

Learning to Hunt under a Moonless Sky

by purpleygirl

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Remus's elation at breaking the curse at the end of the passageway was short lived.

He stepped into the castle corridor. It was one he had crept along hundreds of times before in the dead of night, yet now it seemed more swathed in darkness than ever.

He wondered exactly what to do now he was actually inside the school. When he had made his spur-of-the-moment decision earlier that night to check on the children's safety, perhaps to contact Minerva, he had not thought this far ahead.

But before he could form some kind of plan, his wand was whipped out of his hand.

He made a grab for it and knocked over a suit of armour. It fell to the floor with a crash that echoed around the castle. His wand had vanished.

He peered up and down for his disarmer and then saw the tapestry hanging over the recess opposite. The shadows around it rippled beneath the torchlight. A dark wand emerged, followed by the pale face of Severus Snape.

"Just what do you think you are doing, Lupin?" Snape whispered.

Remus drew himself up. "Isn't it obvious, Severus? I was out for an evening stroll and thought I'd just check on how you're doing in your new job."

Snape's black eyes bored into him. His stare did not falter. "Amusing," he breathed at last. "I repeat. What are you doing here, Lupin?"

The torchlight flickered about them as they stood staring at one another, Snape's outstretched wand between them.

"I wanted to do something."

"For the children? How touching." Snape curled his lip. "What about your wife? Isn't she carrying your pup, werewolf?"

"I need to do something. I offered to accompany Harry..." Too late, Remus realised what he had said. "You can use Legilimency. Truth serum. I. Don't. Know. Where. He. Is."

Snape regarded him for a long moment; then his thin mouth twisted slowly into a smile. "He will be found."

Remus flicked his gaze to the side. The nearest torch was behind Snape.

Though they both knew that Remus was far from any kind of weapon, in the next second Snape lunged forward. "Try me!" he jeered and dug the point of his wand into Remus's neck.

"I thought I heard a crash. Who's this?"

His head pinned against the wall, Remus glanced down the corridor. A man was slouching towards them with his wand out. He almost stumbled over the fallen armour.

"Remus Lupin."

Remus snapped his gaze back to Snape.

The man studied him. "Haven't seen you around here before. A trespasser?"

Snape continued staring at Remus. "I believe he wants his old job back."

"What job was that?"

"Yours, Amycus."

"Well, he can't have it. Hold on..." Carrow's snarl fell away; he narrowed his eyes at Remus "...it's past midnight."

"Who knows the mind of a werewolf."

"Werewolf!" Carrow pointed a finger. "I thought I knew you from somewhere. You're one of them Dumbledore's cronies. I should've finished you when I had the chance."

Remus looked at his scowling face. He knew him as a Death Eater, but beneath the hood Carrow would have worn, he could not place him to any particular fight. Perhaps when they had escorted Harry from his aunt's house. "What chance was that?" he asked.

"You do understand," Snape said as Carrow was about to answer, "that as Headmaster I cannot allow a live werewolf to roam my school corridors."

The way Snape had lingered over the word 'live' made Remus's blood run cold with hate. But worse was the way that Snape continued to stare at him. He had not glanced at Carrow once the entire time.

Remus tried to draw himself up against the point of Snape's wand, ignoring the pain. "So you're going to kill me like you did your predecessor? How very predictable."

The way Snape stood perfectly still, wand in Remus's neck, eyes unblinking like a horrible statue, made Remus all the more afraid for the children, their dark-filled days, their lessons in torture and killing and hatred. He silently cursed himself for getting caught before he had been able to reach them.

"I have a better idea," Carrow said at last. "So you want to be in class again, werewolf?" He grinned. "I know how you can be of use. I've been looking for a new demonstration for classes. I reckon the kids are getting bored with the same old curses. I know I am. Might learn some werewolf lore while we're at it. Effects of silver. That kind of thing."

"While I applaud your dedication to the students' learning," Snape said, "is it wise to attempt it with a live werewolf?" he asked, his gaze fixed on Remus. "I have witnessed your class demonstrations."

"No harm in giving the kiddies a bit of a fright now and then do 'em good. You want to keep up their respect, don't you? If we don't keep 'em occupied..." his beady eyes moved over Remus "...entertained, they'll get restless. Unruly."

"Just make sure you keep things under control and get the werewolf back alive once you've finished he is in the Order, and the Dark Lord may want to speak with him."

"It's a new moon," Remus told Carrow's eager face. "The effects won't be as strong."

Carrow's expression darkened. "Shame. Then maybe we should try and draw the wolf out a bit, eh? Can't disappoint the kids, can we?"

"Draw out the wolf?" said Snape, eyes still on Remus.

"Yeah. It's in there somewhere. Just a case of finding it."

"It's never been attempted. Not by any but the werewolves themselves."

"Thought you liked a challenge, Snape."

Snape was silent, his black eyes impassive.

"And don't forget you owe me the werewolf because of your stupid wand-waving. Maybe you can see tonight if you can bring the wolf out." Carrow shot Snape a sidelong look. "If you can't manage it..." he shrugged "...I s'pose I'll just have to make do with him tomorrow." He glanced at Snape again. "If you're worried about the wolf, use the shackles. I'm keeping 'em for that Gryffindor kid, but he don't have to use 'em just yet."

"I'm sure Longbottom would appreciate the thought." Snape's low voice was as expressionless as his gaze fixed on Remus.

"I will take it from here, Amycus," he said at last. "Make sure the intrusion did not disturb anyone else."

But Carrow remained where he was, studying Remus. Remus could almost see Carrow's mind turning over all the things he could do with him in class in the morning.

On seeing no movement, Snape took his eyes from Remus for the first time that night. His gaze turned slowly toward Carrow.

Seeing the black eyes on him snapped Carrow out of his trance. His face darkened. He turned without a word and sloped away, disappearing around a corner.

Snape turned back to Remus. "It seems you will be doing something for the children after all." He curled his lip as he held his wand into Remus's neck.

"You can't really think you can bring the wolf out."

Snape raised an eyebrow. "That is for us to discover."

"And the children? I don't need to tell you the danger, do I?"

A shadow passed across Snape's face at this allusion to his encounter with the wolf. His wand pressed harder into Remus's neck. "Then I think we should go somewhere the wolf will feel more at home for this, don't you?"

He released the pressure from his neck and brought his wand a few inches back, its point to Remus's face. Snape opened his mouth, and Remus heard a low mutter before his vision clouded and darkened.

Remus woke with his face against a wooden floor. He tried to move, but his limbs were bound fast to his body.

The grey-dirt hem of a black cloak swept by his face. "Remember this, werewolf?" asked Snape. "Just like four years ago."

Remus strained against the tight cords around his arms as he heard Snape's heavy boots behind him. It was then Remus saw the paper peeling from the walls, scratched, torn, cracked, the four-poster bed, its hangings laden with dust. Snape had brought him to the Shack.

"All we need now is Black at the end of my wand to complete the picture."

It took all Remus's effort to roll onto his back. He stared past Snape's wand inches from his head. At least this time, Snape had not bound his mouth as well. "You're the coward I always thought you were, Severus," he said. "Always demanding retribution from the past as though you're owed it."

Snape snapped his fingers, and the ends of the cords binding Remus flew to his hands. He hauled him to his still-bound feet and, using his wand to keep Remus upright, dragged him toward the bed. He pressed him against one of its lacerated posts so that Remus's face was twisted to one side. Then he spelled loose the rope around his arms, raised them above Remus's head and secured them tightly to the bedpost so that the rope hung from the carved beast that adorned its top at the dusty hangings.

"You used to intrigue me, years ago," he breathed into Remus's face. He tightened the cords at Remus's ankles with his wand until they cut into him. "The mysterious boy refusing to join in his friends' antics. Then there was here." Snape glanced around hatefully. "The Dark creature. It seemed to explain everything, justify my curiosity. But then I saw the pitiful reality the spineless prefect, the coward that didn't deserve to belong to the Dark. Useless and ineffective. Just as the werewolves last year knew you for the pathetic creature you really are."

"Spineless?" said Remus, his voice shaky against the strain of the tightening ropes. "To come to the castle now?"

"Whatever did you hope to accomplish here, werewolf?" Snape made a derisive noise. "Werewolf creature of the Dark. You're not worthy of the title. You remind me too much of Black. A true creature of the Dark thinks before acting. He takes his time, plans every detail carefully and deliberately. He is willing to wait years if necessary to achieve his goals."

"And what are your goals? What is it you hope to achieve in this war?"

There was a moment of silence. "What everyone wants in war."

Snape had paused so long that Remus had almost thought he would not answer. "And what's that?" he asked him.

"Its end."

Remus hesitated then forced a weak laugh. "But I think we disagree on the finer points of how this particular war will end."

"Doesn't everyone?"

Remus's voice hardened. "You know what I mean."

"Enough of this," said Snape in a bored tone. "Let's see if we can't get the wolf out, shall we?" Without further warning, he took two steps back and pointed his wand firmly at Remus.

"Severus..."

Snape began muttering, and Remus felt a shiver of magic run over him. Snape did not know the magic to bring out the wolf within him the magic simply did not yet exist and Remus's body convulsed with each new wave that Snape tried. Snape was attempting to invent the magic to fit with the result he wanted.

Remus gritted his teeth against the throbbing magic and the pull of the cords. "You're really...you're really going to give Carrow what he wants?"

"That's right, Lupin. I intend to give Carrow exactly what he wants."

A fresh tremor consumed Remus, and unable to catch his breath under its force, he let out a low groan as the cords cut into him. A warm liquid trickled from his nose. He put out his tongue to his upper lip and tasted iron.

"This is inadequate." Snape sounded frustrated. "I need to see if there is any change. We don't want the wolf in the flesh, but perhaps any mental change will be reflected physically."

Remus heard him pronounce a more familiar spell, exposing Remus's skin to the cool air of the Shack.

"Better."

Snape's magic grew more intense now it had full access to Remus's flesh. Remus felt as though he were falling, the magic dancing over his skin, seeping into his head, peeling away the layers of his mind, seeking out his wolfish core.

His senses became confused in the ensuing battle. He tried to fight it, the magic, the wolf, but the wolf seemed to latch onto the magic, welcome it as its liberator. Remus began to drown in the instincts being reawakened.

Snape was right behind him again, checking him closely for signs of the wolf.

The human part of Remus clung on desperately to full awareness. "Don't," he gasped. Even as he spoke, the last thread linking him to his human senses began to dwindle. "You kill...Dumble..."

"Dumbledore wasn't the first I've ever killed," whispered Snape.

And suddenly Remus's wolfish senses broke through into his human body. The point of magic that Snape dragged over him was magnified a hundredfold. He felt each breath that Snape expelled on his exposed back, his raised arms, his neck.

Behind him was a fellow hunter. But this was much more this was a successful hunter, one that knew how to kill, had killed and Remus stopped struggling against his bonds.

Snape had stopped as well, sensing that something had changed. He watched Remus closely.

Remus leaned his head to better feel Snape's breath on his throat. He bent his head further back and stared defiantly into the eyes of the hunter, his captor. "Teach me."

As he looked, the dark gaze began to diffuse before Remus's eyes, and he felt his mind spin, images whirl past of moon-soaked forests, crisp night air dragging through his throat, the thrill of the chase rousing him. Just as suddenly, they stopped and the black eyes returned. He pulled on the ropes preventing him from getting closer to the hunter.

"You want me to teach you?" Snape pushed Remus's head forward to face the bed and leaned in. His breath was shallow. "You still owe me. Your life is mine." A thumb travelled around Remus's ear. "All for an ear," Snape whispered.

The cords at Remus's ankles loosened and fell away as those at his wrists were tightened even further. Anticipation of what the hunter could teach him drove his senses wild with arousal. He tried to twist his head back around, but Snape held him fast, and Remus breathed in the smell from the heat of the hand pressed against him.

Snape slid a hand between Remus's legs. His fingers touched his tightening sac, his thumb stroking him behind, entering him.

"Poor Carrow. It seems I'm cheating him of his werewolf trophy for the second time."

Remus ground against his thumb to take in more of Snape's scent, stroking his own onto Snape.

Snape's breath against Remus's skin grew shallower. He muttered, and Remus felt something large and hot and slick slide into him. Snape slid in deeper, piercing him, and Remus strained on his ropes. They cut into his wrists. He strained harder. It was an honour to be taken by this skilled hunter, this expert deceiver, and Remus ached to learn everything he could from him. He longed for his victories to infect him, craved his killing instincts, his superior predatory skills. He needed this perfect killer, faultless, uncaught, to reach to his core and invade every fibre of him.

"I'll teach you what you need to know, werewolf." Snape's voice was uneven as he pulled back then began to ease in again. "The secret to success..." he slid in unhurriedly, deeper and deeper "...is to act slowly little by little so gradually that it will never be noticed... until it is too late. To rush any part... is to risk a fatal error."

When Snape was almost at Remus's core, he began to withdraw again. Remus hungered for more and pulled his wrists down hard so that he felt the sharp heat there pierce his skin.

"Patience," whispered Snape as he drove back in, this time a little faster, but not nearly fast enough. "Slowly but surely. That is the key."

"You may even need to take what seem like backward steps..." Snape started to retreat again, too soon "...so as to advance further toward your target."

Snape was almost there now, consuming him, possessing him, the killing heat deep inside him, against him, thigh on thigh, and Remus's entire body coiled in tension, ready to take its kill to slaughter or be slaughtered.

But the moan he released was one of anger when Snape grabbed his sac, squeezing him hard. "To succeed," he breathed by Remus's ear, tightening his grip, "you must resist. Resist the desire to strike, no matter how strong that desire may be."

He had stopped moving, and Remus whimpered, his senses in turmoil. "It is essential to wait for the opportunity that will ensure success." Snape brought his mouth closer to Remus's ear, almost touching it. "It may take years." Remus growled; Snape moved his head back, but did not loosen his grip. He started to move again. "Everything must be in place. And then only then do you know your time has finally arrived. Only then can you emerge from the shadows to make your final, fatal blow." Snape released Remus and thrust hard.

Snape, the practised killer, the accomplished deceiver, tore into him, destroying his senses, capturing them and infecting them completely as he forced Remus to rid himself of every weakness, every failure in thick, hot pulses.

Slowly, Snape slid out. With the supporting weight of his impalement removed, the thin cords sliced into Remus as he hung limp against the bedpost.

"I think enough of the wolf is at the surface." Snape's voice was as expressionless and even as before when he had been hitting him with spells. "The magic will wear off by the morning. I will return then to replenish it and collect you for Carrow."

Snape muttered something, and Remus felt the soothing air that had brushed his back disappear, enclosed in clothing that was now dampening with his sweat.

He felt his hands seized. His fingers were being curled around the bedpost and held there, relieving his wrists from the pressure of the cutting cords. Remus obediently gripped the wood as Snape let go.

A moment later there was the heavy sound of boots on wood as Snape left the room.

Remus was sliding in and out of his mind. Some human part of him was trying to regain control while the wolf rested. But it sensed danger and fought to retain its ascendancy, spurred on by its recent possession by the killer.

As each part battled for control, Remus realised that his arms were slipping lower and lower down the wood. He moved his grip to the cords. At some point the knots must have worked themselves loose at the post they came away in his hands as he pulled.

Remus staggered to the side. He dropped to the bed, burning where Snape had taken him, and looked at the bloodied cords, the ends dangling from his wrists. He loosened the knots and flung them away. The cuts were still strong, the pain stinging. He brought each arm to his mouth and licked the fresh wounds until the pain began to abate.

Remus sniffed the air, heavy with musk. It was strongest between his legs, and he brought his hand down beneath his robes to the dampness on his thigh then licked his fingers. It was the scent, the taste of an expert killer.

At the far end of the room, the door stood ajar. Remus glimpsed the staircase beyond, and he pushed himself up from the bed.

As he lurched to the door, bits of him swam in and out of awareness. Part of him was confused at this new distance to the ground; part of him wanted nothing more than to be far away from here, to feel himself sink into his own warm bed.

Somehow he got down the stairs. He knew this prison so well he found the tunnel at once, and before long, he was out into the night, its redolent air enticing him, heightening his senses.

He stumbled toward the forest, its blurred shadows welcoming him. The sky out here made him fearful with its absence of moon, though something in him was trying to persuade him it was not unnatural.

He had reached the dark recesses given by the trees when he saw the moon coming towards him.

Through the forest it seemed to come, seeking him out. Against a tree wearily he waited as the moon moved nearer. But as it drew close, he saw it was being carried by a man. Its light fell full on him.

"Snape said I'd find you out here. Broke loose did you?" The moonlight swung to his left, his right. "Where did he tie you? To a tree?"

The man was mocking him with his miniature moon, but as his limbs began to burn in readiness, the thing inside him reared up, and he tore instead into the bark, his body

pounding with an alien, paralysing energy.

"Snape's really been letting rip on you, hasn't he?"

The man was moving closer, unaware of the danger.

Remus watched his steps draw nearer, nearer; then before the thing inside could overpower him again, he was at the man's throat, pinning him to the ground, the light thrown to one side. The man struck out and struggled, a blur in Remus's cloudy vision.

Then suddenly there was a dull thud, and the man was still. Remus leaned in to the bared throat...

A snap behind made him turn.

"Enough." It was the voice of his teacher.

Remus moved from Carrow and made towards the black shadow.

"Stay where you are!"

Snape raised his wand arm to keep him back, but it was not needed. Already the ache in Remus's body had begun to grow stronger again. It fastened him to the ground, breathing in grass and soil.

When the grip had released him, Remus found himself looking into Carrow's face. Fear was etched onto it in his unconsciousness. Remus's head swam as he raised it.

"If he is killed or bitten," said Snape, "the Dark Lord will be unhappy. He will ask many questions." Remus turned from Carrow. Snape was watching Remus closely. "Now you understand what I told you, wolf?"

"For an ear." Remus had muttered the words without thinking. He tried to clear his head and reached a hand to his ear, trying to place where he had heard that said.

Snape peered down at him.

Remus frowned, some distant memory surfacing. "George..."

"What did you say?" breathed Snape.

Remus looked back at Carrow.

"Lupin?"

Broomsticks were flying through the night air... He was gripping onto George, blood pouring from his wound as Remus looked back at Snape, unhooded and wand arm raised... The Death Eater in front shot past, answering Voldemort's call, Snape following...

Remus stared into Carrow's face. Carrow. That night. That was the chance Carrow had had to finish him. The chance he had lost. Lost for...

Remus took his hand from his ear and absently rubbed his pounding wrist. He turned to Snape, his blurry vision clearing for an instant. "Why ... why did you stop him that night?" He studied Snape's indifferent silence. "He implied it was an accident. But it was George's ear that was the accident, wasn't it?"

"You're delirious."

"Why did you save my life?"

A tension seemed to grow in Snape. He kept his wand trained on Remus as they stared at one another. When finally Snape spoke, his voice heaved with anger as though the words were being pulled from him. "Four years ago, when you returned to the school, I thought... could it be? Is this the Dark creature here now, plotting, waiting to make his move on Potter? But no..." his voice was heavy with disappointment "...you were only the usual coward, siding with Black again."

"Answer me."

Snape held his gaze for a long moment. "Why?" he said at last. His lip curled. "Because I could."

In Remus's vision, Snape's wand swayed from side to side. His body throbbed and ached with the magic that Snape had poured into him earlier. "Are you telling me you acted without thinking, Severus?"

Snape's face darkened. His look was murderous.

A fresh wave of pain clamped down on Remus then, leaving him doubled up on the ground. Acid burned his throat. He raised his head a little and saw the hem of a black cloak over black boots as Snape approached.

"Look at me."

Remus gasped with the effort.

Snape's wand was at his face, pointing between his eyes. Red sparks flew from its tip. He thought he heard Snape mutter *Obliv...*. Then everything went dark.

How long had he been lying here?

Remus tried to push himself up, pausing to blink when his head began to swim. The roadside was damp with dew. His hand hit thick glass with a dull clink a bottle, half-empty and spilling Firewhisky as it sloshed around.

He held his aching head as he heaved himself to his feet. There was a noise to his left, in the dark expanse of field. "Who's there?" He lit his wand and drew it over the bushes littering the other side of the half-collapsed stone wall. A sheep let out a startled bleat and scattered, a streak of wool and nimble legs.

Remus breathed heavily. The fresh air made him feel queasy. He looked to the horizon and the castle's towers against the pale band of light marking the start of dawn.

"Stupid, stupid."

He reeked of alcohol. Dora was sure to smell it on him. He would cast a cleaning charm, of course, but it would not make the shame vanish with it.

He did not know which was worse that he clearly must have succumbed to drink on his way to the castle, or that he had come within a hair's breadth of reaching its walls. He dared not think what might have happened if he had succeeded. It was one thing to have offered Harry the protection of his company. But tonight had been a desperate attempt that only Sirius would have dreamed of trying alone.

He could not remember much since setting out earlier that night, buzzing with the need to be of use, feeling resentful of Dora's condition.

It had been selfish of him, and he knew it now, as though the alcohol had cleared his mind. He had neglected his responsibilities.

He rested a hand on a cold stone jutting from the wall. He felt a strange pull to the castle as he watched its twinkling lights. It felt like a raw eagerness that the wolf would have. But the moon was new, and already the feeling was beginning to wane as the sun rose. It was as if something at Remus's core believed the school still had much to teach him.

It wanted the night to return, full moon or not.