

Snow Turns The World Deaf

by TeddyRadiator

Severus has always believed that, if you love someone, you must promise them the moon, and deliver it. How do you wrestle that moon to the ground?

One

Chapter 1 of 8

Severus has always believed that, if you love someone, you must promise them the moon, and deliver it. How do you wrestle that moon to the ground?

*This fic is written for and dedicated to the marvelous **stgulik**, my beta, my friend, my editor, my partner. When she challenged me to write this story, I had no earthy idea what to write about, until my dear Muse Dahlra told me. In a sense, they are both my partners, encouraging and inspiring me.*

The characters in this story do not belong to me. They are the property of JK Rowling and Warner Brothers. I make no money from these stories.

Years of being the Head of House for a group of cunning, patronising, privileged youth had taught Severus Snape one important rule. At night, when the darkness blanketed everything, they were all the same: male, female, first or seventh year, pretty or ugly, rich or poor.

Night reduced everyone down to children, and many of those in his charge had either haunted his nights with urgent taps on his door, reeling from nightmares of their own tense home lives ('*Sir, Miranda Dovekeep has done it again!*') or earning his scorn by getting caught out in cold, dark corridors without permission, doing things best done in the confines of Slytherin's dungeons. ('*Blaylock, if you are going to spend your misbegotten youth with your hand down Leaderley's trousers, for sweet sucking sake, don't do it where you know you'll get caught. Mr. Filch is getting old, boy; his heart can only take so much.*')

Years of interrupted nights had conditioned Severus. He would awaken unbidden, almost before the knock sounded, his inner antennae calibrated to its highest sensitivity setting. At times, his sensors were so well attuned, he could almost predict the messenger's identity before he even opened his eyes.

In the years after Tom Riddle's return, sleep became an even more elusive lover. If his House members weren't waking him, his own dark hopelessness took up the slack. During those last years, right before the war and the end of Voldemort, Severus fancied that he never really slept at all; he just idled. Even now, with his Hogwarts teaching days long behind him, the slightest movement out of the ordinary had his body on the move before it even knew it was awake. The night was no respecter of house, sex or blood, which was why he often felt more at home in the dark than the light.

Tonight's interruption was just a dream, and not even his dream at that. The dream had made her call out softly, a low, mournful sound. He rolled onto his side, and looked into the face of his sleeping wife, and with the worst of things behind them, a measure of cautious calm stole into his heart. Her hair, like baby Devil's Snare, had finally grown back, and the tumble of curls around her heart-shaped face gave her the look of a naughty cherub sleeping off a night on the tiles. A faint line of worry creased the smooth skin between her brows, and he wished with all his magical ability to remove it.

She was the one thing in his life that he could call a blessing, and he cherished her more than anything else on this earth. For a man who had spent much of his life a hated, bitter enemy, he had somehow been given the chance to be a good husband to a wonderful witch, and the very sight of her made him want to be a better man.

Severus resisted the urge to caress her lovely face in case he woke her. It had been late when they had gone to bed, and she had been so tired. Even a year after both Muggle doctors and Mediwitches proclaimed her in top health, Hermione still tired more easily. The potions he brewed for her had gone a long way to restoring her stamina, but he was loath to risk anything that might cause a setback.

Even as he lay there, still and contemplating, her large amber eyes opened, and she took a deep, tired breath. "S everything okay?" she asked, still more asleep than awake.

"It's fine," he whispered. "Sleep, pet." With a soft sigh, she snuggled closer, and he enveloped her in his arms, so carved up with the love he felt for her, it threatened to stop his heart.

-oOo-

Severus Snape had been tenuously hanging on to life the day his former pupil blithely walked in and took it over. More out of a sense of obligation than anything else at first, she had visited him daily at St. Mungo's during his long, painful recuperation from his near-fatal meeting with Tom Riddle's familiar. In those first weeks, nearly demented with pain, heartsick with the knowledge he had survived when so many other good witches and wizards had not, he had treated her abominably.

She had been full of forced-cheery Gryffindor bravado at first. "Good morning, Professor! How are you feeling today?"

"What do you think, you silly fool? I feel like shite," he retorted, his voice ragged and pebbled from the venom damage. "Now kindly fuck off and let me enjoy my agony in peace."

The look of distress in her eyes didn't make him feel as vindicated as he'd hoped.

She left, but something told him that although he'd sent her packing today, tomorrow she would stand on the other side of his hospital room door, square her small shoulders, push the door open and brave him again. And that was exactly what she did.

Now he squirmed inwardly as he recalled the horrible things he'd said to her during those first few visits.

"Back again, Granger? What, all the other charity cases have their full quota of house-elves?"

"Gods, Granger, what are you wearing? Is Madam Malkin having her bi-annual prostitute sale early this year?"

"New perfume, Granger? I always did like garlic prawns."

"Go away, Granger. I don't want you here. I despised you as a student and I detest you now. You're too boring to converse with and too ugly to fuck."

She had the measure of him by the first week. Soon after, she just rolled her eyes at his insults. The last one made her laugh. No matter what he said, no matter how foul-tempered or cruel or insulting he was, she took it, gave it back, and kept returning. She was his only visitor besides the mediwitches, the Aurors, and Boy Potter, who had tried to give him his memories back. Severus flatly refused them. They had brought him grief enough trying to hold onto them; perhaps he could learn to make a different life for himself without them.

"Good morning, Professor! I've brought you a few things to read," she said, sailing in one morning, six months into his recuperation. She was wearing a red scarf and matching hat, and her cheeks were pink from the cold. She was glowing, fresh and pretty. She smelled like baking cookies. As Severus took in these things, a swift, unwanted desire swept over him; it was not so much a desire for her, he told himself, but for the normality she seemed to represent.

She is just a witch, he told himself. Years later, he would think back to that and laugh ruefully. There was nothing 'just a' about Hermione Granger.

Plunking down in the chair beside his bed, she did her daily ritual. She looked over him carefully, especially his face, and seemed to run through some internal checklist in her head. She pressed her tiny, cool hand against his forehead.

He grudgingly allowed the liberty. In the first month of his recovery, she'd noticed something out of the ordinary, called his mediwitch in, and they'd barely saved him from a dangerous relapse. Had she not been there, had she not noticed the sudden, rapid rise in his temperature, he would have died.

Strange that he had proceeded to fight so hard to overcome death when it came knocking this time, when only weeks before he had been ready to welcome any release from life.

Now, satisfied that nothing was amiss, Hermione sat back, produced a ball of eye-wateringly ugly purple yarn, and started knitting. "How are you today, Professor?"

He looked at what appeared to be some woolly horror oozing from her knitting needles. "Bored, sick of your irritating presence, vaguely horny." He leered at her with all the menace of a toothless tiger. "Care for a bunk up to get my heart started?"

She laughed. "Why, Professor Snape! I didn't know you had a heart."

"Ha bloody ha. Stop the presses." He peered closer at her so-called knitting. "Gods, what is that hideous thing?"

She beamed and held up her handiwork for him to see. "I'm knitting you a scarf, see? Healer Blyte says you might be able to go outdoors soon, and I wouldn't want you to catch cold. I'm going to make gloves to go with it as soon as I learn how."

Severus looked at his 'scarf' with a sense of dismay. It was the most uneven mess he'd ever seen. "I wouldn't bother, Granger. A blind Molly Weasley with Wizarding Palsy could make a better go of it. If that scarf is the only thing standing between me and pneumonia, I'll take my chances if it's all the same to you. Wearing that could cause death by humiliation."

It was the most words he'd strung together in days, and the first that hadn't insulted her physical shortcomings or requested her to fuck off. Suddenly she laughed, a pearly, sweet sound that was unaffected and endearing. "You must be feeling better. Your insults are becoming more inventive." Challengingly, she said, "I'll do you a deal, Professor. You let me walk you around in the fresh air, and I won't make you wear this hideous scarf."

Eventually he was on his feet, taking his first unsteady steps, hanging on to her when his legs grew shaky with sudden weariness, holding onto her shoulders when he grew too tired to go on. She was patient, and stubborn, and firm, and encouraging, and soon he was walking on his own.

The day he left St. Mungo's, he wore the purple scarf. Even wrapped several times around his thin neck, it still reached the ground. She never did find time to make the gloves. For that, he was fond of saying, he was very grateful.

Later, when Severus was placed under house arrest, Hermione came every day, bringing tempting dishes to entice him to eat, brewing Strengthening potions to help regain his stamina, and making sure reporters and gawkers left him alone. The *Daily Prophet* snapped a photo of her leaving his house early one morning and the public had a field day with the darling of the Golden Trio 'sneaking out of Snape's Spinner's End love nest.'

No one had bothered to discover that he'd been ill that day, and that she wouldn't leave him until his fever broke. Mundanities, Rita Skeeter declared in court, do not sell papers.

During his trial, Hermione had attended every day, and sat with him, holding his hand, daring Rita Skeeter and her ilk to harass him. By then, Severus was no longer deluding himself. He had fallen in love with Hermione Granger, and she with him, and he held onto her as fervently as she to him.

The night following his acquittal and subsequent awarding of the Order of Merlin, he took her back to Spinner's End, and they made love for the first time. It had been glorious. They were married six months later. He pestered her until she said yes.

Three years on, Severus and Hermione had made their peace with the Wizarding world, and had settled in relative obscurity in a little Muggle community south of Hogsmeade. They brewed mail-order potions, and Hermione was working on a commissioned edition of *Hogwarts: A History*. They loved one another with equal parts fire and honey, passion and tenderness. Severus cherished his wife very much, and she adored her husband. They had ignored the rumour mills, the well-meaning warnings of friends and colleagues, and had proven the nay-sayers wrong time and again. They were two people for whom loyalty and courage were as important to a marriage as desire and duty.

Soon they seriously discussed starting a family. Their business was strong, their reputations had swung the pendulum from notorious to stellar and back to normal, and they felt it was time. Life had turned out better than he would have ever expected, and Severus had thought his luck might be on the upswing.

That was when Hermione was diagnosed with cancer.

She had come home from her pre-pregnancy consultation with St. Mungo's shaking and terrified. The Healers were adamant: it had been caught in time, and they could eradicate it.

The treatment, though, would be aggressive and costly. Sitting in the uncomfortable chairs in Healer Blyte's office, Severus had glared at the young man and quietly said, "Don't worry about the money, Blyte. Concentrate on healing my wife. Do whatever it takes. Cost is no object."

Hermione had placed a hand on his arm. "But Severus..."

"No. Object, Hermione," he'd hissed, trying to stem the rising fear roiling in his gut. He fixed Blyte with a stare that would freeze water. "When can we start?"

They sold everything they could sell and still have a roof over their heads. Hermione put her foot down against selling some of his precious books, but he sold them anyway. She cried a little at that, but did not ask him to keep anything else. He ruthlessly flogged everything that wasn't nailed down, not caring. Hermione needed it more than he did.

It still wasn't enough.

So he had gone, cap in hand, to Lucius Malfoy, the only wizard he knew who had managed to keep any modicum of wealth, and called in his life debt for Draco. The Malfoys had contributed as much as they could, which was enough to start the first round of treatments.

Watching Hermione struggle each day was torture, especially as the days went by and the Malfoys' funds dwindled. The treatments were indeed aggressive, painful, and humiliating. Hermione's wild hair fell out. Severus kept it all in a small box, unable to part with it. She lost weight, she was sick. Every day brought small triumphs and setbacks in equal measure, but still, she all but wasted away.

Severus never left her side. He held her as she wept in misery and shame as basic functions failed and her body fought the treatments almost as much as the disease. He presented a brave, stoic face each day as the one important person in his life struggled and battled with her Muggle body. At night he wept alone, railing at his helplessness. Each morning, they saluted the day together, vowing to beat it, and each evening they congratulated one another on getting through it.

One morning, the mediwitches unceremoniously chivvied him out of her room so they could prepare Hermione for the second round of treatments. She had suffered through a particularly bad night and he hadn't wanted to leave her, but the cursed Healers had been adamant.

"Please try to get some rest, Mr. Snape," one of the officious hags had urged. "Mrs. Snape is in good hands. You don't want to tire yourself out when she needs you most, do you?"

Resigned, Severus had been aimlessly wandering the halls when a familiar voice called out, "Severus? Is that you?"

He turned and found himself face to face with Remus Lupin.

Two

Chapter 2 of 8

Severus has always believed that, if you love someone, you must promise them the moon, and deliver it. How do you wrestle that moon to the ground?

This chapter is dedicated to my mother, who nursed my father throughout his long, painful illness; and to my good friend, Irishredlass, whose brother lost his fight with cancer this past week.

Please note this story is not political; it is not a study on Privatized vs. Socialized medicine.

It is about all those caregivers who lovingly take care of their loved ones with unselfish, unconditional love, and sometimes have to make the hardest decisions on earth. This story is dedicated to them.

It is also written for stgulik, the best.

All my respect and love, Teddy.

Looking at his former schoolmate and colleague, Severus thought he actually looked a little better than the last time they had seen one another. Of course, Lupin had always looked like a man far older than his years, but admittedly, so did he.

He had always been pleasant, even friendly toward Severus in school. Of all the Mauraders, Remus had always been the one Severus could have befriended, had Sirius Black and James Potter not been in the picture.

Looking back, Severus realised Lupin had tried so hard to create a more stable friendship with Severus the year he taught at Hogwarts, but Severus' bitterness and

frustrations, as always, created a barrier none could cross. It never occurred to him that the man simply needed a friend.

"Lupin," Severus answered, evenly, too tired and heartsick to summon any real reaction. "What are you doing here?"

Lupin had smiled tiredly. "Wolfsbane. It's offered on the Wizarding Health Service now, so each month before the full moon I have to report to St Mungo's and receive my potion." He said it with the air of someone who has been told once too often how grateful they should be for the charity offered them. Severus could appreciate the resigned tone of his voice.

He and Hermione had heard through Potter that Lupin's marriage to Nymphadora had foundered in the years after the war, and she and their son now lived with her mother on the Channel Islands. Lupin was now working for the Ministry in their Magical Beings Liaison office, and was by all accounts well-respected in his field. Some even hinted that he was a likely candidate as Ambassador to the European Commission for the Advancement of Werewolves and Vampires.

"Their potion isn't a patch on yours, though," Lupin continued, his soft eyes respectful. "I don't know who brews for the WHS, but it doesn't have the strength and potency of the potion you used to brew for me."

Severus gave a slight bow at the compliment. "Perhaps I can have a word with them. I know the head of the department; they call on me from time to time for a bit of consultancy work."

Lupin nodded. "Ah. I was wondering why you were here."

Severus looked past Lupin. "My...my wife is here."

The vague self-pity was instantly wiped from Lupin's face and replaced with concern. "Hermione? Is anything the matter?"

Severus looked away, struggling against his emotions. Lupin had always held Hermione in high regard, and she had always equally admired Remus. Haltingly, he said, "She's ill... cancer... treatments..."

Five minutes later, he and Lupin were in a small waiting room, drinking the foulest coffee he'd ever ingested, as he haltingly spoke of her bravery through the worst of the illness. Remus was a good listener, nodding encouragingly, as Severus confessed aloud his greatest fear...that Lucius' money would not be enough to see Hermione through the treatments she needed.

Lupin's care-worn face had been taut with concern and compassion. At one point, he placed his hand on Severus' shoulder, and such was his distress that he didn't even hex the wolf for his liberty.

"Severus, I can't tell you how sorry I am," Lupin said kindly. Reassuringly, he added, "But I know Hermione. She's a very strong witch. She'll beat this. She has a lot to live for."

The compassion in his voice tore loose Severus' fear, and for the first time since they'd been told about the cancer, he felt panic overwhelm him. "I cannot lose her, Lupin," Severus choked out, his heart contracting. "She's the only part of my life that has worth. I don't care about myself, but I can't..." He swallowed and looked away. "I can't disappoint her. I have to find the means to keep the treatment going."

Lupin had sat quietly beside Severus as his fear and frustrations spent themselves. When Severus was able to pull himself together, Lupin said, "Severus, I know we haven't always seen eye to eye about many things, but please believe me when I say that if there is anything I can do to help you or Hermione, please call on me." He looked down at his shabby robes with a grimace. "I'm sorry I don't have the funds to give you myself."

Severus, feeling drained and foolish after his outburst, waved the man's comments away with an impatient hand. "Few people do." For Hermione's sake, he added, "But I appreciate the sentiment."

Lupin had looked at him strangely for a moment. "Actually Severus, I know the perfect solution for your problem."

"Explain."

Lupin told him, and Severus shook his head. "That would be my last resort."

"Don't be daft, man! He would give you the money in a heartbeat."

"I would think it obvious why I do not wish to be beholden to another bloody Potter. There has to be another way."

But none presented itself, so on the day the money ran out, Severus dressed in his best robes, and arrived five minutes early for his appointment with Harry Potter.

"Why the hell didn't you call on me in the first place, Snape?" said Potter angrily. "Did I really have to hear about it from Remus before you deigned to let me know one of my best friends was gravely ill?"

Gritting his teeth, Severus answered, "She requested that no one know. She did not wish to alarm her friends."

Potter shook his head and motioned Severus indoors. "What rubbish! That's what friends are for! Honestly, Snape, *Malfoy*?"

Feeling defensive, Severus pulled his cloak tighter around his best robes. "He owed me..."

"You don't always have to do everything on your own, Snape! When are you going to get it through your thick skull that when I say 'friends,' I'm including you?" He turned and looked at Severus with a mixture of pity and worry. "After we go to Gringotts, I'm coming to the hospital with you."

"That's hardly necessary..."

"That's where your wrong, Professor. No offence, but you look as bad as you did when we were at school. Hermione would have my dangly bits for her door knocker if she knew you were wearing yourself into the ground and I did nothing about it."

Severus tried to protest, but the boy stayed true to form and argued him down. "That's what friends do, Professor," he explained, pushing his glasses up his shiny nose. "Hermione's always been there for me; I'm returning the favour."

Moments later, Potter had Apparated them to Gringotts and handed Severus his key. Severus had taken one look into the vault and felt weak with relief. The boy had more money than Salazar Slytherin. "Take what you need," Boy Potter had said, looking at Severus with his mother's earnest green eyes. "It's about time it did something useful rather than sitting there gathering dust."

Even looking at more money than he'd ever seen in one place, Severus faced the boy and forced himself to say, "The treatment is quite expensive. Perhaps you should set up a line of credit..."

"Professor," Potter had interrupted, his face tense, "Stop being so bloody-minded. When I said 'take what you need', I meant it." He pointed to the key in Severus' hand. "That's yours to come and go with as you need. I just want Hermione to get well. I truly don't care if you empty the bloody vault. Gods, man, that's what it's there for!"

It had not taken all of the boy's gold to heal Hermione, but it had taken a lot of it. The silly fool had actually grown angry with Severus when he tried to breach the subject of

repaying him. *A Prince paid his debts*, his mother had always said, but the imbecile Potter wouldn't let him.

"I don't want to owe anyone..."

"Professor. Severus." Harry looked up at him exasperatedly. "After all you've done, do you honestly think you owe me anything?" The look Potter gave him was nothing short of hero worship. "I wouldn't be alive now but not for you, or Hermione, for that matter. I owe you both everything."

He glanced over to his wife Ginevra, playing with their toddlers. Severus saw the deep, almost feverish joy in the younger man's face. "Because of you both *have* everything," Potter added quietly, his voice low with emotion. He turned back to Severus, all business. "So, you and Hermione concentrate on getting that hundred-percent bill of health. That's my *payback*."

Stubbornly, Severus tried one final time. "Perhaps we could set up some sort of trust for your children..."

"You want to repay me, Snape?" Potter had asked challengingly. At Severus' terse nod, the young man narrowed his eyes and looked at him carefully. "Then make Hermione happy. Promise her the moon and deliver on it. Do whatever it takes to show her every day that she's the only thing that matters to you, and that nothing will stand in your way in bringing her joy. That will be my payment." Potter suddenly grinned. "That, and letting me call you Severus from now on. In public."

"Don't push it, boy," Severus had growled, but Harry just laughed.

-o0o-

In the dark, with Hermione curled against him, trusting and loving even in sleep, Severus thought about Potter's words *Promise her the moon, and deliver on it*.

Every day, he had tried to show her how much he loved her. Each moment, Severus looked for new ways to bring his wife pleasure. In all ways, they were compatible, comfortable and happy.

But Severus had come close to losing his happiness again, and vowed he would do anything to lasso that moon and bring it down to Hermione, to deliver it like a jewel, to see her face alight with satisfaction. He knew he had achieved his goal in many things. Their business was thriving again. They had just purchased a larger house. Healer Blyte had even agreed that next year, barring no unforeseen circumstances, they could start that family they wanted.

What was there left to do?

As if stirred by his thoughts, Hermione made a soft sound and stroked his belly. Severus smiled tiredly; his wife was a delicious, randy little minx, and *that* was certainly one aspect of their lives he never tired of indulging. They had made love earlier that evening; it had been a sweet, tender, love-affirming time, as *always*.

They were a passionate, inventive couple, and sex had always been a playground for them. Lately, it had taken on even more significance. It was one way he could physically show her that he still found her desirable, that the ravages of her illness and the treatments had not diminished his adoration for her graceful body and her bright, sharp mind.

Severus sighed. What could he do to deliver that moon?

Three

Chapter 3 of 8

Severus has always believed that, if you love someone, you must promise them the moon, and deliver it. How do you wrestle that moon to the ground?

Thank you for all your lovely comments on this story. I hope you will continue to enjoy it!

*This story was written for **stgulik**, the best beta/editor a person could pray for. Sh is such an inspirational, supportive force in my life. It is a joy every moment we have working together.*

They celebrated Hermione's first cancer-free year with a party, and such was his joy at her recovery that Severus indulged her every whim, including the guest list, even though it contained every Weasley alive. Most of the time Severus could barely tolerate being in the same room with the dozy lot, but he suffered their boisterous Gryffindor silliness because it pleased Hermione to be surrounded by her friends and family.

He stood proudly by her side as they received their guests. She wore a set of dress robes in a deep Slytherin green, which brought out the burnished colour of her newly-regrown hair. She looked so beautiful, her face glowing with renewed health, her eyes warm and inviting as her gaze caught his throughout the evening.

Severus watched in silence as the various Weasley family members, along with other school friends and work colleagues, gobbled up the catered canapés and Honeydukes chocolates and quaffed down butterbeer, firewhisky and wine. He counted the hours until it was time for them to leave.

Their cheery avoidance of the subject of Hermione's health scare puzzled and offended Severus. It was all he could do not to shout, "Why are you standing around stuffing yourselves when you should be appreciating her? Don't you understand how close I came to losing that beautiful witch in the green robes? You're all but ignoring her! You should be showering her with attention!"

But he bit back his tirade with supreme effort, and concentrated on nursing his firewhisky instead. Only in two other faces could he see his own joy and relief mirrored: Harry Potter's and Remus Lupin's. Remus caught his eye at several points in the evening, and silently raised his glass toward Hermione, a look of fond satisfaction upon his careworn face. Severus nodded his thanks...at least *someone* understood how precious she was.

Severus could not recall exactly when Lupin became 'Remus' in his mind. The man had always called him by his Christian name, even before Severus gave him tacit permission. In the aftermath of Harry Potter's generous gift to save Hermione's life, Remus had become a boon. Severus had initially treated his presence with uncomfortable silence; as the days passed, he no longer had the energy to devote to being aloof. Even more than Potter, Remus had devoted every moment of his spare time so that Severus could catch a few hours sleep here and there, or work to fulfill Potions orders and keep their business alive. Remus helped chop ingredients and make deliveries. He made sure the pantry had food, he paid bills and kept the house tidy.

Then came the horrible day Hermione suffered a terrible reaction to her treatments. Her fever raged so high for so long they were afraid they might lose her. As mediwitches and Healers rushed in and out of her room, refusing to allow Severus to sit with her, Remus stayed with Severus. For two straight days and nights, he never left his side. When the fever finally broke, and Hermione was pronounced out of the woods and sleeping peacefully, Severus, to his later chagrin, broke down and wept in front of the other man. To his surprise, Remus put his arm around him.

Shamed, he pushed away, sobbing, "I don't require your pity, wolf! Leave me, please."

Remus released him, but remained by his side. "I can't do that, Severus."

"Why are you doing this? Why are you here?" he sobbed, hating his tendency to cry when overwrought. "Come to have a laugh at poor Snivellus?"

"Severus, please!" Remus entreated, his voice strangely harsh. He put his hand on Severus' arm. "I never felt that way about you...you know that!"

Severus shook off the comforting arm. "I can't lose her, Remus! It will kill me!"

Remus allowed Severus' shattered nerves to calm, and pressed a handkerchief into his fumbling hands. As he blew his nose, Remus said quietly, "I know we've had our differences. But for Hermione's sake, we don't have time for them anymore, Severus. I have always respected you; I have always adored Hermione." He tried to smile. "I'm not leaving you two in the lurch."

Remus had sat quietly with Severus until his relief and anguish was finally spent, and even in his hysteria Severus had been grateful that Remus had not done any of that woolly Gryffindor, 'why don't you talk about your feelings' bollocks. His placid silence had been admittedly comforting in those darkest of hours.

On the nights they allowed Severus to stay, he slept with Hermione, tucking her frail little body in his arms in her cramped hospital bed. Many was the night he would wake to see Remus nodding in the uncomfortable chair in the corner. There were other times when Severus would return from working or grabbing a shower and hear his wife's soft laughter, and Remus' answering chuckle, within her hospital room.

As Hermione grimly and belligerently fought both her illness and the treatments through its last and toughest stage, Remus made sure Severus ate and slept adequately. When asked how he could be repaid, he merely said, "Get well. Stay healthy. Take care of one another."

Severus found it puzzling, but he was too occupied with just getting through each day to ponder the man's behaviour at any great length.

-oOo-

Once, near the end of Hermione's treatments, returning from a long night of brewing, Severus heard the unmistakable sound of her crying as he reached her hospital room door. Alarmed, Severus nearly called for the mediwitch, but froze at her words.

"I can't help it, Remus! I'm so worried about him. He looked so dreadfully tired today. The poor man pushes himself too hard." She sniffed woefully...it was a sound that nearly drove Severus to his knees.

Remus' voice was reassuring. "I know, Hermione. But you have to understand, it's his way of coping. If he can't be with you, he needs to keep himself busy. His only thoughts are for you to get well. He loves you very much. But he is getting more rest; I'm making sure of that."

"Thank you, Remus. I don't feel so guilty, knowing you're helping out."

"I'm thrilled that he'd allow me to help at all. You know how stubborn he is."

Severus felt a frisson of irritation build in his chest, until he heard the warmth and smile in his wife's voice. "Yeah, maybe, but you can't deny he's wonderful, isn't he? So strong and good. But he's been through so much. People don't appreciate him like they should, you know." She was crying again.

"Hermione, darling, please don't distress yourself. Severus has never cared about any of that. You are all he cares about."

Hermione was quiet for a few moments, and when she did speak, Severus had to strain to hear.

"Remus, promise me something."

"Anything, dear."

There was the slightest of hesitations. "Promise me that, if things... don't go well, and he has to make some hard decisions..."

Remus' voice was quiet, but strong. "He won't make them alone, Hermione. I promise you that."

"It's just that Severus has had to bear so much on his own..."

"He won't be alone in this."

"Thank you. That...that helps. Oh, Remus, what a blessing you've been to both of us during all this. I don't know how to thank you."

Remus' voice was warm and loving. "Don't be silly. Now, why don't you rest a little, so that when Severus comes, you can have a good long visit with him? Now, no more tears, dear. You don't want him to see you've been crying, do you?"

Severus had stood at the door, shaken to his foundations. It had taken almost five minutes before he could compose himself enough to announce his presence.

Remus had not tried to placate Hermione with empty assurances that all would be well, or chastise her that she was being fatalistic, or insist that she shouldn't talk that way. He had been as pragmatic and as grounded as Hermione about it. How strange, Severus thought, that this should comfort him so.

Two days later, Harry Potter had spelled Remus as he suffered through the full moon. Severus brewed his Wolfsbane, but he still hid himself away as a precautionary measure. As Severus and Potter sat through a rather strained and sticky weekend, Severus realised that he missed Remus' quiet, mild presence. When he returned, looking tired and listless from his transformation, Severus made him a strengthening tonic and watched over *him* as Remus slept off the worst of the monthly change.

-oOo-

"She looks wonderful tonight," said a voice to his right. Severus turned to see Remus smiling at him. He indicated Hermione with a nod. She was laughing at some comment of Ginevra Potter's, and Severus' heart lifted at the sound of her mirth.

Remus' eyes followed Severus' to watch Hermione and her school chum giggling together like third-years again. "I always had a soft spot for her, even as my student. She was so smart, and eager to learn. A teacher's dream pupil."

Severus snorted, remembering his own view of the younger version of his wife. He had thought her insufferable and a complete pain in the arse, mainly because she so often reminded him of himself at her age. "Thank you for reminding me," he replied dryly, and to his surprise, Remus laughed.

"You don't fool me a bit, Severus." His expression softened. "I'm so happy for you both. It's truly gratifying to see you happily married, and Hermione looking like her old, delightful self again."

Severus nodded shortly. "I am pleased," he said, not trusting his voice to carry the sentiment further.

The two men stood side by side, looking out at the horde of invading redheads and their spouses. "It's a lovely party."

Severus shrugged noncommittally, feeling awkward as always at these functions. "Thank you for coming."

"I wouldn't have missed it," Remus laughed. "Hermione ordered me to keep you company while she did the mingling. She didn't want you to disappear into your study until everyone left."

Severus' expression must have reflected his disappointment. He'd been planning to do just that. He should have known Hermione would be on the lookout for it and send her lapdog to intercept him. Remus added smugly, "Quite a woman, your Hermione. Always looking out for her wizard."

Just then, Hermione looked up from exclaiming over Bill and Fleur Weasley's newest child, and caught Severus' eye. The love on her face staggered Severus, and suddenly with all his heart he wished they could have a child. He wanted to hold his first born and whisper to it all the things he loved about its mother.

Turning away to do battle with his thoughts, he caught Remus' expression out of the corner of his eye. He, too, was watching the young parents with their newborn, and his expression was so melancholy Severus felt a reluctant trace of pity well in his breast. Remus noticed Severus' keen look, and cleared his throat, pulling on his nose.

The two men stood in excruciating silence for almost two minutes, until Severus asked, "Do you miss them?"

Remus shot him a puzzled look. "Dora and Teddy? Of course," he said evenly, looking back toward Bill and Fleur. His face was curiously unreadable. "It's strange, when I think back about it. Shortly after the war, when things settled down, we drifted apart so gradually I didn't actually notice it. Suddenly, it just seemed harder to find things to talk about.

"I'm not saying I'm blameless in this," he added quickly, as if he suspected Severus of somehow accusing him. "I had tried for so long to discourage our relationship. What did someone like me have to offer someone like her?"

Severus swallowed, remembering the battle he'd waged with his own sense of self-worth about Hermione. Strange that, after all these years, he could empathise with Remus Lupin.

Remus continued. "When Dora got pregnant with Teddy, I wasn't happy, but toward the end of the war, I had grown to realise how much she meant to me. But by then, perhaps it was too little too late. Neither of us truly expected to survive, and when we did..."

Severus nodded. "You hadn't planned that far. I know."

Remus' eyes widened, then he nodded. "Yes, I suppose you do." He shrugged. "After that, things started on a downward spiral. Losing her father hit her hard. She no longer took any interest in being an Auror.

"I think the first real sign that something was wrong happened during the Order of Merlin ceremony. She got so agitated when they mentioned Mad-Eye. They'd been good friends, and his death had really rocked her as well. She became overly emotional. I put it down to battle fatigue. You know how we all were at the time, just trying to find a little equilibrium. A few days later, when some people recognised her from her photo in the papers, she got quite upset and lost her temper. She tried to hex some poor man who merely asked for her autograph! I couldn't understand it."

He shrugged, and a ghost of a smile touched his lips. "You know Nymphadora...she loved being in the thick of it, showing off that outrageous hair of hers." He sobered. "Suddenly she didn't want to go outside. She became paranoid that Teddy might be in danger. She grew depressed. I wasn't prepared to deal with it...Merlin, what wizard really is?"

He shrugged, and Severus nodded, understanding. As much as he adored his wife, there were moments during her monthly cycle when she exhibited behaviour that baffled him completely. He found the best method was to simply ride it out and work on restocking the St Mungo's orders until the storm blew over. It never lasted long...he had long ago learned to take it in stride, just as they did with everything about their marriage.

"One afternoon I came back from the Ministry and she was waiting for me at the door. Her bags were packed, and she told me she was leaving. Said she needed some space and time," Remus continued, looking lost and hurt. Severus could hear the frustration in his voice. "No discussion, no plan. She just left. Andromeda urged me to give her a little time, but..." he sighed and looked down at his empty glass. "At the time, I thought it was the right thing to do to let them go, that perhaps they would be better off without me. It didn't occur to me how much worse off I'd be without them."

Four

Chapter 4 of 8

Severus has always believed that, if you love someone, you must promise them the moon, and deliver it. How do you wrestle that moon to the ground?

Thanks to all of you for your support and encouragement. I have been thrilled at the response this fic has received. I hope you will continue to enjoy it.

This is dedicated to Stgulik, my beta and Hermione Granger, who is one of the most indispensable person in my life. It is also dedicated to my husband, who always believes each story is great, and to my precious Muse, who writes the song that makes my whole world sing.

The characters in this story are the property of JK Rowling and Warner Brothers. I make no money from this story or any fanfiction I write.

As Severus sat and listened to Remus pour his heart out to what he undoubtedly suspected was the gutter, he wished fervently that Hermione was here instead of him. She was much better at this sort of thing than he. Anything he could think of to say either sounded sarcastic, unfeeling or unkind. He finally settled for inane. "Another firewhisky, Lupin? I believe my glass is dry."

Remus seemed to snap out of his melancholy reverie, and nodded. "Thank you, I believe I will." He passed his empty flagon to Severus, and their eyes met. "You know, I never thought I'd say this, but I have to confess, I'm rather jealous of you."

Severus blinked. "Why in Merlin's name are you jealous of me?" he blurted, then felt foolish. He knew the answer, and the Gryffindor didn't disappoint.

"You and Hermione are so right for one another. Anyone can see you two are a formidable team. You move together like one single entity." He chuckled in that characteristically silent way of his. "You have something rare together, Severus. You and Hermione make *sense*. Not many couples have what you two have, and it's lovely to watch you together." He looked down at his hands. "If anything good has come from this, it's that I feel like you and I have finally become friends."

He looked up then, deeply into Severus' eyes, and held them for a long time. It was a surprising and rare thing for someone to do, given Severus' reputation as one of the world's most skilled Legilimens. It was almost as if he *wanted* Severus to see something, or wanted to find something in Severus he sought very badly.

Pondering this, Severus excused himself, and headed for the bar to refresh their drinks.

When he returned, Remus had joined Hermione on the sofa, and several others were listening as she regaled them with the story of Severus' proposal.

"...I mean, it was a given that I was going to say yes, but there I was, elbow-deep in the Curleaze Elixir. Well, I wasn't going to let him get away, was I? So I turned to say something, it was probably something I thought sounded romantic, but it probably would have been complete rubbish..."

"Hermione!" Harry, Ron and Ginny all whined her name at the same time, and Severus stifled a chuckle.

"Indeed," he said, crossing his arms. "We'll be in our dotage before you finish the story, Madam Snape."

She playfully wrinkled her nose at him, and Severus felt his body grow warm. Saucy little minx.

"Anyway, if you'll all let me finish," she continued imperiously, only to be pelted with Honeydukes' sweet wrappers. "As I was saying," she laughed, "I was going to reply with something clever and erudite, so I turned to Severus, and I took my eyes off the brew for one second, and of course the entire cauldron started melting. The next thing I knew, Severus was knocking me out of the way just as the whole sorry mess exploded all over us!"

Amidst the chuckles, she caught his eye, and smiled. "After the smoke cleared, I looked up and he was covered in this grotty, green goo, looking at me like he was thinking about taking house points away. I mean, here we were in the middle of the most romantic moment of our lives and all I could think was, 'oh, Merlin, he's going to give me a detention!'"

"I wish I could have, seeing the result," he interjected dryly.

"What happened?" Remus asked, his eyes twinkling.

Hermione answered, "For a week, Severus' hair was as curly as mine." She gave him a wicked smile. "He looked so adorable."

Severus gave her a withering look that fooled no one. Through clenched teeth, he growled, "I looked like a labradoodle."

The room erupted with an explosion of laughter, and Severus stood still, uncertain as always if people were laughing at him or with him.

"Well, it could have been worse," Ron interjected.

"True," Severus drawled. "It could have turned ginger."

"Oy!" Ron protested, but the laughter from the good-natured Weasleys soon had him chuckling as well.

"Severus has always been a good man to have in any crisis. He never loses his head," Remus added, and Hermione beamed at him.

She turned back to Severus, and gave him her secret, sweet smile. "That's very true. He's the best man to have in a crisis." Impulsively, she stood and toasted him. "To my husband, who never loses his head."

"Hear, hear," Remus added, and all the guests raised their glasses in a toast to Severus, who acknowledged their tributes with a slight bow.

"I appreciate your sentiments, Madam Snape," he said, his voice reaching into the far corners of the room. "But I think you'll find it was my heart that was lost that day. Thankfully, you found it, and have kept it safe for me ever since."

The chorus of surprised "Awwwws" made him roll his eyes. "Stand down, Gryffindors. It's not bloody panto," he grumbled. This time, he knew they were laughing with him.

"And in any case, I have indeed lost my head on several occasions." He toasted her back with a secret smile of his own. "Thankfully, you have always found it, and brought it back as well."

"To Hermione, who always finds Snape's head!" Ron Weasley chortled, raising his butterbeer.

"Ron!" Hermione exclaimed, shocked. Her face was flaming.

Remus laughed, and gave her an affectionate peck on the cheek. "To Hermione!"

"Hermione!" The voices roared. Severus raised his glass with them. As he looked toward his wife, his eyes met Remus' again, and Remus was looking at Hermione with such tenderness Severus was shaken. There was something about the man's expression that elicited no jealousy, no worry. It was the look of someone who truly cared about Hermione more than he did for himself. Severus saw that look in the mirror every day.

He knows exactly how I feel about Hermione. He feels the same way.

Then Remus turned and gave Severus the same look. Severus looked away quickly. He was not sure what he had seen in Remus' expression, but it was just as strong for him as it was for Hermione.

-oOo-

Later that evening, once all the guests had left, he and Hermione undressed and got into bed. They rehashed the usual post-mortem all couples do after a successful party, and spoke in turn about all the different guests. Everyone was mentioned...except Remus.

"Tired?" Severus finally asked, when the closing ceremonies had ended.

Hermione nestled against his shoulder. "Not too much," she said, then proved the lie with a jaw-cracking yawn. "Well, maybe a little," she laughed. Severus chuckled and pulled her closer.

"You looked beautiful tonight."

Hermione rose and looked at him. "Thank you, darling." She snuggled back into his arms, and her hand drifted down his taut belly. "I thought you looked rather dashing as well."

Severus would have scoffed, but her slender fingers were teasing the waistband of his pants, and he felt his cock stir. By the time she had eased her hand inside his

boxers, he was already hard for her, aching to touch her. "I thought you were tired," he murmured, sighing as she slid her palm over his erection.

"I think I've got my second wind," she said, and he could feel her smiling against his collarbone. In one single, fluid movement, he rolled them over so that he was leaning over her.

Her kisses were sweet, flavoured with elf-made wine, and as he cupped her warm, firm breast in his hand, he felt the nipple grow hard against his palm. She moaned, and arched into his touch.

"Severus," she mewled, and the delicious scent of her arousal reached his prodigious nose. He held her and kissed her deeply as he wandlessly removed their nightclothes.

"I love you," she whispered as he slid home with a whimper of pleasure.

"I love you," he said, his body, his heart, his *soul* crying aloud with joy at joining with his precious woman.

She moved beneath him, and as her climax peaked, she cried, "I would do anything for you... gods, Severus!"

Her orgasm took his own to the point of no return, as they trembled and held onto one another, Severus whispered, "I'd do anything to make you happy, wife."

She pulled him closer. "You're in this world, Severus. You're mine. Nothing could make me happier."

They lay in the dark, replete and sated, and as Hermione drifted off, Severus touched his lips to her forehead. "Anything, Hermione," he whispered, as tears wet his lashes.

Five

Chapter 5 of 8

Severus has always believed that, if you love someone, you must promise them the moon, and deliver it. How do you wrestle that moon to the ground?

A huge thank you to everyone who has taken the time to read this fic, and left an encouraging comment or two. I am really thrilled you are enjoying it.

*This is dedicated to **stgulik**, my amazing beta, who asked me so sweetly to write this fic I could not refuse, and I'm glad I didn't.*

As always, I do not own these characters and make no money from the writing of this fanfiction.

Remus started spending less time with Severus and Hermione over the next few days. His absences soon stretched into weeks, then a couple of months went by without a word from him. After his almost daily, steady presence, they both felt the absence of it keenly. When they made discreet overtures to friends and family, no one seemed to know where he was or what he was doing.

It troubled Hermione, which in turn frustrated Severus. Hermione was a brilliant witch with keen intelligence and compassion; she cared about friends. Severus only really cared about how Remus' absence affected Hermione's health. He told himself they missed him, because he had become part of the furniture. Hermione worried if perhaps he had felt taken for granted, and moved on. Severus shrugged noncommittally. He didn't think that was the reason at all.

Severus remembered the look of longing in the wolf's face as he gazed at Hermione on the night of their last party. He had wanted her, of that much Severus was sure. But if that was the case, why did he look at Severus in the exact same way seconds later?

No. No, no, no, Merlin and the Pleiades, NO. I will not entertain the thought that Lupin has somehow developed...

The notion, Severus realised, was like a Sticking charm. Once it had been conjured into life, he couldn't *Obliviate* it. Lupin had left them, because he had finally accepted to himself that he desired what he could not have, and could no longer bear to be in close proximity of the objects of his desire.

Both of them.

As the third month of his absence was drawing to a close and autumn blew its last, smoke-spiced breezes throughout England, Severus and Hermione watched the full moon wax and wane, and fretted about Remus.

They had just returned from visiting Andromeda Tonks, who lived in East Anglia alone. She was a sad, shadowy figure now; the death of her husband, her daughter's estrangement from everyone, her own isolation from her disgraced family; all were taking their toll, and the witch who had once been called the 'prettiest of the Black Family witches' looked jaded and drawn. Severus was convinced she was drinking too much.

She was also completely unhelpful. She had seen Tonks only once in the last several months herself. "I tell you, I don't know what happened," she insisted, as if they'd accused her of withholding information. She sighed harshly. "My daughter has always been headstrong. If Nymphadora doesn't want Remus anymore, he needs to accept that."

"Why would he not accept it?" Severus asked casually, and Andromeda shot him a sullen, haughty look that reminded him too much of Narcissa at her elitist worst.

"It's really none of my business, Severus," she said, taking a sip of her tea. Her unspoken words hung in the air *and it's none of yours, either*.

"Do you think he's safe?" Hermione whispered, as they watched the first snowflakes whirling in the white, wintry sky. "Three full moons have come and gone, Severus," she said, worry and love warring in her face.

"Where ever he is, he's got a lot of explaining to do," Severus muttered, through clenched teeth.

The Yule holidays passed; Severus gave her a first edition copy of *Hogwarts: A History*, a week-long spa retreat in Ireland, and a stunning eagle feather quill with a golden nib. Hermione gave Severus a beautiful sterling silver cauldron, a set of stirring rods composed of ten different elements, and a rare book on Ceylonese Potions ingredients. "For that trip you're going to take next year while I'm at the spa," she said with a smile.

"The trip *we're* going to take," he corrected her. "I can join you at the spa afterward. Who knows? We might capture two Occamy eggs with one Niffler."

Hermione laughed. Before her illness, they had spoken of taking a trip to Sri Lanka. Neither had ever been, and the potions ingredients there were some of the highest quality on earth. At the same time, they had considered starting a family. Severus had teased that Hermione would take advantage of the exotic locale and good tea to lull him out of the woods and into her netted bed so often they would come back with fewer ingredients than when they arrived.

"Well, it was a good idea at the time," she said, with a warm glow in her eyes. Severus pulled her into his arms so swiftly she made a little squeal of surprise.

"I suggest we start preparing now," he drawled, smirking down at her with unrepentant lust. "You will come with me, my girl. Refusal is not an option."

She giggled girlishly. "I do love it when you get all 'Potions Professor-y' on me," she said, somewhat breathlessly, and he playfully pinched her bottom just to hear her squeal of delight again.

"Detention, Miss Granger," he growled, carrying her into their bedroom.

-oOo-

"Severus!" Hermione's voice sounded shrill and alarmed. With his heart in his throat, Severus dashed from their cellar lab up the flight of stairs to the main part of their house.

"What is wrong, love? Are you ill..."

Remus Lupin was standing in the Floo, looking as if the only thing holding him up was his sheer force of will. Hermione had her arm around him, and was quickly losing the battle to keep him upright.

Severus caught him as he sagged to his knees, and Remus muttered, "I do apologise. I'm not quite myself." He sounded exhausted and embarrassed, and managed to smile weakly at them. "It's lovely to see you both looking so well."

Then he fainted.

A quick Floo call to St. Mungo's later, and Severus was dosing Remus with Strengthening and Nutrient Potions. He was dehydrated, hungover and suffering from a lack of food, but was otherwise surprisingly unharmed.

"Remus, where have you been? Severus and I have been frantic for news about you," Hermione chided, after tucking him in the guest bedroom he'd used so many times during her illness. "No messages, no owls...even Andromeda didn't know where you were."

He sighed, and looked faintly angry. "She knew, Hermione. She just wasn't inclined to share that information." He lay back against the pillows. His mild eyes were sunken and haunted.

"You could have at least let us know you didn't wish to be found," Severus growled from the corner. "You've caused Hermione to fret over you, wolf."

Remus looked stricken with remorse. "I'm sorry." He turned to Hermione, seated by his bedside, and took her hand in his and kissed it fervently. "Please forgive me, dear Hermione. The last thing I want is to cause you to be upset."

"She's been worrying herself ill," Severus muttered, pushing himself from the wall with his shoulders. "I realise what you do is your own affair, Lupin, but you could at least spare a thought for her."

"Severus, please," Hermione entreated, her eyes full of compassion, and gentle reproach. "Be honest, you've been just as worried." She turned to Remus, who looked stricken with guilt. "We're both so happy you're back."

Remus closed his eyes; a tear rolled down his cheek. "Forgive me. The idea that someone gives a damn is a bit overwhelming at the moment, Hermione."

Hermione took his hand, and looked up at Severus, worry and compassion in her amber eyes. "I'll get him a Calming Draught," Severus replied tersely, with a nod.

Remus took the potion automatically, and downed it in one gulp. "Thank you, Severus."

Severus nodded. "Do you wish to explain your absence?" he asked.

Remus nodded, and wiped away another tear as it threatened to fall. "Of course. But, tomorrow, if you don't mind? I don't think... I am not..." he gasped for breath, and Hermione held his hand as he wept.

"It's alright, Remus," she soothed, and when Severus came to stand behind her and place his hands on her shoulders, Lupin looked up at him. The hurt and misery in his eyes was so fresh and familiar Severus almost turned away. He'd seen those same haunted eyes in the mirror the day he knew Lily was James Potter's, and would never be his.

-oOo-

During Hermione's illness, she and Severus had developed a little ritual; he would bring her breakfast in the morning, and they would sit in bed, reading *the Prophet* and drinking their coffee over eggs and rashers. It had become such a comforting, bonding custom they decided to make it permanent, and as Severus carried a tray of eggs, soldiers and tea to their bedroom, another tray for Remus glided smoothly up the stairs behind him.

He deposited their breakfast on the bedside table, and trained his wand on the levitating tray following him. "I'll be back shortly," he informed Hermione. "Eat up while it's hot."

"Come in," Remus answered, after Severus' knock, and he smiled as the tray wafted onto his lap. "Thank you, Severus. This is most welcomed indeed."

Severus nodded. "Good. I've got a large potions order to fill in the next several days. I could use an extra pair of hands." He turned to go without waiting for an answer.

"There was another man, Severus."

Severus looked back at Remus, confused. "What?"

Remus sighed. "After your party, I realised I had been using you and Hermione as an excuse to avoid talking to Nymphadora. Seeing you both so well and happy forced me to admit to myself I needed to see what I could do to salvage my marriage." Remus ran a thin, trembling hand through his sandy hair.

"Andromeda warned me not to go, but I thought she was being protective. So I went to Sark to find Dora. I was going to surprise her and little Teddy." He looked down at his breakfast tray.

"When I arrived, a man answered the door. I recognised him. He was the same man who'd approached Dora the night of the Order of Merlin ceremonies. Remember me telling you about the incident? It turns out they'd been seeing one another for months before the war. She was upset that night because he approached us with the idea of confronting me, but she wouldn't let him."

"Merlin," Severus said, sitting on the edge of the bed. "Has he been there with her all this time?"

Remus nodded, his eyes bleak with pain. "Teddy calls him Dad. It's like he's been *Obliviated* of any memories of me. He didn't know who I was."

"Surely not," Severus said, doubtfully. "I can't imagine Nymphadora..." He couldn't finish the sentence. The idea that she would do something of that nature was abhorrent, but could he swear she honestly wasn't capable of it?

As if in answer to his thoughts, Remus shook his head. "Children are adaptive and flexible. I chose to stay away. Not that it would have made any difference how long it had been," he added bitterly. He shrugged. "I've been told on no uncertain terms I am no longer a part of their lives. I signed the divorce papers before I left."

Severus stood, knowing he should say something. He pitied the man. Remus had left them to find his wife and child, and had found himself alone and unwanted. Severus had himself felt that way on more than one occasion; it had taken years of Hermione's gentle, loving insistence to leave that bitter, unloved man behind and embrace the role of beloved husband.

"I am... sorry for you, Remus," he finally said. "Of course, Hermione and I will do whatever we can to help."

Remus smiled at him. "I know you would, Severus. You're both good, good people. I'm sorry I returned to you both such a broken man." He forced himself to brighten. "But not a useless one, eh? Onward and upward, as they say. I'm still a young wizard; no doubt I'll learn to make my way again."

"You will stay with us," Severus said, and his heart contracted. What in Merlin's name had possessed him to make such an outlandish offer...without discussing it with Hermione?

Remus must have sensed the bewilderment and turmoil; he actually laughed. "Thank you, Severus, but I don't think it's necessary. Besides, I think Hermione might wish to be involved in any decision making of that nature, don't you?"

"Absolutely, and she thinks it's a fine idea."

The two men turned to see Hermione standing in the doorway, still dressed in her nightrobe, looking tousled and sleepy and, to Severus, absolutely beautiful. She beamed at him, and crossed the room to kiss his cheek. "Thank you, dear. It's a grand idea. You need help with the business, and Remus, you need to be surrounded by friends."

He looked humbled. "Thank you, Hermione. You have both been so generous. Are you sure?"

Severus could hear the hope in his voice. It irritated him, for some reason. "Wouldn't have made the offer, would I?" he asked. He nodded to the food and removed the warming charm. "Well, eat up. You've got to get your strength back. Those potions ingredients won't chop themselves."

He led Hermione from the room, just as Remus answered softly, "Yes, sir."

Remus settled in, and gradually they grew accustomed to the new living arrangements. At first, Severus had been worried that the arrival of the last of the Marauders would mean a Gryffindor free-for-all at the Snape residence, but in all fairness, the ginger hordes managed to contain themselves. Harry Potter and Ron Weasley, however, joined them one Thursday evening for a game of cards, and a standing evening invitation was born.

The four men favoured the game Dark Wizard, a lethal form of Wizarding Poker not unlike the traditional seven-card stud in Muggle Poker, and more than one Friday morning was postponed by that fearsome malady the likes of which only a strong Sober-Up Potion could surcease. Hermione loved Thursday evenings. Her husband's laughter mingling with her friends' was something she never tired of hearing.

In Severus' case, the general mixture of jovial banter and firewhisky also meant that Thursday nights often left him feeling blissfully relaxed and amorous, and after an especially athletic session of lovemaking, Hermione quipped that poker nights should be a nightly occurrence.

To Be Continued...

Six

Chapter 6 of 8

Severus has always believed that, if you love someone, you must promise them the moon, and deliver it. How do you wrestle that moon to the ground?

Thank you so much for the outpouring of support and encouragement you have given me over this story. I don't think I can ever convey how much it means to me.

*This story is dedicated to **stgulik**, the most awesome beta/editor a writer could be blessed with. Thank you for believing in me.*

All early disclaimers still apply.

The champagne cork popped and they all laughed as Severus filled three flutes with Dom Perignon. "Tonight definitely calls for celebration!" Hermione declared, trying to keep the bubbly from foaming over the top of the glass.

Remus was so happy he was nearly floating off the ground. "Hear, hear! To the formidable team of Snape and Snape: The greatest Potioneers the Wizarding world has ever known!"

"Oh, I'm sure there is at least one other Potions Master in the world who could have cracked the Mela-Wolfsbane Serum," Severus replied smugly.

"Of course, Professor Modest," Hermione teased gently. "Which is why you're receiving another Order of Merlin, while this other poor, talented, unknown Potioneer is living in complete obscurity in a tree in the Trossachs."

The trio downed their champagne in one gulp, then threw their glasses into the fireplace, where they made a satisfying smashing sound. Hermione cheered, and Severus allowed himself a smile as she threw her arms around him and kissed him soundly on the lips. "I'm so proud of you I could burst," she said softly, and over her shoulder, Severus met Remus' eyes. The look of joy in them matched the content in his heart.

~o0o~

Remus' transformation the first month after his return was horrific. Even with the most potent Wolfsbane they could brew, the full moon nearly ripped the man in half. They chained him down in their cellar with strong, magically-reinforced shackles, and still Severus had to guard him. He never reverted back to human form during the entire full moon period, even during the day.

They tried Calming Draughts, Dreamless Sleep, even Seditivo Elixir, a potion used in the Janus Thickey Ward on the most violent mental patients. These seemed to actually agitate him further. When the full moon phase was finally over, Remus was so exhausted and magically depleted Hermione remarked he looked worse than she did during her cancer treatments. He was also ravenous.

As they sat by his bedside, watching him sleep, Hermione and Severus talked about what they could do. "It could be his upset over Tonks has caused some sort of chemical imbalance. That can trigger depression in Muggles," Hermione said absently.

"Don't chew your lip," Severus said just as absently. "I insist on doing any lip-chewing, Madam." The joke brought a ghost of a smile.

The next day, while researching ideas on how to strengthen Wolfsbane, Hermione asked, "What if it does have something to do with Melatonin levels, Severus? These chemicals and hormones trigger all sorts of chain reactions in the body...cause and effect. Melatonin regulates the body clock.

"Remus was almost malnourished when he came back; you need Tryptophan to produce Melatonin. Melatonin acts to regulate Leptin, which is an appetite inhibitor. Without Melatonin, Leptin can't suppress the appetite, which, in a werewolf, is its driving factor. Maybe that's why his transformation was so severe."

"It's a plausible theory," Severus mused. "We could try adding synthesised Melatonin and Leptin to the next batch of Wolfsbane."

Remus was only too happy to be their guinea pig. In addition, they placed him on a special diet, with heavy amounts cherries, bananas and grapes, rice and cereals, certain herbs, olive oil, and wine. They tried using several different enzymes and hormones, opting to increase the Feverfew and St. Johns Wort ratios in the original potion.

When they discovered that depletion of Melatonin and Leptin affected chemotherapy, they consulted with Healer Blyte on the treatment used for Hermione's cancer. An agent in the treatment, closely resembling chemotherapeutic drugs, was isolated, and it was hypothesised that the same cancer-producing cells that had threatened Hermione could indeed be related to the cellular metamorphosis that took place in werewolf transformation.

Mela-Wolfsbane Serum was created, which allowed the werewolf to complete a series of intravenous treatments which kept the transformations at bay for eight months at a time. The results were astounding. Remus declared he'd never felt better, and Severus was awarded a second Order of Merlin, First Class.

~o0o~

After the awards ceremony and their own private celebrations, the three of them sat happily staring into the fire in their front room.

"So, what now?" Remus asked, looking content and healthy as he stretched his legs toward the fire's warmth. "Still planning that trip to Sri Lanka?"

"Perhaps," Hermione said lazily, and laid her head on Severus' shoulder. "With the extra money coming in, perhaps we'll extend our trip. Japan, Uruguay, Africa..."

"I knew you'd throw that one in," Severus drawled, toying with one of her curls. "Admit it, wife of mine, you only wish to visit Africa to have a chance to play in your Animagus form."

Hermione nodded sheepishly. "Well, I won't deny there's a bit of truth to that."

"Here now, what's this?" Remus asked good-naturedly, his eyes full of curiosity.

Severus explained, "Hermione was in the final stages of registering as an Animagus when she got ill."

Hermione took up the story, as was her wont. "When I was ill, I couldn't transform at all. It was so frustrating...all that work and preparation, and I couldn't so much as transfigure a toe. But since I got the all clear, I've been able to transform without any hitch whatsoever."

Remus nodded. "Ah, yes, an otter, I believe."

Hermione shook her head modestly. "No, that was my Patronus. Turns out I'm a Multi-magus."

Lupin's eyes grew wide with surprise. "Well, well. That's very rare, especially in witches. I've heard of a few wizards, but never a..." He shook his head, marveling. "Trust you, Hermione."

"Once an overachiever, always an..."

"Yes, thank you very much, O supportive one," Hermione sniped, playfully swatting Severus' thigh. "Anyway, as I was about to say: when I was ill and couldn't change, I started obsessing about trying to join a den and see if I could somehow communicate or be accepted as one of them. Who knows?" she smiled. "Perhaps I can now."

Clearly intrigued, Remus drew near. "Well, go on! You can't have a build up like that and not perform the big reveal."

Hermione turned to Severus, a mischievous glint in her eye. Severus felt a little thrill. "Go on, then," he rumbled, feigning indulgent sufferance. "But don't get too boisterous, or you'll likely hurt one of us and not even be aware of it."

Remus laughed. "Would you two stop teasing me and get on with it? I'm breathless with anticipation."

Severus smirked. "Brace yourself, Lupin." He nodded to Hermione. "Go ahead, Lass. Show Remus what a true Gryffindor Animagus witch can do."

Hermione looked into his eyes and Severus tried to convey to her all he was feeling. There was immense pride, and love, and that frisson of arousal he always felt when her...

...body trembled, and she began to change. Her eyes were the first to transform, changing from their lovely amber brown to a deep golden, growing larger into a face that was elongating and enlarging, her entire body growing so heavy the sofa sagged with her weight. The tawny head looked down at him, and the huge tail thumped so hard against his leg he winced.

"Sweet Neptune and the Naiads," Remus breathed, his eyes round with wonder.

Severus couldn't help but chuckle at the fully grown lioness sitting beside him on the sofa. Hermione nuzzled her massive head against his. He could feel her deep rumbling purr vibrating through the sofa cushions.

As if mesmerised, Remus sat down on the opposite side of Hermione. "Gods, her Animagus form is stunning."

Severus smirked. "Just you wait," he promised, and stroked Hermione's tawny neck. "Show him, my love," he whispered. For a moment, the look on the lioness' face was so implacably Hermione that he laughed. "Well, go ahead, my little show-off!" The thrill changed to arousal. "Show him," he whispered.

Hermione threw back her head and *roared*. It was the most beautiful, sexy sound in the world to Severus. It was deep and full of power and magic and it rattled the glass in

the windows.

"Bloody hell!" Remus exclaimed, and the second roar was as fierce and thrilling as the first. Remus stared at Hermione's transformed body in wonder. "You are amazing," he said, unabashedly, and stroked her body as if she were a cat.

Watching him, Severus felt a sudden, stunned realisation. It wasn't just him. Remus was just as aroused by this magical creature, alchemised from his wife's body, enormous and beautiful. His hands shook as he, too, stroked her flanks, and as he and Remus petted and stroked her, she nuzzled against Severus' face, her purr deafening in his ears.

"The heat," Remus marveled, now stroking her with both hands. "The heat from her body is tremendous. And the fragrance is like nothing else I've ever encountered."

He closed his eyes, and pressed himself against her, unmindful of anything but the animal's warmth and scent and acceptance. He moaned softly as the big cat purred and preened beneath both men's hands. "That is the most delicious scent."

Severus watched, his arm around Hermione's neck as she lolled her huge head against his shoulder. Remus looked almost rapturous, and Severus knew his own expression would no doubt be similar. Anytime Hermione transfigured into her Animagus form, when she returned to her human form they were both so randy and aroused they usually made love where ever they were, not bothering with trying to even locate a bed. Hermione would be wet and ready for him, and Severus would be bone hard, as hard as he was growing now.

As if on cue Remus' eyes opened, and he straightened, though his hands stayed on Hermione.

"I can smell her," he said, and swallowed. "And I can smell you, too, Severus." His words were barely a whisper. His eyes were glazed with arousal. "You're both so beautiful, and you want each other." He sagged, as if his good humour and joy were draining from him. "I'll leave you now..."

"Stay." The word was out of Severus' mouth before he could think, before he wanted to think. "You love her."

Remus froze, but refused to look away. "You know I do. I love you both dearly."

Don't think don't think don't think... "Then stay. Stay and make love to Hermione with me."

To Be Continued...

Seven

Chapter 7 of 8

Severus has always believed that, if you love someone, you must promise them the moon, and deliver it. How do you wrestle that moon to the ground?

Thank you so much for the outpouring of support and encouragement you have given me over this story. I don't think I can ever convey how much it means to me.

This story is dedicated to stgulik, the most awesome beta/editor a writer could be blessed with. Thank you for believing in me.

All early disclaimers still apply.

Please note this chapter contains explicit sexual content.

"Then stay. Stay and make love to Hermione with me.

Help me to show her how perfect and precious she is."

Hermione turned her leonine head and gave him a look of pure disbelief. Severus could feel the feline body tremble, and knew Hermione was returning to her human form. As she shrank in size, Remus seemed to remember himself, and drew away, removing his hands as if caught doing something wrong.

And there she was, looking at Severus with shocked, glazed eyes. Before he could regain his senses, Severus drew Hermione into his arms and kissed her deeply. "I love you so much," he whispered between frantic kisses. "I would do anything to give you pleasure. Let us do this for you. Let *me* do this for you. Let me show you how damned grateful I am that you're alive and in this world and married to me." He could hear the desperate longing in his voice, and no longer cared. Some wild, hot wind was blowing through his mind, and he wanted to be swept up in it, and take her with him.

"Severus," she replied, her smile tremulous and sweet. "I know all those things. You show me every day." She returned his kisses fervently, her eyes round and surprised at such a frankly sensual display of affection in front of another person. As Severus drew back from the kiss, he saw the same shock in Remus' eyes, but there was heat and desire in them as well. *Don't think. Don't think don't think don't think...*

Severus' heart was pounding so loud, he was sure Hermione could hear it. Her body was as hot and her scent as delicious in her human form. "I have the most beautiful wife, Remus," he rasped. "I'm the most fortunate wizard in the world. And I want her to be happy. I'd do anything to make her so. Wouldn't you?" He looked into his wife's lovely eyes, and whispered feverishly, "You've given me nothing but love and joy. I want to return it. I want you to feel like a goddess being worshipped. Let me. Let us."

He glanced over at Remus, who was already stroking her shoulder. A look passed between them. "I would give my wife the moon if I could, Lupin."

Something like stunned gratitude filled his soft hazel eyes as Remus planted a hesitant kiss against Hermione's shoulder. "I would love to help you drag it down to her, Severus."

Hermione's eyes fluttered as Remus trailed soft kisses up the delicate curve of her neck, his eyes boring into Severus' with such unfettered desire his cock pulsed with unbidden arousal. No one but Hermione had ever looked at him that way before. And yet, there was still lingering doubt in his eyes. Softly, Remus asked, "Are you sure this is what you want, Severus? What you both want? It's not too late to say no, but if we continue, it will be."

Severus' answer was to transfigure their sofa into a large bed. The back lowered, and the seat lengthened, and soon the three of them were lying sprawled together. Severus watched in gasping, aching silence as Remus cupped Hermione's face in his hand and covered her lips with his.

It was a deep, powerful kiss, and Remus took his time, slowly drawing her out, until she pulled him fully to her with a soft moan of surrender. Her hand found Severus', and as Remus gently opened her mouth with his entreatling tongue, she held onto her husband as if he were her lifeline.

Severus stared, unblinking, as she sighed into the kiss and drew Remus closer with her free hand. He would have never believed the sight of another man kissing his wife with such blissful abandon could be so erotic, and yet Severus had never loved her more than in that moment.

It was then that Severus realised, for the first time in his life that love truly stretched and expanded to fill the spaces provided. Like water, it found all the cracks and crevices, and there was an unlimited supply. Hermione would make love with Remus tonight, but she would love her husband with the same blissful, adoring abandon tomorrow. And wrapped in that precious thought, Severus edged closer, so that when Remus pulled away, Severus hungrily took over.

She moaned into his mouth, her body tensing with arousal, as Remus quickly unbuttoned her blouse. "Gods, you are so beautiful, Hermione," he panted, placing a line of kisses down her belly. In a rare gesture of impatience, Remus drew his wand and spelled her clothes away. Severus broke the kiss long enough to watch Remus' mouth close over one taut, pink nipple.

She mewled with pleasure, and Remus raised his head and gave Severus a smile of staggering sensuality. "Why don't you join me?" he said, and gave the pouting little bud a lick of such lascivious intent Severus growled.

"With pleasure," he answered, and as one, they closed their lips upon the velvety, succulent flesh. As Severus nipped and bit with teasing, biting kisses, Remus suckled the nipple almost tenderly. Hermione gasped and uttered a cry of arousal, arching up to meet their greedy mouths. She put an arm around each man, and cradled them close to her, pressing a fevered kiss on Severus' bowed head.

Feeling lightheaded with desire, Severus hastily removed his clothes with a wandless spell, and pressed against her warm, tender body, his hand stroking down to cup her mons. She was so hot; the scent of her arousal made his mouth water, and judging from the slight flare of Remus' nostrils, it was making his water as well.

She moaned helplessly as the two men laved and nipped, suckled and soothed her enticing nipples. Remus released his with a little sucking pop, and slid lower onto the makeshift bed, leaving slow, hot kisses in his wake. "You smell divine, Hermione," Remus growled, his voice growing darker with his arousal. Poised between her silken thighs, he looked up at the lovers with naked, rapacious hunger as Severus teased her labia open with a single finger.

Remus' voice was low and urgent. "I've fantasised about this. I've lain in bed and heard Severus pleasuring you, and I've wanted to be him." He paused, and took a deep appreciative sniff, then looked up at her adoringly as he slid his hand up the inside of her peach-coloured thigh. "That's right, love. Spread your legs nice and wide. Oh, yes, just like that."

She kissed Severus with wild abandon as Lupin settled between her thighs. Severus heard the other man's enraptured sigh, and knew what he had found: Hermione's plump, glistening labia, the pink petals, the little clitoris glowing like a jewel in a bed of velvet. "Oh, yes. So perfect," Lupin breathed, and flicked his long tongue against her clit.

She cried out, her body fishtailing as Severus returned to her rock-hard nipples. With a moan of pleasure, Remus bedded down, his lips pursing over the taut flesh. The suckling noises were at once obscene and thrilling; Severus looked down into his wife's face, watching her carefully. She was gasping, her face flushed and softly sheened with sweat, her body tensing and tensing as that coil of need within twisted tighter.

Severus watched her body undulate as Remus pleased her, his tongue sure and skilled. As he drank in the sight of them, Remus inserted two fingers, and a smile flitted across his face. Severus knew the reason for that smile; the hot, tight passage of his wife's core was like a siren song, slick and irresistible.

Slowly, Remus pumped his fingers in and out of her core, his tongue flickering like a serpent's, and she whimpered feverishly, straining for her release. "Come, Hermione," Severus crooned, his mouth against hers. She was so close; he could see feel the change in her body, that surrendering moment of climax. He stroked her face, urging her to completion. "That's it, witch. Come. Show Remus how sweet your pussy is when you come."

The coil wound tighter, higher, to breaking point... Her eyes flew open. "Oh, gods, I'm coming.... Sev...Remus...Yes!" She screamed as her orgasm pulsed through her, her wail of pleasure like music. Remus rose onto his forearms and surged forward, easing his cock into her pulsating sex, sliding home on the crest of her release. His hoarse shout of ecstasy was almost pained, and the intense look of rapture on Remus' face as he thrust into her was glorious.

Severus watched another man make love to his wife, and thought his heart would burst with happiness. He searched it for any latent jealousy or fear, and all he could see was her face, her smile of wonder and pleasure as their friend made love to her, and her husband kissed her and told her how much he loved her.

Remus didn't last very long. His orgasm was swift and sudden, and as he came, he wrapped his arms around Hermione and held on as if she were his lifeline, crying out her name, sobbing over his relief and gratitude. He fell against her, spent and trembling, and gave her a kiss of boundless affection.

They lay beside Severus, panting and sweaty, and she kissed Remus lovingly, soothingly, and he collapsed by her side. "Beautiful," he panted, lying against her breast. "Gods, I'd forgotten how beautiful it can be."

She turned to Severus, tears in her eyes, and he knew his unselfishness was about to be rewarded, perhaps in ways he wasn't sure he wanted. "I love you so much," she said, kissing him gently, pulling him close as well. "You are the most amazing man," she whispered into his ear, "and I'm going to show you how much you are adored." She turned her head toward Remus, and stroked his damp hair. "Okay?" she said, with a shaking smile.

Remus laughed, equally shaky, and kissed her shoulder. "I think I'm in some sort of parallel universe, where all my dreams come true."

Hermione laughed, and turned back to Severus, and he raised a quizzical eyebrow at the look in her eye. "Remus?" She said, softly.

Remus rose onto his elbow. "Yes, dear?"

Still looking into Severus' eyes, she licked her lips. "Do you know what would make me happier than anything else right now?"

Remus looked at Severus. "Tell me."

She lay down between the two wizards, looking up at them. "I want you to show Severus how much ~~he~~ is loved by us both."

Stunned, Severus looked from her to Remus. This was definitely not what he wanted. "I...I don't, I'm not..."

"Shh." Remus leaned over Hermione, and cupped Severus' cheek in his hand. "You heard the witch," he said, with a soft, hesitant smile.

Severus' breathing stopped as their lips met. He'd never been kissed by another man, had never felt the need or inclination, but Remus' lips were soft and warm. Severus trembled, amazed at his own desire. He felt Hermione's hands gentling him even as Remus leaned closer, and eased his mouth open with a soft, entreatling tongue.

Severus' hand closed around Hermione's, to reassure himself she was still with him. He had never felt so needy, or so vulnerable. It was both frightening and exciting, being kissed by a man, *this* man, and when Remus slid his hand behind Severus' neck and pulled him closer, Severus gave in, opening his mouth, angling his head to surrender to the urgent lips that claimed him as hungrily as he had Hermione.

For a small eternity, Severus was plundered, filled, and plundered again, as Remus devoured him, their breaths mingling, their tongues battling. Severus heard a moan of

complete and utter abandon, and realised it had come from his own throat. Remus growled, and his warm, calloused hand slid down Severus' torso, and wrapped around his cock with an experienced firm stroke. His breath left his chest, and pushed into Remus' mouth with a choked cry of lust.

"Oh, gods, that is the the most erotic thing I've ever seen," a soft voice said somewhere between them, and Severus broke away, shocked to his foundations and so hard he felt dizzy. Before he could react, Hermione all but pushed Remus out of the way, pressing Severus onto his back. She straddled him, her eyes wild with arousal. "I have never wanted you so much," she growled, looking like the goddess he'd called her. She rocked against his erection, teasing it, sliding it over her rigid little clit. With a wicked grin, she shifted, and he felt the head easing into the entrance of her sweet, tight cunt.

"Yes," he moaned, aching for her body. His hands clamped onto her waist, pulling her down on his cock. "Yes, oh, gods, Hermione, fuck me, fuck me, witch..."

They both howled as she plunged down onto him, melting around him with such delicious friction he nearly screamed. From behind her, Remus cupped her breast with one hand, and toyed with her clit with the other, moving with her as she rode Severus' cock with feverish abandon.

"Lean over him," Remus commanded, and she obeyed, sucking Severus' nipples until they were hard. Somewhere in all the pleasure of his wife's body, Severus felt Remus push his knees back. "Hold him in place," Remus intoned, and Hermione leaned back, hooking Severus' knees over her elbows, pinning them both down. Unable to move, Severus moaned helplessly, his hand tugging at her nipples, rolling the rigid flesh between his fingers, reveling in the carnal joy she took at fucking him.

Severus felt a gentle finger probing his rectum, and then a cool whisper of lubrication eased the way for it to slide into him. He tensed, but Hermione soothed; he met her eyes, and she gentled him.

Two fingers made their way into his passage, and Remus said gently, "That's it, Hermione. Keep him nice and relaxed. I want this to be pleasurable. Just relax, Severus. I won't hurt you. I would never do that."

"No," Severus panted, pulling Hermione closer. He felt so vulnerable, and for a moment, afraid.

Then, as she had always been able to do, Hermione eased him by whispering, "Let it happen, love. Do you honestly think I'd let anyone hurt you?"

Severus felt as if his heart were going to fly from his chest. He could see Remus over Hermione's shoulder, his face full of love and arousal and desire. A softly worded spell lifted his hips, and Remus' cock nudged entreatingly against his opening. "Just relax, Severus," Remus crooned. "Have you ever?"

"No," Severus breathed, his eyes locked onto Hermione's. *She won't let him hurt me... she won't let anyone hurt me... she loves me...*

Remus entered him slowly, his face taut and open with pleasure. He made a soft sound of wonder. "It's alright, love, just relax," he gasped, his voice strained. He made Hermione release Severus' legs, and once that happened, Severus did relax, and he hissed as Hermione's walls tightened on his cock at the same time Remus withdrew and thrust a little harder.

They held Severus between them, until he was almost demented with need. "More, please," he gasped.

Hermione rose again, and started her slow ride, even as Remus began to rock forward. It was pain, and it was pleasure at once, and Severus' body registered it all as sensation, deep and burning, turning his loins to fire. They made love to him; he was their instrument, their idol, and he answered their worship with his passion, his ecstasy, his surrender.

Hermione's cunt was hot and tight and wet and felt like home, but Remus' cock was hitting a place that was making him see stars and then he was shouting, his balls tightening against his body like fists and he was coming, oh, gods, he was coming harder than he'd ever come, dragging his wife down hard on his cock as if to fill her and she was coming, her luscious pussy clenching and clutching his spraying cock, milking him until he was flame and fire and shuddering and so drained he couldn't move.

Floating in a world of utter pleasure, Severus opened his eyes and Hermione was leaning over him, smiling at him like a new dawn. "Welcome back," she said, softly, and kissed his bruised mouth very gently.

A large hand swept his sweaty hair from his eyes. Remus lay on the opposite side, and kissed Severus' forehead tenderly. "You're a beautiful man when you make love, Severus," he said, his mild voice calm and placid. He looked from Severus to Hermione and back. "You're both so beautiful. Thank you." He looked away.

"If you are going to cry, Lupin, kindly go to the loo," Severus growled, but they all laughed. Instead of heeding his advice, Remus lay down against Severus' chest, his head resting against Severus' shoulder.

Hermione did the same, until they were both nestled in his arms, and Severus fell asleep to the sounds of his wife's deep breathing, and his friend's soft snores.

To Be Continued...

Eight

Chapter 8 of 8

Severus has always believed that, if you love someone, you must promise them the moon, and deliver it. How do you wrestle that moon to the ground?

Thank you all for your lovely comments and encouragement through this fic. I hope you have enjoyed it as much as I did.

The story was prompted to me by my beta/editor, stgulik. Jules and I have been working closely together for two years now, and I can't remember what my life was like without her in it. Thank you, Jules, for stretching my writing muscles, testing my hard limits, and being brutally honest. I love you, and this is my love poem to you.

As with all my HP fanfics, I own nothing. These characters belong to JK Rowling and Warner Brothers. I on the other hand, belong only to Dahlra.

Severus woke with a start, then glanced around to see what exactly had startled him. He lay curled around Hermione, who made a soft cooing noise and snuggled closer, the soft cheeks of her gorgeous bottom pressing against his increasingly interested cock. She hummed appreciatively and wriggled delightfully against him, earning a growl of lust.

She turned and placed a kiss on his lips. "Are you alright?" she whispered, turning to face him. She looked rested and happy. Her arms slid around his and pulled him close.

"I am fine," he rumbled, his voice deep from sleep. "Where's Lupin?"

"The loo." The door to the bathroom opened, revealing a naked Remus outlined in the light of the room beyond. Even in shadow, Severus could see the man's erect cock. He felt Hermione's hand close over his own erection, her palm sliding over his rigid flesh in slow, expert strokes.

"Good morning," Remus said, looking a little uncertain. Hermione beckoned to him with her free hand.

"Good morning, dear Remus," she replied with a smile. She glanced down at Severus' now aching erection. "Severus and I were just getting started, but we wanted to wait on you."

"Did we?" Severus muttered, and Hermione turned back to her husband, and whispered something in his ear. His eyes widened, but he looked beyond her to the almost painful hope in Lupin's eyes, and nodded. "I think you'd better join us, Remus. Hermione must be satisfied."

Remus smiled, and crossed to the bed, where Hermione pulled him down onto all fours. With a pounding heart, Severus rose from the bed, and watched as Hermione slid beneath their friend, pulling his cock into her waiting mouth. Remus cried out her name, and his hips rocked gently toward her mouth.

Severus approached the man from behind, stroking his own cock. The lubrication spell instantly soothed Remus, and he turned around, his eye wide. "Oh, gods, Severus, if you knew how I've..."

"Hush, I'm nervous enough as it is," Severus rasped, and grasped the other man's hips. He closed his eyes, and gently eased two fingers into Remus' waiting hole. He shuddered with pleasure, and at Severus' command, he gently pulled Hermione until she was repositioned before him, and he parted her legs and lapped eagerly at her soft, wet folds.

Severus' cock was like bone, and he eased into Remus' arse slowly, shivering at the tight, slick heat of his passage. Remus whimpered against Hermione's flesh, and Severus thought about Remus licking his wife's juicy pink cunt, he thought about her sucking Remus' cock. He thought about the warm, soft hand stroking his balls as she reached to make contact with him, and he entered Remus in one long, slow push. He gripped Lupin's hips hard, knowing he was probably leaving bruises, and even that somehow excited him, and in his third stroke he was pistoning into Remus' arse, his rhythm fast and relentless and thrilling.

Remus cried out, and Severus and Hermione took him, fucking him with abandon, both of them pleasuring their friend, a combined force of thrusting, sucking, stroking pleasure. Between them, Remus cried out with every hard thrust, moaning their names, pushing back onto Severus' cock, thrusting down into Hermione's mouth, begging them and fingering her pussy and calling Severus beautiful, dirty names.

Lupin's arse was unbelievably hot and tight, and when Severus angled down and sinuously nudged his prostate, Remus came with a sudden shout of painful pleasure. As Severus watched Remus' semen come spurting over Hermione's breasts and belly, he came with a growling, ragged moan, pumping his issue into a man for the first time in his life. He sagged against Remus' back, breathless, and closed his eyes.

Hermione quickly moved before Remus collapsed on top of her. He was gasping for breath, and looked both exhilarated and exhausted. Severus leaned against their bed, and Hermione melted into his arms. He could feel the sticky slide of semen on her chest, and they both grimaced good-naturedly. Hand in hand, they headed for the bath. Remus had already drifted back to sleep again.

It was much later that Severus stirred again. As before, he and Hermione were alone in their bed, but there was no light in the bathroom. Looking at Hermione's peacefully sleeping face, Severus rose, donning a black bathrobe and pyjama bottoms. He padded soundlessly into the kitchen, and made a cup of tea.

The events of the previous night paraded across his mind. It had been a special moment in time, but one he knew they would never repeat. It had been a gift; perhaps for all of them. He thought of what he and Remus had done, and allowed himself to take comfort and pleasure in it. He thought of how they had made love to Hermione, and nodded to himself. That gave him the most pleasure, and he knew his head was going to stay in the right place over this.

In the front room, the sofa had been restored to its normal shape. Nothing looked out of place or unusual. Looking around the room, he could have been forgiven for thinking the events of the previous night nothing more than a strange, erotic dream.

The note, however, was very real. It sat on the sofa, where the three of them had made love to one another, and Severus retrieved it and read.

Dear Severus and Hermione,

I woke up shortly after the two of you drifted back off, and I came in here to give you some privacy. While I sat here, I realised just what a precious gift you gave me last night. It was more than the gift of your bodies, as beautiful and wonderful as that is, but it was more than that. It was the gift of complete unselfishness.

Severus, when I first learned of your marriage to Hermione, I was worried. Forgive me, but our history has not always been a happy one, and I knew enough of your feelings for Lily to worry that you would try to revisit your feelings for her onto Hermione.

No doubt you are aggravated that your motives were being misinterpreted, and I apologise for that. Now, I can put my hand on my heart and pledge that no one knows the depth of love you have for your wife more than I; no one more than I knows how special she is to you, how much you adore her. And you must never forget that, as much as you love Hermione, she loves you back as much or more. It is a joy to see you both with so much happiness in your lives you can share it with someone like me.

Thank you for last night. I'm going to go now, because I need to put a little distance between us. I will be in touch; I promised not to disappear like before, and I won't. But you must understand that, having tasted the sweetness of making love to you both, if I stay, I may be unable to resist asking for it again. The last thing I want to do is to force something upon you that you are unable or unwilling to reciprocate. The memory of what we shared will be cherished and bring me a great deal of comfort.

You will always be my dearest friends, and when a little time has passed, I will be able to return back to our friendship with the gratitude of our special moment together to sustain me. It's time I went out and tried to find my own happiness and allow you to enjoy yours.

With all my affection,

Remus

Severus folded the parchment and stared into the banked embers. Remus was right, of course; he needed to find his own happiness. Severus allowed himself a wistful moment, recalling Remus' placid, calm nature, the blazing passion underneath. He would make any man or woman an excellent mate. Perhaps he and Hermione had helped him to realise that.

Severus laid the parchment on the side table, and rose to prepare a breakfast tray for his wife.

-oOo-

"Oh, I hope he isn't ill. These long-distant Portkeys can make you dreadfully ill, I'm told."

"Which is why we are waiting for Lupin here in London, and not staggering around in the International Portkey centre at the foothills of the Himalayas."

Hermione sighed. "It will be so good to see Remus again."

"It will be even better to see my ingredients manifest," Severus grumbled, as a young wizard jostled him without so much as an 'excuse me.' Gods, if he ever needed a reminder why he didn't miss teaching...

"I'm just so worried the Portkey will make him sick."

"If he's forgotten the *Dipterocarpus zeylanicus*, he's going to have a lot more to worry about than puking on his shoes."

"You don't fool me for one moment. You're as happy about seeing him again as I am," Hermione retorted with a soft laugh. She smoothed her robes and pushed her mane of hair from her shoulders. "Do I look alright?" she asked, fidgeting with an embellishment on her bodice.

"You look stunning and you know it," he chided.

It was true; Severus felt an absurd surge of pride as he stood with his wife. Several acquaintances nodded approvingly their way *We make a good pair*, he thought. *This little Gryffindor witch and I.*

A Sonorus-enhanced voice drifted across the concourse: "*International Portkey ISA773534 arriving at gate two. Portkey ISA773534 arriving at gate two..*"

Severus took Hermione's hand, and together they craned to see the first arrivals coming through.

-o0o-

Remus had been as good as his word. They didn't see him for almost a month after Severus and Hermione received his note, but he owed every other day, and sometimes sent a Patronus message just to keep in touch.

Severus was relieved. It had been a special night, and he and Hermione spoke of it at great length, but they were in agreement that it wasn't something they felt the need to repeat. It had been a sudden, in-the-moment thing, and they had taken great pleasure in it, but to dwell on it, or Merlin forbid, try to revisit it would most likely end in disaster.

Time passed, and the three of them met for dinner. Severus had anticipated the meeting to be an awkward affair, but Remus had gone to great lengths to make it as comfortable as possible, and after a rather quiet hour, they relaxed and became friends again. The only sticky moment came at their parting, when he enfolded Hermione in an embrace, and placed a kiss on her forehead. He had looked up at Severus, and opened his mouth to speak. Something stilled his tongue, and he gave Severus a rather sad look of wistfulness, and Severus nodded, preferring the unsaid to remain so.

Severus and Hermione never managed to organise their trip to Sir Lanka. Their business kept them too busy, and Hermione's second book commission had a short deadline. Every time they found a little breathing room, some new venture or challenge presented itself, and they couldn't tear themselves away.

In the end, Remus volunteered to go in their place, and so, armed with a Potions ingredients list as long as he was tall, Remus bade his friends farewell and disappeared halfway across the world.

He had been gone six months, but they knew of his daily activities and his adventures. He sent them weekly reports, he owed little gifts and packets of tea, he sent ingredients samples, he spoke of witches and wizards he'd met and befriended. In all his correspondences, he sounded happy.

A group of rather green and queasy-looking witches and wizards came streaming out of the concourse, and Hermione and Severus eagerly checked each face for their friend. For ten minutes a steady stream of increasingly revived men, women and children filed out, fanning themselves and popping anti-nausea potions.

"He must be really ill," Severus muttered, after almost thirty minutes passed and no Remus.

"Perhaps he got the next Portkey," Hermione said with a frown. "It's almost time for the next...Severus, there he is!"

To his relief, Severus saw the disheveled face of Lupin come into view. He didn't look particularly ill, just harried *Gods, I hope he didn't have problems passing those ingredients through customs...*

"Severus, Hermione! Sorry to be so late!" He rushed toward his friends, enveloping Hermione in a bear hug and lifting her off the ground. "You look more beautiful than ever!"

"Careful, wolf, that's my wife!" Severus growled, but there was no rancour in his words. He was pleasantly surprised to realise he, too, was happy to see Remus.

"I can't help it, Severus. She's so beautiful and I've missed you both so much!" Remus declared. Nevertheless, he carefully set Hermione on her feet. "What a ride in," he exclaimed, shaking Severus' hand. Their eyes met, and Remus pulled him into an embrace. "You look wonderful too," he said quietly, and released Severus with a pat on the shoulder. "It's so good to see you both, and I've got so much to tell you."

Severus regarded Remus carefully. He was a little travelworn, but his eyes were bright and alert, his skin ruddy with health. He was a different wizard from the man who'd passed out on their carpet months before. He looked content and happy. He looked glad to be alive.

"I'm so weighed down with luggage and gifts and potions ingredients I'm surprised I made it through! Truth to tell, I didn't have too bad a time of it but Selva didn't have such good luck with the Portkey, and the poor dear had to go to the loo..."

"Selva?" Hermione asked, a slow, dawning smile spreading across her face. "Who's Selva?"

"Or, what's Selva?" Severus asked suspiciously. Remus laughed, refusing to rise to the bait.

"Well, I owed you that I had a surprise for you," he added, his eyes scanning the crowd. His face lit up with pleasure. "And here she is!"

A pretty witch in her thirties approached them. She was pale beneath her dusky olive complexion, but looked otherwise none the worse for wear. Her long black hair was smooth and shining, and her dark eyes flashed with intelligence and warmth. She smiled softly as she took Remus' outstretched hand. "Well, that will teach me to have a hearty breakfast before a long trip!" she said, rueful laughter in her lilting, pleasant accent. She turned to Severus and Hermione, and smiled her greeting.

Remus put his arm around her. "Selva, this is Severus and Hermione Snape, my two closest friends. Severus, Hermione, meet Selvakumari Sivabalasubramanian."

The witch laughed at their startled expressions. "But please, just call me Selva." She beamed. "I am so happy to meet you at last. Remus has spoken of you so much I feel I already know you."

"I hope you will not hold that against me, nevertheless," Severus replied, with a courtly bow.

"Oh, I don't think there's any danger of that," she replied, looking up at Remus with a startling amount of affection in her face.

The two of them stared at one another for a split second, then Remus started. "Ahh! First things first." He withdrew a small package and handed it to Severus.

"I recommend being in a large room to enlarge that," Selva said, her dark eyes twinkling. "We were up half the night trying to get everything shrunk down enough to travel."

You might have an explosion on your hands when you return it to its proper size."

"How exciting! It's like Christmas," Hermione answered, "And we have the perfect place for it. I hope you don't mind, but Severus and I thought we'd all stop at our place for a cup of tea first, and then we can give you a tour around Hogsmeade, if you not too tired..." The two women walked ahead, arm in arm, chatting comfortably, like old friends.

They silently followed behind their witches for a few steps. "Hermione looks wonderful," Remus mused.

"So you said."

"And how far along is she?"

Severus looked at him keenly. Remus shrugged. "Her hormones are all over the place, she weighs about a stone heavier than the last time I saw her and she's glowing. It couldn't be anything else."

"How did you know about the hormones? Oh," Severus grumbled, as Remus laid a finger to the side of his nose. "I should have known your base animal instincts would come into play."

"I prefer to think of it as concern, but you will think the worst of me."

They continued a few steps in silence. Severus observed Remus out of the corner of his eye. The man looked positively smug. "Will Miss Sivabalasubramanian live with you, or will you join her at Hogwarts?"

At Remus' startled look, Severus did a fairly credible imitation of his shrug. "Minerva owled me about a candidate from Sri Lanka who had applied for the Ancient Runes position, so I thought I'd help research her credentials. They seemed to be in order, so I recommended her." At Remus' grateful expression, Severus waved his hand dismissively. "It would not do to have you moping about the place, sending expensive owls across the world."

Remus looked at Severus sharply, then laughed. "I should have known you'd look out for me."

"I prefer to think of it as spying, but you will think the best of me."

Remus laughed. "I suppose it sounds rather sad, but I'm glad you've been spying on me. It's good to know good to know I have friend who care about me, enough to make sure I'm alright." He paused, and added softly, "It's a good feeling, surrounded by friends who don't give a damn about past lives and mistakes. People who believe that a person can change and grow and reinvent themselves and still be who they are. You and Hermione have always tried to instill that in me."

Severus glanced over at his friend, and the contentment and joy he saw in Remus' face gave him a sense of peace, of completion. Remus was the last loose end he had needed to tie up before he and Hermione settled down to start their family. Now he was safe and happy, and not alone. Severus thought of his unborn child, and the terrifying responsibility of bringing that child into the world. He wanted to be worthy of this child; after all these years, he finally felt he was.

Severus looked at his wife, laughing and exclaiming over something Selva was saying. She turned in profile, and he saw the graceful swell of her belly, and the love he felt for her multiplied, like *Gemino*, filling his heart to bursting point for his witch and his unborn child. "I might have been her professor, but Hermione has been my true teacher, Remus. She made me realise that I needn't be the person I had become. One can reverse course *at any time*. The point of power is always the present."

He caught Hermione's eye, and she beckoned to him. Before he joined her, he gestured toward Selva. "It's time. Past time, really. Go and write your unwritten saga, Remus Lupin. Look at that fresh, blank page and write that new chapter. No one else can write it; only you know how it will end."

Remus smiled quizzically. "And how will I know, my sage friend?"

Severus looked at Hermione. "Because you will make it happen."

They caught up with the witches, and Hermione took his hand in hers. "Home?" she asked.

Yes, *you are*, he thought. "Yes. Home."

~Mischief Managed~