

Crown of the North

by *Grace has Victory*

Two years after Voldemort's fall, Remus Lupin plays at teaching, while Ariadne MacDougal prepares for a career in apothecarism. But what is the price of choosing what is right over what is easy? And is Caradoc Dearborn really dead?

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

The Purple Flowers of Friendship

Chapter 1 of 21

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The Moon-Cursers

For PETER,

my one and only,

who risked his heart on me.

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 the parts of this story that were "too much like a love story".
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CHAPTER ONE

The Purple Flowers of Friendship

Saturday 4 June Thursday 21 July 1983

Hogwarts, the Grampians; King's Cross Station, London; Kincarden, Inverness-shire; Perth.

Rated PG for references to real-world issues.

As the rain beat against the windows, week after week, and the thunder crashed about Hogwarts' towers well into third term, Hestia Dearborn sighed, "I think my summer holiday is doomed."

Ariadne could not help agreeing that if one had not booked a camel in the Sahara, one might as well bide at home.

"Where were you planning to go?" asked Sarah Webster.

"I want to see Scotland."

"What!" exclaimed Richard Champion. "Where do you think we are now?"

"We're shut up in an Unplottable castle that can only be accessed by magic vehicles, and when I look out of the window, I don't know whether I'm seeing the Cairngorms or the Grampians."

"You've never cared about geography before," pointed out Ivor Jones logically.

"Of course I care," said Hestia. "My brother died in the Cairngorms. At least we think he did. If he died at all. Now that the Death Eaters have gone, I want to retrace Caradoc's last journey and imagine to myself... as nearly as anyone can... what happened to him."

Ariadne accepted that desire with a respectful silence, but Ivor swiftly interrupted with, "Don't go off doing something like that alone. Not in the mountains. Take your parents."

Hestia shook her head. "I can't do that. It would upset them too much, so I'm not telling them what I'm doing. But you remember Glenda Foster, who was Caradoc's girlfriend? I've written to her about it, and she says she'll come with me. I've told my parents that we're going on a walking holiday to see Scotland. But they won't swallow that story if the weather doesn't turn kinder."

Joe Fenwick moved a random chessman without really looking at the board. Richard sighed and checkmated him.

"To do a holiday like that," said Kingsley Shackbolt, "you'd need to take an *Auror*. Think about it, Hestia. Your brother was murdered. Someone out there is hiding a very guilty secret. Either you have no hope of ever finding out how he died or else, as soon as you do find out, that Someone will put you straight in the firing line. Not counting ordinary problems like mountaineering accidents, snake bites, and being rained out. Do you really think two girls should try all that by themselves?"

Hestia shrugged. "You can come with us if you like. Why don't you *all* come?"

Richard had a holiday job with Quality Quidditch Supplies that he could not cut short because he needed the money; Sarah was spending the whole summer in Spain with her parents; and it was too much to ask of Joe, sitting by the Gryffindor fireside as immobile as Niobe over the horror of his own brother's death, that he spend his spare time trailing the fate of somebody else's. But Kingsley and Ivor simply informed their parents that they would be spending the second half of July on a walking holiday in Perthshire. And that was that; the parents were not solicited for *permission*.

Ariadne was seized with a wild envy of her friends, together and unsupervised in the fresh air, saying what they liked and going where they liked... her parents would take it for granted that she was too young to do anything so dangerous.

"The invitation will have to come from your parents, Hestia," she said. "I'll only be allowed to go if they can sell mine the idea of safe walks under adult supervision."

"Adult?" asked Richard. "Ariadne, you're the only one who isn't seventeen yet."

"I am, but I'm not the only one who's not forty yet. Can you fix it, Hestia?"

"I'll... oh, don't tease her, Richard! I'll have my mum write to your mum. Glenda wrote this morning that she's bringing a couple of Caradoc's old friends from the Order of the Phoenix. Not Aurors, Kingsley, but they'll have seen active service against the Death Eaters. They'll know what they're doing, so that does reduce the danger problem."

On balance, Ariadne felt it was wiser not to invite her parents to think about danger at all. She primed Hestia to use phrases like "established tourist routes", "walking guides", "advance bookings", and above all, "adult supervision". Her own letters were full of words like "revision" and "summaries" and "mnemonics" because she knew she had no hope of gaining special privileges unless she first convinced her parents that her head was full of her exams.

"Well, it is," said Ivor. "We'd be mad not to be thinking about exams right now. The teachers are taking these jolly sixth-year exams almost as seriously as the O.W.L.s."

"They were the palmy days," said Kingsley, "when we only had ten subjects to worry about." Kingsley was by far the ablest student in their year, but he complained that taking six N.E.W.T.s was like taking sixteen O.W.L.s.

Sure enough, it was not until the exams were over that Ariadne's mother mentioned the holiday in Perthshire. And Ariadne found herself surprised by the news that her parents were granting permission.

Mrs Dearborn has invited you to join Hestia and a few others on a hiking holiday in the Cairngorms in July. I think this will be a good opportunity for you, darling, as it is not really very far from home (if anything goes wrong, we'll receive your owls within minutes), and at your age you must not be nervous about occasionally venturing out without your parents.

The hike is being organized by a very respectable lady, a Miss Vance, who was a member of the Order of the Phoenix. I visited her yesterday, and she does seem very responsible. It turns out that Remus Lupin was also in the Order and that Miss Vance knew him quite well. (Do you remember Remus? He has worked for us for nine months now.) So we have instructed Remus to accompany you.

Ariadne, we want you to pay most particular attention to whatever Remus requires of you since we have placed your safety in his hands. You have to treat him as your guardian rather than a farmhand for as long as the excursion lasts.

But enough of warnings since we expect you to have a wonderful time with Hestia and the others, and in the meantime you should be thinking about your exam results...

"Are your parents really so concerned about safety and responsibility that they're sending you off into the wilderness under the protection of *a young man*?" asked Sarah shrewdly.

Ariadne thought it unkind to dwell on the fact that her parents probably had not noticed that their mere farmhand was a man. They evidently considered Mr Lupin to be a Responsible Adult and herself to be a bairn who was *just* beginning to be an adult, but was certainly not a woman. If they began to notice otherwise over the next few weeks well, she knew they did not find it easy to think of her as growing up; they might easily change their minds about letting her go.

"It will be all right, Sarah," she said. "Mr Lupin is the teacher-type."

Her reply home said no more than:

I'm sure we can trust Miss Vance's judgment since Hestia also thinks her a very sensible lady.

The rest of the letter focused on the range of available sleeping-bag thicknesses and their efficacy against night temperatures in the mountains, and the viability of using weightless charms on rucksacks and the cost of climbing boots. These were problems with solutions. Too many words about bee stings and sprained ankles would only lead to a veto on the whole holiday.

* * * * *

Finally the exam results were published, trunks were packed, and Ariadne made the long train journey from the Grampians to London, where her mother escorted her to the public Floo in the Leaky Cauldron so that she could make the swift transition from London to Inverness-shire.

By late afternoon, she had exchanged her school uniform for the MacDougal working robes and was out in the fields, where her brother Kenneth was directing the fly-treatment of sheep. The repellent was already mixed, and the application charm was so simple that William the farmhand could do it, but each sheep had to be individually treated. She watched as William cradled lamb after lamb in one arm, holding the bucket above its head and joyfully shouting, "*Dissemino!*" Unfortunately, he kept forgetting to update the written record. He *could* write, Ariadne knew, but he generally avoided doing so.

She picked up his clipboard and said, "Let me help you, William. What's the number on that lamb again?"

William grinned guiltily, read off the serial number, and pretended that he had been waiting for Ariadne all along. She noted that the other farmhand, Mr Lupin, had placed his quill under a *Scribo* charm and was efficiently dictating information to it. Kenneth was grateful for her arrival, but he only nodded briefly to acknowledge her assistance with William and then turned to his own portion of the sheep field. The weather had turned kind, and the work was mindless. Ariadne longed to throw off her robe and work in her petticoat. She wished home could always be this way, with no need to pretend that what was happening in front of them was in any way different from reality.

Kenneth did not speak to her until he asked her to collect the records. Mr Lupin did not notice her until she took his clipboard, when he startled at the sight of her and seemed altogether disconcerted. He did not seem to hear when she thanked him again for having sent her the Transfiguration model last November, but she felt he was pleased rather than otherwise to see her, so she took the clipboard to Kenneth and left Mr Lupin to his own thoughts.

Ariadne was the centre of attention for that first dinner. Her parents wanted to know every detail of every exam, and the state of health of every teacher. The conversation had only flagged a moment before Janet, her sister-in-law, was asking about every Quidditch match and whether there were any alterations to the buildings in Hogsmeade. Her niece Morag kept asking "Why?" and William wanted to know whether Professor Sprout still grew biting plants and whether Professor Slughorn still ran that special club he found it very difficult to grasp that Professor Slughorn was no longer teaching. Only Kenneth and Mr Lupin were completely silent: Mr Lupin was politely listening to every word, while Kenneth's attention was devoted entirely to his bashed neeps and bacon stovies.

The first three weeks of the school holidays were all alike. The weather was scorching, and July was the easiest month of the year on the farm. Every day Ariadne climbed the hills to the sheep paddocks, usually taking Morag with her (Janet was busy with baby Aidan and grateful for the intervention), and they helped with whatever the farmhands were doing. Often they could not help much. Remus Lupin managed the raspberry crop single-handedly by ranging the barrels in a row in front of the canes and commanding, "*Decerpo!*" The berries all flew off the bushes and rained into the barrels within ten minutes. Then they had to call in William to help with the tedious business of guiding the full, slightly levitated barrels back to the barns. For the rest of the day there was nothing to do except watch the sheep, help Morag pick bunches of purple heather, and sit in the sunshine reading postcards from Sarah and Richard or pretending to read a textbook.

"Do you not ever read?" Ariadne asked Remus.

"I haven't any books."

She did not hide her shock at this appalling statement. "Do you not own *anything*?"

"A house in Nottingham, which is no good to me in the Highlands. I can't really lug trunkfuls of books to every farm where I find a casual job."

"Are you not *starving* for the printed page?"

"Yes," he admitted.

"Will an Astronomy text do?" She held out hers.

"Very well, since I dropped Astronomy on the night of the O.W.L. and haven't ever seen the N.E.W.T.-level text." He flipped it open to the third chapter and ran his eye down a diagram.

"Do you not like Astronomy?" she asked.

"I like it well enough, but I was advised to drop it. For a start, the theory classes clashed with Potions, which seemed more useful in those days. Professor Slughorn was horrified when Dumbledore advised him to accept me into his N.E.W.T. class because my Potions marks were abysmal. But you, I am told, are doing rather well in that field."

"You love to change the subject, do you not?" she teased, wondering why he had been advised to drop Astronomy in exchange for a subject in which his marks had been abysmal.

"No one ever made subject-changing as difficult as you do. Most people jump at the chance to switch the conversation to themselves. You're the first person I've ever met who doesn't."

"You're doing it again! You're so anxious to change the subject that you're talking about changing the subject."

"You're the only person around here who wants to discuss abstractions. It makes a refreshing change."

She had no idea why Remus was not wanting to talk about his schooldays, but it seemed safer to discuss Astronomy. William and Morag pretended to listen as Ariadne and Remus took turns reading out loud. In the end Morag became bored and interrupted: "Aunt 'Radny, I have brought flowers for you."

"They're lovely. Are you wanting me to play with you now?"

"I have flowers for Mr Looping too."

"Flowers from a lady are a Great Event," said Remus solemnly. "Do you have any for William?"

"You have to come with me to pick some for William."

Ariadne stood up and began to pick. After a while, Remus closed the book and followed them.

"But William must not pick. The flowers are for him," said Morag.

So William sat while Morag passed over fistfuls of purple heather. "The'll be wested," said William. "I canna carry all thirr hame. Unless I levi-tet them. Can the Mooggles see levi-tetted flowerrs, Rremus?"

"Not if you aim low," said Remus with a perfectly straight face. "But what shall we do with so many flowers when we are home?"

"Heather is a good antiseptic," Ariadne pointed out. "And a cholagogue. A vasoconstrictor. A diaphoretic. An expectorant. A diuretic..."

"Aunt 'Radny, what's a die your tick?"

"A medicine," she said evasively, but she felt the blush invading her cheek.

"All right, I take the point," said Remus. "Some of us here listened to Professor Sprout."

"Powdered heather is mixed with the clay of some evil-warding amulets. Infused heather is the base of most good-luck or protection potions."

"And some of us listened to Professor Slughorn too."

"And decaying heather compost is scattered in an ancient Celtic rain-making ritual."

"I can't imagine that any Hogwarts teacher would You made that up!"

She sauntered on ahead, cradling armfuls of Morag's heather, and never looked back.

Finally William agreed to keep all of the flowers in empty jam jars that he had been storing under his bed. "I'll Soommon wa'er," he said.

"*Aguamenti!*" Remus intercepted adeptly. William was likely to be drenchingly good at a simple Water-Transferring charm.

As the jam jars filled, Ariadne asked, "Mr Lupin, are you worried about this trip to Perthshire?"

"What makes you think that?"

"You had to have known I was coming home this week, but when I walked into the field the other day you looked as if you'd seen a ghost. And it was hours before you spoke to me."

"Yes... yes, I suppose it was. Miss MacDougal, I don't relish the thought of being appointed anyone's watchdog. And I can't imagine that you think the post very necessary either."

She nearly laughed at the thought of Remus-the-giant-bulldog, standing in front of her to growl at stray highwaymen and giants or at random amorous advances from Kingsley or Ivor, if that had been what really worried her parents. "Mr Lupin, I'm wanting to go to Perthshire. Do you really think I'm going to be a difficult prisoner to guard? I promise I will not make any trouble for you."

"I was more concerned that my presence would make trouble for you."

"I doubt it. But you have to make me a promise too." She looked around, but Morag and William were both concentrating on arranging the flowers. "Promise that once my parents are out of earshot, you'll drop the 'Miss MacDougal' nonsense and call me 'Ariadne' like all my other friends."

By the time they all walked into the kitchen for dinner, Ariadne could truthfully say that they had finished the chores and started on next year's studies, which put her parents in a very good mood.

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The sunlight was still blazing strongly on the third Thursday, when Ariadne and Remus hoisted charmed-weightless rucksacks onto their shoulders and took the Knight Bus to Perth. There was no public Floo in Perth indeed, as far as they knew, there was not a single wizard so the Knight Bus was the only option.

"I do hope it will be safe," said Mamma. "There are strange types on the Knight Bus. And there will be no way of alerting us if there is trouble." Since it would attract too much Muggle attention to have Ariadne walking around Perth with an owl on her shoulder, one of the Kincarden owls had been instructed to fly on ahead and wait for her in a tree, so there would be no way of sending a message from inside the bus.

"That," said Papa firmly, "is precisely why Remus is going along too. Remus, you are not to allow anybody on the bus to speak to Miss MacDougal."

The bus was not crowded; the only stranger who spoke to them at all was the conductor, an aged Cockney who kept complaining, "I'm too old for vis, shoulda retired years ago, but Ernie says 'e can't do nuffink wivout a conductor, and does vat vare Minis'ry give penshuns for bus conductors? Oh no, not vem..."

The Knight Bus rolled right up High Street, which was strictly for pedestrians, and screeched to a halt outside a Muggle café. Ariadne followed Remus, who hesitated at the bus door before apparently deciding that his babysitting duties did not require him to help her down the steps. The Kincarden barn owl hooted softly from a nearby tree. Ivor and Hestia were waiting for them inside the café, looking strangely under-dressed in jeans, T-shirts and sun-hats.

"Honestly, Ariadne," said Hestia, "I always dress this way at home. No one under thirty wears robes when they don't have to."

Ariadne thought fleetingly of the trussed-up little pure-blood children at the Malfoys' Christmas party, and of the workday robes that she wore on the farm, and decided not to comment. The Macmillan children certainly dressed Muggle in the school holidays, but the jeans felt strange to her, and they looked stranger still on the dignified Miss Vance, who walked through the door a moment later.

Miss Vance had so thoroughly impressed Mamma with her respectability that Ariadne was surprised to realise that she was only Remus's age; they had been in the same year at Hogwarts. She lowered her weightless rucksack onto the floor as if it weighed a ton, pulled several pound-notes out of her wallet to pay for everybody's drinks, and

slid a photograph onto the table.

"That's Caradoc!" breathed Hestia.

"I Charmed the picture still in case we have to show it to Muggles," said Miss Vance. "It was taken just a few days before he went missing."

They were interrupted by the jangling of the door, which swung open to admit Kingsley (looking very Muggle in mountaineering boots), Glenda Foster (whom Ariadne vaguely remembered from being a couple of years ahead of her at Hogwarts), and a lanky, square-jawed, straw-haired wizard whose red-checked shirt clashed with his khaki-splotted army trousers. He did not look at all like a Muggle, and Hestia looked as if she were fighting the urge to tell him so, but Ivor laid a hand on her arm and said, "Mr Podmore, I presume?"

"We took the Muggle bus from Dundee," said Mr Podmore. "They're strange people there, Emmeline. They couldn't stop staring at us."

"You clash, Sturgis," said Miss Vance coolly. "You'll have to go to the gents' and change your shirt for something less garish before we leave here. Don't worry, there are Muggles who make the same mistake. Glenda was just about to tell us about the day Caradoc disappeared."

"It was exactly three years ago," Glenda said. "The last Sunday in July."

Remus frowned briefly. Everybody else was looking at Glenda, but something made Ariadne ask, "Remus, do you remember what you were doing on that day?"

"As a matter of fact, I do," he said. "But continue, Miss Foster."

"Glenda," she corrected. "Caradoc Apparated to Perth that morning. He couldn't Apparate any farther because he had never been in the area before and didn't know any of the landmarks. So he had to walk the rest of the way. He sent me an owl from Pitlochry to say that the white man had sent him to meet some friends that was standard code for saying that Dumbledore had sent him to spy out a Death Eater meeting. He didn't say where the meeting was, only that he was 'going out into the wilderness'. And that was the last anyone ever heard of him."

"Did Dumbledore know where the Death Eaters were meeting?"

"Not exactly. It's wilderness for miles around Pitlochry, and the Death Eaters would have been meeting outdoors. It doesn't make any sense to me why they would choose such an isolated location, but..."

"It does to me," said Ariadne suddenly, and everybody looked at her. "There's no wizarding community anywhere near this area, except..."

"Yes?" urged Sturgis Podmore.

"... Except for Macnair Castle."

There was silence. Finally Sturgis Podmore broke it with, "Trust a Scotswoman to know Scotland. I didn't know that the Macnairs lived in these parts."

Ariadne forced herself to remember that nobody here would lock her up all day for speaking her mind. "I know Walden Macnair was cleared by the Ministry, but I'm sure he was a Death Eater. His castle is... oh, show me a map... somewhere along the River Tummel here. Unplottable, and probably invisible to Muggle eyes, but almost certainly a Death Eater stronghold. There Foss. I'm sure the Macnairs once owned Foss. If Caradoc had been sent into Macnair territory... but how could Dumbledore have sent one man alone on such a dangerous assignment?"

"He had an Invisibility Cloak," said Hestia soberly, "and he was an Apparition expert. And, as Glenda says, I'm sure the meeting would have been outdoors, not in the castle itself. There was no real danger unless someone detected him and moved very fast."

Which somebody presumably did.

"I'd always thought that 'going into the wilderness' meant going north to the mountains," said Sturgis. "But what if Caradoc was going west, to a suspected Death Eater stronghold? If we'd thought to ask Dumbledore, he might have told us..."

"If we'd thought to ask Dumbledore... he would have told us not to go," said Glenda. "He certainly wouldn't have handed out the clues."

"Going as far as Macnair's personal territory is out of the question in any case," said Emmeline Vance firmly. "We're here to retrace Caradoc's last hours for our own satisfaction, not to bring his assassins to justice."

Kingsley looked as if he wanted to argue, but said nothing. Sturgis pushed back his chair and led the way to the door. Hestia stepped out into the sunshine and began singing, "*It's the far Cuillins are puttin' love on me...*" Ivor joined her song with a spring in his step.

The Man who Disappeared

Chapter 2 of 21

The quest to discover the fate of Caradoc Dearborn only reveals fresh mysteries.

CHAPTER TWO

The Man who Disappeared

Thursday 21 July Sunday 24 July 1983

Perthshire: Perth, Dunkeld, Pitlochry, Foss.

Rated PG-13 for explicit lycanthropy.

In fact they did not walk very far on that first day. Ivor and Hestia were virtually dancing down the pavements, but with a fine disregard for direction or route, and those who

had risen early to take the Dundee bus wanted to set a more reasonable pace. Emmeline Vance was managing the map, but with so many frowns that in the end, Kingsley gave it a swift glance and announced that he would navigate. Sturgis Podmore was apparently enjoying his reunion with Remus and Emmeline, and he wanted to talk about the Order of the Phoenix, so Ariadne fell into step with Glenda Foster. Remus, although replying to Sturgis, never left her side; he seemed very happy to pay her so much attention and very glad of the excuse of her parents' orders to be able to do so. The Kincarden barn owl hovered discreetly after them, fluttering from tree to tree.

Glenda, however, was not in the mood for conversation, and Ariadne wondered if she were already regretting the melancholy excursion.

As they left the elegant Georgian streets of Perth, Hestia slowed down and stopped singing. She waited for Glenda, which gave Ariadne, who walked long distances every day at home, a chance to quicken to a more comfortable pace. It was almost amusing how Remus lengthened his stride to accompany her. But letting him see that she had noticed would remind him that she was his job. She asked him instead, "Remus, what were you doing on the day Caradoc disappeared?"

"Some of us from the Order spent the afternoon together. I remember it because it was the last time I saw James and Lily Potter before their son Harry was born."

Once again, she wondered what he was not saying. She wanted to ask him more about the Potters, but Sturgis appeared on her other side, saying, "Your memory is better than mine, Remus. Did any of us talk about Caradoc that evening?"

"Not that I remember. I didn't hear that he'd vanished until after Harry was born, so before this morning I never made the connection that Caradoc was killed ~~at~~ that day. Or night."

"Night? What was special about that night?" asked Sturgis.

"Nothing in particular. I just remember walking with Sirius Black who was still a friend in those days in the blinding rain, staring at the full moon, talking about James." Remus was looking at the ground as if he did not want either of them to meet his eye. "Obviously what I'm asking myself now is: how many of those people knew Caradoc had been sent into a Death Eaters' den?"

Sturgis swore loudly. The noise drowned out Ariadne's next question. Remus only looked politely at Ariadne so that she could repeat herself. "You're meaning did *Sirius Black* know where Caradoc had gone? Was *he* the one who tipped off the Death Eaters?" She had not realised that Remus had known the infamous Black, but it made sense if they had worked for the Order together.

"It probably isn't a helpful speculation," he admitted, "but the possibility is crossing my mind."

"Never mind speculation," Sturgis interrupted. "What about the *danger now*? If we'd realised this earlier... We're going to have to change the itinerary for this excursion. The original plan didn't include Macnair territory, and it has us camping up in the mountains on Sunday. It looks as if we're going to need to avoid open spaces on that night."

"We have no reason to believe that there *is* any danger," said Remus smoothly, "so don't go putting frightening ideas into your friends' heads."

"I still want the youngsters to be spending Sunday night with civilisation," said Sturgis. "It's starting to sound as if Pitlochry itself is nearer the mark anyway. That means slowing the whole thing down."

Ariadne did not know what Remus meant when he agreed that "loitering would be safer". However, Sturgis had a word with Kingsley, who, without checking the map, led them unerringly to a camping ground only a couple of miles out of Perth. Fortunately they were able to hire a site despite not having booked; Emmeline paid the manager in Muggle money, and they set up their tents by hand, since the site was full of Muggle campers. The Kincarden owl settled in a tree beside Emmeline's tawny and Ivor's Scops, all of them trying to look as if they had nothing to do with the campers.

The next two days were equally slow-paced. On Friday they only walked as far as Dunkeld. They left their bags inside their tents and spent the rest of the day walking through the larches, photographing the Hermitage, exploring the cathedral and the Ell House. On Saturday they made a very leisurely pace to Pitlochry, but instead of camping, they hired a cottage just outside the town.

At five o' clock on Sunday morning, Hestia pulled Ariadne's covers from the bed. She was not smiling. Glenda, obviously sleep-deprived, tip-toed to Emmeline's bunk. She hesitated, but Hestia encouraged her with a nod, and Glenda daringly pulled off Emmeline's covers. Emmeline began to mumble something cross, but then thought better of it.

"Today's the day, then?" said Ariadne.

Hestia nodded. Five minutes later they were dressed and hammering at the door to the other bedroom. Sturgis's voice called out something that sounded like a complaint, but Ivor's voice reminded him, "Lay off. Today's the reason we came here."

They were all out of the cottage before six. Hestia and Glenda led the way, not speaking to anybody else, although Ivor tagged closely behind them. Ariadne and the others lagged a respectful distance back. Kingsley, who had taken charge of all the maps and memorised them, pretended to consult one about the route. But they all knew that the only possible plan was to follow the River Tummel until they reached Macnair Castle unless they first encountered anything that looked like a Death Eater meeting place.

The silence was almost deathly; they could hear every rustle of the leaves, every fall of their own feet. Their owls were silent. They passed no human settlement. They met neither hikers nor fishermen. There was not even a sign of past tourists, a footprint in the mud or a cigarette butt. Yet the light was so strong almost blinding, despite the shade of the trees that it was difficult to imagine that anything Dark had ever happened here, or even to remember that "Dark" was only a metaphor and that Death Eaters might kill in open sunshine.

"What are we expecting to find?" Emmeline murmured. "The grass scorched where the Death Eaters passed?"

"Skulls in the river?" offered Kingsley.

"Trees carved with the Dark Mark?" added Sturgis.

"It's three years since Caradoc came this way *if* this is the way he came," said Emmeline. "And two since the last Death Eater meeting."

Remus had said nothing. He was keeping so close to Ariadne that she felt he would have held her hand if she had let him. She knew he was worried about the day's excursion, and it was obvious why.

They had ambled along the riverbank for about three hours when Hestia pointed upwards and left. "That's *it*!"

Ariadne saw nothing for several paces more, and then suddenly it snapped into view: a huge Gothic castle with a yawning portcullis, and pinnacles and turrets clinging to the rose-beige walls at impossible angles, doubtless held in place by Dark spells. A spine-shivering chill had invaded the summer air, and she could see a face through a lancet window...

A *face*. Although wrapped in a wimple, complete with thirteenth-century filet cap, the face was not at all ghostly. It was young, female, and very much alive, with huge haunted eyes...

"Stand back!" Remus had a hand on her shoulder and was pulling her away, but she was hardly aware of him. She was still staring at the face high up in the window, sure that the stranger was staring back at them. "Ariadne!" Remus was speaking more urgently now. "*Come away from the castle.*"

It was the first time she had ever felt angry with Remus. The longer she stared at the girl in the window, the more distinctly she could see the face. It was a face she had never expected to see again. When Remus's hand tightened on her upper arm, she wrenched her eyes away and saw that he was terrified.

To oblige him, she began to step backwards. Instantly, the castle vanished and the air was warm again. She looked exactly where the castle had been, but all she could see was trees, hillside, and then a ruined kirk beside a cluster of houses that announced themselves to be the village of Foss.

"The castle is invisible," she breathed, "unless..."

"Everyone stand back!" Kingsley had latched on, and his voice cut into her thoughts. He grabbed at Glenda Foster, none too gently, and said, "We'll talk later ~~stand~~back from the castle." Suddenly everybody was taking notice of him, and they all scuttled backwards. "Keep walking," said Kingsley, "we need to move."

After they had moved a hundred yards back the way they had come, they stopped and sat down at the bank. Glenda, despite all attempts at nonchalance, was in tears, and Hestia had buried her face in Glenda's shoulder. Remus did not budge from Ariadne's side, but he addressed the whole group.

"It isn't safe to investigate that castle any more. Whatever it is, it's Dark magic."

"But we didn't actually go *near* it," said Ivor. "It was like telescope vision. We could see every detail the cracks in the bricks, the faces at the windows but we weren't in fact very close to it."

"We were too near," said Kingsley soberly. "We couldn't see it at all until we crossed some kind of boundary. Then we saw everything. We must have stepped over some kind of magical territory marker Ariadne, do you still think it's Macnair's territory?"

"I do; the village of Foss was clearly marked."

"I suspect a Muggle tourist would see Foss and nothing else," said Emmeline. "Only wizards who step inside the Macnair border could see the castle. Which means that if they saw us seeing them they would know we are wizards. That would put us in danger of retaliation even if we had innocent intentions. Which we haven't, exactly."

"I think we should have lunch in Pitlochry," said Remus. Sturgis gave him a significant glance, which he ignored, and nobody argued.

Those who could not Apparate held on to those who could, and they relocated themselves to the cottage. Ariadne had not expected Side-Along Apparition to be so disorienting; her head was spinning as they walked across to the lawn outside the Festival Theatre and sat down to recover from the long hike.

Ariadne was thinking about the face she had seen at the window. She had met most of the Macnair clan at one time or another (and had not liked any of them), and this had not been a Macnair face. Obviously, they would not be living there alone; there would be all kinds of employees and visitors. Yet, despite the quaint costume...

"The face at the window... It looked so exactly like somebody..."

"A ghost?" offered Sturgis.

Remus accepted Ariadne's assertion that it was definitely not a ghost, but suggested, "An illusion? We're dealing with magical vision here, so don't assume that anything you saw was literally real."

"But it was not just the face. The expression. It was so... *solike* a person I used to know." As long as everybody else was concerned with Dark wizards and Caradoc Dearborn, it seemed wrong to throw another mystery into the composition. If the face were not literally real, then was it a specific torment designed for herself? But why would Walden Macnair bother with such a weak and random ploy? She could not make herself think about Uncle Macnair. Perhaps she should, but her imagination was entirely taken over by the image of the very familiar face in that very foreign place.

The face of Veleta Vablatsky, who had died three years ago.

Nobody was very talkative, and in the end it was Glenda who said, "We can't mope. We should ~~do~~ something with the rest of the day. How about Blair Castle?"

"I've had enough of castles," said Sturgis. "And enough outdoor hiking. How about the salmon ladder, or the distillery?"

They made a list of the tourist traps and visited them at a very leisurely pace, between long hours of sitting on the grass. Oddly, Hestia and Glenda seemed to be avoiding each other. Hestia clung to Ivor's hand, showing very resolute enthusiasm for salmon and whisky, and even some genuine laughter at Ivor's jokes. That left Ariadne to seek out Glenda, who clutched at her arms and seemed unable to speak.

"It's been a frustrating morning," Ariadne offered. "We're yet none the wiser."

"But I think we *are*." Glenda steered Ariadne down the street. "I'd never heard of Macnair Castle until you mentioned it. And now it just reeks of Caradoc's last hours. I was thinking about it all morning, wondering how far he went before they caught him, and whether he was aiming for the castle or some spot in the open countryside, and whether he walked along the river-bank or left it to cross the fields... I'm feeling I want to survey the area on a broomstick. Yes, I know, it's stupid. Looking for a sight of burned grass."

"It all has to be exquisitely painful for you."

Glenda nodded as if she found this hopeless statement comforting. She kept close to Ariadne all day, alternating among wanting to talk about Caradoc, wanting to talk about looking for him, wanting to talk about Pitlochry, and wanting to be left in silence.

Ariadne found herself not only walking with Glenda, but thinking her thoughts, feeling her feelings, missing Caradoc in his absence, living the frustration of never being quite certain that he was really dead. When Glenda lapsed into another silence, it took Ariadne a moment to remember that she had never actually known Caradoc; he'd just been the Prefect in her first year at Hogwarts, a mere name to a face.

She looked around for Remus, realising that he had finally eased up in his vigilance in order to mingle with Sturgis, Emmeline and Kingsley. Just as she began to hope that he had finally let himself forget that she was his job, he turned his head to meet her eyes, then nodded, acknowledging that she was with Glenda and safe. He was still marking her every move. He did not consider himself to be on holiday at all.

So she was very surprised over dinner when Remus announced that he had an appointment in Hogsmeade. "I can't avoid it gracefully. I'm putting Sturgis in charge of you, Ariadne. Just in case any Dark wizards decide to attack in front of the Muggles." He was smiling, but she thought he sounded grim. "Have her back at the cottage by dark."

"But we're going to the Festival Theatre tonight," protested Hestia. "The play doesn't end until after ten."

"Not tonight." Remus sounded almost sharp. "Tomorrow perhaps. But Ariadne is not to be out after dark tonight. Give me your word on that, Sturgis, or I will Apparate her back to Inverness-shire now."

Ariadne had never heard such desperation over a simple appointment. "It's all right," she said, "I'm tired. Why do we not go to the theatre tomorrow when Remus can come too?"

Several of her companions looked as if they would like to protest further, but nobody did. After dinner they walked through Pitlochry even the evening air was warm back to their cottage. Remus frowned at the door, bolted it, and Disapparated.

It had been a long day, yet somehow nobody really wanted to go to bed. The Kincarden barn owl was looking reproachful at not having been given any work, so Ariadne wrote a quick note to her parents to say that everything was going well, despite her own lurking suspicion that something was about to go very wrong. They played several rounds of Exploding Snap, but nobody's mind was on the game. After a while they put the cards away and talked. At first they avoided the subject of Caradoc. Then they could only talk about Caradoc. They stopped to watch the sunset, and Ariadne wondered where Remus really was. He might well be in Hogsmeade for all she knew it was not in fact very far away but she knew that this was another of his mysterious "appointments". She also wondered what impenetrable danger he feared outside in the dark something about which Sturgis and Emmeline apparently knew but were unwilling to discuss with the rest of them.

At sunset they felt justified in lighting a fire, even though it was only a standard hearth and not a camp fire. Kingsley made a very good blue flame "in honour of North Sea gas", and he turned it orange and then pink at the flick of a finger. Emmeline conjured a toasting fork and began to make raisin toast from a loaf she had bought in town. Ariadne guessed that Hestia and Glenda were still restless about Caradoc; but her own mind could not leave the subject of Remus. She wondered if Sturgis and Emmeline had some good reason to worry about him and his "appointment".

Then they heard it. A long, low-pitched, lonely howl.

Ariadne froze to the floor, trying not to hear the message that the howl was bringing. Glenda murmured something about "someone tormenting a dog", but Ivor was already suggesting, "A wolf."

"It can't be a wolf," said Kingsley. "Wolves have been extinct from Scotland for three hundred years."

Ariadne glanced instinctively beyond Kingsley to the window, where a huge moon, unquestionably full, was clearly visible on the horizon. Hestia followed her gaze and asked, "What about a werewolf?"

The animal howled again. Emmeline leapt to her feet and said, "He's in trouble." Sturgis, also pulling to his feet, said, "Not necessarily," but Emmeline persisted, "We have to look."

Ariadne's head was pounding. Remus had wanted her indoors tonight. He must have remembered it was the full moon. And she remembered his words *in the blinding rain, staring at the full moon*. The night when Caradoc disappeared. Remus had been trying to tell Sturgis, without upsetting anybody else, that Caradoc had disappeared on the night of the full moon. Caradoc... at the jaws of a werewolf?

"Friends," said Sturgis, "we have to go out and check this 'werewolf', just on the off-chance that *it isn't* someone's mistreated dog and it *isn't* properly restrained."

"You're leaving us?" asked Glenda.

"You're in charge, Glenda," said Emmeline. "Don't for any reason allow any of the others to leave the cottage."

Had Remus *known* that there was a werewolf in the area? Or was he just being cautious? He had taken his task of protecting her on this holiday very, very seriously. But if caution were so important tonight of all nights, why had he persisted in keeping his appointment in Hogsmeade? Those appointments... had not Janet written that they happened once a month? Something was forcing itself into her mind, something so fantastic that she felt stupid for considering it.

Glenda nodded soberly. Horrid imaginings were apparently entering her own mind as she opened the door for Sturgis and Emmeline and then barred it behind them. But Ariadne was not thinking about Caradoc. She would not, *would not*, imagine anything so horrible about his fate until she knew for sure that there *had* been a werewolf in the area on the night he died.

"Do you know any good Stunners?" That was the last they heard of Sturgis's voice, floating through the moon-flooded night. "Good, we'll Apparate towards the sound, a hundred yards at a time..."

But Remus has a secret. The voice took over Ariadne's thoughts as soon as she had withdrawn her mind from Caradoc. Not a guilty secret, but certainly a painful one. That evening in November when she had been home from school, and he had insisted that he had to keep his appointment... he had followed her outdoors, he had Disapparated... She had walked around the farm, doing his jobs for him in the dusk, doing no end of out-of-school Charms, or coaxing William to do them for her... it must have been dusk it had been after four o' clock but it had actually been quite light, because...

Because it had been a full moon that night.

Every full moon, Remus went out to keep his "appointment". And every morning after, he was sick and wasted with an illness that nobody recognised.

Ariadne sat down on the sofa, holding her head in her hands. Glenda, who obviously believed that Ariadne shared her images of Caradoc's horrific end, sat down next to her and threw her arms around her shoulders. Ariadne hugged her friend back, but did not admit that she was not thinking about the man whom she had barely known. She was not thinking of the victim at all, but of the attacker.

Her whole mind was emblazoned with the horror of *being...* the assailant, the destroyer, the mindless monster... knowing day after day that month after month one would lose all human control to the bloodthirsty predator inside, would become the vessel of its acts of carnage... She sobbed bitterly.

Remus Lupin was a werewolf.

The Werewolf from Foss

Chapter 3 of 21

A Muggle werewolf gives the friends a vital clue about Caradoc Dearborn, but Remus has no need to explain anything to Ariadne.

CHAPTER THREE

The Werewolf from Foss

Monday 25 July 1983

Hogsmeade, the Grampians; Pitlochry and Foss, Perthshire.

Rated PG-13 for violence, lycanthropy, lycanthropophobia and general nastiness.

It was blindingly bright when Remus awoke in the Shrieking Shack, and warm, so that he thought at first that he couldn't have transformed back properly. But the hands on the ends of his forelimbs were definitely human hands, and his bones ached, and he appeared to be thinking verbally, so he knew the warmth was simply the continuation of the good weather.

It was altogether too early in the morning for the sharp knock on his door. Sturgis Podmore was calling, "Remus! Are you awake? I've unlocked this door, and I'm leaving your wand here for you. We need to be back at base, fast."

Remus's first panicked thought was that something had happened to Ariadne, or to one of the others. He was out of the door before he realised that Sturgis was probably only referring to the need to return to Pitlochry before they were missed. He swayed downstairs cautiously, holding on to the banister and feeling about two hundred years old.

Sturgis was waiting in what had been the sitting room before the schoolboy Moony had ripped and shattered all the furnishings. He looked terrible, as if he hadn't slept all night, but he only said, "Can you Apparate?" and when Remus shook his head, said, "Fine, hold on to me. I'll take you there Side-Along. But I need to warn you first that we've had a bit of an emergency. The girls are quite upset." He was aware of Sturgis grabbing him around the waist, and the loud *pop!* of Disapparition exploded in his ears before he had time to protest.

They landed in the sitting room of the cottage in Pitlochry. Remus's first thought was that none of them looked as if they had slept. He wondered why they were all up; but Ariadne was making porridge over the hearth (not in the Muggle kitchen bar), and Kingsley was playing with the Muggle toaster. Then he noticed a ninth person among them, a haggard young man, no more than twenty years old, with grey streaks in his dark hair and hair growing all over his face and huge black rings around his eyes. This person looked as if he hadn't slept for a week.

Remus shook off Sturgis and sat on the sofa. No one seemed very interested in his "appointment", or in why Sturgis had brought him back from it at six o' clock in the morning, so he kept quiet and waited for the others to talk.

"Look, it flashes real sparks if you stick a fork down it," Kingsley was explaining to Emmeline.

"Con, this is Remus," Emmeline said to the stranger, who looked too wild-eyed to be absorbing the information. "Remus, this is Connell Dewar."

Connell Dewar continued to glance around the room with all the terror of a trapped wild animal. Even when Ariadne brought him a dish of porridge, he sniffed suspiciously and asked, "Is it poison?"

Ariadne also brought porridge for Remus and told him, "Emmeline was sitting with Con all night. Nobody here has had any more sleep than you have."

He was too exhausted to work out what was odd about this statement. He registered that her eyes were red, far redder than could be explained by a sleepless night, but he only asked, "What's going on?"

"When the full moon rose last night," she said, "we heard howling. Sturgis and Emmeline went to investigate. They followed the sound for nearly seven miles, until... You're not wanting to hear this, are you?"

He wasn't. To anyone but Ariadne, he would have pleaded his headache (truthfully) and taken himself to bed. But Ariadne had spent four days of what should have been her holiday tolerating his guardianship his intrusive, humiliating, authoritarian guardianship with an almost saintly cheerfulness and not the smallest hint that her friendship would be withdrawn in consequence. She was being friendly now, filling him in on the details of their common business without any enquiries into his personal secrets. And she had definitely been crying. This business, whatever it was, must have distressed them all no end. "Tell me anyway," he groaned.

"They found a wolf chained to a tree. Do not worry about it, Remus. It was nowhere near Macnair's boundaries, and the wolf turned out to be very safely chained. They were not needing to Stun it or anything. They would have left it alone completely if it had not been a full moon. But Emmeline could not leave without checking its snout..."

"Ariadne, it's all right. Go on."

"It was a werewolf." She was perfectly calm. It must have been some time since she had stopped crying. "And, what's worse, the chain around his neck was too short. Once he became human again, he'd not be able to lie down without being strangled. So Emmeline stayed with him. She Summoned a bowl of water we had a real shock when we saw that flying out through the glass window and she spent the whole night just twelve feet away from the length of the werewolf's chain. Sturgis told us where she was. Then, of course, he had to go back to keep her company. And the rest of us were up the whole night, counting the minutes until moonset anyway, we were up yet when they brought Con back here. So Sturgis went to fetch you, and we've been trying to convince Con that we will not hurt him. He's a Muggle; he's not used to the idea that other people believe in werewolves."

Remus had never met a Muggle werewolf before. The majority of Muggle bite victims did not survive their first Transformation; the twisting of the bones, the distortion of the inner organs, was enough to kill most of them. Only a very hardy and supple Muggle for example, a young one who had lived outdoors in the Highlands or a wizard, who had some automatic skill in Transfiguration was likely to be still alive by that first moonset a month after the bite. Those who survived one Transformation could survive an indefinite number, but a Muggle community would never understand exactly what was happening to the victim. Muggle psychologists had even invented a name for the phenomenon, lycanthropic delusional disorder, meaning a person who *believed* that he became a wolf each full moon. But they would never accept that the lycanthrope really did transform.

Connell Dewar was now licking out his porridge bowl in a distinctly animal manner. He finally balanced it upside down on his head and asked, "Did I hurt anybody?"

"No." They all spoke with one voice.

Remus shifted his two-hundred-year-old bones off the sofa and crawled across the floor to crouch beside Con. He found that everyone else had moved to the floor too.

Kingsley took control, "You didn't hurt anyone. It's all right."

Remus tuned in and out of the conversation as the others tried to soothe Con, feeding him toast (for some reason the Muggle toaster was malfunctioning, and Ivor had to Charm it to make it work) and reassuring him that they would take him home before he was missed. Ariadne brought Remus a cup of something that did seem to relieve his aches and asked, "Are you wanting to lie down?"

Of course he wanted to, but he replied, "I think we'd better look after the young man before we worry about me."

Ariadne gave Con a cup of whatever she had given Remus, but Con managed to spill it all over the floor and then sobbed like a baby over it. Sturgis persuaded him to take a shower, and then to eat more toast, and it seemed a long and noisy hour before Con was sitting calmly in the centre of the floor, clear-headed enough to ask a question:

"But if yourself believes in werrawolves, why are ye no goin' tae take me away?"

"We have nothing to do with the Werewolf Registry," said Emmeline calmly.

The word "registry" seemed to terrify Con. "Thae Rregistry people will kill me," he said. "A week after I got bitten, a men came... but nobody believes in wizarrds."

"Let's say the man was a wizard," Remus choked out. He already knew who this man must have been.

"He wore a wizard's hat, and himself was a wizard, as surreal as I am werewolf. He came to say that I was on the Registry now. And that if I got chained up every full moon and made no trouble, they wouldn't bother me. But if I made any trouble they would come for me and take me away. But they never said where they would take me away to."

Everyone else was stunned into silence, but Ariadne offered, "He sounds a very frightening man."

"Never mind that, Con," said Glenda. "It doesn't matter where. We're not Registry people. No one is coming for you."

"But there has been trouble," said Con. "Last time they unchained me I did hurt somebody. I'm no safe to folks."

Remus tried to ignore the significant glance that Sturgis shot at him.

"Last night you were chained up," Kingsley explained patiently. "We only unchained you in the morning, when you were human again. You can't hurt anyone while you're chained. Who is it who chains you?"

"Grrendma," he said. "She always chains me. Mum and Dad was no wantin' me any more, they didn't like wolves. They left Foss and went to live in Glasgow. So I live with Grrendma now. She has to chain me, to be safe. She comes for me when she can. But it's too early. She'll not come until ten o'clock, at least."

Hestia gasped even before Ariadne had finished translating. "Doesn't your grandmother check the times? You mean she leaves you chained while you're human again?"

"Nobody sees. Nobody comes your way. Sometimes she can leave me a day, a night, another day, and yet nobody comes. So nobody finds out, and everybody is safe from me. There has been no more trouble. I only killed that one man. And they didn't come for me even then, because nobody told. That witch kept my secret three years long."

Remus did not like where this conversation was heading. Ariadne held Connell's hands and said, "It's your secret, Con. You do not have to talk."

Connell seemed to relax at her touch without hearing her words. "It was three years ago," he said. "I didn't remember it, but I woke up and found... and found... I woke up. And there was a body. A man, all covered with blood, scratched. And I hid from it."

Black bile churned in Remus's throat. He nearly vomited onto the floor in front of them. Opposite him, Glenda had turned very white, but she was nodding slowly, as if to urge their guest to keep talking.

"That's my secret. I killed a man. And I can't tell anybody, never ever, or the Registry men will come to take me away. Nobody knows except that witch." Connell Dewar glared defiantly at his audience. "Whatever anybody says, they are all real. Werewolves, wizards, and witches too." Nobody questioned the existence of the witch, so Con continued. "She was standing there, with a magic wand pointed at me. Then she moved it to point at the body. And she said a *spell*."

"What spell?" asked Hestia.

Con raised his arm, as if holding out a wand, and announced, "*Arredocto!*" After a moment's silence, he dropped his arm and said, "It was a real spell. The body vanished."

"Just turned to dust and sank into the earth," agreed Ivor. "Yes, that's a spell all right."

"And then the witch chained me up again. She used a spell for that too, but I didn't remember it. I'm thinking she had to have unchained me with a spell, when I was yet being the wolf. And when I got loosed, I killed whatever I found. But I'm *thinking* it was only the one man." Tears rose up in his eyes.

"The Registry people didn't come for you then," said Sturgis reasonably.

"The body had gone," sobbed Con. "Perhaps the witch didn't tell."

"Perhaps she was a friendly witch," soothed Ariadne, although none of them really believed this.

Remus held his head and tried not to look. But nothing could shut out Con's voice, pouring out in full tirade, oblivious to his audience. "I didn't know if she was a friendly witch. I didn't really see her face. Not ugly. Not even old. But I didn't really see her. I only saw the man that died. He was staring with open eyes. Blood running down his face."

Emmeline met first Hestia's eye and then Glenda's. Finally she said, "It seems cruel, but we will make sure he never remembers it." She held out her photograph of Caradoc Dearborn and asked, "This man?"

Connell Dewar recoiled. "There's no blood on that one in the picture. But it's a bit like him. Maybe, before I killed him, he could have looked like that. I didn't know." He burst into tears. "I killed... I killed... I killed..."

Emmeline put away the picture, and Hestia and Glenda moved over to put their arms around Con. Remus looked up to find Ariadne's gaze focused on him while everyone else was looking at the other werewolf.

Kingsley conferred a moment with Sturgis. Then he announced, "We're not going to learn anything more from Mr Dewar. Now that we've interrogated him to the limit, we ought to put him out of his misery. Stand back, girls."

It took them a moment to recognize what Kingsley was saying. "Stand back," he repeated. "Out of the way." Hestia and Glenda moved away.

Kingsley aimed his wand. "*Obliviate!*"

"Kingsley, that was a very dangerous spell," said Emmeline half-admiringly.

"No more dangerous than sleeping six feet from a werewolf or deliberately Apparating in the direction of Macnair territory. That's it. He won't remember anything about Caradoc. I've moved that whole night and morning from his memory, from midnight until noon. It was three years ago, so he won't miss it."

"It's all right," said Ivor, "Kingsley is the best in the class at Memory Charms."

Con, who had stopped crying, abruptly realized that he had stopped. "What happened?" he asked. "Was I crying?"

"I expect you're worried about your grandmother," said Kingsley glibly. "We should get you back to her. Hold my hand, and I'll take you back to Foss the quick way."

When Con did not move, Kingsley took his hand, and with a loud *pop!* they both vanished. Remus took himself to the bathroom and was able to be sick properly. When he staggered back to the sitting room, Kingsley was still absent. He was away for about twenty minutes in all, just long enough for Sturgis to talk of going after him, but in the end Kingsley returned smiling.

"We had to land outside the village so that no one would see," he explained. "Then we had to walk through Foss to find his grandmother's house. The old lady was home and very shocked that Con had been released by a stranger. So I had to Memory-Charm her so that she would forget that she hadn't gone herself, which meant wiping out her whole morning. Then I had to Charm Con to forget all about his meeting with us - wiping out his whole morning too - and both of them to forget about seeing me in front of them. But I forgot that they could both still see me, so of course they thought I'd sprung up out of nowhere, and they wanted to know who I was and what I wanted. So I

had to step outside their threshold, and try again from a hidden angle. A neighbour saw that spell, so I had to Memory-Charm him. And then I had to walk all the way out of the village until I was far enough into the trees to Disapparate."

"Kingsley," said Emmeline admiringly, "did you know that you can go to Azkaban for abusing Memory Charms?"

"The only place I want to go now," said Kingsley, "is bed. Because I didn't last night."

* * * * *

It was several hours later when Remus awoke in his bunk in the cottage outside Pitlochry. His bones were only mildly aching. There was a faintly sweet smell of vegetables in the air and there was a clinking noise from the sitting room. The other bunks were empty. It seemed to be mid-afternoon.

Ariadne was alone in the sitting room, hovering over a pot on the hearth. It was a distinctly wizard-like pose, but she looked so Muggle in her too-new jeans and tidily plaited hair; for a moment he nearly laughed aloud. She heard him come in and ladled something into a cup.

"Here. It's only a soother, I'm afraid, so it will not do much for you. It's the best we can do on the ingredients we have."

His heart plummeted. Without Connell Dewar's plight to distract him, Remus now remembered Ariadne's every look, every word, every gesture from this morning. He swallowed a mouthful of the potion; it did dull his perception of the aches in his muscles, and even seemed to soothe his hoarse throat, but nothing could numb the chilling dismay that tore at his soul. "You know where I was last night," he said.

"You went to Hogsmeade," she said casually.

"And you know why." He gulped at the potion again and dropped heavily onto the sofa.

She sat down next to him. All she said was, "The others have gone out to Blair Atholl for the afternoon."

"Why aren't you with them?"

"We were not liking to leave you alone. And I'm the one who promised my parents never to let myself out of your sight."

"That was for your protection, not mine," he protested. Reality was swinging into a crazy inversion; she was meant to be his protégée, not his protector; she was giving him soothers when she was the one who had obviously been weeping for hours. And she ought to be terrified of him, but instead...

"Why are you frightened of me?" she asked.

He jolted; it was fortunate that his cup was now empty. He put it down on the floor.

"I'm not daft enough to tell my parents about any of this," she said. "Ivor and Hestia have not worked it out yet. Nor Kingsley nor Glenda. They were too busy with Con to take much notice of you this morning."

Oddly, it hadn't occurred to him that she might betray his secret; her power over him was of a very different kind. The fear was a familiar one, but it took him a moment to place it.

It was the same fear that had stabbed at the pit of his stomach when he was twelve years old and James Potter had cornered him in the Gryffindor dormitory to say, "Remus, we know what your illness is." It was the absolute terror that had seized him when James horrifyingly flanked by Sirius and Peter had announced that they all knew he was a werewolf. And for a full minute he had stared them in their faces, thinking that this was the last time his friends would ever speak to him, believing that he was about to be cast into outer darkness...

And Ariadne could do that to him too. If she shrank from him now... avoiding his direct company for the rest of their holiday... keeping to the opposite corners of the farm, making polite excuses to her parents for why she did not choose to associate with the farmhand more than she must... then fleeing back to school in hopes of never seeing him again... His vision of isolation was too appalling to be contemplated.

"I'm not afraid of you," he said. "I'm afraid of what happens when you become afraid of me."

"But I'm not afraid of " she began. "Oh. You mean you're caring about my good opinion of you. But I knew that anyway."

That was putting it rather too bluntly for comfort, so he changed the subject and asked, "Why have you been crying?"

"I've stopped crying now," she said. "I promise I will not cry again."

"But what's been upsetting you?"

"Last night we were dealing with Caradoc's nightmare death," she said. "And it's seeming that our worst imaginings turned out to be true. This morning we had to deal with the nightmare life of that poor boy from Foss. And *he* might have been *you*. I know you're used to the nightmare, but I was looking at it for the first time."

"But it isn't *your* nightmare," he said. "It's mine. Why distress yourself over someone else's problem?"

She misunderstood this. "But I did not," she said. "I was so selfish. Glenda thought I was crying for Caradoc and kept saying what a wonderful, caring friend I was. But I'd only met Caradoc a few times, and I was hardly thinking about him at all. I was really crying for you. And now Glenda thinks I'm some kind of angel, and I'm not knowing how I'll convince her of the truth without destroying her."

"Ariadne, there are some truths that are not worth telling."

When she smiled, he almost basked.

The Yellow Flowers of Danger

Chapter 4 of 21

Two werewolves, several Dark wizards, a funeral and a serpent.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Yellow Flowers of Danger

Monday 25 July Friday 29 July 1983

From Pitlochry, Perthshire, to The Cairngorms, Aberdeenshire.

Rated PG-13 for explicit lycanthropy.

There was a long and perfectly companionable silence before Remus asked, "What have the others been doing today?"

"Avoiding," said Ariadne. "We were all supposed to be sleeping earlier, but I'm not thinking we did, very much. Every time I stirred, Glenda was crying. And Hestia spent hours pacing the room. Emmeline was restless, and we heard Ivor shouting... Did you not hear that?"

"No. But I'm usually oblivious to everything at this time of the month."

"It's a great deal to process. But about one o' clock Glenda awoke properly and said, 'I want to do something else.' And suddenly everybody was out of bed, and they decided to visit Blair Castle. I think they were just wanting a break from thinking about horror if we could not sleep, doing anything was better than doing nothing. Sturgis offered to stay behind with you, but I told him it would be better if I bided because I really was finally on the point of falling asleep."

"You and Sturgis are both mad," he complained. "Usually no one bothers to stay behind with me."

"That's not meaning that 'usually' is right. I did sleep for an hour, and then I got up and mixed some more soother. The others will probably stay at the castle until it closes, then take a Muggle tourist bus back in time for dinner... which reminds me, I have to go out to buy food. They're wanting to take a walk this evening... Will it look suspicious if you're too tired to do it?"

"Is it a gentle stroll along the river, or a swift hike up the mountain?"

"A stroll, I'm thinking, because we're all pretty sleep-deprived."

"Fine, I'll lie down again later, and then I should be able to stroll this evening. But you're not going into town by yourself. My dereliction of duty does not extend to days when I am human."

She did not protest when he followed her out of the door, but she did ask, "What kind of harm could come to me in a Muggle town?"

"Automobile accident. Squashed in a crowd of tourists. Ripped off by an unscrupulous tradesman. Assaulted by a mugger who is after your wallet or worse. Assaulted by henchmen of Walden Macnair, who are only pretending to be Muggles..."

"What are you thinking Mr Macnair had to do with Caradoc's murder?" she asked suddenly.

"We don't know that he had anything to do with it. The only people there were Connell Dewar and some unnamed witch."

"But it was so close to Macnair territory. Uncle Macnair must have known there was a werewolf in the area. Ivor and Hestia are saying he must have sent a friend to release the wolf at the right moment."

"Do you believe that?"

"Perhaps," she said, "but it's making no sense. If she was simply wanting Caradoc dead, why did she involve Con? Why not just use *Avada Kedavra*?"

"And if her real goal were to frame the werewolf," agreed Remus, "why did she destroy the evidence of the corpse? But we don't need to know exactly what happened. We can never report it."

He waited for her to ask why not, but she only nodded. "I was not thinking of reporting. The Ministry would give Con the silver bullet without making any attempt to identify the witch. I was only wondering why Caradoc really had to disappear, and why there were at least two people involved in the process of killing him. Wondering what motivated that witch and whether she was Bellatrix Lestrangle."

"What makes you think of Mrs Lestrangle?" He had thought of Bellatrix too, because the murder smacked of the Black style of cruelty. "Our only description was 'not old, not ugly', and there are three thousand witches in Britain who might answer to that."

"I'm not really suspecting anybody. But Rodolphus Lestrangle is Walden Macnair's nephew."

He stopped to stare at her. "Do you know everyone's genealogy?"

"It's a pure-blood thing, Remus; we're all knowing each other."

He suddenly felt very self-conscious of the fact that both his parents had been Muggle-borns as he asked, "How many generations back does your magical bloodline go?"

"Twenty. At least. But the MacDougal name is only about eight hundred years old. The first MacDougal married the pure-blood heiress of Kincarden, whose family had been magical for a couple of thousand oh, are you really caring?"

"That's pure-bloodedness with a vengeance. It makes the Blacks, Malfoys, Lestranges and their like look positively *nouveaux riches*. It may explain why your family survived Voldemort's reign."

She did not flinch at Voldemort's name. She said, "Blood purity did not save Mr and Mrs Longbottom or the Prewett brothers or the Bones family. The MacDougals escaped because of a dedicated policy of neutrality."

He was beginning to know that when she spoke so softly and calmly, she was hiding her real attitude to something. He wanted to ask, but decided that this might amount to an invitation to criticise her family, which would be a breach of his contract to her parents. Instead, he took hold of her jute shopping bag and said, "I should be carrying that."

After they brought the shopping back to the cottage, Remus did need to lie down again. His conscience smote him at the thought of Ariadne single-handedly and without magic producing dinner for eight in all the heat of the day while she was supposed to be on holiday; he was asleep before he had time to reason that the most talented Potions student in seven years was probably also a very efficient cook. He had bad dreams, largely concerned with raking claws and tearing jaws and the corpse of Caradoc Dearborn.

* * * * *

When he awoke, finally well in body but very uneasy in mind, the front door was opening to admit the noisy returning tourists, the dinner smelled very ready, and the heat

and light had dimmed to the pale gold of early evening. He was able to enter the sitting room before it became obvious that he hadn't been there all along.

Glenda and Kingsley were carrying huge armfuls of flowers, and Emmeline was carrying a Muggle toaster that she had for some reason decided to buy in Pitlochry. Sturgis was Summoning saucepans to act as vases (pausing them in the kitchen sink for long enough to allow half-filling with water), and Ivor was asking Ariadne for instructions about laying the table.

Dinner was a sober affair. All of them had now had time to think deeply about Caradoc's fate. Since no one wanted to talk about him, no one said much at all. After they had cleared the table, Kingsley distributed the flowers, and they held on to each other in order to Apparate to the place of Caradoc Dearborn's final adventure. Ariadne was dizzy and disoriented as she landed in the clearing, but it must have been the right place, because Emmeline said, "Here. This is Con's tree."

It was a Scots pine, with a huge iron ring jammed into the trunk about five feet up, a clumsy chain hanging from the ring, and another iron ring a dog's collar attached to the chain. Sturgis picked up the collar and said, "It opens this way. This is the link I charmed broken to release him."

Ariadne was shuddering, but she automatically took Glenda's hand when the older girl stepped closer to her.

"I suppose Caradoc was decoyed to within a few feet of the wolf," said Emmeline. "We can't know where, but probably in the straight-ahead direction."

"Straight ahead" was south. They all instinctively moved that way, eyes to the ground, as if expecting to see Caradoc's ashes. There was nothing, of course, just very fresh grass, too well shaded by the trees even to have wilted under the scorching summer. Glenda knelt to pick a handful of... dust? There was no dust; she could not even scoop up a fistful of damp earth.

"It must have been here, Glenda," said Kingsley. "Try it this way." He pointed his wand and commanded, *Accio, pulvis Carataci!*

Absurdly, the clean evening air was suddenly filled with flying dust that swirled up from the ground apparently from several yards around and several inches deep, so that clods of grass were being uprooted everywhere and whirled around their heads before landing in a pile at Kingsley's feet. It was pure matter with nothing remotely like a form, nothing to indicate that these were the pulverised remains of what had once been human. There was nothing but Kingsley's Summoning Charm to indicate that the dust had once been Caradoc.

"Shall we make it to look like his corpse before it was Reduced?" asked Kingsley. "I know a good Reconstruction Charm."

"No," said Glenda. Everyone looked at her. "I don't want to see... a corpse looking like... like his last few minutes. It won't help. It'll just get that poor werewolf into trouble if anyone else finds it. We can't ever let the Ministry know that we found him here. We just have to remember that we... that we did find out for ourselves."

Kingsley nodded and put away his wand.

Glenda looked as if she were trying to speak again, but in the end she said, "You talk, Sturgis. I can't."

"I don't know if I can either." But he walked up to the pine and stood in front of the werewolf's chain to block it from their view. Emmeline placed her photograph of Caradoc on top of the pile of dust, and they all moved into a circle around it.

"Er, Caradoc Dearborn was a good friend," Sturgis began nervously. "He never lost his temper, even when I accidentally knocked him off his broom in his third year at school. He was a considerate son to his parents, he was kind to his sister Hestia when many brothers wouldn't have bothered, and he had honourable intentions towards Miss Glenda Foster... Is this the kind of thing I'm supposed to be saying?"

"Keep going," said Hestia.

"Caradoc refused to remain neutral in the darkest days of Him-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, but was completely loyal to the ideals of the Order of the Phoenix, which he joined as soon as he left school. He never gave way to fear, but was willing to tackle the most difficult and dangerous assignments. And..." Sturgis paused, as if running out of words, but then settled on, "and for this commitment to doing right, Caradoc Dearborn paid with his life."

There was a pause, in which Sturgis suddenly stopped looking uncomfortable, and came out with, "Here he lies, and so we remember him. May he live on in our memories until the day we meet beyond the Veil."

Glenda walked into the centre of the circle, tears streaming down her face, and laid a bouquet of pink and red roses onto the dust-pile. She said something, which might have been, "Goodbye, Caradoc," but her voice was muffled. After a moment she straightened up and returned to Ariadne's side.

Hestia followed Glenda's lead into the circle and laid a wreath of white lilies next to the red flowers. She made no pretence at speaking; she just knelt and looked for a while.

Emmeline went next, with a corsage of irises. Then Sturgis, with a bunch of yellow and orange zinnias. Remus felt awkward at following since he had only known Caradoc slightly, but he chose a stem of pheasant's eye and laid it on top of the pile. Ivor came behind him and dropped a shower of blue salvia, then Ariadne, with a handful of wild heather. Kingsley completed the procession with a branch of elder that he must have picked up from the river path on their way.

They remained encircled around the dust and flowers for several minutes. Hestia had fallen into Ivor's arms, her frame heaving tearlessly. Glenda, still silently weeping, had her head on Ariadne's shoulder. Kingsley was holding himself at a respectful distance from everyone who had held a personal stake in Caradoc's life. Remus also kept his distance; Sturgis and Emmeline had both known Caradoc better than he had, and it seemed wrong to stand too close to them.

It was only when the sun began to set that Glenda raised her head and said, "We should go back. It could be dangerous to remain here in the dark." She took Ariadne's hand; the next moment, they had both vanished.

That night they all slept well.

* * * * *

It was late the next morning when they finally left the cottage at Pitlochry. (With all their care in packing, Emmeline still managed to leave her new toaster behind.) They had planned an easy journey, yet everyone felt well, and Hestia was singing, "*Sure by Tummel and Loch Rannoch and Lochaber I will go..!*" with an almost defiant gaiety. By the time they pitched their tents in Kirkmichael, they were all singing. When Ivor said he should write his parents a postcard before the post office closed, they all followed without waiting to defer to Glenda.

Remus, having no one to whom he might send a card, was impressed that Ariadne bought five. She crammed into her cards twice as many words as any of the others, and in about half the time. "It's a great deal of work for just three owls," she said doubtfully. "And all this writing about salmon traps and distilleries and walks by the river... I'm supposing it's all true."

"It's going to be," said Hestia. "All those things I claimed to my parents that I would do on this holiday... Well, there's nothing left now except actually to do them."

And with this permission from Hestia, they became complete tourists. On Wednesday they walked as far as Glenshee. On Thursday they walked through the pine forests in the Cairngorm foothills. On Friday they sent the owls off with more messages to home before they left the forests behind to climb the slopes. By the time the trees were thinning, Ariadne was lagging behind her friends, which surprised Remus, since she must have climbed more hills in her lifetime than any of them.

"Becoming tired?" he asked.

"I'm not; it's the fungi. If Professor Sprout could see these! It's illegal to pick any, but I cannot just walk past them without looking." She indicated a notebook, on which she had scribbled a couple of sketches. "Do not tell me, I cannot draw, and all my toadstools look alike... The others are way ahead of us. I'm sorry to slow you down, Remus." She put her notebook in her pocket and began to walk swiftly, like a farmer's daughter who had lived all her life in the Highlands.

Later in the day, when they had climbed so high that it no longer seemed like summer, and the toadstools and heather had given way to alpine speedwell and hare's foot sedge, Kingsley claimed he had spotted a reindeer. While the others crowded around to look, with Emmeline protesting that it was actually a red deer and Sturgis announcing that there were two of them, Ariadne wandered away upwards, presumably still in pursuit of alpine flora. Remus watched, but did not follow, because he imagined that she must be at the limits of her patience for his constant dogging of her personal space. It was five minutes before the deer disappeared into the mountains and Hestia noticed, "Ariadne is miles above us."

It took them another five minutes to reach the spot where Ariadne was kneeling over a yellow-flowered shrub, murmuring, "This is interesting... It cannot be..." She heard them approach and whipped her head around, her face frozen in white terror.

"Do not touch it, Remus!"

Her voice was almost a scream, and he stepped backwards instinctively. So did Emmeline and Kingsley, who were both standing nearer to Ariadne than he was. A small brown snake with zig-zag markings slithered out from the bush.

"It's only an adder," said Kingsley. "It won't hurt us if we leave it alone."

Ariadne had risen to her feet and was blushing furiously. "I'm sorry," she said. "I panicked. It... I was not expecting to find snakes in the mountains. I'm sorry I overreacted."

They carried on walking, but Remus couldn't forget the episode. Many people panicked at the sight of an adder, but he had never seen Ariadne lose self-control before. And she was a farmer's daughter who should have known better. Even when they reached the peak of the mountain and gazed out at the breathtaking view of half Scotland, she seemed embarrassed by the memory of her outburst.

No one else remembered. They found ptarmigans in the upper boulders, and when they returned to the lower slopes, Ivor obliged Ariadne by photographing the toadstools. They bought dinner at the tourists' restaurant, but afterwards returned to their camp site to sit around a Conjured fire. It was still a very warm evening, and the sunset was long and slow.

"I wonder how the Longbottoms are doing," said Emmeline, out of nowhere. In reply to their questioning looks, she explained, "Tomorrow is Neville's third birthday. I always wonder whether he'll ever know his parents."

"Have you seen them lately?" asked Sturgis.

"I visited them at St Mungo's a couple of months ago. There is no change."

Before the pause became too awkward, Sturgis reminded them, "Remus was a friend of the Potters. How's Harry doing, Remus? He'd also be three tomorrow, wouldn't he?"

"The next day," Remus corrected. "But I haven't seen Harry Potter since his parents died. Dumbledore doesn't allow any wizard to contact him."

Ariadne's eyes widened. While her friends moved the conversation to other topics, she asked, "But is that not very hard for you, Remus? Were you not expecting to watch Harry grow up?"

"It is, and I was," he told her, wondering briefly why he bothered to burden her with this particular bruise. "But Dumbledore wants Harry to grow up without knowing about magic."

"And you to live without any link to your old friends?"

He nodded. She looked as if she had several hundred more questions about the Boy Who Lived or perhaps they were questions about his own misspent youth but once again she restrained herself. He would have told her about it if they had not been sitting in a group. The presence of the group also reminded him to restrain his hand, which was an inch away from closing around hers, and to pull his gaze away from those Gaelic-blue eyes. He stared at the Conjured flames, but he was not paying attention to the group chatter.

Had he really been about to tell Ariadne his life story? He was still wrestling with the question when he lay awake in his tent, long after Sturgis was snoring and Kingsley had stopped tossing inside a hot sleeping bag. It was so long since anyone had found him so interesting. Certainly Sturgis and Emmeline did not; he liked them both, but he had never been close to either of them. If Ariadne thought to ask him any more personal questions after they returned to the farm, he knew he would tell her whatever she wanted to know. Perhaps, in return, she would drop the well-bred MacDougal mask long enough to tell him what she herself was really thinking.

Even when he closed his eyes, images of Ariadne poured before his vision. She had cried all night over the plight of werewolves... she could produce dinner for eight without thinking about it... she absorbed her Astronomy textbook as fast as James ever had... she had helped him hide the wolf last November without asking any questions about what she was abetting... her face had frozen in terror at the sight of an adder... she picked flowers patiently and kindly with her little niece... she had recognised Snape's malice automatically... she was eerily aware of his feelings... but her presence was always comfortable... she spoke softly, with endless restraint... her eyes were profoundly blue...

But he knew that these reflections were not really the ones that were keeping him awake. He was restless because of the other thing that his conscience would not let him avoid. He had tried to touch her and would have touched her if they had been alone. He stared at the tent wall while a Muggle camper on the way to the shower block swung a torch beam against the canvas; he imagined for a moment that he could see Ariadne's shadow moving on the canvas of the adjacent tent, even though he knew it must be impossible. Had he really been on the verge of kissing her good night?

He reminded himself that she was only sixteen years old.

He reminded himself that he had placed himself in a position of trust with her parents.

Above all, he reminded himself that he was a werewolf.

The Friend who Understood

CHAPTER FIVE

The Friend who Understood

Tuesday 2 August Thursday 1 September 1983

Kincarden, Inverness-shire; Hogwarts, the Grampians.

Rated PG for references to romance and lycanthropy.

Ariadne arrived at King's Cross Station on the first of September annoyed with her mother. She tried to squash the unworthy feelings *It's not Mamma's fault. She was not knowing it was important.* But another, less dutiful, voice inside her argued, *But it is Mamma's fault. She should not let that kind of thing upset her. It's because I knew she'd become upset that I could not tell her about it. And that's why she did not know.*

Ariadne had been hustled into the Floo at ten o' clock before she had had a chance to say goodbye to Remus. He had been out in the potato fields since dawn, and she had counted on being able to have a last word with him, sometime when nobody else was monitoring her movements. But she had been monitored *spied on* all morning: had she packed all her books, did she have enough robes, would she be needing extra Potions ingredients, should she swap her telescope for the better one that Kenneth no longer used, had she marked all her family anniversaries in her diary? She had recited all the dates without opening her diary (so that Mamma could not see that she had marked all the full moons in red ink) but her foot had been tapping with irritation under her robes all the while. Finally Papa had come in from the fields to remind her to hand in her homework on time, to wear the fleece-lined cloak at Quidditch matches, not to over-spend her allowance, to write home every week, to begin her thank you letters no later than this evening (her birthday had been yesterday), and to be on her way now so as not to miss the train. Realising in despair that she had no further reason to go out to the fields, she had kissed her father, taken a handful of Floo powder, followed her mother into the hearth... and glimpsed, from the corner of her eye, that Remus was entering from the back door, just as the green flames licked around her and pulled her away to the Leaky Cauldron.

She said, "I will, Mamma," and, "I do not, Mamma," as they walked through Muggle London, but she barely heard what her mother was saying *Mamma would be so hurt if she knew*, she tried to tell herself again and again. *Papa would be heartbroken too.* But the rebellious voice was louder. It kept interrupting: *They never treat Remus well.*

They were good employers, of course. They provided comfortable quarters, generous wages, moderate workloads; and they were polite. But they were not friendly. They had never shown the slightest sign of treating Remus as anything more than a convenient automaton.

* * * * *

When Ariadne had returned home from Perthshire, her mother was waiting in the kitchen and greeted her with the words, "Dear, you must be exhausted after all that walking. And you're so freckled it's a wonder you did not burn!" Mamma removed her rucksack, sat her down, poured her pumpkin juice, and asked when the photographs would be ready.

At that moment Remus stepped into the hearth, and Mrs MacDougal acknowledged him with the merest glance. "Thank you for taking care of Miss MacDougal, Remus. The barley harvest begins today, so they will be wanting you in the fields. Ariadne, how did you like Miss Vance? She seemed a very suitable lady to us."

And Remus was on his way to the barley fields without even being offered a glass of water. Nobody thought to ask *him* if he would like a rest, even though he had spent the last twelve days walking as hard as she had and had done so for duty rather than pleasure.

Ariadne replied that she had indeed liked Miss Vance very much, but the truth sounded like a lie in her ears. She would have had to say the same thing, no matter who the suitable person was, so the words were meaningless.

She would never be able to tell her parents how well Mr Lupin had guarded her on that holiday. He had protected her from a Dark castle and ~~two~~ werewolves.

After the cows were milked and the pigs were fed, Ariadne wandered out to the barn with her Transfiguration textbook. Within ten minutes, Remus came looking for her and sat down on the bale next to hers.

"Really studying, or just pretending?" he asked.

"Good intentions, but distracted. I keep thinking about that face I saw at Macnair Castle."

"The one that didn't seem like a ghost or an illusion?"

"But it did seem like an old schoolfriend of mine. What I did not tell you then was that my friend died three years ago."

"That must have given you a scare." He looked right at her without a hint of scepticism. "Now you've had a few days to think about it... what do you think you really saw?"

"I've had so much else on my mind that I have not been able to think very clearly," she admitted. "But, to be realistic... either I'm wrong, and it was some kind of spell... or it was a real person who happens to look like my friend a close relative, perhaps... or..." She felt foolish suggesting the third alternative, but Remus did not falter.

"Or your friend never really died."

She exhaled and nodded. "Is that a very stupid idea, Remus?"

"Not necessarily. It would be stupid to insist on any one interpretation, natural or magical, before you had enough evidence to support it. How did your friend die?"

"Oh, the usual way. Death Eaters at her home, the Dark Mark above her house... Her mother was a Muggle-born, but a very quiet one; we never understood why their family was targeted."

"You've sidestepped the important point," he said. "Was there a body?"

"I'm supposing so. I mean, I never thought to ask. I... well, I'm imagining the record can be checked, but I've always presumed that a person declared dead was known to be dead. After all, Caradoc was officially only 'missing', but the Vablatskys were definitely 'dead'."

"The record can be checked," Remus affirmed. "Do you think you can manage not to worry until one of us has done that?"

After that they really did read a chapter of Transfiguration, and when Ariadne entered the parlour to bid her parents good night, she told them that Mr Lupin had been helping her with homework.

"I am pleased that you take your studies so seriously out of school," said Papa. "If Remus is able to help you with the more difficult subjects, my dear, I'm believing we should employ him to tutor you every evening."

"Employ" did not mean a pay rise, or even a reduction of the hours spent in the fields; it only meant that Remus was told over breakfast that the family was truly grateful for his assistance to Miss MacDougal, and that they hoped he would have time to continue the good work throughout her school holidays.

"I'm sorry," said Ariadne that evening. "It's the end of your free time."

"Will you really spend the rest of summer wondering whether I'm only speaking to you because your parents very charmingly commanded it?" he asked. "Well, I think I'll keep you guessing!"

Every evening she wandered out to the herb garden or the barn, and Remus always came to sit with her. They revised every chapter of the Transfiguration text. They worked on Charms, "although we're wasting our time," Remus conceded. Ariadne understood the theory of Charms perfectly well, but she was not allowed to rehearse the practicals out of school, though she badly needed to. They translated fifty pages of Ancient Runes, with a great deal of laughter, since it was a subject in which neither needed any help.

My ninth spell is for preventing shipwreck. It stills the blast on the stormy wave and charms the sea to sleep.

"Don't you think your translations are rather *creative*?" asked Remus. "The original is more like:

A ninth I know: when it is necessary to keep my ship floating, I quieten the wind, flatten the wave, smooth down the whole sea.

"Do you not think yours are rather stilted?" she countered.

As the weeks rolled by, Ariadne heard nothing from Hogwarts, but she did receive a postcard from Kingsley, in which he cheerily mentioned that he was to be Head Boy. This meant, of course, that Ariadne was not to be Head Girl. She was still a Prefect, but her parents became alarmed that perhaps her studies really were falling behind.

"Be sure to pay attention to everything that Remus teaches you, my dear," said Papa, trying hard to suppress any hint of anger or disappointment over... well, over what had *not* happened.

Ariadne read to Remus from her Astronomy and Herbology texts. She tried to educate him in Potions, but that was a subject in which he remained very stupid. "Thank goodness you have *one* weakness," she said. "I'd begun to fear that you were perfect."

She even twitted him on the subject of friendship. "You must have *some* friends," she said.

"No, I lost them all on the night when Voldemort fell."

He had already told her all about the Potters and brave little Peter Pettigrew, but she said, "There have to be others. Is Sturgis Podmore not a friend?"

"Yes, if a friend is 'a person who knows I have lycanthropy and still treats me normally'. But I never knew him all that well. When we first worked together, he was engaged to Marlene McKinnon, and I didn't like to intrude. After she died, he spent a long time grieving. Then the war ended, and I had to move on, and I never really knew what Sturgis did next."

"You could have owled."

"Believe me, he'd have thought it very odd. We'd only ever talked shop was I supposed to start asking his opinions on the Quidditch scores?"

"Well, there's Emmeline, then. Did you not know her?"

"In the same way; she was nice enough, but always a little aloof from everyone. If I'd sent her an owl for no reason, she'd have suspected romantic attachment or madness. Either of which would have been highly uncomfortable."

"What I'm thinking you're saying," she folded her arms in mock-annoyance, "is that you were determined *not* to have any friends."

"That was certainly true for the first twelve months after Voldemort fell," he conceded. "I was too busy trying to survive to send owls asking if my acquaintances had read any good books lately."

She abruptly dropped the annoyed posing, unable to block the compassion from her voice. "And did nobody ever take the initiative to send an owl to you?"

He froze. "No..." He tried out the new idea. "I suppose... Well, no one knew where I was... Probably everyone thought that someone else was contacting me. Only no one was. And, to be honest, it was a year before I noticed that I cared."

"Did you hear what you just said?"

"You're making a ring around me. All right, I'll bite. What did I just say?"

"Not 'before I cared', but 'before I *noticed* that I cared'."

"'Noticed'... yes, I was fairly numb in those days, I suppose. I concede that you have won your point. Whatever your point was." Despite the serious nature of his confession, he was looking at her quite happily; he never seemed hurt by even her most candid statements. He said, "We should do another translation."

They had hardly completed a sentence before a huge black owl swooped into the barn and dropped a pale blue note onto the book. "Remus," said Ariadne, "I'm believing you have not met Thangalaathil properly. He owns Sarah."

"That's your stylish dorm-mate who isn't Hestia?"

"That's oh, stop laughing at me. This letter's not about dress-robos and knitting patterns. It's a matter that concerns you intimately."

Sarah had written:

Darling Ariadne,

I am home after six weeks in Paradise. I can't believe that you never left Scotland. Don't you ever go anywhere? Was your holiday rained out? It's just sweltering here in London. What I have to show you is a million photographs, a very bronze tan, two flamenco dresses, and something that I won't mention until I can give it to you in person.

On Wednesday I'm going to Diagon Alley. My parents are both working that day, so I shall be very alone unless you can come with me. Why don't you come to my house on Tuesday evening to claim your present, and then we can make an early start on shopping? And if you can stay over until Thursday,

that will take all the pressure off.

I am booked up all the other days, so owl back quickly and say that Wednesday suits you.

Hugs and swirls (from the flamenco dresses),

Sarah.

"Well, it wasn't about knitting patterns," Remus conceded. "Will your parents let you go?"

"They will be mildly worried about my wandering all over Diagon Alley. I'll have a better chance if I suggest that you or William escort us... carry the parcels... keep us away from the Knockturn Alley types... Sarah will probably distract me into so much fuss and frivolity that we'll end up staying out late without finishing the job," she struggled to control her bubbling laughter, "so I'll have to owl my parents that you'll be taking a room at the Leaky Cauldron on Wednesday night so that you can help us finish shopping in the morning..."

"But I can't make Wednesday..." he began, then caught her eye. She stifled another gasp of laughter while he tried again. "It seems a little too lucky that your friend is so keen on Wednesday... Now you're laughing at me!"

"I owled Sarah yesterday to write that Wednesday was the only day that would suit her. She knows how to write the kind of letter that I can show to my parents."

"You've set me up!" He frowned. "Just how elaborate is this ruse that you've undertaken to protect me without my consent?"

"I'm knowing you'd rather solve your problems without my help," she admitted, "but, believe me, you're not wanting my parents to find out what you'll really be doing on Tuesday night."

So on Tuesday evening Remus followed Ariadne through the Floo to the Leaky Cauldron and escorted her to Sarah's front door. The evenings were yet so long that she knew he would have time to finish his chores at Kincarden before he Apparated to the Shrieking Shack. He was obviously wondering how exactly she planned to release him the next morning, but she teased him by asking, "Why do you not just trust me?"

"Well, when I trusted Sirius Black to treat my secret life responsibly, it wasn't altogether a good thing."

"Will it relieve your mind if I promise not to send any Dark Arts acolytes to their doom in the Shrieking Shack this evening? Especially not my cousin Severus."

"Even when I trusted James and Peter, our behaviour was not exactly ethical."

"I also promise not to become an Animagus at any time before tomorrow morning."

With all her care not to let Sarah keep her up talking all night, with all her diligence in pulling Sarah out of bed early in the morning, with all her hints that she had to be at Diagon Alley early it was still eight o'clock before Ariadne stepped into the public Floo at the Leaky Cauldron, then out again at the Three Broomsticks grate. She raced to the Shrieking Shack, reminding herself that it was not haunted, and never had been, opened it with an illegal, under-age *Alohomora* charm, and knocked at every door.

"Remus, are you hurt?"

"No." He emerged from a downstairs room.

"Except for the blood creeping through your shirt, which I'll ignore. Can you walk?"

"Yes. How did you get here? You were meant to be in London. What's that walking stick thing?"

"It's a walking stick. Sarah thought it very odd that I was wanting to borrow one, but she asked no questions. Lean on it, and try to walk as far as the Three Broomsticks."

"Why didn't you bring Sarah?"

"I was not wanting to tell her everything. She's waiting for me in Diagon Alley she said she'd give me an hour to do my Top Secret Business. She thinks I'm meeting some boy, or maybe buying something in Knockturn Alley. Do not worry. Sarah understands that not all secrets are guilty ones she has plenty of her own, and only about half of them are connected with boys. She pumped me like mad to find out what was going on, but she's becoming used to the idea that she cannot always make me tell."

Ariadne left Remus in the Leaky Cauldron and found Sarah waiting for her outside Slug and Jigger's apothecary shop.

"Thank goodness you were only meeting some boy," said Sarah. "For a while I was starting to worry that you really were buying something dangerous on the Dark Market."

Ariadne managed to spin the shopping trip out all day; this was very easy with Sarah as a shopping companion. She ate dinner with Sarah's family, watched some kind of flickering lantern show that Muggles called a "video", then Sarah really did keep her up talking until past midnight.

On Thursday morning she hugged Sarah goodbye outside the Leaky Cauldron, dumped all her parcels on the first table inside the door, paid Remus's bill, and looked around for him. He had already spotted her and was soon sweeping up parcels into his arms. He looked much healthier today.

Her mother was waiting for them in the kitchen at Kincarden. When she saw how many parcels they were carrying, she did not question Ariadne's story that she and Sarah had spent the previous day shopping until dusk.

* * * * *

So on the first of September Ariadne kissed Mamma good bye on platform nine and three-quarters, promising to pass on the family's compliments to Severus (and knowing that Severus did not want them), and boarded the train quietly without bothering to look for her friends.

They found her, of course. Ivor and Richard burst into her compartment with an unceremonious, "Hey, Ariadne, you're in the wrong place we're up the other end!" Richard Summoned her trunk and Levitated it down the corridor. Ariadne followed them, but hardly said a word.

Remus is thinking I do not care. The thought throbbed like a painful pulse. He had no other company on the farm. Her parents maintained proper the social distance between themselves and the menials; Kenneth never spoke to anybody if he could help it; Janet was pleasant, but had no interests beyond her bairns, the dairy and her

embroidery; and the best that could be said for William and Morag was that they offered great scope to an aspiring teacher. The farm was so isolated that the neighbours (all Muggles) rarely came to call, and not even the tradesmen bided to chat. *Remus will be alone as long as I am at school. And I did not say goodbye.*

"What's wrong?" asked Kingsley.

"*She* has a guilty secret," said Sarah. "Something *very unsuitable* for even her friends to know."

"What, even more unsuitable than our high jinks in Perthshire?" asked Ivor.

"Much more unsuitable," Ariadne managed to say.

"If it isn't some boy," hinted Sarah, "then it's Dark Magic."

"Oh, don't be so hard on Ariadne," said Ivor, "it's probably only a shady money deal."

"Or it could be drugs," offered Hestia, "given how sedated she seems."

"Why not a boy?" asked Richard. "What I want to know is, are these the pangs of unrequited love? Or has the cruel world placed an obstacle in the path of reciprocated passion?"

"It could be just homework," said Kingsley.

"Before the academic year has actually begun?" Sarah frowned. "No, not even Ariadne would be that stupid."

But I would, she thought. *I was willing to do all kinds of extra homework when the ruse worked.* She wrenched her mind away from Remus and said out loud, "If you're really wanting to know my dark secrets..."

"Yes, yes, tell all!" urged Sarah. "Is it a new Potions project?"

Ariadne waited until they had all finished guessing (the word "boy" recurred several times) and were ready to listen. "If you're really wanting to know," she said, "I was thinking about something... unexpected... that happened in Perthshire. When we were walking along the River Tummel, we apparently stepped over a magical boundary. And we saw a castle that is otherwise invisible Macnair Castle."

"Ariadne, you're telling our holiday out of order," Kingsley complained. "Richard and Sarah might want to hear from the beginning."

"We saw the castle," Ariadne repeated, "and I saw a face at a window. Did you not see it, Hestia?"

"I saw several faces," said Hestia. "But none of them looked like Macnair. Most seemed to be house-elves."

"The only face that I saw," said Ariadne, "looked exactly like Veleta Vablatsky."

The silence became sharp and pained as Joe snapped his eyes around to meet hers, his expression suddenly switched from passive to reproachful. His silence shrieked louder than words: *But Veleta is dead!*

"This sounds like a ghost story," said Richard. "I thought you were bothered about something serious."

"You're upsetting Joe," said Hestia.

It was a moment before Kingsley gathered his wits enough to suggest, "It was probably some kind of magical illusion. A face that looks like whomever you most miss or least expect to see."

"It did not look like that kind of thing," Ariadne insisted. "It looked so solid, so expressive, so... alive. And so exactly like Veleta. I'm not telling ghost stories."

"That would certainly spook me," said Sarah, "but be rational, Ariadne! Did anyone *else* see a ghost that looked like Veleta?"

"I did." Everybody turned from Ariadne to Ivor. "It took a moment before I realised that the place was dangerous and I had to get Hestia out of there. But I definitely saw someone at the window, dressed in fancy mediaeval get-up. And I know what Ariadne means. I thought at once of Veleta. The movement was exactly like hers."

Ariadne was thunderstruck. She had not mentioned how the girl at the window had been dressed. And the figure had been standing still for all the time she had looked at it; she had not noticed any movement at all. But Ivor had remained within the forbidden boundary for several seconds longer than she had; he could have seen the person moving. *And he thought of Veleta too.* It must have been more real than she had dared to believe.

Hestia asked, "So you think you seriously think that you both saw something real?"

Ariadne was relieved that her friends now believed her, but she could not help comparing their initial scepticism with Remus's implicit trust in her judgment. His immediate response to the problem had been to try to do something about it. She looked around the train compartment at her fellow Gryffindors and knew that she would miss Remus for many evenings to come. For over five years, her affections had been settled on Hogwarts. Kincarden was where she bided in summer, to do her duty by her parents, but she had long since felt that Hogwarts was her real home. Now her affections were shifting again. She would be happy enough at school, but she knew that Hogwarts would never again command the full focus of her emotional attention. That was winging away to the far north, where Remus was casting his *Eruo* charm on the potato fields.

Her spirits did not lift until bedtime, when she arrived in Gryffindor Tower to see that a small parcel addressed to her had been propped against the notice board. She snatched it up and carried it off to the dormitory before Sarah could ask what was all the hurry. She flung herself onto her bed, drew the curtains, and eased off the brown paper. Inside was an everlasting candle, three inches thick, which released the scent of lemon and jasmine when lit and illuminated at a hundred Watts to a radius of a yard in all directions. It bothered her because she knew Remus could not afford items like that, and he must have had to sneak away from the plough in broad daylight to go anywhere where he could have bought it. With trembling fingers, she opened the attached note.

Dear Ariadne,

A belated happy birthday.

I am sorry I missed your departure this morning; I meant to say goodbye but I am sure you already know that my good wishes follow you to school for this year. The potato fields are not a very good excuse for my absence, given the favour you did me last week, but in the potato field I had to be.

If you have any trouble with the Animate to Inanimate Transfigurations (or any other subject), don't leave yourself to flounder. Write to me at once. Teaching by long distance is more complicated, but please don't assume it can't be done. Don't on any account let yourself drown because you forgot to ask for help.

Rehearse those Protean Charms as soon as you are allowed to use magic again. You do understand them, and I'm certain you can make them work.

I have owled Sturgis to ask him to check the wartime death records, but it isn't his department, so it may take him a while to find time.

My regards to Kingsley, Ivor and Hestia, and also to your comrade-in-collusion Sarah (even though I only saw the back of her head). And I know there are a couple of others in your class (Richard and Joe I was listening, and I do remember) but I don't feel introduced to them. I'm sure you could do a convincing pen-portrait.

Apologetically,

Remus.

She folded the paper and tucked it under her pillow, finding that she was in a much better mood. Her friends had forgiven her for broaching a taboo topic. They were going to find out the truth about Veleta's death. And Remus wanted her to write back.

Shampoo

Chapter 6 of 21

Now in her seventh year at Hogwarts, Ariadne has to deal with N.E.W.T.s, her cousin Severus and Remus's transformations.

CHAPTER SIX

Shampoo

Friday 2 September 1983 Tuesday 20 December 1983

Hogwarts, the Grampians; Diagon Alley, London; Kincarden, Inverness-shire.

Rated PG for indirect references to sex, violence and lycanthropy, and for overt rebellion against an authority figure.

Needless to say, every teacher began the year with dire warnings on how seriously the seventh-year students were expected to take their N.E.W.T.s. Professor McGonagall said, "I'm feeling obliged to remind you that your entire future rests on your performance this year. Those who are needing extra careers advice can come to me at any time. Those who are expecting to coast through the first two terms and make up the difference after Easter might as well take the next train home."

Professor Flitwick said, "I don't want anyone to have a nervous breakdown about passing Charms. Of course you don't have to make yourselves sick or light the midnight wands over your homework. Five hours a week will be plenty."

Professor Sinistra said, "Those of you who have remained with Astronomy have chosen a difficult and obscure subject. If any of you is not willing to endure the sleepless nights and develop the focussed concentration required, now is the time to drop Astronomy and give the extra time to your other studies."

Professor Babbling said, "The few of you who have chosen an Ancient Runes N.E.W.T. are all competent in basic translation, and you have a working knowledge of early Norse magical culture. But none of you so far has managed to integrate your knowledge. Your translations remain flat, unpoetic, unrelated to the inner dynamics of the culture that produced them and hence devoid of magical power. We have a hard year ahead if we are to rectify the deficiency."

Professor Sprout said, "I'm sure you're all very competent and will do very well. It just takes a positive attitude, which I'm sure you all have, and plenty of hard work. Make up your minds to spend five hours a week on Herbology homework, and don't be afraid to ask for library permits. My best students the ones who score Outstanding have always made the effort to consult twenty texts before beginning an essay, and they do half their research out of books from the Restricted Section."

Severus said, "Those of you who have assumed that, by accumulating adequate marks to date, you have earned the right to cruise through your final year are about to encounter a heavy dose of reality. The seventh year introduces the most difficult and dangerous potions on the entire syllabus. In addition, you will all be required to work on a private research project, which will be worth one fifth of your final mark. Think now what you would like to select as your project, and make your decision before the end of the week. Any ideas, Miss Parkinson?"

"An aphrodisiac?" smirked Hazel Parkinson.

"Five points from Slytherin for reaching your seventh year without mastering the Code of Ethics. No student in this class will brew an aphrodisiac. Even after you have left school, if I hear that any one of you has had any hand in any such unsavoury enterprise, I shall personally ensure that you are struck off the Registry of the Most Extraordinary Society of Potioneers. Miss Parkinson, you will develop a new household cleaner. Miss MacDougal, tell me about your plan to employ your limited abilities to make the world a better place."

Ariadne pressed down the fantastic, self-centred, grandiose thought that she really might discover a fabulous medicine or transformer that would change the world forever, and said, "I was thinking about sleeping draughts. There are several types that suppress dreams, but there's not one yet that causes *only* dream-sleep."

"Too arrogant," snapped Severus. "Do you fancy yourself a Glover Hipworth already? How about a more modest ambition, one within the limits of your capacities? I have here a nice little project for shampoo."

Ariadne could not imagine why the world needed another brand of shampoo.

"Something to meet a gap in the present market... a shampoo that will cleanse greasy hair, that will ~~un~~-grease it, without destroying the natural oils. And a conditioner to match. You, Miss Dearborn, cannot possibly have thought of an idea of your own, so you will work on the companion soap and body lotion. Shackbolt, what ideas have you had?"

"I was thinking of a brew that would make people glow in the dark." Kingsley's voice was deadpan, but Ariadne knew that this outrageous suggestion was part of his private rebellion against Severus. Kingsley had probably compiled a semi-plausible list of ingredients and would never admit that his suggestion had been a joke.

"Ten points from Gryffindor for your insolence," said Severus, but routinely, without passion. "If you have nothing more suitable to suggest, you can work on a vocal suppressant."

* * * * *

I was so angry with him,

Ariadne wrote to Remus that evening. She almost expected the paper to hiss at her for attacking her cousin in this way. Although her classmates often discussed their teachers frankly, she had never before committed such criticism to writing. But the paper did not hiss, so she ploughed on recklessly:

I was not expecting to save the world, but I was hoping to do something useful. Sometimes I think Severus enjoys humiliating us more than he enjoys teaching (and a great deal more than he enjoys shampoo).

After a page of venting about Severus, she felt she owed Remus at least a page of a more pleasant topic, so she described the doings of her classmates. Remus wrote every day at length, but never with complaints. Some of her replies were a mere line of acknowledgment, but if she cleared her homework before bedtime, she spent the rest of the time covering paper with trivia for him.

Ivor and Hestia are always happy, no matter how heavy the workload or how savage their taskmasters. At the moment they are grinning at one another across the table, like two sunflowers in full bloom. Joe is always sad. He is a younger brother of Benjy Fenwick, whom you probably met through the Order of the Phoenix. We're knowing what his inner torments must be, but he never shares them with anybody.

Today Kingsley decided to refine his Memory Charm skills by practising on six of the school owls. The owls now fly as far as the Quidditch pitch, then suddenly drop to the ground like stones, and are not seeming to have any clue where to go next. Unfortunately, Kingsley was not able to reverse the spells, and he had to confess as much to Professor Kettleburn.

Richard was thinking he'd let off some tension by picking a fight in a corridor with a fifth-year named Quirinus Quirrell. They were throwing minor hexes at each other - jelly-legs, tarantallegra, wart attacks, you're knowing the type - and Sarah decided to stop them before Mr Filch turned up. She cast a charm that made showers of pink hearts fly out of their nostrils; I'm fearing Richard will never forgive her for the indignity.

She copied out her Transfiguration problems and challenged him to produce some hints for her by Friday before signing off.

Sarah and Richard both teased her about the number of letters she was writing, for of course the everlasting candle was the kind of present that could not be used without being displayed.

"You do have a boyfriend," crowed Sarah.

"Silly, the candle would have been from that aunt in Glasgow," said Hestia.

"Aunts are too practical to send stuff like that," said Sarah. "The candle doesn't actually do anything that can't be done with a wand-tip, it's just prettier. And aunts don't need letters a mile long."

In the middle of the month, her parents wrote to ask if they would be allowed to take her out to dinner for Kenneth's thirtieth birthday. Professor McGonagall readily granted permission for students to spend important family occasions with their parents, but Ariadne replied:

In general it would be allowed, but I will not dare take time off as soon as Wednesday, since homework is piling up alarmingly. I'm expecting to have a much easier conscience by Thursday. Could we delay a day?

She spent Monday and Tuesday procrastinating her homework so that she could be quite sure she would not have lied about Wednesday being busy. Her parents, still unsuspecting, agreed to postpone celebrations until Thursday.

They gave Kenneth books and Firewhisky and a new Comet 260, and it was already dark when they set out for dinner at The Plum Tree in Diagon Alley. As the full moon rose high in the east, Ariadne kept them talking. She had made a long list of questions to ask and topics to discuss. Whenever conversation with Kenneth flagged, Ariadne asked her family about every crop, every animal, every piece of equipment. She told them about every subject, every teacher and every student. She asked if they needed new scythes, extra fertiliser, more tiles to repair the barn roof. She kept them talking so determinedly that they hardly thought it odd that she was quilling a shopping list onto her napkin. When she ran out of ideas for farm supplies, she asked Janet about the bairns, whether they needed new clothes, books, toys.

By the time anybody else thought of the time, it was too late to take Ariadne back to school, and her parents had bought the idea that they needed to spend the next day shopping in Diagon Alley. They all took rooms in the Leaky Cauldron for the night, and Kenneth escorted Ariadne back to Hogwarts via the Three Broomsticks in the morning. He glowered as he did so and "hoped those farmhands were managing the chores without supervision for once". Ariadne hoped so too, since she doubted William's ability to remember everything when he was the only person home. As soon as she had shaken Kenneth off - he was happy to be rid of her and to begin his

shopping trip in earnest she fairly ran to the Owlery to write to William.

William, did you let Remus out of the shepherd's hut? Did you milk the cows? Did you take them to pasture? Did you feed the pigs? Did you feed the hens and collect their eggs? Did you clean the plough? Did you remember that the charm for ploughing is "Culthro"? Remus is sick, but he has to try to be well by 3 o' clock. Master and Mistress will be home in the afternoon. If you cannot read this, take it to REMUS in the HUT.

A couple of weeks later Remus informed her:

Sturgis has managed to unearth the old record of the Vablatsky murder. The autopsies on Pythios and Jane Vablatsky and their two sons indicate that they died by Avada Kedavra, but the body of their daughter Veleta was never found. Ariadne, I still don't think it's safe to conclude that your friend is alive, but I do think we must stop assuming that she is necessarily dead.

When she broke the news to her friends, Joe stared at her with large, reproachful eyes as if to ask *How dare you raise our hopes?* but Ivor took it very seriously. He spent the rest of the lunch break helping her compose a letter to the Office of Births and Deaths, detailing what they had seen in July.

* * * * *

In the third weekend of October Ariadne went home. The full moon fell on a Friday, and she planted the way carefully with many hints to her parents about how difficult Transfiguration was, how nobody ever explained it as clearly as "that nice Mr Lupin who I'm thinking yet works for you". It was difficult to concentrate at school, the boys were too noisy with their Quidditch talk, and they did not always sympathise with a person who was serious about finishing homework on time. By the time Ariadne wrote to say that she thought she would concentrate on an important essay better if she could come home on Friday, her parents believed that they had thought of it first. When Remus entered the kitchen for dinner, his employer greeted him at the door with the words:

"Miss MacDougal is home for this weekend, Remus. We're thinking it would be a good use of time if you left your chores to William so that you can instruct her in Transfiguration."

After dinner they walked up to the shepherd's hut "to talk over the theory". Ariadne locked Remus in, then roughed out some ideas herself. The next morning she released him from the hut and helped him to the farmhands' quarters. While he slept through most of the day, she sat on William's bed, working through Herbology and Astronomy and anything but Transfiguration. It was alarming how much work she could cover in a day with none of the usual school-Saturday distractions. Although she was sitting uncomfortably, and glancing every ten minutes to see if Remus were awake, there really did seem to be a genuine argument in favour of going home to complete more homework.

On Sunday Remus patiently explained the subtleties of Conjuring. Ariadne drew diagrams, and took notes, and read the text over and over, and still felt very, very stupid.

"You're of age now. Conjure something," said Remus. "A button. A matchstick. A quill. A tam o' shanter. Anything."

She waved her wand, and a button, a matchstick, a quill and a tam o' shanter all swept through the window and onto the table.

"But that's not *Conjuring*, it's only *Summoning*," she said. "Look, it's Morag's hat. I should send it back."

Remus smiled and Banished the objects. "Try again. A stone. A dead leaf. A mirror... "

She glanced at his face and suppressed a gurgle in her throat. "We are needing a mirror," she conceded softly. *Speculum!*

A sheet of glass shimmered in the air before them, then crashed down to the table. Remus brought it together with a swift *Reparo*, then frowned at his own image. "Ariadne, you managed the mirror because you wanted a mirror."

She looked at him and then looked away before she laughed.

"You could have just told me that I'd forgotten to shave."

"That would have been rude. What if you were growing the moustache on purpose?"

"I remember now. Yesterday morning you and William came for me just when I was about to shave. So I forgot. It was a bad day to forget, because my hair always grows faster on the day after a transformation. Then this morning you knocked at the door when I was half finished. So now I'm growing a caterpillar under my nose."

"It's your face. Maybe you're liking it."

"If *liking it* matters, do you like it?"

"Are you planning to keep it?"

"You didn't answer my question. Do you want me to keep it?"

It was hard to keep her face still as she insisted, "It'll maybe set a new trend."

"What does it take to make you give a direct answer to a direct question?"

"How about *Veritaserum*? Or you could try a less personal question."

"Or you could try not caring whether I like your answer."

"All right, you can have my opinion. The moustache does not look like you."

"And I don't like to carry reminders of the wolf on my face. *Raso*. There. Improvement?"

"It is. I'm liking you better without the moustache."

"Ha, I finally extract an opinion from you! If I knew more about what you really wanted, we might have better success with Conjuring. It's about whether you really want the item... "

* * * * *

Professor McGonagall and Professor Flitwick were both pleased with the improvement in Ariadne's practical work, but Severus was not pleased with any of the students. Everybody could be faulted somewhere, and everybody was. Even when Ariadne had finished all her written homework by Friday evening, she still had to devote all Saturday to practicals and reading.

"The hard part," said Hestia, "is finding a time when Snape isn't in the dungeon. I work better when he isn't watching."

They worked on their degreasing soap and shampoo from breakfast to mid-afternoon. "We have to suppress the stimulation of the follicle, but not too much," said Ariadne for the twentieth time. "So, the question is, how much wormswort?"

"And what will counteract the horrible smell without interfering with any of the active ingredients?" wondered Hestia.

Finally, Hestia went down to the kitchen to see if the house-elves would take pity over the lunch they had missed. Bringing food into the laboratory was not allowed, and Ariadne was not willing to risk another ruined experiment by leaving her cauldron unattended, so she stayed put.

Five minutes after Hestia left, there was a *bang!* and something clattered about the bottom of her cauldron. Ariadne peered in. A perfect cake of soap lay at the bottom of Hestia's cauldron, a rich creamy colour and smelling of vanilla and burnt feathers! The fluid residue had vanished. But the viscous liquid in Ariadne's own cauldron was not only still bubbling merrily, it also seemed to be whistling like a blackbird. She turned off the fire, and the boiling subsided. Her potion was also a creamy colour, and also smelled vaguely of vanilla through the strong stench of the burnt feathers, but there was nothing to indicate that the experiment had actually worked.

It might be shampoo. Sarah might be willing to test it out and report. It might even attack grease and inhibit follicle growth she could experiment by applying it to a fast-growing plant like beanstalk dripped over with olive oil. The problem was, *she did not care*. As she ladled the mixture into a glass jar, she was thinking *Muggles have shampoos in hundreds of scents and colours, for every type of hair. What does it matter if I've invented one more?*

She screwed a lid on the jar, suddenly feeling openly rebellious. *I have the right to be useful.* She would not test her shampoo yet, nor would she go to the library. She would spend the rest of the afternoon trying out her *other* idea, the one that might do some good for the world. She opened the students' store cupboard and began to lift out herbs.

It took five minutes to find barakol; it was hidden at the back of the cupboard, between the poppy seeds and the chamomile petals on a shelf laden with sedatives, in a dark jar with the label facing inwards. The label, in the lightest pencil, was barely legible, but she could make out the words *Cassia simea*. Had Severus taken to labelling his ingredients only in Latin? She had heard him complain about the demise of the Latin language in primary education. After another five minutes of searching, she was still moving every box, every jar, every bottle, but none of the other ingredients had come to light, in either Latin or English. She began to know that somebody was watching her, but she did not allow herself to be distracted until her cousin's voice enquired:

"Having trouble, Miss MacDougal? Forgotten how to read labels? Or are you perhaps after something from my private store?"

She turned around. "I'm thinking it's not in stock, Professor."

His lip curled. "If it is at all a useful ingredient, I'll have it in stock somewhere. What do you require?"

"Atropine, digitalin, strychnine and vulparia."

Severus snorted. "And the person you wish to kill would be ? Have you taken leave of your senses, Miss MacDougal?"

"I have not, Professor Snape. I'm aware that those substances have poisonous properties."

"To put it *mildly*. Some of them would finish off your clients by mere skin-contact. Miss MacDougal, if you can outline to me a legitimate ~~medicinal~~ purpose for your dangerous whim, I can supply limited quantities of atropine and digitalin. But not strychnine or vulparia. Those ingredients have no useful purpose save to commit murder."

Not true vulparia is as much a sedative as barakol, she mentally corrected him. *If I mixed the thinnest tincture of vulparia with atropine and barakol, I might set the most chronic insomniac to dreaming like Endymion.* "My idea was medicinal, Professor. But the atropine will be useless without the vulparia."

She could see, behind his sneer, that his mind was moving very fast, and that it was still set on the idea of poisons. "Miss MacDougal," he said, "do your parents continue to employ that very disreputable and irresponsible Englishman whom I met at their house twelve months ago?"

She was furious that the mere mention of poison had directed his mind to Remus presumably connected with his knowledge of Remus's lycanthropy. But if Severus were willing to discuss family matters in school, he had to be seriously concerned about something. She managed to keep her voice steady as she replied, "I'm believing so, sir."

"Purely hypothetically, Miss MacDougal," his voice had dropped an octave, "if there were a person whose presence in your life you found frightening or distasteful, then the poisons you mention would not be the way to deal with the problem. On the contrary, the correct procedure would be to inform the Ministry of Magic of this person's inappropriate behaviour. Do you understand me?"

"I do, Professor Snape." Her fingers were shaking so violently that she almost dropped her basket. *Severus has a warped view of life, but he ought to know that I would not kill anybody. Or is he believing that all young people are as misguided as he once was? Now that he has abandoned the Death Eaters, he would not actually commit a murder... but is he yet wishing Remus dead?*

"Or why not simply inform your parents?" he asked. "If they knew they were harbouring a dangerous Beast, they would dispose of him at once, without troubling you any further. But be assured that they would act within the law, without resorting to poisons."

Dangerous Beast? She saw no need to reply; she could not speak pleasantly after he had insulted Remus like that.

Severus seemed unable to drop the subject. "Or is there something you would prefer your parents didn't know?" he probed. "Are you contemplating a different kind of murder entirely? Perhaps, Miss MacDougal, you think yourself in need of an... abortifacient?"

An image flashed through her mind, Remus holding her gaze across a cornfield; yet he had never even held her hand. Severus was insinuating *that* this man could not control himself, and was daring her to unleash her own temper into the bargain? She managed her soft, bland MacDougal voice as she asked, "Can an abortifacient be brewed from digitalin, Professor? I did not know. Well, I'm thinking I'll keep you guessing about my purpose." The soft voice had rarely delivered such rudeness.

"You needn't think your affairs are of any interest to me," he growled. "I am only reminding you that if you have committed some folly, you can expect Hogwarts to deal severely with you. And if you are the victim, you must operate within the law. You took barakol that you may keep, provided you use it only to scent your shampoos."

She nodded, and walked out of the store-room, still carrying the basket. What a waste of barakol. It would be no good to her without the vulparia. And she knew now that she would never find vulparia at school. It was not until she was seated at the library, depressingly blank scrolls flattened in front of her, that she realised something else.

If Severus had supposed she wanted the ingredients in order to *kill* somebody, then he obviously had no idea what her real purpose had been. And he had not been bluffing. The only possibilities that had crossed his mind were that she was planning violence either against Remus or against a hypothetical unborn baby or that she was being stupid about herbs. The truth had been a million miles away from his imagination. She could spend her spare time brewing up as many varieties of sedative as she

liked, and it would not occur to him that she was performing serious research behind his back.

She also realised that barakol might be exactly the right ingredient to counteract the burnt-feather smell of her degreasing shampoo.

* * * * *

The homework excuse remained good for November, when the full moon fell on a Sunday. Her parents readily invited her home, and they did not even bother to inform Remus what was expected of him; he was supposed to know that tutoring their daughter was a priority. Ariadne spent the whole weekend shut up in the barn with Remus and her textbooks, and she released him from the shepherd's hut on Monday morning. She could not hide his "illness", but it was now five months since the last time he had been ill without an alibi, so no suspicion was aroused when she reported, "I went to thank Mr Lupin for his help, Mamma, and he has come down heavily with the cold."

"It's obviously too chilly to spend all weekend in the barn," her mother worried. "Ariadne, I'll brew you some Pepper-up before you return to school. And if you have holiday homework at Christmas, we'll make space for Remus in the house."

The brewing, then the drinking, followed by the walk through Hogsmeade with her disgruntled brother, meant that she reached her first lesson with only two minutes to spare. Professor McGonagall raised her eyebrows, leaving Ariadne to wonder if she would be allowed to go home again.

* * * * *

In due course Ivor received a reply from the Office of Births and Deaths. It read:

Dear Mr Jones,

Our office has conducted an investigation into the unfortunate deaths of the Vablatsky family in 1980. We confirm that our records prove that Miss Veleta Vablatsky was indeed murdered on Wednesday 2 April of that year (copy of death certificate attached).

A review of Macnair family history has indicated that no Macnair has married a Vablatsky at any time in the last 200 years (when the Vablatskys first migrated to Britain). Copies of both genealogies are enclosed.

The cost of this research will be ten Galleons, payable by the 31st of this month.

It is natural that you should be curious about the identity of a person who resembles your deceased friend, but further enquiries would be an unwarranted intrusion on the privacy of both the Macnair family and the woman concerned. We surmise that she was most likely to have been a temporary guest or business associate in their home.

The Office of Births and Deaths extends its earnest sympathies over the demise of the Vablatsky family.

Yours sincerely,

Eugenia Thanatos, Archive Administrator for the Office of Births and Deaths.

"What a waste of time!" said Richard. "It doesn't tell us anything."

"But it does," said Ariadne slowly. "It tells us that the Office is trusting its own records to the exclusion of the objective facts. It's not willing to undertake a proper investigation... Ivor, I'll give you the five Galleons."

"One Galleon and eight Sickles," corrected Kingsley. "We are all in this together."

Remus took an even more pessimistic view:

I cannot believe that they literally did not investigate. It is more likely that they did inquire, but they accepted Macnair's word that no Vablatsky lived in or had visited his home. In other words, he now knows that his household has come under scrutiny. This is bad news even if there is an innocent explanation for the Girl-at-the-Window, because the Macnair family certainly has some guilty secrets to hide. I hope this Madam Thanatos had the sense not to mention the names of the people who initiated the inquiry.

She tried to write a cheerful answer, but she was very worried about the plan for the next full moon. Remus kept telling her that it was not her problem, but she could not accept that.

I cannot wrangle an excuse to go home this month, because it's too close to the end of term, and full moon will in any case be mid-week. I cannot even write to William to remind him to release you from the hut, because he would probably go to one of the family to ask for help in reading the message. I am stumped.

The shampoo is turning out well, and I'm trying to be glad about it. It has stopped whistling when I boil it. Professor Sprout lets Hestia and me work on the

olfactory angle in Greenhouse Four over the weekends. Yesterday three panes of glass shattered while we were working. A third-year Hufflepuff named Myron Wagtail had sung In Dulci Jubilo at it! Hestia repaired the glass quickly, but not fast enough to prevent a frost catastrophe, and Myron has been banned from singing.

Ariadne could not settle on the night of the Cold Moon. She sat next to the window, staring at the moon's full face, imagining that she could hear the howling. She could not, of course (distance aside, Remus always charmed the hut to be sound-proof), but something was howling deep inside her. Even if he had remembered a warming charm, it was one of the longest and coldest nights of the year. Remus should not be hiding on a remote farm; he should be working as a teacher, and living among friends who could protect him from the world and the world from the wolf.

She must have fallen asleep, because she was still sitting in the casement when Sarah shook her awake for breakfast.

The Orange Flowers of Self-Deception

Chapter 7 of 21

Remus continues to play tutor to Ariadne while they collaborate to protect his job.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Orange Flowers of Self-Deception

Tuesday 2 August Friday 23 December 1983

Kincarden, Inverness-shire; Hogsmeade, the Grampians.

Rated PG for self-deception and romantic attachment.

It took Remus a long time to acknowledge that his behaviour towards his employers' daughter was unethical.

He had returned from the expedition to Perthshire with good intentions. *I can hide this*, was his automatic resolution. *What she doesn't know can't hurt her*. He would never indicate, by word or deed, that Ariadne that *Miss MacDougal* was anything more to him than a casual acquaintance, and a social superior at that. Ariadne didn't care about social distinctions, but she tended to respect them when her parents were around; it should be easy to maintain the correct distance for the few remaining weeks of her holiday. Then she would go back to school, and probably stay away all year. She would be among her own friends, and never spare him a thought. By the time she set foot in Kincarden again, he would have doubtless lost his job, and that would be the end of it.

Good intentions lasted all through the afternoon, when he was kept occupied with the barley, while Ariadne took Morag out to the sheep. They lasted through dinner, when he kept his eyes to his plate, while she looked from one parent to the other and spoke only of the tourist traps in Perthshire. They lasted through the evening chores, when Ariadne was busy in the kitchen. But after the chores, there was nothing to do. Muggle farmers would have been glad of an early night, but harvesting was less strenuous for wizards; over an hour of light remained, and William had walked off to the edge of the property for some obscure purpose of his own. Remus saw Ariadne wander into the barn, and he wandered in after her before he remembered that he had promised himself not to.

That evening they talked until long after dark. The next morning Mr MacDougal instructed him to act as Miss MacDougal's tutor, to spend every evening going over her books. Withdrawal was now conveniently impossible.

Next he justified the situation by asking his conscience, *Why shouldn't I have a friend?* The MacDougals were naïve if they really believed that two young people who had no other intelligent company available could spend every evening together and not become friends. *They can't be that stupid; of course they expect us to be friends.*

Why, then, interrupted his conscience, *do you both behave as if you had something to hide?*

At every meal, Ariadne chose the seat next to her father, while Remus sat near the foot of the table, as far from her as he could. He said nothing to anyone unless someone (never Ariadne) spoke to him first. She occasionally initiated a conversation with her parents, but more often waited for them to question her. In her parents' presence, she rarely gave a sign that she acknowledged his existence.

Her mother noticed it. "Ariadne, dear, Remus puts a great deal of effort into tutoring you. Will you not ask him if his day went well?"

"I beg your pardon, Mamma. Had you a good yield in the crib today, Mr Lupin?"

"Excellent," he replied, avoiding her eye. He would not dare report in front of the MacDougals that any part of his day had gone wrong.

Out in the fields, they had little cause to work together. The barley was only the beginning of the harvest, for the MacDougals also had sidelines in wheat and oats. Kenneth supervised William in the fields, positioning their scythes in rows at the edge, and then commanding, "*Tondeo!*" The tools sliced through the stalks, which flew into the air then landed horizontally. Then Kenneth would cast the *Colligo* spell (it made a dreadful mess when William tried it), and the straws gathered together in sheaves. Each sheaf had to be separately subjected to the *Desiccatio* Charm (this was one that William could do, so they left him to it) and then levitated across to the cart. Once the first cart was loaded, Remus took it to the threshing floor, where he worked with Mr MacDougal.

"Why can ye no levi-tet them tae t' barrn?" asked William.

"Because if sheaves are flying through the air all day, some Muggle will maybe see them," explained Kenneth for the tenth time. William asked the same question nearly every day.

Ariadne sometimes guided the carts into the barn, since she could do this without magic, but more often Remus came out to fetch them. Occasionally he saw her in the field, poring over a school book, waiting for her brother to give her an instruction, and his eyes would follow her while he walked back to the barn; he didn't think she noticed. But more often she was in the sheep fold, and the grain fields were empty of her presence. Once the sheaves were in the barn, Mr MacDougal performed the *Tritico* charm, which separated the grain from the stalks; then Remus winnowed with a simple *Ventilo* and directed the heavy grain into the crib.

The men left the harvesting in the middle of the afternoon to return to the lambs, who needed to be weighed and weaned. Sometimes Ariadne spent the whole day in the pastures to watch the sheep in the ordinary Muggle way; more than once Remus interrupted her guiding back the strays, a book still open in her left hand, and surprised her by pulling back the sheep with an "Accio!" But he never spoke to her if any other member of the family were present.

She doesn't want her parents to know that you are friends rebuked his conscience, and nor do you.

But it was difficult to maintain the posture of menial farmhand when her parents had made him her teacher, presumably with authority over her. It was almost as difficult to assume the authority of a teacher when they both knew that he would be a menial again tomorrow. And when he treated her like an equal the way she treated him the gulf of professional distance yawned unnaturally between them.

"You will not be able to see the book if you sit so far away," she once said but she passed the book over, so that he didn't have to move. It wasn't an invitation, he was sure. She never tried to move closer, or to deflect the conversation from her studies. But within twenty minutes, they were always talking about something else. And if he even remembered that the conversation had become unprofessional, friendly, even intimate... he always argued, "Why shouldn't I have a friend?"

He didn't want her to go back to school. He hoped against hope that he would be instructed to escort her to King's Cross Station, so that he could say goodbye to her properly. But on the first of September he was ordered out to the potato fields at dawn. By the time he had a plausible excuse to sneak back to the house an owl brought an unaddressed catalogue from Diagon Alley and someone needed to dump it on the kitchen table it was too late; Ariadne was vanishing into the Floo even as he entered the back door.

He immediately sat down at the kitchen table, potato fields calling him or not, to write a note of apology *This is the act of a desperate man*, he reminded himself. *She is going to school. She won't remember me once she's there. She is happier at school. She has her own friends there. As of today, I am completely superfluous to her life. A nuisance, even.*

Yet he wrote. He wrote as if they were still friends. He wrote as if he could still be useful to her. He wrote as if she would write back. And he told the owl to take the message to Hogwarts, because he didn't want her to read it on the train in front of her curious friends.

Ariadne's reply arrived before breakfast the next morning. She had not even started lessons yet, but her account of her journey and arrival was so friendly that he was drafting a reply before he knew it. She seemed to like his letters, for, amazingly, she wrote every day. Even if she didn't have time to write properly, she would acknowledge his letter with a line such as:

Dear R, So much to do today that I cannot tell you any of it, but of whatever is yet seeming of interest tomorrow, you can in due course be expecting a full account. A.

The candle that he sent her on her birthday was an impulse buy. He had meant to give her a book, and he had meant to spend only a Galleon. But personal shopping had to be fitted in around general errands for the farm; when Kenneth gave him permission to go to Gringotts to deposit his wages, he didn't dare spend more than ten minutes in Flourish and Blotts. He realised, as his eyes swept the well-stocked book shelves, that he had no idea what Ariadne read when she wasn't reading school books; and then his glance lighted on the candles arranged among the note pads and quills. He knew, vaguely, that he was supposed to be saving his money; his job provided food and shelter, so his wages ten Galleons a week were usually deposited intact. So far the only incursion into his savings had been some odd expenses for the holiday in Perthshire (the MacDougals had financed campsite rental and food, but not entrance tickets or ice creams) and basic stationery, most of which was used to write to Ariadne. Now he suddenly found himself breaking out four Galleons and thirteen Sickles so that a pretty candle could double as reading-lamp and pot-pourri.

He had forgotten why he was saving anyway. He already owned a house, and he would never have a family to support. If he didn't spend the money on Ariadne, it would only accrue to the benefit of the Gringotts goblins. And she seemed pleased that he had thought of her.

The candle is causing a great deal of speculation at school. Hestia is believing it came from Aunt Macmillan (whose present was actually thermal underwear), but Sarah insists that I have acquired a male admirer. Madam Pince frowned when I brought it into the library, and said a great deal about hot wax falling on books, even though I explained that it was an Everlasting. I placed it in the centre of the table, and eight students could read by its light.

Cousin Lucius gave me a diamond watch. I'm thinking I'll never wear it, because it's too fine to match my clothes definitely finer than school uniform! The watch that my parents gave me when I was ten keeps perfect time yet and was given with a great deal of love. There was nothing from Severus, who yet maintains the pretence that we are not related, but I do not doubt that Kenneth will send Janet to buy me a book. Ivor and Hestia conned the house-elves into baking me a cake, and Richard provided Filibuster's fireworks, so everybody is happy in the Gryffindor common room.

About tomorrow night: I have managed to lure my parents away from Kincarden for the evening, and I will try to detain them overnight, but I cannot guarantee that they will stay away all Friday. Your best bet would be the shepherd's hut, with a strong hint to William to let you out in the morning. Teach him the Alohomora charm in advance, and hope for the best.

A week later he was writing:

Your brother is becoming very annoyed by William's proficiency in the Alohomora charm. No lock on the property is safe from William's unlocking, and we see every door swinging in the wind and rain.

Ariadne, I don't want you to feel responsible for my problems. I am grateful for your help, but it's a burden that no student should have to bear in her N.E.W.T. year. We can delay the inevitable but we cannot prevent it: in the end, I will be found out.

She ignored this paragraph for a couple of weeks, but eventually she addressed it:

Any delay in discovery is better than none. Month by month, we deal with it. This month everything will go well, for I am arranging to come home for the weekend. Try to look a little surprised when you see me surprised, but not too interested.

In fact he managed the surprise with no trouble. He hadn't seriously expected to see her again, not standing in the kitchen on a working day, and when he saw her there, chatting to her mother, arranging a vase of marigolds on the table, and giving no sign that she had seen him, that stopped him in his tracks.

All through Saturday, as he slept off his affliction, Ariadne was there. He could hear her quill scratching as he turned on the bed. Whenever he opened his eyes, she was sitting nearby, apparently floating in front of his line of vision. If he tried to speak, she offered water. Finally, when he awoke enough to hoist himself to vertical in the bed, he made out her words.

"They have not missed you yet, Remus. Everything's all right. Are you well?"

She had placed a jar of marigolds next to his bed too, together with a couple of books and a writing pad and quill, as if she were nursing him in an infirmary. She was sitting cross-legged on William's bed, which explained why she had appeared to be floating in front of him, and she was working on a scroll that looked like a school essay. He asked, "Ariadne, have you been here all day?"

"I have. You're teaching me, remember?"

The situation suddenly seemed wildly funny. She had a secret too. She hadn't come home to be his pupil. She had come home for him. This month she had gone to some trouble to cover up his lycanthropy, just as she went to considerable trouble to write to him every day. As he suppressed his grin he acknowledged what was happening. She didn't only want to *have* his friendship, she wanted to *be* his friend.

And he still did not accept that there was anything wrong with this.

Whom am I hurting? he argued with his conscience. *Ariadne is home for the weekend, but she isn't neglecting her studies, and she hasn't directly disobeyed or deceived her parents. If she wants me as a friend, why shouldn't I be one?*

And the lies of omission? his conscience nagged. *What about everything that you don't tell your employers?*

My whole life has been a lie of omission he protested. *And so has Ariadne's. It's the only way I can survive or she can have any reasonable comfort at home. It's the way she has to live until she leaves her parents' house, and it's the way I have to live until society changes.*

And what about that huge lie of omission right in the middle of your "friendship" with Ariadne?

I'm keeping that private because it really would hurt her to find out about that. Any young girl would be distressed and terrified to realise that her teacher fancied her. But as long as she doesn't know, our being friends can't hurt her. I'm the one who can come off second-best. The risk is all mine, and I can take it if I choose.

When Ariadne came home again in November, she was apologetic. "Having the full moon on Sunday night is bad timing. I can let you out of the hut on Monday morning, but there'll be nobody to look after you during the day."

He failed miserably to look grave. The timing had brought Ariadne home for the whole weekend, and he wouldn't be wasting any of it being sick.

When she didn't come home in December, and the full moon fell in a cold snap, he charmed the shepherd's hut to heat up to twenty-five degrees as soon as the sun rose. It was a ridiculous level of warmth, but it was worth it, because he awoke bruised and exhausted, but not frozen. He had to lie and swelter until the middle of the day, when William, who had been half-heartedly looking for him, happened upon the hut and once again experimented with *Alohomora*.

"It's gey het un herre," commented William, as the door nearly swung off its hinges and the heat blasted out to the frosty hillside.

Remus had to plead a magical accident, as well as a bout of winter flu.

Two days later he was sent to Hogsmeade to bring Ariadne home from school. "There is no need to have Miss MacDougal travel all the way to London, and keep her from home another nine hours," said Mr MacDougal. "She has been studying so hard that she's maybe not even had time to finish all her Christmas shopping. Remus, you have to allow her to purchase whatever she's wanting in Hogsmeade before you bring her through the Floo."

Needless to say, Professor McGonagall did not find the solution so easy. "Miss MacDougal was booked onto the Hogwarts Express. She has either to travel on it or to stay at school unless we have signed permission from her guardians to do otherwise."

Remus had to walk out of the Hogwarts gates, Apparate back to Kincarden, entice a signed notice of permission out of Mrs MacDougal, and Apparate to the gates of Hogwarts again. By this time it was almost eleven o' clock, and the thestrals were drawing the school carriages into Hogsmeade Station. Remus located Ariadne without difficulty, but he then had to negotiate her release with Hagrid.

"Highly irreg'lar," Hagrid complained. "Changin' plans at the last minute. Yer not her mum or her dad, are yeh, Remus?"

"I have their permission." Remus handed over the note.

"It looks all righ', but please tell them for next time to make up their min's a week before term ends. How do I prove to Professor McGonagall that you weren't some boyfrien' who forged that note fer yer own advantage?" Hagrid showed enough of a smile to deter further argument; but Ariadne's friends were apparently entertaining the same doubts.

"Ariadne, is that man your *boyfriend*?" asked a blonde girl whom he quickly identified as Sarah. "The one you'll never tell us about who writes all those letters?"

Ariadne only laughed, and said that Mr Lupin worked on the farm, but he could tell that she wasn't comfortable with the question. He would *definitely* never let her feel she was being asked for anything more than friendship.

Once the Hogwarts Express had departed, Ariadne confirmed that she hadn't started her Christmas shopping, and they went into Scrivenshaft's to do it. She took a long time selecting an almanac for her father, and finally admitted that she wanted one that did not show the full moons. It only took her ten minutes to pick out an armload of books for the rest of the family, and then she said, "Let's go to Zonko's. William will not be wanting a book, and poor little Morag will be wanting at least one present that's not one."

"A gift for William? Is it your custom to give presents to the menials?"

"It is if I'm home for Christmas. Though there are rather strict rules about what's a suitable present."

"What, no pink teddy bears!"

"Especially not if you can press their paws to make them sing 'Santa Claus is Coming to Town'."

"What other rules are there?"

She measured his face before deciding to tell him. "No strong spirits, because William does not cope well with alcohol. My parents usually give him a crate of Butterbeer. Nothing violent or noisy or smelly, so we'll have to be careful which Zonko's product we select. And... if I'm buying..." she looked embarrassed, but he was too fascinated to excuse her from answering, "nothing costing more than ten Sickles."

"And the shame of this True Confession... is it that you might hurt my feelings, or that your parents will magically overhear what you said and have their feelings hurt?"

"You're laughing at me again! I assume that if you can refer to yourself as a 'menial', then your feelings are safe. But my mother... she would not like to know that I'd repeated her words."

"Does she regret that she said them?"

"She does not. But she'd be very hurt to think that you knew you had a market value. You're supposed to be believing that we're all elevated above such tawdry discussion of Sickles and Knuts."

"And what are the menials allowed to spend on you?"

She pretended to be shocked. "What travesty! A labourer gives his landlord nothing but his labour. He cannot give back his well-earned Knuts to the employer just because it's Christmas. Not even if the Knuts have been Transfigured into a box of chocolates."

"So William never gives you anything at Christmas?"

"Of course not."

"So I'd better give you this now, when they're not looking."

For a moment she was confused by the parcel he handed her, which really was the shape of a box of chocolates. "Mr Lupin, are teachers allowed to give presents to their pupils?"

"Only if they give an identical present to every student in the class."

"That's appearing to be in order then." Her face steadied to its usual colour as she unwrapped the paper. She probably knew from the weight that the present was a book. "It is... you remembered that I was wanting to read it!" The second-hand copy of *Memoirs of Cliodna* (Montmorency's translation) was at least a hundred years old, the pages yellowed, the spine so conspicuously sturdy that it must be obvious that he had used charm-work to repair it. Ariadne cradled it as if it were a baby, opened it, then slammed it shut. "I will not be tempted." She moved a step backwards, as if reading the book in the open street were not the only temptation she was resisting. "I'll save it until I can be alone with it. Thank you. And this one's for you... but it's not wrapped..."

"Wrapping is a silly custom," he said automatically. "We put the paper on just so that it can be taken off again. And...*did you really?*" He remembered in time not to hug her. The book, very new and very obviously costing a great deal more than ten Sickles, was Emeric Switch's new release, *Tempting Transcendence: New Transfiguration Tricks to be taken with Logic and Humour*.

She shrugged. "It was no difficult guess. Just do not tell my parents that it came from me."

The Good Shepherd and the Ravening Wolf

Chapter 8 of 21

Ariadne continues to hide Remus's secret from her family. But how much can Remus hide from Ariadne herself?

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Good Shepherd and the Ravening Wolf

Friday 23 December 1983 Sunday 18 March 1984

Kincarden, Inverness-shire; Hogsmeade, The Grampians.

Rated PG for unethical behaviour from our hero and references to lycanthropy.

A/N: Babel service here... "Mancunian" means "from Manchester".

Remus had time to read Switch's book from cover to cover over the next three days and to work through most of the puzzles, because there was no work for farmhands beyond the routine care of animals. The Macmillans had come to stay, so Ariadne was kept busy in the kitchen. She avoided speaking to him so pointedly that he was surprised when she sent him an owl an owl to someone on her own property? The owlery was further from the house than the farmhands' quarters!

Dear Remus, all is well in the house, just very noisy and busy with so many of us. You're not banished forever. When the Macmillans leave, you are to enter the parlour and teach me more Transfiguration. Do not feel neglected. A.

P.S. I'm knowing you usually keep my letters, but do not keep this one. There are too many people asking too many questions.

He knew he was tempting fate, but he wrote back,

My dear pupil, can't you do a Chameleon Charm yet? Obviously we shall need long hours of study over the New Year. You definitely need to learn to enchant a page so that the words look different to different recipients. This page, for example, looks like a shopping list if anyone except you reads it. R.

He felt himself very much in disgrace when the owl returned in only ten minutes, bearing the words:

Cousin Steadfast could not believe his eyes why would anybody exhaust a good owl just to transport a shopping list? And why was I wanting to buy fence wire? When he realised I could not actually read the shopping list, he teased me no end. He did not believe me when I said that it was from a friend wishing me a happy Hogmanay. It's lucky he did not recognise the messenger as a Kincarden owl.

But when the Macmillans had left the farm, and he was finally seated with Ariadne at the desk in the parlour, she did not mention the incident. Her anger was always so understated that it was difficult to tell, from writing, when she was really annoyed with him and when she was only teasing.

"Can you Transfigure the desk into a pig?"

She closed her eyes and moved her wand, and the desk turned into a ram.

Remus Stunned the ram before it butted them and asked, "Did you do that on purpose?"

"Of course I did not. I cannot imagine why it..."

"Ariadne, what were you thinking about when you closed your eyes?"

"I was thinking about how city people think of pigs as greedy and selfish and of sheep as sweet and vulnerable. Yet really pigs are intelligent and friendly, while sheep are mindless, and an angry ram can be dangerous..."

"Well, I think you produced an angry one then. So here's a challenge. Turn your ram into a pig."

She frowned furiously and the ram became a very small piglet.

"Were you thinking that you must only produce tame animals from now on?"

"I was thinking that your next idea would be to try the Animate to Inanimate Transfiguration, and I'd rather do that with a small animal than a large one."

"Just one fatal flaw with that plan. Your piglet is not animate. That arrangement of molecules looks like a piglet, but it isn't one. You need a real animal if you really want to practise the Animate to Inanimate "

She shook her head expressively. "Oh, do not say do not have new ideas now!"

He waved his wand, and the piglet reverted to a writing desk. "I was only going to say, begin with a small animal. A mouse. A canary. A goldfish. A bee. A ladybird..."

"Where will I find a bee or a ladybird at this time of year? Are you going to Conjure one for me?" She sounded ingenuous, but there was a mischievous glint in her eye.

The week they spent in the parlour was long and glorious. The weather alternated dismally between snow and rain, so there was nothing to do outdoors. When Mrs MacDougal told Ariadne that she was wanting a break from studying books, Ariadne practised charms from *Mrs Skower's Housewitch's Hints*, or experimented with her Potions practical, or read Beatrix Bloxam's *Toadstool Tales* to Morag. Remus had to go outdoors, weather notwithstanding; his choices were between searching out tools and fences that needed repairs, and sitting in his own quarters watching William play with his new toys. He always timed Ariadne a careful three to four hours before venturing back to the kitchen to ask if she wished to continue.

* * * * *

The Christmas holidays progressed so smoothly that he was not prepared for the storm in January. It was literally stormy, with no day free from snow, and howling gales through the middle of the month. The full moon brought special problems, as Ariadne pointed out in a letter.

You're not saying what your plans are for the 18th. I'm expecting you will not be using the shepherd's hut since (amazingly) it will be under constant surveillance in preparation for shepherding. Tell me you've left it in good repair. If it comes to that, you will be needing to tend to the pregnant ewes my father will not grant you time off when it's so close to the lambing season. And what is your alibi for the 19th? You've suffered from winter illnesses for the last two months; if it happens again, they might start noticing that your ailments are recurring monthly. Tell me your plan, or I will not be able to concentrate on my Transfiguration...

He had to admit:

I will look for a shed not occupied by animate life perhaps the hay barn. The problem will be in getting out again. As for the 19th, I will have to plead influenza; and, given the weather we're suffering here, that's very likely to be the truth.

She found this plan completely inadequate.

Remus, are you planning to have yourself turned over to the Committee for the Disposal of Dangerous Creatures? Or will you settle for merely losing your job? If you spent the night in the hay barn, I'm thinking that not even you could produce a spell that would restore the hay the next morning. Go to the Shrieking Shack. I'll make sure you're back at Kincarden before you're missed. And try to have a fairly serious magical accident on the way home to explain your subsequent illness. Wizards are not supposed to catch the flu as often as you claim you do.

In the event, he had to go to the Shrieking Shack without any clear understanding of what would happen the next day. He reminded himself that anything was better than bursting out of an insecure barn, inevitably to scent out the sheepfolds and spend the night eating his employer's livestock; the image of chewing all that raw meat, complete with winter fleece, was revolting enough to harden his resolve. If ever he lived in his own house again, he would definitely become a vegetarian.

On the morning after, he awoke to the soothing sound of Ariadne's voice. She was in the Shrieking Shack, presumably looking for him, and she was talking to someone.

But she shouldn't be here! He leapt to his feet, dismayed by the broadening daylight. Since it was light, she ought to be at school *And who was her companion?* He couldn't make out the words, and it took him a moment to place the unusually deep voice as Kingsley Shackbolt's. A fist thundered on the door, and Kingsley was asking if he were in there.

Remus opened the door and retrieved his wand, wondering just how much Ariadne had told her friend. He also wondered about the friend. Ariadne had never said that Kingsley was anything more than a friend to her, but Remus began to wonder why not, for Kingsley was personable, clever and thoroughly decent. It struck him as a very uneven competition, between elderly persecuted werewolf and gallant young werewolf-rescuer. He had completed this thought before he remembered that it was a competition that no werewolf had any right to enter.

Kingsley helped him across the hall. "Are you all right, Remus?"

"Yes," he lied. It was a lie he had told Madam Pomfrey sixty-five times during his school days; she had never believed him. "You aren't, though. Why aren't you in school?"

"School doesn't start for another ten minutes. Hold on to me. I'm going to Apparate you home."

They landed outside the farmhouse, in a howling gale, with Remus feeling sick from the Apparition. Kingsley admitted, "I don't know the way from here. I've only ever seen this place in a photograph."

They hobbled towards the farmhands' quarters with Remus worrying so much about making Kingsley late for school that he didn't notice Kenneth MacDougal approaching from the opposite direction. He was furious.

"Remus, did you go drinking *again?*" he hissed. "What need was there to bring your despicable drunken companions here?"

"Beg your pardon, sir," said Kingsley, "but are you this man's employer? I found him lying on the path to this property. Lucky I was passing, he was half dead from hypothermia."

Since Kingsley was obviously not drunk, Kenneth nodded curtly and ignored him. "Deadrunk, more likely," he told Remus. "If you did succumb to hypothermia... but you're not looking as if you've been out in the cold at all hours."

"I'm all right now," said Remus to Kingsley. "Go about your business... and... thanks."

Kingsley nodded and Disapparated. Since the clocks were striking nine, and he still had to pull Ariadne out of Hogsmeade, it was probably the most sensible thing he could have done; but of course it immediately told Kenneth that Kingsley was a wizard.

"Lucky he was passing did he say? Unlucky that he's not knowing the area well enough to realise that no Negroes with Mancunian accents live around here. Wherever you passed the night, I'd say that friend of yours was there with you. And you've been passing the night somewhere quite warm and comfortable, I'd say. Just not for quite long enough to sleep off that regular hangover of yours. Remus, this is the last time you insult the MacDougals with your immature hobbies. My father will be hearing of this scandal, and one more offence will cost you your job."

Kenneth might have said a great deal more if his mother had not emerged from the back door at that moment. She listened patiently to Kenneth's summary of the situation, cast an eye over Remus, and said, "However this happened, Kenneth, Remus is too sick to work today. Go to bed, young man, and we'll talk it over when everybody has cooled off."

It was difficult to imagine anything cooler than the biting Kincarden wind as Remus stumbled through the snow to his dormitory. The writing was on the wall. His job here was going to last exactly one more month. He would never see Ariadne again. The thought of being cut adrift in midwinter, when no farm in Scotland needed more unskilled labour than it already possessed, refused to enter his mind properly. He fell asleep thinking of Ariadne, and he awoke thinking of her too, because an owl was brushing a letter against his face. He was too tired to absorb it properly.

Dearest,

I'm sorry I handled this morning so clumsily. You have the right to be angry with me for involving Kingsley, but I promise you, he's not guessed the true story yet. His theory is that you had an errand to Hogsmeade and a magical accident; he was puzzled about how you "managed to owl me from the Shrieking Shack", but he accepted my suggestion that you must have taken a Kincarden owl with you for the errand. So no more about that.

I was going to suggest a cover story in which you felt sick in the night and tried to revive yourself with a brisk walk, but you collapsed instead. It's maybe simplest to stick to that story, because it explains the important points. My parents would have probably accepted that version if they had heard it from the first, but Kenneth's preference for a theory that involves alcohol might, unfortunately, sway them.

That is our real problem: my brother caught you. He has suspected you of drinking for some time, Remus, and it seemed dangerous to suggest to him that your problem is maybe of a different nature. Even if you can convince my father that you were sober today, Kenneth is now primed to place the worst construction on every accident. I'm not knowing what we can do about that.

Kingsley and I were only ten minutes late for our first lesson. We both have detention tomorrow evening not wonderful for Head Boy! but they are believing we were just late in the ordinary way; they are not knowing that we were actually out of bounds.

I've been practising the Chameleon Charm. I have Charmed this page to look like Ivor's favourite Martin Miggs cartoon to anybody except you.

Yours always,

Ariadne.

He was too tired to analyse why this depressing missive was comforting. He was able to snatch a page from his notebook and scribble back

I am never angry with you. R.

in full confidence that he had now addressed all the really important points in her message. After the owl had returned to Hogwarts, William entered their room and said, "Brraw barray, it's Marratin Muggs!" He claimed the page without a thought that it might be someone else's property, so Remus never had a chance to re-read the letter.

When he awoke properly, in the evening, he had to deal with his employers. Mr MacDougal was very disappointed and asked, "Were you really drinking in work time, Remus?"

"I haven't been drinking, sir, but I've been unwell."

Mr MacDougal accepted this, but he gave a long lecture on how it would have been better to ask Mrs MacDougal for a potion than to leave himself to weaken, and without informing any of them, on a day when he knew how badly his labour would be needed around the farm. "At the very least, Remus, come and tell us next time you have a problem. Dilemmas that nobody can help arise from time to time, and in Clan MacDougal we work together to find solutions."

This was so exactly the way the MacDougals liked to perceive themselves, and so very far from the reality when there actually was a problem, that all he could think was, *Ariadne has lived with these meaningless platitudes all her life* and for a moment, her problems seemed worse than his.

But it seemed his job would live another month, and the next day Ariadne really did come home. She worked outdoors, helping to check the ewes; she learned the basics of Dairy Charming from her mother; and when she and Remus were finally shut up together in the barn, they did not open a book.

"I'm not needing to," she said. "After your tutoring, and my parents' attitude to holiday homework, I'm yet ahead in every subject. I'm wanting to know about you."

"It's as you wrote, Ariadne. Your brother is primed to believe the worst, and the fact that Kingsley is so obviously a friend was so obviously there by design only alerted him that something suspicious was happening. I still have this job for now, but I can't afford another accident. If I'm lucky next month, that only delays the inevitable until the month after."

"And you're quite sure that it *is* inevitable that you're now on borrowed time "

"Ariadne, at this stage I don't think it'll take your brother longer than three months to work out the truth. He may tumble to it tomorrow. I don't know if I shall ever see you again."

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, he knew what he had said.

He stared at her speechlessly, not knowing how he could repair the gaffe, and then knowing that his own horror at his indiscretion was creating a second gaffe. If he changed the subject, she would be polite, but she would still *know*; and his mind was barren of any topic for conversation.

Her face did not change. She had taken his hands and was chafing them against the cold, as if he were a child. It wasn't really cold because they had Conjured a brazier and a fire to go with it, but inside he was as numb as if he had swallowed an iceberg. Her eyes were so blue. She seemed concerned, but not at all... surprised.

He would have rather her father know about his lycanthropy than that Ariadne know his heart.

She dropped his hands abruptly. "Sorry, that's against the rules too, is it not? We do not touch. And we do not speak of it. And we do not let anybody else think that we... Remus, what *are* the rules?"

"You've just given a pretty good summary." She knew. She *knew*. He should have known he could not hide from Ariadne. She always understood him so well. She might recognise that he didn't want to talk about his feelings, she always observed his limits scrupulously... but that did not mean she was blissfully oblivious to the whole situation. On the contrary, she had understood so thoroughly that she had understood the limits to be a rule, binding on them both.

Merlin, she *knew*.

"We're quits, Remus. We've broken one rule each in the last two minutes. Ready to play fairly again now?"

"Do you always know what people are thinking?" he asked.

"Like a Legilimens? Of course not. I'm generally knowing what people *are feeling*. That's not the same thing at all."

"What's the difference?"

"Morag was sad this morning. I did not know whether it was because Kenneth had rebuked her, or because Janet was too busy with Aidan to notice her, or because all the red in her paint box was used up. When she finally came to talk to me, I learned it was because her favourite kitten had died. I'd never have guessed because I'd not known about that. But I was right about her being sad. Whereas Kenneth's guess was wide of the mark he was thinking she had a stomach ache and was suggesting a potion."

He wanted to ask: *How long have you known that I love you?* But that was a question that broke all the rules, one that would ensure he never did see her again. She knew, and she hadn't let it distress her. She knew, and she trusted him not to pursue her. She knew, and she still wanted his friendship. She knew, and the fact that he had only just realised she knew did not change the situation from her point of view. She knew, and she was still smiling at him.

The simple and obvious interpretation of this phenomenon was a possibility that he did not allow to cross his mind.

* * * * *

In February Kenneth worked out a roster so that each man took turns to sleep in the shepherd's hut, and Remus was indeed rostered for the night of the full moon. As he wrote to Ariadne,

What would your brother say if he knew he was losing a real live unfettered wolf among his lambs? I will try to swap duties with William, but if your father finds out that we've swapped without telling him, he will call it "failing to work together", and I don't see him giving me a third chance. We knew all along that it could not end any other way, so you are not to incriminate yourself by interceding for me...

Remus had to use an immoral Persuasion Charm on William to arrange the exchange of duties. William agreed, with a dazed smile that suggested he was not quite aware of what he had agreed to do, and Remus Disapparated to the Shrieking Shack.

The next morning Ariadne brought a stranger to release him from the Shack, a shockingly good-looking young man who turned out to be her friend Richard. Remus was

disturbed by Richard's being so well-favoured, even though Ariadne had written that he was going out with a girl in Hufflepuff. But Richard Apparated him back to Kincarden without any questions, and no one intercepted them, perhaps because sunrise was now an hour earlier than it had been last month. William reported that he had delivered a healthy lamb during the night, without complications, so the MacDougals never found out about the exchange of shifts; and Remus was able to plead illness with no worse consequences than a collective sigh at the inconvenience to the family.

Ariadne was home again that weekend. By this time Remus was back in favour because of his long hours in the lambing shed, and her homework had loaded up, so they were able to spend most of their time together. He followed her into the parlour, grinning like a Cheshire cat and not troubling to break eye contact. It didn't matter if she noticed; she already knew everything.

"You've relaxed," she said. "Is that because the Transformation went well the other night?"

No, of course not. I've relaxed because I'm no longer hiding anything from you. Out loud, he said, "Every criminal is glad to live another day." He remembered then that he was a criminal; that she tolerated his infatuation because he didn't impose it on her, and that he ought to behave more discreetly in front of her family.

She teased him for being cryptic and opened the book. A week later she sent him a photograph.

I'm sorry you did not recognise Richard the other morning. My pen-portrait was evidently not vivid enough, but here at last is a photograph of all of us. I'm hoping you recognise Joe, who is said to look very like Benjy, and Sarah is the blonde.

It took a while to organise this portrait. The camera belongs to Ivor, but he did not manage to Charm it to delay the Exposure for long enough to allow him to run around and sit down. After three misses he bribed a second-year to press the button for us. The boy a very streetwise redhead named Bill said that pressing camera-buttons was a very difficult and delicate business, and he could not do it for less than a Galleon. We were all so amused by his cheek that we gave him one. But then the sixth-years were wanting a group portrait too, so the next thing we knew, Bill was clearing us off the sofas, and arranging the sixth-years for a pose, and they paid him a Galleon too. For using Ivor's camera! Then the fifth-years were wanting a portrait, and none of them had a Galleon, so at this point Bill gave in and said, "I'm not really mercenary. You can have a picture for nothing." Using Ivor's camera yet!

You might notice something different about Kingsley. That's another story about Bill. He had grown his hair into a wee pony tail, and Professor McGonagall did not approve at all. Bill argued the point with his usual aplomb. "But, Professor, it's tied back. The school rules say that 'long hair must be tied back', and mine is." Professor McGonagall pointed out that this rule is for girls, and the boys' rule is that hair 'must not be longer than an inch below the ear' and that 'no boy may grow a beard'. Bill grumbled loudly that the rule was 'sexist', but he had to give in and cut it short.

Anyway, Kingsley felt sorry for Bill. Or the stress of N.E.W.T.s is maybe telling on him. In a show of solidarity, he said, 'Never mind, Bill, I'll cut mine too, and we'll see what McGonagall says about that.' And with a wand-wave and a Raso!, *Kingsley divested his head of every single hair! Professor McGonagall was extremely displeased, but there was not a thing she could do about it because the uniform rules only say the maximum amount of hair anybody is allowed there's not a word about a minimum. 'Now, Professor,' said Kingsley, 'if you had some unfortunate student who was dying of a terrible illness that made him bald, would you punish that student for breaking uniform rules? Or if an elderly teacher goes bald, are we so ageist as to accuse him of setting a bad example to the students?'*

Hestia told Kingsley that he looked better bald, and Ivor acted very jealously about it.

It was Remus's only photograph of Ariadne, but he couldn't display it. It would look too odd for the farmhand to frame a portrait of his employers' daughter's schoolmates. He shut it up in the book she had given him and hoped William would never ask why he used a photograph as a bookmark.

* * * * *

On 10 March a Hogwarts owl brought him a book, Pinkstone's *Vultures and Victims: Persecution Perpetrated by and against the Wizarding World* with a note from Ariadne:

You must be thinking I'm a very unimaginitive gift-giver to resort to giving you a book again, but this made me laugh as well as cry (I'm in a rebellious mood at present). Happy Birthday.

He was certain he had never told her when his birthday was.

The March full moon fell a week later. Ariadne negotiated her way home again and spent all Saturday in the barn (she hinted to her mother that the house held too many distractions). A survey of the ewes indicated that none was likely to give birth that night, so Remus was able to transform in the shepherd's hut.

The door swung open at dawn, and Ariadne stood there, cradling a newborn lamb. "Thank goodness it's warm in here," she said. "Had you a comfortable night, Remus?"

He stared at the lamb she was placing down on the straw, and at the ewe that she had Charmed to follow her into the hut. "What happened, Ariadne? Yes, yes, I'm fine... but what happened?"

"We were wrong about the ewe, that's all; she gave birth in the night."

He sprang to his feet then swayed, because he was too weak to balance alone. "Does your father know?"

"Of course he does not." She finished settling the animals and closed the hut door. "It's all right, Remus. You've spent the night here... exactly where you were meant to be. Yesterday evening I said good night in the parlour, then went out through the back door, so nobody knows that I patrolled the pen all night. I delivered the lamb and Conjured enough fire to keep it warm through the night..."

Appalled, he sank to the floor and said, "You must be frozen! And you can't have slept. What if there had been a complication with the birth?"

Her eyes were large and brilliant in a very sober face. "Then I could not have saved the lamb," she said quietly, "and we might have been found out. But if we had left the ewe to give birth alone, and she had been discovered outdoors in the cold while you were sleeping in the hut... then you would *certainly* have been found out. So it was a

chance worth taking. As it is, the ewe has given you an alibi for today... you're needing to sleep because you were up all night delivering her. I do know, Remus, that when we're caught, we're caught. But it's not happening this month."

"I meant if *I'm* caught I'm caught. There's no need for you to be in trouble for colluding with me."

The Enemy who Lied

Chapter 9 of 21

Remus faces up to Ariadne, his conscience and an unidentified enemy.

CHAPTER NINE

The Enemy who Lied

Saturday 7 April Monday 28 May 1984

Kincarden, Inverness-shire; from Hogsmeade to Hogwarts, The Grampians.

Rated PG for adult themes (romantic attachment and corruption in the workplace).

In April Ariadne was home in person for the Easter holidays. Remus remembered this idyllic fortnight for the rest of his life. The lambing season was over, the weather was warm and dry, and they managed his Transformation without any trouble. Ariadne had finished her shampoo project, and she walked around the farm, book in hand, learning to cast the *Dissemino* charm on the fertiliser and the *Accio* charm on the straying sheep.

"Potions cannot mean shampoo forever," she said thankfully. "I've written to every apothecary on the Registry, enquiring about apprenticeships. There has to be one out there who is willing to teach me something useful."

But over the next few days Ariadne received three letters from apothecaries who regretted that they had no vacancy at the present time. The first was brief and polite, and she thought nothing of it. The second was quite pointed.

Dear Miss MacDougal,

Although we would be willing to accept an apprentice at this time, we cannot offer the position to you.

For future reference, you may be interested to know that we hear you are a young lady of questionable character. According to a person who should know, you are of a meddlesome and frivolous disposition, more interested in other people's business than in completing the task at hand.

We admit this freely because we believe that young people are both easily led astray and readily reformed. If you show evidence of improved character in a year or two, you may then aspire to the noble career of apothecarism.

With our best wishes for your future reformation,

Figwort and Dittany Teazle.

"Did Severus really ?" began Remus.

"He did not; I cannot believe that Severus would give me a dishonest reference. Or Professor McGonagall. Or Madam Bones, who was my out-of-school referee. Somebody who works there must have heard something unofficially. *Incendio!*" There was only a second's hesitation before an amber flame leapt out of the air and licked up the letter.

The third refusal would have been cryptic without the illumination of the second.

Miss MacDougal,

There are no apprenticeships for the likes of you. Apothecarism is a profession of DISCRETION and INTEGRITY and JOLLY HARD WORK.

Hemlock Thornapple.

Ariadne was upset about this one and ventured, "It's almost as if somebody has deliberately assassinated my character. But who would care enough to bother?"

"You can go mad trying to think of everyone whom you've ever offended at any time in your life," he said. "Let's see if there really is a pattern of one person broadcasting a bad report everywhere before we worry." Despite what someone was doing to Ariadne, Remus never forgot the way she brought her problem straight to him. Even the suspicion that she had a mysterious enemy could not spoil the few days when most of her attention was so focused on *him*.

But of the twenty-two apothecaries listed on the M.E.S.P. Registry, only one more ever replied to Ariadne's application.

Dear Miss MacDougal,

I shall be entirely willing to teach you the subtle science and exact art of potion making, contingent on an O grade N.E.W.T. in Potions and EE grades in Herbology and at least three additional subjects.

The term of the apprenticeship will run from 1 August 1984 until 31 July 1987. Hours will be from nine until five, Monday to Friday, and nine until one on Saturday. You will be entitled to one week of holiday a year, and your stipend for that period will be twenty Galleons a week. Conditional on the satisfactory completion of this apprenticeship, you will acquire the status of Journeyman.

You are reminded that the utmost concentration and diligence will be at all times required of you. I await your owl.

Yours sincerely,

Arsenius Jigger.

She was almost as upset by this acceptance as she had been by the third refusal. "Professor Jigger?" she said. "Remus, I'm not knowing if I can! But I've no choice, have I? Not if I'm wanting to be an apothecary."

"Yes, you have. For a start, Jigger's driving a very hard bargain. People have found apprenticeships and even become competent apothecaries with grades of only EE in Potions and Herbology and A in two other subjects. More importantly, you can ask Severus what on earth is going on here, have him investigate the bad references, and find out who started the poison. Jigger evidently doesn't believe the rumours, so why should all these other apothecaries take this unknown enemy's word against Severus's?"

"Professor Jigger's never caring what anybody else thinks. You've bought supplies from his shop do you not remember him?"

"I do recall that Jigger was a very cantankerous shopkeeper, and I do think you can do better than to work for him."

"You can do better than to milk cows and fertilise grass," she remarked, "but you've never seriously tried to look for a teaching post. So what's the truth? Can we do better, or should we settle for whatever we can find?"

"The truth is that you are a very competent Potions student who could reasonably expect to receive seven or eight good offers. Whereas Hogwarts only holds about fourteen teaching posts in total, and most of them are filled for about thirty-five years at a time, so it is genuinely difficult to become a teacher."

"Despite the fact that so many of our teachers are incompetent. It makes me think that not many people really want to teach. The Defence Against the Dark Arts post is regularly available; we've had three new teachers since Voldemort fell. Or... would you teach Muggles?"

"I would, but I don't know whether I could. Muggle qualifications are very different; and even if I somehow qualified, I'd have to fake a completely Muggle lifestyle. I think there are already enough lies in my life as it is."

"Do you ever think about moving into the kind of life where we're not needing to lie?"

"I think about moving you into a life where you aren't the butt of other people's lies, as you clearly have been in this case. Will you write to Severus today, or will you leave it to me?"

"Of course I cannot ask anybody else to do this for me," she said. *Accio* oh, you do it."

"No, no, you don't escape that easily. Not before your Charms N.E.W.T. Make three good attempts to Summon your writing pad before you ask me to bail you out."

The pad arrived on her first attempt, and she sat down on the grass and began to write to Snape. Remus tore off a page himself, Conjured a smooth wooden board, borrowed her spare quill, and dropped a line to Ivor Jones. Snape's reply arrived only a couple of hours later.

Dear Miss MacDougal,

You may rest assured that every apothecary on the M.E.S.P. Registry has indeed received from my quill a reference that was in every way a fair assessment of your abilities and character. You should know better than to suspect me of an open perjury that would ultimately harm my prospects more than yours. While you are neither as wise nor as diligent as you think yourself, I would not employ such open libels as "lazy", "dishonest" or "interfering" before I had clear and definite evidence of such qualities.

I have no idea how Figwort Teazle or Hemlock Thornapple heard a contrary report, but they are only two among many. Since you have received a respectable alternative offer of employment from a competent apothecary, I do not understand why you are wasting my time with this enquiry.

Do not neglect your studies over the holidays,

Severus Snape.

An unexpected note arrived the next day.

My dear Miss MacDougal,

I trust you are well. I am very pleased to learn from dear Dittany Teazle that you are continuing with Potions, just as I always encouraged you to do. Why did you not cite me as a formal referee? As Hesper Starkey always used to say to me, never be afraid to approach an old friend for help.

Libatius Borage and Phoebe Scarpin are among several M.E.S.P. members who have recently approached me in that capacity, knowing that I must have taught you. I was glad to give them my highest praise of your abilities, for, as Roderick Plumpton likes to say every time I see him, "Never stint in telling the good truths you know about others." These apothecaries have been hearing the oddest rumours about you. I do wonder how such stories begin. However, Severus Snape denies them, and he should know.

I am glad to hear that you have secured a post with Arsenius Jigger, who was one of my earliest pupils. Last week I indulged in a lengthy Floo conversation with him concerning your character. It seems that I succeeded in convincing him of the best. Let's hope that good times are to follow!

Your sincere friend,

Horace Slughorn.

Ivor did not write back until the end of the holidays, by which time Ariadne had bitten her lip and squared her shoulders and accepted the apprenticeship with Jigger. The owl flew into the cow byre just after milking.

"Ut's muckle worrds," said William. "I tsunk yourself an' Miss MacDuggal booth likes worrds, Rrremus." He rolled the milk urns out to the gate, leaving Remus alone with Ariadne and the letter.

Remus read the first two lines, then folded it abruptly and said, "Maybe Ivor didn't mean you to see this."

"What did they do to him?"

"Ivor is fine." He scanned the letter, then handed it over. "Ivor is very fine, by the sound of it, but please remember that he wrote this letter and I didn't."

Dear Remus,

Nice to hear from you again, are you and Ariadne still a couple? She's totally cagey with her FRIENDS about what's going on, one day one of us will guess it wrong and make a major social forks pass.

Yes, I do think something went rotten in my job applications. I had an interview at Gringotts last week, and I was told that they had a bad report of my character. According to some person unnamed, I am meddling, misfocused, misguided, lazy, dishonest and a garrulous talker. (Had to look up "garrulous" in the dictionary afterwards.) The goblins also claimed they didn't care a ruddy toss as long as I was willing to meddle in high finance and bring back piles of gold for Gringotts.

So I've gained an entry-level position as a treasure-hoarder for Gringotts, starting on forty Galleons a week, and I've refused all other interviews. It's lucky goblins don't listen to gossips.

I'm sorry to hear that it didn't go so well for Ariadne. It's going fine for Hestia and Richard, so I wonder if it has to do with that letter we wrote to the Office of Births and Deaths last year? I signed it, but Ariadne's name was mentioned. They gave us the right royal brush-off then; someone who works there must have noted our names and decided on a petty revenge. Makes you wonder what they have to hide.

In my opinion, they're hiding VELETA. I'm thinking I want to spend next summer trailing the last journey of another departed companion, are you game for that?

All the best,

Ivor Jones.

Ariadne did not seem disconcerted by the first paragraph, for she only said, "I believe our question is answered. But who in the O.B.D. knew about our career plans? I cannot think of anybody among my acquaintance who might work there." She unbuttoned her skirt pocket and pulled out a wallet. "If you ouch!" The barn owl, perhaps intent on immediate gastronomic reward, had pecked her cheek sharply.

"Pestering bird," complained Remus, brushing the offending owl away more roughly than was strictly necessary. The owl squawked and flapped angrily at their arms, and Ariadne lost balance. She steadied herself on a stall-post and dropped her wallet. It thudded to the floor open and papers strewn out. Remus automatically stooped to pick them up.

Snape's letter was at the top of the pile, together with brief Easter greetings from Sarah and Kingsley, and beneath them was a photograph of himself. "What's this?" He was too amazed to stop the question. He did not remember that anyone had ever taken his picture since he arrived in Kincarden, yet there he was, slightly blurred, apparently Charming a repair to the sheep-pen.

"I know it's not a very good photograph," she said, "but it's the only one I have of you. My cousin Dreadnought took it at Christmas. He was snapping things all over the farm, and he left a pile behind for our family album. I thought my parents would not be wanting this one as much as I was."

There were no other photographs, only a pad of blank notepaper and a self-inking quill. She didn't keep her parents' picture in her wallet, or an image of the long-mourned Veleta Vablatsky, or even the group snapshot, of which she must own a copy somewhere, showing her closest friends at school. He found his voice and asked, "You carry my portrait around with you?"

"Of course I do."

I mustn't look away. A terrifying truth was about to crash down upon him, but it would be cowardly to evade it. She was looking steadily at him, and he had to look steadily back.

"Why are you so surprised?" she asked.

"I didn't think..." he choked up stupidly, "that you would think of me that way... the only one in your wallet..."

"But I'm always thinking about you. Remus... amid all that we have to worry us... are you not at least secure *of me*?"

Crash. The truth was written all over her face. He might lack her talent for intuition, but this time there was no mistake. What he had pushed away and avoided, she had accepted and taken for granted and never attempted to hide. He fought to control his astonishment at the same time as he suppressed his horror at the situation he had created around them both, only to discover that the emotion he was suppressing was not horror at all, but a wild, surging (and unsuppressable) joy.

She is in love with me.

Merlin, what had he done?

He pushed it all away. "It would help if you had a copy of Ivor's letter," he said, accepting a sheet of blank paper from her wallet. *Zerocso!*

She offered him Snape's letter, then, after a pause, took it back. "I take the hint. You're expecting me to copy this one. *Zeer* that's Greek, not Latin! *Zerocso!* There, I did it. I will pass Charms."

"That was never in doubt."

* * * * *

The next day he escorted her back to school, and then he was left alone with his very sore conscience. All the feeble excuses of the last nine months had died their well-deserved death. As cold and rocky as the Cairngorms in winter, the facts stared him in the face.

He had courted his employers' daughter. He had known that her parents, on whose generosity they both depended, would not approve. She was considerably younger than himself and of correspondingly more limited life-experience. He was a werewolf, who could offer no kind of life to any girl, only poverty, instability and social ostracism, in addition to the endless lunar cycle of monthly danger and illness. And he had persisted in his hopelessly arrogant pursuit.

She was the ideal woman, honourable, courageous, sympathetic, so restrained and refined in her manners, yet so fiery and hardy at the core. She was the brightest Potions student in seven years, and she read the human heart with genius. She was seventeen years old and had the world at her feet. (She was also the most beautiful woman on earth, but he would ignore that detail.)

And he had let her throw her heart away to a werewolf.

Somehow, she had granted his deepest and darkest desire, the shocking request that no person has the right to demand of another, the absurd and barbarous petition, "Place me first in your love, to the exclusion of the entire human race." Time and again, he crushed his rejoicing at this thought. What could be more intolerable, more terrifyingly incongruous, than a werewolf who demanded that outrageous gift from the ideal woman?

She loves me.

She had never hidden her love for him; it was he who had refused to read the signs. From the moment she had first offered him her Astronomy textbook, he ought to have known. The only reason he had not known was that he had not wanted to know, for in ignorance he had been able to avoid the moral requirements of the situation. And now they had exploded in front of him.

He had encouraged her infatuation, as well as his own, by building trust and intimacy for month after treacherous month. In a few weeks she would finish her exams, leave school, remove from her parents' house, and start her new job. She would expect him to declare his intentions. *And he had no intentions.* However he might have deceived himself at the time, the reality was that Ariadne had no future with him, so he had most horribly toyed with her affections. He *must not* encourage her any longer. He needed to tear himself out of her life.

Yet that immediately raised another problem. He did not seriously expect that he could walk away and leave Ariadne unscarred. He did not know how much it would hurt her to lose him, but she might be quite distressed. She might even lose concentration and perform badly on her N.E.W.T.s. He would have to continue this hopeless charade up until the day her exams ended. Yet another lie in his life, this time a lie against Ariadne herself.

His conscience did not let go of him until at around four o' clock in the morning he had reached this conclusion. He must slide himself out of Ariadne's life as soon as practicable. But "practicable" meant "after her N.E.W.T.s". They had just two months of borrowed time left.

Sorry for disjointed writing, I'm out of focus today. I will write and ask Sturgis if he knows exactly who works in the

Office of Births and Deaths. If no significant names emerge, be ready to suspect that your libeller is Macnair.

It seemed hypocritical to call Macnair a liar after his own record of deceit.

* * * * *

Ariadne agreed to drop all enquiries about Veleta while she put in the final effort before her N.E.W.T.s. She managed Remus's May Transformation easily (by now the sun was rising at five o' clock, so Kingsley could meet him at the Shrieking Shack and return him to Kincarden before the MacDougals were awake) but otherwise she did not write about much except her studies. He had even less to say: how much could one write about planting potatoes and weeding out barley fields? He managed, however, to fill two or three pages every day writing it.

Ariadne came home for the last weekend in May so that Remus could help her cover the final section of the Transfiguration course. The weather had turned cool, but they sat in the herb garden with her textbooks. She focused easily, apparently unworried by either the exams or anything else.

"But you're distracted," she said. "What's wrong?"

"Exam nerves. I'm suffering all the stress that you're not feeling."

"I'm not believing you."

"What?"

"Remus, I can tell that you are not worried about my exams. *Notthat* worried. What *else* is bothering you?"

"What makes you think I'm upset?" he stalled.

"Half your mind is somewhere else. And it's nothing to do with nerves. It's sadness. Are you not going to tell me?"

"It's a story that I'm honour-bound not to tell."

She accepted this, but not gladly. He knew now that when she inched backwards along the bench and lifted the book to her face, she was restraining herself... from hugging him, from crying for him, from asking more questions... from doing anything that might have immediately relieved his distress yet ultimately complicated the situation further.

She was behaving so well, and he was treating her so badly. She loved him, and he was going to strike her a mortal blow.

As they emerged from the Three Broomsticks on Monday morning, she asked him about it again. "Can you not tell me about it? I've never seen you so distressed."

"Ariadne, you know I would tell you if I were the only person concerned. But I don't see how I can say anything without breaking faith with someone else *With you, the only person who matters.*

"Why are you looking at me like that?"

"Because I wish I could tell you." *Because I am never going to see you again.*

They walked silently for a while. Her sympathy was palpable. He wondered briefly how much she did love him, and how long it would take her to forget him. At the Hogwarts front door, he tried to lighten the atmosphere.

"Owl me at once if a problem emerges in your revision."

"What are you going to do at full moon?"

"The shepherd's hut and William's *Alohomora* charm. Absolutely no Hogsmeade." *After all, it won't matter if I lose my job now.* "You aren't to think about anything except your N.E.W.T.s. In four weeks it will all be over, and then you can think about anything you like. Promise me?"

"Promise."

He dropped her bag on the doorstep before he knew what he was doing. He stiffened his arms in time; he had been about to embrace her. *No*. His arms ached. She swayed uncertainly for a moment, as if confused by his contradictory signals, and then she picked up her bag.

"Thanks, Remus. Thank you for everything. I'll see you next month."

"Goodbye, Ariadne."

He stared at the door for a minute after it had closed behind her and then shook himself to attention. There was hay to mow on the farm, and he must try to behave normally to Ariadne. That meant having a normal enough day to be able to write her a normal letter at the end of it.

The Black Thorns of Rejection

Chapter 10 of 21

Ariadne sits her N.E.W.T.s and deals with an unexpected catastrophe.

CHAPTER TEN

The Black Thorns of Rejection

Monday 28 May Saturday 30 June 1984

Hogwarts, the Grampians; Kincarden, Inverness-shire.

Rated PG for romantic attachment and soul-searching.

The hay is baled and today we sheared the sheep. I am very impressed with the neatness of the onso charm. Your brother and I sheared off 500 fleeces in half a day. Morag has been playing with the clippings. I think she has been using wandless magic to spin the wool, because we found her plaiting it...

I know that almost everything seems more interesting than homework at this stage, but don't be distracted into replying to this letter before you have finished all your revision. Then be sure to outline every point of the Human Transfigurations theory, so that I can be sure you understand it...

"There's no humour." That was what Ariadne felt was wrong with Remus's recent letters. Usually he made her laugh. Now he wrote with a deadly earnestness about her affairs (mainly revision) and a dull indifference about his own (mainly farming). There was very little about himself, and nothing about whatever was bothering him. After dutifully outlining the Theory of Human Transfiguration, she pleaded:

I can tell you are yet sad, and I'm wondering if this is really about your friend's problem or about yourself. When I become this upset about other people's problems, it's usually because there is a parallel distress in my own life. So what is distressing you?

She wondered about the identity of the friend whose confidence he was protecting because she knew he never saw anybody. Possibly it was Sturgis Podmore; she was fairly sure that nobody else was in contact with him.

You have evaded the all-important question, Remus. I have answered your questions and told you everything there is to know about my N.E.W.T. preparation. Are you really thinking that you spare me any distress by not telling me the nature of yours?

He evaded her interrogation very slyly, by reasonably pointing out:

The N.E.W.T.s are upon us, and your exam timetable looks very awkwardly spaced. We shall defer all personal matters until they have finished.

On Monday morning the breakfast owls brought a good luck note from her mother as well as a page of last-minute mnemonics from Remus. But she entered the examination hall without much trepidation. She really did feel that she knew every charm thoroughly. As she wrote to Remus that evening,

They were all on the paper Protean, Chameleon, Memory, you name it and there was an essay on specialised charms in a field of the candidate's choice. I was able to write about farming charms without much trouble. Professor Marchbanks was pleased with my Zerocso Charm, and it made me think of you.

On Tuesday morning he wrote:

I don't like to think how long you spent writing to me last night. Don't feel obliged to answer every note. You need the revision time for your Transfiguration.

But she replied:

I owe you a huge debt over this one. The first question on the paper was the elephant-to-mouse problem over which I was struggling on the day I first met you. Have you any idea how many hundreds of times my friends and I have used your Transfiguration aid since then? The theoretical questions would have stumped me just six months ago; I managed them by reproducing the essays that you made me write at the parlour desk last Christmas. And you were right: during the practical I had to Conjure a mirror, as well as a functional quill and a flock of birds.

Wednesday brought the Herbology exam, and apologies from Remus.

I cannot give you anything for this one since your knowledge of the subject always was far more advanced than mine. I can only wish you all the best, and wish I were there with you.

Immediately after the exam she indulged in a long and leisurely reply, which needed to be dispatched before moonrise.

It went very well. It was a very fair exam, covering every major plant on the syllabus, but only a couple of the minor ones (and I did know those too).

I'm wishing I could be home with you tonight. I have no exam tomorrow, and, although I will spend the day revising vocabulary in the library, in truth I already know my runes very thoroughly. The time would be better spent letting you out of the shepherd's hut (or wherever you will be) at dawn and providing an alibi for your "illness".

Tomorrow's exam is your favourite, Defence against the Dark Arts. Kingsley is confident, the others are trembling, and I am very pleased not to be studying this subject any more. The teaching has been very piecemeal, and Sarah is threatening death to every examiner in the system if the students are punished for the weak teaching.

She began to be uneasy when the letter that Remus wrote on Thursday was still very serious and completely devoted to the topic of Ancient Runes. He was supposed to be too sick to write at all, yet he seemed more involved with her exams than she was: had he forgotten that Ancient Runes always had been the easiest subject to her? On Friday he wrote briefly to wish her luck, but the exam was just as easy as she had been hoping it might be. She spent the afternoon writing to her parents before tackling Remus.

Dearest, you really have to tell me what is bothering you. I have the whole weekend ahead of me, and I can afford to spend a couple of hours on you.

He wrote back in the evening, and again on Saturday morning, and again on Sunday, but only to describe William's antics with haymaking and Morag introducing her little brother to the pigs. He was trying hard to make his letters interesting. She knew by then that he was not going to divulge his secret, but he did not seem to be laughing at her while he kept his silence.

Monday brought the Potions exam; Remus was nerve-racked on her behalf, Hestia was terrified, and even Kingsley was drooping a little. The worst Ariadne could say was that she was glad she had studied hard; she knew the principles of sedation and stimulation, the ethics of seduction, poison and transformation, the influences of like and unlike principles; and she was sure she finished the practical by corking a perfect Veritaserum.

"What a horror!" said Hestia. "My truth potion was slightly pink."

But I'm sure Hestia will not fail she wrote to Remus, because a pink colour cannot change the properties of the potion, it only makes it more detectable if it's poured into some other drink. A blue colour would have been more of a worry, and I did not see any blue ones when I left the dungeons. Severus was looking impassive and grim, but no more so than usual.

Only one more to go...

By Tuesday she did not want to study any more. Remus wrote two pages, and she perversely answered by sending him four.

I'm knowing this is the last day, but the hours are seeming a year. Joe and Ivor had Arithmancy this morning, and Sarah is doing Care of Magical Creatures right now. Kingsley and Hestia are among the lucky few who have already finished, but most of us are supposed to be yet studying. However, the print on my Astronomy text is dancing in front of my eyes; my brain appears to have given up two days before it should have... No, do not worry, I am yet studying!

The next day he sent her a brief note that made her smile again; it was more like his old style of writing.

Tonight I will watch the stars and think of you naming them. I always look for the Corona Borealis first your constellation and hope that no Forgetfulness Potion mars your concentration tonight...

On Wednesday afternoon she was able to report:

The Astronomy theory was tricky. We had to answer questions about the Southern Hemisphere and calculate the path of a comet of which most of us had never heard. But I did know all the information about lunar phases. Our agony is unnaturally prolonged, since this is one of the shortest nights of the year, so we cannot begin the practical until ten o' clock. It's raining now this is a bad time to remember the night in second year when the telescope charms broke down and the telescopes did not penetrate the cloud cover. By the way, it was Theseus who drank the Forgetfulness Potion; Ariadne was the one forgotten. We are obviously needing to invest in a good Greek Mythology text to read over summer...

At one o' clock the next morning, the seventh-year students stumbled down from the Astronomy Tower. Ariadne was too tired in mind and body to consider that her N.E.W.T.s were finally over. They were not over for everybody, because History of Magic had been scheduled for the next afternoon, so the released students crept around the grounds as quietly as if they were still studying. Ariadne kept thinking that she ought to be reading something, and she could not shake off that feeling until a Kincarden owl brought her a note of congratulations from her parents.

Darling, we are pleased for you that the exams are over. Now that you have time to think it over, give us a full account of each subject...

She obliged them with a lengthy letter. It did not really occur to her that Remus had not written today until his letter arrived at around dinner time.

I am glad it went so well for you. I hope you will enjoy your final week at Hogwarts without the trouble of homework to slow you down.

The words seemed odd, rather conventional and lacking in heart. She read the letter three times before she realised what was wrong: there were no questions about her friends or her holiday plans, no suggestion that they could now think about her homecoming next week. It was as if she were yet doing exams. His moods were obviously fluctuating from day to day; whatever was bothering him, she was determined to drag it out of him once she was home.

* * * * *

On Friday the seventh years sat by the lake in the sunshine and conducted the post-mortems on their exams. On Saturday they went to Hogsmeade and refused to discuss exams at all. On Sunday Ariadne did not know what to do with herself. She re-read the *Memoirs of Cliodna* and wondered why Remus had not written since Thursday. His letter finally arrived on Sunday evening.

Dear Ariadne,

You must be very happy that exams are over, but somewhat sad, I imagine, to reach the end of your schooldays. I remember Lily Evans (Potter) and Emmeline Vance sobbing in one another's arms at the thought of leaving Hogwarts forever; it seems to be a very natural reaction.

I am writing to tell you that I handed in my notice to your father this morning.

She froze to her seat, her fingers riveted to the page, before she could process the meaning of the words.

I shall be moving further south, picking up casual labour on Muggle farms during the summer season; no fixed plans for what I shall do after that. By the time you return home from school, I shall be gone.

I would like to thank you once again for all your support and assistance with my health problems. You went far beyond the call of duty, and I shall never forget it. Your parents still haven't worked out the truth, so for once I am leaving a job on good terms with my employers.

I am very pleased that you have found a good apprenticeship, and that you will have the chance to live in London while you work there. I wish you success in your career and many new friends, and hope you will have time to move at a gentler pace in the coming weeks. I don't doubt that you will in every way do very well in the future.

All the best,

Remus.

Remus has gone. That much seemed easy. She would return to Kincarpen next week, and Remus would not be there. He was not going anywhere in particular, but he would be gone.

Slowly the unthinkable invaded her mind. *Thank you once again... I shall never forget... I wish you many new friends... you will in every way do very well... all the best...* People did not write these things when they intended to write again tomorrow. *This letter is a farewell.*

The future for which he was wishing her "all the best" was a future that would not include him. She would go to London, and he would not write to her. She would work out her apprenticeship, and he would never come to see her. The full moon would rise, and she would never know whether he was safe.

He will not write to me again.

Remus has gone.

Lily and Emmeline sobbing at the thought of leaving Hogwarts forever... This was no random memory. He knew she would be distressed at his leaving; to protect her privacy, he was giving her distress an alibi, as she had given so many alibis to him. Presently, when Sarah and Hestia came to ask her why she was crying, she could plead Hogwarts, and they would cry with her, and they would never know that in fact she had left Hogwarts behind a year ago. But she was not sobbing. She was numb.

In a daze, she pulled herself out of her chair and upstairs to the dormitory. She drew her bed curtains around herself and lay down with her letter in her hand, willing it to say something different. But the message became clearer with each re-reading. Remus had only left Kincarpen because he was leaving *her*.

There was no clue about why.

Throughout that long and sleepless night her mind made the same endless circles. She quickly dismissed the wildest notions. It was theoretically possible that he had written the letter under Imperius, or that a Gringotts goblin had forged his handwriting, but no wizard or goblin had any realistic motive for doing it. The painful truth was that he had written the letter all by himself. An outsider might claim that his attentions to her had never meant anything, that he had deliberately deceived her for his own vanity or amusement, but that was ridiculous too; she knew that Remus had told her the truth. Therefore he must have changed his mind.

But how could anybody change so fast? *Tonight I will watch the stars and think of you naming them.* It had taken him only four more days to dismiss her from his life. What had happened in those four days?

She wanted to ask him. It had been her instinct for the year past to bring all her questions to him. She actually lit the everlasting candle and began to write.

Remus, what is happening here? Are we yet friends? Why are you not expecting to contact me again? What has changed between us?

Then she pictured Remus, reading her note when he thought he had rid himself of her, irritated that she was yet demanding his attention. (Irritated? Well, why not? He was clearly capable of behaving in ways she never would have predicted.) He would despise her for being unable to take the hint. If she wanted to keep his respect, she would have to let him have the last word.

She tore up her letter and held it to the candle flame. She lay down again. She did not sleep, but she lay quietly until morning.

* * * * *

Over the final week at school, Ariadne was grateful for her parents' training. She had chafed against the constant self-control and pretending, but, for the first time, it now felt useful to her. She could swallow her misery, move her mind over to her friends and her teachers, pretend to be interested; and nobody guessed how unhappy she was. Sarah did ask, "What's the secret this time? Some dramatic sorrow?" and Hestia did encourage, "Aren't you going to tell me about it?" But they were both too busy with their own end-of-term dramas to press the enquiry. Ariadne held onto the wishful hope that she had misunderstood Remus's letter, or that he would change his mind again, and that she would hear from him again by the end of the week. She suffered a vague, uncomfortable feeling that she was deceiving herself, but school was the wrong place to examine her state of mind.

Finally every exam paper had been exposed in a teacher's post-mortem, every teacher had given advice on the applications of his subject in the workforce, everybody had everybody else's autograph, every casual acquaintance had been tearfully hugged, every word of Dumbledore's final speech had been spoken, every trunk was packed, and Ariadne boarded the Hogwarts Express for the last time.

"Now are you going to tell us your problem?" asked Sarah.

"My problem is that... that I'm not going to have my own way."

"Oh, you spoilt brat! What outlandish thing did you want that you can't have?"

"All the gold in Gringotts? The Ministry of Magic under my thumb? To bide at Hogwarts forever and never do homework again?"

"The Quidditch World Cup in my grasp," chimed in Richard.

The subject was turned for the rest of the journey. She knew that Sarah and Hestia would ask her again, but probably not in front of the boys.

Her father met her at King's Cross, and they took the Floo home. But as soon as she stepped out of the kitchen fireplace, Ariadne knew that she was not really home. Her mother greeted her kindly, her sister-in-law casually, and her niece very enthusiastically; but she felt like a visitor. There were two strangers at the dinner table, a middle-aged couple who were introduced as "Sherman and Rachel Duncan, who have replaced Remus."

She barely had time to reflect how quickly the replacement had occurred before her mother explained, "We are so fortunate to have found a couple. Rachel will be doing some of your tasks, for we're not expecting that you will be here much in the future."

For all that her parents considered her a bairn, unable to take a Floo without adult supervision or to complete her homework without being reminded, it seemed that she now had their permission to leave their household. They really were trying to let her grow up. She was grateful, but it reinforced that Kincarden was no longer her home.

* * * * *

That night she placed a Silencing Charm on her bedroom, which reminded her of the way Remus had placed Silencing Charms on the shepherd's hut; she took the stack of his letters from her trunk and his photograph from her wallet, placed them next to the *Memoirs of Cliodna*, and lit her everlasting candle. The photograph-Remus was absorbed in whatever he was doing to the fence; he did not look at her and kept moving so that she could not see his face properly. She sat down on her bed and made herself grasp the situation. She would never see Remus again. He would never make contact again. And he was not willing to explain his reasons.

Once she had forced herself to accept this, a second reality was instantly obvious. *If he loved me the way I love him, he would not have changed his mind* However things had seemed, he had not really been in love with her.

She relived the steel grip of his hand on her arm as he pulled her over the boundary of Macnair Castle. Not a lover's touch; a simple act of human decency. Yet she had remembered it every day, because it was the only time he had ever touched her voluntarily. The only other time they had touched was the time she had held his hands, that day they had thought her family was about to discover his lycanthropy. His hands had been dry, cold, long-fingered, stiff, unsteady... He had seemed terrified of never seeing her again. But she must have been wrong about that. Perhaps he had only been terrified of losing his job. About how much else had she been wrong?

He had never spoken of love. At the time there had seemed to be a good reason. They could never have admitted to her parents that they had an understanding, and there was no point in thinking too far ahead while she was yet at school. She had such a long habit of ignoring any words that did not fit her perception of a situation that she had barely noticed that the words were missing; his love for her had seemed obvious. But perhaps there was a simpler reason why love had never been named. Perhaps her perceptions had been wrong.

It had seemed to her that he had focused his entire attention upon her; not only had he written every day, but his letters had been strewn with hints that he thought of her every hour. He had seemed insecure about their situation, even at times insecure of her love for him, yet his devotion to her had appeared never to waver. He had seemed intensely interested in every detail of her life; he had remembered all her friends before he had met any of them, every book she had read or wanted to read; he had memorised her school timetable; he had even feigned interest in Potions when she had teased him by pretending to teach him that subject. His face had lit up at the sight of her, his eye had always followed her, and if she had not sought him out within an hour of being home, he had come looking for her.

Perhaps these things were not enough to add up to love. Perhaps they were not even friendship. She had simply been available, at a time when he had no other friends, and so he had leapt at the opportunity to play teacher. Now that he had flitted from Kincarden, he had also flitted from her because she was not important enough to play any further part in his life. Not even as a friend.

But why had he not taken the trouble to write just a few words more? Had he been mercifully oblivious to her obsession with him? Had he noticed, but been too polite or too embarrassed to refer to it? Why had he not given her the smallest hint of explanation about what had happened between them?

More than the touch of his hand, more than the sight of his face or the sound of his voice, she wanted his words.

That night she was able to cry. She cried herself to sleep while the everlasting candle continued to burn.

Forging a Future

Remus pursues his vocation but in the process must abandon all hope.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Forging a Future

Saturday 30 June Sunday 2 September 1984

Hogwarts, the Grampians; London; Old Basford, Nottingham.

Rated PG for cheating and getting away with it.

Albus Dumbledore set down his empty tea-cup and steepled his fingers. "Remus," he said, "I see no reason why you should not become a teacher."

Remus hardly dared let himself hope. "Are there any teaching vacancies at Hogwarts?"

"Alas, we did have one, and I offered it to Furius Spleen yesterday. But if you are determined to teach, you could consider teaching Muggles."

"Does the Muggle system accept wizards?"

"Obviously the Muggle education boards do not know that wizards exist. However, you would not be the first wizard to have transferred to the Muggle workforce. Since the Muggle education authorities borrowed their exam system from the Hogwarts model, a qualification can be translated. Do you have your exam results with you, Remus?"

"They were destroyed six years ago when the Death Eaters attacked my home."

"No matter, we keep copies at Hogwarts. *Accio!*" Several sheets of buff-coloured paper sailed out of a filing cabinet and landed on the desk in front of Dumbledore.

"*Zerocso.* Keep these, Remus; consider them your new originals. Ah, I always thought you did unusually well..."

Remus held in front of him a perfect replica of his O.W.L. results.

ORDINARY WIZARDING LEVEL RESULTS

Pass Grades:

Outstanding (O)

Exceeds Expectations (E)

Acceptable (A)

Fail Grades:

Poor (P)

Dreadful (D)

Troll (T)

REMUS JOHN LUPIN HAS ACHIEVED:

Ancient Runes O

Arithmancy O

Astronomy E

Care of Magical Creatures O

Charms O

Defence against the Dark Arts O

Herbology E

History of Magic O

Potions E

Transfiguration O

Signed on behalf of the Board

G. R. Marchbanks, Head of Board

Sapiens Tofty, Secretary to the Board

The ink on Professor Marchbanks' signature looked so authentic, as if she really had set her quill to the paper; no one certainly no Muggle would ever know that this page was a copy.

"There is a standard trick to convert this to something that Muggles will accept." Dumbledore placed a blank sheet of paper next to the O.W.L. certificate, tapped each with his wand, and commanded, "*Translato!*"

The blank sheet suddenly acquired words of black typeface and the beige-patterned background of the certificate. It looked like an O.W.L. certificate, but the words spelled out the names of institutions and school subjects of which Remus had never heard.

Joint Matriculation Board

General Certificate of Education

This is to certify that REMUS JOHN LUPIN, born on 10 March 1959,
was entered in June 1975 by Northside Secondary School
for the General Certificate of Education,
and reached the grade specified in each of the following subjects.

Biology B

Chemistry B

English Grammar A

English Literature A

Geography B

History A

Mathematics A

Physics A

Viking Studies A

Woodwork A

0163 0116

Signed on behalf of the Board

J. K. Allanson, Head of Board

Colin Wickerman, Secretary to the Board

"But I never have " Remus began.

"For some reason, Charms always comes up as 'English Grammar' and Defence against the Dark Arts as 'Mathematics'. That creates a problem, of course, because Muggles don't have an English Grammar course at N.E.W.T. level, so wizards who take the Charms N.E.W.T. which is most of them find it translated into all kinds of strange courses in the Muggle version."

"What is that number at the bottom of the page?"

"An exam number Muggles are fond of such things. The way we make your number look authentic to the Muggles when you didn't actually sit exams with their Board is to borrow their next unused number. Although that may be an over-particular piece of magic; I've never heard of a case when the Muggle authorities actually bothered to check that the result-sheet was genuine. If they did, of course, they would now find your name and results entered into their computer, just as if you really had sat their exams."

Remus decided not to ask what a computer was at this stage.

"We do the same with your N.E.W.T.s, of course," Dumbledore continued. *Translato!*"

Remus's original certificate read:

NASTILY EXHAUSTING WIZARDING TESTS

Pass Grades:

Outstanding (O)

Exceeds Expectations (E)

Acceptable (A)

Fail Grades:

Poor (P)

Dreadful (D)

Troll (T)

REMUS JOHN LUPIN HAS ACHIEVED:

Ancient Runes O

Charms O

Defence against the Dark Arts O

Herbology E

Potions A

Transfiguration O

Signed on behalf of the Board

G. R. Marchbanks, Head of Board

Sapiens Tofty, Secretary to the Board

But the Muggle version untruthfully declared:

Joint Matriculation Board

General Certificate of Education Advanced Level

This is to certify that REMUS JOHN LUPIN, born on 10 March 1959,

was entered in June 1977 by Northside Secondary School

for the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level,

and reached the grade specified in each of the following subjects.

English Literature A

Mathematics A

Biology C

Chemistry D

Physics A

0175 2984

Signed on behalf of the Board

J. K. Allanson, Head of Board

Colin Wickerman, Secretary to the Board

"Ah, I see that this time Charms has decided to be 'English Literature'," said Dumbledore. "And Ancient Runes has dropped off the list. That is inevitable. It would look decidedly suspicious if you claimed to have taken as many as six subjects, for few Muggles take more than five. Besides, there is no such subject as 'Viking Studies'. You can get away with fabricating an obscure and exotic course for fifth year, but never for the seventh."

"Why do I have a D grade for Chemistry?"

"Another Muggle peculiarity. They recognise five passing grades at N.E.W.T. level, so your Outstanding, Exceeds Expectations, Acceptable have to be translated into A, B, C, D or E not always predictably. But now for the important thing, Remus. You have to apply to a Muggle Teachers' Training College and you have missed the deadline."

His heart sank. "So I have to wait until next year?"

"Oh, we can fix it. You just have to be aware of what you're claiming that you've done. Accio! These are the application forms... ten years out of date now *Annus nunc!* Some of the words blinked and altered, and Dumbledore passed the forms to Remus.

"You should have filled this out and addressed it to U.C.C.A. "

"What?"

"The Universities Central Council on Admissions. You should have addressed it to them and put it in a Muggle post box. Only you won't, of course, because you've missed the deadline. Just fill it out now, and I'll send it to Sapiens Tofty, our representative at U.C.C.A. He will ensure that your details appear on the computer, and that the form goes into the correct filing cabinet, and that no one notices that it arrived late. He'll also negotiate with the college you've chosen, so that they send you a backdated offer, and later don't notice that they sent it out late. Offers aren't finalised until the Muggle N.E.W.T. results are published, which won't be for another month yet."

Remus began to write. "Professor... to which college should I apply? Is there more than one?"

But finally the paperwork was sorted out, together with the charmwork to go with it, and Dumbledore turned to his bookshelf. "Now," he said, "obviously you can't expect to be rewarded for telling such bare-faced lies. We have to justify your fraudulent claim by introducing some level of truth. Unfortunately, Remus, that will be very hard work, and no one can do it for you." He took down a heavy volume. "We now have to find out just what exactly you have claimed to learn, and then you have to go away and learn it! Ah, here we have it. The year was 1977, and the texts are..." Dumbledore began to write on a blank sheet of paper. "Here you are, Remus. The set texts for the Muggle O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s that you claim to have taken. Except for 'Viking Studies', which doesn't exist. You now need to go to a Muggle bookshop and buy the books. Ideally, go to a second-hand academic shop and buy the editions published in 1973 and 1975. Sometime over the next two months, I'm afraid, you will actually have to read them, and absorb as much as you reasonably can."

Remus gulped. "I have to absorb fifteen courses four years' work in two months?"

"Oh, it's not as bad as that. The average Muggle student forgets everything he ever learned within one hour of sitting the exam. You won't be expected so much to memorise the texts as to understand the broad general principles. And you'll find you already know some of it there's considerable overlap with magical education. The subject that worries me most is Transfiguration. It always comes up as 'Physics' on the translator. And you'll notice that the theories of Muggle physics take no account of magical forces. Newtonian and Einsteinian theory is all very well as far as it goes, but you'll have to block out a lot of what you know about magical forces and matter when you're teaching Muggle children. It will be a true education for you, young man."

Aghast, Remus nodded, and decided not to look for another farm job. He had planned to find seasonal work picking fruit, but he now knew he would need every spare moment for reading.

"By the way, Remus, *do* you have any basic knowledge of Muggle woodwork?"

"No, but I expect I could buy some wood and Charm or Transfigure it into whatever objects I was supposed to have made."

"Fair enough. They won't expect you to remember any of the theory of carpentry, given it's so long since you're supposed to have learned the subject, and that woodwork is so unrelated to what you plan to do next. Oh, but do buy yourself a book of Norse mythology, or something to make it sound as if you know something Muggle-friendly about Ancient Runes."

When Remus finally left Hogwarts, booklist in hand, he remembered Ariadne asking, "Would you teach Muggles?" and he began to wonder if he ever would.

He tried not to think about Ariadne again. *Think about the books. Think about going to college. Think about where I'll find the money. Think about... anything, really* But it

wasn't helping to remember that today Ariadne had left Hogwarts behind her, that he had (quite deliberately) missed seeing her again by a single hour.

There was still an hour before the shops closed. He Apparated to Diagon Alley and made his way out to Muggle London. There were bookshops there. By a series of enquiries, he could find out which ones sold ten-year-old academic texts. Tomorrow he could begin shopping in earnest. He even managed to pick up second-hand copies of the set texts for the English Literature courses. That would be the easy part of his homework. He had read Muggle fiction before, and he knew that no one would still require him to remember the techniques of literary criticism; he need only give some evidence that he remembered reading the books.

* * * * *

When the shops closed, he Apparated to his house in Nottingham. He had moved in two days earlier when he left Kincarden for good. He had bought some furniture from a second-hand shop – a formica-topped kitchen table and mismatched metal chairs, an upholstery-spilling lounge suite, a battered but solid wooden desk, a creaking bed and garish orange-painted wardrobe – and tried not to hate the hideous design of all of it. In the end he decided he didn't hate the desk quite as much as the rest; but the attempts to turn his sisters' old bedroom into a study stopped short when he realised that he had forgotten to buy a bookcase. He would have to pile his new books on the study floor.

He was worried about money. He had two and a half years of wages, saved almost completely intact, but he now had to live off it, as well as buy books and stationery, for the next three years. (It took *three years* to become a Muggle teacher!) Since he owned his house, he might just manage, but not if he had to keep making major outlays on furniture or clothes. Dumbledore had told him not to worry. "Enrol in the training course anyway, and if you have to defer a year later on, that won't be the end of the world. If you wait until the perfect moment, you'll find that it never comes."

But had Dumbledore ever tried to support himself on eight Galleons a week, with no reserves for special expenses or emergencies?

Worrying about money was hardly more productive than daydreaming about Ariadne. Yesterday he had paid a visit to Chippendale and Hepplewhite in Diagon Alley. He wasn't sure what he wanted there, beyond kitchen pots and bed covers, but he was driven to distraction by the cost of buying these items new. He didn't dare ask the price of curtains.

"We can do anything, sir," Mr Arvel Chippendale assured him. "Upholster your favourite armchair, French-polish your table, throw a pot to your liking, build a cabinet into your wall. We are Furniture with a Capital F. We don't just retail, you know; we do all the work ourselves."

Remus was about to ask for a kettle when he was distracted by the large photograph montage behind the reception desk. "Your Servants at C & H" showed mug-shots of various Chippendales and Hepplewhites, each portrait flashing white teeth as it waved energetically at the approaching customers, and each labelled with a title. There, between "Madam Verbena Hepplewhite Drapery Consultant" and "Mr Sophereth Chippendale Accountant" was a face he recognised – a pink-cheeked, black-haired girl, introduced as "Miss Hestia Dearborn Apprentice."

He ripped his eyes away and made himself hear the proprietor's question about how the Chippendales could serve him today.

"I really only came to buy a frying pan and a kettle," he said. "But an everlasting candle would be nice – the plain sort, which can be used as a desk lamp."

Hestia did not seem to be in the shop today. *No, of course not*, he reminded himself. Apprentices usually began work on the first of August, so the friendly montage was in anticipation of the fact Hestia wouldn't arrive in person for another month. But if Remus did much more business with Diagon Alley traders, he would certainly run into Hestia – or *someone* eventually. The magical community was of limited size, and if he had too many dealings with it, he would find himself unable to avoid people who knew Ariadne, people who might even try to pull him back into her orbit.

* * * * *

Today he surveyed his under-stocked kitchen and wondered how he was going to fit housekeeping around studying. Back in the golden days of the Order of the Phoenix, he had eaten so many meals at the courtesy of other Order members that he had been able to live off cheese sandwiches at home. It wasn't that he absolutely could not cook – he had learned all the basic recipes when he was ten years old – but that it always seemed too much trouble when there was only himself to eat the food and when there was a world outside that needed saving from Voldemort.

He emptied a tin of lentils into one saucepan and set brown rice to boil in a second. Now he had run out of saucepans, but he had a vague idea that he should add cabbage to make a balanced meal. He began to push the shredded cabbage around in the new frying pan. Turning vegetarian was proving easier than he had expected, because buying beans was a great deal cheaper than buying meat. He ought to learn some new recipes, but there was already a great deal of learning in his life.

After dinner he sat on the ruined sofa and opened the O level maths book. It was amazing what Muggles thought they needed to do with numbers. He had vague memories of learning basic algebra at his Muggle primary school, and these problems looked almost like a Transfiguration exercise, but... no... there was something going on here that he had never met before. He wondered if he should have invested in the first-, second- and third-year maths textbooks as well. He would definitely never teach any O level courses. He would become a primary teacher.

He delayed going to bed as long as he could. It was past eleven o'clock when he knew that he was not absorbing any more O level maths. But in the end there was no help for it. He needed to sleep, and he knew what awaited him there.

Ariadne invaded his dreams. Even when he didn't remember the dream, he always awoke knowing she had been there. Tonight he relived his interview with Professor Dumbledore. Dumbledore smiled at him, and asked, "Would you teach Muggles?" but he spoke with Ariadne's voice.

"You should teach," said Ariadne – the person in front of him was definitely Ariadne now. "You only need to forge your qualifications. A Zerocso Charm will do it, even though that's Greek and not Latin."

"My whole life has been forged," he complained.

"Then forge ahead," she said. "Claiming that you took the exams is no more a lie than pretending you're not a wizard." And he could see she was laughing at him. "Of course it's a lie," she admitted. "You would not be needing to tell so many lies if I were here to tell the truth for you."

After such nonsense his head was spinning even in his dreams. "But it's all right," she said, holding her hand to his forehead. "You only have the cold, and I can brew you some Pepper-up. I'll tell my parents that you're teaching me algebra. Algebra will be useful if I have to invent a new kind of shampoo."

"Don't go," he pleaded. "Don't tell them anything."

Suddenly she had his hands in hers, was stroking them, and was gazing at him with a tearful glitter in her huge blue eyes. (How could he have once thought her bland? Even in his sleep, every contour of her face was seared into his memory, every one of her thousand expressions was accurately reproduced.) "I will never leave you," she said. "It's you who leave me. I love you even though you would not read the Norse fairy tales."

"I am going to read them," he protested, "but I don't know if I can fit that much reading into just nine weeks."

"If you had read them on time," she insisted, "you would know that when a princess kisses a wolf, he turns into a prince."

"But no woman wants to kiss a wolf," he said.

"I'm wanting to," she said, and her mouth hovered very near to his face, and for a moment the dream threatened to become indecent. Some nights the dream did become very crass, and he ripped her clothes apart; other times he crushed her in his arms until she whimpered. But it always ended the same way, whether he was touching her

or not. At some point he would recognise that he had come too close to her, and that was always the moment when she vanished.

And someone the Ministry official in charge of the Werewolf Registry, or Severus Snape, or the long-dead Lily Potter, or poor Connell Dewar would say something like, "But she had to go. Staying near a werewolf would have destroyed her."

That summer he read his way through the Muggle physics and chemistry courses. Chemistry was more difficult than Potions although Ariadne could have doubtless managed it. Physics seemed so easy... but just when the next step looked obvious, the textbook jumped, and landed somewhere else. It was as Dumbledore had said: magical forces were completely omitted. Remus would have trouble with remembering what to leave out (how Ariadne would have laughed!), but he had to adopt a working model of their assumptions.

For light relief he hacked away at the overgrown garden ("*Tondeo! Incendio!*") and tried not to imagine how Ariadne would have lined it up with herbs. He had his garage fitted with a Muggle lock and key, so that he could lock himself away safely for his Transformations, and he hung the key around his neck so that it counted as a garment and would transform with him, safe from the wolf's jaws and claws.

In due course he heard that he had been accepted by the local teacher training college, and he wondered how Ariadne had fared in her N.E.W.T.s. She would be starting her apprenticeship now. He hoped Professor Jigger's temper had improved. He reminded himself that he did not need to go to Diagon Alley. If he needed anything that could not be bought from Muggles, he must go to Hogsmeade. But in fact he should learn to live on Muggle items; if he were to attend a Muggle college, he would need to live like a Muggle.

The Parents who Misunderstood

Chapter 12 of 21

The girls embark on new careers, Hestia looks forward to marriage, Sarah becomes a woman of property, and Ariadne begins her adult life with severely shaken self-confidence.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Parents who Misunderstood

Tuesday 3 July Wednesday 25 July 1984

From Shrewsbury to Caernarfon; Kincarden, Inverness-shire; Diagon Alley, London

Rated PG for adult themes (specifically, psychological separation from parents and money).

Three days later Ariadne met her friends in Shrewsbury for the long-projected walking holiday. Despite the early protests of Ariadne, Ivor and quite a few others, they had decided not to venture anywhere near Macnair territory after all since they didn't have enough information to pursue their nagging questions about Veleta Vablatsky; so this excursion was nothing but a straightforward holiday.

Mamma had lamented, "It's a great pity Remus could not stay with us a few months longer; he would have taken good care of Ariadne," but she had accepted Ariadne's clarification that, "My friend Kingsley is doing all the planning and organising this year, Mamma, so Miss Vance will be able to put more time into taking care of me. And this year we'll not be climbing mountains."

This year there were thirteen of them. Sarah had told her parents that she could not join them in Tuscany until after her holiday with her friends; Richard now had a permanent job with Quality Quidditch Supplies and had negotiated not to begin it until after "my last carefree fling with the companions of my youth"; and Joe's parents had been instructed that Joe was to be made to accompany the excursion whether he knew about it or not. The older members of the group had also been surprisingly keen to rejoin them. Sturgis had cancelled a booking in Cornwall when he heard that Kingsley was inviting him to Wales; Emmeline announced that she was taking annual leave in the first half of July despite the contrary wishes of her boss; and Glenda explained to Ariadne on the first day, "But of course I wanted to come. After all you people did for me last year, how could I not want to see you all again for a happier reason?"

The past year had been kind to Glenda. She had a new job, newsreading on the Wizarding Wireless Network, and she had bought her first house, "a very pretty three-bedroom semi in Coventry, with a front garden full of rosemary and lavender". She also had a new boyfriend, a clock merchant named John Chittock, who was affable to everybody and turned out to be a buff on mediaeval castles. Richard brought his new girlfriend, a Ravenclaw sixth-year, and Sarah brought her new boyfriend, a Frenchman whom she had met over Easter.

Inevitably, Ariadne received six separate enquiries about why Remus had not come this year. Six times she held her head high and said that he was needing to work. Sturgis said that it was a great pity and owed him a postcard of Llangollen, to which Ariadne scrupulously avoided adding her signature.

Ariadne sent postcards to her parents every day, postcards that suggested that she was having a wonderful time. She had never been to Wales before, and she was able to report that the weather was fine and warm, the campsites were comfortable, the scenery was breathtaking, the castles were fascinating. She remained very grateful to her parents for teaching her to control herself and concentrate on pleasant conversations, for she had never needed to do so more. She regretted the times she had silently criticised them for being so polite, for sacrificing the truth every time it might cause a fuss. She understood her parents now: when truth was such an uncertain commodity, why not have the courtesy to say what other people were wanting to hear?

For as the fortnight progressed, it became clear that missing Remus was only one of Ariadne's problems. Last year, she had liked Glenda Foster and felt that Glenda liked her. Now, she suddenly wondered if Glenda really liked her or was only being polite. After all, she had been wrong about Remus; she could just as easily be wrong about Glenda. Once that thought occurred to her, everything snowballed. What did she know for certain?

She had always felt that her Cousin Lucius was an evil man who had lied about not being a Death Eater. Now she wondered if she had been unfairly judgmental. What if Lucius had been telling the simple truth? What if she had been inexcusably rude, that long-ago day when she had accused him of the worst? What if even Walden Macnair, for all his violent threats, turned out to be perfectly virtuous?

If Uncle Macnair were a decent man, then he'd probably not even been interested in her inquiry into the Vablatsky family. In that case he was probably not the person who had misrepresented her to the M.E.S.P. last spring. So who had? Surely not Madam Bones; but how could she be sure that Madam Bones was as respectable as she seemed? Or what if Severus or Professor Slughorn had lied when he claimed that he had given her a good character? She had assumed he would tell her the truth, but she didn't know either of them as well as she had thought she knew Remus.

On a battlement of Caernarfon Castle, she looked around her friends in black panic and wondered why she trusted any of them. How was she to know?

This distrust and confusion did not even end with people. What about her deep-seated intuition that the Girl-at-the-Window of Macnair Castle had been Veleta? It had been a moment of *recognition*: she had known Veleta's personality and character so well. But it was only the same kind of recognition that had misled her about Remus. She suddenly had no assurance at all that the Girl-at-the-Window had been anybody she had ever seen before, or even anybody real. Subtract her confidence in her own judgment, and there was no evidence that Veleta lived. Ivor thought he had seen something, of course, but why should Ivor's judgment be any better than her own?

Hestia noticed her subdued mood and begged, "Tell us about it, Ariadne."

When Ariadne was able to think of anything at all to say, it was a question. "Hestia, how are you knowing when you can trust a person?"

"I don't until I know the person. It takes time, I suppose."

Ariadne struggled with the idea that Hestia found the question so simple. "Were you ever fooled by a person whom you trusted when you should not have?"

"Of course. All the time. Why are you asking me? You do this kind of thing much better than I do."

"Well ... why should I trust you? I'm not saying I do not, but why should I?"

Hestia was perplexed. She was trying to help (or was she only being polite?) but she did not seem at all bothered by the thought that she never knew whom to trust. "Because ... Ariadne, we've been friends for seven years! Of course you should know by now that I'm not going to drop a Killing Curse on you in the middle of the night. If I'd wanted to, I'd have done it a long time ago."

But of course benevolent, cheerful Hestia would never play with the Killing Curse. The usual problem was not murder, but all the small everyday issues that were never spoken in words ... when people were worried, when they were lying, when they would not admit that they needed help ... when they were truly hurt and when they were just trying to manipulate you ... when they truly agreed and when they were simply trying to avoid a quarrel... the difference between genuinely wanting to help and only being dutiful, between merely wishing for company and desiring another's specific friendship ... *Most* people did not recognise these things, yet they somehow managed to deal with each other anyway, like blind people who didn't even notice that they were bumping into each other in the dark ...

And the only summary of all this that Hestia was likely to understand was: "So after seven years, you know a person well enough? Does it not worry you that it takes so long to know a person?"

"Not today," laughed Hestia. "Today we aren't likely to meet a situation where we'll have to trust anyone who can betray us." She managed to be so serene amid such frightening uncertainties; she would never understand why the uncertainty frightened Ariadne.

Remus would have understood. He might blunder through the world mistaking people as often as herself or Hestia he had mistaken a criminal like Sirius Black! and accepting his mistakes far more philosophically than Ariadne ever could. But he would have understood exactly why being uncertain of what was immediately in front of her disturbed her so much. At least ... she had always thought he would understand ...

As the full moon rose, she wondered where he was this month. Was he in Hogsmeade, and if so had he a friend to let him out of the Shrieking Shack? Or would he lie there all tomorrow until he was strong enough to force the door and then repair it with a charm? Had he found a friendly isolated hut with a simple Muggle key? Or had he to take his chance and other people's too on running wild in the forest?

* * * * *

After the holiday ended, Ariadne spent only one more week under her parents' roof before leaving it forever. On Tuesday morning she followed them through the Floo to the Leaky Cauldron and out to Diagon Alley. A small door in a Georgian terrace separated Flourish and Blotts from Madam Malkin's. Mamma paused at the sight of dress-ropes and cloak clasps in one bay window, while Papa was distracted by the display of books and scrolls and quills in the identical window on the other side. Then he recalled the errand at hand and pushed the dividing door open. They climbed two flights of stairs to a door on their left. Ariadne knocked, and a very excited Sarah flew out to greet her.

"Yes, this is it! Good morning, Mr and Mrs MacDougal. No, don't come in, we'll sort out the right of entry first." Sarah placed her wand-tip on the key point below the door handle and said, "Put your wand next to it, Ariadne. Right. *Agnosce et licentio!* That should fix your access to the flat. Now we have to authorise your Apparition."

"But I cannot Apparate."

"You will soon. Step through and put your right hand on the inside of the door a little higher yes, there. Can you feel the sensor? *Agnosce et licentio!* Now you'll be able to Apparate to the inside of the building I know, I know, once you have your licence."

The hall was long and narrow, the light from a large everlasting candle suspended from the ceiling revealing a polished wood floor and wood-panelled walls.

"This is a smart place, Miss Webster," said Papa. "You were lucky to find such a good lease so quickly."

"Not a lease," said Sarah, then added, "sir." Papa had this effect on Ariadne's friends; they almost automatically addressed him formally. "My parents bought it for me as a school-leaving present. That is, they paid the deposit. I'll be paying off the bank loan myself."

"How exciting," said Mamma. "You have your own property already."

"Entirely wise," said Papa. His approval of Sarah seemed to have increased, but perhaps, thought Ariadne, she was reading too much into it. "So you are my daughter's landlady. I hope she'll be a well-behaved tenant."

Sarah indicated the first of three doors to their right. "This is to be Ariadne's room." They carried the luggage in.

Like the hall, the room had wood-panelled walls and a polished wood floor; it also had natural light, through a large diamond-paned window that overlooked the green park between Gringotts and Charing Cross Road. There was no furniture, not even curtains. "We'll fix that when Hestia comes," said Sarah. "The other two bedrooms are exactly like this one, so there's nothing really to see yet."

Opposite the front door was the bathroom. At least, Sarah said it was the bathroom, but it was a very dark room with no windows. "The previous owner took every candle out of the chandelier," said Sarah. "And the next-door neighbours forgot to sound-proof their bathroom, so we can hear every flush of their toilet and every word they say when they quarrel in the bath. Don't worry, I have sound-proofed ours, so they won't know our business the way they're letting us know theirs."

Since there was nothing that Sarah liked better than to know everybody's business, Ariadne did not imagine that she found this arrangement too uncomfortable. But the nagging voice in her head persisted even for this trivial moment: *do you really know Sarah as well as you're thinking you do?*

"And here's the living room," Sarah finished, opening the door to their left. "I've been sitting on the floor for twenty-four hours, but we'll start furnishing as soon as Hestia arrives." The room ran the full width of the house with three diamond-paned windows looking out onto Diagon Alley and a large fireplace against each short wall. The hearth to their right was flanked by the only furniture, built-in cupboards and a sink, indicating a kitchen area, but there was no clear point where the kitchen ended and the sitting room began.

Mamma began to say how nice and suitable the flat seemed. Papa opened his wallet and counted out Galleons "to furnish your new home, young ladies." Suddenly,

Ariadne realised they were leaving. They might have stayed for a cup of tea if the flat had contained a kettle, but it was so empty, there was nothing left to do. Ariadne hugged her mother and found that she was stifling tears.

"Mamma," she said, "I've not been a good daughter."

Mamma seemed very surprised, but perhaps she was only being polite. "Of course you've been a good daughter," she said. "You were always very hardworking on the farm, and you put enormous efforts into your studies. I'm sure we'll be proud of your N.E.W.T. results."

"But I've not I did not " She could hardly express what she meant, not in words that Mamma would understand.

"Do not be silly, dear. You were never one of those rebellious types who sniffed at magic mushrooms or chased boys, and I think you've not raised your voice or disobeyed us since you were five years old." Mamma was forgetting, or pretending to forget, Ariadne's quarrel with the Macnair cousins. "You've chosen suitable friends, and Janet has always been pleased by the attention you paid to Morag. Do not cry just because you've grown up and reached the time to leave us. You can talk to us by Floo this evening."

"Actually, we're not connected yet," said Sarah. "That will change, but maybe not until tomorrow."

"Perhaps that's better," said Papa politely. "It will give us all thirty-six hours to settle down to the change."

Ariadne squeezed down the lump in her throat and the sting in her eyes crying seem to come more easily these days and kissed her parents goodbye. They walked out of the front door, still chatting happily about what a charming girl Miss Webster seemed to be and how Ariadne was certain to settle in quickly. They didn't seem to understand at all how ungratefully eager she had been to leave them for the last twelve months, or how much she had resented their values for the last twelve years. Unless, thought Ariadne with a chill, they *did* know, and were mortally hurt about it, but were too polite to admit that they knew. She would never know, now, whether she had really hurt them or not.

One thing was clear, however: they had finally given her permission to be an adult. She had to make a new home here.

* * * * *

The Floo had hardly been connected for a minute the next day before there was a blast of green flames and a voice was calling, "Aunt 'Radny!" Morag was standing in the fire, dangerously close to swaying right into their living room.

"Hello, darling, careful you do not fall."

"Auntie, I've been trying to Floo you all day, but the powder kept jumping back into the jar. Where were you?"

"We've been home, darling, but the Floonet man only left a minute ago. You're our first caller."

"Can I come and see? I'm wanting to look at your new house."

"We've not authorised anybody to walk through our Floo yet."

"What does that mean?"

"It means that if anybody tries to walk through the hearth, the flames will jump up and push her back. It could hurt quite a lot. You have to ask your Mamma if she'll let me authorise you to visit me by Floo. Just look at our house through the hearth."

"You have a rug. Have you curtains too? Grandmamma said you had not any."

"That was yesterday. We bought some this morning. Long blue ones; you'll maybe see them if you look sideways. We bought them at the shop where Miss Dearborn works."

Morag swept a long glance at the sofa and cushions, at the table and dining chairs beyond it, and at the new cauldron in the kitchen hearth. "Where does Miss Dearborn work?"

"At a shop called Chippendale and Hepplewhite in Diagon Alley. They sell chairs, rugs, kitchen pots, all kinds of things that make a home. We could buy everything we needed there, even a wash tub."

"What's that black bird?" Morag pointed. "Has he no head?"

"It's a sooty owl; you can see his head when he's awake. He belongs to Miss Webster and his name is Thangalaathil."

"That's a funny name."

"It's an Australian name because sooty owls come from Australia. What did you do today, Morag? Did you go up to the sheep?"

Morag was not deflected. "Auntie, are you yet sad? You were sad all the days you were at home."

"You do notice things carefully, Morag. But I'm thinking I'll be happier here. What about you had you a happy day today?"

Morag's account of her day lasted until Janet pulled her back "because Grandmamma's wanting to brew a potion now".

Twenty-four hours' work had made the flat very habitable. The girls had placed double sound-proof spells on the floor and ceiling to keep their noise in and the neighbours' out (Sarah said that Madam Malkin, below them, was very quiet, but that the elderly couple above them never turned off their wireless). Hestia, after only three days at her new job, had been able to point them very quickly to rugs and curtains, beds and sofas, shelves and cupboards, glassware and china. They had bought a grandmother clock (with help from John Chittock) and a wireless and a gramophone and a set of terracotta window-boxes. After they had stocked the larder, replenished the bathroom chandelier (and scoured away the spider's webs from the claw-footed bath), stacked their books on the shelves and filled the Floo jar, Sarah broke it to them that they would need to tolerate a Muggle telephone.

"But there's no eckeltrickery here!" said Hestia.

"This telephone doesn't need electricity, it works like a wireless. They call it a mobile phone. But it makes a horrible noise when a Muggle wants to ring me, and I can't do my work without it."

"What is that work you do again?" asked Hestia. "Why do those Muggle photographers want to take pictures of you wearing bathing costumes?"

"Because Muggles are like that," said Sarah. "They think they can't sell robes clothes unless they have a photograph of somebody wearing them. And the kinds of clothes they like to wear change every year, so they need new photographs every year. My job is to be the person in the photograph."

"And they pay you, just for having your picture taken?"

"It's jolly hard work," said Sarah. "Keeping still in awkward positions, or keeping moving without leaving the camera's range, and smiling when you're tired, or trying to look

sultry just when someone's made you laugh."

"What is 'sultry'?"

Sarah demonstrated. Ariadne didn't dare comment, but Hestia spoke for her. "Why would they *want* you to look like that?"

"A tall blonde girl who can look sultry is really big business," said Sarah. "They pay her more than they or wizards pay an apprentice. Possibly more than you can earn as fully qualified Home Supplier or Apothecary in independent business. Just think of all the money I'll be bringing into the Wizarding economy by living here but working for Muggles."

"You only 'bring it in' if you spend it," Hestia pointed out.

"Of course I'm going to spend it. What else would one do with money?"

"Ivor's always talking about the virtues of saving and investing."

"Well, Ivor *would*." The words would have sounded rude from anybody but Sarah. "I'm going to pay off my mortgage, but otherwise I'm going to spend, spend, spend and enjoy my freedom, at least until I'm twenty-five. I have big plans for my hard-earned cash."

"Do you think about money a lot?" asked Hestia suddenly. "Just lately, Ivor hasn't been thinking about anything else."

"In my experience," said Sarah, "the day people stop thinking about money is the day they have as much of it as they want."

Ariadne suddenly wondered why she only ever thought about money in connection with Remus.

The Blue Flowers of Transition

Chapter 13 of 21

Ariadne receives the expected N.E.W.T. results and some unexpected gifts, and begins her new job.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Blue Flowers of Transition

Saturday 28 July Monday 24 December 1984

Diagon Alley, London.

Rated PG for adult themes (specifically, the need to earn a living).

A/N: In Professor Snape's first Potions lesson (PS, 8) he describes his discipline in terms of almost poetic eloquence that are quite unlike his usual way of speaking. I have assumed that he is quoting some well-known authority who is widely cited in the M.E.S.P. community, and have therefore put similar words into the mouth of Professor Jigger.

On Saturday the N.E.W.T. results arrived. Ariadne watched the Ministry owls swoop down on her friends without taking much interest in her own letter. Hestia seemed nervous. Ariadne reassured herself that the slight laugh and shaky fingers had always characterised Hestia before an exam; she must not assume that everything she observed in other people was now wrong. Hestia broke open the envelope (it tore awkwardly) and flushed pink all over her face.

"Yes! I did! Ivor will be so pleased!"

"Going to share the good news?" asked Sarah slyly.

Hestia held her letter to her chest for a moment, then passed it over. Sarah's eyes widened. "Ooh, *bee*. Very nice. So you're glad you stuck with old Snape now?"

Hestia nodded gleefully. "Exceeds Expectations in Potions, Transfiguration *and* Defence, and Acceptable in Herbology. Oh, and an Outstanding in Charms. So now will you show me yours?"

"Nothing at all surprising in mine. Unless you'd be surprised to hear that I passed anything. Acceptable in Herbology and Defence, Exceeds Expectations in Charms and Creatures." Sarah struck a bored pose, but Ariadne could tell she was pleased. At least, she *thought* Sarah was pleased. For somebody who so consistently boycotted homework, Sarah really had done better than anybody could have predicted.

"So what about the star pupil, then?" Sarah threw a glance at Ariadne.

Ariadne remembered that she was supposed to open her letter. But she was not wanting to do it in front of her friends. She had always thought Remus would be the first one to know her results. *Remus is not interested any more*, she reminded herself, and she slowly worked the envelope open to expose her certificate.

NASTILY EXHAUSTING WIZARDING TESTS

Pass Grades:

Outstanding (O)

Exceeds Expectations (E)

Acceptable (A)

Fail Grades:

Poor (P)

Dreadful (D)

Troll (T)

ARIADNE FEILTARNA MACDOUGAL HAS ACHIEVED:

Ancient Runes O

Astronomy E

Charms O

Herbology O

Potions O

Transfiguration E

Signed on behalf of the Board

G. R. Marchbanks, Head of Board

Sapiens Tofty, Secretary to the Board

Suddenly Sarah and Hestia were wildly excited. Ariadne did not understand what the cheering was about until Sarah demanded, "Well, aren't you *pleased*? After all the hours you put in, don't the results mean anything to you?"

"They do... I am indeed pleased," Ariadne said. She was, for a moment, but then she remembered that she had expected it of herself. Remus had worked so hard to coach her; it was not really surprising that she had managed to improve her Transfiguration to an E standard and her Charms to an O. This was his triumph as much as hers, and it seemed very unfair that he would never know about it. Instead, she performed a Zerocso Charm so the Ministry owl could take a copy to her parents.

"So, girls, do you have good news?" Ivor's head was in the fireplace.

"Very good for all of us," said Hestia. "Come through, Ivor, and show us yours. Why don't all of you come through?"

Ivor withdrew his head, then stepped into their lounge in a swirl of green fire. He was followed by Richard, Joe and Kingsley. The boys were sharing a flat at the far end of Diagon Alley, about ten minutes' walk away. Hestia had returned from her one visit reporting that they had leased it dirty and had not bothered to clean it up since, and predicting that "they'll be camping with us before we know it".

"Well, they're not staying the night," said Sarah firmly. "Ariadne's parents would have a heart attack if they thought men were sleeping over, and she'd never be allowed to live here again. And if eating our food is what they have in mind, they can jolly well help us cook it." But she had authorised the boys to Floo into their flat, and eating the girls' food was very obviously what the boys had in mind today. They claimed that Joe was a good cook, but he was tired of cooking every day, and they all deserved to be waited on at a time of celebration.

Joe had managed three N.E.W.T.s (History of Magic, Arithmancy and Muggle Studies) and had secured for himself a job in the Butterbeer factory. Sarah did not understand how he would manage the spells to control the machinery, but Richard assured them that Joe was still capable of a non-verbal charm when it was absolutely necessary, so the job would give him practice. Richard had four Exceeds Expectations and only wished his employer showed more interest. "All Mr Wadcock could say was, 'Never mind about your marks in that book-learning stuff, it's sales skills and memory for Quidditch facts that count in this business.'" Ivor had five N.E.W.T.s, which would look very proper in his file at Gringotts Personnel, and Kingsley had six Outstandings, which meant that he would be accepted into Auror training.

Ariadne set a peeling charm to the potatoes and a chopping charm to the onions, but Kingsley interrupted her. "Ariadne, don't be such a push-over. Delegate the chores around all of us."

"I'll be boss," said Sarah. "Hestia, guard the frying pan. Kingsley, you can cut the meat. Ivor, the carrots... whatever does one do to carrots? Ariadne and Hestia are both such good cooks that I don't usually bother."

"You scrape carrots with a blunt knife," Hestia came to the rescue. "Richard, you can mix some herbs with flour and shake around the meat as Kingsley finishes dicing it. Joe, boil us some water, then chop up some greens. And Sarah... oh, well done, Sarah, I don't think there is a job left for you."

"You do manage your life well, Sarah," admired Kingsley.

"I'll lay the table," said Sarah primly. "But before you call me a freeloader, remember that I do all the laundry around here. Ariadne and Hestia haven't a clue about the correct way to iron; if I let them do their own, they'd wear their clothes out in six months."

Perhaps Ariadne was imagining it, but all the boys looked very bewildered by the news that there was a "correct" way to iron a robe.

The congratulatory owls began to arrive as they were eating. Ariadne's parents wrote with unqualified delight:

Darling, these are wonderful results, even better than we had been hoping. We obviously did the right thing in setting that English farmhand to tutor you: you put in long, long hours, and it paid off. We are enclosing 100G to spend on books, or whatever you are needing in your new home.

They had obviously been quick to spread the good news, for half an hour later there was a note from Aunt Macmillan, together with a copy of the new edition *Mrs Skower's Complete Guide to Housekeeping*, and then a line from Cousin Lucius, wrapped around a box of pearl earrings. Owls for all of them flew in and out of the diamond-paned windows, and as well as down both chimneys, all through the evening. Among the masses of packing and wrapping paper, the gifts for Ariadne included a small alabaster vase from Madam Bones, six china mugs from the Patils, a set of padded coat hangers from the Cornfoots, two packs of cards from the Macnairs, and a signed and framed photograph of the Parkinson family.

There was no message from the person whose handwriting she most longed to see, not a single word.

The gift that most surprised Ariadne was a packet of seeds attached to a terse note.

Ariadne,

You are indeed fortunate to have been accepted as Professor Jigger's disciple. I hope I need not remind you to apply yourself diligently to your apprenticeship.

Enclosed is a sample of the seeds you desired. The supplier is Blomsters in Stockholm.

Regards,

Severus.

She recognised that the tone of the letter was, for him, friendly, and realised that he was telling her that he was willing to be her cousin again. He was even willing to help her find a plant she had once wanted, one neither relevant to her studies nor readily available in Britain. But... why *napellus*? She frowned at the label, sure she had never asked for that plant, and unable to imagine why he thought it might interest her.

Ariadne soaked her seeds in lukewarm water for the rest of the evening, then sealed them under a freezing charm for the night. The next day she planted them in the terracotta window-boxes, well mulched with dragon's dung. Sarah agreed to let the *napellus* take up the whole of their tiny growing space "because it's a point of historic interest to be able to claim any kind of present from Snape."

"It will not last long in the window," said Ariadne. "It's really more of a bush than a pot plant, and it'll grow too large for these boxes. Then we'll have nowhere to put it."

It was only when the plants began to grow, first glossy green leaves, then deep blue flowers, that Ariadne realised why Severus might have sent them. She had once asked him for a plant, naming it in Latin; he had evidently remembered the genus she required, but not bothered to note the precise species. Now, meaning to be friendly, he had sent her a sample of the genus, quite unaware that this species would be of no use at all to her, although it was undoubtedly ornamental. It seemed odd that he could not remember a Latin word for long enough to make such a basic distinction, but... but nothing. If Severus had sent her the wrong seeds deliberately, in order to send some kind of subliminal message, she was not wanting to know what it was.

* * * * *

But long before the window-boxes showed any green shoot, Ariadne began her apprenticeship with Arsenius Jigger. She was supposed to begin at nine o' clock on Wednesday morning but, knowing Professor Jigger's ways, she walked out of the flat at eight. His shop was still called Slug and Jigger's, although it was a hundred and twenty years since the last Miss Slug had married the Muggle Sir Hilary Horn and sold her share in the shop to the Belby family. Their son, Hadrian Slug-Horn, had of course been Professor Slughorn's father. It was said that whichever Belby now owned and underwrote the business never showed his face inside the laboratory, but Ariadne knew that he produced a steady stream of research publications. Slug and Jigger's was evidently an establishment that cared about academic rigour.

She put her hand to the front door, wondering if her memory had exaggerated the shop's stink. As soon as the door began to open, she knew it had not exaggerated; an overpowering stench of bad eggs and rotted cabbages swept over her face and almost knocked her over. A plump witch in late middle-age scowled at her over the counter.

"Come to buy something?"

"I'm the new apprentice, Madam " She did not know why she distrusted the woman; she reminded herself yet again to take Hestia's advice and observe behaviour before she passed judgment.

"Madam Jigger to you. Arsenius said he was expecting someone. Young, aren't you? Are you sure you've left school? Come through to the back."

Stepping past the barrels of slimy stuff and under a string of fangs that hung from the ceiling, Ariadne followed Madam Jigger through to the laboratory. Professor Jigger was stirring at a pewter cauldron while a silver one bubbled violently beside him. He was frowning fiercely; he had not grown a drop more affable in the three years since he had left Hogwarts. He did not look up, but he must have heard them, for he said, "Go back to the shop, Belladonna. So, young lady, you decided to turn up? You've come to bottle fame, brew glory and stopper death?"

"I have, Professor."

"You think you can brew liquids that creep through human veins, bewitching the mind and ensnaring the senses, enthralling the soul, laying bare its defences?"

"I'm intending to learn, sir."

"You know you'll have to work hard to achieve that. N.E.W.T.s are just the beginning. You'll need to forget most of what you learned at N.E.W.T. level. I don't suppose Snape set you to any kind of research project?"

"He did, sir. I had to develop a new shampoo."

"Shampoo, bah! You didn't think to manage anything useful, I suppose? Something for which there's a market gap, something that huge sectors of the population need or want?"

Ariadne hoped the question was rhetorical and kept quiet.

"Did you bring overalls? Hogwarts black, I see. It'll do for today, but you don't want to look as if you're still at school. It doesn't impress the customers. I put all my staff in navy."

Ariadne was assaulted by an irresistible memory, an image of Remus playing at colour-charms with Morag. Instinctively, she flicked her wand at her overall and instructed it, "*Caeruleus Coloro!*"

The black cloth lightened to deep blue, and Professor Jigger grunted.

"Wand-work. You won't need much of that here. The first thing you have to learn is that real careers are not all glamour. You'll begin every day by mixing routine potions, the kind we sell in bulk, or according to prescription. Sometimes you won't even mix. You'll be out in the front with Belladonna, pouring and weighing for customers. Then there's the retail aspect stocktaking supplies, checking quality, storing correctly, selling to the public which often means teaching the idiots out there what they really want when they only think they know. And there's the cleaning. Don't forget the endless purging and scouring that make a laboratory possible. You'll slave like a house-elf at that."

He seemed to have run out of words, so she said, "I will, Professor."

"But you will do some mixing," he added briskly. This time he almost looked at her, but he seemed incapable of sitting up completely straight. "I'll start you on a small research project right away. Something to improve our customers' quality of life. I think you should develop a diet pill."

She had a bad feeling about this, but, determined not to judge by appearances, she only nodded.

"To be precise, an appetite suppressant. The kind of thing that turns a fat lady into a thin one. Women will give half the wealth of their house for a potion like that. So you'll need to read up on what's been done already but it isn't much. In giving you this project, I'm making you a genuine pioneer. Well, enough talk for now. Let me see how you clean out a used cauldron."

With an *Evanescio* and a *Scourgify* and a powerful disinfectant, Ariadne began to sterilise the indicated set of bronze cauldrons. She felt as if an iron hand were squeezing around her heart. She told herself that it was senseless to miss Remus at a time like this; he would never, under any circumstance, have accompanied her to work and cleaned cauldrons beside her. But she missed him anyway. Her new life had truly begun, and now she recognised fully that Remus was not playing any part in it. As surely as she had severed herself from school and farming in order to set out on the road that would make her an apothecary, so he had severed himself from her. He would never groan with her over the futility of having to create an *appetite suppressant* in order to gain a qualification.

He would have seen the funny side of that situation. She knew he would.

* * * * *

Before she had been apprenticed a month, Ariadne wondered if she still wanted to be an apothecary. Arsenius Jigger made it clear that "routine stuff" would dominate her first six months. That was fair enough; somebody had to serve in the shop, stock-take the supplies, clean the equipment, and dull as it often was she understood that it was necessary. She was allowed to mix basic potions the kind that Hogwarts students covered in their first three years but she would not be allowed to learn a new formula until next February.

This dull work was required for gruelling hours. Officially, she finished work at five. This, Jigger had explained on her second day, was only so as to conform to M.E.S.P. Guild regulations on her contract. In practice, the shop did not close until six, and therefore her working day did not either. Even after the shop was locked, there were supplies to put away, floors to sweep, brews to bottle. Sometimes she even had to stay back to finish a brew that had refused to boil on time. And there was no exception for Saturdays. She would have to put aside all thought of studying for her Apparition licence or sight-seeing in Muggle London.

Then there were the parts of the job that she *did not* understand. There was a locked cupboard that functioned rather like the Restricted Section of a library, or the Teacher's Private Store in a school laboratory. The locking was of limited value, since Ariadne was allowed a key, and nobody except herself and the Jiggers was supposed to penetrate beyond the shop into the laboratory. The real point was that the potions were not labelled. They were identified entirely by their colour, their odour, the shape of their bottles.

"What are they?" she asked.

"Mind your own business!" snapped Jigger. Even Belladonna, it appeared, did not know what most of them were.

But customers did occasionally take these products. One morning, while Ariadne was weighing out butterflies' wings in the laboratory, Jigger crept up behind her and murmured, "Are you acquainted with a Mrs Patil?"

The question, as well as his furtively lowered voice, thoroughly startled her. She replied that she knew a Manjula Patil.

"She will be coming this afternoon to ask for her order. If you're the one serving in the shop at the time, give her that glass bottle the one tied with a blue ribbon and ask no questions at all."

Ariadne could not imagine why Mrs Patil's order would be such a great secret. All trading was treated confidentially since some of it concerned ingredients that were open to abuse or medications for embarrassing illnesses; why was this particular potion more confidential still?

Mrs Patil greeted her pleasantly by name and sat quietly while Ariadne went to fetch the bottle. It looked very ordinary, a small bottle with a blue ribbon. If it were such a great secret, why was it being highlighted with that flamboyant blue ribbon? What was in it?

The Patils had always struck her as a thoroughly decent family. She could not imagine that they would purchase anything for some dishonourable purpose. So why was she, the apprentice, not being told about a potion that she was helping to sell that she might soon be helping to brew?

Was she wrong about the Patils, as she had been wrong about Remus? Was this some kind of illegal potion, something that Jigger would not want her to report to the Guild? She would not put it past him...

Stop! she ordered her thoughts. Professor Jigger was her employer; she owed him her livelihood and her future expertise; there was not a shred of evidence that he did anything unprofessional or immoral. What possible reason had she for distrusting him? No more reason than she had once had for trusting Remus! Or, for that matter, for trusting the Patils. She had no business to shoot random accusations that assassinated people's characters.

Yet she also had a moral obligation to know what she was handing across the counter.

She brought the bottle into the shop, covered by her two hands, and passed it to Mrs Patil. Mrs Patil closed her own hands around it swiftly and stowed it in her cloak pocket. "Charge it to my account, Miss MacDougal," she said. "Have a good day!"

When the day ended, there was reading homework. Not only did Ariadne have to remind herself of the commonly-sold potions and memorise the ones that were brewed every week but she had to research appetite suppressants. Every evening she took home a different edition of the *Western Journal of Apothecarism* and scoured it for every article that could possibly be relevant to appetite suppressants. There was, as Jigger had warned her, very little research in existence. This was apparently because most apothecaries believed that the best way to lose weight was to eat less and exercise more.

"What do they know?" asked Belladonna crossly when Ariadne commented on the mainstream attitude. "It's far less work to take a pill that blocks your hunger pangs."

"But is it safe?" asked Ariadne.

"Safe? Well, if the researchers think there are dangers, we write 'danger' on the packet. But once we have a pill that works, it's not only witches who'll buy it. We can infiltrate it into the Muggle market, and Arsenius will have made his fortune!"

And that, it appeared, was the end-point of the subtle science and exact art of potion-making. Those who researched medicines did nothing more significant than save lives; but those who researched cosmetics and appetite-suppressants had a serious option on making money.

The Student who Taught

Chapter 14 of 21

Having extricated himself from Ariadne's life, Remus begins to pursue his dream of teaching.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The Student who Taught

Monday 3 September Friday 2 November 1984

Nottingham; Hamilton, Lanarkshire; Hogsmeade, The Grampians; Ecclesall, Sheffield.

Rated PG for adult concerns (careers preparation and spouse-hunting) and coarse language.

As Remus realised on the first day of the autumn term, he was about to carry off a whopping deception. The forged A levels were only the beginning of the story. He didn't even know if he looked like a Muggle. There was no mirror in his house, so he had no idea what he looked like in the jeans and windcheater that he had bought three years ago when he was working on Muggle farms. Even if he looked like a Muggle, did he really look like a student-Muggle? Did he even own the right kind of briefcase? Would he be given away by his pencil box, by his scrap paper, by the notes he had already taken?

On the first day he walked to college, but he caught himself thinking that for tomorrow he must look out a suitable Apparition point. *Think again. How many thousands of students attend this college?* There might be a place a broom cupboard or the gents' toilets from which he could Disapparate home, but there could never be a spot so isolated that he could safely Apparate there in the mornings.

A glance around the lecture theatre showed him that he needn't have worried about his clothes. Although he did see a girl with green spiked hair, a boy with a safety pin through his nose, and another girl in a long flowing gypsy skirt, most of the students wore jeans and windcheaters exactly like his. Instead, he should have worried about his age; among so many school-leavers, anyone who looked over twenty was conspicuous. There was a handful of mature-age students, and they were a very distinctive group a woman in a business suit, another who was showing off wallet-photographs of her children, a fat woman in a faded track suit who was explaining to both of them that she was still recovering from a long illness all sitting a little apart from the young people. He also realised there were five women to every man; being male made him conspicuous too.

If he wanted to hide among the Muggles, he would have to be a very quiet student.

It was easy enough to keep quiet in a lecture theatre. He sat and took notes, inferring from the murmurs around him that none of the other students knew any more than he did about the theory of the acquisition of literacy. It was harder to be quiet in a tutorial. There was a ripple of laughter when the tutor called his name from the register, and one of the girls giggled, "So where's Romulus?"

When the tutor asked, "What are the chief methods of teaching reading?" she was, predictably, greeted by a stony silence; they had heard the chief methods an hour ago in the lecture, but no one admitted to remembering. Remus *knew* the answer, but it was more than his life was worth to volunteer it. At Hogwarts he had played stupid in class to oblige James and Sirius; now he played stupid to avoid being noticed at all.

Being a quiet student carried him through his first two weeks. He knew that he was throwing marks away class participation accounted for ten percent of the final result but he couldn't afford to attract a reputation as a brainy student. He responded minimally to his classmates' greetings, supplied minimal answers to his tutors' direct questions, spent lunch breaks in the library, then Disapparated home at the end of the day in order to spend the evening organising his notes, reading for the next week's lectures and making an early start on his essays. Even when he had to miss a day to be "sick", no one asked him about it; among a hundred students, no one even noticed that he had been missing.

He nearly blew his cover in the third week, when the student sitting next to him glanced at his folder and exclaimed, "Goodness, do *yotype out* your notes?" He had placed a *Tipografia* charm on his précis of the previous week's lecture to make it easier to read.

The girl glanced at his transcript, apparently neatly typed, and said, "You take really good notes. How did you manage to write so much so fast?"

All Hogwarts students learned to take good notes; one could scarcely learn anything in Professor Binns' lessons otherwise; but Remus could hardly admit that he had learned the skill from a ghost. Instead, he blundered into, "You're welcome to take a *Zerocso*..." before he knew what he was saying. He couldn't believe himself. Despite having gone to Muggle primary school, he had forgotten the correct way to speak to Muggles. Fortunately the Muggles also had a concept named "Xerox", so the student only nodded.

On the way out of the lecture theatre, Remus heard the same girl chattering to her friend. "That Remus Lupin isn't nearly as stand-offish as we thought. Perhaps he's just shy; he was quite friendly to me today."

Mortified, Remus realised he now had two things to remember. He must never relax his guard in playing Muggle. At the same time, being "quiet" would be misunderstood as being "unfriendly". And he had to learn to be friendly with Muggles if he was to work with them in the future.

He tried to remember when he had last made a friend. He had been quite withdrawn at his Muggle primary school and he hadn't made any real friends there. At Hogwarts he hadn't needed a strategy; James Potter had made most of the friendly advances, so Remus hadn't so much made friends as been befriended. He couldn't even remember how he had fallen into friendship with Ariadne because it had seemed so natural; they had just talked.

But how did he "just talk" when there was so much that he could not say?

The male students devoted a great deal of time to discussing football. They allowed Remus to occupy a seat at a cafeteria table and listen to them for hours. But there was always one student in the group who was too friendly to ignore him; in the end someone always asked him about League standings or goalie tactics or fan violence, and he had to confess his ignorance.

"Whom do you support, then? Are you Forest or County?"

It would be a major social gaffe to admit that he did not know the difference; but what did these young men find to say to a person who didn't understand football? One of the girls said, "Oh, football bores me silly. I don't have a team," and she was instantly surrounded by avid fans, determined to convert her to the rival merits of Aston Villa, Manchester United and Chelsea. Remus had never even followed Quidditch with that kind of passion; his early, half-hearted interest in the Appleby Arrows had long since been transferred to the Pride of Portree.

In mixed company, the conversation turned to politics. Everyone had a great deal to say on the doings of the Muggle Prime Minister. Remus had to think twice to remember her name; he had no idea whether she had really saved the economy, or whether the price had been too high, or whether it mattered. He wondered if he should take to reading Muggle newspapers, but that would be yet another outlay of time and money. The Muggle students talked about their Prime Minister in terms so similar to wizards' talk about Madam Bagnold that Remus was once on the point of stating that "the Minister has been libelled by Death Eaters because she hunts them down". He remembered in time that the person under discussion was *not* Bagnold, and declined to have a view on politics.

He did no better on the subject of music. He had never heard of Chicago or The Police, and had to confess that he didn't know which song was "number five on the charts this week".

"Come off it, you *must* know," said a giggling brunette.

"Oh, his sort never knows," said a bespectacled girl who was looking up from a large book. "I expect Remus prefers classical. Is it Beethoven or Mozart, Remus?"

"Which do you like?" He turned the tables.

The girl blushed and admitted to Haydn; on pressing, she added that she played the clarinet. The truth was that Remus didn't know much about classical music either; Ariadne had liked mediaeval and Renaissance. His mother's parents had owned a gramophone, but someone had told him that no one used gramophones any more; he had forgotten the name of the modern device that they did use.

More common than any of these topics was the universal question: "Did you see that programme on the Telly last night?" That cartoon, that quiz show, that football match, that documentary, that drama... Students didn't seem to mind admitting that they had watched *Noah and Nellie* with their younger siblings; some of them even admitted that they had watched an adaptation of Shakespeare; and they watched every shade of culture (or lack of it) in between. Remus didn't understand how they watched so much Telly and still finished their homework.

Remus knew what a Telly was; both pairs of grandparents had owned one; he had even watched *Play School* or *Blue Peter* occasionally. But that had been a long time ago; his paternal grandmother had in fact sold her Telly before the period when he had lived with her, so he hadn't watched one since he first went to Hogwarts. He cautiously offered, "I don't have a Telly at home. I can't afford it right now," and was greeted by howls of disbelief.

"Come off it, you can pick up a second-hand one for twenty quid." *Four Galleons*, he mentally translated.

"Can't you go and watch at a friend's house?"

"I'll sell you our third one. It's only black and white. We were thinking of getting rid of it."

"Everyone has a Telly!"

"I read somewhere that more people in Britain have Tellys in their houses than have bathrooms... no, I remember now, I didn't read it, I saw it on the Telly..."

"Oh, that's gross! Some people are too poor to own a bath but they *still* have a Telly?"

"Yep, that's what the stats say."

"Remus, you are chasing a majorly Alternative lifestyle."

Obviously he could not explain to Muggles how very accurate a remark that was. He quickly realised that he did not understand anything about any aspect of Muggle culture at any level and that admitting he did not understand exposed him as different.

Perhaps the coursework would be a safe conversational topic. "How are you doing with the essay?" sounded innocent, but it was greeted with, "What, have you started already?" When the woman in the business suit imprudently admitted that she too had started the essay, the green-haired girl immediately acknowledged, "Ah, the class swots." By the time the first round of essays was due long before they were marked everyone knew who the top ten students were. Remus was one of them, once again exposed as different.

One day he heard the girl next to him promise her friend, "We're in luck; I managed to find it in the library this morning I'll make you photocopies this afternoon."

Immediately attracted to her soft Scottish burr, Remus took a risk in asking both girls, "Did you understand what Dr Fogg was saying about assimilation and accommodation?" It was a risk because, for all he knew, every Muggle understood assimilation and accommodation, but he never found out.

The Scottish girl spat out, "A psychiatric patient makes more sense than Dr Fogg!" Her tone was flat and nasal, quite devoid of Highland lilt. "His mind is like a sheep's backside; he wouldn't have needed to use both his brain cells to give that lecture."

Her friend laughed; no one looked surprised. Apparently the malice of the remark was exonerated by its humour. This, Remus knew, was not a Muggle thing; Peter Pettigrew had laughed in much the same way when Sirius Black had made that sort of remark about Snape. (And Remus himself had most shamefully pretended that he had not heard.) But he must have changed since his schooldays, for he could no longer ignore it so easily. Ariadne would never have made or laughed at that kind of joke.

I must not think of her.

It seemed to take a long time to find and settle into a group who were friendly but not too interested in his personal peculiarities. He knew that many wizards did have Muggle friends; some wizards even married Muggles. But he did not understand how they managed it. There was so much that he should know but didn't that it added up to: *It will take me a long time to know these people.* There was so much more that could never be told the general secrets of the wizarding world as well as the personal secrets about himself that it was fair to add: *These people will never know me at all.*

* * * * *

By the time the students began to work seriously on their second round of essays, Remus was beginning to feel that he had found a comfortable relationship with his classmates, friendly but not friends. But even then, he found he was misreading all the cues. One morning Nicky the student with the Scottish accent offered him a share in her umbrella (it had been a very wet autumn). Having accepted her offer, it was only polite to ask after her essays.

She replied, with some force, that Dr Fogg's essay on the theories of Piaget had wrecked her life, and she called Dr Fogg a few names that were worthy of Severus Snape himself.

They were twenty minutes early for the first lecture, so they stopped by a vending machine to buy a cheap and nasty cup of coffee. Nicky was short of change, so Remus handed her some of his without really thinking about it. He definitely preferred tea. They sat down to drink, and she continued her venting against Dr Fogg.

"So, enough of that," she said suddenly. "We know that everybody feels the same way about the beef-witted bastard. What are you doing on the weekend?"

"The same as you writing."

"Yes, but what *else*? Why do you not take me to the pictures on Friday evening?"

It took him a moment to understand what she meant. "Pictures" did not mean an art gallery; it was a Telly-type entertainment that Muggles visited in a building called a Cinema. It took another moment to register that she hadn't asked him to "go with her", but to "take her". And that meant... Women didn't often proposition him like that, but some kind of proposition it certainly was.

"Nicky," he said, "I don't take people to the pictures."

"Not ever?" Fortunately her scowl was half-humorous. "You're no fun at all. Why not?"

"Lots of reasons, of which the most immediate is the essay I have due this Monday."

"You have not an essay due every week. The lasses are in competition, you know, for who will be the first to go out with you."

He swallowed his shock. She was probably exaggerating. "I can't believe you're all that desperate," he said.

"Oh, lighten up, it's not desperation, it's for fun. There are only sixteen men on this course, and one is married and five already have girlfriends. That leaves about sixty women speculating on only ten men. Of course you've been noticed."

He wanted to ask if her speculating friends had put her up to asking him out, but couldn't decide whether "yes" or "no" would be a more worrying answer.

"I'm flattered," he said briefly, "but, since you've been the one brave enough to approach me, perhaps you should have the honour of spreading the word that I'm not looking for a girlfriend at present."

One week later, Nicky found herself a boyfriend; she had discovered that the engineering faculty was a well-stocked pond. But it was not the end of girls approaching Remus. If Nicky had passed on his message, her peers had not believed her. They no longer accused him of being "unfriendly"; with no acknowledgement of any kind of middle ground, they considered him fair game.

Claire, the girl with green hair, invited him to a disco three times before she accepted that his refusal was serious.

Melanie, the girl in the gipsy skirt, offered him home-made soap and New Age music tapes before inviting him to her house so that she could read his Tarot cards. Remus thought immediately of Ariadne quoting Professor Vablatsky, who had apparently taught her Divination class that the Tarot never worked for Muggles, and that set off a train of thought, wondering if Ariadne had ever followed up her suspicions that Veleta Vablatsky was still alive, and whether she was doing so safely... He reminded himself that he was supposed to be listening to Melanie, and blurted out an abrupt, "Sorry, but divination isn't my thing." *Watch your language*, rebuked the mentor in his brain. *The Muggles don't usually call it "divination"*.

Jackie, the girl who played the clarinet, mentioned casually that she had a spare ticket to a concert. Remus had been practising his put-down line, and he managed to tell her with reasonable adroitness, "Why don't you offer it to one of the engineering students?"

Samantha, the giggling brunette, giggled to her friends that she was going out to dinner with Brian. "In a real restaurant, with penguin-suit waiters and *la carte* menu." For the ten minutes until the tutorial began, Samantha was the centre of attention. Apparently it was a major coup to have attracted a dinner invitation from Brian. Then Remus remembered who Brian was. He was a mature-aged student, aged well into his fifties, and divorced. For a moment Remus couldn't understand why he would be chasing a girl of eighteen, or why Samantha would be so obviously flattered at being chased. Then he was disgusted with himself; after all, *he* had pursued a girl even younger than Samantha.

Then he remembered that adult Muggles aged much faster than wizards. Brian looked fifty-five to Remus, but he was probably only forty-five. That raised the interesting question: *how old do I look to the Muggles?* He was twenty-five, but perhaps the girls thought he was only twenty? That might explain why none of them had written him off as too old. He made sure that a rumour about his real age was floated that day.

The next day he was accosted by Valerie, the woman in the business suit. She steered him into the cafeteria and bought him coffee, real coffee from the percolator, not the imitation from the vending machine. She approached him cleverly, asking his opinion on the theories of Phonics and Whole Language, sounding out which references he had found most helpful for their essay, before letting slip that she was only twenty-nine and that she would have time on her hands once this blasted essay was out of the way...

Remus counted that there were eighty-four women enrolled in the course, of whom seven were married and at least twenty must have a boyfriend already; so once the other fifty-seven had asked him out, that would be the end of it. He had not once had to remind himself that werewolves did not have girlfriends, for none of the propositions had been in the least tempting. They had only emphasised the yawning gulf between what he really was and what he was pretending to be.

Fortunately, the word about his aloof attitude spread through the grapevine, and only three other girls asked him out before they collectively gave up on him. Serious essay-panic was setting in, and students huddled over tables in the library or the cafeteria to swap references and clarify ideas.

"Did *anyone* understand that part about phonemic awareness?" wailed Claire.

"Remus did," said Valerie. "Tell them, Remus."

"It's about being able to hear the separate sounds that make up a word. Hearing that 'cat' is C and A and T."

"Oh, you mean it's about a *spoken* word and not a *written* one," said Claire. "But can't just about anyone who isn't deaf hear that much?"

"Small children can't. They can understand a whole word without recognising that it consists of different sounds."

"So what's the point of this non-words decoding business?" asked Simon, the boy with the safety pin in his nose.

Remus explained decoding assessment concisely. He was half aware that not only Simon, but every student at the table, had eyes on him. But it was only when he saw that Claire was taking notes that he realised what was happening.

He was *teaching*.

Dr Fogg was a blundering, verbose, confusing teacher. However Nicky had over-reacted to his lectures, there was no question that her criticisms had been essentially justified. Remus felt that if he claimed to be a better teacher than Dr Fogg, he was not claiming very much.

And, apparently, his classmates found him a better teacher than Dr Fogg too.

After that the other students had plenty to say to Remus. They met every day to discuss their homework, and he slid effortlessly into playing teacher. He wasn't the only person who could explain better than Dr Fogg often Valerie or Jackie knew the work as well as he did but, somehow, the other students deferred to his judgment. His peculiar personal habits were forgotten, and there was no further need to discuss them. Keeping a professional distance felt as natural in his relationship with the Muggle education students as it had felt unnatural with Ariadne.

The Apprentice who Persevered

Chapter 15 of 21

Ariadne's friends try to bail her out, but the real trouble lies in a place they cannot reach.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Apprentice who Persevered

Wednesday 19 September Friday 7 December 1984

Diagon Alley, London.

Rated PG-13 because of what does not happen in this chapter.

The young man with green thumbs laid a carton on the apothecary's bench. "Tilden Toots is the name. Professor Jigger was expectin' the delivery."

"Thank you, Mr Toots," said Ariadne, pulling a leather purse from under the counter and trying to forget that Tilden Toots had been in Remus's year at Hogwarts. "Professor will be glad to see this."

Professor Jigger had instructed her to place the contents straight in the greenhouse cupboard. At first glance, the leafless pot-plants did not look very lively, but then she saw that they were slightly pulsating.

Mimbulus mimbletonia!

She had never seen them before; they grew only in Assyria and were rare even there. But those grey boils were unmistakable. She knew better than to provoke the plants into defending themselves; she placed each one gently on the shelf and closed the glass door with a Locking Charm.

The bell on the front door jangled again, and an insincere-looking wizard entered. Ariadne reminded herself not to judge the customer on first impressions.

"A quart of Photapergaz," he said. "Wet weather, isn't it?"

She handed him a bottle. "That's seven Sickles."

"I could have sworn," he said, without touching his purchase, "that the supplier who just parked that box with you was Tilden Toots."

She made a non-committal noise, wondering what the customer really wanted.

"Quite a celebrity, you know. I always enjoy his gardening broadcasts on the Wireless."

"He's a gifted Herbologist," she agreed. *Do not keep assuming that this man has an ulterior motive.* She warned herself. "Can I help you with anything else, sir?"

"I might take a throat-soother. So what was in the box? Anything out of the ordinary?"

"Two Sickles. Do you prefer lemon, blackcurrant or wild cherry?"

"Oh... lemon." The customer pocketed the paper bag without checking its contents. "Young lady, what would you say is young Tilly's specialty?"

She tried not to imagine that the customer was becoming aggressive in his search for some kind of information. "I'm not a Herbologist, but his radio shows are certainly entertaining."

"Professor Jigger is lucky to have Tilly on side. Do you think "

A heavy footstep announced that Professor Jigger had entered the shop. "Morning, Bobbin," he said. "What d'you want from us that your own shop doesn't supply?"

"Your charming apprentice has already served me." The customer, now identified as fellow-apothecary Salix Bobbin, looked embarrassed. He threw out a "Good morning!" and beat a hasty retreat.

"It's as well you kept a still tongue in your head," said Professor Jigger to Ariadne. "Last thing we want is the competitors knowing what's brought into this shop."

Ariadne was surprised to hear another guild-member described as a "competitor". But logic asserted that a competent apothecary had no need to forsake his own shop for basic items like Photapergaz and throat soothers, so Mr Bobbin had to have had an ulterior motive for visiting.

"Why would Mr Bobbin care what Mr Toots brings us?"

"Because if Bobbin knew how Toots accesses our stuff, he'd be acquiring it himself. And then where would we be? *Mimbletonia* and the like could be bought on every street corner, I'd never make a profit. Toots and I keep our suppliers dark. And *you* are to keep dark who brings what into the shop."

Keeping "dark" about *Mimbulus mimbletonia* was fair enough; it was rare, but nearly harmless and quite legal. Ariadne tried to push away her suspicion that some of Professor Jigger's other products were immoral, illegal or dangerous. She had no *proof*.

"Keep quiet now," Jigger repeated, "and you'll find out a lot more in due course."

"I will, Professor." She gave the Burn-Healing paste a final stir and began to ladle it into jars.

"The Scotchman was wrong," Jigger commented. "You keep quiet and you keep busy."

She looked up. "Is this the man who gave me a bad character last spring? I would not be wishing his report to be repeated to my parents."

Jigger grunted. "He did say he knew your father. Since before you were born, he claimed. He walked into the shop like a customer and spilled the dirt like a journalist. Lazy, he said you were, and always poking your nose into other people's business. I told him right off, if you were to work for me, I wouldn't give you time to be lazy or to poke your nose anywhere, so that didn't bother me. Then he became angry and said you spread gossip and had accused your own cousin of being a Death Eater. But he was too underhand to give me anything in writing. Made me wonder what his game was."

Anybody who knew that she had accused Cousin Lucius of the Dark Arts before she was four years old had to be a person who knew her parents. One of the Macnairs? *have no evidence*, she reminded herself yet again. Donald Cornfoot? Surely not Uncle Macmillan! Yet there was a real risk she would suspect the wrong person unless she identified her true accuser soon.

"Professor, do you remember anything about the man? What did he look like?"

"Big-built, dark, wore a red and green tartan. I'd say in his fifties. Now enough of this, or I will start believing that you like gossip. Go and see what the new customer wants."

The tartan alone eliminated most suspects. So it was Uncle Macnair!

* * * * *

"Has Jigger forgotten how to tell the time *again*?" asked Sarah sympathetically. "You really should report those long hours to the Guild."

"Your hours are not regular either," Ariadne pointed out.

"Yes, but I'm paid a lot more for my trouble. Honestly. Hestia's contract says 'eight until six, not Wednesdays or Saturdays,' and that's what it always is. And no one asks her to play with poisons."

"I'm sorry I was not here to start the cooking, Sarah."

"Don't worry about it. Ivor's here, and Hestia's teaching him. About time he learned. We might tactfully go to my room this evening, so that Ivor and Hestia can tactfully possess the sofa. I'll put your hair up."

After they had eaten Hestia's chicken stew (Ivor had been steered through the process of making the dumplings), Ariadne was too exhausted to relish the thought of playing hairdressers all evening, but talking to Sarah would help her not to think about Remus. It was days since she and Sarah had both been home for long enough to talk to each other. So she submitted to having her hair curled and twisted and thrown up in a French roll. Sarah had apparently spent the day wearing the Muggle equivalent of dress robes and being photographed in unnatural poses on the steps of Westminster Abbey or precariously perched on the railings of the Thames embankment, and she was keen to practise the new hairstyles on a dressing-doll of her own.

"I've broken up with Jean-Philippe," said Sarah mournfully. "I didn't see it coming. I've never had a man become bored with me before, so do you think he's found someone else?"

"What are you thinking about it?"

Sarah sighed. "I'd know if he'd been unfaithful. No, it isn't another woman. It's more likely the distance. All those international Portkeys were a great nuisance to organise. But I can't believe he wouldn't take a little more trouble over me!"

"How frustrating for you to be so uncertain."

"Perhaps. It's stupid to fuss over a man who isn't interested, isn't it? On the other hand, masculine ardour has been known to rekindle. Ariadne, do you think he'd regret chucking me if I owed him? Just a short, happy note describing the British rain and the sights of London."

"Maybe."

"Then again, the sexy Muggle photographer who was working with me today has already asked me out twice. Perhaps I shouldn't be so quick to *de*el/ unavailable when I actually *don't* have a real boyfriend any more. Ariadne, would you go out with a photographer?"

"Does he make you laugh?"

Sarah smiled, and twisted a pin painfully. "Yes, he does. That's the problem. Is he just frivolous? My manager is older and more likely to stay faithful over the distance. He's a very distinguished man and he's divorced; I'm sure I could extract a dinner invitation from him if I really wanted to."

"So are you wanting to?"

"Sometimes. But sometimes all this business of chasing men seems too much trouble. You don't know how lucky you are to be unattached, Ariadne! Some days I just want to give up on all men altogether because none of them can really be trusted..."

At last Sarah had finished with Ariadne's hair, and Ariadne had said "hmm" and "I see" enough times to convince Sarah that what she really wanted was the dinner with the photographer.

"That's it! Next time he asks me, I *will* accept. Now let's talk about you, Ariadne. That Jigger isn't making your working hours any shorter. Why do you put up with it?"

Because being busy saves me from thinking too hard. No amount of idleness would induce Sarah to think too hard, so Ariadne told her, "If I forfeit this apprenticeship, I'll never find another. I'm needing to please my mentor."

"Would he really throw you out just for demanding your rights under the contract? What would happen if you *did* complain to the Guild?"

"I might win the case, but it would take too much time and energy, and it would be awkward to work with Professor Jigger after challenging him before the Guild. It's really no harder to do it this way, Sarah... trying to please him as far as I can."

"But you can at least take a lunch break."

"I'm sometimes allowed to eat a sandwich in the shop." She thought fleetingly of Remus, to whom her parents had so often condescended. They had made him many, many concessions certainly far more than Professor Jigger had ever made to an employee but even when they allowed a little thing like a lunch break, they had always been so very conscious of how generously they were conceding to him.

"And sometimes they forget to allow it," said Sarah shrewdly. "I think it's time for a rescue mission. If I turned up in the shop at noon tomorrow..."

"Not at noon," said Ariadne quickly. "The shop is busiest between twelve and two. Half our customers *can* only come at that time of day."

"It will be after two, then," said Sarah, with a gleam in her eye. "But we are not leaving you to Jigger's mercies."

* * * * *

Richard Campion bounced into Slug and Jigger's the next afternoon as the clock was striking the half-hour after two. He had just enough tact to buy a quarter-pound of black beetles before grabbing Ariadne's cloak from the wall and announcing, "Come on I've somewhere to take you!"

Ariadne would have preferred not to annoy Professor Jigger. But Richard was obviously too zealous to brook a disappointment, so she followed him out into the pouring rain, hoping the "somewhere" would be indoors, and said only, "Tell me about your new girlfriend."

"I met her in How did you know about that?"

She *should not* have known; nobody had told her anything. "Only guessing. So tell me the rest."

"Mr Waddock sent me to Wigtown last month to negotiate a deal on Nimbus Seventeen Hundreds for the Wanderers, and they gave me a free ticket to their Michaelmas game against the Kestrels. There wasn't a very good turn-out because of the pouring rain, but that made it easier to spot people in the crowd. And I saw this gorgeous nymph sitting quietly with her family and actually enjoying the game." Richard had a long-standing gripe about witches who only attended Quidditch matches to show off their robes and attract wizards.

"And was the gorgeous nymph wanting to go out with you?"

"I didn't ask. She's still at school and she had her father with her I'm not stupid. But I remembered her older brother's name, so I went around to *meditum*, and before long we'd found so much to say about the old days at Hogwarts that he'd invited me to dinner with their family. And I took so little notice of the Pretty One that she was soon flirting with me madly. Now I Floo her every evening in her common room, and in a couple of weeks I'll be meeting her in Hogsmeade. Here, let's find you some food."

They had stopped in front of Let Them Eat Cake, a patisserie displaying a mountain of cream horns and iced buns in its window. There was no evidence of a wholesome sandwich, but the blurb on the window advertised "finest quality tea", so Richard held the door open and guided Ariadne to a chair.

"So what's her name?"

"Natalie. What will you eat?"

"Is that Natalie Selwyn? From the year below us in Slytherin?"

He grinned. "Shocked?"

"I am not, for it's your concern." She could not be shocked; her instinct that the pretty Natalie was shallow and materialistic would be mere inter-house prejudice; and Richard had never yet stayed with one girl long enough for her to do him any harm. After all, her own instinct that Remus Lupin had been her soulmate had been utterly betrayed by the reality of his indifference...

"Can I take your order, sir?" interrupted a vacant-faced matron, stabbing her quill into her notepad with some aggression.

"I'm thinking we have met before," said Ariadne, trying not to assume that the woman was stupid. After all, it was nearly two years since their only meeting, and neither of them had said much. "Are you not Madam Crabbe the grandmother of Victoria and Vincent?"

Madam Crabbe nodded uncertainly, evidently not recognising Ariadne.

Richard took control. "One coffee, one peppermint tea, two currant buns... Do you have anything so healthy as a salad roll?"

The matron looked even more confused, as if adding the question made the whole order too complicated. She doodled on her notepad, then took refuge in the question: "What does your lady-friend want?" She glared at Ariadne for a second, as if daring her to want anything more than was visible at the counter. "And how do you know my grandchildren?"

"We all met at the Christmas party at Malfoy Manor two years ago. You were wearing that holly-patterned robe."

"Yes!" Madam Crabbe broke into a broad grin, apparently remembering the robe with fondness. "The little ones have grown a lot since then. Vicky lost a tooth last week. And Vincy can already ride his broomstick as high as the roof. His father that's my Valerian found him stuck on the chimney last week, not sure how to fly down again. Vincy said he'd been playing at Death Eaters and had caught five Auros "

A glass tumbler crashed to the floor.

"Sorry," said Richard, with no attempt at sounding sincere. *Reparo*. Madam Crabbe, can you bring us a sandwich, or should we try a different shop?"

Madam Crabbe seemed less stupid at this point; she hurried off to fulfil their order.

* * * * *

"Miss MacDougal will *not* be out in a minute," snapped Belladonna Jigger. "She's in training to be an apothecary, so she'll keep the hours that the job requires, not the hours that some outsider dictates."

"The Guild regulations "

"Hipworth's herbiary, who are you to spy on the regulations of the M.E.S.P.? Not an apothecary yourself, are you? Professor and I are becoming pretty tired of this endless stream of gentleman friends who have nothing better to do with their afternoons than pull our apprentice away from her work for wining and dining."

Ariadne entered the shop. Today her rescuer was Horatio Chittock tall, impassive, gracefully ignoring the tirade, and savouring some good news of his own. Ariadne had no time to suppress her instinct that he and Glenda Foster were newly engaged before Madam Jigger spun around to confront her.

"Miss MacDougal, does this one here know how many suitors you have?"

"I'm knowing the laboratory is busy, Madam Jigger, and I'll be back in half an hour."

Horatio opened the door for her, Conjured an umbrella and said, "Half an hour will give us time to walk down to the Wireless Headquarters and back. Glenda is keeping some pumpkin soup hot for you."

"I heard Glenda reading the news last Thursday," said Ariadne. "She has an excellent voice for it; she did not even stumble over the Xhosa names."

Horatio resisted the invitation to talk about Glenda; she should not have jumped to the conclusion that they had news. Instead he asked, "So how many young *mehave* been taking you out to lunch?"

"Richard Campion, Ivor Jones, Sturgis Podmore, my cousin Steady... You bring the count to five. But there is also Emmeline Vance, so it's not only men."

"Miss Webster has her rescue operation well organised. Does she ever come herself?"

"She does not, since I eat dinner with Sarah and Hestia every evening. Nor does Kingsley Shacklebolt, as he is not allowed to leave the Auror training base. So the queue

of 'suits' is far from 'endless'."

They passed the "out to lunch" sign on Horatio's clock shop and kept walking: past the briny odours of Runcorn the fishmonger, past the flashing baubles that advertised Flint's insurance brokerage, past the cow on the door of the Catchlove family's dairy outlet, then through the floral notes that pierced the oriental wafts from Honeysmooth's perfumery, before stopping outside number seventy, the headquarters of the Wizarding Wireless Network.

"Here," said Horatio, once again holding the door open as he Vanished the umbrella. "Glenda is on the first floor. By the way, we are now engaged."

* * * * *

"You might be eating lunch, Ariadne," said Hestia, "but you're working longer and longer into the evenings."

"There's an endless demand for Pepper-up Potion at this time of year," said Ariadne, sinking into the sofa. She was too exhausted to explain to Hestia that it was easier to be overworked; it left no room in her mind for thinking. And she did not want to think. She did not want to ponder what might be in Professor Jigger's secret cupboard; she did not want to consider that she was being exploited; above all, she did not want to think about Remus. She did not even want to re-read her textbook, but she knew Professor Jigger would grill her on it in the morning, so she would have to open it soon.

"I'll bring you food Ariadne, *sit down*. It's in the oven and I'll bring it to you. Ivor followed up your enquiry about the Macnairs."

Ariadne had not even noticed that Ivor was in their flat, but she tried to pay attention when he sat down next to her.

"I asked my supervisor just who it was who slandered me last spring," he said. "Griphook told me that he couldn't care less who had accused me of nose-pokery since I was obviously quite adequate in the matter of bringing home the gold. But it was a valued Gringotts customer of pure-blood heritage, and he wore a red and green tartan monogrammed with little castles. So remind an ignorant half-blood Welshman what colour is the Macnair tartan?"

"Red and green. I'd know it anywhere; my mother brought a dozen blankets of it to Kincarden when she was married."

"No surprises, then. Griphook wouldn't let me guess the man's name; he said that since I had in turn slandered the valued customer, I must consider the matter at quits or he would put me on assignment to a dragon's hoard in China."

Hestia placed a tray on Ariadne's lap. "That explains everything," she said. "Not that it ever was very much of a mystery. It's the Macnairs who've been trying to sabotage your careers because they know you know something about Veleta."

But Ariadne did not feel that it explained very much. Uncle Macnair might have a guilty secret, but they had no proof of this and no way of finding out any more about it. Veleta might be alive; or the face at the window might have been a mere apparition, and Uncle Macnair's anger might be about something quite different.

"But what if I do annoy Griphook?" mused Ivor. "Dragon's hoard sounds exciting, don't you think?"

Hestia was horrified. "Ivor, you *wouldn't!*"

Ariadne let their chatter wash over her because her participation was not really required and she had to read a chapter before bedtime. At first the words danced on the page in front of her, but she forced herself to focus. By the time Sarah arrived home smelling of ylang-ylang musk and draped in clinging crimson satin Ariadne could afford to lay down her copy of *Everyday Medicinal Potions*.

"Sarah, what went wrong?"

"Oh, the usual!" Sarah threw her black fur cape onto an armchair furiously. "I should have stuck with the photographer I'm never going out with our manager again! A French restaurant watercress soup, oysters on ice, salade niçoise, rack of roast lamb in ginger sauce, five cheeses with hothouse grapes, Grand Marnier soufflé, the works together with string quartet and candle-lit shadows and Château Duc de Who Cares burgundy and a gentlemanly *insistence* that I not know the price of anything although there wouldn't have been *much* change out of fifty Galleons no, no, that manager is a Muggle, I'm translating; I'm fairly sure he paid over a hundred pounds for my dinner alone... Then, if you please, he proposes a walk in the park! How sweet, how romantic, we'll gaze at the stars and feed cake crumbs to the swans on the lake, and he'll blow the dewdrops off stolen hyacinths to make a bouquet for me never mind the torrential rain of the last three months! After all, his real plan is to drench me enough to make me want to drink coffee in his bachelor flat... And he can't even wait to reach the flat, for the minute we're alone in the lift he makes a *grab* for me."

She paused theatrically, restraining her hands as if she could not possibly demonstrate exactly where she had been grabbed, so Ariadne provided the correct audience.

"Sarah, how terrifying! How did you throw him off?"

"I pushed him away. And he said he *wasentitled* to me because he'd paid for dinner. After all, why would I have agreed to coffee in his flat if I didn't intend to oblige him? He was an inch away from grabbing again, so I Disapparated."

"How lucky that you kept your wits about you!" said Ariadne, because Sarah was clearly in the mood for being congratulated. She *wasot* in the mood for being reminded that she ought to report the incident to Auror Headquarters however justified, it was a breach of the Statute of Secrecy.

"Sooo..." Having told her story to an appreciative audience, Sarah dismissed the memory of her caddish escort. "I'm going to apply for a new manager. What hav~~you~~*you* been doing today, Ariadne?"

By day she could keep busy. It was over the nights that Ariadne had no control. Remus invaded her dreams; perverse dreams, in which he loved her and begged her to return to him. In her dreams, he gave a rational explanation that she never quite understood, and they laughed together over some joke that she never quite heard. In her dreams, a tame wolf was forever at her side, and they walked together towards a huge full moon.

A Professional Distance

Chapter 16 of 21

Remus is determined to live for his work. But even if he can fool the Muggles, can he really control all the variables?

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

A Professional Distance

Monday 12 November Monday 31 December 1984

All around Nottingham; Hamilton, Lanarkshire; Hogsmeade, the Grampians; Ecclesall, Sheffield.

Rated PG for references to legalised child abuse.

"Remus, did you hurt your face?" asked Valerie.

Remus touched the scratch on his cheek, wondering how serious it really was. "Encounter with a dog," he said. "How did you find the essay on teaching maths?"

"It was "

"Oh, *calamity!*" wailed Claire. "My presentation is *today*, and the O.H.P.'s broken!"

Remus sat quietly, hoping to work out what O.H.P. stood for, while Claire ran her fingers through her green hair. Simon marched up to some Muggle contraption in the corner, jiggled a switch a few times, and muttered that it *seemed* to be connected. He gave the flat surface a hard thump, and the glass replied with a resounding *crack*.

Samantha giggled to Nicky. "It's definitely broken now!"

Simon and Claire stared back at them in horror. "It isn't funny!" Claire protested. "We could be accused of vandalism! And I can't afford to pay for it, can you?"

"They won't make you pay. Simon's the one who broke it," said Nicky.

"I was only trying to help!"

Remus forced his wand back up his sleeve. It would be so easy to throw a *Reparo* at the device. He still wasn't sure what the machine did, or what had been wrong with it even before the glass broke, but he didn't need that information for such a simple repair job. Ariadne could have done it even before he started helping her with her wand-work.

But magic must not be used to solve Muggle problems.

"Fogg's arrived," interrupted Melanie. She dragged herself out of the comfortable chair, and they all trekked out to the lecture theatre opposite.

Remus was last. He lingered in the tutorial room as the theatre doors swung shut behind Valerie. *He must not use magic to solve Muggle problems.* Yet it was such a very small spell to save so very much trouble; and no Muggle would see it, so it was not technically a breach of the Statute of Secrecy.

Technically? They would still notice that a broken object had been suddenly mended and they would remark on how very strange it was. Even though they would never, ever guess how it had happened, they would know that something abnormal was going on. They might even connect the strange event with the presence of the eccentric Remus Lupin. It would confirm their impression that he just didn't *fit in*. Every wizard knew that to make himself conspicuous among the Muggles was the first step to revealing himself as a wizard to betraying the Statute and hence the entire wizarding community.

He walked away resolutely. He would not look back.

"*Reparo!*"

It wasn't until he spoke the word that he knew he had his wand in his hand. He would definitely not do anything like that again.

After an hour of trying to rearrange Dr Fogg's lecturing into something that made sense, Remus had forgotten the incident until Claire squealed from the tutorial room.

"It's fixed!"

Remus lagged back again, not wanting to be caught anywhere near the scene of the crime.

"It can't be, they It *is!* Someone fixed it! How...?"

"Don't *ask!*"

As Remus entered, Valerie was running her hand over the O.H.P. "It certainly doesn't look as if it suffered any damage today, and there hasn't been time to fix it. Are you sure it really broke?"

"Of course it really " began Claire.

"Nah." Simon stopped her. "It was a loud crack and it *felt* bad, but I reckon we exaggerated when we panicked. Look at it that glass was never actually broken."

"Then I expect I'd better set up my presentation." Claire was completely calm; the Muggles had talked themselves out of noticing magic. But Remus knew better than to count on always being able to hide his tracks so successfully.

He was very glad that he had not brought Ariadne into this mess. She was so pure-blooded that she wouldn't have been able to hide her magic for an hour; the Muggles would have known she didn't belong the minute she entered a room.

It turned out that the O.H.P. was a kind of Muggle magic lantern, which Claire was using to show her pictures. Remus wasn't quite sure how photographs of children at the local playgroup, accompanied by enthusiastic anecdotes of their games, illustrated the theories of Lev Vygotsky, but perhaps it made sense to their tutor.

* * * * *

"Do you really think they'll ban corporal punishment?" asked Melanie, spreading her gipsy skirt over the carpeted steps.

"No, it's all talk," said Nicky. "They've been lobbying it for years, but nothing ever changes. The tawse will always be legal, and there will always be some schools that refuse to use it."

"It's a *cane* in England," Simon reminded her. "And here's a hint I'm going to give my pupils. If you go to be caned, don't hold your hand out flat, with the muscles tight. Hold it loose, with the muscles relaxed, and it doesn't hurt so much."

Samantha giggled. "Ooooh, were you caned a lot, Simon?"

"Only twice; once for starting a fight and once for walking on the roof. It was rare at my school. What about at yours?"

Remus remembered the legends of Apollyon Pringle, whose Flagellus Jinx had been said to leave permanent scars in multiple colours. Dumbledore had put a stop to the torture before Remus had started Hogwarts, but the *Daily Prophet* throughout his schooldays had been peppered with regular petitions to "bring back the Flagellus". Remus couldn't remember reading one since the war ended; either Dumbledore had carried his point, or the enthusiasm for inflicting pain had died with Voldemort's downfall.

"... What about you, Remus? Where did you go to school?"

"Oh... up north. They never beat us, but it was extremely easy to get detention. I had a friend who served a detention just about every week, and *he* managed to become Head Boy."

"I never found detention much of a deterrent myself," said Brian. "Often you didn't serve it before the next week. If you want to knock kids into shape, you need to do it on the spot. A ruler across the knuckles at the scene of crime is worth a week of detentions."

"But that's secondary school," Valerie reminded them all. "Primary schools don't go for the rough treatment. Perhaps they should; a good smack never did permanent harm. I've no idea how I'm going to manage a class. Any ideas?"

Brian frowned at Claire, as if she were the pupil who needed the good smack.

Startled, she let the tuna and cucumber drop out of her sandwich. "I expect I know how to mark a register, but I'm really dreading writing all those reports."

Samantha giggled. "That's not what she meant, Claire. She was asking how you plan to control children's behaviour. You know, punishments and stuff."

"Well, how will *you*?"

"Haven't thought yet. I'm too busy with last week's essay." Samantha giggled again.

"You'd have to stop giggling like that, for a start," said Valerie.

"That's right, the 'never smile in the first week' rule," said Nicky. "Actually, there's some sense in that advice. If you pile up the homework and detentions at first, they start behaving, and then you can ease up later. But you can use rewards too. Stars on charts, elephant stickers, class storytime and so on."

"What's the big deal with controlling people anyway?" asked Simon. "I don't have a problem with letting kids run around and play a bit. I always hated those teachers who claimed you weren't learning unless they could hear the classroom clock ticking."

"The problem is that if you let kids run wild, they will," said Brian. "That's what's happening nowadays kids are so wild that you can only teach them if you use serious punishments."

Melanie's jaw dropped with horror. "Just what do you mean by a serious punishment?"

"I mean putting electric shocks in the canes."

Ariadne would not have found that funny, but Samantha giggled again. Melanie declared that she did not believe in punishments. "Children are good when they're happy. Hasn't anyone thought of being nice and winning them with love?"

Several people looked sceptical at this point. Remus tried not to think of all the times he had teased Professor Flitwick.

Jackie, the bespectacled girl, lifted her nose from her book and used tact. "That could work well with the reception class, Melanie."

Brian snorted. "And what's your plan, Miss Know-All?"

Jackie shrugged. "I don't have one yet. It's obvious that children mustn't be left to get bored; if the lesson is interesting enough they won't think to misbehave. But school can't be fun and games all the time... So, no, I'm just hoping I'll pick it up as I go."

Remus tried to remember which Hogwarts teachers had never had a behaviour problem in their lessons. There had never been serious disrespect towards Sprout or Slughorn, but they had allowed a level of background chatter that just didn't work for, say, Transfiguration. Of course, everyone was always absolutely silent for McGonagall, but it wasn't because of anything she *did*, but simply the way she *was* when she walked into a room. Ariadne might have been able to explain that quality, but Remus had no idea how to capture it, or whether he could ever learn it.

He wondered how Ariadne would manage a classroom full of unruly Year Six Muggles. Probably she would approach them one by one and try to "win them with love". But he couldn't imagine that method working with a young Mulciber or Avery. The truth was, he couldn't really imagine Ariadne as a teacher. Her voice was too soft; she disliked demanding obedience; and sooner or later, without even realising she was doing it, she would find herself using magic.

"Oh, no!" wailed Samantha. "My little sister's scribbled all over this library book it's ruined!"

Remus resisted the temptation to throw a *Tergeo* at the purple wax crayon.

* * * * *

He was going to be happy at work. He wondered if he would ever be happy at home. The house in Nottingham seemed very large for one person, and the pile of books in his study seemed very unresponsive company. After being professional all day, he wanted to speak to a friend in the evenings. He wondered if Ariadne still thought of him, and decided that she probably didn't. She had had five months now to congratulate herself on her lucky escape from a werewolf. Meanwhile, she had the support of her old friends, her budding career, and constant opportunities to meet people, many of whom would become new friends.

I have a new career too, he reminded himself, because he didn't want to dwell on the friend-shortage. With his first round of exams approaching, he probably needed the pile of books more than he needed a friend. He should count himself lucky to be able to spend the next three weeks utterly divorced from human company. So he made himself study.

Fortunately the full moon fell just before the exams; Remus was more or less well by the time he first entered the exam hall. There was nothing conceptually difficult about the material he had learned, nothing tricky about the exam questions: both "how to teach maths" and "early childhood development" seemed a great deal easier than mastering Potions. The exams were well-spaced, and he left the exam hall for the last time with no fears about his performance.

* * * * *

"Question three was a horror," said Simon. He was nursing a beer in the parlour of the Little John and the extra safety pin through his eyebrow made him look quite jaunty. "What *is* the difference between 'authoritive' and 'authoritan'?"

Claire groaned. "Let's not do the whole exam *again*. Especially as it's too late to get any marks." Her hair was blue today.

"I've failed, I know I've failed everything," Melanie moaned. "There was disaster in my tarot reading this morning."

"Then drown your sorrows in another drink," said Valerie briskly. "My shout, I think."

Remus leaned further back into his corner, making his one tomato juice last an hour. He hadn't yet absorbed that the term was over. He was still adjusting to the idea that today's exam really had been the last one. There would be three weeks without lectures, without essays, without discussions in the college library.

It was dark outside, but not so dark that he could Disapparate without being noticed, so he walked on home, wondering for the first time what he would do about Christmas. It was not only being alone on Christmas Day but having over two weeks of unscheduled time that bothered him. His only remaining family were an aunt in Canada (who always sent a very friendly Christmas card) and an uncle in Manchester (who had severed all pretence at contact since the death of his parents, almost as if he believed that Remus had died too). In the end he shelled out a Galleon for a box of chocolates and went to visit Mrs Pettigrew.

"You're the only one who comes to visit me," said Mrs Pettigrew mournfully, as if Remus had been in the habit of visiting regularly. "It's been three years, you know, and public sympathy has dried up. Nobody remembers my brave wee Peter any more." She indicated a small table, covered with a red velvet cloth, which was cluttered with photographs of Peter and a scrapbook of his meagre life achievements. Propped up in the centre was a pasteboard covered with a newspaper découpage.

"I've kept every newspaper clipping," said Mrs Pettigrew, eyeing off her chocolates in a way that Remus found strangely uncomfortable. "I pasted up everything that ever appeared in the *Daily Prophet*, or *The Quibbler*, or the *Witch Weekly*, or even the Muggle press about my little Peter. That table is a kind of shrine to him. It's such a pity that the world has forgotten how *heroic* he was."

"It won't be forgotten by anyone who actually knew him," said Remus, wondering why it felt so awkward to discuss his friend.

"But that's only you and me, Remus," said Mrs Pettigrew, clutching convulsively at her chocolates, so that the corner of the box was dented. "He had no other real friends who are still alive. His dear father passed away the year before he did, and even his sister seems to have forgotten. But I keep my lonely vigil every, every day. You see that silver box on the table?"

Remus nodded, trying not to feel repelled by what was coming.

"That's *it*. Him. All that's left of Peter. Take a look if you like, Remus. His index finger is all that's left of him."

Remus had to look, but he wondered why he wasn't in the mood to oblige Mrs Pettigrew. He ought to feel sorry for her, after all she had lost, but somehow he found himself wondering if she had enjoyed all the media attention when Peter had died.

* * * * *

It was a relief to spend the rest of the weekend at home, sorting out his stationery supplies and reading through *What to Expect in the Classroom: the B.Ed. Student's Guide to Teaching Rounds*. But of course the relief did not last. By the third day of solitary confinement, he found himself wondering if it would be so very wrong to walk down to Diagon Alley and call on Emmeline Vance... collect the news, find out whom she'd been seeing... He jerked his mind away from that idea. *I might just as well take a trip to Azkaban and ask to visit Sirius Black!*

So he took himself out every day. He walked between the red buildings of Castle Wharf or the bare trees of Sherwood Forest, imagining that Wormtail and Prongs were racing through the trees with him. When imagination expired, he resorted to being jostled by frantic Muggle shoppers in the Victoria Centre, watching them pay high prices on Christmas Eve and low ones on Boxing Day, listening to the railway clock tower strike away the hours until he could return to college and wondering what Ariadne would have to say about a Muggle Potions enterprise like Boots... He squashed that idea too. Why on earth was he contemplating that Ariadne might want to live in a place like Nottingham?

Eight full days of living like Robinson Crusoe on an urban island was all that anyone could stand. On the ninth evening he boredly toyed with the idea of Apparating to Diagon Alley, simply to see something different from the walls of his own house. Most places would be closed, but there would be enough people around to give the illusion of company. In the end his better judgment prevailed, and he went instead to Hogsmeade, where one shop in every four had been open but was now closing down for the evening. Enough people were spilling in and out of the buildings to make the village look alive, and the taverns were brightly lit and still doing a roaring trade he had forgotten that it was New Year's Eve. While there was little chance of actually meeting anyone he knew, he wondered if he could blend into the crowd for a while, walk along with them without entering a tavern, and fool himself into believing he had company

"Oi, Remus!"

So much for that theory. Sturgis Podmore was walking out of the Three Broomsticks.

"Good to see you," said Sturgis, because Sturgis was usually pleased to see everyone. "What are you doing here? Are you going to Emmeline's tonight?"

Remus had time to reflect that Sturgis was harmless, and probably the nearest thing in all the world that he presently had to a friend. "What are you doing here?" he countered. "Don't you work in London?"

"Yes, I'm still with the Ministry, but the Leaky Cauldron is packed with rowdy types I like it better at Rosmerta's. My workmates are just having their third round, but I want to be sober for this evening. You haven't answered my question yet are you going to Emmeline's?"

"She didn't invite me this time."

"Well, she wasn't very formal with the invitations; she and her grandmother ran up the party at the last minute when they realised that a dozen of their friends hadn't been invited anywhere. I'm sure it would be all right if you came along. You aren't doing anything else, are you?"

Remus had to admit that he wasn't.

Sturgis kept him chatting in the street for several minutes, asking what he was doing now, and why he hadn't kept in touch. Remus countered with questions about Sturgis's own life, although Sturgis kept saying he had nothing to tell. "Still working for the Department of Transportation. Still living in the Clapham house and still have too much mortgage on it. Still don't have a girlfriend. Still hoping to visit Romania one day... Which reminds me, why didn't you come to Wales with us last summer?"

"Money was one reason."

"And anti-social mood was another? You've hidden yourself for months now... Anyway, you won't tonight. You're coming to Emmeline's, right?"

Remus still hesitated. "Where does she live? I'm not sure I can take myself there unsplined."

"She's still living with her grandmother in Sheffield. You know the house; we had Order meetings there. Come on!"

There was no time for further protests, because Sturgis immediately Disapparated, and Remus had nothing to do but follow him. A second later they were both standing in the porch of the smart Regency terrace in Ecclesall. Sturgis rapped at the door, and a not-very-elderly lady in a ruby-red shawl let them in.

"It's Mr Podmore, isn't it? Emmeline is in the drawing room, but come through to the kitchen first; we've made mulled wine. And your friend ... We have met before ... Yes, you're Remus Lupin, aren't you? Young man, I'm Matilda Plumpton."

Remus followed Madam Plumpton down to the kitchen, accepted the hot wine, then accompanied Sturgis back to the drawing room and looked around at the strangers. At

least half of them were over ninety years old, clearly a cohort of Madam Plumpton's generation. The rest were young, presumably Emmeline's friends. He scanned the crowd for Emmeline herself, hoping that this really was the sort of party to which Sturgis was allowed to bring a random uninvited guest. Sturgis evidently spotted an acquaintance, because he started off across the drawing room, knocking his head against mistletoe and tinsel as he went. Remus followed him a couple of paces, then stopped dead in his tracks.

He was staring straight into the Gaelic-blue eyes of Ariadne MacDougal.

A/N. Nicky was wrong. Corporal punishment was abolished in British government schools only three years later.

The White Flowers of Surrender

Chapter 17 of 21

An exchange of messages, verbal and otherwise.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The White Flowers of Surrender

Monday 31 December 1984 Saturday 26 January 1985

Diagon Alley, London; Old Basford, Nottingham.

Rated PG for emotional complexity.

She was sitting sideways on a striped Regency sofa, her hair caught up in a pretty Celtic-knot clasp, chatting to Glenda Foster. Her face froze the instant she saw him, and what little colour she had in her cheeks drained out.

"Good evening, ladies," said Sturgis. "I hope I'm not interrupting anything too private."

"Oh, no," said Glenda. "We were talking about our jobs. Come and tell us about yours, Sturgis."

Sturgis folded his long legs onto the ground at their feet and admitted, "Mine's boring. But I've been hearing you quite regularly on the Wireless, Glenda. How did the W.W.N. discover your talents?"

Ariadne had not moved. As Glenda repeated to Sturgis her description of her job interviews followed by a glowing description of two personal meetings with the great Celestina Warbeck Ariadne sat like a statue, unable to tear her eyes away. Remus saw Sturgis jerk his head to beckon him over; he heard Glenda's exclamation as she recognised him and made the invitation verbal; yet nothing registered; the vague feeling that some kind of social response was required washed over him without any indication of what that response should be.

Ariadne was *here*.

She was real. And in front of him. Here.

The only social reality that did register was that she was as much mesmerised as he was. She didn't know what to do about this unexpected meeting. And nor did he.

Glenda was moving over and telling him to sit on the sofa. Next to Ariadne. He couldn't judge the appropriateness of this instruction, but it was an instruction in a situation where no other cues existed, so, like a sleepwalker, he moved over and sat down.

"Are you all right, Remus? You look as if you've just seen a ghost." He did understand that question, but Sturgis didn't seem to expect an answer.

"You look as if you haven't eaten properly for weeks," said Glenda. "Are you sure you're keeping sensible hours, Remus? Are you living with people who understand about balanced meals?"

Wide of the mark, he thought. *No ghosts. Nothing to do with diet.*

Suddenly he pulled himself together. "Good evening, Glenda. I'm living alone, as it happens. Carry on about Celestina. Do you think she'll agree to a Wireless interview?"

Encouraged by Sturgis, Glenda carried on. Remus didn't have to say anything except "Um" and "Really?" because Sturgis supplied so many real questions. But he quickly realised that a sofa, no matter how long, is really only designed for two people. He was entirely blocking Glenda's view of Ariadne. If he turned around to face Ariadne, Glenda would be in turn blocked out of the conversation. He tried leaning back and facing straight ahead and found that the girls could now see each other, but he could not see either of them. A sidelong glance suggested that Ariadne had unfrozen, but she still had nothing to say. She was *there*, her arm an inch from his, and she was breathing. But she was obviously not thinking about Celestina Warbeck.

"Oh, don't be so anti-social, Remus," said Sturgis. "What *do* you think?"

"It would be fine," said Remus automatically, trying to decipher the words that had flowed around his head. Glenda hoped for *what-show*. That meant...? She wanted to interview Celestina Warbeck on the Wireless, but that wasn't strictly news. But she hoped to move out of news into a *chat-show*. An interview could open the door the front door? Who was at the door? No, an interview would *provide the opportunity* to do something a little different. However, it seemed a little ambitious to ask for her own show when she had worked for the Wireless for only fifteen months...

"I don't think it's too ambitious," he tried again. "You have a good speaking voice, Glenda. It shouldn't be stifled by reading only what other people have written."

"That's what Ariadne said," said Glenda, "but I was just trying to explain, when you two arrived, how hard it is to do anything independent in the broadcast industry. *Everyone* wants those creative jobs, and there are only so many programming spots in the week."

Ariadne was still sitting an inch away from his right. He could hear her every breath. He knew that his arrival had thrown her off balance. Why hadn't Glenda noticed that

Ariadne had stopped speaking? He shouldn't be here. But how could he extract himself from the situation? He scanned the room, hardly knowing what he was looking for, but *feeling* that Ariadne was marking his gaze.

Finally his eye lighted upon their hostess. Emmeline was turning around from the opposite sofa, at which she had just seated Dedalus Diggle next to Arabella Figg, and she made her way over to greet them.

"So glad you could come, Sturgis," she said. "And it was really clever of you to winkle Remus out of wherever he hides nowadays. Can I fetch you anything?"

Ariadne sprang to her feet. "I'll help you, Emmeline," she said. "I'm expecting that lots of people would like more drinks."

Emmeline displayed no surprise at Ariadne's eagerness and said, "Perhaps we should bring the mulled wine in here. We have trays in the kitchen."

Remus tried not to watch Ariadne's retreating back. She had not been at all glad to see him. It was so unlike Ariadne not to know what to say to him. Clearly, she had *not* yet become indifferent to him. She must still think about him. Perhaps she even thought about him fairly often.

He had been wise to give her a wide berth.

He had been unwise to attend a party hosted by a mutual friend. He ought to have guessed that Ariadne might be among the guests.

And now she would avoid him all evening.

Remus wondered how many more months it would be before he accidentally met Ariadne again. *Many*, he told himself firmly, *since I shall be more careful in future to avoid mutual friends.*

Yet he did owe her an explanation. Otherwise he had abandoned her to endless limbo.

How would he manage such a complicated operation without appearing to encourage her to keep thinking of him?

By the time he had collected his thoughts enough to realise that he should follow her into the kitchen and ask what troubled her, he was too late. Emmeline told him that Ariadne had already taken the Floo home.

* * * * *

Four evenings later, a Post Office owl dropped a letter through Ariadne's window. Her heart leapt to her throat. She *knew* that handwriting, even though it was impossible.

Why, after so many months of silence, should Remus write to her? If the letter was so short if it said no more than "Happy New Year" why was he bothering? That scrap of parchment should have burst into flame and burned her robes should have burned *her* if it said anything worth reading. Yet, somehow, she was able to open it. And it really was from Remus.

Ariadne,

I apologise for failing six months ago to give a clearer explanation of why I was breaking off contact. At the time a clean break seemed wisest, and I assumed that you would know really that you were better off without me. Now I accept that it was too sudden and mysterious. I should have spelled it out and trusted you to accept my reasoning, even if you didn't like it.

I hope this clears it up.

I have taken your advice and enrolled in a Muggle college, where I'm learning to be a teacher for Muggle schools. I am happy sometimes; write back to tell me that you are happy too.

Remus.

Nothing was any clearer. If it had been "mysterious" then if he ought to have "spelled it out" then why did he not "spell it out" now? He yet gave no reason why the "clean break seemed wisest", so of course she could not understand why she was supposed to be "better off without him". As for being happy, she could only claim that she was trying, but that happiness was very hard work.

She had been awkward with him at a party, so he had written in order to tell her nothing at all.

The only change was that he *had* written.

She had no intention of replying tonight; he had kept her waiting for four days, and it would be demeaning a most undignified over-eagerness and even whining to force herself on his attention in less time than that. Instead, she read the last of the scientific papers on what was already known about Appetite Suppressant drugs. She hated the project; she writhed in boredom at the thought of developing it; but Professor Jigger always had said that she had to start her own calculations in the New Year, so there was no room for further procrastination.

It was not until Wednesday that she borrowed Thangalaathil and sent him to Nottingham. She knew that Remus would read the letter, but he would have no reason to reply to it unless he really was hiding something. No matter. She had forgotten why she had wanted him to have the last word between them; it did not seem important now.

* * * * *

Dear Remus,

I'm writing by the light of the full moon, thinking of you, hoping you are safe, and trusting you will be well again by the time this reaches you. What do you do at this time of month? Have you a friend with you?

Thank you for clarifying what happened. I am grateful for your attentions during my final year at Hogwarts and I am only sorry to have made a fool of myself by reading too much into your interest, for I heard what I was wanting to hear instead of what you were actually telling me. I thought I understood people, but I realise now that I gave way to wishful thinking.

It was doubtless good for me to face up to my own vanity and conceit. I assumed that I knew you better than anybody; if I could be so mistaken about what was happening between you and me, then my judgment about everybody and everything is worthless. I once accused my Cousin Lucius of being a Death Eater, but I had no proof. I nearly set off on a wild goose chase to prove that Veleta Vablatsky was yet alive, wasting time and money to invade the privacy of people of whose guilt there was no real evidence. I have been tempted to distrust even Professor Jigger, to whom I owe my future livelihood. There seems no end to the possible mistakes that I could have made.

So I have had a timely lesson in not believing anything without due evidence. I will accept this caution as my lasting gift from you, my greatest teacher.

Ariadne.

She had not answered his only question: she had not stated that she was happy. She had spent the last six months missing him a great deal more than he had considered possible, perhaps almost as much as he had missed her. And there was more at stake in her life than whether or not she spoke to him. She had said so: *I thought I understood people, but I realise now that I gave way to wishful thinking... I assumed that I knew you better than anybody; if I could be so mistaken about what was happening between you and me, then my judgment about everybody and everything is worthless.*

He knew that her self-confidence had been severely dented; doubting her judgment about him was actually causing her to doubt her judgment about everything else.

I did this to her... No. It had to be done. I am a werewolf. In the long term, she will be happier without me.

But how long would "long term" be?

It seemed that he owed her an explanation. But how could he explain that she had read him correctly unless he also implied impossible promises in his explanation?

* * * * *

It was only one more day before she held his answer.

Ariadne,

Of course you were not mistaken. Nor am I in denial. What happened between us is not in question. You are dearer to me than anyone on earth. I still think of you every hour. Is that clear enough?

I am sorry that I under-estimated your affection for me: I did not seriously believe you would still be thinking of me all these months later.

The essential point, however, is unchanged, for it is not about love. You have no future with me. *Trust me on this one: it's a lucky werewolf who even has friends, and a fantastically self-centred one who has a lover. One day you will be grateful that you escaped from me so easily.*

Please continue to trust your instincts. No one knows people better than you do. You were right about me, and you are probably right about everyone else too. In particular, I wouldn't for a moment trust Arsenius Jigger to serve anyone but himself; if you try to treat him as trustworthy, you are certain to meet trouble.

Meanwhile, console yourself, as I do, with the knowledge that you have been profoundly loved.

Remus.

That night she fell asleep with the letter in her hand and she slept deeply for the first time since Remus had left.

The next day she went to work cheerfully. *Everything is all right.* She handed another of the blue-bowed bottles over to Manjula Patil without a second thought. *Mrs Patil does no evil.* She was sure of that, certain of an unspoken, unproved fact for the first time in six months.

She did not ask why she was kept behind to mix potions for all of Saturday afternoon. *What does it matter if Professor Jigger cheats me, so long as I'm knowing he's cheating?*

She almost laughed out loud when Belladonna complained that she was lazy and careless. *Madam Jigger has nothing against me; she complains about everybody equally.* It was miraculous how sure she was about the world.

Remus does love me.

Even when she returned home to an empty flat, her mood sobered only a little. Sarah was out to dinner. Hestia had gone to a Hobgoblins concert with Ivor. The owl's perch was empty, so Thangalaathil must have been out on an errand. Even Simba and Bast were asleep on the sofa. There was nothing to do except drink the tomato soup that Hestia had left out for her at lunch time, tidy away the piles of clothes that Sarah had strewn all over the living room and hall, and then sit down at the kitchen table to re-read Remus's letter, even though she now knew it by heart.

However comforting the sentiment, there was no question that it was a message of dismissal.

And however much Remus demanded that she respect his right to be unselfish, there was no question of allowing herself to be dismissed without a fight. Not when the stake was *his* happiness as well as hers.

The question was, what kind of reply would be most likely to persuade him.

* * * * *

Dear Remus,

It's a great relief to know that I can trust my own perceptions. I am yet becoming used to looking at the world clearly again. It's made my life a great deal more negotiable. For the last few days I have indeed been happy sometimes.

Remus, why are you only happy "sometimes"? Does it not make you happy to be thinking that you will become a teacher? Are you not glad to live among people who will never suspect your lycanthropy because they are not believing the condition exists? Is not your conscience easy now that you have done your duty and more towards me?

Or have you been over-scrupulous in throwing away happiness (mine as well as yours)? Is the wolf the only reason that you hold aloof from me? The wolf is only dangerous when it is loosed; it hurts nobody but you when it is locked away. I have already helped you lock away the wolf several times and covered its tracks from the prying eyes of the unsympathetic world. Please do not tell me that I cannot handle the wolf.

Tell me instead that you will be my friend, and I promise not to ask for more than friendship. With brutal honesty I can assure you that friendship alone will be almost *enough*.

Ariadne.

"Almost enough." He knew only too well that she was right. Friendship alone was not enough, but it truly was almost enough, and enormously better than nothing. But giving her nothing was probably the best way to protect her since she had very obviously missed the point.

It did not occur to him that, by answering her letter, he was entering the debate and very tangibly giving her something. He composed his reply on the same day, between planning his science project and re-reading the chapter on how to teach the multiplication table.

* * * * *

Dear Ariadne,

This week I am doing what the Muggles call teaching rounds. I go to a primary school and assist the teacher in the classroom, sometimes teaching the class myself. Yes, I did have to begin a day late because I was "sick" the Monday before last, but the Muggles never question the excuse of winter flu. I enjoy the work, my secrets are safe, and of course I still miss you.

What I need to explain to you, with some force, is that missing you is not the issue. Becoming a wolf once a month is only a small part of the lycanthropic problem. (Now that I am living in my own house, there is in any case less trouble with my Transformations; I can lock myself in the garage, as I did when I was a child.) Even the recovery days are not a huge problem; I can bind the injuries and sleep off the exhaustion, and I am well by the time the gibbous moon rises. Yes, I do accept that you handle that aspect of the problem better than most people; but don't be so naïve as to assume that managing the Transformations would manage the whole problem.

You have seen with your own eyes what can be done to werewolves. I cannot promise that I will never hurt anyone, and I certainly cannot promise that no unscrupulous person will ever use me to hurt some third party. Let me remind you that I once nearly killed your cousin Severus if James Potter had not been at hand to save the situation, Severus would have died and society would have blamed me for killing him. Connell Dewar was less fortunate he had no friend, and some Dark witch tricked him into committing a gruesome murder. Because episodes like these can and do happen, werewolves are distrusted and shunned.

You need to understand that I am a marked man. Every wizard in Britain has access to the Werewolf Registry. Even if employers forget to check my background, in the end they don't want to employ the "unreliable" type who mysteriously vanishes once a month and then comes home sick. Your brother's attitude was absolutely typical. Professor Dumbledore is the only wizard who has ever willingly employed me after knowing the truth.

No job means no money. A life of lycanthropy is a life of poverty. I am luckier than most in owning a house; few werewolves ever possess so much. Even as it is, I often do not know how I will feed myself from one week to the next. (I am presently living off savings, which will run out in about eighteen months, leaving me unable to finance my final year at college.) It is out of the question that I shall ever be in a position to support a family aside from the safety problems that would arise if a werewolf were so foolish as to have children!

A werewolf finds social life as difficult as working life. It is a life where friendly overtures are often spurned, where casual acquaintances rarely wish to know us better, where few friends remain loyal for long, where officials who know our condition politely show us out of public buildings and merchants who know it will not even buy from or sell to us.

In a word, it is a life of lies. Every new place, every new person, every new situation represents a game of "how long can I hide the truth?" When I deceive those who trust me, as I deceived your parents, I have the chance of normal work and friendship. But these deceptions close the door to close friendships, for intimacy relies on telling the truth.

There is one other option for a werewolf, the one that I am currently taking. We can live among Muggles. They believe our lies about the nature of our illnesses; they do not check registries before they work or learn or eat with us; they think they are our friends. But they are friends whom we are doubly deceiving, for we are pretending to them that magic does not exist. There can be no intimacy amid such deceit.

Ariadne, this isn't the life that I want for you. You need to live in a community where you can tell the truth, where you will be accepted on your own terms, where you can rely on your friends, where you will find work easily, where you can one day have children. You cannot have any of those things with me.

If you tried to be with me, I think in the end you would resent that I had dragged you into this lifestyle. Love could not survive that kind of betrayal; in addition to all the other components of despair, you would be tied to a man whom you could not love. I would rather remember you as the woman who did love me once.

Remus.

As soon as she saw the envelope, she knew that the battle was half won. Despite the forbidding tone of the content, she knew that if he had bothered to write so many words, he wanted her to reply, and if he wanted a reply, he was persuadable. It was not until the fifth reading that she recognised the flaw in his logic.

She wondered if she dared to correct him; he could out-logic her any day. Yet, this time, he was *wrong*. And he was susceptible to logic. If only she could make herself hold onto the argument for long enough to expose the flaw she could do logic if she forced herself she knew that he would concede the point.

* * * * *

Dear Remus,

You did not answer my question. Is friendship not on the agenda?

As to anything more, I am not understanding your argument. Can you prove that I would never find work simply because I was associated with you? You have the misfortune to be shunned by employers, but it does not follow that I would be unable to set up my own business, or even that Professor Jigger would terminate my apprenticeship, simply because I knew you.

Are you believing you will always be poor? Perhaps you would rather not work among Muggles, but once you are a teacher, you will certainly not starve. And why should I be poor after I become a journeyman?

You have not as many friends as you would like, but does it follow that you are doomed to have none? Emmeline and Sturgis know your secret, and they would be friends if you would let them. Hestia, Ivor, Kingsley and Glenda all showed a great deal of compassion to Connell Dewar: why should they shun you? Or me for knowing you?

Whatever some fearful people might do to us, there will always be other people to whom we will be able to tell the truth. There will always be somebody else to love.

It seems that you are proposing that we forswear the certain happiness of being together because of the possible unhappiness that awaits us later. Instead, you wish us to embrace the certain unhappiness of separation, because it might possibly lead to an absence of unhappiness (a negative happiness) later. It strikes me as highly irrational to give up a certain good of a definite nature in order to obtain a possible good of an indefinite but negative nature; to choose a certain evil in order to avoid a possible evil that might, in fact, never occur.

I do not believe that adversity necessarily kills love, but there is only one way to find out. Stop avoiding me, and allow us to live it out naturally. Even if we

lose the gamble (which I am not believing we will), we will at least have a certain happiness meantime.

Remus, are you happy without me? If you are, say so, and I will never trouble you again. If you are not, consider that I am certainly not happy without you. This is a matter of absolute indifference to the rights and wishes of every other person on the planet; it concerns only you and me. Is there a reason why we should not be happy?

Ariadne.

She waited until Monday, another five days, before she sent the owl to Nottingham.

On Saturday the snow began to melt, and Ariadne could once again feel the cobbles under her shoes on the way to work. Professor Jigger met her at the door of the shop in a very bad mood.

"Miss MacDougal, is this your doing?"

An empty-clawed owl swooped over Jigger's head and outwards to the fresh air. Ariadne stepped over the threshold.

"Owls all ruddy morning, before we're even open. That was the fifth. Did you ask your stupid friends to send them?"

"I did not, sir." There was no sign of any letters in the shop.

"It's all out the back in the laboratory," Jigger complained. "Dropping their stuff all over the place."

Ariadne stopped in the doorway to the laboratory, realising what he meant. The laboratory was full of flowers.

Not just formal bouquets, such as a florist might package, but garlands, trails, even individual blooms, dropped all over the place. No wonder it had taken five owls to bring them all. All the flowers were white. There were roses, lilies, violets... She wondered for a moment if it were not some mistake in an order for herbs since there was nothing in writing to indicate that the flowers were for her. But it was obvious that neither Professor nor Madam Jigger wanted them.

She picked up a bunch, and suddenly realised that it contained a message. Somebody had researched herbology symbols quite thoroughly. White roses, the symbol of "aspiring love"; lily-of-the-valley, meaning "humility" and "return to happiness"; white heather, which usually meant "protection", but some herbologists used it for "wishes come true"; mistletoe, for "difficulties surmounted"; even white nasturtiums (which was impossible, was it not? But definitely, they were nasturtiums) for "victory". Best of all, wreath upon wreath of white violets, signalling "let's take a chance on happiness".

"Who sent this rubbish?" asked Madam Jigger.

"There is no card," she replied truthfully. But of course she knew who had sent them.

"It'll throw pollen into the potions. It's not *allowed*, do you hear? If it happens again, you're out of here."

"I'm thinking you're not needing to worry, Madam Jigger. It's not real. All these flowers are Conjured." Ariadne began to pick them up and pile them onto her desk. The white flowers looked, even smelled, real, but she was sure they were not real. They had no long-term chemical or physical properties. They would vanish in a matter of hours.

White flowers, for surrender.

The Green Shoots of Assault

Chapter 18 of 21

The Macnairs send a message to Ariadne.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Green Shoots of Assault

Saturday 26 January 1985 Thursday 11 April 1985

Diagon Alley, London; various Muggle streets in the north of central London.

Rated PG-13 for violence.

It was after the flowers had faded into nothingness that Ariadne heard Belladonna Jigger shouting at somebody in the shop. She corked the last decanter, then left the empty cauldron to see what was happening. Remus was standing very quietly at the counter while Belladonna's angry words washed over him. His face broke into a smile when he saw Ariadne.

"Remus, I'll be out in a minute. I have a cauldron to clean first." It was three o' clock; Ariadne would normally expect to be on her feet for at least another three hours. The Jiggers would be angry if she left the shop before they gave her permission, but she doubted they were able to feel *hurt* over such an occurrence, whereas Remus would be hurt, and perhaps misled, if she made him wait until evening. "Madam Jigger, I'm believing I have to adhere to Guild regulations just for today. I'll tidy the laboratory, then see you again on Monday morning."

Ten minutes later, Remus was closing the front door of Slug and Jigger's behind them, and they set off across the snowy cobblestones. The winter sunlight was just beginning to fade, and there was no trace of a moon in the sky. They did not speak until Ariadne pushed open the door to the side of Madam Malkin's. "It's more like afternoon tea time now, but you will not be avoiding lunch so easily today. Honestly, Remus, you're looking as if you have not eaten for a week."

"You're making personal remarks, Miss MacDougal!"

"I thought that was the whole idea." She flew up the stairs before he had time to reply. He followed hard on her heels.

They stopped outside the door on the second landing and looked at each other. He was laughing at her, although she had not made a joke, and she knew that she had *caught* his laugh and was laughing back for no reason at all. His face was too thin, the skin stretched too tightly over his prominent bones, and the largeness of his grey eyes might equally well be the result of happiness or of hunger. But the ice was broken; he was at ease with her, and this time she knew what to say to him.

She tapped her wand against the lock, and the front door swung open. "I live here," she said.

An hour later, after Remus had Vanished the toast crumbs and Ariadne had washed the mugs, she asked him, "Why are you yet afraid of me?"

He fell silent. She moved from the opposite chair to the one next to him, and he looked her in the eye. "Ariadne, whatever it is that's happening between us... I've promised you that I'll play it out for the term of its natural life, and I will. But I don't seriously believe that the 'natural life' will be anything other than short. Perhaps 'nasty and brutish' too."

"Short? Are you planning to change your mind about me?"

"Of course I won't be the one to change my mind. But now that you've left school now that there are no enforced absences, and I can't be useful to you, and we aren't dabbling in the forbidden what is there left to fuel your inexplicable infatuation?"

She smothered her first instinct to lean against him and caress his shoulder with her forehead somehow, it was very clear that physical touch was yet against the rules. She also smothered her second instinct, to be angry with him for under-estimating her, as if she were a child who had a crush on her teacher. They had time; she would let him see that he was needing to revise his judgment of her. She even smothered the obvious words, "There is *ye*you," because she knew he would not believe her.

Instead, she said, "If you're wanting to be *useful*, there is something you can do."

He looked almost too eager.

"But only if you promise that your own inexplicable infatuation will not die of starvation as soon as the useful part is over."

"No danger of that."

She Summoned a red folder from her room. "Here. This is where I'm keeping information about my friend Veleta Vablatsky. This photograph was taken shortly before she disappeared." It showed a teenaged girl posing with Professor Vablatsky beside a large crystal ball. Both had distinctive long-lashed, chocolate-brown eyes and thick, curly, chocolate-brown hair.

"After you started... speaking to me again, I realised I could not have been absolutely wrong about everything, so I decided to open Veleta's file again. I asked Sturgis to find out if anybody at the Office of Births and Deaths might have any vested interest in her story. He found out that everybody who works there is a Muggle-born, so they would be unlikely to have ties to the politics and petty revenges of old families. But read this..."

Sturgis had written:

The O.B.D. gave me exactly ten minutes to look through their filing cabinet (not really allowed, but they owed me a favour). The Vablatsky deaths were formally reported to the O.B.D. by Auror Scrimgeour himself. He had ticked the "corpse identified" box for four of them, but Veleta's was marked as "corpse presumed destroyed".

I understand why the O.B.D. would co-operate with a heavy like Scrimgeour; but why should Scrimgeour decide to investigate no further?

"Good point," said Remus. "If the Macnairs had some guilty knowledge of Veleta's whereabouts, they'd be in no hurry to draw attention to themselves by begging the Head Auror to rubber-stamp an uncertain death as certain. Not unless they already had the Head Auror in their power."

"But they have," said Ariadne. "Aunt Macnair that is, Walden Macnair's wife is Auror Scrimgeour's sister. If Uncle Macnair said he was wanting a certain stamp on the report, then I'm thinking the Head Auror would not even ask why."

Remus exhaled slowly. Finally he said, "You and your pure-blood connections! So Walden Macnair owns the Auror Office. He's already gone to some trouble to sabotage your career. What do you think he could and would do to you if he heard that you were still pursuing this?"

She sighed. "Please do not bury the important thing in a graveyard of caution, Remus. Obviously, Uncle Macnair was a Death Eater and he is a dangerous man. But that does not mean we should leave it alone."

"So what do you intend to do?"

"Nothing dangerous; stop looking at me like that! I was thinking that it's time to report this to the Auror Division if we have enough evidence to make a worthwhile story. I'm wanting to write a statement suggesting what the Aurors ought to be looking into. But I'm not knowing how to express it without accusing the Macnair family of some fantastic kidnap operation."

"In other words, you don't know how to write something that isn't the truth. The point is, as we have discussed before, that sometimes you don't tell the whole truth. The immediate issue is not whether Veleta is the victim of some crime, but only whether she is alive at all. You think the Office made a mistake in issuing a death certificate; you wish to establish Miss Vablatsky's status as a living person. Why she or anyone else might have wished to fake her death is not yet relevant."

Something cleared up in Ariadne's mind; she knew now how to express her letter. "And evidence? Two people saw a face at a window."

"Actually, I saw the face too."

"What?"

"Ariadne, I'm sorry I didn't realise this eighteen months ago. There were hundreds of windows, and I saw several faces in one brief glance. But one that I would definitely recognise again was the girl on this photograph; I'm sure I wouldn't mistake those eyes. How was I to know that the girl I saw was the same one at whom you were looking?"

"So we can write to the Auror Division on the strength of three witnesses and an intuition?"

"Leave out the intuition. Include the 'body never found', the three witnesses, and the possibility of memory modification by, or fear of further persecution from, whoever killed her parents. We can express it as if the Macnairs are offering generous sanctuary to a refugee. The Aurors have a duty to look into a case like that, no matter how crackpot they at first assume it to be."

After they had owled their letter, Ariadne said, "Remus, I really do have to put some time into my project for Professor Jigger this evening."

He nodded. "To be honest, I have a lesson to prepare too."

The lonely tone in his voice weakened her resolve and she said, "Can you do it here?"

"We'll see if I can. *Accio* science manual!"

"Remus, did you just Summon some huge textbook to fly across the countryside? What if some Muggle had seen ?"

The book thudded into his hands at that moment. "Apparently so. Don't worry it's dark, so at that speed no one would have seen it."

* * * * *

Professor Jigger was furious when Ariadne's non-Potions interests invaded his shop at ten o' clock on a Wednesday morning in April. It took five minutes to convince the Jiggers that Auror Dawlish was present in a purely professional capacity, and then they bitterly resented his insistence that Miss MacDougal assist him with an inquiry. But finally Ariadne was seated in a corner of the laboratory with the Auror, while Belladonna Jigger watched them just out of earshot. Dawlish opened a photograph album onto the table and asked, "Can you identify the woman whom you knew as Veleta Vablatsky?"

Ariadne turned one page, and then another, past portraits of the Macnair family and house-elves and human employees liveried in thirteenth-century style, and finally lighted on one half way down the third page. "There. That's Veleta." The photograph stared blandly at her with no attempt to wave or introduce itself; it might as well have been a Muggle picture.

"Interesting," said Dawlish.

Ariadne saw that this portrait was clearly labelled, like all the others, with a name. The brown-eyed girl in the file was identified as "Jane Smith".

"What makes you think this person might be named Vablatsky?"

"Oh, but it *is* Veleta." There was no question in her mind. This girl was older than she remembered her friend being fully five years older, of course! but the curve of the cheek, the tilt of the head, the shape of the nose, as well as the large expressive eyes, were all far more like the real-life Veleta than any mere memory could be. "Auror Dawlish, is this a recent picture?"

"Every picture in this album was taken the day before yesterday," said Dawlish. "We were finally cleared for access to Macnair Castle, and we photographed every inhabitant. But it's interesting that you pick on that girl, among them all. We nearly *didn't* shoot her. She and her children were hiding out in some secret room. If Williamson hadn't swung his detector at the exact spot on the wall, we wouldn't have found that room at all, and she'd never have made it to the album."

Children? And secret rooms? "Auror Dawlish, did the Aurors find every secret room in the castle?"

"That, Miss MacDougal, is not the kind of thing of which one can ever be certain. Suffice that we found several. One turned out to be a servants' hall for house-elves. Another was inhabited entirely by ghosts. Another seemed to exist for no useful purpose at all. But Mrs Smith's room was definitely one that could have been missed, even with magical detectors going full blast."

"What was the room like?" *An irons-dungeon, a reptile pit, an attic of Dark artefacts?*

"It was a very comfortable room." Dawlish sounded unconcerned. "Soft drapes, good quality furniture, plenty of toys and books. It was difficult to see why anyone would bother to hide such a room."

"Why were there children with her?"

"They were her children. Can't you pick them from the album? Look... "

And Ariadne herself saw, quite plainly, that the next two photographs showed bairns with huge brown eyes exactly like Veleta's. There was a lassie of about four, "Mary Smith", and a boy of perhaps eighteen months, "Peter Smith". Both were in thirteenth-century costume, but there was nothing else remarkable about them; they were just gorgeous, smiling, large-eyed bairns.

And her astonishment over the bairns was masking the most important and astonishing fact of all: *Veleta was alive.*

It was too much to absorb at one sitting. "What happens next, Auror?"

"We return to Mrs Smith and try to establish whether she has any connection with Miss Vablatsky. You must prepare yourself, Miss MacDougal, for a dead end; even if there is a connection, identity will be difficult to prove."

"But surely it's not so difficult? She has a grandmother yet living; there have to be ways of proving kinship."

"Our understanding is that the grandmother emigrated to New Zealand. Our Department doesn't have the resources to spend on an international inquiry unless there is clear evidence of foul play. But there isn't any so far."

"And if Mrs Smith is Veleta?"

"Then, naturally, we find out her wishes whether she needs to hide because she is too frightened to invoke the protection of the law, in which case we insist that the law does adopt her cause; or whether she has lost memory of who she once was, in which case we recommend a Healer; or whether this alias is merely a matter of personal taste. Obviously, we correct any mistaken records; but that might be all we ever do. Be prepared, Miss MacDougal, for the possibility that even if this person *is* your former friend, she may not wish to re-establish contact with you."

"Oh, but she will. You can tell her that I am always available to her."

"No, we cannot. We do not name our informants when we conduct an inquiry. That is a matter of basic safety."

As Dawlish closed the photograph album and walked out of the laboratory, Ariadne realised that he was right. Veleta was alive; she had been alive just two days ago. There was no point in throwing incriminating information around and inviting the Macnairs to punish her again.

* * * * *

"Be careful," said Remus the next day. "The Macnairs aren't going to like where this investigation is heading and they are certain to suspect you. Until you hear from the Aurors again, try not to go out alone, especially not outside Diagon Alley... Sorry, I know this sounds over-cautious. But I... I think I had better come round every day."

"It's not sounding over-cautious," she admitted. "I'm glad you're taking this seriously, Remus. Are we allowed to go out to dinner today?"

"We can't afford it."

"But we can. My parents gave me some money."

"What, they paid you to take the farmhand out to dinner?"

"It was actually to buy robes." She was painfully aware of the difference between their situations. Her parents supplemented her income with cash presents whenever they deemed that she needed to buy something; Remus had no income and nobody who would ever bail him out. "But Madam Malkin was having a sale, so I did not spend it all. Can we not go somewhere Muggle?"

He hesitated. "I know, I know. Hestia and Sarah are taken everywhere, but all you ever do is work for Jigger and help me write essays. It's time someone took you out to dinner, and I can't even afford to do that. Do you really want to go to Muggle London dressed like that?"

"It's not very different from the way Muggle women sometimes dress to go to parties... And it's not really because I'm wanting to be 'taken everywhere'. I'm just feeling so closed in, spending all my time in Diagon Alley. I'm wanting to go somewhere with spaces."

"The Highlander learns the truth about the big city," he teased, but he conceded the point, and they stepped out of the Leaky Cauldron into Muggle London. The streets were crowded, and nobody took any notice of a young man in an ordinary anorak and jeans (their shabbiness clashing a little with his businessman's briefcase) deep in conversation with a very young woman in an outlandish grey cloak over a full-length but shapeless navy skirt. And Ariadne saw that there were no real spaces anywhere in London; but at least the huge buildings were not Diagon Alley buildings.

After they had walked through a couple of streets, she asked, "What's distracting you?"

"Don't look round now, but I think we're being followed."

"Why are you thinking that?"

"Two Muggle policemen Aurors have been taking the same route as we have ever since we turned the corner from the Leaky Cauldron. Only I somehow don't think they are real policemen. My suspicious instinct from my Order-of-the-Phoenix years is kicking in."

"What's the correct thing to do?"

"Keep walking for a while and see if we shake them off. But keep your wand ready just in case. Can you do *Protego* charm?"

"I'm hoping so." She had managed it once; she did not know if she yet could.

After half an hour of walking through London, Remus said, "We haven't shaken off those policemen. I don't like the look of this. Let's stop at the next eatery... This one will do." It was a very cheap Chinese take-away. "Buy us our dinner anything will do but don't let go of your wand."

Ariadne turned to the counter. A middle-aged shopkeeper with a Chinese face but a Cockney accent was serving an elderly Muggle woman. A teenaged shop assistant was the only other person in the room. Ariadne mustered a smile and asked for one serve of fried rice and one of green vegetables with noodles (Remus did not seem to like meat these days). As the shop assistant was shovelling the food into plastic containers, the shop door jangled open, and two policemen burst inside with right arms raised.

Remus was quicker. He had shouted, "*Expelliarmus!*" before the two intruders had even opened their mouths.

They both declaimed, "*Avada Kedavra!*" before they had time to realise that their wands were arching towards Remus's open hand. They were falling backwards, and Remus had caught their wands belching out thin green sparks by the time the Muggle customer began to scream and Ariadne realised that she had been hairsbreadth away from witnessing an Unforgivable Curse. Remus threw out two Stunners before the now unarmed policemen even hit the ground.

"Ariadne, can you do the Memory Charms?" He sounded so businesslike.

Ariadne did her best with the *Obliviate*, but she knew she was clumsy. She had to run it three times, once for each Muggle, and each time she inelegantly wiped out the whole of the last hour.

"What am I doing *here*?" shrieked the Muggle customer.

"Mrs Edwards, you've just bought your dinner, do you not remember?" She did not know how she had dredged up the lady's name; she supposed she had heard the shopkeeper use it. "See, Mr Liu put it in this bag for you." The shopkeeper's name was painted on the window below the words *The Bamboo Bowl Chinese Takeaway*. She took the woman's elbow and gently steered her towards the door.

"So I have. But why don't I remember?"

"Well, what's worth remembering about ordering beef in plum sauce and receiving fifty pence in change? Have a lovely evening." The door clanged shut behind Mrs Edwards, and Ariadne turned around the OPEN sign. "Those policemen look hurt," she said brightly.

Remus was standing over them, calling for a *Finite Incantatem*. So of course they revived from stupefaction; but their Muggle police uniforms, which must have been merely Conjured, also vanished, and they were now wearing very un-civilian costumes.

"*Stupefy!*" Ariadne only managed to re-Stun one of them, the one in a grey thirteenth-century cotehardie, but Remus had caught the other, the one who was dressed in wizards' robes of the red and green Macnair tartan.

"What's goin' on?" asked the shop assistant.

"We need an ambulance," said Remus. "I'll make the call." He threw blue sparks out of his wand-tip, sending an emergency message to St Mungo's, while Mr Liu plaintively pointed out that there was a telephone in the corner, and why didn't one of them use it?

After all those spells, Ariadne realised they would have to give another Memory Charm to Mr Liu and his assistant. But if she blocked out the same hour twice, she might seriously damage their long-term memories, while if she only blocked out the last thirty seconds, they might remember something they should not. It was a mess.

"Memory," she said. "Remus, I cannot do that charm efficiently."

He waved his wand again, while Ariadne did not move her eyes from their captives. They both looked as if they were out cold, but the whole point of the Stunner was that it was a temporary and easily reversible hex; her fingers were curled around her wand, in case either of them showed the smallest sign of revival.

"Wot are those blokes doin' in my shop?" asked Mr Liu.

"They fainted as they walked in," said Ariadne glibly, feeling that this was almost the truth. "My friend has belled for the ambulation."

"Was I servin' you?" asked the shop assistant.

Ariadne repeated her order, her eyes still on the invaders, and passed over her sterling without bothering to count the change.

Remus turned to her, and said, "Ariadne, this is a very important question. What is your friend Ivor doing tonight?"

It took her a second to understand why he was asking. "Ivor's in Egypt. He went yesterday, and he will not be back before next week." The full force of the danger hit her. Since the Macnairs had stalked her from the minute she had left wizarding territory, there was no question that they would hunt down Ivor too.

"So what about the girls? Where are Sarah and Hestia this evening?"

"They're all right for now. Sarah's in the south of France, modelling Muggle bathing costumes. She'll be there until Sunday. But Hestia... she's with her parents for the evening... but after that... she'll be returning to London."

At that moment the mediwizards arrived. After that the situation became complicated as the mediwizards assessed the situation, Apparated the unconscious men away to St Mungo's, took statements from Remus and Ariadne, and measured the state of the Muggles' memories.

"Who did *this* one?" muttered one Healer. "Amateur job, the poor Muggle's lost every detail of a whole hour."

Ariadne burned with shame. Mr Liu protested, "Oo are you callin' a mug?"

Remus changed the subject. "There is a young lady still at risk." He gave Hestia's details.

"We'll have the Aurors pay her a visit within half an hour and warn her to remain in Shrewsbury," said the mediwizard. "The D.M.L.E. will require a formal statement from both of you, but I expect tomorrow will do if you'll just give me your names and addresses for now... Right, if you two will Disapparate, that will leave me free to fix the Muggles one last time."

Ariadne had no time to protest that she could not Apparate; Remus had her by the shoulders, and the last sound in her ears before the noisy shop vanished was the ~~pop!~~ of their own Disapparition.

The Risk of Heartbreak

Chapter 19 of 21

Having escaped Macnair's henchmen, Remus and Ariadne must now deal with each other.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The Risk of Heartbreak

Thursday 11 April 1985

Old Basford, Nottingham.

Rated PG-13 for erotic sub-text.

They landed in the porch of a private home. Her head was spinning as Remus opened the battered front door with his wand, urged her inside, and closed the door behind them. He looked at her for a moment, as if to reassure himself that she was really there, before saying, "Well *done*." Then he pulled her into his arms and held her in a crushing embrace.

Dropping the Chinese take-away to the floor, Ariadne leaned against him, her head on his shoulder, her arms folded around his ribs. His heart was thundering, his breath ragged, and his arms tightened around her convulsively in a protective, almost possessive, gesture, as if the terror of facing the assassins had only that second touched him. His cheek brushed hers, and she pressed her face against his, willing him to recognise that they were safe now.

For one incongruous, timeless minute, she was waiting for him to kiss her.

Suddenly he dropped his arms to her elbows, drew back from her in an agony of embarrassment, and said, "Ariadne... I'm *sorry*."

He was not going to kiss her. Of course not. Faint with disappointment, she managed to say, "It's not mattering, Remus. I was not minding."

"It does matter. Please attribute it to state-of-emergency conditions... Do you have the food?" He picked up the plastic bag and took it through the door to the left. Ariadne followed him through what was evidently a sparsely and hideously furnished living room, which ran the length of the house, and through an arch on the right to the kitchen. Remus pulled two plates from a cupboard and began to spoon out noodles and fried rice. "It's still hot," he said in a valiant attempt to sound casual. "The table's rickety; you might want to sit on the sofa to eat this."

"How safe are we?" she asked as she took the plate.

He seized gratefully on this topic. He sat down at the far end of the sofa, handed her a fork, and said, "This is as safe as anywhere. Hardly anyone knows I live here, it's off the Floo network, and I'm the only person authorised to make any kind of magical entry. I want you to sleep here tonight."

"Are you thinking there are more of them out there?"

"I would say that if Macnair sent his henchmen after you, he almost certainly sent a team after your friend Ivor too. And if they've found out that Ivor is untrackable and that their comrades are out of action, they may well be after you by now if only so that they have something to report to their boss. I also think that Macnair knows where you're living because your parents aren't likely to understand that they shouldn't trust him with the family news."

He had a beautiful voice, low and slightly hoarse, with infinite shades of expression. She caught herself absorbing its timbre instead of listening to his meaning. "They're thinking he's wonderful because he asks them all about my exam results and job prospects," she managed to agree. "They've probably told him everything about where I live and work."

"That means that Macnair *could* Floo to your flat. People aren't supposed to be able to step through a fireplace without authorisation, but wizards have been known to fake an entry, and only modestly competent wizards have sometimes succeeded at throwing hexes through hearths. I'd rather you went home to a wrecked flat in the company of Aurors tomorrow than spend tonight there waiting to become a corpse."

"We nearly did." Safe on the stuffing-leaking sofa, she finally allowed herself to understand what had happened. There was a chill around her spine; the only warmth came from looking directly at Remus. "Macnair's servants tried to use an Unforgivable."

"We'll report that in the morning," he said with a brave approximation of calmness. "Meanwhile, I have their wands, so it won't be too hard for the Aurors to identify them. The Wizengamot won't be impressed that I breached the Statute of Secrecy before I had clear evidence of a life-threatening situation; a wizard is supposed to risk sacrificing his life under that kind of ambiguous condition. But I had already risked your life. I'm not pleased about that."

"How did you risk mine?" She understood why he had been so distressed; anything like gambling disconcerted him.

"By letting Macnair's henchmen stalk us. I could have brought you straight here, the instant I suspected we were being followed, and you would have been safe for tonight. But then they would simply have stalked you another time and perhaps cornered you when you were alone; as it is, I think they attacked tonight on the assumption that I was a Muggle. It seemed safest to provoke the confrontation while I was at hand to do something about it. But I didn't *like* doing it."

"That situation gave no likable options," she said, although the words sounded inane in her ears. No words could be truly reassuring. "And you did save us."

His hand seemed to move towards her for a moment, but he changed his mind and plucked a non-existent piece of fluff from his sleeve. Finally his hand rested on the knee of his Muggle jeans, palm upwards and fingers slightly curved. His fingers were long and graceful, the scar from that long-ago bite faint on two of them... she made herself stop watching his hands as she settled herself back in the sofa, faced towards him.

"I'm glad you think there's any humour in the situation."

"It's not humour. I'm just happy. By the time the Aurors have dealt with all this, Veleta will be safe too. That's why we're in this situation, is it not? For Veleta."

She took his empty plate and laid it on the floor on top of hers. She had never wanted more to curl up in his arms and say nothing, do nothing, except listen to his breathing. Instead, she watched the pattern of creases on his palms, the angle of his thumb, the path of the scar to his fingerprints. Once again, he restrained his hands from moving towards her, as if a second's provocation would entice him to draw her head down onto his shoulder, and she wondered whether those slender fingers would ever touch her cheek.

But an impassable gulf of sofa stretched between them.

"Remus," she said, "why are you not ever wanting to touch me?"

"Of course I want to, but I think it unwise." For a moment his face was unguarded, and his attention was so entirely focused on her that it was as if ~~head~~ touched her. "I'm sorry I indulged myself before dinner. I decided a long time ago that I would let you set the pace. If you wanted to get married tomorrow, I'd do it, and if you decided to cut ties and never notice my existence again, I wouldn't for a second call you back. I think it's easier for you to recognise what you really want from me if we keep our interactions uncomplicated."

She could not entirely shut out the unworthy thought that she longed to smash his restraint and let their interactions become as complicated as they might be. Every grain of the rough upholstery against her cheek, every lifeless fold of her sleeve against her arm, was hinting that the touch of his hand would be softer, firmer, warmer. But of course she could not smash his restraint without also smashing his integrity.

She drew back a few inches, as if to promise that she would not try to persuade him, and said, "Does not ~~what~~*you're* wanting count for anything?"

He stopped short at this new idea, as if embarrassed to admit to what he did want. The hairs on her neck stiffened as his eyes travelled down her mouth, her throat, her arm, then away, and back up to meet her gaze. He swallowed. "Ariadne, you must see that it would be extremely exploitative for a man of my age to seduce a girl like you just because he can."

"Exploit?" She looked at him sharply. "But you've just asked me to marry you!"

"So I did." He could have denied it or changed the subject, but instead he looked right at her, although he did shift uncomfortably. "That was rather presumptuous of me. I'm sorry... I've given myself away rather blatantly... twice in one minute."

The blood rushed up to her ears. He was looking at her so intently that she could not have torn her eyes away. She was almost dizzy trying to think of a sensible answer while all the heat in the room was coming from him, and his hands were at the other end of the sofa, and she was about to collapse against him, except that his eyes were fastening her immobile to the spot and... But he dropped his eyelids and looked away, and she found her voice.

"Remus, I'm not going to make tonight difficult for you. I was not planning to sleep anywhere except in your spare room." Her mouth was dry, and she wondered if her words sounded truthful. "My question was only about why you become so upset at the thought of... of holding hands, or hugging." She interlaced her fingers so that both hands would lie still. "If... if you're wanting to play a game of hands off because then you can pretend we're just good friends, then I... it's not really the hands-off-part I mind. Or not much," she added honestly. "What bothers me is the pretending part."

"I'm only pretending to pretend," he suggested, "since we do both know the real score. I'll tell you the truth any time you ask me." A smile played around his mouth for the first time since they had entered the Chinese take-away, a smile that brought her closer to him than any touch, and her heart turned over.

"Whatever you're calling it, is there really any reason why we cannot be married this summer?"

The smile instantly vanished. "Sweetheart, that would be a horribly cruel thing for me to do to you."

"Remus," she persisted, "are you really thinking that the wolf should be allowed to dictate both our lives in this way?"

He averted his head, as if he had been about to look in the wrong place. "This isn't about the wolf. To be honest, you handle the wolf well better even than James Potter, because his brave and brilliant plan for overcoming the traumas of lycanthropy contained a serious moral flaw. But even if we ignore the wolf for a moment, I don't know how we shall ever deal with the reality that I'm so much older than you are."

Those unexpected words were like a slap in the face, the more shocking because Remus could never slap anybody, and the warmth switched off like a ~~vox~~ incantation. "Why is that suddenly mattering?" She could not keep the quiver out of her voice. "You've never let it worry us before."

"I never believed we would reach the day when it needed to be considered." This time his hand almost reached her arm, as if to soothe her, before he thought better of it and moved himself yet further backwards. "I expected you to lose interest before it became an issue."

"You're treating me like a bairn." She kept her voice very soft. "I'm not going to lose interest."

"You're a child who didn't even have a proper childhood," he said. "Your parents gave you a fearsome work ethic, but otherwise left you to find your own moral compass when you deserved and needed guidance. I'm sorry to say that about them "

"You can say it," she interrupted quickly, "because it's the truth."

"But do you see what's happening to you now? You've had so little playtime, and if you were to settle down now, you'd lose your last opportunity. You also have to come to terms with your parents' mistakes, establish your career on very little money, and learn to channel your idealism... Can't you hear that I sound like a teacher just talking about it? You can't possibly want to marry a pedagogue." But he was running his fingers through his beech-brown hair, as if he doubted his assertion.

She tried not to imagine her hands on his temples, his hair soft between her own fingers. "I'm wanting to marry somebody to whom I can tell the truth."

"Do you think you need to marry anyone at this stage?"

"I never really thought about... being married or not. Only about being with you or not. If we were the same age, would you be asking the question?"

"If we were the same age, I'd probably be too naïve to recognise the traps. And they wouldn't be the same traps. Two young people can discover the world together make mistakes together bolster one another's idealism lose one another's money reach disillusionment together. Even if love doesn't survive the journey, they've no reason to blame each other."

She thought of Ivor and Hestia, but heard him out. She dropped her hand, which had been playing dangerously with her throat-button.

"Whereas I'm always going to be a step ahead of you, sceptical about your grand schemes and trying not to say 'I told you so' afterwards. I've already made my peace with my parents, I've already run riot at school, I've already seen what evil people can do and how little as well as how much the rest of us can do to restrain them. You were still at school when Voldemort fell, and you've begun your working life in a much more normal society, but that also means your growing-up pace will be much more normal that is, slower."

"And that's not good?"

"It's very good, but it widens the difference between our ages. We're at such different life-stages."

"But it's not stopped our being friends until now." She only dimly understood what he was trying to say, but she struggled, between two beats of her heart, to grasp that it bothered him. "It will be a problem, but do not most people encounter problems? Why is this particular problem so insurmountable? Some of Sarah's boyfriends have been older than you are."

"Yes, but Sarah isn't thinking about marriage, and if you'll excuse my speaking of your friend in this way Sarah manages to pick men with money. Whereas I cannot give you any of the compensations with which older men usually lure young girls. There is only this shell of a house, at least two years of living on the breadline, and a lifestyle of pretence among the Muggle community. You'd displease your parents, you'd make no new friends, you'd be socially ostracised, and even if you did stay the course until we began to have some money, we wouldn't be able to have children. You'd quickly discover that it was very inadequate compensation to be allowed to share the house with a world-weary pedagogue."

"That's not you! Some of what you're saying is true, but you're exaggerating. I'm the one who decides whether you're a desirable housemate."

His eyes flickered down from her face to her neck to her waist and back, this time with no pretence at averting his gaze, so that she was acutely conscious of her own flesh under her robe. "To bring this conversation back to where it started, what makes you think I would even be a good lover? It's not as if I come with references."

Her pulse hammered against her wrists, and she fought off a blush; he was teasing her on purpose. "So I will be your one and only. I'm willing to take my chances. I'm just wanting to be *yours*."

"The fact remains that if you were married to me, you would suffer all the disadvantages of being with an older man without gaining any of the usual fringe benefits."

She knew now what he needed to hear. "So the only reason I could possibly be wanting to do it would be for yourself. I notice you have not yet proposed the simple and obvious and unanswerable objection."

"Yes?"

"Look me in the eye, and tell me that you've lost interest in me. Say that you're indifferent that your ardour has cooled that I'm not good enough for you that my presence makes *you* miserable "

"You're asking me to lie?"

"I'll know if you're lying." There was no humour in the observation; her chest was constricting painfully. "Convince me it's the truth, and I promise that I'll walk out of your door and never come back."

"We've already agreed that you can't go out tonight."

"You're meaning I'm only safe when I'm with you?"

"You do persist in discussing this illogically."

"That's because your basic premise is not logical. Remus..." Her words were all breath and no voice, "... of what are you *really* afraid?"

He hesitated, then became serious. "That in ten years, or perhaps in only five, when you recognise that you are dissatisfied with your life, that you have had so much less than you could have had, you will look me in the eye, and we will both know that I am the direct and sole cause of your unhappiness. Ariadne, I don't see how it can end any other way."

His hands were fidgeting, and she suppressed the urge to caress them into quietness. "You might give me a little more credit than that, Remus. Are you not believing that I'd take responsibility for my own actions and accept that I was the direct and sole cause of my unhappiness? If, that is, I became unhappy, which I'm not believing I would."

"Whatever the follies of youth, everyone agrees that youth *is* something of an excuse for folly. But what excuse would I have for ruining your life when I'm old enough to know better?"

"But we're already ruined," she said. "We tried the experiment of separating, and it did not work for either of us. If ruin is inevitable, then I'm wanting to be ruined *with* you, not at arm's length from you."

Suddenly his hands were still and his face motionless. She knew she was tormenting him with a terrifying vision of reckless optimism. When he did speak, his train of thought was in the middle. "I've forgotten whom I'm quoting. 'Hell is the only place safe from the dangers of love. The alternative to the risk of heartbreak is the damnation of not loving at all.' Or words to that effect... have you ever read that book?"

She shook her head.

"But I'd always thought of it as gambling with my own heart; I never thought I'd be risking yours."

"Then 'let our hearts break, as long as they break together'... I cannot remember whom I'm quoting either."

She thought he nodded in concurrence, but perhaps she imagined it. Then he picked up the empty dinner plates. "It's late," he said. "We have to report to the Aurors tomorrow, and then we have to explain your lateness to Jigger. I'll show you the way to the bathroom."

At the head of the stairs, he Summoned a pile of linen for her and Conjured a toothbrush out of nothing. She would never stop marvelling at the smoothness of his Charm-work. He had even found her a voluminous nightdress, presumably an old one of his mother's, which covered her with opaque white lace from neck to wrist to ankle. When she emerged from the bathroom, he was sitting at the top of the stairs, averting his eyes a little, although she was entirely respectably covered.

"It's this room," he said, opening the door beside the stairs to reveal a towering four-poster. "My parents' bed and chest were just about the only items in the house that the Death Eaters didn't scratch. There were even clean sheets in the drawer."

He followed her into the room, so that for one crazy second it almost seemed as if he were offering to sleep in the bed with her after all. She could hear the racing of her blood; surely he must hear it too. He held out his hand, but only to take her wet towel; she piled her robes onto the chest.

"So," he said, "we have an agreement?" He was trying to look solemn, but he was restraining a grin.

"We have."

"Can we compromise on a good-night kiss?"

Before she had time to reply, he saluted her forehead; and before she had the smallest chance to kiss him back, he fled the room.

His touch burned; she willed herself to stay awake, to sear the caress into her memory in case it never happened that he ever kissed her again. For him, she knew, it had been a true compromise; he had sacrificed a small corner of his integrity in order to give her a message. She would never ask him to sacrifice any more of it; she would let him see, hour by hour, that his presence did her no harm. Presently the shower stopped, and she heard him walk across the landing to the opposite room.

She was too tired to ask herself why he had needed to spend so long in the shower.

A/N 1: Ariadne and Remus do not realise that their unreferenced quotations actually come from the same book, which they must have both read separately. That book is, of course, C. S. Lewis's classic, The Four Loves.

*A/N 2. Many thanks to everyone who helped me write this chapter: **Spiderwort** (for Ariadne's viewpoint); **moonette** (for Remus's state of mind); and the Serious Fluffers - **Eudora Hawkins, Gabriella du Sult, hairy hen, Julu, Spartina** and **St. Margarets** - for providing atmosphere.*

The Girl who Lived

Chapter 20 of 21

An unsatisfactory inquiry into Veleta Vablatsky's affairs, together with a public exposure of their private affairs, shows Remus and Ariadne where their real friends are.

CHAPTER TWENTY

The Girl who Lived

Friday 12 April Monday 20 May 1985

Ministry of Magic and Diagon Alley, London.

Rated PG for corruption and spite.

"I promise you both," said Auror Dawlish, "it is dealt with. Absolutely. Miss MacDougal will never be harassed again."

"I don't feel that she is safe," Remus repeated stubbornly.

"Then you are paranoid," said the Auror. "Her assailants have been in custody since they were in hospital. They have been tried before the Wizengamot and sentenced to life in Azkaban for a clear-cut, uncontroversial and unprovoked use of an Unforgivable curse. Their wands have been publicly broken. It really was a very simple case."

"Yes," said Remus patiently, "but who *else* was involved?"

"Truth potion is expensive," said Dawlish dismissively. "We don't go wasting it. We only used a drop, only five minutes' worth. There was no time to poke around for possibly non-existent accomplices. People who have any morals at all know that you can't go casting Unforgivables and then use the claim that it was someone else's idea as an excuse for mercy." He smiled patronisingly, as if they were stupid. "Why do you *want* mercy for a couple of thugs who nearly murdered your girlfriend?"

"I don't want mercy for them; I want to restrain the man who employed them. We believe that they were working for Walden Macnair."

"*Baldwin* Macnair," corrected Dawlish. "The young lout was named Baldwin. *Walden* Macnair is his father, a very upright citizen, very well regarded on the Wizengamot."

Remus kept his temper and tried to imitate the deadly softness of an angry MacDougal. "I believe that the upright and well-regarded Walden Macnair is likely to make another assault on the life of Ariadne MacDougal."

"On the contrary." Dawlish sounded almost smug. "We have extracted from him an undertaking to do no such thing. He is perfectly aware that his son's, er, crime tarnishes the reputation of the whole family, and the last thing he wishes is that any public attention should be drawn to it. He personally guarantees the good behaviour of every member of his clan, and is willing to stake a Dementor's Kiss to himself that all the rest will behave, on one tiny condition."

Remus remembered to save his speech about the perversion of justice until after he had heard in exactly what manner justice would be perverted.

"We are aware that Miss MacDougal has been interested in the welfare of a certain Mrs Smith. And, on the day before the trial, we did in fact conduct a private interview with Mrs Smith. Two Aurors spent nearly an hour asking her all kinds of questions and found her to be a very pleasant, co-operative person. Her words were, 'I thank the public for its kind concern, but I have no idea who is asking after me.' Nor had she ever heard of Veleta Vablatsky, and she could not imagine why she might look like this person. She said she had lived all her life at Macnair Castle, that she was employed by the Macnairs to use her special talents to their advantage, and that they had always treated her and her children very well. She did not know how she could help us, since she had no information beyond the details of her own 'happy but uneventful' life." He coughed. "So, the condition, Miss MacDougal. That you drop all inquiries into the case of Veleta Vablatsky, confident that your unfortunate friend is truly dead, and that Mrs Smith, a stranger to you, has no desire to be further interrogated."

"But... just like that? Did the Aurors use a truth potion? Was there any evidence that Mrs Smith was speaking under Imperius? Had she been memory-charmed? Was there any sense of blackmail?"

"You should have been an Auror," said Dawlish, but not as if he meant it. "No truth potion as I've said, it's expensive, and Mrs Smith had nothing to hide. But she seemed very relaxed; there was no evidence of spell-work."

Remus recognised the look in Ariadne's eyes as desperation, but the Auror might have misinterpreted it as defiance.

"And all corroborating questions were asked? Did this Mrs Smith tell you her date of birth, her maiden name, her parents' professions, the whereabouts of her husband, the ages of her children... ?"

"Calm down, Miss MacDougal; we have to see another client in ten minutes." He flipped through his notes. "For your information, Mrs Smith never knew her parents. She does not know her date of birth, but believes she is about nineteen years old. Her maiden name was Johnson. Her husband is dead, and we did not see fit to ask any more questions about him. Her daughter is four years and her son about eighteen months old. Does this satisfy you?"

"It does not, because that is impossible. If Mrs Smith is only nineteen, how can she have a daughter of four? Did this conveniently-dead 'Mr Smith' ever really exist?"

"Really, Miss MacDougal, if Mr and Mrs Smith made a youthful mistake, do you think it is the business of the Aurors to dig that up? The point is that you have been requested to drop your inquiries. And if you do not, then Mr Walden Macnair will not offer himself as guarantor, and therefore will not be able to promise that every member of his household will accept your curiosity as tolerantly as he does."

Such a welter of confusing questions crossed Ariadne's face that it was not surprising that she took refuge in silence. Auror Dawlish, who had a job to do, mistook silence for submission.

"So, Miss MacDougal, will you give me your word? You will drop all inquiry and give no more trouble to anyone in Macnair Castle?"

"I will not." Her voice was so soft and expressionless that Dawlish misheard.

"Then I must ask Auror Savage to show you out... wait, did you say you *dn*ot?"

"I did."

"Well, that's a relief. You're a sensible girl, and you've agreed with me. Savage, Mr Lupin and Miss MacDougal are just leaving."

Ariadne kept a profound silence until they were on the street. Then Remus told her, "They've gone. You can say it now."

"Uncle Macnair's seeming to have the Aurors in his pocket!"

"I daresay he has. You know better than I do how influential he is on the Wizengamot. He can certainly bribe and threaten his way out of an embarrassing inquiry whether it's about his relationship with his henchmen or his conduct to his 'Mrs Smith'. He can get away with a direct threat on your life because he dresses it up in the crudest of disguises."

"I cannot believe that Auror Dawlish misunderstood what I told him. He *had* to have known that I was disagreeing with him."

"I nearly missed it myself, Ariadne. That was a spectacular use of your Soft Voice. Dawlish heard what he wanted to hear. And when it began to occur to him that you wouldn't lie, he felt obliged to lie for you."

"So my safety depends on Auror Dawlish's corruption. He sacrifices his integrity to save mine. That's not doing much to increase the world total count of honesty."

"I doubt that thought would worry Dawlish remotely as much as it worries you."

"And you're going to tell me that I'm stupid to stake my life for a Cause."

"No, I'm not. Sometimes we have to do that. The Potters did, and so did Peter Pettigrew. But next time you're asked to offer up your life, make sure it's a cause worth dying for. If Macnair zapped you dead in the street today, it wouldn't do a thing to save your friend Veleta. As far as we know, her life isn't even at risk."

She was quiet for a while. When he pressed her, she said, "I'm expecting I was naïve. I really thought that the Aurors would interview Veleta properly, and that she'd be coming home. I expected her to be at our wedding. So tell me. I was naïve to expect the Aurors to be pure and uncorrupted. You're going to crush that piece of my idealism."

"It sounds as if I don't need to. Ariadne, we've had a long day. Are you sure you want to talk to your parents this evening?"

"I have to. If I do not tell them about us soon, they'll hear it from somebody else. They *wouldn*t like to hear the news from somebody who had just heard it from Sarah."

"What have you told Sarah?"

"Nothing. Sarah works out my secrets from the questions that I evade. And anything that I do not specifically earmark 'confidential', Sarah personally marks as 'public news'."

Sarah personally noted that Ariadne was very subdued through dinner. She ran the gamut of guesses: bad news about Veleta, bad temper from Professor Jigger, bad results of experiment, bad quarrel with Remus, bad headache before complaining, "You're no fun tonight. You won't even give me a hint." She turned her attention back to Ivor, who had a great deal to say about his experiences in Egypt.

* * * * *

After dinner Remus sat in an armchair to the side of the hearth. Hestia brought him tea, and Ivor plied him with the Quidditch results while Ariadne threw Floo powder into the hearth and instructed, "Kincarden Croft!"

Remus wondered how close to Ariadne he could crouch without her parents spotting him from the hearth.

"Good evening, my dear, I trust you are well?"

"Good evening, Papa. Is everybody well at Kincarden?"

"I'm hoping you are working hard for Professor Jigger, Ariadne. Are you learning a great deal?"

"A very great deal, Mamma. My diet pills are being tested on rats this week."

They talked through seven minutes of these pleasantries before her father thought to ask, "Had you anything in particular to say to us this evening, my dear?"

"I had." Remus knew she had rehearsed her speech, but even so, her nervousness was surprisingly understated; he doubted her parents were noticing it. "Papa, Mamma, do you remember Remus Lupin, who used to work on the farm?"

"Indeed, he was a very good worker," said her father.

"Mr Lupin did you a number of favours too," said her mother. "Have you news of him?"

"Mamma, I'm going to marry him."

The silence was so deadly that Hestia halted the dishes in the kitchen sink, and Sarah snapped her fellytone shut. Mr and Mrs MacDougal were merely at a loss for words. Ariadne was sitting quietly on purpose.

Finally Mrs MacDougal said, "Ariadne, dear, are you really needing to marry anybody at this stage? You're very young, and there is plenty of time."

"I am, Mamma, and I'm not particularly needing to marry. But I'm going to marry Remus in July."

"My dear, do you think this is wise? It seems very precipitate to make such a final and binding decision on the strength of a few weeks' acquaintance."

"Papa, I have known Remus for a great deal longer than that."

Mr and Mrs MacDougal exchanged glances, as if to reassure themselves that they were united on this delicate issue, and then Mr MacDougal spoke again. "My dear, are Miss Webster and Miss Dearborn in the room? Could you perhaps ask them for a little private time with your parents?"

Sarah and Hestia did not need to be asked. They pulled Ivor out into the hall, all three of them apparently finding the situation highly amusing. Remus sat exactly where he was. He heard Hestia pealing with fresh laughter when she realised that he intended to invade the MacDougals' privacy. But he found it difficult to recognise the humour in the situation; the tension in his muscles, the rushing of his blood, felt suspiciously like anger.

Finally Mrs MacDougal was ready to address her misguided child. "Ariadne dear, we remember Mr Lupin very well. And it's not that we do not like him. We think him a charming young man. But have you truly considered whether he will make a good husband?"

"I have considered it." Remus didn't know how they could hear their daughter's Soft Voice so unsuspectingly; they *must* have learned by now that it meant that Ariadne was making a ring round them.

Her father tried again. "My dear, it's not because he's a half-blood. We would gladly accept even a Muggle-born son-in-law, if he had lived among wizards for long enough to know our ways. And it's not because he's English. We promise you that that's not the kind of thing that matters to us."

"I'm glad," murmured Ariadne politely.

"But have you ever stopped to ask yourself why a young man like Remus was working as a farmhand? I'm knowing we brought you up not to be affected about such things, but did you never notice the difference between Remus and William? William works for us because he has no other capabilities. We have to care for him like a son a son who will never grow up because he cannot look after himself. But Remus clearly is a man who does have other capabilities. He has a fine mind, and he was not needing to settle for such menial work. Did you never stop to enquire why he was willing to undervalue himself in that way?"

"I did, Papa."

This reply was naturally ignored. "Ariadne, I can think of only two reasons why a man of Remus's capabilities would do that. Either there is something terribly wrong in his life there is some criminal secret in his past or, more likely, he is utterly lacking in ambition. My dear, are you really wanting to spend your life with a man who will never be able to earn enough money to keep your children, who will never set long-term goals or give you the opportunity to do anything interesting?"

"I am not, Papa." An ambiguous answer if ever there was one!

"There's a sensible lass." Her father's voice was rich with approval. "We were knowing you'd understand."

"Ariadne, dear," her mother chimed in, "do not let this young man frighten you. He's a half-blood and has no money; he cannot be connected with anybody important. If you tell him nicely that you've had second thoughts, he's in no position to do you any harm. Do not let him pressure you into the wrong decision."

"I will not let anybody do that, Mamma. But Remus and I are engaged. I'm going to marry him."

"Do not be daft, dear. Of course you do not have to marry him, if it's not for the best. Why do you not borrow Miss Webster's owl and inform him before bedtime? Good night!"

The green flames flared, and Ariadne slowly rose to her feet beside the empty hearth. "They did not believe me," she said.

Remus was at her side in two steps. "Sweetheart, you can't *make* people believe things."

"I'm expecting they did believe me really," Ariadne corrected herself. She looked up, trying not to cry. "But they were asking me to choose between you and them. And they'll be so hurt when they realise how I've chosen... Does it not hurt *you*, Remus, to find them so rejecting?"

For a second so many complicated thoughts ran through his mind that he could not voice any of them. He knew the MacDougals were right ~~how~~ was an uninspiring prospect for a son-in-law; but he was angry they had forced an unfair choice on Ariadne. He was annoyed with them for making an obstacle to his own wishes; and he was astonished at his own arrogant annoyance since it would be no more than justice if Ariadne did change her mind. He was extremely gratified that Ariadne had remained steadfast; but it proved she had hardly begun to comprehend what living with him would really be like.

"Did you assume that rejection would only come from people who knew about the wolf?" he asked. "Welcome to the real world."

* * * * *

A fortnight later, Mrs MacDougal Flooded the flat in Diagon Alley. She did not even check whether Ariadne was alone before launching into, "Dear, whatever has gone wrong? Your Aunt Macmillan asks what she should wear to your wedding."

Remus would have been tempted to reply that, "Dress robes will be fine," but Ariadne spoke like a professional soother. "Mamma, you must find this quite distressing."

"Ariadne, we agreed two weeks ago that this marriage was impossible." There was nothing cross or impatient about Mrs MacDougal's tone; her pale face in the green

flames was a mask of agony.

"Mamma, I'm knowing that you and Papa are not pleased by it."

With heart-rending anxiety, Mrs MacDougal pressed on. "Did you not find the courage to tell Remus that you cannot marry him?"

"Mamma, I'm knowing it will take you some time to become used to the idea."

"But, Ariadne," spoken softly and sweetly, "your father and I indicated that you have to break the engagement."

"Mamma, I know you're not liking it when I do not comply with your wishes."

Any other mother would have either backed down or lost her temper at this point, but Bethoc MacDougal only repeated, "Dear, you're *knowing* this cannot happen," as if that settled the matter.

Ariadne did cry that time, so much so that Remus fought through his scruples and held her hands. (She had once held his hands when he had been upset. And they hadn't even been engaged then.)

"I really have hurt Mamma."

"Yes, you have. But not remotely as much as she's hurting you."

Ariadne was very surprised by this idea. "What makes you think that?"

"You're crying and she isn't. Because it's your whole life, but only a detail of hers."

Remus found himself half-waiting for Ariadne to say that she would have to break off the engagement because it was the only way to make Mamma happy. But the fireplace was flaring again, and this time Lucius Malfoy appeared in it.

"Cousin Ariadne," he said, "our Aunt Macmillan claims that you are engaged to someone called Remus Lupin."

"Aunt Macmillan is correct, Cousin Lucius."

"For your information, young lady, his name does not appear on the Black family tapestry."

"He is not related to the Blacks, Lucius."

"That is absurd. Every pure-blood of good character is related to the Blacks. In other words, you admit that you intend to besmirch the MacDougal name by a union with a disgrace or a half-breed."

"Remus is of good character, Lucius, but he is certainly a half-blood."

"Reconsider. The day before you marry any such person will be the last day any Malfoy ever speaks to you."

In the ensuing pause, Remus came down from the sofa to kneel in view of the hearth. Malfoy ignored him with superb disdain.

"Think about it, Ariadne. Otherwise this is the last conversation we will ever have."

"Good bye, Cousin Lucius." The fire crackled, and the hearth emptied. Ariadne turned to Remus. "Oh, dear. I'll never have to enter Malfoy Manor again. And I just cannot force myself to be unhappy about it." The tears were dry on her cheeks, and she was almost smiling.

"Nor do you seem too unhappy about distressing Mr Malfoy."

"He's not distressed. He's glad to discover a concrete reason why I'm just as worthless as he was always hoping... oh, *not again*."

For the flames were yet again turning green, and this time Severus Snape was demanding audience. Remus was still sitting next to Ariadne, but Snape ignored him, much as Malfoy had, and launched straight into business.

"Ariadne, I need to ask you plainly: do you understand what you are marrying? Are you quite certain that your half-blood lover has told you the whole truth about himself?"

"I am, Severus."

"Has he told you that he once tried to kill me?"

"You are mistaken, Severus; it was Sirius Black who tried to kill you. Remus was in no state of mind to know anything about what was happening."

"That's *his* story." Snape turned to Remus for long enough to fix a ferocious glower on him. "Lupin plays the innocent, but don't you think an innocent man would have resented being used in a game of murder? Yet he and Black remained inseparable for years after that little adventure. You are a fool to believe him, Ariadne."

Nine years had passed, yet Remus still felt his stomach turn when he remembered how blindly he had accepted Sirius's excuses on the morning after The Prank. The truth about Sirius's character should have been obvious from that moment, yet he had refused to accept it. But he still found it very difficult to admit his mistake to Snape, especially when Snape was using the incident as an excuse to insult Ariadne.

Ariadne was steering the conversation away from the sensitive topic. "Severus, are you here to tell me that this is the last time you will ever speak to your foolish cousin?"

"I am not so treacherous," Snape snarled with another unfriendly glance at Remus. "The time when my cousin makes the biggest mistake of her life is the time when she most needs her friends around her. I am here to tell you that I shall be at the wedding. And once disaster hits, and you come to your senses, you may be sure that I shall not be among those who desert you to the consequences of your own folly."

"Thank you for your support," Ariadne murmured.

Snape must have understood the irony, because he muttered a curt, "Until the wedding," and his head vanished.

This time they reached the sofa, and Sarah lifted down the powder-jar to begin a call of her own, but before Floo touched flame, a blaze of emerald heralded the head of thirteen-year-old Dreadnought Macmillan. "Hey, Ariadne, are you needing somebody who can take photographs? I take good ones, do you remember the ones I took the other Christmas?"

Remus followed Ariadne back to the hearth, although she could probably manage Dreadnought without moral support. "They were excellent, Dreddy," she was saying. "There was one that I've carried around in my wallet ever since."

"Well, are you needing a photographer for the wedding? I bet I can take photographs just as well as those fancy professionals who charge a bomb."

"Our friend Mr Jones has already said... " she began.

"Oh, brilliant. Some snooty friend of yours is more important than your own cousin! He's grown up and not needing a career boost the way I am. And I was going to offer to do it for free, so that you could save money, and I could start a portfolio of my work. But, no, I'm supposing you'd rather pay a thousand Galleons to this Jones..."

Even after calling Ivor to the fireplace, it took twenty minutes to soothe Dreadnought and negotiate a compromise that would involve co-operation between the two photographers. Dreadnought was outraged to learn that his rival was not a professional photographer and was also offering a free service, and utterly unmollified by the news that Remus and Ariadne would be delighted to have two people working on the project together.

"Can't you make your cousins shut up?" called Kingsley from the kitchen table. "Some of us are trying to do homework here."

"In *this* house?" asked Remus. "If I'd seriously needed to finish my essay tonight, I'd have stayed at home."

Ivor sat down next to them. "I have a report to write too. Hestia, would it be better if the visitors left so that there's no one's work to disturb when Ariadne's cousins want to annoy her?"

Hestia took the hint and cast a Blocking Charm on the Floo connection. "I don't know how you tolerate it, Ariadne. Why don't you argue back or run away like the rest of us?"

Ariadne smiled slightly; Remus recognised that a great many thoughts about her cousins were flitting through her mind. All she said out loud was:

"But surely you have not misunderstood Dreddy just because he made a fuss tonight? It all came from generosity; the Macmillans are a very good family."

The Red Flowers of Celebration

Chapter 21 of 21

No matter how many loose ends are left untied, Remus and Ariadne resolve the matter dearest to their hearts.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The Red Flowers of Celebration

Saturday 6 July 1985

Diagon Alley, London; Glengarry Parish Church, Invergarry, Inverness-shire; Old Basford, Nottingham.

Rated PG for sexual references.

A/N: I know, I know! There is no church hall attached to Glengarry Parish Church in Invergarry. I confess. I invented it as a plot device. So no Brit-picking about that one. Please?

"The question is," said Hestia, "will the Malfoys be more offended if Ariadne invites them, or if she doesn't?"

"If she doesn't," said Sarah instantly. "It would be gross cruelty to deny them the pleasure of refusing her."

Remus, who was officially buried in his final essay, assumed he wasn't supposed to have overheard that exchange. But the question of whom to offend and how much was setting the tone for the entire wedding.

Once the invitations were owled, Mr and Mrs MacDougal did not speak a word about the unsuitability of the union. They told all their friends how pleased they were that Ariadne was to be married and confined their gentle objections strictly to the manner in which the wedding was to be conducted.

"Darling, I'm believing Madam Bones found it very odd that the invitations were sent in your own name instead of in ours."

"Mamma, were you wanting your name to appear on the invitation? I'm sorry; I did not know."

"Do not be daft dear; a wedding has to keep to the conventions. Otherwise the community begins to believe that something shameful is occurring."

"My dear, have you considered who is to conduct the ceremony? There are only four wizards in Britain who are authorised by the Muggle state to conduct legal weddings, and only one of those is a Nonconformist. Do not let your young man talk you into a secular wedding; be sure to employ the Nonconformist wizard."

"Papa, we have already engaged him."

"Excellent. But I've heard that he's a Baptist. Is he willing to read the Presbyterian ceremony?"

"Darling, did you consider the bridesmaids' dresses? The Macmillan lasses cannot wear pastels, and Letitia cannot wear much else."

"Mamma, Letitia's not intending to come to the wedding. I was thinking that Morag should be the only bridesmaid."

"My dear, did you remember to invite Mr Nott?"

"Papa, we cannot afford a very extensive guest list."

"My dear, no matter what the short-term cost of the wedding, nobody can afford the long-term cost of offending old friends."

Remus noticed, however, that Mr MacDougal did not offer to pay for the short-term costs in question.

Remus didn't want to tell Ariadne that he was worried about the cost of getting married, but of course she ferreted it out of him. She had no qualms about refusing to invite the Macnairs or the Notts or the Parkinsons, but there were other people whom she really did have to invite if she wanted to stay friends with them. They managed to pare

the guest list down to sixty names, in full confidence that only forty would accept; but that was still forty mouths to fill.

"Host the reception at afternoon tea-time," advised Hestia, "when no one expects lunch or dinner. Serve only bridge rolls, wedding cake and Butterbeer. And hold it in the church hall, so you don't have to hire a hotel lounge or apply for Portkeys to take you there."

"Mamma is wanting about thirty Galleons' worth of flowers."

"Glenda will give you some from her garden."

"And live chamber music."

"Richard will lend you his stereo and amplifiers and some Classical tapes."

"And an antique satin wedding robe."

"Sarah can use her work connections to find you something to wear."

"And a full choir and organ in the kirk."

"You'll have no control over that. The minister always decides what happens in the church."

Hestia's advice was very sensible, and under her professional guidance there was even a degree of elegance in the "show"; but there was no question that this low-budget elegance was going to make a significant incursion in their savings. The hard-earned Galleons that were supposed to last Remus at least another twenty-four months would now hold out for only twelve.

* * * * *

The day on which the world was to be offended was the first Saturday in July. Remus had handed in his essays, studied for and sat all his exams, and lived through his July Transformation in his garage. Early on Saturday morning he Apparated to the little mock-Gothic church in Invergarry, where Kingsley Shacklebolt was directing operations in the church hall. Ivor was carrying scarlet and gold streamers up a stepladder, and Glenda was tweaking vases of red roses and red carnations. Sarah was spreading butter on two hundred bridge rolls, while Joe was obediently piling on red salmon and Hestia was dealing with the mashed egg. Richard was setting up his stereo, charming it so that it would look wired-in to any passing Muggles.

"Hi, Remus," Kingsley called without ceremony, "come and hold the other end of these streamers. I'm going to blow up balloons."

Remus scanned the milling bodies.

"She isn't here, Remus," said Sarah. "Ariadne slept at Kincarden last night and she isn't allowed to arrive a minute before the ceremony begins. It's supposed to be unlucky for the bride to see the bridegroom before then."

For a sinking moment, he wondered if Ariadne would be kept at Kincarden and not permitted to attend the wedding at all.

"Don't worry," said Sarah. "Do you really think the MacDougals will want to be embarrassed in front of all their friends? They've committed themselves to a wedding, and it had better be perfect. Talking of which, what are you wearing? You can't go to your own wedding in work-robos."

"Sturgis was going to lend me something."

"That's hopeless, Remus, he's a *foot* taller than you are. You'd be better off borrowing from Richard. No, that's no good, he only has one set of dress-robos. Kingsley... ?"

"The set I outgrew three years ago should fit," Kingsley confirmed. "Remus can keep them as I'll never wear them again *Accio!*"

That was an impressive Summoning Charm; in thirty seconds the outgrown dress-robos flew in through the church hall windows, having presumably travelled all the way from London to Inverness-shire. Fortunately the robes were very plain and an inoffensive shade of brown.

"He'll clash with Sturgis," said Sarah darkly.

"No one will be looking at Sturgis," said Hestia.

* * * * *

By the time Remus met Sturgis at the table in the front of the church, he was vainly hoping no one would be looking *at* him. Their friends had worked hard all morning, had made the best of very little, and the only thing that seemed to be wrong with the wedding was the bridegroom. Ariadne was about to sign her life away, and the congregation was full of people who thoroughly disapproved. Janet MacDougal was already dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief, whether from sorrow, sentimentality or stress he could not tell; Severus Snape was grimly silent in the second row, trying to ignore the crowd of Macmillans who were crammed in beside and behind him; Mrs Pettigrew the only guest who had been invited solely on Remus's own account was whispering to Madam Bones what a pity it all was, and Madam Bones gave no sign of disagreeing.

"Could you manage to look like that again, Mr Lupin?" asked Dreadnought Macmillan, clicking a new flash to his camera with a flourish. "Just the thing for the album anxious bridegroom will the bride change her mind at the last minute? is it going to happen at all? Best man soothes, but then wonders if he's forgotten the ring. That's it, guys, perfect picture! And here's Mr Presbyter we have to have a shot of this, last minute counsel between presbyter and groom. That's it, Preacher, hold the Bible right there!"

Fortunately Dreadnought was willing to be silent once the organ began to play *Scotland the Brave*. Ariadne entered the church, and Remus forgot that he wasn't supposed to look round. She looked so radiant dressed in white satin with her hair loose under a crown of white roses that a great smile split his own face before he could prevent it. Her eyes lighted as soon as she saw him. She must have known that her father was doing his duty with a tragically grave face, but she took no notice. Behind her walked a delighted Morag, carrying red roses and wearing the MacDougal tartan to which Ariadne would never again be entitled. Beside Morag walked the cousin nearest to her own size, kilted in the full red-and-yellow Macmillan regalia and carrying the rings on a black velvet cushion.

Ariadne stood beside him, her eyes so brightly blue that he almost forgot to listen to the minister. All he had to do to keep Ariadne smiling was answer a few easy questions. The minister was indeed reading from the Scottish Prayer Book (the one published in 1645); however, it seemed to Remus that, Baptist or Presbyterian, he was asking the wrong questions. Stripped of the archaic language, the first question was: *Do you want this woman to be your wife?* That was not at all the same question as: "Do you think you are the most appropriate man to be her husband?" *Will you be a loving and faithful husband to her?* That was quite different from the more necessary question: "Will your love and fidelity be a nuisance to her five years hence?"

But there was no question in the liturgy that permitted him to voice his doubts. And so he heard himself promising the congregation promising Ariadne herself that he would award himself the most beautiful woman in the world and spend the rest of his life indulging in her company. And all Ariadne did was clasp his hands and drink in his words.

She had no doubts. She spoke her vows so clearly and gladly that the female guests wept. The only dry eyes belonged Prudence Macmillan, who was surreptitiously

passing pepper imps around her brothers, and Emmeline Vance, who (as she explained afterwards) was at that minute calculating whether she had brought in enough glassware to cover all forty guests.

"I will be a faithful, loving and obedient wife to you..."

Well, that was an inappropriate promise for a teenaged girl to make to a werewolf, but it didn't matter much. He would not, after all, ever give her an order.

It was only when the ceremony ended, the organ struck up, he took her hand for the recessional march, and she automatically laced her fingers through his, that Remus began to acknowledge what he had just done. He had *married* her. He had surrendered to her misguided adolescent aspiration... No. He had gratified himself. He had stood by without protesting while she fettered herself to a werewolf... because Ariadne herself was the obvious and direct benefit to *him*. And she was so naively *happy* about it. And he didn't seem to be able to take sober responsibility for his presumption. However wrong he had been to do it, he found himself on the point of laughing. He was now *hers*.

There was nothing to do in the reception hall, nothing but receive the congratulations and good wishes of their forty guests. All the serving and catering were being shared by Sarah, Hestia, Emmeline and Glenda. Ivor and Dreadnought kept ordering poses and flashing their cameras, but Dreadnought had relaxed and now seemed easily satisfied. Morag jumped up and down, telling everyone who would listen, "This is our wedding day! Aunt Radny is married now, and I'm her bridesmaid!"

One by one the guests filed past to speak to Ariadne. Although she never let go of his hand, the crowd seemed to be pulling her further from him, and each guest engaged her deeper in conversation. A few of them even stopped to talk to him.

"Oh, what a day, Remus, what a day," sobbed Mrs Pettigrew, squeezing at his free hand until his bones threatened to break. "It should have been my Peter up there as your best man, are you not thinking? He would have been so proud! Perhaps Peter would have been married himself by now. The blonde in the sapphire robes would have had him, would she not? Or the brunette in the emerald shawl?"

"Who knows whom Peter might have liked if he were here?" Remus hoped he didn't sound too surprised. What did it matter if Mrs Pettigrew had a completely wrong idea about the kind of girl who might have been attracted to poor little Peter?

"Congratulations, Remus, I think you've done well," said Madhav Patil. "She's a very intelligent girl." The words sounded kind and sincere, but Remus found himself noticing that no one had yet stated that Ariadne had done well. Did he look as incongruous beside her as Peter Pettigrew would have looked beside Sarah Webster or Emmeline Vance?

"I just knew it was *meant* to be." Glenda Chittock was dewy-eyed. "It was obvious from that first day in Perth that you couldn't keep your eyes off her. Doesn't Ariadne look *Celtic* with her hair loose? I'm wondering if the two of you would come to the Wireless sometime to talk about Ancient Runes and Viking spells... but after the honeymoon, of course. Isn't she just a dream come true?"

Yes, *she is*. He blandly replied, "In the autumn, perhaps," but uncomfortable thoughts were invading. How far had he over-reached himself today?

William pumped his hand heartily. "Wull fowks call ye Musterr MacDuggal, Rrremus, now ye've marrr-it young Mustrrrress?"

"I think folks will still call me Remus."

William kept pumping until he was dragged away by the combined efforts of Pradeep Patil and Zelly Macmillan, who were both demanding to wrestle.

"Lupin, you must be congratulating yourself profoundly." Snape had chosen his moment nicely; no one else was attending to Remus, or taking the least interest in their conversation. "Your guilty secrets are buried under a veneer of social normality; you've gained connections with all the most respectable Wizarding families; you can soon expect an apothecary's income to bolster your times of idleness; and you'll have a pure-blood virgin in your bed. No man in your condition could dream of doing better."

Ariadne would have known what to say, would have kept up appearances beautifully. It took Remus a long five seconds to think of a reply, by which time Snape had thought up another remark too.

"I know my cousin, Lupin. If she isn't a virgin, you have no one but yourself to blame."

Remus decided that his planned reply to the previous statement should not be modified. "You're right, Severus, I never dreamed of finding a woman of such character."

Ariadne was displaying character now, for she was being harassed by her brother. "You're not needing to let one bad decision ruin your life," Kenneth was saying. "When you're ready for a divorce, your family will stand by you no matter what."

Remus had to revise his impression of the MacDougals as a family who specialised in professional courtesy: Kenneth had evidently failed to profit from his parents' example.

"Cousin Remus, do you not think weddings are entirely boring?" This was Ernie Macmillan, five years old, and now divested of his velvet cushion.

"Perhaps cake would increase the interest," said Remus. "Why don't you ask Miss Dearborn over there if we're allowed to cut the cake yet?"

"No cake!" interrupted Emmeline in mock-horror. "Positively no cake until the speeches are finished!"

"Speeches are utterly boring," complained Ernie.

The speeches were short. Mr MacDougal spoke for three minutes on Ariadne's polite manners, hard work and talent for Potions (he even advertised her shampoo formula) before remarking, "Mr Lupin has shown very good taste today. Let us drink to the long-term prosperity of the bride and groom."

Remus spoke for two minutes, thanking all the guests for coming and proposing a toast to Morag and Ernie "for their great patience in attending grown-up affairs so compliantly."

Sturgis managed five minutes, with moments of genuine humour in his anecdotes about past services that Remus had rendered to the Order of the Phoenix, before toasting the bride's parents and reading the owls. There was a Muggle telegram from the aunt in Canada, a short (and suspiciously formulaic) note of congratulations from Professor Dumbledore, and a (rather saccharine) best-wishes poem from the Cornfoot family.

"There was also a Howler from Letitia Malfoy," Sturgis confided afterwards, "but I managed to open that this morning, before we started."

Finally the toasts were drunk, the cake was cut, the photographs were taken, everyone had shaken hands one more time, and Sturgis called for silence while the bride and groom departed. The guests stood around them in a circle Snape shooting poisonous glances, Manjula Patil sobbing into a handkerchief, Ernie Macmillan announcing that "standing in circles is completely boring" while Ariadne placed her hands on Remus's shoulders and looked up into his eyes.

They Disapparated.

* * * * *

Out of habit, he withdrew his hands from her waist as soon as they landed in his living room. For a moment he didn't know what to say.

"Remus, why are you angry?"

"Nothing you want to know."

"Remus. I heard what Severus said to you."

That commanded his attention. "He spoilt your wedding day."

"Is it not nearer the truth to say that he spoilt yours?"

"Ariadne, you couldn't have *liked* what he said."

"I've become used to the idea that Severus spoils parties. And even for Severus, it was not a very clever insult, was it?"

The anger that he had hardly known he was harbouring began to dissolve. "No. No, I suppose it wasn't."

"Quite unoriginal."

"Entirely lacking in humour value."

"Totally without insight."

"Of no interest to the wider community."

"Not even you could be fooled into believing that his words held any truth."

That stung a little; all Snape had really said was that Ariadne was too good for him, and Remus had been chewing that bitter reality all day long.

Ariadne sighed. "Remus, are you knowing what my cousin Felicity said to me? She said, 'What are you doing with such a good-looking man when you never take the trouble to dress up or flirt?' She was not seriously jealous, but she was surprised. We're friends, and she's not quite sixteen, but she had not expected that I'd do so well for myself." She drooped a little. "It hurt. Felicity's sharp words never mean anything, but today I was not wanting to be reminded that I'm not good enough for you."

"Let's hope Felicity will appreciate you better in future." He hardly noticed that he had taken a step towards her, but her droop seemed to revive when he touched her arm, and the bitter taste in his mouth seemed to doubt itself. "But your brother... Ariadne, I heard what Kenneth said too."

"He was not trying to hide his feelings. Talk about the line *calculated* to spoil a wedding... I'm thinking I've never lost so much respect for one person in so few seconds." Ariadne's annoyance seemed surprisingly feeble; she had never had much opinion of her brother. "Yet Madam Bones said... Oh, do not be cross about this one; she truly was meaning it kindly... She said, 'Are you quite sure you're happy about this, dear? Your parents have always seemed so determined to settle you down early. Did they pressure you into this marriage?'"

"Well, what does she know?" His other arm was around her now, and the bitter taste was poised to dissolve.

"What are any of them knowing? Remus, that's the point. How many of them took the trouble to find out the truth before they shot out their opinions? And whatever they're maybe wishing, they have not been able to stop it happening. We're married now. And I have to deal with the wolf, and you have to deal with my family. And I'm not glad that I'm dragging all these mean-spirited people into your life, because I'm knowing you deserve so much better. But all our closest friends the ones who know the most about us every one of them was truly happy for us."

"All of them?" The words were honey.

"All. My classmates, Emmeline, Aunt and Uncle Macmillan, Sturgis, the Chittocks, the Patils... Even Madam Bones at least accepted my word when I told her that my decision had surprised my parents. All of them are glad about our marriage. There were no exceptions." She did smile then, and her arms crept up around his neck.

"We're married now," he repeated, but he wasn't thinking about his new in-laws.

He pressed his mouth down onto hers, hard.

THE BEGINNING.