

The Werewolf's Bride

by Grace has Victory

Remus and Ariadne Lupin have the same problems as any other newlyweds – work, money, in-laws, communication – and, of course, werewolves. Will her idealism collapse under the pressure of his lycanthropy? Or will her approach take him by surprise yet?

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

Forest Honeymoon

Chapter 1 of 21

Remus and Ariadne Lupin have the same problems as any other newlyweds – work, money, in-laws, communication – and, of course, werewolves. Will her idealism collapse under the pressure of his lycanthropy? Or will her approach take him by surprise yet?

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

For NADIA MUHSEN,
who is a good mother.

May justice prevail.

Disclaimer

1. **J. K. Rowling** owns the Potterverse. And she has made a lot of money out of it. I don't own anything. And I haven't made any money at all.
2. Thanks to my beta reader, **Spiderwort**, who has made this series as much her project as mine.

CHAPTER ONE

Forest Honeymoon

Sunday 7 July 1985

Sherwood Forest, Nottinghamshire.

Rated G for references to soft toys.

"Stop! Leave me alone!" Terry tried to slink off behind a tree.

"Give me Ramkin," bargained Lucy menacingly, "and I'll go away."

"No, he's mine!" He clutched a grubby stuffed toy closer.

"I'll pull your hair." His sister extended a fist.

"You'll hurt him ooowww!" Terry gasped and squealed in pain as his sister grabbed at a tuft with one hand and reached out for the toy with the other. "Nooooooo!"

"Give me Ramkin," Lucy repeated, as Terry squashed his toy against his chest with both arms and tried to jerk his hair out of his sister's grasp.

He screamed piercingly, and suddenly his hair was released. Lucy's scrabbling hands were nowhere near him. He could not even see Lucy. All he could see were the green branches of trees not trunks, definitely branches and Ramkin was safe in his arms.

Terry cuddled his grubby fur and looked around. He was apparently sitting in a tree. He was up high, in the comfortable fork between two large branches, surrounded by rustling green leaves. He looked down. He was so high up that it would have been scary if the fork hadn't been so broad and flat. Over his shoulder and in the distance, he could just make out their parents sitting on the picnic rug. Lucy was standing firmly on the ground below him, holding Terry's mousy tuft of hair in her hand and staring up furiously.

"Terry, come down!"

"Shan't," said Terry, for indeed he had no idea how he would climb down such a tall, smooth trunk. Now he came to think of it, how had he climbed up? And so quickly, too!

"Do you want me telling Mum and Dad?"

"Tell if you like!" Since it was obvious that Lucy would never manage to follow them up this tree, it was obvious that he and Ramkin were safe, so Terry didn't care who told what.

"Terry, don't you *understand*?" sighed Lucy. "It's happened again! Everyone will know you couldn't have *climbed* that tree. Do you want everyone knowing that *it* has happened again?"

Terry supposed that was true. He hadn't climbed; he had simply, well, arrived. With Ramkin. And without his hair, which Lucy was still holding. He reached a hand to his head and, sure enough, there was a bald patch on the crown. Mummy and Daddy wouldn't believe that Lucy had pulled so much hair out; they would say that Terry had cut it off with scissors (even though, of course, he hadn't brought any scissors into the forest with him). And they wouldn't believe that he didn't know how he had landed up in the tree; they would say it was more of his "odd" behaviour.

"If they know that *it* has happened," Lucy yelled, "they'll take you off to that cycle-jist again. You'll be locked up in hospital! I told you to be careful. They'll feed you pills for the rest of your life, and everyone at school will say you're weird!"

Everyone at school thought Terry was weird as it was. When Terry was around, unbreakable glass windows shattered, turned-off cold taps spurted hot water, paint-pots caught fire, and Terry himself was found sitting on top of the stock-cupboard or inside the grand piano. Terry promised every morning that "I won't let anything weird happen today," but he couldn't really stop the weird things happening because he didn't know how he did them.

"Throw Ramkin down and I won't tell!" Lucy was shouting. "It's starting to rain, you have to come down now."

"Strangers are coming," said Terry. He knew that Lucy was embarrassed to let strangers know about the odd happenings in their family.

Lucy closed her mouth and turned around carefully. Two strangers were indeed emerging between the trees, a man and a woman both dressed in a kind of loose gown. They didn't seem to be noticing the rain, although they had no umbrella, and they didn't seem to be noticing the children, because they were too absorbed in their grown-up talk to each other.

"Terry." Lucy's voice was low and urgent now. "You *must* come down. Those people will *know* you couldn't have climbed up. Otherwise you'll be in trouble for being up a tree that can't be climbed. But I'm not in trouble because nobody has done anything to Ramkin. So do as I say."

"I can't climb down," said Terry. "Why should those people notice me?" They might not have noticed, except that Terry had made no effort to keep his pitch or volume low, and the strangers had just stepped within earshot. At the moment Terry was saying "notice me", they both turned their heads, and they *did* notice him. As they began to walk over, Lucy's face was an agony of embarrassment, and Terry meanly felt himself avenged for Lucy's cruelty to Ramkin.

"I don't think it's *allowed* to be up public trees," Lucy pleaded.

"Well, I can't come down," said Terry, more loudly still. "I flew up and I don't know the way down. That's what we can tell people."

The strange man glanced up at the tree, then down at Lucy. Lucy was miserable, but she still hurled a hateful, predatory glance at Ramkin. It was this glance that tempted Terry to one last taunt.

"I had a flying carpet, and it flew off without me," he announced. "So now Ramkin and I are staying up this tree for ever and ever unless you call the fire brigade to bring us down."

"Children," broke in the strange man, "do your parents know that you're playing here?"

They weren't really supposed to talk to strangers, but the man had a kind face, and Terry knew that, since he would have to come down from the tree eventually, he needed adult help especially if Ramkin were to be safe from Lucy.

"They're just over there." Terry pointed.

"Do they know that you're up a tree and can't get down?"

"No, they do *not*," said Lucy. "It was very naughty of Terry to climb up like that."

"I didn't climb, I flew," Terry insisted.

"Ah. A very intelligent piece of climbing er flying." The man walked around the tree, as if looking for the footholds that would have helped Terry up to his sanctuary. "I wonder just how you did manage it."

The strange lady spoke for the first time. "Terry, are you scared about being up in the tree, or are you scared about being down again?" Her voice lilted, as if her words were poetry, and she rolled her Rs in the Scottish way. Her eyes were large and startlingly blue, and the eccentric gown looked pretty rather than silly on her.

"Down. Lucy was going to hurt Ramkin."

"I was not!" lied Lucy. The stranger ignored her.

"She was going to do an operation on him by tearing up his stitches with a sharp stick and drowning his insides in the brook. I'm not coming down unless Ramkin is safe."

"How did you get up?"

"I was running away from Lucy, and she was trying to grab Ramkin, and suddenly I was up here."

"I suppose," said the man, still from behind the tree, "you climbed the ladder."

"But there isn't any lad " Lucy began.

"I'll stand right behind the ladder," said the man evenly. "Terry, throw Ramkin down to my wife, then climb down. You won't fall, but if you do I'll catch you. "

Ramkin was flying through the air before Terry thought to ask whether he should trust the strange lady with the large blue eyes. Terry had thrown crookedly, so that Ramkin almost dangerously landed on Lucy's head, but somehow the curiously-dressed stranger caught him anyway and began stroking him between her two hands.

"He's a ram," she said. "That's why you call him Ramkin."

Ramkin's fur was so dirty, and his face so squashed, and one horn so twisted out of shape, that it wasn't surprising that strangers didn't usually recognise what animal he was. "Most people don't know that," said Terry. "Most people say he's a sheep. Unless they think he's a dog or a dinosaur."

"They must be city people," said the lady. "I grew up on a farm, so I know the difference between a ram and a ewe. Now, can you make it to the ladder safely?"

Terry looked around and, to his astonishment, saw that there was a ladder behind him, a ladder that reached all the way up to the branch-fork. He didn't remember seeing it when he had looked around for his parents, but there it was, exactly the right height. He shuffled around cautiously and placed his feet on the second-highest rung. The man stood there, holding the ladder, as he had promised. He had light-brown hair, like Terry's, and a thin bony face.

Terry stood up slowly, leaning against the tree-branch, and managed to turn himself around so that he was facing the ladder. He grasped the sides and began to climb down. There was something odd about this ladder. The rungs were very broad, and they were close together, so he didn't have far to step from one to the next it was more like the steps up to a slide in the park than a real grown-up ladder. He relaxed, although it was such a long descent, and quickened his pace.

He reached the ground, and the man said, "Are you hurt?"

He shook his head. "Ramkin."

"Here." The lady walked around and handed him back. Terry cradled him; he was wet from the rain.

"What happened to your hair?" asked the man.

"Lucy..." He had forgotten about the missing tuft, and now he didn't know how to explain it. "She was holding it before I flew I mean, before ~~went~~ up the tree."

"I did *not* cut it," said Lucy loudly. "I don't have any scissors." She opened her fingers and threw the tuft down on the ground. It was becoming very tangled and grubby. "Here, I don't want your stupid hair. Mum and Dad will be furious to see it off. They'll make you pay a hundred pounds out of your pocket money for your next haircut."

The strange lady picked it up, glanced at her husband, then said, "You're saying Lucy held your hair, and it just came off in her hand? Leaving that bald patch? And without her pulling?"

"Not much pulling. And no scissors." Terry felt very small and silly to have to explain an impossible thing like that. "It didn't even hurt. It just... fell..."

As if it were the most natural thing in the world, the lady said, "Let's stick it back on, before your parents find out." She held the handful of hair against the bald patch on Terry's head and murmured something that sounded like, "Repair it." When she pulled her hand away, she wasn't holding the hair any more.

Gingerly, Terry touched his head. His hair was back in the right place, growing out of his head as if it had never been pulled off, and there was no smooth skin at all. He hardly dared ask how the lady had done it.

The oddest thing about these odd people was how they didn't seem to find him odd at all.

"Terry, does anything like this ever happen to Lucy? Does she ever fly up trees, or lose body parts or or make things happen?"

Make things happen. Terry knew exactly what kind of things the lady meant. With a rush of gratitude, he said, "No, never."

"Of course I don't," said Lucy, piqued that they weren't speaking to her.

"Or your mother or your father?"

"Definitely not Mum or Dad," said Lucy. "Only Terry is weird enough. And we try to stop him, because we don't want people thinking our whole family is weird."

"Terry." The lady knelt down (in the mud!) and held Terry's arms with her hands. "Things like that happen to lots of people. But the ~~other~~ people, to whom it does not happen, are scared of it. So it's probably easier to keep it a secret. We're not needing to tell your parents about what happened today, are we?"

Lucy looked disappointed, but Terry nodded again.

"Let's go and look for your mother and ask her to take care of Ramkin."

Terry held the lady's hand, while Lucy kicked at the ground and then followed. She said to the strange man, "Why are you dressed up like that?"

"Why do you think?"

"You look like something off the telly. Are you actors? Are they making a film in Sherwood Forest?"

"We all have to do some acting," said the man. "Like now, when we pretend that you and your brother didn't quarrel, and that nobody flew up a tree or pulled hair off. Because that's the kindest thing to say to your parents, and it saves both of you from being punished too."

"Why is it kind?" Lucy grumbled. "Terry *deserves* to be punished for climbing public trees." But she grumbled without passion. She must have worked out that their parents would not be pleased about Terry's version of *why* he had flown up the tree.

Their parents came into view; they were in the process of packing up the picnic rug, because the picnic weather was over for the day. That reminded Terry of something else.

"Why aren't you wet?" he asked the lady. "It's raining on everyone, but not on you. You don't even have mud where you were kneeling."

The lady looked surprised, as if she hadn't thought of this. "Well, nobody likes to be wet, so I keep the rain at a distance," she said. The lilt in her soft voice was like music. "You've caught me out, Terry. It's another of those things where I should not have let anybody know my secret, is it not?"

The lady stopped walking and let go of Terry's hand. The man stopped talking just as their parents looked up from the packed picnic basket.

"Oh, there you are, children," said their mother. "It looks as if our picnic is rained out... Who are those people? Did they speak to you?"

Terry kept quiet. Lucy opened her mouth, then closed it again. It looked as if she didn't want to accuse Terry of anything else today.

"Children, we have warned you about speaking to strangers," said their father. "We can't let you play out of our sight if you're going to speak to every stranger who walks past."

"But they weren't strangers," said Terry. "They helped us."

"They said, 'Where are your parents?'" said Lucy. "And Terry pointed. And then they said we should go back to where our parents could see us. So we did."

Their mother nodded. "That was probably all right, then. Especially as there was a lady there. But don't let it happen again. Anyway, that's definitely the end of the picnic, so let's drive to Newstead Abbey."

Lucy, who seemed to have forgotten all about tormenting Ramkin, followed their parents back to the carpark. But Terry looked back at the kind man and lady in the odd gowns, who were still standing between the trees, just out of earshot. The man had his arm around the lady's waist, but they were watching Terry's family, to make sure he and Ramkin were safe with his parents. Although it was raining quite hard by now, Terry couldn't help noticing that they still didn't seem to be wet. The lady's hair, which hung very long down her back, still had a soft, wavy look, and their old-fashioned gowns were loose, not clingy, with no wet patches at all. The rain should have been hitting the man right in the chest, but Terry was sure he could see it bouncing off, about six inches away from him, and hitting puddles at his feet.

He waved at them. They waved back, then turned around, joined hands, and walked back into the trees. They weren't going towards the carpark or the city; they were heading further *into* the forest.

Only after they were out of sight did Terry ask, "Mummy, why do you think those people didn't get wet?"

"What? The ones you met in the forest? Of course they must have been wet, in this downpour."

"No, the rain wasn't touching them; I saw."

"They must have been sheltered under a tree, then," said his mother.

But Terry knew they hadn't been. "They were dressed strangely," he said. "Maybe they were actors for a film."

"But there were no cameras," argued Lucy. "And they weren't wearing make-up. You have to wear stage make-up all over your face for a film."

"Perhaps they were members of a club," suggested their father. "There is a club where grown-ups can dress up like people out of the Middle Ages."

Terry thought that sounded like fun, but Lucy broke in again. "Did you notice that they were in lo-o-o-ove?"

"How do you know a thing like that?" Terry asked.

"I know by the stupid way he was staring at her, as if he had no brains at all. She was no better; she thought he was Superman or something."

Terry hadn't noticed anything like that, but it was unwise to risk being called stupid, so he volunteered, "He said they were married."

"They couldn't have been married. They were in lo-o-o-ove. Married people don't stare at each other in that stupid way, or hang off each other's hands like that."

"But he said she was his wife."

"Well, she was really his girlfriend. Or else they'd only been married for about one day. One day at the *most*... Mum, are we allowed a chocolate bar?"

Terry held his chocolate bar without unwrapping it. He couldn't stop thinking about the people who understood about *making things happen*. He remembered how his hair had come off in Lucy's hand, just because he had been so angry with Lucy that he had *had* to escape her, and how the blue-eyed lady had stuck it on again just as easily. Neither thing was supposed to happen, yet it had all seemed so natural. How had the man found that ladder so easily? Why did the rain bounce off both of them? How had Terry himself so suddenly flown from the ground to the tree?

Was it really true that things like that happened to lots of people?

* * * * *

Remus and Ariadne Lupin walked on into the forest. The rain dripped down from the leaves above them and was deflected by *arimpervius* charm. When the Muggle family was well behind them, Remus waved his wand in the direction of Terry's tree, and a flash of silver light arched over the tree-tops to Vanish the Conjured ladder. Then they continued walking through the trees.

"What were you thinking just now?" he asked.

"Was I thinking something?"

"I distinctly saw a thought cross your face, but you decided not to confide it in me."

"You're right."

"Well?"

"I was thinking," she conceded, "that if anybody else had thrown a spell backwards without looking, and with his wrong hand, and the spell had hit its mark... well, if anybody *else* had done it, it might have looked like showing off."

"I had to find some way to impress the most brilliant Potions student in seven years. And trying to brew a ladder-dissolver in the middle of Sherwood Forest might not have worked out too well. Especially as we don't have a cauldron. But I thought a charm would be safe enough no-one would have noticed the flash amid all this rain."

"That little boy was noticing things more awkward than a few flashes. He was asking about why the rain does not touch us. Remus, why did his parents not notice such obvious magic?"

"Because Muggles don't. My parents told me that their own parents reasoned it away. Magic didn't exist, therefore magic couldn't have happened. Muggle parents just don't see it, Ariadne."

"But Terry could not ignore it. It must be harder to ignore magic when you're suspecting that it does exist. Remus, what happens to bairns like that? The Muggle-borns, like Terry, whose families are not understanding what's happening?"

"It's a secret that keeps itself," he said. "No matter how odd the child seems... the parents don't wish to discuss it with outsiders. Then the Hogwarts letter arrives, and that explains everything."

"Do all Muggle siblings tease as much as we saw Lucy teasing Terry?"

"Probably not all the time. We don't know whether Lucy always teases Terry; today might have been a bad day. For all we know, it could have been Terry who started the fight and Lucy who was only reacting. Besides, the quarrel didn't seem to be about magic; it was just a quarrel. All siblings do that."

"Not all siblings are that spiteful," Ariadne observed. "The quarrel may not have been about magic this time, but the toxicity had something to do with Terry's being different. Are you thinking that always happens in a Muggle-born household?"

"Not always. But it's certainly a..." He trailed off.

Her fingers closed around his more tightly. She knew he was thinking about Harry Potter, his honorary nephew, the famous boy-wizard who was growing up among Muggles.

He knew that she was thinking about the children whom they had agreed never to have in their own home. For the rest of their lives, it was to be just the two of them.

But "just the two of them" was, for the time being, a happy thought. When he chanced a look down at her, he found that she was turning her head to gaze up at him. Each saw that the other was smiling. For, as young Lucy Boot had correctly observed, they had only been married for one day.

Once in a Blue Moon

Chapter 2 of 21

The honeymoon is over and reality strikes with a vengeance.

CHAPTER TWO

Once in a Blue Moon

Monday 8 July Wednesday 31 July 1985

Old Basford, Nottingham; Diagon Alley, London.

Rated PG-13 for implied references to conjugal love.

She was leaving.

It felt unnatural to pull herself out of the shared bed and ignore the sunlight that was stealing through the curtains. She crept into the bathroom and turned on the shower. The water was icy, because it was supposed to be heated by a Muggle gas-heater that no longer existed, so she breathed out a *Thermo* charm. Her baskets of lemon-jasmine soap and shampoo were improbably hung from the tiles around the bath he must have put them there by magic and they would wash away the last trace of his body scents. By the time she turned off the shower, there was no evidence that he had ever touched her.

He was still lying in the bed in blissful sleep. He looked so childlike with his eyes closed, so ignorant of the inevitable day ahead. She pulled on her working robes and overalls, the scrupulous clinical linen that separated her from her potions, her home life from her labours. She plaited her hair, wound it around her head, and covered it with the regulation-navy laboratory cap. She kissed him very softly, so that he would not awaken and repeat his protests. There was no point in letting him list his objections again; she had to leave.

She was leaving the man she adored in order to spend the day with a man whom she didn't even like.

They had been married for less than two days. And she had to go. She could not risk jeopardising her apprenticeship, for there was more than her apprenticeship at stake.

She picked up her lunch box, threw Floo powder into the fireplace, and called, "Diagon Alley!" A few minutes later she stepped out of the public Floo in the Leaky Cauldron and walked across the cobblestones to Slug and Jigger's apothecary shop. A clock was striking the half-hour half-past seven; she was early. But of course that was what Professor Jigger expected of her.

"Decided to come to work, did you?" said Belladonna Jigger sourly. "Where were you on Saturday? Where were you Friday evening, if it comes to that?"

"Good morning, Madam Jigger," said Ariadne. "Professor granted me Saturday as annual leave."

"How come he never told me?"

Ariadne knew that Professor *had* told his wife, but evidently the information had not registered. "I'm sorry if your work was disrupted on Saturday," she said evenly. "This week I will make up the missing hours."

Madam Jigger grunted. Ariadne knew that she had laid herself open to an unfair arrangement a day had been struck off her annual leave allowance, yet she would still have to work a dozen hours of unpaid overtime before the Jiggers forgave her. But it had been difficult enough to negotiate for Saturday. At first she had asked Professor Jigger, "Can I take my annual leave in the second week of July?"

He had been appalled. "Course not. You haven't been here a year yet. You're entitled to a week after you've worked for a year; you can't take any before the first of August."

"I know it's not a good time for me to take leave," she had bargained, "but I've been here for nearly a year. Does that not entitle me to nearly a week?"

"Not in the busy season. Go and stir that cauldron."

Ariadne had never yet worked out which periods qualified as the not-busy season. "Professor, I'm needing Saturday off," she had persisted. "I'm going to be in the Scottish Highlands that afternoon."

"What for?"

"I'm getting married."

His jaw had dropped, but more in annoyance than in surprise. "Well, you should have asked me first. I didn't say you could get married. In my day young folk *didn't* marry until they'd finished their apprenticeship. Look at me. I was seventy-six years old when I married Madam Thornapple, and I made sure I chose a competent apothecary who'd help the business on."

This, Ariadne had known, was not quite fair. Professor Jigger had indeed married Belladonna Thornapple at the age of seventy-six, soon after he had stopped teaching at Hogwarts; but she was his second wife. Ariadne knew that he had been only twenty and still an apprentice when he had married for the first time.

"I don't suppose, Miss MacDougal," Jigger had continued, "you've thought about the business side of married life? More likely you chose a pretty-boy who couldn't even brew a wart-cure. I suppose you're marrying that one who sent you the flowers."

"I am. And I'll be needing to take the wedding day as annual leave."

"Fine," he had grumped. "*One* day. The Saturday only. But we'll expect to see you back here *first* thing on Monday morning."

It was indeed "first thing" her contract stated that her day began at nine, and even the Jiggers did not seriously expect her before eight as Ariadne walked into the laboratory.

"Time for a trial on humans," said Professor Jigger abruptly. He did not wish her a "good morning", or even look at her; those were his first words.

Ariadne opened a book to the formula for eyebright infusion.

"Your appetite suppressant," said Jigger, as if she were stupid. "We've done all we can on rats. It works and it's safe. Time to find some fat, vain witches and invite them to the trial." After an impressive pause, he added, "We advertise. Easy enough to find vain women. We just put a notice in the *Witch Weekly* that they get a free sample during the experimental stages. You can draft the advertisement today, Miss MacDougal. But do the eyebright first. The hay fever season isn't over yet."

Ariadne opened the jar of newly-delivered eyebright, knowing she was not really required to speak.

After a pause, Jigger observed, "I suppose you're not using the name MacDougal any more. What is it now? Mrs Flowers?"

"Lupin." She wondered if she should spell it.

"What? Bruno Lupin? I thought he died in the war."

"He did, sir. I've married his brother Remus."

Professor Jigger snorted, then decided on some words. "Yes, remember him. Quiet one. Came into my shop every year to buy his school supplies, but he never understood what he was asking for. He wouldn't have remembered the cure for hay fever, let alone known how to brew it. Why did you want to go and marry a type like him?"

* * * * *

Thirteen very long hours later, Ariadne was too exhausted to think of anything except how grateful she was that Remus had had the Floo connected last week. She stumbled out of their hearth, where Remus had jumped up from the sofa to greet her, and had barely enough presence of mind to pull herself away from his outstretched arms.

"You're not knowing what might have spilled on my overall," she reminded him, as she unbuttoned it.

Seizing the overall with one hand and the cap with the other, he tossed both onto the sofa, then pulled her towards him. "You've been driven very hard today," he said.

"So have you." She could feel the tension in his muscles; without being able to say how she knew, it was obvious that he had spent the time in hard physical labour. "What have you been doing?"

"I took a walk into Old Market Square and checked an employment board. I found a farm offering casual labour, so I've spent the day picking gooseberries."

"So we've both had a long day... Will you be working there again, Remus?"

"Probably. They only offer day-contracts, so when the gooseberries are picked, there's no more work.... Perhaps we should have dinner."

She knew he did not want to talk about the insecurity of his working arrangements; he hated the reminder that, once his meagre savings ran out, they might have to live off her wages. "Oh. I was not intending that you should cook. Or keep dinner waiting when I'm this late."

"I didn't intend that either of us should starve. Besides, you've been working all day *all* day while I've been home since six. But I'm afraid it's only beans. I don't really know how to cook anything else."

She went into the kitchen and lifted the pot from the stove to the table. "It smells wonderful. Remus, why do you not eat meat any more? Is it a moral stance on animal rights or world famine, or is it about health?"

"It's partly to save money," he admitted, "but it's more about aesthetics. My period of playing the good shepherd at Kincarden gave me a profound disgust for the appetites of the wolf. Perhaps I'll get over that eventually. "

"It's all right. I'm sure I can find a vegetarian cookery book at the Muggle library and learn to use it. You're right, living on a farm does that to you. I was about four when I realised that all my favourite animals would end up on somebody's dinner plate, and I think I coped by distancing myself from all animals indiscriminately. Even dogs and others that would not be eaten."

He sat down and picked up his fork. "Is that why you've never had a pet? I've never seen you take any interest in cats or owls."

"Well, Hestia will tell you that I do tend to stroke a cat if it jumps up beside me, and I've been thinking that, with no post office anywhere near us, we're needing our own owl. But I've concluded that it would be unfair to the owl if I did buy one because, as you say, I'd not ever pet it. Call it a deficiency in my character; I've never been very attached to any animal."

A strange look crossed his face, then suddenly cleared. Did he really think of himself or worry that other people might think of him as *an animal*?

She ate for a while, then brought out her clearest memory of the long day. "Professor Jigger remembers you, Remus," she said. "He knows his regular customers, but you have not bought supplies there for nearly ten years. He admits you were a 'quiet one', yet he remembers you anyway. What does that say about you?"

Remus laughed. "It says what a naughty boy I was. Jigger probably remembers that time when Sirius Black was bored with the standard school Potions kit order and dared me to rewrite my shopping list. I put on my most innocent expression and asked for cyanide and strychnine, but Jigger became suspicious when I also wanted liberty cap

powder. I looked right into his eyes and told him with a straight face that it was for a 'special project' investigating hallucinogens in rats. But then I overplayed my hand by asking for amanitin, and he emptied my whole basket into the fire, and told me never to come back to his shop. Peter had to buy double quantities so that I could be restocked, but he didn't have enough cash, so James had to underwrite him, and amid all the fuss Jigger realised that I was waiting outside for them, so he reported me to Hogwarts. I didn't usually get caught at that kind of game Professor Dumbledore was highly disappointed in me."

"Am I allowed to ask what you were meaning by saying you did not usually 'get caught'?"

"Ask all you like, but it would take until midnight to explain everything I meant by that remark."

After several examples of exactly what Remus had meant by "not getting caught", Ariadne cleared the dinner plates. The last two anecdotes had run through her head without leaving any impression. She was not paying him the attention he deserved. She was tired... and somehow, very angry about the fact that she was tired.

He stopped mid-story. "Ariadne, you need to be in bed."

"You're angry too," she observed.

"Of course I am," he said calmly. "I'm angry that Jigger wrings you out like a dirty dishcloth, and I'm angry that he can take you away from me like this on our honeymoon."

"It's not a good beginning," she agreed, swallowing her anger so that she could break the bad news. "But, Remus, it's going to happen again. Professor is expecting me to work these hours every day this week, to make up for missing Saturday."

He levitated the washed dishes into the cupboard. She almost wondered if he would explode, but of course he spoke quite evenly. "Ariadne, what would happen if you rebelled, and told Jigger you were only going to work your contracted hours?"

"I'm not knowing whether I'd lose my apprenticeship or not. But I cannot afford to risk it. He knows that no other apothecary in Britain will give me a chance. And if I do not become an apothecary, we have no future." *More than you're knowing* she thought. She could not tell him what was really at stake; it would be too cruel. But he took her words at face value.

"Sweetheart, I know we don't really have a choice. You have to finish this apprenticeship, and you have to finish it with Jigger, and we have to avoid annoying him. I just wish that he would play fairer. Most tradesmen treat a good apprentice like a valuable asset."

She leaned against him, trying to suppress her sad thoughts. They both knew that there was nothing they could do to force an unfair person to play fairly, and Remus was being so patient. The day before yesterday she had promised to provide him with love and companionship for the rest of his life; at the very least, he deserved a bride who was awake enough to listen to him...

* * * * *

Remus was patient all through Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. He picked fruit all day, although the weather was dull and wet, then he came home to cook for them both, and she was never able to join him before eight-thirty.

On Saturday afternoon, while she was serving behind the counter, Remus walked into Slug and Jigger's. He waited quietly in the queue while she dispensed Eyebright Solution and wrapped unicorn horns for the other customers. Just as it was his turn to be served, Madam Jigger called her from the laboratory.

"Mrs Flowers! You're wanted out the back."

Timed with unerring accuracy, thought Ariadne. She was so exasperated that she nearly said it out loud. As she turned, she heard Remus asking, "Who's Mrs Flowers? Is that what they call you here?"

Professor Jigger came out into the shop, and said, "Madam Jigger needs a hand. If you'll clean up the used cauldrons, she'll show you how to mix a wit-sharpening potion."

Ariadne glanced back at Remus and saw him shaking his head, very slightly. She stopped still and waited for him to speak.

"Professor Jigger," he said, "I believe my wife is contracted to work here for forty-four hours a week."

Jigger looked harder at his customer. "Hmph. It's you again. Mr Flowers. Might have known."

"Since Monday morning this week," Remus persisted, "Mrs Lupin has worked for seventy-three hours."

"Counted, did you? Young folk today are always watching the clock and trying to get off early. That's right, the name's Lupin, isn't it? Remember you. Quiet trouble-maker at school. Married Miss MacDougal so that someone else could mix the potions for which you were always too stupid, isn't that right? Well, she won't learn to mix potions unless she stays behind to learn this new one."

"I'm here to bring my wife home for the weekend. Or else to make a formal complaint to the Guild." Remus waved a letter in front of Professor Jigger's nose.

"Listen, do you want your wife to have a career? Or do you just want her to get a certificate? Because the Guild will back you up, but the Guild will be sorry when it grants Mrs Flowers that journeyman certificate and then finds she can't brew. I'm not here to let Miss MacDougal occupy space in my shop; I'm here to make sure she becomes an apothecary."

"Mrs Lupin already knows how to brew a wit-sharpener," said Remus. "It's on the O.W.L. syllabus and she hasn't forgotten. She'll be back here on Monday morning, and she'll put in as many hours as she needs to learn the week's work. But right now I'm taking her home."

He held out his hand. Ariadne walked around the counter, past Professor Jigger's scowls, and took it. "Good bye, Professor, I will work sixty hours next week," she said.

Outside in the street, Remus asked, "Will you be punished for that? How unpleasant can Jigger make your working life?"

She was not wanting to give a full account of Jigger in a temper. "He'll be moderately angry. But he's knowing, really, that ~~have~~ made up the hours I missed on Saturday. And I could tell that he believed you when you said you'd complain to the Guild. He knows that I will not do that." She began to laugh.

"Is it funny?"

"Not funny; I'm just happy to be away from there. Wait... *it is* funny. Do you remember when you said that being married and settling down would deprive me of my last opportunity for you called it 'playtime'? But actually the person who takes away my playtime is Professor Jigger. You're the person who rescues me from Jigger."

She was rewarded when he threw back his head and laughed out loud. It was not so very funny, but she had made him laugh. She knew there was a gap in her logic somewhere, but he was polite enough not to hunt for it.

"Did you work today?" she asked.

"No, I left you to be the breadwinner. I cleaned the house and bought next year's text books."

"Breadwinner? But you've earned more than I have this week," she said.

"I can't have, for you've worked nearly twice as many hours. They paid me in Muggle money, but if you did the sum..."

"I did not exactly add it up, but I do know roughly what that Muggle money is worth. You must have earned at least twenty Galleons..."

"*Have* I? You're right!" He was laughing again. "It's twenty-three Galleons, six Sickles and twenty-three Knuts. I shouldn't be glad. It's a paltry sum. It's what a grand total of rather less than ten Sickles an hour?"

She laughed too. "It is. Paltry! But it makes your hourly rate more than double mine. It's obviously more efficient to work in gooseberries than in eyebright."

* * * * *

Jigger grumbled, but he accepted Ariadne's stipulation of working eleven-hour days.

"And I suppose he thinks he's generous," said Hestia. "Mr Hepplewhite becomes agitated if I try to work nine. He thinks it's unbalanced to spend all day working, and that unbalanced people make poor workers."

Ariadne certainly felt unbalanced. She did not feel she was *learning* Potions when Professor Jigger only required her to repeat the O.W.L. syllabus and serve in the shop. She was hardly aware of how the science and atmosphere of apothecarism was sinking into her mind; she only felt that if she could not learn anything more useful, she would rather be at home.

Remus was easy to live with... too easy. He did not complain about being lumbered with all the housework, and he did not complain about Professor Jigger. She wondered what he was not telling her. She knew he was nervous about their first full moon together, but he evaded her questions with kisses and counter-questions and comments about current affairs.

On the day of the full moon she dragged herself to work an hour early so that she could leave an hour early. ("Out carousing at some party with your frivolous friends," complained Jigger, but after he had counted up her hours on his fingers, he let her go home with no more than a grunt to follow her.) She was already peeling potatoes and pumpkins in the kitchen when Remus arrived.

"You're home already. Did Professor Jigger run out of work today?" he asked.

"Remus, what's on your mind?"

"At this moment? I'd say Harry Potter. It's his birthday today, and I always wonder if it really helps him that I'm not allowed to send him so much as an owl."

She played along. "He'd be five, would he not? He might not be able to read yet. But I'd certainly be asking Professor Dumbledore if we can send him something next year."

"I think he probably can read," said Remus. "And I'm sure I can play Muggle for as long as I must. But Dumbledore doesn't want Harry to have *any* connection with his father's friends. He was absolutely inflexible about that, and I haven't a clue about his reasons."

"Are you sad for Harry or for yourself?"

"Both," he admitted.

She hugged him. "Now tell me really. Is the moon bothering you?"

"Of course it is."

"Why now? I've known about the wolf for two years, and it's never bothered you before."

"You've never before been married to me." He drew her to the sofa.

"What difference does that make?"

"Well, I've found that being married makes a difference, and I'd hoped that you had too." He pulled her onto his lap and attempted to smile.

She wound her arms around his neck and nuzzled his cheek. "I've liked living with you." She managed not to blush. "And I've liked being best friends with you too. But why will one more full moon make any difference?"

"Tonight isn't 'one more full moon'. It's the night when you'll realise that you've been holding a monster in your arms."

"That I have not. Not ever. You're a man now. And you'll be a man again at moonset."

"You may feel differently by moonset. When you realise what I've turned into, and *that* *that's* what's been touching you..."

She hugged him more tightly. "I will not. I knew before I married you that... that this happens to you. And other friends have seen the wolf, have they not?"

He recoiled. "Ariadne, I don't want you to *see* the wolf!"

He sounded so horrified that she had not the heart to press the point. What she said was, "You'll be locked up where I cannot see. But I'm not the first friend to ~~tan~~*now* about the wolf. There were James and Peter." But she could not ignore the pang that jolted right through her heartbeat. She had assumed that she *would* see the wolf, that he would relax once he knew that she had seen and that it had not made any difference. Instead, he wanted to close her out of this most private and painful aspect of his life. "I know you're feeling the stakes are higher this time," she said, "but it's no different, really. It's happened before that you've made friends who met the wolf and still loved you."

"Rarely. Once in a blue moon."

"Well, it *is* a blue moon."

"What?"

"Tonight. It's the second full moon of this July. A blue moon."

When he still could not muster a smile, she pressed a kiss into his cheek, and asked, "Did it ever worry Lily Potter that James was an Animagus?"

"She was very angry about the irresponsible way he ran wild with a Transformed werewolf."

"But was Lily physically disgusted " his face contorted at her word choice " by the fact that James sometimes rearranged his molecules into an animal shape?"

"I suppose not; she knew about it long before she married him. But it isn't comparable to our situation, is it? James kept most of his human mind when he Transformed, and a stag isn't a dangerous animal. And James only ever Transformed at will he was still in control."

"In other words, James was still human, even if he didn't *look* human."

"Whereas I shall actually cease to be human."

"Remus, losing your mind when you Transform *is* a problem, but it's not the problem we're discussing now. We lock you away to keep everybody safe from the wolf's mind. But not from its body. The point I'm making is that you do not stop being human just because you *look* like a wolf. Any more than I stop being human after a grimy day at work just because I need a bath and a hair-comb. I may not *look* very beautiful then "

"Actually, you do."

"Then you have not seen me after a really bad day. But do not change the subject. The point is, once I've cleaned up, I'm not repulsive any more. And once James had reverted to his human shape, the memory of the stag did not make him repulsive either. So why should it be any different with you?"

He was silent for so long that she could almost hear him thinking. Finally he said, "Just make sure you lock the garage properly. Be sure you're safe."

"Remus, we've managed your Transformations together before! This will be easy compared with the way we had to creep around at Kincarden."

"And don't be too surprised if you find that things like like repulsion and attraction can't be reasoned away with logic."

She buried her face more deeply in his shoulder. "Fear cannot be reasoned away either," she said, but she did not think he heard.

His fears were groundless, but the only way to convince him was to wait until moonset and show him that nothing had changed. Her fears were only beginning. Whatever happened tomorrow morning, it would be the first hurdle of many. He did not want her to see the wolf, although he had let James Potter and Peter Pettigrew see. And even if he did one day let her see the wolf's body, she herself did not understand how she would dare to meet the wolf's mind.

They had a long way to go.

Dinner by Moonlight

Chapter 3 of 21

Married life consists of perfectly ordinary events, such as a lycanthropic transformation, snubs from the family, poisonous shrubs, and news of kidnappers.

CHAPTER THREE

Dinner by Moonlight

Wednesday 31 July Saturday 17 August 1985

Old Basford, Nottingham.

Rated PG-13 for more references to conjugal love.

She had not expected sleeping alone to be so uncomfortable. She had slept alone for fourteen years ever since the day her teddy bear had been relegated to the top of her bookcase and slept soundly. Only once had the privacy of her sleep been invaded, when Morag, terrified by a nightmare, had crawled sobbing into her bed, and Ariadne had held her through the night. Morag had fallen asleep, but Ariadne had found that allowing another body into her bed had caused lumps in all the wrong places, and her eyes had not closed again until dawn. Sleeping alone was easy; it should have been natural to revert to the habit of a lifetime.

Instead, the bed seemed large and cold. For only twenty-five nights she had fallen asleep in Remus's arms, yet already she could not lie still without him. She thought of him, directly below her in the garage, yet her arms were seeking him in the bed beside her. She had asked him if it hurt to Transform, and he had admitted that it did, so now her ears were straining to hear him, even though she knew that the garage had been sound-proofed. She tried to tell herself that he was long since Transformed, was probably sleeping himself, but she could not settle. She reminded herself that Professor Jigger would require her full concentration in the morning, but she couldn't make herself think about potions. Even when she tried to think about sleeping draughts, she only remembered that they had none in the house, and that she ought to have set up a basic stock of medicants... if only she were not so tired when she arrived home in the evenings...

She tossed and turned and finally kicked off the covers and wandered downstairs. On her left, the door to the garage was locked, and Remus or the creature that had somehow stolen his mind and his body was lying behind it. Presumably sleeping. On her right, the door to the living room was open, giving a broad view to their normal life. Remus had ripped out his hard-earned savings to connect their hearth to the Floo network so that she could travel to work easily; opposite was the shapeless, stuffing-leaking sofa on which he had proposed to her. The kitchen table, still rickety, and its mismatched chairs were actually not in the tiny kitchen, but beside it, in front of the French windows that looked out on the overgrown garden. The garden was quite large, but it had not been loved for seven years. The full moon threw ghostly light on the uncut grass, the uncurbed weeds, the half-dead bushes. She wondered if Remus would let her do anything with the garden.

In fact, now she thought about it, the whole house had an unloved look. She never thought about the house when Remus was with her, because he was always so much more interesting than their surroundings. But now that she walked through the house alone, she saw it as Hestia in her professional capacity might the house that nobody had bothered to make into a home. Remus had invited her to live in his house, but was it now *her* house? Would he let her change anything? Would Professor Jigger allow her to take the time? Would it cost any money?

At the very least, she ought to be able to plant enough horseradish and poppies to mix her own Pepper-Up and sleeping draughts.

But the kitchen, even with its wizarding cooking range, was not really large enough to support a home-brewing business along with normal meal preparation. And of course if she was going to manufacture anything dangerous, there was the possibility of cross-contamination. What she really wanted was her own laboratory and that in addition to control of the garden!

The garage would have made an ideal laboratory, but the wolf needed it. The only other space in the house was the "spare bedroom" the room where Remus had slept until this month. His old bed and that horrible orange wardrobe were still there, in case of visitors; she wondered if she could convert it into a laboratory instead.

She sat down in front of the garage door, and said to it, "There's no reason why not, really. We can squeeze in visitors anywhere if ever they come. But I'll be wanting a

laboratory nearly every day."

Converting that room to a laboratory meant they would have nowhere to put their bairns, if ever they came. But Remus, she quickly reminded herself, believed that werewolves should never have children.

"That's another thing I have not told you," she said to the door. "There's no need to mention it for some years yet."

For Ariadne had never intended to be childless.

"If you hated bairns," she said to the barrier between them, "I'm thinking I could not have married you. But it's a nonsensical hypothetical, because you'd not then be yourself. The fact is, you're a child-lover who is duly cautious about real dangers, which is a very different proposition."

She pushed away the thought that there seemed to be a great deal that she didn't want to tell the man she trusted, and lay down on the hall floor. He was there, on the other side of the door. This was as close to him as he would let her come. "He is there. He is there," she told herself.

Knowing he was there, she came close to sleeping.

* * * * *

At half-past five in the morning she tore open the door. He was lying on the garage floor and his eyes were open. "Did you not sleep?" she asked.

"You should be asleep," he murmured, trying to sit up.

She helped him to his feet. "Sleeping alone is not seeming to work any more. I kept thinking of you, in there by yourself. Did you sleep?"

"I think the wolf had a bad time," he said, "but I don't really remember."

They climbed the stairs and collapsed together into bed. She knew at once that she would sleep now. But somewhere in the back of her mind was the self-preserving thought, "Jigger..."

Remus shifted beside her. "You need an alarm charm." He moved his wand tiredly. *Evigilo hora septem riginta*. Try not to dream about Jigger."

She moved herself closer to him and his arm closed automatically around her. She kissed his forehead, and then his mouth, and then lay still.

Both were asleep before either was conscious that Remus now knew the answer to yesterday evening's agonised question.

* * * * *

The fire crackled, the flames turned green, and Morag's head appeared in the hearth. "Aunt 'Radny! Are you home?"

A voice behind the bairn gently corrected, "It's 'Aunt Lupin' now, Morag."

"Aunt Looping," said Morag, "are you there?"

Ariadne put her copy of *Five Hundred Vegetarian Recipes* down on the sofa and slid out from under Remus's arm until she was kneeling on the floor. "We're here, darling, and the Floo is connected."

"Grandmamma said you might be yet on holiday. I've been on holiday. Papa took us to Fife, but it rained all the time."

"Did you see St Andrew's museum?"

"I did not; Mamma just took us shopping. But we did see seals on the beach one day. Did you go on holiday, Aunt Looping?"

"We have not been on holiday because we've had to work," said Ariadne.

Morag's head snapped out of the fire rather abruptly, and was replaced by Ariadne's mother. "Darling, I see you're connected. Are you all right?"

"Everything is fine, Mamma. Is everybody well at Kincarden?"

"Of course everybody's well. Ariadne, you look tired. What have you been doing?"

Ariadne was aware that Remus, behind her, had put down *A History of Education* and was paying full attention to the fireplace. "Professor Jigger keeps me busy, Mamma. But we are both well. We were reading when Morag Flooed."

"But surely Professor Jigger could have given you the day off on such an important occasion. Why were you not at the wedding, dear?"

Her mind blanked. "I was not invited to any wedding, Mamma."

"Of course you had to be invited. Perhaps the owl was lost. Or the invitation was buried under the wrapping paper from your own wedding presents. But surely you knew that your Cousin Letitia was married today?"

"Mamma, I was not even knowing that Cousin Letitia was engaged." Sheer curiosity pushed out of her mind the important question of why nobody had informed her. "Who is her bridegroom?"

"Claud Greengrass. You know, the greengrocer's son. They announced the engagement a month ago and sent the invitations the next week. I'm expecting you were on your honeymoon then. But you have to have the invitation somewhere."

Ariadne looked at her mother steadily. "Mamma, have you not forgotten that Cousin Lucius has disowned me? I doubt I'll ever be invited to Wiltshire again."

"That's ridiculous, dear; whatever he said in anger, he would not snub you like that."

Ariadne could not hurt her mother's feelings by contradicting this assessment of Lucius Malfoy's character. "I am glad that Letitia invited you and Papa. But even if I had been invited, Professor Jigger would not have allowed me to go. You understand, Mamma, that I cannot compromise my apprenticeship if I am to become an apothecary."

"Dear, I'm sure Professor Jigger appreciates how hard you work. You look too exhausted. Is that your sofa? It looks as if it needs a good *Consuo* charm. Tell me truthfully, Ariadne, are you really happy?"

Ariadne wondered what her mother expected her to reply, given that Remus was so obviously within earshot. "I'm very happy when I'm not tired, Mamma."

"Do you have a laboratory of your own?"

"Not yet, Mamma."

"And what work is Remus doing at present?"

Ariadne replied that Remus had a job with an orchard, but she felt that the questions were somehow unfair, as if Mamma were expecting unsatisfactory answers. "And is Papa ?"

"Your father can hear what we're saying. He is well, and he did a good job of protecting the barley from the rain." Mamma briskly dismissed Papa from the discussion. "We are both quite concerned, dear, about your talk of orchards and long hours and no laboratory yet. You have to be having considerable trouble setting yourselves up."

"We have no trouble, Mamma."

"Dear, it's brave of you to say so, but there's no need to struggle so. Your father wants you to have this." Mrs MacDougal extended an arm through the hearth and handed something through. Ariadne took it before she realised what it was.

Money.

A leather purse packed with Galleons.

Everything inside her chest dropped to the floor like a stone. It was all she could do to bend her mouth into a smile and thank her mother.

"It's no sacrifice, dear; families should help one another."

"It was kind of you to be thinking of us." She said the words despite a pounding conviction that it had not been kind at all. "Have a pleasant evening, Mamma."

"You too, dear. Good night!"

Her mother's head vanished; the magical flames flared green and then disappeared. Ariadne picked herself up and hoped she would not cry in front of Remus. But she wanted to cast a *Reducto* on the drawstring purse.

Remus put his arms around her without saying a word.

"You're angry too," she said.

"Furious," he agreed.

"I'm wanting " She was rigid with rage, but she knew now that she would not cry.

"Yes?"

She spoke very softly. "I'm wanting to explode that purse! I'm wishing I'd thrown it back through the fire and sent the coins rolling all over their kitchen floor."

"Why didn't you?"

"My parents would be very hurt if we refused their help."

"If not hurting people matters that much..." There was an edge of doubt in his voice. "... We need not tell them we are refusing it."

"So you'll agree to throw away the money?"

"It might be more constructive," he temporised, "to donate it to St Mungo's."

"Fine. Whatever you say." She pulled away and forced herself to speak sweetly. "What do we have to do to convince my parents that we can take care of ourselves?"

"If I knew that I would have done it by now."

The conversation went around in circles for several minutes before Remus said, "This isn't only about your parents, Ariadne. We do have to talk about money. Your mother is right about one thing we don't have much."

"We have enough."

"Enough to live on the breadline, perhaps." He was trying to sound stern, but she could tell that he was less worried about starvation than about her possible reaction to the prospect. "My total savings are down to four hundred Galleons. That will keep us for, perhaps, six months."

"I have three hundred. That will keep us until you finish exams next summer. After that, there will be nothing for it we'll have to live off my earnings."

"Do you want to be our sole source of income?"

She knew this bothered him. "It seems fair enough, since you've supplied the house. We can live very well off fifteen Galleons a week, and I'm earning twenty. Even if we allow that you'll need books by the time you become a teacher, I'm believing we'll be a thousand Galleons in the black."

"Ariadne, have you any idea how frugal we shall have to be? Did you really do the sum?"

"Of course I did. I added up our accounts before we were married. Remus, I'm knowing it means we cannot take holidays or buy new clothes or improve the house or or whatever else people do." The truth was, she did not really understand how other people did spend their money. "But you can have whatever books the college prescribes, and I'm hoping that I can have..." Her voice died away; there was always the danger that he would decide to give her whatever she wanted and then finance it by finding a Muggle job and abandoning his teacher training forever.

"What do you hope?" he prompted.

"A garden. I mean, I know we have one, and that you're not wanting it, but I'm wanting to plant it out properly with herbs. And I was thinking we could put my cauldron in the spare bedroom, and use it as a laboratory."

"That won't cost anything. Of course you can use the third bedroom as a laboratory."

"Remus, it will not cost much, but setting up a herb garden for the first time probably does cost a little more than you're thinking it does. Not as much as a thousand Galleons, but well, if we both keep finding things that we want, we'll end up completing our education with no gold left in our Gringotts account. But I'm telling you now, if I have a garden and a laboratory, I will not want much else."

"And you're quite sure," his eyes slid round to the rejected leather purse on the floor, "that you don't want to regard this garden as your parents' gift?"

It was a second before she realised he was joking. "I'll take the gold straight to St Mungo's on Monday morning," she affirmed.

* * * * *

Ariadne spent every evening the next week casting *Eradico* charms over every green shoot in the back garden, sending the ripped-up weeds to the hearth to be destroyed in blue bonfires, and mulching over the soil with bladderwrack that she had bought in Diagon Alley. The dragon-hide gloves rarely left her hands. Remus helped her divide the garden in half by building a low lattice fence with a gate (he said he had learned how to combine magic and carpentry when he was pretending to study for his Muggle O.W.L. in woodwork). The half nearer to the house was sown over with grass and destined to be ignored; Ariadne said she could manage a simple lawn with *Secto* charms.

On Sunday morning, when she planted out foxgloves and fennel, comfrey and catnip, poppies and parsley, she warned Remus, "Promise me you'll take this garden seriously. Always remember that herbs can be poisonous."

"I was always terrible at herbology and I don't remember what any of those plants are. Of course I promise not to touch what I don't understand. Seriously. I solemnly promise not to touch that innocent little green leaf in case it's a rank poison that slays on touch."

"Actually that innocent little green leaf is parsley and you'll be seeing it on your dinner plate one day. But that is indeed the principle. Some herbs do indeed slay on touch. So do not touch the garden, or me while I'm working with it."

"Why are there so many spaces? Are you expecting more plants?"

"I've ordered some bushes, but before I plant any of them, I'm wanting to leave space for a few that Sarah and Hestia are bringing over."

"Why are Sarah and Hestia bringing us bushes? Are they presents?"

"They are not. They already belong to me. I was growing them in the window box in Diagon Alley. They're too large for the window now, so Sarah said she'd bring them over sometime. Maybe next Saturday. Remus, do you feel up to inviting our friends to dinner next weekend?"

He seemed surprised. "Yes yes, I suppose we could. I'm not used to the idea that I have enough friends to invite to a dinner party. I didn't ever expect to become so... so normal."

She thought he had never more frankly admitted that his old life, the life that had died with James and Peter, was over and replaced.

* * * * *

Ariadne escaped from Jigger at three o'clock on Saturday. She barely paused to exchange her laboratory overall for the one she wore in kitchen before she began grinding hazelnuts and washing lettuce. When Remus came down from the study she had forgotten to silence the knives for the *Frendo* charm he said, "You had a delivery this morning."

"A letter?"

"No, a huge tawny owl carrying a big bag of something plants, I suppose. Is this evening going to be a planting party?"

She drew a deep breath before answering. The last thing she wanted was other people even her closest friends walking all over her garden and asking what she was growing. She tried to sound casual as she told him, "It is not; I'll be doing all the planting. The shrubs that Sarah's bringing over are poisonous, and I'm not wanting to spoil a dinner party with trips to St Mungo's."

But her hands shook as she mixed the nut-loaf, and she was almost too excited to concentrate on cooking. Her seedlings had finally arrived! She wanted to race outside and plant them immediately, but Remus would only ask questions...

Remus had his arms around her waist from behind. "Sweetheart, you seem so preoccupied. I've asked you twice what I should do to help."

She forced herself to be practical. "Sorry, I was thinking about the plants. Most helpful would be some chopping. Carrots, cucumber, radishes, onions, tomatoes. Or do you know how to make saffron rice?"

"You could teach me."

It seemed a long, slow afternoon before the hazelnut loaf was in the oven, the tomato soup was simmering over the stove, the saffron rice was bedded on a china platter, the mustard vinaigrette was poured into a jug, and the green salad and clotted cream were stacked in the froster beside the dessert that she had made yesterday. But finally she was able to unwrap her parcel and stare. Gloat. Not mere seeds, but sprouting plants, which would yield a small harvest within a matter of weeks.

She had only meant to look. But suddenly she snatched up her parcel and her gardening gloves and was raced to the gate in the lattice fence. She didn't know how long it had been since the seedlings were packed; they might wilt and die if she didn't plant them immediately.

When she returned from the garden, Remus had performed a *Dilato* on the living room, making it twice its usual size, and he had Transfigured their ugly formica table into a handsome Sheraton-style dining suite (the chairs Conjured). He had also Conjured two extra sofas, but he had carelessly made them exact replicas of the existing sofa, complete with the leaking stuffing, and was earnestly asking, "What spell did your mother say that our sofa needed?"

Ariadne hastily ran the *Consuo*, but the sofas still looked threadbare, so she Summoned some rugs from upstairs, none of which matched the others. She waved her wand to make them all at least the same colour a deep periwinkle blue. Remus had laid the table the cutlery now looking suspiciously like silver, their cheap glass tumblers mysteriously transformed into crystal goblets and she didn't dare meet his eye when he Conjured up candles and a bowl of roses.

"You forgot the damask tablecloth," she said.

He produced one.

It was all she could do not to request gold napkin rings and a centrepiece-statue of Cupid. "How long will this stuff last?"

"You do the sum. If I started at six o'clock, and I used a spell with a force of three thousand ergs, and I Conjured up a mass of "

She was saved the trouble of having to calculate by a crackling in the fireplace. Sarah, cradling a pot of blue-flowered shrub, had arrived in their hearth. "Hestia's right behind me," she said, "and you'll never guess who's now leasing your old room. Sorry we're early but I daresay we know you well enough."

Sarah stepped aside for Hestia, who was followed by Ivor, and then Joe, all carrying similar pots. Ariadne led them out into the garden and had them put the pots down next to the fence. "My herbs," she said briefly. Fortunately, her friends were taking no interest in the gaping spaces in her garden, or in the tender seedlings that she had just planted. "I'm expecting you'd like a tour of the house."

There wasn't much to show; Remus's study, and even her laboratory, were "too much like school," as Hestia frankly put it. Sarah didn't seem to notice anything because she was too busy explaining about her new tenant. "Kingsley's new girlfriend has moved in with us. Or else the new flatmate has started going out with Kingsley; I forget which came first. Anyway, he's bringing her this evening. We hope that's all right, because it's someone whom you know very well."

"Quite all right," said Ariadne, chancing a glance at Remus as he hastily Conjured an extra Sheraton chair. Emmeline Vance rang the doorbell at that moment, exactly on time, and the tour of the house had to be repeated for her. By the time they had poured out the drinks (provided by Ivor and Emmeline), Horatio and Glenda had arrived, fashionably late, with Sturgis Podmore at their heels. Glenda admired the Sheraton suite profusely, not realising that she was looking at a visual joke.

As they were completing the third tour of the house, the doorbell rang again, this time unfashionably late. Richard explained that he had been watching the Arrows thrash the Wasps, and was launching into a full description of how Bagman had smashed a Bludger into Ilkley's broom-head and spun him head over heels by the time Kingsley arrived. Despite Sarah's hints, Ariadne hadn't known whom to expect as his companion, but the mysterious lady turned out, harmlessly enough, to be her cousin, Mercy Macmillan.

"But now we are thirteen at table," said Sarah. "I hope no-one takes Professor Trelawney's prognostications seriously!"

Ivor picked up a fork and said, "No hallmark. Ariadne, your husband Conjured this."

Ariadne countered, "We're liking a change of pattern sometimes," and they all laughed.

Richard's account of the Quidditch match, and Mercy's story of how she had met Kingsley, and Glenda's request for Hestia's expertise on the subject of home furnishings, and Sarah's report of what was showing at the Muggle theatres, carried the conversation through to dessert. A dull red sun was low on the horizon, and a crescent moon clearly visible above it, when Ariadne began slicing up the summer pudding, and Sturgis spoke into a lull:

"Do you people want to hear the latest news about Veleta Vablatsky?"

There was instant silence. Joe's face puckered into its usual frown that suggested that speaking of Veleta was not entirely good taste.

"Walden Macnair is about to spend a year in Korea," Sturgis continued. "I had to stamp the passports. He's organised International Portkeys for every member of his family but they aren't taking Veleta."

Reaching for the Moon

Chapter 4 of 21

Remus begins to unravel the mystery surrounding Veleta Vablatsky.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reaching for the Moon

Saturday 17 August Sunday 3 November 1985

Old Basford, Nottingham; Pitlochry to Foss, Perthshire.

Rated PG for hints of the Dark Arts.

It took a long time for Sturgis to convince his friends that he had told them everything he knew. "They've applied for Portkeys for Walden, Gertrude, Crudelia, Humphrey, Coira, Dragomira, Regelinda... It must have been all the Macnairs who still live in the castle. It was Coira that's Walden's daughter-in-law who came to deposit the paperwork, and she mentioned that they were going for a year to look for Demiguises and dragons. But there wasn't a passport for Jane Smith, or for anyone else who might have been Veleta."

"Then they are remarkably confident that she won't run away!" protested Sarah.

"Or that she *cannot*," said Ariadne. She went into the kitchen to brew coffee, while Remus moved the guests onto their periwinkle-blue sofas.

"Sturgis, what else?" began Richard.

"No, nothing else," said Sturgis. "It was against the rules to tell you that much applicants' business is supposed to be confidential. But the Macnairs aren't keeping it much of a secret among their friends, and I don't feel any obligation to protect their evil interests." His expression reminded Remus of their days in the Order when Sturgis was listening to the news of the latest Death Eater atrocity. "So, anyway... if any of you want to visit your friend Veleta, you might be able to do so safely after 15 September."

"But it can't be that simple," said Hestia. "Surely we don't just knock on the door and ask the house-elf if we can see Mrs Smith?"

"It might be easier to take broomsticks and work our way down from the roof," said Richard.

"Sturgis, would you be able to authorise a Portkey?" asked Ariadne.

"For a place as large as Macnair Castle, you'd have to know the exact room you wanted," said Sturgis.

"We need to know more about the enchantments around the castle before we risk tackling them," said Kingsley.

"We could try Flooing, and at least speak to Veleta first," said Sarah.

"But Ariadne can't be involved with any of it," said Remus.

He felt all eyes turn in his direction.

"It's less than six months," he said, "since Ariadne asked innocent questions about whether a Macnair employee had ever been known by any other name. And Macnair tried to kill her for it. I think he would also have tried to kill Ivor if Ivor hadn't been out of the country at the time."

"But the Macnairs will be away," said Glenda. "They'll never know who visited."

"Don't say 'never'," said Remus, "because they could find out after the event, and Ariadne and Ivor are already on their blacklist."

"Then Ivor's not going either!" Hestia exclaimed.

"But Ariadne and I are the only real witnesses," said Ivor. "One of us has to go."

"Don't be silly," said Sarah. "I know what Veleta looks like. I can walk into that castle as well as you can. And I will, too."

"Glenda tells me that the castle radiated Dark magic," Horatio Chittock reminded them. "I hope nobody would mess around with that without taking due care."

Ivor seemed to approve of this remark, but Mercy Macmillan burst out, "We cannot use caution as an excuse for doing*nothing*! We have to try something!"

"It couldn't hurt to do more research into the enchantments first," said Emmeline.

"There won't be any book that publishes a list of Every Secret Spell the Macnairs Ever Cast," Richard pointed out. "Any useful research will have to be done practically, on the castle premises."

Ariadne came to perch on the sofa-arm next to Remus. Neither of them needed to say much because everyone else's conversation was buzzing with a vengeance. Kingsley did ask Emmeline about the publishing list, and Horatio did ask Sturgis about Ministerial policy, but the focus always came back to Veleta despite the fact that no new ideas were expressed. Ariadne seemed to be following everyone's contribution with intense interest for a couple of hours, apparently with nothing to say herself, then happened to glance up at the clock. At once she sprang to her feet.

"It's time to stand up. Sarah Richard Emmeline we're needing to clear these two sofas."

Emmeline politely rose, and Remus began to urge the others to their feet. The party had lasted longer than he had expected, and the guests were still enjoying themselves... but the clock was striking eleven, and Ariadne had done the sum correctly.

At the final stroke, Joe crashed to the floor, as the two Conjured sofas, the thirteen dining chairs and the damask table cloth vanished, the Sheraton table reverted to a battered formica-top, the crystal goblets were thick glass tumblers, and the silverware dulled to pewter. Ariadne silently laughed as Mercy plaintively remarked, "But it seemed so *real*. If I could Conjure like that I'd never buy anything."

Joe stood up, rubbing his head. Remus was relieved to see that, in their real sofa, the *Consuo* charm was still holding.

* * * * *

Ariadne was very quiet the next day. Her attention to her new garden was half-hearted, and she spent most of the time reading for Professor Jigger. Remus waited for her to finish a chapter before placing his hand on the open page and asking, "Are you angry with me?"

She nuzzled up to him and said nothing.

"Are you going to tell me about it?"

She took so long to arrange her thoughts that he almost prompted her again. But in the end she admitted, "Veleta was my closest friend. I was thinking I would be the one to go to Foss."

It was on the tip of his tongue to repeat his speech about safety, but something in her face warned him off. Instead, he said, "Are you angry that I'm telling you what to do?"

"I know you're feeling you have to," she said dully. "I'm just not... happy about it."

"Ariadne, I promise you'll be included the first moment we've established that it would be safe."

She nodded. "That was not in doubt. And I am grateful to you for caring about Veleta when you've never met her." She closed the book and kissed him.

He supposed they had had their first quarrel.

* * * * *

Once Remus had returned to college, the evenings became alarmingly short. He tried to finish his homework in the college library, but the library was full of distractions. On the second day of lectures, he was interrupted from his first essay plan by the chattering of his fellow-students.

"Swot!" teased Claire, the green-haired girl. "Won't you have time to run our study group this term?"

"Of course he will," said Valerie, the woman in the business suit, taking the seat next to him. "Remus, did you catch what Dr Fogg claimed to be the premise of the Summerhill experiment?"

Simon, the boy with the safety pin through his nose, took the next seat and opened his folder. "Wait a minute, let's begin at the beginning. The topic was Alternative Pedagogies what does 'pedagogy' mean?"

So with his classmates insisting that they hadn't understood a word that Dr Fogg had taught them, Remus found himself re-delivering the whole lecture, and it took all the time until the tutorial. When he arrived home, he decided to read for the next lecture (The Origins of the Montessori Philosophy) before beginning dinner. Then he lost track of time and resuscitated his essay plan. The next moment when he was aware of other responsibilities was when Ariadne knocked on the study door to tell him that dinner was ready.

He was very contrite about leaving all the work to her, even though she said she didn't mind and she really *didn't* seem to. He followed her downstairs, wondering if Claire or Simon worked remotely as hard as Ariadne did.

"Would you be happier if we agreed to cook on different days?" she asked.

"I'd be happier if you left it all to me, as you used to."

She shrugged. "It was different in summer, when you had not to bring your work home with you. Now that you have to pass exams, you cannot do all the housework too."

He did not want to provoke another disagreement on the topic of what constituted Ariadne's best interests, so he meekly ate her lima bean stew. After dinner they cleaned the kitchen together, which left less than an hour to continue their studies before they became too tired to read.

And that was the pattern. Ariadne worked eleven-hour days for Jigger, while Remus attended lectures, tutored his classmates, and tried to make a head-start on the housework. They were both supposed to study in the evenings and they were usually too tired to achieve much. Remus made up for lost ground over the weekends; he went to the council library to write up essays. But Ariadne rarely reached Sunday evening feeling finished; she had to read, design experiments, make trial runs in the laboratory that she had set up in the spare bedroom, and tend her garden often enough to provide enough herbs to make it happen.

"Ariadne, what does Jigger require of you that drives you so hard?"

She shrugged. "The diet pills are nearly finished, and I'm supposing Professor wants to start marketing. We've finished the human trials now; I'll have to write it all up. On Sunday, when I'm less tired. What about you? How many essays have you to write this term?"

"Eight not counting my presentations."

"And have you to write them all with that *thatbirro*?"

"To be honest, I don't find Muggle writing implements very comfortable. I sometimes Transfigure a quill to look like a biro."

She smiled, as if this commonplace detail were wildly fascinating. She had, he noticed, moved the conversation from her work to his. Before he had time to tease her about it, the fireplace crackled, and Hestia's head appeared.

"Ariadne, you're finally home and awake! Don't you and Remus ever do anything except work?"

"We're not working now, Hestia."

"Well, it's finally happened. The Macnairs have gone to Korea and we have a plan to visit Veleta."

Remus followed Ariadne to the fire. Hestia held out a pale pink block.

"It's... soap," said Ariadne.

"Yes. I learned something useful from Snape after all! It's a wonderful cake of almond-oil soap. And I've been making aloe vera and lime-blossom too. Perhaps I'll try gardenia next. But it's taking me a long time to make enough."

Remus did not understand, but apparently the story made sense to Ariadne, for she sniffed at the soap, handed it back, and asked, "How long are you thinking it will take?"

"Ariadne, don't be disappointed... but it isn't really a matter of how long the saponification will take. I can make soap any time, and Mercy is helping. Even Saral wants to help only she can't be allowed near a cauldron, of course. The problem is that I'm only six weeks from exams, and I don't want to try the adventure before my exams are over."

"It's fine," said Ariadne softly. "You've done more than I have, Hestia. What will you do when you're ready?"

"Take the soap to Foss and try to enter the castle somehow. Bet on the assumption that, if the Macnairs are out, the person whom I'll see will be Veleta. It might just be a house-elf, of course; but I'll take a chance on asking to see a human."

Remus interrupted, "Hestia, are you planning to go by yourself?"

"I'm not so foolhardy. Ivor wants me to take you or Sturgis or Emmeline someone with some experience against Dark magic."

"Fine. I'll be with you." It wasn't fine, of course; a girl like Hestia would be helpless against the Dark enchantments of Macnair Castle. But they had to take someone who had known Veleta, and women made more convincing hawkers than men.

And Ariadne was radiating hope and gratitude.

* * * * *

Ivor broke his usual rule of saving money to splurge on perfumes and stationery from the junk-shops in Diagon Alley. Hestia finished her exams, and Remus chose a Sunday when there was a lull in his essay-writing. He didn't dare leave Ariadne behind altogether, but she was still grateful to him for acting, and she agreed quietly to wait with Ivor in Pitlochry. The shops were all closed, and it was too frosty to sit outdoors, but in the end they found an open church and disappeared into a pew to sing hymns.

Hestia had stacked her "merchandise" in a cumbersome cart, almost as large as an old-fashioned baby's pram, which she borrowed from her employer. Remus shrank it to a size that he could keep in his pocket. But they could not Apparate, since they had no way of knowing how many Muggles they might meet in the wilderness, so the only efficient way to reach Foss was to walk the ten miles along the River Tummel.

It was an absurd scheme, thought Remus. They had no guarantee of entering the castle, or of meeting Veleta, or of escaping safely. But Hestia was marching with a determined air that reminded him she was Caradoc Dearborn's sister; all Remus could do was hold his wand tightly.

When the castle snapped into view ("The air's colder here," said Hestia, her teeth chattering) Remus restored the cart of soap to its natural size and they pushed it down the path to the portcullis. Remus had no idea how they were going to persuade whoever kept the doors that they should be allowed in, but, to his surprise, a panel of the front door was open. He hesitated for a moment, then stepped through, and Hestia followed with the cart. He wondered how long they would have to wander around the castle, looking for a hidden door that could be anywhere, while pretending that they weren't looking for anything at all.

But they had no sooner stepped into the entry a mess of corridors and staircases and doors than a woman in grey Macnair livery stepped out from behind a pillar and said, "Miss Dearborn? Mr Lupin?"

She was carrying a toddler, and a small girl clung to her free hand. All three of them had huge chocolate-brown eyes. The little girl had chocolate-brown curls spilling over her shoulders from her filet cap, but the woman's hair was hidden under a net.

Hestia recovered from her astonishment and exclaimed, "Veleta!"

Ignoring the name, the woman said, "Come this way."

They had no way of knowing whether she were leading them into a trap, but Hestia only hesitated a moment before following.

The stranger led them through a narrow corridor to a staircase, then up two flights of stairs. Remus Charmed the cart weightless so that Hestia could hold it a steady two inches above the stone steps then eight or ten paces along a gallery, and finally tapped at the stone wall with two fingers.

An invisible door swung open to reveal a square room with three lancet windows overlooking a high-walled network of gardens. Each window was draped in red velvet, and a soft Persian carpet, like a field of red grass, covered the floor. There were star charts on the wall to their left, and some three-dimensional astronomical models, while a huge crystal ball on a small table dominated the centre of the room. There were two arrangements of red sofas. Remus was reminded of the Gryffindor common-room and, on either side of the magical door, shelves loaded with books and toys.

"It is safe to enter," said the chocolate-brown woman.

Remus knew that Hestia was wondering if the stranger were telling the truth, but the only options were to trust her or retreat. Remus stepped into the room. Nothing happened. Hestia entered behind him. At once the door swung closed behind them and clunked. They knew, without looking, that it had locked itself without the aid of wand or key.

"I have no wand," the stranger explained. "The door recognises my fingerprints. Be seated, Miss Dearborn." She indicated one of the sofas. As they went to sit down, she stood the toddler on the floor, lifted down a box from a shelf, and began to set up a model railway. This took some time, since the track was very elaborate, but then the little boy began to play with what was unmistakably a miniature Hogwarts Express. Meanwhile, the little girl took a family of dolls from another shelf, and began to play some kind of hairdressing game.

After the children were settled, the chocolate-brown woman sat down opposite Hestia, and asked, "Do you know who I am?"

To Remus, she was unquestionably the face he had seen from a window at Foss Castle two years ago. For Hestia, the question was more complicated, but her reply was simpler. "You are Veleta Vablatsky."

"So says the man called Ivor Jones," agreed the woman. "But how would he know?"

"How do you know our names?" asked Remus.

"I may not say. I know your names, but I do not know who you are, or why you are interested in me."

"Veleta," said Hestia, "don't you remember that we went to school together?"

"I do not remember school. Please tell me about it."

With more enthusiasm than prudence, Hestia launched into a description. "We travelled on a train exactly like that toy one only it was real the Hogwarts Express. It took us to the castle the school called Hogwarts, and we had to wear the Sorting Hat. You and I were sorted into Gryffindor. And we learned Potions and Transfiguration and History and a whole lot more. Your grandmother was a teacher at the school don't you remember that she taught Divination? I had two cats, even though it was against the rules to have two, and the Headmaster made me give one of them to you. And your best friend was Ariadne MacDougal "

"I know who the woman Ariadne is," their hostess interrupted. "She is now Mr Lupin's wife. But I do not recall that she was my friend, or any of the other things you tell me."

It was obvious to Remus that the woman in front of him was either a very cool liar or else in the grip of a powerful Memory charm. If she were lying there was nothing he could do indeed, he had no idea how far they were at her mercy, imprisoned as they were in her sitting room but he did know something about how memory worked.

"Mrs Smith," he said, "what do you remember about yourself?"

"I may not say."

Hestia latched on. "Are there things you can't talk about? Things you mustn't say or are Charmed not to say "

Their hostess did not say a word, but she nodded slowly.

"There are things you can say," said Hestia. "You were allowed to say that you had lived here all your life, and the name Jane Smith how much of that is true? Won't you tell us from the beginning what you do know about yourself? I mean, not what you *have* to say, but the things you know for sure are true? You can leave out anything that's untrue or forbidden."

"That leaves little." The words came out with a great effort. "The first thing I remember in all my life is waking up in that bedchamber." She indicated a door behind them, opposite the astronomical models very obviously an ordinary door, not like the magical entry to their left. "That was in April, five and a half years ago. I don't remember anything before that. They told me I had an accident that caused me to lose my memory. They told me that this is Macnair Castle, and that I have lived here all my life. They told me my name is Jane Smith. They told me that I am a member of the household because of the work I do. They told me I have enemies. And I believed them."

It was obvious that huge parts of the story had been omitted already information that, through magical compulsion or ordinary self-interest, their hostess could not or would not tell.

"Many things have happened since," she continued, "and I remember them all. Perhaps the Macnairs tell the truth sometimes. Perhaps I do have enemies outside Foss, or perhaps the real enemies are here at the castle. I do not know. Perhaps you are enemies; but perhaps you are the people who can tell me the truth about myself. I had to take the chance."

Suddenly Remus realised what Ariadne would have sensed from the first moment: this woman was more frightened of them than they were of her.

"Aurors came to Foss about six months ago," the woman said. "They were looking for someone called Veleta Vablatsky. I do not know who she is, but I wondered if she were anything to do with me. They asked question after question, and to some questions I could give truthful answers. But other questions were about things I did not remember. So I told the story as the Macnair family had told it to me. And " She winced, as if a painful charm had suddenly suppressed her voice. She changed her mind about what she was going to say. "Since then I have been waiting... waiting for you to come and tell me more about this Veleta."

"Were you expecting us today?" Hestia sounded thoroughly bewildered.

"I thought the woman called Ariadne would come. But that doesn't matter; I know you are her friends. I could not come to you; there are charms on this castle, and I may not step outside its boundaries. Nor may I send an owl, or use the Floo. That is to protect me " She winced again. " My enemies must not know that I am living here. So I had to hope that some of you would one day come to me."

Hestia was looking at the crystal ball. She suddenly asked, "What work do you do?"

"It is better not to say."

The pause that followed this statement was uncomfortable, as if their hostess had already said too much. Remus broke it.

"It seems to me that someone has placed a very powerful Memory charm on you."

"What is a Memory charm?"

"A spell to make you forget... did you know that this was possible?"

"I did not know. But perhaps that is why I do not remember my earlier life. Perhaps that is what the mysterious enemies did to me, the ones from whom I am hiding here." But she sounded doubtful, as if she already suspected that no-one outside the castle could be the culprit.

"Veleta, we can tell you your life story," said Remus. "But why should you believe us rather than the Macnairs? Perhaps it would make more sense if your memory could be restored, and then you would know the truth for yourself."

For a moment she lost poise; a huge smile flooded her face. "Can you do that, Mr Lupin? Is it a very difficult magic to undo these these Memory charms?"

"It is complicated to do them well, and they can go wrong. I would rather not do it myself, but I have a friend who is good at it. Can we bring our friend here one day soon?"

She nodded.

The next pause was more comfortable. It seemed they had reached a conclusion; nothing useful could be discussed until this woman had recovered her memory. And she was willing to attempt the recovery.

Or else she was lying, to lure them into a trap.

Finally she said, "You claimed you were selling something. They will ask me about that, so I must really take some merchandise."

Remus had nearly forgotten about that, but Hestia uncovered the cart. Their hostess extracted a glass bottle of cologne and three slabs of soap a lemongrass, a

strawberry and a lavender with far too much speed to qualify as real selection.

"Write me a receipt for one Galleon and three Sickles," she instructed.

Remus scribbled, then returned the cart to his pocket, while Hestia asked, "When can we come back?"

"Do not come if you hear that the Macnairs have returned. They plan to remain in Korea, but if the house-elves tell them you were here, they will be angry, and it won't be safe for anyone to visit me. You must keep to the story that you are selling something, and perhaps they won't suspect."

Remus was rather alarmed when the brown-eyed woman actually handed over twenty Sickles. "I have so little opportunity to buy anything that they watch every Knut," she apologised. "Toady the bailiff will certainly notice if I keep in my purse what I claim to have spent."

"If the Macnairs stay in Korea," said Hestia, "when shall we come again? Shall we owl you?"

"No, I'm untraceable. But if you have a message for me, speak it out loud in the solar I mean, in the living room of your own homes, between eight and nine in the evening. Do this every day, and in the end..." A choke cut off her voice. She drew a deep breath, and continued: "I won't be able to reply to your messages, but come as soon as you can." She stood up. "I will show you to the front door. Do not speak on the way out."

The magical door opened at the tap of two fingers. She gathered up her children and led Remus and Hestia across the hall, up the steps, along the corridor, down the stairs, around the corner, and out to the huge double doors. They stepped across the bridge, across the innocent-looking grass, and through the invisible barrier. Because they had their backs to the castle, they did not recognise the moment at which it vanished from their view.

* * * * *

The river-bank seemed to be deserted, so Remus and Hestia were able to Apparate most of the way back in leaps of a hundred yards. On the outskirts of Pitlochry Ariadne came racing towards them and flung herself into Remus's arms. Ivor, with his face still creased in a frown, followed at a more sober pace. The session of rapture and relief was quite long, but in the end the story was told, and Hestia affirmed, "It was Veleta," and Remus said, "It was a major memory charm, unless it was a major trap."

"She hadn't forgotten everything," said Hestia. "She knew our names. She even knew Remus, whom she had never met."

"Then it was not memory," said Ariadne. "It was watching. She's probably been looking at us ever since the day the Aurors visited her."

Ivor frowned. "How could she watch us? We haven't been there."

"Did I never mention," said Ariadne, "that Veleta is a Locospector?"

Portkey Moonshine

Chapter 5 of 21

Ariadne's reunion with Veleta takes an unexpected twist.

CHAPTER FIVE

Portkey Moonshine

Sunday 3 November Sunday 1 December 1985

Pitlochry, Perthshire; Foss, Perthshire.

Rated PG for violence.

Hestia gave a half-strangled cry. "But that's impossible! Ariadne, how could Veleta have been...? We were at school together, and she never said a word..."

"You were not needing another shock today," said Ariadne.

"No, I I Ariadne, how much else don't I know?"

"None of us knows very much," Ariadne soothed. "The Aurors would consider you to be the person who knows more than anybody. They've dismissed Ivor and me because we never saw the woman in the castle at close quarters, and Remus only met her for the first time today. Whereas you knew Veleta before she disappeared, and now you've met the woman in the castle closely enough to confirm that she really is Veleta. And I'm imagining that that was a shock for you."

"It was," said Hestia, holding a hand to her forehead. "She was so *soobviously* Veleta, yet she didn't recognise me, and she had no memory of herself, or of anything. What have they *done* to her?"

"A fairly thorough Memory charm," said Remus. "One that wiped out her previous memories, but didn't prevent her acquiring new ones. Either that, or the woman was lying to us... somehow inviting us into a trap."

Hestia rounded on him furiously. "It was *not* a trap! Veleta would never... It was Veleta, and she's our friend! Even if the Macnairs did mean us harm, Veleta wouldn't play the accomplice!"

Ivor held down Hestia's shoulders. "Remus has a point, Hestia. Veleta wouldn't deliberately harm us, but she didn't recognise you; she didn't even know herself. And she certainly might not know the Macnairs' real business. They could have tricked her, or placed her under Imperius... I wouldn't assume anything."

Hestia calmed down. "She's alive... she has children... she has no memory... they've done Merlin knows what horrible things to her... and now she's a Locospector! Ariadne, are you certain?"

"Veleta told me herself," Ariadne confirmed, "but it was a secret. I've never told anybody."

Ivor frowned. "I'm surprised you felt bound to keep Veleta's confidence after she was supposed to be dead." There was an edge to his voice.

"Are you wishing I'd told you?" asked Ariadne.

"It was a rather important secret under the circumstances," said Ivor coolly. "It would have been helpful to mention it to the Ministry two years ago."

Remus knew exactly why Ivor was annoyed, but found himself saying, "Ariadne is very good at keeping secrets."

"Sorry," said Ariadne. "I was thinking it better not to mention sensitive information to the Ministry, since it's not had... a helpful attitude. But the truth always seemed obvious to me. The Macnairs kidnapped Veleta *because* she's a Locospector."

"How would *they* know about that when her friends didn't?" Hestia was still nettled about being left in the dark.

"Veleta once spoke carelessly in front of Dragomira Macnair. After Dragomira had worked out her secret, she must have told her father, and he'd not be wanting a Locospector left on Dumbledore's side. Even after the war ended, they could force a Locospector to be useful to them. And if they stole her memory, she'd have no reason to disoblige them..."

"It's surprising she spoke to me at all today," said Hestia. "But she seemed to want to know whatever we had to tell her. She said she had been waiting for us ever since the day the Aurors came."

Ariadne winced painfully. "That means she Locospected the Aurors back to their homes that day. She must have watched them interviewing Ivor and me, and learned our names. She must have watched us every day, hoping one of us would come..."

"But why?" said Hestia, "If she doesn't even know who we are, or whether we're the Enemy..."

"I think it's reasonable that she'd want her memory back," said Remus. "She'd be interested in anyone *whomight* be able to help with that."

"I'm thinking," said Ariadne darkly, "that she cannot like the Macnairs. Whatever they're doing to her, she's hoping we can rescue her from it."

"Do you think she's watching us now?" asked Hestia suddenly.

"Quite likely," said Ivor. "But, as Remus told her, what needs to happen next can't be done by any of us. It's time to talk to Kingsley Shacklebolt."

* * * * *

Remus himself caused the next delay, because his classmates had another spate of essays due. Remus also had essays due, of course, but what ate up the spare moments in the library was the proof-reading for his classmates.

Claire, the girl with green spiked hair, could not define a scalene triangle.

Melanie, the girl in the gipsy skirt, had designed the most elaborate simulation of the water cycle that any of them had ever seen, but she had no idea how to write down her lesson plan in an orderly fashion.

Simon, the boy with the safety pin through his nose, had not read any of the books that he was reviewing for his children's literature essay, and he wanted his classmates to give plot-synopses of any that they had read. When Nicky who had taken the trouble to plough through ten children's novels in order to select three indignantly protested that this was cheating, Simon sulked and complained that she wasn't willing to help a friend.

Remus compromised with, "I can tell you which three are the shortest." Simon happily scribbled down the three titles, and wandered off to the reviews shelf to find a professional critic's opinion.

Valerie, the woman in the business suit, had written a well-researched and soundly argued essay about the Reggio Emilia philosophy, but she didn't trust her spelling, and she required Remus to comb through her work with a red pen. When he found only two mistakes, she asked, "Are you sure you read it properly?"

"Your spelling is fine. But..." He didn't know if she wanted the bad news or not. "The mistakes are more with grammar."

It took a very long hour to explain to this aspirant teacher how the English language was constructed.

That evening Remus shut himself up in his study, promising himself that he would only write until it was time to start cooking. But of course he became completely absorbed in his essay ("Discuss three major difficulties in teaching Geometry in Year Three, and evaluate the most common solutions") and did not raise his head until an overpoweringly sweet odour from the next room told him that Ariadne had arrived home.

He was contrite; once again, there was no dinner. He opened her door softly. The room had no hearth, but Ariadne had built a brazier for her cauldron in the centre of the room. The cauldron was softly steaming, throwing the rich sweet aroma all over the room, but Ariadne herself was standing near the shelves, inspecting a cage of rats.

"A new rat poison?" Remus asked.

"As bad as," Ariadne agreed. "How is your essay, Remus? You said it was about geometry... Is that like Muggle Transfiguration?"

"I suppose there is a similarity. But Year Three means seven-year-olds. They don't learn vectors and vertices. I only have to write about teaching children about areas and perimeters... You're changing the subject! Are you back on diet pills for rats?"

"I am not; the diet pills are finally out of my life. Our report is to be published, and we might work on a Muggle-friendly translation later. But Professor Jigger is thinking I might finally be ready to work on my sleeping draught. I'll be doing something useful for a change."

"So these rats... are you putting them to sleep?"

"It appears not." She lifted a rat out of the cage and showed him. And the rodent was not a rat after all, nor was it a guinea pig; it was covered with a thick white fleece, and its nose was distinctly rounded, and its ears hung long and low.

"Is this a new breed of sheep?"

She placed it back in the cage. "Unfortunately, it's a rat. The potion did not work. Results like this are the reason why unsupervised experimental research is illegal."

"Unsupervised?" He stepped back. "Doesn't Professor Jigger know about this?"

"It's irrational, is it not? Professor Jigger supervises my feeding diet pills to rats. The first batch dies, and that's the price of science. I feed my own potion to rats. They turn into sheep, and that's unethical."

"So why isn't Professor Jigger working with you on this?"

"I'd stopped hoping that he might... accept new ideas. I had to make a beginning by myself. Remus, it's late. Did you begin cooking? We've yet time to make a cheese soufflé."

* * * * *

Remus submitted his final essay and recovered from the November full moon (he had to miss the last day of lectures).

"About going to Foss," he said to Ariadne. "I expect it's no good mentioning this to you..."

"But you're wanting me to bide in Pitlochry."

"I want you to stay alive."

"But the Macnairs are away. Whatever jinxes are on the castle itself... can it hurt if I go to the edge of the boundary, and no further? When you say you're seeing the castle, I'll stop."

"I don't see how that would be any more interesting than staying in Pitlochry although it would be possibly less safe."

"I'm thinking Veleta will maybe come out of the castle to speak to us. But if she cannot or will not do that, I'll return to Pitlochry while you and Kingsley go inside."

Remus had to accept this promise. His first weekend of exam revision coincided with Kingsley's, so they all abandoned their books and took the Knight Bus into Pitlochry.

It seemed a long stroll along the River Tummel, a more deathly march even than the hike of two years earlier. Remus did not let go of Ariadne's hand, but her fingers lay in his like lead, soft and cold and heavy. He shouldn't have brought her to the home of the people who had tried to kill her. Even though the Macnairs were away from home, he should have overruled her. What would it matter if she became angry, if she never spoke to him again? She would be alive.

Kingsley broke the silence with, "Have you thought how we're going to get out if things turn ugly? It might not be the type of place from which we can Disapparate."

"If I must, I'll make an illegal Portkey, and hang the consequences," said Remus shortly.

Ariadne's lead fingers stirred. He crushed her hand briefly and kept walking.

No-one spoke again until the village of Foss came into sight. Then Ariadne suddenly stopped short and exclaimed, "She's there!"

A small figure had appeared ahead of them, standing alone on a grassy plain between the trees and the village. To Remus, she was just a grey-gowned blur who might have been wearing a filet. But Kingsley had stopped walking too.

"Merlin's beard! It *is* Veleta!"

Remus gripped Ariadne's hand before she could have any ideas about racing on ahead.

Kingsley was staring as if he had never before quite believed in Veleta's survival. It was a long moment before he said: "We must be close to the castle boundary. Ariadne, don't move another step until I tell you it's safe."

Remus expected a protest, but Ariadne only nodded and asked, "Why are you thinking we can see Veleta, when we cannot see the castle or anything else within the boundary?"

Kingsley took the lead; Remus and Ariadne followed. The grey-gowned figure waved to them, and soon Remus could see that she was indeed the brown-eyed woman whom he had met inside the castle last month. At a distance of twenty paces, she called: "Can you hear me?"

"Yes," said Kingsley.

"Don't come any closer." By this time they were so close that they did not need to raise their voices, but they stopped obediently. "Can you see me?"

"Yes."

"Mr and Mrs Lupin must stay where they are, but Mr Shackbolt may step forward."

Remus caught Kingsley's eye: *Is this a trap?*

Kingsley shrugged, and stepped forward. He held out his arms to their hostess as if he were about to hug her, then changed his mind and dropped them, for she was gazing at him with all the politeness of a stranger.

"We need to talk about safety," she said. She bent down and went through the motion of lifting something, then settled her arms, as if she had just picked up an invisible person. She continued, "This whole castle is booby-trapped. The boundary is right there, between Mr Shackbolt and Mr Lupin. It repels Muggles, and people outside it can't see the castle. I cannot move beyond it, so I can't come any closer to you. More importantly, the boundary is cursed to kill any Banned wizard who tries to cross it. I've lately discovered that Mr and Mrs Lupin are both Banned."

Instinctively, Remus drew Ariadne back a pace, and said, "I entered safely last month. What has changed?"

"As soon as you had gone, Toady that's our bailiff entered my chamber and asked who you were. I showed him the cosmetics you had sold me, but he didn't believe me. He reminded me that, since I have enemies, Master does not allow me to receive visitors. He extracted the grease of Miss Dearborn's fingerprints from the cologne bottle, and that of Mr Lupin from the receipt. Humphrey Macnair came home from Korea to cast the Banning Curse on you both. I knew you would drop down dead as soon as you touched the Macnair boundary, but I had no way to warn you not to return."

"So you watched," Ariadne filled in the gap. "You Locospected Remus and Hestia every day, so that you could come and warn them in person if they tried to approach."

The huge chocolate-brown eyes widened in alarm, as the woman slowly nodded. "I asked Humphrey if the Aurors who came last spring were also enemies," she said, "but he said no, they were just doing their job, and they were no danger to me if I did not contact them again. But he said that the Aurors had come because two enemies had sent them, and that he knew the names of those enemies, and that he had Banned them."

"And you already knew who Ivor and I were," Ariadne supplied, "because you had already Locospected the Aurors until you found out the names of the people who had begun the inquiry."

Their hostess opened her mouth, then shook her head. Locospection was evidently a forbidden topic. "I know the names of Ariadne MacDougal and Ivor Jones," was all she could say. "Humphrey Macnair has returned to Korea, but he instructed the house-elves to look out for enemies. It's only a matter of time before they find me talking to you today and then one of the Macnairs will come home and Ban Mr Shackbolt too."

"What you're saying is," said Kingsley, "that no-one can visit you more than once."

He might have said more, but something apparently cut off his speech. The brown-eyed woman seemed distracted, then turned her attention back to them.

"What happened?" asked Remus.

"Did you not see?" said Ariadne. "The lassie tripped over, and Veleta picked her up."

"What lassie ?"

"My daughter, Mary." Their hostess held out her arms in surprise. "Can't you see her?"

"This is complicated," said Kingsley. "I don't think Remus can see your children or hear them. I couldn't before I crossed the boundary. If it comes to that, I don't understand how he and Ariadne can see *you*, since they're outside the boundary-line."

"I don't understand it myself," she said. "Certainly no-one beyond the boundary-line can see the castle or anything inside its walls. But I've noticed before that some of us mainly the house-elves become visible when we're between the wall and the boundary."

"But your bairns..." mused Ariadne, almost dreamily. "Even beyond the boundary, they are visible to me, yet not to Remus or Kingsley. Yet we all saw *you*, Veleta..."

"Never mind that," Kingsley told her suddenly. "It doesn't matter exactly how the magic works. The point is, we can see Veleta, but this is probably our last chance to see her, since the Macnair house-elves are spying on her every move. Veleta..."

It took a moment for the brown-eyed woman to respond. "Sorry, that's your name for me, isn't it? You think I'm someone called Veleta Vablatsky. And you think I've had my memory magically suppressed."

"That much can be checked quite easily," said Kingsley. "Do you want me to try?"

"Of course I do!"

Ariadne gasped so loudly that Remus Conjured a rug, a yard further back than they had been standing, and pulled her down to sit on it. "Remember," he whispered in her ear, "you're Death-cursed. You can't afford to become too interested." He tightened an arm around her waist. "Keep your mind on that boundary."

"I know. But she sounded so... so Veleta-like just then."

Kingsley had thrown a spell at the brown-eyed woman. "*Exhibeo Memorias Modi*"

Bright green light streamed off her forehead, danced a wavy pattern, and faded.

"The spell works. *Exhibeo Memorias Rei*!"

This time a silvery-blue light glanced off her head, twisted around, and faded.

"*Exhibeo Memorias Sui*!"

A rosy glow shone for an instant, sputtered, and abruptly died.

Kingsley stood poised for a moment, as if waiting for something to happen, and then said, "That explains everything."

Remus felt that it didn't explain much to him, and evidently the brown-eyed woman was no wiser.

"There are different kinds of memory," said Kingsley. "Veleta, there's no damage to your memory for how to do things ordinary things like walking and knitting and riding a broomstick if anything, I'd say someone's been dosing you with potions that artificially enhance that part of your memory. And there's no damage to your memory for facts and ideas you'd have no problem reciting the multiplication table, or naming the goblin rebellions. But your personal memory... the way you remember your own life-history... that only seems to go back about five years. Then it just *dies*, quite suddenly. It's what I'd expect in a five-year-old child there's simply no memory at all of anything that happened more than five years ago."

"No, there isn't," the woman agreed. "I could have told you that."

"Personal memories don't disappear that completely unless they've been deliberately wiped."

"But that's what I've been telling you!"

"You could have been lying to trap us." Kingsley's tone was so business-like that the others forgot to take offence. "But we know now that you weren't. You really don't have those memories. They *can* be brought back... but, really, it's a job that I'd rather leave to the experts."

"But you can't do that to me!" The brown eyes were huge and moist with sudden desperation. "I can't pass the castle boundary... and Healers won't leave St Mungo's to come to me! And it's only a matter of time before someone interrupts us here today. If you don't restore my memory now, it will probably never happen. Mr Shacklebolt, can't you do anything?"

"No. Only a qualified Healer could break through a charm as powerful as the one that's been placed on you. If I tried to reverse it, I'd probably do irreparable damage to the rest of your mind in the process. What we have to do is take you to St Mungo's."

The woman laughed bitterly. "If I walk through the magical barrier, will you give me a lift on your flying carpet?" She moved, as if to put down something she had been carrying, and threw herself towards them. The angle was so sharp that she should have fallen, but instead she remained diagonal in the air, as if an invisible wall were supporting her. "See, it's solid. I can't come any further. And your friends not only *can't* cross, they'll die if they *try*."

"Can you Apparate?" asked Kingsley without much hope.

"Of course not. And even if I could in general, the charm that keeps me inside the barrier would probably prevent my Disapparating too."

"Floo?"

"I am not authorised to travel through the castle's Floo network."

"Then we must make a Portkey. A Portkey is a powerful instrument; the reason it's illegal is that it works under all kinds of conditions where Apparition is prevented. Do you have anything, Remus?"

"I'll make it," said Remus suddenly. "We'll be in trouble, and Kingsley can't afford to be thrown out of Auror training." He took a Runic dictionary from his pocket *Portus*." The book glowed blue, shimmered, and lay still. "I've set it to Transport to St Mungo's in ninety seconds."

He threw, and Kingsley caught it. The brown-eyed woman looked sceptical, but all she said was, "Mary."

Kingsley made a swooping grab and apparently picked up something in his left arm. The brown-eyed woman also picked up some invisible burden and settled it on her right arm. Kingsley held out the dictionary, and the woman gripped its other end with her free hand.

They looked at each other.

"You think I should know you, don't you?" she said. "I'm sorry. I don't."

Remus heard a catch in Ariadne's throat. She stood up on the rug, without moving forward, but trying to meet her friend's eye.

"I'm sorry," said the woman to Ariadne. "Perhaps I knew you too. I hope I did. But perhaps I've been Watching a stranger."

Ariadne nodded and waited. Remus tried not to count the seconds.

Suddenly Kingsley, the woman and the dictionary had vanished. And Remus was screaming Ariadne's name before he was consciously aware that she had leapt forward. His heart stopped beating as he grabbed for her, but she was beyond his reach, hurtling towards the invisible barrier.

And the world moved in slow motion as Ariadne was flung backwards and fell lifeless to the earth.

Moonlit Wanderings

Chapter 6 of 21

Ariadne learns more about her family history, but is no nearer to solving the mysteries of Macnair Castle.

CHAPTER SIX

Moonlit Wanderings

Sunday 1 Monday 2 December 1985

St Mungo's Hospital, London.

Rated PG for life-and-death situations.

Ariadne did not understand why she had not died.

When she first awoke she was certain she must be dead. As soon as she had ascertained that she was not racing towards the falling bairns, but was lying motionless on a white-sheeted bed, she remembered that she could not have reached the children, no matter how fast she had run, because there was a barrier of death between her and them. That made sense of why Remus had been screaming but he had been abruptly silenced.

So she had not saved the bairns she could not in any case have run fast enough to reach them before they hit the earth and now she was dead.

She felt very, very daft.

She replayed her last minutes. Veleta had not recognised her or Kingsley, had looked at them like strangers. But she had been so desperate to escape whatever horrors surrounded her in Macnair Castle that she had taken the risk of trusting Kingsley. Remus had made a Portkey to St Mungo's and thrown it across the barrier, Kingsley had caught it and picked up the little girl, and Veleta had been carrying the boy. Then Kingsley and Veleta had vanished *without* the children. And the children had been falling through the air.

And she had raced off on the fool's errand to catch them both of them at once? Evidently there was no limit to her density. And Remus had been screaming, but all she had known was that she *had* to catch them, otherwise... what? They would break their necks? Possibly. More likely, falling onto damp grass from a height of four feet, they would suffer a few bruises. And she had hit the barrier, and of course she had died instantly.

No wonder Remus had screamed. A lump swelled in her throat when she realised what her death would mean to him; it had been extremely self-centred of her to run off and die, especially just before his exams.

She wondered what *had* happened to the children. They had probably struck the ground even before she had hit the barrier. And she had died before she had had the chance to know if they were hurt.

She sat up in the bed, wondering what dead people were supposed to do after they, well, arrived. There were several other beds lined up against whitewashed walls, some of them occupied, and a person in lime-coloured robes was bending over one of the other occupants, almost like a Healer in a hospital.

A hospital? Was this a hospital?

It was only after she had established to herself that the lime-coloured witch was indeed a Healer that she allowed herself to play with the possibility that she might have survived after all.

She did not doubt that the Macnairs had the power to set up an invincible barrier of death around their castle; but it was possible that Veleta had not understood exactly how the spell worked. What if it had not killed her after all?

That would be a great relief to Remus. But, if she were alive, where was he?

Someone had placed a huge display of red roses on her bedside table. A drawn curtain suggested that it must be dark outside the window; the light in the room the ward? came from a chandelier. Two of the other beds were empty; another was occupied by a man whose head was slowly revolving on his shoulders. He didn't seem distressed, but it would have been rude to stare, so she looked in the other direction. The Healer was just standing up from tending to the other patient. She wrote something on the chart at the end of the bed, then walked quietly over to Ariadne.

"Mrs Lupin, you're awake."

"Am I dead, Healer?" It was a stupid question, but today was a very stupid day.

"No, but you've been unconscious for half the day. Try to relax, everything is all right now."

"Where's Veleta?" The Healer looked blank. "My friend. We were trying to bring her to the Spell Damage department. How can I find out if she's there?"

"This *is* the Spell Damage department. Hush, don't worry about your friend. You're the one suffering spell damage."

Ariadne tried not to be agitated at the voice of the professional soother. "Healer, my friend was damaged worse than I am. What do I do to find out...?" But she saw at once that the Healer had no intention of discussing anything. She drew a deep breath and changed her question to, "When can I see my husband?"

"I'll bring him in," said the Healer. "The poor man's had a terrible day; he'll be so relieved to see you awake."

For a moment she was almost not wanting to see Remus; was not wanting to look at his face and recognise the appalling thing she had done to him today. The Healer brought him into the ward in a very few seconds, saying, "... careful not to excite her, Mr Lupin," which meant that he had been waiting in the corridor all day. She made herself look at the taut lines on his face, the dark circles under his eyes, and knew at once that he'd been far too troubled by anxiety to bother with being angry. That made it worse; she felt she deserved his anger.

He sat on the edge of her bed, and she said, "I'm sorry," but he was obviously too happy that she was speaking at all to hear what she said. She held his hand, then changed her mind and put her arms around his neck, and let him hold her. It seemed so unfair that ever since their marriage he had made so much effort to accommodate her, yet all she had ever given him in return was more problems. But he hadn't noticed what a burden she was to him; the only question presently on his mind was whether she would recover.

She absorbed the guilty pleasure of being held and cosseted for a long time, until Remus's mouth moved beside her ear, and he said, "You haven't asked anything about your illness."

"I'm not feeling ill. We can go home, can we not?"

He loosened his hold so that he could look at her. "Not for a while. The Healer told me, as a rule of thumb, that every hour you spent unconscious would be a day you'd have to remain in hospital. That means you'll be here for about a week."

She nodded, knowing that Professor Jigger would never give her permission to be ill for that long, but she could not argue with Remus any more. She was itching to ask him about Veleta, but he wanted to talk about herself, and she owed him the indulgence.

"Ariadne, you're suffering from quite serious spell damage. Whatever the Macnairs put on their boundary ought to have killed you."

"What was it a kind of wall of *Avada Kedavra*?"

"That isn't possible, but it was certainly a fairly serious hurling hex. The way it threw you ought to have broken your neck. But, granted that I was lucky enough to catch you in time, the Healers found something else... You were penetrated by some spell that ought to have halted your heartbeat. They don't understand why it didn't."

Ariadne did not much care why the spell had failed, but she hoped that talking about it would bring the conversation back to Veleta. "Remus, what happened? I know I was daft, but what happened this morning?"

"When the Portkey vanished, you started running off. I ran after you, but I wasn't quick enough, and you hit the barrier. That seemed to set off some kind of alarm, because a swarm of house-elves appeared in the same moment. They looked so hostile that I Disapparated us. And by the time we'd landed at St Mungo's, I'd worked out that you didn't seem to be dead after all... So I took you to Spell Damage..." His voice trailed off. She knew he must have been moving like a zombie from the minute she fell.

He could not tell her what had happened to Veleta's bairns because he had not been able to see them, but she ventured, "And Veleta... Is she here in Spell Damage too?"

"Kingsley was taking care of Veleta; I've been occupied with you. I promised I'd owl him when you became conscious."

His evasion meant that something had gone wrong. "Remus, is Veleta going to be all right?"

"It would be better if you heard that part of the story first-hand from Kingsley." Veleta was very definitely *not* all right. "He's had to go back to Training Headquarters, but he said he'd come to visit you tomorrow."

She wanted to scream that they were hiding something important from her, but she knew the Healer would send Remus away if she became agitated. So she reminded herself that Remus had had enough trouble for one day, and let him carry on hushing her apologies.

* * * * *

A Mediwitch forced Remus out of the ward so that Ariadne could be dosed with six kinds of potion. Then she slept for a while. She awoke in the middle of the night with a middle-of-the-morning alertness that no invalid has any business experiencing, which could only mean that her Circadian rhythm was completely disrupted. She lit her wand, but realised at once that there were no books on her bedside table... only that huge vase of roses.

She wriggled in the bed for a while, trying to re-settle, but her mind was screaming that it must be occupied somehow. She wondered what she had to do to procure herself a book. At one end of the ward, the Mediwitch on duty was almost asleep over her desk. Ariadne inched herself out of bed, and had walked half way to the desk before she had time to ask herself if she were supposed to be well enough to walk.

"Excuse me..."

The Mediwitch startled, raised her head, and opened bleary eyes. She had harassed lines of overwork all over her face.

"Excuse me, is there a patients' library in this hospital?"

"The bathroom is first on the left outside the ward," recited the Mediwitch. It was clear she did not know which patient had asked the question that she had not really heard.

Ariadne took this reply as permission to leave the ward. The floor was cold under her bare feet, but the thick flannel of the hospital nightgown covered her well enough for a ten-minute excursion. She *hoped* it would only be ten minutes. She considered opening the other doors in the corridor so that she could find where Veleta was lying. But there was no real point if Veleta were not asleep, then she ought to be; Ariadne knew she must restrain her curiosity until tomorrow.

At the end of the corridor, a placard next to the stairs indicated that she was on the fourth floor and the shop and tea-room were on the fifth. That seemed as likely a place as any to find a library, so Ariadne climbed the stairs. She found herself slightly breathless, and had to clutch the banister half way up, which warned her that she might be somewhat sick after all, but she kept climbing slowly, until another placard welcomed her to the fifth floor, with arrows directing her to ladies, gentlemen, tea-room or shop.

The shop was disappointing; not only was it closed, but it seemed to be primarily a florist's, with sidelines in exotic stone fruits and boxed chocolate. There was a single stand of newspapers, postcards and magazines, but nothing that she would call a book. Ariadne decided at once that she was not going to give up; her mind was racing with alertness, while her legs were beginning to ache with exertion, and it would be miserable to drag herself back downstairs with no reward for the effort. There were more stairs leading up to a sixth storey, so she began to haul herself up.

She knew before she reached the top that patients were not supposed to be here the lighting was a great deal dimmer, and there were no signposts but she calculated that the worst anybody could do was to send her back downstairs. The doors on this corridor apparently led to offices and other quarters for the hospital staff. She felt entirely justified in her quest when, half way along, she found a door left ajar that was labelled LIBRARY. The lighting was brighter here, as if in welcome, and the couple of lime-green figures that were leafing through books were a long way down the room. Ariadne walked in and picked up a book.

She realised at once that this was not a patients' library the book was *Ye Originies of Dragon Poxe* by Gunhilda of Gorsemoor, and every book on the shelf was about magical bacteria. So many thoughts were crowding into her head as she walked to the next aisle that she did not know whether she wanted to look up memory charms, serious bites, hurling hexes or potions. She wondered whether the Mediwitch would be very distressed if she stayed here all night. But before she had to decide, the right book was winking at her, inviting her to the feast. It was a bound copy of the last five years of the *Western Journal of Apothecarism*. Every article in every edition for every year! She need not waste any more time on appetite suppressants and shampoos. She could read the interesting articles, the ones about sleeping draughts and body rhythm allergies, with no need to justify herself. It would be a whole week before she again needed to read to Professor Jigger's orders. She was so excited that she could hardly pronounce the Summoning Charm.

The heavy book landed in her arms, and she swayed then toppled to the floor with an alarming crash. She was more surprised than hurt, but it proved that she was not really as healthy as she felt. Before she could find her feet, strong arms were lifting her, and she found herself staring into the face of a lime-robed stranger. She was startled to find that this stranger had touched her, was about to discover her illicitly sneaking Healers' books. But the stranger, she quickly realised, was even more astonished was staring into her face as if they were not strangers.

He had a kindly, rather solemn face, neatly bearded, and she supposed he was about ninety, old enough to be retired had he wished it. The badge on his lime robes bore the unfamiliar name *Hippocrates Smethwyck*. Obviously, he was a Healer, and he had a right and duty to read the books in the staff library. But she knew she had never seen him before.

"I'm sorry..." she began, for it did seem a terrible intrusion to be borrowing journals when her Healer wanted her to be in bed.

But her apology was drowned out by his. "I beg your pardon, young lady. I thought for a moment that I knew you." He bent over to retrieve the book. "Yours, I believe."

"I'm afraid not, Healer Smethwyck. I was only hoping... to borrow... but I should not really..."

He frowned at the title. "Are you an apothecary, young lady?"

"I'm yet apprenticed. I'm here as a patient... I'm expecting I should not have come..." She had not been thinking clearly since the moment she had woken up believing herself dead; but suddenly her head had snapped into complete clarity, and she realised what an impertinent thing it had been to prowl private corridors looking for other people's books.

Healer Smethwyck was clearly trying to assess the situation. "A sick apprentice is sentenced to hospital... and her choice of light reading... is the complete journal? I'm impressed." He still sounded faintly embarrassed to have mistaken her for someone else. "What is your field of research?"

She was mortified to admit that she was supposed to be researching appetite suppressants and shampoos. To admit to such a trivial use of Potions was far more humiliating than to admit that she had been gate-crashing the library. She found herself saying, "I'm very interested in sleeping draughts. I've always wanted to develop one that will cause dream-sleep but suppress the other kind."

"I'm glad someone cares. You'll find a very interesting article on sleeping draughts published in October four years ago. It was never followed up. If you wanted to take it the next step, Ankarad " He broke off, embarrassed again. "Let's just say, young lady, that when you've finished your apprenticeship, setting up shop isn't your only option. St Mungo's sponsors research fellowships that replace the journeywork quite well."

She had been going to ask what his research field was, but her curiosity was more piqued by his mistake. "You called me Ankarad. Did you know Madam Murray?"

The Healer was electrified. "Yes... yes, as a matter of fact, I did meet her." They must have done more than meet; Ariadne saw that they had been dear friends. "She was the greatest brewster in Europe; seventy years ago, every Healer as well as every apothecary knew her name. But she would have died long before you were born, young lady. You've done your homework well to know about Ankarad Murray."

"Ankarad Murray was my grandmother."

Healer Smethwyck looked almost relieved. "No wonder I felt I was looking at a ghost! It seems you have inherited her mantle, Miss... you're not Miss Murray, are you? You wouldn't even be a Miss Macnair." He spoke the Macnair name with a stony edge, as if he were aware of their Death Eater connections.

She told him her name, and he raised his eyebrows in mild surprise almost another recognition. But that made no sense. Remus was only a second-generation wizard; the Lupin name would not mean anything to a man as old as Smethwyck.

"Mrs Lupin, I don't know what malady brings you to St Mungo's, but I'm fairly certain you ought to be in bed. If you can't sleep, by all means take the book back to your ward; I'll check it out under my name." He walked over to some kind of register on a desk and picked up a quill. "Show me the spine. When you bring the book back, leave it on this desk, and sign in this column here." He tapped his wand on the book and muttered a Disarming Charm.

Of all the extraordinary things that had happened in the last twenty-four hours, Healer Smethwyck's kindness in allowing her to take the book suddenly seemed the most overwhelming. "Thank you very much, sir," she said. "It's... I'm extremely grateful that you're letting me read it. I've a great deal to learn, and this will help me enormously."

* * * * *

"I've identified the spell, Mrs Lupin," said Healer Strout. "There is a definite trace of *Animum Quiesco* that we need to annihilate. Not many people survive that hex by the time someone else has realised that what's needed is to re-animate the heartbeat, it's usually too late. But in your case... young lady, I'd be very interested to know what you did. I found more than a trace of the counter-charm that repelled the hex."

"I did nothing, Healer. What was the counter-charm?"

"It was in your blood. I couldn't identify it, which is peculiar... When I have that much trouble identifying a spell, it's usually some kind of illicit Dark Magic. But Dark spells don't usually lurk in your blood waiting to save your life... Well, whatever it was, the world needs more of it."

"You're welcome to take a blood-sample for analysis, Healer."

"Thank you, I might just do that. Not that *Animum Quiesco* is much used nowadays, but it's good to know it has a counter. Now, did you drink all the potions that the Mediwitch left you?"

"She fed them to me by force," said Ariadne ruefully. Five of the six had tasted horrible.

"Then I'll admit your visitors. But you must keep very quiet and not let them excite you."

Ariadne thought guiltily of her midnight book-seeking expedition. It must have raised her heartbeat and circulation, and then she had fallen asleep reading five years' worth of research on sleeping draughts. If she let her visitors tire her out, Healer Strout would be angry with her in earnest.

Remus, looking much happier than yesterday, entered the ward. He was followed by Sarah, who was dressed in flamingo-coloured robes and carrying pale pink orchids, then by Kingsley, who was helping her cousin Mercy with a basket of peaches. Ariadne was embarrassed by the fuss; they radiated so much concern for her. But finally she had finished apologising, and her friends were all sitting on chairs around her bed, and she was able to ask her question.

"Kingsley what happened yesterday?"

"The Portkey brought Veleta and me here to St Mungo's. But as soon as we arrived, we saw that it hadn't brought her children. Veleta kicked up a storm of protest, and even asked if I had tricked her deliberately. A Mediwizard had to cast a Calming Charm, and I managed to persuade Veleta to see a Healer, but she was crying the whole time. The Healer told us exactly what we already knew that someone had removed her personal memories. She said Veleta would need to stay in hospital for several months if they were to restore the memories without destroying her whole mind."

He paused for so long that Ariadne nearly asked, "So is she here?" But she already knew the answer.

Kingsley finished his story. "Veleta wasn't willing to stay anywhere without her children. She was even sobbing that they might not be safe in Foss now that she had left them. All she could think about was going back to them. Ariadne, it wasn't an option to keep her away from her children any longer, and I've no idea how we're going to winkle them out of the castle. So I gave her back the Portkey."

Ariadne lay back on her pillows, trying not to be agitated by the news. "So... she's in Foss?"

"It's not as if she's *wanting* to be!" exclaimed Mercy eagerly. "Tell her, Kingsley. What did Veleta say to you the moment before she touched the Portkey?"

"She was crying so hard that I wasn't exactly certain," said Kingsley. "But it sounded like, 'Mr Shackbolt, if you're my friend at all, try to find a way to rescue all of us from the Macnairs!'"

Moonraker's Justice

Chapter 7 of 21

The letter of the law is upheld, and the very perceptive are provided with a clue.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Moonraker's Justice

Thursday 12 December Saturday 28 December 1985

Courtroom Ten, The Ministry of Magic, London; Old Basford, Nottingham.

Rated PG for nasty snapping things.

"The charge against the accused is as follows: that on Sunday the first of December 1985 at twenty-nine minutes past ten in the morning, he did knowingly, deliberately, and in full awareness of the illegality of his actions, make a Portkey without Ministry authorisation, which constitutes an offence under Paragraph 5 of the Decree for Portkey Restriction, 1782."

Remus tried not to grip the arms of the great chair as the plum-garbed Wizengamot glared down at him. *This is only an illegal Portkey*, he reminded himself. *It doesn't matter that I'm going to be found guilty.*

The Minister for Magic faced him. She seemed bored by the formal recitation of standard questions. "Are you Remus John Lupin, of number 24, Spurge Street, Old Basford, Nottingham?"

"Yes."

"Did you make a Portkey on the morning of the first of December?"

"Yes."

"Did you have Ministry authorisation?"

"No."

"Did you know that it was illegal to make an unauthorised Portkey?"

"Yes."

Dr Bagnold frowned. "Mr Lupin, do you wish to make any statement in your own defence?"

"A young lady wished to go to London, but she was being detained at Foss. A Portkey seemed the only possible way to move her."

Amelia Bones suddenly cleared her throat. Dr Bagnold fell silent at this interruption from the Minister for Magical Law Enforcement, and allowed Madam Bones to ask, "Mr Lupin, in what way was this lady being 'detained'?"

Remus swallowed. They had agreed that he would not mention Kingsley's name, and he would prefer not to mention Ariadne's. But he could never face Ariadne admitting that he had missed his cue to plead Veleta's case. And once he described Veleta's situation, it would be difficult to avoid the rest. "She was in the grounds of Macnair Castle, which is protected by a magical barrier. She demonstrated that she was unable to pass through that barrier, but stated that she very much wished to. She was unable to Apparate and she was not authorised to use the castle's Floo network. A Portkey seemed to be the only option."

"And this woman... after she had taken your Portkey... where did she go?"

"She returned to Foss." He could hear the titters of disbelief among the Wizengamot members. "The Portkey failed to transport her children, and she would not leave them alone there."

"That is absurd," expostulated Dr Bagnold's Senior Secretary a portly man named Cornelius Fudge. "All the magical traces that our detector recorded indicate that it was a working Portkey. The accused himself admits that it successfully transported some woman. How could it have failed to transport other passengers?"

"It seems to me," said Madam Bones, "that the very absurdity of the story demands investigation. Mr Lupin, you say you made an efficient Portkey that transported a

woman to St Mungo's. Are there witnesses to her arrival?"

A murmur around the courtroom reminded Remus that he was being invited to incriminate himself by citing witnesses who belonged to the prosecution. But he gave the name of the Healer who had examined Veleta.

"And then she took the same Portkey back again?"

"Yes."

"Because this fully functional Portkey had failed to transport her children."

"Yes."

"And she now retains this illegal Portkey in her possession."

"Presumably. But it would have deactivated within an hour."

"Mr Lupin, if this woman really were illegally incarcerated, why did you not report it to the Aurors?"

"It was reported nearly a year ago, but the Aurors refused to act. They claimed that the circumstances..."

"These questions are wasting the court's time!" interrupted Fudge. "We are not here to investigate this woman, but to discover whether there is any possible reason to acquit Mr Lupin of making an illegal Portkey. So far we have uncovered none. He admits that he was operating outside the law that he had no interest in involving the law to deal with his alleged problem. Has anyone any more to say?"

A ripple of whispers ran through the courtroom.

"I mean, has anyone anything to say *about the Portkey?*"

The courtroom fell silent.

Dr Bagnold spoke. "Those in favour of clearing the accused of all charges?"

Three or four hands were half-heartedly raised.

"Those in favour of conviction?"

At least forty hands shot into the air at once. A few more straggled after them. The Court Scribe counted, and waved his wand. The number 46 erupted into the air, hovered before Dr Bagnold's face, and vanished.

Dr Bagnold fixed her eye on Remus and recited: "Remus John Lupin, the Wizengamot finds you guilty of making and using an illegal Portkey, and sentences you to a fine of three hundred Galleons. You have twenty-four hours to bring the money to the Office of Disciplinary Revenue." Then she turned to Madam Bones and asked in a more normal voice, "Who's on next?"

"Fletcher."

"Oh, hang Mundungus Fletcher! Let's have our tea-break before we deal with him!"

There was some enthusiastic shuffling at this suggestion. Remus supposed, from the clatter of a hundred feet stamping towards the door, that he must be dismissed. He found himself swept along in the wake of the plum-coloured robes, which charged out through the courtroom door, nearly squashing Mundungus Fletcher.

Before he had time to decide whether to Disapparate, one pair of feet had stopped behind him, and a voice in his ear was asking, "Mr Lupin?" It was Amelia Bones.

She had just fined him three hundred Galleons; he wondered whether she were about to remind him how to register his payment or to hail him as the acquaintance whom Ariadne had been pressured into marrying.

"Come and have tea with me," said Madam Bones. She hustled him down the corridor and onto the landing, where witches and wizards in plum-coloured robes were sitting around small tables. She seated herself at a vacant spot and ordered, "*Accio!*" Two cups and a teapot appeared in front of her; Remus supposed they had flown down from her office.

"This adjournment was well-timed. Otherwise I'd have had to visit you at home." Madam Bones poured tea. "Mr Lupin, I couldn't ignore what you were saying about a prisoner at Macnair Castle. While I can't guarantee that your three hundred Galleons will be refunded, I do think it's important that we don't gloss over a situation like that." She passed him a cup. "What do you know about this prisoner, and what has the Auror Division done so far?"

This was their first and last chance, owed entirely to Ariadne's pure-blood connections with important people like Madam Bones. Remus curled his hands around the cup, but did not drink. "Madam Bones, I think you've heard of Cassandra Vablatsky, the famous Seer," he began. "She has a granddaughter named Veleta, who is a Locospector..." He tried to hurry the story into the five minutes that a busy Ministry official would be able to spare him.

Madam Bones poised a Quick-Quotes Quill over a parchment and listened without interrupting, holding Remus's gaze over the rim of her tea-cup. She remained so silent that Remus wondered whether she were even taking him seriously, although the endless scratching of the Quill assured him that she was indeed absorbing his words.

"... we believe the Aurors' conclusion completely failed to account for the possibility that something was preventing Miss Vablatsky from telling the truth."

The Quill skidded to a halt, paused as if waiting for him to speak further, then hopped down to horizontal. Remus pretended to sip at his cold tea, then abandoned the cup. Madam Bones ran her eye down the parchment, and then looked up again.

"A very disturbing story," she said. "Most immediately, because there has been another attempt on Ariadne's life."

"Ariadne is recovering well. But, yes, it is disturbing that a wizard would choose this method of protecting his castle. Madam Bones, I did try to register a complaint, but once the Aurors realised that I was involved with an illegal Portkey case, they wouldn't listen."

"The Portkey offence is now expiated, so I will authorise an investigation of the Macnairs' barrier today. While they have the right to refuse entry to any unwanted visitor, they shouldn't make the barrier invisible and then cry 'trespass' against anyone who happens to step across it. And they should certainly stop short of murder in making their point. I haven't forgotten, you know, that it was the Macnairs who attacked Ariadne last March. Now, you say there was some claim that this magical barrier doesn't hurt *everyone* only what they call 'banned' people?"

"That was Miss Vablatsky's story."

"In other words, she admits that the Macnairs are conducting some kind of personal vendetta against specific individuals. That suggests to me that unless she's completely stupid Miss Vablatsky is quite willing to betray the Macnair family's secrets. However, it still won't stand up in court as evidence of unlawful detainment. Mr Lupin, did you pick up on the other aspect of your story that automatically indicates illegal activity? Do you understand why the Portkey failed to transport the children?"

"No. I only wish I did. If I'd known how to extract the children from the castle..."

She held up her hand. "Mr Lupin, you miss the point. I know something about Portkeys since my job requires me to curtail their abuse. The reason they are so heavily regulated is that they are very powerful magical objects. Your Portkey transported Miss Vablatsky, so there was nothing wrong with it; it ought to have transported her children. If it failed, that suggests to me that some spell had been cast on the children to render them immune to Portkeys."

Remus's mind raced. "But that's illogical..." He stopped; he didn't want Madam Bones to reach the conclusion that was now staring at him.

But Madam Bones was following up a different train of thought. "These transport-immune spells would not be possible in any of the commonly-used forms of magic," she confirmed, "since they would have the effect of making the person concerned a prisoner. While an anti-Portkey spell is not illegal of itself, in practice I don't see how anyone could cast one without using some form of illegal magical methodology." In case he had not grasped it, she added, "Whoever enchanted those children must have resorted to the Dark Arts."

"So... can it be investigated?"

"It can and must be; but I warn you that practitioners of the Dark Arts are usually very good at covering their tracks. Meanwhile..." Half a dozen Wizengamot members walked past and Madam Bones checked her watch. "Bother. I have to return to the courtroom. Thank you for telling me your story, Mr Lupin. Give Ariadne my regards, and assure her I'll look into it."

* * * * *

When Ariadne finally Banished her overalls upstairs at around half-past six her face was so drawn and haggard that Remus expected her to faint, and she was carrying a basket of kittens. She said she was glad he was home, and began pouring milk into a saucer as she asked after the trial.

"Ariadne, do you think Professor Jigger is taking seriously what the Healer said about your taking things easily?"

Her voice dropped several decibels. "Of course. He's taken my week in hospital from my annual leave without requiring me to make up any of the hours I've missed." Reverting to her usual volume, "Remus, what happened today? They've let you come home: is that good news?"

She had to know eventually, of course. "Ariadne, it will be three hundred Galleons."

She wrapped her arms around him and nodded. "But it was not Azkaban."

"That was never likely. But, sweetheart, do you know what this means?"

"It means I've used all our money. I've set up a herb garden and a laboratory. This fine will cost us the last of our savings. There's no more for for any other emergency." She pulled out of his arms to right a black kitten just before it fell into the milk bowl.

He wondered what she had nearly said what "other emergency" had she had in mind? But she looked so fragile and exhausted at the end of this very stressful day that he didn't like to intrude. "So, are you going to tell me why you've brought five kittens into our household?"

"It's nothing research, like the rats. You've had the busy day: I'm wanting to hear about it."

He swallowed the endless question, "Why do you persevere with Jigger?" for he did know why really. Instead, he brought the casserole out of the oven, while she pulled dinner plates out of the cupboard by hand; it seemed she was too tired to attempt a charm.

She sat quietly, with eyes brilliantly bright in her pale face, while he dredged up every detail of the trial, then told her what Madam Bones had said. And she asked exactly the same question that had occurred to him.

"But why would they make the children Portkey-proof and not Veleta herself? Does that mean that it's the bairns whom they are wanting to keep in Foss and not Veleta at all?"

"They wanted Veleta enough to keep her behind the barrier," Remus reminded her. "But, yes, I am wondering why they didn't bother to secure her detention with whatever method they used on the children. I'm quite sure it wasn't due to a scruple against using Dark Magic."

They talked around in circles for the next half-hour, but their only conclusion was that there was nothing they could do until they heard from Amelia Bones again. Meanwhile, Remus had an exam the next day.

* * * * *

On Boxing Day Remus said they should visit Mrs Pettigrew.

"Should? Are you not wanting to see your friend's mother?"

"Of course I want to."

Mrs Pettigrew seemed pleased to see them. "It's a very cold day. I'm thinking the water will be frozen in the pipes before winter ends. My Peter knew a wonderful warming charm that kept the water flowing. But when I try it, the water's always too lukewarm for drinking."

Was this a hint? While Remus was arranging his thoughts, Ariadne asked, "Mrs Pettigrew, are you wishing Remus to charm your pipes?"

"He's welcome to try it, but I'm not thinking anybody could manage as neatly as my Peter."

"Of course not. But Remus could maybe manage an approximation."

Mrs Pettigrew showed Remus to the back door and waved him out into a light snow-shower. He found the pipes at the back of the house and cast ~~the~~ *thermo*. The trick was to set the temperature to only a couple of degrees above zero.

When he returned indoors, Mrs Pettigrew was showing Ariadne her photograph albums of Peter. "And here he is in his Hogwarts uniform. We were so proud when he became a Gryffindor."

"Remus tells me often how brave he was."

"And here he is with his friend Owen, who was murdered right at the beginning of You-Know-Who's reign of terror. Owen was Peter's ~~best~~ friend, so You-Know-Who cast a dark shadow over his life right from the beginning. This is a few months later Peter with James and Remus... and I'm sure you know why the edge of the photograph has been ripped off. I'm not needing to tell *you* who was standing next to James Potter, *pretending* to be Peter's friend. I do not speak his name as far as I'm concerned, this person is the *other* He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Suffice that it's He-Who-Killed-Peter..."

Mrs Pettigrew had so much to say that Remus did not need to add much to Ariadne's polite murmurs.

"... and this is the Loch Ness Kelpie, just half an hour before it ate Peter's dear father. That was a horrific day, you know... the monstrous waves, the blood-curdling

screams, the ominous overhead thunder... and my husband, tangled in the beast's coils... thrashing and struggling and pulling at the scales... plunged under the cold water until I was sure he must be drowned, then thrown up to the sky for just long enough to take a gasping breath, before being once again caught by those terrible coils... it was almost a relief when he hit his head on a rock and died quickly..."

"A dramatic dramatic death," said Ariadne, with a strange look on her face.

"Oh, desperately dramatic!" agreed Mrs Pettigrew. "It was all over the *Daily Prophet*! It was the first non-murder death in a decade to have been considered newsworthy. We had reporters crawling all over this house, just begging us for an interview. Six months later, Rita Skeeter came round to publish me in the *Witch Weekly*. It was the sweetest article all about the sorrows of widows, and how I was putting a personal tragedy behind me to concentrate on the public efforts against You-Know-Who, and how the public should spare a thought for those of us who were grief-laden for reasons *other* than Him-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. I have that article yet. I'll show it to you, if you'll give me a minute..."

"That's kind," interrupted Remus, "but I'm afraid we have another appointment, and must be home before dark."

"Mrs Pettigrew, thank you so much for showing me those pictures of Peter," said Ariadne, standing as she spoke. "I've always been wanting to know more about him." She extended her hand. "Happy New Year!"

* * * * *

Twenty-four hours later, Remus was in bed, sleeping off the effects of another Transformation. He was confused about not having enjoyed his visit to Mrs Pettigrew, and grateful that Ariadne had seemed to know how to talk to her. The air was very cold, and he wondered whether his stiff bones were because of the Transformation, or whether he were in need of ordinary Pepper-up.

He awoke properly when Ariadne brought him some kind of potion. Her face was grave. "My parents are coming to stay for the weekend," she told him. "I told them that we've no spare bedroom, and that Professor Jigger will not give me time off, and that you have not been well. But they're wishing to come anyway."

He tried not to look annoyed. When the MacDougals gave such clear hints they expected other people to understand them; why were they choosing to ignore the same hints from Ariadne?

"Dearest, I know it would be easier for us to go to them, and at a better time. But they are wanting to see our house..." she sounded doubtful about this, "... and I was not wanting to field questions about your illness."

There was a mew from the doorway; Ariadne must have let the kittens out of the laboratory.

Kittens? These little animals were white, and covered with soft curly fleeces...

"You're not needing to tell me," she said ruefully. "My experiment went wrong again. The rats lost their fleeces within twenty-four hours. I'm hoping the cats will be cats again by the time my parents arrive."

* * * * *

It was not just Ariadne's parents who stepped through the Floo on Saturday afternoon, but also Kenneth and Janet and their children. First Remus had to make them understand why Ariadne was not home; Mrs MacDougal was very concerned, and said, "But if Professor Jigger will not keep to Guild regulations, I'm hoping you'll insist, Remus."

Then he had to show them around the house. Mr MacDougal admired the staircase, the bathroom tiles, the handsome dimensions of the bedroom, and the "diligent habits" suggested by the orderliness of the study. Mrs MacDougal admired the kitchen range, the laboratory, the airing cupboard ("Is it adapted from a Muggle model?") and the number of books. They worked so hard at finding details to compliment that Remus could not be fooled; the house was too ugly, too shabby, too Muggle. They must have noticed that he didn't show them the garage, but they asked no questions.

By the time they returned to the living room, the smell of lentil soup, cashew loaf and sprouts au gratin was so obvious that Janet asked, "Do you not eat meat?"

"Not often," he admitted. He could almost hear his parents-in-law exchange the question of whether his problem were a weak heart, a slender wallet, radical-fringe politics or an outlandish religion.

Fortunately Ariadne arrived home at that moment. Unfortunately, over the course of dinner the inquisition not only switched to focusing on her, but became far more pointed.

"This is a well-sized room it could comfortably house a formal dining suite. Are you thinking of buying one?"

This was code for "Remus does not earn enough money." Ariadne replied, "Remus once Transfigured this table into a wonderful Sheraton suite. He'll maybe show you after dinner. But it would be too grand for every day."

"But you must be regretting that you have no Wireless or gramophone."

"We are too busy to miss them, Mamma. We are more comfortable in a quiet house."

"Remus must find it difficult to work among Muggles. Mr Nott could help him find a job in the Ministry."

"That would be kind of Mr Nott; but Remus enjoys his work and is not wishing to change."

"To speak of old friends, the Macnairs have curtailed their trip to Korea. I'm thinking Remus has never met the Macnair family properly. Why do you not owl Regelinda and invite her over?"

"The Macnairs have already sent us a message, Papa."

"Perhaps you forget to send messages because you have no owl. We can give you an owl if you're needing one."

"I should maybe write to people more often," Ariadne placated. She took two decks of cards out of the kitchen drawer. "Does Morag know how to play rummy?"

Remus was grateful that all the MacDougals accepted this cue as an unfloutable order to play rummy. They played six-handed, with Morag as Ariadne's partner and Aidan sitting on Janet's lap. The game was of limited suspense, because Morag kept asking questions like, "Can I meld with our five clubs?" and "Why can I not discard the king if he's no use to us?" Aidan was very taken by the artistic value of his mother's cards, and kept announcing, "Blackberry! S'awberry! Lady!" until he finally turned her hand right around to face her opponents so that he could examine the backs with an admiring, "Castle!"

Kenneth took shameless advantage of these exposures, so that Remus found himself close to gloating when he discovered that he himself could go out first. While Mr MacDougal calculated scores for the first round, Remus drew in the cards for the next deal, and one of the painted court cards dug sharp teeth into his palm.

"Remus, what's wrong?" Ariadne's response was instant.

"Nothing, I..." Did he really think a sheet of cardboard had *bitten* him? But when he held up his hand, blood was leaking out of what looked exactly like a ring of tooth-marks.

"It's only a scratch. Let's deal." He told himself that the Jack of Hearts was not really laughing at him.

Kenneth did win the next round, and Mrs MacDougal dealt the third hand. By this time Morag had mastered the rules, and she sat quietly on Ariadne's lap, gazing at her cards with round eyes, discreetly pointing at their next move. Now Kenneth was frowning, and making some distinctly short-sighted moves. It was Janet who quietly laid her final sequence onto the table, and her father-in-law who drew the cards towards him for the next shuffle. But before he had the last one in his hand, the Queen of Clubs seemed to stick to his thumb and almost crunched.

"Good gracious!" Mr MacDougal sucked his thumb, which was bleeding. "Who hexed these cards?"

"This is absurd," said Kenneth. "Cards do not bite. Deal!" And Mr MacDougal was parcelling out cards before Remus had time to suggest that they might be better off choosing a different activity.

This round Remus's mind was not on the game. He had five threes in his hand, but he forgot to meld. Then he discarded a seven that he needed to keep. He was brought down to earth by a shriek from Janet.

"They *are* hexed! That King of Diamonds was not wanting to lie on the table!" Two of her fingers were dripping blood out of a ring of tooth-marks.

"*Accio*, cards!" ordered Remus. "No more play tonight."

"I'm going to bathe Aidan," said Janet.

After that there was a great deal of fuss with putting out towels and soap in the bathroom, finding a bucket for Aidan's nappies, placing sound-barriers around the study windows so that Aidan wouldn't be disturbed by the city traffic, and Conjuring thicker curtains so he wouldn't be distracted by the street lamps. ("City Muggles are to be congratulated on ever managing to sleep at all.") Remus reduced his desk and bookcase to the size of matchboxes, while Kenneth restored the shrunk lilies that he had brought from Kincarden, but there wasn't room for all four of them in the study. Janet suggested shrinking one lily down again and letting Aidan lie head-to-feet with Morag. After ten minutes of politely insincere discussion ("I'm not thinking it would really be uncomfortable," and, "They will not be so restless as to disturb anybody during the night") Kenneth agreed to do it.

It took Remus the best part of twenty minutes to recognise that the guests did not need him upstairs: whatever trouble it was costing them to settle, they were enjoying the process and not really uncomfortable. He went downstairs, intending to boil the kettle, and found Morag alone in the living room.

For a moment he stopped still in the doorway, transfixed with horror. Morag was building a card-castle. It was quite elaborate, with turrets sticking out of the second storey as if glued there by magic, and the fourth storey was steeping impossibly towards a pinnacle. As he moved forward to distract her from the game, she gleefully picked up the King of Spades and balanced him at the topmost point with a triumphant, "There! He's the King of the Castle!"

For some reason, the cards never seemed to bite Morag.

A/N: The Wiltshire legend of the "moon-rakers" tells of yokels who tried to rake the moon's reflection out of a lake. Some say that the peasants were really smugglers who, having hidden their merchandise in the lake, pretended to be fools so that the authorities would think them too stupid to be doing anything illegal.

Wolf Moon Revealed

Chapter 8 of 21

Ariadne observes that the best people have their dark side.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Wolf Moon Revealed

Saturday 25 Sunday 26 January 1986

Old Basford, Nottingham.

Rated PG-13 for the explicitly bad and the implicitly worse.

It was late in January before Amelia Bones contacted them again. She chose a very inconvenient time, around three o'clock on a Saturday afternoon, only seconds after Ariadne had arrived home from Slug and Jigger's, and only half an hour before the rise of the full moon.

Ariadne raced back to the fireplace as soon as the Minister's head appeared, with a sinking suspicion that the conversation might last a very long time. She knew Madam Bones hadn't believed her assurance that she had married Remus voluntarily, so she was not surprised that the visitor's first words were: "I'm afraid this is all business, Ariadne. Do you wish to keep this just between the two of us?"

Ariadne shook her head vigorously. "I do not, Madam Bones, for Remus is needing to hear this too." She took his hand and drew him down to the hearth, so that they were sitting side by side directly in front of the Minister's line of vision. Ariadne kept hold of Remus's hand, caressing his fingers on her lap.

"Let me tell you the good news first," said Madam Bones. "The Macnair family has dismantled its burglar alarm. Walden Macnair was very concerned to hear about your accident, Ariadne; he said that if you had sent an owl about your visit, someone would have replied to explain that the family was out. But when they heard that an innocent visitor had been seriously hurt by the burglar alarm, they decided their protective spells were too strong, and they stripped them all down. We've had Aurors investigating, and there isn't a trace of them left."

So they claim. Ariadne sat still. The Macnairs had hurried home from Korea within an hour of discovering that their "burglar alarm" had been activated, but they had never sent any expression of regret or sympathy towards her accident they had had no interest in keeping up appearances before Ariadne herself.

"Does that mean that Macnair Castle is now visible again?" Remus asked.

"No, the invisibility spells were separate. Mr Macnair was quite free with the details there. The castle, and the members of the Macnair family, are still invisible to everyone outside the barrier, and the barrier still repels Muggles. What the Macnairs have removed is a hurling hex that detects malicious intentions and attacks any intruder who is

unfriendly to the inhabitants. They say they cannot imagine why it attacked Ariadne, but since it was obviously over-efficient, they took it away on the day after her accident."

Still feigning the motion of stroking Remus's fingers, Ariadne could feel his muscles stiffen under her touch. She pressed his hand gently, to remind him not to become angry, while she drew in her breath and asked very softly, "Madam Bones, had you the chance to speak to my friend Veleta?"

"She is now using the name 'Mrs Smith'," corrected the Minister. "Yes, I saw her, and alone. The Macnairs were very co-operative about that. They acted for all the world like people with nothing to hide." There was a shadow of doubt in Madam Bones' tone, but she continued briskly. "Mrs Smith assured me that she was very happy in Foss, that the Macnair family treated her kindly, and that she had no desire to leave. She said it was the only home she had ever known, and she wouldn't know where else in the world to go."

"That is what we were expecting." This time straining the anger out of her voice left the merest whisper, and Madam Bones had to lean forward in the fireplace to hear her. "Did you find no evidence of Memory Charms or Imperius or blackmail or Madam Bones, when I spoke to Veleta, she seemed so unhappy, so definite that she was wanting to escape... Did you find no evidence of any of that?"

"The law cannot recognise a vague impression that something might be wrong." Madam Bones spoke regretfully, as if she almost wished it could. "There was no objective evidence of foul play, Ariadne. Mrs Smith seemed very alert, and her story was quite clear and consistent, through nearly an hour of cross-examining some very simple facts. I was looking for symptoms of Imperius blank or dreamy expression, repeating rote-learned formulae over and over, monotonal speech, vagueness, robotic movements... there was nothing. Mrs Smith may not have been telling the truth, but she was certainly speaking voluntarily."

"But there was in fact a Memory Charm," said Remus. "Healer Strout will confirm that."

"I spoke to Healer Strout before I spoke to Mrs Smith. She was extremely reluctant to tell the Aurors anything a matter of the patient's privacy, you see. We went to some trouble to extract an Order of Confession to oblige her to breach confidence, and I had to visit her in person. But when she eventually brought out the record, I read it myself. The patient whom Healer Strout had known as Miss Vablatsky had been suffering from a clean and total loss of personal memory, was pregnant, had bruises on her left arm, and was in a state of intense distress."

Remus stifled a gasp as Ariadne nearly crushed his fingers. They both asked at the same moment, "Why was she distressed?"

"Healer Strout said that Miss Vablatsky seemed very agitated about being at St Mungo's, and insisted that she wished to return to Foss immediately. And that she would not let her friend out of her sight. That was the other point that Healer Strout raised... Miss Vablatsky had a friend with her at St Mungo's. You didn't mention that, Mr Lupin. Healer Strout said he was a tall dark young man with a Mancunian accent and that he was carrying the Portkey... can you identify this man?"

"I know his name."

"Then why didn't you mention him before? In court you made it sound as if it were you were alone with Miss Vablatsky, without witnesses, and you were convicted. Then you admitted to me over tea that Ariadne had been there. Now there is a fourth person as well. How many more of you were present?"

"Just the four of us, and Miss Vablatsky's two children."

The Minister sighed. "I'm afraid this concealing of important information will tell against you, Mr Lupin. It implies that you have something to hide. And that's in a story that is already telling against you, since this is the second time Ariadne has interfered in Miss Vablatsky's affairs, yet there is no evidence of any untoward dealings."

"There were bruises," said Ariadne quietly. She forced herself to relax, and had resumed stroking Remus's hands quite gently. "And what she said to me... is my witness nothing?"

"Mrs Smith told me at Foss that the bruises had occurred when she slipped on the stairs. And before the law, Ariadne, your witness counts only if it supports Mrs Smith's. You are not an eyewitness to her life, and she declares that her life does not require intervention."

"But we've established that she has a damaged memory. Will she not be taken to St Mungo's?"

"She has been invited to St Mungo's," said Madam Bones, "but she has declined the invitation. She says that she cannot go anywhere without her children, who are unable to leave Foss. Ariadne, I'm not happy with that answer, but your friend is an adult. She is no danger to anyone else, and her disorder is not life-threatening; she cannot be forced to accept medical treatment against her will."

"Can the Healers not go to Foss to treat her there?"

Madam Bones almost smiled. "And transport all that hospital equipment to a private home, for the sake of a private patient who is perfectly *capable* of bringing herself to St Mungo's? Ariadne, you know that the system doesn't work that way. Now, this brings me to the other thing... the Portkey, and its failure to transport the children. As I promised, the Aurors inquired quite thoroughly into the issue of whether the Dark Arts had been used." She paused. "We found no spell-work traces on the children at all. Whatever was done must have been done by potion-work. That is itself strange, since potions rarely have permanent effects and the Aurors found no potion traces either. But the most interesting aspect was what Mrs Smith told us. She claimed that, although she had no idea what kind of spell had been used, she had consented to its use on the day each child was born."

"That cannot be true," breathed Ariadne. "Veleta certainly did not know eight weeks ago that her children could not be Transported." She could hear time ticking away; Remus would have to make his excuses if the conversation did not end within minutes.

"Her story at present is that the children need to be detained at Foss because they are in danger of being magically kidnapped by their father's relatives. And with no evidence of the Dark Arts to hand, and with Mrs Smith's own consent to the detention, the law has no reason to interfere."

Remus brought the conversation to the point. "Madam Bones, do you really believe, beyond reasonable doubt, that the truth has been told here?"

"To be honest, I have many doubts," she said, "but none that would stand up in court. Without Mrs Smith's own co-operation, there *is not* anything that the law can do to investigate her interests. Without definite external evidence, we cannot prove that she has been forced to lie. My dear, I have done all I can. I may be Head of Department, but I cannot place myself above the law and, before the law, there isn't a case. It was hard enough to convince Scrimgeour that it was worth re-opening Mrs Smith's file at all. You have to remember that Walden Macnair is his brother-in-law. He protested that you had cherished some grudge against the Macnairs from your schooldays, that you had made wild accusations before, that the new story added next to nothing to the old... truth to tell, Ariadne, I had to pull rank and give him a direct order before he moved. And then I had to move most of the investigation myself because the Aurors kept pushing it back to their lowest priority. But that does give us one powerful advantage, my dear... I *did* investigate in person, and I *do* know all about this case."

"And you're disliking the smell of it, but there remains nothing you can do."

"And I dislike the smell of it, but there remains nothing I can do." Amelia Bones paused, as if listening to some distraction in her own house. "Ariadne, I have to go, but first I must warn you. If you find concrete evidence of something amiss something actually illegal in Mrs Smith's life, come and tell me, and I shall act. But otherwise... it isn't just that you can't help your friend. These inquiries are annoying an influential wizarding family, and they would know all kinds of ways of making life unpleasant for you." Her eyes flickered to Remus, and Ariadne wondered if she had checked his name on the Ministry registries. "Ariadne, if you and your husband tempt fate by launching a third enquiry, I probably won't be able to do anything to protect you. You'd only be digging yourselves into a difficult hole that might harm you and couldn't help anyone else."

"We're understanding that, Madam Bones. We're not asking for favours."

"And I'm not saying I'll never grant you any. But I have to fly. Pass my regards on to your parents... but I expect I'll see them soon anyway. Good afternoon!"

Remus sprang to his feet the second her head vanished. The conversation had taken twenty minutes, so he had perhaps five left. A million thoughts swirled around Ariadne's head as she followed him out to the garage, and it wasn't until he had the door open that he looked at her. When he reached out to touch her face, and she realised that his thumb was brushing away tears, she enclosed his hand and pushed it back to him. "We've no time," she reminded him on a choke. It was the worst moment to be left alone; she tried to remember how she had processed overwhelming horror before she had known Remus.

He backed into the garage. "Sweetheart, I "

She shook her head. "We can talk tomorrow. Or the next day. Or " But he was standing paralysed, unable to close the door between them. Finally she begged, "Remus, do not send me away!"

"Dearest, I'm the one who's going away in about two minutes."

"I'm knowing what's going to happen," she acknowledged, "and I'm knowing the person behind the garage door will not exactly be you. But I... I'm wanting not to be alone tonight!"

"I don't want you to be alone either. But the wolf is no company... it isn't a dog, you know. Do you really think the wolf would be less frightening than whatever's preying on your imagination?"

"Of course it would!" She drew a steady breath. "I'm sorry. That was childish. I know you're not wanting to be seen."

"But it isn't whether I " he began. Suddenly he waved his wand at the garage door and ordered it, *Transparens*!"

The door became as clear as glass.

"It isn't glass," he explained quickly. "It's still wood, and it won't break. Ariadne, if you see anything that frightens you... promise me you'll walk away and won't look again."

She nodded, but her words were cut off by a jerk in his shoulders and a stinging spasm across his face. With his last human movement, he thrust his wand at her and slammed the door. As she locked it, she saw a wrenching agony throw him down onto all fours.

She flinched when his limbs shot out in all directions. His face was so twisted that for a moment she could not tell whether he were reacting to pain or whether this were part of the shape-shifting. She knew his face had to stretch, his arms drop to the floor as forepaws; what shocked her was the way steel-grey hair was sprouting out of his ears, his neck, his cleaving fingers. She hadn't realised that excess hair looked so bestial... she understood now why he hadn't liked her to see him wearing a moustache. By the time she had completed that thought, it was no longer a case of *looking* bestial: Remus had become the wolf.

He arched his neck and extended his jaws. Ariadne knew from the throbbing larynx that he was howling, although of course she couldn't hear anything. Then he hurled himself against the wall, and she recoiled. The fangs were real, the jaws were slaving, even the claws could have ripped her open from throat to navel. Before she had time to consider that further, she saw that the wolf had collapsed to the hard floor, jaws snapping in the motions of yelps; he was very obviously in torment. She asked herself for a moment why he hadn't aimed for the invisible door, where he could see human prey was waiting, then realised that Remus wouldn't have been so foolish as to make the door transparent in both directions. Even on the verge of losing his senses to the wolf, he had had the presence of mind to use a one-way transparency spell.

The door was still between them. It was as thick as it had been last month. She was perfectly safe. And she was not distracting the wolf, who could not see her. But he was still distressed, and a danger to himself. She had no way of knowing whether he had slammed himself against the wall like that last month or the month before, or whether he was acting out a specific distress tonight. Did he retain some nebulous awareness of the horror-story that Madam Bones had just told them, or of his fears connected with her own presence? Or could he somehow smell or hear her, beyond the thickness of the sealed door?

She made herself watch. The wolf was biting himself, and she wondered how long he usually took to settle down. She could imagine that a larger animal say, an outsized dog could have butted the wolf's head away from such destructive behaviour, could have lured him out to harmless play. She shivered to realise that the presence of a criminal like Sirius Black might have seemed comforting right now.

But Sirius, along with James and Peter, had provided company for the poor wolf, genuine animal companionship. And this option, Ariadne suddenly knew, would never be open to her. Her Transfiguration skills were not, and never would be, of Animagus standard. The sight of her, a mere human, would never soothe the wolf; he could only perceive her as prey. Tonight, when he most needed her, he could not even see her. She no longer existed in his world.

She tried not to cry. It was only as much as he had been trying to tell her all along. But that was *if he had tried to tell her* Remus still existed for her; he was inextricably buried inside the desperate wolf, but in some sense he still existed. Even when he did not know her, she still knew him. If she turned away from the garage door and left him there unwatched, she would have walked away from him. As long as she sat here, she was near whatever was left of him shape-shifted, mind-addled, a senseless mass of self-torture but Remus was still in there somewhere. He might not be aware of her, but she was fixated on him. And tonight, of all nights, she did not want to process the day's events without him.

The wolf slumped to the floor in temporary defeat. He was twitching too much to be asleep, and there was blood she would attend to that in the morning but he had stopped biting and was lying more quietly. It was easier to believe that, somewhere inside the quieter beast, she might yet find Remus. But as soon as she could release the breath she hadn't known she was holding as soon as Remus was safe from attacking himself she was assaulted by thoughts of Veleta.

She and Remus hadn't had time to talk. And she needed to hear his wisdom on Madam Bones's words. She had no idea if she were blowing things out of proportion... but there was so much that Madam Bones simply hadn't *seen*. And Remus in his present form now staggering to his feet and opening his throat for another howl was unable to help. This howl felt half-hearted, as if the wolf knew that no fellow-canine would ever hear. Remus in his teacher mode would have Summoned a note-pad and summarised the new information and told her the logical conclusion. Her own mind, presumably in tired-out-and-aching-for-the-wolf-and-missing-Remus mode, was quite unable to conduct an analysis; it could only pounce on random details and shake them into a chaotic image that might be entirely wrong.

Veleta was pregnant. She didn't understand how Madam Bones could recite the fact and not recognise it as important. At the very least, it carved a major hole out of the Macnairs' story that Veleta was a widow. Were they suddenly going to propose that John Smith had been miraculously resuscitated, or that Veleta who never left the castle had met somebody else? It was not as if she had been wearing a wedding ring, let alone two of them, or had mentioned, "By the way, it's Mrs Brown now." *I never did believe that 'John Smith' really existed*, she reminded herself. So how had Veleta become pregnant? Ariadne did not like the kinds of answers that were suggesting themselves.

But she loves those children. They are all the world to her.

This was true but not comforting. It did not prove that Veleta had wanted to become a mother; it only proved that her maternal instincts were stronger than... than *what*?

The wolf scratched at the wall, probably whining and begging to be let outside. But it soon slumped with a helpless air, and rubbed its head against its paws. It looked so pathetic that Ariadne found herself considering the idea of moving over to sit next to it and rubbing its neck, even while she knew the door lay between them. The problem was, it didn't look like a glass door. It looked like an empty space like an invisible barrier. *And*, she reminded herself severely, *I have learned something about invisible barriers*.

How like the Macnairs to remove their killing-hex for the day of an Auror investigation! She did not doubt that they had re-erected it within an hour of the Aurors' departure. A *hurling hex*, indeed! Madam Bones had heard the Healer's report that the hex had included *Animum Quiesco*, which ought to have killed Ariadne, and which could hardly

have settled itself into the barrier by accident. But Madam Bones had accepted the Macnairs' word: "Very sorry, it *was* an accident, we were not intending our defences to be so strong." And somehow the Aurors' evidence that there was no spell today was deemed more significant than a Healer's evidence that there *had* been a spell last December.

Yet Madam Bones was not corrupt, and she had spoken to Healer Strout personally. Did she not recognise the implications of *Animum Quiesco*?

And by what fluke had Ariadne been immune to the full force of the spell?

The wolf really was asleep now. He looked very dog-like, almost tame. As he lay quietly, Ariadne's thoughts settled and lay quietly as well, but like a blanket of hopelessness. Madam Bones believed there was nothing more to be done for Veleta. She had warned Remus that Dark Arts practitioners were good at covering their tracks (Ariadne would have expected nothing less of Uncle Macnair), and lack of evidence meant no more help from the law. Madam Bones would listen if they could produce more evidence, but she would not pursue the case. And she had never met Veleta she had no stake in it.

Who was left in the world who did care about Veleta? Herself, Remus, Hestia, Ivor and Kingsley all of whom had been Banned from Foss and warned to stay away. That left Sarah, Richard and for what it was worth Joe. And they could possibly enlist sympathy from Sturgis or Emmeline or the Chittocks. Each of them could become involved in *one* attempt to rescue Veleta's children, and then if they survived a failed attempt they would be permanently eliminated from further usefulness.

There was no point in even attempting it unless they could first work out the nature of the Dark Magic that detained the bairns at Foss. And they could not begin to do that unless they had some kind of contact with an ally inside Macnair Castle. As far as Ariadne could see, the only possible ally was Veleta herself, who had already told them everything that she was able to tell.

Ariadne must have slept, because there were confusing dreams about magical barriers and bleeding wolves and people with chocolate-brown eyes, but it was only with the dawning of the new day that anything like a new idea dawned into the bleak situation. Remus was awake behind the invisible door, so she unlocked it. She heard him asking her something, but she didn't hear his question. There was somebody else who might help.

She opened her eyes, looked at Remus properly, and stood up. "Dearest, it was fine. The wolf did no harm last night, except to itself. Here, lean on me... you badly need a yarrow lotion, and probably a Strengthening Potion too."

She knew he didn't like being nursed, but he meekly leaned on her shoulders, and they progressed slowly across to the living room, where he sagged down on the sofa. Although she tried to smile reassuringly while she Summoned the yarrow lotion, he was still frowning doubtfully as he suffered her ministrations.

"What Madam Bones told us," he began, "doesn't make sense..."

"Hush, we'll talk later." The first Summoning Charm had succeeded, so she tried Summoning a blanket. When Remus consented to close his eyes, she Summoned her writing pad and quills and sat down at the kitchen table.

She had to write a very long letter to Cassandra Vablatsky.

Properties of Moondew

Chapter 9 of 21

Some things just can't be spoken out loud.

CHAPTER NINE

Properties of Moondew

Saturday 8 February Tuesday 24 June 1986

Old Basford, Nottingham; Diagon Alley, London.

Rated PG for references to alcohol abuse, insanity, bankruptcy and other unpleasant aspects of being an adult.

"I'd forgotten how vile the climate can be here!" said the dinner-guest, as she stepped out of the Floo and shook snow from her boot. "I found an icicle growing in my cistern which doesn't flush and walking in the wind on my way to the public Floo was like being whipped with knives! Remind me, Mrs Lupin is every winter like this?"

"I'm believing it's worse than usual this year," said Ariadne. "I'm so glad that you could come, Professor Vablatsky. You've probably not met my husband before this is Remus Lupin."

The thick eyebrows concentrated over the chocolate-brown eyes. "I think I do recognise you, young man. Weren't you one of the boys who were always hanging around with James Potter? And, of course, I certainly remember Miss Webster."

"Welcome home, Professor." Sarah shook hands with her old teacher with a warmth that she usually reserved for her male acquaintances. "And I think you can't have forgotten Richard Campion or Joe Fenwick?"

If Professor Vablatsky had mislaid their names, she didn't admit to it. She took Joe's hand, a dark shadow crossed her face, and she dropped it again abruptly. "I see you have suffered a major trauma since we last met," she said. "But Mr Campion do you still play Quidditch? I missed the British Quidditch League when I was in New Zealand."

Ariadne left her friends to tell Professor Vablatsky what they now did with their lives while she brought mushroom soup to the table. It seemed a long time before the guest of honour was ready to stop asking questions and begin answering them.

"I put my affairs in order as soon as I received Mrs Lupin's owl," she said. "I returned to the British Isles four days ago. I sold my old house five years ago, when I thought I'd never return home, but I've just bought myself a new one in Galway."

"But that's... miles from everywhere!" exclaimed Richard. Ariadne was surprised too, for the Vablatsky family had always lived in Guildford, and there was only one Floo grate in Ireland powerful enough to connect over the Irish Sea it no longer seemed surprising that Professor Vablatsky had had to walk through the snow between grates in

order to reach Nottingham.

"Exactly. Miles and miles away. It'll take those media sharks years to work out exactly where I am. Meanwhile, I have a quiet house with five spare bedrooms in a very Muggle village. If we ever pull Veleta and the children out of Perthshire, they will have a very private home."

Joe nodded, the first sign that he had been listening, while Ariadne collected the dishes and brought the two casseroles out of the oven. Remus's distaste for meat was slowly weakening, but she still kept the shredded chicken in a separate dish so that he was free to avoid it.

"So tell us, Professor," Sarah urged. "What's going to happen to Veleta? After all these years... didn't you *know* she was still alive?"

"No, I didn't." The prophetess spoke very matter-of-factly as she spooned out paella. "I've never been able to See much for Veleta. I've always been too close to her. Obviously, when I heard my son had been murdered, the first thing I did was to consult the crystal. But it told me nothing. Nor did the cards, or the runes, or even the zodiac wheel. There was just fog, and silence, and intense sadness but not even clear enough to be accepted as confirmation of death. It seems that no magic can untangle our most complex emotions enough to forecast a future."

"So does that mean that you can't that you won't be able to divine anything about Veleta's present situation? What's happening to her in Foss, or what kind of spells are keeping her there, or what we can do about it?"

"I'm afraid not, my dear. Not by any magical method, anyway."

Sarah came close to pouting, as if a prophetess with no prophecies were wasting their time.

"But you can go to Foss, can't you?" Richard prompted. "You're a prominent community member. If you went to the castle, saw for yourself, and kicked up a fuss in the media you could do *something*, couldn't you?"

"You could do that part better than I. I probably *can't* enter the castle because the Macnairs have cast some kind of spell over me... something they call *Banning*."

"We know about that." Remus groaned. "It means that if you try to enter the castle you'll die."

"I don't understand," said Richard. "Why would social climbers like the Macnairs want to Ban a famous person like Cassandra Vablatsky?"

"Because I'm *infamous*. It's to do with a prophecy that I made, oh, twenty years ago now. They asked me to dinner along with a whole crowd of important guests and then asked me to foretell their futures in front of everyone. I did warn them that it wasn't a good idea, but they wanted to impress their guests, and I'm afraid that what the crystal told me was... rather embarrassing."

"Oh, do tell!" said Sarah. "After everything they've done to Veleta, can't we know about their embarrassments?"

Professor Vablatsky laughed bitterly. "After everything they've done to Veleta, their other little sins won't surprise you too much. I Saw that Walden Macnair would waste his loyalty on a Dark Lord and spill much innocent blood, yet gain no profit. That Gertrude would continue to have sorrow in her married life without gaining in character, and that Crudelia would always be assumed insane. By this time the hall was so silent that I realised I'd been... too honest."

"Had they dropped a truth potion into your wine?" asked Sarah breathlessly.

"I'm certain of it now, my dear, but I didn't realise it at the time. So when Walden said, 'Don't stop,' I found myself telling him that the Macnairs would be cast into utter penury because his son Humphrey who was about nine years old at the time would drown his life away in Firewhisky. At this point Gertrude was overcome with rage, and asked me what else I had to say about the Macnair bairns. So I said that the Lestrangle nephews would be the most notorious criminals of their time, while Baldwin would spend his youth in Azkaban without becoming famous for it, and little Dragomira would make a name for herself by specialising in spells that required... cruelty to small animals. I even said that Gertrude's unborn child would grow up to cheat the Macnair boundaries and do the deed that her ancestors had most dreaded. It was all quite nasty, really."

"And Walden Macnair didn't throw a hatchet at you?" Richard helped himself to the last scoop of rice.

"Even *he* didn't dare attack me in front of all his guests! But the next day I received a Howler telling me I'd been Banned. And I wasn't too interested in finding out exactly what that meant."

"Well, some of it's come true," said Richard. "We all know that old Walden was a Death Eater, and it's difficult to imagine that Gertrude is happy about being married to him. Baldwin's in Azkaban for trying to kill Ariadne, and his Lestrangle cousins were all over the *Daily Prophet* when they tortured the Longbottoms."

"And Dragomira's animal fetish *ugh*." Sarah tried to speak lightly, but her tone was brittle. "I only hope it's true that Regelinda will disgrace her ancestors. I don't foresee it, though. She's such a Macnairish Macnair. Professor, what do you intend to do while we're waiting around for inspiration about Veleta? Would you go back to teaching?"

"No, I've finished that chapter of my life. In fact, chapters are what I'm doing at the moment. I'm writing a book."

Ariadne knew at once that Professor Vablatsky had a draft in her pocket. And, sure enough, the conversation for the rest of the evening revolved around the fascinating topic of *Unfogging the Future*.

* * * * *

"I'm surprised Professor Vablatsky didn't want to spend more time talking about her long-lost granddaughter," said Remus afterwards.

"I'm feeling she finds the subject too painful. She's a visionary, and for this situation she has no visions. So she's... not going to help us after all. Not unless somebody else tells her what to do. I was hoping that *she* would have ideas for *us*."

"She said that your cousin Regelinda would 'cheat the Macnair boundaries'. Could that be a clue?"

"Perhaps. But even if Regelinda has discovered a way to horrify her ancestors... are you thinking she'd share her discovery with us?"

"Certainly not tonight," he agreed. "No, definitely not tonight. It's far too late in the evening..."

* * * * *

Professor Vablatsky had not exaggerated: the weather was so cold that no wizard ventured into Diagon Alley. The Post Office owls huddled on their perches, refusing to deliver mail, and Madam Jigger had to hand-deliver bulk orders of Pepper-Up Potion by Floo. By mid-afternoon the orders were completed, the books were up to date, and the laboratory was spotless; there was not even a research project to hand, for Ariadne's report on diet pills was already sitting on the publisher's desk.

Even Professor Jigger was too bored with being trapped indoors to pretend he needed to mix a potion. "We'll start your sleeping draught project as soon as the weather clears," he said, "but there's no point in keeping the shop open any longer today. Miss MacDougal, be here at the usual time tomorrow."

Ariadne took the Floo back to her empty house. Remus, who was in the final week of his second teaching round, had been assigned to a Reception class in Mapperley, where the tiny pupils paid more for their haircuts than for their designer shoes, but where surprising numbers of them were unable to count to ten. A sweet young lady

named Miss Peach was instructing him on the best way of teaching them nursery rhymes. The hardest part of the job was that Remus had to walk nearly three miles through the snow every morning (he usually contrived a way to Apparate home). But today he would not be arriving any time soon, for this afternoon he had a teachers' meeting and would not be home before six. There was not much for Ariadne to do except curl up in front of a blue fire and open Hesper Starkey's *Soporifics and Hypnotics* to pore over the herbological breakdown of natural sleep-inducers.

She had written two pages of notes before the fire crackled and turned green. Her brother's head was in the flames.

"Ariadne, are you alone? Thank Merlin. It's taken weeks to catch you home alone on a day when our parents are both out. I'm not wanting to trouble them with this very serious matter."

"I'm listening." She knew she was supposed to ask what the problem was, but somehow she felt it wasn't as important as Kenneth liked to believe.

"Ariadne, have you still those cards that were hexed to bite?"

"I have not. Remus did not let me touch them; he destroyed them the day after you left."

"So he disliked being caught out, did he?" said Kenneth. "Where did he buy the cards?"

Ariadne ignored this insulting insinuation and answered softly, "He did not. They were a present to me from Uncle Macnair. They had a picture of Macnair Castle on the backs, remember?"

"Whatever their origin, they were hexed. Ariadne, think carefully about this. Could Remus ever have been alone with those cards and hexed them?"

"The Macnairs cast the hex."

"It's not appropriate to cast wild accusations without evidence. The Macnairs are very respectable people. Whereas Remus never did make very much of himself. When he worked here at Kincarden he was always disappearing off somewhere..."

The hairs rose on Ariadne's neck and she dropped her eyes to the floor. The flow of her brother's narrative did not falter.

"... and reappearing as a nervous wreck. I seriously suspected him of alcoholism. But Janet seems to have been nearer the mark she thought he had symptoms of spell damage. And those hexed cards only confirm it. The kindest thing I can say about them is that Remus has a very spiteful sense of humour."

"You're certainly wishing him to be guilty of something."

"I " Kenneth pulled himself up short. "Rubbish. I'm wishing to save you before you're dragged in any deeper. Remus likes jinxes, even though he's too much of an amateur to save himself from the consequences of his own spells. I spoke to Severus last month and he confirmed all my suspicions. He says that Remus used to be a close friend of the mass-murderer Sirius Black."

Kenneth paused, presumably to check whether she were shocked or defiant. She refused to look at him.

"Ariadne, I think you're needing to consider seriously the possibility that you've married a man who plays with the Dark Arts."

"I am not." Ariadne lifted her head again. "You're guessing wrongly, Kenneth. Remus loathes the Dark Arts. He's never "

"I'm not here to argue," Kenneth interrupted. "If you will not face reality, that's your problem. I've given my warning. Until Remus can demonstrate decent mature behaviour, I'm having nothing more to do with him. And nor are my bairns."

Ariadne froze on her knees.

"You heard me. I'm not loosing my bairns in a house of spiteful jinxes and Dark artefacts. Either Remus grows up, or you give up on him, or you both stay right away from Morag and Aidan." And Kenneth's head disappeared from the hearth in a blaze of triumph.

For Ariadne, there might as well have been no fire. *Kenneth's wanting to believe that Remus is dangerous* The absurdity was devoid of humour, since the consequence was that she might never see Morag and Aidan again.

If Remus were home she would throw herself into his arms and weep a full cauldron... no. Her bone-marrow frosted over with the lonely realisation *can never tell Remus about this*. He had suffered enough rejection for reasons related to his lycanthropy; he was not needing to hear that he was now accused of Dark magic, or that he was unfit company for children.

So she cried out, and washed her face, and began to chop onions for dinner.

Remus said, "You seem distant this evening."

"Perhaps I'm thinking about Potions," she said. "Professor Jigger has finally agreed that I can begin work on a sleeping draught. I cannot decide between henbane and sweet violet as a base."

"Why not poppy syrup?"

She suppressed a genuine smile as she reminded him, "The idea is to induce sleep for a night, not a week! Have you any idea how many opiates would be striking the cerebrum if the primary decoction were poppy?" And so the subject was turned.

* * * * *

Professor Jigger became bored with waiting for the weather to improve. After two more days of closing the shop early, he decreed that they would use the days of light custom to begin work on the sleeping draught.

"But forget about the henbane and violet juvenilia," he said. "If you're serious about sending people to sleep, use moon dew."

Ariadne was by now familiar with all Professor Jigger's cupboards, but she had never seen moon dew in any of them. It was almost unobtainably rare; on the N.E.W.T. syllabus it had been mentioned as a mere academic theory.

He was unimpressed by her astonishment. "Of course you can get it, if you know where to look. But remember that it loses its potency when exposed to fresh air. You'll need to use a spearmint decoction to seal it."

Her mind raced. Moon dew would catch illusions and multiply visions, but spearmint was a stimulant. The problem was how to preserve the fragile lunar properties of the moon dew without upsetting the hypnotic balance and creating a *waking* hallucinogen.

No examiner, requiring an answer within the hour, would expect a N.E.W.T. student to solve the problem. It was a calculation beyond the limits of the Hogwarts syllabus. A dozen possibilities were charging into her mind, but she couldn't produce the correct solution without quill and parchment. But perhaps... if she added desiccated fennel and stirred widdershins...

Even when Professor Jigger brought out the unlabelled star-shaped phial, he did not volunteer how he had procured it. He only said, "While you're at it, remember that the product has to be commercially viable. Fresh moon dew is an exorbitant price, but it can be forced to self-perpetuate in the laboratory. Show me how you'd set about that."

* * * * *

The snow was still falling well into April. On a miserable evening when the rain was undecided whether to become sleet, and Remus was preparing an oral presentation on Non-English Speaking Children in the Multicultural Classroom, a voice from the fireplace called, "Is anybody home?"

"Mercy, what's wrong?" Ariadne flew to the hearth. "We're not busy... come in and talk properly."

Mercy Macmillan whirled in the flames and stepped into their living room. She was fighting back tears. "Ariadne, I've made a mess of everybody's life."

"How miserable." Ariadne set a pint of milk to boil on the stove-range, then stirred a teaspoon of crushed hypericum and a teaspoon of cacao into a mug.

"It is! I'm thinking I've destroyed Kingsley!"

"You're feeling responsible for everything that's gone wrong."

"Well, I am. Hestia says I've just about killed Kingsley, and she's so angry that I'm wondering if we can ever be friends again."

Mercy was alarmingly close to breaking down, so Ariadne passed a handkerchief. Mercy sniffed into it.

"And I'm not knowing if Kingsley will ever be normal again. He'll fail his exams, he'll never be an Auror, and it's all my fault!"

Ariadne handed her cousin a mug of hot chocolate and sat quietly beside her. Mercy gulped at it, then sipped tearfully without speaking. Ariadne pushed away the thought that she had a report to write for Jigger, and let Mercy take her time. Only when the mug was empty did Mercy speak again.

"Kingsley chucked me yesterday. I never thought he would. I really thought he'd stand by me no matter what. But he left me feeling," Mercy's eyes were wide with terror, "that he *despised* me."

It must have been a bruising experience, but Ariadne wondered what Mercy had left out.

Mercy was apparently expecting Ariadne to say something. She eventually broke the silence with: "He saw me with somebody else." Pause. "It was Dempster Wiggleswade."

Ariadne remembered Dempster Wiggleswade, a large-framed Ravenclaw who had been Mercy's first boyfriend, right back in their fourth year at Hogwarts. Mercy had been devastated when Dempster had abandoned her for Ivor's sister Gwenog; she had never seemed so attached to any of her subsequent boyfriends. "Are you thinking you and Dempster will get back together again?"

"He said he was wanting to," said Mercy, tears trickling down her cheeks, "but there was Kingsley. I've been with him for nine months, and we were supposed to be committed. My parents like Kingsley. He's honest, hardworking, even-tempered, very clever... and I suppose he's good-looking, too. You were expecting me to end up with him, were you not, Ariadne?"

Ariadne had never expected that; she had sensed from the beginning that Mercy wasn't seriously interested in Kingsley. "Were you feeling pressured to stay with Kingsley?"

"Nobody *said* anything," Mercy admitted truthfully. "But I was feeling how they'd all be... disappointed... if it did not work out. Most of all, Kingsley himself. He'd be so broken-hearted if I changed my mind. So I had to *make* it work. And it might have, if Dempster had not turned up again."

"But were *you* wanting to be with Kingsley?"

"In a way I was. I'm not like you, Ariadne. I was frightened of leaving my parents' house having to live alone and earn a living. Kingsley helped me move into the flat in Diagon Alley, and he carried on looking after me. I do *like* him. Being with him was better than being alone. We really might have stayed together if I had not met Dempster again. Then Dempster was wanting me to meet him... and I was feeling it better not to tell Kingsley... so I was seeing both of them... Ariadne, I was never *intending* to go out with two men at once!"

"It took you by surprise, then."

"It certainly did! At first I was only seeing Dempster as a friend; and when it happened... when he said...*when he kissed me*... I knew I had to break up with Kingsley. But it was hard to find a good moment. It took," her voice dropped to an inaudible mutter, "six weeks. And then last night, just as I really was going to do it I was, Ariadne, really! Kingsley *saw* us. In the worst way. Dempster was kissing me in the living room just as Kingsley Flooded into the fireplace. And Kingsley *heard* me telling Dempster I loved him. We were not even knowing he was there until we looked up and saw him standing in front of the sofa with a bunch of red roses. And he just *looked* at us, never saying a word, and laid down the flowers and Disappeared."

"How terrifying."

"It was. And an hour later an owl tapped on the window, and Kingsley had sent *methis*." The scrap of paper that Mercy pulled out of her sleeve was so crumpled and blotted that Ariadne was struggling to make out the familiar handwriting.

Mercy,

Just in case it wasn't clear, we have now officially broken up.

Have a happy life,

KLS.

"He's so calm so controlled so furious with me... and I've ruined his life. Hestia's angry that I didn't tell him six weeks ago, and Sarah says that love is too complicated to have rules of right and wrong, and now Hestia's shouting at Sarah too. But Sarah says nobody can help these things, and Kingsley will get over it... she's maybe right about that, are you not thinking?"

"You're hoping no permanent damage is done."

"But was it such a very wicked thing to do?" Mercy pleaded. "I *have* to be with Dempster. And it happened because I'm *not liking* to hurt people. Surely there are many wronger things in the world..."

Two hours and three handkerchiefs later, Mercy had gone to bed in the study (she hadn't the courage to return to Diagon Alley) and Ariadne was aimlessly pulling yet more stuffing out of the sofa, feeling that she was needing the hypericum almost as much as her cousin was. Mercy had been very very willing to pour out her troubles, had

thanked Ariadne for taking so much interest... yet Ariadne was left with the dismaying suspicion that she had said all the wrong things.

Remus finally laid his quill down on the dining table and looked over at her. What she saw in his face tore at her heart worse than any of Mercy's tears.

"You're displeased with me," she said.

"I'm sure you did the best you could." He spoke evenly, but he slapped his presentation notes into a folder with unnecessary force. "To be honest, I've no idea how I'd handle a situation like that, and I'm glad I didn't have to."

"But you'd not have done it that way."

He moved into the kitchen and took two mugs out of the cupboard. Ariadne watched until it was clear that he had no intention of speaking, and then returned to fiddling with the stuffing. Mercy had been so unhappy, so sorry about making Kingsley miserable, so guilty... yet so ready to make excuses for herself, so unwilling to admit that she had actually been selfish or deceptive...

Remus handed her a mug and sat down next to her, still without comment. Ariadne knew at first sniff that he too had mixed hypericum with cacao; he had been watching her earlier. That meant he hadn't really had his whole mind on his presentation he must have absorbed most of what had happened on the sofa.

"You're doing to me what I was doing to Mercy," she said at last.

"What were you doing to Mercy?"

"Not telling her that she was wrong."

"I don't like to tell people they're wrong." He took a careful sip so as to avoid her eye. "I like to focus on the positives."

"Mercy was already so miserable. I was not wanting to make her feel worse."

Remus still did not look at her as he hunted for words. "She might perhaps feel better in the long term if, just for a few minutes, she acknowledged she had been selfish and decided to apologise to Kingsley." He did not add, *You have prolonged her misery by encouraging her not to acknowledge her mistake* but she felt it hanging in the air between them.

It was a very long minute before Remus spoke again. "Actually you did well to keep your temper as long as you did. I couldn't have. I'm afraid my sympathies right now are with Kingsley."

"So are mine," she agreed. "As soon as we have Mercy out of the house, we should invite him to dinner."

* * * * *

By the time Kingsley came to dinner, he had moved into the Auror dormitories so as to avoid Diagon Alley. He spent the evening pouring out his troubles. But he was evidently embarrassed to have burdened them, because he refused their next invitation.

"He doesn't visit us either," complained Sarah. "Even if Mercy is going out, he won't risk it."

"I don't blame him," said Hestia, after Sarah had gone. "Ariadne, it's *so hard* not to be angry with Mercy. I try to be nice, but I don't know what to say to her any more."

"The silence is thick enough to cut," said Mercy, after Hestia had gone. "Hestia says nothing but I can see *hethinking*. Whereas Sarah does not care about what I did, but she complains all day long that Kingsley is not wanting to be *her* friend any more. Ariadne, I'm thinking I cannot live with them any more!"

Mercy moved out to the Healers' dormitories at St Mungo's. Sarah let the spare bedroom to a French tourist.

"She's a wonderful gourmet cook," said Hestia after one week. "I'm learning so much from her."

"I've dismissed her," said Sarah after another week. "I found her in bed with my boyfriend. We've found an Austrian this time."

"She's amazing with her cleaning polishes," said Sarah the next week.

"She's very particular about housework," said Hestia dubiously. "She's too sensible to annoy Sarah, but she picks *orme* quite a lot."

Evidently Sarah wised up to the situation, because after another week the boarder was Japanese.

"She's polite and quiet and no trouble at all," they both reported.

But a fortnight later the new flatmate vanished, and Sarah's collection of Wedgwood jasperware vanished with her.

Confidence under a Crescent Moon

Chapter 10 of 21

Ariadne reveals all.

CHAPTER TEN

Confidence under a Crescent Moon

Thursday 12 Friday 13 June 1986

Old Basford, Nottingham.

Rated PG-13 for explicit reference to poisons.

A/N. Please do not try to brew the potion described in this chapter at home. You are likely to end up killing someone. You probably won't manage to brew it correctly unless you are a descendant of Ankarad Murray.

"I'm sorry I'm not much company this evening," said Remus.

"We cannot be fascinating every day," said Ariadne, as she cleared the dinner plates from the table. "I'll wash up by myself. You're needing the time to study."

"I've been revising all day. I could give you a long lecture on Curriculum and Integration."

"And I could give you one on Potions.*Lavo!*" Hot water gushed into the kitchen sink and the glasses hopped into the water. "Are you bored with exams?"

"I'm boring myself almost as much as I'll bore you if I tell you about it all. Aren't you bored by the thought of sitting by yourself every evening for a fortnight?"

"Are you not just looking for an excuse not to revise?" she asked.

He was, but not seriously. He was eight days away from the end of term; before he was married, seeing to the end of another eight days had been easy. But there was a difference between comparing exam revision with deadly solitude and comparing exam revision with Ariadne. "What will you be doing if I study all evening?" he asked.

"Potions. I've plenty to do." She kissed his cheek quickly and said, "I'll see you in bed."

Once he had opened a book, he knew exactly how he was going to spend his evening. Curriculum and Integration was a dry, fiddly subject, easy enough to understand, but with endless trivial facts to learn. He still had two chapters to commit to memory, and the exam was tomorrow. So he switched his mind off the clatter of pots and thump of knives in the kitchen below, as Ariadne sliced vegetables then slid a heavy casserole into a slow oven for tomorrow's dinner. He was not consciously aware of the laundering and ironing of tomorrow's clothes, the mopping of the kitchen floor, the dust-expulsion from the lounge carpet, nor did he register the moment when she ran upstairs and the laboratory door closed behind her. He must have known that the sounds of her movement were now coming through the wall instead of the floor, but he did not pause to ask himself what she was doing until a warm spicy smell began to creep under his door.

The aroma was so powerfully sweet that in the end he had to notice it. "Is she brewing a new brand of perfume?" was his first conscious thought about her all evening. Ariadne would be sitting with her face on top of the cauldron steam; he didn't understand how she managed not to suffocate. The smell was vaguely familiar; it was a variation on the fragrance that had clung to the laboratory all year; so he supposed it was necessary.

Presently he heard her stirring the cauldron, and he realised he had become distracted, so he once again buried himself in his text book.

As the clock struck eleven, he knew that he was *almost* ready for the exam. There were three more tables he had to check in the morning, but the exam was scheduled for the afternoon, so he decided to sleep on it. He crept around the bathroom very quietly, so as not to wake Ariadne; it wasn't until he crawled between the sheets that he realised the bed was still empty. But he didn't think about it much, because the small part of his mind that was still awake was full of Curriculum and Integration.

It was only when the clock struck one, and he stirred in his sleep and reached out his hand to the flat cool sheet beside him, that he realised that he was still alone in the bed. Suddenly he was very awake. Ariadne had not come to bed. He lit his wand and pulled on a dressing gown. There was light under the laboratory door opposite, and he wondered if Ariadne had fallen asleep beside her cauldron. He opened the door.

A lemon-and-jasmine scent wafted out through the doorway. Ariadne was sitting quite upright, but she was completely absorbed in her potion. The scent and the light came from her everlasting candle, suspended from the ceiling directly above her. As he approached, the cauldron bubbled out a hint of the sweet fragrance from earlier. He leaned over and murmured into her ear, "Does Jigger deliberately keep you busy all night?"

"This is not for Professor Jigger," she said. She stood up, closing a book that she had been balancing on her lap, and glanced at the window, where there was no longer any sign of the moon. "Goodness, it must be midnight or later! I'm sorry, dearest, I was not meaning to stay up all night, but I'm very reluctant to leave this one."

"What is it? It smells like cinnamon porridge."

Her face closed over. "It's the project on which I've been working all year. I'm thinking I finally have it right. I've just... no real way... of knowing. Remus, do not touch me while I'm wearing overalls!"

"Sorry... deadly poison woven into the weft of your overalls. I keep forgetting."

She began to remove the overall, then the headscarf, then the dragon-skin gloves. "It's not a joke.*Scourgify!* You're really not knowing what might have been splashed onto these garments, and some of the ingredients *will* burn to the touch. Lye, for example... the amount of lye that Hestia and I had to handle in our seventh year... and the slightest brush can burn the skin right off your fingertips. There, I'm safe to touch now."

He put his hands on her waist and said, "Is this one the deadly secret that turns rats into sheep? The one about which you daren't say a word? Is it illegal?"

"It is very illegal. My contract says I'm not to do any research without Professor Jigger's direct guidance. And he's not interested in this project. It's also not legal for me to test it on human subjects." She doused the fire, and the cauldron settled to a seductively scented simmer.

"Well, I'm relieved to know that no humans are to be transformed into sheep." He drew her into his arms, but she wasn't smiling.

"I'm hoping not! The problem is... the effects on animals are not the same at all... the animal trials do not really prove anything. Sooner or later I'll be needing a human subject. Tonight's brew will be useless unless it can be tested..." Her voice trailed off. "I've always known I'd have to tell you about this one day."

"So you've reached the moment of truth with this one. You've stayed up until one o' clock in the morning to brew something that completely wasted your time unless you can find yourself an illegal human tester. What does it do?"

She glanced out at the stars again. "It's late, and you've an exam tomorrow. Is this really a good moment? Perhaps we should go to bed and...?"

"... and forget about it, and hope I never ask you again? What is it about this potion that makes it such a state secret?"

"If you keep kissing me like that I will not be able to tell you anything. I can kiss you, or I can talk to you. Choose one."

"You have me properly intrigued now." He drew his head back from another kiss. "I think we'd better choose talking." He took her hand and pulled her after him to the armchair beside the window. "Have you been keeping a secret from me?"

She settled herself into his lap and said, "You might call it a professional confidence. I've never told anybody about it. But I've known all this week that I either have to give up or to tell somebody... but the idea has been so fantastic... who would listen?"

She sounded so serious that he stopped caressing her arm and said, "You have my attention. Start at the beginning."

"The beginning was three years ago. Do you remember that day in the Cairngorms, when I was drawing pictures of toadstools, and we found ptarmigans?"

"I'll never forget." For him, it would always be the day when he had acknowledged to himself that he was in love with her. "You'd recently faced two werewolves without

flinching, but on that day you nearly fainted at the sight of an adder. And you shrieked at me as if I were about to dive into a cauldron of lye."

"What I never told anybody was that I did not see the adder until *after* I'd shouted. I was just lucky that it slithered out at that moment. The real reason I was shrieking was the bush."

He couldn't remember any bush. "Remind me. You mean the bush that had sheltered the snake? Was it a special bush?"

"It was, because it was a species not native to Britain at all. It was *aconitum vulparia* or, in plain English, wolfsbane. The plant that is fatal to werewolves. I did not then understand its exact properties, and I was afraid that if you touched it you might die."

"And would I have?"

"You would not have, as I've since discovered. As long as you're in human form, wolfsbane affects you in the same way as any other human. Not that that's pleasant. If you touched wolfsbane sap with broken skin, you'd soon experience difficulty in breathing, a weakened heartbeat, gastric complications and pains in your limbs. And if you accidentally swallowed any in that case, you could die. And you'd suffer several hours of intense pain, without any hope of oblivion, because wolfsbane has no effect on the mind; the victim remains clear-thinking and fully conscious to the last second. But if you'd simply touched the plant with unbroken skin it wouldn't have done worse than to sting a little."

He made a face. "It sounds a thoroughly undesirable plant. We should be glad it's *not* native to Britain."

"I've no idea what that shrub was doing up in the Cairngorms, but it set me thinking. Although it's so poisonous, it does have medicinal qualities when used in tiny, tiny quantities."

He did not ever remember hearing Professor Sprout or Professor Slughorn discussing wolfsbane, and he was sure that he would have remembered everything about a plant that was fatal to werewolves.

"It was used to treat the common cold before the invention of Pepper-up. It can be used as a pain-killer. And it slows the heart-beat and lowers blood-pressure... useful in a fever if you lack access to a dozen safer preparations. It suppresses respiration, assuming you're willing to risk the side-effect of death by suffocation. And a werewolf in *canine* form is powerfully repelled by the smell alone. So I began wondering..."

"Yes?"

She shifted in his arms and looked right at him. "It was a long shot at first. But could we brew a tincture of wolfsbane that was strong enough to repel the wolf, yet weak enough to do no harm to the human?"

The shock almost gave him whiplash. He turned his head towards the sweetly-smelling cauldron and asked, "Ariadne... *is that* what you're trying to brew? A potion to treat lycanthropy?"

She bit her lip and said, "I told you it was a fantastic idea."

"That cauldron... is it full of wolfsbane?"

"It contains some wolfsbane juices. Together with some barakol, which neutralises the effect on the respiratory system it's the barakol that causes the sweet-cinnamon aroma. But it wouldn't taste much like cinnamon, because of what else I've had to put in it. Atropine, which counteracts the cardiac effects but has a bitter, acrid taste. Digitalin, which is said to taste nauseous, but it's needed to neutralise the effect on the blood pressure. And strychnine "

"Strychnine? Even I know that *that's* a poison. Doesn't that kill you in about ten seconds?"

"That depends on how much you take. The tiniest quantities say, one-tenth of a grain relieve gastric problems, like those caused by wolfsbane. Anyway, if all the undesirable qualities of all the ingredients cancelled out, we might be left with a potion that had no effect except to repel the wolf."

His mind was reeling. "So you've somehow laid hands on all these poisons "

"I've grown them." She slid off his lap and opened the window. *Lumos*." Her wand beamed down onto her herb garden, and he looked really looked at the innocent rows of flowers that she had so lovingly weeded. There were poppies and catnip and a sprinkling of wild heather, but there were also stout tri-branched shrubs with irregular leaves and bell-shaped violet petals.

"That's nightshade," she said, "from which I've extracted atropine."

There were tall spikes of bright purple foxgloves. "Are they for decoration?" he asked.

"They are not. Foxglove seeds are the source of digitalin."

There were tender saplings of some red-leaved tree, and a smooth ash-coloured tree whose pale green blossoms had lately given way to some apricot-like fruit. "I always wondered," he admitted, "why you grew trees in a herbary. Your mother never did."

"It'll take a few years yet," she said. "The large tree is a Poison Nut from India. The fruits are called Quaker buttons, and they are the source of strychnine. Also of brucine, which is said to have similar properties, but is less poisonous. But it can cause paralysis, so I have not dared to experiment with brucine yet, because I know so little about it; at least I know what to expect of the strychnine."

"And the small trees?"

"Cassia which, by the way, is *not* poisonous. When the trees are ten years old I'll be able to extract barakol from their leaves. But in the meantime I've had to buy barakol and strychnine from a supplier in Madras. Obviously it would be preferable to use fresh ingredients whose history I know."

But dominant among all the other plants was a striking collection of large shrubs with glossy dark-green leaves, at present opening into new blooms, some with pale yellow flowers, others with deep blue. "Those are the aconites," she confirmed. "The yellow ones are the wolfsbane. And the blue... well, they're a mistake, I suppose."

Not knowing how else to respond to the revelations of the night, hardly daring to acknowledge the wild excitement that had gripped him, Remus remarked that the mistakes seemed to be taking up a great deal of garden space.

"I could not bring myself to throw them out," said Ariadne. "They're so pretty. And they were a present from... from Severus. I know you're not liking him, Remus; I'm often not liking him myself. But he does mean well by me, and those bushes were his clumsy attempt to be friendly. In my seventh year I asked him for *aconitum vulparia* that's wolfsbane and he asked me whom I was wanting to murder. But after I'd left school he sent me some *aconitum napella* that's those blue flowers, the monkshood. I'm not knowing why he sent the wrong species, whether he forgot what I'd said, or whether perhaps he was not knowing the difference between the two. Monkshood is just as poisonous as wolfsbane, and quite different chemically absolutely useless for combatting lycanthropy but anyway, I was somehow wanting to keep them..."

He reached over her to close the window, then slid his arms around her waist and rested his cheek against her hair. "So this is the grand point, then," he said. "This whole elaborate structure three years of research, a garden full of poisonous plants, nearly a year of brewing up poisoned cinnamon soup is aimed at combatting lycanthropy?"

She trembled. "There's not been any previous research. The few apothecaries who noted the properties of wolfsbane always concluded that any brew likely to be effective would contain so many other poisons that it'd not be worth experimenting. Even if a viable treatment could be brewed, some incompetent or unscrupulous apothecary would be bound to add the wrong proportion of something and end up killing some innocent werewolf. They've known for three hundred years that a wolfsbane medication is theoretically possible, but it's always been thought too difficult... the idea's been too unpopular... there's not been the funding... they have not cared enough to..." Her voice caught on a sob.

"Hush." He tightened his arms around her. "What would be likely to happen if a werewolf did drink that very obnoxious concoction? How poisonous is it?"

"Not very." She turned around in his arms, and he saw a tear on her cheek. "That's one thing of which I am certain. The proportions that I'm brewing at present are not strong enough to do much harm even to a wolf. That brew might cause some pain, but there'd be no irreparable damage. It did no harm to the rats. Or to the kittens, who are carnivorous. For some reason, aconite is far more poisonous to carnivores."

"So I did myself a favour by giving up meat." Already he was a jump ahead of her. "You say that your wolfsbane potion would be very unlikely to poison a vegetarian."

She leaned her head against his shoulder. "I'm really not knowing if I'm ready to experiment on humans, Remus. There's nothing more I can do to the formula... it's as right as an untested theory ever can be... but how right is that? It's safe for cats and rats... they're not even seeming to suffer any pain... but what would it do to a human?"

"Could it turn me into a sheep?"

"I do not know." Her voice against his dressing gown was muffled. "Those rats... well, they were not lyco-lycopontics, were they? Even under a full moon, there was no wolf to drive off. So they reacted to the potion by becoming the opposite of wolves... lambs..."

He moved her to arm's length and looked her in the eye. He could see that she was more frightened than he was. "Ariadne. If I'm to become an animal, I'd rather become a sheep than a wolf. The only question for me is, how dangerous is that potion? And, if you're quite certain that it won't kill me, how permanent are the side-effects?"

"It would not kill you. Not at that strength and in the safe quantity that I'd recommend. But it could take several days for the residue to be cleared out of your system. And the unknown side-effects... well, the rats turned back into rats eventually, but I'd never forgive myself if you ended up with a permanent fleece."

"I'd forgive you. Easily. Because wearing sheep's clothing is nothing compared with being a ravening wolf within. How much do I have to drink?"

He was already moving in the direction of the cauldron before she said, "It's yet nine days until the full moon. For the drug to have any effect, you'd have to take some every day until then, and I'm not sure how long the drugs would remain in your system... To be completely safe, I'd not take more than a gill."

"Is that a conservative estimate?"

"Of course. Remus, are you *sure*? It's against the law."

"Sweetheart, the law has never done anything to help werewolves. And someone has to go first in the name of science. If you're sure that a gill can't kill me, then I'm sure I want to try the experiment." He took a glass measuring cup down from the shelf and picked the ladle out of the cauldron. "Is there anything else that needs to be done to this potion before it's used?"

White with terror, she shook her head. "It has to be taken warm. Just make sure it's still smoking at least a little."

It was. He poured in one ladleful, then a second. At close quarters, a sudden suggestion of nausea nearly knocked him sideways, but he held the measuring cup steadily while he tipped out the excess, so that he held exactly a gill. His gorge rose almost high enough to make him reconsider; he wondered briefly if it were worth becoming a wolf for one night a month in order to avoid drinking this sickening brew for ten.

She closed her eyes for a second, then shook herself, opened them, and forced herself to watch.

He drank.

Victory under Rose Moon

Chapter 11 of 21

Remus and Ariadne break the law in order to save the world.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Victory under Rose Moon

Friday 13 Sunday 22 June 1986

Old Basford, Nottingham.

Rated PG-13 for explicit lycanthropy.

The following evening Remus was still alive, his exam had gone well, and he hadn't grown a fleece. The only symptom of the wolfsbane potion was that his breath reeked of sweet spices. But he asked for another dose then, and for each evening afterwards.

After feeding him the poisonous cocktail, Ariadne tried to leave him alone to revise for his exams, but she found that he was pursuing her all around the house with a honeymoon ardour. If she worked in the kitchen, he would catch her around the waist; if she were busy in the laboratory, he would creep up behind her to stroke her hair; if she were reading on the sofa, he would pull her into his lap; if she weeded her garden, he would seize her hand and hold it against his face (she had to remind him of the poisonous plants and his lack of gloves); in the middle of the night, she would awaken because he had suddenly clasped her. He was slightly apologetic for paying her so much attention, but the only explanation he ever gave her was, "I didn't think you would love me this much."

After two days she mixed him a peppermint gargle. That greatly improved the after-taste in his mouth, but it did nothing, he admitted ruefully, to soften the immediate revolting taste of the potion.

She was worried by how happy he was. She knew that part of it was simple gratitude to her for trying. But he was also expecting the wolfsbane potion to work. And if it didn't work this month, he would want to keep experimenting until it did. She kept trying to explain that if the dose were low enough to be safe, then it was probably too low to have any repellent effect. But he only laughed, and said, "There are thousands of werewolves in the world, and we are a potential danger to millions of people. Someone has to try the experiment."

On Sunday Ariadne sat at the kitchen table and wrote up her sleeping draught interim report for Professor Jigger.

On Monday Remus sat his Education Studies exam and claimed it was the best exam he had ever taken.

On Tuesday Professor Jigger grudgingly conceded that the report required only minor corrections before it would be ready for publication. Ariadne made the corrections between washing the dishes and ironing the robes.

On Wednesday Professor Jigger submitted the report to the *Western Journal of Apothecarism* under the authorship of Belby, Jigger, Jigger and Lupin. (Belby, the joint owner of Slug and Jigger's, had had nothing to do with the project, but it was a condition of sponsorship that his name be included on all publications.)

On Thursday Remus sat his Practical Teaching exam.

On Friday he bought a Muggle newspaper and scoured it for casual summer jobs.

When Ariadne stepped out of the hearth on Saturday evening she was greeted by a warm aroma of stewing mushrooms. Remus was stirring a frying pan in the kitchen.

"I'm sorry I'm late," she said. "Thanks for starting dinner. Have you been home all day?"

"It's Professor Jigger who should be sorry. No, I went to Evesham and joined the queue of casual day-labourers in the strawberry fields. I've brought home perhaps five Galleons to offset the costs of my education." Remus indicated the Muggle money piled on the kitchen table beside a pound-punnet of strawberries.

Ariadne forced herself to speak casually. "I'll take it to Gringotts on Monday. You must be exhausted if you've been out in the sun all day."

"I'm certainly not as fit as I was two years ago... Sweetheart, is my potion ready to drink?"

"It'll need reheating. I'll fetch you some." She climbed up to the laboratory soberly, lit a fire under the cauldron, and waited for the potion to boil. She knew there was no escape from tonight's full moon, but Remus's focus on the potion was alarming. So far, as she had predicted, the potion hadn't hurt him; indeed, it didn't seem to have any side effects at all. But they had no way of knowing how wolfsbane and a werewolf would interact with the full moon.

She knew it was too late to discuss the dangers. The time to protest had been nine days ago, before Remus had volunteered himself as a human guinea pig. Nothing they said or did this evening could alter whatever must happen tonight. But Remus was only facing danger; she was facing the moral responsibility for having allowed another person to accept those dangers.

She handed him the measuring glass, filled up to a quarter-pint. He drank it swiftly, without commenting on the horrible taste, and turned back to the frying pan. He told her over dinner that Muggle berry farming was a ludicrous waste of effort, and he couldn't believe the Muggle farmers paid out so much money to so many pickers when the whole crop could be managed with a single spell.

Ariadne did not dare suggest that he was wasting his energy by expending so much unnecessary effort for so little money. Her wages would keep them both through the summer, but she knew better than to suggest that he deserved a holiday.

The strawberries were dry in her mouth. After the first two or three, she left them all to him. She leaned against him on the sofa; although he automatically put his arm around her, he was very tense, and she knew that his mind was travelling in the same endless circles as hers.

"Ariadne. I don't want you to worry about it."

"Of course you do not. But of course I will."

"It can't do me any harm. The worst thing that can happen is that nothing will happen." But she knew he didn't quite believe this. They both knew that they *couldn't* predict the side effects.

"If you wake up in the morning with an unshearable fleece, will you laugh it off as the cost of playing roulette with science?"

"Ariadne." He tilted her chin so that she was forced to look at him. He was looking at her very seriously, as if this were the last evening they would ever live together as husband and wife. "That's the point. I played roulette with science. Nobody forced me to. You advised me not to. But I chose to."

"And I colluded and made it easy for you. I could have Vanished the potion before you touched it."

"What, you've maintained your Vanishing skills at your N.E.W.T. level of competence?" She had to smile at this. "Yes, you could have made it more difficult for me to drink the potion. But I knew the risks. If I lose the gamble in the end, it's my responsibility. Not yours. Can you accept that?"

She wanted to make it easy for him by pretending she could. She compromised by saying, "We share the responsibility. I can accept that much."

"And what is the likeliest outcome?"

"On the dose you took," she recited dully, "I'm about ninety percent certain that the wolf will feel rather sick and have a painful night. Then you'll wake up human in the morning, and there's a possibility that you'll feel just as sick as the wolf did. There's no real antidote to aconite poisoning, but on the dose you've taken the effects will wear off in the end, and I've prepared the pain relievers for you."

And there's the chance the wildest, outside chance that there will be no wolf tonight. The potion may have contained enough wolfsbane to repel the wolf altogether. She didn't want to repeat the fragile hope that was the reason he had taken the potion in the first place.

"And as to how long the wolf will have to suffer," he said, "we did manage to choose the shortest night in the year."

They both relapsed into silence. At half past nine Remus stood up and she followed him to the garage door, the door that implacably separated his nightmare life from his normal one.

"I suppose I can't tell you to go straight to bed," he said.

She shook her head. "I'll have to watch you every minute. If it works we'll... More to the point, if the wolf ends up in trouble, I'll have to be there to do something."

"Ariadne, *no!* What if it bites you?"

"If you're in pain, I'll probably have time to send a Stunner; but that's a risk that the apothecary has to take. Just as you've taken a risk in becoming the apothecary's guinea pig."

He nodded unhappily, then held out his arms to her. "Promise you'll take all reasonable care," he murmured in her ear.

"Of course I will."

"I love you."

"I love you."

She clung to him, and for a few seconds for eternity they held each other as if they would never hold each other again. Finally he loosed his arms and said, "We're cutting it fine. The moon will be up in about seven minutes."

Unwillingly, she relaxed her arms. He kissed her briefly, opened the garage door, cast a two-way Transparency charm, and handed her his wand. She closed the door with a locking spell and Summoned the pain-killer preparations down from the laboratory it was months since she'd had a Summoning spell go wrong. Then she lit her wand-tip and settled to watch Remus.

He was lying face down, because this was the most comfortable position for Transforming. The light was fading fast, and, even with the illumination from her wand, she almost missed the first twitch.

Perhaps it didn't happen at all, she told herself. Perhaps, in a few minutes, I'll be opening the door and letting him out.

But the pain shot through his face as his shaking limbs bent out of control. His face began to lengthen, grey hair sprang out of his pores, and as his clothes were mysteriously absorbed into his shaggy pelt he unmistakably had a tail. His arms were longer, his legs were shorter, his hands were paws... in just one minute, the creature lying on the garage floor was a wolf.

He was a wolf.

She could have wept with vexation. She hadn't realised, until she saw the wolf lying in front of her, how much she had counted on the wolf'sot coming tonight. It had been foolish, it had been fantastic... but she had clung to the dear and desperate hope that the potion would make a difference. She had worried about Remus's optimism, but the truth was that she herself had dreamed of success more than she dared to admit.

But the potion had made no difference at all. Remus was as much a wolf as he had ever been. She watched him push himself stiffly to his four feet, shake himself, then walk over to the garage door.

He reared up so suddenly that for a second she forgot that the transparency was magical, that a solid wooden door stood between them, and cowered back on her heels at the sight of the beast's fangs. He placed his paws on the transparent door, and she wondered what exactly he could see whether he perceived her at all in any meaningful way, and whether he understood about the barrier or whether he believed he could reach her.

The wolf closed his jaws and abruptly dropped himself down to all fours again. He paced slowly around the garage once, twice. He nodded his head in a manner that by some trick of the wand light almost looked intelligent. Then he lay down on the floor and closed his eyes. She did not know whether he were really asleep or only lying quietly. But he lay for a long time, with no movement except his own breathing.

Sick with disappointment, Ariadne finally stopped watching the wolf and looked at the array of pain-killing potions in front of her. It seemed she would not need them. Far from being affected by the wolfsbane potion, the wolf did not even seem to be in any pain. Nothing had changed. This was a simple Transformation, like every other Transformation since Remus had been four years old.

Ariadne set the alarm on her watch for four o' clock and lay down on the hall carpet. It was only as she closed her own eyes that one small difference occurred to her.

The wolf had not howled.

Obviously she had not expected to hear the wolf; the garage was always covered with a Silencing charm. But now she recollected that he had notlooked as if he were howling. Not while Remus was Transforming; not after the Transformation; not when the wolf had reared up to the door. His jaws had been parted, but not wide open for a howl. The wolf really didn't seem to have attempted to make any noise at all. Nor had he seemed at all aggressive towards her, his prey on the other side of the invisible barrier. After that first attempt, he had shown no interest.

She sat up again. Through the door, she saw that the wolf was still asleep. He didn't usually settle this quickly. Usually he paced and complained and thumped and tore for hours.

Perhaps it was just a coincidence. But could it be that the wolfsbane potion had had some kind of sedative effect? Aconites certainly acted as a sedative on humans; but no other sedative taken by a human seemed to carry over its sedative effect to a werewolf in canine form. And it was almost impossible, to say nothing of perilous, to persuade a wolf to drink any of the sedatives known to be effective on animals. Could aconite be the exception the plant that would restrain a werewolf efficiently?

She didn't want to think about it too hard. It was such a complex and poisonous potion; if its only useful property were to sedate, then she didn't think it would be worth the trouble of brewing it again.

She began to cry quietly. *I must not cry tomorrow, she told herself. Tomorrow Remus will be needing me to take care of him. Tomorrow I'll have to deal with his disappointment.* So she tried to cry herself out through what was left of the evening. *The potion did not work, but the idea always was ridiculous, she tried to tell herself. For three years I've been following a magically illogical pipe dream; it serves me right if it did not work.*

After she had cried, she washed her face in cold water. Then she covered it with Hestia's face cream the face cream that they had both thought so daft and frivolous, but which really did do a good job of refreshing the skin and smoothing out the puffy bags under one's eyes. *I will face tomorrow with dignity, she said, over and over again, like a mantra. I will try to be glad that Remus seems not to be in any pain.*

She lay down on the hall carpet and slept.

Her alarm woke her at four o' clock. There was the beginning of the hint of dawn through the hall windows. She surveyed her medical supplies, realising that there wasn't much that Remus would need this morning. He hadn't scratched or bitten himself at all, and he didn't seem to have suffered any pain. She tried to rehearse what she would say to him. All she really wanted was a truthful answer to the question, *Are you all right?* But Remus was a past master of Stoic deception on this point. How crushed would he be that their experiment had failed? Would he really joke that he was glad not to have grown a fleece?

Would he want to try again next month, with a stronger and more dangerous dose?

Or would he be sufficiently sobered and discouraged to leave well enough alone?

After about twenty minutes the wolf in the garage gave a tremendous shudder. As the moon set and light poured in through the hall windows, the beast's limbs twisted out of shape, his shoulders straightened, his torso shrank. Ariadne tore open the garage door. She was in time to see grey hair dissolving into nothing, and the wolf's snout shrank back into the exhausted face of her husband.

He opened his eyes.

"How long have you been here?" he asked crossly. "That could have been dangerous."

"Only a few seconds," she soothed. "I did not open the door until after moonset." She held out her hand and helped him to his feet. "Are you in pain?"

"No ouch!" He groaned. "Not pain, honestly. I'm just stiff, as usual."

She guided him across the threshold and into the house. He needed to lean on her, but suddenly he was smiling.

"Ariadne it works!"

"What?"

"The potion!" He grabbed her hands excitedly. "It works! The wolfsbane repels the wolf!"

She thought he must have been dreaming. He had been so optimistic that his happy dreams must seem more real than his memories of what had actually happened last night. "Remus, it did not work," she said sadly. "You turned into a wolf, as always. The only difference was that you seemed slightly sedated. Were you having good dreams?"

"Oh, wonderful dreams." Remus walked into the kitchen and began to boil the kettle. "But I wasn't sedated. I could move freely." He pulled out two teapots, one for chamomile tea, one for Sri Lankan blend. "Sweetheart, I don't know what we expected to happen last night, but it's clear that your potion *does* work. I know it looked as if I had turned into a wolf but that was only my body. *I kept my own mind all night*"

She didn't understand. "What happened?"

"Usually the wolf takes over my mind *and* my body. But last night it couldn't reach my mind. It seemed *frightened* of something... of the wolfsbane, I suppose. I could feel the wolf howling around me, but it didn't want to come any nearer. I was thinking like a human."

Her mind reeled. It hadn't occurred to her that the potion might have this kind of effect, protecting the mind without affecting the body. "Do you remember much?" she asked.

He poured the tea and handed her the mug of chamomile. "I remember it all. Which I usually don't. The wolf's brain is so fuzzy that the most I ever remember in the morning is a series of sensory impressions. But last night I saw and heard and smelled everything so clearly... I saw that I had paws, and I began thinking, 'It hasn't worked,' and then I realised... I was actually thinking in *words*. How human is that?"

She drank her tea, too much surprised to say anything.

"I'm sorry I gave you a fright last night," he said. "I leapt up to tell you it was working, and you looked as if I were about to eat you. Then I remembered that I still looked like a wolf to you, and that the garage was sound-proofed, so I dropped back to all fours."

"That must have been lonely," she said.

"Being a wolf is always lonely. But usually the wolf doesn't remember how it felt five minutes ago. So I walked around the garage, and realised that I couldn't speak words anyway. That was nothing to do with my state of mind; it's just that the wolf's mouth is the wrong shape to make human speech sounds. The animal part of the wolf wanted to go out hunting, but my human mind knew that the doors were locked, and the only sensible course of action was to lie down and go to sleep. I was *rational*. So I started to recite the multiplication table, but I fell asleep before I finished it."

She hardly dared ask the all-important question. "So are you thinking are you honestly thinking that it would have been safe to let you into the house?"

"To be completely truthful," he admitted, "I could still *feel* the wolf. I still had the wild perception that eating raw meat would be pleasurable, and that howling was friendly behaviour. Reciting my tables was quite a lot harder than usual, and I couldn't remember any long words. So I don't want to be set loose in the house until you've modified the formula. Next month you must try mixing me a stronger dose "

She was aghast. "Remus, do you not believe in quitting while we're ahead?"

"Would a *slightly* stronger dose hurt me?"

"I'm not knowing. On last night's showing, it'd not do permanent harm. But the risk would be there."

"Then I want you to try it. The minimum dose left my mind about three-quarters human. I could control the wolf's instincts in the same way as as delaying gratification in the ordinary human way. But I can't help wondering whether a stronger dose would destroy the canine urges altogether, whether it would leave my mind completely human. I want to be able to walk down the Old Market Square without the smallest desire to scratch or bite or jump. I don't know if that's possible, but we have to try it... Ariadne, don't cry!"

She leaned against him. "Sorry. I cried enough last night, when I was thinking it had not worked at all. Even though I was not seriously expecting it to work at all. And it never crossed my mind that it might work in the way it apparently did. And you still look sick."

"That's the result of the physical Transformation." He put their empty mugs into the sink. "You look rather exhausted yourself. Perhaps we both need a few hours to sleep it off."

Moonbeamed Nuptials

Chapter 12 of 21

Replicability of results is demonstrated, Hestia Jones enters the stage, and Ariadne hears news of Veleta.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Moonbeamed Nuptials

Friday 11 July Wednesday 20 August 1986

Old Basford, Nottingham; Vale of Evesham, Worcestershire; Worcester and the River Severn.

Rated PG for drugs and pick-up lines.

"We need to try a higher dose this month," said Remus.

Ariadne looked as if she would like to argue, but she dutifully measured out three jackpots of Wolfsbane potion one and a half times last month's dose. Remus tried to drink it with a straight face: he didn't want her to know how bitterly the brew punished his tongue, or how his gorge rose at each nauseous swallow. His heart hammered his chest for about ten seconds, while his bones shook and he was almost laughing, but everything had slowed to normal by the time he had relieved his taste buds with the peppermint mouth-wash.

"You're having convulsions!" Ariadne's voice sounded a long way away; then suddenly her tone was imminent again. "I've given you too much."

"It's stopped now," he said. "It wasn't as serious as it looked." He saw no need to mention that his chest and fingertips had become slightly numb.

"Your eyes are huge," she said. "I'm thinking we've discovered the maximum safe dosage."

Three days later, while Ariadne mixed potions for Professor Jigger, he found his mind racing. He was crouched between gooseberry and blackcurrant bushes, filling baskets with ripe berries in order to bring home five Galleons a day, and the work was absurdly slow and boring. He tried not to think about the simple *Decerpo* charm that would strip every berry from the bush in a second. He thought instead about wolfsbane. And the Runic dictionary that he had given to Veleta Vablatsky. And the Five Golden Rules of Classroom Management. And that if they had a wireless they could listen to Glenda Chittock reading the news. And that a blue-eyed witch had brewed a tincture of exactly the right strength to terrify the wolf, and now the wolf was cowering at bay. The wolf would never invade his mind again, while the woman with blue eyes was waiting for him at home...

Insanely, he found himself looking forward to the full moon.

It was on Saturday, after the ninth dose, that he noticed a burning pain in his abdomen. It lasted for perhaps five minutes before fading away. He decided not to tell Ariadne.

But on Sunday, as soon as he had taken his final dose, the burning sensation returned. Ariadne gazed at him for a moment, then said, "You're in pain."

"It's nothing."

"You're over-dosed," she said. "Why did you not tell me?"

"I don't *feel* overdosed. The potion makes me feel alert."

"I'm glad it's the last day," she said. "I'm thinking there's been too much build-up of lycocotonine in your bloodstream."

This time it was close to twenty minutes before the sharp tingling subsided. But it was worth it, he thought with reckless optimism, because he was thinking so clearly.

At sunset he went out to the garage and cast the Transparency charm on the door. "Let's not bother with the Silencer," he said. "I won't be howling tonight."

Ariadne tried to look disapproving, as if she wanted to tell him that he was over-confident, but Ariadne was adorably incapable of looking very disapproving about anything. He gave her his wand, saying, "You can lock the door if you want to," and walked through it

It was a shock when the first wrench of pain threw him forwards; he had almost forgotten that the Wolfsbane Potion did nothing to relieve the pain of Transformation. Still optimistic, he decided that Ariadne might be able to brew something to fix that next month. Meanwhile, he turned his head away from the door so that she wouldn't see his grimacing. His bones twisted, his muscles tore, and by the time he was lying comfortably on the ground, he was aware that he had a tail.

And he was human inside! He still remembered the multiplication table indeed, the numbers slid through his mind faster than any human voice could have spoken them out loud. He still remembered the goblin rebellions. He still remembered the formula for Animagus Transformation. He even remembered the recipe for the Draught of Living Death, which he had certainly *not* remembered in his sixth-year Potions exam.

His mind raced. The words barakol, atropine, digitalin, strychnine and wolfsbane flooded into his mind he remembered exactly what Ariadne had put into the potion. It had tasted vile, but... by the time that thought was completed in his head, he also knew that the worst thing one could do to a wolfsbane tincture was to mix it with sugar. He didn't need a text book it was so *obvious* that sucrose would decompose the lycocotonine, leaving nothing of substance to drive off the wolf. He would tell Ariadne; while it had probably already occurred to her, she would be proud of him for working it out for himself. He actually turned his head to look at her through the transparent door, but in the process caught sight of his paws, and remembered that he couldn't actually speak.

The sight of her, kneeling beside the door, reminded him of her words: "The victim remains clear-thinking and fully conscious to the last second..." And then it hit him that the speed and clarity of his thinking was not at all natural. It was the influence of the wolfsbane. Ten days of taking a larger dose had augmented his intelligence. It was a pity that this was happening during the college vacation it would have been an enormous advantage to think so clearly when he had an essay due. He would certainly ask Ariadne to give him wolfsbane next time he had an exam.

In fact, he would tell her that her experiment was an unqualified success, that werewolves were no longer dangerous, and that there was no longer any point in locking him away each full moon. She could convert the garage into a laboratory, and his childhood bedroom (which was really too small for all the brewing she wanted to do) could become a nursery, because they were going to have twelve children and live happily ever after... He lifted a paw and tapped softly on the transparent door. He even wondered if he should sit up and beg like a pet dog, but decided that this would be undignified. Sitting quietly should be enough to convince her that he was safe.

Sure enough, Ariadne seemed quite unafraid. She opened the door and let him into the house.

He nuzzled his head against her robes, careful to keep his mouth completely closed, then padded into the living room and settled himself on the hearth rug. Ariadne came to sit next to him, ruffling his pelt as if he were indeed her dog. *Rather her dog than her devourer*, he thought. Nothing could disrupt his good humour tonight.

"So it's working, is it?" she asked.

The sound of her voice was soothing. He nodded his head a couple of times, refusing to be frustrated by his inability to reply verbally.

"What you're understanding English?"

He nodded again.

"Are you in pain?"

He shook his head.

"Perhaps the dose should be a little weaker next month."

This time his head-shaking was vigorous. He would tell her in the morning how amazing it had felt to be a genius, with all his neurons firing as fast as James Potter's ever

had, and the sheer ecstasy of feeling human despite his hairy snout. Not only human, but practically an Animagus! James and Peter and Lily would have been so happy for him.

Her hand was stroking his head. "We should maybe sleep," she said.

He wanted to stay up all night, listening to her voice while his own mind raced companiably in parallel. But Professor Jigger didn't know that Ariadne had just changed the course of history; he would expect her at work at eight o' clock tomorrow morning as usual. So he lowered his head submissively, to indicate that she should retire to bed if she wished.

Ariadne laid her head against his flank. "Would you be able to walk safely thought Old Market Square tonight?" she asked.

He nodded, but he didn't think she saw. Her eyes were already closing. Telling her that she had successfully saved the world would have to wait until morning.

* * * * *

When Remus awoke he was stiff and aching, he was human again, someone had covered him with a blanket, and he was alone. He rolled over onto his back, and the first words to enter his exhausted mind were, "Oh, *no*."

Burning with shame, he remembered all his grandiose thoughts of the night before. He had felt so clever so reckless*Werewolves are no longer dangerous... I'm a genius... look out for the dangers of sugar... you've saved the world...* he had even considered taking the potion as a wit-sharpener so that he could cheat on his next exam!

The wolfsbane had certainly sharpened his alertness from the day he began taking it. Under the influence of the full moon his thinking had exploded into that swift, brilliant clarity, with a thousand thoughts tumbling one over the other. He had remembered all kinds of facts accurately, analysed them logically and synthesised them usefully... but the price of all this intellectual brilliance had been that his judgment of the real world had been completely awry. He had been full of how clever *he* was, how he would miraculously support a dozen children in this tiny house on a teacher's salary, how the salvation of werewolves had somehow redeemed the whole world from every evil... He had been wildly, ridiculously unbalanced and self-centred.

He was very, very glad that Ariadne had not heard his thoughts.

The Wolfsbane potion did nothing to relieve the morning-after exhaustion of lycanthropy. He huddled under his blanket, drifting between sleeping and wakefulness, aching muscles and stabbing head, wondering how he would break it to her that her potion held all the dangers of a hallucinogenic drug.

* * * * *

Ariadne was not discouraged. "Perhaps I should take a blood sample," she suggested. "Just to check that you're clear."

The blood-test indicated no trace of residual lycocotnine. "Lycocotnine is supposed to break down inside the body quickly," she said. "And it has. You could not have acted on your strange ideas in wolf form, and they are likely to be gone by moonset. But I'm yet thinking that thirty jackpots was more than necessary. Next month I'm wanting to reduce to twenty-four."

He conceded that she might have a point.

The next day he was well enough to return to work. Currants had given way to raspberries, but any other novelty value in the toil of picking berries the Muggle way had long since worn off. The weather was cool, and Remus thought longingly of centrally-heated libraries, shelf upon shelf of hard-backed volumes, quills Transfigured into biros, research essays and deadlines, fellow-students who needed help to decipher their notes... He reminded himself sternly that he wouldn't be able to afford to return to college unless he found a way to earn his book-money.

* * * * *

August brought cooler and wetter weather: the Muggles complained that "we haven't had a decent summer's day for over a year," while Ariadne observed, "I'm thinking Hestia has miscalculated."

Hestia Dearborn had just finished her apprenticeship at Chippendale and Hepplewhite's and had accepted a permanent-contract journeyship to begin in autumn. That left her with the whole of August as a holiday month, and Ivor had finally conceded that they probably had enough savings to justify getting married. Hestia thought it would be romantic to be married by moonlight on a cruising barge on the River Severn. It was obvious to Remus that any boat open to the moonlight would also be open to shrill winds and chilling showers.

At sunset on the wedding day he and Ariadne took the Floo to Worcester, where the public Floo was tucked away in a corner of the cathedral. The weather was already unpromising: Remus Conjured a couple of lanterns filled with blue fire, hoping they looked like something a Muggle was likely to carry. But they had hardly emerged onto the short path to the river bank when a Muggle on a bicycle accosted Ariadne.

"Hey, miss! Where did you buy them lanterns?" he asked enviously. "Why don't the flame blow out in the wind?"

"Cleverly designed, are they not?" she said, sliding her hand through Remus's arm to urge him away from the embarrassing conversation.

Ivor welcomed them aboard the barge (black, painted with vermilion flowers), and they climbed the few steps to the upper deck, where nearly a hundred guests were already watching swans sail into the sunset. There were red roses wound around the railings, and a string quartet of goblins was delivering Handel's *Water Music*. But Remus doubted whether there would be any moonlight, for the sky was cloudy and already spitting out rain, and an unpleasant breeze was stripping petals into the river. Ariadne hugged her lantern almost before she realised what she was doing Remus abruptly Vanished it. It would have been bad manners, in public, to tell her that she had been right, Hestia *had* miscalculated.

The boat began to move into midstream, and at the same moment the skies opened the downpour. What was needed, Remus reflected, was a simple*Declino*. Would it seem unduly critical of their hosts if he cast it himself? Most of the guests were huddled together in dejected clusters, too polite or too preoccupied with being wet to ask Hestia's parents whether they could help. Silently casting the spell, Remus caught Kingsley Shackbolt's eye across the crowd.

Kingsley winked at him just as the rain began to bounce away from the boat, around the invisible arch that Remus had Conjured above them. Kingsley flicked his wand slightly; he must have cast a *Zephyro*, for a second later a warm breeze was caressing the length of the barge. At that moment the goblins changed their tempo to the *Largo*, and Hestia walked up to the deck. She had emerged just a few seconds too early: her damp wedding veil was plastered to her shoulders.

Not to be outdone, Remus Conjured a brand flaring with orange fire, handed it to Ariadne, then Conjured a second for the stranger on his left.

Instantly, Kingsley Conjured his own brand, this one with fire that at a flicker changed colour through every hue of the rainbow, and handed it to the witch beside him. By its light, Remus noted that Kingsley's breeze was drying Hestia's veil before his eyes.

"You two are playing a game," said Ariadne. "But you're both a step ahead as usual. I'm not recognising your spells."

Ivor, with the last of the rain streaming off his face, held out his hand to Hestia, and the goblins put down their violins. An Anglican vicar called the assembly to order. While he spoke, the rain beat down on the arch above the boat, then slid down around it to pour off into the river below. As the sky darkened, more of the guests began to Conjure flaming brands for themselves, although no-one else managed to reproduce the rainbow-brilliance of Kingsley's torches. It was only as the vicar was finishing his

opening address that two clouds parted, and a sliver of crescent moon appeared in the sky.

Ivor and Hestia were able to exchange their vows by moonlight after all.

After the formalities the party continued in the hold below the deck. It was rather squashed: Dempster Wiggleswade took the cosy conditions as an excuse to pull Mercy Macmillan onto his lap, and it almost looked accidental when Ragnok the Pigeon-Toed shoved an elderly Dearborn aunt out of the last remaining seat. It was also very noisy: Remus found himself forcing his voice out so that Kingsley could hear him, while Ariadne did not attempt to speak at all.

"They look happy," said Kingsley, with a sad glance over at Mercy and Dempster.

Before Remus could think of a reply, the voice of Ivor's sister drowned out all competing sounds. "Witches are better at administration it's well known that it would be a complete waste of effort to promote any wizard above middle-management level."

"A young lady who thinks for herself," said Remus.

"And who has no interest in a career in management," offered Kingsley. "The Holyhead Harpies have already accepted her as a reserve, and she hasn't a thought beyond professional Quidditch." He was speaking of Miss Jones, but his eyes lingered on Mercy Macmillan, who suddenly caught his gaze and flushed in an agony of embarrassment.

"... not in good taste," she mouthed to Dempster Wiggleswade or something like that as she slid off his lap.

Through the buzz of the crowd, the word "Quidditch" had carried, and Richard joined the conversation. "Are you talking about the World Cup? They'll be hard-put to beat the fight that the Prousticks gave the Magpies last week."

"That was sensational," agreed Kingsley. "I couldn't be near a radio until the last hour, but when Maddock came hurling down the pitch "

"Old hat!" Ivor's sister interrupted them. "If Uganda would just allow a few *morewitches* to play on its teams, the Prousticks would have beaten the Magpies easily. Maddock's an unstable player; his hard hitting won't compensate for his experimental ideas. Now, Richard, have you decided yet when you're taking me out to dinner?"

Richard batted his eyelids effeminately. "Gwenog, you look like an angel welcome to Earth. If beauty were sunlight, you'd shine from a million light-years away. If you were a tear in my eye I would not cry for fear of losing you. You're like a magnet because I'm helplessly attracted to you. You're like a dictionary because you add meaning to my life. My tooth hurts because you are so sweet. Your legs must be tired because you've been running through my mind all evening. I'm a thief, and I'm here to steal your heart. So stand still so that I can pick you up."

Miss Jones seemed amused by the tirade, but Remus heard Ariadne saying, "Gwenog's maybe not read Sacharissa Tugwood's book of *Flattery Fantasies*." She was speaking to Sarah, almost kissing her ear in order to be heard.

Sarah was hanging off Joe's arm. She was resplendent in spangled ruby-red satin, while Joe hardly seemed aware that he was at a party he was wearing black work-robes decorated with the amber logo "It's the real zing... BUTTERBEER."

"You don't know," said Sarah, "how many men have tried those lines on me seriously. They really believe that no woman has ever heard any of it before."

Remus couldn't help asking, "Isn't Richard serious, then? I mean, I know he's joking, but is there any kind of serious intention behind the madness?"

Ariadne and Sarah exchanged glances and both laughed. "Gwenog isn't Richard's type at all," said Sarah. "He wouldn't even go out with her..." she glanced at Joe, "as friends. The jokes are his way of refusing the invitation."

"Have you had any luck with flatmates yet?"

"Wonderful luck," said Sarah. "Kingsley wants to stay at Auror dormitories, so the boys don't really need their pig-sty any more. Richard and Joe will be moving in with me tomorrow."

"One more frivolous remark from you, Richard," cut in Miss Jones's stentorian tones, "and you'll find yourself a woodlouse!"

But even her voice was suddenly absorbed by a whistling gale, which pushed the barge down the river at an alarming rock. Remus put out a hand to steady Ariadne, only to find that she didn't need it. He looked at Hestia, so radiant that she seemed unaware how woefully she had misjudged the weather. He looked at Sarah, so unembarrassed about dressing to outshine the bride. He looked at Mercy, a kind and sensible girl who had nevertheless needed to be *reminded* that her indiscreet behaviour had such power to wound Kingsley. He looked Gwenog Jones, so utterly frank and uninhibited.

He looked at Ariadne, smiling quietly at her friends without making any attempt to force her gentle voice over the din. Surely other men were noticing that she was the most appealing and desirable woman in the crowded hold? The thought did not bother him. Ariadne had so magnificently kept the promises she had made on their wedding day, and now she was smiling directly at him, so miraculously happy about the dubious bargain she had received in return.

* * * * *

Three days later, Remus started drinking Wolfsbane Potion again. Ariadne still measured out three jackpots, but she didn't let him begin taking the potion until a week before the full moon. That meant Remus had only been dosed eight times instead of ten when the full moon rose.

"You've taken more than you did two months ago," she said. "I'm thinking there's no need for you to go out to the garage."

He lay down on the hearth rug, quite confident that Ariadne would be safe tonight. It was the first time since he was four years old that the rising of the full moon had not banished him from all human contact. This time he hardly noticed the pain of Transformation. It was almost a happy moment when he saw hairy paws stretched in front of him, and was able to think, "I must definitely learn some kind of sign language. Ariadne deserves to be told immediately when her experiments are working."

She knelt down beside him and ran a hand over his coat. "I'm hoping you can remember all the details tomorrow morning," she said. "I'll be needing to write up my results. I can tell it's working by looking at you. You've no idea how odd it feels to keep our conversation so one-sided."

He nodded his head. Of course it was odd not to be able to reply. But it was ecstasy that she spoke to him at all.

This time there were no extraordinary ideas. He had no thought of conquering the world, or having children, or cheating on exams. His brain was working at its normal speed. There was nothing but the sight of his paws and the swish of his tail to give any clue that the wolf existed. Tonight he was the same person inside the wolf's skin as he had been today inside his human flesh.

"Monologue is unnatural," said Ariadne after a while, "but reading is a performance." She opened the local library's edition of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* and began to read out loud.

"When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,

I all alone beweep my outcast state,

*And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself, and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee...and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at Heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.."*

"I took notes," said Remus twenty-four hours later. "As soon as I was awake enough to hold a quill, I wrote down everything about last night, and everything about the last two full moons too. But you must be prepared for the possibility that my word isn't acceptable evidence of anything. People are quick to accuse werewolves of lying."

Ariadne scanned the page. "One case proves nothing anyway," she reminded him. "We're needing to replicate before we can publish."

"How many times? I'll happily drink your potion every month for the rest of my life."

"It's rather a question of whether we can persuade *anyother* werewolves to try the experiment. Dearest, do you know any others? I could just request a copy of the Werewolf Registry and make formal contact with all of them, but I'd need to involve Professor Jigger to do it that way."

"We'll have to involve Jigger eventually," Remus pointed out. "But in the meantime... no, none of my personal friends has ever admitted to lycanthropy. The only person I ever heard confide such a deathly secret was that poor Muggle in Perthshire. Con...?"

"Connell Dewar. I've always wondered what became of him. We should maybe find out and ask if he'd like to help us."

They were interrupted by a swishing in the chimney as a sparrow owl swooped into the living room and held out one claw to Ariadne. It swept out again as soon as she had untied the letter, without offering her any option on sending a reply.

"We... it looks as if we have to return to Perthshire," she said. "We cannot ignore this."

She held out a scroll, and Remus read a completely strange handwriting.

Dear Mrs Lupin,

First let me congratulate your friends Mr Jones and Miss Dearborn on their marriage. I was with you all in spirit and only wish I could have been there in person.

You cannot owl me because they have made me Unsearchable. Usually I cannot owl you because all the owls in the castle are loyal only to the Macnair family. Today I intercepted a Post Office owl when they were not looking. So now I can finally write to you.

I do not know why you bother with me, and I only hope it is true that we were friends once. I think of you as a friend, and I do not have another friend. I watch you every day. At eight o' clock every evening, when my children are in bed, I watch you in your living room (I do not follow you to any other room). If you have nothing much to say I watch your friends Mr and Mrs Jones and Miss Webster and Mr Shacklebolt and Mr Campion. I do not mean to spy on you, but I listen to hear if any of you speaks of me.

Thank you for entertaining the lady called Madam Vablatsky six months since. That was a huge favour. She claims to be my grandmother, and I have to believe it, since her eyes are exactly like mine. So I finally know my real family. It seems you were correct all along: I am indeed a Vablatsky.

Please do not leave us in this castle. I cannot leave without my children, and they are kept prisoner here. I have three of them now. If I have to stay in the castle they will make me give birth to twenty.

If any of you has a message for me, speak it between eight and nine in the evening, and I shall know about it. But do not send me anything in writing. The castle is loyal only to the Macnairs.

I beg you not to forget me. But thank you for enabling me to sign my name confidently,

Veleta Vablatsky.

Reaping the Harvest Moon

While Connell Dewar experiments with Wolfsbane Potion, Ariadne discovers more than she expected about her own family history.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Reaping the Harvest Moon

Wednesday 10 Thursday 18 September 1986

Foss and the environs, Perthshire.

Rated R for human rights violations.

"Are ye frrom the Rrregistrry?" Connell Dewar narrowed his eyes warily.

"We are not from the Registry," Ariadne patiently repeated. "The Registry's not... not been very friendly to us. We have not told the Registry people about this new medicine. We're wanting to give you it without having them interfere."

"But those Rrregistrry people are wizarrds. They're dangerroos to werrawolves."

"Very dangerous," Ariadne agreed. "We're not wanting any Registry wizards around."

"Because they mecht not let me take the medicine."

"They might not. So we will keep it a secret."

"We will. Secrrret medicine."

Ariadne saw that Connell had made his decision. It had taken her half an hour to reach this point in the dialogue. She had first had to soothe the old grandmother in order to beg an entry to the house. Since Connell had been Memory-Charmed not to recognise them, it was no good claiming to be friends of his, so she said they were "friends of a friend" wishing to "deliver a present". Mrs Patterson had been astonished and sceptical, but Ariadne had murmured reassuringly that it was "something Connell's been wanting for a long time," and eventually they had been allowed entry.

Next they had had to introduce themselves to Connell, and to convince him that they came as friends he thought they were police, and kept saying that he couldn't have done it because he had no driver's licence. Controlling his frustration, Remus had made the illogical statement that "policemen don't carry satchels like this one". And for some reason Connell had found this statement completely reassuring.

Then Ariadne had had to broach the subject of "illness" and explain that she had medicine. It had taken Connell a long time to admit that he had an illness, but he had stopped evading as soon as Ariadne mentioned that "my husband takes werewolf medicine". It was at that point that Connell had jumped to the conclusion that they were from the Werewolf Registry.

Remus frowned slightly when Connell agreed to take the "secret medicine", for it was doubtful that Connell knew his own mind well enough to make an informed decision about drinking an experimental potion. But there was no real benefit in trying to *understand* whatever was going on in Connell's mind. Ariadne stood up to open her satchel, telling Remus as she passed him, "People like Con are not here to be understood, they are here to be cared for." She lifted out her scales and told Connell, "I'm needing you to stand on this."

Connell stepped up awkwardly, and red numbers flashed up to hover in the air. It appeared that Connell Dewar weighed only seven stone two even less than Ariadne herself.

"You're needing hardly more than a gill," she said.

Remus took out the goblet of Wolfsbane potion, removed the lid, and set it to boil in a saucepan over the stove. Connell watched with rounded eyes until the cinnamon-scented steam arose from the goblet.

"Does it taste guid?"

"I'm afraid not," said Remus. "It tastes horrible."

Ariadne measured out three jackpots for Remus and a generous gill for Connell. Remus skulled his with a grimace. Even then, Connell did not ask why Remus was taking the medicine too. He simply lifted his cup and solemnly downed his own share.

And even this did not end the complications. Ariadne had to break it to Connell that he would need to take the new medicine every day for a week. Then they had to find a way to visit Foss every day of that week. Ariadne had had vague thoughts that Remus could Apparate to Connell's house, but Remus vetoed that idea.

"The last thing we want is a Ministry inquiry. And it won't take them five minutes to find out who's been Apparating into an all-Muggle area."

So one of them had to take the Knight Bus every evening, at a cost of thirteen Sickles for each one-way journey fifteen Galleons and five Sickles that they couldn't spare!

Connell's grandmother was pleased that "Con hes fennally made some frriends," but she completely misunderstood the situation with the "medicine". Whatever Connell had told her, she inferred that Ariadne was hawking some kind of cough-relief; it never crossed her mind that they knew about his lycanthropy. She hinted that they shouldn't come on Thursday "when Con will be busy", so on Thursday Remus and Ariadne had to bypass her house and walk in the early-evening chill from the village to the old pine tree in the forest.

They had borrowed a nylon tent from Sarah an ordinary Muggle two-man tent, no larger inside than out. Ariadne struggled for a minute to separate the poles and hooks from the fabric, until Remus drew her out of the way and waved his wand with a swift, "*Erecto!*" The tent flew instantly into position, complete with pumped lilo and primly-spread baffle sleeping-bag. The next moment Remus cast a Disillusionment charm over his construction; Ariadne moved to hide behind a tree almost before she was aware that she could hear Muggle voices. Connell and his grandmother were on their way. If they had arrived ten seconds earlier they would have witnessed the magic.

Ariadne was not prepared for what she saw next. She knew the purpose of the chain nailed into the old Scots pine, but the empty clang of the dog-collar as it closed around Connell Dewar's neck bit into her soul like a poacher's rabbit-trap. Connell looked so lonely as his grandmother walked away, abandoned like a stray dog. She collected herself, opened her bag, and approached the prisoner.

"Con," she said, "we've brought your medicine."

"Ye shoudna hae coom tonecht," said Con, although he drained the goblet anyway. "Tonecht I'll be a woluf."

"My husband is a werewolf too," Ariadne reminded him. "And I'll be biding to watch over you both."

Remus was having second thoughts about that part of the plan. "It's too cold," he said. "Look, the grass is frosted over."

"I'll be all right," said Ariadne, trying to control the chattering of her teeth.

"We'll be warrum when we're wolufs," said Connell.

"You *won't* be all right," Remus worried. "Not all night, in sub-zero temperatures."

Ariadne flicked her wand, but her *Incendio* charm sputtered feebly. "I'm not l-leaving," she said. "I'll be fine in the tent." She knew Remus had seen her ineptitude, because, at a mere twitch from his fingers, blue flames licked the frosty grass and flared to life.

Connell sprang back in horror. "It'll burrrun oos!"

"It will not spread," Ariadne soothed him. "It's magic fire."

"Oh. Aye. Megic." Connell was not convinced, but he protested no more.

"Would you like me to unchain you?" asked Remus.

Connell recoiled. "I'll be a woluf! It's dangerous. The Rrregistry men will tak' me away if I hev no chain."

Remus sighed, and dropped his hands.

"Are ye biding with me?"

"Yes," said Remus, "we're staying with you tonight."

"Folks dinna usually bide near a werrawolf."

"We're staying tonight."

Connell stood quietly for a moment, looking from Remus to Ariadne and back again. The three of them were so still that it was a shock when, at the identical moment, Remus and Connell both threw back their heads and jerked forwards. The glow of the full moon just above the horizon was beaming through the dusk, illuminating the two young men as they dropped onto all fours. By the time they contacted the grass, their arms were covered with grey hair, their noses were elongated, and their hindquarters had sprouted tails...

Remus settled himself on the grass, glancing from Ariadne to Connell. Connell stared at Remus for a moment through wide yellow eyes, then experimentally raised a paw. He examined one paw, then the other, as if he questioned what was happening to him.

"That's right, you're looking like a wolf yet," Ariadne told him. "And Remus is a werewolf too. But you can yet think like a human, can you not? That's the potion we gave you. You're yet human inside the wolf's body." She had no idea how much language Connell was still capable of understanding, but he seemed to relax at the sound of her voice.

Beside her, Remus growled. Reflexively, she stepped back. She saw that she had one hand raised, as if she had been about to pat Connell on the head. This was unwise; Connell was distressed, and didn't fully understand his new situation he might react impulsively if she came too close. Instead, she sat down beside Remus, and buried her hands in the pelt around his neck.

"You're safe, Connell," she said, with more confidence than she really felt for she was shamefully glad that he was chained. "You're human inside. You can control what you do."

Remus raised his head and looked pointedly at the tent. She had promised to keep warm; he wanted her inside. She scooted over to sit in the doorway, pulled a MacDougal-tartan blanket over her head, and held her hands out to the blue blaze in front of her, already colder than she cared to admit. Connell, with a distinct air of bewilderment apparent even in his canine form, laid his head down on the ground and closed his eyes. Remus kept his eyes trained on the other wolf; Ariadne knew that he would not sleep as long as Connell seemed to be awake.

It was while she was sitting huddled in the blanket, certain that Connell was asleep and hoping that Remus would relax soon, that something icy slid right through her spine. She cried out, and Remus sprang to his four feet. Neither an Arctic gale nor a sweep of snow was disturbing the landscape; but presently the blue firelight and the yellow moonshine seemed to be highlighting a wavery shape.

"You're not glad to see me," said the shape.

Ariadne's heart thudded to a halt. It was a ghost... a ghost with bloody stains across its breast and her mother's face.

"Merlin's cauldron! You're... nobody told me that you were... oh dear..."

"Mrs Smith said you'd be pleased to see me." The ghost complained in Mamma's voice, yet its face seemed somehow younger than it should be. Remus was lying quietly, apparently recognising that the creature wasn't dangerous. Of course, Mamma couldn't be dangerous, even as a ghost but what horrible accident had brought her here like this?

The ghost glided downwards, to something close to a sitting position. "Mrs Smith's sent me to tell you everything. Why are you not happy to see me?"

"I... I'm very very glad you came to speak to me." *This is not Mamma. It's a lass of my own age. But it looks so much like her, and it's bringing a message from Veleta...* "But I was not expecting company."

"It's been thirty years," said the ghost. "I'm supposing they've all forgotten me." She brightened. "But we could do introductions. Mrs Smith says that you are Ariadne Lupin. And I am Keindrech Macnair."

Ariadne's heart fluttered to life again and she allowed herself to breathe. Mamma was not dead. This ghost had been dead since before she was born. Ariadne ought to have made the connection; they were so close to the boundaries of Macnair Castle, where she knew her aunt had died... This time she extended her right hand cheerfully.

"Good evening, Aunt Keindrech. I am your sister Bethoc's daughter."

The ghost's icy hand slid through her own. "It's nice to meet *close* family," she said mournfully. "The Macnairs are not much for family affection. In fact, if you're wanting the truth, they are perfectly horrible people."

"How lonely for you," Ariadne agreed. She repressed the urge to ask, "*Why did Veleta send you to me?*" "One must never hurry a ghost.

"Lonely! It took far more than loneliness to drive me to *this*." The ghost gestured to her messy bodice. "But the living are never really understanding, are they? Have you any idea, Mrs Lupin, how hard it was for me to achieve death?"

"I'm expecting it was a great accomplishment."

"It took me four months to die." Aunt Keindrech spoke proudly. "Day after day, I looked for a way to end myself. Spells and potions and cursed objects and fire and water and plain ordinary rope. But nothing worked. The Macnairs made sure of it. Are you knowing what worked in the end? Did they never tell you?"

Ariadne couldn't help shivering as the ghost's face pressed close to her own.

"It was a sword. I plunged it through my ribs at sunset. And I've been dead ever since."

Ariadne could not bring herself to say "Congratulations," but an indistinct murmur in her throat encouraged Keindrech to keep talking.

"On the whole, I prefer being dead. It's less painful. Bethoc may have mentioned that we had a very painful childhood. Our father was a drunk, and our sister Gruoch... she was a terror. Bethoc and I were always running into cupboards and hiding behind curtains, trying to get away from her. Once we found an invisibility spell that nearly worked. But Gruoch always found us in the end. She made our clothes disappear when we walked down the High Street, and she turned us bald in the middle of parties, and she covered us with acne. She knew hot needle spells, and tripping hexes, and freezers, and stingers... as well as Muggle torments like kicking and punching and twisting and scratching and biting and... well, it's amazing, really, that we did not die as toddlers. And Nyfain never did a thing to stop her, and if Donat tried it, Gruoch would just find a way to torture Donat too. Sometimes I think that what Gruoch did to me is worse than what Cousin Walden and his mother did."

Ariadne swallowed her nausea. The Truth About Mamma's Childhood tasted like a draught of asafetida and wormwood. "What did the Macnairs do to you?"

"*Torture*." Aunt Keindrech relished drawing out the word. "The Macnairs are just like Gruoch, you know. They're *all*iking to hurt other people. They *said* they did it for science, but they really did it to have somebody to hurt."

"So you were trapped with your tormenters." Ariadne hoped she wouldn't have to hear what exactly the Macnairs had done to Aunt Keindrech, but the ghost, having found a sympathetic audience, was merciless.

"I was their guinea pig. The Macnairs were researching new ways of attacking their enemies. Melt their eyeballs, sew their fingers together, bend their joints backwards, dig craters in their chests, curse them with uncontrollable flatulence... they thought of everything. And of course they had to check that these punishments worked properly, had to try them out on somebody. That was me. They called it 'assisting with experimental research into magical hexes', but what they were meaning was that they'd cast every hex on me. Covered me with boils, made my body transparent so that every visitor could see my intestines and kidneys at work, changed my gender to male and then to a hermaphrodite and even neutered me... I was wishing to be dead long before they thought of turning my limbs inside out (which they never perfected) or causing my own speech to give me electric shocks (which they tested under Veritaserum). I was hoping every time that each new hex would be the one to kill me."

"Is that how you died?"

"It is *not* I've told you that I died by the sword. Those hexes could not kill me. Not the endless coughing although it scraped my throat raw nor the stomach-splitting, nor even the three days I spent encased in a block of solid ice. Nothing belonging to the castle could cause my death because... well, you're knowing..."

"I am not knowing. Why are you thinking these hexes could not kill you?"

"The obvious reason," said Aunt Keindrech mysteriously. "The same reason it was so difficult to kill myself. I could not be poisoned, or suffocated, or drowned. Even when I threw myself from the topmost turret and broke every bone at once... yet I survived. The only thing that worked was the ancient sword of Gifford Ollerton. Barnaby Ollerton brought it to the castle when he was visiting Cousin Walden and I... I *borrowed* it. I was the first person to bloody Gifford's sword in five hundred years. That's my claim to fame, I'm supposing; I died by the same sword that slew Hengist of Barnton."

Ariadne tried not to think too hard about the circumstances that would drive a young witch to such a painful and hazardous suicide. Keindrech had had thirty years to become proud of her dramatic death.

"The sword came from outside the castle, you see," said the ghost. "So it could kill me just like anybody else. It's only weapons and curses from *inside* the castle that cannot destroy a Macnair."

In the cloudiest depths of Ariadne's brain, something was slowly clicking into place. "Are you saying that items inside the castle are Charmed not to attack members of the Macnair family?"

"They are not; it's quite the other way around," corrected Keindrech. "It's the family members who are Charmed. Nothing that belongs to Macnair Castle no weapon, no object, no spell, no potion can cause our deaths. We can be hurt most horribly, but never quite as much as those things hurt other people. And we cannot be killed. I had to choose a weapon that did *not* belong to the Castle to have any chance of dying. And I found one!" she finished triumphantly.

"But I'm not a Macnair..." Ariadne began.

"Of course you are," said the ghost. "You've said you're Bethoc's daughter. The spell protects all bairns of Macnair blood born in Macnair Castle, and all their descendants to three generations. Descendants were included in the spell so that married daughters could safely bring their bairns to visit. Well, my father Cuthbert Macnair was born inside the castle. So all his daughters are protected, even though we never went there in childhood. And so are you, and so, I'm expecting, will all your bairns be."

"So *that* is why the *Animus Quiesco* could not kill me."

"Of course it cannot. Your protection is Charmed into your blood."

It was a very sobering thought. She had survived last winter's adventure, not because the Macnair spells were weak, but because they were overpoweringly strong. Perhaps she had survived Baldwin Macnair's assassination attempt the previous spring, not because Remus had chosen to protect her, but because her own blood had been Charmed to call upon to demand his protective instincts. Eventually the Macnairs would be careful to select a weapon from outside the castle. Until then, their attacks on her were a hazard to Remus and the other people around her.

"Why did you use the sword?" she asked suddenly. "Why did you not ask Barnaby Ollerton to take you out of the castle?"

Aunt Keindrech snorted. "I'd never risk trusting a friend of the Macnairs! And where did I have to go? Mamma was murdered. Gruoch was in Azkaban. Nyfain and Donat were long since dead. Bethoc was married, and her husband would not have been wanting... well, I'm doubting they had room for me. Besides, there was the magical barrier around the castle... I could not cross the barrier. Nobody can Disapparate within the barrier. I was not authorised to use the Floo. I had not the skill to make a Portkey. I was just like your friend Mrs Smith... but I'm forgetting! It was Mrs Smith who sent me to tell you. She's wanting you to know *everything* about her."

Ariadne swallowed her impatience, and made an attentive sound in her throat.

"Everything would take too long, but I'll tell you some of it, and then you'll know why Mrs Smith's longing to escape. Did you never wonder who was the ~~father~~ of her bairns?"

"I..."

"Walden's son Humphrey did the first one. But when he married that Yaxley quine, she objected, so he wouldn't do the second. His brother Baldwin had to do that one. But he's in Azkaban now they're saying that that's *your* fault, Mrs Lupin. So for the third, Cousin Walden himself "

Uncle Walden was a heavy-set man who reeked of gingivitis. Ariadne's self-control gave way. She emptied her dinner all over the tent-pole. *This is not really news*, she

desperately reminded herself, to calm her heaving stomach. *I have known it for months.* But she could have very happily survived a lifetime without learning the exact details.

Remus stood up and surveyed the mess. But not even Remus could perform wand-magic while he was Transformed. Ariadne waved her own wand wretchedly and muttered an *Evanescio*. Some of the vomit seemed to vanish her robe was dry again but the foul smell lingered.

"You're wanting to be careful what you eat," said Aunt Keindrech unconcernedly. "I was telling you that Walden had to do the third one. Gertrude his wife objected very strongly, and Walden had to put her in a Bodybind. That would be why Regelinda hates Mrs Smith so much. She sees that third baby as a betrayal of Gertrude her mother, you know. But they will not be stopping at three, Mrs Lupin. They'll keep on and on, until Mrs Smith is dead with exhaustion. Because they want wee Macnair Locospectors, all of their own, as weapons against their enemies."

Ariadne nodded, while her spine tingled and the sweat ran down her neck.

"And there is lots more to tell you, but that's maybe enough for now."

"Certainly it is."

"Mrs Smith has been Locospecting you every day, so she knew you would be here this evening."

A low growl escaped Remus's throat; Veleta must know by now that he was a werewolf.

"She sent me to tell you that she's wanting to take her bairns out of Macnair Castle, and she begs you to find a way to do it."

Ariadne suppressed her first impulse to make promises. Ghosts were not like live people; it was much harder to discern their real intentions. Aunt Keindrech *seemed* to sympathise with Veleta, but ghosts were notorious for obliging any person who paid them any attention; she might betray everything to the Macnair family tomorrow. Instead, she asked, "How are you suggesting we manage that?"

"I'm only telling you the message." Aunt Keindrech sounded suddenly cool. "I've no idea. I'm supposing you should find out what kind of spell is keeping the bairns inside the castle, and then find a way to break it."

"Are you knowing what kind of a spell it is?"

"Of course I'm not. If I did know I'd break it myself. But it's very important you find a way to move the bairns. Because Mrs Smith will not leave them behind. By the way, Mrs Smith's not her *real* name."

"Of course it's not."

"I was there when they named her. They planned on the day they caught her they would call her Jane Smith. And they were knowing she'd guess that it was a fake name, so she'd always live with the question of who she really was, but she'd never find out. Regelinda's liking it when Mrs Smith's uncomfortable. Anyway, that was the message."

A slew of questions were fighting their way out of Ariadne's mouth, but she had no opportunity to ask any.

"I'm not understanding," remarked the ghost, "why you sit around with werewolves on such a cold night. You've maybe a connection with the Dark Arts yourself? Tell me another time; I have to inform Mrs Smith that her message is safely delivered."

Aunt Keindrech wafted off before Ariadne had time to protest that Veleta was needing no information since she would certainly have Locospected the interview.

Ariadne turned to Remus, on the point of asking for his reaction until she remembered that he was unable to speak. Instead, she caressed his head, fanned her bonfire to a higher blaze, and retreated to the tent.

It was a long time before she slept. But she knew that Remus *thought* she was sleeping, because, after a long silence, she heard his low, angry howling.

*A/N. Many thanks to my Alpha, **Robert**, who thought of the more unpleasant spells that were practised in Macnair Castle.*

Pursuing Hunter's Moon

Chapter 14 of 21

Remus plans to meet other werewolves, and Sarah sets out on a fool's errand.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Pursuing Hunter's Moon

Thursday 18 September Wednesday 8 October 1986

Foss, Perthshire; Old Basford, Nottingham.

Rated PG for adult themes (money, industrial relations and crime).

Remus awoke abruptly. The moon had certainly set, for the ice seeping through his robes warned him that he had lost his wolf's hair. Opposite him, Connell Dewar jerked upwards against the tree to which he was still chained.

"The woluf did come," said Connell. "I almost thought I didna transforrum, but I hed woluf-paws."

Remus hauled himself stiffly to his feet. "Shall I unchain you?" The damp wind cutting through his cloak was thoroughly unpleasant.

"Dinna do thet! Grendma will be angry. She's not knowing that I'm not a rreal woluf any more." Connell suddenly stood stock-still, as if he had only just heard his own words. "I'm still a woluf, but I'm not a danger. If Arrriadne gives me her medicine everry month I winnot be hurrtin' anybody ever."

He broke into the first smile that Remus had ever seen on his face.

* * * * *

Connell Dewar was a Muggle, and Connell Dewar was a strikingly confused human being. It was clear that, as an objective reporter, his word would be worth even less than Remus's. "Besides," said Ariadne, "we cannot publish results on a sample of two." They could not progress any further without a larger sample, so the next day Remus owed Sturgis Podmore to ask for a copy of the Werewolf Registry.

It arrived a week later, on a lecture-free day when Remus was supposed to be writing essays. He had assumed that he and Ariadne would read the Registry together, but of course he couldn't settle to write essays when the document that had controlled his life was finally in his hands. It was a manila folder of *Zerocso* pages. The introduction began:

There are 67 werewolves currently living in the British Isles. Sixty-two are wizards, five are Muggles. Thirty-three are male, 34 are female...

It wasn't that Remus hadn't known what to expect. A list of names, addresses, dates... why else would a Registry be kept? But when his own name leapt out at him, the reality struck him very forcefully. *His* life. Chronicled, by some official who had never met him, for every eye to read.

Name: Remus John Lupin.

Born: 10 March 1959.

Pedigree: Both parents magical; all grandparents Muggles.

Bitten: 6 July 1963.

By: Fenrir Greyback.

The words leapt out and slapped him in the face. *They knew who had bitten him.* It was public knowledge. Yet... the Ministry official who had grilled his parents, nearly a quarter of a century earlier, had claimed that they hadn't known the identity of his assailant.

Perhaps they hadn't, at the time. But they had evidently found out since. They had written it up on the public Registry. But they had never informed him. Had they ever informed his parents? If so, why had Mum and Dad never shared the information with him? *Why does the Ministry know more about my life than I know myself?*

He made himself keep reading.

Last Known Address: 24, Spurge Street, Old Basford, Nottingham.

Human Connections: Married Ariadne Feiltiarna MacDougal (pure-blood) on 6 July 1985 and still legally bound.

He had been so overwhelmed by reading Mr Greyback's name that he had only half-noticed the coincidence of the date. But it struck him between the eyes now. His wedding day had been the anniversary of his biting. Everyone who ever read the Registry would know that. And it had never occurred to him. He hadn't *known* the date of his biting.

He tried to tell himself that he would still want to celebrate their wedding anniversary next year. But... they knew about Ariadne. He was suddenly glad that she was at work. She didn't need to know that she had fallen under suspicion, was under some kind of Ministry surveillance as a woman who had abandoned respectable society in order to "bind" herself to a monster.

Victims: None known so far.

None known? Not, "no victims," but, "none known so far."

Died:

And there was a space on the last line, waiting for some official to add the date of his final demise.

He wondered what had happened to Mr Greyback. Whose responsibility had it been to care *for him* during his Transformations, and by what accident had the safety measures failed on that night? Had he been carted off to Azkaban? With trial or without? They must have told the poor man that he had bitten a child. Had he been wracked with remorse? Had he tried to contact the Lupin family, expressed any apology or regret?

The questions crowded through Remus's mind so noisily that he was barely aware of how he had been flipping the pages until Mr Greyback's profile stared him in the face. It was very long.

Name: Fenrir Greyback.

Born: 21 January 1924.

Pedigree: All grandparents magical.

Bitten: 13 September 1943.

By: Shual Zev.

Last Known Address: Itinerant, presumed sylvanian.

Human Connections: Allied with Him-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named.

Victims:

The list of victims filled the page. Fifty people, mainly Muggles, had been savaged to death. Two hundred and seventeen children, all Muggles, had been bitten and had died during their first Transformation. And his own name was listed among the thirty-one living wizards and witches whom Greyback had reduced to lycanthropy.

Two hundred and ninety-eight victims? That was too many accidents. Did Greyback plan to bite? or was some person using him as a tool? Yet it didn't seem that he had ever been arrested why not?. Did "sylvanian" mean that Greyback was camping in some forest which forest? And did such a vague address mean he was still at large, poised to attack again?

Feverishly, Remus turned to Shual Zev's page. The entry was short. Shual Zev had been a refugee from Poland. Fenrir Greyback had been his only victim. Mr Zev had died six weeks after this biting. Remus could guess the cause of death.

By the time he had read the profile of every British werewolf, a definite pattern was emerging. Thirty-one of the sixty-seven living werewolves had been bitten by Greyback. Twenty-seven were the work of his betas. All of these had been bitten when they were less than eight years old. Only nine living werewolves had a pedigree unrelated to Greyback. These nine included all five of the Muggles. All seven of their alphas had been captured. Only two had needed the silver bullet; the other five had mysteriously "died" within days of discovering their mistake.

But when it came to the Greyback victims... again and again the ledger read like this.

By: Fenrir Greyback.

Last Known Address: Itinerant, presumed sylvanian.

Human Connections: Allied with Greyback.

Was there a whole colony of werewolves somewhere out in the forests? What was this "alliance"? Was this some kind of premeditated attack against human society? If so, why were Greyback's betas never captured?

Remus began to be glad that Shual Zev had not lived to see any of this. It appeared that, before Mr Zev's arrival in Britain, the werewolf problem had been under control.

It made sense of Ariadne's assertion that "nobody had cared enough to research a cure." When there were only a few werewolves, it was easy to restrain them, therefore a waste of resources to invest in research. When there were many, people were too much afraid of them to want to give any help.

And it seemed that civilised society actually had a good reason to fear Greyback. Remus repressed the bile rising in his throat as he asked himself what might have been done to Greyback to inspire such an uncontrollable revenge against the whole world...

He tried to remind himself why he was reading the Registry. He was looking for werewolves who were interested in researching a cure for lycanthropy. Obviously none of Greyback's allies would want to support the advancement of civilised society. The werewolves to contact were the Muggles.

They all had normal addresses. Remus supposed he could buy stamps and envelopes at an ordinary Muggle post office.

* * * * *

"I'm not seeing any problem," repeated Ariadne when she finally came home. She was only an hour late, but she looked pale and drawn, and she didn't volunteer any information about whatever Jigger had made her do with the day. "You'll write to these people, I'll brew the Wolfsbane Potion, and if they are interested we'll take it to them. But, Remus, today I "

"The problem is with transport," said Remus. "These people live all over the place can you even find their homes on a map?" He opened an atlas that he had borrowed from the local library along with *Experimental Design and Method* and *Helping the Reluctant Reader*.

"Of course I can. Here is Lancashire... here is Essex... why are you laughing?"

"I'm not laughing," he fibbed hastily. "I'm wondering if you have any idea how far those places are from Nottingham. How long would it take us to travel to all of them using Muggle methods?"

She considered. "Do those Muggle trains go faster than the Hogwarts Express? Even if they do, I'm supposing it would take two or three days to round the whole country. I was not thinking we should travel like Muggles. We could take the Knight Bus, or..."

"Sweetheart, that's what I'm trying to tell you. The Knight Bus would charge us separately for each leg of the journey that means over four Galleons a day, for eight days, for just *one* of us to go. And it wouldn't be for just the one week; we'd have to make some arrangement for every month. Even if we could fit a round trip into a single evening, we haven't the money to finance all that."

As he spoke, he knew how mean-spirited he sounded. Ariadne survived on astonishingly little money. She had cheerfully refused when Kingsley had invited them to join the group on last summer's camping holiday in Cornwall. She hadn't demanded home renovations or elaborate furnishings. She had had no new clothes since they were married. She grew her own Potions supplies. When she wanted books she went to the council library. And what money they had was currently being absorbed by his education. Now she wanted something that cost money, and not even something for herself, but something born of that youthful idealism that he had promised her never to crush.

And he had to tell her that they couldn't afford it.

Ariadne looked as if she might be trying to reply, but before she could say anything coherent, she was interrupted by a crackle of sparks in the fireplace. The green flares in the flames warned them that someone was trying to Floo them, and soon Sturgis Podmore's head appeared in the hearth.

"Come in, Sturgis." Remus hoped he sounded as if he meant it. "We were just about to boil the kettle." Ariadne was moving towards the kitchen before he closed his mouth. She must be aching to argue her case, to plead that the money would grow on some tree somewhere, but she simply smiled brightly at Sturgis as he stepped into their lounge then began to fill the kettle.

"Hope you're having a good day." Sturgis seemed to be speaking with an equally false heartiness. "Oh, you've been reading the Werewolf Registry. Did it tell you what you wanted to know?"

"Yes, thanks. It's been... enlightening. And how are you?"

Sturgis stretched out on the sofa and said, "Well enough. I'm planning my trip to Romania at last."

"Sturgis," said Ariadne suddenly, "what's wrong?"

"I have a great deal of free time on my hands. So I'm looking on the bright side and thinking of it as my opportunity to visit Romania."

"Are you meaning that you've lost your job?"

"Well, yes. But I was bored with the job anyway. I "

A horrible suspicion crept through Remus's mind. "Is that because of me? Tell the truth, Sturgis. Were you not allowed to hand the Werewolf Registry around to real werewolves?"

"What?" Sturgis looked genuinely surprised. "Oh no, it's nothing to do with you, Remus. I'm encouraged to show the Werewolf Registry to as many people as possible. No, I've been caught out in a totally illegal crime, one that I knew would be serious before I agreed to do it." He spooned three sugars into the mug of tea that Ariadne held out to him. "The person whom I was illicitly obliging was your friend Miss Webster. By the way, does she have a boyfriend?"

"Sarah always has a boyfriend," said Ariadne.

"Pity. But never mind. Miss Webster breezed into my office without an appointment two days ago, saying she urgently needed a Portkey for Ministry-disapproved business. She had written out the co-ordinates of where she was going..."

"*Sarah?*" asked Remus incredulously. He knew perfectly well that Sarah couldn't have calculated the co-ordinates of the next room.

"Why not? She's a clever young lady. I saw at once that the co-ordinates would take her right inside Macnair Castle, but she hadn't mentioned the address, so I didn't let on that I'd worked out her destination. I just made her the Portkey, took her money, and wrote down in the record that it was for a 'private visit'."

Ariadne was now ashen. "Sturgis... in how much trouble are you?"

Sturgis gulped at his tea. "I suppose that's what I've come to ask you. Did Miss Webster discuss her plans with you?"

"Not before she acted. Remus," Ariadne turned to him, "Sarah took me to lunch today, and she was very... pleased with herself. She told me that she went to visit Veleta yesterday. I was assuming that she'd maybe Apparated to the front gate and waited until Veleta could let her in. She did not say, Sturgis, that she had taken an illegal Portkey, or that she'd involved you in making it. Perhaps she'd learned the co-ordinates from Hestia."

Remus began to grasp what had happened. Sturgis had stuck his head into a bee-hive in order to oblige a girl with hair like honey.

"I was happy to help," said Sturgis. "I knew that Miss Webster was going visiting without an invitation, but I assumed that you or Kingsley or the Joneses were in on the plan and had considered the dangers. Obviously something backfired, because Walden Macnair Flooed the Portkey Office this morning to complain about the intrusion. I explained that Miss Webster was Muggle-born and didn't understand the rules, at which Mr Macnair transferred his complaint to the Head of Department. And of course I was in trouble for authorising a Portkey without checking whether the client had an invitation. I was sacked on the spot, but I think I managed to keep Miss Webster out of trouble."

"Sturgis, you'd better take that holiday in Romania *soon*," advised Ariadne. "It's very unwise to anger the Macnair family. It's... oh, Sarah was not thinking! You've maybe kept her out of trouble with the Ministry, but you cannot keep her out of trouble with the Macnairs. And she told me today that everything had gone smoothly she has yet no idea that she's made trouble for you."

Sturgis placed his empty mug on the floor. "I did it with my eyes open," he said reasonably. "I knew it was about Miss Vablatsky, and I was glad to help. It was Miss Webster who took all the real risks."

"Sarah never worries about danger," said Ariadne. "She's feeling her visit was a grand success. She said that Veleta recognised her at once from Locospecting her. And apparently they talked for hours."

Remus groaned inwardly. Sarah had evidently stirred up a cauldron of trouble without any awareness of the consequences. Just how gargantuan would the mess turn out to be?

"And Veleta told her... all kinds of things that... that she's had no time to discuss before." Ariadne closed her eyes. "It's not that I'm so surprised... but it's all so horrible..."

"Veleta's the new Aunt Keindrech, is she?"

"Pretty well. Ever since Dragomira was married, Regelinda has not known what to do with herself. Her only entertainment is to barge into Veleta's room and use her and the children as target practice."

Sturgis winced. Remus felt compelled to ask, "Did Sarah achieve *anything* useful with her visit?"

"She did start out with a useful plan," Ariadne said carefully. "She said that Veleta should leave by Portkey and report her whole story to the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Once the Aurors knew the truth, they could return for the children and arrest the Macnairs. I'm supposing that plan... would look right to Sarah."

"You needn't say," said Remus. "But Veleta refused to leave her children."

"Of course she did. She *tried* to explain to Sarah... Regelinda would take revenge by increasing the target practice against them. And Cousin Humphrey once threatened that if ever Veleta left Foss, he'd track her down and Obliviate her memories of her bairns, so that she'd no longer be knowing that they ever existed. Then they'd lose their mother for the rest of their lives. The Macnairs are so adept at keeping a step ahead of the law... Veleta has good reasons to believe they would win the fight."

"Do you think Sarah understands that now?"

"Better than she did. She was telling me today that we must never discuss Veleta's circumstances with anybody who might make any kind of trouble for the Macnairs because that would only result in punishments for Veleta or the children. She announced with great enthusiasm that we have to think of a plan that will remove all the children at once."

"In other words, you've made no progress in helping Miss Vablatsky," said Sturgis. "It's a pity... Miss Webster seems such a down-to-earth person."

"Actually she discovered one small thing that might be useful," said Ariadne. "Sarah did quiz Veleta quite hard about the kinds of spells that might be keeping the children in the castle. But all Veleta was seeming to know about it was that nothing was ever done *to* the bairns. The spells have been part of the castle for hundreds of years. So then Sarah asked if any of the ghosts could help. Veleta said that only Aunt Keindrech was her friend, but that she was quite a new ghost, she'd not know about centuries-old spells. However, Sarah made Veleta Locospect where Aunt Keindrech was and fetch her into the sitting room. And of course it took ages to make Keindrech understand what they were wanting to know. And then Aunt Keindrech only repeated what she'd told me that she was not knowing what kind of spell it was."

Remus found it difficult to imagine that Sarah would have accepted this reply.

"While Sarah was working on Aunt Keindrech, Regelinda walked in."

"What!" interjected Sturgis. "And Miss Webster still thinks she had a successful visit?"

"To be fair, Sarah handled the situation quite efficiently. Regelinda was so furious to see Sarah whom she recognised, although she'd forgotten her name that she turned Veleta into a rabbit on the spot. So then Sarah tried to turn Regelinda into a carrot, but of course it did not work not in Macnair Castle. The hex did turn Regelinda's hair green, which made her even angrier. That gave Sarah time to end the spell on Veleta, which made Regelinda angrier than ever."

Sturgis was grinning, but Remus couldn't find it funny.

"Sarah pushed Regelinda out of the room, modified her memory, and slammed the door shut before Regelinda had time to reorient herself. Then Veleta implored her to leave she said she'd be... in trouble..." Ariadne closed her eyes for a moment and shook her head. "It was while they arguing about that that Aunt Keindrech interrupted. 'I've thought of something,' she said. 'That spell used on the Macnair prisoners it's about blood.' But when they asked what she meant, she just repeated that she was not knowing what kind of spell it was, but that it involved the Macnair blood."

Dark Magic again.

"When it became clear that Keindrech had no more to say, and that Veleta would not touch Sarah's Portkey, Sarah really did leave. So we did learn one thing. All the same... I'm wishing Sarah had consulted the rest of us before she acted."

"Did you tell her so?" A superfluous question, he knew.

"Of course not. There was no point after the event, and she was meaning no harm. But the consequences... well, Sarah's never thinking about much beyond the immediate emergency."

"Obviously the Macnairs know that there has been an intruder," said Sturgis. "How do you think they worked it out?"

"They have their ways," Remus sighed. "If the children said anything... if Aunt Keindrech were in a talkative mood... if Veleta had to describe her day under Veritaserum... if a hair fell from Sarah's head, or if she left a fingerprint on a table... by the time Walden Macnair complained to the Portkey Office, he must have known who had intruded."

Sturgis sat up in alarm. "So Miss Webster is in trouble?"

"She should probably take a very long trip to New York," said Ariadne. "It's safe to assume that both you and she have joined the list of the Banned."

After Sturgis had left, Ariadne said, "*Ablood* spell. That might be one clue that matters. Ghosts do not always talk sensibly, but... how can we find out about blood?"

"Nowhere respectable," Remus pointed out. "A spell that requires blood usually involves the Dark Arts. Even that Protection Charm on the Macnair descendants... it may have saved your life, but I wonder if it were the kind of spell that Professor Dumbledore would use."

Ariadne shuddered palpably beside him and drew her hand across her forehead, as if to drive away disturbing thoughts. "That's what made me think Aunt Keindrech could be right. We're knowing that the Macnairs have already used one blood-spell. What if there's another... one that keeps all Macnairs inside Macnair Castle? Veleta's children *are* Macnairs. It would explain why she could take a Portkey when her bairns could not."

"But it wouldn't explain more basic things. Such as for a simple example why Regelinda was able to go to Hogwarts. Why your grandfather was able to move out, and why you can't even enter. Various Macnairs have been leaving the castle for all kinds of reasons for centuries. There won't be a straightforward explanation for why Veleta's children can't."

Ariadne nodded unhappily. "I'll research blood-charms. But I'm not expecting to find any answers quickly."

"Sweetheart, how will you find time to do that? Your working hours aren't becoming any shorter, and we were discussing the time-shortage before Sturgis arrived."

"That's right. Before we were interrupted I was going to say: if we cannot travel to all those werewolves, we'll have to ask them to come to us."

"Here? In this house?" He was aware that she had changed the subject, but the last thing he wanted to encourage was yet another extra research project, so he was glad to bring his mind and hers, he hoped back to the werewolves.

"Unless you've a better idea... could we not have guests for a week?"

He doubted they would come. The werewolves who could afford the train fare were the ones who had jobs, which meant they wouldn't want to spend a whole week in a strange city. But it was the only plan they had, so he nodded and asked, "Where do you propose they sleep?"

"I'm assuming only one or two will agree to come... can you not Transfigure the attic or the garage into a suitable room? You enlarged the parlour at Kincarden."

He supposed he could; if he did it carefully, the neighbours would never notice. The real question was whether Ariadne understood the magnitude of her own generosity. "Ariadne, are you sure you're wanting strangers in your house for that long?"

She shrugged. "I'm not seeing how else we can distribute the potion. Remus, I am knowing we'll maybe meet some... uncomfortable people. Not everybody is noble like you, or innocent like Connell Dewar. But what else can we do?"

He could think of a dozen alternatives, but they all involved requesting help from the Ministry or the Most Extraordinary Society of Potioneers. So he nodded again. "You're right, there's no other way for now. We've left it too late to make elaborate plans for this month perhaps we should invite only Connell to stay this time. That'll give you time to think about whether you really want to play hotels in November."

She agreed. For a second she seemed to be sitting at a great distance, although she was actually curled under his arm. She was too loyal to complain about their financial situation, but when she was so emotionally invested in this werewolf project, of course his poor providing skills must bother her.

Mooning after Dreams

Chapter 15 of 21

As Muggles enter the magical world and Mages engage with Muggles, Remus loses track of the fine line between reality and fiction.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Mooning after Dreams

Thursday 9 October Friday 31 October 1986

Old Basford and Carlton, Nottingham.

Rated PG for anti-social honesty about the difference between the real and the imagined.

"Tipografia"

The handwriting on Remus's last essay transformed itself into serified print as uniform as any produced by those new Muggle machines in the College library were they called Raincoats? He Banished the essay into his bag he would submit it tomorrow and stretched himself, cramped from writing on a clipboard in the laboratory armchair. He had stayed away from college because his classmates distracted him from his essays, but his own study had suddenly seemed a lonely place. So he went to sit in the laboratory, where the delicious scent of Wolfsbane Potion crept comfortingly around every pause in his writing. No matter how vile it was going to taste, the smell of the potion was relaxing, as if Ariadne stood in the room with him.

But she wasn't with him. It would be months before she was released from the long hours at Slug and Jigger's, so Remus was once again home alone. With his essay finished, it was time to restructure his attic. He scratched numbers onto scrap paper for a few minutes, then went out to the landing and Conjured a ladder.

The first thing he did in the attic was to put his foot through the plaster he had forgotten there were no floorboards. He Conjured a chipboard platform, but obviously he would need raw material of some kind if he were to Transfigure something into a permanent floor. He glanced down at the numbers again, then ordered the walls, "*Dilato*!"

Immediately the sloping walls sprang backwards and the attic gables were arching far above his head. The room was still shaped like an attic, but it had tripled in size. It needed windows, but they would have to be invisible to the Muggle neighbours in the street. He didn't recall anything in Goshawk's *Standard Book of Spells* that would Transfigure sections of a roof into invisible windows, but it shouldn't be a conceptually difficult spell. He waved his wand and tried, "*Fenestras occaecatas*!"

Four large panes of glass shimmered into place between the rafters. He was so entranced by his success that he promptly stepped back from his chipboard (which, as a Conjured object, hadn't expanded along with the original attic) and thrust his foot through the plaster again.

He would need a real floor. And he would need internal walls. And furniture. All before this time tomorrow. It was time to walk down to the lumber yard and hope that the price of a few rotten offcuts would work out at less than the cost of a week of journeys on the Knight Bus.

Connell Dewar and his grandmother arrived the next day. Remus met them at Nottingham Station on his way back from submitting his essays. Old Mrs Patterson was very excited. "We hev not hed a holiday since Con was bitten." She had never seen a city larger than Perth, and she had never travelled to a foreign country. "We hed to change trrrains twess, at Glesgow end at Crrrewe, and fowks didna underrrstand a worrrud we were saying!" She didn't even mind having to walk all the way back to Old Basford, and chattered animatedly on how few trees there were, and how the houses went on and on forever.

Connell was more subdued. "We'rre wolluves but we'rrenot wolluves," he repeated to Remus several times. Fortunately the crowds of shoppers took no notice. Connell had little else to say until they entered the house, when his first words were, "Em eh to hev meh medicine now?"

He looked so hopeful that Remus led him straight up to the laboratory. He measured a gill for Connell and three jackpots for himself. They faced one another solemnly and drank.

"Ye hev a lovely house, Rrremus," said Mrs Patterson.

He could not help accepting the compliment with an architect's pride. He had Transfigured some very rotten lumber into a continuation of their existing staircase, a sturdy floor for the new second storey, and partitions that gave two large rooms. He had even managed beds, by Transfiguring his desk and bookcase. He knew the construction would not last for ever perhaps, on such scanty original materials, no more than six months but no Muggles on a week-long visit would guess that it wasn't real.

Mrs Patterson settled in to enjoy her hosts' kitchen. By the time Ariadne arrived home, there was a huge vegetarian haggis on the rickety dining table.

Ariadne shook hands with Mrs Patterson first, then with Connell. Suddenly her eyes filled with tears. She shook her head and could not speak to him. When she excused herself as fast as she decently could, Remus followed her upstairs.

"Ariadne, what's wrong?"

"It's nothing. I'm... It's really nothing."

"Is something about Connell upsetting you?"

"It's... Not Connell. I'll be all right. But I'm going to change into house-robies before dinner."

He couldn't imagine why she didn't want to discuss it further. It did seem odd it was ~~sur~~*urtful* that she was excluding him from her confidence. But of course he couldn't intrude.

Mrs Patterson loved her holiday abroad. She spent her week gaily riding on buses (as well as up and down escalators in the shopping centres), feeding ducks in Vernon Park, visiting Green's windmill and Nottingham Castle and the Robin Hood Museum, and spending what little money she had on lace curtains and Boots hand lotion so that she could prove where she had been.

Connell remained very quiet. He seemed to like wandering into shops to watch the televisions or admire the bikes, but he never said much about his activities.

And Remus had no time to be an attentive host. For on the Monday he began this third teaching round.

"This one is bothering you," said Ariadne.

It was. By the third round, a certain standard of competence was expected, and how competent was he really? On the first round, he had done little more than observe. Miss Peach, the supervisor of his second round, had been very uncritical and had required very little of him (or, for that matter, of the children). It had been fun, but he hadn't learned much about teaching. But now he had to do well. If he failed to meet the standard, his ineptitude would be duly noted on his record, and, even if he did pass his exams, his chances of ever securing a job in teaching anywhere would be severely reduced.

At this stage when all their savings were spent, when they were living off what Ariadne brought home each week, when Ariadne was discovering that altruism cost money but when the worst hadn't yet happened and might never happen he could not express his insecurities out loud.

So he kissed her and said, "Carlton is a long walk from Old Basford. This seems a bad week to be spending such long hours away from home."

The faint frown on her brow indicated that she knew he hadn't told her whole truth.

He had calmed down by the time he actually entered the Year Two classroom. His supervising teacher was a plump Irishwoman in her sixties no. She was a Muggle; she was probably still short of fifty. He tried not to feel sad at the thought of such a young woman looking so distinctly middle-aged, for Shannon Reed was certainly not a person who wasted any pity on herself. She greeted him warmly, and began to brief him on the children.

"Remus, aren't you comfortable about using Silly Sammy?" She lifted a two-foot rod-puppet clown off her desk and it flopped stupidly towards him. "The gimmick won't work unless you're comfortable with it."

She had an Ariadne-like ability to latch onto his feelings. "I'm not much of a ventriloquist," he admitted. "But if the children expect it, I'll give it a try." His fingers fumbled towards the rod that controlled the puppet's mouth.

"Here," said Mrs Reed. "You move the arms this way."

He was still experimenting with the stiff rods beneath the folds of lozenge-patterned cloth when the children arrived back from assembly. Mrs Reed introduced him as "Mr Lupin, our new teacher" and left him to manipulate Silly Sammy and hence control the class.

"Silly Sammy says that someone has a birthday today," he began. He waved the puppet's arms, and turned it this way and that, but it was while he was looking to his right that a boy on his left sprang to his feet.

"It's me." Jonathan Miller held out his arms for the puppet and cradled it. "I'm seven today. And I had a bike from Mum and Dad and an air-gun from Grandma and Lego from Uncle Andrew..." After Jonathan had finished detailing his aeroplane-shaped cake and the flavours of soft drink that were to be served at his party, he gave the puppet back to Remus and sat down.

There was no brief for what had to happen next, but Remus waved the puppet at random, pointed at a child, and squeaked in Silly Sammy's voice, "Have you any news?"

A girl with a long swinging pony-tail and gold ear-studs took hold of the puppet and spoke in a clear carrying voice. "I am Jacqueline Sutton and on Saturday I went to New Walk Museum. I saw the dinosaur exhibit, including fossils of stegosaurs and allosaurs, and also the fossils of non-dinosaurs such as pterodactyls and plesiosaurs. Then we went to the art gallery and saw paintings by the Impressioners and Re-Prapraelites." Jacqueline Sutton glanced around her classmates significantly, as if to say: *Top that!*

A grubby-faced girl shrank back, almost in terror, while a mousy-haired boy frowned angrily. A neatly-dressed black boy seemed eager to comment, so Remus held out the puppet, and the boy scrambled up to receive it. "I went out with my Granddad and... sorry, my name's Wayne Elliot. And I'm a Maggie fan."

There were instant hissing noises, presumably from boys who were Forest fans.

"Be quiet. I'm the one holding Silly Sammy. And I'm telling you that on Saturday my Granddad took me to the match to watch the Magpies play..."

While Wayne Elliot gave his controversial account of his sporting interests, Remus found himself looking at the boy who had seemed so annoyed with Jacqueline Sutton. *know that face*, he thought. The button nose. The straight tufts of mousy hair. By the time Wayne Elliot had finished talking about jockeying and feinting and goalies and strikes, Remus had recalled the boy's name.

"Silly Sammy says it's time to do our writing." The puppet was an effective gimmick to remind the children to talk one at a time, but Remus knew it would take him weeks to become used to delegating classroom control to a wooden doll. He picked up the pile of exercise books handing them out to each child separately would be a start to learning their names. Sure enough, the familiar boy with mousy hair responded to the third name on the pile: Terry Boot.

Remus spent the next hour calling children up, one by one, to hear them read. They were seated around five tables, labelled Lions, Tigers, Elephants, Giraffes and Zebras, but it was clear from Mrs Reed's notes that these names were meaningless. There were children at every reading-level at every table. Remus was relieved to discover that the sounding-out drills he had learned at college really did seem to help the pupils stumble through the large print in *The Red Book*.

Terry Boot, it appeared, was the milk monitor. At half-past ten he handed Remus his exercise book and crossed over to the sink to do his duty. Remus read Terry's latest entry, keeping one eye on the mousy tufts.

My sister had a bally consit and she was won of the shuger plum farys. I wocht the bally consit. I had a loos tooth and it cam out on sun day it was a insizer tooth. It came out in the sanpit in the park. When I was in the san pit I bilt a cassel becos I wud lik to liv in a cassel...

Terry was picking up a round-handled skewer from the draining board. When Remus had been at Muggle primary school he had called this tool a "bodger", but he had a vague idea that this was probably a slang term that would no longer be in current use. Terry bodged or whatever the verb was the milk tops and threaded an orange straw into each bottle. Then he began to carry the bottles, two at a time, around the classroom. Remus trying to remind Jonathan Miller of the Magic E rule took no notice until Terry reached the Lions' table. What caught his attention there was the way Jacqueline Sutton's hand shot out to help herself first. She shoved Dolly Clott's arm out of the way, grabbed a bottle, and wrinkled her nose triumphantly at Terry.

Terry stood mesmerised for a second, then suddenly his arm swept the Lions' table and the second bottle of milk smashed onto the floor. Jacqueline's mouth curved into a smile before she clamped it over her orange straw. Mrs Reed, abandoning her observation-only post, was at Terry's side with a dustpan before Jonathan Miller had worked out how to read the word "bone".

After the children had gone out to the playground, Remus asked, "What is the tension between Jacqueline and Terry?"

Mrs Reed began mopping the spillages around the sink. "I'm glad you noticed that. Terry is... excitable. I think he feels sorry for poor little Dolly, who has always been nervous about fitting in. The popular children are merciless to her."

Remus glanced out of the window, where Wayne Elliot was leading the boys in football. Terry Boot was kicking vigorously along with the rest. Half of the girls had paired off with a best friend to play whatever mysterious games girls played in pairs. The other half had clustered around Jacqueline Sutton, like ladies-in-waiting around a queen. Dolly Clott hung on the edge of the group like a mere housemaid.

He felt that Mrs Reed could have said a great deal more, but she tactfully left it at, "Jacqueline has been in trouble for... teasing Dolly. Terry wants to right the wrongs, but has no idea how to set about it, as you saw today. Jacqueline pushed ahead of Dolly by a second, and Terry completely lost control of his limbs. Let's go to the staff room you must be craving a cup of coffee."

Mrs Reed might rationalise the incident in this way, but Remus had seen perfectly well what had really happened. The glass bottle had exploded *before* Terry had had the presence of mind to sweep it to the floor.

On Friday night Mrs Patterson took courage and agreed that Connell need not be chained for his Transformation. "Connell said last moonth that the medicine had a strrrong effect," she conceded. What else she thought Remus never discovered for, once he and Connell were Transformed, Mrs Patterson gave them each a brief pat and then chattered only to Ariadne. Ariadne modified her accent to suit Mrs Patterson's, and Remus was disconcerted to find that he didn't understand a word that either of them

said.

In the morning the same thick accent was calling into his ear, "Wake oop! Wake oop! We werre the not-wooluves again!" This time it was Connell, thoroughly delighted that the medicine had worked again. Remus forced his eyes open.

"Eh'm going to get a job," Connell informed him conversationally. "In a hotel or barr. Now Eh'm not dangerrouss Eh ken worruk casual. Eh'll save the money and then Eh'll be able to take the train to coom and see Arriadne everry moonth."

Ariadne didn't seem bothered by this announcement. "Connell will be safer with us," she said. "If he's willing to pay his own fares, that'll make it easier for us. But I'm wondering whether the others will be able to afford it every month. Werewolves have not much money."

He winced.

"Remus... what's wrong?"

"You wish we had more money."

"Everybody's wishing that all the time. If we'd a million Galleons we'd not be worrying about how to distribute the Wolfsbane."

She sounded so cheerful that he didn't bother continuing the topic. But he knew she was really only putting on a brave face.

"They live all over the place," she continued. "I'm not knowing how we'll reach all of them if they cannot afford the fares."

* * * * *

But it seemed that the Muggle werewolves were interested in Ariadne's introductory letter, for they all accepted the invitation to visit Nottingham on the second Sunday in November. Ulrica Phelan, a shift worker in the marmite factory at Burton-upon-Trent, was going to beg a lift from a friend. Marcia Lovell, a sales assistant in a ladies' dress-shop in Tewkesbury, was going to take the train from Gloucester. Blethyn Wolcott, a lorry driver from Preston, was going to schedule Nottingham for his weekend deliveries. And Adolphus Randall, a retired gardener, had already booked a coach from Colchester. "My friend Miss Tungsten doesn't seem to know about this," Mr Randall added in a postscript. "Should I pass the message on to her?"

They had not thought to invite Lycaonia Tungsten, for, according to the Registry, she was a pure-blood witch. But she had no obvious Greyback connections, so after Remus had finished planning his Ice, Water and Steam demonstration for the science hour he Flooded her home address.

"Er I'm Remus Lupin," he began.

"Hello, dear." Miss Tungsten was an elderly lady who, to judge by the clicking sound just behind the flames, planned to continue with her knitting even while she was kneeling in a fireplace. "I was hoping you'd call. You're a werewolf, aren't you? I always keep an updated version of the Registry to hand."

This was disconcerting, despite the old witch's bright smile.

"Young Mr Randall says that your wife is developing a cure. He wanted to know all kinds of things about whether he should trust a magical apothecary. I'm afraid I couldn't tell him much I couldn't find a Madam Lupin listed in the M.E.S.P. Maybe she uses her maiden name?"

"She isn't listed," said Remus briefly. "But I've been using the potion for five months now, and there haven't been any side-effects. What's worrying Mr Randall?"

"Hard to say, dear, except that the Werewolf Support Services have never done very much for any of us, so Mr Randall is understandably suspicious of the magical community. I've done my best to keep an eye on him over the years, but really for most of the time I haven't had much wisdom to offer."

Remus knew how that felt too. "If your friend wouldn't be comfortable meeting strange wizards..." he began.

"Oh, he intends to turn up on Sunday he says any attempt at hope is better than none. But, if you don't mind, dear, I think I'll pop in too. I'd like to reassure myself that the ethical procedures have been followed."

The truth was, of course, that procedures *hadn't* been followed, and, under the circumstances, could not have been. And if Miss Tungsten recognised that, she was as likely as not to report them to the Ministry. But there was no point in alienating the first witch who might prove an ally. So Remus told her she would be very welcome.

That would make five extra bodies in the house (not counting Blethyn Wolcott, who would visit every day but wouldn't need to stay the night). Last month's attic renovations would be very inadequate to the necessary hotel game. The question was, where did a wizard with no money go to find raw material raw *anything* to use in advanced Transfiguration?

The solution that occurred to him seemed too extreme to confide in Ariadne. But he realised within minutes that this was exactly what he was going to do.

* * * * *

He dreamed about renovations. Gables pushed up through windows and staircases twisted around hearths. Numbers marched through floorboards and ceiling joists, crazily threatening the trillions of molecules and trillions of ergs that would be required. And a familiar voice a gasping moan warned him that Ariadne was falling through the rafters...

He tried to push himself awake. The numbers were not real. The paper-thin floorboards were not real. But the sobbing beside him probably was real. He forced his eyes open, although it was still dark. A restless sighing was muffled into the pillow next to him.

"Ariadne." He stroked her shoulder. "Ariadne, wake up."

She turned to him. He stroked her cheek, which was wet. She hadn't been asleep after all.

She stayed his hand. "I'm all right, Remus. Just a bad dream." She moved nearer to him, so that his arm closed around her.

But she had been awake for long enough to dismiss a mere dream. Why was she letting it upset her? And why on earth wasn't she telling him about it? Was she distressed because of *him*? He fell asleep again before he could ask her.

* * * * *

It was school policy to spend the last week of October counting skeletons and telling ghost stories, bobbing for apples and carving faces on turnips. Autumn Silverstone, all wide-eyed innocence, paused from the problem of how to divide twenty black kittens fairly among four witches to announce, "My mother *is* a witch."

Jonathan Miller and Wayne Elliot burst out laughing.

Terry Boot leaned forward with interest. "Could your Mum put a spell on *me*?"

Jacqueline Sutton calmly stated, "Then she's a bad person. In all the stories, witches are evil."

Autumn looked ready to cry. Terry dropped his pencil-box with a spectacular (and non-magical) crash.

Remus decided to intervene. "I think we're all confusing two meanings of the word 'witch'. When Autumn says her mother is a witch, she means she follows the Wiccan religion. What Mrs Silverstone calls spells are similar to what other people might call prayers. But a Hallowe'en witch is different that means a person with magical powers."

Jacqueline looked startled, then frowned furiously, and said, "Oh, yes. 'Bear' has two meanings too. An animal, or carrying something. And so has 'light'. What's not dark, or else what's not heavy."

"And 'right'," said Gershom Wallace. "The opposite of left and the opposite of wrong."

Gershom liked rhyming words; after "right" he thought of "bite" and "sight" and "kite" and even "trite". Jacqueline stopped protesting that these weren't words with two meanings and returned to her maths.

But the damage was done: Terry Boot was completely bemused by the thought of Autumn's mother. Obviously Mrs Silverstone had no way of knowing that, between breakfast and afternoon tea, she had become a super-powered arch-mage. At half-past three she entered Mrs Reed's classroom in person, carrying a box of home-baked pumpkin pies to share around the class.

While the other children swarmed around the pies, Terry hung around Mrs Silverstone herself.

"Mrs Silverstone, can you really do *magic*?"

"Don't let the other boys push you out of the way, dear." She handed over a pastry. "I stirred the pumpkin with magic spices, and I used a magic rolling pin to make the pastry. You could certainly see baking as a kind of magic!"

"I mean, can you... would you be able to... well, make *me* fly?"

Mrs Silverstone laughed. "I know something about the Craft of the Wise, dear, but I don't think that kind of spell would be in harmony with the natural forces! Autumn might explain to you..."

At that moment, Mrs Silverstone was distracted by Jacqueline Sutton's imperious enquiry about second helpings, so she did not see that Terry was holding his pie at arm's length, squinting curiously at the pattern on the crust.

"Terry," said Remus gently, "she was joking about the rolling pin. Mrs Silverstone isn't *areal* witch. There's no spell inside that pie."

Terry stared at him in dismay, as if he had betrayed some great secret. "Ladder!" he mouthed. The pie crumbled in his hands, squelching pumpkin custard all over his shirt. "Hair!"

The final bell rang at that moment. Terry lingered in the cloakroom, his eyes following the Silverstones until they had left, and refusing all help with cleaning his shirt. Remus knew he should approach, but he couldn't think what to say. Finally, Terry hurled the remains of the pumpkin pie into a litter bin and raced to the school gate as if the hounds of Hades were pursuing.

With all the children gone, Remus returned to the classroom to debrief the day with Mrs Reed.

"You handled the incident in the playground yesterday very well," she began. She always began with a positive remark. The incident had concerned boys who had forgotten not to throw stones; an easy situation, since they had accepted the reminder very meekly. "Now, about the Red Book group..."

It took them twenty minutes to discuss all five of the children who were still drowning in the mysteries of the Red Book. One had begun to improve before Remus arrived; two more, said Mrs Reed, were flourishing under his care; one, she strongly suspected, needed testing for dyslexia; while poor little Dolly Clott was not even ready for the Red Book. Mrs Reed was apparently pleased with Remus's insights, for she next turned the conversation to the difference between fantasy and religion.

"You did well to clear up the witch-mystery so succinctly for Jacqueline Sutton. And Autumn Silverstone feels better about it too. But did you notice that Terry Boot is still confused?"

"I don't think he understood the distinction at all," Remus agreed. "He's still glancing over his shoulder in the hope that Mrs Silverstone will jump out of a dark corner to turn him into a chocolate frog."

"It's just the way you expressed it, Remus. I realise you had to make a spur-of-the-moment statement. But for goodness sake, if the issue arises again, make sure you emphasise that 'Hallowe'en witches' don't exist!"

Remus gazed fixedly at Silly Sammy. Stating his case on the spur of the moment, he had completely forgotten the Statute of Secrecy policy of Lie Through The Teeth. While he hadn't exactly said that magic was real, he hadn't denied it either. And it made no sense at all to lie to Terry Boot, who in less than five years would *know* the truth, and who in the meantime wouldn't believe him, since he had some very good reasons to suspect that "Hallowe'en witches" were absolutely real.

He shook himself. Muggle-borns were one child in ten thousand; he would have to teach in this school for a hundred years before he was statistically likely to meet another one. He evaded the issue by half-changing the subject.

"And I suppose that applies to Father Christmas too? If the discussion arises, I make it clear that he's only a fantasy-person?"

Mrs Reed's eyes widened in shock. For the first time he felt her to be out of sympathy with him; she actually seemed in doubt as to whether he were insulting her or joking.

"Remus," she warned him, "if you said an anti-social thing like that, I *carguarantee* that the parents around here would campaign to ensure that you *were never* registered as a qualified teacher!"

Sheltering the Moonchildren

Chapter 16 of 21

Remus continues to break the law as he deals with his house, his job, his marriage and the outcast community of werewolves.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Sheltering the Moonchildren

Saturday 1 Sunday 23 November 1986

Old Basford and Carlton, Nottingham.

Rated PG for accidental violence, mild petting, legal drugs, deceit... lots of reasons really.

On Saturday Remus walked down to the local rubbish dump. Once he had checked that he was alone amid the broken fridges and shredded car tyres, it was a simple case of sifting through the muck. He found plenty of rotten timber, ruined carpets and curtains, even sections of beds, all free for the taking.

He performed his usual trick of shrinking the useful items to portable size and arrived home with enough molecules to make his Transfiguration of the attic permanent: a floor and walls, furniture for two dormitories, even enough fabric if Ariadne would show him how to clean it properly to provide drapery and linen. He was well on the way to setting up his guest rooms when the doorbell rang.

The neighbours hardly ever came to call; this time it was Mrs Ponderator from next door, wanting to borrow a cup of sugar. Remus invited her in, reminding himself that she had been a great friend of his mother's, and that she must wonder why he didn't make more of an effort to be sociable.

While he was measuring out the sugar the fireplace crackled. Mrs Ponderator's jaw dropped in astonishment as the flames flared green and Ariadne stepped out of them.

"Good afternoon," she smiled, "I'm Ariadne Lupin "

"You're... excuse me, but is that a *door*? The flames look so real, I could have sworn..." And Mrs Ponderator was on her feet, intent on walking through the fireplace herself.

Remus was quicker. He reached the fire ahead of his visitor, and was waving his wand in her face almost before Ariadne realised that the stranger was a Muggle.

Mrs Ponderator's eyes crossed. She swayed, then shook herself and focussed on the newcomer. "Ah, you must be Mrs Lupin." She cast an eye over Ariadne's work robes, but was too polite to comment on her peculiar dress sense. "I'm the thief who only visits when she wants to ransack your larder I haven't been here since before you renovated the kitchen. I was admiring so hard that I didn't even hear you come in."

"We've been renovating upstairs too," said Remus, purely for want of a more imaginative line of conversation.

"Ooh, I never even noticed that you had the builders in. Can I take a look? I know I'm nosey, but I love poking around other people's houses."

Ariadne behaved impeccably. She followed Remus and Mrs Ponderator up the new staircase without for a second betraying that she too was seeing it for the first time. He hoped she would like the improvements. Mrs Ponderator's admiration was loud enough for two.

Unfortunately, Mrs Ponderator's admiration also gave anvil-sized clues about where Remus had betrayed his use of magic. She kept saying things like, "You wouldn't have thought there was so much space up in this attic it looks quite small from the street," and, "The furniture looks wonderful but won't it be awkward to move it all downstairs when the carpet-layers come?" and, most fatally of all, "But if you're planning for a large family, won't you need another bathroom just here?"

Remus mumbled something about future plans when finances had recovered (which, when he came to think about it, was the truth), and he began to wonder just how this Muggle had managed for so long to deceive herself so effectively about her magical neighbours. Over a period of thirty years, she *must* have noticed something odd about his family.

After Mrs Ponderator had taken her sugar away, Ariadne said, "We're needing to cover our tracks better, are we not? We're giving ourselves away without even realising."

And he remembered that he had warned her that this was what living among Muggles would be like, and that she hadn't begun to understand what he had meant. "Mrs Ponderator is right," he said. "If we're to have regular guests, we will need another bathroom." It was a very, very bad moment to remind Ariadne that she had married a man who was also chronically poor.

"Can you not Transfigure the metal bed-heads into porcelain?" she naïvely asked him.

"I can make the appropriate shape, but I couldn't engineer the plumbing properly. We'd need to call in Cloaca Harington to be certain it was hygienic, or even functional, to say nothing of compatible with whatever the Muggles have already put there." There it was again they couldn't *afford* the services of Cloaca Harington Ltd., located at the discreeter end of Diagon Alley, and proudly building wizarding plumbing systems since A.D. 532.

"Never mind. We'll manage," said Ariadne bravely.

Ten days later Remus was wondering if they *would* manage. Connell Dewar was tremendously excited to be introducing the glories of the Wolfsbane Potion to the new friends who had suffered the same problems as himself. But before they even sat down to their first dinner together, Marcia Lovell was already complaining that he spoke too loudly and too fast. "Why couldn't he just help peel the vegetables instead?"

Marcia was not one to shirk her share of the chores, and she resented anyone who was less principled. But none of the other werewolves was capable of Marcia's almost demonic energy. Connell was far too excited to settle to any task for longer than five minutes. Ulrica Phelan was, as Ariadne said, "like somebody who's been standing too close to a Dementor." She could sit immobile for hours on end. When Marcia snapped at her to "come and wash up," Ulrica dragged herself somnambulant to the kitchen and stood in front of the sink, but she seemed unable to turn on a tap. And Blethyn Wolcott left the house immediately after dinner, provoking a bitter tirade about freeloaders who eat other people's food but sneak away before it's time to wash up.

Adolphus Randall had the best of intentions. He certainly never meant to be any trouble to anyone. But it never occurred to him to initiate an offer of help; he even had to be asked to pick his own dirty socks up off the living room floor. Ulrica wept her eyes out in protest at the smell of his cigarettes, but it never occurred to her to ask him to stop smoking, or even to leave the room herself. While Adolphus generally complied with polite requests, he seemed completely deaf to demands that he not smoke indoors he really didn't seem to know he was doing it.

Then there was the inevitable problem of practical resources. The larder was empty after three days. On Wednesday Blethyn Wolcott bought fish and chips all round. On Thursday Marcia demanded that everyone donate to a kitty. Adolphus complained about her high-handed tone, but no-one refused to contribute. However, everyone's resources were already strained. They were all on low incomes, and they had had to sacrifice a week of wage-earning to travel to Nottingham.

And of course having only one bathroom wasn't working. Remus tried to assert his authority as the host and organise a staggered bathroom roster. But Connell drank around a gallon of water a day; Ulrica was frequently nauseated by some medication prescribed by her Muggle Healer; Adolphus freely announced to anyone who cared to listen that he was constipated; Marcia complained that the hours she spent locked in the bathroom with her hair-dryer were necessary if she wanted to keep her job... In short, they all wanted to be exempted from the roster. As for Lycaonia Tungsten, she didn't bother to join the queue. At first she tried to Conjure a spare toilet and shower in the attic cavity between the two dormitories. Remus was only just in time to prevent Adolphus Randall from using it. It took him a long twenty minutes to explain to Lycaonia

why plumbing didn't work that way, that any workable bathroom *had* to be integrated into the existing Muggle network. Lycaonia was agreeable about the rebuke, but after that she simply took the Floo back to her own house every time she needed the bathroom, or anything else that the Lupins couldn't immediately supply. When the Muggles asked her what she was doing, she showed them how to use the Floo and invited them to make free use of her house. Remus saw that if they kept this up even the Floo powder bill would be unmanageable.

Lycaonia found it difficult in general to remember that her fellow-guests were Muggles. She knew that werewolves were already informed about the existence of the magical community, that the Statute of Secrecy didn't apply to them in the same way as to other Muggles, so she saw no reason to minimise her magical behaviour. Indeed, she didn't have a very clear idea what was magical behaviour. She would leave ten pairs of knitting needles merrily flashing away in the air, while she sat down to concentrate on the tricky turn in the eleventh, or she would Summon and Banish the cooking utensils with gay abandon. When it became obvious that Lycaonia couldn't be warned ("Oh, was that magic? Mr Randall has never commented on it, so I thought everyone could do that") Remus took to warning the Muggles that it was wiser not to discuss this kind of thing outside the household.

"People won't believe it anyway," said Ulrica gloomily. "They don't believe in werewolves, so why should they believe in automatic knitting needles?"

"But if the Ministry for Magic found out that you'd been discussing it, you'd be in trouble regardless of whether anyone believed you."

"We're in trouble anyway. Being a werewolf is trouble."

Remus knew he could not rely on the werewolves' discretion, but he still wasn't prepared for the weekend. They were making so much noise over a Muggle game called Monopoly that he didn't hear the doorbell ring. He had no idea that Muggles were entering the house until between a count-out of imitation cash and a roll of the dice he caught Ariadne's gentle tones murmuring, "Of course it's no trouble. Remus will be pleased to see you. Do come in."

Remus was *not* pleased to see Mrs Reed, triumphantly bearing a folder that he had accidentally left at school on Friday, and he was certainly not pleased to see that she was followed by all three of the other Year Two teachers, together with the student-teacher of one of them.

"But this is a bad time," Mrs Reed faltered. "You're having a party."

"It's not a party," said Ariadne. "Just a few friends who "

"Ulrica," interrupted Blethyn Wolcott, "if you complain again about how wizards persecute werewolves, I'll put my next hotel on Mayfair."

Remus froze. The silence was so profound that he could hear Lycaonia Tungsten's racing pulse. Every Muggle in the room knew that someone had overstepped some invisible mark.

"As you heard," Ariadne cheerfully finished, "a few friends who are liking to play board games. Ulrica generally chooses to play the werewolf. And I'm thinking that Lycaonia is the witch."

"Let's not disturb the game," said Remus, hoping frantically that the teachers hadn't seen that the game was only ordinary Monopoly. "We can talk shop in the study."

"But, my dear, there's only one chair..." began Lycaonia in her most helpful tone. As the living room door closed, Remus heard an ominous *pop!* behind him. He tried to lead the way upstairs slowly, but he wasn't slow enough, for as he pushed the study door open, Lycaonia was still inside, merrily Conjuring chairs to place around a card table laid with a Derby tea service. The teachers exchanged startled glances, which at least prompted Lycaonia to use the door to exit the study, but only Mrs Reed spoke.

"Thank you so much for agreeing to let work intrude on your private life," she said. "I'm afraid this is the price-tag of teaching you can never have an absolute plan for a day without your pupils. This meeting is rather impromptu, Remus. Originally I only dropped in at Barbara's because she'd left some folders behind. But then we discovered that one folder was yours, and we started talking about the students, and we realised there were problems to discuss. So we rang the others to ask if they could spare an hour, but we don't seem to have your telephone number anywhere. Anyway, I had planned to pick you all up and take you back to my house, but Mrs Lupin very kindly said we could talk here. We feel it's time to make a full analysis of literacy levels in Year Two..."

Remus caught himself wondering what on earth Ariadne could have been thinking. But the other teachers were eagerly explaining their concerns, and they had actually begun to make a list of Children at Risk of Not Reading by Easter before the study door flew open again.

Lycaonia Tungsten was bearing a teapot, milk jug, sugar bowl, teaspoons and two plates of biscuits.

The problem was, she wasn't carrying a tray.

Remus toyed with the idea of Conjuring a glass one into her hands, but there was too much risk that this would surprise her into dropping the lot. So he simply grabbed as much of her load as he could handle and asked how the game was progressing.

"Oh, it's finished. Blethyn bankrupted all of us in two more moves those Muggle games are fun! So now they're all Flooing to my house to borrow the bathroom, and then I'm going to charm Connell's wireless to receive WWW so that we can hear the Bats play the Catapults. I'm teaching them the rules of Quidditch. Ariadne is boiling the werewolf potion."

"More jargon from that fantasy game," Remus muttered to his visitors, but this time there was no disguising how "eccentric" his friends were. He didn't know how to hint to Lycaonia that her conversation was inappropriate, so he just thanked her for the tea and switched the conversation back to the children before the teachers had a chance to ask any more questions.

The teachers' meeting proceeded smoothly for half an hour: Mrs Reed cheerfully accepted the duty of tutoring the At Risk group, and they began to explore strategies for distributing her other pupils among the other classes. The main impediment was that this began to look very like Streaming the wicked practice of grouping students according to academic ability. The Local Education Authority had, of course, utterly prohibited Streaming, and the Headmaster would not support such a seditious strategy.

And then... the fatal clatter of footsteps sounded up the stairs: Blethyn's heavy stride, Ulrica's shuffle, Marcia's tapping, Adolphus's creaking limp, Connell's lithe jump (which presented a serious threat to the upper-storey flooring), the swish of Lycaonia's outlandish skirts... the Wolfsbane Potion must be ready to drink. And the chatter that filtered through the door was lethal: "werewolves", "transformation", "full moon", "Ministry for Magic". Connell Dewar's voice sailed clearly above the rest:

"Dinna forrget Rrrremus, Arrriadne! Eh'll take him his potion. We're not wanting those teachers to fehnd out he's a werrrawolf!"

Ariadne began to say that the teachers shouldn't be disturbed, but within thirty seconds Connell Dewar stood in the doorway, a goblet of steaming Wolfsbane Potion in his hand.

Retreat was impossible: Remus had no option but to accept it gracefully.

"I hope you don't mind my asking, Remus," said Mrs Reed, "but is that drink part of the role-playing game? What exactly are your friends doing?"

Remus drained the goblet, wondering how he was going to escape this one. When he looked up, Ariadne had replaced Connell in the doorway.

"Did Remus not explain that they are rehearsing a drama?" she asked. "The effect of the smoke rising from the goblet... we managed that very nicely, did we not? Connell's very enthusiastic about it, and he's not understanding about not interrupting people who are at work; I'm hoping you can sympathise."

She removed the goblet and closed the door. A kindly light beamed in Mrs Reed's eye: she understood perfectly well about young people with sub-normal intelligence.

They stumbled through to the end of the discussion, as only Mrs Reed was still interested in it. All the other teachers exchanged questioning glances every time anyone downstairs made a sound. They were bursting with curiosity about Remus's private life, and he wondered if, after all they had seen and heard, they would still feel comfortable working with him at school.

Finally they descended the stairs. He wanted to show them the door, but of course Mrs Reed just had to say good bye to Ariadne, and the others were dying to check out the latest antics of the eccentric friends. They all entered the living room just as Marcia Lovell was emerging from the Floo. The Quidditch commentator on the radio was describing the acceleration and precision of the Cleansweep Ten. Lycaonia had set up six pairs of autonomous knitting needles. And she herself was in the process of Summoning her Derby tea service down from the study and Transfiguring the pieces back into plant pots.

The girl from teacher training college could no longer restrain her discomfort. She shrieked that she was hallucinating and collapsed in tears on the sofa.

* * * * *

Remus wanted to join her. But Lycaonia Tungsten's nervous suggestion that it might be time to call in the Ministry Obliviators prodded him to produce an alternative solution *now*. So he scraped the last of the Floo powder from the jar (yes, the new stock of Floo that Ariadne had brought home on Thursday) and called the Auror Dormitories to explain their predicament to Kingsley Shacklebolt and beg for emergency assistance.

When Kingsley stepped out of the hearth he swiftly herded the student-teacher to the foot of the stairs. He Memory-Charmed her, showed her to the front door, and Accio-ed Mrs Reed to repeat the procedure. They were all still in the post-Obliviation daze when Kingsley firmly closed the door on the last one.

"Have a nice cup of tea, Auror Shacklebolt," said Lycaonia, apparently unaware of her personal contribution to the chaotic situation.

"Actually I'm not yet an " Kingsley began, as he accepted the tea. "Bother, this is complicated. I'll have to file a report on this, Remus. I can see that the situation was complicated. Would it be better if I *didn't* know too much about what was happening?"

"It was just Muggles who burst in without knocking, so we didn't have time to turn the Wireless off," said Lycaonia. "They heard about Quidditch, that's all."

"I see. Some Muggles had hysterics because they heard about a new sport. Yes, very convincing..."

But how many more times could they rely on Kingsley to bail them out? For one moment, Remus indulged the unworthy thought that he didn't care if no werewolf in the world ever tasted Wolfsbane again.

But they did, of course. Their final dose was due the next day. And the six wolves slept soundly in their dormitories. Remus slept at the top of the stairs, guarding the space between Ariadne and her monstrous guests. However, Ariadne had been right to assume that the correct dosage depended on body mass. She had measured carefully, and no monsters haunted their house that night.

On Monday the exhausted werewolves camped in the dormitories, including Remus, who had to send Ariadne next door to borrow Mrs Ponderator's telephone to plead illness to the school. Ariadne had never used a telephone before, and reported, "I was not knowing how many of those teachers were listening, so I spoke softly, and the secretary did not understand me. She thought I was saying that you're ill because you've been drinking. I'm hoping she did not say so to the academic staff."

On Tuesday the guests went home. They waved good bye with a cheery, "See you in three weeks!"

And Remus tried not to let his heart sink.

* * * * *

Mrs Reed mentioned, almost dreamily, "It's funny how I can't remember much about that meeting at your house, Remus. But the minutes indicate we managed some very good work. You can run today's spelling test while I mark the maths."

Remus wondered how one spelling test could be helpful for twenty-five different children. Terry Boot pulled his pencil laboriously across the page, writing *outeef, teecha, beed*, while Jacqueline Sutton tapped hers impatiently against the desk to draw attention to her neatly scripted *bread, head, threaten*, and Dolly Clott made scratches that didn't look like any word at all. *Search, year, learn...*

"Dolly's are all wrong," said Jacqueline smugly. "She didn't learn the EA sounds."

"Let's not talk about other people's work," said Remus.

"But when I finished writing each word I could see over to the next table. And Dolly was just writing rubbish."

"That's enough, Jacqueline," said Remus.

Perhaps he spoke too sharply, because Jacqueline glared at him before vengefully leaning over to Dolly's chair and hissing, "When you aren't good at things you should take more trouble to hide your mistakes. You're stupider than Silly Sammy!"

Dolly's gap-toothed mouth crumpled, while Terry Boot's blue eyes narrowed and he clenched his chubby fists silently.

"Jacqueline," said Remus, "stop talking in class and hand out a maths sheet to everyone."

Jacqueline stood up and began to hand out maths sheets, but she couldn't resist muttering angry asides to her classmates. As she passed Jonathan Miller she was in exactly the right place for her murmur to carry to every ear equally. "When Dolly's a bald old woman in a wheelchair, she might have just begun the first page of the Violet Book."

Dolly's face dissolved in tears and Terry's exploded with red at the same instant as Silly Sammy levitated himself from his perch on Mrs Reed's desk and hurled himself through the air. He landed with a resounding clonk on Jacqueline Sutton's head.

Jacqueline crumpled silently to the floor before Remus had time to catch her.

Several children burst into tears.

"Sammy!" gasped Gershom Wallace, his mind firmly on the most important matter.

"She's dead!" shrieked Terry above the din.

And while Mrs Reed herded the children back from crowding around Jacqueline, Sammy leapt nimbly into the air and shattered into a thousand smithereens. The pieces crashed to the floor and rolled around like marbles.

Ten minutes later Remus returned from the school office. An ambulance was on its way and the Suttons had been informed. Jonathan Miller had brought a blanket, Autumn Silverstone had provided a cushion, and all the children were assembled in a semi-circle around Mrs Reed and a feebly-stirring Jacqueline. They were all mute except Gershom, who was still gabbling about Silly Sammy, but only Terry remained tearful. By the time the ambulance arrived, Wayne Elliot was ready to be excited about seeing a real one, and asked if he could go to hospital too, "because I'd be a real help to the doctor, holding his steffiscope and shaking his barometer and all."

While Mrs Reed reasoned with Wayne, Remus had one minute to ensure that he would be the first one back in the classroom. In the doorway he Summoned the fragments of Silly Sammy, reassembled him with a *Reparo*, and held him aloft as the children stampeded through the cloakroom.

"Mr Lupin fixed him!" said Jonathan Miller. "He must have found a really strong glue in the stock cupboard. Did you use UHU, Mr Lupin?"

"Stupid, he didn't have enough time to fix anything," said Wayne Elliot. "Silly Sammy couldn't have broke after all. He must have just rolled away so we couldn't see him, and Mr Lupin simply picked him up again."

Terry snatched his glance away from the intact puppet and scuttled back to his seat. Remus knew he must try to speak to him alone. But Terry steadily avoided him all day.

It was the last day of his teaching round. Most of the children shook hands with him on their way out of school. But Terry hid behind Mrs Reed until he saw his sister standing on the step. Then he marched out of school clinging to Lucy's hand.

* * * * *

Remus had no homework, but Ariadne spent the evening scratching away at her report on the Moondew potion. He sat down next to her, watching the torchlight dancing on the red lights in her hair, hoping what? That she would read it to him? He knew he wouldn't understand a word.

Finally, as she paused to turn a page, he asked, "Does it bother you to work so long and hard that we never do anything?"

She smiled ruefully. "I'm always telling myself that it's only for eight more months. But there are days when eight months seems a very long time."

And then, quite abruptly, she began to write again. He hoped she wasn't remembering that if only they could afford domestic help... if only they could pay to transport the Wolfsbane Potion... if only he were the kind of man whom her parents didn't want to criticise in short, if only they had more money then everything would be smoother.

In fact, he wondered what she was thinking. He found he had no idea. It seemed a long time since she had confided in him. When and why? had that stopped? Once she had let him feel her feelings, think her thoughts and dream her dreams. Now she suddenly seemed impenetrably *other*.

"Ariadne," he tried again. She looked up, and he found he didn't know what to say.

She laid down her quill and stood up to hug him. "Dearest, what's really bothering you?"

She had always been a very affectionate wife. When he was holding her in his arms it seemed foolish to suspect her of coveting worldly goods. When he did not speak, she began to kiss him; her mouth was warm, and he didn't understand why he was thinking: *but this is evading the point*.

Ten minutes later she said, "I really do have to finish this report, Remus."

He released her, and she continued to write. Her hands were small and slim: they looked so fragile as her quill flew over the page, not at all like hands that had changed the world by first brewing Wolfsbane. How long had it been, he asked himself, since they lost the miraculous intimacy of their first six months of marriage?

He had answered his own question. It was now almost a year since he had begun to feel that Ariadne was somehow remote from him. At first he hadn't worried; they had both been busy, and he had accepted that ups and downs were to be expected. Then she had revealed the Wolfsbane Potion, and with it a rapturous renewal of intimacy. But after that first flush of success, she had had to negotiate the realities of her actions: that her brew was illegal, that it would cost money, that their home would be crowded with strangers, that they could never rule out the terrifying possibility of accidentally poisoning someone. Throw Professor Jigger into the equation, and he completely understood why Ariadne must be too exhausted to spare any energy for a perpetual honeymoon.

He reminded himself how he had always been whatever she wanted of him teacher, confidant, comrade-in-arms, lover. Now, it appeared, she just wanted an ordinary husband. That wasn't an unreasonable requirement.

But she was still the glowing hearth in his winter, the flowing river in his desert, the steady shelter in his rainstorm, the lilting melody in his routine, the bright sunrise that banished the terrors in his night, and everything else the poets had ever promised. And he wasn't ready to give it up. He didn't think he would ever be ready to think of Ariadne as ordinary.

Moonshiner Exposed

Chapter 17 of 21

Unexpectedly backed into a corner, Ariadne has to confess her illicit activities to Professor Jigger.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Moonshiner Exposed

Friday 23 January Saturday 4 April 1987

Diagon Alley, London; Old Basford, Nottingham; the Ministry of Magic, London.

Rated PG for Higher Morality (i.e. breaking the law).

Professor Jigger had announced that today they would discuss Ariadne's next project. That meant she shouldn't try to avoid the all-important interview. She tried to concentrate on stirring the blood-replenishing potion that St Mungo's had ordered, but it was difficult to keep her arm steady when the image of Professor Jigger's frown kept invading her mind. He would be merciless if he decided she had breached their contract. By this time tomorrow she could be scouring the newspapers for jobs among Muggles, destined never to become a journeyman.

But Professor Jigger was going to hear of her crimes anyway, so it would be better to tell him herself.

December and January had passed exactly like November. One third of her free time had been spent brewing and measuring for werewolves. The house had been noisy and crowded. And her new friends considered her an angel. The other two-thirds of her life had been devoted to sleeping off the exhaustion and writing up her

observations. She had not mentioned Wolfsbane to anybody. But Lycaonia Tungsten had forced her hand.

"The few friends I have left are very excited about this medical advance," Lycaonia had enthused over the knitting needles. "Through them I've met a couple of other werewolves. Can I invite them to meet you next month?"

Ariadne felt she was swallowing lead as she tried to find the words to promise to help Lycaonia's contacts. Before she could open her mouth, Remus put his foot down.

"Miss Tungsten, we hope your friends can wait a few months more. You know that this experiment is technically illegal, and we've a better chance of benefiting more people if we keep it a secret for now."

"Oh, no trouble, dear, I'm sure they'll all understand," said Lycaonia, but with a brittleness that told Ariadne that Lycaonia had already promised too much to too many people. The news could be buzzing around the magical community long before summer. St Mungo's... the Apothecaries... the Ministry... the *Daily Prophet*... Greyback... as she poured the final phial of comfrey syrup into the cauldron, she knew that ensuring Professor Jigger first heard about it from her own mouth was her only hope of either mercy for herself or dignity and legality for the Wolfsbane Potion.

She knew Professor Jigger was serious because he looked her in the eye when he called her over to his desk. "Have you had any inspiration at all, Miss MacDougal?"

"As a matter of fact, Professor, I have done a literature search." That much couldn't be illegal. "Here are my notes."

He scanned them. "Hmph. Might work. But not commercially viable. Werewolves don't have any money, and the taxpayer won't be willing to sponsor them." She almost expected him to throw her notes in the fire and tell her it would be better to invest in a new perfume. Instead, he frowned, and said, "Cardiac arrest... no, you had the sense to include atropine. Well, you'd be lucky to force anyone to drink a brew that tasted like this one. Did you by any chance bother to boil up a test run at home?"

Her heart stopped beating, for the temptation to lie was overwhelming. *Save your face and your career... Just pretend it's all theoretical, that you're waiting for your supervisor's approval... He'll never know... make some at work and pretend you're producing it for the first time...*

She looked Professor Jigger in the eye and spoke into the silence. "I did."

"Did you feed it to guinea pigs?"

"Rats and cats." Something was wrong. He wasn't... angry. "They sprouted fleeces for a few days, but came to no other harm."

"Did you calculate body mass before risking it on a human?"

"I did, Professor."

"How many humans?"

"Seven."

He still wasn't angry. "What happened?"

Slowly, she opened her yellow file, and held out her second wad of notes. Professor Jigger did not speak a word as he ran his eye down the pages. Finally, he made a *Zerocso* and handed back the original.

"You've been busy," he said. And, absurdly, he sounded *approving*. "We'll owl this to the *Western Journal of Apothecarism* as soon as you've conducted an official trial under my guidance. Which will be next full moon. And you won't say a word to anyone about all the times you handed out unpatented medicines without supervision. If anyone ever asks, I was with you every time."

She was speechless. Even if he could see that she had taken all due care and that no harm had resulted, he ought to express ~~some~~ annoyance that she had breached their contract. The anti-climax was disturbing. She almost began to remind him that she had broken several rules.

"Come off it," Jigger growled. "How would anyone ever make any money how would science ever happen if everyone always kept the rules? No invention that mattered was legal at the time it was invented. Just make sure your experiments don't ever kill anyone."

She supposed Jigger never had had much respect for the law. It seemed that none of her docile industry, none of her technically flawless work in the laboratory, none of the papers that she had drafted under his name, had pleased him as much as her defiantly independent originality.

* * * * *

"The timing could not be worse," said Ariadne. As the crescent moon waned, Remus had a revision week. As it waxed, he would have two exams. As it became gibbous and the werewolves arrived to drink their potion he had a thesis to finish. "Are you preferring not to have the werewolf community visiting so long? We could maybe cancel this month."

She caught him suppressing an eager smile at this suggestion, but what he said was, "No, we can't refuse to help. We'll work around it."

She knew that Remus had been vaguely unhappy, but she hadn't been able to make him tell her what was bothering him. "It's nothing. I'm just feeling unsettled." The winter was once again very cold, they had just made another rather dreadful visit to Mrs Pettigrew, and a journal article that Remus required for his research was nowhere to be found... there were plenty of reasons to feel deflated. She concluded not that nothing was wrong but that Remus himself could not label the problem.

So their house was once again invaded by noisy guests who filled the living room with the stink of tobacco and stained the carpet with spilt tea. But otherwise the week was uneventful. Ariadne urged Remus to spend long hours in the college library, which meant he managed to submit his thesis several hours before the full moon rose. On Friday Professor Jigger closed the shop early so that he and his wife could follow her through the Floo to her own house to monitor the trial.

And the anti-climax was total. Professor Jigger watched Ariadne as she measured out the final dose of Wolfsbane potion for each werewolf. He watched them drink. He followed them up to the attic dormitories to await moonrise, while Madam Jigger poised a quill above a clipboard. The moon rose. The werewolves transformed. They all lay quietly, as Ariadne had known they would. Professor Jigger approached Adolphus Randall cautiously, and Adolphus lay quite still. He looked for a moment as if he were calculating whether he dared take the test any further, so Ariadne moved in beside them and stroked her fingers against the edge of the Mr Randall's jaws. The wolf lay completely quiet.

"Check them all," instructed Professor Jigger.

Ariadne felt she was treating them like pet dogs, but she obediently stroked each wolf on the head. They went into the women's dormitory and repeated the procedure.

"I'm afraid it becomes boring now," she said. "They just go to sleep and... nothing much happens."

"Nothing," snapped Jigger, "is exactly what we want to have happen."

He said no more. He did not even comment on Ariadne's husband being one of the wolves. He simply Conjured himself a chair and sat down at the head of the stairs, leaving both dormitory doors ajar. Madam Jigger Conjured a second chair for herself and sat opposite. She seemed to be writing something, but apparently nothing that

required much thought. Ariadne sat on the floor.

And they sat all night.

It became almost a competition to see which of them could keep silent for the longest.

When it was not quite light Professor Jigger pulled himself out of his chair and Vanished it. He walked into one dormitory and Madam Jigger investigated the other. They stood quietly until semi-human groans told Ariadne that the wolves had Transformed back to human. It was strange, she thought, how Remus usually managed to do it quietly. She wondered how much pain he refused to express.

"Time for work," said Professor Jigger, although nobody had had breakfast.

"I usually brew them a strengthening potion in the morning."

"Belladonna, fetch a Strengthenener and feed it to the patients. Miss MacDougal, we have urgent work to do in the laboratory."

The urgent work, of course, was to write up their paper.

* * * * *

My dear Mrs Lupin,

Please accept my warmest congratulations on the publication of your third paper. Your first two were solid additions to the research venture, but your third project has been ground-breaking. You are truly the granddaughter of Ankarad Murray.

As a specialist in dangerous bites, I am delighted that a project to combat lycanthropy has finally been initiated. Please inform me as soon as the medication is patented. Should your team ever continue this necessary (and fascinating) work in the future, I would be very interested in collaboration.

Yours sincerely,

Hippocrates Smethwyck.

Healer Smethwyck's owl lay next to the spring edition of the *Western Journal of Apothecarism*. Squeezed between the lead article on invisibility potions and the latest report on dragon pox, her life's work stared at her: "Hope for treating Lycanthropy" by Belby, Jigger, Jigger and Lupin. An important Healer like Hippocrates Smethwyck had taken notice. Now they needed the Ministry of Magic to take similar notice, and Wolfsbane would be legal. More research would be done, an outright cure would be discovered. Lycanthropy would, perhaps, be conquered in her own lifetime.

"Not many people change the world at twenty," said Remus proudly. He had read the article three times, despite not understanding a word, and he was now sifting triumphantly through the personal owls. Ariadne had burnt the one from her brother,

Our parents are maybe proud that you've published yet another paper, but what in Merlin's name are you thinking of to mess around with Dark creatures and poisons? Is that husband of yours not knowing better than to keep you out of that kind of trouble or has he perhaps werewolves and vampires among his personal friends?

but she now showed him the one that Mr Belby had forwarded.

Dear Mr Belby,

In the light of your article published in this quarter's edition of the WJA, the date of your patent application review has been brought forward. I will interview your research team on Saturday 4 April at 10 am in Room 4.17 of the Ministry of Magic.

Yours sincerely,

Dolores J. Umbridge

Head, Beast Division, DRCMC.

"We will not be needing to open our home again," she said. "Next month our friends will be hosted at St Mungo's."

"Never mind how long it takes." He tightened his arms around her and nuzzled against her hair. "A month two six however long it takes them to process the red tape, we won't back down now."

* * * * *

"You're going about it the wrong way," said Sarah. "You need to make an impression. You look haggard in those navy overalls, and your tartan house-robcs confuse the eye. If you want this Ministry woman to look at you, you have to be wearing a solid block of colour... nothing red, it isn't a love-tryst. Blue looks professional: how about a blue to match your eyes?"

Garbed in Sarah's royal blue business robes, and decked for the first time in the pearl earrings and diamond wrist-watch from Cousin Lucius, Ariadne felt as if she had borrowed a different person to approach the Ministry in her place.

Nor was she reassured by the new companion who was to accompany her. It was the first time she had ever met Damocles Belby, the financial backer of Slug and Jigger's whose name appeared first on all Professor Jigger's journal articles. He was a small, dapper man in his forties, who walked with a spring in his step as he swung a golden cane. His robes gold thread shot through crimson satin were exactly what Sarah would have written off as unprofessionally flashy for a working wizard trying to present himself as a serious scientist. Ariadne knew that Mr Belby was a scientist: he had Master status in the M.E.S.P. But his smile was entirely unconvincing.

"Nothing to worry about, I've taken out dozens of patents in my time," he said. "Just tell the official what our potion does and a few details of our team's work in developing it she won't understand anyway, so keep it short and snappy."

They were kept waiting in the fourth-floor foyer for half an hour beyond their appointment time. Ariadne kept reading through her notes, because she suspected that anybody who had to approve a patent *would* understand something about potions. Mr Belby kept twirling his cane and saying things like, "We've made a breakthrough here this is the kind of discovery that changes the world," and, "This will certainly look good on your résumé, Miss Lupin you'll remember all your life your years on my little team."

It's not mattering. As long as the potion is legalised, I will not care whose name is on the deed Ariadne told herself again and again. Just as she was feeling she couldn't

listen to another word about what a privilege it was for an apprentice to be allowed to work on something so very important, a new voice broke into her thoughts a light, clear and warmly friendly voice.

"Ariadne? It is Ariadne Lupin, imagine meeting you here!"

Ariadne closed her file. "Glenda! Oh, I'm so pleased to see you!" She jumped to her feet. "What brings you to the Ministry of Magic?"

Glenda Chittock indicated the large black box in her arms. "Work I use this Sound Trapper to pre-record interviews with interesting people. I've just been lucky enough to hear what Dirk Cresswell has to say on the festive customs of goblins that will make a fascinating broadcast for Easter. But you're all dressed up are you here for Beasts, Beings or Spirits?"

Ariadne avoided the offensive distinctions by saying it was about a medical patent, then asked if Horatio were well. Mr Belby showed no interest in meeting Ariadne's friend, and nor was the patent office door opening. By the time Glenda had finished talking about clocks, she had taken the seat next to the rubber plant, and was comfortably asking whether they could buy coffee here.

"And I've been meaning to ask you for ages is there any more news about your friend Veleta?"

"She's yet in Foss. But we're now knowing why..."

Glenda made a sympathetic noise in her throat, and Ariadne found herself suddenly confiding everything as if a dam had burst inside her. How the Macnairs had exploited wartime conditions to destroy the Vablatsky family for their own private vendetta. How they were holding Veleta captive for her Locospection talents. How her memories of her former life had been wiped. How she kept having babies, presumably because the Macnairs were hoping to breed new Locospectors. How St Mungo's had written a medical report on which nobody was wanting to act. How Veleta had expressed her desire to leave Foss, but would not leave her bairns. How the children were apparently Portkey-immune and subject to some unclassifiable act of Dark magic. How the Aurors were reluctant to take any action, and how Auror Scrimgeour was Walden Macnair's brother-in-law. How Veleta was unwilling or magically unable to speak the full truth. How anybody who did try to approach Veleta was simply Banned from the castle...

Glenda carried on saying, "Yes," and "I see," and "How criminal," and, "Wicked." Otherwise she said nothing, giving Ariadne her complete attention while her eyes grew large and moist. It seemed a very, very long time since any outsider had shown any real concern for Veleta. And finally Ariadne had told the whole story.

Glenda sat quietly for a moment more, then said, "Ariadne, the M.L.E. Department has been disgracefully apathetic. The community won't accept this. I think it's time we *shamed* the Aurors into taking action."

Ariadne felt a cold prickle on the back of her neck. She obviously had said too much. But before she could frame a response, Glenda was speaking again, kind and sweet and very concerned.

"I'd like to make a feature of Veleta's story. The next couple of weeks are booked up, but that gives me time to interview a few more people." Glenda's eyes were lighting up eagerly. "As soon as I have an empty hour of prime-time, I think the whole magical community should know about Veleta."

Glenda was so inspired, and she meant so well. Ariadne wouldn't hurt her feelings for the world. She began, "Glenda, it's so kind of you to offer... we've been waiting for months... for years... for some influential person like you to take an interest..." But how was she going to explain that Glenda's kindness was misdirected, that publicity was the last thing that would help Veleta? The Macnairs would be both alerted and angered, while the M.L.E. would pacify community outrage by repeating whatever lie the Macnairs chose to tell next. "But, Glenda, are you sure you're wishing to go to the trouble...?"

"It isn't trouble," said Glenda, "it's my *job*. I've never forgotten how kind you were about poor Caradoc. And now your good deed has come full circle, because it's the direct cause of my being able to help *your* friend."

Ariadne tried again. "You're needing to tread very, very carefully. The Macnairs can be dangerous..."

"But, Ariadne, of *course* I'll protect my sources!" Glenda stared in surprise. "There are journalistic ethics, you know. I won't say a single word unless it's directly from an eyewitness, but I won't give a single clue about who those eyewitnesses were. I'll "

Whatever else Glenda intended, Ariadne never found out, for at that moment the door to Room 17 swung open, and an elderly wizard in pin-striped robes announced, "Mr Belby? Madam Umbridge will see you now."

"Glenda " Ariadne began urgently.

Glenda completely misunderstood the fear in her voice. "Later, we'll talk later. You can't be late for your appointment. Good luck with that patent!"

And Glenda Chittock flew away towards the lifts, her Sound Trapper still clasped under her arm. Ariadne forced the image of Veleta to the back of her mind and followed Mr Belby into Room 17.

A short, squat, middle-aged witch in pale pink business robes greeted them with a toothy smile so wide that her jaw seemed on the point of dropping to the floor. The touch of her plump fingers was so cold and clammy that Ariadne found herself thinking: *toad*. She knew instantly that Madam Umbridge would be merciless.

"Good morning, Mr Belby," fluted the official. "It's a very interesting *aunique* potion that your little team has been developing."

Ariadne's heart lurched into her throat and then sank down to her knees, but she trained her eyes on the parquet floor. She knew already that Madam Umbridge had decided to refuse the patent.

"An absolutely *fascinating* exercise in just what the right balance of herbs can do for the human or bestial metabolism. I do congratulate you on your creativity."

A sidelong glance at Mr Belby revealed an eager and energetic smile. That meant he still hadn't understood the Head of Division's intentions.

"I believe, dear Mr Belby, you could be nominated for an Order of Merlin award for the sheer brilliance of your excellent theory." Madam Umbridge fingered the wide pink ribbon that topped her mousy curls. "Certainly you are enough of a mastermind to understand the difference between theory and practice."

Only at this point did Mr Belby's smile become fixed.

"Obviously no right-thinking wizard could think of *actually* feeding this potion to real werewolves. Imagine the dangers if a criminal like Mr Greyback chose to imbibe it... the horrors of giving human thought to a hunting pack... Mr Belby, you are *such* a genius. You could were you not a man of such obvious integrity destroy our entire civilisation with your little brew."

Ariadne forced her clenched hands to relax. She would not, *would not*, betray her revulsion to this nauseating woman.

"So of course," Madam Umbridge gave a girlish little giggle, "you have presented the Ministry with the interesting little puzzle of how to suppress your recipe before some unscrupulous person takes criminal advantage of it. Quite the busy fortnight we've had, calling in every published copy of this quarter's *Western Journal of Apothecarism* and removing your article and all the time having to step discreetly, without raising the alarm that your little discovery might be in any way interesting, before anyone realised his copy had pages missing. That journal circulates all over Europe and the English-speaking world... there are even subscribers in Japan... but do not worry, Mr Belby, we believe we have them all now. You have all the credit of being a genius without the least concern that anyone will ever be *hurt* by your little discovery."

Mr Belby found his voice. "So it's... you're recommending that the potion be considered illegal?"

Madam Umbridge tittered again. "Well, of course it's illegal. But no-one will miss it, Mr Belby. It wasn't marketable anyway. So complex to brew *sælever* of you to manage it, really and there *are* only sixty-seven werewolves in the British Isles, which is too small a sample to be worthy of science's attention. Then there's the expense werewolves can't afford to pay what it will cost, and the British taxpayer certainly won't want to foot the bill of providing for such an unpopular minority. It's safe to say that the chief contribution of the Wolfsbane Potion will be the *concept* how the scientific barriers have yet again been pushed further back."

For the first time the toad-woman looked directly at Ariadne. "And your little apprentice here she's had such a wonderful initiation into the world of research. You are a lucky girl to have assisted with such a revolutionary project, *Mrs* Lupin."

Her stress on the honorific spelled out that Madam Umbridge had, long before this interview, checked the details of Werewolf Registry pretty thoroughly.

She had known all along that she was really speaking to Ariadne and not Belby.

A/N. "Moonshiner" is slang for a person who brews illegal liquor.

The Moontrimmer

Chapter 18 of 21

Like a juggler with too many balls in the air, Remus worries about smashing the most valuable one of all.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Moontrimmer

Saturday 4 April Friday 15 May 1987

Old Basford, Nottingham; Kincarden Croft, Inverness-shire; Sneinton, Nottingham.

Rated PG-13 for petting.

Remus squashed the sinking feeling in his stomach, and tried to tell himself that he wasn't really surprised by Umbridge's verdict on the Wolfsbane Potion. "It's what happens to werewolves," he said. "Sweetheart, what do you want to do about this?"

"Our friends will be arriving in two more days," she said. "We cannot disappoint them. I cannot stop brewing Wolfsbane just because it's now officially illegal." Suddenly her mouth opened in shock. "Remus, I nearly forgot! I'm needing to Floo Glenda Chittock at once!"

But the Chittocks were out that evening, and they were out all the next day too.

"Write her an owl," said Remus.

Ariadne sat down with a quill, tore up two or three drafts, and finally produced a message with no more commentary than, "I'm hoping I did not express myself too harshly." She gave no more details about this vitally important communication... was it something else that she felt she couldn't tell him?

She seemed so restless that his first question when she arrived home on Monday was, "Did you send your owl?"

Ariadne nodded. "Lycaonia Tungsten happened to enter the shop this morning just as Professor Jigger was telling me that I'd not have time to go out for errands today. Lycaonia said at once that she'd go to the post office for me it was on her way to Knitwit's." She sounded doubtful for a minute, then brightened. "I'm glad to have that out of my life I nearly embarrassed everybody horribly."

He could not ask her any questions, for their monthly guests had arrived. Lycaonia was sitting right behind them, knitting five pairs of socks while she chatted to Adolphus's newspaper. Marcia was directing Connell in the kitchen, Ulrica was staring out of the French windows, and Blethyn was expected at any minute. Remus tried not to resent that it would be more than a week before he had Ariadne to himself again. *How would we feel* he reminded himself, *if someone else had discovered Wolfsbane and he refused to share?*

* * * * *

They were invited to Kincarden for Easter. It used up the last of Ariadne's annual leave. "But it's time I spoke to my parents again," she said.

When Remus stepped out onto the red flagstones of the kitchen floor, his first thought was that the farmhouse seemed huge. Mr MacDougal was sitting in the carver chair, folding the *Daily Prophet* onto the table, and Mrs MacDougal, having just removed something savoury from the stove-range, was greeting Ariadne with affection but restraint. The house seemed altogether too quiet.

He shook hands with his parents-in-law, feeling awkwardly like a hired man, and asked, "Where are the children?"

There was a split second of silence before Mr MacDougal replied, "Did Ariadne not mention it? Kenneth had to take his family to Edinburgh."

"I've been working so hard I forgot to tell you," Ariadne apologised.

"You certainly have to take a rest now you're home," said her mother.

Over dinner the MacDougals spoke to their daughter exactly as if she were "home" from a term at school, asking about her work, congratulating her on her new publication, enquiring after the health of Sarah and Hestia, checking up on whether she maintained contact with her cousins. The Duncans, who by now understood how Kincarden farmhands should behave, were wise enough not to speak a word, but William interrupted the pauses by giving Remus excited news of the lambing and sowing. After dinner it was time for Ariadne to ask the questions, to learn that Morag was taking piano lessons from Iris Parkinson, that Aidan could write his name and count to a hundred, that Bruic (born last November) had two teeth and colic, and then to admire photograph after photograph of all of them.

"You have not yet seen Bruic, dear," commented Mrs MacDougal. "You really are working too hard."

"It will be worth it when Ariadne earns her journeyship," temporised her husband. "Meanwhile... we did not see you at Hogmanay, so your present is still waiting in the parlour."

The present was a wireless set. Remus and Ariadne both made a good show of admiring it for they *were* glad of a wireless, and they *had* been planning to buy one as soon as they began to earn money but Remus wondered whether it had been given to them in the same spirit as the cash presents that Ariadne regularly passed on to St Mungo's. What kind of a son-in-law couldn't even afford to buy a wireless?

At ten o' clock it felt very, very awkward to follow Ariadne up the staircase (which he had never before climbed) and enter her childhood bedroom (although the Beatrix Bloxam posters and collection of antique dolls told him that the room was nowadays occupied by Morag). When he closed the door he felt disconcertingly like a callow farmhand who was treacherously seducing his benefactors' daughter.

Ariadne, seated on the narrow bed to unbutton her robe, seemed a long way away. He was startled by the ordinariness of her voice. "Are you feeling like the farmhand again?"

He nodded.

"I'm glad I'm not the only one. I'm feeling like a lassie again. As if I'd no right to bring you upstairs with me. As if... oh, can you not place a Sound-Proofing Charm on this room?"

He did so, and sat down beside her. The candlelight threw enticing shadows over her petticoated curves, but she still seemed very concerned about *something*. He stroked her arm, and she began to undo his buttons for him.

"Ariadne," he said suddenly, "I went to Gringotts this morning. I've taken out a mortgage on our house."

She looked at him questioningly as she continued to undress him.

"Only a small one a thousand Galleons. We'll be able to repay it as soon as I'm working again. But we already owed money to Spencer's Alimentation. Our werewolf friends *think* they're chipping in with the housekeeping costs, but the reality is that we're supporting them more than their pride would like to know."

"Remus, why did you not tell me?"

"I didn't want to worry you. I know that money bothers you... I promise that once I have a real job you'll never know want or debt again."

"It does *not*!" There was an expression of genuine horror on her face. "Dearest, money is *not* bothering me. I'm knowing we have not much, but we've enough, and we'll one day have more. But it's bothering me that... that you'd be worrying so much... and not tell me..." Her voice trailed off, then recovered. "You've told me now. We ought not to have secrets from one another not about something like money."

"You've a secret," he hazarded. "I've told you mine. Won't you tell me whatever it is you've been keeping from me lately?"

Her blue eyes grew so large in her pale face that he knew he had hit near the mark. But she said, "It's nothing, dearest. Really nothing that... that you're needing to know, or is any matter between us." She slid her bare arms up around his exposed neck to indicate that he should kiss her.

So Remus knew that Ariadne had a secret from him.

* * * * *

After Easter Remus began his final teaching round. This time he was allocated to a Year Six class in Sneinton. He took an instant dislike to his supervising teacher, a Mrs Sharp, who wore a short jagged haircut, dangly triangular earrings, and a deep-jowled frown.

"This lot are trouble," she told him. "Half are on free dinners, and some barely speak English. Don't take any cheek from them. Don't smile in the first week. Watch your wallet, and it'll be your job to check the boys' toilet for smoking."

The children were indeed very casually dressed: some had holes in their jeans, one had holes in his trainers, another had her shirt folded up above her midriff, and most had grubby fingernails. And there certainly was a roughness to their manners: they jostled one another out of the way, seemed entirely unacquainted with words like "please", "thank you" and "excuse me", and spoke Anglo-Saxon expletives that would have been utterly unknown in the Mapperley reception class and highly punishable offences in Carlton. There was also a streetwise cunning to their rule-bending: Remus could smell the tobacco in the toilets, but he never found any cigarette butts; and the graffiti was in a round generic handwriting that betrayed no personal loyalties or names.

"Tracey Saunders, pull your shirt down *at once*," were Mrs Sharp's first words to the class. Tracey slowly obeyed, but Mrs Sharp did not appear to absorb the sight. "That display is *disgraceful*. If we'd displayed our navels like that twenty years ago, we'd have been sent to the Headmaster to be caned. A girl who exposed herself three times was *expelled*. You obviously have no idea what kind of trouble you attract when you walk around half dressed..." Interestingly, Mrs Sharp did not elaborate on the specific nature of the "trouble", but she spent a full five minutes assuring the class that Tracey's exposed midriff had set her on a pathway to Certain Doom.

She then sent three of the pupils to wash their hands. It was another two minutes before they could actually leave their seats, because first they had to listen to a lecture on the life-threatening illnesses that lurked in wait for "free rides" on the dirty hands of those with poor hygiene habits.

Finally Mrs Sharp could complain that it was already a quarter to ten and they hadn't done any work yet. "We get into this situation *every day* because some of you will not learn. Have you stopped to think what kind of impression you're giving our new student teacher? This is Mr Lupin, and he's here to teach some of your lessons. Now open your grammar books and turn to chapter twenty-nine."

The children rummaged through their desks wooden Hogwarts-style desks that still had inkwells and where books were kept under a hinged lid and brought out elderly editions of *Writing Plain English*. Chapter twenty-nine detailed the use and formation of the subjunctive mood. Mrs Sharp made no attempt at a group lesson. The children simply read the paragraph of explanation, then launched into the wholesome, but boring, exercises. They worked in a sulky silence. Remus was allowed to walk up and down the aisles to watch them. Most of the children did not appear to have understood the lesson they were guessing at the answers to the questions.

The boredom was broken when a pencil clattered to the floor. A boy with ear studs and a T-shirt proclaiming "Anarchy in the U.K." grinned sheepishly before diving under his desk to retrieve it.

"Darren Lackey! That was not funny! But you never think about other people, do you? Everyone else is quietly working, and you decide to amuse yourself by disrupting a whole class. You don't think about taking care of your possessions, of course you just assume your parents can buy you another pencil. And you certainly don't think ahead to what will happen if you don't learn your English. In five more years you'll be leaving school for good, and if you don't know enough English to pass your C.S.E. you'll end up in a life career of digging up the roads or emptying dustbins..."

Remus was pleased to notice that Darren Lackey was not listening to a word.

* * * * *

By lunchtime he felt an unholy relief at being allowed to spend an hour away from his supervisor's shrill voice. Six weeks! And Ariadne had tolerated a disagreeable supervisor for almost three years! He walked up to the school gate like a prisoner released from jail. And standing by the gatepost was against all probability the lean, curly-haired figure of Richard Campion.

"I've something to show you," he hailed Remus, "but we need to get away from the Muggles."

Remus swung himself over the school gate in full view of the children, feeling that he might as well give Mrs Sharp some reason to be displeased with him, and followed Richard to Colwick Park. "How did you get here?"

"Apparated. Ariadne told me the coordinates and I borrowed this " he indicated an invisibility cloak over his left arm, "from Ludo Bagman. But I didn't waste my time showing Ariadne *this* "

As Richard drew something from out of the folds of the invisibility cloak, Remus felt his jaw drop. No wonder it had to be hidden from the Muggles. He had seen pictures, of course, but he had never before seen one in the wood... the broomstick was beautiful. Its tail was smooth and tapered, with long, even, perfectly honed twigs, while the slender ash handle had been French-polished until the light seemed to shine right through it.

"Is it a real ?"

Richard nodded. "A Moontrimmer. Hand-crafted by Gladys Boothby herself in 1903, and not flown since 1920. I bought three of them from a deceased estate auction for the shop, and my boss is selling this one to me."

"Does it fly?"

"Of course it flies! We've stripped it down thoroughly, and every charm is intact. It isn't fast by modern standards, of course, but the steering is high-precision, and compared with the mass-produced brands it doesn't leave many magical traces. If a thief swooped through your window on a Moontrimmer, the Ministry couldn't track that it had been there."

Remus laughed. "Are you thinking of a career in burglary?"

"Perhaps..." Richard glanced around, almost as if he were hoping to make a trial flight right there in the Muggle park, then continued. "Last month Emmeline Vance spoke again to the Auror Division about Veleta. The story hasn't changed. The Aurors openly admit that the 'guest' at Macnair Castle is officially Veleta Vablatsky, but they repeat that no laws have been broken and there is nothing to be done. Emmeline says the file was nearly empty it had none of Veleta's statements about wanting to leave Foss, no mention of her third child, nothing about the report from St Mungo's, not even her real name. When Emmeline pointed out that the file was out of date that they had just admitted that they knew her name wasn't really Smith they very kindly reported Emmeline's enquiry to Walden Macnair, who very kindly informed her that Mrs Smith is very well. I think it's safe to say that Emmeline has now been Banned."

For Remus, the only surprise was that Emmeline had bothered to try. Obviously there would be no co-operation from the Aurors while Scrimgeour remained Head of the Division.

"No great surprise," Richard confirmed, "but it does underline the need to operate outside the law. We have to find out what that Macnair ghost Keindrech meant by a 'blood-spell' and try to break it preferably without getting ourselves noticed in the process. That's where the Moontrimmer comes in." He stroked it almost unconsciously, as if it were a pet.

"What are you going to ?"

"I already have. Last night I took the Moontrimmer on a land-survey of Foss. What I was trying to do was establish the limits of that magical boundary. I flew to the first spot where I could see the castle, and then flew about, keeping myself in the middle of the boundary. If I leaned my head the tiniest fraction to the outside of the boundary, the castle disappeared. Back again, and there it was. No *modern* broom would allow that kind of precision... well, a Nimbus would, but none of those mass-market brands. So I just kept myself there and flew upwards, to see how high the barrier went. It seemed at first to be about thirty yards high."

"A little higher than the castle, then." This was hardly surprising.

"But I was wrong. Remus, when I tried to fly *over* the barrier... there was no 'over'. I'd fly forward a bit, and I'd meet the barrier. So I'd fly a little higher, fly forward again, and meet the barrier again. It kept on happening, until I realised I'd been wrong about the barrier's shape. I'd thought of it as a wall fly high enough, and we could fly over, then down onto the castle roof. But what I discovered last night is that it's a dome. The closer I came to the castle, the higher the barrier went. And even when I was plumb over the middle of the roof, the barrier was still there. At a height of some eighty-five yards, the castle is completely invisible. Drop down to eighty-four, and it snaps into view, bird's-eye."

Richard seemed puzzled by his discovery, and it made no sense to Remus either. "You mean this barrier is about four times higher than the height of the castle?"

Richard nodded. "I'm really asking myself what the Macnairs are playing at. You'd think they'd hide their castle better if they kept the barrier close to their roof. But, no, there's over sixty yards of visibility any Muggle kellyhopper could fly through and count the battlements then suddenly, at a height where nobody ever goes or didn't until Muggles invented their flight contraptions the castle is gone. Why such a high dome?"

"Because it's a sphere. Or rather, half of one. Perhaps the castle is for some reason surrounded by a perfect hemisphere, so it has to be as high as the castle grounds are wide."

"Could be. But the perfect shape doesn't seem to serve any practical purpose it would be more useful to have a simple cuboid that made the castle more efficiently invisible. Anyway, what my little survey shows is that the castle can't be entered from above. I always liked the idea of hiring thestrals or hippogriffs and having them fly the children up over the barrier. But now I know that it can't be done. There isn't a way out of the castle not even up where the children won't hit the barrier."

"Thank goodness you tried the survey before launching into some insane rescue scheme! Did you get away with it are you sure no-one knows you were there?"

"No," said Richard soberly, "that's the bad news. I was discovered. I had the invisibility cloak, but Veleta knew I was there anyway. She climbed up a turret to speak to me. So I flew down to say hello... it was a shock. Even by wandlight, even after seven years, that woman so obviously *is* Veleta. And she knew my name from Locospection, but she had no memory of the time when we were friends. She asked if I'd come to rescue her children. I had to tell her no, my idea hadn't worked out, and I was no nearer finding a way to break the spell. She was close to tears..." Never one to dwell on the unpleasant, Richard shook away the memory with a toss of his head. "I asked if I could take any messages, and she asked me about Futhark."

"About Ancient Runes?"

"Oh, is that what she meant?" Richard's face cleared. "She said the castle has books that are charmed shut, and that this seemed a waste of a hex, since most people can't read Futhark anyway. But she said she could make out a few words as if Futhark were a language that she had once spoken but since forgotten. She wonders if the important spells at Macnair Castle might have been cast in Futhark, and says that if any of us is interested in researching the crucial spell, perhaps the Elder Futhark spellbooks are the place to start. Is that a clue?"

"Could be," said Remus. "But it doesn't narrow the field much. Any spell can be translated into any of the magical languages."

He was considering this when Richard abruptly added, "A house-elf caught us. A nasty little brute named Toady. He asked her what she was doing up in the tower in the middle of the night talking to strangers. She said she'd thought I was an intruder, but I was actually just a traveller who had lost my way, and she had given directions. But

the elf didn't believe us. I think it's reasonable to say that she'll be cross-examined, and that her cloak will be analysed for a hair from my head or the grease from my fingers."

"You're a Banned man," Remus agreed. "Bother, I have to return to work. Have you a message for Ariadne?" He meant from Veleta, but Richard's mind was working in a different direction.

"No, don't tell her! I mean... oh, tell her if you must, I'd rather she heard it from you than from Sarah. I've been going out with the same girl for four months now. I know, that's a record. And..." He swallowed. "It's Ariadne's cousin, Felicity Macmillan." Then he grinned. "Sarah's been giving me hell over it, going on and on about what happened last time a friend went out with a Macmillan. But Felicity isn't Mercy."

Certainly not. Remus privately felt that Felicity could probably lead a man twice the dance that Mercy ever had. But surely Richard had around five times Kingsley's capacity to handle a skittish woman.

* * * * *

"It doesn't help." Remus lost count of the number of times he said that over the next few weeks.

It didn't help to take instructions from Mrs Sharp. "They need discipline," she said every day. "It was a mistake to outlaw corporal punishment, but there are other ways." Other ways included keeping children in at recess, sending them to stand in the corner, setting them lines to write, having them pick up litter... but, above all, shouting at them.

Remus couldn't make himself shout. He knew that Mrs Sharp would be writing the report to his examiners, that she considered him wildly over-permissive, that he winked at the children's "disrespectful" freedom of speech towards him. Yet, time after time, he found himself sacrificing his exam results and his career in favour of the immediate gratification of maintaining a happy classroom atmosphere.

It didn't help to teach Muggle children about "great inventions of the twentieth century", for Remus constantly found himself a step behind his pupils. He simply hadn't considered that Muggles hadn't had flight before 1903 or antibiotics before 1928 or potions-based contraceptives before 1960. (Mrs Sharp did not approve of children discussing contraception, but of course the Sneinton children already knew about it.) The Muggle children talked excitedly about televisions and computers in a way that reminded Remus he had no real clue of these machines' everyday function in the Muggle lifestyle. The boys deliberated about the atom bomb with an excited disregard for its horrors ("It changed the world, didn't it?" argued Darren Lackey). Remus even let them chatter on about telephones and wirelasses and automobiles and photography for a whole afternoon before he checked his time charts and realised that these belonged to the *nineteenth* century.

It didn't help that Professor Jigger had extra ambitions for Ariadne. "We've started another project at work. I was only needing to complete three to gain my journeyship, but Professor's wanting me to do a fourth. It's just a cheering libation, but time's running out, so I'm having to put in long hours. Remus, I'm enjoying the work," but she said it wearily. "It's an interesting potion, and Professor's seemed more... respectful... since he's known about the Wolfsbane."

It didn't help that Ariadne was still trying to brew Wolfsbane at the end of her long working day. "We cannot let down our friends," she said.

"Does Professor Jigger know that you're doing this?" asked Remus.

"Probably. It's not important, dearest. He will not report me, for he's not caring about the law. But nor will he help in a project that'll bring us no money."

It didn't help that the werewolf community had such absolute trust in Ariadne. That month Lycaonia Tungsten brought three werewolf acquaintances through the Floo, and Adolphus Randall brought another two. They weren't staying overnight, since they were all wizards who could travel home through the Floo network, but it still made for a very crowded dinner table.

"Did you explain to your friends," Remus ventured, "that Wolfsbane Potion will always be illegal?"

"Oh, they're willing to take the risk, dear," said Lycaonia calmly. "If you're brave enough, so are we."

When Remus finally had Ariadne alone in the back garden, he asked, "Are you sure you trust all these new people?"

"I do not trust them," she said frankly. "I'm not liking Caleb Oldfang at all, and Mr and Mrs Skyolang are maybe... unreliable in their loyalty. But if we anger them, they are all the more likely to turn against us."

It didn't help that Ariadne was so vulnerable to anyone who demanded her sympathy.

It didn't help that Veleta wanted them to research Elder Futhark spells. If Ariadne knew, she would be burning midnight oil to re-devour her Ancient Runes texts before ordering special loans from the Hogwarts library. But Remus already felt half-destroyed in watching her wear herself out over other people's problems, so he was deliberately withholding the message. And he felt interfering and dishonest for his evasion.

Above all, it didn't work that they were always so tired... so busy... so crowded... that there was never any opportunity to talk about anything important. Remus still hadn't tackled Ariadne about whatever secrets she was keeping from him. He couldn't demand that she confide in him against her will, and there was never any time to persuade her to trust him. And there was always a pile of maths books or history projects to mark. So he sat over his books, while his fellow-werewolves played monopoly in his living room, and watched Ariadne evade him, slip through his fingers before his very eyes...

* * * * *

The werewolves slept off their Transformations and returned home. The next evening Remus had nothing to do except mark piles of algebra and geography. Ariadne only had to make notes about cheering libations. Remus switched on the new wireless so that he wouldn't have to think about the fact that he wouldn't hear much of Ariadne's voice tonight.

"How far do you trust British justice?" The clear, pleasant tones of Glenda Chittock floated over the dining table. "It is as strong, I believe, as the personal justice of each British wizard. But even the fairest and kindest person cannot help before he knows that a problem exists. Come with me to uncover the tortuous web of mysteries that envelop the life of Veleta Vablatsky."

Ariadne's quill smashed to the floor, and her face froze in horror.

"Seven years ago, the Vablatsky household was visited by the Dark Mark..." Glenda's sweet voice began the whole story. Veleta was not dead, but living in "a castle in central Scotland". Then "a close personal friend" was introduced, and suddenly Ariadne's soft burr was describing how Veleta was a Locospector, how she had been kidnapped for her talents, how her memory had been wiped.

Ariadne did not move as long as her own voice flooded the room. Then Glenda was talking again, about the attitude of the Ministry, and the voice of Auror Dawlish was protesting how thoroughly the castle had been inspected, how he had personally spoken to Mrs Smith and hadn't found anything suspicious. Glenda added the subject of Veleta's children, and this time a stranger spoke, a Cockney youth who claimed to have been "a reg'lar visitor to the castle in question". He described the children with relish, made some juicy insinuations about their paternity, and commented that Mrs Smith seemed "a very lovin' mother, someone 'oo'd never leave 'er kids just to go fer the easy life."

The Cockney's story, however lurid, was essentially true. Remus considered turning the wireless off, but he knew they had to hear just how much of Veleta's story was being exposed to the magical community. It was almost obscene when the wireless once again produced Ariadne's voice, this time on the subject of Portkeys. He stole a glance at the real Ariadne.

She was immobile in her seat, as sickly-white as her parchment. Her attention was so riveted to the wireless that at first she did not seem aware that he was looking at her. But finally her eyes, huge and glassy, flickered towards his. Her face crumpled, and she collapsed like a punctured balloon, burying her head on her arms, while her frame heaved with wracking sobs.

And Remus knew that something was very, very wrong.

Dark Side of the Moon

Chapter 19 of 21

Ariadne's moment of weakness has devastating consequences.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Dark Side of the Moon

Friday 15 May Thursday 11 June 1987

Old Basford, Nottingham; Diagon Alley, London; WWN Studios, London.

Rated PG-13 for violence.

Ariadne tried not to cry. She was dimly aware that she was being weak and self-pitying and that this would not help Veleta. She knew she should calm down and consider how to undo the damage she had done. *But the damage could not be undone.* Every time the enormity of her misdeed seized her, huge sobs gripped and squeezed her and crushed her breathless.

The wireless prattled on relentlessly in her own traitorous voice, betraying to the whole world that Veleta could have fled her captors long since, but that her children the children whom she had never chosen to bring into the world were inextricably imprisoned and that Veleta would never abandon them.

"No laws have been broken. Mrs Smith states she does not even know the troublemakers who level these wild accusations."

She had to control herself. It was unfair to Remus to impose these histrionics on him. Ariadne half-knew that she had been lifted from her chair, was being held in somebody's lap, was being cradled like a baby, that long fingers were stroking her cheek while a soothing voice was promising to take care of her, and a droning voice (probably Dawlish) was relentless.

"Zero-evidence accusations are never admissible before the law. Before we point any fingers at imaginary kidnappers, let's ask what kind of petty vengeance motivates this malicious charge..."

"But it's all my fault." She was trying to speak calmly, but she could barely force out the words. "What I've done Macnairs are forewarned everybody will be asking them they'll lie again now nobody will believe us "

"Hush, you can cry if you need to."

That only made it worse. That at a time like this when she was guilty of such an unspeakable crime, when she had selfishly disturbed an over-stressed man's peaceful evening Remus should enclose her with such ill-deserved sympathy... he obviously had no idea of the depths of her transgression.

"Naturally any normal mother would collude in her oppressors' lies if the alternative would bring harm to her children."

"But Veleta has no chance now the law will not our only hope was in keeping quiet in finding out something we could tell the Aurors letting them act quietly and now they will not they'll never..." She gasped for breath and tried to control herself, but she could not stop shaking.

"It's all right, I'm here."

*"Don't you find it odd that there is no trace of these children's father?"*chirruped Glenda.

"It's not all right." She found herself clutching him even while she was telling herself to let go and display some independence. "I have to... I should not..." And she was sobbing again, in a puerile exhibition that would have shamed her nephew Aidan.

And still Remus did not tell her that she should stop crying, or that she had not really done anything very wrong, or that the consequences would not be so very terrible. He just held her for what must have been a very long time, and presently Glenda's voice intruded again.

"... How do we know who is telling the truth? That question is not difficult. All we need to do is to bring Miss Vablatsky and her children to some neutral place, far from both her alleged captors and her would-be rescuers. With her children held safely in her arms, let her make a public statement of her wishes, whether she considers that Scottish castle to be her home, or whether she desires to abandon it forever. This case will be closed only on the day when Veleta Vablatsky speaks her mind freely."

Remus flicked his wand, and the wireless abruptly muted before the fading-in of Glenda's signature music.

Ariadne forced herself to pull back and look Remus in the eye. He held her steadily, while she made herself say, "You heard."

And he did not try to excuse or deny. He spoke with perfect neutrality. "This won't be at all helpful for Veleta."

"Glenda..." Her throat was knotted with a rope. "She was wanting... so badly... to do something to help."

"Did you know that she was recording your words?"

"I did not. But it's not Glenda's fault. She told me she would broadcast Veleta's story and I... I did not explain... I'm meaning, I tried to tell her... but we'd so little time... and I could not bring myself to make her understand that her idea would not help. Remus, she'd have been so hurt if I'd discarded her idea..." She trailed off hopelessly. Making

the statement out loud only emphasised how feeble her excuse was. She had ruined Veleta's whole life in preference to hurting five minutes of Glenda's.

"Tell me about that owl you so urgently needed to send Glenda last month."

She had almost forgotten that. "When I had time, I wrote to Glenda, explaining that her plan would not help Veleta. I'm not understanding why she'd ignore..." But once again her voice died in her throat. Glenda enjoyed using her chat show to broadcast her favourite causes, but she would never have disregarded a written request to keep silent in order to protect an innocent person. "Glenda could not have received my owl," she choked. "But why not...?"

She was not needing Remus's reminder. "You asked Lycaonia to deliver your note to the post office."

Lycaonia had been so eager to help, so delighted to return a favour... she would have been hurt if Ariadne had said, "Thank you, but I'll owl it myself." So Ariadne had passed over her scroll, with several misgivings, suspecting *knowing* that Lycaonia might forget to perform her errand.

She had not had the nerve to look Lycaonia in the eye for long enough to say, "You're wonderful to be wanting to help, but I'm not trusting anybody but myself to do a job as important as this one."

Was there no end to her weakness and folly?

"We can check this one out," said Remus. He set her on the floor, took the two steps towards the fireplace, floored Lycaonia, and asked the question. It took Lycaonia an alarmingly long time to recall the errand in question, but her memory finally returned.

"Goodness gracious, I do remember now! I was going to owl that note as soon as I'd been to Knitwit's. And they had no alpaca in stock, and only six-ply cotton when I'd requested three, and Madam Knitwit had bungled my order for sky-blue merino and supplied robin's-egg instead... it took half the morning to sort it out. So by the time I had the right wool... oh dear, Ariadne's little note..." Lycaonia fumbled for something, and presently held aloft a drawstring purse. "I'm so sorry, dear, it's right here in the bottom of my purse. It completely slipped my memory. I do hope it was nothing important."

Ariadne managed to say, "It's all right, Lycaonia... it's not mattering any more." She was grateful to Remus for continuing the necessary two minutes of pleasantries before curtailing the conversation. *I cannot blame Lycaonia... she was not understanding... and I certainly cannot blame Glenda. I was the one who was knowing what should be done... and I failed to do it.*

She looked hopelessly at Remus.

He once again held out his arms to her and said, "We'll know more about the situation tomorrow. There's no action we can take tonight."

* * * * *

Remus insisted on accompanying her to work the next day, and he spoke urgently to Professor Jigger about former Death Eaters who might try to avenge an old grudge.

"Not here," said Professor Jigger. "I'm not having Dark wizards attack my apprentice when we're so busy. Mrs Flowers, you are not to leave the laboratory today. If any suspect characters enter the shop, I'll deal with them myself."

An hour later a Howler arrived. Professor Jigger refused point-blank to open it and threw it out onto the cobblestones still sealed. Its furious shrieks unmistakably Regelinda's shattered several windows, and five neighbouring traders dropped in to complain about people who were too selfish to open their own Howlers. But a Howler was only incoherent words.

In the afternoon, Cousin Humphrey Macnair strode into the shop and demanded, "I'm needing to speak to Mrs Lupin."

"Then you can get lost," snapped Madam Jigger. "We've no time around here to run a chatter-club. We're not the types who send our apprentices off to play in working hours."

Humphrey snarled something about transferring his custom as Madam Jigger snatched up a common broom and began chasing dust towards the front door, sweeping the intruder out with it.

At mid-afternoon Remus Apparated into the street and entered the shop to escort her home. "I've set up repelling barriers around our house," he said. "So far no-one has tried to enter our property but I don't want you to go anywhere alone before we know exactly what their game is."

Ariadne was supposed to spend the rest of the day calculating formulae for cheering libations. But she could not write. The wireless was on, and her mind was battered by rubbish about Quidditch results and society divorces. There was nothing worth listening to until Euglossos Showman began broadcasting *Wizards World Tonight*

"Last night the wizarding community recoiled in horror at the devastating story of an English witch held captive in a Scottish castle. Our Floo chimneys have been jammed with enquiries from the concerned public who want to know what the Ministry is doing about this scandal. Here is a small selection of public opinion. First we'll hear from Gallus Cobbler, a shoefitter from Barnsley who celebrated his one hundred and twentieth birthday yesterday. Mr Cobbler, you're on air."

The broad accent of an elderly Yorkshireman cut over the presenter's. "T' Minis'ry should force them bloody Scots to let t' lass and her bairns aht sharp!"

This was followed by the lilting brogue of an Irishwoman. "Madam Chittock did be having no business at her to be telling such a tall story without citing sources, so she did not. How do we be knowing what to believe now?"

But an ancient witch from Leicestershire apparently disagreed. "The Ministry should compel the kidnappers to release the woman and her children quickly."

A businesswizard whom Ariadne recognised as her father's friend Titus Nott opined: "The taxpayers shouldn't have to support this woman. Since she chose to become a single mother, she should stay near her children's fathers."

A Norfolk farmer: "Th' Ministry shud a-fawce th' crim'nals to lets th' geerl and huh kids oot fahst."

The clipped syllables of her cousin Letitia Greengrass: "Even if Madam Chittock's story is true she ought to keep silent until she can produce some evidence. Otherwise since it's obvious which family is being accused she's guilty of libel."

A tradeswitch from Lancashire: "The Ministry should order them castle crooks to let the lady and her kids out fast."

The singsong of a Welshman: "The Ministry should forrce the kidnapperrs to let the girrl and her children outt immediately."

A Ministry official who introduced himself as Cornelius Fudge: "I do not understand the difficulty. The woman admits that she is not only able to take a Portkey out of the castle, but that she once had a Portkey in her possession. Since she did not use it, she is obviously choosing to stay where she is, and it is not the business of the public to interfere with this."

And then Veleta's own voice, slow and heavy, as if every word had been dragged out of her. "Because I have no way of ascertaining my true identity, I am known as Jane Smith, but obviously no-one claims that this is my real name. I am grateful to everyone who has suggested a plausible identity for me, and I thank all the kind people who have expressed their concern. People like them ensure that British wizards cannot, in fact, keep prisoners in remote castles, because, if ever it did happen, the right-thinking public would make an outraged protest. But in my case their sympathy is misplaced. I have good friends who have most generously opened their home to my children and me. We could freely leave them at any time, but we have no wish to do so, for we have nowhere else to go. We are happy with our situation, and we choose to

remain where we are."

It was evidently not a live interview, for Euglossos Showman asked Veleta no questions. He seemed more interested in Glenda. "Let's return to the accuser. Madam Chittock, you heard Miss Vablatsky. She says she is happy. Do you still consider her life your business?"

Glenda was valiant in the face of dishonour. "Did that sound like the voice of truth or the voice of slavery? Miss Vablatsky attended our broadcasting studio today in the company of three of her captors but her children remained in their castle. I won't believe a word of Veleta Vablatsky's testimony unless she has her children with her."

Euglossos Showman suggested that Madam Chittock was making a very serious accusation without evidence.

"That is absurd, Mr Showman. Any mother would lie to protect her children. I know of six sane adults to whom Veleta has told an alternative story. Before anyone accuses me of libel, bring all Miss Vablatsky's children here to this studio, and *then* ask her for the whole story."

"And now the question that must be tormenting every wizard in Britain." Mr Showman was clearly alone in the studio as he read his script. "After such an extraordinary and toxic story, can Madam Chittock's career survive? Will we ever again hear her voice on the Wizarding Wireless Network? In other news, Wilhelm Wigworthy's latest book was launched today "

Remus snapped off the Wireless.

Ariadne could not look at him. "What are you thinking they did to Veleta to make her say that?"

"Nothing new, I daresay." Remus sounded almost convincing. "Veleta would do anything to placate a person who would otherwise hurt her children."

"But she sounded so..." Had she been speaking under Imperius, or hexed with throat-burns to remind her to co-operate with the required story? Or was she sufficiently intimidated by the threat reported by Sarah that the Macnairs would Obliviate her memory of ever having had children and then throw her onto the streets, leaving her forever unaware that she had a family? And they had already... Ariadne tried to will the information out of her mind. She asked Remus, "How can you love me when I did this?"

"Ariadne, we all have our faults."

"But mine are... Remus, my weakness and lack of forethought are going to ~~destroy~~ Veleta. Her bairns too. And it's not an isolated incident. I could not tell Lycaonia... I did not tell Sarah... it's not even only about Veleta. Remus, I've never been able to tell anybody what they were not wanting to hear ever! My parents... my cousin Mercy..." She sank against his shoulder, too exhausted by the magnitude of her transgressions to consider them any further.

He spoke reasonably. "You've never been afraid to speak your mind to the Macnairs or the Malfoys, or even the Jiggers."

"That's not the same thing at all!" She stared up at him, astonished that he could change the subject in so off-hand a fashion. "Those people are maybe angry that I'm not giving them their own way, but there's no damage to their *feelings*."

His frown indicated that his mental cogwheels were whirring furiously, as if this were a new idea to him. "Being careful not to hurt people strikes me as a very minor vice, nothing worse than the weak point of a virtue."

"But this time I was *criminally* weak, Remus. While you're always so rational... so quick to do whatever has to be done... and you somehow manage never to hurt anybody."

"Sweetheart, you're talking to the man who spent two years of his life exposing an innocent community of children to the risk of a werewolf's attack... who deceived the mentor who had trusted him... who was so desperate for the school bullies to like him that he kept silent while they tortured your cousin Severus... haven't we *all* hurt other people sometimes?"

Obviously the question required agreement. She would never have claimed to be a mistake-free human. But it had not occurred to her that her cowardly silences could ever cause real harm... that her apparently sweet and considerate behaviour could devastate other people... that her whole life was a character-pattern of deliberately choosing what was nice over what was wise... or that this pattern had the power to destroy countless lives with incalculable ripple-effects...

"But how do we reverse... how can we undo..." She had no words to express the question, because the all-enveloping horror of the situation was that of course the past could not be unmade, and there were some wrongs for which no atonement was possible.

Remus did not attempt to answer the unanswerable. "Sweetheart, wouldn't it be more useful to ask what we can do to help Veleta now?"

* * * * *

"Don't go anywhere alone," Remus had said, but in fact she had no reason to go anywhere except to work. He set up intruder alarms, and once that week they blasted the chorus of *The Campbells are Coming* through the house, but by the time Remus opened the front door, nobody was detectable. It appeared the enemy was chary of attacking forewarned victims.

The weather was miserably dull and damp. Hardy foxgloves and nightshade and especially wolfsbane thrived regardless, but so did dandelions and thistles and grundy swallow. Ariadne cast an *Impervius* around herself before kneeling in the black mud to weed around her yamwurzels and peppermint. The air whistled unkindly down her neck as she held out a flowerpot and commanded, "*Accio*, thistles!" The thistles tore themselves sulkily out of the ground and into the air, pelting her Poison Nut with earthworms, but then they flopped down and settled into the mire, with no hint of an inclination to jump into her pot. She began to pick up the thistles by hand, conceding that the borrowed competence that had pushed her through her Charms N.E.W.T. was gone forever, and groaning a little because fresh thistle seeds must have been sprayed all over the garden.

A footfall alerted her. She sprang to her feet, *knowing* that the approaching footsteps were not Remus's. Her wand was aloft before she had registered that the intruder must be wearing an invisibility cloak. She was already thinking, *Protego, Protego*, before her mind had completed the question of how he had penetrated their protective barriers. Her wand even managed to splutter out a thin stream of silvery light before a cool voice hissed:

"*Gelo!*"

She was instantly paralysed, her muscles set like iron, her wand-arm absurdly trapped high in the air, while her almost-spell dropped forlornly among the weeds.

Then the invisibility cloak was thrown over a tree-branch, and Humphrey Macnair sneered, "Surprised to see me?"

He will not kill me. She knew that already; he could have as easily killed her as frozen her.

"Perhaps not. After broadcasting your insipid voice onto every Wireless in the British Isles, you had to be knowing that we'd meet soon."

She was glad he had frozen her face; any kind of emotion would be betraying too much. Whatever he might plan to do to her, it suddenly seemed far more terrifying than mere death.

"Your pet werewolf made a nice job of these barriers," said Humphrey. "But of course they'd not keep me out forever. I'm less stupid than Baldwin. I check my facts before acting. It cost me a jackpot of Veritas serum to make your friend Veleta spill everything but you betrayed her, so why should she not return the favour? She's knowing every

detail of your domestic life your dinner menu, your pretentious reading matter, your inept wandwork, the colour of your underwear..."

He had overreached himself he had lapsed into lying.

"Your fastidious habits in the bathroom, why you quarrel with your Beast in the living room, how you entertain him in the bedroom..."

Then he was telling the truth again.

"Why you need to nurse him when the moon wanes, who visits you when it waxes, the potions you give to the scum. And, of course, how the Beast attempted to defy us she described his pathetic wee barrier spell, charm by charm and jinx by jinx. By the time she had drunk us out of Veritas serum, we were knowing exactly how to tear down his hex-hedge. Veleta has ensured that we're knowing *everything* about you. It's seeming only fair that you'll be knowing nothing more about her."

In a flash she knew what he was going to do. He had not come to cause tactile pain or visible injury as he had boasted, Humphrey always had been cleverer than Baldwin. He'd not risk arrest when he could achieve his aims by simply modifying her memory, by removing every part of the last four years that contained any knowledge of Veleta. Her heartbeat became as frozen as her muscles as she contemplated a life of not knowing that Veleta yet lived and was needing her help. Once Humphrey had fixed her he would approach Remus probably all their friends too. And none of them would ever know that they had been assaulted. Nobody would file any complaint, for there would never be any symptom that they had been wronged.

"*Oblivate!*"

The world stood in slow motion as the spell zoomed towards a spot between her eyebrows.

One inch from target, the sparks dispersed outwards like a star and fizzled into nothing, as if quenched by the rain.

Despite Humphrey Macnair's perfect aim, the spell had missed her.

For a moment he was too thunderstruck to react. It gave her time to recognise what was happening. She was of Macnair blood. Humphrey who had apparently learned less than he claimed from Baldwin's mistakes must be using his own wand. She was safe.

He tried again. "*Oblivate! Confundo! Pervius! Obliv* "

"*Stupefy!*"

Humphrey crashed earthwards, and Ariadne found herself worrying that he would crush her monkshood bushes. Then Remus was releasing her from the Freezing charm and asking what had happened. He was shaking uncontrollably, far more distressed than she was.

"It's all right. I'm all right," she kept telling him. "But my monkshood bush is not. Nor is Humphrey we should maybe call the Medi wizards before your Stunner wears off." She took his hand to urge him back into the house. "I'll explain how he penetrated your barriers... Remus, truly, I'm all right!"

* * * * *

It took the Medi wizards all of two minutes to recognise that there was nothing wrong with Humphrey Macnair beyond what *arEnergate* could cure.

It took the Aurors two hours to agree to perform a *Prior Incantato* on Humphrey's wand and acknowledge his attempted assault on Ariadne Lupin. Even then, "pending a verdict on Mrs Lupin's alleged complicity in the Wireless libel on the Macnair family," they were unwilling to do more than issue a temporary Intervention Order forbidding any member of the Macnair family to enter within a mile of Ariadne's whereabouts.

It took Remus two nights (on the assumption that Veleta could not Locospect his actions in her sleep) to rebuild the magical barriers around their home with a different set of charms. Ariadne was not needing to say out loud how exposing how intrusive how terrifying it felt to know that their every move was being scrutinised by the enemy. By daylight it seemed safer not to discuss it with Remus at all.

It took a further two weeks for Remus to finish his teaching round. When he arrived home from his final debrief, the brewing week had begun, and the werewolves had already finished the apple crumble and had arranged themselves contentedly around the books and Wireless and Monopoly board.

"Mrs Sharp had nothing interesting to say," Remus admitted. In front of all the werewolves, and always aware that somebody might be spying on their conversation, he was unwilling to make a stronger criticism.

"But you've been liking this class," said Ariadne, for he did speak with great affection of the children.

"What? I'm afraid Mrs Sharp's teaching style... hasn't suited me at all."

"But you've been liking the work. Is this perhaps the age-group that suits you?"

"I... you're right." He risked a smile. "The times when I actually was teaching, the children had so many interesting things to say... the not-quite-Hogwarts age..."

If only the Muggles would let Remus teach a Year Six class again, Ariadne felt that he might have found his vocation. He had only two more weeks of revision lectures before his final exams. Then he really would be a teacher. But she was too exhausted by brewing for Jigger, by brewing for werewolves, by brewing her very thoughts over Veleta's problems, to be as happy for him as she ought to be.

* * * * *

The crashing *thump* shattered whatever Ariadne had been dreaming. Her eyes flew open to the pale light of the full moon. A second *thump* confirmed what was creating the din as her hand groped along the bedside table for her wand, but her fingers had barely closed around it before the third echoing *thump* tore the door from its hinges. As it crashed to the floor, something was bounding into her bedroom.

"*Protego!*" she whispered feebly, struggling to be on her feet on the floor before the beast pinned her to the bed. A spark did fly in the right direction, but it died before reaching the bare fangs, the slaving jaws, the haunches poised to spring at her.

"*Stupefy!*" she mouthed, without much hope, but no sound came out. *My whole past life flashed before me* was the traditional report of people who stared death in the face, but what Ariadne saw was her future. For the single second that the two yellow eyes glared out at her in the dark, her mind very calmly acknowledged that she was either about to be torn to pieces or else to receive a single small bite. What clamped her heart with the chill of doom was the certainty: *either way, I'll never become a mother.*

And then, with howls and growls and a frenzy of terrified limbs, the yellow eyes were torn away and driven to the ground. Other bodies had thundered across the ruins of the door fang and claw and cacophonous din were screeching at her feet she was knocked sideways by the thwack of a tail and somebody yelped in outraged pain while somebody *else* was keening.

She knew that Remus was holding her assailant to the ground even before she made a light. His jaws were threatening Oldfang's neck that wolf was certainly Caleb Oldfang in a way that was almost *not* Remus, it was so pitiless. He could probably have held Oldfang alone, but nothing was being left to chance, for lying all over Oldfang's head and still indignantly keening was Connell Dewar.

A fourth wolf was wandering into the room, looking as if he would be willing to help if really necessary. But as usual, Adolphus Randall had arrived too late for the action.

A Collusion of Moon-Cursors

Chapter 20 of 21

The Lupins negotiate with the werewolves, the Macnairs, exams and each other.

CHAPTER TWENTY

A Collusion of Moon-Cursors

Friday 12 June Monday 13 July 1987

St Mungo's Hospital, London; Old Basford, Nottingham; Sherwood Forest.

Rated PG for Ministry corruption and environmental destruction.

"Mr Lupin, your wife is perfectly well," Healer Smethwyck repeated. "The werewolf didn't touch her. It is *you* who are suffering from shock. So keep drinking that potion while I talk about bites."

Remus took a token sip. This liquid didn't smell like any of Ariadne's morning-after potions. Ariadne was smiling encouragingly in the hard-backed chair next to his own, but of course she *would* claim to feel perfectly well in order to protect the werewolf community.

"Can you imagine the horror of my Medi wizards when they arrived in Spurge Street to find a dozen Transformed werewolves, and one solitary girl casting Stunners at one wolf while she patted another on the head like a dog? Her claim that only *one* of the wolves was dangerous and not the one who was howling would be very difficult to explain in polite society."

Remus gave a low laugh as he set his empty goblet on the table. He *wasn't* a member of polite society. And surely last night had destroyed Ariadne's final chance of pretending that she was. Now she must grow up and realise the true consequences of her actions.

"What I need to know, Mr Lupin," said the Healer, "is how much you remember about last night."

"After the Medi wizards Stunned us, we revived in hospital, and you tested the werewolves all night. A Mediwitch took a blood sample, and your assistant was taking notes on reflexes and memory, and you were trying to assess literacy and reasoning and... No, I don't remember *all* those tests. There were too many of them. And I remember Ariadne telling you that it was no good trying to do the reasoning test on Connell because it wasn't the kind of thing he could do even in his own body, but I didn't hear much of the rest of your conversation with her."

"In other words, you do remember last night. That drug you've all been illegally imbibing... it's no mere sedative. There seems little doubt about Mrs Lupin's claim that it allows a werewolf to keep his human mind."

There was nothing to say to that.

"It doesn't look good for your friend Mr Oldfang. There are three witnesses that he tried to bite Mrs Lupin, and now we have evidence that he was in full possession of his right mind at the time. I wonder, Mr Lupin, why Oldfang was so set on quite literally biting the hand that was feeding him?"

Remus had been tormenting himself with that question all night. "We never trusted Oldfang," he said. "He isn't *isn't* *friend*."

"We dripped Veritas serum onto Oldfang's tongue the second the moon set," said the Healer. "He admitted that he had acted under the order of Walden Macnair, who is apparently a longstanding acquaintance of his. Oldfang says that the Ministry doesn't yet know about a Muggle whom he killed last year, and Macnair threatened to report him unless he bit Mrs Lupin. I am rather interested to know how Macnair could uncover Oldfang's personal secrets like that, and why he would wish to harm Mrs Lupin."

Remus held his head in his hands, not knowing where to begin.

But Ariadne did not seem worried. "It *is* all right to explain, Remus. Healer Smethwyck, there is a Locospector at Macnair Castle. I'm not knowing why the Macnairs would set her to watch Oldfang in particular, but they probably spy on all their acquaintance in the hope of uncovering guilty secrets. It would be an obvious strategy to have her watch werewolves at the full moon. And they are wanting to punish me because I've been trying to help the Locospector escape... oh, a long story... but that's why they'd send Oldfang to bite me, and why he'd have to agree."

"I heard Glenda Chittock's wireless broadcast about the captive Locospector," said Healer Smethwyck. "So it was a true story, was it? And you were behind it? That explains why the culprits would want to punish you."

"No, it doesn't," said Remus. His wits were creeping back to him through the morning-after fatigue. "Oldfang first came to us in *May* before Glenda Chittock's indiscreet broadcast."

"But that was after Sarah's indiscreet visit to Veleta's parlour. And after Richard's indiscreet aerial survey. I'm thinking the Macnairs have been watching us for a long time... that we've no privacy at home, because they're maybe spying on us at any time... that they were intending Oldfang to attack us even before Glenda spoke..."

"Enough," interrupted Healer Smethwyck. "You have plenty of witnesses. I can call the Aurors now and have them arrest Oldfang. The problem is, I can't report this case without incriminating Mrs Lupin for brewing her illegal potions. You tell me, Mr Lupin... do you want the Department of Magical Law Enforcement to know about all this?"

Of course he did. He would *be glad* if Oldfang met the silver bullet. But the truth was, Oldfang *hadn't* bitten Ariadne, and his arrest would be unlikely to lead to the prosecution of any of the Macnairs. It wouldn't help Veleta, but it would brew up a cauldron of trouble for Ariadne and her illegal potions.

"No," he said. "If *we can* drop charges... but it's only a matter of time before the Macnairs punish Ariadne by reporting the Wolfsbane Potion."

"I hope Mrs Lupin will not be so foolish as to brew anything else illegal in her own home," said the Healer. "It seems that Ankarad Murray's granddaughter is willing to travel

a long road in placing the science of healing ahead of the letter of the law. But it really isn't safe legally or medically to brew such a toxic and controversial potion anywhere except in a hospital. Mrs Lupin, I will arrange to keep you out of trouble, but you must give me your word that from now on you will brew the Wolfsbane only under my supervision."

That was the last thing Remus had expected to hear from a respectable Healer.

"I'm sure you understand that this is not the first time that politics has stood in the way of healing," Smethwyck continued. "Should Muggles be informed of the cure for Bubonic plague? Should we give them a hint on how to prevent smallpox? Should we share the secret of how to defeat a Dementor?" The Healer Summoned a yellow folder and brought out a document. It was set with the crisp type of the *Western Journal of Apothecarism*, but it was dated autumn 1916, and the header began:

Murray, A. P., and Smethwyck, H. C.

Resuscitation from the presence of Dementors

Remus ran his eye down the abstract, but Ariadne was quicker. "Did my grandmother write this? Was ~~she~~ ^{he} responsible for the discovery that chocolate is the remedy for being drained by a Dementor?"

"She and I together. It was very unpopular when we first discovered it. There was all kinds of fuss that people might sneak chocolate in to their friends in Azkaban, and that Dementor-victims who *deserved* to suffer would miss out on their punishment, while no-one outside of Azkaban was ever in danger of meeting a Dementor anyway. The Ministry suppressed every known copy of this article within twenty-four hours of its printing. If I hadn't happened to do a *Zerocso* on it an hour earlier I'd never have been able to prove my authorship. The tables were turned, of course, twenty-five years later, when the Dementors were loosed from Azkaban during the Muggle war. That's when unquestionably innocent people began to need the chocolate remedy. Anyway, my point is, if an article looks at all controversial and even a little interesting, I know to make a *Zerocso* immediately. This one, for example."

The second document had identical print, but it was dated spring 1987.

Belby, D. F., Jigger, A. C., Jigger, B. L., and Lupin, A. F.

Hope for treating Lycanthropy

"I have the recipe, so we can brew the Wolfsbane Potion here. It will be very illegal, and there will always be the risk that someone in the werewolf community will turn against us and report us. But it will be safer, since we have the facilities here to keep the Transformed wolves under surveillance, and it will be more efficient, because we can organise Portkeys to transport those without access to Floo. So you must both promise me that you won't take any more risks in your own home."

Ariadne looked doubtful, but Remus swiftly interposed, "I can promise that without hesitation. We will definitely not be playing at hotels and hospitals again."

Ariadne smiled weakly.

"Next month, Mrs Lupin, you may visit me here after work to check that we are brewing it correctly, but otherwise you must concentrate on your apprenticeship. In August your apprenticeship will be finished, and I suggest you take a holiday. Then in September... if you have no other plans, you should consider returning here permanently." He brought another document out of his folder, florid Edwardian lime-green script glittering on lush pink paper. "The sudden creation of a new full-time post would arouse too many questions, so I can only offer you twenty hours a week. But it's a genuine research fellowship, and it will take you to Masters level in the end."

Twenty hours a week. That sounded blissful. Remus clamped back the shout, "Take it, take it!" Instead, he sat quietly, while Ariadne, of her own volition, picked up the quill and signed her name in lime-green ink.

* * * * *

Remus flew through his final week of revision. The concepts in *Practical Pointers for the Prudent Pedagogue* leapt off the page, and he could have written out his notes on "The Child, the Family and Society" blindfolded. All he had to do was study, and he already knew the material thoroughly.

Ariadne when she was home tiptoed around the house. She barely asked him after his day before fading into her own pile of notes. She placed Muting Charms on her cooking pots and a Silencer on the washing machine. Visitors were dismissed with a soft, "I'm sorry I cannot invite you in, but Remus is studying for his finals."

He knew she was avoiding speaking to him, so one evening he caught her around the waist as she handed him a mug of tea and asked, "Ariadne, haven't you anything to say? Aren't you happy about having a job?"

"Of course I am, but we can talk about that later."

"Aren't you worried about what the Macnairs might do next?"

A shadow crossed her face, but her tone was cheerful. "I am not. I've spoken to Madam Bones, and she's made it all right. I'll explain later... but we'll have no more trouble."

He wasn't unduly worried by her saying no more. She obviously had reached some kind of understanding with Madam Bones. The Wolfsbane Potion would continue to be brewed, at no extra trouble to themselves. Her future job would be short hours. *Only a few days more*, he promised himself, *and then we'll have time to talk.* Everything was going to be all right.

His exams were all right too. He wrote twice as much as anyone else, yet his pen flew across the booklets so fast that he still managed to leave both exams early. He joined his classmates for drinks in the Little John afterwards, but he sat quietly in the corner, nursing a tomato juice while their conversation washed over him.

On Friday evening Ariadne kept him talking about his exam and job prospects. On Saturday she had to go to work. In the evening they went out to dinner with Ivor and Hestia. So it was Sunday before Remus had Ariadne to himself. She agreed to follow him through their fireplace to the public Floo at Edwinstowe, and out into Sherwood Forest.

* * * * *

The sun was emerging from a flat grey sky for the first time in months as they wandered onto the track through the birches. It was several minutes before Remus dared to break the peaceful atmosphere with the question, "What happened between you and Madam Bones?"

Ariadne seemed ready to discuss this much. "She personally checked all the files in the Aurors' office. Scrimgeour was not best pleased, but she gave him no choice. And the end of it is... Auror Scrimgeour has had to make a deal with the Macnair family." She picked up a birch branch, and hurled it with uncharacteristic force into a clump of ferns. "They'll drop their libel case against Glenda and cease all attacks on me on all our friends. Any further assault will reflect very, very badly on them. But in return..." She grabbed a handful of fern and shredded it mindlessly. "Veleta's file has been closed. If she's yet not willing to speak in her own defence, it's to be assumed that she's not wishing to do so. So her own word that she is happy in the Macnair household is to be accepted as an absolute proof of the Macnairs' innocence."

Remus was surprised that Ariadne had accepted this.

"Of *course* I'm not happy about it." Her blue eyes were moist. "But Madam Bones gave me no choice. She says she's worrying about my safety, and is not wanting to wait until I'm already dead before acting. Whereas whatever they're doing to Veleta is not... not life-threatening." She frowned. "So Madam Bones has placed Veleta's file in her

private safe at home, and has promised that the M.L.E. will never again intervene unless something happens to me. Remus, you're knowing what this means, are you not?"

"It means you're safe," he blundered, then amended, "Yes, I know, it also means that we've reached an impasse in the Veleta situation. There's to be no more help from the Law."

"I'm understanding why Madam Bones acted as she did, but I'd not have asked her for help if I'd known that she'd make bargains with criminals. My original query was only whether she could help prevent the spying."

Remus had tried not to dwell on that distasteful thought. At any time, in any place, Veleta might be forced under Imperius to watch them, to invade their innermost privacy, and then to reveal their secrets under Veritaserum. "And can she?"

"The only way would be to arrest Veleta for abusing her magical powers. That would most likely end with Veleta in Azkaban, while the Macnairs could probably employ a good enough barrister to keep them from being incriminated. So we cannot pursue that. Dearest, I'm knowing it's horrible, but it will not be forever. Veleta has always been so careful not to abuse her gift. I'm thinking she would spy on us as little as she could, and lie to the Macnairs as much as she could... she will not tell them anything really important. And they'll lose interest in the end... they'll stop forcing her... once it's clear that we're no further threat..."

She looked so sad at the thought of being no further threat that he remembered that he was keeping a secret from her. "Ariadne, we won't give up yet. I... I've something to tell you. When Richard visited Veleta a few weeks ago she suggested to him that the essential spells that are holding her children in the castle might be Runic magic. If we dusted off our Elder Futhark spells..." He trailed off.

Ariadne was staring at him very oddly, her eyes very large. Slowly, she stepped backwards, and seated herself on a convenient oak log just off the track. She held out her hand to draw him to sit down beside her her fingers were suddenly icy. When he had arranged himself on the log, and she had arranged her thoughts, she spoke in the lowest whisper.

"Had you a message from Veleta that you did not tell me?"

"You were so busy... with work, and with brewing Wolfsbane, and then with the Macnairs... I didn't want to lay another task on you."

"I see." She bit down whatever words might otherwise escape. "So you decided for me... you were protecting me..." Her voice was so soft that it was almost drowned out by the breeze in the leaves above them.

"Yes, I did it to protect you." He was disconcertingly uncertain of her thoughts, but he knew he did not dare reach for the hands that lay stiffly still in her lap. "Ariadne, are you angry with me?"

She nodded slightly. "When you hide... when you treat me... when you overrule... Remus, I do understand why you were wanting to protect me!"

Suddenly he wanted her to lose her temper. At least then she would be telling the truth about whatever she was really feeling. But already Ariadne had expressed as much anger as she ever would, and, seated on the other end of their fallen log, she seemed a mile away...

"Ariadne," he said, "did you never keep a secret to protect someone?"

Her head whipped around to face him, and her mouth fell open in shock. "Well... of course... of course I'd not deliberately tell somebody something that would hurt him!" She recovered. "Remus, I *do* understand that you were protecting me. But I'm not *liking* it. Would you be liking...?" But her voice faded again, as some new thought struck her.

"No, I wouldn't like it if you 'protected' me by not telling me something. But I'd understand it. Ariadne, *did* you ever think to protect me by keeping silent?"

"You're already knowing I did," she said on a tremble. "I worked on the Wolfsbane Potion for three years before I told you about it, rather than risk a disappointment."

"What else did you never tell me?"

She seemed to move several inches closer and she looked right at him. "I've never liked to ask why you're so dutiful about visiting Mrs Pettigrew."

The words sounded like a test, but he had no idea what he had to say to pass. "What? She's my friend's mother... my last link with my past..."

"But you're not liking her."

There was a small explosion in his head, as if he were seeing sunlight for the first time, and he found himself trying out the words that had never before formed in his mind. "I don't like her." They rang true. "You're right, I suppose I don't. But she's lonely and unhappy, and no-one else bothers with her much..."

"But they do! She told me that she goes to her Muggle neighbours' coffee mornings three times a week, and to the Witches' Institute for craft classes and excursions at least twice. And the local council and a couple of the churches are always keeping in touch with her. But she's not liking any of these people she complains that they're not interested in hearing about Peter. Remus, when Mrs Pettigrew talks about her son she makes me feel that... that I'd not have liked *Peter*."

It was unnerving to hear his most private and unconfessed feelings so clearly verbalised, but Mrs Pettigrew's influence *had* sometimes engendered disloyal thoughts towards the memory of Peter. "Do you think," he asked her, "that Mrs Pettigrew would be very distressed if we stopped visiting her?"

"I'm thinking she'd not even notice. She's not able to distinguish one person's attention from another's."

Remus was meanly glad to acknowledge that they need not maintain contact with Mrs Pettigrew, but he knew that this wasn't really what Ariadne had been hiding. "That wasn't so terrible," he said. "Is there anything *else* you've avoided telling me something you've hidden to protect me?"

"Why should there be?" She paused to read his face, and her own flushed with shame. "Remus, I'm not liking... really not liking... to say what will hurt you."

"So there is something." He took her hand and her fingers curled around his. "Ariadne... if you're disappointed in our life together... in me... I'd rather know."

The flush vanished. Completely stunned, she asked, "How could you be thinking... of course I'm not disappointed... Remus, why should there be a problem with *you*?"

"I told you that being married to a werewolf would be difficult, and it has been. You must understand that by now."

"But it has not been." Her hands slid up to his shoulders, so that he was forced to look at her full in the face. "We've had our problems, but ~~it's~~ *her* people who've been difficult. Never you. Why did you not *tell* me that you were worrying that I...?" Her voice faded again. "Is this another time when you've kept quiet to protect me?"

"We've both been doing that," he conceded.

"And neither of us is liking it," she said.

"Don't protect me any more," he said quickly. "It doesn't make me at all happy that you have a problem that you feel you can't discuss with me. It makes me worry ~~that~~ *about* your problem. So if this problem isn't with me... what is it?"

"I was not wanting to discuss my family problems with you." She swallowed, and summoned her voice. "Kenneth was so unkind so unfair so stupid you were not needing to hear about his nastiness. Remus, he told me more than a year ago that he'd be keeping his family away from us. He's thinking you're some kind of Dark wizard a danger to his bairns he will not listen to reason, he's just wanting to stay away from you."

"Is *that* all?" Remus had to steady himself on the log so as not to float away on the warm waves of relief. "Knowing that Kenneth finds me inadequate is far less hurtful than believing that you might. Sweetheart, don't you think Kenneth might have hurt you more than he could hurt me?"

"I'm sorry." Her cheek nestled comfortably against his shoulder. "There's Glenda. It's nasty of me, but I have not been happy to admit... how angry I'm feeling with her. I'm knowing it's my fault that I never told her not to broadcast Veleta's story, and Glenda has apologised to me for doing it. But I'm still... not feeling the same way about her as a friend."

"That's natural. You may feel better over time."

She nodded, not quite convinced.

"Ariadne, did something happen last autumn? You seemed quite distressed at that time, but you wouldn't tell me about it."

"Remus, it's nothing between the two of us. I'm sorry if you were thinking it was. It's just something Sarah told me about her visit to Veleta... something I'm wishing I did not know..."

"Something that's been haunting you ever since. If you're to be tormented, I want to know why."

She sighed. "Very well, but it's..." She leaned her hands against his shoulders, and studied his face while she spoke. "Veleta told Sarah that the Macnairs sometimes put her under Imperius. One of the worst times was seven years ago. Walden Macnair marched her out to the forest under the full moon..."

He still did not know what was coming, but his stomach lurched anyway.

"... and forced her to cast the *Frango* charm that broke Connell Dewar's chain. And Connell attacked the nearest person... that is, Caradoc Dearborn. You're remembering that he said that when he Transformed back at moonset, there was a witch standing near him? Remus, that witch was Veleta!"

Bile churned up through his throat, and he did not try to hide his disgust. People did this to werewolves. It wasn't news that Connell had been forced to kill Caradoc. That Veleta had in her turn been forced to release Connell was only one more link in the malicious chain.

"I told you this story was... Anyway, Uncle Macnair lifted the curse from Veleta just as the moon was setting, so that she'd know what she'd done. She saw at once that she or Connell could be in trouble, so she cast the *Reducto* onto Caradoc's body and repaired Connell's chain. Then she tried to run this was before she had any children but of course Uncle Macnair re-cast the Imperius and sent her back inside the castle... oh dear, I should not have told you!"

"Yes, you should." The last knot in his stomach uncurled and melted. Ariadne really had been trying to protect him. "I didn't like what I heard, but I'm glad you told me. Is there any more?"

She shook her head. "Dearest, are you happy now?"

"Yes." Whatever he had been imagining might be wrong, those topics didn't seem relevant any more. Against all odds, her infatuation with him was miraculously intact. "Yes, I am." He helped her up from the log, and she kept her hand clasped in his.

Hand in hand, they walked away from the track, through the oak trees, and further into the forest.

A/N. "Moon-Curser" is slang for a smuggler.

Home before Red Moon

Chapter 21 of 21

Remus and Ariadne achieve their hearts' desire.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Home Before Red Moon

Friday 31 July Saturday 8 August 1987

Diagon Alley, London; St Mungo's Hospital, London; Old Basford, Nottingham; Baie des Anges, Nice, France.

Rated PG-13 for conjugal love.

Ariadne had five more weeks of apprenticeship, but they were as uneventful as such long hours could be. Professor Jigger set her to brewing Felix Felicis and Skele-gro because he said she needed the practice in the most complex standard potions.

Remus and the other werewolves spent the full moon in a locked ward at St Mungo's Hospital. Healer Smethwyck and a green-robed Mediwizard patrolled the room with clipboards, recording their every move. Caleb Oldfang had better sense than to attack anybody in front of so many witnesses.

The Muggle postman brought Remus's exam results: he had taken out a first. Ariadne flung herself into his arms, but he was so tense that she needed to ask, "Are you not glad? You're a teacher now!"

He shrugged. "I expected it of myself. I'm not really a teacher until I find a job."

"Job or not, you're allowed to be happy that you did well."

"Do you know what day it is?"

He had changed the subject on purpose. "It's Harry Potter's birthday. He'd be seven."

"Yes. And we're *still* not allowed to send him a card. But it's also the end of your apprenticeship."

"Not yet," said Ariadne. "Not until this evening."

"When this evening comes, can we talk about taking a holiday?"

In fact the day was an anti-climax. Ariadne couldn't believe that it was the last time she would ever enter Slug and Jigger's. She began the morning by mixing an ordinary batch of Eye-Bright, then scoured ordinary cauldrons, and began work on an ordinary brew of Photapergaz. At eleven o' clock, Professor Jigger called her out to the shop and said it was time to go to the Guild Hall. She followed him across the cobbled street, not really grasping that they weren't going there to deliver Wit-Sharpener.

Jigger handed a sheaf of papers to the clerk behind the desk. The wizard checked Jigger's credentials, then Ariadne's her published papers, the endless progress reports and said, "Ah, Belby's pupil. No surprise to see that this apprentice has learned more than most." He pulled out a blank certificate, scribbled on her name and the date, and stamped it.

"Congratulations, Madam Lupin. Here is your apron."

Ariadne found herself holding a literal apron soft red leather embossed with the gold insignia of scales and a cauldron and wondered how she was going to carry her certificate back across Diagon Alley in the rain. Jigger had already turned back towards the door, so she muttered an *Impervius* and followed him out.

Belladonna Jigger looked up from the shop counter, and said, "Oh, you're back. Well, technically, you've finished with us you can go home. But we'd prefer you to finish the Photapergaz first."

Ariadne stirred the Photapergaz, strained it into bottles, and cleaned the cauldron. Then she picked up her journeyman's apron and certificate, said good bye the Jiggers, and took the Floo home.

She was mystified to find a crate-shaped parcel in the middle of the living room floor.

"I pity the owl who brought *that* down the chimney," said Remus, for the delivery would have required two eagle owls and several Galleons of postage.

Ariadne recognised Aunt Macmillan's handwriting on the brown paper, but even when Remus ripped that off to reveal two matching brown leather suitcases, she was too fatigued to comprehend that they had been sent as a graduation present. She had read the covering letter twice before understanding struck.

"Is Aunt Macmillan wanting us to go to the South of France with *hertomorrow*?"

"I said we must talk about holidays. I told your aunt in the spring that we'd like to go." He placed his hands on her back and began to massage her shoulder-blades. "If you don't remember it, you definitely need the holiday."

She tried to relax. Remus must be as tired as she was, but he was never too tired to pay her these little attentions. "But this coming week you'll be needing to drink Wolfsbane."

"I collected a flask of it from St Mungo's this morning. We'll only need to reheat it."

She relaxed a little more, trying to remember that she no longer had to do everything herself. "If we're to be up early tomorrow, I'm supposing we should pack those suitcases now. Nice sounds like a Muggle resort. Remus, what do Muggles take on holiday?"

"Sun hats. Sandals. Cameras. Buckets..."

"*Buckets?*"

"Well, children do. All right, no buckets for us. Towels and toothbrushes and Muggle clothes..."

Fortunately the suitcases were larger inside than out, so Ariadne was able to pack her potions kit beside the jeans and shirts that she had last worn three years ago in North Wales. Remus wrote mysterious words like "shorts", "sun-dress" and "bathing costumes" on the back of an old envelope, saying they would have to buy those items in Nice. Ariadne only hoped she would recognise them on entering the shop.

Remus closed the suitcases with a tricky little locking charm, and Ariadne first noticed the black lettering stamped across one corner of each lid: "Madam A. F. Lupin" and "Professor R. J. Lupin".

Evidently nobody had told Aunt Macmillan that Muggle teachers are not addressed as "Professor".

* * * * *

Alex Macmillan always congratulated himself for choosing that summer to take his family to Nice. While the weather in Britain was endlessly cool, wet and cloudy, the Baie des Anges remained warm, dry and sunny. He knew he couldn't cram his whole family into a single three-bedroom cottage, so he hired two of them. That meant his older children could bring their Significant Others, with Ariadne and her husband installed as chaperons, and that left space in the younger lasses' room for Morag MacDougal.

What Morag always remembered about the blissful holiday in the Baie des Anges was that she had Aunt Ariadne's attention, day after day.

"Papa's not liking your husband," she confided sadly. "I was thinking I'd never see you again."

"I was worrying about that too," replied her aunt.

"Grandmamma and Grandpapa are always pretending that Papa will let me see you again soon. But he never will. I will not tell anybody at Kincarden that you were here. That would only make Papa angry with the Macmillans."

Morag remembered other things too the butterfly parks, the dolphin reserve but what she later discussed most excitedly with her parents was the water slides.

The water slides were what Ernie and Grace Macmillan remembered about their holiday. They would race Morag to the end of the queue, climb the ladders, and settle themselves on the lap of the nearest adult. Then they slid delightfully into dark tunnels, splashed through cold foam, swooped down into stomach-churning gradients, twisted around death-defying corners, and finally swept off the foot of the slide into the receiving waves of the cold pool below. Grace howled that there was water up her nose, Ernie shrieked that Remus could let go of him now, Morag complained that Steadfast had nearly lost her sun-hat, and all of them insisted that they wanted another turn *right now*.

What Clement and Zealous Macmillan remembered were the castles that Cousin Remus engineered on the beach. When they found an uncrowded stretch of white sand, Clement was about to disdain that sand-castles were for babies, but Remus spoke first.

"I can build Hogwarts here," he claimed.

And Clement found himself hollowing up a pit, two feet deep and six feet wide, with no idea of how it would transform into a castle. Remus directed Zelly to begin the walls,

while Morag brought buckets of water to hold the fine white sand together, and Ernie up-ended bucket upon bucket of sand to represent the towers. They did this nearly every day, and there were so many Muggles on the beach that Remus couldn't have been using magic, yet somehow his keep never crumbled, his turrets never toppled, his battlements never buckled.

"Tell me the secret!" Zelly begged. "Can you do charms without a wand? Did Ariadne brew some kind of glue?"

But Cousin Remus only smiled secretively, and claimed, "It's just the appliance of engineering."

What Prudence Macmillan remembered was her failure to acquire a tan. The sunshine was glorious, and every day she slathered Lockhart's Browntone onto her exposed limbs. Every morning she paraded the Promenade des Anglais, dressed in a peacock-blue strapless sun-dress (boys were willing to whistle), and every afternoon she showed off her fluorescent-purple bathing costume on the white beaches (boys were willing to stare). A rash of freckles flared up in protest, but the skin beneath them remained a pale carnation-pink.

What Dreadnought Macmillan remembered was the photographs. After he had captured the bay, the cottages, the ancient buildings, the animals, the sandcastles and the water slides, he turned his attention to human portraits. He snapped his mother unpacking picnics, his father buying family-concession entry tickets, his younger siblings paddling in the sea, his older siblings sneaking off to secluded corners with their Significant Others, strange lasses climbing the hillside, strange lasses admiring museum exhibits, strange lasses swimming, strange lasses sunbathing...

Both Dreadnought and Prudence remembered how difficult it was to meet new people. By the middle of the holiday, Dreadnought had only to raise his camera, and suddenly his brother Steadfast would be at his side, lecturing him on Respect For Women, or Prudence would be muttering to that new boyfriend about a "dirty one-track mind", or Cousin Remus would be asking polite questions about exposure and angles. Prudence could not escape her mother's endless reminders to pull her neckline a little higher or to arrange her sun-hat over her shoulders, her father's constant warnings about road safety and tidal rips, or Mercy's mysterious path-blocking appearances, complete with lectures about Talking To Strangers, whenever any strange boy stopped to ask her the time. Even Cousin Ariadne seemed to have remarkably poor timing when it came to asking for their opinions of the local pottery and wood-carvings, their feelings about sharks and butterflies, or their translations of the local sign-posts. More embarrassing still, the French natives did not speak any version of French that Dreadnought and Prudence recognised, and the American tourists did not understand a word of the only form of English that Dreadnought and Prudence were able to produce.

What Margaret Macmillan remembered was how both Ariadne and her husband relaxed and flourished in the summer sunshine. They had arrived at the International Portkey Office looking haggard and exhausted, each constantly glancing at the other. By breakfast time the next day they seemed to have slept out, and they were listening to the family conversations. By the day after that they were exuding energy. They were first to the top of the hill, the last left swimming in the sea. Remus carried the heaviest load back to the cottages he even hoisted Grace onto his shoulders and Ariadne, the first into the kitchen, had peeled all the potatoes before Felicity even found an apron. Aunt Macmillan noted approvingly that they were wonderful baby-sitters they seemed to enjoy the water-slides almost more than Ernie and Morag.

"Such a devoted young couple," she remarked to her husband. "It's so sweet how they can hardly tear their eyes away from each other, yet they're seeming unsure whether it's good form to hold hands in public."

Aunt Macmillan did not know about the locking and sound-proofing charms that Remus placed on the bedroom door at ten o'clock every evening, or about the passionate exchanges between the Provençal cotton prints.

Felicity couldn't help noticing. What Felicity Macmillan remembered was the frustration of being treated differently. "Mother would not let me lock myself up like that with Richard," she said.

"I'd jolly well think not," interrupted Steadfast.

"Mind your own business, Steadfast. But, Richard, this is *Ariadne*. She was always too busy with her books and her potions to notice men. It was almost an accident that she ended up married, and she and Remus are always so *proper* together. Yet they've just waltzed off to the bedroom, not even pretending to be tired..."

"Don't tease her about it," said Richard suddenly.

"What?"

"Don't tease her," he repeated. "I've known her for ten years and... well, she wouldn't find it funny."

What Mercy Macmillan always remembered was the cauldrons. Since her mother was directing all the catering from the other kitchen, the Muggle stove in the second cottage wasn't needed for food. Yet it always seemed to be lit for a bubbling cauldron. Even before breakfast, Ariadne would be chopping leaves, straining flowery tinctures, stirring at something that smelled like a rich cinnamon... Mercy suspected that her cousin must be creeping into the kitchen in the middle of the night to mix her brews. She didn't like to ask what the potions were for, since they seemed to be medicines. Ariadne and Remus had certainly both *looked* sick when they first arrived in Nice.

Remus looked a great deal healthier now, but he still drank the cinnamon-scented medicine every day, and with such a grimace that it couldn't have tasted as delicious as it smelled. Ariadne's medicine had a minty aroma; it must have been some kind of tonic, because she always relaxed and began to glow within about ten seconds of drinking it.

What Steadfast Macmillan remembered was how well his girlfriend fitted in with his family. Miss Scholastica Blott was a transfigurationist at the potteries. She talked about antiques with his mother, Quidditch with his father, clothes with his sisters, books with the Lupins. There was a bad moment when Zelly and Ernie crept up behind her and shoved wet seaweed down her neck. Luckily Scholastica saw the funny side, for she told the boys, "If you don't want it back, I'll cook it for your dinner tonight." She sounded so serious that Zelly made a hasty grab for the seaweed. But when she turned back to Steadfast, she couldn't suppress her giggles.

On the fifth day of the holiday, Steadfast asked Scholastica to become a permanent Macmillan. They agreed on a Christmas wedding.

What Dempster Wiggleswade remembered was the sunsets. That was when Mr and Mrs Macmillan began putting the younger ones to bed. The rest would sit on the grass outside the second cottage, drinking peach soda and watching a huge red sun sink over the horizon. Mercy would lean her head against his shoulder, politely pretending to understand what they were saying about broomsticks.

Steadfast spoke directly from his work as an aerodynamic researcher for Nimbus. "There is empirical evidence to suggest that the increased oscillation in the tail section during periods of high wind velocity is reduced in the 1700 because of the increased rudder action in the stabilising charm that allows the flier to control the broom in the yaw axis with far greater precision."

"Customers don't notice that," said Richard lazily. "Market research indicates that it has a limited appeal even among professional sportswizards. It's the additional comfort afforded by the new cushioning charms that gives the 1700 its broader base of interest. And it offers greater potential for sustainable market development because it's a value-added service showing a real customer-focused approach."

"But a causal relationship has been shown between yaw axis control and directional precision that surely has to be an advantage to anybody wishing to fly the 1700 in an area of variable viscous flow."

"What's more, it's now a legal requirement," Dempster pointed out. "The 1500s no longer meet British Safety Standards and will probably have to be recalled."

"The average purchaser doesn't usually ask about that," said Richard, "whereas cushioning charms..."

"Is that a full moon?" asked Mercy suddenly.

"No, that'll be tomorrow," said Scholastica. "The true full moon doesn't rise until sunset."

"Let's take a moonlit walk along the shingle beach tomorrow night," said Felicity. "Ariadne, have you and Remus really to go home tomorrow? Surely you can bide just a couple more days. You'd like to walk under the full moon and tell werewolf stories, would you not?"

"You seem remarkably confident that there are no real werewolves in Nice," said Remus. "I imagine that a holiday resort in a city of a million people would be a prime target for malicious types."

Steadfast began to say that Remus was right, and they should be careful, but Felicity interrupted, *Please* stay, Ariadne? You're surely not having to go straight back to work on a *Sunday*?"

"We've an appointment that we cannot avoid," Ariadne repeated.

* * * * *

It was hard to tear themselves away from the Baie des Anges. The sun shone warmly on the beach, while they knew it was raining in England, and Ariadne ached to think how long it would be before she saw Morag again. The afternoon shadows were already lengthening when Remus stood up from his sandy battlements and said, "We really do have to go home now."

"Goodness, you cannot leave at this time," said Aunt Macmillan. "Bide for dinner!"

"Why not bide the night, and leave first thing in the morning?" asked Uncle Macmillan.

"It's sounding wonderful... but we've packed our toothbrushes," said Ariadne. It was a stupid excuse, but her watch warned that it was less than three hours until moonrise.

She hugged all the cousins, and the whole family trailed them down the two streets to the public Floo. Then they had to pay for Floo powder, check the correct pronunciation of "Ministère de Magique", and hug all the cousins again. But at last she was whirling through the emerald flames, and then Remus was helping her out of the grate at the other end. The clerk in Paris (working long hours in the holiday season) checked their passports and authorised their Portkey (a bronze fleur-de-lis). The clerk in London checked their passports again, and sold them more Floo powder. Ariadne whirled through the Floo channel feeling sick, and then she was stepping out of her own grate, while early evening light was still dimly shining through the drizzling rain, and Remus arrived half a minute behind her.

"You're looking rather green," he said. "Are you sure you're all right?"

"I'm fine. Just dizzy after a rough trip through the Floo."

"I noticed you didn't eat much at lunch. You're still stressed."

"I'm ravenous now. I'll go into the kitchen and make us some soup."

She opened the froster cupboard and pulled out a container of frozen vegetable soup. Still too dizzy to cast a proper fire-charm, she had to use a match to light a ring of the stove range. The soup was melting into a warm golden liquid inside a small cauldron when Remus walked into the kitchen. His face was lit like a burning phoenix, as if his head had caught a *Lumos* charm.

"Remus, what's happened?"

He was trying to control his grin, but he was on the point of laughing as he waved an envelope in the air. "Look what the Muggle postman brought us!"

They rarely received anything in the Muggle post, apart from rates bills, which never made either of them smile. Ariadne squinted at the return address, but she couldn't read it while Remus was flapping the paper around. "What is it?"

"Ariadne, I have a job!"

The wooden spoon fell into the cauldron as she flew into his arms.

"I'm being offered the Year Six post at Willowgate Primary School," he said. "That's the red-brick building just the other side of the shopping arcade."

"I'm knowing which one. Walking distance from home."

"It's only a one-year appointment, and the first year of teaching always means very long hours of preparation there won't be many free evenings at home."

"But you'll be *teaching*."

"And earning a salary of... it must come to... around thirty-five Galleons a week."

"So our fortunes are made."

"I wouldn't go that far..." he began.

"But I'll be earning another twenty from St Mungo's. You will not be needing to pick fruit for the rest of this summer."

"I didn't say that... look, the soup's boiling over. *Extinguo!*"

* * * * *

Later in the evening, after they had eaten the soup and washed the pot, and the sun was hanging red on the horizon, they sat down in front of the hearth, where Remus lit a cool blue fire. They had discussed his new job the pupils, the teachers, the curriculum, the money, the endless challenges of pretending to be a Muggle five times over. Ariadne tried to push away the dark chill that always pressed around the edges of her mind when they were so close to Transformation hour.

Remus broke the silence. "It's done you good to spend a week doing nothing. Promise me you won't wear yourself out for Healer Smethwyck the way you did for Professor Jigger."

She smiled. "That's a safe promise. I will not be so dependent on Healer Smethwyck's goodwill." Then she braced herself. "But, Remus, I've something to tell you... you will not be altogether pleased."

He frowned. "Perhaps you should show me the St Mungo's contract now. Let me know the worst before you start working there."

"It's nothing to do with work. Remus..." She exhaled and held his gaze, reminding herself that he had the right to know, that no good had ever come from her failing to confide in him. "I did not do this on purpose. But last June I was very busy and had too much to remember. You warned me that I'd finish by forgetting something important... and you were right. I was so busy with werewolves, and Wolfsbane, and Veleta, and Professor Jigger, and... and everything... that I forgot. And by the time I remembered again it was too late..."

"Sweetheart, while you're gathering the courage to make this dreadful confession, might I just mention that I haven't the least idea what we're talking about?"

She drew in a deep breath. "I'm talking about my yamwurzels potion. I forgot to brew it. So now we're going to have a baby in March." She dropped her eyes wretchedly. "Of everything I had to do then, taking the yamwurzels seemed to be the least important. I've known ever since we discovered the Wolfsbane Potion that we'd be able, one day, to have children. But I did not neglect the yamwurzels deliberately, Remus; I was expecting to wait a few years yet, until we had money, and I was a Master, and you were feeling ready to be a father..."

He stroked her cheek, so that she was forced to look up at him.

The surprise on his face was giving way to unrestrained delight.

"You're right," he managed to say. "I never thought... but this is one more thing that the Wolfsbane changes... *wecan* have children now. We..." The words were swallowed in his laugh. He was even happier than he had been about the job offer. Finally he gasped out, "Ariadne, are you *sure*?"

As she nodded, he pulled her into his arms, and she rested her head on his shoulder. She hadn't expected him to take the news so well; he must have wanted a bairn more than he wanted to be practical. She reclined against him quietly for a while, listening to his heartbeat.

Eventually he said, "The moon..."

Reluctantly, she disengaged herself.

She would never stop hating the minute of Transformation. He was always so mortified to be forced into an animal's shape, and the physical pain was always so acute. She would work on brewing a painkiller, but it would be months before she could balance the herbs so that the endorphins did not cancel the effects of the wolfsbane.

The wolf now crouched beside her. It would be years before she worked out how to prevent the physical Transformation. But lycanthropy, like all curses, was unnatural, therefore there must be some way of restoring nature. She would surely find that way in the end. She wound her arms around the wolf's shaggy neck, and drew his head down onto her lap.

The wolf growled a little he still did not quite believe that she could have any affection for his animal form but he obediently settled himself down on the floor. She stroked him like a dog.

"You're seeing how normal we've become?" she said. "You're now a teacher. I have my journeyship. We both have jobs. We've been on holiday with our family. We're going to have a baby. And soon all werewolves will be as normal as we are."

She scratched behind his ears, wondering if he found her words of normality soothing. Wolfsbane was yet illegal, and society was yet prejudiced against werewolves, and Veleta was further out of their reach than ever. But there was nothing they could do to save the world tonight. Tonight, within the walls of their own home, all was right between them.

"Good night, Professor Lupin," she said.

THE END.

*A/N. Many thanks to the brilliant **dp360**, who explained to me everything there is to know about broomsticks.*