

Vigil

by shalimar1981

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: All you recognise isn't mine.

Thanks to Ladyinthecloak for the beta-work. And thanks as always to Little One, for sleeping peacefully so I have a chance to write. :)

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A soft growl jolted her out of her reverie. She looked up and found him staring at her, his head tilted to the side inquiringly. Looking remarkably like he did in his human form.

She laughed softly and directed her attention back to the werewolf sitting not five feet away from her. Pulling her knees up to her chest, she laid her arms on her knees and rested her chin on them, staring back at him with a smile on her lips.

He yipped quietly, as if he were a dog instead of a werewolf, and after circling the spot he had selected a few times, he settled on the ground three feet away from her, his head resting on his paws in a perfect imitation of her own position.

They spent the night staring at each other, until they both fell asleep.

Hermione's vigil had been going on for almost a year now. Every full moon she made sure that all occupants of the house were asleep before tip-toeing down the stairs, avoiding the third step down from the second floor because it creaked horribly, and made her way out into the garden to stay with Remus.

He was always staying in a roomy enclosure in the backyard of number twelve, Grimmauld Place made up of an elaborate set of wards specifically designed for and tuned to him. Someone could enter that enclosure, but he couldn't leave it. It was invisible to the eye and involved a complicated combination of a Repelling and a Silencing Charm for Muggles, but alerted the members of the Order sleeping inside the house if something was wrong. The temperature inside was kept at an even 25 degrees Celsius.

McGonagall, Flitwick and Moody were deservedly very proud of their hard work, and Remus was more than grateful for the four weeks they had sacrificed for him. He was indebted to them and they knew it, although they never mentioned it. He couldn't have borne to be locked up in chains ever again.

Sometimes the two of them would just stare at each other. Sometimes she would bring a book and read to him, a pastime which seemed to soothe him when he was agitated and his instincts to hunt and chase, to feel the wind blowing through his fur when he ran were becoming hard to resist. Sometimes she would try to play a game with him, catch or something similar. That always seemed to amuse him greatly for some reason. And sometimes the two of them would just lie on the ground, so close to the barrier and to each other that they were almost touching and could feel the other's body heat through it, although it should be technically impossible.

They would both wake at the same time on those mornings, tense because the other was close enough to touch and yet light years apart. They would lie there, unmoving, savouring their time together.

She would leave before the others woke up, without sparing his now human and very naked body a glance.

They never talked about her visits during the full moon.

She had no real inkling of why she had come down that first night and stayed with him all through the night why she was still coming now on every full moon months later.

She supposed it might have been a mixture of pain, pity, compassion, concern, friendship, affection at first. But it certainly was that no longer.

She refused to think of what it had become, however. She refused to think about it now on another night of a full moon as she stared at him, staring at her; she refused to think about it that first moment when they met that first time after every transformation, and she refused to think about it when he wasn't there, when she was alone or with Harry or the others. She didn't really understand it, so what good would thinking about it do?

Of course their watching each other was slowly taking over in other aspects of their lives as well.

Remus found himself contemplating her hair when he should have been listening to the latest debriefing of the Order. Not that there was much to listen to a year after Voldemort's death, but still. It was the principle of the matter more than anything.

Hermione fared no better. Countless times she found herself staring at his eyes, his hair, his hands, zoning out of surely highly interesting talks about Quidditch.

He didn't really understand it all either. He had often wondered why she was spending every full moon with him. But he hadn't examined the matter too closely to be honest. It felt too nice, too comforting, too bittersweetly *familiar* that there was someone keeping him company, being close to him. He wasn't about to give that up again by foolishly asking her why she stayed with him. Because he knew somehow that's what would happen if he did. He didn't want to know really. The real reason could only prove his fantasies, what he imagined, wrong.

Since she was there for every full moon and never arrived later than three hours past moon-rise, he grew concerned when she didn't come down after four hours one night.

He was pacing from one end of the barrier to the other end restlessly, tail wagging in agitation, when after five hours there was still no sign of her. Finally, after almost five and a half hours, his ears pricked at the sound of long-awaited footsteps in the hallway two floors up in the house.

If a transformed werewolf could frown, however, he would: her footsteps were loud and uneven, not muffled at all as usual. For a moment he wasn't sure it was her at all until he caught her scent through the backdoor left slightly ajar in anticipation of her visit.

Then he heard a slight, pained gasp, and a thud as a body hit the wooden floor.

Body taut and ears pricked, he waited for someone to come for her. Surely someone must've heard her? But no one came, and she didn't move again.

It wasn't a conscious decision on his part that had him starting to throw himself against the barrier almost immediately after her fall. No, the way he ran against the barrier until he hurt himself sufficiently for the buzz alarm of the wards to go off and look for him was even against all instincts of self-preservation. But it worked.

Turned out she had a ruptured Appendix and was rushed to St. Mungo's immediately.

For his part, he was given a sedative and was looked at in a strange way until it took effect, so the remaining members could look at his right paw that was lying in an unnatural angle.

Two days later Hermione woke to the sterile smell and too bright light of what could only be a hospital room. The light burned even through her closed eye-lids.

She hurt everywhere, but especially in her right lower abdomen. It felt like someone had taken a bite out of her. At that thought, she wanted to laugh at the irony but decided to postpone it till later since she hurt too much to chance it.

When she checked her body over mentally, she found that her right hand was not where it was supposed to be lying beside her sheet-covered leg but was resting against something nice and warm and soft and scratchy at the same time.

Opening her eyes was an effort. Having the glare of the sunlight pierce her eyeballs and not die was even more of one.

But when her eyes adjusted it was worth it.

Remus was sitting in a chair beside her bed, leaning forward with her hand pressed against his lips and stubbly chin, staring at her intently.

She blinked.

"Remus?" she croaked out like a toad. How charming.

But he only nodded, not changing the destination or intensity of his regard.

"You were not there during this full moon," he commented, his lips moving against her fingers. It should've seemed curious that that would be the first thing he'd say to her after she had almost died when they had never talked about her visits before. But it didn't.

She nodded slowly, not daring a more elaborate movement or speech again, for fear of... disturbing him? Scaring him away? Of stopping this... whatever it was, she supposed.

Then she noticed that his right arm was in a sling.

"What happened?" she asked haltingly in alarm.

He merely shook his head and said solemnly, "Don't ever do that to me again. I was... terrified."

She wondered what it cost him to admit his fear, his helplessness to her. He who was always so controlled and never let feelings come to the surface when he could help it.

The slight tick in his jaw and that intense look in his eyes, as if he was burning up on the inside (a curious thought as that wasn't possible, right?) as he waited for her to acknowledge his admission told her more than anything he could ever say. It made her feel warmer, less in pain and less alone.

The smile she attempted had to be abysmal, and yet he tried to respond in kind, still holding her hand to his lips. It tickled.

"Me, too," she replied, but they were both quite sure that she meant something completely different.

The End

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A/N: This was in part inspired by TPP chat, or more specifically by quilter_infinity's plight (hope you'll get better soon!), and chapter five of Ksianna's/Ellaselenelupin's translation of Anny An's fic 'The Wolfsbane Potion', which is excellent by the way so go read it.