

The Very Unlikely Story of a Wolf And a Nymph

by Ninquelote

The twins have a prank, the Nymph has an incident and the Wolf... simply has no clue. This would be the Very Unlikely Story you end up with after combining the three. (Set during OotP)

Prologue: A Not So Ordinary Sunday

Chapter 1 of 5

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To my beloved Phoebe, for making sure this idea was brought to life.

And to my perfect (imagination) beta reader Phoenix, for being the best beta a girl could ever wish for.

Prologue ~ A Not So Ordinary Sunday

It all began on a Sunday morning, seemingly no different from any other Sunday morning.

The sun had once again reached the horizon of a sleepy London, and most of the citizens were still sound asleep; a few noticeable exceptions were the bleary-eyed morning paper delivery boys, awake solely by the power of caffeine. Within the hour, various Sunday paper editions had found their way into various British homes, and the usual weekend routine seemed to flow as normally as ever. In fact, nothing about this Sunday morning in London bore witness of anything out of the ordinary. But then again, since when did ordinary ever have anything to do with reality?

Few would have thought that this normal city also was the keeper of places strange and abnormal. On the rundown square of Grimmauld Place, for instance, any newspaper delivery to number twelve would have been utterly absurd. Mostly because there simply was no house between numbers eleven and thirteen, but also since the non-existent House of Black didn't even have a letterbox to begin with. Still, the most peculiar thing about number twelve this morning was actually taking place inside.

On any other early Sunday, we would have found all red-headed youngsters of the house sleeping in their beds, possibly accompanied by loud snoring sounds. The same would suffice for the fairly pretty, bushy-haired young lady and the famous, scar-faced young fellow with messy black hair (only the former rarely snored at all, and the latter sometimes had mysterious dreams about long corridors). These were not the only ones to take late Sunday "sleep ins", however, since there were currently four Order members residing at Grimmauld Place as well, and out of those, only former professor R. J. Lupin was likely to willingly rise before dawn. The exception of course being Mrs. Weasley, whose mother-hen-like energy sometimes spurred her into preparing extra festive breakfasts for the young ones. Her husband, Arthur, was never too early out of bed on weekends off, and gratefully, no one ever saw Grimmauld Place's rightful owner, Mr. Black, too early either, since he was a very scatterbrained person in the morning. Additionally, the man slept in the nude.

Rarely did notable exceptions take place from these weekend routines at number twelve, Grimmauld Place, but this Sunday morning was not like any other morning. Admittedly, someone was indeed in the kitchen, but it was not Mrs. Weasley. She was sleeping quite soundly (perhaps even a bit *too* soundly) some floors above and was

not likely to wake up for another several hours. Instead, barricaded in the basement kitchen, her twin prankster sons could be found, seemingly in the middle of a very smug conversation about upgrades to their Skiving Snackboxes. Something bearing a faint resemblance to yellow toffee was stirring on the kitchen stove, but knowing Fred and George, this was hardly something as innocent as sweets. The twins' keen interest in the "art of pranking" (as they themselves no doubt would call it) was actually quite well known to everyone close to the Weasleys. They had all learned early on that if you did not want to have your nose growing into anything rude and amusing, you had better stay clear of the unpredictable paths of the Weasley twins. Still, never would anyone have suspected them to *really* refrain from an entire night's sleep in favour of brewing and plotting in the kitchen, and so this is where the remarkable overpowers the usual.

As night slowly turned to dawn, their latest experiment finally seemed to have been successfully mastered, which led to the self-satisfied discussion mentioned earlier. They agreed that the only thing left to do now was to conduct a trial. Naturally, this would be done on themselves first, but ultimately, they found that only trying it on themselves just wasn't nearly as much fun as basking in the humiliation of others. But who would be granted the honour of consuming this latest streak of brilliance? That was the tricky part because, outrageously enough, people tended to blankly refuse anything offered by a Weasley twin. They pondered on this for a while but were soon forced to put the matter aside, realising that they now desperately needed to clean this ruddy mess up and get the hell out of the kitchen before Lupin or anyone else decided to have an early Sunday breakfast.

In Muggle London outside, everything was still as perfectly normal as before, but inside the strange and musty house of number twelve, Grimmauld Place, something out of the ordinary had definitely taken place this morning. Little did anyone realise that the brewing of this particular prank was about to become the start of something best described as *the very unlikely story of a wolf and a nymph*.

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In a messy little flat across the city, a young witch with outrageously pink hair was stirring in her sleep, blissfully unaware of the worries lurking on the other side of her bedcovers. To her, this was still just an ordinary Sunday.

A/N: Hello, you've reached the automatic cyberspace service of the fanfiction VUSoWAN. If you want to leave a message, please choose Submit Review. If you want to be transferred to the following sequence, please choose Next Chapter. If you want to be stupid and miss out on a great story, please reconsider.

Thank you ^^

The Woes of Caffeine

Chapter 2 of 5

Tonks needs caffeine, the twins need a test person and Sirius... needs to realise that high falsetto voices are for eunuchs only.

The Woes of Caffeine

Nymphadora Tonks had had a lousy morning thus far.

It all started fairly well; she was in bed, snoozing peacefully to the sound of her own gentle snoring. Suddenly realising that her bedroom might be too bright for early morning, she managed to pry one of her eyelids open to check her alarm clock and *oh, bollocks* she was already thirty-two minutes late for the morning's Order meeting. *Must've been too tired last night to charm the darn clock thing properly* she figured.

After a minute's fierce struggle, she managed to disentangle herself from her sheets, noticing with a frustrated groan that her work robes were all wretched and wrinkly after having slept in them. *Ah, well, no time for petty things like ironing anyway*. (Somehow Tonks always managed *not* to bother herself with these householdy sort of spells.) Coffee making, however, was something she did bother to manage every morning, no thanks to her impressive cooking skills, though, but who said that Mr. McMutton's coffee mixers were for bachelor blokes only?

Moments after successfully rising from bed, urgent needs made her seek out the loo. Unfortunately, she also happened to glance into the mirror, and suddenly, a short shriek of horror was heard from the bathroom. (Tonks was a woman fairly easy to startle when tired.) The ghastly person gazing back at her bore no resemblance to her own colourful self, but was rather looking nearly as charming as Sirius' mum.

After regaining the ability to breathe normally, she spent a moment earnestly wondering whether sleep-Morphing was possible. *Better ask Remus*, she decided, since he probably knew far more than was good for him anyway. Although, various Hufflepuff slumber parties *had* taught her early on that Metamorphmagi definitely were highly sensitive to sleep deprivation, and last night's guard duty had hardly improved her monstrous appearance.

Thank goodness it's easy enough to fix, though she thought as she screwed her face up in the strained expression that always foretold a morph. Seconds later, Tonks was inspecting her once again vividly pink spikes in the mirror, clearly pleased with the upsides to Metamorphing.

Suddenly remembering she was already frightfully late, Tonks valiantly tried to ignore her coffee-craving body while heatedly cursing her weak alarm spell for depriving her of her daily dose of caffeine.

Eight minutes after getting out of Bedfordshire, she found herself successfully Apparated to Grimmauld Place. Cautiously walking up to the border between houses eleven and thirteen, she focused a moment on the Order's whereabouts, and after the house squeezed into view, she rang the doorbell to number twelve.

She realised her mistake instantly. 'Oh, buggler it,' she exclaimed. Mrs. Black was easily aroused, and she once again remembered, just a second too late, that Sirius repeatedly had asked them not to use 'that bloody thing'. (He just didn't have a very warm relationship with that doorbell.)

Tonks was abruptly cut off in her dizzy daydreams of Molly's gloriously fresh-brewed coffee when Master Black himself suddenly appeared from behind the door and pulled her inside in a not so very gentle manner. Tonks recalled that Moody's endless 'Code of Constant Vigilance' (as she had mentally come to call it) now included never to linger on the threshold of headquarters, and obviously, Sirius was just more than happy to honour the code on this matter. Probably because he was provided with such an excellent excuse to torment his younger cousin.

'Listen, I'm sorry about the' she began, but the apology died when she caught a glimpse of his smug face. 'What's so funny?' she demanded instead. Something about his self-satisfied appearance definitely rubbed her the wrong way.

'Oh nothing,' he said innocently while they sealed the door, his quite obvious smirk implying otherwise.

The fierce glare she threw at him had the potential power of stunning a small Hippogriff, and frankly, only a complete dimwit would comment on her late arrival after being on the receiving end of *that*.

'So... sleep well?' The man obviously had a premature death wish.

Her fingers itched to hex his bloody daft tongue right off. 'Wouldn't know, I just got off from an early shift at work,' she said instead, deciding to deny him the pleasure of gloating at her misfortune.

'I see,' he said, openly observing her messy robes. 'On a Sunday?' he then ventured, now more smug than ever.

Tonks let out an indignant snort. *What's with the idiot today?* She decided he could just stick to his gruff Buckbeak brooding, because that innocent voice just now was simply *infuriating*. She refused to answer him and was suddenly very preoccupied with glaring at Sirius' backside; she even forgot to congratulate herself for not knocking over the umbrella stand.

Reaching the end of the hall, he finally revealed the reason for his poorly concealed smugness.

'I've just spent a most enjoyable morning *not* being in dear Molly's bad graces,' he said conversationally.

'Git,' she muttered, her sense of humour currently non-existent. She had never before tried being social without first enjoying her morning coffee, and decided now never to do so again. Frankly, she felt like a giant walking deck of Exploding Snap cards.

'Don't take it too personally, though,' he whispered. 'She's only feeling touchy for oversleeping a tad herself this morning.'

'I did NOT oversleep!' she snapped loudly, realising all too late they'd just reached the basement kitchen. *Bollocks*, she decided for the second time this morning after spotting the twenty-or-so people gathered around the kitchen table, all watching her.

Sirius smirked triumphantly at her. 'Ah... good to know. I trust you don't mind if I drink the last sip of coffee here then, eh?' He gestured towards a dark iron kettle on the table, only a few mere steps away.

'Help yourself,' she said in a very false, bright voice. Because, frankly, it was either that or biting his head off. 'Wotcher, everyone,' she then said, helping herself to a seat as far away from Sirius as possible. (She didn't want to accidentally poison his coffee, now did she?) 'Sorry I didn't manage to come earlier.'

The others greeted her with nods and amused smiles. Bill was also grinning at her, she noticed, with a faint flutter in her empty stomach. Smiling back, she immediately gave herself a mental kick up her buttocks. *Don't be daft, Tonks, this is no time for romance!* She settled down in a corner between Kingsley and Remus, who, judging by the slight twitching in the corners of his mouth, also seemed to find the situation rather amusing. Molly, however, was eyeing her disapprovingly, giant bags under her eyes making her look perhaps a bit more intimidating than intended.

'Oy, Tonks,' a voice suddenly called, 'are those sheet marks on your face?'

Sirius was doing his innocent act again. Consequently, Tonks decided then and there to end his nasty lifetime habit of surviving certain death. She had definitely had a lousy morning so far and it wasn't about to improve much any time soon.

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The meeting seemed endless. It was the Sunday after Harry's hearing, and they did have many important things to discuss, but Tonks couldn't concentrate on a word said. She had twice already counted every single brick on the gloomy kitchen wall opposite her and had also decided that the door might need a good, strong *Scourgify* as well. Instantly, she realised her craving now bordered on madness.

I desperately need some caffeine

Still observing the door, she suddenly noticed a thin, flesh-coloured string, worming its way into the kitchen from under it. She stifled a mad snicker and reckoned that Molly must've been too distracted this morning and had simply forgotten to perform the Imperturbable Charm on the door. She wasn't the only one who noticed the new arrival, however.

'FRED, GEORGE! YOU HAND ME THOSE RUDDY THINGS THIS INSTANT!' Obviously, Molly had definitely had it with those Extendable Ears. She stormed out of the kitchen, shouting violently, and was soon accompanied by Mrs. Black and the other portraits.

'Er... Let's all take a short break, shall we?' Arthur suggested lightly.

Giddy with relief, Tonks hardly turned to excuse herself before following Molly's example and storming off herself. The only thing she needed now was a minute or two alone in a private spot. By now, she'd even risk blasting her eyebrows off if she could just conjure some coffee in the process. She knew, of course, she could probably ask Remus or one of the others that would be far safer but she just didn't want to grant Sirius the pleasure. Therefore, deciding on the drawing room, she quickly made her way upstairs and carefully closed the door behind her.

'Accio coffee!' she cried a moment later, remembering all too late that Sirius had drunk the last anyway. *It was probably for the best that he did, though* she thought, since she suspected it was slightly far-fetched to hope anyone would fail to notice a giant kettle of coffee flying across the room (not to mention coffee without the kettle flying about, because that would be downright embarrassing).

She was cut off in her thoughts when a muffled sound made her realise she was not alone. At first, she hoped it had only been the supposed Boggart in the rattling corner dresser, but ultimately, she was forced to realise that the noise rather seemed to have come somewhere from the wall beside the Giant and Most Obstinate Tapestry of Black.

'Hello?' she called, wondering if they'd missed a spot when decontaminating this room after Harry's arrival.

'Is anyone here?' she tried when the wall remained silent. Not that she expected an actual answer from whatever creature was hiding there, but since stranger things had happened, one just couldn't be too sure.

She was surprised, nonetheless, when a loud 'Schh' was heard from within the wall. Suddenly, a door materialized on the mouldy old wallpaper pattern, and moments later Fred and George crawled out from what appeared to have been a small, hidden broom cupboard.

'You crazy, woman?' one of them demanded in a hissing voice. 'Mum's around here somewhere!'

'Yeah, and for the sake of all our remaining sanity, you wouldn't want her to find us right now,' the other one continued.

'...Mm-kay?' Tonks said, still too surprised to manage anything else.

'Anyway,' said George. *Or was it Fred?* she wondered as she hadn't quite managed to figure out which one's which yet. 'You want coffee, no?' he asked.

The room suddenly seemed tinged with pink, sparkling clouds. 'Desperately,' she breathed, still not daring to believe this wasn't just another dizzy daydream.

A slightly more vigilant witch would have noticed the sly look they exchanged beside her.

'Right-O,' said Fred. (At least she had decided that was him, for now.) He disappeared with a loud *crack* *hope Molly didn't catch that* and reappeared moments later, holding something that appeared to be a sample of Mr. McMutton's coffee mixers.

She briefly wondered how they had managed to afford one of those because hers had certainly been wickedly expensive but ultimately decided against looking a gift horse in the mouth. (She was probably better off not knowing anyway.) Meanwhile, the twin redheads provided some yellow and dark brown ingredients and charmed the mixer to life. Instantly recognizing the divine humming of coffee being made, Tonks uttered a sudden squeak of delight.

'Oooh, I could just kiss you!' she beamed. Spotting their sudden looks of interest, however, she quickly added: 'Won't though, sorry. Haven't brushed my teeth today.'

Mere moments later, they handed her a cup of deliciously fresh-brewed coffee. She performed a quick spell to cool the beverage to a drinkable temperature and was just about to take a long draught, when sudden suspicion caught hold of her.

'Where's the catch?' she asked. She had a nasty feeling these two never did something merely out of the goodness of their hearts. Obviously, there had to be a catch.

'Oh,' said George, sounding slightly unsettled.

'Isn't that obvious?' Fred quickly chimed in. 'We brew coffee for you, you forget to mention to anyone'

'especially our mum'

'that you ever saw us here today,' Fred finished smoothly.

Fair enough, she thought, grinned her approval to the idea, and downed the coffee in four deep gulps. She heaved a deep sigh of contentment, handed back the empty cup, and was just about to thank them when she noticed how very intently they were watching her. She was suddenly struck by an alarming feeling.

'I have a coffee moustache, don't I?' she demanded.

This was clearly not the reaction they seemed to have expected. In fact, the twins suddenly looked so stunned that Tonks started to wonder if she'd accidentally Stupified them. One of them blinked (and her wand was gratefully tucked away in her robe), but she didn't find it likely to believe her moustache could be worthy of such drama. She swiftly brushed the back of her hand against her lips, just to be safe.

'Anyways,' she tried in lack of any further response, '...I had better get going. Thanks loads for the coffee, guys.'

'Mm-hm,' George finally managed. Fred still gawked openly at her retreating form. Where Tonks had stood mere moments before, only utter confusion remained.

On her way downstairs, Tonks briefly wondered whether something really was fishy about that coffee mixer after all. Maybe they'd bought a forged copy or something... At least *her* coffee never left this peculiar, sweet taste lingering down her throat. *Ah, well, no need to get jumpy over technicalities* she ultimately figured, waiting for the soothing effects of caffeine to appear.

But they never did.

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When Tonks returned to the kitchen, she was surprised to find it was no longer crammed with Order members. Less than a dozen were now spread across the room in groups of two or three. She removed her black work robe and threw it on a chair beside her, suddenly realising it was definitely too warm in here.

'Oy, where'd everyone go?' she asked the room at large, earning herself a dull glare from Snape, who was standing nearby. Obviously, the greasy-haired man didn't appreciate being disturbed in his discussion with Professor McGonagall. (Despite being nearly ten years out of school, Tonks still couldn't manage calling her anything but Professor.)

She discreetly tiptoed around the two and decided to join Sirius and Remus instead, repeating her question.

'We decided that enough's enough, and that we're too hungry to proceed,' Sirius said, taking a big bite from the apple he was holding.

'You'd probably know it yourself had you not been in such a hurry to leave the room,' Remus added, smiling slightly.

She grinned back and was just about to come up with a random excuse for her sudden departure, when she had the unpleasant feeling of being hit by a quick series of extreme Disillusionment Charms. Waves of heat and ice flowed through her body, and she grabbed the thing closest to her (the kitchen table) to keep her balance, accidentally knocking over Sirius' emptied mug of coffee in the process.

In a swift movement, Remus saved it from tumbling onto the floor. 'Are you quite all right?' he then asked, studying her intently.

'Yeah, no offence, Tonks, but you look like hell.' Sirius always seemed to know just how to cheer a girl right up.

'Oh, don't worry 'bout it,' she assured them. 'Just lost my balance, 's all. You know me, always dead clumsy and whatnot...' But her voice seemed strangely distant to her, as if her mouth was talking by itself from somewhere beside her.

When none of them seemed overly convinced, she forced a smile, hoping it was a fairly normal one. She was determined that there was just no way she'd come this far, only to confess now that Sirius had been right all along. She also decided to smother those twins for giving her such useless coffee. *Probably decaf or something*, she figured with disgust.

She nearly choked when Sirius suddenly gave her a hard pat on the shoulder. Taking in his chuckling form and Remus' unimpressed facial expression, she reckoned her dear cousin might just have cracked one of his smart comments about hangover remedies, or something.

She forced another weak smile, but was saved from the necessity of making a clever response when Snape suddenly approached them. He passed Remus a bottle of something grey and foul-smelling.

'I trust I needn't emphasize the importance of consuming this today,' he drawled in one of his most superior tones.

'Of course, thank you, Severus,' Remus said.

Seemingly unwilling to spend a second more than necessary in such unworthy company, Snape granted Remus a short nod before turning to leave, completely ignoring Sirius and Tonks. (Suffice to say she hadn't exactly been his favourite student in Potions.)

'What's that?' she asked, desperately trying to focus on anything but this persistent feeling of nausea.

'It's' Remus began, but was instantly cut off by Sirius, who still seemed to be in his abnormally glorious morning mood.

'Ah... Let me think,' he said, fingers clutching his unshaven chin. 'Considering 'twas provided by old Snivellus there and illuminating the fact that full moon's only a few nights away I think we might safely conclude that *that*,' he indicated the bottle in Remus' hand, 'is in fact a dose of Wolfsbane Potion,' Sirius finished, obviously pleased with his cunning detective skills.

An awkward moment of silence occurred.

'You're a *werewolf*?' Tonks finally managed disbelievingly.

Before Remus had the chance to answer, however, a loud gasp was heard from Sirius.

'Whaat? *You're a werewolf!?*' he echoed in a high falsetto, not wanting to pass up on the fun. Only she wasn't kidding.

'I honestly had no idea,' she croaked, feeling more warm and dizzy than ever.

'*What!?*' said Sirius, not needing to feign his shock this time.

And then she realised at once how incredibly stupid it *had* been of her not to notice right away. *Of course*, she thought fiercely, *the premature lines on his face, the all-too early shades of grey in his hair, him being unemployed and wearing these patched things all the time, not to mention his issues with that Umbridge woman and good grief she'd known them for a month and they'd all just failed to inform her that the man WAS A WEREWOLF!?* Perhaps they're all so used to it no one reckoned I didn't know or perhaps all this Voldemort business made them neglect petty details like telling the new girl.

Her head was just crammed with thoughts and feelings.

She tried to recall what Remus had said the other week when Harry had just arrived; it had been something about the occupational hazard of being a werewolf and... Sudden comprehension forced her to stifle a groan. She was just about to make a desperate wish that the floor would open up and obscure her when, suddenly, she realised something else.

Wicked! I know a werewolf. She was overwhelmed. *But weren't werewolves supposed to be all wild and bloodthirsty?* She spared a puzzled glance at Remus (who was looking all normal and human) and decided that *that* was definitely not how she'd pictured them to be. Funny.

Remus and Sirius were both watching her closely.

'But you're so... *nice*,' she finally managed.

'Yes, I know,' said Sirius, sounding relieved. 'And frightfully boring, too. Not at all the usual werewolf type.'

Tonks immediately decided to remove her tongue and fry it with Gillyweed. *What an utterly stupid thing to say.*

Spotting her uneasy expression, Remus merely smiled and said, 'Ah, well... Surprise.'

'I'm sorry, that didn't come out right,' she started, desperate to make it right this time. 'It's just that I've never actually *met* a werewolf before, and though I think it's totally wicked that *you* in fact happen to be one, I just never reckoned but then I figured how utterly stupid of me not to notice, you know, because ~~is~~ quite obvious isn't it? I mean me being an Auror an' all it's just *outrageous*. Honestly, how daft can you get and blimey is it hot in here or 's my head the only one boiling?' Her quick rambling came to a sudden stop.

Ever since her return to the kitchen, she could have sworn her blood had started acting funny. But the painful sensation she experienced just now was nothing but excruciating; it was like her blood rapidly increased in every vein of her face, threatening to burst any second.

I need to get out of here. Now.

Oblivious to Sirius' comment on her beet-red face, she mumbled her excuses and bolted out of the kitchen to flee the house, knocking over that traitorous umbrella stand in her desperate retreat. Not noticing the shrieks set off inside number twelve, she Apparated to her flat and desperately made her way to the toilet.

I gotta lay off the coffee, she thought with a groan, before an explosive sensation in her nose made her pass out cold on the bathroom floor.

* * *

A/N: Feels absolutely great to finally be able to post this :)

Two more chapters are already written and will appear on site shortly, promise. Still don't know exactly how long this'll be but I do know that there are loads of plot twists yet to be unravelled, so you just lay back and enjoy the ride at least, that's what I'll be doing ;)

Would love any feedback you're willing to give, since this is (in fact) my first fanfiction ever. Thanks!

An Unwanted Cinderella Situation

Chapter 3 of 5

Tonks decides that had the choice been up to her, she'd certainly have preferred the carriage-turned-pumpkin ordeal any day.

An Unwanted Cinderella Situation

The first thing Tonks became aware of was that her cheek seemed to be unpleasantly stuck to something sticky and smelly. In fact, this entire position started to feel

incredibly uncomfortable, and it became more and more difficult for her struggling mind to stay in its dark, dizzy dream-world.

Slowly gaining consciousness, she opened her eyes blindly and tried to get used to this new, excruciatingly bright light. The first thing she noticed was that her white, fuzzy bathroom carpet wasn't so very white and fuzzy anymore. It was soaked and bore a dark shade of red.

Why am I on the floor? she thought confusedly after fully comprehending her current position. She tried to turn her head and look around but was only rewarded with a dull, aching throb from her nose. *Ow, that hurts.*

She then noticed that not only her bathroom carpet, but also the entire front of her favourite Muggle T-shirt seemed to be soaked in that same smelly and sticky red substance. An alarming thought appeared.

Is that blood!?

Suddenly, it all came back to her.

She uttered a groan, realising what must have caused this. *Ruddy stupid coffee; ruddy idiot twins*, she cursed randomly. *Was this their idea of a bloody joke?* She decided it was all just a bit too literal for her liking. *Twits.*

Slowly managing to rise to her feet, she realised she desperately needed to regain her strength or else she might just pass out again from sheer exhaustion. She slowly made her way to the kitchen to grab something to eat. Getting clean again was something she could worry about later.

A warm Butterbeer, two apples and a glorious bath later, Tonks glanced at her Chudley Cannons Quidditch clock in the living room and noticed that it was nine-thirty already. (The score was 210 to 30 in favour of the Cannons, and a little sun was descending over the miniature Quidditch pitch.) She decided it must still be Sunday, because otherwise, her Head of the Auror Office would most likely have sent her an owl by now, inquiring about her absence.

Thinking of Rufus Scrimgeour made her realise that she might want to iron her work robe after all, or he would surely comment on her unprofessional appearance again. *But where did I put my...* She was abruptly cut off in her thoughts when she suddenly remembered exactly where she had left the robe.

Oh, bugger.

Ah, well, she might as well Apparate back to headquarters at once, or she would regret it tomorrow. Besides, she had a thing or two she wanted to ask those twin menaces.

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Once again standing in front of the door to number twelve, Tonks was just about to ring the doorbell when Arthur Weasley emerged from behind the door. He flinched slightly upon unexpectedly meeting someone on the doorstep, but gathered his wits quickly and smiled broadly at her.

'Tonks!' he exclaimed brightly. 'Good to see you.'

She was just about to greet him back when he continued. 'Listen, I myself need to be on my way to guard duty, but that ghastrly ghoul seems to be back and has inhabited the girls' wardrobe. Molly's busy in the kitchen, and I didn't want to wake Remus, but perhaps you might consider...?' She could tell Arthur seemed to be in a hurry.

'Of course,' she said quickly, 'but where's Sirius?' Normally, he was the one considered to be the master of ghoul-hexing.

'Ah,' he said and paused to consider his words. 'I think you might find that he's locked himself in with Buckbeak again,' he explained diplomatically.

'Oh,' said Tonks in comprehension.

'Oh, my, look at the sun. I better get going,' Arthur said and then added a hasty, 'Thanks for your trouble!' over his shoulder before scurrying away.

After sealing the door behind her, she considered fetching her robe from the kitchen first, but upon recognising the sudden vague shouting of Ginny Weasley, she decided against it. Passing the stuffed heads of Kreacher's ancestors, she made her way upstairs. The scene that greeted her on the first landing was almost rib-crackingly funny.

Ginny's aggressive tone was distinctly heard from behind the closed door to her and Hermione's room. Ron and Harry were standing outside the door, seemingly in the middle of negotiating their way in. Needless to say it was a fairly pointless quest, at least judging by Ginny's stern voice. Additional loud banging and an occasional moaning from the murderous house ghoul were also heard from inside. Considering the powerful volume of these various noises, she was surprised that Mrs. Black hadn't decided to awaken and join the chaos. Still, Ginny did a pretty grand attempt in filling her place.

'NO, Ron, I've told you a gazillion times, you're NOT to come in here!' her angry voice exclaimed. 'Besides, Hermione and I have already changed for the night.' Tonks thought she might have heard a protesting sound from Hermione, but she wasn't sure due to all the banging and moaning. 'And we can HANDLE this,' Ginny continued. 'Just sod OFF!'

'Right,' muttered Ron. '*Right...* like they could bloody handle *that...* Can't even use magic outside school, those two.'

'Um... Ron, neither can you,' Harry pointed out.

'Right,' Ron said again, his ears a tad redder than moments before.

Tonks stifled a snicker and decided to deliver the poor lad from the situation, clearing her throat loudly to announce her presence.

'Wotcher,' she said, smiling broadly. 'Ghoul bothering you again?' she asked, not waiting for them to greet her back.

'Yeah,' said Ron irritably, 'and my bloody persistent sister refuses to let us in.'

'I heard that!' came Ginny's indignant voice from inside.

'Listen, why don't you just let me take it from here, and I'll help them Vanish the thing,' Tonks suggested. 'You know, Sirius taught me a thing or two the last time,' she added with a grin.

Harry shot her a relieved glance, but Ron still didn't seem entirely content.

'I'm *sure* we'll manage,' she reassured him, fairly certain that the girls had good reasons for not letting them in. 'Come on, off you go,' she then said and ushered them towards the stairs. Watching them ascend to the next landing, she firmly knocked on the door.

'Ginny, Hermione, it's me, Tonks,' she said. 'Open up!'

She wasn't surprised to find a fully dressed Ginny open the door.

'Oh, thank heavens it's you,' she said, letting Tonks enter the room. 'This ruddy ghoul's been going on and on for hours now, and I'm really losing my nerves here,'

explained an obviously frustrated Ginny while she gestured towards the large wardrobe at the far end of the room.

'Yeah, your dad told me,' answered Tonks and then greeted the also fully-dressed Hermione with her usual, 'Wotcher'. Hermione smiled brightly, greeting her back.

'So... what's with the not letting Harry'n Ron in?' Tonks wondered between the now less ferocious bumps from the closet.

'Oh, that,' Ginny began. 'It's just that *Ron* simply refuses to realise he only ever manages to aggravate these buggers further,' she explained. 'So I figured it was all for the best not to let him near the thing, since nothing but a wand'll be able to get rid of it anyway.'

'Good thinking,' said Tonks.

'And speaking of wands...' Hermione said rather urgently. 'Perhaps we could just use yours?' Hermione had never had the questionable benefit of growing up with one of these ugly noise-makers right in the attic of her home.

'Darlings,' said Tonks with a solemn sigh, 'that's why I'm here.'

After only a few futile attempts, the ghoul finally gave up its current residence, and with any luck, they wouldn't be hearing from it again anytime soon. Tonks mentally decided to thank Sirius some day for showing her this brilliant alternative way of kicking ghoul butt.

They all chatted happily for a while, and Hermione came up with an excellent suggestion on how to perform a regular *Scourgify* in order to have it specialised to remove blood stains. Tonks was relieved to notice they didn't demand detailed explanations from her on that specific matter, since the situation was delicate enough the way it was. By then, she suddenly remembered one of her original reasons for coming here.

'Listen, about the twins,' she began. 'They wouldn't happen to be close by, would they?' she asked, since she couldn't recall noticing them before.

'Ha!' Ginny exclaimed. 'Those two claimed they were tired and would retire for the evening... Never heard such a load of cock'n bull before in my life!'

Ginny paused abruptly. 'Not counting the recent *Daily Prophet*, of course,' she added grimly.

'How so?' Hermione wondered, since curiosity seemed to have overpowered her urge to join the *Daily Prophet* bashing.

'Oh, nothing important, really,' Tonks replied. 'Just a question I had about some funny coffee I drank earlier.'

'Don't tell me you actually *drank* something either of those two gave you?' Ginny demanded.

'So what if I did?' Tonks inquired lightly.

'Are you *mad*? Everyone knows they're nothing but disasters waiting to happen,' she said. 'Sure they're brilliant, even hilariously so, and normally, I couldn't care less, but you're actually kinda cool, you know, so it *would* grieve me if you suddenly sniffed it.'

Tonks cut her off with an unsettled laugh. 'Um... sniffed it?' she repeated. 'Surely you're exaggerating a tad,' she said, desperately hoping this was indeed the case, for the fierce throb in her nose was still freshly remembered.

'No, not really,' said Hermione earnestly. 'I remember this one boy who spent ages in the hospital wing after crossing paths with those two,' she explained and then added after some thought, 'I don't even *want* to know what that was all about.'

'Alright, that's it,' said Tonks, jumping to her feet. If even a smart girl like Hermione didn't regard them as simply harmless, she had no business sitting there, waiting for the grass to grow. 'Screw them getting their beauty sleep, I need some answers here! Where did you say their room was again?' she demanded.

Ginny decided against informing Tonks that she hadn't, and said, 'Third floor, the door to the right.'

'Right,' Tonks muttered and stormed off, leaving the girls in a slightly more puzzled state than when she'd come.

She had just closed the door behind her when she noticed that someone with a somewhat spiky-haired and sleepy appearance had just emerged from the drawing room down the hall.

'Oh, wotcher, Remus,' she said, and continued instantly, 'I'd love to stay and chat, really, but I seriously need to go smother some twin bra-ATS.' The sudden cry of surprise was uttered when she tripped over a Dungbomb that seemed to have settled itself in the middle of her path. (Kreacher's doing, no doubt.)

She closed her eyes, waiting for the inevitable crash to the floor, but was surprised to find it abruptly cut off by a pair of steady hands grabbing her sides, constraining her downfall.

She was just about to thank her rescuer when a powerful and unpleasantly familiar feeling of heat and ice flowed through her body, making her oblivious to anything else.

'Oh, *no*,' she said instead, groaning when she felt her face grow warm again. She knew what this most likely would lead to and was suddenly very anxious to get home in the hopes of preventing another blood-bath. Abruptly jumping away from Remus, she quickly bolted down the stairs and fled the house, again.

It was not until *after* she had reached the sweet calmness of her flat that she realised her work robe still was in the kitchen of number twelve.

Well, damn.

This had, by far, been the worst Sunday ever.

*

More than a week passed, and during that time, Tonks' confusion had only managed to increase further. She had several times already tried to seek out the twins to get some answers, but she only ever managed to run into Remus first, and before she knew it, she was back to the running off part.

What was it *with* him that suddenly coaxed her blood into such unpleasant behaviour? It's not like she'd had any problems with this *before* the coffee incident. *And now I can't even stand within ten feet of him without having to bolt*, she thought irritably. Besides, there would be an Order meeting tonight, and what was she to do if she started to spurt blood all over the place?

I definitely need to corner those twins.

She decided to take her chances and Apparated once again to Grimmauld Place. She rang the doorbell, realising that she didn't really know any other way to open the door. After some moments (probably spent in wrestling the curtains to Mrs. Black's painting), Sirius opened it.

Tonks had, decidedly, never felt more relieved to see him.

'Wotcher,' she said and scurried past him into the hall.

They sealed the door and spent a moment in low-voiced conversation before Tonks decided there was no point in avoiding the one subject that solely might ruin this twin quest of hers.

'Listen, Sirius,' she began. 'You wouldn't happen to know if Remus is around?' she asked anxiously.

'Moo er... Remus?' he asked, eyeing her suspiciously. 'Why?'

Of course, he just *had* to make this even more difficult for her. 'I, er... would just not rather run in to him right now's all,' she said hesitantly.

'Thought that might be it,' he said, 'and I'm sorry to say that you just missed him. He'll be away for some time. Order mission, you know.' Tonks remembered, and was just about to let out a giant sigh of relief when he added, 'Actually, I've been meaning to tell you... You need to cut the poor lad some slack.'

'Pardon?' she choked, not realising she'd been that obvious.

'The man won't admit it, but I can tell he's feeling bad that you obviously can't handle him being a werewolf.'

'*What?*' she exclaimed, failing to see what Remus being a werewolf had to do with anything.

'I'm just saying, try to act normal. It wouldn't kill you, now would it?' said Sirius and uttered a snort of disapproval, similar to one of Molly's.

It suddenly dawned on her what he was saying.

Chuckling slightly, she was just about to explain the whole nosebleed situation when her eyes caught hold of something thin and flesh-coloured descending from a landing above.

'Aa-HA!' she cried suddenly. 'HOLD IT RIGHT THERE!'

Bad move.

'*Dirt! Scum!* And the mad woman behind the moth-eaten curtains was set off again. 'BEGONE FROM THIS PLACE, YOU BLOOD TRAITORS AND FILTHY HALF-BREEDS...'

'Sorry,' Tonks mouthed to Sirius, but she didn't pause to help him.

It was time those twins coughed up some answers.

*

Next Tuesday, on the last day of the teens' school holiday, Tonks found herself anxiously pacing her office. The past week seemed to have lasted forever. Remus, she heard, had returned by now, and that did *not* make things any easier.

On the bright side, she had got some answers from the twins that day, and they had indeed promised to help her. (The intimation that she would tell Molly Weasley *might* have helped them reach this conclusion.) But as to *why* this was happening to her, they hadn't been certain why Remus of all people seemed to cause these strong reactions. They *had* ultimately admitted their guilt in having spiked her coffee with some newly upgraded Nosebleed Nougat, although, they seemed rather puzzled to hear that the effects were so selective and long termed. In the end, they assured her they would have it all sorted out before school started.

Which was tomorrow, Tonks mentally groaned for the billionth time that day. *What was taking them so long?!*

She was just about to completely lose her marbles when Kingsley entered the room.

'I've just spoken to Arthur, and he tells me we're invited to Molly's Prefect Party for the kids,' he said in his dark, now lowered voice. 'It'll be sometime after six. I'm also to inform you that the twins have something for you.'

Tonks felt giddy with relief. 'Okay, see you tonight then,' she said, and smiled like she hadn't done it in a thousand years.

She Apparated to Grimmauld Place an hour before the appointed time and was relieved to find that Remus was nowhere in sight. Ascending the stairs to what she remembered was the twins' room, she knocked on their door.

'It's Tonks,' she called.

They magically opened the door and she entered, taking in the untidy room and the twin brothers, who seemed to be concentrating intently on a spot a little above the floor, where a small kettle was floating in the air over an enchanted, blue fire. George looked up.

'Well,' he said, 'look who's here. Just in time.'

'Just a few more minutes, now... The last stage is the most crucial one,' muttered Fred absently.

She decided to leave them to it for a while and merely stood there, watching them silently.

'There,' said Fred triumphantly as he finally transferred the purple liquid from the kettle to a small iron goblet and handed it over to Tonks. 'Drink this, and your woes shall be no more,' he said solemnly.

'You sure you're not just pulling my leg?' she demanded, eyeing them suspiciously.

'And risk further irking the woman we call our mother?' said Fred with a shudder.

'Er... no, thanks; we choose life,' George informed her.

'If you say so,' said Tonks, still not entirely convinced they were doing this to actually help her.

'What's with that ungrateful attitude anyway?' said Fred and shook his head. 'George, is this acceptable behaviour?'

'It sure is not, brother,' said George, mimicking his twin's mock concerned facial expression. 'We even *borrowed* one of that Granger girl's precious books for this, didn't we?' he continued in a tone that implied this was indeed a grand achievement. 'Come to think of it, she didn't seem all too pleased when she found out it's gone missing,' he added in puzzlement.

Tonks wondered whether to actually thank them or to simply smack them silly.

'After all the trouble we've been through,' Fred sighed melodramatically.

'Oh, all right. *Thank you,*' said Tonks finally, resisting her urge to point out that they wouldn't have had to go through all that trouble if they'd only been able to keep their wicked ways to themselves in the first place. Thank goodness it all seemed to be coming to an end now.

She drank the potion and felt... nothing. 'Isn't it supposed to, you know, do something?' she wondered.

'No, not really,' said George, 'it's one of those antidotes that kicks in when you need it, much like Muggle vaccines,' he said, sounding well-read.

'Oh, alright then.' Tonks smiled in relief.

She had just turned turn to leave when Fred suddenly said, very smugly, 'Of course, you'd have to kiss him before midnight if you want the effects to be permanent.'

Tonks froze.

'*What?*' she cried incredulously.

She swore the smirks on their faces could have outdone even Sirius'.

'Oh, you're definitely taking the mickey now. *I know you are,*' she finally decided.

'No, no, it's right here,' said Fred, showing her a passage from the very same book she suspected Hermione had been deprived of. Tonks skimmed the part he referred to.

...In order for the bezoar to become fully activated, one must share a kiss with the other person, creature or beast involved. This part must be fulfilled before midnight on the day of consuming the potion. Else, unwanted side effects might erupt. (These include, but are not limited to: loss of memory, loss of limb, violent hiccups, additional facial hair, and the growing of tusks.)

Tonks groaned. She *really* regretted thanking them now.

'You don't understand,' she tried desperately. 'This is *Remus* we're talking about! He was even a professor once, for heaven's sake. It'd just be...*wrong.*'

'Come on,' George smirked. 'It can't be *that* bad.'

'Yeah, the man's a pretty decent looking bloke,' Fred continued, but then paused awkwardly. 'This being said in a very manly, heterosexual way, of course.'

'Of course,' the other one agreed.

The twins then exchanged a look that suggested this whole situation might not turn out to be so bad after all.

Tonks wasn't paying much attention to the twins' random rants, however. She was far too busy focusing on the whole 'before midnight' part. 'Talk about your Cinderella situation,' she muttered to herself. Although, had the choice been up to her, she'd certainly have preferred the carriage-turned-pumpkin ordeal any day. (To be honest, tusks were simply one of those things she wasn't quite ready to deal with just yet.)

'What was that?' said Fred, eyeing her closely. 'Not bailing, are you?'

'Of course not,' she said, a smile plastered to her face. 'And you didn't happen to find out *why* this must be done?' she asked in addition.

'The text didn't say anything specific, but it did imply that these situations rarely happen, and when they actually do, they're extremely powerful,' explained George.

'Thanks, I noticed,' muttered Tonks.

'We also found out that alternative blood might cause these unique reactions,' said Fred. Excitedly he added, 'Actually, if you're willing, it'd be bloody brilliant to find out what else might happen. You know, we've got heaps of other Skiving Snackboxes you could try.'

They honestly looked like they thought she might consider it.

'Er... no, thanks,' she said delicately.

The twins looked slightly put off, but quickly regained their smug faces when she added dejectedly, 'I've got other plans tonight.'

'Right, snogging prince charming, was it?' George said, grinning nastily.

She glared at them and exited the room without bothering to answer. The moment she closed the door, she heard them crack up in laughter. *Man, those two are infuriating,* she thought tiredly, before making her way to the kitchen. She decided this had better work, or she'd hex those two into oblivion.

*

If the Order meeting some weeks before had seemed endless, this evening's gathering just seemed to fly right by. Before entering the kitchen, she had morphed her hair to become tomato red and waist length for the night, thinking she'd probably miss both Ginny and the others awfully once they were gone. Deciding to make the most of this last evening with them all, she had a great time chatting, morphing and laughing, but still, every time she spared a glance at the sinister clock on the kitchen wall, she was filled with dread. She couldn't even muster enough energy to feel anxious over the fact that Bill was around (and that was saying something).

Her mind was simply fixed on other matters. The antidote seemed to be working fine, so far, but she simply wasn't mentally prepared for that 'before midnight' part just yet. She knew it must be done but couldn't muster determination enough to just *do it*. (She told herself there were far too many people around right now anyway.) Frustrated, she noticed that her eyes repeatedly seemed to be drawn to *his* presence in the room, and she had to tell herself more than once to just *quit staring!*

If only this could be ruddy over with.

She was listening half-heartedly to Ron, who was raving about his new broom, when her eyes once again came to rest on Remus. She measured him, taking in his sickly form and patched robes, but also noticing, perhaps even for the first time, that there might be something else to him. She couldn't exactly put her finger on it, but she registered that he really wasn't the slightest bit repulsive or unpleasant. *In fact, had he been ten years younger and not such a hopeless bookworm case, I might even have considered him,* she realised with surprise. But as it was now... The man just wasn't kissable.

Remus noticed her staring and paused in his conversation with Kingsley to raise an inquiring eyebrow at her. She grinned awkwardly, hoping it would hide her flush, and then returned to face Ron, who seemed to not have noticed her mental absence.

The closer to midnight it got, the more preoccupied and restless Tonks felt. The night really seemed to have flown right on by (on an express-broom, no less), and soon, people started, one by one, to bid everybody a good night and then leave the kitchen. Molly was the first one to go, closely followed by Harry.

Come back! Tonks desperately tried to transmit, but sadly, neither of them obliged. Moments later, Mad-Eye, Remus and Sirius also left the room in a sudden haste, and by the time they got back, only she and Dung were left, the latter feasting on a newly discovered supply of Ogden's Old Firewhisky.

Tonks suddenly decided she might need something additional to drink herself.

Far too soon, both Dung (pockets filled with Molly's delicious cooking) and Mad-Eye turned to leave. Tonks was left alone in the kitchen with Remus and Sirius, and the clock showed half past eleven.

She couldn't believe she was getting so nervous about this. *Get a grip, Tonks*, she thought angrily, and took a deep breath to calm herself. *It's just Remus.*

She cursed the twins once again for putting her in this situation, and then she gathered her wits.

It was simply now or never.

* * *

A/N: Evil cliffhangers are so fun to do when you're the author. >) Comments, please.

Tonks' Worst Nightmare

Chapter 4 of 5

Tonks finally strikes up the nerve to plant one on Remus. Need I say it didn't *quite* go as smoothly as intended?

Tonks' Worst Nightmare

In the drawing room of number twelve, Grimmauld Place, Molly Weasley was sobbing her heart out on Remus' shoulder. Moments before, a dead Harry had lain spread-eagled on the drawing room carpet, or at least, it might as well have been the real Harry, considering the heart-rending way Molly was moaning.

Moody had used his electric blue eye to follow her and Harry's departure from the kitchen and had instantly informed Remus of the inexplicable disturbance. Sirius had merely been standing nearby, but had been quick to follow when catching word of the sudden series of corpses displayed on his drawing room floor.

The Boggart had been easy enough to Vanish, but Molly, on the other hand, seemed to have worked herself into a real state. Remus did his best to soothe the distraught woman.

It took a while, but finally, she seemed to have calmed herself enough to offer a tremulous smile. 'Being silly,' she muttered then, mopping her eyes.

A little while later, after bidding Molly and Harry a good night, the three returned to the kitchen and found that almost every party-guest had left for the evening. Only Tonks and Mundungus were still sitting by the enormous kitchen table, the latter of which had evidently found himself a secret supply of Firewhisky he now seemed determined to consume.

On the exact moment of their entry into the kitchen, Tonks appeared to choke abruptly on a bite of the orange trifle she was holding. Over the next ten minutes or so, she had speedily emptied a bottle of mulled mead and managed to break two perfectly unscratched glasses in a haste attempt to pour herself some additional mead (even the shards were Vanished surprisingly fast, Remus noted). Ultimately, she ended up snatching one of Mundungus' Firewhiskies, downing it straight from the bottle in deep gulps.

That was indeed one peculiar woman. When Remus first met her, he had discovered that the very young Auror not only had outrageous taste in hair-colour, but she had also a multi-faceted personality to go with it. Cocky and loud (perhaps even slightly annoyingly so), she had reminded him much of when he had first met Sirius on the Hogwarts Express, and it was only with mild surprise he learnt later on that her mother's maiden name actually had been as Black as her daughter appeared.

This sudden boozing, however, seemed a bit extreme even for Tonks, and Remus discreetly wondered whether this young witch ever would cease to puzzle him. Still, none of the others seemed to have noticed this odd behaviour of hers (they were currently busying themselves, trying to separate Mundungus from his beloved bottles), and so Remus decided that this odd behaviour merely implied she might already have had one bottle of mulled mead too many.

Finishing his own butterbeer, he simply remained his calm old self and half-leaned against the sink, enjoying the others' amusing struggle with Mundungus.

At last, Moody managed to fix Mundungus with such a stern 'Constant Sobriety' stare that the ginger-haired scoundrel dared nothing else but to obediently follow Moody out of the kitchen as the elder Auror gruffly exclaimed that only stupid people who wanted themselves killed would neglect a healthy, full-night's sleep.

An awkward moment of silence occurred in the emptied kitchen.

Remus suddenly came to reflect over how very unusual it was for Tonks to still be around. Somehow, he'd got the distinct impression that she had been avoiding him over the past few weeks. But perhaps he had been mistaken, since she now clearly was sitting there (admittedly looking quite unsettled, but still, sitting right there).

Sirius looked like he was just about to break the prolonged silence when Remus noticed that Tonks suddenly rose from her seat. She walked up to him with an oddly urgent look on her face.

'Remus,' she said resolutely, 'I need you to kiss me.'

He thought he might have heard Sirius spurt out a mouth-full of his mulled mead from somewhere beside him, but he wasn't really sure because before he knew it, Tonks had quickly leaned in to press her lips against his.

Startled by this sudden contact, he didn't manage much else than to stare wide-eyed at a couple of tiny freckles on the bridge of her nose.

For a split second they merely stood there, her lips awkwardly pressed to his, when suddenly, a low and murmuring sound could be heard from the back of Tonks' throat. Without any further warning, the young witch grabbed the bench on either side of him and pressed close, firmly pinning him to the sink. His body was quick to inform him it had been far too long since a woman had been this close, and a suppressed part of him longed to touch her, just to confirm she wasn't a mad phantom.

It was only two seconds after he registered her slowly biting down on his lower lip that she finally seemed to come to her senses.

Jumping back as if he had just performed an Imperturbable Charm on his tweedy self, she merely stood there, slightly breathless, looking absolutely horrified. Remus gazed back, eyes unblinkingly fixed on her nose, still not really able to fathom what had actually happened just then.

Sirius measured the situation and then cleared his throat.

'You know, Tonks,' he said with only the slightest hint of a smirk, 'when I said you should cut the man some slack, I didn't *actually* mean you oughta give the poor lad a heart-attack.'

Tonks' face grew as tomato red as her hair.

'I, er...!' she mumbled, clearly having no idea what to say.

Sirius smirked openly now, and Tonks made a few fish-like attempts in moving her mouth. 'Ineed'to go,' she ultimately managed and quickly stumbled out of the kitchen. Remus was left staring bewildered at the kitchen door.

'Wow, *Moony*,' Sirius then said, sounding as if he had never really seen the man before. 'I must confess I never saw you as much of a ladies' man before, but *damn*, women are just throwing themselves at you tonight, huh?' He wiggled his eyebrows vigorously.

Remus was efficiently pulled back to reality and turned to look at Sirius with a face that suggested the man was really one persistent and annoying little pebble, unwelcomely trapped in his shoe.

'You knew something about this?' he demanded, ignoring Sirius' most recent comment.

Sirius fought to maintain his innocent face. 'You mean to imply that I somehow *knew* my dear cousin'd go all mental with this sudden Female Werewolf in Heat act?'

'Yes,' Remus merely confirmed, unmoved.

'Okay,' Sirius began, now sounding slightly alarmed. 'Okay. So I admit being slightly guilty about, er... enlightening her that she had no business bolting off on you like before, but...'

'Say what?' interrupted Remus and narrowed his eyes, efficiently displaying his discontentment.

Sirius started to look much like a naughty child caught in action. '...But it was all for the greater good,' he quickly continued. 'If I hadn't, you'd still think she had secret werewolf issues...which she really hasn't.'

Remus wasn't looking all that convinced.

'I swear, Moony, I had only your best interests at heart,' Sirius urged.

He really seemed to fully master the art of making a werewolf feel extremely sceptical.

'Honest, I'd never...!' Sirius tried desperately, but the sight of Remus' highly incredulous facial expression made him stop short. He cursed loudly. 'Would you bloody stop *doing* that?!'

'What?' asked Remus, adapting a perfectly unknowing facial expression.

'That bloody stupid inquiring technique of yours, is bloody what,' Sirius raged.

Remus smiled, almost wickedly.

Sirius gave an indignant snort. 'And people say you're the nice and sensible one,' he muttered, eyeing Remus with admire-mixed-dislike.

'But as I was *saying*,' he stressed, still glaring at Remus, 'she didn't get round to saying too much during, er... certain loud circumstances but *she'd* make it clear enough that there were no secret prejudice issues involved whatsoever.'

'And since she didn't "get round saying too much", you figured this... how?' asked Remus, uncorking another butterbeer and raising an inquiring eyebrow at Sirius.

Sirius gaped open-mouthed. 'Pardon? You mean to say you were *completely* Stupefied before?' he exclaimed in an overly incredulous tone. 'I, of course, figured it all out straight away,' he continued in an unjustifiably smug voice. 'Obviously, if not all the mad blushing and running off knocking things over said it all, then her cave-woman display tonight most certainly did...!' He made a theatrical pause for effect.

'Yes?' Remus pressed, not really knowing whether to laugh or not.

Sirius cracked a smug grin. 'I'd say she's either off her rocker or completely delusional, 'cause Moony, old mate,' he sighed solemnly. 'Clearly, the poor woman's madly in love with you.'

The werewolf brutally choked on his newly opened butterbeer.

*

When Tonks woke up next morning, she spent the whole of three seconds in a sleepy state of blissful oblivion, but then remembrances of last night's fiasco ruthlessly overpowered her mind, and she uttered a tormented groan. Burying her face under the many layers of pillows in her bed, she decided to smother herself instantly.

'Tonks, you're so stupid, stupid, *stupid*...' came her muffled rant from under the pillows as she attacked them fiercely with her hammering fists. '...Stupid, stupid, *stupid*, Tonks, what were you *thinking*?' She unburied herself to gasp for breath.

This was a nightmare. A very cruel one, to say the least; it was one of those that just seemed too mortifying to be true, but too real to possibly be make-believe.

Oh, her blood had undergone some remarkable changes all right, but for once, the twins had nothing to do with it and as far as she knew, their potion had worked perfectly well. Actually, everything about last night ought to have worked perfectly well she had even waited until the opportune moment and everything but then...

'I had to go pounce on him like a bloody Kneazle on a bloody little mouse,' she groaned, smacking her forehead with the palm of her hand.

She hadn't even been able to muster a decent explanation before her traitorous feet had carried her far away from the place. She snorted tersely *Like there would have been an explanation anyway*.

Fighting an urge to maul her pillows with another flurry of fists, she suddenly realised that, surely, she must have done more embarrassing things in her life than to attack Defenceless Against Daft Acts professors. Still, on every other occasion, there had been valid reasons for her mad actions. But in this particular case and this was what

really was bugging her the only explanation she had been able to think of (while twisting and turning before falling asleep) was that the man had smelled *so damn good*. And she wasn't about to accept that as a valid reason anytime soon.

Surely it should take more than a whiff of clean washed tweed, dark chocolate, and some discreetly masculine after-shave to have Tonks lose her marbles that utterly. *Not that I remember any of it that clearly, anyway*, she quickly informed herself.) She stared at her bedroom ceiling and pondered for a while.

Suddenly realising that she really needed to be on time this time, she finally decided to appoint that last drink of Firewhisky as scapegoat, and distinctly pleased with this new prospect, she rose from her bed to get ready for the day.

Tonks was infinitely relieved to remember that she had volunteered with Molly and Podmore to be Harry's special escort to King's Cross this morning. She deftly morphed into disguise and picked out one of her hideous-but-useful grandma outfits, and even though she really had no particularly strong urge to face Remus today, she ultimately decided against using that one draught of Felix Felicis her mum had got her after finishing Auror training. Tonks reckoned she had better just grab that infamous bull's balls and get this ruddy day over and done with, unpleasant as it undoubtedly would be.

Unfortunately, once she had reached number twelve, Tonks was about to discover that "unpleasant" was a massive understatement.

There were, thankfully, no further kissing incidents, but Remus had (of course) already risen from bed. He entered the kitchen just when she was about to dig in on one of Molly's juicy breakfast pies and, naturally, she mistook her wand for a fork and turned the whole thing purple and inedible. Actually, it reminded her much of one of Aunt Mildred's suspicious-looking hats.

'Perfect,' she exclaimed brightly, trying really hard to sound as if she had *meant* to do that. She put the pork pie on her head and hurried out of the kitchen, not daring to look Remus in the eye.

Since they couldn't wait around for the mysteriously missing Podmore any longer, they brought the youngsters to King's Cross and saw them off (Padfoot looking deliriously happy to finally be let out from his current prison, if only for a short little while).

She found herself desperately hoping to sneak off into the crowd before Remus would try to speak with her, but alas, no such luck. She had just barely managed to slowly work herself to the back of the Order escort, when he suddenly approached and slightly leaned in towards her currently short-and-granny form.

'Might I have a word later?' he asked in a lowered voice.

Oh, damn.

'Sure, whenever,' she said, forcing a bright smile. Tonks resolutely ignored the faint and all too familiar smell that radiated from him, seemingly determined to rub her nose in yesterday's little mishap.

'Today?' he pressed.

Double-damn. No further possibility to act stupid and deliberately misinterpret his request.

'Of course,' she managed finally, this time massively failing to force a grin. 'I'll just come by headquarters after work then.'

'Excellent,' said Remus and offered a brief smile before leaving her to her misery.

Damn. Damn. Damn.

*

It was a, yet again, vividly pink-haired Tonks that Apparated to Grimmauld Place later that day. Reluctantly ascending the old stone stairs to number twelve, she suddenly felt extremely aware of the oddly blended sensation of curiosity and horror within her. (Curiosity, since she *did* sort of wonder whether she actually had managed to cause that alleged heart-perturbation, and horror, since the whole kissing accident really wasn't one of those things she could look back at and laugh about just yet.)

Remus must have seen her coming through the window, because before she knew it, he had opened the door.

'Hello, Tonks,' he said.

'Yeah, heya, Nymphadora,' came Sirius' voice from behind him. 'Hope you're hungry, 'cause I've got a smashing piece of wolf steak coming *right* u...'

'Sirius, you stay out of this one,' Remus interrupted, sounding dead serious. Tonks was surprised to notice that her cousin surrendered with only the faintest of grumbling sounds.

'Shall we?' Remus asked and made a gesture towards the kitchen entrance.

Tonks merely nodded and offered a brave smile. *Alright, Tonks, act normal. Like nothing major's happened. Since nothing major HAS happened. Really. It was just the necessary end to an evil concoction.* She drew a deep breath. *Yeah. That's right. Just smile.* She forced the corners of her mouth into a slightly unnatural position.

They wandered off to the end of the hall.

'Coffee?' Remus wondered after he closed the kitchen door behind them.

'Um... no, thanks,' she said quite frankly, the rigid smile still plastered on her face. 'I could use some mead, though,' she added hopefully, realising that some mildly alcoholic courage might come in handy, as she really needed to rid herself of this stupid grimace that refused to unglue itself from her face.

He poured them a glass each and suggested they should have a seat.

'So...' he then said, taking a small sip.

'So...' she echoed perkily, providing herself with a much mightier sip. She realised this whole ordeal had better be explained quickly, or there would be no end to this prolonged torture.

Remus put his glass down on the table and cleared his throat carefully. 'About last night...' he began cautiously, but Tonks decided to cut him off short.

'Listen, I'm really-really sorry about all that. I've honestly been meaning to tell you for ages but my bloody blood always seemed to go off and well sort of boil like mad, really, and I know it was kinda weird of me, but I just *had* to take off.' Her eyes were fixed on the mead in front of her. 'You see, once I figured out what it was all about, there was no time left to explain; I just *had* to get it on and kiss you.' She drew a breath and offered a slightly more natural smile, ultimately daring a peek at him from under her pink fringe.

'Again, I'm sorry for any inconvenience,' she tried, when spotting the still very clueless face of Remus Lupin.

'I see...' he said, although he quite obviously didn't. 'So yesterday was just...?'

'Oh,' she said. 'Yeah, that was all just the final part of a really weird antidote Fred and George found to have my blood stop boiling around you and I have to say all that bolting off to avoid nosebleeds *really* got on my nerves there in the end.' She was relieved to notice that her tongue-tying smile finally seemed to have worn off.

Remus was looking much like a professor trying to make heads and tails out of a particularly blurry essay answer.

'Good thing it all seemed to work, too, 'cause well I'm still sitting right here, and you're not wearing anything all too red'n sticky,' she added brightly, after another couple moments of silence.

Finally, Remus reached what he must have considered was the most sensible conclusion here. 'Oh, the actual Antiblood Elixir then, I take it?' he then said, sounding somewhat impressed.

'Could be it; I never really checked the title that thoroughly,' she said, shrugging.

'Well, it certainly would explain most of this,' he admitted with a smile. Tonks nodded in affirmation and started happily to slurp on her mead.

But somehow, Remus still didn't seem to be fully at ease.

He cleared his throat again and shifted uncomfortably in his seat. 'So, I'm definitely not your, er... secret sweetheart then or anything?' he finally said.

Tonks fought not to choke on her drink, but she failed to bottle up the incredulous snort of laughter that escaped her.

'Not exactly,' she said, conveniently blocking out the kiss that had gone slightly berserk.

The man was rude enough to almost look openly relieved, and Tonks knit her brows. *Well, that was uncalled for*, she thought, suddenly as cross as two sticks.

Meanwhile, Remus' face had darkened, and he growled something that could have been, 'I'll kill that dog.'

But Tonks wasn't paying much attention to this, since her eyes suddenly had caught hold of something suspiciously familiar-looking. Something thin and flesh-coloured that really couldn't be much else than...

'Hey, isn't that...'

'Why, yes, I believe it is.' Remus had also noticed the Extendables and had swiftly cut her off. 'I mean, would you look at that. It's the latest edition of *The Quibbler*,' he continued without hesitation, fixing her with a look that seemed to urge her to play along.

'Yeah, er... Would you look at that,' she echoed, not really sure what Remus expected of her in this odd tangent to their conversation.

'You've read the article on Sirius, I take it?' Remus then asked, corners of his mouth twitching almost maliciously.

It all suddenly clicked. *Ah, Sirius, of course. But where the heck did he get one of those?*

'Naturally,' she answered, winking mischievously to show him she had caught on.

'Although, I bet you didn't know that Sirius actually used to date that Doris Purkiss woman.'

Tonks exclaimed a short laugh that just barely managed to muffle the sound of protest that was uttered behind the kitchen door. 'No way,' she cried incredulously, 'the woman was old like a hag... gross!'

'Aah, you wouldn't believe it, but twelve years ago, that woman was quite the looker,' he said, raising an eyebrow suggestively.

Tonks grinned broadly, intrigued. 'Really... so what happened?'

'The REAL Stubby Boardman,' Remus said in such a perfectly grave voice that Tonks couldn't help but to chuckle loudly. 'You know, the actual Hobgoblin singer?' he continued swiftly. 'Turned out he and muddle-headed Ms Doris had been going steady for quite some time already, and he wasn't shall we say *overly* thrilled to discover his beloved repeatedly had mistaken him for this horny stripling with moral senses about as profound as the depth of his navel.' Remus' face gleamed with mischief. 'And *then...*'

But Tonks didn't catch the rest, she had been irrevocably set off at the "horny stripling" bit and was now clutching her sides, desperately fighting not to fall off the chair as the laughter bubbled out of her like a giant fountain of mirth.

A very offended-looking Sirius burst into the room, gesticulating wildly in what presumably was a vain attempt to claim his innocence to this 'bloody falsehood'. Unfortunately, any comprehensible part of his speech was efficiently drenched in Tonks' now madly enhanced fit of laughter.

Tears gushed down her cheeks, and Remus seemed rather to enjoy himself as well. He rose to calmly lean against the kitchen table, corners of his mouth ever twitching.

'Why, Sirius, dear,' he said smoothly when the man had finished his enraged defence. 'If I didn't know any better, I'd say you were blushing. Didn't even have to tell her about the really luscious part where you got dumped after she found out you only ever preferred to spend your nights with a certain chubby...'

'YOU LEAVE MR. MOOSE OUT OF THIS,' Sirius bellowed.

Remus chuckled loudly; Tonks had long since collapsed to the floor.

'Er... that is to say, that's all just utter bollocks, and you know it,' her cousin exclaimed lamely from the upper side of the kitchen table.

'Too late,' Remus smirked (yes, he actually smirked). 'Kings to me.'

'Yeah, yeah, kings to you, you randy old sod,' Sirius admitted gruffly.

Remus gave him what appeared to be a fatherly pat on the shoulder. 'That ought to teach you not to stick your trouble-seeking nose in other people's business,' he said.

Sirius was still glaring grumpily at the perfectly smug Remus when Tonks finally managed to climb back up on a kitchen chair, still out of breath from roaring of laughter. She noticed that the broad, stupid smile from earlier seemed to have sent for an upgrade because she just couldn't stop grinning, no matter how hard she tried. She shook her head in disbelief.

The man was funny. Who would've thought?

*

Much later, when all sounds of day had been silenced by the dead of night, Tonks turned restlessly in her bed, her breathing fast and shallow. Shadows had closed in on

her from every corner and angle, and suddenly, a high-pitched scream pierced the stillness. The young witch desperately twitched and struggled in her sleep, her sheets damp with sweat and shed tears.

'Noo, no, please... no.'

But no one heard her cries for help, and when dawn finally chased the shadows away, she remembered nothing.

* * *

A/N: *And so, the Very Unlikely plot thickens...*

Oh, and the pork pie hat is definitely canon. It's right there on page 165 (UK edition) ;)

Cookies to those who feel gracious enough to offer me some comments ^^

Of Scars and Belly Buttons

Chapter 5 of 5

Tonks decides not to ever drink rum again, and we get a glimpse of what might be going on under the skin of a werewolf.

Of Scars and Belly Buttons

Ever since that memorable evening of severe Sirius-jesting in the kitchen of number twelve, Tonks and Remus seemed to have reached an unspoken agreement to start fresh. Bit by bit, a relaxed camaraderie started to sprout among the three. And as the mild breezes of September slowly turned into the cutting winds of October, Tonks wasn't all too surprised to find herself spending a good many of her chilly autumn evenings with the two bachelors of Grimmauld Place.

They were sometimes joined by Mundungus who, besides from thievery, recently seemed to have taken up a questionable interest in cross-dressing. Fortunately for him, Mr. and Mrs. Weasley had both moved back to the Burrow once the new term got started, so he could freely show up in any of his pitiful drag-attires without having to risk exposure to those looks of deepest disdain Molly seemed to reserve exclusively for him. Still, Ms Mundungus himself was always surprisingly quick to point out that this was only a strictly makeshift means of disguise until the spare Invisibility Cloak was regained. Nobody had the heart to tell him that Moody already had got hold of another one.

This Friday, however, neither Tonks nor Dung had showed up at number twelve, so there were only two emptied cups of tea visible on the battered kitchen table tonight. Remus and Sirius were right in the middle of discussing Harry's newly formed defence group when Sirius came to the sudden realisation that he hadn't yet managed to nail that sly wolf for bringing up the Doris-incident earlier. An eye for an eye they say, and it was time for Remus to pay up.

But to suddenly blurt out excessive allegations on Remus' love life was virtually impossible (at least if you were aiming for any form of response on his part). What Sirius needed was something plausible. Something female. *Something pink-haired and well-shaped*

'Saaay, Moony, speaking of Tonks,' he began, cutting Remus off short. 'You wouldn't say she's been spending an awful lot of time here lately, would you?'

'But we weren't talking about Tonks,' Remus replied flatly.

Damn. And people said Gillyweed is slippery.

Sirius decided to try something slightly more suggestive. 'I'm only saying that if she keeps coming around every other night, then what of those full moons, eh?' He studied his fingers innocently. 'I mean, the woman's a *woman* after all... You sure you can handle it, old mate?' Sirius looked up to venture a glance at Remus' face.

The other man had narrowed his eyes, presumably trying to figure out what Sirius was playing at this time.

'Of course, with your saintly senses, even that famous wolfish libido won't stand a chance... right?' Sirius raised his eyebrows slightly. This was an absolute shot in the dark, he was more than well aware of that, because somehow Remus always seemed to skillfully avoid the subject, never allowing Sirius to fully state the ongoing rumour as a fact.

Unsurprisingly, Remus merely declared that next full moon is a normal moon, and then he reached for the latest edition of *Daily Prophet* and buried his nose in it, clearly demonstrating that the subject was closed.

Sirius snorted impatiently. *Just like him to hatch a cryptic answer like that*

But Remus had overlooked the small fact that old mates often manage to decipher even the other one's smallest habits. And right now, Sirius noted that the seemingly casual wolf was clenching his jaw awfully hard.

Interesting... Veery interesting. Remus might believe that Sirius had the perceptive skill of a Flobberworm, but this little piece of information would definitely be used for future Black-mailing material. And Sirius *might* just have the ultimate idea what to make of it...

His mastermind plotting was abruptly disturbed by a sudden crash, instantly followed by a heated, *Damn,* coming from somewhere upstairs. Mrs. Black quickly began the portraits' usual cacophony of screams and wails, and any other possible sound was efficiently drowned out.

Remus looked up from his newspaper to exchange a knowing glance with Sirius. Concurrently, they rose from their seats to assist Tonks in her current predicament.

'Perhaps showing her how to enter wasn't such a bright idea, after all,' Remus commented.

'Anything to keep her from using that bloody doorbell every other night,' Sirius responded. But neither one of them complained she had decided to turn up after all.

Together, they managed to haul the obstinate curtains shut again, and peace was restored in the hallway.

'Sorry,' muttered Tonks. 'It was just that damned umbrella stand again.' She straightened her coat and vainly tried to adjust her messy, currently amber-coloured spikes. 'Can somebody tell me *why* exactly no one has disposed of this yet?' she asked irritably, giving the ugly troll-leg a hard kick on its shin. Not waiting for an answer, she handed Remus a large, green bottle with a giant, piggy-pink ribbon tied around it. 'Hold this for me, please,' she then said and started to unbutton her coat.

'Hell, what's *that*?' said Sirius with disgust.

'Read the card,' answered Tonks, sounding amused.

He managed to locate a comparatively small card under the ghastly ribbon. *Dear Professor Minerva McGonagall. I, on behalf of everyone here at the Ministry, wish you a happy birthday. May this token gift prove our deepest appreciation for your many devoted years of service in educating our magical youth, and may you have many happy years ahead! Sincerely* and so on and so on *Cornelius Fudge, Minister of Magic,*' Sirius read.

'Ah, Minerva's seventieth birthday,' Remus noted, exchanging an amused glance with Sirius.

'Yeah, Fudge always seemed to have a weak spot for that old missy.' Sirius smirked and then eyed the bottle with almost malicious pleasure. 'That man... evidently no sense of smart wooing, whatsoever,' he commented, suddenly sounding all smug and superior.

'That's pretty much what Professor McGonagall figured, too,' Tonks replied with a grin. 'Met her in Hogsmeade the other day, when I was running some errands, and she instantly loaded it over; claimed it wasn't proper for her to be seen carrying around something like that.' Tonks uttered a laugh and added, 'I must confess, red currant rum doesn't sound overly appealing, but I guess it's up to us to empty it, huh, guys?' She hung her coat in the hallway wardrobe and turned to face them, smiling expectantly.

'Um... guys?' she pressed. But the sight of bare abdomen under her short jumper abruptly seemed to have deprived them of any ability to comprehend English. (Or more rather, the shining piece of jewellery attached to the middle of said stomach.)

Sirius was the first one to recover. 'Since when do you have a belly button piercing?' he asked, eyeing her with new-found approval.

'Oh, that,' said Tonks, failing to sound indifferent. 'Since yesterday. So...wha'dya think?' she asked, basking in their attention. 'Mum's gonna throw a fit, that's for sure, but it'll so be worth it,' she said, sighing in contentment.

'And Remus I'm sure there's a camera around here somewhere... You know, a picture*would* last much longer,' she added teasingly.

Remus raised his gaze to meet her eyes and slowly shook his head, not really needing to say anything else.

'What?' said Tonks. 'It's a perfectly comprehensible thing to have,' she added, sounding slightly affronted.

'Your words, not mine,' Remus answered shrewdly, earning himself an appalled snort from Tonks. But Remus conveniently failed to notice this and simply turned to walk back towards the kitchen.

'Why, you...' Sirius heard Tonks mutter, before she steamed after Remus.

Well, someone's sure enjoying himself, Sirius noted with a grin and joined the others walking towards the basement kitchen.

Momentarily, Remus had fetched another cup from a corner cupboard and transfigured all three of them to pints, as Tonks stubbornly insisted that real wizards sure drink their rum pirate-wise, pink ribbon or not.

They soon agreed that red currant may for reasons left unsolved indeed have been the flavour of Fudge's choice, but it sure tasted absolutely repulsive. Remus and Sirius were also amused to find that Tonks evidently passed for an extremely tipsy rum drinker (this being established despite Tonks' loud objections that she bloody well could hold her liquor).

By the time the rum bottle finally was adequately emptied, Tonks was so wasted, neither one of the remaining two dared send her home in such a sorry state. Therefore, as she turned to leave the kitchen, they insisted she'd sleep in Hermione and Ginny's old room on the first floor. But Tonks, persistent as few, had her mind entirely set on sleeping in her own bed.

'Don't be shilly, Ssirius, deer,' she said in a drunken slur. 'I'm perfelly capel of making me own way hoo oopsy daisies!' she exclaimed, as she abruptly stumbled over a small stool that had had the nerve to settle itself right in the middle of her path.

Remus was the closest one at hand to catch her, and she ended up leaning heavily on him. 'Why, Remush,' she said and batted her eyelashes violently. 'You migh wanna give a gal fair warning, 's all shoo very shudden...' her voice faded away, and she spent a moment lost in something that might have been described as deep thought.

'You really-truly fanshy me, don'tcha?' she then cried out, pinching his nose.

Remus barely managed to keep his face straight. 'Surprisingly enough...I don't,' he said. 'Now piss off,' he added with a smile and shoved her off him.

'Too late!' she said, and cracked up in a hysterical fit of laughter at her own incredibly clever pun.

Remus and Sirius exchanged highly amused glances and had barely managed to agree that there was no chance in hell they would ever let her forget this, when Tonks abruptly silenced herself with a huge yawn. She wrinkled her nose pensively.

'I'm shleepy,' she announced and shifted her gaze critically between the two wizards. *You may carreeh me home,*' she ultimately decided, with a gracious nod towards Remus. She closed the small distance between them and threw her arms around his shoulders, childishly nuzzling her face into the crook of his neck. Two seconds later, she was snoring loudly.

'Well,' Sirius began, 'can't argue with *her majesty*, now can I...' he said airily, and started to discreetly make his way out of the kitchen.

'Oh, no, you don't,' Remus enlightened him. 'Grab her feet.'

And since Sirius occasionally was smart enough to recognise the fine difference between an order and a request, he did like he was told. Together, they managed to transfer the heavily sleeping Tonks up the stairs and into bed.

'Aren't we supposed to er... remove her clothes or something?' Sirius tried wickedly, thinking it would be a priceless opportunity to observe his friend this close to a full moon.

Remus made his answer with a not-so friendly smack to Sirius' head, and then he turned to exit the room.

'Ow...' Sirius rubbed his forehead grudgingly.

Damn him and his prudish morals

*

Remus awoke mere hours later due to having the nearly-full moon shining brightly through the window down onto his face. *Can't be morning yet*, he concluded tiredly, but since he didn't feel much like going to sleep again with that thing hanging over him, he decided to make his way down to the kitchen to boil some tea.

Closing the door to his room, Remus thought he might have heard a distant cry for help. But since he was used to hearing weird sounds from all over this place at night, he thought no more of it. Until he reached the first landing, that was.

'No, please, let me go...'

The struggling plea could be heard more distinctly this time, and moreover, it definitely seemed to have come from Tonks' room. Remus stopped cautiously to listen further. His monthly enhanced hearing allowed him to discern strained choking sounds, and Remus quickly decided that this was not a good time for hesitation. He stormed through her door.

Remus did not quite know what he had expected to find in there. Some vicious, ancient creature perhaps, or anything really, that might have crawled up from a random cupboard and decided to charge. What he had not expected was Tonks, sleeping alone, brutally entangled in her sheets whilst looking very much like she was desperately trying to strangle herself.

Remus didn't examine the situation too closely before instinct made him bolt forward to insure that the girl got some oxygen down her throat. But just when he had grabbed her wrists to loosen her iron death-grip, Tonks uttered a surprisingly high-pitched shriek of absolute terror. Her nails suddenly started to aim persistently for a total theft of Remus' eyes, and relief that she finally had let go of her trachea was rapidly replaced with a strong feeling of alarm.

This just isn't normal.

She was sweating abundantly, and her eyes roamed restlessly beneath their eyelids. Her breathing was also too forced and her movements too direct; Remus quickly decided that any possibility of an ordinary dream was definitely excluded. She needed to wake up this instant.

He grabbed her forearms and pinned them to her sides, shaking her and calling her name sharply. She struggled to get away, but Remus called her name again and gave her another forceful shake. Suddenly, she opened her eyes widely and gasped for air. Realising that someone was holding her arms, she desperately pulled away and pressed herself against the wall, whimpering.

Her dark eyes bore a haunted expression of unspeakable horror.

'Tonks...' Remus called softly.

She turned her pale face towards him and looked at him blindly for some moments before her lips slowly started to tremble.

'Shh,' he whispered. 'It's okay, Tonks. You're okay.' He reached out for her, and she whimpered again, but obediently crawled into his arms.

Remus knew that human touch often was the most crucial thing one could offer in these situations, so he held her close and stroked her back, murmuring soothing nonsense into her damp hair. Finally, her last resistance ruptured, and he could feel the shoulder of his worn-out pyjamas turn soggy from her shed tears as she clung to him desperately. He rocked her gently and continued talking soothingly to her. It was then that he noticed something very odd.

The bedroom that mere moments ago had been clad in darkness and shadow of night was now brightly illuminated by the very same moonlight that had forced him awake in the first place. Remus could only hope that a passing cloud had temporarily blocked the moon, but somehow, he didn't manage to fully convince himself.

As Tonks' sobs slowly subsided, Remus was tempted to ask whether she had these nightmares often, but then he thought better of it and decided it could wait until morning. He continued holding her, silently, and waited until her breathing had grown steady and deep before he slowly untangled her arms from him and started to move her into a lying position.

He had barely let go of her when she opened her eyes abruptly and grabbed his pyjama sleeve.

'No,' she said in a rasping voice. 'Stay with me... please...' She refused to let go of him and he registered an urgent plea in her eyes.

'Please...' She moved over to make room for him beside her.

Not until he had nodded his confirm and settled himself next to her did she let go of his pyjamas and return to her restless slumber.

Remus soon found that not only the moon but yet another object (a very female, gently snoring one) was now efficiently preventing him from gaining any comfortable rest. He looked out through the window with a dejected sigh. And at that moment, his doubts were ruthlessly confirmed.

Not a single cloud was visible on the star laden sky outside.

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Tonks woke up the next morning to the unpleasant discovery of a blistering headache. She also registered a somewhat feeble sensation inside that left her feeling much like a wrung out cloth. *Definitely not a very dreamy combination*, she concluded weakly.

She realised then that this certainly was not her own lovely pink bed sheets. She looked around and recognised a large wardrobe in the far end of the room. This was Ginny and Hermione's old bedroom!

What the...? She had absolutely no memory of how she had gotten there.

She remembered bringing the rum over and getting a wee bit tipsy (okay, well, not so wee then). But all that just seemed so very distant to her now; it was as if an entire lifetime had passed rather than a mere couple of hours, and it wasn't a very pleasant feeling at all.

Something's very off about this. She had a gut feeling about it.

Obscure shadows and the panic of being haunted suddenly echoed inside her head, making her headache even more excruciating. And what was that distant warmth of steady arms around her...? A million scattered memories crowded her aching head and, right then, she wanted nothing more than to scream bloody murder and tell them all to leave her alone.

But somehow, she had the feeling her head wouldn't be very indulgent to something like that right now. She drew a few deep, calming breaths and tried turning it slowly to one side; splitting pain. Tonks groaned. *That's it. I'm so never drinking rum again*

She noticed then that someone had placed a large, steaming cup, some chocolate and a note on the small, battered chair beside her bed. She slowly reached for the note and read:

Dear Tonks, Made you something against the unpleasant aftermath of alcohol. Hope you are feeling all right. Last night really didn't look too good. Make sure you eat the chocolate. Remus.

She was just about to conclude that the man really was such a sweet dear, when she suddenly couldn't help but to notice that the purple contents of the cup had a most

disturbing smell of old eggs and too much aniseed. She hated aniseed.

Bloody sadist.

She reluctantly emptied the cup, and by the time she'd finished her chocolate, she was delighted to notice that her headache had vanished completely. (Okay, so maybe he was the sweetest sadist she'd ever met, then.)

She wondered if that rum really had made her look that bad last night, or if Remus had referred to something else with his note.

Tonks realised she probably needed to speak with him. She also realised that she desperately needed a toothbrush. *Ah, well, can't have everything.* She rose from bed and straightened her short top from yesterday, wondering what hair-colour she would go for today. She ultimately settled for acid green.

Closing the door behind her, she had just started to wonder where she might find Remus at this time of day, when Sirius descended the stairs from some floor above. He was wearing an oddly purple dressing gown in satin (a suspiciously feminine one, covered in black laces). It made Tonks briefly wonder if Mundungus was missing one of his night attires.

'Nice robes,' she greeted with an unavoidable smirk.

'Piss off,' he grunted. Clearly not a morning person.

'Where's Remus?'

'Upstairs. Third floor. Left.'

'Thanks,' she said and started to make her way upstairs.

She stopped when she heard Sirius calling something after her.

'What was that?'

He hesitated. 'Nothing... Absolutely nothing. Off you go, brat.'

That man had a seriously annoying habit of pushing all her wrong buttons. She gritted her teeth, but decided to let him live. At least he didn't call her Nymphadora.

Thirty-two seconds later, she knocked on Remus' door and entered without waiting for him to answer. It might just have been the single most stupid thing she had done that day.

Remus stood with his back against her, wearing pretty much nothing apart from the towel that was draped loosely around his hips. He turned his head to check who had entered.

'Gosh, I'm so sorry,' she said desperately and decided to dash quickly before she dropped dead of embarrassment. Sirius was so going to die for not warning her.

It was then she noticed the scars. She froze helplessly.

His entire back was covered with scars and nasty gashes of all various shape and age. Some still bore a heated shade of red, but most of them looked like they had been there for the longest of times.

Tonks could have been floored with a feather.

What on earth happened to you? She couldn't help but stare, and despite her hard efforts, she felt her eyes water up.

Remus finally decided to break the awkward moment of silence. 'You know, we might just have to dig out that camera after all. I hear that pictures are supposed to last much longer, really,' he said, with an almost boyish sort of smile.

'It's not funny,' she said weakly, not being able to take her eyes off his wounded body.

'Perhaps not,' he replied, 'but tears won't change the fact that they're there.'

She decided she really needed to perk up a bit.

'Well, lucky me then. *I never cry.*' She offered a cocky grin and quickly turned her nose in the air. But this time, Remus was the one unable to smile.

'Oh, I wouldn't say that,' he merely said, and looked her straight in the eye.

Her own forced grin died instantly.

'You know something, don't you?' The question was meant to sound like a statement, but her voice sounded oddly strained, almost puny, and it only made her sound every bit as much a lost child as she felt.

'You need to tell me, Remus. I've tried remembering, but I just... can't.' She raised her gaze and found him watching her silently.

'You had a nightmare, Tonks,' he said carefully after some moments. 'A very bad one, and' He hesitated. 'You sure you can't recall anything?'

She was just about to shake her head when she suddenly remembered, more distinctly this time, the warmth of a human embrace and *wait a second here*. She got a sudden feeling that Remus might have something to do with that memory, but decided quickly to disregard the slightly disturbing thought. (*She* sure didn't need any sodding knight, shining armour or not.) An all too familiar scent of dark chocolate then inconveniently entered her remembrance, and she made the inevitable connection.

Oh. Sweet. Merlin.

Honestly, those arms (*his* arms) had been almost shockingly soothing; no one had held her like that since she was a little girl. They had been *real*. And she was startled to realise that they might just have saved her life.

'...Tonks?' Remus was looking expectantly at her, and she realised he must have asked another question.

'I'm sorry,' she said, still feeling a bit shaken. 'What was that again?'

Remus got a concerned look in his eyes. 'I just wanted to know if you've had these dreams before,' he said. 'Try to remember. It might be very important.'

'No... never.' She was fairly certain of it.

'I see,' he said and narrowed his eyes.

A contemplating silence occurred. Tonks realised she was staring again.

'How did you get those scars?' she suddenly blurted.

Remus looked completely taken aback for a little moment. 'I guess one could say they're pretty much self-inflicted,' he finally said in a slightly off-hand voice.

She immediately regretted bringing the subject up. *Of course*. She knew that werewolves without access to human prey often tended to inflict harm on themselves instead, especially in the days before the invention of Wolfsbane. But mostly, she just completely failed to remember the fact that Remus supposedly turned into a vicious man-eating beast once a month. She cursed herself for being so blunt.

'I'm... sorry,' she stammered.

'Why are *you* sorry?' He fixed her with a sharp gaze. 'You had no part in this.'

'I know. It's just...' But she could no longer bear looking at those piercing eyes, and her voice trailed off.

She had no idea what she possibly could say to him. I know how you feel? *Utterly ridiculous*. She wasn't a werewolf; she would never know. Her eyes darted towards him. She realised he suddenly did not seem at all like the calm and casual man she always had pictured him to be. He looked lonely and... haunted. It seemed so unfair that he had done so much for her and she could offer nothing in return.

She had a sudden idea.

'Listen, why don't I just join you during next full moon?' she suggested brightly. 'I'm sure it's perfectly safe what with that Wolfsbane and stuff, and'

'The *hell* it is, Nymphadora.'

She was startled by the sudden anger in his voice. It was as if she had crossed some sort of unspoken barrier, and whatever lay beyond it, she certainly wasn't welcome.

'Oh.'

She tried hard several times, but she just couldn't seem to muster any other sound, and ultimately, she decided to do as he wished for now.

She left him alone.

A/N: So this was it for now. This chapter might not have been fully as 'nice and light hearted' as before, but seeing as HBP turned out like it did, I really needed this story to have some darker sides to it as well. You also might want to know that this'll be a twelve chaptered story that will cover entire OotP, so there are lots more yet to come!

Hope you all enjoy reading, and don't hesitate to let me know what you think.