

Werewolves and Serpents

by phoenix

Voldemort is back and the Order of the Phoenix is reforming. They need new members and Kingsley recruits one of his fellow Aurors - even though she is a Slytherin. Assigned to work with Remus Lupin, things get very tense. Set during 'Order of the Phoenix'.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 27

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A/N: This was originally posted in 2006 to other archives, and I belatedly realized that it had never been archived here. I know it's an OC fic, but the number of canon females we know anything about to interact with the adults is limited. I hope that you will give the story, and Wendy, a chance.

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Chapter 1

Harry Potter had just been brought to Number Twelve, Grimmauld Place and it became painfully obvious to Albus Dumbledore that they would have to more aggressively recruit new members to the Order. The current members were stretched too thin. After the meeting he pulled Kingsley Shacklebolt aside. "Have you found any more candidates?"

Kingsley was a mid-level Auror and, as such, in the best position to recruit his fellow Aurors, though he had to do so discreetly given the Ministry's current stance on Voldemort. "I have one, but I'm not sure that you'll want her."

"We need to gather all the loyal wizards and witches we can. Why would I turn her down?"

"It's Wendy Westin," Kingsley replied soberly.

"I see," Albus replied. He silently mulled this pronouncement. "And you are sure?"

"Positive. We were out on a case the other night and I brought it up in conversation. I don't think you would believe how much she hates the Death Eaters."

"I believe I do. Can you bring her to the next meeting? I'll interview her and we can decide from there."

"I can do that. I owe her a pint so she shouldn't get suspicious."

"Excellent. Anyone else?"

"Afraid not. It's hard to find anyone that works for the Ministry that's willing to say anything about You-Know-Who or the Death Eaters. Everyone is afraid they'll lose their job."

Albus placed his hand on the other man's shoulder. "Do what you can, but don't draw undue attention to yourself."

"Don't worry about me. I know how to maintain a low profile." He paused a moment before continuing, "You do realize they aren't going to like her being one of us."

"They are adults and will realize the value of an ally. I was at that trial and I concur with your assessment," Albus replied. He knew they would be resistant to her presence at first, but if Kingsley vouched for her, that was all the confirmation he needed.

"Hey, Wendy, you busy after work today?" Kingsley asked.

Wendy looked up from her overly neat desk. "Depends, what did you have in mind?" Kingsley had been trying to get her to go out with him for years, but she vehemently held to her rule of not dating coworkers. Of course, that pretty much meant that she didn't date. Aurors were notoriously busy and the closer she got to forty, the less attention she found she got from men. Not that she really minded that much. Relationships were messy and complicated and only got in the way of her doing her job.

"Well, I said I owed you a pint for saving me from that cockatrice, I thought I'd pay up tonight."

"As long as you realize it's just a pint. You aren't taking me out to dinner or anything," she said in a very well rehearsed tone.

"Oh, come on, it'd be fun." He gave her a winning smile.

"Have I mentioned you remind me of Lockhart when you do that?" she replied sarcastically. She was one of the few female wizards in the department that actually didn't care for Lockhart. She had spoken with him on one occasion and thought he was a complete idiot.

The smile had abruptly dropped from his lips. "All right, just the pint. I'll swing by when I'm ready to go."

"Right, see you then, mate." She shook her head as Kingsley walked away. She'd give him that he was persistent, but she couldn't fathom why. He could have done much better than her. Her plain, shoulder-length, brown hair was starting to go grey, she had completely unremarkable hazel eyes and that nice scar on her cheek from Timor Leah's poison-tipped dagger. That was a low point of her Auror career she didn't want to dwell on. One pint and she would head home to go through the stack of mail that had undoubtedly been piling up in her absence. After that she could enjoy her three days off before it all started again. Of course, that assumed there was no crisis.

At the end of the day, Kingsley stopped by her cubicle. "Ready to go?"

"Let me finish this one last memo." Once she was done, she sent it on its way.

As they were walking to the lift, he said, "I have a quick errand to run; I've got to drop something off at a friend's place. You don't mind stopping there on the way, do you?"

"Can't I just meet you at the Leaky Cauldron?" she asked. Going on errands was not something she preferred to do.

"I thought we'd give this new place that's come to my attention a go. I want to scope it out as a source of information."

Since the lift was now at the Atrium, she replied, "Fine, let's just get this over with."

"I didn't think I was that bad company," he said defensively.

"It's not you. It's been a long couple of days and I'm looking forward to my time off."

"Oh, that's right, your off cycle is up, isn't it?"

"Yes, so I'd appreciate you telling me where we are going?" She was quickly losing patience.

"Grimmauld Place, you know where that is?"

As an Auror she was very well acquainted with London, but that was not the only reason she knew about Grimmauld Place. "Yes, I know where that is." Why were they going there? The only wizards in that area had been the Blacks and that house had been closed for ages. Besides, they weren't the type of wizards Kingsley associated with.

"Meet you there," he said cheerfully and Disapparated.

Wendy was suddenly very suspicious and gripped her wand tightly before following. When she arrived she spun around scanning the area, looking for danger.

"Wendy, nothing's going to jump out and attack you," he reassured her.

"Fine, deliver your package and let's go."

He handed her a slip of parchment. "You need to read this first."

On it she saw "*The headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix is located at 12 Grimmauld Place*." She laughed at the irony of that statement and watched as the familiar façade of the Black home appeared. "How in Merlin's name did you ever get access to the house?"

"I'll explain later. Now let's get inside before we attract attention." He went to the door and rang the bell.

Through the door she could hear the familiar screech of Mrs. Black.

Molly Weasley threw open the door. "If I've told you once, I've told you a million times, don't ring that doorbell!"

"Sorry, Molly. Old habit," Kingsley replied repentantly.

"Come in, come in. Almost everyone is here. You must be Wendy. I'm Molly Weasley. Let me take you to the drawing room."

"Nice to meet you, Molly." She looked around and could see someone vaguely familiar adjusting a curtain that she presumed must be covering a portrait of Mrs. Black, but she was being rushed up the stairs and didn't get a good look at him.

As they walked upstairs to the drawing room Molly muttered. "I tell them not to ring the bell since it sets her off, but no one remembers. They don't have to live with that portrait screaming at them every day."

Wendy tried not to laugh. From what she had heard, Mrs. Black had done an excellent job having her personality captured in that portrait.

"Here you go, dear. See you downstairs in a little while."

Wendy found herself alone and looked around the drawing room. It looks like the new residents had done some cleaning. Most of the dark artifacts she remembered seeing the last time she had been here were gone.

"Ah, Wendelin, so glad you could join us," came Albus' kindly voice from behind her.

"Professor Dumbledore, what an unexpected surprise to see you here, though I should have suspected you had something to do with this."

"Then am I to assume you have an idea of why you are here?" he asked.

"Based on the Fidelius Charm and the words on the parchment, I assume you are reorganizing the Order of the Phoenix."

"Excellent. Anything else?" he prompted.

"I'm guessing Kingsley's recommended me for membership."

"He has. He speaks very highly of you."

"I'm not sure you want me. A lot of people are going to question my background. And while we're on the subject of background, how did you get in the house? Only a Black could have gotten in here?" She was beginning to get a funny suspicion about the whole situation.

"I have never held anyone's background against them. I was at the trial and can vouch for your reaction. Besides, you were never accused of anything, because you didn't do anything wrong. If I place my trust in you, so will the others."

"You know what we are fighting against. Every person on our side is a step closer to victory. Kingsley has told me your feelings on Death Eaters and Voldemort. This is an opportunity for you to make a difference since the Ministry has foolishly chosen to ignore Voldemort's return."

She snorted in agreement. "Fool is an excellent word to associate with Fudge. About the house?" she asked again.

"That is a secret known only to members of the Order. Do you wish to become one of us? Your duties to us will not interfere with your ability to do your job. Kingsley has been working with us all summer."

She considered his offer. She knew she had complained numerous times to Kingsley about the Ministry's decision to ignore the Dark Lord's return since he had been a sympathetic ear. They had both seen an increase in Death Eater activity since June, though it was still small scale. He was one of the few willing to admit that the Ministry was going in the wrong direction. This would also give her a chance to atone for doing nothing the last time. "All right. I'm in."

"Good, then let's introduce you to the others."

"Professor, the house?" she prompted.

"Please, call me Albus. And as for the house, Sirius Black opened it and offered it to the Order." He could see her stiffen and go for her wand. He raised his hand to stop her. "Sirius is not the murderer everyone thinks he is. Trust me for now and know that Kingsley can explain all the details to you later. Come now, we don't want to keep everyone waiting."

Albus walked into the kitchen followed by Wendy and addressed the Order, "Good evening. Before we begin the meeting, permit me to introduce our newest member..."

Wendy interrupted, "Wendy Westin, Auror." She knew that Albus would call her by her full name and she detested being called Wendelin. It was easier to stop that idea from forming in anyone's head now.

Albus quickly went around the room and introduced the others. After that the Order got down to the business of organizing the next round of watches outside the Department of Mysteries and then receiving reports from the members.

Wendy couldn't keep from glancing at Sirius. She had a hard time accepting that he was not an escaped murderer and Death Eater. She noticed he kept whispering to the wizard seated next to him. The man looked familiar but she couldn't place the name, Remus Lupin. Another surprise had been seeing Severus Snape among the members of the Order. His presence was even more unexpected than hers.

At the end of the meeting, Albus announced that he was pairing up members of the Order to investigate some of the areas of purported Death Eater activities that Kingsley had given. Wendy had been paired up with Remus to follow leads in Gloucester. This would at least give her a chance to find out why he looked familiar, probably from Hogwarts. He must have been in one of the other Houses. She wasn't able to determine if he would have been ahead of or behind her. She thought ahead because of the greying hair and lined face.

After the meeting broke up, she endured a slew of welcoming handshakes. She recognized Arthur Weasley because their offices were on the same floor and Aurors were always finding misused Muggle artifacts that they turned over to him. Naturally, she also knew Tonks from the Ministry and Minerva from her days at Hogwarts. She had given a disdainful look at Mundungus, who had wisely decided not to shake her hand. Unsurprisingly, Sirius remained on the other side of the room, studying her.

Remus stepped up to her when the crowd subsided. "Welcome to the Order, Wendy. I guess we'll be working together. I'm Remus Lupin."

"Nice to meet you, Remus. If you don't mind me asking, you look familiar. Have we met before?"

He chuckled softly. "I was thinking the same thing. Sirius and I discussed it, thinking it might have been school, but neither of us could place your name. We were Gryffindors, '71-'78."

"Then it would be school. I was '69-'76. You probably can't place the name because I was Wendy Leah back then."

Remus still couldn't place the name. She must be married, but a quick glance showed no ring. "Sorry, that didn't help much. What House were you in? Ravenclaw?"

She knew it was bound to come up sooner or later. Better sooner, she guessed. "No, Slytherin."

He looked surprised, "Slytherin. I, uh, see."

She was amazed at how long that sort of information followed one around. When she had submitted her application as an Auror, it had been an issue, too. "Honestly, it was a House and it was nearly twenty years ago. I don't hold it against you that most of you were Gryffindors. I don't hold it against my fellow Aurors and they don't hold it against me. Besides, Severus was Slytherin and he's a member of the Order."

He smiled weakly. "It is nothing to get excited about, is it? I'm sorry. It's just very unusual."

Sirius had approached, unnoticed, to eavesdrop on the conversation. "Wendy Leah, is it? Feel good to be back in the Black house?" he asked snidely. "I'm afraid we've cleaned up a bit since you were last here."

"Black," she replied gruffly.

"What possessed Albus to let you in the Order? Surely he knows who you hung out with?" His voice was filled with disgust.

"Yes, hung, past tense, and he knows. I severed all contact with your cousins and the others long ago," she replied defensively.

"And what about *your* family?"

"That's none of your business. I'm here for same reason as everyone else. I'm against Death Eaters and their master. Now if you'll excuse me." She had no desire to relive the past with Sirius Black.

"What was that all about?" Remus asked.

"I knew she was familiar. Back in her school days, she was thick as thieves with my cousins Bellatrix and Narcissa and that whole group of Slytherins, including Lucius Malfoy, which turned out to be Death Eaters or suspected ones. Her husband, Edgar Westin, was sent to Azkaban. The whole Leah family has been on the questionable side of things, though none of them ever got convicted. Kind of like Malfoy, they kept their noses clean. I don't trust her."

"Kingsley and Albus trust her." Remus glanced over and saw her talking with Severus. "Besides she's been working as an Auror for quite some time. I think she's on our side."

Sirius lowered his voice to a whisper. "You didn't see what they used to do. The whole lot of them used to practice Dark Magic all the time. And you know that there were quite a few Aurors that switched sides last time. What if she's just been putting herself in a position to infiltrate us?"

"I'll keep an eye on her when we're out. See what I can learn to make you feel better. Just because she was Slytherin doesn't mean she's all bad."

Wendy approached the one friendly face in the room, though with that scowl he didn't look particularly friendly. She hadn't really known Severus well at school. He had been a studious loner a couple of years behind her. She had been Seeker on the Quidditch team and quite popular. While Bella and some of her other friends had used him as a plaything, she had not. "Severus, good to see you again, though I will admit some surprise." She had known that Lucius had taken young Severus under his wing, and suspected Severus had been involved in Death Eater activities.

"I am likewise surprised to see you here. You know some of them will always be suspicious because we are Slytherin." He cast his glare at Sirius.

"I think holding petty grudges is a criteria for being sorted to Gryffindor." She chuckled at her joke. "You know, it's a shame we didn't get teamed up, but I guess with you going back to school it's best. Besides, it will keep people from thinking the Slytherins are conspiring to turn everyone in to the Dark Lord."

"Indeed. I was surprised he teamed you up with Lupin."

"Oh, why's that? He seems nice enough and it looks like he won't hold my Slytherin past against me, even if Black will. Though, that's not surprising; he's never liked me."

"You know Black?" he asked.

"Our families have been close for ages. Bella, Narcissa and I were close when we were young, though once Bella started exploring her darker side, I pulled away a bit. She didn't notice since she had discovered boys by then. I'm afraid we used to pick on him a bit since he was the youngest. Well, actually Regulus was the baby, but we could never get him away from his mother."

There was a gleam in Severus' eye as he listened to her admit her past. "You used to pick on Black?"

"We were quite nasty about it. Bella used to hold contests to see which of us could come up with the best hex. It's not something I'm particularly proud of now, and I'm sure he'll be more than happy to bring it up to everyone as further proof I'm not fit to be here." She didn't really want to talk about her childhood. She wasn't that person anymore. "Well, I'd better talk to Remus and find out what time he wants to meet up so we can check out some of Kingsley's leads."

"There's one more thing you should know about him," Severus said with an evil grin on his face.

"Oh?" She had seen that Slytherin sneer many times and had herself perfected it. No Slytherin could resist any information that was preceded by that grin.

"I've found it is information he's not prone to sharing, but since you will be his partner, it is vital you know. Lupin suffers from Lycanthropy."

Wendy could feel the color drain from her face. She despised werewolves. She had thought the Order was the best, the only chance they had to defeat Voldemort. Having someone like Mundungus had been bad enough, but to have a werewolf? It was inconceivable.

"I would suggest you keep track of the moon cycle before inviting him to investigate any leads with you." This was one of those secrets Severus delighted in revealing.

"A werewolf," she said quietly as she glanced across the room at Remus and Sirius deep in their own discussion. Once she regained her composure, she turned back to Severus. "Thank you for that information. It will be very useful."

He gave a small bow. "My pleasure." He thought that she had been entirely too friendly towards Lupin.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 27

Voldemort is back and the Order of the Phoenix is reforming. They need new members and Kingsley recruits one of his fellow Aurors - even though she is a Slytherin. Assigned to work with Remus Lupin, things get very tense. Set during 'Order of the Phoenix'.

Chapter 2

Wendy walked back to where Remus and Sirius were still conversing. "I'll be here four-thirty tomorrow. Be ready. I don't have time to waste waiting for you," she said shortly.

The two men looked at each other in confusion. "What was that about?" Remus asked.

Sirius looked towards Snape and saw the triumphant sneer on the Potions Master's face. "That bastard. I'll bet he told her you're a werewolf." He lunged for Snape.

Remus restrained his friend as Severus pulled his wand. "Give me a reason, Black. You continue to prove you are unstable and a danger to yourself and others," Severus replied dryly.

Arthur joined Remus in restraining Sirius. "Now, Sirius, you know he does this on purpose. Walk away from him."

"Ah, he's not worth it anyway," Sirius snarled and stormed out of the kitchen.

Remus spared one last glance for Severus before following. *Why does he insist on making my life difficult?* Remus wondered. Now he would have quite the uphill battle in getting Wendy to act normally around him.

It was four twenty-five and Remus was waiting in the kitchen. Being late would be the wrong way to earn his new partner's trust. He was surprised when he heard a knock on the door rather than the doorbell. Most people forgot about the portrait and rang the bell. He hurried up to the door, not wanting to keep her waiting. His jaw dropped when he saw her. She had styled her hair quite nicely and was wearing enough makeup to accentuate a beauty he hadn't seen yesterday, yet at the same time it wasn't overpowering.

"Don't flatter yourself, it's not for you," she said sardonically. "Are you ready?"

"Yes." He cringed when his voice cracked.

She gave him appraising glance and raised an eyebrow in disapproval. "All right, we'll go with plan B then."

"What's plan B?" he asked as he stepped out of the house.

"We act like we don't know each other while trolling the pub for information," she replied shortly.

"Out of curiosity, what was plan A?" He wasn't entirely sure he wanted to know the answer to that question.

"You were going to sell me," she replied nonchalantly as she walked down the street looking for a secluded Apparition point.

He momentarily froze, aghast at what she had just said. "I was going to sell you? Is that how Aurors do business?"

"Doesn't matter. Wouldn't work anyway." She had always preferred working alone since a partner tended to ask too many questions. Though, it was always nice to have someone watching your back.

"What do you mean it wouldn't work?" While he was against the idea, he knew an insult when he heard one.

"No one would believe that someone dressed like you would be selling a woman like me."

"Excuse me?" That was most definitely an insult.

"You *are* a bit shabby," she replied derisively.

He took one look at her traveling cloak, which was somewhat tattered. "And you are any different, how?"

She opened her cloak for him to see the low cut, tight fitting red dress she was wearing.

"Oh, my," he replied quietly unable to help staring at her.

She pulled her cloak closed and looked around the street, pleased to find it deserted. "Let's go."

Remus followed her to Gloucester.

They found themselves standing outside a pub that was somewhat seedy. "You're going *inthere* dressed like *that*?" he asked incredulously.

"Give me a couple minutes, then you can come in and start your own information quest."

"And what if something goes wrong?" He didn't like this plan. He'd been in places like this before and the clientele had a tendency to get rough, especially with ladies of the night.

She smiled confidently. "Don't worry. I'll come to your rescue. I can take care of myself, so don't interfere."

Remus couldn't help but worry. Going into the pub dressed as she was, she was sure to draw the wrong sort of attention. He began to question Albus' decision. She didn't seem to fit in with the rest of the Order. He gave her the couple of minutes she had requested and then sauntered into the pub. The air was thick with smoke and the stench of unwashed bodies. Instinctively, he searched for Wendy, but didn't see her.

After ordering a drink from the bar, he tried find a likely candidate to covertly interrogate. He was just about to hit his first mark when he heard a musical giggle coming from a corner booth. Peering into the murk, he could see Wendy fawning all over what had to be one of the most repulsive men he had ever seen. His instincts told him to protect her, but she had made it clear that they were working alone.

"Hey, luv, buy a gal a drink?" asked a plump witch that was at least thirty years older than he was.

He tried not to act repulsed while still keeping an eye on Wendy. "Sorry, no, I'm, uh..."

She saw him looking towards Wendy. "Hmph. I see how it is, after the young tart like all the rest. I have experience that she could never have," she purred as she ran her hand along his lapel.

"Thanks anyways," he replied and picked up his mug, searching for a more secluded place to observe the patrons.

After an hour, he had yet to learn anything of any value from those he had plied for information, though he had been propositioned three more times. Wendy had been with at least six men and, in his opinion, she had drunk far too much. He saw her give her latest victim a good slap and stumble away from him. Gripping his wand in his pocket, he fought the desire to protect her.

As she walked by, he grabbed her arm. "What do you think you are doing?" he said through clenched teeth.

She threw herself on him. "Mmm, guv'ner, how much are you offering me? The others just haven't got the price. Have you?" She ran her fingers through his hair. "Though, I don't think you have. Rather shabby, aren't you?"

"I've got the price," he said as he pulled his coin purse out of his pocket. "Outside, now," he added quietly.

She examined his coin purse and said cheerfully. "I guess you do have the price." She stood and led him by the hand out of the pub.

He pulled her into the alley. "Your behavior is despicable. We are supposed to be gathering information."

She suddenly sounded very sober. "And what do you think I was doing? I told you not to interfere."

"What?" He was very confused. She had appeared totally sloshed just a moment ago.

Even though her voice was angry, she was still able to affect the appropriate body language so that anyone glancing in the alley would not see anything unusual. "Look, Lupin, I know what I'm doing. Do you know how much information people will tell a pretty girl that acts interested in them? An awful lot. And I happen to be very good at what I do."

"How far do you go?" He was appalled by this behavior, but then again, she was Slytherin, it shouldn't be that surprising. And he did have to admit that she did seem skilled at what she was doing. His body was involuntarily reacting to her touch.

"Let's just say that I'm very good at memory charms." She gave him a cruel grin. "Now then, are you going to play nice and leave me alone or do I have to make a big fuss when you go back in there?"

"How come you aren't drunk? As much as I've seen you drink you should be passed out."

She pulled a vial out of her pocket. "Standard Auror issue."

"And you weren't going to share that with me?"

She shrugged. "No reason to. For what you are doing, you don't need to drink like I do." She patted his cheek condescendingly. "Now, be a dear and speak well of me. Tell them what a marvelous blowjob I gave you, if they ask. I plan to be here until closing unless I get a particularly juicy bit of information."

He was really beginning to despise working with her. He had always been shy and had a hard time getting anyone to talk to him. On the other hand, she seemed to have every male in the place wrapped around her fingers. Of course, wearing a dress like that probably helped. Once they had waited a decent amount of time, they walked back into the pub. He watched as she almost immediately began flirting with her next victim. He ordered another ale and tried to find someone else to question.

The more he watched her flirting around the room the more it bothered him. It was unbelievable that Kingsley would have thought she was the type of person they needed in the Order. Noticing his glass was once again empty, he ordered a refill to gain the courage to continue socializing.

As the barkeep announced closing time, Wendy pulled herself away from her latest would-be paramour. She looked around and saw Remus passed out at a table. "Oh, bloody hell," she exclaimed under her breath. She saw the bouncer getting ready to throw him out. "I'll take care of him. He's my brother's mate."

"He's all yours, luv," the bouncer replied.

She walked over and slapped at his cheeks. "Lupin. Come on. Let's get you out of here." He was mostly unresponsive. "Bloody hell," she swore again. "Lupin!" she said sternly and gave him a good shake.

"Five more minutes, mum," he muttered.

"You're bloody pissed. Come on, let's get some fresh air." She had to at least get him on his feet. Pulling him up, she almost collapsed under his weight. He was heavier than he looked. "Lupin, you are bloody well going to walk out of this pub or I'm going to leave you here."

He opened his eyes and tried to focus. "My, aren't you pretty." He reached out to touch her.

She slapped his hand away and slipped under his left arm, trying to guide him out the door. As they were trying to walk through the door, he fell forward into the doorframe. She didn't feel at all bad about that and hoped it left him with a black eye.

Once outside, she took him back into the alley and propped him in a corner created by a stack of crates and the wall. She fished a locket out of her dress. "Here, touch this." She pressed his finger against the locket with her hand. She used her other arm to pull him towards her and hoped for the best. Thankfully the destination of this Portkey was her front hall and no matter which direction he fell, he shouldn't hit anything.

Trying to maintain the precarious balance, she pulled out her wand. She was vaguely aware that his free hand was touching her quite inappropriately, but she could do nothing about it. She touched her wand to the locket and said, "*Portus*."

Instantly, she could feel the tug behind her navel as the Portkey activated. Unfortunately, once they arrived Remus fell forwards, landing on top of her. She tried to shove him away, but he was dead weight. "Lupin, get off."

"You called me Remus once," he mused.

"I'll call you a lot worse if you don't get off." She shoved again and he rolled over. She watched him babbling in a state of semi-coherency. *hate my job* she thought. Picking her wand up off the floor, she decided to levitate him to the sofa in the drawing room. He wasn't a guest so there was no way she was putting him in the guest room. He kept babbling incoherently and she continued to ignore him.

Once he was on the couch she called, "Cappa!"

A house-elf appeared in the room. "Yes, Mistress?"

"Get a bucket, pitcher of water and a blanket for our...*visitor*."

"Yes, Mistress. Should I take him to the guest room?"

"No. He can stay here."

"Yes, Mistress. Will you be needing anything tonight?"

"No. Turn down the bed and that will be all."

She walked upstairs to her bedroom and a long hot shower to wash away the filth of the night. Why had Dumbledore saddled her with an incompetent partner? First, he almost ruined her cover and then he had the impertinence to pass out on her. She would send an owl to Albus requesting a new partner. She couldn't work under these conditions. Her time was valuable and Remus Lupin was wasting it.

Remus woke to a splitting headache and thought his mouth tasted of old socks. Looking around the room, he tried to determine where he was, but thinking too much only made his head hurt worse. He didn't recognize his surroundings, but he did see that water was on the coffee table. He helped himself to three glasses of water and re-examined his surroundings. It was a very nicely appointed formal drawing room. He could smell coffee and followed the scent. He wasn't quite sure about eating, as queasy

as his stomach felt, but coffee would probably be a very good idea.

He entered the dining room and saw Wendy reading the paper and having breakfast. "Is there a washroom I could use?"

Without looking at him she pointed at a swinging door. "Through the kitchen, to the left. Ask Cappa if you get lost."

He muttered thanks, but they went unanswered. He found the small water closet with no trouble and went about trying to make himself somewhat presentable. As he washed his face, he tried to remember how he had ended up in Wendy's drawing room. He had fuzzy memories of being in the pub in Gloucester, but not much more than that.

Once he was as clean as he was going to get without a shower, he returned to the dining room. She was still ignoring him. "Do you mind?" he asked as he pointed at the coffee service. When she didn't answer, he assumed she didn't mind and helped himself. He looked at the pastries and tried to decide if he should attempt eating. His stomach wasn't quite sure it was ready for that step.

"About last night?" he asked nervously knowing he had made a complete fool of himself.

She folded the paper and glared at him. "Yes, about last night. I have sent an owl to Dumbledore requesting a new partner."

"What?"

"Your behavior was deplorable. First, you almost ruined my cover with your little fit. Then, you went and got completely plastered, leaving me to make up some silly excuse to explain why a whore would be taking a passed out drunk home with her."

He grimaced at her yelling. It made his headache pound harder. He interrupted, "Could you please lower your voice?"

"I bloody well will not lower my voice. You earned that splitting headache, so suffer through it. We can only hope that there will be no need to return to that pub. Though, since it's highly unlikely you found out anything useful, there is a very real possibility that a return trip will be necessary."

"I think I might have chosen the wrong side. From what I have seen of the Order, you are bunch of incompetent boobs that let petty grudges dictate your behavior. The lot of you could be wiped out inside a week."

Remus was in shock. He knew he hadn't used his best judgment, but he had not expected an outburst like this. "Well, you could have given me more warning about what your plan was. That sort of behavior is not the type of thing anyone in the Order normally does."

"That's because you are all damned honorable Gryffindors. Wouldn't dream of doing anything sneaky, that wouldn't be honorable, would it? Well, you know what? The other side isn't going to play fair. You lot need to realize that and change the way you play. That's why I was brought in. You need diversity, a new way of thinking. The Order was almost wiped out last time and he almost won. You know what turned the tide? The Ministry deciding to let the Aurors do what they had to do, that's what. They were encouraged to become devious and sneaky, to think like their adversary. That's what I do best."

"As I said, I've asked Dumbledore for a new partner so you can finish your breakfast and be on your way," she said dismissively.

He was glad that she seemed to have finally stopped yelling. "I have been assigned as your partner and until I'm replaced, I'm going to stay. Albus doesn't want any of us working alone, not on any of these information gathering missions."

"Bloody lot of good you did. You were watching the insides of your eyelids, not my back. If that's all the help you can be, I'm better off alone."

"I used poor judgment last night. I wasn't prepared for what you were going to do," he said defensively.

"What the bloody hell does preparation have to do with it?" She started shouting again.

He grabbed his head in an attempt to stop the throbbing. "I'm used to protecting my partner and you were placing yourself in a very vulnerable situation, and I felt like I couldn't do anything about it."

"So you decided to get pissed? Very mature and wise decision there," she replied sarcastically.

"Look, I'm sorry. Give me another chance." He decided that perhaps he could stomach a piece of dry bread.

She was busy glaring at him when Cappa entered the dining room carrying a silver tray with a letter on it. Wendy took the letter and quickly read it. She crumpled it and threw it across the room. "Looks like you're getting your second chance. Cappa?"

The elf stepped next to Wendy. "Yes, Mistress?"

"Escort Mr. Lupin up to the guest room so he can shower. Then get out some of Mr. Edgar's old clothes and clean his."

"Yes, Mistress." Cappa bowed and waited at the entrance of the dining room.

Wendy glared at Lupin. "I'm not doing this because I like you. I'm doing this because if I have to spend all day working with you, it's not going to be with you in those smelly old clothes. You reek of the stench from that pub."

Remus had guessed that they were in Wendy's home, but he had no idea where it was. "Cappa, where are we?"

"In Mistress Westin's house," she replied.

"No, I mean, where is the house? I didn't see much when we arrived last night."

"Chelsea, sir. Here is being the guest room. Cappa will get clothes for you to wear and place them on the bed."

Chelsea, a very upscale neighborhood. Though, if what Sirius said is correct, I shouldn't be surprised he thought. At least she had consented to letting him shower and was following Albus' orders, no matter how grudgingly.

Feeling somewhat better after his shower, he went into the bedroom to dress and saw a small phial next to the clothes. He pulled the stopper and sniffed the contents. It didn't smell like any poison he knew. Of course, he reasoned there would be no point in her poisoning him and he drank it. As he dressed, he could feel his mind clearing. By the time he was finished, he felt completely refreshed.

Considering his reflection, he thought that he cleaned up quite nicely. He couldn't recall the last time he had worn nearly new clothing and it certainly had not been of this quality. He went back downstairs with the intent of thanking her, but found that she was no longer in the dining room. He started walking around the downstairs looking for her and realized the house was actually quite large. "Wendy?"

"In the library," came her reply.

He followed her voice to the library and found her studying an array of maps. "Quite a nice place you have," he said in a conversational tone.

"You aren't here to socialize. Now that you've recovered from last night, did you learn anything of value?"

"Thank you for the potion. It was quite helpful." He hoped that being polite would elicit the same behavior in her.

"Let's see that you don't need something like that again, shall we? Now, were you completely useless last night?" she asked derisively.

"I was talking to a, er, woman last night who mentioned that her man had been away from home a lot lately. Lots of late night meetings and she was feeling a bit jealous over the whole thing. I think she was under the impression he was seeing someone else and she wanted some revenge."

"That's not particularly useful," she replied sardonically.

"That's when I bought her a drink to see if she knew anything else. She seemed rather inclined to talk about it. I got her to admit that she had followed him one night, and he had met up with a bunch of other men. At that point she got scared and left, but she told me they were meeting in a wooded area outside Gloucester." He pointed to a place on the map. "She said they were all dressed up in robes and masks."

She smirked at him. "So, you aren't completely useless. I learned the same thing. One of the blokes I was with is one of the Death Eaters that's part of that group. They meet on Saturdays so we should be able to infiltrate tonight's meeting."

"You intend to infiltrate a Death Eater meeting?" he asked incredulously.

"Why not? Can you think of a better way to find out about them?" she replied calmly.

"I can think of a hundred reasons why not. We will be outnumbered, we could be captured or killed. Really, the list goes on. We should get reinforcements." Her idea had to be one of the most ludicrous he had heard in recent memory.

"None of them are compelling. We need to get information. As for the concerns you listed, based on the people involved I do not expect it to be a high level meeting. This is a group of lackeys and maybe one trusted lieutenant. They aren't going to be expecting to have to deal with an Auror."

"No, but all it takes is one hex for them to take you down," he replied soberly.

She smiled slyly. "I'm smart, experienced and I don't play fair. We'll be fine."

"We should let the others know what we are doing in case something happens." He was concerned that she was a bit too confident.

"By all means, go tell them, but I was planning on spending my time on researching the meeting site. I'll meet you back here in two hours. She stood and Disapparated.

He knew he was doing the right thing, but she made it feel like he was acting childish and afraid. In reality, she was the one acting childish. He really didn't know what to think about her. She was brusque and most definitely Slytherin in her approach to things. Severus liked to treat him in the same manner.

When Remus arrived at Grimmauld Place, he found Sirius alone in the kitchen. "So, she didn't kill you?" Sirius asked.

"No. Did you think she would?"

"I wasn't sure. Everyone else seems to trust her, but I don't. I don't think she's changed."

"Well, she's definitely a Slytherin," Remus replied as he took a seat at the table.

"Nice clothes."

"What? Oh, after last night's adventure at the pub, she didn't like the way I smelled. They used to be her husband's." He had forgotten about the clothes.

"After more than thirteen years she still has some of his clothes? Very odd, especially if she would have hated him for being a Death Eater," Sirius said suspiciously.

"Some people just don't throw stuff out. Look at what we found around here. That place of hers in Chelsea is every bit as old as this place."

"You did check to see if they were cursed, didn't you?"

"Now you're staring to sound like Moody," Remus replied dryly.

"So where is she anyway? I expected the two of you to report your findings."

"That's why I'm here. She seemed to feel that reporting every little unsubstantiated fact to the Order is beneath her. She's scouting a place we think the local Death Eaters use as a meeting place."

"And you let her go alone? Are you mad? What if she sets a trap to have you captured?"

"Now I know you're sounding like Mad-Eye," replied Remus dryly.

"Someone mention my name?" asked the grizzled old Auror as he stumped into the kitchen.

"What do you know about Westin?" Remus asked. He hoped Moody could provide some insight that he was missing.

"Good Auror. Nice person to have guarding your back in a fight. I worked with her a couple of times and didn't have any complaints. Why?"

"Sirius seems to think she's working for the other side and is trying to lure me into a trap," Remus said in a tone of voice that indicated he thought his friend was imagining things.

"Wendy? No, I wouldn't worry about that. She's on our side, no question about it. Her family disowned her when she became an Auror," Moody replied confidently.

"But what if she's decided she wants to get back in their good graces?" asked Sirius, clearly still suspicious.

"I've never heard her talk about missing her family. I doubt they'd want her back, anyway. There was a little incident," Moody said cryptically.

"Incident?" asked Remus. This could be the insight he needed to better understand her methods.

"It's not for me to say. It just means that she's not trying to get in good with her family. Where is she anyway? Did you two learn anything last night?" His magical eye spun its socket to see if she was somewhere else in the house.

"She's scouting a possible Death Eater meeting site we learned about last night. I came here to make a report on that in case anything happens tonight," said Remus.

"You let her go alone? Not smart. Place like that you can really use someone to watch your back. Where is this place?" Moody asked, sounding every bit like the paranoid ex-Auror he was.

"Near Gloucester. They don't meet until midnight so it should be deserted." Remus had known that letting her go by herself was a bad idea and now it looked like he had definitely made the wrong choice.

Moody grunted. "Should be has gotten people killed, you know. Good people. That's why we were all teamed up. I'd get out there if I were you. Make sure there's nothing funny going on."

"Yeah, make sure she's not betraying us," added Sirius snidely.

Remus Disappeared from Grimmauld Place and reappeared outside Gloucester. He then began his search for his partner. He knew from the map that this was the wooded area in question, but he could find no sign of anyone. Searching for any sign of human presence, he held his wand at the ready. While he did not entirely believe Sirius' assertion that Wendy would turn them over to the Death Eaters, he also did not entirely discount it. For once, being a werewolf would be useful since his senses were sharpened by his lycanthropy.

He heard a noise off to his left and turned to face it, but before he could do anything he heard the word, *Stupefy*," saw a bright red flash and the world went dark.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of 27

Voldemort is back and the Order of the Phoenix is reforming. They need new members and Kingsley recruits one of his fellow Aurors - even though she is a Slytherin. Assigned to work with Remus Lupin, things get very tense. Set during 'Order of the Phoenix'.

Chapter 3

Remus could see light returning to the world and then began to feel the pain from hitting the ground. He tried to focus, but his head was still spinning.

"What the bloody hell are you doing here?" Wendy asked angrily.

"What happened?" he asked groggily. His short-term memory was still foggy. Looking around, he could see that he was in a wooded area, but he still wasn't exactly sure why.

She leaned casually against a nearby tree. "You were sneaking around and I didn't know who you were so I stunned you."

He sat up and rubbed the back of his head. To his great dismay, he could feel a knot forming and grimaced. "Why did you do that?"

She crossed her arms and took on an air of superiority. "I told you, I didn't know who you were. I've learned to ask questions later. It keeps me alive longer."

"Aren't you going to apologize?" His memory was returning. He had come to help her scout the area for the Death Eater meeting. Given her recent actions, Sirius' assessment was beginning to sound more and more plausible.

"For what? You showed no interest in coming. I would think you would be smart enough to know not to sneak up on an Auror. After all, Moody is in the Order and he's the most paranoid person I've ever met." She watched Remus struggle to his feet, offering him no assistance. "Since you're here, I suppose I can make use of you. Scout around that way," she pointed to the north, "and see if there's a good vantage point. Meet back here in half an hour. If you see anything moving, stun it and ask questions later." She turned away and headed the other direction.

He couldn't believe she had offered neither an apology nor assistance. He loped off to the north to scout the area she had indicated, the pain dissipating the more he moved. This was turning out to be a horrible assignment. She clearly hated him for being both a werewolf and a Gryffindor and was determined to continually demean and bully him. If Albus wouldn't listen to her pleas for a new partner, perhaps the old man would listen to his. He simply couldn't work with her if she was going to continue to treat him like a servant, there to do her bidding.

He didn't see any place that would provide a good vantage point for watching the clearing and still provide concealment. He checked his watch and saw that if he didn't hurry, he would be late. He hurried back to the meeting point and found Wendy waiting impatiently. "I know. I'm late. The undergrowth is quite thick that way. I didn't find any place suitable."

"I didn't expect you would. Come on, I found a place over here." She led him to a slightly elevated, though still concealed area. "From here we should be able to see without being seen and the brambles are thick enough, it's not likely anyone would approach the clearing from this direction."

She headed toward the clearing and dropped an old shoe into the brush. "Remember where that shoe is. In case of emergency it will act as a Portkey and take you someplace safe."

"Where?"

"Away from here, but still in the middle of nowhere. I can't risk someone else finding it and ending up in my house."

"When you say emergency, what do you think might constitute that emergency? I can't help but notice that it is closer to the clearing than our vantage point."

"I'm planning on capturing one of them and interrogating him for information," she replied nonchalantly.

"You mean torture. You are no better than they are." *How could Kingsley have recommended her to the Order?*

She was starting to get irritated. He obviously listened to Sirius far too much for her liking. "I mean interrogate. I will use only Ministry approved methods. If I were to tell him I'm an Auror, that might convince him to cooperate, but that doesn't always work. Of course, I can't tell him that, now can I? That leaves my plan."

"Why are you on our side? You seem quite eager to do things their way." He probably should have asked this question sooner, but it hadn't occurred to him to question her motives.

She was aghast. "How dare you! I do not do things *their* way. I don't use Unforgiveables and I don't kill people. You just cannot accept the fact that not everyone was a

Gryffindor. Add to that the fact you take everything Black says way too seriously. Not everyone does things the same way. What better way to get information from a prisoner than a little creative interrogation?" She gave him a cocky smirk.

He didn't like the way she accused him of blindly listening to Sirius. "And what if you are caught? We will be outnumbered," he reminded her.

She laughed derisively. "I know a few tricks to help out with that. Aurors learn a little something about crowd control."

He decided to change the subject a little. "You didn't answer the first part, why are you on our side?"

"I would think you would have figured it out, since I'm sure Black gave you all the details," she spat.

"He told me your husband was a Death Eater," he said simply, hoping to draw some more information.

"There's your answer," she replied shortly, clearly not wanting to discuss the subject.

He didn't think it was much of an answer. "Because your husband was a Death Eater? That's it? *Could it really be as simple as some sort of twisted revenge?* If that was the case, they definitely didn't need her on their side.

Her voice went cold. "We aren't going to talk about my personal life. I have no love of the Death Eaters, so I'm on your side." She stalked back into the trees.

Remus was left to follow her. He had obviously struck a nerve.

She stopped in a small clearing. "This is where we'll Apparate. We'll go back to the house until later. I figure if we arrive about ten o'clock we'll be early enough to get here before any of them." She then Disapparated, leaving Remus to follow.

He Apparated and instead of finding himself in her house, found himself on a sidewalk on a well-appointed Chelsea boulevard. Once again, she wasn't treating him as an equal by neglecting to mention she had anti-Apparition wards. Realizing he had no idea which house was hers, he looked down the street both ways for any sort of sign. He saw her poke her head out of the door on number sixteen and headed in that direction. When he entered the main hall, he started looking for his hostess. She didn't seem to be on the main floor. He heard the stairs creak and saw her coming down from the second floor.

"You might want to wash up before lunch." It was less of a suggestion and more of an order.

"Am I being permitted to stay?" he asked cautiously.

"We will have a strategy planning session this afternoon. I suggest you get a few hours rest after lunch and then we'll start planning at tea. We should be well rested before facing our adversaries." When he didn't move she said, "There is a water closet at the end of the main hall on the left."

"How gracious," he replied. After he washed, he found she was already eating her lunch. Once again, she was making him feel like her inferior.

When he sensed she was almost done with her lunch, he asked. "Why do you hate me?"

"What?"

"Why do you hate me? You didn't hate me when you first met me. You only hated me once you found out what I am. I thought we should clear the air since we will be working together for the foreseeable future." As painful as it might be, he had to know.

"I don't hate you. I have a very strong dislike and distrust of werewolves and stupid Gryffindors. You score two for two on that scale," she explained.

"Why do you feel that way about werewolves?" If he could get her to realize that he was a person and that he deserved a fair chance to be accepted, he thought their working relationship might be more pleasant. One of equals, instead of the current senior/subordinate relationship they had.

"Werewolves are dangerous and unpredictable," she said shortly.

He thought she sounded like she was quoting the Ministry stance on his kind. "You're prejudiced."

She set down her fork and turned her attention on him. "I'm practical. Look, I'll work with you as long as I am told to work with you, but that doesn't mean I have to like you. The next time I see Albus, I plan to push for reassignment. I prefer not to socialize with werewolves."

"And how many werewolves have you known?" He knew that most people had never met a werewolf and based their opinions on hearsay.

"Enough," she replied and then got up from the table. "This conversation is over," she said with finality.

He was unwilling to let this subject rest. "We are normal people. We're just afflicted with an incurable curse. I have the same emotions you do."

"I will not discuss my hatred of werewolves with you," she growled and started walking out of the room.

"So, you do hate me," he replied.

She spun back on him, menace in her gaze. "You want to know why I hate werewolves? I'll tell you, if you really want to know, but I guarantee you will not like the answer. Do you really want to know?"

Remus was not willing to admit he was afraid of the disdain in her voice. "I do."

She leaned forward on the table to appear more intimidating to the still seated Lupin. "It was early in my Auror career. I was at my family home, visiting my brother and his family. It was full moon and we could hear the distinct sound of a werewolf somewhere on the property. I was young and felt invincible. After all, I was an Auror. I decided to take care of this werewolf.

"I thought I could capture the werewolf. I was able to track him down and I had an opportunity to kill him, but I wasn't going to do that. Along with being young, I was naïve. I went for the capture instead. That werewolf escaped from me." She stood straight and walked towards the window.

When she spoke, her voice was filled with sorrow. "I didn't know that my nine year old niece had gotten outside the house. I was chasing the beast when I heard her scream." She closed her eyes as the memory of the night came rushing back to her. It was familiar, since she saw it so often in her dreams. Once again, she relived the horror of the night in slow motion. There was the werewolf, hunched over the small, prone body of her young niece, blood dripping from his jaws. Her voice caught, "By the time I arrived, it was too late. She had been bitten. I killed the werewolf before he could get away and hurt anyone else."

She turned back to face him, cold malice in her eyes and voice devoid of emotion. "Since then, I have killed every werewolf I find out in the wild and I will continue to do so. Unless you want to be number nine, you had best lock yourself up on full moon." She walked out of the dining room and upstairs.

Remus found he had suddenly lost his appetite. This must have been the event Moody had mentioned that ostracized her from her family. He could understand her hatred of werewolves. While his parents had never spoken of it, he knew they must have felt the same way about the beast that had bitten him. Thankfully, they had been able to show him love and look beyond his affliction.

He also understood how truly dangerous she was. She had let her emotions make her decision that day and it had cost her the love of her family. It was clear that she did not let them sway her now.

As he lay on the bed, he wondered what had happened to her niece. He had no idea how long ago this had happened, but he assumed that the girl had not attended Hogwarts since Albus had not mentioned it to him. Perhaps one day he could ask her about her niece. He might offer to speak with her about living life as a werewolf, but something told him that her life would be nowhere near as difficult as his since she came from a wealthy family.

When teatime arrived, Remus found Wendy in the library with a topographic model of the gathering place taking up most of the large table. "Nice of you to join me," she said sarcastically.

He checked the grandfather clock and saw that it was quarter to four and assumed she was goading him. "I was under the impression tea was at four. That makes me fifteen minutes early."

She arched her eyebrow at him, clearly surprised by his response. "Well, congratulations. Do you want a reward for that?" she asked sarcastically.

He moved closer to the table so he could get a good look at the model. There were two figures, which he assumed were the two of them, on the small ridge they had chosen as their vantage point. Never having seen this sort of visual representation of an area before, he was quite impressed by the level of detail.

She drew her wand out of her sleeve and waved it at the table. More small figures appeared in the clearing. "I'm going to assume that they would Apparate at the meeting place. You didn't hear any different, did you?"

"Well, the woman said she followed her man. I don't know that she would follow him if he Disapparated. Perhaps they walk up from the outskirts of town?"

She thought about his statement. "Okay, it would make sense for them not to Apparate directly into the clearing. I would be inclined to attack someone appearing in my midst."

"Obviously," he muttered.

She stared at him a few seconds before continuing, "It's likely they would have an Apparition point in this direction since it's the easiest way to approach the clearing and it's the same direction as town. That's another reason our hiding place is where it is, it's a more difficult approach to the clearing."

"What do we do if someone decides to use that approach anyway?"

"I'll take care of that."

"What does that mean?" He hadn't liked her tone of voice.

"It means, the less you know the better. You don't like the way I do business, so don't ask about it."

"The Order will not stoop to the same level as the Death Eaters," he said definitively.

"I'm not. I will not use an Unforgivable. I will break no Ministry law. That should be good enough for you."

"Look, I don't like the way you keep secrets. All of us in the Order have to trust each other. What I am doesn't matter and you have to put that behind you." He knew that she was new to the Order, but she should have trusted Kingsley's judgment about the rest of them.

"Do you know why I keep secrets? I'm an Auror. I am wary of anyone that I don't know, and I don't know you. I am working with you because I have a great amount of faith in Albus and he has ordered me to work with you. I'll do that. But I also know you're a Gryffindor and I know how you lot think."

He interrupted, "That's another thing, you seem to put me down just because I'm a Gryffindor. I have done my best not to judge you based on your former House affiliation, why can't you do the same? I am not weak and useless. I fought in the first war, which is more than I can say for you."

She stared at him in stunned silence for several long seconds as she tried to ensure control of her emotions. "Finished?"

"No. All I ask is that you treat me with some respect. I'm not one of your rookie Aurors. In addition to fighting Voldemort last time, I have also successfully taught a year of Defense Against the Dark Arts. Mad-Eye trusts me, Kingsley trusts me, isn't that enough?" He watched her raise an eyebrow. "Now, I'm finished."

"Understand that I grew up in a world far different from you. I grew up on the other side. I never fully subscribed to the pureblood philosophy and I guess I never realized how far my friends would go in following that philosophy. In a way, everyone I knew betrayed me. For that reason, I am leery to trust anyone's word on another person's trustworthiness.

"As for you being useless, I'll admit I entertained that thought, briefly. I know that wouldn't be the case with you in the Order. I just wonder why you were so deferential in the beginning."

He tried not to sound too frustrated. "Deferential? I was trying to figure you out. You did a complete turnaround on how you behaved towards me. You are a very complex and confusing person. Letting me know where your hatred of werewolves comes from helps, but I still don't know a lot about you."

"If I were you, I wouldn't expect to learn too much more. You are a partner that I do not particularly want to work with. I think you know as much as you need to know about me. Now, I know how you feel about the way I do things. I hear about it all the time from the others. Ask Kingsley about it next time you see him. You know what? I'm damn good at what I do, and when there's a particularly nasty job that they need an Auror for, they call me because they know I won't hesitate.

"Albus told us to gather information on suspected Death Eater activity in Gloucester. That's what I'm doing. He didn't give any more instruction than that, so I'm interpreting it my way. If your way is to only watch the meeting and maybe get names, which is unlikely since they'll be wearing hoods, you can stay here for all I care. I'm going to get some real information. And that's going to involve things you don't like. There's probably going to be some violence and torture and obviously some Obliviation to keep the first two a secret. If you're going to come, I need to know that I can trust you. I need to know that you won't balk at stunning someone."

"You obviously don't," he replied snidely.

She replied defensively, "No, I don't. And you know what? I'm still alive. Ask Moody about constant vigilance. I'm sure he can tell you an awful lot about it."

"He has." He refused to let her rile him.

"Excellent. Now that I've wasted enough time explaining myself, are you going to be a help or a hindrance? Because if it's the latter, you can go now and save me the time of planning for your presence."

"I'll help." She was so wrong for the Order. Once this mission was over, he would explain that to Albus. As powerful a wizard as Albus was, he could surely make her forget her involvement with the Order.

"Fine, now, back to planning," she said gruffly.

They spent the next several hours going over numerous conceivable sequences of events. She ended the scenarios by discussing what should be done in case of injury

and a reminder of where the Portkey was hidden.

"Any questions?" she said when she was satisfied they had gone over everything. He had actually been quite useful in developing contingency plans. She thought they had covered just about anything that could happen.

He shook his head. "No." He knew that he probably shouldn't ask, since they seemed to be on reasonably good terms, but he had to. "Would you really torture them for information?" There just had to be another way. It's not that he had sympathy for the Death Eaters, it just wasn't how he liked to do things.

"We've been over this and I don't intend to change my mind. I will, if I have to. I have found some rather creative ways of getting people to give me the information I desire. Mind you, I don't do it on a regular basis, but sometimes the situation calls for extreme measures. Since these are suspected Death Eaters, I'm not overly concerned. Their adherence to the law is selective at best and since the Ministry refuses to acknowledge the current situation, there would be no trial."

"Does Albus know this is how you intend to handle things?" Remus did not like her way of doing things.

She shrugged her shoulders. "I would assume so. My methods are not a secret with the Aurors. I've worked with Kingsley many times so he knows how I am. I think I'm just what the Order needs. I will go out there and get the information we need."

"You know that we are supposed to maintain a low profile so the Death Eaters don't know we have reorganized," he reminded her.

"And they won't. You have to trust me that this will work. There's a reason I was given this mission, I have no doubt about that. None of the others were told to see if they could figure out where Death Eater groups were meeting." She was truly tired of having this argument with him.

"And that was all we were supposed to find out, not spy on them or otherwise risk ourselves," he insisted. There were so many things that could go wrong, and if they were captured, it would place the Order in very real danger before they could return to full strength.

"So I'm supposed to be a mindless follower and pass up an excellent opportunity to further our cause? I'm supposed to be just like them, huh?" she asked, not bothering to hide her frustration.

She was twisting his words. "That's not what I said. You ask me to trust you, but why I should I? You have already said you don't trust me because you don't know me. I have the same reasons for not trusting you," he defended.

"Point taken, but that's not going to change the plan. I think we have minimized the risks. Now, if you have no further questions, it's about time for us to leave. We'll leave from the foyer in ten minutes."

Remus waited in the library since he didn't have anything else to do. When the ten minutes was nearly up he moved to the foyer to wait for Wendy. She came down wearing Muggle jeans and a dark jumper.

She saw him questioning her clothing. "It's easier to fight without having robes to get caught in anything. Ready?" She wrapped a cloak around her shoulders to ward off any chill from sitting in the forest waiting for the Death Eaters to arrive.

When they arrived near the clearing, they quietly moved to their place of concealment, wands at the ready. They had no idea if they would be the only ones arriving early.

After half an hour, Remus tried to start a quiet conversation, but Wendy gave him a scathing look that said she would not tolerate any noise. He leaned against a nearby tree and waited. He alternately checked the clearing and watched her. She looked very different than she had last night. Last night, she had exuded femininity. Tonight, it was an air of danger and menace.

The fact he was watching her didn't go unnoticed. "Stop watching me and watch out for the Death Eaters," she whispered harshly. "I'll be back shortly," she whispered as she got up.

"Wendy!" he called out in a hoarse whisper, but she didn't reply.

As the time for the Death Eaters to congregate arrived, Remus held his wand at the ready. He wanted to be able to help if she needed it. It wasn't too long before he started seeing the first Death Eaters filter into the clearing, and he hunched down further into the brush. He hadn't heard any unusual noises, so he assumed that Wendy had not been discovered. Surely if a Death Eater had found her, he would have raised the alarm. He noticed that they were all hooded and cloaked in typical Death Eater fashion.

As the clearing filled, he became concerned that Wendy still hadn't returned. His apprehension grew when the meeting started and there was still no sign of her. He was torn between watching the meeting to learn what he could and looking for her. He rationalized that whatever had happened to her, the Death Eaters hadn't discovered her since the alarm had not been raised, so she was most likely not in mortal danger. The mission was more important at the moment. Besides, it would be easier to search for her once the Death Eaters were gone.

The meeting lasted just under an hour. The various members reported on minor acts of Muggle terrorizing. Their leader insisted that they keep their activities low key for the time being, that the Dark Lord had plans, but they should not draw undue attention to themselves. They were also all encouraged to support the Ministry's stance that the Dark Lord had not returned and foster that belief in their neighbors.

All in all, Remus found this meeting a waste of time. He hadn't really learned anything that was useful and he was growing concerned about Wendy's absence. Had one of the Death Eaters captured her and decided to keep her for himself?

The meeting drew to a close and the Death Eaters began filtering out of the forest. He noticed one of them was hanging back, obviously trying to catch the attention of the one he had determined was the leader. *Where is Wendy? This was her plan* he wondered. Watching the clearing, he saw the Death Eater hanging back pull a wand out of his sleeve and stun the leader. He leapt over the log he was hiding behind and ran down to the clearing, ready to attack.

"Put your wand down," said Wendy as she pulled the mask off her head.

"What they hell are you doing here? This wasn't part of the plan." Infiltrating the meeting had been even more reckless than her decision to capture one of them.

"I thought of a better one," she replied casually.

He couldn't believe she was so cavalier about the danger she had placed herself in. They could sort that out later. "Where did you get the robes?"

"From some other Death Eater. He's unconscious and tied up. He didn't really know anything useful."

"And what about this one?" Remus asked while pointing at the unconscious leader.

"We wait a few minutes to make sure everyone is gone and then we ask him some questions."

Remus frowned. He still didn't like the idea of interrogation. Despite all her assurances, there were too many things that could go wrong. "What are you going to do to him?"

"I've already told you not to worry about it. Now, let's move him somewhere I can tie him up." With a wave of her wand and a Mobilicorpus charm she moved him to the smaller clearing and tied him to a tree. She pointed her wand at her captive.

"Wendy, we shouldn't do this. It's too dangerous. What happens if he identifies us?" He hadn't liked the plan and this wasn't even part of the plan.

"Don't worry. I have everything under control. Just stay behind him so he can't see you." She replaced the mask, returned her attention to the captive and said, "Ennervate."

Remus cringed and didn't want to watch. She wasn't overly cruel, using itching and tickling charms for the most part, only occasionally using a pain causing hex, but he was reminded too much of the friends he had failed to control when he had been a student. Grudgingly, he had to admit that her methods were effective.

"Well now, I'd like to thank you for your cooperation, but you won't remember any of this," she said. She was about to Obliviate her captive when she heard a noise behind her. She and Remus both turned to face the noise, and she jumped out of the way when she saw motion. There was an explosion behind her, and she cried out in pain.

Remus took aim at their attacker and cried out, "*Expelliarmus*," before their attacker could get off another shot. Once their attacker was unarmed he stunned the man.

Wendy tried to get to her feet. "Fuck! Bloody hell!" she cursed from the pain of standing.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

"No, dammit. I've got tree lodged in my leg. Fuck! Don't touch it," she ordered when he tried to take a look at the splinters. "Where's our friend?" she asked as she leaned up against a nearby tree.

"Over there," he pointed to the direction of the first attack.

"Bring him over here. I'll Obliviate them both and we'll be on our way." She limped closer to the Death Eater she had tied up and Obliviated him. She then stunned him. "Untie him and move him down to the clearing."

While Remus took the leader back to the clearing, she Obliviated their attacker. Then she realized that she still had to return the robes to the first Death Eater and that Remus had no idea where she had left that man. "Dammit." She looked around for something to use as a cane to help alleviate the pressure she had to put on her leg. Thankfully, it had only been her left leg that was injured. She pulled out her wand, cut a tree branch and transfigured it into a cane. After pulling the larger chunks of wood out of her leg, she ripped her cloak for bandages to stop the bleeding.

Remus returned to the clearing and found her gone. "Wendy," he called out, but not too loudly, in case there was anyone else around. He heard underbrush snapping and headed in that direction, wand at the ready. It didn't take him long to catch up to her. "What are you doing?"

"I have to return the cloak and mask. There will be enough questions already." She grimaced in pain.

"You're bleeding," he said as he got a good look at her injury in his wand's illumination.

"I know. I've bandaged it as best I can. I'll take care of it when I get home." She stumbled and would have fallen if Remus hadn't caught her.

"We can't wait, we need to get you home," he insisted.

"No, dammit. We need to finish the mission." When they found her captive, she pulled off the Death Eater robes and leaned against a tree to take the weight off her leg. "Dress him so we can get out of here," she ordered.

Remus dressed the man as quickly as he could. "Can you Apparate?"

She shook her head. "I don't think so." She reached for her locket, but it was gone. "We'll have to find the Portkey."

He tried to pull her arm over his shoulder to help support her, but she pulled away from him. "Don't...touch me."

"Wendy, we need to leave as soon as possible. You can move faster if I help." He was concerned that she was growing weaker and refused to admit it.

"I'll make it on my own," she growled. She didn't want that werewolf touching her.

He sighed and walked close to her in case she stumbled again. After she stumbled the third time, he wrapped his arm around her waist. "No arguments. They'll be waking soon and we need to not be here when they do," he said firmly.

"Fine," she growled and let him help her. She had to admit they did make better time. They found the shoe fairly easily and with a touch, were in yet another wooded clearing.

"Where are we?" Remus asked.

"Oh, bloody hell!" she shouted, having forgotten the Portkey would take them somewhere safe, not back to her house. "Near Hogsmeade." She was trying to decide what to do next, but the pain in her leg was making it hard to think.

"Well, if you can't Apparate, we can take a room at the Three Broomsticks." He thought *if only the school year had started, I could have gotten Madam Pomfrey to heal her.*

"No! That will draw too much attention, coming in at this hour." She sighed. There was only one choice. "We go into the village and call the Knight Bus." She truly hated traveling that way, but there was no other choice at this hour. The conductor and driver would not ask questions once she flashed her badge.

He helped her walk into the village and they summoned the Knight Bus. Wendy fished some coins out of her pocket, handed them to Stan Shunpike and then flashed her Auror Identification. "Next, stop, Chelsea."

Stan took one look at her badge, gulped, and replied, "Right. Chelsea it is." He decided it was best to leave them alone.

Wendy slapped Remus' hand away. "I can make my own way," she insisted, but when the bus lurched, she fell into his arms.

He helped her to the nearest bed. "Of course you can."

Remus watched her throughout the bus ride. He could see the color draining from her face and a look at the floor showed him a puddle of blood forming around her foot. Before he could say anything there was another bang and lurch as the bus stopped in front of her house. She tried to fight off his help, but was forced to accept it when she found she couldn't stand on her own.

Once in the light of her house, he could see her injury more clearly. Her left leg was soaked in blood. "We need to get you to a healer."

"No! If we do that, then I have to explain it. Cappa," she called out for her house-elf. "Get the aid kit." She hobbled into the drawing room and collapsed onto the sofa.

"And going in to work with a limp won't draw the wrong sort of attention?" *How could she be so cavalier about her health? That is a serious wound that needs professional attention.*

She tried to pull her blue jeans away so she could get a good look at her wound. "It looks like it's only a flesh wound. I can take care of that here."

"You've lost a lot of blood," he said, the concern very clear in his voice.

"The aid kit, Mistress," Cappa said as she arrived with a bag in her hand.

Wendy looked up at Remus. "If you don't mind?" She indicated that she'd like privacy.

Remus realized she must want to remove her jeans to treat the wounds. "I'm sorry."

"You can stay here in the guest room or you can return to wherever it is you live." The bite had gone out of her voice. She was too tired.

"I'll stay here in case you need anything," he replied quietly.

"Cappa is capable of tending to my needs. There is no need for you to stay," she said in a civil tone.

"I'll stay here. Tomorrow, we can report our findings." He felt a certain level of responsibility to make sure she was all right.

"You mean, my findings. Fine, whatever. You know where the guest room is. Now, if you will excuse me?"

Remus lay on the bed trying to assimilate the events of the night. He was beginning to wonder if his new partner had a death wish. He most certainly did not. Even with everything he had learned about her, he still felt there was much that he didn't know. She seemed to go out of her way to not let anyone close to her. Why did he even care? She would surely plead with Albus for reassignment every opportunity she had. Perhaps he could talk to the old wizard and add his voice to hers in requesting reassignment. They were clearly incompatible.

He finally heard her hobbling up the stairs and down the hallway. He could hear her grunting in pain as she walked by his door and wondered why she hadn't taken anything for the pain.

Tomorrow morning they would report to the Order on the night's events. He didn't have all the facts, since she had done some things without him, but he knew enough. While they had gathered some potentially useful information, he did not agree with the manner in which it been obtained. She took entirely too many risks. True, the interrogation had not been as bad as he thought it might be, but he still thought it was not appropriate.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 of 27

Voldemort is back and the Order of the Phoenix is reforming. They need new members and Kingsley recruits one of his fellow Aurors - even though she is a Slytherin. Assigned to work with Remus Lupin, things get very tense. Set during 'Order of the Phoenix'.

Remus awoke around mid-morning. His clothes were laid out on the valet chair, looking somewhat better than they had when he had last seen them. Obviously, Cappa had repaired them as well as cleaned them. After taking a long, hot shower and dressing, he went down to the dining room. Breakfast was waiting for him, but his hostess was nowhere to be seen. When Cappa brought out the tea, he asked, "Will Wendy be joining us?"

"Mr. Lupin, Mistress will be down later. She is taking breakfast in her rooms this morning."

"Is she all right?" *I should have insisted she see a healer, no matter what sort of questions they would have had to answer.*

"Mistress is fine. Just tired after coming home so late last night." Cappa replied evasively.

"That's good," he replied politely. He would not have wanted to tell the others that his partner had become seriously wounded on their first mission. That and he would have felt guilty for not insisting she seek professional help.

After he finished eating, he decided to check on Wendy. He had a feeling that Cappa might not be telling the whole truth. Standing in front of her door, he steeled himself for the reception he was going to receive. When he knocked on the door, he heard a gruff, "What do you want?" and replied, "I've come to see how you are doing," as he opened the door.

She was sitting on a divan by the window, and adjusted her robe to cover her wounded leg as he entered her room. "I haven't died, if that's what you were checking," she said brusquely.

He had seen the wounds on her leg. Judging from the tray next to her seat, she was in the midst of changing her bandages. "Good morning, to you, too. I just came to see how you were doing. If you would go to a mediwizard or a healer..."

"NO! I'll be fine," she interrupted. "I've cleaned the wounds so there is no chance of infection. We'll leave for headquarters in an hour."

"Should I get you something for the pain?" he asked, trying to be helpful.

"Pain potions also dull the mind. I'll meet you in the foyer in an hour," she said dismissively.

An hour later, they Apparated outside Number Twelve, Grimmauld Place. He walked close to her in case she needed his help. She was limping slightly and he could tell she was still in a tremendous amount of pain. It must be a foolish sense of pride that had led her to decide she didn't need to use a cane. He performed the charms to unlock the door.

Molly was coming down the stairs as they entered the foyer. "How good to see you. We were worried about you when you didn't report back last night. Come in, come in. Some of the others are down in the kitchen."

Remus let Wendy precede him and watched her gingerly climb down the stairs as she leaned heavily on the handrail.

Kingsley stood and crossed the room to give Wendy a hug when he saw her. "Damn, girl, we were wondering where you were. Everything go all right last night?"

She did her best to look pleasant, though she did notice Sirius glowering at her from the far side of the table. "As well as can be expected. I learned some good information last night. I managed to interrogate their leader." She grimaced as she lowered herself onto a chair.

"Did you hurt yourself again?" Kingsley asked.

"Nothing too serious. A little bit of an exploding tree hit my leg. It could have been a lot worse had the jinx actually hit me. I'll be fine in a couple days."

"You interrogated their leader?" Sirius asked. "How convenient," he sneered.

"Black, just shut the fuck up. I'm not in any mood to deal with your snide remarks today. If you can't limit your remarks to something useful, I will turn you into a flobberworm," Wendy snapped.

"You don't have the guts," he replied confidently.

In a flash, she drew her wand and pointed it at him. "Try me. Ask Lupin, I think he'll tell you I do have the guts."

Sirius leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms. "Actually, I shouldn't be surprised you would stoop to something so cowardly, that's the way Death Eaters operate, isn't it?"

She tried to leap from her seat to hex him, and the only thing that saved Sirius was the fact that she couldn't maintain her balance on her injured leg. With a complete lack of grace, she fell forward onto the table.

"Sirius, enough," ordered Kingsley as he wrestled Wendy's wand out of her hand.

Sirius had no intention on stopping. "How do we know she isn't a Death Eater? She was married to one. I saw him in Azkaban. Old Edgar didn't last long. He was crying all the time, whimpering and whining about how sorry he was and how he missed his beloved wife. I can only assume he meant you, but I can't see how anyone would pine for you. But I guess for a Death Eater you are the perfect match."

"I'll send you back. I'll send you right back to Azkaban. I had no idea what he was." She struggled against Kingsley's grip, but he was holding her tight.

"Oh, sure. You hung out with that whole lot of Slytherins that turned out to be Death Eaters. You played Quidditch with them. Malfoy, the Lestranges, Nott, Westin, they were all on the team with you. Not to mention your friendship with my cousins. I find it very hard to believe you didn't know what they were and are completely innocent. And now you tell us that you were able to *interrogate* the leader of this cell? How convenient," he replied snidely.

Kingsley admonished, "Wendy, he's not worth it. Leave him be. Sirius, if you can't behave, I'm going to have to ask you to leave. We have important Order business to discuss."

"And I'm not important to it," he added. "I'm not important to anything because I'm stuck in this bloody house!"

"Stop this bickering!" Minerva ordered sternly as she entered the kitchen. "Now *what* is going on here?"

Wendy pointed at Sirius. "*He* slandered me, and I demand an apology."

"I will not apologize to that Slytherin. I stand by what I said," he replied defensively.

Athena jerked away from Kingsley and straightened her robes. "When it is decided that I am a valuable member of the Order, I'll return. Until then, I'll be at my house. Lupin knows how to reach me." She took her wand from Kingsley and did her best to make a dramatic exit, given her injury.

"Wendy, would you be a dear wait in the drawing room while we sort this out?" Minerva asked. She then shot a glare at Sirius. As she had feared, Sirius was unable to overlook the fact that she had been a Slytherin and her husband had been in Azkaban.

Wendy sat in the drawing room and fumed. *Why did I agree to this? I knew they would be suspicious and unappreciative. I should have walked away. Joining the Order was a world-class bad idea.* She thought she heard something outside. Moving as quietly as she could, she peered out the door. "Why don't the lot of you come down here? There's no point pretending you aren't there, I can hear you." It was a few more seconds before a group of teenagers trudged down the stairs. She crossed her arms and scanned the crowd. "Eavesdropping are you?" She let them protest for a few seconds. "Don't worry about it, I would have done the same thing if I were you." She looked at the children, four boys and two girls. "Well, now, I've got a bunch of Weasleys, Harry Potter and Hermione Granger if I'm not mistaken."

"No, ma'am, you're not. I'm Fred, this is George, Ron and Ginny. And who might you be?"

"Fair question. I'm Wendy Westin, Auror. I think you know Mr. Shackbolt, I'm a colleague of his."

"You're in the Order, aren't you?" asked Harry.

"Yes, I am."

"Then what are you doing up here?" Harry demanded.

"Harry," whispered Hermione, trying to get him to be polite.

She smiled. "It's okay. Black and I don't get along well. I decided to wait up here while he decides what's really important."

"You know Sirius?" Harry asked suspiciously. He wondered if she didn't like Sirius because he was still thought to be a convicted murderer.

She got the idea that Harry rather liked Sirius and decided not to revisit the unpleasantness she had just escaped downstairs. "Not well. I was a few years ahead of him and Lupin. I played Quidditch against your father though."

"You played against my dad?" Harry asked eagerly.

Now she was wishing she hadn't brought that up. It would invariably lead to them finding out which House she had been in, though she was sure Sirius would rather quickly volunteer that information if they asked. "I did, I was a Seeker, so I didn't interact that much with him. They were a good team, but not good enough." The five years she had played on the team, they had won the Quidditch Cup four times. Those had been happy days. She had enjoyed Quidditch and had even been offered a spot on the Falmouth Falcons, but that was considered beneath her station. Instead, her parents had found her a respectable husband.

"How did he play?" Harry was excited to have someone to talk to someone who knew his father. Sirius had been rather bitter lately.

"I really can't tell you much. You know that as Seeker you generally don't get to watch the game." She really didn't want to tell him that his father had been a bit of a dirty player. Of course, the Gryffindors had called their style of play aggressive. She wondered what was taking so long in the kitchen.

"Am I the only one that finds it suspicious that she was able to just infiltrate the Death Eater group like that?" asked Sirius.

"They were masked and robed. I didn't even know it was her until after the meeting when she took the leader aside," defended Remus.

"That proves my point. Death Eaters have rituals. How would she know what they were if she wasn't one?" He thought he had a very valid point and couldn't understand why no one else seemed to understand.

"That's enough, Sirius!" said Minerva.

"Wendy is not a Death Eater. If she were, I would know," added Severus.

"Oh, like I'm supposed to trust you? I notice that you haven't really turned up anything useful. How do we know the two of you aren't working together?" asked Sirius.

Minerva interrupted, "Sirius, I will not tell you again. Both Severus and Wendy are trusted members of the Order. The fact they were both in Slytherin has no bearing on their loyalty. Remus, what happened last night?"

Remus explained events from his point of view. He glossed over her methods of getting that information so as not further inflame Sirius. "So, while we weren't able to find out anything about any meetings of the next level, we have learned about planned Death Eater attacks in the Gloucester area and that they have found a way to communicate without using owls."

"That is most troubling. I haven't heard of anything like this before. And there were no other details about this book?" Minerva asked.

"No. All he told us was that his orders appeared on the pages of the book. Once they had been carried out, he would erase the text. He didn't seem smart enough to have any knowledge on how something like that would work."

"Well, I think it's time we brought Wendy back down here. Sirius, I will warn you now, any further outbursts and you will leave. Understood?" Minerva watched Sirius nod once. "Remus, if you would?"

Remus headed up stairs to bring his partner back to the meeting. He found her having a conversation about Quidditch with the children. "Wendy? We're ready for you downstairs."

"About time. I was getting ready to head home." As she limped down the stairs, she muttered, "One snide comment and I'm turning him into a flobberworm." She gave Sirius an icy glare before sitting at the table and doing her best to look relaxed.

"Wendy, we've heard Remus' accounting of last night's meeting. We were hoping you could elaborate," said Minerva.

"He witnessed the most important parts. I was able to surprise and stun one of the Death Eaters while he was heading for the meeting and I decided that being in the meeting was the best way to get information. That way I would be sure who the leader was."

"What if you were asked questions? How did you know that you didn't replace someone important?" asked Molly. She hated to see people take unnecessary risks.

"Let's just say he wasn't the brightest person I've ever met. It was easy to find out he was a minion and what information he had to report. Aurors are well trained at undercover work so impersonating him wasn't hard. In the robes, all I needed to disguise was my voice and that's a simple charm."

"You tortured him for information?" asked Molly.

Wendy shook her head. "No, I used Legilimency. For surface thoughts like the ones I was after it was quite easy, especially since he was thinking about what he had to report for the meeting. At the meeting, I took note of the minor mischief and mayhem they were planning. It looks like they don't want to make any big moves early that would serve as an alert of their return to prominence. The biggest things I discovered were their leader's identity and about the books. Unfortunately, he didn't have his book and I was injured. I'd like to make arrangements to get the book. I think it could be valuable. Perhaps we could learn how it works and at the very least use something like that ourselves."

"And how to you propose to do this?" asked Sirius. "You're just going to walk into his house and take this book, which will surely become worthless once it's reported stolen?"

"Give me a little credit. That book will disappear in a way that he doesn't realize it's been stolen," she replied.

"I don't know that we're ready for that kind of risk right now. Once you have a proposal, let me know and I'll run it by Albus for approval," said Minerva.

"Approval? Are you serious?" Wendy asked incredulously.

Minerva replied soberly, "Very serious. We can't have members of the Order exposing themselves to danger needlessly. We are very few in number and we cannot afford to lose anyone."

Wendy leaned forward against the table. "Look, I assume I was recruited for some of my unique skills. I'm one of the best undercover Aurors around, Tonks excepted, but that's different. I specialize in this sort of work. Right now, we need to gather as much information as we can, keep one step ahead of the Death Eaters. We can't pass up this opportunity," she insisted.

"Albus will decide that," replied Minerva definitively.

"So in the meantime, what? I sit outside the Department of Mysteries in an invisibility cloak? Look, my family doesn't care about me. They would probably throw a party if I got myself killed. I'm the perfect person for dangerous missions." Wendy was clearly frustrated at having her activities restrained.

"Right now our advantage is that the rebuilding of the Order is secret. Our main goals are keeping him from getting into the Department of Mysteries and getting Harry safely back to Hogwarts. As valuable as the intelligence you could gather might be, the risk of discovery is too great. Your status with your family has no bearing on this decision," countered Minerva.

"I'm not going to get caught," Wendy insisted.

Kingsley cleared his throat. "Wendy, you have been caught in the past. You've escaped or been bailed out, but you aren't infallible. And right now you're also injured. Keep in mind that some of the people you'll be going up against know who you are. They won't know you're in the Order, but if word gets back to the Ministry that an Auror has gone rogue..."

Wendy sighed. "I know. I just feel like I should be doing something."

Sirius snorted derisively.

"We have to go slow, girl. The longer we can go without being noticed, the better. For now, we need to gather information and find out all we can about areas with Death Eater activity."

Minerva said, "Remus, you and Wendy will continue to gather information. I've listed several establishments we suspect of being Death Eater congregation places on this parchment. You'll have to work around Wendy's schedule."

Wendy leaned over Remus' shoulder to look at the list. "These are a bunch of cesspools. Aren't we going to try to investigate the more affluent Death Eaters?"

"We already have a very good idea of who they are. They tend to be more cautious than those you are investigating. Besides, you would not be a good choice to investigate them. Most of them know who you are," said Minerva.

"Intimately," Sirius added quietly.

Wendy couldn't take it anymore, she let loose with her hex and kept her promise to turn him into a flobberworm.

Minerva leapt out of her chair in shock and saw Sirius, the flobberworm, writhing on his chair. "Wendy! Turn him back this instant!" she ordered.

"I warned him. I told him that if he didn't hold his tongue I would do it. I hope he learns a lesson from this." She turned her attention to the flobberworm. "Learn a lesson from this, Black. I won't put up with you telling lies about me. I put you in your place when you were a boy and I can still do it." She waved her wand and restored him.

Sirius looked around the room for support. "You aren't going to let her get away with that, are you?"

Wendy sat smugly in her chair with her arms crossed, wand still held in her hand.

"You were warned to watch your tongue," replied Minerva acidly.

Kingsley was trying hard not to laugh. Molly still looked horrified by the whole ordeal.

"Don't fuck with me, Black. I've been an Auror for more than a decade and you are no match for me. I'm not the teenager you knew. Are we done now?" She was eager to leave. If Sirius wanted to start something he had the advantage of mobility.

"I have no further business. Anyone else?" asked Minerva. "That concludes our meeting. We'll meet again next Saturday afternoon."

Severus moved to Wendy's side. "I have a healing potion that could help your wounds if you would permit me to examine you."

"That would be much appreciated," she replied, and let Severus lead her upstairs.

Remus watched them go. He hoped she would not leave before he had a chance to speak with her. He turned his attention back to Sirius. "You shouldn't antagonize her."

"I don't trust her. She has always had questionable morality, and what we heard and saw today proves it. Surely you saw it last night."

Remus sighed and took a seat at the table. "I did. While it wasn't that horrible, it was not what I expected."

Sirius snorted. "Nothing she does would surprise me. So, she didn't use any Unforgivables?"

Remus shook his head. "Not that I saw. Do you really think she would?"

"I know she would. There was no remorse when she turned me into a flobberworm."

"You did sort of bring it upon yourself," Remus replied.

"So, now you're on her side?" Sirius asked angrily.

Remus defended, "No. I'm not on her side. I'm merely making an observation. You've known her since childhood. I'm going to assume she had a temper then. I just think that maybe you should be more careful what you say around her."

"Are you protecting your new best friend?" Sirius asked sarcastically.

Remus thought this was quite a good joke. "Hardly. She can't stand me. Typical werewolf prejudice with a dash of hatred of a Gryffindor. Well, maybe not so typical in her case. It doesn't really matter. We're being forced to work together and I'd like to make the best of it. She already requested a new partner and was denied."

Sirius leaned close and spoke in a conspiratorial whisper, mindful that Molly was starting lunch preparations. "Keep a close eye on her. I don't trust her no matter what anyone else says. She is not an honorable person."

"Were we?" Remus asked soberly. Last night, he had been reminded of some of the less than moral acts they had perpetrated at school. "Let go of your old grudge. A lot has happened in the last twenty years. I would think it's fair to say that we've all changed in that amount of time. I don't think she's a bad person; she's just been through a lot of bad situations. Take Severus, for example. I know you don't like or trust him, either. He has had plenty of opportunity to do something to hurt the Order, but hasn't. I'm not advocating you become best friends with either of them, just quit antagonizing them. I know pretty much everyone they went to school with is either a proven or suspected Death Eater, but that doesn't automatically make them Death Eaters."

"Don't you see? That's why I don't trust her, why I can't trust her. With all those dark ties, she just walked away? You did not see or experience the Dark Magic that she used to practice. I have no idea why she wasn't recruited to be a Death Eater. Perhaps Edgar wanted to keep her safe so she could bear his children, like Malfoy protects his wife. If she is a spy, she could find a way to pick us off, one by one. There aren't many of us, and she knows that. And you would likely be her first target."

"I think she would have acted by now. Besides, I've talked with her. She despises Death Eaters. You didn't see the look in her eye when she interrogated that man. She...enjoyed it." Now he began to feel some of the same doubts Sirius had voiced. Enjoying causing torment was most definitely a Death Eater trait.

"Remus, watch her. She's unorthodox," Sirius warned.

Remus started to think about the previous day's experiences. "You know, she did keep saying that we needed to not be afraid to be sneaky or use other underhanded tactics."

"Exactly. She's ruthless. Don't let her kid you and tell you that everything she did as a child was Bella's idea. It wasn't. All three of them used to delight in finding new ways to cause torment. They used to catch mice and rats to practice their techniques. I have no doubt she could cast an Unforgivable."

"I'll keep an eye on her. She's not a Death Eater, but she's also not completely converted to the way we do things. Though, she does seem to have a desire to use Death Eater tactics." Remus just had a hard time believing that she could be so callous. He always looked for the good in people and he had to believe that she did have some good, no matter how hard she might try to hide it.

"Just make sure you do watch her. I worry about you being out with her." There was nothing anyone could say that would make Sirius trust Wendy.

"Thanks, my friend, but even though she hates me, I don't see her doing anything to hurt me. When I made a fool of myself, she ensured I was taken to a safe place." This proved that she did have a conscious and a small spark of compassion.

They both stopped talking when they could hear someone coming down the steps. Wendy entered the kitchen, limping less noticeably. "I'll be back here at six o'clock unless you have a place of residence where you would prefer to meet."

Remus shook his head. "No, I live here."

She looked at the two of them, wondering what lies Sirius was feeding Remus. "Then I'll be back at six. What you're wearing should be fine for the type of establishments we'll be visiting. So we don't have a repeat of the other night's performance, I'll bring a sobriety potion for you." With that she swept out of the room.

"What was that about?" Sirius asked.

"Nothing. It didn't go well the other night. Can we just leave it at that?" He had no interest in letting Sirius know how stupid he had been the other night. He still couldn't believe he had felt pangs of jealousy from watching her play her role as a whore.

"Sure thing. I have a closet to attack, care to give me a hand?" Perhaps he could ferret out the information while the two of them were working at cleaning more remnants of Dark Magic.

Remus was glad to have some time to spend with his old friend and followed Sirius upstairs.

While Wendy was waiting for someone to open the door she heard a crash and then the familiar shriek of Mrs. Black. When the door opened, she recognized Tonks. It all made perfect sense.

"Wotcher, Wendy. Sorry about the noise," Tonks apologized, looking quite embarrassed.

Wendy could hardly hear Tonks over the portrait's screaming and she went over to pull the curtains closed.

"YOU!" the portrait screamed as Mrs. Black pointed at Wendy. "Another blood traitor. And I thought you were better than my son. You had much better taste in friends. I had such high hopes for you."

"Shut up, you old bag!" Wendy screamed back as she got the curtains closed. Mrs. Black would settle down soon in the dark, so Wendy and Tonks headed down to the kitchen. "Where's Lupin?" she asked when she saw that he wasn't waiting for her.

"I think he's helping Sirius clean out a closet upstairs. Want me to get him for you?" Tonks offered brightly.

Wendy thought the odds of Tonks making it upstairs without setting the portrait off again were slim. "No. I'll find him. Thanks anyway."

She didn't see any sign of them on the second or third floors. When she got to the fourth floor, she could hear sounds of a struggle coming from a room at the end of the hall.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 of 27

Voldemort is back and the Order of the Phoenix is reforming. They need new members and Kingsley recruits one of his fellow Aurors - even though she is a Slytherin. Assigned to work with Remus Lupin, things get very tense. Set during 'Order of the Phoenix'.

Wendy crept towards the room, wand at the ready, and peered around the doorframe. She could see Sirius and Remus fighting with an enchanted blanket, and leaned against the doorframe to watch.

Remus caught a glimpse of her standing in the doorway. "You could lend a hand," he said as he fought with the blanket.

She laughed at their predicament. "I could." The blanket was wrapping around the two of them much like a boa constrictor.

"Are you?" he asked.

She considered their predicament for a few seconds, tapping her lips as she thought. "No," she finally replied.

"Why not?" Remus asked impatiently.

"I want *him* to ask." She pointed at Sirius.

Remus gave Sirius a pleading look. The blanket was constricting tighter.

"I won't ask her for anything," Sirius growled.

She sneered at them. "I wish I'd brought popcorn. This is quite a show."

"Wendy, please," Remus begged as he tried to keep the blanket from wrapping around his throat. "Sirius, we need her help."

"All right, fine. Would you *please* lend a hand?" Sirius asked.

She stood up and pointed her wand at them, acting like this was not a particularly important task. "Since you asked ever so nicely," she replied sarcastically.

"*Impedimenta*." The blanket immediately stopped moving and she watched the two men untangle themselves from the now still blanket. "Do I even want to know what kind of stupidity was involved in the two of you ending up in that predicament?"

Sirius was about to say something when Remus stopped him. "That doesn't matter."

She shook her head and chuckled. "I'll wait for you in the drawing room."

They could hear her laughing as she walked away from the room. "Don't get started with her, Sirius. I have to spend a good chunk of the night with her and I don't need her in a bad mood."

"Sounds like she's in a right good mood now. Watch your back." He placed a hand on his friend's shoulder.

"I will." He headed down the stairs. When he entered the drawing room, Wendy broke into a fresh fit of laughter. As she calmed down, he asked, "Have you got it out of your system, now?"

She wiped the tears from her eyes. "I think so. Oh, the sight of the two of you. I'm going to remember that for a long time. I'll have to share that with Severus. He'll appreciate it like no one else I know."

Remus winced at the thought of Severus learning about their failure to control the constricting blanket. "I would really rather you didn't."

"I'll think about it, but it may be too good to pass up. Ready?"

"Yes." He took a look at her clothes; they were shoddy and masculine. "Trying a different tactic?"

"We're going to some rough places. It's a little too dangerous to pose as a whore."

He was still amazed at how easily she referred to herself as a whore. "So what is our cover tonight?"

"General criminal. I'll hint at doing violence for money, but nothing specific. You'll be my partner."

"I can't pretend to be a criminal," he said incredulously.

This was frustrating. "Damned Gryffindors. You lot are so hard to work with. Well, then you can pretend to be a mute or you have to act like you don't know me. But the type of places we'll be going, it's really best if you arrive with someone."

"Worried about your safety?" he asked.

"No. I'm worried about yours," she replied seriously. She reached into her pocket and pulled out a vial. "Here, drink this." She watched him stare at it. "I'm not going to poison you. Honestly, quit being paranoid. You've been listening to Black, haven't you?"

"Well, he does know you better than any of us," he replied.

"No, Kingsley knows me better than anyone else. Black knew me when I was a teenager. Are you the same person you were back then?" She was truly tired of her past coming back to haunt her, thanks to Black's inability to let it go. Briefly, she considered slapping Remus upside the head in hopes of getting it through his thick skull that she was not like her classmates. Unfortunately, that would be counterproductive.

Thinking back to his teenage years, and some of the things the Marauders did to Severus, the guilt he felt for not stopping his friends came to the forefront. He wasn't sure he was any stronger now, but he still knew the answer. "No. I suppose we should go."

"Right. Now, which role did you want?" she asked impatiently.

"I'll be your partner," he replied reluctantly. He wasn't sure he could be convincing, but it seemed to be the best course of action.

That was really the best solution and she was glad he realized that. "Good. Do you have a common middle name? Remus is a little unusual and might draw too much attention."

"John. Is that common enough?"

"It's great. Let's go," she said abruptly.

They went outside and Apparated to a place that Remus would describe as worse than the Hog's Head. It most definitely smelled worse, and that was from the outside. "We're going in there?" he asked skeptically.

"Isn't this what you wanted when you joined up?" she asked dryly.

"And you did?" he asked.

She shrugged. "This is what I do for a living. Though, I generally prefer to spend my days off doing something different."

"Sorry if I'm keeping you from your busy social life," he replied sarcastically.

"Ha. Not bloody likely. I'm not date material. Let's quit standing around outside. Just follow my lead." She really didn't want to discuss her lack of a social life.

Remus found that hard to believe given how she had looked the other night. The interior of the pub was very much what he expected from the exterior. It was dark, smoky and looked like it had never been cleaned. He could feel his shoes sticking to the floor with each step and dreaded having to drink out of any of the glasses. "Are you sure about this?" he whispered as they headed to an empty table.

"Perfectly, just don't wipe the chair off before sitting down and don't make eye contact with anyone," she replied.

He looked at the chair and desperately wanted to perform a cleansing charm, but he would have to trust her judgment on how to avoid the wrong sort of attention. Looking around the room, he saw that it was a very unsavory clientele. He had no wish to meet any of these people in a dark alley. Since he had no idea how being a criminal for hire worked, he decided to follow Wendy's lead and behaved in a very similar manner.

Within five minutes, they were in a fight. One of the men had come over and propositioned Wendy. For his trouble, she had rammed his head into a wall and then the table before he collapsed to the ground. She kicked him in the stomach for good measure. "I'm not that kind of woman," she growled.

Once they were seated at a new table, Remus leaned forward and whispered, "Perhaps we should head to the next place."

"Not on your life. That was exactly what we needed. We should start getting some interest from the sort of people we want to talk with." She was energized from the adrenaline rush.

He glanced nervously about the room. "Are you sure about this? I don't exactly feel safe here."

"Relax. Don't worry about it. Just glare menacingly at anyone you see staring at us. After that little performance, people will think twice about messing with us. After all, if little old me can wipe the floor with a big bloke like that, imagine what they'll think about you," she sneered.

"I'd rather not," he replied as he stared at his ale, thankful it had come in a bottle. He decided to make some small talk to pass the time. "How did you get that scar?"

She pointed at her left cheek. "That one? I have my brother to thank for that."

"Your brother?" That sounded to far-fetched to be true.

"A little thank you for what happened to his daughter. It was poisoned so it wouldn't heal properly. He was actually trying to kill me, but since Aurors are trained in more

conventional fighting techniques, I was able to deflect the blow. Company coming." She nodded her head slightly to her right.

It was after eight when they left. They hadn't really learned anything interesting, though a man had solicited them to kill his mistress. Wendy had led him through a series of questions that drove the price to something more than he was willing to pay. "That was a waste of time," he said as they left.

"That's what a lot of this business is. I need to get something to eat before our next stop. I know a little place where the food is edible, but we won't attract attention."

She led him to small, out of the way establishment that he probably would have never noticed.

The man behind the counter gave them a friendly wave as they entered. "Wendy! Good to see you, girl. Wasn't expecting you. Isn't it your night off?"

"Hey, Lou. Yeah, but I'm helping a friend out. This is John."

Remus waved at the man behind the counter.

"Usual?" Lou asked.

"Two," Wendy replied.

They sat at a table in the back corner of the room. When Lou set the plates in front of them, Remus picked up the top piece of bread and looked at the contents of the sandwich. "What is this?" he asked.

"Eat it or not, doesn't matter to me."

He sighed. He really wished she wouldn't be so difficult. After taking a bite of the sandwich, he had to admit that it wasn't bad. "I take it you come here frequently?" he asked between bites.

"Lou's a retired Auror. That's pretty much his entire clientele, too. He knew that we needed a place where we could take a break in peace. It's actually very quiet tonight, but then again, Sunday's tend to be his slow night."

"I'd like to thank you again, for helping with the blanket." While she may not demonstrate the possession of manners, he had been raised to be polite and wasn't about to change the way he behaved.

She set down her sandwich and looked at him curiously. "How exactly did you end up in that predicament? I mean, I could see one of you getting tied up in the blanket, but both of you?"

"As you said, it was stupid. We were cleaning up the room and we both reached for the blanket at the same time. It was jinxed to react to touch and had both of us wrapped up before either of us could reach for our wands."

She started laughing again. "You've been living in that house how long? And you haven't figured out that anything could be jinxed?"

"And you would have known better?" he asked snidely. They did know that many things were jinxed, but had just been careless.

"You'd better believe it. Odds are, I'm responsible for some of the jinxing around there, though the blanket was not one of mine," she said before taking another bite of her sandwich.

"Are you serious?" he asked incredulously. "You've jinxed things around that house?"

"Remember, I used to spend time during the summer with Bella and Narcissa. We, uh, had some unusual ways of entertaining ourselves," she admitted with a great deal of embarrassment.

"Perhaps you could give us a hand in getting rid of some of your handiwork?"

She shook her head. "Not with the way my schedule is. Besides, that was more than twenty years ago. I don't remember every little jinx we did back then and I'm sure Black would really love to hear that I'm responsible for some of his misery." She smiled wistfully at the thought of twenty-five-year old pranks annoying Sirius. That had, of course, been the original purpose behind most of them.

"It would really help get Headquarters in order and you wouldn't have to spend too much time helping. I, er, wouldn't mention to anyone your initial involvement," he offered.

"I'll think about it, but I have to go back to work tomorrow and my five days on call can get rather hectic. Especially since I didn't really get any proper rest."

They ate in silence for a few more minutes before Remus put down his sandwich. "You know, Sirius is not that bad a person. He's just in a bad situation. He was wrongfully imprisoned for twelve years and now he's been forced into hiding for the last two."

"You don't need to defend him to me. He's always been an arrogant little git and I don't think he'll ever change. We've never gotten along and since he is incapable of forgiveness, I think we never will. Are you about ready? It's time to get to the next round of fun." She watched as he quickly finished off his sandwich. "Charming," she said sardonically.

He used his napkin to wipe the crumbs and took a drink of pumpkin juice to wash down the rest of his meal. "Sorry. As you can imagine, I've not led a life of privilege and I've learned to eat quickly."

She gave him one last glare, recognizing the insult, before getting up from the table. "Lou, catch you later."

"All right, Wendy. Take care of yourself. I've got a bad vibe about tonight."

"I'll keep that in mind," she replied casually before leaving.

"What was that about?" Remus asked.

"Nothing much. Lou is always having a bad feeling about something. Most of time it's nothing so we just humor him."

Thankfully, the rest of the night until closing was uneventful. Remus was actually quite pleased at how the evening had gone. They didn't get involved in any arguments, though several people did try to recruit them for murder or mayhem, and he actually got her to open up a bit, telling him some colorful tales from previous undercover assignments. He stayed away from what he thought would be the more sensitive subjects.

He was actually a little sad when closing came. They hadn't really learned anything, but it had been a rather pleasant evening, despite the unsavory surroundings of most of the establishments. She hadn't brought up the blanket again and almost seemed to have forgotten that he was a werewolf.

"I'll see you at the meeting on Saturday and we can head out after that."

"Right, Saturday. If you have the time, we would appreciate any help you could give cleaning house. The kids are helping, but there is Dark Magic there that they aren't ready to handle."

She replied dryly, "Neither are you. I'll see. But this is not a personal favor. It's only to make the Order's headquarters livable."

"Of course," he replied quietly and watched her disappear into the night. He had a strange feeling that she had not just been referring to the blanket when she said there was magic he couldn't handle. They had already found many nasty surprises and he hated to think there were worse things to be found.

The following week was very busy for Remus. Since he was currently unemployed, he ended up running a lot of errands for Albus and the other members of the Order. He didn't mind. Besides, Molly was a good cook, and other than his time at Hogwarts, this was one of those rare occasions where he was eating on a regular basis and had a decent roof over his head. He enjoyed being useful and accepted. In the evenings, a part of him kept waiting to hear a knock at the door. He knew it wasn't likely that Wendy would stop by, but he kept hoping. Even though she presented a gruff exterior, much the same way Severus did, he knew there was more to her, that she was hiding the pain of her past. She had hinted at that when she mentioned her brother's attack. He was positive that was a contributing factor in her extreme hatred of werewolves, along with the fact her niece was one.

They had made significant progress on the house, even with Kreacher continuing to take items they were trying to throw out. The drawing room and three-quarters of the bedrooms were declared clean. The library, dining room, and other bedrooms were still off limits. In fact, none of them had figured out how to enter the library, yet, but that wasn't important. Molly had plans to ask Moody about it the next time he came by, but he was busier on Order business than anyone else.

Friday afternoon there was a knock on the door and he went to answer it. He smiled warmly when he saw who it was. "Wendy, glad to see you here."

"I was able to get out a little early. It's been a busy week. Seems the Death Eaters are continuing their Muggle baiting. They've had to enlist some of the Aurors to Obliviate people; it's been that busy. I thought I'd stop by and see if there was anything specific you needed help with before I headed home. I'm wiped out and I'm taking the night off before we recommence our pub crawl."

By now, they had walked upstairs to the drawing room. "Actually, if you could give a hand with the library, it would be appreciated. Tonks hasn't been able to give any good advice and none of the rest of us has any ideas, either. Even Sirius is at a loss."

She snorted derisively. "There's a surprise. What's the trouble?"

"Well, we, er, can't get in," he admitted with some embarrassment.

She started laughing. "You have got to be kidding me? Not even Black? They never told him how to get into the library?"

"He left home when came of age and his family more or less disowned him. I would think you would appreciate that," he defended.

"You know, I think I was thirteen or fourteen when we figured it out. Though truthfully, it's probably best to leave the room locked up. If you thought the drawing room was bad, the stuff in there is ten times worse. I wouldn't want those kids anywhere near that room."

"But you used to go in there," he said.

"Yeah, and look how I turned out. I've met the Weasley twins. I don't want them anywhere near that room once it's been opened. No. Once they're gone, I'll open it up and Order members can clean it out."

"I think we should at least go in there and take inventory to make sure there's nothing useful."

She replied sarcastically, "That's a good one. Trust me, there's nothing useful in there."

"What if the kids get in there? They are incredibly curious," Remus countered.

"I wouldn't worry about it. It took us a long time to figure it out and a lot of research in books that they don't have access to. Let's just say, that without the help of my library, we never would have gotten in there. My parents didn't much care what sort of books I got into. They thought my pursuit of the Dark Arts was admirable. They never questioned what I was doing with it."

"They sound like wonderful parents," he replied sarcastically.

"Now you see why I had such a hard time becoming an Auror. I probably should have just given up on it, played Quidditch a few years and then opened a flying academy or something."

"Why did you become an Auror?" he asked, since she had broached the subject.

"Knowing what you know of my family, do you really have to ask? The easy answer is familial guilt. Of course, I could have reverted back to my maiden name and really driven the shame home, but one reformed Leah wasn't going to atone for the rest of the family. On the other hand, the Westin line is at an end. For all his faults and weaknesses, Edgar wasn't that bad a man and the Westin family was once great. The least I can do is give them a clean mark to end on.

"Now, is there anything else around here that needs an Auror's touch? If not, I'll go home and get some rest." She really didn't want to talk about her past; it was too painful. Edgar had been weak and foolish. The Dark Lord had found it quite easy to manipulate him.

Remus could tell he had touched a sensitive spot. "We've had some trouble with the dining room, too. The furniture seems to go feral when anyone tries to use it."

She laughed again. "That, I can help out with. It's not as hard as you think, though I don't think you can remove that particular jinx."

"Minerva tried and gave up when the chair started ripping apart her dress," Remus replied. He didn't think he had ever seen Minerva stumped by a spell.

"Yes, I can see that. It's an obscure bit of Dark Magic used to ward off intruders. Mrs. Black didn't like us playing in the dining room and jinxed the furniture so that it would attack between meals. Of course, if you used the right counter jinx between meals it was no problem. You seriously mean to tell me that Black knows nothing of any of this?" she asked incredulously.

"He knew it was jinxed and told us to avoid the dining room, but he never told us why. Again, he left before they would have told him the family secrets." He followed her back downstairs.

Wendy drew her wand and prepared to enter the dining room. "*Desinere animalis*," she said as she opened the door. The furniture had started to move, but stopped immediately once the spell was cast. "The effects will last for half an hour after the last person leaves the room. The curse that started this mess is *animare animalis*, but I don't know of any way of permanently removing it."

"It seems that Mrs. Black's efforts to keep you out of the dining room failed," he observed.

"Let's just say there was little the three of us couldn't figure out given time and the resources of my parents' library." She walked over to the cabinet on the far wall and ran her hand along the door. "You'll want to be careful cleaning out the cabinets. The china's fine, but most of the other stuff is dangerous. Mrs. Black liked to display Dark Artifacts, just like she did in the drawing room. There is some really nasty stuff here. Black should know about most of it."

He watched her open the cabinet, hold her hand over a ring, and mutter an incantation before picking it up. "I'll take this to the Ministry for destruction." She then pocketed the ring.

"What was that?" he asked suspiciously. Despite the fact he was starting to trust her, she had not kept secret her interest in Dark Magic.

"You really don't want to know. There's nothing else immediately deadly in the room that I'm aware of. If that's it, I'm going to head home."

"You could stay for dinner," he offered quietly.

"No thanks. I'd planned on eating at home for once." It was a nice gesture, but she really didn't feel comfortable around the other members of the Order, and she was almost positive that Black would have told the children about her, how she had been in Slytherin, and undoubtedly he would have told them she had been a dirty Quidditch player, like the rest of her teammates. She just wasn't in the mood to deal with all of that.

He tried not to sound dejected. "... just thought you might like the company."

"Given the fact that Black will be here, I'll choose eating alone. Make sure everyone that needs to know how to disarm the furniture. I'll be back tomorrow for the meeting." She looked at his clothes and saw how shabby they were. "I'll bring something for you to wear, too, unless you have something better than that."

He hated the way she could make him feel self-conscious. "That would be appreciated," he replied quietly. Once again, he was embarrassed by the fact that he was perpetually broke. He received a small stipend from the Order to take care of personal necessities and he took most of his meals here, but it wasn't enough to replace his tattered wardrobe.

Sirius was coming up the stairs from the kitchen, when he saw Wendy coming from the back of the house and out the door. He headed down the hallway and found Remus in the dining room, examining the contents of the cabinets. "What was she doing here?" he asked.

"She showed me how to disarm the furniture," Remus replied. He was still stung by the way she had treated him as an inferior.

"Hmph. Why doesn't it surprise me that she'd know how to do that?" He pointed at the empty spot in the cabinet. "Where did the ring go?" demanded Sirius.

"She said she was going to take it to the Ministry for destruction."

Sirius grabbed Remus' lapels. "You let her take it? Do you have any idea what that was?"

"She didn't say. She only indicated it was the most dangerous thing in the room." Remus was starting to get a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach.

"That's an understatement. It was probably the most dangerous thing in the house. That's why it was here. How did she get it out of the cabinet?" Sirius demanded.

Remus was struck by depth of emotion in his friend's voice. "I don't know exactly. She held her hand over it, said some sort of incantation I couldn't make out and picked it up."

Sirius started pacing and ordered, "You need to go get it back from her. We can't let her have it."

"Why not?"

"Just trust me on this. I know Dumbledore and Kingsley say they trust her, but if that ring were to fall into the wrong hands, it would be very bad. She shouldn't have been able to pick it up," Sirius said anxiously. Of all his mother's possessions, she had been most proud of that ring. That's why it had been given a place of prominence in the dining room and had a powerful sticking charm applied to it.

"We talked a little and she admitted to having studied Dark Magic extensively, with...your cousins. She even said she could get in the library," Remus said.

Sirius scoffed. "That's an understatement about her studying Dark Magic. Do you see now why I say she's dangerous and can't be trusted? Did she let you into the library?" He had no idea what could be found in the library. His parents had always kept that room warded. Since he hadn't been much of a reader, it hadn't bothered him.

"No, she said she wouldn't open it until the children were gone."

"Go get the ring from her. I'll let Dumbledore know what's going on," Sirius said urgently.

"Sirius, I don't think she's going to give it to me because I ask for it. I'm going to need some sort of order from Albus. She doesn't exactly like me, you know," reminded Remus.

"Then go and stay with her. Don't let her leave the house with that ring. I'll let Dumbledore know to send the order to her." He couldn't believe she had taken the ring. Well, actually, yes, he could. He just hadn't been aware that she could get in the dining room or he would have mentioned something about not letting her in earlier.

"What is this ring? If I'm going to be carrying it, I want to know what it can do," asked Remus.

"No, my friend, you don't. If she was able to pick it up, she must have cast some sort of protective charm on it. It should be safe for you to handle. Just go, there is no time to lose."

Remus sighed. He could tell that this was an argument that he was not going to win. If he didn't agree to stay with Wendy, Sirius would probably leave the house on his own. "Fine. But before I go, the spell for the furniture is *desinere animalis*. It lasts a half hour after the last person leaves the room." He headed out of the house.

Standing before her door, Remus tried to imagine the type of reaction his arrival would spawn. He knew she would react poorly to his demanding to stay with her until Albus replied to Sirius' request. He rang the bell and waited.

Cappa cracked the door. "Mr. Lupin, what can I do for you?"

"I need to see Wendy."

The little elf looked over her shoulder, as if trying to decide what to do. "Mistress is not in and has not told Cappa when she will arrive." She looked over her shoulder again and finally opened the door. "Come, Mr. Lupin. You will wait for Mistress in the drawing room."

Remus followed the elf into the house and took a seat in the drawing room. In short order, Cappa returned with a tea tray and left the room without a word. With nothing else to do, he inspected the contents of the room as he wondered where Wendy could have gone. When she left Grimmauld Place, she had indicated that she would be coming here. He began to wonder if Sirius was correct and if Cappa was being completely honest. She had seemed very nervous, though that could have something to do with the fact that her mistress didn't like him.

A/N: *Desinere animalis* = cease being animals from *desinere*=to cease *animalis*=animals

animare animalis = become animals from *animare*=to animate

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 of 27

Voldemort is back and the Order of the Phoenix is reforming. They need new members and Kingsley recruits one of his fellow Aurors - even though she is a Slytherin. Assigned to work with Remus Lupin, things get very tense. Set during 'Order of the Phoenix'.

As the wait neared an hour, Remus was growing more impatient. If Sirius was correct, he might be in danger. Every time he heard a noise, he jumped. His hand kept going to his wand as he prepared to defend himself. Though, from what Sirius had told him about Wendy, he doubted he would have a chance to defend himself against the Dark Magic she knew. She seemed very well versed in obscure magic and most of the defenses he knew were against the more common Dark spells.

He decided to go wait in the library. Perhaps he could find something interesting in one of the books there. Of course, she had indicated the books on Dark Magic were at her family home, but the Westin family had also supported dark wizards in the past.

Cappa stopped him in the foyer. "Sir, please, where is you going?" she asked nervously.

"I'm going to wait in the library. I thought that I might read a book until Wendy returns."

Cappa once again looked around nervously, trying to decide if she could leave him in the library. "You may go the library, but sir must be staying there," she finally decided.

He began perusing the shelves, impressed by her vast collection. There were many very rare tomes, and he couldn't help but notice the number that dealt with some aspect of Dark Magic. After choosing a book, he settled into an overstuffed armchair.

Checking the clock, he could see that he had been waiting nearly two hours. He was contemplating returning to Grimmauld Place and letting Albus know that she had not been home yet. He was also getting quite hungry, since it was well past dinnertime. As he set his book down, the library door opened.

"What do you want?" Wendy asked gruffly. She didn't like having uninvited guests, and he was not only uninvited, but unwanted.

"I've come about the ring," he replied.

She crossed her arms and asked defensively, "What about it?"

"Sirius says that it is dangerous..." He realized how stupid this must sound. She had already accused him of blindly following Sirius and he had denied it.

She mocked, "Of course 'Sirius says,' and we know he doesn't trust me. Typical. Of course, since he can't leave, he sent you. And you agreed to this?" she asked in a condescending tone of voice.

"Well, yes," he admitted sheepishly. He watched her sit at the desk and begin sorting through a stack of mail. "Where is the ring?"

"Safe," she replied shortly as she perused her correspondence.

"Safe?" What did that mean? Had she already turned it over to the Death Eaters? He somehow doubted there had been anyone in the Department of Mysteries to take custody of the ring at this hour on a Friday.

She looked up at him. "I thought we had gotten past the point where you believed everything Black said about me? I haven't turned it over to the Death Eaters and I have no plans to do so. I have put it someplace safe until I can turn it over on Monday. Those who can destroy it don't work on the weekends. So, since it's not here, you may leave," she said dismissively.

"Actually, no, I can't. Sirius sent word to Albus, and I'll be remaining here with you in case he orders it returned."

She sighed. "I assure you, he won't." She put down the letter she was attempting to read. "Let's theorize that I did turn it over to the Death Eaters. Wouldn't it be better for you if you weren't here when word comes from Albus that I am to turn it over to you? If I were a Death Eater, I would react very poorly to being discovered. I could just Obliviate you and all you would report is that you waited here and I wasn't at home. After all, according to Black, I am a dangerous Dark sorceress that is not to be trusted."

"You wouldn't do that," he replied semi-confidently.

She smirked at him. "How do you know?"

"Because you aren't that type of person. Yes, you know things about Dark Magic that very few know, but you don't strike me as the type of person to do that sort of thing."

"Exactly!" she said triumphantly. "I'm honorable in my own way and I definitely take my oaths seriously. Not the traditional way, but I am loyal to the Order and committed to defeating the Dark Lord." She saw him cringe. "What?"

"You said Dark Lord," he replied uncomfortably.

She suddenly realized why it had bothered him. "Oh, right. I know that's how the Death Eaters refer to him, but look at the environment I was in. Grow up. I've heard you refer to him by his name. I am truly tired of having to continue to try to convince all of you I'm loyal to the Order. The Black family is even less upstanding than either the Leah or Westin families and no one questions his loyalty. And do you know why? Because he was sorted into Gryffindor." That one little fact that people still couldn't get past her Hogwarts House affiliation bothered her.

"You're really going to wait here until you hear from Albus, aren't you?" She was growing tired of this conversation.

"Yes," he replied firmly.

She sighed. "And I suppose you've been here since I left Grimmauld Place?"

"Basically, yes."

"Then you might as well join me for dinner since I have no idea how long you're going to be waiting here for a reply." She finished sorting through her mail and headed to the dining room without saying anything further.

They sat in, what Remus considered, an uncomfortable silence until about the halfway point of the meal when he decided he had to say something. "You have some interesting books in your collection."

"They come in handy as an Auror." She was spared the necessity of further conversation when Cappa brought a letter into the dining room. She unfurled it, read it quickly and handed it over to Remus. "I'm sure Black will be thrilled." She resumed eating her meal with a victorious smile.

He read the letter twice. He knew that Sirius would not be happy.

Wendy,

I have complete faith that you have placed the ring in a safe place. While I am surprised to learn of its existence, I am pleased that you were able to remove it from the house. Hopefully, there will not be too many questions when you take it in to be destroyed. Use your best judgment.

Remus,

I know that Sirius will not be pleased at my decision, but it stands. The less said to the others about the ring, the better.

It was not signed, but the handwriting was unmistakably Albus'. "No, I'm sure Sirius will be livid." He was not looking forward to returning home. He wiped his mouth with his napkin. "Well, thank you for the dinner. I'd best be on my way."

"Good luck with Black," she replied. While she felt no particular friendship towards Lupin, she was well aware of how horrible one of Black's bad moods could be and did not wish that on anyone. Once again, she found herself wondering why someone like Lupin had befriended Black.

He turned and smiled at her. "Thank you." That was one of the few times she had been decent to him.

Remus was waiting in the kitchen with the other members of the Order. The only one they were expecting who had not yet arrived was Wendy. He wanted to trust her; she had seemed very sincere yesterday.

"Figures that she wouldn't show up," whispered Sirius.

"I think we can trust her. I told you that last night." He had listened to Sirius vent last night when he returned home and had tried to defend Wendy, but Sirius hadn't listened.

"Oh, yeah. She took two hours getting from here to her place and now she's late tonight. Real trustworthy," said Sirius sarcastically.

Remus was glad that Albus started the meeting. He really didn't want to get into another argument with Sirius. Wendy had been correct about Sirius not changing his mind.

It was fifteen minutes into the meeting before Wendy arrived. Her clothes looked somewhat disheveled. She walked up to the table and deposited a book in front of Albus. He picked up the book and flipped through the empty pages before looking up at her.

"This is the book I was telling you about." Since all the chairs were taken, she conjured herself a chair and sat on it backwards so she could rest her arms on the back of the chair.

Remus thought she looked very much like the proverbial cat that ate the canary.

"Thank you, Wendelin. I will see that someone with proper skills gets to work on deciphering it." He gave her a look that said he needed to speak with her after the meeting was over.

She wasn't surprised by his reaction. There was no doubt in her mind that she would be chastised for what she had done to get the book. Even though she was working for the Order, she wasn't going to completely change her methods. There were times when Aurors were required to work alone, and she had decided this was one of them.

Reports were given and new assignments were handed out. Overall, the meeting was useful, but Wendy still thought they were moving too slowly, being too cautious. The Death Eaters were not well organized and not large in number. The Dark Lord was most vulnerable now, yet they were giving him time to gather new followers.

"If there are no further questions, that concludes our meeting," said Albus. He stood and gave Wendy a quick glance before walking out of the room.

Sirius snorted. "Serves her right. Hopefully Dumbledore will take her to task for what she's done."

Remus found himself hoping she hadn't gotten herself in too much trouble. He knew why she had decided to retrieve the book and, while it might not have been the wisest decision, it would hopefully provide them with some valuable information. Her methods definitely had the potential help their cause.

Once the door to the drawing room was secured, Albus held up the book. "Would you care to tell me how you came to possess this book?"

She lounged in one of the chairs, trying to act like she wasn't intimidated. Albus had always been able to let people know when he was disappointed. "I had some time this morning and decided to pay our Death Eater cell leader a visit. He remembered me from the pub the other night and was more than happy to invite me in. Once inside, neutralizing him and finding the book was easy enough. Don't worry, he has no memory of what happened."

"And if Voldemort uses Legilimency to verify his story on the loss of the book?" While Wendy had hung out with a mischievous crowd at Hogwarts, she had never been outright disobedient when specifically ordered not to do something. While her reputation as an Auror was that of one willing to skirt the rules, she had an impeccable disciplinary record.

"Do you honestly think he's that important? I don't. Besides, his mind was a mess. I doubt my work would be noticed," she commented off-handedly, refusing to be intimidated or feel guilty for doing what she knew was right.

Albus sat across from her, looking at her sternly. "Wendelin, if you are going to be a part of the Order, you need to be able to take orders and respect authority. I know that you have been granted a certain amount of latitude within the Ministry, but that does not extend here. You have been assigned a partner for good reason. With two people working together, it reduces the risk of capture. I know that you do not care for werewolves, you made that abundantly clear in your letter, but it will not change the assignment of Remus as your partner. The two of you are particularly suited to work together. His heightened senses make him an excellent match for the type of work I have assigned the two of you and he is rather adept at defending against the Dark Arts. Do you have any further questions about my expectations?"

She clenched her jaw, forcing herself not to talk back to him. "No."

"Excellent. I trust there will be no more solo excursions?" he asked sternly.

She met his eyes, refusing to be intimidated. "No."

He sighed. "Even though you operated against my express orders, excellent job on retrieving the book. Even if we can't infiltrate Voldemort's communication network, we may be able to use something similar."

She watched him leave before getting up. She hated being treated like a child. They had recruited her, and now they were limiting her ability to do her job. She was actually getting used to working with Lupin, but there were some things it was better if she did alone. Unfortunately, she had now promised to play by their rules. She sighed and headed back down to the kitchen.

On her way down stairs, she saw Severus loitering in the front hall. She entered the dining room, eager to speak with him in private. "You got my message?" she asked after disarming the room.

"I did. You have really found it?" he asked eagerly.

She nodded. "I knew it was here, well, I hoped it would still be here. I was going to turn it over to the Department of Mysteries, but I have a bad feeling about the whole situation. I can't say what it is, but something is going on with the Unspeakables and I don't trust them with it." She reached into her pocket and pulled out a ring. "Can you keep this at Hogwarts? I would feel safer with it there."

Severus accepted the ring and slipped it into his pocket after only the briefest glance. "Of course. No one will know that I have it."

"That's best. The others believe I'm taking it to be destroyed. I may want it back at some point, but for now, it's safer with you. I have a good set of wards at home, but nothing compared to those at Hogwarts." She stopped talking as she tried to place the sound she had just heard from the hallway. Dismissing it as someone going up the stairs, she continued in a whisper, "I'll be going into the library sometime after the children leave. There may be some books that would interest you there. If you have any titles you wanted to add to your collection, let me know and I'll save them from the purging."

"That would be appreciated. I heard that a great many artifacts were destroyed in the last purge," he replied.

"I noticed what was missing more than what was thrown out. They've even done some cleaning here. They don't seem to understand the value in studying those artifacts," she replied sadly.

"I was quite surprised to see that you have not managed to secure a new partner," he said dryly.

"It's not for lack of trying. Albus seems convinced we are perfectly suited for working together. I will admit his refined senses have been of some use and, quite surprisingly, he is a quick study for fieldwork. Speaking of which, I need to get back downstairs. Send me an owl for any books you might like. I'll see what I can do."

Remus was waiting in the kitchen when Wendy returned. He thought she looked angry more than anything else.

She poured herself a cup of tea. "There's a valise in the front hall that has some suitable attire," she said shortly.

He nodded and left to change. Once in his room, he pulled out the clothes. They were well tailored and looked practically new. Of course, one living a life of privilege got rid of clothes once they began to show the first signs of wear. He should have expected no less from her.

After changing, he could not help but look in the mirror and think about how different his life would have been if he had not been bitten. He sighed, knowing there was no way to change the past. He had always made the best of the situation, no matter how dire.

When he returned, she was alone and in a worse mood than when he left. Obviously, Sirius had decided to antagonize her again.

"About time," she replied tersely. "Let's go."

"Is there anything you want to talk about before we leave?" He hoped that if she opened up, it might dispel some of her bad mood.

"No. I don't know how you live under the same roof with that man," she spat.

"What did he do this time?" He knew full well that she was referring to Sirius.

"Oh, nothing special. Just being his usual spiteful self," she replied casually.

"You could be a little less spiteful to him yourself," he reprimanded.

She pointed an accusatory finger at him. "Do not blame *any* of this on me. I'm perfectly content ignoring him. *He* is the one that continues to make an issue of my existence. He hates me for what I did to him as child. Now, add to that list the fact I know more about this house than he does and that makes it even worse. He had the nerve to demand I give him back the ring and let him in the library. Neither one of those two things is going to happen. I really don't want to talk about him. Let's go." Actually, Black had done more than demand. The two of them had ended up with wands pointed at each other and only Moody's intervention had prevented them from launching hexes at each other. She didn't know what he had intended, but she had been planning on something much worse than turning him into a Flobberworm.

Remus returned to the house early Sunday morning to find Sirius still up. "Couldn't sleep?" he asked.

"Truth be told, I was worried." He had feared that Wendy might take out some of her hostility towards him on Remus. She had never seemed too discriminatory in her youth. "I heard her talking to Snape before you left. I couldn't really make out the words, but I thought I heard something about books. Whenever two Slytherins start whispering, it makes me nervous, especially those two. They're scheming something."

Remus took a seat and grabbed a bottle of butterbeer. "I think that she would have done something to me already if she wanted to. You can probably quit worrying about my safety." It had actually been an almost pleasant evening. As long as he didn't mention anything having to do with Sirius, he found that her mood improved. She had almost been friendly toward him.

Sirius looked at Remus suspiciously. "Your problem is that you're too eager to trust people."

"Your problem is that you hold a grudge. It's been twenty years, can't you admit that she's changed?" He took a seat next to Sirius at the table.

"No," he replied gruffly. "You saw how she has disregarded the rules. And I don't trust anyone that comfortable with Dark Magic. She knows too many secrets of this house and doesn't seem eager to give them up. Doesn't that sound suspicious to you?" What would it take to convince Remus he was wrong to place his trust in her? He feared it would take serious injury. Of course, Albus had not listened to his concerns either.

"We'll see, once the children are gone. She said she would open the library once they left," he defended. He knew how much Sirius had hated his family, and even though Wendy was not a direct relation, she had strong ties to his cousins.

"Do you want to bet on it?" Sirius asked, sure that he would win this bet. "And in order for you to win, she would have to open it without any prompting."

"You know I don't have anything to bet." Sirius always liked to bet on things. Normally, Remus did not like to make wagers because it only accentuated his Spartan lifestyle.

"How about cooking duties for a week after everyone leaves? You know Molly has said she's not staying here after the kids go back to school," Sirius offered. He was almost positive he was going to win this bet and since he hated cooking anyway, it seemed like a bet that would benefit him greatly.

"If I won the bet, I would still lose. Your cooking is horrible." He watched Sirius for a few seconds before they both burst out in laughter. He finished off his butterbeer. "It's late and I'm off to bed. She has a scouting mission lined up in the morning. Good night."

The following two days were uneventful. The Death Eaters seemed to be lying low. Remus and Wendy spent Sunday in Glasgow and, other than hearing about some minor anti-Muggle mischief, were unable to uncover anything of importance. Remus had to admit this was a tiring mission. Of course, most of the work the Order was doing now seemed yield little immediate reward.

They were walking down the street in Edinburgh late Monday, enjoying the cool night air after the stifling air of the last pub, when Wendy suddenly yanked him into an alley. He watched her peer cautiously around the corner. "What is it?" he whispered as he tried to determine who or what she was looking at, his hand wrapped around his wand in his pocket.

"My brother and his family," she replied sadly.

He watched as she moved out of the shadows to keep an eye on them as they made their way to a nearby restaurant. He saw a man and a woman, both in their forties, a young woman, probably in her early twenties, and young teenage girl. He shifted his gaze to her when he heard her whisper, "Andorra." He watched her come back into the alley and lean against the wall with her eyes slammed shut. She sank down to the ground and pressed her hands against her eyes as if trying to block a painful memory. "Wendy?" he asked gently as he knelt next to her. He knew that it must hurt for her to see the family that had disowned her, but this reaction seemed to be something far more intense.

She wiped a lone tear off her cheek. "I'm sorry," she apologized. It wasn't like her to lose her composure like this. She had always prided herself on maintaining control.

"What's wrong? Was it something to do with your brother's family? I heard you whisper 'Andorra.' Is that your niece's name?" He thought she might have been referring to her lycanthropic niece.

"No, she's my daughter," she replied sadly. She could see the look of shock in Remus' face.

"Your daughter?" he asked incredulously.

Her voice took on a distant quality and she stared at the far side of the alley, "I was pregnant when Edgar was arrested and she was born while he was in Azkaban. I was distraught over the whole affair and couldn't really take care of myself, let alone a baby. My brother knew this and was awarded temporary custody. At that time, I lived with him, but I didn't see much of her. I didn't want to be reminded of what Edgar had done and that's exactly what she was, a reminder. When she was about a year old, I started to pull my life back together. I wanted some sort of purpose, something more to life than raising a child that reminded me of a traitorous husband.

"Through family influence, I got a decent job at the Ministry, but it didn't make me happy. I didn't think I was making a difference. True, the Dark Lord was gone by that time, but pushing paper and writing speeches didn't satisfy me. I started talking with some of the Aurors and I thought that was a field suited to my particular talents. They were still chasing around those claiming to be the Dark Lord reborn and all that nonsense. I knew that my knowledge of Dark Magic would be useful. That's when I decided to become an Auror.

"At first, my family humored me, figuring I would never be selected or if I was, that I wouldn't make it through training. I even suspect my brother tried to block my acceptance. Once I was accepted, my family used that as proof that I was definitely not fit to be a parent and they petitioned for full custody. Of course, they won, since they are the Leachs. The fact I didn't fight the ruling helped, too. I still had visitation rights up until the incident with the werewolf. That was the last time I saw her from anything more than a distance. That was about ten years ago. I'm sure she's forgotten all about me by now."

He could hear the pain and loss in her voice and comforted her by embracing her. She collapsed into his arms and he could feel her sobbing. He rubbed her back reassuringly, hoping it would help her calm down. "Would you like me to take you home?" he asked after a few minutes when her sobbing began to subside.

Pulling out a handkerchief, she wiped her eyes. "I'll be fine. We have work to do." She still couldn't believe how weak she was and it angered her. Seeing her family should not have bothered her like this.

He looked into her eyes, which were red and swollen. "You're not fine. We can always come back out later." He helped her to her feet. "Right now you need some time to recover." There was no way she would be of any use tonight. No matter what happened, her mind would be preoccupied. It really was best to get her home.

She really didn't feel like arguing and pulled her locket out of her dress. "Here, touch this. It's a Portkey to my foyer."

"Why didn't we use this when you were injured?" he asked.

"Because I lost it and had to go back for it later." She touched her wand to it and they both felt the pull of Portkey activation.

Remus led her into the drawing room and asked Cappa to bring them something to drink, hoping it would help calm Wendy.

She took the drink without question and stared off into the distance. "She's beautiful, isn't she? She's growing up so quickly now."

"She's a very beautiful girl," Remus agreed. Using this as an opening point, he asked, "She's starting her third year at Hogwarts, isn't she?"

"Yes. How did you know?" She was taken aback by the accuracy of his knowledge.

"I taught there her first year. I remember her from my class. She was very bright and eager to learn, though I thought she knew quite a bit more than an eleven year old should." When he saw the look of confusion on her face, he added, "I taught Defense Against the Dark Arts."

"Ah, yes, that's a bit of a family trait. She no doubt learned some of it from my brother and some from my niece. Bella and I were very good in that class, though we were smart enough not to let on how much we really knew." She gulped down the remainder of her brandy.

"Did your niece attend Hogwarts as well?" he asked as he refilled her glass, hoping she would drink this glass a little more slowly, though it might not be all bad if she passed out.

She shook her head and accepted her refilled glass. "No. My brother sent her to Durmstrang because of her condition. He didn't want anyone here in Britain to find out what she was. I'm actually surprised he sent Andorra to Hogwarts. I thought for sure he would send her as far from me as he could. At least there is the chance I can see her during her Hogsmeade visits this year."

She looked into his eyes. "I worry about her. I can only imagine that with the Dark Lord's return, my brother has renewed his ties. I don't want to see her hurt. I know my brother's smart and it kept him out of jail last time, but I don't know if he can repeat that performance this time." A part of her wanted to be the one that saw her brother brought to justice since he had been the one to recruit Edgar and turn her life completely upside down.

He moved closer to her so he could place his arm around her to reassure her that she wasn't alone.

She welcomed his warm embrace and snuggled against him. It had been so long since she had been with someone who would just hold her. He really wasn't a bad person, despite being a werewolf and a Gryffindor. "I'll see her again in a few days at King's Cross. I only wish I could talk with her, get to know her. I know she sees Timor and

Elena as her parents, but I just wish I could be a part of her life again but it won't happen. If I talk to her, Timor will see that I am punished. He's made it clear that I am to have no contact with her," she said forlornly. *Yes, after the werewolf incident he had made it quite clear that he had enough influence at the Ministry to see that I would be fired if I disobeyed.*

He continued to hold her. There was nothing he could say that would make it better. Instead he kissed the top of her head.

After several minutes, she said, "Thank you."

"For what?" He was confused.

"For being here, for listening, for not judging me. You could have called me selfish or told me that I brought this upon myself," she replied.

"That's what friends do," he replied as he rubbed her arm.

"After how horrible I've been to you, you consider yourself my friend?" It was odd for her to have someone say that. Even among her coworkers, Kingsley was the closest she had to a friend. Most of the others had a hard time accepting her for what she was and the way she did things.

"I'd like to, if you'll let me. I'm really not a bad person." He tried to sound upbeat, but wasn't sure he had succeeded. He knew how lonely it could be as an outsider and he had never wanted anything more than to make her feel welcome in the Order. Unfortunately, she had let her hatreds of both werewolves and Sirius cloud her perception of him.

She sighed. "I know." After a short pause, she added, "I'm sorry."

"Whatever for?" he asked. He had not expected her to apologize for anything.

"For treating you the way I did. I acted like a real git, every bit as bad as Sirius. Will you forgive me for the way I acted?"

He nuzzled her hair, enjoying the scent of her shampoo. "Of course. Though, I think now I can understand why you behaved the way you did. You blame that one werewolf for the ostracism from your family and the loss of your daughter and you chose to take it out on all of us."

She nodded and sat up so that she could look into his eyes. Taking hold of his hands, she said, "I'm sorry about that. You really are a decent fellow. Thanks again for looking out for me. I know I've been a real pill about the whole thing."

"Yes, you have," he replied playfully. He didn't like her "decent fellow" comment, and tried to hide the sting those words delivered. That was too much like the infamous, "let's just be friends." In fact, he had dated women who had claimed he was too nice. Sirius, the bad boy, had always had more luck with the girls in school.

"Well, you didn't have to agree with me." She returned his smile.

"You know, you're quite beautiful when you smile. You should do it more often." He brushed a stray lock of hair off her face. The hard edge that was normally part of her expression was gone.

She self-consciously ran her fingers through her hair and looked away from him. She wasn't the type of person that normally got compliments anymore. Even in her youth, she had always paled in comparison to the Black sisters and had rarely been called anything more than pretty. "I don't normally have much reason to smile." Right now she was a mess of conflicting emotions and sitting in Remus' arms wasn't helping matters. It had been several years since her last boyfriend. "I think I'm ready to go back out now."

As she stood up, he closed his eyes and sighed. He wasn't really ready to leave, but they did have a job to do. He stood and moved to face her, trying to control his anxiety. "I was wondering, I know we spend a lot of time together, but I thought perhaps you might like to have a quiet dinner some day?" he asked nervously. Now that he had said it, he thought about how stupid it sounded. Not only did it sound stupid, but he also realized he really had no way to pay for dinner.

She could see the change in his expression and quickly figured out why he was suddenly uncomfortable about a suggestion he had made. "My work week is unpredictable, but I could send you an owl and we could have a quiet dinner here. Cappa's quite an excellent chef, though I'm not sure how much advance warning I could give you."

He smiled warmly, thankful that she hadn't rejected his offer. "That would be nice. And don't worry about the short notice, I'm used to doing things that way." He was glad that the air between them finally seemed clear, though he did find it hard to concentrate on the task at hand with the promise of an intimate dinner in his future.

They got a few whiffs of Death Eater activity, but nothing they could follow up on. "I'll write a report for Albus when I get back," he offered.

"There's not much to report. Once again, we seem to have gotten a lot of empty leads." Working for the Order was even more frustrating than working for the Ministry. It took a large number of hours to turn up even the smallest bit of information. She knew they had to be cautious, but it didn't mean she had to like it.

"That's the way it's been all summer. And I think it will be that way for a while. The Death Eaters are being very secretive." There was a brief awkward silence before he continued, "I look forward to receiving your owl. And in case you've forgotten, I won't be able to patrol with you on your next off period, full moon, you know."

"Keep yourself safe when you're transformed. I won't know it's you." There was no spite in her voice, but genuine concern.

"Don't worry. Severus brews the Wolfsbane Potion for me and I sleep quite peacefully as a wolf. I don't go outside transformed. I don't know if I could bear hurting someone." There had been too many near misses while he had been at Hogwarts. He involuntarily shuddered as he recalled the time that only Sirius and James attacking him had prevented him from biting an unsuspecting farmer. For that matter, Sirius or James could have just as easily been his victims.

She hadn't noticed his reaction. "That's good to know. I'll let you know when I get a free evening." She stared at him awkwardly for a few seconds before flashing him a smile and disappearing with a crack.

Remus stared at the place she had stood for a few seconds. He should have kissed her, or at least hugged her. Something, anything was better than standing there with his feet frozen to the pavement. He was definitely out of practice as far as courting went. Unfortunately, there was no one he could ask for advice.

When he arrived back home, he was not surprised to find Sirius still awake. "Good evening, Sirius," he said jovially.

"You're in a very good mood. Did you find out something about the Death Eaters?" Sirius asked anxiously.

"Not exactly," Remus replied as he began digging through the upper shelves of the pantry.

"Then what?" Sirius asked. What could possibly have Remus so happy?

"A-ha!" Remus said as he emerged from the pantry with a bottle of Firewhisky. He waved two glasses to the table. "I knew she hadn't gotten rid of all of it. A toast."

"To what are we toasting?" Sirius asked suspiciously as he clinked glasses.

"I have broken through her exterior, invited her to dinner, and she accepted," Remus said victoriously.

Sirius spit out the mouthful of whisky. "You what? Are you mad?"

"I'm not mad. I'm happy. Sirius, she knows what I am and she isn't shunning me. She explained to me why she has a general hatred of werewolves and so much more." He leaned forward across the table. "She opened up to me. We really connected."

"Remus, you're delusional. She's using you." There is no way that Wendy could be serious in her intentions towards Remus. She was the type of person that didn't have a compassionate bone in her body.

"Well, thank you for trying to put a damper on my happiness, but it's not going to work. You weren't there. I was. Besides, what would she be using me for?" he retorted.

"So...When is this dinner?" Sirius asked cautiously.

"Not sure exactly. It depends on her schedule. She said she'd send me an owl." He would not let Sirius ruin his moment of joy.

"And you believed this?" Sirius leaned back in his chair and shook his head. "Remus, Remus, Remus, you have a lot to learn about women. She's not going to send you an owl, that's what they say they want to let you down gently." He knew Remus didn't have a lot of experience with women, but he never thought his friend would be this naïve.

Remus slammed his glass down, some of the liquid sloshing over the sides. "You're wrong. Please, don't ruin this for me."

Sirius placed a comforting hand on his friend's shoulder. "Remus, old friend, I don't want to see you hurt. She's not right for you," he pleaded.

"She's not the same person you knew. She's been through a lot since then. I'm going to bed before you ruin all my happiness." He drained the last of his whisky and headed upstairs. He reminded himself that Sirius had a very strong distrust of Wendy and that was sure to cloud his judgment of her. She had been correct; Sirius really didn't know her anymore. This evening, he had seen a different side of her, the human side that did not hide behind a tough façade.

The Order, led by Moody, escorted Harry and the others safely to King's Cross. Remus was watching the station not only for danger, but also for Wendy. He had brought up the rear with Fred, George and Ginny. That had been more of a chore than he had anticipated since Fred and George tried to take advantage of now being of age by trying out small magical tricks on Muggles. This had left him precious little opportunity to look for Wendy since, in the hustle and bustle of the station, the boys were causing more mischief. She had said that she would be there to see Andorra and he hoped to be able to speak with her after Harry was safely seen off. While they were waiting to cross onto the platform, he thought he saw someone that might be her. He did not expect to see her on the platform where her brother might recognize her, so he couldn't search after they crossed through the barrier.

After the train was gone and he was back through the barrier, he scanned the station, but didn't see any sign of her.

"Did you see something?" Moody asked as he stepped next to the younger man.

Remus gave one last scan of the area. "No." He tried to keep the disappointment out of his voice. She had to have seen him and he had hoped that she might wait to speak with him. Molly and Sirius had joined them now and he definitely didn't want to bring this subject up around Sirius.

Moody looked at him in disbelief, but said nothing, though his magical eye spun in its socket.

Remus left the station to return home, and hopefully to a letter. He just knew that Sirius was wrong. Her not staying to see him didn't mean anything. She hadn't been part of the escort because she couldn't get away from work. Perhaps it was just that she couldn't stay away from work for very long. Yes, that had to be it; it made perfect sense.

The end of the week was approaching and Remus was growing more anxious. He still had not heard from Wendy. The full moon was approaching and if he didn't hear from her today, he would have to decline her invitation.

"Would you quit pacing?" admonished Sirius as he looked up from his game of solitaire. He had not yet convinced Remus that dreaming of a nice dinner with Wendy was just that, a dream. This was just one more way that she would hurt him. No matter what he said, Remus continued to defend her and insist that she was worthy of his attention.

"Sorry," Remus said as he took a seat and picked up the book he had been attempting to read. He should be used to waiting by now. His life was filled with nothing but waiting. Waiting for the next job, waiting to be evicted, waiting for someone that would accept him and most of it ended in disappointment, but he held steadfastly to the belief that this time it would be different. There would be no disappointment.

"I told you she wouldn't contact you. Why did you get your hopes up?" Sirius asked. They had had this argument countless times over the last few days. Sirius was beginning to believe it was fruitless, but he wouldn't give up.

"Dammit, Sirius, there's something between us," Remus insisted as he closed the book. "You know that Aurors are busy. Besides, you know that we have to keep the owl traffic down so as not to draw attention." Now he was making excuses for her, but he didn't care. It was the truth.

"Keep telling yourself that," Sirius muttered as he flipped over his next card. He noticed that Remus was holding the book upside down and only shook his head.

The both looked up as an owl fluttered into the room and landed by Remus. He took the letter from the owl.

Remus,

I'm so sorry we haven't been able to get together sooner. I had hoped to meet you earlier this week, but we've been swamped. Looks like I'll be able to get out of here at a reasonable hour today.

If it's not too close to full moon, would you care to join me for dinner tonight, say sixish? Send an owl back to my place addressed to Cappa and let her know if you can make it.

Wendy

P.S. It was good to see you at King's Cross the other day and I wish I could have stayed longer, but I had to get back to work.

Remus smiled triumphantly as he looked from the letter and waved it at Sirius. "So, she wasn't going to keep our date? Looks like you owe me an apology."

"She isn't there yet. She could still stand you up," said Sirius sardonically as he waved a card at his housemate.

Remus was scribbling a reply on the bottom of the piece of parchment Wendy had sent. When he was finished, he ripped it off, rolled it up and gave it to the owl. "Wendy Westin's in Chelsea, for Cappa." He watched the owl fly off. "Now, if you will excuse me, I'm going to get ready for dinner."

Sirius abandoned his card game and followed Remus upstairs to continue heckling. He watched as Remus pulled clean clothes out of his wardrobe. "Am I the only one that finds it disturbing that you are wearing her dead husband's clothes?" he asked.

He brushed the wrinkles out of the clothes and replied, "I haven't owned any new clothing in more years than I can count. What does it matter if I get them from a second-

hand shop or they are given to me by another?" Everything he had gathered from Wendy was that she didn't really feel any further emotional attachment to her deceased husband.

"I think it matters a great deal. She's out of your class, mate. I mean, honestly, what can you offer her?" There had to be a way to stop this before Remus ended up hurt. Every relationship Remus had ever been in had ended in pain and Sirius steadfastly held the belief this would be no different.

"Sirius, it's dinner, not an engagement," he replied as he peeled off his well-worn shirt.

"So you would be happy being her kept man? You really don't think she would marry someone like you, do you?" Sirius had to stop this. There had to be a way to get his friend to realize how bad an idea this was. He had hoped that she would stand Remus up; that would be the quickest way to convince him to give up.

"Would you quit trying to plan my life? We can talk about this later if it really becomes an issue." He pulled on his trousers and tucked in his shirt before working on the tie. "Besides, would it really be that bad being a kept man? I mean, it's not like I'm getting a lot of job offers or anything. Just about everyone I meet shuns me as soon as they find out what I am." He put the finishing touches on his tie and smiled. "I think it might be kind of nice. Think of it, never having to worry about working, having your every desired met. Would it really be that bad?" he joked.

Sirius chuckled. "You're twisted, mate. Though I will admit there is a certain appeal to that plan. I suppose I'm not going to talk you out of dinner since you've been talking about nothing else all week?"

"Nope. Don't wait up for me," Remus said cheerfully.

Sirius laughed at the audacity of this comment. "See you tomorrow and I guess good luck, though I have no idea what you see in her. You did take your potion, didn't you?"

"Yes, mother, I took my potion and I promise not to stay out past my curfew," Remus replied sarcastically.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 of 27

Voldemort is back and the Order of the Phoenix is reforming. They need new members and Kingsley recruits one of his fellow Aurors - even though she is a Slytherin. Assigned to work with Remus Lupin, things get very tense. Set during 'Order of the Phoenix'.

Before heading to Chelsea, Remus decided to stop by a flower shop in Diagon Alley. It was still before six and he didn't want to arrive too early. He browsed the shop, trying to make a decision since he had never bought flowers for a woman before. Aside from being too expensive, he thought that roses were too presumptuous. He was looking at the carnations when the shop lady came up to him. "Can I help you?" she asked.

He felt the loose change in his pocket. It wasn't much. "Yes, I'd like to, er, get three carnations." He would have preferred to get a whole dozen, but three was all he could afford.

She arched an eyebrow, thinking that someone wearing clothes like his would probably be buying roses, but some people were eccentric. "What color?"

For just a moment he thought about red, but that might be too forward. "White, please." He watched her bundle up the flowers and paid for them. Surrounded by baby's breath and fern fronds, the carnations looked a bit more suitable. It was just past six when he left the shop and headed to Chelsea. It took him several long seconds to work up the courage to knock on the door.

Cappa opened the door. "Good evening, Mr. Lupin. Mistress is not home yet, but I is expecting her soon."

She led him to the drawing room. Almost immediately after she left, she returned with a glass of Champagne. He wasn't much of a drinker and had never acquired a taste for wine, but he sipped from the glass and found it fairly pleasant.

After half an hour, he heard the familiar crack of Apparition in the foyer. Picking up his flowers, he moved toward to foyer. He saw Wendy hand her cloak to Cappa. "Wendy," he said nervously.

She was glad to see that he had arrived; it was very close to full moon and she wasn't sure he would come. "Remus, I'm so sorry to make you wait. I got caught on my way out the door with one last errand to run." She saw that he was wearing some of the clothes she had given him. "You didn't have to dress up."

"I, er, just, um...I brought you some flowers," he said sheepishly.

She took the flowers from him, letting her hand rest on his momentarily, and smiled warmly. "They're lovely. Cappa, could you get a vase?" She walked into the dining room and used the flowers as the centerpiece of the table setting. "If you wouldn't mind terribly, I'd like a few minutes to clean up?"

"Of course." What else could he have said?

She kissed him on the cheek before heading upstairs. "Thank you for the flowers. I'll be down shortly." She had most definitely not expected him to bring flowers. It was a very touching gesture, especially since it was a small bouquet.

He brushed his hand against his cheek. She had kissed him and, more importantly, had indicated she accepted him for who he was. He heard the stairs squeaking after about 10 minutes. When she came in the drawing room, he saw that she was wearing a simple green dress of fine wool. "You look lovely," he said.

"Thank you. Dinner should be ready in about 10 minutes," she replied, changing the subject. She still wasn't comfortable being complimented. Taking a seat on the sofa next to him, she sipped her wine. "I'm glad it wasn't too close to the full moon. I had been afraid I would have to wait until next week."

"Today is the last day that I can safely be out. I'll be ready for the next patrol cycle," he replied. He was painfully aware of how pathetic he must sound.

"What's it like?" she asked tentatively. "I'd understand if you don't want to talk about it," she added hastily.

"I understand your curiosity. It's not as bad as it was. I now can retain my presence of mind with the Wolfsbane Potion, but it does leave me weak afterwards." This was one

of the few times he had ever had someone show any curiosity about his affliction.

"Does it hurt?" She was truly curious about the transformation.

"I've grown used to it." He could see the pity in her eyes. He hated seeing that and placed a reassuring hand on her knee. "Please, don't worry about it. It's who I am."

"I'm sorry. I just know my niece goes through that, too. Well, enough of this talk, dinner should be ready by now." She realized that this was not a conversation that could end well.

He stood first and offered her his hand.

"Thank you, gallant sir," she said as she let him escort her to the dining room.

They talked pleasantly throughout the evening, learning about each other's pasts. Wendy tended to focus more on her life since becoming and Auror and Remus was somewhat embarrassed by his past after graduation. Sirius was correct; they were from two different worlds. He was sitting in a magnificent old home in Chelsea and he had most recently lived in a horrid, rat-infested flat before moving in with Sirius, not that Grimmauld Place was much better.

"Thank you for a marvelous dinner," he said as he wiped the dessert crumbs from his lips with his napkin.

"I can't take much credit for it, but I thought it would be better than eating out. Would you like to go for a walk? There's a lovely park nearby," she offered.

"That would be wonderful. We can walk off some of this dinner," he replied as he patted his stomach. He was pleasantly full and had comfortable buzz from the wine. This was turning out to be quite a nice evening.

Once they were deep in the park, Remus asked, "Why did you agree to have dinner with me?"

"Because you asked," she replied playfully.

"Wendy, I'm serious." He stopped and turned to face her, while also making sure they were alone. "I mean, look at me. I'm not exactly in your class."

"Oh, so you mean I should be with a suspected Death Eater or pureblood bigot? No thanks, not again. I find you interesting and I thought I ought to get to know you better and give you a chance to prove my stereotyping wrong. Now, my turn, why did you ask me to dinner?" she asked. They had started walking again and she found herself watching the moon as it rose into the night sky.

He shrugged and answered evasively, "You knew what I was and accepted me. I thought I'd take a chance and ask you to dinner. I'm glad you accepted. I've had a lovely evening."

"Me too." She looked up into his moonlit face. In the soft glow of the moonlight, he looked closer to his real age, with the grey in his hair obscured and the lines softened. "We should be getting back. It's late," she said softly. They had been walking for nearly an hour.

"We still have time before midnight, Cinderella," he replied softly as he brushed her cheek. He bent down to kiss her and lightly brushed her lips with his. When she didn't resist, he began to probe deeper.

After a few seconds, she gently pushed him away. "Remus, wait. Please, this is too much."

He pulled away, embarrassed that he had been so forward. He had always been prone to acting irrationally near the full moon and he was sure the alcohol had loosened his inhibitions. "I'm sorry, I'll go."

Taking hold of his wrist, she replied, "No, wait, I don't want you to go. It's complicated."

"It's because I'm a werewolf, isn't it?" he asked sadly.

She touched him reassuringly. "No. It doesn't have anything to do with that. I've been hurt in the past from moving too quickly. When will you be able to get together again?" Hurt was almost an understatement. One of the only men she had dated had been after nothing more than sex, but had toyed with her emotions for several weeks before brutally dumping her for a younger woman. Since then, she had been leery of forming a relationship with anyone.

"Possibly Tuesday. We'll see how I feel. I'm always quite exhausted after my transformation."

"I have guard duty Tuesday night, but if you wanted to patrol Wednesday, or even if you don't we could still get together, you could send me an owl."

"I'll do that." He smiled warmly and followed her toward the entrance to the park. He was surprised when she hooked her arm with his.

On the way back to her house, they started asking each other what their favorite things were. It was a fun way to learn about each other. He had not been surprised that she had said green was her favorite color. While he didn't know exactly where he was going, he had the distinct impression that she was not taking the most direct route back to her house, not that he minded.

In Remus' opinion, they still reached her door much too soon.

"I've had a lovely time, Remus," she said as they stood on her doorstep.

"So did I. I'll let you know about Wednesday," he said softly as he smiled at her.

She found his boyish grin infectious. "There's something I want to tell you. I've made it a point not to date my fellow Aurors because of the nature of our work," she said nervously.

"I'm not an Auror." He leaned closer to her.

Instinctively, she leaned back against the door. "I know. But what we are doing is no less dangerous. I... I'm afraid of getting attached to you, but I think it may have happened already." He was so very close; she could feel his breath hot on her cheek.

"Is that so bad?" he asked softly as he tilted her chin up so he could look into her eyes.

"It could be. I wouldn't want to put my feelings for another ahead of the mission." This was all so irresponsible. She never should have agreed to dinner, but he had been so warm and compassionate. He was everything that she had wanted in a man, but had never found.

"Did you not want to get together?" He couldn't help but sound disappointed.

She hugged him. "No, I do. You pulled me out of my shell, and now I don't want to go back." She pulled away. "Just, don't tell Kingsley. He's been after me for years, and I keep turning him down because he's an Auror."

He laughed softly. "I won't tell him, but he'll probably figure it out on his own."

She sighed, "I know. I'll see you in a few days?"

"Yes." He leaned forward for a kiss and was not refused.

She returned his kiss eagerly, running her fingers through his hair, and momentarily thought about inviting him inside, but instead reluctantly pulled away. "Send me an owl." She quietly slipped inside and leaned against the door, wondering if she had gone mad. He was completely wrong for her. He was a werewolf, he was in the Order, and he was broke. But even through all his misery, when he could have fallen into self-pity, he hadn't. He was not what those of her class generally were: pompous, overbearing and possessing an over-inflated sense of self-worth. He was caring, compassionate and a good listener. The more she thought about it, the more agitated she felt. This was exactly what she didn't need at this point in her life. Getting involved with him was probably worse than getting involved with an Auror.

She would try to maintain her distance. It had hurt too much when she found out what Edgar was and she did not care to feel that way again. Unfortunately, her body did not agree with her mind. She cursed her hormones and stomped upstairs for a cold shower.

When Remus finally crawled out of bed, he found Sirius in the kitchen. "How did last night go?" Sirius asked.

"Not bad, all things considered. You will be pleased to know that she did not reject me and was quite passionate about kissing me." He poured himself a cup of tea and joined Sirius at the table.

"That's it? She just kissed you?" After all Remus' boasting last night he had expected something more than that.

"Unlike you, I don't jump into bed on the first date," Remus admonished, though if she had asked him inside, that's what would have happened.

Sirius sneered lasciviously, "Oh, those were never dates, mate, that was precisely what I wanted. You know what times were like. That was not the time to form a long-term relationship. And times now are just like that. What I wouldn't give to be with a woman," he said wistfully. "Once this whole mess is over and Albus clears my name, that's on the top of my list of things to do."

"Why does that not surprise me?" Remus replied sarcastically.

"Just because you voluntarily chose a monastic lifestyle doesn't mean the rest of us should."

"You know I didn't choose this, but I've never been as smooth with the ladies as you. Once they find out what I am, they run," he reminded Sirius.

"I keep telling you, that's information they don't need," Sirius offered. He had told Remus many times that he should stop telling them the whole truth and enjoy the moment, but Remus had steadfastly believed that sort of deception was wrong.

Remus rolled his eyes. "Oh yes, it's easy to go missing around full moon and not explain it. I'd like to see you try that. My celibacy is no less forced than yours."

"But not for much longer, right?" Sirius asked eagerly. "And when it is, you will tell me about it, won't you?" He still couldn't believe that Remus and Wendy were getting close to each other, but he was still glad to see his friend on the verge of female companionship.

"Sirius! I most certainly will not. Perhaps if she wasn't also a member of the Order, but because she is, and you know her, I won't." Sirius had always been quick to tell the others about his conquests, even after Remus has expressed a complete lack of interest.

"Spoilsport," he replied. "Everything's all set upstairs. I'll check on you tomorrow morning."

"Thanks." Remus was glad to have a good friend like Sirius. "I'll enjoy my last few hours of freedom."

Tuesday, once he had resumed his human form, he was too weak to move. He was grateful Sirius was there to take care of him. His good friend brought him something to eat.

"You look worse than normal. Should I talk to Snape about getting lax with your potion again?" No matter what Remus said, Sirius would never trust Severus. It didn't matter the Potions Master had been brewing the potion for more than a year.

"No, it's all right. I'll be fine. I just need some rest. Tomorrow morning, I'll go out for supplies." He quickly ate the meal Sirius had brought for him.

"Do you want seconds?"

Remus shook his head. "No thanks. I'll just rest." He let Sirius help him to his more comfortable bedroom where he collapsed on the bed. It was not long before he was once again asleep.

The following morning, he felt a little better, though he was still famished. The two of them shared a modest breakfast. While he didn't exactly feel up to going out, he knew they needed supplies. When he finished eating, he stood and used his cane for support. "I'll be back in a few hours."

"You're not going to Apparate, are you?" Sirius asked, very much concerned that his friend might splinch himself.

"No. I'll take the Underground. It's a pity the Floo network is being watched." He knew better than Apparating after the transformation.

Once he arrived in Diagon Alley, the first thing he did was go to the post office to send an owl to Wendy. He was thankful that she lived in London so he could get an inexpensive local owl. After he sent the owl letting her know he would be by that afternoon, he went shopping. Now that it was just he and Sirius for the most part, it was much easier to shop. Of course, the other members of the Order were kind enough to bring groceries when they came over. Thankfully, he had become quite adept at stretching funds. He and Sirius both preferred to accept as little as necessary from the others. While Sirius still had some money left from his Uncle Alphard, they had no idea how long they would have to make it last.

He and Sirius prepared a light lunch and, between spending some time in the fresh air and a decent meal, he felt a little better, at least until he glanced at his reflection in the mirror. He looked as old and tired as he felt. "Better she know what she's getting into from the beginning," he mused aloud.

It was a long walk from the nearest Underground station to her place in Chelsea and his warming charm was wearing off by the time he arrived; there was an unseasonable chill in the air today. He dared not renew it in a Muggle neighborhood. This was one of the unfortunate side effects of his transformations; his magic was also much weaker in the few days following the full moon.

When he rang the bell, Cappa let him in and led him to the drawing room. He wasn't waiting too long before Wendy came downstairs. With difficulty, he rose, took her hands in his and kissed her on the cheek.

"Good to see you. My goodness, you're frozen." She pulled out her wand and applied a warming charm.

He could see the pained expression on her face as she looked at his wan and haggard appearance. "It's quite a long walk from the Underground," he said quietly.

She could tell that he was weak and sat on the sofa. "I wish you'd said something. I would have sent you a Portkey." One of the advantages of being an Auror was a certain

amount of latitude granted by the Portkey Authority.

"The fresh air is good for me. So, now that you've seen me at my worst, what do you think?" he tried to sound jovial.

"If this is your worst, it's not that bad. I've definitely looked worse, many times after an Auror night on the town." She tried to make him feel less self-conscious.

He couldn't imagine her going out and getting that drunk. "I find that hard to believe."

"Ask Kingsley next time you see him. Can I get you something? Tea or perhaps a snack?"

"That would be wonderful." He hadn't realized how exhausting walking could be.

All too soon for Remus' liking, the day was winding down. They had played cards for several hours and just talked. Her company had been very pleasant and he thought he could get used to eating meals like this. "Do you eat like this every night?"

She shrugged. "I don't give Cappa a lot of input, so it depends from night to night." She could see the strange look on his face. "What is it?"

"Nothing," he replied restlessly.

"Remus, please, I'm not blind. Something is bothering you."

"It's really petty and I don't want to talk about it." He looked away from her and stared at the fire.

"It's money, isn't it?" she asked softly.

He put it fork down. "If you must know, yes it is. I had plenty of time to think about it over the last few days. I have absolutely nothing to offer you." He tried not to sound disappointed and angry, but he wasn't sure he succeeded.

She reached across and took his hand in hers. "Remus, you offer more than anyone else I have dated. You are true to yourself. Everyone else I grew up around presents a false public persona. You don't do that."

"You know I'm not a pureblood." He was trying to get everything out in the open. If she was going to shun him, he wanted to get it over with.

"Given that fact that you are a werewolf, I think that is hardly important. Besides, they've already disowned me, what more can they do? I've worked with many halfbloods and Muggle-borns and don't hold it against them. Are you trying to drive me away?"

"Heavens, no. I...just want you to know who I am." Truthfully, a part of him was trying to drive her away to avoid any future pain.

"I thought we covered that the other night. I enjoy your company. Tell me, how much experience do you have with women?"

"Not much, I'm afraid," he replied nervously. "Let's just say that being a werewolf is a turnoff for most women."

"Let's just say that trying to drive a woman off is also a turnoff. Just be yourself, that's who I care about." She stood up and led him back to the drawing room. "Are you sure you're all right?" she asked as she watched him lean heavily on his cane.

He carefully lowered himself onto the sofa and set his cane to the side. "In a couple of days, I'll be back to normal. I think the walk here took more out of me than I anticipated." He would say that he was in more pain than normal, but it was nothing that he couldn't tolerate.

"Is there anything I can do?" She was truly concerned about his wellbeing.

He shook his head. "No, unfortunately not."

She scooted next to him on the sofa and leaned against him. "Well, I think it would be best if you stayed here tonight. I don't want you walking in the cold and I don't think you could Apparate."

He wrapped his arm around her. "Thank you. I'd also like to apologize for my behavior the other night."

"What about it?"

"I'm afraid I behaved rather poorly. I'm not normally that forward, but I tend to take on a few wolfish qualities near the full moon and I was a bit drunk, too," he said apologetically.

"I figured as much. I wouldn't worry about it, though. I'll admit I didn't find it unpleasant. I rather enjoyed it, actually," she replied coyly. *So much so, I almost invited you inside.*

He kissed the top of her head. "Really? I hadn't noticed," he said with mock innocence.

"Oh, quit it," she replied playfully. She shifted so she could give him a passionate kiss. "Have you noticed now?"

"Most definitely. You do realize you have me at a bit of a disadvantage tonight?" *If I weren't so tired you would be in for a memorable evening* he thought.

She gave him a sly little grin, keeping her arms wrapped around his neck. "I know. That's why I figured it's safe for you to spend the night."

He feigned a hurt tone of voice, "You don't trust me? Surely an Auror can defend herself from a single werewolf."

"No, I don't trust myself. You know I was attracted to you when I first saw you?" she asked, somewhat shocked that she was admitting her feelings.

"I thought as much, but then Severus had to go and ruin it." He did nothing to hide the disappointment in his voice.

She rubbed her hand along his chest. "I don't think he ruined it. I probably would have been more upset if I'd found out later. I got it all out of my system early. I can't wait to see the look on his face when he finds out I'm not mad at you anymore."

He smiled at her. "That's a little cruel, don't you think?"

"Childish and completely Slytherin, yes, but not cruel. Actually, I think Black will take it worse."

"He has been rather childish about it and he continues to try to talk me out of it, but I haven't listened to him." He thought back to Sirius' comment of the other night. "In fact, he may be growing to accept it." He relished the feel of her snuggled next to him.

"That's good." She could tell he was exhausted. "I think it's time to call it a night. Can I help you upstairs?"

"As embarrassing as it is, I would appreciate it." He was panting quite heavily as they reached the top of the stairs. "Give me a moment," he said as he leaned against the wall.

Once he caught his breath, she continued to help him down to the guest suite. "You really shouldn't have come," she admonished gently.

"Will you forgive me for wanting to see you?" He collapsed on the bed and tried to remove his jacket.

He had a wonderful boyish smile that made it difficult for her to remain upset. "It's an awful risk. What if you had collapsed before you made it here?" She helped him with the jacket and then took off his boots while he undid his tie.

"I guess I hadn't thought about that." He watched her walk over to the wardrobe and pull a nightshirt off the shelf.

"Here. This will be more comfortable." She watched him give her an inquisitive glance. "I had Cappa pull some of Edgar's old clothes out, I was going to offer them to you. They aren't doing me any good." She turned to leave so he could change.

"Why did you keep them all these years?" he asked as he began unbuttoning his shirt.

She sighed. "I don't know. Space was never an issue. I just never got around to it. Gili, my house-elf before Cappa, had everything packed up by the time I moved back here. She wouldn't have gotten rid of them unless I specifically asked because she's a Westin house-elf. Cappa was born after Edgar died and I'm the only master she's known."

Since she still had her back turned to him, he decided to finish dressing for bed. "And you don't find it the least bit...odd that you are dressing me in his old clothes?"

There were a few moments of silence as she considered his question. "I hadn't until just now. I don't know. I just thought that perhaps they could do some good after all these years of sitting in the attic. I don't want you to feel uncomfortable, but I've seen how ashamed you are of your appearance. I don't judge a book by its cover, but I thought you might feel more comfortable around me if you were dressed a little better." She could hear him limping toward her by the tap of his cane on the floor. She turned to face him and barely managed to catch him before he collapsed. Even then, he was heavier than her and they almost ended up on the floor anyway. "You really ought to be in bed." She led him back to the bed.

He brushed her cheek and said sadly, "I know you don't judge me by what I wear, but it doesn't change the fact I feel shabby around you. Sirius was actually the one that brought the clothes to my attention."

She sat next to him on the edge of the bed and took hold of his hand. "There's something you should know about my marriage to Edgar. Like most pureblood marriages, it was more political and financial than emotional. Oh, he never treated me badly or anything, but it was a business arrangement. Not much more than that. So we were never in love with each other. I guess that's why I didn't feel it was odd to give you some of his old clothes. Black should understand that having grown up in the house he did. It was abundantly clear that his parents didn't love each other." Unable to meet his eyes, she had taken to examining his hand and the myriad of small scars.

"And the aristocrats have all embraced this?" he asked incredulously.

She nodded slowly. "We have for ages. Marriages are political contracts. If you want emotional satisfaction, you tend to take someone on the side. I have no doubt Edgar had a mistress. And honestly, it didn't bother me all that much. It's just the way of our society. My mother explained it to me when I came of age. All that was stressed was that I needed to produce an heir or two. Once that was satisfied, I had fulfilled my part of the contract, other than appearing the doting wife in public.

She finally looked up into his eyes. "Now you know why I've had no particular desire to go back to that lifestyle. I've secretly been jealous of those that do marry for love, like Molly and Arthur and some of my coworkers. And now I'm old enough that my desirability as a wife is pretty much gone, so there's not much incentive for me to get back into the aristocratic circle. Now I'm just looking for someone to love me that I can love in return." She leaned forward and kissed him gently. "I'll see you in the morning. I let Cappa know we'll have breakfast en suite."

"You know, I've always envied those with money, but perhaps I was wrong." Even though Sirius was his closest friend, he had never really contemplated the negative aspect of coming from a privileged family.

"You were. The life of the middle class is so much simpler. Good night, Remus." She kissed him one last time before pulling away.

"Good night." She had given him a lot to think about. Should he dare think that she had hinted that she loved him? He would. As he drifted off to sleep, his mind was filled with pleasant thoughts.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 of 27

Voldemort is back and the Order of the Phoenix is reforming. They need new members and Kingsley recruits one of his fellow Aurors - even though she is a Slytherin. Assigned to work with Remus Lupin, things get very tense. Set during 'Order of the Phoenix'.

He woke the following morning to the smell of breakfast permeating his senses. He looked around the room and saw he was alone. Moving to the bath, he quickly cleaned himself up and threw on a dressing gown. When he returned to the bedroom, he found Wendy seated at the small table, already dressed. "Good morning," she said cheerfully. "Are you feeling any better?"

"Some, and I believe that breakfast will help a great deal." While he still needed his cane, he was not leaning on it as much this morning. "Thank you," he said as she handed him a cup of tea.

"I'm afraid I have to leave soon. I received an owl from the Ministry this morning, and it seems they have one of those things that only I can take care of," she said regretfully.

"Only you?" he questioned.

She explained pompously, "As the most unsavory of Aurors, I get a lot of interesting tasking. There are some things you Gryffindors just don't want to do. You need people like me." She smiled slyly.

He chuckled softly at how silly she was acting. "When will you be back?"

"I'm not sure. I never know how long these things will take. It might be best if you went home rather than wait here," she replied simply.

He tried to hide his disappointment and forced a weak smile. *Could this possibly be a ploy to get rid of me?* he wondered. "I suppose you're right. Once I have my strength up to Apparate, I'll head home. There's still some stuff left to clean up that they didn't get to this summer." Suddenly, he had an idea. "When do you think you might come by to give the library a once over?" he asked optimistically. He knew he wasn't supposed to remind her in order to win the bet, but he didn't care.

She wasn't exactly looking forward to spending time around Black. "I was wondering when someone would bring that up again. If it's not too late when I finish up, I'll stop by this afternoon. I'm not sure exactly when I'll find time after today. I'm starting my duty cycle again." She finished her tea and gave him a brief open-mouthed kiss. "Feel free to take any of the clothes you want."

It was mid-morning when Remus returned to Grimmauld Place. He dropped the valise in the entry and decided to see if Sirius was in the kitchen before heading upstairs. The kitchen was deserted. Once he made it to the third floor landing, he called out, "Sirius?"

"Up here," came a muffled voice.

Remus deposited the bag in his room before heading up to the fourth floor where he met Sirius outside Buckbeak's room.

"Glad to see you're still alive. I got a little worried when you didn't come back last night. I thought you might have splinched yourself somewhere," said Sirius.

Remus shook his head. "No. I ended up staying at Wendy's. She had the same concerns about my well-being and wouldn't let me leave."

Sirius leered. "So, you spent the night with her."

Remus crossed his arms in disbelief. "Honestly, your mind is always in the gutter. I stayed in her guest room *alone*, if you must know. We're still in the 'get to know you' phase of our relationship."

Sirius shook his head. "I still can't get over someone like you with an aristocrat like her." Actually, it was more like an aristocrat like her choosing someone like Remus. She had been as fervent in pureblood beliefs as the rest of his family.

"We talked about it. She's sick of the aristocratic ways and likes my commoner charms. Besides, I'm a friend with you, aren't I?" He leaned confidently against the wall with a self-satisfied smirk on his face.

"Are you sure you didn't sleep with her?" Sirius asked suspiciously after seeing that grin.

"That, Sirius, is my business." He started back downstairs. Let Sirius think what he wanted.

"Remus, wait. You're lucky if she's everything you say she is. I'll admit, I'm jealous. You've found something special and I'm stuck here," he said bitterly. "I just have a hard time getting past how she used to be. Maybe the fact that she's accepted you means that she really has changed."

"As I have been trying to tell you," Remus replied with an air of satisfaction.

Shortly before dinner, there was a knock at the door. Remus had his sleeves rolled up, cooking dinner. "Would you mind?"

Sirius stomped upstairs and cracked the door, surprised to see Wendy standing out in the rain. Of course, she had cast a charm so she wasn't wet, but he still enjoyed making her wait. "Well, well, well, look who's here? Come to mingle with the riff raff?" he asked in a condescending tone of voice as he blocked the door.

"Oh grow up and open the damn door before I decided to wake up dear old mum," she replied gruffly. This was why she had not wanted to come here.

"You wouldn't dare?" He thought she probably would.

"If you don't open the door I will." She brandished her wand.

Now there was no doubt she would, and he opened the door. "He's down in the kitchen. Your timing is impeccable; you're just in time to join us for dinner." Sirius gave her a wry grin, knowing their idea of dinner would not match hers.

That was not a prospect she was enjoying; she had hoped she had arrived late enough to avoid dinner. Before heading down the stairs, she stopped him and whispered menacingly, "Look, there's no love lost between us. You won't forgive the things I did as a kid and I'm not asking you to. All I'm asking is that we put our differences aside for one night. I hate arguing during a meal. And just so you know, I'm perfectly happy ignoring you, but if you decide to snipe at me, I'm not going to let it go. I can't let it go. So just bloody well shut up and behave for one fucking night!"

"What language from a lady," he admonished. He crossed his arms and asked snidely, "So, do you present Remus with a completely different persona? Does he know who you really are?"

"He has seen my darker side, though not as often as you do. Dammit, Black, I like him, okay? Just get over it." She headed down to the kitchen. She hated the fact that Sirius seemed to bring out the worst in her. When she entered the kitchen, she said, "Smells...interesting."

Remus laughed softly. "Well, we don't quite have the resources available that you do. I assure you, it is quite edible."

"I'm sure it is," she replied politely. "I came over to check out the library, but I suppose I can do that after we eat." From the look and smell of dinner, she would have preferred eating at home, but one thing she had learned as a child was how to be polite when faced with an unpleasant task.

They actually managed to have an almost pleasant dinner. It was simple, but didn't taste as bad as it had smelled. What made the dinner pleasant was that Sirius remained quiet. Remus of course, found the silence uncomfortable, but it was preferred to the arguments that normally occurred between Wendy and Sirius.

"That wasn't bad, Remus. Thank you," she said as she finished eating.

"I only wish I could have done better." Once again, he was embarrassed by his simple means.

"It was good enough." She stood and glanced between the two of them. "I think I'm ready for the library. I will ask that no one disturb me while I disarm the room. It will take me about twenty minutes. I'll let you know when it's safe."

"She's going to get herself killed," said Sirius soberly after she left the room.

"Do you really believe that?" asked Remus. He had gathered the library was dangerous, but he had never thought she might be placing herself in mortal danger. After all, she had indicated that she had been in there before.

"No. I'm not that lucky. The fact she knew how to get in the dining room leads me to believe that she also knows how to get into the library. I don't even want to know what

we'll find in there." He remembered hearing the girls whisper about the library from time to time and none of it had been pleasant. Of course, as soon as they noticed his presence, they had always changed subjects.

It only took Wendy fifteen minutes to disarm the room. The charms were the same ones that had been there all those years ago. The five additional minutes were so she could save a few things from the room. She had seen and heard of the previous house cleaning efforts and knew that many valuable Dark Artifacts had been destroyed. She would spare the more valuable ones here from that same fate.

Out of her pocket, she pulled a miniaturized traveling case and enlarged it. With a wave of her wand, nearly two-dozen books flew into the case, many of them ones Severus had requested. De-activating the protective charms, she quickly removed some of the Dark Artifacts from the shelves and placed them in the case as well. She knew her time was running out. A quick scan of the room showed she had what she wanted. She magically sealed and shrank the case and about the same time there was a knock on the door. "Enter," she called out.

Remus cautiously opened the door. "Is it safe?"

"It is. I know that Albus is against Dark Magic, but it would be a shame to destroy all these books. They might provide some insight for the upcoming war." Most of the books on Dark Magic remaining were duplicates of ones in her library. She knew that saving them all would be noticed.

"We'll catalogue them and send the list to Albus. Are any of these artifacts overly dangerous?" Remus looked around the room and saw many gruesome objects on display. If he were so inclined, he was sure he could sell them for a handsome sum in Knockturn Alley.

Sirius was looking around the room. He had never been in here before. "I wouldn't be surprised. That was some fun stuff we had to deal with in the drawing room. I imagine some of the stuff in here has to be worse than what we found there," he replied dryly.

"Not overly so, as long as you are careful," she replied.

"Then why was the room sealed?" Sirius asked suspiciously.

"Probably for the books and the records and a few of the more dangerous items. Edgar used to keep me locked out of the library, or so he thought." She sneered at Black. "He had all sorts of interesting records. I'm sure if you go through the desk, you will find all kinds of information on the Dark Lord's first rise."

Sirius circled around her. "Dark Lord, huh? Sure you aren't on his side?" he asked suspiciously.

She replied acerbically, "Oh grow up. I was in Slytherin and surrounded by Death Eaters. Everyone in my social circle called him that. Less cumbersome than You-Know-Who, don't you think?"

"Why not simply call him Voldemort?" chided Sirius.

She shrugged. "To each his own. Look, I've done you a favor. I can stay and help, but not if you're going to treat me like that. My time is valuable." She truly hoped that she could just leave. The prospect of spending the evening in the same room as Black was an unpleasant one.

"And how do I know you haven't taken anything out of the room?" he asked suspiciously.

"With the level of suspicion you show, you should have been in Slytherin," she replied evasively, knowing this comment would sidetrack him from his original inquiry.

"You take that back!" he demanded as he moved closer to loom over her, his hand in his pocket, clenched around his wand.

"ENOUGH!" shouted Remus. He noticed them both staring at him in amazement. "I am sick and tired of the two of you always at each other's throats. I trust both of you and you are both my friends. Sirius, you have been my friend for more than twenty years. Wendy, I am very fond of you. All I ask is for the two of you to both grow up and forget petty childhood grudges. Sirius, Wendy is not going to jinx you so quit antagonizing her. Wendy, don't give him the satisfaction of giving in to him. Do you think you can do that? For one evening, at least? We are going to be working with each other for some time, after all."

Wendy and Sirius both glared at each other. Wendy sneered, "I have already explained to Black that I am more than happy to ignore him, but I will not back down if he goads me."

Sirius started to protest when Remus interrupted him, "Sirius, enough. I don't want to hear any more arguments."

Sirius scowled at the smug look she gave him once Remus apparently chose her side. He watched her move next to Remus and lean against him, wrapping her arm around his waist as they began perusing the bookshelves. His scowl deepened as he watched Remus place his arm around Wendy's shoulder. He had never anticipated Remus deserting him like this.

As it neared midnight, Wendy announced, "I must be going. I have to go to work tomorrow. I think we've cleared the dangerous stuff out of the room, though I would like to seal it back up to keep Kreacher out."

"And would you share those wards with us?" Sirius asked sharply.

"It's advanced magic, Dark Magic, that takes some time to perfect. It took us nearly two years to work out how to get in here. I don't think either of you are capable of performing it correctly."

Sirius looked at the two of them and remembered that Remus had admonished him about goading her. "I'm going to bed," he said gruffly and stormed out of the room.

Wendy chuckled softly. "He's always been partial to drama."

"That he has. Do you really have to go?" he asked, his voice tinged with disappointment.

She placed a book back on the shelf after determining it wasn't overly dangerous. "I do. I wish he had left earlier. I couldn't stand his scowl whenever I got close to you." Actually, she had rather enjoyed finding a new way to torment Sirius, especially one so pleasant.

"He's jealous, you know," Remus stated as he pulled her close.

"I know. I'll try to get together with you this week, but I can't make any promises. I'm not home every night." She stretched up to kiss him. When she pulled away, she teased, "You're entirely too tall."

He brushed her hair and smiled playfully. "And you're entirely too short."

"Hey, now. I'm not short. I'm even taller than average." She pushed him onto the couch and straddled him. "That's better. Now I can kiss you without getting neck strain." She leaned forward and kissed him passionately.

He returned her kiss, probing her mouth deeply with his tongue. This was something he had wanted to do all evening, especially with the way she had been brushing against him. Unable to ignore his desires any longer, he pushed her onto her back and draped himself over her. He didn't want to let her leave.

"Remus, I really ought to go," she said reluctantly.

"What if I don't want you to?" He pressed against her, making his desires known.

"Not here. Not with him here," she replied as she half-heartedly tried to push him away. She really didn't mind him between her legs.

He nibbled at her neck. "We could go back to your place."

"Mmm. Tempting," she replied. Knowing what was in store for her at the Ministry, she really ought to go home and get some sleep. It was really quite late.

"But?" he asked as he continued to lavish attention on her.

"You make it so hard to think straight," she replied. His touch felt wonderful and a part of her didn't want him to stop.

"Then don't," he replied quietly between kisses.

She reveled in the feel of his hands exploring her body. "Remus," she pleaded softly as she rubbed her hands along his back.

"Yes, luv?" he asked, before capturing her mouth in his to delay any argument. "Do you want me to stop?"

"No, but we've only had one date. Isn't this rushing things a bit?" she whispered weakly. This was not the right time for her to become romantically involved with someone in an equally dangerous line of work.

He explained between kisses, "Given all the time we've spent together...I like to consider this...our fifth date. The first...being that night in the diner owned by your friend, Lou...the second...the night I consoled you...the third would be...when I asked you to dinner...and the fourth...this past Wednesday. After all, we did spend most of the day together." He flashed her his smile.

"So you're saying our fifth date was cleaning out this library under Sirius' scowling gaze?" she asked playfully as she ran her fingers through his hair.

"Why not?" He rubbed his hips against her, letting her feel his arousal. "We did spend the evening together and now you don't have to feel like we are rushing."

"I thought the wolf only came out before full moon?" she asked playfully between kisses.

"Perhaps you bring it out in me? Now, should we go to your place?" he asked hopefully and nuzzled against her neck.

It was very hard to think clearly with him nibbling her neck and his hand rubbing her thigh. Besides, it had been a long time since she had felt this way about anyone and she didn't want to fight it. "Okay, but I'll need a couple minutes to secure the room, first."

He kissed her deeply one last time, barely resisting the urge to take her right there. "Hurry," he whispered urgently.

She tried to clear her mind in order to reset the wards. It took her a little longer than it should have, but she did it. A quick pat of her pocket reassured her that everything was safe. As soon as she closed the door, Remus swept her into another kiss and pinned her against the wall, his hand rubbing between her legs.

"Not in the hall," she admonished playfully and led him outside.

With a crack, they left Grimmauld Place and arrived in Chelsea. They left a trail of clothing as they worked their way upstairs and only stumbled once. Many years of pent up frustrations were about to be relieved, on both sides.

When Wendy fell against the bed, she kicked off her knickers, finally free of her clothing. She pulled away just long enough to throw the covers clear of the bed. She pulled Remus onto the bed and ran her hands through the hair on his chest. Feeling his erection pressed against her stomach, she whispered, "Take me."

This was one order he was not going to argue. He reached down and found she was quite ready for him. Slipping his fingers into her, he searched for the nub that he heard about, hoping his inexperience would not be too noticeable. Once he heard her soft moans, he knew that he had found what he was looking for.

After teasing her for a short while, he positioned himself to do as she had asked. He moaned as he penetrated her. She was warm, slick, and tight and it felt wonderful. He could feel her wrap her legs around him and he realized how much he had missed this. As he thrust into her, he felt like a teenage boy having his first sexual encounter, and he thought it might be as brief.

His tension was building and he did not have the presence of mind to resist his urges. Thrusting harder and deeper, he knew release was near. Pulling himself tight against her, he was pleased to feel her using her legs to pull him closer. He was panting and could feel a sheen of sweat forming on his skin. As he reached climax, he couldn't hold back the cry of relief.

He collapsed on top of her after he was spent, unable to support his weight any longer. After kissing her several times, he rolled next to her. He was pleased when she snuggled against him.

"We shouldn't have done that," she said.

"Oh? Did you not enjoy it?" he asked nervously. He knew that he had finished rather quickly and his inexperience must have been painfully obvious, but she had not seemed disappointed at the time.

She quickly reassured, "Oh, no, I enjoyed it immensely. It's just that being intimate can change a working relationship." She ran her hand across his chest, surprised that she really did have a man in her bed.

"Change can be a good thing, you know." He still feared that he had been too forward.

"I suppose it can. Why did you have to be so damned sexy?" she asked as she ran her hand through the hair on his chest.

He chuckled softly. "Me? Sexy? That's not a word I think I've ever heard used to describe me." He had to admit the compliment pleased him. The moon broke through the clouds and illuminated her bedroom. He could see several scars on her exposed skin. He traced one of them on her back. "Where did you get these?"

"Mostly magical creatures, though a few are human inflicted," she replied uncomfortably, not really desiring to discuss her past injuries, or the fact that some were werewolf inflicted.

"It's a shame such beauty has to be marred with such marks." He could feel one particularly nasty gash on her lower back and frowned.

"Flatterer. Beauty is not a word I associate with me."

"Well, I beg to differ. When I saw you that first night, dressed like..." He was trying to choose a word to complete the thought.

"A whore? Why is that so hard for you to say? It's just an undercover persona." She found it amusing how uncomfortable that made him. Undercover assignments had always been her favorite part about being an Auror. You could be anyone you wanted. She had about a dozen different characters she played.

"Because you aren't a whore. Anyway, seeing you in that dress, it aroused desires in me that were long dormant. And then, with your little hard to get routine..."

She interrupted, "That was no routine. I truly despised you. After making persecuting werewolves a bit of a hobby, it's hard to turn away from that. I'm really glad you persisted, though. You're just too damn charming to hate." She nuzzled against him and kissed his chest.

"I'm very glad to hear that." This was such a wonderful feeling, one that he had yearned for, but was sure he would never experience. After their first couple of days together, he hadn't anticipated this ever happening. He could hear her breathing slowing into the steady rhythm of sleep and he carefully reached down to pull the blankets up over them. For now, he would enjoy sleeping with her in his arms.

Remus woke when he felt Wendy stirring. During the course of the night, she had nuzzled against his chest and draped her leg over his body. "Good morning, beautiful," he said softly.

She was startled to find someone in bed with her. "Remus?"

Gently, he brushed her hair out of her face. "You didn't think I would leave, did you?"

She smiled back at him. Actually, she had expected him to be gone. Most of the lovers she had taken over the years did not spend the night. "I don't know. I guess I hadn't thought too much about it. What time is it?" From where she was, she couldn't see the clock.

"Just after seven. Plenty of time," he replied as he kissed the top of her head. "Assuming you weren't completely disappointed last night."

She reassured, "I most definitely wasn't disappointed." Running her hand down his stomach, she found his engorged manhood. She had never understood the morning erection, but was more than willing to take advantage of the situation. With a light touch, she rubbed him before trailing a line of kisses down his chest and stomach. Pushing the blankets away, she teased his tip with her tongue before taking him fully into her mouth.

He gasped at this new sensation. Oh, he had heard about getting a blowjob numerous times from Sirius. Sirius had enjoyed enumerating the places on campus where he had received them. Remus tightened his grip on the sheets as she gently ran her teeth along his shaft. Once she pulled away, she gently blew on the moist tip, causing to him shudder at the sensation.

Once again she teased his tip with her tongue, before taking him back into her mouth. He moaned once she wrapped her hand around him and began pumping.

His body reacted involuntarily to this new stimulus and before he knew it, he was on the verge of orgasm. "Wendy," he said weakly, trying to get her attention, but she only seemed to make her stimulation more intense. "Wendy!" he proclaimed more urgently and was surprised to hear his voice crack. He knew he couldn't hold it anymore and felt the heady rush of release.

When she was sure he was finished she looked up and licked her lips. "How was that?"

Grabbing her arm, he pulled her where he could kiss her. He was slightly surprised by the salty taste. "It was wonderful, but I fear you've left me spent," he replied.

She snuggled against him. "We still have time for you to recover," she replied slyly. "After all, I don't have to be at work until nine."

Much to Sirius' dismay, Remus was spending more and more time away from Grimmauld Place. Remus would come over during the day when he wasn't otherwise occupied with Order business, but he generally left in the evenings. Sirius was torn. He couldn't remember Remus being this happy, but he was afraid that Wendy was just stringing his friend along, using him for entertainment. He had long ago stopped trying to convince Remus that Wendy was not to be trusted. Remus had made it quite clear that he trusted her implicitly.

Sirius looked up when he heard Kreacher muttering quite loudly about what a disappointment he had turned out to be. They should have gotten rid of the elf first thing upon moving into the house. Kreacher was an impediment to whatever they were doing and was thoroughly useless as a house-elf. He didn't clean anything or do any cooking. All he did was root around the house trying to save possessions that members of the Order were trying to get rid of. Unfortunately, Albus had dictated that Kreacher had learnt too much to be set free and was vehemently against doing away with an innocent, though seemingly insane, house-elf.

Sirius' thoughts of figuring out a way for Kreacher to have an accident were disturbed when he heard the front door open. He looked up and saw Remus coming down the stairs. "So, you've decided to grace me with your presence?" he asked sarcastically. "Or did you just come for your potion?"

"Sirius, I'm sorry. It's just been really busy. I try to spend as much time here as I can, but..."

"You've got a girlfriend now. I've heard it before," he replied glumly. Gesturing behind over his shoulder with his thumb, he said, "Your potion's on the counter."

Remus quickly downed the vile concoction, took a seat at the table and poured himself some tea to wash the taste out of his mouth. He was trying to decide if Sirius was truly irritated with him or just being Sirius. "It's not that. Order business has kept me quite busy. I'm not ignoring you on purpose. It's just... Sirius, it's a wonderful feeling. These last few weeks... I've never felt this way before," he said excitedly. "She's a wonderful person. I don't know how to explain it."

"Are you in love with her?" Sirius asked incredulously. Remus had certainly made it sound like he was.

Remus considered this question carefully. "I think that I am."

Sirius had expected that answer, but he still couldn't believe it. "Why?"

"Despite all our outward differences, we are very similar inside. We are both outcasts and misunderstood by our peers. I can understand why she is miserable."

"Miserable? Her? You must be joking. She comes from a prominent family, married into another, and is quite wealthy from that marriage, I might add, and has a successful career as an Auror."

He wasn't about to discuss her past with Sirius. The last thing he needed was to give his friend more ammunition to use against her. "It's complex. Let's just say, I understand her like no one else she has met."

"And is she in love with you?" This was the real question. The one Sirius thought he knew the answer to and the one that Remus was ignoring.

"That, I don't know," he replied sadly.

"You haven't told her, have you?" Sirius asked snidely.

Remus stared into his teacup. "No. I'm afraid to tell her. What if she doesn't return the feeling? I'm sure that would ruin everything." He couldn't face the rejection.

"You should tell her now and save yourself the heartache in the future," offered Sirius. This might be what it would take to end the affair. He refused to call it a relationship.

Remus shook his head. "It's too soon; it hasn't been a month yet. If she doesn't love me now, she may grow to love me. I want to give her time. She's admitted she really hasn't had any long-term relationships and I don't want to rush things."

"What would you be rushing? You're already sleeping with her. This way you could find out if she's just using you for sex."

"I prefer to remain ignorant for the time being." He sipped at his tea. "I'll choose a few months of happiness over the possibility of it ending now. You can't tell me you wouldn't do the same."

Sirius was silent for several seconds before saying, "You're right. I would do the same. And I guess this way you are keeping a close eye on her and would know if she does anything suspicious."

Remus checked his watch. "Well, I had best be getting upstairs. The moon will be up soon."

"Nice to see I'm good for something," replied Sirius sarcastically.

Remus sighed. Sirius had been doing this for the last couple of weeks, ever since he had more or less taken up permanent residence with Wendy. A part of him felt bad for not spending as much time with Sirius, but this was the first time he had found a woman willing to accept him for who he was.

Remus stretched, trying to work out the stiffness leftover from transformation. He noticed he was covered with a blanket and wondered how that had happened. He had been too tired and weak in the early hours of the morning to move, let alone cover himself with a blanket. He jumped when he heard, "Good afternoon," come from the far side of the room. He watched as Wendy got up from where she had been sitting against the wall. "Wendy?" Embarrassed of his post transformation appearance he pulled the blanket tight around him, even though she had seen him naked before.

She smiled warmly at him. "I came by to look something up in the library and decided to check on you first. I think Sirius was hoping I had arrived sooner and would find you in your wolf form."

He assumed this was a half-truth since he knew there were few books in the Black library that she did not have in her more extensive collection. "He knows the potion renders me harmless."

"Well, since he doesn't really trust Severus, I think he was hoping you might still be dangerous. How are you feeling?" she asked as she set a tray of food next to him.

"I'll sum it up in one word and spare you the details, miserable." He tried to remain relatively civilized as he ate the food she had brought with her. As was the case after transformation, he was completely famished and still feeling slightly wolfish. His instincts compelled him to prove the term 'wolf it down' had been a true description, but his rational mind fought this urge, narrowly winning.

She sat next to him on the nest of blankets. "I've been going through some of the books in my library, and I have a couple I'm going to lend to Severus. They might prove useful in his refinement of the Wolfsbane Potion."

Remus choked on his food. "Refinement? What makes you think he's refining it? I'm sure he'd be happy if I dropped dead tomorrow and he didn't have to brew it for me any longer."

She shook her head. "How little you know about Severus. The more difficult the potion, the happier he is brewing it. As for refining it, he has been doing so since you taught at Hogwarts. Didn't you notice any differences in it as time went on?"

He shrugged and took a long draught of water. "I don't know. I thought it was just my body getting used to the whole process."

"It's become one of his new pet projects. Of course, it won't do him any harm if he improves it. I dare say it would go over quite well on the lecture circuit if he could derive a significant improvement over the original."

"Severus? On the lecture circuit?" Remus asked incredulously.

"You really don't follow the Potions community do you? Despite the fact he teaches at Hogwarts, he does publish and speak quite frequently. Even though he doesn't particularly like you, he is devoting quite a bit of time to helping you."

This was the last thing he had expected to hear about Severus. After the incident fifth year, Severus had almost refined his dislike into hatred. "I hadn't realized. Why hasn't he said anything about it?"

She shrugged. "Probably because none of the refinements have been a drastic step and the fact he doesn't want anyone to find out about his research. If the Dark Lord were to find out, he would surely want Severus to refine it in a way that would allow the Dark Lord's minions to control werewolves. I think we can both agree that would be a very bad idea. He would no doubt create an army that could terrorize the populace on the full moon."

Remus shuddered at this thought. It was something he had never contemplated, but it would be a true horror if it became a reality. "And you're helping Severus with this?"

She shook her head and chuckled. "No. While I got my Potions NEWT, I'm no good at theory. I'm more of a 'brew established potions' type of person. I collect books and thought a few of them in my collection might be helpful. I'm heading over to Hogwarts this evening to drop them off."

"You know that Umbridge has been appointed High Inquisitor, don't you?" he asked. He had heard stories about how the atmosphere at Hogwarts had changed since her arrival.

Wendy shrugged, "I'm an Auror. What's she going to do to me?"

"I've heard that she's letting her power go to her head. It might look odd for you to stop by and see Severus," Remus added.

She gave him a confident smile. "That's where I have an advantage over all of you; I went to school with him. While we weren't exactly close friends in school, she has no way of knowing that. As an Auror, it's understandable for me to have a certain amount of interest in potions, as well. Besides, worst case, I Obliviate her. I'm sure no one would object."

He was trying to determine if that was a joke. "You are kidding, aren't you?"

She wasn't, but decided to make him feel better. "Of course I am. I'm not going to get myself in trouble with the Minister's pet at Hogwarts. Of all the Aurors out there, I am probably the one they would least suspect of supporting Albus. I'll be fine." She noticed he had finished the food. "I'll go down and draw a bath for you." Returning to the where she had been waiting for him to wake, she retrieved a dressing gown. "I'll be back shortly to help you downstairs."

"Wendy, I," he started as she was leaving the room, but he lost his nerve. When she turned to look at him, he finished with, "I wanted to thank you."

She knelt down and kissed him softly on his lips. "You're quite welcome. Now, wait here for me. I don't want to hear you falling down the stairs." She smiled at him affectionately.

Once she was gone, he threw off the blanket and pulled on the dressing gown. He was upset with himself, but he wasn't sure if it was from almost telling her how he felt or chickening out before he finished his declaration of love. It had been a very pleasant surprise to find her waiting for him when he woke. It was even more surprising that she had been so supportive. Surely this would prove to Sirius that she was not the person he had known in childhood. He also thought it was an expression of love. Not having a lot of experience with relationships, he wasn't sure if this was something the man declared first or did he wait for the woman?

Wendy turned from drawing the bath and saw Sirius standing in the doorway.

"Still alive, I see?" he commented.

"What do you want, Black?" she asked defensively and crossed her arms.

"I want to make sure you don't do anything to harm my best mate." He narrowed his eyes suspiciously as he noticed she had a vial in her hand.

"Are you still on about that? Honestly, if I were going to do something to hurt him, would I do it here where you could strike immediate revenge on me? No, I'm not an idiot. Regardless, I'm not going to do anything to hurt him. I'm here to help."

"Then what's that in your hand?" he asked gruffly. "What did you put in the water?"

She held up the empty vial. "This is a soothing potion to help him recover. I told you I'm not an idiot."

"Yes, nurse your little pet werewolf back to health," he replied sarcastically. "That's all he is to you, isn't he? A plaything. Something for you to use and throw away when you are done or until a better toy comes along."

She wasn't sure if Black was just goading her or trying to find out information. She clenched her jaw to keep from lashing out at him. Once she could trust herself to speak, she replied, "I'm not discussing my personal life with you." Forcing her way past him, she said, "Excuse me, I have more important things to attend to."

"If you hurt him, I'll make sure you pay," he threatened.

Slowly, she turned to face him. "And how, pray tell, are you going to do that? I think I've proven, on more than one occasion, that I'm better than you. And that was before I had a dozen years of practice as an Auror. Besides, you're stuck in this house. I can easily avoid you. And if you do hurt me, you had best hope you kill me because I take revenge *very* seriously." The look in her eyes left no doubt that she was telling the truth. She spun out of the room to fetch Remus.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 of 27

Voldemort is back and the Order of the Phoenix is reforming. They need new members and Kingsley recruits one of his fellow Aurors - even though she is a Slytherin. Assigned to work with Remus Lupin, things get very tense. Set during 'Order of the Phoenix'.

Once Remus had fallen asleep, Wendy had collected the books she needed out of Black's library. He had, of course, been reluctant to let her take them.

"What do you think you are doing?" asked Black shortly.

"Looking for books," she replied sarcastically.

"I can see that. What are you planning to do with my books?" he asked.

She sighed. Why did he always have to be so difficult? "While your library is not as extensive as mine, there are some rather obscure books on potions. I was going to borrow a few to take to Severus."

"So the two of you can work on a better poison? Or perhaps a better truth serum?" he accused.

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. It would be so easy to change him into a Flobberworm and come back later to reverse the transfiguration. "Not that it's any of your business, but Severus is working on the Wolfsbane Potion. There is a possibility one of these books has something helpful in it. While Hogwarts has an excellent library, it does not have every book. Rest assured, Severus respects knowledge and nothing will happen to any of your precious books, though I suspect it's been quite some time since you voluntarily read anything," she replied derisively.

"Severus helping Remus? There's a laugh." Sirius picked up one of the books and began flipping through it. He found that he couldn't read it. "What is this? Greek?"

She pulled the book from his hands. "As a matter of fact, yes. Let me get on with my work and I'll be on my way."

"So I'm just supposed to let you take my property?" Sirius asked with arms crossed.

Wendy knew the quickest way to end this discussion was through the use of magic, but Remus had been asking her to be more tolerant of Sirius. She reached into her pocket and saw him go for his wand. Pulling out a handful of coins, she stacked five galleons on the desk. "For your troubles. The books will be returned." The books were worth considerably more, but that sum should appease Sirius.

It had been a while since Sirius had seen that much money. Now that he knew she wasn't going to hex him, he relaxed slightly. "Fine, take the books," he replied gruffly.

She desperately wanted to throw out a snide comment about how he couldn't have stopped her if he wanted to, but she resisted. Instead, she grabbed one last book off the shelf, placed it into the bag she had brought with her and left.

By the time she finished reliving her latest encounter with Black, she was nearly to the castle. It had been a very long time since she had been here. It was between the last class of the afternoon and dinner. There was a very slim chance she might catch a glimpse of Andorra, but that was not the main reason she was there.

She was almost across the main hall, when she heard, "A-hem-hem," coming from her left. The odds had been slim that her visit would go unnoticed, but she was surprised that she had been discovered so quickly.

Umbridge frowned when the visitor didn't react to her cough. "Excuse me? Can I help you?"

Wendy stopped and slipped into full Auror mode. "No thank you. I can find my way."

"Well, you are not a student and you are not on staff. I was not informed of any visitors this evening. Visitors are required to register, for the safety of the students," she said officiously.

Wendy was amazed that someone so short and unimposing could present such an air of self-importance. "Is this a new requirement? I was not informed by the Ministry." As she had expected, the mention of 'Ministry' elicited a reaction from Umbridge.

Umbridge quickly regained her composure. "It's a new Educational Decree this year. Who are you and what are you doing here?" she demanded.

Wendy pulled out her badge. "Auror Westin, here to see your Potions Master." In this case, brief answers were the best.

Umbridge asked suspiciously, though somewhat more respectfully, "And what do you want with our Potions Master? I know for a fact that the Ministry employs Potions Masters that are at the disposal of the Aurors." She was concerned that an Auror might be investigating one of the professors and thus bring a bad light upon the school. Especially Snape, who she thought was more sympathetic to her than the others. Of the staff, he was the only one that seemed to appreciate the necessity of firm discipline. But then again, since Severus was hired by Dumbledore, that might be more fuel for her to further her ambitions.

Wendy had been expecting this. "Severus is an old schoolmate and this is a matter of intellectual curiosity and not Auror business. Now, if you will excuse me, my time is valuable. She turned and headed towards the dungeons, hoping her answers had been vague enough to convince Umbridge to leave her alone. She also hoped that Severus had done nothing to get on her bad side. Umbridge was even better than Sirius at holding a grudge. When she didn't hear anything else behind her, she assumed she was safe.

Upon arriving in the dungeon, she headed straight towards Severus' office and knocked on the door. When the door opened, she entered.

Severus saw Wendy standing in his doorway and quickly crossed the room to ward the door against eavesdropping. "What are you doing here? Were you seen?" he asked.

She placed the bag on his desk. "I brought you some books you might find useful, and yes, I was seen. I played twenty questions with Umbridge and seem to have passed, at least for now. I don't think she knew what to make of me."

"You told her who you were?" Severus asked incredulously.

"Don't worry. I gave her just enough information that she shouldn't find anything overly suspicious about me coming to see you. I told her we were in school together and that I had something I trusted only you to help me with. That seemed to satisfy her, and any facts she finds will support what I told her."

Severus had started going through the books. "Do you know what these are?" he asked as he dug through the titles.

"I thought you might find them useful in your research on Wolfsbane. A few of them are from Black's collection, but most of them are mine," she replied as she watched him examine the books. When he got to the bottom of the bag, he pulled out a sealed tube. "Be careful with that, it's extremely old and rare. It's from the Egyptians, but written in ancient Greek on papyrus. Wear gloves when you handle it."

"You should copy this," Severus said as he examined the outside of the tube.

"I have, but I thought the original would be more useful to you. I know there are times a copy does not get everything." Many times she had come across a tome that was enchanted so that its deepest secrets were not openly revealed. She hadn't checked the scroll for that sort of enchantment, but it was always a possibility.

He placed it on the desk, separate from the others. "I will return this to you at my earliest opportunity."

"Don't worry about it. I have no need for it." She examined his specimens as he continued to look at the books.

As he paged through the books, he said, "I find it interesting that you would help me with my research on improving the Wolfsbane Potion. I had always thought you believed in the policy of werewolf eradication," he said sarcastically.

She knew he was leading her and had expected this. "Just those who would cause trouble."

"Is there a particular werewolf you are trying to help?" he probed.

"You know my niece is Lycanthropic," she replied evasively.

He replied as though he didn't entirely believe her. "Ah, yes, of course." He set down the book he was flipping through. "You have made some wise selections. I think these will be most useful. Perhaps I can find time to visit and explore your library first hand?" He paused before continuing. "How did Lupin look? I have made some modifications to the Potion."

Before she consciously realized what he had asked, she began answering, "Pale and tired. I can't really compare it to before since this is the first time I've seen him right after transformation. He led me to believe there is still a significant amount of pain." Finally, her brain realized that she had fallen into his trap and told her to stop talking.

Severus let a confident sneer grace his features. "So, you and the werewolf..." While he did not approve of the relationship, he was pleased that he had won this round of verbal sparring. It had always been one of his favorite forms of entertainment.

She cursed herself for falling into his trap. "Oh, shut up. It's bad enough I get it from Black. If the books will help, great, if not, return them to me at your leisure," she replied tersely.

He was disappointed that one who hailed from his House had chosen a Gryffindor. Grudgingly, he had to admit that Lupin was one of the better that House had produced, much better than Potter and Black, not that it was saying much. Given his history with those three, he had a very hard time accepting Lupin as a responsible adult. "I will send owls and keep you apprised of my research. If you would like information on the brewing..." He left his sentence unfinished. He knew this potion was well within her capabilities.

"I'll let you know. Is the ring safe?" she asked in order to change subjects.

"So to speak. If you had any desire to use it in the future, I suggest you take it with you. Umbridge is the sort of person who will continue to make changes, changes that will make it more difficult for you to visit, or for me to leave. Surely you must have somewhere you can keep it safe."

"I'm away from home a lot and I didn't want to keep..."

They both turned to face the door as it opened to reveal Umbridge. "I believe it is proper protocol to knock before entering someone's private office," Severus said snidely. He had not locked the door to reduce any suspicion it would elicit if Umbridge had come by.

With her usual air of superiority, Umbridge replied, "Normally, yes, but I was concerned something unseemly might be happening since you had warded your office." She gave Wendy a suspicious glare that turned to a frown when the Auror gave her a confident grin.

Severus did his best to maintain his calm. "I do not take kindly to invasions of my privacy," he sneered. He thought she would probably take that to mean the ward and not her barging into his office unannounced.

"It isn't proper for professors to have personal visitors. What would the students think?"

The corner of Severus' mouth twitched, as he could smell a new Educational Decree being born. "I daresay the shock would kill them," he replied dryly.

It took all Wendy's training not to laugh at the joke Severus had just made.

Umbridge did not see the humor in his statement. "Yes, well, I think it would be best if Auror Westin were to leave."

Wendy moved closer to Umbridge, taking full advantage of the height difference and the intimidation that being an Auror naturally provided. "I will leave when I have concluded my business." The temptation to just Obliviate Umbridge was almost overwhelming. "It has been quite some time since I have seen my old friend. As for something unseemly happening, I thought Aurors were above reproach. Besides, do you think we are stupid enough to do something behind an unlocked door?" she asked derisively.

Umbridge tried to maintain her sense of presence, but found she had lost her advantage as Severus took up a position on her left side. "Yes, well. You will ensure that you remain here. Professor Snape, you will escort her out of the castle once your business is concluded," she ordered somewhat nervously, fully aware that both of them were more powerful than her magically. Yes, there would definitely need to be a new Decree ensuring the safety of the castle from outside visitors.

He gave a small sneer. "Of course."

After Umbridge left and the room was re-warded, Wendy asked, "That toad is teaching here?" They had already seen a drop in quality of the new recruits, thanks to the utter inconsistency of the Defense Against the Dark Arts curriculum. With Umbridge teaching, it would only get worse.

"I wouldn't exactly call it teaching. If she wasn't so dense, I would suggest that she is working for the Dark Lord trying to undermine Albus, but that would be giving her entirely too much credit. She is accidentally wreaking havoc. Given the fact she has this whole castle under a microscope, I'm not sure how much assistance we will be to the Order. Every time she sees someone exerting independent thought, she writes a new Educational Decree. I suspect she will now write one restricting visitors. As I believe she reads our mail, we will have to be circumspect in our discussion of the Wolfsbane Potion. Neither of us needs to be tied to any of the Gryffindors."

Wendy thought a moment before replying, "Not necessarily. As you know, werewolves need to be registered and my niece's name is on the list. I don't think that Umbridge would connect my interest with Remus, especially since I really have no reason to know him. I know I'm not much help in the research sense, but I can look things up and provide you with information."

"That will be acceptable. Unless you have further business to discuss, it would be best if you departed."

"No, that was about it. I'll let you know about the Potion's effects. Will you be able to get away to deliver it?" She was concerned that with Umbridge's crackdown, Remus wouldn't be able to get his Potion.

He gave her a sly smirk. "I have my ways to come and go undetected, though I must keep my absences brief. I'll get the ring."

She followed him to his quarters and waited in his sitting room while he retrieved the ring from his bedroom. "Thanks for keeping it, though I would much prefer it to be here."

"Are you sure you won't turn it in for destruction?" he asked. He knew how dangerous this ring could be in the wrong hands.

"Not now. There are things about the Department of Mysteries that bother me, and standing guard down there has only accentuated that feeling. I never really liked the Unspeakables; they're even more secretive than Aurors. They have always rubbed me the wrong way, but this is something different." Placing the ring securely in an inside pocket, she turned to leave.

As she opened the door, she thought she caught a glimpse of Umbridge scurrying around the corner. Deciding to take advantage of Umbridge's paranoia, she made great show of adjusting her clothes and smoothing her hair. Even though she had only been in Severus' quarters for a few minutes, she was sure this would set Umbridge's mind into motion. "Thanks again, Severus," she said cheerfully.

He looked at her curiously, not exactly sure what she was doing. "You're quite welcome."

As they climbed out of the dungeon, she leaned close and whispered, "Umbridge was outside your door. I wanted to give her a little show. If I'm going to get myself banned, I'd like to feel I earned it."

"Are you trying to make my life difficult?" he whispered back. The last thing he needed Umbridge suspecting was that he had a relationship with anyone. He was a loner and liked it that way.

She waved away his question. "You live in a constant state of misery. Besides, I'm sure you derive pleasure in annoying her. In that respect, I'm helping you out." She gave him a cheery little grin and said in a normal voice, "I look forward to hearing from you."

As she walked back to the village, she pulled the ring out of her pocket and examined it. It was a heavy gold man's ring. In the place of a crest, was a serpent, not unlike the one on the Slytherin crest. Rumor held that the ring had been Salazar Slytherin's, but that had never been substantiated. Holding it up to the sun, she took one last look at it before putting it back in her pocket. She hated having it back in her possession. It was just too great a temptation.

Remus started at himself in the mirror. *Where did she get these clothes?* he wondered. He scowled at his reflection. *How did I let her talk me into this?* "Are you ready yet?" he called out.

"Almost," she replied.

He had hated this idea the first time. He hated it even more now.

She finished at the vanity and turned to face him. "Ready." Looking at him, she was unable to hide her grin.

"I look like a...a..." he couldn't finish the sentence.

She rose and smoothed his collar. "You look exactly like you should."

He looked down at her, and he found his gaze drifting to her bosom. The dress she was wearing really enhanced her cleavage and the slit in the skirt was nearly scandalous. "And you, you can't go out like that," he insisted.

She replied defensively, "And why not? I went out like this the first night?"

"Well, that was different," he replied uncomfortably.

"How so?" She placed her fists on her hips.

He ran his hand through his hair nervously. He hadn't liked this idea one bit from the moment she mentioned this was on the evening's agenda. "For one, you were single..."

"It's not like I actually do anything with any of these guys. I just make them believe I did. Besides, they have no idea who I am." She swayed her hips in an exaggerated manner, rubbing against him. "What's the matter, guv'ner? Afraid there won't be any left for you?"

"It's just too dangerous." He was finding it harder to think of counterarguments the way she was behaving. "One of them could easily overpower you before you could get to your wand."

She gave his bottom a good hard squeeze. "You should know me well enough to know that's not a concern. I've done this more times than I can count and have never been overpowered." She pulled him close for a kiss. "Think of the show you'll get tonight. It should be quite a turn on," she purred. "Come on, time to go."

He grabbed her arm as she tried to walk away and pulled her back to him. "Be careful."

"I will. I will need you to let me do my job. Unless one of them tries to hurt me and I call for help, let me be," she said insistently.

"Wendy," he pleaded.

She stepped away from him. "I'm serious, Remus. That's the way it works. Customers are allowed to feel up the merchandise to a point."

"You aren't merchandise," he protested.

She gave him a sly grin. "I am tonight. Come on, darling. We really do need to get going."

She entered the pub on his arm and gave the room a disapproving glance. "I'm not sure about this place," she said loudly, hoping to attract attention.

"Go mingle, luv," he replied and gave her a slap on the bum. They had discussed how he was supposed to behave and he didn't like it. He went over to the bar and ordered a drink, even though he knew it wouldn't have any effect. He tried to remain detached as he watched her flirt around the room. She was entirely too comfortable with this persona.

He gritted his teeth as he watched one of the patrons grab her and spin her onto his lap. Without realizing it, he was gripping his wand in his pocket. She at first feigned indignation, but then her attitude changed. Presumably, the man was talking money with her. When the man began feeling her breast, Remus almost lost control. This situation was untenable.

She pulled away. Apparently, the man had not had the price she was asking. Remus smirked when the man tried to grab her again and she slapped him quite soundly. This was his cue to take a few steps toward her. The man noticed his movement and released her. Even though she had told him how to behave, he found it all very odd. Never would he have believed there was a code of conduct amongst such unsavory characters.

After nearly an hour, Wendy had made the rounds of the establishment. She returned to Remus' side and pouted petulantly. "John, this place is a real dud. Come on, let's find some place with some action."

A man came up behind Remus and announced, "No action, eh? She's a pretty one." He grabbed her chin and examined her as though examining livestock.

Wendy smoothly slid closer to her potential client, ignoring how he had been appraising her. He was the man they had been hoping to meet; their sources had indicated he led the Death Eater ring in the area. "Well, now, this one might actually have the price, though I'm not sure."

"You think you're worth that much?" he sneered.

This was the part of the role that he had dreaded. Remus smiled smoothly. "I assure you she is well worth the asking price." He tugged at the shoulders of her gown, pulling them down to expose more skin. He watched as she pushed on her breasts, amplifying her cleavage. "As you can see, she is quite voluptuous."

The man pulled her close, simultaneously feeling her breast and her bum. "She's good to the feel," he admitted. "A little old, though?" He was used to taking his pleasures from women in their early twenties.

Wendy played her part admirably. "I have experience those young tarts could never hope to match," she purred seductively and ran her thigh up his leg, the slit in the dress exposing her flesh.

Remus watched as their mark flinched. He then realized he could only see one of her hands. Gently, he reached out, pulled Wendy away and held her possessively. What he really wanted to do was hit that man with a hex that would make James proud, but he resisted. "Well, then, good sir, now that you've tested her, do you think you have the price?"

The man leered lasciviously as he pulled a moneybag out of his pocket. He extracted a galleon and placed it on the bar. He paused, judging Remus' reaction before reaching into the bag and adding a second. When Remus made no move to pick up the money, he asked incredulously, "Surely you don't think she's worth more than that?"

She's worth all the money I have ever had. "I assure you, she is well worth the price." He pulled her hair away from her neck and inhaled her scent deeply. "I have sampled her wiles and I assure you, you will not be disappointed." Maintaining a pleasant demeanor was the most difficult thing he had done. He most definitely did not like the lecherous grin the man was giving Wendy. He almost frowned when she slipped from his grip and began to rub up against the man.

Wendy purred at him, "Come on, guv'ner, one more galleon will buy you a truly memorable time."

Remus bit his lip at way she was flirting shamelessly. He had seen her behave the same way toward him. A part of him began to wonder if the way she behaved toward him was just as much an act. The sound of a third galleon clinking on the bar brought him back to reality. Looking at the two of them, he saw Wendy giving him and imploring glance. Slowly, he picked up and pocketed the galleons. "Enjoy yourself, good sir." He forced a polite smile as he watched the two of them head upstairs.

There was nothing for him to do but fume and wait. Even getting drunk was denied him this evening, thanks to Wendy's potion, but that did not stop him from ordering another drink. He took his drink to an empty table and sat alone with his thoughts. All he could think about was whether or not she was sincere when she was with him. He found that she too easily flirted with other men and made them believe she was interested only in them. He had seen far too much of that this evening. Was Sirius right? Was he just a plaything for her?

He looked up when he heard her giggling. Checking his watch, he saw that she had been gone for more than half an hour. He frowned. It was unlikely that it had taken her that long to probe the man's mind with Legilimency.

Wendy slunk away from the suspected Death Eater and slid a chair up next to Remus. "I think that's all the business we will find here," she said quietly, in case someone was listening.

"Good," he replied tersely and grabbed her by the arm and nearly dragged her out of the establishment.

Wendy thought he was acting rather odd, but didn't want to bring it up in the open. After all, she was supposed to be subservient. Even after they returned to her house, he didn't say anything. "Remus, is something wrong?" she asked.

He spun around to face her. "Something wrong?" he asked incredulously. "You have the nerve to ask me if something's wrong?"

She was completely confused. It wasn't like him to get angry. She tried to place a reassuring hand on his arm, but he shrugged her off. "Remus, what is it?"

"Why don't you read my mind and tell me?" he spat.

"I would never do that to you," she replied softly. She didn't know what had set him off. Her best hope was to get him to calm down and explain himself. "Darling, why don't we sit down and discuss this?" She tried to lead him into the drawing room, but he remained rooted where he was.

He stood silently, his back to her for several long seconds, trying to gain control of his emotions. "Am I just a play thing for you?" he asked quietly, afraid his voice would crack if he spoke louder.

"What? No, of course not." She tried to wrap her arms around him, but was once again rebuked. "Is this about how I acted tonight? Because if it is, that's all it was, an act."

"Is it?" He still couldn't look at her. "I'm not sure I can believe that. I saw how you were behaving this evening, and I couldn't help but notice how similar it was to how you act around me. Sirius told me you were just using me for your entertainment, but I told him he was wrong. Now, I'm beginning to think he was right."

"It's not an act when I'm around you," she replied sincerely. This was trouble she had never expected. Her mind raced as she tried to figure out how to defuse this situation.

"What happened when you were upstairs? You were gone for quite some time, far longer than was necessary for you to read his mind and Obliviate him," he said angrily.

Doing her best to remain calm, she replied, "I was keeping up appearances. He has a certain level of importance in the community. If we had returned to the common room too quickly, it would have drawn the wrong sort of attention. I figured, the less attention we drew the better. Once I had the information I needed, I stunned him. When I revived him, I Obliviated him and gave him a false memory. Then we came downstairs. That's all that happened." She was trying to determine what to say to him. "I didn't cheat on you and I won't cheat on you. You're the only one I want." This time, when she touched him, he didn't pull away. She slipped in front of him and nuzzled against his chest.

He closed his eyes, fighting back the tears, as he wrapped his arms around her. "I can't do that again. I can't stand seeing you like that," he said softly.

"I'm sorry," she replied. "I didn't realize how much that bothered you."

He finally wrapped his arms around her. "How could you not know? You know how much you mean to me. *Or perhaps you don't.*

She explained, "It's just that we had a job to do. I thought you would realize that's all it was. I thought you understood after I explained it to you the last time. You know that undercover work is my specialty."

"I do, and that's what makes it so hard. How am I to know when you are acting and when you are sincere?" This is what frightened him most, he couldn't tell.

"You just have to trust me." She looked into his eyes. "Believe me when I say that I have never shown you a false persona. I show you who I truly am."

He gazed into her eyes, desperately wanting to believe that she was telling him the truth. There was no doubt her initial gruff treatment of him had been sincere, but he still had a hard time believing her affections were sincere.

She ran her hands across his chest. "When I was flirting with all those other men, I was thinking of you, wishing it was you, hoping the mission would be over quickly so I could get you home and take you to bed," she purred.

It was so easy to fall prey to her charms, and before he realized it, he found himself giving her a passionate kiss. After all, Dumbledore trusted her, why shouldn't he? He got lost in that kiss before he realized she was unbuttoning his jacket. He gently pushed her away. "Wendy, no," he said firmly.

"What can I do to prove to you I'm sincere?" she asked. This evening was not working out at all like she had planned. According to her plan, the two of them should be upstairs having mad, passionate sex.

He sighed. "I don't know." His body told him to believe her. Unfortunately, all he heard in his mind was Sirius' voice telling him how untrustworthy she was.

She didn't want to lose him. "Darling, don't listen to Sirius." Placing her hand on his heart, she implored, "Listen to what your heart says." Rubbing against him, she continued quietly, "I only want to be with you." Standing on her tiptoes she started kissing him.

Remus' body betrayed him and he began to eagerly return her kisses. Slipping his hand through the slit in her skirt, he rubbed her bottom, pulling her close. "Are you sure about that?"

She slipped her hand down his trousers and ran the inside of her thigh up his leg. "Absolutely," she replied between kisses.

He swept her into his arms and carried her to the sofa in the drawing room. He trailed kisses down her neck and nuzzled into her cleavage. Her giggling only encouraged him.

She looked down when she heard a pop. "What are you doing?"

He spit out a button. "Getting you out of that dress," he replied slyly.

"There are easier ways to do that," she replied sarcastically.

He popped off another two buttons to free her breasts from the confines of her dress. When he captured her nipple in his mouth, he could hear her gasp. Did it really matter if Sirius was right?

"Oh, Remus," she moaned. This is what she had been waiting for all evening. She ran her fingers through his hair and pushed his head against her chest. "I want you. I need you," she panted.

He pulled away, lacing his fingers in hers, and noticed that she was wearing a ring. He found this odd, since she never wore much jewelry. Pulling her hand where he could see it, he noticed that while the ring was sized for her finger, it was very masculine in appearance. "Where did you get this ring?" he asked.

She silently cursed herself for forgetting to take the ring off. "Nowhere special," she replied and tried to pull her hand free of his grip.

"Is this the ring from the dining room? The one you were supposed to destroy?"

For a brief moment, she considered lying, but she knew that he could easily get a description of the ring from Black. "Remus, please, let me explain. There's something not right in the Department of Mysteries. I felt it when I was down there. I didn't want to give it to them, afraid it would be misused."

He finally released her and stood up. "How very convenient," he snarled. "Is that how you've been able to seduce me?"

She sighed and sat up. With a quick wave of her hand, the buttons flew back to her dress. "Look, I haven't been seducing you, at least not for anything other than pleasure. And even if I were, the ring is not something that would affect you."

"Oh, really? And what exactly does the ring do? You and Sirius have both been very evasive about it." He crossed his arms and scowled at her.

It had taken her a long time to find out what the ring was. While it was a prized possession displayed prominently in the dining room, no one had ever spoken about what it was. It had taken her even longer to figure out how to break through the protective wards. Thankfully, this was one artifact she had never discussed with the others. Before she had known what it was, she had planned on telling Narcissa and Bella all about it, but once she learned what it was, she knew she was no longer willing to share.

Taking the ring off her finger, she explained, "This ring is a magical focus, much in the same manner as our wands. Any spell you can cast with your wand, you can cast while wearing this ring. As something like this is essentially unheard of, it can make the wearer quite dangerous. Others would let their guard down around an apparently unarmed prisoner."

"By Merlin!" he exclaimed softly as he sank down into the chair.

"That's not all. If used in conjunction with a wand, it will amplify a spell's effects. For example, if you were faced with a group of attackers, you would normally only be able to stun them one at a time. With this ring, you could stun several people at once if they were standing close enough together. I know that use has been tested. I can only assume that the same would hold true for the killing curse."

The color had drained out of Remus' face and he was glad he was sitting down. "And Sirius knows this?"

"I don't know how much he knows. He may only know one part of what I have described. Albus knows. You have may have noticed the silver ring he wears; it is similar to this one. With this ring a mediocre wizard would become a powerful wizard, a powerful wizard..." There was no need to finish that sentence.

"Does Albus know you haven't destroyed it?" he asked weakly.

"I don't know. I gave it to Severus for safekeeping. The wards at Hogwarts are substantial and I felt it was quite safe there. Unfortunately, with Umbridge running amok, it would be too dangerous for me to return if it were needed. I've had it with me the last couple of weeks. While my house is well protected, I won't risk someone getting through the wards. I can't very well take it back to Grimmauld Place with Kreacher there."

"Why didn't you give it to Albus?"

She shook her head. "He can't have it in his possession. It's something similar to brother wands interacting with each other. While it would be safe in his study, he would not be able to deliver it if it were needed. Believe me, I would like nothing more than to destroy it, but I can't risk it falling into the Death Eater's hands. I just have a feeling that the Unspeakables wouldn't destroy it and would want to study it. As unlikely as it is, it might be stolen. Even more disturbing is that remote possibility they would unravel the mystery of the ring and figure out how to make more."

"I hadn't thought about that," he replied soberly. "What do you intend to do with the ring?"

"I generally keep it in my pocket. I only had it on tonight as a precaution. I know you were concerned about something happening. I need you to keep this secret. No one can know I have the ring. Especially Sirius. He would be livid if he knew and he would once again start his anti-Slytherin campaign. I truly wish I didn't have it. It's a very great temptation to use it. It fills you with a sense of power and immortality when you wear it. Either Albus' ring is different, or he has more willpower than most."

"Is it safe for you to have it?" Her last statement concerned him.

"I don't know. All I know is that I have nowhere else to keep it for now. I have been researching protective wards, hoping to find one obscure and difficult enough that I will feel safe leaving it unattended. So far, I have found nothing. This was the first time I wore it and you saw that I forgot it was there."

He sat next to her and took her in his arms. "Give it to me. Don't bear that burden."

She wrapped her arms around him. "I can't give you this burden. I can bear it for now. Just watch me and make sure I do what is right."

"I will."

Remus returned from a day of running errands for Sirius and the Order. He was looking forward to getting home and relaxing, preferably with Wendy, if she was home from work. He had never realized what long hours Aurors worked. He heard her laugh coming from the library. As he moved closer, he heard her addressing someone.

"Listen to this, 'side effects may include extreme nausea...' on an impotence potion, no less. That must go over really well. That would definitely ruin the moment. 'Oh, darling, that's it, a little to the left. Oh, uh-oh!'" She feigned vomiting and started chuckling again. "Ah, here we go, this could be useful," she said in a more moderate tone of voice.

Remus snuck closer to the door, trying to see who she was with since he had not heard a reply. As he peered around the corner, he saw Severus leaning over Wendy's shoulder to read the book. He felt a very strong surge of jealousy when he saw Severus place his arm over her other shoulder to point at the text.

"That might work quite nicely," Severus said quietly.

"Severus, how nice to see you again. Will you be joining us for dinner?" Remus asked in a tone that probably sounded overly polite.

Severus stood slowly, knowing that he had done nothing wrong. "No. I cannot remain away from Hogwarts that long," he replied curtly.

Remus had always tried to be polite with Severus, trying to overcome the grudge that Severus held. "Pity. Have you found anything illuminating?"

"Wendy offered to let me borrow any of her books and I was taking advantage of her offer. She has many volumes that are too dangerous for even the Restricted Section," he replied emotionlessly.

Wendy rose and gathered several volumes in a stack. "I believe this will be a good start. Feel free to come back anytime."

Severus could tell that Remus was bothered by his presence. "Of course. Your assistance has been invaluable. Thank you for placing your resources at my disposal." He gave Lupin a sneer as he slid out the door.

Remus watched Severus leave the room and kept his eye on the door until he heard the front door closing behind the Potions Master. He then spun his head around to face Wendy. "What was that about?" he asked angrily.

She sat on the edge of the table, crossed her arms and grinned at him. "Are you jealous?" He had been somewhat more possessive since last week's information gathering.

"He was being incredibly friendly. And what was that with the impotence potion? Why were you researching something like that with him?" he asked suspiciously.

She grinned even more. "You are. Remus, it was nothing. My eye just happened to catch that side effect when I was skimming the text and I thought it was funny."

"How long was he here?"

She wiped the grin from her face and crossed the room to embrace him and was surprised when he pulled away. "He was waiting for me when I got home. We were pouring through the books for about an hour before you came home. Honestly, nothing happened. Besides, Severus isn't my type." She leaned up against him, hoping to

dissipate some of his jealousy.

He finally placed his hand on her shoulder. "It's just the way he was leaning over you, looking at that book. It seemed very...intimate."

"Well, I assure you, there is nothing going on between us. Though, I may have given Umbridge that impression a few weeks back. It was all for fun," she replied off-handedly.

He stiffened. "You gave Umbridge the impression that you and Severus?" He couldn't even finish that thought.

She shrugged and continued to snuggle against him. "It seemed the thing to do at the time. She's quite paranoid, you know?"

He pulled away from her. "How could you?" He was aghast.

"Remus, calm down." She could tell this situation was going from bad to worse. It didn't help that it was nearly full moon. He seemed to get more emotional that time of the month. "Let's look at this objectively. She didn't like me visiting Hogwarts, probably because she doesn't want anyone to know what's going on there, and hinted quite strongly she was going to ban visitors not cleared through her. I figured if I was going to be banned, I might as well really deserve it. Besides, it would annoy her to no end. And let's not forget that right now my biggest asset to the Order is that I have no ties to any of you Gryffindors or the original members of the Order, other than Moody, who was purely a coworker. In the off chance she mentions me to anyone, I will be associated with a fellow Slytherin. You have already agreed that we need to keep our relationship secret from those outside the Order."

He knew she was right, but after her performance the other night, he couldn't help feeling a little insecure. "You're sure that's it?" he asked suspiciously.

She pushed him into the chair and sat on his lap. "Of course it is. I don't want to see you hurt. I hadn't realized you would be jealous of what Severus was doing. I didn't see anything wrong with it. We aren't particularly close friends, but there is a sort of bond between us, as we are both Slytherins. We grew up in a similar environment and, to an extent, think the same way. I guess it's probably more brother and sister than anything else." She hoped that last part would put him at ease.

"Now there's a scary thought. He's not the illegitimate son of your father, is he?" he teased as he tickled her.

She tried to squirm away, but he somehow maintained a firm grip while continuing to tickle her. "No. Now will you stop?" She found it hard to sound angry while having a fit of the giggles. Finally, she slid out of his grip and landed on the floor.

He pinned her to the floor. "I suppose," he replied before kissing her.

"So, I'm forgiven?" she asked breathlessly.

"I suppose," he replied as he began to push her skirt up. He was leaning in to kiss her again.

"Mistress? Dinner is ready," interrupted Cappa, who, upon seeing what her mistress was doing, squealed. "Cappa is sorry for interrupting," the elf said repentantly.

Wendy gave him a smile that said 'I'm sorry.' "Thank you, Cappa. We'll be there shortly." When he didn't immediately move, she asked, "Are you going to get up?"

"I rather like it here," he replied playfully.

She struggled against his grip. "We're having a soufflé tonight so we need to go eat. We can come back to this later."

"And I was so looking forward to make-up sex," he replied sadly as he released her and helped her to her feet.

"Well, then, I'll have to arrange for another misunderstanding," she said playfully.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 of 27

Voldemort is back and the Order of the Phoenix is reforming. They need new members and Kingsley recruits one of his fellow Aurors - even though she is a Slytherin. Assigned to work with Remus Lupin, things get very tense. Set during 'Order of the Phoenix'.

News of the attack had spread quickly, and by the time Wendy arrived at Grimmauld Place, the others were already gathered in the kitchen. She had just now been able to get away from the Ministry. Everyone there was in full cover-up mode after Arthur's attack, and she had done her part to keep the truth hidden.

Kingsley was heading up the meeting since Minerva and Albus were both at Hogwarts. They were all thankful that Arthur was going to recover, but disheartened that he had been attacked in the Ministry. "Obviously, someone within the Ministry had to let the snake in. We don't know who it is. Those of us who work in the Ministry need to be more aware of what our coworkers are doing. I know that we don't have people in all the departments so we'll have to do the best we can.

"Severus has agreed to provide those of you going on night watches with a revivifying potion to help you remain alert. We must keep You-Know-Who from gaining access to the Department of Mysteries at all cost. We've all been given a taste of what that cost could be," he said soberly.

Kingsley continued, "Now, the Weasleys will be staying here, probably for the duration of the Christmas holidays, so we will need to be careful about what we say outside this room. Albus wants the children as isolated from all this as possible."

As the meeting broke up he pulled Wendy off to the side. He handed her a roll of parchment. "Dumbledore sent private instructions for you."

"Thanks." She took the parchment and moved toward the corner.

I wish I could discuss this in person, but circumstances prevent my leaving. We know that someone in the Ministry must be responsible for this. I know that at one time you were close friends with many suspected Death Eaters. I do not enjoy asking you to renew these old friendships, but I fear I must. The New Year's Ball at the Ministry would be an excellent opportunity for you to do so. I know that you have sporadically attended this affair over the years, so your presence this year should not garner the wrong sort of attention.

I know this will be difficult for you given your strained relationship with your brother, but I trust the Westin name still carries some weight amongst your old classmates. Do what you can to earn their trust. Severus still provides us with excellent information, but he is a limited resource during the school year. Even so, do not place yourself in undue danger.

She crumpled the letter and incinerated it.

Remus had been watching from the other side of the room. Once he saw her burn the letter and lean her head against the wall, he moved over to her side and placed a hand on her shoulder. "Anything you want to talk about?"

"Looks like I won't be spending New Year's with you. Albus wants me to go to the Ministry Ball and try to renew some old acquaintances," she replied sadly.

He would be lying if he said he wasn't disappointed. They had been planning a quiet celebration at her house. "We both knew there would be sacrifices."

"True, but I'm not looking forward to this." That was an understatement. There had been a reason she had distanced herself from those people. She had long ago lost interest in playing all the little games the aristocrats played.

"Perfectly understandable," he reassured.

She didn't think he did understand. How could he? He was a Gryffindor. What she thought Albus was asking of her was not something that would naturally come to him. But was Albus really asking that of her? She was almost positive he was. That was the way to earn the close confidence of those they were investigating. Should she try to explain it to Remus? It wasn't likely he would understand. She would wait until she knew whether or not they would accept her back into their circle. After all, she was not a twenty-something tart anymore. It wasn't a guarantee that she would catch anyone's interest at thirty-seven.

"I'll take the thirty-first off. Do you think you could arrange to spend it with me?" she asked.

He tried to sound optimistic, "Of course. I can think of no better way to spend the day since your evening will be occupied with that stuffy old ball."

"Thank you," she replied, holding him tight.

There was something about the way she was behaving that bothered him. He knew that she didn't normally associate with any of her former schoolmates, but she seemed especially upset over the prospect of having to contact them again. Was she afraid her brother would do something to make her life difficult? She had never hinted that she was forbidden from socializing with her old friends.

New Year's Eve came far too quickly for Remus' taste. He hadn't had as much time to spend with Wendy as he would have liked; between escort duties for Harry and the others going to visit Arthur and trying to help the werewolf that he met in Arthur's ward, his days had been rather full. Remus had been bitten so young that he hardly remembered his life before being changed, so he had a hard time understanding the anger, but he could certainly understand the fear that was hidden beneath that anger.

Thankfully, Wendy had been supportive and not begrudged him the time he spent trying to help the new werewolf. Or course, the Aurors had been busy conducting the investigation into the attack and she had not been home much anyway. Now, he was lying in bed with his arms wrapped around her. She would have to get ready for the Ball soon. He found himself wishing that he were the one escorting her to the Ball, but it would not be proper for her to show up with a date, especially a known werewolf, and a social inferior at that.

She traced her finger through the hair on his chest. "I have to get up now," she said reluctantly.

"I know," he replied sadly.

"I'll save the first kiss of the New Year for you," she said as she kissed his chest.

"Than I shall be eagerly awaiting your return." He gave her a quick squeeze before reluctantly releasing her.

She kissed him and slipped out of bed. The next thing he heard was the water running in the shower. After about twenty minutes, she emerged wearing the most amazing dress. It was iridescent, shifting color with the light. "If you put some clothes on, I'll give you the first dance of the evening," she said.

That was all the motivation he needed to get out of bed. As he threw on his shirt and trousers, he watched her select her jewelry to complete the effect. She stood and twirled. "Absolutely stunning. Every man will be staring at you and I will be truly jealous." All he could think was, She is truly out of my league, but still she wants me.

"Thank you," she replied as she blushed. "Now, if you would be so kind as to escort me downstairs, I'll let you have that dance," she said as she offered him her hand.

Remus enjoyed dancing with her. He closed his eyes and, for a few brief moments, he could almost believe he was at the Ball. It made him wish even more that he were her escort tonight. He could easily imagine having her in his arms all night long.

"What are you thinking?" she asked, when she saw that his eyes were closed.

"I'm thinking how lucky I am, and how much I would love to take you to the Ball tonight," he replied wistfully.

"Well, tell you what, once the Dark Lord is defeated, you can escort me to the Ball and you can dance every dance with me."

"I'll hold you to that promise," he replied as he spun her gracefully around.

"I look forward to it." She wanted nothing more than to be able to take him out into polite society. He had cleaned up quite nicely, and now that he was eating regular meals, he looked a bit healthier, though she suspected he would never look completely well around the wake of the full moon.

"I think you'd best be on your way before I take you upstairs and rip those clothes off you," he said reluctantly as the music stopped.

She kissed him quickly. "I'll see you after the ball."

He watched her leave, already dreading the lonely night he faced.

Wendy arrived at the Ball and immediately wanted nothing more than to crawl into a corner. Naturally, her brother and Elena were there, along with most of the other pureblood wizards of good standing. All the senior Ministry officials were present, dressed in their very best finery. There were a few lower level officials, like her, in attendance. A quick glance around the room showed that she was one of only a few Aurors present.

Thinking she might as well make the best of bad situation, she helped herself to a glass of wine from a passing waiter and tried to decide the best place to start her mingling. While it would be easy to hang out with her Auror friends, she knew that was not why she was here. Deciding the best place to start was with her department head, she walked up to Amelia Bones. "They decorations are lovely, aren't they?" she asked.

"Wendy? I hadn't expected to see you here. I thought it was another couple years before your next appearance at the ball," replied Amelia.

They both laughed at this joke. "Well, I decided I didn't have anything better to do and, since I participate in so few social functions, I figured this would be as good a chance as any to scope out some eligible bachelors."

Amelia took in Wendy's attire. "You've definitely dressed to attract attention."

"Thank you. I guess all that's left is to conveniently forget to mention my profession." She scanned the room quickly, as if searching out a potential match. In actuality, she was trying to see which of her old school chums was nearest.

Lucius Malfoy was circulating through the room. Narcissa and her friends were going over the latest gossip and she generally took little interest in his behavior, leaving him free to mingle. His first goal was to be political and socialize with those in power at the Ministry. He had just left a rather boring conversation with Cornelius Fudge and was trying to decide who would be next. He grabbed a glass of champagne from the nearest waiter, hoping to dull the pain of the tedium.

Scanning the room, he saw Amelia Bones talking to an attractive woman wearing an almost scandalous dress. He smirked and decided Amelia would be his next victim so he could talk to that vixen. "Amelia, how good to see you this evening." He shifted his gaze to her companion. "Would you intro...Wendy? Is that you?"

She tried to smile pleasantly. She had hoped to put off meeting with Lucius until later in the evening. "Yes, Lucius. Good to see you again. It's been too long, hasn't it?" She offered him her right hand.

He kissed the back of her hand. "Indeed. Forgive me Amelia, Wendy and I are old friends." For a few minutes, he politely kept the conversation to something that would interest Amelia, playing the political game he knew so well. "I hate to be rude, Amelia, but would you mind terribly if I stole Wendy away so we could reminisce about old times?"

"Not at all, Lucius." She was actually glad for an excuse to get away from him, though she did feel bad about leaving Wendy alone with him.

"How is life as an Auror?" he asked once Amelia had left.

"Very busy, but it keeps me focused." She smiled softly at him, still ready to play the same game all aristocrats played. "Of course, there are certain perks to the job," she hinted as her grin turned into a mischievous smirk.

He sipped his champagne. "Mmm, yes. I had heard that you were a bit... unorthodox, shall we say?" He smiled back at her.

Oh, how she had missed that self-confident grin of his. Like a fine wine, he had aged well, becoming even more handsome. "I've found that as long as I get the desired results, and don't leave any evidence, no one asks too many questions." That should pique his interest.

"Have you thought of retiring? I know that Edgar left you quite well off and you've already been marred once." He gently brushed the scar on her cheek. "You do look quite lovely and deserve much more than running around Britain chasing down petty criminals."

She laughed softly, "Thank you, but I do need something to fill my days. Timor has gone out of his way to see that I am no longer welcome in polite society." She looked away and sipped her wine. *Damn his charm*, she thought, even though this was the reason she was here.

"That could be changed. You may not know this, but Timor has made some bad business decisions lately and his influence is waning." His voice was smooth and hinted at promises for a better future.

"Is that so? I hadn't heard." She did try to keep abreast of her brother's dealings to ensure that Andorra was looked after properly. Of course, it was entirely possible that Lucius was not telling the whole truth or was willing to engineer these bad business decisions based on her response.

Out of the corner of his eye, he caught a glimpse of Narcissa watching him with a disapproving look on her face. "As much as I'm enjoying this conversation, I fear I must move on. It's good politics to mingle. You will save a dance for me later, won't you? Perhaps we can find time to meet for tea and continue this conversation?"

"Of course," she replied. He was suave and had that silky smooth voice that left reason a useless puddle. She finished off her wine and looked for a waiter to get a replacement. She had almost finished that glass when she heard a familiar voice.

"Wotcher, Wendy," said Tonks.

"Tonks, nice to see you." She was somewhat relieved to see that her colleague had chosen a fairly normal appearance, though the red hair was bordering on outlandishness. "I didn't know you did stuff like this."

"Every year. I'm surprised to see you here." She had expected Wendy would be with Remus.

"I normally put in an appearance every three or four years if I have nothing else to do. This year's a little different, though."

Tonks knew something was up, but she wasn't sure what and figured that Wendy probably couldn't tell her any more than that. "Right. Me, I like the fact I don't have to cook." The two women laughed at that. "I just wish more of the younger people came. It's always a bunch of old fogies."

"Hey, now, I resemble that remark," Wendy replied with mock indignation.

"You don't count, you're still one of us. Besides, looking like that, I don't think anyone would lump you in that category. I don't know if you've noticed, but an awful lot of the guys can't keep their eyes off you. Speaking of which." She nodded toward an approaching gentleman.

"May I offer you a drink?" he asked, indicating Wendy's empty glass. "I'm Tom Wilkins."

She accepted the drink and took his hand in hers. "Good to see you again, Tom. It's Wendy Westin."

He didn't completely hide the surprise when she introduced herself. "Wendy? You look marvelous."

Tonks could tell that she was going to be excluded from this conversation. "Wendy, catch you later."

Now that she was getting back into her old habits, she found that socializing with her old friends was coming much easier. The one thing she didn't like was answering the same questions over and over. As usual, she received disapproving stares from the wives. When she was speaking with Narcissa's group, they were polite, but Wendy had always been closer to Bella. The other girls had not really approved of her playing Quidditch, but they were always happy to celebrate the victories. Secretly, she thought they were jealous of the time she got to spend with the boys.

As she was walking away from the latest boring conversation, Lucius slipped beside her, took her glass from her hand and placed it on a passing tray. "Now, about that dance?" he asked smoothly.

She absolutely melted under his smile. "Of course." With practiced grace, he led her around the dance floor. Feeling his touch, she found her body remembering days past and reacting as it had then. She got lost in his grey eyes. At times they could be icy cold, but now, they were warm and inviting.

"You know, I was quite distraught over what happened to poor Edgar and I tried to see you in the months following his arrest, but your brother claimed you were refusing

all visitors. I did miss seeing you." His voice was pure silk.

"I wasn't in a state to see anyone at the time. Could we talk about something else? That's an ugly period of my life," she replied uncomfortably.

"Of course, my dear. I didn't mean to upset you. I only wanted you to know that I hadn't forgotten about you. And it's now been far too long since I've seen you. I do wish that you hadn't ignored me after you came out of seclusion." He tried to sound hurt.

"I figured that if I was going to make a go of things at the Ministry, I should do it on my own. Besides, no one in that circle associates with an Auror," she replied apologetically.

He replied smoothly, "For you, I shall make an exception." He pulled her close, letting her feel his arousal. "If you would prefer to not have to do field work, I'm sure I could find a supervisory position for you."

"That's a wonderful offer, Lucius, but I truly don't mind the field work. It gives me a chance to work out any frustrations I might have." This was moving much more quickly than she had anticipated. She had thought that after all these years, Lucius would have forgotten about her. Obviously, she had been wrong.

"I can think of better ways to do that," he purred seductively. "Meet me for tea the day after tomorrow. I have business here at the Ministry and Narcissa won't miss me." It was less of a request and more of an order.

She was both attracted and repulsed by his behavior. Knowing this was what Albus wanted, she replied, "Of course. I'll do what I can to get away." Could it really be this easy? Would Lucius just take her back, no questions asked?

"I look forward to it. Now, if you will excuse me, I must dance with my wife." His tone suggested this was a burden; something he did to keep up appearances. She knew their marriage was for political and business reasons, not for love, as were almost all marriages amongst her peers.

She found she had no shortage of dance partners, including the Minister of Magic. It was very easy for her to slip into her old aristocratic ways. She was actually enjoying the evening until she found herself face to face with her brother.

"Well, well, well. Little sister, what a distasteful surprise to see you here. I had thought you had abandoned all pretenses of your breeding," he said sardonically.

"No thanks to you, I might add," she replied coldly. She had hoped to finish up the evening without having to deal with him.

"Your career choice did prove a bit of an embarrassment for the family. I had no choice. A lady of breeding does not take a common job of an Auror. Had you remained with the Department of International Magical Cooperation, I could have arranged a suitable marriage for you. You could have avoided all this," he said dryly.

"Oh, yes, we know that Father did an excellent job choosing Edgar," she replied sarcastically.

Anger tinged his voice, though he kept the volume level down so only she could hear what he was saying. "I would have done better than Father. You've wasted your life. What do you have to show for it, an Order of Merlin, Third Class? Is that really all you want to be known for?" He stared at her in silence for several long seconds. "Why did you bother to come tonight?" he spat.

"I was lonely, dear brother. I figured I had a chance of meeting a respectable gentleman tonight." She gave him a self-satisfied smirk, hoping it would drive him away.

He replied dryly, "So I've noticed. You've danced with just about everyone here, eligible or not. Does this mean I can expect to see more of you?"

"Perhaps. I haven't decided yet." She scanned the room. "There are a few interesting bachelors out there." She grinned at him in an attempt to infuriate him.

He moved closer and spoke in a hoarse whisper. "Just remember your place. Do not embarrass the family further."

She watched him leave and knew that there was really nothing he could do to her. She had little concern about her social standing and she had always been more powerful magically. "Of course, big brother," she whispered before mingling with the crowd again.

It was nearly two in the morning before she returned home, still somewhat inebriated. It had not occurred to her to take her sobriety potion. She could see a light coming from the library and wondered if Remus was still awake. When she entered the library, she saw him lying asleep on the couch, one arm hanging off the side, the other resting on a book on his chest. She smiled at how adorable he looked.

Gently, she placed the book on the table and draped herself across him. She kissed him gently to wake him. Once he started stirring, she said, "Happy New Year, darling."

"Happy New Year to you as well. What time is it?" he asked groggily.

"Very late," she continued to kiss him.

He could think of much worse ways to be woken up and pulled her close for a passionate kiss. "Did you enjoy your evening?"

She ran her fingers through his hair. "Not really. I would have much rather spent it with you. We can talk about it in the morning." She unbuttoned his shirt and kissed his chest after she undid each button. When she reached his trousers, she undid them as well, and coaxed him to hardness before taking him in her mouth.

He gasped in surprise. This was definitely a very good way to be woken up. He gripped the edge of the couch as she brought him to orgasm. He watched her lick her lips as she looked up at him. "You can wake me up like that anytime you like," he said as he reached out to pull her on top of him.

"I thought you might like that," she purred as she caressed his chest.

"I'll have to take you upstairs and repay the favor." He shifted her around so he could carry her upstairs. "I've wanted to get you out of that dress all evening," he said as he set her on the bed.

"I have an idea." She stood and pushed him onto the bed. Crossing the room to the record player, she selected the perfect song. With a wave of her wand, she moved her vanity chair to the center of the room.

Remus watched with interest as she started stripping for him. He licked his lips as she unbuttoned her dress and then turned her back on him as she slowly pushed the sleeves down her arms. She shook her hips back and forth as she wiggled out of her dress. He had not been aware that she was wearing such sexy undergarments.

Once she had slipped out of her dress, she danced in time with the music, running her hands along her body. This was quite possibly one of the most erotic things he had experienced. He couldn't take it any longer when she put her foot on his knee and slowly pushed her stocking down. He grabbed her and threw her onto the bed. "Do you have any idea what that does to me?" he asked before devouring her mouth in a passionate kiss.

She smiled seductively at him. "Absolutely."

Wendy had completely forgotten her agreement to meet Lucius for tea. She wasn't entirely sure he had been serious at the Ball, but it appeared he was when a memo showed up in her inbox, asking if she would still be available. Of course, she had no reason to turn him down and every reason to accept. Because of their past, she hoped

to get him to confide in her. Of course, there was also the chance that her past would come back to haunt her.

Due to work, she was running about fifteen minutes late. She had briefly considered wearing her Auror's robes, but quickly decided against it. Lucius was waiting for her in the tearoom of an upscale wizarding hotel, one they had been in numerous times. Unless she was mistaken, he maintained an extravagant suite at this hotel.

"Lucius, forgive me for running late. I had a few last minute memos to deal with," she said apologetically as she joined him at his table.

He rose and exhibited his usual polite, public persona. "I completely sympathize with you, though I was beginning to wonder if you had stood me up," he tried to sound hurt.

She tried to smile warmly. He was playing his usual games and she decided to do the same. "You know I would never do that," she reassured. "May I first apologize for ignoring you years ago? I was an awful mess then."

"I find that hard to believe," he said smoothly. He oozed charm from his every pore.

She laughed softly. "Oh, but I was. I spent the better part of a year hiding in my room and when I finally emerged... Well, I was still an emotional mess. It was years before I was ready to be with a man again." She thought this excuse should be enough to placate his ego.

He took a sip of his tea. "And are you fully recovered now?"

"I have been for a while, but I was disowned at that point and Timor had made it clear that I was not to associate with my old friends." It was the truth and a very plausible excuse. If Lucius didn't know all the details, there was no reason to enlighten him.

He reached out and placed a sympathetic hand on hers for a brief moment. "I wish you had contacted me. I've never been much for obeying your brother's wishes. He has an over-inflated sense of self-worth. The Leah family is not as powerful as he likes to imagine."

"No, it's not." She tried to sound ashamed, hoping to draw a sympathetic reaction from him. Her family's standing was one of the reasons she had not married Lucius.

"It's nothing against you, my dear. You can't help the family you were born into. Personally, I have always had a very high opinion of you. But I think you already knew that." He flashed a charming smile at her.

"Why thank you," she replied. He had always been so good at flattery.

They chatted pleasantly for the next half an hour. She listened to, what she suspected, were exaggerated reports on Draco and, of course, his difficulties with the Ministry. She said the right things to encourage his belief she was sympathetic to his cause.

As she was finishing her second cup of tea, she asked, "As much as I enjoy catching up with you, I am curious as to why you invited me to tea? It must look strange for you to be seen with common Auror."

He gave her his trademark smirk. "Well, yes, that is unusual, but, as I said, I will make an exception for you. I have a proposition for you."

"Oh? Do tell," she prompted, trying to sound eager.

"Meet me in my suite," he said quietly before rising and walking out of the parlor.

She had a very good idea what he wanted, but she could be wrong. After all, the Ministry was still conducting raids, looking for Dark Artifacts. He might very well be looking for protection, as unlikely as it was. It wouldn't hurt to talk with him.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 of 27

Voldemort is back and the Order of the Phoenix is reforming. They need new members and Kingsley recruits one of his fellow Aurors - even though she is a Slytherin. Assigned to work with Remus Lupin, things get very tense. Set during 'Order of the Phoenix'.

A few minutes after he left, Wendy found herself standing in front of the door to Lucius' suite. For many long seconds, she paced in front of the door, trying to rationalize her behavior. *I shouldn't be here. I think I know what he wants, but I'm not that person anymore. And I haven't talked to Remus about this. This is a decision he deserves to know about, to be a part of. But, Albus did want me to get close to people like Lucius. Earning his trust will be good for the Order. If I leave now, I'll never earn his trust and lose access to the others. I'll listen to his proposal. After all, I could be wrong. He's always liked pretty, young women and that's not me.*

She steeled herself and raised her hand to knock on the door. When it swung open, she saw Lucius standing at the sidebar pouring drinks. He had removed his jacket and was wearing a silk brocade waistcoat over his crisp, white shirt.

"I prefer a more relaxed and private setting to discuss business, don't you?" He handed her a drink and took her cloak.

"What sort of business?" she asked as she sipped a very fine cognac. It was always the best with him.

"I thought we could renew our past arrangement," he said confidently as he sat on the opposite side of the couch from her.

She thought she was hearing things and almost choked on her drink. "Are you serious?"

"Quite. You see, my last mistress has decided that she wants a family. Of course, I had to let her go since it wouldn't do for her to bear my children." He swirled his drink in his glass before taking a sip. "I've yet to find a suitable replacement. It's incredibly tedious finding one who will be discreet and is pleasing, and young women today don't seem to understand what it means. Seeing you at the Ball brought back such wonderful memories." He gave her that melt-your-spine smile he was so good at.

"Aren't I a bit old for your mistress?" she asked cautiously. Surely, it would not be this easy. She had never imagined that Lucius would be so eager to renew their relationship. Of course, this would create a rather significant problem in her personal life.

"Nonsense." He slid closer to her. "Aside from that one scar marring your beauty, you still look quite young. Better than Narcissa, if I do say, and I spend a small fortune on her looks." He once again traced the scar on her cheek. As always, his voice was smooth and seductive. "Besides, you know me, how to please me and I know how to please you." He let his hand trail softly down her arm. "You were always my favorite and I was distraught after you shut me out. None of my lovers since have compared to you." He leaned close and kissed her gently.

"It's a very tempting offer, Lucius." Her pulse was starting to race. The pure sexuality he exuded was nearly overpowering. He was sitting entirely too close to her and she found herself falling prey to his flattery.

"Of course it is. It's completely discreet and passionate, just the way it used to be. I need a mistress and you need a lover." He let his hand gently run down her leg and back up her thigh.

"And how would you know that?" She was finding it very hard to concentrate with him this close. His scent was intoxicating. She took a rather large gulp of her drink, hoping to help calm her nerves.

He continued to caress her leg, letting his hand drift closer and closer to her belly. "I have my sources, and they indicate you have been alone for some time." He shifted closer to her and placed her glass on the table.

"Is that all that's in it for me?" *Concentrate, you must concentrate. Don't let him befuddle your mind.*

He looked shocked that she might be refusing him. "You mean I'm not enough? I wasn't aware that you had other needs." That had been the joy of having her as his mistress. She had never asked for material goods. The others had always been expensive, expecting baubles and fancy clothes.

She smirked back at him. "I don't. I just like to see you surprised." *I need to get away. This is moving too fast.*

He laced his fingers through her hair and pulled her head back. "I had almost forgotten about that. You always were very devious." He pulled her close and kissed her deeply. "You can't tell me you didn't miss that." She had not been shy about returning his kiss, so he knew it to be true.

She had to admit her heart was racing and it was extremely hard to think clearly with her nerve endings set afire. "I did, but my life is rather complicated right now. I don't know that I could devote the attention you need. It wouldn't be fair to you." She knew what he demanded of a mistress. She would not be at his beck and call. She needed to get away and think about what he was saying.

"We made it work in the past. I have no doubt we could make it work again. And if I were to get you that supervisory position, you would work much more conventional hours. Perhaps I could even arrange for a transfer out of Magical Law Enforcement?" He nibbled at her neck, clearly remembering exactly how to drive her wild.

She inhaled sharply as her body reacted to his touch. When her awareness returned, she was straddling his lap and could clearly feel his arousal. "This is all so sudden," she said weakly as she looked into eyes filled with desire.

"That's what makes it so wonderful, the spontaneity. When was the last time you were truly spontaneous?" he asked playfully.

She couldn't tell him the truth. "I don't know, I guess it's been a while."

He kissed her chest and started unbuttoning her top. "Then indulge yourself."

She forced herself to pull away and stand up. "I... need to think about it." What she needed to do was discuss this with Remus, but everything was happening so quickly; she still couldn't think clearly.

He was growing irritated. Rejection was not the sort of thing he took well. He stood as well and wrapped his arms around her possessively, pulling her tight so he could grind his hips against hers. "Is there really so much to think about? You joined me here, willingly. I'm growing tired of your games," he said impatiently.

And play her games is exactly what she would do in order to get the information she needed from him. He was so very strong and virile, nearly irresistible. Besides, this was what Albus had told her to do, right? Giving him her best playful smile, she replied, "Are you really?" She undid his tie, pulled it slowly around his neck, and tossed it over her shoulder. "I was under the impression you rather enjoyed my games?"

His smile returned as she began to undo his buttons. "As long as I know it's a game." He devoured her mouth, letting her know who was in charge, and was pleased when she nearly melted in his arms.

Before she knew what was happening, she was on the bed with Lucius delicately removing her clothes. She saw him grimace as he saw the scars the on her otherwise smooth skin.

He kissed the scars softly. "You really should take better care of yourself," he whispered. He trailed his kisses further down, until his tongue was exploring her soft folds. One thing he had learned over the years was the importance of pleasing his partner. He would make her remember what it was like to be his mistress.

As he drove her to frenzy, she bucked her hips and laced her fingers in his hair. Release was coming soon, but then Lucius pulled away. "Please," she begged.

"Please, what?" he asked smoothly as he slowly unbuttoned his waistcoat.

She got up on her knees and began frantically working on his buttons. "Take me," she pleaded. She had to have him; it felt as though she couldn't live without him. Her body was on fire and she was in pain, having been left on the verge of ecstasy.

He gently pushed her back onto the bed and slipped out of his trousers. "You want me?" He wasn't ashamed to have her feed his ego. He brushed his erection against her without penetrating her.

She writhed beneath him as he continued to tease her. "Yes," she replied desperately. As he finally plunged into her, she moaned in relief. She knew that Lucius liked her to be vocal.

Well aware of the power he had over her, he thrust slowly, holding her on the edge of release, relishing her moans of desire and pleas for him to take her.

"Lucius, please," she moaned. "I'm so close it hurts. Take me. I want you! I need you!" She was nearly crying and had her hands on his buttocks trying to encourage him to move faster and take her deeper.

"You need me?" he asked as he rotated his hips.

"Yes, yes," she panted in reply.

He thoroughly enjoyed the pained look on her face. He pulled nearly all the way out of her and thrust deeply to her core. "You want this?"

"Oh, gods, yes!" she moaned. She was so very close. A few more thrusts like that was all it would take.

He continued to tease her for several more minutes until his own release was imminent. He then did as she had asked. It didn't take long for both of them to climax. He was incredibly pleased when she screamed his name in ecstasy. "Is that what you wanted?" he whispered as he showered her with kisses.

Her mind still clouded in the aftermath of her orgasm, she replied, "Yes. That was wonderful."

"Of course it was," he replied confidently. "No one knows you like I do." He pulled away from her and began to dress. "You see? We can make this arrangement work. After all, if Edgar didn't stand in our way, why should your job at the Ministry? And I'm pleased that you missed it as much as I did. You will forgive me for having to leave, won't you? Sadly, I do have other obligations." He flashed his charming smile at her.

"I understand." At that moment, she didn't care. What she had experienced was utter bliss.

Wendy walked out of Lucius' suite trying to determine how she had let the situation get so out of hand. She had never intended to actually do anything with Lucius, only to see if he was receptive to her friendship. Well, he had been receptive, and for more than just friendship. Running her fingers through her hair, she tried to determine what to do about this situation. She knew that Remus would feel betrayed, and rightly so.

I'll talk to him about this, let him know what Lucius has offered me and how it could be exactly what the Order is looking for. With Umbridge at Hogwarts, Severus isn't as useful as he once was. I'll tell him that this would be nothing more than me using Lucius to get vital information. Yes, this will work quite nicely. He'll see the reason behind this. There's no reason for him to know that I have already made the arrangement with Lucius. He may not like it, but surely he will see the logic behind it.

Of course, I'm still not sure how it all happened. I know how charming he can be and I've been able to say no to him before. Did he drug me? Was it in the drink? No, it couldn't have been. I didn't have more than a sip. She was still perplexed at how quickly she had lost control of her faculties. Her Auror training should have provided her some protection, even against coercive drugs.

Feeling more confident that she could work her way out of this predicament, she Disappeared.

Remus was in the library, waiting for Wendy to come home, having finished his work for the Order. He was used to her coming home late, and she had more than enough books in her library to occupy his time. Over the music, he thought he heard the crack of Apparition. When he didn't see Wendy, he put his book down and headed out to the foyer. "Wendy?" He thought he heard a door close and made his way upstairs.

As he neared their bedroom, he saw the door was indeed closed, as was the bathroom door. It wasn't like her to not let him know she was home. He crossed the room to the bathroom door and was about to grab the knob when the door opened.

"Remus, I didn't know you were home," she said in a surprised tone. She had, of course, suspected he was home, which was why she had hurried upstairs. She was positive her clothes reeked of Lucius' cologne, and she'd rather not answer those questions right now.

"Are you all right?" he asked, his voice full of concern.

"Why do you ask?" She tried to sound as nonchalant as possible.

"You don't normally change when you come home," he observed.

"I know. It was a particularly messy day. How was your day?" She hoped that by deflecting his attention she could avoid any unpleasantness for a little while longer.

"I think I'm making some progress with Albert, but he's to be discharged tomorrow. They don't want a werewolf at St. Mungo's during the full moon if they can avoid it, and there's really no reason for them to keep him there. I was thinking that perhaps I would spend the full moon with him, that my presence would provide him with some comfort during his first transformation."

She wrapped her arms around him, not wanting to look into his eyes. "That sounds like a marvelous thing to do. Where will you go?"

"I have a cave, well isolated, that I have used in the past. But, since both of us have taken our potions, it shouldn't matter. I truly hate this time of the month. I hate leaving you." He returned her embrace. While standing this close to her, he smelled something different, but he wasn't sure what it was. Surely, it was just a residue of whatever had made the mess that had led her to shower and change.

"I'm not fond of it either. It's all right, I suspect work is going to be busy this week. So many people like to start the new year off the wrong way. George has already hinted that the hours are going to get longer. I guess there's a new series of raids they are planning, so I'll be busy in your absence." She knew she had to bring up her arrangement with Lucius, but there just was no good time to bring up that sort of thing. Especially since there was a chance that Lucius would come by her house; there was no reason for her to turn him away since she ostensibly lived alone. There had to be a way to make Remus understand this was purely a business arrangement, for the good of the Order. Since he was going away for the full moon, she had a few more days to figure out how best to explain it.

"Why don't we head down to dinner?" she asked.

"Sounds like an excellent idea."

They enjoyed a pleasant dinner, but Remus couldn't get over the feeling that she was hiding something from him. "Is something bothering you?" he asked.

"What? Oh, no, I'm just distracted by work. Sorry. I'm not trying to ruin dinner," she said apologetically.

He smiled at her. "You haven't ruined dinner; I was just wondering what, other than me, had your mind so occupied." He rubbed his leg against hers under the table.

"I would much rather be thinking of you." She reached over and took hold of his hand *should tell him, but I can't send him away for the full moon distressed. Let me have one more night of happiness with him.*

He still had the feeling she was hiding something, but it was possible that it was work related. He knew that she could not talk about much of what she did as an Auror. "I thought that perhaps you might like to retire upstairs early tonight? Nothing interesting arrived in the post today."

Knowing how he was the night before full moon, she thought this was exactly what she needed to keep her mind off her problems. "That sounds like a wonderful idea," she replied.

Wendy arrived at work and found a memo designating her as part of the raid teams. They were meeting at nine o'clock to hand out assignments with raids scheduled to start after lunch. This was definitely going to be a long day. She quickly sorted through the rest of the paperwork that had materialized since yesterday afternoon. There were several silly new policies, but that seemed to be the new hallmark of Fudge's reign. Clearly, the idiocy at Hogwarts was contagious. She was waiting for the day they started regulating the color of a person's socks. There was really nothing pressing that she had to do before the meeting.

She decided to walk around the cubicles and see what gossip she could pick up. She was walking by Kingsley's desk when he stopped her. "Oi, Wendy, I see you've been volunteered." He held up a memo.

"Yeah, thrilling, isn't it?" she replied sarcastically. "Though it's been a while since we've done this and I've gotten out of the last three or four so I shouldn't complain."

"Yeah, I've noticed that. How do you manage that?" he asked suspiciously.

She shrugged. "Good luck, I guess. It's about that time, ready?"

"Yeah," he replied reluctantly.

The room was noisy with the twenty or so Aurors all involved in conversations or demonstrating hexing techniques. George Stroud entered the room and just barely deflected a hex. "All right, settle down." He waited for order to resume. "Now then, you lot are the lucky few running this round of raids. I know it's been a while. We'll draw lots. All of you have your team assignments and I'll ask the senior member of each team to come up and draw."

"Who did you get?" Kingsley asked quietly.

"Caleb Thomas. This ought to be fun, I think it's his first raid," she whispered sarcastically.

"Could be worse," he whispered back, "I've got Tonks."

"I thought she had a lifetime ban from raids?" Wendy asked.

"So did I. I guess they forgot. I can only hope I don't get a house with a lot of breakables." The last time Tonks had been on a raid, he had been teamed with her and it had been quite the disaster. She had to be the clumsiest person anyone had met.

It was Wendy's turn to draw from the hat. She opened the slip of paper and thought fate must be conspiring against her. Malfoy was the name on her slip of paper. She sat back down and stared at it in shock. There went her plan for avoiding him until she could talk to Remus.

Kingsley took his seat and sighed. "Gilbreath. I can see those suits of armor going down now. You want to place a bet on how many?" When she didn't answer he leaned over and looked at her slip of paper. "Malfoy, huh? Good luck. He's an unpleasant bastard. I had him about two years ago. You went to school with him, didn't you?"

"Yeah, he was quite a few years ahead of me, though." She really wanted to downplay any association she had with Lucius.

"I don't envy you. You might want to prepare Caleb. Old Lucius might make him piss himself." He chuckled softly at the thought.

Wendy couldn't help but laugh at that mental image. "Well, I guess I ought to brief him. Good luck at the Gilbreath place. Keep Tonks out of the trophy room, though."

"Thomas, come on," she called out. Caleb Thomas had only just recently finished his training. He was eager, but still very inexperienced and prone to intimidation. She knew he was following her out of the room like a puppy. On her way out, she grabbed the floor plan for the Malfoy manor. "Okay, Caleb, I need you to familiarize yourself with the floor plan. Most of our searching will be in the first floor rooms and cellar. It's not likely that anything would be hidden in one of the guest rooms. There's too great a chance that a nosy guest would stumble upon something. You know how to search for hidden chambers?"

"Yes, Miss Westin," he replied nervously.

"Let's go over this again, at work we all go by first names, out in the field it's last names. Remember?" she lectured.

"Yes, Mi..., er, Wendy."

She had always hated working with rookies. They were too easily intimidated. "Excellent. I'm going for tea and we'll talk about a plan of attack when I get back." She also needed time to think. She was almost positive that Lucius had things in that house that he wasn't supposed to have. If they found them, it would ruin any chance she had of remaining in his good graces. Conversely, keeping him out of trouble, would earn his trust. The best thing she had going for her was Caleb's inexperience. If only she knew where the hidden chambers were. She would have to make her best guess and send Caleb to the places where there was not likely anything incriminating. That would probably be the library, study and cellar. Those were the obvious places to hide something, which meant that Lucius would not use them. He much preferred to hide something under a person's nose.

Once she returned to her desk, she started to brief Caleb on the plan. By the time the Aurors met again in the conference room at eleven-thirty, she thought he was as ready as he was going to get.

George took a quick head count. "Okay, are there any questions? Everyone has a warrant, right? All right then, report back to me when you're done."

"Good luck, Kingsley," Wendy said.

"You too," he called back.

"Let's go, Caleb," she ordered.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 of 27

Voldemort is back and the Order of the Phoenix is reforming. They need new members and Kingsley recruits one of his fellow Aurors - even though she is a Slytherin. Assigned to work with Remus Lupin, things get very tense. Set during 'Order of the Phoenix'.

They Apparated outside the front gates of Malfoy's manor. Fortunately, it was in Wiltshire and, while it was cold, there was no snow on the ground.

"We have to walk all the way up there?" Caleb asked.

"Yeah, most of these places have anti-Apparition wards to discourage uninvited guests. Now, you remember how this works, right?" she asked as they began the long walk up to the house proper.

"I let you serve the warrant and do all the talking," he said by rote.

"That's right. And why is that?" She was thankful he was a quick study. The last time she had been partnered with a rookie, the poor kid had been so nervous he was nearly useless.

"Because Mr. Malfoy is intimidating and I'm not used to dealing with people like him," he replied sarcastically.

"Exactly. And this isn't a joke. People like Malfoy will do what they can to make you feel like you are doing something wrong. This is your first raid. Watch and learn. Remember to defer any questions to me and, if you find something?" This was a very important question, as two of the younger Aurors had been injured during the last set of raids.

"I'm not to touch it because I don't know what kind of protective spells it will have. I'm to find you."

"Good. Just remember that." They walked in silence until they were standing outside the door. "Get your ID ready," she ordered. She saw that he had obviously forgotten to cast a warming charm in his nervousness. She truly despised working with rookies. Reaching up for the silver doorknocker, she rapped three times and pulled out her badge.

After only a few seconds a house-elf opened the door. "How may I be helping you?" it asked obsequiously.

Wendy flashed her badge. "Magical Law Enforcement to see Mr. Malfoy." The elf gestured for them to follow. She saw Caleb looking around with his mouth agape and realized that he had never been in surroundings like this. If she recalled correctly he was Muggle-born. She had lost count of the number of times she had been to this manor. "Close your mouth, you look like a fish," she muttered quietly.

"Sorry," he replied sheepishly.

She strongly resisted the urge to roll her eyes. The elf left them in a drawing room. "Stand still," she ordered quietly. She watched Caleb stand nervously next to her. She crossed to the mantle and began investigating its contents.

"May I help you?" asked an irritated Lucius Malfoy.

She took her time turning to face him. "Mr. Lucius Malfoy, I am Auror Westin and this is my partner Auror Thomas. I have a warrant to search your residence for Dark artifacts and illegally enchanted Muggle artifacts." She held the warrant in her hand. While someone else would have walked to him, she would make him come to her.

Lucius scowled as he crossed the room to take the warrant from her hand. It was incredibly insolent behavior on her part. "I assume you have identification?" he sneered as he read over the warrant.

She flashed her badge at him. "Are you wife and son present?"

"They are at her mother's," he replied dryly.

That was not what she was hoping to hear. He would likely feel compelled to take certain liberties since he was home alone. "I will, of course, have to confiscate your wand for the duration of the search." She knew he did not have it with him, but held her hand out anyway.

He gave her a small smirk. "Of course. It's in my study, but I assure you, this search is a waste of time." He gestured toward the doorway.

"Thomas, start your search in the cellar," she ordered before gesturing that Lucius should lead the way. Caleb gave her a tentative look as though he was unsure about leaving her alone with Malfoy, but she shooed him on his way.

Once she was in the study, he closed the door. "He's quite young isn't he?"

"There is nothing dangerous in the cellar, is there?"

He picked up his cane and brushed her cheek with the snakehead. "Nothing overly dangerous that he shouldn't be able to handle. Are you looking out for me?" he purred.

"Purely by chance, but yes. Was I correct in assuming that you have nothing hidden in the cellar?"

"What makes you think I'm hiding anything?" He pulled her against him.

"Now, Lucius, I am supposed to be searching the premises." She half-heartedly tried to pull away, realizing she had a role to play.

"Of course. And any good search should begin with the master of the house. Young Thomas should be busy down there for quite some time. That was your intention, wasn't it?" He trailed the serpent down her body.

"Lucius, you're horrible," she chided playfully, hoping she would not succumb to the same bout of poor judgment that had overtaken her the other day.

He gave her a roguish smile, "I am, aren't I?" He devoured her in a kiss. "Now then, would you care to start upstairs with the bedrooms? The idea of having an Auror during a raid is positively divine."

"You are horrible," she joked. She reached around and pulled his cane out of his hand and forced some space between them. "I will have to hold onto this," she said as she pulled his wand free.

"Of course. I would never do anything to prevent an Auror from carrying out her job." He slipped his hand inside her robe and was pleased to feel her shiver at his touch. "I've always wondered what Aurors wear under their robes." His eyes twinkled with amusement and desire.

There was something about the way he looked at her that made her weak at the knees and she could feel her resolve fading. "Then I guess I'll have to let you find out, won't I?" She ran her hands down his chest and pushed him away. In a very professional voice, she announced, "Now, Mr. Malfoy, I will begin my inspection upstairs."

As they walked up the stairs, he said, "I would be interested in knowing what would happen if a raid were conducted on your house? I know that Edgar had many things that could prove rather embarrassing, and I have to assume that you've found them all. Not to mention the fact you have done your own dabbling in the Dark Arts," he hinted malevolently.

"As I'm above reproach, that's not something I concern myself with. Don't worry Lucius, nothing will be found during this raid. Your reputation will remain spotless and you will be free to protest to Madam Bones about the horrid treatment you received by the Aurors conducting the search." She shoved him into the first bedroom they passed. Playfully, she brandished his wand and backed him to the bed. "Now then, Mr. Malfoy, which rooms should I keep my colleague out of?" she asked as she straddled him.

He drawled, "Truly, I will have to complain about this horrid treatment. The dining and drawing rooms along with the garden." Slowly, he began unfastening her robes.

"Good. Now that we have that covered we can get down to business."

"Yes, we can," he said. There was no way he would allow her to remain in control and he flipped her onto her back.

Wendy was searching the library under Lucius' close scrutiny when Caleb returned from the basement. He was quite dusty and dirty. Wendy took one look at him and cleared her throat. He saw how dirty he was and quickly cleaned off the dirt.

"Well?" she asked.

"I found a couple of concealed chambers, but they looked like they hadn't been opened for a long time. Other than that, I found nothing suspicious," reported Caleb.

"As I said, this was a waste of time," Lucius drawled.

"Mr. Malfoy, thank you for your time and cooperation. We'll show ourselves out." She pulled his wand out of her pocket and placed it on a small table.

He crossed the room to retrieve his wand. His voice carried an air of menace as he said, "The Ministry will of course hear about this."

Wendy inclined her head slightly. "That is well within your rights, Mr. Malfoy. Good day."

Once they were away from house and walking toward the front gates, Caleb asked nervously, "What did you do that he's filing a complaint?" He was not looking forward to being disciplined so early in his career when he had done nothing wrong.

"Nothing. He just likes to file complaints of harassment any time his house gets searched. So you found nothing at all?" She had to make sure he wasn't just saying that in front of Lucius in order to avoid confrontation.

"I saw some strange things down there, but nothing forbidden. Did you know there's a second level to the cellars?"

She did, but since it wasn't on the drawings, she couldn't admit it. "Really? That's interesting. You'll have to update the floor plan." She looked over at him and he looked quite pleased with himself for his discovery.

The following morning, Wendy was assaulted by a memo ordering her report immediately to Amelia Bones' office. She had no idea what the urgency of the situation was, but it couldn't be good. She stopped by Kingsley's cubicle to see if he had received a similar summons, but he wasn't in.

When she arrived at Amelia's office, the receptionist admitted her immediately. Wendy saw that her department head was furious.

"Would you care to explain this?" Amelia asked as she thrust a piece of parchment at Wendy.

Wendy read the parchment as she took a seat. Lucius had filed a complaint and listed several indignities he claimed to have suffered. He had been particularly creative in his complaints. She began to wonder if he was trying to get her removed from fieldwork, since he had hinted that getting her a desk job would give her more time to devote to him. She shrugged her shoulders and placed the letter on Amelia's desk. "He's Lucius Malfoy. He loves to over-react to everything the Ministry does."

"Knowing that, you should have been more careful. The Minister is livid over this. I'm meeting with Mr. Malfoy this afternoon, and I'm going to see if he'll accept a formal apology from you. If he doesn't, I may have to suspend you from fieldwork and put a formal reprimand in your file. This is your last warning to behave within the Ministry's guidelines."

"That's what you said last time," Wendy muttered.

Amelia leaned forward across her desk. "Wendy, I'm serious this time. You know things are changing at the Ministry. Your style of work has been tolerated, but those days are at an end. You know that your presence within the Department has always been questioned. The less attention you draw to yourself the better."

"If I leave, there will be no one left to do your dirty work. I have seen my fellow Aurors flinch at what is asked of me. I produce results and I always operate within the guidelines. If Mr. Malfoy wants an apology, I will give him one, though it will not be sincere." She couldn't believe he had done this. He could have filed a complaint without getting her in this much trouble.

Amelia sighed. "Just be civil and make him believe it's sincere. I'll summon you if he agrees."

Wendy maintained her composure as she left Amelia's office. It lasted until she noticed an unfortunate dustbin and launched it down the row of cubicles with a swift kick, narrowly missing Tonks as she stepped out of her cubicle. "Oy, watch it!" Tonks admonished.

"Sorry." She hadn't meant to hurt anyone.

"What's got you so worked up?" Tonks knew it was rare for Wendy to lose her temper.

"Lucius bloody Malfoy. He filed a formal complaint about the search yesterday. Now Amelia's begging him to let me apologize," she complained.

"What'd you do?" Tonks knew that Wendy was careful when she did searches not to ruffle feathers.

"Nothing. We didn't damage anything, we weren't overly rude, but he feels that *we behaved inappropriately*. That's what I hate most about these raids, dealing with people like him." Surely he was up to something. Probably just trying to prove how much influence he had. She knew he hated not being in control, and she had taken some of that control away yesterday. Seeking revenge in this manner was just the sort of thing he would do.

"I know what you mean. Wanna get together and talk about it tomorrow?"

"What time?" Wendy figured this was an announcement of the next Order meeting.

"Seven. Same place as usual," Tonks replied.

"I'll be there."

It was late afternoon and Wendy was just getting ready to leave for the day, when she was, once again, assaulted by a pale violet piece of paper summoning her to Amelia's office. She had actually begun to think that Lucius was going to be childish enough to not accept her apology. She headed towards Amelia's office, but did not rush, more than willing to play the same petty games he was playing.

The receptionist looked up from her desk. "You can go in," she said politely.

Wendy made her face neutral and entered the office. Amelia still looked upset and Lucius was sitting there wearing that smug and superior grin of his.

"I believe you have something you'd like to say?" Amelia prompted.

Wendy looked at him coolly. "On behalf of the Ministry of Magic and Department of Magical Law Enforcement, I apologize for what you feel was unfair treatment during yesterday's search of your premises." She could almost see the steam coming out of Amelia's ears.

"Is that the extent of your apology?" Amelia asked.

Wendy continued reluctantly, "Furthermore, I apologize that you felt your privacy was *violated* and rest assured that was not the intent of the search. I endeavored to ensure the inspection was carried out with the utmost dignity and respect of your personal privacy. If you were made to feel victimized, that was not the intent of the Ministry."

He gave her an amused grin over her apology. The grin was gone by the time he faced Amelia. "I will accept the apology as long as there are assurances that this sort of

behavior will not be tolerated in future inspections. I believe that perhaps someone as overzealous as Westin should not be permitted to conduct future inspections."

"Of course, Mr. Malfoy. Westin has been counseled on the inappropriateness of her behavior and steps have been taken to ensure that something like this does not happen in the future," Amelia assured, pleased that that he was apparently accepting Wendy's apology and would not be bringing this to the attention of the Minister.

"Thank you for your assurances, Madam Bones. I will trust you to handle this situation appropriately and I will inform Minister Fudge the situation has been resolved to my satisfaction. Good day." He bowed his head slightly at Amelia and scowled at Wendy, who glared back at him.

Wendy was turning to leave when Amelia called her back. Wendy sighed and turned to face her boss.

"That was not quite as sincere an apology as I had expected, but Mr. Malfoy seems to have accepted it. It will be a while before you will be conducting any more raids, but somehow, I doubt that seems like punishment to you. Just keep in mind that was truly your last warning. You can't go around antagonizing people like that. Once more and you will find yourself chained to a desk. Understood?" Her tone indicated there was no room for discussion.

"Perfectly," Wendy replied and was dismissed with a wave. She would definitely give Lucius a piece of her mind when she next saw him. Unfortunately, that came a lot sooner than she had anticipated. He was waiting for a lift when she arrived at the landing. "Mr. Malfoy," she said coldly.

"Westin," he replied in an equally polite tone.

Surprisingly, the lift was empty when the door opened. As soon as the doors were closed she asked angrily, "I suppose you enjoyed toying with me like that, didn't you? She was going to take me off fieldwork over that little deception of yours."

"You mean she hasn't? Pity," he drawled and moved closer to her.

She shoved him away. "Dammit, Lucius, I love my work in the field, don't take that away from me." The conversation paused as the doors opened on the fifth floor for a flurry of memos. "When I said to file a complaint, I wasn't serious."

He smirked at her. "I thought it would be interesting and it most certainly was. Fantastic apology, by the way. Are you busy this evening?"

"What?" She was caught off guard by his abrupt change of topic.

He softly brushed her cheek. "I'll come by your place for dinner, say six-thirty?"

She was unable to answer since the lift had opened to the lobby. She banged her head against the lift wall after Lucius left. Thankfully, Remus was still gone, but she would have to tell him when he came back.

It was mid-afternoon when Remus returned home, exhausted from his transformation. It had gone reasonably well with the new werewolf. He had a new collection of cuts and scratches, but it was nothing he wasn't used to. In a few days, when they had both recovered, they would get back together and he would continue helping his new friend acclimatize to his new lifestyle. For now, he would rest on the sofa. He was sure that Cappa would be along shortly with food and drink.

Around five, he heard Wendy arrive home. He smiled at the thought of seeing her again even though it had only been a couple days.

Wendy entered the library and was startled to see Remus. "Remus? I wasn't expecting you back so soon."

"Sorry to surprise you. The transformation was short this time. You don't look entirely happy to see me, is something wrong?" Before the full moon, he had gotten the impression that she was hiding something from him.

She quickly put a happy smile on her face and crossed the room to sit next to him on the sofa. "Of course, I'm happy to see you. I was just a little startled and you do look a bit worse for the wear."

"Do I look that bad?" He had not yet looked in a mirror.

She brushed his hair, which was somewhat matted by dirt and, she suspected, blood. Kissing him gently on the lips, she replied, "Yes, you do. I see that you've eaten so I'll have Cappa draw a bath for you. I'll be right back."

Remus' untimely return presented her with a rather large obstacle. Well, if she could get him upstairs, she hoped she could find a way to get rid of Lucius. Of course, Lucius did not take kindly to someone telling him no. She found Cappa and ordered the elf to draw a bath with a soothing potion to help with the cuts and scrapes. She then helped Remus upstairs.

As they passed the mirror in the bedroom, he paused to look at his reflection. "I guess I did take a bit of a beating this time, didn't I? You know, you take such wonderful care of me. Thank you."

She felt a pang of guilt at his praise and the affection in his voice. "You're quite welcome." She helped him undress and step into the bath. "I'll be in the other room if you need me. You aren't going to fall asleep, are you?"

"No, I'll be fine. I'll call if I need anything," he replied. He could tell that something was bothering her. Normally she stayed with him and helped him wash.

As she was changing, she checked the clock. It was half past five. The odds were in her favor that Remus would be asleep by the time Lucius arrived. Then it was a simple matter of hopefully getting rid of Lucius quietly and quickly. She was definitely regretting her decision to renew her relationship with her old lover.

She was almost done flipping through the *Daily Prophet*, without really retaining much of what she read, when she heard Remus stirring in the bath. "Do you need help?" she called out.

"No, I've got it," he replied. It was another ten minutes before he emerged wearing the nightshirt she had laid out for him. He was leaning heavily on his cane. "I feel much better. Thank you." She rose and helped him into the bed. "Thank you again," he replied. "I do hope you will forgive me if I don't join you for dinner, won't you?" He placed his hand on her cheek.

She smiled warmly at him and covered his hand with hers. "Of course. Take all the time to recover you need. Can I get you anything before I go downstairs?"

"No, I just need some rest," he replied as he wriggled on the bed to get comfortable.

She kissed him gently. "I'll check on you later." She brushed his hair out of his face and looked into his eyes.

He saw a sadness behind her eyes. "Wendy, what is it?"

"You need your rest, I'll tell you about it in the morning." She kissed him again, hoping to diffuse the situation.

"What have I missed?" He had a sinking feeling in his stomach. Whatever she was hiding from him must be truly horrible *she going to break up with me?* he wondered.

She decided to tell a half-truth. "You remember how Albus wanted me to renew my old friendships? I ran into Lucius Malfoy at the Ministry today and, long story short, he's coming over for dinner tonight. I hadn't expected you here, so I didn't think it would be an issue. I'll try to get rid of him."

"You were going to have dinner alone with Malfoy?" He was outraged.

She flashed him confident smile. "I wouldn't worry about it. I'm used to dealing with people like him."

"I don't trust him. I don't want him alone with you," he protested. He knew what sort of man Malfoy was.

"Remus, darling, I'll be fine. We'll talk more about this tomorrow when you're feeling better." She continued to lavish attention on him, hoping to discourage further conversation.

"Promise me you'll be careful," he said as he brushed her cheek.

"I'm always careful. I'll check on you after I get rid of him. Now, rest." Normally, she didn't mind keeping secrets. That was the way of her life. This one, she didn't like keeping. The possessiveness he had displayed led her to believe he would not take her arrangement well, but it was too late now. She had committed herself to this course of action.

Wendy was in the library and it was six-thirty exactly when Cappa entered the room. "Mistress, Mr. Malfoy is in the drawing room."

"Tell him I will be with him shortly and offer him a drink." It wouldn't do for her to appear to be waiting for him.

After about ten minutes, she decided to join him. "Lucius, how good to see you again. I apologize for keeping you waiting." She watched him set down his drink and rise to greet her as she had expected. She did not expect him to pull her into his arms and kiss her passionately.

"You know I detest to be kept waiting," he chided.

"I do. Unfortunately, I have an unexpected houseguest upstairs convalescing. A very close friend of mine and I couldn't say no." She brushed her hands on his lapels, trying to slip out of his grip.

He frowned. "A guest? Will this guest of yours be joining us for dinner?" He had not expected this and was disappointed.

"No, he's resting," she explained.

"Then we will be careful not to disturb him," he drawled before kissing her again.

She finally managed to extricate herself from his grip and found herself panting. Once again her physical memory was betraying the actions her mind had planned. "Now, Lucius, you can't have dessert first," she reprimanded and then casually placed a chair between them.

He arched an eyebrow, taking her statement as a challenge. "Oh, really?" He circled around the chair trying to catch her as she did her best to keep the chair between them. He finally managed to grab her arm and pull her to him. "I always get what I want," he whispered quietly as he held her tightly.

She could feel her heart racing. "Dinner will be ready shortly," she said weakly.

"I'm sure it will keep," he purred as he threw her onto the sofa. "I never got a chance to properly thank you for your assistance during yesterday's raid." He buried his face in her neck.

She could feel herself losing control and used her Auror training to slip out from underneath him and pin him against the sofa beneath her. "First you will have to allow me to thank you for getting me in trouble." Lacing her fingers into his clothes, she ripped open both vest and shirt, sending buttons flying across the room in a clatter. She was pleased to see the look of shock on his face. "You aren't used to being treated like this, are you?" He tried to get up and she shoved him back against the sofa. It was her turn to show that she would not meekly acquiesce to his every desire.

"You are quite a bit more aggressive than you used to be."

"Disappointed?" she asked mischievously, as she undid his trousers.

"Not in the...least," he replied, his voice cracking on the last word as she sucked on his hardened cock.

Wendy sucked and teased him, watching him squirm under her careful ministrations. When she felt he was just about ready to burst she pulled away and stood up.

"Wendy?" he asked. His erection was painful and throbbing, so very close to release, and she had just left. "Come back here," he ordered. How dare she leave him in this condition?

She kept her back to him. "No," she replied playfully.

This infuriated him. The purpose of a mistress was to please her man. He rose from the sofa, one hand clutching the waist of his trousers to keep them from falling and grabbing her with the other. "How dare you?" he growled and then found her wand at his throat.

"Because I can." She felt him release her arm. "Do not mess with my ability to do my job," she growled as she backed him to the chair.

"What are you..." he didn't finish his question because he had let go of his trousers and, in tripping over them, landed in the chair.

She pulled up her skirts and straddled him. There had been a momentary flash of fear in his eyes, and she liked it. "Something wrong?" she asked as she settled onto him.

The fear was gone now that he realized she wasn't going to hex him. "Not anymore," he replied as he grabbed her hips with his hands.

Due to his state of high arousal, he was finished rather quickly. Wendy remained on top. "Now then, any questions about the state of our arrangement?"

"None whatsoever," he replied. He could not remember ever having a woman dominate him like that. He had to admit that he had secretly enjoyed it, but he would never tell her.

She kissed him and as she pulled away, sucking on his lower lip. "Now then, I believe it's time for dinner." She stood and smoothed her skirts. This was not at all like she had planned on this evening going. He just made it so hard for her to think; his very presence aroused her.

Lucius rose and was going to button his shirt, before remembering his buttons were scattered around the room. "Some assistance would be appreciated."

She waved her wand at his chest. "*Tunica reparo.*" She watched the buttons fly across the room and reattach themselves to his clothing.

"That was quite...stimulating. I presume that you will permit me to thank you after dinner?"

"Perhaps," she replied playfully. She really needed to get rid of him. This situation was getting worse and worse. The more time she spent around him, the less resistance to him she seemed to have.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 of 27

Voldemort is back and the Order of the Phoenix is reforming. They need new members and Kingsley recruits one of his fellow Aurors - even though she is a Slytherin. Assigned to work with Remus Lupin, things get very tense. Set during 'Order of the Phoenix'.

Throughout dinner, Wendy did her best to keep her thoughts from drifting to the man sleeping in her bed. Even with the extremely handsome, and still randy, Lucius sitting beside her at the table, she found her thoughts drifting to Remus. *You are a Slytherin. You do what needs to be done to accomplish the mission. You are not a foolish and sentimental Gryffindor*, she chided.

As they finished the last of the wine, Lucius said smoothly, "Now that we have finished dinner, my dear, are you ready for dessert?"

"I should check on my patient, make sure he doesn't need anything." She hoped to get rid of him without seeming too obvious.

He rose and stood behind her chair so that he could nibble on her neck. "And what of my needs?"

She could feel her body reacting to his expert touch. "Lucius, he really shouldn't be disturbed. Perhaps another night? I'm terribly sorry."

He continued to nibble at her neck. "You would deny me my dessert? Have you forgotten what it means to be my mistress?"

She was finding it very hard to maintain her focus; there was something about him she found irresistible. "Not at all, but these are special circumstances." Saying no to him had always been incredibly difficult.

"Were my sources wrong? Do you have a lover? You know, I don't like to share," he drawled.

She lied, "No, I don't have a lover. It really would be better another time."*This time I will be strong. I will send him away* she repeated to herself.

He pulled her out of the chair, making sure to grab hold of her wrists so she couldn't reach her wand. "I don't think that it would."

She could tell from the tone of his voice that he would not take no for an answer. "Lucius, please, you're hurting me. We both knew this would be difficult. Please, he'll be gone in a few days or we can meet somewhere else." He had never hurt her before, and she hoped that he had not changed in that respect.

He loosened his grip, not wanting to hurt her. "You're telling me no?" he asked coldly.

She knew this was a dangerous situation. Her answer could easily drive him away and, with it, her opportunity to get information from him. "Not 'no', just until later. After all, you wouldn't want to be discovered here, would you? I know that Narcissa has been tolerant because you are discreet." She did her best to be charming and seductive. "My friend might be prone to let slip that you were here should he wake." She hoped this bit of logic would be enough to convince him to leave.

He frowned. "You do have a point. I will let you know when I'm in London again." He pulled her close for a rather passionate kiss. "Next time, I won't take no for an answer." There was cold menace in his voice.

She sank back into her chair as he left.*What have I done? How did I let the situation get so out of control?*She found herself wondering if he was using some sort of potion, but as an Auror, she had been trained to recognize signs of manipulation. Besides, he hadn't had access to anything she had drunk or eaten, but it had to be something. She had not had any intention of doing what she did; it had just...happened.

After Lucius left, she spent a long time in the guest suite shower washing away his scent, trying to make sense of the evening's events. Once she was sure she was clean, she turned off the tap and quickly dried herself. She dried her hair magically, not wanting to wait for it to occur naturally. Slipping on the nightgown Cappa had brought her, she left the rest of her clothes for the laundry.

Quietly, she crept into her room and slipped into bed behind Remus. As she nuzzled against him, he rolled over in a state of half-alertness and wrapped his arm around her. She rolled onto her other side to spoon against him. His embrace was exactly what she needed, though a part of her felt she didn't deserve it. She lay awake for a long time as her mind toiled with the conflicting emotions; emotions she hadn't been aware she felt.

She woke to a shower of kisses on her neck. The sun was just peeking through the partially drawn curtains.

"Good morning, beautiful," Remus said softly when he felt her stirring.

She snuggled into his embrace. "Good morning, lover," she replied.

"Mmmm. I like the sound of that," he replied as he continued to nuzzle into her neck.

She giggled as three days worth of stubble tickled her. "Nice to see you are feeling better," she said as she rolled over to look into his warm brown eyes. She was touched by the adoration in his expression and started to feel her guilt creeping to the surface.

"Yes, I feel closer to my old self. I thought you might like to have breakfast together before you left for work." He rubbed her back, just enjoying the way she felt in his arms, hoping his fears of the previous evening had been unfounded.

"That would be wonderful. Join me in the shower?" she asked as she rolled out of bed.

He looked at her sadly. "Normally, I'd say yes, but my strength is not up to it. I'll meet you at breakfast." While she went into the bath, he pulled his clothes out of the wardrobe. Since he had no intention of going anywhere today, he chose his own clothes. While he appreciated her giving him her husband's old clothes, he preferred to wear his own clothes as much as possible.

When Wendy joined him at breakfast, he was halfway through his first cup of tea. In the full morning light, she could see that bruises had developed under some of his

deeper cuts. "I'll bring a healing potion home tonight to help with the cuts."

He was touched by her concern. "You shouldn't worry so much about me. This isn't too bad. How was your dinner last night?"

"It went as well as can be expected. He's a difficult man to work with." She tried to keep a light and airy tone.

"And you think you can renew your friendship with him?" Remus asked suspiciously.

"It might take some time to gain his confidence, but yes. I only hope I will be able to glean something useful out of it." She took a sip of her tea. She knew she had to tell the whole truth, but right now her time was limited. She was sure this would not be a short conversation.

He had the impression she was not being entirely truthful. "What are you offering him in return?"

"What?" She hadn't expected him to ask questions.

"Malfoy is not the type of person that provides something for nothing. What are you offering him in return?" He found she was not meeting his gaze. The color drained from his face and he asked weakly, "You aren't, are you?"

She had no idea why she suddenly felt guilty, but she did. She knew she was doing what was necessary in order to accomplish the mission. Feeling uncomfortable sitting at the table with him staring at her, she rose and stood before the window. "As you know, most of those I went to school with were pureblood aristocrats. We used to get together for various holiday balls and over the summer we generally met at someone's house every weekend. Our parents didn't provide too much supervision; children were expected to entertain themselves while the adults talked politics or the latest fashions. Even as we became older teenagers we weren't well supervised. No one would notice if we weren't around, so we used to get together in the evenings and have drunken orgies." She paused, trying to find the least painful way to continue. "I was Lucius Malfoy's favorite. Even after he was married, he used to seek me out." She knew this should be nothing, but why did it hurt so much to tell him the truth.

Remus felt detached from what he was hearing. It sounded like a nightmare, something that couldn't possibly be happening to him. She was entertaining using sex to get to Malfoy. Or perhaps she already had. "Have you?" he could barely hear the words escape his lips.

She heard the pain and disappointment in his voice and found she couldn't answer. In an attempt to maintain her composure, she bit her lower lip. He had awoken emotions in her she hadn't even thought she possessed. She had never realized what getting involved with a Gryffindor would mean; their damned sense of honor complicated everything.

He saw her shoulders slump slightly. "You have." Anger was starting to supplant shock. "And last night? Did the two of you *fuck* each other while I was asleep?"

She had regained control of her emotions. "Yes, and that's all it is. It's a business arrangement, nothing more. There is no emotion between the two of us. I fuck him to earn his trust and learn his secrets."

He was infuriated. "I can't believe you would have sex with another man. I thought we had something."

She turned to face him, doing her best to control the tears she could feel welling in her eyes. "We do. Remus, I care deeply for you. Lucius means nothing to me. I'm Slytherin and we will do what is necessary to get the job done."

"Including cheating on me!" he shouted. "You could have at least had the common courtesy to bring this up before you fucked him."

She flinched as though struck. "You weren't exactly around to consult." *Why doesn't he understand? Why is he making this so complicated? I'm simply using the resources at my disposal to get information for the Order.*

He stared at her in shock. "You mean this is something you decided in the last couple of days? What kind of slut are you? Perhaps you really are a whore? Who else are you selling yourself to?"

She tried not to let his words sting. "I hadn't expected things to move so quickly. I had intended to feel out the situation, see if he was amenable to being friends. After all, it's been more than a decade since I've spoken with him. But whatever you may think, I'm not a slut. I was his lover for eight years. It's not like he's a complete stranger. He made a business proposition, I saw it was a great opportunity for the Order, and I took it," she defended.

He ran his hand through his hair and was most definitely feeling physically ill. "I need some time." He turned and limped out of the dining room.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"Out," he replied shortly as he grabbed his cloak from the hook.

"When will you be back?"

He slammed the door on his way out without answering.

Wendy collapsed onto her chair, picked up a butter knife and threw it across the room, embedding it to the hilt in the wall *Damned Gryffindors and their damned sense of honor*. She knew he had a right to be hurt and angry. Only now, did she realize how deeply her decision would hurt him. The worst thing about this whole situation was that she had no one she could discuss this with. "Fuck!" she screamed and decided to just go into work, though she wasn't sure how much work she would get done. There couldn't possibly be any worse way to start the day.

Remus found himself aimlessly wandering around the park. There was no one he could talk to. If he told Sirius, he was sure his friend would say, "I told you so." Sirius had repeatedly warned him that getting involved with Wendy was a bad idea. Not just because she was a Slytherin, but based on the things she had done her past. Up until today, Remus had thought she had changed. He had obviously been wrong and the pain was almost unbearable.

This was why he had never given his heart to anyone before. He had not yet told her he loved her, but the truth was that he did. The only reason he had not told her was the fear that she would not reciprocate his feelings. He had thought that perhaps in time she would grow to love him. When she had called him lover this morning, he had gotten his hopes up that the time was near, that she did love him in return. Apparently, he had been wrong. There was no room for love in her cold, reptilian heart. Or was there? She had arranged a part time job for him with one of her coworker's Muggle sister. It wasn't a lot of hours, but it gave him the flexibility to have full moons off, still do work for the Order without drawing a lot of attention while gaining a sense of financial independence.

I care deeply for you, he mused. *What the hell does that mean?* As his anger subsided, it was replaced by grief. He should have known better, should have listened to Sirius, and should have listened to his own doubts. A woman like her had no need of a man like him. He had been nothing more than plaything, and obviously he wasn't good enough. Of course he wasn't good enough. He didn't compare to Lucius Malfoy.

Malfoy was better looking and had money. The fact that she might also get some information about Death Eater activity was probably a bonus. Well, he wouldn't get in her way. Though, now that he thought about it, might she have decided to switch sides? Malfoy could offer her a way to return to the aristocratic society she claimed to hate, but did she really? She had told him she didn't have a good time at the Ministry Ball, but he had heard Tonks describing Wendy as appearing to have fun while socializing with all her old high society friends, flirting with most of the men in attendance. How much of it had been an act? Most Slytherins were excellent liars and the ease with which she slipped into character when they went out looking for information began to make him wonder how much of her relationship with him had been an act.

Come to think of it, she had mentioned being Malfoy's lover for eight years. Quick mental arithmetic led him to conclude that not only had she been Malfoy's lover after he was married, but also after she was married. True, she admitted that she didn't love her husband, but this showed she had no respect for a monogamous relationship. He had truly been played as a fool.

Glancing at his watch, he saw that it was well past time she should be at work. He decided he had no choice but to move back to Grimmauld Place. There was no possible way he could continue to live under the same roof as her.

Mercifully, she was gone when he returned. He went upstairs and pulled out his tattered suitcase. Since he had few possessions, it didn't take him long to finish packing. Taking one last look around the room, he tried to hold onto the smallest bit of happiness. As he was closing the suitcase, he heard a small voice behind him.

"Master Lupin, where is you going, sir?" Cappa asked.

"Away," he replied sadly. There was no point in taking his anger out on the elf.

"When is you coming back, sir?"

"I'm not."

"Sir, Mistress was telling me to ask you to stay. She says she has more to tell you." Cappa was clearly agitated that he was leaving against her mistress' wish.

"You tell her that I don't want to hear what she has to say. She's said enough. Thank you for your hospitality, Cappa," he said before heading down the stairs.

Remus stood before the door of Number Twelve, steeling himself for Sirius' reaction. He hoped that Sirius would see his heart had been crushed and this was not the time to gloat. When he opened the door, he could hear happy voices coming from the drawing room upstairs. He had no interest in joining in the merriment, so he went down to the kitchen. Seated at the table was the last person he wanted to deal with.

"You're still alive? Pity that other werewolf didn't kill you. Though, judging from your appearance, I would say that he made an excellent effort," Severus said dryly.

"Not now, Severus." He was in no mood for verbal sparring.

This was, of course, exactly the prompting Severus needed to continue. He appraised his opponent trying to choose the best course of attack. Noticing the suitcase, he sneered as he recalled a recent conversation with Lucius and extrapolated a likely course of events. "So, she has finally come to her senses and realized what a poor choice you were. I was surprised that someone from my house would even have been remotely interested in a Gryffindor," he sneered.

Remus drew his wand. "Shut up!"

Severus knew it was unlikely Remus would actually attack him. "It seems I've struck a nerve. I'm glad she has finally kicked you out. It was demeaning to know that a Slytherin was consorting with the likes of you."

Remus was on the verge of hexing Severus. "Just so we are clear, I left, she didn't kick me out."

"Because you knew she has found someone better. You are no competition for one from my House. I'm glad to see she has regained her senses." This was shaping up to be an enjoyable day. "You do realize she was only using you? You were so clearly desperate for female companionship that it made you such easy prey. As if someone like her could ever care about someone like you," he snarled.

Remus was seething with anger, but he still realized that Severus was goading him on purpose. "Believe what you want." He grabbed his bag and left the room in a huff.

Severus had a satisfied smirk on his face as he heard Remus stomp up the stairs. It seems this trip to this pathetic excuse for a house had not been a complete waste of time.

Sirius thought he heard someone going up the stairs. That was odd, especially since he hadn't heard the doorbell. Since he was not enjoying the festivities, he slipped out of the room and decided to investigate. When he reached the third floor landing, he noticed that the door to the bedroom Remus had used was closed. Checking the doorknob, he found that it was locked. He knocked on the door.

"Go away!" came Remus' muffled shout.

"Remus, let me in," Sirius replied. It was more of a request than an order. As he stood outside the locked door, he began to suspect that Remus was not going to let him in. He was just about to leave when he heard the door unlock. One look at his friend showed that Remus was incredibly distressed. "What is it?"

"I don't want to talk about," he replied tersely and threw himself into the armchair.

Sirius saw the suitcase. "It's about her, isn't it?"

"I don't want to talk about it!" Remus snapped.

Sirius involuntarily pulled back. He couldn't remember seeing Remus like this before. "What did she do to you?" He had known she was trouble and she could pay for whatever she did to Remus.

Remus could tell that Sirius was not going to leave him alone. "Fine, you want to know? You were right."

"Right about what?" Sirius asked cautiously.

"Right about her. She was the wrong sort of person for me. She used me. Okay, are you happy? You were right," he replied bitterly.

Sirius found that he wasn't happy. The last few months he had seen Remus change for the better. At least one of them had found happiness. Sirius had found his prison here at Grimmauld Place even worse than Azkaban. At least there, he knew he was a prisoner. Here, it was a bit of a gilded cage. He was constantly tormented by his contact with the outside. "No, I'm not. I had hoped that you were right, that she had changed. What happened?" he asked gently as he took a seat in the desk chair.

Remus had been thinking about this for hours. He knew he would have to explain it at some point. "Right before New Year's, she got a message from Dumbledore encouraging her to make contact with her former classmates. She was incredibly successful at that." He had to pause before continuing. "It seems she and Malfoy have a past, a rather sordid past." He didn't want to go on and hoped that Sirius could make the connection.

"Why, that bitch!" Sirius shouted as he realized what Remus was hinting at. "I'll kill her."

"No, don't do that. I just want to move on."

"What are you going to do when you see her?"

"I'm just going to ignore her. I think it'll be easier."

Wendy checked her watch; it was nearly seven. If she left now, she should have time to stop by her house, though she doubted Remus would be there. The lift seemed to take forever to reach the lobby. At least no one tried to stop her on her way out.

Shortly after she Apparated to her foyer, Cappa was standing nervously in front of her.

"Mistress, Master Remus has gone. He was saying he was not coming back."

Wendy ran upstairs and pulled open the wardrobe door. Remus had packed all his belongings and left. Everything she had given him was still there, though. In anger, she pulled out her wand and hexed the door, blowing it to bits. There was no time to sulk now; she was going to be late as it was.

As she had expected, the meeting had started without her. She saw Remus on the far side of the room, avoiding making any eye contact with her. Hopefully, she could get him to listen to the rest of her explanation after the meeting was over.

She was only half listening until it was her turn to report. "I've made some progress in befriending Malfoy. It will take some time to gain his confidence, but I know he would love to have an Auror on his side. He's always liked to boast about how well things are going for him. I can also get an idea of his schedule and hopefully extract some important information from that. I did have to bend some rules, but in the long run I think it will serve us better that I didn't find anything when we raided his house. He's somewhat in my debt because I protected him from embarrassment and possible prosecution." She scanned around the room as she spoke and could see the hatred Remus was directing at her as she glossed over the fact she had chosen to become Lucius' lover. She also thought part of it may be due to the fact she had never mentioned raiding Lucius' manor.

"He's also hinted that my brother's influence is waning and that I might find some acceptance within my old circle of schoolmates. It's definitely an opportunity worth exploring. I know it's a fine line I have to walk so I don't get drawn into the Death Eater circle too deeply, but I'm up to the challenge."

"Excellent. We can use your information to corroborate what we receive from Severus." Minerva then turned her attention to Moody.

Severus leaned over and whispered into Wendy's ear, "Glad to see you finally came to your senses."

"What?" she whispered back.

"It was truly inspired. Making the werewolf your lover before crushing his heart. Far more effective than any torment I could have devised," he whispered smugly.

She chose to ignore him rather than making a scene. She felt truly miserable about her actions.

Remus and Sirius were talking quietly after the meeting broke up. Sirius nudged Remus. "Here she comes."

Wendy stopped in front of Remus and did her best to ignore Sirius. "Remus, we need to talk."

"I have nothing further to say to you," he replied coldly.

"Remus, please." She hated demeaning herself by begging, especially in front of Black.

"He said he doesn't have anything to say to you," said Sirius snidely.

"Stay out of this, Black. It isn't your business." She knew that his presence would only make the situation worse.

"It is when you abuse my friend and that's exactly what you've done." Sirius was ready to make her pay for what she did to Remus.

"Remus, I didn't get to finish my explanation this morning. I was hoping we could speak more rationally this evening. I would appreciate it if you would join me in the library," she said politely.

After she left, Sirius looked at Remus. "You aren't going to go up there, are you?"

Remus sighed. "I have to. I have to know." He would at least give her the opportunity to finish her explanation.

"Good luck, mate," Sirius said. *You're going to need it.*

Remus entered the library and took a seat. "You wanted to talk? Talk." He crossed his arms, taking an adversarial stance.

With a wave of her wand, she locked and warded the door. "I apologize for not speaking with you first. I should have mentioned my past when I received the letter from Albus requesting I attend the Ball and try and renew old friendships. That was wrong of me. I was being selfish. I was thinking of what was best for the Order. I did not take your feelings into consideration. I also thought that I could resist him, if he would even still be interested in me. Truthfully, I thought I would be too old for that role. I realize, now, that was a monumental mistake."

"Those are pretty words and they flow so nicely off your forked tongue. I supposed you've been practicing this little speech all day, haven't you?" he replied sarcastically.

"Can we please be civil? I know that what I did hurt you, that you see it as betrayal. I know you are going to claim that what I say next is nothing more than a flimsy excuse, and perhaps it is, but I am going to attempt to explain. Growing up in an aristocratic family, I learned nothing of love. It's something that does not exist in that culture. It's not something that I understood."

"Very touching," he said with mock sympathy.

She tried not to get frustrated, but began pacing anyway. "Dammit, Remus, I'm trying. From a very young age, I have been taught to suppress positive emotions, that they are signs of weakness and others will exploit you if they get the chance. I was told from the time I was seven that my parents would select a fine husband for me, one that would take care of me. We were never told fairytales; those were dreams reserved for commoners, those that could never aspire to our positions of privilege. These teachings were only reinforced in the Slytherin common room. Promiscuity was never discouraged or encouraged, I was just taught that a lady was discreet and took care not to conceive a child. Sex was a physical pleasure; some enjoyed it and others chose to abstain from it. I think you know what type of person I was. I was raised in a very different world from you. I will be the first to admit that my morals are vastly different from yours; something I didn't fully appreciate until this morning."

"And now that you appreciate this, what are your plans? Have you suddenly decided that fidelity has meaning?" It was really quite an interesting story she told, but it did not earn his sympathy. She had only admitted to having hurt him, but had mentioned nothing about what she planned to do about it.

She continued pacing around the room. "This is where my dilemma is. Lucius' dissatisfaction with his marital relations, or lack thereof, and my past with him have given me an excellent opportunity to get close to him, and by extension, my old schoolmates."

"He would parade his mistress to his friends?" Even as naïve as he was to the world of the aristocrats, this seemed a bit too audacious.

She explained, "I would never be presented as his mistress, but I would have the opportunity to integrate myself back into that social circle. There are a few bachelors in that circle and, as I am the last with the Westin name, that does make me somewhat desirable from a social standpoint, not to mention a financial standpoint."

"Even the Leah family is influential, if there was such an attraction between the two of you, why did he not marry you?" he asked sarcastically.

She recalled a conversation she and Lucius had many years ago, shortly before his betrothal to Narcissa had been announced. "The Leah family isn't that influential. Politically, it was much better for him to marry a Black." That news had devastated her when she had heard it. Even though she knew that it wasn't likely he would marry her, she had foolishly held out hope. Now, she knew it had all been for the best.

"And your dilemma?" he asked, growing impatient with her lengthy excuse. While he was nearly positive he knew what her dilemma was, he wanted to hear her put it into words.

"The information I could learn by associating with him could make a tremendous difference in our efforts to thwart the Dark Lord. My dilemma is that you have taught me something of those positive emotions that I have suppressed for so long. I hurt you in a way that I never could have imagined and, for the first time in my life, I have felt remorse. I never had any intention of hurting you and it's not something I take pleasure in."

"Congratulations on taking the first step towards emotional development. Are you done?" For all he knew, this was an elaborate ploy on her part to gain his sympathy. He would not indulge her.

"No." None of what she said seemed to be making any difference. There had to be a way to help him understand.

"Then do hurry up. I really have no desire to be around you."

She could hear the disgust in his voice. "Can you honestly say that?" she asked, barely holding her emotions in check.

It was his turn. He stood to face her, hoping to use his height to intimidate her. "I think that I can. I trusted you. I gave you my heart and you yanked it out of my chest and stomped on it as if it were nothing. You showed me *absolutely* no consideration whatsoever, and I somehow doubt your new epiphany will change that. After all, you were his lover for eight years, and by my calculation, not only was he married to someone else, but so were you. As you said, you were raised differently and have different morals. I should have listened to Sirius' warnings. There is no way that we are compatible. I was just a plaything for you, wasn't I? Someone you could dress up and play house with? You saw that I was vulnerable and alone and you took advantage of me and used me. And now you want to continue to do so? I think not." He was using Severus' statement against her because it seemed to ring true.

She was growing desperate and reached out for him. "Remus, no, I didn't use you. I am attracted to you. From when I first saw you trying to pull the curtains back over Mrs. Black's portrait, I have been attracted to you. I feel absolutely wretched for what I did to you."

He pulled away from her grip. "But are you not also attracted to Malfoy?" He assumed this was true if she had been his lover for that long.

She stared into his eyes, trying to decide how to answer that question. The time for lying and deception was over. "It's purely a physical attraction; one that has a very strong physical memory associated with it. With you, it's more than that. We have spent evenings reading poetry to each other, discussing books, taking long walks, enjoying music, bonding at a personal level. I never did any of that with Lucius."

"But you don't deny you are attracted to him," he insisted.

"I would be lying if I did. There is too much history between us. He excites and frightens me at the same time." She thought back to how easily she had slipped into her old habits, even when she had not planned to. "And perhaps there is something more. I had no intent of doing what I did, but when I am around him, I find I can't resist..."

He interrupted, "You expect me to believe that an Auror, trained in the arts of not being controlled by others, would succumb to some sort of love potion?"

"I don't know what it is. I just know that I never wanted to hurt you, and I had no intentions of doing anything without first speaking with you. But once I was in his presence... it just happened. I know that he is morally reprehensible, but I don't share those morals. I would never go around killing or torturing innocent people."

"Unless they were werewolves," he said sharply. They stared at each other in silence for several long seconds. "I notice that you don't deny it. You don't feel any remorse for those innocent werewolves you killed, do you?"

"No." She was barely holding her emotions in check. She could hear the pain in his voice and it felt as though she were being stabbed.

He asked hoarsely, "Even now? You know that werewolves are people for all but a few days a month and you still feel no remorse for killing an innocent? None of us want to be werewolves or asked to be werewolves." He was starting to raise his voice again.

"Those werewolves were dangerous and irresponsible. They placed lives in danger. Those are the ones I have hunted down," she defended, her voice on the verge of cracking.

"For a personal vendetta!" he shouted.

She cringed at the truth of his words.

He sighed. "It can't work between us. We're too different."

"So that's it?" she asked quietly.

"Yes, I think so. I won't come between you and your information gathering, and I'm not willing to share you." He started to leave the library.

His words sounded very much like the ones Lucius had told her. "Remus, wait. I care about you, a lot." She couldn't just let him walk away. There had to be a way to heal this rift.

"But not enough," he replied sadly. He tried to open the door, but found it still locked magically. "If you wouldn't mind?"

She unlocked the door and watched him leave. It felt like a piece of her was leaving with him. She followed him out of the room and caught his sleeve as he was ascending the stairs. "Remus, please, don't go. I love you."

He stared into her eyes, trying to judge the sincerity of her words. "Had you said those words earlier, they may have meant something, though I do wonder if you even know what it means to love. Now, all I hear is a hollow plea to keep me around. You already have your love slave. What use could you have for me?"

"Because you took a piece of me when you walked out of that room. Before, I was feeling angry that you weren't able to understand what I was doing. Now, I feel empty that you won't be there." She could feel a tear running down her cheek. Never before had she felt such a sense of loss.

He looked at her sadly. "Wendy, I just can't trust you. How do I know that any of this is the truth?"

She pulled him close and gave him a passionate kiss. "Can you just walk away from that? I do love you. This is something I never thought I would ever feel."

Even though his heart was racing and his body was on fire, he looked into her eyes and said sadly, "Goodbye, Wendy."

She watched him walk up the stairs without even a glance back at her. Before leaving, she was tempted to kick the troll-leg umbrella stand, but thought better about waking Mrs. Black. Instead she left.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 of 27

Voldemort is back and the Order of the Phoenix is reforming. They need new members and Kingsley recruits one of his fellow Aurors - even though she is a Slytherin. Assigned to work with Remus Lupin, things get very tense. Set during 'Order of the Phoenix'.

Sirius was waiting upstairs for his friend. "Good. You're alone."

Remus collapsed onto the bed. "Unfortunately, yes."

"What do you mean 'unfortunately'? That was a bad situation." He still couldn't understand what Remus had seen in Wendy. Sirius had known she was nothing but trouble.

Remus buried his head in his hands. "I love her, Sirius. I don't know why and I don't know when it happened, but I love her."

Sirius had no idea how to respond to this. He had heard Remus talk about this before and had half-expected Remus to take her back if her explanation was even slightly plausible. "Then why aren't you with her?"

"Because I don't think she returns that love. She said she did, but how can I believe her? Especially after she admitted how she was raised." He then recounted their conversation. He finished with, "I know you were right and that I should have listened to you. You tried to tell me it was a bad idea, but I thought she had changed."

"I'm sorry you had to learn this the hard way, mate," Sirius said sympathetically. While he was calm outwardly, inwardly, he wanted to make Wendy pay for what she did to Remus.

Remus tried to go about life as normally as possible. Wendy seemed to have gotten the message and hadn't been around headquarters since their last meeting. He was still running errands for the household, mostly on the way home from work. In a way, he was thankful there were no more leads to investigate, even though it was unnerving that the number of reports of Death Eater activity had gone down.

He was glad to see Harry and the other children return to Hogwarts where they would be safe. The Order headquarters was no place for them with the gathering storm and he strongly suspected this was the calm before the storm. Of course, Harry's departure meant that Sirius' mood now matched his, and he decided to work as many hours as he could, just to get out of the house.

The Tuesday after the children left, he was trying to make the most of the day. Sirius was refusing to come out of his room, which actually suited Remus quite well after the unpleasantness of the previous night. They had gotten into an argument about Harry. Sirius, naturally, did not trust Snape and Remus, strangely enough, found himself sticking up for the Potions Master.

The only problem with not having Sirius around to talk to, was that he was quite bored at breakfast. They didn't take the *Daily Prophet* in order to protect their location. Normally, someone from the Order would stop by and drop a copy off sometime in the afternoon. Seeing as it was still early, he was quite surprised to hear someone banging at the door and ringing the bell. This, of course, set Mrs. Black off on one of her tirades.

As the beating at the door became more insistent, he knew he had to answer the door first and deal with her later. "Kingsley? What brings you here at this hour?" he asked over the shouting portrait.

Kingsley slipped inside. "I can't stay long. I thought you might want to see this. I don't think you're going to be seeing any of the Aurors in the near future." He handed Remus the paper and began working on closing the curtains.

Remus almost dropped the paper when he saw the pictures of the ten Death Eaters on the front page. "By Merlin, they didn't?"

"They did. It was as Albus feared. We've lost control of the dementors. The *Prophet* isn't reporting that, though. Gets worse. Bode was killed, too. It's on page ten. I really have to go." With that, Kingsley slipped back out the door, the curtains only half closed.

Remus was reading the Azkaban breakout article, completely oblivious to Mrs. Black's screaming.

Sirius came storming downstairs. "Shut that old bat up!" he yelled. "Remus, don't tell me you've lost your hearing?" he snapped.

Remus handed Sirius the paper and closed the curtains around Mrs. Black.

"By the gods, they're loose," Sirius said quietly. "How did it happen?"

"Kingsley didn't say exactly, but he did say the dementors seem to be outside Ministry control now. And Bode's dead, too. Page ten. I haven't read it yet. Coffee?" he asked as he headed back down to the kitchen.

The next week passed in a daze. Most of the members of the Order were busy with their Ministry jobs in the wake of the escape. Wizarding London was very nervous and Remus was beginning to feel as helpless and useless as Sirius. The only escape he found was in his job at the bookshop. He was reorganizing the books on the shelves when he heard a familiar voice.

"Hi, Sally," came Wendy's cheerful voice.

Sally embraced Wendy warmly. "Wendy, good to see you, though I'm a bit surprised. Andy's been too busy to come by and see me."

"I'm on my lunch break and I don't have a lot of time. Is John around?"

"Back there," Sally pointed toward the back of the store.

Remus immersed himself back in his work, wishing he could have made it to the back room, but Sally would have probably just let Wendy go back there.

"Hi, John. I don't have a lot of time and I wanted to talk with you." He had agreed to go by his more Muggle middle name for this job, even though Sally might know he was a wizard, the other employees did not.

"Well, I'm quite busy right now. Maintaining these books in order is never ending work," he replied without making eye contact.

Wendy was mindful of the others in the store. "John, please. After the events of the thirteenth I had to talk to you again. I actually wanted to talk to you before then, but the escape happened and this was the first chance I've had to get away. We've been working almost non-stop."

"Oh really? You wanted to come talk to me?" he asked incredulously.

"Look, this is hard for me, okay? I'm not the type of person that has done a lot of apologizing. You taught me about emotions I wasn't even aware of. You were right when you said I was taking my first step towards emotional maturity. And as such, I'm going to make mistakes. I miss you. My home and my heart are empty without you."

He stopped what he was doing and looked at her. The apology sounded sincere, but he would move cautiously. "But do you really mean it? I know how easy it is for you Slytherins to lie."

"I'm not lying to you." She placed her hand on his bicep. "I do love you."

"And how many times have you seen him?"

She knew he was referring to Lucius. "Just once."

"So that hasn't changed?" he asked coldly.

She replied sadly, "No. And now is not the time to alienate him. If what Harry has said about who his associates are is true, I may be the best chance to find out some more information about the escapees. Add to that the fact that one of them was at one time my best friend, and there is a definite chance I could provide us with the information to capture them. I can't stop seeing him."

Remus leaned his head against the bookshelf. He sighed. "That doesn't make it hurt any less."

She wrapped her arms around his waist. "I know that. It hurts me, too. The only way I can stand it is by telling myself that I am doing it for the greater good. He's incredibly shallow and arrogant; traits that I find I can no longer stand. You, on the other hand, embody the traits I now appreciate. You are warm, compassionate, thoughtful, loving and so much more. All the things I had never known. I think it's a secret you commoners like to keep from us. In that way, you are richer than we are. We are the Ebenezer Scrooges of the world. All we care about are our fortunes and political influences. You are my three spirits and I've changed."

"Have you? Have you done anything out of the goodness of your heart?" She was saying exactly what he wanted to hear, and that was why he had such a hard time believing her.

"I've loved you. Prior to that, no. I didn't become an Auror to serve the greater good. I did so because of the role my husband and family had during the last war. It was purely for revenge. That has led me to do some rather unscrupulous things. That's pretty much the same reason I joined the Order. To get back at those that destroyed my life." She kissed his cheek and whispered, "Remus, I am so very sorry I hurt you. I have to go now. We don't get very long for lunch. I am home late most evenings and I've not changed the warding, so if you wanted to visit and talk longer, you still can." With her fingers she turned his head so she could kiss his lips gently. "I've missed you so very much." She really wanted to jump into his arms and kiss him passionately, but she knew that would be too much for him to handle.

Remus watched her go. *Why does she torment me so? I was finally getting over her and now she had to come here sounding so sincere. I want to believe her, but should I?* He went back to his books, burying himself in his work.

Sally came over and saw he was agitated. "Is there something I can help with?"

"No, thank you, Sally. It's rather complicated." He tried to sound as nonchalant as possible.

"You know, from the first time she came to see me about hiring you, I knew that she had it bad."

"Had what bad?" he asked innocently.

"Had you bad. She's absolutely smitten with you, John. Don't tell me you're too blind to see that." She leaned against the stack of books and smiled at him.

"Perhaps I am," he replied sadly.

"Oh, don't tell me you've broken up. You two make such a nice couple."

Remus studied Sally. That woman really had no idea what station either of them held in wizarding society. "Thank you for your kind words, but we've a bit of a difference of ideology that we don't seem to be able to work through."

"That's truly a shame. Though, I don't know everything about your type, I hope you can work through it. Well, I'd best get back to the register. Let me know if you need some time off." She smiled warmly before heading back to the counter.

He found himself contemplating exactly what he knew he shouldn't do, what he knew Sirius would tell him was a very bad idea.

When Remus returned home, he found that Sirius had dinner prepared. Unfortunately, he didn't feel much like eating. Instead, he pushed his food around on his plate.

"Now, I know I'm not that good a cook, but it's edible," said Sirius.

Remus pushed his plate away. "I'm sorry. I'm just not hungry."

"Are you sick?" Sirius asked as he tried to determine if his friend showed an outward sign of illness.

"No." Remus tried to decide how to explain it all to Sirius. He didn't think it was likely Sirius would understand. "Wendy came by the bookstore today," he said simply.

When Sirius realized Remus wasn't going to elaborate, he asked, "What happened?"

"She tried to apologize, once again claiming that she loves me, that she wants me back."

"And you told her to bugger off, right?" Sirius asked optimistically.

"It's not that easy. You've already admitted you've never been in love and this isn't something I can really explain. I know what she did is wrong, but I still miss her, and seeing her today only made it that much worse."

"Did you ask her about Malfoy?"

"I did, and it hasn't changed, but the way she explains it..."

Sirius interrupted. "There isn't an explanation for it. She's a Slytherin, through and through. Her behavior confirms that. You said she admitted she and Malfoy were long time lovers. What proof do you have that this isn't something she wants? Or that she would really give him up? Don't think about it, mate."

"I can't help it. I felt as though she accepted me for who I am. I felt normal. I know that doesn't mean much to you, but it meant the world to me. I'm used to being shunned and living in poverty. With her help, that has changed. If she doesn't care for me, why would she go through the trouble to get me a job?"

"Well, er." Sirius had to admit he didn't have an answer for that.

"Exactly. And then Sally told me that she could see how much Wendy loves me. You know, she doesn't think like us. I thought you would appreciate that growing up with your family."

"Yeah, well, I didn't exactly like them. But you're right; they aren't normal. What are you going to do?"

Remus ran his hands over his face and through his hair. "I don't know. I can't seem to talk her out of Malfoy. If she would agree to give up her foolish idea of getting information from him, I think we could make it work."

Sirius stood and placed his hand on Remus' shoulder. "You're better than her, mate. The two of you have too many ideological differences. It's time to just move on."

"I suppose you're right," Remus replied, though he didn't really believe his words.

Over the course of the next week, he almost went to her house on three separate occasions, but resisted. Finally, as the full moon approached, he used the wolf inside to muster the courage to talk to her. He would break it off once and for all. He had to leave no doubt in her mind that he was not willing to make the sacrifices she asked of him.

When he arrived at her house around eight, she was not there. Cappa seemed extremely pleased to see him and kept offering him food and drink. He was too nervous to accept either.

It was nearly ten when he heard the familiar crack of Apparition. He was leaving the library to go talk to her, when they collided in the doorway. "Wendy..." he started soberly.

At the same time she wrapped her arms around him and proclaimed happily, "Remus."

He pulled her arms away and backed out of her embrace. "Please, let me speak first," he said soberly.

She didn't like the tone of his voice, but entered the library to hear what he had to say. "Okay." They took seats on opposite sides of the couch.

"I came over to tell you that it has to end. We are too different. I cannot accept what you are doing with Malfoy. Even if it ends when he is captured, I will always wonder if there could be someone else in the future. You have already mentioned renewing ties to those from your old social circle and you have mentioned the questionable morals of those people. I need to be in a committed relationship, and I don't think it's something you can do." He put up his hand to stop her from interrupting. "Let me continue. Add to that the fact I would be doing you a great disservice. You deserve a normal life with a normal man. I cannot give you that. I will be forever linked with the moon.

"In addition, you have no doubt noticed my premature aging. That is a side effect of the transformations. They put an incredible strain on my body. I won't live a normal lifespan and to pretend otherwise would be horribly unfair to you."

She looked at him out of the corner of her eye. "I can understand you're unhappy with the current arrangement I have with Lucius, but that is only until this is over. I have no interest in him or any of my other old friends. I don't fit in with that group anymore. Sure, I can pretend, but I'm not happy around them. Now, to bring up your lifespan as a convincing argument against a relationship is a pretty flimsy excuse. I could die tomorrow. As a matter of fact, we've already lost an Auror in our quest to recapture the escapees, though you won't see that in the Prophet. Not to mention the brewing war that will undoubtedly cause us all casualties. You would give up fifty or sixty years of happiness in order to spare me the pain of having to bury a husband? I wouldn't. I would suffer any torment in order to experience a life of happiness with you, no matter how short it might be. You have shown me what it means to be in love, to be truly happy."

She reached out and placed her hand on his arm. "When I would lie in your arms I would feel safe, happy and think of nothing but you. I want that feeling back. I've missed you terribly since you left. I know I hurt you and I know I do things that you don't understand. I wish it could be different, but this isn't a perfect world and we have to accept the imperfections."

"Wendy, I know this isn't a perfect world. I've lived a less than perfect life." He looked away from her. "The thought of you with Malfoy tears me up inside. I know you tell me there is no emotion in that relationship, but it doesn't matter. It's a hard thing for me to accept, since fidelity in a relationship is part of my culture." He felt her slide closer to him and he shifted away from her. A part of him knew that letting her get too close was bad. When she had hugged him, it had been very hard for him to pull away.

She wrapped her hand around his and looked into his eyes. "I know that. And I never intended to be unfaithful, something unexpected happen; something I'm still investigating. In any case, I never imagined he would want me back." She moved closer and ran her free hand through his hair, never breaking eye contact. "The last thing I wanted to do was hurt you. I never took into account how different we are. I just used all the resources at my disposal, as distasteful as it might be."

He pulled away and stood up. "Perhaps when this is all over. But for now, I can't. I'll see you at the meetings, and if we are told to work together, I won't protest. I'll see you around." Walking out of the library was one of the hardest things he had ever done.

After nearly a month of searching for the escaped Death Eaters, neither the Ministry nor the Order had turned up anything. The manhunt ordered by the Ministry was dramatically scaled back, much to the relief of all involved. None of the Aurors had been given any time off, and, as one of the more senior members of the department, Wendy found herself as one of the first getting a couple days off. They would soon return to their normal schedules.

She wandered into the library and took a look at the stack of mail burying her desk. She really wasn't in the mood to go through any of it, but it had been ignored for far too long. She poured herself a drink and started sorting it into piles. When she was about half way through the stack, she noticed Cappa standing in the doorway.

"Mistress, you are having a visitor."

Before Cappa could say anything else, Lucius swept into the room. "Forgive me for disturbing you."

Even though she was tired, she put on her most polite demeanor. "Not at all. Please, have a seat. What brings you by this evening?"

"I've missed you terribly and I heard that the Ministry was finally scaling back its use of the Aurors and that you had some time off." He flashed a smile at her. "As I had business in London today, I thought I'd stop by." Moving behind her, he started rubbing her shoulders.

She wouldn't have been at all surprised to learn he was responsible for her being one of the first with time off. "You don't know how good that feels," she said quietly. "It's been very hectic and we haven't got a clue how the escape happened or where they've gone. I had the privilege of spending three days combing around Azkaban for clues."

"And you didn't find anything?"

She thought she could hear a little bit of nervousness in his voice, but she was so tired she wasn't sure. "There wasn't really anything to find. The dementors made sure of

that. Even without them there, it's still a dismal place. I really don't want to talk about it."

"I'm surprised they let you conduct the investigation, given your past." He sat on the edge of her desk.

She shrugged and leaned back in her chair. "I think they've hit the point where they've forgotten. They sent me because of my affinity for rooting out Dark Magic. Of course, since it was less of a breakout and more of a release, there really wasn't anything to find." She had an idea, which she didn't believe was truth, but might serve to convince Lucius to draw her into his confidence. "Perhaps they wanted to give me a nice lovely waste of time to keep me out of the way. Maybe they haven't forgotten?" she mused.

"Interesting thought," he purred and led her over to the couch. "Do you think it's true?"

"Now that I think about it, there is a strong possibility it is." She continued to try to earn his trust.

"Have they questioned you about your past associations?" he asked.

"Not in a very long time. Have they questioned you?"

"Do you honestly have to ask that question?" he replied coyly.

She laughed along with him. "No, I guess not. You are above reproach, aren't you?"

"That I am," he replied as he brushed her cheek. "You look tired; perhaps I should take you up to bed?" He leaned over her, pinning her against the arm of the couch as he nibbled on her neck.

"I somehow doubt you'd let me get any rest," she replied playfully.

"Not at first. It's been far too long."

"Narcissa hasn't provided you any relief?" She tried to sound shocked.

"The Ice Queen? Not bloody likely since my birthday isn't until May and she has long since ceased considering Valentine's Day a worthy holiday. You know that," he teased.

She ran her finger down his nose. "Just checking to see if perhaps she had changed."

"I don't think any of us have really changed. I, for one, am quite glad that you have not." He helped her up from the couch and kissed her passionately as he began undoing her clothes. The two of them left a trail of clothes from the library to the bedroom.

By early March, Lucius had made quite a habit of coming by Wendy's house. She was dismayed that he was not more forthcoming about any illicit activities. Over the past few weeks, she had carefully hinted about her growing dissatisfaction with the Ministry and their pandering to the less worthy. She had even danced around the subject of the dementors' defection. While she didn't care for them and wasn't really surprised that they had rebelled against Ministry control, she had made it sound like they were being mistreated by the Ministry and rebelled because they had no choice.

In return, all she had gotten from Lucius were hints of business deals and how they would make things so much better for all true wizards. She continued to try to pry information out of him, but he continued to remain evasive.

They were lying together in bed after one their marathon love making sessions. He had come over for dinner, but they never made it to the dining room. Exhausted, she was starting to drift off to sleep when she felt him stirring. Surely, he couldn't be ready for another go? She began to suspect he was taking some sort of potion to enhance his performance. "Lucius, where are you going?"

"I have a meeting that I can't miss," he replied apologetically.

"At this hour? Make them wait until morning." She grabbed at him to keep him in the bed. If he wanted to get up, he would have to do better than that. Besides, it would force him to divulge more information.

"I can't do that, my dear. He's a very important... colleague," he replied evasively.

She started to suspect something in the way he carefully chose his words. "Is it at your manor?"

"No."

"Oh, good, then you can take me with you and I can entertain you afterwards," she said playfully as she pushed him back on the bed and straddled him.

He placed his hands on her waist. "As enjoyable as that would be, I'm afraid not. This isn't exactly the sort of place I can bring a guest."

She leaned across his chest. "Even if I promise to dress well and act respectable? Or I could always Apparate directly to your room. Then, no one would know I'm there." Trying to further confuse his thought process, she licked his chest and started trailing her tongue lower. "I would be very discreet."

Reluctantly, he pushed her away. "It isn't a place for you. It's quite cold there and you've been exposed to the elements enough already. I'll return when I can."

"Are you sure? I'm really quite good at warming charms, so I wouldn't feel the cold." She hoped her persistence would pay off with more specific information.

"Now, now, my dear. You know I make it a rule not to mix business and pleasure. Now you are going to make me late and my mas... It would be bad form for me to be late," he corrected as he once again pulled away from her and went to the bathroom.

She tried not to react to his gaffe. It looked like the last several weeks of pouring through the books she had salvaged from the Black library might pay off. It was obscure Dark Magic and she hadn't had the opportunity to test it, but now was as good a time as any to try it. She pulled on her dressing gown and waited for Lucius.

Lucius was surprised to find her out of bed when he emerged. He took his clothes off the valet and began to dress. At least her house-elf was competent. Dobby had been the most capable of his house elves and, in reflection, that didn't say much for the quality of his elves. "You don't need to see me off," he said.

"The weather outside is frightful. I thought I'd let you Disapparate from the foyer," she replied casually.

"That's very thoughtful of you," he replied. He was still somewhat perplexed that she had not changed the warding on her house to allow him direct access. He knew that she was capable of that, unlike most other wizards and witches.

She followed him downstairs and once he was in the foyer, she lazily waved her wand and muttered two soft incantations. The first was to allow him to Disapparate. The second was a subtle tracking spell that would tell her which direction and how far he was traveling. She could have used a more complex tracking spell, but that one would leave a magical trace that a strong wizard could sense. If he was indeed meeting with the Dark Lord, the trace would no doubt be discovered.

"I'll see you soon," he said cheerfully before vanishing.

As soon as she had what she needed from the tracking spell, she raised the full warding and ran back upstairs to shower and change as quickly as she could. Once dressed, she left for Order headquarters. Hopefully, there would be someone there. She would definitely need backup for this mission.

While it was late, she still knocked gently on the door, hoping someone was awake. When there was no answer, she rang the bell. If the bell didn't draw someone's attention, Mrs. Black would.

Remus threw the door open, "What the bloody hell," he started off shouting and continued in a more reasonable tone, "are you doing here?" She had made Order meetings when she could, but he had not seen much of her since their falling out in early January.

Wendy shoved past him to come inside, out of the weather, and saw Sirius wrestling with the curtains to cover the portrait. "I need you to get dressed. I think Lucius is meeting with the Dark Lord tonight and I have a very good idea where, but we have to hurry."

Remus hurried upstairs and Wendy moved over to help Sirius with the curtains. "And how would you have gotten that information?" he asked suspiciously.

"He was at my place this evening and when he left, I used a tracking spell to get an idea of where he was going," she replied.

"A tracking spell? Are you daft? They'll be able to sense that." Sirius had never thought she could be that stupid.

"Not the one I used. Do you think I'm that stupid? I know an awful lot of Dark Magic and part of Dark Magic is being tricky. I don't know exactly where, but I have a very good idea."

They stared at each other in silence while they waited for Remus to return. It didn't take him very long and he was tucking in his shirt as he descended the stairs.

Wendy pulled a cloak off her shoulders that she had been wearing over hers. "Put this on. It'll be very cold where we're going."

"Where are we going?" Remus asked as fastened the cloak.

"Can you Apparate by direction?" Wendy asked.

"Yes." This question made him nervous. It was always disorienting to Apparate purely by direction.

She placed her wand on her open palm and muttered a quiet incantation. The wand rose and spun to point in a north-northwesterly direction. "One-hundred-seventy-two miles that direction."

"Do you even know what you are getting in the middle of?" Sirius asked. He was more concerned about Remus' well being than hers.

"Not exactly. For all I know we will find the Dark Lord, a number of his current supporters and the ten escapees."

"And the two of you are going to take them all on?" he asked skeptically.

She shook her head. "No, I don't intend to fight anyone. I intend to take names and perhaps find out if they are hiding in the area. If I figure out where they escapees are hiding, I'll come back with a full contingent of Aurors. Until I have something firm, I'm not likely to get any Ministry backing." It was still risky for just two people to Apparate at a potential Death Eater meeting with the Dark Lord, but it was the only course of action they had. There was no time to find more help or to ask for advice.

"Be careful out there, Remus," said Sirius.

Wendy and Remus walked outside. "Do you need me to show you the direction again?" she asked.

"No. I've got it." He pulled his wand out of his pocket. "Ready?"

"As ready as I'm going to get." She leaned over and gave him a quick kiss for luck before Disapparating.

He quickly followed and found himself in a wooded area. Looking around, he saw no sign of Wendy. He held out his palm and placed his wand on it *Quaero Wendy.* He watched as the wand spun before steadying. Using his heightened senses to search for any signs of danger, he went the direction his wand pointed.

After five minutes, he found Wendy doing much the same thing he was doing. "What do we do now?" he whispered. She had been right about it being cold, and he was glad she had brought the heavy cloak for him.

"I'll use the Seeker Spell to find Lucius. I think it's more prudent for you to use your senses to look out for danger."

"Of course," he whispered back. Once her wand was pointing towards Lucius, they began their journey. "How far do you think it is?"

"Can't be too far, the Seeker Spell found him fairly quickly. That's a distance dependent spell."

They were walking for perhaps ten minutes when Remus placed his hand on her shoulder to stop her. "Something's not right." He looked around and sniffed the air trying to determine what he sensed. Both of them had their wands at the ready.

Only now, was Wendy beginning to contemplate how truly stupid this was. She could feel the hair on the back of her neck standing on end as she had a very bad feeling about the mission. She started pushing him back the way they had come and shoved him hard against the ground as she felt the crackle of magic.

The spell flew over their heads and she rolled back to her feet, wand at the ready and launched a spell of her own. "RUN!" she shouted to Remus. If they split up, they might stand a better chance. Blindly, she launched another series of hexes, hoping to keep whoever had been attacking on the defensive. After about a half dozen spells, she ran in the same general direction Remus had.

She could hear more magic coming from her right, but had no time to worry about that. Thankfully, the trees were thick enough to provide some cover. She wasn't sure how far she had run, but the explosions of magic had stopped. Finding a somewhat sheltered place, she crouched down to catch her breath.

Once her breathing had almost returned to normal, she felt a darkness descending. It took her a few seconds to comprehend what it was. It was a dementor. Her mind went momentarily blank. "In the name of the Minister of Magic, I order you to stand down," she said as she flashed her Auror badge.

Of course, since the dementors were outside Ministry control, it did not back down. She tried to summon a happy thought and pointed her wand at the dementor. *Expecto Patronum!* she shouted but only a faint silver glow escaped her wand, not enough to deter the dementor. *Expecto Patronum!* she said again, but this time it was nowhere near as forceful and she found any sort of happy memory slipping from her mind. She started descending into darkness and despair.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 of 27

Voldemort is back and the Order of the Phoenix is reforming. They need new members and Kingsley recruits one of his fellow Aurors - even though she is a Slytherin. Assigned to work with Remus Lupin, things get very tense. Set during 'Order of the Phoenix'.

Remus finally realized that no one was giving him chase. He also realized he was quite alone. Using the Seeker Spell, he once again began looking for Wendy. When he noticed the air was getting particularly cold, he stretched out with his enhanced senses and confirmed the presence of a dementor. He ran blindly towards the dementor, fearing the worst. Once he saw it, he forced control of his emotions and summoned his Patronus to drive the dementor away.

He started to lose hope when he saw Wendy lying prone on the ground. Reaching down to touch her, he was relieved to find that she was alive and apparently untouched by the dementor, but she was injured. "Wendy? Can you hear me?" he asked.

She moaned softly, but was not coherent. Seeing her wand lying on the ground, he picked it up and pulled her locket out of dress. He placed her hand on the locket and held it there with his. He hoped that her Portkey was keyed for her wand and her touch, and that it would make no difference that he was the one casting the spell. "Portus," he said, and thankfully felt the tug of Portkey activation.

Once they landed in her foyer, he called for Cappa. "Get the aid kit, hot water and towels." He watched the elf vanish and carried her upstairs. Once he set her down on the bed, he began undressing her so he could assess her wounds. She was bleeding from several gashes on her arms and legs and had a rather severe burn on her back.

With Cappa's help, he washed off most of the blood. He was surprised when Cappa began pulling bottles out of the aid kit and applying ointments. "You've done this before, haven't you?"

"Yes, Master Remus. Mistress often has me tend her wounds."

As he watched Cappa tend her wounds, he couldn't help but notice that her breathing was still shallow. Once Cappa was done, he asked, "Do you have any chocolate?"

"Chocolate? Cappa can get chocolate."

"Then do so. She was attacked by a dementor."

Cappa squeaked before disappearing with a pop.

Remus sat on the edge of the bed and held Wendy's hand. She was still very cold and she looked pale and weak. With a small wave of his wand, he cast a warming charm on her. He didn't think she was suffering from hypothermia, but the effects of a dementor could be quite shocking.

After five minutes, Cappa returned. "Master Remus, I has your chocolate, sir," she said as she held out a chocolate bar.

"Thank you," he said as he took it and placed it on the bedside table. He watched Cappa gather up the clothing on the floor and disappeared.

Since she didn't seem to be improving, he examined her wounds again. None of the cuts appeared serious and were reacting as expected to the healing ointment, but he noticed the burn on her back was not getting better. It was approximately the size of a saucer and was blistering. He wished he had some level of competency with healing spells, but that had never been one of his strong suits. He also noticed that her left arm was swelling and quite probably broken. Her injuries were well beyond his capability to heal and appeared to be beyond the capability of her aid kit.

As much as he hated to wake her, he needed to take her to St. Mungo's. He carefully rolled her over and sat her up, trying to keep the burn from making contact with anything. Slowly, he dripped the Reviving Potion into her mouth. She started moaning as she regained consciousness.

"I know it hurts," Remus said gently. "You were seriously wounded and I need to get you to St. Mungo's. You don't have what's needed to treat your injuries."

She grabbed at his chest with her right arm after realizing something was wrong with her left, "No. You can't do that. Healer. Friend. Clarice Matthews." She was panting with the effort of controlling the pain that was now shooting through her left arm after she had attempted to move it. "On desk. Go."

He understood. "I will go to Clarice's and bring her here, but you will defer to her recommendation." He supported her with one hand and reached for the chocolate with the other. "Before I go, you were attacked by a dementor. Do you think you can eat some of this?" He broke a square off and handed it to her.

Her hand was shaking as she reached for the chocolate. Biting it in half she slowly chewed, feeling minor relief from some of her discomfort.

He stayed with her until she had eaten two squares. "I'll send Cappa up to feed you more. If you can, I'd like you to eat the whole bar."

"I'll try," she replied weakly.

He looked at her sadly, hoping she wouldn't take a turn for the worse in his absence. He kissed her cheek softly. "I love you. I'll return as soon as I can." He had felt the need to tell her. Her injuries were severe and he had no idea if he would get the chance to say it again. He paused at the door to take one last look at her before hurrying downstairs.

Thankfully, her address book was easy to find. Once he found Clarice Matthews address, he consulted a map. He was unfamiliar with the area she lived, so he had no idea if there were a lot of Muggles in the area or not. He only hoped that she was not working the night shift.

When he arrived, he noticed it wasn't the best neighborhood, but it was late enough that it was deserted. With a quick wave of his wand, he unlocked the outer door to her building and proceeded to her apartment. He knocked firmly on the door and waited for a response. When he didn't receive one, he began banging on the door harder. He wanted to give her a chance to answer the door before he Apparated inside.

One of the upstairs neighbors shouted down at him, "If you don't stop that banging, I'll call the cops."

Since he didn't need that sort of attention, he Apparated inside and startled a witch, who was just shuffling out of the bedroom and still tying her bathrobe around her waist. "Accio wand!" she cried out.

He raised his hands to show that he had not drawn his wand. "Please, I'm not here to hurt you. I've come on behalf of Wendy Westin. She was seriously injured, but doesn't want to go to St. Mungo's."

"How seriously?" Clarice asked as she started digging through a cabinet.

"She was hit with a spell that left a blistering burn on her back, I don't know what spell it was. I think her arm is broken, too. Her pulse and breathing are both very shallow and a dementor attacked her. I gave her some chocolate for that."

Clarice spun around. "You gave her chocolate?"

He didn't think he had done anything wrong. "Yes. That is the standard treatment for a dementor attack."

She took on a lecturing tone, "When there are no other injuries, yes. Giving someone with serious injuries food or drink can be fatal." She finished putting potions in a traveling case. "Give me a moment and we can leave." She went back into the bedroom.

Remus spoke loud enough for her to hear him through the door and said, "I'm sorry I didn't introduce myself. I'm Remus Lupin."

"That's quite all right. This isn't the first time someone's come here late at night, though I do have to say, you don't fit the Auror mold."

"I'm not an Auror. I'm... a friend of hers." He stopped talking when Clarice emerged. "I assume you know where she lives?"

Clarice nodded. "I'll meet you there."

Clarice rushed to Wendy's bedside and looked at the wound on her back. She then cast a diagnostic spell. "She really should be in St. Mungo's where the medical staff can look after her."

"Can you help her?" He would have preferred to see her in St. Mungo's as well, but Wendy had been correct that her injuries would draw the wrong sort of attention.

Clarice began pulling potions out of her bag. "I can. But someone will have to stay with her. Now, if you will excuse me, I prefer to work in private." She began casting spells as Remus slowly walked out of the room. He closed his eyes and collapsed against the closed door. He knew he should have tried to talk her out of that spur of the moment mission north to try to find the escaped prisoners, but she had made it sound like such a good idea and one that had to be acted on immediately.

He went downstairs to the library, but found that he was only staring at the book in his hands and not actually reading it. His thoughts kept drifting to Wendy and he hoped that she would recover. He massaged his temples and looked at the clock. Clarice had been with her almost an hour and there was still no report. He thought about going upstairs to check, when Clarice joined him in the library. He leapt to his feet. "How is she?"

"She's going to make it. Her arm and ribs have been healed and, as you saw, the cuts and scrapes are healing. She suffered some severe internal injuries, but I think I've been able to stop all the bleeding and repair all the damage. I've given her some Blood-Replenishing Potion to help with the blood loss. I'm not sure what spell caused that burn, I suspect some rather nasty Dark Magic, but I've done what I can for it. I've left an ointment on the bedside table and her dressing will need to be changed twice a day.

"She's in a drug induced sleep for the next ten hours or so to give her body time to recover. I imagine she'll be quite hungry when she wakes. After two or three days, she should be well enough for work. Let her know I'll send an owl to the Ministry informing her boss she's ill and will be away from work for a few days. I'm used to writing these sorts of letters so it shouldn't attract too much attention.

"I assume you can keep an eye on her?" she asked.

"Yes, I'll stay with her." He was relieved that Clarice had said she would recover. He had been so worried that he would lose her.

"Good. Send the house-elf to me if you need any more help. I'll stop by after my shift this evening to check on her."

Remus watched her leave before ascending the stairs. The door to the bedroom was cracked, and he slowly pushed it open. She was lying on her stomach, asleep, with her face turned away from the door. He moved to the far side of the bed and lit the lamp on the side table so he could look at her. Most of her color had returned, but he still thought she looked weak. At least her breathing was strong and steady.

He leaned over and hooked her hair behind her ear. "I will take care of you," he whispered, before gently kissing her cheek. Not wanting to jostle her too much, he got up from the bed and moved to sit on the divan where he could watch her.

Wendy at first became aware of light. She tried to open her eyes and see if it was her imagination, but they didn't want to open. She tried to listen to see if that would give her clues as to where she was, but she couldn't hear any telltale noises. Searching her memory, she tried to determine where she might be. *I was in the woods with Remus. What were we doing and what woods? Oh, we were after the Death Eaters and the escapees. What happened then? I think they found us. I remember running and pain, and then what?* She tried to remember what else had happened. *One of them must have hit me with a spell. Am I their prisoner?* She noticed that she seemed to be sleeping on a bed. That meant she probably wasn't a prisoner.

Once again, she tried to open her eyes. She thought they were opening, the room seemed lighter, but she still couldn't really see anything, it was very blurry. When she tried to get up, she fell back to the bed from the searing pain.

"Relax, you're safe. Clarice came by to help you last night. You need to rest," said a calm, reassuring voice.

"Remus?" She needed some confirmation that she wasn't imagining him.

He knelt next to the bed and took her hand in his. "I'm here. Can I get you anything?"

Her vision was starting to clear. "What time is it?"

"Nearly two."

"Two? I've missed work." She tried to get up again.

Remus pressed her gently back onto the bed. "Clarice took care of it. She's written a letter letting them know you won't be at work for a few days. Can I get you anything?"

"You stayed with me?" she asked as she smiled at him.

He brushed her hair out of her face. He wondered how much she remembered from last night? Did she remember him admitting his feelings for her? "Of course I did. Are you hungry?"

"Now that you mention it, I am getting a little hungry." She had found a semi-comfortable position on her side.

"I'll let Cappa know to send something up. I'll be right back." He gave her hand a reassuring squeeze before leaving the room.

While they ate, he told her what he knew from the events of the previous night.

"So there was a dementor, huh?" she asked, once he finished.

"I was surprised you couldn't defeat it yourself." He knew that she was magically strong enough to conjure a Patronus. "You seemed to have done a good job against our other attackers. Though, Clarice has no idea what caused the burn on your back, and neither do I."

His recount of the previous night's events had brought back some of her memory, but most of it was still fuzzy. "I don't remember what spell it was. I wasn't paying that much attention to what was being hurled at me. As for the dementor, I've never had much luck conjuring a Patronus. I guess there hasn't been enough happiness in my life," she replied sadly and quickly changed the subject. "Thank you for bringing me home."

"I couldn't leave you there. You know, that was a foolish idea," he said playfully. She didn't seem to recall what he had told her last night. He wasn't sure how he felt about that.

She laughed softly. "It sure looks that way now. If it had succeeded, it would have been pure genius. I'm not sure if they'll stay there or not. Probably not." In her haste, she had ruined an excellent chance to strike a blow to the Dark Lord.

"Do you think any of them got a look at you?" He knew that most of the escapees were the aristocrats she had grown up with and could probably identify her.

She shook her head. "No. Though that might not matter. I'm not sure, but I think that was Bella attacking us. She may recognize some of my spellwork."

"Do you think that likely?" He was very concerned about her safety.

"I don't know. I know we weren't the only ones playing around with that sort of magic and it's been a long time. I hope not."

"If she did and tells Malfoy..." Just the thought of Malfoy caused a bitter taste in his mouth.

She sighed, knowing how much she had hurt him. "I know. I'll be careful around him. He knows I'm an Auror and he's been very careful not to tell me anything that would give him away. I think I'll be all right. Now, if you don't mind, I think I'll get some more rest." She shifted and tried to get comfortable.

"Not until I've changed your bandage," he insisted.

She rolled onto her stomach. "Have at it." She felt him peel the bandage off her back. When he didn't immediately do anything more than that, she asked. "How does it look?"

He rubbed his upper lip. "It's, er..."

"Remus?" She was really getting concerned.

"It looks bad. Clarice said she would return this evening to check on you. Are you sure you can't remember what hit you?" he asked, as he put the ointment on her back.

She flinched as he touched the wound. "No. It was all happening so fast. I can't remember what I dodged and deflected and what I didn't. So it's not getting any better, but is it getting any worse?"

"It doesn't seem to be getting worse, but I still don't like the looks of it." Once he finished dressing the wound, he tucked her in. "Now, get some rest. I'll be right here if you need anything."

"Does the Order know?" she asked.

"I sent Cappa over to Tonks' place early this morning, and she said she would let them know. I don't want you to worry about that, I want you to worry about getting better." He kissed her cheek.

When he tried to pull away, she grasped his arm. "Remus, I'm glad you're here. I've missed you."

He smiled sadly at her. "I know. I'll be downstairs for a little while." He wasn't sure if she heard him as she was already drifting off to sleep.

Remus stared out the library window. He held his hand up and saw that the shaking had finally stopped. When he had seen her lying unconscious on the ground, a sense of dread had filled him. Now, he was relieved that it looked like she was going to recover. He had almost lost her without forgiving her.

Once she was feeling better, he would talk to her about Malfoy again. Perhaps now she would realize it was a bad idea. Of course, knowing her, she would insist that having made one breakthrough, it made sense to pursue further breakthroughs.

He didn't notice the passage of time until the doorbell rang. The sun was setting and the room was in shadows. Quietly, he crept to the doorway to see who was at the door, afraid it might be Malfoy. He was relieved to see that it was Clarice. He stepped out of the library. "Clarice, I'm glad to see you."

"Remus, how is she doing?"

"She ate around two and then went back to bed. The wound on her back isn't getting any better."

Clarice grimaced. "I was afraid of that. I'll take a look at it. I may need to take her to St. Mungo's, I know she doesn't want to, but this may be beyond my capabilities. Can you help me convince her?"

"I'll do what I can, but she doesn't always listen to me." He sounded tired.

She appraised him. "How much rest have you gotten?"

He ran his fingers through his hair. "Not much, I'm afraid. I've been worried about her, though I might have dozed in the library. I lost a few hours this afternoon."

"Well, I suggest you get some sleep after you eat dinner. You're no good to her if you make mistakes due to exhaustion," she chided.

"I know."

She placed a reassuring hand on his shoulder. "Remus, she's in no danger of dying. That burn on her back will not be fatal." They went upstairs. "Wendy, I hate to wake you, but I'm here to check on you."

Wendy answered groggily, "Clarice, glad to see you. Sorry to have you fixing me up again."

Clarice joked, "I keep telling you that you need to stop making a habit of this. How do you feel?"

"Other than my back, not too bad. I'd never know I broke my arm. Thanks," she replied as she flexed her left hand.

"And a couple of ribs and some internal bleeding. I heard you ate a hearty meal?" Clarice asked as she cast her diagnostic spell.

"Yes, and now that I'm up, I think I could use some dinner, too. So what's the deal with my back? He didn't seem pleased when he looked at it earlier." She rolled over so Clarice could pull back the dressing.

Clarice examined the wound for quite some time. "I'd like to know about that, too. I've never seen this sort of spell damage before. Even with the ointment, it isn't healing. I want to take you to St. Mungo's."

"No. No hospital. That will be too many questions," Wendy insisted.

"Wendy, this is serious," said Remus.

Wendy was very insistent. "No! I can't afford that type of scrutiny. Not right now. Is it getting worse or is it going to kill me?"

"No to both," replied Clarice.

"Give it another day. If it isn't getting better by tomorrow, I'll go," Wendy negotiated.

Clarice seemed to think this was the best she could have hoped for. "Deal. I'll come over after my shift tomorrow. You look fine other than the wound. Your strength should start to return tomorrow. Eat and sleep are your official orders."

Remus and Wendy enjoyed a nice dinner. She could tell that he was exhausted, since he was so quiet. After finishing her meal, she feigned sleep. It wasn't long before she heard Remus' soft snoring coming from the divan. She hadn't asked him to come to bed, giving him time to accept her again.

Once she was positive he was asleep, she got out of bed as quietly as she could and slipped down stairs. She hoped that one of the books in the library would provide her with an answer. The spell that had hit her was bound to be obscure Dark Magic and it wasn't very likely that anyone at St. Mungo's would know how to deal with it. "Cappa, a pot of tea," she ordered when she saw the elf shadowing her.

"Yes, Mistress," Cappa replied. She was glad to be taking orders from her mistress again.

Wendy gathered some likely candidates and stacked them on the floor by the couch. She had to be careful not to lean against the back of the couch and ended up sitting sideways.

The first group of books yielded nothing and she perused the shelves looking for other candidates.

Remus rolled over and fell onto the floor. It took him a moment to realize what had happened. He picked himself up off the floor and went to check on Wendy. The bed was empty. "Wendy?" he called out as he ran to check the bathroom and found she wasn't there. "Wendy!?" he shouted as he ran out of the room. Where could she have gone?

"Library," she called back.

He ran into the library. "What are you doing here?" He was upset that she had snuck out on him, but relieved that she was fine.

She swept her hand across the pile of books. "Research. I'm trying to determine what spell that was that hit me."

"You should be resting," he chided.

"It's not like this is overly taxing. I just had to get out of that bed. I'm really feeling much better." It wasn't quite the whole truth. While her more mundane injuries were better, she could feel the spell doing something to her, weakening her.

He crossed his arms. "That and you have no intention of going to St. Mungo's, do you?"

She grinned slyly at him. "Of course not. I said what the two of you wanted to hear to leave me alone. And I must say, it worked marvelously. She stopped making a fuss about me going to hospital and you so kindly fell asleep."

"This is serious," he insisted. He was not entirely surprised that she had deceived him.

She closed the book she was flipping through and dropped it on the 'read' pile. "I know it is. If I go into St. Mungo's with this wound on my back, a lot of questions will be asked. This is unusual magic and I have no interest in admitting how I got it. And even if I invoke Auror's privilege, word will get back to the Ministry and then I have to answer questions about it there. Either way, it places me, and the Order, in extreme danger. I have reason to believe there are Death Eater spies in both places. Remember, Bode was killed in St. Mungo's."

He considered her logic for a few seconds. "I see your point. Can I help?"

She pointed at a pile of books. "If you are familiar with any of those titles, see if you can find anything."

They worked fruitlessly until sunrise. "Wendy, I think we should get some rest and start again this afternoon."

She held her hand up. "Wait, I think I've got it. Oooh, this is nasty one," she said, her voice filled with admiration over the choice of the spell. Even though she was victim of this spell, she could appreciate the choice. She stood and placed the book on the table.

Remus read over her shoulder. "So now what do we do? We know what it was, but there's nothing there about treatment." He didn't like what he read. It was a progressive spell. Over the course of two to three days, the spell drained the life energy of the person attacked until death.

She moved across the room and slid the ladder over to the part of the shelves she was interested in. "No, not in that book, but I know where to start looking for a treatment now that I know what it is." She started handing books down to him.

"I think perhaps we should get some rest before starting on this next phase of the search. Please? I'll make sure Cappa wakes us for lunch," he insisted.

"All right. We'll eat breakfast and then get some rest," she relented.

He carefully led her out of the library and to the dining room. In short order, a simple meal of fruit and porridge was before them. "Do you really think you will find an answer?"

She replied optimistically, "Oh, yes. I have an extensive library on arcane magic and that's exactly what that spell was. It doesn't do much good to know how to curse someone if you can't reverse the effects, especially for a spell like that. It's quite a good blackmail spell. I was surprised the cure wasn't in that same book."

"Do you think it will be a spell or a potion?" he asked.

"I'm not sure. It could be either. I'm kind of leaning towards potion since it was a blistering spell. Do you think I might take a look at it when you change the dressing?"

"You really don't want to. It's quite nasty." He really didn't have a particular desire to look at it and had hoped to spare her having to see it.

"That's exactly why I need to look at it. It'll give me a better idea what I'm trying to cure."

"I'm not going to win, am I?" he asked, resigned to this fact.

She smiled at him. "No. I don't like to lose."

"So, Clarice has fixed you up before?" he asked, trying to change the subject.

"More times than I can count. I owe her big for all the times she's kept me out of trouble," she replied. She had met Clarice early in her career and the two had become friends after a long stay at St. Mungo's.

"You have a habit of flouting the rules, don't you?" He knew the answer to this, but was enjoying just talking with her.

She explained, "I don't really flout them as much as adapt them to my needs. And I haven't really done anything illegal, just things of questionable morality that the Ministry might be forced to investigate. It's been a nice arrangement, not having to answer a lot of questions. Well then, I'm done if you are."

He stood and swept his arm towards the door. "After you." He watched her walk slightly stiffly up the stairs, but he refrained from asking after her wellbeing. Once in the bedroom, he changed her dressing and let her see the wound.

"That's interesting, isn't it?" she asked as she examined it in the mirror.

"Not the adjective I would have used. Does seeing it make it easier for you to find a cure?" He still would have preferred she go to the hospital, despite any beliefs that to do so would bring the wrong sort of attention. Now that they knew what it was, it was more likely someone at the hospital would be able to help.

"I think so." As she crawled into bed, she noticed him moving towards the divan. "It's a big enough bed that we can both sleep here. It will be more comfortable." She saw him looking at her warily. "I don't bite," she reassured.

He knew that was not strictly true. "It's not that. I...just don't know that I'm ready."

"Remus, this isn't anything sexual. Nothing's going to happen with me in my current state. I just thought it might be more comfortable." She smiled warmly at him.

He slipped off his shoes. "I'll be fine over here," he replied as he tried to get comfortable.

"Suit yourself," she said as she settled onto the bed. She had tried.

Remus tossed and turned as he found the divan suddenly very uncomfortable. He couldn't help but notice that she had left plenty of room on the bed and had her back to him. He had to admit that he wouldn't have to touch her. Who was he kidding? He longed to feel her in his arms again. That was why he was trying to sleep on the divan.

One last time, he tried to get comfortable and failed. Swallowing his pride, he crawled into the far side of the bed, staying as close to the edge as he could. In no time at all, he drifted off to sleep.

Remus woke to someone tugging on his hand. "Master Remus, it is time for lunch."

Lunch? Oh, yes, I asked Cappa to wake me. "Thank you, Cappa." He ran his hand across his face and then became aware of Wendy snuggled up against him. His arm was wrapped around her shoulder and he had no memory of encouraging her to snuggle with him. It did feel good. He allowed himself to revel a few minutes in her embrace before waking her. "Wendy, it's time for lunch," he said quietly.

She looked up into his eyes, a smile on her face. "I'm glad you changed your mind."

"It seems you were right. The bed is much more comfortable. Now, if you don't mind, we should get back to our research."

"Of course," she replied somewhat sadly and allowed him to leave the bed. She then slowly made her way out of bed. "I'm going to clean up as best I can. Why don't you have Cappa send lunch to the library and I'll be down shortly?"

He looked at her to make sure she didn't seem to be having any problems. "All right. I'll start looking."

Wendy joined him after about twenty minutes, having managed to dress in a loose set of robes. She started snacking on the lunch Cappa had provided and immediately dove into the books.

Every now and then, one of them would consult with the other when something particularly promising was found, but so far there was nothing Wendy would classify as a cure.

After about two hours of searching, the doorbell interrupted them. Wendy furrowed her brow in confusion. She wasn't expecting a visitor. "Cappa, whoever it is, don't let them into the library," she ordered.

"You weren't expecting anyone, were you?" he asked warily.

"No. With a note from a healer, no one at work should care and I wouldn't expect anyone from the Order this time of day."

Cappa returned, "Mistress, Mr. Malfoy is in the drawing room."

□

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 of 27

Voldemort is back and the Order of the Phoenix is reforming. They need new members and Kingsley recruits one of his fellow Aurors - even though she is a Slytherin. Assigned to work with Remus Lupin, things get very tense. Set during 'Order of the Phoenix'.

"Remus, stay here. I'll get rid of him." She mussed up her hair and applied a spell to make herself look pale and ill. She affected a fake cough as she shuffled down the hall.

"Lucius, what a surprise to see you. What brings you here?" she asked weakly.

He looked like he had been about to embrace her, but a coughing fit made him change his mind. "Well, I heard at the Ministry that you were ill and I thought I would see how you were doing."

"I'll be fine a few days. It's rare, but they don't think it's contagious," she replied, trying her best to sound sick.

"Do you know where you caught it?" He was trying to sound concerned.

"They think it might be from some foreign wizard we caught playing around with Dark Magic."

"And where was this?"

After another fit of coughing, she replied, "Out in Wales." She didn't want to give him any reason to think she had been up north.

"Is there anything I can do for you?"

She could tell it was a polite yet insincere offer. "I'm afraid not. I just need to rest and recuperate. I appreciate the offer, though."

"Yes, well, if there's nothing else I can do for you, I think I'd best be on my way. I'll come check on you in a few days." He seemed relieved by her answers.

"I look forward to it." She was thankful she was sick. "Thank you for stopping by."

He stood in front of her and placed his hand on her cheek. "Of course, I am very concerned about your well-being. Do get well soon." He smiled his insincere little smile and left.

Once she was sure he was gone, she reversed the spell and returned to the library. "Well, I think I've convinced him it wasn't me up north. He seemed to believe I was sick and I told him the source of my illness was a foreign wizard in Wales. Since I know he knows nothing of Legilimency, I'm confident he believed me."

Remus put aside the book he was reading. "But he will return, won't he? Wendy, this is too dangerous. You need to stop this before you get yourself killed, which I would like to point out, nearly happened the other night."

She hugged him and he very carefully avoided her back. "I know. But we nearly made a difference from what I learned."

"Now that sentiment is positively Gryffindor," he said playfully.

She replied sharply, "Mind your tongue. This is all about revenge, nothing quite so noble as your Gryffindor mind imagines. Followers of the Dark Lord turned my life upside-down and I want them to pay for that."

He smiled at her as she buried her nose in a book. She could believe what she wanted, but he thought he was right.

Evening was approaching and they still had no idea how to cure the burn mark on her back.

"You will go to St. Mungo's, won't you?" he asked. He knew that time was running out.

"I can't. The answer is here, it's just a matter of finding it." She was tired and frustrated and it was showing, but she wouldn't give up.

"You read about the curse. We don't have time to waste," he insisted. He didn't want to lose her.

"If Clarice has no idea how to treat it, I doubt anyone else would. I would lose time at the hospital and possibly get worse. Here, I have the best possible chance of finding the cure. I have books that no one else has ever heard of. Now, let's not give up. We still have about half an hour before Clarice arrives."

"You're impossible," he replied as he opened another book.

"Yes, I know," she replied smugly.

Clarice would be arriving at any moment and Wendy had begun frantically skimming books about ten minutes ago. Remus thought it would be highly unlikely for her to find anything that way, but he knew better than to comment.

When the doorbell rang, it was only a few seconds before Clarice arrived in the library doorway. "Should I ask what you are doing out of bed?" she asked sternly.

"Looking for a cure. I know what caused it, but I don't know how to fix it, yet. The answer is here," Wendy replied and gestured at the library walls.

"That's wonderful, but if you know what it is, I can take you to St. Mungo's and we can get about making you well." Clarice had grown used to Wendy's stubbornness, but this was setting a new mark. She couldn't believe Wendy was gambling with her life. Especially since it was obvious the spell was making her weaker.

Wendy looked up from her work as she put the latest book on one of the 'read' piles. "Not bloody likely. This is very old Dark Magic. It's over there," she pointed toward the other end of the table while grabbing a new book off the 'to read' pile.

"Here." Remus led Clarice over to the book, once he realized picking the right book out of the haphazard piles would be impossible.

"I hold you responsible for this. You were supposed to make sure she rested," she reprimanded.

He shrugged and replied resignedly, "I did the best I could."

The color drained from Clarice's face as she read about the spell Wendy had been hit with. "I'm taking you and this book to St. Mungo's."

"NO! That book does not leave this house," she said forcefully. She watched the two of them stare at her in shock at her outburst. She moderated her tone. "If that book were to be discovered, there would be too many questions. Questions I cannot afford. Wait a minute. Ah-ha! Here!" She stabbed at a page in her most recent book.

Clarice and Remus came around the table to look at the book. "I can't read Greek," Clarice said.

"Well, this is it." She cleared room on the table and brought parchment and quill over from the desk. "I'll transcribe it and then I'll need one of you to go out for ingredients. I don't think I have everything."

"Are you sure this is it?" Remus asked.

"Yes. It's specifically mentioned as a cure for the curse that hit me." She was only half listening to what they said as she began translating the text.

Clarice was examining some of the books scattered around the room. "Where did you get some of these books? There are some very rare and unusual tomes." As she continued perusing the titles, she noticed something else. "And banned."

Wendy looked up from her transcribing. "Most were part of the Westin library, some were ones I liberated from the Leah library over the years and never returned. Still others were rescued from the Black house." She looked at Remus and shrugged her shoulders in apology. "A few I've found at some of the less reputable bookstores around Britain and the Continent. I collect them. Now, if you will excuse me and let me finish transcribing this?"

Remus paced nervously. He still didn't like the idea of her trying to do this herself. He also didn't like the idea that she had essentially stolen books from the Black library. He began to wonder what else she might have taken.

"All right, here it is. Some of the ingredients are rare." She handed them a list of ingredients.

After looking over the list, Clarice said, "I'll take care of this. I don't think he'd be able to get some of these. What does the potion look like?"

"I haven't finished translating that yet. I wanted to get you started on the ingredients. I've placed checks next to the stuff I already have." She was now standing in front of a portrait on the wall, placed her hand on the edge of the frame and muttered an incantation before swinging it away from the wall like a door. She did the same for a safe door that was hidden behind it. She filled a small bag with Galleons. "This should cover the expense."

Clarice took the heavy bag of gold. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

Remus continued pacing as Wendy returned to her translation.

"Would you please stop that? I find it distracting," she asked.

"Sorry," he muttered and sat on the couch.

It took her nearly fifteen minutes to complete the translation. Once she was done, she read through the instructions several times. "I'm not sure I can do this one. It's very difficult. I have to ask you to go get Severus."

"You're kidding?" he asked incredulously. They had heard about how things were at Hogwarts with Umbridge. In the past, he might have been able to walk into the school and see Severus, but now, his presence would be questioned, especially with Umbridge's rule against visitors. He also knew that he would not receive a warm welcome.

"I can't afford to mess this one up. Surely, you remember enough from Potions to know that many of those ingredients are generally used in poisons. An error could kill me. Severus is the only one I trust to brew this potion," she implored.

"You've heard what it's like at Hogwarts with Umbridge there," he warned.

She sighed, "I know. I have an invisibility cloak you can use. That should keep your visit secret." She placed her hand on his arm. "Remus, I really need you to do this," she said urgently.

She left the room, leaving him to follow. "I don't suppose I have a choice in this, do I?" he asked. He found he was asking that question and awful lot lately.

"This is the only course of action. I don't know any of the potions brewers at St. Mungo's and that's why I want Severus. I know most of the rest of the Order doesn't trust him, but I do." She led him down into the basement. In the back corner of the basement, she waved her wand at the wall and door appeared. From a hook on the wall inside the door, she grabbed the invisibility cloak and handed it to him. "Thank you," she said softly.

He reached out to take the cloak from her and his hand froze as he touched hers. "You're quite welcome." Slowly, he pulled her towards him until they were nearly touching. In the dim light of the basement, he thought she was starting to look worse, as the effects of the curse started to prevail over the treatment she had received. "I'll return as soon as I can." He leaned down to kiss her softly on the lips. He found she was pulling him closer for a more passionate kiss and he wrapped his free arm around her.

Wendy pulled away as Remus touched the wound on her back and stomped her foot, due to the sharp stab of pain.

"Wendy, I'm so sorry," he apologized.

She knew he hadn't meant to hurt her. "No, don't worry about it. Go, get Severus and I'll set things up here."

When Remus arrived at Hogwarts, he could immediately tell how oppressive the atmosphere was. While it was after dinner and there normally should have been students milling around, the castle was quiet. A part of him was thankful for this, but the other part of him was sad.

Quietly, he made his way to the dungeons. He could see a light coming from under the door to Severus' private laboratory. He knocked on the door and waited for Severus to invite him in.

Severus watched the door open, but he didn't see anyone. He drew his wand and was about to throw a hex at the door, when he saw Lupin emerge from under an invisibility cloak.

"It's just me," said Remus.

Severus did not lower his wand. "What are you doing here? You know how dangerous it is." He quickly locked and warded the door.

"I do. Wendy has been injured and needs a very difficult potion brewed. You are the only one she trusts," he reported.

Severus finally lowered his wand and held out his hand. "Where are the instructions?"

"She wants you to come to her place and brew it there," Remus replied.

"Is she mad? I can't just leave the castle." He was currently on Umbridge's good side, if she had one, and he didn't want to do anything to change that. Leaving Hogwarts would be a quick way for that to happen.

"Severus, without this potion, she will die. She flatly refuses to go to St. Mungo's, saying that she can't trust them. It was a very obscure curse that hit her, obscure Dark Magic, and she doesn't want the scrutiny that would come along with explaining the injury."

"And *how* did she come to be injured with this obscure bit of Dark Magic?" He had a fairly good idea, but wanted confirmation before he formally committed himself to this task.

"She thought she had learned from Malfoy where the Death Eaters were meeting and hoped to find the escapees." Remus didn't really want to tell the whole story and hoped this would be enough.

Severus arched an eyebrow. "And?"

"We found them, well, actually, they found us. Are you coming or not? I'd really prefer you did, because if you don't I fear she will try to brew the potion herself, and she has already indicated she thought it was beyond her capability. If she does it wrong, it will kill her." Hopefully, this revelation would be enough to get Severus to cease questioning him.

"Do I need to bring anything other than myself?" Severus asked. He had always known he would help; he just wanted to torment Lupin. He had never before turned down an opportunity to further his knowledge of obscure magic.

"No, she has a healer friend of hers getting the ingredients she didn't have." Remus was relieved that it looked like Severus would be coming.

"I will meet you there."

"Thank you," Remus replied and wrapped himself back in the invisibility cloak.

When Remus returned to the house, he found Severus and Wendy in the basement debating over her translation of the original text. He was surprised to see that Severus had arrived before him. He was even more surprised to see how sickly Wendy looked. He knew the curse would kill her, he just hadn't expected it to happen so quickly.

"Your translation cannot possibly be correct," insisted Severus.

"This is ancient Greek, Severus. There *are* differences," she replied condescendingly.

He argued, "I am aware of the differences. As you know, the correct translation is imperative. Using my expertise as a Potions Master, what you have written is wrong."

She slammed her hand against the table. "Damn it, Severus, I know I'm right. *I'm* the one that has to take this potion. I know that if it's wrong it will kill me." She pointed at the parchment. "Do it that way."

Severus glared at her. "Fine, but when you die, it is not my fault."

Remus pulled her aside. "Are you sure you want to argue with him?"

"My Greek is impeccable. I know I'm right." Her knees buckled and Remus caught her before she fell. "I think I should sit," she said quietly.

"Has Clarice returned yet?" Remus asked as he led her over to the small couch.

"No. She should be back soon." Wendy was surprised at how quickly the curse was taking its toll. She had expected her decline to be more gradual.

"Can I get you anything?" He was very concerned by what he saw. Had they found the cure in time?

"Just some water," she replied weakly.

As he was heading upstairs to get her water, he ran into Clarice. "They're down in the basement."

Clarice saw Severus hard at work on the potion and Wendy resting on the couch. After a quick examination, she realized that Wendy was quickly getting worse. "How is the potion coming?" she asked.

"You have the rest of the ingredients?" he asked tersely.

She placed a bag on the worktable. "Of course."

"It will take several hours, and before you tell me, I do realize that time is of the essence. The less I am interrupted, the sooner I will finish," he said shortly.

Remus returned with the water and Wendy slowly sipped from the glass, doing her best to keep her hands from shaking. "Thank you."

Remus and Clarice could do nothing but watch and wait as the hours passed. Remus sat on the couch with Wendy leaning against him. "How much longer does she have?" he asked Clarice.

"I'm not sure. The book said two to three days and we're nearing the end of day two." She noticed that Wendy's breathing was becoming more labored. "Severus, do you know how much longer?"

"Perhaps half an hour," he replied. He was actually quite impressed that they had been able to leave him undisturbed for so long.

Remus closed his eyes and kissed the top of Wendy's head. He wasn't sure she would last that long as she had long since lapsed into unconsciousness. "Is there anything you can do for her?"

Clarice shook her head and replied sadly, "I'm afraid not."

After close to an hour, Severus ladled the potion into a glass. "It is finished. Though in my opinion, it will kill her."

"Severus, she will die without it. What do we do with it?" Remus asked.

"She needs to drink this dosage and some will need to be placed topically on the wound." He handed the glass to Clarice as he ladled another dose of the potion into a bowl.

Remus held Wendy as Clarice gently dripped the potion into Wendy's mouth. It took several long minutes before the entire dosage was gone. He then shifted her so that they could expose her back. As Clarice pulled off the dressing, he grimaced. The wound looked worse than it had before.

Clarice took the bowl from Severus and began dabbing it on the wound.

"How long will we have to wait?" Remus asked.

"Unknown. Books of that age tend not be incredibly detailed. Unfortunately, I cannot stay. My absence would be noticed and questioned. There is nothing more I can do, in any case." With that, he swept out of the room.

Clarice looked at Remus. "I think we should get her upstairs. It will be more comfortable for her." With a quick wave of her wand, she levitated Wendy upstairs. Once they had her settled in bed, Clarice said, "There is little more that I can do. I'll leave you to keep an eye on her. Contact me at home if you need any help. Tomorrow's my day off. Good night." She gave his shoulder a reassuring squeeze.

"Good night. Thank you, Clarice." He sat next to Wendy and cradled her in his arms.

Hours passed and Remus could not detect a change in her health. Her breathing was still shallow and now she had broken out into a cold sweat. He knew that Clarice had said there was nothing more to be done for her, but he couldn't stand helplessly watching her suffer. When he picked up her hand, he was shocked at how cold it was.

"Excuse me, Master Remus? Mistress is having a visitor," said Cappa meekly.

"Who is it?" he asked quietly.

"Mister Kingsley has come to see her. I is not knowing what to tell him," she replied nervously as she wrung her hands.

"I'll go see him." He kissed Wendy's forehead before going downstairs.

"How is she doing?" asked Kingsley when he saw Remus.

"Not well. She's taken a potion, but it doesn't seem to be doing any good." He ran his hand through his hair, hoping to straighten it out somewhat. He must look a mess.

"How are you doing?" Kingsley asked taking in Remus' particularly haggard appearance and the dark circles around his eyes.

"Not much better, I guess." He was physically and mentally exhausted from this whole ordeal.

"You know, I'm glad that she has someone like you to look after her." Kingsley had long since lost any jealousy he had over Wendy choosing Remus.

"It's a bit of a change. Normally, she looks after me," he tried to sound upbeat.

"You're a lucky bloke. Someone will come by tomorrow to see how she's doing. Hopefully, the potion will work."

"Did you want to see her? She's unconscious..." Remus realized how absurd this sounded, but he didn't know what else to say.

"No. That's quite all right. If you need anything, send the elf to me or Tonks and we'll see the message gets passed on. You should try to get some rest," Kingsley offered.

"I'll try. Has anyone said anything about Severus being gone from Hogwarts?" He knew that if Severus did get in trouble, the Potions Master would be sure to remind him that he was at fault for the foreseeable future.

Kingsley shook his head. "I haven't heard anything. I don't think anyone noticed he was gone. He's good at sneaking in and out of places."

So I noticed, he thought. "That's good. Thanks for coming by." He was starting towards the stairs, intent on returning to Wendy's side, when he saw Cappa standing on the bottom stair.

"Master Remus should be eating something. You is not taking care of yourself, sir. I has made you dinner and it's on the table."

"Thank you, Cappa." It occurred to him, as he ate his dinner, that Cappa had been referring to him as "master" for quite some time. Malfoy and Kingsley had both been "mister". From what little he knew about house elves, this was highly unusual. He would have to speak to Wendy about that. He looked down and saw that he had cleaned his plate. He hadn't realized how hungry he was.

After his second helping, he returned upstairs to his vigil. She was shaking from chills so he cast a warming charm on her, hoping it would help. He pulled a chair next to the bed and fell into a restless sleep; he didn't want to get too comfortable and fall into a deep sleep in case she needed help.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 of 27

Voldemort is back and the Order of the Phoenix is reforming. They need new members and Kingsley recruits one of his fellow Aurors - even though she is a Slytherin. Assigned to work with Remus Lupin, things get very tense. Set during 'Order of the Phoenix'.

When Remus heard a noise coming from the bed, his eyes popped open and he saw the room was dark except for a lamp on the table. As the room came into focus, he could see Wendy thrashing against her blanket. He grabbed her wrists and found he had to crawl on top of her to stop her legs from kicking. She continued to fight against him and was muttering incoherently.

Wendy could feel something heavy on top of her and opened her eyes. "Get off!" she shouted.

"Wendy, calm down. You're safe," he insisted as he maintained a tight grip.

"Remus?" she asked as she began to calm down.

He released his tight grip on her wrists and gently brushed her face with the back of his hand. "Yes. You're safe at home." Relief washed over him. She seemed to be cured; her temperature had returned to normal.

"I'm at home?" She was not entirely sure of her surroundings.

He rolled next to her and brushed her hair from her face. "Yes. How much do you remember?"

She furrowed her brows, lost in thought. "The potion. Severus brewed it for me, didn't he?"

"He did. Though he was not happy about doing it your way. How do you feel?"

"I'm not sure. I'll start with thirsty and see where it goes from there. How's my back?" she asked as she rolled onto her stomach.

Remus nervously pulled back the bandage and ran his hand across the smooth pink skin. "How does that feel? Does it hurt?"

She shivered at his touch, but felt no pain. "No. How does it look?" she asked nervously.

"A little pink, but otherwise fine." He watched her roll onto her back and slam her eyes shut. "Something wrong?"

She opened her eyes and smiled at him. "No. I'm just glad it's over. Thank you for watching over me." She reached for his hand.

He pulled away from her. "Let me get you some water." He returned from the bath with a glass of water and found her sitting up with the lamps lit. As he handed her the water, he said, "You look much better." Her color had returned and the circles under her eyes were not as pronounced.

"Thank you." She quickly drained the glass. "You, on the other hand, look horrible. Were you that worried about me?"

He sat on the bed next to her and pulled her into his embrace. "I was." He fought back the tears before continuing. "I thought I was going to lose you."

She returned his embrace, though not as vigorously. "Remus, can't breathe," she gasped.

He loosened his grip slightly. "Sorry. I love you, Wendy, and I want to tell you that now before anything else happens."

She was stunned silent.

"Wendy?" he asked as he pulled back so he could look into her eyes to make sure she was well.

"I'm sorry. You just surprised me. Do you mean it?"

He placed his hands on the side of her face and leaned his forehead against hers. "I do. I have loved you for a long time. I just... I was afraid you wouldn't return the feeling and it hurts too much to say it and not hear it in return."

She smiled and placed her hand behind his neck. "I have already told you I love you and I'll say it again: I love you, Remus John Lupin." She kissed him gently at first and then slipped her tongue into his mouth. "Now the question is, do you believe me?"

He crushed her in his embrace again. "I do." He found he couldn't control the few tears he could feel running down his cheeks.

"Ribs," she warned. When he pulled away, she wiped away his tears. "Why are you crying?"

"They are tears of happiness and relief. I never imagined I would find anyone who would love me." He couldn't keep his hands from touching her, reassuring himself that she was real.

"And you call yourself a Gryffindor?" she chided gently. "How strange that you would find a Slytherin who would tell you that?"

"I have come to wonder whether you truly belong in Slytherin. Our houses share many qualities, you know," he replied playfully.

Wendy became defensive. "Oh, no, I most definitely belong in Slytherin. I'm not in the Order to improve life for everyone, to protect the Muggle-borns or Muggles themselves. I'm here to seek revenge on my brother and the others that turned my world upside-down. I became an Auror mostly because it would embarrass him. And the fact I could play around with Dark Magic and not get in trouble. I'm sure you've noticed that I have one of the best collections of books on Dark Magic you are likely to find in a private library. I have many books that are banned, but since I'm an Auror, no one will ever search my house. It's purely self-serving, so, as you can see, while you may interpret my motives as noble, they aren't."

"Well, you won't fault me if I choose not to believe a word of that explanation, will you?" He smiled warmly at her.

She couldn't help but smile back. "I suppose not. And I assume you attach the same Gryffindor sentiments to what Severus does? He didn't give you a hard time about coming to brew the potion, did he?"

"Much less than I had anticipated, but then again, the two of you are from the same House. As for what motivates him, I have no idea. I don't know him near as well as I know you."

"That's good. I would be troubled if you did," she replied before kissing him again. "You know what I would like?"

"What's that?" he asked expectantly.

"I would love it if you would draw a bath for me. I feel wretched. And then a nice meal."

He felt slightly embarrassed. How could he think of his needs at a time like this? "Of course."

She could tell that he was slightly disappointed. "Once I've got my strength up, I know what I would like to do. That is, of course, if you will have me," she asked shyly.

"Goodness, yes. I've wanted you so badly." He gave her a look of longing.

"I suppose we should talk about Lucius," she said as he got up and headed towards the bathroom.

"You aren't seriously considering seeing him again, are you?" Remus asked. Surely after this latest incident she would realize how foolish that whole endeavor was.

She sighed. Once again, she was forced to confront the legendary Gryffindor sense of right and wrong. "Yes. I think he can still be a useful source. He doesn't seem to suspect that I was in Little Hangleton the other day. I'll be careful when I next meet with him to make sure."

He poked his head out of the bath. "You know I don't like you with him." That was a very significant understatement.

She eased herself to her feet and walked slowly to the bath. "Yes. I don't particularly like being with him, either, but is there a better option?" She wrapped her arms around him from behind.

He was surprised that she had made it to the bath on her own and jumped when she touched him. He turned to face her. "He doesn't seem to be confiding in you very much. I don't think the risk is worth it." Couldn't she see how much this hurt him? That there had to be a better way?

She looked into his eyes. "Not now, but the fact he mentioned the meeting, and what he said when he mentioned it, leads me to believe he's starting to place some trust in me. It shouldn't be long. It would be a shame to give up everything I've worked for."

Remus sighed; she still didn't get it. He hoped he could talk her out of it later. "You will be careful with him, won't you?"

Running her hands along his body, she replied, "I'm always careful around people like him. Believe me, I would much rather be spending all my free time with you. And I will *never* bring him in here. This is our room."

He turned off the tap and embraced her. It still hurt to think of her with Malfoy, but he knew he couldn't live without her. He had been thoroughly miserable these past few weeks. "I will try to live with that." *At least for now.*

"I'll keep busy with work as much as possible. Though, I think he has been equally busy now that some of his cohorts have escaped. I haven't noticed him around the Ministry as much, but that could just be me not being there that much." She pulled away and slipped out of her clothes and into the bath.

He wanted nothing more than to climb into the tub with her. "Do you know how hard you make it for me to resist you?"

"No, I hadn't thought about that. Why don't you have Cappa see to dinner, and I'll be down in about twenty minutes?"

"Are you sure you don't need me to wash your back?" he asked playfully.

"No," she giggled.

"Wash your front?"

She splashed him with water. "No. Just go. I nearly died and that's all you're thinking about?" While she was glad to see he was in a good mood, she wasn't in the mood to play around quite yet.

"I'm a man and I'm staring at a beautiful, naked woman in a bathtub. It would be unnatural if I didn't have that thought," he joked and leaned towards her, trying to steal a kiss.

She shoved him away playfully. "Just go."

After bathing and eating, Wendy had to admit she was feeling much better. "Thank you for saving my life," she said at the end of the meal.

"I think you already thanked me for that," he replied sheepishly.

"No, I thanked you for taking care of me. Without your help, that dementor would have had me. How did you get us home?"

"I used your wand and the locket."

"Quick thinking. I'm glad you thought of it. I'm not sure how we would have gotten out of there otherwise. That distance is a little far for Side-Along Apparition."

"That it is. I probably would have gotten us to the nearest village and summoned the Knight Bus, but they might have found us first. Are you sure no one can track your Portkey?"

"Now, Remus, you should know enough about me to not have to ask that question," she replied slyly.

"More Dark Magic?" he asked.

She could hear the disapproval in his voice. "Just a little. It bothers you, doesn't it?" Hatred of all Dark Magic was definitely a Gryffindor trait. There were times when that which was technically classified as Dark Magic could be quite useful.

"Yes. Look at what it did to you." He reached across the corner of the table to take her hand in his.

She sighed. "I know." She almost got lost in his eyes. "You do realize this injury is precisely why I was against getting involved with you in the first place, don't you?"

"Yes, but it's too late now, isn't it?" He didn't sound at all disappointed as he asked that question.

"Definitely. I'm sorry about all the Dark Magic, but you know the saying 'fight fire with fire'? I think it applies here. We can't stay on the defensive the whole time. I'll also see what I can do to encourage Lucius to use his suite as a meeting place, rather than here. I'll tell him I have a new housemate, one of my coworkers that has found himself temporarily homeless." She got up and sat in his lap. "Perhaps my new housemate would care to join me upstairs?"

"I take it you're feeling better now?" he asked hopefully as he wrapped his arms around her.

"Much," she replied before kissing him deeply. Even she found the speed of her recovery surprising.

He carried her upstairs and gently placed her on the bed. "I have missed you," he whispered in between kisses.

"It has been very lonely here without you. I suppose we should check in tomorrow. Though, I think I'll take another day off from work." She pushed off his shirt and threw it across the room.

"That sounds like a splendid idea," he replied. For weeks, he had dreamt about this moment. As he unfastened her robe, he noticed that she was not wearing undergarments. "You planned this, didn't you?"

She pulled him closer to her. "Only since I got out of the bath. The longer I've been up, the better I've felt." Deftly, she undid his trousers. She reached her hand into his trousers and cupped his balls. "I've missed you," she whispered.

All sense of reason vanished, leaving only desire. He let his hand cup her breast and coax her nipple to hardness before suckling. When he heard her inhale sharply, it aroused him further. Pulling away from her, he pushed his trousers off the rest of way and threw them clear of the bed. "I missed you, too." He reached between her legs and found that she was as aroused as he was.

She moaned as she felt his fingers massaging between her legs. "Take me," she growled.

While he normally would have insisted on more foreplay, he had an incredible amount of unresolved sexual tension and would do whatever she suggested.

The next morning, they Apparated to Grimmauld Place. Remus let them into the house and they checked the kitchen for Sirius or any of the other members of the Order. The kitchen was deserted and they started searching the house floor by floor. It was a brief search, since Sirius was in the library.

"I wasn't even aware you could read?" Wendy drawled when she saw Sirius sitting in the chair by the fire, book in hand.

"So, you're still alive. I shouldn't have gotten my hopes up. Snape stopped by and said that the cure might kill you. For once, I was actually hoping he was right. I guess I'm not that lucky." His voice was especially bitter after how badly her involvement with Malfoy had hurt Remus.

"You should know it would take more than your cousin to kill me," she replied dryly.

He assumed she was referring to Bellatrix. "I've heard that it was a rather obscure book on Dark Magic that saved your life." He closed the book he was reading. "There are a lot of interesting and obscure books here, but I guess you know that, don't you? I've heard that you *liberated* some of the more interesting books. I wonder if one of them had the cure?"

"None of the books from your library were *that* interesting. I took the books that Albus would have insisted on destroying. I do notice that there are some volumes missing, and that proves my point."

"I wonder what else you took from here?" he asked suspiciously.

Wendy glared at him, but refused to rise to the challenge. She had a much better idea. Turning her attention to Remus, she wrapped her arms around him and kissed him. "Come, darling. Black will report that I'm not dead. I'll help you pack your things."

Sirius was confused. "What's going on here? What do you mean 'pack your things'?"

Wendy kept her arm wrapped around Remus' waist as she stood next to him and was quite pleased that he placed his arm on her shoulder. She gave Sirius a very smug grin.

Sirius' eyes quickly passed between the two of them. "You didn't! You aren't?" he was unable to form a complete sentence, as he understood what was going on between the two of them.

Remus smiled at his friend, hoping to calm him. "Sirius, this attack led both of us to realize how we feel about each other. We're in love."

"In love?" Sirius asked incredulously. Even though he had heard Remus talking about loving her, he would not consider her behavior something a person in love would do.

"Come now, Sirius, I've told you I love her. You seemed to support that before. What happened?"

"She and Lucius Bloody Malfoy, that's what," Sirius replied belligerently.

"Yes, well, we're working through that," Remus replied evasively.

"Working through that? Are you insane?" Sirius was near apoplectic. How could that be something you could work through?

"Well, we are looking at the fact that my association with Lucius can possibly provide some valuable information. There was great potential for learning something useful from the meeting the other night. Unfortunately, we didn't take the dementors into account. That, and they were a bit more suspicious than I thought they would be. I wasn't expecting to run into your cousin. I should have detected any wards that they were using." She was still vexed by that. Even if they were using spells she was not familiar with, she should have been able to detect the traces.

"I guess you aren't the Dark Sorceress you thought you were," Sirius said snidely.

She frowned at him. "Oh, buggor off!" she spat at him. Turning to Remus, and in a much gentler voice, she said, "You talk to him. I'll go upstairs." She made a great show of kissing him quite passionately before leaving.

Sirius had a queasy look on his face as she left. "You do realize Malfoy has kissed that mouth?"

Remus sighed and took a seat across from Sirius. "I do. We're working on reaching an understanding on what sort of relationship she will have with him." He raised a hand to stop Sirius from further protestation. "Please, don't judge me. Sometimes affairs of the heart cannot be comprehended by the mind. I think this is one of them. With everything at the Ministry, she has been much too busy to see him. For that, I am grateful, and I think that she may continue to find a way to be busy."

"There are times I just don't understand you, mate," Sirius replied.

"Well, I'm actually planning on convincing her not to see Lucius anymore, but that may take a little time. I had hoped the fact that she had almost died would have done that, but she's a bit more hardheaded than I had anticipated."

Sirius leaned forward. "Remus, I know you've had it rough, but you can do better than her."

Remus looked conflicted, knowing his friend was only looking out for him. "You don't know her. Surely you noticed how miserable I was without her. I don't want to live like that again. Just, trust me to work it out. Please?"

Sirius thought this was a recipe for disaster, but he could tell that he wasn't going to talk him out of it. "There's always a place for you here."

As Wendy had suspected, Lucius seemed to have much less free time. The part of her that loathed Lucius was glad of this, but the part of her that wanted information on the Death Eaters was quite disappointed. Of course, Remus had been trying to convince her that any contact with Lucius was not worth the potential danger, but she continued to insist that she had to follow that line of information. While Lucius might not tell her anything directly, he had always underestimated how clever she could be. All she had to do was arrange a meeting with him. It would be quite simple, wouldn't it? Then why did she have so much doubt?

Whatever the Death Eaters were doing, they were not making a display of it. The Ministry continued to be plagued with the embarrassment of the escapees remaining at large, though the *Daily Prophet* conveniently was not reporting this fact. As a matter of fact, the newspaper did not seem to be reporting much that was newsworthy. This greatly concerned everyone in the Order.

They were meeting on March tenth, hoping that any of the information they had gathered separately might yield more clues when pooled together. Unfortunately, it didn't. No one seemed to be making any progress.

Kingsley asked, "Wendy, have you learned anything else from Malfoy?"

She shook her head. "No. In fact, I haven't seen him since he came by after I was injured. I actually take that as a good sign. If he hadn't believed I picked up a bug in Wales, he probably would have arranged to see me again. I think that since I've been at work that pretty much proves to him that I wasn't in Little Hangleton. Unfortunately, I can't approach him, so that complicates things."

"Well, if you learn anything, let us know. Next time, we'll organize a larger expedition to spy on the Death Eaters. Just a reminder, those of us working in the Ministry need to be more mindful of departmental bounds. Some of you have been seen associating with those outside your department, and it's starting to draw the wrong sort of attention. I shouldn't have to remind you about that.

"The only other news I have is that things are getting worse at Hogwarts. Albus still has ways of communicating with us, but getting a message to him is quite difficult."

"What about the book?" Wendy asked.

"We haven't been able to make any progress on deciphering what magic was used there."

"I could take a look at it," she offered.

"I'll pass on the offer, but I think you have enough responsibility right now."

"Kingsley, I've already been researching it in my library, but without the book to examine it's a bit difficult," she said insistently.

"It's in good hands. Let's just leave it at that."

Wendy sighed and decided to drop the subject. With nothing else to put out, the meeting ended. Since she had come straight from work, this was the first she had seen Remus since that morning. Once everyone had filtered out of the kitchen, she gave him a big hug and kiss. "So, how was your day?" she asked.

He shrugged. "It was a day." To him, one day seemed very much like another.

"Well, perhaps I can do something to make it special." She gave him a seductive grin and led him out of the kitchen.

He started to think his day was definitely looking up. When she led him up the stairs and away from the front door, he wondered what was happening. He had expected her to take him home. "What's going on?" he asked as they climbed the stairs. She didn't reply, but led him into the drawing room.

"Surprise!" shouted those that had been at the meeting.

"Happy birthday," Wendy said in a near whisper and gave him a kiss on the cheek before moving away so everyone else could deliver their birthday wishes.

After a rousing chorus of "Happy Birthday", Wendy helped pass around cake and punch. As people began socializing, she noticed Remus making his way toward her.

"Were you responsible for this?" he asked.

"In part. I mentioned it to Kingsley, Tonks and Arthur. Arthur got the other Weasleys involved, and you have Molly to thank for the cake," she replied modestly.

"How did you know it was my birthday?" He hadn't told her. The only other person that knew was Sirius, and he knew the two of them weren't on speaking terms.

"Oh, come now. As an Auror, things like that are easy enough to find out. I've known since October when your birthday was," she replied as she took a bite of cake.

She had known since October. That was very surprising. "And when is yours?"

She smiled slyly. "Oh, no, you won't get an answer that easily. I want you to figure it out."

He reached his arm around her. "I could always tickle it out of you," he said as he lightly tickled her ribs.

She squirmed away, trying not to drop her cake. "I would hex you before then."

"So, how long do we have to stay to fulfill politeness?" he asked playfully and set her plate on a nearby table.

"Let everyone finish their cake, then we can go home."

"That's good," he replied before pushing her against the wall and kissing her very passionately.

She pushed him away and whispered, "Not here. They're watching." She could especially see the disapproving glare Black was giving them.

"Let them watch," he replied as he nibbled at her neck. Behind him, he could hear Molly quietly ushering everyone out. "It seems we won't have to wait that long. I'll have to thank Molly later," he whispered.

With the room now deserted, he led her over to one of the sofas. Once she reclining on the threadbare piece of furniture, he slipped his hand under her robes and ran it up her leg. He was quite pleased to find that she had forgone stockings in favor of knee-high socks. In between kisses, he said, "I do believe this is the best birthday present I've ever received."

"You haven't finished unwrapping it, yet," she replied playfully.

"Give me time," he said as he opened the front of her robe.

She put her hand on his to stop him. "Should we be doing this here?"

He nibbled at her neck, knowing how it drove her wild. "And why not? I'm sure the others have gone home and Sirius will be sulking upstairs. I'm sure we will have complete privacy, but to make you feel better..." He dug his wand out of his pocket and locked the door.

Once he had slipped her robes off, she pushed him away so that their positions were reversed. "I'd hate for the birthday boy to have to work so hard on his special day." Slowly, she began to undo the buttons of his shirt, taking time to kiss the revealed skin. When she reached his trousers, she didn't stop.

He gasped as she ran her tongue from his balls to the tip. Ever so gently, she ran her tongue around the tip, sending shivers through his body. When she finally took him into her mouth, he closed his eyes and gripped the sides of the couch.

Slowly she laved his swollen manhood, wanting to bring him to, but not over, the edge. Carefully she ran her teeth up his shaft, leaving him panting.

"Wendy," he pleaded.

She knew that he was close and swirled her tongue around his tip one last time before pulling away. "Yes, darling?"

He grabbed her shoulders and pulled her across his body so he could kiss her. Once his lips met hers, he pushed his tongue into her mouth, pleased when she returned his kiss with enthusiasm. "You drive me insane," he panted.

"Good," she replied as she settled over his erection. Slowly, she slid onto him, enjoying the tightness.

As she rocked atop his erection, he let his hands drift up to fondle her breasts. As he teased her nipples to hardness, he could see her close her eyes. Knowing that he couldn't last much longer, he pulled her against his chest and thrust into her while giving her a crushing kiss. Upon breaking the kiss, he squeezed her and felt the orgasm rush through him. Once the tremors subsided, he could feel her kissing him softly.

"Happy birthday, darling," she whispered.

"Definitely the best birthday ever," he replied as he enjoyed the comfort of her weight on him.

"I'm glad you're happy."

He brushed her hair, trying to hook it behind her ear. "You could do one more thing for me," he said hopefully.

"And what might that be?"

"Don't see Malfoy anymore."

"Remus..." she started.

He placed his finger on her lips. "Please? The thought of sharing you hurts too much."

She nuzzled against him. "I'll try to stay away, but I can't make any promises. I'd need a good reason to completely stop seeing him without drawing too much suspicion. I'll let George know I'd like more field work."

"I would really appreciate that." Hopefully this would force Malfoy to find a new diversion.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 of 27

Voldemort is back and the Order of the Phoenix is reforming. They need new members and Kingsley recruits one of his fellow Aurors - even though she is a Slytherin. Assigned to work with Remus Lupin, things get very tense. Set during 'Order of the Phoenix'.

True to her word, Wendy had managed to spend most of her time out of the office. George had been extremely pleased to have her volunteering for so much undercover work. She had even agreed to take some of the younger Aurors with her and offer them advice on going undercover successfully.

Unfortunately, she still had to return to the office to file her reports. In the past, Lucius had spent quite a bit of time at the Ministry, and she kept expecting to run into him. So far she had been lucky.

With the latest round of reports filed, it was time for her to go home. As she walked past the other cubicles, she finally took note of how late it was. She was the only person on the floor. When she reached the landing, she pressed the button for the lift and began impatiently tapping her foot. Naturally, they were all at the lobby level.

"I think that you have been avoiding me," came a voice from the shadows.

Wendy spun around, wand at the ready, and saw Lucius giving her a playful grin.

He lowered her wand with his fingertips. "Now, now, you wouldn't want to hurt me, would you?"

Even knowing what she had promised Remus, she found her body reacting to his silky smooth voice and masculine presence. "No, of course not," she replied coyly.

He brushed her cheek, tracing her scar, and laced his fingers into her hair. "I didn't think so."

She pulled away from him, afraid of what her body was doing.

"Are you avoiding me?" he asked suspiciously.

"No, not at all. I've just been very busy." She found herself backing away from him.

"And now?" he asked, his voice full of desire.

"Lucius, please, we're in the Ministry," she protested as she looked around nervously. She had to get away from him, but without the lift, there was nowhere to run.

"There's no one here," he whispered before nibbling at her neck.

She found her resolve melting. There was something about his touch that made her lose her sense of reason. Desperately, she tried to cling onto her desire to flee.

"Since you have finished your work for the night, I think perhaps I know what you can do for the rest of the evening," he said seductively.

There was a reason why this wasn't a good idea. What was it? She found her fingers laced into his hair. Had he been wearing it loose before? She gasped as she felt his hand reach between her legs. Even with the layers of fabric separating their skin, she could still feel the heat pooling from his touch.

"Why don't we go to your house?" he suggested.

This seemed like a very good idea. Everywhere he touched her, it felt like her skin was on fire. She had a nagging feeling that they shouldn't go to her house, though. Why was that? Oh, yes. "I have a houseguest right now." Yes, she wanted to go home, but without Lucius. She tried to push him away.

He pulled her tight against his body and grinded his hips into her. "That's rather inconvenient, but I believe I have a solution."

When he pulled her into the lift, she wondered when it had gotten there. She didn't remember the door opening. Before she could think of anything else, he pressed his lips against hers and forced her mouth open. The fire within her demanded she return the kiss. As the doors opened, she noticed they were on Level One. "Where?"

"Shhh." He pulled her down the hallway and into an office. Once there, he took hold of her arm and Side-Along Apparated.

When the spinning stopped, Wendy noticed she was in his suite. She returned her attention to him when she felt her outer robe drop to the floor.

"Now, then, my dear. It's been far too long, don't you think?"

At this point, she didn't know what to think and nodded. Her fingers began working on unfastening his buttons, searching for the smooth skin hidden beneath.

Lucius grinned lasciviously at her. She had always been putty in his hands. He would have to convince her to spend more time with him. She had been downright neglectful recently. He had needs and it was her job to fulfill those needs.

Wendy found herself wandering the park near her house aimlessly. When she left Lucius' suite, she had been about to return straight home, but then realized something wasn't quite right. After half an hour in the park, she realized what it was: she had never intended to be with Lucius. Now she was left with trying to determine how it had happened.

She knew that Remus would react quite poorly to this. After all, she had told him that she would do her best to avoid the man. Sinking down onto a park bench, she ran her fingers through her hair.

Only when she noticed Muggles staring at her did she realize that she was still in her robes, and headed home.

Remus heard the front door open and decided to investigate. He and Wendy were the only ones that should be able to open the door, but she always Apparated home. He saw a visibly shaken Wendy heading towards the stairs. "Wendy?" he asked tentatively.

She turned to face him, her eyes puffy and red from the crying she had done. "I didn't mean to," she sobbed before collapsing into his arms.

He was very concerned and confused. "You didn't mean to what?"

"He was there, at the Ministry, and I don't know what happened. One minute, I was waiting for the lift, the next..."

If she said anything more, he couldn't understand it through the tears. "Wendy, what happened? Who are you talking about?"

"Lucius," she sniveled. She could feel him stiffen. "I don't know what happened. I wanted to get away from him. I tried to get away from him, but... I don't know. The next thing I knew, I was with him. He has to be using a potion. That's the only solution I can see. I didn't want to. I wanted to come home to you." She broke down into tears again.

A potion. That made sense, but could he believe her? Watching her emotional breakdown, he knew that she was telling the truth. "Shhh. Darling, it's all right. Why don't you go upstairs and have a nice long shower? I can have a bite to eat ready when you get out? How does that sound?"

She nodded. "Okay."

He kissed the tears on her cheeks before kissing her lips and sending her upstairs.

When she emerged from the bath, he was in the bedroom reading a book. "How do you feel?"

"A little better," she replied. Sitting at the table, she picked at the tray of food. Deciding to not dwell on what she had done, but on what she had learned, she said, "I think my brother may be taking a more active role than he did the last time. Lucius seemed to hint that there was someone important at my brother's place. I'm not sure who it is. It might be one of the escapees. It's disturbing that my brother seems to be taking a more active role this time around." She paused and looked away, unsure of how to continue.

Remus rose from the divan and knelt beside her. "What else is there? Did he hurt you?" If Malfoy had hurt her, he would kill that arrogant bastard.

"No, it's not that. He told me that Timor has pulled Andorra out of Hogwarts. I fear he may send her to Durmstrang. At least this year I've been able to see her in Hogsmeade. Now, I worry what will happen to her between Durmstrang and my brother being more open in expressing his loyalties."

"Is it possible Malfoy told you this to try to get you to do something reckless?" He didn't see that Malfoy would just offer that information for no reason.

She shook her head. "I don't think so. He's one of the few that knows that Andorra is my daughter." She paused. "Remus, I'd like to go see her."

"But you said there may be a rather dangerous Death Eater there." He recalled the last time she had talked him into a spying mission.

"I don't care about that. I just want to see her. Please?" She ran her fingers through his hair, wanting to touch him, to know that he was real.

He could see how much she wanted to do this. "What's your plan? Surely you aren't planning on just knocking on the front door?"

"No. My brother was never a very good wizard. I've always been able to get by the wards when I wanted to and I know where Andorra's room is."

"You want to sneak in with your invisibility cloak?" he asked incredulously.

"No. That's far too risky. In the past I have climbed up to her window and watched from there. You could hide in the garden below while I climb up in the cloak."

"It still sounds risky. While your brother may not be that good of a wizard, his guest probably is, and there's a good chance the wards have been updated. We still aren't sure how we were discovered in Little Hangleton. If there is an escapee there, we could get help from the others."

"And how would that help us? We'd break into my brother's place and conduct an unauthorized raid? That would draw exactly the wrong sort of attention to me. He still has enough influence in the Ministry to make it very uncomfortable if any of us were caught. No, I just want to look in her window and see her again. That's all. I won't go prowling around, causing trouble, or looking for Death Eaters. I just want to see her again. Please? We could go tonight and we'd only be gone about an hour." She was running her fingers through his hair and kissing him in hopes of convincing him to agree.

He found he couldn't say no. It seemed like such a harmless request. After all, she had grown up in that house. "All right. We'll go. How soon would you be ready to leave?"

"Just let me grab the invisibility cloak," she said and hurried out of the room and downstairs.

She seemed so much happier now that he had agreed to this trip. He tried to convince himself that he was doing the right thing. After all, they weren't capturing anyone or spying on anyone.

They Apparated to a wooded area that couldn't be seen from the manor. "Which way?" Remus asked.

Wendy looked around, getting her bearings. "This way," she replied and led him into the darkness. They had both agreed that using their wands would be a bad idea.

"How far?" he asked.

"About five minutes."

They moved cautiously through the trees. Pausing at the edge of the glade, they stared out across the vast lawn that made up Wendy's childhood home.

"What now?" he asked.

She looked up at the sky. The moon was nearly full and illuminated the lawn enough that anyone looking out a window would surely spot them. Thankfully, there were clouds in the sky. "We wait for one of the clouds to cover the moon and then we run across to the manor."

"This isn't a very good plan," he stated.

"Well, this whole side of the house is dark. Downstairs are the ballroom and dining room, both likely to be deserted. Upstairs are the family rooms. Andorra and Caroline's rooms will be there. The other two rooms should be deserted. Guests wouldn't be kept in the family area."

He looked at the side of the building and couldn't see any clear handholds. "And you're sure you can climb up to her room?"

"Positive. My brother, in a fit of arrogance, decided to give her my old room. Let's just say, I used to sneak out of that room on a regular basis," she replied confidently.

"That was more than twenty years ago," he reminded her.

"Actually, the last time I climbed up there was last summer. I'll be fine." She gave him a reassuring smile and looked up at the sky. A large cloud moving across the nearly full moon. "Let's go."

The two of them sprinted across the lawn and into the shadows of the manor's wall. They slunk along the wall until they were under Andorra's window.

"Not to question your abilities, but how are you going to get up there?" Remus asked.

"There are enough irregularities in the rock that I can get a good hand and foot hold on it." She gave him a quick kiss, covered herself with the invisibility cloak and began scaling the wall.

Since he couldn't see her, he decided to keep watch around the rest of the grounds.

Wendy made it to the small balcony without incident. The doors were closed and the drapes were drawn. With a small wave of her hand, she was able to part the curtains enough to look into the room. She could see Andorra sleeping in her bed. How she wished she had made different choices all those years ago. But if she had, she never would have met Remus.

She had just started climbing down, when she saw a stunner heading for Remus. There was nothing she could do about him getting hit by it, but she pushed off from the wall and rolled to the ground, coming up with her wand at the ready to retaliate against whoever had attacked him. Unfortunately, their attacker had moved and she found herself stunned before she could attack.

Remus could feel. And what he felt wasn't pleasant. It was cold, dark and the ground was hard. He felt the stiffness and disorientation that came with waking from a stun. He had no idea where he was. *Wendy! Perhaps she escaped?* he thought.

Crawling on his hands and knees, he began investigating his surroundings. His hands found another in his cell. "No, no, Wendy." He shook her gently, trying to rouse her. Gently slapping her cheek, he said, "Wendy, please, wake up."

She swatted at the hand that was slapping her cheek. "Quit it." Slowly opening her eyes, she tried to take in her surroundings. "Where are we?"

"I was hoping you could answer that."

She sat up and tried to make out anything in the room. They were in almost complete darkness and it was difficult to see anything. "Damn, whoever it was got me, too. I saw you get hit and tried to take out your attacker, but whoever it was, was too fast for me." She got to her feet and started feeling around the room. "I think we're in one of the storerooms." A quick search of her pockets revealed her wand was missing. "Is yours gone, too?" she asked.

"Yes. It seems we are quite helpless. Unless you know a way out of here?" he asked hopefully.

"I'm afraid not. This particular storeroom is warded against magical entry or exit. In the past it was used to store some rather nasty magical items. If I had my wand I could get out of here, but wandless magic is nowhere near powerful enough to provide an escape."

"What are they going to do with us?"

"I have no idea. Depends on who captured us." She sat back down and leaned against the wall. "There's nothing to do but wait." She could feel Remus sit next to her, and she leaned up against him for comfort. "I'm really sorry about this. I had no idea this would happen. I seem to get us in an awful lot of trouble."

"It's all right. I should have said no to you. I knew it wasn't right for us to come, but I came anyway." He should have listened to that little voice in the back of his mind, but it had been too quiet.

"We almost made it," she replied half-heartedly.

As time passed, the two of them drifted into an uneasy sleep.

They both jumped to their feet as they heard the door click. Timor Leah came into their makeshift cell, and used his wand to light the lamps on the wall. "Well, well, well. Little sister. What a surprise to find you here?" he drawled. "I'm quite surprised you were sitting here in the dark. I thought you surely would have lit the lamps."

Truthfully, she had forgotten about the lamps on the wall. She had never spent much time in the storerooms. "What do you want, Timor?"

"I could ask you the same. After all, you were the one that was trespassing. And who do we have here?" he asked as he examined Remus. "Could my sister finally have taken a lover?"

"John is just a friend," she replied casually.

"And what are you doing here?" Timor asked.

"I heard that you had withdrawn Andorra from Hogwarts, and not knowing when you would send her to Durmstrang, I wanted to see her. I had no intention of being seen. I just wanted to look at her," she replied truthfully.

"How touching. But I find I don't believe you. What else should I think when I find a pair of Aurors on my property?" he asked suspiciously.

"I'm not an Auror," Remus replied.

Timor raised an eyebrow. "Not an Auror? Interesting. I didn't realize that Wendy socialized. What, pray tell, do you do?"

"I work in a Muggle bookstore," he said defensively, thankful that he really did have an honest job right now.

"A Muggle bookstore?" He turned his attention to Wendy. "Have you stooped so low that you can only associate with Mudbloods?" Timor said snidely.

"He never said he was Muggle-born," Wendy said defensively.

"No self-respecting pureblood would ever work for a Muggle. Not even one of the Weasleys, and they are an embarrassment to the name of Wizard."

"What are you going to do with us?" Wendy asked, eager to change the subject.

Timor crossed his arms and considered her question. "I haven't the foggiest. Your story is plausible, but there could be more to it. I'll have to consider what I'm going to do with you."

"I don't suppose you could detain us somewhere more comfortable?" she asked. "After all, I am your sister."

"And that, is why you are here. You will know as soon as I decide on your future." He walked out of the cell, humming a happy tune.

"What do we do now?" Remus asked quietly.

Wendy closed her eyes and ran her hands along the doorframe. "I don't know. Without my wand, I can't get out of this room." She walked over to the very small transom window. It was much too small for either of them to crawl through. "I'm so sorry. I should have listened to you." She gave him a hug.

"Do you think he knows what's going on in here?" Remus asked.

"He might be able to hear, but I don't know of any magic that would let him see. I'm not sure how much interest he'll have in me."

"How long do you think it will take for him to decide what he's going to do with us?"

"I don't know. He can be petty, but he has to keep in mind that if I'm gone too long, it will raise a lot of suspicion at the Ministry because I am an Auror."

"Do you think he would keep you here more than a day?" he asked nervously.

"Why?" As she asked, the reason suddenly dawned on her. "Oh, shit!"

"While I took my potion last night, if I don't take it this evening..." he couldn't finish that sentence, he just held her tight, trying not to think about it.

"I need to think." She took a seat in the middle of the room.

"About what?" Remus asked.

"How to get out of here. Perhaps in the depths of my memory is something useful. It might be some time before I speak again." She closed her eyes and slowed her breathing, traveling within her mind.

Remus had been alternately pacing and sitting against the wall, watching Wendy and the door. Neither had moved. From the light coming in the window, he could tell it was past mid-day. Checking his watch he saw that it was nearly three o'clock. He was disturbed by the fact that neither food nor water had been brought to them. He grew more nervous as it got later in the day. If she didn't emerge from her trance soon, he would have to wake her.

He looked up when he heard the door click. A tray with a pitcher of water and a small loaf of bread was shoved into the room. A part of him wanted to devour the bread and water, but he knew he had to share. He decided he would wait another half hour.

Just as he was about to break her trance, she collapsed sideways to the floor. He scurried to her side. "Wendy, are you all right?"

She rolled onto her back and opened her eyes. "Fine. That just took a lot out of me."

He helped her to a sitting position. "Someone brought us food and water. I waited for you."

"Thanks." She smiled sadly at him. "I could use some water."

He helped her over to the side of the room so that they could sit against the wall. Handing her the pitcher, he let her drink first. "Did you find anything?"

"I'm not sure. I have one spell that I'm not sure will work, but I'll give it a go."

He thought she was hiding something. "Just the one spell?"

"Yes," she replied, before ripping the bread in half and slowly eating her half.

"I'm sure it will work," he replied nervously.

Once they had finished their meager meal, she announced, "I'm ready to give it a try." She took another small sip of water and moved towards the door. "Please, stand back." She didn't want him to hear the spell.

Remus stayed where he was and watched. She stood close to the door and began waving her hands in a complex pattern and chanting quietly. He couldn't make out the words, but he could tell from her behavior that it was very old magic.

After five minutes, nothing had happened and he was starting to lose hope. She had to find a way out of this cell. She just had to.

She lowered her hands and her entire body slumped in failure. "I'm sorry, it didn't work."

He wrapped his arms around her and felt her collapse onto his chest. "It's all right." He knew it was only a few more hours until the moon would rise. "Wendy?" he really didn't want to bring this subject up, but he knew he had to.

"Yes?" she asked cautiously.

"I need to ask a favor of you if we aren't released soon."

She could see the torment in his face, and she felt a lump settle in the pit of her stomach. "What sort of favor?"

"If I turn into the wolf, I will likely kill you, or at the very least give you my affliction." He paused trying to find the strength to continue.

She suspected what he was going to ask of her and shook her head. "No, I can't. I won't."

He grabbed her shoulders. "You have to. I couldn't live with myself if I hurt or killed you. I need you to..."

She pulled away, not wanting to hear him say it. "No! I won't do it."

"You know I can't control myself. You have to, for your sake, for both our sakes. If we aren't released before the moon rises, you have to kill me."

Tears were starting to stream down her face. "No, I won't do it. I can't." She whispered, "I love you."

"And I love you, too. That's why I need you to do this. I can't give you my curse. And as hungry as I am, it's more likely that I would kill you. If one of us has to die, I would rather it be me. You have more to live for. Besides, I couldn't live with myself if I harmed you."

"No, there has to be a way. I can get us out of here," she was nearly hysterical.

"Do you know another spell?" he asked gently.

She replied evasively, "Well, no, yes, no! I'll find a way out."

He shook her gently, trying to bring her back to reality. "What do you know? Is there something that can help?"

She forced herself to look into his eyes. "Yes and no. A long time ago I learned a spell, a Binding Spell."

"Then do it!" he insisted, even though he had no idea what a Binding Spell was.

She pulled away. "It's not that easy."

"What do you mean it's not that easy?"

"Do you have any idea what a Binding Spell is?" She found she couldn't look at him.

"Well, no," he responded quietly.

"It's very ancient magic, done in rare instances when one person would become magically bound to another. It was generally done in the noble families to ensure the loyalty of the most trusted servants. It has effects similar to what binds a house-elf to a family. If I were to do this, you would become completely loyal to me. Not only that, but you would do my bidding without question. You would cease to be an individual. And I know of no way to reverse it. That was part of the appeal of the Binding Spell. It was irrevocable. I can't do that to you." Tears were streaming down her face.

He held her head in his hands, forcing her to look into his eyes. "You have to. There are two choices: you either do the Binding Spell or you kill me. I can't hurt you. I love you." He kissed her passionately.

"I don't think you understand. If I were to get mad at you and tell you to go away, you would, and you would feel no desire to return, ever. When, in the course of foreplay, I playfully tell you to stop, you would. If I were to tell you to drop dead, you would. Your will would be subject to my orders. You would not be leading a real life."

"But we would both be alive," he said insistently.

She held onto him tightly. "There are still a few more hours."

They spent the next couple of hours holding each other and saying very little.

"Wendy, it's time. The moon will be up shortly. You need to make your decision," he said sadly.

"I know. I just...I can't." Never before had she balked at doing anything difficult.

He insisted, "You must. I couldn't live with myself if I killed you."

"But there's a chance you wouldn't," she said optimistically.

"Not much of one. A hungry wolf will feed on whatever is available. You have gone against werewolves before. Could you defeat one without your wand?" he asked soberly.

"I could try. I could try an obscuring spell. It might hide me from you," she offered desperately.

"Then I would hope you are much better at it than I am. I could never hope to do one without my wand, and I don't know if it would mask your scent. Please, do the Binding Spell. Save both our lives," he pleaded.

"Remus, I..." She couldn't hold back the tears.

"Shh. I love you and will be loyal to you even without the spell. You must hurry. Time is running out. I can feel the moon," he said urgently.

Wendy picked up the tray and smashed it against the wall. When she saw Remus' inquisitive look, she said, "It is a blood spell." She picked up one of the pieces and led him to the center of the room. They knelt facing one another.

Chapter 19

Chapter 19 of 27

Voldemort is back and the Order of the Phoenix is reforming. They need new members and Kingsley recruits one of his fellow Aurors - even though she is a Slytherin. Assigned to work with Remus Lupin, things get very tense. Set during 'Order of the Phoenix'.

Wendy held Remus' left hand in her left. She spoke the incantation, first in the ancient language of the Druids, and then in English. "With this spell, your loyalty is pledged, never to be broken. You shall obey all orders given by your rightful master." She paused to regain her composure. The tears were streaming unbidden down her cheeks.

Remus watched her with a sad, resigned expression. He knew how much this was hurting her, but there was no other solution that would allow them both to live.

Her voice was cracking as she continued, "You shall serve your master until released by death. In blood this oath is given." She stabbed his hand with the piece of the tray. She watched the blood pool on his palm, unable to look into his eyes anymore. "In blood this oath is taken." She stabbed her own hand. She could feel the tingling in the air as the first weaves of the binding were woven. "The binding is sealed in blood. Your will is given to me." She reached for his hand. They were about to touch when she heard something in the hallway.

As the door cracked open, she lunged at it. "Run! To the left, there is a door. Run!" she shouted as she fought with their captor. She was too preoccupied with her fight to notice if Remus had gotten away.

Thankfully, she had caught their captor unaware with her finely tuned reflexes and was able to subdue him. She found his wand a short distance away from the door; it had been knocked free during her initial attack. With a quick spell, she had him bound, gagged and locked in the storeroom. Remus had gotten free. Now, if only he had made it out of the manor.

She needed to recover their wands, and, if possible, her cloak. Casting a quick Seeking Spell, she took the back stairs up to the main level. The family should be at dinner,

and hopefully this would give her the advantage she needed. She knew she would have to move quickly before Timor noticed his servant had gone missing.

Her spell led her to the library. She checked the hallway for signs of anyone. It was deserted. *Accio wands*," she said quietly. As she had suspected, he had not locked them, and they flew to her hand. A quick look around the room showed her Invisibility Cloak draped on the desk chair. She left the other wand on the desk, grabbed the cloak, opened the window and dropped to the ground.

Hoping that Remus had run into the forest, she took off at a sprint across the lawn, not caring if she was seen, only trying to make it to the end of the anti-Apparition wards. When she was halfway across the lawn, she could hear the alarm being raised at the manor. Hopefully, she would be in the trees before anyone saw her.

As she ran into the trees, she could hear the distinctive howl of a werewolf, and it was much too close for comfort. She had kept her wand out just in case she would have to use it, and it looked like that was going to happen. Her one comforting thought was that whomever her brother sent out to capture her was in for a very nasty surprise. She knew of few wizards that could deal with a werewolf.

She could hear Remus getting closer and stopped, holding her wand at the ready. She was nearly to the end of the wards. As the wolf lunged at her, she shouted, *"Impedimenta!"* She knew it would not stop him for long, but she only needed a few seconds. Sprinting away from the manor once more, she was soon at the end of the wards and Disapparated.

Cappa hurried up to Wendy. "Mistress, can I be getting anything for you?"

"Dinner, Cappa," Wendy replied tiredly, trying to catch her breath.

"Yes, Mistress. Will Master be joining you?"

"No, it will just be me." Wendy headed upstairs to shower and change. She knew she had time before Cappa was done preparing dinner. Tomorrow morning she would return to the woods to find Remus.

After she finished eating, she said, "Wake me before dawn. Do not let me sleep in, no matter what. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Mistress." Cappa was used to receiving strange orders, and she always carried them out.

Wendy was still not entirely awake when she Apparated near her ancestral home. She had no doubt that her brother would send out a search party now that it was day, though he must realize it would be fruitless since their wands were gone. Then again, Timor had never been very bright.

Casting a Seeking Spell, she began her search. Using short range Apparition, she was able to find him rather quickly. He was curled up in a small hollow, covered with tree branches. She knew that while his form was human, his mind was still mostly wolf. It would be another day before he was normal since he had not finished his Wolfsbane regimen.

Standing above the hollow, she called, "Remus." He did not wake and she didn't want to make much more noise. Cautiously, she reached out to touch him. "Remus," she said again as she gently nudged him and quickly pulled back.

He spun around and growled at the intruder that had surprised him.

She jumped back. "Remus, it's me. It's Wendy. I've come to take you home."

He snarled at her and crouched down, as if preparing to attack.

"It's Wendy. Please, remember me. Remember that I love you. I won't hurt you." She had no idea how much of this he understood, but she hoped her soothing tone of voice would help placate the animal within. "Let's go home. I have food for you, a warm bed. Come, darling, let's go home." She thought he seemed less belligerent and found herself wondering if she could still be infected when he was in this state. She probably should have thought of that earlier, but she couldn't risk her brother finding Remus. "Give me your hand and we'll go home."

He was about to give her his hand, when he heard something moving in the forest nearby. He started growling again.

She realized she was losing him and grabbed his hand, placed it on the locket, and activated the Portkey before he could react.

Once they arrived in Chelsea, Remus began turning in a circle and growling. He wasn't handling the abrupt change in location well, since his mind was not quite fully human yet.

"Remus, we're home. Home, remember home? It's safe here. No one will hurt you. Come with me." She led him towards the basement. Hopefully, Cappa had finished the preparations. Wendy had left instructions that one of the small bedrooms was to be cleared of all furniture save the bed and water and food provided.

Once she had Remus settled in the bedroom, she locked and warded the door to ensure he could not leave until he was in his right mind. Now that they were both safe, she had to consider what her brother would do. If he believed her story, hopefully nothing. It would be embarrassing for him to admit that she had escaped. Of course, if he realized that her companion was a werewolf that may be a different story. There was nothing to be done either way.

Checking the clock, she realized she was already late for work. As much as she hated leaving Remus alone, she had to go to work. "Cappa!" she called out. Once the elf was standing before her, she said, "I am leaving for work. Until Master Remus calls you by name, do not open that door. Do you understand?" She had no idea how much fuss he would create in this intermediate phase of his transformation.

"Yes, Mistress," Cappa replied nervously at this very strange order. The elf wanted to take care of Remus, but she would do as her Mistress ordered.

Wendy spent most of the morning answering questions about her absence the day before. It was highly unusual for her to miss work without telling anyone. Thankfully, the ordeal of the previous day had left her looking quite exhausted, and no one questioned her statement that she had been sick.

Shortly after lunch, she received a memo from Lucius. He wanted to see her that afternoon. Seeing Lucius was really the last thing she wanted to do, but he might serve as an advocate on her side against her brother. Of course, she would have to answer questions about Remus, which would prove interesting. She spent most of the rest of the afternoon developing a slightly twisted version of the truth that should answer all questions and hopefully not generate any new ones. Of course, this would only be successful if her brother had not listened in on their conversations.

When she arrived at his suite, she found him lounging in a chair, reading a book and sipping brandy. He put his book down when she entered.

"Lucius, how good to see you, though I'm afraid I can't stay long. I'm still not fully recovered from my illness."

He leered at her. "Come now, my dear. We both know that you weren't ill yesterday. I know that you were a guest at your brother's house."

She decided to help herself to his brandy. "I wouldn't exactly say guest. If I was, his hospitality leaves much to be desired," she replied sarcastically.

"That is a very true statement. Now, I do wonder what you were doing there?" He was now standing behind her.

"I only wanted to see Andorra, since I don't know when he might be sending her off to Durmstrang. I told him that, but he seemed not to believe me." For once, she was actually telling the truth.

"Can you blame him? After all, you are an Auror. Though your *companion* wasn't and that seems to lend support to your assertion. Who was that man you were with?" There was a slightly menacing edge in his voice.

She knew this would be the most difficult part of their conversation. "John? He's a friend that I recruited to be a lookout for me. Obviously, I should have chosen better since he was caught."

Lucius swirled and drained his glass, setting it on the bar. He closed the distance between the two of them. "An interesting choice of friend. He's not an Auror. In fact, he doesn't work at the Ministry at all. I believe he said he works in a Muggle bookstore? I know you have fallen out of polite society, but I had no idea you had fallen that far. You can do better, I can help," he replied. He pulled her hair back and nibbled at her neck.

Now was the time for her lies. She only hoped that she could maintain control of her faculties. "John is nothing more than a friend. The bookstore belongs to a coworker's sister, and I shop there frequently. He helps me select books."

He spun her around to face him. "Are you sure that's it?"

"Of course, my life is quite boring. Besides, I don't have time for a relationship. I find I barely have time for you." She hoped her lies were convincing. The fact that he hadn't mentioned a werewolf led her to believe at least that secret was safe.

"That's good, because I've already told you, I won't share." He pulled her tight for a kiss and started undressing her.

"Lucius, please, I'm quite exhausted after yesterday's ordeal," she protested.

"Oh, no, my dear, I think not. I can speak to your brother on your behalf. I can get him to leave you alone." He ripped into her clothes. "Besides, our work has kept us apart too much."

She knew she had no choice. He could do a lot to make her life miserable. He had influence at the Ministry and over the other Death Eaters. She was caught between a rock and hard place. "Of course, you are correct." She started returning his attention.

"That's much better," he said quietly.

It was nearly midnight when Lucius finally let her leave. She was now beyond exhausted. He had been absolutely insatiable. When she had asked him if he was taking some sort of potion, he had been very evasive. This led her to believe her initial hypothesis was correct.

Rather than knocking on the door, she rang the bell. This late, it was likely Mrs. Black's screaming would be necessary to wake Sirius.

"Where the hell have you been?" he yelled over his mother's screaming.

Wendy came in and helped him close the curtains before following him to the kitchen.

"Where's Remus? He didn't drink his potion last night," he demanded as he turned to face her. In the light of the kitchen he got his first good look at her. "You look like hell."

She replied sarcastically, "Thanks. Do you have anything to drink around here?"

Sirius got the bottle of whisky and two glasses.

She drank down the first shot he poured and then poured herself a much more generous second helping. "I did something stupid the other day. I talked Remus into accompanying me..." She realized she couldn't tell him the whole truth.

"What happened to him? Is he all right? If you got him killed..." He left the threat unspoken.

"No. He's fine; he's locked back at my house." She decided to tell a half-truth. "I got him to agree to go with me to spy on my brother. It seems he's being more supportive of the Death Eaters this time around, and I heard he might be harboring one or more of the escapees. I thought that since I grew up there, we could easily sneak up to the house. I was only partly right. While I was peeking in one of the windows, Remus was stunned. I tried to counterattack, but I was not in an advantageous position and found myself likewise stunned.

"We were imprisoned in a storeroom and managed to escape mere minutes before the moon rose. I had no choice but to leave him there. I went back for him this morning after moonset. I have no idea what happened while I was gone. As you know, he is not very lucid after his transformation."

"You know that if he bit you, you would be infected," Sirius said soberly.

"I had wondered about that. Thankfully, he did not bite me. Now, I'm exhausted and I'm going home. I wasn't able to learn anything worth reporting."

"That's it? You get the two of you captured, near a full moon, no less..." he started.

She interrupted, "Don't you think I know that? I was locked in a room with him as the moon was approaching. All we had eaten in the last twenty-four hours was a small loaf of bread. Don't you think I realize how close to death I came?" *Or as good as death*, she added silently. After quickly downing the rest of her whisky, she nearly fled from the room.

Sirius watched her go. He thought he had heard something in her voice he couldn't remember hearing before, fear. Could she have finally learned she wasn't infallible?

When Wendy returned home, Cappa met her in the foyer. "Mistress, Master Remus made some horrible noises this morning, but I did as you asked. Cappa has tended to him as best as she could, but she was not sure how to treat him. I has fed him his meals, and he was asking for Mistress, but Cappa didn't know where Mistress was. Master went back to sleep hours ago," said the elf nervously.

"It's all right. It was to be expected." She walked towards the library, leaving Cappa to follow her. Wendy realized the house-elf was looking for guidance on what to do next. "Leave me," she simply. Right now Wendy needed time to come to terms with what her arrogance had nearly cost her.

"Yes, Mistress." Cappa bowed and left the room.

Wendy closed her eyes and took a deep breath. How close had they come to disaster? All because of her foolish pride. And now, she owed a debt to Lucius. Thinking back, she realized that Lucius had probably arranged the whole thing. She had been so concerned about Andorra that she had not thought about anything else. Lucius had dangled two things in front of her in the hope that one of them would cause her to risk her safety.

As she reached for the cognac bottle, she noticed her hand was shaking. She clenched her hand into a fist, willing it to stop. She grabbed the decanter and a glass and

took a seat at her desk.

Cappa tentatively entered the library. The moon had just set. She had tried to get her Mistress to bed last night, but Wendy had been quite belligerent about not being moved. Cappa gently tugged on Wendy's sleeve. "Mistress? Mistress? Master Remus needs you."

"Wha?" Wendy responded. She was still quite drunk, having polished off a good portion of the decanter before passing out.

Cappa had jumped back from the desk. "Mistress, Master is not well. Master is mumbling in his sleep and I is worried. Cappa has brought you tea to make you feel better. Please, drink it, Mistress."

Wendy reached for the teacup on the desk and drank it. "Ugh, what is this?"

"Cappa has used a potion to help Mistress feel better. She apologizes for the taste."

Wendy forced herself to drink the tea, knowing it would help her feel better. "Why did you wake me?" she asked as her mind started to clear.

"Master is not well and I is not knowing what to do," replied Cappa nervously.

Wendy presumed he was having some sort of nightmare, but she knew she needed to check on him. She should have checked on him when she returned him, but she had not been emotionally prepared for that. "Make some breakfast. A large breakfast and bring it to my room," she ordered. "Bring a pitcher of water and a glass to the bedroom."

Cappa was gone with a pop.

Wendy was starting to feel better and made her way upstairs to where Remus was. Cappa was waiting at the door with the water. Wendy poured herself a glass and drank it down before taking the tray and opening the door.

Cautiously, she peered through the crack. Remus was curled up on the blankets, twitching and mumbling. She could tell he was battered and bruised, but didn't seem to have any serious injuries, though it was difficult to be sure. Setting the pitcher by the door, she sat next to him and gently woke him. "Remus, I need you to wake up," she said gently.

He panicked when he saw the small room and that she looked horrible. "Oh, no. Wendy?"

She shook her head. "No, we're at my house, I brought you here yesterday morning. You're in one of the small bedrooms"

"Did I?" He couldn't bring himself to finish that sentence. If he had bit her...

She reached out and brushed his hair, smiling to reassure him. "No. We were able to escape very soon before the moon rose."

He pulled himself to her and hugged her as tightly as he could. "Thank goodness." He suddenly remembered about the spell and flexed his hand. "And the spell?"

"Thankfully, whoever came by did so right before I finished the spell. You should still be yourself." She could feel the tears welling up in her eyes.

"I know that was hard for you. Thank you." He gave her a reassuring squeeze.

"I never should have gotten us into a position where it was necessary. Next time I have a foolish idea like that, you have my permission to tie me up until I come to my senses." She pulled away and summoned a glass of water, which he eagerly downed. "Let's get you downstairs. I have Cappa cooking a nice big breakfast, and we can get you cleaned up." She noticed he was covered in dirt and blood, and she couldn't help but wonder whether it was all his.

After wrapping a blanket around his shoulders, she helped him down to the master suite. Cappa came out of the bathroom. "Mistress, Cappa has drawn a bath for Master Remus."

"Thank you, Cappa," she replied.

"It will be good to be clean," he said. As he lowered himself into the bath, with Wendy's help, he asked, "Do I look as bad as you?"

She walked over to the mirror. "Once you clean the dirt off, I think I will look worse." She watched him dunk himself in the tub to wash some of the dirt off his face and head. She moved the stool behind the tub and rolled up her sleeves to wash his hair. "There's something I have to tell you."

When she didn't immediately continue, he prompted, "Go on."

She began reluctantly, "I saw Lucius last night. Obviously, he knew about our little expedition. I think I was able to convince him you were nothing more than a friend and a rather poor choice for the expedition." She paused briefly knowing her words stung him. "You know I'm doing this to protect you, right?" she asked cautiously. She hated slandering him.

He sighed. "Yes, I do. Though, I look forward to the day when we won't have to hide from everyone." He sometimes wondered if she would ever take their relationship public. She came from a prominent pureblood family, and there were times when she seemed to espouse all the pureblood glory. He was, after all, a half-blood and a werewolf; two things definitely not accepted into polite society.

"As do I," she replied as she kissed him on the cheek. "Anyway, I was able to convince him our presence had nothing to do with the guest my brother is hosting and everything to do with Andorra. He will be convincing Timor that what I told him the other night was correct. That I was not there as an Auror, and the Ministry knows nothing about any guests my brother may be hosting."

She paused, giving him a chance to rinse the shampoo from his hair. "Of course, he is expecting more of my time as a result of that magnanimous gesture." She quickly apologized, "I'm so sorry. I know now that he told me about Andorra on purpose to get me in his debt. He holds a lot of power over me now. He can get me in trouble at work or with the Death Eaters and he knows it. I was foolish and let my emotions control my actions." She wrapped her arms around him, not caring if she got wet and soapy.

"We are all human and we all make mistakes," he replied quietly.

She could tell that he was hurt. "I know, but this was a bigger one than I normally make. I don't ask you to forgive me for this one. I nearly got us both killed and nearly ended your life as you know it. I'd understand if you wanted to leave."

"No, I don't want to leave. I just want it all to be over." He was thankful she was sitting behind him and couldn't see the look of anguish on his face.

"So do I." She continued to hold him, needing to feel him. "I stopped by to see Black last night and let him know that you are alive. I told him a half-truth, leaving out the part about Andorra and the spell. I decided he has no reason to know I can do that sort of magic. No one does."

"How much magic like that do you know?" he asked tentatively.

She started washing his back. "More than I should. I have studied Druid runes, learning much about magic from the times before wands, from a time when the mystics

slowly went mad from using unchanneled power. Fortunately, Bella did not realize the depth to which I studied that magic. Reading ancient languages was not something she had much interest in, and she tended to ignore my studies in those languages. If she had known what I was learning, she surely would have brought me to the Dark Lord's attention.

"I know you've seen some of the books in the library, but I have others that I keep locked away in the basement. I'll show them to you when you're better, but I don't know that you will make much out of them, very few people can read them."

"Could any of it be used to defeat Voldemort?" he asked.

"I'm not sure. Most of these spells exact a price on the caster. That's why I've not used them much, but I have studied them. There's a reason wizards use wands. It protects us from the raw magical energies. I know he has used equally Dark Magic to become who he is. If I had a better idea of how he evolved, I might be able to find something useful. But again, I don't know who would use this magic. Depending on the spell, it might sentence the caster to madness."

In the bedroom, she could hear the clinking of dishes. "I think Cappa has brought us our breakfast. You should finish up, eat and then you can rest while I'm at work."

"You have to work?" he asked, very concerned about her well-being.

"Sadly, yes. Hopefully, I won't get a message from Lucius. Maybe I can arrange a day of field work so that I'd miss any message he sent me?" she mused.

"Do you really think you could do field work today?" He could tell that she was exhausted.

"I'll take a potion to get me through the day. I'll be fine." She helped him out of the tub and into a bathrobe.

With her assistance, he shuffled across the room and sank into the chair. While he felt somewhat rejuvenated by the bath, he had forgotten how taxing transforming without the potion could be, and that was just with missing one dose. He couldn't fathom going back to transforming without it. Eagerly, he dug into his breakfast. He couldn't recall his last meal. After a few minutes, he noticed that Wendy was not really eating anything. He thought it might be his lack of manners. He swallowed the food in his mouth and wiped his mouth with his napkin. "My apologies for my appalling lack of manners."

"What? Oh, no, that's perfectly understandable. You must be famished," she replied.

"What's wrong, then?" He continued eating at a more civilized pace.

"I'm just thinking about how stupid I was. I almost ruined both our lives, all because I wanted to see my daughter. I just... It's very hard for me to realize that I was so stupid." She found she couldn't look at him anymore.

"You weren't stupid, you were human. You let your emotions guide your behavior, something you aren't used to doing." He reached across the table to grab her hand. "We were lucky this time. We'll have to be more careful next time."

She pulled away, still ashamed by her behavior. "I need to get ready for work."

He watched her walk into the bathroom and soon heard the water running. She was obviously quite bothered by the events of the other night. He would have to spend some time with her that evening to help her work through her guilt.

By the time she emerged from the shower, he had finished eating. He was surprised by how much he had eaten; he had not realized how hungry he had been. She looked a little better, but still seemed physically and mentally exhausted.

"Are you feeling better?" she asked.

"Somewhat." He let her help him to the bed, as he could hardly stand on his own. "I think that once I rest, I'll be doing much better. Will you be back for dinner?"

"I hope so." She crawled next to him on the bed. "I'm so sorry," she said as she gently embraced him.

He was exhausted, but he wanted to make her feel better. He patted her reassuringly. "It wasn't all your fault. I knew the full moon was coming, yet I still agreed to go with you. We share the blame on this one." He gave her a kiss. "Now go and have a good day at work. Don't worry about me. I'll be fine in a few days."

Normally, his sleep following a transformation was dreamless. That was not the case this time. He dreamt quite vividly.

He was a wolf, running through the woods. As a hungry wolf, he was searching for prey. Raising his nose to the air, he caught the scent of blood and sprinted to capture his prey before it could get away. It was close, and it smelled familiar, but he didn't have time to consider the scent. All he knew was that he was hungry and this was food.

Running towards his prey, he was eager to feed. Unfortunately, his prey was not cooperative. He was knocked back by something he couldn't see, something familiar that he could not put a name to. Once he recovered from the blow, he continued his chase of his prey. Just as he was closing on his prey, the scent vanished.

He sniffed around the ground, searching for any sign of where his prey went. His ears perked up as he heard a howl in the distance. Raising his muzzle, he returned the howl. When he received a howl in reply, he loped in that direction, stopping to howl every now and then to make sure he was getting closer.

As he got closer, he caught the scent of the other. It was a she-wolf. He moved cautiously closer, aware this was not his territory.

The two wolves stood nose to nose and began sniffing each other. He couldn't remember ever meeting a she-wolf; this was a very exciting moment. In his excitement, he started bounding around her, and she around him.

As they played, he noticed an interesting scent, something that definitely marked her as female. He sniffed at her again and found the scent excited him. As instinct took over, he began rubbing against her and marking trees, trying to prove he was worthy. He sniffed the trees that she marked, further excited by her scent.

He nipped at her gently, testing her receptiveness to his advances. She pulled away and playfully nipped back. He bowed at her and whined softly, further testing her receptiveness. All indications were that she was interested in him. He tried mounting her, but she loped away. Sprinting after her, he had no intention of letting her get away.

She hadn't gone far, and he caught up to her quickly. Once again, she ran from him when he got too close. He was quickly tiring of her game. This time, when he caught her, he grabbed her by the scruff of the neck and gave a warning growl. She whimpered softly and he released her. When he mounted her, she did not run.

Chapter 20

Chapter 20 of 27

Voldemort is back and the Order of the Phoenix is reforming. They need new members and Kingsley recruits one of his fellow Aurors - even though she is a Slytherin. Assigned to work with Remus Lupin, things get very tense. Set during 'Order of the Phoenix'.

Remus woke, drenched in sweat. Was it a dream or was it a memory? He didn't know. Checking the clock, he saw that it was just after noon. He had to go talk to Sirius. After eating lunch, he would discuss this dream or memory with Sirius. Hopefully, his friend could provide some insight.

Sirius was quite surprised to see Remus limping into the library. He helped his friend to a chair. "What brings you here?"

"I had to talk to you. I've had a rather disturbing dream." It was difficult, but he related the dream to Sirius.

"And you don't know if this really happened or not?" Sirius asked, in a state of mild shock.

Remus shook his head. "No. It seemed far too real to be just a dream. Normally, I have very little memory of what happens when I am a wolf."

"Surely, it was a dream. I mean, the odds of finding a female are pretty slim," Sirius rationalized.

"Her niece is a werewolf," Remus replied soberly.

"Oh," said Sirius quietly. They stared at each other in silence for several seconds. "Surely, they would keep her locked up for full moon and on the Wolfsbane Potion," he offered hopefully.

Remus ran his hand through his hair. "But I can't be sure. It all seemed so real. I can remember her scent. I wish I could find out for sure."

"Yeah, that would go over well. Knock on the door to the Leah manor and ask if someone molested their daughter on full moon."

"I didn't molest her!" Remus defended. "It was... It's hard to explain."

"I'd really rather you didn't," replied Sirius dryly. He involuntarily shuddered at the thought of his friend having wolf sex.

"But if it did happen, then what? I can't hide it from Wendy. She keeps track of her family and would find out her niece was pregnant."

"What if she didn't get pregnant or the family decides to..."

"She was in heat, there is no question of that. I don't know what her family will do. I have to tell Wendy. She has a right to know."

"To know what? You don't even know if it happened. What if it is a dream? What does telling her accomplish? Besides, did she tell you about her arrangement with Malfoy? You don't owe her anything," insisted Sirius.

"I'm too tired to argue. I'm going to rest." With difficulty, Remus rose from his chair and limped his way upstairs.

Wendy returned home and Cappa immediately informed her that Remus had gone to Grimmauld Place. She wondered what could have led him to undertake such a journey while he was so weak.

She received her typical sarcastic welcome from Sirius. After he had hurled several insults at her, he informed her that Remus was resting upstairs. She saw him, asleep on the bed, and crawled in front of him, pressing her back against him. As he woke, she could feel him squeeze her.

"What a pleasant surprise," he whispered.

She rolled over to look at him. "What possessed you come here? I was quite surprised to find you gone when I got home."

"I had to see Sirius," he replied.

"And it was so urgent it couldn't wait another day? You were utterly exhausted this morning," she said her voice full of concern.

He smiled weakly. "I still am, and yes, it was that important."

"What could be that important?" she asked cautiously.

"I may have done something, something terrible the other night," he replied sadly as he sat up in the bed.

"Had you bit and infected someone, Lucius surely would have brought that to my attention," she replied, also sitting.

He brushed her hair. "No, not that," he said quietly. "I believe there was another of my kind in the woods that night," he began gently.

"My niece," Wendy added. She wondered what point he was trying to make.

He nodded. "Yes. I dreamt after you left, only I think it was more than a dream, I think it was a memory. The sensations, the smells, the tastes, were too real for a mere dream."

"What did you remember?" she asked warily.

He kissed her softly on her forehead. "If what I remember is true, I found your niece in the woods. Since wolves are social animals, we played. As we played, I noticed a scent..." he paused, hoping he wouldn't have to explain further.

She saw the forlorn look on his face. "And the two of you? You..?" she asked, unable to say the words.

"We did, if it was a memory," he replied sadly.

"And you have no way of knowing if it was a memory or a dream?" She wasn't quite sure which was more disturbing. The thought of him mating with her niece bothered her, but having him dream about wolf sex was even more disturbing.

"I'm inclined to believe it's a memory because I have never had a dream like that before. It's not something I have contemplated."

"I see." She pulled away from him, trying to comprehend what she was hearing. The rational part of her mind knew that when he was the wolf, he had little control over his instincts. That was why he had hunted her; she had been the closest prey.

"You know it's not something I did on purpose, right?" She had to believe that he had very little control over his actions when he was a wolf.

"Yes. I'm just trying to think what this might mean. I mean, could you impregnate her?" She turned to face him.

"Possibly. It's not something I've read about, but as you know, little is written about werewolves."

She furrowed her brows in thought. "This could be quite interesting. I'm not entirely sure how my brother would react to that. I know he has been trying to arrange a marriage for her. This could either hasten or postpone that marriage."

"He wouldn't...have it...terminated, would he?" he asked tentatively.

She shrugged. "I have no idea. I think it depends on what she says. If she were to tell the truth, probably. He wouldn't want a werewolf's offspring in his family; he's still in denial of what she is. If she lies, and tells him she had a liaison with someone else, probably not. This, of course, assumes that she does not take a potion herself, without telling him what happened. If she remembers what happens, this may be the most likely scenario. Remember, she is a pureblood and we are taught not to let accidents happen." She saw that he looked somewhat disappointed. "What is it?"

"I don't know." He looked away momentarily. Turning back to her, he took her hands in his. "Marry me," he said abruptly.

Wendy was caught completely off-guard. "What?"

"When this is all over, say that you will marry me." Now that he had asked, he would not stop without an answer.

"Remus, this is all very sudden." She was slowly recovering from her shock.

He leaned his forehead against hers. "You have said that you love me and I love you. I know that you want a normal life as much as I do. That brief thought of my child being born into the world filled me with a sense of longing. I find I want that reality. I could see it happening with you. Be my wife and the mother of my children." He smiled warmly at her. He had always wanted a family and now he thought that he had to grasp at the chance before it got away from him.

She reached out to touch his arm. It was clear how much this meant to him. "I long ago gave up on that life. I'm damaged. I've been through too much," she replied sadly.

"We are both damaged and I don't care." He pulled her to him. "I can think of no reason why you should say no, unless it's who I am or who my parents were."

"You know that doesn't matter to me," she replied. It didn't matter after Edgar. He had proven that being pureblood didn't make you better, despite what she had been taught.

"Then say yes. I know I can't provide you much other than my unconditional love, but I hope that will be enough. After all, you were the one that said you would take happiness, even if it was only for a few years."

She couldn't help but smile at his honesty. "I did say that, didn't I? I guess I have no choice but to say yes, don't I?"

"I daresay you don't. So you will?" he asked to get confirmation.

"When we make it through all this, I will gladly marry you."

He kissed her passionately. "Thank you. You won't regret this decision. Though, I'm afraid I can't get you a proper ring," he admitted.

"Don't worry about it. I've never been much for jewelry. But if you insist on giving me a ring, I have my great-grandmother's ring. I'm sure she would have been honored to have a man like you in the family. She placed great store in personal integrity, something you have no shortage of. And before you ask, no, it is not the ring Edgar gave me. She only passed away a few years ago."

"Than I shall give you that ring since you accept me for who I am. I look forward to the day you can wear it with pride."

"As do I. How strange this is? That I should consent to marry a Gryffindor."

"Or that I should ask a Slytherin to marry me? House rivalry is really silly, isn't it?" he asked.

"It is. I'm glad I could see past it." A sly smile graced her expression. "I would love to tell my brother. I think he would have an apoplectic fit to hear that his sister, and last acknowledged survivor of the Westin family, was marrying a halfblood commoner who happens to be a werewolf. I think that will be an unexpected benefit." As much as she wanted nothing more than to celebrate their engagement, she could tell that he was still not fully recovered. "I suppose I should go help Black with dinner. I seem to recall you mentioning he wasn't much of a cook."

"No, he isn't. Help me downstairs. He's less likely to abuse you if I'm there." He tried to get up.

She pushed him back down. "No. Stay here. I can put up with him. Your rest is more important. One of us will come get you for dinner. Now that does bring up an interesting point. When are you going to tell him?"

"That's a very good question. I think he still needs some time to get used to us. I'll tell him when the time is right."

She kissed him gently on the lips. "That's okay. I like having a secret." The fewer people that knew about it, the less likely the wrong person would hear about it.

Lying back on the bed, Remus felt a wave of relief wash over him. He had no idea what had possessed him to propose in that manner. To date, he had never really considered marriage; there was so much going on with the Order and the coming war. He had just been content to have a long-term lover, but it had suddenly seemed that he needed more in life. Thankfully, she had said yes. Now that it was over, he had no idea how he would have reacted had she said no.

It had been about a week since the events at her brother's house. Remus and Wendy were enjoying breakfast when Cappa brought in the *Daily Prophet*. "Do you mind?" Remus asked.

"Go ahead," she replied.

"Oh my!" he exclaimed and flattened the paper on the table.

Wendy leaned forward to see what he was looking at. "They what?! They must be mad. They fired Albus?" She got up and stood behind him to better read the article.

"There aren't a lot of details to the article," Remus said as he scanned the article. "I'll go to headquarters and see what happens. He may get in touch with us and give us directions." He gave her a quick kiss. "I'll let you know what I learn."

Remus found Sirius eating breakfast in the kitchen. "Have you heard?" he asked.

"Albus came by last night after he was sacked. He's gone into hiding, but didn't leave any orders. He said he would be in touch as the situation dictated."

"What does that mean?" Remus asked.

Sirius shrugged. "Your guess is as good as mine. At least now he'll have time to work on fighting the Ministry's disinformation campaign. Maybe he can get about recruiting more help? Everyone keeps saying the big battle is coming, but we still only have about twenty people in the Order."

"Wendy seems confident that push come to shove the Aurors will side with Albus against Voldemort," Remus offered.

"Nice sentiment when they spout whatever dribble Fudge tells them to," Sirius replied sarcastically.

"Now, you know that Amelia Bones is quite sensible. They have the same atmosphere at the Ministry that there is at Hogwarts, you have to toe the party line or invite the wrong kind of scrutiny. Once they have the proof necessary to speak out that Voldemort has returned, they will."

"And what if we don't get the warning? What if the battle starts without us able to recruit more help? We've already received reports on the numbers the Death Eaters have, and it doesn't look good. If all those small groups can be mobilized, we will be seriously outnumbered, even if we get the Aurors on our side."

"True, but we've seen the caliber of person the Death Eaters are recruiting. I think the skill of the Aurors can overcome the numerical difference."

"For every good Auror like Kingsley, you've got someone like Tonks. Sure, she knows what she's doing, but she has a clumsy streak that could cause problems."

Remus decided not to bring up the fact that Wendy had been researching Dark Magic that could be used against Voldemort. He had assisted a little, but he wasn't as fluent in the ancient languages so he was only of limited help. "Well, the Aurors have the experience dealing with Dark Magic. Of course, I'm not sure how much Dark Magic some of these Death Eater's know." He wondered how many people like Bella they had? People like that could cause serious difficulties.

"Well, even without Dark Magic, they can still cause a lot of trouble." Sirius ate a few more bites of his cereal. "I wonder how Harry is going to do without Albus there? He wasn't doing too well with Umbridge before."

"I'm sure he'll be fine. It's safest for him at Hogwarts. I guess we'll just sit tight until Albus contacts us."

"She hasn't had any more crazy plans to get you killed, has she?" Sirius asked after a long pause.

"Sirius, be nice. That's never been her intention. She's just a little overzealous at times." He still hadn't told Sirius about their engagement, and this was the reason why.

"I still have no idea how you can defend her."

"Let's not talk about that right now. I suppose that we will be having an Order meeting tonight? I guess I'll get the word out."

"Oh, that's right. When I ask the hard questions, just run away." Sirius chided.

Remus regained his seat. "I know it bothers you. It bothers me, but all of us have agreed that we would do anything to see You-Know-Who defeated. I'll see you this evening."

When Wendy arrived at the Ministry, everyone was whispering in the corridors about Dumbledore's removal as headmaster. She sought out Kingsley, hoping he would have more information than she had seen in the paper. She found him at his desk working on paperwork. "Kingsley, you know what happened last night?"

"Some of it." He handed her a report.

"They sent you?" she asked incredulously as she skimmed the report.

"Yep. Fun evening, let me tell you. I can't tell you much more than what was in the papers. I have no idea how he got out of there, but he was gone without a trace."

They both looked up when a voice boomed across the room, "All Aurors report to the briefing room, immediately."

Wendy raised an eyebrow as she looked at Kingsley. "One guess what this is about," she muttered as they filed into the briefing room.

On the wall was projected a picture of Albus Dumbledore. Rufus Scrimgeour was standing at the podium. Everyone filed in quickly and settled into their seats. No one was speaking. It was rare for the head of the Auror Office to speak to them as a group.

He spoke without preamble. "You all saw the paper this morning. Albus Dumbledore is now our number one priority."

There was some murmuring and whispering amongst the Aurors.

"Westin, something amusing?" Rufus asked as he noticed she was laughing at something.

"Not to question you or the Ministry, sir, but I would think that locating the escaped Death Eaters would be more important."

"I guess you didn't read the paper, did you, Westin? Dumbledore was raising an army to be used against the Ministry. We can't have a man that was trying to undermine the government on the loose."

"Oh, yes, a bunch of half-trained teenagers are a real threat to the Ministry. Ten fully trained Death Eaters are a much lower priority," she replied sarcastically. She ignored Kingsley, who was anxiously tugging at her sleeve in an attempt to get her to be quiet.

Rufus gave her a smug grin. "Well, now that I see you are on the same page, I think this would be a good investigation for you to head. Come up with a plan by lunch and present it to me."

Wendy scowled and leaned back in her seat. She hadn't expected that and sat in silence as Rufus summarized Kingsley and Dawlish's reports of the attempt to arrest Dumbledore. There really wasn't any illuminating that hadn't been revealed in the paper.

After they were out of the briefing room, Kingsley whispered, "I was trying to get you to shut up."

"I know. I've really got to learn to keep my mouth shut, don't I?"

"Yeah. Would you like some tips on hopeless searches?" He held a straight face for only a few seconds before laughing. His search for Sirius had become a legendary failure.

"Thanks, but I'll figure it out."

Albus Dumbledore had gone to ground so effectively that even the Order members couldn't find him. He did send them instructions, but he did not meet with them. Remus was concerned that they had not heard much from Hogwarts since his departure. As expected, Umbridge was ruling with an iron fist. Unfortunately, the Ministry seemed to

be taking the same direction. The Aurors were kept incredibly busy with fieldwork, trying to locate the still at-large escapees.

With little else to do, and Wendy occupied with Ministry's search, Remus was spending a lot of time at Grimmauld Place with Sirius. Over the last couple of weeks, he and Sirius seemed to have come to an understanding that they would not discuss her. This pained Remus. He had always hoped that when he found someone special, he would be able to share his feelings with Sirius, but that was not to be the case.

He had once again tried to speak with Sirius about Wendy. Rather than listen to anything Remus had to say about Wendy, Sirius had childishly left the room, claiming he needed to search for Kreacher. Remus had been left to study the cryptic message they had received from Dumbledore two days ago. None of the Order had been able to decipher it so far. While he normally enjoyed puzzles and had engaged in mental exercises with Dumbledore while he had been a teacher, this was far more difficult than any of those puzzles.

Now the two of them were staring at each other across the table. They had just finished having an interesting conversation with Harry about their fifteen year-old selves.

Sirius finally broke the silence. "Go ahead, I know you're dying to say it."

"Sirius, you just finished admitting a lot of people are idiots at fifteen, yourself included. She's changed."

"Why are you so keen to talk about her?"

Remus ran his hands nervously across the table. "I never thought that I would be in love, not like this. I had always hoped to be able to talk to you, like James used to talk to us about Lily. You know, I'm going to marry her."

"Sure you are," Sirius replied dryly.

"Seriously, when this is all over, she has agreed to marry me." He watched the look of shock wash across his friend's face. "I'd like you to be there, be my best man."

When Sirius recovered his powers of speech, he replied, "You are serious about this, aren't you?" He watched Remus nod. "All right then, I suppose if you're happy. Maybe you can convince me what you see in her."

Remus smiled brightly before trying to convince Sirius that Wendy was not the same person she had been.

Wendy arrived home and hexed the chair in the hall to bits. For three weeks she had been spearheading the fruitless search for Dumbledore. More like, wasting her energy trying to find someone that she knew no one would ever find. She had finally decided to try to talk to Amelia. Perhaps she could be the voice of reason, as she had known Albus from their days on the Wizengamot together. That meeting had gone far worse than she had expected.

"Wendy? What's wrong?" asked Remus, who was cautiously hiding around the corner to the library.

"The Ministry, that's what's wrong. They insist on wasting resources hunting for Albus. I'm wasting time that I could be spending looking for escaped Death Eaters. I tried to convince Amelia this is a useless search, that if he doesn't want to be found, we won't find him. She not only didn't support me, but reprimanded me for my lack of results. Reprimanded me! And then she had the nerve to suggest that if I wasn't up to the task, that perhaps I would be better suited for a desk job. Like that's any different from what I'm doing now."

He had determined that she wasn't likely to hex anything else and wrapped his arms around her. He decided it was best to say nothing.

When there was a knock at the door, she exclaimed, "Oh, bloody hell!"

Remus quickly moved out of sight as she yanked the door open.

"What the hell do you want?"

"Well, now. Is that any way to greet me? I'd heard what a horrid day you had had, and came by to offer some support," replied Lucius.

"Yeah, well, I don't need any, so you can just bugger off!" She was mad enough, she didn't care that she was treading on thin ice by risking his wrath.

Lucius pushed his way into the house. "I don't think that I will. You seem to have forgotten about our arrangement. You haven't been replying to my messages."

"You'll forgive me if I've been a bit busy. Someone decided I should be in charge of the hunt for Dumbledore. As you can imagine, that's going to take up quite a bit of my time. I'm really quite tired."

"Well, then, perhaps the Ministry would be interested in learning that one of their Aurors was trespassing on private property, harassing a prominent citizen, and attacking an employee of that citizen?"

"That happened more than a month ago. They won't care anymore."

He grabbed her possessively. "Do you want to take that chance? I seem to recall that Amelia was quite upset with you, and didn't you admit to me that you were one misstep away from being pulled from the field?"

"True, but I think you will recall that I have a housemate? He's in the library." She hoped that reminder would be enough to get him to leave.

Lucius loosened his grip slightly and pulled her out of the entrance hall and into the drawing room. "I'm sure we can arrange something."

Wendy was trying to determine if he was especially upset by her refusal. She hadn't expected to see him today, and hadn't had a chance to take one of the antidote potions she had developed. Perhaps her anger was enough to allow her to maintain control. "Lucius, please, I've been working on this for days on end. I haven't got any energy."

Before she could react, Lucius pulled her tight for a passionate kiss. When he released her, she was panting heavily. "What about now?"

Her body was beginning to betray her conscious mind. "Lucius, please, he might see," she protested, though not as forcefully as before.

Remus was having a hard time hearing what was happening. He heard Malfoy trying to use his blackmail information, but little after Wendy mentioned that she was not alone in the house and had been led into the drawing room. Still gripping his wand tightly, he wanted to charge into the drawing room and hex Malfoy. Unfortunately, he knew that was not a good idea. While Malfoy may not recognize him, it was possible that his description would get back to Wendy's brother, and Timor might make the connection.

Peering around the library doorframe, he strained to make out the whispers coming from the drawing room. They were speaking too quietly for him to make out the words. He was considering what to do next, when he heard Wendy exclaim, "Oh, Lucius!"

The ecstasy in her voice made his blood boil. He knew that it was not her fault, that Malfoy was using some sort of potion on her, but it didn't make him feel any less jealous. He closed his eyes and took several deep breaths to calm himself, telling himself he had accepted this arrangement, even if he didn't like it and that if he did anything, it would jeopardize them both.

When he heard the front door open and close, he cautiously moved out of the library. He was not entirely surprised to find that Wendy was not in the drawing room. Deciding he didn't want to be alone, he headed over to Grimmauld Place.

"What are you doing here?" Sirius asked when he saw his friend standing in the doorway.

"Nice to see you, too," replied a tired Remus.

"I don't mean it like that; I thought you had a big romantic dinner planned for this evening?"

"Yeah, well, something came up," Remus said gruffly.

"Did you want to talk about it?" Sirius offered.

"Not particularly," replied Remus. "I just wanted some company."

"Let me finish up with Buckbeak and we can play some cards."

"Sounds good. I'll put together a snack." Since he had not yet had dinner, he was quite hungry.

It was nearly midnight, and Sirius could tell that Remus still did not have his mind in the game. He could tell the Remus didn't want to leave, but he wasn't sure what his friend wanted. The few attempts he had made at conversation had failed, with Remus only answering in short sentences. Sirius finally put the cards down. "Why don't we try this again later? You don't seem to be that interested in playing anyway."

"I'm sorry, Sirius. I'm a little preoccupied," he said as he dropped his cards to the table and leaned back in his chair.

"I'll say. Are you sure you don't want to talk about it?"

"I'm sure."

By now Sirius was almost positive this had something to do with Wendy. "Remus..."

"Sirius!" he started angrily, but he realized he wasn't made at Sirius, but Malfoy. "He came by tonight, and he's definitely doing something to her, but I'm not sure what."

He didn't get to say anymore because he was interrupted by a voice at the door. "I thought I might find you here," Wendy said.

Sirius thought she looked as miserable as Remus. The two of them had reached an uneasy truce over the last several weeks. "How did you get in?"

"I let myself in the door. You really should put a more complex locking charm up. The first time I saw Remus unlock the door, I knew I could replicate the spell." She turned her attention to Remus. "Did you want to come home?"

"I'll be there shortly," he replied. Once she was gone, he turned his attention to Sirius. "We need to do something about him. I can't stand what he's doing to her."

"So what? You think we should take him out?" Sirius asked, making it clear that attacking one of wizarding Britain's most prominent citizens was a ludicrous idea.

Remus ran his hands through his hair. "I don't know. I just want him away from her. I almost did something stupid tonight. I'll see you tomorrow."

When he returned home, he found Wendy sitting in the darkened drawing room, hugging one of the throw pillows. "How are you doing?" he asked gently. When she looked at him, he could see the lamp from the hall catching the tears running down her cheeks.

"I couldn't resist him. I tried, but I couldn't."

He sat next to her and wrapped his arms around her. "I know." He was trying his best not to start crying, too. "Did he say anything to you?"

She sniffed, trying to control her sniffing. "He-he mentioned that he was going to be busy. That something big was going to happen soon. I didn't really get the chance to ask him too much." She paused for a few seconds. "He wants to get together again... soon," she added quietly.

"Perhaps you can be better prepared then," he offered in a whisper.

She held him in silence for several long seconds. "I don't deserve you."

He stroked her hair. "Of course you do." After that, he did nothing more than hold her, providing her the comfort she needed.

Wendy had gone to the Ministry to file another round of reports on the status of her search for Dumbledore. Naturally, there was little substance to these reports, but she had to file them so that her superiors thought she was actively searching for missing wizard. In truth, she had decided to take it as a challenge to find the old man, just to see if she could find him, but nothing she had done had yielded any clues.

When she looked at her in basket, she noticed the top piece of paper was a summons to Amelia Bones' office. It had no details about why she was being summoned. As this was an urgent summons, she set down the incomplete reports and decided to get it over with.

Upon arriving at Amelia's office, the secretary instructed her to wait. Wendy sat in the chair in the reception area trying to determine why she was there. If it was about the search for Dumbledore, they really had no reason to reprimand her for a lack of results. After all, Kingsley hadn't turned up a solid lead on Black in many months and no one had captured any of the escaped Death Eaters. To the best of her knowledge, she hadn't done anything else to garner the wrong sort of attention, so she was at a loss to explain why she was there.

After about fifteen minutes, the secretary told her Amelia was ready to see her. Upon entering the office, Wendy was about to open her mouth to say something, when she saw the angry look on Amelia's face and decided silence was the best course of action. She also decided that it would be presumptuous to take a seat and remained standing.

Amelia angrily waved a file folder at Wendy. "Do you know what this is?"

"I'm afraid not," Wendy replied cautiously.

"This..." Amelia stabbed the file for emphasis. "Is your personnel record."

Wendy started having a bad feeling about where this discussion was going, but chose to say nothing. She tried to keep her outward demeanor neutral.

"Do you know why I have it?" Amelia asked pointedly.

Wendy knew it was best to take a guess. "Because someone submitted a complaint?"

"More than just that." Amelia opened the file and pulled out sheets of parchment, one after the other. "This one is for trespassing. This one is for unprovoked attack on a civilian. This one alleges that you are in possession of a dangerous Dark artifact. Should I go on?"

Wendy reached forward and picked up the new complaints. "These are all events that happened more than a month ago. Surely you don't put credence in something that wasn't reported right away?" Lucius. She knew that he was behind this. His name wasn't on any of the reports, but this was his doing.

Amelia pointed at one of them. "This one is only dated a couple of days ago. I can only assume that your brother was protecting you, but when you did this, he decided he needed to act."

Wendy grabbed the sheet of parchment. She grew incensed as she read. "This never happened. I never did this. It's all lies," she said defensively.

"But you don't deny the others?"

"I don't have any Dark artifacts." At least none that her brother would know about. "He's making that up. You should let me search his house and show you what I turn up."

"Yes, so you can get back at him."

"What? No! I would never do that."

"You have been warned in the past about your conduct."

Wendy interrupted, "You don't believe that drivel, do you?"

Amelia spoke louder, over Wendy's protestations, "As a result of your continued difficulty in adhering to the rules, you are being placed on suspension..."

"SUSPENSION!"

"BE QUIET! Effective immediately you are placed on suspension. You will turn over your badge and you will be escorted home."

"Escorted home? What? You don't want me to cause a scene here?" Wendy's head was swirling as her life seemed to come crashing down around her.

"Once there, you will allow the escort to search your property," Amelia continued.

"On what grounds?" Wendy asked defensively.

"On the grounds of this report. We have a duty to investigate all reports of Dark artifacts and magic from reputable sources. This is a reputable source."

"I can't believe this," Wendy cried out in disbelief.

"Believe it. You have been walking the edge since you were hired. Once we have concluded our investigation, you will be notified."

"You're going to fire me, aren't you?" She could not believe this was happening. True, she had pushed the rules to the boundary, but she had never crossed that boundary. The last decade had been dedicated to rooting out Dark wizards and preventing the rise of another Dark Lord. Now she was being told that her services were not needed. She had no doubt that the investigation would go against her. Clearly the Ministry had decided it was inconvenient to have her around.

"That depends on the outcome of the investigation. If you have truly done nothing wrong, you will be allowed to return to work. If not..." Amelia held out her hand, waiting for Wendy's badge.

Wendy had over her badge and left the office. Waiting outside were two Aurors that she was not particularly close to. She assumed that was why they had been chosen.

"Sorry about this, Wendy," said Bates, the elder of the two, apologetically.

"Yeah, well, my brother is an arse. I'm surprised he didn't do this long ago." They didn't say anything else as they left the Ministry. She knew that any incriminating Dark artifacts she had were safely locked behind wards and wouldn't be found. She had some books that were questionable, but they should be overlooked. Hopefully Remus wasn't at home. She knew that he spent most of his days with Sirius if he wasn't working. She was pretty sure he was working today.

Chapter 21

Chapter 21 of 27

Voldemort is back and the Order of the Phoenix is reforming. They need new members and Kingsley recruits one of his fellow Aurors - even though she is a Slytherin. Assigned to work with Remus Lupin, things get very tense. Set during 'Order of the Phoenix'.

Chapter 21

Remus returned home, carrying a copy of the latest best seller that he hoped to dig into before Wendy got home. He was quite surprised when Cappa appeared in front of him.

She was wringing her hands. "Master? Please, you have to help Mistress. She is not being well and I is not knowing what to do. She has shouted for Cappa to go away many hours ago, and... and..."

He knew that Cappa could not return to where Wendy was without being summoned, and that would account for her agitation. "Where is she?"

"In the library, Master. I is so glad you is home. You will make her better, right?"

"I'll do my best," he reassured. He knew that Wendy was not generally rude to her house-elf, and he wondered what might account for her behavior.

When he opened the door, he was met with a shout, "I said go away!" Wendy looked up and saw that it was Remus. "Oh. It's you." She downed the contents of her glass and refilled it from the bottle of whiskey on her desk.

Knowing that something bad had happened, he asked gently, "What happened? Why are you home so early?"

"Lucius fucking Malfoy and my arse of a brother. Those bastards conspired against me. With some rather creative reports to the Ministry, I have been suspended. They are investigating the reports. Depending on the outcome..." She once again downed her glass.

Remus grabbed the bottle before she could refill her glass. "Do you really think they will fire you?"

"I saw the reports, and they weren't all filed by my brother. In addition, I'm sure Lucius will get to testify about the raid I conducted on his house." She stared at the bottle Remus was holding. "Give me the damn bottle," she ordered.

"No. I'm not going to let you wallow in alcohol."

After staring at him for several seconds, she rose to her feet unsteadily, and retrieved another bottle. This time she didn't waste time pouring into a glass and drank straight from the bottle. "I haven't even got to the good part yet."

He approached her to try to take the bottle away and found she could still draw her wand quite quickly. "Wendy..."

"Don't try to rule my life, too! You want to hear the best part? She had my house searched. SEARCHED!" she sneered angrily.

"Did they find anything?" he asked cautiously. While all her prohibited items were concealed, there was a fairly good chance whichever Aurors that conducted the search, might have found something.

"Of course not. I'm not stupid. They raised some eyebrows at a couple of my books, but it was nothing too bad." Since she was having trouble standing, she slumped onto the couch.

He sat next to her. "What do you do now?"

"Sit on my bloody hands. What the fuck else do you think I'd do?"

He finally grabbed the bottle from her. When she tried to get up, he pushed her back onto the couch. "I think you've had quite enough to drink."

"Not by a long shot. Now, give that back," demanded while unsuccessfully trying to wrestle the bottle out of his grip.

"No. Cappa!" Once the house-elf appeared, he said, "Brew some tea, please." He turned back to Wendy. "Can't you prove that they are affiliated with You-Know-Who? That would surely solve your problem."

"Yeah, well, that's a little hard to do, now isn't it?" Her speech was really starting to slur.

"I think you should go to bed and then we can talk about this some more in the morning. Even if you aren't in the Ministry, you can still be helpful. Now, let's get you some tea, food and then to bed."

"Don't mother me," she growled.

Cappa returned with the tea and Remus handed her the cup. "Now then, you'll feel better once you drink this."

Wendy took a sip and curled her lips in distaste. "Tastes horrible. Are you trying to poison me?"

"No, darling, I'm not. Keep drinking," Remus insisted as he pushed the cup towards her lips. "It will help. I would really rather prefer to discuss this with you while you're sober."

He finally got her settled down and sober thanks to the potion that had been added to the tea, and they were discussing the specific charges against her, when the doorbell sounded.

"Were you expecting anyone?" he asked.

She stopped, fork midway to her mouth. "Lucius," she whispered. "Cappa! Wait a minute on the door." She turned back to Remus. "Can you go?"

"I don't want to leave you alone with him." He knew that Lucius had already threatened to have her removed from fieldwork so he could spend more time with her.

"Please? I need to find out why," she pleaded.

Looking deeply into her eyes, he found he could not deny her this request. "Be careful," he replied and kissed her quickly before hurrying to the entrance hall so he could Disapparate.

Wendy rushed out of the room. "Give me a few seconds to get upstairs and then you can let him in, but don't let him upstairs." She ran upstairs.

Not long after arriving in her room, Cappa appeared. "Mistress, Mr. Malfoy is downstairs."

"Thank you, Cappa." Nervously, she headed downstairs. She saw Lucius in her library, perusing her books. "Lucius," she said coldly.

He turned to face her, a smug grin on his face. "Ah, so good of you to see me. I was just looking at your books, it seems some of your titles are missing."

"They aren't missing," she replied simply, knowing he was thinking of the search of her house.

"Ah, good girl. I thought you might keep stuff like that... hidden. I did hear about the bad news, and of course, I had to come over and check on you."

"To see how mad I am at you? I know you had something to do with this," she hoped to use her anger to maintain some semblance of control around him this time.

"Actually, no. This was not my idea. It was your brother's. Of course, I know how much your work means to you and I would never do anything to ruin that," he said smoothly.

"Why do I find that hard to believe?" She crossed her arms defensively.

"Come now, my dear. Don't be so glum. This actually works out quite well." He paused a few seconds. "Is your house guest in?" He watched her shake her head and then moved closer to her. "That is good news. I had hoped to get here before he returned from whatever it is he does. Until this whole investigation is resolved, you will have plenty of time on your hands. I thought I might offer you a pleasant diversion. It's much easier for me to get away during the day." He placed his hand on her shoulder and ran it down her arm.

"Are you sure you didn't plan this?" she asked. She knew that he had a lot to gain personally from her new status.

"I will admit that there is an unexpected benefit to this problem you are having, but believe me, I didn't do anything. Of course, Amelia has asked me to testify for your investigation." He brushed her hair aside so he could nibble at her neck. "I will do my best to help you, but I can only be seen showing so much support for you. It may not be enough." He continued to kiss her, letting his hands feel her body. "If you are looking for employment, I can offer you work. Something suited to your unique talents."

She was only half listening to what he was saying, unfortunately succumbing to his wiles. "Sounds tempting. What sort of work?"

"Just something to take advantage of all the knowledge you have, and that marvelous library you have hidden." He led her over to the couch. "I have a small research project for you. I ran into a seer a few days ago and was fortunate enough to hear a prophecy. I know that prophecies can be stored, but I don't have anything in any of my books. I thought that perhaps you could help me with that?"

"If you've heard a prophecy, why not talk to the Unspeakables?" she asked simply.

"Well, I don't completely trust them. I think you can understand that, especially after that ugliness earlier. You understand, don't you?" He leaned over her, unfastening her robes.

She really didn't see the harm in helping him. It was such an innocent request, wasn't it? "Of course. I'll look into it."

"Good. Then I'll just have to come back tomorrow and see what you've found."

"You don't have to do that; I could send you an owl at work."

He suckled on her nipple. "I would much prefer to come here."

She moaned at his touch. The rational part of her mind knew that it was an aphrodisiac wreaking havoc with her senses, but it was overruled by the more primitive part of her mind. "Okay," she whispered as she ran her hands through his hair.

"Good girl," he commended. Shifting her to a better location on the couch, he took his time satisfying his urges. Now that she was not actively working for the Ministry, he would have to spend more time with her. This was the way it was supposed to be. A man of his importance should not have to spend all day in his office.

When Remus returned home, he had been gone about two hours. Rather than Apparating right to the entrance hall, he arrived outside and came in through the front door. Cappa met him and informed him that Malfoy had departed. He found Wendy in the library, reading a book.

She looked up from the book and said weakly, "Hi."

He was pleased to see that she had not resumed drowning her sorrows in alcohol. Leaning over, he tried to determine what she was reading about. "Prophecies?" he asked.

"Something Lucius is interested in. He claims to have heard a prophecy, but doesn't want to go to the Unspeakables."

"Do you believe him?" Remus asked suspiciously.

"Not really, at least not anymore. I did when he explained it. I'm going to have to test out those antidotes. I can't go through that again. It's bad enough I have to be with him, but to lose control like that?" She shuddered. Changing subjects, she asked, "I wonder why he is interested in prophecies? I'll see what information I can get out of him tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?" Remus had known there would be little reason for Lucius to stay away, but he had not expected the man's visits to be a daily occurrence.

She sighed. "I know. But now that I'm temporarily unemployed, he's decided I need something to occupy my time during the day. Since I'm not sure I'll be an Auror much longer, I'll need to find something else to occupy my time. I'm sure my skills can translate into something, or I can always take a more active role in the administration of my holdings."

"Your holdings?"

"You know that I don't maintain this lifestyle off my Auror's salary. Among other smaller companies, I own the broom company that makes the Nimbus and Firefly models. They've been working on something to compete with the Firebolt, but haven't come up with anything. My involvement may change that," she said as though this was common knowledge.

"Are you serious?" he asked incredulously. There were times he forgot that as a Westin she had a great deal of money.

"In the past, I have found they work harder if I'm breathing down their necks..."

He interrupted, "No, not that. About owning the Nimbus company."

"That, oh, yes. I suppose I ought to sit down with you some day and go over my holdings. Aside from the candy company, the others are all pretty mundane. As a general rule, I stay out of the day-to-day operations. I have final approval on all new products, but that's about it. Anyway, back to Lucius and the prophecy, I'll see if I can get a better idea of why. I got the impression that he is using this as a test. He indicated he was willing to give me employment suited to my talents. Now, we both know that I don't need the money, so I can only guess that he is starting to trust me."

"I don't like it. I think it's getting too dangerous." He scowled at her.

She moved over so she could wrap her arms around his neck. "Don't worry. I'll be fine. I'm assuming they'll give me a series of tasks, each increasingly more difficult, before they make their decision to really invite me in. Of course, having been an Auror was a good reason not to join them. It's not like I could really have the Dark Mark on my arm, could I?"

He placed his hands on her arms. "But now, that has changed."

She shrugged her shoulders. "I'm still not going to become one of them."

"Wendy, this is serious. You aren't an Auror right now and depending on what you do, you might not be one again. I thought you had respect for the law." He could see her once again heading down that reckless path she was so prone to follow.

"Normally. But then again, I've never been afraid of skirting the law. See, the problem is, I know the law very well."

He saw a gleam in her eye; one that he thought meant trouble. "What are you planning?"

She gave him a gentle kiss. "Nothing."

"Wendy, I know you are planning something. What is it? Is it something to do with your brother?" His suspicions were fully aroused now with how evasive she was being.

"Don't worry about it. I'm not going to do anything dangerous. I know better than to go after him directly."

"I would prefer you not do anything. Promise me," he said insistently, knowing that she was already in enough trouble with the Ministry and any more could land her in jail.

"Don't make me give you a promise I can't keep."

He looked her into the eyes. "I don't want to lose you. You have to admit that you have a habit of being somewhat reckless. I want you to be careful. Don't go after any of the Death Eaters by yourself, and I'd really prefer it if you broke things off with Malfoy. The situation is especially dangerous now."

"We've talked about this before. Now, more than ever, I'm being placed in a situation to learn what they are doing, why they are remaining so quiet. Already, I've learned that they have an interest in prophecies. While we may not know what significance that has, perhaps Albus does. If I can give him some information on that, and I'll keep it vague, I should be able to draw more information out of him." She nibbled at his ears. "I promise I'll be careful, and I'll test out those antidotes, find one that works."

"Why is it I find I can't say no to you?"

"Because you love me," she replied coquettishly as she led him out of the library.

Wendy was waiting behind the desk. Checking the clock on the wall, she knew he would be arriving soon. She waited until he was hanging up his cloak before saying, "Hello, Timor."

He spun around, wand at the ready, wondering how someone got in his office.

Wendy summoned his wand before he could cast a spell. "I can't have you doing that."

"You're trespassing. I'll call the authorities," he said authoritatively.

"Not until I let you. The room is sealed. No one can get in; no one can hear." There was a menacing edge to her voice as she toyed with his wand.

"What do you want?" He tried not to sound nervous, but was not entirely successful.

"You have committed a grievous error by filing those complaints against me. You'll regret it," she stated simply.

He tried to sound confident. "Threatening me? That will be a nice one to add to the others."

She rose and slowly approached him, and he took an unconscious step backwards. "Oh, dear brother, it's not a threat, it's the truth. Go ahead. Add it to the others. You've taken everything away from me. I have nothing left to lose," she growled. She was pleased to see beads of sweat forming on his brow. "You see, you've made a very powerful enemy. I was content to leave you alone. You've changed that." She had moved back by his desk.

"So what are you going to do to me," he asked nervously, clearly wishing he was anywhere else but locked in his office with Wendy.

She sat on the edge of his desk, still toying with his wand. "I haven't decided yet. I want to make sure it's particularly *gasty*. You won't know when or where I will exact my revenge, but I will."

"I have powerful friends, and I'm well protected. I caught you at the house, I can do it again."

"Can you? I got in here no problem. As for your friends, they don't concern me. You all made a serious mistake all those years ago." She stood and got ready to drop his wand on the desk. "Oh, I would ask for a refund from whoever set your protective wards, or are they yours?" She could see that he was getting angry and assumed it was the latter. "Well, until later, *brother*." She Disapparated with a pop.

Remus woke and found that he was alone. He worried about what she was doing. She had not promised him to behave, and he feared that she had decided to go after one of the Death Eaters, probably her brother.

He decided to wait for her downstairs. While he didn't feel like eating, he thought he would take some tea.

It was shortly after nine when he heard Wendy Apparate. He hurried out of the dining room to catch her before she went somewhere else. "Where have you been?" he demanded.

"I had to run an errand," she replied evasively.

"Before seven o'clock? Where did you go and what did you do? I've been worried sick about you."

She had been about to tell him it was none of his business up until the point he admitted he was worried. "It's personal." She tried to head upstairs.

He grabbed her arm. "What did you do to your brother?" he assumed that was where she had gone.

"I didn't do anything. I just talked to him."

He didn't release her arm. "Wendy?" he prodded.

"Okay, I basically told him that he made a serious mistake by ruining my life," she reluctantly admitted.

"You threatened him? You may not think he's much of a wizard, but he is a Death Eater." Remus could not believe how reckless she was being after the discussion they had had last night.

"I didn't threaten him," she insisted. "I just told him the truth."

He hugged her tight. "You do many things that drive me crazy and this is one of them. You are making powerful enemies."

"Not if I play my cards right. Lucius knows what sort of value I have. They won't do anything to me based on what my brother says. I doubt he will even admit I was there. He would be admitting to his fellow Death Eaters that he's unable to protect his office from intrusion. No, I don't think he'll ask for help, and I know he can't get me here."

"Yes, but there are times you would be leaving the house. If he's in charge of a Death Eater cell, he could send them after you."

She laughed. "Oh, come now, we've gone against those. Do you honestly think any of them are a match for me?"

"If they catch you off-guard, yes." He wished she would take this more seriously. She was being entirely too cavalier.

"You worry too much about me."

"And you don't worry enough about yourself. You have proven that you are not infallible. Perhaps I should take you up on that offer to tie you up until you come to your senses?" he mused.

She relaxed a little in his arms. "Hmmm. I like the sound of that. You didn't have to go into work, did you?" she asked as she rubbed her hips against his.

He looked into her face incredulously. "You're serious, aren't you?"

She started unbuttoning his shirt. "Tie me up and have your way with me. I promise to scream for you."

He could feel his loins tightening at the idea of this suggestion. "I suppose I should punish you for being a bad girl, shouldn't I?" He gave her a shove toward the stairs. "Upstairs! Now!" he ordered.

They were upstairs cuddling in bed when they heard the doorbell ring.

"Cappa!" called Wendy. Once the house-elf appeared, she said, "Tell whoever it is, I'm not in and I didn't tell you when I would be back."

"Yes, Mistress." Cappa curtsied and disappeared.

"Do you think it's him?" Remus asked.

"I wouldn't be surprised. But I really don't want to think about him," she replied as she nuzzled back against him.

Cappa returned to the bedroom. "Mistress, Mr. Malfoy left a message for you." She held out a piece of parchment.

Wendy took the note and held it so that Remus could read it as well.

Wendy,

I was dismayed that you were not at home when I called. I had so hoped to see you again today. Unfortunately, my schedule precludes me from coming by later. I'll come by again tomorrow, around ten. I not only look forward to seeing if you have learned anything about prophecies, but to spend some time with you. I found the most sinful massage oil I'm dying to try.

Yours,

Lucius

Wendy balled up the letter and threw it across the room. "Sinful, my arse. I'm sure it's some aphrodisiac." She lay in Remus' arms a few minutes before saying, "I suppose I should send a message to Albus letting him know what's happened."

"I'm surprised you haven't heard from Kingsley or Tonks," Remus said.

"I'm not. Normally when an Auror is suspended, the others stay clear. Call it self-preservation. I'll probably hear from Kingsley when it's all over. He and I have been friends for years."

"When is the hearing?"

"Probably next week. They'll want four or five days to collect evidence and line up testimony," she replied morosely, fully aware that at this point the hearing was likely perfunctory.

"Do you need anyone to testify on your behalf?" he asked, clearly offering to be one to provide it if needed.

She had been thinking about this, but with the Order of the Phoenix's resurrection being kept secret, there were few she could consider. A part of her didn't want to involve Kingsley, but instead to protect him from the fallout. She sighed. "No. It wouldn't do any good and would only hurt whoever testifies for me. Right now, you are anonymous, and I think we should keep it that way. Besides, anything you say about our imprisonment won't help anyway. I'll defend myself the best I can. In the end, I expect I will be fired. I'd resign if it weren't for my pride. If I resign, it's as good as admitting I did something wrong." She got up from bed, wrapped her dressing gown around her and went to the window. Once there, she tried to send a Patronus message to Dumbledore. After two failed attempts, she looked back at Remus. "Do you think you could?" She had never been very good at conjuring a Patronus.

"Of course." He rose and crossed the room to the window. After sending the message, he wrapped her in his arms. One day, he hoped to provide her with the happiness necessary to reliably conjure a Patronus. "Should we get some lunch?" When she nodded, he led her downstairs.

Albus' response and her hearing summons arrived on the same day. The hearing was scheduled for the day after tomorrow, and she had one day to submit the names of any witnesses on her behalf. Albus' message had showed slight disappointment, but assured her that her skills were important to the Order whether or not she was an Auror.

"Are you sure you don't want me to testify?" Remus asked gently, wanting to do anything he could to help her.

She reached across the table for his hand and smiled sadly. "Thank you, but no. I know that you are standing beside me and that's enough."

The day of the hearing, Remus saw Wendy off and went to Grimmauld Place to await the outcome. Sirius was being surprisingly sympathetic. "I know her brother. He's a real bastard. Of course, most of those purebloods are bastards. I can definitely see him doing something like this. So, what's the plan if she's fired?" Sirius wasn't sure how he felt about that. With Wendy around more often, he thought it likely he would see less of Remus. It didn't seem likely that Wendy would want to spend more time at Grimmauld Place.

"I suspect she'll spend a lot more time researching in her library. There's a chance that somewhere in those books is information on how Voldemort transformed into what he is. We haven't really talked about it much. Every time I try, she changes the subject," he said sadly.

"Want to play cards to pass the time?" Sirius offered.

"Sure," replied Remus, though he wasn't sure how much interest he would have.

Chapter 22

Chapter 22 of 27

Voldemort is back and the Order of the Phoenix is reforming. They need new members and Kingsley recruits one of his fellow Aurors - even though she is a Slytherin. Assigned to work with Remus Lupin, things get very tense. Set during 'Order of the Phoenix'.

Chapter 22

Remus and Sirius had been playing cards for about an hour, when Remus said, "I'm worried about her."

"What? You said that she was almost positive she was getting fired. You're worried about that?"

"No. Not that. She's been acting strange." Remus held his cards loosely in his hands, not looking at them.

"How can you tell?" Sirius joked.

"Come on. I'm not joking. She used to reprimand me for being reckless and not understanding about undercover work. Now, she's doing many of the things she used to harass me about. She's been making a lot of rash decisions. Did I tell you she threatened her brother?"

"About time. Someone's needed to put him in his place for years," Sirius said derisively.

"Sirius!" Remus said harshly, trying to get his friend to be serious.

"Okay, okay. What's bothering you?" Sirius asked as he put his cards down and gave Remus his undivided attention.

"Ever since she got hit by that spell that nearly killed her, she's been acting odd. Taking all sorts of risks that she normally wouldn't."

"What do you propose we do?"

Remus put down his cards and ran his hand through his hair. "I don't know. I know she didn't want to go St. Mungo's the first time around, so I doubt she would go now. I guess I'll just keep watching her. But that's the other problem."

"What? Is she Disillusioning herself around you now?"

Remus was so distraught that he didn't catch the joke. "No. It's just that I'm still working, and I can't keep an eye on her during the day. I know that she has been seeing Malfoy. She won't tell me about it, but I can tell."

"I thought she was going to take an antidote for whatever potion he was giving her?" Sirius asked pointedly.

He nervously shuffled his cards around the table. "She's been working on it, but hasn't found the right one yet. I can't take it anymore. I know she's not doing it willingly, but that doesn't change anything. I'm going to tell her that she has to quit. That she'll have to give up on getting inside information. Add to that the fact that she's not an Auror anymore, and I think she could be in some serious danger."

"Do you think she'll listen to you?"

Remus sighed and looked away from Sirius. "I don't know. I hope so. She's said she loves me, but she has become almost fanatic about finding out what Malfoy and the others are up to. You heard the last report she gave."

Sirius thought back to how adamant Wendy had been at the last meeting that she was getting closer to the Death Eaters and was working to unravel the mystery of why Malfoy was interested in prophecies. "Yeah. I think you may be right about her. I always remember her being the sensible one, even if she was tormenting me. She's acting more like Bellatrix now." He didn't know what else to say. He knew that he was the last person Wendy would listen to.

"It's your deal," Remus finally said to break the silence.

It was late afternoon before Wendy arrived. Remus and Sirius looked toward the door to the drawing room when they heard her coming up the stairs. Remus saw the glum look on her face and thought he knew what the outcome had been. "How bad was it?"

She flopped into a nearby chair. "Bad. My brother is quite an accomplished liar. Of course, the panel was more than willing to believe him given my long history of questionable behavior. Never mind that much of that behavior was at the behest of my superiors. And because of who he is, there was never any discussion of using Legilimency to determine the truth of his statements, even after I brought it up. I don't think that made me look any better.

"His cronies, of course, testified as to my brutality. And since I did attack one of them, even if it was self-defense, though I really couldn't tell them that, the testimony of the others was believed. Effective half an hour ago, I am no longer an Auror. Lucius, being the bastard he is, didn't show up. I'm sure he will have some sort of wonderful excuse about why he couldn't be there. Not that I'm entirely sure his testimony would have been beneficial, since he would be hard-pressed to contradict the complaint he submitted at the beginning of the year.

"I have also been notified that any interference, perceived or otherwise, I might give to official investigations will be severely punished with a sentence to Azkaban. While there are no dementors there, it's still a miserable place." She leaned forward in her chair. "They even warned me against any sort of vigilante justice. This basically means that if I look at my brother oddly, he can probably get me in trouble." By now her glumness had been replaced by anger.

"Did he say anything about the other day?" Remus asked cautiously.

"No. I didn't think he would. He's going to pay for this." She rubbed her hands together.

Sirius scoffed and was silenced by a glare from Remus. Remus said, "I think you need to set your revenge aside for the time being. We need you as a member of the Order, not stuck in prison."

"Oh, I'm not going to act now. I've already got him nervous. That's good enough for now. My revenge is not going to be simple. I want him to suffer, but only him. The rest of his family will be spared. I'm going to ensure that he is discredited and publicly humiliated."

"Hell hath no fury..." Sirius started.

"Oh, shut up," reprimanded Remus. "Wendy, please, let it go. He's not worth it," he pleaded.

She grinned devilishly at him. "Don't worry about me. When I decide to act, I will leave behind no proof. If you don't mind, I'd like to head home. Coming?"

"Sirius, I'll see you later," Remus said before departing with Wendy. He didn't like the tone of voice she had been using.

Arriving home, Wendy was contemplating the possibility of a nice hot soak when she heard a rather unwelcome voice greet her. "Ah, Wendy. My sincerest apologies for missing the hearing this morning. I heard it didn't go well." While his voice sounded sincere, he was giving Remus a disapproving look. "I see that you have a guest."

"This is John, my houseguest," hoping that would be enough to get Lucius to ignore Remus.

Lucius gave Remus a small smirk and said, "Pleasure." Turning his attention back to Wendy, he continued, "I wonder if we might finish this discussion in private?"

Knowing that she had no choice, she replied, "Of course. John, I'll finish explaining it later."

Remus tried to plaster a pleasant expression on his face. "No problem." He watched Lucius escort Wendy into the drawing room, and he found himself wishing he had a set of extendable ears.

"Once again, I do apologize for not being there. Narcissa took ill this morning, and she simply wouldn't let me leave her until the Healer assured her it was nothing serious, and she would be perfectly fine in a day or so. Though, from what I heard, it may not have made much difference." He flashed her a placating grin and took her hands in his. "I would like the opportunity to make it up to you."

"How so?" she asked cautiously.

"We are hosting a dinner this Friday, and I would love for you to attend. It would be the perfect opportunity to reassert your presence in society. Not all of us agree with what your brother did. Of course, he has made some rather questionable decisions lately."

"I don't know..."

He continued smoothly, "Oh, come now. It will be quite a good time. You know most everyone that will be there, and I assure you, they are sympathetic to you. I've even invited Andrew MacCleod and Simon Jones. I think you will agree that either one of them would be a good match, though I suppose you may find Simon a tad old."

She was trying to decide if there was a diplomatic way she could turn down his offer. "I had hoped to just spend a quiet evening at home. This has been a very rough week for me."

"Understandable." He reached up and brushed her cheek. "I just thought you might welcome a bit of a diversion. And the guest list is just large enough that I'm sure a brief absence on our parts would go unnoticed," he finished in a whisper and leaned forward to capture her mouth for a passionate kiss that left her momentarily breathless.

Unable to think clearly, she replied, "I'll think about it."

He continued to touch her. "Please do. I would hate to think of you cooped up here when you could be having a much more enjoyable time at our dinner. I'm afraid I can't stay much longer. Narcissa's sleeping potion will be wearing off soon, and I must be there when it does. Have you made much more progress on prophecies?"

"Nothing more than what I already gave you. I don't think I have anything else that would be of assistance without more information," she replied, hoping to get some more information from him.

"No matter. What you gave me has been very helpful already. I may have another task for you on Friday. I look forward to seeing you then." He gave her one last kiss before departing.

Remus found Wendy sitting in the drawing room after he heard the front door close. "What did he want?" he asked gruffly. When she didn't answer, he touched her shoulder and tried again. "Wendy? What did he want?"

She shook her head to clear the confusion from her mind. "Oh, what? I'm sorry. Damn him. He gave some excuse about Narcissa being sick and that's why he couldn't be there. I'm sure he planned it so that I'll think he's on my side. On that note, he invited me to a dinner on Friday. He has several bachelors lined up for me."

"You're not going, are you?" Remus asked hopefully.

She sighed. "I don't know. I don't want to, but there are advantages to going."

He sat next to her on the sofa and took her hands in his. "You can't go. It's too dangerous now. You were protected as an Auror, but that protection is gone now." He knew that there was now no reason why they would not try to get her to join the Death Eaters.

"What else can I do for the Order? He said he had another task for me. Dumbledore was pleased when I gave him the information about Lucius being interested in prophecies. Maybe whatever this task is will give him more clues."

"Or perhaps it's the start of your initiation?" he offered.

"I doubt it. Lucius hasn't told me about his involvement with the Death Eaters."

"No, but that may be what the dinner is for. Think about it. You've been feeding him information for months that you are unhappy with the Ministry, unhappy about the state of the Wizarding World. In short, everything he would expect a Death Eater to say. Did he say anything about the other guests?" he asked, hoping to get her to think more objectively about what might occur at or after this dinner.

She thought back to her conversation. "No. All he mentioned was that they were sympathetic to me and unhappy with my brother. He didn't give me any other names."

He knew by now that asking her not to go would only be met with resistance. "You will be careful, won't you?"

"I always am," she replied smugly.

He held his head with his hands and leaned his forehead against hers. "No. You're not. That's the point. You aren't invincible; you are just incredibly lucky. I don't want that luck to run out on you."

She started kissing him. "I will be very careful with him."

"And what about his potions? You still haven't found an effective antidote."

"I think I know what I need now. I'll be safe. Besides, if he's trying to fix me up with one of his buddies, he won't really be after me that much," she said reassuringly.

"I hope you're right." He finally returned her kiss and decided to lead her upstairs.

They had spent most of the day sequestered upstairs, trying to have a few moments of peace in the chaos. They were drifting off to sleep when they heard the doorbell ring.

"Who could that be?" asked Remus, noticing that it was incredibly late.

"I have no idea," she replied as she slipped out of bed and began throwing on clothes. Picking up her wand, she headed towards the stairs. Remus followed closely behind her.

Cappa was waiting at the door for her mistress's permission before answering the door.

"Please, please. There is no need for that," said Albus.

"Albus? Come in, come in." She wondered what he was doing here. There was the chance that he might be seen, however slim.

"Thank you. My apologies for disturbing you at such a late hour, but it was less likely I would be noticed this late. Remus, would you mind if I spoke privately with Wendy for a few moments?"

Remus really wanted a chance to speak with Dumbledore, to let him know what he thought about Wendy's erratic behavior, but he knew that this was not really a request. "Of course. I'll wait in the other room."

Once they were alone in the drawing room, Albus said, "Kingsley informed me of what happened today."

"Yeah? What of it?" she replied defensively.

Albus had known this would be a difficult discussion. "I also suspect that some of the Death Eaters had something to do with this."

"Obviously. Lucius *claims* that my brother acted alone, but I don't believe him. What do you really want?" she asked shortly. She knew that he wouldn't have come by just to ask her about the hearing.

Albus knew that her emotions were still raw and did not respond to her anger. "I wanted you to know that even though you are no longer an Auror, you still have value as a member of the Order."

"Isn't that nice and sentimental." she replied snidely.

"Wendy, you are a very gifted witch, and you are in a unique position to help the Order. You have an opportunity to get information from within the Death Eater organization. It would be a shame for you to do something else to ruin that now."

She stared at him, unblinking, unwilling to rise to his challenge.

"Yes, I know that you visited your brother. You would be unwise to carry out any threat you may have given him."

Anger flashed in her eyes. "It was no threat. He will regret his decision to have me fired."

"Because he ruined your life?" Albus asked.

"Yes!" She started pacing the room like a caged animal.

"But did he really ruin your life?" he asked pointedly.

"Of course he did!" she said defensively.

"You have shown no interest in returning to your place in aristocratic society. You have continually complained about the shallowness of those people. Was it so horrible that he removed you from that society?"

"Well, no," she admitted sheepishly.

"And if he had not done so, you would not have met Remus. I have heard that the two of you are engaged. In a way, you have your brother to thank for that."

"I was happy doing my job and he has taken that from me. It was all I had after he took Andorra away from me," she cried, desperately trying to hang onto her anger.

He replied gently, calm in the face of her waning anger, "But now you have Remus. Being an Auror was just a job. A job cannot fill an empty void. That is what family is for. While your brother took your family from you, he also made it possible for you to love." His blue eyes twinkled at her.

"It's always love with you, isn't it?" she asked bitterly, she snapped as she crossed her arms. He didn't seem to understand the magnitude of what had happened to her.

"It is a very important emotion. You did not love your job. You were good at it, but you did not take joy from it. I think that perhaps you can be of more use to the Order now," he said sagely.

"So, what is my new role to be?" she asked defensively.

"Much as it was. Use your contact with Lucius to learn more about the Death Eaters. The information you have provided about his interest in prophecies has proven quite useful. I have several theories on why he is interested in that information. Since you have helped him once, he will likely turn to you again."

"Ask me anything but that. I can't be around him anymore." She knew she sounded weak and hated showing weakness, but he was asking the impossible.

"We all must make sacrifices. I know this is a very large one, but with luck, you will not need to make it much longer. Remus will understand. The time may come when he is asked to make a sacrifice of his own."

She had the impression that he meant something specific by the statement. "What do you mean?"

"Nothing in particular. We all must make sacrifices from time to time, and we never know when that time will come. Now, I cannot remain long. Stay the course." He rose, placed a reassuring hand on her shoulder, and walked out of the room.

She couldn't find the strength to get up.

Remus was in the library waiting for Dumbledore to leave. When he saw the old wizard, he caught the older man before he could step outside. "Albus, I'm worried about her. She's changed."

"We all change, Remus. You know that," Albus replied simply.

Remus knew that he was not explaining himself well. "That's not what I mean. Ever since she was hit by that spell, she hasn't been right. She's been more reckless, less willing to listen to advice."

"I think that she is cured from her troubles with the spell. There may be something else causing her strange behavior."

Only now, did he consider there might be other possibilities. "If it's not that, it would have to be Malfoy. Something about the potion that he is using on her."

"That is a possibility. And she has not yet formulated an antidote?" Albus knew she had been working to that end.

"No."

"I shall ask Severus for assistance."

Remus pleaded, "No, please. Don't ask him."

"Do you not trust him?" Albus asked cautiously.

"It's not that. It's... complicated." He knew that while they were on the same side, Severus still did not approve of his relationship with Wendy. Severus would probably claim that it was not a potion, but the fact that she naturally desired someone like Malfoy.

"I understand, but if you truly believe it has something to do with the potion, we should enlist his aid. There is no one better at potions," Albus said solemnly.

He knew the old Headmaster was correct. "I know. I'll contact him if we need his help. She told me she thinks she has it now."

Albus looked into Remus' eyes and the two men shared a pained expression. "I know this is difficult. I hope it will soon be over. I have found those like Lucius have a short attention span."

"Not for her. They have a long history," Remus replied morosely.

Albus said nothing for several seconds. "I see. Then we will have to find another way to ensure this ends soon. If she can provide proof of his position within the Death Eaters, we could remove him from the picture."

"Thank you, Albus." Remus watched the elderly wizard disappear into the night before walking to the drawing room. "Wendy? What did he want?"

"More of the same. Telling me what a great job I'm doing. Keep up the good work. Keep trying to get close to Malfoy." She looked up into his eyes, on the verge of tears. "I don't think I can do it anymore."

He knelt next to her and pulled her to him, not quite believing his own words. "You can do it. You are strong."

She desperately clung to him. "I want to run away. Find someplace where none of this is happening."

He gently stroked her hair as she leaned against his shoulder. "No, you don't. You would regret it. You are the only one that can do it." He wondered why he was encouraging her. Right here, he had the opportunity for an easy out. When she didn't reply, he noticed that she was crying, and he rubbed her back, trying to reassure her.

"It's so hard," she whispered between sobs.

He kissed the top of her head. "I know it is. War is never easy. You're strong. I know you can do it."

When she finally pulled away from his arms, she wiped her eyes and said, "I'm sorry."

"For what?"

"For all this. For getting you in the middle, for having a breakdown."

"There's nothing wrong with that. You're under a lot of stress." He stroked her hair. "Did you want to head back upstairs?" he asked gently.

She nodded. "Okay."

The following morning Wendy realized how empty everything seemed. She had nothing to do, no job to go to. At least not until tomorrow evening, though she really didn't want to do that. She thought she should go into the factory. The problem was, she just didn't feel like it.

Remus noticed her sullen mood and had been trying to engage her in conversation all morning. "Wendy," he called sharply to get her attention. "I said, I could take the day off work, if you would like."

She finally looked up from shoving her eggs around the plate. "No. You don't need to do that. It wouldn't be fair of you to just not show up."

"It wouldn't be unfair. I let Sally know that I might not be in."

"No, you go to work."

"Are you sure? I'm worried about you." His concern was clear in his expression.

She tried to flash him a reassuring smile. "I'll be fine. I'll get out of the house today."

He reached across the table and took her hand. "Are you sure?" He had known that she would be upset by the decision of the board, but he had thought they had prepared for the negative ruling.

"I'll be fine." She took note of the look he was giving her. "Really. I will. I won't do anything stupid. I know they will be really watching me for the next couple of weeks."

"Why don't you meet me for lunch?" He thought this was an innocuous way to keep an eye on her. "There's a passable pub by the book shop."

She smiled weakly. "I'll meet you then."

Wendy spent two days surveying her holdings. She had only half paid attention to the briefs and tours she had been given. None of it really interested her. That was why she had never really gotten involved.

Now, she was staring at her wardrobe, trying to decide what to wear. Thanks to all the undercover work she had done, she had plenty of options. She discarded the first few robes for being too sexy. Another for being too matronly. She was staring at two, a black one and a green one, when Remus entered the bedroom.

"You're going," he said quietly.

"Yes." There was really nothing else to be said.

He noticed that the dresses she was considering were somewhat conservative. "Have you found an antidote?"

"I've got it under control. I'll be fine." She discarded the black one and decided to go with the green. It had less embroidery and was in the Slytherin colors.

"When are you leaving?"

"A little before seven." She began digging through her jewelry box, looking for pieces that were not too ostentatious. After several minutes, she settled on a simple set consisting of emeralds set in platinum. When she looked up, she noticed that he was gone. Slowly, she dressed for the evening. She spent a lot of time working on looking good, but not too good. After she finished putting her earrings on, she looked briefly in the mirror.

Before leaving the bedroom, she picked up her wand and pointed it at a painting on the wall. It swirled and revealed a hidden chamber. She removed the box hidden within and removed the protective charms. Slowly, she picked up the ring and slipped it on her finger. Even though she thought it was her imagination, she thought she could feel the power from it flowing through her body. Closing her eyes, she clutched at the ring.

After the feeling of power subsided, she applied a charm to the ring to alter its appearance. At a minimum, she knew that Remus would recognize it and there was a decent chance that someone at the dinner party, especially Narcissa, would also recognize it. One last look in the mirror and she was sure that she was ready.

Remus was waiting downstairs. He couldn't bear to watch her dress for the party. He could feel the knot in his throat when he saw her. She looked regal, though not ostentatious. "Are you leaving?"

"I have a few minutes."

"And you're sure that you've solved the potion problem?" he asked cautiously, knowing it was the only chance she had against Malfoy.

She nodded. "I've got it now. There won't be any problems with it this evening." She wrapped her arms around him, wanting to feel him. "I'll get out of there as soon as I can."

"Be very, very careful," he said quietly.

She leaned her forehead against his and looked into his eyes. "I will."*None of them can harm me*, she added silently. The ring would protect her. She pulled away and Disapparated.

Chapter 23

Chapter 23 of 27

Voldemort is back and the Order of the Phoenix is reforming. They need new members and Kingsley recruits one of his fellow Aurors - even though she is a Slytherin. Assigned to work with Remus Lupin, things get very tense. Set during 'Order of the Phoenix'.

Chapter 23

The wards at Malfoy's manor had been changed to allow guests to Apparate within a receiving area. It was considered poor etiquette to require guests to walk up your drive for a formal reception. She stared at the door, knowing that she didn't need to waste any time knocking since Malfoy undoubtedly knew someone had arrived.

When the door opened, a house-elf bowed at her. "Welcome, my lady. Master is waiting in the library."

Library, she thought. *That's very odd*. Since she knew the way, she headed for the library without waiting for the house-elf. She found Lucius sitting at his desk, going through a stack of parchment.

He looked up when he heard the door open and rose from his chair to greet his guest, a broad grin spreading across his face. "Ah, Wendy. I'm so glad you decided to come." He swept her into his arms for a passionate kiss.

She pushed herself away. "What about Narcissa?"

He pulled her back against him. "She's preparing for dinner and won't be down for a while. And before you ask, the others won't be here for half an hour. Might I say that you look absolutely delectable?"

"You had me come early on purpose?" she asked curiously.

He flashed a knowing grin and gently caressed her. "Of course I did. I thought we could have some time to ourselves, since you have been so busy lately. It seems that we just haven't been able to make time for each other. You have missed me, haven't you?" He nibbled on her neck, knowing it drove her wild.

She lied, "Of course I have."

"Good. Then how about a quick shag before everyone else arrives?" He reached his hand between her legs, to let her know he was serious.

She tried to behave as though she was going against her desires. "As much as I would like to, I don't want to take the risk. What if someone arrives early or Narcissa comes downstairs? You know I've never felt comfortable with her here."

"Well then, we will have to find time once everyone is here and otherwise occupied. I'm sure the opportunity will arise." He pulled her tight against his body, letting her

know how he felt.

"Of course," she answered evasively.

Realizing that his urges would have to wait until later to be fulfilled, Lucius poured Wendy a drink. "In addition to Andrew and Simon, there are a couple of others you might be interested in."

"Oh? Who might they be?" She knew that Lucius was trying to set her up with one of his society associates so that he could spend more time with her.

He gave her a sly smile. "I think I'll leave that as a surprise."

"You know I don't really like surprises." Perhaps in her younger days she had, but after being an Auror for more than a decade, surprises were likely to be met with a hex or two.

"Don't worry. This isn't a dangerous surprise. I just thought you might appreciate not knowing who to expect this evening." He slid next to her on the sofa and wrapped his arm around her shoulders. "Are you sure you want to wait until later?"

She resisted the urge to demonstrate a rather painful hex on him and replied, "It's not that *want* to wait, rather it's that we should wait. I don't want to do anything to ruin my welcome."

"I wish you would believe me when I tell you that Narcissa will not be down until later. We have plenty of time," he replied insistently.

She could tell that he was very randy. "Lucius, please. Perhaps later in the evening, but it would be too obvious now. I think Narcissa might recognize that satisfied grin. It would be best if we moved out into the drawing room to wait for the others."

While he was disappointed, he tried not to let it show. "Of course. I will find a way to steal you away later." He nibbled at her neck, letting her know how much he desired her.

Wendy was glad she had begged him off. Narcissa joined them shortly after they arrived in the drawing room. "Wendy! So nice to see you again," Narcissa said warmly.

"Narcissa, it's been far too long." Wendy forced a fake smile on her face. She really hated society events.

"When Lucius said you would be coming, I was ecstatic. I don't know if he's told you, but we've invited several eligible bachelors. It would be nice to see you more often."

"Yes, Lucius mentioned that Simon and Andrew would be here." Wendy knew that Narcissa was not genuinely sincere.

"And a few others," Lucius added. "But I've kept them a surprise." He placed his hand on Narcissa's back, playing the game he knew so well. All evening, he would appear to be the perfectly attentive husband.

Wendy was thankful that she didn't have to make small talk too long with Narcissa. While they had been good friends growing up, they really didn't have much in common anymore. In fact, Wendy had little in common with the other wives. Her work as an Auror had taken her away from the normal pursuits.

The others arrived within about ten minutes. A quick count of the others showed there were about thirty guests. Almost all of them she recognized. She still wasn't sure who the surprise guests were. She had been almost positive that Lucius would make a big deal of introducing her to all her potential suitors, not just Simon and Andrew, but he had introduced her to no one else.

The two of them were competing for her attention. She found the behavior particularly disgraceful from Simon, who was old enough to be her father. Andrew was only a few years older than she, but his behavior was still better suited to someone much younger.

She did notice that she was not the only single woman there, though none of the others was receiving as much attention from members of the opposite sex. Of course, propriety dictated there be equal numbers of men and women, and Lucius had made it quite clear he was trying to find a suitor for her. Even though she hadn't seen the seating arrangement, she was positive that she would be placed between Simon and Andrew. Lucius seemed to have chosen them as the two most acceptable for her. This whole process reminded her of her youth and how her father had arranged her marriage.

Dinner was excellent, though the conversation seemed to be the same tired topics she remembered from the past. There was naturally a good deal of gossip about those who were not in attendance, most notably her brother. It seemed that Lucius was right about Timor losing face. She learned of several bad business arrangements he had made and shuddered at the thought that he was on the verge of losing companies that had been their family for centuries. This was good information for her to have, though. She could probably expect him to try to do something to take control of some of her holdings to pay off his debts. Perhaps she could act first and move into position to wrest control from him.

As dinner wound down, they filtered back to the drawing room. Wendy found herself with quite the audience since she had let it slip that she was taking an interest in product development for the new Nimbus. She figured this would be the best way to ensure that Lucius would not have a chance to get close to her. Every now and then, she could see him glaring at her, but he could do nothing overt to get her alone without drawing the wrong sort of attention, which suited her mood perfectly.

Remus sat in the drawing room, staring at the fire. He didn't like Wendy being around Malfoy, especially since he had found a way to circumvent her rational mind, but Remus was even more nervous than usual. When she had left, she had seemed far too confident. He tried to determine why he felt so uncomfortable tonight, but he couldn't say.

Checking the clock on the mantle, he saw that it was past midnight, long past when Wendy should have returned home from a dinner party. Scenarios kept running through his mind. Unfortunately, the best was that she was secreted away with Malfoy. He wasn't sure what the worst was. It was either her being tortured by the Death Eaters or being forced to join them.

Finally, he heard the crack of Apparition and he walked toward the foyer. "Wendy?" he asked to get her attention.

She spun around, wand at the ready. "Oh, Remus, it's you."

"Who did you expect it to be?" he asked cautiously, concerned that she had drawn her wand on him.

"I... Nobody," she replied evasively, her wand now held at her side.

He was on edge now. She didn't seem to be acting normally. "Are you all right?"

She put her wand away, but still seemed on edge. "I'm fine."

"What happened?"

"Death Eaters," she said quietly.

"What about Death Eaters?" He was instantly on alert, wondering if their house was about to be invaded.

She opened her mouth answer, but closed it again when she heard the clock chime. "I have change and go or I'll be late." She turned towards the stairs.

He grabbed her arm to stop her. "Wendy, go where?"

She pulled away and looked irritated. "A meeting. I have to get back to the meeting."

"I'm not letting you leave this house until you give me an explanation," he said insistently. He was still not entirely sure she was not being affected by the Imperius curse or something else.

"I don't owe you anything. I know what I'm doing," she said sharply.

He grabbed her left arm and pushed up her sleeve.

"What are you doing?" she asked defensively as she tried to pull her arm back.

"Just checking. What's wrong with you?" She had not taken the Dark Mark, but something was causing her odd behavior.

"I could ask you the same thing," she replied snidely, as she pulled her sleeve back down.

"Nothing's wrong with me. I'm worried about you. You were going to a dinner with a bunch of known Death Eaters, ones that have a strong interest in recruiting you. Now, you come home and you aren't acting at all like yourself. How do I know you aren't under the Imperius Curse or something? Talk to me," he pleaded.

Looking at the concern in his eyes, she returned to reality. "I'm not under a curse. They are gathering tonight. I didn't get told that in as many words, but I was able to figure it out. When he wants to be, Lucius can be very open-minded. Though I will admit this is the easiest I have ever been able to read his mind, that's how excited he was at the prospect of finally having me on his side.

"We talked after dinner. First, it started off as business discussion, which more or less encouraged the women to go to another room. As the evening wore on, and those who were not members of the inner circle left, it turned to... other things.

"They didn't speak in specifics, but generalities. In the end, I must have said the right things, because I've been invited to a gathering tonight. I have to change quickly and meet back at the manor," she explained quickly, clearly eager to be away.

This was not a completely unexpected turn of events. He had known that only her position as an Auror had protected her from being officially recruited. "Let me notify the Order and we can follow along."

"How can you do that? You won't be able to get on the manor grounds, and I have no idea where we are going from there."

"There is something I've been working on. I found information about complex tracking spells in your library and I've been working on creating some sort of talisman that members of the Order could use to keep track of each other. It's by no means perfect yet. So far, I've only been able to track just one object, and only the spell caster can use the tracking. I've charmed a necklace. Take it and we'll come to you."

"It's too dangerous." She knew they would be facing at least a dozen Death Eaters. On such short notice, he would be lucky to get three more people to come with him.

"How can it be too dangerous? You there alone is too dangerous." When this was over, he would insist that she not see Malfoy any more. Any advantage they could gain was far outweighed by the risks, no matter what Albus might think.

"You don't understand. I have to do this alone," she stated definitively.

He began to suspect something was wrong and grabbed her shoulders, attempting to return her to reality. "Why do you have to do this alone?"

"Don't ask me to explain. Just believe me that I'm telling the truth," she implored.

He looked down at her hands and had a sinking suspicion about why she was acting so odd. "Are you wearing the ring?" He didn't see it, but he knew she could have charmed it look like one of the rings she was wearing.

She yanked her hands out of his and refused to meet his gaze.

She was wearing the ring. This was not good. "From what you told me about that ring, no one should wear it. That's why you're acting odd, isn't it? Take it off," he ordered.

"I can't. If I go before them without the ring, I'll be defenseless." She was adamant she was right.

"Don't go at all, then. You said they never spoke in specifics. You don't need to do this. Or if you do go, take the necklace and we will know where you are. We can attack and keep you safe. Now, give me the ring." He watched the turmoil on her face and said softly, "Wendy, please, give me the ring. It's changing you."

She looked down at her hand. Part of her mind knew he was right, that she should not wear the ring. The other part of her mind knew how vulnerable she was without it. Lucius could easily control her, since she had not found an antidote to the potion he was using against her. With it, she had the power to bring down most of the prominent Death Eaters. She could end her relationship with Lucius once and for all. She held onto the ring, but did not take it off. "There will be more than a dozen of them there. You could not assemble a force to defeat them in the short amount of time you will have. With this ring, I could subdue them all. I could remove the Dark Lord's financial support. Power only goes so far without money behind it."

"Wendy, please. It's not good for you. You don't need that ring. We can cause enough commotion to capture a few of them and provide the opportunity for you to escape." He hoped his words would reach through the changes the ring was causing and find the woman he loved.

She looked up into his eyes, the fire of determination in her expression. "But don't you see? I can put an end to so much of it. All with this ring."

"But at what cost? I assure you, it's not necessary. Give me the ring. I know the woman I love is listening to me. Hear the truth in my words. You can't use the ring. You know what it will do to you if you do. Please, take it off. See reason." He brushed her cheek with his fingers, hoping to get through to her.

Chapter 24

Voldemort is back and the Order of the Phoenix is reforming. They need new members and Kingsley recruits one of his fellow Aurors - even though she is a Slytherin. Assigned to work with Remus Lupin, things get very tense. Set during 'Order of the Phoenix'.

Chapter 24

Wendy started at Remus for several seconds. He just didn't understand. Of course, he couldn't understand. He wasn't wearing the ring. "I can't give you the ring. I'll take the necklace, but I can't face them without the ring."

He placed his hands on hers, planning on removing the ring, and suddenly found a wand pointed at his throat. "You would attack me?"

"Do not touch the ring," she said in low, menacing voice.

Remus let go of her hand. "Wendy, think about what you are doing." He feared that she was losing control, that he was losing her.

"I have thought about what I'm doing. The Dark Lord tore apart my family last time. I'm not going to let him gain power and do it again. They don't play fair, and neither will I. With this ring," she held her hand up before him, "I can do great things. I can gain the advantage for our side. This is the only way we can get an advantage. The Ministry refuses to even admit that the Dark Lord has returned." She slowly lowered her wand and put it away. "I'll take the necklace, but I really do have to get going. If I wait too long, they will assume I'm not interested and the opportunity will be lost." She turned and climbed the stairs.

By the time Remus arrived in the bedroom, she was pulling on a set of everyday robes. He went over to his dresser, pulled the necklace he had charmed out of the drawer, and placed it on her dressing table. While his feelings were hurt by her actions, he reminded himself that it was the ring that was altering her behavior. "I'll go gather as many members of the Order as I can," he said before leaving. He had hoped she would have said something in return, but she didn't stop him from leaving.

As soon as he arrived at Grimmauld Place, he sent messages to everyone he thought might be available.

"What are you doing here?" asked Sirius, quite surprised to see Remus well after midnight.

"Wendy has been invited to a Death Eater meeting. I gave her a necklace that will allow me to track her. I'm going to assemble as many members of the Order as I can, and we're going to crash the meeting and see how many we can capture."

"That's a rather bold plan. How do you know that they won't recognize the necklace for what it is?" Sirius said, not even bothering to stifle his yawn.

"I don't," Remus admitted, "but I would be very surprised if they did. I've learned that a lot of the books she has are one of a kind."

Over the next ten minutes, Kingsley, Tonks and Emmeline Vance arrived. They waited a few more minutes and Dedalus Diggle and Moody arrived.

"What's going on?" asked Moody, clearly suspicious at being summoned in the middle of the night.

Remus explained, "Wendy has found a way to infiltrate a Death Eater meeting. I've given her a necklace that will allow me to track her. Right now, she is still at Malfoy's manor, but once she moves, we'll know where the Death Eaters are meeting. The dinner she attended this evening had several suspected Death Eaters that will also be attending this meeting."

"How many can we expect?"

"She estimated about a dozen, but that wasn't counting anyone they might be meeting there."

"All right then. Let's go over some offensive strategy."

Wendy returned to Malfoy's manor and found him waiting for her. "Ah, Wendy. I was beginning to think you wouldn't come back. I was just about to leave without you."

"Sorry. I had something come up that I just had to take care of before I could return." She saw that he had picked up a black robe. "What's this?"

He gave her a knowing grin. "Come now, you're an intelligent woman. If you didn't know what this was, you wouldn't be here."

She took the black robe from him and donned it. "So, you have finally deemed me worthy?"

"Yes, well, that was a rather large oversight on our part. Bella had wanted to recruit you, but Edgar wished to keep you safe. Now that you are free of the Ministry, we can correct that oversight." He handed her a mask and watched her don it. He then took hold of her arm. "Hold tight," he ordered before Apparating them to the meeting.

Remus froze during the planning session and looked to the west. "They've moved." He dug through the paper on the table, looking for the map. Pointing at a desolate area northwest of London, he announced, "They're here."

"You're sure of that?" asked Moody.

"Positive. Before she moved, I could have pointed you straight at Malfoy's manor in Wiltshire." He was thankful the necklace worked and was apparently going undetected.

"All right." Moody pointed his wand and the map, and a three-dimensional image of the area Remus had indicated was before them on the table. "We can assume they have set up temporary anti-Apparition wards. Since they are temporary, we should be able to come in closer than if they were permanent." He pointed to a part of the map. "This looks like a good Apparition point. It's uphill from the gathering, which will give us the advantage. I would expect this meeting to take some time, so we'll wait another five minutes or so to ensure that everyone has arrived before us. Any questions?"

"Five minutes? Should we really wait that long?" Remus was concerned that the longer it took, the more likely Wendy was to do something irrational. He hadn't discussed there being a delay in the arrival of help. She was likely to believe that no one was coming and act on her own.

"Since you told us how you delayed her, it is unlikely that the others wouldn't already be assembled, but I'd like to wait and be sure," Moody replied.

Remus knew the others would defer to Moody and remained silent even though he was aching to leave.

Wendy looked around as best she could while wearing the mask and not looking too obvious. A couple of the Death Eaters she could identify by height and build, but the others had not exhibited enough behavior for her to identify them. She wondered how long it would be before Remus and the others would arrive. That, of course, assumed that he had been able to get any of the others together and that the necklace worked. She thought that was unlikely on such short notice and was fully prepared to take

matters into her own hands.

"You bring our new recruit?" asked an unrecognizable voice.

Lucius replied in an equally altered voice, "I do. This recruit is worthy and shares our views."

The speaker addressed her. "Are you ready to become one of us? To preserve the Wizarding way of life?"

Quickly, she masked her own voice and replied, "I am." This was it, all the suffering at Malfoy's hands was about to pay off.

"Are you prepared to prove your loyalty to our ways?"

She knew that she had to answer 'yes' and that she couldn't hesitate, even though a part of her wondered how quickly they would expect her to prove her loyalty. "Yes." She clenched her hand, feeling the reassuring presence of the ring, ready to go on the offensive. She could feel the eyes of the others upon her, and she wondered how many of them knew who she was.

The speaker circled around her, and she noticed that Lucius had fallen back into the ring with the others. "We ask each that seeks to join us to prove their worthiness. You will be given a mission to complete. It may or may not be easy to you. There is a small Muggle village nearby. Living in that village is a blood traitor. You are to bring that blood traitor here for judgment and sentencing." The speaker held out a photograph.

Wendy took the picture. "It shall be done." She would try to give Remus and the others a few more minutes. If not, she would act to subdue as many of them as she could. The ring was powerful, but she didn't know if she could take them all down.

She was just leaving the circle, ostensibly to carry out her mission, when a series of hexes flew into the circle. Those still standing after the initial attack ran for cover. Wendy knew there were at least four or five of the Order there and managed to dislodge her mask so they knew not to hex her. She did her best to look like she was putting up a fight without actually hitting anyone from Order. If the opportunity arose, she would throw a hex at one of the Death Eaters. With members of the Order nearby, she feared using the ring, suspecting that its powers were indiscriminant.

Death Eaters were fleeing, and she was about to join them when she felt an arm wrap around her quickly followed by the sensation of Portkey activation. If not for the arm wrapped around her waist, she would have fallen when the motion stopped. She fought to free herself from her captor.

"Easy. We're safe," came Lucius' reassuring voice. He released her and removed his mask.

"Where are we?" she asked as she examined her surroundings. It was obviously not Malfoy's manor.

"Somewhere safe. And I think you should remain here. I believe some of the attackers may have seen your face." He brushed her hair out of her face.

"And what of it? We can hunt them down," she replied, hoping to be allowed off on her own.

"What of it is that they are affiliated with the Ministry. I recognized one of them as Moody," he said cautiously.

"He's not part of the Ministry anymore. He's actually become a bit of a joke with the Aurors. You do know they made him retire because his behavior was... erratic, to say the least." She hoped to convince him that Moody was not a danger.

"Nonetheless, he will surely report you to the Ministry. I suspect that Aurors will be at your home within the hour. It won't be safe for you to return," Lucius replied pointedly and not the least bit disappointed.

This was a completely unexpected turn of events, one she did not want to experience. "Of course." Surveying the room closer, she noticed that it was quite rundown. "Should I expect better accommodations?"

He stroked her cheek. "I thought you were above such things?"

"I'm not asking for luxury. I am asking for something that does not smell quite so bad." This was not the type of place that she wanted to stay for an extended period of time.

"Of course. I will see that wards are set up at a better location." He pulled her close. "You know, I think we can find a way to make the best of this bad situation."

She really wanted nothing more than to knock him across the room and run. Instead, she said, "Oh? How so?"

"Well, I see it as my duty to come here and make sure you aren't too lonely during your involuntary exile." He leaned down and kissed her.

She forced herself to return the kiss. "What of your plan to set me up with someone else?"

"Well, that will be much harder to do since you won't be able to be seen in society."

"I suppose that is an added bonus." It was a nightmare. As soon as he was gone, she would leave. It would mean that she would have to hide at Grimmauld Place with Sirius, but anything was better than being trapped here at Malfoy's beck and call.

When the members of the Order arrived, they quickly ran downhill to attack the Death Eaters before they could react. At one point, Remus saw Wendy flailing around with the other Death Eaters, but in the ensuing melee he lost track of her. They had managed to stun five of the Death Eaters, but most of the rest had fled into the trees and were able to escape. He felt the sudden shift that indicated Wendy had Apparated elsewhere. Strangely, she was now somewhere to the north.

Once they were sure that the area was secure, Kingsley left to arrange for Aurors to pick up the prisoners.

"Where's Wendy?" asked Moody.

"Somewhere to the north. She left near the end of the battle. I don't think she left willingly, though. She made sure that we knew who she was, and if she escaped anywhere it would have been to her house. I think we should go after her."

"I think we should wait on this. Undercover work is one of her specialties. If we go in after her, it will let them know that she's on our side and may place her in danger."

"But, Alastor, what if they suspect that she gave away the meeting location? She could be in grave danger now," Remus insisted, his heart aching at this plan gone wrong.

"Could be, but that isn't a definite. Let's figure out where she is and come up with a solid plan. She's well trained and can take care of herself," Moody replied, indicating that there would be no unplanned rescue attempts.

Remus found that he didn't completely believe this. He had no idea what situation she had gotten herself into, but he felt that she was definitely in over her head. Unfortunately, he knew this was something he couldn't do on his own. He would have to follow Moody's advice for at least a little while longer.

Wendy was about to make her escape when she heard a sibilant voice behind her say, "Lucius, I had not expected visitors. Introduce your guest to me."

Lucius bowed his head. "Yes, my lord." He led Wendy closer to the speaker. "This is Wendy Westin, who we have told you about."

"Wessstin, the former Auror. Has she passed her test?" the Dark Lord asked.

"Not yet, my lord. We were... interrupted," Lucius replied deferentially.

"Interrupted?"

Bella joined them. "What my dear brother-in-law means is that we were followed. Those meddlers from the Order attacked us."

Wendy could almost feel the accusatory stare Bella was giving her. She forced herself to meet Bella's gaze, refusing to be the first to look away. The periphery of her mind was giddy that she had the Dark Lord a mere pace from her, and she had an incredible power that could destroy him. She squeezed her hand, trying to determine when would be the best time to attack. Unfortunately, she had little idea what would be the outcome of channeling power through the ring for that purpose. She was drawn from her reverie when the Dark Lord began to speak again.

"So, you have brought someone to my presence that has not proven her loyalty?" the Dark Lord asked dangerously.

Bella chimed in. "Yes, how do you know that she wasn't the one that brought the Order?"

Wendy was about to answer, but Lucius spoke first. "She had no opportunity. I brought her straight to the gathering from my manor. I trust her completely. She was about to leave to fetch the blood traitor when the attack began."

Voldemort turned his penetrating eyes on Wendy. "Is this true?"

She forced herself to meet his gaze, only Occluding the small part of her mind that would get her in trouble. She could feel a slimy presence moving through her mind. Never before had being probed by a Legilimens felt like this. "Yes, my lord."

"A former Auror would be quite useful," he mused. "If she can be trusted." He eyed her appraisingly.

"I have no love of the Ministry or their policies. The restriction of those policies is what got me fired." She knew that staying as close to the truth as possible would help her succeed in her deception.

"Yesss, but you were harassing some of my Death Eaters when you violated those policies. That makes you untrustworthy in my estimation."

She knew this was very dangerous territory. "My lord, if I may explain? I actually protected Lucius during the Ministry raid. I knew where he would be hiding things the Ministry did not need to know about and ensured my partner would not search those areas. As for my brother, well... It has been quite some time since the two of us have gotten along well. I'm afraid that was more of a family feud, and he was never placed in any trouble with the Ministry."

"Do I make you nervous?" he asked as he walked around her.

She knew he was looking for an answer that would feed his ego. "Not so much nervous, my lord. Awed would be a better word."

"Why?"

It was such a simple question, but she knew that answer would need to be something more. "I am rarely in the presence of such a great wizard. I know that you will do great things for Wizard-kind."

"Yet you share your roof with a Muggle-lover," he countered.

"That is true, but I hope to reform him. He has been a friend for a number of years." She desperately hoped that he couldn't see through the lies. Even though he was not looking into her eyes, she could still feel his presence in her mind. He had truly sunk deeply into the world of Dark magic.

He leaned close to her and took her hand in his. She tried not to look visibly nervous. "This is a very interesting ring."

"An old family heirloom I found after Edgar's death. I wore it to dinner this evening and forgot to take it off," she replied offhandedly.

He could clearly feel the power emanating from the ring. "It is quite the family heirloom." He reached to remove it from her finger and was thrown back by a burst of magic.

Lucius and Bella both immediately had their wands pointed at Wendy.

"That is quite a powerful ring. And I see that it is not what it first appeared to be." He maintained a respectful distance.

Wendy looked down at her hand and saw that the charm was gone.

Bella's eyes widened when she saw the ring. "How did you...? Master, that ring has been in the Black family for centuries."

"And you never brought it to my attention before?" he asked, diverting his attention from Wendy to Bellatrix.

Wendy tried to Disapparate and found herself knocked to the floor.

Voldemort sneered at her. "Oh, you won't be getting away from here, my child. Only those who are loyal to me have that power. Bellatrix, the ring?"

Bella had a cruel grin on her face. "I wonder how you got that ring? I always knew you were the brilliant one when it came to obscure magic, but that doesn't explain how you got into the house and got the ring." She stepped closer to Wendy. "Now, I think you should prove your loyalty by giving me the ring."

Wendy had been considering her options. They were very limited. She had no idea how far she would have to go in order to Disapparate, and she was no longer entirely sure the ring would be able to stun everyone for her to escape. "There is some magic that interferes with the ring, some of the interference could be fatal. I know that it is safe for me to use the ring. My lord, the ring was only defending itself when you tried to remove it. I had no idea that would happen to you."

He almost believed her. "Then why would you try to run?"

"For protection, my lord. I know that your anger can be great, and I did not want you to react over a misunderstanding. I only desired time to be allowed to explain." She hoped that he would believe it. It sounded plausible to her.

"Now that we have that misunderstanding cleared up, hand me the ring."

Bella held her wand menacingly. "I can cut her hand off."

Wendy did not like the crazed glint in Bella's eyes. She knew that statement was not a joke. She momentarily considered activating her Portkey, but that would require her to use her wand, which was still tucked in her sleeve. Besides, she wasn't sure that would work either. At this point, she could either try to flee which would undoubtedly lead to horrible torture if she were captured, which was very likely or she could continue lying. "My lord, if I could give it to you, I would, but I can feel the ring melding with me. I'm not sure I can remove it."

Voldemort turned his attention to Bella. "Is what she says true?"

"I-I don't know. We were never allowed to touch the ring. My aunt was very proud of it. We could hear her telling visitors about it, but it was kept locked in the library." She turned her attention back to Wendy. "How did you get that ring anyway?"

"Come now, Bella. You know there were very few magical wards that could keep me out. I already knew how to break into the library. It wasn't that hard to figure out how to get the ring out of the case."

"When did you do this?" She had already tried to get into the Black house, but found it was unplottable.

"Oh, some time back. I forget exactly when. I'm really surprised that your family never turned over the ring, given the fact they openly supported the cause." She was trying to deflect attention away from her.

"Enough!" shouted Voldemort. "We have plenty of time to figure out how to get the ring off since Wendy will be our guest."

Wendy tried to control her fear. "Of course, my lord. Though if I might suggest, I have numerous books at my house that could provide more information about the ring. Perhaps one could be helpful in determining how to remove it."

Lucius stepped forward. "I would advise against that. During the attack, her mask came off and it is highly probable she was recognized. I would not be surprised if Aurors were waiting at her house."

"I can Apparate directly inside. My house is protected against intruders. I doubt that even the Aurors could break through my protection," she had hoped that Lucius would have remained silent.

"That is not a risk I am willing to take. We will wait. After a week or so, they will conclude that you are not returning and turn their attention to something more important," Voldemort replied.

"Of course, my lord," she replied meekly. This was not turning out at all like she had anticipated. And with the news that their current location was warded against transportation spells, she wondered if the others would mount a rescue.

Chapter 25

Chapter 25 of 27

Voldemort is back and the Order of the Phoenix is reforming. They need new members and Kingsley recruits one of his fellow Aurors - even though she is a Slytherin. Assigned to work with Remus Lupin, things get very tense. Set during 'Order of the Phoenix'.

Chapter 25

Remus and the others returned to Grimmauld Place after the raid. Remus headed straight to the kitchen and the maps. "Here, Alastor. This is where she is."

"And she's still there?"

"Yes, she hasn't moved."

Moody tapped the map and expanded the image. The image was very blurry and could only be vaguely identified as a building. Any details were completely obscured. Moody spent several minutes casting spells, trying to clear up the image to no avail. "That place is protected by powerful magic. Once Kingsley gets back, he and I will go investigate."

"I'm coming with you," Remus insisted.

"I don't think that would be best. You're too emotional about this. We need to see what we are facing and come up with a plan of attack. When we go in, I'll make sure you are there, but not for the scouting mission."

Remus opened his mouth to continue to argue, but Arthur placed a hand on his shoulder and spoke first. "Alastor's right. I know that I would want to go if Molly was the one being held prisoner, but you are too close. Alastor and Kingsley can be more objective. Besides, they're trained for that sort of work. You know we will only get one chance at this."

Remus let his head fall to his chest. "I know. I just hate feeling so helpless. I should have done more to stop her from going."

Arthur replied, "You did all you could. She has to make her own decisions. We don't even know that she is in danger. Last you said, it sounded like they still trusted her."

"Of course. I just don't like the idea of her being around them." *Especiallly Malfoy*, he added silent. Only Sirius knew about that danger.

"None of us do, but we all agreed it was necessary," offered Moody.

Bella shoved Wendy out of the room. Once they were down the hall, Bella whispered harshly, "I don't believe a word you are saying."

"Come now. Surely you trust me? We were very close friends once." Wendy really didn't like the idea of being alone with Bella. Between her complete embrasure of the Dark Lord's philosophy and her years of incarceration, she was no longer the woman Wendy had known.

"That's why I don't trust you. I know how conniving you can be." Bella had her wand pointed at Wendy.

"Do you really think I could lie to the Dark Lord?"

Bella pushed her wand against Wendy's neck. "That's what I intend to find out."

Wendy did not like the cruel grin on Bella's face. "What are you going to do?"

Bella gestured for her to go into a room on the left. Wendy had no choice but to comply. Once inside, Bella placed a silencing charm on the room. "I don't want my dear brother-in-law coming to your rescue."

"Is that what this is about?" After Lucius had announced his engagement to Narcissa, he and Wendy had been very discreet. No one should have suspected anything between the two of them, and that was years ago. She had been virtually absent from society in the intervening years, and they had both been discreet since New Year's.

"It's about a lot more than that, but that is part of it. I won't see my sister hurt. Not again. Now, it's time for you to answer a few questions. Are you loyal to the Dark Lord?"

"Completely, but I've already..." Wendy doubled over and cried out in pain as she was hit with the Cruciatus Curse.

"Yes, you did answer, but I don't believe you. Would you kill for him? Look at me!" Bella shouted.

Wendy could feel the pain dissipate and looked up at Bella. "I would." *And I'll start with you.* She fell to her knees as she was hit again with the curse. Drawing on the strength of ring, she tried to throw off the curse. While the pain did not go away, it diminished until it was merely uncomfortable, though she still pretended that she was feeling the full effect of the curse. "Do you want me to prove it?" she panted, feigning pain.

"It was very convenient that members of the Order arrived just in time to keep you from having to prove it. How did they know where to find us?" With a flick of her wrist, she hit Wendy with another round of Cruciatus.

By now, Wendy was writhing on the floor, crying out, hoping she was not overacting. "I... don't... know."

Arthur and Molly stayed with Remus while they waited for Moody and Kingsley to return. Neither one of them said anything when he couldn't sit still and kept getting up to pace. Sirius had also long since given up on trying to cheer his friend up.

Remus tried to push down the guilt he felt. He knew that he should have stopped her from going to Malfoy's in the first place, before it got out of hand. If he had stopped her from going, this never would have happened. She had told him to stop her from doing stupid things and once again, he had let her do what she wanted.

"Remus, it's not your fault," offered Arthur upon seeing Remus' distress.

"But it is. I knew she was acting odd, and I didn't do anything about it. I mentioned it to Albus and he offered help, but I declined. I knew that she hasn't been right since she was injured. I just didn't think it was this bad." He ran his hand through his hair.

Molly crossed the room and gave Remus a hug. "You had no way of knowing."

He reluctantly returned her hug. "Thank you, Molly, but I did." He realized they didn't know about the ring and wouldn't understand. "I can't really explain it, but I should have realized she was in trouble."

They all looked toward the hall when they heard the door open. Remus did not like the look on Kingsley and Moody's faces. "Well?"

Kingsley shook his head. "We couldn't get close."

"That building is protected by some powerful Dark Magic. Any work that we could have done to get closer would have resulted in alarms being set off," added Moody.

"Is there any way we could move quickly and push our way in? I know exactly where she is."

Kingsley placed his hand on Remus' shoulder. "I wish we could. We could get together an entire squad of Aurors and it would still take too long to get to the house."

"So that's it? We're just going to leave her to the Death Eaters?"

"Remus, be practical. You say she's still alive. That means they don't suspect she's on our side. If they believe in her loyalty now, that's not likely to change. I know her and I know that she will be biding her time until she can escape. If they did suspect her, odds are she wouldn't be alive right now."

Remus found this statement of little comfort and tried to storm out of the room. Moody caught his arm. "Don't do anything foolish and get yourself captured. If you go near that house, you won't be doing her any good."

Remus whispered harshly, "You don't understand. She has the ring with her."

"The ring? You mean *that* ring?" Moody replied knowingly.

"Yes. We have to get her out of there before they discover it," Remus said urgently.

"I thought she destroyed that ring? That's what she reported."

Remus shook his head sadly. "No. She didn't trust the Unspeakables after what happened to Bode. I didn't know she had it with her when she left the first time. I figured it out the second time, but she refused to give it to me."

Sirius has moved closer. "She still has that ring and you knew?" he asked angrily.

"Sirius, please, not now," Remus replied.

"No, now is a good time. Did I not make it clear how *dangerous* that thing is. Did you think it was a joke?"

Remus shouted, "No, Sirius! I didn't. But given what's happened at the Ministry would it have been better off there? Do we know for certain the Unspeakables would have destroyed it? And then there would have been record of the ring's existence. Do you think this hasn't been bothering me all night?"

Kingsley tried to sooth Remus. "Calm down. No one is judging you. What's done is done and we can't change the past." Kingsley shot a warning look at Sirius.

Sirius stalked out of the room.

Moody rubbed his chin, considering the new information. "We'll have to talk to Dumbledore about this. He should know that the ring might fall into the wrong hands."

"That's it?" He was shocked that they would not mount a full rescue in light of this information that the ring was in a Death Eater stronghold.

"Remus, you have to be patient," said Kingsley. "You didn't do anything wrong. She's always been sneaky and somewhat unpredictable. Just wait until we hear more from Dumbledore. He may have some ideas that haven't occurred to us."

"I'm going home to see if I can find anything in her library." He refused to sit here and do nothing.

The door slammed open and Lucius was outlined in the doorway. "What's going on here?"

"A loyalty test," replied Bella off-handedly.

Wendy curled up in a ball and started crying, and Lucius hurried to her side. "Our master has already tested her loyalty, or do you doubt him?" he said as he glared at his sister-in-law.

"I know her, better than you, and I know better than to trust her implicitly. I'm not blinded by my hormones," she spat.

Lucius drew his wand. "Be careful who you insult." With his other hand, he pulled Wendy to him.

Bella sneered at him. "And you should keep in mind that we are all watched. I know things you would not want my sister to know."

He smiled wryly. "She knows that you have never liked me. I think you will find that she trusts me implicitly and would see your lies for what they are." He swept Wendy into his arms and carried her out of the room. Climbing the stairs, he took her a bedroom on the second floor that looked out of place given the general shabbiness of the residence. "I was preparing your room when I felt the magic. I should have known that she would do something like that." After setting her on the bed, he brushed the hair from her face and dried her tears with a handkerchief. "The pain will soon pass."

Wendy nodded, and hiccupped, as though she were trying to control her tears. She desperately hoped that he would leave her to recover and not insist on staying with her.

He took her shoes off and then poured a drink for her. "This will help. Your muscles need to relax. That will not be your usual treatment. I will speak to the Dark Lord about her behavior."

She reluctantly accepted the drink. The last thing she was wanted was anything that dulled her senses. She didn't like the fact that Bella was already suspicious. If Bella could get anyone else to share her suspicions, things could quickly become dangerous for Wendy.

"Let me stay with you for a few hours, make sure you're all right," he said warmly.

She smiled weakly at him. "I'm fine, Lucius. Well, I will be. I think I just need some rest."

He snuggled against her. "I'll keep you safe. I won't let her hurt you anymore."

Wendy closed her eyes and fought the urge to hex him. She knew that she had to play along until she was trusted enough to be released. "Really, that's not necessary. You should probably get home in case Bella decides to carry through with her threat. We should be cautious around her since she already suspects something."

He continued to nuzzle against her. "I think you might be right. I'll come back this afternoon and see how you are feeling. By then your strength should have recovered."

"I look forward to it," she said in mock anticipation. Once he was gone, she got up and began pacing the room. She was not sure how long she could keep lying. Hopefully she would not have to face the Dark Lord any time soon.

Remus shoved a stack of books across the table. There was so much information and so much of it useless. He had even looked in some of the books she kept hidden and could not find anything that would easily help him find his way through the security wards. He was no good at the Dark Arts, at least nowhere near as good as those who had protected that house.

He contemplated going and scouting the area himself, but he reasoned that if two Aurors couldn't find a way in, he was not going to do any better. He hated feeling helpless. The last time he had felt this way, he had lost his best friends.

Deciding doing anything was better than doing nothing, he retrieved her Invisibility Cloak and decided to pay a visit to the one person that could provide any sort of help, Severus Snape.

When Remus arrived, he couldn't find Severus. The labs were all deserted, and Severus was not answering the door to his private quarters. Rather than wandering the castle looking for the Potions Master, Remus decided to wait. It was much less likely he would be discovered down in the dungeons.

He was dozing off when he heard Severus' sharp voice. "Show yourself. I know you're down here, Potter."

Remus left the cloak on, but replied, "It's not Harry; it's Remus."

"Lupin? What are you doing here?" Severus quickly unlocked his door and left it open for Remus to follow.

Remus closed the door and doffed the cloak. "You are the only one that can help."

"It isn't enough that I brew your potion for you?" Severus said snidely.

"Wendy is in over her head." He gave a brief description of how she ended up in her current predicament. "None of us can get close to her, and they aren't letting her leave. It's imperative that something be done to get her away from the Death Eaters."

"Isn't this what you all wanted? You wanted another spy in the Death Eaters since it is hard for me to get away from the school, didn't you?" Severus asked pointedly.

"Severus, she isn't herself. I know the two of you argued about the potion to cure her. I think that perhaps she is not totally cured. Since you are also trusted by the Death Eaters, I thought that perhaps you could do something to expedite her release, get them to believe that she's loyal and doesn't need to be held prisoner."

"Worried? She is Slytherin. There is little for you to worry about," Severus replied off handedly. To advocate for Wendy might lead to him blowing his cover.

"I don't think that's the case," Remus insisted. "She's been acting very irrational. I think she may be in serious danger." He looked around the room nervously.

"I assure you, no one is eavesdropping," replied Severus dryly.

Even so, Remus whispered, "She was wearing the ring."

That got Severus' attention, and he sat forward in his chair. *The ring?*

"There isn't any other."

"I will see what I can do. I will make no promises. The Dark Lord is not one who acquiesces to the wishes of others."

"I understand. Just do what you can to let her get free."

Severus chuckled softly. "Now you see why you should not form emotional attachments to others. I will do what I can. You should leave since the sun will be rising soon."

Remus wanted to argue with Severus that it was not wrong to care for others, but he knew he should leave before the sun rose. "Thank you, Severus," he said before

throwing the cloak over his head and slipping out the door.

To say Wendy was suffering from cabin fever was an understatement. Over the last three days, the only person she had seen was Lucius, far more of him than she would have preferred. She began to wonder if he had any sort of professional commitments at all. Her attempts at getting him to spend less time with her on the grounds that Bella might tell Narcissa were met with ridicule. It turned out the Dark Lord had sent Bella away to research the ring.

He had tried to make her stay more comfortable and less prison like. One of the things he had done was to provide her with clothing. Unfortunately, this was not the type of clothing that she would be wearing outside of the bedroom. She thought he was doing it to discourage her from wandering around the house. It would have taken more than clothing to discourage her curiosity. In fact, all it had taken had been the Dark Lord's snake. She had never been fond of snakes, especially ones that large. To further encourage her to stay in her room, Wormtail was staying at the house, and she did not like the looks he gave her. She couldn't understand why the Dark Lord kept him around. She was tempted to hex him and face the consequences.

The only good thing that had happened was that she had not been forced to speak with the Dark Lord again. She was not sure how long she could maintain the charade around a wizard that powerful. A part of her now understood why so many of those she had grown up with had chosen to follow him. There was something about his presence that compelled obedience.

Her door slammed open and Bella sauntered in. "Show me the ring," she commanded.

Wendy waved her fingers. "Here it is." Bella grabbed her hand and twisted it. The pain brought anger and Wendy could feel the power building in the ring. "You take your life into your hands if you try to remove that ring."

"I'm not trying to remove it, whore," Bella said sharply.

Power exploded from the ring, sending Bella into the wall. "What did you call me?" Wendy asked angrily.

"You know what I called you. It's what you have always been." Bella had struggled to her feet and drawn her wand.

Wendy had no need to waste time drawing her wand. "You were always the bigger whore. I've heard how you fawn all over the Dark Lord, ignoring Rodolphus. And what of Rabastan? We all knew you preferred him, but only married Rodolphus because he was the older son."

Bella launched a hex at Wendy, which Wendy easily deflected. Wendy chuckled cruelly. "It seems you aren't as powerful as you think."

"I can still cast Unforgivables, can you?" Bella sneered.

Wendy jerked back as the Cruciatu Curse hit her. Not caring that she was giving away the ring's power, she broke free of the curse and raised her hand at Bella. "Oh, yes. I most certainly can. You should know that." She stepped closer to Bella, who was now writhing on the floor and crying out in pain. Wendy twisted her wrist and the cries were silenced. "I can do so much more," she whispered quietly. She released Bella when she heard someone coming up the stairs. "Should I take the memory from you? Or better yet, I'll make it so you can't speak of it."

Once again, Bella was thrown back against the wall. She was just struggling to her feet when there was a knock at Wendy's door. Wendy was perplexed; Lucius never knocked, and it was too soon for Wormtail to be bringing her food. "Come in," she replied, curious to see who her visitor was.

Severus arched an eyebrow when he saw Bella eyeing Wendy vindictively.

"What do you want, Snape?" Bellatrix asked sharply.

"I do not have to share my business here with you." He stood stoically by the door, waiting for her to leave.

Bella glared at both of them before leaving.

"What was she doing here?" he asked.

Wendy sneered. "Getting what she deserved. What are you doing here?"

"I could ask you the same thing." With a quick wave of his wand he placed a Silencing Charm on the room. "Imagine my surprise when I found the werewolf at my door pleading for me to help you escape." He gave her scanty attire an appraising glance.

"And?" she asked impatiently, ignoring the look he was giving her, acting like entertaining a guest while in lingerie was normal.

He pulled two vials from his robes. "Drink these. You will need them."

"What are they?" she asked curiously.

"Drink first. I don't have long."

Wendy drank the two potions. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm doing my best to help you find a way out. I haven't worked out the details yet, but you will need the potions I have given you. I see the ring has revealed itself," Severus said, noticing the lamplight glinting off the ring.

Wendy used her left hand to shield the ring from view. "What of it?"

"I had not expected you to still have it," he replied knowingly.

Further conversation was disturbed by another knock at the door. Almost immediately, Wormtail opened the door. "Master commands you to report to him," he said to Severus. After Severus left, he stared at Wendy until she shot him a murderous glare.

Report? What did Severus have to report? Now she became concerned about what Severus had given her. She did trust him, but this situation kept getting worse and worse.

Remus hadn't left the house since his visit to Hogwarts. He had hardly ate or slept. Cappa had been trying to get him to take better care of himself, but he had ignored the elf's pleas. He was trying to find information on how he could get through the protective wards to rescue Wendy.

He looked up when he heard Tonks address him. "Remus, you look like hell." She moved closer, taking in the full effect of his unkempt appearance. "Whew! Smell like it, too. When's the last time you took a break?"

"I don't know. What day is it?"

"Why don't you go get cleaned up, mate? Then we'll talk over dinner," Tonks prompted.

He perked up. "You have news?"

"Yeah, but you need to clean up before I tell you anything." He hurried out of the room, calling for Cappa to serve dinner.

When he joined Tonks in the dining room, he was clean, though he had not taken the time to shave. "What do you have?"

"We received a report from Severus. He's seen Wendy and says that she's doing fine. She's still in possession of the ring."

"Did he say anything about getting her out?" Remus asked anxiously.

"He's doing what he can. Obviously, You-Know-Who is very interested in the ring and is keeping her close to him..."

"Well, if that's where he is, we should attack him now."

"If you would listen to the whole report, you would see that's not possible. Severus confirmed what Kingsley and Mad-Eye learned about the protections. There's no way for any of us to get past them. You need to have the Dark Mark. Unfortunately, that keeps her from getting out."

"Unless she takes the Mark," he added quietly.

"I don't think we need to worry about that. Severus said that she wants to get out of there. Unfortunately, we just have to wait."

He poked at his food, finding his appetite once again waning. It was close enough to the full moon that he was getting quite moody. "I don't want to wait. I know that Malfoy is with her." He squeezed his fork until his knuckles were white.

"Remus, she loves you. I'm sure she'll get out of there as soon as she can. We've talked about it, but none of us can figure out how to get in there, not even with Severus' help. Oh, he did say he gave her a potion that should make her better. He said you'd know what that meant."

"He did?" Remus was beginning to think that Severus was being non-cooperative on purpose, though deep down he knew how important it was for Severus to maintain his cover.

"Yeah, well, thanks for the meal, but I've got to run. You'll be all right for full moon, won't you?" She knew that Wendy had taken over the duties of brewing the Wolfsbane Potion after Umbridge began keeping a closer eye on the staff.

Remus nodded. "I'll be fine. Severus is brewing my potion and Cappa will see that I'm locked safely away. Thanks for coming by."

"No problem. Take care of yourself, okay?"

He held out a small amount of hope. Severus was still on their side and had access to Wendy. The fact that he had given her a potion to make her better heartened him. He still hated not being able to do anything to help free her, well nothing directly.

When Lucius returned the following day, she asked, "Is there any chance I could get out of here?"

"The Dark Lord is reluctant to let the ring out of his grasp. While he does trust you, the Aurors are still looking for you. Word did get out that you were with a group of Death Eaters. I'm afraid you're a bit of a fugitive right now."

Wendy saw through this thinly veiled lie. "So is Bella, and she doesn't have to stay here," Wendy said defensively.

"True, but you are their number one priority right now. Seems you've risen above Dumbledore on the most wanted list. Narcissa is planning a trip to Paris in the next few days. I will speak with him about allowing you some time at my manor. You would be safe there."

Not from you, she longed to add. "Of course. That would be greatly appreciated."

He wrapped his arms around her. "Now, then. I have about an hour before anyone expects me back."

"Only an hour?" she tried to sound disappointed.

His hands roamed her body. "I know. It's a despicably short period of time. I promise to make the most of it."

She played with his lapels. "I was thinking, I know that I can't openly court anyone right now, but victory is coming soon and I really should make a choice between Andrew and Simon. It would give me something to do in the evening other than keeping Wormtail away with dirty looks."

"Does he really try to get to you?" he asked, implying that he would take care of Wormtail if need be.

"Don't worry about him. The day I can't defend myself from Wormtail is a tough day indeed," she replied lightly/

"If he lays one hand on you, I will make sure to cut off his other one."

"That won't be necessary. He would be missing something much more important." She slid her hands down his pants.

"You're squeezing a little tight," he replied in a strained voice.

"Am I?" she asked coyly. "Perhaps I can convince you to arrange a better situation for me?"

"How can I say no?" When she loosened her grip, he leaned down to kiss her. "You know I hate to share, but I know it is inevitable. Of course, the sooner you make your decision, the sooner I can have you back to myself. I'm sure you can arrange for whoever you choose to tire of you." Reasserting his dominance, he shoved her onto the bed and straddled her.

"Are you?"

He tore through the flimsy material of her nightgown. "You've already done it once. I somehow doubt you would have a problem doing it again. I will see what I can do to make your stay more pleasant..." He slipped his fingers into her warm folds.

She knew that he was using her, that he probably had no intention of doing anything to lessen her solitude. All she needed was to get to his manor. If she could make it that far, she could easily get away. "Tell me it will be over soon," she moaned.

"Very soon." He kissed her passionately before trailing kisses down her chest. "Tell me, what do you know about getting into the Department of Mysteries?"

She untied his hair and ran her hands through it. "Not much. They have the damned rotating room so you can't find anything unless you know the magic to reveal the markings. That's one thing I don't know." *So, they are interested in the Department of Mysteries? I was right in hiding the ring* Now all she had to do was get free and let the others know.

He quickly unfastened both her necklaces. "I don't want anything hiding your beauty."

Remus was heading down the basement for the approaching moon when he felt the change in the magic from the necklace. He could no longer feel Wendy. Fearing something horrible had happened, he ran back upstairs and Disapparated to her last known location. While Remus the man might not be able to get close to the manor, Remus the wolf might. There was no time for him to inform the others before he transformed.

Chapter 26

Chapter 26 of 27

Voldemort is back and the Order of the Phoenix is reforming. They need new members and Kingsley recruits one of his fellow Aurors - even though she is a Slytherin. Assigned to work with Remus Lupin, things get very tense. Set during 'Order of the Phoenix'.

Chapter 26

Remus Apparated near the house where Wendy was being held and immediately fell to the ground as the transformation began. He had hoped to arrive soon enough to detect some of the protective wards, but time had been against him.

When the transformation completed, a wolf stood on shaky legs where a man had been. After a few minutes, he felt strong enough to explore his surroundings and tested the air to see if anyone was nearby. Sensing no one, he tried to feel out for any of the magical wards. As he had expected, his magical senses were quite dull. He could tell that powerful magic had been used in the area, but nothing more specific.

Deciding to take his chances that his wolf form would prevent his detection, he loped toward the house. After five minutes, he gained confidence that his theory about being able to pass undetected as a wolf was valid. Surely, the Death Eaters would have come to investigate an intruder by now. And it seemed that an animal could not activate any of the destructive wards. His confidence bolstered, he picked up his pace and began running toward the house.

When he arrived at the house, he could see no lights; all the windows were blacked out. Even so, he moved cautiously around the outside of the building looking for a way in. He saw a window that was partially open. Standing on his hind legs, he could just nose the window further open. He hoped it was far enough that he could jump through quietly.

The room beyond was dark and quiet, but his wolf senses were perceptive enough to allow him to see and hear. The house was oddly quiet, so he carefully opened the door with his paw. Once he could get his snout through the crack, he sniffed the air. He caught Wendy's scent, but she wasn't on this floor. Further investigation of the air led him to conclude the ground floor was deserted.

Slipping through the door, he walked back and forth down the hall to determine which direction he should go based on where her scent got stronger. Deciding to go left, he quickly located the stairs. There was another strong scent mingled with hers, one that was almost familiar. He reasoned it must be Malfoy's, and a low growl rumbled in his throat.

Once at the top of the stairs, he tested the air trying to ascertain which room she was in. Before he could locate her by scent, he heard the squeaking of wood coming from a room on the right. He tried to push the door open, but found it closed. This door had a knob, which he could not operate.

Sniffing desperately at the door, he could tell they were both in there. Judging from the sounds and scents, they were having sex. Driven by anger, he lunged at the door.

Wendy had become detached from her current situation. She knew that she couldn't do anything to Lucius right now, or she risked incurring the Dark Lord's wrath. With her as his captive partner, his sexual urges had begun leaning somewhat toward the deviant side. She was desperate to find a way out. Before, he had been a tender and gentle lover; now, she found her hands tied to the headboard.

When they heard the thump at the door, they both stopped and looked. "Go away, Wormtail," Lucius growled. He was about to resume thrusting when there was another thump at the door. "She's mine!" he shouted at the door. Deciding to hex Wormtail, he rose from bed, picked up his wand and was walking toward the door when it splintered under the attack of a determined wolf.

Wendy cried out in surprise as something large and furry charged into the room. After a few seconds, she realized that it was Remus.

Lucius had dropped his wand and was trying to pry the wolf's jaw off his throat. The deep rumble of the growl filled the room.

"Don't kill him!" she shouted. With one quick yank, she broke the slat on the headboard, scrambled across the room, grabbed Lucius' wand, and freed her hands of the bonds. *If Remus got in, perhaps I can get out?*

Remus backed away, but did not stop growling. The fact that no one else arrived indicated they were the only ones in the house.

"Get dressed," Wendy ordered. She used his wand to transfigure his cloak into something more suitable for her. Once she was properly attired, she grabbed her necklaces off the table and summoned her wand. "Now, we're leaving."

Remus barked in protest, clearly not wanting Lucius to go with them.

"I need the Mark to leave. He happens to have one." She shoved Lucius out of the room.

"You're making a serious mistake," Lucius protested. He jumped as the wolf nipped at his heels.

"No, dear Lucius. It's you that have made the serious mistake. You will have to explain to your master how you lost him the ring. But I find I don't want to listen to you anymore." With a twist of her wrist, she silenced him. "Perhaps I can alter your memory to ensure the Dark Lord punishes you severely." Remus nudged against her, clearly displeased with her behavior.

Once they exited the house, Wendy stood very close to Lucius. "Now, guide us out of here. Know that I can use the ring to wreak havoc if you don't do so safely." She subjected him to a small round of Cruciatius to get his attention. Once again, Remus nudged her in disapproval.

After about fifteen minutes, she could tell that they were past the protective wards. Remus bounded about, trying to encourage her to leave.

She held her hand up in front of Lucius and gave him back his voice. "What should I do with you?"

"You're a blood traitor," he snarled.

She smiled proudly. "Of course I am. You were the one naïve enough to believe I was anything else. I will thank you for defending me from Bella. She could have blown my cover." Once again she submitted him to Cruciatius. This time she relished in the cries of pain it elicited as he fell to his knees. She only stopped when Remus barked at her. She grabbed Lucius' chin in a chokehold and forced him to look up at her. "Know this, Lucius, I used you and you never knew it. All you could think of was being with your precious lover." Before releasing him, she altered his memory so that he would not be able to reveal her duplicity and stunned him. The evidence would show that someone broke into the house and abducted her, and his memory would support that conclusion. While she would have enjoyed having him remember how she had betrayed him, she did not need the Death Eaters attacking her house.

Moving closer to Remus, she knelt down and pulled out her locket. "I don't know how Side-Along Apparition with you in this form would work." He put his paw on her hand, and she activated the Portkey.

Once they were back at home, Remus danced around in agitation. He wished he could communicate with her. He knew they had to leave. He ran back and forth between her and the door, hoping she understood.

Wendy sounded tired when she replied to his barking. "Let me shower first. I need to wash his stink off." As she climbed the stairs, Cappa appeared at her side. Before the elf could speak, she said, "Cappa, we won't be staying long. Please, pack a bag for us. I'm not sure when we'll be back."

"Yes, mistress," she replied before hurrying upstairs to carry out her mistress' wishes.

He followed her upstairs and curled up outside the door to the bath. The longer she took, the more likely they would come looking for her, even with her modifications to Lucius' memory.

After a five minutes, she emerged from the bath and quickly dressed in the clothes Cappa had left out for her. She then grabbed the bag and followed Remus downstairs. Once there, he stood on his hind legs and placed his paws on her shoulders. She took hold of his foreleg and Disapparated, knowing there was no other way for both of them leave without being seen.

Upon arrival at Grimmauld Place, his weight knocked her backwards. The weight of everything that had happened was weighing heavily upon her, and she was exhausted. She quickly looked around to make sure the street was deserted. Thankfully, it was. Picking up her bag, she moved as quickly as she could toward headquarters and unlocked the door.

Wendy dropped the bag and collapsed to the floor. Remus nudged her, but she didn't move. He started barking to get someone's attention. He succeeded in getting Mrs. Black's attention. Between the barking and the screaming, it wasn't long before Sirius, Moody and Tonks ran upstairs.

"What are you doing here?" Sirius asked Remus.

Remus bowed down next to Wendy and began whimpering.

Tonks knelt next to Wendy and heard quiet, incoherent mumbling. "She needs a Healer. She's conscious, but she's not here."

"We can't get her to a Healer. She's escaped from the Death Eaters, and they will be looking for her. Let's get her upstairs," Moody replied.

Sirius was about to pick her up when Remus whined and pawed at her hand. *The ring. It's the ring. Come on, Sirius. I know you have to recognize it.*

"Remus, back off," Sirius said as he shoved the wolf away. Sirius fell backwards when Remus growled at him. He saw that both Tonks and Moody had their wands at the ready.

Remus once again nudged at Wendy's hand.

Sirius couldn't understand his friend. "What's up with...?" He picked up Wendy's hand. "The ring! She still has the ring."

Remus barked triumphantly and moved away from Wendy.

Moody looked at the ring. "I'm going to send a message to Albus. He needs to know about this. Get her upstairs. Tonks, take a look at her and make sure she's not injured."

Remus followed them upstairs and refused to leave the room.

Wendy began thrashing in her sleep and mumbling. "No. Get off. Don't touch me."

Remus, still in his wolf form, found he could not restrain her and tried comfort her by lying next to her..

She screamed, "Get off!"

Remus found himself thrown across the room. She had used the ring against him. He crawled across the room and whimpered at the side of the bed. He looked up when he heard the door open.

"I came as soon as I heard." Albus asked with Tonks following in his wake.

Tonks frowned. "She's still not coherent. She passed out as soon as she got here."

Albus placed a comforting hand on Remus' wolf shoulders. "You should rest. There is nothing you can do for her like this."

Remus' ears drooped and whimpered. He feared he would lose her, that the ring's hold was too strong.

"It's the ring, isn't it?" Tonks asked quietly, knowing that's what Remus was thinking.

"It is," Albus replied sadly.

Tonks asked, "Can you help her? Supposedly, Severus gave her a potion to help her, but I didn't get any of the details on how it would help."

"I know what potion he gave her. Now, my friend, there is nothing you can do here right now. Go get some rest. I'll let you know when I have finished," Albus said, addressing Remus.

"Come on," Tonks nudged gently.

Remus started to leave, but glanced back at Albus and Wendy.

"It is really best if you don't see what I have to do," Albus replied as he waved Remus out of the room. Sirius was waiting outside to take Remus to his room.

Remus froze outside the closed door and made it clear he was not moving any further.

"Fine," Sirius said in exasperation. "You've had your potion; you're safe enough."

After a few hours vigil, Remus' ears perked up when he detected a change Wendy's scent; there was something wrong with it. She smelled ill.

He couldn't hear anything coming from the room. Clearly, a Silencing Charm must have been cast, but he didn't like the smell coming from the room. He started whimpering and pawing at the door. When that didn't get any response, he started barking.

"Bloody hell, Remus!" shouted Sirius as he descended the stairs. "Would you quit it? Dumbledore is still in there." Sirius tried to shove Remus back across the hall, but the wolf wouldn't budge and gave a low warning growl. "Fine, have it your way, but wait quietly." Sirius stomped back upstairs.

Remus lay down in front of the door determined to see Wendy as soon as Albus was finished.

Albus opened the door and was not at all surprised to see a wolf waiting for him. "Remus, come in."

Remus moved into the room and glanced at the bed.

Knowing what Remus was thinking, Albus replied, "She will recover. It will not be an easy recovery, but she will survive. The ring was taking control of her, changing her personality. I have done the best that I can." He regained his seat, feeling quite exhausted from removing the ring.

Remus put his head on Albus' lap, thanking the old man for what he had done to help Wendy.

"I will take the ring and find a way to destroy it." He absentmindedly petted Remus. "I cannot say when she will wake. She was wearing the ring for nearly a week and there is evidence she was using it. The more it is used, the more it changes the wearer."

Remus whimpered and crawled into bed with Wendy, curling up next to her. He gently licked her face, hoping for any sort of reaction, but he was disappointed.

"It will take time, my friend," Albus replied sadly before leaving the room.

When Wendy woke, she wasn't sure where she was. She was in a musty old house and started to panic, thinking she was back at the Dark Lord's hideout and that she would soon have to face Lucius again. When she tried to get up, she discovered that someone's arm was wrapped around her and started to panic.

"Wendy? Wendy, you're safe. It's Remus," he said as he realized she was awake. With a wave of his hand, he lit the lamps so she could see him.

"Remus?" She reached out to touch him to make sure he was real. "You look horrible."

He leaned into her touch and covered her hand with his. "I've been worried about you and have hardly left your side."

From his appearance, she thought she must have been unconscious for some time. His hair was quite a bit longer than what she remembered and he had a beard. She carefully felt his beard. "How long?"

"It's been two weeks since I rescued you." He could feel her playing with his beard. "I'll shave it off." He had not taken much time for himself while she was unconscious.

She smiled at him. "I kind of like it." She began to process what he had said. "You came for me?"

He lay next to her and wrapped her protectively in his arms. "I will always come for you. How do you feel?"

"Weak, sore, I don't know. What happened?" She was confused. Her memories were a jumbled mess.

"Are you sure you want to hear that?" he asked cautiously.

"Why?" She didn't like the tone of his voice.

"Well, you did a lot of mumbling while you were unconscious. I think you were remembering things that happened then. You... did some things you might regret." He gently stroked her hair, not really wanting to upset her. "Would you like to walk around a bit?"

"Maybe a little and then it would be heavenly if I could take a soak."

He kissed her softly and replied, "I could arrange that for you. Why don't we go get something to eat?" After helping her to her feet, he found that she had to lean heavily on him for support.

She was exhausted by the time they made it to the kitchen. "Nothing fancy, if you please."

"Of course." He quickly made a couple of sandwiches for the two of them.

"What's been happening while I've been out?" she asked.

"Not much. Cappa reported that Malfoy did come by your house, but she couldn't tell him anything." He couldn't really tell her too much more since he had been with her most of the time. "Are you ready for that bath?" he asked when he saw that she was finished eating.

"Looking forward to it," she replied.

She was so exhausted when they reached the first floor, that he picked her up and carried her the rest of the way. "Where's Sirius?" she asked.

"He's been spending a lot of time with Buckbeak." Once her bath was drawn, he helped her into the tub. "Did you need me to stay with you?"

"Afraid I'll fall asleep?" she asked playfully.

He stroked her hair and looked into her eyes. "Actually, yes, I am." He took a seat on the toilet lid. He didn't want to risk losing her to a silly accident after all they had been through.

"If it will make you feel better, you can stay." She noticed he was watching her with a pained expression. "What?"

He knelt beside the tub and took her hand in his. "I was afraid I had lost you. We had no idea how we were going to get you back." He then launched into what had prompted his rescue.

As he recapped her rescue, the memories started flooding to the surface. She started crying.

"Wendy?" Remus asked cautiously.

"Oh, Remus, it was horrible. I've been horrible." She disintegrated into tears.

He helped her out of the tub, dried her with a wave of his wand, and wrapped her in her bathrobe. "It wasn't your fault, darling," he reassured as he led her to the bed. All he could do was hold her while she cried. He knew Albus had said it would be a difficult recovery, and it might take a long time before she was once again herself, but he was willing to wait.

"How can you forgive me?" she whispered after several minutes.

He kissed the top of her head and continued to hold her tight. "Because I love you."

She clung to him desperately, gaining strength from his presence.

Epilogue

Chapter 27 of 27

Voldemort is back and the Order of the Phoenix is reforming. They need new members and Kingsley recruits one of his fellow Aurors - even though she is a Slytherin. Assigned to work with Remus Lupin, things get very tense. Set during 'Order of the Phoenix'.

Epilogue

Wendy woke and wasn't immediately sure why. She was alone, which was odd since Remus had hardly left her side after she regained consciousness. It was dark outside and had the feeling of being quite late. She heard a sound and jumped out of bed. Fear clenching her heart, she fumbled for her slippers before summoning her wand. Cautiously, she moved out into the hall, searching for the source of the sound. The rational part of her mind knew that only members of the Order could get into the house, but the irrational part of her mind feared the Death Eaters had found her. She couldn't stand the thought of being trapped with Lucius again.

The noise was coming from downstairs, and it sounded like some sort of strange laughter. She rushed downstairs, wand at the ready. "Albus? What are you doing here?" she asked, relieved that it was just Albus. Strangely, it was Kreacher that was producing the laughter.

"Ah, Wendy, good to see you. Where are the others?" he asked.

"I don't know. I just woke up." She found it odd that Albus wouldn't know where everyone was. If they were all gone, they were likely on Order business.

"No matter. Kreacher will tell us."

Kreacher continued his maniacal laughing. "I don't have to tell you nothing. You isn't my master."

Wendy watched Dumbledore continue to question Kreacher, drawing out the answers in a most elegant manner. She was in awe of his skills as a Legilimens. When he was finished questioning Kreacher and rose to leave, she followed.

"Wendy, I need you to stay here," he said gently.

"I want to help. Remus might be in trouble," she insisted.

He placed a comforting hand on her shoulder. "You aren't ready to face them."

"I want to help," she repeated quietly, fighting back the tears.

Gently wiping the tear from her cheek, he said softly, "When you are recovered, you will be ready to help. It's not safe for you to be there. You still have nightmares, don't you?"

She looked away from him, closed her eyes, and bit her lower lip to stem the flow of tears. "I'm a trained Auror. Fighting Dark Wizards is what I do," she insisted, though her voice lacked conviction.

"Another day, Wendy. You would be no help to them tonight." He then slipped out the door, leaving her alone.

She heard Kreacher cackling behind her and spun on him. "Shut up!" she shouted.

"Oh, the blood traitor isn't allowed to play and now she gives Kreacher an order. The mistress would be so disappointed." He wandered off, his laughter echoing in the empty house.

Wendy decided to ignore Albus and ran upstairs to dress. Once she was ready, she ran back downstairs and tried to open the front door. She found the door wouldn't open for her. After trying every locking spell she could remember, she gave up and went upstairs.

Hours passed and still no one returned. Wendy grew quite nervous. She jumped out of her skin when an unfamiliar voice called from behind her, "You! Where is Sirius Black?"

She spun towards the voice, wand at the ready, and saw it was a portrait. Since she knew her history, she recognized him. Of course, any Slytherin would have known him. "Headmaster Nigellus?"

He replied sarcastically, "Wonderful. You know who I am. Where. Is. Black?"

"He's not here, hasn't been here for hours. He and a group of the others went to the Ministry. Has Dumbledore returned to Hogwarts? How are the others?" She watched as Phineas disappeared through the paintings without answering.

She paced nervously. Apparently, Albus was back at Hogwarts. That meant the battle had to be over. When she heard the door open, she ran downstairs. She saw Remus standing in the doorway in a state of shock. Throwing her arms around him, she asked, "How are you?"

He held her tightly, as though his life depended on it. "He's gone," he replied quietly.

"Who's gone?" she asked gently, sensing something was wrong.

"Sirius. They are all gone. James... Lily... Now Sirius... I'm the last."

She could feel him crying and held him tight. "I'm here for you."

He pulled back just far enough to lean his forehead against hers. "He just fell... Right through the Veil." He kissed her, wanting to feel alive.

"Should I put the kettle on?" she asked as she led him downstairs. He didn't say anything, but didn't fight against her. Once tea was served, she placed a cup in front of him. "What happened?" she asked cautiously.

He recapped the battle for her and took comfort from her presence. "With Malfoy captured, you should be in little danger. I think it will be safe there."

She could tell that he didn't really want to stay at Grimmauld Place. "What about the house here?" She was curious as to what its disposition would be.

"It's Harry's now. I'm sure Albus will talk to him about it. It's still protected by Fidelius."

"We can pack up and head home whenever you're ready," she said as she placed her hand on his.

After a few moments of silence, he blurted out, "I don't want to wait any longer."

"For what?" She had no idea what he was talking about.

"To get married. Time is finite and we never know when our time will come." He cupped her cheek.

She looked into his eyes and could see that he was very serious. "Of course. I love you and want to be with you. Let's make the arrangements after we are done here."

He pulled her to her feet and embraced her tightly. "Thank you. Do you know how much I love you?"

"I'm here for you," she replied. "I love you more than I've ever loved anyone. We'll be all right."

"We will," he replied with conviction.

~Fin~

A/N: Thank you very much to all who stuck with this story. I know that Remus is not the most popular character and doing an OC pairing is always taking a risk. Rereading this makes me sad that JKR decided to kill him off. I prefer to live in my own little world where he survived and went on to champion rights for werewolves and rebuild the wizarding world to a better place for his son.