

It's Really Better This Way

by phoenix

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None

Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: Well, since I'm not receiving any royalty checks, I'll assume that neither Remus and Tonks nor anything else about the Harry Potter Universe belong to me. I'm just borrowing them.

A/N: This story takes place after the battle at the Ministry in OotP and is told in first person from both points of view.

Tonks

I finally finished the debriefing. It went a lot longer than I had expected. Of course, there had been a lot of destruction in the Department of Mysteries. I told them what I saw, but I didn't see it all. A lot of the destruction happened before we arrived, and more happened while I was unconscious. They seemed to believe the excuse we gave them for being there. It doesn't look like any of us will be in any trouble. Of course, the Ministry has enough trouble now that they can longer hide from You-Know-Who's return.

Now that Sirius is gone, I know that the ownership of the house will come into question. I've decided to go help clean up so that we don't leave anything incriminating behind. Besides, I'm not sure if I want to continue using the house as headquarters now or not. I never got the chance to know my cousin well, but the house still holds a lot of memories of him. My mother always spoke fondly of him, surprised that he had been sent to Azkaban. I suppose I can tell her she was right, that he was innocent. I only wish they had been able to get together one last time. I think we all thought we would have more time. Now I realize that isn't always the case.

When I arrive at the house, I find the door unlocked. The house is quiet, but that's not surprising. After checking the kitchen and finding it empty, I climb up to the second floor landing. "Hello?" I call out.

"Up here," comes Remus' reply from far above me.

Climbing the stairs, I find him on the fourth floor, with Buckbeak. I watch the two of them for a while, just wanting to remember this very mundane moment in the chaos.

"Hi, Tonks," he says. I can tell he is very tired. "I was just... Hagrid will be by soon to pick him up."

I'm pretty sure I know what the rest of that sentence was going to be and I can't blame him. "How are you doing?" I know that he and Sirius had been like brothers.

He smiles weakly and replies simply, "I'll survive."

I have the feeling that he has said that before, many times before.

"I suppose you're here to help clean up?"

"I thought it would be a good idea." Why is it that I can't say what I mean around him? I'm sure he thinks I'm an idiot. I watch him pat farewell to Buckbeak before we head downstairs.

I want to find a way to reach out to him, but I don't want to sound like I pity him. I'm going to curse my mum. While she went against her family to marry my father, she still decided to pass on the idea that women don't ask men out on dates. I've been trying to get past that for a long time, but haven't been able to do it. And since Remus doesn't seem to have picked up on any of the signals I've given him, I know that I will have to be the one to act.

"I'm glad that you weren't seriously injured at the Ministry. I saw you fall and that was a pretty bad hit."

"It was nothing." That wasn't exactly the truth. I was lucky that Madam Pomfrey could fix me up without sending me to St. Mungo's. Hagrid's pounding on the door spared me from further conversation. Remus left me in the kitchen to finish cleaning up. I could hear Hagrid's heavy footsteps going up the stairs. I assume Remus went with him. It didn't take long before I hear them coming back downstairs, with the added clatter of a hippogriff's hooves. I'm surprised they would take Buckbeak out the front door, but it is quite late.

Unfortunately, Buckbeak's departure sets off Mrs. Black's portrait. I briefly consider going up to help, but realize that I'm never very good at that at the best of times, and this is far from the best of times. The more nervous I am, the clumsier I get, and I'm incredibly nervous.

When he returns, I ask, "Isn't it a little odd to take Buckbeak out the front?"

He shakes his head. "Not really. There should be no one up at this hour and I cast a Disillusionment Charm on him. I think he'll be happier back with Hagrid. I know he's been miserable cooped up here."

I can see him getting lost in his grief. We work in silence for several long minutes before I work up the courage to speak. "It's going to be a little strange leaving here, isn't it?"

"It will, but I think a temporary absence will be good."

I can tell he's trying to sound upbeat. "So, where will you go?" I know that he doesn't have much.

"I'll manage. I always do. Don't worry about me." He gives me a warm smile.

I open my mouth to say more, to offer up my spare room, when once again, there is a knock at the door. I curse myself for being so slow and watch him walk up the stairs to open the door. I quickly pack up the last few things using that wonderful packing charm I learned from my mum. I look up when I hear footsteps and see Snape and Remus.

"Is this everything?" Snape asks tersely.

"All of it," I reply. I've tried to keep an open mind about him. After all, he was the one who told us Harry was probably heading for the Department of Mysteries. He's just so standoffish it breeds mistrust. I watch him shrink the box and put it in his pocket. He leaves without saying another word.

I know that time is running out. I don't know when or if I will see him again. We will all have to wait for word from Dumbledore on where and when our next meeting will be. "Would you like to get a cup of coffee or something?"

He gives me a warm smile, and replies, "Sure."

Remus

Emptiness. It's not that I wasn't expecting the house to feel empty. I was. I just hadn't expected it to weigh this heavily upon me. It's only been a day, and it's still very hard for me to realize that he's gone. I have already received a message from Dumbledore saying that we will have to leave Grimmauld Place, at least temporarily. He's sending Hagrid for Buckbeak.

I think it will be better for Buckbeak. I know he hasn't liked being locked up here, just like Sirius. At least one of them will have some freedom now.

Since I have time before Hagrid is due to arrive, I decide to pack up my meager belongings. I know it won't take long. I look at the pitiful handful of knuts and sickles that is my life savings. I've made do before and I'll survive this time. At least it's summer. Being homeless in the winter is a rather miserable prospect, and I refuse to impose myself upon my friends.

After packing, I go up to see Buckbeak. I bow to him, and he returns my bow. He is agitated and knows that something is wrong. I pat him on the neck. I have always known that hippogriffs are intelligent, though I have no idea how much they can truly understand. "He's gone, my friend. Sirius is gone."

Looking into his eyes, I get the impression that he understands. "The good news is that you'll be leaving here. Hagrid will be taking you back to Hogwarts. You can be with others of your kind."

I hear a voice downstairs call, "Hello?"

Ah, Tonks. I figured she would be the first to offer her help. "Up here," I reply. I don't know that I want to be alone with her. She's a very special person. I know that she likes me, and I think as more than a friend. I have tried to discourage her. She deserves better than me. I have nothing to offer her.

I hear her enter the room, but I'm not ready to face her. I spend a few more seconds reassuring Buckbeak. Finally, when I think I can face her, I turn and say, "Hi, Tonks. I was just... Hagrid will be by soon to pick him up." I realize I have no idea what to say around her. This is one of the reasons we have never really talked with each other. In fact, we've never been alone before. There was always someone around.

She looks at me sympathetically and says, "How are you doing?"

I have no idea how to answer this question. I've lost friends before, I thought I had lost Sirius before, but I know the grief has not kicked in yet. I try to smile. "I'll survive." We stare at each other in awkward silence. I finally come up with some thing to say. "I suppose you're here to help clean up?"

"I thought it would be a good idea." She's trying to sound upbeat, and I think it's for my benefit.

After a final pat of Buckbeak's neck, I lead Tonks downstairs. When I walk past her, I can smell her unique scent. I have spent many nights trying to determine what it is, but I have failed. Whatever it is, I like it.

As we begin packing up the documents in the kitchen, I find that we have once again lapsed into silence. I get the impression she wants to talk to me, but has no idea what to say. "I'm glad that you weren't seriously injured at the Ministry. I saw you fall and that was a pretty bad hit." Last I heard, they weren't sure if she would have to go to St. Mungo's or not.

"It was nothing," she replies meekly.

So much for initiating conversation. Before I can choose a new topic, I hear Hagrid pounding at the door. "Excuse me," I say before heading upstairs.

"Hagrid, I'm so glad you could make it." I lead the half-giant upstairs. "I've told Buckbeak what happened and that he'll be leaving with you. I think he's quite upset."

"I though' as much. Poor ol' Beaky. Rough time for him comin' up. Well, he'll be better off with his own kind. Though, Dumbledore says I'll have to give him a new name."

"Perfectly understandable." I can tell that Hagrid is a little worried. "I'm sure he'll be fine. After all, I seriously doubt that Malfoy can tell one hippogriff from another."

"I know, I know. It's jus' been so unfair. It's great that Beaky will get to be free again, but..."

He's thinking the same thing I am. There are no words for a moment like this. "Well, then, here we are," I say as I open the door. Buckbeak looks quite happy to see Hagrid again. I'm glad that he will have a good home.

After I give them a few minutes to get reacquainted, I say. "Well, then, if you're ready, I'll cast the Disillusionment Charm on him."

Hagrid turns to Buckbeak. "Now, this won' hurt a bit. Migh' feel a touch odd, but it's fer yer own good. Oh, I almos' forgot, Snape'll be by in a bit to pick up everything."

He nods to me when he's ready. Buckbeak prances around the room a bit after I cast the spell, but otherwise behaves. I let Hagrid lead him downstairs and out the door. Naturally, between the noise and Buckbeak hitting the curtains in front of the portrait, I am now subjected to one final round of screaming from Mrs. Black. As I work quickly to close the curtains, I look over my shoulder to see if Tonks is coming to help. I desperately hope that she doesn't. Every time she has tried to help, she's made it worse. Thankfully, I'm able to get the curtains closed quickly.

When I return to the kitchen, she asks, "Isn't it a little odd to take Buckbeak out the front?"

I shake my head. "Not really. There should be no one up and I cast a Disillusionment Charm on him. I think he'll be happier back with Hagrid. I know he's been miserable cooped up here." Just like Sirius was. Some are never meant to be caged.

We work in silence for several long minutes. This time, she is the one to work up the courage to speak. "It's going to be a little strange leaving here, isn't it?"

That's an understatement. It was a rare treat for me to live in a house that was actually worthy of that name. "It will, but I think a temporary absence will be good." I don't want her to worry about me. I find myself wishing that it had been Kingsley, Emmeline ...anyone but her that had come to help.

"So, where will you go?" I can hear that is so much more than a simple question.

I try to give her a reassuring smile. "I'll manage. I always do. Don't worry about me." Thankfully, I am spared from further questioning by another knock at the door. "That must be Severus," I say and quickly head up the stairs.

He sweeps into the house. "I assume that I will have to assist you in removing all evidence of our occupation?"

Ah, yes, Severus, who was never any good at pleasantries. "Actually, no. Tonks has been helping me and we're nearly done."

He snorts derisively and strides down the stairs to the kitchen. "Is this everything?" Snape asks tersely.

"All of it," she replies.

I notice that she has obviously cast a spell to pack the rest of the documents. I watch Severus shrink the box and place it in his pocket. He leaves without saying another word. I don't know why, but I find this disappointing. I know that I should go upstairs and grab my suitcase and leave, but I find that my feet aren't listening. I wish they would.

"Would you like to get a cup of coffee or something?" she asks nervously.

I know that I should say no, but right now, I really don't want to be alone. Everyone else is busy with their families, and I know she's the only one that I can talk to. "Sure," I reply, even though I know this isn't a good idea.

After retrieving my suitcase and locking the door for the last time, we walk down the street. It's starting to get light, and I know a place a few blocks from here where we can sit and have a cup of coffee.

We order coffee and sit in silence staring at our cups. Neither one of us is ready to speak. I have no idea what to say to her. I can tell she wants to talk about something, but I have no idea what it is. I steal quick glances at her. Normally, she is energetic and vibrant, but recent events have changed that.

"I wish I had gotten to know him better," she finally says. "He was the one family member from my mum's side that I actually liked."

"He was a good man," I reply lamely. For all his faults, this is essentially true. Though I don't think any of us are without fault.

"When did you two become friends?"

"We met on the train to Hogwarts. Neither one of us really knew anyone. For obvious reasons, my parents kept me away from other children. He was trying to avoid his relatives. Since we both felt shunned, we had a lot in common. Getting sorted together only reinforced that friendship."

Now that she has me talking, I find myself reminiscing about our days at Hogwarts, the carefree days of our youth. She laughs and smiles at the stories, and I feel more alive.

At one point, my eyes catch hers and I realize that she isn't smiling at the stories, but at me. I should have left long ago; I've let this go on far too long.

She reaches across the table and places her hand on mine. "You were a lucky man to have a friend like him."

Nervously, I pull my hand back. "I like to think that I was."

"Remus..." she starts.

I cut her off. "Well, this coffee has been lovely, but I think that it's time we get going." I have an excellent idea of the turn this conversation is about to take, and it's one I don't want to have. It would be best if we just keep our feelings hidden.

She grabs my arm as I try to get up. "Don't go. Please? There's something else I want to talk about, something that's been bothering me for a while."

There it is. She's starting to open up. I really don't want to stay, but the look in her eyes compels me to stay. I try to talk her out of continuing. "Tonks, don't. Just let me go."

"What? And let you fade away? I don't know when, or if, I'll see you again. Losing Sirius has made me realize what a precious commodity time is. I've seen the way you've looked at me during dinners and meetings. We need to talk about this," she insisted.

"No, we don't. No good can come of this." I never should have come, but I had been too scared to be alone again.

"What do you mean no good? Hasn't Dumbledore always told us how important love is? Isn't that worth anything?"

"This isn't love," I reply. I don't entirely believe that, but I don't want to explore the possibility.

"How can you say that? I've seen the way you smile at me, the way you watch me."

She's getting very emotional, but thankfully the other patrons are only interested in getting their breakfast and getting about their day. I reply wistfully, "That was nothing more than the youthful fantasies of an old man." Yes, I had watched her. She wasn't wrong about that. If my circumstances had been different, I might have done something, but they weren't, and I didn't.

"You aren't an old man. You're younger than my parents. Remus, don't run away from this."

"I'm not running away, I'm being practical. I need you to be practical, too. You are a young woman, full of life, and deserve someone like you, not a tired, old... Well, you know. My affliction is robbing me of life. I'm aging faster than I should, and there's nothing to be done about that. You may not call me old, but I am. You have a century or more of life ahead of you; I have much less than that, a few decades at most." It always comes down to my affliction. It controls everything in my life.

"How can you say love is practical? Has love ever been practical?"

I have feared this conversation for months, rehearsed different scenarios in the hope of sparing her emotional pain. Unfortunately, I had never taken into account this level of bad timing. "This isn't love," I insist.

She reaches across the table to grab my hands. "How do you know that? This is the first time that we have been alone, and we were having a great time. We need to get to know each other before you can make that statement."

"Tonks, I can't. Not with you; not with anyone," I insist. I know she thinks she understands, but no one really understands what it means to be a werewolf. I have always accepted the fact that I will be alone.

"But why?"

I sigh. I had really hoped that she wouldn't be this insistent, that she would just look at the fact that I'm a werewolf and let it go. "Look, I care for you. You're a good friend, but I'm just not right for you. I'm too old, too poor and I have far too much emotional baggage. I'm not right for anyone."

"Remus, I don't care. No one is perfect. Can't you at least give us a chance?"

I look into her eyes and see her pleading with me. She really does care for me, and that's why I have to protect her. "People like me don't get to be happy. It's too dangerous. I have to go," I say sadly. She's only the second woman to know me for who I am and accept me. I lost the first because of what I am. I won't lose the second. "Goodbye, Tonks."

Before I walk out the door, I look back to the table and see her with her head down on the table. I'm almost positive she's crying, but it's really better this way.

A/N2: Thank you for reading. In the next day or so I will be posting another fic that is more or less a continuation of this one, but as it's not written in first person, I don't consider it a second chapter. That one was also a Sycophant Hex Deathday Festival entry.