

A Cup of Kindness

by Regina Demonica

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Should auld acquaintance be forgot,

And never brought to mind?

Should auld acquaintance be forgot,

And days o' auld lang syne?

For auld lang syne, my dear,

For auld lang syne,

We'll tak a cup o' kindness yet,

For auld lang syne.

From Auld Lang Syne, Robert Burns

Corvus Huggins wandered through the neighborhood, not entirely sure of what he was doing there or where he was going. He liked wandering for its own sake. He was returning from a trip to visit some relatives of his, and he always preferred walking to travel by broom or Apparition. It always helped to calm him down when he needed calming. It served another purpose, too. Since he knew from hearsay that things were becoming quite grim in the war, an inconspicuous means of travel was the best, wearing ordinary clothes, looking like any old Muggle off the street.

Perhaps it was his own luck, but Corvus had not been affected by the war as much as so many other people had, mainly because when left to his own devices, he kept to

himself most of the time. He had simply chosen not to involve himself in what he considered a war between the Ministry of Magic and the Death Eaters. No one was out on the street, so he was left alone. He didn't mind, though; it gave him some space to think and helped him relax.

Sooner or later, he would go home, but for now, he would just listen to the wind blowing through the trees and watch the stars. He had always been a wizard who was fond of nature. He wasn't an open person, but a loner. It was the way he was, and he liked it. He always felt safest at night, on clear nights when the stars could be seen. On these nights, he would look at the stars and simply stand stock-still, counting them and finding the constellations.

Suddenly, he was distracted by a flash of light, which startled him briefly. He squinted, struggling to work out what made the flash, and saw another. He realized what he saw at once...he had tried to avoid the war, but it had found him.

He rushed for shelter beside a nearby house, although none of the things darting through the air took notice of him. He tried to work out what was going on, frightened and awestruck at the same time. The things were people, almost certainly wizards, and they were fighting. He watched as two of the figures seemed to struggle, then one vanished in an instant, leaving the other to confront his pursuers alone.

Corvus flinched, knowing what was probably going to happen next. He had a sick feeling that things weren't going to go well for the lone man, who, to his credit, was facing what would be his certain death with dignity and courage, and who didn't try to get away as his companion had done. Corvus found himself cheering the unknown fighter on as he prepared to defend himself...and the man was struck full on by one of the flashes, losing his grip and plummeting to earth.

"No," Corvus heard himself breathe. It was a solid distance from the sky to the ground, and the fellow wouldn't have a chance if he hit the earth. And Corvus knew that he couldn't just let someone who had fought so bravely die. The other figures were gone, but Corvus, who wouldn't have cared if they had still been there, charged out from his hiding place, screaming "*Arresto Momentum!*" at the top of his lungs. The spell slowed the fall, but it wasn't enough, and Corvus watched in horror as the man struck the ground and lay still, flat on his back. Corvus stifled a cry and rushed to the scene.

But the young wizard's spell had done what he had hoped it would do. The fall hadn't been fatal. The man wasn't moving and had no doubt been stunned by the impact but he was breathing faintly, although in pained rasps. He was hurt all the same, and badly, no doubt about that. Corvus felt sick when he saw dark blood staining the dirt. He cautiously approached, wondering just who he had saved. The fellow was close to unrecognizable, features mutilated by scars both old and fresh, obscured by oozing blood and an empty eye socket. He was old, judging from his rugged face and grey hair, but his body was far from frail. There was a gaping cut on one shoulder where the poor man's coat had been torn open, revealing an ugly red gash.

Corvus's stomach heaved, but he managed to keep his footing. He knelt by instinct, as if to comfort the injured wizard, whose breaths had degenerated into pained coughing. If he had burst an organ, or was cut on the inside, he could very well suffocate on his own blood. Corvus wasn't a trained Healer, nor could he treat such a wound. But if the man wasn't treated, and soon, he would surely die.

"Hang on," Corvus heard himself say. "Stay right there." He instantly felt very stupid; of course his patient wouldn't be going anywhere, he realized. One leg was twisted back in a position that made Corvus wince, unmistakably broken, the other a prosthetic of some sort. He searched the ground beside the man, seeing if he had anything on him that would identify him or prove to be useful. Fumbling in the dark, he found something small and spherical and used a *Lumos* to get a better look. He almost dropped the object in disgust.

It was a disembodied eye, staring directly at him as if it were alive.

He regained his senses once he realized that the horrid thing was artificial. He watched as it looked about in darting glances, useless to the man who no doubt owned it. Perhaps Corvus could keep it and give it back to him once he recovered. But as he saw its movements become jerkier in his hand, he had a more practical idea.

The man he had rescued had not been the victim of an accident. Someone had tried to kill him and had very nearly succeeded. To ensure his charge's protection, Corvus knew that he would have to make it look as if they had been successful.

Trying not to be sick, he dipped his hands in the old wizard's blood and removed the beaten coat, then smeared the coat thoroughly in the stuff until it was slick. He tore the cloth several times with a *Diffindo* to make it seem as if a wild animal had dragged off the body, then threw it on the ground in a heap, leaving the now-motionless eye beside it. If the man had been conscious, Corvus suspected that he might not have been willing to cooperate, but he could hardly ask.

Now he had to make sure that the old wizard didn't die of his injuries anyway. Not only wasn't Corvus a Healer, but he also didn't know much about first aid, magical or otherwise; nonetheless, he was under quite a bit of pressure, and sometimes, that is all it takes. His hands still wet with blood, he used his own jacket to help stabilize the broken leg while he searched for the site of the bleeding.

The man's shoulder had taken much of the impact's force, but it was enough, and it was where the bleeding was heaviest. The wounds to the face and leg could and would heal over time, but this was the potentially lethal one.

"*Coagulare!*" Corvus muttered, repeating the spell, hoping that it would work. The bleeding slowed and the blood clotted, allowing Corvus to wrap the wound. The worst of the injuries was treated, or at least reduced to a hopefully nonfatal trickle. "Now, then. I guess I'll bring you back home with me, and we'll decide what to do next." The man was heavy, but Corvus didn't want to risk a *Mobilicorpus* or Side-Along Apparition, not in a Muggle-populated area, and it might put the man into shock anyway.

He'd have to do this the old-fashioned way.

He shakily stood, draping the injured man beside him, still out cold. "I've got you. It'll be all right. Just come along with me; I'll take you home and get you some food and drink, help you get better. It'll be all right." The man didn't speak, but Corvus was sure that he could explain things once they got to his place, which, luckily, wasn't far. Bracing himself, he set off, helping the poor fellow stay upright.

It was six in the morning when the man woke up, gazing round with a frightened, wild one-eyed stare, muttering to himself. He didn't seem to notice the bloody wrapping around his shoulder.

"It's gone," he repeated, softly at first, childlike. "Can't see. It's gone." He began fumbling around him, searching for something and wincing with pain as he did. Corvus watched, wondering what he was talking about. "It's gone," the man moaned. "Where is it? *Where is my eye?*"

"Glad to see you're up," Corvus said brightly. The old wizard glowered at him, his gaze wounded and piercing, like an injured lion; in pain but still dangerous and defiant. "Good morning to you, then."

"Where am I?" the man rasped, leaning back on the bed that Corvus had given him to rest in. "What in..."

"Don't do anything...your leg is broken in several spots, and it would be best if you didn't move. You took quite a fall. You're lucky that you survived."

"Filthy traitor." The man began mumbling again, ignoring Corvus completely. "Left me to die. Never should have gone with him." And again: *Where is my eye?* Lost it, lost it, gone, all gone. . ."

Corvus sighed as his patient began searching the bed for the missing object again. "My name is Corvus Huggins," he said, and the other wizard paused, glaring. "You fell from the sky and were badly injured. I took you home with me so you could get well again. Your eye is not here, and your leg is badly broken. You should rest."

"Gone," the man repeated before falling back in the bed, exhausted. He didn't speak again, but Corvus saw his chest rise and fall as he breathed.

Corvus had understood the part about the eye, and clearly, it was more valuable than he had thought. Perhaps he should have kept it to return after all. Its loss had deeply affected his patient, whose other mumblings had made little sense at first. The traitor he had mentioned was probably the other man whom Corvus had seen that night, the one who had vanished.

Perhaps he could learn more about what had happened that night when the man's head cleared a little and he was more willing to talk about the subject. For now, the injured man was delirious, exhausted, hungry, and angry. Rest would do him some good, while Corvus might be able to ease his temper with some friendly conversation. At the very least, a full stomach might help. With some healthy food to eat, the old chap might calm down a little, and Corvus could explain things to him a little better and maybe find out who he was.

Whistling softly to himself, Corvus began to cook some vegetables and slices of chicken for their first supper together, listening to the sound of his new friend's snoring.

It wasn't long before the wizard woke up again, groaning, trying to sit up. He drew back, startled, when he saw a lean, dark-haired man at his bedside, holding a bowl of steaming chicken soup. Corvus dipped a spoon in the soup, holding it up invitingly.

"I've got something for you."

The man squinted, or at least tried to. With one of his eyes gone, he couldn't see well, but he could definitely make out that the stranger had food. "Leave me alone," he grumbled. "I'm tired. Not hungry."

"Come on, old chap. What, you think I'll poison you?"

The man's remaining eye narrowed to a slit. "I don't know who you are. Why should I trust you? That stuff could very well be poisoned."

Corvus reached out for his hand, and the other wizard flinched.

"Think about this, mate. If I wanted to hurt or kill you, I could have when you were lying helpless. Easily. Instead I took you home with me and set you up here. To get better, you'll have to eat something. I promise, this is good stuff. Here, I'll try some myself."

Corvus sampled a little bit of soup. "Mm. Good." The man's eye didn't move or twitch. "Come on, I didn't save your life from whoever it was that knocked you out of the air just to have you refuse to eat and starve yourself."

Cautiously, the other wizard looked at the soup. He was clearly starving, despite his insistence otherwise, and his reluctance to try it was strange considering that. At last, it seemed, his hunger and curiosity overcame his anxiety.

"Fine. Give me some. But first, promise me that it's all right to eat."

"Of course it is," Corvus remarked and heard a faint growl when he added, "Are you always this difficult?" He held out the bowl, and the man warily took a spoonful of soup. He waited for a moment, as if testing it, before he finally swallowed.

"Not bad," he mumbled, half to himself. "Not bad at all."

"See? What did I tell you? You were worried for nothing."

"Always best to be cautious," the man replied gruffly. He seemed slightly awkward asking the question that followed. "Can . . . can I have some more?"

"Of course," Corvus told him, holding out the bowl. He thought to himself that it was very much like dealing with a stubborn child. "You can have as much as you like." The bowl was snatched from his hands, and he watched his patient greedily devour the soup. Corvus felt a sting of pity for him; the poor fellow was so hungry that he rushed as he ate, scarcely bothering to chew.

"Thanks," the injured man said, handing back the empty bowl. "I needed that."

"I'd never have guessed it from the fuss you made." Corvus noticed that the other man was speaking in complete sentences now and responding to him with words instead of glares. "You seem to have gotten a little better."

"It was nothing personal. I wasn't sure if I could trust you." The older wizard looked around the room, as if checking that they were alone, before speaking again. "There's a war on, and I can't afford to trust easily."

"I saw the fight. You did well, considering that you were badly outnumbered and that the chap with you bolted."

"Typical Fletcher. I only agreed to go with him to see to it that he didn't endanger anyone else. Didn't expect him to do anything useful."

Corvus reasoned that "Fletcher" must have been the other wizard's name. It still didn't provide any clues for him; he had never met or heard of anyone called Fletcher. The man had vanished without a trace, meaning that he couldn't be tracked down and questioned.

"Why did he leave you there? Didn't he know you couldn't handle it alone?"

The wizard sighed. "Oh, he knew. He knew, all right, and he didn't care. A coward and a thief, that's all he was and is. Never understood why we kept him around; he caused more trouble than he was worth. You'll know him if you see him. Short, slovenly, never cuts his hair." He leaned against the wall, muttering, "If I ever see him again, I'm going to kill him."

Corvus went to get a newspaper, reading it over before giving it to the man. "You were fighting in the war, then."

The man nodded, not looking up from the paper. "Yeah. Used to work for the Ministry, as an Auror. I'm supposed to be retired." He drew himself up as much as his broken leg would allow him to. "I may not look like much now, but let me tell you, there was a time when they were terrified of running into me. Not that it matters much these days." He fell back again, staring up at the ceiling. "And here I am, bedridden, almost blind, and being fed like a baby in a bib."

"Better than being dead, though, if you ask me." Corvus was eager to learn more; it seemed that his companion had an interesting history behind him. An Auror, of all things, even a retired one!

"If I'd died, I'd at least have kept some scrap of dignity," the old wizard retorted bitterly. "I'm helpless like this."

This wasn't the sort of thing Corvus had expected. Maybe something more along the lines of, "Thank you for saving my life," or even just a simple, "Thanks for the help," not something that implied, "I wish you'd left me there." Obviously his guest wouldn't exactly be the easiest of patients to care for.

"I'm looking after you," Corvus chuckled, trying not to seem upset by the old Auror's remark. "Don't worry about a thing. No one's ever bothered me; I stay out here by the forest. Hardly anyone knows I'm even here. If you need a place to lie low, you couldn't have found better."

The other wizard just groaned.

"Since you'll be staying with me for a while, we should get to know one another a little better. My name's Corvus Huggins. What's yours?"

The man's single eye narrowed in the glare that Corvus knew too well. "You don't know, eh? Well, usually I'd tell you that I'd like it better that way, but I've decided for now that you aren't dangerous. Just annoying." He edged a little closer to Corvus. "My name's Moody. Alastor Moody."

"Moody by name and moody by nature," joked Corvus. "Pleased to meet you."

Judging from the look he gave Corvus, Alastor didn't share the sentiment. "I've got to get back," he muttered, looking away from the young wizard. "I have to. They must think I'm dead."

"And it would, I think, be best if everyone kept thinking that for a while. You can't walk, are half-blinded, and there's a war on. If you were out there in your current state, how long would you last?"

Alastor couldn't argue that point, but was insistent regardless, quickly suggesting another idea. "At the very least we should tell them that I'm still alive. There again, the message could be intercepted. Can't risk it." Another groan. "I'll *murder* Fletcher for this! *Murder* him!"

"Calm down. Here. Read a few of these," Corvus suggested, grabbing a few books from his shelf. "It'll be an easier recovery if you rest. You can deal with what's-his-name when the war is over. For now you'll be staying with me." Corvus opened one of the books. "Here. I've had this for a very, very long time, you see. Ever since I was a little boy. It's a poetry book."

Alastor gave a short, barking noise that could have been his attempt at a laugh. "I'm too old and jaded for children's poems."

"Well," quipped Corvus, "you were a child yourself, once."

"A very long time ago, Huggins. So long ago I don't remember being one anymore."

Corvus flipped through the book, finding a poem he had marked earlier and holding the book open. "Here's one I think you'll like, then *Fern Hill*, by Dylan Thomas. Here, lie down and I'll read it to you." It did almost feel like he was reading to a child ill with fever; despite his grumbling, Alastor did fall quiet and slouched, waiting, listening. Corvus read, his voice soft and calming but lyrical, spinning music out of the words. The other man's muscles loosened, and he relaxed, lying on the bed and obediently listening to the poem.

Corvus finished reading and shut the book. "What did you think, then?"

No reply. His patient was staring into the wall, one hand on his injured leg. The poem had obviously touched him. He didn't say a word, but his expression seemed softer, more thoughtful, than before. Corvus realized that he might have reminded the old fellow of his own lost innocence, back when he was no doubt young and strong, able to run and jump and tumble like the rest of them.

"If I upset you, I'm sorry. It is a good poem, although I admit it is a bittersweet one. I'll read another one, if you'd like."

Alastor turned, not bothering to cover or shield his grotesquely mutilated features, and spoke in the most quiet voice Corvus had heard him use. "I would like to see that book of yours, Huggins. A fine one, it is."

Corvus passed him the book, watching as he examined it. It would do him good, no doubt. At the very least it would take his mind off the broken leg. Corvus didn't know how to treat it without risking permanent damage, but he could numb the pain if asked to. The only thing Corvus could do to help it mend was to try and keep Alastor still, so it wouldn't get any worse.

He had a sneaking suspicion that, despite his bluster, the old man was becoming quite fond of him.

The days passed, and despite the war raging around him, life for Corvus Huggins carried on as usual. He hadn't left his place for what felt like ages. He had an ornery wounded Auror in his house who needed constant attention and feeding, and he knew that the near-sightless Alastor wouldn't stand a chance in the open. The old man was virtually helpless, which Alastor found very annoying.

He insisted on eating himself, claiming to preserve what little was left of his pride, and read Corvus's books when not complaining about his injured leg. His appetite improved significantly in spite of his apparent paranoia, and he began to ask for solid food instead of soup. He was in particular eager to know when his leg would be well enough for him to stand on it, let alone walk. Corvus said that, with any luck, it would be mended in a few months. But even with that done, he was as helpless as a child without his eye.

Despite his pessimistic outlook on things, which contrasted with Corvus, a bond slowly began to form between the two, for the simple reason that you can't live with someone for a long period of time without feeling something for him. They weren't really friends, not yet (Moody was still reluctant to divulge more than his name), but they felt more comfortable around one another than they had before. Corvus suspected that even crabby old Alastor thought that his company was better than none at all.

Corvus introduced Alastor to herbal remedies, explaining that he owned a small garden near his home with a small flock of chickens and different types of plants. While the old Auror seemed to dislike the taste of several homegrown painkillers, he enjoyed herbal tea. Corvus offered it to him frequently, giving the two the chance to talk. The young man tried to keep up his spirit. However rude, sarcastic, or bitter Moody sounded, he was becoming more open. Despite his sullen nature, Alastor had realized that Corvus was the only person for him to talk to.

But even more than that, Moody had genuinely been impressed by Corvus's kindness, in particular that a complete stranger had helped him when he was vulnerable, fed him, and had given him a place to stay. He made it clear that he would leave once his leg was mended. However, he did speak to Corvus more quietly at times, and only grumbled a little when he was fed, which his caretaker guessed was probably an attempt to keep up his image.

As it turned out, Alastor did have a few other things on him, his wand, most notably (Corvus had found it, fortunately intact, lying not far from his body), which he agreed to leave in Corvus's safekeeping. He was too weak to attempt the use of magic, which greatly irritated him. He seemed to be very bored with his life in the house, since most of his day consisted of eating, sleeping and, if he felt like it, making sarcastic jabs at Corvus or reading his books.

Corvus, for his part, didn't mind the sardonic remarks he heard every day. Alastor was hurt, no doubt eager for recovery, and if Fletcher really had abandoned him to die, he had a reason to be bitter about the incident. Since Fletcher wasn't there to insult, he insulted Corvus instead, or no one in particular. He sneered at all offers of sympathy, saying that he had no need for pity.

One day, however, he did not taunt or in any way deride Corvus Huggins, instead pulling himself up on one arm and asking, very softly, "Corvus, why did you stop to help me? You didn't know who I was. I could have been a Death Eater, and you brought me here and gave me food and a bed. They would have killed you if you'd been seen."

Corvus pulled over a chair and sat beside him. "You were hurt. I couldn't have watched you die, and I wanted to save at least one person from those killers. I know about them. I know about the things they've done. In fact, I'm surprised that they didn't kill you outright."

"So was I, at first. If he'd used the Killing Curse on me, I'd have been dead for sure. Must've found it more satisfying to think of me as a bloody mess than struck down by a quick, painless Kedavra. I caused a lot of trouble for them in the past, you see, and he wanted me to suffer for it. Alive just long enough to feel it when I hit the ground."

Corvus shuddered. What he had seen that night had been a fall slowed by his Arresto, and despite that, Alastor had hit the ground hard enough to be given a bad maiming. If he hadn't intervened, the scene would have been much more stomach-turning.

"But you're still alive, though. I couldn't just see a human being be killed like that. Without a chance to fight back, I mean."

"If I'd been a little younger, I'd have given them some trouble first." Alastor gave a twisted grin. "And if that cur Mundungus hadn't run out on me. Thanks to him, I've been cut off from the rest of the Order, given a limp to make sure I don't come back any time soon, and everyone thinks I'm dead. No way to find them, see if they're still alive. . ."

"Actually," Corvus remarked, "I can help you with that."

Alastor stared at him, his expression one of shock. "No. No one else will be put in danger for my sake. Don't risk your neck for me." But before his eye, the man shrank into a magnificent bird, feathers ink-black. Its voice was a hoarse, rasping croak.

"No danger. I can spy for you. An eye for an eye." He changed back into a man and nodded firmly. "Learned how to do it some few years ago."

"An Animagus," Moody breathed. "So, yours is a crow."

"Raven," Corvus corrected gently. "I'm bigger than a crow, you see. Transfiguration always was the only area of magic that I really consider myself good at. We can make a deal. You stay where you are; tonight I will go find the Ministry in my Animagus form and see if I can discover anything. By morning I'll be back to tell you what I saw there. I'm in no danger. I've done this before. How else would I keep up on things, living by myself?"

Alastor's remaining eye narrowed slightly, but his voice held no hostility, rather genuine concern. "You'd better come back, Huggins. It'd be a hell of a life here without you."

True to his word, Corvus came back, entering through the chimney and landing beside Alastor. The old man sat up, shocked, as the raven transformed into the dark-haired, short Huggins.

"I have news," he began, dusting soot off his robes. "None of it good, I'm afraid."

"They think I'm dead, don't they?"

"Well, yes. But first things first. The Death Eaters took over the Ministry of Magic, for starters. They put old Pius Thicknesse under the Imperius Curse and made him into a puppet Minister, so he's allegedly in charge of things, but the real power behind him is You-Know-Who."

"Vol..."

"*Don't say the name!* There's a Taboo on it, he'll know you're alive, and this time he'll make sure to finish the job properly! But yes, he's in charge of the Ministry now. He's using that old toad...what's her name...to sniff down Muggle-borns and feed them to the Dementors. She was always bad, but now she's become a right monster, sending people to living deaths. And that's not all she's done. You might not want to hear the next part."

"Her name is Dolores Umbridge. She is a traitor, then. That would be nothing for her; she was always an opportunist and always had some sympathies for his ideas, although she was sly enough to hide them. I have to know what's going on; they killed Scrimgeour? He'd never stand for this."

"Afraid so. He died bravely, though, they say, protecting the boy Harry Potter. Potter's on the run; they're searching their hardest for him, but they haven't caught him yet."

"Good. While Potter lives, there's hope. What were you going to tell me?"

Corvus swallowed. He was more than a little afraid to tell this part of the story, and he knew how Alastor would react to hearing it. "Umbridge had something of yours, Mr. Moody. She took your eye. Had it outside her door. Heard them talking about it; Harry took it back, and I don't know where it is now."

Moody was beyond enraged. His remaining eye burned, and he gritted his teeth, hands clenched into fists, every muscle in him stiff with disgust and indignation. "How *dare* she? Grave-robbing as well as torturing innocent people and cooperating with the enemy? Is nothing past her? How dare she lay her stinking hands on it! If I were able to, I'd find her myself, and I'd..."

"I told you, Harry has it now. There's nothing we can do. It's gone." Corvus felt ashamed of having left the eye beside the bloodstained coat. He had expected it to be found, but not to be plundered, and he was the one to blame for Umbridge possessing it in the first place. "I'm sorry," he added. "Harry got away, though; he's still out there. He'll set things right, and once he does, you might get it back again."

"If they think I'm dead, he'll probably bury it. It'd be the sort of thing he'd do. Sentimental boy. Good, though."

Corvus tried to think up an idea. "Can't you just get another one?"

"No. I made and enchanted it myself, and I'm the only one it will move for. I can try, but it won't be easy, and I don't have the materials or energy to do it. You're right, Huggins. It's gone for good." There was another flash of fire in Moody's eye. "Blast that woman to hell! Hope Harry can keep ahead of 'em."

"We can hardly help him. Neither of us knows where he is, and I'm a registered Animagus. Making too many trips out to the Ministry of Magic might make them suspicious. But I promise that things'll turn out all right in the end. They have to, don't they?"

"I don't know, Corvus," Alastor sighed, that quiet voice back again. "I don't know anything anymore. I'm just a bitter old man, alone and broken. I may as well have died from my fall."

"You aren't alone," Corvus replied, smiling gently. "You've got me, haven't you?"

Alastor stopped, looked up at the other man, and nodded quickly.

"Look, mate, I know things look bleak at the moment. But the least we can do is try and cheer ourselves up. Say, are you up for a bit of a drink? I've got some cider lying around somewhere."

"Nothing stronger?"

"Fraid not. Drank the last of the Firewhisky before you turned up. But cider will do. After all, it's the spirit that counts. We'll be with Mr. Potter in spirit, then." Corvus went to another room, emerging a few minutes later with two cups of cider, one of which he kept for himself and the other of which he gave to Alastor. The younger man gave another grin, raising his cup to propose a toast.

"To Harry!"

"To Harry," Moody repeated, lifting his own. Their cups came together, and they drank.

It was many weeks after that before Corvus agreed to go out again. He returned with a newspaper, unrolling it and handing it to Alastor. "I have good news and bad news," was all he said.

Alastor scrutinized it, squinting, trying to read the words through his single eye. What was clear, though, was that the war was over, Harry Potter was victorious, and Voldemort was dead. Despite himself, Moody felt like leaping from the bed and cheering. It was over. He was free to rejoin the Order and show himself, alive and well.

Almost giddy with excitement, he flipped through the newspaper, gathering details, until he found something that knocked the happiness right out of him.

"I can't believe it," he muttered, staring blankly at the obituaries. "Tonks is dead. Lupin, too. Both of them, and they were only married last year! Tonks is dead!"

"Were they friends of yours?" Corvus asked. His friend seemed deeply distraught, a note of pain and despair in his voice.

Alastor nodded grimly. "Both old fighting comrades. I trained Tonks myself. She was young, Corvus, her death was a waste. Lupin, too. It isn't right that he died when he was newly married and happy for the first time in many years. I should have gone back and protected her, damn my leg! I should have died out there instead of her. I'm old, she was so young. . ." He held up the paper. "Colin Creevey, not even of age, Fred Weasley, Tonks, Lupin, and so many others. And I'm still alive, while they are dead. They had more to live for than I do."

"Don't say things like that. It isn't your fault that they died."

"I should've been with them, Corvus, not like this." Alastor gestured to the bed. "I should've helped them fight, been there in the battle." He showed Corvus his own obituary in the paper, which, the young man thought, must have been a surreal experience for him. "They think I'm dead. And in a way, I am. I have nothing left to live for; what is Mad-Eye Moody without his eye?"

"Maybe you can find it," Corvus suggested, but realized how stupid his idea must have sounded to Alastor. "Or ask around, find out where he buried it."

"I'm *supposed* to be dead. If anyone recognized me, I'd never be given a moment's peace." Bracing himself, Alastor Moody got down from the bed and stood on his own two feet for the first time in nine months. Corvus suspected that he could have done it before, perhaps, but had either been too listless or too despairing to try. He winced, but he tried to hide the pain, smiling his twisted smile through it. "I've been thinking about what I can do now that the war's done with, and I've decided to retire. Permanently."

"So, where will you go? You need food and a place to stay."

Alastor sighed. "I'll figure something out."

Corvus thought, trying to come up with a solution that could help both sides. "Maybe you could live with me for now. Now that the war's over, I'll try and find a job somewhere, maybe working as a shop apprentice. That should be enough to supply the two of us. We can work out the details later; perhaps you could help out around the house. That might help you get your strength back."

"But I may as well go out once in a while, find out what's going on with Mr. Potter and his friends, learn about what happened to the Ministry. Thicknesse is out, no question about that. Can't help but feel a little sorry for him; before the Imperius he wasn't as bad as Umbridge and her sort. Weak-willed, though, and none too bright."

"But your leg isn't fully healed. You shouldn't go haring around until you're sure you won't be making it worse."

Moody glared ferociously, determination in his eye. "I'll get better. Practice will help. Maybe I'll start out by looking around the house, walking, testing my strength. I'll do some chores for you. Then, when I'm well enough, I'll go exploring."

"You'll be up and about soon enough," Corvus assured him. "I'm impressed that you're standing. I didn't know how to treat your leg, not really, and it didn't mend properly. But you're certainly stubborn enough to do it on your own. Feel free to do spare work for me if you'd like; I could use a helping hand. In the meantime, I'll find myself a job that will pay well enough for us to live comfortably."

It took some weeks of chores and walks for Moody to regain enough of his strength to venture outside of the house, a moment which he had eagerly anticipated. He had discussed what he would do with Corvus; he wanted to find news himself, in disguise, which he was confident he could do despite the leg.

"I'll need an alias," he told Corvus. "Something that we can remember."

"I have an idea. How about something from one of our books?"

"There's a thought. I have something: Grimnir. I'll use Grimnir. The Hooded One, the one-eyed."

"A wanderer. It fits you," Corvus remarked, winking knowingly. "And I do remember reading that Odin had the help of ravens."

Moody limped over to the far side of the room, looking back for a moment. "I won't go far the first day, maybe testing my leg for a while. I'll go into Hogsmeade soon, though, maybe in a week or two, to learn what happened after the war. Mind if I borrow your cloak, then?"

"No, not at all. Won't you be recognized when you do go out, though?" Corvus watched as Moody put on a black, hooded travelling cloak; wearing it, his empty socket covered by a bandage, he looked quite fearsome, despite a very visible limp. "I mean, you are distinctive. No offence meant, of course."

The old Auror slid on a boot to hide his prosthetic. "Without my eye, it'll be harder for anyone to identify me on sight, never mind the newer scars, and I can hide in the shadows. I will be fine, Corvus Huggins. Have my dinner ready for me when I return tonight." He waved a quick farewell to Corvus and left without another word.

But something continued to eat away at Corvus's heart. He had done his friend wrong in leaving his eye behind to the shame of being used by the traitor Umbridge. But it was gone; if Harry had buried it, it would be likely impossible to find again. Moody would have to make a new one or go half-blind for what remained of his life. He had poor vision in his natural eye, and had relied on his magical one for so long that he had difficulty adjusting to a life without it. His leg was mended enough for him to stand and walk on his own, despite not having had proper care for it, and he could probably work magic again.

Corvus could think about it later. For now, he poured out a mug of cider and set to preparing a meal for his friend's return.

Ten years after the war ended, things hadn't changed much for Corvus or Alastor. Corvus had sometimes left, leaving Moody in charge of the house, and vice versa, during the other man's excursions to the wizarding areas as Grimnir. He hadn't been recognized yet, watching from the shadows, sometimes with Corvus close by in raven form. Together, they almost resembled an illustration of the Norse god whose name Moody used, cloaked and fearsome, a tame raven obediently perched on his shoulder, whispering in his ear.

Moody hadn't chosen to reveal himself, either, instead choosing to stay in hiding for the time being, picking up news in bits and snatches. Lupin's son was growing up well, Harry Potter had become an Auror, and things were slowly returning to normal. Shackbolt was Minister of Magic now, and he would do a fine job, Moody thought. He confided to Corvus that he felt out of place in the postwar world, but his curiosity kept him from secluding himself completely. He had become accustomed to living with one eye, and had taught himself to find his way using his other senses, especially touch.

Corvus, on the other hand, had become more open to society. He had become an apothecary in Diagon Alley, selling herbs for potions and traditional remedies. He had a healthy income, enough to feed two people. Now that the war was over, he felt safer wandering longer distances. Sometimes, just for the joy of it, he would transform and visit cities and forests, enjoying the wind in his feathers. It was on one of these trips that he overheard a conversation that he found interesting, listening as long as he could hear before taking off, allowing the wind to carry him. He knew where he was going and what he would do there.

This was his chance to, many years later, set things right.

That night, Alastor Moody was lightly napping in a chair beside the fireplace, a book from Corvus's collection beside him, when a dark shape plummeted down the chimney

and startled him awake. "Corvus!"

The raven shook soot off of its feathers and gave a croak of greeting. "Morning, Alastor!" It held something in its right claw, which Moody couldn't see clearly but was small enough for the bird to carry. He watched as Corvus changed back into his human shape and put the thing in his hand, smiling good-naturedly. "Good to see you up. I've found something that I think belongs to you. Tell me if it does."

"Show it to me," Moody requested, excitement in his voice, as if he already knew what Corvus had to give him.

The other wizard nodded, opening his hand to reveal Alastor's artificial eye, motionless. The old Auror's expression was a mix of shock, pleasure, and confusion. "How did you find it? I heard Harry had it buried somewhere in the Forest of Dean. Never thought I'd see it again."

"I know you probably don't approve of grave robbing, but this time I thought you wouldn't mind."

"Corvus." Moody swallowed, as if not sure what to say next. "Thank you."

Corvus gave Alastor the eye, which whirled to life in his hand as if it was his touch that reawakened it. Corvus turned away as he removed the bandage, used a cup of water to clean the thing, and put it back in its socket. When he dared look back, his friend looked quite different with his eye returned. Alastor seemed to have become stronger, more confident, beaten and betrayed no more, returned to his old majesty and strength. Corvus realized what he had done; Mad-Eye Moody was back.

"I have something else to tell you," Corvus said, trying not to seem overwhelmed by the sight. "Harry's holding a party tomorrow. Everyone involved in the last war is welcome to come."

Alastor's normal eye flashed, and he smiled. "I hope he doesn't mind if some uninvited guests turn up."

"What are you saying?"

"It's about time I came out of hiding. It's been long enough. Bring me a pen and some paper, I've got a letter to write." He looked directly at Corvus with both eyes. "And don't stop me."

As he handed over the materials, Corvus gripped his friend by the hand. Moody seemed startled at first, but after a moment returned the gesture, grinning in a way that would have seemed frightening if Corvus hadn't known him and seen the kindness and gratitude in it.

"Thank you very much, Corvus Huggins," he said again before he brought out a wooden desk and began to write.

"What else are friends for?" the young wizard told him, feeling a sense of pride and warmth that he knew only comes when you have done a good deed. He had done right, he knew; he'd saved a life and made a friend in return. It looked like his long years of seclusion were long over.