

The Open Door

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Thanks to my diligent betas, ladyinthecloak and lux_astraea, and to my little one as always, who endured me watching that movie more than once.

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The Open Door

It has become a habit for him. Each night he extinguishes the lights in the house, as he is always the last to go to bed. He waits up especially.

Each night he ascends the stairs, one hand trailing over the banister, step after step, landing after landing, until he makes one stop in front of a door on the second floor. It's not his room.

He sleeps in one of the attic rooms one floor up.

That door, farthest from the landing, is open a crack like it is every night, and he peeks around the door inside the darkened room.

He's never stopped to think why the door is left ajar every night. Perhaps she is afraid of the dark? Or of being completely alone after all those years of sharing space at Hogwarts and later here at Grimmauld Place? He doesn't know and doesn't really care. The only thing he thinks about is that he is grateful that it is so. So he can watch, and it helps him justify his nightly visits to himself.

Why is he watching her? *Oh, well, you know, just checking everything is all right. And the door is open after all.* That is what he thinks. Or rather what he makes himself believe.

A pitiful excuse, but it keeps his conscience, echoing 'lecher, pervert, voyeur', mostly in check.

And so he stands here every night, staring at her while she is sleeping.

This had been going on for weeks. When the three came home after destroying yet another Horcrux, and while everyone else had gone to bed, she fell asleep where she'd been, at the kitchen table, utterly exhausted. He had taken one look at her awkward position and carried her upstairs to her room. After that, everything changed.

His relationship with Tonks had been long over by then, and Hermione's romance with Ron hadn't played out as they had all thought it would either. They broke up quietly without any fuss and are just friends again.

He knows that incident wasn't really the start of it all, however. It had been more of a gradual development from appreciating her as an eager student, to liking her as Harry's friend, to respecting her as a fellow Order member, to admiring her accomplishments for bringing the war to an end, to noticing her as a woman when she had come out of the bathroom one day, clad only in a bathrobe drying her hair absent-mindedly with a towel, skin still glistening with moisture from her shower. That was lust. But that feeling, too, had been only a stage on the journey for him.

He knows that what he feels whenever he looks at her now is no more lust than it is the appreciation he had for her when she had been his student. Both feelings are still there, but rather a part of a combination of feelings, facets of the whole, with one emotion predominating all others.

He loves her. He loves her and is in love with her, to clarify it. For he had loved her as a friend before, but now his love for her is so much more than that.

But them being who they are, he doubts that she will appreciate this knowledge if he ever decides to tell her, nor will probably any of their friends to be sure.

So he tries to behave as always. As if things hadn't changed fundamentally for him.

He spends as little time in her presence as possible, and the time he does, he behaves like always. He is kind and distant, pleased to talk with her every chance he gets, but nothing more.

No hint of what is really going on inside of him shows. He's had too much practise maintaining this mask for that to be the case.

And he is both glad and angry that she doesn't seem to notice.

She figured out that he is a werewolf, but can't figure out that he loves her?

But then he has to admit that there were clues and proof right under her nose to his being a werewolf for her to find and interpret, thanks in a large part to Severus' machinations, and none at all for his feelings for her. He doesn't treat her any differently than before he realised how he felt.

And he doesn't want her to figure it out, right?

So he doesn't try to be more with her than he normally would. But as much as he wants it, he needs to indulge his feelings somehow or go mad. He has tried to stop himself, but he can't.

Which is why when he had first noticed the open crack of her door, he had been unable to resist temptation for long.

And so he finds himself here every night, staring at her.

It's really nothing to beat himself up for. She's always properly dressed in a not very revealing cotton nightgown. One he suspects she'd nicked from her mother one summer to feel close or because the dorms at Hogwarts can be very chilly. And he only ever watches her sleep, for fifteen minutes perhaps, nothing more. He's never stepped over the threshold of her room, has never done anything truly inappropriate. But watching her sleep, her features relaxed and calm, peaceful in repose, does all the things for him he sees on her face. This illicit watching her relaxes him, calms him and gives him a sort of peace he can't obtain in any other way. It keeps him sane. Which is why, up till now, he has been hard pressed to feel real guilt or shame about it.

Her face, captivatingly animated in various expressions of her thoughts when she is awake, is a true masterpiece at night, when she dreams and doesn't feel the need to express anything more strenuous than serenity.

Her chest is moving up and down with every breath she inhales and exhales, slow and shallow. An intimate sound. She is lying on her side with one knee drawn up to her chest, covered with blankets, hugging a small pillow to herself with slender hands. Like a lover missing from her embrace and replaced by that fake and inadequate substitute of feathers covered with cloth.

How would it feel to lie in her arms, cradled to her chest like this? When they would lie intimately entwined after a night of lovemaking? He longs to know what it feels like, so much that it hurts physically.

Her soft lashes touch her cheeks, hiding her beautiful, expressive brown eyes from view. They move in an erratic rhythm as she dreams. What would they look like should she wake up in that moment and see his shadow fall across her bed? Would they express fear or look trustingly around her, sure nothing could happen to her, here, in this house? Or would they contain some other emotion, depending on what she dreamt about?

There is nothing he wants to know more, and yet fears to know, than these things in the whole world. The war, Voldemort or the Order don't feature in there at all. They rule his life, but this, these quiet moments at the end of each day rule his wishes, his desires. They consume his thoughts. During the day, even while he is plotting in an Order meeting, they are there in the background, keeping him sane.

He has nothing else, and while he knows that this is wrong, the way he feels about her and how he watches her, he can't doesn't want to stop. It's all he has. All he allows himself.

For example he doesn't allow himself to wonder about anything more that could or couldn't happen. He doesn't allow himself to think about a future or what ifs. That would contradict the purpose of it all. For he knows deep inside that this is all he will ever get from her, these moments he steals from her when she can't protest.

As that thought takes hold, he feels dirty, ashamed, watching her like this. The guilt of what he is doing is finally catching up with him. His grip on the door tightens until his muscles protest. Fuck.

The one good thing he has, and his conscience has to muck things up for him. He turns to leave, disgusted at himself and so very weary of it all.

Then, a noise.

A moan. From inside her room.

He turns back, conflicted, but he is listening intently, straining to hear more. He knows he shouldn't, that he is already crossing the line as it is. But what if it's a nightmare? Should she suffer unduly because of his bloody conscience?

And he crosses the floor toward the door again with two long strides, his will weak in the face of temptation, resting his forehead on the rough wood of the door-jamb and grasping the door with one of his hands, just as another strangled moan echoes from inside. He doesn't look inside yet; instead his eyes are darting nervously across the floor, his shoes, that small hole in one of the floorboards everywhere but where he wants to look. Instead he counts the tiny fibrous veins of the wood in front of his eyes.

It doesn't sound as if she is distressed, and he hesitates, his conscience making itself known again. If she is not having a nightmare, he has no reason to be here. It is wrong to intrude on her privacy without her knowing. It was wrong before and now even more so.

She moans again louder this time. The quality of her voice tells him it is not out of pain or fear, but out of arousal.

The sound hits him straight in the groin. He almost moans himself at the torturous feeling. He closes his eyes, presses his forehead harder against the door-jamb, and his grip tightens, the rough wood of the door rasping against the sensitive skin of his palm. His grip intensifies even more at the sensation. He opens his eyes again and, raising his gaze, twisting his head slightly, looks inside. He is weak, oh, so weak in the face of temptation. Or that's what he tells himself anyway.

She is moving restlessly under the sheets, writhing almost. Her arms twisting this way and that, seeming unsure where to go. At some point her pelvis thrusts upward beneath the sheets, making it clear what it all means. She is seeking purchase, contact that is not there. Cheated by the illusions of her dream, or rather dream lover, and

seeking satisfaction that can't be had.

He doesn't want to know whom she dreams about. Let him just imagine it is him, with no intervention of a superfluous conscience, because thoughts are free. Or should be at least. He is not yet doing anything wrong. His vigil every night might be morally questionable, but he is not yet abusing his position of power. His position of trust maybe, but nothing else.

Her writhing increases in desperation, and her moans echo more frequently throughout the room.

He gets hard just listening to her and watching. He doesn't allow himself to relieve the tension. That is too much, even for him.

Then a word slips out. It shatters him and turns his world upside down.

"Remus..." the whisper escapes her in a gasp.

His eyes jerk open, although he had no idea they had closed again. He grips the door so hard it hurts, his muscles cramping.

No.

No, it can't be! Him? She... She's dreaming about *him*, like this?

But this is a dream. It doesn't prove anything. God knows, he's had his share of wet dreams involving people he doesn't care to ever see again, not to mention being more intimate with them. A notion probably heartily reciprocated.

So what does this mean?

Against his better judgement he pushes the door open a little wider. Wide enough to illuminate the darkness of her room, wide enough for him to step through. And he does, ignoring his screaming conscience.

He can't stop himself; he has to know. What exactly he hopes to glean from closer proximity is not clear, even to him. But he strides slowly into the dark room nevertheless and stops in front of the foot of her bed. He has perfect view of her from there. How she is lying on her back, her legs writhing against each other for friction they won't achieve this way. How her arms are lying helplessly beside her head, curling open, then closed every other moment. How her generous breasts are literally heaving with her continued gasps and moans. And how her head is moving from side to side in erratic movements, her brows furrowed in a slight frown of frustration, and her breathing hard through open, wet lips.

He has to catch himself from groaning out loud as he takes in the sight of her, aroused and ready.

He runs a shaking hand through his hair and down over his face as he wonders what ~~the hell~~ he is doing in here. It's not as if he can have really expected to feel better after watching her like this.

His name falls from her lips again, in a pleading sort of sigh crossed with a choked moan at the end. And then he does something ~~g~~*really* stupid.

He moves to sit down beside her on the bed, without any intent to do anything, just because he is compelled to do so.

It vaguely occurs to him that in all his life he has never done anything this inherently and utterly stupid at least fully knowing what he was getting into but he does it anyway.

And it doesn't pay off of course. As soon as he has sat down, she jerks awake, her sleepy eyes opening slightly.

The fact that she doesn't scream the house down, like she should when finding a man sitting on her bed, tells him that she is not fully awake and that he should take advantage of that fact immediately and bugger off as long as he is still able to. He knows she is very quick with her wand.

He doesn't leave, however, his brain lacking sufficient blood at the moment for this kind of coherent thought. And she doesn't scream the house down. To the contrary.

She looks at him, her eyes focusing and smiles a slow, hazy, aroused kind of smile that he wished he could be the recipient of when she is awake enough to know what she wants.

"Hi, Remus," she breathes his name and starts to stretch languorously, the muscles in her whole body tensing, causing her to arch her back and neck, breaking eye contact. He watches this sensual display and wishes again that he would be able to see this again in another context, preferably in combination with those throaty moans.

With a sigh she slumps back down on the bed, still sending him that slow smile.

He smiles back at her.

"What're you doin' here?"

"Nothing. I heard a noise and was just checking if you had a nightmare," he lies smoothly through his teeth. She blushes, remembering her dream, but only unconsciously and probably still half asleep for she doesn't stop smiling and takes his hand from where it was resting on his thigh and takes it between hers, as if it was the most natural thing to do.

"I wasn't. But thanks for checking."

"Then what were you dreaming?" he asks, the words slipping out before he can catch himself. Stupid, stupid *stupid*.

Her blush deepens, and says, "Nothing."

"Didn't sound like nothing to me." *Stop while you still can. What are you thinking, asking her that?*

"You know, I don't believe I'm awake at all. You never come to me when I have a nightmare. Why should you do so now?"

"I could have missed it. I'm a heavy sleeper. Maybe I was simply still awake tonight."

"You are not. You always wake up when someone wakes up Mrs Black."

"Doesn't everyone?"

"Pity this is a dream. Just like all the others. You never come to me otherwise. No one sees me as female. ...I wait up for you every night, you know. As long as I can before my eyes get too heavy. I always fall asleep thinking of you. And just in case, I keep the door open a crack, hoping you will look inside at me before you go to bed. It's hopeless, though. ...How I wish you would like me just a little bit. I've fancied you from the first moment I saw you. I've loved you since that time between my fourth and fifth year. And for a few months I've been wanting you to do things to me, to my body. To make me mad with desire for your touch. To feel your hands on my legs, my breasts..."

As she is speaking she takes both of his hands and places them on her sides, guiding them over her body, letting them glide over the smooth expanse of her cloth-covered stomach, grazing over her ribs, the undersides of her breasts with his fingertips and finally closing them over her breasts, rubbing them over the firm outline of her nipples beneath her nightgown. She lets out a tiny moan, then guides his hands onward over her chest, her collar-bone up to caress her throat and nape.

"Oh. My." Those strangled words are the only things that escape his open mouth. He is panting, thoroughly confused and aroused from that simple touch. Just when he thinks the torture will get even worse, her hands fall away from his, to land on the pillow to each side of her head.

She is fast asleep.

Slowly he removes his trembling hands from the arch of her neck, resisting the temptation of brushing them against her breasts again. To wake her once more and continue this until they are both sated. He is grasping his knees tightly with them instead, battling for control.

With a last look at her, he stands up and staggers to the door. He pulls it closed behind him.

Not five minutes later he comes hard into his hand with a choked gasp in the shower. As soon as he is coherent enough, his head resting on the cool shower tiles and panting as if he had just run a marathon, he resolves to do something *anything* about this thing, this attraction. Ron or Harry or the whole disapproving world be damned. Even if she is only lusting after him or if it's only a crush on her part. He needs to know, and he will only know for sure after he has asked her to have dinner with him.

He tosses and turns for the rest of the night, both excitement and dread leaving him unable to sleep more than a few minutes at a time. When he gets up the next morning at the crack of dawn, he is surprised that he is almost bursting with energy and excitement instead of being completely exhausted. He wants to approach her just before she gets ready for bed, which means he has a whole day of waiting ahead of him. And it's pure torture, but fate is smiling on him, and he is kept busy with Order matters for most of the day. The few minutes here and there he has nothing to do or when is confronted with her are the worst though.

Since she behaves as always towards him and none of the Weasleys have tried to murder him for being a perverted stalker, it seems she doesn't remember what happened the night before. He is very relieved about that.

Although he has resolved not to bother her in any way until she is alone, in those rare moments she is in the same room as he is, he can't help himself from staring at her. He tries to stop himself, but to no avail. And he is slipping, too. When she catches him staring at her a third time, she looks at him as if he must be ill. He refuses to take that as a bad omen. No, he will ask her and if she declines, then... Well, he'll think about that when it happens.

It isn't normal for him to be so optimistic. Usually he is very much a the-glass-is-half-empty person. He doesn't know what makes this different.

No. Of course he does. It's not that he is really optimistic after all. More a case of refusing to think of the inevitable. This is too important for him to accept defeat lightly, and he fears that if he even contemplates failure it will happen. So he doesn't think about it. Or rather he tries very hard not to.

Finally the day draws to a close, and after dinner, he waits for everyone to turn in like every day. Only today the time seems to pass more slowly than usual. She is one of the first to go to bed, however, and since he doesn't want to wake her up by coming by her room at his usual time, he decides to merely wait for half an hour so no one connects his exit with hers and to give her enough time to change.

After the thirty minutes are only barely up *Who cares if there are another forty seconds to go?* he puts aside the book he had been pretending to read, and with a last steeling breath, he gets up from his seat on the sofa in the library and excuses himself for the night. To him the climb up those two flights of stairs seems to take an eternity while it takes only half a minute in reality. His heart is beating rapidly, and he is breathing much too hard to be excused by physical exertion.

When he finally stops by her room, it is only ten o'clock much earlier than his usual time. Most of the house's occupants are still awake and scattered about the house, and the light is still on in her room, just according to plan. Her door is still closed.

For a long while he is standing outside her room, breathing ragged and heart beating fast. Countless times he turns away from the door only to turn back, hand raised high to knock on her door.

Finally his body is faster than his mind, and his hand connects awkwardly with the door, the knock barely audible. But since he doesn't know if she has heard it or not, he has to knock again, more firmly this time.

There is no going back now.

"Yes?" her voice echoes out of her room. The roar of blood in his ears is almost overwhelming, but he hears her voice only too well. He has become attuned to the sound of it over the last few months, hearing it two floors up or a few rooms away from him.

He takes a deep breath and swallows around the lump in his throat.

"Hermione, it's me, Remus. May I come inside for a moment? There is something I want to talk with you about."

The door opens a crack and she appears, dressed in one of her ridiculously unrevealing nightgowns, hand on the door.

"Oh?" is her only reply, and she wears that awful friendly mask she normally puts on for everyone save her friends. Normally that includes him, and for a horrible moment he fears it wasn't her dreaming yesterday at all, but *him*, and if it isn't best that he turns around right now and never thinks about doing such a foolish thing again.

Then she opens the door wider and beckons him inside, and the moment passes. She sits down on her unmade bed and motions for him to join her.

He hesitates for only an instant before pushing the door closed behind him and sitting down beside her much closer than he should the hand hidden from her view with his body curls tightly around a portion of her sheets. They feel cool and crisp and warm and soft all at once. Curious.

"So, Remus, what was it you wanted to talk with me about?" she asks politely. He has to restrain himself from not shaking her out of this mask, loudly proclaiming his love for her not his style or running from the room. He does neither of those.

"Hermione, there is only one reason why I should ask you what I'm about to and many reasons why I shouldn't, but I will nevertheless."

"Yes?"

"Uh, would you...? Er, I mean, could you possibly...?" He sighs, cursing himself five times a fool for being so 'eloquent' right this moment, when it matters most.

"Would you like to have dinner with me tomorrow?"

A moment passes, then another while he looks at her expectantly and more than just a touch hopefully, and she simply stares back at him. Then another moment follows, and he begins to fear she either didn't understand him or is thinking of a polite way to say 'no'.

Now here and hoping, however, he refuses to consider the latter option until she actually says so and begins to ask carefully, "Hermione, did you..."

"Dinner? With you?" she asks suddenly, her voice very high, and he can't help but notice her flushed cheeks. He wonders if that is a good or a bad sign.

He simply nods.

"As in a...?" she trails off, looking at him expectantly to finish the sentence for her.

He clears his throat and nodding once again, elaborates, "As in a date, yes."

"Where?" It sounds more curious than anything, which he takes for a good sign as does the fact that she hasn't refused him point blank, as she should.

"It will have to be here, I'm afraid... in the garden, though," he explains apologetically, adding that last bit on impulse.

No matter his bravery, he hasn't actually expected to get that far he's improvising.

"In the garden?" she asks, wonder creeping in her voice, and a slight smile touches her lips. He can't help smiling along with her, although his heart is still beating much too fast. He still needs to receive a definitive answer from her.

"Yes, in the garden, but I won't say anymore until you've given me your answer. One can take the 'leave him hanging' approach too far, I think," he replies mock-sternly, to cover up the fact that there is absolutely *nothing* in the world he needs more right now than her answer.

"Come on, put me out of my misery!" he cajoles, trying to make light of it.

"Yes, Remus, I'd like to have dinner with you," she answers, a brilliant smile breaking out on her lips.

It takes a moment to sink in but when it does, he exhales so audibly in relief, both of them start to chuckle. His chest hurts again, but this time in a good way *She said* 'Yes!' echoing over and over again in his mind.

Staring into each others' eyes they both do and don't notice at once how he slides one of his hands in between hers and grasps her hand tightly, fingers entwining so that neither can tell where one ends and the other begins.

One hand is cold and soft, while the other is warm and rough. They stroke over each other like two serpents, over and over, entwining with each other until there is no hope of ever untangling them again. Or so it seems. For as he sees her eyes widen and her pupils dilate from the sensation of their hands rubbing against each other, he simply slides his hand from hers and, though he feels the loss, brings both of his hands up to frame her face, lightly grazing over the skin there with his fingertips.

Her eyelids flutter, and she licks her lips.

A breath hitches in his throat as his gaze turns from her eyes to her lips, red and slightly swollen from where her teeth left their marks on them.

He swallows, his throat suddenly very dry, and looks into her eyes again. He cannot resist temptation staring him in the face like that anymore.

He leans down and kisses her. Eyes closed, lips grazing softly over hers, he kisses her once, twice, three times. Then his touch firms, his lips settling over hers more insistently though nipping at her lips gently. To his surprise her mouth opens slightly, the tip of her tongue touching his lips hesitantly.

He gasps, opening his mouth a little to touch his tongue to hers. The shivers that had been running down his spine constantly since the moment they touched are changing in intensity; so pleasurable they get hard to bear without doing *something* about them. He knows what that means, that he needs to leave soon, but he doesn't want to stop just yet. Not without a more thorough taste of her.

She is also not unaffected. Her breathing has become both rather ragged and faint at once. Her hands are still lying in her lap, almost forgotten, while his are gently cradling her face.

And even as they kiss languidly, he feels as if he has come home, and he is relieved to find that his conscience finally has nothing more concrete to say than a very eloquent shrug.

He deepens the kiss a little, his tongue sliding along hers, a hitched breath all the encouragement he needs. Finally her hands creep up his arms, tangling in his hair at the base of his neck, sending a delicious shiver down his spine.

And he can't remember when he has ever felt more content than in this moment, right in her arms.

End

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A/N:

Well, I hoped you liked my little experiment. It was my first foray into writing in present tense.

I hope I have portrayed both characters as well as their thoughts in a way so that no one will get any creepy vibes. The thought of someone watching you can be creepy or it can be very erotic. I hope that the latter applies with this little one-shot.

Regarding both Remus' and Hermione's shyness during their talk, I had the image of those two people in mind who were attracted to each other and liked the other very much, but would never have done anything about it had not the other taken the first step in their eyes at least.

Remus reacts because Hermione says his name in her sleep and she reacts when he approaches her first. It may seem a little frustrating or not very realistic to some, but shyness and insecurities can be very inhibiting and not all have enough courage to overcome them Gryffindor or not.

Finally this piece was inspired by the truly wonderful movie "Besieged" by Bernardo Bertolucci and with David Thewlis. It's a wonderfully understated movie about attraction, love and what you are prepared to do for love. It relies very much on subtle gestures and looks, and because of it is very erotic, although there is not one sex scene depicted. I hope I managed to capture some of the charged atmosphere of the movie.