

Moons of Deceit

by Grace has Victory

Remus Lupin tolerates mischievous friends and lycanthropy while the prophetic Ariadne MacDougal negotiates a misguided family, and everyone must deal with the Death Eaters. A rather dark coming-of-age story of the death of innocence and the renewal of hope during Voldemort's first war.

Part I of *The Moon-Cursers*. Now updated to be *DH*-compatible.

Truth under a Waxing Moon

Chapter 1 of 21

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To the wonderful SPIDERWORT,
because she made this story happen.

Disclaimer

1. **J. K. Rowling** owns the Potterverse. And she has made a lot of money out of it. I don't own anything. And I haven't made any money at all.
2. Thanks to my alpha readers, **Robert** (age 12), **Julia** (age 9) and **Benjamin** (age 7) for encouraging me to write, even though they hated some of the parts about bodily mutilation and weeping werewolves.
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CHAPTER ONE

Truth under a Waxing Moon

Saturday 30 October 1982

Kincarden Croft (unplottable, but easily located in Inverness-shire).

Rated G for references to playing house.

He first saw the girl framed in a window seat, her brow furrowed over the parchment in her lap. He would have known she was a MacDougal, for her slender frame, milky complexion and cloudy dark hair all shouted her Pictish ancestry. But he knew anyway, for the family had mentioned that their daughter would be home from Hogwarts for the weekend. She had arrived yesterday evening, but he had been too busy around the farm to notice her.

"Good evening, Miss MacDougal. I'm afraid I must ask you to move away from your seat."

She slid to the floor with an obliging smile. "Good evening. I'm thinking you'd be the new farmhand. Remus Lupin, is it not? Can I help you with anything?"

"At the moment, I am only measuring." Remus pulled a tape from his pocket and threw one end to the far corner, where it stuck. He drew the other end across the wall, past the window recess where she had been sitting, and into the opposite corner. A red number flashed into the air, quivered uncertainly, then vanished. "As I thought," he said. "This room is still of unstable dimensions from the last time it was Transfigured. It doesn't know its own size. Miss MacDougal, I don't suppose you know the history of the spells cast on this room?"

"Unfortunately I do not. But I'm thinking that nobody has tried to change its size for at least ten years. Are you saying that it's never been changed back to its natural size since then? Surely it's not safe to leave an old Transfiguration spell in place for so long."

"Yes, they do degrade over time but that appears to be what's happened here. We can convert it back, of course, but we'd better look out for the furniture. Have you any idea what size the room *should* be?"

"Only a little smaller than it is now," she told him. "If we moved the furniture to the centre, so that nothing is touching the walls... Is that how it's done?"

With a swish of his wand, Remus moved all the unfixed items in the room to hover around a point in the centre and a foot above the floor. "But that was the easy part," he admitted. "The curtains the pictures the lamps " he moved around the room, charming each item off the walls as he spoke. "And the carpet... Can I ask you to put yourself back in the window...?" He jumped up after her. "Now we should be safe to undo the old spell I'm sorry I keep asking you to move, Miss MacDougal."

"It's no trouble. I'm only sorry that I cannot do magic outside school and help you."

"*Finite Incantatem!*" Remus waved his wand at the four corners, and the whole room shuddered. The walls groaned; the corners blinked; the stonework sprang like rubber and suddenly each wall had moved forward a couple of feet. The room was definitely smaller and quite still.

"Now," he said, bringing out the tape again, "your mother wants this room enlarged to roughly twice as wide and three and a half times as long. Just a moment, while I do the sum..."

"Are you wanting parchment?" She moved towards a writing desk against the long wall.

"No, it's just a simple Transfiguration problem. *Dilato!*"

Miss MacDougal took a second to recover her balance. Where there had been solid walls, there suddenly were none. They had all moved outwards, so that the furniture was now clustered around them in the middle of an otherwise bare hall. "You make it look so easy," she said. "Did you change the size of the whole house, or only the inside?"

"Only the inside of this room is enlarged. The outside should be the same size as it always was. Do you think your mother wants the furniture moved back to the new walls?"

"She does, and I can help you with that. I'm expecting she'll want more chairs to arrange in groups around the room. Can you conjure those?"

"I can, but there's no point in doing it before tomorrow."

As they began to push back the furniture and replace wall-hangings, Miss MacDougal asked, "Will you be working here for long, Mr Lupin?"

"As long as I can." He saw her looking at him and knew he needed to change the subject quickly. "You're at Hogwarts, aren't you? Why aren't you at school now?"

"I was meant to be," she said, "but my parents were needing help preparing for this party. My mother was relying on my sister-in-law, but she's having a bad pregnancy she's really not well enough to do much. And they cannot afford to hire help on top of all the catering expenses. So Professor McGonagall gave me permission to come home for the weekend."

"And you've been in the kitchen all day?" She nodded. "That's a valiant exchange. You're missing out on Hallowe'en at Hogwarts and perhaps a trip to Hogsmeade too? to help your parents with their affairs."

"This party is important to them," she said. "It's the first anniversary of You-Know-Who's downfall. After so many years of confusion, they're wanting to remind themselves that we're finally safe. And to reaffirm that they do trust their old friends."

"How many guests are they expecting?"

"Forty or fifty. Mainly family, a few longstanding friends... I think we've finished, Mr Lupin. I should... continue my homework... or I'll lose all credibility with Professor McGonagall..."

She sounded so reluctant that, on an impulse, he said, "Show me."

She silently took a parchment from the desk and showed him a standard sixth-year Transfiguration problem, shrinking a very large mammal into a very small one. On a second sheet, she had made several attempts at diagramming the change, but all were hopelessly confused. "I cannot draw it out properly," she said sadly. "My mind always seems to lose the beginning of the vector before it reaches the end."

He thought that was a very good description of why her calculations were not working. Most people had trouble calculating the geometry of a Transfiguration. Not wanting to admit that he had already worked out the answer, he carefully suggested, "It seems to me that you're trying to draw on a flat parchment what can only be portrayed in three dimensions. Unless you're as good as Professor McGonagall, your polygons will end up looking like a bowl of spaghetti. Here, draw it in the air." He conjured a three-dimensional model of the starting dimensions, each vertex glowing red. "You have the angles? Each time you move a vertex, code the new position in blue..."

He had been going to add that she should write down the numbers as she went, and he would move the vectors as she calculated them, but he could see that she had already latched on to how his model worked. He suspended the model over the desk, while she moved corners, lengthened lines and wrote figures. Finally the new shape had been correctly formed, and the entire model glowed blue.

"That's it! If I reshape each energy parcel according to these figures, the elephant will become a mouse." Her face was flooded with relief. "Thank you so much, Mr Lupin. This is the first time all term that Advanced Transfiguration has made sense to me. I'm hardly daring to ask you..."

"Ask what?"

"Why you're not a teacher."

"I would like to teach." He tried to sound neutral. Teaching was the one vocation that had always fascinated him, the career in which his interest could not fade, of which the usefulness could not be questioned, over even the longest lifetime. But teaching was not an option for him, so he refused to dwell on it. Instead he asked her, "What would you like to do with your life, Miss MacDougal?"

She was not to be deflected. "I'm thinking it's let's say a sort of Advanced Transfiguration to be wishing to teach but to settle for farming. What brings you here, to do the heavy labour on somebody else's farm, when your talents so obviously lie elsewhere?"

Fortunately, he did not have to answer, because at that moment Mrs MacDougal entered the room. As slim and softly-spoken as her daughter, she glanced around the lofty hall that Remus had just created and smiled graciously. "Oh, well done, Remus. I had not imagined that anybody in our household would have the talent to conduct such a huge Transfiguration so efficiently. Thank you so much. I'm very, very impressed. By the way, William has been asking if you can help him in the cow-byre."

This was the nearest Bethoc MacDougal ever came to giving a direct order to anyone. Making his way to the door, Remus heard his employer speaking to her daughter.

"Ariadne, dear, we're needing another batch of raspberry fool in the kitchen. Did you finish your homework yet?"

Remus knew very well that she had *not* finished. When he heard an obedient murmur to the effect that the raspberries would be attended to immediately, he wondered if Miss MacDougal would ever be allowed to complete her studies in peace.

Hiding from Hunter's Moon

Chapter 2 of 21

Remus needs to hide his furry little problem from his new employers, but his past is catching up with him faster than he expected.

CHAPTER TWO

Hiding from Hunter's Moon

Saturday 30 October Monday 1 November 1982

Kincarden Croft, Inverness-shire.

Rated PG for complex situations.

Remus spent the evening doing routine tasks. Since there were two Mr MacDougals, father and son, and the farm ran largely on magic, it needed only two hired men, himself and William. Some jobs could be overseen with a single spell, but any activity concerned with animals in motion demanded constant supervision until the whole sequence was completed. Remus had also learned that, in any task that was at all complex, he needed to focus a large part of his attention on William, who often sabotaged his own spells by forgetting the chain of events before it was completed. William was in the byre now, charming the milking equipment onto each cow in turn, but he was forgetting to check that the milk landed in the tank. Once they had collected the milk from every cow, William rolled the tanks to the front gate (he rarely remembered to use magic for this) and waited for the Muggle agent who bought it from them.

By the time the next morning's routine tasks were finished, Mrs MacDougal had found more work for everyone. Remus was kept busy enlarging bedrooms and conjuring beds, since most of the guests would be staying the night. Mr Kenneth MacDougal was stringing up jack o' lanterns and paper chains and placing amplification and equalisation charms over the Wireless. William was diplomatically sent to move sheep so that he would not upset the delicate spell-work in the house. Mr MacDougal was levitating crates of Butterbeer and Atholl Brose from the larder to the parlour, where he was setting up a bar.

Mrs MacDougal and her daughter hardly stirred from the kitchen: there was marmalade to be spread over lamb chops, corned beef to be shredded into soufflé, endless slices of salmon to be basted in rolled oats, orange rind to be grated into the carrot soup, leeks and courgettes and asparagus to be chopped (since the girl was doing this, without the luxury of enchanting the knife) and griddled, potatoes to be peeled, and three sticky toffee puddings to be rescued from the oven. They were also stirring a mysterious concoction of spearmint and yamwurzle over the kitchen fire; this, Miss MacDougal explained, was for her sister-in-law, who was still far from well. They had to care for the two-year-old granddaughter of the house until Mr MacDougal, having finished his complicated arrangements for the liquid refreshments, took her out on an extensive survey of the farm. After the spearmint potion was strained, Miss MacDougal stopped flaking smoked haddock for the cullen skink and began instead to feed chopped asafetida and wormwood into some kind of condensing machine. It was unmistakably a home distillery, and the combined stench of distilled asafetida and wormwood was so vile that Remus was not tempted to enter the kitchen again.

The guests began to Floo into the fireplace at four o' clock in the afternoon. Remus, who had not mixed with wizarding society for the last year, was glad enough to hide outdoors. There were potatoes needing to be sacked and stacked, and he could always pretend that the Sacking Charm needed him to watch over it. But Miss MacDougal interrupted him within half an hour. She was wearing tartan dress-robos, black crossed over scarlet, and she looked weary, as if she had no energy for socialising.

"Mr Lupin, are you not wanting to go indoors? My parents are expecting it of you."

"Are you sure?" He stopped the charm. "Thank you for telling me. It's taking me a long time to understand what your parents require."

"They are certainly expecting their employees to attend their Hallowe'en party. William is helping serve drinks." She watched him glance down at his shabby work robes, and added, "They are not expecting you to look like anything other than an employee."

He admitted, "I'm never quite sure what your parents do expect of me, Miss MacDougal. I can manage the robes *Pulvinexpulso!*" With a flick of his wand, the dust swept away in a grey cloud and settled in a far corner of the shed. "But I'm never sure whether I'm welcome indoors or not. William and I eat at the family table nearly every meal, but we sleep in the out-buildings."

"That's nothing. The out-buildings were built generations ago, when all the farmhands were Muggles. It gave the family some privacy against betraying the Statute of Secrecy."

"Your mother didn't seem to mind at all when she found me in the parlour with you yesterday, yet at other times I have the distinct impression she doesn't like us to dirty the house."

"It's not about dirt. It's not about you at all. They only keep you out of the house to be fair to William. And the only real reason they're wanting him out of the house is because of Morag. You could not be sure a baby would be safe around William. I know my parents are wanting you to remember that they employ you. But as long as you do remember that, they're wanting you to feel welcome on their property."

They had reached the threshold. There was not a whiff of yamwurzle left in the kitchen, only the broad competing aromas of chicken-in-the-heather, green pea soup and rhubarb crumble. Strains of *Loch Lomond* and *Bonnie Doon* were wafting out from the Wireless, barely audible above the laughter of some loudly-spoken guest. The lanterns, winking with candles, were swinging from the kitchen rafters, and all through the parlour now a grand hall beyond it. A shrieking child in a pumpkin-gold dhoti and turban raced through a knot of middle-aged wizards, leaving their Firewhisky to spill all over the carpet, then threw out his hands to save himself from colliding with the kitchen architrave. Neatly avoiding a red-kilted playmate in hot pursuit, the child hopped backwards towards the Conjured chesterfield, and landed in the lap of an elderly witch, who recovered from her surprise in time to ask his name. Remus learned that the turbaned child was Pradeep Patil, the kilted child was Zelly Macmillan, and the surprised witch was Esmeralda Cornfoot, before he followed Miss MacDougal into the hall.

And he found himself staring straight into the face of a person whom he had never expected to see again.

He had known, all along, that one of the problems of working for an ancient pure-blood family like the MacDougals was that it could only be a matter of time before he did meet someone who recognised him. He had held the job for exactly eight weeks, and already he was looking right at someone who had once known him only too well.

Greasy hair that grew faster than it could be cut. Large hooked nose. Hands that moved like a twitching spider.

There was nothing to say except, "Good evening, Severus."

"Remus Lupin." The words were spat out like an asafetida mouthwash, but with no suggestion of beginning a conversation. The beetle-black eyes narrowed, but with no suggestion of looking away.

Miss MacDougal, having realised that they knew each other, seemed uncertain whether to volunteer a topic or not. It was up to Remus to think of something to say. He managed the uncreative line:

"What is your connection with the MacDougals, Severus?"

"Didn't anyone bother to tell you? Mrs MacDougal is my aunt. What's your excuse for being here, Lupin?"

"I've been working on the farm. What about you: are you working?"

"For some of us, Lupin, the question is not *whether* to earn an honest living, but merely *how*. For your information, I teach. At Hogwarts."

"Severus." Remus thought he detected a flicker of horror on Miss MacDougal's face. But perhaps it was just a trick of the candle-light from the jack o' lanterns. "I'm sorry to interrupt, but Mr Lupin has had no drink yet, and he's wanted over in the far corner. You can perhaps continue your conversation later."

Remus followed her across the room, noting that the far corner was inhabited mainly by children. When they were out of earshot, she said weakly, "I'm sorry. I do not know why my cousin would... I mean, I'm used to him, of course..."

"It's all right, Miss MacDougal. You couldn't have known, but Severus Snape is a man whom I have greatly wronged. His attitude is not at all surprising. I can only confess my utter astonishment to learn that he is your cousin." He studied her face for a moment. Her eyes were surprisingly blue, because she had Gaelic ancestry intermingled with the Pictish, and there were light freckles across her nose. He supposed she was pretty, in a bland, forgettable way, but he was satisfied that he could not detect any resemblance to Snape.

"It would not have been a one-sided wrong," she observed shrewdly. "But as to our being cousins Severus's grandmother was my mother's eldest sister. I'm related to half the people in this room. Do you know any of them?"

He glanced around, rather surprised at how many he had met before, and even more surprised at the combination of guests. He did not like to ask about the tactlessness of inviting Amelia Bones to share the room with Lucius Malfoy, or of seating the Macmillans so close to the Parkinsons. Whatever did these people have in common? Suddenly he knew. With the sole exception of Severus Snape, all were pure-bloods.

"I know you're surprised," she said. "My parents see nothing odd in gathering *all* their friends together. Nobody here officially ever did anything wrong, so all of them *officially* are glad to celebrate You-Know-Who's downfall."

Remus did not know how she could speak so softly about her parents' obtuseness.

"Our family is tolerant," she said. The choice of word sounded rehearsed, as if she had had to explain this oddness before. "It's been that way for generations. My father has two sisters. One married Abraxas Malfoy, and the other married Alex Macmillan. My sister-in-law was born Janet Cornfoot, and my father takes financial advice from Titus Nott. But I do understand, Mr Lupin, if you do not care to associate with all these people equally. There has to be somebody here..." He followed her eyes across the room. Her mother was approaching, unquestionably with an extra task for her. "I cannot abandon you to Severus. If you were at school in his time, would you not also have known Manjula Chandak? Now Manjula Patil, of course."

She led him over to a group of younger couples seated on his plush conjured sofas. Even as he was reminding the Patils of his name, he could hear the dulcet voice of his hostess: "Ariadne, darling, have you a moment to check the shortbread?" It would be more than "checking", he knew. But it was still difficult to imagine the gently bossy Mrs MacDougal as a relation of Snape.

The party, which lasted all afternoon and all evening and through the night, was unremarkable. There were plenty of rumbledethumps and Dundee chops and griddled greens and oat-crust salmon steaks, followed by enough chocolate whisky gateau and Strathbogie mist to sate the sweetest tooth, and the Butterbeer and Gillywater and redcurrant rum flowed until the adult guests were joining their children in the queues for nettle tea or pumpkin juice. There were soft lights and soft music, enough space for a dozen children to run around, and enough seats for their elders to gravitate to whichever conversation interested them. Nor did anyone find an excuse to behave badly, for the MacDougal politeness was contagious. All the guests expertly threaded their way to their own kind of people, politely ignoring anyone whose real opinion on the downfall of the Dark Lord might be different from their own. Remus spotted Severus Snape at various times, chatting to the Parkinsons, the Macmillans or the Cornfoots, apparently with equal enjoyment each time. Unsurprisingly, Snape pointedly avoided Remus.

As the evening wore on, children were put to sleep in the sleeping bags that Remus had conjured in the spare bedrooms. The Malfoys, pleading urgent but undefined "business at home", gave their excuses at five minutes after midnight, but no one else asked for Floo powder. It was one o' clock before Mr MacDougal began to hint that plenty of spare beds were available, and two o' clock before the last guest had settled.

"It wuss a guid parrry, do ye no sunk?" said William, not quite certainly, as he and Remus walked back to the out-buildings.

"It was a good party," agreed Remus. Indeed, several people had spoken kindly to William. Perhaps Mrs Parkinson had only been patronising him, but William would not have been able to discern that. And there had been nothing patronising about the way the Macmillan children had wrestled him to the floor and demanded he swing them from his ankles. William had every reason to be contented.

But Remus did wonder why such an arbitrary social occasion justified pulling a sixteen-year-old girl away from her N.E.W.T. preparation to act as house-elf.

* * * * *

At six o' clock the next morning, William began shouting that they were needing to see to the "kye". By the time they had finished the milking, Remus saw through the kitchen window that the guests were being fed a leisurely breakfast and decided to keep well away from them. He had plenty to do, for he needed to clear his workload before the light faded. Today he had a problem.

Fortunately, the farmhands were not needed in the house. Indeed, with tours through the outbuildings and rambles through the farm, the party was in a fair way to continuing throughout the morning. It was not until lunch was finished that the final guest departed, with warm congratulations on celebrating the happier times so thoroughly, and William and Remus were called indoors to receive their instructions for tidying up. In Remus's case, this meant Vanishing what had been Conjured, charming down what had been thrown up, sweeping up what had been dropped down, scouring out what had been stained, and shrinking what had been enlarged. The women, he knew, did not leave the kitchen; even the daughter-in-law was shakily charming the mountain of dirty dishes into the sink.

Remus worked swiftly, but he knew that time was catching up with him. He could finish the rooms, but there was always the danger that more would need to be done. At half-past three Mr MacDougal wandered into the last bedroom to ask if Remus were needing help. This, he knew, was the MacDougal way of hinting that there was work elsewhere on the farm that needed attention.

"I shall be finished in five minutes, sir. What else needs doing?"

"We're needing a bonfire to burn the remaining rubbish, and one of the irrigation machines is requiring repairs."

As he had feared: legitimate jobs, and he had no legitimate excuse for avoiding them. The irrigation machine could surely wait until tomorrow, but Mr MacDougal wanted it fixed today. And he needed to be away from the farm well away by four o' clock.

"Tell Mrs Kenneth to give you some soup before you go outdoors," said his employer. "And, if Mrs MacDougal asks, tell her that I am seeing to the bull."

That meant the orders were final. There was no way he could plead an appointment. He had asked three weeks ago if he might take today off, and they had told him, very charmingly, that he could take any day later in the week but that today would be out of the question. They had brightly announced that they were sure his appointment could be postponed.

He would have to become sick. But they already knew that he had wanted the day off. A sudden illness now an illness with no visible symptoms would look too convenient. Even if they were only mildly annoyed by his stubbornness this time, he did not know for how many months he could suddenly fall sick, with no symptoms, before he aroused suspicion. He had been "ill" last month. If he had to be "ill" again next month, he would be well on the way to losing his job.

All the women were in the kitchen. Mrs MacDougal was singing lullabies to her granddaughter; her daughter-in-law was stirring soup over the fire; and her daughter was tidying the larder. Remus did not bother asking for soup. He made straight for the back door. William was outside, building a bonfire that looked as if it could become very dangerous if left unsupervised. He did not know for how long he could supervise William before his time ran out.

Miss MacDougal set a bucket of scraps, intended for the pigs, down beside the pyre and asked, "Mr Lupin, is anything wrong?"

He knew she had followed him out on purpose. Was his desperation really so obvious? "Miss MacDougal, I know this is very bad timing but I can't be here this evening."

"Do my parents not give you any days off?"

"They do in general, but the farm cannot be stopped simply because we are clearing away a party. As you know yourself. But, unfortunately, I can't cancel my appointment either. I have to be gone by four o' clock."

Surprisingly, she did not ask where he was going or why he thought it more important than his employer's business. She only said, "Tell me what you were meant to be doing here. I'll try to make Kenneth and William cover for you."

He listed his tasks, and she repeated the list back to him. "Fine, I have it," she said. "Go now, while they're not looking. Apparate."

"Miss MacDougal, I... I'm not expecting a problem. But in case anything goes wrong..." It wasn't fair to add this burden to her weekend, but the whole situation was unfair. "Let's say, if I'm not home by eight o' clock tomorrow morning... perhaps William could come and look for me by the shepherd's hut?"

She still did not ask for an explanation, but she nodded briefly, and he Disapparated. He didn't know whether it had been wise to involve William, but who else was there? The girl would be going back to school; there was a good chance that something *would* go wrong before tomorrow morning; and William did not expect to understand other people's business.

He closed the door of the shepherd's hut on himself, and cast a Locking Charm. The hut was sturdy and only used in lambing time, but there were sheep in plain view from the window. He hoped the sheep would be safe he didn't know if the glass would hold. He pushed his wand out through the crack under the door and looked around. There was no furniture, only a few old wooden boxes. It was bad luck for the boxes. It was altogether a risky situation. But where else was there to go? The sun was already setting. It was only a matter of minutes before the full moon rose...

Ineffable Deceit

Chapter 3 of 21

Ariadne discovers that if you want to succeed in life, people expect you to tell a few lies.

CHAPTER THREE

Ineffable Deceit

Wednesday 31 August 1966 Saturday 31 July 1975

Kincarden Croft, Inverness-shire; Malfoy Manor, Wiltshire.

Rated PG for questionable child-rearing techniques and unquestionable deceit.

Ariadne spent much of her childhood running barefoot in the heather, bracing her face against the moist Highland winds and her muscles against the steep Highland slopes. But she never understood why outsiders called this "running wild", for the MacDougals were among the most orderly people there were. "Tidy it away, dear." She

remembered her mother telling her that before she was two years old.

And nobody ever raised a voice. She must have learned that before she had memory, for she clearly remembered, at the age of three, feeling she had to scream with frustration when her brother Kenneth falsely accused her of stealing cream from the dairy, and their parents believed him. But she did not scream; she just sat.

That was the first time she ever did wandless magic. In her frustration, she only *glanced* at the great barrel, the one that Mamma churned every day, and suddenly the entire supply of milk the fresh milk intended for cheese-making was curdled. Her parents were so impressed that they forgot to punish her for the stolen cream.

Ariadne was almost an only child since her brother was thirteen years older than she was. There were, she knew, Muggle children in the village beyond the loch, but she never met them. Occasionally, Mamma took her through the Floo to play with other pure-bloods Dragomira and Regelinda Macnair, Hazel Parkinson, the Malfoy or Macmillan cousins but for most of the time, she played alone. She collected eggs from the henhouse, bottle-fed orphaned lambs and piglets, weeded out the herbiary, and climbed trees or swung on the gate, waiting for the Muggle lorries to drive up the narrow dirt road to take away the milk churns or bales of fleece. When it rained, she kneaded the dough, swept the floors, tied messages to owls' feet, and shredded herbs for the daily brew.

Her parents were too busy to pay much attention to her education. They taught her to read, then set her to the exercises on the basic maths syllabus for an hour a day, but otherwise, they considered that teaching her housework and farming counted as "education". By the time when it no longer seemed like play to help Mamma with the chores, Ariadne took it for granted that of course she would do her share of the work. Besides, the farmhouse was full of books the kitchen, the parlour, the bedrooms, even the hall and landings were all lined with loaded bookcases so as soon as Ariadne could read at all, she was able to educate herself.

"Apart from reading and farming, magic is what matters," said Papa, "and magic cannot be taught until she comes of age."

Ariadne would have liked to ask why not, but she knew it was better not to ask "why" questions.

When the house was tidy and the farm chores were done, Mamma liked to sit by the cauldron over the kitchen fire. She brewed every day potions for food, medicine, charms, hexes, abstractions and she let Ariadne help her with that. "It's not strictly magic," she said, even though it was obvious that no Muggle who infused or desiccated or stirred the ingredients could ever have produced the same results. Ariadne learned to weigh the newts' eyes, chop the teasle, stew the figwort, strain the crushed nettles, extract barakol from cassia, and bind pennyroyal powder into fine white pills.

"It's all I have to remind me of my own dear mother," Mamma used to say. "She was the greatest brewster in Scotland perhaps in all Europe."

"Why are you sad to think of your mother?" Ariadne once asked.

Mamma abruptly dropped her ladle into the cauldron. "That is too sad for a lassie to know," was all she would say. "But if your Grandmamma were with us today, you would hardly be needing to go to Hogwarts at all she could have taught you all you were needing to know."

Ariadne learned not to ask questions about her mother's family. Indeed, it was unwise to ask too many questions about any of their relatives, for questions usually led to trouble. Her parents disliked trouble, so she spent most of her childhood walking quietly, speaking softly, reading silently, completing chores docilely, obeying their gentlest suggestions without a murmur of argument. This behaviour kept them in a very good mood, which meant they would read her stories or play Exploding Snap with her in the evenings. But trouble occasionally blew up unexpectedly. She suffered the severest punishment of her childhood when she was less than four years old.

It happened when Kenneth was home for the school holidays, the same day a Ministry owl brought him his O.W.L. results. Kenneth had three Outstandings, two Exceeds Expectations and four Acceptables, which his parents assured him was an excellent result. Yet Ariadne knew that they were disappointed. She did not yet know what an O.W.L. was it was different from the kind of owl who had brought the letter, and different even from the letter it brought but it seemed that Kenneth's O.W.L.s weren't as good as they should be. When her parents were not looking, she hugged her brother's legs and said, "I'm thinking you have a good, good owl there."

That evening Cousin Lucius invited himself to dinner. Lucius Malfoy was her father's nephew, and she knew her father was proud to be related to the Malfoy family, far prouder than he was to be related to the Macmillans.

"It was a tolerably pleasant surprise," Lucius kept saying. "A little better than I had expected. Six Outstandings and three Exceeds Expectations. It really is very gratifying to feel that my diligence was not wasted." He kept on and on talking like that, even though Kenneth was sitting right opposite him and was visibly shrinking into himself while Lucius talked.

Yet her father did not seem to notice. "A fine, fine show, young man. A very respectable score indeed," he kept saying.

The more Papa spoke, the more Lucius spoke; and the more Lucius spoke, the more Papa spoke. Papa seemed not to know how to change the subject, and Lucius was not wanting to. Ariadne nearly said, "Kenneth will cry," but realised in time that drawing attention to her brother like that really would distress him. She would not have said anything at all, but at about the time Mamma brought the cherry tart to the table, Lucius himself seemed to realise that he sounded daft saying the same thing over and over again.

"That looks like a sublime dessert, Aunt MacDougal," said Lucius. "Quite ineffable. What do you think, little Ariadne?"

She had no idea what "sublime" or "ineffable" meant, but the sneer in her cousin's voice suggested that they were disapproving words, so perhaps he really wanted to talk about his O.W.L.s again. Bearing this in mind, Ariadne replied, "I'm thinking you are cruel."

The stunned silence around the dinner table told her that she had chosen the wrong words. Even Kenneth, who had every reason to agree with her, looked shocked; and William the farmhand, who had not listened until now, naïvely said, "That's boggin! Ist no, Mrs MacDuggal?"

"Ariadne, dear," cautioned her mother, but with a cool note to her voice, "I think you are confusing real things with the story we read this morning. You're needing to pay attention to what people say at the table, dear, and not daydream about fairy tales."

But Ariadne knew that they had not read any stories that morning.

Her father broke the silence. "That was a dreadful, dreadful disaster on the London Underground last week. Death Eaters swarming all over the pipe, and fourteen Muggles dead. And nobody's even knowing what they did to annoy Lord Voldemort."

"Oh, dreadful, Uncle. Quite appalling." As Cousin Lucius sliced the point off his triangle of cherry tart, Ariadne knew that his words did not match what he was really thinking, in the same way that Mamma's words about fairy tales had not matched what had really happened.

"They are saying that young Travers ran off to join the Death Eaters on the day after the Hogwarts term ended. Did you know Travers, Lucius?"

"Not very well," said Lucius in that same not-matching voice. "He was two years older."

"I'm not understanding why a young man like Travers would associate with Lord Voldemort's thugs. Have you a theory, Lucius?"

"My theory is that... to some people... the Dark Lord's philosophies make sense. He wishes to see the Wizengamot in the hands of pure-blood families, who know the ways of the wizarding world. The Dark Lord says some wise things about learning from history to avoid repeating its mistakes. And it's the old pure-blood families who *know* the history of the magical community."

"That part, I believe, is beyond dispute," said Papa. "But Voldemort is very publicly using violence to make his point. What I'm wanting to know, Lucius, is how youngsters like Travers are being fooled into accepting such blatantly poisonous ideology."

Cousin Lucius kept his eyes on his dish as he said, "I'm told Travers never was very clever. But I don't really know much about him."

Ariadne did not know how her parents could yet listen to him; his voice was so different from when he had been talking about his O.W.L.s and had meant what he said.

"Everybody's knowing that Voldemort commits these atrocities," Papa mused, "yet he's never present at the scene of crime." Ariadne was not following this speech very well, but she certainly understood the question her father asked next. "Are you knowing, Lucius, whether anybody has ever sighted him?"

"I'm sure no one has," said Lucius. "He'd be too cunning to expose himself to arrest."

"But you did meet him!" Ariadne had not known that she was going to speak before the words burst out of her. "You did meet Lord Mort, and you've seen that he does use violence on his point!"

Once again, everybody turned to look at her.

"Ariadne," said Papa, in a deadly-soft voice, "go up to your bedroom."

She did not move. "Cousin Lucius is a *best friend* of Lord Mort," she said stubbornly. "He's *liking* that there is violence on the point."

Without a word, her father rose from the table, lifted her from her seat, and carried her up the stairs.

Her heart thumped against her chest; Papa seemed so furious that she wondered if he planned to drop her out of a window. Papa did not speak until they reached the landing, when he pulled out his wand and ordered, "*Scalae!*" A trap door in the ceiling slid open and a stepladder glided down to the ground. Then Papa ran up the stepladder, still carrying her, and dumped her down on the attic floor. She began to cry; she had never known him move or touch her so roughly.

He spoke at a hiss. "You *do not* accuse other people of doing wrong," he said.

Then he turned away, walked down the stepladder, and said, "*Claudero!*" The ladder rushed upwards, so fast that she had to jump out of the way, and the attic trap door closed beneath it.

Ariadne was alone in the unlit attic.

At first she was bewildered; she had never been up in the attic before, and she did not know what the room was for. It contained a few boxes (all sealed, as she discovered when she bumped into them), but nothing useful. She did not understand why she had been put here.

Then she became truly frightened. The attic was dark, and an attempt to rattle the heavy ladder showed her that there was no exit unless one had a wand to use the spell. Even if she did manage to blast the floor open (she was angry enough to make it happen) it was a long jump down to the landing. Her family was eating cherry tart two floors below her, angrily, she was sure, and even if she did manage to escape, it would make them angrier still. She was trapped in this dark place all alone.

She cried for a while, every so often feebly wailing, "Mamma, let me out!" But she knew that Mamma would never come unless Papa allowed it, and Papa was for now as angry as a cornered giant. After she had cried herself out, it seemed that she had been here for a long time, and she wondered how much longer they were going to leave her. Her next thought was that it was boring up here, and she wondered what she was meant to do. She kicked at the boxes, but they were hard, and kicking hurt her feet.

She lay down, muttering to herself, "But Cousin Lucius *does* like the violence-at-a-point, and he *has* met that man." After a long, long time, she slept.

The next morning, Papa opened the attic and climbed the ladder, just high enough to put his head through the floor. "Ariadne," he said, "do you understand now that nobody can say what is happening in somebody else's life? Cousin Lucius is the only person who knows about himself."

She understood well enough that Papa did not want her to contradict her cousin in public, but he had chosen his words most unfortunately. She looked him in the eye and said, "But Cousin Lucius was saying the wrong words. He *has* met that man and the man *is* using violence and Lucius *is* liking it."

"Then I'm not believing you understand at all." Papa jumped down from the ladder and, to her horror, sent it back up to the attic before she had time to step on the first rung.

She was left in the attic all that day and all the next night. They brought her no food, and she had to break the rules of personal hygiene. It was not until the middle of the next day, when she felt she might die of thirst, that Mamma came to bring her out.

Mamma did not ask if she understood now, so Ariadne did not have to weigh up whether she was willing to exchange freedom for speaking words that did not match and so make herself like Cousin Lucius.

* * * * *

That scene almost replayed itself three years later, when Ariadne was about seven. Aunt and Uncle Malfoy both caught dragon-pox and died, quite suddenly, and Cousin Lucius called everybody to Malfoy Manor to celebrate his inheritance. At least, that was how Ariadne remembered it later; at the time, it had been officially presented as some kind of post-funeral mourning party.

The five Malfoy cousins were dressed in black satin robes clasped with serpentine silver brooches, and silvery stars glittered in their platinum hair. An endless queue of dark-robed people shook hands with each one in turn, murmured polite nothings, and then dispersed outwards to the refreshment table, where house-elves were serving out cold lobster and cucumber salad. Ariadne clung to Mamma's hand, an iron weight clamping around her chest as she imagined how wretched poor Cousin Letitia had to be feeling with both parents suddenly dead.

Letitia, who was the same height as Ariadne, extended one slim cold hand while she smiled a society lady's smile, and her eyes glinted as brilliantly as an iceberg.

Ariadne's words froze even before she brushed the proffered hand. How could Letitia be so relaxed when her parents were dead? She did not understand why Letitia had agreed to this condolence ritual, but she was chillingly certain that all sympathy was wasted.

Linus was exactly the same coolly aplomb, superbly indifferent. So were Lucretia and Lavinia. Lucius managed to be haughtier yet. "Thank you for your good wishes," he said to Kenneth. "This is a very sad day for us." It was all said in the tone that Ariadne now called his "lying-voice".

Ariadne had no appetite for the walnut pilaff and lemon sorbet on the dining table, but in a far corner she glimpsed the Macmillan cousins fussing over a toy cradle and a suitcase of doll's clothes. They were the only people in the room who were unembarrassedly happy, so she moved over to join them.

"Bessie's having a new dress, a yellow one because the green's not really suiting her," Felicity was saying.

"Ariadne, can you hold Polly?" Mercy greeted. "She's needing help with feeding, but I cannot hold the spoon because Sukey's teething and requiring all my attention."

Both cousins sounded so much like their mother that Ariadne accepted the wax doll and pretended to spoon imaginary porridge into its mouth. Presently she noticed that Lucius was sauntering in their direction, with Uncle Macmillan following.

"frightful that the Dark Lord has gathered so many Death Eaters that he's now able to attack two places at once," Uncle Macmillan was saying.

"Terrifying," Lucius agreed coldly. "Wizards without heart or conscience. I am glad that I never joined them."

Ariadne pressed her lips together, knowing better than to say out loud, "But you're lying. You~~h~~ave joined them, and you're liking what they're doing!"

She knew they were talking about Lord Voldemort, even though respectable people no longer spoke Voldemort's name. Although both the Wireless and the *Daily Prophet* contained more and more information about his activities, they usually called him the "Dark Lord".

Twelve months later a Wireless announcer pointed out that "Dark Lord" was what the Death Eaters called their master. After that, respectable people stopped saying even "Dark Lord" it sounded too much like admitting to being a Death Eater. Most people said "He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named" or simply "You-Know-Who".

"Why can You-Know-Who not be named?" asked Ariadne.

"Hush, dear!" said Mamma. "It's unlucky to speak the name of evil people. It's as if we were wishing to attract their attention."

"Is he evil, then?" It was so unlike Mamma to admit that anybody ever did anything wrong.

"We'd certainly do well to keep out of his way. Have you the dragon's blood, dear? We're needing to clean the stove-range."

Before another twelve months had passed, Ariadne had to return to Malfoy Manor, this time because Cousin Lavinia was marrying Mr Valerian Crabbe. Ariadne was one of ten bridesmaids dressed in shimmering, pale-pink satin, which had cost her parents more than they could bear to think.

"But Lucius is paying for the garnet earrings and garnet necklaces," said Cousin Lucretia, "so really there is no need to fuss."

"That there *is*," said Mercy Macmillan. "Father said that he could not afford the dress-robos, so Felicity and I were not to be bridesmaids. And then Lucius said we'd embarrass the whole family if we were not bridesmaids, and he could not ever speak to us again, but he did not yet offer to share the cost. In the end Grandfather Macmillan had to give Father some money and he's not even invited to the wedding!"

If Ariadne had been caught speaking to Lucretia like that, she would have been banished straight back to the attic. Yet Aunt Macmillan, who had certainly heard the whole exchange, looked rather proud before she abruptly walked away, pretending not to have heard anything.

Ariadne tried not to think the disloyal thought: *I like the Macmillans much more than the Malfoys* Then she remembered that nobody could hear her thoughts, so she let them wash over her like a warm wave.

Cursed by Thunder Moon

Chapter 4 of 21

Remus discovers that if you want to succeed in life, people expect you to tell a few lies.

CHAPTER FOUR

Cursed by Thunder Moon

Tuesday 10 March 1959 Monday 26 June 1967

Old Basford, Nottingham; St Mungo's Hospital, London; Paris, France; Maiduguri, Nigeria.

Rated PG-13 for explicit lycanthropy.

It was a very long time since Remus had thought of asking anyone for help, for at every major crisis of his life he had been alone.

He was alone on the moonlit night when he had wandered outdoors alone and met that large grey dog. The night was so hot, and the moon was so bright, that he didn't see how anyone could have slept. He was surprised to find a stray dog in his back garden, but he wasn't scared, for he liked dogs. It wasn't until the last second, when he realised that the dog was actually going to bite, that he became terrified. It was too late then; there was no point in screaming. It was almost a relief when he realised that the bite was only a nip. Two of his fingers were bleeding, and all of them were stiff, but none had been actually bitten off.

So he withdrew his hand from the huge dog's mouth with as much dignity as he could muster and turned around and marched back into the house. Fortunately, the dog did not seem to be in the mood to follow. He needed plasters on his fingers, so he knew he would have to admit to his parents that he had been out of bed.

"Mummy," he said, "someone left a stray dog in our back garden."

"Why aren't you in bed, Remus?"

"I couldn't sleep. There's a dog in our garden, and it bit me. Look." He waved his bleeding fingers.

At that moment, the dog howled.

The effect on his parents was electrifying. His father sprang from the sofa and grabbed Remus in his arms. His mother reached for his bitten fingers and gently inspected them, one by one. Then his mother had tears spilling out of her eyes and running down her cheeks, even though she was a grown-up lady, and his father was looking furious, even though he didn't shout a word. Then his father rushed him into the fireplace, shouting, "St Mungo's!" which didn't make any sense to Remus, because people went to St Mungo's only when they were very sick, not just to have a plaster put on a cut.

He had no clear memories of the night in hospital, of the green-robed Healers speaking in hushed voices, poking and prodding, winding and unwinding bandages, spooning in medicines, while he tried to sleep. He thought he shouted, "Leave me alone!" at one time, but no one became cross with him for losing his temper, so maybe he dreamed that part. He didn't remember his mother arriving, but he supposed she must have followed his father through the Floo; she seemed to sit all night on a hard-backed chair beside his hospital bed, nursing her two younger children, but weeping real tears and talking soothingly to him.

He didn't remember what anyone said to him. He only remembered his mother's words to the Healer: "But is there any hope...? Is there anything...? Surely we can do something...!"

And he remembered the Healer's reply. "No, Mrs Lupin, there is no doubt. There is no cure and no treatment. Your son will suffer this condition for the rest of his life."

The Healer was kind; he didn't mention what else his parents needed to know. A few days later a wizard from the Ministry knocked on their front door. He had a grim face, and he told Remus, "I need to see your mother and father." He sat down in the lounge and said, "I've come about Remus," but he never spoke a word to Remus himself.

"It's your job to keep him under control, Mr and Mrs Lupin. If you feel you cannot control him, we can dispose of him immediately."

"No!" His mother was screaming, in the way she was always telling his sister Emily not to. "You can't just put him down like a dog."

"Before the law he actually is a dog," said the grim-faced Ministry wizard, "and a wild dog too. If you want to keep him in your household, you must fill out these forms." He handed over a huge wad of papers.

Remus looked and looked and he couldn't see a dog anywhere in their house; he ~~new~~ knew their family didn't keep a dog. His parents wrote and wrote, filled out endless papers, and finally the Ministry wizard seemed to think they had written enough.

"He will be on the Lycanthrope Registry by this evening," the man said, "and after that, Mr and Mrs Lupin, it's up to you. If you can keep him under control, he can live with you. But one accident and that's it. We will then have no choice but to come for him; and if he's under seventeen when it happens, there will be hefty fines and other penalties for the two of you. I hope you understand."

"Understand? What happened to the one who bit Remus?"

"Tried to track it, but couldn't find it. If we ever identify it, it meets the silver bullet."

Remus's mother started crying yet again when the man had gone. She pulled Remus onto her lap and held him for a long, long time, sobbing over him. "But they won't come for you," she said. "Not ever."

Remus still did not understand: the man didn't want to come *for him*; he was angry about some dog.

* * * * *

The real crisis came a month later. His father had been working in the garage all weekend, warning the children to stay away. On Monday he was supposed to go to work, but he didn't go; he seemed very anxious about something. Remus played in the garden with Emily, but their mother hovered over them and kept warning him not to go too close to her. He didn't really want to be close because Emily was wheeling her doll in a pram and Remus wanted to play trains.

In the afternoon it was rainy, even though it was supposed to be summer. His mother sat him on her lap and read stories. He remembered that for the rest of his life; for hour after hour, she read his favourite stories. She took almost no notice of Emily and Bruno, but treated Remus as if he were the only one.

Early in the evening, when his parents should have been talking about bedtime, they exchanged glances, and then his father nodded. "Remus," said his father, "you're going to sleep outdoors tonight."

"In a tent?" he asked.

"In the garage," said his father.

His mother clutched at him convulsively, then began to carry him to the garage door.

"I can walk," Remus started to say, but she took no notice.

The garage looked different. For a start, the car had gone; it was parked outside by the kerb. The walls didn't look like brick any more; they had been covered with some soft stuff, a kind of padding. The doors were dark because the glass windows had vanished, and now the doors were solid wood. In fact, the garage was dark his parents were making no effort to light it with their wands. It was also very large and empty.

"There's no bed," said Remus.

"You won't need a bed tonight," said his father.

"I haven't cleaned my teeth."

"That doesn't matter for once."

"Daddy, I don't think I want to sleep out here. It doesn't look like a sleeping place."

"You're sleeping here tonight, Remus," his father repeated.

His mother set him on his feet in the middle of the garage floor. Even the floor seemed covered with soft stuff over the concrete. She threw her arms around him and hugged him tightly. She seemed so nervous that he began to be afraid.

"Good night, Remus," said his mother.

"Good night, Remus," said his father.

And they walked out of the side door, back into the house, and closed it behind them. When the magical lock clicked fast, the garage was quite dark.

"Wait!" called Remus. "Mummy! Daddy! I don't want to sleep here!"

But they did not come back.

Terror seized him. It was his bedtime, but he wasn't sleeping in a proper bed. His parents had left him alone in this dark place, which wasn't even a proper garage any more. He ran up to the side door and began to shout.

"Mummy! Let me out!" He banged on the door. "It's dark here! I want to come in the house!" He wondered if he should dare to do the naughty thing that crossed his mind next. But it was very dark in the garage, and strange shapes seemed to be looming up in the dark. He summoned all his force and hurled himself against the door, kicking and battering it with his feet, and screamed, "Daddeeee! Let me come hoooooome...!"

Yet they did not seem to hear.

"I'll be good!" he sobbed. "I won't do it again! I'll put away my toys! I'll share with Emily! I'll eat my vegetables! I won't fuss at bedtime!" He realised, vaguely, that he ~~was~~ was fussing at bedtime, right this minute, but he was too distressed to turn it off. "Let me iiiiiiiinnn!" He meant to shout again, *Let me in!* but the howl that came out of his throat the second time was more like... a growl. The words weren't clear at all.

So he tried again. The words were in his mind, but all that came out of his voice was, "Grrrrrr-ooooo-oooooh!"

But before he had time to worry about that, a sharp pain was crippling his shoulders... and his thighs... and his back. His back was hunching uncontrollably. He overbalanced and dropped down to all fours. Now his muscles seemed to be tearing away under his skin in all directions, his bones were twisting, and pains worse than indigestion were ripping at his insides.

He howled again: "Aooowwww-aaaaooooo-aaaaooooo!"

And he never did remember much about what happened after that.

His next clear memory was of lying very stiffly on the strange soft floor. Every twitch of his limbs was like being stabbed with a hot needle. He was bleeding but he couldn't see where. Someone had torn at the soft stuff on the walls, so that it hung in ribbons in places, and the room was unnaturally silent.

"Mummy?" he asked, but it hurt to talk.

Suddenly the side door did open, and normal noises came flooding in music on the Wireless, the baby grizzling, Emily shouting for toast. Strong hands were lifting him, and he was in his mother's arms.

"Remus, are you all right, darling?"

"Hurts."

His mother gasped. "Blood! Stan, he's covered in blood!"

After that they rushed him to St Mungo's again. He remembered more fussing from Healers, and inspections of great spiteful scratches that had appeared all over his arms and legs and chest, and a good deal of salving and bandaging, and a cross Healer saying, "It's only a few scratches, you know. You can deal with these yourselves." And something even stranger: "He isn't dangerous when he's human. A few spots of blood and saliva aren't going to harm anyone else."

He spent the rest of the day at home in bed, sleeping, waking, aching, then sleeping again. The next day he was able to get up without any pain to his muscles, and most of the scratches across his body had healed up. The day seemed very normal. But he didn't dare ask his parents, "Why did you do that to me?" in case they decided to do it again.

It wasn't until the next month that his parents were able to make him understand that it *had* to happen again. From now on, every month for the rest of his life, he would have to spend a night locked up alone.

"It's no good shouting for us, darling," said his mother. "The garage is sound-proofed. Once we close the door, we can't hear you."

"Mummy, I'll be good. I don't have to go there."

"Sweetheart, you're good, but you have an illness. The only treatment for this illness is to lock you up in the garage every time you're going to be sick."

"Don't I need a Healer?"

"The Healers can't do anything. We just have to lock you up." She pointed at the gibbous moon in the sky. "Tomorrow the moon will be completely round. Whenever you see the moon as round as the sun, that's when you'll be sick and that's when you have to be locked up."

* * * * *

Slowly, Remus learned that his "illness" meant that he was no longer fully human. Whenever the moon was as round as the sun, he would become an animal. He was a dangerous wolf who could hurt and even kill other people, or perhaps turn them into wolves themselves. Even locked up, he could still attack himself; the morning after, his human body would carry the scars of the wolf's attack.

"Could I *kill* myself?" he asked.

"Probably not," said his mother, but she didn't sound too sure.

"Can I have a light in the garage?"

"It would be too dangerous. The wolf could smash the light, or be burned by it. And the wolf isn't afraid of the dark."

"But *I'm* afraid of the dark. There are ghoully things in it attacking me."

"The ghoully things are in your imagination, Remus. You imagine them when you're afraid of the wolf."

Inside or outside, the dark and dangerous shapes were always lurking for him. Something inside or out was always waiting to pounce and take control of him, waiting to turn him into something that would hurt himself.

"Daddy, can't you stay in the garage with me when I'm a wolf?"

"No, Remus, because then the wolf would bite me, and I would become a wolf too."

"So I'll be always alone with the wolf?"

"That's the only way to keep the world safe, Remus."

By the time he had been a werewolf for six months, Remus knew that he was a danger to the world.

Another thing he learned early was never to talk about his affliction. He was already used to a life of secrets. His parents were both Muggle-borns, so they had a number of Muggle friends. Magical things were never, ever discussed or demonstrated when Muggle friends came to visit. The whole family behaved exactly as if magic didn't exist. His four grandparents knew about magic, but the family tended to avoid magic even in front of the grandparents. It was a secret, his parents explained, that could really only be shared with other wizards.

But even in front of other wizards, they cautioned, he must never, ever talk about his illness. He must never mention that he sometimes slept in the garage, let alone why. When he was recovering on the day after, his parents would pretend he had a cold. Muggles did not believe that werewolves existed, so talking to them about werewolves was like admitting to being a wizard; and wizards were too much afraid of werewolves to treat them kindly.

"Shouldn't we tell the truth?" asked Remus. "That's what you told me when I smashed the casserole."

"We should own up when we make a mistake," said his mother, "but in many other situations we have to lie."

"You mean we only tell the truth when it's convenient for other people? When the truth is something they don't want to hear, we have to lie?"

His parents both looked at him very oddly when he asked this, but they did not reply.

* * * * *

It was more than a year after the Bite that Remus started school. His parents sent him to the local Muggle primary school, with strict instructions never to talk about either magic or werewolves. By the end of his first week, Remus discovered that he had a third secret.

He could read.

Schoolteachers did not like children who arrived at school able to read. Teaching reading was *their* job, and they were angry with the idea that someone else might have taught reading first.

In his second week, Remus began to pretend that he couldn't read after all. He pretended that he couldn't do sums. He pretended that he couldn't name the continents on the classroom globe and that he'd never heard of dinosaurs. He pretended so well that his teachers started to like him. He overheard them, when he passed the staff room door: "That good, quiet Remus Lupin, who tries so hard and learns so fast."

By the end of his first year at school, Remus had also learned not to learn too fast. Teachers didn't believe you if you finished your sums in the first ten minutes; you were supposed to make them last a whole hour.

His classmates did not share his teachers' positive opinion of him. "Good and quiet" meant "weird" and "unfriendly". "Learns so fast" meant "shows off" and "thinks he's better". They didn't actually bully him, but they did tend to leave him alone.

He learned not to make friendly overtures. If he offered sweets, they would be accepted, but he would not be invited to join in. If he asked directly to join in, the answer was likely to be "No" unless there was an unpopular job, such as watchman or deep fielder, of which he could relieve them. If he sat quietly, he would be left alone. By the time he was in Junior School, he was officially allowed to know how to read, so his teachers allowed him to bring a book from home, and he spent a great deal of playtime reading.

From time to time his parents took him back to St Mungo's. They talked to Healers; they tried new potions. They were very insistent on wanting the strongest and safest pain-killers and sedatives. Once they saved all their money to take him to a distinguished Healer in France; another time, they even took him to Nigeria to meet a famous Kanuri surgeon in the remote savanna. But experts all over the world agreed that there was no cure for lycanthropy.

Deceit at the Wedding

Chapter 5 of 21

Ariadne receives her Hogwarts letter, makes new friends and expands her view of the world.

CHAPTER FIVE

Deceit at the Wedding

Saturday 24 July 1976 Thursday 1 September 1977

Kincarden Croft, Inverness-shire; Salford, Greater Manchester; Malfoy Manor, Wiltshire; King's Cross Station, London; Hogwarts (unplottable, but believed to be in the Grampians).

Rated PG for reported violence and first-hand avarice.

A year after Cousin Lavinia's wedding, the Malfoy and Macmillan cousins all congregated at Kincarden Croft, where Kenneth was married to a politely-mannered Edinburgh pure-blood named Janet Cornfoot. Ariadne wore the MacDougal tartan; Papa roasted a sheep and an ox on spits in the courtyard; and the wedding cake was a square of Dundee cake that Mamma had baked at home. The Macmillan children wanted to run around the farm to visit the animals.

"What, in your best robes?" gasped Letitia Malfoy in disbelief.

"In my robes," said Dreadnought Macmillan firmly. "I'm wanting to see the pigs."

"Ariadne's knowing better than to scuff her bridesmaid's robe," interposed Uncle Macnair. "I would not play with those yellow-tartans if I were you, Ariadne. You'd be better off taking my daughters indoors to play a nice, quiet board game."

It was unwise to disobey Uncle Macnair, who was Mamma's cousin and whom Mamma respected to the point of reverence. His own children always obeyed him instantly, and he expected similar compliance from the MacDougals. But little Dreadnought looked desperately disappointed to be told to play indoors, so Ariadne said, "I'll bring out a tarpaulin and some Gobstones. We can *all* play."

Dragomira and Regelinda Macnair were willing to play Royal Ur and Wei Qi with the Macmillans, but Letitia could not bring herself to sit down on the dirty ground, not even on a tarpaulin. She sailed off to find her brother Linus, while Steadfast Macmillan distributed the counters.

In the middle of the game-playing, an owl arrived for Mamma. Perhaps she was unwise to open the letter in such a public place, for she turned very pale and clutched at Papa's arm. She looked as if she wanted to walk out of the party on the spot, but of course she did not; that would have been quite improper on her son's wedding day.

It was half an hour before Ariadne could politely leave her cousins to their games and ask her mother, "Mamma, what is wrong? Did you receive dreadful news?"

This turned out to be one of the few types of Bad Event that could be discussed freely. "Dreadful indeed," she said. "My poor niece is dead! I always knew she would end up just like my dear mother!"

"Mamma, what happened?"

"I'm not yet knowing." Mamma was spilling tears now. "The owl did not mention whether it was accident or illness or something worse. But I never believed poor Eileen could live a long life after she married that Snape!"

Ariadne hugged her mother, and this seemed to be the correct thing to do.

Even when Cousin Lavinia Crabbe approached with raised eyebrows, asking, "Tears at Kenneth's wedding, Aunt MacDougal?" Mamma only replied, "Do not inform anybody until the party ends, Lavinia, but my only niece died this morning!"

Lavinia nodded, not with sympathy, but with a kind of satisfaction that no rule of Good Behaviour had been breached. She said, "I will mention it to Lucius this evening. If you wish to dismiss the party early, Aunt MacDougal, everyone will understand."

"That I am not wishing, for I could not cause such gossip," said Mamma, speaking more steadily; and this seemed to be correct too.

Ariadne was nearly ten now, and it was harder for her parents to hide the distasteful secrets of their family history. She had access to photograph albums, to scrapbooks of newspaper clippings, to genealogies scripted in the family Bible. She knew that most of her father's family had been killed on a holiday in Albania because they had encountered an agent of Grindelwald during a hike in the forest. Papa and two of his sisters had survived only because they had happened to dine on reheated chicken livers the previous evening and had spent the fateful day abed in the hotel with food poisoning.

Ariadne knew that her mother's mother had been born Ankarad Murray and that she had married Cuthbert Macnair. But they and their children had never lived at Macnair Castle, for Cuthbert had belonged to something called a "cadet branch". This meant that he had not inherited anything from his parents, while his nephew, the great Walden Macnair, had succeeded to the whole "from portcullis to pinnacle". Mamma had always taken it as a great favour that her cousin Walden sometimes visited Kincarden or arranged to meet Papa in Diagon Alley and asked questions about the MacDougals' well-being.

"But Walden Macnair is not as great as he thinks he is," sniffed Lucretia Malfoy, "for he made weak investments and lost most of the Macnair fortune. Why keep a castle that you can't afford to maintain? Walden Macnair has to work for the Ministry of Magic work for *pay* just to put food on his table!" According to the Malfoys, it was a shameful thing to need to work for pay.

"My father was never a happy man," was the most Mamma would say about the Cadet Branch.

Aunt Macmillan was blunter. "Goodness, lassie, do not upset your mother by asking any more questions about the Macnairs," she said. "Her childhood was the most miserable you could imagine. Her father never forgave Life for making him a second son, doomed to earn an honest living instead of inheriting that rickety old castle at Foss. He was addicted to Firewhisky and never gave a moment's peace to anybody unfortunate enough to fall into his power. He would have gone to Azkaban for killing his wife except that when the Aurors came to arrest him, they found he'd already been killed in a duel with a neighbour."

So that was the shameful secret of Grandmamma Macnair, the greatest brewster in all Scotland her own husband had killed her.

Ariadne knew from the genealogies and scrapbooks that Mamma had been the fourth of five daughters, and that none of her aunts had lived happy lives. The eldest aunt, Nyfain, had married an Englishman named Impugnus Prince, which Mamma always considered very unfortunate, although she would never say why. Aunt Prince had died in childbirth a year later, and there had always been something mysterious something not to be discussed about her daughter. All Ariadne really knew about her Cousin Eileen was that she had inherited Aunt Keindrech's old school books because Uncle Prince had been too mean to buy new ones, that she had been a Gobstones champion, and that she had married a Muggle. But that none of these facts was the reason why Mamma was not liking to talk about her niece.

The second aunt, Gruoch, had been exactly like their father: she had married an Acerbus Nott, and, according to the newspaper clipping pasted to the scrapbook, the two of them had gone to Azkaban for killing their own children. Perhaps they were there yet; there was no record on the genealogy that they were actually dead.

The third aunt, Donat, had been the family rebel. According to another cutting, she had mysteriously died one week after refusing to marry a Dark Wizard, a man who openly admitted to six years in Grindelwald's service. Ariadne felt that Grandpapa Macnair had probably killed Aunt Donat too, but of course there was no evidence of this.

As for Aunt Keindrech, the youngest, she had "never known what to do with herself" after her parents' scandalous deaths. The album's final photograph of Aunt Keindrech showed her at her parents' funeral, dressed in black and carrying a spray of red roses. According to the caption underneath, she had on that day been invited to live as an indefinite guest at Macnair Castle in exchange for "assisting with experimental research into magical hexes". The family Bible recorded her death-date as six months after her parents' funeral, but there were whispers that her ghost was yet haunting the turrets of Macnair Castle.

Ariadne began to understand why Mamma always spoke so softly and never argued with anybody. If she had chosen to marry Papa, she evidently wanted to make her married home as unlike her childhood home as possible.

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They had to go to Cousin Eileen's funeral on the day after Kenneth's wedding. After one glance at Tobias Snape, Ariadne knew why Mamma disliked him. There was a cruel, angry line around his mouth; he was probably a Muggle version of Grandpapa Macnair. It must be nightmarish for Mamma to be forced to imagine her niece's life, living in that man's house, listening to his soft, deadly voice, being punished by his sneers (and perhaps worse) and isolated from all her wizarding friends. Ariadne slid her hand into her mother's and did not let it go all through the memorial service. Mamma squeezed her hand back and sobbed quietly throughout the final hymn.

The wake at the Snapes' family home was crowded out with Muggle neighbours. They all spoke to Cousin Tobias, and he leered back at them.

"She was something of a witch. We'll probably live more happily without her."

Ariadne could not believe he would say anything so spiteful or so indiscreet in front of Muggles. She had no desire to meet him, so she studied his walls, which were completely lined on every side with bookshelves. The books surprised her too: there were no Muggle volumes (was Tobias unable to read?) but only blatantly magical ones. They must have been charmed so that Muggles did not notice them, for they had such frightening titles as *Harnessing the Inferi*, *Fast Curses for your Foes* and *What Wizards can Learn from Vampires*. At least half of them were related to potions: *Dictionary of Aphrodisiacs*, *A Hundred and One Undetectable Poisons*, *Home-Brewed Hexes*, *Complete Uses of Deadly Nightshade*

Had Eileen dabbled in the Dark Arts? Was that why Mamma had made so little effort to maintain contact with her niece?

One bookcase covered an open door; Ariadne looked through it into a stone kitchen. She saw cauldrons, scales and jars of herbs; there was even a trail of red powder spilled carelessly over the counter, as if nobody had bothered to wipe up the mess from last week's brew. There were more books a herbiary, recipes for rashes and emetics, a collection of household hints left lying open near the shelves, indicating that Eileen had continued her brewing right up until the day she died. Perhaps the softly-scented steam rising from a shimmering cauldron had given her a small corner of happiness even while she was living with that horrible man. Or perhaps it had been her way of deliberately annoying him, of reminding him that she had powers beyond his imaginings and that she might use them to destroy him if she chose.

Then Ariadne spotted him the only person, apart from Mamma, who was honestly grieving. A thin, sallow, hook-nosed youth of about seventeen was staring out of the window at the dilapidated giant chimney of a run-down mill. She knew at once that he was Eileen's son because he looked so much like Tobias. And she knew that he was utterly friendless. Mamma was by now leaning on Papa's arm, so Ariadne drew a deep breath and approached the young man.

"I'm sorry about your mother, Cousin Severus," she told him. "This has to be a bad day for you."

Cousin Severus looked very surprised. He nodded, but did not speak to her.

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Six months later, Tobias Snape was also dead, and Mamma said they were not needing to attend this funeral; everybody knew that she had never been acquainted with her nephew-in-law. However, she wrote quite a long letter of condolence to Severus "because he's the only blood-nephew I have".

Six months after that, Lucius Malfoy was married, and Ariadne was one of twenty bridesmaids, all arrayed in the finest pale-blue lace and carrying posies of sky-blue roses. Lucius was so determined to outshine his sister that he personally paid for the twenty pale-blue lace dress-robos, and the sugar figures around the edges of the seven-tier wedding cake actually moved like little clockworks, and the three fountains in the grounds of Malfoy Manor each ran with a different kind of wine.

The bride was Miss Narcissa Black, but she was so proud and pallid and platinum that she could have passed for a Malfoy by birth. Ariadne overheard Cousin Linus whispering to his sister Lucretia that Narcissa had brought a personal fortune one might almost say, a dowry of one hundred thousand Galleons.

Lucretia frowned furiously and hissed, "Don't be vulgar, Linus! No well-bred person is so crude as to discuss money." She slid her eyes across the lawn to ensure that the bride and groom were out of earshot, then finished her rebuke with, "Just because the Blacks are among the few families who are fit to associate with the Malfoys, there is no need to *thank* them. We have plenty of capital of our own and we don't claim to be *surprised* that Narcissa accepted Lucius!"

"And bridesmaids in position again!" called the photographer.

Ariadne moved into her spot as Eleventh Bridesmaid and lifted her blue bouquet.

"I'm wishing we had not to take yet another photograph!" complained Felicity Macmillan, who was Thirteenth.

"How ungrateful!" hissed Letitia Malfoy sharply, from her position behind them as Second. "Attending a wedding between the ancient Houses of Black and Malfoy is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. You'll want to treasure these portraits for the rest of your lives."

Ariadne wondered how any of them dared speak so freely. She was still rearranging the chaplet of blue roses on Mercy Macmillan's head when she noticed that her parents were speaking to Cousin Severus. She was surprised to see him at the wedding, since he was not related to either the Malfoys or the Blacks and, since he was a half-blood, it was unlikely that either family considered him a personal friend. But he was standing by the white-wine fountain, garbed in black dress-robos and with his greasy hair neatly combed, and Mamma was hovering over him affectionately.

Mamma was trying so hard, but Severus looked bored with her attention. *He behaves badly because he's been treated badly*, Ariadne reminded herself. *He's needing a friend*. When she was finally able to escape the torments of Being a Blue Bridesmaid, she tried to speak to him.

"Mamma says you did very well in your N.E.W.T.s, Severus. You have to be pleased."

"I am not as lazy as some."

She wondered which lazy person he resented so deeply, but she persevered. "What work are you thinking you'll do now you have left school?"

"I have plans."

These plans obviously did not involve love or friendship, but of course she could not discuss this. "Do you care for books, Cousin Severus?"

"Hmph! What would a little girl like you know?"

It was obvious *why* he had no friends, yet she knew she had to keep trying. "Was it not terrible news on the Wireless about the vampire employed by Him-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named to attack Muggles?"

"You'll see what you'll see about the Dark Lord," he growled.

"I'll ?" There was something so cryptic about his tone that she heard herself asking, "Severus, you're not a Death Eater, are you?"

"No," he replied too quickly; and she knew instantly that he was.

She could not tell Mamma; Severus had denied it, so Mamma would not want to believe her. Mamma's newborn affection for Severus was quite blind, but as her parents insisted on believing the best even about Lucius, they would certainly not accept accusations against Severus.

Fortunately, she did not have to worry about it for long. A few days later, her long-awaited Hogwarts letter arrived, and all Mamma could talk or think about for the rest of the summer was preparing Ariadne for the grand adventure of going to school.

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On the first of September, Mrs MacDougal was more anxious than Ariadne. "There are hundreds of students, dear," she said. "You have to make the effort to be friendly, but it would help if you already had a friend... Oh, dear, I'm not knowing if anybody from Hufflepuff is starting this year."

They gazed around platform Nine and Three Quarters together. Letitia Malfoy and Hazel Parkinson, their black Hogwarts robes looking suspiciously as if they were made of velvet instead of the regulation merino, were standing in front of shiny new leather trunks, but they already knew that they would be in Slytherin.

"There's Regelin...," said Mamma dubiously. Macnairs were sometimes Sorted into Hufflepuff; but Regelin Macnair was clutching the arm of her sister Dragomira, a third-year Slytherin, in a way that suggested the Sorting test would not dream of separating them.

"Steady Macmillan's over there," Ariadne suggested. The Macmillans were a backbone-of-Hufflepuff family, but Mamma would prefer her to make friends with girls, and Steady, already in second year, might not have time for her.

Finally Ariadne approached a kind-looking girl with large, chocolate-brown eyes and wonderful chocolate-brown hair curling over her shoulders. "Excuse me," she began, "but I'm new this year... Do you know where the Hufflepuffs are?"

"I'm new, too," said the brown lass. "My name's Veleta Vablatsky, and I don't know anyone at Hogwarts either. Except my grandmother but perhaps teachers don't count."

"Really? Will your grandmother be one of our teachers? Which was her house?"

"Ravenclaw. Everyone in our family is always in Ravenclaw. But Granny doesn't teach first-years, so I won't be seeing much of her."

Ariadne felt her mother watching them carefully. If Mamma did not recognise the girl or her name, then she was probably not a pure-blood; and she was not in Hufflepuff. But nobody else was making any friendly overtures, and a teacher's granddaughter had to be respectable, so Mamma said nothing other than, "You two should maybe board the train."

As Ariadne moved her trunk into the luggage rack, she was overcome by a wave of shyness. She was not used to meeting new people, and she suddenly did not know what to say to Veleta. She cast around for something personal but not too personal, and by the time all their luggage was stowed, she was able to come out with, "Do you live in London?"

"Not far away I'm from Guildford."

Ariadne was pleased to recognise this name from her geography lessons. "It's said to be a bonny town... Is *it* huge?"

"Not as cities go. Are you from a city?"

"I am not; I live on a farm near Loch Ness. Fort William is the nearest large town."

"Ooh, in the *Highlands*. Are you near any castles?"

"We're not far from the ruins of Urquhart but you would not be wanting to spend a rainy night there."

"Yes, I would. I've always loved castles I've always wanted to go exploring one with a long history."

It was a little embarrassing for Ariadne to admit that she had visited Macnair Castle four or five times, but that she had never seen it from the outside and did not know what it looked like. She took the Floo into the Great Hall, she explained, and then played in Regelia's room or in the garden...

Mrs MacDougal had worried that Ariadne might fall in with the wrong friends; she would have been more anxious still if she had known what would happen at Hogwarts that evening. Ariadne did not pay very much attention to the Sorting because she already knew her house. She almost missed her cue when Professor McGonagall called, "MacDougal, Ariadne!"

Ariadne sat on the Sorting stool, picked up the Sorting Hat and began to put it on. But it had barely touched the first hair of her head before it shrieked, "GRYFFINDOR!"

Astonished, she looked around to see who had shouted, but the Hat spoke again, this time so that nobody else could hear, "Put me down, you're Sorted!" So, strictly speaking, Ariadne never wore the legendary Sorting Hat at all.

She passed the Hat to Regelia Macnair and stumbled right past the Hufflepuff table, wondering how on earth she was going to explain this turn of events to her parents. They were expecting her to keep to their approved circle of friends, but Regelia was swiftly dispatched to Slytherin, and so was Letitia Malfoy. Ariadne thought briefly of the nice Ravenclaw she had met on the train Veleta Vablatsky would have made a wonderful friend! but then a round-faced big boy wearing a shiny P badge was extending a hand to her.

"Welcome to Gryffindor, Ariadne. I'm Caradoc Dearborn. And welcome to you too, Wendy."

Ariadne saw that a mousy little girl clutching a very large toad had followed her to the Gryffindor table. Her face was familiar because she had attended all the right pure-blood parties, and Ariadne remembered in time that her name was Wendy McKinnon.

"Why don't you two take the seats next to my sister?" Caradoc invited. "She's in first year too."

Hestia Dearborn was rosy and black-haired. When Wendy's toad hopped into her lap, Hestia broke off her conversation with the boy opposite and smiled at them.

"His name's Croaker," said Wendy. "He's a natterjack the loudest species in Europe."

"I didn't think natterjacks grew that large," said Hestia.

Soon they were chattering away about how Wendy fed growth-hormone to her tadpoles. Ariadne fervently hoped that this did not count as illegal breeding, for she would have to report at least one respectable new friend to her parents, and Hazel Parkinson had just been waved over to Slytherin.

"... Eats spiders and snails, and I've trained him to wake by day..."

The chair on Ariadne's other side scraped across the floor and, before she could look around, Veleta Vablatsky sat down on it, her brown eyes dancing. "My goodness!" she exclaimed breathlessly. "*Gryffindor!* Ariadne, I was sure I'd be an Eagle!"

"And I was sure I'd be in Hufflepuff," said Ariadne. "You could not be more surprised than I am. But," she suddenly realised, "I'm not at all sorry."

"Heavens, Granny will never believe that I'm a Lion!"

A beautiful blonde took the seat next to Veleta and asked, "What's special about Slytherin?"

"Nothing much." Hestia shrugged. "It would be my last-choice Hogwarts house."

"That Sorting Hat took *forever* to place me," said the blonde. "It kept telling me *I could* do well in Slytherin because I had the 'preservation instinct'. So when I asked it well, I didn't seem to need to speak; I just thought when I wondered why it wasn't putting me in Slytherin, it kept saying, 'Not so sure, there's quite a lot of generosity in there too.' In where, I wondered? So in the end I told it, 'I'm hungry, so just Sort me, and if the other Slytherins are spiteful about my not fitting in, I can give them as good as I get!' And the next second, it had made me a Gryffindor."

"Then welcome to Gryffindor, Miss Sarah Webster," said a tall black boy opposite. Ariadne knew at once that he was a very clever boy, but she had already forgotten his name.

The long table was hosting such a sea of strange faces perhaps no more than seventy students, but at the end of a long day it could have been all of two hundred and fifty that Ariadne did not know how she would ever remember everybody. She concentrated on the new first-years, the girls who would share her dormitory. Veleta-from-the-train, whose Granny was a teacher here. Hestia-the-prefect's-sister. Wendy-with-the-toad. And now Sarah-almost-in-Slytherin. That was plenty to begin with.

Barricaded against the Moon

Chapter 6 of 21

Remus receives his Hogwarts letter, makes new friends, and expands his view of the world.

CHAPTER SIX

Barricaded against the Moon

Tuesday 27 June 1967 Sunday 3 January 1971

Old Basford, Nottingham; a straight line from King's Cross Station, London, to Hogwarts, the Grampians; Hogsmeade, the Grampians.

Rated PG for gratuitous violence.

The good news did not arrive until Remus was eight years old. An eagle owl brought a message from a man called Professor Dumbledore.

"He's the Headmaster of Hogwarts," explained Remus's father. "That's the school where your mother and I learned magic, the only school in the British Isles that trains witches and wizards."

"Why don't we go there?" asked Bruno.

"You have to be eleven to go. How many years until you're eleven, Bruno?"

He counted on his fingers. "Seven."

"No, it isn't," argued Emily. "It's only a bit more than six. It's four and a half years for me. And for Celia "

"Godric's hat!" exclaimed their father. "I can't believe it! Edith, read this..."

There was no mistake. Remus saw his mother's fingers tremble as she read the Headmaster's lime-green words.

Dear Stanley and Edith,

Looking down the waiting list this morning, I noticed that the name of your eldest son, Remus, had been scratched out, and the reason given was "permanent illness".

I do not believe that illness should stand in the way of a child's education. With your permission, I would be glad to restore Remus's name to the waiting list.

Yours sincerely,

Albus Dumbledore.

Hardly daring to hope, his parents owed to explain that Remus's malady was lycanthropy. The next day Dumbledore owed back.

Dear Stanley and Edith,

Thank you for explaining the nature of your son's affliction. Now that we are aware of his condition, we can make provision for it. We shall ensure that there is a safe place available for his Transformations, and medical attention will be constantly available. All confidentiality will be strictly observed.

We expect Remus to join us at Hogwarts in September 1970, and that Emily, Bruno and Celia will in due course follow. A formal letter of invitation will be sent nearer to the time.

Yours sincerely,

Albus Dumbledore.

"So you won't have to live like a Muggle," said Remus's father. "Professor Dumbledore will make the wizarding world accept you in your rightful place."

* * * * *

The first time Remus boarded the Hogwarts Express, he wondered if his father had exaggerated. Professor Dumbledore was a great wizard, but could he really change the attitudes of a whole civilisation? The other students were hanging around in pairs and in groups; they all had friends. Remus knew there must be some Muggle-born first-years, for example who didn't know anyone, but he couldn't work out who they were.

He finally lugged his trunk to a random compartment and sat down next to the window. The other two passengers were both big girls, and they were giggling like cannon-fire.

The plump, dark-haired one held her side as if she were in pain and said, "Oh, Florence, did you see his ~~face~~? He was *hic* so scandalised when we *te he he* told him that Alice *oops* oh, hold me, Florence, I can't bear it *ha ha ha*..."

The lanky, fair-haired girl shrieked, pushed her friend down on the train seat and gurgled, "And he thought we meant ~~and he~~ *believed* and behind those bushes Bertha, I think when Janet hears about this " And whatever else Florence had to say was swallowed in raucous guffaws.

Remus pulled a book out of his bag, hoping the Hogwarts boys would be more sensible than the girls, but knowing that Florence was so absorbed in the rapid-fire volley of Bertha's speech that neither girl had even noticed him. The written words were jumbling before his eyes so that he couldn't read them, but he felt less self-conscious if he at least pretended to be busy.

About an hour later, the door slid open, and two children of his own age took the seats on the far side. The boy was sallow and hook-nosed and he had greasy, dark hair; the girl had brilliant green eyes and long, red hair. Wondering why they had decided to change compartments, Remus put down his book and smiled at them.

"Hello, my name's Remus."

The boy didn't smile back. The girl beamed cheerfully. "I'm Lily, and this is Severus. We're both new; we don't know anyone except each other. Is this your first year at Hogwarts too?"

Severus scowled, as if he didn't want Lily to talk to Remus.

She ignored him. "What are you reading, Remus?"

Remus held up his book for Lily to see, while Bertha's voice shrilled over everyone else's.

"... And Fabian says that over the summer Travers joined the *Death Eaters*. Imagine that, Lord Vol... well... you know who... grabbed a school-leaver and, if you can believe Fabian, initiated him to be a *killer*!"

"Oh, help me keep a straight face, Bertha!" But Florence had no serious interest in keeping her face straight. "Are you telling me that fat old detention-if-you-breathe Travers has rejected law and healing and banking in favour of being paid to commit murder?" She dissolved into more giggles.

Severus glared at the older girls in icy disapproval, but the sight of Remus's book goaded him into speaking. "It's by a stupid Muggle writer who thinks there's a spell to bring the dead back to life! Wardrobes of astronomically-impossible inter-planetary transportation, and a soppy lion who lets the witch overpower him when he could have torn her to pieces!"

Remus had always found it a comforting story, but he supposed it was rather babyish for someone who was going away to secondary school. He wished he had chosen *Lord of the Rings* instead.

"I *liked* that story!" Lily protested. "It was so amazing when the lion's sacrifice turned out to be more powerful than the witch's evil. I used to spend *hours* sitting in wardrobes... hoping..."

Severus snorted. "It won't seem so amazing once you've seen a bit of real magic. This Travers person was in luck. He might learn a few decent jinxes if he sticks around the Dark Lord long enough."

Remus tried not to dislike Severus as he asked, "What's your favourite book?"

"Huh! I don't read fiction. Why waste time on something that never happened? Lily, let's "

Shrieks from Bertha and Florence cut off whatever Severus was trying to say. He fingered his wand as if he wanted to send a hex in their direction; then he pulled a small package out of his pocket and unfolded it. It was a traveller's chess set.

Lily darted a sympathetic glance at Remus, but Severus rattled the chessboard pointedly. If Lily did not want to annoy her only established friend, she would join him in this game for two players.

Too disheartened to persist, Remus put away his childish Muggle fairy-tale and took out *The Four Loves*. There should be *theremust* be some good advice for him in the chapter on friendship.

* * * * *

For the first couple of weeks, Remus wondered if he ever would make friends. Hogwarts was a huge sea of strange faces, and the boys in his dormitory seemed very unlike himself. James Potter and Sirius Black were clever, good-looking, athletic types. They had made each other laugh before they had even stepped off the Hogwarts Express, and it was clear that they would decide who else was going to be popular. Peter Pettigrew and Owen Lamb were agreeable, accommodating types. They laughed at everything the leaders said and looked as if they had never opened a book without protesting. Even if they weren't already all best friends with each other, Remus felt he wouldn't know what to say to them.

He opened his Herbology textbook in the library and hoped the pleasures of learning would be enough to carry him through his school career. One of his classmates, a girl named Emmeline Vance, was sitting at the next table, but Remus decided not to move into the seat next to her. After all, what would they talk about? Besides, the library was supposed to be silent.

Not that this stopped most people. All around him, other students were chattering with their friends.

"They blamed Muggles for Britannia Bridge," an earnest sixth-year was saying, "but, Kenneth, everyone knows it was the work of Death Eaters."

"Have you proof of that, Frank?" Kenneth had a Highland accent. "Muggles do daft, daft things all the time, without needing help from Death Eaters."

"Cynbal Avery was seen in Bangor," affirmed Frank, "just *five minutes* after the blaze took hold. But there wasn't enough evidence to arrest him."

The voice of a Ravenclaw first-year sailed over the political discussion. "The Bats will beat the Falcons this afternoon, I just bet you!"

"Rubbish. The Falcons beat everyone," protested his friend.

"That's because the Falcons play rough. They're *foul fowls* get it? But now the Broadmoor brothers have gone, the Falcons will lose the plot they'll be more interested in breaking heads than in scoring goals. Come on, Gaspard, I bet you. Two to one, the Bats will win."

"Oh, all right. Just five Sickles, Ludo. I need "

"Quiet, boys!" rapped Madam Pince.

At the table ahead, a dazzling silvery blonde stumbled into Emmeline's chair and dropped her books over the floor. It looked like an accident, but there was a triumphant ring to her voice as she addressed Emmeline. "Pick those up, elf!"

Emmeline turned to face the blonde. "Is there a good reason why you can't do it yourself?" she enquired.

"You made me drop them; you can pick them up!"

"No," said Emmeline with dignity. She turned back to her essay. By this time Remus was on his feet, and someone else was also approaching with wand drawn Severus Snape from the train.

The silver girl fingered her wand threateningly. "It's time I had a human subject for my entrail-expelling curse," she said. "If you give me one more excuse to use it "

"I'll handle that creature, Narcissa," said Snape, pointing at Emmeline. *"Scyllae Pestis!"*

Remus didn't think. As Emmeline hit the flagstones, his wand was in his hand, pointed at Snape, and he shouted a spell that he had heard his father use *"Sílencio!"*

At the identical moment, someone else was shouting, *"Crures Flaccidae!"* Snape crumbled to the floor, and Remus registered that the newcomers were James Potter and Sirius Black.

Three Slytherin boys were advancing from the opposite direction; Narcissa was furiously aiming her wand at James; and everyone was shouting at once.

"Caeco!" screeched Narcissa to James.

"Pinocchio!" hurled Sirius at Narcissa.

"Pilousus!" hissed the largest Slytherin at Sirius.

"Aures Radiculae!" shouted a smaller one at Remus.

"Feteo!" yelled their friend at everyone in general.

"Lingaugeo!" cried James, stumbling backwards and apparently unaware that his wand was aimed at a bookcase.

Snape had his wand thrust upwards towards James, and his mouth was working furiously, but not a sound came out; Remus's silencing spell had muted him.

"Silence!" announced Madam Pince, grabbing Narcissa's arm before she could throw out another hex and peeling the wand out of her fingers.

Madam Pince was not showing a wand, but somehow everyone fell silent at her word.

"This is a dis *grace*," the librarian hissed. "Nine boys and girls are brawling like Death Eaters and you're only *infirst year*. How would you all like a lifetime ban from my library?"

Looking around, Remus couldn't understand how he had become involved in such a dramatic fight. Emmeline was groaning on the floor, her face and hands covered with ugly churning boils and scales. Snape was trying to stand up, but he kept falling back to the floor. Narcissa was staring down in horror at her nose, which was growing and growing and was already nearly two feet long. Sirius Black had bushy, black hair sprouting all over his face, while James Potter was clutching his forehead and stumbling around off-balance. One of the Slytherin boys had an enormous tongue swelling up out of his mouth as far as his chin. Remus found that radishes were falling out of his ears, which seemed rather tame, and the stink of rotten eggs seemed to be hanging around all of them like a cloud.

Now Madam Pince did produce her wand. She waved it around at all of them and said, *"Finite Incantatem!"*

Narcissa's nose stopped growing it was dangling around the region of her knees and Snape managed to push himself to his feet and vocalise a rude word, while the last radish dropped out of Remus's ear and vanished into nothingness. The hair disappeared from Sirius's face; the enormous tongue suddenly shrank down to normal size; and the bad smell abruptly lifted. But Emmeline was still scaly and still moaning in agony, and James's hands dropped away from his face to reveal eyelids gummed shut.

"I saw *you*," Madam Pince jabbed her wand at Remus's arm, "and *you*," she jabbed at James, "aim for *him*," she indicated Snape. "And *she*," Emmeline, "was already down, so what I want to know is, which one of you struck the first blow by hexing *her*?"

"Snape." Sirius Black pointed. "We saw and ran straight over. No one did anything to anyone before Snape hexed Emmeline."

"That's a lie!" protested Snape. "Vance was attacking Narcissa. I came to the rescue."

Narcissa nodded piteously, hot tears now pouring down her delicate cheeks, but Sirius cut in with, "Liars yourselves! We saw everything, from the moment Narcissa dropped her books, and Emmeline never did a thing to her. And don't you care that Narcissa *blinded* James?"

"Since you can't agree on your story," said Madam Pince briskly, "there is nothing for it but to put all of you in detention. But first you can go to the hospital wing."

Narcissa fled. Snape shrugged and went back to wherever he had been studying. The larger boys scowled while Remus helped Emmeline to her feet. He ignored them and guided her out of the library, while Sirius Black took James Potter's elbow. Despite the gravity of the situation, Remus heard Sirius say something that sounded suspiciously like "elephant".

Up in the hospital wing, Madam Pomfrey ungummed James's eyelids and shrank Narcissa's nose, but she was shaking her head over Emmeline's scaly skin. "That will take twenty-four hours of lavender-oil treatment," she said. "I won't ask who was playing around with the Curse of Scylla, but I do hope all your friends understand how dangerous it is!"

"Pince had no right to put Emmeline in detention just because Narcissa decided to attack her," muttered James as they walked out of the infirmary. "I'm going to McGonagall *now*."

The end result was that Emmeline was exempted from punishment, but James, Rosier and Wilkes spent the whole of Saturday afternoon re-shelving library books without magic, while Sirius was pressed into hard labour on Hagrid's pumpkin patch in company with Snape, Mulciber and Narcissa.

"They forgot to think of a detention for me," said Remus that evening.

"Of course they didn't forget," said James. "Once I'd told McGonagall that your spell shortened the fight without hurting anyone, she lost interest in you."

"You must be *clever*," said Peter Pettigrew.

"And *good*," said Owen Lamb. "I'm afraid I'd have done something violent without even thinking."

James changed the subject. "I went to the kitchen after detention. Anyone want to know what I nicked?"

He displayed a large bread-basket of cream horns. And Remus found that he did have friends after all.

* * * * *

On Tuesday night Remus excused himself from dinner to go to a private interview with the Headmaster.

"Ooh, what have you *done*?" asked Sirius admiringly. "Is it worse than the fight in the library?"

Remus smiled faintly and said nothing. Professor Dumbledore was not in his office, but waiting in the entrance hall.

"You will always have an escort, Remus," said the Headmaster, "but we'll try to take you over when no one is watching."

Remus followed the Headmaster down the entrance steps, across the Quidditch pitch and towards a large tree with wildly waving branches.

"Be careful of that tree," cautioned Dumbledore. "It isn't just a willow it's a Whomping Willow. It was only planted last month and it's already put three house-elves in the hospital wing. But there is a way around it. Watch. *Prolato!*"

Dumbledore's wand suddenly shot out to a length of four feet, and he used it to prod a knot near the base of the trunk. Abruptly, the branches stopped waving. Now Remus could clearly see a gap in the roots.

"Enter," said Dumbledore.

"What?... Sir." Remus wasn't sure he liked the tree, and the idea of dropping through a hole in the ground beneath it... But however bizarre the idea felt, the Headmaster was expecting him to move, so Remus dropped to his knees and crawled through the gap. The ground sloped downwards, and by the time Remus had reached the tunnel at the end of the slope, Dumbledore had followed him, wand alight.

"It's through here," said the Headmaster, as if people walked through tunnels under trees every day. Remus followed in silence, wondering if the plan were to ~~bury~~ bury him for the night; but eventually the tunnel sloped upwards again, and Dumbledore said, "*Alohomora*." A rush of light appeared above their heads, and Dumbledore led the way up through the trap door in the ceiling and into a perfectly normal room.

"You have nothing to worry about, Remus," smiled Dumbledore. "This house was built for you."

"Just for me, sir? A house built and a tree planted and a tunnel dug?"

"And the school syllabus rearranged," said Dumbledore solemnly. "Professor Pavo will delay teaching anything about lunar cycles until fourth year. That way, your classmates are unlikely to notice that your frequent illnesses coincide with the full moon."

"That seems an awful lot of trouble."

"Lycanthropy is quite a lot of trouble," Dumbledore countered. "Well, you should be quite comfortable here. You are locked in and you can make all the noise you like, for we've already spread a rumour around the village that the new house is haunted. Madam Pomfrey will bring you back to school in the morning. What I need from you, Remus, is a promise that you will never do anything foolish that you will take no risks with anyone else's safety, but ensure that the wolf is at all times locked away."

"Oh, I promise, sir," said Remus earnestly. "There's no way I want the wolf to put anyone in danger."

"And you must also promise me, Remus, that you won't *gotelling* people your secret. Some students will be frightened, and others will use it as an excuse to make trouble for you. So it's a story better left untold."

"I won't be telling anyone, Professor," said Remus quickly. "No one at all. I want to make ~~afriends~~ friends at Hogwarts."

* * * * *

The next morning Remus felt he had had a good Transformation. His muscles were seared with pain, his bones ached, he was stiff and cold but he had been safe.

He could go to school after all, like any other wizard.

And he had friends.

His friends visited him in the hospital wing that afternoon. James, Sirius, Owen and Peter all thought he had a bad cold; the real nature of his illness never occurred to them.

"Listen, are you lot game for the girls' toilets?" asked Sirius.

"The *what?*" spluttered Owen.

"The girls' toilets on the second floor," said James. "The ones that are said to be haunted. Sirius knows a wonderful regurgitating spell. If some of us would volunteer to guard the door to make sure no girls or teachers come near, you know Sirius could hex every toilet in the room."

"Make a total flood," Sirius explained. "And then the girls would be shrieking their heads off we could sit around near the stairs, pretending to do homework and we'd see them all running out shrieking "

"And some of them would have maybe forgotten to pull their pants back up " Peter was nearly speechless with excitement.

"It would take Filch *months* to fix that!" agreed Owen. "How about it, Remus?"

Remus tried not to frown at their enthusiasm. They were his friends, and their scheme wouldn't exactly hurt anyone much. "Do you think school is really about playing pranks?" he asked cautiously.

"Of course it is," said Sirius earnestly. "That's *exactly* what school is about."

* * * * *

One evening, Peter suddenly looked up from his Astronomy homework to ask, "Sirius, who is Lord Voldemort really targeting?"

"He's a lunatic," said Sirius. "He'll kill anyone who stands in his way."

Remus winced at the word "lunatic", and James misunderstood his objection.

"Honestly, Remus, he makes no secret of it. His ambition is to rule the world, and he really believes that one day he will. And the way he's going about it is to kill anyone who disagrees with his plan."

"My parents think he's *wonderful*," said Sirius. "Which is clear evidence that he's evil. He's in favour of old wizarding families like ours being his deputies, while Muggles become his slaves and Muggle-born wizards are zapped dead. Oh, and he'll also zap any pure-blood who disagrees with him. My mother can't wait for the day when he's so powerful that she can do exactly what she likes. She'll go around zapping her personal unfavourites."

Owen shivered. "But if he's so dangerous, why isn't the Ministry of Magic doing anything to get rid of him?"

"I expect they are doing something," said James airily. "But naturally they don't broadcast their plan on the Wireless. The problem is, so far there's no proof he's committed a murder. No one who's actually witnessed him killing has survived to tell about it."

Sirius muttered into his quill and then looked up. "I could give the Ministry proof if they'd listen to me. Half the stuff I hear in my parents' house... Well, I know that Lord Voldemort's done murders, all right. Oh, don't worry about it, Owen. You have your big, strong friends in James Potter's gang to take care of *you*."

But no one took it too seriously in those early days. The murders were just a run of bad-news articles in the *Daily Prophet*. The Ministry would catch the lunatic-wizard soon... wouldn't it?

They all began to take it seriously when they returned from the Christmas holidays. When Remus entered his dormitory, he found James, Sirius and Peter all sitting on James's bed, snuffling a little and trying to look as if they weren't snuffling.

"Thank Merlin you're here, Remus!" exclaimed Peter as soon as the door closed.

"Why shouldn't I be...?" Remus began, and then realised how mournful the atmosphere was. "Where's Owen?"

"Owen is dead," said James.

"What?"

"It's my fool of a father's fault," raged Sirius. "He mentioned to his friends in the Dark circle that I had a Muggle-born in my dormitory. Next we hear, the Death Squad decides that this would make a beautiful example to the wizarding world. Because Muggle-borns, you know, have 'no right to learn at Hogwarts'. So they wait outside Owen's home on Christmas Eve and strike him dead as soon as he comes out into his own front garden."

Remus must have looked as Stupefied as he felt, because Peter felt the need to clarify further.

"Owen was murdered by Lord Voldemort."

Eschewing Deceit

Chapter 7 of 21

Even in a nice safe place like Hogwarts, evil is lurking more closely than Ariadne expected.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Eschewing Deceit

Friday 2 September 1977 Thursday 29 June 1978

Hogwarts, the Grampians.

Rated PG because the bad guys behave badly.

There were more shocks for Ariadne in her first few weeks at Hogwarts.

It was shocking that nobody listened to Professor Binns in History of Magic.

It was shocking how long it took her to master a simple colour-changing charm for kindly Professor Flitwick.

It was shocking that Professor Pavo not only wore a midnight-blue, skin-tight sheath covered with silver spangles instead of academic robes, but actually spent the first ten minutes of their theory lesson talking about all the men who had admired her for wearing it before she began teaching them any Astronomy.

It was shocking that Ariadne fell off her broom in the first riding lesson (admittedly from a height of only six feet), for her brother had assured her that broomstick-riding was easy.

It was demoralising that, by the end of her third Transfiguration lesson, neither she nor Veleta had budged one molecule of their matchsticks, although Kingsley Shacklebolt had turned his into a perfect darning needle.

It was shocking that Professor Viridian punctuated every sentence with profane language. He spoke menacingly about the need for "tough revenge in these dangerous times," and began by teaching them a hex to make radishes grow out of their enemies' ears.

"Those radishes were *funny*," said Wendy.

Perhaps they had been, but when her classmates looked at Ariadne for comment, she could not think of a polite way to describe how filthy her ears felt for hearing their teacher's words. "I'm needing some carbolic soap to wipe out my ears..." she began. But she knew her shock was not really about vulgar words; it was about the malice that seemed to leak like poison out of Professor Viridian's every pore.

Veleta understood at once. "No, you don't need soap," she replied swiftly. "It's Professor Viridian who needs the carbolic to wash out his *mouth*. And his *heart*."

Wendy giggled all over again.

"Maybe he'll teach us next lesson to have our enemies foam at the mouth," said Sarah. "Radishes aren't really a serious punishment. What kinds of enemies do wizards have? Does he mean people like the Muggle Prime Minister?"

Hestia's bright smile faded for a moment. "You'll find out soon enough, Sarah," she said. "But never mind. We're safe at school. Let's go and watch the Quidditch try-outs my brother's a Chaser on our House team."

Ariadne did not feel she could write any of these things to her parents. The surprise of being sorted into Gryffindor was, she felt, enough of a shock for any parent's system.

* * * * *

Of all the adjustments to school culture, none took Ariadne as much by surprise as her Potions lessons. She had noticed in the first lesson that she found the work much easier than any of her classmates did, but she supposed that was because her mother had prepared her well.

Today's task, the Forgetfulness Potion, was the first seriously tricky brew, and it seemed to go badly for everybody. Veleta chopped her parsley crookedly; David Berriman couldn't produce a fire-charm to light his cauldron; Wendy McKinnon dropped poppy seeds on the floor, and Hazel Parkinson stuck out her tongue at her.

"Never mind, never mind," said Professor Slughorn. "We all make our little mistakes. The important thing is that we practise."

"Salazar!" exclaimed Kingsley Shacklebolt. "Sorry, sir. But I've just realised that I used jujube instead of lotos. Will that matter?"

"I'm afraid it will, Mr Shacklebolt. Never mind; I can give you fresh ingredients. Not even Glover Hipworth could brew without practice..."

"Just try to look busy," Ariadne whispered to Veleta. "Weigh the lotos or something. I'm thinking I can save our parsley..."

After that she kept her eye on her ingredients. She did not trust herself to produce any kind of fire while the atmosphere was so tense, so she used a wooden spatula to steal a flame from under Ivor Jones's cauldron and then kept her eyes steadily on the brew inside her own.

It was a long, long hour before Professor Slughorn sniffed at Ariadne's potion and ladled some into a glass bottle. He held the bottle up to the light to check the colour, and then placed it on his desk. He turned around to face the class and cleared his throat impressively.

"So," he said, "Miss MacDougal is a brewster."

The class broke out into applause.

"Show off!" hissed Hazel Parkinson.

"Hazel, do not flatter her with your attention," said Regelinda Macnair. "She's just snooty about that grandmother of hers as if Ankarad Macnair had been a person of any consequence!"

At these words Professor Slughorn's eyes lit up. Ariadne stared at her cauldron, suddenly wishing herself invisible. She began to clean her equipment, determined not to meet Professor Slughorn's eye.

He was in no hurry, however. He did not address Ariadne again that lesson. She had almost forgotten about him by four o' clock, when lessons ended, and she and Veleta made their way to the library. A shadow fell across the returns desk, and Ariadne found herself cornered.

"Ah, Miss MacDougal!" Professor Slughorn beamed genially. "Do you know, I was devastated when I heard that your grandmother had died. Ankarad Murray was the most remarkable student I ever taught, and most of my best students since have been descended from her. I'm not ignoring you, Miss Vablatsky but *your* famous grandmother is most happily still with us. Listen, I've invited a few students to dessert in my study at eight o' clock this evening won't you both come along?"

Obviously a body did not refuse an invitation from a teacher. But after Slughorn had left the library, Ariadne and Veleta were left staring at each other in astonishment.

"What's his game?" asked Veleta.

"I cannot say. He's not a bad man, but I'm not trusting him."

"How can you be so sure he isn't bad? Lounging around in his chintz armchair, drinking port and stuffing himself with his crystallised pineapple... What's he hiding?"

"Veleta, how are you knowing what he does when...?" Ariadne broke off the enquiry when she saw the horrified look on Veleta's face. She changed the subject. "Professor Viridian, now *there's* a man who's hiding something!"

* * * * *

It was shocking what her parents had never known or, at least, had never told her about the wizarding world. After Ariadne had covered an eighteen-inch scroll with a full account of her first month at Hogwarts, Sarah said, "I don't see how you can write so much! Would you like to borrow Thangalaathil?"

"He's a lovely owl," said Ariadne, as she tied her letter to the feet of the huge, black bird. "I've never seen one like him before what species is he?"

"A sooty native to Australia. He was the only one of his kind in the Emporium, and I just fell in love with him on the day after my Hogwarts letter came."

Thangalaathil flapped out of the common room window, large and grand, like everything connected with Sarah. Ariadne asked how she had chosen her owl's name.

"I spent *ages* reading a book about Aboriginal magic," Sarah said. "In one of those Australian languages, 'Thangalaathil' is the word for 'message bird'."

Wendy looked very impressed. "Croaker is not seeming a very clever name for my toad after Thangy-hill whatever you said. My sister raises toads as a hobby; we've had this one since he was a tadpole."

"You have I mean, you must have scores," said Veleta.

"Yes, we have. But we're only allowed *one* pet..." She glanced meaningfully at the two kittens who were tangling in Hestia's long curls.

"Oh, I'm sure that's just a guideline," said Hestia quickly, as she disentangled sandy-coloured Simba. "My Mum said it would be all right to bring both. They were litter-mates, so we couldn't play favourites and separate them."

Ariadne knew that Hestia was lying, that she must have sneaked both kittens into the travelling basket when her mother was not looking, but she could see why Hestia would refuse to leave either behind. Simba was just like a tiny lion, and there certainly was a hint of the Egyptian cat-goddess about Bast.

Hestia wanted to change the subject. "Do you have a pet, Veleta?"

The chocolate-brown eyes darkened. "Not any more," she said. "I had a puffskein but it... it died. If you really want to know, a girl named Dragomira Macnair murdered it."

"That's just the sort of thing that Dragomira *would* do!" exclaimed Wendy, clutching her toad even more tightly. "Ooh, did you see her do it? Can you *prove* it? If you have proof, we can set my sister onto her. My sister's in the Order, you know."

"No, I can't prove it." Veleta's face shuttered down.

With a lump in her throat, Ariadne realised that asking, *So was the poor little puffskein abandoned without justice?* would be too distressing for a group conversation.

Fortunately, Sarah had lighted on a change of topic. "What's the Order? Is that a kind of rule-book?"

Ariadne was glad that Sarah had asked first, because she had never heard of the Order either.

"She means the Order of the Phoenix," said Hestia. "It's a secret group that Dumbledore runs. No one knows what they do."

"It's not such a secret," corrected Wendy. "They're really just the opposite of Death Eaters. They try to stop Voldemort killing people. Only last week, my sister and her boyfriend stopped the Lestranges from blowing up practically the whole of Manchester. Of course, that puts them on the hit-list now. Voldemort will be after Marlene next."

Ariadne noticed that Wendy did not seem at all embarrassed to speak the name of Voldemort. Perhaps Hogwarts was the kind of place where speaking the name was allowed.

Sarah looked as if she were about to ask what Death Eaters and Lestranges were, and why this Voldemort wanted to blow people up. But before she could open her mouth, Veleta was speaking.

"Don't worry, Wendy; He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named isn't thinking about your sister. He's still after the Order member who exorcised his vampire in July "

"Can you be *sure*?" Wendy had to loosen her grip on Croaker, who was croaking painfully.

Veleta seemed to shake herself awake. "Merlin, did I say that? I mean, I read about it in the *Daily Prophet*. Yes, I must have read about it. And surely You-Know-Whomust be more worried about losing a valuable vampire than about one botched Muggle-bait. He says he doesn't know who staked the vampire, but when Mulciber finds out... I mean, I suppose Mulciber is the person he'll ask, since Mulciber was I mean, I read in the paper that he was the only Death Eater who saw... Oh, dear, I only mean that I think Gideon Prewett is the person who needs to be worrying, not Wendy's sister!"

Wendy was appalled. "Who told you that Gideon was the one who went to the vampire-raid in Birmingham? That was ~~classified~~ information. Now I'm going to have to write to Marlene to tell her there was a leak..."

"Wendy, calm down!" But it was hard to say which girl was more agitated. "There hasn't been a leak. I know from *friend*. Yes, a friend. Gideon Prewett knows my Granny; he must have told her that he was in Birmingham. But if that's a secret, I won't tell, and nor will Granny."

Ariadne did not understand why Veleta was lying so hard about the source of her information, but she grasped well enough that the Order of the Phoenix was so active that Voldemort was finding it a serious threat.

"Are *vampires* real?" asked Sarah. "What about werewolves? Are they real too? No, don't tell me I don't want nightmares tonight."

Sarah, who had never even heard of Dark magic, lay down to sleep that night thoroughly frightened by the discovery the wizarding world was not the enchanting and happy place she had expected. But Ariadne lay down to sleep very comfortable, enchanted and happy to learn that there were people including Dumbledore himself who were willing to stand up to Lord Voldemort.

* * * * *

Professor Slughorn's private parties were as tedious as Ariadne had feared. Her parents would be shocked at how eagerly she tried to avoid them. The formula was always the same. Ariadne, Veleta and half a dozen other students would enter his study to be served chocolate éclairs or strawberry shortcake. Slughorn would ask them questions about their families and career aspirations before turning the conversation to Quidditch or Potions. Then he would reminisce about the famous people who were his friends.

"He's only interested in himself," complained Veleta.

Slughorn's favourite students were also the friends of famous people. There was a quiet and clever fifth-year named Barty Crouch, son of an important Ministry official. There was the rakishly handsome Regulus Black, scion of an ancient and wealthy pure-blood family. There was Claud Greengrass, only a greengrocer's son, but champion of the fourth-year Charms class; he was almost frightening in his beauty, as chiselled and perfect as a Greek god. Ariadne could not warm to any of these people, except perhaps Greta Catchlove, who came from a modestly successful family of Somerset cheese-makers.

Soon Veleta was looking for an excuse to refuse the invitations. "Let's say we haven't finished our homework."

"But we have," objected Ariadne.

"But we can say we haven't... Oh dear, there's no protection for people who insist on telling the truth! Well, we can say we want to watch the Quidditch practice. Wouldn't you rather do that than go to the Slug Club?"

Ariadne agreed that she would, but she knew the excuse sounded feeble. "When are you thinking the next party will be? We could take care to leave some homework unfinished for that night."

"Or we could just say, 'Sorry, can't make it.' Our reasons are not Slughorn's business. Ariadne... what are you thinking?"

"I'm hoping we will not hurt Professor Slughorn's feelings... No, that's not right... It's *notus* whom he likes, it's our possible importance; so there are no feelings to be hurt. But my parents would be horrified that I'm so willing to disoblige a teacher!"

"And mine would be horrified that I nearly lied to one. Thanks for reminding me not to. Come on, we'll be late for Astronomy."

It was a shock to Ariadne that Veleta and Hestia disagreed with one another so openly. Hestia did not believe in prophecy and said that Seers were frauds.

"But my grandmother *is* a Seer," said Veleta.

"She's just picking up cues and telling people what they expect to hear," said Hestia.

"No, she predicted the rise of Him-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named ten years before anyone had heard of him," said Veleta. "She predicted that Dumbledore would be Headmaster of Hogwarts, and she says that a man called Fudge will one day be Minister of Magic."

"I've never heard of any Fudge. I'll believe it if I live to see it!"

But the really extraordinary thing was how friendly both girls were about the exchange. It did not sound at all like the Macmillans bickering with the Malfoys; Hestia and Veleta could actually present opposite points of view and still stay friends. What was more, Wendy had giggled at the whole dispute, as if disagreement were somehow funny.

Ariadne was surprised by Hestia Dearborn's directness. One afternoon she was carrying her two kittens down a corridor when Professor McGonagall emerged from the opposite direction.

"Here take Bast!" she hissed, dumping the tortoise-shell into Ariadne's arms. "If McGonagall asks, she's *your* cat."

There was absolutely nothing polite about the request: no, "Could I trouble you..." or, "Would you be so kind..." nor even an indirect statement of need: "Oh no, Professor

will be angry if I'm caught..." Hestia had simply handed over the kitten and expected Ariadne to take control, even to lie about the situation. And yet there was nothing bossy or threatening about it; Hestia simply expected her friends to help her out and told them so directly.

Ariadne's parents would have been horrified by the lack of manners; they would have summarily refused a lass like Hestia with a line such as, "Dear, keep your cat, and have a think for next time about the correct way to ask somebody a favour."

Yet Ariadne quickly recognised that Hestia never refused a request for help. She expected her friends to ask for whatever help they needed, just as she expected that people would always give help on demand. What she did not expect was that anybody should be left guessing about what was required.

The MacDougals considered it ill-mannered to demand favours, but they did tend to oblige other people who asked favours of them. Even if a request were extremely unreasonable, even if the requester had to be written off as "ill-bred" and thereafter held at a distance from the family, they never gave a direct refusal to people who asked politely. So it was yet another shock to Ariadne how easily her friends could say "No".

Sarah and Wendy were both obsessed with clothes. Students were supposed to wear school uniform at all times, but that had not discouraged either of them from bringing a trunkload of weekend clothes to Hogwarts. Wendy had twenty robes in all the colours of the visible spectrum, and Sarah had piles and piles of Muggle togs. They spent Saturday afternoons rifling through one another's wardrobes and trying on each other's garments.

"Oooh, a *trouser*," said Wendy enviously. "I've seen Muggle men wearing those."

"Women wear them too," said Sarah.

"It's beautiful," said Wendy, stroking the blue denim. "It's so rough... so strong... oh, Sarah, could you possibly let me borrow it for a few days to send home for Marlene to have a look? She'd send it straight back. It would be a huge favour. Please?"

That was a request so politely framed that Ariadne could never have refused it. But Sarah quite calmly replied, "Sorry, Wendy, but I promised Mum not to go sending my stuff off school premises." She did soften her refusal with, "You can borrow them for yourself, that's fine. But Mum nearly killed me a couple of years ago because I lent clothes to friends who never brought them back, so I had to promise her faithfully that none of this stuff would ever leave Hogwarts."

Ariadne felt that, while Sarah was not actually lying about her mother's attitude, she was rather glad to be able to bring in a mother to strengthen her case. But the really interesting point was how comfortable Sarah felt in being so disobliging, quite in addition to how well Wendy took the refusal.

Wendy did look strange wearing the Muggle trouser, somehow undressed and un-magicked; she looked nowhere near as natural as Sarah looked in a wafty dress-robe.

"Where's Hestia?" asked Ariadne.

"Down in the library with the boys," said Veleta. "She and Ivor Jones are looking for something in the Quidditch section. But they haven't noticed yet that the book they want is on the top shelf and oh!" She clapped a hand over her mouth.

"Is that a secret?" asked Ariadne. "Why did you not just tell them where the book was?"

"I promised I wouldn't talk like that," said Veleta, as if she were remembering a lesson. "It unnerves people. Even people who know my grandmother is a Seer don't like it when I talk about things I'm not supposed to know."

Ariadne began to grasp the situation. "I'm not unnerved, Veleta," she said. "Are you a Seer?"

"Not exactly. I'm a a Locospector."

Ariadne knew she had read the word somewhere, but she had completely forgotten what it meant.

"I can't foresee the future," Veleta explained. "I just See the present that is, I see things that are happening in a different place, places where my eyes can't reach. And my mother told me not to let people know that I can spy on them because it *is* a kind of spying."

For a moment the blood crawled into Ariadne's face, as she imagined what might happen if Veleta could see what she was doing ~~at~~*every* minute of the day. "How does it work? Are you forced to look like prophets who cannot help having visions or can you choose?"

"Mainly I can choose. But I have to know the person, or the object I'm Locospecting, or the place." Veleta blushed this time, and lowered her voice. "When I was six, I used to Locospect my brothers going to the toilet. Honestly, I promise you, that became boring after a few weeks. Once you know you *can* at any time, the mystery is gone, and toilets just aren't interesting any more. When I was eight, my cousin's broomstick was stolen, and I was able to Locospect the thief selling the broom on the Dark market. Then I Locospected the purchaser until he was in a place where I could find out his name and address. My cousin was able to reclaim her broomstick, but I never found out the thief's name, so the Aurors never caught him."

"There have to be people who would pay hundreds of Galleons to have you tell what you can See," said Ariadne. "But it could be dangerous too. Does that not frighten you?"

"I'm more worried about how easily I can invade other people's privacy. Ivor and Hestia are only looking for a book well, they've actually found it now but one day I might find out something that I really shouldn't know... You're right, though, one day I might See too much, and that could get me into trouble."

* * * * *

"Professor Viridian is late *again*," said Richard Campion. "Doesn't he care about teaching any more?"

Once again Veleta had light in her eyes and a firmly-closed mouth. Ariadne waited until the rest of the class was busy with hangman and Gobstones before asking, "Where *is* Professor Viridian?"

"Waiting outside Dumbledore's office. But there's no one to let him in, for Dumbledore's teaching a Transfiguration class, because McGonagall had to... Well, never mind. Every time Viridian's been late recently, it's because he's been skulking around Dumbledore's office. What do you think he wants?"

Ariadne could not imagine; a teacher who wished to speak to Dumbledore only had to write a note.

When Viridian charged into the classroom, ten minutes after the hour, he made no apology. "Salazar, don't you kids do a second more work than you're forced to? Books out, everyone! Who bothered to learn the incantation for the Curse of the Bogies?"

Professor Viridian was always abrupt and rather rude, but Ariadne knew that today he was assuming a defensive attitude so that nobody would ask him any questions. What was he hiding?

"I've a feeling you should keep watching Professor Viridian," she said to Veleta.

"I think so too," said Veleta. "Well, he's off to the staff room now no secrets there."

But that evening, Veleta sprang up from the study table in the common room and exclaimed, "Ariadne! Why would Professor Dumbledore keep a sword in his office?"

"A sword? Is it a kind of decoration?"

"Perhaps. But why would Professor Viridian be alone in Dumbledore's office *taking the sword away*?"

Ariadne dropped her quill. "We have to tell Professor Dumbledore. Where is he?"

"In the staff room. But perhaps he instructed Viridian to bring the sword... We'll look really silly if... No! Viridian's taken the sword into to his own office."

"This is no time to worry about tattling," said Ariadne. "Perhaps we'll look daft. But if this is something Dumbledore's not yet knowing, then he certainly ought to be told." She lifted the communal jar of Floo powder down from the mantelpiece and threw a handful into the fire. "The staff room! Veleta, if you'd rather not tell, I will."

"But I'm the witness, so I suppose I must." Veleta knelt down timidly in front of the hearth. "Er... Professor Flitwick? Professor Viridian has just taken a sword out of Professor Dumbledore's office, one with huge rubies in the hilt. I'm just checking that... er... that Professor Dumbledore knows about this, and that there's some good reason why Professor Viridian needs a sword in his own rooms..."

"Emergency, Albus!" squeaked Professor Flitwick. "Thank you, Miss Vablatsky I assure you, the Headmaster *does not* give random permission for teachers to remove the Sword of Gryffindor. Albus, I think we'd *all* better go to Vindictus's room I'll explain as we go..." And his head vanished from the fire.

The next day, Veleta was late for dinner. "I was called up to Professor Dumbledore's office," she explained. "Ariadne, you'll never guess what. Professor Viridian he was a Death Eater all along! That sword was once the personal possession of Godric Gryffindor, and Viridian was trying to steal it for Him-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. We don't really know why You-Know-Who wanted it, but Viridian's been sacked, and I have fifty points for Gryffindor. Oh, and you have twenty too I told Dumbledore that I'd never have dared tell tales on a teacher if you hadn't kept telling me that you knew Viridian couldn't be trusted..."

An owl fluttered above them and dropped an elegant note into Veleta's potatoes.

"Bother," she said, "it's from Slughorn. His next party will be in my honour. 'I always knew you were a prescient young lady,' he writes. What's 'prescient'? I suppose I have to go to this one thank goodness it'll be the last one before the exams!"

Veleta had managed to avoid most of Professor Slughorn's parties, while Ariadne had been too truthful to talk her way out of more than half of them. By the end of the school year, she was firmly ensconced as a favourite student.

"She knew the difference between wild chamomile and corn chamomile in her first week that's more than you knew in your first year, Crouch! As for her exam result, we won't publish the percentage too loudly, but it was in three figures. Miss MacDougal, you are the most gifted Potions student that Hogwarts has seen for seven years." He filled her glass with something dark red; she decided not to try drinking it. "I trust you will remain faithful to your future career as an apothecary. The other staff may well try to lure you away to their disciplines, but your true vocation is unquestionably with Potions. Miss Catchlove, will you give us your opinion on the Frinault cheese?"

*A/N. My beta suggested the best parts of this chapter's dialogue. So when you leave a review for me, be sure to leave one fo**Spiderwort** too.*

Defying the Moon's Demand

Chapter 8 of 21

Even in a nice safe place like Hogwarts, evil is lurking more closely than Remus expected.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Defying the Moon's Demand

Sunday 5 September 1971 Friday 16 March 1976

Hogwarts, Hogsmeade and the vicinity of the Grampians; somewhere between Hogwarts and London; around Nottinghamshire.

Rated PG-13 for disobedience.

"You couldn't have gone home *again*, Remus," said James. "It's only the first weekend of term."

"I... No, I didn't go home," said Remus. "I wasn't feeling well. To be honest, I've spent most of today with Madam Pomfrey."

"What does she say about these illnesses?" asked Sirius, with an air of studied innocence. "You seem to see quite a lot of Madam Pomfrey."

"She says I need bed-rest," said Remus dully. "Do you know the Quidditch score? Puddlemere played Caerphilly, didn't it?"

"We were thrashed," said Sirius, an inveterate Puddlemere supporter. "But don't change the subject, Remus. Your friends are enquiring after your health."

"I am quite well, thank you." Remus shifted backwards, hoping he could reach the book lying on his chest of drawers, and hence signal the end of the conversation.

James was quicker. He swept up the book, and said, "Oh, no, you don't, Remus. Not while we have so many interesting questions to ask you."

Remus took another step backwards and realised that he was about to touch the dormitory wall. James took a step forwards, so that he was directly opposite, and Sirius and Peter moved in, one on either side.

"Remus Lupin," said James, "you are a werewolf."

Remus slumped against the wall, too defeated to attempt a protest. They had all been friends; they had been friends for a whole year; and now they knew that he was a monster. It was a long, long minute before Sirius's laughter painfully penetrated his eardrums. Peter seemed to leer closer to his face. And James said, "It's *brilliant*! We know a *real* one. Our own hidden weapon!"

"Next month we'll set you onto Snape!" said Peter.

"Or maybe the Head Boy. I'd like to wipe that smirk off Malfoy's face," said Sirius.

When Remus dared to look, he realised that the laugh and the leer had been friendly. James, Sirius and Peter didn't seem at all disturbed by their discovery.

"You can't set me onto anyone," he said. "The Headmaster made me promise to take no risks with safety. And I had to promise not to tell anyone either."

"You didn't tell," said James. "We guessed. But we won't tell anyone~~else~~."

"We'll keep the secret," echoed Sirius.

"Promise," said Peter. "That's the spirit of the Marauders!"

More astonishing to Remus than the exposure of his secret was the discovery that he still had friends.

* * * * *

Years later, when Remus knew that he had behaved badly at school, he recognised that the spirit of the Marauders had been a large part of the temptation. Yet he never recognised the point at which he had *begun* to allow marauding to lead him astray.

Was it when Sirius had dared him to charm Professor Flitwick's chalk to write in different colours? That prank had been harmless Flitwick himself had laughed but Remus had been solely responsible; his friends had only applauded.

Was it when James, busy with a Transfiguration essay, had begged him to borrow the Invisibility Cloak to steal pork pies from the kitchen? It didn't feel like stealing, since the house-elves were always so pleased to supply whatever students wanted; but the fact remained that he had taken without asking.

Was it when Sirius dared him to beg copies of a Muggle birth certificate and National Insurance card? Remus didn't think to ask why Sirius might want such documents. He and Peter approached every Muggle-born in their year and several others too with the lame story, "Please, we're very interested in Muggle record systems, so could you help us get hold of a real Muggle birth certificate?"

The only student who happened to have his papers to hand was a seventh-year Ravenclaw named Ted Tonks, who good-naturedly Summoned his papers and copied them for Remus and Peter with a *Zerocso*.

Remus still didn't allow himself to become suspicious when Sirius announced that they were going to make forgeries. They sat in the library, painstakingly copying out the certificates the size and thickness of the paper, the background pattern, the font of the print. Even when they filled in the forged copies with the details of a real person (Sirius's cousin, Andromeda Black), Remus tried not to ask why Sirius was so keen on practising forgery.

Peter was more direct. "Come on, Sirius, will you not share the joke?" he nearly pleaded.

But Sirius laughed and said they would know eventually.

They didn't find out until the school year ended, and the Marauders were aboard the Hogwarts Express. While James was handing out the Chocolate Frogs, their compartment door slid open to reveal a haughty Bellatrix Black.

"Is Andromeda here?" she asked. "Does any of you know where she is? I told her to be in my compartment by half-past eleven, but I haven't seen her since breakfast!"

"I've no idea where she is," said Sirius blandly, stuffing his mouth with more chocolate. "Here, have a Frog." He threw one over, and it hit Bellatrix on the shoulder. She winced, caught the bar, and swept out into the corridor furiously.

"Sirius!" Peter pounced. "You *do* know where Andromeda is, do you not?"

"Not exactly... Oh, all right. She isn't on the train, anyway. She did a Side-Along Disapparition with Ted Tonks as soon as we had Hogsmeade behind us. I don't know where they went probably to Edinburgh."

"Sirius oh, stop him laughing, James, and make him talk properly! Sirius, tell us what's going on! Why have Ted and Andromeda gone to Edinburgh?"

Sirius shrugged innocently. "To get married, I suppose."

"The documents..." Remus realised. "We weren't just forging that birth certificate for fun... We *were* helping Andromeda pass herself off as a Muggle... elope... settle down with Ted when she has only just finished her O.W.L.s... before she's even of age."

"And half her luck," said Sirius. "She'll never have to live with or speak to the Black family again. Don't look so shocked, Remus. She's of age in Muggle Scotland, and I'm *nearly* certain that wizarding law will automatically ratify that kind of marriage as soon as she's seventeen. I'm sure the day will come when you'll be very glad you supported Andromeda's noble decision."

Remus conceded that Andromeda might be better off with Ted than with the Blacks. But... forgery, elopement, no N.E.W.T.s, wasted career opportunities? What was James *thinking* to let Sirius get away with it?

The mischief continued unabated into the Marauders' third year. Had his downfall been on that first Hogsmeade weekend, when James and Sirius laced Peter's Butterbeer with Firewhisky (Remus supposed Sirius must have brought the Firewhisky from home) and drank him under the table? Remus, making his one pumpkin juice last an hour, never raised a finger to stop them. To be fair, Peter found it funny the next morning after Remus had dosed him with clary sage concentrate from Madam Pomfrey.

Had it been when James had urged him to run through the school corridors in the middle of the night? "You can have the Invisibility Cloak, Remus, but it can't wait until morning. I really need the parchment that I left in the Transfiguration classroom, and Madam Pomfrey told me not to take stairs for twenty-four hours after today's Quidditch injury."

James never asked a favour if there was any chance he could do the job himself, so it would have been churlish to disoblige. Remus enjoyed swishing through the dark corridors in the Invisibility Cloak, was thrilled to walk right past Filch in utter security. When he found the parchment, of course, it was nothing just a crude ballad of toilet jokes; but James had signed it with a flourish, and it just wouldn't do to let McGonagall find it.

Remus decided not to ask if James had left it behind deliberately, in order to tease him or Peter.

There was certainly something nastier less of a pure joke about the way Sirius placed the Bucking Bronco Hex on Severus Snape's broomstick. Snape, who knew a whole lexicon of anti-hexes, brought the broomstick under control within sixty seconds, so Remus kept very, very quiet and never told Madam Hooch who had done it.

He did remember asking James, "Is it fair to hex Snape like that?"

"Of course it is," said James. "Snape is the arch-hexer do you remember the Curse of Scylla that he put on Emmeline Vance before we'd been at Hogwarts a fortnight? He doesn't care how much his curses hurt people or how little provocation he received. Whereas we only do it for laughs: nothing that hurts and nothing that will end up permanent. Just enough to put him in his place."

Remus believed the Bucking Bronco Hex could have ended up causing a very permanent injury, but James disagreed.

"Come on, this is *Snake*, the master of the Dark Arts! Do you really think he can't control a wobbly broomstick?"

Remus wondered if Sirius had thought of it in those terms before casting the hex, but said nothing.

"And what loss is it if the broomstick does throw him?" asked Peter callously. "One less Dark Wizard in the world. Remus, are you wanting Him-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named to gain new supporters?"

Snake's gang of friends Cyneward Avery, Brandon Mulciber, Evan Rosier, Pelagius Wilkes, the Lestrangle brothers, their Macnair cousins, Coira Yaxley, Bellatrix and Narcissa Black all swore blind that their parents had never met the Dark Lord and didn't want to, even though Sirius darkly asserted that he knew they were all lying.

"Prove it!" snapped Sirius's cousin Bellatrix. "If you're so clever, show us *all* how you know whose parents have Muggle blood on their hands!"

Sirius flicked his wand and intoned, "*Manum Cruento!*"

Bellatrix gasped with horror; bright red blood was pouring off both her hands, despite the absence of a visible cut.

"*Finite Incantatem*," said Sirius quickly. There was no sign of injury on his cousin's hands, but her robes were splashed with dark stains.

"I suppose *that's* your idea of a joke," she said haughtily. She stalked off, throwing over her shoulder, "I'll have thirty points from Gryffindor for that and your parents will know about it by this evening!"

"Thirty points because she has no sense of humour!" yelled Peter at Bellatrix's retreating back. "I cannot wait for her to leave Hogwarts. I'm glad this is her final year."

"I'm not," said Sirius bitterly. "Who cares about a few house points? She'll marry Lestrangle major before she's been out of Hogwarts for a week, and *then* what will they get up to together? I bet Lestrangle is a junior Death Eater already."

James was guffawing too heartily to eat. "I wish I'd had a camera. Well, we need a few laughs," he said, wiping the tears from his eyes, "because there's not much to laugh about outside school."

And Remus had completely lost track of the faint, tremulous whisper that jokes about death and torture were probably not funny at all.

* * * * *

Remus's loss of moral compass was certainly complete by fourth year, the year the Marauders spent exploring the castle. It was supposed to be a year of serious study, the year they conquered the major mysteries of the O.W.L. courses.

"Teachers claim every year is a year of serious study," said Sirius. "I don't see why we can't work hard *and* play hard."

There was no evidence that James or Sirius worked *hard*; they did a minimum of work, yet still managed to do better than everyone else. To be fair, if Remus was determined to put hours into finishing his homework thoroughly, James and Sirius usually spent their spare time helping Peter. But Remus didn't like to play the boss and dictate whether they would spend a weekend working or playing, so they played more than they worked.

"That fourth-floor mirror is suspect," said James one Saturday. "Why put an ordinary mirror with no magical properties in the middle of a corridor where no one ever stops to admire himself? Shall we crack it?"

"Either the secret or the mirror itself," said Sirius.

Remus couldn't help thinking that the mirror truly was ordinary, but he followed his friends upstairs. Peter turned their reflections every colour of the rainbow; Sirius distorted them through every dimension of concavity and convection; James doubled the images and turned them upside-down before concluding, "It's no good. The magic isn't in the mirror; we're doing it ourselves. I *am* going to break it. *Frango!*"

The mirror obligingly cracked, and the two halves fell dramatically to the floor. Before Remus had time to be shocked, they all saw what the mirror had been hiding. There was no stone wall behind it, but only a dark tunnel.

"Let's explore!" said Peter.

"And let Filch find the broken mirror?" asked Sirius. "No, let's find out how we were really meant to open it *Reparo!*"

After trying several complex unlocking charms, they discovered that the mirror was a door and that it opened to a simple *Sesame*. After that discovery, there was nothing to do except follow the tunnel on its downward spiral. It wound down so far that Remus wondered if they would end up under the lake, but eventually their wandlight revealed another door, which opened to *Alohomora*.

"Buried treasure?" asked Peter hopefully.

It was completely dark, but the combined beams of all four wands showed that they were in another tunnel, this one quite wide and completely horizontal. It must be underground, and this time Remus wondered if they would end up drowning in the lake altogether, but they charged through it anyway. They ran for nearly half a mile before they reached a short flight of steps that led up to the next door.

"I bet it's locked," said Peter. "Do you think we're even still at Hogwarts?"

"Of course we've left Hogwarts behind," said James. "*Aloho* hey, this door *isn't* locked!"

They found that it opened straight onto a cobbled street the main street of Hogsmeade! It was absurdly un-secret; the unlocked door simply stood between Cordwainer's and Gladrags, as if it led to the shopkeepers' back garden.

"Come on Zonko's!" yelled Sirius.

"But Mr Zonko will know that it isn't a Hogsmeade weekend," said Remus. "He'll report us."

"Not if we give him good custom," said James, chinking the Galleons in his pocket. "Next stop Honeyduke's!"

"Are we buying chocolates for Lily Evans *again*?" groaned Sirius.

"Buy them for us instead," urged Peter. "We do not throw them in the dustbin."

After a term of tapping every portrait, tapestry and chink in the plaster and of demanding that every window and staircase reveal its secrets, James said, "We should write this down. If we discover many more of Hogwarts' secrets, we'll start forgetting them."

"It might be better to *draw* it," suggested Remus. "Make a diagram of the *real* Hogwarts the Hogwarts that hides its existence."

"A map," said Sirius. "Floor by floor, with the moveable parts charmed to move on our map."

"*All* the moving things?" asked Peter. "Even the people?"

"Yes, why not?" said James. "There's no Hogwarts without its people. We'll do the people *and* the places."

It took them the rest of the year. With all their exploring, all their artistic effort, all their charmwork, it took six months for them to be satisfied with the magical Marauders' Map of Hogwarts.

* * * * *

On the first day of fifth year, Remus did not take the Hogwarts Express because the full moon was due. Two days later he arrived at school, having missed the distribution of the timetables and half the pep talks about the importance of O.W.L.s, and very conscious of the Prefect's badge shining on his chest.

"We'll have to be good boys now," said Sirius. "Remus will have us thrown off the Quidditch team if he catches us hexing anyone."

"We *are* good boys," said James. "We've solved all Remus's problems."

"And he'll be far too grateful to go recommending us for detention!" Peter was squeaking with excitement. "Show him, James. Show him what we managed in the holidays!"

"Mr Prefect," said Sirius, "we are Animagi."

Remus laughed; his friends had been talking about becoming animals themselves ever since the day they had discovered his lycanthropy.

"It isn't a joke," said James, somehow swelling up. Before Remus could ask what was happening, the black school uniform was light brown, James was on all fours despite having moved *up* rather than down, and antlers had sprouted from his impossibly long face.

He was a stag.

"And it doesn't break any rules," said Sirius. "There's no school rule that says we can't be Animagi. Look *at me*!" But there was no Sirius at which to look; he was morphing into something huge... wild... a big black dog.

"I've had some trouble," panted Peter, his brow furrowed with concentration. "But watch me!" Peter clenched every muscle, then seemed to vanish. Where Peter had stood, there was only a grey rat.

"But what problems does it solve?" asked Remus.

The stag became James again, and laughed. "It solves the problem of the wolf, of course. Animals as large as that one " He jerked his head towards the black dog, " won't be hurt by a mere wolf. And werewolves can't transfer their curse to other animals, only to humans. So now you can spend your full moons with friends. We animals will all be company for one another."

At the time it sounded like an excellent idea. It was hours and hours before Remus remembered that Animagi had to be registered, and that becoming an Animagus in secret, and while still under-age, was probably illegal. He pushed aside that thought with a defensive, "The law has never been friendly to werewolves."

It certainly didn't occur to him that a Prefect should discourage his friends from breaking the law.

* * * * *

The crash of the opening trap-door startled the wolf so much that he stopped howling. He turned to face the intrusion with bared teeth.

The intruder was a large animal, something vaguely hunt-worthy but far too large to pursue, and its horns looked hard and painful. It leapt clear of the trap to make way for a second creature. This one smelled almost like a wolf, yet it wasn't a wolf, and it approached the real wolf with jaws closed. The wolf began to bare his teeth, to defend his territory, when a third creature scampered over his paws. This was a very small animal, one that he could slay at a swipe but the wolf had a full stomach, and the small animal looked neither dangerous nor tasty.

The horned animal cantered back to the trap and dived down. By instinct, the wolf began to follow. And they ran down a dark place, the other two creatures close at their heels, and they emerged at a broad open place, bathed in moonlight. The horned animal careened off in a different direction, and the wolf followed. He almost pounced on the little one, which became tangled beneath his paws, but the almost-wolf hit the real wolf from the side and pushed him away, and the little one sprang up onto the large one's back.

In the wide grassy place there was no fight for territory. The strange animals neither attacked the wolf nor staked their own claims. They simply ran, the barking one urging the wolf to run with them. So the wolf lost his suspicion of the strange beasts, and the four animals ran like one pack.

The full moon was low in the west by the time the horned one led the way back to the pit under the tree, and the barking one pushed and urged the wolf through. The wolf had no particular wish to forsake the open place for the constricted one, but the other animals followed and herded him back through the trap door, then curled themselves around him and nuzzled his fur. The wolf lay quietly until the moon set and, with great rips to his muscles and wrenching twists to his bones, he found that the wolf was no more.

Remus saw briefly that he was surrounded by animals, but as soon as they saw that he was human again, they transformed back to their own human forms.

"Were you here all night?" asked Remus in astonishment.

"Of course not," said James. "That would have been too boring! No, we took you for a good run around on the Quidditch pitch. We went right to the edge of the Forbidden Forest."

Scandalised, Remus said, "We... You took me *out* of the Shrieking Shack? We were running loose? But what if I'd hurt someone?"

"How could you have?" asked Peter. "They were all in bed."

"But if anyone had been so foolish as to wander around in the night," said Sirius, " let's say Hagrid had to check on his latest creatures we wouldn't have let you do any damage. We keep our minds when we transform; we're able to keep you out of trouble."

"Next month," said Peter, "I'm wanting to go *right into* the Forbidden Forest! With a wolf beside us, we'll be in no danger from whatever's in there... I'm wanting to see it!"

The forest sounded so enticing, and Remus was so exhausted from his sleepless Transformation, that it took him a minute to realise that his friends were still in trouble. "You're out of bounds!" he cried. "Madam Pomfrey will be here at seven, and she mustn't find you here."

It wasn't until after they had left that Remus remembered that he had promised Dumbledore to take no risks with safety. "Well, it wasn't my fault," he muttered. "The wolf

had taken over my mind, and I didn't even know it was happening."

But his conscience remained uneasy, for, of course, he had made no effort to discourage his friends from turning up next month. Implicitly, he had promised that he would take whatever risk the marauding spirit required.

* * * * *

So, for nine glorious full moons, the Marauders divested themselves of their human intelligence and decency in order to rampage through Great Britain in bestial form. Seven times they terrorised the grounds of Hogwarts, the streets of Hogsmeade and the depths of the Forbidden Forest.

The school holidays did not deter them, for James, Sirius and Peter insisted to their families that they had urgent appointments to meet their friends. Twice they took the Knight Bus to Nottingham for the thrilling risk of releasing the wolf from his safe captivity in the Lupins' garage. James would unlock the door with an *Alohomora* Charm, then hastily transform into the stag before the wolf had time to pounce. The four animals would dash through the streets of Old Basford to the broad green freedom of Sherwood Forest.

"But what if I'd hurt someone?" asked Remus the next morning.

"You didn't," said Sirius firmly.

"What if some Muggle with a weapon had hurt James?"

"They didn't," said James.

Death Eaters Undeceiving

Chapter 9 of 21

Ariadne's second year at Hogwarts is characterised by rule-breaking, lies, Dark Magic, locospection and murder.

CHAPTER NINE

Death Eaters Undeceiving

Saturday 1 July 1978 Tuesday 17 April 1979

Kincarden Croft, Inverness-shire; Malfoy Manor and Salisbury Cathedral, Wiltshire; Hogwarts, the Grampians.

Rated PG-13 for references to the Dark Arts.

When Ariadne arrived home for the summer holidays, it took her less than a day to notice how school had changed her. Hogwarts people said exactly what they thought, and she had become comfortable with hearing it, even if she could not quite bring herself to do it. Kincarden people said what the situation required, even if this did not match what they were really thinking at all.

For the fourth summer running, Ariadne found herself dressed up as a bridesmaid (this time in a pale yellow silk robe that did not suit her at all) because Lucretia Malfoy was marrying an Irishman named Gordius Goyle. Ariadne knew as soon as she entered the bride's dressing room that Cousin Lucretia did not love her bridegroom; she was happy enough to enter the married status, but she did not seem to care for Mr Goyle at all. The bridesmaids had hardly entered Salisbury Cathedral before Ariadne realised that Mr Goyle did not love Lucretia either, although he was looking very smug.

Cousin Severus was again among the guests, although he was not related to the Malfoys or the Goyles; Cousin Lucius slapped him on the shoulder (Severus winced) and plied him with more champagne, hoping he was enjoying himself. Ariadne wondered why they seemed so close, then remembered that they had both lied to her about not being Death Eaters. She was more certain than ever that they recognised each other because they were both serving Lord Voldemort.

"Lovely wedding," sniffed Mamma to Cousin Lavinia.

"Beautiful flowers," said Aunt Macmillan, with more accuracy, to Cousin Letitia.

Ariadne knew that there was a great deal happening at this wedding that could never, ever be discussed with any member of her family.

"My dear, are you not happy to be home for the holidays?" her father asked her when, a week later, he caught her curled up over a Defence text in the herb garden.

"Papa, I'm very glad to see you and Mamma again," she replied, for this was the only part of the truth that her parents were wanting to hear. Mamma made so much effort not to be a Macnair, and Papa worked so hard to help Mamma forget her childhood, that Ariadne could not bear to hurt their feelings by telling them how much more freedom she enjoyed at school. She was indeed glad to spend two months of the year being whatever kind of daughter they wanted.

But on the first of September, her heart lightened at the thought of leaving her duties to Kincarden behind her. She felt she was returning to her real home at Hogwarts.

* * * * *

By the time Ariadne began her second year at Hogwarts, wizards generally agreed that the school was the only safe place in the British Isles. Only at Hogwarts could a child be safe from the hateful masked Death Eaters, the serpent-tongued skull with which they signed their violent acts, the whispers about Him-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, and the corpses of those who defied or displeased him.

"I'm not feeling safe with that new Defence teacher," Ariadne said to Veleta.

Professor Viridian had been replaced by a pale-faced, dark-eyed witch named Professor Tepes. She had no time for curses; her speciality was Dark Creatures. They studied Banshees and Red Caps, hags and Hinkypunks, Kappas and Grindylows, Malaclaws and Manticores. Richard Campion and David Berriman said the best lesson ever was when Professor Tepes brought in a live Occamy for a practical demonstration.

"No need to bait it," said Joe Fenwick. "It's probably only aggressive to people who attack its eggs."

"Five points to Gryffindor, Fenwick," yawned Professor Tepes languidly, "for bothering to read the chapter in advance of the lesson."

Professor Tepes always spoke slowly, as if her own words bored her. It took Ariadne a while to realise that the information she gave them was actually very interesting. By the time they had been at school a month, Professor Tepes had dark rings under her eyes. Hestia said she was an insomniac and ought to take sleeping draughts from Madam Pomfrey. She was obviously far less aggressive than any of the Dark Creatures in her showcase.

"Yet she's dangerous," was what Ariadne always concluded.

* * * * *

There was no protection for those who ventured outside of Hogwarts. That February Veleta clutched at Ariadne in the middle of an Astronomy Theory lesson.

"Merlin's beard, they have David. I know they do!" Her chocolate-brown eyes were huge in a face as white as the blackboard chalk. Professor Pavo turned away from the diagram on the blackboard, swished at her sparkly skirts, and asked, "Are you quite well, Miss Vablatsky?"

"Professor, why isn't David at school today?"

Professor Pavo glanced around the classroom, as if she had not noticed that David was missing. "I believe Berriman went home for the weekend. Professor McGonagall gave permission." She made an extravagant gesture, designed to call attention to her jewelled sleeves. "That, however, gives him no excuse to stay away on a Monday morning." She shook her head, which set her diamond-and-sapphire earrings swinging prettily.

Veleta looked so distraught that Professor Pavo stopped posing with her costume for just long enough to say, "Miss Vablatsky, you may go to the hospital wing and ask Madam Pomfrey for a mild sedative. Miss MacDougal may accompany you if she returns to class directly."

Out in the corridor, Veleta was sobbing. "I was thinking about all of us in Gryffindor, and I Locospected the Dark Mark above David's house."

"So you're frightened that David is..."

"I don't fear, I *know*!" Veleta snapped hysterically. Instantly contrite, she murmured, "Sorry I shouted, Ariadne. But I looked inside. I saw him. He's dead."

"Are you wanting to go to Madam Pomfrey?"

"No, that wouldn't help at all! I just want to get away from Peacock-Pavo for a while." She clutched wildly at Ariadne's arm. "I'll go to Granny as soon as the bell rings, but I can't go now as she'll be teaching. Oh, I told you that one day I'd Locospect something I shouldn't, and now I have! It was so horrible. David lying there and his mother his poor mother the way she was howling..."

Ariadne managed to steer Veleta into the girls' toilets. It was the disused toilet that was said to be haunted, but the taps over the basins still worked, so Ariadne was able to wet a handkerchief and help Veleta wipe up her bloated face.

"Do you think things are worse today than, say, five years ago?" asked Veleta suddenly. She was speaking more calmly now. "In the olden days, Death Eaters used to wait to catch people outdoors before they killed them, but now they are so powerful they just blast up whole houses, if the houses belong to Muggles. I don't think the Ministry *tries* to stop them any more."

Ariadne did not doubt that Veleta was accurate. There was nothing in the *Daily Prophet* about David's murder but David Berriman had been just a twelve-year-old Muggle-born, hardly front-page news in a time of war.

It was Professor Dumbledore who made sure that the whole school knew about the tragedy. He made them sit silently over dinner while he told the story, his grief and anger as fresh as if David were the first Hogwarts student ever to be slain. The Death Eaters had killed David's father and sister, who had happened to be standing in their way, but they had spared his mother because she had been standing at the back she had not even been important enough to be worth killing. Ariadne detected a sneer from Letitia Malfoy, who was sitting directly in her line of view on the far side of the Great Hall, but nobody broke the silence before dinner ended.

Up in the Gryffindor common room, the second-years sat in a circle on two red sofas, and one of them was missing. Ariadne leaned sore-eyed against Veleta; Kingsley was grim-faced; Wendy sobbed on Sarah's shoulder; Richard couldn't stop fidgeting; Hestia held Ivor's hand; Joe was ashen-white. Nagging at the back of Ariadne's mind was the accusing thought: *But I never took the trouble to get to know David*. She had not really bothered with any of the boys after the isolation of her childhood. It had been enough work to befriend four girls at once.

She watched the boys, determined from now on to remember how they were all quite different from each other. Joe Fenwick was easy-going, the clown who made the others laugh despite the daftness of his jokes. Richard Campion initiated the major pranks, but his humour had a competitive edge. Kingsley Shackbolt, the natural leader, was more serious. And Ivor Jones, who never said much in a crowd, could rattle like a Jarvey if you caught him on a subject like numbers or money. Quiet little David had just blended in with the group, and it disturbed her that she could not remember much about him; it was as if his life somehow had not mattered. She would never let that happen again.

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During the Easter holidays, Veleta sprang to her feet in the library and hissed to Ariadne, "We must go! The Slytherins have Wendy! Oh, it's horrible."

Ariadne pushed away her chair. "What are they doing?"

Veleta pulled her towards the door. "They stopped her in the library corridor and they've dragged her off to one of those unused classrooms. Merlin's beard, your cousin Linus has stolen Croaker!"

They flung themselves into the corridor, ignoring Madam Pince's sharp reminders not to run in the library, and soon they heard shrill screams from the last room on their right.

Ariadne shoved at the door; it was locked, but it opened to Veleta's *Alohomora*. Five Slytherin students were spread over the empty room, playing what looked like some kind of ball game, while Wendy, unable to restrain her squeals, was dodging from one to another.

"Catch, Wendy!" called Hazel Parkinson. But the object she threw sailed right over Wendy's head something red dripped onto Wendy's hair and the missive was caught by Letitia Malfoy.

The object was not a ball. It was Croaker the toad.

Veleta leapt into the fray and tried to catch. She was taller than Wendy, but not as tall as Dragomira Macnair, who caught Croaker from Letitia and waved him high above her head.

Ariadne tried desperately to remember the charm for attracting objects. *Adverto! Accerso! Confero...*! What was it her brother used on the straying sheep?

"You're wanting a Summoning Charm," said Dragomira coldly. Everybody stopped moving. "But you cannot manage one, of course, because that's fourth-year work."

"Ten points from Gryffindor for using magic in the corridors," said Linus Malfoy, pompously tapping his Prefect badge. "You two couldn't have entered without using magic."

"Meanwhile, about this amphibian." Dragomira held Croaker aloft by one leg; he was bleeding, and his other leg looked broken. Veleta made another grab for him, but Linus knocked her away, while Dragomira whirled Croaker in a circle in the air, and he gave a soft and painful croak. Ariadne put her arms around Wendy, who was sobbing shamelessly, while Dragomira pressed the toad between her two hands, squeezing him not quite tightly enough to crush him. "The McKinnons are blood traitors," said Dragomira, "who have openly defied the Dark Lord when they ought to be defending everything that is purest in wizarding civilisation. Wendy McKinnon, if you're wanting to keep your sister alive, you'll go to your dormitory and fetch down those cats."

Dragomira's frenzied half-smile as she enjoyed the toad's misery betrayed that giving her the cats would not spare Croaker; but if she were allowed to do something unspeakable to Hestia's cats, she would lose interest in Wendy's sister.

"No cats," gasped Wendy between sobs.

"Of course there are cats. We know the red-faced half-blood up in Gryffindor Tower keeps two of them, although the school rules only allow one. And we're needing a cat."

"Use your own cat!" snapped Veleta.

"Shut up, Vablatsky," said Regelinda Macnair. "Your freak grandmother keeps you safe as long as you're silent, but give us a reason to ask our friends to eliminate you, and Granny will be powerless to stop us. The same for the lemon-headed Mudblood we'll eliminate her soon, but any time will do for that. Today we're interested in the *traitors*: McKinnon's sister, who has sold out to the Muggles, and Dearborn's brother, who persecutes his pure-blood kin."

Veleta stared, and Wendy froze in terror while Ariadne forced away her ghastly mental images of tortured animals. *Pretending* to co-operate seemed to be the only strategy.

"We're needing a cat," repeated Dragomira. "The spell requires a tortoise-shell pelt, removed live. McKinnon, you will fetch us a tortoise-shell cat. Linus will give you ten minutes by his watch, after which we pull the legs off this toad. Remember, one word to the teachers about any of this and your sister meets the Dark Mark."

Linus pressed a button on his watch.

The Gryffindors fled up the corridor. Wendy could not stop sobbing. "I have to sacrifice Croaker to save Bast! Then they'll set the Death Eaters onto our families anyway!"

"Let's rescue Croaker first," said Ariadne, starting on the downwards staircase. "Quickly, McGonagall's office."

"No," said Veleta desperately. "McGonagall's out all teachers in Hogsmeade." She explained rapidly that the only adults remaining on the school grounds were Madam Pince, who would not leave the library, and Hagrid, whom they would never reach and bring back before their ten minutes were up.

"Hospital wing, then," said Ariadne, flying down the stairs. The blood was rushing to her head so painfully that she could not think straight, but she was knowing *knowing* there had to be something... What had Mamma always told her...?

The hospital wing stock room was strictly forbidden to everybody who was not Madam Pomfrey, but this was no time to worry about rules. Veleta opened it with another *Alohomora*, and Ariadne snatched at a pair of identical bottles and handed one to Wendy.

"Aim the solution at Croaker," she said breathlessly, sweeping a third bottle into her pocket. "Veleta, you mew like a cat as we're arriving. We're not wanting to let on too soon that we have not brought Bast."

They arrived back at the fourth-floor classroom at nine and a half minutes. Veleta almost forgot to mew, but Linus Malfoy opened the door a crack and said, "Oh, no, McKinnon, not your little friends. Just you and the cat. Otherwise we tear up the toad."

Dragomira flaunted the twitching toad high above her head while Hazel eagerly held out her hands for Bast. Ariadne pulled Veleta back from the door so that Linus would open it, knowing they would only have one chance at this, and uncorked her bottle.

She threw it hard at Croaker.

Dragomira screamed and dropped the toad. Wendy had thrown her bottle on cue, and both bottles smashed to the ground, splattering Regelinda and Hazel before splashing all over Dragomira and Croaker. Ariadne knew that it was Croaker, but it was not surprising that nobody else recognised him, for in a fraction of a second he had swollen to five times his natural size. By the time he hit the floor, he was dragging a broken leg the size of an adult wizard's, and his amber eyes had ballooned to the size of Quaffles.

The Swelling Solution had expanded Dragomira's hands to the size of melons, and the ripping of her school robes suggested that her legs and were now like tree-trunks and her abdomen like a dustbin. When she made the mistake of wiping her cheek, it bulged out like a Bludger. Regelinda and Hazel were staggering on feet the size of cauldrons, and Letitia, who had tried to shield her eyes from the splash, found she had wiped them up to the size of apples.

Linus threw a furious *Crues Flaccidae*, and Ariadne felt herself crumple to the ground as if her legs were jelly. But the Slytherins were discomposed for long enough to allow Croaker to hobble over to Wendy and squeeze himself out through the door only a second before he became too gigantic to fit. Wendy kissed him and sobbed over him, while the swollen Slytherin girls, recognising that their predicament required professional help, stamped furiously past them and stormed off down the corridor.

Linus Malfoy, whom the Swelling Solution had not splashed, announced, "You have put yourself in trouble, Ariadne MacDougal. You are a pure-blood with whom we had no quarrel. But you couldn't mind your own business, and now we shall have to deal with you."

Then he stalked off after his friends.

As soon as he was out of earshot, Ariadne pulled out the bottle from her pocket and passed it to Wendy. "Antidote," she said. "He's needing to drink it."

Wendy dripped the Deflating Draught onto Croaker's serpentine tongue, and in about two seconds he had reduced to his natural size.

"We can't stay here," said Veleta. "The Slytherins will be back as soon as they realise that Madam Pomfrey is out. We'd better go to the library and keep near Madam Pince." She cast a *Finite Incantatem* on whatever Linus had done to Ariadne while Wendy scooped up the rapidly-shrinking Croaker, and they soberly made their way to the last safe place in the castle.

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As soon as Veleta announced that the teachers had returned from Hogsmeade, they took Croaker down to the hospital wing, where Madam Pomfrey mended his bones, staunch his bleeding and warned Wendy to keep him quiet and cosseted for several days. Ariadne confessed to her theft and paid for what she had taken, and Madam Pomfrey immediately placed her stock room under a stronger Locking Charm that could be broken only by the touch of her own wand.

Professor Slughorn, who regarded the school holidays as private time to pursue his own research, grumbled a little about brewing up fresh Deflating Draught to reduce the Slytherins to their usual size, until he realised who had stolen the Swelling Solution.

"Little rogues!" He winked at Ariadne and Veleta. "A very clever strategy in your mischief, young ladies. But next time, put your creativity to some more constructive

purpose!"

By the time the brew was boiled, the Slytherins had had time to agree on their story, and they accused Ariadne of starting the fight. But when Professor McGonagall demanded explanations, all Ariadne would say was, "There is a threat against the life of Marlene McKinnon. I will not discuss anything else until somebody takes that seriously."

Astonished, Professor McGonagall took her to see Professor Dumbledore. After Ariadne made him understand that the Macnairs and the Malfoys knew that Marlene McKinnon was a member of the Order of the Phoenix and that they were making guesses about Caradoc Dearborn too, Dumbledore took no interest in anything else until he had spoken into his fireplace twice and sent seven owls. Then he called in the Slytherins, who all denied that they had been bullying Wendy.

Ariadne ignored the denials and asked, "Linus, why did you take away house points?"

"Because I heard Vablatsky use a charm in the corridor... *Idid*, Ariadne; she cast *Alohomora*."

"She did. She cast it because you had locked the door and you had Wendy trapped inside with you."

After this devious piece of tattling, Dumbledore very quickly decided that Wendy's version of the story was the true one. He informed the Slytherins that their treatment of Croaker indicated that they were unfit to care for animals, so all their pets were permanently sent home. Linus's eagle owl, Letitia's black cat, Dragomira's nest of rats, Regelinda's adder and Hazel's three Puffskeins. Linus lost his Prefect's badge, and all five of them were given a week of detentions. The younger lasses only had to do slimy jobs for Professor Slughorn, but Linus and Dragomira were sent to accompany Professor Kettleburn on some very distasteful errands in the Forbidden Forest. As for the suggestion that they had planned to use a cat in the Dark Arts

At this point, Hazel Parkinson sulkily complained that Hestia Dearborn owned *two* cats and this was against the rules.

Dumbledore replied that for such defiance, Miss Dearborn should certainly be punished by forfeiting the right to bring *any* pet to school; she must without delay donate one cat to Miss Vablatsky and the other to Miss MacDougal.

But as for the suspicion of Dark practices, to say nothing of the fact that Ariadne and Veleta had felt the need to steal and use Swelling Solution... It was clear to Dumbledore that the real problem was inadequate supervision. The next morning at breakfast, he stood up to decree that no member of the school community was to visit Hogsmeade again until the war was over. Instead, he set up rosters for every weekend to ensure that there were always teachers patrolling every area of the school where students were allowed to go (he reduced the number of these).

"What, no more drinks in the Hog's Head after a hard day's work?" hurled an infuriated Filch before Dumbledore had finished speaking.

"How am I supposed to buy my supplies?" huffed Professor Tepes at every lesson for the first week of summer term, as if she had never heard of owls.

"I do think you went a little too far, Miss MacDougal," complained Professor Pavo, who had heard Regelinda Macnair's version of the story. She ran her ruby-manicured fingers through her exquisitely piled curls. "Do you really think this fair? For the sake of some other person's crime, all teachers are kept away from Gladrags until July!"

Professor Pavo's troubles did not end there, for she and Professor Slughorn were also required to make a thorough inspection of the Slytherin common room and dormitories. After they had confiscated three Dark Arts spell books, five poisonous candles, two voodoo face masks, a biting snuffbox full of ripped-off fingernails, eight decanters full of three different kinds of Love Potion, a suspicious-looking opal necklace, a Hand of Glory, an unregistered Time-Turner and seventeen Auto-Answer Quills, the Slytherins were fuming.

Examined under Rose Moon

Chapter 10 of 21

Remus faces up to some sobering truths about himself and his friends.

CHAPTER TEN

Examined under Rose Moon

Monday 2 Thursday 26 June 1975

Hogwarts; around the Grampians.

Rated PG-13 because the good guys behave badly.

There wasn't a real crisis at school until the time of the Marauders' O.W.L. exams. Dumbledore requested the Examination Board to rearrange the O.W.L. timetable so that the exams on the day after the full moon would be Muggle Studies and Divination, the only two subjects that Remus was not taking.

"We need to sleep through that full moon," said Remus. "Professor Dumbledore has gone to the trouble..."

"Are you *kidding*?" snorted Sirius. "We'll need the break from all that hard studying. Dumbledore wouldn't know if we raced all the way to the mountains beyond Hogsmeade! In fact, that's what I vote we should do."

After a week of examination stress, Remus was ready to agree. He felt he had done well enough on Charms, Arithmancy and Ancient Runes, but indifferently on Herbology and Care of Magical Creatures.

"Did you work it out, Remus?" asked Peter. "Was the Knarl the one who would not take the milk?"

"I hope so," said Remus, "because that's what I told Professor Tofty. Do you think they'll take marks off because the Fire Crab gave me a blister?"

"It's a *very* small blister," said James. "Perhaps Tofty didn't see. We need to think about Astronomy. What's the formula for calculating the date of Easter again?"

That question was easy for the friends of a werewolf, so Peter was able to produce the right answer.

"But whose idea was it," Peter asked, "to schedule the Astronomy practical for just about the shortest night of the year?"

They were all fatigued by the time it was dark enough to climb the Tower for their Astronomy practical. Perhaps that explained what happened next. After a gruelling three hours of filling out charts, no one was thinking very clearly. Tilden Toots was plaintively asking Gaspard Shingleton, "What was the location of Perseus?" while James whispered to Peter, "Let's sneak off to the kitchens and make a night of it," and Peter nearly choked in his eagerness.

Most students were stampeding through the exit (Bertram Aubrey nearly pushed Emmeline Vance down the stairs), so Remus stood back against the ramparts to make way for them. That was why he was in time to see Severus Snape wave a wand at Mary Macdonald.

Mary gasped in pain. "You pulled my hair!"

"Didn't touch your hair," said Snape, making a dash for the exit.

"You *did*, Severus," said Lily Evans, blocking his way. "Hexing is the same as "

But Snape had lost interest in the conversation. While he and Lily confronted one another, Brandon Mulciber the only other person still left on Astronomy Tower prodded Mary with his wand-tip and whispered, "*Imperio*"

Mary's head lolled sideways, and for a second it actually looked as if the Unforgiveable Curse had succeeded. Remus, from his position in the shadows, held his breath, wondering if this was the moment to interfere.

Then Mary's head snapped upright again, and she flushed with fury. "Mulciber, you just tried to put me under Imperius!"

"Rubbish. I'm only a schoolboy. How could I put anyone under Imperius?"

"You might have been too feeble to succeed, but you *tried*," charged Lily. "I'm going to report "

"Who are you calling feeble?" interrupted Mulciber with an ugly frown of concentration. He must have cast a non-verbal spell, because Mary suddenly shrieked as she was swept upside-down into the air and hung by her ankles, her robes falling from her waist over her head. Remus averted his eyes from her pink, flowery underwear.

"Let her down!" shouted Lily. "Severus, make Mulciber " But Snape was doubled up with laughter. Lily whipped out her wand and began to focus on the counter-curse.

Before she had time to release Mary, Mulciber shouted, "*Mobilicorpus*!"

At once Mary floated gently through the air, over the edge of the tower, and stopped just beyond an arm's reach of the parapet, hovering over a hundred-foot drop of empty space. Lily stopped in her tracks in horror, obviously trying *not* to think of the counter-spell.

"So shall I release Macdonald?" sneered Mulciber.

Snape was laughing too hard to speak. Lily stared in horror from one to the other while Mary dangled helplessly.

Remus pointed his wand and firmly ordered, "*Accio*, Mary!"

Before Mulciber had properly realised that anyone else was there, Mary was hurtling towards Remus and landing in his arms, still upside-down. Lily shot a murderous glance at Snape and Mulciber before helping Remus to set Mary the right way up and support her down the stairs.

* * * * *

"I don't understand why Snape and Mulciber weren't expelled!" raged Sirius.

Remus privately understood why Dumbledore couldn't expel Snape for laughing; but it was disconcerting that a prank close to an attempted murder was insufficient to expel Mulciber.

"Snape has detention with Filch," said Peter, looking excited at the thought. "And I heard that Mulciber has to do community service all through the summer holidays!"

"Bah, what's community service?" Sirius threw his apple core into the lake. "Decent wizards sometimes volunteer to do that for no reason at all!"

"It means that Mulciber is still answerable to Dumbledore," James reasoned. "If he'd been expelled as he would have been in peace-time he'd be racing off to join the Death Eaters. This way, Mulciber has two more years of being *very* closely monitored by Slughorn. Perhaps Dumbledore still hopes he'll reform."

"Dumbledore always was an optimist," grumbled Sirius. "Hey who's behind that tree?"

Remus turned his head in time to see someone slouching off someone who slouched like Snape.

"He's always spying on us," said Peter. "Always hanging around, trying to work out our marauding secrets. Why does he care?"

Sirius opened his mouth, but James interrupted. "Oh, forget Snape. He's gone now. And forget the exams. Let's talk about *tonight*. It'll be a short jaunt because the full moon doesn't even rise until half-past nine. Are you game for that race to the mountains?"

They had only half-planned the night's adventures when a bell rang.

"Time for Potions practical," groaned Peter. "Wish me luck. Just *don't* let it be the Strengthening Solution."

"It can't be Strengthening Solution," Remus reminded him, "because that takes days to brew. It'll probably be the Draught of Peace, because that didn't appear on the written paper this morning."

After the exam, when the last flask of the Draught of Peace was stoppered, and Peter was heaving with relief, Remus saw from a distance that Sirius was exchanging yet more angry words with Snape; but he thought nothing of it.

* * * * *

The full moon that fell during the O.W.L. exams was the tenth occasion when the stag, the dog and the rat accompanied the wolf. Remus didn't remember anything about it, of course. But on the tenth morning-after, as he lay recovering in the hospital wing, Professor Dumbledore came to visit him.

"Remus, I'm afraid I have something very serious to tell you."

Heart plummeting, Remus hauled himself up in bed. "Did something go wrong last night? I've hurt someone, haven't I?"

"Calm down, Remus. Take a sherbet lemon and listen carefully. No, you have not hurt anyone. Nothing has gone wrong. I promise you."

Remus breathed carefully and sucked on the sherbet lemon.

"What I have to tell you, Remus, is that someone was *almost* hurt last night. A student who had wandered down to the Whomping Willow saw you in the very act of Transforming."

"What? Who, sir? Do I have to leave Hogwarts?"

"You will swallow your sweet, Remus, if you keep jerking around like that. No, of course you do not have to leave Hogwarts. But Mr Snape saw you "

"Snape!" This time Remus did swallow his sweet, and choked a little.

Dumbledore offered him a second sherbet lemon, but he did not take it.

"Mr Snape has solemnly promised not to speak a word of what he saw to any human being. And I, for one, trust him to keep his word. Fortunately for Mr Snape, as well as for yourself, your friend Mr Potter *happened* to be in the right place at the right time. He was able to warn Mr Snape off and bring him back to school before the wolf had time to attack. But it tried to, Remus; if Mr Potter had not been there, the situation could have been very nasty indeed."

Remus felt the sweat running off his forehead. He had *nearly* done it. If it hadn't been for James... And a small part of his mind was also asking *What was Snape doing sneaking around after us anyway? Students don't usually hang around near the Whomping Willow after dark! And how did he know how to foil the Willow?*

"Let us be grateful for Mr Potter's quick thinking, Remus. But since no actual harm was done, here is the most distressing part of the incident. It seems that it was no coincidence that Mr Snape happened to be in the wrong place at an unfortunate time. Your friend Mr Black confessed please remember this, Remus; he owned up voluntarily, without the prompt of any kind of inquiry or suspicion Mr Black confessed that *he* had goaded Mr Snape into going to the Willow last night."

"No! Professor, that can't be true!"

"I'm afraid it is, Remus. Oh, he didn't actually *tell* your secret. He and Mr Snape both agree about this. They had been quarrelling, and Mr Black's actual words were, 'If you want to prove that you can mind your own business, then stay away from the Whomping Willow at sunset tonight.' Mr Snape need not have gone if, indeed, he truly had been willing to mind his own business. Nevertheless, the fact remains: Mr Black goaded Mr Snape into a situation that might have cost him his life or his health, and he certainly has betrayed your secret without your authorisation."

"And Sirius...?"

"Mr Black will tell you himself, if you are still willing to speak to him."

"Of course I'm willing to speak to him!"

The words were out of his mouth before he knew it. It didn't matter what Sirius had done. Whatever misunderstanding whatever mistake whatever crime was about to be confessed, it must be overlooked. Sirius still wanted to be Remus's friend, and a werewolf could not afford to throw away friends. Remus did not mention to the Headmaster that his friends were all illegal Animagi; no *actual* harm had been done, and they had only broken the law for him.

Sirius entered the hospital wing in abject terror and repeated the story and his apologies. He seemed far sorer about betraying Remus than about nearly killing Snape, but Remus did not dare mention this to him. The nearest he came was, "But, Sirius, doesn't it matter that Snape could have died?"

"Greasy little Snivellus *deserves* to die if he can't get his big nose out of the Dark Arts."

"But doesn't it matter that I'm the one who nearly killed him?"

"You wouldn't have been morally responsible for your actions."

But I still didn't want to be used in that way... But you were morally responsible... But no one deserves to die just for a bit of snooping... If I'd bitten him, my parents and Dumbledore would have been in huge trouble with the Werewolf Regulation Board... He didn't see how he could say any of this to Sirius and still stay friends.

"Remus, are we still friends?"

"Of course we are."

"You look as if you never want to speak again."

"I'm just tired," he lied. "I always am on the day after. Bring James and Peter to come and see me this evening, won't you?"

Sirius chose to believe the lie and left the Hospital Wing. But Remus could not sleep. Sirius *really could not* understand that Snape's life mattered. He admitted that he shouldn't have done it, but since he recognised his fault, had apologised and wouldn't do it again, and no actual injury had been inflicted... he just didn't see that it still mattered. Remus didn't want to think of his friend that way, as a violent man who couldn't admit his faults. Perhaps James could talk some sense into him.

Although his closest friends were in the same building and would soon be coming to see him, they felt a million miles away.

"Say it, Sirius," prompted James that evening.

"Remus, what can I do to make it up to you?" asked Sirius.

Do? There was nothing to be done. Nothing could make it up.

Suddenly Remus said, "Tell me I don't have to do it any more."

"Do what?" asked Peter.

"Run loose at the full moon. It's been fun, but... No. It's too dangerous. We're lucky that nothing like this happened any earlier."

"But, Remus!" protested Peter. "It's what we look forward to all month. Being animals is the best thing that ever happened to us! We'll be more careful next time..."

"You can do what you like. A rat, a dog and a stag can't do much harm. But a wolf can. I want you to promise that you won't set me loose through the summer holidays. And when we return to Hogwarts next year... Promise me that I'll be safely locked away in the Shrieking Shack, and no one will let me out until I'm human again in the morning."

His three friends looked aghast.

"But it took *years*," squeaked Peter. "Nearly three years to learn how to do the spell! And we have had less than one year to enjoy it."

"You can enjoy it any time you like," Remus repeated. "But the only thing that will make me feel right about this is if I know I'll never endanger anyone again. And," he

added, feeling mean and manipulative as he said the words, "never run the risk of the Ministry's silver bullet for myself."

"Fine," said James, but he could not hide his annoyance. "I promise."

Sirius and Peter promised too, but it was clear that they only did it to humour him; they did not understand at all.

* * * * *

"Evans has been shouting at Snape," said James gleefully.

"It doesn't look like any big deal," remarked Sirius. "That girl has large opinions. I wouldn't call it a quarrel."

"No, I'd call it 'Evans seeing Snape for what he really is.' The shouting is a sure sign that she's losing interest in him."

"I doubt it. He wouldn't have that spring in his step if he really thought she hated him. Face it, Prongs. Evans is loyal to her friends even when she *shows* they don't deserve it. And she doesn't count you as a friend."

"That will change," said James.

When Lily Evans entered through the side door, she walked straight past James, but she greeted Remus. "I think you should know," she told him, "that Severus Snape is spreading the *strangest* rumours about you. I wonder if he's mentally ill!"

"Not sick in *that* sense," muttered Sirius.

Lily ignored Sirius. "Remus, he's taken it into his head that you're a werewolf. I don't know how long he'll play with that idea, but you know how vicious his friends can be. I think you should cover your back before they have time to spread the gossip. Next full moon, show yourself whole and human in the Great Hall or something."

Remus thanked her for the warning, and she walked off still without speaking to his friends. James and Sirius were staring at each other in horror.

"But Snape *promised* not to tell! He gave Dumbledore his word!"

"How long before *everyone* knows?"

Remus tried not to remember that he too had broken a few promises to Dumbledore.

"What will we *do*?" piped up Peter.

"Nothing," said James briefly. "Use your common sense. The next two full moons fall in the school holidays. If anyone even remembers this next term, we'll just remind them how much Snape hates us all and that he's told plenty of lies in the past. As for Snivellus himself..."

"What?" asked Peter.

"I'll deal with him," said James briefly.

Remus didn't really hear this; he was too worried about the possibility that every Slytherin would know his secret by tomorrow. He didn't think about it again until the following afternoon, when they were sitting by the lake revising for their final O.W.L., Transfiguration. The nagging in his brain was interrupting his concentration, so he didn't pay attention to his friends until something swished through the air and landed beside him. It was a wand.

Remus looked up from his book. James had Disarmed someone, and students all over the grounds were staring. The "someone" was knocked flat on the grass, struggling to get up and cursing: it was Snape. Had he started a quarrel? Remus tried to remember what he had heard. Or had James or Sirius picked this fight to punish Snape for breaking confidence?

Remus turned his eyes back to his book, although the words were dancing on the page in front of him and he wasn't reading a word. James was hexing Snape; a whole crowd of students were jeering; and Lily Evans had appeared on the scene. She was not laughing; she was shouting at James. Remus didn't see how the situation could become any worse: hadn't James learned that it was dangerous to provoke Snape?

A brilliant flash of light flew across his field of vision, and Remus looked up in time to see a deep, dripping gash on the side of James's face. James threw another flash back at Snape, and suddenly Snape was hanging upside-down in the air, just as Mary Macdonald had been last Friday, just as so many of Snape's own victims had been all term. *That's fair exchange for that Cutting Hex* Remus tried to reason. But his reasoning did not convince him. The more he thought about it, the more it seemed that James was the one who had started today's fight.

Snape was not in pain, but he was humiliated. A crowd of students was jeering at his dirty pants, and only Lily Evans was screaming at James to stop the bullying at once. Remus tried to close his ears, tried to fill his mind with the incantation for a Switching Spell, but one extraordinary exchange penetrated his consciousness anyway.

Snape's voice, with a venom he normally reserved for his enemies, clearly enunciated: "I don't need help from filthy little Mudbloods like her!"

And Lily's voice, with an unbelievable chill, replied: "Fine. I won't bother in future. And I'd wash your pants if I were you, Snivellus."

Remus could not trust his ears.

Up in the Gryffindor common room that night, Lily was also in a state of shock. "I can't believe he said it, Emmeline. I can't believe that said it. We've been friends for eight years; I was the person who was trying to help him; and there weren't even any of his horrible Slytherin cronies around to be impressed. Why would he just turn against me like that?"

Emmeline made a soothing noise, but did not offer advice. Once again, Remus could not concentrate on his Transfiguration textbook.

"Was he humiliated that I tried to help? Did that just emphasise how helpless he was? It still doesn't explain why he attacked a friend; he grovels enough to Avery and Mulciber and the rest. Emmeline, do you think he's actually starting to believe all that pure-blood propaganda? Have I been a complete fool in trying to believe the best ?"

"Sorry to interrupt, Lily," said Mary Macdonald, "but Snape's *yet* outside, demanding a word with you. He says he'll sleep in the corridor and catch you on your way to breakfast if that's the only way. I was not going to pass on the message, but..."

Lily stood up wearily. "But perhaps it's better to settle this for once and for all," she said. "I haven't forgotten what he did to you last week, Mary." She made her way out through the portrait-hole. Remus couldn't hear what she said to Snape, but there was shouting, and Lily returned looking flushed.

"You're as bad as I am, Remus," she remarked. "We hang around with the wrong sorts and then we make excuses for them. I know James Potter never does any *permanent* harm to his victims, but other people's feelings have never been his priority."

Remus looked at Lily without knowing what to say. *Hecould* have stood up to James this afternoon; confronted by Remus as well as Lily, James might even have listened.

But Remus had tried to tune out and ignore the little drama, so unlike Lily he hardly had the right to condemn James now.

"Severus is worse," she said. "He's willing to do bodily harm and he doesn't wait to be wronged before he attacks. Do you think Severus has changed, Remus? Or has it just taken me this long to see that he always was vicious?"

Remus shrugged. "Who knows what other people are really like inside?"

"I can't tell what other people are thinking," said Lily, "but anyone can watch how they behave."

Deceit around the Crystal Orb

Chapter 11 of 21

Ariadne faces up to some sobering truths about herself and her family.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Deceit around the Crystal Orb

Wednesday 18 April Wednesday 5 September 1979

Kincarden Croft, Inverness-shire; Hogwarts, the Grampians.

Rated PG-13 because my Alphas tell me that this chapter was definitely not suitable for them.

My dear,

I cannot believe you were so foolish as to quarrel with your own cousins. Whatever your loyalty to your school house, blood is thicker than water, and both the Malfoys and the Macnairs have been loyal kin to us, to say nothing of the Parkinsons being very old friends. I only beg you to picture your poor mother's fright this morning when, in the space of an hour, we received three owls complaining of your conduct.

As we understand it, your Cousin Linus subtracted house points because your friend used magic in a corridor a minor infraction for which she received a minor penalty. When your friend over-reacted, not only did you make no attempt to restrain her but you actually participated in a vengeance scheme that involved stealing Swelling Solution and throwing it at Linus and four uninvolved bystanders.

We trust and hope that there is some detail, some extenuating circumstance, that is missing from this account, and that you will inform us of neither more nor less than the truth. But whatever your cousins did to anger you, nothing excuses such violent hexing and certainly nothing excuses stealing. I hope to hear in your reply that you have apologised to Linus and that you have appealed to Professor Dumbledore to reinstate him as Prefect.

Above all, my dear, I'm hoping you have not forgotten that there is a war in progress, a war in which many have paid with their lives. This is no time to be paying off petty personal scores, but rather to be cultivating whatever friends we have. I'm wishing you from this time forward to make no more enemies at school.

Ariadne read her father's letter twenty-four hours after the event, by which time she was not able to take it seriously. She was not surprised that her parents had heard a distorted version of events, so she wrote them a long letter to explain what had really happened. But, knowing the Malfoys as she did, she was only mildly surprised when her mother's reply expressed scepticism.

We cannot believe that you would accuse your cousin Dragomira of practising the Dark Arts. Try harder, dear, to believe the best of the people around you, and accept that whatever happened to the poor frog was an accident. We are glad to hear that you only borrowed the potion to help your friend and that you paid for what you took, but we're hoping you understand now that fighting back only increases rough play. What you should have done was to consult a teacher immediately.

"I expect that's the end of your trusting your parents' advice," said Veleta.

And Ariadne realised it was.

* * * * *

The school gossips lost interest in the fight in May, when something far more sensational occurred. Professor Tepes suddenly vanished. Some very tall stories were in circulation for example, that she had flown out of a window of Ravenclaw Tower without using a broomstick, or that she had been eaten by a manticores that had then spontaneously combusted but everybody agreed that the story somehow involved that swaggering seventh-year, Regulus Black.

Regulus bragged at the next Slug Club party that Professor Tepes had tried to seduce him, but that he had fought her off valiantly, and that she had left Hogwarts in

chagrin at being a woman scorned. But Ariadne never believed a word that Regulus said, and it seemed that even Professor Slughorn would not tolerate that level of self-vaunting.

"Oh, come, Black," he chided lazily, "you doubtless fought valiantly, but you can't expect us to believe that much. Have another madeleine. Aren't you just feeling a little humiliated because it was Sangera Tepes who attacked *you*? And not romantically! But, hush, we don't want to frighten the younger students now that the danger has passed."

"We've all been stupid," said Barty Crouch. "Tepes was a danger to the school community. If Dumbledore had only done a little research into her *ancestry*, he'd never have employed her."

While the other students were speculating on Professor Tepes and the Quidditch Cup and the forthcoming exams Linus Malfoy continued to write angry letters to Kincarden. Ariadne's parents could not ignore the offence to such an important person.

Darling, we do insist that you apologise to Linus. Even if the incident was half his fault, your apology now will do a great deal to preserve strong family ties in the future.

But Ariadne did not apologise. Letitia Malfoy disdainfully ignored her, but Walden Macnair's daughters confronted Ariadne and Veleta outside the library.

"We'll never forgive you, Ariadne," said Dragomira. "It's because of you that we've lost our pets. And no other house has teachers spying on them the way you've made happen in Slytherin."

"My poor little Ophis," sniffed Regelinda affectingly. "Mother's not knowing a thing about snakes, so she keeps him all cooped up in a goldfish-bowl. And she cannot stand rats, so she threw Dragomira's babies down from the turret and dashed out their poor wee brains."

"That's a lie," said Veleta instantly. "That snake of yours is basking in the rockery, with a house-elf on hand to ward off cats. And your mother loves rats she's moved them into a huge cage and she's at this moment petting the little white one " Veleta broke off in hideous embarrassment.

"That's what's seeming a more likely version to us," Ariadne covered up, "since we could both tell, Regelinda, that you were lying."

Dragomira almost pounced in triumph. She said nothing, but her eyes gleamed with victorious discovery before she gestured to her sister to move away.

* * * * *

Ariadne was still in disgrace when she arrived home for the summer holidays. Papa was grave and disappointed in her, while Mamma gazed at her with big sorrowful eyes and said, "Darling, how could you *do* this to your family?"

One glimpse at her mother's face, and Ariadne could not stop crying. She was unselfishly sad to have hurt her parents, selfishly miserable that they refused to comfort her when she was needing it, and irrationally furious and rejecting towards them for their insistence that smooth social relationships were more important than truth and justice. She fled to her room to sob all evening. *I will never trust them again.* After a while, this extreme avowal was replaced by a more moderate recognition. *I'm not their little lassie any more. I'm not ever going to think like them again...*

The next morning, she put on working robes and started doing the chores around the farmyard. Her parents spoke softly to her, but they said as little as possible, and she did not volunteer a word beyond the briefest replies. The warm summer air became frosty as she tried to avoid them.

Unpredictably, it was Uncle Macnair who made peace. He strode out of the kitchen hearth, saying, "Now, Cousin Bethoc, I hear there's been a to-do about some childish spat. We have daft, daft lasses in our family, but that's no reason to upset the whole clan. Perhaps Ariadne is wishing to walk with me to the pig sty?"

There was nothing Ariadne was wishing less, but she followed Uncle Macnair out of the back door.

Once her parents were out of earshot, he was far less polite. "You've made yourself some enemies, young lady, have you not? You're needing to mind your own business if you're wanting to regain your lost friends. A word to the wise Dumbledore will not be running Hogwarts for much longer. In the near, near future, a witch who can cast a Dark spell will be winning school prizes, not sitting in detention. And when the Dark Lord triumphs, you will not be wanting enemies among his friends."

Six years ago, respectable people had denied all association with Voldemort. Now the tide was turning; people like Uncle Macnair were hinting at their affiliation, were openly admiring the Dark Arts. This proved that the war was going well for Voldemort.

"I'm not wanting to have any enemies, Uncle Macnair," Ariadne said quietly.

"Good," he said. "Because you would not be wanting to make trouble for your parents, would you? If my daughters resented you, they might think to take revenge on your parents as well. That would be a pity, given the MacDougals are such an ancient pure-blood family. But whether there's trouble or not that depends on you, lass. Will you be making friends?" He threw a pebble at the old sow and turned to look at Ariadne.

"Are you meaning, Uncle, that I have to agree with everything my cousins say or do?"

"I am indeed."

She raised her eyes to his face. "I believe I'll always be thinking for myself."

His ugly mouth twisted into a snarl. "That attitude, young lady, will cause you and your parents great, great grief when the Dark Lord triumphs."

She knew he was trying to frighten her, but she did not care at all that she was frustrating him. There was a tiny corner of her mind that occasionally felt sorry for Regelinda, but she was not feeling at all sorry for Uncle Macnair. She could not even hold in her mind the reality that he was a Death Eater and that he was threatening her parents. However, *if* the Dark Lord triumphed, thinking was only one luxury that would be forbidden, and his remark seemed to require an answer, so she said, "I'm thinking, Uncle Macnair, that you're absolutely right about that."

A little to her surprise, he accepted this without a murmur. Did he think she had *agreed* with him? Was he completely daft? She tested his credulity with the truthful remark, "I promise I will not start any fights at school."

"Good." And he marched her back into the house in satisfied silence.

"Your daughter and I understand one another," he announced. "She's a sensible lass, really. And her cousins have forgiven her indiscretion."

He accepted a Butterbeer, but he did not mention Voldemort in her parents' hearing. Evidently the Dark side was not yet quite ready to alienate respectable old families like the MacDougals and the Cornfoots, people who would not support Voldemort until they lost the last vestige of hope that he might one day be defeated.

After Uncle Macnair had Disapparated, Ariadne asked her father, "Papa, do you think Death Eaters could come to Kincarden?"

"Anybody *could* come, my dear, for we've no debarring jinxes on our gates. But do not worry, for they *will not* come."

Remembering that Uncle Macnair had already come, that Cousin Severus was invited for later in the summer, and that the Malfoys might descend at any moment, Ariadne could only ask, "Papa, how can you be so sure?"

"Do not take fright, my dear. We're pure-bloods and we've made no trouble for anybody. And here in the Highlands, we're so remote. We're the last people in the world that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named would wish to harm."

She wanted to ask what would happen if any of their old acquaintances joined the Death Eaters, but she did not know how she could phrase the question acceptably.

"Ariadne, it is a point of great wisdom to avoid ever making an enemy," her father repeated. "Our work is to grow food and clothes; not even such misguided people as Death Eaters can object to that. Why would they remember that we exist?"

This only emphasised that it was poor taste to suggest, even without naming names, that anybody with whom they were at all acquainted could ever be so misguided.

* * * * *

"Professor Moonshine is quite good-looking," giggled Wendy.

"If you like the type," conceded Sarah. "But he doesn't know anything."

Their Defence teacher for third year was an apothecary. The Dark Arts against which he warned were all to do with poisons and aphrodisiacs, and his defensive strategies included how to use Polyjuice and Confundiserum and how to detect them in one's enemies. It was clear to Ariadne that Professor Moonshine did not know much even about potions he could not tell the difference between puffballs and amanitas, and he claimed to distinguish Hate Potion from Scintillation Solution by the smell.

Professor Slughorn invited Professor Moonshine to the Slug Club.

"Remember when I was your teacher, Reggie? And look at you now! If ever you tire of the Defence post, consider taking over my position."

Professor Moonshine did not grasp that Professor Slughorn was only flattering him: Slughorn so obviously knew that Moonshine was incompetent.

Third year was the year they began work on their elective subjects. Ivor Jones calmly said he would ace the Arithmancy class; but Ariadne, deterred by the threat of endless numbers, had not signed up for Arithmancy. Instead, she and Veleta opted for the "endless foreign words" offered by Professor Babbling's Ancient Runes course.

Bathsheba Babbling was an ancient, silver-haired witch who walked with a painful limp, squinted nervously over misty spectacles and spoke in a frail, reedy voice. But once she began speaking, it was clear that she knew everything about the Runes, everything that had ever been written in the Runic alphabet, and everything about the culture from which the Runes sprang.

"Rowena's mantle, she's a genius!" breathed Veleta.

Ariadne stopped wondering how Professor Babbling would discipline a class; it was clear that the only students who ever attended her lessons were utterly devoted to learning the subject. Ariadne and Veleta arrived at their second Ancient Runes lesson knowing the Elder Futhark alphabet perfectly, and they never looked back.

They also wondered whether they would learn anything from Professor Kettleburn, who had lost his left leg and right eye to the Magical Creatures that he reared and researched. On their first lesson, he presented them with a huge, eagle-headed, horse-haunched creature, and they wondered if they would be lucky enough to lose *only* an eye and a leg.

"Who will be the first to bow to the hippogriff?" Professor Kettleburn challenged.

Ariadne wondered if she should, wondered if making her way to the front of the class would be really brave or just daft. While she was weighing it up, Wendy marched out into the paddock and bowed down low. The monstrous hippogriff bowed back, and Wendy stroked its feathers.

"Magnificent beast!" she said, in much the way she had admired Sarah's denim trouser. "Ooh, Professor, does it let humans ride on it?"

"I'd lose my job if parents heard I'd let students do that," said Professor Kettleburn grimly. "But twenty points to Gryffindor, Miss McKinnon, for trusting that creatures do behave according to their nature."

Ariadne's parents had written wistfully that it would be "so nice if one member of the family had a first-rate academic record," so she had dutifully signed up for a third elective the optional tenth O.W.L. that distinguished Hogwarts' best students. She did not know if she were suited to Divination, but she knew her parents would not thank her for taking Muggle Studies (which they deemed irrelevant) or for failing (which would be inevitable if she took Arithmancy).

"Granny is a good teacher," Veleta tried to reassure her. "She says you don't have to be a Seer to pass the O.W.L.; you only need to understand the principles of Seeing."

The first glimpse of Professor Vablatsky was reassuring. She was a large, solid woman, swathed in bright orange and purple scarves, and she had Veleta's large brown eyes and enticing smile she was almost too real. She broke the ice by inviting all the students to look into the crystal ball and describe whatever they saw there.

Richard said he saw Gryffindor beating Slytherin at Quidditch.

Sarah said she saw herself becoming Queen.

Joe said he saw shepherd's pie for dinner.

Ariadne saw a grey swirling mist.

Veleta said she saw a Death Eater raid on Gringotts, but the Aurors were arriving in time, and a man who looked like Lucius Malfoy was Disapparating before they could catch him, even though no one really looked like anyone because of course they were wearing masks, and...

Professor Vablatsky stepped up behind Veleta, steered her away from the crystal ball and said, "Hush! That's not the kind of Seeing we do here."

Veleta jerked her head away and looked embarrassed. Her grandmother began to explain how rare it was to find anyone who could truly See anything in the crystal.

"Do not pretend, children," she said. "The world is full of charlatans many of them Muggles who only pretend they can See the future. Naïve people pay good money for their imaginary predictions. It is better to understand an Art that you cannot perform than to pretend to perform an Art that you cannot understand."

She went on to explain the Five Principles of Crystal Ball Gazing, and Ariadne began to feel she had a useful page of notes after all.

"Let me demonstrate," finished Professor Vablatsky. "I will Foresee your futures, beginning with Gryffindor." She stared at the crystal ball, and announced, "I see hands! Two hands, a left and a right. They are clasped together, two halves of one whole. They unclasp and there is blood! The little fingers have crumbled to dust... There is a deep gash down the left middle finger... The right ring finger rips open and bleeds... The right thumb is chopped off... But the right index wears a crown... Blood pours out of every tear... The left index breaks off and is smashed to a pulp... The stump drips with blood..."

All the good work of the afternoon was undone. Wendy burst into tears, and Sarah angrily announced that it was all a fraud.

"It isn't a fraud," said Professor Vablatsky, "but after that gory vision, perhaps the other Houses have lost curiosity about their own futures? You may leave... all except Miss MacDougal."

"I'll wait for you at the bottom of the ladder," whispered Veleta. "Don't worry, Granny won't tell you anything scary."

Not much reassured, Ariadne waited quietly to be alone with the prophetess. Professor Vablatsky sat down in Veleta's chair, a safe distance from the crystal ball.

"Miss MacDougal," she said, "I am interested by the fact that you told the truth this afternoon. When the crystal revealed nothing to you, you made no attempt to invent a prediction."

"I'm not thinking I could be a Seer, Professor."

"Give me your hand." Ariadne held it out unwillingly, and Professor Vablatsky ran her index finger down the creases. "Ah, I see. No, you cannot be a Seer. But you do have a gift, don't you?"

"Have I, Professor?"

"Certainly. Of all the students in this class, you would be the one most capable of becoming *afraudulent* fortune-teller. Because you can read people, can't you? Veleta only hinted at this, but I understand now what she meant. You always know who is telling the truth, don't you?"

"I do. But it's not much good to me, Professor. Even when people are lying, I cannot tell them so to their faces, can I? My friends will always require me to act trustingly towards people whom I know are not trustworthy."

Professor Vablatsky was indignant. "And will you allow those friends to dictate your life? Think again, Miss MacDougal. Your gift is a real one. I don't say it's a magical talent, for I've known Muggles who can do the same. But most people, magical or Muggle, don't have a clue about the people in front of their faces. They simply *don't know* who will fool them next. If you can discern other people's fraud or their malice, or their fear, or their anger any emotion or attitude then you are seeing more than most."

Ariadne did not know what to say.

"Miss MacDougal, I'm telling you to trust your own judgment. Trust it even if you can't justify it logically. And don't worry about people who don't believe you. You can See people as clearly as I can See the future or my granddaughter can See never mind."

"It's all right, Professor. I'm already knowing about Veleta."

"Yes, I suppose you would work it out. Anyway, that's all I'm saying. You have a gift, and it isn't Divination."

Resigned under a Crescent Moon

Chapter 12 of 21

Remus's final year at Hogwarts is characterised by exam-taking, pranks, job applications, war casualties and murder.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Resigned under a Crescent Moon

Friday 4 July 1975 Wednesday 20 July 1977

Hogwarts, the Grampians; Old Basford, Nottingham; Ecclesall, Sheffield; Corporation Street, Birmingham.

Rated PG-13 for graphic violence.

On the last day of term, Remus Lupin knocked on the door of Professor Dumbledore's office and handed in his prefect's badge.

"Remus," said Dumbledore in surprise, "I know you've had a shock lately but what makes you think you shouldn't be a prefect?"

Remus knew at once that he couldn't tell Dumbledore the whole story. He couldn't explain that his friends were Animagi, or that they had been letting him out of the Shrieking Shack, or that he had encouraged them. He couldn't talk about the way they had planned their excursions, had run miles out of bounds, had created that fascinating map. If he started to talk, he wouldn't stop, and he would end up betraying all of them. If he opened his mouth, Dumbledore would know his utter unworthiness, would be disappointed and hurt that he had ever made Remus a prefect.

Nevertheless, he *couldn't* keep the badge.

He laid it quietly on Dumbledore's desk.

"Remus," said Dumbledore gently, "is there anything you'd like to tell me?"

No. Remus tried to keep his face neutral as he shook his head. He definitely, definitely did not want Dumbledore to know the particulars of why he was such an unsuitable prefect. He only wanted Dumbledore to accept that he was unsuitable, to authorise his resignation, perhaps to acknowledge that, by facing up to his faults and acting accordingly, Remus had taken one step in the right direction.

"It's a pity," said Dumbledore. "There was no question in my mind that you would have made a very fine Head Boy."

"No!" It had never crossed Remus's mind that Dumbledore was considering that; he had taken it for granted that Benjy Fenwick or Gaspard Shingleton would be Head Boy, and had hoped against hope that it wouldn't be Evan Rosier. "Sir, please no, I would be a terrible Head Boy! I would be the worst Head Boy Hogwarts ever had!"

"Calm down, Remus. I will accept your resignation. But I think we'll leave the prefecture open for next term, just in case you ever change your mind."

"I won't change my mind, Professor. I'm I suppose I'm just not suited to leadership."

"It leaves open the question of who *is* suited," Dumbledore mused. He did not need to say out loud that Sirius had demonstrated that he was not quite ready for the responsibility. "If you don't want the badge back after a reasonable time, Remus, I will find someone else. But I shall be keeping it to myself for the time being."

Lily Evans was disappointed. "Remus, you're very good with the younger students, and they all like you. What's gone wrong? All this talk of being 'unworthy' well, isn't it the people who think they deserve the honour who always turn out to be too swollen-headed to be suitable?"

"But it isn't talk," said Remus. "I'm really not good enough... I mean, I don't see how I can do well in my N.E.W.T.s if I remain prefect."

He found he had stumbled upon the one irrefutable argument. She nodded, unconvinced, but stopped trying to persuade him. "Well, if this means that Dumbledore gives your badge to James Potter, I think I'll be giving mine to Emmeline. Unless you can persuade Potter to stop harassing me to go out with him, I just don't think I can work with him!"

"The fact that I couldn't stop him," said Remus, "ought to tell you how inadequate I am as prefect."

When Remus confessed his resignation to his friends, Sirius was seriously shaken. "Moony," he said, "you've taken it too hard. It was my mistake, not yours."

Remus had nothing to say. But Sirius, who was steadfastly committed to never upsetting him again, did not try to persuade him.

The next full moon fell in the school holidays; when Remus awoke in the garage at Old Basford, knowing that the wolf had been locked away all night, his conscience felt as light and clean as a unicorn's.

* * * * *

Hogwarts felt different during their sixth year. Sirius was more relaxed because he had run away from home and spent the summer camping at the Potters'.

"Didn't your parents order you home?" asked Remus.

"No, they're glad I've gone. My brother says our dear mother has burned my name off the family genealogy she has no more record that I ever was her son."

"That's real freedom!" said Peter, whose mother was a notorious fusser.

Remus had learned not to ask about Sirius's indifference to his family. "How will you live?" he asked.

"I'm staying on at the Potters', but I can pay my way because Uncle Alphard gave me some money. Regulus says that Mother nearly died of chagrin and she burned Uncle Alphard off the genealogy too."

"So you're still speaking to your brother," said Peter.

"Only when he's in the mood to tell me what a disgrace I am..." Sirius's voice trailed off and his eyes lit up mischievously. "I don't think Prongs is paying attention any more!"

As usual, James had been distracted by the entry of Lily Evans. She was surrounded by a crowd of girls who were all avidly discussing the latest Voldemort atrocity. Lily took no notice of the boys, although two of her friends waved at Sirius. Sirius was still staring at James, who was yet again marching forward to bar Lily's way until she spoke to him.

Another boy was quicker. Severus Snape thrust himself in front of the girls and said, "Lily, can you lend me a quill?"

She pulled one out of her bag without looking at him. "Keep it. Mary, I know you think the Crabbes are stupid, but even stupid people..."

Snape tried again. "Lily, will you ?"

James cut over him, shouting loudly enough to silence the chattering girls. "Evans, will you go out with me?"

Lily, still surrounded by the girls, pushed her way through the courtyard without addressing either of her devoted suitors. Remus didn't hear what Emmeline said to her, but everyone heard Lily's answer.

"Snape and I are no longer friends. Let's go indoors."

She said nothing at all about James.

That was how it remained all through the autumn. James and Snape both tried to speak to Lily nearly every day, and she ignored both of them. Snape eventually gave up; but James kept trying throughout the year. Meanwhile, Sirius heard nothing at all from his parents and didn't seem to care.

Although Peter grumbled a little, the four friends did not miss their moonlit capers as much as they had feared. The workload for the N.E.W.T.*shad* to be taken seriously, even by students as bright as James and Sirius. Remus, having opted to keep Ancient Runes as a sixth subject, felt obliged to score Outstanding in it; and if he had any free time after an evening's homework, it was usually devoted to tutoring Peter. Peter had ignored all McGonagall's advice and enrolled himself in a hefty five-subject N.E.W.T. course, and Remus didn't know how he would handle the stress.

One night Remus awoke feeling that the dormitory was unnaturally quiet. Gentle snores from the next bed told him that Peter was still indoors, but a glance out of the window showed him the distinct outline of a stag and a dog running over the Quidditch pitch. He was glad they had not invited him. A stag and a dog couldn't do much harm, but his friends were still breaking the law, to say nothing of the school curfew; and, not being an Animagus himself, he wouldn't have been able to join whatever game they were playing.

Peter was hurt. He cornered James and Sirius the next morning, and protested: "You could have taken me too!"

"Sorry, Wormtail," said James, "but we're growing rather large for the invisibility cloak to shelter three of us."

"You could have taken me Transformed, in your pocket."

"Sorry, Wormtail," repeated Sirius, "but I've had enough of getting my friends into trouble through my high jinks. I'm not going to lead you astray any more." He spoke with a finality that told both Peter and Remus that some life events were strictly Potter-and-Black only. The relationship between James and Sirius had always been the closest in the quartet, and this was never going to change.

* * * * *

The following summer, Dumbledore wrote to Remus, again asking if he'd like his badge back.

If you will agree to be prefect again, I will not press you to accept the Head Boyship. While Mr Shingleton has indicated that he does not want the post

either, I believe that others are capable of performing very adequately.

That was Dumbledore's way of reassuring him that the Slytherin prefect, Evan Rosier, was not in the running for the job; Remus need not fear that, by refusing the Head Boyship himself, he had imposed a Death-Eater-in-training on Hogwarts. Remus cracked a smile at the thought of Gaspard Shingleton mad-professor-Shingleton, who was quite brilliant, quite virtuous and quite out of touch with reality trying to chair prefects' meetings and keep the school bullies in order. But Benjy Fenwick really was a much brighter and braver person than most people ever noticed; he was ideal Head Boy material. Remus briefly imagined himself as one of Fenwick's team of prefects, how productively they might all work together, how rewarding it would be to see Hogwarts run properly even while Death Eaters' children were swarming in their midst. Nevertheless, within minutes he had sent the owl back to school.

Dear Professor Dumbledore,

Thank you for your trust in me and thank you for giving me yet another chance. I hope that this time next year you will look at both my general conduct and my exam results and be glad you took the gamble of admitting a werewolf to Hogwarts. I have been luckier than I deserve.

However, even with Fenwick as Head Boy, I don't think I could return to being prefect. For one thing, I'd like to put more time into my studies in my final year.

He was proud of that line.

More importantly, I don't think I have the right temperament to be a leader.

I hope you will find someone else who does have leadership talents and give that person the opportunity to be a much better prefect than I ever was.

Sincerely,

Remus Lupin.

Remus knew, of course, who "someone else" would be. But he was still surprised when James appeared in his fireplace two days later, triumphantly crowing, "Guess what, Remus! I'm Head Boy!"

Remus congratulated his friend, then listened to the more serious questions about whether Lily Evans would *finally* notice him. Then came the news that Sirius's Uncle Alphard had died.

"The old boy bequeathed him a pile of gold. So Sirius has moved out of Chadlington and he's gone and bought himself a mansion in Daventry."

Once their seventh year at Hogwarts began, what with studying for N.E.W.T.s, exchanging news about Voldemort's latest murders and planning adventures for when they would visit Daventry, there was no time to worry about who was wearing which badge.

* * * * *

The issue of girls was also becoming very serious. James, having stopped feeling clever for cavorting with a werewolf every month, was now approaching all his friends more humbly. The effect on Lily Evans was electric. She grudgingly admitted at the first prefects' meeting that James had improved. By the end of the month, she seemed to be enjoying working with him (which she had to do, because she was Head Girl). By Christmas she had agreed to be his girlfriend.

"And by Easter they'll be married," said Sirius, who had a different girlfriend every six weeks.

Remus was stupefied by the way girls flocked around Sirius. He never had to try; half the girls in the school wanted to go out with him. Lucretia Malfoy hung around the Quidditch pitch, pretending she was interested in the sport and hoping to catch his eye after play.

Sirius confronted her about it: "What makes you think you're my type, Miss Malfoy?"

Mortified, Lucretia tossed her head and said, "Just because my brother liked your cousin, you needn't think that ~~you~~ have a chance with the Malfoy fortunes! I'm here to watch the game!"

But she never came to watch again.

Sirius spent nearly two months glued to the side of Remus's sister, Emily, "Which is almost commitment for Sirius," said Peter. The affair came to a messy end when Emily said she "wanted someone steadier". Sirius complained that he didn't want to be steady and that girls ought to accept him the way he was, and melodramatically announced that Emily had broken his heart.

The next day Remus was able to assure Emily that Sirius's heart was on the mend; he had spotted his friend with his arm around Greta Catchlove. A month later, Sirius announced to Greta that They Were Through, but Greta laughed and didn't believe him. Sirius went through agonies trying to make Greta accept that he had chucked her. When a week of snubbing and ignoring and running away only led to tearful requests from Greta that Sirius would take her back, Sirius was nearly in tears himself.

"Sticky fingers, sticky lips: how do you shake off people who are that sticky?"

"Try a public humiliation," joked Peter.

So Sirius walked up to Emmeline Vance in full view of the entire Gryffindor common room and asked her to go out with him. Greta burst into hysterical tears, and Emmeline

very publicly announced that she didn't think Sirius was her type, "Which was all very humiliating for *me*, in its way," said Sirius.

Peter went through agonies because none of the girls seemed to like him. Then he went through more agonies because a Hufflepuff fifth-year *did* take a fancy to him, and he had no idea how to behave in front of her.

Remus buried himself in his reading, half glad and half envious that the girlfriend issue was one that would never plague his own life. For werewolves, of course, *just didn't*.

Most serious of all was the issue of Lord Voldemort. What had been a mere whisper of news undercurrent in their first year was now the main headlines nearly every day in their seventh. The murder of Owen Lamb had seemed an extraordinary tragedy; but by seventh year it was clear that murder was becoming an *ordinary* tragedy, one that could happen to anybody.

"Until You-Know-Who has gone," said James, "I'm not going to do anything with my life except work to get rid of him."

That was easy for James to say; the Potters were independently wealthy, and Being Useful to Society was James's only possible motivation for working. The only job that James ever considered was to work for Dumbledore, without pay, in the Order of the Phoenix; he sent off no other applications at all.

* * * * *

James and Sirius sailed through their N.E.W.T.s. They knew every charm, every herb, every star. Remus had to work much harder to achieve the same effect, but when he corked the final potion at the end of his final practical exam, he knew that he had passed everything.

"I'm sure I stirred in the asphodel wrongly!" Peter panicked. "I should have listened to Professor McGonagall what was the point of sitting five subjects if I fail all of them?"

Exam results would not be published until the middle of August, but the last week of term was dominated by job applications, with students frantically, and often untruthfully, writing that they "expected excellent marks in every subject". While James sauntered around the school, tossing his Snitch and attending private conferences with Dumbledore, Remus had to apply for paid work everywhere. Ideally, of course, he wanted to teach, but there were no vacancies at Hogwarts. He pushed to the back of his mind the poignant thought that teaching was the privilege of the elect few, and wrote to every department in the Ministry of Magic. Then he sounded out every Spellcrafter and businesswizard for an apprenticeship.

But it was only two weeks into the summer holidays by the time his every application had returned to him blank. No Ministry Department wanted to wait for the exam results; they all regretted that "there were no vacancies at present", even though most departments were in fact actively recruiting among school-leavers. The Ministry accepted Benjy Fenwick and Evan Rosier, whose N.E.W.T. results turned out to be, as expected, nowhere near as good as Remus's; but the bottom line was that the Ministry of Magic did not employ a person who was listed on the Werewolf Registry. Remus's weak Potions skills precluded his becoming a Healer. He knew he was not suited to business or banking, so he was not surprised when his applications there were ignored.

"I would have thought you were highly suited to research, Moony," said Sirius.

But, as the Spellcrafters bitterly complained, there was no funding for research in the dark days dominated by Him-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. The only student in Remus's year who found a job in that field was Gaspard Shingleton.

"So you really only have two options left," said James. "Screwing lids on bottles in the Butterbeer factory. Or joining the Order of the Phoenix."

* * * * *

"You are *not* intruding, Remus," James repeated wearily. "Dumbledore *told* me to bring you to the meeting. He told me to bring all my friends."

James took him to a Regency-style house in Sheffield. "The Plumpton place," he said.

"What, Roderick Plumpton the Quidditch player?"

"It belongs to his brother. The Order is using it for some meetings because Emmeline Vance is his granddaughter."

Emmeline opened the door and led them to the meeting in the drawing room. Dumbledore seemed to be expecting them; he welcomed Remus into the Order of the Phoenix and asked if he would like to take over the paperwork of keeping their records and rosters in order.

Remus replied that he would be glad to do anything to help.

"Good. The salary will be twenty-five Galleons a week."

Remus tried not to feel patronised he hadn't realised it would be *paid* position. James, Lily and Sirius, who worked for the Order as long and hard as he did, were not being paid at all. Even Peter, who had taken a clerical position at St Mungo's, Emmeline Vance, who had found a printing and publishing apprenticeship with Obscure Books, and the indefatigable Benjy Fenwick were pouring all their spare time into the work of the Order for no pay.

The paperwork only took about twenty hours a week, so Remus had no time to feel that his share of the work was too comfortable. Within a week, a colleague named Gideon Prewett was Flooing into Remus's house, saying they had to go to Birmingham at once.

"Dumbledore had the tip-off that Mulciber is planning a Muggle-baiting attack there," Gideon explained. "He specialises in Imperius, so there's no limit to the horrors we might find. Are you sure you want to come?"

Remus flung the Floo powder in the hearth and ordered, "The Crown, Corporation Street!"

When they stepped out of the public Floo in The Crown a drinking house patronised by both wizards and Muggles hysterical screams pierced their ears. Gideon stopped, frozen.

"We're too late," he said quietly. "They're already here. That's Brandon Mulciber; I've known him all my life."

A large man was sprawled lazily over the bar, a tankard of tomato juice? a tankard near his left hand. His right fingers were loosely playing with a smooth stick, an object that no Muggle would think of associating with a magic wand and no wizard would associate with anything else. In front of Mulciber, a pale-faced man was holding the screaming man to the ground, while a vacant-eyed man stropped a razor down this man's arm.

A few customers were also screaming, and one woman tried to run towards the scene of the violence, but she tripped over some invisible barrier when she was about an arm's reach from the crime. Most of the customers, however, were not doing anything; they were just sitting, vacant-eyed, as if it weren't happening.

"*Imperio*," said Mulciber, pointing his wand at the woman. "Hold the Mudblood down. Lestoat, let her take your place, while you break his wand."

He gulped at his scarlet drink, while the woman, zombie-like, pressed her hands down on the victim's shoulders. She wasn't as strong as the man she was trying to hold, but when Mulciber sternly ordered, "Keep holding!" she forced her weight down, and the victim presumably a Muggle-born wizard struggled in vain.

The man with the razor kept mindlessly scratching while blood poured into the floor, and the pale man named Lestoat stood up and reached for the victim's wand. Remus knew he had heard the name Lestoat before... but where?

Crack. The wand snapped. Lestoat walked over to another customer and said, "Mulciber, I know this one's just a Muggle but can I have him?"

He had an American accent. Was Lestoat a famous writer? Suddenly Remus remembered the title of his autobiography. "I'll go first as he doesn't know me," he said. Gideon, with his flaming hair, was as recognisable as Remus was overlookable.

Remus raised his wand, moved to the doorway of the bar just out of sight of the Death Eaters and threw a Stunner at Mulciber. Mulciber toppled, unconscious, which immediately broke his Imperius spell. As Lestoat whipped his head around, the woman sprang to her feet, and the man with the razor who had also been acting under Imperius stared at his weapon in horror.

Before Lestoat could work out the direction from which the attack on Mulciber had originated, Gideon had Stunned him. He sprinted towards the bar, throwing *Finite Incantatem* spells around the bar as he went, while the bleeding wizard's screams dropped to groans.

Remus checked swiftly for more Death Eaters, but no one else was making any attempt to attack Gideon or himself, so he had time to scan the bar and snatch up a long-legged stool. The moment he had it in his hand, he plunged one of the legs through the unconscious Lestoat's chest. Then he turned his attention to the man with the razor, who was in tears.

"I suppose we'd better take all of them to St Mungo's," he said.

Gideon, having staunched some of the victim's bleeding with a *Pulpa* charm and thrown a *Petrificus Totalus* at Mulciber for good measure, nodded.

With the help of a few persuasion charms, the two wizards herded the Muggles back into the Floo and levitated the body-bound Death Eaters after them. It was a tricky operation, but finally they were all standing in the foyer of St Mungo's, and the Aurors were on their way.

"We were lucky," said Gideon. "I was certain the American was his name Stoat? I took it for granted he would throw a curse at you the second he saw Mulciber down. I don't know how I had time to Stun him."

"Lestoat couldn't have cursed you," said Remus, "because he wasn't a wizard. He wasn't even human."

"Lestoat?" Gideon tried out the name. "Not *Amarillo* Lestoat? The vampire?"

Remus nodded. "I don't know what he was doing in Mulciber's pay, but we shouldn't be too surprised to learn that Voldemort uses Dark creatures."

He reflected for a moment on the fact that he had destroyed the creature a creature who, like himself, had begun as human until he had received a bite. But Lestoat had a long record of deliberate vampire-making as well as murder; and, technically, Remus's oak stake hadn't killed him because Lestoat had been already dead.

It was just luck that Remus happened to have read that very boring book, *A Vampire's Monologue*, and that the pub furniture was built mainly from oak. He wouldn't always be so lucky in knowing his enemy.

It looked like being a long and violent war.

Double Deceit

Chapter 13 of 21

In Ariadne's third year at Hogwarts the war intensifies and the losses become personal.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Double Deceit

Thursday 6 September 1979 Saturday 7 June 1980

Hogwarts, the Grampians; Kincarden, Inverness-shire.

Rated PG for tragedy.

Children at Hogwarts were supposed to be happily passing exams without worrying about the outside world.

"That just shows what they know about children," said Kingsley Shacklebolt.

Sometimes You-Know-Who seemed a long way off. When Richard Campion was appointed to the Gryffindor Quidditch team, or Professor Moonshine taught them the Jelly-Legs Curse, or Sarah spent a whole month's pocket money on an adult-sized trouser for Wendy to owl home to her sister Marlene Ariadne understood why everybody claimed that youth was the happiest time of life.

When Professor Slughorn conceded yet again, "There is nothing wrong with Miss MacDougal's potion," she could daydream of becoming a great apothecary of discovering the cure for some life-shattering illness, or of inventing some brew that solved some age-old magical problem, or of using Herbology to end world famine.

Then the *Daily Prophet* would report the murders of the week, and she would remember that no solution to the World's Great Problems would seriously make the world a better place unless Lord Voldemort and his loathsome Death Eaters were defeated.

Fortunately for the third-years, Professor Vablatsky never again saw in front of them anything as horrible as her vision of mutilated hands. She did make small prophecies that came true. The lost Quaffle would be brought back to school by a centaur; Professor Sprout would receive a surprise gift from a fellow-Herbologist in Brazil; Professor Moonshine would lose a cauldron through his own carelessness on Thursday; a house-elf would break a leg and not bother reporting it to Madam Pomfrey (so one of them must volunteer); there would be a purple sunset on the twenty-seventh that Professor Pavo had never predicted.

Professor Vablatsky even told them that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named would lose his powers within two years, which they all desperately hoped was true.

"First there will be sadness," she warned. "The year's end will be like its beginning."

They did not understand this cryptic message. In retrospect, it was astonishing that none of them grasped it. For Wendy McKinnon – silly, giggly Wendy, who was terrified of blood yet had looked a hippogriff in the eye – went home for the weekend after Hallowe'en and never returned to Hogwarts. Her sister Marlene, as a member of the Order of the Phoenix, had openly defied Lord Voldemort, and their entire family was murdered in a Death Eater strike.

* * * * *

"The Death Eaters can't enter Hogwarts," Professor Dumbledore assured the terrified students. "The safety barriers around the school are too strong, and Professor Moonshine has been working on installing extra repellent-jinxes."

After losing two classmates to Voldemort, none of the survivors accepted the grown-up mantra that "children shouldn't worry about adult problems". You-Know-Who was everybody's problem, and they grouped themselves around Richard's Wireless every evening for the nine o'clock news. No matter how frightening the news became, it was more disconcerting still to be left ignorant.

As the Hogwarts Express arrived in King's Cross Station for the Christmas holidays, Ariadne said, "Sarah, *bēcareful*."

"I'm always careful," said Sarah carelessly.

"You're a Muggle-born," said Hestia, "like David Berriman."

"Wendy was a pure-blood," said Sarah. "It seems to me we should*all* be careful."

"Wendy's family was very outspoken in defying You-Know-Who," Veleta tried to explain. "But Muggle-borns don't need *tāo* anything to annoy him. People like you annoy him just by existing."

"You're a special target, Sarah," Ariadne repeated. "Promise us you'll be careful."

"All right. Promise. Have good holidays!"

Yet nothing prepared Ariadne for what awaited her in the spring term. Her brother brought her back to Hogwarts on the Knight Bus. She flew up to the Gryffindor common room, and there came face to face with Sarah, perched on a table, swinging her long legs and sporting a faint and highly unseasonable tan.

"*Hola, amiga!*" She threw out her arms for a hug, and breezily announced, "I've spent the whole holiday in Valencia. My parents are so terrified of Moldy-Voldy that they won't ever again let me remain in Britain when I'm not at Hogwarts."

Ariadne breathed a huge sigh of relief – Sarah's family could afford to take her to the Continent for every single school holiday – and they climbed the stairs and threw open the dormitory door.

There were only three beds. And Hestia was sobbing on one of them.

It was Veleta Vablatsky who never returned to school. It was not clear why, since she had been a respectable half-blood whose family had never made any kind of anti-Death Eater stance. But the Dark Mark had appeared above the wreck of her house, and her whole family was wiped out.

Too shocked to weep, Ariadne climbed straight up to Professor Vablatsky's tower. She found the Divination teacher swishing around her classroom, charming incense into jars, candles into boxes, teacups into crates, pulling star charts and silk scarves off walls, Transfiguring bookcases into trunks. Her movements were brisk and angry, the kind of anger people only feel when they are afraid to be sad.

"Professor, I've come to say how sorry I am." Ariadne's own throat was tied up with coarse strings, but she had to force the words out. "It's – it's such a devastating thing to happen."

"The Ministry should have listened!" Professor Vablatsky snapped. "*Itold* them and *told* them that if they let blood-prejudice affect even *one* Ministry decision, it would affect the next and the next. I warned that if they listened to Tom Riddle for *one* year, they would never be rid of him, and that he'd be invincible within seven! But did they listen? No, Divination is only relevant when they want to know whom they'll marry and how they can find easy money. When it's something that actually matters – such as who will live and how many will die – suddenly you can't trust the Seers; we're all a pack of charlatans!"

Ariadne had no idea who this Tom Riddle was, but she caught the general drift. "Infuriating!" she agreed. "Villainously thick-headed!"

"You-Know-Who will be with us for nearly two more years," said Professor Vablatsky. "But I don't know if Britain can survive another two years of untrammelled slaughter. Perhaps he'll only fall after he's taken the whole country down with him." She threw six packs of Tarot cards into a trunk. "The Dark Lord already has plans for the whole of Europe, you know. Why else did he persuade the Muggles into this Common Market lark? Only to make conquest and carnage easier for himself! I think it'll take him less than eighteen months to begin the inroads into France and Germany."

"The whole world?" asked Ariadne. "Will he take over the whole world, Professor?"

"No." Professor Vablatsky barked out a short, mirthless laugh. "That's one thing on which the stars were quite definite – and the crystal and the cards too. You-Know-Who will never control as far as Australasia. It will always be safe in the Antipodes." She slammed her last trunk shut; her classroom was now alarmingly bare.

"Professor, what will we study this term if we will not be needing any equipment?"

"Apollo knows! It isn't my problem any more. I resigned my post at Hogwarts this morning."

Ariadne stared blankly.

"Didn't I make myself clear enough, Miss MacDougal? I shall be emigrating to New Zealand tomorrow! And as to who will teach you from now on... do you think school still matters, when we have Death all around us? Child, this is a hard blow for you, so I'm asking you frankly: did you come here this evening to comfort me, or yourself?"

Ariadne thought this an unfair question. "Both, Professor."

"Then I'll be honest too. Safety isn't the only reason I'm going to New Zealand; my youngest son is already living there. And that's my advice to you, too. If you want to keep your heart in one piece, you must keep it in more than one place. Find yourself someone else to love."

That sounded like callous advice: where would she find another friend like Veleta?

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Ariadne, Sarah and Hestia sat together numbly, all of them too exhausted to think of loving anybody. There were great gaping spaces in their dormitory, where two of the four-poster beds had been removed. They tried to fill up the spaces with Ariadne's writing desk and spare cauldron, with Sarah's stage-lit dressing table and make-up case, with Hestia's gramophone and records, with the feeding bowls, litters, wicker baskets, cages and perch for Thangalaathil and the cats. Sarah stopped accusing Ariadne of being a goody-goody; Hestia never complained when Sarah left her spare clothes trailing over the floor; Ariadne never mentioned hygiene when Hestia forgot to clean up

after Simba and Bast.

Perhaps they were bonding; it just did not feel like it in that lonely second term of third year.

Professor Dumbledore took only a fortnight to find a new Divination teacher, one Sybill Trelawney, the great-great-granddaughter of a gifted Seer. She mistily promised them, "We shall achieve great things this term, children. We shall penetrate the hidden depths of the orb and draw aside the veil of the future." She then spent their first lesson inventing stories from their astrological charts, and she seemed most offended when Ariadne refused to play the pretend-game.

"Trust your intuition, Miss MacDougal! The secrets are there if you will allow yourself to receive them!"

But the only information that Ariadne intuited was that Professor Trelawney had not one iota of Cassandra Vablatsky's talent. She had no gift and no interest in the theory; she simply liked to guess. She never once asked the class, "If you saw this portent, what would it mean?" She only ever asked, "Which portent can you see?" Since nobody in their class was a true Seer, Ariadne wondered what any of them was learning.

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When Ariadne went home for Easter, there was an addition to the family at Kincarden, for Kenneth and Janet were the proud parents of a three-month-old daughter. Janet, who usually carried the baby around all day, was glad of a break and allowed Ariadne to take her niece all over the farm.

"These are *pigs*, Morag, and these are *hens*. The hens give us *eggs*, except the one with the *crest*, who is a *rooster*." Ariadne knew that Morag was too young to understand a word she said, but she talked to her all day long. "This is the *garden*, and you can *smell* the *peppermint*. But this plant is a *poppy* and this is *heather*. This is an *oak tree* and here is a *larch* and a *pine*..."

She did not know why she bothered with such exotic vocabulary, but soon Morag was smiling whenever Ariadne walked into the room. Without meaning to, Ariadne had after all found somebody else to love.

"Here is the *gate* where we leave the *milk* in its *churns*. The *lorry* will come up the *hill*, and the man who comes to take it away will be a *Muggle*. You can see the *village* on the *horizon* beyond the *loch*..."

"Your pretence that the infant can understand your asinine ramblings really is extremely irritating," broke in a man who had just Apparated to the gate.

"Good morning, Severus. Morag, this is your *Cousin Severus*."

For some reason, Morag chose that moment to begin howling.

"Oh, take her away," snapped Severus. "There's enough going on without being interrupted by squalling brats!"

Ariadne read in his voice, in his movements, in the lines on his face, that her cousin was a man betrayed. An old wound had been traumatically re-opened, and he reeked of a despairing self-loathing. She told him, "Papa is with the sheep, Kenneth is drying silage and Mamma is in the dairy."

"And you, I suppose, are doing nothing at all."

He seemed to want to enter the house, so she led the way. "Are you quite well, Severus? I can brew you a sage infusion."

"I was never so well in my life!" he snapped back at her.

Oddly, this seemed to be the truth. He seemed very vulnerable, frightened in a way that no Death Eater had any business to be frightened; and he had been disappointed in love. The man who distrusted everybody had apparently lost trust even in himself. Nevertheless, he had never seemed less tormented; his moodiness had never felt more honest. She found herself liking him better than she had before.

In the kitchen, Ariadne secured Morag's cradle in a far corner, then brought a jar of sage leaves out of the larder. Severus did not protest, so she began brewing it for him. He glowered at her, as if willing her to find him so unpleasant that she stopped waiting on him. And he kept silent, as if daring her to speak so that he could find something wrong with her words. So of course she kept brewing without saying a word. Morag grizzled over the loss of attention, but Ariadne kept listening to kept smelling the stormy atmosphere that radiated from Severus.

"There's been a change in your life," she said as she finally set the cup in front of him.

"The headache is a change," he snarled, gulping down the liquid. Mildly surprised, he added, "This is brewed correctly."

"Ankarad Murray was my grandmother too."

He gulped without comment.

"You've left the Death Eaters," she said flatly. It must have taken enormous courage to switch allegiance like that; she trembled to think what Voldemort would do to a traitor. And surely it was only a matter of time before Voldemort found out?

"Mind your own business!"

"Dangerous," she said. "Severus, does Professor Dumbledore know ?"

"Shut up." He drained the cup and slapped it back on the table. "The less you know, the less you can tell."

"I will not tell anything to Uncle Macnair." He had never been more receptive to love; but it yet had not crossed his mind that he might find love here, with his own family.

On the third day of Severus's visit, Walden Macnair stepped through the kitchen fireplace. He told Mamma that he had come to call on Severus.

"I'll go and look for him," said Ariadne, knowing that when she found him she had to warn him to vanish. She fled from the kitchen, wondering if Uncle Macnair could see the thundering breach of promise written all over her face. She knew by now that most people did not *see* the cues that were in front of them; but it was so obvious that she was not going to bring Severus back with her; and Dragomira and Regelinda must have already warned their father not to trust her...

Severus had said he would follow the cows because he couldn't stand stupid sheep. But as she raced between the paddocks, Ariadne could see that he had moved beyond the cows. She wished fleetingly that Veleta were here, to tell her exactly where her cousin had gone; but there was no Veleta any more. Ariadne assumed Severus had become bored with animals and had walked as far as the trees that marked the boundaries of their property.

He was ambling under a clump of pines, just outside their boundaries, tearing off handfuls of bark and ripping apart fallen branches. A cone nearly hit her ear before she dodged and he saw her.

"Your fault for not looking," he growled.

She ignored his vandalism of the local ecology. "Severus, Uncle Macnair is here."

His hand stayed in mid-throw.

"Severus, he's asking for you. You had better Disapparate."

"You'd better stop giving orders about what you don't understand," he said. "I'm not running away from Macnair."

They walked back to the house in silence. Ariadne did not understand why Severus did not run into hiding, for one mistake in the interview with Uncle Macnair would certainly cost him his life. But for some reason he was still speaking to the Death Eaters, so evidently he was pretending to them that he was yet one of them.

She was not surprised when Uncle Macnair took no notice of anybody but Severus for the rest of that day. She saw them walking round and round the farm, their heads bowed deep in conversation. She wondered yet again how Mamma and Papa could fail to see that Uncle Macnair had a history of murder etched all over his face.

* * * * *

Uncle Macnair had to visit Hogwarts just before the exams. This was because yet another Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher lost his job. Professor Moonshine's pinnacle of folly was his announcement that he had invented a potion that would neutralise manticore-venom.

"Oh, nonsense, Reggie," said Professor Slughorn. "Even a bezoar would... well, it might work, but I wouldn't want to try the experiment. Your sting-victim would most likely die before you could administer the bezoar."

Two days later, a great crowd of students was gathered outside Hagrid's hut. Pressing their way around the sides, Ariadne, Hestia and Sarah saw a barred cage, looking like something from an old-fashioned zoo and half the size of the hut. It was obvious why nobody was hurrying to the front of the crowd: the seething creature inside was bright red, the size and shape of a lion, but with a head like a gargoyle. Ariadne suddenly felt that the cage was not so large, given the strength and energy of its prisoner, and she wondered who had been so daft as to make this creature angry.

Professor Moonshine and Hagrid were standing on each side of the cage, and Professor Moonshine was advertising his captive like a fairground showman. "Professor Kettleburn doesn't know that Hagrid and I managed to bring this fine specimen onto Hogwarts grounds. Won't he be surprised when he sees how I've tamed it!"

The manticore swished around, lashing its long scorpion-tail through the bars dangerously. The students all jumped back another yard.

"Keep away! I'm breaking out!" the creature screeched.

"No, you are not," said Professor Moonshine. "It*thinks* it can talk, but it has no intelligence to speak of. Anyway, let me introduce my marvellous potion." He brought out a bottle and waved it with a flourish. "Manty, would you like a nice drink?"

"I'm not convinced that that beast lacks intelligence," muttered Kingsley Shacklebolt from behind them. "And/ wouldn't take a drink from Moonshine. Sarah, do stand a little further back!"

The manticore was snarling, but Professor Moonshine ignored it. He Summoned a dish; when the one belonging to Fang flew out of Hagrid's window, he unstopped his bottle and poured out his potion. It stank of raw flesh. The manticore ceased its noise and took a long sniff.

"It tastes of sirloin steak," Professor Moonshine promised. "*Abigo!*"

The dish hopped into the manticore's cage, and the ugly gargoyle-mouth opened. It was only seconds before the manticore had lapped the dish dry.

"Now we wait one minute. Then we should find that its venom is neutralised. All right ready? I'm going to demonstrate."

"So am I!" screeched the manticore, rattling its bars.

"Sir, that is daft!" Ariadne protested, but her soft voice was drowned in a bellow from Hagrid.

"Reggie! Don't annoy poor Manty!"

Professor Moonshine ignored him; he Conjured a turquoise ostrich-feather and used it to tickle the manticore's tail through the bars.

Instantly, the scorpion-tail swung high in the air and smashed itself across Professor Moonshine's arms.

Professor Moonshine yelped and was knocked sideways. A sickly yellow venom was dripping across his robes. The manticore lashed its tail again, but Professor Moonshine, clutching his side in agony, had just enough sense to roll away from it.

Pandemonium broke loose as students screamed for teachers, ran for Madam Pomfrey, shouted the*Novem-novem-novem* emergency incantation, or raced towards the castle. Hagrid strode towards Professor Moonshine, sternly warning everybody not to touch the corpse (but nobody had any such intention).

"Looks as if the potion wasn't completely useless after all," Hagrid said. "He's still breathin'. But that was the wrong way to handle a sensitive creature like a manticore."

To cut a long story short, the mediwizards arrived in time to transport Professor Moonshine to St Mungo's on a levitated stretcher a stretcher that the mediwizards were careful not to touch. Professor Moonshine would be in St Mungo's for several months to come, and he was lucky to be there at all.

Professor Kettleburn was furious that such a dangerous beast had been brought onto Hogwarts premises without his authorisation; there was no safe way to send away a manticore, so this one had to be destroyed.

Uncle Macnair arrived within an hour, carrying axes and chainsaws and an iron Ever-Bashing Boomerang, but although he laid out these weapons before the manticore's cage, he did not use any of them. The students were awed into silence when he simply raised his wand and announced, "*Avada Kedavra!*"

Uncle Macnair had obviously had plenty of practice in casting the Unforgiveable Curse.

Moons under the Order

Chapter 14 of 21

As Remus continues his work for the Order of the Phoenix, the war intensifies and the losses become personal.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Moons under the Order

Wednesday 20 July 1977 Sunday 10 June 1979

Old Basford, Nottingham; Tintagel, Cornwall; Daventry, Northamptonshire; Chadlington, Oxfordshire; the Fens, Lincolnshire; Canterbury, Kent; Ecclesall, Sheffield.

Rated PG for offstage violence and severe distress.

A/N 1. Babel service reporting... A "lilo" is the only brand of air mattress about which anyone in Britain ever talks.

A/N 2. More from your Trans-Atlantic Babel service...**Meccano** was the ultimate construction toy before **Lego** took over the market. See <http://www.meccano-toys.nl/>.

Brandon Mulciber escaped scot-free. Perhaps it was his connections with the Malfoy money and with Rookwood's influence in the Ministry. Perhaps it was the mysterious amnesia suffered by all the traumatised Muggle witnesses, who lost all memory of the events in The Crown before they even left St Mungo's and could not provide any useful information, even under Veritaserum. Perhaps it was the article that appeared in the *Daily Prophet* the next day, suggesting that Gideon Prewett was the real author of a series of lurid horror novels that had recently tumbled off the Obscurus Press and that Prewett's friends considered him an unstable person who was having difficulty separating reality from his own gut-churning fantasies. However it was, the Mulciber case was never brought to trial.

Remus began to understand why the fight against Voldemort was taking so long. Everyone knew what You-Know-Who was supposed to be doing, yet no one of consequence ever caught him doing it. The Death Eaters could cover their tracks, and the Ministry certainly didn't know the whereabouts of Voldemort himself.

For the first year or so after leaving school, Remus and his friends felt noble and heroic in their great fight against world evil, as they rescued Muggles and Muggle-borns, intercepted Death Eater raids, fought giants, and sometimes even gathered enough evidence to arrest a Death Eater after all.

"It was a very happy year," said Lily Evans.

Things began to go wrong after that first year.

Officially Remus still lived with his parents, although he was away on Order business more often than he was home. In the first week of August, he accompanied Frank Longbottom on an assignment to Cornwall.

After three days hard on the job they tracked down five giants in the heart of Tintagel. Remus Apparated back home, only to find himself stumbling over piles of bricks and rubble in the lounge. Half the ceiling had crashed to the floor, the front wall had been razed, and shattered furniture (beds from upstairs as well as armchairs) was flung all over the wreckage.

Before he had pulled himself upright again, he had absorbed that he would find bodies strewn around the ruin. That thought was in his head before he knew that the feet underneath the remains of the front window frame were Celia's. Another step, and he almost squashed a black rook from his father's chess set. His father was not visible; there was only the shattered pile of smashed bed heads and splintered boards and crumbled plaster from the ceiling. Bruno's arm was flung over what might have once been a dining chair, and Emily's fingers were closed around a white bishop, as if she had been playing chess against their father at the moment of the blast.

But he saw his mother quite clearly. She was lying across the entry to the kitchen, her eyes wide open, her mouth on the point of registering a protest.

My mother.

He almost offered his hand to help her up, for she didn't look unconscious. He almost told her, "It's all right, they've gone now," when it hit him. It was not all right. "They" had gone, but it was too late for his mother to protest.

Yet he still found himself kneeling down beside her, wanting to find out if there were anything he could do, even though he knew it was too late, and he should not disturb any aspect of the crime scene before the Aurors arrived.

Of course, they wouldn't arrive unless he sent for them.

Dazed, he shot the emergency signal from his wand. That had given him time to know that he must not touch his mother, or look for his father, or in any way clear the wreckage. He could not bring them back, but he could co-operate with the workings of hollow justice. He knew from the way they were lying all feet pointing towards the centre of the room that there had been only one blast. A single *Avada Kedavra* had killed them all. They would have died instantly before the first brick fell.

And he still did not really understand that they weren't coming back. They had been very energetically present three days ago. Bruno and Celia had squabbled over who owed whom a Galleon and how it should be spent. Emily had been frowning over the Apparition Standards Agency's *Apparition Theory Test*, muttering that she'd never master the Transport Code in time to apply for her licence before school began again. His father had been reading the Quidditch results from the *Daily Prophet*, so that he could barely hear his mother asking him to consider refusing the assignment to Tintagel because it sounded too dangerous.

Obviously his family couldn't have met any real dangers since they had stayed safely at home; he was the one who had walked into danger, and it hadn't hurt him.

The Aurors arrived and sent for the Healers. The Healers instructed the Aurors to withdraw the corpses from the rubble. The Aurors instructed the Healers to transport the five bodies to St Mungo's. But the Healers had nothing to add to Remus's own instinctive assessment that his family had been victims of the Killing Curse. It was the only possible explanation for the instant deaths of five healthy people who bore no marks of assault.

Remus didn't know how he managed to assist the inquest as much as he did; perhaps he was too exhausted from his task in Cornwall to feel any real surprise. After providing the names of his family, he permitted gruelling interviews on possible reasons for the slaughter. His parents were both Muggle-borns. His father had publicly denounced Lord Voldemort at a Ministry committee meeting. His mother had sheltered two Muggle-born orphans. The Death Eaters might know about his activities for the Order of the Phoenix *had they mistaken Bruno for him?* Emily had formed a romantic attachment with the rebellious son of a Death Eater. Bruno had been rather too successful in counter-jinxing the dutiful son of another Death Eater. Celia had written for the school magazine a strongly-worded essay on the need to resist terrorism. In other words, no one knew why the Lupins had been murdered, but it was clear that they were obvious Death Eater targets. And, to Remus, it all seemed like something that was happening to someone else.

Then the Aurors had to interview the Muggle neighbours and wipe from their memories the image of the Dark Mark floating high above the Lupins' mutilated roof. It was only after the Aurors had left, the Healers had left, and the corpses of his family had been removed that Remus realised he didn't know where to sleep tonight. There was a very good chance that the Death Eaters would return as soon as they realised he had survived. And he almost laughed at the irony that the werewolf, the acknowledged enemy of society, was the only member of the family whom they had failed to kill.

At sunset, a post owl arrived, bringing Bruno's O.W.L. results. They would never be needed now.

He went to Sirius's house in Daventry. Sirius was out, but the front door unlocked to Remus's wand. He lay down in the fourth bedroom, at first not understanding why, after three bad nights, he still couldn't sleep. But huge memories were flooding in.

His mother holding and rocking him all afternoon before his first Transformation. A family picnic in Sherwood Forest. Bruno squabbling with Emily, and his father finishing the fight with the *Silencio* Charm. His mother buying yards and yards of lace curtain in the sales, then, at the flick of a wand, altering the pattern from roses to acorns before draping it over the windows. Celia building a snowman. Setting up lilos and sleeping bags on the bedroom floors because they were going to foster the two Muggle-born orphans. Emily buying them candy floss at the Goose Fair. The whole family in tears, two years later, because an aunt in Austria had taken in the orphans. His father reading the *Daily Prophet* over the dinner table, his face grave because most of the news was about Voldemort...

Twelve hours later, when he awoke and realised he must have drifted off to sleep after all, Remus was amazed that he had managed to turn his brain off.

He sat in Sirius's house all day, in too much of a stupor to know what to do with himself. Loud, colourful memories were still charging through his brain. Emily's first flight on a toy broomstick (she had fallen off and bounced). His father pushing Celia in a swing. Himself and Bruno building a tree-house, then lugging up all their Meccano to play with there where the girls couldn't reach it. (They had left it out in the rain overnight, and Bruno's had been ruined, so Remus had bequeathed all of his to his brother.) His mother teaching Celia to play the piano. Bruno letting off helium balloons with messages to Martians attached, and not understanding why the balloons would never travel as far as Mars.

And Remus found himself shaking, unable to boil a kettle without spilling the water, yet still a corner of his mind was asking what on earth was wrong with him...

The mansion in Daventry seemed huge and empty. Sirius remained out, probably on his own assignment for Dumbledore, and James and Lily were on their honeymoon, but the next day Peter came to visit.

He had been expecting to see Sirius and was somewhat embarrassed to find Remus there instead. The bad news had been spread around the Order of the Phoenix, so Peter said, "Sorry to hear about your mum and dad."

After that, the two didn't know what to say to each other.

The next day was the funeral, attended by Remus, his one remaining grandmother, and an uncle from Manchester to whom he hadn't spoken for years. And that was the end of his parents and siblings, simply wiped out of existence.

The Muggle solicitor with whom the Lupins had left their wills announced, unsurprisingly, that Remus had inherited everything. "Everything" meant the wrecked house and its contents. Remus knew that the house had been insured with some Muggle company, and it seemed rather a cheat to claim the money on a house that had been destroyed by magical means, but filling out the forms gave him something to do.

The insurance money was enough to repair the structural damage to the house, but it did not allow for any cosmetic improvements. The brickwork and plaster were replaced, the plumbing system was restored, and the builders cleaned up after themselves; but there was not enough money left over to replace the furniture or personal possessions. It was a case of what had survived: in his parents' room there was an unscathed four-poster bed and a chest full of towels and sheets in perfect condition, but his sisters' room had been so crushed that there was not one toy or hair-ribbon left to remind him of them. Downstairs, the lounge was a gaping empty hole, but the kitchen was restored to functional with the shell of a stove-range (no cauldrons) and a new sink.

Once the restoration was complete, Remus knew he didn't want to live in the house. But he could not lease it out. The kitchen was very obviously a wizarding kitchen, and there was no gas, electricity or aerial, or anything else that Muggles liked, so he certainly could not lease the house to Muggles without spending more money, which he didn't have. And the magical community in Nottingham consisted of fewer than a hundred people, all of whom had perfectly adequate houses of their own; none of them would consider renting a half-repaired house that was no longer even connected to the Floo network. So the house stood empty.

With work, friendship and the ever-menacing wolf to distract him, there was not much time to dwell on grief. But sometimes he awoke in the night and remembered that now he was alone always alone.

* * * * *

For a time he lived with his grandmother, but her life was declining, in the ordinary Muggle way, of cancer.

"Why do you live among wizards when they kill innocent families?" she would ask. "Why don't you leave them alone and find yourself a nice job in the civil service?"

"Only a few wizards are like Lord Voldemort, Grandma. It's people like my friends who protect people like you from people like him."

"But they didn't manage to save your parents."

"We weren't quick enough that time. It happened while I was away from home, saving a whole village."

"Who is this Voldy person?"

"He's a wizard who went bad, Grandma. We have to fight him, the same way you fought Hitler in the Muggle war."

She accepted this; she accepted, too, that he spent more time out on assignment than actually living in her house. For much of the time when he was home, he was accompanying his grandmother back and forth to Muggle hospitals and Muggle Healers.

"Why don't you bring her in to St Mungo's?" asked Peter. "They can cure Muggle illnesses in minutes, and then they charm the memory so that the Muggle thinks it was a natural recession."

But the Healers said there was no point in Healing Mrs Lupin. "She's nearly eighty, which is old for a Muggle, and the cancer is too far advanced. The blast from the Healing Spell would kill her on the spot. Why didn't you bring her in two years ago?"

He didn't know. His parents had assured him that her illness was not yet serious; it seemed they had been too worried about Voldemort to notice that his grandmother was deteriorating.

"I didn't like to complain," she confirmed. "After all, I've had a good life, and everyone has to go sometime."

A good life? he wondered. A childhood of poverty, followed by two world wars, then losing her parents to the Blitz, her son to the magical world (and ultimately to Voldemort), one daughter to Canada, the other to a car accident, and her husband to heart attack?

"But I still have you, Remus," she said placidly, "and a large number of friends. There is always someone else to love."

His grandmother also died without leaving a trace. The sale of her property was barely enough to cover her debts; her books and records and photographs were shipped off to the aunt in Canada; and her pot plants died from neglect.

* * * * *

Remus became busy again. There was no time for self-pity, for death was striking everyone's family. Over the next two and a half years, James and Lily Potter lost all four of their parents; Voldemort paid a personal visit to Edgar and Iphigenia Bones; both septs of the McKinnon clan were slaughtered; Peter Pettigrew's father died in an accident concerning the Loch Ness kelpie; Caradoc Dearborn disappeared without a trace; Sirius's graceless younger brother was murdered by an anonymous Dark wizard; the Prewett brothers fought a valiant last stand against five Death Eaters at once; the Bones grandchildren were wiped out alongside their parents; Benjy Fenwick was blasted to bits; and Dorcas Meadowes was personally slain by Voldemort himself.

Remus kept files on every murder, every Order intervention and every Death Eater arrest. Month by month, the Aurors clocked up the tally of Death Eaters who had been removed from society; but month by month, new recruits were lured or pressured into the Dark Lord's service.

Month by month, Remus had James or Sirius lock him up at the full moon (Peter was unable to help because he still lived with his mother) and kept the tally of his own life as he survived from one month to the next.

One sunrise, Remus suddenly came to his senses to find a stag nuzzling against him. He was about to topple onto the Potters' back lawn in Chadlington.

"Prongs?"

The stag obligingly transformed back to James.

"Prongs, what happened? Why am I out of the shed? Where did the wolf go last night?"

"Nowhere," James began, but at that moment Peter loomed up out of nowhere.

"Remus, you gave me a fright!" he gasped, ignoring James's furious frown. "You would have bitten me if I'd not become Wormtail in time."

Remus waited, and James tried again.

"You were locked up in my shed all night," James repeated. "I just mistook the time. I opened the shed a few seconds too early, and the wolf raced out. So I transformed and held you down until you were human again."

Remus stared from one to the other, speechless.

"Sorry, Remus," said James. "It was literally a matter of thirty seconds. Next month I'll leave you a wider margin."

"But I could have hurt Peter!"

"You could not have," said Peter, who had recovered. "I can transform faster than the wolf can pounce. You just gave me a fright at first."

"Let's have breakfast," said James. "If Moony wants to argue, we can at least do it over a full stomach."

Sirius was in the kitchen boiling eggs while Lily buttered toast. Peter, having regained his bounce, gave a spirited account of the morning's miscalculation. Remus sat quietly, nurturing a mug of tea and not finding the narrow escape at all humorous.

"I wish James would miscalculate moonset sometime when Lucius Malfoy is around," said Sirius.

"Sirius, that's horrible!" exclaimed Lily.

"Lucius Malfoy is horrible!" retorted Sirius. "We all know he's a Death Eater, but he's as slippery as Salazar the hard evidence keeps on eluding us. If we staged a nice simple accident, a mauling by some anonymous wild beast well, if you ask me, we'd be saving a lot of lives without breaking any hearts."

Remus gulped at his tea, trying to push this horrifying idea from his mind.

"Moony," interrupted James quickly, "can't you work out yet when Sirius is joking?"

The problem was, when Sirius spoke with that deadpan straight face, it was difficult to catch the flaw in his logic; to kill Lucius Malfoy really did look like a favour to the rest of the world. Remus found himself thinking: *What if they did set me onto someone?* He shook himself. They wouldn't. They had all learned something since they were in sixth year.

But the thought kept creeping in: *What if I deliberately loosed myself on someone?* All he had to do was convince James he was staying with Sirius and vice versa. Then he could Apparate to wherever he knew Death Eaters to be congregating and and who knew how many of them he could kill or maim before one of them thought to shoot out a Killing Curse? Perhaps he would even destroy Voldemort himself.

For a terrifying minute, it didn't seem senseless, but noble and heroic, to sacrifice his life in bringing down the Dark forces.

And perhaps, he sternly reminded himself, I wouldn't kill any at all. Perhaps I would only manage to bite them and create a pack of Death-Eater werewolves, people with enough malice and cunning to create within a year enough werewolf-descendants to enslave or destroy the whole of Britain.

"Remus, are you listening?" Peter's voice was breaking into his dark thoughts.

"Sorry. Daydreaming there. Tired after a long night."

"Sirius was saying that you're seeming not to like your house in Nottingham."

"No, I don't. It's too rundown for comfort."

"You spent last week camping with the Longbottoms, several days before that with Sturgis Podmore, and the previous weekend with the Fenwick family," said James.

Remus shrugged. "They invited me."

"Remus, we don't have a problem with you visiting friends," said Sirius. "We were asking if you'd rather have a more stable arrangement. If you don't like living alone, you should move in with me. My house is too large for one."

His heart leapt. "I might like that," he said cautiously. "How much rent do you want?"

Sirius gave a Padfoot-like growl. "Nothing, you idiot. We just want to know you're all right. Which we'll know best if you're living close to one of us."

His heart sank back down to the pit of his stomach. Sirius was in the nicest possible way offering him charity. His friends didn't expect the poor werewolf to live among them on equal terms. They were all waiting for his answer, so he conceded, "I might come for a couple of weeks."

Sirius's smile faded. "Not for longer?"

"I don't like to impose. A couple of weeks would be nice."

Remus moved in. After a fortnight, as he had promised, he moved out. He endured the house that was legally his for three days before going on a long raid-interception in the Fens. After that he stayed with the Diggles, working on the weeds in their garden for four days, until the flower-beds were so tidy that no amount of scything really justified his continuing to eat their food. Then Madam Plumpton moved him into one of her spare bedrooms, where he worked feverishly on Dumbledore's papers until the next full moon.

* * * * *

The papers were disorderly, a certain sign that Dumbledore was overworking. They included a note to Professor Flitwick about the fourth-year Charms exam and an invoice from Flourish and Blotts for new library books. Remus began to make a new file of items that had to be owled straight back to Hogwarts. He could recognise at a glance most of the ones that he ought to avoid reading, but when the name "James Potter" leapt out at him, he swept his eye down the whole short page. And there it was, in Dumbledore's loopy handwriting:

Received from James C. Potter on 25 May 1979 the sum of 107 Galleons, 2 Sickles & 12 Knuts, being for the salary of Remus J. Lupin for the month of June 1979. A. P. W. B. Dumbledore.

He was not being employed by Dumbledore at all. He was being supported by the charity of James Potter. James had tried to save Remus's dignity by pretending that Dumbledore had a fund to support several full-time Order employees... but it was all a ruse. The Order members were all volunteers; only Remus was being paid; and Remus was utterly dependent on James.

James would never miss the money, of course, for it was rumoured that he had a million Galleons in the five percents at Gringotts. The question was how Remus could ever again look him in the eye as a friend and an equal when they both *knew* that James was his benefactor, yet James must never know that Remus knew...

He had planned to return to Nottingham for his Transformation, but his friends cornered him after Sunday's Order meeting.

"What are you *hiding*, Moony?" Sirius demanded in exasperation. "Why don't you want your friends to know your movements?"

"You've been very good to me, but I can't keep on living at your expense."

"Rubbish," said Peter. "We have to stick together in the dark times, do we not, Padfoot?"

"Is it a woman?" asked James shrewdly. "Are you sneaking off to some girlfriend whom you're not yet ready to introduce to us?"

"If only!" said Remus. "No, it isn't a woman. I promise you that."

For the rest of his life, Remus was to regret saying those words with quite such earnest assurance. For his friends believed him about the non-existence of the woman. And they did *not* believe that he was "sneaking off" solely because he disliked imposing.

*A/N. This chapter was very significantly revised under **Spiderwort's** guidance. So if you enjoyed reading it, be sure to tell her so.*

Deceived on Every Side

Chapter 15 of 21

During Ariadne's fourth year at Hogwarts, the war is brought into the classrooms, and so is an illicit love-interest.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Deceived on every Side

Wednesday 30 July 1980 Monday 31 August 1981

Hogwarts, the Grampians; Kincarden, Inverness-shire.

Rated PG-13 for unprofessional behaviour.

In the middle of the summer holidays, Ariadne received a frantic owl from Hestia.

My brother has disappeared while on assignment for the Order of the Phoenix. Professor D. sent him north to intercept a Death Eater rally. We know Caradoc arrived in Pitlochry because he sent his girlfriend an owl there. Do you know where that is, Ariadne? I can't find it on the map. That was three days ago, and no one has seen him since. But there wasn't a corpse or even a Dark Mark. Just nothing. Maybe he isn't dead, or at least not from Death Eaters. We don't give up hope that Caradoc will come home.

But Caradoc Dearborn never did come home. No body was ever discovered, but he became a statistic: "missing, presumed dead".

* * * * *

Ariadne's fourth year at Hogwarts was a never-ending nightmare.

On the first day of term, as the Gryffindors were waiting for the new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher to arrive, Letitia Malfoy turned away from the History of Magic classroom opposite and sailed up to Hestia.

"So, Dearborn," she said smugly, "did your brother find out the hard way what happens to Muggle-lovers?"

While Hestia fought off tears, and Ariadne tried to draw her away from the argument, Sarah confronted Letitia directly.

"You *bitch*! I would think *your* brother's pretty high on the *Order's* hit-list!"

"Call me that again and I shall cast a barking hex on you."

Sarah raised her wand, but a baby-faced stranger was faster.

"You don't *warn* your opponent," she breathed, in the tone of one accepting a dinner invitation, while her wrist twitched the tiniest possible flick. And suddenly Letitia Malfoy was yapping like a pug.

Joe Fenwick and Sarah doubled over with giggles, but Ariadne could see that Letitia was seriously humiliated. The newcomer kept her barking for about twenty seconds and then silenced her with a contemptuous flick of her wand.

"Do you see why I could not have hexed Golden-Hair like that?" she asked. Her voice curled around Ariadne's ribs with a full, rounded resonance. "Silver-Hair had warned her, so she should have been prepared with a counter-hex. Surprise is the essence of strategy. I am Messalina Honeysmooch. Let us enter the classroom."

In the full light, Ariadne saw that Professor Honeysmooch was wearing tight, low-cut robes (shouldn't teachers be made to wear a uniform?), and she had amber curls to match her amber eyes. By the time she had been at Hogwarts a week, she had batted her eyelashes and fluttered her smiles at every male in the castle, from Dumbledore down to the youngest house-elf.

Professor Pavo hated her on sight. She brought out her own clingiest robes and brightest jewellery and practised speaking in a low alluring voice to the bewildered first-years. Professor Honeysmooch responded by tilting her own tones to a melodious purr in front of an appreciative row of seventh-year boys.

"Cheap little flirt!" snapped Professor Pavo, apparently to Hazel Parkinson.

"The ridiculous old fool," lifted Professor Honeysmooch, with the merest pretence that she might have been referring to the caretaker's cat.

Veleta would have appreciated the joke that two such similar women could dislike each other so intensely. She would have understood that Pavo was vain and insecure and in need of a few kind words from her pupils (Richard and Ivor were sniggering behind their hands). Honeysmooch could afford to be generous since, in addition to being twenty years younger, she was good at what she was trying to do. But Honeysmooch was too cold and self-absorbed to treat her rival with anything but triumphant disdain, and Ariadne no longer had anybody with whom it seemed wise to share this thought.

Professor Honeysmooch was also a good teacher. She taught them Disarming and Protection spells, counter-curses and duelling tactics, and set them role-plays and exercises on the subject of 'Know Thine Enemy'. "Find out your opponent's weak spot and press it hard," was one maxim. "Infiltrate enemy ranks and pass yourself off as a friend," was another.

"I'd certainly like her as *my* enemy." Richard grinned.

Ariadne stared at the floor.

"Don't be silly, Ariadne," said Sarah. "They're *boys*. What do you expect?"

"Respect for women?" suggested Kingsley. "A woman who respects the weakness of men? Sarah, don't run off by yourself; wherever you're going, I'm walking with you."

In fact, Kingsley didn't have to escort his friends very far. That was the year when the teachers never left a class alone in the corridor because the students were in too much danger from one another. McGonagall, Flitwick, Sprout and Slughorn escorted them with unfading cheerfulness, but Pavo and Honeysmooch complained every day about the "mollycoddling".

"Do the other teachers *really* believe that your fellow-students will hex you?" enquired the Ancient Runes mistress, Professor Babbling.

"They're not thinking, they're *knowing*," replied Regelinda Macnair. "Ariadne MacDougal was once called to the Headmaster's office because she threw a Swelling Solution at me. And even Professor Honeysmooch is becoming afraid of Kingsley Shacklebolt's memory charms."

At four o'clock every afternoon, the students were led crocodile-style to the library, and all the teachers remained with them for the next two hours. House-points were docked every time anybody spoke a word one couldn't even ask a friend to lend a quill. Nobody ever went behind a bookcase without some staff member on the trail, and Hagrid and Madam Hooch were spending more time indoors than out.

At six o'clock, everybody went down to dinner, and nobody ever stood up from his own House table until a quarter to seven, when teachers escorted each table to its common room. They were locked inside the common room until eight o'clock the next morning when the journey to breakfast was once again strictly by escort only.

None of these precautions could stop the verbal taunts. The next major news story was about the valiant last stand of the Prewett brothers, whom Voldemort had never forgiven for some episode concerning a vampire. It took five Death Eaters to shoot down the two of them, and they were still throwing Stunners and Body-Binders as they fell to the ground.

"But in the end," said Regelinda, "what hope is there for the goody-goodies who're too cowardly to use *Avada Kedavra*?"

These days no child or sibling of a Death Eater bothered to deny the family's allegiance; they were open and proud about enjoying the Dark Lord's protection.

By contrast, relatives of Order members kept very quiet; it seemed that Dumbledore could not save his allies' lives even when he knew exactly who was being targeted. Ariadne found that if she said as little as, "Lord Voldemort is evil," the Death Eaters' children pounced on it as evidence that her parents were Order members. At least she could truthfully say that her parents had no interest in that kind of thing. But she was not wishing to prolong these conversations; if the Dark side lost interest in her, they would start remembering that Sarah was a Muggle-born or that Joe had a brother in the Order.

The next great news story was that Death Eaters had wiped out a branch of the Bones family in a matter of minutes. Ariadne's parents arrived at the gates of Hogwarts that evening, so terrified that they insisted she spend the weekend at home under their eye.

"For once," said Professor McGonagall. "Make sure she finishes her homework."

Ariadne spent the whole weekend in the kitchen, writing until her fingers bled and reading until her eyes were sore, because her parents did not allow her outdoors in the farmyard. It was the same the next week. She went home for five weekends in a row until Professor Dumbledore put his foot down.

"Can't you see, Malcolm," he said to Papa, "that Ariadne is safer at Hogwarts? It's the one place where Voldemort has never penetrated. The Bones children died because they were too young for Hogwarts they would certainly have been safe if we'd had them here."

Her parents took the point, and Ariadne did not go home for Christmas that year.

* * * * *

Ariadne began to look forward to History of Magic lessons, because Professor Binns was the only teacher in the school who did not let the war affect his teaching. He droned on and on about peace conventions and centaur dissidence without a thought for anything that had happened since 1689.

Professor Trelawney, by contrast, was not interested in anything that happened earlier than next week. She was teaching them to read Tarot cards; every student in the class laid a different combination of cards onto the table, but Professor Trelawney was remarkably uniform in the message she extracted from each combination.

"*Death*, my dears! Champion has the Wheel of Fortune in the Self position, the Ten of Swords in his Situation, and the Ten of Cups in his Destiny. That double Ten is most unlucky it confirms the end of life as we know it! Alas, our fortunes are turning for the worse, for the cards say that the situation is just as bad as you fear, and those whom you love have no chance of safety! Miss Webster has the Knight of Wands, the Nine of Pentacles and the Six of Wands. That means swift action many people new

purchases victory oh no! My dear, I hope your purchases are defensive artefacts, for your cards show a certain victory for Him-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. And Miss MacDougal is the Queen of Cups, with the Seven of Wands in her Situation and the Moon in her Destiny. What could be more disastrous? You are under attack there are unexpected enemies lurking in the moonlight hidden dangers everywhere there is no escape from the need to fight, fight, fight... My dears, we are all at You-Know-Who's mercy!"

Meanwhile, Professor McGonagall elaborated on the importance of being able to Transfigure any given object into a really solid, hex-proof brick wall. Professor Flitwick talked about Invisibility Cloaks and Shielding and Disarming Charms. Professor Honeysmooch put them through Stunners, Body-Binders, Icers and Burners until Ariadne wondered if she were trying to teach attack instead of defence. Professors Sprout and Slughorn talked endlessly of poisons, antidotes and wound-staunchers, while Professor Kettleburn completely forgot about *caring* for animals in favour of disarming and disempowering them. Professor Pavo became obsessed with battle strategy. If she mentioned the phases of the moon and the positions of the stars, she was certain to explain how this affected a defensive bulwark or a spy's route through the enemy camp. Even Professor Babbling became nervous; all her poetry was centred around sharpening swords or raising invisible shields, and every new spell gave a fresh idea for befuddling an enemy's wits.

Every Saturday morning, the students were escorted into the library and, with nearly every teacher in the school watching, there was nothing to do except finish every last scrap of homework.

"They don't ask how teachers are supposed to find time to *mark* the homework," grumbled Professor Pavo. But they must have found time, because Sarah, with nothing else to amuse her, was forced to complete her homework after all, and her marks had never been so high.

After lunch, the students were escorted back to their common rooms and locked in until dinner time. With all homework finished and trips outside forbidden, there was nothing to do but watch the rain and read the newspapers.

"I never thought I'd say this," said Sarah, "but lessons are better than these vile endless weekends."

Madam Hooch tried to maintain Quidditch. Each team was allowed one session on Saturday and one weekday evening to practise, and Madam Hooch escorted them and supervised them every minute. Nobody else was allowed to watch the practices, but watching the matches was compulsory. Each House had to sit in a separate corner of the stadium, but even this did not prevent fights. Rude songs were sung, objects were hurled at rival athletes and houses, and the athletes themselves committed so many fouls that the Slytherin team went through twenty-one different players in its three matches.

"Perhaps it's time we banned Quidditch," said Professor Sprout.

"Oh, that would make school impossibly dreary for the students," said Professor Flitwick.

Hufflepuff trounced Gryffindor because Ivor's sister was a new Chaser; she scored thirty-two goals and soared into a loop-the-loop above the goalposts after each one. Professor Slughorn responded by inviting her to his next party.

"He's never taken any notice of her before," said Ivor. "She complains he doesn't even remember her name in class."

Professor Slughorn certainly remembered her name thereafter. "Has there been any thought of providing you with your own broomstick, Miss Jones?" he said. "That old school Shooting Star really doesn't do you justice."

"Professor Sprout was thinking of a Comet Two-Sixty. That has a neat braking charm, but I don't really see how it's otherwise better than the Cleansweep Eight."

"I could sell you my old Swiftstick." This mischievous suggestion came from Claud Greengrass.

Gwenog Jones was not in the mood to take a joke. "If you tried that trick, I'd turn you into a woodlouse and set the broom on fire!"

"I'm sure our best flier in a decade would like some Dundee cake," pacified Professor Slughorn. "You may know, Miss Jones, that Devlin Whitehorn is an old student of mine. I expect I could talk him into giving us a Nimbus Fifteen Hundred for your personal use."

Ariadne poured a cup of tea for Gwenog, then sat down next to Claud Greengrass without really looking at his flawlessly chiselled face. *Professor Slughorn is retiring at the end of this year*, she reminded herself. *I can afford to sit quietly at these daft parties for just a few more months.*

* * * * *

At the next school Quidditch match, Ravenclaw beat Slytherin simply by virtue of cheating less. As Professor McGonagall escorted the Gryffindors back up to Gryffindor Tower, they heard the strains of Mendelssohn's *On Wings of Song* floating out of a sixth-floor practice room.

"Someone's playing the piano," said Hestia. She spoke enviously, since it had proved too complicated for teachers to escort students to the practice rooms every day, so Hestia had had to abandon her music lessons. She stopped outside the door where the music was sounding most loudly.

"But who would have missed the match?" asked Sarah quickly.

"Perhaps it's a charm to keep the piano playing when no one's there," suggested Ivor.

The same thoughts had apparently occurred to Professor McGonagall, for she waited until the song had swollen to its most augmented trill before pointing out, "If there's an innocent explanation, then nobody will mind my investigating. *Alohomora!*"

The door burst open to reveal not only a piano that played itself but Professor Honeysmooch locked in a passionate embrace with a flaxen-haired man. Ariadne averted her eyes instantly. No matter how badly anybody might be behaving, that degree of osculation still seemed a very private moment to be witnessing.

Professor McGonagall had no such scruples. She treated the errant adults as she might have treated two first-years who had skived out of the Quidditch match in order to lay a Trip Jinx on a classroom door. She stepped softly into the room and said, "That will be enough for now, Messalina. Perhaps the two of you would like to explain yourselves to Professor Dumbledore."

With a mighty squelch, the lovers broke apart, and Ariadne dared to look up. Professor Honeysmooch had furious patches of pink on her high cheekbones. She was embarrassed and disconcerted, but she hid it under anger.

"Minerva, how *dare* you interrupt us?"

The man was the seraphically beautiful Claud Greengrass. He frowned insolently at Professor McGonagall as he returned his arm through Professor Honeysmooch's slender waist. "Messalina, are you going to let a dried-up spinster dictate to us?"

"I'll be speaking to the Headmaster as soon as these students are safely in their common room," said Professor McGonagall. "It's up to you whether he hears your side of the story before mine." Then she walked out of the door and told the students, "Let's mind our own business and keep moving upstairs."

Of course the common room was buzzing with gossip and speculation for the rest of the afternoon. Ariadne tried to sit quietly with *Blood Brothers: My Life amongst the Vampires* to block out the memory of how Professor Honeysmooch and Claud Greengrass had exposed their private passions to the whole of Gryffindor, but the whole of Gryffindor was too fascinated by the subject to allow anybody to ignore it.

"I always knew Honeysmooch might have a boyfriend or two tucked away."

"But a *student*!"

"He's already eighteen, of course, and she's only twenty-one."

"But she was still marking his essays how unprofessional do you call that?"

"They weren't actually undressed."

"But that was some seriously heavy snogging."

"Greengrass never could leave the girls alone."

"But a *teacher*!"

Dumbledore announced at dinner that night that Professor Honeysmooch had resigned. Claud Greengrass's name was not mentioned, but of course everybody knew he had been expelled.

* * * * *

It took one week for the new Defence teacher to arrive. He turned out to be the apothecary from Slug and Jigger's in Diagon Alley. His name was Arsenius Jigger, and the rumours that flew around the school indicated that he had accepted sanctuary at Hogwarts because Death Eaters had murdered his wife and daughter and blasted his shop to pieces. He was not particularly grateful to Dumbledore for this; he seemed to regard students as an unwelcome interruption to the real business of private research.

"I certainly wouldn't go to him for help outside lessons," said Kingsley Shacklebolt. "I think he'd cast an *Engorgio* on the spot, then yell at me for bursting."

It was difficult enough to ask Professor Jigger for help even during class time when, protested Ivor Jones, it was his *job* to answer. His teaching style was to pack as much information as possible into one lecture and leave the students to distinguish the central facts from the peripheral. Mistakes always made him angry; he was fond of cutting off questions with remarks like: "We covered that last Tuesday. You ought to understand by now!"

Hestia nearly sobbed when Jigger called her Confundus Hex "a bungling botch dredged up from the dustbin"; Joe had to clench his teeth together when he was told that he could betray an army with his clumsy wandwork; Sarah was actually given detention when Jigger called her a "fairy-brained dabbler" and she hurled back that he was a "manticore-faced bastard"; Richard only remained calm because he forgot that, in context, "triumph of logic-enhancement" was not a compliment. Ariadne was so astonished when Professor Jigger called her a "lumbering wand-hacker with the intelligence of a doxy" that she forgot to feel hurt.

"He's a poisonous old goat." The class had hardly reached the corridor before they were all saying it. "Remember Viridian from our first year? The main difference between him and Jigger is that Jigger bothered to learn some long words for his insults."

But Ariadne knew that the main difference between Viridian and Jigger was that Jigger lacked malice. He might be cantankerous, but he was perfectly indifferent as to whether he succeeded in hurting anybody's feelings. Ariadne was used to the honesty with which her classmates discussed their teachers, but she never knew what to say in such conversations.

"He has just lost his whole family," she ventured.

"Come on, Ariadne," objected Sarah. "Plenty of people suffer personal tragedies without retaliating against the whole world. Don't you hate the old troll just *ditto*?"

"What, you're wanting me to think of a rude name to call him too?"

"Well, no," Joe admitted. "We know you don't do that. But do give some sign that you're listening when the rest of us do it!"

"I was listening. I heard a great deal of anger over Professor Jigger's attitudes, including one animal metaphor, one Being metaphor, two comments on his age, two about his morals and one on his intelligence... Will that do?"

* * * * *

A few weeks later, Hestia burst into tears and threw the *Daily Prophet* onto the common room carpet. Ariadne and Sarah automatically ran to Hestia, but Kingsley picked up the paper, glanced at the headline and said the rudest word they had ever heard him say. Ivor and Joe looked up from a game of chess.

"Have the Death Eaters conquered Gringotts?" asked Ivor.

"Or St Mungo's? That would be worse," said Joe.

Kingsley shook his head and handed the paper to Joe. The headline read, *DEATH EATERS STRIKE DARTMOOR*.

Aurors arrived too late yesterday to assist yet another Death Eater casualty. When they arrived at the isolated spot, three miles north-east of Twobridges, Devon, they found only scattered pieces of flesh underneath a huge Dark Mark, which the Aurors estimate had been made eight minutes earlier.

Auror Cassius Proudfoot, 44, says, "Picking up all the lumps of flesh was like piecing together a very unpleasant jigsaw. We didn't find all of the bits, but we found pieces of heart and brain, as well as several fingers and a squashed eye. No doubt the poor chap was blown up into little pieces by a Body Blaster curse. I'd hope the Death Eaters Stunned him before they threw the Blaster, but knowing them, not likely."

Expert Genetiwizarders have identified the pieces as the remains of Mr Benjamin Fenwick, 22...

The newspaper slipped from Joe's hands. He did not move from his chair, and nor did he speak.

In fact, he never spoke again. At first, they all thought he was only shocked for the weekend. On Monday morning, Richard was able to steer him into a seat in class. But Joe would not answer even the most direct question. As the weeks went by, the teachers soon learned not to ask him questions in class, and the students gave up inviting him to join their activities. It was a deep, dark, haunted silence from which Joe Fenwick never emerged. He continued to occupy chairs in the classroom or common room, but he never said another word.

* * * * *

Next, Voldemort tried to attack Hogwarts itself; they said he was coming for Dumbledore.

"Let him try!" said Professor Jigger. "Just let him, that's all I say!"

Professor Jigger had placed a Hurling Hex on the boundaries of Hogwarts, and it threw Voldemort off literally; he sailed for seven miles before he landed on a bare hillside somewhere in the Grampians.

"It's almost funny," said Richard.

"He just didn't try hard enough," said Kingsley. "Next week he'll bring stronger spells to break the ancient Charms of Protection."

"I'm ready for him," said Jigger grimly.

On the first Saturday of that July, Hogsmeade Station stood empty. For the first summer in a hundred and fifty years, the Hogwarts Express was not running, for there was too much risk that Death Eaters would be sent to attack the students on their homeward journey. Instead, Dumbledore placed in the Entrance Hall a huge carton of what Sarah called "ordinary Muggle tennis balls". The students lined up in the hall, baggage secured to one hand, while Filch ticked names off a list and Dumbledore converted each ball to a Portkey to each student's home.

Ariadne landed dizzily in the Kincarden kitchen, almost tripping over her trunk, and not at all prepared for her mother's tearful embrace.

"Darling, I was so worried that you'd never come home! It's just not safe any more... You're to bide at home all summer, and I'm not letting you out of my sight!"

Ariadne writhed inside, but she knew why Mamma was so frightened.

"At home" meant "inside the house", for her parents had lost their earlier confidence that the Death Eaters would never venture as far north as Kincarden. Ariadne found herself excused from all chores, even from such short journeys as collecting the eggs or feeding the pigs, and shuttered away from the sunshine with nothing to do except play with Morag or read her school books. She wasn't even allowed to owl her friends because her parents worried about the consequences of the most innocent messages being intercepted. The Floo charms had been re-set so that only members of the immediate family could Floo into the house, and everybody else even the Macmillans, Malfoys and Macnairs had to Apparate to the front door then chap like a Muggle. Every owl was subjected to anti-jinxing charms before anybody was allowed to touch a letter, and even the news that Ariadne was to be a prefect was only mildly cheering.

A/N. While a non-Seer only turns up an accurate Tarot reading at chance level, it is certain that Professor Vablatsky would have interpreted the students' cards differently. Her readings would have been along the following lines.

Richard: "You are a lucky person who is unafraid of change and apt to improve the fortunes of those around you. While the present situation is just as bad as you fear, the worst of it is over. You are destined for permanent love and happiness."

Sarah: "You are charismatic, sociable, fast-moving and somewhat selfish. You have been financially lucky, and your wallet now contains enough to buy whatever you want. You are destined for a long and exciting trip that will result in success and victory."

Ariadne: "Your passions are hidden by your natural reserve. You are an intuitive and loving Healer who is destined to create a powerful and nurturing magic. You are currently under attack, but surrender would be dangerous; stand your ground, and you will succeed. However, things will not be what they seem, and you will make unexpected enemies."

Flying without the Moon

Chapter 16 of 21

As it becomes clear that someone is betraying the Potters, the Order members become suspicious of one another. But Sirius finds time to acquire two new love-interests!

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Flying without the Moon

Sunday 20 January 1980 Sunday 1 November 1981

Ecclesall, Sheffield; Godric's Hollow, Devon; Daventry, Northamptonshire; around Nottinghamshire.

Rated PG for yet more violence.

Alastor Moody saw no reason to arrive quietly when he was to be among friends. He pounded on the Plumptons' door, and after Peter Pettigrew let him in, he thumped into the hall with a scowl and a growl, apologising for having missed lunch and grumbling about the Ministry of Magic. New powers had been granted to the Auror Division.

"As if it's 'in the best interests of the British public' to have Aurors acting like Death Eaters! It took me six months to track down Karkaroff because I played within the law. And I think it's taken all of three weeks to come to this!"

He tossed the morning's issue of the *Daily Prophet* onto the dining table, and Remus read:

SUS LAW VICTIM MURDERED

This is the year that Muggles are finally due to abolish their much-abused Sus Law (which gives Muggle Aurors the right to arrest criminal suspects even without evidence). It is also the year in which wizarding authorities have seen fit to introduce a Sus Law of their own, thus setting back the progress of

wizarding society by about eight hundred years.

Bartemius Crouch, Head of Magical Law Enforcement, decreed last week that Aurors should be allowed to use "whatever means are necessary" to bring suspected Death Eaters to justice.

Yesterday a surprise Auror raid on the Wolverhampton home of Evan Rosier, 21, revealed a large collection of Dark artefacts and some suspicious-looking documents.

"That was good enough for us!" says Auror John Dawlish, 57. "We'd long suspected young Rosier of being up to no good, and this confirmed it."

To a question about why the Aurors had blown up Mr Rosier's parents' house, Auror Dawlish only replied, "It's sometimes necessary to blast places to winkle people out."

Mr Rosier resisted arrest, shouting that he knew nothing about the Dark artefacts, and he threw several Stunning curses at the Aurors.

"We did warn him to come quietly," says Auror Dawlish, "but he just threw an anti-gravity mist and completely disoriented Auror Proudfoot. So there was really no option except to kill him."

Auror Dawlish threw the Killing Curse at Mr Rosier within seconds.

No charges will be pressed. Mr Crouch, 49, commented from his office yesterday evening: "This is the kind of difficult measure to which these desperate times have driven us."

"Don't see why they had to resort to killing," said Moody. "An Imperius would have brought Rosier along to Azkaban nicely. Then a fair trial and a life sentence how would it have hurt old Crouch to allow that much?"

"If it's any comfort," said James, "Evan Rosier was a Death Eater. I'm sure he had more than one murder on his own record."

"I'm not comforted," said Sirius. "I doubt the Aurors will always be so careful about only using their illegal curses on people who happen to be guilty."

"Why are we fighting this war," asked Peter, "if there's no difference between what the Death Eaters do and what the Ministry does?"

"I'm not fighting for the Ministry," said Remus. "I see a difference between what Death Eaters do and what Dumbledore does."

Dumbledore called the meeting to order. "Now that we are all here," he said, "I have to make a very grave announcement. Voldemort has new plans, and at the top of his latest hit-list are the Potters."

Alice Longbottom, slightly green in the face from the rigours of her first pregnancy, asked, "Are you sure?"

"How do you know?" asked Sirius.

"I have my sources," was all Dumbledore would tell them. No one really doubted that Dumbledore had long since posted spies to watch the Death Eaters; but it was an uncomfortable reminder that Voldemort also had spies watching the Order.

"I'm a Muggle-born," said Lily soberly. "Professor, is Voldemort after James because of me?"

"No," said Dumbledore, "that isn't the reason. I'll explain it after the meeting." He looked around the room, from one Order member to another, almost as if measuring up each one of them. "What you must all understand is that James and Lily need to go into hiding."

"But you need us to keep working for the Order!" James protested.

"We're willing to take the risk," said Lily.

"This is more important than your work for the Order, or even your lives," said Dumbledore. "As I'll explain later, this is about the survival of the whole wizarding community. The reason I'm raising it at a meeting is so that the other Order members clearly understand that all ties will be cut."

"What! We will not be speaking to James and Lily any more?" asked Peter. "But they're our friends!"

Dumbledore was implacable. "This is more important than friendship."

* * * * *

Dumbledore found James and Lily a vacant cottage in the ancient village of Godric's Hollow. He placed a charm on the building so that he would know immediately if anything happened to the Potters. James and Lily remained inside like prisoners, doing no further work for the Order of the Phoenix.

After a couple of months, Sirius told Remus that the Marauders had been cleared to visit the Potters. "Dumbledore has ascertained that the Death Eaters have no idea where they are hiding. But don't spread the word only their closest friends are allowed entry. Even most Order members don't count."

Remus and Peter paid a visit to Spencer's Alimentation so that they could bring the Potters a box of groceries. Lily, whose abdomen had ballooned out to the size of a Diricawl, seemed placid and delighted to see them, but James was champing at the bit.

"No work, no friends, not even a safe place to ride my broomstick! I'm going to end up smashing down a wall if I can't start moving!"

"Can you not wear your Invisibility Cloak as you ride?" asked Peter.

"Dumbledore won't even let me risk that much. To be truthful, I have sneaked out wearing the Cloak before now, but it isn't really safe. Death Eaters are everywhere. I just hope Voldemort changes his target soon!"

Voldemort did not change any targets, but he added new ones. By the time he had terrorised Britain for ten endless years, even the Muggles were complaining about high prices and unchecked acts of violence. The Ministry of Magic retaliated by tightening its own controls. Remus remembered one particularly dreary Sunday afternoon, in which the Order of the Phoenix spent hours and hours discussing a list of Death Eater suspects that Sturgis Podmore had stolen for them from the Ministry. Several of these people were certainly innocent, and the question of how to protect them from their own Ministry absorbed time that could have been spent discussing the question of protecting Muggles from Lord Voldemort. It wasn't until the clock struck seven that Remus, Sirius and Peter were able to Disapparate to Daventry.

It was raining, and the full moon was due to rise within an hour. Remus, taking temporary shelter under a cherry tree, only wanted to race into the garage, but Sirius suddenly said, "Let's not bother with the shed. Let's be Moony, Wormtail and Padfoot tonight."

Remus looked at the eager faces of his two friends and felt himself weakening. "But it isn't safe," he said. "What if the wolf jumps the hedge?"

"*This* hedge?" laughed Sirius. "Oh, no, I defy you. This is a neighbour-proof, burglar-proof, wolf-proof hedge, designed to keep us in and everyone else out."

"Go on," begged Peter, gesturing at the riot of rhododendron and lilac bushes spread over the five acres of lawn. "This is a fabulous garden for animals. And we cannot spend *all* our lives worrying about You-Know-Who."

Remus hesitated a moment longer. They had been idiots at school, but this was a safely enclosed space. The next-door neighbours lived at such an expensive distance that even if they did see or hear anything, they would simply assume that young Mr Black had acquired a couple of dogs. And Peter really was nervous about something; he deserved some fun.

"All right," Remus conceded. "If you *promise* you'll keep me inside the garden."

"Who'd be wanting to leave a garden like this one?" said Peter.

"It's a pity Prongs can't be here," said Sirius.

"Do you think this baby is going to ruin everything?" asked Peter, for Lily's baby was by this time already overdue. "James has become such a *very* married man. Do you think he'll spend the next twenty years always shut up in Godric's Hollow, bathing the children and reading their bedtime stories?"

Sirius burst out laughing. "No, Wormtail, it'll be the other way round. Voldemort will be defeated, and then this baby will be the fifth Marauder. We'll corrupt him early into the ways of mayhem and mischief he'll be an Animagus before he receives his Hogwarts letter."

They shivered under the cherry trees for a little longer, and when that became boring, Sirius and Peter transformed. Remus sat leaning against the dog, with the rat in his hands, waiting for the moon to rip away his awareness of his friends.

* * * * *

That was one of the Marauders' last adventures adventures that didn't seem the same without James. Lily's baby was born four days later and, with nothing else to occupy their time, James and Lily became completely absorbed in parenthood. If little Harry ever became a fifth Marauder, it was only going to happen after the war ended, because as long as the Potters remained in hiding, the marauding spirit barely existed.

Their last adventure of all occurred a year later, on a night when Remus jerked awake to the sound of shattering glass. He sat bolt upright in bed, and found himself staring through the broken window into the maniacally-laughing face of Sirius Black.

"Padfoot, what on earth ?"

"Sorry I startled you," said Sirius carelessly. He was level with the upstairs window, as if he were sitting on a hovering Thestral except that his mount was purring like a cross between a cannon-volley and a tiger. "Get dressed, and I'll fix the window after you've brought yourself out here."

"What's going on?" Remus could see now that the "Thestral" wasn't a living creature at all, but a huge motorbike. "What if the Muggles ?"

"They won't see a thing. There's a new moon, and we'll shortly be higher than the most interfering please-man cares to look."

Five minutes later, Sirius had helped Remus onto the back seat of his contraption, and they were shooting up to the heavens faster and more smoothly than Comet's newest-release broomstick. Remus tried not to feel sick as he held onto Sirius's Afghan jacket while the wind rushed through his ears. The ground felt a million miles below him when he chanced a glance downwards but it was so dark that he might as well not have looked. Finally, Sirius brought his bike back to a hover and agreed to light his wand.

"Ingenious machine, isn't it? I saw some at a Muggle-bait that I intercepted last month, and I bought this at one of those Muggle show-rooms the next day. They call it a motor-triumph no, a motorbike; the Triumph is the manufacturer. It accelerates from zero to 125 miles per hour in five seconds, and it has a five-speed gear box, a 750 CC engine..."

Remus managed to find his balance, perched in the sky in the middle of literally nowhere, and told himself that if he began to fall, he could Disapparate before he hit the ground.

"... MK Three carburettors, seven point nine to one compression to reduce vibration, eckeltronic ignition and eckeltrick starter, halogen lamp..."

When Sirius had exhausted his new words, Remus reminded him, "But I don't think the Muggle ones fly."

"Of course they don't; I stripped down a load of second-hand broomsticks and re-applied their flight charms to the bike. It's better than a broomstick, wouldn't you say? James was about ready to give up Quidditch after I took him out on the Triumph the other night. Wearing the Invisibility Cloak, of course."

Sirius chattered on about James and the motorbike for a while, then suddenly changed the subject. "Remus... Who are your friends?"

This was an odd question, but the glow of the halogen lamp didn't allow Remus to see Sirius's face properly. "Apart from you and James and Peter, you mean? No one much."

"There must be someone... Who else is your friend, even a casual one?"

"If I had to name my fourth-best friend, I think that person has come to be Lily. Why?"

Sirius hesitated. "Because someone someone close to the Potters has been talking to an enemy. Dumbledore told James that someone close to him has a Death Eater connection."

Remus jolted. "Padfoot, if you want to talk about such alarming things, can we go down to the ground?"

"Fine, we're right above the forest." Sirius sounded displeased, but he lowered the motorbike.

Breathing easily for the first time that night, Remus jumped off the bike, lit his wand, and asked, "What do the Death Eaters know about the Potters?"

"Too much. I've been combing my mind for what one of us might have accidentally told whom. Because aside from you, me, Peter, Emmeline and Dumbledore ~~who~~ does know where the Potters are hiding?"

"Lily bonded with Alice Longbottom last year, but I didn't think the Longbottoms knew where they're hiding. Besides, Alice couldn't... She'd never..."

"Of course not deliberately. But I have been wondering how far I'd trust Frank. I don't say *don't* trust him, only that I don't know him all that well. You've worked with him, Moony what do you think?"

Remus's mind turned upside down at the thought that *someone* was not trustworthy. But some instinct made him say, "I don't suspect Frank Longbottom he's always seemed decent."

"I know," said Sirius uneasily. "I'm not saying anyone's deliberately playing double agent. Only that someone, beyond doubt, has spoken carelessly to someone else whom we only *thought* we could trust. If we discount Frank... Who are Emmeline's friends?"

"She talks to Sturgis Podmore and Dorcas Meadowes. But I've never heard Emmeline discuss any person's private business with a third party. She ~~just~~ *doesn't*. What about Peter he has a girlfriend, hasn't he?"

"They broke up a couple of weeks ago. And she was a Muggle anyway she wouldn't have had Death Eater connections. While Peter's mother..." His voice trailed off. They both knew that Mrs Pettigrew's conversation was limited to whether Peter was wearing his gloves and had remembered to wipe his feet on the mat; even if Peter had spoken out of turn, his mother wouldn't have absorbed what he was saying. Then Sirius spoke again. "Moony, I need to know do *you* have a girlfriend? Or is there anyone at all whom you're seeing... Order business, or anything?"

"No. No girlfriend, no friend who isn't also a friend of yours, and no one at all with whom I'd have any reason to discuss the Potters."

"You've been quite busy tonight was the first time in two months that I've caught you at home."

"I've been taking the Order paperwork to other people's houses because I can't concentrate at my own. The Plumptons', the Longbottoms', the Diggles'... anywhere, really." He wondered why this simple explanation sounded hollow when spoken out loud. "No, the Diggles don't talk about anything except their garden and Quidditch. What about you, Padfoot are you seeing anyone apart from me and Peter?"

"Yes." Sirius was plainly dissatisfied with the absence of clues. "Since you ask, I've been seeing Dorcas Meadowes." He smiled faintly, as if a vision of Dorcas Meadowes could cheer the gravest situation. "She knows nothing about the Potters and nothing about motorbikes. Oh, let's not pick any more of our friends to pieces. I've warned you to speak carefully, and we're not going to learn any more tonight. Let's get out of these trees and enjoy the bike."

Remus tried to close his mind to the dangers of friends-who-weren't, and even to the dangers of flying motorbikes, as he climbed back onto the pillion and placed his arms around Sirius's Afghan. The engine roared, his heart flew into his throat, and the motorbike dived upwards into the stars.

* * * * *

In that dreary autumn, when it rained and rained and rained, Sirius was too distracted with worry to talk to anyone, and Peter was so nervous that Remus expected him at any minute to shatter like glass.

Remus Flooded the Potters to ask if he could do anything to help; but Lily said, with a slightly forced cheerfulness, that James was "too busy to come to the fireplace". Remus sent an owl, but by evening no answer had arrived. Mystified, he Flooded Sirius.

"James can't be contacted," said Sirius briefly. "Don't try too hard; you might endanger him."

Remus was left with the distinct feeling that Sirius was cold-shouldering him. So he Flooded Peter to ask about that.

Peter squeaked, "But why are you thinking that, Remus? Sirius is just busy and frightened, like all of us! Nobody is cold-shouldering anybody." And he began discussing Quidditch with such force that Remus was left feeling that, in a different way, Peter was cold-shouldering him, too.

The next morning, Remus tried Godric's Hollow again he knew that James would be out, but Lily and Harry were at home. Lily seemed pleased to see him, yet even she was evasive about Sirius's strange behaviour.

"It's nothing," she said. "No one trusts anyone very much nowadays. The less everyone knows about anyone else's business, the better."

"Lily... is someone suspicious of me? What am I supposed to have done?"

She hesitated. "No, Remus, I don't suspect you of anything. Do you want to hold Harry?" She passed the baby over, as if in pledge of her good faith. "But, Remus, someone... but something... However it came about, Voldemort knows too much. Dumbledore thinks there is a spy among our closest friends, someone who is on the point of selling out to Voldemort and betraying exactly where we are."

"But that's " It was a very small group of people who counted as the Potters' closest friends. Once one ruled out Sirius (who was James's shadow) and Peter (who couldn't have betrayed a stray dog without plastering the signs of guilt over his every move) and Dumbledore (because the Order of the Phoenix still existed) and Alice Longbottom (who just *could not* have faked her devotion to Lily)... the shortlist looked very frighteningly short.

Emmeline Vance. Or himself.

Only it isn't me, he thought. But it was hardly less absurd to accuse Emmeline. She might be somewhat cool and mysterious, but she had been Lily's friend for eleven years; she had several times risked her life on Order business; and Lily, who was no fool, had always trusted her absolutely. Remus began to see why, with such a short list of suspects, the finger of suspicion might be pointing towards a werewolf.

He couldn't even deny the charge; that would insult Lily, who had just acquitted him.

He shook himself out of the horrible thoughts. It must be someone else, someone of whom he had never thought as being close to the Potters, perhaps someone whom Lily herself had forgotten ever taking into her confidence...

He said, "Lily, what's going to happen to you and James?"

"Dumbledore says we have to increase the security. Professor Flitwick has discovered an obscure spell, something called the Fidelius Charm, which should keep us absolutely safe. And," she added ruefully, "absolutely imprisoned. Once the Fidelius Charm is cast, we'll effectively be invisible. Even people who thought they knew where we were hiding... people like you... well... you just *won't* know any more. You could look through our front window and simply not see us. The information will be hidden with

a Secret Keeper, and not even we ourselves will be able to reveal where we are. No one can know anything unless the Secret Keeper himself tells."

"Well, no one will think of you as trusting a werewolf. Do you want me to act as your Secret Keeper?"

She looked embarrassed for a moment. "I think Dumbledore will decide who does that."

Harry stared at Remus with huge green eyes, and distinctly announced, "Moony!"

* * * * *

Remus was always glad he had made the opportunity to say good bye to Lily and Harry, for that same evening the Fidelius Charm was cast, and the Potter family disappeared into hiding. Sirius was Secret Keeper and he didn't tell anyone where his friends were, neither Remus nor Peter nor even Dumbledore.

"It's safer that way," said Remus.

"Oh... yes, yes, of course," said Peter. "It's just that I well, I'm missing them so much!"

It was less than a month later that Peter burst into Emmeline Vance's drawing room, where several Order members were holding a breakfast meeting, and shouted, "They're dead! James and Lily are dead!"

Emmeline dropped the minutes.

"And the Dark Lord is dead too."

Madam Plumptre dropped the teapot.

"Sounds like a trap to me," said Alastor Moody. "Are you certain, Pettigrew?"

"Sit down, Peter," said Arabella Figg. "Tell us everything."

Gasping for breath, Peter took the chair next to Mrs Figg, and said, "He-Who-Must-Not-be-Named went to Godric's Hollow last night and killed James and Lily. But the curse bounced and it killed him too. You-Know-Who has gone."

"How do you know?" asked Emmeline, disbelieving.

"Dumbledore had a charm on the Potters' house, remember, so he'd know if anything happened. The alarm went off just before midnight, and Dumbledore sent Hagrid straight to the scene of action, but he was too... too late." Peter brought out his handkerchief and sniffed into it. "I'm thinking Hagrid would have saved James and Lily if he could, but if he could see their bodies at all... what with that Fidelius Charm... they must have been deadlier than dead. He says the house was all collapsed, just a pile of ruins..."

"Oh, my dear, how terrible," said Madam Plumptre.

Peter wiped his eyes and finished his story. "Dumbledore was there himself a couple of hours ago. He investigated the magical traces, and he's thinking... thinking that You-Know-Who has gone!"

"You mean he Disapparated?" asked Elphias Doge eagerly.

"Perhaps," said Peter. "But Dumbledore's thinking it's more permanent. He's yet checking the details, but the reason he sent his Patronus to me so early this morning is that it's not only about the Potters any more. It's seeming that You-Know-Who was destroyed by his own spells."

"Wait a minute," said Moody. "How did You-Know-Who find out where the Potters were hiding?"

There was a deathly silence.

"I'm supposing..." squeaked Peter, "I'm supposing Sirius Black must have told him!"

There was another long pause. Remus's mind was reeling, but he was the first person to speak into the silence, latching onto the one obvious detail that Peter had failed to cover. "And Harry?" he asked. "Is the baby dead too?"

"He is not," said Peter. "Harry Potter is alive and well. You-Know-Who could not kill him."

A/N 1. Huge thanks to **Spiderwort**, who guided a major re-write of this section of the story

A/N 2. Thanks also to **Asherr** for explaining to me exactly how Sirius made his motorbike fly. And thank you to **Keridwen** and **Soonertoby** as well as **Asherr** for helping me to settle the bike's make and model. In case Sirius's own description wasn't crystal-clear, we've made him the proud possessor of a Triumph T140E Bonneville 750 Executive.

Deceits Laid Bare

Chapter 17 of 21

Ariadne's fifth year at Hogwarts sees the end of the war, and everybody's loyalties must be realigned.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Deceits Laid Bare

Tuesday 1 September 1981 Friday 29 October 1982

Hogwarts, the Grampians; Hogsmeade, the Grampians; Kincarden Croft, Inverness-shire.

Rated PG for adolescent concerns (exams, romantic attachments and questionable taste in music).

On the first evening of Ariadne's fifth year, before the welcoming feast had even begun, a school owl brought her a note instructing her to go down to the dungeons at once to meet the new Potions master. As she knocked on Professor Slughorn's door, she could hear that his office was already re-occupied. She entered and, to her very great surprise, came face to face with her Cousin Severus.

"Be seated," he said abruptly. "I have replaced Horace Slughorn as Potions master at Hogwarts and Head of Slytherin House."

She decided it would be tactless to express any surprise, for Severus was an expert at Potions. But she had always assumed that he would prefer to teach Defence.

"There are some things that you need to know. Miss MacDougal, do you understand the expression 'dual relationship'?"

"It means having two kinds of relationship with the same person."

"Precisely. And a dual relationship is a highly unprofessional manner of proceeding." His hands twitched across the desk. "Miss MacDougal, you need to understand that for the next three years I am to be your teacher. Therefore, as of this evening, I am no longer your cousin."

"I understand, Professor Snape."

He nodded curtly. "In term time, no matter in any way relevant to the family is to be mentioned between us. If we should meet during your school holidays, no subject in any way relating to school business is to be discussed. Do you understand, Miss MacDougal?"

"I do, Professor Snape."

"So much the better." He paused. "Professor Slughorn's records indicate that he was pleased with your work. I would have you remember, Miss MacDougal, that a history of high marks is no excuse for laziness. You will need to continue with your utmost concentration over the next ten months if you seriously wish for an Outstanding O.W.L."

"I will, Professor Snape."

She knew that Severus would not be popular with her classmates, but even she was startled by how quickly he established himself in their disfavour. As they entered their first Potions lesson, Sarah was asking, "Who is this Jugson person whom they arrested yesterday?"

"A hero," interrupted Regelinda Macnair. "He purged the Muggle-borns from the Ministry of Magic, relieved the over-population of every major city, and would not deny his allegiance to the Dark Lord, even at the gates of Azkaban."

"A common mass-murderer, then," said Sarah. "Ivor, why did that Auror say ?"

"All students will be silent," Severus announced, not loudly, but with impeccable projection across the dungeon. "Matters unrelated to Potions are not to be discussed in my lessons."

They listened to the beginning-of-term speech. But no sooner had the practical component begun than Regelinda hissed across her cauldron, "Webster, don't bother with this potion you'll never live long enough to be needing to use it."

"Deluded!" Sarah threw back through clenched teeth. "They arrested Jugson, and it's only a matter of time before they catch his commander. You'll see; no one really wants your precious Voldemort."

Hazel Parkinson nearly had a fit at the sound of the Dark Lord's name. But once again, Severus was faster.

"Detention, Miss Webster," he said. "And this is your only warning, Miss Parkinson."

* * * * *

Lord Voldemort's doom arrived, quite suddenly, just two months later. There was no warning at all. Hallowe'en fell on a Saturday so wet and windy that nobody minded being cooped up in the castle all day. Ariadne wrote a Potions essay in the common room, trying to ignore Richard as he read out loud the *Daily Prophet* headlines about the murder of Dorcas Meadowes.

In the evening they were taken down for a very subdued feast in the Great Hall. The house-elves sent up pumpkin soup, turkey medallions, apple pie and gingerbread, and Hagrid had strung jack o' lanterns across the enchanted ceiling. But the atmosphere was so muted that Ariadne could hear voices from three tables away.

Regelinda Macnair was happily repeating to Hazel Parkinson the good news about the Dark Lord's personal visit to Miss Meadowes to "knock her out of the running properly". A boy from the Ravenclaw table was threatening to stand up and challenge Regelinda, and Letitia Malfoy's voice clearly sailed over the hall. "No need to *gloat*, Regelinda! It won't be long now before all the Dark Lord's triumphs are public. Until then, why make enemies?"

Amid such an atmosphere, it was not surprising that there was no thought of playing party games. The desserts disappeared from the table only half finished, and the students were led back up chilly corridors to an early bedtime.

On Sunday morning there were several staff missing from breakfast Dumbledore, McGonagall, Hagrid but students were used to the staff having business with the Order of the Phoenix. Professor Flitwick took charge, and although he announced that there was to be no playing with Snitches in corridors or taking books from the Restricted Section without written permission, he didn't say a word about any teachers being ill or detained.

After breakfast they were herded back up to the common room; since it was raining and raining and raining outdoors, there was nowhere else to go anyway. Hestia tried to help Ariadne with a Vanishing Charm it was alarming how she had not yet mastered it and Joe scratched away at a very long History of Magic essay; Richard made a token effort at the lost cause of teaching Sarah to set a lunascope properly, while Ivor and Kingsley compared notes on Arithmancy. But for most of the time, they simply sat around Richard's Wireless, listening to old Melliflua Nightingale recordings of wizarding battle songs. As the *March of the Men of Harlech* died away, a newsreader cut in.

"Reports are now confirmed that Death Eaters all over Britain are panicking because the whereabouts of Him-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named are unknown. Far from sheltering their leader, prominent Death Eaters are frantically searching for him. Leading Magical Theory experts are claiming that You-Know-Who has probably been defeated by a bounced curse. Aurors caution the wizarding public to await further evidence before trusting the rumours that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named has been disembodied..."

"*What* was that?" asked Ivor.

"Are they seriously claiming that Voldy has gone away, and they can prove he didn't just Disapparate to Mongolia?" asked Sarah.

They all rushed on the radio, but Melliflua Nightingale was singing again. Nobody did any more homework after that. There was news every half-hour, and the news grew.

"And we interrupt this programme once more to remind you that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named has now vanished to whereabouts unknown. He went to Godric's Hollow last night, where he personally killed James and Lily Potter; however, for reasons that are not yet understood, he failed to kill their infant son Harry. Well-known magical theorist Miranda Goshawk claims that the curse-traces in the Potters' house indicate that You-Know-Who cannot have retained his magical powers..."

"Who were these Potter people?" asked Richard.

"Old pure-blood family my parents knew them," said Kingsley. "I think they worked for the Order. Well, I suppose they must have, if You-Know-Who killed them personally."

"But what *happened* to Voldemort?" asked Ariadne.

"Are they saying that the war is over?" asked Hestia.

"'Whereabouts unknown' is not fully reassuring," said Kingsley, then sneaked in with, "What do you think, Joe?"

Joe startled at the sound of his name, but shook his head and did not speak. The end of the war had not ended his private torments.

* * * * *

At dinner time, Professor Flitwick squeakily called the school to order and announced, with great excitement, that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named was finally gone. Just gone, apparently defeated by a baby. Leading Death Eaters had admitted under Veritaserum that they could not locate their master. The reign of terror was over. Dragomira Macnair looked scornful, but Letitia Malfoy was distinctly thoughtful, while Hazel Parkinson burst into tears.

"This is the first time in history that anyone has survived the Killing Curse," said Professor Flitwick. "We don't know why, but He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named has been destroyed by his own weapon. So stand up and raise your glasses to the Boy Who Lived!"

Glasses were clinked so enthusiastically that several of them shattered (although Letitia Malfoy did not stand). Then the house-elves sent up prune-stuffed pork roast, black bean salad and spider cakes, and the feasting that had been restrained yesterday continued in earnest throughout the evening.

The next morning brought a flurry of owls from parents. Ivor and Hestia read notes of joyful congratulation out loud, but Letitia was frowning over whatever she had received from her eldest brother. Ariadne's parents had written:

We could not be happier, but we hope you young people will not neglect your studies. There is less excuse than ever before for being distracted from your learning.

The MacDougals had evidently not considered what the attitude of the staff was likely to be. When the fifth-years arrived in the Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom, Professor Jigger was behind his desk as usual, but he announced, "You need not bother with your books today. I'm never teaching another lesson in my life. Play hangman or something, but I am leaving Hogwarts this evening." He glared ferociously at their astonished stares. "Do you think I'm teaching for fun? Teaching is dreary, and teachers tolerate it because Hogwarts is a safe place. But now that the outside world has become safe too, why do you think we'd bother with staying here?"

Four of the staff voluntarily ended their teaching careers that Monday.

"I don't know how Dumbledore can hold the school together," worried Kingsley. "There's no one to teach Defence, Astronomy, Arithmancy or Muggle Studies. And no one wants to teach now that You-Know-Who has gone. Dumbledore will never fill all those positions in time for us to pass our O.W.L.s."

* * * * *

On Tuesday afternoon, Letitia Malfoy threw herself at the line of Gryffindors emerging from Greenhouse Three. "Ariadne," she said, "we must speak to you! Now!"

"Why should Ariadne want to speak to you?" asked Sarah.

"She sounds desperate," said Hestia kindly.

She's pretending, thought Ariadne. But out loud she said, "Say what you like, Letitia."

Letitia beckoned with genuine desperation to Dragomira and Regelinda, who were hovering behind her with nowhere near the same level of eagerness. Hazel was there too, but Letitia took no notice of her everybody knew that the Parkinsons had remained neutral during the war.

"Ariadne, I know I haven't always been nice to you. I'm sorry, for example, about bullying your friend Wendy poor little Wendy, it's so terrible that she's dead! and I'm sorry about telling untrue tales on you to the teachers." This was spoken with such rapid fire that not even Hestia still believed that Letitia was really sorry. "But there's something you need to understand too, Ariadne. That evil man the Dark Lord has had our whole family under Imperius since since before Father died. I've been blindly obeying his wicked instructions ever since I was a little girl."

She stamped impatiently on Regelinda's foot, and Regelinda remembered her lines. "Us too, Ariadne, the Macnairs too! You-Know-Who had Imperius on Father, and Father had it on the rest of us. We have not been able to control a single thing we've done for the last eight or nine years."

"We were not intending any of the bad things we did," intoned Dragomira, so flatly and dully that Ariadne wondered how Letitia had bribed her to say it.

Sarah raised her eyebrows. "Are you three saying you were under Imperius *atschool*? And that none of the teachers noticed?"

"Oh, believe me, Miss Webster!" Letitia's grey eyes were filling with the most realistic tears. "A truly *Dark* wizard doesn't need to be present in person to keep the spell in power. You-Know-Who could make Imperius last a year, and he often had his victims remember a thousand commands at once. That's the kind of terrible, terrible curse that we Malfoys were suffering all this time."

Ariadne knew that Letitia was making it up, but there did not seem to be any point in gloating now that the war was won. She could not go to the extreme of saying, "Let's be friends," or, "I believe your apology," so she compromised on, "Letitia, I will not be holding against you anything that you've done in the past."

"You do trust me, don't you, Ariadne?"

Letitia sounded so frightened that Ariadne had not the heart to admit that she did not. Instead she said, "I'm knowing you're afraid for Lucius. And we'll all be needing some time to adjust to the new political climate. But I've no spare time to make trouble for anybody."

"Afraid!" The indignation escaped before Letitia had time to remember that she was supposed to be angling for Ariadne's sympathy. She bit her lip, and changed her words to, "We're cousins, Ariadne. Blood's thicker than water... isn't it?"

"I will not be looking for trouble," Ariadne repeated.

Sarah waited until the Slytherins had gone before exploding. "How *dare* she? She perjured herself on Wendy's life! Ariadne, why didn't you just tell her she's a shark who had better watch her own back now that her side's lost the war?"

Suddenly Sarah's anger seemed reasonable. Ariadne faltered. "You're furious that I did not rub salt into her wounds?"

"Yes, I am! She'll think we're pushovers and be bullying people again before Christmas!"

"I'm not so sure," said Ariadne quietly. "She really is frightened. Her parents are dead, and her eldest brother will only survive if he can convince the Wizengamot of that Imperius story. She cannot afford to keep a string of enemies the way she used to."

"Let's not quarrel," said Hestia quickly. "Let's go and watch the Quidditch practice. We can do that now teachers aren't going to fuss any more about going outdoors unsupervised."

Ariadne shifted her bag of books and savoured what had just happened. Letitia Malfoy had been so frightened that she had feigned regret and begged Ariadne to trust her! She had as good as pledged, on a cause as precious as saving her own skin, not to make any more trouble! The war was over. And they had survived.

* * * * *

Dear, we hope all these unfortunate disruptions to the teaching have not harmed your learning. They are most inconvenient, but we hope yet that you will be able to settle and produce the very best O.W.L. results. Pass on our regards to dear Severus.

Ariadne's immediate reaction upon reading her mother's letter was: *What about the disruptions to our hearts?*

Changes in the staffing did not really count as disruptions. Professor Vablatsky had resigned, Professor Slughorn had retired, and there had been a different Defence teacher every year; students were used to the idea that their teachers changed. The constant bad news in the media, deaths of classmates, threats from fellow-students, intrusive monitoring from teachers, endless stressful vigilance those were the factors that had made it very difficult to remember that finishing homework and passing exams still mattered. Mamma and Papa had never really understood that; it was amazing that they suddenly believed that learning might fall apart due to a few replacements amongst the teachers.

There were not going to be any more disruptions to their hearts. There were no more murders on the news, no more teachers patrolling the corridors, no more hexes thrown across the Quidditch pitch. The rival factions had simmered right down, for nobody still admitted to having been associated with Voldemort. So Ariadne was concentrating on her learning better than she ever had before. There were long, long stretches of hours to practise the Charms that always faltered off her wand so clumsily, to memorise those details of Transfiguration theory that always seemed to filter out of her brain.

The new Astronomy teacher was good. Her name was Aurora Sinistra, and she was a quiet, mournful young widow, devoted to her muse and knowing it thoroughly. Indeed, her new job at Hogwarts seemed to be all that stood between her and despair, for, it was rumoured, Voldemort had destroyed everything and everybody else whom she had ever loved.

Ivor assured them that the new Arithmancy teacher was also good. Septima Vector was brisk, practical, sympathetic, and "she makes numbers look beautiful". Hestia laughed out loud at the astonishment on Ariadne's face and said, "It's all right, Ivor is entitled to his personal tastes."

The new Muggle Studies teacher was a Phoebe Penrose, who was very learned and kept talking about black holes and rhombi and bathroom tiles. Kingsley thought he was brilliant.

But it took months to find a new Defence teacher. It was the middle of January before the Ministry sent over a timid little employee named Gilbert Wimple, who reluctantly agreed to fill the post for the rest of the academic year, just until somebody better qualified could be found. He taught them a great deal of theory and history, but a real live spell never entered his classroom. Ariadne supposed it did not matter; the war was over now, and their previous Defence teachers had already taught them more practical manoeuvres than any decent person would ever want to use.

Ariadne had the shortest Careers Advice consultation that Professor McGonagall had ever held.

"What do you wish to become, Miss MacDougal?"

"An apothecary."

"There does not seem to be any problem there. You'll need N.E.W.T.s in Potions and Herbology, of course, and I'd also recommend Astronomy. Do you know how long the apprenticeship is, Miss MacDougal?"

"Three years, Professor. And it is long hours on low pay."

"Then I believe you will not need to think about anything other than your exams for the next two years."

Ariadne did think about other things, of course. They never abandoned the habit of gathering around Richard's Wireless in the evenings. Sometimes they regretted it: the gruesome story of how the Lestranges tortured the Longbottoms to insanity made them wonder how many closet Death Eaters would never be captured. But usually they were reassured to hear nothing more sinister than Bagnold's latest legislation, the Muggle-relations successes, the high society divorces, the rare beast sightings, the professional Quidditch scores and the weather forecast.

School Quidditch was more civilised this year. When Ariadne's cousin Steadfast Macmillan pioneered the Hufflepuff team to victory and the Quidditch Cup, students from every house ran onto the pitch to congratulate him. Perhaps Regelinda resented having to pretend, but Letitia hissed at her not to be a fool, so Regelinda cheered for the Badgers along with the rest.

Hogsmeade weekends were permitted again. Ariadne danced attendance on her friends, while they splurged on fudge and pepper imps in Honeydukes; then Sarah spent hours in Gladrags, draping uncut fabrics over herself and poring over robe-makers' catalogues. Then Hestia would browse through the musical discs in Calypso's, building up her collection of post-war music with bright new artists like Canola O'Shee, Orpheus Carroll and the Quodlibets. They would stock up on Sneakoscopes and Remembralls at Dervish and Banges before sighing and saying, "Ariadne wants books. As if Hogwarts didn't have a library." And they would traipse into Scrivenshaft's to watch Ariadne waste her pocket money on mediaeval medicinal texts or Celtic mythologies.

Ariadne still found herself missing Veleta. Veleta had always understood the craving for books. She would have burrowed into the Muggle Cast-offs section and found more second-hand books than Ariadne could have read in a month detective stories, romances, fantasies, travelogues, old-fashioned school stories and they would have read them together for hours before Mr Scrivenhaft forced them into the agonising decision of how many they could afford to take back to Hogwarts.

Kingsley just wasn't the same. He would steer Joe between the bookcases before browsing through thirty volumes and buying three or four; but he liked Muggle mechanics and military history and other subjects that had to be read with a very long face. Joe never touched the books, although he did read anything that Kingsley or Ariadne placed open in his arms. Sometimes they tried reading out loud to him, but they were never sure that he listened. Meanwhile, Hestia would be polite and feign interest, but Ariadne knew she was counting the minutes until Ivor came to rescue her. Sarah never feigned anything; she would sit on a chair and gloat over the contents of her Gladrags bag, fluttering her eyelashes towards the shop window, since there was always some boy due to meet her here and spirit her off to Madam Puddifoot's.

Ariadne watched with great amusement as Sarah went through three boyfriends all seventh-years and Richard went through six girlfriends all fourth-years while Kingsley steadfastly resisted all attempts to acquire any girlfriend at all.

"Don't you ever tell which boy you fancy, Ariadne?" asked Sarah. "I tell you everything surely you must have had a crush on someone at some time!"

"Well, I suppose that retired singer was good-looking was his name Stubby Boredom? But he probably was not an intelligent man."

Sarah rolled her eyes and said, "We weren't talking about intelligence. You fancy a man for his books."

A peal of laughter cut through their conversation. Ivor, so solemn himself, had yet again managed to amuse Hestia.

"On balance," said Ariadne, "if I'm obliged to fancy somebody, I'm thinking I'd rather make friends with him first."

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But the O.W.L.s had to be sat and were sat with surprisingly little stress. When Ariadne's results arrived at Kincarden, she did not even open the envelope. Her father, overcome by curiosity, asserted his position as head of the household and held out his hand for the letter before she had finished untying it.

She knew her privacy had been invaded, but she also knew that this mattered more to her parents than it did to her. Her father was smiling widely. He passed the envelope to his wife before Ariadne had a chance to look.

"This is a pleasant, pleasant surprise," he said. "Your Cousin Lucius but never mind. You have done well, my dear."

Ariadne could not look at her brother. Seven Outstandings! She knew just how badly her father would have liked to throw that in Lucius Malfoy's face. But he never would, of course; even without Kenneth to consider, he would never annoy a Malfoy.

"I believe you could undertake six N.E.W.T.s, darling," said her mother.

Ariadne remembered what McGonagall had said about the best apothecaries qualifying in Astronomy as well as Herbology and Potions. She recalled her father's claim that no seriously skilled wizard lacked the N.E.W.T. in either Charms or Transfiguration. She considered how hard it would be to give up Ancient Runes just when it was all coming together so well in her mind. She looked at her mother's happy confidence that Ariadne would prove to be the family scholar. She looked again at the O.W.L. result sheet, which assured her she had slipped down to Exceeds Expectations in only three subjects.

And she really believed she could manage six N.E.W.T.s.

* * * * *

So Ariadne returned to Hogwarts enrolled in six courses; she was overjoyed to see her friends again; and there was no sign that Lord Voldemort still existed. This was the situation when, late in October, her mother sent her this owl.

My dear,

Your father and I have decided to host a little Hallowe'en party to celebrate the first year of peace. We are inviting about fifty of our closest friends and relations.

Janet was feeling unwell this morning; you maybe know she is pregnant again. I believe we cannot count on her to assist with the catering. So I have written to Professor McGonagall to ask if you can spend this weekend at home to help with the preparations and, of course, to join the party. You are, in any case, a far better cook than I am, my dear.

Pack a weekend bag as soon as you receive this, and your father will meet you in the Entrance Hall at four o'clock on Friday. Bring your homework with you, for you will be needing to help out with only a few odd jobs here and there.

Give our regards to dear Severus if you see him. But do not go out of your way, for he will be with us at Hallowe'en.

Fondest love,

Mamma.

Moon after Endless Moon

Chapter 18 of 21

The end of the war has cost Remus his livelihood and all of his friends. But the threat of starvation is a powerful motivator.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Moon after Endless Moon

Sunday 1 November 1981 Saturday 30 October 1982

Ecclesall, Sheffield; Old Basford, Nottingham; a straight line from Derbyshire through Manchester, Leeds, Yorkshire, Cumbria, Dumfriesshire, Lanarkshire and Argyllshire to

Inverness-shire; Fort Augustus and Kincarden Croft.

Rated PG for offstage violence, implied lycanthropy, complex emotions and obscure regional accents.

The news kept coming all day. The Order members hung around Madam Plumptre's Wireless, sending frantic owls to Dumbledore to request verification, clarification and instructions for action. But all Dumbledore ever sent them was:

No need to do anything yet, but stand by to await further instructions. APWBD.

Professor McGonagall Flooded in to say that she'd been hearing *rumours*. But when they assured her the rumours were true, she left at once, saying she would not believe it until she heard it directly from Dumbledore. Dedalus Diggle turned up, wanting to know if it were true that Voldemort had Transfigured into a bat and was flying around the Ministry of Magic, squalling like a seagull because he couldn't Transfigure back again; if so, said Diggle, he wanted an assurance that no one here would help him. Sturgis Podmore said he wasn't satisfied that the "disappearance" of You-Know-Who meant that he had actually ceased to be dangerous.

But at that moment a newscaster spoke from the Wireless: "Reports are now confirmed that Death Eaters all over Britain are panicking because the whereabouts of Him-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named are unknown. Far from sheltering their leader, prominent Death Eaters are frantically searching for him. Leading Magical Theory experts are claiming that You-Know-Who has probably been defeated..."

Elphias Doge said he would go to the Ministry of Magic because his friend Amelia Bones generally knew what was really happening in the world. He had hardly Disapparated before Mundungus Fletcher appeared in the fireplace, cheerily shouting, "It's true! 'E's not comin' back!"

"Are you *certain*?" asked Mrs Figg. "Can you *prove* that You-Know-Who is dead?"

"Unlikely to be ackshully dead," said Mundungus carelessly. He lit up his disgusting pipe, and Madam Plumptre didn't even bother to rebuke him. "But Dumbledore says 'e's definitely lost 'is powers. At first people were sayin' 'e might of just Disapparated to get out of a sticky sichuation. But Dumbledore says no, there's clear evidence of a bouncin' spell, and of You-Know-'Oo catchin' it in a way 'e *adn't* planned. Anyway, they've arrested some Deaf Eaters, and they'll give'm the troof potions, so we'll know soon enough."

With all the comings and goings, Mrs Figg began to complain that the Sunday was feeling more like a Tuesday.

At lunchtime the Longbottoms arrived. Alice was tearfully cradling her baby, saying, "It could have been Neville! Dumbledore says that Voldemort nearly targeted our Neville instead of Harry Potter. It could so easily have been Neville who was left without parents!"

Frank was more lucid. "It's too early to take a rest. We still have to bring every last Death Eater to justice."

"Where is Harry Potter?" asked Remus suddenly.

"Caernarfon," said Frank.

"*What?*"

"Hagrid was at Godric's Hollow before it was light, and he found Harry alive in the ruins of the house. Obviously he wouldn't leave a baby there, so he took him to... Yes, Caernarfon does sound obscure, doesn't it? I suppose anywhere would have done as long as it was a long way from Godric's Hollow."

Remus asked, "Why not to Daventry with Sirius?" before he had time to remember how stupid this question was. With a plummeting heart, he processed everything he had heard that morning and realised why Dumbledore had not wanted to leave Harry with Sirius.

Sirius was the only person who could have betrayed the Potters to Voldemort.

"Black did in fact turn up at Godric's Hollow," said Frank, "and he did try to talk Hagrid into handing the child over. But in the end Hagrid induced Black to part with that fabulous motorbike of his, and he used it to take Harry to Caernarfon."

It was only surprising that Sirius had relented so readily... and lent his beloved motorbike too... and to Hagrid!

Had Sirius gone mad?

Remus hoped so, because the alternative was too sickening to consider.

"There are huge gaps in this story," he said. "I hope Sirius will be here shortly to explain it all."

"Remus," said Peter, "I'm thinking you're being altogether too nice about this!"

"I'm just hoping that Sirius can explain... that there's something I've overlooked..."

"Such as?" Peter demanded. "Use your common sense, Remus! Nobody except Sirius was even knowing where the Potters were. It's not as if this could have happened by accident. In fact, I'm going straight off to tell Sirius just what I think of him!"

Remus clutched desperately at the last available straw. "Don't go," he said to Peter. "If this isn't some terrible mistake, then Sirius is far more dangerous than we ever imagined. Don't run a private vendetta leave it to the Aurors."

"Are you *afraid*?" asked Peter scornfully. "This is a *personal* matter."

And those were the last words that Peter Pettigrew ever spoke to Remus. He Disapparated on the spot, presumably to search all their regular haunts until he found Sirius. Frank immediately sent an emergency message to Auror Headquarters, but they knew there was little hope of the Aurors finding Sirius before Peter did.

An hour later, Peter confronted Sirius in a public street full of Muggles, and Sirius responded to Peter's accusations by hurling out an *Avada Kedavra*. The curse was so powerful that it not only blasted Peter to bits all they ever found of him was one finger but it also struck down twelve of the Muggles in a second. The Aurors arrived just half a minute too late, and as they marched Sirius off to Azkaban, he laughed in their faces.

* * * * *

In a space of twenty-four hours, Remus had lost all four of his friends. On the whole, it was more comfortable to think of James, Lily and Peter as honestly dead, for they had lived bravely and left the world a better place than they had found it. But Sirius was worse than dead; not only was he locked away in Azkaban, as inaccessible as if he had died, but it appeared that he had never been a true friend at all.

When had it gone wrong? Remus wondered. Had Sirius sold out to the Dark Lord impulsively, perhaps unbalanced by the sudden loss of Dorcas Meadowes? It didn't make much sense that he would ally himself with her killer, unless Sirius had already decided... Had the murder of his brother two years ago triggered some inner darkness, ignited some mad desire to finish what Regulus had started? But that was absurd, unless Sirius had already become bored with the relentless virtue that Lily required from James (and that Remus himself had always seconded) and reverted to his Dark roots soon after leaving school. But why? Had his whole contribution to the Order of the

Phoenix been a sham, because he had never really forsaken the Dark Arts at all? Had his murderous prank on Snape in their sixth year been an indication of his true character all along? Had their whole friendship been a lie, right from the age of eleven?

Remus felt faint and furious by turns, although the full moon was still ten days away.

Dumbledore arrived at the Plumpton's house around dinner-time. He confirmed that the house at Godric's Hollow was wrecked, James and Lily were dead, baby Harry was very much alive (although scarred for life), and Voldemort was simply... gone. There was no corpse, but this was not because Voldemort had Disappeared or otherwise left the scene; the terror of the Death Eaters in being unable to locate him confirmed that he was simply nowhere.

"Let me have Harry," Remus said to Dumbledore. "If James had known the truth about Sirius, he would have wanted Harry to go to Peter or me."

"You must admit, Remus," said Dumbledore, "that you would have a serious babysitting problem once a month without fail. Please don't take this personally; I have also refused an identical request from the Longbottoms. On balance, however, I believe that Harry needs to grow up among Muggles, where he won't suffer the inconvenience of celebrity status."

"Professor, are you *sure* a young wizard will thrive among Muggles? I'm certain I can play the Muggle if I have to. I'm Harry's only surviving uncle, and it seems hard "

"It will be very hard on a great many people, Remus," said Dumbledore gently. "But my priority is Harry's safety. And he cannot be safe if the surviving Death Eaters have any suspicion of his whereabouts, or if there is any hint in his life of either magic or his father's friends."

Remus guessed that Dumbledore was invoking some kind of spell to protect the child, but he could not imagine why the presence of wizards might damage the magic. "Sir, is there something you're not telling me?"

"Remus, I'm sure there are many things I haven't told you. But one thing I am telling you as I told Frank and Alice and will doubtless tell dozens of others is that I don't want any of you to contact Harry. Even pretending to be Muggles, you are not to do it. Harry's safety in fact, the survival of the entire wizarding community depends on his separation from our community."

Dumbledore Disappeared before anyone had time to protest further and did not reappear for another three days. By that time no one was surprised to hear that his errand was to pronounce the Order of the Phoenix indefinitely adjourned.

"I do not believe that Voldemort has gone forever," he said. "He is not dead and he is certain to return one day. However, that day may be years, even decades, in the future. Until that time, we may consider ourselves discharged from duty."

But the work of the Order had been Remus's only source of income, his only means of occupying his time, and his only way of making himself useful to society. As soon as the final Order meeting was closed, Remus Disappeared without waiting to hear if Dumbledore had anything to say to him.

He landed in his house in Nottingham. He didn't know what he was doing there. His mind churned over and over the realities of his new existence. James dead. Peter dead. Sirius a traitor. Lily dead. Harry banished to Muggledom. One could go mad thinking about it. He must find himself new work. But no one in the wizarding world would give him a job, not even a menial one. He would wait until the moon began to wane since his forthcoming Transformation was bound to be a bad one.

He spent it locked in his garage, something he had not done since his parents had died. In the morning he found he had scratched and bitten his flesh to ribbons: the wolf must have been profoundly and desperately distressed. It was afternoon before he even had enough strength to voice the spell that opened the garage door and admitted him back into his own house. He did not dare turn himself over to St Mungo's, in case some officious authority figure decided he wasn't competent to take charge of his own safety, but he did not stay in the Nottingham house for more than a few days.

It was time to look for a job. And that job would have to be among Muggles.

* * * * *

He began in the Derbyshire dales, looking for casual work on Muggle farms. It was a bad time of year to be looking; the harvests were finished, the lambing was still months away, and it was the bitterest winter he could remember; elderly Muggles died every week because they couldn't afford to heat their houses. It was pure luck when the odd farm could offer him a couple of days' labour. He also tried the Muggle factories in Manchester and Leeds. But those jobs did not provide accommodation he had to sleep in church halls and railway stations, risking arrest from Muggle please-men. And these large cities supported large wizarding communities; he was terrified that someone would recognise him.

The last thing he wanted, at this stage in his life, was to explain himself to a former acquaintance.

From one week to the next, he slowly moved himself northwards through Britain. After three months he had made his way to the Lake District, where a kindly Muggle farmer was willing to accept extra help with the lambing season. For the March full moon, Remus hid himself in a disused barn. After the April full moon, he was so sick and his evasive behaviour struck his employer as so suspicious that he lost his job.

So he moved north again, into the Scottish Borderlands. He spent the whole of summer in Argyllshire, tying up sheep fleeces, cutting hay, picking fruit and harvesting grains. Muggle farming seemed so clumsy and slow: how many men would lose their jobs if he could set the equipment to work with a single charm? Instead, he had to move his own arms and legs, his muscles at first screaming from the exercise, then later strengthening and accepting the labour easily under the pretence that this was an efficient way to feed the nation.

How many more lies would he have to tell?

Yet another advantage of working for the Order was that he had been able to tell the truth. The work had been honest, he had lived among wizards, and nearly all the members had known about his lycanthropy. Now he could not even claim that the work was honest; Muggle farming only produced half the amount of food that was necessary to support the British population, yet the Statute of Secrecy forbade wizards to use magical methods to increase the yield. It was a thoroughly deceitful level of inefficiency.

Three days after the September moon, Remus lost yet another job to "laziness", and he Apparated northwards to Fort Augustus. By this time he was asking himself how much further north he could go before he fell off the far end of the British Isles into the North Sea. But he scanned the map of the area posted on the community notice board, hoping to find enough details to enable him to make his way to the farms.

"IF YOU CAN READ THIS NOTICE, YOU ARE THE MAN FOR THE JOB!"

The words leapt out of a point on the map, so impossibly that he wondered if he had really seen them. But it was unquestionably a notice, and the paper full of words was unquestionably pinned to the board. He reached out his hand, and, unbelievably, the paper came loose, an ordinary sheet of paper covered with ordinary writing. The notice read:

THIS PAPER IS INVISIBLE TO MUGGLES. UNEMPLOYED WIZARDS ARE INVITED TO APPLY FOR THE VACANT SITUATION AT KINCARDEN CROFT. OFFERS A VARIETY OF CHARMING AND HERBOLOGICAL TASKS. WILL TRAIN ON THE JOB. COMFORTABLE QUARTERS; TEN GALLEONS A WEEK. KINCARDEN IS UNPLOTTABLE, BUT IS CLEARLY VISIBLE FROM THE VALLEY BETWEEN INCHNACARDOCH FOREST AND LOCH LUNDIE.

No matter how hard he squinted at the glossy photographs surrounding the map, Remus had no real idea what the area looked like, so he couldn't Apparate. But there was

no hurry. He began to walk south-west, in the direction of Loch Lundie and, just as he was wondering if the area included any human habitation at all, found himself face to face with a gate boldly labelled Kincarden Croft. It was so clear that even a Muggle would have seen it.

He opened the gate and walked in.

* * * * *

Working on the farm gave Remus plenty of time to think. First of all, he had to learn to farm by magic. There were spells to bale straw, spells to send the plough furrowing over the fields, spells to drill seeds, spells to uproot and bag potatoes. There was a tricky little charm that called all the eggs out of the hen-house without breaking them as they landed in the bucket, the clever *Delugeo Alpei* that mucked out the sty and byre, and a whole sequence that dealt with the manipulating of a complicated set of Muggle tools into the process of wizard-style milking. Wizard-farming was, on the whole, a great deal more efficient than its Muggle equivalent; with a smaller acreage, less effort and fewer workers, Kincarden was by far the most productive and profitable farm on which Remus had ever been employed.

"But we canna use majuck on t' sheep," said William, the only other employee. "They get hurrt if ye levi-tet them tae t' pairrk. Ye just hae tae shoow them tae t' pairrk without usin' spells, an' they feed themselves after, off t' grrass. An' ye have tae check they canna away o'err t' fence, ye can do majuck tae fix t' fences."

Malcolm and Kenneth MacDougal could not hide their surprise at how quickly Remus learned. It seemed that the old farmhand who had died last month had been exactly like William, who was large-limbed, strongly-muscled, good-natured, and took a month to learn every new spell.

"Dud yourself go tae Hogwarrrts, Rrremus?" William asked. "Masel' wuss at Hogwarrrts, an' they callit me a Skwub."

"How mean," said Remus. "You are not a Squib."

William was delighted by this response, and they had the same conversation every day for seven weeks. William was not a Squib in fact, once he knew a charm, it tended to hit its target with life-threatening force but his thought processes were extremely slow.

"Ye'rre no like me, Rrremus," he observed. "Ye speak lang worrds. Dud yourself learn muckle oot o' books?"

"I'm not experienced in farming," said Remus. "I'll need you to show me how it's done."

Soon Remus didn't need to think about farming. That left huge stretches of mental space empty and open to invasion. Voldemort's reign of terror was over, but the terrors in his own mind were only beginning.

His parents were dead. His siblings and grandparents were dead. His friends were dead.

James and Peter really weren't coming back. Sirius was worse than dead; he had violated the trust of them all and was now paying for his crime amid the miseries of Azkaban.

Somewhere at the other end of Britain, Harry Potter was growing up among Muggles, and Remus would never know what was happening to him. Morag MacDougal was only a few months older than Harry; Remus found himself watching the toddler, wondering if Harry could run and climb like Morag, speak distinct sentences like Morag, pretend to sweep floors or wash dishes like Morag. Was Morag a typical child? Was Harry? What was the difference between growing up as a girl in an isolated wizarding community and growing up as a boy in a busy town among Muggles?

He had avoided thinking about these things when he had needed to concentrate on Muggle farming. But now that so little concentration was required, the memories flooded in. His parents taking him to Healer after Healer... His siblings building a mediaeval-style sand fortress on the beach at Scarborough... The Dark Mark hovering above the ruined house in Nottingham... His grandmother telling him that there would always be someone else to love... Sirius and Peter swooping past his window on the flying motorbike... Who would have thought that Sirius would end up *killing* Peter? He didn't want to think about Sirius. He thought about James scoring goal after goal in the school Quidditch matches... Peter complaining about Professor McGonagall's essays yet refusing to accept Remus's help... because all the time he had really been struggling with trying to Transfigure himself into an Animagus... Prongs the stag cantering towards the Forbidden Forest... James and Lily cutting their wedding cake... Peter carrying baby Harry through the cottage on his shoulders... James and Peter sitting around Dumbledore's table at Order meetings, attending with identical earnest frowns...

Now Voldemort had gone, and Peter, James and Lily had paid the ultimate price. In a time of war, one had to accept casualties among the victors as well as among the vanquished. *But why am I the one who's still here?* Remus asked himself. *I can't contribute anything to this new society; I'm expendable. James, Lily and Peter are the ones who should have survived to reconstruct the community...*

It was so many months since they had all died that, although the painful thoughts were invading his concentration hour after hour, he was barely aware that the process was called grieving.

Sometimes, he had to switch off the avalanche of memories in order to be practical. Every month he had to find a way to deal with the wolf. On the Muggle farms he had lost jobs without really caring very much, but he knew now that he had to keep this job. He wouldn't find any other kind of work, and living among wizards reduced the number of lies he had to live. That meant he had to hide the wolf.

At the Harvest Moon, Remus managed to beg himself a day off work and Apparated to Fort Augustus. There he found an empty house scheduled for demolition; he cast a sound-proofing charm over it and Apparated inside. He stowed his wand in a cupboard that closed with a Muggle bolt; he didn't think there was any danger that the wolf could manage the bolt, but he shut himself up in a different room anyway.

In the morning he found that the wolf *had* managed the door-handle somehow, for he was lying at the foot of the stairs. In fact, the wolf had significantly increased the internal damage to the building, although he didn't think anyone would care. But he was able to crawl to the cupboard-room to retrieve his wand and charm his way out of the house.

The problem was finding his way back to Kincarden a journey of seven miles when he could barely walk. It took all morning. He managed to stagger into his sleeping quarters unseen, and to sleep away the rest of his "day off". But he was still exhausted the next morning; he didn't even need to plead illness, for Mr MacDougal informed him over breakfast that he was too sick to work.

However, he couldn't afford to lose two working days every month; and the house in Fort Augustus was due to be bulldozed in less than a week. Next month he would have to Transform somewhere closer to Kincarden. Next month the moon would rise earlier and set later, and the weather would be colder; he would need to account for more missing hours, and probably awaken feeling sicker. Above all, he certainly couldn't afford to let his employers notice that his "illness" recurred at such regular monthly intervals.

As it happened, the next full moon fell on the day after their Hallowe'en party, so there would be extra work for everyone on the farm throughout that week. They would not even let him take the relevant day off.

Sunrise after Hunter's Moon

Chapter 19 of 21

It's the Morning After the Night Before, and Remus will have to hide the real nature of his malady from his employers if he wants to keep his job.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Sunrise after Hunter's Moon

Tuesday 2 November 1982

Kincarden Croft, Inverness-shire; from Hogsmeade to Hogwarts, the Grampians.

Rated PG for references to alcohol.

When Remus awoke on the morning after the Hunter's Moon, there was glass on the floor, and the wooden boxes had been smashed to splinters. The door was scratched too, but it was still locked fast. He had a raging headache, every bone ached, and every muscle screamed when he moved it. Ignoring the pain, he tried to push himself to a sitting position, but he was so stiffly tensed against the biting cold that his body would not co-operate. He must get up. The wolf had been contained through the night, and the human was no sicker than could be explained by a bout of influenza. If he could move himself to somewhere warmer, he could collapse safely.

He managed to drag himself a few inches along the floor to run his hand along the crack under the door. But his wand was not there. It must have rolled away during the night. And he had locked himself in. He should have used an ordinary Muggle lock, he thought, for the wolf would never have managed the key. Then he saw that the door did not have a Muggle lock anyway.

Be that as it may, he had to move himself out of a magically-locked hut without using a magic wand. He was too weak to Apparate. He tried it, but his molecules were as unresponsive as a Squib's; there was no danger of even a small Splinch. So he was certainly too weak to batter his way out using brute force; he could not even haul himself through the broken window.

And it was too cold to stay here.

It was while he was still trying to move his mind around the hut and the cold that someone thumped the door from outside. He groaned. There was no way to explain the situation.

"Uss yourself unside therre, Rremus?" That was William, shouting far louder than necessary.

"Mr Lupin?" That was Miss MacDougal, who evidently felt responsible for him. It was about half-past seven, earlier than he had suggested they come to look for him. If she had arrived just ten minutes earlier, she would have seen... Well, it was a good thing that she spent most of her time at school. He felt that if she lived on the farm, it would take her less than six months to understand his secret.

"I'm here," he croaked as loudly as he could force out the sound. "But the door's locked."

"Key," said William.

"There's no key," said Miss MacDougal patiently. "Let me *Alohomora!*" The door flew open, and William stamped his way in. "Help him up, William. He's hurt. Mr Lupin, is this yours?" She had found his wand.

Remus allowed William to haul him to his feet and to half-lead, half-drag him down the paddock past the sheep. It was a frosty morning; the cold was not only in his body. The three made slow progress across the farm, Miss MacDougal leading and opening gates, William dragging Remus with a diligent mindlessness that soon ceased to be supportive. None of them asked the others any questions. It was fifteen minutes before William pushed Remus through the door of the outhouse quarters and onto a bed. It was actually William's bed, but Remus supposed it was too much to expect William to remember the distinction when they all had so much else to recall.

"William, go to my mother," said Miss MacDougal. "She's in the kitchen. Tell her that Remus is sick. He needs Pepper-up. Can you remember that? Bring it out when you can." As soon as William had gone, she dropped to one knee so that her face was level with his. "Mr Lupin, what are you wanting me to tell my parents?"

"That I'm sick. Because that's the truth."

She nodded. "Mr Lupin, do you know who locked you in the hut? Are they around yet? Is there likely to be any danger?"

"Yes, I know who, and no, there is no danger at present. There are no enemies on the farm this morning."

"So will it be safe for me to run up there and repair the glass?"

"Yes. I mean, no. Not for you, if they find out you've been doing magic outside school."

"I'm already in trouble for that, remember? I'll take a chance that they will not be asking too many questions about spells cast in a pure-blood household that includes six adult wizards. I'm inferring, Mr Lupin, that there's some reason why you're not wanting people to know about whoever it was who locked you in."

"Correct," he groaned. He knew she must be making connections between the "appointment" last night, the "enemy" who had locked the hut, and the real illness this morning. So far, she was guessing wrongly, but it was only a matter of time before she worked it out. "I'm sorry I can't explain better, Miss MacDougal. And thank you very, very much for taking me on trust. But if you can allow your parents to believe that I've been in bed since yesterday evening... You probably won't have to go as far as telling an outright lie, and it would help me a great deal."

Mrs MacDougal was in fact too busy to ask many questions. Although she hadn't exactly forgotten that the hired man had asked for this day off, it was obvious that he was genuinely sick, so the only sensible thing to do was to dose him with Pepper-up and leave him to sleep it off. She would find it strange that he seemed so unresponsive to Pepper-up; she would soon conclude that there was something else wrong with him in addition to the ordinary flu. She would certainly interrogate him about his symptoms when she was less busy...

* * * * *

As usual, Remus slept for most of the day. In his dreams, James and Peter were swooping down on the flying motorbike, waving happily, which meant that the Transformation had gone well. Peter was saying, "Remus, you got away with it again!"

"Yes, my job will live another month," said Remus.

"And another, and another," said James, the grin under his glasses infectious. He was more James-like than the real-life James had ever been. "We're going to get away with it again, Moony, you'll see."

"The best way to get away with it," interrupted Lily, "would be not to do anything illegal. Don't you want Remus to be safe?"

Lily wasn't supposed to be there; she didn't approve of the motorbike. But of course the dream supplied an answer to everything. "Harry and I came by Floo," she said. "We knew a family like the MacDougals would be on the Floo Network."

"What are we going to do next month, Prongs?" asked Peter. His tone was flat and bland, somehow not like the real Peter, so that Remus was tempted to ask, "Where's Peter?" At the back of his mind was the thought that he wouldn't like the answer to that question, but in his dream he didn't know that Peter was dead.

"Not far away," said the dream-Peter, still astride the motorbike and sounding more like himself. "What's *your* plan, Padfoot?"

Now the dream was going wrong; Sirius definitely wasn't supposed to be there. But he was sitting at the handle-bars. Of course, he must have been there all along, because it was *his* bike. "People with motor-Triumphs live dangerously," Sirius confirmed. "We'll have a dangerous time next month, and if Moony loses his job, he can come and live with me."

Remus mustered all the willpower that a dream could allow him and hurled, "Go away, Sirius. You killed Wormtail and Prongs."

Sirius leaned forward across the handlebars, raised a quizzical eyebrow, and asked, "Are you sure?" He sounded so much like Sirius he looked so bemused and carefree that it was difficult to remain certain that he *had* killed them.

Remus found his throat too sore from his Transformation to form any words. And Sirius's face was looming closer, asking, "Remus, do you really think I would kill James?"

Remus struggled to remember that Sirius *had* sent James to death, that seeing his face so clearly and closely ought to be repulsive, but all that was left was the vivid sense of a personality, of the loyal and honourable person who should have been Sirius.

"How well do you know me, Moony?" asked Sirius.

"How well do you know anyone, Remus?" That was Lily's voice. But somehow the face was not Lily's; it was the face of the farmer's daughter, the girl with luminously blue eyes. She definitely shouldn't have been in his dream. But she repeated the question: "How well do you know anybody, Mr Lupin?"

"I don't know you," he gasped.

"But I know you," the stranger tilted. "Your secret will be safe with me."

You don't know my secret, he hoped desperately.

"But I will keep it safely," she promised. "Sit up, you're needing to eat."

He found that he was awake, and the blue eyes really were above his face. He wondered when he had awoken and how much he had spoken out loud. What nonsense had Miss MacDougal heard him spouting? What had he been dreaming? He knew Sirius had been there, yet it couldn't really have been Sirius, for the dream hadn't felt like a nightmare. And his employers' daughter... What had she been doing in a dream about his friends, and what, for that matter, was she doing here now?

"I have it safely," she repeated, showing him his wand in her hand, then laying it down on the chest beside the bed. "Can you eat?"

He hauled himself upwards in the bed. He was ravenous, of course he was always ravenous after a Transformation but he didn't know if he had enough co-ordination to find his mouth. Miss MacDougal stood quietly while he settled into a more vertical position, then handed him a mug of vegetable broth. He worried for a second that she was intending to spoon it into him, but she simply observed for a moment, then said, "I have to do the laundry. I'll be back with you in a couple of hours." And she turned to the door.

She might well have kept that promise, but Remus slept too deeply to be aware of it.

* * * * *

As usual, he felt better by dinner time. When William came to ask him if he would eat with the family, he was only slightly paler than yesterday.

There were seven of them at the dinner table. The daughter, he noticed, was still not at school; but the son, it appeared, was in London, dealing with the family's commercial interests. He would not return until tomorrow.

"I'm wishing I'd known," said Mrs MacDougal.

"I'm sorry, Bethoc, I was thinking you did know," replied her husband. "Is it a problem?"

"I was expecting Kenneth to take Ariadne back to school this evening."

"Can you not take her yourself, my dear?"

"I could have if I'd planned it. But, Malcolm, I cannot leave the potions in the fireplace half-brewed. It's beyond Janet's capacity to deal with the brewing by herself, and she's not well enough to take Ariadne. I was counting on Kenneth."

"How unlucky," said Mr MacDougal, without much interest. "Kenneth could have postponed the business if he'd known we were needing him at home. But it's too late now. Ariadne will have to wait until tomorrow. I would have taken her myself this morning, but she seemed busy."

"There was work to be done this morning," Mrs MacDougal agreed. "I could not spare her as soon as I was hoping to. By the time she had finished, Kenneth had gone and you were busy. Can you not take her this evening?"

"I cannot, my dear, I have the books to balance and letters to write. Tomorrow morning will do."

Remus wondered how many more days of school Miss MacDougal would miss before her family finally decided that her education was a priority. Surely they had finished clearing away the aftermath of their party by now?

Miss MacDougal looked up from her plate. "Can I not take the Knight Bus by myself, Papa?"

"That is an unselfish thought, my dear, but you're not knowing what strange types you might meet on that bus. It's not safe for you to travel alone in the dark."

"Then could I Floo to Hogsmeade?"

"That is hardly safer when you consider that Hogsmeade is full of pubs, and the road from the village to the school is unlit."

It was becoming ridiculous. "Mr MacDougal," said Remus, "will you allow me to accompany your daughter through Hogsmeade?"

Husband and wife exchanged glances and nodded very slightly. Remus suddenly wondered if discussing their business at the dinner table like that had been all along their way of asking him to take their daughter back to school for them.

"Professor McGonagall will worry if I'm not back at school this evening," confirmed Miss MacDougal. "I owed this morning, to say I had been delayed, but she will not expect a second delay."

"It will be an hour after dinner before we can move the cauldron from the fire," observed her mother. "That will give you plenty of time to pack your bag, Ariadne."

The potion was evidently more important, but finally Mrs MacDougal was willing to draw the simmering pot away from the hearth and offer Remus the jar of Floo powder. He picked up the tartan travelling bag and directed, "The Three Broomsticks, Hogsmeade!"

Even as he landed in the grate, he couldn't help wondering if he would be waiting by the bar for another hour before Miss MacDougal was allowed to follow. He conceded that her parents did have a point about exposing oneself to undesirable strangers, for a few of the customers had become rowdy and were staring with unabashed interest at his shabby robes. He didn't like to think of them sizing up a fresh-faced girl through their fog of Firewhisky.

Madam Rosmerta had just served the loudest table. She turned around, saw Remus standing outside the hearth, and asked if he were staying to drink. "I'm sorry I do not recall your name, but were you not James Potter's friend?"

He began to explain that he was only using her Floo, which she had authorised to the non-drinking public during opening hours, but before he had time to add that he was waiting for another traveller, Miss MacDougal stepped out of the grate. She was now dressed in Hogwarts uniform, and she looked immensely relieved to have escaped; evidently she had shared his suspicion that she might have been kept at Kincarden all week before it became convenient for her family to allow her to return to school. She looked very young and vulnerable among the hardened drinkers and worldly-wise businesswizards, and Remus didn't want to keep her inside the tavern for another second. So he merely waved to Madam Rosmerta, then ushered his charge down the thoroughfare and guided her out of the door as fast as he decently could.

"Thank you," said Miss MacDougal as soon as they had stepped into the cobbled street. "I know it's not really part of your job to do this, especially when you've been unwell. I am extremely grateful to you that I will not miss another day of school."

She held out her hand for her travelling bag, but he swung it aloft out of her reach and told her to make a light.

As she shone her wand onto the Shrieking Shack opposite, it briefly occurred to him that he might have Apparated there last night. He could have found a safer place for his wand in the Shack, and in the morning he would have been able to charm his way out again by himself... No. He would still have been too weak to Apparate, so the only way back to Kincarden would have been by Floo from the Three Broomsticks. So he would still have stepped through the kitchen hearth looking like a drunken wreck, and that would certainly have provoked an inquisition of awkward questions. He tried not to think about what he would do next month. It wasn't too hard to find isolated buildings where he could lock himself away; the real problem lay in explaining away his "illness" the next morning.

When they were clear of Hogsmeade and could hear their footsteps striking the path, Miss MacDougal spoke. "I'm knowing what you have to be thinking."

"What am I thinking?"

"About my family. But it does not happen often. The last time they pulled me out of school was nearly two years ago. And that was after a series of Death Eater scares, when they were wanting me at home so they could see I was safe... You're not speaking. Seriously, Mr Lupin. I'm knowing they ask a great deal from me. But that's because they contribute a great deal too. You have to have noticed that."

"They are good employers," he said non-committally.

"They are. They've taken care of William for years, because they know he will not survive anywhere else. They never speak a cross word, or raise their voices, or make life in any way unpleasant for anybody."

"Do you never guess wrongly what they expect of you?"

"Not really. My sister-in-law does not always get it right the first time. That does not matter. My parents just tell her again, then again, as many times as it takes her to understand them. And they do it with endless patience and never a hint of annoyance."

He could not dispute that. They were extremely calmly-spoken people. He asked, "Wasn't it a shock for you, Miss MacDougal, to discover that other people are more direct?"

"A great shock, in my first year at school," she admitted. "It took a long time to realise that people can disagree or give orders or refuse requests, all without meaning to hurt anybody's feelings. But, Mr Lupin, have you never had to learn to behave in different ways in different places?"

"I would certainly never have behaved at home the way I behaved at school. But that is no credit to me. I think you said, Miss MacDougal, that you are in Gryffindor?"

"Oddly enough. I'm knowing we look like a family who would invariably and instantly be Sorted into Hufflepuff. Were you not in Gryffindor too, Mr Lupin?"

"Yes, I was. But I only meant to ask you whether Professor McGonagall was the person to whom we should report your return."

Professor McGonagall was in fact awaiting her errant pupil in the Entrance Hall, so Remus handed back the bag and abandoned his employers' daughter to the warmth and light of Hogwarts. He tried not to wish himself back at school: occupied, provided for and befriended.

But the path back to Hogsmeade felt dark and very empty.

Drawing-Room Deceit

Chapter 20 of 21

Ariadne continues her sixth year at Hogwarts amid friends, family and Transfiguration problems.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Drawing-Room Deceit

Tuesday 2 November 1982 Monday 4 April 1983

Hogwarts, The Grampians; Halifax, Yorkshire; Malfoy Manor, Wiltshire; Giffnock, Glasgow.

Rated PG for low-level violence and high-level lies.

"Ariadne, have you been job hunting?" asked Hestia.

"Or do you just have about five new boyfriends?" asked Sarah.

"Alas, not even one." Ariadne hung her cloak and sat down on the edge of Sarah's bed. "Have you a new boyfriend, Sarah?"

"No, just the same old one. But look at all the owls that arrived for you this morning!" Sarah waved the packet. "If it isn't boyfriends, have you been buying herbs on mail-order?"

"If you give her the letters," Hestia interrupted, "she'll be able to tell you who wrote them."

"If she doesn't go all secretive on us," Sarah agreed. "Look at this one it's sealed with a crest *Miseris* something... Well, something Latin."

"Sarah Sticky-Beak, *if* you'd like to spy on Ariadne's private and most intimate correspondence," said Hestia.

"Of course I would," said Sarah.

Ariadne took the crested letter and broke it open, knowing that a thank-you note from Aunt Macmillan would not contain anything very private. "Before you even ask, the fascinating and most intimate epistle reads as follows:

My dear Ariadne,

Thank you so much for your hard work and hospitality over the weekend. It was well worth the effort, for the food was delicious and the whole party was lovely.

I wonder if I could trouble you to divulge the recipe for your chocolate whisky gateau? Could you also tell me the title of the story that you read to Zelly and Ernie? They have been begging me to read it to them again.

Do not neglect your studies any further on our account, my dear. Take advantage of the peaceful days ahead now that Evil has been defeated.

Your affectionate aunt,

Margaret Macmillan.

"There, you can see that all my dark secrets are exposed. I have to betray my recipe." As she had hoped, Sarah and Hestia were losing interest, and they did not comment when she read the rest of the letters silently. The notes from Manjula Patil and Amelia Bones were in similar vein. The fourth note was slightly different:

Dear Miss MacDougal,

It is my understanding that you were entirely responsible for the Strathbogie mist served at your parents' soirée. It was excellent within its limits, although the luxury of Napoleon brandy would of course have improved it.

You made that faded old dress-robe look charming. Next time you are in Diagon Alley you should drop my name to Madam Malkin, and she will grant you discount on silk robes in the design of your choice. I understand she makes tartans to order.

You must ask your brother to share the spell he used to hollow out those pumpkins. Are they not a rather un-British custom? It is my understanding that jack o' lanterns are traditionally carved from turnips. However, they were beautifully even.

With best wishes for your O.W.L. preparation,

Iris Parkinson.

But nothing rivalled the pale pink envelope, delicately scented with jasmine, that was sealed with the crest of Malfoy Manor.

Dear Cousin Ariadne,

Thank you for receiving us at your home on the 31st. Lucius, Linus, Letitia and I greatly enjoyed meeting your friends, and we thank you in particular for sharing your excellent culinary skills.

We rejoice with you over the downfall of Him-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named and trust that you remain in good health.

Sincerely,

Narcissa Malfoy.

The paper writhed like an adder in Ariadne's hands, as if each copper-plated lie were leaping off the page to spit venom. *Dear... greatly enjoyed meeting... rejoice over the downfall... sincerely...* she would not, *would not*, let herself harbour up a mental record of Narcissa's misbehaviour by reading the lies a second time. She would destroy the evidence and hope to wipe the words from her memory. She pointed her wand at the letter and murmured, "*Incendio!*" A feeble puff of grey smoke singed the Malfoy watermark and died.

"Hestia...?"

"Honestly, Ariadne, can't you do a fire-charm yet?" complained Hestia good-naturedly. She aimed her own wand at a point six inches above the foot of Sarah's bed, and commanded, "*Incendio!*" A tongue of pale blue fire leaped into the air.

Ariadne fed Narcissa's letter into the flame until it was licked to ash. Then she tendered the envelope, then, as an afterthought, the letter and envelope from Mrs Parkinson. At another wave of Hestia's wand, the flame and the ashes vanished.

When the next morning's post arrived, a huge barn owl from the Kincarden owlery dropped onto Ariadne's lap an unwrapped item about the size of a Quaffle. It took her a moment to realise what it was: it was a Transfiguration aid like the one that Remus Lupin had Conjured for her over the weekend. But this one was clearly not Conjured: it was constructed of straw, strengthened by some kind of paste, jointed so that the matrix could be moved into any shape, and charmed with some kind of flashing colour so that the vertices would change from red to blue after the vectors had been moved. Ariadne did not need to move the starting position into the basic dimensions of an elephant, or convert them back into the dimensions of a mouse, to know that this model would work even more perfectly than the crude Conjured version that had helped her on Saturday.

The ragged sheet of paper tied to the handle said only:

Dear Miss MacDougal, I hope you will do well in Transfiguration. RJL.

The owl hooted insistently, clearly requiring her to scribble a quick reply on the back of the note, so that it could set out on the return journey towards its busy working day. But some instinct caused Ariadne to stow the message in her school bag and rip a clean sheet of paper from her notebook. She wrote,

Thank you, Mr Lupin, it was most extraordinarily kind of you to take the trouble to build it for me. I'm hoping you remain well. Regards, Ariadne MacDougal,

and tied it to the owl's foot. She really was touched that the farmhand had spent his limited free time thinking of her, particularly when he was so obviously distracted by some frightening secret of his own.

He really should have been a teacher.

* * * * *

Ariadne managed to avoid returning to Kincarden for the rest of the academic year. Her weekly letters to her parents carefully emphasised the long hours of homework, the frequent class tests, and the extra recommended reading, while glossing over the Quidditch matches, the trips to Hogsmeade, and the political and philosophical debates with her friends. Her parents were convinced, quite accurately, that academia kept her very busy, and they did not try to draw her away from school again until the Christmas holidays.

In the event, no part of Christmas was spent at Kincarden. Ariadne met her family at King's Cross Station, and they all Flooed from the Leaky Cauldron to Manchester, where they passed four rather dismal days at Severus's house in Spinner's End. Ariadne finished all her holiday homework in that period; she spent nearly all day in the attic, listening to howling gales cutting through the chimneys, trying to bolster her mother's Conjured fire without actually using magic, and lighting up her wand-tip to three hundred Watts to dispel the gloom. The archaic charms revealed by her Ancient Runes translations, the comfortably solid facts of her Herbology text, and the illuminating guidance of Remus Lupin's Transfiguration aid were all far more enticing company than the family bickering that pierced through two flights of stairs into the attic floorboards.

Cousin Severus, although he never stopped brewing anti-nausea medications for Janet, disapproved of the way she was bringing up Morag. "Foolish indulgence. How will she survive the rigours of Hogwarts if you don't teach her self-discipline now?"

He disputed with Ariadne's mother on the correct way to brew every potion. "Stir deep and smooth, Aunt, and then add the catmint. If you shovel it in while you're stirring, the juices draw out too quickly. Although they will anyway, if you keep chopping them so finely like that."

He disagreed with Kenneth on Crouch's policies. "He hunts down Death Eaters because they are still a threat to us. His son was guilty. Show mercy to them now, and they'll show none to us when the Dark Lord returns." Kenneth considered it very bad taste to suggest that the Dark Lord would ever return, and the political dispute took a noisy hour.

Severus even tried to tell Ariadne's father the correct way to manage his farm. "Animals don't need to be pure-bloods. You'll get a hardier strain if you cross-breed your Highlanders with Merinos." Her father resolutely refused to say more than, "You've maybe a point," but it was obvious that he was not going to alter his pastoral policy on Severus's advice.

When Severus's next words were, "Get that brat away from my atropine powder!" Ariadne hurtled down the two flights of stairs into the kitchen and swept the sobbing Morag into her arms. It was clear from the smouldering glares around her that all the adults had plenty more to say, so Ariadne carried Morag upstairs to the attic.

Morag stopped crying and said, "Tuzzin S'ape is never 'appy."

"Hush, you'll be in trouble if they hear you say things like that. That powder was poisonous; he was not wanting you to hurt yourself." She lit her wand and tried to distract the bairn by making different coloured lights.

"But he's never 'appy," persisted Morag.

"Cousin Severus has had a sad life. It makes him even sadder to hear people talk about it."

When Ariadne went down to the bathroom at night, she heard her mother weeping with frustration behind the guest-bedroom door. "Why can he not, just once, drop the controversial topics and speak pleasantly to people? Did he not learn anything from his own childhood? And why do Kenneth and Janet have to rise to the bait every time?"

"My dear, if it upsets you so much," her father's murmur returned, "why do you insist on visiting him?"

"He's my only nephew, Malcolm. We cannot abandon *family*."

* * * * *

Ariadne's parents were relieved to Floo from Severus's house to Malfoy Manor for a grand and glittering Christmas celebration. Morag was enchanted by the holly wreaths and helium balloons, the ceiling-sweeping pine tree lit with real fairies, the piles of rosette-decked presents, and the endlessly available bowls of sugared almonds and chocolate snowmen. But her fingers had hardly touched the nearest tempting bowl when Cousin Lucius's son, Draco, who was about the same age, ordered:

"Don't touch! Those are *my* sweets!"

Morag replied that she *would* touch, and the cousins were quarrelling tooth and nail before they had been acquainted ten minutes.

The scenario was repeated that afternoon, when Cousin Narcissa hosted a matinée party for a dozen pure-blood toddlers. After a puppet-charmer had presented a marionette performance of *Puss in Boots*, half the children clambered onto the stage, wanting to know if the puppet-cat had really eaten the puppet-mouse. Morag murmured to one of the Patil lassies her opinion that they should "wait forra tarmer-man to tell us if we can p'ay wiv his puppets," and young Draco instantly interrupted with:

"We don't wait, we take puppets, because it's *my party*." He grabbed the King-puppet, shook it roughly, and ordered, "Dance!"

"It will brrrrreak!" Morag's voice had risen several decibels. "Put it down!"

Draco promptly clonked the wooden marionette onto Morag's head. She screamed in pain. The Patil twins both pushed at Draco, tiny Pansy Parkinson and her friend Daphne pushed back at the Patils, and Draco's cousin Gregory took advantage of the general disruption to shove randomly at Janet's nephew Stephen. Stephen landed on top of the Zabini boy, who landed on top of the Puss puppet that he had been trying to charm, and at this point a puppet really did break. Pansy was grabbing at Morag's hair, Draco was urging Gregory to finish up the Patils, and order was only restored when Dobby the house-elf brought round a tea tray of chocolate éclairs.

Morag spent a great deal of that week in time-out, learning not to speak her mind in polite company because it caused fights, to the delighted triumph of her Cousin Draco.

Mr and Mrs MacDougal seemed completely at home among the polite pure-blooded company that flooded through the manor-house.

"I haven't seen the Macmillans in Society for a while," said Mrs Parkinson.

"Goodness, no, that family has no sense of its proper place," replied Cousin Narcissa. "We invited them here, Iris, and they pleaded a prior commitment. They are spending Christmas with the last remaining dregs of the Longbottom family, if you please!"

Cousin Narcissa's friends tittered, while Ariadne kept her eyes to the floor, knowing that she could not expect her parents to speak a word in favour of the Macmillans.

"And Margaret's had yet another baby, I believe?" prompted Mrs Parkinson. "Isn't she your sister-in-law, Bethoc? You must know about this baby the seventh, or the eighth, or the ninth?"

Mrs MacDougal shook her head. "I'm afraid I've lost count too. It's a long time since I've seen the family."

Ariadne stared at the green-and-silver Persian carpet until the pattern blurred before her eyes. Mamma knew every detail of Aunt Macmillan's nine children, and it was less than six months since the two families had met; it seemed such a daft lie to pretend otherwise.

"Altogether too many children," Cousin Lucretia Goyle was saying. "One is my limit. Or perhaps two, at the outside. I don't know how Aunt Macmillan manages so many. Aunt MacDougal, do you think she'd like to buy a couple of house-elves? I have two young ones ready to sell."

"I'm not knowing anything about Margaret's domestic arrangements," lied Mamma. "As Iris reminded us... the Macmillans have not appeared in Society for a long time. Having so very many bairns has to keep them busy. As you say, the family is perhaps too large."

Ariadne clamped her teeth on her tongue to prevent herself saying, *But the Macmillans are not needing a house-elf because they all take care of each other*. She even wanted to say, *They are better people than anybody in this room*! But talk like that would expose Mamma as a liar and hurt her deeply.

Cousin Lavinia Crabbe passed around a plate of mince pies as she pressed the point. "But I expect you MacDougals will be seeing the Macmillans soon. Aunt MacDougal, why don't you find out about those house-elves and owl Lucretia about them next week?"

"I'll be glad to owl Margaret this evening, rather than later," Ariadne already knew that a thundering lie was to follow "for in fact I will not be seeing her at any time soon."

Ariadne only hoped that Aunt Macmillan would never find out that Mamma had as good as disowned their friendship in order to appease the Malfoys.

Cousin Narcissa already knew that the MacDougals would be staying with the Macmillans for Hogmanay, so she knew that Mamma had lied; she raised her eyebrows triumphantly when Lavinia and Lucretia were not looking.

But Narcissa could play the game better than anybody; she said nothing but, "Do have another cup of tea, Aunt MacDougal. Talking of breeding creatures, we have a dozen of last summer's owl chicks to give away. I'd like all of you to put your heads together and give me the names of people who'd like a new eagle owl. Pass your cup too, Iris."

"What a quiet, well-behaved little thing that Miss MacDougal is," observed old Madam Greengrass.

"Yet she speaks so intelligently in her own home," puzzled Manjula Patil.

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Mamma did in fact have an attack of conscience about the way she had sacrificed Aunt Macmillan. That evening, away from the inquisitive ears and rattling tongues of the Malfoys' friends, she asked Ariadne, "Darling, are you thinking I did wrong to fib about our plans like that to Cousin Narcissa? After all, it's not her business how we spend Hogmanay."

It's not about our holiday plans. It's about whether we care about the Macmillans enough to tell their enemies that they are our friends. But Mamma looked so anxious, so contrite, in such desperate need of reassurance, that Ariadne smothered her anger and tried to say something comforting instead.

"Nobody here is likely to mention it to the Macmillans," she soothed, "and what they are not knowing will not hurt them."

Ariadne and Morag were both relieved to flee from Malfoy Manor to Glasgow to celebrate Hogmanay with the Macmillans. The Macmillans always managed to be polite without worrying about politeness, and Morag made herself so inconspicuous playing with Zelly and Ernie that she was not put in time-out once. Ariadne and the older cousins ventured out for a few dismal walks around Glasgow, but they invariably returned home soaked and chilled, so for most of the time, they played at sardines and charades until they were exhausted and then at chess and Snap and Gobstones until it was dark. On Friday night they welcomed in the New Year, and Kenneth was sent out to the front gate to chap on the door as the clock struck midnight so that they could all be sure of shaking hands with a tall dark man as the New Year entered.

On Sunday afternoon, Kenneth accompanied Ariadne, Steady, Mercy and Felicity onto the Knight Bus back to Hogwarts. He never spoke a word to them she always felt he resented being pulled away from his real activities in order to babysit but he glowered at any stranger who was foolish enough to come near them, and the pupils were all deposited safely at Hogwarts before dark.

When her friends asked if she had enjoyed her holidays, Ariadne was still glowing with the warm memories of the Macmillan household. She replied without thinking that she had had a wonderful time with her cousins, and what had her friends done?

Sarah had been skiing in the Austrian Alps and sightseeing in Vienna, and the enthralling account of her holidays deflected all interest from whatever Ariadne might have done.

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The spring term was very hard work. Ariadne used Mr Lupin's Transfiguration aid every day, and so did most of her classmates. Her charm-work was still clumsy, and Kingsley and Hestia spent hours tutoring her in practical work. They only pretended to grumble about her ineptitude, for they knew they would need her help in Herbology and Potions.

Nothing Ariadne said about Severus ever inspired Kingsley or Hestia to feel any sympathy for him. They hated his lessons. He never devoted any time to theory; they were supposed to absorb the theory naturally as they worked on the practicals. He did not tolerate students helping one another; his lessons were always conducted in dead silence. Biting sarcasm, docked house points and extra homework descended on any student who was caught out in a mistake. Even on a day when everybody worked well, Severus could be trusted to sneer and snap, never to explain anything more than once, and to mark hard. But Hestia ruined a potion at least once a fortnight because she lost her nerve when Severus hovered twitchily over her cauldron.

The weather was uniformly horrible, so nobody was surprised when Ariadne announced that she would be biding at school for the Easter holidays.

I do not blame you,

her sister-in-law wrote on Good Friday,

because we are now banked up in snow up to the windows, and it's so overcast that you would not know the Equinox had passed. You are certainly happier at the school, where there is less to distract you.

Despite the cold, the farm has had a successful lambing season, due to a great deal of patience and many sleepless nights from all the men. Remus never spares himself when we're needing him to be busy. It's odd that such a hard worker has such peculiar personal habits. On Monday night he was off again to wherever it is he goes each month he never says where, but it's presumably to some kind of schoolboys' reunion, since it's quite regular but always on a different day of the week. Kenneth thinks these "friends" of his drink him under the table because he's always very sick and fit for nothing the next day. But his symptoms do not look like a hangover to me, so I'm wondering if the reunion is not some kind of duelling club in which the members hex one another into oblivion. We do not mention his evenings off to your parents (who have yet not noticed) because if they decided that Remus was too irresponsible to keep his job, it would go very hard with Kenneth. Your father literally notices nothing, and your mother is thinking that Remus's "illnesses" are some kind of body-rhythm allergy.

Talking of sick, I'm finally well again, just very large and always exhausted, wondering if I'm carrying triplets. I cannot wait for June, when I'll have a chance of feeling normal...

For Ariadne, June always meant exam time. Sixth-year exams were supposed to be a minor interruption, the lightweight practice exams between the O.W.L.s and the N.E.W.T.s, but Professor McGonagall told them that she would not tolerate any slacking off in case slacking became a habit, while Severus informed the class that he would be marking to N.E.W.T. standard so that they would all see how far short they fell of their required goals.

Under such pressure, Ariadne had no time to wonder about the personal habits of her parents' farmhand. She would have staked her Potions exam that his problem was neither alcohol nor a hexing club, but "body rhythm allergy" did not seem quite right either. She wondered if his mysterious "enemies" were untracked Death Eaters who bore a personal grudge; the dangers of that kind of situation would account for his unwillingness to explain himself. Whatever the exact nature of Remus's problem, it seemed to Ariadne that his safety and perhaps other people's too was best ensured if she discouraged the discussion.

She did reply to Janet, but she confined herself strictly to commiserations about pregnancy, enquiries about Morag, the stresses of homework, and the glories of Hogsmeade in the spring snow.

Truth Under a Waning Moon

Chapter 21 of 21

Remus comes to terms with his grief, attempts to hold onto his job, and hopes for a better future.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Truth under a Waning Moon

Tuesday 2 November 1982 Saturday 2 July 1983

Kincarden Croft, Inverness-shire; Invergarry, Inverness-shire.

Rated PG for implied lycanthropy.

After his encounter with Ariadne, Remus found himself brooding less on the past. She had blazed into his dilemma like a beacon of light. Finding an ally, however briefly, marked the end of his grieving period. Instead, he found himself wanting to be cheerful, and he often succeeded simply by thinking of her. The image of Ariadne MacDougal entering the shepherd's hut in the cold dawn, trusting him enough to mind her own business, yet trustworthy enough to make it her business to guide him to safety, became a kind of talisman. Friendship had not died with James and Peter; new friends were always a possibility.

He did not seriously expect to see Miss MacDougal again, let alone to make a real friend of her. His thoughts of Ariadne were more symbolic, to remind him that the cosmic system was not all bad, that humans were not always hostile, that a rescuing angel (albeit with Gaelic eyes) had sought him out in his hour of need.

The next full moon fell on St Andrew's Day, and Mr Kenneth MacDougal offered to take Remus and William to the Muggle celebrations in Invergarry. That meant another night of slinking off to the forest, of searching out a tree far enough from the reaches of adventurous village drunks yet close enough to allow an easy journey home, of chaining himself with a Conjured chain that he desperately hoped would last the night, of casting warming charms and Silencing Charms before the moon finally rose...

He escaped from Invergarry undetected. After he staggered the two miles back to Kincarden, the family noted that he had been out all night and they noted that he was unfit to work; therefore, they assumed he had drunk too much at the revels (even though neither Kenneth nor William remembered seeing him in the hotel). He was told that he might consider his "hangover day" his day off, and there was an end to it.

Ariadne, of course, would have recognised that it was not a hangover. He wondered if the real Miss MacDougal would have worked out by now that he was a werewolf, and how angry she would be that he had imposed on her. But the ethereal Ariadne who comforted his dreams, the one who did not objectively exist, probably did not take much interest in wolves. On the contrary, he decided, he would imagine her as a person who would always open doors for him, month by month, and continue to sweep away every lurking disaster...

The following full moon coincided with Hogmanay while the family was away in Glasgow. That gave Remus time to spy out the local area unquestioned, and he found a disused barn between two villages. He Apparated there for the next six months, casting a sound-proofing charm on its outer walls, a mild heating charm on its inner walls, and a locking charm on its double doors, then throwing his wand to the high ceiling with an *Adhaero* Charm timed to end five minutes after moonset. It was very safe, and morning escapes were relatively easy, but it still left the problem of staggering back to Kincarden (as often as not, when he didn't have permission to be away) and then explaining his illness.

In January, he said he had flu. Mrs MacDougal believed him because they all had the flu.

In February, he said he had flu. Mrs MacDougal believed him because it was obvious that he really did have the flu.

In March, he attributed it to the cold it was still snowy. Mrs MacDougal believed him, but she gently suggested he take better care of himself, because becoming ill at lambing time was not really allowed, and it seemed that he became ill rather often.

In April, he didn't have a convincing excuse. Mrs MacDougal began to talk about how "regular" his illnesses were, how non-responsive to traditional medicants they were, and asked if he had consulted a Healer about the possibility of a "body rhythm allergy". He said that he had, muttered something about the tests being inconclusive, and apologised for the wasted time.

"Remus, we are concerned," Mrs MacDougal repeated. "It's not that your disorder has cost us very much time, for you've had hardly any days off, except to be sick. You're a good worker, and we're worried about you that if your illness is not treated, you'll become a great deal sicker."

He apologised again. It seemed that he was in no danger of being sacked; the real danger was that his employers would diagnose the true cause of his malady. And they didn't want to lose a good worker, but of course they couldn't harbour a werewolf, especially not one who had tricked them into believing he was a normal person.

He pushed the thoughts away. It hadn't happened yet. It wasn't going to happen for at least a month. He made himself think about Ariadne, a Pict with Gaelic eyes, the product of such an ancient magical heritage that she wasn't even afraid of werewolves. Not in his dreams.

In May, he managed to beg a couple of days off. He spent them lying in the barn.

Early in June, his convenient, sturdy, isolated barn was demolished. "Of insufficient historical interest," the Muggles had decided, and "of no current use." That full moon, Remus had to Transform in the shepherd's hut, which was lashed by such a violent thunderstorm that he need not even have bothered to lay the Silencing Charm. But the trick of sticking his wand to the ceiling wouldn't work in the hut, because, with a vigorous leap, the wolf could reach the ceiling and might snap the wand. So he had to leave his wand outside, knowing very well that it could be lost in the storm, and, once again, he spent most of the next day lying in the hut. It was late afternoon before he mustered the strength to smash the window, clamber out, locate his wand, throw a *Reparo* at the window, and take himself down to the farmhouse kitchen.

Mrs MacDougal said nothing, for it had officially been his "day off", but he saw Mr and Mrs Kenneth exchange significant glances. He wondered what they speculated about his poor health.

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That evening Mr MacDougal summoned him to the parlour and began, "Remus, I believe you are acquainted with a lady named Emmeline Vance."

It was the last topic that Remus had imagined. "Yes, sir."

"My wife called on her this morning. Imagine her astonishment, Remus, when she saw your photograph on Miss Vance's chimney-piece!"

"Sir, that astonishes me, too."

"It was a group portrait," Mr MacDougal clarified, "of the Order of the Phoenix members. Miss Vance keeps a large print on her mantelpiece. My wife saw at once that you were sitting next to her on the photograph and quickly learned that you, too, had been a member of the Order."

"Yes, sir."

"That is highly commendable; I cannot think why you did not mention it to us. But to business. The reason my wife was in Sheffield is that our daughter wishes to go on a walking holiday that this Miss Vance is organising."

Remus had no idea why this might be his business, but he nodded.

"I confess to you, Remus, that my wife and I are quite torn. Miss Vance seems a very respectable lady, who has planned the route carefully, made all suitable provisions for food and shelter and safety, and is intending to chaperone the young people very carefully. In short, it's difficult to imagine what could go wrong." The father, however, was obviously imagining all kinds of things that might go wrong. "But it seems to us that Miss MacDougal is yet very young to spend as long as a fortnight so far from either home or school. There are two other lasses in the party, and we wonder whether Miss Vance will really have time to give each of them the focussed care that they all deserve."

The next pause was so long as to demand a comment. "I quite see the dilemma, Mr MacDougal."

"Remus, we have decided to send you to join the young people on this holiday. It will be part of your employment contract with us; you will be the particular protector of Miss MacDougal."

Remus was amazed that Mr and Mrs MacDougal did not see the obvious flaw with this plan. Perhaps, given his social labels of "farmhand" and "half-blood", they did not consider him to be a man at all.

"Professor Dumbledore himself vouches for your character, Remus," said his employer. "He says you were especially skilled in Defence Against the Dark Arts. I believe we do not encounter many of the Dark Arts nowadays, but there are other evils in the world snakes, flies, dogs, rain, sunburn, late nights, unbalanced meals, rash over-spending, harebrained schemes to climb dangerous mountains, over-familiar young men, forgetting to owl home. You have to understand that the only *adults* involved in this scheme are Miss Vance, who cannot possibly do everything herself, and a man whom Miss MacDougal has never met. I know my daughter has met you only briefly, but we would feel her to be safer if you would accept the task of being her guardian."

Her guardian or her guard? sprang inevitably to mind. There was no choice, of course; Remus was obliged to obey. It was, he knew, a sign that his employers trusted him enormously and were a thousand miles away from guessing the true nature of his monthly illnesses.

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Now Remus had to re-order his thoughts swiftly. Miss MacDougal would be coming home in less than a week. And she wasn't some kind of angelic spirit. She was a real child, who officially needed his protection. Unofficially, she was likely to become very irritated by the way he had been installed to guard her, report on her, and invade the leisure time that she had hoped to spend with her friends.

But he didn't remember much about the real child; there had been so many fantasies that he no longer recalled what was true memory and what was merely a figment of his imagination. He knew there had been a Hogwarts school uniform, and a Transfiguration problem, and a lit wand beamed on a dark path. But she wouldn't be wearing uniform, or calculating Transfiguration either, not in the school holidays, and she wouldn't light her wand by daylight.

There had also been a nebulous feeling of collusion, an assumption that she was on *his* side... an assumption that couldn't possibly transfer over to new situations all these months later. It was he who had to try to be on *her* side this summer, to do his job without ruining her holiday.

He mulled over this a hundred times, while he scythed hay, while he packed fleeces, while he applied fly-repellant to the shorn sheep. And when he looked up from the final sheep, Ariadne was standing in front of him.

This time she wasn't a figment of his imagination. She was carrying a lamb and speaking very prosaic words. "Can I take your clipboard? Kenneth's wanting all the records." She placed the lamb in the pen and held out her hand.

He passed over the clipboard. "Good afternoon, Miss MacDougal. I didn't see you enter the field."

"You were concentrating on the sheep. Or was your mind engaged with some Transfiguration problem?" She was looking right at him, as if their last encounter had been yesterday.

He had remembered her smile correctly after all.

A new friend was always a possibility.

THE END.