his body, not reigniting, just reassuring.

"I want to have Ron and Hermione over," Harry said a few moments later. He blushed when he remembered just how very naked he was and yanked the covers over both of them.

"That sounds fine," Remus said. He was obviously trying to sound nonchalant, but Harry heard the pride in his voice. "I'll owl them first thing in the morning. I've been looking forward to spending the weekend with you and Teddy all week."

Harry sighed and turned into Remus' easy embrace. If he'd known sex between them was so explosive and yet so comfortable, he would have seduced Remus ages ago. But even as Harry thought that, he knew it to be untrue. He'd had to come about this discovery the long way. It was thanks to Remus that he'd realised just how very far away he'd pulled from everyone who mattered to him. He wouldn't have been able to do it on his own, and who could even know how far it would have gone without Remus there, a constant presence, a familiar face that made life a little less frightening.

When had he gotten so far removed? It hadn't happened overnight, he knew, and yet it seemed like it had happened all at once, unexpectedly. One minute he was fighting a war, winning a war, and the next he didn't want to speak to anyone...especially about the war...and he was pulling away even from his best friends. Sequestering himself inside a house of bad memories, relying on his former professor and fellow Order member to keep him sane when really, that was *his* job. And he hadn't been doing it very well.

"I don't want to lose myself," Harry whispered. He didn't know if Remus understood how very close Harry had gotten to doing just that, but he knew he had Remus to thank for bringing him back.

"Just saying it is the first step to finding yourself," Remus said. He kissed Harry lightly, then hard, then soft again until he finally pulled back.

Harry watched with some detachment as Remus unhooked the shackles from the ring on the headboard and rose, unashamed of the scarred body that Harry suddenly realised he hadn't even been able to touch. Harry looked on as Remus donned his robes and turned back to the bed. He ran a hand over Harry's body, the cover too much of a barrier between them. His hand rested on Harry's cheek and he leaned in for another kiss.

"Stay?" Harry asked, even though he already knew it wasn't going to happen. He wanted to wake up next to Remus, to listen to him snore, to watch him dream. But Remus wouldn't want that; he'd done his job. He'd gotten Harry to see the absolute ugly truth about his withdrawal from humanity. Now Remus' work was done and he could return to his own bedroom, his own life. Everything would go back to way it was.

Harry cringed away from the gentle lips on his.

"Stop thinking so much, Harry. I just want to show you that you can sleep by yourself, without the aid of the cuffs and without me acting as your shackles. You can do it all by yourself, I promise you."

Harry flushed at being found so transparent. He wanted to argue, to deny that he'd ever be able to sleep without the cuffs. They were like a drug to him now. But he let Remus kiss him one more time, let him whisper goodnight and really seem to mean it.

He lay on his back, contemplating the ceiling and thinking about how long he would be able to try to sleep before he'd have to slip away to Remus' room to get his drug back.

It was less than five minutes later that Harry fell asleep.

*

That weekend was the first happy one that Harry could remember in a long time. If Ron and Hermione thought Harry's abrupt change in attitude was strange, they didn't say anything. They seemed genuinely happy to be around him, and just seeing them made Harry's insides ache.

At first, things were awkward. Ron and Hermione had hovered near the door, and Harry had stood behind Remus like a child hiding in the shadow of his parent. Then Remus had turned and given Harry's shoulder a brief squeeze, and from that, Harry was able to pull enough strength to act a little more naturally toward his friends.

It wasn't that Harry didn't love them or want to be around them anymore. He just didn't understand them. It was so easy for everyone else, it seemed, to just act like the war hadn't happened and go back to their 'normal' lives. Harry'd never had a normal life. He didn't know *how* to go back.

Remus was helping him with that. Harry didn't really understand how it worked, and he didn't try to dissect it. Remus just knew what he needed, and connecting with Remus on both an emotional and physical level made Harry's life less complicated. And Teddy... Teddy made everything brighter, easier. When Harry'd first asked Remus to live with him, he'd expected Teddy to be an annoyance, difficult to deal with and boring, even. He'd always loved Teddy, of course, but he had almost no experience with

young children. His misconceptions had changed in a day. Teddy was difficult at times, but so rewarding. Harry couldn't imagine life without him any longer, and he hoped he would never have to.

Thanks to Remus' intervention, Harry could now sit on the sofa with his friends and talk about normal things, like the Burrow, or Hogwarts, or even the Ministry. They didn't try to push him to venture out like they usually did; again, Harry suspected Remus' involvement there. It was Harry, instead, who suggested they meet for a movie the next week. He pretended not to understand the long silence that followed, or Hermione's tears when she eagerly accepted, or the way Ron's hand gripped his shoulder as he nodded.

After they left, Harry felt tired, but not the bone-deep exhaustion that used to come from seeing his friends. He yawned a little and stretched and then went up the stairs to check on Teddy, who had been put down for a nap by Remus a half-hour ago. Harry slipped into the narrow bed, careful not to jostle his godchild. He pressed a soft kiss to Teddy's forehead, and Teddy made a small, grumpy noise before falling back asleep. Harry followed him under.

*

After the film, Hermione, Ron, and Harry all ventured back to Grimmauld Place, not willing to part ways despite having spent most of the day together. Harry had gotten a little upset at the restaurant; it had been very crowded and noisy, and the waiter had recognised him, leaning very close to take Harry's order.

Harry had contacted Remus from the kitchen's Floo. Just hearing his calm, soothing tones, seeing Teddy playing with his army men in the background, made Harry able to breathe through his anxiety. Then Remus promised to take care of him when he got home.

The rest of the evening, Harry pondered what that might mean.

As the trio of friends sat before the fire, Ron filling Harry in on how he'd proposed to Hermione, Harry felt like there was a real chance things could go back to normal for him. He hated that he'd missed so much.

There were many times that Harry almost told his friends about Remus, about their new relationship. Harry had never before felt as he did. Remus made him human. Still, he kept it to himself. He had the ugliest feeling that if he told anyone, it would suddenly become untrue. He also didn't know what Remus wanted in the long run. Was he merely trying to get Harry back on his feet? Would he eventually want someone...a woman...to step in as a mother for Teddy? The very thought made Harry see red. He hadn't realised how strongly he felt about being a parent for Teddy, but the idea of someone usurping his role made him see just how imperative it was to keep Remus and Teddy in his life.

"We're so glad you invited us out, Harry," Hermione said at the front door. Her scarf trailed between her fingers; she was obviously trying to keep herself from touching Harry, no doubt recalling all the times he'd pushed her away. The heat flare he'd given off the last time he'd had guests over hadn't been repeated since, but she couldn't have known that.

"Me, too," Harry said, pulling her into a light embrace. "Maybe next time I'll come to the Burrow, yeah?"

"That'd be brilliant, mate," Ron said, his voice low and thick. He yanked Harry into a hard hug before pushing him away almost as quickly. He nodded at Harry and left with his fiancée.

As the door closed, separating him once again from the real world, Harry wondered how long he could have remained in his self-imposed exile. Without Remus and Teddy to make him real, probably forever. It was a sobering thought.

"I'm really proud of you," Remus said from behind Harry.

Harry turned to see his lover leaning against the wall, arms crossed over his chest and a small smile on his lips. His worn grey cardigan was so familiar to Harry that he felt his throat ache.

"You always say that, but I'm not doing anything special. Normal people don't get praised for going to see a movie." Despite his rather caustic tone, he approached Remus, wanting that connection after having gone the entire day without it. He stopped about a foot away, and Remus smiled down at him, pulling him in the rest of the way and wrapping strong arms around him.

"You should stop putting yourself in the same category as everyone else, Harry. You're not them. What you did was extraordinary, and what you are now is equally so. You could have used your power and influence to do any number of despotic things; many would have. Or you could have resented the world that put so much pressure on you. Instead, you withdrew. You tried to be as little trouble as possible. But you're not trouble, Harry. My Harry. You're human."

Hearing Remus echo his own earlier thoughts made Harry smile. He let the words wash over them, the familiar low tones and careful enunciation making Harry's heart swell.

That night was the first time Remus ordered Harry to do something sexual.

Right there in the kitchen, where countless Order meetings had taken place, where Snape had sniped and Mrs. Weasley had micromanaged, Remus told Harry to get on his knees and suck him.

At first, Harry froze. He was still getting used to Remus giving him chores to do; demanding something of a sexual nature certainly took their burgeoning relationship to the next level.

Trying for fluidity, Harry sank to the floor before Remus. His actions were slow and tentative, and Remus said and did nothing to encourage him. Harry trailed his hands up Remus' thighs, feeling the power hidden in the muscles there. Then his fingers rested on Remus' belt as Harry licked his lips. He'd never done this before, though Remus had done it for him a number of times.

Instead of words, Remus carded his fingers through Harry's hair, and the action, as it always tended to do, calmed him. Inhaling deeply, Harry unbuckled his belt and then opened the placket of his trousers. Remus groaned in approval as Harry reached in, past his pants, to grip his heavy erection. Freeing it, and his sac as well, Harry gently stroked it while he gathered his courage and tried to remember what it was that Remus did that made him so crazy. He hadn't exactly been paying attention to the details during those times.

With an exploratory lick, Harry's confidence swelled when Remus hissed in approval. He chanced a glance up, and Remus was staring down at him with heavy-lidded eyes, an expression much too serious for the clumsiness Harry felt. Emboldened, Harry took the tip into his mouth. He knew better than to shove the entire thing at once, or try to force it down his throat the way Remus sometimes did just before Harry came.

Harry nibbled along the shaft, pressing his lips tightly across the throbbing vein on the underside and sucking. He moved his ways down to Remus' balls, recalling how much he, himself, adored that. Remus did, too, it seemed. His hand tightened in Harry's hair, pressing him closer. Harry laved and mouthed, even bit softly, which elicited a laugh instead of a groan, so he didn't do that again.

He was panting by the time he returned to the crown, taking it in again and sucking. His hand stroked the shaft and he finally found a rhythm. Remus seemed to approve of this as well, because his hips pushed ever so slightly forward each time Harry's mouth moved down.

Then Remus pulled his head away and replaced his hand, fisting his own cock. Harry looked up, wondering if he'd done something wrong, but the heat in Remus' pale gold eyes made his mouth fall open. He became aware of his own arousal, overlooked to that point in his concentration.

Remus cried out, and Harry didn't realise what was happening until he felt the first wet stripe of come splatter on his cheek. Instead of rearing back, though, Harry gasped

and shifted closer. The intimacy, the sheer possession of the act made his cock throb desperately. Another rope landed in his mouth and on his chin, and Harry swallowed it down before placing his mouth right over Remus' cock, not wanting to waste the next spurts.

When Remus was finished, he fell to his knees in front of Harry and yanked open Harry's trousers, tugging his cock out quite roughly and stroking it hard and fast. Harry could still feel the slow glide of Remus' come on his face, and that brought him over the edge. He cried out, his voice raspy, and came into Remus' hand.

"Was it... good?" Harry asked, once his breath had returned to him.

"So good, Harry." Remus spelled away the mess, even that on Harry's face. "Amazing."

A day for firsts, that evening Remus let Harry sleep in his bed instead of alone in his own.

*

Harry woke up to an empty bed...though that was expected; Remus had to work...and a strange sound. It took him a second to place it, and once he realised it had come from the monitoring spell on Teddy's room, he got up and put on yesterday's robes. When he heard the sound again, he ran out of the room. It wasn't Teddy's normal waking sounds. This was a distressed sound, not loud, but insistent.

"Teddy," Harry breathed, looking down on the child. His heart slowed to normal. Teddy was fine, sleeping soundly.

Then Teddy jerked and his face turned toward Harry, and everything stopped. The child's cheeks were bright red, but the rest of his face held a deathly pallor. He was covered in a sheen of sweat.

Touching his forehead, Harry cursed and cast a temperature spell. Way too high.

"Oh, god... What do I do?" Was he supposed to move Teddy? Put him in the tub with ice? He remembered hearing so many different ways of dealing with fever, but there was only one thing that would satisfy Harry. He couldn't sit around and try home remedies, not with Teddy.

"Come on, baby," he cooed, lifting a frightfully limp Teddy into his arms. Teddy didn't even wrap his arms around Harry's neck, a move that was normally instinctive.

Too frantic to even bother with a glamour...the first time he'd left the house without one in years...Harry called for St. Mungo's in the Floo and stepped through after the Floo powder.

The hospital was as busy as Harry remembered. Busier, even. People with all variety of maladies were walking around, laying down on the waiting room chairs, or chasing after Healers, who looked harried but efficient.

Harry didn't know what to do. He'd never been to the hospital by himself. "I need help!" he called loudly, growling when all he got in return was a chorus of his words from the other patients.

"Please, my... my son is very sick!" Harry said to a passing mediwitch, who quickly glanced at Teddy and looked ready to give a rehearsed response when she looked at Harry for the first time.

"Oh, my..." she whispered, a hand to her heart.

Harry fought the urge to snap. "Please, he's got a fever of one hundred four. I don't know how long he's been like this. He's non-responsive."

The mediwitch was still staring at Harry, but she snapped into action and nodded briskly. Harry wanted to faint in relief.

"Come with me, Mr. Potter. We'll get your... son taken care of."

Harry's hand moved up and down Teddy's back, mostly to reassure himself of Teddy's breathing. He followed the mediwitch into a small room. The beds were adult-sized and Harry knew he wasn't in the paediatric ward.

The mediwitch took Teddy from him, her brisk hands making Harry want to shout at her to be careful. He watched anxiously as she placed Teddy on the bed and began to cast spell after spell.

A few harrowing moments later, she turned to Harry with a smile. "He's going to be fine."

Harry stumbled sideways, breathing for what felt like the first time since he'd seen those numbers floating over Teddy's glistening forehead.

"What's wrong with him?" he asked, not looking away from Teddy.

"He seems to have a bit of a bug. His fever is still quite high, but we've got the potions to treat it, and from there, we will simply have to wait it out."

Harry nodded. The mediwitch eyed him curiously.

"I'm glad you're all right, Mr. Potter. And that you have a family."

Harry realised that very few people even knew he still lived in wizarding England anymore. He'd stopped reading the papers, but after he'd withdrawn from the world, the rumours had run rampant.

"A family," he repeated to himself with a small smile. *A pack*. He shook his head at that silly thought, but the idea stuck with him. "Yes, thank you."

He stayed with Teddy as she administered the potion, having to hold himself back from accosting her as Teddy choked a little in his sleep. But she massaged his throat and Teddy swallowed the draught. There was no change, and he looked to the mediwitch with accusing eyes.

"It is not immediate," she said in the tone of someone who rather thought it should be. "His body still has to fight the fever. Only a few hours, typically."

After she left with a final squeeze on his shoulder that Harry bore with good grace, Harry approached Teddy; he looked much too small for such a large bed.

"I'm sorry," he whispered. He wished he knew how Teddy could have gotten sick. Neither he nor Remus was, though the daycare was a pretty good guess. He gave Teddy a kiss before slipping out. He jotted off a quick hospital owl to Remus, telling him where they were. He didn't want to worry Remus, but he was Teddy's father and needed to know.

When he returned to Teddy's room, the child's breathing was a little easier, and Harry finally let himself experience the relief in knowing that he was going to be fine. Without touching Teddy, Harry slipped into the bed beside him. He was slender enough that there was room for both of them without him crowding Teddy, but Harry felt infinitely better being close to him.

His little cub. Harry smiled at himself and eventually fell asleep.

*

"Daddy!"

"Hush, baby, Harry's sleeping."

"I *know*. Daddy brought me here and then fell asleep. You don't let him sleep enough, I think."

"Teddy, who brought you here?"

"Daddy."

"Oh, baby. Come here. Gently, don't wake him."

"He worries too much. I was just sleeping!"

"No, you were sick. Harry... Daddy did the right thing."

"I was sick?"

"With a fever."

"Better now, though, right? I feel fine!"

"Yes, better now, Teddy. Now keep your voice down until Daddy wakes up."

"I *told* you that you don't let him sleep enough! He'll get sick like me if you don't. Silly Daddies."

Remus' warm chuckle woke Harry up. "Teddy?" he gasped, looking around after seeing the empty space beside himself.

"Here!" Teddy cried, and tried to leap onto the bed beside Harry, but Remus had a solid hold on him and lowered him instead. Teddy crawled up the bed and pressed himself against Harry's chest.

Harry's arms wrapped around his godson. "Thank goodness," he whispered, overcome. "I was so worried."

"The Healer and mediwitch both said he was fine to go home," Remus said.

Harry looked up at him for the first time. "I'm so sorry..." he blurted, clutching Teddy to his chest.

A firm but gentle hand rested on Harry's leg. "Don't be silly. He's just fine, aren't you, cub?"

"Fine!" Teddy declared, sounding impatient. "Can we go home? It's *soboring* here."

Shaking his head at himself for falling asleep, Harry got up with Teddy in his arms. "You're sure they said he can go?"

"You can ask them yourself if you like," Remus said. His voice was serious but his eyes were teasing.

Knowing he was being overprotective...Remus wouldn't let Teddy leave if he hadn't been perfectly okay...Harry nodded. "Let's go."

Remus stopped him with a hand on his arm. "Do you want your glamour?"

Teddy made an impatient noise and Harry shook his head. "I'm okay without it."

Remus kissed his temple and put his hand on the small of Harry's back. "Finally you realise what I knew all along," he said softly, leading them home.

*

That night, when Teddy was fast asleep with enough monitoring spells around him to practically Apparate Harry right into his room if need be, Remus told Harry that he wanted them to both sleep in Remus' room all the time.

"You won't get sick of me?" Harry asked, grinning. "I steal the sheets, you know."

"Yes, I do know," Remus said wryly. "But if you're cuffed, you won't be able to. It's a foolproof plan."

"You want to cuff me every night just to save your sheets?" Harry pressed himself against Remus, sated from having made love earlier, but not opposed to another go.

"Among other reasons."

"Tell me the reasons."

Remus kissed him softly. "To keep you with me always."

Hearing the words unspoken, Harry whispered, "You don't need cuffs for that."

Remus pushed the hair away from Harry's forehead, kissing his scar and removing his glasses. Harry blinked up at him before his eyes focused. Behind Remus was a blur, but he was in focus.

"I want you to legally adopt Teddy," Remus said. "I don't want you to be lying when you say you're his father."

"It wasn't a lie," Harry protested, but then he realised that technically it had been. "But I don't think that's necessary. He... he already calls me Daddy." Harry's heart had nigh on exploded when he'd heard that. Teddy had said it before, but Harry'd just thought he was confused or mistaking him for Remus. There was no denying it now, though.

"It's not just for him. It's for me, too. In case something happens to me, I want it known that he's yours. And it's for you, Harry."

"For me?"

"Because you deserve a family of your own. Because I want you to raise him with me. I want us to be a family."

"I want that, too," Harry whispered, overwhelmed. Teddy, his son. It was more than he could ever hope for. It was everything he'd wanted since he'd been a child. A family of his own. Love that was all his. "Yes, I'll adopt him."

Remus kissed him hard this time, and desperate sounds escaped them both until Harry pulled away.

"You want me, then? You want us to be together?" For some reason, the idea hadn't really occurred to him. That Remus would want him in such a permanent way. A part

of him had assumed Remus would end whatever was between them when Harry was better. He was getting there, he knew.

"I want you, Harry. Gods, I love you, you know. For longer than should be true."

"Remus, I..." He wanted to say it. He *felt* it. It was beautiful and powerful and important. But he was scared, still. Less now than ever, but still scared.

"I know, Harry. And it's okay."

And Harry knew that if Remus said so, it was true. He whispered the words long after Remus had fallen asleep. It was enough, for now.

Seven years later...

Harry held Remus' hand tightly as they stood on Platform 9¾. It didn't matter that they'd known this day was coming since the very first time Teddy's hair had changed colour; that didn't make it any easier. That Teddy was a wizard there could be no doubt. That Remus was proud of him also wasn't up for argumentation.

Now, what house Teddy would end up in, that was something worth debating.

Which was exactly what Remus and Harry were doing.

"Well, to be honest, I don't even think Tonks should have been Sorted into Hufflepuff in the first place. She was a total Gryffindor," Harry said, smiling fondly as he recalled back. She'd been kind and sweet, but fiercely brave and protective.

Remus shook his head. "She was only like that because that was her job. The real Tonks was gentle. Hufflepuff was the right place for her."

It had been years since either of them had been uncomfortable saying her name. Remus still mourned her as the mother of his son. Harry, at first, had had his moments of jealousy. She'd given Remus something Harry never could...a child. That was something Harry couldn't compete with. Then he'd realised he didn't have to compete. Teddy was his, too, now. Harry was more than a godfather; he was a stepfather. And Tonks had given him that.

"Still, he's clever as anything, always reading. He hates Quidditch." To Harry, that was as good as being branded Ravenclaw.

"You have to admit, though, that he wouldn't exactly be out of place in Slytherin. Remember when he'd convinced you I'd said it was okay for him to buy that snake? That I'd said *you'd* help him take care of it because you could speak Parseltongue and could find out what it needed?"

Chuckling now...it hadn't been so funny then...Harry shook his head. "I even cleaned the damned thing's cage for months because he'd told me you wanted me to. I don't know when he figured out that I do what you say."

"He's a brilliant boy," Remus said, affection tinged with just a hint of smugness.

"But he never got away with that again."

Over the years, Harry had continued to ask for Remus' instructions. Even though he was more than comfortable in public, he still liked the sense of purpose and structure. If a few days went by without directives, Harry felt listless and uncomfortable. Even if it was simple things like the order in which to get ready, Harry felt safe and secure knowing Remus was taking care of him, and in return, he took care of Remus. It wasn't typical, and maybe it wasn't normal, but it worked just fine for them.

"I know there'd be a home for him in every house," Remus said, his voice pitched low so only Harry could hear. "But I can't help but hope it'll be Gryffindor."

"Of course it's going to be Gryffindor!" cried Teddy. He'd wandered off to explore the station a little, fascinated by the dense magic all around them. Teddy's Metamorphmagus abilities were always more powerful in places loaded with magic...Hogwarts was going to power him like a battery. Harry didn't envy McGonagall, though he knew if anyone could keep Teddy in line, she could.

"Of course it is," Harry agreed, brushing his fingers through Teddy's fire engine red hair.

Teddy pulled away from the affectionate touch, but he gave Harry a smile to show that it wasn't personal.

Beside Harry, Remus drew himself up taller, which Harry knew was his way of maintaining his stoicism. "It doesn't matter which house..." he began, his voice wavering only slightly.

"I *know*," Teddy interrupted, rolling his eyes and sharing an exasperated smile with Harry, who winked back. "You'll love me no matter what."

"That's right. And if you need to get a hold of us, you can borrow a school owl. Remember what I said about your grades..."

"Yeah, yeah, all Os and I get an owl of my own."

Harry knew Teddy was excited about the idea of getting his own familiar. He'd work his arse off for those Os. But Harry ~~was~~ *so* knew that Remus would get him the owl no matter what his grades were. Teddy wasn't exactly spoiled...he was just loved almost excessively.

The sound of steam releasing had Remus hauling a resisting Teddy into his arms. Teddy put up a good fight, but Remus was still strong and he had a lot of experience holding Harry down; Teddy was no match for him.

"Write us right away, all right? We want to hear about your first day."

"Dad," Teddy groaned, drawing out the word as only someone his age could.

Teddy finally freed himself. Turning to Harry, he offered his hand, but Harry just laughed at him and tilted his head to one side. After a moment, Teddy capitulated and launched himself at Harry, who caught him easily and held him close.

"Humour your father and write," Harry said quietly. He kissed Teddy's temple and held him at arm's length.

Teddy nodded sagely. He gave a brave smile and gathered his things. He insisted on getting on the train himself, and Remus let him go after one more hug.

Harry and Remus stood on the platform long after the train had departed and the rest of the parents had left.

"I should have seen you off on your first day," Remus said.

Even after all their years together, Remus still held heavy regret for not being in Harry's life.

"Remus, if you'd been that involved in raising me, we never would have gotten together," he said wisely. He'd thought a lot about it and knew it to be true. Remus' distance during his formative years, though regrettable, had ensured that they weren't *too* close to entertain a romantic relationship. And *that* would have been a real tragedy, possibly even in the literal sense of the word. Harry knew now that Remus' intervention in his life had saved it.

"How did you get to be so smart?" Remus asked, pulling Harry into an easy embrace.

"You taught me."

Remus nuzzled Harry's cheek, kissing along his jaw. "When we get home, I want you to go upstairs, get undressed, lie down on the bed, and cuff yourself in."

Harry gasped, blood immediately rushing south at the thought of all Remus could and would do to him. The cuffs were as familiar as his glasses, as his wedding band, and nothing made him feel more loved.

"What else will you do to me?" He arched slightly against Remus, pleased to discover he wasn't the only one affected by the erotic instructions.

"Anything I want," Remus promised. His hand cupped the back of Harry's neck, a threat, a promise, a lifeline.

"And everything I need," Harry agreed.

The End.