

Inside the lines

by Rose of the West

A tired, old-feeling man has all but given up on life. As the war ends, he finds himself challenged-and charmed-by a witch who's lost as much as he has.

The Gray Man

Chapter 1 of 5

A tired, old-feeling man has all but given up on life. As the war ends, he finds himself challenged-and charmed-by a witch who's lost as much as he has.

The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

He was known as "The Gray Man of the Ministry." It was easy to see why. His clothing had long since become a non-descript color and the shape drooped in a general slumpishness that gave the impression of gray even on days when it was a shade of brown or blue. Old timers would whisper of the days when he was young and vibrant, with a gorgeous wife, *even if she was a Muggle*, they would whisper amongst themselves. Some knew him as a real fire-eater who spoke out of turn as like as not and seemed to be headed for a fall. The fall came, but did not hurt him. Instead it hurt his small son, and the color seemed to seep out as the next few years went until he seemed older than he was.

If he knew that he was called the Gray Man after that, he didn't acknowledge it. He had more than his share of concerns in the world, but he shouldered them fairly well. It worked fine for a couple of decades at least, but then another, sadder fall came upon him. The beautiful Muggle got sick and died. He stopped caring what became of himself, although his work never failed. He simply floated from one project to the next and didn't mind overtime or extra work. By this point, if someone said, "Let the Gray Man handle it," he raised his head over his cubicle, looked for the speaker, and put out his hand to receive the airplane that unfolded into a project folder on his desk. There were even days when he referred to himself as "The Gray Man."

The war with Voldemort didn't affect the Gray Man in the same sense that it affected his son, who wanted him to take a side. His son had a particular side he wished to everyone to take, and indeed it seemed the only reasonable side to take. Yet he couldn't summon the will to chose a particular side. It didn't really affect him, anyway. Dark creatures had to be found and contained and then turned over to the next person, who would see them to their proper place. Politics might decide what that place was, but it didn't affect how he did his job.

At the age of thirty-odd years, the boy finally got married. He found a young woman, not quite young enough to be his daughter. She was quite a looker, or at least she seemed to be in some of the pictures. In other snaps, she had rather odd-shaped nose or eyes, and in still others she simply looked... off. The boy said she was a Metamorphmagus. The old man looked it up to check. Metamorphmagi weren't considered dark or controlled for any reason, so there was no need to worry about her non-conformity. The Gray Man wasn't invited to the wedding.

Yet fate was at the window, and walked into his Ministry office in the form of a middle aged sort of man. The Gray Man had seen him around the Ministry, in the canteen and where have you, but hadn't put the face together with any name. There was just a tremor of something in the air as the man held out his hand and said, "Lyll Lupin? I'm Ted Tonks, Nymphadora's dad."

It was a solid shake, and Lyall noted that his son's father-in-law to be was younger than himself and had at one time been far more active than his Ministry job must now allow for. "How do you do, Ted, you say?"

"Short for Edward, but only the wife ever calls me that."

The Gray Man nodded with a twitch of his mouth. He remembered having a wife. He even remembered how and why proper names were used.

"Speaking of which," said Ted, "I'm supposed to give you this and make sure you read it."

Lyall unsealed and unrolled the scroll, which was heavy linen-weave parchment written upon with a well-schooled hand.

Dear Mr. Lupin,

You are expected at 4:30 today at the Registry Office for the wedding.

Do not be late.

Sincerely,

Edward and Andromeda Tonks

He looked up in confusion. "I was not planning to go."

Ted held up his hands. "We were told the kids wanted to go it alone, but that's been overruled by Andromeda."

"I'm the reason he was-"

"Remus told us all about it, including the fact that doesn't see it that way. He points out that Greyback was known to target children and that it could have been any child that night."

"Surely you can't want your daughter exposed to-"

"We've already argued that out with Remus. Our Dora can look out for herself. She's an Auror, you know."

"I'm still not sure."

Ted rested his hands on Lyall's desk. "Look, mate, if Dromeda were here, she'd tell you that family is something you only throw away when it's life or death. She'd tell you how important these moments are and a hundred other things that she believes. I've given up trying to figure out if those things are woman things or pure blood things or just her. She'd tell it all to you, and you would find that you believe it deep in your soul as if you'd believed it from childhood. Trust me on that. The kids were planning to run to Gretna, but she wanted to be there, and she insists that Remus's family be there, too."

Ted looked around and lowered his voice. "What I'm going to tell you is that you'd better be there. The witch posts a mean Howler."

The Gray Man considered it, his mouth twitching all the while. His own wife hadn't had the means to post a Howler even if she'd wanted to write one, but he'd seen one or two from his own mum, not to mention those received by friends and co-workers from time to time. No doubt the House of Black had its own special spin on the technique. A Howler was quickly over, of course, but he wanted Remus to have as fair a start with his in-laws as possible.

He sighed. "I'll be there."

Ted smiled and held out his hand to shake again. "We really like Remus. The combination of our families will be a good thing."

Due to the events of the following week, he would never exchange more than a greeting with Tonks again, yet because of that short conversation, Lyall Lupin would come to think of Edward Tonks as a kindred spirit.

He worked on the folder on his desk, making notes for what he would do when he went into the field the next day. He told himself that he wouldn't go to the wedding, after all. If he didn't go, he wouldn't be late, would he? Could it really matter that much to Remus, or to the Tonkses? Besides, his clothes were rumpled. Surely that was enough reason not to go.

He sighed and set the folder on the top of his desk. Then ran out the door. There was a twenty-four hour dry cleaner around the corner from the Ministry, and with luck, there was more than enough time to do something about the rumpled state of his robes.

At four twenty-five, wearing robes that were still distinguished when proper care was taken of them, The Gray Man walked through the doors of the Registry Office. The first thing he saw was the beaming face of his son. Remus wasn't looking at him, though. He was smiling at his bride, who was gorgeous in quite elegant dress robes. Her brown hair was swept up, and she looked very much a bride. Ted Tonks caught his eye and nodded, and then the Gray Man saw Andromeda, who was looking at him with a face full of approval. She was glad he was there, and for some reason he knew that she was aware of the care he'd taken in his appearance. He allowed himself to bask in that approval for the instant he had.

"Tonks! Lupin!" Their names were called from a clipboard and the wedding commenced. It was a sweet ceremony, and Lyall judged for himself that this was indeed the right woman for Remus. The nuptial charm was said, and the newly-wed couple kissed briefly before turning their radiant faces toward their parents. A moment later, everyone was outside the office. Nymphadora walked up to the Gray Man with a twinkle in her eye that she'd surely gotten from her father. "Thanks for coming... Dad!" She gave him a quick hug and moved on to her parents, leaving him with the impression of a vivacity that would soon exhaust him.

An instant later the bride was pulling her dress robe off, showing significant amounts of denim and a football shirt underneath. She handed the wadded up garment to Andromeda and said, "Thanks so much, Mum! We'll see you later!" A moment after that, the newlyweds were gone.

Andromeda stared after them with narrowed eyes and thin lips. "And what sort of wedding is this?" She shook out the dress robe in her hands. "Barely over and off to whatever takes her fancy. No time for a proper meal, or cake and a toast? The only greeting just a, 'Thanks for coming, see you later?'" A moment later the robe was folded into a neat package, which she twisted as her hands moved to emphasize her point.

Ted took the robe before she could damage it. "Ah, Dromeda, you know it's how she's always been. No tying her down. No doubt they've planned a romantic time for themselves and wanted to get to it as quickly as possible. Not much time off these days."

"No, I suppose not, and we have to worry about the moon, too."

They looked at the Lyall a little sheepishly. Andromeda stepped forward and took his hand into both of hers. "Mr. Lupin, I'm so sorry that this wasn't more of an event. I believe Ted got some pictures of it though, and at least they'll be able to tell their children a little bit of a story about it."

The Gray Man found himself smiling. "It's no trouble at all, Mrs. Tonks. It was more than I expected to participate in."

She sighed and looked at her husband. "I suppose I might as well take that shift at the hospital. There are one or two children I'm worried about."

Ted kissed her cheek. "I'm sure they'll be far better off for your care dear. Lyall, it's a pleasure. I'm sure we'll see you again soon."

They stood so close to each other, and there was something so intimate about the way they shared smallest of life's details. The Gray Man felt a wave of nostalgia for the time when that existed in his life. He made an awkward goodbye of some sort and left them at the elevator.

A/N: Thank you to Blue Artemis for the look over and the reassurance that this isn't too strange a boondoggle.

Sepia Tone

Chapter 2 of 5

Remus has a crisis of conscience.

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The Gray Man didn't see the Tonks family again. At least he didn't see them together again. There was an overhaul of the Ministry and several rule changes regarding certain types of dark creatures, which he incorporated into his ongoing cases. Someone walked through the office, clucked with a pleased sound over his four magical grandparents, and left him to continue his job. Others weren't so lucky, but they weren't in his field of vision.

One evening he arrived home and saw a gray mass on the steps to his flat. As he approached, he saw that it was Remus, a very dejected Remus, with tears on his face. This flustered him. He'd never been the one the boy came to in the past, and shouldn't a newlywed be happy?

Remus stood up. "I've ruined everything!"

Lyall led him into his lounge. "I'm sure that's not true."

"Dad, she's pregnant."

It took him a moment to figure out how this could be worth crying over and gave up. "Congratulations!"

"Have you forgotten something important?" Remus's voice became a stage whisper. "Such as that I'm a werewolf?"

"You've managed it quite well for thirty-odd years now."

"But what if? And what if I'm not properly contained and hurt my child? And how good a parent can I be with the existence I've had? And what kind of father knowingly allows his child to be a werewolf?" His face was full of anger and disgust.

Out of no where, a pain went straight through Lyall's entire being. Merlin, after avoiding emotions for so long, it hurt. There. Remus had finally said it, after thirty-odd years of them all living through it.

"I'm sorry," he wheezed, unable to find his whole breath. "I was young and thoughtless and didn't think about what I was saying or who might be listening. I relive that day over and over..."

Remus looked stricken. "Dad, I didn't mean you. You were a wonderful dad. You and mum did everything to help me live with it. To make it almost your life's work, helping me to learn how to be a good man and a good wizard, despite my lycanthropy..."

Lyall looked up hopefully. Remus looked thoughtful for a moment, and then somehow the idea escaped him.

"I can't live with myself. I can't expect Dora to live with me under the circumstances."

"But don't you see..." Lyall shrugged helplessly... "life has to be lived."

"Andromeda said something like that. But what do you know about it?"

The Gray Man considered himself for a moment, and then became lost in the thought. He'd lived his life, really lived it, until there was nothing left to live, hadn't he? Hadn't he? Had he become so lost in finding a way to give Remus a normal life that he hadn't actually lived it with him?

Through the white noise in his mind, he was vaguely aware that Remus was still muttering. "Maybe Sirius's house..."

There was a crack of apparition, but the Gray Man didn't really notice it. He sat on a chair, still holding his briefcase, still wearing his outer robe, pondering the emptiness of his life.

There was another crack of apparition. The Gray Man looked up and saw his son again and that it was full dark. How long had he been pondering his life and whether he'd lived it?

"Dad." There was a note of resignation in the boy's face, as though he were used to inattention. Was the Gray Man really this preoccupied?

"Yes? Yes, you're back."

"I saw Harry Potter. Harry wanted nothing to do with me. He called me a coward. A coward, Dad."

"With everything you've gone through and accomplished anyway? How dare he?"

"He's not wrong. But I can't face Tonks after what I've done."

"Is she angry?"

"She's-she was actually pretty happy until she saw my reaction. Dad, I can't face what this will do to her. Her family was tortured because they thought she knew where Harry was. Crucioed."

"Ted and... and Andromeda?"

"After a minute or two, she had some way of throwing it off. It was pretty scary, but I guess being raised a Black prepares a person for things. She got control of whoever was hexing her and demanded that they stop. They didn't know where to find Potter and there was no point to continuing the torture, because no one knows where Harry is."

A spark of interest ran through Lyall's mind. *Except Remus, now.* He opened his mouth, but the boy wasn't done talking.

"After the commission was set up, Ted left. Andromeda was furious and said that she could handle anyone who came after them, but he was adamant. He saw it as the best way to protect his family. She's like a force of nature, sort of like Tonks when she said she was determined to marry me, but look at what became of that. Ted couldn't stand for his wife to be tortured again, not because of him. Maybe Andromeda really is better off without Ted, and most likely Tonks is better off without me."

The Gray Man was nodding, following his own thoughts about what Remus was saying, now. This was what the world had become, when witches had to throw off Cruciatus hexes and men had to leave homes to protect their families.

"Dad."

There it was again, he needed to pay better attention. "I'm sorry. What is it?"

"Do you mind if I sleep on your sofa for a while? I'm not sure where to go."

"Of course. Of course. Or... there's a guest room in this flat. I'm not sure of the state of the sheets, but that's a minor fix..." With something concrete to do, Lyall stood and lead the way down the hall.

It was nice having the boy around. The Gray Man felt a little less gray with someone sharing the house, and it was nice to bump into another person when making coffee the next morning. Then he sort of lost track of Remus and a week after that realized he hadn't seen him much at all. He peeked into the guest room and saw that it was immaculately swept up and cleaned except for a note on the desk.

Dad,

I've decided to go back to Tonks. She says she'll take me. Andromeda was right. Better to live a life than live a ghostly existence. I'll be in touch.

Remus

Was there censure in that? Did Remus consider Lyall's life to be ghostly? A spark of annoyance burned in him as he fixed his dinner that night, and went over his cases and went to bed. It hummed through him the next morning, but one of the cases was particularly baffling and he forgot all about it until he got home. He shrugged and fixed his dinner and read through the folders he'd brought home before going to bed.

A few days later, the Gray Man reached his front door and was attacked from behind. Perhaps it was the side. He was smothered in a robe and a feminine voice said, "Thanks, Dad. Whatever you said mattered." When he was finally released and turned, he was face to face with a tall Amazon of a woman who bore a resemblance to his daughter-in-law. She winked, and suddenly her nose looked a bit like an Erumpet horn. Remus stood in the dim hallway behind her, looking pleased but awkward. Lyall hardly knew what to say. Remus reached for his wife's hand and they slipped away while the Gray Man fumbled with words and keys. "You're welcome. Do you wish for some tea?" He turned and saw that he was in an empty hallway.

Ombre

Chapter 3 of 5

A time to rejoice and a time to mourn.

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There might have been a note or two, and the Gray Man set those on his desk with every intention of answering them. So things went as the fall wore on, past Halloween and then Christmas. He saw no reason to trouble anyone with his existence. The people at the Ministry might be a bit more demanding than usual, and there was always some urgent flyer going around demanding that someone or other get caught, but it had little to do with him. He kept finding the creatures he was sent to capture. Then he returned them to the places he was told to put them, giving custody to the keepers, and went to find his next folder.

He barely noted the New Year and kept working through the winter and early spring. A troll was found near Edinburgh, a knarl was captured near Blackpool. So on and so forth until April. He was writing preliminary notes about a redcap said to be somewhere in Cornwall when a note came from Andromeda Tonks of all people.

Mr Lupin,

I thought you should know that we're about to be grandparents. Please come to the address at the top of this note.

Andromeda

He shrugged. She must mean that he should come to meet the baby in the morning. He had plenty of time to catch the little blood-lover and bring it to the Ministry, although he was interested enough to hope they didn't plan to use it to hurt Muggles. He took another half hour to write the rest of his notes. Lyall had just got his protective gear on when a red envelope flew into his cubicle. Some sort of talons sprung from a corner and grabbed his elbow.

"Ouch!"

DO NOT IGNORE MY LETTER, MISTER LUPIN. I'M HOME ALONE WITH A LABORING WOMAN AND YOUR ASS OF A SON. COME TO THE ADDRESS I SENT YOU BEFORE I'M FORCED TO COME GET YOU MYSELF!

The talons pinched a little more firmly, finding a way through his protective coat and drawing blood. Lyall took off his protective hat and gloves and nearly took off the coat

as well but decided he might need it. He walked out of his cubicle to see several heads peering over the walls in the office.

"I believe I'll be out for the rest of the day, perhaps tomorrow too."

The Apparition directions brought him to a quiet country lane with a house of some sort in the distance. He walked down the lane and saw that the house was of an architecture popular eighty years earlier. It gave the impression of a one and a half story cottage. When he looked a little slantwise at it, he could tell that it was the sort of house that bordered on a mansion. He'd be surprised if there were fewer than six rooms on the first floor and another six on the second floor.

The garden made him sigh in appreciation. It was early spring, yet, but it was a well kept lawn in the places where it was lawn and otherwise a lovely landscape of shrubs and flowers all kept in harmony with each other and likely chosen to give harmony to whomever passed through. He had always pictured such a place when he thought of his retirement, back when he thought he would want to retire sometime.

He knocked on the door and it opened at his touch.

"Just get it out! I don't want it anywhere near me any more!"

"Can't you do anything for her?"

The gray man was in a hallway. As he got to the stairs, he saw his hostess approach from a hallway toward the back. She was holding two flasks.

"MIS-ter Lupin, I see you finally decided to pay us a visit."

"Your er-" The look she gave him was dangerous- "correspondence suggested I could be of use."

"Indeed. Follow me."

He meekly followed her as she went up the stairs. They walked half way down the hall and stopped at a door.

"I have something for you," said Andromeda.

"She doesn't want it," said Remus.

"It's for you."

"I don't want it, either."

"Drink it or I'll lock you in the shed." The look in Andromeda's face accepted no argument. Remus took the flask she held out. She looked over at the Gray Man. "Lyall, take your son downstairs and keep him from making this harder than it needs to be, while I deal with my patient. Remus, I'll call you when you're wanted."

As they left the room, she walked over to the bed. "Nymphadora, this will help you relax while your body does the work. For once in your life you need to trust me."

Remus led the way to a comfortable lounge and sat on the couch. Lyall gingerly sat on what looked like an easy chair and found himself all but sucked into the comfort of it.

"Is Andromeda always like that?"

"Not really, except when she thinks things are going all to hell"

Lyall nodded.

Remus sighed. "Which is pretty much all the time, now."

Lyall nodded again. "She's some sort of Healer, right? She knows what she's doing."

"I know. I shouldn't have been trying to... I don't know what I was doing. She's a brilliant Healer. I've been told she'd be running the pediatric department if it weren't for Ted."

"How are you doing, son?"

"I'm just worried about Tonks. She's not used to going through this sort of thing. It's not as though she can pull out her wand and start casting spells to improve the situation."

"I strongly suspect her mother will know what to do with her."

"I don't doubt it. I think I lost my mind up there." He looked over at the Gray Man. "Thanks for coming, Dad. I know we don't see much of you, but..." He shrugged and yawned.

That pretty much exhausted their list of conversations. Remus drifted to sleep, and Lyall remembered a time when he paced in his own hallway, waiting for the boy to be born who became the man sitting across from him. He'd worried about Hope, but she'd sailed through beautifully, just as she did everything.

"MIS-ter Lupin."

A hand was holding a highball glass out to him. He looked up to see Andromeda, who looked much more relaxed. "The child is born, then?"

"A boy. Very healthy, and already a Metamorphmagus like his mum."

A shiver went through him and he looked at the glass. Andromeda held hers up. "To Edward Remus Lupin!"

The Gray Man swallowed the slightest bit of disappointment and lifted his glass up as well. "Teddy Lupin!"

It was the best firewhisky he'd ever tasted. "Amazing."

"Uncle Alphard would buy it already aged and then save it another 25 years. She looked at the bottle. "This one is from the 1920s."

"It doesn't get too old?"

"Not in Uncle Alphard's cellar." She sipped again. "How he would enjoy another generation in his house." She smiled at the thought, twisting her pearls as she did so. Lyall wondered, irrelevantly, how many healers wore pearls to deliver babies.

He took another swallow himself, letting it roll over and under his tongue. "How will you let your husband know-" He saw the look cross over her face and suddenly realized he'd made a mistake. He'd seen that face in the mirror every time he'd shaved for almost a decade, now- "I'm so sorry."

"Thank you."

"Do you mind me asking how it happened?"

Her face turned angry, but not at him. "He stumbled into a trap. It was bound to happen eventually." She looked piercingly at him. "It wouldn't have happened if he'd stayed with me. A bunch of bumbling fools who barely passed any O.W.L.s. I would have eaten them for lunch and he'd be here..." Her voice broke at the last word.

Lyall Lupin would never know why he did what happened next; perhaps the emotional upheaval of becoming a grandfather played a part. He just knew he had to stand up and put his drink down, taking hers and putting it aside as well. Then he pulled her into a hug so that he could hold her as she cried.

Full Black

Chapter 4 of 5

A day too awful to be ignored.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Dear Mrs. Tonks

Dear Andromeda

Mrs. Tonks

Andromeda,

My dear,

Dear,

He tried for weeks to write a note. He felt a need to follow social convention, but he wasn't sure what it was, given what had happened. There was so much to discuss after that moment in her lounge. Remus had come down holding the baby so that Lyall could meet him. Andromeda had disappeared into the kitchen and then the Gray Man felt awkward and left soon after. Yet somehow there must be a way to express socially proper feelings about the birth of a grandchild and the death of a friend. Lyall had no idea what that was. Every morning he sat at the desk of his home office and took out a fresh piece of parchment, and every morning he went to work, unable to figure out how to even begin such a letter.

He made quick work of the Redcap whose capture was interrupted by the birth of Teddy Lupin and moved on to some Boggarts near Piccadilly. After that there were a ghoul in Yorkshire and some trolls in Glasgow. There was always some creature, and he was a bit suspicious when one of the trolls looked very familiar. A question came up in the back of his mind, but he turned the creatures over to the keepers as instructed.

A month went by in this way, and it was with great embarrassment that he found a letter on his desk when he arrived one morning, addressed to him in a handwriting that was becoming familiar.

Mr. Lupin,

Given the events of the past day and night, I don't have the energy to send a Howler. I'm at Hogwarts, seeing to things, and I simply ask that you join me here if you can.

A~

What events? The Gray Man lifted his head over his cubicle walls and noticed that the room was all but empty. There was some sort of weeping in the far corner, and a bit of scratching of quill on parchment over to the side, but none of the usual industry in the Magical Creatures Bureau. There was no one walking between the cubicles and no memos flying hither and yon. The walk in had been somewhat somber too, with few greetings along the way other than quiet whispers not intended for him.

He looked at the note again. Something horrible had happened, if it had kept her up all night and she was now at Hogwarts. The Gray Man looked longingly at his in box. Something about an Erumpet in the Lakes District. He didn't want to involve himself in Andromeda's trouble. He'd had too much trouble in his life already, in raising a werewolf. Surely Nymphadora and Remus were on hand to help her. He looked at the note again. She'd made no mention of them and at the pit of his stomach, he suddenly wondered what things she was seeing to. With dread in his heart he grabbed his hat and outside robe.

The dread only grew as he approached the elevators. Suddenly he realized just how quiet and hushed the Ministry was today. The few people who were there slipped around like ghosts, as though they hoped to transact their business and leave before they could be noticed.

He lost heart at the sight of the Hogwarts gates, that were twisted and pulled over their hinges as though by giants. There weren't many reasons why a pediatric Healer would be needed at a school with its own matron, and the reasons became clear as he walked past smoking tree stumps and craters in the lawn. At the door, a professor stopped him. "Are you here to pick up your children?"

"I'm supposed to meet Andromeda Tonks."

Her face, already sad, became kind. "Mr. Lupin, then? I remember Remus as a professor. The children loved him and he was quite a noble gentleman."

"Thank you."

"Andromeda is in the Great Hall, with-all of them."

His worst worries roused, Lyall went on and found Andromeda kneeling beside her daughter. She was wiping her face with a flannel and crying. The baby was held to Andromeda's chest with some sort of wrap. He cleared his throat and she looked up.

"I'm so sorry," she said.

It was then that he realized Nymphadora was dead and that on the other side of Andromeda was Remus.

At some time, the Gray Man realized he was sitting in a well-kept kitchen. Chocolate scones were baking in the oven, and the hot cocoa in his hands must have brought him back to himself. His hostess was also sitting at the table, holding a bottle in the baby's mouth.

"I can't think what came over me," he said by way of apology.

"It was shock. I should have found some other way to tell you," she said. The fragility of their last meeting had come upon her, except now she was completely worn out. The war had used her up.

He felt ashamed. He'd done nothing while so many others had shouldered all of the burdens. "I should have been here."

She shook her head.

"No, I should have. Since the wedding, I should have been here."

"What difference would it have made?"

Could he have convinced Ted Tonks not to leave the home where he was safe? Could he have protected Ted when the Snatchers found him? What about in the month and a half since the baby was born?

"I could have done more than I did."

"Perhaps," she agreed. "But perhaps if everyone had done more than they did, this war wouldn't have even happened. One tiny little shift on everyone's part, maybe." She shrugged, "How was any of us to know what the difference was or would have been?"

"I wouldn't have expected Nymphadora to go."

"She couldn't stand to be away from Remus if he was in danger, and she was always one who couldn't bear to miss the action. They tell me it was my own damned sister."

He'd kept himself away from pain for so long that was almost unbearable to see even in another. His own loss washed over him and nearly took him. He took another sip from his mug and let the chocolate flavor soothe him. "What will you do now?"

"Manage, somehow."

He sipped again. The pain still hurt, but it was the right thing, somehow. It was right to feel the pain, to grieve, to allow himself to accept that something was gone and he wanted it back. Out of the corner of his eye there was color: Andromeda's healer robes. She was leaning over the oven, pulling out her baking pans. The scones were ready.

He spoke before he could talk himself out of it. "Were you at Hogwarts all night?"

She shook her head. "Teddy and I were at St. Mungo's until it was over, and then we went to Hogwarts. They were sending the most serious cases to the hospital all night."

An urge leapt up in him, and he followed it before it had a chance to shrink away. "You'll be wanting to rest, then."

She shook her head. "There's no rest for me. I'm home for a bit of a snack, but then back to the hospital. I have several cases I need to keep an eye on."

"There must be some way I can help."

She smiled. "I don't wish to put you out, Mr. Lupin."

He felt a little annoyed. Was it with her for brushing him off, or with himself for making it seem as though he didn't care to be part of the family for so long? He'd work that part out later. "It's high time I let myself be put out. Teddy is my grandson, too."

She raised her chin and an eyebrow. "Have you any idea what to do?"

His annoyance still piqued, he answered, "I spend my days tracking magical creatures. If you will tell me the basic things I need to do with this one, I'm sure we'll manage, and you'll be better able to do your work at St. Mungo's."

She relented. "Well, that's true enough. While the baking cools, let me show you about his bottles and diapers, and I think he'll go into his cot for several hours. There's a day bed in the nursery, so you can rest too."

A/N: It's been pointed out to me that this was a terrible way for Andromeda to let Lyall know his son had been killed. I don't disagree.

Gray Scale

Chapter 5 of 5

A cobbled-together family starts to move forward from devastation

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Within an hour, Lyall proved that he could pass muster. Andromeda nodded her head and went to her bedroom. A few minutes later, dressed in fresh healer robes, she patted a sleeping Teddy on his behind and nodded to Lyall. He stared at the baby as she moved through the house. There was the firm thud of the front door closing, a clanking sound as the gate shut, and after that the crack of Apparition.

Then there was silence. The Gray Man looked around himself and swallowed hard. There was really nothing to do until the baby woke up again, so his best option at the moment was to sleep himself. He knew where the loo was from Andromeda's quick tour of the house, but he'd forgotten to bring pajamas or a change of clothes for the

morning. He realized they hadn't made any arrangements for that, either. Would he be able to go to work in the morning? Should he? How could he not, given the number of magical creatures at large in England after the battle of Hogwarts?

The baby woke up twice in the night. Both times, the Gray Man simply did what he'd been told. Change the baby, feed the baby, rock the baby to sleep and then check the baby again before putting him in the cot. On the second go around, the baby wouldn't sleep. The Gray Man sat on the daybed and cradled Teddy close to his chest. The baby whimpered for just a minute before yawning and somehow burrowing deeper into Lyall's chest. A moment later small snores were heard.

It was probably a couple of hours later that Andromeda's harrumph woke them up. "I'm required to tell new mothers that what you're doing is extremely unsafe." Her voice moderated. "Between you and me, though, sometimes it's the only way to get them to sleep and catch a few winks of your own. Just make sure your position is such that he can't slip and get caught between you and a pillow or something."

Lyall smiled down at their grandson before handing him up to her. "I will keep that in mind for next time. As far as I know, everything went as you directed. Do you need me today? If not, I should get home to have breakfast and shower and change. I'm sure there are plenty of creatures that need my department's attention."

She nodded. "From what I'm hearing, they definitely need you to get to work, so you're free to go. On the other hand, I made a rather large breakfast, if you're interested?"

Lyall felt a hunger pang as he realized he smelled bacon.

It was obscene, how quickly a moment's urge became a way of life. The Gray Man made an offer, and an hour later he'd been put in charge of a tiny wizard. Ten hours after that, he was promising, over bacon and porridge, to come back that evening so that Andromeda could go back to work. She had already had the foresight to arrange working nights while there were so many patients at the hospital. The only shift was that after a little planning ahead, Lyall insisted on being the one to take care of the morning meal. Andromeda watched him carefully the first time and then gratefully nodded her acquiescence. If he noticed, once in a while, that she sat on a window seat that looked out over the back garden carefully wiping her eyes every few seconds, she never mentioned finding him doing something similar, except sitting in the lounge.

After a week of following this first day's pattern, they stood side by side at the combined funeral of Nymphadora and Remus, both dry eyed and both looking a bit gray and shabby. The Gray Man watched Andromeda receive condolences and well wishes and thought to himself that she was a bit gray around the edges now, just as he had once been before going fully gray. The vibrancy he'd seen on their first meeting had been washed out by too much grief. It was a great shame; she was quite lovely in her regal way, and now she looked beaten down.

Three weeks later, Lyall came down to fix breakfast and found Andromeda ahead of him, pulling a finished pan of scones out of the oven. He saw that her face was all red from the heat, until he realized that her eyes were full of tears. He rushed forward to help her.

"My dear, what is it?" he asked. He drew her to a chair and sat her down.

She got back up and shook her head. "I have another pan that needs to be moved to the other rack." Lyall pushed her back into her chair and took the pot holders. "One of my patients, a sweet young boy, isn't going to recover."

Lyall moved the scones as directed and looked at her with the question on his face. She shrugged. "It's not spell damage; it's a poison."

"You can't find the antidote?"

"It's some sort of acromantula sting, but the standard antivenin didn't work. If anything, he's worse. If we can't figure this out, it's a matter of days."

Lyall thought for a moment. "Did he describe the creature that stung him?"

"He said it was an acromantula, but different somehow."

"A bit longer and thinner than the usual sort?"

"Yes."

Lyall nodded. When he got to the office, he looked through the inbox of active files and found a particular folder. He waved the folder at the manager, who nodded, and then he headed to Hogwarts. Heading toward the Forbidden Forest, he skirted around a meadow and entered through a berry patch.

"Zzzzz... you aren't supposed to beee heere... zzz."

"Ralph, I told you that if you stung anyone again, I'd have to come find you again."

"It was just a little one, and I so rarely get any fun any more," whined the creature.

Lyall sighed and pulled out his wand. "Petrificus Totalus!"

After clearing up a group of Boggarts he found near the Caretaker's cottage garden, he returned to Andromeda's house. She was already cooking again, or rather from the looks of it had been cooking since he left. A roast chicken was sitting on the table, along with dressing and vegetables. From the smell of it, there was roast pork in the oven. A stew of some sort was bubbling on the back of the cook top, while several counter surfaces contained pies and cakes. The baby was wrapped against her chest.

"Are you cooking for the hospital?" he asked.

She looked around. "No. I just couldn't sleep, and this gave me something to do. I didn't want to be wakened by the news that little Roger had... had..." she bit her lip.

He carefully placed a vial on the table. "Try this in your antivenin."

She picked it up. "We've tried acromantula antivenin. Didn't I tell you?"

He nodded toward it. "That's from an apimagnus."

She pondered it. "A bee?"

"More like a wasp."

She thought for a moment and then nodded. "That actually does sound more like what he described. Are they really near Hogwarts?"

He shrugged and sighed. "Just the one, and it's quite long in the tooth. I think it's just staying alive because it knows it troubles me so much."

He woke early the next morning to the smell of bacon. Wondering what new tragedy had struck and fearing she would break down altogether, he went down in his pajamas to see her singing along with the wireless. The gray had moderated to subtle browns; compared to a month earlier, she was radiant.

"Lyall! You'll never imagine... Well, of course you imagined it, that's why you helped us!"

"It was the right venom?"

"Precisely. Just the odor of the potion seemed to perk him up, and after he took it-well, we expect him to go home with his parents in a couple of days."

Lyall felt his face cracking. It was the first smile in months. "I'm delighted."

She came over to him and hugged him tight. "It was all your doing. Thank you so much."

He'd always thought that Nymphadora's artless charm had come from her father. Now, for the first time, he realized that he's daughter-in-law's charm seemed so boundless because it came from both parents. He knew that the grief wasn't gone. In a matter of hours or perhaps moments it would be as crushing as ever, but for the moment Lyall would eat all the breakfast that Andromeda put on his plate, and he would feast upon the joy on her face just as glutinously.