

'Too' Times Three

by Subversa

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The front door to number twelve, Grimmauld Place flew open with such force that the door hit the wall and rebounded, but the guilty party was in the entrance hall before the door slammed closed again with a pane-rattling slam.

The draperies flew open, revealing the portrait of Mrs. Black, which began to shriek. 'Filth! Half-breeds! Freaks and mutants! Befouling the house of my fathers!'

The grizzled ex-Auror was on his feet and out of the sitting room before the intruder reached the stair-landing. The look of startled surprise on his ravaged face pulled his twisted mouth into a lop-sided 'O' and made the artificial eye spin in its socket. He gathered himself to roar, 'Now, see here!' but he was unceremoniously pushed past with an impatiently snapped, 'Oh, shut it, Mad-Eye!'

Remus Lupin heard the commotion downstairs and assumed one of the Order members had come by to leave a report for Dumbledore, only to fall foul of Moody's paranoia, which prompted him to hex first and ask questions later. Remus shook his prematurely-greying head and hoped Moody would manage to stifle Sirius' mum soon. The old harrikan reminded him far too keenly of her disdain for him when he had still been at school the Lupins were not a pure-blood family which had held to the Old Ways, and his heritage had not endeared him in this house.

His tawny hazel eyes narrowed for a moment at the sudden sharp reminder of school of Sirius and James and Peter and the sweeter, more recent memory of laughter and tenderness. And acceptance unconditional acceptance.

The screeching from below disguised the sound of footsteps outside his door, so that he was alarmed when a small figure erupted into his room and made straight for his dresser, snatching the stoppered phials there.

'Tonks!' he cried, springing to his feet. 'That's my Wolfsbane Potion!'

'I know bloody-fucking well what it is, Remus,' she stormed, her heart-shaped face pinched and tear-streaked in the inadequate candlelight. She placed the potion in the pockets of her robes with a savage thrust. 'It's Saturday night! When you're in town, we always meet at the Leaky for a drink on Saturday night. I've been waiting. Waiting!'

He had the handkerchief in his hand before he knew what he was about, yearning to dry her face, to soothe her tempest with soft words and gentle touches but he must not must not approach, must not touch. Wordlessly, he extended the scrap of linen.

Tonks took a step back, and for the first time he noticed the drawn wand.

'You promised me last summer that I would not be alone on Valentine's Day. You said that if no bloke asked me out, you would make it *my* day.'

Pain twisted his face. 'Tonks '

'I hold you to it. I know you don't love me, but I don't care.' She was implacable.

Remus took a deep breath and seemed to grow taller; his chin rose and his mouth firmed. He pushed the handkerchief back into his pocket. 'No. I'm sorry. It would be a mistake.'

Tonks uttered a slightly crazed laugh. 'Do you think Snape has any more Wolfsbane brewed?'

'You know I won't be safe without it, Tonks. Put it back.' Remus sat again and picked up his book, directing his gaze to its pages, striving for self-possession.

'You can have it back,' she answered him. A tiny wheedle flavoured her tone. 'Meet me tomorrow in the park, at noon. Be prepared to spend the entire day, and you can have it back when we say goodnight.'

Without looking up, he said, 'No.' He sounded firm, authoritative didn't he?

He might have saved his breath, for the single word was lost in the bang of his door as she exited with his Wolfsbane in her possession.

Tonks paced nervously beneath the winter-bare trees in the park, alternating quickly between excitement and despair. Falling in love with Remus Lupin had been simultaneously the best and the worst experience of her life. The best because he made her feel pretty, charming, graceful, clever, and sexy the worst because he saw himself as old, ugly, poor, damaged, and dangerous. Those early months of camaraderie and friendship, when both were falling and neither knew it, had been the most exhilarating ones she had known. Later, when she had realised she loved him, she had felt as if she were in possession of irrefutable wonder. She had wanted to wear her love like silk and diamonds, to be seen and have it known for what it was.

Huddled in the derelict barn not far from the forest hideout of the renegade werewolf pack, Remus gave Tonks the information Dumbledore had requested. He lingered long past sunset, the two murmuring deep into the night their dreams for a post-war, Voldemort-free future.

'What are you doing?' His hoarse voice sounded strained.

'Kissing you.' She did it again, insistent, until he was convinced of her ardour, and then she was clinging on for dear life, the tables neatly turned as she discovered the true substance of desire.

His unexpected Lumos!' startled her into embarrassment, and she reached frantically for her torn shirt.

'Stay!' he flared, a growl evident in his tone.

The hunger in those gleaming gold eyes brought her to rake her nails down his bare back, drawing an instinctive response from him.

Challenge sought dominance; riposte wrought lunging, rapturous frenzy.

The next coupling and the next and the next were exercises in exquisite tenderness. It all brought her to the same ecstatic completion, and she loved the gentle attention to her pleasure but the wolf-like Remus in extremis was a sight she would not soon forget and hoped soon to repeat.

The honeyed light of the morning sun crept over the windowsill and shone upon the lovers as they lay upon his cloak, covered by hers, illuminating them fully to one another's eyes. His expression of consternation and quickly escalating horror had her grasping as he scuttled from her, grabbing and donning his shabby clothing.

'Remus!'

'Your throat I marked you I bruised you '

'It's all right, love I can heal it you won't even be able to see it -'

'Oh my God I could have hurt you '

'You didn't!'

' Or killed you'

'You wouldn't!'

'No better than an animal'

'Stop it!'

Her shrill cry halted him from pulling on his worn-out boots.

Tonks crossed the room and knelt at his feet, clothed in nothing but her anguish. 'I love you, you dolt! I don't care about a stupid bruise!'

His torment did not allow for patience or kindness. Putting her from him, he was gone.

Tonks wiped her eyes and checked her wristwatch five minutes to noon. She reached up to make sure the colourful scarf tied about her head was in place. She had raided her mum's cedar trunk this morning for vintage clothing; the opaque stockings, mini skirt, and psychedelic vest made her look like a flower-child from the sixties. Her morphing abilities were gone; she could no longer so much as make her hair grow or change the shape of her nose but the outrageous clothes gave her a boost, made her feel as if she could face Remus with a smattering of her old cheekiness.

Meetings since their night together had always ended with the same argument. 'I'm too old for you, Tonks too poor for a girlfriend, much less a wife and too dangerous to ever be in a relationship.'

The phials clanked against one another in her pocket and her fingers closed over them just as he spoke from behind her.

'Happy Valentine's Day, Tonks.'

She whirled, the hated tears springing to her eyes. 'I'm sorry!' She pulled her hand from her pocket and stepped forward to push the potion doses into the pocket of his brown jacket, a likely relic of his student years. 'There's your Wolfsbane. It was wrong of me. You don't have to stay.'

'These are for you,' Remus said, showing her the small heart-shaped Honeyduke's box and the simple pink rose.

Tonks made no move to take the gifts, staring up into his face with tears streaming from her eyes. He dropped the sweets into her shoulder bag and tucked the rosebud into her soft brown hair, using both thumbs to clear tears from her cheeks. 'You said I could spend the day with you,' he reminded her, leaning down to kiss her lips.

Weakly, she clung, crying into his neck, 'But you said you were too old ...'

He sat beneath the nearest tree, pulling her down to sit beside him. 'I am all of those things but am also the man who loves you, Tonks. I can't have you presuming otherwise.'

Intently, she looked into his eyes. Hoping, she kissed him fiercely, and his immediate, quickening response made her a believer.

Only a passing jaybird saw her hair bloom shocking pink.

A/N: Beta reading thanks to Keladry Lupin.