

Repayment

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Hermione likes Remus. Remus likes Hermione. But what will it take for them to acknowledge their feelings for one another?

Chapter I

Chapter 1 of 5

Hermione likes Remus. Remus likes Hermione. But what will it take for them to acknowledge their feelings for one another?

"Bye, Harry, Ginny! See you at Christmas," Hermione called with a smile.

Ginny smiled and waved, giggling at the sight of the engagement ring on her left hand. Harry laughed and blew Hermione a kiss from the foyer before the two Disappeared.

Hermione sighed, still smiling. She would miss her best friends, but she was thrilled with Ginny's new contract with the Holyhead Harpies. Ginny had been trying for the past two seasons to land a position and finally one had opened up. She and Harry were ready to start their lives together, she had said, so to get training out of the way before the wedding was perfect timing.

Remus poked his head out of the kitchen, his shirt suspiciously damp, and called, "Was that them leaving, Hermione?"

Just then, a squealing two-year-old Teddy Lupin dashed from behind his father's legs, hands clutching a very large glass half full of milk. He ran toward Hermione, babbling happily, when one shoe caught on the edge of the rug and he plummeted to his knees, milk soaking the floor. His lower lip trembled and his hair turned a mousy brown.

"Teddy! What have I told you about running in the house?" Remus snapped, running over to his son who was starting to wail.

Hermione trotted over to the pair of them and dropped to one knee next to them both, gathering the small boy up into her arms.

Remus' mouth softened into a half-smile as Teddy immediately quieted. Reaching down, he tied his son's shoelace and picked up the now empty glass. "Guess it's a bit too early for him to use this, eh?" he laughed.

Hermione's eyes crinkled as she nodded her agreement. "Why don't you let me take care of this," she said teasingly, waving one hand to indicate shoes, spill, and boy, "while you take care of that," fluttering her fingers at his milk-soaked shirt.

Nodding his thanks with a grin, Remus stood and began taking off his shirt as he made for the stairs.

Hermione hugged the small boy as she watched his father leave the room. Even though Remus had once been her professor, he was still a gorgeous, gorgeous man. *And besides*, she thought to herself, *he isn't my professor anymore*. They were ... acquaintances. Colleagues. Friends.

Remus came down the stairs a scant few moments later, buttoning up a clean, milk-free dress shirt. "Thanks, Hermione," he said, kissing her briefly on the cheek. "I've got my meeting, and I can't be late, and Teddy's being an absolute mongrel," he said teasingly to his son, who giggled, "and I've got to get out of here. Thanks so much for watching him again!"

With one last pat to his son's now pink hair, Remus disappeared with a pop. An instant later, he reappeared in Hogsmeade. Looking around, he subconsciously straightened his jacket before heading toward the castle.

After Tonks died in the war, it took a while for Remus to come out of his shell, but help had come from the strangest of places. Severus Snape, who had somehow survived the war almost unscathed, had resumed his former post of Potions Master at Hogwarts and, in a gesture of camaraderie that was completely unlike him, had asked Remus to assist him with his independent research. Unfortunately for Remus, the Ministry had not looked so kindly on him and his werewolf kindred, regardless of which side they had fought on, as it had on reformed Death Eaters. So, Remus had absolutely no legitimate means of supporting himself and Teddy except Snape. So far, it was working out very nicely. Harry had been generous enough to allow them to live with him at number twelve Grimmauld Place, along with Hermione and, now that they were engaged, Ginny. Remus met with Snape once a month at Hogwarts to pick up new potions for testing, to drop off research results, or to meet with other colleagues for discussion and planning. In return for his assistance, Snape provided Remus with a monthly living stipend and a new, improved Wolfsbane potion. He had a built-in babysitter in Hermione, who doted on Teddy during her summer breaks from university and her frequent weekends home; Harry and Ginny were rarely there, either planning their wedding at the Burrow or going to visit Ron, who had taken over Charlie's position at the dragon colony; and he still got to maintain a measure of independence. Hermione even showed remarkable (yet unsurprising) interest in his research and, more often than not, proved to be a challenging and insightful second set of eyes. She had really matured into a lovely, vivacious young woman. Yes, Remus thought to himself, *life is starting to look pretty good again.*

"Lupin," Snape said curtly, opening the door at his knock.

"Severus," Remus replied evenly. He extended his hand, not surprised when Snape ignored it and motioned him in with a quick jerk of his head. It was a game they had played since their first meeting after the war, the one in which Snape offered Remus the opportunity to become his colleague. Snape passed it off as sheer selfishness; after all, his new Wolfsbane potion was making him both rich and famous, but it could only be brewed with ingredients taken from a willing werewolf. But Remus thought, deep down, that Snape's true colors were perhaps starting to bleed through to the surface, bit by infinitesimally tiny bit. Every once in a while, he even initiated a conversation. Remarkable.

"I don't have a lot of time today, Lupin," Snape said. "There are some ingredients I need to gather before the full moon next week, and I'll only have time to do it this afternoon." Walking over to the table, he handed Remus two small vials. "Take these. One of them is your favorite brew, and the other is ... something new. I trust you don't need me to tell you which is which?"

Remus smiled twistedly. "Thank you, Severus. I'm quite sure that by now I could tell which was which from fifty paces. The smell alone..."

"Should be the least of your worries, wolf," Snape interrupted. "I've made some small ... improvements, which may help the stench." Moving behind his hard-backed chair, he glared at Remus. "I don't need to remind you that our deadline with *Potions International Magazine* is approaching. How is your chapter coming?"

"Quite well, actually," Remus answered as he pocketed the vials. "I think I should be done within the week."

"The week? That's rather sooner than expected. Miss Granger. I assume that she is home on summer holiday?" Snape queried, arms crossing in front of him. Remus replied in the affirmative. "Hmm. No wonder you're almost finished," he said sotto voce and almost, almost smiled when Remus blushed.

"Yes, well, erm, she's been kind enough to read over my work from time to time, and her comments are often quite perceptive. I dare say she's pulled my irons out of the fire on a number of occasions. And yours, Severus," Remus said and winced when Severus' face shuttered. Damn.

"Touché, Lupin. Touché," he whispered. "Indeed she has. I am grateful that you reminded me of my debt to her. Again."

"Oh, now, Severus, that's not what I meant. I didn't mean to bring that up ... it just ..."

"Popped out?" Snape queried.

Remus nodded lamely. "I'm sorry, Severus. I spoke without thinking. We both have a lot to be grateful to her for, but you of all people need no reminders of that. I won't bring it up again."

Snape stood stock-still for a moment, then, without turning to look at Remus, said "I'll be looking forward to your chapter with or without Miss Granger's comments on Friday then."

Remus nodded, feeling even worse about his off-the-cuff remark, and turned to leave. He knew when he was dismissed. So, he was quite surprised when he heard Snape say, "That other vial, Lupin, is for Miss Granger. She'll be expecting it."

Hmm. That was interesting. Snape had never used him as a messenger between Hermione and himself before, but after what he had just said, the least he could do would be to deliver one, small vial, whatever it was. So, he turned and said, "Of course, Severus. I'll see that she gets it straightaway. You'll be hearing from me by Friday."

As Remus left the room, he didn't see Snape standing by the window, fingers idly tracing the thick white scar on his neck. Oh yes, he did owe Miss Granger, and she would find out soon enough just how he planned to repay her.

Chapter II

Chapter 2 of 5

Hermione likes Remus. Remus likes Hermione. But what will it take for them to acknowledge their feelings for one another?

Remus Apparated home from Hogsmeade, deep in thought. Why, why, why couldn't he learn to stop goading Severus? That had really been tasteless on his part. He knew how sensitive the man was about being in anyone's debt, even for the rare pint at the pub. The fact that Hermione, of all people, had saved his life after the war cut the man to the quick. Only those in the Order knew how Severus had survived, so for Remus to be so callous as to remind him that he owed Hermione for that – again – was completely out of line. He'd have to find a way to make it up to him.

He popped into the foyer of Grimmauld Place, unsurprised to hear that Hermione had the stereo on. She often played music; she said it helped her concentrate when she read, and to relax when she wasn't reading (which was hardly ever), and it most definitely helped soothe Teddy to sleep. It was only lunchtime, so he wondered which of these applied. Whatever was on wasn't a piece he recognized, but it was lovely. He stood still for a moment, lost in the beauty of the voices.

"Remus, is that you?" Hermione's voice wafted out of the kitchen, along with the smell of something delectable.

He shook himself out of his reverie and trotted in, suddenly realizing how famished he was. Having a toddler dump his breakfast on you didn't leave you much time to eat in the mornings.

"Hi, Hermione. How's—"

"Teddy's fine. He's down for his nap, just ate a bit of lunch a while ago, but I thought I'd wait for you," Hermione answered with a smile.

Remus sank into a chair at the table, stomach grumbling an assent. "How'd you know I'd be ready for lunch? And what are we having?"

Hermione laughed. "Remus, after all this time spent under the same roof, I tend to notice things like when someone does or doesn't eat breakfast, especially when that someone had a meeting and was chasing around incorrigible toddlers who were using glassware way too big for them. And where did he get that glass, hmm?"

Remus chuckled. "Yes, well, he was doing fine with it at the table; I didn't think he was going to suddenly trot off with it! What. Are. We. Having?" he asked, punctuating each word with a poke toward the young woman's ticklish middle.

"I whipped up a nice tomato soup and tuna fish sandwiches for Teddy earlier because that's what he wanted. At least, I think that's what he said; he can still be hard to understand sometimes! But he enjoyed himself, and I made enough for us, too," she answered, jumping away from the older man's poking finger and play-swatting him on the arm. "Shall I serve out?"

"Please! I'm starving!" Remus answered, patting his ever louder stomach. "Would you like some help?"

Hermione shook her head. "Sure, if you want to grab some plates and things, I'll get the food."

The two worked quietly for a moment before Remus' attention returned to the music on the stereo. As they ate, he said, "This piece is gorgeous. What are we listening to today?"

Swallowing a bite of sandwich, she replied, "Well, you know how I've been reading Don Quixote in the evenings when my work is done. Great book, by the way. You really ought to read it—"

"When you're finished. You've mentioned," Remus smirked, interrupting. "But what are we listening to?"

"Oh. Well, when I'm reading literature like that, you know, non-academic reading, I like to get into the period a bit, look at what else was going on at the time, like art, and architecture, and fashion, and music. So, this is a recording of music from Cervantes' time." Checking the back of the album, she continued, "This one playing now is by Victoria; it's a compilation of Spanish church music. I have some other recordings for later, some dances and courtly things as well."

Remus smiled broadly. "That's fascinating! Where did you get these? They're Muggle, yes?"

Hermione nodded. "I subscribe to a mail service where I can borrow recordings for a while, then return them for different ones. Much easier than popping off to a Muggle library or something to borrow things."

"Mmm," Remus nodded in return, mouth full of hot, steaming soup. "I've got some work to do tonight as well. Maybe I can join you in the library? Listen to some more of this recording?"

"Oh, the chapter! How's it coming?" Hermione asked.

"Pretty well, actually. It should be done soon. If you want, you can look it over tonight," he replied.

"I'd love to!" she answered, dishing herself up a second bowl. Seeing Remus' raised eyebrow, she mock-scowled and said, "Hey, chasing after your son is hungry work!"

Just then, a stream of babbling words came out of the charmed baby radio on the table. The two looked at each other, smiling, as they listened to Teddy's "talk." More and more words were becoming clear by the day, enough that he could ask for certain foods or toys or people, but not quite enough for complete sentences. But he tried, often to the amusement of the adults around him. "Mah boooOO, bay-beee, mak muk Dah-deee, want cookie!"

Remus and Hermione looked at one another and burst out laughing.

"Alright, Dah-deee, better go get your son that cookie he wants!" Hermione gasped, tears leaking from the corner of her eye. Remus nodded, laughing, and went to go get his boy. With a flick of her wand, Hermione cleared the table and put some water to boil for tea.

After Teddy had gone down for the evening, Remus joined Hermione in the library. The two had worked on different projects throughout the day, stopping every so often to play with a rambunctious Teddy, but now it was time to get down to business. He settled in at his desk, sorting through notes and papers until he found his latest draft. It was almost finished; he just needed to add on some concluding paragraphs and double-check his data. This research he and Severus were doing on werewolf reactions to certain potions was really getting them somewhere; this improved Wolfsbane alone was hardly short of miraculous. Remus felt better while taking it than he had ever felt prior to its invention, and if they could just tweak it a bit more, he thought that perhaps the two of them could even come up with a cure. *Oh, wouldn't the Ministry love that*, he thought to himself.

"Remus, do you want quiet while you work, or would you like me to put on another one of the recordings while I read?" Hermione asked quietly from her usual spot in the corner of the couch.

"Mmm, maybe in a little while?" he replied distantly, jotting down thoughts on scrap parchment.

She nodded and returned to her book, chewing absently on her thumbnail as she read.

He worked, possibly for minutes, possibly for hours, until at some point he put down his quill and stretched. It was done, and quite a bit ahead of schedule, he thought with satisfaction. Now, if Hermione would read over it, then ... He looked over to the couch and realized that the young woman was sound asleep, a blanket pulled across her legs and her book splayed on her hip. Belatedly he realized that it was well past one in the morning. Well and well. Forgetting about his chapter, he walked over to the couch. He wondered for a second whether he should wake her up, but she looked so peaceful where she was that he decided after a second just to tuck the blanket in around her. Reaching down, he pulled the afghan up around her neck, his hand pausing just briefly on her upper arm, and then set her book (page carefully marked, of course) on the end table. Leaning down, he kissed her forehead, smoothing back her wild hair, and wondered when this girl had become so dear to him.

Chapter III

Chapter 3 of 5

Hermione likes Remus. Remus likes Hermione. But what will it take for them to acknowledge their feelings for one another?

The next morning, Hermione awoke with a very, very large crick in her neck. Stretching, she heard things pop that really oughtn't make such a noise, not so early in the morning, anyway, and slowly opened her eyes. The library? Oh yes, she had fallen asleep waiting for Remus to finish that draft. Idly, she wondered if he had indeed finished and then wondered where her book had gotten to. Seeing it on the end table, she realized that Remus must have tucked her in, and a surprising flush of warmth ran through her. Standing up slowly and stretching again, she went over to his desk and found the chapter. She went about her morning toilette upstairs, reading as she went, and when she finished, she raced downstairs to the kitchen.

"Morning, 'Mione," Remus said, trying (and partially succeeding) at getting Teddy to eat his breakfast instead of playing with it. "Come on, Teddy, eggs are nummy!" he said, making train noises and playing Hogwarts Express with his own fork, poking some of the scrambled mess into his own mouth and chewing gleefully. Teddy laughed and poked his fingers into the runny yolks of his own eggs, finger-painting happily on his own plate. Remus sighed in exasperation, looking at Hermione with a doleful expression that made her chuckle.

"Teddy, if you eat all of your breakfast, you can play with your toy snitch," Hermione said to the youngster.

"Nitch!" he squealed and immediately shoved his face into his plate, eating his eggs and bacon. Hermione looked at Remus with one eyebrow cocked, as if to say *see, that's how it's done*. Remus shook his head in amusement and continued to eat.

"There's a plate for you on the stove if you want," he said around a mouthful of toast. "How did you sleep?"

"Just fine, I suppose, until I woke up and realized that I'd somehow lost the ability to turn my head," Hermione answered, busying herself with fresh tea.

Remus immediately looked contrite. "Oh, I'm sorry, Hermione, it's just that you looked so comfortable where you were, and it was so late, and—"

"Remus, Remus, it's okay!" She interrupted his apology with a smile. "I'll live, I promise." Sitting down with her breakfast, she pulled out his chapter. "Now, about this draft ..."

"You read it already?" he asked, surprised. "That was fast!"

"Well, I've read most of it before, you know," she said. Nibbling on a piece of toast, she continued, "I think that it looks just fine. I only had a few questions about your conclusions, though. This place here, where you mention the use of bezoars—"

"I thought you'd wonder about that. You see," he interrupted, "I figure that if the bezoars were introduced into the potion at just the right time, they wouldn't counteract the potion itself, but would fuse with it so that they would actually—"

"Attack the lupine part of the human, as though it were a poison," she concluded. "Brilliant, Remus! But then, why the use of moonflower—"

"Moonflowers? Their medicinal properties in calming the mind and stopping bleeding are well known, even though they're usually used gynecologically," he answered excitedly. "But since the transformation from man to wolf and back is almost like a birth of sorts, they should help. And that's why I also thought that using chamomile would work because—"

"Because it's calming and because it speeds healing time in both men and animals!" She stopped for a second, heart racing. Looking her former professor in the eye, she said sincerely, "Remus, this could change ... everything."

"I know, Hermione," he responded. "I know." Subconsciously he covered her hand with his, somewhere in his mind registering that his heart was beating faster.

Hermione felt him touch her hand and immediately blushed. She hoped beyond all hope that he didn't notice, but his eyes didn't move from hers. After what seemed an eternity, she broke away from him, ostensibly to refill her tea cup, but in reality because she was afraid that she might have kissed him. What on earth was she thinking? Remus was finally getting back to normal, and he was on the verge of a discovery that could change his entire life. She had no right to meddle in that, possibly upset him and risk losing his friendship, all for a schoolgirl crush. With a deep breath, she reminded herself firmly that Remus was a good man, and he would never view her as anything other than a close friend. Ignoring the annoyingly delightful twinge in her nether regions, she squeaked, "More tea?"

Remus shook his head as though he were waking from a dream. For a moment there, it seemed like she was about to kiss him. Him! *What a fool you are, Remus*, he thought. No beautiful, intelligent woman like her would ever see him, an ostracized werewolf who just happened to be both a single parent and her former professor, as a romantic partner, even if she did have excellent taste in books and music and looked so pretty when she slept ... Fortunately for him, Hermione interpreted his head shake as a "No" for more tea and turned away to clear the table, leaving him a few precious moments to quell the strangely unfamiliar but delicious surge of blood to his groin.

Friday came, and with no small amount of pride, Remus showed up at Snape's door with a freshly edited and neatly arranged chapter, which thankfully no longer had the traces of jam from this morning's breakfast on it. He knocked, Severus opened it, and just like usual, greeted him with a curt "Lupin."

"Severus," Remus said, barely disguising his excitement. Snape ignored his outstretched hand, again just like usual, and Remus entered his quarters.

"Tea?" Snape inquired politely but disinterestedly. Remus nodded rather too quickly; he hadn't had his normal second cup at breakfast due to his boyish infatuation, and he knew his excitement would only substitute for caffeine for so long. Sitting down in his hard-backed chair, Snape poured out, giving Remus his typical two lumps and a dash of cream.

"Severus, I really think we're on to something with this potion. I played around with some of the ingredients that we'd discussed after last month's potion, and I think we could tweak it even more," he said, grabbing two cocoa biscuits from the plate. Remus' fondness for chocolate was legend.

"I see," Severus said blandly. "And how did this month's dose do?"

"I don't know," Remus answered, brushing crumbs from his shirt. "I don't have to take it until next week. You know that."

"I'm quite well aware of when the full moon is, Lupin," Snape retorted. "But as we had discussed, taking this version of the potion earlier in the month allows it more time to act within the body. Did you remember to give Miss Granger her vial?"

The vial! Merlin's beard, could one more thing go wrong this week? Between his ridiculous crush on a girl half his age, a little boy who loved to "decorate" his work and his person with food products, and his amazing ability to insult Snape without even trying, he had now forgotten to give Hermione her potion. He froze, not knowing how to respond.

"I can see by the blank expression on your face, Lupin, that you have indeed forgotten," Snape said sardonically. "I trust that you will give it to her immediately upon your arrival?"

Remus nodded, blushing embarrassedly. "I'm so sorry, Severus, it's just that I got caught up in this project, and—" He cut himself off, not wanting to admit to anyone that he had feelings for his young housemate.

Snape turned his piercing gaze upon him and, after a second's pause, said, "Make sure that you remember to give her that vial tonight. Make sure that she takes it. And make sure that you also take your potion tonight." His tone of voice brooked no argument.

Setting his cup down, Remus again nodded, this time wearily. He wouldn't forget this time; maybe he could get one thing right this week after all.

Chapter IV

Chapter 4 of 5

Hermione likes Remus. Remus likes Hermione. But what will it take for them to acknowledge their feelings for one another?

Returning home, he once again stood in the foyer, but no music or delicious smells greeted him this time. The house was strangely quiet. Looking to the desk in the hall, he saw Hermione's note, saying that she had taken Teddy for a walk and would be back after some errands this afternoon. *Blessed, blessed silence*, he thought, heading to the library. Picking up Hermione's book, still sitting on the end table, he sat down and began to read.

Several hours later, Hermione returned home with a very sleepy Teddy in tow. She called out briefly, letting Remus know they were home, and took Teddy off to the kitchen for a light dinner before putting him down for the night. Remus heard them come in but was too engrossed in the book to bother getting up. At least, that's what he told himself, not willing to admit that he wasn't sure that he wanted to face her just yet. After a while, he heard her take Teddy upstairs and sighed. He couldn't let her put Teddy to bed too, not after she'd been with him all day. It was a rare but welcome respite from fatherhood, but it wasn't fair to just assume that she'd take care of it, even though she did such a good job with him. Getting up, he marked his page with a different bookmark and headed upstairs.

"Hi, Hermione. How was your day?" Remus asked quietly as he watched Hermione change Teddy into his favorite Quidditch-patterned pyjamas.

"Went well, actually," Hermione replied, eyes glued to Teddy as he struggled to shove his fist into the wrong sleeve. "We went to the library and then to the ice cream parlour, where your son decided that maraschino cherries were better ammunition than dessert, but he settled down after a nice stroll through the park. He even got to play with the neighbour's new puppy." Remus smiled. It sounded like they'd had a lovely afternoon, and for a moment he wished he'd been out with them. "How was your day? Did Severus like the chapter? What did he think of your ideas?" She lifted Teddy into his crib and whispered, "Good night, Teddy; stay here all night, and we'll have a special treat in the morning." The little boy mumbled sleepily, his eyes barely open.

Remus went over to his son and kissed him on his forehead, smoothing back his hair...purple, today...and wondered why that gesture seemed so unlike the same one last night. Nodding his head toward the door, he motioned for Hermione to follow him downstairs. Once they were headed downstairs, he answered, "I'm not sure. He didn't read the chapter while I was there, so I can only assume that we'll hear something if he thinks it's bollocks." Hermione giggled quietly at the thought of the word "bollocks" coming out of Snape's mouth. At the bottom of the stairs, Remus came to a decision. Turning to look at her, he said, "Here's an idea. You've had your hands full with Teddy today. That means, young lady, that you are going to sit down and relax while I cook us up some supper, and I don't want to hear another word about it."

She looked back at him gratefully and said, "That sounds lovely, Remus, thank you. But only under one condition...that you and I are taking the night off. No work, no studies, no research. Just relaxing, perhaps putting on some more of that music you enjoyed yesterday, or some light reading."

"That, Hermione, is perfect." Remus followed Hermione into the library, where he poured each of them a glass of Chianti. "Victoria, was it?"

"Yes, that's who we were listening to yesterday. I have other recordings, though, that I think you might like," Hermione responded as she sipped her wine.

"Well, if they're as good as that one was, I think that's exactly what I'm in the mood for this evening." Remus grabbed the book from the end table where he had left it, and said, "By the way, I've also started reading this. Quite enjoyable, really. Been meaning to read it for ages, so I'm glad you're forcing me to finally do it."

"Forcing you, eh? Is that what I'm doing," Hermione said teasingly. "I don't recall a wand to your head and saying 'Cervantes or death,' Remus."

The older man laughed as they walked into the kitchen. He handed her the book and said, "Even if you had, I'd have still been glad to have read it." Rummaging through the pantry, he started pulling out the ingredients for a pasta fra diavolo that would go nicely with their wine. Starting the garlic to sauté on the stove, he went into the foyer quickly, and came back with two vials. Sitting with Hermione at the table, he handed hers to her and said, "Severus asked me to give you this, by the way." Uncorking his own potion, he downed it in one gulp and picked up his wine immediately to mask the unpleasant taste.

Hermione blushed and said, "Oh, thank you, Remus. I should have known Severus wouldn't forget." Uncorking hers, she too swallowed it all in one go and followed it with another sip of wine.

"He's never asked me to bring anything to you before. I'm glad to see you were expecting it," Remus said, a bit curious as to what it was.

Hermione looked at him out of the corner of her eye and said quietly, "Severus has brewed me my ... monthly potion ... ever since I was a student at Hogwarts. I was always ill during that time, and the regular potions didn't work, so he's concocted me a special, extra-strength brew for years now."

A bit embarrassed that he had asked, but glad that she confided in him, he raced to change the subject. "Why don't you read me a bit while I cook?"

She took a rather large gulp of her wine...Chianti was her favorite; it had nothing to do with the fact that she had just talked about her time of the month with Remus...and opened the book to his page. She read the next chapter to him as he added in tomatoes, herbs and spices, and they laughed at Don Quixote's antics as he skillfully deveined the shrimp and set them to cook. Before either of them knew it, they were three chapters further into the book and each of them had a plate piled high with steaming pasta.

Topping off their wine glasses, Remus sat and looked at his plate with delight. While he still had cravings for rare red meat at times close to the full moon, at any other time he reveled in cooking exquisite dishes. Hermione inhaled, then moaned in pleasure.

Remus stiffened; that sound was almost ... erotic. He masked his sudden interest by picking up his fork and digging in, urging her to do the same.

Hermione was glad to do so. That had been no mere acknowledgment of a delicious meal...that was the type of noise she made in her bedroom. Where had that come from? *Careful*, she urged herself, *you cannot, under any circumstances, let him know what you're thinking!*

After the second bite, though, she moaned again, a bit softer. This was utterly delicious, spicy, rich, and intoxicating, and she told Remus so. He blushed a bit at the compliment, but didn't deny it. He dug in with fervor, and it was all Hermione could do not to watch each strand of pasta disappear between red-stained lips. Excusing herself hurriedly, she got up from the table, ostensibly to turn on the stereo. She went into the library and stood there a moment, trying to compose herself. Why was she having such a difficult time, today of all days? She knew she had had feelings for Remus beyond friendship for some time but she had always been able to tamp them down by reminding herself that Remus was still healing, and she would never do anything to hurt him or make his life more difficult. It wasn't easy to shut off her feelings, but she had always been able to do so...until today. Maybe it was the wine. She'd have to watch that when she went back to the table. Hurriedly she put one of her recordings on the stereo and returned to the kitchen.

Remus seemed not to notice her discomfort, but instead remarked on how beautiful her choice of dinner music was. "What is it this time, Hermione? More Victoria?"

"No, this time I went with something a bit closer to home. Same time period, though. This one is by John Wilbye, I believe," Hermione responded, happy to have a neutral subject to discuss, even though her eyes kept flickering back to his lips, and she wondered how the sauce would taste if she could just kiss the corner of his mouth ... She dropped her fork with a clang. *Merlin, girl*, she thought, *get a hold of yourself!*

"Are you all right, love?" Remus asked concernedly. *Did I just call her love?* he wondered idly in his head. *I couldn't have, shouldn't have, but she looks so beautiful tonight, and every time she slides that fork into her mouth I want it to be me, and ... dear Merlin, where did that thought come from?* Covering his confusion with another large gulp of wine, he returned his attention...and his gaze...to his dinner.

"Oh, oh yes, sorry, I just ... dropped my fork," Hermione squeaked. *Did he just call me love*, she wondered, and for goodness' sake, why did the sight of his fingers so delicately cupping his wine glass make her want those same fingers cupping her bottom?

Remus found himself recognizing the song on the stereo. Wilbye it was indeed; his mother had had quite the penchant for English madrigals, had wanted him to sing in the cathedral choir until his ... affliction ... rendered that an impossible dream. Still, this piece he knew by heart. "Lady, when I behold the roses sprouting, which clad in damask mantles deck the arbours, and then behold your lips, where sweet Love harbours, my eyes present me with a double doubting. For, viewing both alike, hardly my mind supposes whether the roses be your lips or your lips the roses." It wasn't until he looked up and caught Hermione's intense stare, those gorgeous lips slightly parted, that he realized he had been speaking the words out loud. If possible, he flushed even darker, but found himself unable to break her gaze. To his sheer and utter surprise, she didn't look away, or blush, but instead lifted a shrimp to her lips, and ... sucked.

Dear Merlin. He watched helplessly as her dainty tongue cleaned every drop of sauce from the shrimp, as she nudged it, bit by bit, between her red, wine-stained lips, as she licked the last bit from her perfect fingertips. He must be dreaming. He must be dreaming! *Wake up, Remus, before you make a fool of yourself*, he screamed silently at himself. But instead of stopping, she stood up and slowly walked to where he sat across from her. As if in a dream, she leaned down, never breaking eye contact, and ran her tongue across his lips, tasting him. Her eyes darkened as she stood back up, watching him, watching his reaction. He could hardly contain himself; it felt as though every fibre of his body was on fire, demanding to be touched. She moved even closer, placing her hands on his upper arms, and kissed him. This was no tentative peck or friendly gesture. This was total onslaught, lips on lips, tongue around tongue, teeth clashing, biting. Remus moaned, low in his throat. How was it possible that she could taste like fra diavolo and yet so utterly sweet? But...but this was wrong, this was wrong, this was Hermione, his friend, and even though she started it, it wasn't right to take advantage of her youth, her friendship, in this way. With a groan of frustration, he pulled his face away from hers, panting for air.

But Hermione was not to be dissuaded so easily. Dimly in the back of her mind she wondered where on earth this sudden burst of nerve had come from; she had longed to do this for so long, and suddenly it was like she had no inhibitions whatsoever. But she didn't care. She had to touch him, tell him how she felt...no, show him how she felt. How much she wanted him. Moving around behind his chair, she placed her hands on his shoulders, gently massaging his tensed muscles, and felt him relax marginally. Slowly, she lowered her head to his and began to nibble on his ear. He jerked, surprised at the sudden touch, but her hands on his shoulders wouldn't let him stand up out of the chair. Her skillful tongue delved into the nooks and crannies of his ear, finally stopping to circle lazily around his earlobe. His mouth went slack, and his hands clenched and unclenched in his lap. He was dying to touch her, to touch himself, but ... he just couldn't. It wasn't right, even if Hermione seemed to think that it was.

Her hands slid lower, across his chest, lower, to his waist, and back up, coming to rest on his nipples. She palmed them slowly, feeling them grow even harder with every circle. Her tongue worked its way lower as well, trailing from his earlobe down his neck to that point where his shirt met collarbone. He didn't think it was possible, but his mind grew even fuzzier with every touch. It was harder and harder for him to remember why this was so very wrong. After all, she obviously was demonstrating affection for him above and beyond the bounds of friendship, and she obviously wasn't at all appalled by his age. But it was wrong, wasn't it? *Merlin, remember why it was wrong, man*, he pleaded with himself, *or I won't be held accountable for my actions!*

Just then, her fingers pinched his nipples, and something inside him snapped. With a feral growl, he stood and faced her in one swift move. Without a word, he grabbed her and pressed her up against the wall behind the table, pinning her shoulders there with his hands and lowering his face to hers. He kissed her fiercely, tasting her as deeply as she would allow, before he moved his tongue to her ear and repeated her actions. Her eyes rolled back in her head, and she slumped against the wall, overcome by the sensation of his bristly cheek against hers. She moved her hands back to his chest and began undoing the buttons on his shirt.

He growled and tossed his head in the air, finally whispering in her ear, "Don't do that unless you mean it."

She paused for a second, as though considering, and without hesitation continued to unbutton his shirt. Remus groaned and grabbed his wand, vanishing their clothes with a flick of his wrist.

Hermione gasped at the sudden coolness on her skin and leaned into Remus' warmth, pressing her lips to his chest and working her way to his nipple, running her tongue in circles around the hardened nub. Remus, in turn, ran his hands down her sides to her pert bottom, cupping it as she had earlier fantasized about, squeezing, then sliding his hands back up to her beautiful breasts, copying her motions with his thumbs.

Looking up at him with an expression of sheer lust on her face, Hermione boldly slid one of her hands down and encircled his incredibly hard cock. Remus almost lost control at that point; it had been so long since anyone, including himself, had touched him in that way. Growling, he grabbed her hands with his and in one swift motion had them both pinned in one of his fists above her head. She spread her legs wantonly, leaning up against the wall for leverage. Remus grinned evilly and ran his free hand up one thigh into her warm center. She was deliciously wet and ready for him, and although he wanted desperately to taste her, he knew he couldn't wait much longer.

With wolf-like strength, he scooted Hermione up the wall with one hand until she could wrap her legs around his waist, and with one swift thrust, he seated himself inside her. Feverishly, he thrust into her over and over again, moaning his lust into her ear as she tightened her legs around him, until, with one final spasm, they came together. Remus let go of Hermione's wrists, moving his hand down to her hip and helping her to her feet. The remainder of their dinner was left on the table as they went upstairs to bed.

The next morning proved awkward, to say the least.

Hermione woke first, only to find herself in a strange bed...naked!...with Remus! A second later, the memories of last night's adventures in the kitchen, and the others in this bed, came flooding back, as did the blood to her face. What on earth had possessed her? She had never acted like that in her life...not with Viktor, not even with Ron. She...she had seduced Remus! Oh, now she'd gone and done it. What must he think of her? Did he feel used? Did he think she'd taken advantage of him, or had had too much wine? Oh, Merlin's bloody beard!

Shortly thereafter, Remus awoke to the pleasant sensation of warm, smooth skin pressed against his. Hazy he wondered who it might be, and a moment later, he remembered. Everything. Remembered vanishing their clothes, remembered taking her up against a wall, remembered ... shite. Shite, shite, shite. What on earth had

possessed him? He'd never acted like that in his life...not with Sirius, not with Tonks. He'd let her work him up into a bloody fever, and then he just ... took her, without so much as a by your leave! Oh, she was going to hate him, he just knew it. Damn.

They were both aware of the other being awake, but neither wanted to be the one to break the silence. Fortunately, Teddy intervened, bawling loudly at a wet nappy and wanting his moo moo, whatever that was. Both of them hastily said, "I'll get him," jumping out of bed and hastily searching for clothes, until they remembered that they had come upstairs without any. Hermione blushed and, grabbing one of Remus' robes from the door, fled the room without a word. Damn and double damn.

Remus collected Teddy and took him downstairs, fixing them all breakfast and nice, hot tea. Tea would solve it. Tea always solved everything. After a while, a conservatively dressed Hermione joined them at the table. "Good morning, Remus," she said very formally.

"Good morning, Hermione," he rejoined. "Did you sleep well?" Blast. *That probably wasn't the best thing to ask, now, was it, you dolt,* he thought.

She flushed faintly and responded, "Yes, actually. You?"

He nodded, sipping his tea, unsure of how to proceed.

"Remus, I..." Hermione started to say.

"I'm so sorry, Herm..." Remus began.

The two laughed uncomfortably and motioned the other to continue. After a distinctly awkward pause in which they sipped their tea a bit too quickly, Hermione started again.

"I don't know what came over me last night, Remus. I'm so sorry if I in any way offended you, or took advantage of you, or made you feel uncomfortable. I've never acted like that before, and I'm completely embarrassed by it," she blurted out, fidgeting with her tea cup and pretending to clean Teddy, who hadn't even had the chance to make a mess yet.

Remus sat back, astounded. She thought she had taken advantage of him? No, no no no! "Hermione, it is I that should apologize to you. I've never behaved like that either, and I feel like a lecherous old man. You have nothing to be sorry for. I should have had better control of myself," he finished quietly, utterly ashamed of his behavior.

Hermione gaped at him. Remus was anything but a lecher, and after all, she had seduced him, not the other way around. "No, Remus, you have nothing to be sorry for! I started it, after all. I just ... don't know why," she muttered, still trying to understand her complete change of behavior. Remus winced and looked down at his tea cup, misunderstanding her statement. Looking at his face, she realized what he must have thought she meant. "Oh...oh no, that's not what I meant at all. I know why I did it, I just don't know ... how, or where I got the nerve, or ... something," she said hastily, trying to rectify the situation.

The older man looked up sharply. The nerve? "The nerve to do what, Hermione?" he asked, intent on her answer.

"The nerve to ... to seduce you, I suppose. Or ... Oh, bloody hell, just to kiss you, Remus. I've been thinking about it for ages, but I just never had the courage to do anything about it. I didn't know how you'd react, I didn't know what you'd think of me...if you'd even think of me. And I didn't want to ruin our friendship. You mean so much to me, Remus. I didn't want to lose you," she spoke into her tea cup, afraid to meet his eyes.

His gaze softened. So. So and so. This hadn't come out of nowhere, this wasn't some side effect of the wine and some glorious music. She had real feelings for him...for *him!* "Hermione," he said gently, "I've felt the same way, for some time now. I just ... never thought that you'd see me as anything but your old professor, as some cranky old werewolf. But I'm awfully glad that you do, love."

Hermione looked up at him, startled, and seeing the serious look on his face, she smiled, suddenly lighthearted. He wasn't mad at her...in fact, he was apparently quite pleased that this was all out in the open. *Well, will wonders never cease,* she thought.

Epilogue

Chapter 5 of 5

Hermione likes Remus. Remus likes Hermione. But what will it take for them to acknowledge their feelings for one another?

The next month, Hermione accompanied Remus to Hogwarts to meet with Severus. She wanted to see him before the students came back later that week and thank him once again for his potions. And since Remus' and Severus' article in Potions International Magazine had not only caused quite a stir, but had won them a major commission from one of the leading potions suppliers to wizarding England, they had a lot of work to discuss. After a lovely dish of tea with Severus, she left them to talk shop, as it were, and went off to find Professor McGonagall for a nice chat.

"So. You two are ... an item now, I presume?" Snape inquired blandly.

Remus looked at him, surprised. He hadn't expected the news to travel quite so fast; Harry and Ginny had only just owled them back with their blessing and congratulations. Still, Severus was nothing if not perceptive, so perhaps he shouldn't be surprised after all. He nodded, answering, "We're—whatever the younger folks say today. Dating? Ah well. One day at a time, as they say, right, Severus?"

They concluded their meeting, and as usual, Remus held out his hand, which Snape refused to shake, and saw himself out the door. From his window, he could watch as Remus and Hermione made their way back to Hogsmeade, hand in hand. It was about time those two bloody fools acknowledged their feelings for one another. Any idiot could have seen them mooning over each other for almost a year, and yet, given their stupid Gryffindor pride, it would have taken them an eternity to ever do anything about it. He smirked with satisfaction. Neither one had ever realized his part in their little romance, for which he was thankful, as one of them may have actually tried to share the details with him. Dreadful. He fingered his scar. A life for a life. His debt to Hermione Granger had been repaid.

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