

# At This Juncture

by stgulik

It's the moment of truth for Remus.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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***"To burn with desire and keep quiet about it is the greatest punishment we can bring on ourselves."***— Federico García Lorca, *Blood Wedding* and *Yerma*

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Remus reached across the restaurant table and gently took hold of Hermione's hand.

"All right, one more time." He laid the red chopstick across her palm. "The bottom stick is held like so. Keep it steady. Then you place the second stick here ... and hold it with your fingertips, like this." He lingered a moment, tracing the soft flesh where her thumb and finger met. Her hand lay curled in his, a bird with a long, delicate beak.

Absorbed, she bent her fingers until the chopsticks touched. She flexed experimentally. "All right, I think I have it."

"Now the true test." He slid his hand away, nodded and gestured. She picked up her bowl the way he had showed her, *thăm sum* laid atop a snowy mound of rice. He watched not her hand, but her eyes, so it took a moment to interpret her impish look of triumph—she had simply skewered the dumpling with both sticks.

"Success," she proclaimed, taking a healthy bite.

He laughed and sat back. "Don't try that in China – it's considered bad manners," he teased.

"I can imagine," she replied after swallowing. "How long did you live there?"

"Oh, eight months, I think. Mainly stayed in Hong Kong, working odd jobs where I could, and then I ventured out into the rural provinces."

"Did you miss England at all?"

He concentrated on his own bowl. "I missed some things," he replied smoothly. "Mattresses with springs. Honeyduke's chocolate. Apothecaries with potions I recognize. That sort of thing."

"And any ... people?"

He caught the tone in her voice, and his eyes quickly raised to hers. Her eyes did not dart away, but held his gaze for a lingering moment.

Here, at last, was his opening, the chance to say what had been on the tip of his tongue all night. He could finally bridge the space between them. He felt sure she was waiting.

But over her shoulder, in the window behind their booth, the waxing moon showed its face like a hateful maitre d' not at all sorry to intrude on an intimate moment. The moon: his first enemy, his eternal burden, his constant companion throughout his travels after the war. Already he could feel its intrusive power, coiled inside him, primed to take over sinew, muscle, bones, and will.

No woman should have to intersect her life with his. He would never make that mistake again, not even for her, Hermione, the woman who knew him so well; the woman he had loved, in some fashion or another, since her third year at school.

He took a deep breath. "Well, my son, of course," he replied. "My Teddy."

She dropped her eyes. "Naturally," she agreed, laying aside the chopsticks. As she picked up her fork, Remus hitched up his most convincing smile and asked about work.