

Between the Lines of Fear and Blame

by HogwartsHoney

A mid-war fic where Voldemort is winning. Lupin is captured by Death Eaters and given to Snape as a slave.

Chapter 1 of 1

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As he goes left and you stay right

Between the lines of fear and blame

And you begin to wonder why you came

How to Save A Life The Fray

Prologue

Heavy chains clatter against cold stone as the man's body is thrown to the floor. Even in the semi-darkness, Severus can clearly see blood dripping onto the flagstones and pooling in the cracks, and the pungent smell of animal is almost overpowering in the large room. A black-robed figure kicks the lump of flesh and bone hard then, closely followed by another figure similarly clad, strides towards the raised dais upon which sits their lord and master. The figure shifts slightly in his tight robes and pulls the hood back to reveal matted hair, and Severus recognizes him. Greyback. He notices that the werewolf doesn't bow to their Lord, even as the thin man rises from his throne and steps almost daintily from his platform to slowly circle his Death Eaters. Turning his full attention to the prone form huddled on the ground, his red eyes glitter in the lamplight and his maniacal grin shows uneven teeth.

'Another traitor, Fenrir?'

'Yes, Lord, one of my own, but he serves the others now. I was showing him what happens to a traitor when I was interrupted.' His rough voice, so reminiscent of the animal, is little more than a growl as he gestures rudely at Dolohov. 'I would have killed him myself if it were not for your *boy* here.'

Dolohov glowers at him, his hand twitching in the direction of his wand, but Voldemort raises his thin, pale hand and all movement ceases, although the threatening looks continue.

'My *instructions* were to capture as many members of the Order as possible. Dolohov understands this, and you would do well to remember it. Surely you do not think that because we have won the battle we can now relent? Although Potter is still alive, several key members are dead and many more are wounded, and with Dumbledore gone there is no leadership. Their counterattack is failing. Our victory is virtually guaranteed.'

Voldemort's head cocks to the side as his gaze takes in the man on the ground; then he turns and in a swirl of robes is in front of Severus.

'So, he's one of Dumbledore's men? Perhaps someone you know, Severus?'

'Perhaps so, my Lord,' he says, looking directly into his master's eyes and reinforcing his shields, allowing only images of Dumbledore, phoenixes and battles to skitter across his mind. 'May I?'

'Of course, of course... please. Tell me what you see.'

Severus maintains an air of indifference as he walks over to where the semi-conscious man lies. Even from a distance he sees that his breathing is erratic, and his groans of pain only confirm Severus' initial suspicions. The kick from Greyback alone was enough to break ribs, and internal damage is likely. He suspects that, by now, the other side is aware that one of their own has been captured and will probably take steps to recover him. He withdraws his wand and casually murmurs, '*Lumos*,' as he peers down at their prisoner, itemizing the damage. Bones definitely broken; extensive bruises, many already beginning to turn dark; gashes, some of them deep; so much blood covering the face and body that he's barely able to recognize...

Lupin.

Fuck.

Only his years of training and the foreknowledge that this would be someone he knows prevent him from reacting, yet he feels his heart constrict just a little. He straightens and raises his mental shields into an impenetrable fortress as he schools his face into a mask of antipathy.

'One of Greyback's curs, my Lord.' Severus allows distaste and scorn to seep into his words as he turns his back on the wounded man and faces his master. 'He used to be a teacher at Hogwarts, but he's been gone for several years. I had seen him at some of their meetings, a long time ago. He has obviously returned.'

The half-truths flow effortlessly from Severus' tongue as his mind screams, but his shields are as impenetrable as granite. Voldemort seems to ponder his words for a moment, and Severus feels the slight tickle of Legilimency as his master searches his mind, but he expects the intrusion and reinforces his shields, allowing only certain images to bleed through. The only sound in the room is the painfully shallow breathing from the man on the floor.

Greyback clears his throat. It sounds like the scraping of bark.

'If I may, Lord, perhaps this pathetic creature can best be used to remind the rest of my pack what happens to traitors.'

Greyback's meaning is clear, and an uncomfortable shiver runs along Severus' spine, but he remains impassive as he waits for their Lord's answer. Voldemort's eyes narrow, and Severus senses a shift in the atmosphere of the room as the red eyes settle on the leader of the werewolf pack.

'I am disappointed by your lack of control, Fenrir. I would think that your animals should be reminded of what happens when *anyone* displeases me. There have been reports of similar incidents...'

'Fabrications, Lord, and nothing but malicious and subversive attempts to sully my name and wrest control from me!' Greyback's pointed stare and glittering eyes focus all his rage and ire on Lupin's back and Severus looks on impassively, knowing that the Dark Lord is a master at Legilimency and will have his answer soon enough.

'So you admit that there is dissention among the ranks?' Voldemort's anger is carefully controlled, but his sibilant consonants give the impression of a room filled with hissing snakes.

Greyback's eyes flicker for a moment as he turns to face his master.

'There is no such thing in *my* pack, Lord.'

The lycanthrope spits the word with as much venom as Severus has ever heard, and the implication hangs heavily in the air between them. In that one moment all three realize that Fenrir has crossed a line, but Severus remains still as magic ripples past him, and Greyback is on the floor, writhing in pain, screaming and clawing at phantom attackers. The Dark Lord is relentless, casting *Crucio* repeatedly until the screams become howls which become whimpers which eventually become nothing. All that is left is Greyback, eyes wide in terror as he pants and shudders on the floor.

'That is how to control power cemented with pain and fear is the only power that cannot be subverted.'

Voldemort commands two of his followers to throw Greyback out, and as the Death Eaters descend like swirling shadows on the werewolf, Severus sees in the animal's eyes that there's more of this discussion to be had. Their master's gaze sweeps over the bleeding form on the floor and then takes in his remaining faithful who stand in a loose circle. He nods and, one by one, they descend on the already-battered man. Each well-placed kick and curse draws groans of pain as the body writhes and cringes until a pale, thin hand is raised and, again, all movement ceases save the irregular rise and fall of the traitor's chest with each gasping breath.

'Perhaps I shall allow my most trusted servant to oversee the rest of the punishment. Severus, step forth.'

'My Lord?'

'Take this filthy animal away from me. He is yours to do with as you like. Ensure that he cannot escape and strip him of all magic.'

'Yes, my Lord.' Severus bows low and turns as he straightens, looking at Dolohov.

'His wand?'

Dolohov glances at Voldemort for confirmation, then digs in his pockets before handing over the thin piece of wood. Severus turns quickly and strides towards the prisoner, snapping the wand in half with barely a moment's hesitation. A burst of magical energy flashes once and then dissipates, but the body on the floor barely stirs.

'Severus.' The word is softly spoken but rife with danger and once more Severus turns to face his master, bowing slightly as he skillfully avoids looking into the blood-red eyes.

'Ensure that he is adequately punished first.' The consequences of failure are implicit.

'As you wish, my Lord.'

His incantation is silent but the bouts of *Cruciatus* rend tortured screams from Lupin's battered lips that echo through the room and rebound off the impenetrable stone walls. The sounds of torment mingle with the Dark Lord's maniacal laughter and reflect the anguish within Severus' own mind.

Between The Lines Of Fear And Blame

The scrape of metal against stone jolts Remus into consciousness. The pain behind his eyes is still there in full force, and he tries to concentrate despite his pounding headache, tries to reason where he is, tries to remember what had happened and how he arrived here. Wherever 'here' is.

He is naked and lying on his right side on a cold stone floor in a dimly lit room and he shifts experimentally but encounters no sharp or stabbing pain, although he clearly remembers the sounds of his bones breaking and the sight of his skin torn and bleeding. Now there is only the dull ache as his body heals. He tries to sit up but discovers that his hands are chained in front of him and also realizes that the heavy links on the collar at his neck and the shackles on his wrists connect through a thick leather belt at his waist and continue down to his feet. The chain between his ankle cuffs barely allows for movement, but he manages to get to his knees, and he tastes his own blood in his mouth, the slightly metallic taste bringing home his injuries with a crash.

Greyback.

Remus had been captured and beaten by the filthy werewolf, then brought before Voldemort where he had been abused and tortured in turn by each one of his loyal followers. He had tried to defend himself against the fists and boots, had tried to close his ears to the sounds of his own screaming, at first fighting desperately to survive, then wishing desperately to die. Throughout the night only one face had haunted him.

Severus.

He had been only partially conscious when Voldemort eventually passed him on to Severus as a 'reward' for his loyalty, and he had held onto a faint ray of hope that somehow the spy could have lessened the damage, but the force of his curses had been, if possible, even more violent than the others. Remus had screamed and screamed until he knew no more.

He vaguely remembers being stripped by rough hands and chained, his wrists and ankles bound and manacled, and surmises from the hard ground and dank, seeping dungeon walls that he is still within Voldemort's lair. Violent shudders wrack his body and his headache amplifies the waves of nausea and despair that roll through him.

Not far away, a door slams closed, and the sound explodes in Remus' head, the bright pain causing him to cringe and grab his ears as best he can while bound. He recovers his equilibrium and lifts his head to see Severus stalking toward him in a billow of robes. Remus feels a rush of relief in his chest and a thin blade of hope slices through his darkness, but Severus stares at him, stares right through him, his black eyes glittering like obsidian mirrors, reflecting everything and revealing nothing. Remus feels the knot in his gut twist tighter as the thin, pale fingers reach down, and he closes his eyes, hoping for a moment that with just a touch, Severus will reassure him; that with just one gesture he will know that he can be saved.

His eyes open again at the gentle rattle of his chains, and he watches with a sort of detached curiosity for a moment as Severus' hands slide slowly along the thick links; then, with a quick downward jerk of his hand, the chains snap and Remus is pulled forward by the collar around his neck. Barely able to brace his fall, he's face down on the floor and tasting his own blood again, fresh blood that is only slightly less alarming than the dried filth already beneath his body.

'Eyes on the floor. The Dark Lord has been merciful and spared your life; now you are mine to do with as I see fit. I give the orders and you obey me. No questions, no exceptions. Follow those rules and your life will not be intolerable.'

Remus can't believe what he's hearing; he needs to make Severus understand.

'Severus... Greyback means to kill me. He knows that I've been leaking information to the Order.'

'That useless animal will not touch anything that is mine.'

'But...'

'Silence. I am now your master and you are my slave, nothing more.'

Remus barely dares to look up, breathing heavily as the alarms go off in his head. No! This is all wrong, Severus is a spy for the Order—surely he is merely playing the game. Another shudder wracks his body as he considers that perhaps, just perhaps, this time it's all real, horribly, frightfully real, and the snakes twist in his gut, harder, sharper, and he is sick on the very ground he's resting his forehead on. The smell of it, the hot, sick, pungent odor of his filth, his vomit, and his fear overwhelm him, and he retches again and again, unable to prevent or even control his body's convulsions. He is barely aware of harsh words and harsher tones and everything swims around in his consciousness, the words, the sounds, the light and the dark, all one sickening, whirling mass that pulls him into darkness.

He is shaken awake by the iron grip of hands on his shoulders. He dimly hears muttered words and feels pulse after pulse of magic wash over him, clearing his head as the familiar tingle of *'Scourgify'* dances over his skin. Remus notices that the area around him is clean, and he chances a look at Severus.

'Thank you.'

'I will not abide this filth.'

His tone is sharp, and Remus wonders whether the anger is directed at him or at the situation in general, but he is alive and clean, more than he had realistically expected.

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'You cannot seriously expect to keep me here, naked, and make me call you "Master".'

Severus gives Remus a withering look, and his thin lips are pressed together in obvious anger.

'Perhaps you fail to grasp the gravity of your situation. You are nothing more than a prisoner of war that the Dark Lord has seen fit to keep alive for my gratification. He does this because it pleases him, for the moment. Do not presume that your position is in any way permanent.'

Remus is uncomfortable being naked at all times, especially in front of Severus, but he is silent for a moment as he ponders Severus' words. From the tone of voice, he knows that danger is everywhere, and he can feel it. Voldemort's followers lurk in every corner, and the great snake has taken to slithering into and out of the room regularly. He vows to kill the reptile one day, provided he is given the chance, and he knows that although he is Severus' slave, if he is to survive, he must find a way to reach the human within the darker-than-death robes and steel persona of the Death Eater. Still, under it all he feels that Severus plans to play his role to the very end, and he hopes that there is some way that he can break through the mask and reach the man beneath, the man he thought he knew.

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Kneeling.

Whenever Severus is in the room, Remus must kneel beside him with his head bent and eyes on the ground. He finds it particularly ironic that in his many erotic dreams this scenario was always considered an act of trust—surrendering his bare neck without hope of defense—but instead it is the ultimate act of supplication, and with it he also surrenders his dignity. Remus must be completely obedient or he will be severely punished; whereas at first he had doubted this, the punishment meted out to him after his first breach of conduct still serves as a powerful reminder that Severus is not who he had seemed. Memories of the Death Eaters, their malicious faces and the echoes of their mirthless laughter still linger in his mind.

Remus is alone and cold, and his chains rattle softly in concert with his shivers. Severus sweeps into the room and glares as he points to the floor beside the desk, and as Remus sinks slowly to his knees, spreading them apart as he has been commanded, he notices plush carpet under the desk which extends just far enough that his knees rest on it instead of the rough floor. He studies the carpet's green background with black entwined snakes which serves as a not-so-subtle reminder that he is surrounded by Slytherin evil at every turn. Oddly, he doesn't remember the carpet being there yesterday, but Severus gives no sign that anything is amiss, and Remus has learned that

when Severus is like this he must not draw attention to himself or he will be punished.

Moments later, a dark-robed figure appears in the door and casts a sharp glance at Remus before he approaches Severus. Remus does not need to look at Severus to know that he is glowering the very atmosphere around them virtually tingles with his anger.

'Our Lord requires an update by nightfall, Snape.'

The amount of derision in those few words is matched and bettered by Severus' clipped 'Indeed.'

Hours pass and Severus pays him no further mind as he wades through tome after tome of what appear to be Potions books. Several are scattered on the floor, and Remus almost wishes that he is allowed to glance through them, but he has been ordered not to move and he doesn't, even though his back and neck ache and his legs are almost asleep; although he wants nothing more than to sink onto the carpet or even the cold stone floor and escape this consciousness, he knows he must not or he will be punished. His only point of comfort is that his knees will not be raw and bloodied tonight, and maybe that's enough.

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Remus wonders how long his incarceration will last. Severus continues to treat him with thinly veiled hostility and occasionally punishes him rather severely for what he considers to be minor transgressions. The most memorable one happened the previous day during a heated argument between Severus and another Death Eater whom Remus didn't know. He hadn't heeded his master's command to leave quickly enough, and Severus had pushed him away hard and he fell, striking the edge of a table with his side. The pain had nearly caused him to black out, and he wondered whether he would be able to stand, but Severus' ire prompted him to scramble to his feet and limp away. That night there was blood in his urine, and the raw tightness of his torso indicated internal damage, yet Severus did not come down from his fit of pique, and he was left alone that night. It was difficult to sleep with the pain, and Remus dreamt of hands upon him, firm and comforting, but those dreams were fleeting and he eventually slipped further into slumber.

The pale light of morning filters through the small windows cut into the thick walls, and Remus stirs, groaning at the aches of his body. At least the cot is better than the ground, but it is really too small and cramped for his long frame. He cracks an eye and surreptitiously scans the room, but there's no movement or other sign of Severus. Remus stumbles into the bathroom and is shocked when he catches a glimpse of himself in the mirror. His skin is pale and his hair is stringy, longer than he normally keeps it. He is reminded fleetingly of Sirius after he escaped from Azkaban and shudders uncomfortably at the comparison. Unable to perform shaving charms without his wand, his beard has grown out slightly, and he is forced to look every part the animal, chained and submissive. He examines the large bruise on his right side, no doubt as a result of his fall, but there is no deeper pain like there was last night, nor is there any blood this morning as he relieves himself. He knows that his powers of regeneration can in no way account for that and a fleeting image dances through his mind more of an impression really, of his dream, of hands on him... but, was it a dream?

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Severus is agitated and has been for days. Remus knows it despite how well his captor conceals it, and the pressure that his master obviously feels comes out in his treatment of Remus. He barely sleeps or eats, and his commands are sharper than usual, his movements quick.

Greyback saunters unannounced into Severus' lab, and Remus feels the familiar prickles of fear surge through him. Even with Severus' protection, his history in Greyback's pack and the treatment he suffered at the hands of the pack leader still elicits very strong and visceral reactions. Trying to survive under those conditions has forever scarred Remus.

Severus casts a Stasis Charm and turns very slowly with an air of nonchalance about him, but Remus knows that his master's anger is bubbling just beneath the surface. He can also feel Greyback's gaze heavy upon him, the malevolent yellow eyes boring into the top of his skull even as his own are trained on the floor.

'I question your authority over the prisoner, Snape.'

'Perhaps you would like to take the matter up with our Lord?'

'The cur needs dominance. He is seemingly acquiescent, but underneath it all, he's a traitor.'

'I am duly warned.'

There is a swish of robes and heavy footsteps on the stone floor as Greyback paces, but out of the corner of his eye, Remus sees that Severus has not moved.

'How do we know he is suitably *controlled*?' he drawled. 'We wouldn't want the beast to get free, now would we?'

Remus shudders at the thinly veiled threat in Greyback's voice, and memories of the pack scream through his mind. The sound of his own breathing is loud in his ears, and he shifts despite himself; only slightly, but his chains rattle and Severus' thunderous voice sets his teeth on edge.

'I have told you, wolf, no sound, no movement.'

But Remus is assailed by memories and unconsciously does the unthinkable he looks up at Severus, a quick look, silently pleading with him to be released from Greyback's presence.

'Methinks your power is slipping, Snape. The Dark Lord doesn't like mistakes.'

Remus can feel the glower and rage and flinches instinctively even before Severus moves.

'My control is never in question.'

Severus turns quickly and shoves Remus forward onto his hands and knees, his hands harsh, his movements rough, and Remus doesn't even have time to react. He feels Severus behind him, kicking his knees apart as his hands move rapidly against the fabric of his robes; then he hears Severus mutter a lubricating charm, and pain explodes in his body as Severus thrusts into him without warning, filling him with such white-hot, *biting* pain that he shrieks. His arms collapse, and he is face down on the ground, his cheek and jaw scraping along the hard stone, his entire body shaking as it tries to reject the intrusion. Severus grips his hips hard, fingers digging into flesh, cutting and bruising *Gods, no, please...* but he continues and Remus is helpless, bound by his shackles and being buggered in front of Greyback. The humiliation is extreme, but at least this is Severus, *Severus, not Greyback...* Severus and he can do nothing more than hold on and try to breathe, for Severus is his master and he cannot escape.

'Control. Is. Mine. Do. You. Understand?' Each word is punctuated by a thrust more vicious than the last, and the room is filled with the sound of skin slapping against skin, Remus' gasps and Severus' harsh voice, and throughout it all Remus knows that Greyback is there, watching.

'Yes.' Remus can hardly get the word out.

'Yes, what?'

'M- Master. Yes, Master.'

Remus can barely think through the pain, and his cock hangs limp with horror. He feels Severus' thrusts grow more erratic, and the hard ground scrapes away at his skin; his knees are burning, slipping on the floor. Severus thrusts once more, hard, then shudders and stills behind him, gripping his hips even harder. Barely a second later he pulls out quickly and rises to Remus the pain is almost as bad as penetration and the cold air of the room is harsh on his bare skin. A boot is planted on the side of his hip

and thrusts hard; then he is on the ground, lying on his side on the cold stone with the smells of sweat, blood and sex, his knees and hands scraped raw and his face bleeding.

'I assure you, Greyback, that I am in complete control, something you blatantly cannot achieve. Now get out before I find new uses for werewolf fangs.'

The air in the room has become colder, and Remus is only barely conscious of the standoff between the two men. With a scrape of boots and a whirl of robes, Greyback leaves, and Remus hears his master perform a Cleaning Charm on himself, only marginally aware that Severus has not moved. He feels as though he has been split open and gutted with wounds left raw and bleeding, then discarded like so much rubbish; the pain is pervasive, and his mind struggles to close itself off from the hurt. His clothes land on the floor beside his head.

'Clean yourself up.'

Remus whimpers his acknowledgement and rises from the ground slowly, painfully, and shuffles off, chains dragging on the ground, barely able to walk upright. He turns on the water, as hot as he can stand it, and slowly lowers himself onto the floor of the shower, trying to ignore the stinging and burning of his wounds, just sitting under the heavy spray as the water sluices away the blood and the grime.

He knows that he shouldn't be surprised at Severus' actions; in truth, Greyback hadn't treated him any better when he ran with the pack, but at least Severus is someone he knows and almost trusts, rather than the savage rutting of Greyback whose only motivation had been cruelty and anger. There must be no opposition to the leader of the pack, ever... but something wasn't right. Of course, Remus didn't orgasm couldn't under such circumstances and suddenly he realizes what was different; what has gnawed away at his mind. He hasn't had many lovers, but one thing was very different this time. There was no evidence of semen running down his legs after their encounter; Severus had not gotten off even though he went through the motions. But why? For his own protection, or for both their sakes?

Remus closes his eyes, leans his head back against the shower wall and sighs; a long, slow exhalation borne of despair as the water cascades against his chest, pounding him into submission, and Severus' words wash through his mind.

Control is mine.

He finishes his shower and returns to the room where he sits gingerly next to Severus' desk and leans against the side of it, trying to ignore the soreness and stabbing pains inside him. He does not see his master until the black-robed man emerges from the shadows, and Remus scrambles to kneel, gritting his teeth against the pain, but he refuses to let Severus have anything to punish him for. Severus settles at his desk once more, and Remus kneels on the carpet beside him, his face and knees burning, uncomfortable but trying to shift without being obvious.

After a few minutes, Severus throws down his quill and points his wand at Remus, who eyes its tip warily, not daring to meet Severus' gaze.

'Stand.' And Remus does, with difficulty.

A muttered spell later and the skin on his cheek and jaw tingles; another spell and the battered flesh on his knees is healed, although still pink. Severus tosses him a small pot of salve.

'Use that and then go to bed. I cannot have you distracting me.'

Remus is at a loss for words but manages to stammer, 'Th-thank you,' before Severus bellows at him, and he scampers off as quickly as he comfortably can. His superficial wounds are already mended, and the salve is both cooling and soothing, and Remus uses it liberally on his injured flesh, inside and out, his fingers gingerly exploring the damage that he cannot see. Nothing feels torn, only bruised, and as he works the salve inside him his cock twitches. He slides his finger in deeper, hooking and angling it just so, stroking his prostate until he is hard. Growling softly as the sensations intensify, he presses on the gland and frictions back and forth furiously until he comes, shuddering and gasping to a mental image of a pale face surrounded by darkness.

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'We need to speak, Snape.'

The voice is harsh, and Remus instinctively cringes away from the sound. Greyback stands in the doorway, but he only sees the bottom of the man's robes. Remus dares not look up, but he is nervous, feeling every bit the captive as he struggles against his manacles. He notices that Severus treats him much worse when in the presence of company, although he reasons that perhaps his master is playing the part of spy, and to be convincing he must convince all—even Remus.

'Very well, but not in front of *this*.'

Severus appears beside Remus, and strong hands grasp him by his collar, pulling him upright. He stumbles as the blood returns to his legs, and the hands tighten around his collar—not bruising, but steadying, offering support in a moment so brief that Remus does not have time to react, but he regains his balance quickly. The hands are gone, and he is left to wonder whether he has imagined it all.

'Leave us.'

The order is succinct. Remus grits his teeth and forces himself to answer, 'Yes, Master.'

Remus keeps his eyes steadfastly on the floor as he shuffles into the small bedroom that they share. 'Share' is rather a stretch of the imagination; Severus has the bed although he doubts that the man sleeps at all—and Remus is relegated to a cot in the corner, small and cramped, but at least he is kept warm and fed. As a prisoner of war and Severus' slave, he fares considerably well.

The time spent with Severus isn't intolerable either, Remus realizes. True, he is not allowed to initiate conversation, and they barely speak when others are around, but in the evenings when they have both retired and Remus is lying in his cot, Severus treats him almost considerately. Remus is allowed one book to read—of Severus' choosing, of course—and although he longs for information about the Order, he knows that he must not push the other man too far.

Remus also yearns for contact, human contact. He is still not allowed clothing and notices that Severus is careful never to touch him now, always leaving his food and other items on the table instead of handing them to him personally. He knows that it is of little use to question the dark man, and still, for all that, Remus needs to feel a connection, but Severus is consistently out of reach. Once, he made the mistake of touching Severus, barely grazing the midnight robes with the tips of his fingers, and he thought that, for just a moment, he felt Severus begin to respond. A split second later, though, a stinging hex had left him scraping at his skin.

'Do. Not. Touch. Me.'

The words had been spoken with loathing; but there was an undertone, something Lupin could feel more than define. He struggled to identify Severus' emotion. Could it be...but how could it be, Lupin asked himself logically...*fear*?

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'Severus?'

His question is met with nothing more than stony silence and a murderous glare. Remus flinches, although he tries not to show it, and asks again, anxious for news, hoping for a moment of connection with Severus.

'M-master, please, the Order? Surely you know something.'

'It is not your place to question me, wolf.'

'You MUST know... Kingsley, Tonks, Moody? H-Harry? Please, tell me something. You fought with them. You were our spy; you must have some information.'

'Do not presume to know me, Lupin,' he says, and the razor sharpness of the voice and those words causes Remus to fall silent after that exchange. Even though Severus called him by name something he hasn't done in years his eyes are like the black depths of hell with no light, no hope and no chance of salvation. Remus begins to despair, even as he tries desperately to find something positive to hold on to.

'The Dark Lord has no reason to keep you alive.'

Remus' stomach lurches as the reality of his situation finally sinks in he is truly lost and his own life is forfeit. The look on Severus' face is something he's seen before loathing on a thousand faces throughout his life once people learned what he was, and he understands it at a cellular level. He wants to die anyway; he has no hope left, not even from Severus, and his mind is plagued by the knowledge of the approaching full moon, fearing that, without the Wolfsbane or the ability to run free, the animal will destroy his body. Remus squeezes his eyes shut, trying desperately to block out the images of self-mutilation running through his mind, but they persist, graphically replaying in vivid detail. He shakes his head and opens his eyes to take what refuge he can in the present, only to see Severus with his head in his hands, rubbing his face and eyes tiredly as though trying to block out images of his own.

For days Remus had searched for a sign, had *believed* there to be signs that Severus still held his life as somehow important, but in fact there were none. They were never anything more than the desperate wishes in his mind, and now, he wishes to die.

His one hope had been Severus.

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Remus is awakened by cold fluid that lashes his skin and burns his open wounds, but he is too disoriented to react. His skin still tingles as he is pulled upright by the collar around his neck and made to kneel on the ground. His knees are kicked apart as far as they'll go, and the harsh stone rips into the flesh once more as the ankle cuffs bite into his already-raw skin. Remus' wrists are now bound behind his back and the chains are still attached to the leather belt. He tries to open his eyes, but even the smallest amount of movement hurts, and the light that invades is too bright, too sharp, too cruel.

He feels heat in front of his face, and the musky smell of *an animal* assails his nostrils, especially sensitive as the full moon approaches. He hears the snap of the chain at the back of his neck and knows that his collar is now chained to the walls on either side of his corner so that he is unable to move forward, backward or to the side. The sense of danger increases as his mind begins to realize that this is not Severus, and a mere glance reveals that he is alone with his attacker. He hears movement of fabric, smells the thick cloy of male arousal as something firm yet soft pushes against his lips, and something else, sharp and hard, digs into his cheek.

'Open.' The order is as incisive as the jab of pain in his face, the voice as harsh as the scraping of branches.

Greyback.

Oh, god, please don't.

He is terrified, and the pressure against his lips increases; he opens slowly, curling his lips around his teeth as he remembers all too well the wounds on his back that still twinge occasionally from the last beating when his sharp canines were not properly covered.

'No teeth, whelp, or this time you die.' The sharp tip of Greyback's wand twists against his flesh.

Remus dares not nod or move his head, so he does what he must. He relaxes his jaw and accepts the intrusion as the thick cock slides over his tongue and into his mouth until his nose is nestled in the dark curls of Greyback's groin, the scent so overpowering in its muskiness that he finds it difficult to breathe. For months he has had nightmares of this, of being helpless while the werewolf forces him, fucks him, and he tries desperately to quiet the shrieking in his mind as his body shakes violently. He breathes through his nose, staggered, hesitant breaths, and he trembles as he waits.

'Suck,' comes the order, and the wand is still there, demanding obedience without question, so he does, and his wrists strain against their bonds as he works his jaw and his tongue, hollowing his cheeks as he creates the suction. He almost chokes as Greyback fucks his mouth, and he tastes blood as his sharp teeth shred the insides of his lips. Their only point of contact is the cock in his mouth, only his lips and tongue against the hot, turgid flesh, and even now he still searches for some sign that this is not real.

'Suck... harder.' The voice is harsh, roughened by arousal, and the muscles in Remus' jaw are cramping, but the sharp point of the wand digs harder, and he knows that the end is close. He presses his tongue firmly against the underside of the cock and creates a tight slick passage within his mouth, and finally the thick liquid spurts, hitting the back of his throat again and again, and he swallows it and his blood with difficulty, still sucking, the animal above him still rutting in his mouth, and maybe because he is submissive means that there's a chance that he will not be beaten; that maybe Severus will forgive him?

He stops sucking when the cock is limp, and he feels it being withdrawn, the wand now under his jaw, digging and cutting into his soft flesh as he obediently opens his mouth. The muscles ache and his jaw is stiff; he runs his tongue along the inside of his lips and feels the ripped and pulpy flesh. Then suddenly stars explode behind his eyes as he is cuffed on the side of his head. There is screaming in his ears that is perhaps his own but he can't be sure as his fading consciousness registers receding footsteps and the door slams. His body finally goes limp, and he slumps to the side, his upper body held in place by the chains that still attach his collar to the walls and it cuts into the flesh of his neck. He fights for breath, and his arms strain against his bonds as he tries desperately to scream for help, but the collar is tight, constricting his airway, and the taste and smell of blood is everywhere. He concentrates only on breathing since there is very little hope of rescue or even survival.

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It is dark; a lone torch casts a baleful light in the passageway beyond the door. Remus is barely conscious, but he hears rapid footsteps, then a swish of robes and swearing. Severus is beside him, crouching low to the ground and releasing the bindings on his neck; then strong arms lower him to the cold floor.

'Who did this?' Severus' harsh tone is commanding.

Remus refuses to look at his master; he's too ashamed of his fear and his helplessness and too tired to care any longer. With a quick movement, Severus thrusts a small earthenware bottle at Remus.

'Drink this,' he commands.

'Don't, please... no more.' Remus can barely open his mouth for the pain, and his voice is little more than a rasp.

'Drink it!' The command is rapid, hissed and urgent.

Remus groans but obeys his master. With eyes still averted he raises a trembling hand, and his long fingers grip around the bottle that is thrust at him. He fleetingly hopes it is poison and that Severus is finally putting him out of his misery. Voldemort has commanded Severus to brew a host of potions, and Remus is locked away in this darkened cell because the full moon rises tonight.

'Please... just let me die.' His mouth and the side of his face feel badly swollen, and Remus can barely do more than mumble, but he raises the bottle to his lips and obediently downs the liquid, hissing as it burns his tattered flesh and almost choking on the horrible taste. He retches and coughs as he curls into a pile on the ground, barely acknowledging the movement of fabric against his skin as he realizes with disbelief what he has just ingested.

Wolfsbane.

Whispers of breath ghost along the skin of his neck as he is engulfed in the soft, warm folds of a robe, and for a moment he relaxes into the embrace, because just this once, he will not expect anything, will not look for signs that aren't there; for once he will simply accept what is being offered without question.

'I will not let you die, Lupin. You must escape tonight.'

The sharp twisted dagger of hope slices into Remus anew, and he bleeds fear, his body shuddering both from the cold and from the feeling of Severus' arms around him as he wraps the robes tighter. A whisper later and his chains are Banished, and Severus runs his wand over Remus' body as he mutters a few incantations the cuts in his mouth and on his neck tingle as they heal, and the swelling in his face begins to lessen. Remus drinks the other potions without question as roughened hands explore his wounds and bruises; then Severus casts a quick '*Scourgify*'. The look in Severus' eyes is one of guarded determination, something that Remus recognizes from their youth.

'Severus...'

'You will transform tonight and overpower me in a bid for escape. Do not bite me, but you must slash me with your claws.' Remus makes a horrified sound, but Severus continues as though he hasn't heard. 'Make your way out and kill as many as you can; I will disarm or hinder them to the best of my ability. These wards will allow werewolves through, and once on the grounds outside, get to the Shack and stay there until you are human once more. There is a Portkey waiting for you a letter opener which is charmed only to you and will take you directly into my home. I will find you.'

He cannot think, cannot move, and can only stare mutely at Severus' mouth as it forms the words that give Remus back his life. He nods slowly and understands that Severus is sacrificing more than just his slave. Suddenly he *can* breathe, can think and can move, and he does, shifting quickly towards the body before him and pressing a quick kiss to his dry lips. The fleeting look of surprise mixed with warmth on Severus' face is a revelation of his unexpected depth of feeling, and in that one unguarded moment, Remus sees the truth; then, in a swirl of ebony robes, his liberator is gone.

~~

Remus arrives in a tiny, dark sitting room clutching the tarnished letter opener to his chest. The room has a definite air of stillness about it and reminds Remus of the dungeons from whence he has only recently escaped. He drags himself through an open door and into the kitchen where he is unable to go any further. During his bid to escape, he had felt a sharp blow to his right shoulder, but the werewolf had paid it little mind. Now the wounds burn horribly, and although there is a little food and running water, enough to help him survive, there are no potions or supplies within easy reach. He is flooded with relief that he is finally free, but now he worries for Severus, ashamed at the realization that three times he has misjudged the men in his life; once again he had lost faith and mistook someone's actions so completely.

Sirius he should have known better than to doubt him, but the circumstances being what they were... his friend had behaved so strangely in the weeks before James and Lily's murders, secretive, unhinged almost, and Remus had felt a chasm between them that had never existed before. He had almost felt as though he didn't know his friend anymore.

Peter who could have imagined that the quiet, mousy boy would have betrayed his friends to a murderer? There must have been a change somewhere; at some point there must have been some clue, some little indication that things were awry how could he not have seen that?

And now Severus, certainly not as trustworthy as he had thought the others to be, and still, for all that, he had been the one to save Remus' life. The look on Severus' face when he had given him the Wolfsbane and outlined plans for his escape spoke volumes where mere words could not, but the animal inside Remus had felt the raw energy and understood it at a primal level. The fortitude that it must take for Severus to continue his undying loyalty to Dumbledore and the Order in the face of scorn, distrust and outright animosity... at immense risk to himself, both emotionally and physically, never resting, unable to trust anyone...

Remus shakes his head sadly as guilt and worry eat away at his mind, and he pulls the cloak closer around his body. Wincing slightly in pain, he huddles in the corner of the kitchen until weariness eventually pulls him slowly into slumber.

~~

Remus is awakened by shaking. Uncontrollable shaking. He is feverish, and the gashes on his shoulder ache and burn; his vision is blurry, and his body trembles constantly. He is weakened as always in the days following his transformation, and although his body has tried to overcome last night's wounds, he fears that they may be infected. He hears faint noises, and his mind tells him that someone is in the house; he wonders who has come and hopes that it is Sirius or James, making their way through the tunnel into the Shack, treading softly and carefully so as not to startle him, coming to tell him that his transformation is over and they can all return to the Castle. He will finally be with them again, and he hopes that they will be happier this time around...

Suddenly darkness moves before his eyes, and he bites back a scream; death is everywhere and he is helpless with no wand and no way of escape. His terror stirs the animal inside him, but he cannot summon it forth, and he curses his life that he isn't an Animagus, because if he was, he would be a bird, a large bird, and he would change and fly away where they'd never find him, fly into the night, into freedom...

The black robes descend in front of him, and he recoils further, wrapping his arms around himself protectively, wanting death but fearing it nonetheless.

'Don't...' The word is but a ghost of a breath between chattering teeth.

'Lupin... Gods...' The voice echoes from a great distance, and the sounds swirl in Remus' head as the darkness moves closer, ever closer.

'... don't...'

Remus retreats further into the corner, feeling the stinging burning of gashes along his sides, but not realizing that his own fingernails dig into his flesh. Visions shred through his mind of a werewolf's eyes, yellow and inhuman as it bites him, rips into his flesh and marks him, but he holds on, desperately trying to protect himself as his mind screams.

'Please don't....'

He closes his eyes as the darkness engulfs him with strong arms and low whispers, and he is moving; his body rises, and he is held against something hard; then he lies on something impossibly soft. His skin tingles, and flashes of coloured light try their best to penetrate his eyelids, but he can barely hear Sirius and James anymore, can only hear murmuring around him. He opens his eyes, hoping to find his friends but comes face to face with Severus, and fear, relief and dread vie for supremacy in his mind, but pain flares through his shoulder and the darkness wins.

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Warm hands cradle Remus' face as gentle words encourage him to open his mouth, and he does so obediently, swallowing as warm liquid is poured down his throat. He does not want to wake he prefers this dream state to anything the world has to offer but the voice is insistent, the tone mellow like pure honey. Remus thinks that he'd do anything for that voice... Severus' voice was like that once...

*Severus!*

Remus springs into full consciousness as he jerks upright and almost spills the bottles of potions on Severus' lap. He is speechless as the pale man gathers his supplies and prepares to move away, but Remus catches his hand, halting his retreat. He needs answers.

'What day is it?' he asks, his voice rough from sleep and lack of use.

He is rewarded by a faint twitch of facial muscles as Severus regards him slightly less harshly than before, and Remus notices that he hasn't withdrawn his hand.

'Tuesday. You've been in and out of sleep for two days.'

*Two days!*

'Voldemort?'

Another twitch, this one more pronounced, and Remus shifts closer to Severus. He doesn't retreat, but Remus is almost afraid to think of that as a sign.

'The Dark Lord was extremely displeased with the circumstances of your escape. Greyback has been punished severely, and I have been ordered to locate you and ensure your demise. You must leave here soon, Lupin; I cannot guarantee your safety.'

Greyback. The name alone sends shudders of fear down Remus' spine, and his stomach lurches at the memory of what he was forced to endure, both during his months of spying in Greyback's pack, and their most recent episode.

'Dumbledore would never have let you join the pack had he known.'

Remus feels a biting flash of anger even as he takes the offered glass of purple liquid.

'And what would you know about what Albus would have done, Severus? You're his murderer.'

'I'm his killer. There's a difference, and one day I hope to be able to explain it to you,' Severus says softly.

Remus is taken aback at Severus' tone, and his anger is forestalled by the carefully spoken words. He suspects that there is more to be told and drains the glass as he thinks about his next question.

'Why explain to me? Explain to the Ministry, to the Order, to Harry... why me?'

Severus shifts uncomfortably and looks at the floor for a moment, and Remus suspects that the man is gathering his thoughts.

'You know me, Lupin. You are the only one left who was witness to my youth. Everyone else is dead. You are the only one I care to tell.'

'There's Minerva, Severus.'

Severus stares at him and the silence hangs between them, heavy and oppressive, almost a solid thing. As understanding dawns, Remus feels the blow like a silver arrow straight to his heart and closes his eyes briefly as though to block out the pain of knowledge. The bed moves slightly as Severus takes the empty glass from Remus and stands stiffly; as he turns and places the bottles carefully on a small table beside the bed, Remus notices that his movements appear pained and is reminded of himself in the days immediately following his transformations.

'What's happened to you?' he whispers, and Severus' back stiffens even further, but he does not turn. Instead, he speaks softly, addressing his words to the dirty window in the far wall.

'You... the werewolf slashed me during the escape, and the Dark Lord turns against even his most *loyal* followers when he is displeased.' Severus stresses the word as though it is poison, and Remus feels the prickles of goose bumps along his spine at the dark tone of his voice. 'The Cruciatus is among his favourites, if you must know, and he performs it... flawlessly.'

Remus cringes at his own memory of being covered with the most needle-like, all-encompassing, burning pain imaginable that affected every single cell of his body, and his stomach lurches sickeningly when he thinks that Severus had been forced to endure that curse repeatedly. For a moment he fears that he may throw up everything he's just ingested, but the feeling slowly passes, and he wipes the sheen of sweat from his brow. Glancing up, he sees that Severus has turned and is now regarding him carefully, his features mask-like and his emotions, as always, tightly controlled.

'I'm sorry, Severus.' Remus knows that his words mean next to nothing, but they are all he has.

Severus is quiet for a moment, and Remus can almost believe that he sees something lessen, just slightly, in the impervious hardness of those eyes.

'It has to be done, Lupin, for the greater good.'

'Perhaps, but that doesn't negate your suffering.'

There is another long silence, during which Remus' eyes slowly begin to lose their focus, and he fights to keep them open. Finally, so softly that he barely hears the words, Severus answers, his exhalation sounding like release.

'No, it does not.'

Then strong hands are on his shoulders, gently this time, lowering him onto the pillows, and Severus' touch lingers for a moment before he pulls back slowly, almost reluctantly. Remus reaches out and grasps the long, strong fingers, trying to prevent him from leaving.

'Rest now, you will need to be on your way soon enough.'

'Don't... Stay.'

'Stay?' Severus' voice isn't as harsh as it could be, and Remus wants the comfort of his strong arms, yearns for the soothing presence of another human being, something he hasn't had in entirely too long. He tries to implore without begging, but he is tired, the potions are working, and his eyelids begin to droop.

'Mmmm, with me.' His tongue is heavy, and he slurs as sleep pulls ever more insistently at him. 'Mmm, 'sss your bed after all...' He struggles to keep awake, and Severus finally relents, his hand never leaving Remus' grip as he removes his boots and climbs gingerly into the bed beside him.

'Very well, Lupin, but just for tonight.'

Remus is barely able to open his lips to answer as Severus' comforting warmth settles behind him, and he shifts backward until his back is flush against Severus' chest, only dimly aware of warm breath tickling the hairs of his neck as a cocoon of sleep enfolds him.

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A further two days pass before Remus is healed enough to leave. Severus has worked tirelessly on potions to renew their strength and has sent word to Arthur that Remus is safe.

Remus rises from the bed feeling stiff but otherwise intact. A quick shower later, he half dries, wraps an old bathrobe around himself and walks down the corridor into the sitting room where Severus is slumped in an armchair, his robes fanning out on either side of him like unfurled wings. His eyes are closed, and a book rests on his chest, but Remus has learned never to take this man at face value. He leans against the door frame for a moment and commits the scene to memory; something to hold on to in darker times.

'Must you stare, Lupin?'

Remus jumps. The sardonic tone is expected, and yet, somehow, even now, Remus hopes for more. Severus has barely met his eyes over the past few days and seems withdrawn, almost as though he is uncomfortable being in close proximity to his former slave. A frisson of understanding ripples along Remus' spine as the thought dances through his mind. Could it be he wonders could Severus be ashamed of his actions?

No. Remus shakes his head. Shame is an emotion, and Severus Snape doesn't have emotions. At least, he wouldn't have thought so a week ago, but weighing what he knows against what he *feels*, he questions that idea and then makes a decision purely on impulse, relying only on his Gryffindor courage and the pooling in his gut.

His heart pounding, Remus pushes away from the door frame and walks towards Severus, his bare feet making soft padding sounds on the old wooden floors. He keeps his eyes on Severus' face as he approaches, and eventually the man opens his eyes, sitting up slightly in the chair with a stony, questioning look.

'Is there something you want?' To Remus' ears, Severus' voice sounds slightly hesitant, with almost a quaver, if such a thing is possible, and the very uncertainty of the question arouses him.

I want to be yours.

Remus cannot quite bring himself to say the words out loud.

I want you to be mine.

He wants Severus more than anything.

I need you to trust me.

But Severus trusts no one...

Please trust me.

Remus loosens the tie around his bathrobe and lets the material fall from his shoulders and pool around his feet, the soft ~~swish~~ wish of the fabric the only sound in the room. His arousal is evident, and rivers of goose bumps appear on skin still moist from his shower, only partly due to the chill air in the room. He is afraid of rejection, afraid that Severus will once more push him away, physically and emotionally, and that he will be left with nothing. Remus keeps his eyes locked on Severus' as he slowly sinks to his knees in front of the chair. Slowly, he spreads his knees the way he had always been commanded to and crosses his wrists behind his back. He is achingly hard, and every fibre of his body is focused on the man in front of him, but he bows his head, looks down at the floor between Severus' feet and waits.

'Lupin, don't...' Severus is obviously uncomfortable.

'Severussssssss...' Remus whispers the name, tastes it on his tongue, moves his lips around the word, but still he waits, kneeling, head bowed, hands behind his back. He aches for acceptance, for understanding, but he will settle for a simple touch from those hands. The silence pounds in his ears like a second heartbeat, and he waits.

Eventually, after what feels like a lifetime, he feels the heat of a palm on the back of his neck, static and trembling at first, then slowly moving as it rubs gently at the still-visible scars from the collar. Remus closes his eyes and surrenders to the sensation of the mere touch of Severus' hand on him, and a barely audible moan escapes his lips. The rubbing increases, the hand making slow, gentle elliptical patterns down one side of his neck and up the other, into his hair; then the chair creaks, and Severus is suddenly before him, kneeling and holding him close against his body, hands tangling in Remus' hair, crushing their lips together in a bruising, desperate kiss that burns like fire, a fire that engulfs him and consumes his very soul. Remus' body vibrates with his need as Severus kisses him, hard and demanding like the man himself, but as Remus opens his mouth to accept the probing tongue and succumbs to the biting teeth, Severus' onslaught seems to become less about taking and owning and more about mutual need.

Remus is on his hands and knees again, so much like the last time, but Severus' hands are gentle on his body now, sliding instead of grabbing, soothing instead of harsh. He shivers as Severus runs the tip of his tongue along his back, tracing the line of his spine and down further to the cleft of his cheeks; then long fingers slip inside him, gently stretching and preparing him, and Remus rocks back against the sensations, pushing against Severus' hand and spreading his legs wider, wanting and needing more. The fingers disappear, and he groans as his body aches for their return, but the soft tip of Severus cock is a welcome replacement, nudging at his opening, pushing forward in tiny, slick increments, and Remus wonders whether it is hesitation or deliberate.

'Gods, Severussss... please,' he hisses, and his arms tremble with the effort of holding himself back he wants nothing more than to impale himself on Severus' length, desperate for that kind of connection. A warm hand is between them, guiding, and this time as Severus eases in, there is no pain, no fear, only the deliciously agonizing stretch of muscles and the slick slide of hard, heated flesh inside him. Remus moans in pure pleasure, and the hands on his hips still for a moment, but as he arches his back, angling his hips upward and rocking back against the heat of Severus' groin, the message is received and understood.

Severus backs out of him, slowly, agonizingly, and then slides in again with minute thrusts and a sweet burn that threatens to send Remus beyond the point of reason. He is awash with sensation, Severus inside him, Severus' hands on him, Severus' heat behind him, and every inch of his body revels in the onslaught. His animalistic grunts match his movements, and he spreads his hands out on the floor, bracing himself and surrendering completely to Severus, stretching his back to accept everything that is given. His head hangs low, and his knees, damp with sweat, slide on the wooden floor, but Severus holds him firmly, controlling his body and orchestrating the movements, and this is how it should be, *this* is the way they fit together, yes, just like this, always this! *Forever this!* His desire pools deep in his groin, the fire is everywhere, and he is conscious only of the coiling, spiraling of his need, swirling inside, sucking him down into himself and the sensations. Callused hands slide down his hip and wrap around his cock, and it's all too much; suddenly he's exploding, crying out as his body shudders with the inferno of his release, dragging Severus over the edge with him and feeling the pulses of Severus' orgasm deep inside.

Remus struggles for breath and braces against the weight of Severus' body draped along his back, his chest heaving and their sweat slick and hot between them. Remus' mouth is dry and he is sore, his knees ache and his arms shudder from the strain of resisting Severus' thrusts, but he is sated, and the deliciously cloying musky smell of their sex combined with sweat is intoxicating. He slowly lowers them both onto the ground, and Severus gently slips out of him, then Summons a blanket and drapes it over them. Remus examines the lean body beside his and the scars that litter the flesh, some old and others quite fresh, and he runs a finger along the angry, pink marks of newly healed wounds that run parallel to each other across the front of Severus' left shoulder and chest.

'These are new,' he murmurs as he runs the pad of his index finger across each line, vowing to learn each and every scar on this body.

'They're yours. Well, the wolf's.'

Remus' fingers falter in their movements, and his gut clenches hard at Severus' words, his post-orgasmic mood rapidly dissipating.

Broken images flash through his mind, *Oh, god...* and he sits up as disjointed memories of the werewolf assail him, *oh, god... no, no, NO...* and he's not sure he can even voice the thoughts in his head, but Severus is beside him once more and forestalls anything that Remus might have said by tracing the uneven lines along Remus' neck.

'I think we're even.'

Remus shakes his head and shifts slightly as goose bumps erupt on his skin from the touch of Severus' fingers and the roughness of his voice.

'How can we be?'

'Lupin, had you been anyone else, you would have been dead. I was thankful that you were the one captured; I knew that I could work on your escape.'

Remus closes his eyes as the guilt threatens to pull him under, and his heart feels as though it has been pierced by a knife: hard, sharp and long leaving only the truth to bleed out through the open wounds.

'But I doubted you. I searched for signs, hoping there would be something that I could hold on to, some way I could explain to myself why you were treating me the way you were, behaving as you were, and I lost faith, Severus. I hoped, but I didn't believe. I condemned you after that night on the Astronomy Tower, and I condemned you further once I was your prisoner. All I wanted was to know, for one moment, that you were on my side; that we were fighting for the same thing, that we shared... something. I'm sorry, so sorry...' and then Severus is holding him, strong arms around his shoulders as his barely intelligible whispers fall like tears against Severus' neck.

He feels drained after confessing his fears and guilt and is somehow lighter, comforted by the long capable arms even as he is forgiven without explanation or reservation.

Severus clears his throat, and the sound startles Remus.

'You can't stay here much longer. Tomorrow you must leave and get back to the Order. We will continue to fight this war on two fronts, and we will win.'

'How can you be so sure?'

'Control is mine, Lupin. Remember that.'

Remus looks into Severus' eyes, the colour of darkest night, and can almost imagine that he sees the hint of a twinkle in their depths.

Epilogue many months later.

Moments after an injured Potter slays the Dark Lord, Severus leaves him in the hands of the mediwizards. Granger and Weasley are fighting against Dolohov, and they appear to be winning, but Severus casts a discreet '*Sectumsempra*' to hasten their victory. He moves quickly among the fallen until he sees Lupin, who is standing back to back with a scarlet-haired Tonks and doing battle against Greyback and another dark robed Death Eater. As Severus approaches the skirmish, Tonks manages to stun Fenrir, but she is hit with a curse, and her body crumples as she falls to the ground. Lupin casts a protective charm over them as he tries desperately to rouse her, and Severus increases his speed, feeling the rage swirl within him as he points his wand at the Death Eater and whispers the Killing Curse. A flash of green later, only Greyback remains, and Lupin stands once more to face the lycanthrope. Severus can clearly see the hatred in each man's eyes as they hurl curses at each other, parrying and blocking just as quickly.

Severus removes his Disillusionment Charm and stands beside Lupin, his wand trained at Greyback's chest. Lupin barely acknowledges him, so focused is he on his enemy, and with a mere flick of his wand, Severus wordlessly casts another '*Sectumsempra*'. He is grimly satisfied to see the rivers of blood that flow from Greyback's face and torso. The animal falls back howling, and Lupin lunges forward, falling on him as he bites down on his neck, clenches his jaws and rips and tears out his throat, silencing his enemy's dying screams.

Lupin spits out the torn flesh and looks up, his face and neck painted with the blood of his victim, and his hands shake violently. Severus grips his shoulder and casts a rapid '*Scourgify*', then moves him out of the way as he casts several more Cutting Curses before he is satisfied that Greyback's body is in parts. He draws upon all his magic and casts a powerful '*Incendio*' and stands by until the body is completely destroyed.

When only ash and bone remain, he looks around for Lupin and finds him kneeling beside Tonks' body a short distance away. Severus sees her touch his face weakly, and the barest thread of jealousy weaves its way into his consciousness as the tired man grasps her hand, holding it tightly to his chest. He views the scene from afar and, moments later, Lupin holds her limp body against his own and looks across at him with a haunted expression. Severus sees the tears that mark the pain and despair etched on the man's face and angrily, *desperately*, he tries to close his heart against his own anguish with his usual iron will, but he fails. Eventually, he will have to accept that his actions against the gentle man were inexcusable, knowing that he will never be forgiven, and he is not able to offer Lupin any words of comfort when the loss of his love is only moments old.

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Remus looks down into her grey eyes and strokes her hair, once vibrant and alive, now a benign shade of brown.

'You were brilliant.' His voice is harsh with worry.

She smiles sadly and with difficulty. 'I was clumsy. Sorry I won't be able to see your new life.'

'Tonks...'

'Remus, please make him understand how you feel.'

'I... I can't. He won't listen.'

Her eyelids flutter, and she becomes lighter somehow.

Her last whisper.

'*Make him.*'

Her body is limp in his arms, and he holds her to his chest, rocking her gently and unable to stop the tears from falling. He feels centuries older than the number of moons he's seen, and he looks around for help, even though he knows that there is nothing that can be done anymore. He can no longer hold back his despair, pain, sorrow, fear and helplessness as he bears witness to the pointless end of another young life, yet another victim of this inhuman war. He looks across the landscape as the gentle light of dawn illuminates the horror of the battle's aftermath. Bodies lie strewn everywhere and the living move among them, searching for signs of life and hope. Remus follows the slight incline up the hillock to the summit, upon which stands a figure of death, wand in hand, black robes billowing in the soft breeze, life and death and hope and loss tied irretrievably and inextricably into one person.

Severus.

Their eyes meet, and suddenly death is moving; Severus strides towards him, and for an instant, Remus is back in the dungeons; the image so powerful that he must resist the impulse to avert his eyes. Severus glides to a halt in front of him and, to Remus' surprise, kneels.

'Harry? Where's Harry?' In the maelstrom of Remus' mind, James's son is the only person he can think of, and he searches Severus' dark eyes for the answer.

'Injured, but alive. Poppy is tending to him.'

'What about Arthur? Kingsley?' Remus is shaking, partly from adrenaline and partly from Severus' proximity, his mind too filled with conflicting and confusing thoughts and emotions to express them properly.

'I don't know, Lupin.'

Heavy silence falls between them, and Remus' gaze falls once more on the woman in his arms. Tonks, once vibrant and colourful, now lies peacefully, as though asleep, flecks of blood and dirt marring her smooth, pale face. He sucks in a long, shuddering breath, glances around him without being able to focus on anything, then carefully

brushes the hair off Tonks' forehead and shifts her body onto the ground. He tries to stand and it is difficult; his knees and ankles protest heartily after their lengthy incarceration, and he stumbles against Severus. Strong hands enfold him as his world abruptly fades to grey.

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A week later, Severus meets Lupin at Tonks' grave. He hasn't laid eyes on Lupin since the day of the final battle when the lycanthrope passed out and had to be attended to by the mediwizards and eventually admitted to St. Mungo's. He'd heard of his release earlier today and reasoned that this would be his first destination.

'I'm sorry for your loss, Lupin,' he hears himself utter, not knowing what to say but needing to say *something*. Lupin seems older and paler than before, yet he appears to have accepted that the fates have once more seen fit to be unbearably cruel to him.

'She was such a brave soul, and a good friend.' His voice is soft but calm.

Friend.

Severus ponders the tone of Lupin's voice and the possible underlying meaning of that word. Their eyes meet, and for a brief moment Severus can see the deep chasm within Lupin's soul, the gaping hole created by so many deaths, so many injustices and such great pain; a large empty space that perfectly echoes the one within himself.

'Friends are important to you.' He keeps his words a statement, his tone carefully neutral.

'Yes, they are. You... you're important to me too.'

'I am not your friend.'

'I know,' Lupin replies in a low voice, almost a growl, and the timbre of it sends ripples through Severus, 'but I hoped you could be... that and more, perhaps.'

'But, Tonks...'

Lupin shakes his head gently, his kind face a mix of emotions as he meets Severus' eyes.

'See for yourself.' The voice is soft, and Severus' palms are slightly damp as he looks into Lupin's honey-brown eyes. A softly murmured '*Legilimens*' later and he is flying through Lupin's mind. He sees flashes of their teenaged years and is surprised at the warmth of the boy's feelings towards a pale, skinny, lank haired Slytherin who always lurked nearby. More memories, years later at Order meetings, tinged with the lycanthrope's nervousness and hesitancy as he chanced quick glances at a figure in black standing in the shadows. There are snippets of Potter, the Weasleys and Albus, but Severus sifts through them until once more he returns to the scene of battle and feels Lupin's anger and resolve as he battled Greyback, feels his relief when he, Severus, stood beside him in battle, the depth of the other man's emotions at the loss of his friend when Tonks died, and Lupin's *surge* of hope as Severus strode towards him that day.

Severus eases out of Lupin's mind, shaken to the core at the sheer power of the emotions that he has been immersed in, yet he is unable to break eye contact. The corners of Lupin's mouth twist in a wry smile, and Severus is on unfamiliar ground; for the first time in entirely too long he doesn't know how to proceed. Thankfully, Lupin does, and the ensuing kiss is both tender and hungry, filled with the need they both have for each other. They break apart slowly with lingering touches of lips and tongues, and Severus' eyes remain closed. He feels lost, adrift on an ocean of want and need and dependence, and it frightens him.

'Lupin.' His voice breaks.

'Control is yours, Severus.'

Severus opens his eyes and sees Lupin, really *sees* him, and realizes that control is something given, not taken. Although it has taken years, Severus Snape finally understands the true measure of the man.

~fin~